



# A Free Course on the History of Western Art

Dr Laurence Shafe [www.shafe.uk](http://www.shafe.uk)

- Welcome. This is one of over 200 talks on the history of Western Art. I have arranged the talks chronologically starting with cave art through to art produced in the last few years.

## **GENERAL REFERENCES AND COPYRIGHT**

- My talks and notes are produced with the assistance of AI systems such as Claude, Perplexity, ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Microsoft CoPilot.
- They are also based on information found on public websites such as Wikipedia, Tate, National Gallery, Louvre, The Met, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Khan Academy and the Art Story.
- If they use information from specific books, websites or articles these are referenced at the beginning of each talk and in the 'References' section of the relevant page. The talks that are inspired by an exhibition may use the booklets and books associated with the exhibition as a source of information.
- Where possible images and information are taken from Wikipedia under an [Attribution-Share Alike Creative Commons License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).
- If I have forgotten to reference your work then please let me know and I will add a reference or delete the information.

## 56-01 MAGIC REALISM AND NEW OBJECTIVITY

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK

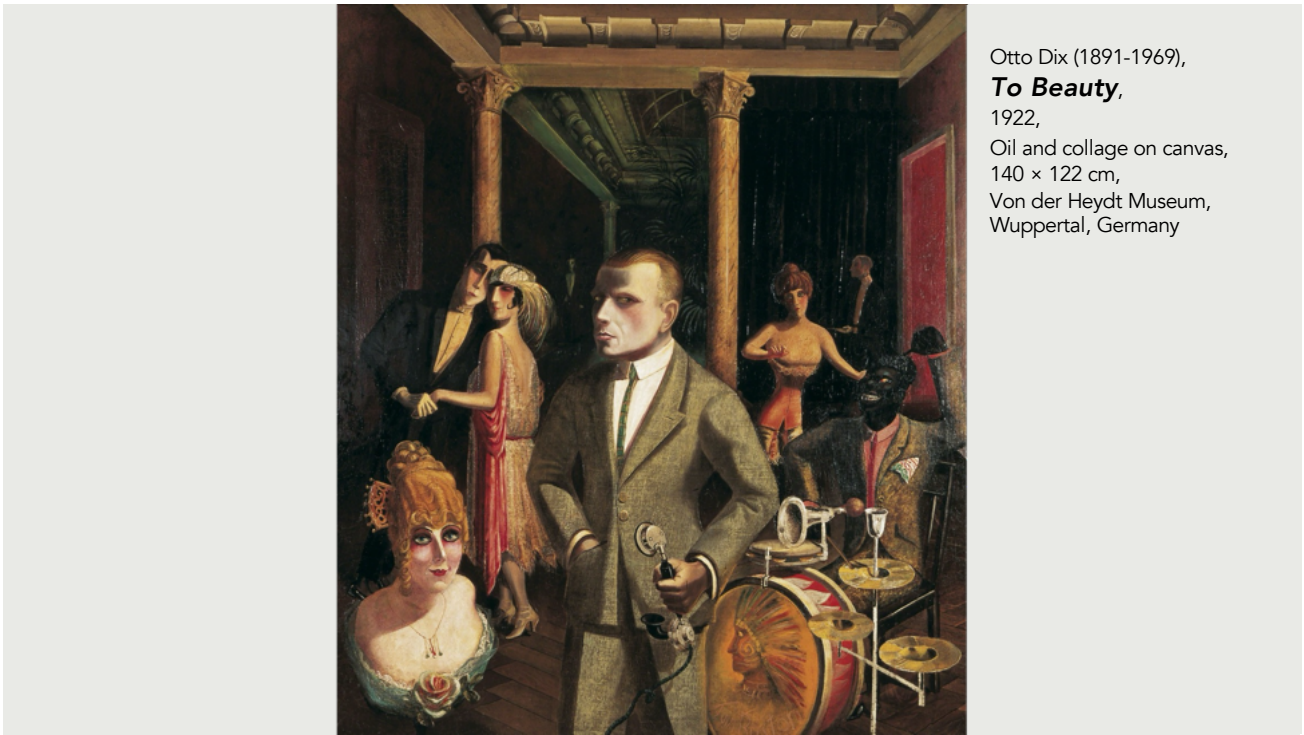


Otto Dix ,  
*Portrait of the  
Journalist Sylvia  
von Harden,*  
1926

- This is Section 57 on Magic Realism and New Objectivity. **They emerged simultaneously** in Germany in **1925**, both reacting against Expressionism's emotional intensity.

### NOTES

- Magic Realism and New Objectivity emerged in Germany between 1918 and 1925, both rejecting Expressionism's emotional intensity. Franz Roh coined "Magic Realism" whilst G.F. Hartlaub organised the exhibition that gave New Objectivity its name. The movements overlapped considerably. Both demanded precise observation. Both rejected abstraction. Magic Realism found mystery in the everyday. New Objectivity pursued social critique. Together, they documented Weimar Germany's brief, brilliant, doomed existence.
- The Nazis condemned both movements as "degenerate art" in 1933. Artists fled into exile or fell silent. Museums purged their collections. Paintings were destroyed, sold, scattered. This persecution paradoxically spread the movements' influence internationally. Artists like Beckmann brought New Objectivity to America. Roh's writings on Magic Realism influenced Latin American literature profoundly. Gabriel García Márquez acknowledged the debt. The term "Magic Realism" became more famous in literature than painting.



Otto Dix (1891-1969),  
**To Beauty**,  
 1922,  
 Oil and collage on canvas,  
 140 × 122 cm,  
 Von der Heydt Museum,  
 Wuppertal, Germany

Otto Dix (1891-1969), **To Beauty**, 1922, Oil and collage on canvas, 140 × 122 cm, Von der Heydt Museum, Wuppertal, Germany

- The term "**Magic Realism**" was coined by Art critic Franz Roh to describe paintings combining **photographic precision with dreamlike strangeness**. G.F. Hartlaub curated the landmark exhibition "Neue Sachlichkeit" (New Objectivity), giving that movement its other name. The terms overlapped considerably. Both rejected abstraction. Both demanded clarity. But Magic Realism found mystery in the everyday, whilst New Objectivity pursued unflinching social critique.
- Dix's **To Beauty** exemplifies both movements perfectly. The technique is **ruthlessly objective**, every detail rendered with cold precision. Yet the scene **feels surreal, nightmarish**. Dix places himself centre-stage in a garish **Weimar nightclub**. Dix had returned from World War One **traumatised**. In 1922, he married Martha Koch, a ragtime dancer. Hyperinflation was crippling Germany. A loaf of bread cost **billions of marks**.
- In the painting A dancing couple twirls elegantly while an African-American drummer pounds out jazz. Behind him a **semi-naked sex worker gyrates alone**. In 1920s Berlin a sex worker was legally and socially termed a prostitute. Artists like Otto Dix or George Grosz often used the term Hure (whore, pronounced "hur-ah") or Dirne (streetwalker, pronounced "dirn-ah") to shock the bourgeoisie.

