

DE STIJL - FROM AMSTERDAM TO NEW YORK

The (re) presentation of De Stijl in the historical retrospective De Stijl exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (1951) and the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1952-1953)

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Programme: Arts and Culture

Specialization: Art of the Contemporary World and World Art Studies

Academic year: 2015-2016

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CONTENT

	INTRODUCTION	3
1.	EXPLORING EXHIBITIONS AS INSTRUMENTS IN THE PRODUCTION OF ART HISTORICAL CANONS	8
	1.1. On art historical canons	8
	1.2. The Museum of Modern Art, the Stedelijk Museum and the modern art canon	10
	1.3. Exhibitions as spaces of representation	12
	1.4. Exhibitions as narrative environments	14
2.	DE STIJL REPRESENTED IN THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART IN NEW YORK AND IN THE STEDELIJK MUSEUM IN AMSTERDAM BEFORE THE RETROSPECTIVE DE STIJL EXHIBITION	17
	2.1. De Stijl in the Museum of Modern Art: painting towards architecture	17
	2.2. De Stijl in the Stedelijk Museum: Van Doesburg and Mondrian as pioneers of abstract art	25
3.	THE HISTORICAL RETROSPECTIVE DE STIJL EXHIBITION IN THE STEDELIJK MUSEUM IN AMSTERDAM (1951) AND THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART IN NEW YORK (1952-53)	31
	4.1. The exhibition-process	31
	4.2. De Stijl in the Stedelijk Museum (1951)	37
	4.3. De Stijl in the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1952-53)	45
	CONCLUSION	56
	APPENDICE I - ILLUSTRATIONS	58
	LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	80
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	83

ABSTRACT: The Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and the Museum of Modern Art in New York played a significant role in the assimilation of De Stijl into the canon of modern art as an important and influential modern art movement through the construction of institutionalized narratives. The historical retrospective De Stijl exhibition, shown in the Stedelijk Museum in 1951 and in the Museum of Modern Art in 1952-53 was an important instrument with which both museums produced and distributed narrative histories of De Stijl and contributed to the canonization of De Stijl. The aim of this research is to analyze the retrospective De Stijl exhibition and a selective number of preceding exhibitions organized by both museums in the period from 1932 to 1946 as narrative environments and spaces of representation in answer to the question what narrative histories of De Stijl were produced and with what narrative elements and devices these narratives were produced.

KEYWORDS: De Stijl, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, exhibitions, representation, canonization.

INTRODUCTION

In March 2015 I started with an internship in Museum De Lakenhal in Leiden, doing archival research in the context of an exhibition on Nelly van Doesburg and De Stijl that will take place in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam in 2017, celebrating the century of the founding of De Stijl. While immersing myself in the archives, looking into the memoirs, manifests, texts and correspondence of different De Stijl members I became fascinated by De Stijl; every photograph, every letter revealing a different aspect of its colorful history, formed by artists, writers, artworks, philosophies, theories and series of events that spread from the Netherlands to the United States and beyond.

In April 2016 the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam organized the international symposium ‘De Stijl and its legacy’, marking the sixtieth anniversary of the first monograph about De Stijl by Hans Jaffé and saluting a century of De Stijl, presented by the Rijksmuseum as: “this important chapter in the history of Dutch modernism”, whose influence “now reaches into all fields of culture.”¹ “It is no understatement”, the Rijksmuseum added, “that De Stijl still constitutes the Dutch contribution to modern art”. This characterization of De Stijl forms an illustration of the ninety-nine years bridging today and De Stijl’s foundation, in which De Stijl has been presented in numerous scholarly publications and art exhibitions that have contributed to the assimilation of De Stijl into the history of modern art as influential Dutch modern art movement. Like any history, the histories of De Stijl that were produced and distributed with these presentations are

¹ This symposium will take place on April 20, 2016. It salutes a century of De Stijl and celebrates the sixtieth anniversary of Hans Jaffe’s publication of 1956, the first monograph of De Stijl. See Jaffe 1956.

representations, coherent and ordered reconstructions of selected events and developments in sequential time.²

It is not within the scope of this research to take the different agents into account: writers, art critics, dealers, curators, collectors, who had a part in this dynamic process of canonization and representation. I will bring to light one agent that held a dominant position in the international art-world of the twentieth century: the modern art museum.³ In line with the view of history as a cultural product, museums are approached in this research as centers of cultural production, distribution and reception that do not give objective descriptions but held the power to create knowledge and meaning with the representational modes of collecting, exhibiting and publishing; a perspective that is explored by many scholars in the broad field of museum-studies.⁴

The Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam have the leading role as the two modern art museums that played an important part in the construction of the canon of modern art.⁵ Through the production of narrative histories of De Stijl both museums had an equally important role in the assimilation of De Stijl into the modern art canon. The representational modes of exhibiting, collecting and publishing work together in the production of narrative histories, in this research the main focus will be on the mode of exhibiting as *the* most important instrument for museums in the production, distribution and reception of art.⁶ Both museums had represented De Stijl in a number of exhibitions and accompanying publications from the 1930's onwards, the historical retrospective De Stijl exhibition, shown in the Stedelijk Museum in 1951 and in MoMA in 1952-53, was the first exhibition that was solely devoted to De Stijl and can be understood as important instrument in the canonization of De Stijl. The exhibition was shown in the Stedelijk Museum as a 'test set-up', meaning that from the very start the exhibition was organized with the intention of sending it from Amsterdam to MoMA in New York.⁷

² White in Thompson 2004, p. 132.

³ After 1930, the power of other players such as art-collectors and – dealers diminished and the voice of the modern art museum was one of the loudest and strongest voices to be heard, see Noyes-Platt 1981, p. 14. Leigh 2008, p. 7.

⁴ Hooper-Greenhill 1992. Bennett 1995, Preziosi 1995, 2003.

⁵ Leigh 2008. The role of MoMA as creator of the canon of modern art is also brought to the fore by other scholars, such as Noyes-Platt 1981, Grunenberg 1999, Staniszewski 1999, Halbertsma 2007. Roodenburg-Schadd has studied the Stedelijk Museum as important actor in the production of modern art history, see Roodenburg-Schadd 2004. For the formation of modernism and the positioning of De Stijl into the modernist discourse as a Dutch modern art movement Beckett 1983, pp. 67-79 and White 2003. White has emphasized the role of MoMA in the production of the history of De Stijl.

⁶ Ferguson 1996, p. 178.

⁷ See letter of Van den Broek to Vroom, art-department of ministry of Art, Education and Science (AES), May 5, 1951. (CA Amsterdam; De Stijl exhibition 1951; De Stijl exhibition in the United States). Before mounting at MoMA the exhibition was shown at the Biennale in Venice. This exhibition will not be included in this research because the focus is on the representation of De Stijl in the museum-context.

The question central to this research is: What narrative histories of De Stijl were produced and distributed in and with the retrospective historical De Stijl exhibition shown in MoMA and in the Stedelijk Museum; how were these histories created and in what way are these histories aligned with the narrative histories of De Stijl as produced with the preceding exhibitions organized by MoMA and the Stedelijk Museum in the period from 1930 to 1946 in which De Stijl was represented? The aim of this research is to analyze the form and content of the museum's narrative histories, in other words: What was the constructed narrative and with what narrative elements and strategies was this narrative constructed?

Exhibitions have been explored by a number of scholars as visual and verbal speech acts; a perspective that places the emphasis on the exhibition as communicative medium and on the exhibition maker as communicator, leading to an analysis of its rhetorics of speech.⁸ In this research the main focus is not on the museum as communicative agent but on the histories constructed by both museums: on the exhibition as a spatial narrative.⁹ In this context the exhibition is not only a medium through which a story is communicated to the public, but a physical environment that contains a narrative. Theoretical perspectives are derived from *De narratieve ruimte* by Herman Kossman, Frank den Oudsten and Suzanne Mulder, in which the canon of classic rhetoric is used to bring the exhibition to light as a constructed space of representation, containing a narrative that is distributed to the audience. This view on exhibitions provides a set of tools to analyze the form and content of the narrative histories of De Stijl as constructed by the Stedelijk Museum and MoMA in the retrospective De Stijl exhibition and preceding exhibitions that were closely connected to this exhibition.¹⁰

It is important to reconstruct the exhibitions and the accounts of their production in order to analyze the narratives they contain and to uncover the organizational principles with which they were created. A reconstruction is not possible without thorough archival research. My research material consists of installation photographs, floor plans, correspondence, shipping documents and minutes of meetings. I will take into account journals, press releases and reviews and study the publications closely connected to the exhibitions, such as leaflets, exhibition-

⁸ Scholars have drawn comparisons between the exhibition and other media, such as literary texts, speech acts and theatrical representations, in order to analyze the functioning of the exhibition. For example Ferguson and Leigh, who both have approached exhibitions as institutional speech acts, Ferguson 1996, Leigh 2008. Bal has compared exhibitions with narrative texts, Bal 1996. Den Oudsten has drawn a parallel between the exhibition and scenography in the theater in the sense that the exhibition is an environment where knowledge is 'staged' and described the exhibition as 'a particular form of choreography'. Den Oudsten 2012, pp. 25-29.

⁹ A narrative perspective on museums can be found in: Silverstone 1989. Bal 1994, 1996. Ferguson 1996. Kossman, Mulder and den Oudsten 2012. Ferguson describes exhibitions as 'narratives that use art objects as elements in institutionalized stories that are promoted to the audience', p. 175. Silverstone has examined the role of the museum as mythmaker, storyteller and imitator of reality.

¹⁰ Mulder, Kossman, Den Oudsten 2012.

catalogs and museum bulletins. Analyzing the installation-photographs I have often wished that I could go back in time for a brief moment to walk around the galleries and get a thorough view of the installation design. It is important to be aware of the limitations of using the black and white installation photographs. However, with the available source materials it is possible to make a reconstruction of the exhibitions.

When analyzing a narrative and the accounts of production it is important to have a clear view on the agents producing this narrative. In this research I will use the characterization of MoMA and the Stedelijk Museum as outlined by Nana Leigh in *Building the image of modern art, the rhetoric of museums and the representation and canonization of modern art (1935-1975). The Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and MoMA in New York*.¹¹ Leigh has argued that both museums had an important part in the creation and modulation of the canon of modern art. Although Leigh has analyzed an extensive number of exhibitions mounted at MoMA and the Stedelijk Museum from a comparative point of view, the museums' representation of De Stijl in the retrospective De Stijl exhibition has not been taken into account in her research. This exhibition, shown in both museums of modern art, proves to be an interesting topic of research in terms of the representation and canonization of De Stijl. When placed within the context of Leigh's research, the question arises how both museums 'colored' the narrative histories of De Stijl produced with the retrospective De Stijl exhibition; can the exhibition be labeled as a 'typical' MoMA exhibition or did it bear the imprint of the Stedelijk Museum?

The retrospective De Stijl exhibition has been studied in a number of scholarly publications. Jonneke Jobse has approached the exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum in 'De Stijl als lichtend voorbeeld' as a political instrument; a call on the Dutch government to give *Het Nieuwe Bouwen* a leading role in the reconstruction-work after World War II.¹² Roodenburg-Schadd has studied the exhibition in Amsterdam in light of the collection policy of Sandberg in *Het verzamelbeleid van Willemn Sandberg voor het Stedelijk Museum*.¹³ She has pointed out the influential role of this particular exhibition in the canonization of De Stijl, but this aspect is not further explored. Mary Anne Staniszewski has briefly mentioned the exhibition in MoMA in *The power of display* as part of a broader analysis of the installation-design of a series of MoMA's exhibitions.¹⁴ Although the retrospective exhibition as shown in the Stedelijk Museum differed in numerous significant aspects from the exhibition in MoMA, these exhibitions have never been analyzed

¹¹ Leigh 2008. The role of MoMA as creator of the canon of modern art is also brought to the fore by other scholars, such as Noyes-Platt 1981, Grunenber 1999, Staniszewski 1999, Halbertsma 2007.

¹² Jobse 2010.

¹³ Roodenburg-Schadd 2004.

¹⁴ Staniszewski 1998.

from a comparative approach before in the light of the canonization and representation of De Stijl.

This research is divided in four chapters. In chapter one I will examine the process of representation and canonization and present MoMA and the Stedelijk Museum as producers of the modern art canon. In chapter two I will turn to MoMA and analyze a series of exhibitions organized by MoMA and the Stedelijk Museum that preceded the retrospective De Stijl exhibition in answer to the question how the narrative histories produced with these exhibitions were aligned with the history of De Stijl as told in the retrospective exhibition. The following exhibitions will be examined: Modern Architecture: International Exhibition in 1932, the well-known exhibition Cubism and Abstract Art in 1936 and the Piet Mondrian memorial exhibition in 1945 shown in MoMA and the Theo van Doesburg exhibition in 1936, *Abstracte Kunst* in 1938 and the Piet Mondrian memorial exhibition in 1946 in the Stedelijk Museum.

In chapter four I will analyze the representation of De Stijl in the historical retrospective De Stijl exhibition. The question is how both museums portrayed De Stijl. Did the museums' main emphasis lie on De Stijl as cohesive art collective, as journal, or avant-garde movement? Which artworks were brought to the fore as main representatives of De Stijl? Were certain disciplines given a primary position? Was the focus on the artistic program, the theoretical background, philosophical roots and utopian ideas behind De Stijl or on the means of expression and the practical artistic achievements? Was the movement placed within a social or political context or stripped from that context? Which artists were brought to light as central to De Stijl? In this context I will explore the role of Mondrian vs. Van Doesburg, two artists who both have an important position within De Stijl, the former as De Stijl's most well known painter, the latter as De Stijl's founder and theorist.

1. EXPLORING EXHIBITIONS AS INSTRUMENTS IN THE PRODUCTION OF ART HISTORICAL CANONS

Before arriving at the analysis of the narrative histories produced by MoMA and the Stedelijk Museum, I will bring to light a number of characteristics of art historical canons on a structural and functional level in order to gain more understanding of the process of canonization. MoMA and the Stedelijk Museum will be introduced as narrative agents who had an important part in the construction of the modern art canon. In the final section of this chapter I will explore the exhibition as important instrument in the production of art historical canons and approach the exhibition as a space of representation and as a narrative environment.

1.1. On art historical canons

The art historical canon has been the subject of research of numerous scholars in the academic discipline of art history, who have studied the ground that is 'covered' by the canon or analyzed the processes and mechanisms of canon formation.¹⁵ Griselda Pollock has defined the art historical canon as: "a discursive formation which constitutes the objects or texts it selects as the products of artistic mastery".¹⁶ In line with this definition Anna Brzyski has described canons as 'discursive structures that organize information within a particular field, according to a hierarchic order, which engenders cultural meanings, confers and withholds value, and ultimately participates in the production of knowledge.'¹⁷ In these definitions the art historical canon is outlined as a classificatory system; the result of the selective structuring of texts, containing one possible set of selections among several possible sets of selection.¹⁸ The canon reflects and is founded upon those normative values, artistic criteria, beliefs and principles that are dominant within a shared knowledge base. This system functions as a measure of things; it imposes limits, confers or withholds value and governs the areas of neglect and attention alike; it singles out particular works within one artist's oeuvre and privileges the work of certain artist, a medium, discipline or movement before the other. As an arbiter of taste, the canon dictates what is valid and fundamental, what deserves a central position and what belongs in the periphery, in other words: what counts as art.

Canonical works are by definition objects of study, analysis and interpretation; works that collectors lobby to add to their collection and that attract large amounts of museum visitors. Their position within the canonical structure guarantees visibility and ensures their reproduction

¹⁵ The extensive body of canonical critique has explored the canon as an instrument of inclusion and exclusion, shaped by social, economical, and cultural values.

¹⁶ Pollock 1999, p. 9.

¹⁷ Brzyski 2007, p. 3.

¹⁸ Gates jr. 1992, pp. 31-32.

as image and as referent within the art historical discipline, but also in the broader circles outside this discipline.¹⁹ The iconic significance of certain canonical artists or key works of individual mastery is strengthened by enforcement agencies such as universities, museums and academies.

The art historical canon stages the history of art as a historical continuum, a selective sequence of artistic movements, key works and canonical artists.²⁰ The canon hereby produces the effect of inevitability; the artworks and artists included are essential for the unfolding of its narrative. Brzyski has outlined the canon as an overarching framework that contains different 'sub-canons'. By dint of being part of the same framework these different canons share the same canonical logic; each canon appears to be exhaustive and objective, simply revealing the official history of art that was there all the time, ready to be picked up and passed on.²¹ This apparent totality, as Pollock has argued, is mere fiction; canons are always incomplete, exclusive and selective.²²

Although the art historical canon has been 'opened up' and critiqued many times it is still very much alive.²³ Marlite Halbertsma has argued that art history in the twenty-first century is: "as canonical as it ever was, perhaps even more so".²⁴ Blockbuster exhibitions with their seemingly endless rows of visitors draw on canonical standards, survey courses in universities are mainly devoted to the great art historical masters and scholarly research is often aimed at canonical works.²⁵ Halbertsma has stated that the canon is fundamental to art historical discourse: "the canonical artists and their works still form the building blocks of art-historical dialog. Art history would be impossible without a canon. In my view it would be as ridiculous as studying theology without God for art historians to study art history without a canon".²⁶

The canon is a cultural product and as such is produced by subjective agents. A particular exhibition or publication can be pointed out as point of origin of an art historical canon. However, many canons emerge over time through an assemblage of social, cultural, economic, political and institutional processes. Their formation and modulation involves many different players such as curators, artists, scholars, buyers, dealers, critics and lecturers, that together form the dynamic playing field of the art world. They emerge and are kept in play by intersecting

¹⁹ Brzyski 2007, p. 246.

²⁰ Narrative is understood as an account in a semiotic system in which a sequence of events – brought about and undergone by certain actors - is presented and communicated with words, images and/or objects; a story-like unity with an internal coherence, a hierarchical structure and an underlying logical order. See Bal 1994, pp. 98-100.

²¹ Brzyski 2007, p. 5.

²² Pollock 1999 pp. 9-12.

²³ Staniszewski has written that art history is built on the canon and the canon both reflects and constitutes what is recorded as history, Staniszewski 1998, introduction XXI.

²⁴ Halbertsma 2007, p. 17.

²⁵ Brzyski 2007, p. 2.

²⁶ Halbertsma 2007, p. 28.

institutions: academies, the art market and – central in this research – the institution of the museum, that creates and maintains art historical canons through the production of organized and institutional narratives.

1.2. The Museum of Modern Art and the Stedelijk Museum as producers of the modern art canon

MoMA was one of the dominant players in the art world of the twentieth century who had an important role in the creation of the canon of modern art. This “most extreme manifestation of the modern art museum” was founded in New York in 1929 as the first museum exclusively concerned with modern art.²⁷ From the start of its foundation in 1929 the aim of MoMA was to become the leading modern art museum of the world.²⁸ Alfred H. Barr jr. (1902-1981) was asked by the museums’ founding trustees to become director of the museum.²⁹ His ideas and beliefs would shape the museum’s policy for years to come. The museum was able to expand considerably in the following years and grew, in line with its goals and ambitions, into an arbiter of modern visual culture.³⁰ As earliest and most influential museum of its type, MoMA set the standard for other museums of modern art.³¹

Willem Sandberg (1897-1984) became the director of the Stedelijk Museum in 1945 and was highly inspired by Barr’s approach. He would visit MoMA in 1949 but had met Barr in Paris in 1938 where Barr had provided him with MoMA’s program. Sandberg would use this program as point of departure to shape the Stedelijk’s policy. “Because of MoMA, the program was already there”, Sandberg would state later.³² Just as MoMA’s policy was colored by the views of Barr, Sandberg defined the course of the Stedelijk Museum. Although he would be director until

²⁷ For an overview of the history of MoMA see Hunter and William 1984. Elderfield 1995, 1996. Kantor 2002, pp. 190-241. Leigh 2008. Susan Noyes-Platt has stated that the museum at the time of its founding was rooted in the twenties and emerged as a logical result of the widespread discussion and display of European avant-garde art and theory in New York throughout the 1920’s. “The individuals involved with that founding were formed by the art shown, and the critical issues discussed during the decade”, Platt 1981, p. 344. Although the responses to modern art in the twenties were primarily intelligent and positive, this was a dispersed situation, “in which all varieties of modern art were shown simultaneously and the critical evaluations of the art were as various as the styles.” Critics and art-dealers had significantly contributed to the understanding of modern art, MoMA in its turn provided a central focus as the first museum exclusively concerned with modern art. The museum became the center of critical attention and altered the character of the environment of modern art in New York. Platt 1981, p. 343-344.

²⁸ Barr wrote at the time of MoMA’s foundation that the museum would become “perhaps the greatest museum of modern art in the world”. Barr, *A new art museum*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1929, no page nr.

²⁹ Barr was director until 1943. In 1947 he took the position of director of museum collections; in the years between he was director research.

³⁰ Staniszewski 1998, p. 307.

³¹ Leigh has written about MoMA and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam as producers of the canon of art history, Leigh 2008. The role of MoMA as creator of the canon of modern art is brought to the fore by Grunenberg 1999, Halbertsma 2007 and Staniszewski 1999. Roodenburg-Schadd has pointed out the role of the The Stedelijk Museum as creator of the modern art canon, see Roodenburg-Schadd 2004.

³² Translated from Dutch by the author: “Door het MoMA was t’ programma er al”, Barr quoted in Roodenburg-Schadd 2004, p. 79.

