

# Blue Rider

## a Tribute to the Life of Wassily Kandinsky

—Edward Sanders  
with Glyphs for Kandinsky

Born in Moscow in 1866  
raised in the South at Odessa  
a major Russian seaport  
near the mouth of the Dniester  
on the Black Sea

His father was a successful tea merchant  
His mother, as he later noted  
was full of energy & drive  
They divorced when he was five

He married his cousin Anja Shemiakina  
in 1892

Trained as a lawyer  
turned to painting just before 30



1896 to Munich to study painting

1901 cofounds exhibition society called *Phalanx*  
which sets up a school  
whereat K teaches painting and drawing

In '02 meets a student in his painting class: Gabriele Münter  
They become close

She was 26 He was 37.

Summer of '02  
Kandinsky brought his class from the Phalanx art school  
on bicycles for a two week painting tour  
at a place called Kochel,  
in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps

Kandinsky would summon his class for critiques  
by tweeting on a police whistle  
in the countryside.

By October both Kandinsky & Munter  
were back in Munich  
where on the 12th  
their first kissing

She was hesitant, at first very hesitant, to  
begin an affair hidden from his wife



Kandinsky shows his work in various places  
Kept connected with the art scene in Russia  
even though ensconced in Germany

Trouble in Painterly Paradise  
Untenable situation of two, then three  
September '04, K separates from his wife, Anja

(divorced from her in the fall of 1911)

1904-1908

Münter and Kandinsky

though together

were constantly moving from place to place

both of them painting

December '04 K and M to Tunis

for several months

then to Italy, returning to Munich in April of '05

May-August '05 in Dresden

November to Brussels beginning an 18 month trip together  
to Rapallo, Italy at Christmas, staying there for months

Then to France, to Sèvres, near Paris, May '06 till June '07  
when Gabriele and Wassily returned to Munich

In Paris K kept his painterly brain focused

on his Russian roots

with themes of Russian fairy tales and folklore

turning up in his work

such as *Riding Couple* an oil which shows a youthful rider  
and a girl on horseback embracing

plus the work, *Colorful Life*, tempera on canvas

with the Kremlin in the upper portion, and below

a vast assortment of Russian humans, including a rider  
on a horse

This was early '07, just a few years from Abstraction

A walking tour of Switzerland in the summer of '07

September '07 till April of '08 in Berlin

Then back to Munich

where they each had their separate apartments

Big pressure on Münter as an unmarried woman accompanying  
Kandinsky She could have been arrested sharing a room

K always Organizing— as in January of '09  
cofounding the group NKVM  
*Neue Künstlervereinigung München*  
*New Artists Society of Munich*  
becomes its president

(In December the initial NKVM exhibition in Munich.)

Murnau era: mid-May 1909  
to early August 1914

Summer of '09 Münter purchased a house in Murnau  
a town on the edge of the Bavarian Alps  
around 70 kilo south of Munich  
often their residence till, alas, WW I burst forth

Kandinsky “had fallen in love”  
to use Münter’s own words  
with the newly built residence  
and “he put a certain amount of pressure on me”  
so that by late summer of '09 Münter used her own money  
to purchase it for them.



During their years as a couple  
“each had a private income,” though “not particularly lavish”

Münter received an income from the estate of her parents  
both of whom were deceased

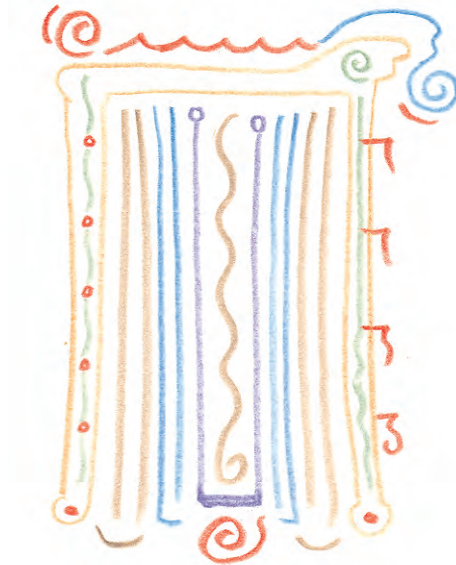
Kandinsky’s funds came from rent on a house in Moscow  
which he owned, plus “irregular” gobs of money from his parents

He dressed like a square  
As with William Burroughs

W.K. wore the clothes of the upper middle class  
—a jacket and tie  
even while painting

