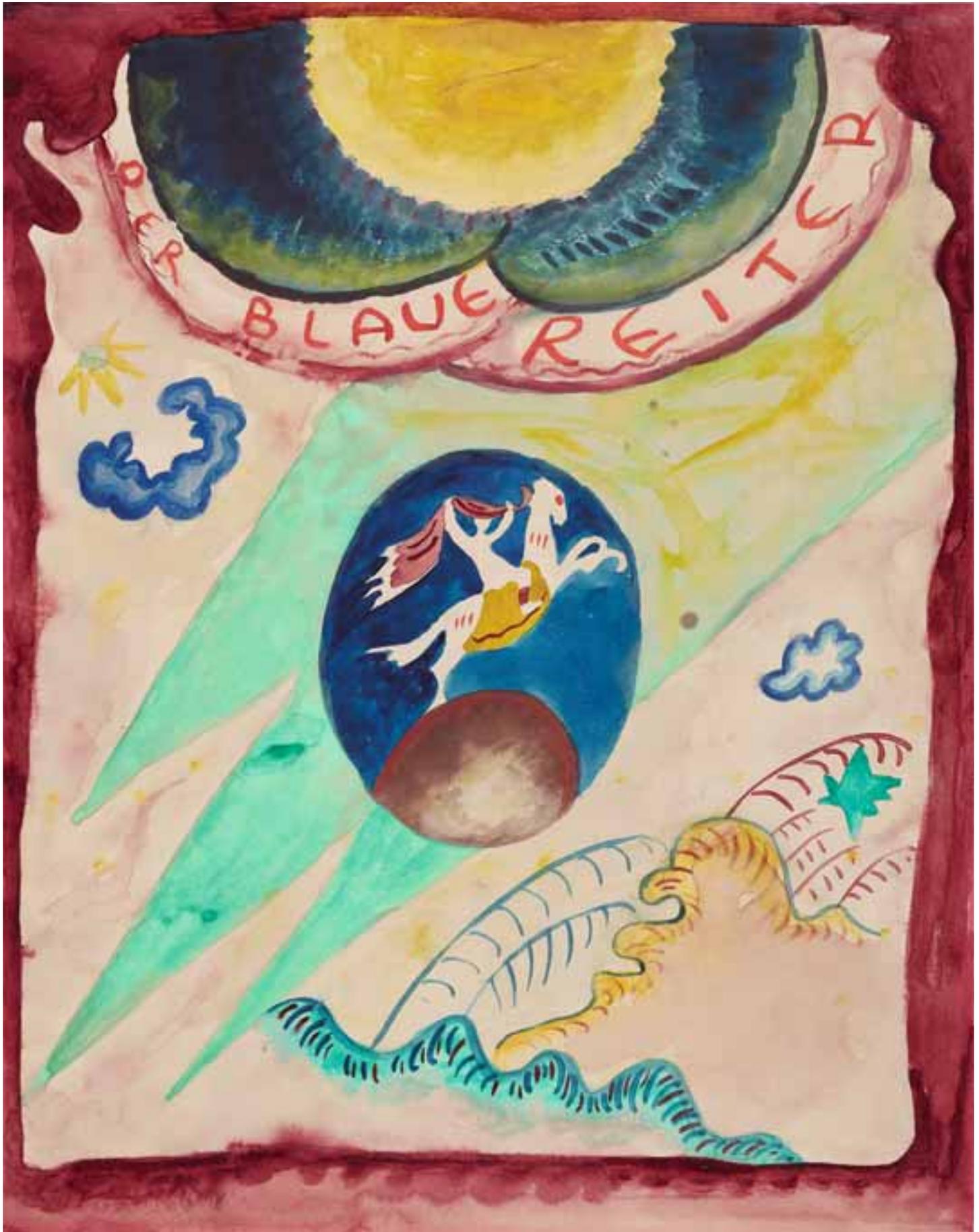


THE BLUE RIDER



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THE BLUE RIDER
IN THE LENBACHHAUS, MUNICH

PRESTEL

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The Blue Rider (*Der Blaue Reiter*), the artists' group formed by such important figures as Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, Gabriele Münter, August Macke, Alexei Jawlensky, and Paul Klee, had a momentous and far-reaching impact on the art of the twentieth century not only in the art city Munich, but internationally as well. Their very particular kind of intensely colorful, expressive painting, using a dense formal idiom that was moving toward abstraction, was based on a unique spiritual approach that opened up completely new possibilities for expression, ranging in style from a heightened realism to abstraction. The Blue Rider begins with the story of how the artists came together to work in Munich and Murnau. The subsequent period of extremely intense activity and revolutionary innovations in the years just before the outbreak of World War I culminated in the two Blue Rider exhibitions in 1911 and 1912 and in the publication of the almanac *Der Blaue Reiter* in May 1912. The Blue Rider united different artistic personalities working together on the basis of diversity. What they had in common was a striving after new forms in art with which to express an inner vision in a direct and original way. Art was to be independent of any traditionally binding formal canon and of any "external, modernistic program of today," as Kandinsky and Marc liked to refer to the various "isms" of the avant-garde. In this open attitude toward expressive means, the Blue Rider differed considerably from other artists' groups of the period, and indeed it was this that made it a modernist movement that has maintained its relevance and broad acceptance to this day. The search for "the spiritual in art" was one of the Blue Rider's chief concerns and was, for Kandinsky at least, to lead the way toward abstraction.

The works of the Blue Rider, especially the collection held by the Lenbachhaus, are now world-famous. For today's viewer, they have lost nothing of their original effect. On the contrary, their popularity is growing steadily. For this book we have made a new selection of over 130 major works, whose undiminished aura communicates something of the astounding self-assuredness and conviction of the Blue Rider artists that *they* were the avant-garde. This sense of mission, confirmed by the overwhelming reception of the Blue Rider works right up to the present day, is a crucial element informing the character and influence of this group of artists.

The fact that Munich, with its world-famous collection in the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, is still a center for the art of the Blue Rider is due to the extraordinarily generous donation made by Gabriele Münter, a founding member of the group and Wassily Kandinsky's companion until 1914. On the occasion of her eightieth birthday in 1957, Münter gave the City of Munich the large collection of works by Blue Rider artists in her possession, the largest and most important gift in recent museum history. In 1965, Münter's generous gift was complemented by that of the Bernhard und Elly Koehler Stiftung, which made valuable additions to the Blue Rider collection, notably paintings by Franz Marc and August Macke. Both donations are described in detail in the essay "How the Blue Rider Came to the Lenbachhaus."

A year later, in 1966, the Gabriele Münter und Johannes Eichner Stiftung came into being. Housed in the Lenbachhaus, it contains Münter's entire personal estate, which, besides many of her own

8 pictures, includes writings by herself and Kandinsky, letters, diaries, documents, photos, and their joint collection of glass paintings and objects of folk art. An important part of this legacy is the Münter house in Murnau, where the artist lived with Kandinsky during the decisive years of the Blue Rider up to 1914, and where she died in 1962. Part of the house has been accessible to the public since the 1970s, and in 1999 this especially attractive and authentic artistic memorial site was reopened following renovations that carefully preserved its original features.

In recent decades, the Lenbachhaus has held a series of major exhibitions, some of them devoted to individual artists of the Blue Rider. These have contributed considerably to the awareness, scholarly research, and artistic presence of the Blue Rider. Here, I would like to point out that, after years of being defamed by the Nazi regime, it took some time for the art of the Blue Rider to gradually regain its place in public consciousness. After World War I, a decisive turning point in the lives of all the artists involved, the works of the prewar avant-garde and the context in which they had emerged were soon forgotten. Wassily Kandinsky, to whom the Blue Rider group owes its name, and Franz Marc should certainly be regarded as the leading figures in the movement. Marc's death on the front and a certain hero-worship of him as a person led to a greater degree of attention being paid to his achievements. The same holds true for Paul Klee, who rose to become a "master of contemporary art" in the 1920s, and whose historic role in the Blue Rider group around 1911/12 hence came to be exaggerated.

To what extent Alexei Jawlensky and Marianne von Werefkin belonged to the Blue Rider circle is less clear. After collaborating closely with Kandinsky and Münter in Murnau in 1908, they became cofounders of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung München* (NKVM, New Artists' Association Munich). However, when Kandinsky and other artists took the decisive step of quitting the NKVM in late 1911, after a dispute about an almost entirely abstract painting by Kandinsky, and formed the Blue Rider, Jawlensky and Werefkin did not follow them. Nevertheless, only a few months later, their works were included in a traveling Blue Rider exhibition, which toured several cities in Germany and abroad and was on the road until 1914.

