

A Free Course on the History of Western Art

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42-01 EXPRESSIONISM

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Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
(1880-1938), *Street,
Berlin*, 1913, Museum Of
Modern Art, New York

- This is Section 42 on Expressionism which emerged in Northern Europe at the turn of the 20th century as a **rejection** of what was considered as the **superficial naturalism of Impressionism**.
- Expressionism is closely **related to Fauvism**, as both movements use shocking, arbitrary colour. However, Expressionism is more focused on psychological anxiety and social criticism, particularly in the German context.

NOTES

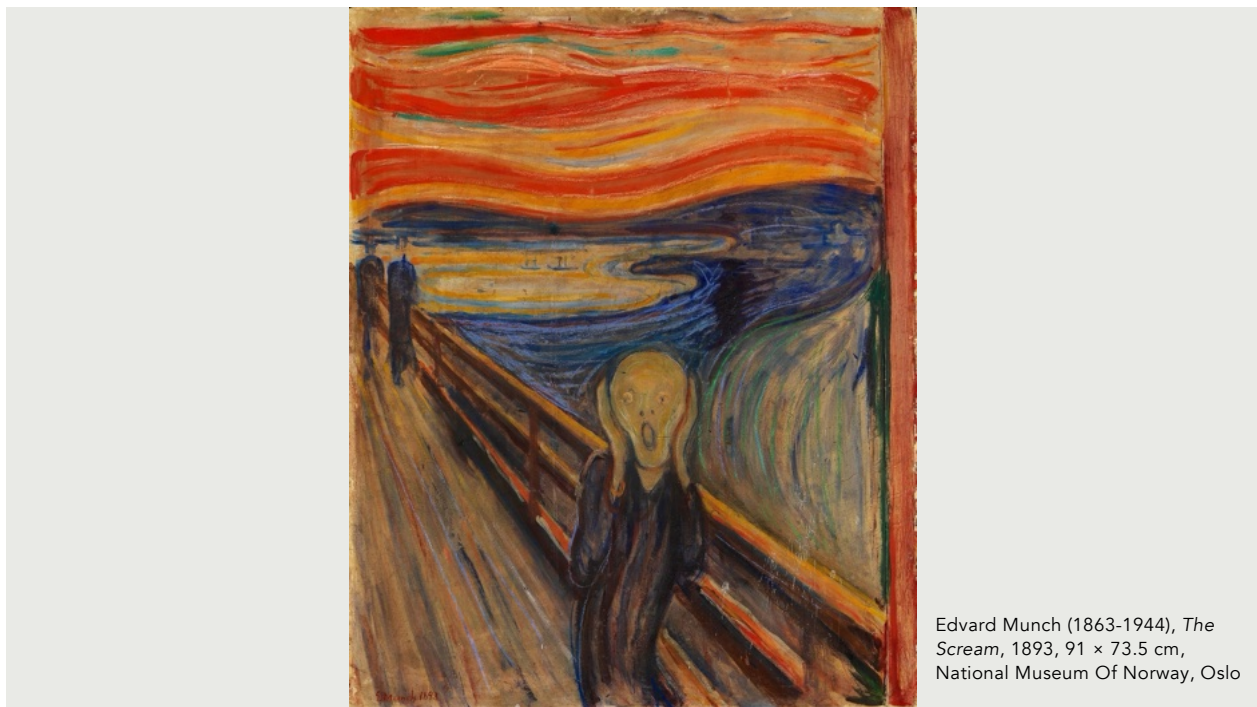
- The presentation is organised chronologically from 1889 (Van Gogh's *The Starry Night*) through 1928 (Klee's *Castle and Sun*), covering:
 - **Key precursors** (Van Gogh, Munch)
 - **Die Brücke** artists (Kirchner, Heckel, Schmidt-Rottluff, Nolde)
 - **Der Blaue Reiter** artists (Marc, Kandinsky, Klee)
 - **Austrian Expressionists** (Schiele, Kokoschka)
 - **Post-WWI developments** (Beckmann, Meidner, Grosz)

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Slide 1

Edvard Munch (1863-1944), *The Scream*, 1893, 91 × 73.5 cm, National Museum Of Norway, Oslo

- The term Expressionism is generally associated with art that is distorted to achieve an emotional impact and it dates from the early twentieth century. However, this earlier work *The Scream* by Edvard Munch is often used to illustrate what we mean by the term.
- The term Expressionism was first used seriously in 1910 by the Czech art historian **Antonin Matějček** (pronounced UN-toh-neen MUH-tyey-check), who intended it to mean the **opposite of Impressionism**. Where Impressionists looked outward to capture nature, Expressionists **looked inward** to their **psychological landscape**. Two major **German groups** dominated the movement. **Die Brücke** formed in Dresden in 1905, led by **Ernst Ludwig Kirchner**. Members included Erich Heckel and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff and **Der Blaue Reiter** formed in Munich in 1911 around **Wassily Kandinsky** and **Franz Marc**.
- **As well as Munch, Vincent van Gogh was a crucial precursors.**
- Munch painted *The Scream* after **experiencing a panic attack whilst walking near Oslo**. He described how the setting sun turned the clouds blood red whilst he sensed an **infinite scream passing through nature**. The figure's androgynous, **skull-like face** has become one of **art's most iconic images**. Munch created **four versions** between 1893 and 1910. One was stolen from

Oslo's National Gallery in 1994 during the Winter Olympics. A pastel version sold for \$120 million at Sotheby's in 2012.

- Munch wrote on one version in Norwegian script that it could **only have been painted by a madman**. His **mother and sister Sophie died** of tuberculosis when he was young. **His father died** when he was twenty-five. His **sister Laura was interned in an asylum** around the time he completed this work. The painting embodies both **collective anxiety** at the century's turn and **Munch's personal psychological torment**. It influenced the entire Expressionist movement that followed.

