

# 8

## Expressionism in Germany

In its most general sense, “expressionism” is a term that has been applied by art historians to tendencies recurring in the arts since antiquity. The aim of all art is, of course, to communicate, to express ideas or sentiments that evoke responses in the viewer. But in the early twentieth century, the term was applied to art that conveyed, through a wide range of styles and subject matter (or in the case of abstract art, no subject at all), the emotions and spiritual preoccupations of the artist—what Vasily Kandinsky called “inner necessity.” Herwarth Walden, critic, poet, musician, and the founder in 1910 of the German avant-garde periodical *Der Sturm* (The Storm), drew the distinction between new, revolutionary tendencies after the turn of the century and Impressionism. Expressionist artists, including the Fauves (see chapter 7), built on the discoveries of the Post-Impressionists, who rejected Impressionist devotion to optical veracity and turned inward to the world of the spirit. They employed many languages to give visible form to their feelings, but generally they relied on simple, powerful forms that were realized in a manner of direct, sometimes crude expression, designed to heighten the emotional response of the viewer. The essence of their art was the expression of inner meaning through outer form.

Important forerunners of Expressionism included Van Gogh, Munch, Klimt, Hodler, Ensor, Böcklin, Klinger, and Kubin. However, the young Expressionists in Germany also drew inspiration from their own native traditions of medieval sculpture and folk or children’s art, as well as the art of other cultures, especially Africa and Oceania. In contrast to the Fauves, whose stylistic affinities were never expressed through a formal artistic grouping, German Expressionism involved the formation of groups of artists in several cities, primarily Dresden, Munich, and Berlin. We will see that separate developments also took place in Vienna. The period of German Expressionism began in 1905 with the establishment of the new artists’ alliance known as Die Brücke (The Bridge) in Dresden, and lasted until the end of World War I, when radical Dada

artists (see chapter 13) in Germany rejected all forms of Expressionism in their turn. Many Expressionist artists welcomed World War I as a new dawn that would see the destruction of an old, moribund order. But as the horror in the trenches dragged on, the war took its toll on artists: some died in battle; others suffered psychological trauma and profound spiritual disillusionment.

### Making it Personal: Modersohn-Becker and Nolde

Paula Modersohn-Becker (1876–1907) was born in Dresden and settled in the artists’ colony at Worpswede near Bremen in 1897. Although she was not associated with any group outside of the provincial school of painters at Worpswede, Modersohn-Becker was in touch with new developments in art and literature through her friendship with the poet Rainer Maria Rilke (who had been Rodin’s secretary), as well as through a number of visits to Paris. In these she discovered successively the French Barbizon painters, the Impressionists, and then, in 1905 and 1906, the works of Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Cézanne. Following this last trip, she embarked on a highly productive and innovative period, distilling and simplifying forms while heightening the expressiveness of color. In her extensive letters and diaries, the artist wrote of her desire for an art of direct emotion, of poetic expression, of simplicity and sensitivity to nature: “Personal feeling is the main thing. After I have clearly set it down in form and color, I must introduce those elements from nature that will make my picture look natural.” She worried about the implications of marriage and motherhood for her professional life and, tragically, died prematurely following the birth of her only child, leaving us with only a suggestion of what she might have achieved. But in works such as *Self-Portrait with Camellia Branch* (fig. 8.1) there is a clear grasp of the broad simplification of color areas she had seen in Gauguin as well as in the Egyptian and early classical art she had studied at the Louvre.



**8.1** Paula Modersohn-Becker, *Self-Portrait with Camellia Branch*, 1907. Oil on paperboard, 27½ × 11¾" (62 × 30 cm). Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany.

Emil Nolde (1867–1956) was the son of a farmer from northwestern Germany, near the Danish border. The reactionary, rural values of this area had a profound effect on his art and his attitude toward nature. Strong emotional ties to the landscape and yearning for a regeneration of the German spirit and its art characterized the popular *völkisch* or nationalist tradition. Early in his career, Nolde depicted the landscape and peasants of this region in paintings

reminiscent of the French artist Millet (see fig. 1.19). As an adult, he even took as his surname Nolde, the name of his native village (he was born Emil Hansen), to underscore a strong identification with the land.

As a youth, Nolde studied woodcarving and worked for a time as a designer of furniture and decorative arts in Berlin. His first paintings, of mountains transformed into giants or hideous trolls, drew on qualities of traditional Germanic fantasy. The commercial success of some of these images enabled Nolde to return to school and to take up painting seriously in Munich, where he encountered the work of contemporary artists such as Adolph Menzel and Arnold Böcklin (see fig. 5.24), and then in Paris. While in Paris in 1899–1900, he, like so many art students, worked his way gradually from the study of Daumier and Delacroix to Manet and the Impressionists, and his color took on a new brilliance and violence as a result of his exposure to the latter. In 1906 he accepted an invitation to become a member of the Dresden group Die Brücke. Essentially a solitary person, Nolde left Die Brücke after a year and devoted himself increasingly to a personal form of Expressionist religious paintings and prints.

Among his first visionary religious paintings was *The Last Supper* of 1909 (fig. 8.2). When compared with celebrated old master paintings of Jesus among his disciples, such as Rembrandt's *Christ at Emmaus* or even Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*, Nolde's mood is markedly different from the quiet restraint of these earlier works. His figures are crammed into a practically nonexistent space, the red of their robes and the yellow-green of their faces flaring like torches out of the surrounding shadow. The faces



**8.2** Emil Nolde, *The Last Supper*, 1909. Oil on canvas, 33¾ × 42¾" (86 × 107 cm). Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen.

themselves are skull-like masks that derive from the carnival processions of Ensor (see fig. 5.23). Here, however, they are given intense personalities—no longer masked and inscrutable fantasies but individualized human beings passionately involved in a situation of extreme drama. The compression of the group packed within the frontal plane of the painting—again stemming from Ensor—heightens the sense of impending crisis.

Nolde believed in the ethnic superiority of Nordic people. In 1920 he became a member of the National Socialist or Nazi party. His art was for a time tolerated by Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's minister of propaganda, but by 1934 it was officially condemned by the Nazis as stylistically too experimental—"primitive" and "un-German." In 1936, like other Expressionist artists in Germany, he was banned from working. Over one thousand of Nolde's works were among the sixteen thousand sculptures, paintings, prints, and drawings by avant-garde artists that were confiscated from German museums by Nazi officials. In 1937 many of these were included in a massive exhibition called "Entartete Kunst," or "Degenerate Art" (see fig. 13.44). Designed to demonstrate the so-called decadent art that offended the Nazi government, which preferred watered-down classicist depictions of muscular Aryan workers, pretty nudes, or insipid genre scenes, the exhibition contained art in a tremendous range of styles and featured work by most of the artists discussed in this chapter. During four months in Munich, the exhibition was seen by two million visitors, a staggering attendance even by the standard of today's "blockbuster" exhibitions. Many of the works exhibited, including several by Nolde, were later destroyed by the Nazis, or lost during World War II.

## Joining the Revolution: Die Brücke

In 1905 Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, and Fritz Bleyl formed an association they called Die Brücke—the bridge linking "all the revolutionary and fermenting elements." These young architecture students, all of whom wanted to be painters, were drawn together by their opposition to the art that surrounded them, especially academic art and fashionable Impressionism, rather than by any preconceived program. Imbued with the spirit of Arts and Crafts and Jugendstil (see chapter 5), they rented an empty shop in a workers' district of Dresden, in eastern Germany, and began to paint, sculpt, and make woodcuts together. The influences on them were many and varied: the art of medieval Germany, of the French Fauves, of Edvard Munch, of non-Western sculpture. For them, Van Gogh was the clearest example of an artist driven by an "inner force" and "inner necessity"; his paintings presented an ecstatic identification or empathy of the artist with the subject he was interpreting. The graphic works of Munch were widely known in Germany by 1905, and the artist himself was spending most of his time there. His obsession with symbolic

subjects struck a sympathetic chord in young German artists, and from his mastery of the graphic techniques they could learn much. Although they worked in many media, it was probably their intensive study of the possibilities of woodcut that did most to formulate their styles and to clarify their directions. Among historic styles, the most exciting discovery was art from Africa and the South Pacific, of which notable collections existed in the Dresden Ethnographic Museum.

In 1906 Nolde and Max Pechstein joined Die Brücke. In the same year Heckel, then working for an architect, persuaded a manufacturer for whom he had executed a showroom to permit the Brücke artists to exhibit there. This was the historic first Brücke exhibition, which marked the emergence of twentieth-century German Expressionism. Little information about the exhibition has survived, since no catalogue was issued, and it attracted virtually no attention.

During the next few years the Brücke painters exhibited together and produced publications designed by members and manifestos in which Kirchner's ideas were most evident. The human figure was studied assiduously in the way Rodin had studied the nude: not posed formally but simply existing in the environment. Despite developing differences in style among the artists, a hard, Gothic angularity permeated many of their works.

The Brücke painters were conscious of the revolution that the Fauves were creating in Paris and were affected by their use of color. However, their own paintings maintained a Germanic sense of expressive subject matter and a characteristically jagged, Gothic structure and form. By 1911 most of the Brücke group were in Berlin, where a new style appeared in their works, reflecting the increasing consciousness of French Cubism (see chapter 10) as well as Fauvism, given a Germanic excitement and narrative impact. By 1913 Die Brücke was dissolved as an association, and the artists proceeded individually.

