

# The Essence of the Art of Franz Marc

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**Abstract:** Franz Marc painted mainly animals in an original and characteristic style. His focus on animals is attributed to his pure spirit as an artist who felt a special affiliation with animals. Marc changed his style, forms and colors as he developed his ideas on art, influenced by van Gogh, Cézanne, and Matisse, and by the artistic trends of Fauvism and Cubism. Marc created remarkably sophisticated animal paintings in the early 20th century. Over the course of the alteration of his style, Marc's affection for and identification with animals never changed.

Marc lived during the turbulent and dramatic international changes that led to World War I. Although Marc hoped that Europe would be purified and then reincarnated by that war, his hope was not realistic. Just before his death, one of his last abstract works suggests his concept of his value to the world. Marc's ideas about art and the world were admirably pure, and his true affection for animals was the basis of his art, which contributed to his peculiar optimism. Franz Marc's death marked the end of his creations, but he will be remembered as the first painter to convey pure affection for animals in the history of Western art.

**Key words:** spiritual aesthetic, affection for animals, abstraction, World War I

## Introduction

Franz Marc is a well-known German painter who depicted mainly animals. Many thousands of people have seen his remarkable, colorful paintings and felt the passion of his art. However, Marc is not very well known in Japan. His painting *Blue Horse I* is representative of his expression, conveying his gentle personality. Indeed, Franz Marc was known for his humanism and for his great affection for living things, which led him to paint many animals. The artists of the age (the late 19th / early 20th century) used a variety of styles of expression, and Marc was influenced by many of his predecessors and peers. Vivid colors, characteristic forms, and the introduction of cubistic methodology endowed his works with remarkably outstanding characteristics.

Marc's affection for animals is the essential core of his many paintings. For Marc, "animals came to represent a sort

of primeval purity, each signifying some admirable strength or desirable virtue: the deer fragile agility, the tiger restrained, latent strength. Although at first he painted animals in the foreground of his pictures, later they became integrated with the landscape, as though he were seeking a complete identification of both" (Brit. 2010, 144-5). His depiction of animals is certainly derived from the purity of his own personality. Because of his gentle honesty and humanity, the style and colors he used seem to release "rather childish symbolism, the strong sense of personalization" (Brit. 2010, 145). It is not difficult to understand the transition of ideas in art, whereas an artist's personality is less easily comprehended. Marc was not only honest and sincere; he was frequently cynical, pessimistic, and critical. His affinity for animals, in a sense, may have reflected his disappointment regarding humans. He apparently felt that in contrast to animals, people were not pure and honest. Here I will discuss Marc's essential expression of animals and humanism, based on an attempt to decode his works.

## 1 Animals as the main motif of art

In the history of Western art, animals (including imaginary animals such as dragons) have been used to provide various ideas and symbols in paintings, and as statues. Initially, animals and the diversity of living things were symbols of life and nature. In ancient civilizations, the world of animals was directly united with both nature and religious implications, and animals were often the objects of worship and prayer. Along with religious and ritual meanings, animals became aligned with concepts such as productivity, eternity, terror, fertility, life / death, strength, and destruction.

Archeologists have excavated many ornaments, paintings, and statues of animals from the remains of ancient civilizations. For example, in ancient Egypt, numerous animals had their own deities eg., Anubis (jackal), Wadjet (cobra), Sekhmet (lion), Sebek (crocodile), Bastet (cat), and Ra (falcon). Such personified animal gods and goddesses demonstrate the affinity and respect for animals among the people of that time. The personification of animals was one representation of the ancient Egyptian's ideas regarding nature and living things.

Ur is thought to be the oldest city of the ancient civilization of Sumerians in Mesopotamia. The lyres excavated from the remains of Ur are especially famous oldest stringed instruments. One of them, 'the Queen's lyre' is thought to have been made during the Early Ur Dynasty (22nd to 21st century BCE), and it has a beautiful bull's head made of gold.

(Fig. 1) The history of ancient Sumer and Babylon is well known, and ornaments such as the bull's -head lyre suggest that animals have had a close relationship with humans for thousands of years. In this case, the bull symbolized agrarian fertility in the Ur civilization.

Another example is the sculpture known as 'The Ram in a Thicket' which was discovered in the 'Great Death Pit' of the Royal Cemetery of Ur (2650-2550 BCE). (Fig. 2) This mysterious ram symbolizes the ancient religion of Babylonia. Its posture of note, as it is standing on its hind legs with its forelegs on the branches of a thicket. <sup>1</sup>

After the Sumerian civilization's peak, the kingdom of Babylonia thrived. During the dynasty of Nebuchadnezzar II, the famous gate of Ishtar was constructed, with its famous presentation of hundreds of lions. (Fig. 3) The use of the lions indicates that at that time many lions inhabited the region, ie., mid-west Asia. The lion was used by the dynasty as a symbol both power and prosperity. In other ancient dynasties as well, the authentic power of the lion was recognized. Lions are depicted in a variety of modes and expressions as ornaments on buildings, interior decorations, tapestries, vessels, and as a motif of paintings in many regions around the world. As the strongest carnivorous animals, the lion became one of the earliest representative objects for symbolic expression.

