

ARTS

Shape of light: 100 years of photography and abstract art

Duncan Harper reflects on the current exhibition celebrating a centenary of photography and abstract art at the Tate Modern in London.



Wassily Kandinsky 1866-1944
Swinging, 1925
Oil paint on board, 705 x 502 mm
Tate

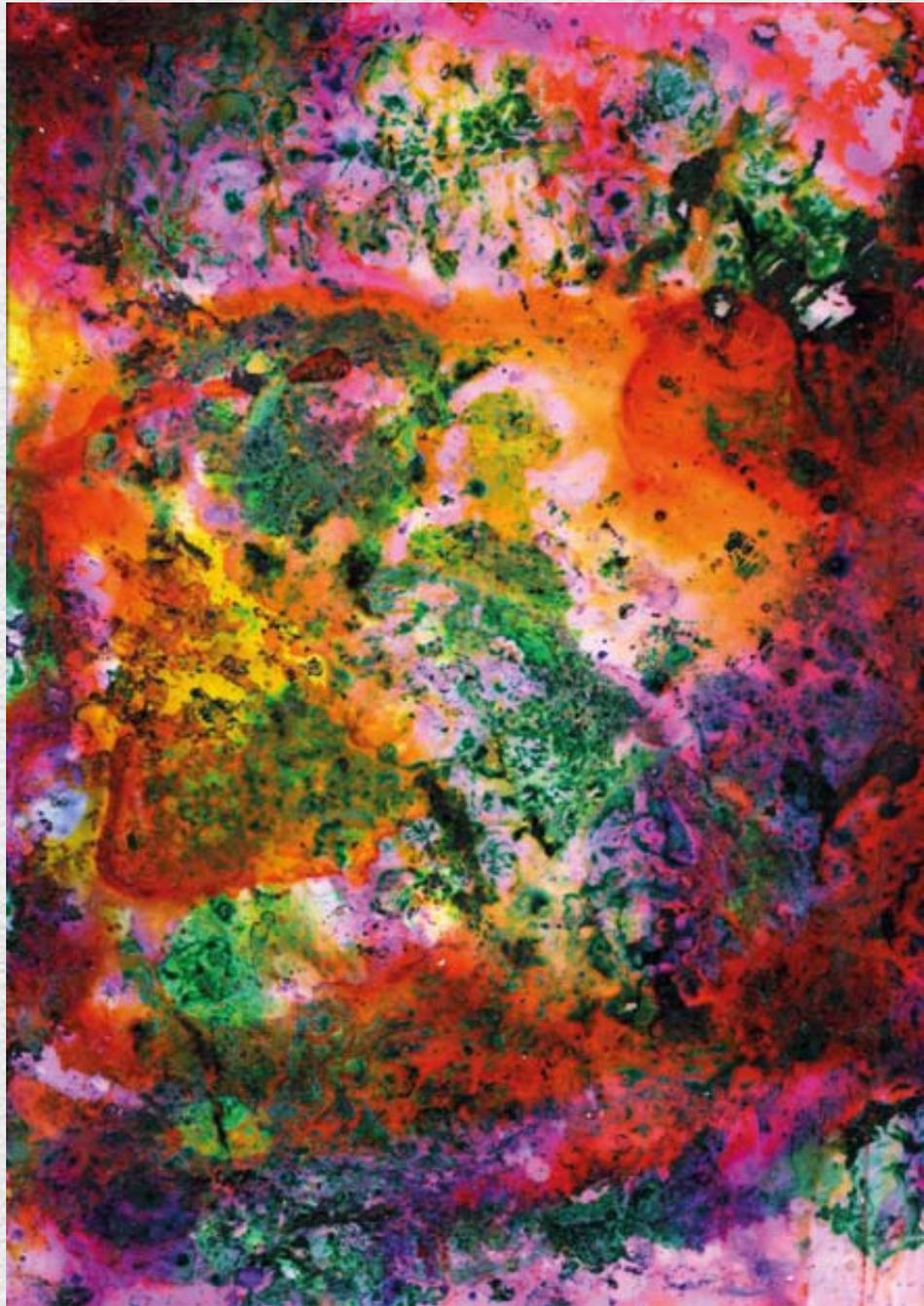
Photography is a relatively recent invention. The earliest photographic prints date from the 1830s, but paintings have been discovered which are at least 30,000 years old. A new exhibition at Tate Modern brings the two processes together to show how painters and photographers have worked and often influenced each other over the last century to create works of abstract art.

Photography is by definition about using light to create an image, and the camera has been used by many artists to develop their compositions. It is a perfect medium for accurately recording reality. However, since the birth of photography, artists began to transform their work from pictures that represented the literal look of things into images that used shape, colour, contrast and texture more poetically to portray a deeper, inner life or universal human emotions. Painters, sculptors and photographers have all moved in similar directions, towards the abstract. And in this way photography came of age as an artistic medium and many artists today use its processes, both chemical and digital, sometimes combined with other media to create installations, videos or performances.

The exhibition includes work by both well-known and younger artists, juxtaposing abstract paintings, sculptures and photographs to show how new ideas, techniques and processes have grown and interacted over time.

Wassily Kandinsky was a Russian, working at the famous Bauhaus art school in Germany between the wars, who developed a personal visual language based on his ideas about the spiritual nature of art. He saw colour as the key to purifying his work and eliminating material forms. This painting 'Swinging' shows his love of music, which he viewed as the most transcendent abstract art form.

Maya Rochat, b.1985
A Rock is a River
(*META RIVER*), 2017
Courtesy Lily Robert
© Maya Rochat



The photograph above is by Maya Rochat, a young Swiss artist who creates images by playing with chemical and digital techniques, layering, cutting, collaging and re-photographing to create images which are beautiful in themselves regardless of any deeper meaning which she or we as viewers might care to attach to them. 🍷

The exhibition *Shape of Light: 100 Years of Photography and Abstract Art* is on at Tate Modern, London until 14 October 2018