

October 2017

**Douglas Cooper:
A Cubist Love
Story**

Clara Marcellán

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***The Death
of Hyacinthus*
by Giambattista
Tiepolo**

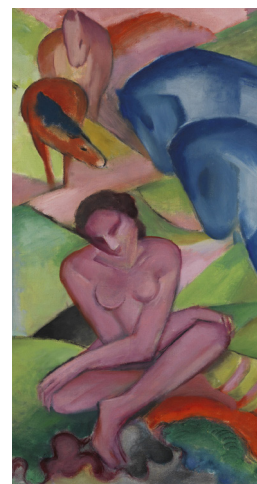
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Douglas Cooper: A Cubist Love Story

Clara Marcellán

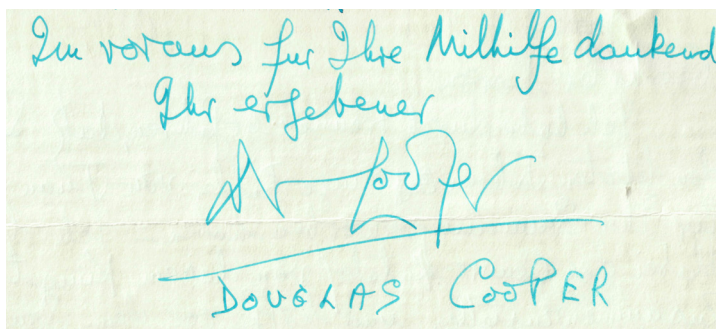


Picasso
Man with a Clarinet
(1911-12)

[\[+ info\]](#)

fig. 1

Closing of Douglas Cooper's letter to Baron Thyssen dated 18 March 1977



1

Letter from Douglas Cooper to Baron Thyssen-Bornemisza, 18 March 1977, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza Archives.

2

Cooper defined and exhibited his idea of "true" Cubism in the show *The Essential Cubism 1907–1920* at the Tate Gallery, London, in 1983, which he co-curated with Gary Tinterow. The Thyssen Collection lent two works for the occasion: Picasso's *Head of a Man* (1913) and Braque's *Woman with a Mandolin* (1910).

3

John Richardson. *The Sorcerer's Apprentice: Picasso, Provence and Douglas Cooper*. London: Pimlico, 2001, p. 75.

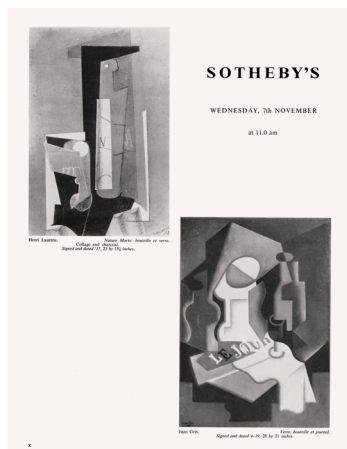
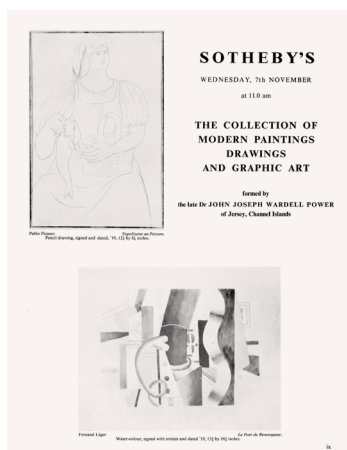
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I would like to thank Carmen Giménez, Curator of Twentieth-Century Art at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, for generously helping me to understand the context of Douglas Cooper's relationship with Baron Thyssen and Spain in an email interview on 29 March 2017.

"My dear Baron! My friends tell me that in recent years you have acquired some paintings by Juan Gris for your collection."¹ So begins the letter that Douglas Cooper (1911–1984) penned to H. H. Thyssen on 18 March 1977, energetically handwritten in the greenish-blue ink that everyone in the art world associated with him [fig. 1]. A British art historian and collector, Cooper was considered one of the foremost authorities on "true" Cubism, which encompassed the works produced by Picasso, Braque, Gris and Léger between 1907 and 1921.² Through the exhibitions he curated, his monographs and his reviews published in *The Burlington Magazine*, a leading monthly art journal (in which he also owned stock), Cooper became the arbiter of Cubist taste in his time and fuelled countless controversies in the art world. But according to John Richardson, Cooper's partner from 1949 to 1961 and Picasso's most distinguished biographer, Cooper deserves to be remembered by his letters.³ Our museum archives contain three of these epistles which he wrote daily, to the delight of some and the terror of others. This article uses them as a springboard for exploring his relationship with the baron, the Thyssen Collection and Spain, as well as Cooper himself who, as Carmen Giménez recalls from her dealings with both men as director of the National Exhibition Centre from 1984 to 1989, "was anything but ordinary".⁴

fig. 3

Advertisement for the auction of John Joseph Wardell Power's art collection organised by Sotheby's. *Bottle and Fruit Dish* (1919) by Juan Gris, now in the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, is pictured at the bottom right



5

Douglas Cooper with Margaret Potter. *Juan Gris: catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint*. Paris: Berggruen, 1977.

The Expert on Juan Gris

In 1977 Cooper was putting the finishing touches on the most ambitious publishing project of his career, the catalogue raisonné of Juan Gris's paintings.⁵ The aforementioned letter to the baron continued: "It is possible, as I've been working on this for the past 40 years, that I have already seen your paintings in other hands and photographed them, but I would like to make sure that I don't end up omitting any authentic painting." Two weeks after this request was made, Sándor Berkes, curator of the Thyssen Collection in Lugano, sent him the histories and photographs of Gris's works.

One of them, *Bottle and Fruit Dish* [fig. 2], now on display in Room 41 at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, had not been exhibited or mentioned in any publications between 1919 and 1962; since Juan Gris painted and showed this work at Galerie L'Effort Moderne, it had effectively been missing until it reappeared on the art market 43 years later. The work was purchased in 1919 by Léonce Rosenberg, Gris's art dealer and owner of the aforesaid gallery, and later entered the collection of John Wardell Power, an Australian doctor turned painter and also represented by Rosenberg. Power divided his time between Paris, London, Bournemouth and Brussels from 1920 to 1938, the year he moved to Jersey in the Channel Islands for health reasons. His art collection went with him, and after the war began and the island was occupied by German forces in 1940, he decided to pack it up and hide it in the basement of a friend's house in Saint Helier, the capital of Jersey. Power died in 1943, and the artworks remained in storage until his widow's death in 1961. This hitherto unknown piece of information explains the silence surrounding the work during that period. In her last will and testament, Power's widow left instructions that the paintings should be sold at auction and the proceeds donated to fight cancer, the disease that had killed her husband. The reappearance of these works on the market was advertised in the Australian and British press, and Juan Gris's *Bottle and Fruit Dish* became one of the highlights of the auction at Sotheby's London [fig. 3].

After studying the history of *Bottle and Fruit Dish*, Cooper replied to Berkes in a letter that left no doubt as to his vehemence and authority, openly challenging the title assigned to the work in the baron's collection, *Le Journal*. Juan Antonio Gaya Nuño had given it this title in a 1974

monograph on Juan Gris published in Spanish, French, English and German. The *Juan Gris* exhibition at l'Orangerie des Tuileries, curated by Jean Leymarie, had also presented the canvas as *Le Journal*. Cooper's judgment of both was scathing:

In Léonce Rosenberg's records—in other words, in 1919—his work was entered as *Bouteille et Comptoir*. I stand by this title. Who came up with the title *Le Journal*? That idiot Gaya Nuño knows and understands nothing of Gris, and he's never even asked me for information. The same goes for Leymarie and the Paris exhibition. These two publications are not competent sources in the literature on Gris, only my catalogue. The source is Léonce Rosenberg, i.e. Gris himself.⁶

Oddly enough, the inventory of Galerie L'Effort Moderne, now in a private collection but transcribed in a publication devoted to the correspondence between Gris and Rosenberg,⁷ lists this work as *Nature morte*, using neither of the two previous options. In any case, Cooper had privileged access to records and other sources of information that lend substance to his assertions. Today, the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza continues to use the title that Cooper gave it in his catalogue raisonné of the artist's paintings.

This letter to Berkes contained one more curious thing. Before signing off, Cooper asked him to send a catalogue of the exhibition held in Kobe in 1976. He was probably referring to *The Origin of the 20th Century in the Collection Thyssen-Bornemisza*, which travelled to four Japanese cities that year. The show included a work by Juan Gris, *The Table in Front of the Window* (1921) [fig. 4], for which Berkes supplied the exhibition and publishing history, as it is part of the catalogue raisonné as Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection. The painting was sold at auction in 1989 and no longer belongs to the Thyssen. The catalogue, which we know was sent thanks to a note on the photocopy of Cooper's letter in our archives that reads "Katalog geschick", contained works by Picasso and Léger which would have interested the historian. In an odd twist of fate, when he received the book Cooper encountered a work by Klee, *Still Life with Dice*, which had actually been in his possession from 1945 to 1957 and now hangs in the galleries of the Museo Thyssen.⁸

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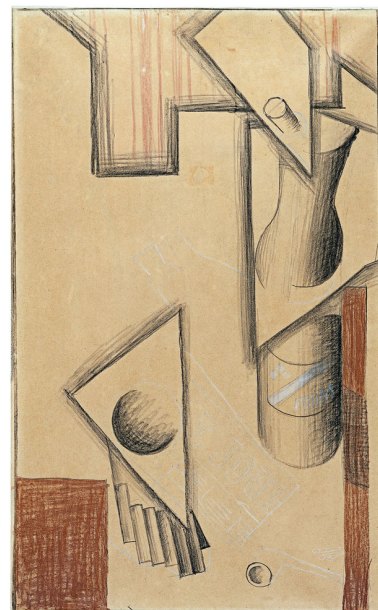
Letter from Douglas Cooper to Sándor Berkes, 12 April 1977, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza Archives.

