

Lecture Notes

Syllabus 2/07 – KANDINSKY AND DER BLAUE REITER AND EXPRESSIONISM IN AUSTRIA

Reminder: Der Blaue Reiter artists were united by an idea and an intention to express something more profound and deeper using various styles and methods of avant garde abstraction, and not in any way by their styles. Their styles were very diverse.

KANDINSKY AND DER BLAUE REITER:

Kandinsky born in Russia. Quit law practice at age 30 to be fulltime painter. Always interested in art, music, poetry.

Kandinsky was convinced that art had to be concerned with the expression of the spiritual rather than the material.

Kandinsky influenced by **THEOSOPHY**: theology/philosophy. Metaphysical combined with religious practice founded by wacky Russian heiress who synthesized several theologies/philosophies into one. 1880's. (Mondrian, Van Gogh influenced.)

Rudolph Steiner (Waldorf Schools) founded American version of theosophy in 1894. (Georgia O'Keefe, Steiglitz and his circle influenced).

One tenet of Theosophy: **SYNAESTHESIA**: ascribing more than one sense to the perception of art etc, ie. hearing blue, smelling hot. Having sensory experiences in multiple ways.

Kandinsky's Theory of Association comes out of this: He says **color could directly influence the human soul**. No Jung or Freud here. Talking about the inner experience/inner necessity here. "Color is keyboard, eyes are hammers, artist is hand that plays, touching each key one after another to cause vibrations in the soul." His use of COLOR becomes totally independent of representing local things.

- The two things a person experiences when looking at color:
 1. physical effect – superficial leaving no lasting impression on the soul; associating blue with ice
 2. psychological effect – producing a spiritual vibration that goes beyond just warm or cold association but includes further emotional memories perhaps, or feelings, of when we were warm or cold
- Problem: responses aren't "universal" – people respond differently
- More sensitive souls will be more receptive to this theory

Also became interested in "klänge" – sound poems.



- **01_Composition no. 2 – 1910 - Kandinsky**
 - Looking at the world and simplifying forms. Expressionist.
 - Blue Rider on horse gave name to group of artists
 - Lines less descriptive. COLOR TAKING ON LIFE OF ITS OWN.
 - Blue Rider formed in Germany. In Munich Kandinsky brought Russian folk tradition of blue rider based on St. George who rode in and slew dragons and rescue people. Russia would rise up like the blue rider and slay the dragons from Europe and lead Europe into a new enlightened era. Likewise, these artists envisioned themselves as forging a new way of understanding.
 - **Kandinsky became interested in the use of color speaking directly to the human soul**



- **02_Composition VII – 1913 - Kandinsky**
 - Title to do with music, a non-objective form (no object) because he wanted to associate his work with an image-free art form that spoke directly to the senses in modernist fashion
 - Nonobjective art never starts out with a visible object
 - K. didn't set out to depict objects. He was trying to use color and line as expressive vehicles in and of their own right to strike a chord as a universal language. To convey an inner necessary in all people.
 - Color being applied independent of line. The lines are not contours. Important development.



- **03_White Line No 232 – 1920 - Kandinsky**
 - Shows where fluid color abstraction was leading to. He did go back to Moscow during WW I and left the Der Blaue Reiter artists
 - Became influenced by Constructivism's clean lines and began to refine his fluid lines into more discernable shapes
 - We'll return to Kandinsky when we study the Bauhaus, as he made important contributions there in 20's.



- **04_Large Blue Horses – 1911 - Marc**
 - Another German Der Blaue Reiter artist Kandinsky worked with
 - Killed in WW I
 - Der Blaue Reiter artists not linked to ea other by similar styles but by notion they would reach human souls in their own ways and that like music art could speak directly through a universal language.
 - 3 lge. Blue horses. **Marc's Theory of Color:**
 - BLUE = MASCULINE PRINCIPLE
 - YELLOW = FEMININE PRINCIPLE
 - RED = RAW BRUTE MATTER
 - Used color deliberately to express something beyond local surface color
 - Loved animals. He believed a better harmony of man and machine and animal would come to pass. Harmonized painting in the same way:
 - BLUE horses abstract and simple, rounded – masculine, dominant
 - RED rounded hills – landscape echoes rounded curves of horses backs
 - YELLOW – in sky floating above
 - All being harmonized together