Symbolized animals also implied authorized power, emblems of the class of aristocracy, moral goodness, or sometimes primitive religious evilness, vice, and destruction. In this sense, the lion depicted in the tapestry 'Les six



Fig. 1 Bull's head of The Queen's lyre  
London, the British Museum



Fig. 2 Ram in a Thicket  
London, the British Museum



Fig. 3 Lion of the Ishtar Gate of the city of Babylon

tapisseries de *La Dame à la licorne*, *Le Goût* ' is a symbol of the authority of this aristocratic line. (Fig. 4)

With regard to ancient religious stories, the famous tale of Noah's Ark involves a great number of pairs of animals that are collected in order to ensure the animals' survival after an upcoming apocalyptic flood. Noah's mission to save animals from the flood implies that all living things should survive and be saved under God's protection (except for some evil organisms). This story, derived from the Bible's Old Testament, has been a motif of painting since ancient times, and it was one of the first in which the idea protecting living things on the earth was proposed. The story of Noah's Ark was remarkable because it taught that not only humans (Noah and his family) but also animals had to be saved under God's providence. This motif had been repeatedly used for the depiction of mammals (such as cattle), birds, and even fish by many painters. The animals are the symbol of all life saved by God.

In the 17th century, the animals depicted by the Dutch painter d'Hondecoeter have already departed from the Ark and are resting on land. (Fig. 5) Their stillness and relief due to being saved are felt from their expressions. d'Hondecoeter seemed to focus on the wonderful life of animals rather than the context of the religious myth, as he was a painter who painted animals using the typical techniques of realism. His detailed depictions of the vividness and importance of animal life are still appreciated. His was an honest style for the 17th century.

Indeed, mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and

other invertebrates have been assigned symbolic or direct implications, metaphors of goodness, fortune, beauty, honesty, greediness, vice, wrath, evilness, intelligence, betrayal, or ominousness. Of course the selection and characterization of each animal's symbolization were performed by human, and such as these choices are associated with many aspects of religion, myths, legends, prejudice, folklore, views of nature, and the awe of or respect for life. As an example of an old religious fable, an Old Testament story evokes the cryptic being of a giant fish (or whale) that swallowed the prophet Jonah. The terrible fish was presented as a messenger of God, Jonah whose faith was being questioned by God.

Being swallowed merely provided the opportunity for Jonah to find his true faith after his survival from the monster (This scene is depicted many times in illuminated manuscripts in the Middle Ages).

In the Renaissance era, animals were described or expressed in various styles and meanings.

They were no longer simple objects of ancient civilizations nor religious symbols. For example, Hieronymus Bosch was an excellent painter who depicted every kind of organism in his works. Enormous numbers of creatures emerged in the strange and mysterious world created by Bosch. Many of them were not real animals; rather, they belonged to the category of Bosch's original monster-like creations called 'grillos' which he designed as combinations of various types of organism, including plants, invertebrates, crustaceans, mollusks, birds, and mammals. Bosch created a large quantity of monsters, hinting at the expanding knowledge



Fig. 4 Les six tapisseries de *La Dame à la licorne*, *Le Goût*, around 1500 (the part of a lion)  
Musée national du Moyen Âge, Paris



Fig. 5 d'Hondecoeter *Animals From Noah's Ark*, 17c



Fig. 6 *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, c1500  
(A part of the central panel)  
Oil on panel Lisbon, The National Museum



Fig. 7 *The Adoration of the Magi*, c1500 (A part of the right wing)  
Oil on panel Madrid, Plado

of live organisms during the Renaissance. Such ‘grillos’ or animals appear in almost all of his representative works. The monsters play the role of a great menace to humans, threatening human life, including the torture and death of humans. Even the mammals or mammal-like imaginary animals in the paintings by Bosch generally seem to be mysterious, leading an existence beyond human intellect. For Bosch, humans are depicted as being fragile and easily susceptible to the power of destiny and nature. All organisms are veiled in mystery and cruelty and even with humor, completely overwhelming human beings. Under such conditions, humans are eternally threatened by the menace of animals.

In Bosch’s *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, St. Anthony is in the air riding on monsters; fish, a frog-like bat, a giant mite-like monster bearing a scythe; all grotesque creatures are threatening him with ‘temptation.’ (Fig. 6) In *The Adoration of the Magi*, a triptych by Bosch, a man is attacked by a large wolf-like beast, a wild boar is wandering around, and a woman is being chased by another wolf; these are depicted in the distant view of the work, and they are scarcely related to the main subject of the painting, implying that humans are always suffering from something akin to destiny. (Fig. 7) This is a device that Bosch uses effectively throughout his work, claiming that humans are significantly vulnerable beings, always facing the menace of nature and easily deprived of their lives. In paintings by Bosch, animals are more clever and powerful than humans, and thus humans are easily and cruelly killed by beasts; humans are always

surrounded by the mysterious destiny of death. In many cases, the existence of animals is opposed to that of humans, and the animals comprise a menace to humans’ survival.

Another painter from the Netherlands, Jan van Eyck, created a very famous portrait of a couple from Italy by the name of Arnolfini. A dog is depicted at the feet of the man and woman.

