



Vasily Kandinsky (1866-1944), *Landscape with Factory Chimney*, 1910, oil on canvas, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection.

# Vasily Kandinsky and Franz Marc: Expressionism and Der Blaue Reiter

**Modern Masters Series:** Highlights from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

## What is Expressionism?

The two paintings presented here in the Peter and Margaret de Wetter Gallery help us explore Expressionism, and the beginnings of the Blaue Reiter (Blue Rider) movement. For both of these movements, ideals shaped practice. In the early 1900s some young artists began painting with the primary goal of expressing the emotions within the human spirit. This artistic movement became known as Expressionism. The term “expressionism” represents their desire to capture a feeling (expression) rather than a physical “impression” of a moment or scene.

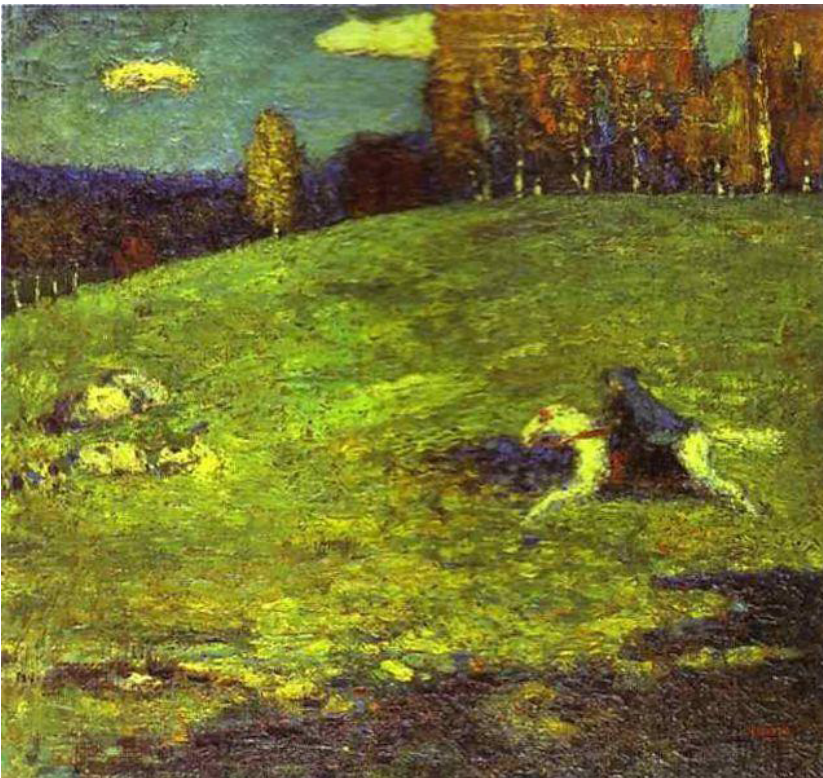
## Looking on Your Own

The Expressionist painters typically used sweeping or “gestural” brush strokes to convey feeling. How gestural are these two works? How do they make you feel?



## Der Blaue Reiter

Vasily Kandinsky and Franz Marc were two of these “expressionists.” They believed that focusing on feelings could provide a doorway to spiritual understanding. They formed a group of like-minded painters in 1911 and called themselves **Der Blaue Reiter** after Kandinsky's 1903 painting of the same name. Kandinsky and Marc believed the image of the “blue rider,” as a symbol of spiritual leadership, best represented their movement. According to their theories of color and symbol, blue embodied intellect and masculine energy, while the rider stood for the knightly hero who could lead the fight against materialism. Kandinsky and Marc published *Der Blaue Reiter Almanac* in 1912. This journal was a collection of writings from Kandinsky, Marc and other artists within the movement. *Der Blaue Reiter Almanac* helped to express the group's goals as individual artists and for the movement as a whole.



Vasily Kandinsky, *Der Blaue Reiter*, 1903



Subscription Advertisement for *Der Blaue Reiter Almanac*, 1912

## Think About It

Do you ever use art to express yourself?

How would you express your emotions with art?

Would it be different from how you would represent simply a physical object or place?

## About the Artists



### Vasily Kandinsky

Born in Moscow, Russia in 1866, Vasily Kandinsky grew up in an educated family that valued culture. He studied at the Art Academy in Germany and later led the New Artists' Association of Munich (Neue Künstlervereinigung München). He met Franz Marc in 1911 and the two formed a fast friendship as a result of their common belief in the role of art as a means of strengthening the spiritual and combating the materialistic impulses of humanity. In 1914, Kandinsky was forced to move back to Russia because of the First World War. While that marked the end of Der Blaue Reiter, it continued to influence his work until his death in 1944.



### Franz Marc

Franz Marc was born in Munich, Germany in 1880. He was the son of a landscape painter, and started his career as an artist after a year of military service. From 1900-1901 he studied at the Academy of Fine Arts (*Kunstakademie*) in Munich. After finishing his studies, Marc traveled to Paris, where he encountered artists such as Vincent Van Gogh and Henri Matisse. When he returned to Munich, he focused on painting animals, which he viewed as “purer” than humans. He felt what he called the “animalization of art” best expressed the spiritual unity contained in “the organic rhythm of all things.” During this time, he also began developing color theories that would become quite significant to his work in Der Blaue Reiter. In 1916, shortly after the end of Der Blaue Reiter, Marc was killed in the Battle of Verdun in France.

