

GERMAN EXPRESSIONIST PRINTS



NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

Part I:
Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
(1880-1938)

1

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
***Port Scene (Hafenbild)*, 1908**
woodcut
National Gallery of Art
Rosenwald Collection

This image of peaceful sailboats reflected in calm water reminds one very much of the kind of image characteristic of the Impressionists — both French and German — who were mainly concerned with the effect of light outdoors and its interaction with colors and forms. Likewise, the rounded, undulating shapes of the shadows of the boats in the water remind us of the smoothly rounded and undulating shapes of Art Nouveau — a movement which existed also in Germany and Austria, and was known as *Jugendstil*, or youthful style.

However, this particular image of sailboats has about it a kind of intensity — a kind of riveting quality — in the way those shadows reach out from the boats and come toward us. There is considera-

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ble emphasis also on the texture of the wood block from which this print was made. All of this leads us to its author, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, who was, toward the beginning of this century, the leader of a group of artists in Germany known as the *Brücke* — the Bridge.

My name is Andrew Robison. I'm the Curator of prints and drawings at the National Gallery of Art, and this program is about prints produced by members of the Brücke.

2

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
Bridge on Crown Prince Embankment
(*Brücke am Kronprinzenufer*), 1909
drypoint with tonal etching on
blotting paper
National Gallery of Art
Ruth and Jacob Kainen Collection

The image of sailboats that we just saw was created in 1908; here we have a drypoint by Kirchner of barges going under a bridge in Dresden. It was made the very next year — 1909 — , and the change in style is extraordinary. There are no more evocations of the past styles of Impressionism and Art Nouveau; rather we have a very intense, focused, ex-

tremely swift capturing of the scene with short staccato strokes drawn on the copper plate. Drypoint allows for this kind of swiftness and directness because one does not use acid or other types of preparation, but draws directly on the copper plate with a very sharp needle. Thus, it's very much like sketching on a piece of paper. Kirchner has done this sketch brilliantly and swiftly. He loved to draw. He made thousands of drawings throughout his life and he frequently talked about how important drawing was to him. He studied drawings by past artists — especially Rembrandt. He loved the late Rembrandts, which have the kind of fire and speed of a reed pen drawing that excited Kirchner. Naturally, he was interested in old German art, in Dürer, in other printmakers of the past — for example Cranach. And the *Brücke* artists, as with early twentieth-century French artists, had a great interest in primitive art — art from other countries. There was a sense in the air that artists were discovering that art could come from many countries and many cultures. There were many possibilities for art, and Kirchner and the *Brücke*, building upon these numerous possibilities both from their past European tradition and also from other cultures, wanted to revitalize what they saw as a kind of stagnant academic art in Germany at the time.

3

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
Russian Dancers (Russisches Tänzerpaar), 1909
lithograph in red, blue, yellow, and black on
wove paper
National Gallery of Art
Ruth and Jacob Kainen Collection © Ingeborg
and Dr. Wolfgang Henze-Ketterer, Wichtrach/Bern

This color lithograph was created in 1909 also. Kirchner and his friends were very poor as students, and they had to create techniques which allowed them to make prints with very few materials. Thus, in this case, Kirchner worked out a way to use a single lithographic stone to print many colors on top of each other.

Again, we have an echo of the fluid, rolling, circular lines of Art Nouveau, but here Kirchner has created more abstract forms with such lines. The large white area of the dancer's dress has a life of its own, independent of its function of showing the form of her hemline. The elegant stance of the male dancer interacts beautifully with the gestures of her arms. The marvelous quasi-abstract, quasi-organic lines of black hatching on the curtain in the background seem not quite like stairs, not quite like snakes, but seem to radiate and move and enhance the fluid movements of the dancers.

4

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
Dancing Couple (Tanzpaar), 1909
lithograph on yellow wove paper
National Gallery of Art

Ruth and Jacob Kainen Collection © Ingeborg and
Dr. Wolfgang Henze-Ketterer, Wichtrach/Bern

Here in another lithograph from the very same year — 1909 — we have quite a different type of image of the dance. This is a wild Dionysian dance. The drawing is bold. Again we have a kind of riveting quality to the drawing. Kirchner has thrown away all conventions. He's not creating a smooth, flowing line. His focus here is really on the whirling dress of the female dancer. It's the same subject as the previous image, that is, two dancers, one male, one female, against a patterned background. But now the drawing is so different; the style is so different. The focus here is on the speed and swiftness of the whirling dance. You see that the dancer's legs are not connected in a way which makes any sense anatomically, but they are put there for visual reasons — to give one the impression that the dancer whirls. Her pantaloons billow out. Her dress remains in a rigid, horizontal position because of the

swiftness with which she turns. Even the man, her partner, bends forward in a kind of arc, because he's drawn into this rounded, whirling motion of the female dancer. The effect of this lithographic image is enhanced by having been printed on an acid yellow paper. The quality of the yellow color reinforces the sense of wildness and the sense of intensity in the dance.