Unlike Bosch’s imaginary creatures, the dog in *The Arnolfini Portrait* plays the role of a symbol of loyalty and affection, implying his honesty after the wife’s death. (Fig. 8) In those years (the painting was made in 1434), dogs were kept inside the home as companion animals. The small dog standing at the Arnolfini’s feet symbolizes the couple’s eternal oath as husband and wife.

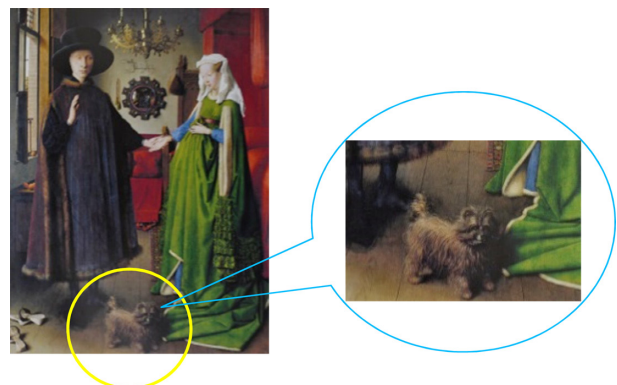


Fig. 8 *The Arnolfini Portrait*, 1434  
Oil on canvas, London, The National Gallery



Fig. 9 *Saint Jerome in the Wilderness*, c 1497  
Mixed media on pearwood, London, The National Gallery



Fig. 10 *Hare*, 1502  
Watercolour and gouache, Vienna, Graphische Sammlung Albertina

The lion depicted by the German Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer in his painting *St. Jerome in the Wilderness* (c.1497) looks calmly at the saint with gentle eyes. (Fig. 9) In this case, the lion respects St. Jerome for removing a thorn from its leg, contributing to the theme of the painting. In this case, the lion, is not a symbol of power, the wilderness of nature, or strength in the age of Babylon; it is presented as a tame and intelligent animal. Dürer depicted animals ranging from insects (e.g., the stag beetle), and snails to monkeys, a hare, lions, deer, and a walrus. The hare depicted by Dürer is a representative example of his elaborately detailed and realistic descriptions of an object. (Fig. 10) Dürer was well known as a lithographer, and he was a sophisticated and excellent oil painter whose paintings of objects were so accurate that it was as if a photograph had been taken of the object. Moreover, it seems that Dürer felt some affection for animals. His many portraits of people showed faces filled with feelings such as anxiety, nervousness, self-confidence, self-respect, and kindhearted emotion. When he selected and painted animals, Dürer seems to have perceived gentleness in the animals' faces, depicting animals not only from the viewpoint of mere realism, but from a pure spirit of affection for them. Thus, Dürer was another 15th-century painter who depicted animals in an affectionate or admiring manner.

In the pre-modern era of the history of Western art, animals were often shown as marginal characters. In many cases, animals played the role of a symbol that humans endowed with individual features; a lion indicated authenticity, a dog

loyalty, sheep (and lambs) were an incarnation of Christ, and a goat may represent a devil. Animals, in a sense, contributed to the art as supporting actors presenting a work's motif. An exception is the swarm of creatures in Bosch's work which were often main characters with much more impact than the humans. In the 17th century, the depiction of animals in art began to decline. The artistic expression of religion and its symbols retreated after the Reformation. Anthropocentrism based on 'reason' became established during the 17th and 18th centuries. Many paintings of that age tended to be people's portraits or landscapes with humans depicted in greater detail with more sophisticated techniques of realism. For example, the works of Rembrandt, Diego Velázquez, and France Harz present such characteristics of artistic trends. In the later era of realism and romanticism in the pre-modern era ranging from the end of the 18th through the entire 19th century, the idea of a painter's more subjective view and subjective but realistic depiction of an object was ascendant, and symbolic roles of animals dwindled in the Western art tradition.<sup>2</sup>

The ideas underlying art have changed dramatically since the end of the 19th century, however, painters tackled their work based on more original styles which they pursued in light of the influences and trends of the age. Franz Marc was present in such a vortex of artistic trends, but what is notable is that his interests concentrated on animals.

## 2. The Essence of Art, i.e., Animals, for Franz Marc

It is necessary to consider the time when Franz Marc lived (1880-1916), and the influences he experienced. At that time, painters in Germany were influenced by the progressive trend of art and developed their own views on art, polishing their original styles. German expressionism is one such artistic trend and many painters in Germany were affected to some degree by the transition of art. However, Marc was not in the art 'group' of those times. He had experienced hard times during his youth, and he was uncertain about his future. He studied and was interested in theology, philology, literature and painting, and his first career goal was to become a clergyman. Marc's completion of a year's military service while he studied philosophy was a turning point for him; he began to think of becoming a painter at the age of 20 (in 1900). During his military service, he rode horses, which fascinated him. That experience stayed with him. Marc spent three years studying painting at the Munich Academy (1900-1903), and thus acquired the 'basic training' of painting. However, his mind as a painter was not settled. He sought his own methodology, but could not find anything that satisfied him. In 1905, he met an animal painter, Jean Niestlé who encouraged him and taught him about the depiction of the essence of animals. Their encounter was important; Marc was interested in depicting animals based on his intuition. This was an opportunity to paint animals, and Marc was soon on his way to pursuing his own original style of expression. He felt that his academic lessons had taught him nothing useful. What Marc hoped to convey in his paintings was 'spiritual essence' that he felt existed in living animals.