1945, he was already involved in the museum's policy from the early 1930's onwards, first as a member of the VANK's committee of temporary exhibitions of applied modern art in the Stedelijk Museum - of which he would become a member in 1934 - and from 1938 onwards as curator of modern art; a function he was given with the task to cover the terrain of avant-garde art for the museum.³³ Sandberg proved himself to be a strong advocate of avant-garde art. His main interest in the period before World War II was directed at geometric abstract art, with an important position for De Stijl and Het Nieuwe Bouwen. Sandberg had been reading De Stijl journal since 1925-1926 and shared the De Stijl ideals of a unity between the visual art and architecture that would contribute to a new and pure human society.³⁴ In the 1930's Sandberg organized a number of exhibitions as member of the VANK, such as the retrospective Theo van Doesburg exhibition in 1936, in which he expressed the ideas he had developed the preceding years.³⁵ With Sandberg as director the Stedelijk Museum grew into a powerful institution of modern art with a widespread influence.³⁶ The Stedelijk Museum was considered a new type of museum that would function as a blueprint for many other museums of modern art throughout the world.³⁷

Leigh has outlined both MoMA and the Stedelijk Museum as leading cultural institutions. Both museums had a common aim: to convince the public of the value of modern art.³⁸ However, the approach of both museums in achieving this aim differed. Leigh has characterized MoMA as an accomplished authority on art historical matters who provided its public with an

³³ Roodenburg-Schadd 2004, p. 62.

³⁴ Roodenburg-Schadd 2004, pp. 43-44. In 1934 he organized the exhibition *De stoel gedurende de laatste 40 jaar*. During this time Sandberg met the Dutch architects Mart Stam and Gerrit Rietveld, according to Roodenburg-Schadd he was influenced by their ideas.

³⁵ Sandberg became member of this committee in 1934. This year he also became head of this committee, together with Paul Bromberg.

³⁶ In the 1970's this leading role of the Stedelijk Museum was internationally recognized. See Roodenburg-Schadd 2004, p. 716. About the international position of the SMA see Schulze-Veilinghausen 1955, Schiff 1958, *Aujourd'hui* 1959. Museums of modern art in Kopenhagen, Stockholm, Krefeld, Rio de Janeiro were founded with the ideas of Sandberg as their point of reference. Pontus Hultén, director of MoMA in Stockholm and later director of Centre Pompidou in Paris wrote in 1975 that: "MoMA was the great creation of the thirties, in Amsterdam the scope was wider. The Stedelijk was unpretentious, open and popular. Sandberg constructed a new social situation for the museum. (...) In the Stedelijk Museum Sandberg showed what a center of artistic and cultural information could be like (...). It is possible that most of the best elements of the modern museum world were first introduced in the Stedelijk." Hultén quoted in Roodenburg-Schadd 2004, p. 217.

³⁷ Museums of modern art in Kopenhagen, Stockholm, Krefeld, Rio de Janeiro were founded with the ideas of Sandberg as their point of reference. Pontus Hultén, director of MoMA in Stockholm and later director of Centre Pompidou in Paris wrote in 1975 that: "MoMA was the great creation of the thirties, in Amsterdam the scope was wider. The Stedelijk was unpretentious, open and popular. Sandberg constructed a new social situation for the museum. (...) In the Stedelijk Museum Sandberg showed what a center of artistic and cultural information could be like (...). It is possible that most of the best elements of the modern museum world were first introduced in the Stedelijk. Roodenburg-Schadd 2004, p. 217.

³⁸ It was important for both museums to accomplish this goal in order to maintain their image as guiding art institutions, see Leigh 2008, p. 17.

‘objective’ and convincing view on modern art.³⁹ The museum produced a history of modern art by creating key-artists, key-movements and key-works that were positioned in an evolutionary sequence, logically evolving out of a historical tradition.⁴⁰ Modern art was not approached as a product of a specific society or as a statement of political engagement, but classified in terms of its formal features. The museum’s primary duty was to educate a broad public emphasis and to contribute to art historical research.

In contrast, the Stedelijk museum is characterized by Leigh as a dynamic and living center of the arts; a flexible, open, creative and ever changing meeting place where art was to be appreciated and the artist could be inspired and had room to conduct experiments.⁴¹ The main focus of the museum was on contemporary art and the quality of the individual and living artist, linked to its importance for mankind and society. In 1961 Sandberg would write: “For the present, and perhaps for the future, the present is more important than the past.”⁴² This clearly illustrates the now and the future as the main focal points of the museums’ activities. Art was not positioned in history but looked at through contemporary eyes. The museum did not explain or translate modern art for its audience as MoMA did, based on the view that art was something that had to be experienced and brought to life. During his directorship Sandberg organized many avant-garde exhibitions and functioned as a ‘link’ between the avant-garde artists and the museum. The museum-function of exhibiting was placed before the functions of acquiring and preservation and the presentation of the permanent collection.

1.3 Exhibitions as spaces of representation

This characterization of MoMa and the Stedelijk Museum brings both museums to light as subjective agents that did not deliver objective descriptions but produced knowledge and meaning in line with underlying values, institutional conventions and perspectives.⁴³ Preziosi has emphasized this subjective character of museums by stating that: “The museum is one of the most brilliant and powerful genres of modern fiction, sharing with other forms of ideological practice – religion, science, entertainment, the academic disciplines – a variety of methods for the

³⁹ Leigh 2008.

⁴⁰ Leigh 2008, p. 348. Halbertsma has written that the museum set the course that other museums of modern art would follow after World War II when they formed their collections, with each movement represented by one or more now canonical artists, Halbertsma 2007, p. 28. Folkersma has argued that museums of modern art today in the twenty-first century still follow this course: “They anxiously hang on to the autonomy of the artwork and the protection of the White Cube.” see Folkersma 2011.

⁴¹ Leigh 2008, p. 347.

⁴² Sandberg in a letter to G. Knuttel Ezn. 18 juli 1961, (SMA archives, Dossier: Private correspondence Sandberg).

⁴³ Many scholars within the field of museum-studies have drawn upon Foucault’s ideas about the construction of knowledge and the interrelation of knowledge and power, archeology of knowledge and the order of things and applied this to the function of the museum in order to understand the museum as a powerful institution that creates knowledge, see Hooper-Greenhill 1992. T. Bennett 1995.

production and factualization of knowledge and its sociopolitical consequences. (...) At the same time, museological practices have played a fundamental role in fabricating, maintaining, and disseminating many of the essentialist and historicist fictions, make up the social realities of the modern world.”⁴⁴ Preziosi’s perspective on museums highlights the museum as a strategic system of representation that generates representations and uses representational strategies to converse the audience to sets of prescribed values.⁴⁵ The modes of exhibiting, publishing and collecting are representational modes within this system through and in which representations are generated. Although these modes are interconnected, in this research the focus is on the mode of exhibiting as main instrument in the production and distribution of art historical canons.⁴⁶

To understand what the concept of ‘representation’ means when applied to the exhibition as a mode of representation it is useful to take a brief look into the definition of this concept by political theorist Hanna F. Pitkin. Pitkin has described representation in *The concept of representation* as a subjective act of deliberation and reason; an act where decisions, judgments and value commitments are involved.⁴⁷ Pitkin’s concept of representation has three meanings that all reside in exhibition, both on the level of the individual museum-object and on the level of the exhibition as a whole. The first meaning refers to the presentation of an object or image for others to consider. Secondly it means the substitution of one object for another. Thirdly the meaning of this concept is to make present an abstraction through or in a particular object; here, the object serves as the type of embodiment of something else.

When an object is part of an exhibition as a physical space of representation, it is presented to the public to view and study. The insertion of this object in the exhibition space means that the object is transformed into a subject, endowed with representational value. The museum-object is both representational and made representative, meaning that it is staged as original and unique work of art and as the embodiment of a class of like objects.⁴⁸ The object takes on new meaning because it bears relationships with other objects and ideas.

Arranged in the representational exhibition-space, museum-objects collectively represent aspects of the past, the present, a movement, style, relation or state of event outside the museum-walls. Preziosi has written that they function as: “a windows on a (narrative) history of styles, values and people, realigned in a certain order to form an institutional narrative”.⁴⁹ They uphold identities, such as avant-garde, national or international and represent social, cultural and

⁴⁴ Preziosi 1996, pp. 407-408.

⁴⁵ Ferguson 1996, p. 178.

⁴⁶ Ferguson 1996, p. 178.

⁴⁷ Pitkin 1967, p. 243.

⁴⁸ See for the differential and referential character of the museum-object, Preziosi 2011. On the relation of the museum-object within the museological institution from a narrative perspective see Bal 1996.

⁴⁹ Preziosi 2011, p. 53.

institutional values. Therefore the exhibition formed by a collection museum-objects is also a representation of the identity of the institution presenting them.⁵⁰

The exhibition as a space of representation is formed by the acts of classification, identification and differentiation. Museums assert the power of classification to arrange material objects according to categories such as ‘chronology’ or ‘style’ and to place them in relationship to one another.⁵¹ This selective structuring of objects sets up associations. It necessarily involves imposing a certain order and meaning upon them. In the exhibition space, ideas and beliefs are mobilized to tell institutionalized narratives. Henrietta Lidchi has referred to these practices as the ‘poetics of display’. In this research the focus is on poetics of display, described by Lidchi as: “The practice of producing meaning through internal ordering and conjugation of separate but related elements”.⁵² This very process of selecting and displaying an object as something worth looking at involves an implied statement about it, a further series of implications arise from the objects placed together.⁵³ Thus every arrangement, the ordering of space and material objects, is the result of interpretative and representational decisions that will lead to different effects, something that will become more clear in the approach of the exhibition as a narrative environment.

1.5. Exhibitions as narrative environments

Exhibitions are situated within a given institutional environment and formed by numerous visual and textual elements; architecture, installation devices, photographs, textual labels and art objects, diagrams and charts, color, light, movement, all merged into a well defined and programmed story, defined by Bruce Ferguson in ‘Exhibition rhetoric’s as: “narratives that use art objects as elements in institutionalized stories that are promoted to the audience”.⁵⁴ The exhibition has the power to be a highly immersive environment with expressive power, as a real, physical space that envelops the visitor within the museum-walls. In the exhibition a new world, a new reality is created. The visitor is immersed for a certain amount of time in this space, separated from the outside world.

In *De narrative ruimte*, Den Oudsten, Kossman and Mulder have used aspects from the canon of classic rhetorics to view the exhibition as a narrative environment; a deliberate arrangement of objects linked to a physical space, connected to a routing through space that, guided by particular selection criteria have a dramatic and documentary relation in line with the

⁵⁰ Ferguson p. 178.

⁵¹ Barker has defined museums as: “Exercises in classification”. Barker 1999, p. 88.

⁵² Lidchi quoted in McDonald 2011, p. 20.

⁵³ Putnam 2009, p. 93.

⁵⁴ Bayer quoted in Staniszewski 1998, p. 3.

intention of the maker of the narrative, in such a way that this selective arrangement has expressive power and speaks out to the public.⁵⁵ In other words, the exhibition is an environment built on an underlying idea in a controlled process, capable of orienting the public. The exhibition as a whole has a certain aesthetic style that attributes to a logical coherence, a narrative consistency throughout the exhibition.

It is important to make the distinction between the concepts of 'space' and 'environment'. Where space evokes the idea of natural surroundings, environment refers to a space that is designed with a specific purpose in mind, a space in which every element is controlled and works together to create meaning. The exhibition is charged by the exhibition maker with a 'narrative potential' that is contained in the exhibition-space as a result of a particular relationship between content and form, meaning that a story is encoded into new forms and concentrated in the physical exhibition-space.⁵⁶

The narrative that lies within the exhibition-space is only able to unfold because of the creative and connective power of the visitor.⁵⁷ As the visitor moves through the exhibition-space, the different narrative elements of the exhibition are connected to each other. Through the connection of these elements the produced and encoded narrative is 'decoded', distributed to the visitor.⁵⁸ Through the selection and ordered arrangement of different narrative elements: artworks, textual labels, posters, wall-texts, lightning systems and architectural elements in the exhibition space a narrative environment is constructed with a representational logic; a plausible and legitimate coherence for itself.⁵⁹

In the context of the exhibition as narrative environment, the rhetoric devices are approached as narrative instruments with which the different narrative elements are arranged in the exhibition space in order to construct an environment with narrative potential. In the narrative environments constructed by MoMA and the Stedelijk Museum a number of narrative instruments is often used: the motif or repetition of images or texts to strengthen aspects of the narrative; the simile or comparison between works of art that stresses certain differences or similarities; the metonymy with which a work of art is used to represent a movement, a development or the oeuvre of an artist and the metaphor that often spans the constructed environment as a whole as the physical expression of an abstract idea or bundling of ideas.

⁵⁵ Den Oudsten 2012, p. 9.

⁵⁶ Den Oudsten 2012, pp. 12-13, p. 47.

⁵⁷ Den Oudsten 2012, p. 29.

⁵⁸ At times the narrative potential is not able to unfold. An example is exhibition *Bauhaus 1919-1938* that was shown in MoMA in 1938-39, critics labeled the exhibition as 'chaotic' and a 'disorganized promiscuity' *Art News* called the exhibition 'a maze' that made no sense. James Johnson Sweeney wrote that: 'greater critical frankness and a more stringent selection would have been less confusing'. Staniszewski 1996, pp. 145, 151.

⁵⁹ MacDonald 2011, p. 191.

Works of art form an important element of the narrative environments created in the modern art museum; which works are selected, if they are labeled and how they are labeled, lit, framed, and put on pedestals determines to a great extent the content of the narrative that is produced and distributed. Artworks can be analyzed on an individual level, but it is through their arrangement in a particular montage or sequence that a story is brought about: a multidimensional story with numerous themes, actors and plotlines or a linear story with a singular storyline, a selected number of actors and a clearly structured beginning, middle and end.

How the selected artworks are positioned in and linked to the architectural space of the museums' galleries is a crucial aspect in the construction of the narrative environment. Spatial intervals between works of art have expressive power; they function like punctuation marks in a written text; they speak out, underscore or highlight certain aspects. Individual artworks can be surrounded by large intervals of space, isolated as autonomous objects or grouped together in order to make explicit a particular relation between them.

Architectural elements structure the exhibition space. They can contribute to an open sense of space or they can be used to create a divided space with different sections and a clear routing for the visitor as the metaphor of a linear storyline. In 'A visual machine' Germano Celant has explored the relation between the works of art and the architectural context. According to Celant the context can be made 'invisible' through the application of certain materials, forms or colors that are considered to be neutral. In this dematerialized context the artworks are 'abstracted' from the wall.⁶⁰ They stand out against the neutral backdrop of the gallery-space as a perfect frame at the service of the works exhibited. The architecture can be disguised as art, made heterogeneous to the works of art displayed in order to create a sense of harmony, a 'total experience' for the visitor. The architectural context can also stand out and attract the attention of the visitor, forcing the visitor to interact with its surroundings and hereby making the visitor acutely aware of the boundaries of space and the constructed nature of the exhibition-space.

With the perspective on the exhibition as a narrative environment through and in which a narrative history is produced, museums are brought to light as the subjective agents constructing these environments. MoMA and the Stedelijk Museum had an important role in creating and modulating the modern art canon through the production and distribution of institutionalized narratives. How these two powerful modern art museums represented De Stijl and positioned De Stijl within the canon of modern art is the question central to the case study that follows.

⁶⁰ Celant 1996, pp. 260-270.

2. DE STIJL REPRESENTED IN THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART IN NEW YORK AND THE STEDELIJK MUSEUM IN AMSTERDAM BEFORE THE RETROSPECTIVE DE STIJL EXHIBITION

De Stijl had been an integral part of the histories of modern art as produced and distributed by MoMA and the Stedelijk Museum with a number of exhibitions and accompanying publications from the early 1930's onwards. In this chapter I will explore three exhibitions organized by MoMA in answer to the question how De Stijl was represented in these exhibitions: Modern Architecture: International Exhibition in 1932, Cubism and Abstract Art in 1936 and the Piet Mondrian memorial exhibit in 1945. From New York I will turn the attention to Amsterdam and analyze three exhibitions that were mounted at the Stedelijk Museum: the retrospective Theo van Doesburg exhibition in 1936, Abstracte Kunst in 1938 and the Piet Mondrian memorial exhibition in 1946.

2.1. De Stijl in the Museum of Modern Art: painting toward architecture

In 1932 Modern Architecture: International Exhibition was shown in MoMA. The exhibition can be considered as a culmination of the period from 1925 onwards in which architectural historian Henry Russell Hitchcock (1903-1987), Alfred Barr and the architect Philip Johnson (1906-2005), who in 1930 established MoMA's department of architecture and design, mainly through a series of books and essays created an architecture aesthetic and developed the architectural principles of modern architecture, what would become known as the International Style.⁶¹ These scholarly publications on the International Style, published before and concurrently with the Modern Architecture exhibition, worked together with the exhibition to produce and distribute the museum's history of modern architecture.⁶²

The publications worth mentioning here in the context of MoMA's representation of De Stijl are Hitchcock's 'The architectural work of J.J.P. Oud' of 1928, *Modern Architecture: Romanticism and Reintegration*, published in 1929 and *The International Style: Architecture since 1922*, the book published concurrently with the exhibition in 1932.⁶³ Three aspects of De Stijl that are

⁶¹ The term 'international style' was often used in these writings to categorize the new modern architecture. By 1928 both Barr and Hitchcock used the term. Barr would be the first to capitalize the term in his foreword of the publication *The International Style: Architecture since 1922* of 1932. The phrase would turn into the label that enveloped the international modern architecture fitting to the framework or the formulation constructed by Hitchcock and Barr from 1925 onwards. See for a discussion about the usage of the term: Riley 1992, pp. 89-93.

⁶² On the importance and effects of the exhibition see: Riley 1992, p. 11, 94-103 and Kantor 2002, pp. 293-294.

⁶³ The third section of Hitchcock's *Modern Architecture* was to be rewritten by Johnson and Hitchcock and turned into another book devoted solely to the International Style, as was decided in 1930.⁶³ The outlines of the modern architecture developed by Hitchcock and Barr in the 1920's were established and placed in a new format, written with the three disciplines, volume, regularity and avoidance of ornamentation.⁶³ *The International Style: Architecture since 1922* was published in 1932 concurrently with the exhibition. In line with the publication *The International Style*.

brought to light in these publications would return in MoMA's following exhibitions such as Cubism and Abstract Art in 1936. One important motif in these writings is the linear development from painting to architecture, the translation of the formal elements of the Neo-Plasticist paintings of De Stijl to the three real dimensions of modern architecture. This linear development would be the central theme of Hitchcock's book *Painting towards architecture*, published in 1949.⁶⁴ In the foreword of this publication Barr stated that: "It is their passionate and concentrated investigation of form which has made painting and sculpture valuable to architects as never before in the history of art".⁶⁵

Theo van Doesburg was presented as important link in this linear process, whose paintings had been of great influence on the development of the modern architecture of Oud and the Bauhaus.⁶⁶ In Hitchcock's publication of 1929 this was illustrated with the combination of Theo van Doesburg's *Rhythim of a Russian dance* (1918) with architectural designs such as Mies von der Rohe's *Design for a brick country house* (1922) (fig. 1 and 2); a selection with which Van Doesburg was portrayed as Von der Rohe's main precedent. Hitchcock highlighted the similarity in terms of the formal aspects of both works by pointing out the flowing together of interior and exterior.⁶⁷ Where Van Doesburg was positioned as the connection between painting and modern architecture, Mondrian was attributed the position of leading painter of De Stijl, the "chief force of Dutch cubist".⁶⁸ Oud was, as another prominent De Stijl member, represented as the architect of De Stijl who had integrated the aesthetic principles of Neo-Plasticism in his architectural projects.⁶⁹ With his reference to De Stijl as a Dutch Cubist movement De Stijl was placed in the tradition of Cubist painting; another motif that would return in MoMa's following presentations.

In 1932, the story of the International Style, as established in the writings of Barr, Hitchcock and Johnson was presented to the public in *Modern architecture: International Exhibition*, directed by Hitchcock.⁷⁰ Oud was represented in this exhibition as the main

Architecture since 1922 the exhibition catalog *Modern Architecture. International Exhibition* was written with the three aesthetic principles as point of departure. The fundamental message of both publications was identical. See Shulze 1996, p. 78 and Kantor 2002, p. 297-98 about the content of the catalog and the publication. The catalog would also be published with the title *Modern architects* in 1932.

⁶⁴ Hitchcock 1949.

⁶⁵ Barr in Hitchcock 1948, p. 8.

⁶⁶ In Hitchcock's essay of Oud in 1928 Van Doesburg is mentioned as the Cubist painter who influenced Oud. In the publication of 1929 the influence of his work on the architectural works of the Bauhaus is accentuated. According to Hitchcock van Doesburg was the one 'driving' Gropius towards the new architecture.

⁶⁷ Hitchcock 1929, p. 191.

⁶⁸ See Hitchcock 1929, p. 17.

⁶⁹ According to Hitchcock, Oud did not remain dependent upon the Neo-Plasticist paintings of De Stijl; as a true architect he was not bound by 'theoretical stringencies' but developed his own adequate architectural expression. Hitchcock 1929, p. 83.

⁷⁰ The first building was located at 730 Fifth Avenue New York.

representative of Dutch modern architecture and one of the pioneering architects of the International Style.