- Critics were appalled by the picture. One called it "**a slap in the face to good taste.**" That was the intention. The title, *To Beauty*, drips with **irony**. This is nothing to do with beauty it is all about sex and money.

### **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

Dix: DIKS

Neue Sachlichkeit: NOY-uh ZAKH-likh-kite

### **REFERENCES**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/To\\_Beauty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/To_Beauty)

<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/otto-dix-to-beauty-an-die-schonheit>

[https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_image.cfm?image\\_id=4253](https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=4253)

<https://www.moma.org/artists/1559>

<https://www.artchive.com/artwork/to-beauty-otto-dix-1922/>



Otto Dix (1891-1969),  
**Portrait of the  
Journalist Sylvia  
von Harden,**  
1926,  
Oil and tempera on wood,  
121 × 89 cm,  
Musée National d'Art  
Moderne, Paris, France

Otto Dix (1891-1969), **Portrait of the Journalist Sylvia von Harden**, 1926, Oil and tempera on wood, 121 × 89 cm, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, France

- **Sylvia von Harden** sits at a café table, cigarette in hand, monocle glinting. Her bobbed hair, geometric dress and angular pose define the **New Woman of the 1920s**. Dix renders every detail with brutal precision: bony hands, long chin, knobby knees. She looks **utterly modern** and utterly alienated. This is liberation stripped of romance. **No flattery**. No sentiment. Just ruthless observation.
- Von Harden initially **hated it**. She protested that Dix had made her "**look like a monster**." Critics were kinder. One called it "**the definitive portrait of Weimar's intellectual woman**." Another wrote: "**Dix has captured not just a person but an entire generation's ambition and anxiety**." The painting **became iconic**, reproduced in magazines and exhibitions across Europe.
- Dix supposedly approached von Harden in a Berlin café, declaring: "**I must paint you! You are representative of an entire epoch!**" She was a **poet and journalist**, part of Berlin's bohemian left. Women had just won the vote. They were **smoking, drinking, working, rejecting traditional femininity**. Von Harden embodied all that promise and discomfort.
- The painting vanished during World War Two. It resurfaced in Paris in the

1960s. Von Harden eventually made peace with it, writing: "**Dix saw what I couldn't.**"

### **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

von Harden: fon HAR-den

Musée: mew-ZAY

### **REFERENCES**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portrait\\_of\\_the\\_Journalist\\_Sylvia\\_von\\_Harden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portrait_of_the_Journalist_Sylvia_von_Harden)

<https://www.centrepompidou.fr/en/>

<https://www.moma.org/artists/1559>

<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/dix-otto/>

<https://smarthistory.org/otto-dix-portrait-of-the-journalist-sylvia-von-harden/>



Otto Dix  
(1891-1969),  
**The War**,  
1929-1932,  
Staatliche  
Kunstsammlun-  
gen Dresden

Otto Dix (1891-1969), **The War**, 1929-1932, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

- Otto Dix's "The War" (1929-1932) is a **monumental triptych** that ranks among the Germany's **most significant Realist paintings**. Created from Dix's traumatic First World War experiences as a machine gunner, the work comprises four wooden panels arranged like a Renaissance altarpiece, deliberately echoing Grünewald's **Isenheim Altarpiece** (1512-1516).
- The composition depicts German soldiers **marching through fog** (left panel), a devastated battlefield strewn with **body parts** and war debris (central panel), troops withdrawing including **Dix's self-portrait** helping a wounded comrade (right panel), and soldiers lying in a dugout—sleeping or **perhaps dead** (predella). A skeletal figure floats above the central carnage, pointing rightward.
- Dix began the work after **WWI's tenth anniversary**, countering romanticized perceptions of war. Using traditional techniques—limewood panels, gesso, tempera-oil emulsion, and glazes—he employed a restricted palette of cold greens and greys for death, warm reds and oranges for destruction.
- Link to Magic Realism: While primarily **Neue Sachlichkeit** (New Objectivity), the floating skeletal figure and ambiguous predella—where soldiers appear simultaneously sleeping and dead—introduce **surreal, dreamlike elements** characteristic of Magic Realism, blending grotesque reality with supernatural

symbolism to heighten war's horror.

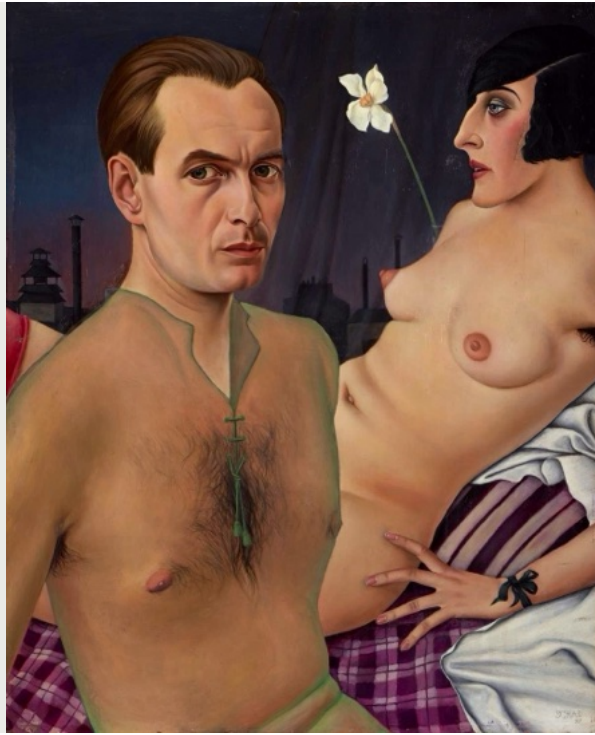
## **REFERENCES**

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-war-otto-dix/CwHM2HdTO3l2vg?hl=en>