### Kirchner

The most creative member of Die Brücke was Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938). In addition to his extraordinary output of painting and prints, Kirchner, like Erich Heckel, made large, roughly hewn and painted wooden sculptures. These works in a primitivist mode were a result of the artists' admiration for African and Oceanic art. Kirchner's early ambition to become an artist was reinforced by his discovery of the sixteenth-century woodcuts of Albrecht Dürer and his Late Gothic predecessors. Yet his own first woodcuts, done before 1900, were probably most influenced by Félix Vallotton and Edvard Munch. Between 1901 and 1903 Kirchner studied architecture in Dresden, and then, until 1904, painting in Munich. Here he was attracted to Art Nouveau designs and repelled by the retrograde paintings he saw in the exhibition of the Munich Secession. Like so many of the younger German artists of the time, he was particularly drawn to German



8.3 Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Street, Dresden*, 1908 [dated 1907 on painting]. Oil on canvas, 4'11¼" × 6'6¾" (1.51 × 2 m). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Gothic art. Of modern artists, the first revelation for him was the work of Seurat. Going beyond Seurat's researches, Kirchner undertook studies of nineteenth-century color theories that led him back to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's essay *History of the Theory of Colors*.

Kirchner's painting style about 1904 showed influences from the Neo-Impressionists combined with a larger, more dynamic brushstroke related to that of Van Gogh, whose work he saw, along with paintings by Gauguin and Cézanne, in the exhibition of the Munich Artists' Association held that year. On his return to Dresden and architecture school in 1904 Kirchner became acquainted with Heckel, Schmidt-Rottluff, and Bleyl, and with them, as already noted, he founded the Brücke group.

For subject matter Kirchner looked to contemporary life—landscapes, portraits of friends, and nudes in natural settings—rejecting the artificial trappings of academic studios. In both Dresden and Berlin, where he moved in 1911, he recorded the streets and inhabitants of the city and the bohemian life of its nightclubs, cabarets, and circuses. *Street, Dresden* (fig. 8.3) of 1908 is an assembly of curvilinear figures who undulate like wraiths, moving toward and away from the viewer without individual motive power, drifting in a world of dreams. Kirchner

probably had Munch's street painting *Evening on Karl Johan* in mind when he made this work, and, as was frequently his habit, he reworked it at a much later date. In Berlin he painted a series of street scenes in which the spaces are confined and precipitously tilted, and the figures are elongated into angular shards by long feathered strokes. Kirchner made rapid sketches of these street scenes, then worked up the image in more formal drawings in his studio before making the final paintings. These scenes' strong sense of movement may indicate his borrowing from Italian Futurist painting (see chapter 11), as well as the impact of Cubism, and his distorted Gothic forms express the condition of modern urban life, in which close physical proximity is coupled with extreme psychological distance.

If Kirchner's *Market Place with Red Tower* (fig. 8.4) is compared with one of the French Cubist painter Robert Delaunay's Eiffel Tower studies, the difference between the German and the French vision becomes evident. Delaunay's *Eiffel Tower in Trees* of 1910 (see fig. 10.43) represents an expressive interpretation of Cubism in which the expression is achieved by the dynamism of abstract color shapes and lines. Kirchner's *Market Place* is expressive in a more explicit way. It reveals the artist's knowledge of



**8.4** Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Market Place with Red Tower*, 1915. Oil on canvas, 47½ × 35⅞" (120.7 × 91.1 cm). Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany.



**8.5** Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Self-Portrait with Cat*, 1919–20. Oil on canvas, 47¼ × 33⅞" (120 × 85 cm). Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Cubist works, but uses Cubist geometry with caution, combining it with defined perspective space distorted in the manner of Van Gogh for the similar end of creating a claustrophobic effect of compression—what Kirchner called the “melancholy of big city streets.”

When World War I broke out Kirchner enlisted in the field artillery, but he suffered a mental and physical breakdown and was discharged in 1915. He recuperated in Switzerland, where he continued to live and work near the town of Davos until his death by suicide in 1938. During this late period in his career Kirchner continued to renew his style, painting many of his older themes along with serene Alpine landscapes and sympathetic portrayals of Swiss peasant life. The Swiss landscape can be seen through the window in Kirchner’s moving *Self-Portrait with Cat* (fig. 8.5), in which the artist’s weary countenance betrays his protracted struggle with illness and depression.

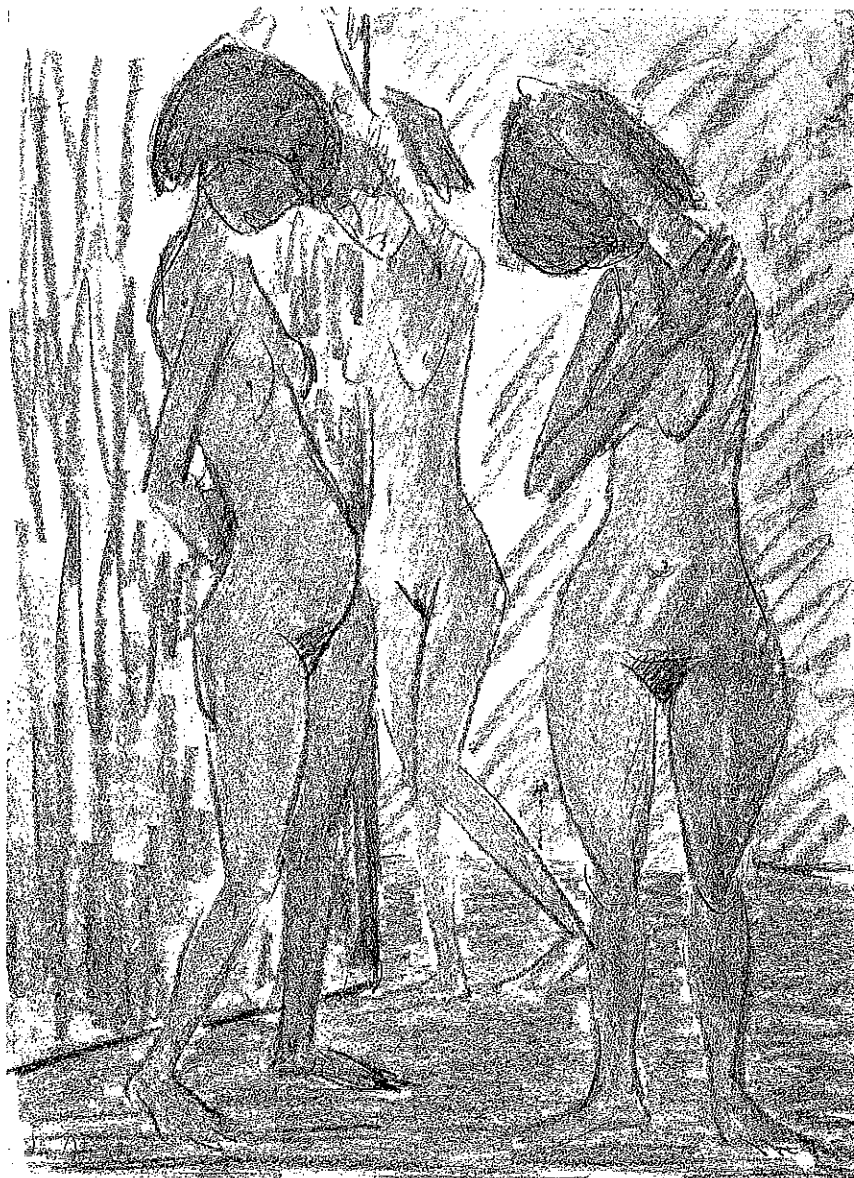
### Heckel, Müller, Pechstein, and Schmidt-Rottluff

Erich Heckel (1883–1970) was a more restrained Expressionist whose early paintings at their best showed flashes of psychological insight and lyricism. After 1920 he turned increasingly to the production of colorful but essentially Romantic–Realist landscapes. A painting such as *Two Men at a Table* (fig. 8.6) evokes a dramatic interplay in which not only the figures but the contracted, tilted space of the room is charged with emotion. This painting, dedicated “to Dostoyevsky,” is almost a literal illustration from the Russian novelist’s *Brothers Karamazov*. The painting of the tortured Christ, the suffering face of the man at the left, the menace of the other—all refer to Ivan’s story, in the novel, of Christ and the Grand Inquisitor.

Using the most delicate and muted colors of all the Brücke painters, Otto Müller (1874–1930) created works that suggest an Oriental elegance in their organization. His nudes are attenuated, awkwardly graceful figures



**8.6** Erich Heckel, *Two Men at a Table*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 38⅞ × 47¼" (96.8 × 120 cm). Kunsthalle, Hamburg.



**8.7** Otto Müller, *Bathing Women*, 1912. Crayon on paper, 17 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 13 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (43.7 × 33.5 cm). Bildarchiv Rheinisches Museum, Cologne.

whose softly outlined, yellow-ocher bodies blend imperceptibly and harmoniously into the green and yellow foliage of their setting (fig. 8.7). He was impressed by ancient Egyptian wall paintings and developed techniques to emulate their muted tonalities. The unidealized, candid depiction of nudes in open nature was among the Brücke artists' favorite subjects. They saw the nude as a welcome release from nineteenth-century prudery and a liberating plunge into primal experience. As Nolde proclaimed, echoing the widely shared, if unwittingly patronizing, view of "primitive" peoples that was current at the time, "Primordial peoples live in their nature, are one with it and are a part of the entire universe." The relative gentleness of Müller's treatment of this theme found an echo in the contemporary photographs of the German-born photographer **Heinrich Kühn** (1866–1944), who, like early twentieth-century modernists in painting, sought to flatten space and create a more two-dimensional design—a Pictorial effect, as the photographers would have said—by viewing his subject or scene from above (fig. 8.8).