In the exhibition enlarged black and white photographs of architectural works were hung in an even row with identical amounts of spacing between them, reflecting the instructions of Johnson, who had wanted to display the photographs “in the same manner as paintings”.⁷¹ Architectural models were brightly lit and placed on rectangular bases, coated with natural-colored monk’s cloth identical to that of the wall covers.⁷² With this presentation modern architecture was placed in an aesthetic frame of reference that showed the architectural projects as autonomous artworks, stripped from their social, technical or economic concerns. The consistency of the installation design throughout the exhibition contributed to the experience of the exhibition as an aesthetic whole, a perfect metaphor of the uniformity and coherence of the International Style. The overall exhibition design transformed the exhibition-space in an autonomous site with neutral interiors that strengthened the idea that the museum provided the visitor with an objective overview on modern architecture (fig. 3-6).⁷³ That this overview was the result of the selective structuring of material is clearly illustrated by Johnson who later stated that the aspects of current architecture that did not fall under their strict aesthetic criteria of the International Style were excluded: “We were very narrow-minded and anything that was slightly offbeat like Mendelssohn or Haring or especially the constructivists or Lissitzky was a little bit off our purist angle. It did not fit the three points we were making so we wrote out the Constructivists.”⁷⁴

The history of modern architecture was presented as integral part of MoMA’s history of modern art in *Cubism and Abstract Art* in 1936; an exhibition that has been widely acknowledged as important element in the construction of the canon of modern art history.⁷⁵ With this extensive exhibition the museum aimed to give the public a structured overview of the

⁷¹ Riley 1992, p. 75.

⁷² Barr believed this beige, natural colored monk’s cloth to be the most neutral, that would enable the visitor to devote their undivided attention to the works of art exhibited, see Staniszewski 1996, p. 64.

⁷³ In the announcement of the exhibition Barr stated that for the past couple of years MoMA had closely followed the development of a new architecture and that this exhibition would “bring the reality of a new style home to the general public in America, MoMA press release January 16, 1932 (MoMA Press Release Archives).

⁷⁴ Johnson quoted in Kantor 2002, p. 299.

⁷⁵ The full title of the exhibition was: *Cubism and Abstract Art: Painting, Sculpture, Constructions, Photography, Architecture, Industrial Art, Theater, Films, Posters, Typography*. About the influence of this exhibition and publication see Noyes-Platt 1988, pp. 284-295, Overy 1993 p. 10, Kantor 2002, p. 325, White 2003, preface, Roodenburg Schadd 2004, p. 494, Leigh 2008, pp. 189-196. According to Platt this exhibition: “profoundly affected understanding of the history of modernism and established, in particular, the idea of the central and dominating role that Cubism played in early twentieth century art.” p. 284.

history of modern art.⁷⁶ Modern art was divided in different art movements, categorized according to the art historical principle of style and represented by a number of key-artists and a selection of their works.

Barr's well-known flowchart functioned as point of reference throughout the exhibition and was used as dust jacket of the exhibition catalog. The chart visualized the evolutionary development of the different artistic movements as they had emerged out of the styles of the nineteenth century and moved towards geometrical or non-geometrical abstract art, offering the viewer a transcendent point of view from which the history of modern art could be apprehended and studied in its apparent entirety (fig. 7). De Stijl was included together as a geometrical abstract art movement that had developed out of Cubism and had influenced modern architecture and the Bauhaus. These motifs would return in the exhibition and in the accompanying exhibition catalog, written by Barr. The logical structure of Barr's chart was reflected in the structure of the exhibition catalog and in the lay out of the exhibition-space, with its sequence of different stylistic sections. The exhibition started with early Cubism from 1906-10 and systematically and in a more or less chronological order worked its way through the different stylistic movements. Explanatory wall-labels and flowcharts introduced the visitor to the different sections, solely devoted to painting and sculpture.

Barr introduced De Stijl in the chapter of the catalog titled: 'Abstract art in Holland: De Stijl and Neo-Plasticism' as: "one of the longest lived and most influential groups of artists" and characterized De Stijl in terms of the aesthetic principles: "in form the rectangle, in color the primary hues, red blue and yellow."⁷⁷ Mondrian was given a leading role as the most important painter of De Stijl and one of the key artists of geometric abstract art.⁷⁸ In line with this primary position the history of De Stijl did not start with the foundation of De Stijl in 1917, but seven years earlier with Mondrian's move to Paris in 1910, where he had started to geometrize Analytical Cubism under the influence of Picasso (fig. 8).⁷⁹ With this positioning of Picasso as Mondrian's main precedent De Stijl was clearly placed in the Cubist tradition.

Although De Stijl and Neo-Plasticism were included as one modern art movement in Barr' chart, in the exhibition a subdivision was made between the Neo-Plasticist paintings and sculptures of De Stijl on the one hand and the architecture, typography and design on the other. A gallery-space on the third floor gave insight into the development of Neo-Plasticism in

⁷⁶ All four floors of the museum's galleries were dedicated to this extensive exhibition, which has been widely acknowledged as important medium in the construction of the canon of modern art history. Over 400 objects were exhibited – most of them created by European artists.

⁷⁷ Barr 1936, p. 141. In the catalog, Mondrian's publication in 1920 of Neo-Plasticism is marked as a significant event and Neo-Plasticism is explicitly mentioned as 'Mondrian's name', Barr 1936, p. 150.

⁷⁸ Barr described Mondrian as: "one of the greatest artists of our time". Barr 1936, p. 141.

⁷⁹ According to Barr, Mondrian "almost overnight fell completely under the influence of Picasso", Barr 1936, p. 141.

painting out of Cubism. To make explicit Mondrian's position as originator of Neo-Plasticism, three adjacent walls in this gallery were dedicated to his paintings. The gallery showed Mondrian's artistic development from 1911 to 1935, from his first abstraction of natural forms influenced by Picasso's Cubism to his later style: "in which thick black lines divide the canvas into rectangles of various greys and colors"(fig. 9, 10 and 11).⁸⁰ The inclusion of paintings such as *Composition* (1917), that represented Mondrian's pure abstract 'plus and minus' style of 1917 right before De Stijl was founded, brought Mondrian to light as the foremost precedent of De Stijl who had first arrived at the pure abstraction that the other De Stijl members would build on in the period after De Stijl's foundation. Although Van Doesburg was often mentioned in the catalog in tandem with Mondrian as one of the founders and the theorist of De Stijl, only one of his paintings, *Simultaneous Counter composition* (1930) was included in this gallery; the main focus remained on Mondrian as leading painter of De Stijl, who had been of great influence on the development of De Stijl's language of form.⁸¹ Next to painting, sculpture was given a primary position in this gallery. MoMA added a new aspect to their story of the development from Neo-Plasticist paintings to modern architecture. The sculptural work of Georges Vantongerloo was represented as the first translation of the principles found in Mondrian's Neo-Plasticist paintings to three-dimensional forms. From sculpture these forms were developed by other members of De Stijl to a system of architectural compositions (fig. 12).⁸²

The narrative history of De Stijl as it had developed from Cubism to Mondrian's Neo-Plasticist paintings to modern architecture and the Bauhaus was continued in a gallery on the

⁸⁰ Barr 1936, p. 150. Nine paintings of Mondrian were exhibited in this section: MoMA catalogue nr. 178: *Composition* 1911, Joosten, Welsh B31. MoMA nr. 179: *Composition* 1911, B26 [repr.]. MoMA nr. 80: *Composition* 1913, B37 [repr.]. MoMa nr. 181: *Composition* 1915, B79 [repr.], MoMA nr. 182: *Composition* 1917, B84 [repr.]. MoMA nr. 183: *Composition* 1919, B100. MoMa nr. 184: *Composition* 1921, B124 [repr.]. MoMA nr. 185: *Composition* 1926, B176 [repr.]. MoMA nr. 186: *Composition* 1935, B257.306 [repr.]. Eight photographs of paintings of Van Doesburg are listed in the catalog, seven of them gifts of Nelly van Doesburg to MoMA. A number of these photographs were exhibited in the gallery devoted to avant-garde practices on the fourth floor. Four of them: MoMA cat. nr. 48: *Self portrait* (1916). nr. 49: *Card players* (1916). nr. 50: *Composition IX. Cardplayers* (1916-1917). nr. 54: *Arithmetical composition* (1930) are not listed on the installation plan nor can they be found on the installation-photographs of the galleries on the fourth floor. It seems that they were not included in the exhibition.

⁸¹ Barr described Van Doesburg as the founder and propagandist of De Stijl, responsible for De Stijl's wide influence: "painter, sculptor, architect, typographer, poet, novelist, critic, lecturer and theorist – a man as versatile as any figure of the Renaissance." Barr 1936, p. 141. Barr had visited Nelly van Doesburg in 1935 in Meudon to select paintings for the exhibition. He selected only one small painting of Van Doesburg and did not buy anything, although he bought two paintings of Domela-Nieuwenhuis. Nelly complained about this to the Kiesler's, see Van Moorsel 2000, p. 156. This makes apparent that it was not due to practical constraints that there was only one painting of Van Doesburg included in this section. A large number of paintings of Van Doesburg would not fit within the story of De Stijl that the museum presented here, with its main focus on the paintings of Mondrian.

⁸² Two sculptures of Vantongerloo were exhibited in this gallery: MoMA cat. nr. 270: *Construction of volume relations* (1921). Nr. 271: *Construction of volume relations* (1930). One sculpture of Domela Nieuwenhuis, nr. 56: *Construction* (1932). Another sculpture of Vantongerloo nr. 268: *Construction within a sphere* (1917) was not included here but probably exhibited in the Surrealist section. A photograph of Vantongerloo's *Volume construction* (1918), was exhibited in the gallery on the fourth floor that showed the avant-garde practices to strengthen this point.

fourth floor.⁸³ Each gallery-wall was dedicated to one international avant-garde movement. The wall directly next to the entrance represented De Stijl, followed by German expressionism in architecture and the Bauhaus, Purism and the influence of Cubism and Suprematism on film and theater (fig. 13 to 16). In contrast to the exhibition *Modern Architecture* of 1932, architectural photographs were not presented as paintings but grouped together and mounted on a number of dark-grey cartons in a collage-like manner, contributing to the documentary character of the installation. The difference between the style of this avant-garde gallery and the Neo-Plasticist gallery on the third floor where the paintings and sculptures were exhibited in a spatial and aesthetic manner functioned as a metaphor of the development from the different avant-garde practices out of painting and sculpture.

De Stijl section consisted of a series of dark-grey cartons with black and white photographs of architecture, sculpture, film and typography. The main was emphasis on the architectural works of De Stijl.⁸⁴ An enlarged photograph of *Project of a private house* (1922) by Van Doesburg and the architects Cornelis van Eesteren and Gerrit Rietveld was placed between the first two De Stijl collages. Directly above this project hung a reproduction of a composition of Mondrian. This hierarchic arrangement showed Mondrian as foremost painter of De Stijl, who had: “impressed his style not only upon a host of younger painters but also, directly and through van Doesburg and Rietveld, upon architects and commercial architects.”⁸⁵ Barr emphasized this sequence from painting to architecture and the position of Van Doesburg as one of Mondrian’s direct followers by characterizing Van Doesburg’s project as: “clearly a projection of a Neo-Plasticist painting such as Mondrian’s *Composition* (1921).”⁸⁶

This poster of Mondrian was not a reproduction of a painting exhibited in the gallery on the third floor. It seems that a specific work was selected for this gallery-space, *Tableau I with black, red, yellow, blue and light blue* (1921) that would illustrate clearly the formal resemblance with the flat

⁸³ The installation consisted mainly of documentary photos of architecture, combined with photos of paintings, posters, journals, book-covers, film stills, and furniture. According to Staniszewski practical restraints prevented Barr from displaying more than documents and token examples of avant-garde architecture, design and exhibition techniques, Staniszewski 1998, p. 75.

⁸⁴ Architectural work of Oud is not included here, although he is described by Barr as one of the leaders of De Stijl and among the finest artists of his time. See Barr, 1936, p. 141. Many of these photographs were plates from the French review for avant-garde architecture *L'Architecture vivante*. Most plates were from the issue dedicated to De Stijl published in autumn 1925. The first collage contained two photographs of the interior of Oud’s *House at Noordwijkerhout* (1917) and two photographs of *House at buis ter Heide* (1916, 1917) of van ’t Hoff, *Villa Verloop* (ca. 1916) and *Villa Henny* (ca. 1917) at House ter Heide. The second collage showed photographs of architectural projects of van Doesburg and Oud, two photographs of the *Project for a private house* (1922) in collaboration with van Eesteren and *Small house at Alblasterdam* (1923-24), Oud was represented with his *Temporary building* (1923) and *Café de Unie* (1925). Also on display here was a photograph of a sculpture of Vantongerloo’s and of a sculptural work of Willem van Leusden, *Construction*. This appears to be a photograph of Vantongerloo’s *Volume Construction* of 1918.

⁸⁵ Barr 1936, p. 144. Other architectural works were presented in a similar manner, for example Oud’s façade of *Café de Unie* (1925) that was characterized by Barr as a “frank and amusing adaption of such paintings of Mondrian’s *Composition* of 1921”.

⁸⁶ Barr 1936, p. 142.

rectangular shapes and horizontal and vertical black lines of Willem Hendrik Gispen's poster for the Rotterdam-South America line (1927) that was positioned in line with Mondrian's reproduction (fig. 17 and 18).⁸⁷ Under the Gispen poster the *Red and blue armchair* (1918) of Gerrit Rietveld was mounted sideways on the wall as a painting to emphasize the resemblance between the planes and bars of this piece of furniture and the formal elements of Mondrian's composition.⁸⁸ These comparisons stressed the similarities between the artworks exhibited and made explicit Mondrian's position as De Stijl's main point of reference.

The selection of those works with a clear formal resemblance created a narrative framework of formalist aesthetic. De Stijl was placed within this framework as an artistic movement characterized by a number of aesthetic principles that were translated from painting to architecture and design. This aesthetic approach is also clearly visible in the selective ordering of images in the catalog, in which Gispen's poster was paired with the façade of *Café de Unie* (1925) by Oud (fig. 19).

The section adjacent to De Stijl section represented the Bauhaus as highly influenced by De Stijl's aesthetic principle and emphasized the influence of van Doesburg on the Bauhaus. A photograph of Van Doesburg's *Composition VIII* (1918) was paired with Walter Gropius *Professor's house* (1925-26). Barr pointed out the sequence from painting to architecture in the catalog by stating that Gropius had handled the façade from a pictorial perspective "as if it were an abstract painting like van Doesburg's cow".⁸⁹ In the catalog Gropius' design was reproduced together with Mies von der Rohe's *Plan for a country house* (1922). Van Doesburg's *Rhythm of a Russian dance* (1918) was presented as the direct precedent of these architectural designs, a comparison already made in 1929 by Hitchcock in *Modern Architecture* (fig. 15).⁹⁰ The inclusion of posters and examples of German typography, arranged together with these works of Van Doesburg and a cover of an issue of De Stijl designed by Van Doesburg showed how Van Doesburg's influence had spread from architecture to design and typography (fig. 20).⁹¹

⁸⁷ This reproduction is only mentioned in the installation plan as: "Composition, without date", (MoMA Archives; It seems to be a reproduction of *Tableau I with black, red, yellow, blue and light blue*, (1921). See Joosten, Welsh 1998 nr. B126.

⁸⁸ The installation of the furniture in this manner was a direct link to the avant-garde exhibition of Herbert Bayer in 1930, the Deutscher Werkbund installation: furniture and architecture gallery, *Exposition de la Société des artistes décorateurs* in Paris. Here Bayer had mounted rows of identical chairs on the walls next to each other as a representation of mass-production and standardization.

⁸⁹ Barr 1936, p. 156.

⁹⁰ In the catalog Barr had written that this painting was not in the exhibition, but it seems that a photograph of this painting was shown on the first carton with photographs of architecture and designs of the Bauhaus, a conclusion that is made after analysis of the installation photographs of this exhibition-space.

⁹¹ Barr described the cover as "a pioneer example of Stijl typical layout with its asymmetrical arrangement of letters blocked into rectangles," laying the emphasis on the formal aspects of the design, Barr 1936, p. 144.

A photo of Picasso's *Standing female nude* (1910) was placed in the Bauhaus section to make the visitor once again aware that De Stijl had developed out of Cubist painting (fig. 21).⁹² Barr summarized the art historical narrative produced in Cubism and Abstract Art as follows: "In the history of art there are few more entertaining sequences than the influence by way of Holland of the painting of a Spaniard living in Paris upon the plans of a German architect in Berlin (...)"⁹³

The story of Mondrian as one of the key figures of modern art history, who had an enormous influence on modern architecture, typography and layout design, was reiterated with the Mondrian memorial exhibition in 1945.⁹⁴ The exhibition, organized by the director of the museums' department of painting and sculpture, James Johnson Sweeney (1900-1986), took place the year after Mondrian's death as an in-memoriam for an "artist of great international reputation and importance."⁹⁵ Mondrian had moved to New York in 1940 where he would live until his death in 1944. In the United States he had gained the status of influential and well-known painter.⁹⁶ Although the paintings of Mondrian were included in a number of MoMA exhibitions from the 1930's onwards, this was the first exhibition solely devoted to his work.⁹⁷

The exhibition showed in a chronological sequence the development of Mondrian's work as it went through different stages from 1900 to 1944 towards pure abstraction, driven by his aim to "transcend the particular and express the universal".⁹⁸ Mondrian's later works formed the focal

⁹² A direct connection was made in the catalog between Van Doesburg's *Rhythm of a Russian dance* and Picasso's *Standing female nude*, see Barr 1936, p. 157. Earlier in the catalog Barr had created the link between painting and architecture by describing Picasso's counterpoint of straight line edges, vertical and horizontal, with the curved contours of cross sections were architecturally speaking a combination of plan and elevation in one drawing, Barr 1936, p. 42.

⁹³ Barr 1936, pp. 156-57.

⁹⁴ MoMA press release February 26, 1945. (MoMA Press release Archives). In the press release of March 19 this message was repeated: "together with Theo van Doesburg and De Stijl group his influence has been great on modern architecture, typography and lay out design", MoMa press release March 19, 1945 (MoMA Press Release Archives).

⁹⁵ MoMA press release March 19, 1945 (MoMA Press Release Archives).

⁹⁶ After his death the American magazine *Knickerbocker Weekly*, aimed at Dutch immigrants in the United States, would devote an issue to Mondrian. The cover showed his photograph and the title: "The greatest Dutch painter of our time", referring to the words Barr had spoken at his memorial service. The article is based upon an interview with Mondrian shortly before his death and discussed at length his life and work. J. Bradley 1944, pp. 16-26. The growing interest in Mondrian in the United States was clearly visible in his value on the international art market; especially his later abstract works were very popular. From the 1920's onwards Mondrian's work had been exhibited in a number of museums and galleries in New York, a number that would increase in the 1940's See Joosten, Welsh 1998 for an overview of the exhibitions. In the 1940's dozens of paintings were shipped to America by art dealers such as Sidney Janis, see Roodenburg-Schadd 2004, p. 122-124. Sandberg would later write that almost no paintings of Mondrian have remained in the Netherlands, "(...) especially from the after 1917 (abstract period). Almost everything has disappeared to America, Sandberg quoted in Roodenburg-Schadd 2004, p. 128. Original source: Letter of Sandberg to the alderman of art affairs, December 19, 1960 (SMA archives, Dossier: Acquisitions, 1960).

⁹⁷ The exhibition was sponsored by the Netherland-America Foundation (NAF), founded in 1921 with a mission to strengthen the link between the Netherlands and the United States through exchange in arts, education, science and public affairs. Clearly Mondrian's paintings were considered valuable heritage shared between the Netherlands and the United States. Thenaf.org/naf-mission/

⁹⁸ Sweeney 1945, p. 5. Barr approached the different art-movements as solutions to particular problems of style, this is for example described by Barr in the Cubism and Abstract Art catalog in relation to the younger generation who according to Barr: "resurrected problems which excited the vanguard twenty years before", see Barr 1936, p. 197.

point of the exhibition as the most important phase of his developmental process in which he had reached his “mature style”; a stage represented by for example his unfinished *Victory Boogiewoogie* (1944).

In his article on Mondrian that was published in MoMA’s Bulletin, Sweeney emphasized Mondrian’s role as originator of Neo-Plasticism and most important painter De Stijl, who had used De Stijl journal to distribute his theories on painting to a broader public.⁹⁹ Although Van Doesburg was mentioned as versatile figure and one of the founders of De Stijl, it is Mondrian who “remained the painter of the movement”.¹⁰⁰

Shortly after the Mondrian exhibition in 1945, MoMA organized its first general exhibition of painting and sculpture.¹⁰¹ In line with the history of modern art produced in Cubism and Abstract Art, Mondrian was portrayed as one of the key-artists of Geometric Abstract Art, who “carried Cubism to its abstract extremes”.¹⁰² His work was shown in a gallery-section titled ‘Abstract painting out of Cubism’, a choice of words that made clear the museum’s linear narrative from Picasso to Mondrian.

2.2. De Stijl in the Stedelijk Museum: Van Doesburg and Mondrian as pioneers of abstract art

The Theo van Doesburg exhibition was the first retrospective exhibition of Van Doesburg’s work in the Netherlands, organized by Sandberg as member of the VANK in close collaboration with Van Doesburg’s widow Nelly van Doesburg.¹⁰³ The exhibition told the story of Van Doesburg as innovative painter who had created a new style that lived on in the modern

This view is also apparent in for example Sweeney’s article on Mondrian, he described how Mondrian, before the formation of De Stijl was influenced by Bart van der Leek and hereby was able to ‘solve’ the problem of color application, Sweeney 1945, p. 5. The article was also included in the press release of March 19, 1945 (MoMA Press Release Archives).

⁹⁹ Sweeney 1945. This article was also included in the museum’s press release of March 19, 1945 (MoMA Press Release Archives). In the twelfth issue of the museum’s bulletin an interview with Mondrian was published, see J.J. Sweeney 1945, pp. 15-16. In the press release Mondrian was described as “originator of Neo-Plasticism” and “the leading painter of the de Stijl group”, who had “an enormous influence on modern architecture, typography and layout design”, see MoMA Press Release February 26, 1945. In the press release of March 19 this message was repeated: “together with Theo van Doesburg and De Stijl group his influence has been great on modern architecture, typography and lay out design”, MoMa press release March 19, 19145 (MoMA Press Release Archives).

