ROSE-CAROL WASHTON LONG

— [that is?] for the purpose of evoking inner feeling and emotion. Soon, Worringer used the term *expressionists* to refer to the works of the Brücke group, to such a painting, as the one on the right, by its leader, Kirchner. By 1912, the Fauves and the Brücke were being exhibited together under the label expressionists. Worringer and the other critics at that time did not distinguish particularly between the French interpretation of expressionism and the German. And I think you will see at a glance between these two paintings that the French interpretation is a much more happy, a much more sensual one, and the German, using the same distorted color and forms, uses them to convey a much more negative attitude towards the world.

Now, the Die Brücke group was founded in 1905 by [00:01:00] the three men that you see in this cover. It was founded in 1905 in Dresden and lasted until 1913, when it died out. The group moved to Berlin in 1911. Unlike the Fauve group, it was a formal organization. The Fauves were a very loose association of painters who exhibited together in Paris, but the Brücke was formal: it had manifestos, proclamations, it issued portfolios, and it had a membership. And this, on the left, is a cover for one of these Brücke portfolios. This was, as a matter of fact, the very last one that was done, in 1913.

Now, the leader of the Brücke was a man called Kirchner, whose picture you can see on the left here. This is also another self-portrait of him, a self-portrait [00:02:00] of him and his model done in 1907. Now, Kirchner was born in 1880 in Franconia. He was born the son of an engineer. His father had always wanted to be a painter, but failing in this because of lack of money and success, he turned to engineering, and when his son also talked about becoming a painter, the father encouraged him rather to become an architect. And so in 1901, at the age of 21, Kirchner set out for Dresden to study architecture there.

The same happened also to another member of the Brücke group, that is, Erich Heckel, Heckel whose portrait remains on the cover of the portfolio up here, and here is another self-portrait of Heckel. This is done in 1909. Heckel also was born near Franconia. He was born in 1883. And, as I said, [00:03:00] like Kirchner, he also came to Dresden to study architecture. And he came there in 1903. The two became very close friends, because both wished to become painters rather than architects.

Kirchner left — I mean Heckel, excuse me — left in his town another friend, Schmidt-Rottluff, who you see down here in the lower left-hand corner, and this is a self-portrait by Schmidt-Rottluff, and Schmidt-Rottluff also came to Dresden to study architecture, in 1904.

And soon the three became very close friends and began to work together in Kirchner's studio. They felt that they must attack the deadness of their society, the materialism that was forcing them into architecture to make money rather than to explore the paths of self-creation. And soon they decided to abandon their architecture studies together for the purpose of self-creation, [00:04:00] and in 1906, they had their first exhibition. And this is the cover to the first portfolio of the Brücke group. And at this time they issued a proclamation stating just why they had abandoned their architectural studies and what they hoped to achieve with their departures. They wrote — and it's here in German on the right, and I will read it in English translation — quote,

"With faith and development and in a new generation of creators and appreciators, we call together all youth. As youth, we carry the future and want to create for ourselves freedom of life and of movement against the long-established older forces. Everyone who, with directness and authenticity, conveys that which drives him to creation belongs to us. That is, everyone who is willing to depart against the traditional styles of painting, who is willing to attack the materialism [00:05:00] of society, who is willing to attack the decadence, who is willing to explore personal self-expression, could become a member of the Brücke group."

And their first exhibition attracted just a few followers. After all, they were still poor students. The first exhibition was actually held in the factory of a friend of theirs. The paintings were hung among the lamp fixtures. Not an especially ideal setting for a first exhibition, and thus there were very few critics attending, and very little notice, actually, was given. But they did attract one already established artist, called Emil Nolde, whose woodcut you see here on the left. This woodcut is entitled *Prophet* but is also known to be a self-portrait, indicating another idea common to all members of the Brücke: not only did they see themselves as trying to convey a new [00:06:00] force of creation, they saw themselves as actually the prophets of a new spiritualization, a new rejuvenation of society, that is, through their woodcuts and through their paintings.

Now, one might wonder just exactly what they were rebelling against. What were these long-established older forces? In Germany, as in France, the academies predominated, and these are two examples of the official style of painting. This, to the left, is by a German painter named [Böcklin?], and this by a French painter named [Bouguereau?]. In both instances, these paintings — topics were generally assigned — historical topics, or here, a mythological topic. This is supposed to be a painting of the Island of the Dead. You can see the dead here in the boat being carried away. Topics were assigned. As I said, they were mythological or historical. They were [to be?] carried [00:07:00] out by certain canons, established canons of perspective, in which the painting again was treated as an [illusion/allusion?], an [illusion?] in which three-dimension was conveyed, figures idealized, but still based upon the natural form. The figures were done mainly in line. Color was not important except to fill in. There was very little experiment with paint and with new techniques.

