

## Wassily Kandinsky

Treppe zum Schloss (Murnau). 1909

Oil on board



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## Cataloguing

### Wassily Kandinsky

1866 Moscow – 1944 Neuilly-sur-Seine

#### Treppe zum Schloss (Murnau). 1909.

Oil on board.

Roethel/Benjamin 323 (with an illustration of the study from Kandinsky's memorandum from around 1911, former location unknown).

Signed and dated in lower right. Verso signed, titled and inscribed "(N°3)".

44.9 x 33 cm (17.6 x 12.9 in).

#### PROVENANCE:

Galerie Der Sturm (owner Herwarth Walden), Berlin (1912 - 1919).

Paul Citroen, Amsterdam/Berlin (acquired from the aforementioned in 1919).

Arthur Pétrónio, Netherlands (Amsterdam)/Belgium (December 1919).

Paul Citroen, Amsterdam/Berlin (until at least 1923).

Paul F. Sanders, Amsterdam/USA (acquired in Amsterdam in 1930).

Since then in private family property.

#### EXHIBITION:

Kandinsky Collective Exhibition, Galerie Der Sturm, Berlin, October 1912, cat. no. 33 (2nd edition of the catalogue. Mentioned as "Kleine Studie, 1910" in the catalogue. In a catalogue with hand-written notes from the possession of Gabriele Münter mentioned as "Treppe z. Schloss 1909", cf. Roethel/Benjamin p. 21 with illu. 12, p. 22).

Voor de Kunst, Utrecht, December 1912 (verso with the label, aforementioned exhibition stop).

Louis Bock & Sohn, Hamburg 1913 (verso with fragmentary preserved label, aforementioned exhibition stop).

Kandinsky. Gemälde und Aquarelle, Galerie Der Sturm, Berlin, September 1916 (44th exhibition), cat. no. 8.

#### LITERATURE:

La Revue du Feu, Amsterdam, December 1919, illu. on p. 62 (as "Collection A. PETRONIO").

"La Revue du Feu", in: Tweede Blad der Provinciale Overijsselsche en Zwolsche courant, January 7, 1920, no. 5, no page (as: "een straatje in een berg-dorp" ["mountain village road"]).

With a certificate from the Artloss Register.

A thorough survey of all relevant provenance- and Nazi-confiscated art data banks has been conducted.

Auction 489: Evening Sale, 7 June 2019

€ 1,500,000 – 2,500,000 / \$ 1,680,000 - 2,800,000

## Findings on the Verso of the Board

Early inscriptions, presumably by the artist or by those in his direct surroundings

- Inscription, blue pen: "KANDINSKY (1909)"
- Inscription, blue pen: "Treppe zum Schloß" (cf. inscription with the same title on Kandinsky's "Memorandum"<sup>1</sup>)
- Inscription, blue pen: "(No 3)"
- Inscription, blue pen: "~~K 8~~" [crossed out in dark blue. Presumably K = Kandinsky]
- Inscription, dark blue pen: "MT A 5" [same pen as used for "K 8". MT = Münter?]

- Remains of a detached label in lower left.

The label covers the hand-written "No 3", meaning it was attached at a later point than the inscriptions in light blue pen. The label had not been on the image carrier for long, as an even darkening can also be identified on the spot from where it had been removed.

Judging the label's dimensions and format, it may well have been a label from the gallery "Der Sturm".

- Inscription, pencil: "f 55" [presumably specifying price/value: 55 Guilders]

- Label, strongly defective, "[...] ,Voor de Kunst' te Utrecht", printed and with hand-written records ("Kandinsky", "Schilderij", under "Aafgezonden door": "Walden"). Thereon, also removed, remains of an industrially made standard label and the inscriptions "= 59" and "180 fl" [indication of price: 180 Guilders].

