

# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

FOR RELEASE:

Wednesday, October 2, 1957

PRESS OPENING:

Tuesday, October 1, 1957

11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

No. 98

MODERN GERMAN ART SHOWN ON TWO GALLERY FLOORS AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

German Art of the 20th Century, the most comprehensive survey ever presented in this country, will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from October 2 through December 1. More than 170 paintings, sculptures and prints, dating from the beginning of German expressionism in the first decade of this century to a selective representation of recent work will be shown on two gallery floors.

The diversified contributions made in Germany to modern art are shown in the exhibition by paintings and prints by Kirchner, Heckel and Schmidt-Rottluff, leaders of Die Brücke, (The Bridge) the first group of expressionists; works by Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider) artists such as Klee and Kandinsky, who painted the first abstract pictures; the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Realism) after the first war when German artists such as Dix and Grosz savagely satirized their world; and work produced at the Bauhaus, the famous school of the 20's where Klee and Feininger taught. Sculptures by Lehmbruck, Barlach and Marcks as well as less known figures are shown as well as painting and prints by two of the most important expressionists, Kokoschka and Beckmann, who were not associated with any group. The propaganda art of the Nazi regime is ignored, but a selection of recent paintings, sculpture and prints indicates the direction of German artists today now that the art before Hitler is being officially reinstated and once again men are free to create works of art.

The exhibition was selected by Andrew Carnduff Ritchie last year when he was Director of the Museum's Department of Painting and Sculpture, a position he has since resigned to become Director of the Yale University Art Gallery. He has installed the paintings and sculpture in the Museum's third floor galleries. William S. Lieberman, Curator of Prints at the Museum, selected and installed the print section of the exhibition in the Auditorium Gallery.

Expressionism, the term applied to the unique contribution of German art, is generally defined as art which concerns itself with the artist's inner feelings about the world, rather than with the way the world actually appears to his eye.

Werner Haftmann, in his section on painting in the catalog\*, points out that among the factors in Germany at the end of the 19th century that contributed to

---

\* GERMAN ART OF THE 20TH CENTURY. Edited by Andrew Carnduff Ritchie. Text by Dr. Werner Haftmann, Dr. Alfred Hentzen and Mr. William S. Lieberman. 240 pages; 178 illustrations (48 in color). Published by the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Distributed by Simon & Schuster, New York. \$9.50.

---

the state of powerful spiritual fermentation which was undermining all the barriers of tradition and convention, were the music of Wagner, the visionary ideas of the Rosicrucians, the French Symbolists, the new complicated psychological view of man in the writings of Ibsen, Strindberg, and the verbal brilliance of Nietzsche. He says,

We may take the years 1905 - 06 as the key period for the birth of German Expressionism. 1905 is the year in which the Fauves appeared as a group in the Paris Autumn Salon. The extension of the human situation made the problem for painting quite clear. The allegorical cloak that obscured the vision of reality had to be pushed aside, a new dialogue with the world had to be initiated, unburdened by tradition and history, and this direct relationship between nature and the ego had to be expressed with as much force as possible. The center of gravity no longer lay in things themselves, but in the sensation they produced, for which a new language now had to be found. It was only natural that the painters sought out the intimations of this direct language where they did: in the art of primitive peoples, in peasant folklore, in the forms created by the 'naive' and by children.

The exhibition opens with paintings and prints by three North German artists who were important in the early development of expressionism but who had no contact with each other: Paula Modersohn-Becker (1876 - 1907), Christian Rohlf (1849-1938) and Emil Nolde (1867 - 1956). But while a new spirit operated within the individual in North Germany, in Central Germany it brought together in a community a group of very young artists for whom this very community and camaraderie provided a fresh spirit of aggressiveness.

