

# THE SURFACE WORLD

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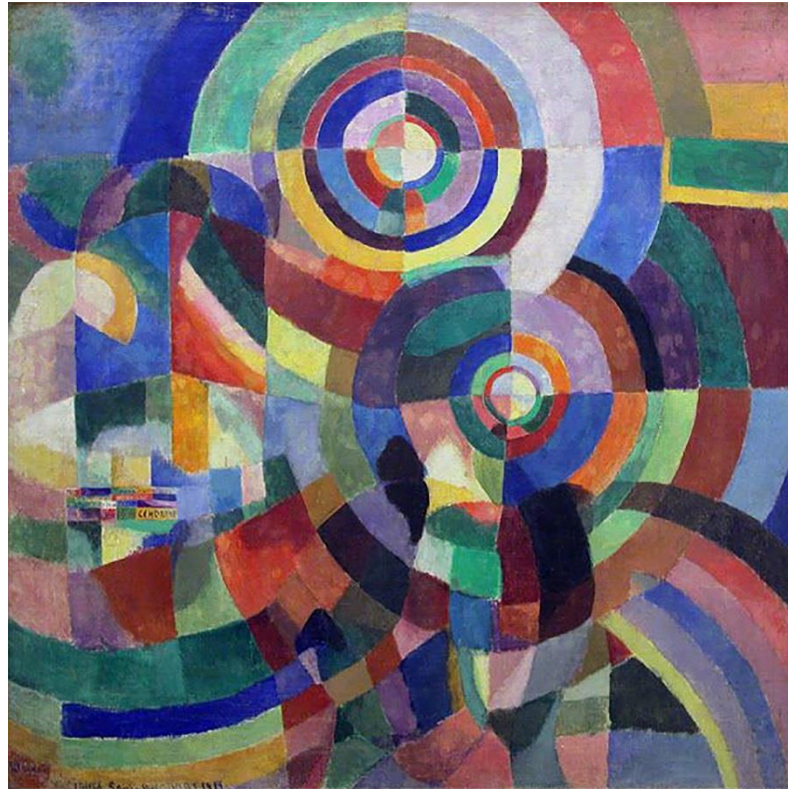
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Part 1

The Invisible World

## Chapter 1 – Introduction

This does not look like a chair.



Sonia Delaunay – Electric Prisms

So it is not a painting of a chair.

It does not look like an airplane.

It does not look like a house.

It does not look like anything you can see.

So, it is not a painting of anything you can see.

If it is not a painting of something you can see it must be a painting of something you can't see.

Abstract art depicts the invisible world rather than the visible world.

Art does not reproduce the visible but makes visible

- Paul Klee

The major forms of traditional painting all have their equivalents in abstract art but these traditional subjects are approached in new ways. We know more about the world than the people of the past so it would be foolish for us to attempt to describe the world like they did.

The four traditional forms of painting are:

- Landscape
- Portrait
- Self-portrait
- Still life

In a traditional landscape the artist aims to reproduce the visual appearance of the natural world. The painter paints the hill and ends up at a recognisable representation of the hill. How something looks is a reasonable way to describe it, define it.

But...what does this achieve? Everyone can just look out of their window and see a hill. Everybody has seen thousands of hills over the decades of their life. Why bother showing them another one?

Showing somebody what a hill looks like is a waste of time because they already know what a hill looks like; it is better to show them something, to paint something, that they have never seen before.

Besides, we know there is more to the world, to the hill, than how it looks. As well as being constructed out of mud and grass the hill is constructed out of atoms. Now we know about the atoms we have a new way to paint the hill, a new way to define it. We can represent the hill by painting the atoms that make up the hill.

An abstract landscape is a painting of the world we can't see rather than a painting of the world we can see. Abstract landscapes are paintings of unseen forces and particles such as atoms and sound waves.

It is foolish to paint the world as we see it now we know there is more to the world than what we can see. The billions of atoms that make up the hill are more important than the hill because there are billions of them. The invisible world is bigger, more interesting, than the visible world.

All we see is a tiny part of the electromagnetic spectrum of light. There are more waves we can't see - such as sound waves - than there are waves we can see. There is far more in the invisible world than the visible world.

Before you can depict something on canvas you need to be able to see it very accurately. You assess your subject's shapes, curves, colours, and attempt to replicate these characteristics on the canvas. It is only when you see the exact curve of a hill that you can paint the exact curve of the hill. Because painting is all about working out how things look the progression from representation to abstraction was a very natural one. Both styles require the same process - you have to work out how something looks. When drawing a person you assess the size of the nose, the curve of the chin, the placement of the eyes, and

it is only when you've defined these characteristics in exquisite detail that you can replicate them on the paper.

In a traditional portrait you paint how somebody looks. You paint their nose, eyes, mouth, and if you copy all of these things faithfully you arrive at a realistic image of the person.

That is not interesting.