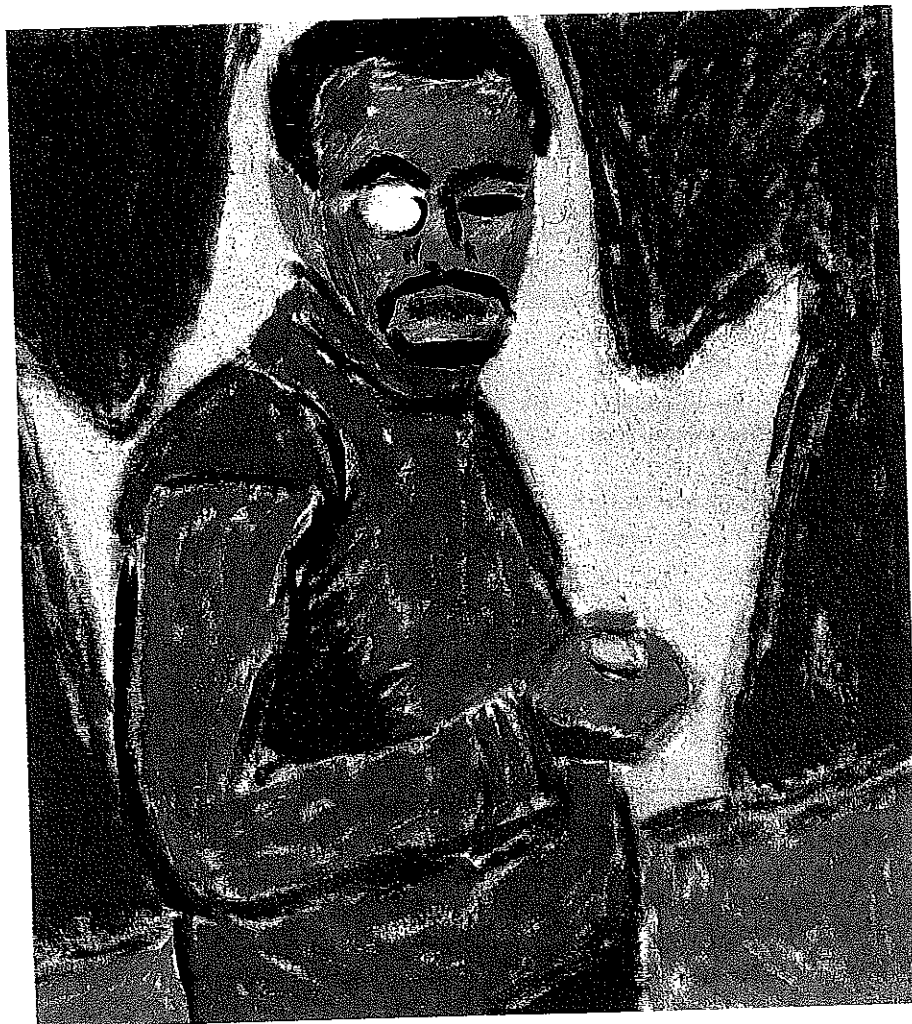
**8.8** Heinrich Kühn, *The Artist's Umbrella*, 1910. Photogravure on heavy woven paper, 9 × 11 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (23 × 28.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



**8.9** Max Pechstein, *Indian and Woman*, 1910. Oil on canvas, 32¼ × 26¼" (81.9 × 66.7 cm). The Saint Louis Art Museum.

Max Pechstein (1881–1953) had a considerable head start in art by the time he joined Die Brücke in 1906. He had studied for several years at the Dresden Academy, and in general enjoyed an earlier success than the other Brücke painters. In 1905 he had seen a collection of wood carvings from the Palau Islands in Dresden's ethnographic museum, and these had a formative influence on his work. In 1914 he traveled to these islands in the Pacific to study the art at first hand. Pechstein was the most eclectic of the Brücke group, capable of notable individual paintings that shift from one style to another. The early *Indian and Woman* (fig. 8.9) shows him at his dramatic best in terms of the exotic subject, modeling of the figures, and Fauve-inspired color. Pechstein's drawing is sculptural and curvilinear in contrast to that of Müller or Heckel, and it was not tinged by the intense anxiety that informed so much of Kirchner's work.

In 1910 Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884–1976) portrayed himself as the very image of the arrogant young Expressionist—in a green turtleneck sweater, complete with beard and monocle, against a roughly painted background of a yellow doorway flanked by purplish-brown curtains (fig. 8.10). Aside from Nolde, Schmidt-Rottluff was the boldest colorist of the group, given to vivid blues



**8.10** Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, *Self-Portrait with Monocle*, 1910. Oil on canvas, 33½ × 30" (84.1 × 76.2 cm). Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Nationalgalerie.

and crimsons, yellows and greens, juxtaposed in jarring but effective dissonance. Although never a fully abstract painter, he was probably the member of Die Brücke who moved furthest and most convincingly in the direction of abstract structure. Schmidt-Rottluff had been traumatized by his service in Russia during World War I, and was later commissioned to redesign the imperial German eagle, casts of which were placed on buildings throughout Germany. Despite this service to his country, when the Nazis came to power he was dismissed from his position as professor of art in Berlin in 1933 and forbidden to work. His *Self-Portrait with Monocle* was seized from the museum that had acquired it in 1924 and included in the 1937 Degenerate Art show staged by the Nazis.

### Graphic Impact: Expressionist Prints

One of the principal contributions of German Expressionism was the revival of printmaking as a major form of art. During the nineteenth century a large number of the experimental painters and sculptors had made prints, and toward the end of the century, in the hands of artists like Toulouse-Lautrec (see fig. 3.29), Gauguin, Redon, Klinger, and Ensor, printmaking assumed an importance as an independent art form beyond anything that had existed since the Renaissance. Several early twentieth-century artists outside Germany—Picasso, Munch, Rouault—were important printmakers as well as painters. In Germany, however, a country with a particularly rich tradition of printmaking, this art form occupied a special place, and its revival contributed to the character of painting and sculpture. Expressionist artists sought a direct engagement with their materials and adapted their technique to the exigencies of the medium in order to achieve maximum expressive power. It was especially the simplified forms of the woodcut, a form of printmaking with a long and distinguished history in German art, that they felt conveyed most authentically the desired emotion. The artists of Die Brücke brought about a veritable renaissance of this medium.

Considerably older than these artists, the painter and printmaker **Lovis Corinth** (1858–1925) formed a link between German Romanticism and later German Expressionist art. In his lengthy academic training in Germany and France he learned that a firm grounding in draftsmanship was fundamental to his art. Like his favorite artist, Rembrandt, one of Corinth's preferred subjects was his own face, which he explored in *Death and the Artist* (fig. 8.11). This print belongs to his series *Dance of Death*, his interpretation of a medieval theme that reminds us of our own inevitable mortality. Although Corinth made woodcuts occasionally, he favored lithography, etching, and especially drypoint, a technique that produces a rich, velvety line.

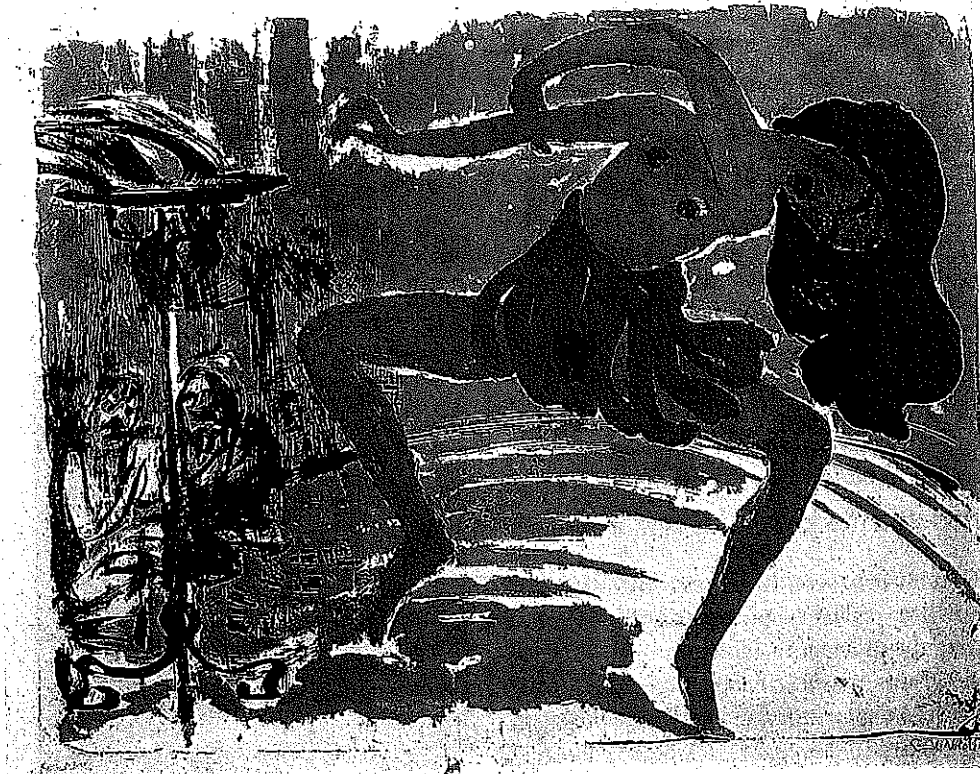
Of the Brücke group, Nolde was already an accomplished etcher by the time he made his first woodcuts.