In this work the background also enlivens the image and extends the movement of the dancers. One of the characteristics of Kirchner is that even though he was fascinated by sketching and made thousands of sketches during his life, he always made complete compositions. He never simplified things into small vignettes, like Whistler, but rather, composed in a comprehensive fashion — more in the fashion of the great old masters, like Poussin and Dürer.

5

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
Performer Bowing
(Beifallheischende Artistin), 1909

lithograph in red, black, and blue on wove paper
National Gallery of Art

Ruth and Jacob Kainen Collection, Gift in Honor of
the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art

This lithograph also was made in 1909, a crucial year for Kirchner and one of his

most productive years — one in which he produced great images in lithography. In this case, we see a performer after she has finished her dance or her trapeze act. She comes out on the stage and bows before the audience in a gesture which elicits applause. Kirchner has drawn her extremely swiftly. If you look at the black line of the drawing, that is, the basic drawing before the colors are added to the lithograph, you will see that Kirchner has shown the simple outlines of the figure, with hardly any modeling at all. The modeling is to be done by the colors. In creating these colors, Kirchner did not simply put them carefully within each outline — like a child doing a coloring book — but rather, associated the colors with certain areas. Certainly her tights and her suit are red, but then there are flashes of red below her nose, on the right hand side of the image, and in the lower left. They pick up the red of her body and spread it throughout the image. Likewise, the mottled blue which appears on what seems to be a curtain hanging in the background, and on what may be part of a stage set in the lower right, spreads the texture throughout the image.

Texture is something of great interest for Kirchner and the *Brücke*. In fact, in this lithograph we can see very clearly an unusual technique which Kirchner created. We have no idea how he made

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lithographs with such a mottled quality. If you know the chemistry of the process, you understand that achieving this texture is extremely difficult. We do know that as the stone was being prepared for printing, he used an unusual preparation of turpentine. The turpentine created those pools, forming a sort of topography like a geographic map of a region of mountains and valleys. This rich texture doesn't simply color in the figure, but lends a quality of modeling, variety, and a feeling of richness both to the figure and to the background.

6

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

German, 1880–1938

Bathing Couple, 1910

color woodcut printed in black,
blue, green, and red
National Gallery of Art

Gift of Ruth Cole Kainen © Ingeborg and
Dr. Wolfgang Henze-Ketterer, Wichtrach/Bern

Here we have a preeminent example from
the following year, that is, 1910, of

Kirchner's developed woodcut style. The image is a very peaceful one with great charm. It shows a man and his girl, presumably out for a swim. The girl has a red flower in her hair. She sits on the edge of the water on a bank of grass. He stands bending over, beneath what looks to be a branch of pine tree, as he prepares to go into the lake. Kirchner and his friends loved to sketch nudes in nature. They reacted against the formal poses of academic art; they thought that one had to see the human body and human beings in simple, free situations. Recall the

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slides that we've seen — landscapes, cityscapes, dancers, and now, a young couple out for a swim. There is nothing anguished or painful about these images. The notion that German Expressionism concerns only pain and anguish is a rather false notion. The Expressionists were intense, and they wanted to express the riveted moment, the exact impression of the moment, in the most intense, and as they said, the most *authentic* way. However, what they were expressing was not pain and strain, but life, light, love, freedom, the beauty of the female

form. Pain and strain did come later, after the First World War, but that is not the essence of German Expressionism.

