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| German Expressionism |
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| The term German Expressionism refers to an aspect of international modernism that dominated the visual arts and architecture in that country toward the end of the Wilhelmine Empire through the early years of the Weimar Republic (from approximately 1906 to 1922). Artists associated with the term used a multiplicity of antinaturalist techniques to attack not only the conventions of nineteenth century academic art but also the conventions of a society they found repressive, materialistic, and corrupt. Experimenting with emotive colour, form, and composition, artists such as Wassily Kandinsky (fig. 1) and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (fig. 2) were determined to communicate utopian visions synthesised from an array of international, anti-establishment cultural and political ideologies such as theosophy, anarchism, and socialism.  As early as 1911, critics in Germany had begun to use the term Expressionist to refer to contemporaneous works of European art that turned away from naturalism and Impressionism. By the time of the 1912 Cologne *Sonderbund* exhibition, its director not only described their survey of the most recent developments of painting as *Expressionismus* but also emphasised the international number of artists from France, Austro-Hungary, Russia, Norway, in addition to Germany, who were simplifying and intensifying their colours and forms. Among the artists included in this exhibition were Henri Matisse of the Parisian *Fauves*, Kirchner and Erich Heckel of the Dresden/Berlin *Brücke* [Bridge], Kandinsky of the Munich *Blaue Reiter* [Blue Rider], and Cesár Klein of the Berlin *Neue Secession*. |
| The term German Expressionism refers to an aspect of international modernism that dominated the visual arts and architecture in that country toward the end of the Wilhelmine Empire through the early years of the Weimar Republic (from approximately 1906 to 1922). Artists associated with the term used a multiplicity of antinaturalist techniques to attack not only the conventions of nineteenth century academic art but also the conventions of a society they found repressive, materialistic, and corrupt. Experimenting with emotive colour, form, and composition, artists such as Wassily Kandinsky (fig. 1) and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (fig. 2) were determined to communicate utopian visions synthesised from an array of international, anti-establishment cultural and political ideologies such as theosophy, anarchism, and socialism.  As early as 1911, critics in Germany had begun to use the term Expressionist to refer to contemporaneous works of European art that turned away from naturalism and Impressionism. By the time of the 1912 Cologne *Sonderbund* exhibition, its director not only described their survey of the most recent developments of painting as *Expressionismus* but also emphasised the international number of artists from France, Austro-Hungary, Russia, Norway, in addition to Germany, who were simplifying and intensifying their colours and forms. Among the artists included in this exhibition were Henri Matisse of the Parisian *Fauves*, Kirchner and Erich Heckel of the Dresden/Berlin *Brücke* [Bridge], Kandinsky of the Munich *Blaue Reiter* [Blue Rider], and Cesár Klein of the Berlin *Neue Secession*.  Expressionism’s theoretical underpinnings can be found in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and in the 1908 book *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* [*Abstraction and Empathy*] by German art historian Wilhelm Worringer (1881-1965). In expressionist works, emotions and tensions were depicted with the help of symbolic colour and lines in the belief that both carry their own innate expressive meaning and have psychological and spiritual effects – a strand of thinking pursued by Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) in his 1911 book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (Gordon, 1987).  Provincial artists such as Carl Vinnen and the general public reacted negatively to the bright colours, flattened shapes, and distorted forms of Expressionism, continuing a long-standing aspect of German thought in which internationalist influences were seen as the direct cause of the decline of German art and culture. Supportive critics, however, cited earlier precedents such as oils by Grünewald and Michelangelo in addition to works by contemporary northern artists such as Edvard Munch to justify the anti-naturalism of the new direction. The art historian Wilhelm Worringer stressed the metaphysical values of the new artistic tendencies and urged the study of ‘primitive art’ to overcome the focus on the world of natural appearance perpetuated by the classical-Renaissance tradition of European art. Artists, aware that much of the public was bewildered by their work, felt compelled to explain their approach in essays, tracts, and manifestos. Periodicals such as *Der Sturm* (fig. 3)and *Die Aktion* reproduced numerous prints from *Brücke*, *Blaue Reiter*, and Neue Secession artists, as well as recognising sculptors, architects, and poets as Expressionists. Even during the First World War, *Der Sturm* and its gallery continued to explain the new tendencies as international by promoting Futurism and Cubism as part of Expressionism.  