

11.02–9.05 2021

JAW LEN SKY

FACE AS LANDSCAPE

In a letter of 1938 to his friend the monk Willibrord Verkade, Alexej von Jawlensky (Torzhok, Russia, 1864 - Wiesbaden, Germany, 1941) wrote: "I needed to find a form for the face, as I had realised that great art had to be painted solely with a religious sentiment. And only the human face could transmit this. I understood that through forms and colours, in his art the artist has to express the divine element within him. For this reason a work of art is God made visible and art is the longing for God." With this end in mind, Jawlensky's work, which principally focused on the themes of still life, landscape and portraits, ultimately took the human face as its principal subject. His output developed in the form of almost obsessive series and reinterpretations in an effort to reconcile his impressions of the exterior world with subjective emotion and a quest for spirituality. Despite the fact that this almost inevitably led towards abstraction, in his painting Jawlensky resisted eliminating figuration as it would be the motif of the face - which moved away from portraiture in a gradual but radical manner - that provided the basis for his most essential creative research.

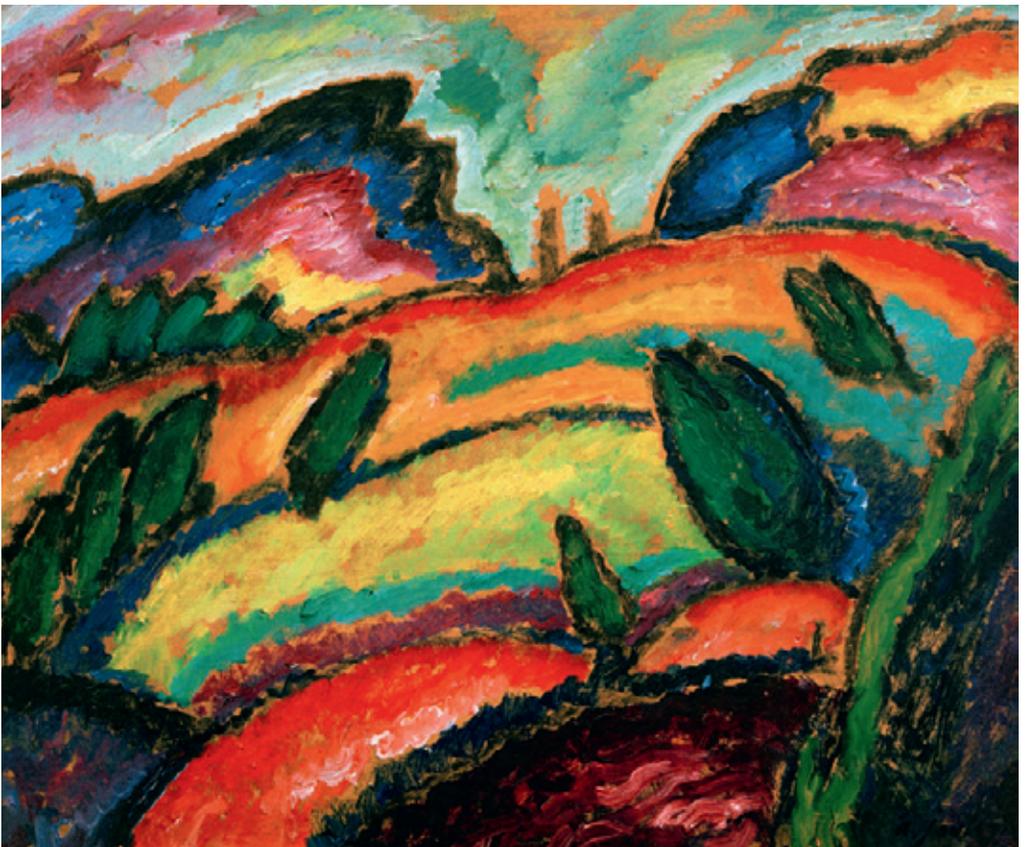
Alexej von Jawlensky

Hill, 1912

Museum Ostwall, Dortmund

INV. SG 83

Photo: Digital / Color Album / akg-images





Alexej von Jawlensky
Mystical head: Anika, c. 1917
Kunsthalle Emden
Photo: © Martinus Ekkenga



Alexej von Jawlensky
Variation: Early summer, 1919
Private collection
Photo: Alexej von Jawlensky-Archiv S.A., Muralto

For Jawlensky, the quest for spirituality through art firstly connected with the tradition of the religious icons of the Russian Orthodox church, which considered them an abstraction of the divine. Secondly, it was associated with two episodes that he considered fundamental for the development of his art, as he recounted in his memoirs. The first arose from the profound impression made on him by an icon of the Virgin in a Polish church which he visited with his mother as a child. The second relates to his first contact with painting, at an exhibition held in Moscow in 1880: “Lastly, I encountered the section on art. It was the first time in my life that I saw paintings and I was touched by grace, like the Apostle Paul at the moment of his conversion. My life was totally transformed by this. Since that day art has been my only passion, my *sancta sanctorum*, and I have devoted myself to it body and soul.”