We have also added a few new works representing Alfred Kubin, who became one of the founding members of the Blue Rider after leaving the NKVM. While as a draftsman he did not participate in the first Blue Rider exhibition, many of his drawings alongside those of Paul Klee did appear in the second one, devoted exclusively to graphic art, in the spring of 1912. Another Blue Rider artist to appear in this new volume is Heinrich Campendonk, who joined the group in the decisive period just before the first Blue Rider exhibition in the winter of 1911/12. Later, he moved to Sindelsdorf to be near his revered artist friend Franz Marc. Two works by the French artist Robert Delaunay are also featured here. Prominent in the first Blue Rider exhibition, his first show in Germany, he later had a great influence on the German artists, especially Macke, Marc, and Klee. Finally, in this book, we are for the first time presenting a work by the Russian Blue Rider artist Vladimir Burliuk, who together with his brother David was one of the stars of the Russian avant-garde of that period and maintained close contact with Kandinsky in Munich. Another first is our presentation of the American Blue Rider artist Albert Bloch, as well as two paintings by the Dutch painter Adriaan Korteweg, which have been part of the Lenbachhaus collection for some time. Korteweg was "the young Dutchman" whom Kandinsky wanted to include in the planned second volume of the almanac *Der Blaue Reiter*, which, however, never came to fruition.

The introductory essay, “The Blue Rider – History and Ideas,” has also been rewritten with a view to providing a lively and detailed account of the evolution of the movement and the characteristics of its members’ art. We were able to add hitherto unknown facts from the apparently inexhaustible resources in the Lenbachhaus and the M \ddot{u} nter-Eichner Stiftung. New discoveries had already been made by Annegret Hoberg in connection with her research for the exhibition *Der Blaue Reiter and das Neue Bild* (The Blue Rider and the New Painting), held at the Lenbachhaus in 1999 on the occasion of the ninetieth anniversary of the foundation of the NKVM. As the Lenbachhaus also has the largest museum collection of works by NKVM artists such as Erbsl \ddot{o} h, Kanoldt, Bekhteyev, and Girieud, we have decided to illustrate a number of their major works in color in the essay section of this book, in order to present them to the reader in an optimal way. The new text also includes findings of the most recent research on the Blue Rider’s links with the Russian art scene, with the contemporary music of the time, and with other major exhibitions of the avant-garde, such as the *Sonderbund* in Cologne and the *Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon* in Berlin. Nowhere else in the world can the history and art of the Blue Rider be studied with such a wealth of works in close chronological sequence as in the Lenbachhaus in Munich. This volume illustrates the finest paintings in the collections as plates, providing just as comprehensive a survey of the art of the Blue Rider as the gallery itself does. We would like to thank the publishers Prestel Verlag for producing this new edition of a book that shows off the works of art to their best advantage.

HOW THE BLUE RIDER CAME TO THE LENBACHHAUS

During the years of their working and life partnership from 1902 until 1914, Wassily Kandinsky and Gabriele Münter lived together in an apartment at Ainmillerstrasse 36 (figs. 1, 2), in the Munich artists' quarter Schwabing, which they occupied from 1909 on, and at the house owned by Gabriele Münter in Murnau, now known as the "Münter House." After Germany declared war on Russia on August 1, 1914, Kandinsky, a Russian citizen and hence now a member of an enemy power, had only three days to leave Germany. Together with Gabriele Münter, he emigrated on August 3, initially to the Swiss side of Lake Constance, and then to Zurich, where the couple separated in November 1914. Kandinsky then embarked on an arduous journey of several weeks via the Balkans and Odessa back to Moscow, his home city. Münter, meanwhile, spent the winter months in Munich and Murnau, the places where, together with artist friends such as Franz Marc, August Macke, and Paul Klee, the couple had formed the *Blauer Reiter* (Blue Rider) movement in the years prior to this. The group had published the almanac *Der Blaue Reiter* and staged exhibitions in the Munich galleries of Heinrich Thannhauser and Hans Goltz in 1911/12. The first of these exhibitions had also involved Alexei Jawlensky and Marianne von Werefkin and had toured many German and European cities.

Kandinsky's sudden departure from Munich, occasioned by the outbreak of war, forced him to leave behind practically all the works he had produced up to that time, including hundreds of paintings from his early, pre-1907 period, as well those documenting his development toward abstraction during the crucial Blue Rider period. There was also a large number of paintings by artist friends, either purchased or given to Kandinsky or Münter as gifts (often in exchange for their own paintings). Although Kandinsky had been aware of the threat of war between Germany and Russia since 1912, the need to flee from Munich came so unexpectedly that he had no time to make arrangements for what should happen to his works or where they should be stored. At that point, Kandinsky could not possibly have known, or even guessed, that he had taken his leave of Munich for good and would therefore never again see most of the works he had created until then. Johannes Eichner, Gabriele Münter's second companion in life, described in detail in his 1957 book *Kandinsky und Gabriele Münter. Von Ursprüngen moderner Kunst* (Kandinsky and Gabriele Münter. On the Origins of Modern Art) the events of 1914: "In 1914, Kandinsky and Gabriele Münter had been spending the summer in Murnau when the war broke out. On August 1, they returned to Munich and took an overcrowded train to Lindau on the 3rd, being joined by a sister-in-law of Kandinsky's, her husband (a justice of the peace), and their daughter. On the 4th they crossed Lake Constance to Rorschach and, on the 6th, arrived at Villa Mariahalde near Goldach on Lake Constance, an empty country house that belonged to their landlady in Munich. The house, which they first had to furnish with rented furniture, was anything but comfortable. Work was completely unthinkable. Kandinsky spent his time pondering over questions that he was not to deal with in his writings until much later, in 1926, in *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche* (Point and Line to Plane)."

1
 Wassily Kandinsky in
 front of his painting
Small Pleasures
 at Ainmillerstrasse 36,
 Munich, 1913
 Photo: Gabriele Münter
 und Johannes Eichner
 Stiftung, Munich



2
 Gabriele Münter, Maria
 Marc, Bernhard Koehler,
 Thomas de Hartmann,
 Heinrich Campendonk,
 seated at the front:
 Franz Marc, on the
 balcony at Ainmiller-
 strasse 36, Munich,
 1911/12
 Photo: Gabriele Münter
 und Johannes Eichner
 Stiftung, Munich



“On November 16, they went to Zurich, and on the 25th, Kandinsky took his leave in order to lead his relatives, who had already made one vain attempt to get home, back to Russia. They found themselves on a train with 200 or so refugees, all with the same destination, and for whom Kandinsky was their leader. They traveled to Brindisi, managed to get luxury cabins on a steamer to Salonica, were held up there for six days because partisans had blown up a bridge, and then took a whole week to cross the Balkans via Üsküb, Nish, Sofia, Bucharest, changing trains at least ten times, and once even having a special train arranged for them before finally arriving in Odessa on December 12. Kandinsky was completely exhausted. Before leaving Mariahalde, he had given Gabriele Münter permission to dissolve their household in Munich and had told her that in future he would not be living with her again but would merely visit her from time to time. He also reaffirmed his solemn promise to marry her.” Gabriele Münter “remained in Zurich for some time, not returning to Munich until January 16, 1915, whereupon she moved all their belongings, including Kandinsky’s works, out of the apartment, stored them with a shipping agency, and left for Berlin, before traveling on to Stockholm via Copenhagen. She arrived in Stockholm on July 18 and waited for Kandinsky, who had promised to join her there that summer.”

In her 1976 memoirs *Kandinsky und ich* (Kandinsky and I), Nina Kandinsky’s description of the same events, namely the outbreak of war and Kandinsky’s resultant need to emigrate, differs somewhat from Eichner’s concerning what happened to the artworks, although it basically relates the same story: “When war broke out in 1914, Kandinsky was forced as a Russian citizen to leave Munich within twenty-four hours. He did this with a heavy heart and indeed regarded his hasty expulsion as especially harsh ... The outbreak of war and his expulsion came as a complete surprise to Kandinsky ... but worst of all for him was that he could not take with him all the works he had produced so far. Being separated from his works was even more painful than having to leave Munich. All the same, Kandinsky was optimistic. He was fully confident that the warring parties would quickly resolve their differences and that the war would hardly be of long duration. And since he was convinced that he would soon be back in Munich, he put all his possessions, including his paintings, into temporary storage in a Munich warehouse. Not for one moment did he consider

having his belongings sent on to him. That was, as it turned out later, a grave mistake. Most of his Munich possessions and most of his paintings were gone forever.”

