



# MARIANNE VON WEREFKIN

## PIONEER OF EXPRESSIONISM

*Ich schaffe mir ganz bewußt Illusionen und Träume.*

*Darin bin ich Künstler. Ich bin mehr Mann als Frau.*

*Allein das Bedürfnis zu gefallen und das Mitleid machen mich zur Frau.*

*Ich bin nicht Mann, ich bin nicht Frau, ich bin Ich.\**

Museum de Fundatie Zwolle: 5 October 2024 – 16 March 2025

---

**At the age of twenty, Marianne von Werefkin was already being hailed as the Russian Rembrandt. She played a vital role in the development of expressionism in Germany in the early 20th century, as part of Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider). Yet Marianne von Werefkin (1860-1938) is less well known than artists Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc and her partner of many years Alexej von Jawlensky. Entirely without justification, in the view of Museum De Fundatie, which is the only museum in the Netherlands with a Von Werefkin in its collection. From this autumn, for the first time ever in the Netherlands, the vibrant work of Marianne von Werefkin will be showcased in a survey exhibition alongside a number of works by her contemporaries.**

Museum de Fundatie is organising *Marianne von Werefkin - Pioneer of Expressionism* in collaboration with Museo Comunale d'Arte Moderna in Ascona.



*Marianne von Werefkin, Tragic Mood, 1910, Fondazione Marianne Werefkin, Museo Comunale d'Arte Moderna, Ascona*

Beatrice von Bormann, director of Museum de Fundatie and curator of the exhibition:

“Marianne von Werefkin has an extraordinarily interesting oeuvre and a fascinating life story. Her work is barely known outside German-speaking countries because so few museums have collected it, despite the fact that she was well ahead of her time. She was the first of the artists associated with Der Blaue Reiter to use intense patches of colour and flat forms, following the example of Munch and France’s Nabis and fauves. Her importance has only been acknowledged in the past few years. For a long time, female painters were underestimated, and she herself helped perpetuate this attitude by devoting many years to supporting the career of her partner Jawlensky. We are looking forward to introducing this artist to the Dutch public, and giving her work the platform it deserves. It is truly remarkable that we will be able to show so much of her work. She painted almost exclusively in tempera and her paintings are therefore very fragile.”

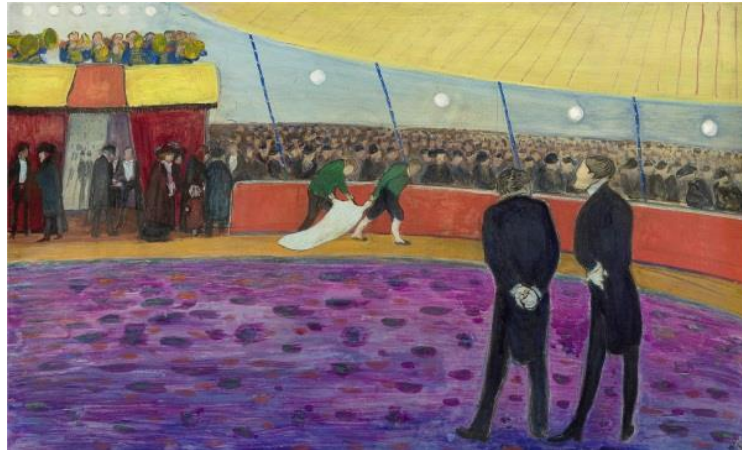
### **Marianne von Werefkin**

As the child of a wealthy family in Russia, Marianne von Werefkin had every opportunity to develop her artistic talents from a young age. She received lessons from world-famous artist Ilya Repin, for example. After she and her partner, the painter Alexej von Jawlensky, moved to Munich in 1886, she stopped painting for almost ten years, in order to support him and to allow her own art to develop. In order not to remain confined to realism, she had to re-invent herself. She did so by travelling to Italy and France, and by establishing a salon in Munich that was frequented by every innovator on the art scene. Her friends included dancers, actors, musicians, writers and artists among her friends, and she made a thorough study of literature and philosophy. Her house on Giselastrasse became a hub for modernists in Munich. To many, Werefkin herself was a source of inspiration, with her idiosyncratic ideas about art, her great knowledge of the arts and her willingness to experiment.

### **New style**

In 1907 Marianne von Werefkin was the first of a group of friends and artists – including Gabriele Münter, Alexej von Jawlensky, Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc – to begin painting in an expressionist style, using intense colours and flat, abstracted forms. During several extended stays in France, she had encountered the work of Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh and Les Nabis, as well as that of Edvard Munch. Around 1905–1906 she started painting unmixed patches of colour immediately adjacent to one another, distancing herself from ‘natural’ colours. A number of artists in Dresden, including Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Erich Heckel, began working in a similar way around the same time. Like them, Werefkin always based her compositions on reality, in order to continue raising concerns about certain issues, including work for women and social inequality. At the

same time, her paintings became studies of the rhythm of form and colour. Over two summers in 1908-09 in Murnau am Staffelsee, Germany, she guided Jawlensky, Kandinsky and Münter towards this new way of painting, where the key concern was to depict emotions and feelings. This artistic movement later became known around the world as expressionism.



