

Exhibition

Light Becomes Colour

11 October 2026 – 17 January 2027

Press Release

What happens when artists set off into a different light, into unfamiliar spaces and landscapes whose colours, forms and architecture change the way they see? The Franz Marc Museum explores this question through two journeys: the little-researched, several-month stay of Gabriele Münter and Wassily Kandinsky in Tunis and the surrounding area in 1904/05, and the famous journey to Tunis undertaken by Paul Klee, August Macke and Louis Moilliet in spring 1914. The exhibition explores how impressions gathered on their travels became paintings, while also asking how the colonial gaze shaped these images.

The First Journey: Münter and Kandinsky, 1904/05

On 25 December 1904, Gabriele Münter and Wassily Kandinsky arrived in Tunis, where they remained until 5 April 1905. For the couple, the journey also offered an opportunity to escape everyday life in Munich and to spend an extended period living together. As the weather was unusually poor at first, they spent the first few weeks mainly in Tunis. Later, they made excursions to La Marsa and Carthage; in March, they travelled to Sousse and Kairouan. Münter's diary provides an unusually detailed account of the course of their stay.

Münter recorded her impressions in photographs, sketches and paintings. Her photographs depict street scenes, buildings and encounters with the Tunisian population, and some served as starting points for later works. Kandinsky also occasionally took photographs. In the paintings of both artists, alongside an impressionistic rendering of light, simplified forms and clearly juxtaposed areas of colour begin to emerge. The journey did not represent a sudden stylistic break, but rather intensified artistic developments that had already begun earlier.

The Second Journey: Klee, Macke and Moilliet, 1914

In April 1914, Paul Klee, August Macke and Louis Moilliet travelled through Tunisia for just under two weeks. Unlike Münter and Kandinsky's longer stay, their journey was conceived from the outset as a joint study trip. Moilliet was already familiar with the country from previous visits and helped to establish important contacts. From Tunis, they travelled via St Germain and Hammamet to Kairouan. There, Klee wrote in his diary: *"Colour has taken possession of me. [...] I and colour are one. I am a painter."* As he revised his notes at a later date, the entry should be understood less as an immediate travel document than as a retrospective interpretation. Nevertheless, it points to the importance he attached to the journey for his artistic development. In his watercolours, architecture and landscape increasingly became transparent areas of colour and rhythmic pictorial structures.

The journey also became a period of intense artistic activity for Macke. In his watercolours, he condensed street scenes and markets into luminous areas of colour, while retaining their connection to the observed subject. He also photographed people and scenes of everyday life. After returning to Bonn, he drew on this material and developed individual motifs further in drawings and paintings. The journey therefore continued to resonate in his work long after his immediate stay. Moilliet was already familiar with Tunisia and played a key role in organising the journey. In his watercolours, North African cities and landscapes seem almost to float in delicate applications of colour.

A Departure Marked by Ambivalence

Tunisia had been a French protectorate since 1881. The travellers moved within colonial infrastructures and along established tourist routes. Guidebooks, photographs, postcards, exhibitions and ideas of the "Orient" all helped shape what they saw, collected and transformed into art.

"With Light Becomes Colour, we bring the famous 1914 journey to Tunis together with the lesser-known stay of Gabriele Münter and Wassily Kandinsky. We are not only asking how Tunisia changed the art of these five artists, but also what expectations they brought with them when they encountered the country. This combination opens up a new perspective on works that may seem familiar," says Jessica Keilholz-Busch, Director of the Franz Marc Museum.

A Theme with a Connection to the Museum

The travelling artists were connected to the museum's namesake: Franz Marc was a friend of August Macke and, together with Wassily Kandinsky, published the *Almanac of the Blue Rider* in 1912, to whose circle Gabriele Münter also belonged. Paul Klee was closely connected to the artistic milieu surrounding the Blue Rider. Works by Klee, Macke and Münter from the collection of the Franz Marc Museum are also on display in the exhibition.

In 1910, Franz Marc visited the exhibition *Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art*. The carpets and metalwork on display made a lasting impression on him. Marc juxtaposed Kandinsky's abstract painting with Islamic art and recognised in its "*art of colour and composition*" a challenge to the "*one-sided limitations of our European concepts of painting*". This opening of the gaze would soon become an important idea within the Blue Rider.

The exhibition comprises around sixty works, including paintings, watercolours, drawings, prints and photographs. Important loans come from the Lenbachhaus in Munich, the Kunstmuseum Bern, the Gabriele Münter and Johannes Eichner Foundation and the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen. Key individual works are on loan from, among others, the Scharf-Gerstenberg Collection of the National Museums in Berlin, Murnau Castle Museum, the Munich City Museum, the Leopold Hoesch Museum in Düren, Museum Würth in Künzelsau and Museo Castello San Materno in Ascona. These are complemented by loans from private collections.

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