

The term "The Blue Rider" was coined in 1911, exactly 50 years ago. It comprises the most important chapter in the art history of Munich, and together with the "Bauhaus" it even signifies the greatest German contribution to culture in the 20th century. Today this term means three different things. First, it is the title of an almanac edited by two painters, the Russian Wassily Kandinsky and the German Franz Marc, in which new artistic ideas are propagated. Since the "Editors of the Blue Rider" showed their works in their own exhibitions, the name was secondly applied to these exhibitions. And as the German and foreign companions whose works had been reproduced in the almanac, also participated in these exhibitions, the term was thirdly transferred and applied to this larger circle of artists. According to Kandinsky's words, the almanac was meant to be "a link with the past and a ray shining into the future". Goethe's call for a "Generalbass" for the art of painting which was published in the almanac, may be regarded as the leitmotiv for the work of this group of friends.

For the purpose of indicating the specific conditions of the origin of the "Blue Rider", the development during the previous fifty years in Munich is included in my presentation. Friedrich August von Kaulbach's painting "The Crowning of Charlesmagne", painted in 1861, is introduced as an example of the official style of painting at that time. The title-page of a large paper edition published by Friedrich Bruckmann illustrates the power of history under which in 1876 the German Renaissance was proclaimed to be the national style.

Things began to change in the ninties. Munich is the birthplace of the "Jugendstil". The character and the form of this movement are discussed with the help of significant examples: title-pages of the magazine "Jugend" (Youth) and "Pan", and the symbolism of Franz von Stuck who was born in 1863, the same year as Munch, and who was the teacher of Kandinsky and Klee.



It took another decade before the freedom achieved for the line could also be won for the colour. The "Neue Künstlervereinigung München" (New Artists' Association of Munich), founded in 1909, carried on a lively exchange of ideas with the avantgardist movements in Paris and Moscow (Adolf Bröslöh, "Big nude with blue cloth", 1910). Late in 1911, the Blue Riders seceded from this association.

Vassily Kandinsky, born in Moscow in 1866, worked in Munich since 1896. His "prophetic" personality made him the uncontested central figure of the circle. Though he was a great theorist who was convinced that "the great spiritual epoch" would lead to a victory of materialism, his creative power did not suffer. According to his own words, he was "the first painter to put painting on the level of pure pictorial means of expression and to ban the object from his painting". Follows a discussion of the complex individual, national, and historical preconditions for his art and of his relationship with contemporary movements of the "Jugendstil", "Fauvism", and the "Brücke". An attempt will be made to show Kandinsky's development with the use of the following works: "Study for improvisation II" (1909), "Landscape with tower" (1909), "Lyrics" (1911), "Composition IV" (1911), "Dreamful improvisation" (1913).

Franz Marc, born in Munich in 1880, also worked in close touch with the contemporary movements. He chose the animal as the main subject of his paintings during his period of development in order to use it as a paradigm for human behaviour. Full of noble idealism, he thus picked up the idea of the classic-romantic period which said that animals still were closer to the "absolute" than "impure" man. Around 1911/12, he created cubistic paintings, reduced to the essence. After 1912/13, he tried to make the harmony between nature and the animal visible, using the pictorial means of "Orphism" (friendship Robert Delaunay). In 1914, he arrived at completely



non-objective creations in order to lay open the structures of the "mystical inner construction" of the world. Marc died in 1916 before Verdun. The following works will be discussed: "The bull" (1911), "The little blue horses" (1911), "The tigre" (1912), "Animals' fates" (1913), "Deer in the woods" (1912), "Struggling forms" (1914).

The circle of their friends will be illustrated with examples of the works of August Macke ("Small zoo", 1912), of Alexej von Jawlensky ("Head", 1912), of Gabriele Münster ("Landscape with white wall", 1910), of Alfred Kubin ("Woman enemies", 1911), and of Paul Klee ("Two riders galloping", 1911); "Warrior tribe", 1913; "Chinese lantern party", 1923).

Although the outbreak of the World War terminated the efforts of the two friends and broke up the circle of their companions, Kandinsky's hope for "a ray shining into the future" was fulfilled. The "Bauhaus", founded by Walter Gropius, was the legitimate successor of the Blue Rider. A brief outlook will show you these connections (Lyonel Feininger, woodcut for the manifesto of the Bauhaus, 1919).

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