

Obrist / Worringer / Marc
Abstraction and Empathy on the Eve of World War I
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This essay considers continuities between the impetus towards abstraction within Jugendstil and Expressionism. Both Hermann Obrist and Franz Marc sought through empathy to intuit and image abstract forces at work within the materiality of the organic and inorganic natural worlds. Their creative practice and theoretical writings share much with Wilhelm Worringer's discussion of the "expressive abstraction" found in the Gothic style, which unified the organic with the abstract. This essay explores the trajectories of this visual and textual discourse, paying particular attention to their nexus during 1914 in Obrist's monumental sculptures at the Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne and the development of Marc's paintings over the course of that year.

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During the summer of 1914 two monumental quasi-abstract sculptures created by Hermann Obrist stood on the grounds of the Deutscher Werkbund Exhibition across the Rhine River from downtown Cologne. Although neither has survived, they were located in courtyards to the sides of the theater that Henry van de Velde had designed for the exhibition (*Figure 1*). To the south was a limestone fountain that stood about twenty feet high (*Figure 2*); while *Movement*, a swirling pinnacle-like sculpture that also approached twenty feet in height, was to the north. A photograph of the latter *in situ* reveals the spires of Cologne Cathedral rising on the distant right horizon. Their "Gothic Spirit" provided political inspiration to the German nation during the nineteenth century, as well as creative inspiration to Obrist at century's end. The Gothic style's "expressive abstraction," which unified the organic with the abstract, was the focus of Wilhelm Worringer, an art historian who had grown up in Cologne and recently returned to teach in Bonn. However, he had spent much of the century's first decade in Munich, where he was exposed to Jugendstil's exploration of biomorphic



*Figure 1. Hermann Obrist
Fountain, Limestone, approximately
630 x 390 cm, ca. 1910-12.
Photograph taken in courtyard of
the House of Art and Crafts in
Munich in December 1912,
Museum für Gestaltung, Zürich*



*Figure 2. Hermann Obrist
Movement, Model for Werkbund
Exhibition, Cologne, 1914.
Mounted photograph
Museum für Gestaltung, Zürich*

abstraction, which was stimulated, in part, by Theodor Lipps' ideas about the role of empathy in aesthetic response. *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, Worringer's dissertation and first book, became, in turn, a text that encouraged German Expressionist artists in their own use of "expressive abstraction" during the years around 1914. This essay will explore trajectories of this visual and textual discourse, paying particular attention to their nexus during 1914 in the work of Franz Marc.

Obrist's earlier artistic production was found elsewhere in the 1914 exhibition – a section called "Pioneers and Leaders of the New German Industrial Art." These nine artists were presented as the originators of a new applied art during the 1890s, which, when organized and industrialized by the formation of

the Deutscher Werkbund in 1907, could compete on the world economic stage with French applied art. Obrist's contribution included embroideries that, when exhibited in Munich in 1896, had secured his place within the new movement. Based in both observation of, and fantasies about, the natural world, his art was, Obrist wrote, "life – condensely perceived, condensely presented, and intensely entered into" (Obrist, "Wozu," 21). August Endell, a graduate student at the Psychological Institute, which Theodor Lipps had established in 1894, termed the embroideries a "totally new, independent, mature, great art" that signified "the dawn of a new era," and promptly took up applied art himself (Endell, "To Breysig," 45-46). He also published *Um die Schönheit*, a pamphlet that celebrated a new aesthetic grounded in biomorphic abstraction. The first section drew on his dissertation, which argued that abstract forms could communicate a full range of feelings because of the human capacity for empathic response. He followed Lipps in this, who had separated the beholder's response to apperceived forms from what the forms depicted, believing that they appealed to some unconscious disposition within the beholder. Endell called for people to learn "to simply see, simply absorb ourselves in color and form" (Endell, "Über," 21). Rejecting the idea that feelings elicited by form are related to anything learned from observation, he wrote: "Forms and colors release in us a particular feeling effect without any mediation. We must only learn to allow them to become conscious in ourselves" (25).

Learning to see meant recognizing that vision was linked to a larger network of senses within the perceiving subject, all connected to processes of emotion and imagination. Having grown up in Weimar with private tutors, Obrist was well aware of Goethe's and other Romantic theories that linked aesthetics and natural science. Stacy Hand has shown how he was attracted throughout his artistic career to contemporary proponents of a *Lebensphilosophie*, who drew on current biological and psychological theories. Ernst Haeckel's ideas and drawings stimulated him, while the writings of Wilhelm Bölsche, Haeckel's biographer, were particularly important in the way they sought to join objective observation with intuitive aesthetic perception in what Bölsche called an

assimilation of life and art (Hand, “Embodied,” 10). Obrist believed that an alliance of science and art could produce images that expressed fundamental structures and forces within nature.



