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Reshaping Textiles: An Inspiration from Wassily Kandinsky

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Abstract

There will be several elements discussed in this article regarding my design inspiration from a renowned painter Wassily Kandinsky. Wassily was an eminent Russian painter and art theorist who is considered as the father of the abstract art. In this research, I endeavored to introduce alien elements in the domain of textiles by merging abstract concepts of Kandinsky's painting with my textile products. Keeping in view the modern art, I have created my designs that could reshape the concept of textile décor regarding wall panels, setae and side-panels. In later sections, we will transit towards our design compositions, techniques and other mediums that have been incorporated within. The aim of this report article is concluded by my endeavor to justify as to how I came up with the innovative textiles ideas by extracting an inspiration from Kandinsky's work which in the end is left up to the critiques and readers to decide as to how much I have succeeded.

Index Terms: abstract art, compositions and impressions, expressionism, spirituality, textiles, Wassily Kandinsky.

I. Introduction

The Russian artist, Wassily Kandinsky¹, was often given credit to be among the primordial producers of abstract works; and contributed in giving

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¹ Born on December 16, 1866 in Moscow, Russia, Kandinsky spent his childhood years in Odessa. He enrolled at the University of Moscow, studying law and economics. Successful in his profession—he was offered a professorship (Chair of Roman law) at the University of Dorpat—he began painting studies (life-drawing, sketching and anatomy) at the age of 30. In 1896 Kandinsky settled in Munich, studying first at Anton Ažbe's private school and then at the Academy of Fine Arts. He returned to Moscow in 1914, after the outbreak of World War I. Kandinsky was unsympathetic to the official theories on art in Communist Moscow, and returned to Germany in 1921. There, he taught at the Bauhaus school of art and architecture from 1922 until the Nazis closed it in 1933. He then moved

birth to abstract art. Since he was a trained musician, he visualized colors with the same sensibility of a musician. He was deeply influenced and obsessed with Monet which he later combined with his creativity to produce innovative work on canvases. Although, his works remained controversial among his contemporaries and critics, yet he dominated the abstract art movement in the early 20th century. Several of his published works highlights spirituality of art.² It was the maturity and clarity of his philosophical ideas and artistic pursuits that has contributed in developing unique works [1]. He was completely engrossed with the ideas of appreciating inner beauty, uniqueness of spirituality that eventually they became focal point in his painted works. He claimed that a well-trained artist must connect his aesthetic sense with his soul to bring forth unique styles [2].

II. Inspiration

Our research project has been inspired by the great abstract artist, Wassily Kandinsky. Before proceeding to my project, let us consider the rationale and philosophy behind Wassily's works and his ardent contribution in the domain of art.

A. Wassily as a Father of Pure Abstraction

As mentioned earlier, Wassily Kandinsky is considered as one of the founders of pure abstraction in painting during 20th century. He had experimented with his compositions and colors by utilizing his artistic experiences. Kandinsky's work was exhibition in the European galleries. The sheer abstract nature of his work often shocks public and stirs controversy. In spite of all that he emerged as the founder of the abstract art.

B. Introducing Representational Themes and Spirituality in Art

We can easily visualize representational themes in Kandinsky's paintings. He pours his emotional states, akin to music, that easily conveys gloominess over a tragic painting or happiness over a joyful scene. Although, the abstract nature of his paintings lacks representational

to France where he lived for the rest of his life, becoming a French citizen in 1939 and producing some of his most prominent art. He died at Neuilly-sur-Seine in 1944 [11].

²Kandinsky was involved in many movements, learning and experimenting with words, music, and painting.

elements yet the usage of colors and his unique style easily conveys the emotions he wants to convey [3]. Upon his return to Munich in 1908, he founded the *New Artists Association* of Munich. In addition, Kandinsky was also a member of the *Blaue Reiter* (Blue Rider), which he co-founded with fellow artist Franz Marc; and he was also a member of the Bauhaus movement with composers Arnold Schoenberg and Paul Klee. His influence of music was so thorough that he had created various abstract glass paintings based on musical elements. Furthermore, he wrote a book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* [2] where he relates art with spirituality, soul and inner beauty. These themes remain the focal point of his art theories and paintings.

C. Inspiration from Musical Compositions

The musical compositions like Mozart and Brahms inspired Kandinsky to such an extent that he became a strong proponent of the idea that music and painting are inseparable art forms. This can be witnessed in his painting's titles such as *Improvisations*, *Impressions*, and *Compositions* [4].