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Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890), *The Starry Night*, 1889, 73.7 × 92.1 cm, Museum Of Modern Art, New York

Slide 2

Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890), *The Starry Night*, 1889, 73.7 × 92.1 cm, Museum Of Modern Art, New York

- I mentioned Van Gogh, he painted this view from his east-facing window at the **Saint-Paul-de-Mausole** asylum in **Saint-Rémy-de-Provence** in June 1889. After his **infamous breakdown** in December 1888, during which he **mutilated part of his own ear** following a quarrel with **Paul Gauguin**, he voluntarily admitted himself on 8 May 1889.
- The asylum, housed in a **former monastery**, was less than **half full** when he arrived. He occupied both a **second-storey bedroom** with **sweeping views** of the **Alpilles** ("Little Alps") mountain range and a **ground-floor studio**. This painting was **composed from memory and imagination** rather than direct observation, as his studio did not face the mountains. The church spire has been identified as more Dutch in character, likely an amalgamation of churches from his homeland.
- Researchers confirmed that **Venus was visible at dawn** in Provence in spring 1889 and was nearly as bright as possible. The brightest star **to the right of the cypress** represents the planet. Van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo that he had seen the countryside with nothing but the morning star, which looked very big. The bright object in the sky on the right is the moon shown as a crescent for artistic reasons as at the time the moon was in its waning gibbous phase. He described the work as an **exercise in deliberate stylisation**, with lines

contorted like ancient woodcuts.

- His brother **Theo was unimpressed**, telling Vincent that the search for style took away the real sentiment of things. **Van Gogh himself considered it a failure**. Scientific analysis revealed his use of ultramarine and cobalt blue for the sky, indian yellow and zinc yellow for the stars and moon. The painting remained with Theo until his death six months after Vincent in January 1891. **Theo's widow Jo eventually sold it** through various owners until **MoMA acquired it in 1941**.

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Franz Marc (1880-1916), *The Large Blue Horses*, 1911, 105 × 191 cm, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

Slide 3

Franz Marc (1880-1916), *The Large Blue Horses*, 1911, 105 × 191 cm, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

- **Franz Marc** co-founded *Der Blaue Reiter* with **Wassily Kandinsky** in Munich in 1911 after Kandinsky's painting *The Last Judgment* was **rejected** from a local exhibition. The group's name came from **Kandinsky's 1903 painting of the same title**. Blue held profound **spiritual** meaning for both artists. For Marc, **blue represented masculinity and spirituality**. He wrote that the darker the shade, the more it awakened human connections with the eternal and intellectual.
- This painting shows **three vividly coloured horses** with their heads bowed before rolling red hills. Marc developed a detailed colour theory. As I said, **blue** was masculine and spiritual, **yellow** represented feminine joy and gentleness and **red** violence and base matter. The powerfully simplified, rounded outlines echo the rhythms of the landscape, uniting animals and setting into a harmonious organic whole. The curved lines emphasise peace and balance in what Marc saw as a **spiritually pure animal world**.
- Marc believed **animals possessed a virginal sense of life** that awakened all that was good in him. He felt their innocence allowed him to develop his spirituality and become closer to God. Art historian Gabi La Cava noted that for Marc, the feeling evoked by subject matter was most important, more so than zoological accuracy.

- The painting was initially **not understood** and was **derided** or even **spat upon by viewers** unfamiliar with coloured and abstracted depictions of animals. The Walker Art Center purchased it in 1942, making it the first major modernist work to enter their collection. **Marc was killed at Verdun during the First World War** in 1916 at age thirty-six, cutting short his brilliant career.

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Franz Marc (1880-1916), *Fighting Forms*, 1914, 91 × 131.5 cm, Pinakothek Der Moderne, Munich

Slide 12

Franz Marc (1880-1916), *Fighting Forms*, 1914, 91 × 131.5 cm, Pinakothek Der Moderne, Munich

- Marc painted this work in the **months before the First World War began**. By 1914, his style had moved increasingly **toward pure abstraction**. The painting shows two large forms, one blue-black and one red, locked in what appears to be **combat or struggle**. The forms are roughly circular but with sharp, angular protrusions suggesting violence and conflict.
- The **red form dominates** the composition, pushing against the black form. Blue and yellow areas surround the central conflict, suggesting Marc's continued use of his colour theory even in abstraction. The **violent energy** of the forms **reflects the tension building in Europe** before the war's outbreak.
- Marc **volunteered for military service** in August 1914 when war was declared. He initially shared the **widespread enthusiasm for war** that swept through Germany. He saw it as a **cleansing force** that could **purify society and art**. His letters from the front initially maintained this optimistic view.
- As the **war dragged on**, his views changed. He witnessed the **mechanised slaughter of modern warfare**. His letters became darker and more disillusioned. He began to see **the war as a catastrophe** rather than a renewal. In his final letters, he **expressed despair about the future of European civilisation and art**.
- On 4 March 1916, Marc was **struck in the head by a shell splinter** during the

Battle of Verdun. **He died instantly** at age thirty-six. His death robbed German art of one of its **most gifted and original voices**. His work influenced subsequent generations of abstract artists. The **Nazis later declared his work degenerate**, despite his military service and death for Germany.

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Wassily
Kandinsky (1866-
1944),
Composition VII,
1913, 200 × 300
cm, Tretyakov
Gallery, Moscow

Slide 7

Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), *Composition VII*, 1913, 200 × 300 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

- **Kandinsky was born in Moscow** and studied law and economics before pursuing art. He moved to Munich in 1896 at age thirty to study painting. In 1911, he co-founded Der Blaue Reiter with Franz Marc. The group focused on metaphysical and symbolic issues in art, believing abstraction was the pathway to a utopian society and new spiritual age.
- *Composition VII* is widely considered the apex of his artwork before the First World War and by many the most important abstract painting of the twentieth century. More than thirty sketches made in watercolours and oil paints preceded this work. After his long preliminary work, he created the final composition in just four days, between 25 and 28 November 1913, documented by photographs.
- The massive canvas measures two by three metres. The surface is entirely covered with countless overlapping amorphous forms, seemingly random lines, and a minefield of colours, some vivid, some blurred. Nothing references the known natural world. Art historians determined the work combines themes of Resurrection, Judgment Day, the Flood, and the Garden of Eden. The main theme, an oval form intersected by an irregular rectangle, is perceived as the centre surrounded by a vortex of colours and forms.
- Kandinsky had been influenced by theosophy, a spiritual movement

emphasising the unity of all things. He believed art should emulate music's effect on the senses, creating beauty without reference to anything recognisable in nature. He discovered this philosophy through architect August Endell whilst studying in Munich in the late 1890s. Shortly after finishing this milestone, the outbreak of the First World War forced him to return to Russia. Depressed about the war, he barely painted at all for years. It was ten years before he resumed his Composition series with Composition VIII in 1923.