*Figure 3. Hermann Obrist
Waterfall in Mountains
Pencil and chalk on grey-brown
paper, 18.6 x 10.4 cm.
Date unknown
Museum für Gestaltung, Zürich*



*Figure 4. Hermann Obrist
Plaster design for a fountain for
use by people, cattle, dogs,
and birds, 1901,
Mounted photograph,
Museum für Gestaltung, Zürich*

Study of past artistic styles, such as the Gothic, which, Obrist wrote, “make the life of forces visible,” helped the artist to understand that true art expressed essences residing within nature’s construction and materials (Obrist, “Zweckmässig,” 127). Thus, he was fascinated by crockets, the stylized carvings of curled plant forms flaring from Gothic spires, seeing them as the release of a surplus of vital force residing in architecture that gives the spire the sense of

growth within the natural world that inspired it (Waenerberg 58). Stimulus was also taken from photographs collected from magazines, provoking drawings that explore the interactions of natural forces and materials (Hand, "Feuer," 76). Other drawings (*Figure 3*) were more fanciful, but their focus on the power of water was related to a series of fountain designs at the *fin de siècle*. One of these (*Figure 4*), which was envisioned as serving humans, cattle, dogs, and birds, showed his

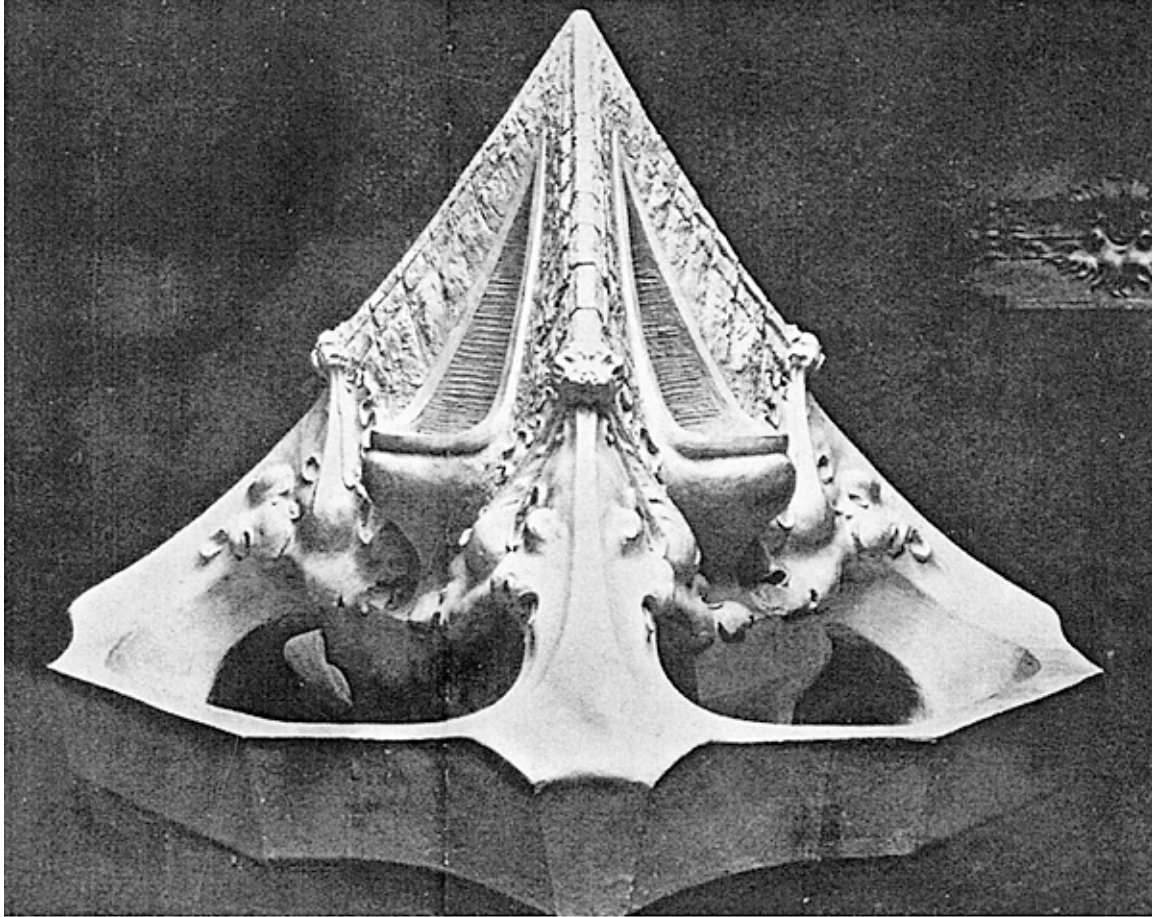


Figure 5. Hermann Obrist, Plaster design for a spring-fountain for a park or castle courtyard, 1901.

Mounted photograph, Museum für Gestaltung, Zürich

interest in communicating the commonality of animal life. Another (*Figure 5*), which he designated as a spring-fountain for a park or castle courtyard, struck one commentator as addressing the relation of plant growth to flowing water, but also the transmutability of water between its liquid and frozen states:

Constant drops hollow the stone and sharp angles are thus absurd. Take the formal structure of water itself, its tuberous icicles, its snow stars and

its layers frozen to each other, thus we have the fundamental essence of the best of Obrist's fountains. Doesn't the castle fountain have the effect of a magnificent ice sculpture? In which the applied ornament does not seem to be copies of various plants themselves, but of the fantastic forms that ice tends to give them? (Schäfer 140)