- **05_Stables – 1913-14 - Marc**
 - Also influenced by cubism
 - This shows his cubist geometric faceting and breakdown of form
 - Uses cubism to unite and harmonize the rounded forms of the horses w angular lines of the stable
 - **His point:** to evoke the colored harmony of man and beast and the world
 - Died in WW I

Klee's early works, from his years with Der Blaue Reiter:



- **06_Two men meet, each one supposing the other to be of higher rank – 1903 - Klee**
 - Engraving – satirical – silly – poking fun @ society and the way people grovel to each other

- Klee also a member of Der Blaue Reiter. He came from Switzerland to Munich to join forces with others in the group.
- In the style of Renaissance and Medieval prints
- Klee's moved around a lot and as a result his style is eclectic. Sources include primitive, medieval, children, insane etc. DIVERSE SOURCES!



- **07_Hammamet with Mosque – 1914 - Klee**

- Painted after trip to N. Africa where he was struck by different light and colors there
- References to Cezanne in this work
- Already thinking in theoretical terms with regard to how to handle color
- Music very important to him. Played violin every day of his life.
- By the time he moved into the Bauhaus years he had moved away from Der Blaue Reiter and into such things as harmony in music and color



- **08_Great Zoological Garden – 1912 - Macke**

- Shared an interest with Marc in animals and in cubism,
- Macke wasn't quite the flower child Marc was in that Macke didn't believe so strongly in the esoteric theory of harmonizing basic universal principles with man and color
- Investigated cubism not for pictorial truth like Braque and Picasso but rather as a means of harmonizing and updating his view of contemporary society
- Colorful, charming image similar to Marc's "Stable". Has applied Cubism, Cezanne, Fauvism, too



- **09_Harbor Mole – 1913 - Feininger**

- Looks very much like Futurism looking at a harbor scene and fracturing it with a cubist geometric abstraction in a way that lines convey movement and energy of harbor scene.

- Exhibited with Der Blaue Reiter but was a spiritual individual
- Believed abstraction offered a way for viewer to respond in a more direct and spiritual way.

EXPRESSIONISM IN AUSTRIA (Vienna)

NOTE: Term Expressionism here is not a school or stylistic label.

Group of artists who seceded from the Vienna Academy of Art called themselves the Vienna Secession because (they said) the jurors decided not to allow foreign born artists to exhibit. The real reason was that the kind of art that Klimt & others wanted to pursue wasn't being well received by the critics and the academies. So he rebelled against the constraints of expressionism that he wished to pursue.

These next two artists were POST Secessionists, and looked to Klimt as MENTOR.



10_The Self Seer II (Death and the Man) –

1911 - Schiele

- Post Secession. Self Portrait representative of emotional torment. Thick painterly brush work encouraged by Klimt (altho very different from Klimt's own style.)
- Reminiscent of Munch who was always haunted by spectre of death.
- Klimt encouraged Schiele to explore taboo subjects.
- Schiele had difficult childhood.
- Many of his images are erotic, sexually explicit. Arrested for young girls modelling.



• **11_The Kiss – 1907-8 – Klimt**

- Sources not primitive stuff but early Christian and Byzantine art & mosaics where he saw a simplified abstraction. Combined with sensual naturalistic drawing style. Very disturbing to critics.



- **12_The Tempest (Bride of the Wind) – 1914**
 - **Kokoshka**
 - Adolph Loes, Secession architect, became the mentor and savior of Kokoshka.
 - Kokoshka a younger artist, Post Secession.
 - Depicting himself and his muse/lover – Alma Mahler (wife of Gustav Mahler and also lover of Walter Gropius).
 - Felt intense passion for her. Reference to lovers Paolo and Francesca in Medieval literature (Dante) who could not be together and were caught up in wind.
 - Ref to earlier post impressionists (Van Gogh etc.)
 - Animated with vibrant energy