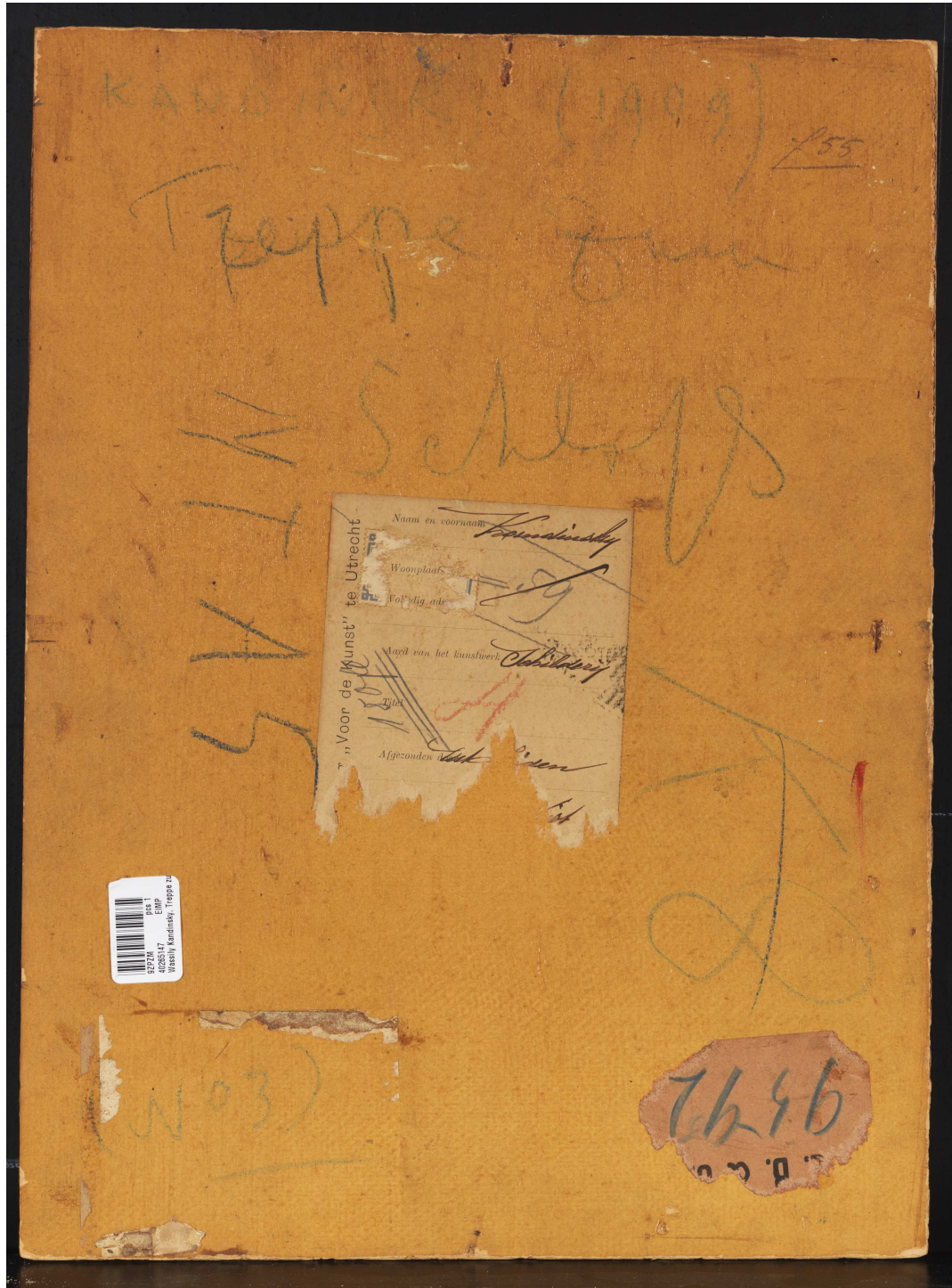
The label comes from Kandinsky Collective Exhibition of the gallery "Der Sturm", on display at the gallery "Voor de Kunst" in December 1912.

- Label, strongly defective, lower right, with imprint "L. B. & S." and with hand-written entry "9592". This is a label from the art trader Louis Bock & Sohn, Hamburg (labels for comparison are at hand, the identity has also been confirmed by Ute Haug, Kunsthalle Hamburg). The label comes from the Collective Exhibition of the gallery "Der Sturm", on display at Louis Bock & Sohn in early 1913.

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1 Abb. in: Roethel, H. K. u. Benjamin, J. K.: Kandinsky Werkverzeichnis der Ölgemälde. Band 1: 1900 – 1915, München 1982, S. 19.

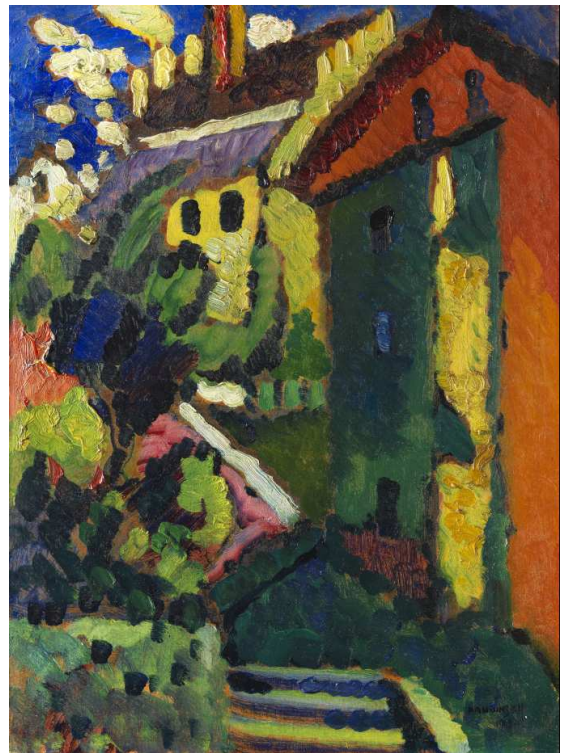




## Art-historical classification

Wassily Kandinsky's bright and colourful painting "Treppe zu Schloss" (Stairs to the Castle) from 1909 is a particularly fine example from his expressive early artistic period as well as a spectacular recent rediscovery: Since it was on display at the renowned Berlin gallery "Der Sturm" in September 1916, the work has not been accessible to the public. "Treppe zum Schloss" is a truly sensational discovery, as it takes up a key position in Kandinsky's remarkable artistic oeuvre as well as within the development of modern art in general.

The picture was painted during Kandinsky's second stay at Murnau. A time defined by dissolving forms and a free and powerful play of colours – signs of the artist's path to abstraction. This art-historically relevant process, which starts out with Kandinsky's "Impressionen" (impressions), "Improvisationen" (improvisations) and "Kompositionen" (compositions) and ends with his famous abstract "Komposition VII" (1913), is in terms of its composition similarly arranged in the painting "Berg", also from 1909, today in the collection of the Lenbachhaus in Munich.