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Erich Heckel (1883-1970),
Two Men at a Table, 1912,
97 × 120 cm, Hamburger
Kunsthalle, Hamburg

Slide 13

Erich Heckel (1883-1970), *Two Men at a Table*, 1912, 97 × 120 cm, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg

- Heckel was a founding member of Die Brücke alongside Kirchner in Dresden in 1905. He studied architecture before dedicating himself to painting. The group lived and worked communally, sharing models, studios, and ideas. They sought to create a new artistic language that broke from academic traditions.
- This painting shows two men seated at a table in an interior space. The figures are rendered in bold, angular forms with sharp contours.
- The men's faces are mask-like, reduced to simplified planes. Their bodies are compressed and flattened, showing the influence of medieval German woodcuts that Die Brücke admired. The spatial relationships are deliberately ambiguous. The table, figures, and background seem to exist on the same plane rather than in receding depth.
- Heckel, like other Die Brücke members, was fascinated by non-European art. African and Oceanic sculptures in ethnographic museums influenced their simplification of forms and use of direct, unmodulated colour. They saw these arts as more authentic and emotionally direct than European academic traditions.
- He served as a medical orderly during the First World War, an experience that deepened his Expressionist vision. After the war, his style became somewhat more naturalistic but retained Expressionist elements. During the Nazi period,

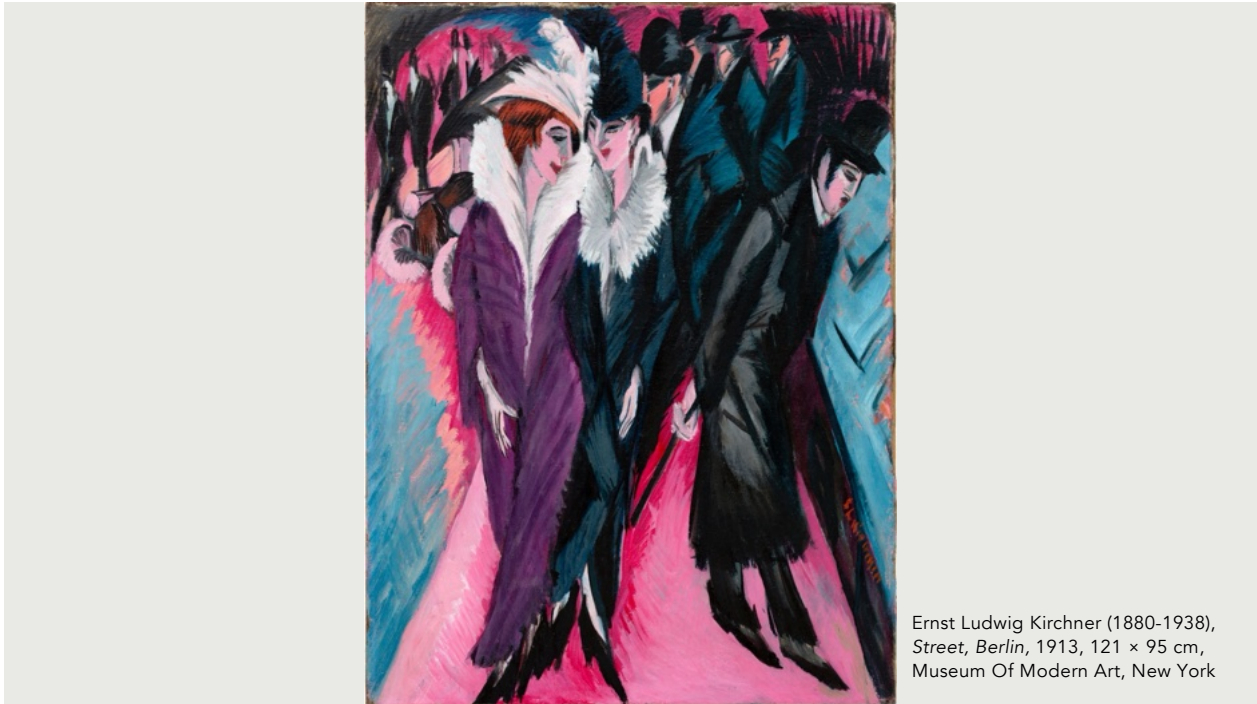
over seven hundred of his works were confiscated as degenerate art. Many were destroyed. His Berlin studio was bombed in 1944, destroying much of his life's work. He survived the war and continued painting until his death in 1970, outliving all other Die Brücke founders by decades.

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Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938),
Street, Berlin, 1913, 121 × 95 cm,
Museum Of Modern Art, New York

Slide 4

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938), *Street, Berlin*, 1913, 121 × 95 cm, Museum Of Modern Art, New York

- Kirchner was a founding member of Die Brücke, established in Dresden in 1905. The group sought to bridge classical art and their vision of the future through avant-garde style. They developed a common approach characterised by flat areas of unbroken colour, radical simplification of form, and glowing unmixed colours applied with fluidity.
- In 1911, Kirchner and other members moved to Berlin. The competitive art scene of the city proved fatal for the formerly close-knit group. Die Brücke formally dissolved in 1913, several months before he painted this work, due to artistic differences and disagreements about direction. That same year, Kirchner exhibited in the Armory Show in New York and was offered his first solo shows in Germany.
- This painting depicts two prostitutes strolling Berlin's streets, surrounded by men glancing furtively about. For Kirchner, the prostitute symbolised modernity and the metropolis of Berlin, representing the paradoxical experience of glamour offset by alienation, intimacy offset by isolation, and the fact that everything was a commodity. He used vibrant, clashing colours to emphasise discord and anxiety.
- The composition is tilted and compressed so perspective collapses, enhancing the sense of disequilibrium. His loose, visible brushwork and opposing

