

# Expressionism

## When?

End of 19<sup>th</sup> century, 1910s (50s and 80s)

## Where?

Northern Europe (U.S.A. and Europe)

Expressionism is a term used to denote distortion and exaggeration aiming for a strong emotional effect, which surfaced in the arts in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Expressionist artists aim to represent the subjective emotions and responses that objects and events arouse in them. Their work is not realistic and often they obtain their aim through distortion, exaggeration and fantasy. In a broader sense Expressionism is one of the main currents of art in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Its qualities of highly subjective, personal, **spontaneous self-expression** are typical of a wide range of modern artists and art movements. Unlike Impressionism, Expressionism's goal is not to reproduce the impression suggested by the vision of reality, but to strongly impose the artist's own sensibility to the world's representation. Because of their wavy lines and the vivid contrast of colors, used to convey personal feelings, the paintings by Vincent Van Gogh (1789-1874), Paul Gauguin and Edward Munch (1863-1944) are early examples of expressionist art. After the Second World War expressionism became abstract (Abstract Expressionism) and later on, in the 80s, represented a new figurative trend in western art.

## Die Brücke

Die Brücke (The Bridge) was the first Expressionist movement. In 1905 a group of German artists came together in Dresden (Germany) and chose that name to indicate the intention to create an art that would serve as a bridge to the future. Dissatisfied with contemporary German art, Die Brücke artists turned to the primitive tribal arts and the art of medieval Europe. The artists of Die Brücke drew inspiration from Van Gogh, Gauguin and Munch. Among Die Brücke's artists were Ernst Kirchner, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Erich Heckel.

**Subject matter** Many Die Brücke works deal with modern concerns: urban scenes expressing the tension of city life and country or exotic scenes filled with and the nostalgia for simpler times. Human figures and portraits are featured too and show a particular relationship with the environment.

**Formal aspects** Expressionist artworks are based on the idea that formal elements can embody emotions and feeling. Colour and lines, made with agitated brushstrokes, disjointed space, massive forms, in sculpture and architecture, are organized to endow the work with some kind of movement, often emphasize by distortion. Wild effects are obtained using high saturated complementary colors. There is a powerful sense of violence, contained with difficulty, in much of expressionist art but even dynamic energy, simple rhythms, and visual tension. Rather than being just a style, expressionism is a way to conceive art that affects not only the

fine arts but also dance, cinema, literature and theatre. The achievement that had the most lasting value was their revival of graphic arts, in particular, the woodcut using bold and simplified forms resulting from the medium employed.



Explore a painting by E.L. Kirchner here: <http://www.artsconnected.org/resource/2571/17/seated-girl-fr-nzi-fehrmann>

Learn more about his paintings here

<http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2008/kirchner/kirchner.html>