7

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
Three Bathers by Stones
(*Drei Badende an Steinen*), 1913

lithograph in pink, blue, red, and black
on calendered paper

National Gallery of Art

Ruth and Jacob Kainen Collection © Ingeborg and
Dr. Wolfgang Henze-Ketterer, Wichtrach/Bern

Here we have the same kind of image as the previous one — that is, a group of bathers sitting near a body of water. In this case, two of them are in the water, while a man sits on a stone on the side. But obviously, there has been a big change. This work was created in 1913. Two years earlier, Kirchner had moved from Dresden to Berlin. His experience of the big city of Berlin — a much bigger, more urban, more intense city than Dresden — caused a notable change in his art. One can speculate about the coming clouds of war in Europe, but most likely,

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the increased sharpness in Kirchner's drawing and the intensity in the faces of his figures has to do with his own experience of urban life after he moved to Berlin. You notice, by contrast with the previous woodcut, that in this lithograph the forms have been smoothed and rounded. Here, simple, large, geometric arcs are the basis for the shoulders and arms and thighs of the female bather on the left, as well as for the form of the seated man. The smoothly drawn arcs are enhanced from time to time by a kind of nervous, rapid hatching. You can also see this back-and-forth hatching on the stones beyond the two right-hand figures, or just below the seated man, and the same kind of nervous, quick drawing in the fingers of his right hand. All of these elements are emblematic of what Kirchner called his "hieroglyphs of nature." He tried to reduce the graphic equivalents, the graphic symbols for aspects of the world, to simple forms. This is, of course, an idea which has a long history in previous art and reminds us not only of early German art but especially of the great classic tradition of art which we associate most frequently with the seventeenth century. The German Expressionists, then, did not create art out of whole cloth, but their art embodies and carries forward traditions which we see throughout previous art history.

8

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
Five Tarts (Fünf Kokotten), 1914
woodcut on blotting paper
National Gallery of Art

Ruth and Jacob Kainen Collection © Ingeborg and Dr. Wolfgang Henze-Ketterer, Wichtrach/Bern

This is a woodcut from the following year, 1914. It has become one of the icons of twentieth-century printmaking. Frequently called *Five Tarts*, it shows five ladies walking down the street in Berlin. You can see a wheel in the lower right. If you use your imagination effectively, you can see that in fact, it is the front wheel of a car. Above it is a hood, and beyond that, farther up, is the windshield. These five very elegantly dressed ladies promenade down the avenue. They have wonderful hats filled with feathers. Their faces show a wide range of emotions — from the kind of blank primitivism of the face on the left, through the kind of joyous smile of the lady in the background, to the "come hither" look of the woman in the foreground. You see that she has thrown a white fur neckpiece over her shoulders. Kirchner has shown the white fur very effectively with a few

deep, shattering gouges into the wood.

The woodcut shows us how Kirchner was always true to his materials. This is a characteristic seen throughout the work of the *Brücke* artists. They wanted to show the exact quality of the matrix, the basis from which their prints were made. No one would mistake this object for anything other than a woodcut. You see bits of texture, the remaining peaks of wood, just below the surface where the gouge has dug them out. You see the knife-sharp slices in the hatching at the lower right, in the spokes of the wheel, on the hood of the car. And you get the sense of splintering wood, especially in the white furpiece which the central figure has thrown around her neck.

As we noticed before, Kirchner composes images completely, that is, with some element in every part of the picture plane. You should also notice the border or edge of this work. Kirchner always left the edges of his images clear. Part of that has to do with the closure of the image, the completeness of the image, but most of it has to do with a reaction against the notions of professional printing which were in force at the time that the *Brücke* artists grew up. Part of their truth to materials was to show just what the edge of the matrix looked like, so that one senses just where the wood block began, where it stopped, just where it hit the

paper, just what its effect was on the paper — including all of the slight imperfections — such as the little nicks on the right, or the slight breaks at the top, above the three figures on the left. All of this serves to emphasize further that this is a woodcut. There's no disguising of the medium; on the contrary, there's a kind of relishing of the possibilities of wood — from the thinnest white lines in the elbow of the righthand figure, to those broad, heavy black hatchings in the form adjacent to the leftmost woman.

As opposed to the image of three bathers, which we saw before, you see that *Five Tarts* has a very faceted, angular quality. Part of this has to do with the image. These very tall, slender, elegant ladies have an angular quality in reality — that is, the style of the period emphasized a kind of angularity. Kirchner has been true to reality in that sense. The nature of the wood block lends itself also to angularity in the process of cutting with the knife, or a gouge. It is easiest to make a straight stroke, or cut, and to produce a forceful, straight line. You see those lines throughout this image.