D. 'Color Studies: Squares and Concentric Circles'

In similar vein, one of the Kandinsky's most cherished and the greatest abstract work is the painting titled *Color Studies: Squares and Concentric Circles* (*Farbstudie: Quadrate mit konzentrischen Ringen*) illustrates 12 sections of circles confined inside a square of divisional angles [5], [6]. He utilized his feelings and emotions combined with earthy hued colors to create abstract master pieces.³ The sheer beauty of those splendid blend of colors impacted the viewer's mind with contrasting earthy tones, thus creating an objective visual reality.

E. Wassily as an Expressionist

His unique style was one of the expressionists as he used geometric shapes, unlike any other artist, fusing abstractness into them. This opens up a new horizon in abstract painting. The shapes were of variant figurative and dreamlike styles depicting his moods and feelings. Before 1912, he had painted landscapes in the Murnau period with his friend Gabriele Münter;

³ With color ranging from cozy reds and gold's and yellows, to Icelandic blues and forest greens, Kandinsky utilized the overlapping of colored circles, and placed them inside a square compartment. See [6]

however, this was transitioned into the line works during the Bauhaus period [5].

Between the years 1936 and 1939, he produced two last major surrealist compositions: *Composition IX* and *Composition X*.

These compositions were highly contrasted, powerful diagonals whose central form gives the impression of an embryo in the womb. Small squares of colors and colored bands stand out against the black background of *Composition IX* as star fragments, while enigmatic hieroglyphs with pastel tones cover a large maroon mass which seems to float in the upper-left corner of the canvas [7].

The depth of Kandinsky's abstract art is entirely veiled and discrete that only a person or viewer who harbors a deeper connection with them could reveal those elements. Thus, we can say that Kandinsky's intended his forms to resonate with the observer's soul.

F. Analysis on Forms & Colors

Kandinsky's analyze forms and colors with absolute subjectivity that emerges from an artist's inner experiences [8]. He believed that there exists a connection between the artist and the viewer where their minds and senses synchronize in accordance to feel what the artist wants to convey.

G. Geometric Figures and their Relationships

In his theory book, *Point and Line to Plane*, he expounded the theory of geometric figures and their relationship. Kandinsky asserted that the circle is the most peaceful shape and represents the human soul [5]. Similarly,

The subjective effect produced by a line depends on its orientation: A *horizontal line* corresponds with the ground on which man rests and moves; it possesses a dark and cold affective tonality similar to black or blue. A *vertical line* corresponds with height, and offers no support; it possesses a luminous, warm tonality close to white and yellow. A *diagonal line* possesses a more-or-less warm (or cold) tonality, according to its inclination toward the horizontal or the vertical. The *basic plane* is, in general, rectangular or square. Therefore, it is composed of horizontal and vertical lines which delimit it and define it as an autonomous entity which supports the painting, communicating its affective tonality. This tonality is determined by the relative importance of horizontal and vertical lines: the horizontals giving a calm, cold tonality to the basic plane while the verticals impart a calm, warm tonality. The artist intuitively feels the inner effect of the canvas format and dimensions, which he chooses according to the tonality he wants to give to his work. Kandinsky considered the basic plane a living being, which the artist "fertilizes" and feels "breathing". The *above of the basic plane* corresponds

with looseness and to lightness. While the *below of the plane* evokes condensation and heaviness. The painter's job is to listen and know these effects to produce paintings which are not just the effect of a random process, but the fruit of authentic work and the result of an effort towards inner beauty [9], [5].

H. Painter's Palette and the Soul

Kandinsky believed that the subjective experiences of life and the individual's spirituality forms a hierarchy akin to a pyramid. Since mankind is coerced by their external desires, they failed to acknowledge the inner spirit within causing the soul to sink into the bottom. Only few artists and mystics can comprehend and enlighten themselves to ascend highest level of the pyramid__ which in his painting case, is the *point*.

Colors on the painter's palette evoke a double effect: a purely physical effect on the eye which is charmed by the beauty of colors, similar to the joyful impression when I eat a delicacy. This effect can be much deeper, however, causing a vibration of the soul or an "inner resonance"—a spiritual effect in which the color touches the soul itself [6], [10].

III. Pros and Cons of My Project

My Project, as mentioned earlier, has been inspired by Wassily Kandinsky. So, a natural query is as to why I chose him as my artistic guide. The rationale behind my research project is to elaborate Kandinsky's work elusively and vividly so that the critiques and readers could comprehend what was unique in his works. With the advent of modern techniques in textile designing, I have created my textile products in a manner as to merge Kandinsky's abstract paintings, his geometrical designs and compositions with my own designs. In doing so I endeavor to reshape textile industry by introducing abstract concepts which were chiefly renowned only to be used in paintings. Now the world could take a benefit from my designs and can build an extravagant atmosphere right in their own drawing rooms, balcony, corridors and bedrooms.