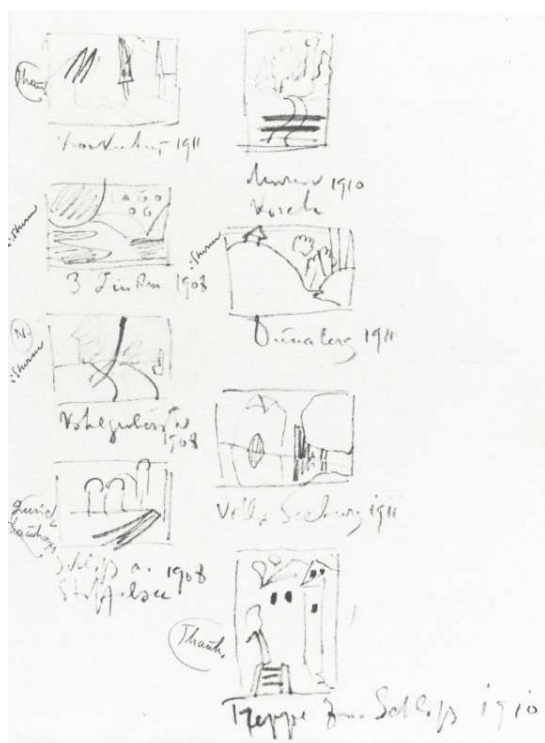


**Wassily Kandinsky, Murnau – Häusergruppe, 1908,  
Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich.**



When comparing the airy composition "Treppe zum Schloss" with the picture "Murnau - Häusergruppe" (Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich) painted in summer 1908, or with the two views of Kochel from February 1909, which are slightly more cloudy in terms of colour application (also at Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus), it becomes obvious how in Kandinsky's "Treppe zum Schloss" form and colour become independent and how little importance aspects like a correct perspective and spatial depth had, while the colours – still having representational relevance – already break into coloured fields. It is not the stairways leading up to Murnau Castle that is the work's central pictorial motif. The latter serves more as inspiration for a liberated concept of forms and colours, which may remain representational while already opening up to a more abstract level of perception.

## The first source: Kandinsky's "Memorandum"



Up until recently Kandinsky's "Memorandum" (illu. left)<sup>2</sup> was the only source supplying information on the appearance of the lost painting "Treppe zum Schloss".

In this memorandum the artist had sketched eight of his Murnau landscapes in swift lines, most likely in the last months of 1911. As Hans K. Roethel and Jean K. Benjamin, authors of the catalogue raisonné assume "Memorandum" was presumably made in preparation of the exhibition "Der Blaue Reiter". It appears that "Treppe zum Schloss", identifiable in lower right, was on the shortlist for this seminal exhibition: The sketch is inscribed with the notation "Thaäh." [Thannhauser].

**Wassily Kandinsky, Memorandum, 1911.**

2 Illu. in: Roethel, H. K. u. Benjamin, J. K.: Kandinsky Catalogue Raisonné of Oil Paintings. Volume 1: 1900 - 1915, Munich 1982, p. 19.

Due to a lack of records and data, we cannot identify today whether Kandinsky actually sent "Treppe zum Schloss" to Thannhauser. It was definitely not included in the exhibition "Der Blaue Reiter", which opened in December 1911, instead it went to Berlin to the renowned "Sturm" gallery.

## "The strongest that Europe has to offer today" – the Collective Exhibition

In 1912, the key year in which Kandinsky published his ground-breaking writing "Concerning the spiritual in art" as well as the pioneering almanac "Der Blaue Reiter", "Treppe zum Schloss" was showcased at Kandinsky's first solo show. The exhibition was a big event for the artist, however, it also faced a couple of difficulties. The Munich art dealer Hans Goltz, who regarded himself as Kandinsky's sole representative, had initially planned to organise the

show, however, it was eventually realised by his competitor: Herwarth Walden and his 'Sturm' gallery in Berlin. The indistinct allocation of competences probably also led to the lacks of clarity in the exhibition catalogue. Hans Goltz also insisted on publishing it for the 'Sturm' exhibition, which may have been quite difficult from afar.

In a letter to Kandinsky from October 2nd, 1912 Walden remarked that there were discrepancies,<sup>3</sup> that were corrected, at least in parts, in a second edition of the catalogue. A copy of the latter in the Kandinsky estate, managed by his partner Gabriele Münter, proves (illu. left)<sup>4</sup> that the errors were still existent.