We know what faces look like: we have seen thousands of faces before. We know exactly what noses look like and exactly what ears look like. Showing somebody a picture of a face is like showing a man who owns a mirror shop his reflection. Society has no use for painted portraits because everybody has already seen it all before. Besides, if you want an image of somebody you can just take a photograph.

The invention of the camera nearly destroyed painting because there's no reason to sit for hours for a portrait when someone can just take a photo in a second. Somebody can take a photo of the view from Everest so we do not need a painting of it. The camera made representational painting obsolete so painting had to evolve and occupy places it had never occupied before. Because there was no need to paint things you can see anymore the only logical option was to start painting things you can't see. You have to paint gravity rather than the hill, love rather than a face.

Abstract portraits are paintings of people's thoughts and feelings. Abstract portraits are paintings of what people look like on the inside rather than the outside. Visual appearance should be left to the photographers now.

A person's thoughts and feelings make a more interesting subject than their visual appearance. The shape of a person's nose tells us nothing about their character. The colour of somebody's eyes tells us nothing about who they are. People are not defined by their appearance they are defined by their personality so a painting of somebody's thoughts and feelings tells you far more about them than a traditional portrait. The invisible world gives you more accurate information than the visible world.

Imagine there is a man on a boat. If I were to paint this scene representationally I would produce an image of the man on the boat and that would be all I have. All I'm telling people is that there is a man on a boat. This image does not have enough information to be interesting so information needs to be added from the invisible world.

Maybe the man thinks the boat is amazing. We can add this information to the painting. If the man hates his fellow passengers this hatred, this feeling, would also add something substantial to our depiction of the scene. Instead of having a painting of a man on a boat we have a painting of a man on a boat he loves surrounded by people he hates.

The invisible world is bigger than the visible world.

When you look at a pen all you see is a pen. The visible world is sparse and boring. In the invisible world the pen is actually billions of atoms. There is increased potential for information with this increased complexity. A woman can both love her husband and hate his mistress at the same time.

A person's personality (their thoughts and feelings, fears and dreams) is far more



important than their physical appearance. The fact that the woman loves her husband even though he is cheating on her tells us a huge amount about her and none of this information would be contained in a realistic depiction of her visual appearance.

The internet made the visible world boring. You can go on the internet and see photos of the view from Everest, photos of the middle of the Sahara. You can see all these things with a simple Google search. There's no reason to paint this world because we already have endless images of it. Why bother showing someone a picture they can find themselves in a couple of seconds on their phone?

But...what does love look like? You cannot find an image of love with a quick Google search. A painting of love has value because it is new and interesting. We have all seen a million faces so there is no need to paint any more pictures of faces.

What does love for a spouse that is cheating on you look like?

There is great variation in abstract portraits because everyone thinks and feels differently. In this way the abstract portrait is very similar to the traditional portrait. The more accurately you depict minute variations in facial features, the more you paint how the person is different, the more your final image will look like the person. It is the recording of differences that leads to recognisable portraits and abstract portraits also attempt to depict differences because everyone thinks and feels differently. Both traditional and abstract portraits attempt to depict people as individuals.

Thoughts and feelings are more interesting than visual appearance. Imagine somebody sat by a window staring out at the rain. The fact that they are staring at the rain is not significant; the real content of the scene is how they feel about the rain. Maybe they hate the rain because they want to go outside or maybe they love the rain because it is watering their flowers. Both of these completely different scenarios would be represented exactly the same in a traditional portrait because they would both look exactly the same. A painting of somebody that hates the rain watching the rain and a painting of someone that loves the rain watching the rain would both be exactly the same so they are both false. Neither of these paintings contains enough information to accurately describe the scene.

It is necessary to add information from the invisible world to the scene.

Abstract still lives add information from the invisible world so the created image can more accurately describe the thing being painted. An abstract still life is a depiction of an object's essence, its purpose. You ask an object 'why are you here?' and let the object's answer dictate the representation of the object.

For example: if I was to say the purpose of my shoe is to keep my foot dry I would paint it constructed of the bright yellow plastic of a child's raincoat.

There is a scale to abstraction all the way from complete representation to complete abstraction and this scale is very long. You can paint at any point along this scale. If I was to paint a person but I change her skin so it is purple I have been slightly abstract. If I were to paint something that does not resemble reality in any way – for example some orange circles on a blue background - then I have been far more abstract than I was in the painting of the girl.

It is impossible to paint at the completely abstract end of the scale because absolutely everything recalls reality in some way. You could look at my orange circles on a blue background and be strongly reminded of a field of orange flowers on a summer's day. Everything recalls nature in some way so there is nothing at the completely abstract end of the scale.

It is impossible to paint at either end of this scale so everything is somewhere in the middle. There will always be minor deviations from reality in photorealistic portraits however real they look. Art is not perfect; we only think it is perfect because our eyes are terrible.