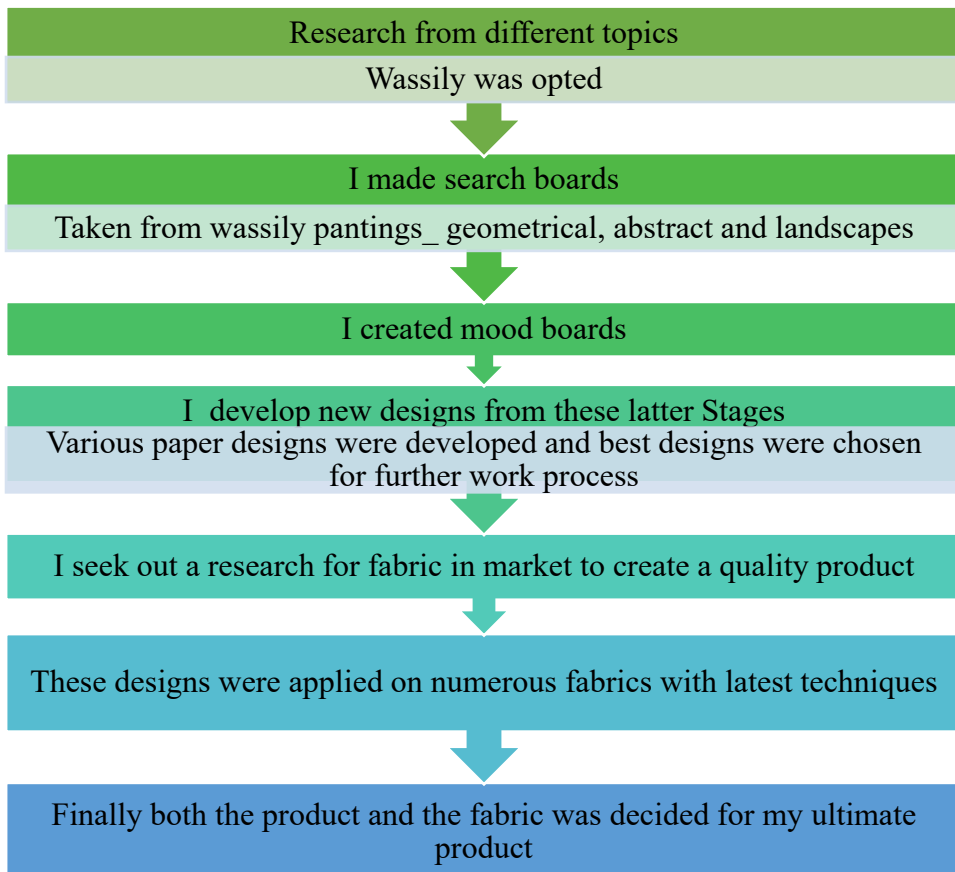
While majority of researchers and students harbor inspiration for their designs from different civilizations; and on topics such as butterflies, coral reefs, gothic, flowers etc., it is rather difficult to utilize works of painters in textile designing. That is one of the reasons that I chose Kandinsky because it opens a wide range of possibilities in the development of new and unique designs and compositions. I thoroughly enjoyed experimenting with Kandinsky's paintings regarding lines, geometrical compositions, circles and color pattern through different materials, mediums and techniques that

I applied on various fabrics (such as cotton, lawn, chiffon, *shamus* silk, jersey, *marina*, *khaddi*, canvas fabric). This enables me to incorporate 20th century style in a mix textile version of 21st century.

There could be an objection to my project regarding digital printing as to what's new am I bringing when I can print any painters' paintings on fabric. My response to all such responses is that I am utilizing Kandinsky's work as an inspiration and in turn creating fresh designs for market; whereas, the digital printing industries are merely imitating the works of painters, thus producing nothing new.

IV. Process of Designing

The following flow chart depicts the entire process of my project design.