## Think About It

There are people today who also think of animals as more “pure” or innocent than humans. Why might they believe this?

## Marc, Kandinsky, and Color

As demonstrated in Marc's *White Bull (Der Stier)*, 1911 and Kandinsky's *Landscape with Factory Chimney*, 1910, color was an important tool of expression for both artists. In Marc's eyes, depicting animals with unnatural colors allowed viewers to step away from the real, or material, world, and tap into the “inner, spiritual side of nature” which was “hidden behind the veil of appearance.” Marc focused on the primary colors, blue, yellow, and red. His ideas about what those colors represented and how they affected human emotions are outlined in the **quotation on the gallery wall** above the shelf. Do you agree with them?

## Looking on Your Own

Marc painted the bull white, but what if he'd used another color? How might that change the impact of the painting, or how it makes you feel? Try using the color paddles to change the color of the white bull in the image below and see what you think. **Hint:** Hold the darker color paddles about an inch away from the image to get the best result.



Franz Marc (1880-1916), *White Bull*, 1911, oil on canvas, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

**Kandinsky** was also interested in using color as a tool to access the spirit. The quotations on the wall show some of his ideas, but Kandinsky broadened and shifted his theories over the years. Here is a sampling of his color concepts:

**Yellow** - earthly, reckless, intense, wild

**Red** - warm, lively, turbulent, intense

**White** - silent, youthful, marks beginnings

**Black** - void, animosity, marks endings

**Green** - stillness, passivity, self-satisfaction, summer

## Looking Further

While Kandinsky and Marc did not always agree on the meaning and impact of different colors, they did agree that colors were a critical element within artworks.

How do you feel about the colors Kandinsky used in *Landscape with Factory Chimney*? What impact do they have on how you react to the painting?

Look carefully at *The White Bull*. What colors other than white do you see in the figure of the bull? Taking Marc's ideas about color into consideration why do you think he might have used those particular colors?

## Symbolism

For Kandinsky in particular, symbolism played an important role within the art of *Der Blaue Reiter*. The following is a list of symbols often used in *Der Blaue Reiter* artworks.

**The blue rider** – often on horseback, holding a sword or lance

**Hills** – in Christian symbolism, hills often represent the communion between the physical and spiritual worlds

**Triangle** – represented the “spiritual triangle” of artistic progress (see below)

**Towers** – associated with industrialism and the materialism that members of *Der Blaue Reiter* wished to break down.

Can you find any of these symbols in *Landscape with Factory Chimney*?

## Looking on Your Own

Try “decoding” *Landscape with Factory Chimney* using Kandinsky's ideas about color and symbolism. **Hint:** Kandinsky very rarely included things associated with the modern (in his eyes, materialistic) world, such as industrial buildings. Consider the symbolism of the colors used for, and around, the chimney as you decode the image.

Do you see any similarities between Kandinsky and Marc's paintings? Think about colors, shapes, or the how the paint was applied to each artwork.

## Try it Yourself

**Use the animal figures as models** to create your own “Franz Marc” style drawing. What unconventional colors would you use to represent each animal and why?

**Use the color wheels and paddles** to explore how colors interact. Why are the colors red, blue, and yellow considered the “primary” colors?

What colors or objects would you use to express different emotions? **Express yourself by creating examples** with the supplies in the contemplation corner.

Using the supplies provided, **experiment with the colors and shapes** you see in *White Bull (Der Stier)* and *Landscape with Factory Chimney*. Try recreating the paintings with the colors you think would work best.

## **Sponsors**

BBVA Compass Bank  
City of El Paso  
El Paso Museum of Art Foundation  
Mrs. Robert M. Graham, Sr.  
Travis and Annabelle Johnson  
Kirk and Judy Robison  
Shari and Stuart R. Schwartz  
Robert and Sara Shiloff  
Texas Commission on the Arts  
United Bank of El Paso del Norte  
WestStar Bank

## **Marketing Partners**

Mithoff Burton Partners  
Susan Eisen Fine Jewelry and Watches

## **About the El Paso Museum of Art**

Founded in 1959, the El Paso Museum of Art (EPMA) is a major cultural and educational resource for West Texas, New Mexico, and Mexico. The Museum house a permanent collection of over 6,000 works of art. In addition to displaying works from its holdings, the Museum offers a diverse schedule of temporary exhibitions, films, lectures, concerts, and other educational programs to the general public. EPMA has a steady record of accreditation by the American Alliance of Museums. The Museum was first accredited in 1972, re-accredited in 1985 and most recently in 2001. Since the new downtown building opened in 1998, the Museum serves approximately 70,000 visitors per year.

## **Museum Hours**

Tuesday-Saturday: 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
Thursday: 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.  
Sunday: 12:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.

## **Administration Office Hours**

Monday-Friday  
8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

## **Address and Phone Number**

One Arts Festival Plaza  
El Paso, Texas 79901  
(915) 532-1707  
(915) 532-1010 Fax

## **References:**

<http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/education/school-educator-programs/teacher-resources/arts-curriculum-online?view=item&catid=740&id=64>

John Moffitt, "'Fighting Forms: The Fate of the Animals,' The Occultist Origins of Franz Marc's 'Farben-theorie.'" *Artibus et Historiae*, vol.6, #12, 1985.

Elizabeth H. Payne, "'Animals in a Landscape' by Franz Marc." *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of the Arts*, vol.36, #3, 1956-57.

Vasily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1910) New York: Dover Pub., 1977.

franzmarc.org