

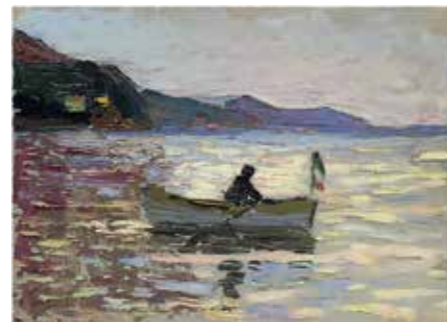
Susanne Baunach **“Pittura Amorosa” in Liguria:
Rapallo as Inspiration for Wassily Kandinsky’s
Path to Abstraction**

Wassily Kandinsky’s oil study *Rapallo – Castello und Kirche* from 1906 provides a vista onto an idyllic small town on Italy’s Ligurian Coast. The Castello, a fortress built in the mid-16th century, is recognizable near the right-hand margin, next to the church’s belfry. The town extends along the coastline and is enclosed by a mountain range in the background. Executed in spatula technique, the oil study conveys a delicate freshness through its nuances of pastel-like colour. These elements give the picture a breezy quality capturing the spirit of spring.

Through his subtle blending of light and colour, Kandinsky creates a weightless, carefree atmosphere. Compared with his later “Rapallo” studies, which mainly dwell on maritime motifs, this painting stands out for its focus on architectural and scenic structures, such as the mountain peaks in the background, the townscape, as well as the guard rails and boat jetties in the foreground. These features already clearly foreshadow the artist’s nascent Expressionist tendencies.

Kandinsky was in Italy from April 1905 until December 1906, accompanied by Gabriele Münter. The lovers were travelling throughout Europe and North Africa, enjoying a freewheeling lifestyle away from the strictures of Munich’s bourgeois society. They had gotten to know each other in 1902 at the painting class Kandinsky was teaching at the avant-garde Phalanx School. An intense relationship, artistic as well as intimate, soon developed between the married professor and his student.

Kandinsky and Münter had begun their trip, which Kandinsky in particular regarded as a ‘probationary period’ for their relationship, in 1904. It was to last four years in all and comprised stops in Italy, Holland, Tunisia, Dresden, Paris, and Switzerland. Münter and Kandinsky intended to use their time abroad not just to live out their budding (albeit complicated) love affair, but also to develop further as artists while carefully recording all that they saw around them. And so the artist couple worked meticulously – photographing, drawing, and painting the locals, street life, and landscapes.



Wassily Kandinsky. *Rapallo – Boot im Meer*. 1906. Oil/ cardboard. Sold at Grisebach 2011 for 670,000 EUR (incl. premium)



Gabriele Münter. *Kandinsky im Ruderboot*. 1905/06

The photographs from their sojourn in Rapallo show Kandinsky sitting in a rowboat, or a wide shot of Münter posing on the beach against a panoramic backdrop of Rapallo. Here as well, the Castello is visible in the distance. A pencil drawing by Münter captures Kandinsky in the Bay of Rapallo, engrossed in a drawing or perhaps even an oil study. These works created on the spot provide important first-hand testimony of the unconventional relationship between these two creative personalities. One which eventually would falter due to Kandinsky’s failure to honour his oft-repeated promise to openly acknowledge his bond with Münter.

The late Impressionist “small oil studies,” as Kandinsky called them, were created between 1901 and 1907. They certainly are early masterpieces of his plein-air painting, but beyond that, they also serve as harbingers of a revolutionary new period in Kandinsky’s creative evolution. As exploratory steps towards the Expressionism and abstraction that would characterize his painting in later years, they allow us to experience the gestation of his ground-breaking artistic vision.



Gabriele Münter. *Kandinsky in Rapallo*. Pencil/paper. 1906



Lot 22

22 Wassily Kandinsky

Moscow 1866 – 1944 Neuilly

“Rapallo – Castello und Kirche”. 1906

Oil on canvas on artist's board, mounted on wooden frame. 24 × 32,8 cm (9 1/2 × 12 7/8 in.). Signed and titled in pencil on the reverse: 1906 Rapallo.

Catalogue raisonné: Roethel 147. [3196] Framed.

Provenance

Gabriele Münter, Murnau / Galerie Otto Stangl, Munich / The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York / Madame Jacques Neubauer, Neuilly-sur-Seine / Marc Blondeau, Paris / Private Collection, Berlin (1990 acquired at Grisebach, thence by descent to the present owner)

EUR 250,000–350,000

USD 269,000–376,000

Exhibition

45 œuvres de Kandinsky provenant du Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum New York. New York, Guggenheim Museum; Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts; Paris, Musée National d'Art Moderne; Lyon, Palais Saint-Pierre; Oslo, Kunstnernes Hus; Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, 1957/58 (with separate catalogues for each exhibition location) / Wassily Kandinsky. Toronto, The Art Gallery, 1959, cat. no. 11

Literature and illustration

Auction Sotheby's London, 30.6.1964, cat. no. 2, w. ill. / Auktion 15: Ausgewählte Kunstwerke. Berlin, Villa Grisebach Auktionen, 23.11.1990, cat. no. 9, w. ill.



Wassily Kandinsky (?). *Gabriele Münter am Strand von Rapallo*, Spring 1906

