

Die Brücke

Die Brücke (The Bridge) was a group of German expressionist artists formed in Dresden in 1905. The four founding members, Fritz Bleyel, Erich Heckel, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, were architectural students. They discussed art together and also studied nature, having a radical outlook in common. The institution provided a wide range of studies in addition to architecture, such as freehand drawing, perspective drawing and the historical study of art. Later members were Emile Nolde, Max Pechstein and Otto Mueller. The group had a major impact on the evolution of modern art in the 20th century and the creation of expressionism. The group came to an end around 1913.



The name "Brücke" was intended to "symbolize the link, or bridge, they would form with art of the future": the aim being to depart from the prevalent traditional academic style and find a new mode of artistic expression. They were influenced in this aim by Northern Renaissance artists such as Albrecht Dürer, Matthias Grünewald and Lucas Cranach the Elder, as well as contemporary international avant-garde artist and movements, such as van Gogh, Gauguin and *les Fauves*.

The group published a **Programme** in 1906. It was hand cut as a woodblock print, in keeping with their ambition to revive the art of printmaking in the tradition of Dürer. Kirchner wrote: "We call all young people together, and as young people, who carry the future in us, we want to wrest freedom for our actions and our lives from the older, comfortably established forces." And "Everyone who reproduces, directly and without illusion, whatever he senses the urge to create, belongs to us".

As part of the affirmation of their national heritage, they revived older media, particularly woodcut prints, and sought an authenticity of expression that they felt had been lost with the innovations of modern life. The group developed a common style based on vivid colour, emotional tension, violent imagery, and an influence from primitivism.

Fritz Bleyel (1880–1966)

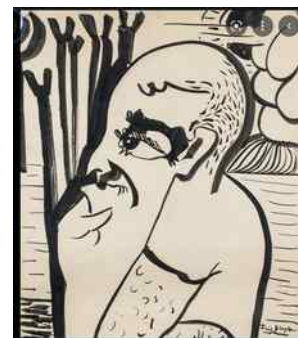
The group met initially in Kirchner's first studio, which had previously been a butcher's shop. Bleyel described it as: "that of a real bohemian, full of paintings lying all over the place, drawings, books and artist's materials — much more like an artist's romantic lodgings than the home of a well-organised architecture student."

In September and October 1906, the first group exhibition was held, focused on the female nude, in the showroom of K.F.M. Seifert and Co. in Dresden. Deriving from the life studies, Bleyel created a lithographic poster for the show printed in orange ink on white paper. It has a narrow, portrait format, more akin to Japanese woodcuts than conventional contemporary prints, and was a distinct contrast to the poster designed by Otto Gussmann for the Third German Exhibition of Applied Arts, which had opened four months previously in Dresden. Bleyel omits iconography such as a crown, a lamp and a flowing gown, to show a bold nude of the model Isabella full-length above the lettering.



Bleyel said: "...without any deformation caused by the silly fashion of the corset... she stands somewhat uneasily, with her arms out and knees bent, as if she is balancing. Shadows play over her body and highlight her womanly figure." However, police censors barred the display of the poster under Paragraph 184, the National Penal Code pornography clause, after perceiving pubic hair in the shadow underneath the stomach.

Bleyel left the group after only two years, when he married, to look after his family, and did not exhibit publicly thereafter.



Three ink drawings: "**Der Raub**" *The Robbery* (1920), *Bathers* (1919) and *Head*.

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938)

"A painter paints the appearance of things, not their objective correctness, in fact he creates new appearances of things."

Kirchner was born in Bavaria. His parents were of Prussian descent and his mother was a descendant of the Huguenots, a fact to which Kirchner often referred.

In 1901, he began studying architecture at the [Technical University](#) of Dresden; where he met Fritz Bleyl and later the other founding members. They discussed art and studied nature together, [shared](#) a radical outlook.

He volunteered for army service in the First World War, but soon suffered a breakdown and was discharged. His work was branded as "**degenerate**" by the Nazis in 1933, and in 1937 more than 600 of his works were sold or destroyed.

Self-Portrait with a Pipe (1906) displays the raw, colour and expressive brushstrokes associated with early Expressionism. It is his earliest known self-portrait, and thought to have been inspired by van Gogh's *Self-Portrait with a Pipe and Straw Hat*, which he may have seen in an exhibition of van Gogh's works held in Dresden in 1905

The use of contrasting bright primary and secondary colours is also an influence from Fauvism, which originated around 1905, therefore in parallel to the Brücke artists, and would therefore have been known to them, along with van Gogh, Gauguin and Cézanne.

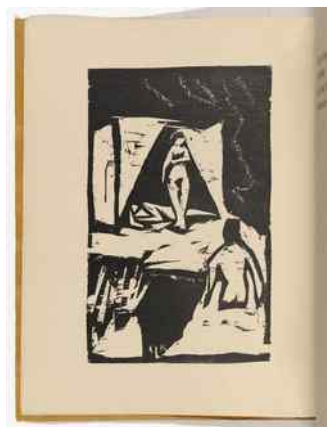


The way Kirchner handled the sky in ***Moonrise, Soldier and Maiden*** (1905) echoes van Gogh's swirling skies seen in *Starry Night* (1889). As in Fauvist pictures the sense of deep shadow in the foreground is evoked by the use of deep, but still bright, greens, in contrast with the golden sky, rather obscuring the foreground details in dark browns, as would have done in more academic painting.

Female Nude With Foliage Shadows (1905) may also betray an influence from Fauvism, but it also carries over the colouring from his earlier Impressionist phase. The purple shadows, contrasted with the natural flesh colours in the patches of sunlight, is an enhancement (or exaggeration) of the natural colours, rather than the radical substitution of one colour by another which we find in his later, Fauvist influenced, work.



It closely evokes Renoir's *Nude in the Sun* of 1875 in its portrayal of a nude young woman emerging from the foliage with sun dappled flesh.



As part of the affirmation of their national heritage, they revived older media, particularly woodcut prints. Germany had a long lineage of printmaking from Dürer and others. As a direct means of communicating an image (and with its commercial possibilities) the technique had great appeal for them.

They developed a common style based on vivid colour, emotional tension, violent imagery, and an influence from primitivism. Dresden and Berlin held ethnographic museums where they were able to see the artefacts from Africa, the Pacific and America.

In this **Wood block print** from the exhibition catalogue of 1910 the bold, contrasting forms in stark black and white, are a dramatic alternative to the refined and detailed steel engravings with which the public was becoming familiar in their news-papers, journals and on gallery walls. With a few deft cuts into

the block Kirchner summons up a woodland scene with a male and female bather; the one standing on the river bank, the other half submerged in the water.

Dancers (1906) is an ink drawing on paper. The free, almost crudely drawn pen and brush-strokes evoke the gaiety of the performance and the emotion and intensity that he wished to elicit in the viewer by the expressive techniques.



In 1906, he met Doris Große, who was his favoured model until 1911. Between 1907 and 1911, he stayed during the summer at the Moritzburg lakes and on the island of Fehmarn (which he revisited until 1914) with other Brücke members; where his work featured the female nude in natural settings.



Kirchner and other Die Brücke artists were influenced by Nietzsche's ideas about breaking apart morality and conventions in modern Germany.

Among Germany's lakes and forests, they were able to live closer to their ideal of a bohemian artists' collective. Their canvases, as in ***Naked People Playing*** (1910), reflected this, turning from urban alienation to themes of happy men and women cavorting naked in nature. Naturism, the philosophy of social nudity, had been defended in German intellectual circles around the turn of the century, and the Die Brücke artists embraced it as part of their radical rejection of bourgeois social norms.

Street, Dresden (1908-19) evokes the dynamism of urban life in Germany in the early twentieth century, depicting the swirling crowds and electric lights of the modern city: an expression of the intensity, dissonance, and anxiety of the modern city. The crowded city street is Dresden's fashionable Königstrasse (King Street.)

In a letter to Erich Heckel, he wrote of the Dresden crowds, "Completely strange faces pop up as interesting points through the crowd. I am carried along with the current, lacking will. To move becomes an unacceptable effort." Kirchner heightened the colours of this city scene, depicting the figures with mask-like faces and vacant eyes in order to capture the excitement and psychological alienation wrought by modernization.



The scene radiates tension. Its packed pedestrians are locked in a constricting space; the plane of the pavement, painted in an unsettlingly intense pink, like abraded flesh, slopes steeply upward, and the exit to the rear is blocked by a trolley car. The street is crowded, even claustrophobically so, yet everyone seems alone. The women at right, one clutching her purse, the other her skirt, are holding themselves in, and their faces are expression-less, almost mask-like. A little girl is dwarfed by her hat, one in a network of eddying, whirling shapes that entwine and enmesh the human figures.