30. Murnauer Landschaft (Kirche)	1909
31. Weiße Wolke	1902
32. Kleine Studie 1909	1909
33. Kleine Studie 1909	1909
34. Bild mit Häusern	1909
35. Improvisation 5	1910
36. Kleine Studie 1910	1910
37. Komposition 2	1910
38. Zwei Pappeln	1909
39. Bild mit dem Bogenschützen	1910
40. Berglandschaft	1911
41. Impression 5	1909
42. Bild mit Kahn	1907
43. Morgenstunde	1909
44. Blauer Berg	1909
45. Alte Stadt	1906
46. Troikas	1911
47. Sankt Georg 2	1911
48. Herbstlandschaft	1910
49. Improvisation 11	1910
50. Improvisation 16	1910
51. Zweikampf	1903
52. Karneval	1911
53. Kleine Studien	1910
54. Lyrisches	1909
55. Improvisation 13	1910
56. Improvisation 4	1910
57. Improvisation 8	1911
58. Landschaft (Kirche)	1912
59. Kleine Studie 1909	1909
60. Improvisation 25	1909
61. Landschaft (79)	1901
62. Landschaft (72)	1904
63. Schlense	
64. Spaziergang	

**Kandinsky Collective Exhibition, annotated page from the second edition of the exhibition catalogue, 1912  
Munich, Gabriele Münter and Johannes Eichner Foundation**

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Walden to Kandinsky, October 2, 1912: "The exhibition opened today at 12. It was one [...] work. The years in the catalogue are inconsistent with your list." "There are a lot more small pictures than indicated. But all without names or different denominations". Quote from Kandinsky, Münter, Walden. Briefe und Schriften 1912-1914. Published by Karla Bilang, Bern [et al] 2012, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Gabriele Münter- and Johannes Eichner Foundation, Munich. Roethel, H. K. and Benjamin, J. K.: Kandinsky Catalogue raisonné of Paintings. Volume 1: 1900 - 1915, Munich 1982, p. 21 with illu. 12 on p. 22.

There are many hand-written corrections in the catalogue. For no. 33, "Kleine Studie 1910", Münter noted: "1909 Treppe zum Schloss".

However, it is not only this document certifying that "Treppe zum Schloss" was definitely shown at the important "Kandinsky Collective Exhibition", as the picture itself also reveals quite a lot: Labels from "Voor de Kunst" in Utrecht and "Louis Bock & Sohn" in Hamburg are on the rear of the board. On its long exhibition tour with stops at several cities in Germany and the Netherlands the "Collective Exhibition" also visited<sup>5</sup> these two galleries. The exhibition made a major contribution to Kandinsky's reputation with the Dutch avant-garde<sup>6</sup> – and "Treppe zum Schloss" had a first "guest performance" in his future home country.

Herwarth Walden was strongly enthusiastic about the works included in his Kandinsky Exhibition. His hymnal praise suggests that this exhibition marked a seminal turning point:

*"Dear Mister Kandinsky: You are a very extraordinary artist. I am really proud of the exhibition. The strongest that Europe has to offer today [...] What a genius! What a life! Vigor and Art. I am all taken with it."*<sup>7</sup>

## Back at the "Sturm": 1914–1919

Even though "Treppe zum Schloss" had in context of the "Collective Exhibition" been to the Netherlands it first again returned to Berlin. Apparently, the return was not all that easy: On January 2, 1914 Kandinsky complained to Herwarth Walden, that some of the paintings had not been returned yet – among them "Treppe zum Schloss". However, he was able to give the all-clear a few days later: "The missing pictures are here".<sup>8</sup>

It seems that the work was soon back at the "Sturm" gallery. In September 1916 it was shown at the exhibition "Kandinsky. Gemälde und Aquarelle" – and it was also correctly mentioned in the catalogue with the number 8. This time Hans Goltz did not try to get involved with the catalogue.

Based on present day knowledge the work remained in the inventory of the "Sturm" until 1919 before it went to the Netherlands again.

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<sup>5</sup> In a letter to Münter from 1912 Kandinsky mentions Leiden, Utrecht, Amsterdam, Aachen and Hamburg.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Letter from Walden to Kandinsky, October 9, 1913: "because there is sincere interest in him in Holland now" (Kandinsky, Münter, Walden. Briefe und Schriften 1912-1914. Published by Karla Bilang, Bern [et al] 2012, p. 101). In late 1913 Kandinsky participated in an exhibition at Kunstkring Amsterdam. Herwarth Walden had organized many exhibitions in the Netherlands before and even during World War I, especially Kandinsky's art was met with great enthusiasm. Cf. Gregor Langfeld, Duitse kunst in Nederland. Verzamelen, tentoonstellen, kritieken, 1919 - 1964, Zwolle 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Letter Walden an Kandinsky, October 2, 1912. Kandinsky, Münter, Walden. Briefe und Schriften 1912-1914. Published by Karla Bilang, Bern [et al] 2012, p. 30.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Kandinsky to Walden, January 6, 1914, quote from ibidem, p. 151. Cf. ibidem. p. 149.



## From "Sturm" to Holland: Paul Citroen 1919 - 1923



**Paul Citroen, Self-Portrait, 1930.**  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

As agent of the "Sturm" in the Netherlands Paul Citroen played a key role. Born in 1896, the painter, photographer, art- and book trader came from a wealthy family, which enabled him to follow his passion for avant-garde art from an early point on. Since around 1916 he was a regular guest at Herwarth Walden's gallery where he rummaged through the storage, which had filled up during the war, in search of new acquisitions. Citroen intended to sell some of the works in the Netherlands – before he eventually settled in Amsterdam for good in 1927, come to Holland as representative of the "Sturm" gallery often.

