

The Expressionist Animal Painter Franz Marc

By Gabi La Cava

“*Da qualche tempo gli Espressionisti tedeschi vanno di moda.*”¹
 (“*For some time, the German Expressionists have been fashionable.*”)

The catalogue for *Expressive!*² vividly illustrates the exhibition’s power, emotion, and vibrancy, as exuded by the paintings, which comprise the majority of the exhibits. The sheer amount of works amassed³ further render the exhibition striking. In an article written on the occasion of *Expressive!*, Renato Diez recognises that German Expressionist art is currently fashionable. The surge in prices fetched at auction from c.1997 onwards for German and Austrian Expressionist art is perhaps a consequence of the fact that this type of art is indeed “fashionable”.⁴ *Expressive!* was one of the most notable exhibitions of 2003 and probably the largest of all the exhibitions based on Expressionist art in recent years. In the past 12 months such exhibitions have included *Egon Schiele* at the Museo d’Arte Moderna in Lugano, Switzerland (16 March-29 June 2003)⁵ and *Il Cavaliere Azzurro 1908-1914: Kandinsky, Marc e i loro Amici (Der Blaue Reiter: Kandinsky, Marc and their Friends)* at the Fondazione Antonio Mazzotta in Milan (18 Oct. 2003-20 Jan. 2004).⁶ The organisers of *Expressive!* acknowledge the effect this trend had on their exhibition in terms of the works which they were able to obtain and the direction it took.⁷

Expressive! is a departure in exhibitions based on Expressionist art since it chose the German and Austrian Expressionists⁸ of the early 20th century as its pivotal point and not as its sole focus. Its scope was expanded to incorporate the forefathers of Expressionism,

¹ Renato Diez, ‘L’espressionismo compie cent’anni’, *Arte (Italy)*, no. 358, June 2003, p. 36.

² *Expressive!* (30 March-10 Aug. 2003):

http://www.beyeler.com/fondation/e/html_05son/15expressiv/01_start_01.htm, Fondation Beyeler, Basel-strasse 101, CH-4125 Riehen/Basel, Switzerland.

³ *Expressive!* featured c.200 art works.

⁴ This surge in prices fetched at auction for German Expressionist art is discussed in: Renato Diez, ‘Il boom dell’arte tedesca’, *Arte (Italy)*, no. 316, Dec. 1999, pp. 152-8.

⁵ For a guide to this exhibition refer to: Gloria Vallese, ‘Egon Schiele a Lugano’, *Arte (Italy)*, no. 356, April 2003 Supp., pp. 2-72.

⁶ Other recent exhibitions based on Expressionist work have included: *Gli Espressionisti 1905-1920* at the Complesso del Vittoriano in Rome (5 Oct. 2002-2 Feb. 2003)

(<http://www.exibart.com/notizia.asp?IDCAtegoria=61&IDNotizia=5591>); *Der Blaue Reiter: die Befreiung der Farbe* at the Wilhelm-Hack-Museum in Ludwigshafen am Rhein, Germany (11 Nov. 2003-29 Feb. 2004)

(http://www.blauer-reiter.de/content/00_startseite/index.html); and *Schoenberg, Kandinsky, and the Blue Rider* at the Jewish Museum in New York (24 Oct. 2003-12 Feb. 2004)

(<http://www.jewishmuseum.org/home/onlinex.php?id=kandinsky&view=intro>). An exhibition based on the work of *Der Blaue Reiter* is currently being held at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, Germany (13 March-27 June 2004).

⁷ Ernst Beyeler and Markus Brüderlin, ‘Foreword’ in Donald Kuspit and Markus Brüderlin, *Expressive!*, exhibition catalogue, Riehen, Switzerland: Fondation Beyeler (30 March-10 Aug. 2003), p. 8.