Kirchner's studio became a venue which overthrew social conventions, where they held group life-drawing sessions using models from their social circle, rather than professionals, and choosing quarter-hour poses to encourage spontaneity.

Bleyl described one such model, Isabella, a fifteen-year-old girl from the neighbourhood, as "a very lively, beautifully built, joyous individual, without any deformation caused by the silly fashion of the corset and completely suitable to our artistic demands, especially in the blossoming condition of her girlish buds.



In ***Self Portrait with Model*** (1910) the artist is in the act of painting, with pallet and brush in hand. The model is seated on a chest or a box towards the back of the picture. She is wearing a pale blue chemise decorated in pink ribbons, the same pink is used to put a blush to her cheeks. She appears to be looking at the artist askance, with perhaps a look of suspicion as she has literally taken a back seat and he is the true subject of the work. He has a pipe in his mouth, virile pink lips, and an audacious orange-and-blue striped robe with large buttons and cuffs –under which he appears to be naked.

There is very little light and shade, and no use of aerial or linear perspective to suggest depth, and very little overlapping. As with the Fauves he lays patches of brilliant colour alongside each other, the sense of depth only suggested by the scale of the figures, and the recessive blue of the model's dress. In line with colour theory he paints his robe in the complementary (opposite) colours of blue (primary) and orange (secondary), which increases the apparent intensity of both. Likewise in the background he exploits the red/green opposition. A broad brown/black line runs around the bottom half of the robe, suggesting a shadow but more importantly acting as a separation of the two figures into different zones of the painting.

Although supposedly engaged in the act of painting, taking a pause between brush strokes, he is in fact looking out at the viewer (or into a mirror). It is like manifesto, or a testament to the artist's freedom to paint as he wishes.

The human figure was central to Kirchner's art, more commonly in movement, as he believed that this better expressed the fullness and vitality of the human body.

Standing Nude with Hat, (1910) is depicted as a flat silhouette set against a background of abstract shapes, perhaps a gaudily patterned curtain. She appears to be suspended half in the air with one foot on an orange stool. The black hat (which connects with the black and green shapes in the patterned background) and the red shoes serve to emphasise the model's nudity.

The long format of the painting and the flat curved shapes with hard edges recall the early paintings of Gustave Klimt, such as *Nuda Veritas* (1899) and the two versions of *Judith* (1901 and 1909).

In 1913, he wrote the Brücke chronicle, which overplayed his part as the 'leader' and led to the ending of the group, which was already suffering strains of disagreement. Pechstein had already been expelled for exhibiting with the Secession, contrary to their rule to only exhibit together.

"It seems as though the goal of my work has always been to dissolve myself completely into the sensations of the surroundings in order to then integrate this into a coherent painterly form."

At this time, he established an individual identity with his first solo exhibition. During the next two years he began his series of scenes showing the streets of Berlin, where he had moved in 1911, with the central characters of street walkers. A cycle of paintings regarded as one of the most important works of German Expressionism.

Kirchner often depicted prostitutes and their relationship to their clients. This was not meant as social criticism but rather an attempt to depict his idea of a new independent type of woman. Kirchner noted:

"The street scenes developed in the years from 1911 to 1914. It was one of the loneliest times in my life, in which I wandered through the long streets full of people and wagons through day and night in agonizing unrest."



In the foreground of ***Berlin Street Scene*** (1913) two men, probably potential clients are depicted. One is facing the prostitutes, the other is looking away. For Kirchner, the prostitute was a symbol of the modern city, where glamour and danger, and intimacy and alienation necessarily coexisted, and everything was for sale. The intense, clashing colours heighten the excitement and anxiety, and the tilted horizon destabilizes the scene. While these women definitely capture our attention, the reaction of the two men in front of them is ambiguous. It is unclear whether they paused or are quickly moving away. One of them defiantly spun his head almost all the way around. Could it be in disgust?

The model for the two men was probably Otto Müller, but it is also possible that Kirchner depicted himself as the model. The models for the two prostitutes were the sisters Erna and Gerad Schilling.

The women are seen wearing very colourful clothing with elaborate lace collars and high-fashion hats. In the background one can see a busy street. On the street are a horse carriage and the sign of the tram line 15, a horsecar that ran

through central Berlin. The women look at the two clients provocatively, one of whom is giving them their attention, while the other is looking away. The cropping of the two men by the bottom edge of the picture has the effect of bringing the viewer close to the scene and creates the impression of a momentary, hasty camera snapshot.

In ***Street, Berlin*** (1913) his colour has become less intense: a few patches of heightened colour amongst the muted greys and blues of the passers by, draws the attention to the women.

"For Kirchner, the prostitute was a symbol of the modern city, where glamour and danger, and intimacy and alienation necessarily coexisted, and everything was for sale." (MOMA gallery label)

In place of the flattened, circumscribed shapes the Berlin street scenes are painted in long, diagonal, slashing strokes, which convey a sense of transience and rapid movement, much as the Italian Futurists were undertaking at the same time. The intense, charged and extremely energetic painting can be seen as a response to the psychological experience of an individual in the over-crowded urban metropolis. Vivid anti-naturalistic, nearly caustic colours and the acute dense composition create an almost claustrophobic experience.



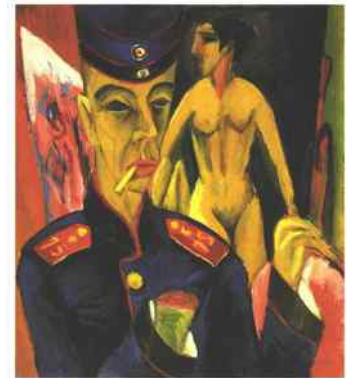
In Berlin his sense of rebellion against the confining principles of academic painting and the stifling rules of bourgeois society took a new turn, as the charged atmosphere and energy of the city was felt in an expression of acute perspectives, jagged strokes, dense angular forms, and caustic colour. The street life in Berlin, in particular the familiar presence of prostitutes, identified by their elaborate plumed hats, captured Kirchner's eye and inspired his streetwalking series. These works exude the vitality, decadence, and underlying mood of imminent danger that characterized Berlin, which on the eve of World War I, was one of the largest cities in the world.



Portrait of Erna Schilling (1913) is sometimes referred to under different titles such as *Sick Woman* or *Lady with a Hat*. She has a melancholy expression and betrays the health problems that she would suffer in her latter years. It is painted with the slashing diagonal brush-strokes that he had developed for his Berlin street scenes.

Nightlife inspired much of Kirchner's work, and he met Erna and her elder sister Gerda, who were dancers in a local Berlin nightclub in 1911. They both modelled in several of his paintings. Erna became his companion and his favourite model at that time. She modelled for other members of the group and made decorations for his studio. She later looked after the artist's business after he suffered a mental breakdown in 1915. She moved to Switzerland with him in 1921 and became a Swiss citizen in 1937. Kirchner proposed marriage to her in June 1938. She was known as Frau Erna Kirchner following his suicide later that year. She died in Davos in 1945.

Kirchner volunteered to serve in the war in 1914, but was discharged in 1915 due to a nervous breakdown. He would spend two years recovering in Switzerland. As a result of this experience in 1915 he painted **Self-Portrait as a Soldier**. Although he didn't actually lose his hand, the painting is perhaps a psychological disability, symbolic of his loss of ability to paint.



In a letter to Dr. Karl Hagemann, a friend and patron, Kirchner writes: "After lengthy struggles I now find myself here for a time to put my mind into some kind of order. It is a terribly difficult thing, of course, to be among strangers so much of the day. But perhaps I'll be able to see and create something new. For the time being, I would like more peace and absolute seclusion. Of course, I long more and more for my work and my studio. Theories may be all very well for keeping a spiritual balance, but they are grey and shadowy compared with work and life"



Self-Portrait as a Sick Person (1918) depicts his feelings of isolation and psychological anguish this time. He stares over his shoulder at the viewer with a look of hollow eyed distress on his pale, sickly green face. He portrays himself as a patient in bed; the red of his blanket and green of the bedhead contribute to the sense of desolation and discomfort.