What we do know is that it was Gabriele Münter who, prior to dissolving the Munich household completely in May 1915, decided to have the artworks and the entire contents of the apartment in Ainmillerstrasse, including the furniture and the arts and crafts collection, stored with the firm of Gondrand in two warehouses in Munich. She left a few of the most important works with friends, such as Paul und Lily Klee. At this point she also shut up the house in Murnau and traveled, as Eichner describes, to Stockholm in order to be reunited with Kandinsky in a neutral foreign country. On May 23, 1915, Münter wrote from Munich to Maria Marc, who had invited Münter to stay with her in Ried, near Kochel, while Franz Marc was serving on the French front: “I was in too much of a hurry to come to Ried. Although it was so wonderful in Murnau, I came back here as quickly as I could. Since then I’ve just been clearing out the apartment and packing the whole time. The furniture will be put in storage at the end of the week and then I’m off, first to Berlin, and then probably to Stockholm, or perhaps first to Copenhagen if I have time before Kandinsky arrives. Received a telegram today—so at least I now know he is well. I send warm greetings and best wishes to you both, yours, G. Münter.” It was not until more than half a year later, in December 1915, that Kandinsky arrived in Stockholm from Moscow. There, he and Münter spent their final three months together before he returned to Russia on March 16, 1916; they were never to see each other again (fig.3). Prior to this, Kandinsky had suggested, as Eichner describes and as is evident from their pre-1914 correspondence, that they should in future live separately, even if he did hold out the prospect of acquiescing to her ever more insistent request that they marry. Kandinsky, however, subsequently broke off contact with Münter and in February 1917 married a young Russian woman, Nina Andreevskaya, in Moscow. Münter remained in Scandinavia for almost four years following Kandinsky’s departure, initially in Stockholm, moving to Copenhagen in late 1917, and spending the following two summers on Bornholm, where she tried to help make ends meet by giving painting lessons. When she finally returned to Germany in February 1920, she went first to Berlin and then back to Munich and Murnau.

On May 18, 1920, a new inventory was compiled of the works kept in Gondrand’s picture store in Schwanthaler Strasse, allocating 101 numbers to Kandinsky’s works alone. These included such now famous paintings as *Impression III (Konzert)* (Impression III [Concert]) and *Romantische Landschaft* (Romantic Landscape), dated 1911, *Improvisation 26 (Rudern)* (Improvisation 26 [Rowers]) of 1912, and a large number of oil studies from the Murnau years. Besides the paintings stored at the “Russian House” in Murnau and at the two Gondrand warehouses in Munich, Kandinsky had also left a large number of works with the gallery owner Herwarth Walden when he departed from Munich in 1914. These were the works shown at his first major solo exhibition, which had opened in Berlin at the gallery Der Sturm in March 1912 and had then toured, finally being shown in Göteborg in June/July 1914 shortly before war broke out. Most of the paintings from the exhibition in Sweden ended up in Petrograd (St. Petersburg) and Moscow after being shown at another exhibition in Helsinki in 1917. Eleven of Kandinsky’s drawings dating from the time the couple spent together in Stockholm in 1915/16 remained in Gabriele Münter’s possession, as did a number of watercolors and etchings. Many decades later they formed part of the large number of works that Münter donated to the Lenbachhaus.

“I wish to be dead, for Germany and for Gabriele Münter,” Kandinsky wrote in the fall of 1918 from Moscow to the gallery owner Herwarth Walden in Berlin. And indeed, Münter for some time presumed him dead or gone missing in the chaos of war and revolution. It was not until late 1921—when Kandinsky and his wife returned from what was by then the Soviet Union to take up a teaching position offered to him by Walter Gropius at the Bauhaus in Weimar—that Münter found out via an intermediary, the young painter Ludwig Baehr, who traveled back and forth between Germany and Russia, that her former companion was not only still alive but married to boot. Following his return to Germany, Kandinsky demanded back the property he had left with

Münter, initially through Baehr, whom Kandinsky had given the task of asking Münter about the whereabouts of his paintings. However, the dispute became a bitter one, marked more than anything else by the deep disappointment and hurt that Münter felt when Kandinsky came back from Russia with a new wife. She sought rehabilitation all along the line. As the only “legitimate” wife of Kandinsky, she demanded that her “husband” either pay her or let her keep his possessions in recompense for the shame and humiliation he had brought upon her.

The dispute between Gabriele Münter und Wassily Kandinsky, which by 1922 had become a legal one, was thus only outwardly about the works and other property of Kandinsky left behind in Munich and Murnau when war broke out. In fact what Münter wanted was moral recompense for

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3
Wassily Kandinsky
and Gabriele Münter
in Stockholm, 1916
Photo: Gabriele Münter
und Johannes Eichner
Stiftung, Munich



Kandinsky’s failure to marry her. In the draft of an undated letter, she formulated her main demand as follows: “What I mean is that since K. has forgotten and deserted his obligations and his earlier life, he should pay me a widow’s pension—for he himself has voiced the wish to be dead, for me and for Germany. Therefore he should simply make over to me everything that belonged to our life together and leave it to me to decide what I wish to give him.” Following the attempts to mediate by Ludwig Baehr and then by Alfred Mayer, a Munich art critic and collector, the attorney Julius Siegel, took over the case. He was on good terms with both Münter and Kandinsky, but as a lawyer, clearly saw himself as the defender of Münter’s interests. Münter had already been in contact with Siegel’s daughter before the war and had also painted her portrait. Her husband, Franz Stadler, an art historian at the University of Zurich and a student of Heinrich Wölfflin’s, had been a friend of Kandinsky’s since 1911.



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Wassily and Nina
Kandinsky in the dining
room of their "Master's
House" in Dessau, 1927
Photo: Bibliothèque
Kandinsky, Centre
Georges Pompidou,
Paris

Eager to come to an amicable settlement, Kandinsky made what he considered a generous offer in May 1923: "My *paintings* and other works: I offer Miss Münter $\frac{1}{3}$ of all these things— $\frac{1}{3}$ from every period in terms of both quantity and quality, including the works right up to the end of 1914. I ask Miss Münter to draw up and make available a list of all works, indicating each title, number, and year, including those works she expressly wishes to keep, giving more precise details of the same." The proposal was, however, rejected by Münter as ridiculous, as "trifling and petty." Her reaction thus thwarted this chance of an early settlement in 1923 and meant that the battle for the works that Kandinsky had left behind in Munich was to continue.

The bitter legal dispute, which also concerned the dividing up of the household and payment of the storage costs to the shipping company (which had since changed its name from Gondrand to ATGE), dragged on for another two years, but in June 1926, Kandinsky finally got back part of his personal property. By then, the Kandinskys had already moved with the Bauhaus from Weimar to Dessau (fig. 4) and were living next door to Paul and Lily Klee, in one of the *Meisterhäuser* (Masters' Houses) built by Gropius. Nina Kandinsky recalls in her memoirs: "At last he finally received back part of his personal property from Munich. A total of 26 boxes. Amazingly, the stuff was still in a very good state after such a long time. It took us several weeks to unpack it all. We unearthed five paintings. Kitchen utensils and linen were packed in suitcases. In one of the suitcases of linen, we also found a portfolio containing watercolors, an invaluable find. The salon furniture dated back to his Moscow days. The furnishings for his studio Kandinsky had bought in Munich."

