

Introducing Modern Western Art : Movements and Artists
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Lecture - 10
German Expressionism

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German Expressionism



Today, we will be looking at another significant art movement that took place in the first half of 20th century and it is known as German expressionism. The name suggests that the movement started from Germany and basically in cities like Munich, Dresden and also later in Berlin. But, because of its possibilities because the power of the movement, it since start spreading almost all over Europe and though due to the origin of its place, the location the term German is always associated with a expressionism. But the idea of an expressionist art or expressionism as a movement became a global phenomenon.

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EXPRESSIONISM 1905 - 1907

- **Expressionism is an art movement that came into being when artists became more concerned with expressing their feeling on an occurrence or object than with creating a photo realistic painting.**
- **Expressionism occurred mostly in Germany and sometimes it is called “German Expressionism” instead. Expressionist artists used exaggerated colors, aggressive brush strokes, exaggeration and distortion to paint.**

Now, in terms of the movement, it started around 1905 and it and 1907 and it went on for more than a decade. Expressionism can be defined as an art movement that came into being when artists became more concerned with expressing their feeling on an occurrence or object than with creating a photo realistic painting. And this holds true to many other movements also like futurism and cubism and fauvism.

But expressionism as a movement occurred mostly in Germany and sometimes it is called German expressionism, also because it has a context a very specific socio political context. A socio political situation a kind of political anxiety that started during before the First World War which started at 1914. And a whole group of artists including painters sculptors also writers poets musicians, even film makers, photographers they became quite upset, and also they were extremely disappointed in the way art fail to respond to the contextual reality of the first half and the early part of 20th century at least in Germany in France the scenario was already different as we have discussed before.

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- German artists were aware of the developments taking place in France at the end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th.
- They were influenced by the work of the Post Impressionists: Van Gogh, Cezanne, and Matisse.
- There were two main groups or schools of German Expressionism: Die Brucke (The Bridge), and Die Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider).

In fact, the German artists were aware of the developments taking place in France at the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century. They were influenced by the work of the post impressionists like Van Gogh, Cezanne, Matisse and 2 groups emerged and both of which the part of the German expressionism one group is known as Die Brucke in English the bridge and the other one is Die Blaue Reiter in English the blue rider and both these groups scores.

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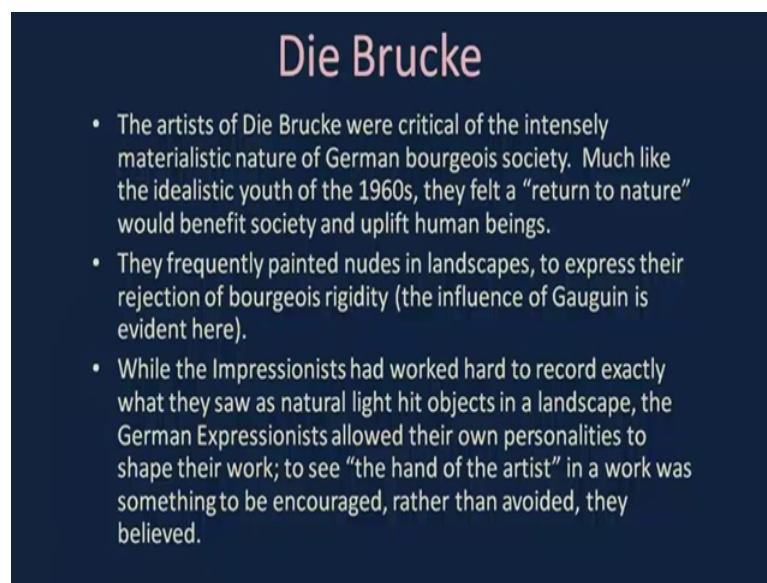
Die Brucke (The Bridge) 1906 - 1912

- A group of young architects in Dresden, Germany, formed an alliance and began painting together.
- They called themselves Die Brucke, which means The Bridge, for they felt that their art would be a bridge to a brighter future, and a way to communicate their utopian ideals to society.

They work on this idea and they produced great amount of and beautiful works of art which all subscribe to the idea of expressionism in some way or the other.