A friend who visited him in his Berlin studio wrote: "I spent two mornings with Kirchner which I shall never forget. I found him sitting on a very low chair next to a small, hot stove in a yellow-painted, sloping-roofed attic. Only with the help of a stick was he able to walk, staggering around the room... A colourfully painted curtain concealed a large collection of paintings. When we began to look at them, he came alive. Together with me,

he saw all his experiences drift by on canvas, the small, timid-looking woman set aside what we had seen and brought a bottle of wine. He made short explanatory remarks in a weary voice. Each picture had its own particular colourful character, a great sadness was present in all of them; what I had previously found to be incomprehensible and unfinished now created the same delicate and sensitive impression as his personality. Everywhere a search for style, for psychological understanding of his figures. The most moving was a self-portrait in uniform with his right hand cut off. Then he showed me his travel permit for Switzerland. He wanted to go back to Davos...When I was leaving, I thought of Van Gogh's fate and thought that it would be his as well, sooner or later. Only later will people understand and see how much he has contributed to painting".

Old Woman and Young Woman (1921) and **Portrait of Henry van de Velde Between Mountains** (1917) are two woodblock prints. They demonstrate Kirchner's skill at cutting directly into the block to make an expressive and immediately arresting image.





Members of Die Brücke (1926-27) represents his memory and tribute to the four founding members of the group. It is painted in his later, flat style, like a poster, with little light and shade, and only a hint of his earlier diagonal brushstrokes.

Throughout 1936 and 1937, Kirchner began to experience health problems.

In 1937, the Degenerate Art Exhibition took place in Germany; a total of 639 works by Kirchner were taken out of museums and 25 were displayed in the exhibition. He was expelled as a member of the Academy of Arts in Berlin.

Throughout 1938, Kirchner became increasingly upset with the situation in Germany. After Austria was annexed by Germany he became disturbed by the idea that Germany might invade Switzerland where he was living. On 15 June 1938, Kirchner took his own life by gunshot in front of his home in Frauenkirch; however, there are doubts about his death being a suicide. Erna, his companion, continued to live in the house until her death in 1945.

Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884-1976)

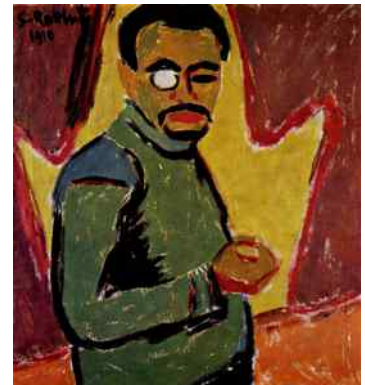
*“..we didn’t have the intention at all of founding a new style...”
“What we wanted, was a refusal of the outmoded, overly-cultivated art practices.”*

Schmidt-Rottluff was born plain Karl Schmidt. In 1906 he added the name of his birthplace, Rottluff, to his name. He spent the summer of that year on the island of Alsen with Emil Nolde, where he convinced Nolde to join Die Brücke.

He enrolled in architecture at the Sächsische Technische Hochschule in Dresden in 1905, following in Erich Heckel's footsteps, but gave up after one term. Whilst he was there, however, Heckel introduced him to Kirchner and Bleyl. They all passionately shared similar artistic interests and used architecture as a front to study art. They founded Die Brücke in Dresden on 7 June 1905, with the aim of creating a style that was uncompromising and which renounced all traditions. Its first exhibition opened in Leipzig in November of the same year.

He initially painted in an Impressionistic style, however his mature style is characterized by flat areas of boldly dissonant colours, influenced by Cubism and African sculpture. **The Self-Portrait With Monocle** (1910) is representative of his mature work.

He depicts himself in the pose and garb of a bohemian intellectual, complete with brooding visage, green turtleneck jumper, and thoughtful gesture; with the focus placed on his eye and his painting hand. The pose is informal, as if he has just turned to face the viewer while engaged in conversation. He sets himself against a yellow and red background formed, possibly, by the curtains tied back before the window to let in the bright sunlight, shaped into a star against which he is silhouetted. His thumb and forefinger form an oval which perfectly mirrors the oval of his monocle, which flashes white with a reflection and obscuring the eye.



Schmidt-Rottluff's works stood out from his peers because of their balance of composition and simple form, which together served to exaggerate their flatness. He spent 1910 painting some of his most infamous landscape works that received recognition and fame.

From 1905 to 1911, during their Dresden period, Schmidt-Rottluff and his fellow group members followed a similar path of development, and heavily influenced by the styles of the Post Impressionists. Schmidt-Rottluff's works stood out from his peers in their balance of composition and simplicity of form, which together served to exaggerate the appearance of flatness.



Schmidt-Rottluff painted **Autumn Landscape in Oldenburg** during his first visit to the coastal village of Dangast near Bremen, where he spent the summers from 1907 to 1912. No sooner had he arrived than he hastily wrote to his friend Erich Heckel to encourage him to follow in his footsteps, stating that “the region was quite fantastic, everything simply demanding to be painted.” From that year onwards they would spend lengthy periods of time there. Heckel was anxious to find a rural Arcadia far from Dresden where he lived during the remainder of the year. It is very close in style to the *Brickworks* by Heckel,

The dense technique of loose, agitated brushstrokes and the direct application of almost pure, vivid colours creating very marked

contrasts recall the landscapes of van Gogh. There is also the influence of French *plein air* painting, evident in the painter's interest in capturing the light effects of the changing atmosphere. The title of the work, also alluding to a specific season of the year, suggests this Impressionist influence.

The present landscape, which represents a small rural property, demonstrates very clearly how Schmidt-Rottluff constructs the space through colour. The use of a restricted palette of a few basic colours — green, yellow, red and blue — gives the composition an intense emotional impact and underlines the painter's skills as a fine colourist.

"I know of no 'new programme'...Only that art is forever manifesting itself in new forms, since there are forever new personalities – its essence can never alter, I believe."

Farm in Dangast (1909) is built up from a series of rectangular buildings, diagonals and curved lines, representing foliage in the manner of Cézanne's Provencal landscapes. There is no arial perspective to suggest depth, which is barely suggested by the overlapping of a few of the forms. He further unites the back and foreground by the device of linking the foliage throughout the painting without a suggestion of spacial division or distance; another technique learnt from Cézanne.

However, in its use of colour it strongly betrays the influence of Fauvism. Flat areas of brilliant colour are locked together on the picture plane. The purple shadows, far from appearing as floating over the surface of the land, carry no suggestion of atmosphere. Rather than being represented by a tonal change in the ground colour, with the addition of reflected light, as they would be in Impressionist paintings, they are like separate fingers of colour fitted together like the pieces of a jig-saw.



"Perhaps I am wrong. But speaking for myself, I know that I have no programme, only the unaccountable longing to grasp what I see and feel, and to find the purest means of expression for it."



After moving to Berlin in 1911 with the rest of the group, Schmitt-Rottluff shied away from the Brücke subjects of urban modernity and began depicting radically stylized nudes and heads, influenced by Cubism and African and Oceanic art.

Nudes in the Dunes and **Three Nudes in the Dunes** (both of 1913) are representative of these powerful, stylistic nudes, created in Dangast, or later in Nidden. The simplicity of the composition and the solidity of the figure group recall the

influence of primitive sculpture, and there is a debt of colour and rawness to the Fauves, though taken much further. This is the up-beat optimistic side of Expressionism.



Two Nudes on a Carpet (1911), **Cats** (1915) and **Melancholy** (1914) are examples of his woodcuts, They show developments in his style but still, as always, are expressive and dramatic in their immediacy.

Around 1909 he was instrumental in reviving the woodcut as a usable medium. From 1912 to 1920, he adopted a much more angular style in his woodcuts and experimented with carved wood sculptures. He was a prolific printmaker, with 300 woodcuts, 105 lithographs, 70 etchings, and 78 commercial prints described in [Rosa Schapire's Catalogue raisonné](#).

Following the dissolution of the group in 1913 Schmidt-Rottluff began to adopt more subdued colouring and

placed greater emphasis in his pictures on draughtsmanship, which featured dark, contrasting lines between shapes rather than juxtaposing colours, which had previously been the norm.

Woman with a Bag (1915, Tate Gallery) was completed in the artist's studio in Berlin shortly before Schmidt-Rottluff left for military service on the Russian front in autumn 1915. Its first owner wrote in a letter: "It is probably the last painting he did in 1915, he knew that the time of his freedom was over. I have the feeling that this painting, which as a subject has nothing to do with the war, it is in its tragic expression and dark colours one of the most impressive documents of the misery of the war."



The woman's face is elongated and angular, with extended cheeks and nose, reminiscent of West African masks. It was probably influenced by the proto-Cubism of Picasso's 1907-09 Primitivism Period as notable in the detail of *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907). By contrast, her clothes and accessories are those of a fashionable European.



Schmidt-Rottluff served as a soldier on the Eastern Front from 1915 until 1918, but these experiences never heavily reflected in his artwork. At the end of the war he became a member of the Arbeitsrat für Kunst in Berlin, which was an anti-academic, socialist movement of German artists during the German Revolution of 1918–19.