By then, Julius Siegel had long since abandoned his brief. The conflict took a further critical turn when Münter requested the intervention of Dr. Kodlin, the legal adviser of the *Reichswirtschaftsverbandes der Bildenden Künstler Deutschlands* (Reich Trade Association of German Artists). For while the intermediaries had until then been recruited from Münter's and Kandinsky's circle of friends, and Siegel had always succeeded in striking a happy balance between an official and a

personal tone in seeking to obtain an amicable settlement, Kodlin's letters struck a completely different note. Kandinsky feared, quite justifiably, that the matter might be brought before a court. And Münter was indeed still contemplating legal action against Kandinsky. She could, for example, have sued him for the storage costs. She thus withheld her legal approval of the final formulation from late 1925 until April 1926. Only on April 2, 1926 did Münter acquiesce to Kandinsky's written declaration, which read: "I herewith recognize Mrs. Gabriele Münter-Kandinsky's unconditional right of ownership of all those works I left behind with her. Dessau, April 2, 1926." The use in this document of the legally non-legitimated double name Münter-Kandinsky, which Gabriele Münter had repeatedly claimed for herself on the basis of Kandinsky's promise of marriage, demonstrates once again that just as important as material recompense for Münter was Kandinsky's acknowledgement of her as "the only Mrs. Kandinsky." Despite the arguing back and forth, and notwithstanding the fact that Kandinsky managed to repossess a large number of paintings—a precise and detailed list of these works is contained in the exhibition catalogue *Wassily Kandinsky. Das bunte Leben* (Wassily Kandinsky: A Colorful Life. The Collection of the Lenbachhaus, Munich), published by the Lenbachhaus in 1995—the outcome of this "divorce settlement" was that the lion's share of all the paintings, watercolors, drawings, prints, glass paintings, and his writings from the time he was in Munich remained with his former companion. With only a very few exceptions Münter had succeeded in keeping virtually all of Kandinsky's glass paintings, as well as almost half

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Gabriele Münter
in front of the Städtische
Galerie im Lenbachhaus,
Munich, 1936
Photo: Gabriele Münter
und Johannes Eichner
Stiftung, Munich

6
Kandinsky's works shown
at the *Degenerate Art*
exhibition, Munich, 1937



of all his existing oil paintings (114 of the 259 catalogued works) from the period up to 1908. Of all the oil paintings produced between 1909 and 1914, approximately one quarter, that is to say 62 out of a total of 244 works. Not all of this vast number of works, especially the early oil studies, were included in the donation Gabriele Münter made to the Lenbachhaus in 1957. A smaller part of them became part of the Gabriele Münter und Johannes Eichner Stiftung, to which we will return at the end of this article.

"I have done the right thing for Kandinsky. I have given him his place in Munich," Münter was to write to the Goltz family on April 21, 1957. After the fraught "divorce settlement" between Kandinsky und Münter, which had lasted from 1922 to 1926, there followed in the 1930s a period of retreat, when these important art treasures remained hidden. Having been on the move for almost a decade, living in Cologne, Elmau, Thuringia, and Berlin, among other places, Münter in 1930

once again settled in her house in Murnau. She was joined a few years later by her second life companion, Johannes Eichner, whom she had met in Berlin on New Year's Eve 1927 and who now moved to Murnau for good. In the early 1930s, the hounding of modern art by the Nazis was becoming ever more threatening. Gabriele Münter, who paid regular trips to Munich and followed the art scene there closely (fig. 5), decided to give up the warehouses in Munich and have the entire collection of paintings brought to her house in Murnau. From then on she kept this valuable collection of paintings, which included many works of her own from the Expressionist period, in what today has become known as the “basement of millions,” a depository in Münter's house in Murnau. It is unlikely that anyone at that time had any precise idea of what was hidden there, although Kandinsky's works were a particular target of defamation (fig. 6) at the exhibition of “degenerate art” staged in Munich in 1937, which Münter, incidentally, attended. The artworks remained undiscovered in the basement of the Murnau house for more than twenty-five years. In keeping with Münter's wishes Johannes Eichner also remained silent, and despite considerable material constraints,



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Gabriele Münter
and Johannes Eichner
at the opening of
The Blue Rider
exhibition, Munich 1949
Photo: Gabriele Münter
und Johannes Eichner
Stiftung, Munich

especially during wartime, the couple never considered selling any of them, as they might have done abroad.

Only after World War II had ended and Germany had been liberated from Nazi tyranny was it possible once again to publicly articulate an interest in the art of what was once the avant-garde. One of those to show an interest in early twentieth-century modernism was Hans Konrad Roethel, the curator of the Central Collecting Point in Munich from 1945 to 1949, later of the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, and, from early 1957 on, director of the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus. In 1949, nine of Münter's paintings were shown in *Der Blaue Reiter* (*The Blue Rider*), a significant exhibition organized by Ludwig Grote, which rehabilitated the art of that period. Münter herself attended the opening, together with other surviving artists of the Blue Rider, such as Maria Marc and Elisabeth Erdmann-Macke (fig. 7).

In May 1952, shortly after her seventy-fifth birthday, Münter had her own exhibition at the Central Collecting Point bearing the title *Gabriele Münter – Werke aus fünf Jahrzehnten* (*Gabriele Münter – Works from Five Decades*), for which Johannes Eichner (fig. 8) compiled the catalogue. The preparations for this exhibition brought Münter and Roethel into personal contact. A few

months before, beginning on December 20, 1951, they had corresponded for a brief period in connection with Roethel's request for information on Kandinsky's biography. On April 8, 1952, Eichner met Roethel for the first time. Later, a friendship developed between the two. "Whenever Eichner came to Munich from Murnau, he would use Roethel's office at the Staatsgemäldesammlungen as a refuge during the lunch hour, of course not just to rest but rather, and more importantly, for the purpose of looking at the magazines, catalogues, and books that were so important for his own research on the lives and works of Kandinsky and Münter," as Armin Zweite related in his commemorative speech for Hans Konrad Roethel in 1982. During preparations for the exhibition *Kandinsky, Marc und Münter* at Galerie Stangl in Munich in 1954, for which Roethel wrote the foreword to the catalogue, the friendship between him and Münter deepened. The intensive contact that developed out of work on this exhibition and catalogue led to Roethel's visiting Münter in Murnau on December 19, 1954. Münter recorded the visit in her diary: "Dr. Röthel arrived at half past ten ... the men first went downstairs, Ei[chner] showed him a few k.[andinsky] paintings.

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Johannes Eichner,
Murnau, ca. 1952
Photo: Gabriele Münter
und Johannes Eichner
Stiftung, Munich



Then back upstairs—looked at paintings, had a nice chat ... likeable." In a letter to Münter in February 1955, Roethel sent her birthday greetings and—rather prophetically—also expressed the wish that her work should be "made accessible to ever larger circles."

It was to be almost two more years, however—in October 1956—before Roethel, who was soon to become director of the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, was allowed to see the collection of all the paintings by Kandinsky and Münter and other artist friends in the basement in Murnau. After that everything happened very quickly. On November 23, Münter was able to note in her diary: "*yesterday* ... large moving van came with 5 men and Dr. Röthel and the police to fetch all K.[andinsky] paintings and around 30 Mü.[nter] paintings. Röthel stayed to eat with us. Slices of celery, vanilla pudding, Vermouth." Thus it was Hans Konrad Roethel who emerged victorious from the contest for this art treasure with both the gallery owner Otto Stangl and the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen. Indeed, it had been a long contest, for Roethel's predecessor at the Lenbachhaus, Arthur Rümmer, had already sought contact with Münter. This we know from a let-

ter written by Eichner to Stefan Musing, the director of the Central Collecting Point, on December 1, 1951. At that time, however, Münter and Eichner and others still had reservations in view of the dilapidated state of the gallery, which had been badly damaged in World War II.

By 1956/57, on the other hand, conditions at the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus had improved to such an extent that Münter in a letter to Otto Stangl dated February 2, 1957 described rather drily how she had arrived at the decision to make this invaluable gift to the Lenbachhaus: “We did at one time consider the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, but there would not have been enough room for this collection for another decade.... It was not until Dr. Röthel had been appointed director that Dr. Eichner, who had called on him at the Haus der Kulturinstitute to offer him his congratulations, was able to see the alterations that had been made to this gallery. From that moment on, everything happened very quickly. Dr. Röthel was shown the K collection for the very first time. The deed of donation was then drafted and the transport of the works arranged. The whole business was conducted very efficiently. How glad we are, too, that Dr. Röthel is the right personality for a collection of such high caliber!”

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Hans Konrad Roethel,
1965
Photo: Städtische
Galerie im Lenbachhaus,
Munich, archive

10

Gabriele Münter,
Murnau, 1957
Gabriele Münter
und Johannes Eichner
Stiftung, Munich
Photo: Gabriele
von Arnim

The fact that Hans Konrad Roethel (fig. 9), with Eichner's and Münter's consent and cooperation, sifted through the entire stock of works at Murnau before making his choice, has left its mark on the collection that is still apparent today. Those works that did not fully meet Roethel's strict criteria were excluded from the Gabriele Münter Stiftung from the very beginning, and it is to this course of action that we can ascribe the high caliber of the collection that exists in the Lenbachhaus today. Münter's entire donation, which she officially presented to the Lenbachhaus on her eightieth birthday in February 1957, consisted of 90 oil paintings by Kandinsky, 24 glass paintings, 116 watercolors and colored drawings, 160 drawings, 28 sketchbooks and notebooks, and almost the entire collection of Kandinsky's prints. Münter also gave the Lenbachhaus 25 of her own paintings and her entire collection of prints, as well as a number of watercolors, drawings, glass paintings, and sketchbooks. The gift also included work by artist friends such as Alexei Jawlensky, Marianne von Werefkin, Franz Marc, and Alfred Kubin. The artworks making up the so-called Gabriele

Münter Stiftung were catalogued by the Lenbachhaus under a series of approximately 1,000 numbers, each bearing the inventory abbreviation GMS.

