



The Clown; Kenneth Noland; National Gallery of Art, Washington; Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Robert J. Wetmore
(Date: dated 1959; Canvas; 46 1/8" x 46" (1172 x 1.169 cm.))

The Clown by Kenneth Noland

The artist grabs our attention through the use of strong red eyes which stare out at us from the center of the painting. The basic elements of a human face—eyes, nose and shape of the head—help us to recognize the image immediately. Noland's use of bright colors, the playful tilt of the head, combined with the title of the painting, *The Clown*, further identifies the subject.

After recognizing the subject of the painting, we can explore the way Noland uses color, line and shape to present his idea. The simple images in the face express the feeling of a clown through the use of the bright primary colors of red, yellow and blue. The green hat on the clown also draws our attention and balances the design. Line is used in a very controlled way in the hard edges of the shapes that make up the face of the clown. Line is also used more spontaneously in the white and black circles that frame his head. The large black line jumps and slides over the surface of the canvas and suggests the direct energy of the artist's hand. Noland repeats circular shapes throughout the canvas in the eyes, nose and head of the clown as well as the white and black circles surrounding him. He also repeats certain elements in variations of three, like the three circles of the eyes and nose, the three bands on the face and the three large circles—the full head, and two outer circles of white and black.

These balanced elements of the design help to control our focus in the painting to the center portion of the canvas. The face of the clown hovers in space like a balloon, or a child's drawing; it dances on the page. The whimsy and magic of a circus that clowns make us feel are captured in Noland's simple shapes, expressive lines and brilliant colors.

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