Now, in France, the revolution took a slightly different — the revolution in painting — took a slightly different turn, as we saw last week when we looked at the development of the Fauves. You remember that it was the impressionists in the 1870s who first reacted against this academic or official painting, and as I had mentioned last week, the student who wanted to study painting had to go into the academies, he learned to draw from models, and in order to earn his living as a painter, he had to follow this [00:08:00] official pattern.

The impressionists dared to set up their own exhibitions where their paintings, wildly departing — first of all, they refused to paint the official things. They went out to the countryside and painted, as here, a river. They also deviated from the official terms because they dared to use color in slightly much more richer and vivid ways, slightly less naturalistically. They, instead of painting shadows black, here in the background, they used purples, they used contrasting colors, orange and blue. They used a much freer brushstroke, indicating that a brush was indeed being used, oil on the canvas.

These experiments were further intensified by the neo-impressionist Seurat, and the experiments in color, of course, were brought to complete fruition in the nineteenth century by Gaugin, on the left, and Van Gogh, on the right. You all remember that it was [00:09:00] Gaugin who dared to truly lift color from its naturalistic boundaries and to use it for emotive and decorative reasons. Here, in a painting from 1888, Gaugin uses in the background red. Now, this is supposed to be grass, normally colored green, but he used red to suggest that this was a vision, a non-naturalistic thing, in the minds of these women. He also used the red to contrast for decorative reasons, to contrast against the white hats, making a very pleasing pattern. Van Gogh also exploited the free brushwork of the expressionists — impressionists, rather — and used this brushstroke for emotive reasons, to help convey the confused, tortured quality of this painter, of this very emotional painter.

In Germany, these innovations of the expressionists — [00:10:00] of the impressionists and the post-impressionists, of Van Gogh and Gaugin, were not known. They were not known until about 1902. You don't have the first impressionist painting in Germany to perhaps 1900. Rather, in Germany, you find a much greater emphasis on a style called the Jugendstil. In this style, you have a much greater emphasis on the distortion of line to convey emotion. And here, in this Munch, who was considered the favorite painter of the Jugendstil, and you will see him also to have been the favorite painter of the expressionists, he uses curving lines, blank faces — he wipes out the faces, almost — and non-naturalistic color again to convey the feelings of anxiety and loneliness that beset modern man. Munch was one of the first — and our current exhibition at the Guggenheim is now about Munch [00:11:00] — to treat the problems of an industrialized society, to treat the problems of a man lonely in the street or beset by anxiety. The academic painters, of course, with their official themes of history or mythology, never dared to treat them.

This is another example of this Jugendstil that predominated in Germany. This is a painting by Behrens — rather, this is a woodcut by Behrens — and this is a bookend by [Weiss?]. And this Jugendstil, and it's an effort to rebel against the dominance of the academies, tries to work out a course that would affect all aspects of life, and thus they developed into the arts and crafts movement, designing not just paintings but also furniture, houses, designs for wood, clothing, books, jewelry, and etc. And the most common feature of the Jugendstil is the [00:12:00] sinuous curving line, this S-curve that you see evident in both these two woodcuts. This was something that the German expressionists of the Brücke group were to pick up and to work with and then to try and shake so that they could be more expressive, and we will see that in a few minutes.

It's not surprising that when Kirchner — and this is a Kirchner on the left — first began to paint, he would follow in the footsteps of what was the avant-garde in Germany, as I said, of what was this Jugendstil movement. And if we compare this early Kirchner from 1907 to a Munch — and this is a Munch from 1896 — I think we can see certain similarities. First of all in the subject matter. Kirchner is here not dealing with a landscape, not dealing with an autumn scene or with some idealistic nudes in a wood or in a mythological scene, but he's dealing with a contemporary [00:13:00] street scene — not fascinated by its charm, but rather fascinated by the crowdedness and what he feels is the sordidness, almost the anonymity of the people, and so he separates the

individuals — one here, a little girl there. [It's?] people entirely separate, very similar to the way Munch does, crowding the people in one corner and at the same time keeping them very separate. And you saw this in that woodcut of his.