*Marianne von Werefkin, Circus, 1908-10, Leopold-Hoesch-Museum, Düren, photo: Peter Hinschläger*

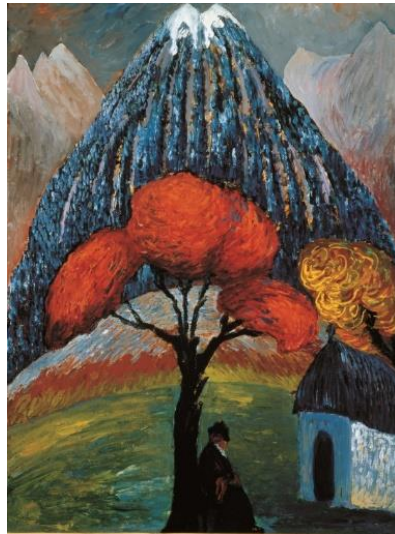
### **Catalyst**

In 1909 the Neue Künstlervereinigung München (New Artists' Association Munich, NKVM) was established at Werefkin's salon in Munich. This would eventually give rise to Der Blaue Reiter. The latter was more an editorial office than an artists' group, a network of painters and writers who, led by Kandinsky and Marc, exchanged views and published and exhibited together. The name refers to a 1911 woodcut by Kandinsky, which itself refers back to an earlier painting of his. They exhibited together in Munich in 1911-12, and in 1912 published their famous almanac *Der Blaue Reiter*, with Kandinsky's woodcut on the cover.

### **Dispersed**

The First World War brought the collaboration to an abrupt end in 1914. Kandinsky, Jawlensky and Werefkin had to leave Germany and others, like Marc, did not survive the war. Werefkin and Jawlensky went to Switzerland, where they were reunited with many of their artist friends who had also fled, including composer Igor Stravinsky and dancers Vaslav Nijinsky and Alexander Sakharoff. They attended the Dada soirées at Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich. In the middle of the war, in 1916, Werefkin showed her work at Kunstzaal Audretsch in The Hague.

In 1921 Jawlensky left his wife for their maid, with whom he already had a child. Werefkin was left destitute in Ascona. After the Russian revolution she had become stateless, and had therefore lost her income. She earned some money making posters and postcards, and wrote articles. Yet her art remained her number one priority. In 1924 she established the Swiss artists' group Der Große Bär (The Big Bear), whose members included Walter Helbig and Ernst Frick. Museum de Fundatie has a work by another member, Otto van Rees, in its collection. In her later work Werefkin mainly used the mountains and the life of the people who lived there for her form and colour studies. She died in Ascona in 1938.



*Marianne von Werefkin, The Red Tree, 1910, Fondazione Marianne Werefkin, Museo Comunale d'Arte Moderna, Ascona*

### **Exhibition at De Fundatie**

The survey exhibition at Museum de Fundatie will include an exceptionally large number of works on loan from Fondazione Marianne Werefkin at Museo Comunale d'Arte Moderna in Ascona. Loans from public and private collections in Germany, the Netherlands, Austria and Switzerland will also be shown.

A number of highlights will arrive a few weeks after the opening, once an exhibition including work by Werefkin at Tate (London) has closed. The exhibition in Zwolle will be arranged partly thematically and partly chronologically. Only a few works have survived from Werefkin's Russian period, but a number of them will be on display at De Fundatie. The NMKV and Der Blaue Reiter period will be illustrated with her own work and several pieces by Jawlensky, Münter, Van Rees and Frick. Nightlife in Munich, which features frequently in Werefkin's sketchbooks, will have a section of its own, as will her trips to the Baltic and Lithuania just before the First World War. Themes running throughout the exhibition include the hard life of labourers, and of men and women living in rural areas.

The landscape acquired symbolic meaning in Werefkin's work, and provides perhaps the most compelling evidence of her strong, androgynous personality.

An extensive catalogue will be published to accompany *Marianne von Werefkin - Pioneer of Expressionism*, with essays by Beatrice von Bormann, director of Museum de Fundatie and curator of the exhibition; Mara Folini, director of Museo Comunale d'Arte Moderna di Ascona; Leiko Ikemura, artist; and Roman Zieglgänsberger, curator of classic modern art at Museum Wiesbaden.

### **About Museum de Fundatie**

Museum de Fundatie is one of the eastern Netherlands' leading museums. It showcases work by makers from a range of disciplines and backgrounds, highlights new talent and works closely with several educational institutions in Zwolle and elsewhere. Though the museum has an international programme, it is deeply rooted in Overijssel province.

Temporary exhibitions and collection presentations are shown at two locations: Museum de Fundatie in Zwolle and Nijenhuis Castle, which has a sculpture garden, in Heino/Wijhe.

---

PRESS RELEASE ENDS

For more information or to request an interview or images, please contact:

Elske Schreurs, press & publicity

[pr@museumdefundatie.nl](mailto:pr@museumdefundatie.nl)

+31 (0)6 41 18 89 63

*\*[translation]*

*I consciously create for myself illusions and dreams.*

*That is I the artist... I am more a man than a woman.*

*Only the need to please and compassion make me a woman.*

*I am not a man, I am not a woman, I am I.*

(Marianne von Werefkin, 1905)