7

Christian Derouet (ed.): *Juan Gris. Correspondances avec Léonce Rosenberg: 1915-1927*. Paris: Editions Centre Georges Pompidou, 1999, pp. 117-39.

8

Cooper assembled an important collection of Klee's works, in part thanks to his relationship with the artist's widow. He met her in Switzerland at the end of World War II while on a mission for the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives program, created by the Allies to retrieve and protect artworks looted by the Nazis.



figs. 2, 4 and 5
**Bottle and Fruit Dish (1919),
 The Table in Front of the Window
 (1921) and Still Life (1913)**
 by Juan Gris

Cooper knew of another recent acquisition made by the baron, which he omitted from his catalogue raisonné because it was not a painting: *Still Life* (1913) [fig. 5], a drawing made with graphite and coloured pencils on silk paper. The work had belonged to the aforementioned John Richardson, who bought it from Helena Rubinstein, the successful cosmetics entrepreneur, during the years when he and Cooper lived together at Château de Castille. The historian purchased this extravagant castle in Provence after World War II, thinking it would be the perfect place to properly hang the Picassos, Légers, Braques, Grises and Klees he had been acquiring since the early 1930s with the money inherited from his family. The castle, which Richardson presented in an article entitled “Au Château des Cubistes” for *L’Oeil* journal,⁹ illustrated with photographs by Robert Doisneau [fig. 6], became a kind of museum and mecca for artists, collectors and scholars of Cubism. When he and Cooper separated in 1961, Richardson left the castle and took only one work with him, this *Still Life*.

⁹

John Richardson. “Au Château des Cubistes”. In *L’Oeil*, 1955, no. 4, pp. 19-25.

Fifteen years later, Baron Thyssen purchased the drawing from the gallerist Alain Tarica, who also provided a certificate

fig. 6

Douglas Cooper in the sitting room at Château de Castille. Behind him, three works by Picasso: *Compotier*, *bouteille et guitare* (1923), a drawing and a pastel



of authenticity issued by Cooper and Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler on 22 July 1976,¹⁰ now in the archives of the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza. On the certificate Cooper added, "I've known this drawing since 1936", probably referring to the year in which he began working on the catalogue raisonné of Gris's oeuvre. In the early days of the project Cooper enlisted the aid of Léonce Rosenberg, who wrote him a long letter dated 6 August 1936 (now at the Getty Research Institute) describing the vicissitudes of the artist's output: most of his works had passed through Kahnweiler's hands, who represented Gris from 1910 to 1914, or through Rosenberg's gallery, his agent from 1914 to 1920. As a German citizen, during World War I Kahnweiler was forced to leave Paris and his assets were confiscated and sold off between 1921 and 1923. Rosenberg was brought in as an expert adviser for the auctions, and as a result he became thoroughly acquainted with Gris's work. The drawing currently in the Museo Thyssen probably came from Kahnweiler's gallery and shared the same fate as the rest of his confiscated property, as the aforementioned certificate of authenticity states that it was auctioned at the Hôtel Drouot on 7 May 1923 (lot no. 67) along with seven other works on paper.

10

Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler (1884-1979) was a man ahead of his time who began representing Cubist painters and collecting their works as early as 1907. Douglas Cooper saw his vision of Cubism as an example to follow.

Picasso and Cooper

fig. 7

Picasso***Harlequin with a Mirror*, 1923****Oil on canvas, 100 × 81 cm****Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza,****Madrid, inv. 709 (1979.87)**[\[+ info\]](#)**11**

Letter from Baron H. H. Thyssen-Bornemisza to Douglas Cooper, 29 April 1980, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza Archives.

12

Letter from Douglas Cooper to Baron H. H. Thyssen-Bornemisza, 5 May 1980, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza Archives. Although the baron made his request in English, Cooper gave his assessment in impeccable German. His fluency in this language and in French made it easier for him to mix with gallerists, collectors and artists in France from the early 1930s, when he bought his first works by Picasso, Braque, Gris and Léger.

13

Mr. and Mrs. Charles Shipman Payson of New York, who owned the work from 1961 until at least 1967.

14

Heinz Berggruen (1914-2007), a German gallerist and collector, published the Juan Gris catalogue raisonné and worked with Cooper on numerous exhibitions and catalogues. The *Harlequin with a Mirror* now in the Museo Thyssen had been part of his collection in the 1970s.

15

Cooper had studied this facet of the artist in his book *Picasso et le Théâtre*, a 1967 luxury edition which the baron had in his library at Villa Favorita.

“I hear that you like my new acquisition Picasso 1923 ‘Arlequin’, very much and I would appreciate it if you could write to me your opinion about it.”¹¹ On 29 April 1980, Baron H. H. Thyssen-Bornemisza appealed to Cooper’s passion for Picasso, fishing for a comment to place the final seal of approval on his recent purchase.

Cooper’s reply to the baron’s request is a letter that exudes erudition, delight and a very intimate understanding of the artwork in question.¹² In fact, he writes of *Harlequin with a Mirror* as if it were an old friend: “Our acquaintance goes back some years, to when it was with Payson¹³ first and later with Berggruen”.¹⁴ He goes on to explain his interest in Picasso’s relationship with the theatre,¹⁵ and situated this harlequin in the context of the artist’s second series of harlequins and Pierrots. Cooper imagines that the figure is backstage, in the midst of a wardrobe change. Beyond the traditional representation of the *Commedia dell’arte* character, he suggests that here Picasso was actually showing the human being, the actor who plays the role of harlequin, vainly admiring his own reflection. He then explains that Picasso painted from personal experience and, knowing that he lived among theatre people from 1917 to 1924, says that the work was probably based on the artist’s own memories.



fig. 8

The library at Château de Castille with Picasso's *Man with a Clarinet* (1911-12) in the centre of the wall

16

Simon de Pury. "Recently Acquired Twentieth-Century Paintings". In *Apollo*. London, July 1983, vol. 118, no. 257, p. 79.

17

Simon de Pury. "Acquis par Thyssen". In *Connaissance des Arts*. Paris, October 1983, no. 380, p. 68.

18

Richardson 2001, *op. cit.* note 3, pp. 131-32.

19

John Richardson. "Douglas Cooper (1911-1984)". In *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 127, no. 985, April 1985, pp. 230-32.

"Have I given you what you were looking for?" Cooper inquired of the baron before concluding his missive.

In 1982, Heinrich Thyssen acquired a new Picasso, adding to the nine already in his possession. This work was *Man with a Clarinet* (1911-12), which had belonged to Cooper himself from 1937 to at least 1977. The baron's latest acquisitions were analysed in articles published by Simon de Pury, then curator of the Thyssen Collection, in which he specifically drew attention to that aspect of its provenance with phrases such as, "This work formerly was in the possession of Douglas Cooper, a leading authority on Cubism"¹⁶ or "It is a painting that had belonged to Douglas Cooper, the great expert on Cubism and friend of Picasso".¹⁷ Not only had he owned the work but, as John Richardson recalls, it was once the pride of his collection.¹⁸ Thanks to the article and photo spread on Château de Castille, Cooper's aforementioned residence, we know that *Man with a Clarinet* was prominently displayed in the library [fig. 8], the indefatigable historian's workspace. In 1974, following the theft of approximately twenty-five of his Picassos, Cooper decided to leave the castle and move into an apartment in Monte Carlo. At that point, finding himself pressed for space, Cooper decided to sell some of the larger works, one of which was Picasso's *Man with a Clarinet*.¹⁹ In 1982 the baron bought it from gallerist Daniel Malingue, thus acquiring one of the most fundamental pieces in the Thyssen's collection of Cubist works.