<https://albertinum.skd.museum/en/exhibitions/der-krieg/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_War\\_%28Dix\\_triptych%29](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_War_%28Dix_triptych%29)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isenheim\\_Altpiece](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isenheim_Altpiece)



Christian Schad (1894-1982),  
**Self-Portrait**,  
1927, Oil on wood,  
76 × 62 cm,  
Tate Modern, London,  
UK

Christian Schad (1894-1982), **Self-Portrait**, 1927, Oil on wood, 76 × 62 cm, Tate Modern, London, UK

- New Objectivity (Neue Sachlichkeit) began as a reactionary movement against the **emotional, abstract style of Expressionism**, following the trauma of World War I. It described a new, "sober" realism—or "new matter-of-factness"—that cynically depicted the harsh realities, social dysfunction, and hedonism of the Weimar Republic.
- This is a masterpiece of New Objectivity.
  - **The Transparent Shirt:** Schad depicts himself in a diaphanous, green-tinted garment that reveals his chest, suggesting a "thinly-veiled display" of his own vulnerability or narcissism.
  - **The Model and the Scar:** Behind him lies a nude woman with a prominent scar on her cheek. This is a sfregio, a mark of passion or possession Schad observed while living in Naples. Her identity was long a mystery, though recent research suggests she may represent a figure from Berlin's subcultural nightlife.
  - **The Flower:** A large narcissus flower leans toward the artist, serving as an allegory for vanity and self-absorption.
- The composition is strikingly clinical; despite their physical proximity on a bed, the two figures remain **emotionally disconnected**, staring into separate spaces.

By placing them against a distant urban backdrop, Schad highlights the alienation of modern life, presenting human relationships as cold, transactional, and intensely observed.

- Contemporary critics were mesmerised. One wrote that Schad had achieved "**photographic exactitude without photography's soul.**" Another noted his "**disturbing ability to make flesh appear both sensual and corpse-like.**" The Tate acquired it from a private collector in 1994, cementing Schad's place in the canon. It now hangs alongside other Weimar-era masterworks.
- Schad had **recently separated** from his Italian wife **Marcella**. He was living in **Vienna**, frequenting the city's demimonde. Recent scholarship suggests the woman may have been a **transgender hostess** from Berlin's El Dorado nightclub. Diaries discovered in 2015 mention Schad's connections to Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute of Sexual Science where she was a maid. In other words a person born as a man and presented as a woman. You may wonder about the breasts. Breast implants were not known in 1927 so it may be hormone treatment although the results are typically limited or simple Schad's artistic licence. The question cannot be resolved at the moment as the diaries are not specific.
- Schad invented the "**Schadograph**" in 1918, placing objects on photographic paper. Man Ray later used the technique, calling them "Rayographs." Schad never received credit.

## **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

Schad: SHAHD

sfregio: sfREH-jyo

## **REFERENCES**

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/schad-self-portrait-l01710>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian\\_Schad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Schad)

<https://smarthistory.org/christian-schad-self-portrait/>

<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/schad-christian/>

<https://www.artsy.net/artist/christian-schad>



George Grosz (1893-1959),  
**Pillars of Society**,  
1926,  
Oil on canvas,  
200 × 108 cm,  
Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany

George Grosz (1893-1959), **Pillars of Society**, 1926, Oil on canvas, 200 × 108 cm, Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany

- Three grotesque figures dominate. On the left, a journalist wears a chamber pot on his head, clutching bloodied newspapers. Centre, a businessman sports a swastika tie, beer in one hand, sword in the other. His head is open, revealing nothing inside. On the right, a Social Democrat's skull contains steaming excrement. Behind them, a bloated priest preaches whilst buildings burn. Grosz's savage caricatures expose Germany's ruling elite as corrupt, stupid and violent. This is New Objectivity as weapon.
- Critics were predictably outraged. One conservative newspaper called it "communist propaganda masquerading as art." The painting was exhibited at the Nationalgalerie but quickly relegated to storage. Decades later, critic Robert Hughes wrote: "Grosz's prophecy was horribly accurate. Every monster he painted came true." The swastika tie was no accident. Grosz saw what was coming.
- Grosz had fought in World War One and been discharged after a breakdown. He joined the Communist Party in 1919 but quit, disgusted by all authoritarians. In 1926, political violence raged. Grosz changed his name from Georg Groß to George Grosz in 1916, rejecting German nationalism.
- Just before the Gestapo raided his studio in 1933, Grosz fled to America. They

destroyed everything he left behind.

### **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

Grosz: GROHS

Stützen der Gesellschaft: SHTOOT-sen dair geh-ZEL-shahft

### **REFERENCES**

[https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_image.cfm?image\\_id=4253](https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=4253)

<https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/neue-nationalgalerie/>

<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/grosz-george/>

<https://mydailyartdisplay.uk/2011/01/22/the-pillars-of-society-by-george-grosz-3/>



Georg Schrimpf (1889-1938),  
**Sitting Girl**,  
1925,  
Oil on canvas,  
95 × 80 cm,  
Städtische Galerie im  
Lenbachhaus, Munich, Germany

Georg Schrimpf (1889-1938), **Sitting Girl**, 1925, Oil on canvas, 95 × 80 cm, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, Germany

- A young woman sits in perfect stillness. Her simplified features recall Renaissance painting. The muted palette creates timeless serenity. Schrimpf strips away all psychological complexity. No angst here, no social critique. This is New Objectivity's classicist wing, seeking order and harmony in a chaotic age. The girl exists outside time, outside history. She is nobody and everybody. Whilst Grosz and Dix attacked, Schrimpf retreated into quiet contemplation.
- Critics were divided. Some praised Schrimpf's "**return to eternal values.**" Others dismissed him as escapist. One reviewer wrote: "**Whilst Grosz shows us Hell, Schrimpf offers us Heaven. Both are lies.**" Yet Schrimpf found admirers. Franz Roh called his work "**a silent prayer for sanity.**" The painting offered respite from Weimar's chaos. People wanted that respite. They craved calm.
- Schrimpf came from **poverty**. He was self-taught, working as a baker before becoming an artist. In 1925, he was included in Hartlaub's landmark Neue Sachlichkeit exhibition in Mannheim. Germany was still reeling from war and economic catastrophe. Schrimpf painted calm when everything was chaos. That took courage.
- The Nazis declared Schrimpf's work "degenerate" in 1937 despite its conservatism. They removed his paintings from museums. He died the following

year, aged forty-nine.