In these fountains Obrist returned to a sculptural type that he had treated at the beginning of his career during the early 1890s, only then his designs were indebted to a Neo-Gothic/Romantic style. When the new designs were shown in Berlin in 1901, one reviewer remarked how Obrist, rather than retaining the allegorical figures of other contemporary fountains, had created new abstract sculptural values through the poetic contrast of the weight and rigidity of rock with the flowing, erosive power of water (Bredt 220-21). Obrist, himself, wrote at this time:

An undreamed-of wealth of possibilities arise for an eye that has learned to see the sculptural forms in nature, which has learned to enlarge the compact power of buds, the roundness and ribs of seeds from their microscopic smallness to meter-high forms. All forms of tactile feeling, the feeling of smoothness, of coarseness, of hardness, of softness, of elasticity, of rigidity, of flexibility, of swollenness, of leanness, of roundness, and of angularity are aroused by forms remodeled from nature, and sculptural architectural ornament awaits, like Sleeping Beauty, its resurrection. No: the human nude is not the beginning and end of sculpture. (Obrist, "Neue," 157-58)

However, as Jugendstil fell out of fashion, less attention was paid to Obrist's works – a shift in values associated with the Third Applied Art Exhibition, held in Dresden in 1906, and the formation shortly thereafter of the Deutscher Werkbund, an association formed to promote a new, industrially-based design aesthetic. While some burial monuments were commissioned during the period before World War I, scholars know little about Obrist's sole realization of a major fountain, since basic resources about his work were destroyed when a bomb struck his house in 1944. The fountain was likely self-funded, carved in Munich,

and when exhibited there in late 1912 it provoked a journal article from Henry van de Velde, a designer who had launched art nouveau in Belgium. Dismissing the depiction of tritons and frogs in fountains during an age “when massive blocks of steel were forged by power hammers,” van de Velde praised Obrist’s creation of “something from nothing” – an “inspiring manifestation of life,” embodied in “this budding and effervescing mass of stone” with its “sequence of gestures directing the water’s course” (40-42). Why van de Velde evoked the power hammer is a mystery, but when Adolf Behne published a review of the Werkbund Exhibition, he cited it and a colossal power hammer produced by Breuer, Schumacher & Co., which was displayed next to Walter Gropius’ Deutz Motor Pavillion, as the most vital sculptures in the exhibition (1498). The fountain certainly displays a powerful tension between the downward plunge of the three toothed, thistle-like tongues of the inner construction and the rise of the three external buttresses, which bear water spouts on crystal-like forms at the ribs’ break toward their center join, where the main spout rises from a bud-like form. The inorganic is contrasted and merged with the organic – crystalline structures with the hypocotyl bendings of plant growth.

After receiving the Werkbund Theater commission, van de Velde had Obrist design the ornament around the eyelet windows of its façade, as well as place his monumental sculptures to its left and right. Published response to these works was largely positive but meager, *Movement* being described as a “plaster rebus” that dispensed with any real or ornamental reference, wanting, “almost like a Futurist, only to establish the flaming rhythm of enigmatic, fantastic forms” (Osborn). Both fluid and frozen, the sculpture is indeed a puzzle of phantasmic forms, similar to those that the commentator had previously associated with water freezing as it flowed over plant and rock forms. Recalling a photograph of a fountain encased in ice that was cut from a journal and has survived in the Obrist archive, *Movement’s* angular, crystalline structures mix with organic curves of sprouting growth to suggest a complex range and metamorphosis of forms within nature.

While Obrist's public presence was less remarked after 1906, the impact of his aesthetic values continued, because of the Lehr- und Versuch-Atelier für angewandte und freie Kunst, a private art school that he opened with Wilhelm von Debschitz in Munich in 1902. One of the students who enrolled in 1905 was Marta Schmitz, an artist from Cologne who was to marry Wilhelm Worringer in 1906 (Grebing 16). Worringer had arrived in Munich in 1901, at the height of Jugendstil, and he was certainly aware of the theories behind its empathic abstraction, since he mixed with writers who were associated with its artists while Paul Stern, his closest friend, had written a dissertation on empathy theory (Grebing 23-25). Attendance of lectures given in Berlin by Heinrich Wölfflin and Georg Simmel during 1903, followed by courses with Lipps and Alois Riegl in Munich, helped shape his approach to art history, as manifested in *Abstraction and Empathy*, his Ph.D. dissertation, defended at the University of Bern in January of 1907.

Worringer's intent, announced on his first page, was to focus on the aesthetics of artistic style rather than natural beauty. He connected the latter to Lipps' theory of empathy, which, he said, could not be applied to large areas of art history and would serve as a foil to his own theory that artistic creation grew out of two distinct modes of artistic volition – empathy and abstraction, which were in unceasing disputation and intermixture. Empathy was, he argued, the artistic volition of peoples who were content in the organic world and found expression in naturalism. Arising with the Greeks and Romans, it diminished during the Early Christian and Medieval eras before emerging again in the Renaissance. Truth to reality came to be seen as its goal and literary content gradually grew to dominate its formal means, until the present condition, which he described in the following way:

Now, for the first time, the outer world begins to live and it receives all its life from man, who now anthropomorphizes all its inner essence, all its inner forces. This sensation of oneself-in-things naturally sharpens the feeling for the inexpressibly beautiful content of organic form, and paths are revealed to artistic volition, the paths of an artistic naturalism, for

which the natural model merely serves as a substratum to the will to form that is guided by its feeling for the organic. (53)