**8.11** Lovis Corinth, *Death and the Artist*, from the *Totentanz* (*Dance of Death*) series, 1921. Soft-ground etching and drypoint on Japanese paper, plate  $9\frac{1}{2} \times 7$ " ( $24 \times 17.8$  cm), sheet  $11\frac{1}{4} \times 9\frac{1}{4}$ " ( $30 \times 24.7$  cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

His *Prophet* of 1912 owes something to Late Gothic German woodcuts as well as the prints of Munch, with its intense black-and-white contrast and bold, jagged shapes that exploit the natural grain of the woodblock. His lithographs, which differ in expression from the rugged forms of this woodcut, include *Female Dancer* (fig. 8.12), one of the greatest of all German Expressionist prints. Nolde appreciated the artistic freedom afforded him by the lithographic medium, which he used in experimental ways, brushing ink directly on the stone printing matrix to create thin, variable washes of color. He was interested in the body as an expressive vehicle, and had made sketches in the theaters and cabarets of Berlin, as had Kirchner. But the sense of frenzied emotion and wild abandon in *Female Dancer* evokes associations with some primal ritual rather than with urban dance halls. Nolde had studied the work of non-European cultures in museums such as the Berlin Ethnographic Museum, concluding that Oceanic and African art possessed a vitality that much Western art lacked. He argued for their study as objects of aesthetic as well as scientific interest and made drawings of objects that were then incorporated into his still-life paintings. In 1913, shortly after making this lithograph, Nolde joined an official ethnographic expedition to New Guinea, then a German colony in the South Pacific, and later traveled to East Asia. He made sketches of





**8.12** Emil Nolde, *Female Dancer*, 1913. Color lithograph, 20 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (53 × 69 cm). Nolde-Stiftung Seebüll, Germany.

the landscapes and local inhabitants on his journeys, from which he returned highly critical of European colonial practices.

Kirchner, in both black-and-white and color woodcuts, developed an intricate, linear style that looked back to the woodcuts of Dürer and Martin Schongauer. In a powerful portrait of the Belgian Art Nouveau architect Henry van de Velde, he used characteristic V-shaped gouges to create complex surface patterns. By contrast, Heckel's color woodcut *Standing Child* (fig. 8.13) is a spare composition. Heckel's adolescent subject was a girl named Fränzi, who, with her sister Marcella, was a favorite model of the Brücke group. The artist reserved the color of the paper for the model's skin and employed three woodblocks—for black, green, and red inks—in the puzzle technique invented by Munch (see fig. 5.20), for the brilliant, abstracted landscape behind her. It is a gripping image for its forthright design and the frank, precocious sexuality of the sitter.

Like Nolde, Pechstein chose dance as his subject for a color woodcut of 1910 (fig. 8.14), a work he may have been inspired to make after seeing a Somali dance group perform in Berlin that year. The dancers are portrayed against a colorful backdrop that resembles the kind of hangings with which the Brücke artists decorated their studios. Pechstein sought a deliberately crude execution here,



**8.13** Erich Heckel, *Standing Child*, 1910. Color woodcut, 14 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (37.5 × 27.5 cm). Los Angeles County Museum of Art.



**8.14** Max Pechstein, *Somali Dancers*, 1910. Hand-colored woodcut, 12½ × 14⅞" (31.8 × 36.5 cm). Brücke-Museum, Berlin.

with schematically hewn figures and a surface covered with irregular smudges of ink.

Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945) devoted her life and her art, both printmaking and sculpture, to a form of protest or social criticism. She was the first of the German Social Realists who developed out of Expressionism during and after World War I. Essentially a Realist, and powerfully concerned with the problems and sufferings of the underprivileged, she stands somewhat aside from Die Brücke or other Expressionists, such as Kandinsky or Der Blaue Reiter. When she married a doctor, his patients, predominantly the industrial poor of Berlin, became her models.

As a woman, Kollwitz had been prevented from studying at the Academy, so she attended a Berlin art school for women. There she was introduced to the prints and writings of Max Klinger and decided to take up printmaking rather than painting. The graphic media appealed to Kollwitz for their ability to convey a message effectively and to reach a wide audience, because each image could be printed many times. Like Klinger, she produced elaborate print cycles on a central theme. Such is the case with *Death Seizing a Woman* (fig. 8.15), which belongs to her last great series of lithographs. Kollwitz had first explored the theme of a mother cradling her dead child much earlier and had no doubt witnessed such loss among her husband's patients. But the death of her youngest son (who, poignantly, had served as an infant model in the earlier works) in World War I transformed the subject into one of personal tragedy.



**8.15** Käthe Kollwitz, *Death Seizing a Woman* (1934) from the series *Death*, 1934–36. Lithograph, printed in black, composition: 20 × 14⅞" (50.8 × 36.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

**8.16** Käthe Kollwitz, *Female Nude with Green Shawl Seen from Behind*, 1903. Color lithograph, sheet 23½ × 18½" (59.7 × 47 cm). Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden.



Although best known for her black-and-white prints and posters of political subjects, Kollwitz could be an exquisite colorist. Her lithograph of a nude woman (fig. 8.16), with its luminous atmosphere and quiet mood, so unlike her declarative political prints, demonstrates her extraordinary skill and sensitivity as a printmaker.

### **The Spiritual Dimension: Der Blaue Reiter**

The Brücke artists were the first manifestation of Expressionism in Germany but not necessarily the most significant. While they were active, first in Dresden and then in Berlin, a movement of more far-reaching implications was germinating in Munich around one of the great personalities of modern art, **Vasily Kandinsky** (1866–1944).

#### **Kandinsky**

Born in Moscow, Kandinsky studied law and economics at the University of Moscow. Visits to Paris and an exhibition of French painting in Moscow aroused his interest to the point that, at the age of thirty, he refused a professorship of law in order to study painting. He then went to Munich,

where he was soon caught up in the atmosphere of Art Nouveau and Jugendstil then permeating the city.

Since 1890, Munich had been one of the most active centers of experimental art in Europe. Kandinsky was soon taking a leading part in the Munich art world, even while undergoing the more traditional discipline of study at the Academy and with older artists. In 1901 he formed a new artists' association, Phalanx, and opened his own art school. In the same year he was exhibiting in the Berlin Secession, and by 1904 had shown works in the Paris Salon d'Automne and Exposition Nationale des Beaux-Arts. That year the Phalanx had shown the Neo-Impressionists, as well as Cézanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh. By 1909 Kandinsky was leading a revolt against the established Munich art movements that resulted in the formation of the Neue Künstler Vereinigung (NKV, New Artists Association). In addition to Kandinsky, the NKV included Alexej von Jawlensky, Gabriele Münter, Alfred Kubin, and, later, Franz Marc. Its second exhibition, in 1910, showed the works not only of Germans but also of leading Parisian experimental painters: Picasso, Braque, Rouault, Derain, and Vlaminck.

During this period, Kandinsky was exploring revolutionary ideas about nonobjective or abstract painting, that

is, painting without literal subject matter, that does not take its form from the observed world. He traced the beginnings of this interest to a moment of epiphany he had experienced in 1908. Entering his studio one day, he could not make out any subject in his painting, only shapes and colors; he then realized it was turned on its side. In 1911 a split in the NKV resulted in the secession of Kandinsky, accompanied by Marc and Münter, and the formation of the association *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider), a name taken from a book published by Kandinsky and Marc, which had in turn taken its name from a painting by Kandinsky. The historic exhibition held at the Thannhauser Gallery in Munich in December 1911 included works by Kandinsky, Marc, August Macke, Heinrich Campendonck, Münter, the composer Arnold Schönberg, the Frenchmen Henri Rousseau and Robert Delaunay, and others. Paul Klee, already associated with the group, showed with them in a graphics exhibition in 1912. This was a much larger show. The entries were expanded to include artists of *Die Brücke* and additional French and Russian artists: Roger de La Fresnaye, Kazimir Malevich, and Jean Arp, an Alsatian.

In his book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, published in 1911, Kandinsky formulated the ideas that had obsessed him since his student days in Russia. Always a serious student, he had devoted much time to the question of the relations between art and music. He had first sensed the dematerialization of the object in the paintings of Monet, and this direction in art continued to intrigue him as, through exhibitions in Munich and his continual travels, he learned more about the revolutionary new discoveries of the Neo-Impressionists, the Symbolists, the Fauves, and the Cubists. Advances in the physical sciences had called into question the “reality” of the world of tangible objects, strengthening his conviction that art had to be concerned with the expression of the spiritual rather than the material.

Despite his strong scientific and legal interests, Kandinsky was attracted to Theosophy, spiritism, and the occult. There was always a mystical core in his thinking—something he at times attributed to his Russian roots. This sense of an inner creative force, a product of the spirit rather than of external vision or manual skill, enabled him to arrive at an art entirely without representation other than colors and shapes. Deeply concerned with the expression of harmony in visual terms, he wrote, “The harmony of color and form must be based solely upon the principle of the proper contact with the human soul.” And so, along with František Kupka, Delaunay, Piet Mondrian, and Malevich, Kandinsky was one of the first, if not—as traditionally thought—the very first, modern European artist to break through the representational barrier and carry painting into total abstraction. But while other pioneers of pictorial nonobjectivity worked in a Cubist-derived geometric mode, Kandinsky

worked in a painterly, improvisatory, Expressionist, biomorphic manner that has had many illustrious heirs, from the Surrealist art of André Masson, Joan Miró, and Matta to the environmentally scaled compositions of Jackson Pollock and beyond, to many contemporary practitioners of gestural painting.

As he was moving toward abstraction, the early paintings of Kandinsky went through various stages of Impressionism and Art Nouveau decoration, but all were characterized by a feeling for color. Many also had a fairy-tale quality of narrative, reminiscent of his early interest in Russian folktales and mythology. Kandinsky pursued this line of investigation in the rural setting of the Bavarian village of Murnau, where he lived for a time with Gabriele Münter. Münter took up *Hinterglasmalerei* (painting behind glass), a local form of folk art in which a painting is done on the underside of a sheet of glass, and Kandinsky followed her example. The archaism of the style and its spiritual purity forecast the more radical simplifications soon to come. Like his contemporaries in Germany and France, Kandinsky was interested in native Russian art forms and in 1889 had traveled on an ethnographic expedition to study the people of Vologda, a remote Russian province north of Moscow. He was moved by the interiors of the peasants’ houses, which were filled with decorative painting and furniture. “I learned not to look at a picture from outside,” he said, “but to move within the picture, to live in the picture.”