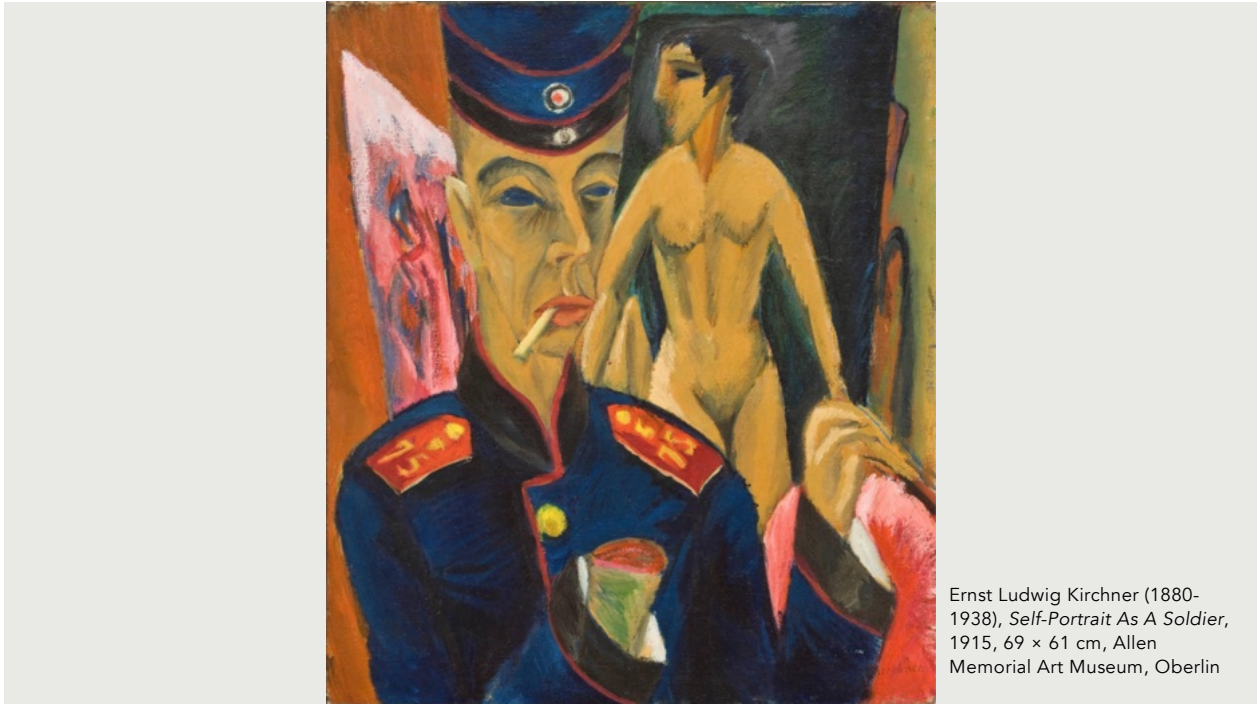
diagonals create distortion and bustling motion. The two women wear elaborate clothing, the left figure in a striking purple dress. The men form an undifferentiated mass with non-distinct facial features, making the women the only figures with identity. Kirchner decorated his Berlin studio-apartment with primitivist hangings and African sculptures he carved himself. He committed suicide in 1938 after the Nazis branded his work degenerate and sold or destroyed over six hundred of his paintings.

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Slide 11

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938), *Self-Portrait As A Soldier*, 1915, 69 × 61 cm, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin

- Kirchner volunteered for military service in 1915 during the First World War. The experience profoundly affected him both physically and mentally. This painting depicts him in military uniform in his studio, dressed incongruously for the setting. Most strikingly, his right hand is severed at the wrist, shown as an amputated stump.
- The unresolved conflict between the military outfit and the studio setting underlines a sudden loss of his former idealism. The amputation is symbolic rather than literal. Kirchner never lost his hand in battle. The severed hand represents his fear of losing his ability to create art, his identity as a painter. For an artist, the hand is the instrument of creation. Its loss symbolises artistic death.
- Behind him, a nude female model stands in the background, painted in bold orange and pink tones. She represents the bohemian artistic life he fears losing. His face is rendered in angular, harsh planes with a greenish pallor, suggesting psychological distress. The eyes stare blankly forward with a haunted expression.
- The painting demonstrates how the war crushed the regenerative impulse of the Die Brücke artists. Their early optimism about modern life and art's transformative power was violently shattered by the war's reality. Kirchner suffered a complete nervous breakdown in 1915 and was discharged from

military service. He spent time in various sanatoria in Switzerland attempting to recover.