The artistic volition toward abstraction was based, in contrast, on a psychological insecurity about the outside world, which was experienced as an extended, disconnected and bewildering nexus of phenomena. This psychological condition compelled the removal of depicted objects from the arbitrariness of the external world, to eternalize them by approximation to abstract forms and to thus find a point of tranquility and refuge from appearances. Space and volume were suppressed in favor of what Worringer termed the geometric-crystalline. While he gave various examples of this abstract style, his primary one was Northern animal style of the first millennium A.D. (*Figure 6*), although he hesitated to call it



Figure 6. Rendering of a bronze clasp from Gotland, Sweden for Bernhard Salin, Die altgermanische Tierornamentik, Stockholm, 1904, as reproduced in Wilhelm Worringer, Formprobleme der Gotik, Munich 1910.

abstract because, despite its purely linear, inorganic basis, it contained restless life within the tangle of line. He continued:

Here we have the decisive formula for the whole medieval North. Here are the elements, which later on, as we shall show, culminate in Gothic. The need for empathy of this inharmonious people does not take the nearest-at-hand path to the organic, because the harmonious motion of the organic is not sufficiently expressive for it; it needs rather that uncanny pathos which attaches to the animation of the inorganic. (83)

His line of argument drove toward his discussion of Northern Pre-Renaissance art in his final chapter, which was, he argued, the product of a

hybrid artistic will: an urge toward abstraction on the one hand and the most vigorous expression on the other. Confronted with a Gothic cathedral (*Figure 7*),

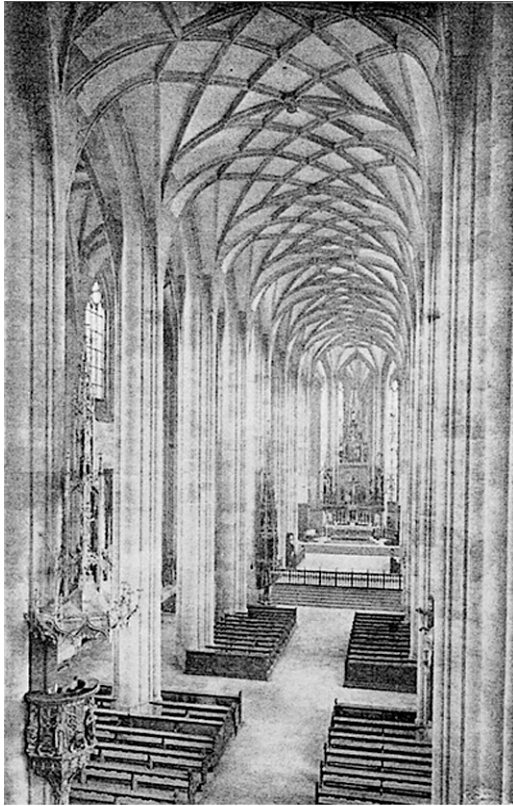


Figure 7. Interior of the Church of St. George, Dinkelsbühl, Illustration for Wilhelm Worringer, Formprobleme der Gotik, Munich, 1910

he asked, how could one say whether its soul, the mysterious inner power of its nature, is organic or abstract? Rather, he answered, the mechanically abstract laws of construction have become a living movement of forces.

Only in this heightened movement of forces, which in their intensity of expression surpass all organic motion, was Northern man able to gratify his need for expression, which had been intensified to the point of pathos by inner disharmony. Gripped by the frenzy of these mechanical forces, which thrust out at all their terminations and aspire toward heaven in a mighty crescendo of orchestral music, he feels himself convulsively drawn aloft in blissful vertigo, raised high above himself into the infinite. (121-22)

His argument continued in *Form Problems of Gothic*, his next book of 1910, in which he asserted that that this vertiginous effect was most firmly achieved in late Gothic churches in Germany, saying that while France gave rise to the Gothic system of building, its “delight in sensuous lucidity and organic harmony kept too strongly under repression the Germanic need for exaggeration, for excess” (96-97). Verticality was counterbalanced by horizontal accentuations, unlike the elimination of all horizontal divisions in German churches where “the Gothic need of spiritual expression found a path for itself and spiritualized the materiality by a delicate process of dematerialization” (107).

The dissertation's argument immediately struck a chord. Praise from Paul Ernst, Georg Simmel and others led to it being published by Reinhard Piper in 1908. The book received a particularly enthusiastic reception from artists and art historians in the Rhineland, both because of Worringer's personal connection with Cologne and the region's intense interest in German medieval art. In January of 1911, Emmy Worringer, his sister, helped found the Gereon Club, a venue for exhibitions, readings, and lectures about contemporary art and literature in Cologne – the first event being an evening lecture, held in July of that year, being Worringer himself on *Abstraction and Empathy*. Immediately, August Macke, a young painter in nearby Bonn, wrote to Franz Marc, a fellow member of the New Artists' Association of Munich, asking if he knew the book and saying that they could make use of it for promotion of their own art (59-60). Both artists would have significant exhibitions in Cologne during the years before World War I. Young art historians and museum directors in Cologne also sensed a connection between Worringer's ideas and

recent artistic developments and assisted in the creation of a modern Gothic chapel at the Sonderbund Exhibition, held in Cologne from May to September of 1912. Prompted by a desire to exhibit new stained glass windows created by Johann Thorn-Prikker for a regional church on the exhibition building's back wall, the chapel also contained murals created by Erich Heckel and Ernst Kirchner for the other three walls (Fischer 250-81). In a letter to Marc, Kirchner included a watercolor (Figure 8) and described the effective interaction of the murals' colors with the windows' red light.

