

MAJOR MoMA EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS EXTRAORDINARY, CATALYTIC ROLE OF PRINTMAKING IN THE GERMAN EXPRESSIONIST MOVEMENT OF THE EARLY 20th CENTURY

German Expressionism: The Graphic Impulse

March 27–July 11, 2011

The Joan and Preston Robert Tisch Exhibition Gallery, sixth floor

Press Preview: Tuesday, March 22, 2011, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
Invitations to follow.

NEW YORK, February 24, 2011—*German Expressionism: The Graphic Impulse* focuses on the explosive production of graphic art—prints, drawings, posters, illustrated books, and periodicals—associated with Expressionism, the broad modernist movement that developed in Germany and Austria during the early decades of the 20th century. The movement encompasses a host of individuals and groups with varying stylistic approaches who shared a commitment to intense, personal expression and the desire to achieve a heightened awareness of what it is to be human. A confluence of forces—esthetic, social, political, and commercial—encouraged virtually every painter and sculptor working in Germany at the time to take up the graphic mediums, giving rise to an unprecedented renaissance, particularly in printmaking. This graphic impulse extends from the birth of Expressionism, around 1905, through the difficult war years of the 1910s into the turbulent postwar years of the early 1920s. Artists in the exhibition include Max Beckmann, Otto Dix, George Grosz, Erich Heckel, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Oskar Kokoschka, Emil Nolde, Max Pechstein, and Egon Schiele. Organized by Starr Figura, The Phyllis Ann and Walter Borten Associate Curator of Prints and Illustrated Books, The Museum of Modern Art, the exhibition is on view from March 27 to July 11, 2011.

The exhibition, featuring more than 250 works by nearly 30 artists, is drawn from The Museum of Modern Art's exceptional holdings of German Expressionist prints, enhanced by selected drawings, paintings, and sculptures from the Museum's collection. Expressionist books and periodicals from the Museum's Library and posters from the Architecture and Design collection are also included. The first major exhibition devoted to German Expressionism at MoMA since 1957, it marks the culmination of a major four-year grant from the Annenberg Foundation to digitize, catalog, and conserve all of the approximately 3,200 Expressionist works on paper in the Museum's collection. MoMA's holdings represent one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of this material outside Germany. Through the generosity of the grant, all 3,200 works are accessible to the public on the Museum's website, where a major online feature has been designed for both general audiences desiring an introduction to Expressionism, and for researchers and specialists who wish to study the works in greater detail.

The Expressionists took up printmaking with a dedication and fervor virtually unparalleled in the history of art. The woodcut, with its jagged gouges and boldly flattened, primitivizing aesthetic, is known as the preeminent Expressionist medium, but the Expressionists also revolutionized the mediums of etching and lithography to alternately vibrant and stark effect. Through printmaking the Expressionists were able to pioneer key formal innovations, to disseminate their images and ideas more broadly, and to engage with the urgent social and political issues of the day.

The exhibition is organized in loosely chronological order, starting with three intimate galleries devoted to the three distinct urban centers in which Expressionism first arose: Dresden, where the artists' group Brücke (Bridge), which included artists Heckel, Kirchner, and Pechstein, was formed in 1905; Munich, where the artist association Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider) was established in 1911 by Vasily Kandinsky and Franz Marc; and Vienna, where an Austrian strain of Expressionism first began to express itself around 1908 and was represented by two major figures, Kokoschka and Schiele. The Brücke artists made printmaking a cornerstone of their practice from the very beginning; Heckel's woodcut *Fränzi Reclining* (1910) reflects the inspiration they took from the "primitive" aesthetic of African and Oceanic sculptures and masks. Although printmaking was not as constant a preoccupation for the Blaue Reiter artists, Kandinsky and Marc embraced the woodcut, with its flattened perspective and reductive forms, as an important vehicle in their quest toward abstraction. Kandinsky's book *Klänge* (1913) includes 56 stunningly evocative woodcuts, created from 1907 to 1912, that effectively trace his development from figuration to abstraction. For Kokoschka and Schiele, a highly expressive, linear draftsmanship served as the foundation for psychologically charged portraits and nudes. The sharply scratched lines and prickled edges that define the figures in Schiele's etchings *Squatting Woman* (1914) and *Sorrow* (1914) enhance the discomfort of their awkwardly contorted poses.

