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Independent German Expressionists

German Expressionism refers to a number of related creative movements beginning before WWI and peaking in Berlin during the 1920s.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- Discuss the importance of the group Die Brücke and artists such as Kirchner, Kollwitzer, Schiele, and Modersohn-Becker in the development of German Expressionism.
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KEY POINTS

- Kathe Kollwitz, Egon Schiele, and Paula Modersohn-Becker are among the independent German Expressionists who were unaffiliated with other Expressionist groups but nonetheless successful.
 - Kollwitz is best remembered for her compassionate series, The Weavers.
 - Many of Egon Schiele's contemporaries found the explicit sexual themes of his work disturbing.
 - Paula Modersohn-Becker is among the first recognized female artists to create nude self-portraits.
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TERMS

- Fauvism

An artistic movement of the last part of the 19th century which emphasized spontaneity and the use of extremely bright colors.

- expressionism

A movement in the arts in which the artist does not depict objective reality, but rather a subjective expression of inner experience.

- Weimar Republic

The democratic regime of Germany from 1919 to the assumption of power by Adolf Hitler in 1933.

Expressionism was a modernist movement, beginning with poetry and painting, that originated in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century. It emphasized subjective experience--manipulating perspective for emotional effect in order to evoke moods or ideas. Expressionist artists sought to express meaning or emotional experience rather than physical reality.

Expressionism was developed as an avant-garde style before the First World War. It remained popular during the Weimar Republic, particularly in Berlin. The style extended to a wide range of the arts, including painting, literature, theatre, dance, film, architecture, and music.

Expressionist painters had many influences, among them Edvard Munch, Vincent van Gogh, and several African artists. They were also aware of the Fauvism movement in Paris, which influenced Expressionism's tendency toward arbitrary colors and jarring compositions.

In 1905, a group of four German artists, led by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, formed Die Brücke (the Bridge) in the city of Dresden. This was arguably the founding organization for the German Expressionist movement, though they did not use the word itself. A few years later, in 1911, a like-minded group of young artists formed Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider) in Munich. Among their members were Kandinsky, Franz Marc, Paul Klee, and Auguste Macke.

Apart from these groups, there were several important independent German Expressionists, including Paula Modersohn-Becker, Egon Schiele and Kathe Kollwitz.

Käthe Kollwitz (1867 – 1945) was a German painter, printmaker, and sculptor whose work offered an eloquent and often searing account of the human condition, and the tragedy of war, in the first half of the 20th century. Initially her work was grounded in Naturalism, and later took on Expressionistic qualities . Inspired by a performance of Gerhart Hauptmann's *The Weavers*, which dramatized the oppression of the Silesian weavers in Langenbielau and their failed revolt in 1842, Kollwitz produced a cycle of six works on the Weavers theme. Rather than a literal illustration of the drama, the works were a free and naturalistic expression of the workers' misery, hope, courage, and, eventually, doom. The *Weavers* became Kollwitz' most widely acclaimed work.