“No one looked less like an artist  
than Kandinsky, who resembled a Wall Street broker”  
(Peggy Guggenheim)

The house in Murnau  
had a music room  
featuring a shiny-wooded pump organ  
with a row of push in/pull out  
white round-topped stops  
above the keyboard  
and an oil lamp  
on a small table next to it



1910 finishes *On the Spiritual in Art*  
(*Über das Geistige in der Kunst*)

Kandinsky always in motion agitated  
placing his art in shows  
contacting galleries and museums  
writing about art and theory

The prickly world of the painter  
The world of opinions, put-ups, put-downs  
put-overs and put-ons

October '10 K to Moscow  
He'd not been there since '03  
He mentioned going to church on October 30

December to Odessa  
till just before Christmas

It was the first lengthy separation for K and M  
in five years

Münter complained to him:

“You know, if you hadn’t been cold & often  
not nice to me more or less the whole of this year  
it would undoubtedly not have affected me so deeply,  
but in the end it looked as if you had changed  
toward me....”

(a letter from M in Munich to K in Moscow, 10-30-'10)

1911 early in the year

Fanny Dengler became M & K's housekeeper

She had previously served K and Anja!

Intimations of hank-pank 'tween Dengler and K



January 2, 1911 Kandinsky, Münter, Franz Marc,  
and Alexi von Jawlensky  
went to a concert in Munich of several compositions of  
Arnold Schönberg (the Second String Quartet,  
Three Piano Pieces, et al)

Kandinsky was very very impressed with the experimental music  
so that the next day he painted *Composition III (Concert)*

and two weeks later wrote to Schönberg, setting off a friendship

Schönberg was painting at the time and Kandinsky  
included him in the first exhibition of the Blaue Reiter group

July 4, '11 Kandinsky drew all the seven sketches  
for the album *Klänge* “which were still needed.

Now I'm going to get on  
with the cutting again.”

'11 saw K involved with religious art  
such as the wood cut *Last Judgement* and the painting  
*All Saints I*, plus a painting on glass  
*Angel of the Last Judgement*, and others

(For a number of years K took part in the technique  
known as *Hinterglasbilder*, painting in reverse  
on glass, so that the work  
was seen on the other side of  
a sheet of glass)

August 26, 1911: “my album is nearly finished  
and I want to start printing at the end of August.”

His move toward Abstract Painting  
the summer of '11

He titled his works “impressions”  
“improvisations”  
and “compositions”

often with a good number of sketches and preliminary  
lay-outs  
leading, say, to a specific “composition”

'Tween '11 and '13  
he would often make preliminary watercolor pieces  
(leading to *Improvisations* and other oils)  
in which pieces  
he would gradually drift away from actual objects  
so that in the oils only traces of their original likenesses  
would remain



For months in 1911  
he pondered and studied  
reading himself  
for *Composition IV*

One day he went out for a walk  
His mate Gabriele Münter  
was straightening K's studio  
& mistakenly turned his canvas  
onto its side

He returned  
not at first recognizing the piece  
but then fell to his knees and wept  
announcing it was the most beautiful  
work he'd ever seen.

December 2, '11, even though he'd cofounded the  
artists group NKVM  
he, Münter, Franz Marc, and Alfred Kubin  
depart the group when K's *Composition V*  
was rejected for exhibition

Within a few days K took part in the Blue Rider  
(Blaue Reiter)

The horse  
K's symbol  
of the Blue Rider "period"  
1911-'12 in Munich

December 18, First exhibition of "The Editorial Board of the  
Blue Rider" at Thannhauser's Moderne Galerie, Munich

February 12-April the second exhibition of the  
Blue Rider, Galerie Hans Goltz in Munich

*Der Blaue Reiter* almanac  
edited by W.K. and Franz Marc  
published in Munich in May of '12

(the Circle, later on,  
took the Blue Rider's place)

There was a plan to illustrate the Bible



Klee to illustrate the Psalms  
Kandinsky the Apocalypse  
Marc Genesis  
Rubin the Book of Daniel  
this was around 1912

'12 and onward made some fairly good money  
from his paintings

(In '13 he sold his Moscow property and then  
built a larger house, with several apartments. He lost  
his property after the Rev of '17)

K wrote prose poems and regular poems

*Klänge* a deluxe edition poems & woodcuts  
published in Munich in '13

300 copies numbered, signed by K  
and was, in K's words, "quickly sold out."

