

The 100th Anniversary of Franz Marc's Death

“Unnoticed trails of life”

Blue horses, yellow cows, red deer – Franz Marc became world famous for his Expressionist animal paintings; no other body of work has been so frequently reproduced as that of this Munich artist. One hundred years after his death, biographies and exhibitions afford significant and sometimes previously unknown insights into Marc's life and work.

Feed 1: “How many times have I longed to roam over these heights, plangently playing on the dark violin of nature; oh, why has fate shut me out from this art? But I would die from this longing, most assuredly, just as from the yearning of love had it never been fulfilled; or from painting – did I not myself paint.”

Speaker: Franz Marc in 1906. The twenty-six-year old artist is at home, at the foot of the Bavarian Alps, to paint animals. He is still searching for his own style. Again and again Marc is plagued by his broken off art studies, the few number of his works, financial difficulties. He is searching for a religious affiliation, initially to Christianity and later to Buddhism. His inner conflict, the tendency to melancholy, fear and apprehension – all this is reflected in his life and work.

Feed 2: “And because of this distress Marc sought contact with people. We can see this in his early relationships with women, but with men and colleagues he was also extraordinarily companionable, very “team-oriented”,”

Speaker: as the journalist and Marc expert Brigitte Roßbeck writes. In 1911 Marc meets Vassily Kandinsky. Together they publish the art magazine *Almanach*, “The Blue Rider”. As editors, they organize exhibitions. But, contrary to the usual idea, as Roßbeck emphasizes, The Blue Rider is not an art movement or artists group.

Feed 3: “It is a marketing strategy. Marc is deeply convinced of the importance of establishing modernist art in Germany. He finds it easy to get in touch with people; he makes the rounds of the art galleries, setting up contacts; he is the born networker.”

Speaker: Not everyone is by any means as convinced as Marc is of the significance of the new art forms.

Feed 4: “... but you can't chuck painting merely because you've arrived fifty or a hundred too early on this planet. If only you could – bury your head under the covers for a hundred years and then start all over again ...”

Speaker: muses Marc in 1912. Yet how would cultural critics respond today to one of his most famous pictures, the *Turm der Blauen Pferde* (The Tower of Blue Horses)? In our highly pluralistic era of technical reproduction, the picture presumably would not create a great stir. In its day, however, the brilliant colouring of the painting was a revolution.

Marc shared with Kandinsky the idea of a completely new art, of an abstract art, as much as he did the predilection for the colour blue and for horses, explains the Blue Rider curator, Dr Annegret Hoberg, of the Lenbachhaus in Munich.

Feed 5: “A key picture is the *Blaue Pferd I* (Blue Horse) of 1911, where we see how Kandinsky’s ideas stimulated Marc. Here we can see very clearly how Marc incorporated in his art elements of the innovations of the contemporary avant-garde such as Futurism and the Orphism of Robert Delaunay as well as Kandinsky’s abstraction so as to create his vivid and radiant animal paintings. In 1913 both Marc and Kandinsky were expecting some kind of apocalypse.”

Speaker: The exhibition *Franz Marc – Between Utopia and Apocalypse. The Unfortunate Land of Tirol* at the Franz Marc Museum in Kochel shows that the gloomy atmosphere and broken forms augur the utopia of a new world. Political symbols such as border posts are today relevant again: the relapse into nationalistic positions, borders and the turning away from the idea of a united Europe.

How is it that an unpolitical, nature and peace-loving man such as Marc advocated the First World War, a war against France, the homeland of his mother, where he had discovered the new tendencies in art?

Marc, like many of his contemporaries an admirer of Friedrich Nietzsche, was disgusted with the Wilhelminian Germany of his day, rejected economic compulsions and opportunistic rationality. He welcomed the war not as a patriot, but in the belief in its *cleansing* power, in a turning point. He could not then have had any idea of the spreading global destruction of the environment and animal habitats that was to come. In his concern for these things, Marc can be discovered as a moral authority for today.

In 1914 the First World War breaks out. Many of his artist friends must go into exile. Among them are Marianne von Werefkin, Alexej von Jawlensky and Kandinsky – so-called “foreigners from enemy states”. Marc says good-bye to them in these words:

Feed 6: “Now things have become really serious. Even I shall swap the brush for the gun”.

Speaker: He still works on sketches, precursors of the art of drawing in the new century, which, in his words, express the “longing for the abstract, for the pure line”. More than sketches are not possible amidst the trench warfare. But Marc was no war hero, any more than he was a volunteer or a war enthusiast, as is often believed.

Feed 7: “There are very interesting letters from him to his mother, Sophie Marc, and to the gallery owner Herwarth Walden, which tell much more clearly of the horrors and terrors of the war than those he wrote to Maria. Since his letters from the field to her were partly published as early as the 1920s, we have had an inadequate picture of his life in the trenches. It is very clear that he sought to spare his wife the worst,”

Speaker: says Hoberg. With the sad news of the death of his close friend August Macke, Marc recognizes his “lapse of conscience”. The war was irretrievably destroying the individuality he sought to foster, as he observes in 1914 in a never published obituary of Macke:

Feed 8: “In war we are all equal. But amongst thousands of the brave one bullet hits an *irreplaceable* man [...]. Everyone takes his own path; and where we meet he will always be missing. [...] Of us all, he gave colour the brightest and purest tone, as clear and as radiant as his whole being. [...] The ravenous war has now gained another heroic death, but German art has become one hero poorer.”

Speaker: Marc's desperation grew; he lives through traumatic experiences, sees in a column of soldiers Dante's Inferno. In December 1915 he writes that the war resembles a Hydra. The more heads you cut off, the more grow back, "the war becomes ever bigger rather than smaller". And all this, he bitterly realizes, "for *nothing*". In February 1916 he confronts his own death.

Feed 9: "Today I would greet it very wistfully and bitterly, not out of fear or agitation, but because I still have a half-finished body of work before me, to complete which is my single thought. In my unpainted pictures lies my whole will to life."

Speaker: Torn between hope and resignation. At Verdun on 4 March 1916 Franz Marc is killed, at the age of thirty-six, when a piece of shrapnel fatally hits his head.

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<http://www.randomhouse.de/Autor/Brigitte-Rossbeck/p152721.rhd>

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