

Andréi Nakov

KANDINSKY
THE ENIGMA
OF THE FIRST
ABSTRACT
PAINTING



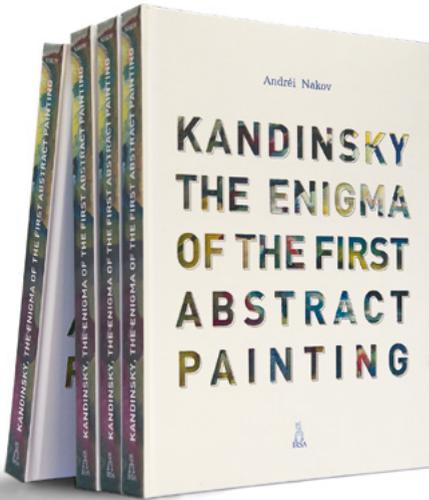
Andréi Nakov

Kandinsky, the Enigma of the First Abstract Painting

Painted in Munich in 1911, *Painting with a Circle* is Kandinsky's first abstract composition – and the first abstract painting in the history of modern art. Yet for long decades it was an enigma for art historians and even for the artist himself, for whom its creation raised complex issues.

After Kandinsky fled Russia in December 1921, leaving *Painting with a Circle* "on deposit" in Moscow, it vanished from the surface of history. The artist was not even able to obtain a photograph of it from the Soviet authorities. In effect, the painting was reduced to silence. So total was the cultural censorship to which it was subjected that it was thought to have been lost. Then, in the late 1970s, long after the artist's death, it was rediscovered in the USSR, although it was not publicly displayed for the first time before 1989. Yet until today this capital work in modern art history has received scant recognition from scholars and has thus not been given the place it deserves in our cultural Pantheon.

More than an innovative interpretation of *Painting with a Circle*, this book reveals the multiple levels of censorship that beset the creation of the first purely abstract composition and in many ways beset it still. Casting an entirely new look on it in the light of hitherto unpublished documents relating to the circumstances of its creation and its cultural sources, Andréi Nakov finally does justice to its historical and artistic importance. The outcome of an exhaustive and exemplary research, his book enables us to grasp the cultural context of the period in which it was painted and to understand the essence of Kandinsky's aesthetic.



Andréi Nakov,
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of the First Abstract Painting*