Also in '13 a book of memoirs, *Reminiscences*

Summer of '13 Münter very busy  
working on Kandinsky's manuscript  
(while he was in Moscow)  
(Perhaps it was "Painting as Pure Art" which  
was published in *Der Sturm* in September, Berlin)

Münter eager always to get Married, as in her letters  
to K August 23 & 25, 1913:

"I should like once again to remind you please to obtain  
the necessary papers for the marriage....  
If we can't have a room together there and I  
have to travel as a Miss and worry about the police because  
of the registration, then in the end I'd rather do without....  
I just want to be together with you."



August of '14, outbreak of WW I  
Kandinsky and Münter splits from Munich  
for Switzerland, till November

World War I propelled him back to Russia  
beginning in December (without Münter)  
He can't return to Germany

December rents an apartment at 1 Dolgii St in Moscow  
where he dwells for 7 years, till 12-'21

(Doesn't paint much '15 till '19)

There were no oil paintings listed by K in 1915

He kept "hand-lists" of his works  
There were 536 oils, for instance, between '16  
and his passing in '44

Doesn't see Münter till they meet in Stockholm  
for Christmas '15

Breaks up with her  
but without telling her

She was bitter, very bitter about it  
Apparently he promised to get back with her—  
then burned her She was 37  
Broken to be dumped  
after 14 seething years

March of '16, after three months in Stockholm  
Kandinsky heads back to Moscow

A break with the Past:  
He never went again to Murnau  
nor to Munich  
He left behind almost all of his pre-war art  
under the control of Gabriele Muntter



March 17 Kandinsky & others  
are exhibited at the Galerie Dada in Zürich

Meets in September the same year  
the youthful Nina von Andreevskaja  
daughter of a military officer in the Czarist army  
(there's debate apparently on her origins and family history)

He's 50 She's around 23

They are married on February 11 of '17  
She is pregnant  
They are together for the rest of his life

Like, really together. She later wrote that  
they were never apart even for a day

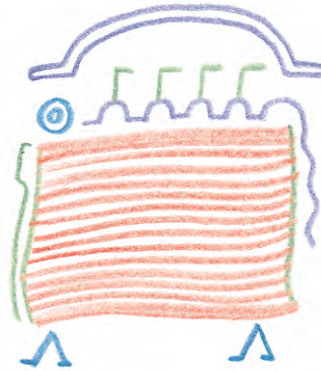
September birth of son, Volodia

October Revolution 1917  
Ten Days that Shook the World

During the early years of the Rev  
Kandinsky was so busy

helping the cultural Rev  
he didn't paint that much

History seems to be silent on Kandinsky's  
stance on the battle 'tween the Reds and the Whites  
which the forces of Red won  
by early '21



The Revolution dented his personal finances.

Writing later about the Rev: "...I also experienced considerable financial shocks. Just before the revolution I was able to provide for myself financially for the rest of my life—I was not rich, but had enough in order to work without worrying, without having to think of making money. This condition lasted only a few months..."

December '21 K and his wife leave Russia  
live in a furnished room in Berlin

June, Kandinsky went to the Bauhaus in Weimar 1922  
invited by Walter Gropius

He was offered a professorship  
He first taught the "Murals" workshop.

The Bauhaus, founded in 1919 urged all the Arts  
to help society move in a more egalitarian direction  
The vehement right wing hated that.

### **Schoenberg Turns Down Kandinsky** Spring of 1923

Back in early '11 Kandinsky had begun a friendship  
with Arnold Schönberg after hearing in Munich

a concert of his works

The friendship had been interrupted for years  
by the Great War & Kandinsky's 7 years in Russia

but now, in early 1923 Kandinsky reached out to the composer  
suggesting that Schönberg become the director  
of the Weimar Musikhochschule. The composer  
replied that a year before he would have accepted  
but that he had heard that Kandinsky had uttered  
anti-Semitic remarks, "I have heard that even a Kandinsky  
sees only evil in the action of Jews and in their evil actions  
only the Jewishness."

It is suspected that Alma Gropius was the one who had  
informed Schönberg about K's remarks. K responded right away,  
He assured Schönberg he'd had a Jewish friend for 40 years,  
And, in text that inflames after almost a hundred years, wrote  
"I reject you as a Jew, but nevertheless  
I write you a good letter and assure you I would be so glad  
to have you here in order to work *together*."

The vom of anti-Jewishness was in full vom. The previous  
summer Schönberg had had to leave a resort near Salsburg  
when its owners learned he was Jewish.

So, the Composer cut off contact with the Painter  
the rest of his life.