In the next gallery, a larger space represents the broadening of Expressionism after 1910, when the center of the movement began to shift to Berlin. Many of the Brücke, Blaue Reiter, and Viennese artists gravitated to Berlin, as did a number of other, more independent figures, including Lyonel Feininger, Conrad Felixmüller, Wilhem Lehmbruck, Ludwig Meidner, and Emil Nolde. The movement thus gained broader momentum as the various strains of Expressionism had the opportunity to mingle with one another. A number of important Berlin-based dealers, such as Paul Cassirer, Herwarth Walden, and J.B. Neumann, began to promote the movement in various ways, including publishing and distributing prints. The dissemination of printed art helped to perpetuate the movement and propel it forward over the next decade.

During these years, a number of crucial themes came more prominently to the fore, including the enticing yet sordid experience of modern urban life; the naked body and its potential to signify primal emotion; the enduring solace associated with nature and religion; and emotionally charged portraiture. These recurring themes are explored at various moments throughout the exhibition.

When World War I erupted in 1914, it dealt a devastating blow to Expressionism's momentum. Many Expressionists enlisted for active duty or were drafted; others served in the medical corps. A large gallery focusing on the war is dominated by Otto Dix's monumental portfolio of 50 shockingly unflinching etchings, *The War*, which was based on his own service in the trenches. It is the largest of several major portfolios dealing with the horror and destruction of the war that were created in the 1920s, when the war was over but many artists were still using their art to exorcise its bitter legacy. Others included in the exhibition are Käthe Kollwitz's *War* (1923), with seven woodcuts focusing on the devastation felt by the families left behind; and Grosz's *God with Us* (1920), which cynically attacks German militarism. The opportunity to see the Dix and Kollwitz portfolios in their entirety is one of the highlights of the exhibition.

With the war's end in 1918, a political revolution in Germany led to the creation of Germany's first democracy, the Weimar Republic. Many artists became politically engaged, creating prints and posters that directly addressed the new social and political challenges. In 1919, Pechstein, Rudi Feld, and Heinz Fuchs created large, colorful, stridently designed posters that festooned kiosks and walls throughout Berlin and urged citizens against the mob violence and anarchy that threatened to destroy the fragile new society, which was suffering from unemployment, inflation, and food shortages. Kollwitz created prints and posters calling attention to humanitarian causes, from starvation in Austria to the plight of the elderly. In his major lithographic series *Hell* (1919), Beckmann took a nightmarish look at the danger, chaos, and privations in Berlin, through fragmented views, compressed spaces, and contorted figures whose bodies sometimes jut outside his pictures' frames. For many of these artists, the starkness of black-and-white printmaking provided the most appropriate means for social and political commentary.

By the early 1920s, artists in Germany had become increasingly disaffected. The final gallery of the exhibition focuses on the new style that emerged as an outgrowth of Expressionism during the postwar climate of disillusion. Marked by cynicism and diffidence, the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity, or, as it was sometimes known at the time, post-Expressionism) involved greater detail and clarity and a harsher material truth. Portraiture was the dominant genre associated with this style, and Beckmann, Dix, and Grosz were its leading practitioners. Their works, including Beckmann's coldly detailed etching *Self Portrait in Bowler Hat* (1921), and Dix's acidly colored lithograph *Procuress* (1923), emphasize the skepticism and decadence of postwar German society.

The print boom associated with Expressionism reached its apex in the postwar years, when inflation followed by hyperinflation devalued the German currency to such an extent that art became one of the most secure investments. Prints, as a more affordable art form, were in the highest demand. Print portfolios were especially popular, as the multiple-image format provided artists with a more expansive way of tackling complex themes. Dramatic portfolios such as Beckmann's *Trip to Berlin* (1922), Dix's *Nine Woodcuts* (1922), Grosz's *In the Shadows* (1921),

and Pechstein's *The Lord's Prayer* (1921) confront the contradictions and uncertainties of postwar life. But in 1924, after the government enacted measures to stabilize the currency, the German art market collapsed and, with it, one of the most innovative, prolific, and impassioned periods in the history of the graphic arts came to an end.

SPONSORSHIP:

The exhibition is made possible by the Annenberg Foundation's GRoW project, in conjunction with its generous support of the Museum's German Expressionist Digital Archive Project.

