



## Ulrich Clewing **Polygons, Compartments, Colour Surfaces: Lyonel Feininger's Very Own Cubist Reality**

It is a bright, sunny day in Cammin but not a single person is to be seen. A surreal atmosphere hangs over the little town in the hinterlands of the Baltic Coast. As if through a broken pane of glass, we glimpse the brown and ochre facades of townhouses reach into the pale sky. A new day is dawning; a solitary sailboat is already out on the water. Or is it merely a cypher, some kind of symbol?

As with Lyonel Feininger's famous paintings of a church in Gelmeroda near Weimar (e.g. "Gelmeroda XIII" held by the Metropolitan Museum in New York), one cannot be entirely sure whether one is looking at an optical illusion. Is the place depicted really Cammin – which in Feininger's day was still a medieval-looking hamlet on the inland bay known as the Camminer Bodden? Using old postcards as a guide, it is possible to locate roughly where in the town centre the artist must have stood to capture this view down towards the water.

Today, this former ducal seat is a seaside resort in the Polish voivodeship (province) of Western Pomerania. Large parts of the old town were destroyed during World War II.

When Feininger came here, only one road ran towards the water and the harbor pier in quite this direction, passing behind the Gothic town hall. Yet Cammin, though a bishopric since the 12th century, was never an imposing town. It never had high-gabled houses that reached into the sky, also not when this painting was made.

For Lyonel Feininger, born in New York in 1871 to a family of German immigrants, all this was obviously of secondary importance. His paintings of places like Halle, Gelmeroda, Cammin have since become highlights in the permanent exhibitions of leading museums in Europe and the United States. Apparently, they reminded him, in a mysterious manner that can only be explained by the freedom of art and the artist's own idiosyncrasy, of the spectacular architecture of his hometown.

And so here as well, Cammin is not really Cammin. It merely serves as a pretext allowing Feininger to follow his vision of painting, composition, and abstraction. He dissects the road to the pier, the houses that line it, the sky, and the Camminer Bodden bay into lines, polygons, and compartments, creating coloured planes which no longer have anything to do with reality, and instead establish their own new truth in a sort of hybrid between synthetic cubism and the minimalism of the 1960s.

Feininger was far ahead of his time. Also in terms of colour: The mix of shades of blue, yellow, and brown not only creates a satisfying harmony – there is a sense of tension that others managed to achieve only decades later. All of which makes "Cammin" a masterpiece and a highpoint of Feininger's mature work.

# 21<sup>N</sup> Lyonel Feininger

1871 – New York – 1956

"Cammin". 1934

Oil on canvas. 60.5 × 50.5 cm (23 7/8 × 19 7/8 in.). Signed and dated lower left: Feininger 1934. On the upper stretcher bar with brush in black signed, dated and titled (partially covered by label): L. Feininger 1934 "Cammin". Catalogue raisonné: Hess 360. With an additional certificate by Achim Moeller, New York, dated 21 April 2006. [3119] Framed.

Provenance

Galerie Nierendorf, Berlin (1936) / Nierendorf Gallery, New York (1943) / Marlborough Fine Art, London (1990) / Galerie Ludorff, Dusseldorf / Private Collection Switzerland (acquired 2006 at Galerie Ludorff)

EUR 500,000–700,000

USD 588,000–824,000

- An important example of Lyonel Feininger's prismatically fractured Cubism
- Documents Feininger's summer vacations on the Baltic seacoast of Pomerania
- An exciting interplay of azure, yellow, and brown

Exhibition

Gesamtausstellung Lyonel Feininger: Gemälde und Aquarelle, zum 65. Geburtstag des Künstlers. Berlin, Galerie Nierendorf, 1936, cat. no. 13 / Deutscher Künstlerbund: Malerei und Plastik in Deutschland 1936. Hamburg, Kunstverein, 1936, cat. no. 61, ill. (Exhibition closed after ten days by the National Socialists) / 2nd Feininger Exhibition 1937. 35 New Paintings, 130 Drawings and Prints by Lyonel Feininger (travelling exhibition 1937/38). Oakland (CA), Mills College Art Gallery; San Francisco (CA), San Francisco Museum of Art, 1937, cat. no. 35; Santa Barbara (CA); Los Angeles (CA), Los Angeles Art Association, University Gallery; Paintings, Water Colors, Drawings and Wood Cuts by Lyonel Feininger. Andover (MA), Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, 1938, cat. no. 13; Seattle (WA), Seattle Art Museum, and Portland (OR) / Feininger Exhibition. New York, Nierendorf Gallery, 1943, cat. no. 9 / *Présence des maîtres*. Basle, Galerie Beyeler, 1967, cat. no. 12 / *Lyonel Feininger Retrospective*. Oil Paintings and Works on Paper. Tokio, Marlborough Fine Art, 1990, cat. no. 5, ill. / *Sommergäste*. Von Arp bis Werefkin. *Klassische Moderne in Mecklenburg und Pommern*. Schwerin, Staatliches Museum, Kunstsammlungen, Schlösser and Gärten, 2011, cat. no. 52, ill. p. 139 / *Il Mar Baltico delle Avanguardie (1886-1945)* [transfer of the Schwerin exhibition 2011]. Ascona, Museo Comunale d'Arte Moderna, 2012

Literature and Illustration

Willy Rotzler: *Konstruktive Konzepte. Eine Geschichte der konstruktiven Kunst vom Kubismus bis heute*. Zurich, ABC Verlag, 1977, cat. no. 156, ill. p. 77 / Hans Schulz-Vanselow: *Lyonel Feininger und Pommern. Eine Materialsammlung*. Kiel, Stiftung Pommern, 1999, p. 253, p. 309, ill. 16, and p. 356