Pressured by the ever-rising anti-Semitism  
the Bauhaus moved to Dessau in '25  
where Paul Klee and K shared a double house  
They were close  
and had influences on each other's work.

"Through their lawyers, Kandinsky and Münter conducted a  
protracted battle— which lasted until 1926— over the  
pictures and personal belongings that  
Kandinsky had left behind.... In the end some pictures  
were returned to Kandinsky." But many of them  
were kept, ultimately, by Münter at her house in Murnau  
(and in 1957, in her old age, she gave the trove  
to the Städtliche Galerie im Lenbachhaus in Munich)  
[See pp. 155-156, *Wassily Kandinsky and Gabriele Münter—  
Letters and Reminiscences 1902-1914*, Prestel Verlag, 1994]

1926 his 60th Birthday Exhibition  
opening in Braunschweig, then traveling to Dresden  
Berlin, Dessau and other cities around Europe

Also in '26 his book *Point and Line to Plane— A Contribution  
to the Analysis of the Pictorial Elements*  
(*Punkt und Linie zu Fläche: Beitrag zur Analyse  
der malerischen Elemente*)

1927 until 1933 Kandinsky taught the popular  
free painting class.

March 1928 Wassily and Nina Kandinsky  
became German citizens

Summer of '31 on a cruise ship he and Nina visit  
Egypt, Palestine, Turkey, Greece & Italy

Meanwhile during the rise of the Nazis  
there were attacks on the Bauhaus and on Kandinsky

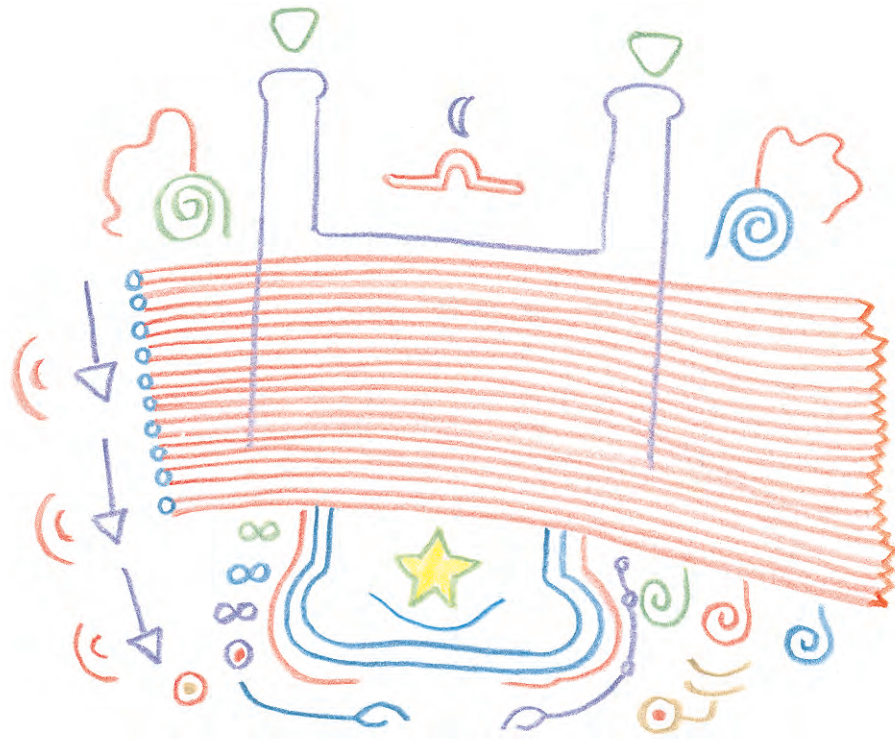
August 22, 1932 the National Socialist Party  
controlling the the city government of Dessau  
decrees the ending of the Bauhaus  
starting October 1

The Bauhaus moves to the outskirts of Berlin  
clinging clinging

July of '33 Bauhaus closes for good

K moves to Paris and by the close of '33  
rents an apartment in a Parisian 'burb, Neuilly-sur-Seine  
on the sixth floor— a new building  
recommended by Marcel Duchamp

There he paints unto his Finality



In July of '37  
three of his "Compositions" sequence were put on display  
as part of the Degenerate Art exhibition in Munich  
then destroyed by the Nazis

(with the result that the first three *Compositions*  
only exist thereafter in photos taken by  
Gabriele Münter)

K's art removed from museums

War declared 'tween France and Germany September 3, 1939  
September 27, K shipped 65 canvases  
for safe storage with Emile Redon in Aveyron  
in the south of France.

