



Erich Mendelsohn, Einstein Tower, Potsdam, 1919–21

The tower was built as a symbol of the greatness of Einstein's concepts. The beginnings of its design can be traced back to letters and sketches Mendelsohn sent from the front during World War I.

engineering and technical limitations meant that it had to be fabricated in brick, then rendered in cement. Its appearance was that of an organic sculpture, and it served as a fitting monument to the celebrated scientist.

While the utopian ideals associated with Expressionism became hard to sustain through the 1920s and 1930s, the legacy of Expressionism was far-reaching in all the arts. In the short term, the ideals of the movement provided a basis for the *Bauhaus, and the subsequent disillusionment and social criticism led to *Neue Sachlichkeit. On a broader level, the liberation of art from its descriptive role, the exaltation of the artist's imagination and the extension of the expressive powers of colour, line and form affected to some extent all the art that followed.

Key Collections

Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Kunsthalle, Bremen, Germany
Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland
Leicester City Museum and Art Gallery, Leicester, England
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Tate Gallery, London

Key Books

W. Pehnt, *Expressionist Architecture* (1980)
J. Lloyd, *German Expressionism* (1991)
J. Kallir, *Egon Schiele* (1994)
D. Elger and H. Bever, *Expressionism* (1998)

Die Brücke

*Everyone who with directness and authenticity conveys
that which drives him to creation, belongs to us.*

ERNST LUDWIG KIRCHNER, 1906 MANIFESTO

On 7 June 1905 in Dresden, four German architecture students, Fritz Bleyl (1880–1966), Erich Heckel (1883–1970), Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938) and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884–1976) founded the 'The Artists' Group of the Bridge', or Die Brücke (The Bridge). The group would become one of the main forces of German *Expressionism.

The artists were young, idealistic and imbued with the belief that through painting they could create a better world for all. Their first manifesto, *Programm*, published as a broadside in 1906, contained Kirchner's call to arms:

'We call all young people together, and as young people who carry the future in us, we want to wrest freedom for our actions and our lives from the older, comfortably established forces.' Like others before them, such as those in the English *Arts and Crafts movement, the artists developed a broad-ranging social ideology, encompassing not just art but all of life. They saw their role to be revolutionaries, or prophets like the *Nabis, rather than keepers of tradition.

The name was chosen by Schmidt-Rottluff to symbolize the link, or bridge, they would form with art of the future.

In a letter inviting the older German Expressionist Emil Nolde (1867–1956) to join the group, Schmidt-Rottluff explained: 'To attract all revolutionary and fermenting elements: that is the purpose implied in the name "Brücke".' Nolde, briefly persuaded, joined the group for a few months between 1906 and 1907. The philosophical underpinnings of the group, their name and their frequent use of the bridge motif have also been linked to Friedrich Nietzsche's book *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (Thus Spake Zarathustra, 1883).

Despite their utopian aims, the group was united more by what they disliked in the art around them – anecdotal realism and Impressionism – than by any clear artistic program of their own. Guided by the spirit of the Arts and Crafts movement and Jugendstil (German Art Nouveau), they set up a workshop in Dresden in which to paint, carve and make woodcuts, often collaborating on projects. Part of their purpose was to advocate a greater connection between art and life, and Kirchner and Heckel made furniture and sculptures for their studios and painted wall decorations. Jugendstil graphics had an obvious influence on their work, as did Gothic German woodcuts and, later, African and Oceanic wood carvings, which were on show at the Dresden Ethnographic Museum. Vincent van Gogh (see Post-Impressionism), Paul Gauguin (see Synthetism) and Edvard Munch (see Symbolism) were also important precursors, admired by Die Brücke artists for their authenticity and expressiveness. Russian and Scandinavian literature also provided inspiration, Dostoyevsky in particular.

The Brücke artists were aware of contemporaneous developments in France, and in 1908 an exhibition of Henri Matisse's work in Berlin confirmed their enthusiasm for the Fauves. Their work shares certain visual characteristics – simplified drawing, exaggerated forms and bold, contrasting colours – and both groups insisted on the freedom of the artist to interpret sources in nature in individual ways. However, in contrast to both Fauve paintings and Die Brücke's utopian ideals, most work by Die Brücke artists, particularly their woodcuts, presents an intense, often harrowing vision of the contemporary world.

