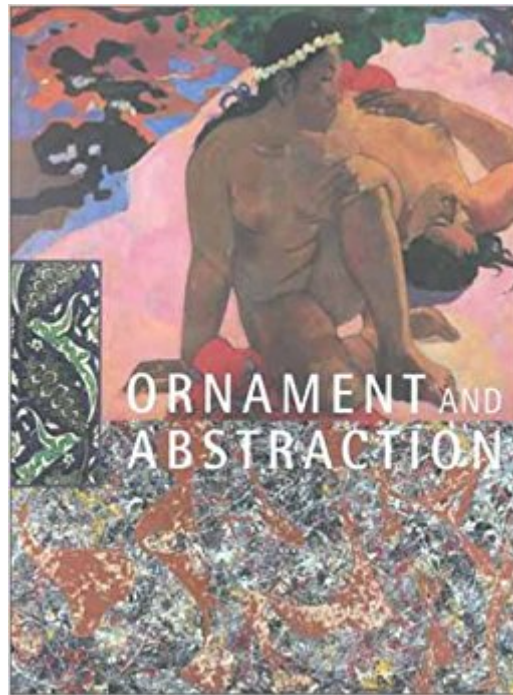# Ornament And Abstraction

# Synopsis

The importance of ornament in the emergence and development of abstract art has long been underestimated. Pioneers like Kandinsky and Mondrian looked upon it as a sin in which abstraction should not indulge. Ornament, with its history dating back thousands of years in all world cultures, was secreted in the development of modern nineteenth-century painting, but surreptitiously began to influence abstract art as a formal and methodical element. This book is an in-depth study of this major theme in twentieth-century art history. The catalogue features four artists who help to highlight the role of ornament in the history of art: Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, Henri Matisse and Frank Stella. The study begins with the innovative pictorial conception of Philipp Otto Runge, whose early nineteenth-century paintings featured the last genuine form in the history of ornament, the arabesque. The arabesque was influential in Symbolism (Maurice Denis, Paul Gauguin) and Jugendstil (Henry van de Velde, Gustav Klimt, Josef Hoffmann), and on painting's move towards abstraction (Kandinsky, Frantisek Kupka, Adolf Hoelzel). It is argued that this resulted, on the one hand, in a non-figurative, geometric structure of lines (Mondrian), and on the other, in the swirls of Matisse and Jackson Pollock. Side by side with the "royal way" of Cubism, arabesque abstraction therefore opens up a second doorway to the world of non-figurative art. In addition to this line of enquiry, the authors examine theoretical findings on the theme of ornament, and what it reveals about the relation between abstraction and figurative art (Malevich, Kandinsky, Paul Klee). Significant influences also result from modern artists' preoccupation with exotic ornamentation found in distant cultures: Matisse & the Orient and Oceania, Ad Reinhardt & Asian culture, or American painting & pre-Columbian ornament (Josef Albers, Barnett Newman). In also considering Minimalism, new media, digital technology, the Renaissance and the Rococo, the book celebrates the impact of ornament on abstract art, as well as showcasing a remarkable array of masterpieces.

# Book Information

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