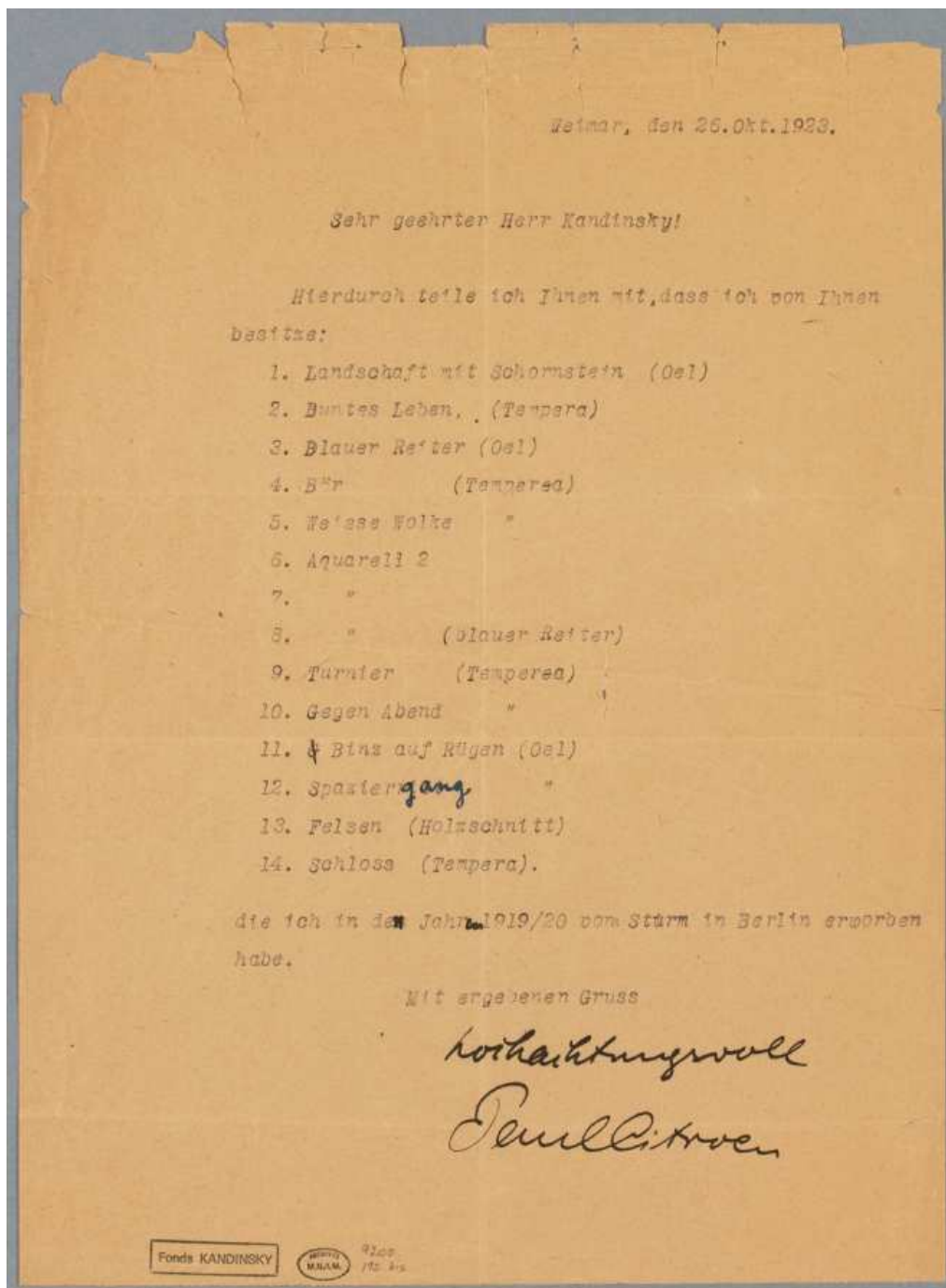
Over the years many of Kandinsky's works went through Paul Citroen's hands. Ten of them were allegedly part of his private collection. In September 1920 Citroen gave four paintings and two watercolours in commission to the Harleem dealer De Bois – "Treppe zum Schloss" was not among them<sup>9</sup> his work though seems to have been in his ownership, too. In a letter to Kandinsky sent on October 23, 1923 (illu. on next page) Citroen mentioned a painting "Schloss (Tempeara)" in his possession that he had acquired from "Sturm" in 1919/1920. Another letter proves that it apparently was no longer in his possession in 1927.<sup>10</sup>

No other known work could be considered to be this painting. Neither the technique "Tempera" is surprising, as letters and lists often provide varying information regarding the materials used.

Accordingly, the date of acquisition through Paul Citroen must be in 1919, as there is proof for the ownership of another avant-gardist for December 1919: Arthur Pétronio.

<sup>9</sup> A list of commissions has been preserved. Gregor Langfeld, *Duitse kunst in Nederland. Verzamelen, tentoonstellen, kritieken, 1919 - 1964*, Zwolle 2004, pp. 32-37.

<sup>10</sup> Centre Pompidou, Paris, Fonds Vassily Kandinsky, Citroen, Paul, *lettres (1923-1927)*, fol. 4; cf. Fols. 1-3. il There are no further indications to the painting either in the Paul Citroen's account books (Museum de Fundatie, Zwolle) nor in the Archief Citroen (RDK Den Haag) either.



Paul Citroen to Wassily Kandinsky, October 26, 1923.

Centre Pomidou, Paris, Fonds Vassily Kandinsky, Citroen, Paul, lettres (1923-1927), fol. 4.