Cooper and Spain

Cooper worked with Braque, Léger and Picasso for many years as a critic, dealer, collector, patron and historian, but they were also united by bonds of friendship. In Picasso's case, he even had a hand in bringing the artist's work nearer to Spain. In 1959 Cooper contacted Fernando Chueca Goitia, director of the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo in Madrid at the time, to request the loan of *Woman in Blue* (1901) for an exhibition in Marseille, acting on Picasso's wishes. It was the Spanish museum's only work by Picasso, so to compensate for its temporary absence Cooper made arrangements to bring another piece by the artist, *Spring*, from the Kahnweiler Collection to Madrid for the duration of the Marseille show. Chueca travelled to the French city to meet with Cooper and Picasso, who in the course of their visit shrugged off the interest in exhibiting his latest creations in Spain with a careless "Oh, never fear! One of these days I'll show up in Spain with a lorry full of my paintings and I'll leave them there for you all to do as you please: keep them or toss them".²⁰ More practical conversations ensued with Cooper and Kahnweiler, who began planning an exhibition of his prints that finally opened in 1961 and was a huge success.²¹

In 1972 the national daily *ABC* announced an upcoming Juan Gris show at the new home of the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, naming Douglas Cooper, "his most important collector", as the person in charge of its organisation. Yet the exhibition never materialised. Gris's first solo show in Spain was ultimately held at Galería Theo, run by Elvira González, in 1977. That same year, a work by Juan Gris entered the state collections for the first time when *Guitar in Front of the Sea* (1925) was purchased for the Museo Español de Arte Contemporáneo. Another was added in 1979 when Cooper donated *Portrait of Madame Josette Gris* (1916) to the Museo del Prado, a carefully calculated move made in collusion with his friend Xavier de Salas, director of the Prado until 1978. In his own words, he was paving the way for *Guernica* to return to Spain and doing his best to mitigate the remarkable dearth of Cubist art in Spanish public collections. Like Picasso, Cooper seemed to have waited until the political timing was right, and for him that moment arrived when Javier Tusell, with the Union of the Democratic Centre party, was appointed Minister of Culture. Cooper was rewarded for his efforts in 1980 when he became the first foreigner appointed to the Museo del Prado's board of trustees, a body chaired by his friend Xavier de Salas from that year until his death in 1982. Yet his

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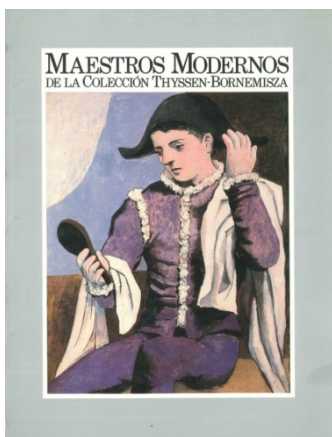
Julio Trenas. "Anécdota de una exposición". In *ABC*, Seville, 11 February 1961, p. 13.

21

Picasso, Museo Nacional de Arte Contemporáneo, 27 January–13 March 1961. That show, which comprised 177 graphic works, was the only monographic exhibition of Picasso's art ever held at an official Spanish institution in his lifetime.

fig. 9

Cover of the modern masters exhibition catalogue, *Maestros modernos de la Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza*, from 1986

**22**

Interview with Douglas Cooper by Juan Manuel Bonet, published in *El País*, 16 October 1979.

23

Juan Gris, *Violin and Guitar* (1913); Pablo Picasso, *Dead Birds* (1912); the palette used to paint *Les Déjeuners* (*The Luncheons*); and the book that Cooper wrote on Picasso's *Les Déjeuners* (1962) series with an original engraving and dedication by the artist.

24

Carmen Giménez was also able to meet with Douglas Cooper's adopted son, William McCarty, who decided not to support the Juan Gris exhibition in Madrid but was willing to consider selling part of the valuable Cubist collection he had just inherited. Unfortunately, the lack of resources in our country at the time made it impossible.

25

Tomàs Llorens. "Se quedan". In *El País*, 19 June 1993.

26

Tomàs Llorens in a conversation held on 3 April 2017.

involvement in the campaign to achieve recognition for Spain's Cubist masters went even further. He was part of the national committee created to celebrate the centenary of Picasso's birth in Spain, and he began working with Fundación Juan March to plan a major exhibition devoted to Juan Gris, "the only great painter Madrid ever produced",²² something the artist's country still owed him. Cooper lived to see *Guernica* in the Casón del Buen Retiro when it was installed there in 1981, but in April 1984 he died before the Gris show could become a reality.

After Cooper's death, the Prado received a bequest of works by Picasso and Gris,²³ augmenting the hitherto token presence of these painters in state-owned collections. Carmen Giménez, executive adviser to the Minister of Culture, picked up where Cooper had left off with the Juan Gris exhibition project, with Gary Tinterow as curator. After overcoming the legal and bureaucratic difficulties involved in accepting a bequest in Spain made by a British citizen living in Monte Carlo, the works by Juan Gris and Picasso were presented at the Casón del Buen Retiro in the summer of 1986. In the spring of that year, also at the initiative of Carmen Giménez, the modern masters in the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection were exhibited in the Pablo Ruiz Picasso Rooms at the National Library in Madrid. And among them were Picasso's *Man with a Clarinet* and *Harlequin with a Mirror* and Gris's *Bottle with Fruit Dish* [fig. 9].

In 1992 these works returned to Madrid for good. When the Spanish government purchased the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection in 1993, Spain's cultural heritage was enriched by a first-rate representation of this avant-garde movement, whose presence in public collections had barely increased since Cooper's bequest due to the scarcity of available Cubist works or high market prices.²⁴ The director of the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza at the time, Tomàs Llorens, celebrated the acquisition in these terms: "The adoring eyes of art lovers ignite a flaming halo around certain paintings that endures and grows brighter with each passing year. They are the great travellers, those whose names journey from city to city and from one age to the next".²⁵ For him, two works exemplify this condition: Caravaggio's *Saint Catherine* and Picasso's *Man with a Clarinet*, whose history in the Cooper collection he specifically mentioned, and which even today Llorens still considers the most important Cubist painting on display in Madrid.²⁶

The Death of Hyacinthus **by Giambattista Tiepolo**

M^a Eugenia Alonso



Giambattista Tiepolo
***The Death of Hyacinthus*, c. 1752-53**
(detail)



fig. 1

Giambattista Tiepolo
Detail of the fresco *The Apotheosis*
of *Prince-Bishop Greiffenclau*
on the ceiling above the main
staircase, with portraits of
Giambattista Tiepolo and
his son Giandomenico, 1753

Giambattista Tiepolo (Venice, 1696–Madrid, 1770) left his hometown for the first time in 1750 to travel to Würzburg, accompanied by his sons Giandomenico (Venice, 1727–1804) and Lorenzo (Venice, 1736–Madrid, 1776), where he had been commissioned to paint decorative frescoes for the impressive residence of Karl Philipp von Greiffenclau. Appointed Prince-Bishop of Würzburg in 1749, Von Greiffenclau began looking for a painter to decorate his majestic palace, designed by the renowned architect Balthasar Neumann. Focusing his search on Venice, he eventually managed to sign a contract with Tiepolo, who upon arrival was given several rooms in the palace itself.

During their time in Würzburg, Tiepolo and his sons worked tirelessly on the ceiling frescoes in the Imperial Hall (*Kaisersaal*) and over the main staircase (*Treppenhaus*), following the decorative programme that the prince-bishop had forwarded to him in Venice, although the artist had a degree of creative freedom and was allowed to propose any changes he deemed necessary. His extraordinary skill as a fresco painter and amazing talent for creating dramatic scenery is perfectly illustrated by one of the staircase ceiling frescoes, specifically the representation of the European continent, in which he glorified his patron and included portraits of himself and his son Giandomenico in the composition [fig. 1].

Würzburg Residence

fig. 2

Giambattista Tiepolo
***The Death of Hyacinthus*, c. 1752–53**
Oil on canvas, 287 × 232 cm
Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza,
Madrid, inv. 394 (1934.29)

[\[+ info\]](#)



It does not seem that Tiepolo received other fresco commissions during his time in Würzburg, which ended in November 1753, but he did paint canvases for other patrons, one of which was *The Death of Hyacinthus* [fig. 2]. The date assigned to the painting (1752–53) is widely accepted given the existence of preparatory drawings by both Giambattista and his son Giandomenico with sketched motifs that later appeared in this canvas and the frescoes at the prince-bishop's residence.

The Death of Hyacinthus was originally in the collection of Baron Wilhelm Friedrich Schaumburg-Lippe in Bückeburg, a town near Würzburg. It is believed to have remained in this family's possession until 1934, when it appeared in the inventory of the Schloss Rohoncz Collection, forerunner of the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection. In all likelihood, the work was commissioned from Giambattista by Baron Schaumburg-Lippe himself. It is probably an elegiac and autobiographical painting, for Robert Contini tells us that the baron, after a passionate affair with a young Hungarian man, had had a more enduring relationship with a Spanish musician with whom he lived in Venice for a time, and who Wilhelm Friedrich's father referred to in a letter as "your friend Apollo". The Spaniard

Giambattista Tiepolo
The Death of Hyacinthus
(detail)



died in 1751, shortly before the young Baron Schaumburg-Lippe, who was twenty-eight at the time, commissioned the painting from Tiepolo.¹

The work depicts the moment of Hyacinthus's death, tragically ending his love affair with Apollo. The theme was inspired by a passage in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Book X, 162–219), which tells how the young Hyacinthus was mortally wounded by Apollo's discus. The god and his lover Hyacinthus, scantily clad and slick with oil, decided to have a discus throwing contest. Apollo hurled the first with such strength that it flew high into the sky and scattered the clouds. The young Hyacinthus, caught up in the excitement of the game, ran to catch the discus as it fell to earth, but it glanced off the ground and struck him full in the face. The pale youth fell, mortally wounded, and the inconsolable Apollo cradled him in his arms. On the ground beside the young doomed lover, flowers sprang up: white hyacinth, the petals stained red by the blood flowing from his wound.