Now, the Die Brucke as a group it lasted from 1906 to 1912 and in case a group of young architects in addressed in Germany which formed an alliance and began painting together. They called themselves Die Brucke, which means the bridge for they felt that their art would be a bridge to a bright future and a way to communicate their utopian ideals to the society.

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Because they feeling this increasing gap between the society and art and they wanted to fill that gap up and probably that is why this term Die Brucke or the bridge can intervene.

Now, the artists of Die Brucke were critical of the intensely materialistic nature of German bourgeois society much like the idealistic youth of the nineteen sixties they felt a return to nature would benefit society and uplift human beings and that is the one of the reasons why you find in the way they painted the human figures or landscapes. And in the way they also located human figures in landscapes or emits nature in their paintings there is something that is not artificial not fabricated not synthetic very natural very primordial and also very organic. And in order to achieve the sense of primeval quality primordial quality they give up.

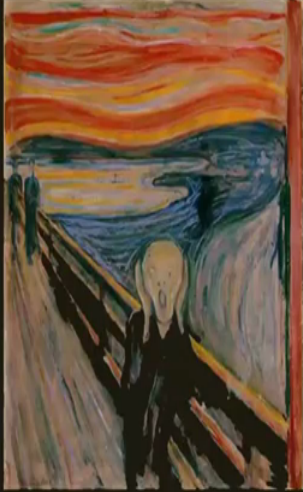
Once again the conventional academic methods of drawing and painting and resorted to something that is more instinctual something that is more driven by impulse in a motion and as a result, when you look at their paintings you will find that the expressionist paintings have given birth to very interesting and different ideas about human form about form and space relationship about even the look gaze and the structure of human anatomy and definitely colors a rack of colors can be seen in German expressionist paintings. And in terms of colors German expressionism can be connected to fauvism, yes whether they admit or acknowledge that or not; I have a strong feeling that German expressionist painters, they are greatly in dated to fauvism because fauvism was a first movement which shown the path to liberate color.

Now, why the impressionist had worked hard to record exactly what they saw as natural light hit objects in a landscape German expressionist allowed their own personalities to shape their work this is very interesting. So, even artist is having or going through a psychological crisis, then that are tests allows himself of herself to be expressed or allows himself or herself to shape the art that your she is making. So, personal psyche or psychological condition is allowed to play a role in not only the subject matter they are choosing, but also in the very technique of art making.

Now so, this is something they wanted to encourage to allow their personalities to share their works to see the hand of the artist in a work and if a something to encouraged rather than avoided they believed. So, art then for them art should not remained neutral or objective anymore there is no harm to make your art to allow your art to become very personal very subjective and inseparably related to your personal trades.

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- The artists of Die Brücke were interested in extreme psychological states.
- Munch is perhaps the most obvious example of this .



The Scream, 1893

The image shows a slide with a black background. On the left, there is a bulleted list of two points. On the right, there is a reproduction of the painting 'The Scream' by Edvard Munch, depicting a figure on a bridge with a turbulent, colorful sky. Below the painting is its title and year.

The artist of Die Brücke or the bridge were interested in extreme psychological states and psychological movements of psychological languish Munch Edvard; Munch is perhaps the most obvious example of this a very well known painting by munch is called the scream painted much before German expressionism as a movement came into being this was painted in 1893 and as you already know German expressionism came into being in 1906.

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They were also interested in traditional German folklore and in the tradition of wood block printmaking, which was developed centuries earlier by the German artist Durer.

The influence of medieval art is seen in the anti illusionism and heavy use of outlines in Expressionist art.

The influence of Oceanic and African masks and totems is also seen in the work of the German Expressionists.

But though Munch had painted this painting several years before the German expressionist movement the way Chirico anticipated surrealism we have seen that similarly Munch's painting at this particular painting the stream almost anticipated German expressionism. So, it is not surprising that German expressionist painters would look up at a Munch as their role model and this German expressionist painters were also interested in traditional German folklore and in the traditional wood block printmaking which was developed centuries earlier by German artist Durer.

They were particularly interested in the medieval art that is a pre classical; pre renaissance art where beauty going by the norm of the classical ideas was not the defining characteristic feature of any art, but pain anguish psychological state and elements of the subconscious not the ways are realists state, but in the way German expressionists artists felt were also allowed to shape the art and definitely they avoided all kinds of illusionism. So, there were known as anti illusionist artists and they used heavy outlines very strong colors and there is certainly an influence of primitive art in German expressionist art styles particularly oceanic and African masks did live a great influence and impact on the way German expressionist artists conceive their forms.