The portrait of **Dr Rosa Schapire** (1919 Tate Gallery), along with its expressive, angular lines, betrays a continuing influence of Fauvism. The division of the face by the strong blue line is reminiscent of Matisse's *Portrait With a Green Stripe*. Light from the window illuminates one side in yellow and orange, while the shadow side is indicated by dark red rather than a darker tone of flesh colour. This suggests light reflected onto the cheek from the interior of the room, creating the deeper shadow dividing the two sides, and represented by the cool colour of blue. Warm colours tend to advance, while cool colours recede; here the placing of the blue on the foremost portion of the face holds them in balance and emphasises the flatness of the picture.



Dr Rosa Schapire (1874–1954) appears seated, with a smiling, open expression. Behind her is a small table above which hangs a painting, alluding to her role as an art historian and a supporter of the arts. The angular features of the head within the painting echo those of Schapire herself, presumably because Schmidt-Rottluff intended to represent another of his own works, hung on the wall of his summer retreat at Hohwacht on the Baltic coast, where this portrait was painted. He gave this canvas to Schapire as a Christmas present that year, and it later became part of a decorative plan the artist devised in 1921 for her home in Hamburg, along with *Woman with a Bag* and other paintings, carvings, furniture, and textiles. She was able to bring both paintings with her to England when she fled Nazi Germany in 1939. The work thus reflects the artist's aesthetic development as well as one of his closest and most significant professional relationships with a notable figure in German art history.



Trained as an art historian, Schapire was one of the first supporters of the Brücke group, of which Schmidt-Rottluff was a founder member. She brought with her to England a large collection of Schmidt-Rottluff's work, and is now regarded as a major expert on the artist. Schmidt-Rottluff's angular, contrasting style became more colourful and looser in the early 1920s, and by the mid-1920s it began to evolve into flat shapes with gentle outlines. Through this development he remained committed to landscape painting as a whole.

In **Evening in the Room** (1935) moonlight shines into the corner of a crowded room, where nearly every element overlaps the next, from the table, chairs, and sheer curtains to what may be a framed canvas tucked behind them. The work is painted with the fairly regular brushstrokes and more naturalistic colours typical of Schmidt-Rottluff's style in this period, when he modified his earlier, more radical approach in part to avoid the growing public criticism of expressionism. Indeed, despite the air of calm that seems to emanate from this canvas, it was painted during a stressful period in Schmidt-Rottluff's life, when his work had been labelled "degenerate" by the Nazi regime. He

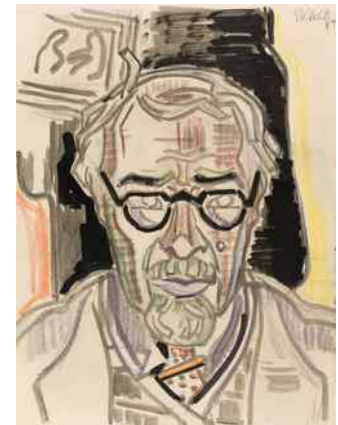
increasingly spent time outside Berlin, either on the Baltic Sea coast or at the home of Hanna Bekker vom Rath - one of his most important patrons - in a small town outside Frankfurt, where this work was painted. The compressed space of the composition may reflect the somewhat makeshift nature of his living and

working situation, and hints at the limitations he experienced in creating his work. This painting, like many of the interiors and still-lives Schmidt-Rottluff made in the 1930s and 1940s, represents both an exploration of space, light, and colour through everyday subject matter, and - if considered from a biographical perspective - an expression of the difficult political and social conditions the artist was facing.

The rewards and honours Schmidt-Rottluff received after World War I as Expressionism gained recognition in Germany, were stripped from him after the rise to power of the Nazi Party. He was expelled from the Prussian Academy of Arts in 1933, two years after his admission.

In 1937, 608 of Schmidt-Rottluff's paintings were seized from museums by the Nazis and several of them shown in exhibitions of "degenerate art". By 1941, he had been expelled from the painters guild and banned from painting. Much of his work was lost in the destruction of his Berlin studio in World War II. His reputation was gradually rehabilitated after the war. In 1947, Schmidt-Rottluff was appointed professor at the University of Arts in Berlin-Charlottenburg, where he would go on to have a great influence on the new generation of German artists. An endowment made by him in 1964 provided the basis for the Brücke Museum in West Berlin, which opened in 1967 as a repository of works by members of the group.

His **Self-Portrait** of 1949 drawn with different coloured inks, directly and without preliminary drawing, is linear in style and shows his confidence and assurance of touch, honed by many years of cutting into wood blocks for printing. The position of his glasses suggests that he is looking down at his paper as he draws; however, if we then look at his eyes, and the uncoloured circles of the pupils, he seems to be looking at the mirror in front of him, and by inference out of the picture to the viewer.



The Legacy of Karl Schmidt-Rottluff

Schmidt-Rottluff died in Berlin on 10 August 1976. He was a prolific artist, with 300 woodcuts, 105 lithographs, 70, and 78 commercial prints described in Rosa Schapire's *Catalogue raisonné*.

While Schmidt-Rottluff's predominant legacy is the Brücke Museum, his impact can be traced on subsequent artists through his strong colours and distinctive forms. Similarly, his role in popularizing the woodcut print as one of the defining forms of German Expressionism led to its prominence as a modernist medium.

Erich Heckel (1883-1970)

"What we [Brücke-artists] had to remove ourselves from [the German Bourgeois mores] was clear; where we were heading was certainly less clear."



Heckel was born in Döbeln, Saxony, the son of a railway engineer. Following school he studied architecture in Dresden, leaving after three terms, shortly after the foundation of *Die Brücke*. The four founders of *Die Brücke* equally regarded pursuing a degree in architecture as a compromise with their respectable middle-class parents who would have never supported them, had they wanted to study art. On leaving he worked in the office of the architect Wilhelm Kreis until July 1907, where he was able to use the position for the benefit of the Brücke. When the firm was asked to design an exhibition room for the lamp manufacturer Max Seifert, Heckel was able to persuade the industrialist that it was worthwhile giving wall space and displays to the Brücke for an exhibition. In July 1907 he resigned to become a full-time artist. Heckel acted as secretary and treasurer to the group.

Man in his Younger Years, Self-portrait (1906) shows the influence of van Gogh in the free, quick brushstrokes, and the Fauves in the use of colour. The

jagged green line on the forehead, dividing the lit from the shadowed side, recalls Matisse's portrait of his wife: *Woman With a Hat* of 1905.

The quest of the group for a primeval harmony resulted in their summer trips in which they left Dresden for distant locations where they would escape the stuffy confines of the city and immerse themselves in what they saw as a more "primitive" way of life. Erich Heckel and his fellow group member Karl Schmidt-Rottluff focused on the small coastal town of Dangast on the North Sea where they first painted the brick factories in 1907.

The brick factories had tall chimneys and were a bright red colour that contrasted strongly with the surrounding green landscape. They were depicted for the first time by Heckel and would soon become one of his preferred subjects. The loose handling of **Brickworks** with its spontan-



eous brushstrokes and brilliant colours, recalls Van Gogh, whose work Heckel encountered in an exhibition held in Dresden in 1905, but differs in the less ordered and systematic application of the strokes.



Midday in the Marshes (1907), painted in raw red and green with deep ultramarine blue sky intimates the oppressive, languorous heat of summer. The red brush-strokes surrounding the trees indicates that they are silhouetted against the sun, creating a halo of light on the edges.

White House in Dangast dates from Heckel's second visit to Dangast in the summer of 1908. The Old Post House portrayed in Heckel's painting still stands.



The composition is dominated by flat, luminous planes of colour, and betrays an obvious parallel to the Fauves. However, *House in Dangast* had been painted as early as the preceding summer, and it is possible that Heckel had arrived independently at similar conclusions, and that his later statement that he was unaware of contemporary French art should be taken quite literally. Such influences could have been mediated through the example of Pechstein, who had discovered the art of the Fauves at first hand in Paris during the winter of 1907-1908.



Paintings by fauvist artists including Derain, and Vlaminck were also exhibited in Dresden in September 1908 at the same time as a showing of the Brücke members' own work.

Painted in crude swift lines with raw, unnatural colour, **Young Man and Woman** (1909) typifies the Brücke aim of extolling the primitivism and immediacy that they found in the work of African and Pacific Island sculptures.

During the summers between 1907 and 1911, the members of Die Brücke stayed both at the Moritzburg lakes and on the island of [Fehmarn](#).