### **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

Schrimpf: SHRIMP-f

Lenbachhaus: LEN-bahkh-house

Städtische: SHTAY-dish-uh

### **REFERENCES**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georg\\_Schrimpf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georg_Schrimpf)

<https://www.lenbachhaus.de/en/collection/>

<https://www.theartstory.org/movement/neue-sachlichkeit-new-objectivity/>

<https://www.britannica.com/art/Neue-Sachlichkeit>

<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1368>



Max Beckmann (1884-1950),  
**The Night**,  
1918-1919,  
Oil on canvas,  
133 × 154 cm,  
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-  
Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Germany

Max Beckmann (1884-1950), **The Night**, 1918-1919, Oil on canvas, 133 × 154 cm, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Germany

- Three thugs burst into a cramped room, torturing a family. A man is strangled whilst another has his arm twisted backwards. A woman is tied to a window frame. A small dog barks helplessly. The space is compressed, claustrophobic. Bodies tangle impossibly. Beckmann painted this immediately after returning from World War One, before the term New Objectivity existed. Yet it anticipates everything the movement would become: brutal clarity, social violence, unflinching witness.
- The painting was too disturbing for public display initially. One critic called it "an assault on decency." Another wrote: "Beckmann has painted the nightmare Germany cannot admit it is living." When it was finally exhibited in 1920, people stood before it in silence. Art historian Stephan Lackner later wrote: "The Night is the Guernica of World War One, though nobody recognised it at the time."
- Beckmann had volunteered as a medical orderly in 1914, full of patriotic fervour. He suffered a nervous breakdown in 1915 after witnessing unspeakable carnage. He was discharged and returned to Frankfurt, haunted. Germany was collapsing. The Kaiser abdicated. Revolution erupted. Paramilitary groups roamed the streets. The Night captures that collapse.
- Beckmann never explained who the attackers were. Left-wing? Right-wing? It

didn't matter. Violence had become Germany's language.

### **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

Beckmann: BEK-mahn

Kunstsammlung: KOONST-zahm-loong

Nordrhein-Westfalen: NORT-rine VEST-fah-len

### **REFERENCES**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Night\\_\(Beckmann\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Night_(Beckmann))

<https://www.kunstsammlung.de/en/>

<https://www.moma.org/artists/452>

<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/beckmann-max/>

<https://smarthistory.org/max-beckmann-the-night/>



Franz Radziwill (1895-1983),  
***The Fatal Crash of Karl  
Buchstätter***,  
1928,  
Oil on canvas,  
Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany

Franz Radziwill (1895-1983), ***The Death of the Lighthouse Keeper***, 1926, Oil on canvas, 71 × 86 cm, Von der Heydt Museum, Wuppertal, Germany

- *Der Absturz* (*The Crash* or ***The Death Dive of Karl Buchstätter***), painted in 1928, is a haunting masterpiece of Magic Realism. It captures the tragic end of a real-life aviation pioneer, Karl Buchstätter, whose plane plummeted during an air show. However, Radziwill transcends mere reportage to create a scene that feels both hyper-realistic and deeply unsettling.
- The composition is defined by a jarring sense of scale and perspective. The foreground features a detailed, almost industrial landscape, while the aircraft itself is depicted in mid-plunge, a small but fatal speck against an expansive, moody sky. Radziwill uses unnatural light and sharp, crystalline edges—hallmarks of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) movement—to instill the scene with a sense of impending doom.
- **The Machine vs. Nature:** The painting reflects the 1920s obsession with technology, portraying the airplane not as a symbol of progress, but as a fragile "Icarus" falling victim to gravity.
- **The Atmosphere:** The sky is heavy and suffocating, suggesting that the environment itself is indifferent, or even hostile, to human ambition.
- Created during the interwar period, the work resonates with the collective trauma of Germany. The "crash" can be read as a metaphor for the precarious

state of the Weimar Republic—a society soaring on the wings of modernism while hurtling toward an inevitable collapse. Radziwill's work remains a powerful memento mori, reminding the viewer of the thin line between human triumph and catastrophe.

- Franz Roh specifically cited Radziwill as exemplifying Magic Realism's "precise depiction of the improbable." Another reviewer wrote: "Radziwill paints dreams with the accuracy of an engineer." The painting was acquired immediately by a museum, unusual for such avant-garde work. It became one of the defining images of the movement.
- Radziwill lived on Germany's northern coast, isolated from urban centres. He painted slowly, obsessively. In 1926, airship technology fascinated Germany. The Zeppelin was a symbol of modernity and danger. Radziwill frequently inserted airships and aeroplanes into otherwise realistic landscapes, creating surreal juxtapositions. The lighthouse keeper's death remains unexplained. Natural causes? Murder? Suicide? Radziwill never said.
- Radziwill later joined the Nazi Party, compromising his reputation. His work was nonetheless banned as "degenerate" in 1937. The Nazis distrusted anything strange.

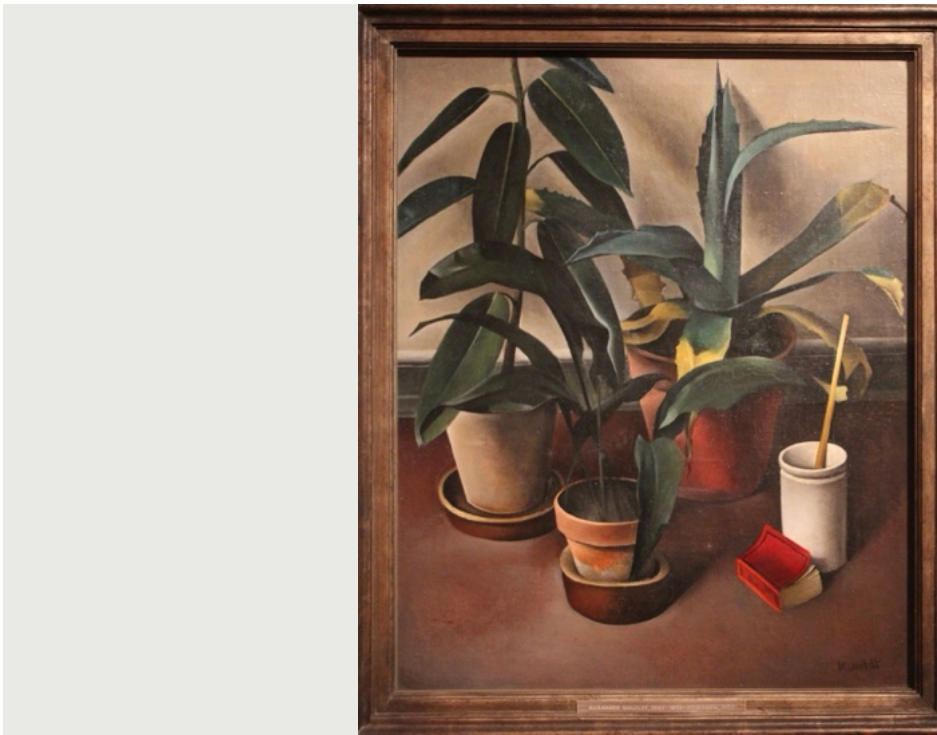
### **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