¹⁰⁰ Sweeney 1945, p. 5. A monograph on Mondrian written by Sweeney was published in 1948, building on the representation of Mondrian as key artist of modern art and leading painter of De Stijl.

¹⁰¹ The exhibition showed 300 paintings and 75 pieces of sculpture of the museum’s own collection, spread over two floors and the museum’s garden. This was the largest exhibition of its kind organized by the museum until then

¹⁰² MoMA press release June 15, 1945 (MoMa Press Release Archives).

¹⁰³ Since Van Doesburg’s death in 1931, Nelly had tried to correct the prevailing image of Van Doesburg as mere theorist and organizer of de Stijl who was often placed in the shadow of Mondrian as one of his followers. With this purpose in mind she had organized an exhibition with an extensive overview of Van Doesburg’s paintings and drawings in *Parc des Expositions* in Paris in 1932 in which Van Doesburg was represented as innovative artist, to be valued for his autonomous, artistic skills that he had developed separately from Mondrian, see Van Moorsel 2000, pp. 212-214. Van Moorsel 2000, pp. 212-214.

architecture of the present time, deserving of this in-memoriam exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum because of his autonomous artistic qualities. Van Eesteren underscored this view in his opening-speech by stating that Van Doesburg had been a painter in the first place and a theorist in the second, even though he was usually portrayed as the theorist and propagandist of De Stijl.¹⁰⁴

With a number of sixty-nine paintings and drawings – exhibited in four gallery-spaces on the ground floor of the museum used for temporary exhibitions – the exhibition offered an overview of Van Doesburg's artistic development. The visitor was first introduced to his most recent abstract works, such as *Composition Simultanée* (1930) that represented the culmination of his artistic development where he had reached a pure abstraction (fig. 23). From the fourth gallery the visitor could walk in a reversed chronological sequence towards the start of his artistic career around 1900. Moving through the gallery-spaces with their even rows of paintings, framed with identical frames and accompanied by small labels, the visitor could string together, piece by piece, an overview of Van Doesburg's development from abstraction back to impressionism and realism. Van Doesburg's development was not explained by means of didactic labels or charts; the aesthetic quality of his work had to speak for itself. In light of the exhibition, an issue of the journal *Prisma der kunsten* was solely devoted to Theo van Doesburg and contained a small selection of fragments of his texts, letters and manifests and catalog with the drawings and paintings exhibited.¹⁰⁵

The fourth gallery showed a selective number of architectural designs and photographs of executed architectural work from 1926 onwards, such as the *House in Mendon* (1929).¹⁰⁶ The inclusion of these architectural works showed the visitor how the artistic principles to be found in Van Doesburg's abstract paintings were translated to modern architecture. Although actual examples of modern architecture influenced by Van Doesburg were not included in the exhibition, the importance of Van Doesburg for the development of modern architecture was emphasized by the public role of Van Eesteren as former architect of De Stijl and main representative of modern architecture and *Het Nieuwe Bouwen*.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant* 03-05-1936. Van Eesteren was one of the leading architects of Het Nieuwe Bouwen. He was head of the department of city development of the city of Amsterdam and played a significant part in design of the *Algemeen Uibreidingsplan* of 1934, aimed at city-planning of Amsterdam, this plan was realized after World War II. From 1930 to 1947 Van Eesteren was chairman of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), see Bock, Van Rossum, Somer, 2001.

¹⁰⁵ Citroen 1936. The issue also contained a catalog of the paintings and drawings exhibited.

¹⁰⁶ It appears that one architectural model was exhibited here, the architectural works are not included in the catalog, it is not entirely clear what works were on display.

¹⁰⁷ Van Eesteren was one of the leading architects of Het Nieuwe Bouwen. He was head of the department of city development of the city of Amsterdam and played a significant part in design of the *Algemeen Uibreidingsplan* of 1934, aimed at city planning of Amsterdam, this plan was realized after World War II. From 1930 to 1947 Van Eesteren was chairman of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), see Bock, Van Rossum, Somer, 2001.

In the exhibition *Abstracte Kunst*, shown in the Stedelijk Museum in 1938, Van Doesburg's position as important modern artist was reiterated; a position he shared in this exhibition with Mondrian, who in Sandberg's view was one of the key figures of modern art.¹⁰⁸ *Abstracte Kunst* was the first exhibition in the Stedelijk that provided the public with an overview of abstract art.¹⁰⁹ The exhibition took place in the galleries on the ground floor of the museum and showed a total of seventy-one artworks created by a number of thirty-three artists. The gallery that functioned as point of departure of the exhibition was mainly devoted to the abstract paintings of Van Doesburg and Mondrian; each artist was represented with four paintings (fig. 24 and 25).¹¹⁰ Their work was not arranged in a clear hierarchical sequence as in *Cubism and Abstract Art* in MoMA; both artists were attributed an equal position as pioneers of abstract art who had influenced and inspired the international modern artists whose paintings and sculptures were exhibited in the gallery-spaces adjacent to this first gallery, such as the Swiss architect, painter and sculptor Max Bill and the British painter Ben Nicholson.¹¹¹

The emphasis in the exhibition was on the younger generation of modern artists, to show that abstract art was not in the past but a matter of the present.¹¹² The inclusion of international artists pointed out the international scope of abstract art and the broad influence of Mondrian and Van Doesburg that spread beyond borders. In another wing of the museum the work of the constructivists and abstract expressionists such as Kandinsky and Klee was exhibited. These artists were not directly influenced but certainly inspired by Mondrian and Van Doesburg.

¹⁰⁸ After Sandberg had become director of the Stedelijk he placed a composition of Mondrian from 1917 in his room, he was deeply touched by the expressive force of this work and viewed it as a call for life renewal. According to Schadd this painting expressed Sandberg's view on Mondrian and stood for the change in the Stedelijk's policy with its shift towards abstract art, see Roodenburg-Schadd 2004, pp. 75-76.

¹⁰⁹ Nelly van Doesburg, who was one of the initiators of the exhibition had approached Sandberg in 1936 with the idea to organize an exhibition on abstract art. Sandberg had directed her to the new director of the Stedelijk Museum, David Roëll. Nelly wrote to Roëll that in 1937 that she wanted to make the exhibition "as objective as possible" and that older Cubist artist could be excluded from the exhibition, but that the younger generations had to be represented, "to show the public that it is really isn't over with abstract art". Translated by author from Dutch: "(...) om het publiek te laten zien, dat het werkelijk nog niet afgelopen is met de abstracte kunst." Nelly to Roëll, December 15, 1937 (SMA Archives; Dossier: Exhibitions; *Abstracte kunst* 1938). See for an account of the exhibition-process from 1936 to 1938 and the role of Nelly in this process, Arian 2010, pp. 247-288.

¹¹⁰ Exhibited of Mondrian: SMA cat. nr. 50: *Composition in blue and yellow* JW. B270. Nr. 51: *Composition of lines and color*, J.W. B2777. Nr. 52: *Composition in blue, red and white*, B272. Nr. 53: *Composition in blue, yellow and white* J.W. B271. Theo van Doesburg: SMA cat. nr. 19, *Counter Composition VIII* (1924). Nr. 20. *Simultaneous counter composition* (1929). Nr. 21: *Decomposition* (1918). Nr. 22. *Composition* (1924).

¹¹¹ Exhibited here are Van Doesburg's *Contre Composition VIII*, 1924. *Contre Composition simultanée*, 1929. *Décomposition*, 1918. *Composition*, 1924. Mondrian: *Composition in blue and yellow*. *Composition of lines and colors*. *Composition in blue, red and white*. *Composition in blue, yellow and white*. No dates in the catalog! Domela-Nieuwenhuis: *Relief in kleuren*, 1937. *Relief in kleuren*, 1937. Vantongerloo: *Functie van rechte en kromme lijnen*. *Plastiek*. Vordemberge-Gildewart: *Composition 91*, 1935. *Composition 107*, 1937. *Composition 110*, 1938. Sandberg was a great admirer of Mondrian's paintings, see Roodenburg-Schadd 2004, pp. 75-76, 120-121, however, this admiration on a personal level did not translate itself in a more prominent position for Mondrian's paintings in the exhibition.

¹¹² This was one of the aims of the exhibition described by Nelly in her letter to Roëll, she writes that older Cubist artist could be excluded from the exhibition, but that the younger generations had to be represented, "to show the public that it is really isn't over with abstract art". Translated by author from Dutch: "(...) om het publiek te laten zien, dat het werkelijk nog niet afgelopen is met de abstracte kunst." Nelly to Roëll, December 15, 1937 SMA.

The important position of Mondrian and Van Doesburg as pioneers of abstract art was emphasized in the exhibition catalog, in which both artists were given a prominent position. Van Doesburg's *Dessin Arithmétique IV* (1930) was reproduced on the cover of the catalog (fig. 26).¹¹³ This drawing, as the embodiment of his later style, pointed out the direct connection between Van Doesburg's work and the younger generation of abstract artists and emphasized both the actuality of his paintings and his pioneering role.¹¹⁴ Next to a list of works exhibited, the exhibition-catalog contained a number of short essays written by abstract artists such as Kandinsky and Mondrian. Mondrian's text, in which he wrote about the development of painting and architecture towards an objective and universal plasticism, was the first article of the catalog, accompanied by a number of black and white reproductions of paintings of van Doesburg and Mondrian. The catalog did not function as a scholarly survey with which the museum positioned itself as contributor to art history, but called on the modern artists to speak.¹¹⁵ The main function of the catalog was to document and strengthen the memory of the exhibition, with Van Doesburg's drawing as the main element that would be connected to this memory.¹¹⁶

In the exhibition-catalog, the connection of Van Doesburg and Mondrian with De Stijl was made explicit. Van Doesburg was described as "founder of the journal and group 'De Stijl'" Mondrian was listed as a member of De Stijl group".¹¹⁷ A selection of paintings and sculptures by De Stijl artists César Domela-Nieuwenhuis, Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart and Vantongerloo, who were also presented as De Stijl members in the catalog, were included in the first gallery or shown in the gallery-sections adjacent to this primary gallery; hereby emphasizing the position of De Stijl as pioneering group of modern artists that had influenced abstract art on a broad and international level.

The exhibition was designed and installed by Sandberg and the architect Mart Stam. Abstract paintings were arranged in an asymmetrical and spatial manner on the recently painted white gallery walls, each wall forming a different composition; resembling the white planes and geometrical forms of the abstract works mounted on them.¹¹⁸ Each work was arranged in such a manner that it could receive the visitor's individual attention. The Stedelijk Museum did not

¹¹³ Van Doesburg's *Composition* (1930) was also used as image of the invitation for the exhibition.

¹¹⁴ It can be assumed that it was due to Nelly's influence that this drawing was reproduced as 'symbol' of the exhibition. Nelly emphasizes the importance of the reproduction of this work because she believed it represented of Van Doesburg's future. See Arian p. 574. Arian specifically refers to a quote of Nelly in a workdocument of Wies van Moorsel. "(...) deze tekening staat voor de toekomst van Does's werk".

¹¹⁵ Dates of certain artworks were not even included in the catalog.

¹¹⁶ For a comparison between the catalogs of MoMA and the Stedelijk Museum see Leigh 2008 pp. 54-61.

¹¹⁷ The Stedelijk Museum 1938, pp. 2-4.

¹¹⁸ After Sandberg became curator in 1938 the museum walls were painted, resulting in white walled gallery-spaces where nothing would distract the attention of the visitor from the works of art on display. Sandberg would later describe the interior of the museum as follows: "It has the neutral character that does not speak but lets the artworks speak for themselves", Sandberg quoted in Bureau Monumenten en Archeologie 2004, pp. 37.

create an educational environment with explanatory wall-texts or clearly structured gallery-sections, but let the artworks speak for themselves in this aesthetic display. The autonomous aestheticism of the exhibition was underscored with an introductory quote of Theo van Doesburg printed in the exhibition-catalog: “The painting is a free creation, an autonomous organism, in the spirit of its maker, born and realized in its material.”¹¹⁹

Although Mondrian had been represented in *Abstracte Kunst* as one of the pioneers of abstract art, the broad public in the Netherlands did not yet recognize Mondrian as modern artist of importance.¹²⁰ Following MoMA, the Stedelijk organized in 1946 an extensive Mondrian in memorial exhibition.¹²¹ The exhibition gave an extensive overview of Mondrian’s oeuvre from the period of 1890-1944 with a number of around 122 paintings, telling the story of Mondrian’s artistic development from naturalism to Cubism and Neo-Plasticism.¹²² The main focus was on Mondrian’s Neo-Plasticist phase, represented with forty-six abstract paintings. Mondrian’s latest works: *Boogie Woogie* or *New York* (1942), *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1943) and his last unfinished work, *Victory Boogie Woogie* (1944) formed the grand finale of the exhibition, the full expression of Mondrian’s artistic mastery and the ultimate culmination of his lifelong quest for pure abstraction (fig. 27 and 28). According to Sandberg these paintings formed proof of the “enormous possibilities that were present in his early work”.¹²³ Mondrian’s paintings were arranged in a spatial and aesthetic manner, enabling the visitor to devote the undivided attention to the aesthetic qualities of each individual work of art.¹²⁴

The exhibition catalog resembled MoMA’s approach in the inclusion of a bibliography and chronology in which the different stylistic phases of Mondrian’s development were marked. Mondrian was not only listed as member of De Stijl as in the catalog of *Abstracte kunst*, but together with Van Doesburg as one of the founders of De Stijl. A direct reference to the in

¹¹⁹ Theo van Doesburg quoted in the exhibition-catalog, translated by author from Dutch: “Het schilderij is een vrije schepping, een zelfstandig organisme, in den geest van den maker, geboren en gerealiseerd in de materie. Sandberg 1938, p. 4.

¹²⁰ Roodenburg-Schadd 2004, p. 120.

¹²¹ The NRC stated: “The assembly of Mondrian’s work in an exhibition in which his development is shown in such a way that it sheds light on his aim, is an important event, which might even raise the question whether his name in the future might have the same symbolical value in the art-world as the other Dutchmen, Van Gogh.” NRC 1946.

¹²² The exhibition-committee was formed by P. Alma, C. van Eesteren, Charles Karsten, Sal Slijper, Charley Toorop, Vordemberge-gildewart and Mart and Olga Stam and Sandberg.

¹²³ Letter of Sandberg, Oud and Toorop to Holzman, December 19, 1949 (SMA archives, Dossier; *Aankopen* 1949). Most of these later paintings were part of collections in America. It took some time before Without these latest works, the overview of Mondrian’s artistic development would be incomplete and the exhibition would miss its crucial part: the presentation of the full realization of Mondrian’s artistic ideas. It took some time before Sandberg could accomplish the loans. This could have been one of the reasons why the memorial exhibition in Amsterdam was shown two years after Mondrian’s death and a year after the exhibition in MoMA in 1945.

¹²⁴ In some galleries pieces of furniture of Gerrit Rietveld were on display; a combination that pointed out the formal resemblance between Rietveld’s furniture and Mondrian’s paintings, Joosten, Welsh 1998, III, p. 46. It is not clear which pieces of furniture were exhibited here.

memoriam exhibition in MoMA and the (then unpublished) monograph of Sweeney indicated how Mondrian had already found recognition as Dutch modern master in America.¹²⁵

From the early 1930's onwards, MoMA had produced a linear and chronological narrative of modern art with a series of exhibitions, each exhibition building on the previous one. De Stijl was embedded within MoMA's carefully constructed history of modern as one of the longest lived and most influential modern art movements that had developed from Cubist painting to modern architecture and design, with Mondrian as De Stijl's principle representative and Van Doesburg as founder and theorist of De Stijl who had translated painting to international modern architecture. In contrast to MoMA, The Stedelijk Museum did not position De Stijl in an evolutionary sequence of well-defined artistic movements or explain De Stijl in terms of its historical background. The institutionalized narrative produced by the Stedelijk Museum had an open structure; De Stijl was attributed a central position in this narrative as and an actual, artistic movement, with Mondrian and Van Doesburg as the two pioneering artists of De Stijl who had been of great influence on modern art and architecture of the present day.

¹²⁵ The *Algemeen Handelsblad* would later characterize Mondrian as "a great painter, who in the final years of his life in America became a pioneer and found the recognition that was long withheld from him in his home-country". *Algemeen Dagblad* 1951. Translated from Dutch by author: "Mondriaan, een grote schilder, die in de laatste jaren van zijn leven in Amerika weer een pionier werd en daar de erkenning vond, die zijn geboorteland hem lang heeft onthouden".

4. THE HISTORICAL RETROSPECTIVE DE STIJL EXHIBITION IN THE STEDELIJK MUSEUM IN AMSTERDAM (1951) AND THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART IN NEW YORK (1952-53)

The historical retrospective De Stijl exhibition was the first exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum and MoMA that was solely devoted to De Stijl. Numerous different actors were involved in its organizational-process, each with their own ‘agenda’, their own values, ideas and beliefs about De Stijl and how the history of De Stijl should be told. In order to analyze the narrative histories of De Stijl as produced with the retrospective exhibition it is important to gain insight into the process that led to this exhibition. In this concluding chapter I will first look into this process, before arriving at the question central to this chapter: How was De Stijl represented in the retrospective De Stijl exhibitions shown in the Stedelijk Museum and MoMA and in what way were the narrative histories produced in these exhibitions related to the histories of De Stijl as created with the previous exhibitions organized by MoMA and the Stedelijk Museum?

4.1. The exhibition-process

In accounts of the exhibition-process, Phillip Johnson is appointed as the main initiator of the exhibition, who approached the Stedelijk Museum with the request to organize an exhibition on the architectural work of De Stijl.¹²⁶ Although MoMA did approach the Stedelijk museum, the Dutch government cannot be overlooked as one of the actors who played an important part in the first phase of the exhibition-process. Johnson would point to Hans van Weeren-Griek, assistant director and head of the department of exhibitions and visual education of the Netherlands Information Bureau (NIB) in New York, as main initiator of a retrospective De Stijl exhibition.¹²⁷ Van Weeren-Griek had first discussed the idea of a De Stijl exhibition in MoMA with Johnson in February 1947. He described the discussed exhibition in a letter to the Dutch government as: “an important historical exhibition which would not only relate to the history of the movement but of its influence throughout the world on other media, such as architecture, painting, sculpture, industrial design etc. etc.”¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Both Roodenburg-Schadd and Jobse have pointed to Johnson as initiator of the retrospective De Stijl exhibition, by writing that Johnson had first approached de Stedelijk museum with the request to organize an exhibition about the architectural work of De Stijl, see Roodenburg-Schadd 2004, p. 494 and Jobse 2010, p. 7.

¹²⁷ Johnson wrote to Sandberg: “Excuse me for delaying so long in writing you, but I have been waiting for Mr. Van Weeren-Griek to return to New York since he is the initiator of the De Stijl exhibition idea.” See letter Johnson to Sandberg, August 7, 1947, (CA Archives, Dossier; Exhibitions; De Stijl exhibition 1951, folder nr. 3425-3431).

¹²⁸ Letter Van Weeren-Griek to Lunsingh Scheurleer, February 5, 1947 (NI Archives, Dossier: Van Eesteren, folder nr. X760). Hans van Weeren-Griek had been curator of education at Virginia museum of fine arts, Richmond and he was a council member of the committee of art education at MoMA. He formed the ideal connection between America and the Netherlands and was involved in the earlier exhibitions organized The NIB had offices in New York, Boston, San Francisco, Washington and Holland (Michigan). After World War II the propaganda activities

The NIB was founded in 1941 in the context of public diplomacy.¹²⁹ The organization of art exhibitions was one of the instruments with which the NIB aimed to strengthen the cultural ties between the Netherlands and the USA. With exhibitions such as Great Dutch Masters shown in Duveen Galleries in New York in 1942 the NIB presented the Dutch masters such as Rembrandt and Vermeer to the American public.¹³⁰ A historical De Stijl exhibition, in which De Stijl would be brought to light as originally Dutch movement with far reaching influence throughout the world, would perfectly align with the previous exhibitions on Dutch masters of the seventeenth century. Johnson voiced this view in a letter to Sandberg in 1947 in which he stated: “It is greatly to the credit to have been the birthplace of such a movement. Not since the seventeenth century has your country been of such great international influence in the arts.”¹³¹

The NIB considered an exhibition of Dutch modern art shown in MoMA as a valuable propaganda instrument. This exhibition could contribute to the international recognition of Dutch plastic art and create new markets to support Dutch artists.¹³² From the 1940's onwards the art world in New York had expanded in size and grown into the acknowledged center of the avant-garde.¹³³ If New York was the center of the new art world, MoMA, as highly influential modern art museum, was the epitome of this center. “I can assure you”, Van Weeren-Griek wrote to Lunsingh-Scheurleer of the Dutch government, “that an exhibition as outlined above would do the Dutch untold good (...) The influence of MoMA in other cities and states of the U.S. is very strong, and consequently a traveling show, based on such a exhibition would have

lowered, They had an exhibition- lecture- and press-department, a radio-broadcast, they spread articles, photographs, films and other material. They organized lecture tours and had educational programs. See Kok 2011, pp. 15-16. Their articles were often published in the *Knickerbocker Weekly*, although not official a publication of NIB. The NIB was closed down in 1974. Around 1950 the exhibition department was closed down, due to financial cut backs.

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¹³⁰ See McCall 1942. Langton-Douglas 1942, pp. 305-308. Another exhibition organized by NIB was The Art of Rembrandt in the MET in 1942.

¹³¹ Johnson to Sandberg August 7, 1947 (CA Amsterdam, Dossier: Exhibition De Stijl 1951, folder nr. 3425-3431). Van Weeren Griek also referred to this view on De Stijl by stating that: it is felt in this country that one of the most important and far reaching influences that Dutch thought and art has had in the contemporary world emanated from the De Stijl group. Letter Van Weeren-Griek to Lunsingh Scheurleer, February 5, 1947 (NI Archives, Dossier: Van Eesteren, folder nr. X760).