After first concentrating exclusively on urban subject matter, the group ventured into southern Germany on expeditions arranged by Mueller where they produced more nudes in an Arcadian setting.

Bathers in the Reeds depicts their ideal image of an original free living in the midst of nature at the Moritzburg ponds in summer 1910.



Typically painted in flat colours with crude, bold hard outlines and a mask-like face **Girl with Doll (Fränzi)** (1910) betrays the interest of the Brücke artists in the potent abstract forms of primitive African sculptures which they would have seen at the Dresden Ethnological Museum.

Fränzi, shown here at the age of twelve, posed frequently for Heckel and other German Expressionists, they responded to her natural, awkward poses, so typical of adolescence and so unlike the artificial, conventional stances of professional models.

Although superficially simple and direct, the composition is in fact carefully considered and sophisticated. An orange rectangular shape, divided by a straight line, suggests light flooding in from another room. This fills the top two thirds and floods into the colour of her body, linking her to the background, but then by extension, across to the left edge by her legs pushing her into the foreground. Green brushed lightly over the upper background section is carried across onto her upper face. This has a double function of further linking the head to the background and also suggesting a shadow cast by her fringe. The green also connects to the dark green rectangle on the left, unifying the two parts of painting. The doll's right hand overlaps the edge of this shape, further defining the spacial relationships of the various parts. The black skirt of the doll spreads out to an abstract flat form with a vertical edge, as if cutting Fränzi's leg off at the thigh, but by making a parallel with the edge of the green rectangle further helps unify the picture and suggests an underlying grid over which the curved forms are placed.

The black is then picked up by various other forms around the picture, suggesting shadows in the blanket on which she reclines. The orange curve of the doll's hair is repeated in the crown of Fränzi's head, with her hair falling down and framing and isolating her face, drawing the viewers attention to it. The features of the face The horizontal line of the eyes and the red mark of the mouth lying just below, are arranged around the implied horizontal line running behind the head. Finally, the clothed doll, sitting on her thigh, emphasises Fränzi's nakedness.



In a woodblock print, **Fränzi Reclining**, also of 1910, after gouging the woodblock to create the figure of his model, Fränzi, Heckel then sawed it into pieces, inked the components separately in red and black, and finally reassembled them like a jigsaw before printing. Heckel's flat, angular rendering of Fränzi's adolescent body and her exaggerated mask-like features were influenced by his interest in African sculpture.



Another version of **Fränzi With Doll** as a Woodblock print, was used for the cover for Die Brücke Magazine in 1910; then reproduced for a centenary **Commemorative Stamp** in 2005.

In December 1911, Heckel moved from Dresden to Berlin. *Die Brücke* was dissolved in 1913.

Painted in the complementary colours of Blue and orange, and in his mature crystalline style

Yellow Sail (1913) gives off a remarkable sense of light. The scene is looking across a bay, with a factory silhouetted on the far bank.



The angular shapes and overall rhythmic diagonals of **Crystalline Day** (1913) unify the picture, creating a sense of an all embracing atmosphere. Not a natural atmosphere as an impressionist would paint, but of an eternal stillness, in spite of the ferocity and dynamism of the brushwork; it is as if frozen in a timeless blue aura. The figure, standing knee deep in the water, and her gesture echoing the forms of the landscape, is painted in angular forms and, picking up the colours of the land, sea and sky, unifies, harmonises and humanises the scene. It is as if we are transported into a parallel universe, where nature and human are one: a post apocalyptic paradise perhaps.



This reflects the Brücke artists' romanticised view of living closer to nature, and a rejection of what they regarded as the disagreeable industrialised city life. That is in contrast to the Futurists who embraced the roar and speed of the machine age and city life.

Portrait of Siddi Heckel (1913) is a portrait of his wife. The head, looking as though carved from a block of wood, betrays his interest in African sculpture, and may also be influenced by Picasso's proto-Cubist paintings. A heavy, patterned curtain is tied back, as if revealing her to the viewer.

Heckel volunteered for service in Berlin when the war broke out in 1914. Although he underwent a brief training period, he was ultimately rejected by the army for being too old. He then turned to the Red Cross, joining a hospital train in Flanders in March 1915 as a medical orderly. At a certain moment in Roeselare, where he was stationed, Heckel found himself in the same hospital train as Max Beckmann. From May 1915 until the end of the war in November 1918, Heckel served in the Ostend emergency hospital. Housed in the railway station, it was home to a true artists' colony. The orderlies painted, made woodcuts and read and discussed literature and poetry. They adorned the building with murals and window decorations and produced special works at Christmas. Heckel befriended James Ensor who invited him into his house and his studio. He also continued his artistic activities in Germany. On the home front, he established contacts with collectors and prepared for exhibitions. As a draughtsman, he made numerous sketches of the places he visited and the people he observed. But as a painter, the Flemish landscape and North Sea created the deepest impression, especially the sunlight penetrating the unusual cloud formations.





Bather with Stone (1914) is in his crystalline style, but painted now in more subdued, earthy colours. The influence of Cubism may be noted in the fragmentation of the mountain landscape and the rock, and in the grey and ochre colours.

Spring Landscape (1917) is painted in a colourful, visionary style, more typical of his mature paintings.

In **Portrait of a Man** also known as **Self-Portrait**, a colour woodcut of 1919, Erich Heckel inscribes the traumas of the war years and the uncertainties of the postwar period onto his own face. This gaunt self-portrait made one year after the end of World War I, embodies a physical and spiritual weariness that was both personal and national.



Between 1922 and 1924 Heckel painted one small, arched room at the invitation of the Angermuseum on the ground floor of the museum. It is now called the *Heckelraum*. The mural paintings, which were subsequently given the title **Lebenstufen (Stages in Life)**, are considered to be the most important surviving wall paintings of German Expressionism.

In 1937 the Nazi Party declared his work "degenerate"; forbidding him to show his work in public, and more than 700 items of his art were confiscated from German museums. By 1944 all of his woodcut blocks and print plates had been destroyed.



After World War II Heckel lived at Gaienhofen near Lake Constance, teaching at the Karlsruhe Academy until 1955. He continued painting until his death in 1970.

Max Pechstein (1881-1955)

"We [the artist of Die Brücke] were overjoyed to discover our complete unison in the urge for liberation, for an art surging forward, unrestricted by convention."

Pechstein was the son of a craftsman who worked in a textile mill. The family of eight lived on the father's salary. An early contact with the art of Vincent van Gogh stimulated Pechstein's development toward expressionism. He first worked as a decorator in his hometown before enrolling at the School of Applied Arts and then at the Royal Art Academy in Dresden.

1906 he met Erich Heckel and was invited to join Die Brücke. He and Otto Mueller were the only members to have received formal art training. He was an active member until 1910. He was influenced by the wood-carvings from the South Seas shown in the Dresden museum of ethnology.

In 1907 Pechstein traveled to Italy to receive an award and upon his return in 1908 spent time in Paris where he met Fauvist painter Kees van Dongen whom he persuaded to join Die Brücke. Later that year Pechstein moved to Berlin (a move that fellow painters would make in the following three years).

In this **Self Portrait** of 1918 the influence of Fauvist heightened colour is evident. In the face he uses the complementaries of red and green, while he opposes blue and orange complementaries in the jacket and hat. Most of his many self-portraits show him smoking a pipe.



The influence of van Gogh and the Fauves, is evident in **House on the Kuhrische Nehrung**, one of the outstanding works produced by Max Pechstein during his stay in Nidden in the summer of 1909. He sought out a lonely spot where he could work undisturbed. The weeks he spent in Nidden on the Kuhrischen Nehrung in East Prussia (now Latvia) were to have a liberating effect on his style.

He painted the landscape and its people, which he described in his memoirs: "Thus it was that I was eventually able to produce considerable numbers of sketches, gradually feeling my way towards nature, the mighty shifting sand dunes and the lagoon, and thus it was that, for the very first time, I experienced the intoxicating and never-ending rhythm of the sea [...]"

These wooden dwellings were generally painted red or bright blue and were roofed in red pantiles. The top of the gable was often decorated with a Kuhrischen cross.

"I would like to express my longing for happy experiences. I do not want us to be for ever regretting. Art has been and remains the part of my life that brings me happiness."

Girl in the Forest is among Pechstein's first outdoor nudes, painted at the Moritzburg Lakes.

Recalling the Summer of 1910 he wrote: "when we met in Berlin, I arranged with Heckel and Kirchner that the three of us would go and work together on the lakes of Moritzburg near Dresden. We had long been familiar with the region, and we knew that we would have the opportunity to paint nudes in the open air without interference... We had to find two or three people who were not professional models and would therefore pose for us without falling onto studio routines... we artists set out early every morning, laden with our equipment, followed by the models with bags of good things to eat and drink. We lived in complete harmony, we worked and went swimming... each of us [three] executed a great number of paintings and drawings."