A further large collection of her works along with her entire archive of writings and photographs became part of the Gabriele Münter und Johannes Eichner Stiftung, which Gabriele Münter had decreed in her will for the promotion of modern art and which attained legal status in 1966.

The proceeds from the sale of other Kandinsky and Münter works in her possession were used for the purchase of works by eighteen different artists for the Lenbachhaus, primarily Paul Klee, Franz Marc, Wassily Kandinsky, Alfred Kubin, and Alexei Jawlensky—more than 100 works in all—which then formed the nucleus of the gallery's Blue Rider collection. Until about 1961, Münter was able to witness a series of purchases made by the gallery. She died in 1962 in her house in Murnau, four years after her companion, Johannes Eichner, who had died in 1958. Despite the painful separation from Kandinsky after the end of the Blue Rider in 1914, she showed an extraordinary degree of devotion in preserving his works through all the subsequent turbulent periods of history, thus ultimately not only giving him “his place in Munich” but making a gift of him to the whole world.

Roethel's efforts were crowned a few years later when he succeeded in securing for the Lenbachhaus the remaining works of the Bernhard Koehler Collection, which included now famous paintings by Franz Marc and August Macke, as well as by Alexei Jawlensky and Jean-Bloé Niestlé. Bernhard Koehler Sr. was the uncle of Macke's wife, Elisabeth, and the most important patron of the Blue Rider. His collection included many paintings by the artist friends Macke and Marc, to whom he gave particular support. Among these were such works as *Promenade*, *Hutladen* (Milliner's Shop at the Promenade) by Macke and Marc's *Blaues Pferd I* (Blue Horse I). “In 1965, Roethel was able to accept the Bernhard Koehler Stiftung on behalf of Munich and this museum. Bernhard Koehler Sr. (1849–1927) was an entrepreneur who had founded the “Mechanical Workshops” in Berlin in 1876, encompassing a stamp factory, an engraving and minting works, and a metal goods factory. After Macke had opened Koehler's eyes to modern art, the latter was able to amass one of the most important collections of modern painting within a very short space of time, buying not just Marc, Kandinsky, Hodler, Munch, Heckel, Nolde, Kirchner, Klee, Münter, and Jawlensky, but Cézanne, van Gogh, Bonnard, Gauguin, Matisse, Degas, Chagall, Delaunay, and Picasso as well.” When his father died, Bernhard Koehler Jr. (fig. 11) inherited the collection. “A large part of these astonishingly rich collections was lost during bombing raids in 1945. Only a small group had been moved, at Franz Resch's insistence, for safekeeping, mainly to Ried, near Benediktbeuern, and to Obersdorf. Bernhard Koehler Jr. (1882–1964) kept the remains of the collection together and in 1965, Elly Koehler made over important works by Jawlensky, Macke, Marc, and Niestlé to the Lenbachhaus. This, too, was a glorious moment in the history of the museum,

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Bernhard Koehler
Jr., ca. 1965
Photo: Städtische
Galerie im
Lenbachhaus,
Munich, archive



12

Elly Koehler and Hans
Konrad Roethel, 1965
Photo: Städtische
Galerie im
Lenbachhaus,
Munich, archive



20 for this additional gift rounded off the collection perfectly” (Armin Zweite, 1982) (fig. 12). At this point we would like to recall with gratitude the offices performed by the Munich gallery owner Franz Resch, who acted as an intermediary.

But it is to Gabriele Münter, supported by Johannes Eichner, and later to Elly and Bernhard Koehler Jr. that we owe thanks for one of the most significant donations ever made in recent museum history.

Armin Zweite, Hans Konrad Roethel’s successor as director of the Lenbachhaus, considerably expanded the Blue Rider collection during his term in office from 1974 to 1990, acquiring in particular many paintings by Paul Klee. He thus responded to the gap left by the previous generous donations and was able to complement them with such important new additions as Klee’s *Rose Garden*, *Destroyed Place*, *Wild Berry*, *rhythmical more rigorous and freer*, *Intoxication*, and the central work *Botanical Theater*. In addition, he succeeded in acquiring Wassily Kandinsky’s large painting *Red Spot II* from 1921 and the outstanding late work *Birds* by Franz Marc. We have continued the acquisitions work of our predecessors within the constraints that current prices on the art market impose. Alongside works by artists such as Adolf Erbslöh, Alexander Kanoldt, Pierre Girieud, Albert Bloch, Erma Bossi, Georgia O’Keeffe, and Adrian Korteweg, more recent purchases include Marc’s watercolor study *The Mandrill*, Kandinsky’s *Zubovskaya Square*, and most recently the large painting *In the Room* by Gabriele Münter.

THE BLUE RIDER - HISTORY AND IDEAS

Annegret Hoberg

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The Blue Rider (*Blauer Reiter*) group of artists, formed in Munich in 1911, was the single most important movement of artistic renewal to emerge in twentieth-century Germany. Only the group *Die Brücke* (The Bridge), founded in Dresden in 1905, had a comparable impact. Whereas the members of the *Brücke* lived and worked together and developed a unified style of figurative expressionism before they moved to Berlin in 1911, the Blue Rider was a loose-knit group of artists whose creative aims differed widely. Under the auspices of its two key figures, Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, the Blue Rider mounted joint exhibitions in 1911 and 1912 and published the legendary almanac *Der Blaue Reiter* in 1912. This publication, created with almost visionary fervor, has remained an eloquent chronicle of the group and its aims right up to the present day. The Blue Rider almanac, like many other writings by Kandinsky and his fellow artists, propounds the notion of the “inner necessity” of true art, which can be expressed in very different forms and styles. This central tenet goes a long way toward explaining the pluralism of the Blue Rider as a group embracing an exacting range of formal approaches, from the “naive” realism of Henri Rousseau to the vividly colored, stylized landscapes and portraits by Gabriele Münter and Alexei Jawlensky, the Orphism of Robert Delaunay, the fantastic drawings of Alfred Kubin, the spiritual animal portrayals by Franz Marc, and Wassily Kandinsky’s own abstract compositions. What is more, this open approach also made the Blue Rider group receptive to other arts, especially music, and recognized the value of creative expression beyond the conventional confines of “high art”—such as art by children, amateurs, the mentally ill, folk art, and the art of non-European so-called “primitives” that had begun to attract the appreciation of the avant-garde since the turn of the century. The much-vaunted claim of lending form to “the spiritual” in art points toward an intellectual aspect of the Blue Rider group as the second major movement of German Expressionism, which clearly sets it apart from other avant-garde movements such as Cubism and Futurism, and finally culminates in Kandinsky’s revolutionary breakthrough to abstraction.

Munich – City of Art

That such a development was possible at all was due to a number of artistic and theoretical givens that coincided in the fertile climate of the fin de siècle and also owed much to the presence in Munich of certain artists who, together, paved the way for the enormous renewal embodied in the Blue Rider. Munich’s reputation as a city of art had attracted them all, providing a catalyst for the emergence of the Blue Rider as a movement that was to roll back the boundaries of artistic expression. Renowned as a fountainhead of art with excellent opportunities for painters to gain a solid artistic training, turn-of-the-century Munich was a magnet for students from Eastern and Central Europe, Belgium, England, Scotland, and the USA, for whom it was even more attractive than Paris.



In 1896, for example, Wassily Kandinsky, Alexei Jawlensky, Marianne von Werefkin, Igor Grabar, and Dmitry Kardovsky had all come to Munich from Russia, followed in 1898 by the Swiss artist Paul Klee, the Austrian Alfred Kubin, and the ethnic German Russian Alexander von Salzmann. In 1901, they were joined by Gabriele Münter from the Rhineland and Eugen von Kahler from Prague, Vladimir von Bekhteyev, and Moisey Kogan, as well as their Russian compatriot, the dancer Aleksandr Sakharov, followed in 1904 and 1908, respectively, by Adolf Erbslöh and Alexander Kanoldt, who came to the Bavarian capital from the Karlsruhe Academy. In 1909, Albert Bloch, an American of German-Bohemian extraction, arrived from St. Louis, and at the beginning of 1910, August Macke first met Franz Marc, the only one of the circle who had actually been born in Munich. Many of these artists who met in this southern German city around the turn of the century became members of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung München* (NKVM, New Artists' Association Munich), founded in 1909, which may be regarded in some ways as a forerunner of the Blue Rider.