Radziwill: rahd-ZEE-vil

### **REFERENCES**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz\\_Radziwill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_Radziwill)

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-fatal-crash-of-karl-buchst%C3%A4tter-franz-radziwill/hQGHqA3DXcUyDw?hl=en>



Alexander Kanoldt (1881-1939),  
**Still Life I**,  
1922,  
Oil on canvas,  
73 × 60 cm,  
Städtische Galerie im  
Lenbachhaus, Munich, Germany

Alexander Kanoldt (1881-1939), **Still Life I**, 1922, Oil on canvas, 73 × 60 cm,  
Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, Germany

- A pot, some plants and a small book. Nothing could be simpler. Yet Kanoldt renders these mundane objects with such extreme clarity that they become almost metaphysical. Every surface, every reflection, every shadow is calculated. The composition is rigorously geometric. The palette is restricted, almost monochrome. This is New Objectivity applied to the oldest subject in Western art: the still life. Kanoldt finds mystery in pure observation.
- Critics debated whether this was modern or reactionary. One wrote: "Kanoldt has taken us back to the seventeenth century, but without the warmth." Another countered: "This is utterly contemporary. Kanoldt shows us that objective reality is stranger than any fantasy." Franz Roh praised Kanoldt's "ability to make the familiar unfamiliar through sheer attention." The debate continues. Is this progressive or conservative?
- Kanoldt had been a member of Der Blaue Reiter, the expressionist group, before World War One. After the war, he rejected emotional intensity completely. He moved to Munich and painted still lifes obsessively. In 1922, Germany was in chaos. Kanoldt painted silence and order. He gave people what they craved: stability, clarity, control. Even if it was just a glass and some fruit.

- Kanoldt died in 1939, just as World War Two began. His reputation faded quickly.

### **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

Kanoldt: kah-NOLT

Städtische: SHTAY-dish-uh

### **REFERENCES**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander\\_Kanoldt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Kanoldt)

<https://www.britannica.com/art/Neue-Sachlichkeit>



Rudolf Schlichter (1890-1955),  
**Blind Power**,  
1932,  
Oil on canvas,  
100 × 80 cm,  
Staatsgalerie Stuttgart,  
Germany

Rudolf Schlichter (1890-1955), **Blind Power**, 1932, Oil on canvas, 100 × 80 cm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Germany

- The technique is precise, almost photographic. But the symbolism is unmistakable. This distorted military figure is an allegory of fascism rising. Schlichter painted this in 1932, the year before Hitler seized power. New Objectivity had always combined precise realism with political critique. Now that critique became prophecy. The painting screams warning. Nobody listened.
- Contemporary critics mostly ignored it. Germany was too polarised for art criticism. One communist newspaper praised it as "exposing capitalist-military alliance." A right-wing paper called it "degenerate." Within a year, Schlichter would be fleeing for his life. Robert Hughes later wrote: "Schlichter saw exactly what was coming and painted it with clinical precision. That makes it even more unbearable."
- Schlichter had been a member of Berlin's Dada group in the early 1920s, known for outrageous provocations. By 1932, he had abandoned provocation for documentation. He was watching democracy collapse. Street battles erupted daily between communists and Nazis. Unemployment exceeded six million. The Weimar Republic was dying. Schlichter painted its death throes. He fled to Munich when the Nazis took power.

- The painting disappeared for decades. It resurfaced in the 1960s, its prophecy fulfilled.

### **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

Schlichter: SHLIKH-ter

Staatsgalerie: SHTAHT-gah-luh-ree

### **REFERENCES**

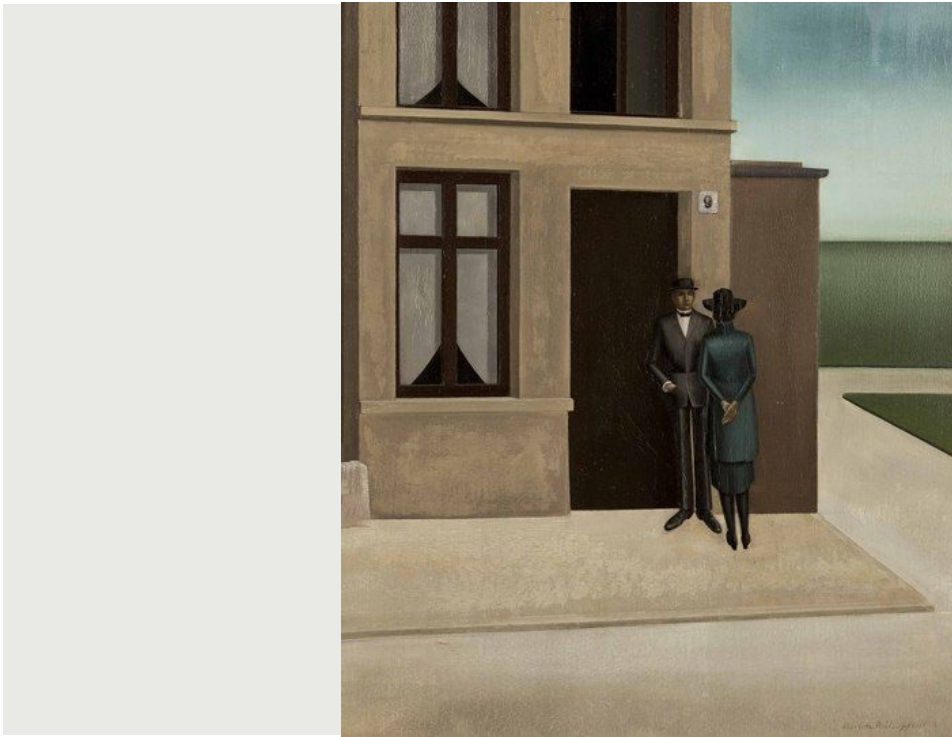
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf\\_Schlichter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Schlichter)