V. Sampling

In the former section, we've discussed how I selected our topic and elaborated it in such a fashion that enables us to choose a suitable fabric for our designs. Thus, reshaping my inspiration of Wassily; and I've transformed it into a quality product of the Millennium. It is then I initiated sampling with different techniques on several suitable fabrics. These techniques are:

- Block printing
- Fabric painting
- Open mesh techniques with different mediums such as thread, rice, leaf, coiling on canvas, pulses, beads etc.
- Digital printing
- Screen printing
- Flock printing
- Machine embroidery
- Hand embroidery
- Weaving
- Nail weaving

A. *Explicating these Samples*

1) *Block Printing*

Block printing is one of the oldest types of printings that have been around for thousands of years. It has been stored in its earliest forms since 5th century BC; these original fragments could be traced back since 15th century. It has been done all around the world whose roots originates from India, China and Japan. Due to its prolonged history and cultural heritage it acquires numerous techniques; but it is essentially using a carved material covered in ink to transfer an image on to paper or fabric.

Hence, I created several designs on different fabrics via this technique. Experimenting new designs with an age-old technique was a unique idea from which my product was liberated, that maintained high quality standards.



Fig. 1. Sample 1



Fig. 2. (a) Sample 2, (b) Sample 3

2) *Fabric Painting*

Fabric Painting is an outlay of vibrant colors upon fabrics with suitable brushes. It paves a magical road to an endless destiny that enables us to create an extravagant world of art ranging from couture to home decorates_ cushion covers, curtains, wall hangings etc.

Since, sampling is an earlier stage to create our product further; so, I merged it with block printing and seek what outcomes are best suitable. Through this merger I created surfaces and textures using silk and other fabric paints.



Fig. 3. Sample 4



Fig. 4. Sample 5

3) *Open Mesh Technique*

Open mesh technique is a printing technique that utilizes a woven mesh to support an ink blocking stencils to receive a desire image. I created several surface patterns with the help of this technique upon which I did hand and machine embroideries.

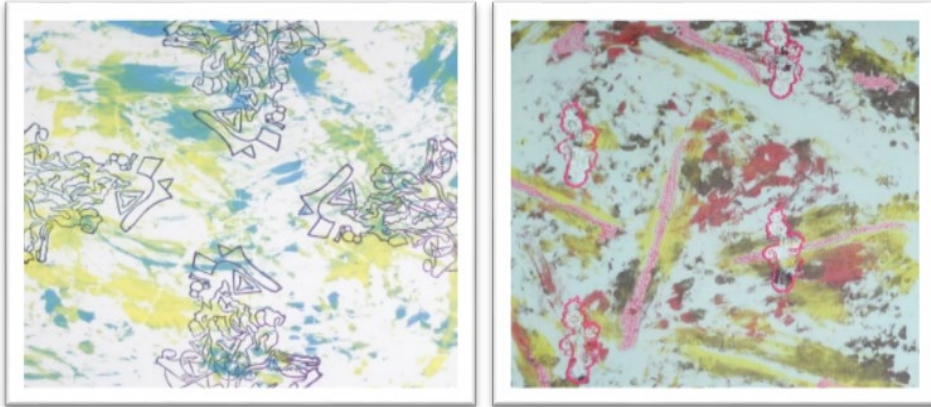


Fig. 5. (a) Sample 6, (b) Sample 7

4) *Digital Printing*

Digital printing is described as any ink jet-based method of printing colorant onto fabric. I developed complete designs on fabrics like *chiffon*, *shamus* silk and cotton *lawn*.

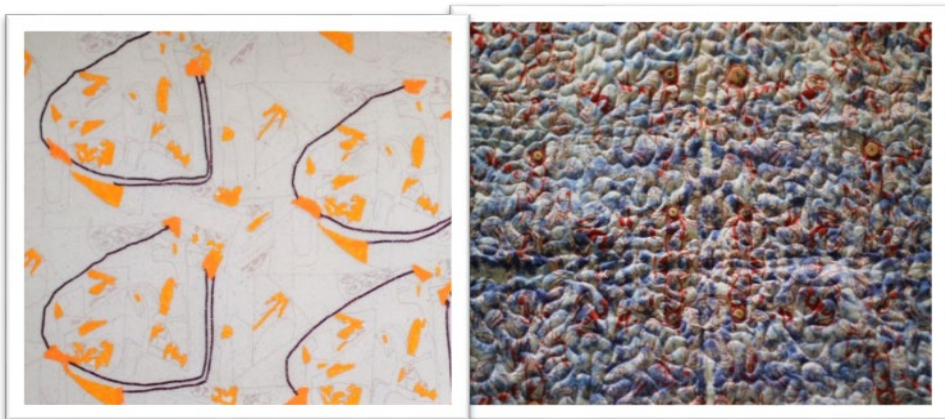


Fig. 6. (a) Sample 8, (b) Sample 9

5) *Screen Printing*

Screen printing is a method of print making that utilize stencils to imposed a design on a screen of polyester or other fine mesh with blank areas coated with an impermeable substance. Color is forced into the mesh by the squeegee and onto a printing surface during the squeegee strokes; as the screen rebounds away from the fabric the color remains on the fabric.

