



ALEXEI JAWLENSKY

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**NEUE
GALERIE**
MUSEUM FOR GERMAN
AND AUSTRIAN ART
NEW YORK



PREFACE

Alexei Jawlensky is an important artist whose role in the development of German Expressionism has never been properly acknowledged. He was a favorite of my good friend and Neue Galerie Co-founder, Serge Sabarsky, and I have also been attracted to his work for many years. His paintings are marked by a strong palette, yet they are also imbued with a quiet spirituality.

Perhaps the closest artistic kin to Jawlensky is Vasily Kandinsky. The two shared a background as Russian artists who made their greatest advances working in Germany. Their time spent in Murnau in 1908 and afterwards yielded some of the key early modern works produced in Germany. I have been fortunate to acquire two exquisite Kandinsky works from this period, and seeing them calls to mind the intensely creative atmosphere in which they were developed. Without Kandinsky and Jawlensky, modern German art would never have attained its most brilliant form of expression.

In order to realize this important show, we have turned to the curator Vivian Endicott Barnett, who is an expert in both Kandinsky and Jawlensky. She has gathered a large number of major paintings in order to show Jawlensky in the best possible light. Her research gives us a better understanding of how this artist bridged his Russian upbringing and his German apprenticeship in art to create unique paintings. We are delighted to bring Jawlensky's work to the Neue Galerie, and offer Vivian Barnett our gratitude for her tireless work and great expertise.

My thanks to the exhibition and catalogue designers, Peter de Kimpe and Judy Hudson, for providing the perfect visual complement to this work. As always, I wish to extend my appreciation to Renée Price, director, and the entire staff of the Neue Galerie for realizing this exhibition, and in the process, bringing greater recognition to a major artist.

RONALD S. LAUDER

President, Neue Galerie New York

Alexei Jawlensky, *Self-Portrait with Top Hat*,
1904, oil on canvas. Private Collection



VIVIAN ENDICOTT BARNETT

Turning Points in Jawlensky's Art and Life

Although Alexei Jawlensky has been the subject of numerous exhibitions in Europe, his art is not well known in the United States. Is he a German Expressionist? Or is he really a Russian artist who lived in Germany and Switzerland? To what tradition does he belong? Toward the end of his life, Jawlensky wrote a letter to a German official explaining: "I am Russian-born. As such my heart and soul have always felt close to old Russian art, to Russian icons, the art of Byzantium, the mosaics of Ravenna, Venice and Rome and the art of the Romanesque period. All these arts would set up a holy vibration in my soul for they spoke to me in a language of deep spirituality. It was this art that gave me my tradition."¹

Jawlensky's life began in 1864 in Torzhok in Tver province (north-west of Moscow), where his father was stationed as a colonel in the Russian army; the family moved several times before settling in Moscow. During the tumultuous years from his youth until his death in 1941, he experienced—and later recalled—numerous turning points.

1882

Jawlensky was a cadet at the Alexander Military Academy in Moscow [Fig. 1] when he saw paintings in the colossal "All-Russian Exhibition of Industry and Art" in Moscow. Years later he recalled that the pavilions dedicated to agriculture, mining, manufacturing, and trade were "very boring. . . . But when I came to a section devoted to art—there were only paintings, and this was the first time in my life I had seen paintings—I was so deeply affected that it was a case of Saul becoming Paul. It was the turning point of my life. Ever since then art has been my ideal, my holy of holies, that for which my soul and my entire self yearn."² The galleries devoted to fine arts presented more than 500 paintings from 1855–80, including works by Mikhail Botkin, Ilya Repin, Viktor Vasnetsov, and Vasily Vereshchagin.³ Jawlensky started to visit the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow on Sundays and holidays to look at paintings and to make drawings. After moving to St. Petersburg, he became acquainted with several artists, including Ilya Repin. It was through Repin that, in 1892, Jawlensky met one of his pupils, Marianna Vladimirovna Verefkina (known as Marianne von Werefkin). The daughter of a Russian general and descended from nobility, Werefkin was a painter who was to exert enormous influence on Jawlensky's life. He remembered that: "Meeting her changed my life, and this intelligent, very talented woman and I became close friends. We used to work together in her studio in the Peter and Paul Fortress,"⁴ where her father was the

1

Alexei Jawlensky as a cadet, Moscow, 1882.