<https://www.staatsgalerie.de/en/>

<https://www.theartstory.org/movement/neue-sachlichkeit-new-objectivity/>

<https://www.britannica.com/art/Neue-Sachlichkeit>

<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1368>



Anton Räderscheidt (1892-1970),  
**House No. 9**,  
1920,  
Oil on canvas,  
110 × 85 cm,  
Museum Ludwig, Cologne,  
Germany

Anton Räderscheidt (1892-1970), House No. 9, 1920, Oil on canvas, 110 × 85 cm, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany

- Sharp-edged buildings. Two figures. Brutal shadows. No movement. Just geometry and silence. Räderscheidt's deserted urban landscapes epitomise Magic Realism's eerie precision. The architecture is rendered with architectural exactitude, yet the scene feels alien, nightmarish. Where is everyone? What happened here? The painting suggests catastrophe without showing it. This is post-war trauma expressed through absence.
- Critics recognised something powerful. One wrote: "Räderscheidt has painted the silence after the explosion." Franz Roh included him in his original definition of Magic Realism, praising his "ability to make ordinary streets feel like stage sets for unknown dramas." The painting's title, House No. 9, suggests bureaucratic numbering, as if the city has been catalogued, filed, emptied of humanity.
- Räderscheidt painted this in Cologne, which had been occupied by British forces after World War One. The city felt alien to its own inhabitants. Foreign soldiers patrolled. Buildings stood damaged. Räderscheidt depicted his hometown as if seen by a visitor from another planet. He suffered a stroke in 1967 which paralysed his right side. Amazingly, he taught himself to paint left-handed and continued working until his death.

- His wife, Marta Hegemann, was also a painter. She appears in many of his later works as a mannequin-like figure.

#### Pronunciation Guide

Räderscheidt: RAY-der-shite

#### References

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton\\_Räderscheidt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton_Räderscheidt)

<https://www.museum-ludwig.de/en/>

<https://www.britannica.com/art/magic-realism-art>

<https://www.theartstory.org/movement/neue-sachlichkeit-new-objectivity/>

<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1368>



Georg Scholz (1890-1945),  
**Industrial Farmers**,  
1920,  
Oil on canvas,  
80 × 60 cm,  
Von der Heydt Museum,  
Wuppertal, Germany

Georg Scholz (1890-1945), **Industrial Farmers**, 1920, Oil on canvas, 80 × 60 cm, Von der Heydt Museum, Wuppertal, Germany

- Three distorted figures symbolise the industrialisation of farming. Scholz depicts rural workers transformed by industrialisation into monsters. This is New Objectivity's social critique at its sharpest: modernisation as dehumanisation. The farmers' faces are horrific, blank, expressionless. They have become what they use. The painting asks: what happens when people become tools?
- Critics on the left praised it as exposing capitalism's violence. One communist newspaper called it "a perfect indictment of bourgeois agriculture." Right-wing critics attacked it as propaganda. One conservative reviewer wrote: "Scholz insults the honest German farmer." The debate was furious. Scholz remained a committed Marxist throughout his life. His paintings were weapons in the class war. He made no apologies.
- Scholz fought in World War One and was radicalised by the experience. He joined the Communist Party in 1919. In 1920, Germany was industrialising rapidly. Farms were mechanising. Traditional rural life was disappearing. Scholz documented that transformation with cold precision. He was arrested multiple times for political activity. The Nazis persecuted him relentlessly after 1933. He was forbidden to paint.
- Scholz died in 1945, just as the war ended. His work was virtually unknown for

decades. Only recently has it been rediscovered.

Pronunciation Guide

Scholz: SHOLTS

References

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georg\\_Scholz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georg_Scholz)

<https://www.museum-wiesbaden.de/en>

<https://www.theartstory.org/movement/neue-sachlichkeit-new-objectivity/>

<https://www.britannica.com/art/Neue-Sachlichkeit>

[https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_image.cfm?image\\_id=4253](https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=4253)

<https://courtauld.ac.uk/research/research->

[resources/publications/immeditations-postgraduate-journal/immediations-online/immediations-no-18-2021/a-re-examination-of-the-city-country-dichotomy-in-weimar-germany-georg-scholzs-industrial-farmers-1920/](https://courtauld.ac.uk/research/research-resources/publications/immeditations-postgraduate-journal/immediations-online/immediations-no-18-2021/a-re-examination-of-the-city-country-dichotomy-in-weimar-germany-georg-scholzs-industrial-farmers-1920/)



Carlo Mense (1886-1965),  
**Portrait of Heinrich Maria Davringhausen**,  
1922,  
Oil on canvas,  
120 × 100 cm,  
Kunsthalle Mannheim,  
Germany

Carlo Mense (1886-1965), **Portrait of Heinrich Maria Davringhausen**, 1922, Oil on canvas, 120 × 100 cm, Kunsthalle Mannheim, Germany

- A massive mill dominates the landscape, solid and monumental. Mense renders it with simplified geometry and clear light, making industrial architecture appear timeless, almost classical. This is Magic Realism's classicist wing: finding permanence and dignity in modern subjects. Unlike Scholz's critical view of industrialisation, Mense celebrates it. The mill becomes a cathedral of modernity. It is beautiful, powerful, eternal.
- The portrait reflects the "New Man" of the 1920s: urban, intellectual, and slightly melancholic. By placing Davringhausen in a modern, minimalist setting, Mense highlights the isolation of the individual within a rapidly industrializing society. The subject's gaze is indirect, suggesting an internal withdrawal or a "cool conduct" adopted to survive the societal traumas of the First World War. Ultimately, the painting is less a study of a friend and more a definitive record of the era's aesthetic and psychological sobriety.
- Critics debated whether this was progressive or reactionary. Franz Roh praised Mense's "ability to find classical harmony in industrial forms." Others were suspicious. One reviewer asked: "Is Mense showing us the future or fantasising about a past that never existed?"
- The painting was acquired by the Kunsthalle Mannheim, which would soon host

Hartlaub's landmark Neue Sachlichkeit exhibition. Mense was central to the movement's classicist tendency.