In addition, one probably should agree that this enhanced angularity — this faceted quality of the image — has a great deal to do with Kirchner's psychological reaction to the intense urban life of Berlin. There is a nervous quality in

this print which we noticed before in the *Three Bathers* . . . , with its rapid hatching. Here there is no hatching like that because there is no free drawing, but still one senses a kind of hypertension in the print. That undoubtedly has to do with the nature of the city shown in the image and of the artist's reaction to that city.

9

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

Mountains with a Mountain Hut, 1921

woodcut touched with black ink
on wove paper

National Gallery of Art

Ruth and Jacob Kainen Collection, Gift in Honor
of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of
Art © Ingeborg and Dr. Wolfgang Henze-Ketterer,
Wichtrach/Bern

The nervousness which we noticed in the two preceding images from 1913 and 1914 comes to a peak in Kirchner's life in 1915, when he was drafted into the army to serve in the field artillery. Kirchner reacted very badly to army life, and within a year he had a nervous breakdown. By December of 1915, he was mustered out, and within another year-and-a-half, he had left Germany to move to Switzerland to a sanatorium — something which was both advised by his doctors and agreed to by the government authorities. In Switzerland, he lived in Davos, where he was surrounded by a

totally new environment. Instead of automobiles, tarts, streets, he was surrounded by mountains, peasants, animals. He reacted to this simple life with characteristic intensity. In portraying the Swiss mountains, as in this woodcut from 1921, Kirchner shows them not as grand panoramas or as romantic aspects of nature, but rather as intense, almost organic forms, which thrust up out of the ground. He locates his mountain cabin in the foreground; being very true to nature, he shows, over the door, the kind of carved symbol which is typical of the area. He scatters his animals around, but in a way which is evocative rather than a simple portrayal. You see how the two white sheep on the right lead back toward four black sheep — this time further up, on the background mountain. They are stacked above each other, giving one the sense of verticality which is so characteristic of the Alps. The clouds dance. They whirl just like the dancers in the early lithograph. They give a sense of vitality and movement, life and light to the entire image.

Eventually, Kirchner focused more on the geometric qualities of his art, as he lived through the remaining 1920s and 1930s in Switzerland. But in this woodcut from 1921, we see the direct line with his earliest works. Again, all emphasize life, movement, truth to materials, and

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are intense, riveting expressions of a particular view, a particular moment, a particular scene.

Part II:
Die Brücke

10

Karl Schmidt-Rottluff
(1884–1976)
Nude, 1909

woodcut on wove paper
National Gallery of Art

Gift of Ruth Cole Kainen@Ingeborg and
Dr. Wolfgang Henze-Ketterer, Wichtrach/Bern

In the German city of Dresden in 1905, a group of four young architecture students who were in their early twenties banded together to form an artists' group called *Die Brücke*, the Bridge. The four students were Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Erich Heckel, and Fritz Bleyl. The friends were originally drawn to each other because of their common interest in renewing German art. They found the academic traditions and the Impressionist traditions to be basically bankrupt, to be finished. They wanted to find in art a kind of essential authenticity which had to do with the direct response to subject matter, to life around them, as demonstrated in this case by a woodcut

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by Karl Schmidt-Rottluff.

One senses immediately the physical presence of the nude woman who is sitting on the edge of a bed or a sofa. The artist has emphasized her reality, her real presence — from the large spread arms

to her heavy breasts hanging on a rather rotund stomach, to her legs, given prominence by crossing one of them. The position of her legs does not appear real — the foot is not hooked on top of the opposite knee, nor is it actually lying on top

of the edge of the bed — but one feels the presence of this leg, and a kind of essential “legness” about it. Let’s remember this image by Schmidt-Rottluff from 1909, as we see another nude from 1913 by the same artist.

