

Dr. Wim van Krimpen, Director
Mr. Hans Janssen, Curator
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Dear Mr. Janssen,

I should thank you for your letter of 1 April.

You are right when you say that art historical interpretation needs a fair amount of humility. It would be nice if this principle would inspire human activities in many other circumstances. I have no problem being humble with people who show consideration and respect. If I took the liberty to draw your attention to the quality of my work, is because you never answered when I first sent you (1991) the essay on *Broadway Boogie Woogie* and later (2006) a whole book on Piet Mondrian . The letter you have recently sent to me is bitter and it is frankly hard to believe that the only reason for this bitterness is, as you say, a lack of humility.

I have never said, as you say, that I am the only one providing significant contribution. I am fully aware of the important studies others have conducted and this is clearly stated on p. 5 of my book. Of course, I think some have written more accurate things than others. I have my opinions about that, but I do have respect for those who try their best anyway. I realize now that I have used wrong words when I wrote that mine was “probably the most accurate analysis of Mondrian’s work ever”. What I actually wanted to say was that my approach to Mondrian is consistently different from the one other have adopted so far. I hope we can agree upon the fact that most of the studies carried out on Mondrian do not focus on the pure visual aspects the way my study does. When I say visual I do not refer to the painterly qualities but to the significance of compositional means. This method has allowed to explore in full depth paintings which had not yet received the attention they deserve. Another aspect worth being noticed is the comprehensive overview on Mondrian’s oeuvre (1899-1944) which has been considered as a dynamic process where most of the paintings become parts of one ideal evolving image; an image which has finally taken shape within his last accomplished canvas. This dynamic picture of the whole was missing. These are the main reasons why I spoke about “most accurate ever”. I do realize now that my words were not appropriate and apologize with you today for having caused so much trouble.

This having been clarified, the basic question remains: why did you ignore (1991) and keep ignoring today my contribution to the understanding and divulgation of Neoplastic ideas?

Asked about why you never reacted to my first analysis of *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, you say: "it did not urge me to get in touch with you, I'am afraid, because I analysed it as so thoroughly formalistic that it wasn't - if I may say so - my cup of tea."

It may not be "your cup of tea" Mr. Janssen but it happens to be Mondrian's, mine and every real abstract painter's *cup of tea* to be able to express life with forms and colours.

If my first analysis appeared to you so thoroughly formalistic, what about the book I have sent you in 2006? The whole book and one chapter in particular (*Broadway Boogie Woogie and the Human Condition* from p. 161 to p. 172) suggest how to see form becoming content.

It is amazing to see how you can ignore the evidence of interpreting Neoplastic compositions from an existential and spiritual point of view. Do you really have nothing to say?

This the point I try to make when I insist on the original approach of my studies: explain Neoplasticism showing that the richness of content is born out of a thoughtful use of form.

Piet Mondrian has spent a lifetime in order to give an appropriate form to fundamental issues of human existence. Good artists are never concerned with form alone.

Art critics and historians often pay too little attention to form. Form and content are different aspects of the same reality. Opposites which become a dynamic unity.

Just to make a short example: let us take the painting *Evolution* which, by the way, I explain in a different way as to the importance so far given by art criticism to the central panel.

Wouldn't be interesting from time to time to consider a different point of view?

Let us consider the detail of space surrounding the head of the human figure in the central panel.

You describe it referring to an egyptian hair-dressing and to old hats of dutch women.

I find instead the meaning of the same detail analyzing form and colour relationships.

Both explanations have their ground and can together offer a more complete picture.

There are many other examples I could make.

Wood with Beech Trees (1899) or *Apple, Ginger Pot and Plate on a Ledge* (1901) interpreted from the point of view of the relationship between the one and the multiple. The same relationship we can detect in the single trees (1908-10) or in the *Sea/Pier and Ocean* series (1914-15) and in the *Checkerboards with light and dark colours* (1919).

I do appreciate many explanations you give, especially those on a technical and historical level but from an artist point of view let me say, in a very humble way, that there is something more to see and this is what my studies try to convey.

What about the neoplastic lines (a symbol standing for natural infinite space) which after a long evolution finally dissolve into planes (a symbol of human measured space) in *Broadway* and *Victory Boogie Woogie*?

What if we discover that this change is not only a *formal* exercise but reveals existential and spiritual implications capable of changing our perspective on reality?

This is what I mean when I say that museums should be open to contributions capable of improving the level of understanding of the artworks they exhibit.

Don't you think that the public deserves options?