You are fallen in your prime, defrauded of your youth,
O Hyacinthus!" the god moaned. "I can see in your sad
wound my own guilt, and you are my cause of grief and self-
reproach. My own hand gave you death unmerited—I only can
be charged with your destruction.—What have I done wrong?
Can it be called a fault to play with you? Should loving you
be called a fault? And oh, that I might now give up my life
for you! Or die with you! [...] The lyre struck by my hand,
and my true songs will always celebrate you. [...] A new flower
you shall arise, with markings on your petals, close imitation
of my constant moans."²

Giambattista depicted the Theban youth after he had been struck down, lying in a rather languid yet unnatural position for a dying man, and, faithful to the literary source, painted little flowers in the foreground.

In another later version of this tale, set down by Nonnus of Panopolis in his *Dionysiaca*,³ the death of Hyacinthus was caused not by Apollo but by Zephyrus, god of the gentle west wind. Zephyrus became enamoured of the young man's beauty and, jealous that Hyacinthus preferred Apollo's company, blew the discus off course and dealt him the fatal blow.⁴

1

Roberto Contini. *The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection: Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Italian Painting*. London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2002, p. 221.

2

Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Brookes More, ed. Boston: Cornhill Publishing Co., 1922. Retrieved <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:latinLit:phi0959.phi006.perseus-eng1:10.143-10.219>

3

A Greek epic poem composed in hexameter by the Egyptian poet Nonnus of Panopolis, probably between AD 450.

4

Gertrude Borghero. *Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection: Catalogue Raisonné of the Exhibited Works of Art*. Lugano, Collection Thyssen-Bornemisza-Milan: Edizione Electa, 1986, p. 309.

fig. 3

Pallacorda racket, 1700–99
Leather and wood, 41 × 71 cm
Procuratie Nuove, Museo Correr,
Venice, inv. 58



Tiepolo portrayed this very scene, but certain details do not match the accounts in the aforementioned sources. The sun god's discus has been replaced by two balls and a tennis racket, whose placement beside the hyacinth in the foreground is deliberately ironic. The backdrop of the tragic event is completed by a partially visible net in what might be the tennis court, situated behind the group of figures observing the central scene. A third tennis ball lying in the foreground, in the corner opposite Hyacinthus, may be the one that struck his reddened cheek. These details suggest that Giambattista may have found inspiration in a rather satirical Italian translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* by Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara (Venice, 1561). During the Renaissance, it was quite common for translations of classical texts to replace certain details of mythological scenes with contemporary elements in an attempt to modernise or update the story's setting. According to Cees de Bondt, the translator may have seen the game of *pallacorda* played at the court of his patron, Alessandro Farnese, who ordered two courts built to practise this sport, one of them at his estate of Villa Caprarola.⁵

As Bondt notes, Tiepolo apparently followed Anguillara's version and substituted a tennis match for the discus-throwing contest. The painter must have been well acquainted with this translator's rendering of the *Metamorphoses*, which had enjoyed great success in its day and remained quite popular throughout the 17th century, while the popularity of tennis endured into the 18th century. For proof we need look no further than the client who commissioned the painting: Prince Wilhelm Friedrich Schaumberg-Lippe himself was a dedicated tennis player.⁶ In his commentary on this painting for the exhibition catalogue of *Giambattista Tiepolo 1696–1770* held at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, Keith Christiansen writes,

This new sport was popular among Renaissance nobility, enjoying a special vogue in England during the reigns of Henry VIII (1509–1547), himself a very good player, and his daughter Elizabeth I (1558–1603). [...] Anguillara's *Metamorphoses* was contemporary with Elizabeth's rule and was first published in Venice, where it saw further printings during the 17th century, one of which Tiepolo must have had in hand.⁷

5

Gabriele Bucchi. "Meraviglioso diletto". *La tradizione poetica del Cinquecento e le Metamorfosi d'Ovidio di Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara*. Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2011, p. 202.

6

Cees de Bondt. "Tiepolo's *The Death of Hyacinth* and the image of the game of tennis in art (1500-1800)". In *Studi Veneziani*, vol. 47, 2004. Pisa and Rome: Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali MMIV, pp. 381-83.

7

Keith Christiansen. *Giambattista Tiepolo, 1696-1770* [exh. cat.]. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996, p. 171.

Drawings

fig. 4

Giambattista and Giandomenico Tiepolo
Two putti, 1750/1752–53
 Red and white chalk on blue paper, 190 × 227 mm
 Staatsgalerie, Graphische Sammlung, Stuttgart,
 inv. C 1475



fig. 5

Giandomenico Tiepolo
*Dying Hyacinthus and details for the Würzburg
 Residence frescoes*, 1752–53
 Red and white chalk on blue paper, 275 × 417 mm
 Staatsgalerie, Graphische Sammlung, Stuttgart,
 inv. C 1471

fig. 6

Giandomenico Tiepolo
 Details of *The Death of Hyacinthus*, 1726?–1804
 Red chalk, heightened with white chalk,
 on blue paper, 235 × 394 mm
 The Morgan Library & Museum, New York.
 Gift of Lore Heinemann, in memory of her
 husband, Dr. Rudolf J. Heinemann, inv. 1997.31



The main scene in the foreground presents the god Apollo as a young athlete with a laurel wreath crowning his golden curls, whose gesticulating body eloquently conveys his inconsolable grief over the loss of the lover at his feet, struck down by his own hand. Apollo had neglected his divine duties to spend all of his time with Hyacinthus, and Giambattista makes this clear by showing two of his attributes, the lyre and the quiver full of arrows, carelessly tossed aside in the foreground. A small cupid has rushed to rest his hand on the god's leg. The figure of this putto is sketched in a study on paper held at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart [fig. 4] which Giambattista later transferred unaltered to the canvas. The same museum owns two other drawings related to this painting, all drawn in red chalk. One depicts the tennis racket, while the other, sketched by his son Giandomenico, shows the nearly full-length figure of Hyacinthus lying on the cloak, exactly as it appears in the painting [fig. 5].

Another related sketch made by Giandomenico using the same medium, now at the Morgan Library in New York, shows details of the painting such as Apollo's arm and the sandal-shod leg and face of Hyacinthus [fig. 6]. Unlike Giambattista's preliminary sketches or studies, most of which were rapidly executed in pen and wash, the extant drawings by Giandomenico's hand are actually *ricordi*, highly detailed copies of the finished painting.

fig. 7
Giambattista Tiepolo
Study for *The Death of Hyacinthus* (recto)
 Pen and deep bistre wash over red chalk
 on paper, 324 × 222 mm
 Victoria and Albert Museum, London,
 inv. D. 1825.171-1885



fig. 8
Giambattista Tiepolo
Study for *The Death of Hyacinthus* (verso)
 Pen and deep bistre wash over red chalk
 on paper, 324 × 222 mm
 Victoria and Albert Museum, London,
 inv. D. 1825.171-1885



fig. 9
Giambattista Tiepolo
***Apollo and Hyacinthus* (recto)**
Studies for a *Crucifixion* (verso)
 Pen and wash on paper, 202 × 160 mm
 Victoria and Albert Museum, London,
 inv. D. 1825.80-1885



8

Michael Levey. *Giambattista Tiepolo: His Life and Art*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986, p. 207.

9

Tiepolo left us an abundance of drawings and etchings made primarily for his own amusement, most of which are poetic musings, improvisations or *capricci*. Giandomenico published many of these works after his father's death under the title *Scherzi di fantasia*.

The Victoria and Albert Museum in London owns six pen and wash drawings [figs. 7–9] that have also been linked to *The Death of Hyacinthus*, in which Tiepolo experimented with various possible poses for the two central figures using a fresh, flowing technique. As Michael Levey⁸ suggests, the figures in the central group of the scene “might have strayed from the *Capricci* and will reappear in the *Scherzi di fantasia*”.⁹ Apollo is depicted to the right or left of Hyacinthus, whose limp body leans against his lover in a more or less recumbent position. Yet there is no physical contact in the dramatic finished canvas, and the god's gesticulating attitude bears little resemblance to the figures in the studies.



Continuing with this series of drawings, we find other examples at the Museo Civico in Trieste. In one of them, the recto depicts Apollo and Hyacinthus [fig. 10] but the two figures on the verso [fig. 11] have been associated with the theme of Angelica tending to Medoro's wounds which Giambattista used in a fresco for the Ariosto room at Villa Valmarana, Vicenza, commissioned by Giustino Valmarana himself in 1757.

Other similar sketches held at the Martin von Wagner Museum in Würzburg [figs. 12–14] even show the racket outlined in the foreground. In these drawings, the artist played with the pose of Apollo and Hyacinthus, using a Pietà-like compositional arrangement.