- Mense had been gassed in World War One. He recovered slowly. In 1921, he was searching for order and stability. The mill represents that search. It stands solid against chaos. Mense painted slowly, methodically. Each painting took months. He believed in craft, in patience, in traditional values. Yet his subjects were utterly contemporary. This contradiction defined his work.
- Mense taught at the Breslau Academy from 1925 to 1933. The Nazis dismissed him. He continued painting in obscurity until his death.

### **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

Mense: MEN-zuh

Kunsthalle: KOONST-hah-luh

Mannheim: MAHN-hime

### **REFERENCES**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlo\\_Mense](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlo_Mense)

<https://www.britannica.com/art/magic-realism-art>

<https://www.theartstory.org/movement/neue-sachlichkeit-new-objectivity/>

<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1368>



Conrad Felixmüller (1897-1977),  
**Kinderfastnachtstreiben**,  
1926,  
160.6 x 100.8 cm,

Conrad Felixmüller (1897-1977), **Kinderfastnachtstreiben**, 1926, 160.6 x 100.8 cm

- Born in Dresden in 1897, Conrad Felixmüller was a precocious talent who mastered both painting and graphic arts. Initially a radical figure, he co-founded the Dresden New Secession in 1919 and contributed to the left-wing journal Die Aktion. However, his marriage to Londa von Berg and the birth of his sons sparked a shift from political criticism to domestic tranquility.
- By the mid-1920s, Felixmüller developed a naturalistic, vibrant brand of Expressionism centered on his family. His 1926 masterpiece, *Kinderfastnachtstreiben*, epitomizes this era. This ambitious composition captures a Shrove Tuesday children's carnival, featuring his sons, Luca and Titus, amidst a kaleidoscope of confetti and costumes. It is a "tour de force" of color, celebrating the innocence of childhood against the gathering gloom of the era.
- Despite his move away from politics, Felixmüller was eventually targeted by the Third Reich. Labeled a "degenerate" artist, over 150 of his works were confiscated or destroyed during the Nazi "cleansing" of German art.
- Contemporary critics noted Felixmüller's shift from his earlier Expressionist style. One wrote: "Felixmüller has abandoned emotion for documentation." Another observed: "This is a painting about painting itself. Felixmüller shows us the artist who shows us reality." Dix reportedly loved the portrait. He kept a photograph

of it in his studio. It confirmed his status within the movement.

- Felixmüller was younger than Dix but equally committed to social realism. In 1925-1926, both were living in Dresden, part of a thriving artistic scene. They exhibited together, drank together, argued about politics and aesthetics. Felixmüller was more overtly political, aligned with communism. Dix was more cynical. Yet they shared fundamental beliefs about art's purpose: witness, document, critique.
- Felixmüller survived the Nazi period by painting landscapes. After the war, he continued working in East Germany, adapting to Socialist Realism.

### **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

Felixmüller: fay-likes-MUUL-er

### **REFERENCES**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conrad\\_Felixmüller](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conrad_Felixmüller)

<https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5334969>



Richard Oelze (1900-1980),  
**Daily Torments**,  
1934,  
Oil on canvas,  
65 × 81 cm

Richard Oelze (1900-1980), **Daily Torments**, 1934, Oil on canvas, 65 × 81 cm

- Richard Oelze's (pronounced "uhrl-sta") "Daily Torments" (1934) stands as a haunting cornerstone of German Surrealism, captured during the suffocating dawn of the Third Reich. Measuring 65 × 81 cm and housed in the Museum of Modern Art, this oil on canvas masterfully translates the invisible weight of existential dread into a tangible, visceral landscape.
- Oelze, who studied at the Bauhaus before gravitating toward the Parisian Surrealist circle, moved away from the movement's typical "dream-logic" toward something more sinister: veristic surrealism. In "Daily Torments," the viewer is confronted with a dense, organic mass that fluctuates between geological rock formations and decaying anatomical structures. The palette is muted and earthy, evoking a sense of ancient, subterranean claustrophobia.
- The painting serves as a psychological mirror of its time. Created just as Oelze fled Germany for France, the "torments" are not depicted through literal monsters, but through an atmosphere of paranoia and stagnation. The warped figures and ambiguous shapes suggest a society under surveillance, paralyzed by an unspoken, omnipresent threat. It is a profound meditation on the "banality of evil"—where the daily agony is not a single event, but the slow, agonizing erosion of the human spirit. The technique remains precise, every figure rendered with Magic Realism's characteristic clarity. But the subject has become pure horror. Oelze painted this in 1934, one year after Hitler seized

power. The Nazis had declared avant-garde art "degenerate." Artists were fleeing. Oelze had moved to Paris. This painting represents the transition from Magic Realism toward Surrealism. The objective precision remains, but it now depicts psychological catastrophe.