Under the Trees (1911) Depicts the 'Arcadian' ideal of living a 'natural' life which they were promoting through their art.

In 1912, after years of rising tensions, Pechstein was expelled from the Brücke after exhibiting some of his work in the Berlin Secession. The 'rule' of the group was that they should always exhibit together. This expulsion didn't trouble him as he had been receiving rewards and recognition far beyond his peers due to his more conservative style that appealed to a wider audience.

His paintings eventually became more primitivist, incorporating thick black lines and angular figures.

No doubt fuelled by the growing interest in the mythological status of Paul Gauguin, who had died in 1903, in voluntary 'exile' in the Marquesas, Pechstein also fell for the magic of the South Seas and its myth of being a paradise on earth; thus in 1914 motivated by the desire to escape "all things forced and cultivated" he and his wife Lotte travelled to Palau in the western Pacific ocean. Since his first visits of the Dresden museum of ethnology he was intrigued by the art and the clear Palau design of the language reduced to its essentials.

In 1914 at the outbreak of World War I the islands, which were in the possession of Germany, were annexed by the Japanese Empire. Pechstein was interned in Japan and returned to Germany via Shanghai, Manila and New York. In 1916 He was sent to fight on the Western Front.

In the Canoe (Outrigger Boat) was painted in 1917 as a result of his experiences Palau.



Since the end of the nineteenth century Nidden had been a regular place of pilgrimage for artists, who sought the unspoilt landscape of this faraway land. Following Max Pechstein's first trip to Nidden in summer 1909, this small fishing village became the artist's Nordic paradise. Located beside a lagoon separated from the sea by a narrow strip of land now Lithuania, Pechstein found in Nidden a preindustrial landscape that remained intact, a place where he experienced a perfect at-oneness with nature that led him to explore his creativity without inhibitions and develop his own, mature pictorial style.



Pechstein's first outdoor nudes had been painted at the Moritzburg Lakes during the summer of 1910, but it was in Nidden that he devoted himself more intensively to the nude. There he painted numerous scenes of nudes in the landscape or amid the waves, using as models both his wife and the fishermen's daughters, who bathed naked when the weather was good. **Summer in Nidden** (1919-20) displays three figures with angular forms and bronzed skin drying their bodies in the sun amid the dunes. The blazing midday sun infuses the whole composition with golden light.

Pechstein returned to Nidden on three occasions, first in 1912, again in 1919 after his trip to the South Seas and involvement in the Great War, and finally in 1920. In 1919, deeply affected by the horrors of war, in which he fought in the ranks of the German army, the artist

was surprised to find that Nidden remained intact after seven years. As he tells in his autobiography, this return caused his works, then “somewhat clumsy, hesitant, and angular in form” to become agile and expressive again, as in Nidden he was “once more possessed by the untrammelled freedom that still existed there after all.”

As with the other members of Die Brücke Pechstein was a consummate and prolific printmaker, producing 421 lithographs, 315 woodcuts and linocuts, and 165 intaglio prints, mostly etchings.



Dr. Paul Fechter (1921)
Drypoint print



The Mirror (1922)
woodcut



Fisherman (1921)
woodcut



Self-Portrait With Pipe
(1921) woodcut

Art is not a pastime, it is a duty with respect to the people, a public affair,”

Gallery



Ruined House (1906)



Haff (Albufera) (1911)



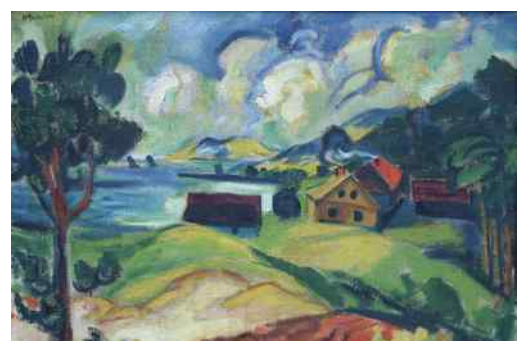
At the Lake (1910)



The Red House (1911)



Summer Day (1911)



At the Lagoon (1919)

Beginning in 1933, Pechstein was vilified by the Nazis because of his art. He was banned from painting or exhibiting his art and later that year was fired from his teaching position. A total of 326 of his paintings were removed from German museums. Sixteen of his works were displayed in the *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) exhibition of 1937. During this time, Pechstein went into seclusion in rural Pomerania. He was reinstated in 1945, and subsequently won numerous titles and awards for his work.

Many of Pechstein's collectors were [Jews](#) whose collections were seized by the Nazis or lost due to Nazi persecution. In May 2013 the Bavarian State Paintings Collections agreed to restitute Pechstein's *White House*, (1910) and his *Meadow Valley* (1911) to the heirs of Curt Glaser. In July 2021, France decided to restitute to the heirs of Hugo Simon the Pechstein entitled *Nus dans un paysage*.

He was married with Charlotte Karpolat from 1911 until 1923 and later was married with Marta Möller. He died in West Berlin on June 25th 1955.

Otto Müller (1874-1930)

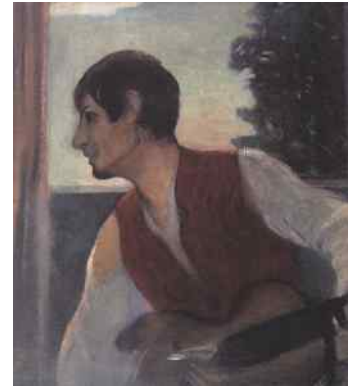
"My principle aim is to express my experience of landscape and human beings with the greatest possible simplicity"

Mueller was born in Liebau (now Lubawka) in Silesia. Between 1890 and 1892 he was trained in lithography. From 1894 to 1896 he studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Dresden, followed in 1898 by a period of study at the Munich's academy, leaving after Franz von Stuck classified him as untalented.

His early works are influenced by Impressionism, Jugendstil and Symbolism. He settled in Berlin in 1908, where he met Erich Heckel and his style became more expressionist. In 1910, he joined Die Brücke and was a member of the group until it disbanded in 1913 due to artistic differences. At the same time Mueller also had contact with the artists group Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider).

He is known especially for his characteristic paintings of nudes and Romani women. His mother was perhaps Romani and his nickname was "Gypsy Mueller". The medium he preferred for his paintings was distemper on coarse canvas, which produced a mat surface.

The early **Self-Portrait With Guitar** (1903-04) is painted in a lyrical, style. The waistcoat and torn shirt, and the pose as he strums a guitar perhaps romanticises his Romani background.



The **Standing Nude With Dagger (Lucretia)** (1903) shows the academic, symbolic tradition from which he emerged.

According to Roman tradition, **Lucretia** was a noblewoman in ancient Rome, whose rape by Sextus Tarquinius (Tarquin) and subsequent suicide by stabbing herself precipitated a rebellion that overthrew the Roman monarchy and led to the transition of Roman government from a kingdom to a republic.

Since the Renaissance, the suicide of Lucretia has been an enduring subject for visual artists, including Titian, Rembrandt, Dürer, Raphael, Botticelli, Artemisia Gentileschi, Lucas Cranach the Elder and others. Most commonly, either the moment of the rape is shown or Lucretia is shown alone at the moment of her suicide. In either situation, her clothing is loosened or absent, while Tarquin is normally clothed.

"I have always taken the art of the ancient Egyptians as my model, even in purely technical matters."

Bathers (Badende) (1911) is typical of his paintings of young women bathing or relaxing on the grassy banks of the lakes.

Mueller distinguished himself from the other members of the group by focusing more on harmonious simplification of colour than expressing raw emotion. The main topic of Mueller's works is the unity of humans and nature; his paintings emphasize a harmonious simplification of form, colour and contours, being regarded as one of the most lyrical of German expressionist painters.

During World War I he fought as a German soldier in France and Russia. After the war he became a professor at the Academy of Arts (Akademie der Bildenden Künste) in Bressla where he taught until his death on 24th September 1930.



The **Gypsy Horse at Black Water** (1928) depicts the horse in bright red and the tree trunks in Turquoise blue. The background bushes and grass form decorative shapes, betraying an influence from Gauguin, and the none natural colouration of animals by the Blaue Reiter artists, August Macke and Franz Marc.

