

ART APPRECIATION GROUP – Report by Tony Seward

At our March meeting we moved on from art of the Viennese Secession to the development of German Expressionism. We began with an enthusiastic overview of the whole movement from artist and teacher Steve Carroll. The leading artists discussed were: Ernst Kirchner, Erich Hechel, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Max Pechstein, Emil Nolde, Franz Marc, Wassily Kandinsky and his partner Gabriele Münter, Paul Klee, August Macke and Max Beckmann. Phew! I can't possibly cover all of them in a short report, but can only pick out trends and highlights

Accounts of German Expressionism usually begin with the groupings known as 'Die Brücke' (The Bridge) and 'Der Blaue Reiter' (The Blue Rider). Both were in revolt against the prevailing classicism of the academies, and focused on developing a new artistic language of direct expression through colour and form. Although influenced by the new trends appearing in France, from Impressionism and the Fauves to Cubism, they evolved their own distinctive style, combining these with elements from folklore and the German woodcut tradition (see Kirchner's Berlin street scenes, for example),

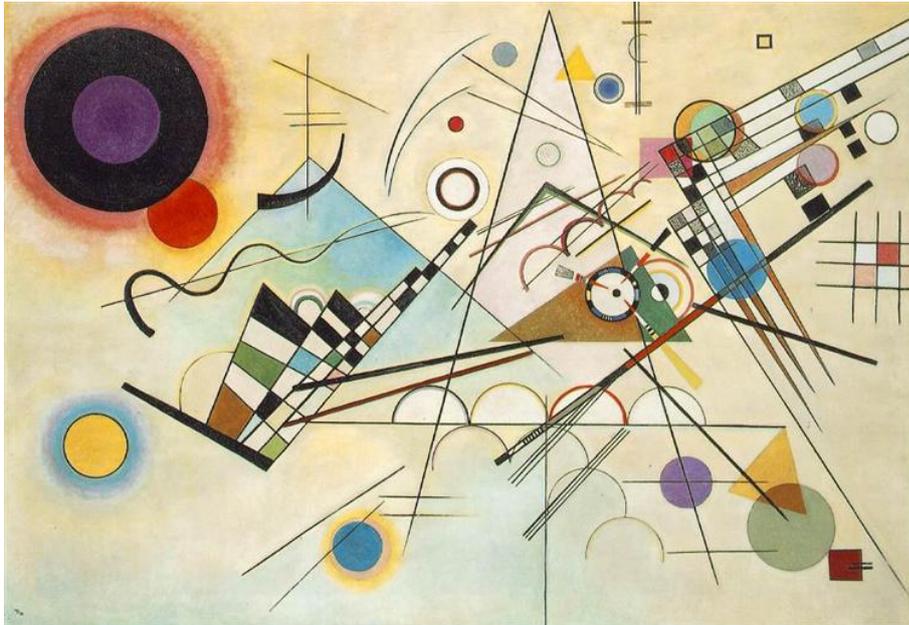
Several of the artists were based in Munich and the nearby village of Murnau, where Kandinsky and Münter settled in 1909. She is a very remarkable artist who has been overshadowed by the famous males surrounding her, but is now recognised for her own distinctive contribution.



Gabriele Münter, Breakfast of the Birds, 1934 (National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington DC)

Kandinsky is regarded as the 'father of abstract expressionism'. Originally from Moscow, he began by painting traditional landscapes, but was increasingly drawn towards abstraction. By the time he was forced to leave Russia, when official Communist policy made only Socialist Realism acceptable, he was already established in a successful career as one of

the leading European modernists. Thereafter, he steadily worked towards total abstraction, with a marked tightening and simplification of forms after he joined the Bauhaus in 1921. Nigel Humphreys, who recorded his lecture on Kandinsky for Aberystwyth u3a, did an excellent job of tracing this progression, noting that it took many years for him to finally reach pure abstraction, without any identifiable motifs - but also how his original standard repertoire of motifs gradually turned into compositions of abstract colour and form. If you want to understand what abstraction is all about, there's no better place to start than with the work of Kandinsky.



Wassily Kandinsky, Composition VIII, 1923 (Guggenheim Museum, New York City)

In April, Colin Dunnighan will speak on 'Street Art'. What is it? That's the question he's asked us to think about in the meantime!