⁸ The majority of Expressionist art was produced in Austria and Germany during the first two decades of the 20th century and the phrase “German Expressionism” is often used synonymously with “Expressionism”. This does not mean that Expressionist art was not produced elsewhere at this time but its greatest exponents were from these countries.

including the Greek artist El Greco (1541-1614) and the Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh (1853-90), through to the expressive work of the contemporary American artist Bruce Nauman (b.1941). Amongst the artists featured in *Expressive!* one stands out from the rest due to his choice of subject matter and to the sense of calm and beauty emitted by his works: it is the German artist Franz Marc (1880-1916). He is represented in *Expressive!* by three paintings: *Die Kleinen Blauen Pferde (The Small Blue Horses)* (1911; Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Stuttgart), *Zwei Katzen, Blau und Gelb (Two Cats, Blue and Yellow)* (1912; Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Basle),⁹ and *Der Hund vor der Welt (The Dog before the World)* (1912; Private Collection). The 'Timeline' section of the Web site for *Expressive!*¹⁰ presents key works from the exhibition and includes only one work that features animals: *The Small Blue Horses*. Moreover, Marc is the only early 20th century artist to be represented in *Expressive!* entirely by paintings which solely depict animals. Throughout the exhibition catalogue the human figure features more prominently than any other motif, and consequently Marc's work presents itself as a departure for Expressionism. Marc spoke in terms of the "animalisation" of art since he believed so strongly in the possibilities held by the representation of animals. It is this aspect of his oeuvre which I focus on here.

The vibrant colours which characterise paintings by Marc make his work instantly appealing. He is best remembered for his images of animals, especially of horses. As one of the leading figures of the German Expressionists, and co-founder of the group Der Blaue Reiter, his position within the canon of art has been consolidated.

After considering a career as a clergyman and then as a school teacher, Marc focused his attention on painting and in 1900 enrolled at the Kunstakademie München (Munich Art Academy) in Munich. His early work was influenced by the French Impressionists, but it is around 1910 when we begin to see his personal style breaking through. His work from this point onwards is dominated by depictions of animals, which he represented in a stylised manner. It is also around this time that he became friends with the German artist August Macke (1887-1914) with whom he was to subsequently exchange and develop ideas and theories on colour in painting. In 1911, through his membership of the Neue Künstlervereinigung München in Munich, Marc came into contact with the Russian artists Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) and Alexei von Jawlensky (1864-1941), and the German artist Gabriele Münter (1877-1962). By the end of 1911, Marc, Kandinsky, and Münter had resigned from the Neue Künstlervereinigung and Marc and Kandinsky had founded Der Blaue Reiter group, for which they organised two exhibitions (one in 1911 and one in 1912) and produced an almanac in 1912. Both Marc and Kandinsky developed their own theories on colour and both placed a great importance on the spiritual aspect of art. In

⁹ Franz Marc: Two Cats (1912):

http://www.bridgeman.co.uk/search/view_image.asp?button=add&image_id=28457, The Bridgeman Art Library, London Office (Head Office), 17-19 Garway Road, London, W2 4PH, England

¹⁰ Expressive! (30 March-10 Aug. 2003):

http://www.beyeler.com/fondation/e/html_05son/15expressiv/01_start_01.htm, Fondation Beyeler, Baselstrasse 101, CH-4125 Riehen/Basel, Switzerland.

1912 Marc came into contact with the Orphist work of the French artist Robert Delaunay (1885-1914) and the work of the Italian Futurists; the influence of both of these styles is evident in Marc's artistic output after this contact. In 1914, with the outbreak of the First World War (1914-18) Marc volunteered for military service, and in 1916 was killed in action, at the age of 36.

Depictions of Animals



Source: <http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/marc/>

One of the most important influences on Marc's work, especially in the context of this discussion, is the work and ideas of the Swiss animal painter Jean Bloé Niestlé (1884-1942), whom Marc met in 1905. It was through this contact and subsequent friendship that Marc was urged by Niestlé to "capture the essence of the animal"¹¹ in his paintings. In Marc's depictions of animals the feeling that is evoked by the subject matter is most important to him. Zoological accuracy is of secondary importance.

In attempting to convey and emphasise the spiritual aspect of his subject matter, Marc often depicted animals in non-naturalistic colours. He developed his own colour theory and symbolism, which equated the three primary colours with qualities and emotions. In its simplest terms, Marc associated blue with masculinity, and red and yellow with femininity since they are more earthy colours, but he also associated yellow with joy and happiness. Blue was viewed by Marc throughout his career to be the most deeply spiritual of the three colours. His decision to apply non-representational colours to animals could perhaps have been an attempt at stepping away from the material world and identifying the need to use non-worldly colours in order to portray the spiritual. In a letter to Macke dating from 1910, Marc states that yellow is associated with femininity and happiness, while red is associated with "matter" and is considered by him in negative terms.¹² In the year after this letter was written, Marc produced *Gelbe Kuh (Yellow Cow)* (1911; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)¹³, an image of a joyous cow leaping through the air: the impression of happiness and the female subject matter are both underlined here through the application of yellow.