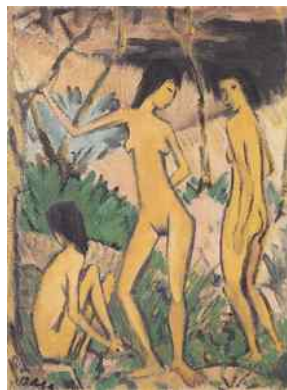
Altogether his printmaking amounted to 172 prints, nearly all of them lithographs, but including a few woodcuts and etchings.

In 1937 the Nazis seized 357 of his works from German museums as "degenerate art". They also looted Mueller's artworks from Jewish collectors. Other works were lost or stolen during the war.

Gallery



Three Bathing Women at the Pond (c.1912)



Three Nudes in a Landscape (1919)



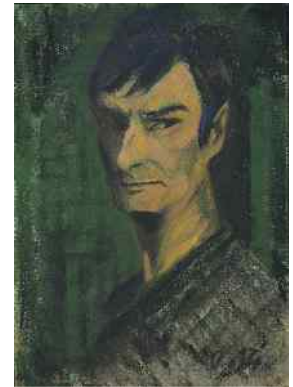
Landscape With Yellow Nudes (c.1919)



At the Lagoon (1919)



Two Nudes the Lagoon (c.1929)



Self-Portrait (c.1921)



Title page (1919 woodcut) of the Brücke yearbook, dedicated to Pechstein.



Mother and Child II (1919) lithograph



Dune Landscape (c.1920) lithograph

Emil Nolde (1867-1956)

"The soul of the painter lives within them. There is silver blue, sky blue and thunder blue. Every colour holds within it a soul, which makes me happy or repels me, and which acts as a stimulus. To a person who has no art in him, colours are colours, tones tones...and that is all..."

Emil Nolde was born as Hans Emil Hansen, near the village of Nolde in Southern Jutland, Denmark. He grew up on a farm. His parents, devout Protestants, were Danish and Frisian peasants. As a child he had loved to paint and draw and he realized his unsuitability for farm life. Between 1884 and 1891, he studied to become a woodcarver and illustrator, at the School of Applied Arts in Karlsruhe, and worked in furniture factories as a young adult. He traveled in Munich, Karlsruhe and Berlin.

He was a drawing instructor at the school of the Museum of Industrial and Applied Arts in Switzerland, from 1892 to 1898 when he finally left this job at the age of 30 to become an independent artist. When he was rejected by the Munich Academy of Fine



Head With Pipe (Self-Portrait) (1907) lithograph

Arts in 1898, he spent the next three years taking private painting classes, visiting Paris, and becoming familiar with the Impressionist artists who were growing in popularity at this time. He married Danish actress Ada Vilstrup in 1902, and moved to Berlin, where he would meet collector Gustav Schiefler and artist Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, both of whom would advocate his work later in life. From that year, he called himself after his birthplace.



Emil Nolde was one of the pioneers in the design of early picture postcards.

In 1896 he was living in St. Gallen, Switzerland, and created over 30 humorous images depicting the Alpine peaks of the region as caricatures based on the mountains' nicknames; as seen in this postcard from the series **"Magical Mountains"**. The images proved so popular they were distributed in the thousands in Germany and beyond. The proceeds from the sales allowed Nolde to move to Munich and dedicate himself fully to his art.

The impulse to attribute human feelings to non-human subjects would continue to inform Nolde's mature landscape paintings, imbuing them with extraordinary expressive power.

In 1906, after Emil Nolde's exhibition at the Galerie Arnold in Dresden, Schmidt-Rottluff invited him to join the Die Brücke group in a letter dated 4 February: "one of Die Brücke's undertakings is to attract any ferment of revolution, that is what its name wishes to proclaim [...]. And so, dear Mr Nolde, whatever you think and decide, we hereby wish to pay tribute to you for your tempests of colour. With our respects, and placing ourselves at your disposal, yours sincerely, *Kunstlergruppe Brücke*."

He became a member of the group in 1906 upon their invitation, but the association lasted only a little more than a year. With his use of intense, expressive colour and vigorous brushwork he is regarded as one of the leading Expressionist painters of the early 20th century.



The double portrait **Emil and Ada Nolde**, painted to commemorate their marriage in 1902, already shows the expressionistic brushwork and bold use of colour, anticipating the French Fauves by several years, that was to characterise his mature style. As a great originator he throws all caution to the wild winds in order to make his inner sensations known.



"I want so much for my work to grow forth out of the material, just as in nature the plants grow forth out of the earth, which corresponds to their character. In the print **'Lebensfreude'** (Joy of living 1905) I worked for the most part with my finger, and the effect I hoped for was achieved. There is hidden in the print a bit of wantonness, in the representation as well as in the boldness of the technique. If I were to make the "ragged and moving" contours "correctly" in the academic sense, this effect would not nearly be achieved."

Nolde was a frequent visitor to Guderup, a town on the Baltic island of Alsén, where he had rented a small fishermen's house since 1903. There he painted many flower pictures in the gardens of his friends. Paintings, such as **Flower Garden** (1908), are clearly influenced by the work of van



Gogh and the French Post-Impressionists, as evidenced by the brilliant colour and the thick, paint-laden brushstrokes. The cheerful colours and sense of happiness conveyed by these paintings is surprising, as they were executed at a time of notable financial hardship and sadness in his personal life on account of his wife Ada's serious illness.



The expressive use of paint and colour exhibited in **Wildly Dancing Children** (1909) reaches its extreme. Nolde's 'wildly dancing paintbrush' seems desperate to catch the fleeting moment and the rapid movement of the children caught in patch of sunlight and swirling in gay abandon. It has the intense feel of an incident which he must have witnessed. Although painted with such vigorous strokes of the brush and thickly laden paint, the faces of the children, two in profile and one facing us, express individual characteristics and emotions.

He began to paint religious themes at the age of 42 following a near death experience in 1909 after drinking poisoned water. He wrote: "In intervals of a few years my pictures with biblical religious content came into existence. The concepts of the small boy, who during the long winter months used to spend all his evenings earnestly reading the Bible, were reawakened. There were pictures of the richest Oriental fantasy. They kept rising in my imagination until the adult man and artist could paint them in dreamlike inspiration."

Painted in 1909 ***The Last Supper*** was the first of his religious paintings, where Christ is surrounded by his disciples, crowding in on him. As he drinks from the cup, which became a symbol of the eucharist he has a beatific look on his face. However, the gaunt appearance of Christ has led some to speculate that Nolde identified with him.



The choice of subject matter may be attributed to Nolde's early travels that included a trip to Milan where he viewed Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*. Its influence remained with him for years afterward. However, this painting is starkly different from traditional representations of the religious scene. There is no depth or spatial context to the space, no sprawling table, just 13 men mostly surrounding the central figure. The light source seems to come from Christ himself at the centre of the canvas. Painted in bright yellows, reds, oranges, and white, Christ is almost crowded by darker figures, looking on as he holds a chalice in his hands.

Although religious images make up a relatively small part of Nolde's artistic oeuvre, he considered them to be "milestones" with respect to his progression as an artist. Having grown up a farmer's son in a small, religious community near the German-Danish border, he was left with lasting impressions of Judaeo-Christian stories after reading the Bible in its entirety.



Nolde was quoted to say about his religious paintings, "I followed an irresistible desire for a representation of the deepest spirituality, religion and fervour, without much knowledge of deliberation."

Painted in a range of close tones of oranges and reds, with flecks of blue and green, the ***Mocking of Christ*** (1909) has an almost claustrophobic atmosphere. Rendered in flat patches of colour, with no modelling, the shadows are 'represented' by green and blue patches. Christ, his face eerily shadowed in green, remains calm, dignified and unmoved amongst the leering caricature like faces of the mocking crowd. The close tonal range of the image serves to increase the harrowing sense of compression and unease.

The subject was common in the art of the Northern Renaissance, for example the German **Matthis Grünewald's *Mocking of Christ*** of 1503-05 shows a blindfolded Christ collapsed on a step beneath the crowd. The faces of the mockers, distorted with hate and mindless lust for blood and pain have found their modern parallel in Nolde's version of the story.



Nolde now turned to his most ambitious work, a large nine-part cycle of ***The Life of Christ***, related in form and spirit to the late medieval German altar-pieces in the church of St. Mary in Flensburg which he had copied with loving emotion and helped restore during his years of apprenticeship. He began this great cycle in Berlin during the winter of 1911-12. It included the rather blurred and pulsating Christ and Judas, and the striking panel of Holy Night in which Mary, seen in profile much like a figure in an Egyptian wall painting, holds a pink fetal Christ Child in her proudly outstretched arms. There is a large central panel of the Crucifixion, with its jagged angular forms and glowing colour, and the austere and



powerful composition of the Doubting Thomas. As the cycle progressed, the forms became simplified, and the vestiges of impressionist technique in the broken colour patches were abandoned for firm construction in large areas of separate, symbolic colours, arranged two-dimensionally in broad planes.