Marc showed three works in the Sonderbund Exhibition, all paintings of



Figure 8. Ernst Kirchner
Drawing of Sonderbund Chapel
decoration by Kirchner and Erich
Heckel in letter to Franz Marc,
1912, Ink and watercolor on paper
Germanisches Nationalmuseum
Nürnberg, Deutsches Kunstarchiv
Nachlass Marc, I. C.

animals, which he had made the focus of his work. The role played by abstraction in their expressive effect was quite different from the earlier paintings by his father, Wilhelm Marc, a professor at the Munich Academy who specialized in animal and genre scenes. Wilhelm's work can be taken to embody that art of empathetic volition, as described by Worringer, which anthropomorphized, indeed sentimentalized the natural world, as in a painting of 1902 entitled *Sweet Tooth*, in which human characteristics are attributed to the sheep that enter a hut seeking a taste of syrup being cooked on the stove. Reinhard Piper summarized Worringer's importance for younger artists who questioned this artistic approach, when he wrote that Worringer was "the first to show the self-sufficiency, not the inferiority, of non-naturalistic representation" (12). Piper wrote this in a section devoted to Nordic animal-style art of a popular book entitled *The Animal in Art*, which he authored and published in spring of 1910. While working on the book, Piper had visited a Munich gallery where Marc was having his first exhibition. Taken by his lively treatment of animals, Piper purchased a lithograph and sought out the artist, eventually commissioning him to copy a Delacroix watercolor for reproduction on the book's first jacket (*Figure 9*). As the book's conclusion about the current state of animal representation, Piper also featured photographs of a bronze sculpture by Marc and the artist's comments about his goals (*Figure 10*). Marc considered the sculpture to be one of his more successful early works, and his words about it have become the most



Figure 9. Franz Marc, Horse Frightened by Storm (after Delacroix), Gouache, 1910 Formerly in the Archiv R. Piper & C. Verlag, Munich 1910 (paperback edition)

famous of Marc's statements:



Figure 10. Franz Marc, Two Horses, Bronze, H. 16.4 cm, 1908-09, Final illustration in Reinhard Piper, Das Tier in der Kunst, Munich, 1910

My goals are not in the field of animal painting in particular. I am looking for a good, pure and light style in which at least part of what we modern painters have to say will show through. I am trying to intensify my feeling for the organic rhythm of all things. I am striving to empathize pantheistically with the quiver and flow of blood in nature, trees, animals, the air. I am striving to make pictures of this, with new movements and colors, that defy our old easel paintings. . . . [T]he new French generation is caught up in a race to this goal. But, strangely enough they carefully steer clear of the most natural subject for art of this kind - the animal picture. I can see no better way of "animalizing" art, as I should like to call it, than the animal picture. This is why I seize it. With a van Gogh or a Signac, everything has become animalized, the air, even the boat resting on the water and above all, the painting itself: these pictures no longer resemble what used to be called "pictures." My sculpture is a tentative

effort in the same direction. The circulation of blood in the bodies of both horses is expressed through the diverse parallelism and oscillation of the lines. The viewer should not be able to ask about the “type of horse” but should feel instead the inner, pulsing life of the animal. I have intentionally tried to remove any indication as to type and breed from these horses. Therefore, for example, the vigorous proportions of the limbs are somewhat unhorse-like. (190)

While Marc’s goals were no longer those of animal painting, he had begun his career within it and was well acquainted with Heinrich von Zügel, its most famous representative in Munich. However, as his statement indicates, the new French painting had captivated him, for van Gogh had shown him the “animalization” of painting, how every inch of a painting could be filled with a breath of life that was communicated to the viewer by the abstract and material means of paint – its texture, movement and color. However, his terminology was also linked to his subject matter and was employed by Piper when he wrote the following about Delacroix’s watercolor:

His white horse frightened by a thunderstorm could perhaps raise concerns for some horse experts. Yet no one can deny the impact of this turbulent scene. It is really an eruption of the elements. And Delacroix has not betrayed the beast’s animality, rather he has allowed it to achieve the most magnificent and triumphant expression. The distinctive organism of the animal is by no means compromised by the introduction of elements foreign to it; rather all of the power and splendor of the phenomenon, otherwise dispersed or quiescent, flares up in a moment of greatest intensity and discharge of forces. (150)

Piper stresses how Delacroix found the means to image the horse’s instinctual response to a sudden and violent change in the world about it.