One color is printed at a time so several screens can be used to produce a multi-colored design. I made screens of my own designs which I imprinted on various fabrics.

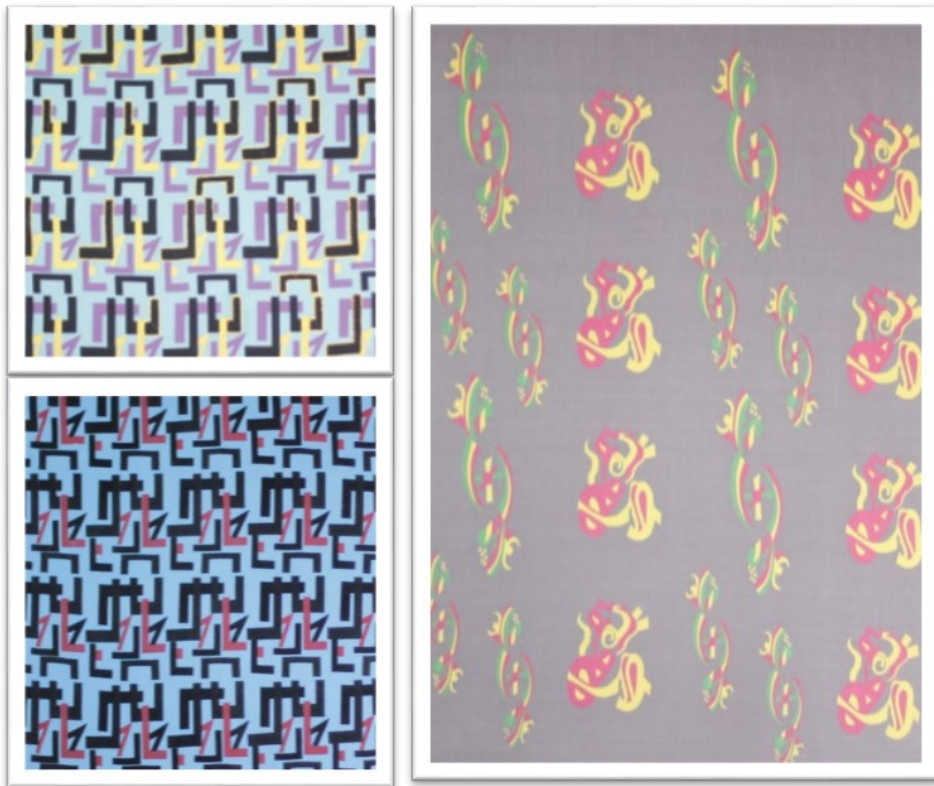


Fig. 7. Sample 10 (a, b, c)

6) *Flock Printing*

Flock printing is a printing where the design is cut from a colored foil and then pressed onto the fabric under high heat pressure. I used jersey

fabric for this technique for experimentation. I am well-satisfied with this new and amazing technique.

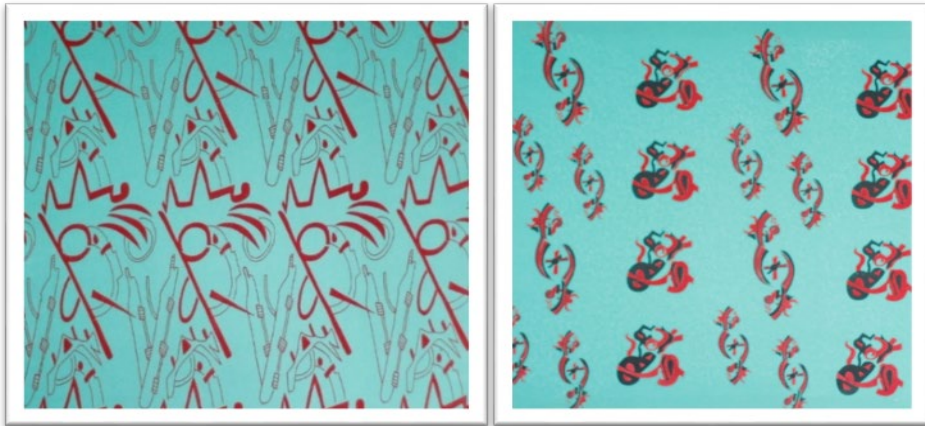


Fig. 8. Sample 11 (a, b)

7) *Hand & Machine Embroidery*

Hand and machine embroidery is a renowned version of stitching patterns with the mixture of age-old and new stitches that are mainly used on fabrics creating a stylish and decorative image or pattern with exotic coloring.