Kandinsky kept on painting  
in his 7th floor apartment by the Seine  
even with nearby bombardments

In May of '41 Varian Fry secures  
a trip from Marseilles to New York  
for Wassily and Nina  
but they decide to stay on in France

What is the Glory of Kandinsky?

That he cleaved to Creativity?  
Well, millions also cleaved—

That he kept on painting  
through It all  
unto Finality?

The proof lies in his Shapes—  
Lines, Shapes, Colors, Patterns—  
dipped in the suffusement of the Numinal

And ahh, his beautiful arrays of Colors!  
(was there ever a more riveting yellow  
than the yellow of '38's *Yellow Painting*?)



That he set up a System  
& kept it Going  
Preserving his Art  
jotting work-by-work Handlists  
in the fist of revolution  
& two wars

Staying calm enough to paint  
He worked and worked & created & created  
all the way to his End—  
blown out of Russia after the Revolution around '21  
blown out of Germany after the Nazis '33-'34



then in an apartment outside Paris through  
much of the war— create create create

For instance when it was difficult  
to keep acquiring canvas around '42  
he switched to paper and cardboard  
create create create  
all the way to the Final “All out! All out!”

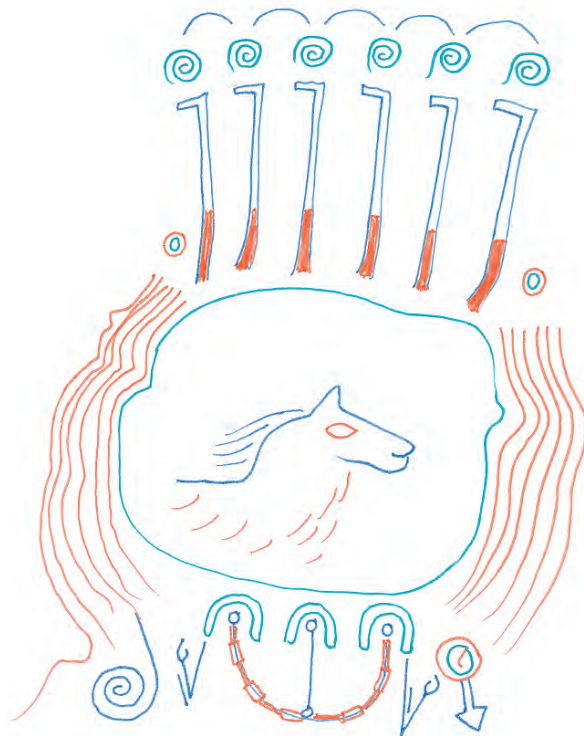
March of '44 the final painting listed in Kandinsky's  
*Handlist* titled *Tempered Elan*

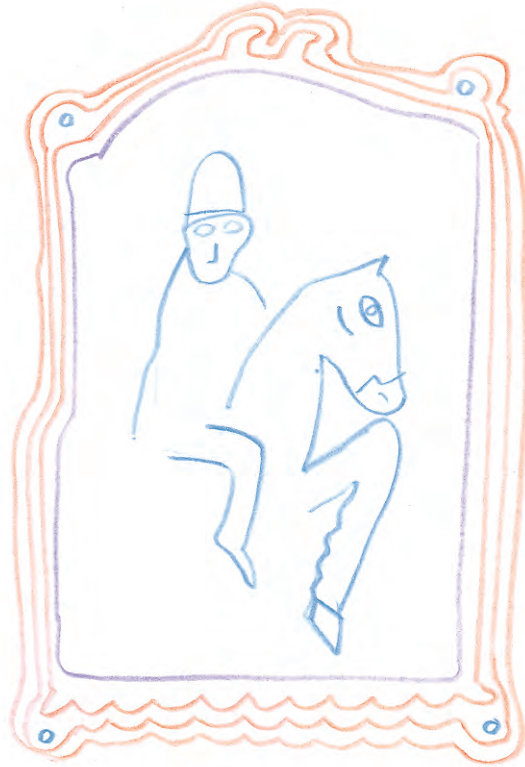
He lived to see the Liberation of Paris  
August 19-25 of '44!

December 13 Finality in Neuilly from a  
“sclerosis in cerebellum” A stroke. He was 78

His wake was held in his studio  
with his final painting *Reciprocal Accord*  
and the 1935 work, *Movement 1*  
on easels set up near his body  
He was buried (as later was Nina)  
in the new cemetery in Neuilly-sur-Seine

The Blue Rider reaches the other side





The Other Side