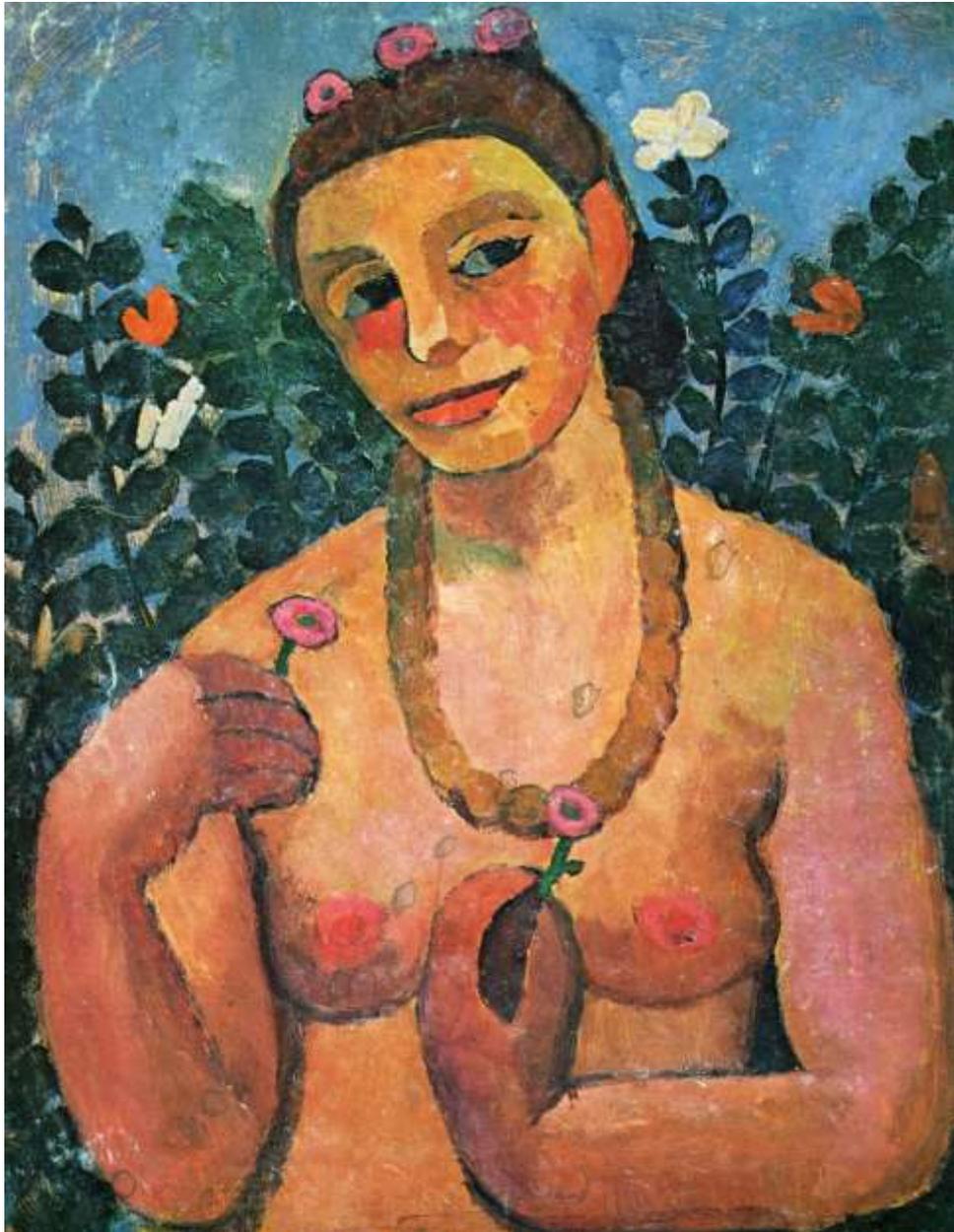
Mother with her Dead Son, by Käthe Kollwitz
This Kollwitz sculpture is a WWII war memorial.

Egon Schiele (1890 – 1918) was an Austrian painter. A protégé of Gustav Klimt, Schiele was a major figurative painter in the early 20th century. His work is noted for its intensity, as well as for the many self-portraits he produced. The twisted body shapes and expressive line that characterize Schiele's paintings and drawings mark the artist as an early exponent of Expressionism. Schiele was influenced by his mentor, Klimt, as well as by Edvard Munch, Jan Toorop, and Vincent van Gogh. Schiele explored themes not only of the human form, but also of human sexuality. Many viewed Schiele's work as being grotesque, erotic, pornographic, or disturbing, focusing on sex, death, and discovery.



Sitzender weiblicher Akt mit aufgestützten Ellbogen, by Egon Schiele
Schiele's depiction of female nudes scandalized his contemporaries.

Paula Modersohn-Becker (1876 – 1907) was a German painter and one of the most important representatives of early Expressionism. In a brief career, cut short by her death at the age of 31, she created a number of groundbreaking images of great intensity. Modersohn-Becker studied briefly at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and was influenced by French post impressionists Paul Cézanne, Vincent van Gogh, and Paul Gauguin. On her last trip to Paris in 1906, she produced a series of paintings about which she felt great excitement and satisfaction. During this period of painting, she produced her initial nude self-portraits-- something unprecedented by a female painter-- and portraits of friends such as Rainer Maria Rilke and Werner Sombart .



Selbstporträt, by Paula Modersohn-Becker, 1906
Female nude self-portraits were uncommon subjects in this era.