Courtesy of Alexej von Jawlensky-Archiv, Locarno



commanding officer. Four years older than Jawlensky, Werefkin was wealthy and well-connected: both came from families of hereditary nobility and military backgrounds.

1896

In November 1896 Jawlensky, Werefkin, and her maid, Helene Nesnakomoff, went to Munich following the recommendation of his friends, Igor Grabar and Dmitri Kardovsky, who had recently moved there. Werefkin stopped painting for a decade to devote herself to furthering Jawlensky's work as an artist. Jawlensky, who gave up his military career, studied at the school of the Slovene artist Anton Ažbè with Grabar and Kardovsky, whom he knew from the St. Petersburg Art Academy [Fig. 2]. At Ažbè's school, he soon met another Russian, Vasily Kandinsky. The move to Munich was a decisive moment in Jawlensky's life. He would reside there until World War I, then in Switzerland, before returning to Germany, where he lived in Wiesbaden until his death in 1941.

In Munich Werefkin rented a large apartment with two studios on Giselastrasse in the Schwabing district, where she lived with Jawlensky and Nesnakomoff. Werefkin's salon became a gathering place for artists, intellectuals, and visitors from various countries: she also founded an artists' association, the Lukasbruderschaft (Brotherhood of St. Lucas) that met in her "rose colored salon." In the spring of 1897, Jawlensky and Werefkin went with Ažbè and friends to Venice (where the Biennale featured Russian artists) and to nearby cities in Italy. From September 1901 until November 1902, they were in Russia, where Andreas, the son of Jawlensky and Helene Nesnakomoff, was born in January 1902. The earliest painting in this exhibition portrays Helene as a girl [Cat. no. 1]; she appears in numerous other figure paintings [Cat. nos. 16, 17, 25]. The artist's *Self-Portrait* of 1904 [Cat. no. 3] reveals his familiarity with Vincent van Gogh⁵ and his *Portrait of Marianne von Werefkin* [Cat. no. 11] confirms his awareness of French art and his mastery of oil as a medium. From the beginning, Jawlensky was fascinated with faces and with the intensity and direction of the sitter's gaze.

Jawlensky traveled to Paris in 1903, where he met Werefkin, who had been in Normandy. He stayed in Reichertshausen, north of Munich, for one or two weeks during the summer of 1904 and then in Füssen am Lech in Allgäu near the Austrian border in March 1905. His landscapes from those years describe, respectively, the subdued greens and mauves in a meadow near Reichertshausen [Cat. no. 4] and a late snowstorm covering the brown heath in Füssen [Cat. no. 5]. In 1905 Jawlensky exhibited six paintings at the Salon d'Automne in Paris (including *Plate with Apples*, *Blue Hyacinth*, and *Mixed Pickles*).⁶ Also in 1905 the Russian impresario Sergei Diaghilev, whom Jawlensky knew from St. Petersburg, stopped in Munich to see him and Werefkin. Impressed with Jawlensky's paintings, Diaghilev invited him to participate in a show he was organizing for Mir Iskusstva (World of Art). Thus, at the beginning of 1906, Jawlensky traveled to St. Petersburg to install six of his still-lives and three landscapes in the exhibition.

2

From left: Igor Grabar, Alexei Jawlensky, Dmitri Kardovsky, Anton Ažbè and Marianne von Werefkin, Munich, ca. 1898. © Bildarchiv PSM Privatstiftung Schloßmuseum Murnau