¹³² These aims were voiced by the Dutch government, see letter of the ministry of AES to Rietveld and other committee members, June 10, 1948 (RS Archive, nr. RSA0443).

¹³³ Crane 1987, pp. 137-138.

guaranteed bookings, for two or three years to come. (...)”¹³⁴ The Dutch government planned to circulate the exhibition throughout the United States to bring De Stijl under the attention of a broad American public.¹³⁵

Although Johnson mentioned Van Weeren-Griek’s as main initiator, it seems that Johnson also had an important role as co-initiator of the exhibition.¹³⁶ An exhibition as outlined in his first meeting with Van Weeren-Griek would not only be beneficial for the Dutch government, but was also of “major interest” to MoMA.¹³⁷ With this exhibition MoMA could continue and build on its history of De Stijl. In contrast with its previous exhibitions, De Stijl would no longer have a side part, but the leading role. According to Johnson, both he and Barr felt that now was the time to celebrate De Stijl as “the most important single movement that resulted in what we now call modern architecture” with an exhibition and a publication.¹³⁸ A number of galleries New York and other parts of the United States had organized exhibitions with works of individual De Stijl members.¹³⁹ These exhibitions could have contributed to the interest of the American public in De Stijl that Johnson mentioned in his letter to Sandberg.¹⁴⁰ Johnson aimed to turn the De Stijl exhibition into one of the most important exhibitions of the season.¹⁴¹ With this exhibition, MoMA would function as a centralizing force as the first museum that would provide the public with a historical overview of De Stijl and its widespread influence.

¹³⁴ Letter of Van Weeren-Griek to Lunsingh Scheurleer February 5, 1947 (NI Archives, Van Eesteren, folder nr. X760).

¹³⁵ Sandberg wrote to Johnson about showing the exhibition in Chicago, Boston and San Francisco. In the same letter he stated that Switzerland (Basel and Zurich), Italy (Florence, Rome, Venice, Milano) and Paris had asked for the exhibition, see Sandberg to Johnson, October 8, 1952 (SMA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951). Friedericy pointed to Baltimore, Miami and Chicago, see letter of Friedericy to Sandberg, November 20, 1952 (SMA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951, folder nr. 5600-5700). No further mention is made of these possibilities later in the exhibition-progress. The ambitious plans of the Dutch government were not realized; after the exhibition was shown in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond in March it was shipped back to the Netherlands.

¹³⁶ He wrote that both he and Johnson arrived at “somewhat similar ideas”, see letter Van Weeren-Griek to Lunsingh Scheurleer, February 5, 1947 (NI Archives, Dossier: Van Eesteren; folder nr. X760).

¹³⁷ Letter Van Weeren-Griek to Lunsingh Scheurleer, February 5, 1947 (NI Archives, Dossier: Van Eesteren, folder nr. X760).

¹³⁸ “Both Mr. Barr and I consider De Stijl as the most important single movement that resulted in what we now call modern architecture. (...) we feel that now is the time to celebrate its achievements with an exhibition and a book.” See letter of Johnson to Sandberg August 7, 1947 (CA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl exhibition 1951, folder nr. 3431-3431).

¹³⁹ Letter of Van Weeren-Griek to Lunsingh Scheurleer February 5, 1947 (NI Archives, Dossier: Van Eesteren, folder nr. X760). In 1947 and 1948 Nelly van Doesburg had organized a Theo van Doesburg retrospective exhibition that was first shown in Peggy Guggenheim’s gallery Art of this century in New York. With this exhibition Nelly van Doesburg wanted to highlight Theo van Doesburg’s role as central figure and artist of De Stijl, see Van Moorsel 2000, pp. 218-223.

¹⁴⁰ Johnson to Sandberg August 7, 1947 (CA Amsterdam, Dossier: Exhibition De Stijl 1951, folder nr. 3425-3431).

¹⁴¹ Van Weeren-Griek refers to an “important historical exhibition which would not only relate to the history of this movement but of its influence throughout the world on other media, such as architecture, painting, sculpture, industrial design etc. etc.” According to Van Weeren-Griek it was Johnson’s idea to give a major portion of the museum to the exhibition. Johnson would handle the architectural end, D’Hanancourt, director of MoMA, would supervise the installation and Sweeney would handle painting and sculpture. Many outstanding scholars would contribute their efforts. Letter of Van Weeren-Griek to Lunsingh Scheurleer, February 5, 1947 (NI Archives, Dossier: Van Eesteren, folder nr. X760).

A few months after this first meeting in New York the plans were discussed with the Dutch Council for the Art, an advisory body of the ministry of Arts, Education and Science (AES).¹⁴² Sandberg was involved in this phase of the process as chairman of the council's section of plastic arts and architecture.¹⁴³ He tried to change the initial idea by proposing an exhibition about the Dutch contribution to modern architecture instead of just a De Stijl exhibition, "which would certainly have a more historical but at the same time a less vivid character, as he wrote to Johnson".¹⁴⁴ Johnson did not meet Sandberg's request. "Of prime importance", he wrote, "is the story of De Stijl and its influence".¹⁴⁵

In 1948 the Dutch government agreed to finance a governmental exhibition about De Stijl with a specific traveling character.¹⁴⁶ In the same year an exhibition committee was formed by the government - this was a subcommittee of the Council for art - with former De Stijl members Rietveld, Oud, Van Eesteren and the Dutch architect Van den Broek, member of the Council for art, as chairmen.¹⁴⁷ In this formation the committee met in June 1948 to discuss the first plans.¹⁴⁸

Rietveld had visited MoMA in the summer of 1947 and discussed the plans for the exhibition with Johnson. He viewed the exhibition as a chance to represent De Stijl as an actual movement that lived on through its influence on modern architecture.¹⁴⁹ These views were reflected in Rietveld's first exhibition-proposal of October 1948, specifically aimed at an exhibition in MoMA of De Stijl that would show the broad influence of De Stijl on

¹⁴² In Dutch: Het ministerie van Onderwijs Kunsten en Wetenschappen.

¹⁴³ Wheeler had visited Amsterdam in 1947 to discuss the plans with Sandberg as representative of the council for arts. Letter Wheeler to Sandberg July 8, 1947 (SMA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl exhibition 1951, folder nr. 5600-5700). About the Council for the Arts (Voorlopige raad voor de kunst) see Oosterbaan Martinius, 1990.

¹⁴⁴ Letter of Sandberg to Johnson August 13, 1947 (CA Archives, Dossier, De Stijl exhibition, folder nr. 3425-3431). In a letter to Wheeler of MoMA Sandberg wrote that he had arrived at this conclusion after discussing the proposal with "some friends and architects". His new proposal was to begin this exhibition with De Stijl and end around 1935.

¹⁴⁵ Letter of Johnson to Sandberg August 7, 1947 (CA Amsterdam, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951, folder nr. 3425-3431).

¹⁴⁶ The idea was that the exhibition as a whole would become part of collection of a Dutch museum after it had returned to the Netherlands, in this context the Kröller-Müller museum was mentioned, see letter Van den Broek to the ministry of AES, May 5, 1951 (CA Amsterdam, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951, folder nr. 3425-3431).

¹⁴⁷ June 1948 the committee members were first approached by Van Den Broek as the result of a meeting with the Council for Art, see letter of Van den Broek, June 10, 1948 to Van Eesteren, Rietveld and Oud, (NI Archives, Dossier: Van Eesteren, folder nr. X760). October 15, 1948 the committee was officially formed, see statement of minister of AES on October 14, 1948 (NI Archives, Dossier: Eesteren, folder nr. X760). The first meeting of the committee was on June 11 1948 with Van den Broek as chairmen, Oud, Van Eesteren and Rietveld, Truus Schröder-Schräder was also present at this meeting.

¹⁴⁸ Their first assignment was to bring together a representative collection of De Stijl, with a main focus on the architectural work of De Stijl-group

¹⁴⁹ Rietveld wanted to represent De Stijl as influential movement that would remain influential on modern architecture in the future, see notes meeting June 11, 1948 (NI Archives, Dossier: Van Eesteren, folder nr. X760).

contemporary architecture and other plastic arts.¹⁵⁰ The proposed exhibition encompassed a broad scale of disciplines: architecture, painting, sculpture and typography, but also film, music and poetry, showing De Stijl's aim for a collaboration between the arts.¹⁵¹ In his proposal Rietveld portrayed De Stijl as a movement founded in the Netherlands that had grown into a movement with international value, not limited by geographical conditions.¹⁵² Van Eesteren and Oud had their doubts whether this message would be received correctly so many years after De Stijl had come into existence. They were afraid that a historical exhibition would show De Stijl as a historical movement that belonged to the past.¹⁵³

In a later phase of the process this first proposal, with MoMA as main point of reference, was further developed.¹⁵⁴ This becomes clear in the notes of a meeting in December 1950 in Meudon, where Sandberg, Jaffé, Rietveld and Sandberg's assistant Kersten visited De Stijl archives in Nelly van Doesburg's house. Hitchcock's *Painting toward architecture* and the biography of De Stijl members in the "book of Barr", probably Barr's chapter on De Stijl in the catalog of Cubism and Abstract Art, are listed as source-material for the exhibition.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ The title of the proposal was: "outlines for a design of: an exhibition of work of members of 'the stijl-group' and the influence of this work on contemporary architecture and other plastic arts, in The Museum of Modern Art, New York, U.S.A." translated from Dutch by author: "Hoofdpijnen van een ontwerp van: een tentoonstelling van werken van leden van 'de stijlgroep' en de invloed van dit werk op de hedendaagsche architectuur en andere plastische kunsten, in 'The Museum of Modern Art' the New York, U.S.A." Exhibition proposal Rietveld, October 1, 1948 (CA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl exhibition 1951, folder nr. 3425-3431). No mention is made here of an exhibition in the Stedelijk museum. It seems that the decision to show the exhibition in Amsterdam was made two years later in 1950.

¹⁵¹ Rietveld still believed in the synthesis between the arts, see Jobse p. 9.

¹⁵² This first proposal provided broad outlines for the exhibition, no actual names of De Stijl members that would be included in the exhibition were listed, in the meeting in Meudon at the start of December 1950 and at a later meeting on December 24, 1950, the proposal would be developed and names were listed, such as Egeling, Richter, Arp and Schwitters. See notes meetings December 1-3, 1950 and December 24, 1950 (CA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951, folder nr. 3425-3431). In the notes the meeting in Meudon is dated with December 1951, the correct date has to be 1950 because in December 1951 the exhibition in Amsterdam was closed off and the meeting in Meudon took place in an early phase of the exhibition-process.

¹⁵³ Letter of Johnson to Sandberg August 7, 1947 (CA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951, folder nr. 3425-3431). See first report of committee meeting on June 11, 1947 (CA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition, 1951, folder nr. 3425-3421).

¹⁵⁴ Van den Broek wrote: " (...) in line with the assignment of the committee, the exhibition architect Gerrit Rietveld has from the very start used the fact that this exhibition would be mainly shown abroad as his main point of departure. In his designs he has taken into account the heights of the walls and the lay out of the rooms in the Museum of Modern art after a i.e. correspondence with the museum". Translation from Dutch by author: "(...) overeenkomstig de opdracht van de commissie heeft de tentoonstellingsarchitect, de heer Rietveld, zich dan ook van den beginnende af aan laten leiden door de overweging dat de tentoonstelling hoofdzakelijk in het buitenland getoond zou worden. Zo wordt o.a. na een correspondentie met The Museum of Modern Art bij de ontwerpen rekening gehouden met zaalindelingen en wandhoogte aldaar". Letter of Van Den Broek to Ministry of AES, May 5, 1951 (CA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951, folder nr. 3425-3431).

¹⁵⁵ Notes meeting December 1, 2 and 3, 1950 (CA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951, folder nr. 3425-3431).

In November 1950 the first research phase was closed off and the committee started with the assembly of material.¹⁵⁶ Around this time Sandberg brought up the idea to organize the exhibition as a test setup in the Stedelijk Museum on the occasion of the third International Congress of Art Critics (ICAC) that would take place in the first week of July in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague.¹⁵⁷ With its international character, attracting a number of 250 visitors from sixteen different countries, the congress was the ideal event for the promotion of De Stijl on an international level.¹⁵⁸ From the start a clear distinction was made between the test set-up and the exhibition in MoMA when it came to financial matters. The city of Amsterdam would finance the extra costs arising from the test set-up, such as the costs for the catalog, flyers, posters and the models and furniture created by Rietveld that would return to the Stedelijk Museum after they had been exhibited in MoMA. The Dutch government would pay for the costs involved with the exhibition in MoMA, such as the insurance, transport and the construction of larger models that could not be shipped to New York.¹⁵⁹

Some changes were made in the original committee as first proposed by the Dutch government; Rietveld would no longer be an official member given his role as exhibition-architect and Sandberg was added to the committee.¹⁶⁰ Although Nelly van Doesburg was not an official member she is listed in the exhibition catalog of the Stedelijk Museum as part of the organizational committee.¹⁶¹ Her role in the organizational process was significant; she made available her art-collection and the De Stijl archives in her house in Meudon, was present at a number of committee-meetings and helped with the inventory and the preparations of the

¹⁵⁶ Letter Reinink, state secretary of ministry of AES to committee, November 3, 1950 (NAI Archives, Dossier: Van Eesteren X760). Reinink wrote about the start of a preparatory study in which a member of the committee would collect, structure and select the material. Rietveld was given this task. It was a rather long period of time between 1947 and 1950, caused by what seems to have been financial matters: "After an interminable amount of waiting we at last succeeded in obtaining from the Dutch government a small credit." Letter Sandberg to Johnson November 27, 1950 (SMA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951).

¹⁵⁷ Letter of Sandberg to Johnson November 27, 1950 (CA Archives De Stijl Exhibition 1951). The De Stijl exhibition was organized as part of this congress; the opening of the De Stijl exhibition was part of the official program.

¹⁵⁸ The international congress of art-critics took place from July 2 to July 10, 1951. Seven research topics were discussed during the congress. De Stijl was discussed as part of one of the research-topics: "the source of abstract art and architecture in the Netherlands". Jaffé was the secretary of this group; other members of this group were J.J. Sweeney, the Swiss architectural historian Sigfried Giedion, the British poet and art critic Herbert Read and French sociologist Pierre Francastel and French art critic Charles Estienne. See report AICA congress July 2-10, 1951 (NAI Archives Van Eesteren X760).

¹⁵⁹ See copy of letter ministry of AES to Sandberg, January 28, 1952 (RS Archives, nr. RSA0619).

¹⁶⁰ Letter of Van den Broek to the ministry of AES, November 27, 1950 (CA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951, folder nr. 3425-3431). At the committee's meeting on February 13, 1951 Rietveld resigned and Sandberg was added as official member, see notes meeting February 13, 1951 (CA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951, folder nr. 3425-3431).

¹⁶¹ Here Rietveld, Oud, Van Eesteren, Van den Broek, Sandberg, Jaffe and Nelly van Doesburg are listed as committee members, see exhibition catalog of the Stedelijk Museum, 1951.

exhibition.¹⁶² Next to Nelly van Doesburg, Truus Schröder-Schräder seems to have been closely involved in the process. Sandberg would later write to MoMA that her role had been substantial.¹⁶³ She had been present at almost all committee-meetings from the first meeting in June 1948 onwards and would later work together with Rietveld on the installation of the exhibition in MoMA.

In March 1951 the second phase of the organizational process was concluded. The committee members had managed to gather an extensive body of material.¹⁶⁴ Rietveld was the one appointed by the committee to make a “strong selection according to quality, with which a representative and valuable exhibition could be created” that would provide the public with an understanding of De Stijl and would show its value and importance as Dutch art movement.¹⁶⁵

4.2. De Stijl in the Stedelijk Museum (1951)

The main body of the exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum was formed by four gallery-rooms aimed at the general public. Rietveld had constructed an exhibition-environment with a clear routing that led the visitor in a circular movement back to the first gallery space (fig. 29 and 30). The gallery-space of the main four galleries was divided in geometric sections with rectangular

¹⁶² Nelly became involved in the organization from 1950 onwards; Nelly was present at the meetings in Amsterdam on April 28, May 31, 1951. Lena Millius, the ex-wife of Theo van Doesburg was also present at these meetings due to her knowledge on De Stijl. Van den Broek wrote to the ministry of AES about an honorary to pay Nelly for her work an amount of 550 guilders, letter Van den Broek to ministry of AES, May 15, 1951 (CA Amsterdam, De Stijl Exhibition 1951, folder nr. 3425-3431). In October 1947 Nelly had written van Eesteren from New York that she had been able to convince MoMA to organize an exhibition and publish a book about De Stijl, see letter of Nelly to Van Eesteren, October 12, 1947 (NI Archives, Dossier: Van Eesteren, folder nr. X1005.) From the first correspondence about the exhibition could be concluded that Nelly had no official role in the first stage of the process. Given her contacts in New York it is possible that she discussed the exhibition with representatives of MoMA such as Johnson or Barr on a more personal level. The cooperation from Nelly in the organization of the exhibition was already discussed in the summer of 1947, Sandberg wrote to Wheeler of MoMA: “I hope you don’t mind when I express my feelings that one should be careful with the co-operation of any artist’s widow, see letter of Wheeler to Sandberg July 15, 1947 (SMA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951, folder nr. 5600-5700). It seems that Nelly got more closely involved in a later stage of the process.

¹⁶³ See letter Sandberg to MoMA, October 27, 1952 (CA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951, folder nr. 3425-3431). She was present at the meetings on June 6 and 19, 1948 and at the meetings on April 28 and May 31, 1951 (CA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951, folder nr. 3425-3431). Truus Schröder-Schräder was mentioned by Van Doesburg as a member of De Stijl, see Overy 2000, p. 13.

¹⁶⁴ The different committee members had assembled artworks; Van den Broek had asked Van t’ Hoff to contribute to the exhibition, see letter of Van den Broek to Van t’ Hoff, May 5, 1951 (CA Amsterdam De Stijl exhibition). Sandberg had approached the Kröller Müller and asked for four works of Van der Leek (no specification was given about which works). Nelly van Doesburg had visited Vantongerloo and Domela-Nieuwenhuis in Paris to select works, see notes meeting February 1951 and letter of Domela-Nieuwenhuis to Jaffé, June 5, 1951 (CA Archives De Stijl exhibition).

¹⁶⁵ Van den Broek to ministry of Education, Art and Science March 6, 1951 (SA Archives De Stijl Exhibition 1951). See also notes of meeting on February 13, 1951. It seems that Rietveld made the proposal about the selection of material and discussed this with the other committee members, see notes meeting April 28, 1951. Rietveld presented a model of the exhibition to the committee that showed the rough outlines of the exhibition and did not yet go into detail about the exact works that would be exhibited. The next meeting, May 31, 1951, Rietveld showed the model again with a more detailed explanation. See notes of the meetings on February 13 and April 28, 1951 (CA Archives De Stijl exhibition 1951).

wall- and floor panels, partitions and support structures that served as pedestals for sculptures and architectural models. A sense of flowing, continuous space was maintained through the coherence of the installation-design in the four different galleries. With their asymmetrical and balanced arrangement of objects, the geometric shapes of the architectural elements and the application of the primary and non-primary colors, these galleries formed a direct manifestation of De Stijl's formal vocabulary. The exhibition-space formed the extension of the artworks exhibited in it. A model of the exhibition was on display in the introductory gallery and made explicit the position of the exhibition as another artwork of De Stijl.

The exhibition-space, in which the artworks of De Stijl seemed to merge with the architectural elements, functioned as a metaphor of De Stijl's ideal of a unity between architecture and the visual arts that would result in a living environment; a harmonious space to inhabit with a beneficial effect on those who found themselves inside.¹⁶⁶ In light of this ideal, the exhibition-space can be considered an atmospheric room, in which the public could experience the effect of the harmonious space De Stijl had aimed to create.

In the introductory gallery a comparison was made with De Stijl and the architectural projects in the period preceding De Stijl, represented with photographs of work of Berlage and Eiffel. In this period architects were confronted with technological innovations and sought after a new means of expression but were not able to find the answer to the problem of balance and harmony. Photographs with examples of Baroque and Renaissance styles made clear that this was a problem that had to be solved in all times and ages. De Stijl was positioned at the opposite side of the entrance as the first movement that had been truly able to move away from tradition and establish a new artistic vocabulary with new materials and new means of construction fitting to the twentieth century. The unity and balance that Berlage and other architects at the end of the nineteenth century had searched for but had failed to discover was reached in De Stijl's new language of form. A white, grid-like framework constructed out of metal tubing visualized this new formal vocabulary as the result of the return to the basic elements of visibility, found in the three aesthetic principles of primary colors, geometric forms and harmonious composition. Photographs of work of Berlage and Eiffel were mounted on a similar metal construction as used to explain De Stijl's new formal vocabulary, as to emphasize the contrast between the old and new language of form (fig. 31).

¹⁶⁶ Van Doesburg had described this collaboration as a: "monumental collaborative art, wherein the different spiritual means of expression, architecture, sculpture, painting, music and the word in harmony that is each individual one gaining by collaboration with another one, shall come to the realization of unity", Van Doesburg in Blotkamp 1982, p. 19.

The three aesthetic principles of De Stijl were not presented as autonomous principles but as the means to an end; the instruments towards a realization of a pure plastic art as the manifestation of a new time consciousness that would be expressed in art but also in the broader society. The public was made aware of this collective striving of De Stijl by multiple references to De Stijl's first manifest in which this main principle was voiced as follows: "There is an old and a new time consciousness. The old is aimed at the individual, the new at the universal. The battle of the individual against the universal expresses itself in the world as in the art of our time. (...) The new art has shown what this new time consciousness is: a balance between the universal and the individual. The new time consciousness is ready to express itself in everything, also in the external life."¹⁶⁷ The central part of the manifest was included in the exhibition-leaflet that functioned as guideline for the visitor throughout the exhibition and gave a description of each gallery, together with an explanation of the development of De Stijl towards a free and pure art.¹⁶⁸ The manifest was also printed in the first part of the exhibition-catalog.

