

## ***Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider)**

One of the two pioneering movements of German Expressionism, *Der Blaue Reiter* began in Munich as an abstract counterpart distorted figurative styles. While confronting feelings of alienation within an increasingly modernizing world, *Der Blaue Reiter* sought to transcend the mundane by pursuing the spiritual value of art. Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc were the theoretical centers of the group, which included a number of Russian immigrants and native Germans. This internationalism led the group to mount several traveling exhibitions during their brief tenure, making them an indispensable force in the promotion of early avant-garde painting.

Though *Der Blaue Reiter* had no official manifesto, Kandinsky's treatise *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1910) laid out several of its guiding principles. It crystallized the group's pursuit of non-objective or abstract painting and was widely read in avant-garde artistic circles across Europe and beyond.

*Der Blaue Reiter* painting structured the idea that color and form carried concrete spiritual values. Thus, the move into abstraction resulted partly from radically separating form and color into discrete elements within a painting or applying non-naturalistic color to recognizable objects. The name "Der Blaue Reiter" referred to Kandinsky and Marc's belief that blue was the most spiritual color and that the rider symbolized the ability to move beyond.

In searching for a language that would express their unique approach to abstract visual form, the artists of *Der Blaue Reiter* drew parallels between painting and music. Often naming their works *Compositions*, *Improvisations*, and *Études*, they explored music as the abstract art *par excellence*, lacking as it does a tangible or figurative manifestation. This also led them to explore the crossing or "union" of the senses in perceiving color, sound, and other stimuli.

Beside its own groundbreaking artists, *Der Blaue Reiter's* traveling exhibitions featured the leading proponents of Fauvism, Cubism, and the Russian avant-garde, creating a vital central European forum for the development and proliferation of modern art.

Source: *The Art Story: Modern Art Insight*, edited

**Vassily Kandinsky** (1866 – 1944) was a Russian painter and art theorist. One of the most famous 20th-century artists, credited with the first modern abstract works.

Kandinsky was born in Moscow but spent his childhood in Odessa. He studied and taught law and economics, but turned to painting studies at the age of 30.

In 1896 he settled and studied art in Munich. He went back to Moscow in 1918 after the Russian Revolution. Being in conflict with official theories on art, he returned to Germany in 1921. There he taught at the Bauhaus from 1922 until it was closed by the Nazis in 1933. At that time he moved to France, where he lived the rest of his life.

The creation by Kandinsky of purely abstract work was the fruit of a long development and maturation of intense theoretical thought based on his personal experience of painting. He called this devotion to inner beauty, fervor of the spirit and deep spiritual desire *inner necessity*, which was a central aspect of his art.

**Youth and inspirations (1866-1896):** Kandinsky's youth in Moscow brought inspiration from a variety of sources; he was fascinated and unusually stimulated by color. In 1889 he was part of an ethnographic group that traveled to the Vologda region north of Moscow. He says that he felt that he moved into a painting when he entered in houses or churches decorated with the most shimmering colors. Kandinsky would write that *'Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammer, the soul is the piano with the strings'*.

In 1896 (age of 30), Kandinsky gave up his career teaching law and economics to enroll in art school in Munich. Also in 1896 he saw an exhibit of Monet and his depiction of a haystack which, had a powerful sense of color almost independent of the object itself. Later he would write about this experience: *"That it was a haystack the catalogue informed me. I could not recognize it. This non-recognition was painful to me. I considered that the painter had no right to paint indistinctly. I dully felt that the object of the painting was missing. And I noticed with surprise and confusion that the picture not only gripped me, but impressed itself ineradicably on my memory. Painting took on a fairy-tale power and splendor."* He was similarly influenced during this period by Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin* (opera) which, he felt, pushed the limits of music and melody beyond standard lyricism.

Kandinsky was also spiritually influenced by H. P. Blavatsky (1831-91), the most important exponent of Theosophy in modern times. Theosophical theory postulates that creation is a geometrical progression, beginning with a point. The creative aspect of the forms is expressed by the descending series of circles, triangles, and squares. Kandinsky's book *Concerning the Spiritual In Art* (1910) and *Point and Line to Plane* (1926) echoed this basic Theosophical tenet.

