Blue Rider
a Tribute to the Life of Wassily Kandinsky

—Edward Sanders
with Glyphs for Kandinsky

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

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

He married his cousin Anja Shemiakina
in 1892

Trained as a lawyer
turned to painting just before 30
1896 to Munich to study painting

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

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

She was 26, He was 37.

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

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

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

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

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

Trouble in Painterly Paradise. Untenable situation of two, then three. September ’04, K separates from his wife, Anja.
(divorced from her in the fall of 1911)

1904-1908
Münter and Kandinsky
though together
were constantly moving from place to place

both of them painting

December ’04 K and M to Tunis
for several months
then to Italy, returning to Munich in April of ’05

May-August ’05 in Dresden

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

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

In Paris K kept his painterly brain focused
on his Russian roots
with themes of Russian fairy tales and folklore
turning up in his work

such as Riding Couple an oil which shows a youthful rider
and a girl on horseback embracing
plus the work, Colorful Life, tempera on canvas
with the Kremlin in the upper portion, and below
a vast assortment of Russian humans, including a rider
on a horse

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

A walking tour of Switzerland in the summer of ’07

September ’07 till April of ’08 in Berlin

Then back to Munich
where they each had their separate apartments

Big pressure on Münter as an unmarried woman accompanying
Kandinsky She could have been arrested sharing a room
K always Organizing—as in January of '09
cofounding the group NKVM
*Neue Künstlervereinigung München*
*New Artists Society of Munich*
becomes its president

(In December the initial NKVM exhibition in Munich.)

Murnau era: mid-May 1909
to early August 1914

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

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

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

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

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

He dressed like a square
As with William Burroughs
W.K. wore the clothes of the upper middle class—
a jacket and tie
even while painting

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

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

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

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

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

October ’10 K to Moscow
He’d not been there since ’03
He mentioned going to church on October 30
December to Odessa
till just before Christmas

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

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

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

1911 early in the year
Fanny Dengler became M & K’s housekeeper
She had previously served K and Anja!
Intimations of hank-pank ’tween Dengler and K

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

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

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

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

July 4, ’11 Kandinsky drew all the seven sketches for the album Klänge “which were still needed.
Now I'm going to get on with the cutting again.”

’11 saw K involved with religious art such as the wood cut *Last Judgement* and the painting *All Saints I*, plus a painting on glass *Angel of the Last Judgement*, and others (For a number of years K took part in the technique known as Hinterglasbilder, painting in reverse on glass, so that the work was seen on the other side of a sheet of glass)

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

His move toward Abstract Painting the summer of ’11

He titled his works “impressions” “improvisations” and “compositions” often with a good number of sketches and preliminary lay-outs leading, say, to a specific “composition”

’Tween ’11 and ’13 he would often make preliminary watercolor pieces (leading to *Improvisations* and other oils) in which pieces he would gradually drift away from actual objects so that in the oils only traces of their original likenesses would remain
For months in 1911
he pondered and studied
readying himself
for Composition IV

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

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

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

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

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

December 18, First exhibition of “The Editorial Board of the
Blue Rider” at Thannhauser’s Moderne Galerie, Munich

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

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

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

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

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

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

K wrote prose poems and regular poems

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

300 copies numbered, signed by K
and was, in K’s words, “quickly sold out.”

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

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

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

“I should like once again to remind you please to obtain
the necessary papers for the marriage....
If we can’t have a room together there and I
have to travel as a Miss and worry about the police because
of the registration, then in the end I’d rather do without....
I just want to be together with you.”
August of ’14, outbreak of WW I  
Kandinsky and Münter splits from Munich  
for Switzerland, till November  

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

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

(Doesn’t paint much ’15 till ’19)  

There were no oil paintings listed by K in 1915  

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

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

Breaks up with her  
but without telling her  

She was bitter, very bitter about it  
Apparently he promised to get back with her—  
then burned her  She was 37  
Broken to be dumped  
after 14 seething years
March of ’16, after three months in Stockholm
Kandinsky heads back to Moscow

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

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

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

He’s 50 She’s around 23

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

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

September birth of son, Volodia

October Revolution 1917
Ten Days that Shook the World

During the early years of the Rev
Kandinsky was so busy
helping the cultural Rev
he didn’t paint that much

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

The Revolution dented his personal finances.

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

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

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

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

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

Schoenberg Turns Down Kandinsky
Spring of 1923

Back in early ’11 Kandinsky had begun a friendship
with Arnold Schönberg after hearing in Munich
a concert of his works

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Through their lawyers, Kandinsky and Münter conducted a protracted battle— which lasted until 1926— over the pictures and personal belongings that Kandinsky had left behind.... In the end some pictures were returned to Kandinsky.” But many of them were kept, ultimately, by Münter at her house in Murnau (and in 1957, in her old age, she gave the trove to the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus in Munich)

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

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

1927 until 1933 Kandinsky taught the popular
free painting class.

March 1928  Wassily and Nina Kandinsky
became German citizens

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

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

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

The Bauhaus moves to the outskirts of Berlin
clinging clinging

July of ’33 Bauhaus closes for good

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

There he paints unto his Finality
In July of ’37
three of his “Compositions” sequence were put on display
as part of the Degenerate Art exhibition in Munich
then destroyed by the Nazis

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

K’s art removed from museums

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

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

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

What is the Glory of Kandinsky?
That he cleaved to Creativity?
Well, millions also cleaved—

That he kept on painting
through It all
unto Finality?

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

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

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

Staying calm enough to paint
He worked and worked & created & created
all the way to his End—
blown out of Russia after the Revolution around ’21
blown out of Germany after the Nazis ’33-’34
then in an apartment outside Paris through much of the war—create create create

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

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

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

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

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

The Blue Rider reaches the other side
The Other Side