## A programmatic Interlude: Arthur Pétronio 1919/1920



In December 1919 "Treppe zum Schloss" was for the first time shown on a picture : It was depicted in the magazine "Revue du Feu" with the caption: "Collection A. PETRONIO". (Illu. right).

Who is this, „A. PETRONIO“?<sup>11</sup> Sources show that he was a vibrant personality and fascinating figure of the avant-garde during the years between the wars. Even his early days were exceptional: The violinist and progressive poet was born the illegitimate child of the famous Italian quick-change artist and actor Leopoldo Fregoli in Davos, Switzerland in 1897. Just as it was the case with his father, the son also must have had a very special aura. Arturo Conati, his real name, was a true wunderkind, who played the solo violin for King Leopold II of Belgium at a very young age.

La Revue du Feu, December 1919, S. 62

But he was attracted to the avant-garde. The young man, who adopted the name Arthur Pétronio, had the vision of a total work of art combining text, sound and picture. In Kandinsky, whom he met personally,<sup>12</sup> he saw a soulmate, as they shared a deeply synaesthetic concept of art. He developed this concept further out of Kandinsky's "Verbophony". Pétronio's first "verbophonic" work "La Course à la Lune" premiered in Amsterdam in 1919 with Henri Le Fauconnier, Piet Mondrian, Gustave de Smet and Wassily Kandinsky in the audience.<sup>13</sup>

That same year Pétronio founded the multilingual "universalist" magazine "La Revue du Feu" in Amsterdam, a platform to promote the rapidly developing Modernism. With great self-assurance he presented his Kandinsky painting "Treppe zum Schloss" in the lavishly made edition from December 1919.

11 Agence régionale pour la coordination des activités musicales et chorégraphiques, Arthur Pétronio 1897-1983. La course à la lune, Cavaillon 1996; Hubert van den Berg, "Der Sturm" und die niederländische literarische Avantgarde. Eine kleine Bestandsaufnahme, in: Der Aufruch in die Moderne. Herwarth Walden und die europäische Avantgarde, Berlin 2013, pp. 79-113; By courtesy of Frank Lamoën, Amsterdam and Hubert van den Berg, Olomouc/Berlin.

12 Cf. Agence régionale pour la coordination des activités musicales et chorégraphiques, Arthur Pétronio 1897-1983. La course à la lune, Cavaillon 1996, p. 10, 40.

13 Ibidem, p. 13.



However, Pétronio was apparently not aware of the verso inscribed title of the painting, as he just mentioned the work only as "peinture", "picture". And of course the motif, the



Murnau Castle, could not be allocated either in the Netherlands. This explains why it was called "een straatje in een berg-dorp" – "mountain village road" in a review in "Revue du Feu" from January 1920. It is not traceable today either how the painting got into Pétronio's ownership.<sup>14</sup> The above-mentioned letter from Citroen suggests that the violinist, who relocated from Bloemendaal to Amsterdam in September 1919, received the picture directly from Citroen, who, on in turn had acquired it from the "Sturm" gallery just shortly beforehand. It likely that Pétronio and Citroen knew each other, mainly because they are both associated with the artist group "D'Orkaan". The painting did obviously not remain in Pétronio's possession for long, perhaps he never was the rightful owner at all.

**Arthur Pétronio as a young man.**  
**Image: Arthur Pétronio 1897–1983.**  
**La course à la lune, Cavaillon 1996.**

Pétronio shared the common fate of many avant-gardists: He was short of money. Furthermore, he had gone to great financial lengths with the lavishly made magazine "Revue du Feu", and soon was unable to pay for it any longer. The newspaper "De Telegraaf" announced the end of the publication on 5 March, 1920<sup>15</sup> and things would get even worse: On 6 May, 1920 the "Algemeen Handelsblad" publicized the artist's bankruptcy.<sup>16</sup> Documents prove that at this point he only owned a broken typewriter and a little money in the bank.<sup>17</sup> "Treppe zum Schloss" obviously went back to Paul Citroen, who mentioned it as part of his inventory in 1923. The painting left the collection Citroen before 1927 – possibly through the art dealer de Bois in Haarlem, who worked together with Citroen on many occasions.<sup>18</sup>

14 The Arthur Petronio papers, 1919-1971 at Getty Research Institute, LA, provide no information on the picture. Checked in March 2019.

15 „La Revue du Feu zal tijdelijk niet verschijnen.“

16 "Faillissement Arthur Petronio. Vonnis van de arrondissements rechtbank (May 3, 1920)": "in staat van faillissement verklaard Arthuro Conati, zich noemende Arthur Petronio, laatst gewoond Marnixstraat 413." By courtesy of Frank van Lamoën.