10 MELANCHOLY IN THE EVENING—WASSERBURG ON THE INN, 1907



11 PORTRAIT OF MARIANNE VON WEREFKIN, ca. 1906



12 STILL-LIFE WITH YELLOW COFFEEPOT AND WHITE TEAPOT, 1908



13 MURNAU VILLAGE, 1908



16 DARK BLUE TURBAN, 1910



17 HELENE WITH COLORED TURBAN, 1910



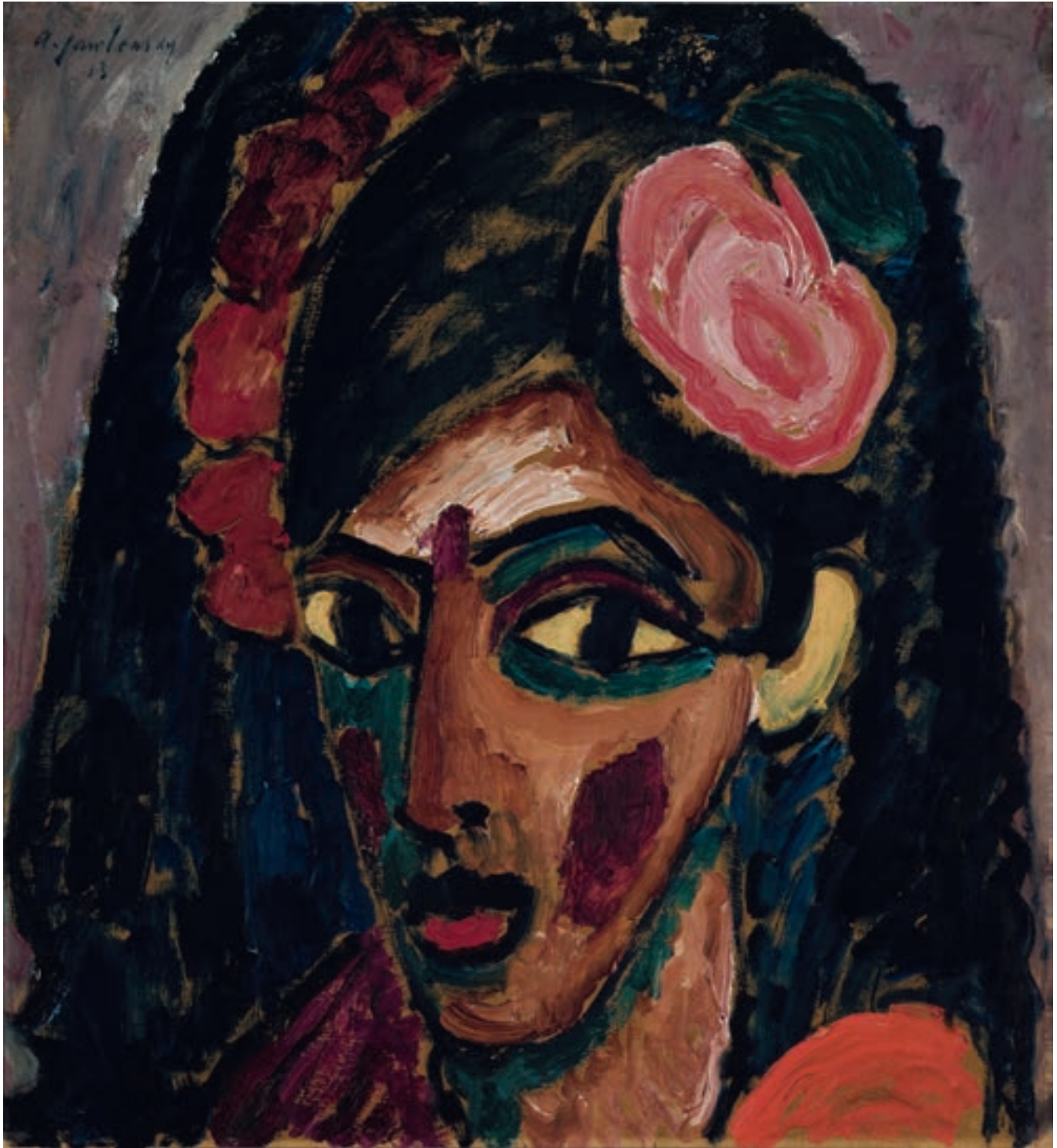
18 GIRL WITH GREEN FACE, 1910



19 THE HUNCHBACK I, 1911



30 SPANISH WOMAN WITH CLOSED EYES, ca. 1913



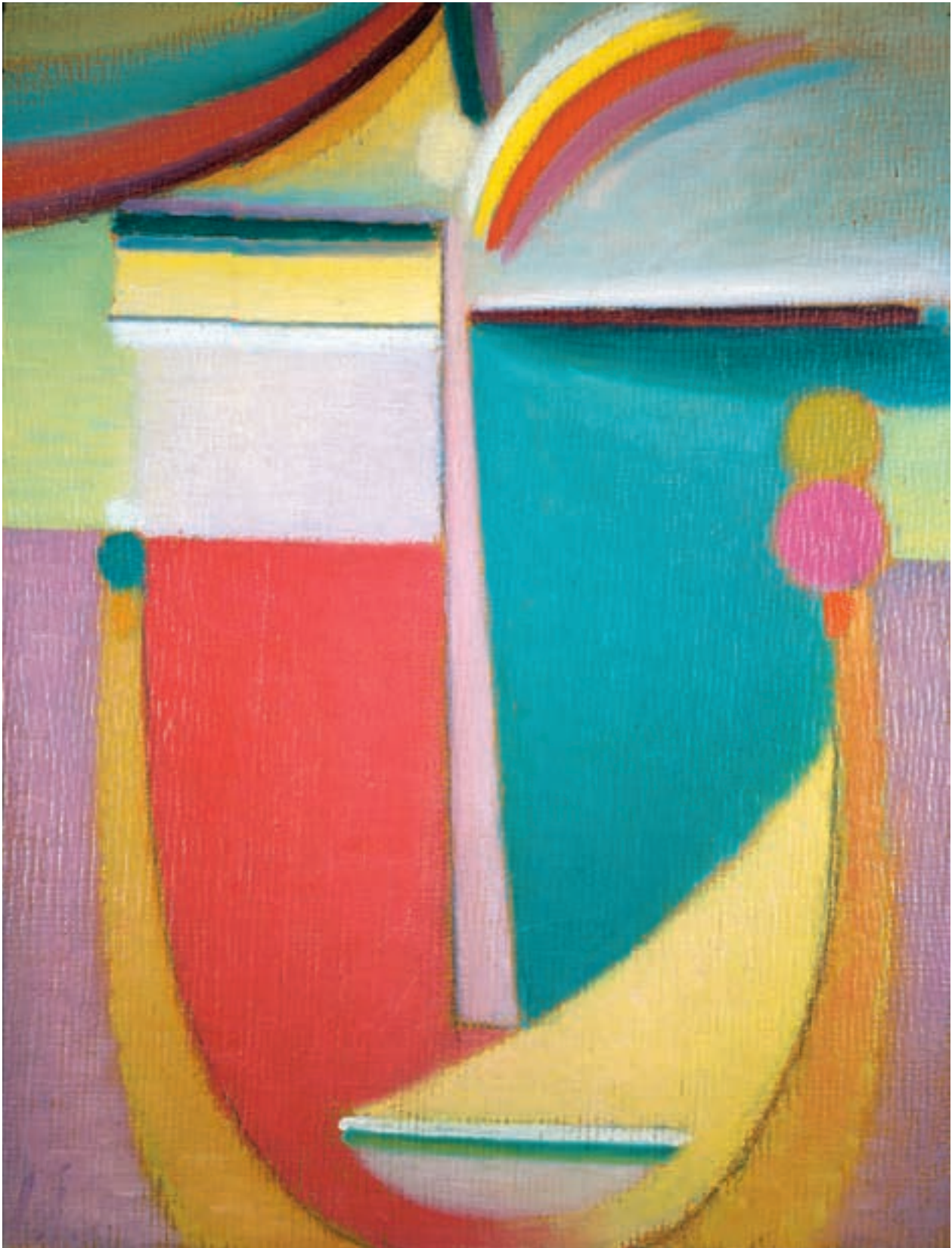