This museum also owns a preparatory drawing for some of the bystanders observing the scene, clad in obviously Orientalising robes and head gear [fig. 15]. At the front of this compact group are two older men, a halberdier and a bearded figure sometimes identified as Hyacinthus's father, King Amyclas of Sparta. Both gaze upon the scene with stern disapproval, perhaps because Apollo had forsaken his duties as a god to live a passionate romance with the young Hyacinthus.



fig. 10
Giambattista Tiepolo
Sketch for *The Death of Hyacinthus* (recto)
Brush and deep bistre wash over red chalk on paper, 337 × 242 mm
Museo Civico Sartorio, Trieste, inv. 2106a

fig. 11
Giambattista Tiepolo
Sketch for *Angelica Caring for Medoro* (verso)
Brush and deep bistre wash over red chalk on paper, 337 × 242 mm
Museo Civico Sartorio, Trieste, inv. 2106b

fig. 12
Giambattista Tiepolo
Sketch for *The Death of Hyacinthus* (recto)
Wash and ink on paper, 369 × 292 mm
Martin von Wagner Museum der Universität
Würzburg, Würzburg, inv. 7912



fig. 13
Giambattista Tiepolo
Sketch for *The Death of Hyacinthus* (verso)
Wash and ink on paper, 369 × 292 mm
Martin von Wagner Museum der Universität
Würzburg, Würzburg, inv. 7912



fig. 14
Giambattista Tiepolo
The Death of Hyacinthus
Wash and ink on paper, 374 × 293 mm
Martin von Wagner Museum der Universität
Würzburg, Würzburg, inv. 7911



fig. 15
Giambattista Tiepolo
Sketches for *oriental heads*
Wash and ink on paper, 438 × 289 mm
Martin von Wagner Museum der Universität
Würzburg, Würzburg, inv. 7913

fig. 16

Giambattista Tiepolo
Sketches for the god Pan
 Wash and ink on paper, 430 × 292 mm
 Martin von Wagner Museum der Universität
 Würzburg, Würzburg, inv. 7914



fig. 17

Giambattista Tiepolo
Rinaldo and Armida, 1752–53
 Oil on canvas, 105 × 140 cm
 Staatsgalerie Würzburg. Leihgabe der
 Bayerischen Verwaltung der staatlichen
 Schlösser, Gärten und Seen,
 inv. WÜ Res. G 159

Why did Giambattista choose Anguillara's version over the Ovidian classic? Perhaps acting on instructions from Baron Schaumburg-Lippe and accepting that the commission was a posthumous tribute to his dead lover, the musician Domènec Terradella, the master opted for this version to give the story a more contemporary backdrop—a tragic yet ironic version, in which the forbidden love between the divine Apollo and the youthful Hyacinthus could either be glorified or criticised. This moralising undertone is betrayed by the presence of various symbolic details alluding to the passions of the flesh. The macaw, perched on a ledge of the classical architectural structure that centres the composition, has often been associated with sin and licentious living. Beneath the bird, observing the scene with a caustic smile, we see a statue of Pan, a Greek deity associated with shepherds and venerated in Arcadia, known as Faunus in Rome. Depicted as a man with horns on his head and the legs and hindquarters of a goat, Pan was the god of fertility and male sexuality, and we can assume that his presence here is not coincidental. His image is the foil to the tragic tone of the scene. There is a drawing with various sketches of this figure at the Martin von Wagner Museum in Würzburg [fig. 16].

Giambattista Tiepolo reused this compositional device with few alterations in *Rinaldo and Armida*, a work dated to 1752–53 and currently at the Staatsgalerie Würzburg [fig. 17], part of the *Jerusalem Delivered* series painted during his years in that German town. Once again, he used the macaw, the god Pan and the arch in the background by the cypresses to centre the scene, and even the colour of the cloak on Armida's lap is identical to the one spread beneath the dying Hyacinthus, whose physiognomy recalls that of Rinaldo.

Veronese

fig. 18

Paolo Veronese (Paolo Caliari)
***Mars and Venus United by Love*, 1570s**
 Oil on canvas, 205.7 × 161 cm
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
 New York. John Stewart Kennedy
 Fund, 1910, inv. 10.189



Giambattista had a special predilection for the paintings of Veronese (Verona, 1528–Venice, 1588), admiring not only his marvellous technique but also his way of imagining different themes. Veronese’s influence is plain to see in the paintings he produced at Würzburg. According to Philipp P. Fehl, both the background scenery and the group of onlookers are a tribute to the painting of the master he so admired, as is the figure of Hyacinthus himself.¹⁰ If we observe Veronese’s *Mars and Venus United by Love* [fig. 18] at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, we find that Tiepolo borrowed certain elements from it for his *Death of Hyacinthus*, specifically the row of trees and the statue of the god Pan forming a backdrop to the main group in the foreground. Following Veronese’s example, Giambattista devised a scene in which the gods are sumptuously attired and the great richness and quality of the splendid objects leaps to the eye. However, while the Verona master’s work celebrates the triumph of love, Tiepolo’s narrates its tragic consequences.

10

Philipp P. Fehl. “Farewell to Jokes: The Last ‘Capricci’ of Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo and the Tradition of Irony in Venetian Painting”. In *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 5, no. 4, summer 1979, The University of Chicago, 1979, p. 777.

Giandomenico Tiepolo



fig. 19
Giandomenico Tiepolo
Pulcinella's Departure, 1797
Fresco, 198 x 150 cm
Ca' Rezzonico, Venice,
inv. Cl. I n. 1752

fig. 20
View of the reconstructed
Pulcinella room at Ca' Rezzonico,
Venice



In 1757 Giambattista Tiepolo purchased Villa Zianigo,¹¹ a typical Italian villa in Mirano, near the City of Canals. He remodelled it to suit his needs and worked alongside Giandomenico, who would inherit the property on his father's death, to decorate it with frescoes. Giandomenico painted one of the frescoes, entitled *Pulcinella's Departure* [fig. 19], as a tribute to his progenitor's work, composing a curious scene reminiscent of *The Death of Hyacinthus*. This work, together with the majority of the villa's frescoes, is now in the Venetian museum of Ca' Rezzonico, where several small rooms have been used to recreate the villa's decorative programme [fig. 20]. Giandomenico's composition features a prostrate figure in the foreground, a man resting after a tennis match but whose seemingly unconscious form emulates the pose of the dying Hyacinthus. The racket and feather tossed carelessly on the ground beside him are positioned just as in Giambattista's canvas. Giandomenico's caustic reproduction of the mythological scene from his father's painting, itself infused with irony, nevertheless retains the tragic undertone of the original tale.

11
Svetlana Alpers and Michael Baxandall. *Tiepolo and the Pictorial Intelligence*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994, p. VIII.

Baron Hans Heinrich Thyssen and *The Death of Hyacinthus*

When Barth D. Schwartz interviewed Baron Hans Heinrich Thyssen for an article in *Connoisseur* magazine, “Thyssen in All Candor”¹² and asked what he thought of this work, the baron replied,

Years ago I did not like it. In 1948, it was inherited by my brother, Stefan. Rudolph Heinemann, who was adviser to my father and also to me, said, ‘If your brother sells this picture, you must buy it at any price.’ So, I bought it from my brother for, I think, \$24,000. That was ‘any price’ in the late 1940s. With time, I changed my feelings about it. Now I use it as a standard. When I am considering what to buy, keep, or sell, I judge it against this one. I ask myself, ‘Do I want to keep this picture, or the one I’ve been offered?’ Many times, I give the other one back.

12

Barth Davis Schwartz. “Thyssen in All Candor: A far-ranging conversation with the world’s most powerful collector”. In *Connoisseur*, New York, January 1984.

The Rider and the Dream

The relationship between Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky through the works they exchanged¹

Marta Ruiz del Árbol



Franz Marc
The Dream, 1912
(detail)

fig. 1

Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky with the cover woodcut for *Der Blaue Reiter* almanac, Munich, 1911
Photograph by Gabriele Münter, Gabriele Münter- und Johannes Eichner-Stiftung, Munich



It is terribly difficult to present one's contemporaries with spiritual gifts.

Franz Marc, 1912²

Like many other artists before and after them, Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc sealed their friendship by exchanging their works. Along with paying tribute to each other in this way, they may have used their canvases to make a statement about the artistic aspirations that spurred them to create *Der Blaue Reiter* (*The Blaue Reiter Almanac*) [fig. 1]. To what extent did they take up their brushes to express their principles? Do their brushstrokes conceal underlying stories of common yearnings and dreams? Are these works anecdotes of competition or even rivalry? This essay sets out to analyze the context in which the editors of the almanac exchanged these works and attempts to ascertain how far the decision to present them as gifts made them particularly significant within their respective oeuvres and, in a sense, a declaration of intent for *Der Blaue Reiter*.

1

This text was originally published in Ulf Küster (ed.): *Der Blaue Reiter* [exh. cat. Riehen-Basel, Fondation Beyeler]. Riehen, Fondation Beyeler, 2016, pp. 158-63.

2

Franz Marc. "Geistige Güter". In *Der Blaue Reiter*. Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, eds. Munich, 1912, p. 1. English ed.: "Spiritual Treasures". In *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, eds., documentary edition, ed. and with an introduction by Klaus Lankheit, trans. Henning Falkenstein with the assistance of Manug Terzian and Gertrude Hinderlie. London, 1974; repr., Boston, 2005, p. 55.