In 1909, Marc viewed the works of Vincent van Gogh at an exhibition held in Munich. The following year, he was affected by Henri Matisse and Paul Cézanne, and he built on those opportunities to introduce new color techniques in his own work (like many artists, Marc was significantly affected by those painters and their work in terms of the uses colors and forms). It seems likely that what most interested Franz Marc was the several ways to use colors, which he clearly applied to his own paintings. In 1910, Marc also met the German Expressionist painter, August Macke, who became one

of his closest friends; they exchanged their opinions about techniques, and the uses of colors and forms of painting. Marc sent his view on colors in paintings to Macke: "Blue is the male principle, stern and spiritual. Yellow the female principle, gentle, cheerful and sensual. Red is matter, brutal and heavy and always the color which must be fought and vanquished by the other two...Despite all spectral analysis, I can't abandon my painter's belief that yellow (woman!) is closer to earth red than blue, the male principle" (Partsch. 2006, 26). Marc's thoughts on colors were at that time, quite normal and reasonable. The idea of red symbolizing wild passion and violence is important, and this idea is validated in Marc's last work. Other colors in Marc's paintings such as, blue, and yellow, etc., are used with certain implications for expression. The above-cited definitions by Marc clearly play roles in his work.

Marc was also interested in the new trend of expression used by the New Artists' Association founded by the Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky and others. Marc felt that those painters had progressed beyond German traditional painting. His comment on the works presented at the 1910 exhibition expresses his view: "Their logical distribution of the plane, the mysterious lines of the one and the color harmony of the other seek to create spiritual moods which have little to do with the subject portrayed but which prepare the ground for a new, highly spiritualized aesthetic" (Partsch. 2006, 24). The concept of 'spiritual aesthetic' is one of Marc's essential ideas on his own art which led to his subsequent depictions of animals. Indeed, from 1910 to 1911, Marc depicted animals based on the idea of a spiritual aesthetic with an original style for color and form.

In Marc's 1911 painting In *Deer in the Snow*, one deer is lowering its head to the ground, and another is looking back, making a natural contrast against the background forest covered with snow. (Fig. 11) The light brown and yellowish bodies of the deer merge into the pure white snow. The contrast created by these colors expresses gentle, feminine tenderness. In *Blue Horse*, created the same year, the horse is painted in vivid blue, and the background of the animal is red, orange, yellow, blue, and green; the ground and hills are painted in non-natural colors, emphasizing the existence of the blue horse. (Fig. 12) The color blue is mannish as



Fig. 11 *Deer in the Snow*, 1911  
Oil on canvas, Munich, Städtische  
Galerie im Lenbachhaus

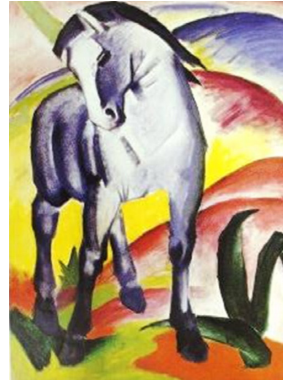


Fig. 12 *Blue Horse I*, 1911  
Oil on canvas, Munich, Städtische  
Galerie im Lenbachhaus

Marc had described it, but the horse's expression is gentle and calm, seemingly with a slight smile. Marc persistently depicted animals' faces with gentle and tender expressions because he thought they were leading pure and beautiful existences, presenting no menace or threat to human beings. After 1911, Marc continued to depict many animals in this style. The animals in his later paintings have equally gentle faces which Marc attempted to infuse with spiritual expression, reflecting his intimate affection for living things. The spiritual aesthetic of animals is the essence of expression by Franz Marc; animals were no longer playing supporting roles in paintings. Rather, they became central characters viewed through Marc's eyes and based on his insights. Leonard Da Vinci painted *The Lady with an Ermine* in the 15th century,

and Marc created *Girl with Cat II* in 1912. Although Da Vinci's ermine is certainly vivid and depicted in accurate forms and lines, Marc expressed soft tolerance and gentleness in the lines and forms of the girl and the cat, and what is more, a certain confidence between the two. (Fig. 13–14) The girl looks contented, holding the cat softly, and the cat is comfortable in her hands. What Marc provided was not the girl and the cat as 'objects,' but a spiritual and comfortable confidence nursed by affection to animals.

Any evaluation of Marc's paintings can be derived from these works, in which he presents animals in a style that places importance on a spiritual aesthetic. His original coloring and unique forms represent animals based on his spiritual affection. The fox, deer, and cows depicted in his paintings



Fig. 13 *Girl with Cat II*, 1912  
Oil on canvas, Private collection



Fig. 14 *The Lady with an Ermine*, around 1490  
Oil on canvas, Kraków, Czartorychi Museum



Fig. 15 *Red Deer III*, 1912  
Oil on canvas, Munich, Saatsgalerie  
moderner Kunst

