

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

No. 92

FOR RELEASE:

Wednesday, November 9, 1955

PRINTS BY NOLDE AND KIRCHNER

at the Museum of Modern Art

An exhibition of approximately 85 prints by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880 - 1933) and Emil Nolde (born 1867), two leading and pioneer German expressionists, will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from November 9 through January 8. In addition to approximately 40 color woodcuts, lithographs and etchings by each of these German masters, William S. Lieberman, Curator of Prints and director of the exhibition, has included a selection of prints by three other members of Die Brücke (The Bridge), the short lived but still influential group of which Kirchner and Nolde were the most important members. An introductory section of the exhibition shows work of Post-Impressionists who influenced the members of this closely knit group.

Die Brücke only existed from 1905 until the First World War, but Nolde and Kirchner continued separately as leaders of German expressionism and the exhibition includes examples of their work through the '20s and '30s. Work by both men was included in the Nazi exhibition of degenerate art in 1937. Many portraits by both artists are shown including several by Kirchner of famous men such as Will Grohman, the art critic, Jean Arp, the sculptor, Otto Klemperer, the pianist, and Ludwig Schames, the dealer and propagandist of expressionism. Kirchner's street scenes of Dresden and Berlin are shown and a woodcut of the same subject as his most famous painting, Modern Bohemia. Nolde's portraits of children, young people and his wife are included as well as landscapes and city scenes. Several lithographs from his period of religious themes which began in 1909 are also in the show.

Die Brücke, founded by Kirchner and three fellow architectural students in Dresden in 1905, was the first group of German expressionists and was contemporary with the fauves in France. The group originally consisted of Kirchner, Fritz Bleyl, Erich Heckel and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff. Nolde joined in 1906 and remained a member for a year and a half. Max Pechstein and the Swiss painter Cuno Amiet also joined in 1906 and Otto Müller became associated with the group in 1910. From its inception Kirchner, however, was the dominant personality of the group which worked in close collaboration, sharing living and working quarters and exhibiting their work only jointly.

From the outset printmaking was as important as painting in the program of Die Brücke and their manifesto, written by Kirchner, was carved and printed as a

more...

woodcut. In it he said: "With a belief in the development of a new generation of creators and appreciators, we summon all youth. As the youth which 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 and without qualification, the creative impulse, is one of us."

Although the formation of Die Brücke in Dresden coincided in time with the looser association of the fauves in France, the Brücke style, angular violence of design and arbitrary patterns of color, was formulated between late 1903 and 1911 and was certainly under the influence of Matisse if not other members of the fauves. Mr. Lieberman says, "Both groups, however, were deeply influenced by the Post-Impressionists and by primitive art, particularly Negro sculpture. Both also exploited unnatural color and bold distortion in their drawing. The neurotic melancholy, the brooding introspective so characteristic of the German expressionists, is alien to the fauves, however, and reveals a debt greater to Munch than to van Gogh or Gauguin," Mr. Lieberman points out. "The more intimate, even daily association of the German artists gave Die Brücke a cohesion as a brotherhood which the fauves neither sought nor desired."

Among the work produced by members of Die Brücke and shown in the exhibition is a woodcut manifesto, a cover for a portfolio, a membership card and an envelope. Between 1906 and 1911, six portfolios of prints were issued, devoted to a single member or to the work of several members. They often used the same stones for their lithographs and freely contributed covers and designs to portfolios of each others' works. The public, invited to join Die Brücke as inactive or lay members, was solicited with subscription prints. Brücke posters, stationery, announcements, annual reports and membership cards all consisted of original prints.

Twenty-six woodcuts in the exhibition were carved by Kirchner. The woodcut was the first and perhaps the most characteristic of the graphic media used by the group because it naturally combined strength and decoration. Although their intensity of emotion seems essentially Germanic, Mr. Lieberman points out, their direct method of cutting and exploitation of the grain of the wood itself contains a tradition established a decade before by Gauguin. Describing printmaking, an art medium now undergoing a renaissance in this country, Kirchner who made 1700 prints during his lifetime said:

"The urge which drives the artist to printmaking is perhaps the effort to fix in final form what in drawing remains unrepeatable and loose. The very technical manipulations release in the artist powers which do not come into play in the much easier handwork of drawing and painting. The mechanics of printing weld the previous and separate steps into a unity"

more ...

When Nolde came to Dresden and joined Die Brücke he was already an accomplished etcher. He learned bold woodcut techniques from members of the group. In return he instructed Kirchner and Heckel in the chemistry of etching. A year later, in 1907, Schmidt-Rottluff introduced Die Brücke members to lithography which he had just learned. The insistent appearance of the actual edge of the stone in all Kirchner's lithographs and in many of Nolde's is characteristic of Die Brücke as printmakers.

Between 1910 and 1911 the group moved to Berlin and the brotherhood gradually disintegrated. Dissension, recrimination, expulsions were followed by the last manifesto by Kirchner which was rejected by both Heckel and Schmidt-Rottluff. Only Otto Müller remained faithful to Kirchner whose volatile, domineering and unpredictable personality was to no small extent responsible for the final dissolution of the group.

Years later in 1926, Nolde in writing of the artist said:

"The devil lives in his limbs, divinity in his heart. Who can realize these powers fighting with one another in endless conflict! Behind walls lives the artist, rarely flying, often in his snail shell. He loves the rarest and deepest natural occurrences, but also the bright, ordinary reality, the moving clouds, the blooming, glowing flowers, the living creatures. Unknown, unknowing people are his friends, gypsies, Papuans, they carry no lanterns. He sees not much, but other men see nothing."

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Emil Nolde. (Emil Habsen). Born 1867 in Nolde (North Schleswig). 1885-1889 studied at the Saueremann School of Graphics in St. Gall. Worked as independent artist in Munich, Paris and Copenhagen. Moved to Berlin in 1902. Lived in Dresden 1906-1907 and member of Die Brücke for one and a half years. Lived in Hamburg in 1910 and journeyed to Russia, Japan and the South Sea Islands in 1913. Permanent homes in Berlin and in North Schleswig. Period of religious themes began in 1909. Great religious painter, and one of the foremost watercolorists of Germany. Most proficient at lithography. One of very few progressive artists to join the Nazi party. Branded as a degenerate artist and in 1941 forbidden to work, despite party membership. Included in the Nazi exhibition of degenerate art in 1937. After the war was appointed a professor by the Schleswig-Holstein Provincial Government. Lives now in Seebüll (Schleswig).

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. (1880-1938). Completed "gymnasium" course at Chemnitz in 1901 and entered the Technische Hochschule in Dresden as student in architecture. Received diploma in 1905. Founded Die Brücke later that year. Military training in 1915, discharged as unfit. After severe breakdown, moved to Davos in Switzerland in 1917 where he lived in relative retirement, although his work was eagerly collected and exhibited in Germany. During the 1920s, the angularity and cross hatching of his graphic style gradually disappeared. Although strongly influenced by Picasso's pivotal painting Three Dancers of 1925, his prints lost much of their former directness and force. Picasso's interest in the simultaneous presentation of profile and full face can be seen in Kirchner's portraits of Arp and Bauer. An increasing curvilinear treatment of line and a relaxation of forms combine into the decorative abstraction characteristic of Kirchner's later work.

In 1937, 639 of his works in public collections in Germany were confiscated by the Nazis. Thirty-two were included in the exhibition of degenerate art shown in Munich that year. In 1938 it was proposed to remove offending works of art from private collections as well. Soon after Kirchner received this news he committed suicide.

Photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 St., New York City, Circle 5-8900.