31 EGYPTIAN WOMAN, 1913



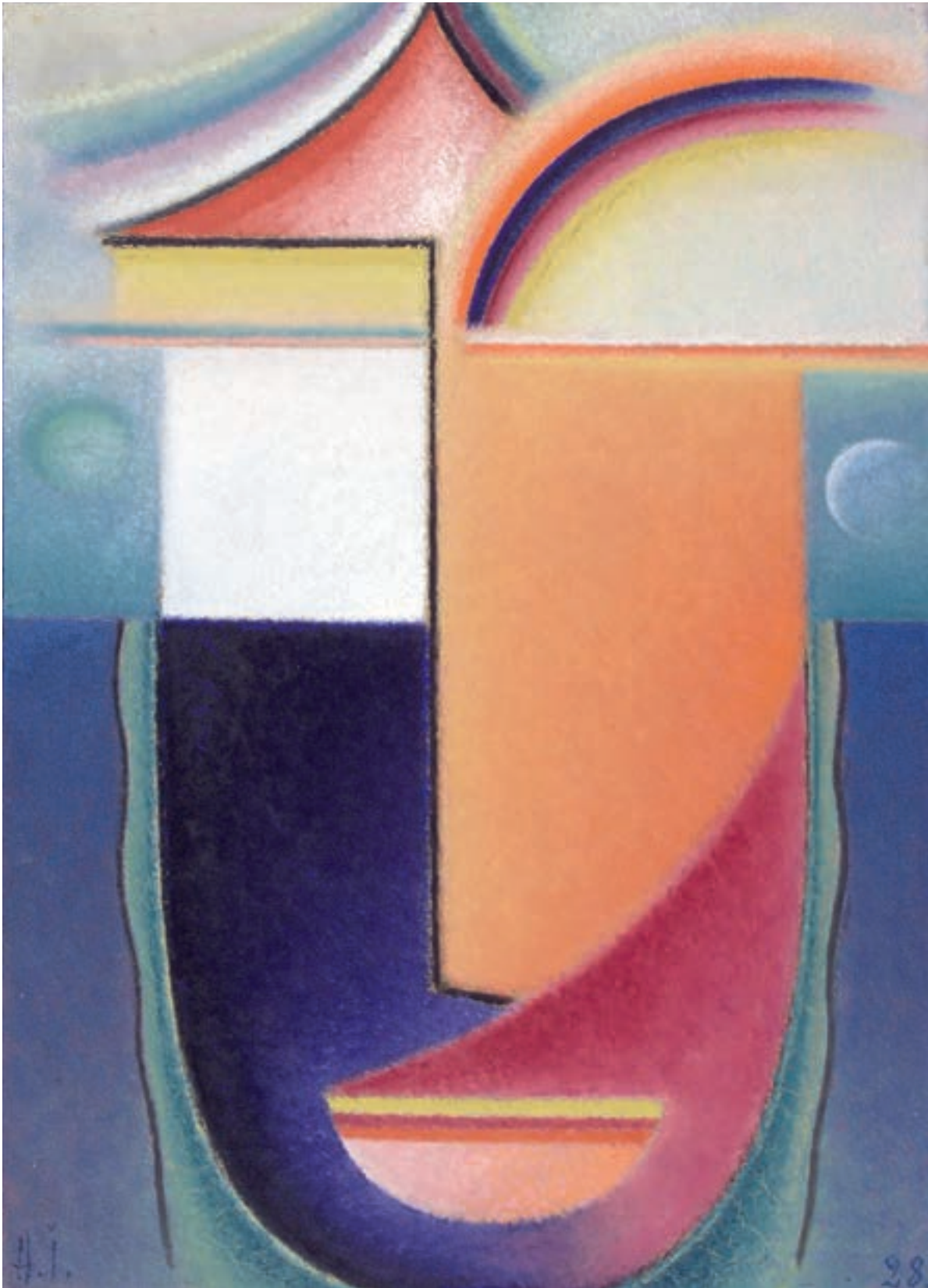
38 VARIATION WITH BLACK FIGURE, ca. 1916



39 LARGE VARIATION: WIDE PATH-EVENING, 1916



52 ABSTRACT HEAD: INNER VISION, 1923



53 ABSTRACT HEAD: APPEARANCE, 1928