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Animal Stories

Förderverein Lenbachhaus e.V. (Friends of Lenbachhaus) acquires a commode by Franz Marc for the museum

The Lenbachhaus is home to the world's largest collection of works by the Blue Rider artists. Exceptionally generous gifts made by Gabriele Münter in 1957 and by Elly and Bernhard Koehler jun. in 1965 that comprised works by Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, Gabriele Münter, and their fellow artists made the Lenbachhaus a premier venue for scholarly and public engagement with the art of the Blue Rider.

On occasion of its thirtieth anniversary, Förderverein Lenbachhaus e.V. (Friends of Lenbachhaus) now acquires a commode decorated with animal paintings by Franz Marc for the museum's collection.

Franz Marc (1880–1916) designed the piece of children's furniture in ca. 1910/11 for the niece of his partner, the artist Maria Franck-Marc. With its naturalistic renderings of animals native to the forests and fields of his homeland surrounded by delicate blossoms, the work takes up a demotic visual idiom and precedes the modernist depictions of animals he will create only a few years later.

Starting in 1908/09, the artists of the Blue Rider circle often sojourned in the Alpine foothills of southern Bavaria. Inspired by the Lebensreform movement's rejection of industrial production, they embraced regional folk art, collecting artifacts that provided them with fresh ideas for their own works. They also explored the world of children and children's art, which they idealized as unspoiled and anti-academic.

In the Lenbachhaus's collection, the child's dresser is a key addition to the furniture that Kandinsky and Münter designed for the home in Murnau where they spent their summers beginning in 1909 and which are now preserved by the Gabriele Münter and Johannes Eichner Foundation. In Murnau, they decorated a chair, a desk, a bookshelf, and the banister rails in the staircase with floral elements and riders on horseback, a motif that held potent symbolism for them.

Franz Marc's depictions of animals on the piece of furniture are faithful to bucolic-picturesque pictorial traditions, while the "chirping" rooster suggests his humorous side. In his later luminous crystalline pictures of animals, Marc developed a novel perspective on the subject that embeds the creature into a cosmic rhythm. In an act of "pantheistic empathy," he created a basic chord in which animal and landscape are in harmony, a distinctive form of expressive articulation that was his singular and significant contribution to Expressionism.

Since 2018, the Friends of Lenbachhaus have complemented their longstanding support for the museum's diverse programming with a dedicated effort to enlarge its collection of modernist art. In just a few years, the Friends of Lenbachhaus were able to purchase eminent works by Wassily Kandinsky, Marianne von Werefkin, August Macke, and others.

In 2022, the Friends of Lenbachhaus made no fewer than five acquisitions intended to close gaps in the museum's holdings and strengthen the representation of women artists and previously neglected positions within the Blue Rider circle. In addition to two outstanding works by Maria Franck-Marc the purchases

included a painting by Elisabeth Epstein and two terracotta sculptures by the artist Moissei Kogan, who was persecuted and murdered by the Nazi regime.

With this new acquisition, the Friends of the Lenbachhaus demonstrate their continuing commitment to the museum. The purchase is a small sensation: the dresser has remained in the first owner's family until now, and objects of this kind have rarely survived and even more rarely come on the market.

Works by Franz Marc are currently on view at the Lenbachhaus in the exhibition "The Blue Rider," which also spotlights the artists' interest in folk art and the art of non-European cultures in the colonial context.