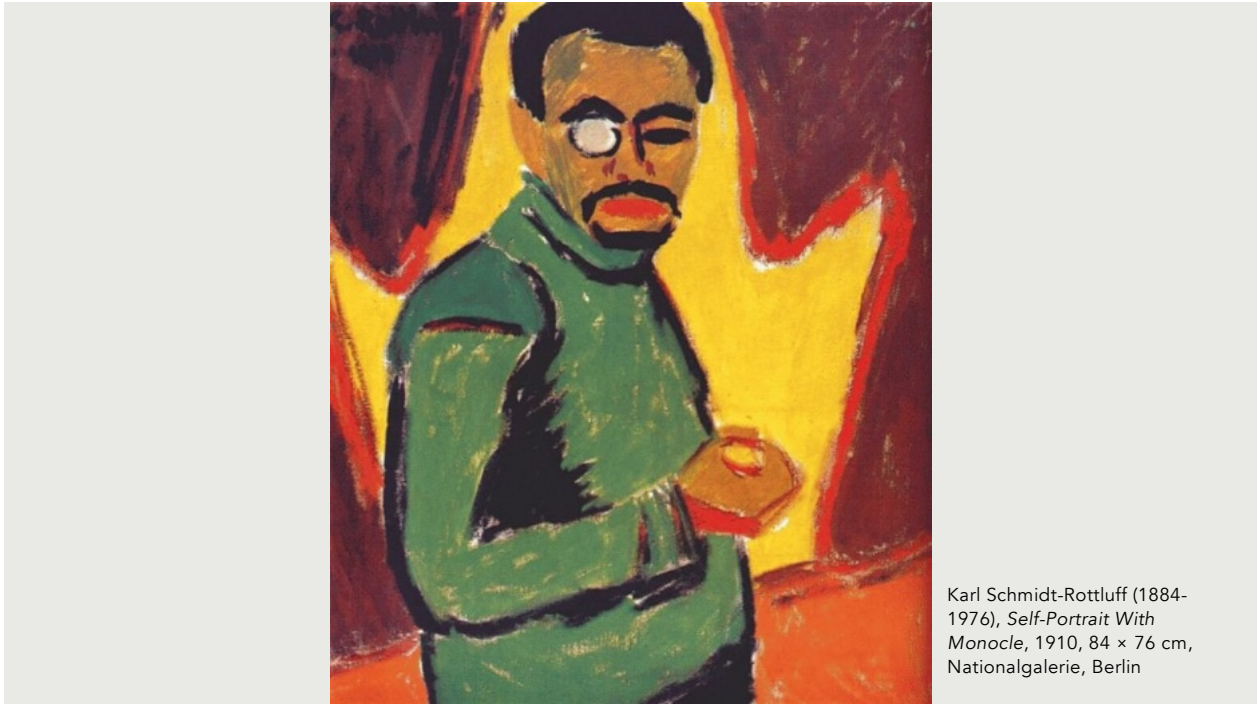
- He never fully recovered from his war trauma. His later work became increasingly anxious and introspective. The Nazis later condemned his work as degenerate. Over six hundred of his paintings were confiscated, sold, or destroyed. Depressed and in poor health, Kirchner shot himself in 1938 at his home in Switzerland.

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Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884-1976), *Self-Portrait With Monocle*, 1910, 84 × 76 cm, Nationalgalerie, Berlin

Slide 14

Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884-1976), *Self-Portrait With Monocle*, 1910, 84 × 76 cm, Nationalgalerie, Berlin

- Schmidt-Rottluff was the youngest founding member of Die Brücke. He was born Karl Schmidt in Rottluff, near Chemnitz. He added his birthplace to his name to distinguish himself from other artists named Schmidt. He studied architecture in Dresden, where he met Heckel and Kirchner.
- He suggested the name Die Brücke for the group, seeing their art as bridging past and future. His early work shows the influence of Post-Impressionism, particularly Vincent van Gogh. By 1910, when he painted this self-portrait, his style had become distinctly Expressionist.
- The self-portrait shows him wearing a monocle, an unusual accessory for a young avant-garde artist. The monocle might reference his architecture training or suggest a certain bohemian affectation. His face is rendered in bold, contrasting colours. Planes of green, red, and yellow construct the features. The brushwork is vigorous and visible.
- The background is simplified to flat areas of colour. There is no attempt at realistic representation. Instead, colours and forms convey psychological intensity and emotional directness. The direct gaze challenges the viewer, asserting the artist's confidence and identity.
- Schmidt-Rottluff painted Dr Rosa Schapire, an art historian and early supporter of Die Brücke, several times. When she escaped Nazi persecution in 1939 and

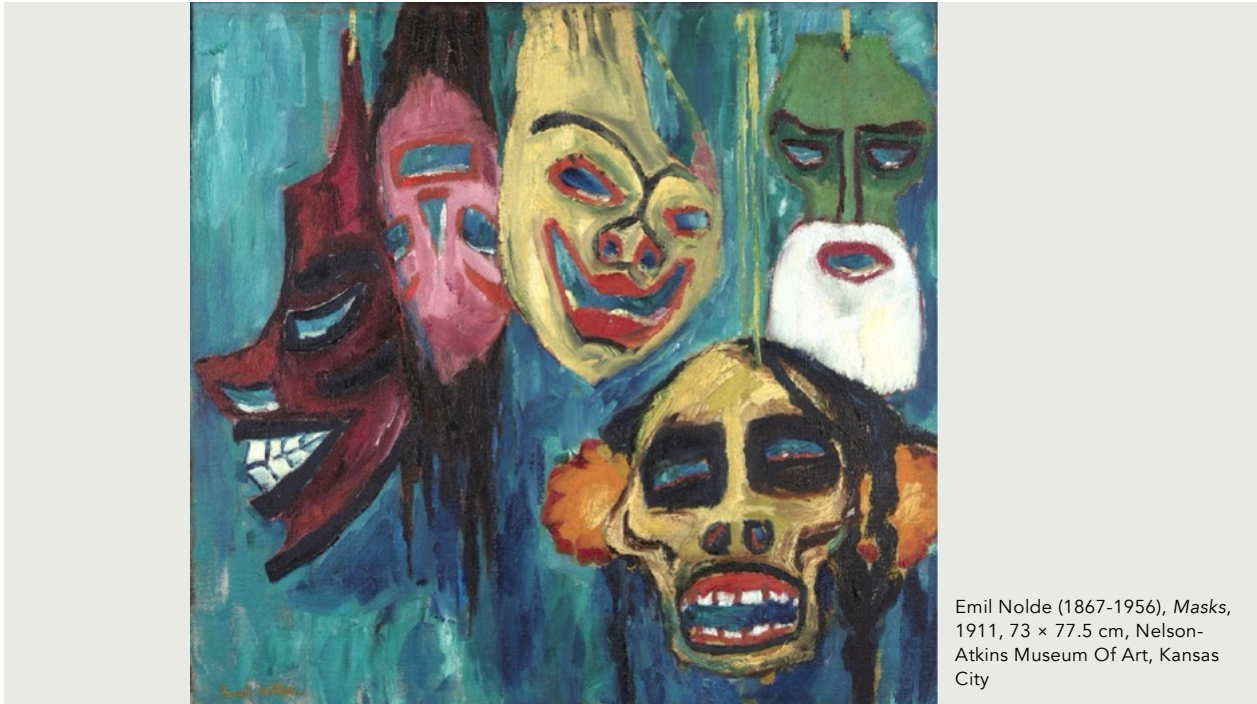
arrived as a refugee in England, several of his artworks came with her. During the Nazi period, his work was condemned as degenerate. He was forbidden to paint in 1941. After the war, he received numerous honours and continued working until his death at age ninety-one. He was the last surviving member of Die Brücke.