The history and development of the NKVM and the later splinter group that was to become the Blue Rider will be traced later in this essay. First of all, however, the focus of attention will be on the prevailing climate that Kandinsky and his fellow artists found in Munich's art world as the nineteenth century drew to a close.

Artists flocked to Munich, drawn by its reputation as a center of art. This image had been consolidated in the course of the nineteenth century by the generous patronage and architectural commissions of Ludwig I, who, from 1815 onward, had single-mindedly pursued his ambition of transforming the residence of the dynastic House of Wittelsbach from a quiet backwater into a regal capital and culturally sophisticated metropolis. His father, Maximilian I, had only shortly before been promoted by Napoleon from the rank of elector to that of king, and even when he was still crown prince, Ludwig I had eagerly collected works of art and had commissioned major buildings from the architect Leo von Klenze, whose late Neoclassical edifices are still dominant features of present-day Munich. During the reign of Ludwig I, a large number of museums were built, among them the Glyptothek, the Alte Pinakothek, and the Neue Pinakothek. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Kunstakademie, founded in 1808—at a time when its fame rested on the presence of such illustrious teachers as Wilhelm von Kaulbach and Karl Piloty and had already earned the city the epithet “Athens on the Isar”—was given a pompous new building on the border between the museum quarter and the district of Schwabing, which was rapidly becoming the home of the art scene and the bohème. Almost all the artists in the Blue Rider group and its circle were later to live and work in Schwabing.

The first glass-and-iron building on the European continent was built in 1854, under Ludwig's successor, Maximilian II. From 1869 on, this so-called Glaspalast housed the major international art

1
Franz von Lenbach's villa,
vintage photo
Photo: Städtische Galerie
im Lenbachhaus, Munich

2
View of the studio wing
of Franz von Lenbach's
villa, vintage photo
Photo: Städtische Galerie
im Lenbachhaus, Munich



3
 Franz von Stuck, *Fighting Amazon*, 1897
 Oil tempera on wood,
 Städtische Galerie im
 Lenbachhaus, Munich
 On permanent loan from
 the Munich Secession



4
 Thomas Theodor Heine,
 indoor poster for
Simplicissimus, 1897
 Color lithograph on
 cardboard,
 Städtische Galerie im
 Lenbachhaus, Munich
 Heine Estate

exhibitions, organized by the *Münchner Künstlergenossenschaft* (founded in 1858), that were to put Munich firmly on the map of the art world. Until the Secession was founded almost thirty years later, the *Münchner Künstlergenossenschaft* was solely responsible for the representation of artists and supervision of exhibitions. Franz von Lenbach—although president for only four years—was for a long time one of its most influential members. After he was granted a peerage in 1882, von Lenbach’s meteoric rise to become the most sought-after and highly paid portraitist of Munich society, whose sitters included leading figures of Wilhelminian Germany, European nobility, and prominent figures of public life and industry, was inextricably linked with the specific conditions that prevailed in the economic boom years of the *Gründerjahre*—with all the extravagance, pomp, and circumstance that entailed.

At the height of his fame, Franz von Lenbach, whose rank as “painter prince” was paralleled only by Hans Makart in Vienna—and somewhat later by the younger Franz von Stuck—had a house built between 1887 and 1891 to plans by the architect Gabriel von Seidl. This magnificent Italianate villa and exhibition hall right next to the Propylaeum on Munich’s prestigious Königsplatz (fig. 1) and close to the city’s major museums underlined Lenbach’s position as the city’s leading artist. Vintage photographs of his studio—which was almost completely destroyed during World War II (fig. 2)—indicate that it was furnished and decorated in the flamboyantly elaborate style of the period. In 1924, Franz von Lenbach’s widow donated the villa to the City of Munich, and since 1929, it has housed the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus. There is a certain irony in the fact that just two generations later, the house belonging to Lenbach, that prototypical conservative artist of history painting, should be used to house the collection of the Blue Rider group. Gabriele Münter’s bequest in 1957 and subsequent gifts and acquisitions have made the Lenbachhaus a museum of international rank, home to a major collection of works by the most important exponents of the avant-garde in Munich, whose art was so highly controversial in their own day and defamed in the Nazi exhibition of *Entartete Kunst* (“degenerate art”) in 1937.

Yet even before the Blue Rider group was formed in Munich, the conservative art scene and traditional teaching at the Academy had already come under fire. Shortly after 1870, Wilhelm Leibl had adopted the approach of recent French painting, especially that of Édouard Manet, imbuing German painting with a nascent realism of precise observation that would develop into the atmospheric naturalism of his followers, such as Carl Schuch, Philipp Sperl, and Wilhelm Trübner. Finally, in 1888, the *IV International Exhibition* at the Glaspalast featured more than 3,000 works, among them many genre paintings and history paintings of mediocre quality. It triggered the crucial protest that was to culminate in the foundation of the Munich Secession in 1892. The founding members included Hugo von Habermann, Bruno Piglhein, Heinrich von Zügel, Gotthardt Kuehl, Franz von Stuck, Fritz von Uhde, and Leibl’s student Trübner (fig. 3). It should be noted that the

Munich Secession was founded earlier than the two other Secession movements of the late nineteenth century—the Vienna Secession around Gustav Klimt and the Berlin Secession around Max Liebermann. In other words, Munich was at the vanguard of a movement that blazed a trail for new forces such as Naturalism, Symbolism, and even Jugendstil. Initially, the Munich Secession had its own exhibition space at the Königsplatz. Yet soon thereafter the new forces had reconciled their differences with the old and in 1897 they exhibited jointly with the *Kunstlergenossenschaft* in the *VII International Exhibition* at the Glaspalast. In 1898, the Secession also included the new international decorative arts of high standard, featuring such artists as Henry van der Velde and René Lalique, in their annual exhibition. One year earlier, in 1897, the famous *Vereinigte Werkstätten für Kunst im Handwerk* had been founded in Munich. This workshop, like the Secession, was to become a pioneering movement in the field of applied arts. Peter Behrens, who later founded the Deutscher Werkbund, Richard Riemerschmid, Heinrich Obrist, and Otto Eckmann were all among the founding members. Their names, in turn, are closely linked with the emergence of German Jugendstil, which, in its early days, was in fact a Munich Jugendstil. The German term for Art Nouveau—Jugendstil—was coined in Munich with the founding of the magazine *Jugend* by publisher Georg Hirth in 1896. His colleague and rival Albert Langen, who came from Paris, founded a similarly important periodical in 1896 called *Simplicissimus* along the lines of the French satirical magazine *Gil Blas*. *Jugend*, which gave its name to the entire Jugendstil movement, and *Simplicissimus* (fig. 4) were the leading periodicals in Germany in the years leading up to World War I, shaping opinions with their articles and influencing style with their illustrations. Whereas *Jugend* tended to concentrate on the aesthetic aspects of layout and virtuoso ornament, the magazine *Simplicissimus* commissioned some of the same artists—Thomas Theodor Heine, Rudolf and Erich Wilke, Ferdinand von Reznicek, Olaf Gulbransson, Bruno Paul, Eduard Thöny, Karl Arnold, and others—to produce political and socially critical caricatures.

Given all this activity, Schwabing had by then become the center of artistic life and home to a new artistic and literary bohème. Its heyday, from 1896 until the outbreak of World War I in 1914, prompted Kandinsky, like so many of his contemporaries, to muse in 1930 that Schwabing, in retrospect, had been not so much a place as a state of mind: “The rather odd, somewhat eccentric, and self-confident Schwabing, in whose streets a man or a woman—without a palette, a canvas, or at



5
Dmitry Kardovsky, Alexei Jawlensky, Igor Grabar, Anton Ažbe, and Marianne von Werefkin (seated) in Munich, ca. 1898
Photo: Privatstiftung Schlossmuseum Murnau

6
Nikolai Seddeler, Dmitry Kardovsky, and Wassily Kandinsky at the Anton Ažbe school in Munich, ca. 1897
Photo: Gabriele Münter und Johannes Eichner Stiftung, Munich

least a portfolio—seemed out of place. Like a cuckoo in the nest. Everyone was painting ... or writing, or making music, or dancing.”