The Origin of the Almanac and a Rider for Marc

fig. 2

Wassily Kandinsky
Improvisation 12, 1910
Oil on canvas, 97 × 106.5 cm
Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen.
Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich,
inv. 11249



“Dear Kandinsky, your painting arrived safely, it came, was hung, and conquered. Many thanks!”³ Marc informed his friend on a postcard dated July 31, 1911. Although the artists had known each other for just somewhat longer than half a year, the Russian painter sent his colleague a canvas at a time when the rapport between them had reached its height. Indeed, since they first met in January 1911, not only had Marc joined the Neue Künstlervereinigung München (New Artists’ Association Munich) –of which Kandinsky was a founding member– but, in particular, Kandinsky had recently outlined the concept of the almanac.⁴

The work in question was *Improvisation 12* [fig. 2], of 1910, a canvas that Kandinsky had classified in accordance with the categories he had begun to establish for his oeuvre in 1909. The *Improvisations* –a name borrowed from musical terminology– stemmed from his wish for paintings to be “chiefly unconscious ... expressions of events of an inner character, hence impressions of ‘internal nature’”.⁵ The work symbolized his desire to capture man’s “internal nature” through an artistic process that shunned Western models of pictorial representation. Although certain

3

Franz Marc, postcard to Wassily Kandinsky, July 31, 1911. In Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc. *Briefwechsel: Mit Briefen von und an Gabriele Münter und Maria Marc*, ed., introduction, and annotation by Klaus Lankheit. Munich, 1983, pp. 48-49, here p. 48.

4

Wassily Kandinsky, letter to Franz Marc, June 19, 1911. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-41.

5

Wassily Kandinsky. *Über das Geistige in der Kunst: insbesondere in der Malerei*. With an introduction by Max Bill and a foreword and annotation on the rev. new ed. by Jelena Hahl-Fontaine. Munich, 1912; 5th ed. Zurich, 2016, p. 146. English ed.: “On the Spiritual in Art”. In *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, eds. Boston, 1982; new, repr. ed., New York, 1994, p. 218.

6

Wassily Kandinsky, letter to Franz Marc, June 19, 1911. In Kandinsky and Marc 1983 (see note 3), p. 40. English trans. in Klaus Lankheit. "A History of the Almanac". In Kandinsky and Marc 2005 (see note 2), pp. 15-16.

7

On the importance of the rider in Kandinsky's oeuvre and the almanac, see for example Kenneth Lindsay. "The Genesis and Meaning of the Cover Design for the First 'Blaue Reiter' Exhibition Catalogue". *The Art Bulletin*, 35, no. 1, March 1953, pp. 47-52; Johannes Langner. "Improvisation 13: Zur Funktion des Gegenstandes in Kandinskys Abstraktion". In *Jahrbuch der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen in Baden-Württemberg*. Berlin and Munich, 1977, no. 14, pp. 115-46; Eberhard Roters. "Wassily Kandinsky und die Gestalt des Blauen Reiters". In *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, 5, 1963, pp. 201-26; and Peg Weiss. "Kandinsky und München: Begegnungen und Wandlungen". In *Kandinsky und München: Begegnungen und Wandlungen, 1896-1914*. Armin Zweite, ed. [exh. cat. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich]. Munich, 1982, pp. 29-83.

8

Wassily Kandinsky. "'Der Blaue Reiter' (Rückblick)". In *Das Kunstblatt*, 14, 1930, p. 59. English trans. in Lankheit 2005 (see note 6), p. 18.

9

In particular, associations with the concept of the blue flower (*Blaue Blume*) of Romanticism. See for example, Peter-Klaus Schuster. "Vom Tier zum Tod: Zur Ideologie des Geistigen bei Franz Marc". In *Franz Marc: Kräfte der Natur: Werke 1912-1915*. Erich Franz, ed. [exh. cat. Staatsgalerie moderner Kunst, Munich; Westfälisches Landesmuseum Münster]. Ostfildern, 1993, p. 183.

10

Wassily Kandinsky, letter to Franz Marc, September 18, 1911. In Kandinsky and Marc 1983 (see note 3), p. 59.

elements of the composition are still recognizable, such as the horse and rider and the three small figures on the left, the scene is not set in a landscape. Instead, Kandinsky dispenses with any references to visible reality in order to situate the main figures in a sort of color storm. Emerging from the upper right corner, a burst of color looms above the horseman" and spreads across the entire upper half of the canvas.

The fact that Kandinsky should have decided to give Marc a painting of a rider is highly significant, because when he sent it the almanac did not yet have a title. Indeed, the only name the Russian painter had suggested for the publication was "*Die Kette*" (The Chain), as he intended it to be "a link to the past as well as a ray to the future".⁶ The gift not only further confirmed the importance he attached to this motif, but also heralded the prominence the figure of the rider would soon take on in his collaboration with Marc.⁷ To what extent was *Improvisation 12* a determining influence in the final choice of the almanac's title *Der Blaue Reiter*?

In 1930, Kandinsky retrospectively explained that the final name arose one day over coffee at Marc's house: "We both loved blue, Marc liked horses, I riders. So the name came by itself".⁸ This mythdestroying clarification has sparked much controversy among historians, since Kandinsky is considered to have consciously ignored the deep symbolism and many associations implicit in this choice.⁹ Even so, it is likely that the Russian painter's account of the context is truthful, and that it was indeed during that hot summer of 1911 when, together in Sindelsdorf and gazing at Kandinsky's painting, they came up with the name of *Der Blaue Reiter*, which reflected their artistic longings so well.

By mid-September, the title for the almanac had been firmly decided upon and Kandinsky had prepared several cover designs to show the publisher Reinhard Piper.¹⁰ Many of his sketches featured a figure on horseback moving upward across the composition [fig. 3]. Although Kandinsky's vocabulary never allows for categorical statements or unilateral interpretations, these riders seem to hail from a legendary fairy-tale world that is present in many of his works

fig. 3

Wassily Kandinsky
Study for the cover of *Der Blaue Reiter* almanac, 1911
Watercolor, India ink, and pencil
on paper, 277 × 219 mm
Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus
und Kunstbau München, Munich,
inv. GMS 605



fig. 4

Wassily Kandinsky
Final study for the cover of *Der Blaue Reiter* almanac, 1911
Watercolour, Indian ink and pencil
on paper, 277 × 219 mm
Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus
und Kunstbau München, München,
inv. GMS 608

from very early on. Linked to an iconography related chiefly to his childhood and native Russia, the figures in these preparatory drawings are connected with the main motif in the work Kandinsky had given Marc not long before. The most anecdotal elements, such as the tiny figures –lingering remnants of narrative, still found in the 1910 canvas– have disappeared, and the figure on horseback has become a kind of ethical symbol of the triumphant power of the spirit over the materialism that had pervaded art since the nineteenth century.¹¹ Could a parallel be drawn between Kandinsky's gift to Marc and the initial idea the Russian artist explored for the cover of the almanac?

As is well known, the rider they finally adopted as the publication's emblem is far removed from the initial design recalling Kandinsky's gift and closer to the iconography of Saint George. The Christian knight slaying the dragon –a motif that gained prominence in the Russian painter's iconography around this time– thus took the place of the horseman in his early sketches, apparently at Marc's wishes [fig. 4].¹² The choice of the saint on horseback –an allegory of the triumph of good over evil– as the cover image for the almanac imbued the modern artist with the saint's virtues. In Marc's words, penned in his essay "Die 'Wilden' Deutschlands" (The "Savages" of Germany), his weapons were the "new ideas" that "kill better than steel and destroy what was thought to be indestructible".¹³

It should be pointed out that *Improvisation 12* was again specifically mentioned in the many letters the two artists exchanged during the autumn of 1911. Both painters, busy preparing the almanac, attached great importance to the illustrations that were to accompany the publication. During their discussions, Marc proposed including a reproduction of *Improvisation 12* to "complete the fantastical illustration".¹⁴ This idea, which seems to have originally come from the German painter's then companion, Maria Franck, underlines the importance of the canvas and corroborates the fact that –at least for Marc and Maria Franck– it evoked a mythical iconography linked to fable. Kandinsky, however, was not entirely convinced, since he feared that it would encourage an overly fanciful interpretation of his work, and in the end the painting was not included.¹⁵

11
Langner 1977 (see note 7), pp. 130-31.

12
Schuster 1993 (see note 9), p. 183.

13
Franz Marc. "Die 'Wilden' Deutschlands". In Kandinsky and Marc 1912 (see note 2), p. 5; English ed.: "The 'Savages' of Germany". In Kandinsky and Marc 2005 (see note 2), p. 61.

14
Franz Marc, postcard to Wassily Kandinsky, November 10, 1911. In Kandinsky and Marc 1983 (see note 3), p. 76.

15
Wassily Kandinsky, letter to Franz Marc, n.d. In Kandinsky y Marc. In *ibid.*, pp. 76-77.



fig. 5

Franz Marc**Portrait of Henri Rousseau, 1911****Oil on glass, partly glazed, underlaid with tin foil, 15.3 × 11.4 cm****Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau München, Munich, inv. GMS 723****16**

Franz Marc, letter to Wassily Kandinsky, December 23, 1911. In *ibid.*, p. 88.