At the same time, there's also this exploring of pattern. But the bright color that you notice in this Kirchner is not at all from any of the avant-garde in Germany, not from Munch or any of the Jugendstil, but is actually — shows the beginning of knowledge of those French innovations that I mentioned before. It actually shows the knowledge of Van Gogh. And in 1905 in Dresden, where Kirchner was just leaving that architecture school, there was an exhibition of Van Gogh, and Kirchner has [00:14:00] commented that this itself was somewhat of a revolutionary thing because of Van Gogh's use of color — these bright, broad, flat areas; this use of contrasting color, the red and the green. And I think you can see how Kirchner has used his knowledge of color, learned from Van Gogh, to more exploit the emotive effects of color that Munch never, never did.

If we compare Kirchner — this is the Kirchner on the left — to what the Fauves were doing at the very same time — these were both done in 1909 — I think we can begin to see the difference in mood and the difference that the German atmosphere contributed to the development of this Die Brücke group. This is a painting of a tavern, and this is again a painting of something indoors. The very choice of subject matter suggests something about the nature of the French Fauve movement and the German Die Brücke movement. Matisse is very interested in the effects of the pattern [00:15:00] of this cloth, across the first tablecloth and then across the wall, and in effect, this is flattening out any illusion of perspective at all. He's also fascinated by the pleasing effects of the blue against the pink. All in all, this is a very pleasing composition despite its flat patterns and bright color. But Kirchner — again, using some of these same art nouveau round, sinuous patterns, and using also bright color applied in broad, flat areas, not breaking them up into shadow or to suggest any sort of a three-dimensional form based on those academic canons of the academic painting — here but Kirchner suggests something different. He conveys the feeling of something sinister in this painting, something uneasy, and he uses this color — the black here and the orange faces — also distorting the faces, of [00:16:00] conveying what he felt about society. Whereas when Matisse distorts the face into these curves, distorts the hair, it's rather to fit this woman into the pattern.

And I think if we compare two comments made by Kirchner and by Matisse, I think you can see — understand further the difference. Kirchner wrote about a painting such as this one, quote, "My goal was always large and simple forms and clear colors. With these two means to express emotion and experience. I wanted to express the richness and the joy of living, to paint humanity at work and at play, in its reactions and interreactions, to express love and hatred." Whereas Matisse wrote in his "Notes of a Painter," which was written in 1908, quote, "The chief aim of color should be to serve expression as well as possible. To paint an autumn landscape, I will not try to remember what colors suit the [00:17:00] season, I will be inspired only by the sensation that the season gives me. The icy clearness of the sour blue sky will express the season just as well as the tonalities of the leaves. My sensation itself may vary — the autumn may be soft and warm like a protracted summer, or quite cool, with cold sky and lemon-yellow trees that give a chilly impression and announce winter." So Matisse was really arguing that color should be used expressively to further clarify his own emotions and feelings, to further convey to the spectator

his feelings about nature, about the landscape, whereas Kirchner would argue that color be used distortedly rather to say something about society in general, to make some comment about humanity.

Now, because Kirchner wished so much [00:18:00] to make a strong a statement about the forces around him, he strove very hard to get rid of some of those Jugendstil S-curves, which he found much too soft and sinuous for the things he was trying to express. And here in a painting of 1909, we can see, if we compare it to an earlier one, this one of 1907, just how much more angular Kirchner's line has become, just contrasting the two skirts. Here the skirt ends in a point, quite rough, and here, still retains a great deal of those Jugendstil S-curves. Even in the background there's much more of a play of graceful pattern than in this painting, though some of this comes from Kirchner's experiments with a woodcut.

This was done in 1909, also for the Brücke portfolio, and it's a portrait of his friend Schmidt-Rottluff. Now, working in woodcut suited the Brücke artists very well because they worked on it very directly. And this was indeed an [00:19:00] innovation, because before the end of the nineteenth century, the woodcut had been commonly relegated for reproductive purposes. They might copy a painting or be used for advertising, but it was not used as an original creative force as it was by the Brücke group. And here you see him exploiting the natural effects of the woodcut. It's very difficult to carve in woodcut, and the results would be quite rough, as you see in the lettering or in any of the figures here. And instead of trying to hide this rough carving, Kirchner exploited it for its primitivistic effects and its more direct effects. And you can see that he learned from these experiments in the woodcut, and you can see this result in the painting where here, he slashes the painting on to almost achieve the same effect that he got naturally through the woodcut. [00:20:00]