¹¹ Susanna Partsch, *Franz Marc 1880-1916*, Cologne: Taschen, 1991, p. 9.

¹² Cited from: August Macke/Franz Marc, edited by Wolfgang Macke, *Briefwechsel*, Cologne: DuMont-Schauberg, 1964, pp. 25-28, in Susanna Partsch, *Franz Marc 1880-1916*, Cologne: Taschen, 1991, p. 26.

¹³ Franz Marc: *Gelbe Kuh (yellow cow)* (1911):

http://www.guggenheimlasvegas.org/artist_work_lg_985.html, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1071 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10128, U.S.A.

Marc's later colour theory changed slightly and is clearly demonstrated with the work *Rehe im Walde II (Deer in the Woods II)* (1914; Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe) which presents a family of three deer in which the buck is depicted in blue, the doe in red, and the fawn in yellow. In this work blue is still used to represent masculinity and yellow still represents the sense of joy of the youngest deer, but red has now developed to represent motherhood.¹⁴ One can appreciate how the idea of red being associated with matter and earth evolved into the idea that it can represent motherhood. Marc's application of his colour theory was, however, abandoned where appropriate: in *Der Tiger (The Tiger)* (1912; Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich)¹⁵ the animal is depicted in yellow but the sense of playfulness and joy, as outlined in Marc's colour theory, is far from the mood evoked.¹⁶ In this painting it is the geometrical composition and angular shapes and lines which dominate as opposed to colour. Marc has used shapes and lines here in order to convey the sense of terror. This was perhaps necessary when his colour theory did not allow for sinister moods or emotions to be represented. In contrast to a work in which Marc departs from his colour theory in relation to animals, the *Turm der Blauen Pferde (Tower of Blue Horses)* (1913; missing since the Second World War and known today through reproductions), which is considered to be one of his masterpieces, is exemplary of Marc's dogmatic application of it. The *Tower of Blue Horses* draws strength in its unification of colour and composition. His belief in blue as the "male principle, stern, and spiritual"¹⁷ is here underlined through the verticality of the composition, which emphasises male virility and strength yet still maintains a sense of elegance and spirituality.

The *Tower of Blue Horses* is exemplary of Marc's treatment of horses on a symbolic level. In the history of art, horses have traditionally been present in commemorative equestrian sculptures and in painted portraits of great leaders¹⁸, but rarely as solitary subjects. This was in part due to the traditional hierarchy of painting which placed animal painting in the lowest category. Due to the breakdown of this hierarchy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which was one of the consequences of the avant-garde movements, animal subjects were no longer confined to the lower ranks of painting. Marc took advantage of this change and elevated horses in his work by using them to represent everything that he believed to be beautiful in the animal kingdom.

¹⁴ Susanna Partsch, *Franz Marc 1880-1916*, Cologne: Taschen, 1991, p. 87.

¹⁵ An image of this work can be viewed at: Blauer Reiter:

http://www.lenbachhaus.de/4_sammlu/sites/geb_d_b.htm, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Luisenstrasse 33, 80333 Munich, Germany.

¹⁶ Susanna Partsch, *Franz Marc 1880-1916*, Cologne: Taschen, 1991, p. 44.

¹⁷ Cited from: August Macke/Franz Marc, edited by Wolfgang Macke, *Briefwechsel*, Cologne: DuMont-Schauberg, 1964, pp. 25-28, in Susanna Partsch, *Franz Marc 1880-1916*, Cologne: Taschen, 1991, p. 26.

¹⁸ For further details on the history of the representation of horses in art refer to: J. Hall, *Hall's Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, London: John Murray, 1984, p. 157.