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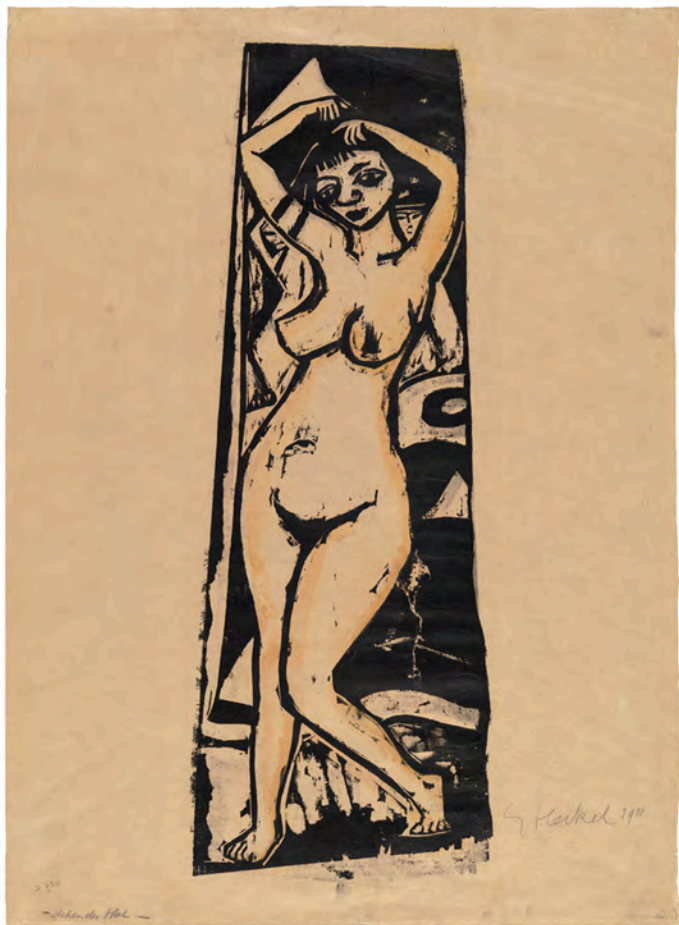
11

Karl Schmidt-Rottluff
(1884–1976)

Woman with Unbound Hair
(*Frau mit aufgelostem Haar*), 1913
woodcut on laid paper
National Gallery of Art
Rosenwald Collection

This woodcut shows the same subject as the previous work; however, the style is totally different. Instead of the rich, textured image of earlier years, Schmidt-Rottluff’s style now has developed toward flat planes, angularity of line, and a kind of primitiveness. Nevertheless, the real physical presence of the woman is not lost; in fact, some might think it enhanced. The round arcs of her thighs and her buttocks; the round, grapefruitlike globes of her breasts; her shoulders curving in towards her waist, and again around her hips — all emphasize her sexual presence, almost like a primitive fertility goddess.

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While Kirchner is generally acknowledged the artistic leader of the *Brücke*, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff was one of his most potent rivals for this leadership. And it was Schmidt-Rottluff who gave us our only contemporaneous explanation of the name for the group. He wrote a letter in which he said that one of the aims of the *Brücke* "is to attract all the revolutionary and fermenting elements to itself." That's the meaning of the name *Brücke* — *bridge*.

12

Erich Heckel (1883–1970)
Standing Nude, 1911
woodcut with watercolor
National Gallery of Art
Gift of Ruth Cole Kainen

Again we have a nude — this time a standing figure by Erich Heckel, another of the founding members of the *Brücke*. In this case, the artist also shows us a real woman, a woman who is full in her sexual implications and in the beauty of her female form. The *Brücke* artists had no problem whatsoever of a psychological nature with regard to women. They're quite different from Edvard Munch in that sense. They loved women. Their models were frequently their lovers; their lovers

were their models. They relished freedom — freedom from restrictions, freedom from inhibiting clothing. These artists were particularly anxious to capture the sense of movement and light, and the attractiveness of the figure as it posed or moved through various gestures.

Here, Heckel shows us — in a marvelous way — a kind of elastic figure. The arms are tiny; the feet are tiny. The arms set up a motion through the figure — a kind of in-and-out motion which begins with the hands of the nude, goes out to her elbows, then in to her breasts, out again, around her copious hips, down to her knees, and then out once more. Even the shape of the wood block itself is used to emphasize the beauty of the female form. Texture is achieved by small bits of wood which are left close to the surface and which create half-lights — the little bits which look like smudges; they are organized around the edges of the form so that they create a sense of softness. You see the bits of tone around her navel, around her waist, below her breasts; yet the figure retains a sense of the harshness of line which is clearly based on slicing and carving the wood. In this particular impression, Heckel has colored the edges of the form with a light golden color which softens the figure and gives it a wonderfully appealing, succulent quality.