Because of his wish to associate his work with an image-free art form that spoke directly to the senses in modernist fashion, Kandinsky began using titles derived from music, such as “Composition,” “Improvisation,” or “Impression.” He made ten major paintings titled “Composition,” which he considered to be his most complete artistic statements, expressive of what he called “inner necessity” or the artist’s



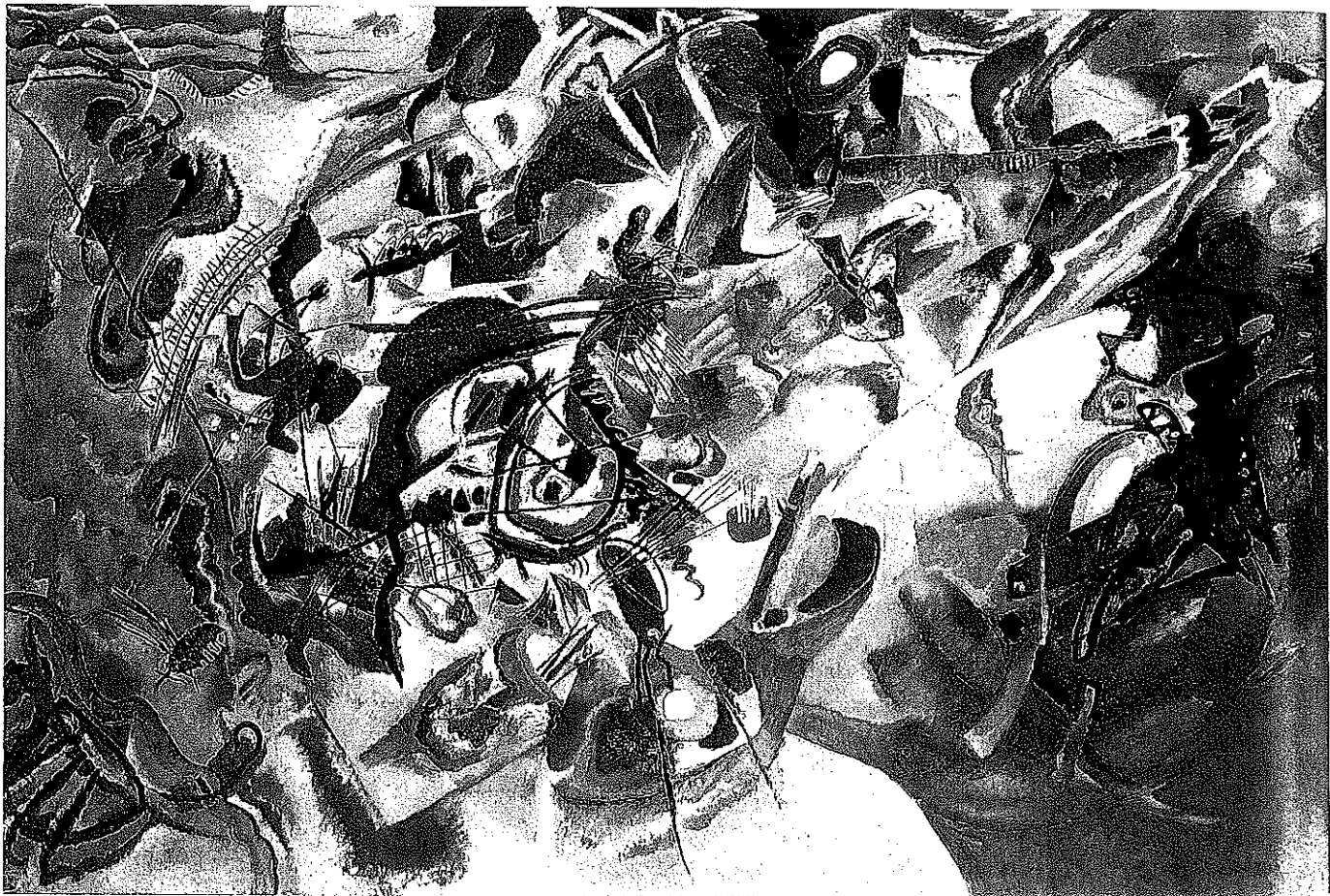
**8.17** Vasily Kandinsky, *Sketch for Composition II*, 1909–10. Oil on canvas, 38% × 51% (97.5 × 131.5 cm). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

intuitive, emotional response to the world. A close examination of *Sketch for Composition II* (fig. 8.17) reveals that the artist is still employing a pictorial vocabulary filled with standing figures, riders on horseback, and onion-domed churches, but they are now highly abstracted forms in the midst of a tumultuous, upheaving landscape of mountains and trees that Kandinsky painted in the high-keyed color of the Fauves. Although Kandinsky said this painting had no theme, it is clear that the composition is divided into two sections, with a scene of deluge and disturbance at the left and a garden of paradise at the right, where lovers recline as they had in Matisse's *Le Bonheur de vivre* (see fig. 7.6). Kandinsky balances these opposing forces to give his all-embracing view of the universe.

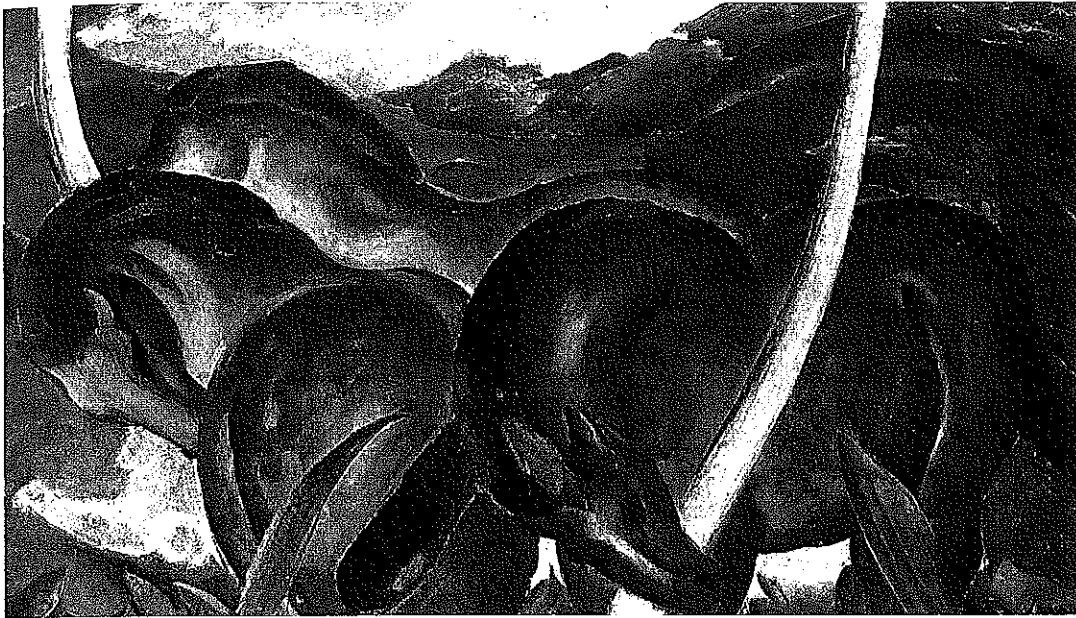
In general, Kandinsky's compositions revolve around themes of cosmic conflict and renewal, specifically the Deluge from the biblical book of Genesis and the Apocalypse from the book of Revelation. From such cataclysm would emerge, he believed, a rebirth, a new, spiritually cleansed world. In *Composition VII* (fig. 8.18), an enormous canvas from 1913, colors, shapes, and lines collide across the pictorial field in a furiously explosive composition. Yet even in the midst of this symphonic arrangement of abstract forms, the characteristic motifs Kandinsky had distilled over the years can still be deciphered, such as the glyph of a boat with

three oars at the lower left, a sign of the biblical floods. He did not intend these hieroglyphic forms to be read literally, so he veiled them in washes of brilliant color. Though the artist carefully prepared this large work with many preliminary drawings and oil sketches, he preserved a sense of spontaneous, unpremeditated freedom in the final painting.

In 1914 the cataclysm of World War I forced Kandinsky to return to Russia, and, shortly thereafter, another phase of his career began (discussed in chapter 11), a pattern repeated in the careers of many artists at this time. In looking at the work of the other members of *Der Blaue Reiter* up to 1914, we should recall that the individuals involved were not held together by common stylistic principles but rather constituted a loose association of young artists, enthusiastic about new experiments and united in their oppositions. Aside from personal friendships, it was Kandinsky who gave the group cohesion and direction. The yearbook *Der Blaue Reiter*, edited by Kandinsky and Franz Marc, appeared in 1912 and served as a forum for the opinions of the group. The new experiments of Picasso and Matisse in Paris were discussed at length, and the aims and conflicts of the new German art associations were described. In the creation of the new culture and new approach to painting, much importance was attached to the influence of so-called primitive and naive art.