Religious and Artistic Influences

The often-cited quotation by Marc, stating his belief that animals are purer and more beautiful than man,¹⁹ begins to explain why he chose to focus on animals for the majority of his artistic output. It should be noted that Marc was a deeply religious person and that he is said to have spoken in terms of “pantheistic empathy”²⁰ with regard to his objectives in representing animals and nature. The notion of beauty being equated with God and God being present in nature does have a precedent in the history of art. The Italian Renaissance artist Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) was influenced by the Neo-Platonic notion that beauty equated to God, that the human figure was the most beautiful form and, thus, that God revealed himself through the human figure. Michelangelo’s work reflected his personal beliefs, and hence the human figure is the most prominent motif in his oeuvre. Closer in time to the work of Marc is that of the German Romantic landscape artist Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), in whose work some scholars have identified characteristics that are similar to Marc’s in terms of Romantic sensibilities.²¹ The idea of landscapes being a manifestation of the Divine is a strong characteristic of Friedrich’s work. The transcendental quality that landscapes held for him can be best demonstrated with *The Cross in the Mountains* (1808; Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden) in which he takes the novel step of using a landscape scene for an altarpiece. Animals are Marc’s chosen means of expression just as the human figure was for Michelangelo and the landscape was for Friedrich. Again the importance of Niestlé’s influence may be underlined here since Marc was primarily concerned with representing the spirit, and thus the beauty of the animals, in order to represent a sense of the pantheistic.

In relation to the quasi-religious aspect of Marc’s depictions of animals, a comparison may be drawn between his paintings of animals and Byzantine and early Renaissance icons of saints or religious people.²² Apart from their decorative quality, such icons had the function of aiding prayer and veneration. They are characterised by stylised images, passive figures, centralised compositions, and plain backgrounds and hence the identification of similarities between Marc’s paintings of animals and religious icons cannot be avoided.²³ Furthermore, religious icons often included areas covered in gold leaf, which would have reflected light when placed next to candles as was common. Marc’s palette is overall very warm with a sense of luminosity frequently being applied to the main subject

¹⁹ Cited from: Edited by Klaus Lankheit and Uwe Steffen, *Briefe aus dem Feld*, Munich: Piper, 1986, p. 64, in Susanna Partsch, *Franz Marc 1880-1916*, Cologne: Taschen, 1991, p. 39.

²⁰ Cited from: Franz Marc, ‘On the animal in art’ in Reinhard Piper, *Das Tier in der Kunst*, Munich: Piper, 1922 in Susanna Partsch, *Franz Marc 1880-1916*, Cologne: Taschen, 1991, p. 38.

²¹ For a further discussion on the similarities between the work of Marc and Friedrich, refer to: D. E. Gordon, ‘Marc and Friedrich again: Expressionism as departure from Romanticism’, *Notes in the History of Art (U.S.A.)*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Fall 1981), p. 29-32.

²² An example of a Byzantine icon can be viewed at: Berlinghiero: Madonna and Child (c.1230): http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/byzantium/byzim_37a.html, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1000 Fifth Avenue at 82nd Street, New York, NY 10028-0198, U.S.A.

²³ Although the backgrounds of Marc’s paintings are not completely plain, they only hint at a landscape and, moreover, do not distract from the main motif of the animal.

matter of a painting. *Die Kleinen Gelben Pferde (The Little Yellow Horses)* (1912; Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Stuttgart)²⁴ is a good example of this treatment of colour with the horses depicted in a warm, golden yellow which creates the effect of the horses shining out from the canvas. In this sense they may be compared to the areas of gold leaf on paintings of religious icons.

Marc may have been introduced to Byzantine icons by his brother Paul, a Byzantine scholar who was studying in Florence, and so may have known of early Renaissance icons. In 1901 the brothers visited the Italian cities of Padua, Verona, and Florence; then, in April 1906, Marc visited his brother in Mount Athos, Greece.²⁵ Taking into consideration Marc's religious beliefs, the appeal of early Renaissance and Byzantine icons is palpable, and there is a strong possibility that he was influenced by such images while visiting Italy and Greece.

