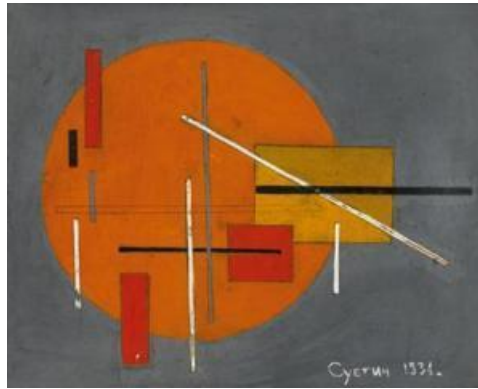


## Being Avant-garde



This image is by Nikolai Suetin, who was part of an art movement in the Soviet Union called Suprematism, which formed part of the larger avant-garde movement. The avant-garde pushed the boundaries of what was accepted as the norm or the status quo. The avant-garde also promoted profound social reforms.

Suprematism was one of the earliest and most progressive developments in abstract art. It was an experimental project that at times came close to mysticism. Although the Communist authorities later attacked the movement, its influence was pervasive in Russia in the early 1920s.

We have chosen this image for the Ashley Church website because it represents optimism, hope, belief, freedom, a freshness, a looking forward and a new way of viewing the world. For these artists it transcended the bounds of the physical world. In short, it was radical. The word avant-garde, coming from French, "advance guard" or "vanguard", literally "fore-guard", means favouring or introducing new and experimental ideas and methods: cutting edge, pioneering, innovative. The teachings of Jesus Christ and St Paul were very avant-garde.

In general, the Suprematist artists used perfect abstract shapes such as the square as symbols of humanity's ability to transcend the natural world. The square, circle, and cross became the group's favourite motifs. These artists were interested in expressing a spiritual reality beyond the physical through art.

As Christians we at Ashley Church are living our lives based on a spiritual reality beyond the physical. The mystical reality of our faith is based on a very radical secret. The secret is open to all and it is that, through Christ, we can become members of the household of God and we can call God, 'Father'.

The artists of the avant-garde fostered the idea that art could serve to make the world fresh. Art could make us look at the world in new ways. As Christians we believe that the Spirit of God brings the truth of the words in the Bible home to us in our hearts so we can see things in a new and different way.

There is a sense in which every human being creates works of art in the way we live our lives. How beautiful are our relationships, our interactions, our words of encouragement, the efforts we put in to create community, to assist others in the mundane tasks we all have to do. As Christians these works of art that we create every day are affected and enhanced by our understanding of this mystical truth that we are members of God's household and recipients of God's love, provision, unconditional acceptance and support.

St Paul and the early Christian disciples were galvanised by the realisation of what it meant and it propelled them to go out and change the world. Who wouldn't want to share this good news?

Avant-garde movements only remain avant-garde when they are sharp like a knife, breaking through, making inroads. As soon as a knife becomes blunt, it is good for nothing. Churches can become comfortable, set in their ways, conventional and conservative. Our prayer is that this image serves as a reminder to us to stay sharp, free, forward looking, pioneering, innovative, fresh, and therefore reliant on the Holy Spirit.