#### The Bridge

This first group of expressionists was formed in 1905 by four young students in their twenties in Dresden who called themselves Die Brücke. Schmidt-Rottluff (b. 1884), Heckel (b. 1883), Kirchner (1880 - 1938) and Bleyl (and later joined by Nolde, Pechstein and Mueller) evolved a joint style out of a feeling of spiritual solidarity. From the outset printmaking was as important as painting in their program. The Brücke manifesto, written by Kirchner and printed as a woodcut, read: "With a belief in the development of a new generation of creators and appreciators, we summon all youth. As those who will bear the burden of the future, we are determined to create for ourselves a physical and spiritual freedom opposed to established and traditional forces. He who portrays directly, without qualification, the creative impulse is one of us."

Comparing the German Brücke artists with their contemporary French Fauves (Wild Beasts) Mr. Lieberman says,

Indeed it appears that the Brücke artists were making discoveries in the Dresden ethnographic museum well before the French artists began collecting Negro sculpture. Both groups exploited unnatural color and bold distortion. The neurotic melancholy, the brooding introspection so characteristic of the German Expressionists is alien to the Fauves, however, and reveals a greater debt to Munch than to van Gogh or Gauguin. The more intimate, daily association of the German artists gave the Brücke a cohesion as a brotherhood which the Fauves neither sought nor desired. Until 1911 the members worked in close collaboration, sharing living and working quarters in Dresden and vacationing together during the summers. They freely exchanged cover designs for portfolios of each other's prints and often used the same stones for their lithographs.

more . . . .

The Brücke moved to Berlin in 1911 and in 1913 dissolved. Of the twelve paintings and prints by the leader of the group, Kirchner, three date from this formative period in German art. In 1925, he also painted a group portrait of the painters of the Brücke, which is in the exhibition. Three color woodcuts by Heckel and two paintings, both from collections in Germany are also shown.

### Blue Rider

The next influential group was the Blaue Reiter (Blue Rider), whose solid core consisted of Kandinsky (1866 - 1944), Marc (1880 - 1916), Macke (1887 - 1914), Jawlensky (1864 - 1941) and Klee (1879 - 1940). The name Blue Rider was taken from a book that Kandinsky and Marc edited in 1911 and published in 1912. This dealt with the works of the naive artist: peasant glass painting, old German woodcuts and children's drawings. Schoenberg wrote on corresponding developments in music; Kandinsky developed his ideas and contributed a play. More cosmopolitan than the Brücke, and lacking the stylistic cohesion of the earlier group, the Blue Rider, nevertheless aroused far more controversy when they banded together to form an active program of exhibition. "This belief in the possibility of rendering in pictorial terms the 'underlying mystical design of the visible world,' as Marc put it, gives the Blaue Reiter painters their great significance," Dr. Haftmann says. "Out of their approach came the abstract and hermetic painting which formed the new attitudes of modern man to plastic reality and to these attitudes Kandinsky and Klee gave a world wide authority."

Works of art in the exhibition from this period include Marc's great "spiritual pictures" of animals, paintings and prints, and Macke's brilliant "The Dress Shop" and "Girls Under Trees." The romantic-religious tendencies implicit in Der Blaue Reiter found their characteristic expression in work by Alexei von Jawlensky, two of whose paintings of powerfully luminous color are shown.

But the prime moving spirit in the group was Kandinsky. "In the course of profound spiritual assimilation of the ideas growing out of the Jugendstil, van Gogh, the Neo-Impressionists, and the Fauves, he succeeded in evolving the abstract picture. His aim was now no longer to reproduce objects in painting, but to make the painting itself the object," Dr. Haftmann says. At this time Kandinsky abandoned titles. Two "Compositions" of 1913 and one of 1914 are included in the show.

At the same time the desire for knowledge of the inner man through art was being powerfully confirmed by the science of psychoanalysis founded by Freud in Vienna. Out of this milieu came the painter Oskar Kokoschka (b. 1886) who had an incomparable capacity for uncovering images beneath the sensitive skin of natural appearance. At the point of strongest psychological tension Kokoschka bored in, as

it were, and came up with--the self portrait, Dr. Haftmann adds.

In addition to five paintings by this famous artist, dating from a 1909 portrait of the art historian Dr. Tietze and his wife to a landscape of the mid-twenties, Kokoschka is represented by four lithographs. His Self Portrait, a color lithograph, is characterized by Mr. Lieberman as one of the most penetrating Expressionist analyses.