In a three-page manuscript, probably written during 1911, Marc posed the following question, which has also become one of his most quoted: “How does a horse see the world, how does an eagle, a deer or a dog? It is a poverty-stricken convention to place animals into landscape as seen by me; instead, we should

contemplate the soul of the animal to divine its way of sight. This observation should not be idle speculation, but leads us to the sources of art” (Marc, “Aufzeichnungen,” 99). He continued, saying that there are artists of the present, like Kandinsky and Picasso, who project their inner world as the subject of their work. Others, who are naturalists, paint the object, while Marc says he wishes to paint the “predicate,” by imagining how the animal feels the world. Through the course of 1910-11 his paintings seem to have been guided, in part, by this speculative effort, with his painting *Horse in a Landscape* of 1910 often



*Figure 11. Franz Marc
Horse in a Landscape,
Oil on canvas, 85 x 112 cm
Museum Folkwang, Essen, 1910*

presented as a prime example (*Figure 11*). The horse’s haunches, anchored in the lower right corner, begin a movement across the picture’s space, the neck’s curve thrusting the horse’s unseen forehead into the world of the surrounding landscape. Many have remarked on the resemblance to the *Rückenfiguren* of Caspar David Friedrich, although there the viewer is prompted to identify with human figures who, one imagines, have consciously

sought the experiences of the mountain peaks and dawning sun. The horse directs our eyes onto undulating grassland, spotted with what may be clumps of brush, all rendered in relatively flat and abstracted areas of saturated colors. The horse’s turn and the landscape’s curves, which lead our eyes around and out of the picture’s limited space, may be formal terms of the “predicate” that Marc sought: a behavioral scientist has alerted us to the fact that the placement of a horse’s eyes, along with its movable ears and sensitive nostrils, provide for a more panoramic and extended sensory field than our own, one highly adapted to life on open ground within a grazing herd (Zeeb 258-60).

During 1910-11 Marc was also thinking about how the human image might fit within this “animalized painting,” as well as making contacts with avant-garde

artistic circles in Munich. He saw the first and second exhibitions of the New Artists' Association of Munich and responded to negative reviews of the second with an appreciation that was published in October of 1910 and led to his active participation in the group. He praised the continuing effort to "spiritualize 'matter,' to which impressionism had held so tightly with its teeth," but wrote that what was really promising was "that their pictures contain highly valuable examples of spatial organization, rhythm and color theory in addition to the most highly developed spiritual sense" (219). Of particular interest here is Marc's reception of Worringer's reviews of the Hans von Marées retrospectives at the Munich and Berlin Secessions during 1909. They were the first comprehensive showings of this German painter, who had worked and lived primarily in Italy from 1864 to 1887, and were followed by Julius Meier-Graefe's catalogue raisonné in 1910, which was published by Piper, reviewed by Worringer, and purchased by Marc. Here, Worringer explains Marées's late, heavily overpainted works as the consequence of a tragic irreconcilability:

Like the best of our race, he has struggled for a synthesis in his art, which never can be realized, because it wants to merge incompatible things. But the incongruity of his effort always has a dynamic, against which the synthetic achievement of the most blissful peoples can appear almost cheap to us; cheap, because they have arisen under very easy conditions and therefore do without the ethos of a promethean expenditure of effort. (231-32)

In *Form Problems of the Gothic*, Worringer referenced similar issues in Dürer's work and ended the book with the question: "who knows whether, in some such new investigation, penetrating to the innermost secret cells of the phenomena of style, much Northern classicism of recent times may not after all reveal itself as merely Gothic in disguise?" (127)

Drawings of 1910-11 show that the Marées exhibition and catalogue prompted Marc to explore the depiction of humans living with animals in naked innocence in an Arcadian world. But the large paintings that eventually arose were different in their compositional character and reflected comments about

Marées made in Marc's earlier exhibition review. Referring to the work of Vladimir Bekhtevyev, a member of the New Artists' Association, Marc wrote: "He recognized what tragically hampered Marées's struggles and spoiled Feuerbach's great ideas: both approached the representation of humans with the wholly exhausted means of the Italian Renaissance and did not dare to draw the ultimate conclusion of introducing them in their ornamental compositions as linear ornaments" (220). This conclusion was drawn by Marc as well in *The Waterfall* (Figure 12), a composition of mid-1912, in which the water pouring through the rocks above unites the nude female figures and landscape in an ornamental surface design (Hoberg 35-38). Symbolically, the rush of water works as a purifying force, cascading over the standing figure at lower left and sweeping her hair back into the compositional pattern. It is also a site where domesticated and wild nature join, a gathering point for both the tabby cat curled up below the female bathers on the near bank and the stretching tiger on the opposite side.



Figure 12. Franz Marc
The Waterfall
 Oil on canvas, 164 x 158 cm, 1912
 Private collection

Within a year, humans had almost disappeared from his paintings; Marc wrote that he came to find them "ugly," but his *Enchanted Mill*, which was painted approximately mid-1913, does focus on civilization's use of natural energy (Figure 13). Water pours over a mill-wheel from a race, the channeling by humans of a stream that enters below, water from each pooling across the painting's bottom, at the right edge of which two animals drink. Birds bathe in the curling torrent, whose dynamic unites with the animal world and contrasts with the more crystalline forms found in the buildings above the wheel and the



Figure 13. Franz Marc, *The Enchanted Mill*
Oil on canvas, 130 x 91 cm, 1913
The Art Institute of Chicago

geological structures at top, bottom, and right edges. The water's fluidity in *Enchanted Mill* also contrasts with the three angular, frozen vectors that slice through *Waterfall in Ice* (Figure 14). This painting, which was destroyed during World War II, was described by Maria Marc as follows: "The color of the frozen water white and bluish-gray. Blue depths lying behind showing through. Left at the edge green, on the upper left a little black bridge on red. On the right a gold-brown trunk is intersected by a diagonal waterfall" (Hoberg and Jansen 257). As different as the states of water are in the two

paintings, they share a new use of transparent color and increased dynamism of form.