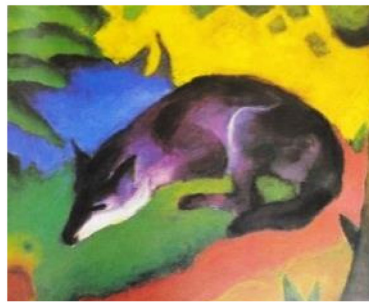


Fig. 16 *Blue-Black Fox*, 1911  
Oil on canvas, Wuppertal, von  
der Heydt-Museum



Fig. 17 *Cow, Yellow-Red-Green*, 1912  
Oil on canvas, Städtische Galerie  
im Lenbachhaus

surely demonstrate Marc's intimacy with mammals. With respect to Marc's ideas about the world and the essence of his art, his own remarks are very effective for understanding his outlook: "I am trying to achieve a pantheistic empathy with the throbbing and racing of the blood in nature, in trees, in animals, in the air..." (Partsch. 2006, 38), and "We will no longer paint a forest or a horse as we like them or as they seem to us, but as they really are, as the forest and the horse feel themselves to be their absolute essence which lives beneath the semblance which we see"; moreover, "From now on we must stop thinking of animals and plants only in relation to ourselves and stop portraying them from our point of view of art" (Partsch. 2006, 39). What these remarks suggest is that Marc wanted to show animals and nature as they really were and present their beautiful pureness. On the other hand, he tended to be a pessimistic and misanthropic person. Paul Klee described Marc's personality as follows: "He is more humane, he loves more warmly, more pronouncedly. He has a human affection for animals. He raises them to his own level" (Partsch. 2006, 41). Klee's appreciation makes the point that Franz Marc was an artist who represented animals not as objects but as great organisms of the earth who are equal to human beings or more.<sup>3</sup>

In Marc's *Red Deer II* (1912), the two deer make a supple posture; one twists its neck and the other turns its head toward the sky. (Fig. 15) They seem not to be alert to their surroundings, feeling rather comfortable in the forest. Their bodies are formed with curve lines, in harmony with the landscape. *The Blue-Black Fox* (1911) and the yellow cow (*Cow, Yellow-Red-Green*, 1912) are also depicted in peaceful

settings; these animals seem relaxed, enjoying their surroundings which are painted in unreal colors. (Fig. 16–17) Although the animals are painted in non-natural colors, we can see that their faces are filled with feelings of comfort and safety. These works represent ideal figures of animals that show the gentleness and calmness Marc infused into his work. This is the very essential style that Marc exploded in those years. Animals were sometimes shown in a dynamic and vivid manner, or relaxed in tranquility. Marc's desire was based on the consistent philosophical idea that his art was meant to express the spiritual essence of animals. He also sought to depict the "soul" of animals, "the inner trembling animal life" (Partsch. 2006, 38).

Marc well described his philosophy concerning his art as follows: "Above all I mean the instinct which has led me away from people to a feeling for animality, for 'pure beasts'. The ungodly people around me (particularly the men) did not arouse my true feelings, whereas the undefiled vitality of animals called forth everything good in me...I found people 'ugly' very early on; animals seemed to me more beautiful, more pure" (Partsch. 2006, 39). We can deduce that he was a person with purely sensitive, somewhat naïve, and calm personality. Viewed from another angle, it seems possible that Marc had difficulty accepting the world of humans, or was not tolerant to humans. He seemed to have a poor view of men in general, with the inclusion of individual men such as his father, who was apparently stern and overbearing. Indeed, Marc described men in particular as 'ugly', and may have limited his contact with them.

Marc's feelings about animals are another matter. Despite



his warm affection for animals, he did alter his style (as many painters did) regardless of his feelings. His desire to develop and grow as an artist led him to try different dimensions of art. As Partsch suggests, Marc aimed at paintings of ‘abstraction’ (Partsch. 2006, 49). Marc’s journey toward abstraction was enhanced by his activities associated with the group of artists known as ‘Der Blaue Reiter’ (‘The Blue Rider’), which Marc joined in 1911. Marc’s articles in the *Der Blaue Reiter*’s almanac explain his own thoughts on art and the trend of modern German paintings. The activity of *Der Blaue Reiter* was a stage for Marc, Kandinsky and other, and they considered the new wave of paintings of their age. While Kandinsky dealt with the specifics of his concept of ‘inner necessity,’ Marc emphasized the importance of ‘spiritual treasures’ of the new art they sought to create. Of course, many painters in Europe sought to create new art in the early 20th century; this goal was held dear by only Marc and Kandinsky. Marc described his attempts to become more insightful and further establish his principle of modern art: “We are seeking the things in nature hidden behind the veil of appearances... We seek this inner, spiritual side of nature” (Partsch. 2006, 59). Such comments reflect those which are common to that of Kandinsky, or Paul Klee; that is, they challenged the description of ‘inner spiritual essence’ of things. Marc continued to alter his approach to painting and his style. His contact with works of Henri Matisse and Robert Delauney much influenced him. The effect of using impressive colors and ‘cubistic’ forms appeared in his work beginning in 1913. Marc began to paint non-representational

pictures. The expressions of simple forms and lines and colorful affection for animals receded and more complicated forms and lines, many-sided or cubic effects, and animals’ somewhat cooler facial expressions were introduced in Marc’s paintings. Some works were complete abstraction similar to that of Kandinsky, but Marc’s main subjects remained animals even in the abstract. One might suspect that Marc’s inclination toward abstraction was based on a desire to achieve a more advanced style of art. Nevertheless, his central subject of description did not change dramatically. Although he modified his techniques, his outlook and affection for animals did not change at all. His painting of animals in 1913 also became his representative work for the next stage. He used more geometric facets and forms and sharp lines for animals’ outlines, and he showed animals surrounded with more acute angles.