### The War and the New Realism

The first world war and its aftermath is strongly reflected in the development of German art. Almost all the painters were at the front for years and many, including Marc and Macke, were killed. After the war a socially critical realism was introduced by George Grosz, in his biting topical satire. Another bitter realist was Otto Dix, whose "dissecting glance and relentless insistence of the carefully built-up old master technique...give these horrible themes the ghastly clarity and silent immobility of a dream." The art of both of these men was related to Dadaism, which Max Ernst also developed when he drew on existing material such as parts of printed pages and manipulated the prefabricated pictures in order to make their harsh reality more eloquent by means of irrational juxtapositions. Out of a similar feeling for the mystery of commonplace things, Kurt Schwitters no longer set form against form but material against material and, with marvelous witchery, made collages of scraps and waste, thus discovering a new variation on Dada paintings.

But the most powerful figure in this trend of the time toward a new definition of reality was Max Beckmann (1884 - 1950), represented in the exhibition by five oils, from "Family Picture" (1920) to the great triptych "Temptation of St. Anthony" which, fleeing the Nazis, he smuggled out of Germany in 1937. Four prints by this famous artist who was prolific in graphic work, including two lithographs, a drypoint and a woodcut, are shown in the print section of the exhibition.

### The Bauhaus

The Bauhaus, an institution that in research and instruction took for its theme the forming of the entire human environment through architecture, industrial design, painting and sculpture, was founded in 1919 in Weimar, by the architect, Walter Gropius. In 1925 the Bauhaus moved to Dessau and Gropius left three years later. The last years of the 20's were difficult, and in 1933, the institution was closed by the Nazis as a "hotbed of cultural Bolshevism."

The works of its four great painters--Kandinsky, Klee, Schlemmer, Feininger--are shown, including one of Kandinsky's sharply defined geometric abstractions,

the architectonic paintings of Schlemmer, four oils and two woodcuts by the American born Feininger, and eight oils and five prints by the Swiss born Klee.

Under Hitler's rule many artists and almost all the men of the Bauhaus including Kandinsky, Klee, Kokoschka, Kirchner and Beckmann, left Germany. Modern artists were threatened by Hitler with the insane asylum or jail. In 1937 "degenerate" art, which includes works by most of the artists in the exhibition, was confiscated, in 1938 the confiscated works were sold or destroyed. In 1939 modern European masterpieces, collected by Germans for decades, were sold in Lucerne. The few important artists still left in Germany were forbidden to paint.

#### Postwar German Painting

The exhibition concludes with three independent significant personalities who perhaps represent the highpoints of present-day German painting: Fritz Winter, who went through the Bauhaus, and was Kandinsky's assistant and worked in close relationship with Klee; Werner, who is interested in the new spaces of science and May, whose new pictures are, according to Dr. Haftmann, graceful, free and bright.

#### Sculpture

Among the twenty works of German sculpture in the exhibition are famous pieces by Lehmbruck and Barlach, the two great men who marked the beginning of new German sculpture in the early part of the century, and five works by Gerhard Marcks, who is the leading sculptor in Germany today. "The paths struck out by Barlach and Lehmbruck unite in him in a new style, and his influence, in turn, extends over the entire artistic scene in Germany. Each of the artists contemporary with him or younger has had to reckon with his work. He is still today the center of German sculpture," Dr. Hentzen says. The exhibition also includes steel constructions by the non-objectivist Hans Uhlmann, bronzes by the talented Blumenthal, who died in the last war, Hartung and Heiliger.

There are seventeen private lenders to the exhibition from the United States and thirteen from abroad; twelve American museums and galleries and fourteen foreign museums have also loaned works to the show.

German Art of the 20th Century has been materially assisted by the Federal Republic of Germany. It is presented at the Museum of Modern Art in collaboration with the St. Louis Museum where it will be on view from January 8 to February 24.

---

For photographs and additional information please contact Elizabeth Shaw, Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York. CI 5-8900.