These formal effects were the result of Marc's appreciation and considered criticism of Robert Delaunay's paintings over the course of 1913. Marc had first seen photographs of the French artist's work in October 1911, and then viewed originals at the initial Blaue Reiter exhibition, which opened in Munich in December 1911 and included paintings from Delaunay's *Saint Severin*, *Tour Eiffel*, and *La Ville* series. Marc must have learned about more recent work

after Delaunay wrote to Kandinsky in April 1912 about a series based on a window motif, explaining his desire to unite the lessons of Seurat and Cézanne in “pure paintings,” ruled by laws “based on transparent colors, comparable to musical notes, which have led me to the movement of color” (12/63, 492). When Marc visited Delaunay’s studio in Paris during October 1912, he expressed his enthusiasm for the window series in a letter to Kandinsky (12/97, 495). A text that Delaunay gave Marc during the visit stated his goal of composing colors so that they simultaneously retained their uniqueness, while combining in a rhythm that communicated unity within the natural world (255-56). Shortly afterwards, Marc



Figure 14. Franz Marc, Waterfall in Ice, Oil on cardboard, 113 x 80 cm, 1913, Formerly Bernhard Koehler, Berlin (destroyed in World War II)

began to set his animals in a shallow spatial grid of transparent colors, a means of intermixing figures with ground and suggesting that the world was a field of moving energy. Believing that experimental physics had radically altered humanity’s understanding of matter, this adoption of a crystalline pictorial space must have helped him believe that he had moved closer to the basic spirit of all art, which he defined in 1914 as

the yearning for undivided being, for liberation from the sensory deception of our ephemeral life. Its greatest goal is to dissolve the whole system of our limited feelings, to reveal an unearthly being that lives behind everything, to smash the mirror of life so that we look into being. (Marc, “Zur Kritik,” 119)

When sent a photograph in April 1913 of *The Cardiff Team* (Figure 15), Delaunay’s most recent work, however, Marc was unenthusiastic, labeling it “the

purest impressionism” (Marc, “To Delaunay,” 484). This was, as was *Enchanted Mill*, a rejection of *The Cardiff Team’s* celebration of modern technology, which Marc believed had robbed the world of intuition and secularized, what he termed, the sacred insights of pure science. In the same letter, however, he reaffirmed his appreciation of *Windows in Three Parts*, seen the previous fall; and the unusual horizontal format of which would be adopted by Marc in several important paintings of the coming fall and winter. September brought the opportunity at the “Erster deutscher Herbstsalon” to see Delaunay’s most recent paintings. Translating sun- and moonlight into color and form, they produce a gyrational force within the canvas that clearly intrigued Marc, as evident in a series of paintings done after seeing the exhibition. Marc’s general response to the exhibition is found in a letter to Kandinsky:



Figure 15. Robert Delaunay
The Cardiff Team, Third Version
Oil on canvas, 326 x 208 cm, 1913
Musée d'art moderne de la
Ville de Paris

For me the result is astonishing: a significant preponderance (also as regards quality) of abstract forms that speak to us only as forms, almost without any figurative associations and beyond representational concerns (I know full well, of course, that this distinction doesn't really exist – all forms are also memories of something). As far as my own work is concerned I realize now in what a confused manner I used to go about painting my pictures; I would work from two more or less totally separate starting points and would carry on painting until these appeared to merge – sadly only “appeared.” Perhaps it's impossible to achieve a perfect

connection, with nothing left over, but there are artists who get nearer to this goal and who see the goal more clearly. Among them I'd unhesitatingly count Delaunay. (Marc 13/108, 511)

While there are watercolors that respond to Delaunay's subject and radiating rings of color, it was a painting entitled *Stables* that pushed further into



Figure 16. Franz Marc, *Stables*, Oil on canvas, 74 x 157 cm, 1913, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

abstraction, while still employing animal subject matter (Figure 16). The extended frieze format relates to the admired *Window in Three Parts*, as do the diagonal shafts of colored light that lend dynamism and space to the horizontal grid. The interplay of diamonds on the rump of the second horse from the right and the arabesque that unites its swishing tail with its mane, not only connect to the dynamic forms of Delaunay's sun/moon series, but also control the horses' radical foreshortenings on the right and unite them with the shallow space built by the profile views on the left. One's eyes find echoing abstract forms throughout the painting that suggest a unity underlying diversity.