13

Erich Heckel (1883–1970)
Man in Prayer (Mannerbildnis), 1919
hand-colored woodcut on laid paper
National Gallery of Art
Rosenwald Collection

While the previous nude was created by Heckel in 1911, this image was created in 1919. The contrast between a pre-World War I image and a post-World War I image is immediately striking. The nude was very straightforward, very appealing, very gorgeous in its direct femininity. Here we see a face sometimes thought to be a self-portrait, sometimes thought to be just an image of a man praying, but a face withdrawn. The dominant mood is not simple and straightforward enjoyment, but melancholy. The image, a large color woodcut, is one of Heckel's most widely appreciated prints. The use of green on the skin of the figure — both the face and the hands — contrasts in a marvelous way with the rust and the blue of the background, and the colors enhance the sense that the figure has experienced some sadness and exists in a world of difficulty, totally different from Heckel's earlier print. And yet, it is not so different in style — that is, there is a

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certain angularity in the fingers; there is almost an insectlike quality in the hands; there are striations on the face. But the real difference is in the mood conveyed by the image and in the use of color.

14

Max Pechstein (1881–1955)
Variety Dancer, 1909
color lithograph in black, red and
blue on wove yellow paper
National Gallery of Art
Gift of Ruth Cole Kainen

Max Pechstein is the last of the four young artists who were about the same age, all born about 1880 or just thereafter, who banded together in the *Brücke*. Pechstein joined the *Brücke* in 1906. He was a fully trained artist in the academic tradition. But in reaction to the sense of vitality, the interest in direct gesture which was characteristic of the *Brücke*, Pechstein changed his style. This *Variety Dancer* — that is, a dancer who performs either in a café or on a stage — is one of the great *Brücke* prints and perhaps the finest print by Pechstein. That arm — marvelously drawn in perspective — looks like a kind of free-floating form; and yet, when you think about it, you see fingers on the end of an

arm, going back to an elbow, and then a shoulder. One's eye continues down through the heavy, pasty red on her body, to the mottled blue on her skirt. The blue floats throughout the background. Pechstein has used the lithographic technique to create a sense of colors moving around the figure — not just within certain restrained areas, but floating around the figure. By printing his lithograph on an acid yellow paper, he gives the sense of this dancer in an artificial environment — in the gaslight environment of a café. The figure whirls and moves, and you see the color from her dress floating around her figure; you see the figure ducking in and out of the light, but always with those intense, riveting eyes which fasten you and keep your attention on her.

Pechstein is an excellent example of the value of an association among artists, because he was perhaps the most influenced of the *Brücke* artists and the one most subject to variation in his style, depending upon those people with whom he associated. (And perhaps he was also one of the least talented.) It's clear, particularly in a print like this, that when he was working together with Kirchner and with Heckel, and with Schmidt-Rottluff, Pechstein could create marvelous works. He's a fine example of a creative personality who needs the interaction with other people to bring out his best talents.

15

Emil Nolde (1867–1956)
Hamburg, Freihafen, 1910
etching on wove paper
National Gallery of Art
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Kainen
in memory of Lessing J. Rosenwald

There were two somewhat older artists who joined the *Brücke*. The best known was Emil Nolde. He had an exhibition in Dresden in 1905, and the *Brücke* artists were struck by his explosions of color, so they asked him to join their group. In 1906 he did so. Nolde brought to the *Brücke* artists an extraordinary sense of etching. He was a very practiced and highly competent etcher who had created many unusual means for portraying images. The tone which we see in the sky of this print — and, to a lesser extent, in the water — is created by Nolde's unique technique. He most often used iron plates, which are a rough medium, much rougher than copper for creating an etching. He undertook an extremely hazardous process by covering small bits of

the plate — for example, the white shape of the smoke coming from the tugboat — with a resistant substance, a wax or an asphalt; then he would simply throw the plate into the acid or put acid over the whole plate, so that the acid would bite the plate directly, creating in a totally unpredictable way a kind of scattered tone. In one of his letters, Nolde claimed that

he had such sympathy with the iron plates and with the character of the acid that he could put the plate into the acid bath and take a nap! And he would inevitably wake up just at the right moment to pull the plate out of the acid, saving the plate from total destruction! At the same time, the plate had received a marvelous, natural kind of scattered tone.

One of the most prominent and constant characteristics of Nolde's art is his sense of the spiritual dimensions of things. Even in an etching of an architectural scene like this harbor, one can sense the way that Nolde has captured the essence of water, the spirit of the buildings. He catches not only the physical environment, but also the feeling of

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smoky air. He sets up an interaction between great masses like the boats and the piers, the buoyancy and lightness of the water, and the kind of overall texture of the air, which as you breathe it, gets inside your lungs. You feel the grit and the smoke. And when you look at Nolde's etching of a harbor, you sense the grit and the smoke all around you, the work of the harbor, and that this is a place, above all, of practical work, where masses and forces are set off against each other.