You may be right: these are not easy things to explain but I am convinced that we should try to elevate the public to art instead of lowering art to the average public audience.

It is not the public's fault if they still find it difficult to understand abstract art. Our role is to help.

This is why I thought of a cooperation with the Haags Gemeente and with other museums.

I must say that universities and private institutions have responded in a more active way.

You know, Mr. Janssen, I wish we could exchange ideas in a constructive way instead of building up walls of silence.

I read in your letter: "You say you are able to describe, in every detail, the evolution process which has guided Mondrian throughout his life."

I did not actually say that. How could I ever possibly do such a thing? There are many historical and biographical aspects art critics and historians can deal with in a brilliant way. This was not my goal. I do not have much interest for details. I try to look at the whole.

What I actually did was to trace, painting after painting, the evolution process which has guided Mondrian from his first naturalistic phase up to the last *Boogies*. What matters in this overview is the fact that while the expressive means change drastically, the final goal remains the same.

Of course, this has not been a rigidly preconceived and schematic process. This is clearly stated on p. 141 of my book.

You are right when you say that there are several processes to detect. Mondrian's evolution has been a very complexed one.

However, if you really look into the multiple aspects of his entire oeuvre, you will discover one process which contains all the different phases; same as, if you look at a tree, you may see branches going different direction whereas the whole tree remains one.

This is actually one of the main aspects of Mondrian visual thinking which is marvellously depicted in *Broadway Boogie Woogie*: multiplicity becoming one and then turning back to multiplicity.

A fundamental issue Mondrian has been dealing with throughout his entire life; from 1908 (*Red Tree*) through 1915 (*Pier and Ocean*) up to 1943 (*Broadway Boogie Woogie*). Three different images dealing with the same basic issue (please refer to p. 143 of my book).

The different processes you refer to belong to one main stream which is made of multiple phases. A great concern of mine has been to make this stream visible.

You talk about different processes which I consider parts of one process.

Mondrian's vision help us realize that we actually talk about the same thing seen from different points of view: one and multiple. This reinforces Mondrian's vision. If you do not want to trust my words, please do trust Mondrian's.

God only knows why you are so reluctant to see that my approach is an honest and original one, worth being taken into consideration?

I would like to know what it really means for you, Mr. Janssen, a new approach.

Is it maybe something like the catalogue of the Brescia exhibition?

Maybe your letter is so full of anger because I do not belong to the official academic milieu?

In a very humble way, let me remind you that none of the greatest achievement in the arts were born in museums nor came from the academic establishment. The most precious fruits in the arts came from hearted artists who did not have an easy life and often had to struggle against the walls erected by the official cultural scenes. Art comes in unexpected ways Mr. Janssen.

It is however a matter of time and art always finds its way.

I am not a critic, I am an artist. An artist who tries to explain why he believes that abstract art is not just one of the many trends of our time, rather, a new vision of reality. Being an abstract painter, you may appreciate the fact that my ideas are based on theory as well as experience.

Museum of modern and contemporary art do not do much today in order to help the public understand the real value of abstract painting. Museums and curators are very busy nowadays with all sort of marketing activities in order to promote themselves rather than the ideals of art.

If we look at the official cultural scene, we have the feeling art has been deprived of its fundamental function which is to give new shapes to our world and deal with universal aspects of life. It's not trendy; you don't make money with that; people would not understand anyway...

Meanwhile, our societies run after debries of reality and seem unable to provide a comprehensive view of today's world. I believe abstraction could help us in our quest for the substance of things.

I did not learn that at the university. I did not write on Mondrian because I had to reach for a title or make a career. I have met Mondrian while I was searching for possible answers to some of the basic questions life poses us.

With my studies on Neoplasticism I wish to ring a bell in order to awaken a more spiritual attitude and see if I can find people with whom I can share the ideals of beauty, truth and progress which are guiding my doing as an artist.

My intention was not to compete with the academic world, rather, to co-operate with it in the higher interest of art and for the public who wish to understand more about abstract painting.

It would be nice and productive if art historians, critics and curators would listen from time to time to what artists have to say. After all, let us not forget that Piet Mondrian was an artist.

Don't you think Mr. van Krimpen and Mr. Janssen that it would be only fair if one of the most important institutions related to Piet Mondrian such as the Haags Gemeentemuseum would recognize my contribution?

I hope you will take into consideration the possibility of establishing a constructive co-operation.

Looking forward to hearing from you, I remain,

Sincerely

Michael Sciam