Kazimir Malevich: Suprematism Two Dimensional Self Portrait

Kazimir Malevich (1879 – 1935) was a well known Russian painter of Polish descent who began the Avant-garde Suprematist movement and was a pioneer of geometric abstract art. He was born near Kiev, Russia and was the first of fourteen children, his parents Seweryn and Ludwika Malevich were descendents of ethnic Poles. He spent most of his childhood in rural settings among sugar beet plantations in the Ukraine, after his father’s death in 1904 he moved to Moscow where he studied at the Moscow School of Painting Sculpting and Architecture for six years. After participating in various art exhibitions as a member of the group Soyuz Molodyozhi (Union of Youth), Kazimir started to utilize cubist principles in his art. In 1914 Malevich exhibited his art in Paris and by 1915 Malevich laid down the foundations of Suprematism. His manifesto, From Cubism to Suprematism was published in 1916 and in 1918 Malevich decorated a play, Mystery Bouffe, by Vladimir Mayakovsky. Malevich was also interested in aviation and aerial photography which led him to create abstractions inspired by aerial landscapes. Later on in his life Malevich exhibited his art in Munchen, Warsaw, and Berlin which gave him international recognition. When the Stalinist regime turned against forms of abstraction his paintings were confiscated and he was banned from creating or displaying similar forms of art. Malevich died of cancer in Leningrad on May 15, 1935; a white cube decorated with a black square was placed on his tomb. "No phenomenon is mortal," Malevich wrote, "and this means not only the body but the idea as well, a symbol that one is eternally reincarnated in another form which actually exists in the conscious and unconscious person."


Kazimir Malevich’s oil painting titled, Suprematism Two dimensional Self Portrait, is a grouping of eight red rectangles all situated at particular angles with relative position to each other. If one tries hard enough it is possible to pick out what looks like facial features or even a stick figure of a man. One can also see the similarities between the painting and the aspects of an aerial photograph of buildings or fields, even though it is not meant to represent a landscape. After looking at this piece of art for awhile I wanted to tilt my head to the same angle that the rectangles were all orientated to. The natural flow of the piece draws one’s eyes from the lower left of the canvas from the smaller rectangles to the upper right where the bigger rectangles are, this particular flow of the painting might also be due to the similar angle which all of the rectangles are situated.


I figured this was going to be an easy painting to imitate and draw using Gargoyle, just a bunch of different red rectangles positioned at similar angles, I was wrong. The subtle variances’ in size, orientation, and relative distance from one another was by far extremely difficult to imitate. I devised a program architecture to draw each of the eight squares individually numbered R1 – R8 starting with the smallest lower left rectangle and working my way to the larger upper right rectangles. Furthermore, I separated the four lower smaller rectangles into a group called RCOMPA, which contained R1 – R4, and the four larger rectangles into a group called RCOMPB, which contained R5 – R8. By combining RCOMPA and RCOMPB into a single program labeled RCOMP, I drew the entire painting in one command. I started by drawing the smallest rectangle on the left part of the canvas and used that as an orientation point for the three rectangles near it, a great deal of trial and error went into the positioning of these rectangles. Then I created the middle square like rectangle, and used that object for positioning the rest of the larger rectangles. An interesting aspect I discovered while constructing this image is that the smaller the rectangle the more difficult to properly position it and the more code I had to write to complete it.