8.18 Vasily Kandinsky, *Composition VII*, 1913. Oil on canvas, 6'6 $\frac{3}{4}$ "  $\times$  9'11 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (2  $\times$  3 m). Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



8.19 Franz Marc, *The Large Blue Horses*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 41% × 71% (105.7 × 181.1 cm). Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

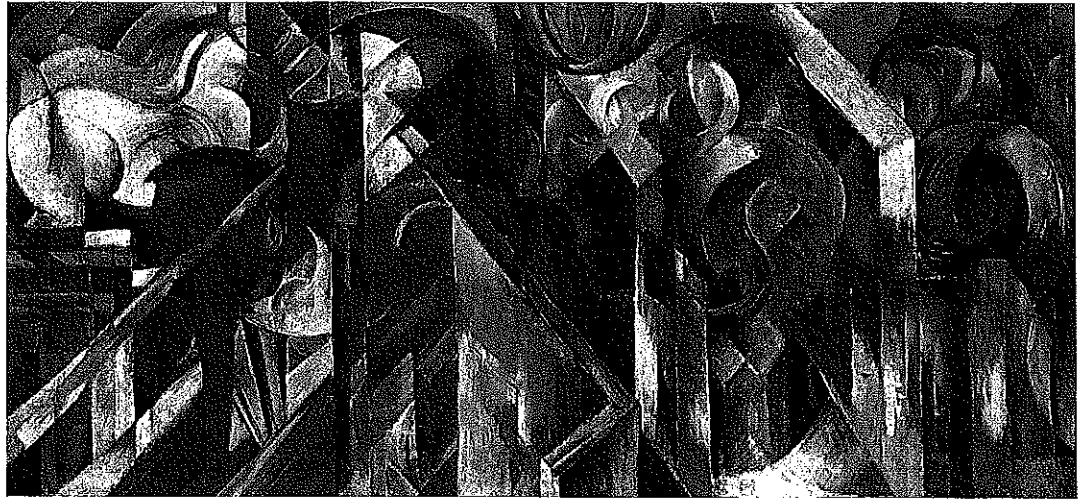
### Marc

Of the Blaue Reiter painters, Franz Marc (1880–1916) was the closest in spirit to the traditions of German Romanticism and lyrical naturalism. In Paris in 1907 he sought personal solutions in the paintings of Van Gogh, whom he called the most authentic of painters. From an early date he turned to the subject of animals as a source of spiritual harmony and purity in nature. This became for him a symbol of that more primitive and Arcadian life sought by so many of the Expressionist painters. Through his friend the painter August Macke, Marc developed, in about 1910, enthusiasms for color whose richness and beauty were expressive also of the harmonies he was seeking. The great *Blue Horses* of 1911 is one of the masterpieces of Marc's mature style (fig. 8.19). The three brilliant blue beasts are fleshed out sculpturally from the equally vivid reds, greens, and yellows of the landscape. The artist used a close-up view, with the bodies of the horses filling most of the canvas. The horizon line is high, so that the curves of the red hills repeat the lines of the horses' curving flanks. Although the modeling of the animals gives them the effect of sculptured relief projecting from a uniform background, there is no real spatial differentiation between creatures and environment, except that the sky is rendered more softly and less tangibly to create some illusion of distance. In fact, Marc used the two whitish tree trunks and the green of foliage in front of and behind the horses to tie foreground and background together. At this time Marc's color, like that of Kandinsky, had a specifically symbolic rather than descriptive function. Marc saw blue as a masculine principle, robust and spiritual; yellow as a feminine principle, gentle, serene, and sensual; red as matter, brutal and heavy. In the mixing of these colors to create greens and violets, and in their proportions one to the

other on the canvas, the colors formed abstract shapes and took on spiritual or material significance independent of the subject.

During 1911–12 Marc was absorbing the ideas and forms of the Cubists and finding them applicable to his own concepts of the mystery and poetry of color. His approach to art was religious in a manner that could be described as pantheistic, although it is interesting that in his paintings only animals are assimilated harmoniously into nature—never humans. Marc, with Macke, visited Delaunay in Paris in 1912 and saw his experiments with color and form; in the same year Marc was impressed by an exhibition of Italian Futurists he saw in Munich. Out of the influences of Kandinsky's of Delaunay's color abstraction, and of the Futurists' use of Cubist structures, Marc evolved his later style—which, tragically, he was able to explore for only two or three more years until he was killed in the war in 1916.

In *Stables* (fig. 8.20) he combined his earlier curvilinear patterns with a new rectangular geometry. The horses, massed in the frontal plane, are dismembered and recombined as fractured shapes that are dispersed evenly across the surface of the canvas. The forms are composed parallel to the picture plane rather than tilted in depth. This treatment was in accordance with the experiments of Delaunay in his *Simultaneous Disk* series (see fig. 10.44). At this stage, however, Marc's paintings were still far less abstract than Delaunay's, and their sense of nervous energy made them akin to the work of the Futurists. Intense but light-filled blues and reds, greens, violets, and yellows flicker over the structurally and spatially unified surface to create a dazzling illusion. Marc's use of color at this stage owed much to Macke, who frequently used the theme of people reflected in shop windows as a means of distorting space and multiplying images.



**8.20** Franz Marc, *Stables*, 1913–14. Oil on canvas, 29 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 62 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (74 × 158.1 cm). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Unlike Kandinsky's, Marc's imagery was predominantly derived from the material world. But in a group of small compositions from 1914 and in notebook sketches, there was evidence of a move to abstraction. Some of his later works carry premonitions of the world conflict that ended his life. In a virtually abstract painting, *Fighting Forms* of 1914, Marc returned to curvilinear pattern in a violent battle of black and red color shapes, of light and darkness. The forms are given such vitality that they take on the characteristics of forces in an ultimate encounter.

### Macke

Of the major figures in *Der Blaue Reiter*, August Macke (1887–1914), despite his close association with and influence on Franz Marc, created work that was as elegantly controlled as it was expressive. Macke, like Marc, was influenced by Kandinsky, Delaunay, and the Futurists, and perhaps more immediately by the color concepts of Gauguin and Matisse. Since he was killed in September 1914, one month after the beginning of World War I, his achievement must be gauged by the work of only four years.



**8.21** August Macke, *Great Zoological Garden*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 4'3 $\frac{3}{4}$ " × 7'6 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (1.3 × 2.3 m). Museum am Ostwall, Dortmund, Germany.

After some Fauve- and Cubist-motivated exercises in semiabstraction, Macke began to paint city scenes in high-keyed color, using diluted oil paint in effects close to that of watercolor. *Great Zoological Garden*, a triptych of 1912 (fig. 8.21), is a loving transformation of a familiar scene into a fairyland of translucent color. Pictorial space is delimited by foliage and buildings that derive from the later watercolors of Cézanne. The artist moves easily from passages as abstract as the background architecture to passages as literally representational as the animals and the foreground figures. The work has a unity of mood that is light and charming, disarming because of the naive joy that permeates it.

Macke occasionally experimented with abstract organization, but his principal interest during the last two years of his life continued to be his cityscapes, which were decorative colored impressions of elegant ladies and gentlemen strolling in the park or studying the wares in brightly lit shop windows. In numerous versions of such themes, he shows his fascination with the mirrorlike effects of windows as a means of transforming the perspective space of the street into the fractured space of Cubism.

### Jawlensky

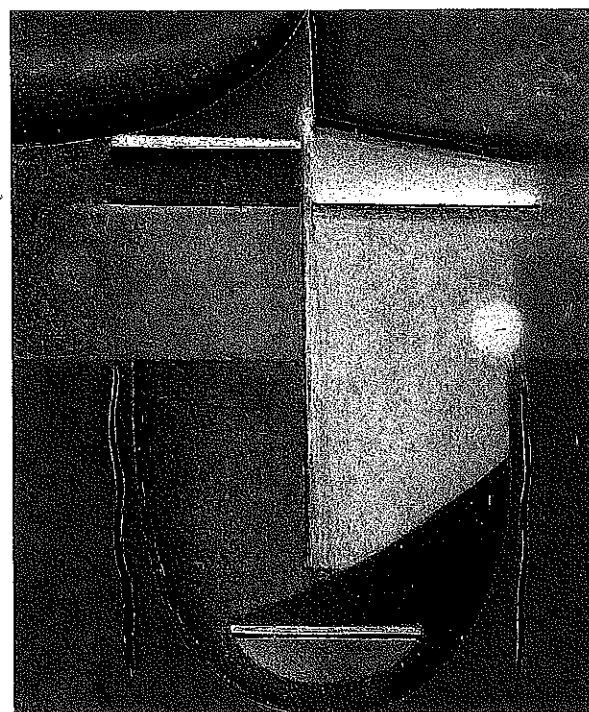
Alexej von Jawlensky (1864–1941) was well established in his career as an officer of the Russian Imperial Guard before he decided to become a painter. After studies in Moscow he took classes in the same studio in Munich as Kandinsky. Although not officially a member of *Der Blaue Reiter*, Jawlensky was sympathetic to its aims and continued for years to be close to Kandinsky. After the war he formed the group called *Die Blaue Vier* (The Blue Four), along with Kandinsky, Klee, and Lyonel Feininger.

By 1905 Jawlensky was painting in a Fauve palette, and his drawings of nudes of the next few years are suggestive of Matisse. About 1910 he settled on his primary theme, the portrait head, which he explored thenceforward with mystical intensity. *Mme Turandot* is an early example (fig. 8.22), painted in a manner that combines characteristics of Russian folk painting and Russo-Byzantine icons—sources that would dominate Jawlensky's work.

In 1914 Jawlensky embarked on a remarkable series of paintings of the human head that occupied him intermittently for over twenty years. Each of these “mystic heads” assumed a virtually identical format: a large head fills the frame, with features reduced to a grid of horizontal and vertical lines and planes of delicate color, more a schema for a face than an actual visage. In the twenties Jawlensky made a series, *Constructivist Heads* (fig. 8.23), in which the eyes are closed, casting an introspective, meditative mood over these images, which, for the artist, were expressions of a universal spirituality. Like Kandinsky's compositions, they were variations on a theme, but in their restrictive, repetitive structure, they are closer in spirit to the neoplastic work of Piet Mondrian (see fig. 17.21). In the mid-thirties the geometry gradually



8.22 Alexej von Jawlensky, *Mme Turandot*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 23 × 20" (58.4 × 50.8 cm). Collection Andreas Jawlensky, Locarno, Switzerland.