Apart from writers such as Frank Wedekind, Thomas and Heinrich Mann, the circle around Stefan George, which included Karl Wolfskehl, Ludwig Klages, and Friedrich Gundolf, as well as Countess Franziska zu Reventlow, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Count Eduard von Keyserling, the streets and cafés of Schwabing were full of artists. One of their favorite meeting places was the Café am Siegestor, frequented by, among others, Otto Julius Bierbaum and Alfred Walter Heymel, the founding members of the Jugendstil magazine *Die Insel*, which had moved from Berlin to Munich in 1901, whereas Café Stefanie was the haunt of Alfred Kubin, Hans von Weber, Max Dauthendey, and artists of the later Café du Dôme in Paris, including Rudolf Levy and Albert Weisgerber. In a back room of the Simpl, run by Kathi Kobus on Türkenstrasse, the famous Elf Scharfrichter cabaret performed every evening in the early years of the century, and commissioned its posters and stage sets from such artists as Ernst Stern and Alexander von Salzmann, who were also members of the small *Phalanx* group of artists around Wassily Kandinsky, founded in 1901.

Kandinsky, Jawlensky, and Werefkin Come to Munich

Wassily Kandinsky was born in Moscow in 1866. He had studied law and economics in his native city and stood on the threshold of a promising university career with a call to the University of Dorpat, when he decided in 1896 to move to Munich and study painting instead. The very fact that, in the last year before he left Moscow, he had worked as an artistic head of a printer’s shop indicates that he pursued other interests besides his academic career. In his memoirs, published in 1913, he mentions two key experiences that strengthened his resolve to become a painter. One was hearing a performance of Richard Wagner’s *Lohengrin* in Moscow; the other was seeing a painting by Claude Monet from his *Haystacks* series, in which he had at first been unable to discern the haystack, dissolved by the artist’s impressionistic handling of light.

When Kandinsky came to Munich at the end of 1896, he studied for more than two years at the then highly regarded and popular private art school run by the Slovenian Anton Ažbe, which



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Alexei Jawlensky with
a lady in his studio in
Munich, after 1904
Photo: Privatstiftung
Schlossmuseum Murnau

attracted a great number of students from Central and Eastern Europe. In the same year, Alexei Jawlensky and Marianne von Werefkin had arrived in Munich from Russia, together with their fellow artists Dmitry Kardovsky and Igor Grabar, to study painting. Werefkin had been a master student of the famous Russian Realist Ilya Repin in St. Petersburg since 1887 and it was there that she had met the young officer cadet and painting student Jawlensky, who likewise became a student of Repin's in 1890. When Werefkin's father, commandant of the Fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, died in 1896, leaving her a generous allowance for the rest of her life, she and her companion Jawlensky took the opportunity of moving to Munich, where they rented a magnificent double apartment with a studio on Giselastrasse in Schwabing. Once settled in Munich, Werefkin interrupted her own painting for almost ten years, and dedicated herself entirely to nurturing and promoting Jawlensky's talent, while holding a salon in her apartment that became a meeting place of progressive thinkers, artists, painters, stage designers, and Russian emigrés around the turn of the century. Jawlensky, Kardovsky, and Grabar likewise studied until 1899 at Ažbe's art school, where they eventually became teaching assistants (fig. 5). In a letter to his brother, recently published for the first time by Russian scholars, Igor Grabar describes Kandinsky's arrival at the Ažbe



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Wassily Kandinsky,
Nikolaipplatz in Munich-Schwabing, 1901/02
Oil on cardboard,
Städtische Galerie im
Lenbachhaus, Munich

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Wassily Kandinsky,
poster for the first
Phalanx exhibition, 1901
Color lithograph,
Städtische Galerie im
Lenbachhaus, Munich

school in February 1897: “Along comes a gentleman with a box of paints, takes a seat, and starts working. His appearance is typically Russian, even with a touch of the Moscow university scene and a hint of the graduate ... that’s exactly how we summed him up: a Moscow don. Well, you can imagine my astonishment when I actually heard his Russian accent ... that was Kandinsky” (fig.6). In those early years at the Ažbe school, contact between Kandinsky, who could, incidentally, speak fluent German and French (his grandmother was from the Baltic and had spoken German with him since his childhood), and the circle around Jawlensky and Werefkin was rather casual. This was, however, to intensify from 1899 on through a shared burning interest in the use of color, including the theory of color, its technical aspects, and practical effect. We know that, in 1899, Kandinsky became a regular visitor to the “chemistry laboratory” that Jawlensky had set up in his studio at Giselastrasse 23. Kandinsky was also given use of Werefkin’s apartment during her and Jawlensky’s one-year stay in Russia from September 1901 to November 1902 (during this period, Jawlensky’s son by Helene Nesnakomoff was born on the estate of a friend in Ansbach). When he returned, Jawlensky extended the studio, and following the death of his revered teacher Anton Ažbe in 1905, gave private lessons there (fig.7). Adolf Erbslöh und Alexander Kanoldt became pupils in 1908 and soon thereafter were among the founding members of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung München* (NKVM).

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It was also around 1908, in Murnau, that Kandinsky’s early acquaintance with Jawlensky and Werefkin bore fruit, blossoming into the artistically important friendship from which the Blue Rider would emerge.

The *Phalanx* Group, 1901–1904

From 1900 on, Kandinsky studied for a year at the Munich Academy under Franz Stuck, having been turned down the previous year. Stuck, who was given a peerage in 1906, was not only Munich’s most famous Jugendstil painter and second “painter prince” besides Lenbach, but also an influential academy professor whose many students at the time included Hans Purrman, Albert Weisgerber, Eugen von Kahler, Hermann Haller, and, somewhat later, Paul Klee. Yet, like many other artists of the new generation around the turn of the century, Kandinsky was dissatisfied with the academic



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Wilhelm Hüsgen's
sculpture class at the
Phalanx school, 1902
(left: Wilhelm Hüsgen,
Gabriele Münter)
Photo: Gabriele Münter
und Johannes Eichner
Stiftung, Munich



11
Members of the *Phalanx* school, Munich, 1902 (from left to right: Olga Meerson, Emmy Dresler, Wilhelm Hüsgen, Gabriele Münter, Richard Kothe, Maria Giesler, Wassily Kandinsky) Photo: Gabriele Münter und Johannes Eichner Stiftung, Munich



12
Kandinsky with his *Phalanx* painting class in Kochel, summer 1902 Photo: Gabriele Münter und Johannes Eichner Stiftung, Munich

13
Gabriele Münter, *Kandinsky Painting a Landscape, 1903* Oil on canvas-lined board, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich

teaching, and soon preferred to concentrate on what he called his “small oil studies” painted from nature, in which he was predominantly self-taught. According to Kandinsky, his intention was to make the colors “sing strongly” by applying them energetically to the carrier. A typical feature of all Kandinsky’s early oil studies is the way he uses the spatula to apply the paint thickly “in colored specks and stripes,” leaving visible traces of the working process. Using this technique, he created many small-format views of Schwabing and other parts of Munich, which differ from the Post-Impressionist style only in their impasto paintwork and intensity of color (fig. 8).

Modest as these beginnings may have been, Kandinsky, still unknown and working more or less alone, joined forces with the sculptors Wilhelm Hüsgen and Waldemar Hecker and the draftsmen and stage designers Ernst Stern and Alexander von Salzmann—who all worked for the Elf Schafrichter cabaret—and other members of the progressive Schwabing art scene to found a private exhibition association and art school known as *Phalanx*. “We rented a rather spacious and high-class exhibition space in the house of Frau Prof. Lossen on Finkenstrasse, very close to Wittelsbacherplatz. The publishers of the *Kunstwart*, Callwey, was housed in the same building. A poster mounted at the corner of the square guided visitors to the entrance,” Gustav Freytag recalls. Freytag, a son of the writer of the same name, was a young medical student and the only member of *Phalanx* who was not an artist. This determined interest to provide artists with opportunities for exhibitions and commissions by founding the *Phalanx* association was echoed eight years later in the founding of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung München* (NKVM). It shows that, right from the beginning, Kandinsky was a skilled, conscious, and strategic “art politician” who sought to exploit the mechanisms of the emergent modern art market to his advantage and to further his own aims.