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Slide 5

Emil Nolde (1867-1956), *Masks*, 1911, 73 × 77.5 cm, Nelson-Atkins Museum Of Art, Kansas City

- Nolde was born Hans Emil Hansen near the village of Nolde in Denmark to Danish and Frisian peasant parents who were devout Protestants. At seventeen, he went to Flensburg, Germany to study woodcarving and illustration. He worked in furniture factories and travelled throughout Berlin, Munich, and Karlsruhe before pursuing art as a career at age thirty-one, after the Munich Academy of Fine Arts rejected him in 1898.
- He took private painting lessons, visited Paris, and familiarised himself with the Impressionist scene. In 1902, he married Danish actress Ada Vilstrup, moved to Berlin, and changed his surname to that of his birthplace. He joined Die Brücke in 1906 and quickly became its most committed member, though he remained with the group for only eighteen months.
- This painting reflects his interest in what he called the grotesque expression of power and elemental force. He regularly visited ethnographic museums to study tribal arts from Africa and Oceania. Two carnival masks appear in the centre. Another on the far left was inspired by a Solomon Islands canoe prow. The mask at lower right depicts the shrunken head of a Yoruna Indian from the Mundurucu people of Brazil. Both objects were in Berlin's Museum of Ethnology, where Nolde studied and sketched them.
- He used bold, expressive colour applied with spontaneous brushstrokes to

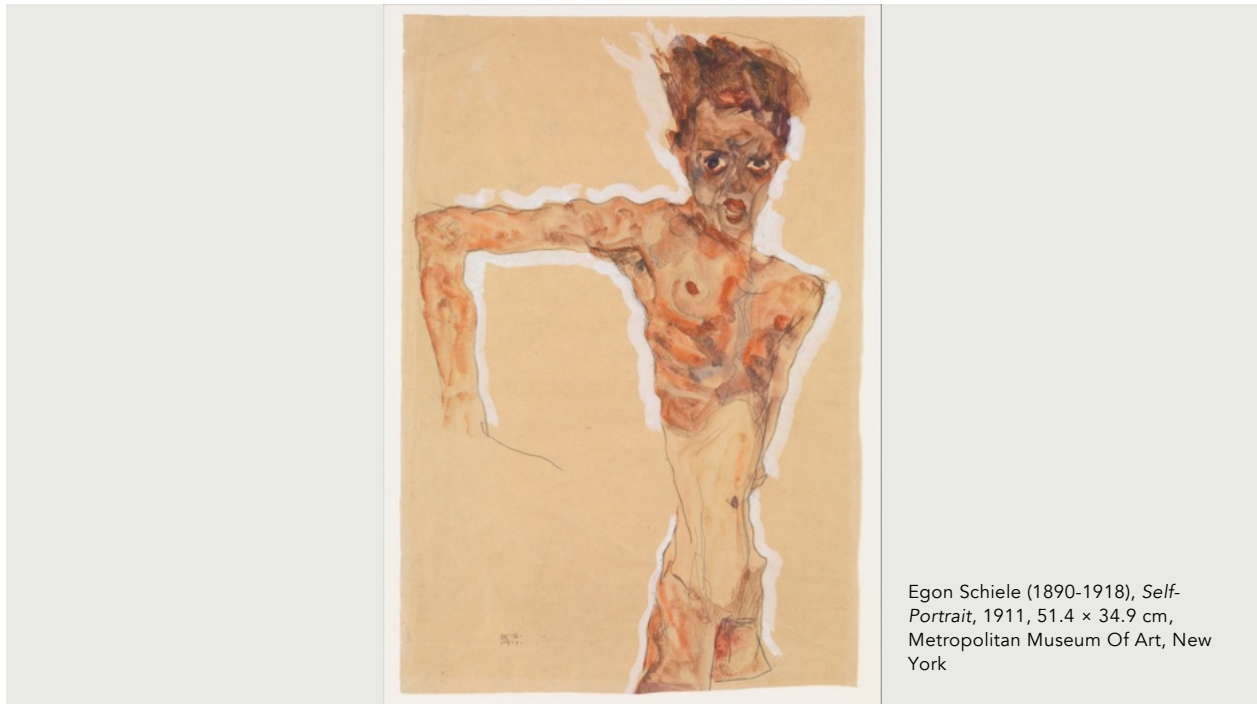
heighten energy and emotional intensity. The juxtaposition of complementary colours intensifies the violent emotions he intended to communicate. In 1937, this painting was labelled degenerate by a committee working for Third Reich minister Joseph Goebbels. Museums were forced to purge such paintings. It was confiscated from the Museum Folkwang in Essen and included in the Degenerate Art Exhibition in Munich, meant to humiliate the artists. Despite his support for the Nazi party and openly expressed anti-semitic opinions, his modernist work was officially condemned.

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Egon Schiele (1890-1918), *Self-Portrait*, 1911, 51.4 × 34.9 cm, Metropolitan Museum Of Art, New York

Slide 6

Egon Schiele (1890-1918), *Self-Portrait*, 1911, 51.4 × 34.9 cm, Metropolitan Museum Of Art, New York

- Schiele was born in Tulln, Lower Austria. His father Adolf, a station master in the Austrian State Railways, died of syphilis when Egon was fifteen. His mother Marie came from Český Krumlov in Bohemia. Schiele studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna but became frustrated with its rigid curriculum. He found mentorship under Gustav Klimt, refining his draughtsmanship but seeking a more personal, probing approach.
- His career was short, intense, and astonishingly productive. Before succumbing to influenza in 1918 at age twenty-eight, during the Spanish flu pandemic, he created over three hundred oil paintings and several thousand works on paper. The human figure provided his most potent subject matter. Art critic Martin Gayford wrote that Schiele found his distinctive style very early. Most work from 1910 to 1911 was created when he was just twenty.
- This self-portrait shows the emaciated, tortured figure of the artist, bony and angular, bristling with inner tension made visible by agitated pencil line and painted white surrounding aura. He stares wildly, large dark eyes glaring menacingly, mouth open, shock of hair standing on end. In a pose suggestive of the crucified Christ, his arm is thrust out awkwardly and bent sharply at the elbow.
- The twisted body shapes and expressive line characterise Schiele's paintings

and drawings, marking him as an early exponent of Expressionism. In 1912, whilst living with his girlfriend Wally in Neulengbach, he was wrongfully accused of kidnapping an underage girl. Although charges were dropped, the experience deeply hurt his creativity and self-image. He later abandoned Wally to marry Edith Harms in 1915. Three days after his wedding, he was ordered to report for active military service. Both he and Edith died of Spanish flu in October 1918, three days apart.