Stables was among the ten works that Marc showed at *Die Neue Malerei*, a major exhibition at Dresden's Arnold Gallery during January 1914. Also present were several paintings entitled simply *Composition*, which were dated 1913 and likely done at year's end. Their generalized titles were new, as was their degree of abstraction. Through the course of the year, until his call to a field artillery unit

in September 1914, Marc created not only some of his most well known animal paintings, but also a series of abstractions. He wrote nothing about this work in surviving letters from that period, although the issue of abstraction is prominent in “The 100 Aphorisms/The Second Sight,” which was written at the front during Winter 1914-15 and probably intended to be published like two other essays



Figure 17, Franz Marc, *Playing Forms*, Oil on canvas, 56.5 x 170 cm, 1914
Museum Folkwang, Essen

penned there. *Playing Forms* appears to have been an important transitional work in his move to abstraction, its format being similar to *Stables* and having a tripartite structure that from left to right employs forms that suggest inorganic structures, animal, and plant life (Fig. 17). Appearing rather programmatic in character, it seems an effort to communicate the “yearning for undivided being” that he had identified as the goal of all art. The following is from Aphorism 44:

Leibniz already had wanted to recognize that material is “also” spirit. But it has required a long road in order to recognize that the world is only spirit, is only psyche and the magical natural laws signify only our second, more spiritual, deeper form and formula for the psyche, for our own psyche. The laws of nature are the tool of our second, better insight, our second sight, with which we observe the appearances of the world today. (Marc 198)

Scholars have looked to his letters and linked the content of such paintings and words to his evident interest in the writings of Wilhelm Bölsche, who, after all, had published a poetic study of the horse’s evolution in 1909 (Bölsche). However, Marc’s interest in such ideas about the transmutability of inorganic and organic life certainly drew as well on the writings of Novalis, who believed in a

vitalism that permitted interspecies metamorphosis and whose literary works were in Marc's library (Hoberg, "Psyche," and Eschenburg).

Some scholars consider *Broken Forms* to be the last painting done before Marc left for the war (*Figure 18*). How it acquired its title is unknown, but its wording is similar to *Cheerful Forms*, which was, with *Playing Forms*, one of two large abstract paintings that were shown in and titled for the large memorial



*Figure 18. Franz Marc
Broken Forms, Oil on canvas
112 x 84.5 cm, 1914
The Solomon R. Guggenheim
Museum, New York*

exhibition given Marc by the Munich Free Secession in Fall 1916. One doesn't know if Marc actually associated "brokenness" with the forms of this painting, but if so, the angular black form thrusting into the pictorial center from lower left seems a candidate. However, it is penetrated by a prismatic vertical ray, which illuminates a boiling multitude of small circular forms at lower center, their inchoate turbulence spinning off forms, which rise and uncurl – mainly red on the left and blue on the right, colors that Marc had previously associated with matter and spirit in a letter to Macke (Marc, "To Macke," 28-29). This boil of colors taking form reminds of Aphorism 54, which reads: "Through the desensualization and conquering of

material, the primeval belief in color will increase to an ecstatic fervor and inwardness like the belief in God once did with the rejection of idols" (200). Painting and aphorism seem to reference a feeling state not unlike Worringer's highly poetic description of a Gothic cathedral's organic abstraction. Indeed, there are many sentiments expressed in the Aphorisms that remind of Worringer's ideas, for Marc clearly looked to the Gothic as an era of sacred

knowledge that anticipated possibilities in his own time, writing the following in Aphorism 42:

The first sacred step of European cognition was the belief of the Gothic person, who saw heaven, the heaven of the legends of the saints and who felt the stigmata of his savior burn his body and built the giant cathedrals according to the images of his conception of heaven. Our belief is the second sight, the second step of cognition, the exact science. Every belief gives birth to form. Our belief in knowledge will have its great form in the twentieth century. (198)

He believed that what he considered the religious content of pure science – its concept of the mutability of energy and matter, its abstract thought – would soon

be broadly recognized and expressed through artistic abstraction, although he wrote that “the path to its fulfillment leads through the sufferings of technology, through the fire of a bitter war” (204).

Marc’s tragedy, of course, was that the “fire of a bitter war” caused his death on March 4, 1916, when shrapnel from a shell-burst struck his temple while he led a reconnaissance patrol on horseback near Verdun. Strangely, tragedy also befell Obrist’s fountain, whose mixture of crystalline and hypocotyl forms related closely to the organic abstraction of Marc’s late paintings and Worringer’s conception of the Gothic. Although the Werkbund Exhibition was planned to extend into Fall 1914, it closed shortly after the war’s outbreak. The fountain, like other



Figure 19. Hermann Obrist, Fountain, Sited by the Krupp company store on Ostfeldstraße, Essen, Photograph from before 1926, Obrist Nachlass, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich

exhibits, was removed, to make room for an arms depot and hospital that served the Western front. Paul Schultze-Naumburg, the architect and proponent of *Heimatschutz*, is reported to have recommended the fountain's purchase to Gustav Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach, an acquisition that occurred in August 1915 (Krupp Archiv). Transported to Essen, it was sited adjacent to the company's general store (Konsum-Anstalt. Central Verkaufsstelle für Colonial-, Maufact-, Schuh-, Eisenwaaren und Hausgeräte) on Ostfeldstraße, just outside the steel-mill's main gate (*Figure 19*). Thus, during 1915-16, after operating the power hammers that forged the cannon and armor-plate used at the battles of Verdun and Jutland, workers and their families passed through the fountain's spray when doing their shopping. The fountain's mixture of organic with inorganic forms, strangely powerful, even aggressive in its effect, remained on public view until its destruction during the night of March 12, 1943, as part of a British bombing campaign that leveled much of the Krupp plant and central Essen. This postscript to a narrative about abstraction and empathy in the art and theory of the century's beginning seems poignantly appropriate, for, as Worringer indirectly suggested, that story contains an "uncanny pathos."

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