The horse, wild boar, and cattle as the central subject were painted in blue-based colors (others adjacent to them have shades of red, making the blue stand out). (Fig. 18–20) Two years earlier, in 1911, Marc used brilliant and vivid colors and gentle lines to depict animals, and those paintings established him as a painter of animals. Whereas the gentle and calm impressions that he used previously reflected Franz Marc’s personality and his warm affection for living things, in this next phase, Marc developed an original modern style of expression for depicting animals, influenced by the trend of art of his age. Expression based on a direct emotional connection to animals seemingly disappeared. Instead of simple gentleness, the new clearer composition of well-



Fig. 18 *Dreaming Horse*, 1913  
Water color on paper, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum



Fig. 19 *Wild Pigs*, 1913  
Oil on cardboard, Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum

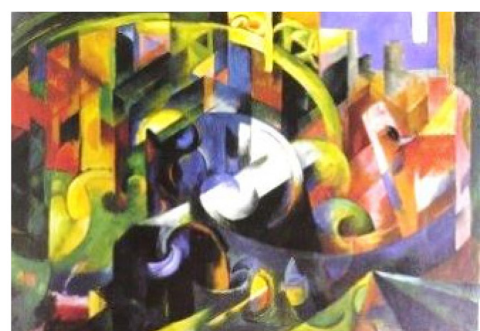


Fig. 20 *Picture with Cattle*, 1913  
Oil on canvas, Munich, Staatsgalerie moderner Kunst



Fig. 21 *Gazelles*, 1913  
Tempera, Krefeld, private collection



Fig. 22 *Deer in the Woods II*, 1914  
Oil on canvas, Karlsruhe,  
Staatliche Kunsthalle



Fig. 23 *Deer at Dusk*, 1909  
Oil on canvas, Munich, Städtische  
Galerie im Lenbachhaus

balanced facets with sharply angled lines generated more sophisticated components and remarkably vivid sharpness of the animals' bodies. Those animals were surely depicted sharply, and more refined souls are infused into their bodies in the complicated lines and facets. (Fig. 21)

*Deer in the Woods II* (1914) is significantly different from the deer that Marc painted in 1909. (Fig. 22) Marc discovered a more original style of expression that could provide more ideal images for animals.<sup>4</sup> In paintings such as *Deer in the Woods II*, animals are incorporated in the landscape, which is shown as a complex abstraction. Animals claim their independent existence in the form, beautifully colored with firmly resolute expressions. In place of a gentle and tranquil expression, the faces of animals came to be firm and dauntless. Such expressions imply independence from Marc himself. Marc surely succeeded in depicting animals in his original style, colors and forms, but his affection for animals seems to have become more internalized in the animals. Such challenges and the result are realized in Marc's works in 1911–12. With the influence of other painters and techniques, Marc developed an abstract style that reflected a more sophisticated expression, leading to his unconventional style. His pursuit of a new way to express, his philosophy consequently brought about independent 'souls' of animals. Marc succeeded in depicting the 'pure soul and inner spiritual side of life' of animals.

In early 1914, however, the political and social landscape in Germany had changed. The World War had begun in

August, and Germany was involved in the global disaster. In the previous year, Marc left an interesting work, titled *Animal Destinies*, which suggested an ominous foreboding of the war. (Fig. 24) It was merely by chance Marc painted this; animals were running, standing, frightened, and a deer has apparently been beaten by something like the 'thunder of destiny.' 'Destiny' hints at death or a haunting fear surrounding the lives of the animals. Impressive and sharp forms are running and crossing the canvas, and blood discharged from a vein empties into the animals' bodies.

However, like many people Marc was optimistic about the war. He was "one of those artists who took a very rosy view of the war and saw it as a great communal adventure that would cleanse and renew society" (Elger. 2007, 165). His own comment shows his optimistic view. "This is the only



Fig. 24 *Animal Destinies*, 1913  
Oil on canvas, Basle, Kunstmuseum

way of cleaning out the Augean stable of Europe.”

Partsch suggests Marc “believed Europe was sick and could only be purged through the war.... He spoke of an international blood sacrifice through which the world would be purified” (Partsch, 2006, 89). From a 21st-century view point, this idea can easily be rejected, and it is not possible to understand such mass psychological enthusiasm for a global disaster. One can speculate that people in the early 20th century still retained a pre-modern sense of nationalism and had no understanding of the overwhelming power and tremendous force of the new warfare. I surmise that most of the people in Europe were enthusiastic about nationalism and thus agreed to support the war and fight against an ‘invisible’ enemy. Victory in this war was supposed to lead to a purification of something corrupt in Europe and to a reincarnation of culture and civilization. Therefore, Marc did not understand the true meaning of the wartime death of his close friend, August Macke. Marc believed in the necessity of bloody sacrifice for the purification of a diseased world. Macke, on the other hand, suspected the significance of the international conflict, and early in his volunteer service in the war, he was killed at the front in Champagne. Macke had left an impressive painting named *Leave-taking* before returning to the front. (Fig. 25) Convinced that he would not survive at the front, Macke felt complete despair; the painting remained uncompleted due to his death. The people in his painting are in dark colors which hint at the imminent death of the painter and others.