Drawing on the way in which religious icons are meant as an aid for the worshipper in prayer, and an encouragement to contemplate the life of the saint or the biblical figure depicted, Marc invites the viewer to connect with the animals in his paintings and to contemplate the spiritual beauty that he strove to depict. His paintings are, more often than not, devoid of humans as though it is an animal-only world. When viewing it, humans are allowed to become a part of the work it, since the viewpoint is often at the level of the animal. The viewer is given the chance to get closer to the animals in his paintings and experience their beauty. Marc's compositions, especially before the influence of Orphism and Futurism, are often formed by a sculptural mass of animals at the centre of the picture plane, with curved lines dominating in order to underline the sense of harmony, peace, and balance. This compositional technique is demonstrated in *Die Grossen Blauen Pferde (The Large Blue Horses)* (1911; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis).²⁶ All of these elements further emphasise the spiritual beauty of the animals depicted.

Der Blaue Reiter and Expressionism

Der Blaue Reiter²⁷ was founded in Munich in 1911 by Marc and Kandinsky after they resigned from the Neue Künstlervereinigung München due to their differences of opinion

²⁴ Franz Marc: Die Kleinen Gelben Pferde (1912):

http://www.staatsgalerie.de/frame.php?page=/de/sammlungen/gem/klamod_marc.htm&logo=2, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Konrad-Adenauer-Str. 30-32, 70173, Stuttgart, Germany.

²⁵ Mount Athos is a peninsula in the region of Macedonia in Greece. It is famous for its 20 monasteries and for the Byzantine icons and manuscripts held within these monasteries. Mount Athos is also known as Hagion Oros or Ayion Oros.

²⁶ Franz Marc: Die Grossen Blauen Pferde (the large blue horses) (1911):

http://www.walkerart.org/programs/vaexhib_images/Franz.html, Walker Art Center, 725 Vineland Place, Minneapolis, MN 55403, U.S.A.

²⁷ The name "Der Blaue Reiter" means "The Blue Rider" in German, thus the importance of the colour blue and the significance of horses in Marc's art are again underlined through this name which he and Kandinsky chose for their group. For a further discussion on the significance of the name "Der Blaue Reiter", refer to Klaus Lankheit, 'The history of the almanac' in Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, and Klaus Lankheit, *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, New York: Viking Press; Macmillan, 1974, p. 36.

with other members of the association. Marc and Kandinsky shared similar ideas on art: both believed that true art should possess a spiritual dimension. Kandinsky's views are outlined in his text *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*²⁸ which first appeared in 1911. For Marc, the spiritual aspect of art was perhaps more concerned with representing the inner soul of a being; Kandinsky represented the spiritual by abstract means.²⁹ Both felt that much of the art of their day lacked any such dimension and thus hoped that Der Blaue Reiter would create a spiritual revolution in art. In addition to Marc and Kandinsky, other members of the group included Macke, Münter, von Jawlensky, the Austrian artist Alfred Kubin (1877-1959), and the Swiss artist Paul Klee (1879-1940). Their work was not united by a particular style but by common objectives in their artistic production. The key events of the group's activities were two exhibitions, in 1911 and 1912, and the publication of an almanac in 1912.³⁰ Both exhibitions were held in Munich, and subsequently travelled around Germany. They featured works by members of the group and by other artists, including the Spanish artist Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), Delaunay, and the French artist Henri Rousseau (1844-1910) whose work was chosen by Marc and Kandinsky because they represented what they believed to be true art. The almanac, which explored the group's shared consideration for the spiritual aspect of art, consisted of a series of essays by its members and was edited by Marc and Kandinsky, who also contributed three essays each. The essays in the almanac are interspersed and accompanied by illustrations which compare art works from different regions and epochs. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 brought an end to Der Blaue Reiter's activities but the group's work, together with that of the Dresden-based group Die Brücke,³¹ marks the high point of German Expressionism. A brief comparison is drawn between these two Expressionist groups in *The Yale Dictionary of Art & Artists*:

Where the Brücke artists used distortion to signal tensions in the artist and sharpen viewers' responses, Blaue Reiter artists typically wished to involve us in a more meditative communication. Whereas some of the Brücke artists wished to be seen as 20th-century Germans developing a truly German art in a country too long dominated by French values and manner, the Blaue Reiter circle was of its nature international, and viewed art in global, even eternal terms.³²

²⁸ For an abridged and English version of this text refer to: Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, New York: Dover Publications; London: Constable, 1977.

²⁹ An example of an abstract painting by Kandinsky can be viewed at: Wassily Kandinsky: Improvisation 28 (second version) (1912): http://www.guggenheimlasvegas.org/artist_work_lg_7111E182.html, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1071 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10128, U.S.A.