The central image of Christ depicts him in pain and in

anguish, his emaciated body distorted with suffering on an instrument of torture and in fear of his death. This is in contrast with those images of him where he is shown gazing to heaven with a look of beatific longing on his face. His followers are shown on the left hand side, along with Mary dressed in green, her anguish and despair manifested by the expressive gesture of her arms. On the right hand side are the soldiers teasing him and throwing dice for his clothes. The other panels depict incidents in his life, from his birth to his mocking.

After 1911 Nolde's religious treatments—now including etchings—became darker and more ominous in tone than his previous works. Even his wife, Ada, was unnerved by his bold vision. In response to his nine-part Polyptych *The Life of Christ* she wrote in a letter: "For the first few days I was only able to take a furtive peek now and then, so strong was the effect."



Golden yellows and deep reds appear frequently in his work, giving a luminous quality to otherwise somber tones.

Dance Around the Golden Calf (1910), in its depiction of naked or near naked women, suggests a nascent interest in Primitivism and offers a rationale for his later travels in the South Pacific where native societies had previously inspired the work of Gauguin.

The story that inspired the image is taken from the book of Exodus in the Old Testament. It was feared that Moses, who had left the Israelites for forty days to journey up Mt. Sinai, where he received the Ten Commandments, might not return. The golden calf was crafted in his absence to fulfil the spiritual needs of the unsophisticated people. The exuberant figures in the foreground dance with wanton excess before the false idol. They may be seen as symbols of the paganism and decadence that the commandments would rectify. In his use of bright colours, slashing brush strokes and uninhibited, rhythmic movement, Nolde uses the vocabulary of Expressionism to condemn the dancers without being explicitly didactic. However this work ignores the religious moralizing about idolatry traditionally found in depictions of the Old Testament subject. With four mostly naked women, *Dance Around the Golden Calf* celebrates the very worship which earlier art images represented as idolatrous and immoral. In removing Moses from the scene Nolde eliminates any notion of human transgression or divine punishment.

"Every colour harbours its own soul."

According to art critic Jonathan Jones the *Candle Dancers* of 1912 "...is the German answer to Matisse's *Dance*. It is a lot more chaotic and frenzied, a confession of lust and intoxication. Two women wearing nothing but translucent skirts are throwing their limbs about wildly as they jump between lighted candles. Nolde juxtaposes their purple-pink flesh with a red and gold background like the fires of hell.... Yet this erotic reverie is fraught, uneasy. Nolde, who grew up in farm country and regularly returned there to paint, finds pre-first world war Berlin a corrupt, scary place."

Candle Dancers gave the new Expressionist dance an even more frenzied composition and a more primitive expression by using grass skirts and candles derived from tribal dances in New Guinea. Rising up like human versions of the flames below them, Nolde's dancers leap and flicker against a red background which becomes a giant wall of fire. More colouristically unified than the earlier *Golden Calf*, it creates a single, rhythmic, visual effect, a passionate dance of Nolde's Expressionistically brushed paint.



It is no accident that almost all of these images of wild dancing between 1870 and 1920 focused on women, often seen in highly sexualized terms. (Earlier depictions of the dance around the Golden Calf showed no special interest in women.)



As early as 1884, the German Symbolist, Ludwig von Hoffmann painted a *Fire Dance* with a frieze of five, bare-breasted women dancing frenetically against a backdrop of flaming orange. Although much more symmetrical than Nolde's *Candle Dancers*, the overall concept of naked female dancers against a wall of fire is strikingly similar.

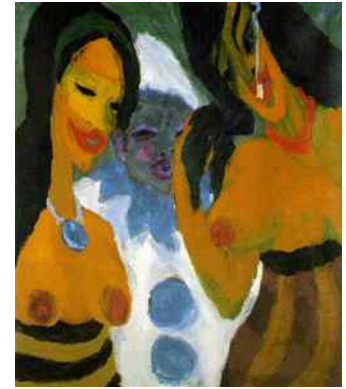
The 1912 woodcut, called *The Prophet*, is Nolde's most famous print. The brooding face confronts the viewer with an immediacy and deep emotion that leave no doubt about the prophet's spirituality. His hollow eyes, furrowed brow, sunken cheeks, and solemn countenance express his innermost feelings.

Nolde also exploits the characteristics inherent to the medium. Coarsely gouged-out areas, jagged lines, and the textured grain of the wood effectively combine in this portrayal of a fervent believer—a quintessential German Expressionist print.

"Every true artist creates new values, new beauty.. .When you notice anarchy, recklessness, or licentiousness in works of contemporary art, when you notice crass coarseness and brutality, then occupy yourself long and painstakingly precisely with these works, and you will suddenly recognize how the seeming recklessness transforms itself into freedom, the coarseness into high refinements. Harmless pictures are seldom worth anything."

In 1913, he went to the South Pacific islands, accompanying a one year anthropological expedition, which set out to study the peoples of New Guinea. During the journey across Russia, Siberia and Manchuria he made numerous notes. He produced 19 oil paintings and a great many watercolours and drawings.

The 'exotic' figures of **Women and Pierrot** (1917) owe something to Gauguin's Tahitian paintings.



After the journey to the South Seas, Nolde resumed his biblical subjects in 1915. It was then that he accomplished one of his finest paintings, the dramatic depiction of the **Entombment**.

The crouching figures in blue of St. Joseph of Arimathea and Mary, who's face is obscured—her grief expressed by her hunched shoulders—dominate the space as they awkwardly clutch the emaciated, yellow body of Christ in their arms, as if trying to contain him within their own bodies. Christ himself, far from lying in the inertia of death seems to be energised and struggling out of a state of lethargy. The raw flesh coloured head of St. John occupies the space between the heads, forging a link running across the top

edge of the picture; his mask-like face of engulfed by a grimace of agony. Finally, the compacted forms of the four protagonists seem as if entombed by the frame of the picture.

There is a moral quandary attached to how we should regard the complete oeuvre of some artists who's moral and ethical behaviour is questionable; none more so than Nolde, whatever may be his status as a major pioneer of modern Expressionism,

Nolde was a supporter of the National Socialist Party from the early 1920s, a fact of his life which was for some time following the war suppressed by critics and his heirs, but since coming to light in recent years has led to much controversy over his behaviour and his place in twentieth century art. Unpalatable now though to us are his views: his fervent antisemitism and name calling through articles and letters that have come to light, his admiration for Hitler and his self serving pleas to him for recognition and status, should we view his work in the light of those revelations, applying them to our critical judgements of the work; or are we perhaps obliged to take the long view and see his work and contribution to 20th century art, detached from that objectionable side of the man?

He considered Expressionism to be a distinctively Germanic style, a view shared by some other members of the Nazi party, notably Joseph Goebbels's, who, until Hitler's diatribe against "degenerate art", championed Nolde and hung his paintings on his walls.

However, **Hitler** rejected all forms of modernism as "degenerate art", and the Nazi regime officially condemned Nolde's work. Until that time he had been held in great esteem in Germany. A total of 1,052 of his works were removed from museums, more than those of any other artist. Some were included in the notorious Exhibition of Degenerate Art in 1937, despite his protests, including (later) a personal appeal to a Nazi *Gauleiter*. Nolde was forbidden to paint—even in private—after 1941. Nevertheless, during this period he created hundreds of watercolours, which he hid. He called them the "Unpainted Pictures".

To Nolde, who always lived on the banks of the Baltic or close by, the sea was always a source of inspiration. He viewed its changing state as highly symbolic and he painted it many times throughout his career.



His watercolours from this period, such as **Stormy Sea** (1938-45), include vivid, brooding storm-scapes and brilliant florals, like his **Sunflowers** (1932) inspired by van Gogh's flower paintings.



After World War II Nolde was once again honoured, receiving the *Pour le Mérite*, an order of merit established in 1740 by King Frederick II of Prussia. He died in Seebüll in

Schleswig-Holstein, in the large house that he designed in 1927.

Gallery

Seascapes



Smoking Steamers (1910)



Stormy Sea (1930)



Still Sea (1936)



Sea With Stormy Sky
Portraits and figures



Coloured Sky Above the Marais
(1940)



Sea Watercolour with Steamers
(red, yellow, blue) (1946)



Self-Portrait (1917)



Self-Portrait (1912)



Dancer and Harlequin (1920)



The Enthusiast



In the Lemon Garden (1920)



Two Old Men Speaking
(1938)