Macke’s art was originally characterized by his use of



Fig. 25 *Leave-taking*, 1914  
Oil on canvas, Museum Ludwig, Cologne

colors. He was affected by the Orphic cubism that featured both brilliant and gentle colors in a manner that differed from those of the German Expressionism at the time. Macke pursued his own sense of beauty in the modern forms of abstraction, and his occasional depictions of animals in his paintings also showed gentle expressions. (Fig. 26–27)

Macke was not as nervous as Marc seemed, and Macke’s personality is well reflected in his expression. His last work reflects the melancholy and ominous premonition of his own death. Of course, huge number of people were killed or wounded in the war across many countries. Few individuals were able to avoid this tremendous disaster.<sup>5</sup>

Marc was shocked when he was informed of Macke’s death and was overwhelmed with grief at the loss of his close friend, but he still hoped that Europe would somehow be purified by the international violence. Marc’s personal-

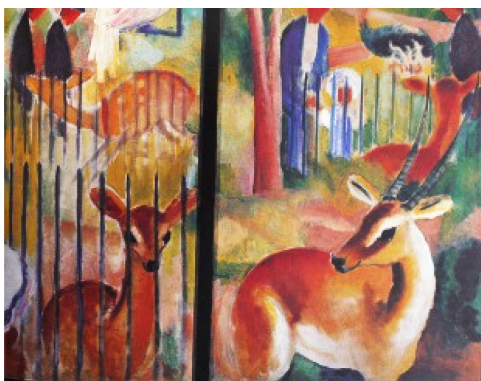


Fig. 26 *Large Zoological Garden*, 1913 (a part)  
Oil on canvas, Museum am Ostwall, Dortmund

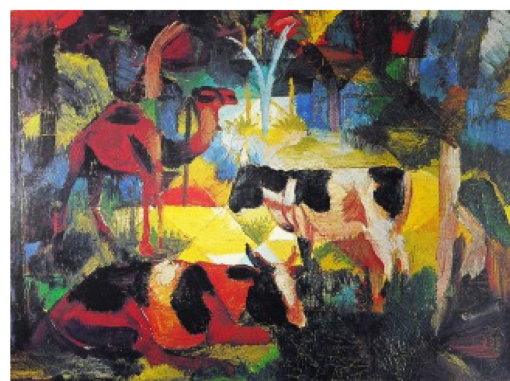


Fig. 27 *Landscape with Cows and Camel*, 1914  
Oil on canvas, Leopold-Hoesch-Museum, Düren



Fig. 28 *Fighting Forms*, 1914  
Oil on canvas, Staatsgalerie moderner Kunst,  
Munich



Fig. 29 *Small Composition*, 1913-14  
Oil on canvas, Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum,  
Hagen

ity began to develop a seriously cynical aspect. His friend Macke's last painting is covered with dark colors indicating his utter dejection due to the war, Marc left an outstanding work expressed by vivid and energetic colors, titled *Fighting Forms*. (Fig. 28)

Around 1913, Marc created abstract paintings that are thought to have been influenced by Kandinsky. In these abstracts, the figures of animals have almost vanished. As the title *Small Composition* reveals, those works were "compositions" as Kandinsky displayed in his works, and Marc was seeking and challenging his new style of expression. (Fig. 29) But Marc's *Fighting Forms* painted the same year as Macke's death, suggests his cynical viewpoint about the war. He wrote at that time: "blue is the male principle, stern and spiritual, red is matter, brutal and heavy..." In *Fighting Forms*, the form of red is clearly fighting the form of blue; some yellowish forms are coiled around the red form. The flame-like red form seems to signify the terrible artillery fire, and the spiral blue form seems to symbolize the bravery of the men who fought at the front. However, in 1915 Marc changed his mind about the war. He felt melancholy about the fighting, and tired of the cruel murder. He sent some letters that revealed his mind to Macke's widow Lisbeth, and to his wife Maria Marc, with opinions such as: "cruellest catch of men to which we have abandoned ourselves" and "The world is richer by the bloodiest year of its many thousand-year of history" (Partsch, 2006, 91). The next year, Franz Marc passed away.

### 3. Conclusion

Animals have been the objects of ornaments, bas reliefs, paintings, and statues all over the world since ancient times. They were used to symbolize virtues and vices and reflected aspects of myths, folklore, religions, customs, and entire societies. Animals also became the objects of personification.

The trend of German Expressionism is characterized of its peculiar colors and forms influenced by Fauvism, or primitivism. Franz Marc was a painter who sought his original style, influenced by the trend without immersing himself in it. His motif was inclined to depictions of animals, to which he devoted much affection throughout his life. His love for animals provided a window into his personality; Marc felt truly pure spirits in animals and attempted to depict such spirits and even the 'souls' of animals. He stated that the tradition of Western art based on realism was not his desired form of expression. As a result, Marc depicted animals according to his definition of colors and forms which could describe 'the inner spiritual aesthetic of animals.' A horse was painted in blue, a cow in yellow, and wild animals were painted in colorful forms. The figures of animals were fundamentally depicted in gentle lines and soft forms that expressed Marc's affection for them.