A clear link to De Stijl journal was created with the display of Vilmos Huszàr's design for De Stijl's first issue in 1917, hung in between the letters NB, standing for *Nieuwe Beelding* or Neoplasticism and the period 1917-1930 next to the gallery's entrance. The visitor entered the introductory gallery through a passage equipped as a documentary center. Here the visitor could look into documentary material such as issues of De Stijl. This arrangement showed De Stijl journal as a medium for the distribution of De Stijl's ideas and principles. This approach of De Stijl as the embodiment of an idea was how many of the former De Stijl members that were part of the exhibition-committee viewed De Stijl. This is how they had wanted to represent De Stijl in this exhibition, not just as an organization or a movement that belonged to the past, but as the idea behind the organization that lived on in the present-day.¹⁶⁹

The artists who had founded De Stijl: Mondrian, Van Doesburg, Oud, Anthony Kok and Vilmos Huszàr, were represented with enlarged portraits (fig. 32).¹⁷⁰ In the introductory section the De Stijl members spoke directly to the audience through the inclusion of quotations from De

¹⁶⁷ *De Stijl* 1918, pp. 2-3. Translated from Dutch by the author: "Er is een oud en een nieuw tijdsbewustzijn. Het oude richt zich op het individueele. Het nieuwe richt zich op het universeele. De strijd van het individueele tegen het universeele openbaart zich, zowel in den wereldkamp als in de kunst van onzen tijd. (...) De nieuwe kunst heeft naar voren gebracht hetgeen het nieuwe tijdsbewustzijn inhoudt: evenwichtige verhouding van het universeele en het individueele. Het nieuwe tijdsbewustzijn staat gereed zich in alles, ook in het uiterlijke leven te realiseren."

¹⁶⁸ Leaflet *De Stijl* 1951 (CA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951, folder nr. 3425-3431).

¹⁶⁹ See notes of a discussion about De Stijl during the congress of IAAC, Rietveld stated that De Stijl "was always considered an international idea", translated from French by author: "Il l'a toujours considéré comme une idée internationale". Van Eesteren added that "De Stijl group had never been a private circle but represented an idea" "Le group De Stijl ne jamais été un cercle privé mais qu'il représente une idée" (NI Archives, Dossier: Van Eesteren, file nr. X777).

¹⁷⁰ These artists were presented in the exhibition catalog as founders of De Stijl.

Stijl issues that expressed their collective ideas, principles and aspirations.¹⁷¹ In the exhibition-catalog, the De Stijl founders and other members of De Stijl were also given a voice as central actors. The catalog contained the theories and ideas as expressed in the manifests and texts from twenty-three co-workers of De Stijl, most of these texts had been published in previous De Stijl issues.¹⁷² Sandberg's short introductory text emphasized this role of the individual artist by stating that: "in this book De Stijl is given a voice, Van Doesburg and his co-workers. (...)".¹⁷³ The exhibition only showed work of the founders of De Stijl as presented in the introductory section, together with the work of the Dutch artists who had also strived for a new and pure art and had grouped themselves around the De Stijl journal: the painters Bart van der Leek, Domela-Nieuwenhuis and Vordemberge Gildewart, Vantongerloo, the poet Til Brugman and the architect Robert van t' Hoff, Jan Wils and Rietveld.¹⁷⁴

After the introductory section the application of the aesthetic principles of De Stijl to architecture was illustrated with a number of architectural photographs and drawings (fig. 33). This gallery-section was mainly devoted to the architectural designs of Van Doesburg, as the leading figure of De Stijl whose ideas had been crucial for the realization of the De Stijl principles in architecture. Van Doesburg's role as a theorist and central figure of De Stijl was also emphasized with the catalog's concluding chapter, "Van Doesburg summarizes", containing a

¹⁷¹ One of the quotations was "Primary observation leads to a new expression of reality", placed next to the white metal framework explaining De Stijl's formal vocabulary. According to the leaflet another quotation was included that also showed De Stijl's striving for a universal style that could be found in all disciplines by returning to the elementary means of expression, see leaflet De Stijl Exhibition 1951, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (CA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951, folder nr. 3425-3431).

¹⁷² The main focus was on the texts of Van Doesburg and his two alter ego's Camini and Bonset, Mondrian, Oud and Kok. Followed by contributions of Vilmos Huszár, Bart van der Leek, Rob van t' Hoff, Jan Wils, Georges Vantongerloo, Gino Severini, Constantin Brancusi, Gerrit Rietveld, Hans Richter, Cornelis van Eesteren, César Domela, Evert Rinsema, Fritz Kiesler, Peter Röhl, George Antheil, Werner Graeff, Friedrich Vordemberge, Hans Arp and Hugo Ball. This list of co-workers of De Stijl differed from Jaffé's list in his dissertation of 1956, he had included Truus Schröder and El Lissitzky and excluded Evert Rinsema and Peter Röhl. Although Truus Schröder was actively involved in the organization of the exhibition and was mentioned by Sandberg as member of De Stijl, she is not mentioned anywhere as such in the publications accompanying the De Stijl exhibition of 1951.

¹⁷³ The text further reads: "the articles are published in their original language/some parts are translated in English and French." Translated by the author from Dutch: "In dit boek is 'de stijl' aan het woord: van doesburg en zijn medewerkers / de stukken zijn in de oorspronkelijke taal afgedrukt / sommige stukken zijn in het engels vertaald." See the Stedelijk Museum 1952, [w.p]. The texts were published in their original language; some parts were translated in French and English to make the exhibition understandable for an international public. Perhaps this was done because of the Congress of the International Association of Art Critics that was organized during the exhibition and would partly take place in the Stedelijk Museum.

¹⁷⁴ Leaflet Exhibition De Stijl 1951 (CA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951, folder nr. 3425-3431). According to the exhibition catalog, Van der Leek, Georges Vantongerloo, Rob van t' Hoff, Jan Wils and Gerrit Rietveld were the five artists who had joined De Stijl shortly after its foundation. Together with the founders of De Stijl and Domela Nieuwenhuis, who later joined De Stijl, these are the members that have been the most active members of De Stijl, with the exception of Anthony Kok, see Blotkamp 1982, p. 11 and Blotkamp 1996, pp. 9-12.

selection of his texts and manifests and the reproduction of *Maison Particulière* (1924) on the cover of the exhibition catalog.¹⁷⁵

It seems that the emphasis in the first two galleries was on the experiments of De Stijl with color and composition; elements that ‘belonged’ to the discipline of painting and that were translated to De Stijl’s architectural designs.¹⁷⁶ The architectural works exhibited here, such as the color construction by Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren of *Maison Particulière* (1924) functioned as illustrations of these formal experiments. The second gallery showed architectural work, paintings and designs of the founders of De Stijl as portrayed in the introductory section (fig. 34).

Two adjacent walls in the second gallery gave insight into the development of De Stijl’s language of form in painting in the first period of De Stijl from 1917 to 1919 with a series of paintings of Mondrian, Van Doesburg and Van der Leck.¹⁷⁷ Another series of paintings of Mondrian, Van Doesburg, Van der Leck, Domela-Nieuwenhuis and Vantongerloo in the third gallery represented the second period from 1920-1925. The fourth gallery showed paintings in the later 1920’s by Vordemberge-Gildewart, Huszár and Domela-Nieuwenhuis. Three compositions of Mondrian formed the concluding part of this chronological sequence.¹⁷⁸ Mondrian’s *En blanc en noir II* (1930); a work from which the color had disappeared, leaving only pure white planes and black lines illustrated the apotheosis of the De Stijl’s search for a pure, harmonious and universal style in painting (fig. 35). This selective arrangement highlighted Mondrian’s position as the leading painter of De Stijl, in line with the view of Jaffé and Sandberg, who both believed Mondrian and not Van Doesburg had contributed the most when it came to the paintings of De Stijl.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ The title in Dutch is: “Van Doesburg resumeert”. This position of Van Doesburg was in line with Oud’s view on Van Doesburg as the center of De Stijl, as expressed in his letter to van den Broek, June 9, 1951 (CA Archives De Stijl exhibition). Rietveld underscored this approach; he described Van Doesburg as “the soul of De Stijl” in a letter to Van Eesteren written on July 1, 1951 (CA Archives Amsterdam De Stijl exhibition).

¹⁷⁶ This approach was described in the first proposal of Rietveld, the first part of the exhibition would be dedicated to experiments with color and composition, the second part to experiments three dimensional forms in space, see proposal Rietveld October 1, 1948 (CA Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951, folder nr. 3425-3431).

¹⁷⁷ Van der Leck had played an influential role in this first phase of De Stijl in the development of Van Doesburg’s and Mondrian’s abstract Neo-Plasticism, this role was also recognized by MoMA as shown in Sweeney’s article on Mondrian accompanying the Mondrian memorial Exhibition of 1946. Sandberg viewed Bart van der Leck as the most important painter of De Stijl after Mondrian, he had organized the Bart van der Leck exhibition of 1949, the first exhibition with an overview of Van der Leck’s work. The first idea for the exhibition came from Sandberg in the summer of 1947, see Roodenburg-Schadd 2004, p. 501, letter of Sandberg to Hammacher, director of Kröller-Müller museum, July 31, 1947 and letter Sandberg to alderman of cultural affairs January 18, 1949 (SMA Archives, Dossier: Exhibition Bart van der Leck 1949).

¹⁷⁸ See Joosten, Welsh 1998, III p. 49 for a complete overview of Mondrian’s work exhibited in the De Stijl exhibition of 1951 in the Stedelijk Museum.

¹⁷⁹ Sandberg greatly admired Mondrian as the artist whose later paintings formed the culmination of the development of geometric abstract art. Roodenburg-Schadd 2004, 517, 534. Mondrian had contributed the most when it came to the paintings of De Stijl. Jaffé agreed with this point of view, he believed Van Doesburg’s contribution to De Stijl in the discipline of painting had not been sufficient to give him a leading role. Roodenburg-Schadd 2004, 506, 510. It seems that Rietveld shared this view, he also thought the most important contribution of

Where the first two galleries mainly showed the experiments of De Stijl with color and composition, the last two gallery-rooms gave insight into the experiments with three-dimensional forms and spatial compositions. The right section of this gallery was dedicated to the architecture and designs of Rietveld (fig. 36, 37 and 38).¹⁸⁰ The *Rietveld-Schröder house* (1924) was well represented as the full expression of De Stijl's formal principles in architecture. A series of eight architectural ground plans and front- and side views were mounted on the gallery-walls, all arranged in a spatial manner similar to the display of the paintings in the opposite section. Enlarged photographs were placed on a vertical panel, next to a white rectangular pedestal with a selection of a smaller architectural model of the house.¹⁸¹ Next to the *Rietveld-Schröder house*, the *Red and blue armchair* (1918) was presented as the work most representative of Rietveld's oeuvre.¹⁸² The chair was positioned directly next to the entrance of the gallery and given a distinct position, visually separated from his other pieces of furniture.

The role of the *Rietveld-Schröder house* as one of the leading works of modern architecture was made clear in the study-room that was adjacent to the third gallery.¹⁸³ This room was intended for 'the experts' and provided a theoretical perspective on the story of De Stijl as told in the main exhibition. This room stood apart from the four main galleries as the result of the difference in installation-design; the room had plain, white walls and contained ground plans and white architectural models. Het Nieuwe Bouwen was represented here as the style most influenced by De Stijl. Van Eesteren had a central role in this gallery as the translator of De Stijl's purifying and ordering principles to modern architecture and city planning.¹⁸⁴

Van Doesburg to De Stijl was in his architectural work, Letter of Rietveld to Van Eesteren July 1, 1951 Stadsarchief Amsterdam.

¹⁸⁰ Also exhibited in this gallery was a series of photographs of architectural works of Van t' Hoff and a sculpture of Vantongerloo, placed on a rectangular pedestal. Nelly had selected three works of Vantongerloo in Paris. Later he would refuse to partake in the exhibition because he had renounced his work in the period from 1917-1919. Later he would agree with the exhibition, but with a number of strict conditions, see letters Vantongerloo to Jaffé, June 3, 1951 and to Sandberg June 11 and 16, 1951, Stedelijk Museum Archives – De Stijl exhibition 1951.

¹⁸¹ A small model of 14 x 20 x 17 cm was exhibited here. The catalog of the De Stijl exhibition in 1981 mentions a larger model of 44 x 72 x 49 cm that was created for the exhibition in 1951. This larger model was not exhibited in Amsterdam, perhaps this was a model created for the exhibition in New York. On the same rectangular pedestal sculptures of Vantongerloo were exhibited, as other examples of the experiments with three-dimensional forms. The main focus however was on Rietveld's work.

¹⁸² The chair was dated in the catalog 1917 instead of 1918. The Stedelijk Museum would re-establish the important position of the *Rietveld Schröder house* and the small series of Rietveld furniture, in particular his *Red and blue armchair*, in the following years. The museum added the chair to their collection directly after the exhibition, together with other furniture exhibited here, such as the four 'military chairs from 1923, his Berlin chair from 1923 and the Elling buffet from 1919, created again for the exhibition. In contrast to the work of Rietveld that was well-represented in the collection, no work of Oud, Van Eesteren, Van t' Hoff or Wills was part of the museum-collection, see Roodenburg-Schadd 2004, 518-523.

¹⁸³ Leaflet exhibition, 1951. The description in the leaflet described the project as "one of the leading works of modern architecture". In Sandberg's view, Rietveld was one of the greatest architects of the Netherlands, see Leeuw-Marcar 1981, p. 117, 119-120.

¹⁸⁴ Leaflet De Stijl 1951. There are no installation-photographs of this particular room.

The gallery-section opposite to Rietveld's work was dedicated to the series of Mondrian's paintings from 1920-21. In the spatial and open gallery, the visitor was offered a comparison between Mondrian's paintings and of Rietveld's furniture and architectural work that stressed similarity in the asymmetrical compositions of rectangular planes, the use of primary colors and the use horizontal and vertical black lines. This comparison stressed the application of De Stijl's elementary means of expression both in painting and architecture.¹⁸⁵ Rietveld's architectural work represented as developing together with Mondrian's paintings in a collective search for a new language of form that transcended the different disciplines. Rather than stressing the linear development from painting to architecture in which painting was given the primary position, the cross-pollination and close collaboration between the different disciplines was emphasized; a collaboration in which painters handled spatial elements like architects and architects applied color and line and arranged their elements just as painters arranged their compositions.¹⁸⁶ The leaflet emphasized this shared development by stating that architecture and painting, according to the principles of De Stijl, followed the same course.¹⁸⁷

A small section in the final gallery showed the translation of the elementary principles of De Stijl in literary and typographical work. Enlarged reproductions of poems of Anthony Kok's and Bonset, Van Doesburg's alter ego, were placed next to a glass showcase with work of Til Brugman.¹⁸⁸ The inclusion in the same gallery of the series of Mondrian's paintings, ending with his composition from 1930, again indicated the interrelation between the different disciplines in their development towards a new, pure and universal art, freed from the domination of the individual.

In the fourth gallery the accent shifted back from Rietveld to Van Doesburg. The emphasis in this last gallery remained on the realization of the De Stijl principles in three-dimensional forms. A number of architectural projects of Van Doesburg were exhibited here. *Café Aubette* (1928) and the *House in Mendon* (1929) were well represented with architectural models, drawings and enlarged photographs as the two most principal works of his later period (fig. 39).¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ The formal resemblance between Mondrian and Rietveld was also made visible in the combination of Rietveld's furniture at the retrospective Mondrian exhibition in 1946. Joosten, Welsh 1998, III, p. 46.

¹⁸⁶ Rietveld's exhibition proposal of 1948 that included painting, poetry, design, music and film, expressed De Stijl ideal of the close collaboration between the arts.

¹⁸⁷ "(...) how, according to the principles of De Stijl, architecture and painting follow the same course". Translated from Dutch by author: "(...) hoe, volgens de beginselen van De Stijl, schilderkunst en architectuur eenzelfde weg volgen". Leaflet Exhibition De Stijl 1951, the Stedelijk Museum.

¹⁸⁸ The leaflet emphasized the similar translation of elementary principles of De Stijl by stating that these literary works showed: "how the poet of De Stijl had used sound in a similar elementary and plastic manner as the painters and architects did with line and color." Translation from Dutch by author.

¹⁸⁹ Hoek 2000, nr. 803 (803.IIIq-t and 803.IIIv) and nr. 828. In the leaflet this significant position was underscored by describing these projects as: "two main works of his later period". Leaflet De Stijl exhibition 1951 (SMA)

The introductory and the concluding section of the exhibition were mainly dedicated to the architectural work of De Stijl. Architecture was brought to the fore as De Stijl's most important discipline; the instrument through which the expression of a new time consciousness in art and in the external life could be fully realized.¹⁹⁰ This view was in line with De Stijl's understanding of a new architecture as the unification of the different disciplines that because of its material form and its tangible place in modern society would express not only in art, but also in reality the new time consciousness and create harmony between its inhabitants and their surroundings.¹⁹¹

The new time consciousness first had to be expressed in a freed and pure art before it could be expressed in external life. How De Stijl artists had realized this aim through the application of the aesthetic principles of De Stijl in art was made manifest throughout the exhibition. Every artwork in the main exhibition-space, whether this concerned architectural drawings or models, sculptures, paintings, typographical work or pieces of furniture, was exhibited as autonomous work of art; the illustration of De Stijl's development towards a pure and harmonious art.

Close to the section with Van Doesburg's work was an arrangement of photographs of modern architecture influenced by De Stijl, such as the *Van Nelle factory* (1931) in Rotterdam by Brinkman and Van der Vlugt and *Sanatorium De Zonnestraal* (1931) in Hilversum by Duiker; modern buildings created with a social purpose that had a tangible place in modern society.¹⁹² The collage of modern architecture functioned as the illustration of the broader society and pointed out to the visitor the realization of De Stijl's main ideal: the expression of a new time

Archives, De Stijl exhibition 1951). Also exhibited here Van Doesburg's early works such as the *House of Rosenberg* (1923) created together with Van Eesteren and a number of photographs of architectural works of Van Eesteren.

¹⁹⁰ Vordemberge-Gildewart opposed the idea represented here, namely that De Stijl's influence was only expressed in architecture, and not in painting. "Everyone has got the impression, that painting has given the injection and that "De Stijl" in the present day only finds its expression in architecture. Vordemberge-Gildewart to Van den Broek January 1, 1952 (SMA Archives, De Stijl exhibition 1951).

¹⁹¹ Mondrian wrote about the new architecture: "architecture has only to realize in tangible reality what painting has demonstrated abstractly in neoplasticism. It is the architect and the engineer who are in the future to create for us a harmony between ourselves and our surroundings (...)", see Jaffe 1956, p. 161. Oud stated that the aim of De Stijl was to: "realize an architecture, which belongs to its period, and would adapt itself and its forms to the modern expressionism of life: an architecture from which a new style could spring through its unity with its surroundings." Jaffe 1956, p. 159. Van Doesburg thought architecture was the instrument to influence human life directly. He wanted to apply the De Stijl principles to architecture, which had a tangible place in the modern world. Oud voiced this view on architecture by stating that: "its [De Stijl's] aim has therefore been to realize an architecture, which belongs to its period, and would adapt itself and its forms to the modern expressionism of life: an architecture from which a new style could spring through its unity with its surroundings, Oud quoted in Jaffe 1956, p. 159.

¹⁹² This follow-up of Van Doesburg's work with work of a later generation of modern architects showed Van Doesburg's view, he believed De Stijl was not an 'end-station', but as the point of departure for a further development. The younger generation would follow the path carved by De Stijl. This view was in contrast with Mondrian's beliefs, who believed De Stijl was a purified 'end-situation'. These contrasting views were discussed during the meetings of the organization committee on 1, 2 and 3 December 1951 in Meudon (SMA Archives, De Stijl exhibition 1951).

consciousness in society. A quotation from De Stijl's first manifest: "the new time-consciousness is ready to express itself in everything, also in the external life", was placed above the exit of the fourth gallery and made the visitor once again aware of this shared ideal.¹⁹³ To underscore the realization of this aim through the application of a universal means of expression in art, the visitor was guided in a circular movement from the fourth gallery back to the first gallery, where De Stijl's new language of form had been first explained.

4.3. De Stijl in the Museum of Modern Art (1952-53)

In November 1952 the exhibition was shipped from Amsterdam to New York.¹⁹⁴ MoMA re-introduced De Stijl in the same manner as in the catalog of Cubism and Abstract Art, as one of the longest lived and most influential groups of, primarily Dutch, modern artists.¹⁹⁵ Philip Johnson had visited the ICAC in 1951, where he had delivered an opening speech in which he outlined De Stijl in a similar manner, as the art-movement with the broadest artistic influence of the twentieth century, hereby emphasizing the importance of De Stijl whose international achievements would be celebrated with this exhibition in New York.¹⁹⁶

Rietveld was assigned to design and install the exhibition as he had done in Amsterdam.¹⁹⁷ MoMA had wanted to let their own staff design and install the exhibition, but Sandberg had stated that exhibition would not be complete without the finishing-touch of Rietveld, who was not merely the designer, but also the author and executive of the exhibition, the "incarnation" and "ambassador" of De Stijl.¹⁹⁸ Truus Schröder-Schröder, who had the role of

¹⁹³ Translated by the author from Dutch: "Het nieuwe tijdsbewustzijn staat gereed zich in alles, ook in het uiterlijke leven te realiseren". This message was repeated in threefold, it was also included in the leaflet and the exhibition catalog.