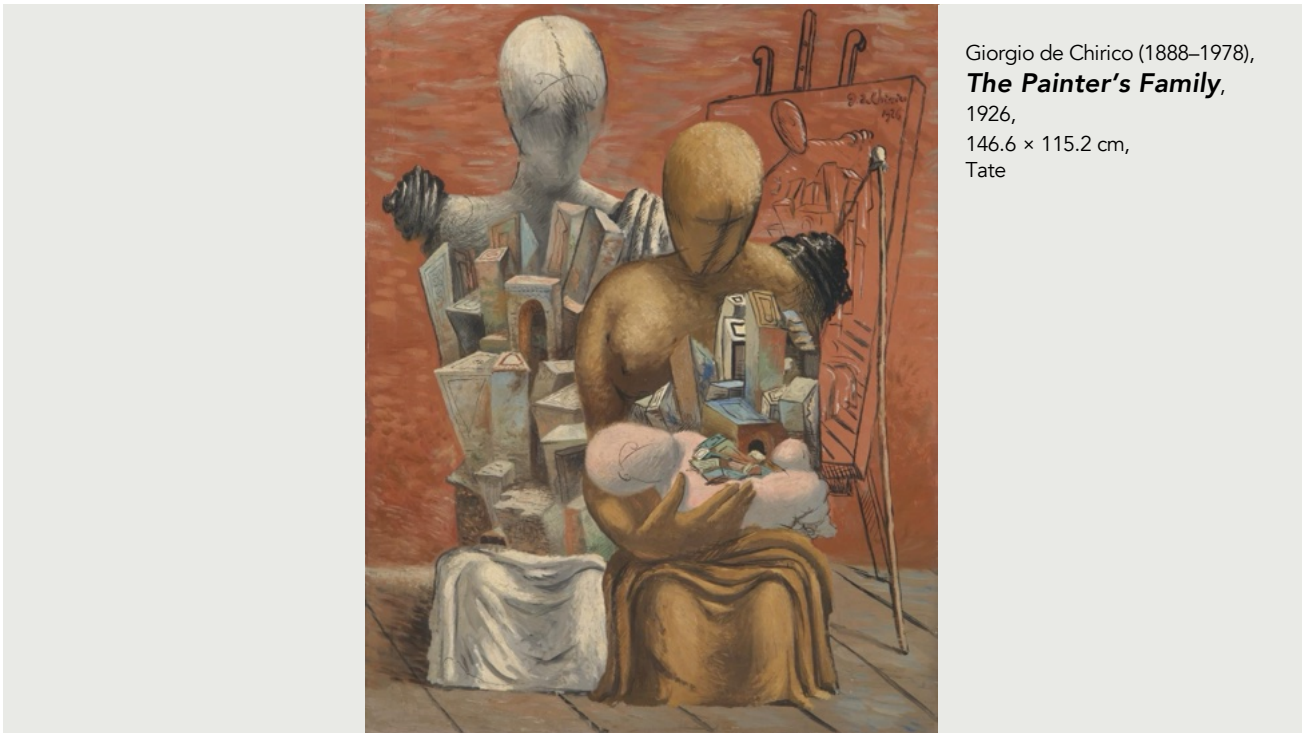
- Critics recognised something unprecedented. One wrote: "Oelze has painted the nightmare we are all living." André Breton, Surrealism's founder, tried to recruit Oelze to the movement. Oelze refused, insisting he remained committed to observed reality. Yet what reality was this? The painting was exhibited in Paris and immediately acquired by MoMA. It became one of the museum's most controversial works.
- Oelze had studied in Dresden, where he knew Dix and Felixmüller. By 1934, those networks had been destroyed. Artists were scattered, silenced, or dead. Oelze painted in exile, watching from Paris as Germany descended into fascism. *Daily Torments* captures that helpless witness. The crowd could be refugees, victims, perpetrators. Everyone is trapped. Everyone is suffering.
- Oelze returned to Germany in 1936 but was conscripted into military service. He survived the war and continued painting until his death.

### **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

Oelze: URL-tsoh

### **REFERENCES**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard\\_Oelze](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Oelze)



Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978),  
**The Painter's Family**,  
1926,  
146.6 × 115.2 cm,  
Tate

Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978), **The Painter's Family**, 1926, 146.6 × 115.2 cm, Tate

- While New Objectivity (Neue Sachlichkeit) and Magic Realism were distinctly German responses to post-WWI trauma, their DNA shared much with the Italian Pittura Metafisica (Metaphysical Art). Moving away from the frenetic energy of Futurism, Italian artists sought a "return to order," influencing the German movement's focus on stillness, clarity, and the uncanny.
- Giorgio de Chirico, though often associated with Surrealism, was a pivotal bridge. By the time he painted *The Painter's Family* (1926), his style had evolved into a neoclassicism that mirrored Magic Realism's heightened, often unsettling reality.
- In this work, the figures are rendered as mannequin-like constructs, their torsos filled with architectural fragments and classical ruins rather than flesh. This "interior architecture" suggests that the human identity is built from history and memory. The heavy, sculptural modeling and the compressed, stage-like space evoke a sense of stasis and mystery—key tenets of Magic Realism. By stripping the family unit of its biological warmth and replacing it with stony, statuesque permanence, de Chirico captures the era's broader European desire for stability, albeit one tinged with a profound, existential silence.

## **REFERENCES**

- <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/de-chirico-the-painters-family-n05976>



Andrew Wyeth (1917-2009), **Christina's World**, 1948, 81.9 × 121.3 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York

- Andrew Wyeth (1917-2009), **Christina's World**, 1948, 81.9 × 121.3 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York
- Andrew Wyeth's *Christina's World* (1948) is an iconic American masterpiece, depicting a haunting, realist scene of his neighbour, Anna Christina Olson, crawling through a desolate Maine field toward her distant farmhouse. Inspired by Olson's resilience in dealing with a degenerative muscle condition, the egg tempera painting captures themes of isolation, vulnerability, and quiet endurance.
- The painting features Anna Christina Olson, a neighbour of the artist in Maine who was unable to walk due to a condition, possibly polio or Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease. Rather than using a wheelchair, she moved around her property by crawling.
- It is a tempera work characterized by a high level of detail in the grass and landscape. Wyeth used a "worm's-eye view" to create a sense of distance and longing, with the figure's back to the viewer and a tense, "frozen" posture.
- While based on the then-55-year-old Christina, the figure was modeled by the artist's wife, Betsy.
- Located at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, the painting was purchased for \$1,800 in 1948 and is now considered an iconic, yet often unsettling, image of 20th-century American art.

## **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

Neue Sachlichkeit: NOY-uh ZAKH-likh-kite

Franz Roh: frants ROH

G.F. Hartlaub: GAY-eff HART-lowb

## **REFERENCES**

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78455>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew\\_Wyeth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Wyeth)

## 56-01 MAGIC REALISM AND NEW OBJECTIVITY

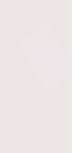
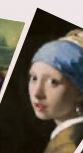
DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK



Otto Dix ,  
*Portrait of the  
Journalist Sylvia  
von Harden,*  
1926

- Magic Realism and New Objectivity emerged in Germany between 1918 and 1925, both rejecting Expressionism's emotional intensity. Magic Realism found mystery in the everyday prefiguring the deadpan aesthetic of Pop Art and the Hyperrealist movement of the 1960s and 70s.
- New Objectivity pursued social critique. It stripped away sentimentality to show the gritty, often ugly truth. We see it in modern political illustration and underground comics, which use quote "ugly" realism as a weapon against corruption.
- Their legacy is found in art that looks "normal" at first glance but feels deeply "off" or unsettling.
- Thank you for your time and attention and I hope to see you again soon.



# A Free Course on the History of Western Art

Dr Laurence Shafe [www.shafe.uk](http://www.shafe.uk)