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Die Brücke:

What is it?

• **Group of German expressionists, founded in Dresden 1905, whose work marked the beginning of modern art in Germany.**

• **Name indicated their faith in the Art of the Future –which they saw their own work was to serve as a bridge towards.**

• **The principal members were the architectural student Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, in whose studio they regularly gathered, and his friends Erich Heckel, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, and, later, Emil Nolde and Max Pechstein.**

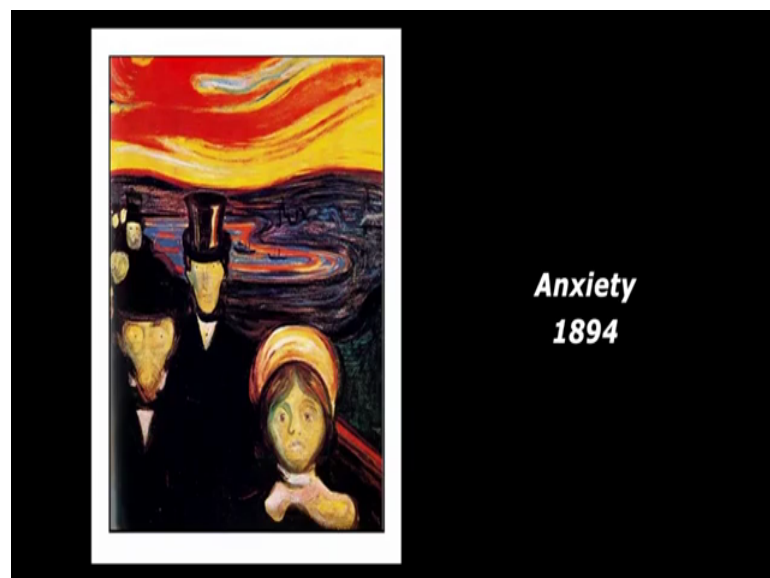
• **Rejecting academic tradition, realism, and impressionism, they drew inspiration from German medieval and Renaissance art, Art Nouveau, Primitive art, and the French Post-impressionists Van Gogh, Gauguin, and the Fauvists'.**

Now, what is Die Brücke of course, it is a group that was founded in Dresden in 1905 and it mark the beginning of modern art in Germany and the name indicated their faith in the art of the future because the bridge connects you with the future which you are trying

to envisage and which they saw in their own work. Now the principle members were of course, the famous ones where Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and then there were Erich Heckel, Karl Schmidt Rottluff, Emil Nolde, Max Pechstein and the one of the founder members like Kirchner; he was interestingly not an art student, but an architecture student.

So, the rejected academic tradition realism impressionism and they drew inspiration from the German medieval and German renaissance art to some extent and they also drew their inspiration from primitive art and of course, Van Gogh; Gauguin the fauvists and I need not mention again the famous Edvard Munch the Norwegian artist.

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This is one more painting by Edvard Munch painted in 1894. And you can see how these through this painting I mean one could almost a sense like a premonition like an anticipation the birth of a expressionism few years later almost 12 years later.

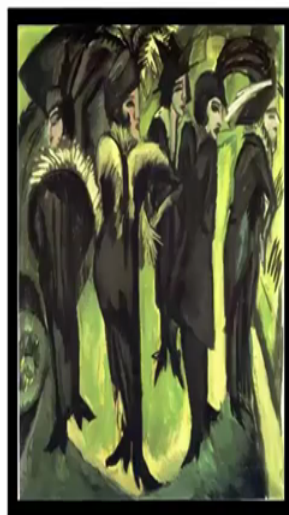
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Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
1880 - 1938
Self-portrait as a Soldier
1915

Now, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and if you look at his paintings his harsh lines, then of course, its awkward anatomy you can see that how the painter is trying to dissolve that gap and the distance between the artist and the art, because art instead of letting art follow a certain given norm.

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Kirchner
Five Women at the Street
1913

These painters were trying to produce art in a way that the art the procedure of painting the forms the language, the idiom all together the style of art would follow a certain

psychological makeup of the artists and their intentions. Hence you find as a result a lot of what is called for the want of better word distortion.