Because of the dominance of the state in artistic affairs during the Wilhelmine Empire, visual artists as well as architects such as Bruno Taut struggled to free themselves from national or state regulations that might determine the direction and content of their works. Social anarchism, with its promise of mutual help and a state that would wither away, set the frame for many Expressionists’ utopian and optimistic estimate of the possibilities of individual creativity. At the same time, most endeavoured to explore communal activities and to weigh their responsibility to the public. After the First World War The First World War became a catalyst for an even more activist stance among many Expressionists. With the collapse of Imperial rule in 1918 and the formation of the Weimar Republic, many artists who had been connected to Expressionist groups before the War, established new organizations such as the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* [Work Council for Art] (fig. 4) and the *Novembergruppe* [November group] which initially supported free art education, public museums, and local participation in housing and other public projects. Now infused with French Cubism and Italian Futurism, Expressionism became a visual signifier for the new Republic with its opposition to the Imperial past and evocation of internationalist innovation. But the anti-naturalism that most Expressionists believed would stimulate change met with resistance from the workers they wished to inspire. As the strikes and street battles of 1919 weakened the Republic, many artists and critics became disillusioned with the governing Social Democrats and turned dramatically against the Cubo-Expressionist style manifested in election posters (fig. 5) and other visual images of the Republic commissioned by the majority party. Communists such as George Grosz and John Heartfield distanced themselves from their Expressionist pasts and many of the original supporters of Expressionism, such as Worringer, wrote of its demise. Yet, during the 1920s, the urban middle class embraced the stylistic manifestations of Expressionism particularly in theatre design and film and references to Expressionism survived in the visual manifestations of Dada and *Neue Sachlichkeit* [New Objectivity].  During the 1930s, Expressionism was attacked by both the extreme right and left. The Marxist critic Georg Lukács severely critiqued Expressionism and modernism for its fragmented, abstracted forms and inability to communicate to the masses, and his 1934 essay set the tone for later criticisms of Expressionism during the 1980s. The National Socialist condemnation of Expressionism and modernism reached its apogee with the 1937-38 traveling exhibition of *Entartete Kunst* [Degenerate Art].  With the conclusion of the Second World War, Expressionism became resurrected in Germany and the United States as an antipode to the authoritarian realisms of both Soviet and National Socialist regimes. In the 1950s, art historians and critics began to publish studies of German Expressionism before the First World War, but scholars did not begin to explore the second generation of Expressionists until the 1970s and 1980s. However, many texts republished following WWII have since become accepted as canonical. Nonetheless, not until the end of the last century and the beginning of the twenty-first, have scholars asked why museums in the United States and England have favoured Cubism over its modernist cousin, Expressionism, in exploring the trajectory of modern art. |
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| Expressionism was an avant-garde movement in German literature that lasted from approximately 1910 to 1925 and was supported by a generation of young writers. Like their visual artist counterparts, they were born in the 1880s and 1890s opposed the values of pre-war Wilhelminian society, and reacted to the developments of modern urban civilisation. Expressionist writers tried to trigger their readers’ imaginations and to evoke their emotions. Albeit connected in those central lines of theme and effect, the broad variety of style and form to be found in all literary genres makes it notoriously difficult to find a widely accepted definition of Expressionism, a problem mostly put aside today by regarding Expressionist literature as a forerunner of postmodern heterogeneity.  In poetry, the effects of urbanization and mechanization were expressed by lining up disparate images in paratactical style (‘Reihungsstil’), showing the new perceptional demands caused by acceleration, new technologies and media (see the poems of Jakob van Hoddis, Alfred Lichtenstein and Ernst Blass), leading to the ‘dissociation of self’ (‘Ich-Dissoziation’, Vietta) and to the impersonality of a technicised society (Gottfried Benn, ‘Morgue’-poetry). Symbolic imagery and synaesthesia are characteristics of the poetry of Else Lasker-Schüler, Georg Heym, Georg Trakl, and Ernst Stadler, all of whom wrote poems in regular form and rhyme as well as free verse-poetry. By contrast, August Stramm’s poems disposed of conventional language structures.  Authors of Expressionist prose likewise discharged conventional patterns of narration and tried new techniques like stream of consciousness and reflective prose (‘Reflexionsprosa’), descending into the minds of their protagonists (Gottfried Benn, *Gehirne*, 1916; Carl Einstein, *Bebuquin oder die Dilettanten des Wunders/Bebuquin or the Dilettantes of Miracle*, novel, 1912), often criminals or mentally insane (Georg Heym, *Der Dieb/The Thief* and *Der Irre/The Madman*, 1912; Alfred Döblin, *Die Ermordung einer Butterblume/Murder of a Buttercup*, 1909). The Prague author Franz Kafka is often deemed an Expressionist because of his nightmarish visions of individuals lost in bureaucracy and mechanisation as in the stories *Die Verwandlung* [*The Transformation* or *The Metamorphosis*] (1915) and *In der Strafkolonie* [*In the Penal Settlement*] (1919) and in the novels *Der Process* [*The Trial*] (1925)and *Das Schloss* [*The Castle*] (1926).  