Now, this primitivistic quality in the woodcut, exploiting the natural texture of the wood, certainly was derived also from Munch. Here you can see a woodcut of Munch on the left in which he allows the grain of the wood to come through, and this, as you see here, Kirchner has also used. But even more than Munch, Kirchner looked at African art, and I think you can see how close these two faces resemble each other — the very angular shape of the nose, the geometric slits of the eyes, the triangle of the mouth. All this is repeated in the face of the Schmitt-Rottluff by Kirchner. Kirchner began to look in the enthnographical museums in his attempts to do away, to shake this academic stifling. He began to look for other sources, and he began to look beyond what the West had achieved [00:21:00] to what he felt were the primary, the most original sources of art, that is, before written civilization. We can see, if we compare a late Kirchner — this is from 1913 — to the early one of 1907, just how much more brutal, how much more angular, much more primitivistic his whole style has become.

It's very interesting that among the Brücke artists there was a great deal of work that was done that was very similar. Very often, the Brücke painters would copy each other's paintings and woodcuts. Here on the left is a woodcut by Heckel, which was done after a painting by Kirchner, and here on the right is a woodcut by Kirchner done, as it says in the bottom, done after a painting by Heckel. It was very common for them, [00:22:00] working together, living together in the same quarters, to often use the same piece of wood in carving or to use the same piece of stone in their works in lithography.

A theme that was also to become very predominant among the Brücke artists, in addition to the comments on the city, was the reaction against the city that was the escape to the country, and the escape to what they felt were the primitivistic woods. Many of the Brücke painters joined nudist colonies in their attempts to escape from the stifling materialism of the city, and often they painted this. Here is the Kirchner nudes in the woods, and this is a painting done by Heckel on the left, an oil painting. And if we contrast this Heckel to a painting, a French painting, we can see a difference again in which the content is determining the style. Cézanne, [00:23:00] who did this painting on the right, was just using this traditional theme of bathers, women in the woods. He was using this to work out certain structural forces, and so he uses the most stable form, the triangle, or the most formal, to balance his painting. Heckel, on the other hand, is rather commenting about this return to the woods, this love of nature, and thus there is very little of this concern for formal structure, no grouping by triangle or any other artificial or geometric means.

Heckel, as did Kirchner, developed in a more brutal and angular way. Here you can see much more rough, much more brutal forces, and the same thing also in the woodcut. [00:24:00] Schmidt-Rottluff began in a similar pattern. This is a woodcut from 1909. As did Kirchner before him, he refers back to the art nouveau in the curves of this woman, these sinuous, round curves. But you can see here at the bottom how he has exploited the very natural quality of the wood coming through on the paper. As did Kirchner before him, he was also influenced by the French. And if we compare — this is the Schmidt-Rottluff landscape on the left — with a Fauve painting on the right, again, we can see what he learned from the Fauves and also how he differed. The bright colors, the broad patterns, again, come from the French, as we saw earlier with the Kirchner. But this blue form of the trees here, done in almost a human pattern of leglike shapes, becomes something quite different, [00:25:00] as does the flat, very flat patterns outlined in black. And again, this refers back to the German background into the influence of Munch. I think if you look at this painting of Munch on the right, you can see that this using of shadow to suggest something almost human does derive out of this art nouveau or the Jugendstil. Here, in the Munch, this could almost be the shadow of the woman, or it could, on the wall up here, or it could also be a tree; it's very hard to tell. And this ambiguity is very unsettling. And this is something that the Brücke artists exploited in addition to distorting color and shape for their emotive purposes.

You can see that by 1911, that Schmidt-Rottluff is also making his forms more angular, and at the same time, he's retaining this animistic force. These houses with their bright lights almost become human faces — [00:26:00] again, this reference back to the suggestive quality of the Munch. In this famous painting of Schmidt-Rottluff of 1912, called *Rising Moon*, again one could compare it to the Fauves to see the difference. Many of the Brücke paintings were done at night — were done to suggest night scenes — something never found at all among the Fauve painters. Again, the houses are distorted into rough, angular shapes, and the paint is put on very thickly and forcefully in very, very broad areas.

Schmidt-Rottluff also looked at African art, as did Kirchner, to help him formulate his more angular and brutal patterns. I think you can see the comparison between — here are the eyes and

the patterns of this mask from Polynesia, if you compare it to the faces in this painting, which was called *The Pharisees* and done in [00:27:00] 1912.