17

Katherine Kuenzli. "Grenzerweiterung der modernen Kunst: Der 'Blaue Reiter: die Pariser Moderne und Henri Rousseau'". In *Expressionismus in Deutschland und Frankreich: Von Matisse zum Blauen Reiter* [exh. cat. Kunsthaus Zürich; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal]. Munich, 2014, p. 98.

18

Wilhelm Uhde. *Henri Rousseau*. Paris, 1911.

The First Exhibition and a Slight Foretaste for Kandinsky

The next gift came a few months later, at the end of 1911, following a busy autumn devoted to preparing the almanac as well as the discussions among members of the Neue Künstlervereinigung München, which prompted both Kandinsky and Marc to leave the group in early December. "If I may hope to offer you a token of Christmas joy, please accept the small portrait of Rousseau I made—I wish I had something better to give you at the moment" [fig. 5], Marc wrote in a letter of December 23, 1911.¹⁶ He felt indebted to Kandinsky for the gift of *Improvisation 12* and offered his colleague his interpretation of the French artist Henri Rousseau's self-portrait *Portrait de l'artiste à la lampe* (*Portrait of the Artist with a Lamp*), of 1900-03. Yet Marc went on to explain in the letter that he would have liked "to have something better to give you," as he did not consider it a fitting exchange compared to Kandinsky's work. The "something better" finally came halfway through the following year.

Nevertheless, Marc's *Bildnis Henri Rousseau* (*Portrait of Henri Rousseau*) illustrated another of the decisive moments in his relationship with his colleague. It coincided precisely with the first *Der Blaue Reiter* exhibition at the Galerie Thannhauser, which ran from December 18, 1911 to January 3, 1912. In fact, this glass painting hung in pride of place in the landmark exhibition, although it was not included in the catalogue's list of works. Marc is documented as having given Kandinsky the portrait on December 23, 1911—that is, after the opening of the first *Blaue Reiter* exhibition. The description of the work in the correspondence and its presence in Gabriele Münter's photos of the exhibition [fig. 6] also confirm that it is indeed his copy of Henri Rousseau's portrait. These circumstances raise the question of whether Marc's work was only featured in the exhibition during the first days of the show. Or, alternatively, did Kandinsky decide to include it after receiving it from his friend?

The painting was the expression of what was perhaps the greatest discovery for Marc and Kandinsky during the months prior to the publication of the almanac. Although Kandinsky had seen Rousseau's work during his trip to Paris in 1906-07, he did not become aware of its significance until 1911, when he read the French artist's first monograph.¹⁷ Published that year by Wilhelm Uhde,¹⁸ it marked a veritable revelation for the editors of *Der Blaue Reiter*, who immediately decided to

fig. 6

First Exhibition of the Editors of *Der Blaue Reiter*, Galerie Thannhauser, Munich, 1911-12
Photograph by Gabriele Münter, Gabriele Münter- und Johannes Eichner-Stiftung, Munich



include the French painter's work in the almanac and sought out images to illustrate it.

In his essay "Über die Formfrage" (On the Question of Form) in the almanac, Kandinsky, who divided art into "Great Abstraction" and "Great Realism," responded to Uhde's text by referring to Rousseau as the epitome of the second type.¹⁹ *Le Douanier* perfectly exemplified the Russian painter's theory that form ought to conform solely to each artist's "internal necessity." This made it not only possible but also necessary for many different and equally valid forms of representation to coexist: from Rousseau's jungle scenes to children's drawings, along with African sculptures and his own nonfigurative compositions.

Marc reacted to the discovery of Rousseau by setting about copying the French artist's self-portrait reproduced in the monograph. His use of the Bavarian technique of glass painting (*Hinterglasmalerei*) –which Gabriele Münter and Kandinsky had first employed in Murnau– imbued the tribute to Henri Rousseau with a specifically German flavor. With a certain amount of irony, Marc painted a halo over the head of this newly discovered father of modernity, transforming him into a modern-day equivalent of the saints who populated the works on glass in Bavarian folk art.²⁰

19

Wassily Kandinsky. "Über die Formfrage". In Kandinsky and Marc 1912 (see note 2), pp. 82, 94 and note 1. English ed.: "On the Question of Form". In Lindsay and Vergo 1994 (see note 5), pp. 242, 252, and note.

20

See the analysis in Angela Lampe. "Realistik = Abstraktion oder Kandinskys 'Neuer Realismus'". In *Der Grosse Widerspruch: Franz Marc zwischen Delaunay und Rousseau*. Cathrin Klingsöhr-Leroy and Franz Marc Museumsgesellschaft, eds. [exh. cat. Franz Marc Museum, Kochel am See]. Berlin and Munich, 2009, pp. 42-45.

The Publication of the Almanac and a Dream converted into a Canvas for Kandinsky

fig. 7

Franz Marc

***The Dream*, 1912**

Oil on canvas, 100.5 × 135.5 cm

Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza,

Madrid, inv. 660 (1978.15)

[\[+ info\]](#)



“The overall effect of the book is marvelous. What a delight to see it completed before me. I am sure of one thing: many silent readers and young people full of energy will secretly be grateful to us, will be fired by enthusiasm for this book and will judge the world in accordance with it,” Marc wrote in May 1912.²¹ The almanac at last saw the light of day at a time when, according to Klaus Lankheit, the artist was painting *Der Traum* (*The Dream*; fig. 7).²² This was the canvas with which Marc finally settled his outstanding debt to Kandinsky, as it was a worthy exchange for the *Improvisation 12*²³ the Russian had sent him nearly a year earlier.

Unlike Kandinsky’s present, which he had selected from among the pictures he had painted before he and Marc had met, Marc set about painting this one after he and Kandinsky had been working together intensely for months. Whereas the first gift marked the start of *Der Blaue Reiter*, this one seemed to celebrate the end of a lengthy collaborative effort that resulted in the almanac. Did Marc intend this work to sum up in the ideas they had discussed during the previous months? To what extent does it reflect their shared yearning for a new, spiritual art?

In the center of the composition, a nude woman sits with her legs crossed and eyes closed. Nearby, several animals—a lion and four horses—gaze at her, stressing her importance. This

21

Franz Marc, letter to Wassily Kandinsky, May 11, 1912. In Kandinsky and Marc 1983 (see note 3), p. 169. English trans. in Annette Vezin and Luc Vezin. *Kandinsky and the Blue Rider*. Paris, 1992, p. 150.

22

Klaus Lankheit. *Franz Marc: Sein Leben und seine Kunst*. Cologne, 1976, p. 84.

23

Unlike the other gifts, the arrival of this one is not recorded in the correspondence. It is nonetheless reflected in Kandinsky’s hand-written lists and also featured in all the catalogues raisonnés. See Klaus Lankheit. *Franz Marc: Katalog der Werke*. Cologne, 1970, no. 172, p. 60; Annegret Hoberg and Isabelle Jansen. *Franz Marc: The Complete Works*. 3 vols. London, 2004-11, vol. 1, no. 175, p. 196; Hans K. Roethel and Jean K. Benjamin. *Kandinsky: Catalogue Raisonné of the Oil-Paintings*. 2 vols. London, 1982-84, vol. 1, no. 354, p. 332.

enigmatic painting is one of the few compositions featuring human figures that Marc produced during his mature period. The German artist, known for his very early preference for animals as the main subjects of his works, decided to give Kandinsky a canvas that was unusual in his output. This rare inclusion of a human in the animal world so predominant in his oeuvre raises the question of whether his choice was somehow influenced by the intended use of the work and the recent publication of the almanac. According to Klaus Lankheit, the fact that it “was given to his friend cannot have been a coincidence” and signaled the possibility that it was a type of Orphic rhapsody –an allegorical transcription of the ideas that sparked the almanac’s genesis.²⁴

Despite the inclusion of the female figure, the work exudes the Arcadian spirit that Marc sought to achieve in his painting and described in what is held to be his first theoretic text, entitled “Über das Tier in der Kunst” (On the animal in art, 1910). In it the artist confessed that he was trying to achieve a heightened “awareness of the organic rhythm of all things, a pantheistic identification with the trembling and flowing of the blood of nature, in the trees, the animals, the air”.²⁵ The female figure appears to be part of this primeval world, which in Marc’s view belonged solely to animals, as humans had been banished from it. The work seems to embody his aspiration to “create a new paradisiacal realm in which man could achieve perfect harmony with nature”.²⁶ What has enabled the woman in *Der Traum* to enter this territory that is the exclusive preserve of untainted beings? The key may lie in the title of the canvas.

Sleep and dreams are a recurring subject in Franz Marc’s artistic production. We find sleeping beings in many of his works, such as *Liegender Hund im Schnee* (*Dog Lying in the Snow*), of 1910-11, and *Der Stier* (*White Bull*), of 1911. In these scenes, the earth welcomes and protects the placid animal. Indeed, unlike other artists, Marc does not associate sleep with nightmares. For him, slumber is the moment when we glimpse the most authentic side of things, the most intimate reality. These scenes thus represent moments of a purity and at-oneness with nature that are almost paradisiacal.²⁷ Like Kandinsky, Marc seeks the spiritual regeneration of society through art, and seems to present this moment as a remnant of what can be regenerated

24

Lankheit 1976 (see note 22), p. 84.