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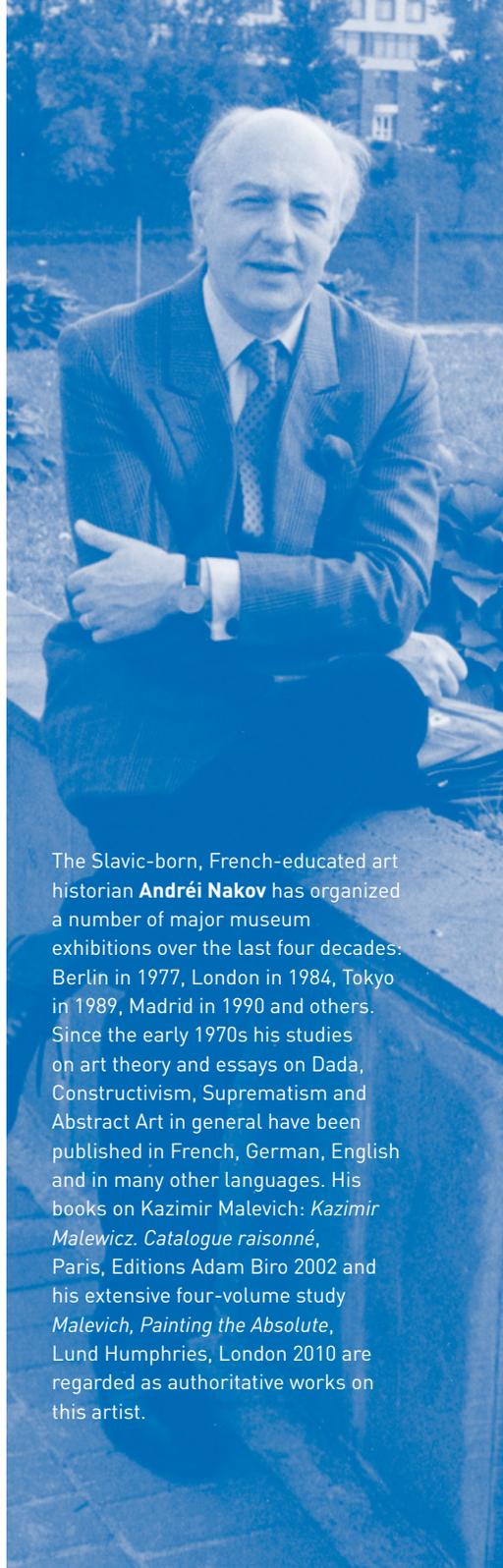
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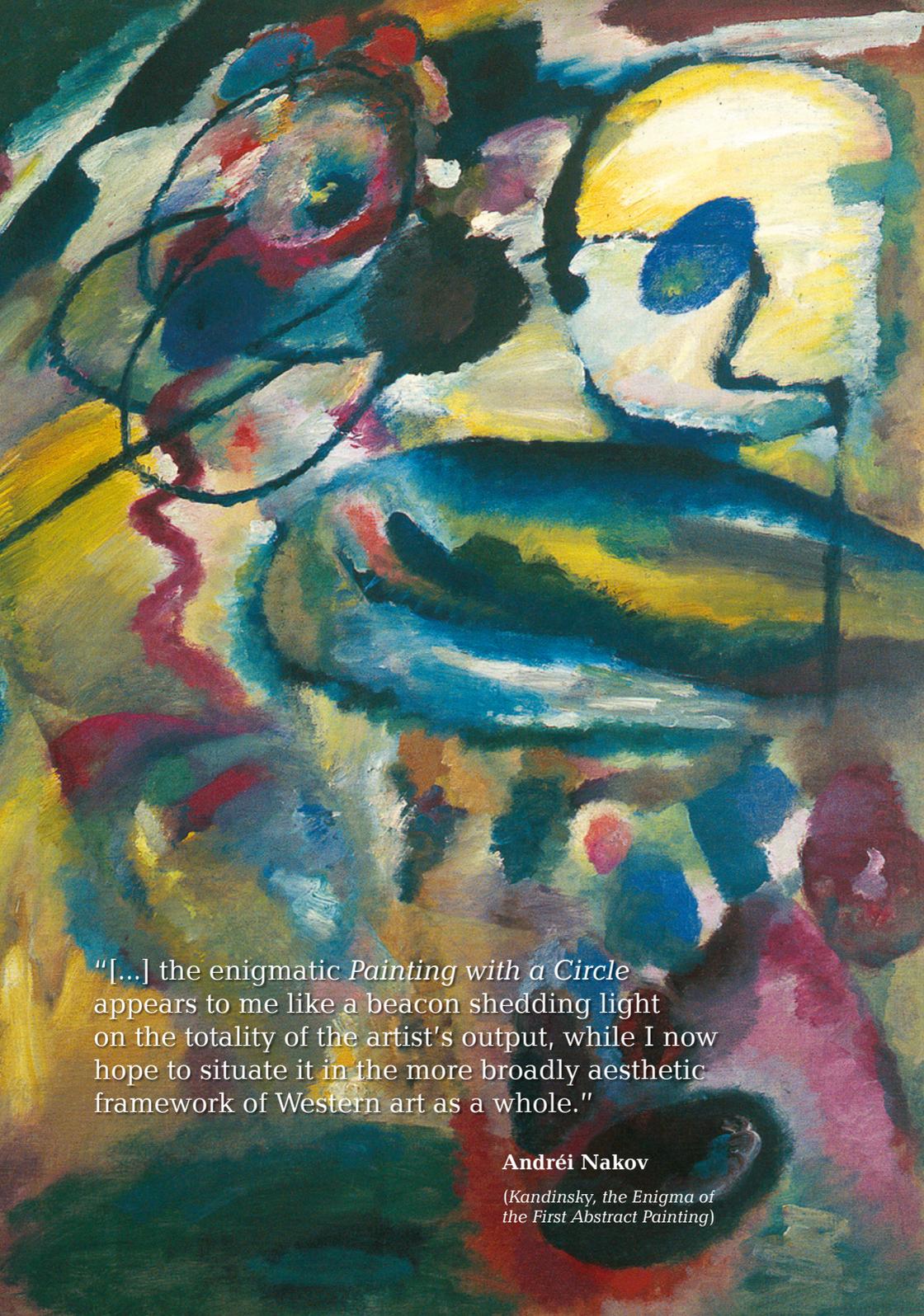
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The Slavic-born, French-educated art historian **Andréi Nakov** has organized a number of major museum exhibitions over the last four decades: Berlin in 1977, London in 1984, Tokyo in 1989, Madrid in 1990 and others. Since the early 1970s his studies on art theory and essays on Dada, Constructivism, Suprematism and Abstract Art in general have been published in French, German, English and in many other languages. His books on Kazimir Malevich: *Kazimir Malewicz. Catalogue raisonné*, Paris, Editions Adam Biro 2002 and his extensive four-volume study *Malevich, Painting the Absolute*, Lund Humphries, London 2010 are regarded as authoritative works on this artist.



"[...] the enigmatic *Painting with a Circle* appears to me like a beacon shedding light on the totality of the artist's output, while I now hope to situate it in the more broadly aesthetic framework of Western art as a whole."

Andréi Nakov

(Kandinsky, *the Enigma of the First Abstract Painting*)