Nolde, who joined the Brücke in 1906, after seeing their first exhibition in the lamp factory in Dresden, learned a good deal from them in terms of the woodcut. He had been experimenting with etchings before but had not done anything with the woodcuts. And here is one of the earliest Nolde woodcuts, done in 1906, which can be compared with the Kirchner woodcut from two years earlier. Again, both of them are reminiscent with their art nouveau patterns, but they're still in the — Nolde, there's the beginning of the experimentation with the natural effects of the wood. You can see, if we compare him with Munch, and this is a woodcut of Munch called *The Kiss*, you can see how similar this is, this exploitation [00:28:00] of the patterns of wood. It's very clear in the Munch here; you can even see the knothole as it is transferred to the painting. Nolde goes even further than Munch and makes this part of the pattern of the face, so that the face emerges very much into the whole pattern of the woodcut.

Nolde, however, left the Brücke after a year of working with them because he was a good deal older — he was born in 1867, he was at least 13 years older than Kirchner — and being a more sensitive, lonelier type of person, he did not like their communal way of working, and so he went and lived off by himself and did not primarily exhibit with them, although he kept in touch.

If we compare this Nolde painting here, of the woman, to an earlier Kirchner, we can see several differences in their use of color. Both used color non-naturalistically, [00:29:00] forcefully, but Nolde uses it much more freely, uses his paint much more thickly. Less interest in creating a pattern on the canvas than in creating a masklike effect around this woman. And Nolde wrote about color, and I'd like to quote. He says, "Color's the material of the painter, colors in their own lives, weeping and laughing, dream and bliss, hot and sacred, like love songs in the erotic, like songs in glorious choruses. Colors in vibration, pealing like silver bells and clanging like bronze bells, proclaiming happiness, passion, and love; soul, blood, and death."

This is something Nolde was to explore much more than any other of the Brücke artists, this effect of the thick, rich color poured directly on the canvas. Like the other Brücke artists, he was [00:30:00] also interested in the effects of primitive art as a further way to stimulate his rebellion from the traditional, academic ways of painting. Here, this is a painting of Nolde on the left, done in 1911, where he's more or less gone to the ethnological museum and copied some of the masks in bright colors. But it also refers to his discovery of a Belgian painter, Ensor, and this is a painting by Ensor on the right. Ensor painted in the 1880s but was totally neglected in Belgium and in France, and it was in Germany and it was by people like Nolde that he was first discovered and given exhibitions. A painting like this was in a German exhibition in 1911.

Ensor, very much like Nolde, was a recluse from society, and very bitter. And he saw society as ghostlike peoples, unindividualized, hiding behind their [00:31:00] masks. And Nolde used some of this ideas, this thematic material, from Ensor. We can also see just how much Nolde looked at primitive art. Here's a painting done in 1911 in which Nolde has almost copied the American Indian material that he saw, again, in the ethnographical museum. You can see how close this face of the cat is to this totem figure here and how close, again, this pattern is to the

pattern on this cloth. Not only did he copy North American Indian material, but he copied masks from Malaysia, and again, to stimulate the mystical quality that he found in them.

Nolde was also famous for his religious paintings. In this, done in 1909, called *The Last Supper*, [00:32:00] I think we can see just how far the German expressionists have come from the traditional painting of the West. This on the right is the painting of *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci, and this was a style that more or less dominated in Western painting up until the twentieth century, a style, which, as I said earlier, emphasized a painting as an illusion of three-dimensional space, emphasized order and stability, the forms are grouped naturalistically around the table. Quite in contrast is Nolde's *Last Supper*, in which he uses crowded forms, blocking out any illusion of space, in which he uses thick painting, bright color, very non-naturalistically applied, all to convey the emotion and the force of this last supper.

And if we compare this *Crucifixion* by Nolde — this [00:33:00] was done in 1912, another one of his famous religious paintings — with that of Gaugin on the right, we can see just how far he has even come from the innovators of the nineteenth century, how much more forcefully he's used color, much more brighter, much more direct, and in much more effective patterns, so that he truly is called one of the greatest of the German expressionists.

I'd like to conclude with two woodcuts, one by Nolde on the left, called *The Prophet*, and a color woodcut by Heckel, in which you can see how they used these distorted lines, the distorted color, for their personal subjective expression. In the next lecture, we will look at another German expressionist group called the Blaue Reiter. You can see how they use color and form in a quite different manner. Thank you. (applause) [00:34:00]

(music)

END OF AUDIO FILE
615215T04_01.mp3

Transformation in Dresden: Die Brucke / Rose Carol Washton Long. 1965/12/4. Reel-to-Reel collection. A0004. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Archives, New York