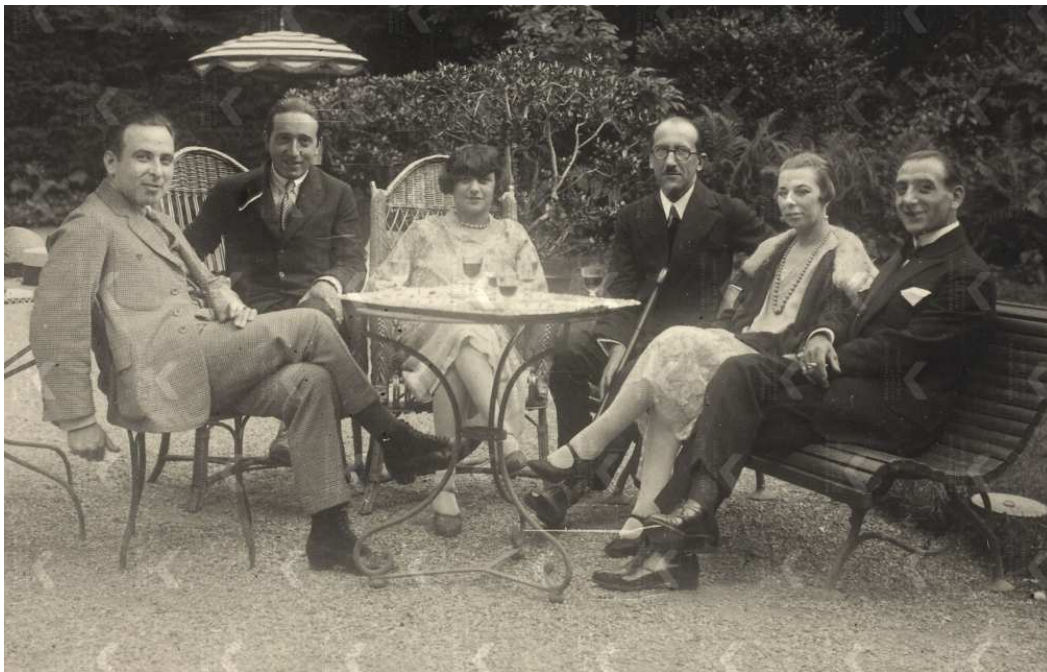
17 Noord-Hollands Archief, Haarlem, archival material of Amsterdam Court, bankruptcy file of Arthur Petronio from May 3, 1920; by courtesy of Mariska Krikken: "In this file art works are not recorded, only a broken type writer and a bank balance. This indicates that by 1919-1920 the Kandinsky was no longer in his possession."

18 The De Bois Archive at RKD, The Hague, contains no correspondence from after 1920.

## Bought and Rescued: In the Collection Paul F. Sanders

"Treppe zum Schloss" found on its journey its way again into the collection of a musician: Paul F. Sanders. The music journalist and art critic, born 1891, acquired the work at an auction in 1930.<sup>19</sup> He knew the painting already in 1919: A copy of "Revue du Feu" with the photograph of the painting was preserved in his estate, hold in an archive in Amsterdam.<sup>20</sup>

It is also possible that Sanders had seen the work in Berlin at an even earlier point. His unpublished autobiography<sup>21</sup> show that he completed an apprenticeship at a bank in Berlin between 1913 and 1915. Paul F. Sanders was a regular guest at the "Sturm" gallery, where he also met Herwarth Walden. His boss whom Sanders only refers to as "Simon" introduced him to the art of the "Blauer Reiter". "Simon" owned a collection of works by the avant-gardists that he also showed to the young Paul F. Sanders. It might be self-evident to assume that this must have been Hugo Simon, owner of the Berlin private bank Carsch Simon & Co and a famous art collector.



**Paul F. Sanders (left) among his artist friends J. and Frie Tas, Piet Mondriaan, Tine and George Vantongerloo in the garden of Avenue des Loges, July 15, 1925.**  
Image: RKD The Hague

<sup>19</sup> The work was presumably purchased in the small Amsterdam auction house Veilinghuis De Zon. The Archief Veilinghuis de Zon in the Stadsarchief Amsterdam was checked (February 2019), but it holds no such early documents.

<sup>20</sup> Amsterdam, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis: Archief Paul F. Sanders, Nr. 142.

<sup>21</sup> Amsterdam, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis: Archief Paul F. Sanders, Nr. 1.

Just as it was the case with Pétronio, Sanders was also part of the circle of the avant-garde in Holland. He attended, for instance, an "Analysis Course" with Arnold Schönberg at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam from November 1920 to February 1921. Sanders had met Schönberg at concerts in the "Sturm" gallery in Berlin<sup>22</sup> – Schönberg, on his part, was in close contact with Kandinsky.

The Jewish musician Sanders, who supported artists that had fled Germany for Amsterdam, was forced to go underground himself when the National Socialists invaded the Netherlands. Thanks to the help of his close friend Willem Sandberg, a Dutch "National Hero" and later director of the Amsterdam Stedelijk Museum, Sanders was able to hide his art collection from the Nazis.<sup>23</sup>

In 1946 Sanders eventually moved to New York as correspondent of the Dutch daily "Het Parool". He took "Treppe zum Schloss" with him. The work had accompanied Paul F. Sanders through dangerous times and hardships, and remained in possession of his descendants up until today.

## Kandinsky and Music

The story of "Treppe zum Schloss" casts a clear light on the enthusiasm the Dutch avant-garde had for the art of Wassily Kandinsky and on the fruitful international connections between Amsterdam and Berlin. Additionally, it casts light on an era characterized by a young and progressive generation that not only pushed the boundaries between the arts, but that strove to tear them down entirely.

