**Towards Abstraction**

In 1911, a new group of German artists began exhibiting their work to the public. Der Blaue Reiter was to become the high point of German Expressionism, but it also opened the way towards abstraction with its stand for free experimentation and originality. It is Wassily Kandinsky, the most influential member of the group, who is most often credited with the distinction of painting the first ``abstract'' picture, in 1910.

Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider) was formed in 1911 and succeeded the first Expressionist movement, Die Brьcke, which dissolved in 1913. The group included Franz Marc (1880-1916), Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), and August Macke (1887-1914), and celebrated the art of children and primitives, but had no precise artistic programme. The most active proponent of this essentially romantic and rather spiritual view of art was Franz Marc, a young artist who was killed in World War I. Marc saw animals as the betrayed but uncontaminated guardians of what was left of innocence and unspoilt nature.

Like August Macke, Marc chose to express these feelings with emphatic, symbolic colors. He painted animals with a profoundly moving love: a love for what they represented and could still experience, unlike humanity. Deer in the Forest II (1913-14, 110.5 x 100.5 cm (43 1/2 x 39 2/3 in)) is made up of a dense network of shapes and lines that border on the abstract. Together they create a forest of experience through which we can see, as if emerging from the undergrowth, the small forms of the deer. The animals are utterly at peace, at home in the forest of the world. It is a stylized and luminous vision of a species that can live without the angers of the ego.

August Macke, who was also to be killed in the coming war, was another artist with a gentle, poetic temperament. He took a simple delight in the joys common to us all, which makes his senseless destruction especially painful. Woman in a Green Jacket (1913, 44 x 43.5 cm (17 1/3 x 17 in)) floats onto the canvas, blissfully detached and pacific. Of the group, he was the most sensitive to form and color, and the hues in this picture irradiate gently within strong shapes to create sensuous areas of light.