³⁰ An English version of the almanac can be found in: Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, and Klaus Lankheit, *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, New York: Viking Press; Macmillan, 1974.

³¹ Die Brücke means "The Bridge" in German. The group was formed in 1905 and dissolved c.1912. It included the German artists Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938), Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884-1976), Erich Heckel (1883-1970), and Emil Nolde (1867-1956).

³² Erika Langmuir and Norbert Lynton, *The Yale Dictionary of Art & Artists*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale Nota Bene; Yale University Press, 2000, p. 227.

From this assessment of the objectives of the two groups one can appreciate how the work of Der Blaue Reiter was defined by its focus on the spiritual and perhaps also on a more personal experience of art.

The importance of the almanac as evidence of the articulation of Marc's views and ideas cannot be underestimated. In his essay in the almanac entitled 'Spiritual treasures', Marc discusses the idea of the "mystical inner construction,"³³ referring to the sense of spirit which gives a being or place its unique character. Marc explores this theme through the figures present in works by El Greco and the landscapes by the French artist Paul Cézanne (1839-1906).³⁴ The use of the word "mystical" encourages both the impression of something which is not immediately obvious or material and a sense of intrigue. Marc seemed to be striving to achieve and to capture this "mystical inner construction" in his paintings of animals. Another essay entitled 'The "savages" of Germany' can further aid an understanding and appreciation of Marc's paintings and the objectives of his artistic production. In this essay Marc identifies "symbols that belong on the altars of a future spiritual religion"³⁵ within the work of Kandinsky and von Jawlensky. He implies that this is a basis for the work of Der Blaue Reiter and consequently for his own work. Hence, it appears that Marc was preoccupied with representing the inner being of his subject, and that spirituality and religion were at the forefront of his objectives.



Source: <http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/marc/>

Late Works

Although there is no definite point at which Marc's oeuvre began to move in a different direction, it is around 1912 and in the subsequent years leading up to the First World War, that we see his work and representations of animals changing. The animals within these compositions become smaller and are often spread out; the sense of calm and contemplation is absent since the picture plane begins to be cut up and divided by lines and geometric forms as the influence of Cubism, Futurism, and Orphism is evident; we begin

³³ Franz Marc, 'Spiritual treasures' in Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, and Klaus Lankheit, *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, New York: Viking Press; Macmillan, 1974, p. 59.

³⁴ Cézanne painted many views of Mont Saint-Victoire in the Provence region of France in order to capture the true essence of the view. An example of one of these famous landscapes by him can be viewed at: Paul Cézanne: Mont Sainte-Victoire (c.1902-06):

<http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/view1zoom.asp?dep=11&full=1&mark=1&item=1994%2E420>, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fifth Avenue at 82 Street, New York, NY 10028, U.S.A.

³⁵ Franz Marc, 'The "savages" of Germany' in Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, and Klaus Lankheit, *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, New York: Viking Press; Macmillan, 1974, p. 64.

to see more evidence of human life, as in *Das Arme Land Tirol (The Unfortunate Land of Tyrol)* (1913; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)³⁶, as Marc's idealised animal kingdom begins to give way to reality. *Tierschicksale (Die Bäume Zeigten ihre Ringe, die Tiere ihre Adern) (Animal Destinies (The Trees Show their Rings, the Animals their Veins))* (1913; Kunstmuseum Basel, Basle) typifies this period.³⁷

This work is also characteristic of the sense of apocalypse and doom which began to taint Marc's work at this time and could be related to his feelings on the impending war. In a 1915 letter to his wife Maria, Marc explains that this change in his art occurred because he began to see the ugliness in animals which he had previously thought only existed in humans. He states that he was no longer able to see the beauty which animals had once represented for him.³⁸ The animal motifs which once conveyed a sense of emotion no longer held their appeal and possibility. The application of paint and the division of the picture plane through the use of lines and geometric shapes now carried the emotional charge previously conveyed by animals. This change may be related to Marc's ideas on the impending war. In apprehension of the First World War, Marc was part of the school of thought that the war would purify and redeem the universe of all that was bad.³⁹ Marc no longer saw animals as separate entities in their own perfect kingdom, as he had once represented them. At the point when Marc began to identify the ugliness in animals, he recognised them as part of the universe which man also inhabited and which was in need of redemption.