In 1889, Jawlensky entered the Academy of Fine Arts in Saint Petersburg and became a student of Ilya Repin, the celebrated realist painter. Having abandoned the military career that he had embarked on in accordance with his father’s wishes, in 1896 he moved to Munich together with Igor Grabar, Dimitri Kardovsky and Marianne von Werefkin. Jawlensky and Werefkin became close in both emotional and artistic terms in a relationship that lasted until 1921. In Munich the artist associated with creative figures such as Wassily Kandinsky and Alexander Sakharov. He travelled to Paris in 1905 where he exhibited at the Salon d’automne and met Henri Matisse, whose ornamental use of colour had a profound



Alexej von Jawlensky
Still life with yellow coffee pot and white teapot, 1908
Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern. Private loan
Photo: Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

impression on him. These were years in which Jawlensky's style revealed the influence of the Post-impressionism of Cézanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin, resulting in an increasingly intense, autonomous use of colour influenced to some extent by Fauvism. From 1908 Jawlensky spent various summers in Murnau in Upper Bavaria in the company of Kandinsky, Gabriele Münter and Werfkin. His contribution to German Expressionism at this period took the form of his participation in the founding of the New Association of Artists in Munich in 1909 and in his involvement with the group Der Blaue Reiter [the Blue Rider] which made its appearance in 1911.

Following his enforced exile to Switzerland during World War I, Jawlensky focused his attention on a single subject, which gave rise to the *Variations* (also known as the "Songs without words"). These paintings repeatedly depict the same landscape that the artist saw from the window of his studio in Saint-Prex on the banks of Lake Geneva. Jawlensky thus embarked on seriality in his work, while the vertical format of these paintings questioned the horizontality traditionally characteristic of landscape painting.



Alexej von Jawlensky
Abstract head: Karma, 1933
Private collection
Photo: Alexej von Jawlensky-Archiv S.A., Muralto



Alexej von Jawlensky
Large Meditation, 1936
Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź
Photo: Museum Sztuki

It was, however, the artist's focus on portraiture and specifically on facial features in order to establish their essential lines that would ultimately distinguish Jawlensky's pictorial output. In a process that moved from the so-called "pre-war heads" to the *Mystical heads*, the *Faces of the Saviour* and the *Geometrical* or *Abstract heads* before culminating in the final series of the *Meditations*, the artist undertook a progressive simplification and paring-down of the features which involved the exclusion of any psychological or expressive trait associated with a particular individual. This process initially focused on half-length figures which were then brought closer to the foreground before the face was reduced to an oval and finally to a cross, in a constant state of tension between the depiction of an individual and his or her reduction to an archetype. This tension always made use of colour as a key element in the creation of harmonious or dissonant relationships between the different parts.

Featuring a selection of more than 100 works, the exhibition *Jawlensky. Face as landscape* presents an extensive survey of the career of an artist who pioneered the autonomous status of painting, while also establishing various points of connection with works by artists with whom Jawlensky shared artistic concerns. Most notably, these include the French painters Pierre Girieud, Henri-Edmond Cross, André Derain and Henri Matisse during Jawlensky's Post-impressionist and Fauvist period; the women painters Marianne von Werefkin and Gabriele Münter during his Expressionist period; and Sonia Delaunay, with whom he shared a vibrant use of colour.

JAWLENSKY

FACE AS LANDSCAPE

Curator

Itzhak Goldberg

Fundación MAPFRE

Paseo de Recoletos, 23

28004 Madrid

Tel. + (34) 915 816 100

cultura@fundacionmapfre.org

Dates

11 February to 9 May 2021

Opening times

Mondays (except public holidays): 2pm to 8pm

Tuesdays to Saturdays: 11am to 8pm

Sundays and public holidays: 11am to 7pm

(Last access: 30 minutes before closing time

Visitors must leave the galleries 10 minutes before closing time)

Ticket prices

Standard: 5 €

Reduced: 3 €

Free entry: Mondays (except public holidays)

Guided tours

7 €

Times and booking:
on this web page

Audio guide

Spanish and English

Bookshop

LAIE

Tel. + (34) 911 703 851

fmapfre@laie.es

Tell us your opinion of the exhibition:

#expoJawlensky

 fundacionmapfreultura

 @mapfrecultura

 @mapfrecultura



<https://www.fundacionmapfre.org/en/art-and-culture/exhibitions/>

Exhibition organised by Fundación MAPFRE, Madrid; the Musée Cantini, Marseille and La Piscine, Musée d'Art et d'Industrie André Diligent, Roubaix.

Fundación
MAPFRE

M | M

Musées de Marseille



Roubaix
La Piscine

MUSÉE
D'ART ET D'INDUSTRIE
ANDRÉ DILIGENT