The first major influence on the Die Brücke style – and on German Expressionism in general – was Art Nouveau. In 1903 and 1904 Kirchner studied in Munich under one of the leading designers of the Jugendstil, Hermann Obrist, and an early street scene, *Street, Dresden* (1907–8), with its

curvilinear figures in a dream-like space and bold colours, displays a debt to his Art Nouveau training. By 1913, when Kirchner completed *Five Women in the Street*, his painting displayed an awareness of the developments of Cubism in its jagged, geometric forms, combining Fauve colour with the distortion of Gothic German art. The elongated figures with spiky feet and features are characteristic of Kirchner's mature style, as is the attempt to convey the harsh, psychologically intense atmosphere of urban life.



Above: **Erich Heckel, *Two Men at a Table*, 1912** The subject of Heckel's *Two Men at a Table* was taken from Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, and the painting is dedicated to the author.

Right: **Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *The Painters of Die Brücke*, 1926** The group portrait depicts the founders of Die Brücke: from left to right: Otto Mueller, Kirchner, Heckel, and Schmidt-Rottluff. The group had already been disbanded for twelve years when this was painted.

Schmidt-Rottluff was the boldest colourist of the group, producing images in a discordant, forceful style. His personal style is exemplified in his work *Midday on the Moor* (1908) in the simplification of the forms and in the balance of the work's composition. In works such as *Rising Moon* (1912) and *Summer* (1913), the two-dimensional quality and abrupt flat planes of colour reflect his style of woodcuts and exemplify many of the characteristics associated with Die Brücke artists.

From 1906 the founder members of Die Brücke were joined by other German and European artists, including Nolde and Max Pechstein (1881–1955) and the Swiss Cuno Amiet (1868–1961) in 1906, and in 1907 the Finnish artist Akseli Gallén-Kallela (1865–1931). In 1908, the Dutch Fauvist Kees van Dongen (1877–1968) joined, and in 1910 the Czech Bohumil Kubista (1884–1918) and the German Otto Mueller (1874–1930) became members.

The group organized a series of exhibitions, the first two in 1906 and 1907, held in the showroom of a lampshade factory in suburban Dresden, which Heckel had designed. Soon their work was shown annually by prominent galleries in Dresden and in travelling exhibitions throughout Germany, Scandinavia and Switzerland. These activities were supported financially by 'passive members' of the group (friends and supporters), who received a portfolio of woodcuts or lithographs each year for their contributions.

By 1911 all of the members of the group had moved to Berlin, and had begun to go their separate ways. Differences between the artists were beginning to be reflected in their work, as each moved away from the principles of style which had originally united their work. In 1913 Kirchner published *Chronik der Künstlergemeinschaft Brücke* (Chronicle of the artists' community of Die Brücke), a history of the group, and the prominence he gave to himself in it led to the formal dissolution of the group in the same year. Although short-lived, the movement's vision of life expressed through their style of hard, angular painting led to Expressionism being considered a primarily German art form. Their interest in woodcuts and the graphic arts led to a revival of printmaking as a major art form. Like the Fauve experiments in France, Die Brücke was indeed a bridge from Impressionism and Post-Impressionism to the art of



the future which would assert its independence of means and expression through colour, line, form and two-dimensionality. As Kirchner wrote about Die Brücke:

Painting is the art which represents a phenomenon of feeling on a plane surface. The medium employed in painting, for both background and line, is colour.... Today photography reproduces an object exactly. Painting, liberated from the need to do so, regains freedom of action.... The work of art is born from the total translation of personal ideas in execution.

Key Collections

Brücke-Museum, Berlin, Germany
Kunsthau, Hamburg, Germany
Leicester City Museum and Art Gallery, Leicester, England
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne, Germany

Key Books

B. Herbert, *German Expressionism: Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter* (1983)
P. H. Selz, *German Expressionist Painting* (Berkeley, CA, 1983)
S. Barron and W. Dieter-Dube, *German Expressionism: Art and Society 1909–1923* (1997)
D. Elger and H. Bever, *Expressionism: A Revolution in German Art* (1998)

Above: **Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Five Women in the Street*, 1913**

The women in the picture appear as menacing creatures, like vultures ready to prey. The painting powerfully communicates the dual sense of attraction and repulsion that women, especially prostitutes, held for many artists associated with Expressionism, Symbolism and the Decadent Movement.

Opposite: **Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Poster: Die Brücke*, 1910**

Simplified forms and bold contours characterize much of Kirchner's work; the poster shows the influence both of Gothic woodcuts and of African carvings.