In Marc's very final works before the outbreak of the First World War, it is extremely difficult to identify any animals, since non-representational form and abstraction have taken over. One of his final major paintings is *Kämpfende Formen (Fighting Forms)* (1914; Staatsgalerie Moderner Kunst, Munich) which is dominated by two swirling shapes, one red and the other black.

The urge to identify the influence of the impending war is compelling. Levine has identified within the red form on the left the image of an eagle⁴⁰; it is possible to recognise beak-like and claw-like shapes. If this had been Marc's intention, it would seem, therefore, that even when his art appears to be the furthest from his earlier representations, the

³⁶ Franz Marc: The Unfortunate Land of Tyrol (1913):

http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist_work_lg_98_3.html, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1071 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10128, U.S.A.

³⁷ This work is also known as *The Fate of the Animals*. It is analysed at length in: Frederick S. Levine, 'The iconography of Franz Marc's "Fate of the Animals"', *Art Bulletin (U.S.A.)*, vol. 58, no. 2 (June 1976), pp. 269-77. An image of this work can be viewed at: Franz Marc: Fate of the Animals (1913):

http://www.bridgeman.co.uk/search/view_image.asp?button=add&image_id=28456, The Bridgeman Art Library, London Office (Head Office), 17-19 Garway Road, London, W2 4PH, England.

³⁸ Cited from: Edited by Klaus Lankheit and Uwe Steffen, *Briefe aus dem Feld*, Munich: Piper, 1986, p. 65, in Susanna Partsch, *Franz Marc 1880-1916*, Cologne: Taschen, 1991, p. 49.

³⁹ For a further discussion on Marc's views on the First World War and how it was reflected in his work, refer to: Frederick S. Levine, 'The Iconography of Franz Marc's "Fate of the Animals"', *Art Bulletin (U.S.A.)*, vol. 58, no. 2 (June 1976), pp. 269-77.

⁴⁰ Susanna Partsch, *Franz Marc 1880-1916*, Cologne: Taschen, 1991, p. 86.



Source: <http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/marc/>

united by a single style but more so by their shared objective of representing the spiritual and emotional aspect of a subject. In *The Story of Art*, Gombrich attempts to define Expressionism by stating that:

The Expressionists felt so strongly about human suffering, poverty, violence and passion, that they were inclined to think that the insistence on harmony and beauty in art was only born out of a refusal to be honest... It became almost a point of honour with them to avoid anything which smelt of prettiness and polish, and to shock the 'bourgeois' out of his real or imagined complacency.⁴¹

Gombrich's definition is a reflection of many people's understanding of Expressionism. Marc's major early paintings, namely from c.1910 to 1912, do not fit neatly into this description; however his later paintings could indeed be considered in this way. For example, *Fighting Forms* may be viewed as an essay on violence and, furthermore, his more abstract works are not characterised by the "prettiness and polish" of his earlier works. Marc's Expressionism was personal since it reflected and transpired from his own personal beliefs. His identification of the harsh realities of the world, as outlined above by Gombrich, led him to depict what he believed to be purer and more beautiful than man, namely animals. The effect of the impending war on Marc's artistic output may be returned to once again here. Since at the end of his career Marc could no longer recognise the beauty and purity in animals, as he had once been able to, there is the implication that he must have been more aware of "harsh realities". Moreover, his country was on the threshold of war and it seems that he could no longer create an idealised world but had to bow to reality. Although Marc's work begins to fit into Gombrich's description more so during the latter part of his career, it still remains quite individual in relation to the work of other Expressionists. It is fitting, therefore, that Marc was represented in *Expressive!* solely by paintings of animals since this was his personal means of expression. Moreover, the inclusion of works by Marc was important to this exhibition both in terms of his in-

⁴¹ Ernst Hans Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, London: Phaidon, distributed in the U.S.A. by Chronicle Books, San Francisco, 16th edition, 1994, p. 564 and p. 566.

volvement in the Expressionist group Der Blaue Reiter and, perhaps more importantly, of the way in which his work represents a more spiritual side to Expressionism. It is for this reason that his depictions of animals have demanded our attention.