8.23 Alexej von Jawlensky, *Love*, from the *Constructivist Heads* series, 1925. Oil on paper, 23¼ × 19⅞" (59 × 49.8 cm). Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich.



loosened, and Jawlensky dissolved the linear structure into dark, forcefully brushed abstractions that he called "Meditations."

### Klee

Paul Klee (1879–1940) was one of the most varied, influential, and brilliant talents in the twentieth century. His stylistic development is difficult to trace even after 1914, since the artist, from this moment of maturity, continually reexamined his themes and forms to arrive at a reality beyond the visible world. He developed a visual language seemingly limitless in its invention and in the variety of its formal means. His complex language of personal signs and symbols evolved through private fantasy and a range of interests from plant and zoological life to astronomy and typography. Also interested in music, he wanted to create imagery infused with the rhythms and counterpoint of musical composition, saying that color could be played like a "chromatic keyboard."

Klee was born in Switzerland. The son of a musician, he was initially inclined toward music, but having decided on the career of painting, went to Munich to study in 1898. During the years 1903–6 he produced a number of etchings that in their precise, hard technique suggest the graphic tradition of the German Renaissance, in their mannered linearity Art Nouveau, and in their mad fantasy a personal vision reflecting the influence of the Expressionist printmaker Alfred Kubin. These were also among the first of Klee's works in which the title formed an integral part of



**8.24** Paul Klee, *Hammamet with its Mosque*, 1914. Watercolor and pencil on paper, 8 1/2 × 7 1/2" (20.6 × 19.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

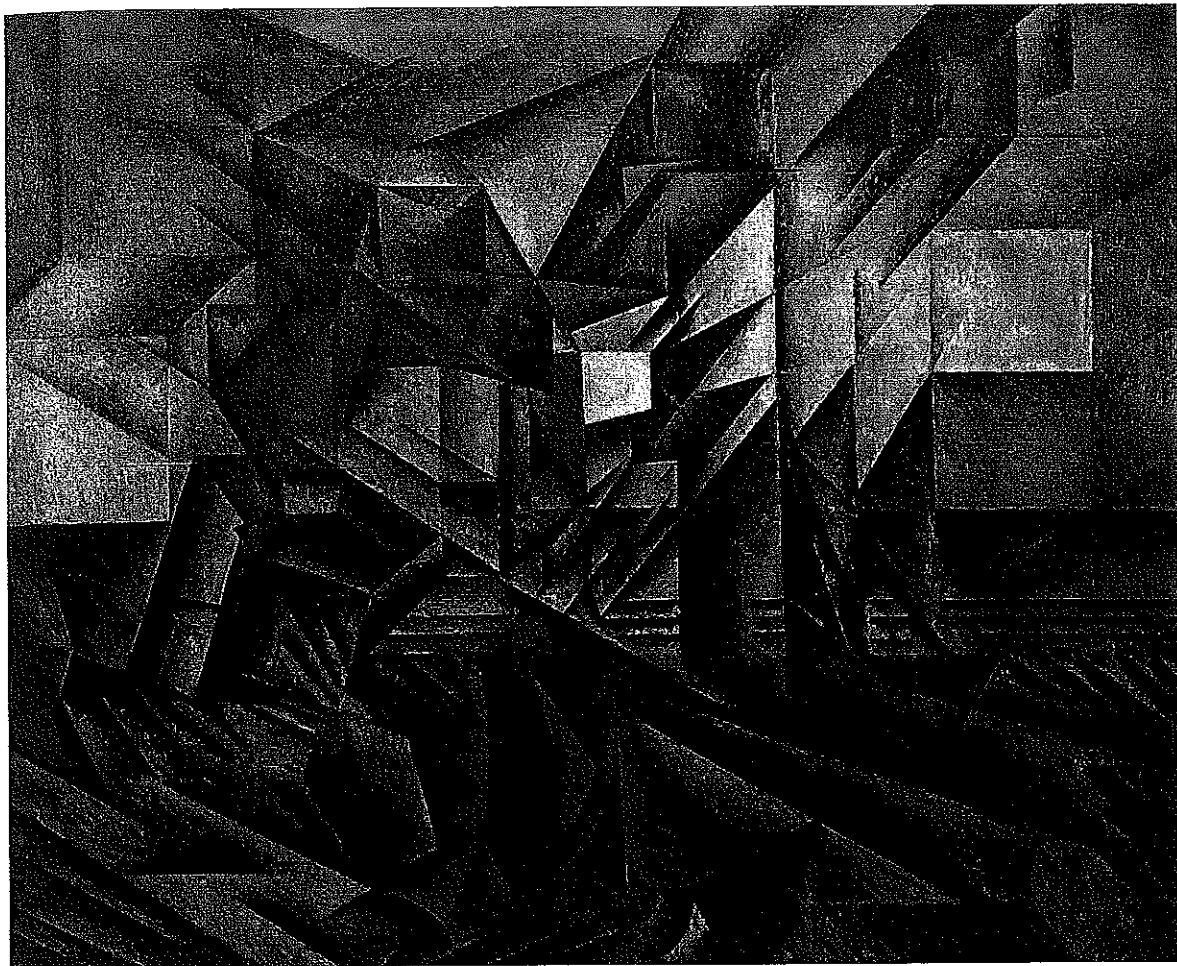
his creative work. Klee brought tremendous verbal skill and wit to his paintings, drawings, and prints, using letters and words literally as formal devices in his compositions, which he then gave a literary dimension with poetic and often humorous titles.

Between 1901 and 1905 Klee traveled extensively in Italy and France and probably saw works by Matisse. Between 1908 and 1910 he became aware of Cézanne, Van Gogh, and the beginnings of the modern movement in painting. In 1911 he had a solo exhibition at the Thannhauser Gallery in Munich and in the same year met the Blaue Reiter painters Kandinsky, Marc, Macke, Jawlensky, and Münter. Over the next few years he participated in the Blaue Reiter exhibitions, wrote for *Der Sturm*, and, in Paris in 1912, met Delaunay and saw further paintings by Picasso, Braque, and Henri Rousseau.

He took a trip with Macke to Tunis and other parts of North Africa in 1914. Like Delacroix and other Romantics before him, he was affected by the brilliance of the region's light and the color and clarity of the atmosphere. To catch the quality of the scene Klee, like Macke, turned to watercolor and a form of semiabstract color pattern based on a Cubist grid, a structure he frequently used as a linear scaffolding for his compositions (fig. 8.24). Although he made larger paintings, he tended to prefer small-scale works on paper. Klee had a long and fertile career, the later phases of which will be traced in chapter 17.

### Feininger

Although **Lyonel Feininger** (1871–1956) was born an American of German-American parents, as a painter he belongs within the European orbit. The son of distinguished musicians, he was, like Klee, early destined for a musical career. But before he was ten he was drawing his impressions of buildings, boats, and elevated trains in New York City. He went to Germany in 1887 to study music, but soon turned to painting. In Berlin between 1893 and 1905 Feininger earned his living as an illustrator and caricaturist for German and American periodicals, developing a brittle, angular style of figure drawing related to aspects of Art Nouveau, but revealing a very distinctive personal sense of visual satire. The years 1906–8, in Paris, brought him in touch with the early pioneers of modern French painting. By 1912–13 he had arrived at his own version of Cubism, particularly the form of Cubism with which Marc was experimenting at the same time. Feininger was invited to exhibit with *Der Blaue Reiter* in 1913. Thus, not surprisingly, he and Marc shared the sources of Orphism and Futurism, which particularly appealed to the Romantic, expressive sensibilities of both. Whereas Marc translated his beloved animals into luminous Cubist planes, Feininger continued with his favorite themes of architecture, boats, and the sea. In *Harbor Mole* of 1913 (fig. 8.25), he recomposed the scene into a scintillating interplay of color facets, geometric in outline but given a sense of rapid change by the transparent, delicately graded color



**8.25** Lyonel Feininger, *Harbor Mole*, 1913. Oil on canvas, 31¼ × 39¼" (80.6 × 101 cm). Private collection.

areas. In this work Feininger stated in a most accomplished manner the approach he was to continue, with variations, throughout the rest of his long life: that of strong, straight-line structure played against sensuous and softly luminous color. The interplay between taut linear structure and Romantic color, with space constantly shifting between abstraction and representation, created a dynamic tension in his paintings.

In 1919 Feininger was invited to join the staff of the Bauhaus, the great experimental German school of architecture and design. He remained associated with the institution until it was closed by the Nazis in 1933, although he had stopped teaching full-time in the twenties because the schedule interfered with his own painting. Feininger's work steadily developed in the direction he had chosen, sometimes emerging in shattered architectural images, sometimes in serene and light-filled structures full of poetic suggestion. He returned to the United States in 1937 and settled in New York, a difficult move for an artist who had made his reputation in Europe. Once he was "spiritually acclimatized," as he said, to his new home, he moved in a new stylistic direction, one less restricted by the "straitjacket" of Cubism and characterized by a freer application of color.