¹⁹⁴ Before traveling to New York, a selection was shown at the Biennale in Venice in October 1952. The exhibition of De Stijl took place in the Greek pavilion and was designed by Rietveld, it was financed outside the budget for the exhibitions in Amsterdam and New York, see letter Rutten-Broekmans to the exhibition-committee, June 3, 1952 (SMA Archives, De Stijl exhibition 1951).

¹⁹⁵ Press releases October 16, 1952 and December 17, 1952 (MoMA Press Release Archives).

¹⁹⁶ Read 1951.

¹⁹⁷ It was decided that MoMA would pay 2000 dollars, including 500 dollars for Rietveld's expenses in New York, letter Johnson to Sandberg November 9, 1951. The Dutch government paid for the packaging of the exhibition, the transport to New York harbor and its return to Holland, the redistribution in Europe, the insurance of transport and the traveling costs of Rietveld to New York and back, see letter Sandberg to Greta Daniel, September 17, 1951 (SM Archives, Dossier: De Stijl exhibition 1951, folder nr. 5600-5700).

¹⁹⁸ "I doubt", Sandberg wrote to Drexler, "if anyone else can give the finishing touch to this exhibition". Letter of Sandberg to Drexler, October 3, 1952 and letter of Sandberg to Johnson, June 27, 1952. In answer to letter of Drexler to Sandberg January 28, 1951 in which he states that it is not necessary for Rietveld to travel to the United States (SM Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951, folder nr. 5600-5700).

It was one of the conditions of the circulating exhibition that it had to be installed by an expert of De Stijl, such as Rietveld or Truus Schröder-Schröder, based on the thought that only an expert of De Stijl was able to express De Stijl's specific character in the exhibition. See correspondence with regard to the installation of the circulation of the exhibition after New York. Letter of Porter A. McGray to Rietveld January 26, 1953 (RS Archives RSA0655) letter of Friedericy to ministry of AES, March 17, 1953 (NI Archives Oud, nr. 134).

consultant, accompanied Rietveld and assisted him with the preparation of the exhibition.¹⁹⁹ Initially MoMA had decided to dedicate the main exhibition-space on the ground floor of the museum to the exhibition. At the request of Sandberg a smaller gallery on the Northwest side was made available as well.²⁰⁰

Rietveld had designed the installation-plans, but MoMA had the final say in the execution of these plans.²⁰¹ Given the much smaller amount of space available, a selection of material would be made by MoMA. Barr also wanted to substitute some of the works exhibited in Amsterdam with works from MoMA's own collection. The exhibition would hereby be reframed as clear product of MoMA.²⁰² The works of MoMA's collection included in the exhibition were given a prominent position in MoMA's bulletin that was published instead of a catalog. Kiesler's exhibition catalog of the theater exhibition in 1924, an issue of *De Stijl* with the letters NB, Van Doesburg's *Color Construction* (1922), *Rhythm of a Russian Dance* (1918) and *Composition VIII* (1918), together with Mondrian's *Composition* (1920), Rietveld's *Table lamp* (1925) and his *Red and blue chair* (1918) were reproduced in color on the first page of the bulletin (fig. 40).²⁰³

The exhibition design of the museum's main gallery was rather similar to the design in the Stedelijk Museum.²⁰⁴ Rietveld had used white, grey or black colored rectangular panels that functioned as partitions. An open and free flowing sense of space remained through the use of rectangular blocks supporting these partitions, which gave the impression they were floating. Although Rietveld had created this free-flowing sense of space in the Stedelijk Museum, the large and open gallery of MoMA was more suited to express *De Stijl*'s conception of space as an open,

¹⁹⁹ Rietveld arrived in New York as representative of *de Stijl* and the Stedelijk Museum at the end of November 1952. He started with the installation of the exhibition in the beginning of December. It seems that Truus Schröder-Schrader arrived in New York in December. See letter of Greta Daniel to Truus Schröder-Schrader, October [without day], 1952 (RS Archives).

²⁰⁰ The exhibition was rescheduled in order to get more space, at the request of the exhibition committee, Sandberg wrote to Johnson: "We think that this will be absolutely impossible in the space that you are offering. Being a space that is 1/4 of that of the Amsterdam show. (...) Therefore I hope you will be able to find a space which would enable us to make a good exhibition, even if this had to be arranged on another date". Sandberg to Johnson December 1951, Stedelijk Museum Archives. The measurement of this space was approximately 36 square meters. All in all, the total of exhibition space available was much smaller than in the Stedelijk Museum, see letter Drexler to Sandberg, December 19, 1951 (SM Archives, Dossier: *De Stijl* exhibition 1951, folder nr. 5600-5700).

²⁰¹ Daniel wrote to Sandberg about changes to be made in Rietveld's plan and the fact that Johnson would make "all the final decisions". Letter of Greta Daniel to Sandberg, October 21, 1952 (SM Archives, Dossier: *De Stijl* Exhibition 1951, folder nr. 5600-5700).

²⁰² Daniel wrote that it was impossible for Barr to come to a conclusion regarding substitutes from the museum's collection or loans from American collectors from the few undated photographs they had received. Barr preferred to make such substitutes after the entire material had been assembled in New York, letter of Greta Daniel to Sandberg, September 30, 1952 (RS Archives, RSA0638).

²⁰³ Barr and Johnson 1952-1953.

²⁰⁴ The gallery was redesigned for this exhibition, in his report Rietveld wrote that new columns were installed floor, walls and ceiling were constructed and everything was repainted in grey, black and white. The gallery had one wall formed by windows, these were taped off with frosted fiberglass as to not to distract the visitor with the rather messy view on the construction of a new part of the museum building. The effect, according to Rietveld, was aesthetically pleasing; it gave the impression of frosted glass, see report Rietveld exhibition New York, 1953 (RS Archives nr. D075).

universal space that was allowed to flow freely and continuously.²⁰⁵ The center of the exhibition-space was formed by a rectangular, roped-off, elevation with selection of Rietveld's De Stijl furniture. As in the Stedelijk Museum, the exhibition-space, with its well-considered division of planes and beams, the asymmetrical and balanced arrangement of objects, the simple geometric forms and the use of the non-colors as counterpoints of De Stijl's primary colors, functioned as a manifestation of the aesthetic principles of De Stijl.

The introductory section led the visitor through a hallway to the main gallery. The first image with which the visitor was introduced to De Stijl was an enlarged reproduction of Van Doesburg's and Van Eesteren's *Color construction* (1922) drawn on the left wall (fig. 41).²⁰⁶ Barr described this work as "a typical example of de Stijl's projection of a painting," in which the de Stijl principles were demonstrated in the flat rectangular planes that defined the asymmetric volume, the use of primary colors and the weightless freedom of composition (fig. 42).²⁰⁷ The cover of the bulletin - that was printed in bright colors - presented the architectural design against a light grey background in such a manner that its primary colors and geometric forms were highlighted.

The representation of this projection clearly illustrated two main motifs of MoMA's history of De Stijl: the definition of De Stijl in terms of the three aesthetic principles and the development of painting towards architecture.²⁰⁸ Johnson emphasized this latter motif by introducing De Stijl in MoMA's bulletin as the main precedent of the International Style, who had highly influenced modern architecture in the aesthetic of balance and composition.²⁰⁹ With this characterization Johnson clearly referred to MoMA's history of De Stijl as told in the publications accompanying *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* in 1932.

Just as in Amsterdam, a reference to De Stijl as journal was made with Huszàr's painting from the first cover of the De Stijl magazine, together with the first issue of De Stijl placed on a small pedestal. The large letters NB, suspended from the ceiling, were accompanied by the dates 1917 to 1928. Oud clearly did not agree with these dates. He stated that the exhibition would not be truly historical when it would end in 1928: "An exhibition like this must be true historical. Especially when you are going to finish it with 1928 (which is also falsch because just the further

²⁰⁵ The new architecture of De Stijl no longer created space, but limited a part of this universal space, in which the different rooms would 'merge' into each other, see Grafe, Leupen et. al. 2007, pp. 58-59.

²⁰⁶ This was not the same work reproduced on the cover of the catalog of the Stedelijk Museum, but a work from the museum's own collection, *Color construction for a private house* (1922), created together with Van Eesteren.

²⁰⁷ Press release December 17, 1952 (MoMA Press Release Archives).

²⁰⁸ As stated above, in the press-releases of the exhibition De Stijl was continually introduced and explained in terms of these three principles, as Barr had also done in the press release and catalog of *Cubism and Abstract Art*.

²⁰⁹ Johnson in Barr and Johnson 1952-1953, p. 5.

results can make the beginning clear).”²¹⁰ For MoMA this was the period in which the ‘essence’ of de Stijl was expressed. As Johnson stated in a letter to Oud: “for us De Stijl was a brief and exciting moment of clarification, unification and vast influence.”²¹¹ MoMA aimed to represent De Stijl not so much as a collaboration of artists bounded by an ideal, but as a set of formal principles that for a limited period of time were applied by a group of artists and selected those works that showed the development towards this essence and the works in which this essence was fully expressed in a clear and orthodox manner. According to MoMA’s definition De Stijl had ended in 1928 with *Café l’Aubette* (1928) of Van Doesburg. For this reason Van Doesburg’s model of the *House at Meudon* (1929) was excluded from the exhibition. Johnson felt this project was “no longer Stijl”.²¹²

MoMA believed it was necessary to add explanatory wall-texts and labels to the original exhibition, based on the thought that the American public would have less knowledge of De Stijl than the Dutch public.²¹³ Rather than letting De Stijl members speak for themselves with quotes of De Stijl journals as in the exhibition in the Stedelijk, MoMA attributed itself a clearly visible role in its own narrative in order to explain De Stijl to the public. A textual label written by Johnson explained De Stijl as artistic movement in terms of its three aesthetic principles.

The first paintings that the public encountered in the introductory section were three paintings by Mondrian from his ‘plus and minus period’ that preceded the foundation of De Stijl in 1917: *Composition in brown and gray* (1913), *Pier and Ocean 5* (1914) and *Color squares in oval* (1914–15) from MoMA’s collection (fig. 43 to 46). The positioning of Mondrian’s paintings as point of departure of the entire exhibition represented Mondrian as De Stijl’s most important painter, whose work gave way to the “collective formal discoveries of De Stijl”.²¹⁴ With this representation MoMA built on its story of the evolutionary sequence from Cubism to the paintings of Mondrian to modern architecture and design. Barr emphasized this point by stating

²¹⁰ Letter of Oud to Johnson, December 13, 1952 (NI Archives, Dossier: Oud, folder nr. 133).

²¹¹ Letter of Johnson to Oud December 19, 1952 (NI Archives, Dossier: Oud, folder nr. 133). Johnson wrote in another letter that the museum wanted to show the essence of De Stijl in the early 1920’s, rather than what the artists did later, see letter of Johnson to Oud, December 10, 1952 (NI Archives, Dossier: Oud, folder nr. 133).

²¹² Rietveld wrote to Oud and stated that he had to exclude the House at Meudon of Van Doesburg “because he [Johnson] believed this was no longer Stijl”. Translated from Dutch by author: “‘bij de oprichter van doesburg moest ik iets inkrimpen omdat hij vond dat het huis in Meudon geen stijl meer was.’” See letter of Rietveld to Oud February 25, 1953 (RS Archives nr. RSA0608). The same accounted for the model of Oud’s *House at Pinehurst* (1931) that was also on show in the exhibition International architecture of 1932. He had send four large photographs of the project in case this model could not be restored. “You would oblige me very much by looking for a good place for these photographs as they belong to my part of the Stijl exhibition and cannot be missed”, he wrote to Johnson, see letter Oud to Johnson, December 1, 1952 (NI Archives, Dossier: Oud, folder nr. 133). See also letter of Oud to the Dutch exhibition-committee about the reproduction of these photographs, letter of Oud to exhibition-committee November 21, 1952 (NI Archives, Dossier: Oud, folder nr. 133).

²¹³ “I found that for foreign presentation a greater amount of explanatory text would be to bring the show closer to the understanding of the viewing public” from copy of letter of Greta Daniel to Sandberg August 29, 1952 (RS Archives nr. RSA0636).

²¹⁴ Press release December 17, 1952. (MoMA Press Release Archives).

in the bulletin that: “the typical architecture of de Stijl grew *first of all* out of Cubism by way of Mondrian”.²¹⁵ In his foreword in the catalog Johnson also pointed at the Cubist tradition of De Stijl by describing the developmental process from painting to architecture as the: “transmogrification and codification of the aesthetic experimentations of cubism”.²¹⁶

MoMA clearly built on the history of De Stijl as told in *Cubism and Abstract Art*; the text of the bulletin was based on a slightly revised version of Barr’s text on De Stijl as published in the catalog in 1936.²¹⁷ Similar to content of the catalog of *Cubism and Abstract Art*, the bulletin gave a chronological overview of the history of de Stijl, starting with Mondrian’s influence by Picasso’s Cubism in the early 1910’s and marking Mondrian’s arrival at a complete abstraction in 1917, the year De Stijl was founded.²¹⁸

The introductory section of the exhibition was mainly devoted to Mondrian, Van Doesburg and Oud as De Stijl’s three founders. Where Mondrian was represented as De Stijl’s forerunner and most important painter, Van Doesburg was positioned as De Stijl’s ‘leading spirit’ who had first experimented with the application of painterly principles to architecture with architectural decorations.²¹⁹ This position was illustrated with the same examples used in *Cubism and Abstract Art*, such as a photograph of the floor of the *House at Noordwijkerhout* (1917) together with Van Doesburg’s original design of the floor tiles, paired with Van Doesburg’s painting *Composition* (1917). A page of a De Stijl issue with its principal members, placed in a glass showcase in the main section, had replaced the enlarged photographs of the De Stijl founders that were given a central position in the Stedelijk Museum. In contrast to the Stedelijk museum, the emphasis of MoMA was not so much on the artists and their expression of the De Stijl ideas but on the artworks as embodiments of De Stijl’s aesthetic system.²²⁰

Vantongerloo was represented, just as in *Cubism and Abstract Art*, as an important link between painting and architecture who had translated “De Stijl’s love of rectangles to sculpture”

²¹⁵ Barr in Barr and Johnson 1952, p. 8.

²¹⁶ Johnson in Barr and Johnson 1952-1953, p. 5.

²¹⁷ The catalog of the Stedelijk was included in the exhibition as an important historical document, but was not distributed by the museum during the exhibition. The museum could only sell publications that were written by the museum. It had been MoMA’s intention to publish an illustrated catalog by Hitchcock but there was no money or available time to research, as Johnson would later write to Sandberg, letter Johnson to Sandberg June 5, 1952 (SM Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951, nr. 5600-5700). A note in MoMA’s bulletin would refer to the Amsterdam catalog being available through Wittenborn publishers in New York, letter of Greta Daniel to Sandberg, September 30, 1952 (SM Archives, Dossier: De Stijl Exhibition 1951, nr. 5600-5700).

²¹⁸ In broad lines the chronologies as published in *Cubism and Abstract Art* and in this exhibition catalog were the same, although here the developmental process to De Stijl’s language of form, marked by a number of formal ‘phases’ was pointed out in more detail.

²¹⁹ In the catalog Johnson describes Van Doesburg as De Stijl’s “leading spirit”. This role is emphasized by the concluding paragraph of the catalog, solely devoted to Van Doesburg.

²²⁰ MoMA listed Van Doesburg, van der Leek, Mondrian, Huszar, Vantongerloo, Oud, Wils, Van t’Hoff, Kok to the first members in 1917. In 1921 Richter joined De Stijl, followed in 1923 by Kiesler. See chronology of De Stijl in the museum’s bulletin, Barr and Johnson 1952.

and hereby provided the architects with early examples of De Stijl design in three dimensions.²²¹ *Construction des rapports des volumes* (1921) was mounted on a black pedestal, jutting from the wall in line with the series of De Stijl paintings to pointed out their sequential relation. The binding function of sculpture that had bridged painting and architecture was shown in the bulletin with a diagram that started with fragments of paintings of Mondrian and Van Doesburg, followed by a sculptural work of Vantongerloo and the architectural work of Rietveld (fig. 47). Another illustration printed next to Johnson's introduction in the bulletin visualized the process from two-dimensional designs to three-dimensional forms (fig. 47).²²² The black geometric shapes that illustrated the first phase in the process from two-dimensional designs to three-dimensional forms seem to refer to Van Doesburg's *Six moments in the development of plane to space* (ca. 1929) and *Study for arithmetic composition IV* (1929) (fig. 49 and 50).²²³ The illustration of the second phase was based another drawing of Van Doesburg, *Basic elements of sculpture* (1922) and showed Van Doesburg important role in this developmental process (fig. 51).²²⁴

Oud's *Café de Unie* (1925) was included here as the point of departure of Neo-Plasticism in architecture.²²⁵ Oud had written to Johnson that it was neither interesting nor historically true to represent his *Café de Unie* in this section.²²⁶ Despite Oud's critical remarks this project was exhibited because for MoMA it formed a clear illustration of the development from painting to architecture.²²⁷ As Cubism and Abstract Art, Barr underscored this lineage by describing the project as: "a frank and amusing adaption of paintings such as Mondrian's *Composition of 1920*".²²⁸

The linear development from painting to architecture was visualized in the exhibition-space with the outer circle formed by paintings and the architectural works mounted on

²²¹ Press Release December 17, 1952 (MoMA Press Release Archives).

²²² Johnson in Barr and Johnson 1952, p. 5.

²²³ In the installation plan of MoMa an ink drawing lent by Nelly van Doesburg is listed, titled *Arithmetic Composition IV* (1930). It seems that the study was exhibited in MoMA although this work is not visible on the installation-photographs (Dossier: Exhibition Records, De Stijl Exhibition 1952-53, folder nr. #527.4).

²²⁴ The illustration is an exact copy of Van Doesburg's drawing, but it is not certain whether this drawing was exhibited in Amsterdam or New York.

²²⁵ Photographs of the *House at Noordwijkerhout* (1917) *Design for factory building* (1919), *Protestant church* (1929). *Contractors shed on building site in Rotterdam* (1923), these works are not visible on the installation photographs, it is highly likely that the architectural photographs were enlarged and framed black and white photographs, in line with the overall exhibition design.

²²⁶ Letter of Oud to Johnson, December 13, 1952 (NI Archives, Dossier: Oud nr. 133). In a letter to Sandberg, Oud wrote: "I am completely at peace with the fact that I am presented with a small number of works. However, this work has to be representative of what De Stijl aimed for. De Unie is only one aspect and I don't want to be used to support the narrow-minded tendencies that are tailored to the American's view on art". Translated by author from Dutch: "Ik heb er volkomen vrede mee als ik met weinig werk aanwezig ben. Maar dit werk moet dan ook representatief zijn voor wat ik in de stijl voorstond. De unie is maar 1 facet daarvan en ik voel er niets voor om door middel daarvan te dienen tot ondersteuning van geboorneerde tendenties, die in de Amerikaanse kunstkraam passen." Letter of Oud to Sandberg, December 21, 1952 (NI Archives, Dossier: Oud, nr. 133).

²²⁷ In the press releases of the exhibition and in the bulletin this work was explicitly mentioned and explained.

²²⁸ Barr 1952, p. 10. This message was repeated in the MoMA's press release of December 1952.

seemingly floating panels, positioned perpendicular to the gallery-walls. Every piece of furniture, every architectural model and drawing in the room could be viewed as related to the paintings of Van Doesburg, Van der Leek, Mondrian, Vordemberge-Gildewart, Huszàr and Domela-Nieuwenhuis that lined the gallery walls and illustrated the first development of De Stijl's aesthetic principles that had followed out of Mondrian's paintings before 1917.

As in the Stedelijk museum, the paintings after the foundation of De Stijl by Van Doesburg, Mondrian, Van der Leek, Vordemberge and Domela-Nieuwenhuis were arranged in a chronological sequence on the gallery-walls.²²⁹ This sequence represented the development of De Stijl aesthetic principles in painting: the "years of trial and error on the part of Mondrian, Van Doesburg and Van der Leek, that resulted in the fundamental elements of de Stijl."²³⁰ The developmental process was clarified by a sub-division in three different phases, all characterized by particular formal elements and explained with a selection of paintings that illustrated best these formal aspects. The different phases were marked in the chronology and further explained in Barr's text in the museum's bulletin.²³¹ Although Van Doesburg and Van der Leek were acknowledged here, more than in 1936, for their important role in the developmental process which led to the De Stijl's language of form, it is Mondrian who maintained the role of "the greatest of all the masters of geometrical abstract art", who, in terms of his international influence could be placed on the same level as modern masters as Van Gogh and Picasso.²³²

The architectural work of Van Doesburg was attributed a significantly less prominent position than in the Stedelijk Museum. In the introductory section a model of the *House of Rosenberg* (1923) created together with Van Eesteren was exhibited, but it seems that no other

²²⁹ Three drawings and a gouache of *Composition (The Cow)* (1917), together with seven paintings of Van Doesburg: *Composition* (1917), *Composition VIII* (1918), *Composition* (1918), *Composition* (1918), *Rhythm of a Russian Dance* (1918) *Counter Composition* (1924), *Contre composition XVI* (1925).

Paintings of Mondrian: *Composition* (1917), (1921), (1922), (1925)

Van der Leek: four paintings, *Composition no. 3* (1917), *Composition* (1918-20), *Writer* (1923), *Composition* (1918).

Paintings of Domela: *Composition* (1924), Paintings of Vordemberge-Gildewart, *Composition* (date unknown), Two sculptures of Vantongerloo: *Blue figure* (1918), *Construction of volume relations* (1921).

²³⁰ Barr in Barr and Johnson 1952-1953.