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Kirchner
Street 1908

For example, German expressionist paintings in many paintings you find lot of elongations presence of elongated figures and you also find figures being painted and drawn avoiding completely any kind of academic realism.

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- Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
- Street Scene, Berlin
- 1913

So, over the years, it developed a style of its own. For example, when you look at this painting which means depicts a very normal scene of a street scene in Berlin painted in

1913; even there the painting is not at least the feel of the painting is not very objective; it is not an objective visual record of a street scene in Berlin; it is pretty obvious from the way the entire thing has been composed. And certain kind of spatial congestion has been deliberately created to make you feel a sense of suffocation despite the presence of some elegant men and women or for that matter this painting by Rotluff.

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**Karl Schmidt-Rotluff
(1884 - 1976)**

Where you can see the figures almost look like wooden figures like sculpted figures even their entire background the landscape also looks like a sculpted landscape.

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So, German expressionist painters beside selecting different kind of subject matters and different norms of painting they were also pretty free with this style of painting they were very they were a kind of exploring an exercising the freedom to the extent that in their art in their painting.

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You come across figuration certain kind of figurations and a certain kind of color pallet which you have not seen before and in this context one should remember that it is German expressionist artists who also gave a lot of importance to another medium which was hider to slightly neglected at least within the practice of art it was quite profusely used in the a field of reproduction and book publishing.

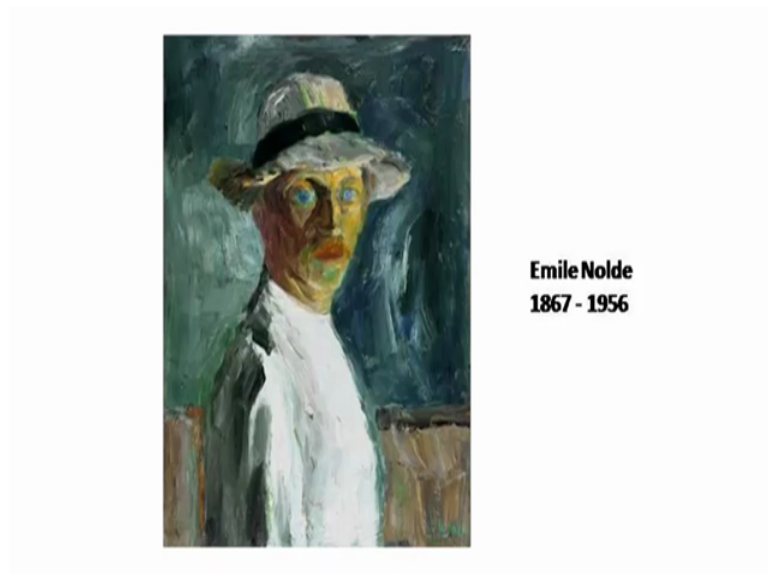
But in the field of art print making was a neglected medium.

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Now, German expressionist artists wanted to make their art accessible to common people and they also did not mind to get their art works painted in a number of additions. So, an art work loses its uniqueness because now you can have many additions because you are using the print making medium and because you have many additions many prints of the same work it can reach a number of people. So, in a sense democratizing art was one of their issues.

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Emile Nolde
1867 - 1956

That this German expressionist painters and artist followed an as a result, if you look at the whole range of German expressionist art a substantial amount of the art was produced from that movement would be prints.

It could be lithography leno cart etch in or wood cart beside of course, paintings Emil Nolde was another impulsive painter from this movement.

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The Last Supper 1909

Who also used religious traditional subject matters like the last supper, but evidently there is an element of subversion there is an element of ridicule and of course, Nolde is interpreting this iconic moment in a very contemporary setting and mindset.

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The Dance around the Golden Calf 1909

Nolde is also very well known for his extremely free brush strokes what could be considered as a lack of knowledge about; how to use pigment properly he leaves his pigments often in a raw state.

But, perhaps it is this rawness of his paintings that became very much that made his paintings very much a part of German expressionist art movement.

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Erich Heckel

Similarly, Erich Heckel one more artist from that same movement.