By 1904, *Phalanx*, of which Kandinsky became chairman soon after it was founded, had organized no fewer than twelve major exhibitions of the international avant-garde in painting and decorative arts. The Munich public took little note, however. For the first *Phalanx* exhibition in August 1901, predominantly featuring works by the members themselves, Kandinsky created a poster whose

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Wassily Kandinsky, *The Young Couple (Bridal Procession), 1904* Gouache on gray board, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich

stylized spear-wielding warrior, with his Jugendstil contours and Hellenistic helmet, is reminiscent of the Amazons in some of Franz Stuck's Secession posters (fig. 9). What is particularly interesting, however, is the fairy-tale aspect of these figures and the doubling, combined with a movement to the left against the direction of reading, which creates an overall effect of dissonance, energy, and dynamism. The subsequent *Phalanx* exhibitions featured work by artists such as Lovis Corinth, the Finnish Symbolist Akseli Gallen-Kallela, and the Munich Jugendstil artist Carl Strathmann, drawings by Alfred Kubin and John Jack Vrieslaender, as well as works by Felix Vallotton, Paul Signac, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. For the seventh *Phalanx* exhibition, where works by Claude Monet were presented in Munich for the first time, Kandinsky also designed a poster. Even the lettering clearly reflects the influence of Munich Jugendstil. The unusual pictorial motif, however, with its boats reminiscent of Viking longships floating along a meandering river like heralds from some distant era lost in the mists of time, also betrays his involvement with the fantastic realms of Old Russian imagery and medieval scenes — inspired by Russian Symbolism and Jugendstil — which he had addressed between 1901 and 1907 in a number of woodcuts and tempera paintings (see plates 3, 4), alongside his thematically less demanding and stylistically completely different “small oil studies.”

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Gabriele Münter in
a dress designed by
Kandinsky, 1905
Photo: Gabriele Münter
und Johannes Eichner
Stiftung, Munich

Kandinsky and Gabriele Münter Meet

In the *Phalanx* school, Kandinsky taught painting and a life-study evening class. In early 1902, Gabriele Münter, who had arrived in Munich from the Rhineland in the spring of 1901, enrolled as a student. Münter had dropped out of a private drawing class in Düsseldorf in 1898, following the death of her parents, to join her sister, Emmy, on a two-year trip to visit relatives in America. On her return in 1900, she decided to continue her studies in Munich. As the art academies did not accept female students in those days, she initially enrolled in the beginners' class given by Maximilian Dasio at the school of the *Künstlerinnen-Verein* (Association of Women Artists), and in the winter semester, she joined the life-study class of Angelo Jank. A fellow student told her about the exhibitions and opportunities offered by the *Phalanx*. Münter would later describe these beginnings and her impression of Kandinsky's teaching in a note from her estate, part of which her companion in her later years, Johannes Eichner, published in 1957: “Then a student at the ‘Bellevue’ pension at Theresienstrasse 30 suggested I should visit the interesting *Phalanx* exhibition at Finkenstrasse. There was a collection by the Finnish artist Axel Gallen—I remember the sunny, clear painting by Kandinsky *The Old Town* and two sculptors Hecker and Hüsgen. I very much

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Wassily Kandinsky,
Gabriele Münter, 1905
Oil on canvas, Städtische
Galerie im Lenbachhaus,
Munich

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Gabriele Münter,
Kandinsky, 1906, colored
linocut, Städtische
Galerie im Lenbachhaus,
Munich



liked Hüsgen's masks for the Elf Schafrichter. It made my fingers itch to become a sculptor. I then went to the *Phalanx* school and enrolled in Hüsgen's sculpture class for the afternoon (fig. 10). That also included the evening life-study course with K.[andinsky]—I dropped the life-study class I had visited before, and took the opportunity. That was a new artistic experience, how K., quite different from the other teachers, explained things in a thorough and detailed manner, and regarded me as a conscientiously striving individual to whom one could entrust tasks and set goals. That was new to me and made quite an impression. It was also very nice on the third floor of the Hohenzollernstrasse *Phalanx* school" (fig. 11).

30 In the summer of 1902, Münter accepted Kandinsky's invitation to join his painting class on an excursion to Kochel. Here, Kandinsky and his student Gabriele Münter got to know each other more intimately, aided no doubt by their shared love of cycling—at that time still a most unusual



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Alexei Jawlensky,
Füssen, 1905
Oil on cardboard,
Städtische Galerie im
Lenbachhaus, Munich
On permanent loan from
the Gabriele Münter und
Johannes Eichner Stiftung

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Marianne von Werefkin,
*Interior with Seated
Couple*, ca. 1907
Gouache and colored
pencil on paper,
Städtische Galerie im
Lenbachhaus, Munich

sport for women (fig. 12). In 1903, they both traveled with the *Phalanx* painting class on an excursion to Kallmünz in the Palatinate. In Kallmünz, Münter, who had previously concentrated primarily on drawing, painted a number of small landscape studies in oil (fig. 13), using the sketchy, impasto technique that Kandinsky taught his students. Moreover, they both experimented intensely with color woodcuts, and the woodcut continued to play an important role in their work until 1908. The visit to Kallmünz inspired Kandinsky to go beyond his Old Russian and Biedermeier imagery and explore an increasing number of motifs from Old German and medieval street scenes and costumes in what he called his “colored drawings” (fig. 14)—tempera painting on a dark, clayey ground, culminating in his famous paintings from the Paris period (see plates 3, 4).

In Kallmünz, Kandinsky and Münter became “engaged”—a move that created an untenable situation in Munich for Kandinsky, married since 1892 to his Russian cousin Anya Semyakina, who had traveled with him to Germany. The nomadic life on which Kandinsky and Münter embarked for several years from 1904 on was due first and foremost to their personal circumstances. But the enormous effort involved in running the financially unviable *Phalanx*, with its ambitious yet little appreciated program of exhibitions, may well have been a further reason. In the spring of 1904, Kandinsky resigned his chairmanship. He still had plans for the *Phalanx*, though, for he envisaged having Alexei Jawlensky elected as a member at the next meeting. Yet, soon after Kandinsky and Münter met up in May 1904, to continue on their first journey together to Holland, the *Phalanx* ceased its activities.

In the winter of 1904/05, Münter and Kandinsky continued their travels and spent some months in Tunisia. There, Kandinsky studied decorative art techniques such as beading fabrics and clothing design, and he designed and made a loose-fitting dress for Münter of the kind known in Germany at the time as *Reformkleid* (fig. 15). For the summer of 1905, they took an apartment in Dresden, where Kandinsky painted his portrait of Gabriele Münter (fig. 16). In the winter of 1905/06, they spent several months in Rapallo on the Italian Riviera. Finally, from June 1906 on, they spent a year in Sèvres, near Paris, with Münter staying occasionally in her own room in Paris and attending courses given by Théophile Steinlein. In Paris, Münter and Kandinsky experienced at first hand the new French woodcut developed by such artists as Félix Vallotton, Pierre Bonnard, and Édouard Vuillard, who, in the closing years of the nineteenth century, had been inspired by the arrival in Europe of Japanese woodcuts to revive this ancient technique as a vehicle for their own modern interest in planarity and simplicity of form. In their own œuvre, Münter and Kandinsky soon developed a consummate mastery of the art of the woodcut (fig. 17). After Paris, they stayed in Berlin until the spring of 1908, and then, having traveled to South Tyrol together in April 1908, they decided to settle again in Munich. Throughout these years of travel, Kandinsky and Münter retained their impasto, Post-Impressionist style of oil painting, whose relief-like, compact, and detailed rendering of the motif indicates little in the way of artistic development.

The Travels of Jawlensky and Werefkin

In 1903, Marianne von Werefkin, who was trying to emancipate herself from her relationship with Jawlensky, traveled to Normandy with Georgia-born painter and draftsman Alexander von Salzmann—also, incidentally, a member of Kandinsky’s artists’ association *Phalanx*. Although at that point she had yet to reembark on her own work as an artist, her relationship with Salzmann will certainly have brought her into intensive confrontation with the influence of the post-Gauguin generation of the Pont-Aven school. Later, Jawlensky joined them in northern France and they traveled home together via Paris. This marked the beginning of the key inspiration that Jawlensky was to receive in the years immediately thereafter from the French avant-garde, initially from the painting of Vincent van Gogh in particular. In the summer of 1904, the artist couple spent three months painting at Reichertshausen an der Ilm, a trip that was to prove productive for Jawlensky, and in early 1905, they stayed in Füssen, south of Munich. It was here that Jawlensky painted his