The publication and website are made possible by Gregory Weingarten and the Annenberg Foundation. The Museum gratefully acknowledges Gregory Weingarten for his outstanding commitment to the conservation, cataloging, and digitization of over 3,000 of the Museum's German Expressionist works on paper, resulting in a major exhibition, publication, website, and searchable online collection of this important body of work.

Additional support is provided by David Teiger and by The Museum of Modern Art's Research and Scholarly Publications endowment established through the generosity of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Edward John Noble Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. Perry R. Bass, and the National Endowment for the Humanities' Challenge Grant Program.

PUBLICATION:

The major publication accompanying the exhibition features more than 250 full-color plates showcasing MoMA's remarkable holdings of German Expressionist prints along with a careful selection of drawings, paintings, and sculptures from the Museum's collection. Essays by curator Starr Figura and Peter Jelavich, Professor of History, Johns Hopkins University, discuss the centrality of printmaking in German Expressionism and describe the movement's sociocultural backdrop. An illustrated chronology by Iris Schmeisser provides a richly textured account of the interwoven strands of art, culture, and politics during the Expressionist era in Germany. Detailed notes on the artists and print publishers highlight the significance of printmaking to the movement. Available at the MoMA stores and online at [MoMAStore.org](https://www.moma.org/store). Hardcover, 12h x 9.5w x 1"d. 288 pages, 304 illustrations. Price: \$60.00.

WEBSITE:

A major website on German Expressionism, [MoMA.org/germanexpressionism](https://www.moma.org/germanexpressionism), is dedicated to the Museum's vast holdings of more than 3,200 Expressionist works on paper. The site comprises two complementary, interconnected sections that enable visitors to explore various aspects of the movement and to browse and search the collection online using various selective filters.

The first section is designed to provide an overview of the Expressionist movement and the significance of works on paper within it, inviting visitors to explore the various styles and groups associated with Expressionism; the major themes treated by the Expressionists; and the printmaking techniques used by the Expressionists. Additional features are devoted to the major artists and print publishers, and to illustrated books, portfolios, and periodicals —formats to which the Expressionists repeatedly gravitated. For the illustrated books, a special page-turning animation has been developed, which enables visitors to virtually page through all of the illustrations in each of 27 volumes.

The second section of the site is a searchable online collection, which allows visitors to browse and search all of the more than 3,200 Expressionist prints, drawings, paintings, and sculptures in the Museum's collection. Search filters allow for the material to be sorted according to artist, date,

technique, or theme. The zoom feature is available with all works. Other special features include a chronology of the Expressionist era detailing the major cultural and political events, and an interactive map of Germany that allows visitors to explore the geographical underpinnings of selected works. The site launches on March 27, but will be up for preview starting on March 22, 2011.

PROGRAM:

Disseminating Expressionism: The Role of Prints, 1905–1924

Friday, May 6, 2011, 1:00–5:00 p.m.

Theater 3 (The Celeste Bartos Theater), mezzanine, The Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Education and Research Building

This half-day symposium centers on the potential of the print as a medium for the dissemination of art and ideas. Scholars will address the print's ability to represent formal innovations and aesthetic goals, to communicate issues of war and national pride, and to appear alongside news, commentary, and literature in publications and periodicals. Participants include Shulamith Behr, Timothy Benson, Meike Hoffmann, Peter Jelavich, Rose-Carol Washton Long, and Christian Weikop. Moderated by Starr Figura. Tickets (\$10; \$8 members; \$5 students, seniors, staff of other museums) can be purchased online or at the lobby information desk and the film desk.

AUDIO:

An audio program featuring commentary by Starr Figura is available at the Museum free of charge, courtesy of Bloomberg; on MoMAWiFi (MoMA.org/momawifi); and as a podcast on MoMA.org/audio and iTunes. MoMA Audio is a collaboration between The Museum of Modern Art and Acoustiguide, Inc. Available in English only.

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For downloadable high-resolution images, register at MoMA.org/press.

Public Information:

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MoMA.org
InsideOut, A MoMA/MoMA PS1 Blog
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Hours: Wednesday through Monday: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Friday: 10:30 a.m.-8:00 p.m.
Closed Tuesday

Museum Admission: \$20 adults; \$16 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$12 full-time students with current I.D. Free, members and children 16 and under. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). Target Free Friday Nights 4:00-8:00 p.m.

Film Admission: \$10 adults; \$8 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D. \$6 full-time students with current I.D. (For admittance to film programs only)