**Artistic metamorphosis (1896-1911):** Kandinsky's time at art school was helped by the fact that he was older and more settled than the other students and he emerged as a true art theorist as well as a painter. His art changed at the beginning of the 20th century with many images of landscapes and towns, using broad swathes of color but

recognizable forms. For the most part Kandinsky's paintings did not emphasize any human figures. Fauvism is also apparent in these early works. Colors are used to express the artist's experience of subject-matter--not merely to describe objective nature.

Perhaps the most important of Kandinsky's paintings from of the 1900s was ***The Blue Rider*** (1903). In it Kandinsky shows the rider more as a series of colors than of specific details, showing the direction that Kandinsky would take a few years later.

From 1906 to 1908 Kandinsky traveled across Europe, until he came to live in the small Bavarian town of Murnau. ***The Blue Mountain*** (1908 – 1909) shows his trend towards pure abstraction. The broad use of color shows Kandinsky's move towards art in which the color itself is presented independently of form.

**The Blue Rider (1911-1914):** The paintings of large and very expressive colored masses evaluated independently from forms and lines which serve no longer to delimitate them or to bring them out but which combined between them, are superimposed and overlap in a very free way to form paintings of an extraordinary force.

The influence of music has been very important on the birth of abstract art, as it is abstract by nature and as it doesn't try to represent the exterior world but simply to express the inner feelings of the soul. Kandinsky sometimes used musical terms to designate his works: he called his spontaneous paintings "improvisations", while he entitled "compositions" to more elaborated and worked at length.

In addition to painting, Kandinsky developed his voice as an art theorist. In fact, Kandinsky is perhaps more influential on the history of Western art because of his theoretical works rather than his paintings. He helped to found the *Neue Künstlervereinigung München* (New Artists' Association) in 1909, but was unable to integrate the more radical approach like Kandinsky with more conventional ideas of art. Kandinsky formed a new group The Blue Rider (*Der Blaue Reiter*) with like minded artists such as Macke and Marc. The group released an almanac, also called *The Blue Rider*, and held two exhibits. The outbreak of World War I in 1914 ended the group which scattered, Kandinsky going home home to Russia.

**Return to Russia (1914-1921):** During the years 1918 to 1921, Kandinsky dealt with the cultural politics of Russia. He collaborated in art pedagogy and museum reforms, teaching of form and color analysis. In 1921, Kandinsky left to attend the Bauhaus of Weimar, on the invitation of its founder, the architect Walter Gropius. Just in time: the Soviets officially forbid all forms of abstract art as harmful for socialist ideals.

**The Bauhaus (1922-1933):** The Bauhaus was an innovative architecture and art school. It taught the theoretical and practical merging of plastic arts with applied arts, Kandinsky taught basic design class and advanced theory, as well as conducting painting classes and a workshop where he completed his colors theory with new elements of form psychology. The development of his works on forms study, particularly on point and different forms of lines, lead to the publication of his second major theoretical book *Point and Line to Plane* in 1926.

In the face of hostility from the right political parties, the Bauhaus left Weimar in 1925 and was eventually dissolved in 1933. Fifty-seven of his works were confiscated by the Nazis in the 1937 purge of “degenerate art.” Kandinsky then left Germany and settled in Paris.

**The great synthesis (1934-1944):** In Paris, he felt quite isolated since abstract painting, particularly geometric abstract painting, was not recognized: the artistic fashion was mostly impressionism and cubism. This period corresponds to a vast synthesis of his previous work, of which he used all elements, even enriching them. In 1936 and 1939 he painted his two last major compositions. ***Composition IX*** is a painting with highly contrasted powerful diagonals and whose central form give the impression of a human embryo in the womb. ***Composition X*** small squares of colors and colored bands stand out against the black background of stars' fragments or filaments, while enigmatic hieroglyphs cover the large maroon mass, which seems to float.

Source: wikipedia, edited