²³¹ The first phase, marked by compositions in rectangular planes of primary colors, was presented as the result of Van Doesburg's synthesis of Mondrian's plus and minus style and Van der Leek's application of color, illustrated with Van Doesburg's *Composition no. 3* (1917) and Van Doesburg's *Rhythm of a Russian Dance* (1918) a work that according to Barr illustrated best the Stijl's principles of asymmetric volume. The second phase was characterized by the exact geometrical method, illustrated compositions with a grid-like structure. It was Van Doesburg who, according to Barr, led the way in this brief experiment. The final stage was formed by the more asymmetrical compositions, rectangles of a few colors divided by heavy black lines to be found in the later style of Mondrian, positioned here as in the Stedelijk Museum as the one who had arrived at a pure abstraction in painting.

²³² Barr quoted Katherine Dreier here. He wrote that: "Katherine S. Dreier, president of the New York Société Anonyme, may have been right, as well as courageous when in 1927 she stated that: 'Holland has produced three great painters... The first was Rembrandt, the second was van Gogh, and the third is Mondrian'- right, at least in terms of international influence". Barr 1952, p. 11. The leading role of Mondrian in this exhibition is reflected in MoMA's presentation of Mondrian today as: "most famous theorist and practitioner" of De Stijl, see description in MoMA's online collection: <http://www.moma.org/collection/works/4044>.

architectural models were exhibited.²³³ Oud's architectural work was not exhibited in the main section. It was Rietveld who was represented as the foremost architect and designer of De Stijl. The *Rietveld Schröder house* (1924) was highlighted as his most important work and the most significant architectural work of De Stijl.²³⁴ Several pieces of furniture designed by Rietveld were arranged in a spatial manner on the white platform that formed the center of the exhibition. Combined with a black lowered ceiling constructed out of horizontal and vertical planes and bars they offered the visitor an experience of a De Stijl interior (fig. 52 and 53). A horizontal panel showed enlarged photographs of the interior of the *Rietveld Schröder house* (1924) as real-life examples of the interior on display here.²³⁵ A vertical partition showed views on the exterior of the house and different floor plans that Rietveld had created specifically for this exhibition. Two models of the house and an early sketch were on display on a white pedestal next to the elevation.²³⁶ Rietveld's *Red and blue armchair* (1918) armchair was highlighted as very important example of De Stijl furniture by its distinct position on a corner of the elevation outside the roped-off section.²³⁷

The importance of Rietveld was emphasized by the representation of his work as main precedent of Kiesler's *City in space* (1925). An enlarged photograph was positioned from floor to ceiling directly against the de Stijl interior of Rietveld (fig. 54). This created a *trompe l'oeuil* effect of an adjacent room with the same asymmetrical balance and open sense of space, which directly followed and almost seemed to merge into Rietveld's De Stijl interior. The importance of

²³³ Exhibited of Van Doesburg: *Dessin Arithmétique IV* (1930), *Design for glass mosaic* (1917) and a series of six *Color constructions* together with Van Eesteren (ca. 1922), *Color sketch for conservatory* (1924-25), *Counter composition XVI* (1925), Drawing of the *House in Meudon* (1929). Colored designs and photographs of *Café Aubette* (1928) A photograph of *Hotel Particulier* (1923) designed with van Eesteren and Rietveld from an issue of *L'architecture vivante* from 1929 was placed in a glass showcase. The last issue of De Stijl from 1928 dedicated to *Café Aubette* (1928) was also on display in this showcase.

²³⁴ Both MoMA and the Stedelijk Museum contributed to the iconic status that this small selection of Rietveld's broad oeuvre would gain from the 1950's onwards as most significant three-dimensional artifacts of De Stijl and key works of modern art history, see Overy 1993, p. 10. Küper 1996, p. 219. According to Overy: "The Red and Blue chair was represented in art historical discourses as Rietveld's major contribution to the history of design and as the key three-dimensional artifact of De Stijl. During this same period the Schroder house was similarly positioned within the emergent and increasingly dominant discourses of modernist architectural history." Overy 1993, p. 10. The retrospective De Stijl exhibition was an important point of origin of this modernist canon, which would be kept in play by both museums from the 1950's onwards.

²³⁵ Two photographs of the interior of the *Rietveld-Schröder house* mounted on blue cardboard that were already part of the collection of MoMA were added to the exhibition. Also included here were photographs of the *Hartog house* in Maarssen (1919).

²³⁶ Other pieces of furniture of Rietveld were grouped around the central elevation: *Arm chair* (1918), *Chair* (1900), *Piano chair* (1919), *Replica of the sideboard* (1917-18). A large, black and white colored rectangular table, placed on black blocks, served as a display for an architectural model and photographs of his *Jewelry shop* in Amsterdam (1920) and a glass sheet held designs and models of furniture: *Model of cupboard*, models of the *Rietveld-Schröder house* (1924), *Design for beach cart* (1916).

²³⁷ MoMA added the *Red and Blue armchair* to their collection after the exhibition. "I am very anxious to take advantage of this unique opportunity of adding to the Museum's design collection this very important example of de Stijl furniture." See letter of Greta Daniel to Rietveld, March 27, 1952 (RS Archives, nr. RSA0666). Other work kept in the collection: was the table lamp of Rietveld and Van Doesburg's *Composition* (1918).

Kiesler's work, as technically "the boldest creation in the De Stijl tradition" was accentuated with the reproduction of the catalog of his theater exhibition in Vienna (1924) on the first page of the museum-bulletin.²³⁸

It would be a quick conclusion to state that this prominent position of Rietveld was due to his own role as exhibition-designer. The more fundamental reason can be found in MoMA's view on De Stijl as an aesthetic system. This characterization of De Stijl had formed a fundamental part of the story that MoMA had produced in their preceding exhibitions. According to Barr the *Rietveld Schröder* (1924) was the ultimate example of the 'essence' of De Stijl's aesthetic, the embodiment of the "orthodox De Stijl manner".²³⁹ Although Barr described Oud as "the greatest architect" and one of founders of de Stijl, it was Rietveld who truly expressed De Stijl's aesthetic principles as never before in Western architecture.²⁴⁰

Correspondence of Oud to Johnson gives insight into the subjective approach of MoMA, who focused solely on the aesthetic system of De Stijl and omitted other aspects because they did not 'fit' within the museum's narrative framework.²⁴¹ Oud wrote: "I think it is not right to rebuild De Stijl into a movement you should like it to be. It was more than alone the trends which go out of the Rietveld-furniture and the Rietveld space-building. This was one of the trends but not the only and not that special trend alone you wish it to be. De Stijl had also social and rational trends (read Zevi about it!). For that reason I must object when you do not show my houses at Kiefhoek or Hoek van Holland (...). I should regret it if the Stijl exhibition should neglect this side of the movement because one wishes to give it a special meaning".²⁴² In another letter to Sandberg Oud repeated this point of criticism by stating that: "De Stijl is more than horizontal – vertical and red –blue and so on. As long as I can do something about it, it has to be represented as such, not in a limitation that meets the later ideas of others."²⁴³ Although at the request of Oud the projects at Kiefhoek and Noordwijkerhout were included in the introductory section, this did not alter the main storyline of the exhibition, with its emphasis on De Stijl as

²³⁸ Press release December 17, 1952, (Museum of Modern Art Press Release Archives).

²³⁹ Barr in Barr and Johnson 1952, p. 11.

²⁴⁰ Barr in Barr and Johnson 1952, p. 9. "Oud was the greatest but at the same time the most conservative of the Stijl's architects". MoMA's representation of Rietveld as the most important architect of De Stijl and of his *Rietveld-Schröder house* (1924) as the main representative of De Stijl's three-dimensional artworks has not changed throughout the years. Today the *Rietveld-Schröder house* is presented in the same manner as in this exhibition as, "the most complete expression of de Stijl, characterized by primary colors, geometric planar forms, and an unconventional open plan." See description of this work in the online collection of MoMA: <http://www.moma.org/collection/works/4044?locale=en>

²⁴¹ Letter of Oud to Johnson December 13, 1952 (NI Archives, Dossier: Oud, folder nr. 133).

²⁴² Letter of Oud to Johnson, December 13, 1952 (NI Archives, Dossier: Oud, folder nr. 133) (emphasis by Oud).

²⁴³ Translated by the author: "De Stijl was meer dan horizontal-verticaal en rood-blauw enz. Zo lang ik er iets aan doen kan moet ze ook zodanig voor de dag komen. Niet in een beperking die aan latere neigingen van sommigen tegemoet komt." Letter of Oud to Sandberg December 21, 1952 (NI Archives, Dossier: Oud, nr. 133).

aesthetic system, developed from painting to architecture and culminating in Rietveld's architectural work and design.

The story as produced in the exhibition was divided in two parts; the central part in the main gallery told the story of the development of De Stijl's aesthetic system in the period from 1917 to 1928 from painting to architecture. The second part provided insight into the influence on the current modern styles after De Stijl and was situated in the smaller Northwest gallery that was visited by the public after they had viewed the main gallery.²⁴⁴

De Stijl's influence on international modern architecture was shown with a number of photographs of architectural projects executed in the 1920's, such as Walter Gropius' *Bauhaus* (1926) in Dessau and Bijvoet and Duiker's *Sanatorium Zonnestraal* (1927) in Hilversum. A small selection of photographs of architecture, designs, a painting and examples of typographical work of contemporary American artists and designers illustrated the influence of De Stijl on modern art and architecture, with an emphasis on the architectural projects. In contrast to the Stedelijk Museum, the focus was not solely on Dutch modern architecture; the variety of disciplines and the work of international artists pointed out the broad scope and international influence of De Stijl.

In this smaller gallery-space Rietveld's metal construction was on display that visualized the return of De Stijl to the visible elements: space, color and form. A photograph of a Victorian interior and an German exhibition poster of 1881 represented the chaos of the historical styles in the 1880's, followed by photographs such as Berlage's Stock exchange (1893) and Victor Horta's staircase (1893) as the first attempts to move away from the historical styles.²⁴⁵ These elements were not included in the main gallery, as they would disrupt the story of Mondrian as main precedent of De Stijl and of De Stijl's lineage from Cubism. With the position of Mondrian at the start of the main gallery he was not only represented as main point of departure of De Stijl, but also as one of the most important modern artists whose influence still lived on in architecture and design of the present-day of which examples were shown in the adjacent North-West gallery.

When drawing a comparison between the narrative history of De Stijl produced in the retrospective De Stijl exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum and the one created in the exhibition mounted at MoMA, there is a certain degree of convergence between both histories. De Stijl was represented with both exhibitions as influential modern art movement that lived on through its influence on modern architecture. Despite these clear similarities the retrospective De Stijl exhibition cannot be viewed as a narrative environment containing one coherent narrative history

²⁴⁴ Letter Johnson to Oud, December 10, 1952 (NI Archives, Dossier: Oud, folder nr. 133).

²⁴⁵ On display here were photographs of Gustav Eiffel, *Eiffel Tower* (1889) and Balat, *Strap-on ornaments Conservatory Laeken* (1897).

shared between the two museums. Both museums produced different histories of De Stijl through the inclusion, exclusion and selective arrangement of artworks and other narrative elements.

MoMA represented De Stijl as an art movement defined by a set of aesthetic principles that had influenced modern architecture and design on a broad an international level. The museum emphasized the linear development from painting to sculpture, architecture and design and placed De Stijl in the Cubist tradition, with Mondrian as leading painter and main precedent of De Stijl, Rietveld as De Stijl artist who had contributed the most when it came to architecture and design of De Stijl. Van Doesburg was brought to light as theorist of De Stijl who had translated the principles developed in painting to modern architecture.

It is remarkable that despite MoMA's initial idea to show the international influence of De Stijl with the inclusion of international modern architecture and design, the emphasis in the exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum remained on the Dutch character of De Stijl, with Mondrian and Van Doesburg as De Stijl's pioneering artists. The exhibition only included work of the Dutch De Stijl members and Dutch modern architecture influenced by De Stijl. Not the development from painting to architecture, but the close collaboration between the different disciplines within De Stijl was highlighted. De Stijl was not placed in an art historical framework but shown as modern art movement of the present-day that had a continuing influence on modern life and society, In contrast to MoMA, the Stedelijk Museum did not solely represent De Stijl as an aesthetic system but made the public aware of the ideals shared by the De Stijl members that lied behind this aesthetic system; ideals that were not only aimed at art but also at the future society.

CONCLUSION

In this research the retrospective historical De Stijl exhibitions shown in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1951 and in MoMA in New York in 1952-53 have been analyzed as narrative environments and spaces of representation. In and with these exhibitions both museums produced and distributed narrative histories of De Stijl and hereby contributed to the assimilation of De Stijl into the canon of modern art. Using an extensive body of archival material, these exhibitions and their organizational processes have been reconstructed and analyzed, in order to formulate an answer to the questions what narrative histories were created, on which ideas these histories were built and with what narrative elements and devices they were produced.

Both MoMA and the Stedelijk Museum constructed narrative environments through the selective arrangement of artworks in the museums' galleries. These works were combined with textual labels and architectural elements, placed in a particular sequence of artworks and linked to a particular physical place in the exhibition-space. Although the retrospective exhibitions in MoMA and the Stedelijk both contained a narrative history of De Stijl as important and influential modern art movement, these narrative histories differed significantly from each other in many aspects. In the narrative history produced in the test set-up of the retrospective exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum, De Stijl was outlined as a group of Dutch modern artists bound by a shared ideal that was realized through the application of a new formal vocabulary and the close collaboration between the visual arts and architecture. De Stijl was highlighted as an exponent of its own time; a modern movement with a lasting influence on modern society. In this narrative history Mondrian, Rietveld and Van Doesburg figured as prominent De Stijl artists. Van Doesburg had an important position as De Stijl's founder and theorist and as one of the pioneering artist's of De Stijl.

MoMA selected a number of artworks from the test set-up as shown in Amsterdam and arranged these works with a selective number of artworks from MoMA's own collection. In the narrative environment that was created as the result of this selective structuring, De Stijl was represented as an aesthetic system rooted in Cubism that had developed in a linear movement from painting to international modern architecture and design. In MoMA's history of De Stijl, Mondrian had a leading role as one of the masters of modern art; De Stijl's most important artist who stood at the base of the development of De Stijl's language of form. Van Doesburg was given the role of theorist and founder and Rietveld was attributed the position of De Stijl's key architect and designer whose work formed the fullest expression of De Stijl's aesthetic system.

In the period from 1930 to 1945 MoMA had integrated De Stijl into its overarching history of modern art as an important and influential Dutch modern art movement with the

exhibitions *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* in 1932, *Cubism and Abstract Art* in 1936 and the Mondrian memorial exhibition in 1945; each exhibition functioned as a link in a logical and structured framework in which the same motifs were continuously repeated and strengthened. In contrast to MoMA, the Stedelijk Museum did not produce a continuous and well-ordered narrative history with their preceding exhibitions: the Theo van Doesburg exhibition in 1936, *Abstracte Kunst* in 1938 and the Mondrian memorial exhibition in 1946. With these exhibitions Mondrian and Van Doesburg had been brought forward as influential modern masters, but the retrospective exhibition was a new and distinct entity in the series of the museum's exhibitions in which De Stijl had been represented. The history of De Stijl that was told in the retrospective De Stijl exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum reflected many of the views and ideas of the De Stijl members that were involved in its exhibition-process. With the exhibition in MoMA this history was remodeled and transformed in order for it fit to into MoMA's narrative framework with its linear sequence from Cubism to Mondrian to modern architecture and design.

This study focuses on the representation of De Stijl by MoMA and the Stedelijk Museum in a selected number of exhibitions and publications from the early 1930's onwards, concluding with the retrospective historical De Stijl exhibition in the early 1950's. An interesting angle for further research would be to broaden this scope and take into account other exhibitions organized by both museums that have contributed to the museum's narrative histories of De Stijl, such as the Bart van der Leek exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum in 1949. Although both museums were dominant actors in the art world of the twentieth century and played a substantial role in the canonization of De Stijl, there were other actors in the Netherlands and abroad: museums, galleries, art collectors and dealers, who have created narrative histories of De Stijl, both in the period that is covered in this study as well as in the years preceding or following this period. The question is in what way these histories are related to the ones produced by MoMA and the Stedelijk Museum. Nelly van Doesburg is only one example of an agent who has represented De Stijl with the retrospective Theo van Doesburg exhibition in the United States in 1947 and 1948. A research into these different narrative histories of De Stijl will reveal once more the dynamic and subjective process of representation and canonization and the constructive nature of art's histories.

APPENDICE I - ILLUSTRATIONS

- *under embargo* -

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Theo van Doesburg (1883-1931), *Rhythm of a Russian dance*, 1918, oil on canvas, 135.9 cm x 31.6 cm, MoMa New York 135.1946.
2. Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969), *Design for a brick country house*, groundplan, 1922, ink on paper, MoMa New York 592.352.
3. Installation view of Modern architecture: International exhibition; view of work by J.J.P. Oud, MoMa New York, February 10 through March 23, 1932, MoMA NY Archives IN15.1.
4. Installation view of Modern architecture: International exhibition; view of work by Le Corbusier, MoMa New York, February 10 through March 23, 1932, MoMA NY Archives IN15.1.
5. Installation view of Modern architecture: International exhibition; view of work by Frank Lloyd Wright, MoMa New York, February 10 through March 23, 1932, MoMA NY Archives IN15.1.
6. Installation view of Modern architecture: International exhibition; work by Walter Gropius, MoMa New York, February 10 through March 23, 1932, MoMA NY Archives MA.262.
7. Barr's chart for the catalog and exhibition of *Cubism and Abstract Art*, MoMa New York, 1936.
8. Page with chronology of De Stijl from catalog *Cubism and Abstract Art*, p. 140, MoMa New York, 1936.
9. Installation view of Cubism and Abstract Art; paintings by Mondrian from 1911 to 1913 in Neo-Plasticist gallery, MoMa New York, March 2 through April 19, 1936, photographer Beaumont Newhall, MoMA NY Archives IN46.28B.
10. Installation views of Cubism and Abstract Art; paintings of Mondrian from 1915 to 1921 in Neo-Plasticist gallery, MoMa New York, March 2 through April 19, 1936, photographer Beaumont Newhall, MoMA NY Archives IN46.28B.
11. Installation views of Cubism and Abstract Art; paintings by Mondrian from 1926 to 1935 in Neo-Plasticist gallery, MoMa New York, March 2 through April 19, 1936, photographer Beaumont Newhall, MoMA NY Archives IN46.28B.
12. Installation view of Cubism and Abstract Art; work by Vantongerloo, Van Doesburg and Domela-Nieuwenhuis in Neo-Plasticist gallery, MoMa New York, March 2 through April 19, 1936, photographer Beaumont Newhall, MoMA NY Archives IN46.28B.
13. Installation view of Cubism and Abstract Art; avant-garde gallery with section dedicated to De Stijl, MoMa New York, March 2 through April 19, 1936, MoMA NY Archives IN46.37.
14. Installation view of Cubism and Abstract Art; avant-garde gallery with section dedicated to German expressionism and the Bauhaus, MoMa New York, March 2 through April 19, 1936, MoMA NY Archives IN46.37.
15. Installation view Cubism and Abstract Art ; avant-garde gallery with sections dedicated to Purism, MoMa New York, March 2 through April 19, 1936, MoMA NY Archives, IN46.37.
16. Installation view Cubism and Abstract Art; avant-garde gallery with section showing the influence of Cubism and Suprematism on film and theatre, MoMa New York, March 2 through April 19, 1936, MoMA NY Archives, IN46.37.
17. Piet Mondrian (1872-1944), *Tableau I, with black, red, yellow, blue and light blue*, 1921, oil on canvas, 96.5 x 60.5 cm, unknown collection.
18. Willem Hendrik Gispen (1890-1981), *Passage to Monte Video and Buenos Aires (Poster for Rotterdam-South America Line)*, c. 1927, lithograph, mounted on canvas, 84.9 x 64.5 cm, MoMa New York 1473.2000.
19. Pages of exhibition catalog *Cubism and Abstract Art*, pp. 148-149, MoMa New York, 1936.
20. Page of exhibition catalog *Cubism and Abstract Art*, p. 157, MoMa New York 1936.
21. Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), *Standing female nude*, 1910, charcoal on paper, 48.3 x 31.4 cm, MET Museum New York, 49.70.34.
22. Page exhibition catalog *Cubism and Abstract Art*, p. 159, MoMa New York, 1936.
23. Installation view of the Theo van Doesburg exhibition, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, May 2 through May 31, 1936, RKD Archives 0408-1064.
24. Installation view of Abstracte Kunst, view of the gallery with paintings by Van Doesburg and Mondrian, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, April 2 through April 24, 1938, SMA Archives.
25. Installation view of Abstracte Kunst, view of the gallery with work of Van Doesburg and Mondrian, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, April 2 through April 24, 1938, SMA Archives.

26. Front page of exhibition catalog *Abstracte Kunst*, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1938.
27. Installation view of the Piet Mondrian memorial exhibition; gallery with Mondrian's latest abstract paintings as ultimate culmination of his development towards abstraction, from November 6 through December 16, 1946, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, SMA Archives.
28. Installation view of the Piet Mondrian memorial exhibition; gallery with chair of Rietveld, November 6 through December 16, 1946, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. SMA Archives.
29. Gerrit Rietveld (1888-1964), Model of the retrospective De Stijl exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, ca. 1950-51, SMA Archives.
30. Gerrit Rietveld (1888-1964), Groundplan of the De Stijl exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam with marked routing for the visitor through the galleries, ca. 1950-51, pencil on paper, Rietveld-Schröder Archives Utrecht, 883A.004.
31. Installation view of the historical retrospective De Stijl exhibition; view of the entrance section in the first gallery, July 6 through September 25, 1951, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, SMA Archives.
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