

# **Drawing 300**

## ***Schoenberg, Kandinsky and the Blue Rider*** **At the Jewish Museum, New York**

**By Kevin Dykstra**  
**Student ID# 4566505**

**January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2004**

**DRAW 300 – Section AA**  
**Professor: Janice Flood Turner**

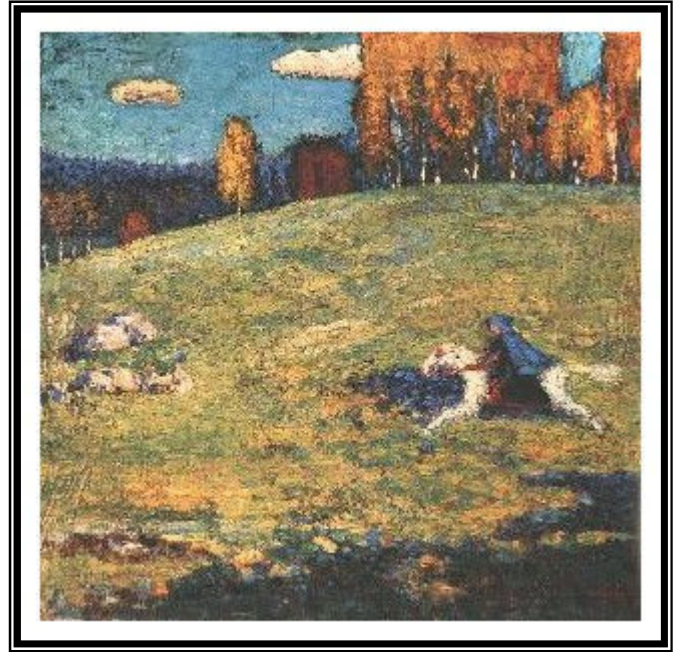
# *Schoenberg, Kandinsky and the Blue Rider*

**DRAW 300 – Section AA**

**by Kevin Dykstra**

For me, most Christmas holidays are spent with family and friends with little time to indulge in self interests but this year I had the occasion to enjoy a few cultural activities in New York City. I also had the opportunity to see *Schoenberg, Kandinsky and the Blue Rider* exhibit that was showing at The Jewish Museum. In all honesty I knew very little about Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) and even less about Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) or how the two of them were connected. I did know however that Kandinsky was an expressionist and that his art was as close to abstraction as mine was to photo-realism. But who was Blue Rider?

Like many of the avant-garde groups that were setting the pace of artistic innovation at the turn of the 20th century, the artists associated with The Blue Rider group in Munich in 1911-12 were international in background and were considered revolutionary in their views. Kandinsky, from the Russian avant-garde was the group's greatest talent and principal theorist and had already exhibited in Berlin, Dresden, Moscow, Paris and Vienna before settling in Munich. Other members of the Blue Rider group included Kandinsky's mistress, Gabriele Muntz (1877-1962), Alexei von Jawlensky (1864-1941), Franz Marc (1880-1916), August Macke (1887-1914), Paul Klee (1879-1940) and Alfred Kubin (1877-1959). As was evident in this exhibition, the group was not like other avant-garde groups