16

Emil Nolde (1867–1956)

Prophet, 1912

woodcut

National Gallery of Art

Rosenwald Collection

Here we have a woodcut. This is the technique which Nolde, in turn, learned from the *Brücke* and which he made intensely his own. This woodcut is called *The Prophet*. One sees clearly how Nolde has deeply gouged out the white areas while leaving rather abstract black areas around the head, the eyes, the mouth, the beard. Nolde was particularly fond of printing his woodcuts very deeply into the paper. In this case, even from the

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slide, one can sense the way that the white paper protrudes in a rounded form from the surface and how the black printed parts of the paper recede into the background, below the surface. In many cases, for example, in this head of *The Prophet*, one almost feels that Nolde is creating a kind of sculpture. Here the forehead of *The Prophet* pushes forward, his high cheekbones push forward from the page, while his deeply recessed eyes fall into the background under the shadow of his brows. Nolde thus creates an intense mood, a mood of devotion, an introspective mood, and one of very strong feelings.

At the same time that Nolde emphasizes the three-dimensionality of the woodcut, like all *Brücke* artists, he remains true to the character of the medium as a piece of wood. On the right-hand side of the image you see the texture of the wood grain itself. Around the image, particularly at top and bottom, you see the small imperfections of the edge of the board. All of this is to manifest clearly that this work of art is a woodcut — a work cut out of a piece of wood and then printed with black ink on a piece of paper. All the materials have their role in creating the final effect of the image. Nolde also worked in other graphic media, and we shall look at one of his lithographs next.

17

Emil Nolde (1867–1956)
Dancer (Tanzerin), 1913
5-color lithograph on japan paper
National Gallery of Art
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund

In 1913, Nolde had an intense period in a lithographic workshop in Flensburg in northern Germany. In the course of many weeks, he worked directly on enormous lithographic stones, varying their colors, varying their images, creating a series of extremely creative prints with a wide variation of colors from print to print. In this print, the *Dancer*, which Nolde said expressed “his passion and his joy,” one sees perhaps the greatest of all of these images created in 1913. One could hardly find a more riveting and ecstatic portrayal of the power of dance. In this particular moment, one senses the final ecstasy, the final combination of the movements of the dance, the life of the dance and the utter devotion and absorption of the performer in the dance. Just as with the portrayal of the essence of a harbor scene — that sense of the life and dirt and power of a harbor scene — and also with the portrayal of the essence of *The*

Prophet — that kind of riveting intense gaze of the prophet — so also here, with the dancer, Nolde has penetrated to the essence of the scene and brought out just those essential characteristics which leave us in no doubt whatsoever about the character of the scene. Indeed, these images and essences remain in our minds as the epitome of just what a harbor means and is, just what it means to be a prophet, and just what it means to dance.

18

Otto Müller (1874–1930)
Nude Figure of a Girl in a Landscape
(*Madchenzwischen Blattpflanzen*), 1912
woodcut on wove paper
National Gallery of Art
Rosenwald Collection

This work is by Otto Mueller, a very free spirit who claimed to come from Gypsy background and who loved to portray Gypsies and other wandering and nomadic folks, and models, totally free, nude in nature. The majority of his prints show images like this beautiful young girl, slightly angular, perhaps, still somewhat adolescent, but with a great sense of joy and charm. The large leaves of the plant protect and enclose the girl in a very

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friendly fashion. Her somewhat Egyptian-looking head is echoed in the peaks of the mountains behind her.

Mueller is a good final example of the breadth of the *Brücke*. When they first banded together, the young artists said they wanted to bring into themselves all fermenting and revolutionary movements and all artists who expressed effectively,

and directly, and authentically what they felt and saw. Mueller was an older man. He came from a totally different background and he was something of a loner. The ability of the *Brücke* group as an association to stretch its understanding of style, to stretch its conception of art widely enough to encompass this man, shows that the point of the movement

was indeed authenticity of expression. The *Brücke* did not promote just one style or another. Most of all, it was concerned with freedom, naturalness — the naturalness of human beings in nature — and with an authentic grasp of the essence of a situation and its portrayal in a fashion which was direct, simple, and effective.