Reinhard Johannes Sorge was the first to deal with the generation conflict in drama, showing the clash of values in Wilhelminian society in a family context in *Der Bettler* [*The Beggar*] (written 1911, first staged 1917), a subject taken up for example by Walter Hasenclever (*Der Sohn/The Son*, 1914). The plays of Carl Sternheim (*Der Snob/The Snob*,1912) are acid satires on outmoded bourgeois values, whereas other dramatists denounce the inhumanity of mechanization and individual powerlessness, for example Georg Kaiser (*Gas-Trilogie/Gas Trilogy*, 1917-1920) and Ernst Toller (*Masse Mensch/Man and the Masses*, 1919; *Die Maschinenstürmer/The Machine Wreckers*, 1922), the latter with a highly political stance. Formally many Expressionist plays consist of a series of episodes, or stations, held together only by a central figure (‘Stationendrama’). Characterised by declamation and distorted language Expressionist drama tends to reduce characters to mere types or abstractions (August Stramm, *Kräfte/Forces*, 1915). Expressionist theatre is often experimental, for example in depicting violence (Oskar Kokoschka, *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen/Murderer, the Women’s Hope*, 1909) or in trying to generate a synthesis of the arts (‘Gesamtkunstwerk’; Wassily Kandinsky, *Der gelbe Klang/The Yellow Clang*, 1909).  Main influences on Expressionist literature were Sigmund Freud’s psychological insights and especially Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy, i.e. his nihilistic diagnosis of human life and transcendental emptiness often succinctly conveyed in the mantra ‘God is dead’ as well as his hymnic vitalism (*Also sprach Zarathustra*/*Thus Spake Zarathustra*, 1883/85), taken up by Expressionism as antagonism between apocalyptic visions of modern civilisation versus renewal and rebirth of man.  Given that Expressionism was an urban movement, writers found opportunities to publish their texts or to present them at lectures and recitals associated with places like Munich, Leipzig, Dresden, Vienna and, especially, Berlin, one of the fastest-growing cities of the time. . Many key texts of Expressionism could first be read in the leading periodicals of the movement, such as *Der Sturm*, published by Herwarth Walden as a platform of aesthetic discussion, Franz Pfemferts’s politically oriented *Die Aktion* or René Schickele’s *Die weißen Blätter*.  The impact of modern technical warfare and the millions of dead on the battlefields of the First World War (1914-1918), where many Expressionist writers lost their lives, became central subjects of Expressionist literature, giving rise to pacifist appeals and to the politically engaged messianic-activist Expressionism of the post-war years. With the rise of National Socialism in 1933 Expressionist literature was banned, not to be rediscovered until after the Second World War, when texts were republished that have since become accepted as canonical, for example the poetry collection *Menschheitsdämmerung/Dawn of Humanity* (1919; re-edited 1959).  The general decline of Expressionism by the mid-1920s was furthered by the implausibility and vagueness of the messianic stance (see for example poems of Franz Werfel or Ludwig Rubiner) and the rise of new stylistic concepts (Dada, Neue Sachlichkeit).  Research of the last three decades has stressed the importance of gender themes in Expressionism and the role of female writers such as Henriette Hardenberg as well as the significance of lesser-known authors like Hermann Kasack or Georg Kulka who were forgotten because their texts had not been included in the major anthologies of their time.  **Key Works:**  Kurt Pinthus, ed. (1919) *Menschheitsdämmerung. Symphonie jüngster Dichtung.* Re-edited 1959 as *Menschheitsdämmerung. Ein Dokument des Expressionismus* (*Dawn of Humanity: A Document of Expressionism*, 1994)  Walter Sokel, ed. (1963, 1984) *Anthology of German Expressionist Drama: A Prelude to the Absurd*, Ithaca/London: Cornell UP.  Ernst Schürer, ed. (1997) *German Expressionist Plays*, New York: Continuum.  Fritz Martini, ed. (1970) *Prosa des Expressionismus*, Stuttgart: Reclam. |
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| Expressionist architecture is characterised by its use of expressive colour and of both organic and crystalline shapes and lines. It is also marked by an interest in monumental and unbuildable structures. Expressionist architecture’s zenith came during and immediately after the First World War, although some of the earlier works of architects such as Hans Poelzig (1869-1936) and Bruno Taut (1880-1938)are regarded as precursors (Sharp, 1966). In the years around 1910, Poelzig took inspiration from Gothic, Romanesque, and Baroque styles for his design of industrial and public buildings. The 1911 Water Tower in Poznan drew its expressiveness from technology**.