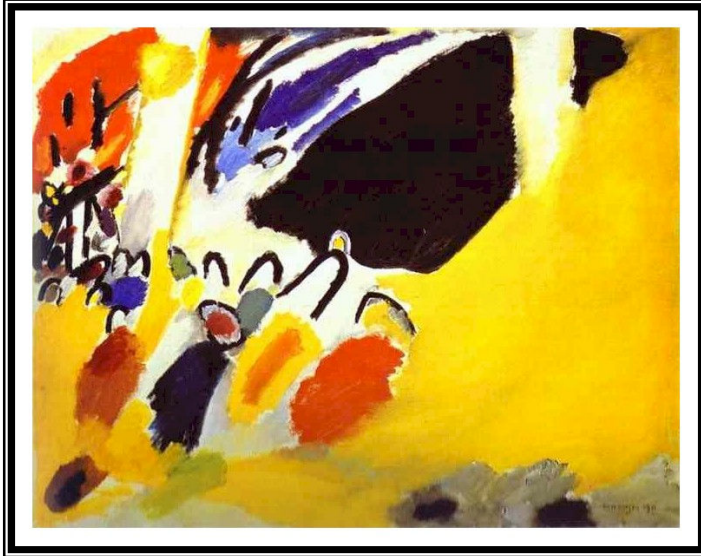
however. They did not share a common style and neither was their aim to be just a group of painters. What they wanted to do and inevitably did was to give a voice to the many artists at the time who were coming up with new ideas and new theories about the arts. The actual formation of Blue Rider occurred after Kandinsky and Marc fell out of favor with The Munich New Artists Association over their refusal to accept what they considered incomprehensible paintings by Kandinsky for their exhibitions. Soon after, Kandinsky and Marc started collecting essays and art work from many of the most progressive figures in the European arts and then published them in an almanac which could be sold to the public. The name "The Blue Rider" was chosen simply because both Marc and Kandinsky liked blue and Marc liked horses and Kandinsky liked riders. It was completely coincidental that a couple of years earlier Kandinsky had produced a painting of that name. Tragically, the lives of the group's two youngest and perhaps most promising members; Franz Marc and August Macke were claimed by World War I. And with them died The Blue Rider.

The exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York placed on view several works from the artists of Blue Rider during this pivotal moment in the early 20th century when artists and musicians were embracing radical ideas and creating new modes of expression but disappointingly the exhibition concentrated primarily on the friendship and dialogue between this visionary painter, Kandinsky and the composer, Schoenberg. The friendship between Kandinsky and Schoenberg began by a fate meeting January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1911 in Munich when Kandinsky attended a concert of chamber music by Schoenberg. Kandinsky was so awed by the starkly modern style of Schoenberg's compositions that he painted *Impression III (Concert)* to commemorate this first encounter. However, it was Schoenberg's theoretical essays, which were reprinted in the concert program that intrigued Kandinsky so much that he eventually wrote

# *Schoenberg, Kandinsky and the Blue Rider*

**DRAW 300 – Section AA**  
**by Kevin Dykstra**

Schoenberg asking him for more ideas and began the friendship and intellectual dialogue that would last for many years.



Wassily Kandinsky. *Impression III (Concert)*. 1911.  
Oil on canvas. 77.5 x 100 cm. Städtische Galerie im  
Lenbachhaus, Munich, Germany.

The few works from the Blue Rider group that were on display at this exhibition were in my view extraordinary and gave me first real view of early expressionism. The vibrant colours and gestural feeling definitely inspired me. I was taken aback by how easily I was pulled into each painting and how after a few minutes face to face with these master pieces the minutes would turn into blur of many minutes, not unlike blur and feeling of the paintings. If not for the closure of the museum, as is the case for me most of the time, I could have stayed there for hours just in front of a couple of paintings. My enjoyment however was rather short lived as I soon realized that most of the exhibit was focused on Schoenberg and the many letters

that composed the dialogue between Schoenberg and Kandinsky. I was disappointed not because I don't like Schoenberg or his music but because I had anticipated the opportunity to see more of Kandinsky's works as well as more from the

other members of Blue Rider. While one could argue that Schoenberg had a tremendous influence on Kandinsky and there are many other studies and articles that have been written on the influence of music on art in general, I found the portraits and self-portraits by Schoenberg rather amateurish. Yes, Schoenberg may have been a revolutionary composer at the turn of the century; his gifts as a visual artist however, were limited and had little, if anything, to do with the radical innovations that I saw in the few pieces from the artists of The Blue Rider group. The organizers of the exhibit had hyped up the Kandinsky and Blue Rider to draw the crowds but it wouldn't surprise me if the majority of them left the museum left still thirsting for the anticipated expressionism as I did.