25

This text is taken from Franz Marc, letter to the publisher Reinhard Piper, April 20, 1910; Piper then published it as *Das Tier in der Kunst*. Munich, 1910, p. 190. Reproduced in Klaus Lankheit, ed. *Franz Marc: Schriften*. Cologne, 1978, p. 98. English trans. in Vezin and Vezin 1992 (see note 21), p. 101.

26

Paloma Alarcó. *Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza: Pintura Moderna*. Madrid, 2009, p. 188.

27

See Mark Rosenthal. *Franz Marc*. Munich, 1989, p. 28; and Volker Adolphs. “Seeing the World and Seeing through the World”. In *August Macke and Franz Marc: An Artist Friendship*. Volker Adolphs and Annegret Hoberg, eds. [exh. cat. Kunstmuseum Bonn; Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus and Kunstbau, Munich]. Ostfildern, 2014, p. 13.



fig. 8

Franz Marc
The Waterfall (Women under
a Waterfall), 1912
 Oil on canvas, 164 × 158 cm
 Private collection

fig. 9

Franz Marc
The Shepherds, 1912
 Oil on canvas, 100 × 135 cm
 Bayerische
 Staatsgemäldesammlungen.
 Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich,
 inv. L 1728



in human beings. In *Der Traum*, nature shelters not only animals but also humans, albeit sleeping. It is a Garden of Earthly Delights, a recoverable Arcadia. There is still hope.

This painting Marc gave Kandinsky was not his only work to include a human figure. It is usually related to another two paintings, also dated to that spring of 1912: *Der Wasserfall (Frauen unter einem Wasserfall) (The Waterfall [Women under a Waterfall])*; fig. 8) and *Die Hirten (The Shepherds)*; fig. 9). Similar in format to *Der Traum*, they evoke the pastoral tradition and the iconography of the Garden of Earthly Delights. This theme, which also interested Kandinsky,²⁸ is conveyed by men and women –always accompanied by animals– who are not ashamed of their nakedness. Portrayed before the Fall, the figures' bodies are folded in on themselves and adapt to the structure of the composition in order to accentuate, also formally, the sensation of their communion with nature. They are beings who sleep or are at least in a state of self-engrossment that isolates them from their surroundings. The solitary woman in *Der Traum* stands out among all the figures, as she seems to be meditating rather than sleeping or dreaming.

Marc showed an interest in non-European cultures from a very early age. He was not only familiar with the ethnological museums in Munich and Berlin but also collected small Asian art objects and prints.²⁹ This concern with the artistic

28

Peter Vergo. *Twentieth-century German Painting: The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection*. London, 1992, p. 264.

29

Isabelle Jansen. "The Yearning of an Unspoiled World". In *Franz Marc: The Retrospective*. Annegret Hoberg and Helmut Friedel, eds. [exh. cat. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus and Kunstbau, Munich]. Munich, 2005, p. 86.

expressions of other continents is reflected chiefly in his sketchbooks, which provide insight into the extent to which foreign sources influenced his own painting. The position of the woman in *Der Traum*, for instance, is probably inspired by Buddhist works. Two earlier drawings bear this out. As early as 1907-08, Marc made a quick sketch of what appears to be a female figure [fig. 10]. Two years later, he drew a male figure, which, according to the work's title in the catalogue raisonné, adopts "the position of a Buddha" [fig. 11].³⁰ Could, correspondingly, the figure in the canvas he exchanged with Kandinsky be an allusion to Buddhism?

Isabelle Jansen, who has analyzed the references to non-Western art in Marc's painting, argues in her study that his interest in Buddhist art was not limited to merely imitating formal aspects. He owned German translations of various Buddhist publications in his library,³¹ whose influence probably supplemented the impulses he received from Kandinsky. Although some of his drawings of Buddha were made at an earlier date [fig. 12], it was precisely during the height of intensity in the relationship between the two artists, starting in 1912, that the German painter developed a greater interest in this religion. The close communication between the two artists must have brought Marc into contact with the heavily Eastern-influenced theosophical ideas that greatly concerned the Russian.³² The wish to add a spiritual component to art, via the association with Buddhist iconography, conveyed the transcendental meaning Marc desired for the gift that was to symbolize his friendship with Kandinsky.³³ As is often the case with Marc, however, we are not dealing with a literal transcription of his source of inspiration. Marc did not reproduce an orthodox position in *Der Traum*, but freely interpreted the representations of Buddha with which he was familiar [fig. 13], rendering them first in his sketchbooks and later on canvas. In the final painting, he made a few alterations to the previously drawn versions. The woman's head is tilted slightly to the right and her torso leans slightly forward, so that her crossed arms rest on her knees. The result is a huddled figure of a woman who appears to be embracing herself. The dream would make it possible to again see the world through the untainted gaze of animals. But humans could only achieve the innocent and pleasurable rest of beasts through a conscious exercise such as meditation.

30

The first of the drawings is found in sketchbook VI, 1907-08, p. 1a, and reproduced in Hoberg and Jansen 2004-11 (see note 23), vol. III, with the title "Sitzender Akt mit gekreuzten Armen und Beinen" (*Nude, seated crossed-legged on the ground with arms crossed*), p. 57. The second is found in sketchbook XIX, 1910, p. 8, and reproduced in Hoberg and Jansen 2004-11 (see note 23), vol. III, with the title "Männlicher Akt in der Haltung eines Buddhas" (*Male nude in a Buddha pose*), p. 153.

31

Jansen 2005 (see note 29), p. 86, lists the books on Buddhist themes in Marc's library. It should be stressed that the full bibliography mentioned by Jansen was published in 1911. It is likewise interesting to note that Reinhard Piper, the publisher of the almanac, also published a translation of Buddhist texts.

32

Ibid., pp. 86-87.

33

In a lecture on Franz Marc's *Der Traum*, Guillermo Solana established a possible link between the iconography of this work and Buddhist art and the lotus position. Guillermo Solana. "Franz Marc: El sueño:" lecture in Spanish delivered on November 14, 2013, at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza auditorium, Madrid; <http://www.museothyssen.org/thyssen/videoplayer/156> (accessed March 1, 2016).

fig. 10
Franz Marc
Nude, seated crossed-legged on the ground with arms crossed, 1907-08
Pencil on paper, 198 × 135 mm
Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, inv. 6361



fig. 11
Franz Marc
Male nude in a Buddha pose, 1910
Pencil and chalk on paper, 209 × 167 mm
Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, inv. 6374



fig. 12
Franz Marc
Composition sketch: exotic figure seated like a Buddha, 1909
Gouache and pencil on paper, 130 × 105 mm
Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, inv. 6367



fig. 13
Buddha courtyard at the Japan und Ostasien in der Kunst (Japan and East Asia in Art) exhibition, Munich, 1909
Postkartensammlung, Stadtarchiv München, Munich

“Art is but the expression of a dream—the closer we come to it, the more we devote ourselves to the inner truth of things,” Marc wrote in 1907 to Maria Franck, the woman who would become his second wife.³⁴ In that early letter, the German artist likened life to a parody that concealed the real truth—which for him was the moment of the dream. The role of art was to evoke this other reality, which emerged during the act of sleeping, when all of one’s barriers were down. Years later—specifically in May 1912—the painter returned to this concept to explain the stage he was at in his art to Kandinsky. This time he used it to compare the creative process with a memory that lingers on in our minds after we awaken. “We are tortured by an enormously precise idea,” he commented, “but we do not know what it is ... (as in a dream: it is perfectly sensed on awakening, but we don’t know how to tell it).”³⁵ The creative process is therefore similar to a dreamlike state in which reason does not dominate the mind; rather, it is a trance in which the soul is liberated and achieves a new vibration that is not limited to the artist himself, but designed to appeal to those who view the work. Artistic expressions capable of illustrating what Kandinsky called an “internal necessity” return humans to this primeval state, which is represented allegorically by the subject of *Der Traum*, the canvas Marc gave the Russian painter.³⁶

Epilogue

In 1916, after Franz Marc died in the Great War, his widow wished to organize an exhibition in his honor. She contacted Gabriele Münter, who had been looking after Kandinsky’s possessions since he departed for Russia.³⁷ After the exhibition ended, Maria Marc kept *Der Traum* for at least four years and displayed it in her home at Ried alongside *Improvisation 12*, the painting Kandinsky had given to Marc.

34

Franz Marc, letter to Maria Franck, May 10, 1907. In Alois J. Schardt. *Franz Marc*. Berlin, 1936, p. 28.

35

Franz Marc, letter to Wassily Kandinsky, n.d. [May 11, 1912]. In Kandinsky and Marc 1983 (see note 3), May 11, 1912, p. 169.

36

Franz Marc, subscription prospectus for the almanac, mid-January 1912. In Kandinsky and Marc 2005 (see note 2), p. 252.

37

Maria Marc, letter to Gabriele Münter, July 15, 1916. In Kandinsky and Marc 1983 (see note 3), pp. 280-83.