In 1912 Herwarth Walden opened a gallery in Berlin for avant-garde art, the Sturm Galerie, where he exhibited Kandinsky and Der Blaue Reiter, Die Brücke and the Italian Futurists, and grouped as French Expressionists Braque, Derain, Vlaminck, Auguste Herbin, and others. Also shown were Ensor, Klee, and Delaunay. In 1913 came the climax of the Sturm Galerie's exhibitions, the First German Autumn Salon, including three hundred and sixty works. Henri Rousseau's room contained twenty paintings, and almost the entire international range of experimental painting and sculpture at that moment was shown. Although during and after the war the various activities of Der Sturm lost their impetus, Berlin between 1910 and 1914 remained a rallying point for most of the new European ideas and revolutionary movements, largely through the leadership of Walden.

### **Self-Examination: Expressionism in Austria**

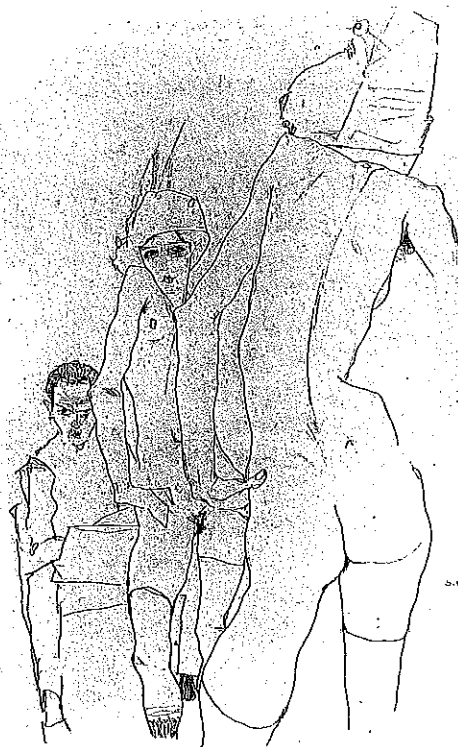
To understand the various directions in which Expressionism moved during and after World War I, we may look at two artists who were associated in some degree with Expressionism in Austria, where its practitioners were never formally organized into a particular group. Like Klee

and Feininger, the Austrians Egon Schiele and Oskar Kokoschka each had his highly individualized interpretation of the style.

### Schiele

**Egon Schiele** (1890–1918) lived a short and tragic life, dying in the worldwide influenza epidemic of 1918. He was a precocious draftsman and, despite opposition from his uncle (who was his guardian after his father died insane, an event that haunted him), studied at the Vienna Academy of Art. His principal encouragement came from Gustav Klimt (see chapter 5), at his height as a painter and leader of the avant-garde in Vienna when they met in 1907. The two artists remained close, but although Schiele was deeply influenced by Klimt, he did not fully share his inclination toward the decorative.

Schiele's many self-portraits rank among his supreme achievements. They range from self-revelatory documents of personal anguish to records of a highly self-conscious and youthful bravado. *Schiele, Drawing a Nude Model before a Mirror* (fig. 8.26) demonstrates his extraordinary natural skill as a draftsman. The intense portrayal, with the artist's narrowed gaze and the elongated, angular figure of the model, differs from even the most direct and least embellished of Klimt's portraits. Here Schiele explores the familiar theme of the artist and model, but does so to create an atmosphere of psychological tension and explicit sexuality. Schiele's models included his sister Gerti, as well



**8.26** Egon Schiele, *Schiele, Drawing a Nude Model before a Mirror*, 1910. Pencil on paper, 21¼ × 13¾" (55.2 × 35.2 cm). Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna.



**8.27** Egon Schiele, *The Self Seer II (Death and the Man)*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 31¼ × 31½" (80.3 × 80 cm). Private collection.

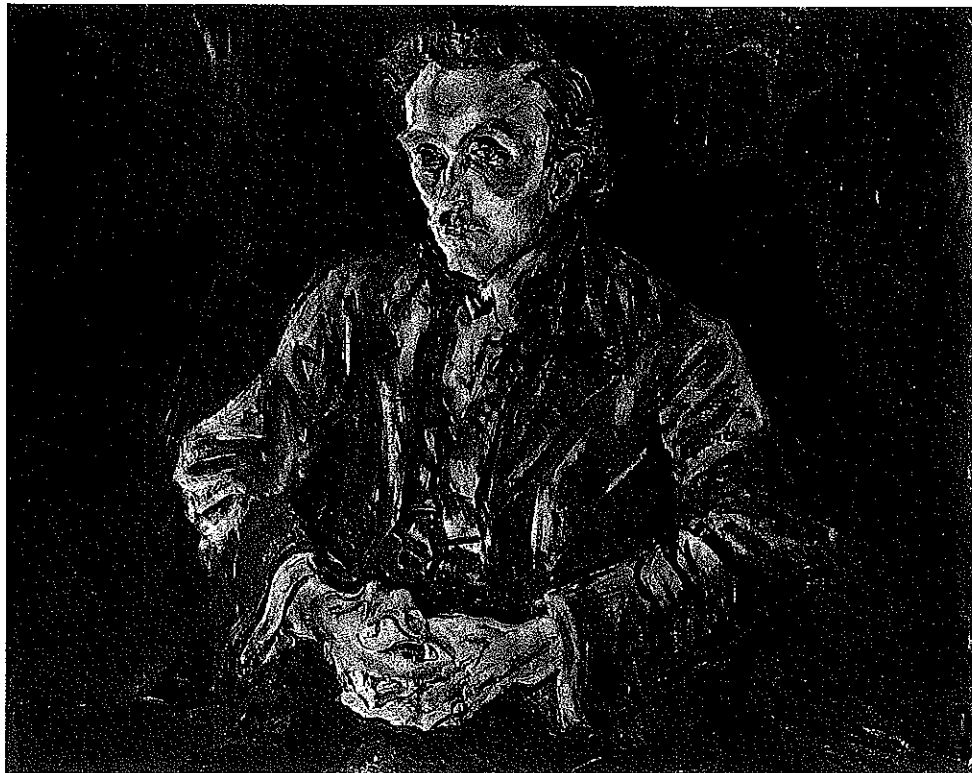
as friends, professional models, and prostitutes. But when, albeit innocently, in 1912 he sought out children for models in his small village, he was imprisoned for twenty-four days for “offenses against public morality.”

A comparison of paintings by Klimt and Schiele is valuable in illustrating both the continuity and the change between nineteenth-century Symbolism and early twentieth-century Expressionism. Klimt’s painting *Death and Life* (see fig. 5.6) is heavy with symbolism presented in terms of the richest and most colorful patterns. Schiele’s *The Self Seer II* (fig. 8.27), painted in 1911, is comparable in subject, but the approach could not be more different. The man (a self-portrait) is rigidly frontalized in the center of the painting and stares out at the spectator. His face is a horrible and bloody mask of fear. The figure of Death hovers behind, a ghostly presence folding the man in his arms in a grim embrace. The paint is built up in jagged brushstrokes on figures emerging from a background of harsh and dissonant tones of ocher, red, and green.

In Schiele’s portraiture, other than the commissioned portraits he undertook occasionally to support himself, there persisted the same intensity of characterization. But in his later work the tense linear quality we have seen gave way to painterly surfaces built up with abundant, expressive brushwork. In one of his last works Schiele dramatically portrays his friend, the artist Paris von Gütersloh, with hands held aloft, fingers spread, as though the hands of the artist possessed some mysterious, supernatural power.

## Kokoschka

Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980), like Schiele, was a product of Vienna, but he soon left the city, which he found gloomy and oppressive, for Switzerland and Germany, embracing the larger world of modern art to become one of the international figures of twentieth-century Expressionism. Between 1905 and 1908 Kokoschka worked in the Viennese Art Nouveau style, showing the influence of Klimt and Aubrey Beardsley. Even before going to Berlin at the invitation of Herwarth Walden in 1910, he was instinctively an Expressionist. Particularly in his early “black portraits,” he searched passionately to expose an inner sensibility—which may have belonged more to himself than to his sitters. Among his very first images is the 1909 portrait of his friend, the architect Adolf Loos (fig. 8.28), who early on recognized Kokoschka’s talents and provided him with moral as well as financial support. The figure projects from its dark background, and the tension in the contemplative face is echoed in Loos’s nervously clasped hands. The Romantic basis of Kokoschka’s early painting appears in *The Tempest* (fig. 8.29), a double portrait of himself with his lover, Alma Mahler, in which the two figures, composed with flickering, light-saturated brushstrokes, are swept through a dream landscape of cold blue mountains and valleys lit only by the gleam of a shadowed moon. The painting was a great success when Kokoschka exhibited it in the 1914 New Munich Secession. The year before, he wrote to Alma about the work, then in progress:



**8.28** Oskar Kokoschka, *Portrait of Adolf Loos*, 1909. Oil on canvas, 29 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 35 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (74 × 91.1 cm). Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Nationalgalerie.



**8.29** Oskar Kokoschka, *The Tempest*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 5'11¼" × 7'2⅝" (1.81 × 2.2 m).  
Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Kunstmuseum.

I was able to express the mood I wanted by reliving it. ...  
Despite all the turmoil in the world, to know that one  
person can put eternal trust in another, that two people  
can be committed to themselves and other people by an  
act of faith.

Seriously wounded in World War I, Kokoschka produced little for several years, but his ideas and style were undergoing constant change. In 1924 he abruptly set out on some seven years of travel, during which he explored the problem of landscape, combining free, arbitrary, and brilliant Impressionist or Fauve color with a

traditional perspective-space organization. Throughout his long life Kokoschka remained true to the spirit of Expressionism—to the power of emotion and the deeply felt sensitivity to the inner qualities of nature and the human soul. In 1933, in financial difficulties, the painter returned from his long travels. He went first to Vienna and then to Prague. During this period his works in public collections in Germany were confiscated by the Nazis as examples of “degenerate art.” In 1938, as World War II approached, London became his home, and later Switzerland, although whenever possible he continued his restless traveling.