Sometimes you look at a painting and it looks 100% like the person.

The painting and the face are clearly not the same: one is made of flesh and one is made of paint. They only look the same because our eyes are so bad they cannot distinguish between flesh and paint.

There are surely infinite differences between the flesh and the paint but our eyes are so bad we see none of them. Our eyes are also not good enough to see what the face truly is – a construct made out of billions of atoms.

Lack of sight, lack of knowledge, is integral to painting an object's essence. When I painted the shoe as a raincoat I made a massive assumption about the object based on a limited assessment of it. In reality shoes do far more than keep our feet dry. Shoes also protect your feet from broken glass and by painting the shoe made of a weak plastic I have stopped it performing this function. When I originally painted the shoe I did not understand the object well enough to accurately describe it. It is necessary to paint the shoe with a thick, impenetrable, barrier as its sole.

Painting the essence can be approached in this way (allowing your assumptions about the object's purpose to dictate its form) but at every stage lack of knowledge is clearly emphasised. It is ignorance that leads us to change objects that have been manufactured in the same way for centuries and this ignorance is born out of our inability to truly understand the purpose of the shoe. Ignorance is important in abstract art. We paint things we cannot see so we cannot possibly know how to paint them.

Everybody already knows how to paint a face so it looks like a face. There are hundreds of books that can talk you through this process if you care enough to read them. There's no point painting faces anymore: there is nothing new to be learned. We already know how to paint faces.

We do not know how to paint space.



Vincent Van Gogh – The Starry Night

This is what Van Gogh thought space looked like.

We do not actually see space: all we see when we look at space is blackness and blackness is not a thing it is nothingness. When we look into space we don't see anything at all but that is not what is there. There are billions of stars in space and we only see the hundred that are closest to us. These unseen stars are hiding in the darkness. There is an invisible world beyond the one we can see. There are billions of planets we can't see as well.

There is an invisible world in the village in the painting. People are living their lives in the buildings - they might be cooking, sleeping, reading - but the world inside the houses is hidden by the walls.

Things exist behind the tree on the left of the painting but we do not see any of those things.

Things exist in space but we don't see those things either.

We do not see the things behind the tree or the things in space all we see is darkness.

We do not see the things in the houses or the things in space all we see are tiny lights.

Both the tree and the village are metaphors for space and they both mean the same thing - there is an invisible world beyond the one we can see.

We are so ignorant we do not even understand what we can and can't see. When we look at a realistic painting we think it is a face but it is really paint. We do not understand

that we don't really see faces.

Before science formulated the theory of particles we had no idea particles existed. We thought we were seeing reality as it truly was but really all we were seeing was the thin surface world visible to us.

Now we know the hill and the face are constructed out of atoms. We know that atoms are what reality truly is. It would be foolish to continue painting the surface world we see when we know there is a far larger far more important world below the surface.

The abstract self-portrait is an attempt to express the subconscious mind. When you express your subconscious mind you express yourself far more accurately than when you express your conscious mind.

The subconscious mind is both larger and smarter than the conscious mind.

The conscious mind is a tiny, almost insignificant, part of our mind. All the conscious thoughts we are aware of are mere glimpses of the extraordinary depths of our subconscious mind. It is like you are in a boat on the Atlantic. The ocean is the subconscious mind. The currents carry you all the way from Britain to America while you sleep.

It is always the subconscious mind that has been expressed through art. When you make art you attempt to express yourself and you make decisions based on this thing you are trying to express but these conscious thoughts, these conscious actions, have never been what is truly expressed. What you think your art means is not actually what your art means. The conscious mind makes a handful of decisions during the creative process whereas the subconscious mind makes thousands.

The real meaning of an art piece has always been dictated by the subconscious mind. Sometimes you think you understand your art when you make it but then a couple of weeks later you see something new in the art piece and your opinion of what the art is about changes completely. Again you think you understand the art piece and again you are wrong. All you have is a slightly bigger glimpse of what your subconscious was actually saying.

It is likely impossible for someone to understand something they made: the subconscious mind is just so much bigger than the conscious mind.

It is desirable for art to be communication of the subconscious mind because the subconscious will understand life and reality far more than the conscious mind. The subconscious will also be far more honest about the artist.

The conscious mind will try to conceal secrets. The subconscious mind will express whatever is most important regardless of whether the fact is a secret or not. The subconscious mind is a better thing to express than the conscious mind. The subconscious mind is a better thing to paint. Honesty is important in art and your conscious mind will never be honest. It is only when you paint the subconscious that you are painting who you truly are instead of who you want to be.

Who you truly are is hidden, unseen, invisible.

The subconscious mind has always been accidentally expressed in art but now, rather than letting it express itself randomly, attempts have been made to intentionally express it, to strengthen its influence over the art piece. It is only when you express the

subconscious mind that you truly express yourself and it is only when you paint the atoms that you are truly painting the hill.