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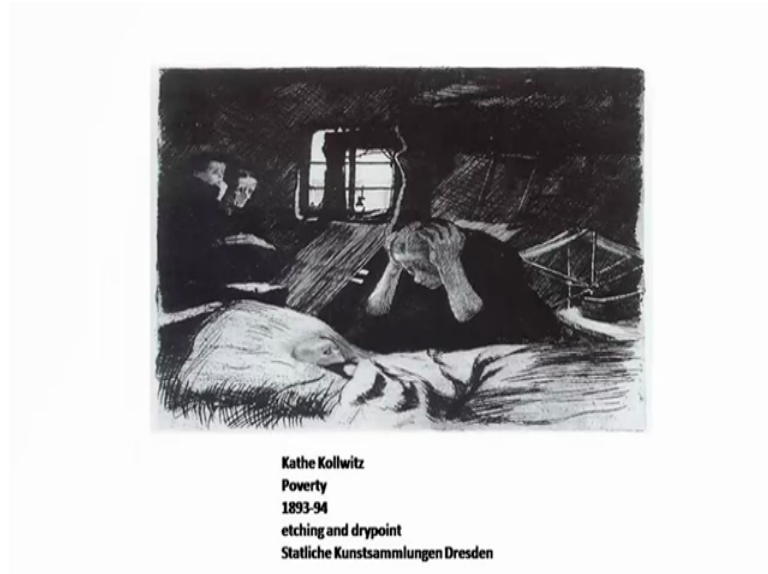


And you can see in this paintings and print makings how Erich Heckel by using or taking advantage of the print making is creating angular faces with a an expression of agony because in most of these art works created by German expressionist artists the sense of agony is very evident and also tension lot of tension lot of agony nobody not a single figure in any German expressionist art seems to be very comfortable with what they are.

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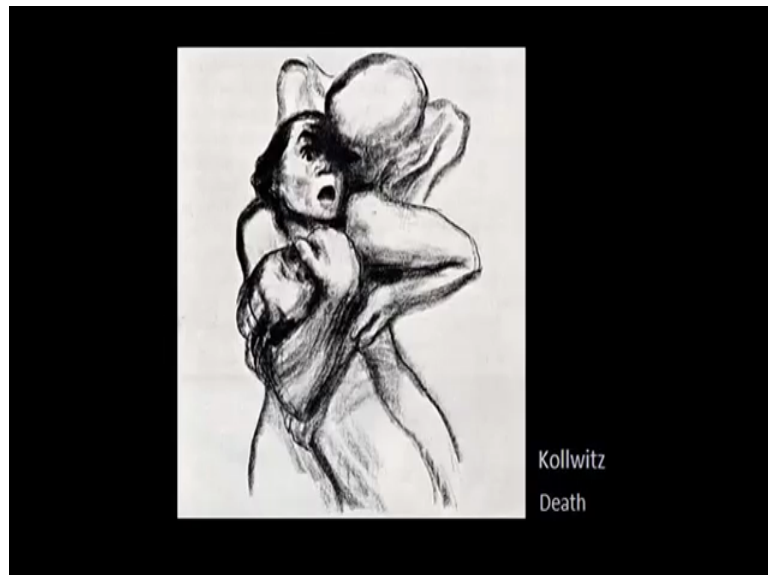


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Perhaps, this is a reflection of the agonized and a terrified world around and that is also one of the reasons why we have an artist like Kathe Kollwitz who way back from the 1893 and 94 has been painting and drawing and also printing images of people who are depraved people who are suffering people for whom death is like a regular companion.

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And for example, when you look at this drawing by Kathe Kollwitz you can say how Kathe; she is personally find death as a regular occurrence.

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Women with a dead child

And she is also trying to address humanity as a helpless kind of community particularly those people belonging to those sections of society who have always been in utter poverty and neglect.

So, Kathe Kollwitz is addressing these topics as her name concerned.

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Der Blaue Reiter

Der Blaue Reiter (the Blue Rider) was a group of artists whose publications and exhibitions sought to find a common creative ground between the various Expressionist art forms. Kandinsky, Marc and Macke were among its founding members.

Then we have the Blaue Reiter in English; it could be call the Blaue Reiter another group or section in German expressionism and their publications and exhibition exhibitions up to find a common creative ground between the various expressionist art forms Wassily

Kandinsky Marc France mark, then Macke August Macke were among its founder members.