**  File: expressionism1.jpg  The Water Tower’s construction of steel with brick and glass fillings, and its solid shape, anchoring it on the ground, created a monumental effect that celebrated industrial achievement and technology. Poelzig’s principles of restrained, sculptural shapes and a surface design where windows merge with walls were also adhered to in his 1906 Werder mill in Breslau and the chemical works in Luban, 1911-12,but his best-known Expressionist building wasthe Großes Schauspielhaus in Berlin with a dramatic interior that was likened to a magic cave (Pehnt, 1979, 69-78).  File: expressionism2.jpg  File: expressionism3.jpg  Taut had also been an early protagonist of expressionist architecture, most notably with his 1914 Glass Pavilion – a temporary structure for the glass industry built at the Deutsche Werkbund exhibition in Cologne. Through his publications and architectural drawings such as in *Der Weltbaumeister* [*The World Architect*;1920]*, Die Stadtkrone* (1919), and *Frühlicht* (1920-1922), as well as in his role as city architect of Madgeburg, Taut became a lynch-pin for this movement (Washton Long, 1993, 122-  139). Since the 1914 pavilion, Taut had taken inspiration from the poet Paul Scheerbart (1863-1915), whose rhymes and poems evoked visions of colourful castles, domes, buildings on mountaintops, and an architecture made of glass, as illustrated by Taut in *Alpine Architecture* (1919). These ideas fuelled a German utopian spirit that had been gaining momentum since the First World War, the abdication of Wilhelm II, and the establishment of the Weimar Republic. Architects saw themselves as demiurges of a new society and future.  File: expressionism4.jpg  File: expressionism5.jpg  File: expressionism6.jpg  Scheerbart’s *Glasarchitektur* in particular fuelled the belief of Taut, the architectural critic Adolf Behne (1885-1948), and (in 1919) the members of Die gläserne Kette (The Glass Chain),that the advent of a new ‘glass culture’ would refine morality. Die gläserne Kette was an exchange of utopian letters and drawings initiated and organised by Taut. Disguised by pseudonyms, twelve artists and architects exchanged thoughts, visions, and drawingsin a search for the roots of creativity, the origins of architecture, and the relationship between architecture and the cosmos. Among them were Hermann Finsterlin as ‘Prometh’, Walter Gropius as ‘Maß’, Wassili Luckhardt as ’Zacken’, andHans Scharoun as ‘Hannes’ (Whyte, 1985).  File: expressionism7.jpg  File: expressionism8.jpg  **Social Aspects**  Social and educational reform and rejection of the city were essential parts of Taut’s ideology and became apparent in his illustrated book *Die Auflösung der Städte* [*The Dissolution of Cities*] (1920) and *Die Stadtkrone* [*The Crown of the City*](1919), which also drew on Garden City and socialist ideals. Social reform was also in the centre of the program of the Arbeitsrat für Kunst[Working Council for Art] and Novembergruppe, both of which were organisations of Berlin artists with similar goals. They were among numerous revolutionary organisations initiated by workers and artists all over Germany to watch over the provisional government of November 1918. As early as Christmas 1918, the Arbeitsrat, whose spokesman was first Taut and then Walter Gropius (1883-1969), published an architectural program and a manifesto that declared it to be the task of the artist to give the new state its appearance and to shape people’s experiences. Here, ideas of combining art and architecture to create a Gesamtkunstwerk (total work of art), relating back to the 1914 Werkbund exhibition in Cologne, resurfaced in both publications. The majority of efforts by the Arbeitsrat related to architecture, demanding the abolition and replacement of established institutions such as building authorities, insisting upon an art for the people, and on advocating the transformation of existing teaching systems (Washton Long, 1993, 1991-209, 210-221 and Pehnt, 1979).  The idea of a Gesamtkunstwerk and the reformation of teaching institutions were also an essential part of the Bauhaus in Weimar in the years between 1919 and 1923. The Bauhaus programme aimed to unify art and architecture and therefore echoes the writings of the Arbeitsrat and Taut. Lyonel Feininger’s (1871-1956) 1919 woodcut in the manifesto as well as the Sommerfeld Haus evoked the crystalline shapes that were symbolic for expressionism.  File: expressionism9.jpg  File: expressionism10.jpg  File: expressionism11.jpg  Among the most notable built examples of the movement are Erich Mendelsohn’s (1887-1953) Einstein Tower built from 1920 to 1924 in Potsdam,and Peter Behrens’ (1868-1940) Hoechst Administration building built within the same time-span in Frankfurt am Main.  File: expressionism13.jpg  Mendelsohn’s streamlined and sculptural design, which make the modestly sized building appear monumental, is an example of the organically shaped expressionism that was also pursued by Hermann Finsterlin in his drawings for the ‘glass chain’. Behrens, who had a successful office in Berlin and was artistic adviser to the Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft (AEG)from 1907, adapted the dramatic use of colour, shape, and space in expressionism in his post-war work. In contrast to the formal and classical work before the war, this building did not adhere to the same strong rules of symmetry, and serial arrangement as previously, but incorporated romantic and dramatic elements.  Related movements can be found in the school of Amsterdam and Rudolf Steiner’s Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland, among others. |
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