**DER BLAUE REITER (THE BLUE RIDER)**

Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider) was an affiliated circle of artists of varying disciplines loosely organized by the visual artists Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc in 1911/1912 in Munich.

The recognition of the spiritual undercurrents of the work of Der Blaue Reiter artists is reflected in its name: the oblique association of the “Blue Flower” of German Romanticism can be read as demonstrating the intentions of the founders in suggesting the link to its historical Romantic precursor, while the “Rider” points to their forward thrust and advocacy on behalf of modern art.

The origin of the name has not been reliably ascertained but is often linked to the title of a painting by Kandinsky of a horse and rider (1903), which was found to have been altered [possibly to suggest the link], and which was also negated in an explanation by Kandinsky himself. According to Klaus Lankheit’s introduction to the *Blaue Reiter Almanach*, it was first mentioned in correspondence between the two artists in September 21, 1911. In a conversation with the critic Paul Westheim in 1930, Kandinsky explained, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that he and Marc loved riders and horses respectively, and both loved the color blue—thus the name evolved.

Under the auspices of a project intended to yield the annual printed work entitled *Der* *Blaue Reiter Almanach (*The Blue Rider Almanac)*,* compiled by Marc and Kandinsky as editors (of which only two editions, in 1912 and 1914 respectively, were produced), as well as two parallel exhibitions of the “editors of The Blue Rider” held at the Thannhauser and Goltz Galleries in 1911 and 1912, an international group was selected by Marc and Kandinsky to document and discuss like-minded artistic endeavors. The “new art” produced by members of this group was characterized by an opposition to academic naturalism and was anticipated to provide the turning point that would usher in a new spiritual epoch which would replace the materialism of the nineteenth century.

Kandinsky and Marc perceived an international wave of revolutionary innovation such as Futurism, Orphism, French Symbolism, and Rayonism, in response to influences of established art concepts, including German Romanticism and ancient and primitive art. Accordingly, artists in the forefront of these endeavors were invited to contribute content to the *Almanach* and/or Blaue Reiter exhibitions. They included Schoenberg, Hugo Ball, Fokine, Hartmann, Paul Klee, Kokoschka, Yevrenov, Muenter, Kubin, Delaunay, and W. and D. Burliuk among others, as representative of these tendencies.

Alexei von Jawlensky, Marianne von Werefkin, August Macke, and Heinrich Campendonk were additional participants in the Blaue Reiter exhibitions. Although continuing to pursue their own individualistic style, these visual artists and their peers adopted a new stylistic vocabulary that transcended the constraints of habit and canon, and transformed natural reality into a new artistic reality, no longer delimited by the conventions of tradition. Characteristic of the movement was a simplification of form coupled with a decorative use of color that was symbolically suggestive, creating works that consisted of shape and tone, ultimately leading to abstraction and the dematerialization of the conceptual world. Particularly for Kandinsky, form became the external expression of the inherent spiritual content of an artwork. *The Yellow Sound*, written by Kandinsky and included in the *Almanach,* is an example of a stage composition that synthesizes sound and color to manifest its spiritual essence.

Although the collaborators did not constitute a fixed organization or society, they hold a unique historic significance along with the members of Die Brücke (The Bridge), an avant-garde movement founded in Dresden in 1905, in the development of Modern German Art. The founders of Der Blaue Reiter, Marc and Kandinsky, were recent resignees (1911) from the Neue Künstlervereinigung München (The New Artists Association of Munich), itself a separatist group established to challenge the academy. They favored the tearing down of walls between the arts and the creation of a cultural synthesis encompassing many fields and nations, including visual artists, musicians, poets, dancers, art theoreticians, etc., from France, Russia, Austria, and Italy, and historic traditional as well as folk art from Egypt, China, Japan and Germany.

Der Blaue Reiter participated in the First German *Herbstsalon* exhibition along with artists of Die Brücke in 1913. The First World War, however, which claimed the life of Franz Marc, brought the collaboration of the founders, and the close affinity of the larger group, to an end in 1914. A number of the artists became faculty members of The Bauhaus, established after the end of the war; Jawlensky, Klee, Feininger, and Kandinsky subsequently formed “The Blue Four” in 1923, and exhibited and lectured in the United States.

The Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus in Munich has a comprehensive collection of artworks produced by Der Blaue Reiter.

References:

Kandinsky, Wassily and Franz Marc, eds. *The Blaue Reiter Almanac* (intro. by Klaus Lankheit). New York: Viking Press, 1974.

Selz, Peter. *German Expressionist Painting*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975

Moeller, Magdalena M. *Der Blaue Reiter*. Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1987.