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Slide 15

Ludwig Meidner (1884-1966), *Apocalyptic Landscape*, 1912, 94 × 109 cm, private collection

Sold at Sotheby's with an estimate of \$12-18m

- Meidner was born in Silesia to a Jewish family. He studied art in Breslau and moved to Berlin in 1905. Unlike members of Die Brücke or Der Blaue Reiter, he worked relatively independently, though he knew many Expressionist artists.
- Between 1912 and 1914, he created a series of apocalyptic landscapes showing cities in the process of destruction. Buildings explode, collapse, and burn. The sky is filled with comets, meteors, and cosmic disturbances. Figures flee in panic through streets torn apart by catastrophe.
- These paintings are remarkable for their prophetic quality. Created before the First World War, they seem to anticipate the destruction that would soon engulf Europe. Meidner later claimed he had a premonition of coming disaster. Whether prescient or coincidental, the paintings capture the anxiety and sense of impending catastrophe that marked the pre-war period.
- The compositions are deliberately chaotic and disorienting. Perspective is fractured. Buildings lean at impossible angles. Space seems to compress and explode simultaneously. The brushwork is frantic, applied with violent energy. Dark, harsh colours dominate, punctuated by lurid highlights suggesting flames or explosions.
- Meidner was conscripted in 1916 and served as an interpreter on the Eastern

Front. His war experiences confirmed his worst visions. After the war, he became involved in left-wing politics and Jewish cultural activities. In 1935, he fled Nazi Germany to England, where he lived in poverty. He returned to Germany in 1953 and continued painting, though he never regained his earlier prominence. His apocalyptic visions remain among the most powerful images created by German Expressionism.

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Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980), *The Bride Of The Wind*, 1914, 181 × 220 cm, Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel

Slide 8

Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980), *The Bride Of The Wind*, 1914, 181 × 220 cm, Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel

- Kokoschka was known as the enfant terrible of the Viennese art scene. In 1912, he first met Alma Mahler, the recently widowed wife of composer Gustav Mahler. A passionate romance ensued, with Kokoschka producing numerous drawings and paintings of his muse. The relationship was exhausting and insane. He could stand at her door guarding against imaginary rivals until morning.
- The painting depicts Alma peacefully asleep beside Kokoschka, who is awake and stares into space. They lie in nervous, swirling, frantic brushstrokes in a sad embrace amidst storms and towering waves. Poet George Trakl, in alcoholic intoxication, whispered new poems every night in Kokoschka's studio and suggested the title *The Bride of the Wind*. The first title was *Tristan and Isolde*.
- Kokoschka wrote to Alma that they were expressing tremendous calm, embracing on the edge of a semicircle, with sparkling coloured lights of the sea, water tower, mountains, lightning and moon. Alma found it a masterpiece but described it differently, saying he portrayed her trustingly clinging to him in the midst of storms, expecting his aid, whilst he with a despotic face radiates energy and humbles waves.
- She was not going to marry him. She was drawn to the energy the artist received from her but frightened and repelled by his obsession. She did not

hesitate to abort their child, and later he tortured her by showing her bloody cotton wool from the hospital, telling her it was his only child. When she married architect Walter Gropius, the news wounded Kokoschka deeply. In deepest desperation, he ordered a life-size doll from a doll-maker in Munich resembling Alma in every detail. The result was disappointing. He beheaded it at a wild, orgiastic party in his Dresden atelier in 1919, separating himself from the curse of his life.

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Max Beckmann (1884-1950),
The Night, 1918-1919, 133 x
 154 cm, Kunstsammlung
 Nordrhein-Westfalen,
 Düsseldorf

Slide 9

Max Beckmann (1884-1950), *The Night*, 1918-1919, 133 x 154 cm,
 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf

- Beckmann initially enlisted in the German army during the First World War with enthusiasm. Like many Neue Sachlichkeit and Futurist artists, he believed war could cleanse the individual and society. After experiencing widespread destruction and horror, he became disillusioned and rejected the supposed glory of military service. He was transferred to the medical corps but still experienced severe disappointment with the war.
- *The Night's* illogical composition relays post-war disillusionment and his confusion over the society he saw descending into madness. Although it does not directly depict a specific battle or war scene, it is considered one of the most poignant and seminal pieces of post-war art. The painting shows a horrific spectacle using his own family as models. Three intruders string up a man on the left, one twisting his arm, another pulling a rope around his neck.
- The painting features seven characters in an overcrowded room in a modern city. Victims and perpetrators, bourgeois and proletariat, are trapped together. A woman is assaulted on the right. The monkey-like sadist in the middle accomplishes his torture with scientific coolness. Only a dog on the left considers outside help as a possibility, directing his howling away from the centre. The foreground shows a pair of candles. One has fallen and given up its ghost. The other carries bravely on, as if the artist wanted to leave one glimmer

of hope.

- The year 1918 saw the German November Revolution, which resulted in tremendous savagery and terror across the country. In 1919, a general strike was brutally put down by authorities. Beckmann blames human nature itself. There is no glory for anybody, no compensation. Victims and aggressors alike are cornered with no exit. The disquieting colours and violent forms convey his pessimism over man's bestiality. His style underwent dramatic transformation immediately following the hostilities, marking a new phase in his artistic development.