Franz Marc made animals the main characters of paintings; his belief was in the absolute pureness and honesty of animals that humans do not have. His ideas about animals and art were the foundation of Marc's original style in a more

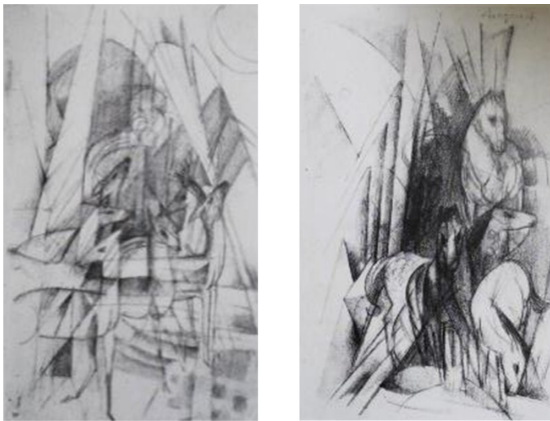


Fig. 30 *Sketchbook from the Field*

abstract form.

As a result, deer, horses, and foxes were incorporated in complicated facets and lines in the style of abstraction in Marc's pursuit of a more original style of expression. Such abstract forms revealed a sophisticated expression of animals. Marc translated his affection to animals into their gentle expressions, and he described and released more independent, sophisticated, and vivid animals which radiated their own energy and bravery as wild animals. His inner spiritual aesthetic was realized in sharper composition. Marc's abstraction was certainly due to the influence of Kandinsky, his close friend. During the harrowing years of the first World War, Marc continued to develop his art.

Marc took part in the volunteer service of the war. One of his last works, *Fighting Forms*, symbolized his thoughts and feelings about combat. After the death of his dear friend August Macke, Marc's optimism about the war waned, and he regarded the war as the cruelest and bloodiest disaster based on humankind's stupidity.

However, he never lost his spirit for art, and animals were always in his mind. He had a small sketch book in his pocket at the front lines, and he drew depicted even then. *Sketchbook from the Field* which contains the truly last works of Franz Marc, showed his continued affiliation with animals. (Fig. 30) The essence of Marc's art was the depiction of animals which, he felt, were the purest and noblest living things in the world. He first perceived the pure soul of a horse, which then frequently appeared in his works. Marc's art directly

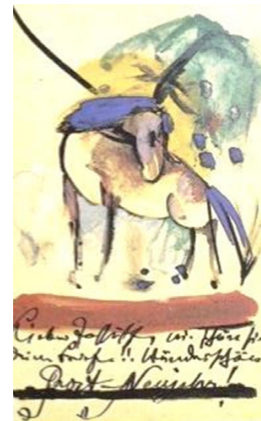


Fig. 31 *Horse*, 1914

Ink, watercolour, gouasche. Munich, Bayerische Staatsgenälde-sammunlgen

corresponds to his personality. Marc painted some horses on postcards in 1914. One horse on a postcard is pretty, and the style of expression is relevant to that of today's illustration. (Fig. 31)

Marc continued to depict his favorite animals to the end of his life — deer and horses in a small sketchbook demonstrating his hope that he would be able to portray more animals with his art after returning to his country. His death in the Battle of Verdun in 1915 ended that hope.

## Notes

- 1 This motif, a ram in a thicket, is thought to be based on the Binding of Isaac in the Hebrew Bible. This ram is a sacrifice to God, in the place of Isaac.
- 2 In contrast, paintings of life forms including animals were appreciated for a time during the Edo era; the works of Jakuchu Ito and Okyo Maruyama include precisely realistic animals. Japanese animal paintings originated in the tradition of the bird-and flower genre in Chinese and Japanese painting. The Eastern view of animals and nature differed from that of Western art. Elaborate lines and colors and technical forms were used to depict animals, making them more vivid and real, and indicating admiration of life and nature that was remarkable for the sophisticated techniques used. Those artists took a more philosophical view of animals compared to Western art, but the animals they painted were not used as religious symbols or implications. The purpose of their depiction was to describe the pure beauty and essential spirit of animals, birds, and landscapes.
- 3 Paul Klee also loved animals. After the war, the birds, cat,



Jakuchu Ito 伊藤若冲  
老松孔雀図, 1761 絹本着色  
宫内庁三の丸尚蔵館蔵

fish depicted in Klee's works began to be evaluated. Animals continued to play a great role in expressing Paul Klee's philosophical idea.

- 4 Marc painted *Deer at Dusk* in 1909. This work was in a more usual and natural style, and completely different from his later work, suggesting how Marc wished to create a more original style of his expression. (Fig. 23) Partsch

suggests that Marc now no longer used animals in his work as a means of portraying himself and his feelings, or his inner sensitivity. He distanced himself ever further from the objects of his paintings, until abstract works were born.

- 5 Paul Klee, who was a close friend of both Marc and Macke was also conscripted and worked in a military airport as a soldier. But he was fortunate; Klee was not required to join the front line due to a special arrangement arranged by Marc, and he survived the war.

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