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Die Blaue Reiter



- A second group of German artists formed a group known as Die Blaue Reiter, or The Blue Rider. The name came from a painting by one of the artists in the group: Wassily Kandinsky.
- These artists were centered in the southern German city of Munich.

So, it is a second group of German artists formed which formed this group called the die Blaue Reiter or the Blaue Reiter and the name came from a painting by one of the artists in the group Wassily Kandinsky these artists were centered in the southern German city of Munich whereas, the bridge was formed in Dresden.

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The Blue Rider School

- Some of the Artists associated with the Blue Rider School were:
 - Wassily Kandinsky 1866 – 1944
 - Paul Klee 1879 – 1940
 - Franz Marc 1880 – 1916

Now, Paul Klee was also a member of this group or at least associated with this group they were many artist who were not necessarily or directly members of this group, but there were quite a few artists who were associated with this blue rider's school or blue rider group.

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- Kandinsky is thought to be the first artist to cross the line into pure abstraction.
- The Post Impressionists had begun the movement away from realism. The Fauves took liberties with colour and abandoned the effort to portray space in three dimensions.
- The German Expressionists were more interested in exploring psychological inner worlds than in faithfully depicting the natural world.
- Now Kandinsky completely abandoned the necessity of using subject matter that referenced the natural world.

Within the context of German expressionism, Kandinsky's paintings might look a little surprising because he is the only one or perhaps the first artist to cross the line into pure abstraction the post impressionists had begun the movement away from realism the fauves took liberties with color and abandoned the effort to portray space in 3 dimensions.

The German expressionists were more interested in exploring psychological inner worlds than in faithfully depicting the natural world and now Kandinsky completely abandoned the necessity of using any reference any subject matter of the or from the natural world.

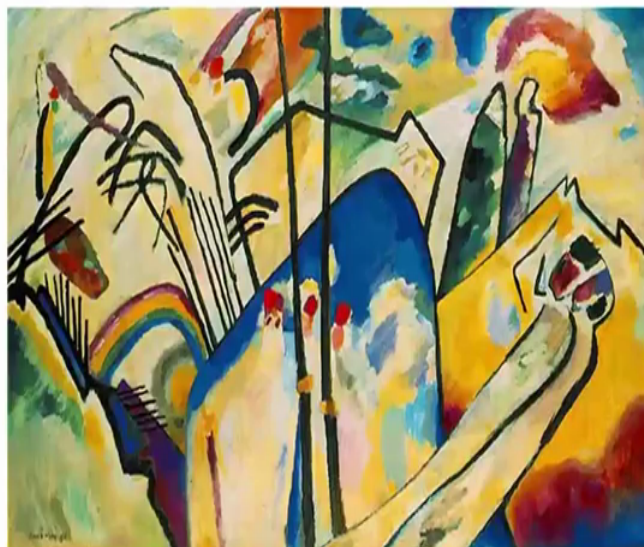
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Kandinsky – Transverse Line



Now, you look at this painting traverse line by Kandinsky; there is not a single element which has any referential connection with the outer world what he is using here is pure abstract visual elements like lines shapes of various kinds circles triangles spheres curvilinear lines arranged in a way that even the arrangement does not make any sense to the real world.

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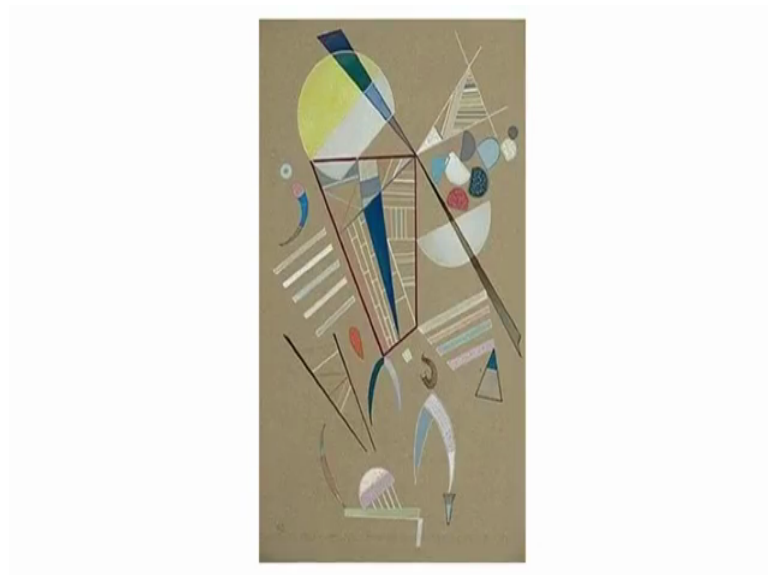
But of course, Kandinsky is one artist; who was doing these paintings abstract paintings very consciously.