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Paul Klee (1879–1940), *Virgin in the Tree (Jungfrau im Baum)* from the series *Inventionen (Inventionen)*, 1903, etching, 23.7 x 29.7 cm, edition approx. 60, MoMA

- Herer I have jumped back in time to show you an early Paul Klee.
- "For the Expressionists, the naked body was a potent site for challenging traditions of beauty and propriety, and artists like Klee used the naked female body to ridicule social and artistic conventions.
- Here a virgin's body has withered from lack of use. Her desiccated breasts and jagged hips, traditionally sites of erotic desire, follow the gnarly contours of the barren tree in which she is perched. Rough hatch marks give the same texture to both her skin and the tree bark. Aware of her wasted body, she hardens her stare away from two nuzzling lovebirds, creatures of nature not constrained by society's sexual mores." (MoMA)
- For the Expressionists, casual nudity and a frank sexuality were a reaction against the stiff bourgeois social mores of the day

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Paul Klee (1879-1940), *Castle and Sun*, 1928, 50 × 59 cm, private collection

Slide 10

Paul Klee (1879-1940), *Castle and Sun*, 1928, 50 × 59 cm, private collection

- **Castle and Sun** is a more typical Klee. This painting shows stylised images created from different geometric shapes and various shades of colour. The lone sun shines in the ingeniously designed sky created by strong lines and structure. Various rectangular sizes add depth to the abstract image. He executed Cubist technique in his patented style. The mix of abstract with reality is shown whilst figures are deconstructed to form interesting images. The clay-coloured background gives viewers a clearer view of how figures seem to form a city skyline of intense colour and light. Pops of yellow bring the eye in and break up the browns.
- He was born in Switzerland to a German father and Swiss mother. From childhood, he was interested in both music and painting. His father was a music teacher. In Munich, he met Kandinsky, Franz Marc, and other artists of the avant-garde. In 1906, he married pianist Lily Stumpf. They had a son, Felix. The young family lived a secluded life in Munich.
- Klee became acquainted with **Der Blaue Reiter** and quickly became friends with **Kandinsky** and **Marc**, sharing the conviction that artistic creation was of spiritual nature. A trip to Tunis in 1914 with August Macke and Louis Moilliet helped him find new joy in colour. He wrote in his diary that colour possessed him, that he didn't have to pursue it, that it would possess him always. Colour and he were one. He was a painter.

- His work is associated with Expressionism, Cubism, and Surrealism. He was one of Die Blaue Vier with Kandinsky, Feininger, and Jawlensky. He taught at the Bauhaus from 1921 to 1931 and the Düsseldorf Academy until 1933. That year, the Nazis declared his paintings a figment of a sick soul and labelled his whole creation as degenerate art. He was dismissed from his teaching position and forced to flee to Switzerland.

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George Grosz (1893-1959), *Daum marries her pedantic automaton George in May 1920, John Heartfield is very glad of it*, 1920, Berlinische Galerie

- George Grosz (1893–1959) was a German artist whose career transitioned dramatically following the horrors of World War I. His early work contained Expressionist elements, but his post-war output became a scathing indictment of Germany's decaying society, shifting toward the anarchic sensibility of Dada and later becoming a key figure in New Objectivity (Neue Sachlichkeit). He used satire and grotesquerie to expose corruption, militarism, and moral depravity in the Weimar Republic.
- The 1920 watercolour, *Daum Marries Her Pedantic Automaton George in May 1920, John Heartfield is very glad of it*, Berlinische Galerie, is a brilliant example of his pivotal work, existing on the borderline between Dada and New Objectivity. Created around the time of his marriage to Eva Peters, whom he nicknamed Maud (of which "Daum" is an anagram), the piece is a highly ironic and satirical take on marriage and the role of the artist.
- Grosz depicts himself as a pedantic automaton—a mechanical, de-sensitized man consumed by "soberly pedantic arithmetical problems." This reflects a Dadaist idea of the artist as a machine-like figure detached from emotion. Daum is shown mostly undressed but still wearing a hat, symbolising how the institution of marriage "comes between" the couple, as described by his publisher Wieland Herzfelde. The title's nod to fellow Dadaist John Heartfield reinforces the context of the anti-art movement. This work vividly illustrates the

despair and disillusionment Grosz channeled into his art, which he famously described as depicting "puking men," "war cripples with crustacean-like steel arms," and the moral chaos of the city.

NOTES

- The concept of the painting was explained by his publisher who said, that marriage "comes between the bride and groom like a shadow, this fact that, at the very moment when the wife is allowed to make known her secret desire and reveal her body, her husband turns to other soberly pedantic arithmetical problems..."
- Grosz wrote, "My Drawings expressed my despair, hate and disillusionment, I drew drunkards; puking men; men with clenched fists cursing at the moon. ... I drew a man, face filled with fright, washing blood from his hands ... I drew lonely little men fleeing madly through empty streets. I drew a cross-section of tenement house: through one window could be seen a man attacking his wife; through another, two people making love; from a third hung a suicide with body covered by swarming flies. I drew soldiers without noses; war cripples with crustacean-like steel arms; two medical soldiers putting a violent infantryman into a strait-jacket made of a horse blanket ... I drew a skeleton dressed as a recruit being examined for military duty. I also wrote poetry."

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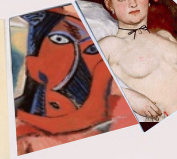
42-01 EXPRESSIONISM

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George Grosz, *Daum marries her pedantic automaton George* in May 1920, John Heartfield is very glad of it, 1920, Berlinische Galerie

- Expressionism was a modernist art movement that primarily developed in Germany and Austria in the early 20th century (c. 1905–1920s). Its core characteristic is the attempt to depict the world not in its objective reality, but solely from a subjective perspective, radically distorting form and using vivid, arbitrary colour to evoke intense subjective emotions and psychological states.
- The artists sought to express the turmoil, anxiety, alienation, and disillusionment they felt in response to the rapid urbanization, industrialization, and political upheaval leading up to and following World War I. Key groups were **Die Brücke** (The Bridge) and **Der Blaue Reiter** (The Blue Rider), with influential artists including **Edvard Munch** (a forerunner), **Franz Marc**, **Ernst Ludwig Kirchner**, **Wassily Kandinsky**, and **Egon Schiele**.
- Thank you for your interest, time and attention and I look forward to recording the next talk in my overview of Western Art.



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