I used both hand and machine embroidery for embellishment in our designs to give them a fresh look.



Fig. 9. Sample 12 (a, b)

8) *Weaving & Nail Weaving*

Weaving and nail weaving is a method of fabric production in which two distinct sets of yarn or threads are interlaced at right angle to form a fabric or cloth. The other methods are knitting, lace making, felting, braiding, wrapping etc.



Fig. 10. Sample 13



Fig. 11. Sample 14

I've weaved together various mediums like ribbons, *doris*, *Saibas*, laces, straws, wool etc. I experimented this technique on cardboard upon which I used nails and weave unto it. I experimented by utilizing nails weaves during our session and created samples of various sizes and techniques.



Fig. 12. (a) Sample 15, (b) Sample 16

VI. Final Product & Targeting Market

Since this is the era of fashion that has lure glamour and classic beauty into exotic heaven. Our textile industry is meeting the upcoming demands of this particular field. Keeping this in mind we have created our products, namely *setae* and wall panel.

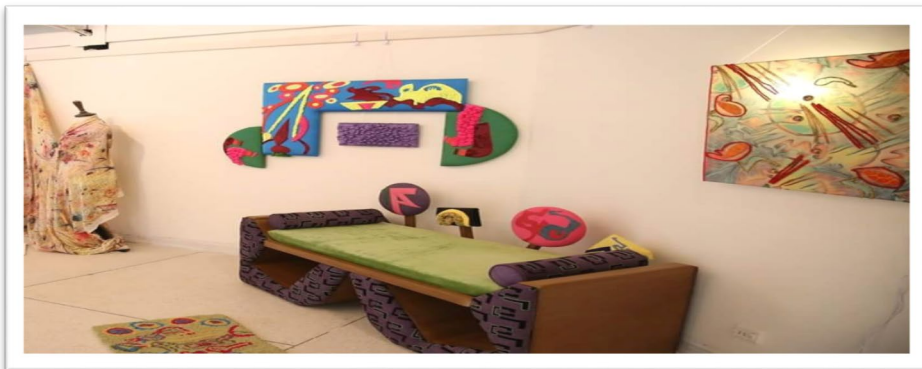


Fig. 13. Final product 1: *setae*



Fig. 14. Final Product 2: Wall panel

As seen from the product 1 and 2, vibrant highlighting and contrasting tones were used to merge textile and interior with Kandinsky's abstract painting. Notice how purples, parrot green and shocking pink are fused together with contrasting colors to blend and bring out a sense of tranquility. We have also endeavored to incorporate Kandinsky's geometric formations of squares and circles in both our panel and *setae*.



Fig. 15. Final products display: wall panel, *setae* and wall lamps

The usage of these products could be anywhere around the house_ the theme ‘*As you like it*’ is a cliché to our products. *Setae* could be placed and used anywhere where people want sitting arrangements. It could be either place in drawing room for a warm and cozy setting; or at the corner of your bedroom to enjoy a sense of inner peace. One may also add an enigma of taste to their balconies and corridors so that the users may sit and rest awhile visualizing nature and connects with oneself spiritually amidst fast pace urban living. Likewise, panels could be hung on walls wherever one’s mood strikes. Both of these products are of course in the fall trend, handy to use_ all in all comfort come luxury.

These products are especially designed with an aesthetic sense that is indeed a merger of vibrant colors, rich classic taste and a synthesis of eastern and western. These products are suitable for both elites and mediocre class, bringing forth Kandinsky’s ideals of fusing colors with spirituality that has been incorporated by us in the domain of textiles and interior for everyday users in the 21st century.

VII. Further Directions

The successful completion of our products paves a way for upcoming generation in fashion industry to experiment new ideas with legendary artists whom we cannot replace as they live forever through their magnificent pieces of art. I feel myself honored to behold a part of Wassily, thus reshaping textile industry and extending it to reach new heights.

Authors Declaration

The authors declare that the current project is their original work and free of any conflicts of interest. The research is part of our project in *Hunerkada Lahore, College of Visual & Performing Arts*, successfully completed during the year 2012.

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