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And he was to a great extent successful also because he was able to connect his abstraction with the abstraction of music Kandinsky was perhaps the first artist who have done that and he often fell the experience of painting music on the converse or on paper and music is something abstract music does not have any tangible visual reality. So, this connection is pretty convincing and it is also more convincing.

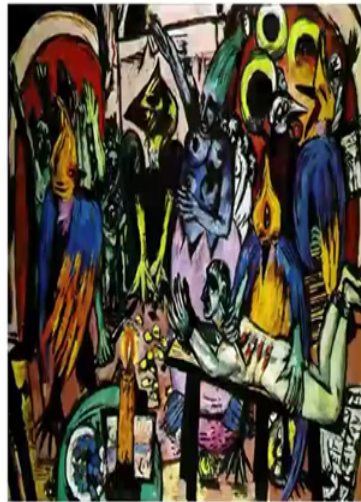
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Because not 1 or 2, but throughout his life Kandinsky has painted 100s of such paintings exploring the possibilities of abstract visual elements either to create certain sensation of

the world certain deeper philosophical significance of the world or to create the experience of music through visual elements.

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Bird hell



Dancing bar

And in the same group we also have somebody like big man who was painting purely figurative works, but once again never following the classical or traditional or realistic or representational world or norm he is also drawing his inspirations from mythologies old legends in stories, but basically there was a strong sense of a social interpretation in his works.

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Gezang der Intellektuellen:
Nehmen Sie den Leib, Gut, Ehr, Kind und Weib,
der Geist muß uns doch bleiben!



The life of a socialist

Which becomes even more jocular and in the hands of for example, orthotics or in the hands of a other German expressionist painters and artists who started ridicule in the society particularly the bourgeois society and one of the famous artists whose works you can see here is George gross who was extremely popular because of his un inhabitant kind of a and extremely incisive sharp political comments on the people whom he thought where exploiting the common people exploiting the society and George gross was trying to unmask them.

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Defining Characteristics

"Goal to express feelings in the most direct and extreme fashion possible. . . extreme distortion to express an inner emotional reality rather than surface appearances"; S. S. Prawer (*Caligari's Children*) raises the possibility that this distortion is quite "real"-- e.g., Caligari sees aspects of the world not readily apparent to others.

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,
Robert Wiene, 1919



So, there are certain defining characteristic features which shaped German expressionism and before we wind up we must mention that in the context of German expressionism apart from hundreds of paintings few sculptures lot of writings even a film was made in 1919; call the cabinet of Doctor Caligari and the fact that the goal was to express feelings in the most direct and extreme fashion possible extreme distortion to express and inner emotional reality rather than surface appearances and it raises the possibility that this distortion is quite real for example, Caligari sees aspects of the world not readily apparent to others.

So, the cabinet of Doctor Caligari is a kind of an epitome of German expressionist thoughts ideas and feelings it more or less embodies everything stylistic features the philosophical framework even the perceptual social and political take on the

contemporary times; it manifests the embodies everything their German expressionism is all about.

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- Narrative structure--legends, the supernatural, horror (but psychological)
- Distortion, stylization of sets, costumes, makeup, acting, lighting



The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,
Robert Wiene, 1919

In fact, if you go through the film even if you do not watch the film if you look at certain shots in sequences like this; you will be amazed to see that way back in 1919; almost 100 years from back from today in cabinet of Doctor Caligori you could see an extreme experiment with the narrative structure how the legends are were being continuously upturn and subverted and the elements of super natural horror psychological issues an; obviously, leading to distortion stylize a stylization of sets then costumes of course, extremely macabre and bizarre makeups and very strange kind of acting enlighting all handmade.

So, German expressionism is not merely an art movement it was a cultural movement that left its impact deeply on the history of the modern art of the west.

Thank you.