The musician, Schönberg admirer and art lover Paul F. Sanders, was part of this generation, as well as the "universal genius" Arthur Pétronio. Just like Kandinsky, declared model for his concept of the "Verbophony", Pétronio also had the ideal of a total work of art in mind: A work that unites music, literature and painting, forming a new universal language of art. Accordingly, it is little surprising that a painting from Wassily Kandinsky can be found in the collections of Sanders and Pétronio.

<sup>22</sup> Sointu Scharenberg, Überwinden der Prinzipien. Betrachtungen zu Arnold Schönbergs unkonventioneller Lehrtätigkeit zwischen 1898 und 1951, Saarbrücken 2002, pp. 91-93.

<sup>23</sup> The Stedelijk Museum and the Second World War, Ex. cat. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam 2015, pp. 77, 84-89 and by courtesy of Margreeth Soeting, Amsterdam. For security reasons no documents were prepared.





**Wassily Kandinsky, Impression III (Konzert), 1911**  
**Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich**

It was Wassily Kandinsky who was one of the main protagonists of this groundbreaking development. One “eye-opening experience” is often mentioned: Kandinsky was deeply impressed by a concert of Arnold Schönberg, the father of Atonality and later inventor of the Twelve-tone technique, that he listened to on New Year's Day 1911. Not only did he paint “Impression III (Konzert)” (illu. above) under the direct impression of this experience, it also led to a penfriendship.

Kandinsky paved the way by writing a deeply personal letter to the composer whom he did not know personally, in which he stressed their affinity with great passion:

*“Our endeavors [...] as well as our mindset and our emotional world are so similar that it only feels just right to express all the sympathy I feel for you. In your works you have realized for which I had felt [...] such strong yearning. An independent course through the own fate, the independent life of the individual voices in your compositions is just what I seek to express in painting. [...] At the moment there is a strong tendency in painting to strive to find this ‘new’ harmony through constructive means, in which the rhythmical aspect is built on an almost geometrical form. [...] However, I feel different about this kind of construction. I am convinced that our present harmony cannot be reached on the ‘geometric’ path, but that it needs a direct anti-geometrical and anti-logical approach. And this is the path of the ‘dissonances’ in art, both in painting and in music. And what we regard as dissonance in music and painting ‘today’ will be the consonance of ‘tomorrow’ [...].”<sup>24</sup>*

For Kandinsky the “sound” of colour and forms, the analogue principles of modern music and modern painting, were of a crucial importance. It went far beyond everything that used to

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24 Lorenz Dittmann, Schönberg und Kandinsky, in: Stefan Litwin und Klaus Velten (editors): Stil oder Gedanke? Zur Schönberg-Rezeption in Amerika und Europa, Saarbrücken 1995, pp. 216-230, here pp. 216f. Cf. ibidem and Peter Vergo, “Die klingende Seele der Natur”. Kandinsky und die Musik, in: Wassily Kandinsky. Gesammelte Schriften 1889 - 1916, 2007, Munich [et al] pp. 676-681.

connect the genres in earlier centuries, especially in the age of Romanticism. In 1912 Kandinsky wrote in "Concerning the Spiritual in Art":

*"A painter who finds no satisfaction in the mere representation of natural phenomena, however artistic, who strives to create his inner life, enviously observes the simplicity and ease with which such an aim is already achieved in the non-material art of music. It is easily understandable that he will turn to this art and will attempt to reciprocate it with his own."*<sup>25</sup>

The almanac "Der Blaue Reiter", published the same year, contains three pieces with musical notes and three essays on music, as well as pictures painted by the composer Arnold Schönberg. In its original conception more musical than pictorial contributions were planned, however, this concept had never been realized.

His "musical" approach to creating a composition becomes particularly obvious in the work "Impression III (Konzert)": Form and colour contrast suggest a spatial sound experience. However, two years earlier something very similar appeared in "Treppe zum Schloss": The seemingly upwards moving forms of cool shades of green at the left hand side create a lively rising crescendo. It powerfully resounds in the colour chords of the houses and fades away in the yellow clouds in the blue sky.

That may perhaps have been the perspective the previous owners Pétronio and Sanders had on "Treppe zum Schloss".

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<sup>25</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, Über das Geistige in der Kunst, 2nd edition, Munich 1912, p. 37.

## Catalogue Raisonné Entry

Roethel, H. K. u. Benjamin, J. K.: Kandinsky Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings.  
Edition 1: 1900 – 1915, Munich 1982, No. 323



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### **TREPPE ZUM SCHLOSS**

Steps to the Castle  
Escalier menant au château

1909–1910

Oil (support unknown)  
Measurements unknown  
Signature unknown

Not in Handlists

The accompanying illustration is reproduced from a small sketch by Kandinsky on a loose page of sketches of some of his paintings which was found in the Münter archives (see p. 21). It must have been a small study according to the entry in the second edition of the catalogue of the *Kandinsky Kollektiv-Ausstellung*, where it appeared as *Kleine Studie*, dated 1910. Münter dated it 1909, which we prefer on stylistic grounds.

1909–1910

#### *History*

Moderne Galerie Thannhauser, Munich.  
Galerie Der Sturm, Berlin.

#### *Location*

Unknown.

#### *Exhibitions*

Berlin, Der Sturm, *Kandinsky Kollektiv-Ausstellung*, 1912; (second edition of catalogue, no. 33, dated 1909 according to an annotation by Münter in one copy (see p. 21)).

Berlin, Der Sturm, September 1916,  
no. 81.



## Detail images





