

MODERN ART AND POLITICS IN GERMANY 1910–1945

Masterworks from the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin

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Introduction

This exhibition traces the development of early twentieth-century painting and sculpture in Germany. Located in Berlin—capital of the German Empire and subsequent governments until the nation’s division after World War II—the Neue Nationalgalerie grew with a special focus on political and social issues. Beautiful and powerful as works of art, the paintings and sculpture displayed here illustrate the connection between art and politics during a turbulent era in German history: the Empire, the First World War, the Weimar Republic, National Socialism, and the Second World War are reflected in their making and in their histories.

During the National Socialist dictatorship, from 1933 to 1945, the government sought to bring art into line with ideology. Many works of art, classified as “degenerate,” were confiscated from German museums and denounced in a vast exhibition of *Degenerate Art* in Munich, Berlin, and other cities, eventually seen by three million people. Among these were many works exhibited here.

This exhibition celebrates not only the works of art but the men and women who, despite political repression, continued to work under difficult conditions during the National Socialist era, whether in secret or in exile abroad. Four galleries show the most important stylistic trends that shaped art in Germany and Europe until 1933: Expressionism, New Objectivity, and Abstraction, as well as the works of artists from other European centers whose careers intersected with modern Germany. The final sections of the exhibition explore the artistic engagement with politics and current affairs, the time of war, and its aftermath.

This exhibition has been organized by the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, in cooperation with the Kimbell Art Museum.

 **Neue Nationalgalerie**
Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz

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The photograph reproduced above shows one of the galleries of the exhibition of so-called Entartete Kunst, or “degenerate art,” held in Munich in 1937. In the photograph are works by many artists on view here, including Lyonel Feininger, George Grosz, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, and Marg Moll.

Much of the art that is most admired in the twenty-first century was despised and denounced by the National Socialist dictatorship that took over German government in 1933. The Nationalgalerie in Berlin, the nation’s capital, saw its galleries of contemporary art shut down in September 1936 on the orders of the Nazi Minister of Culture. The entire building for modern art was closed in early July 1937.

Shortly thereafter, a commission arrived to decide which works from Berlin’s collection should be classified as “degenerate.” More than five hundred works of art from the Nationalgalerie were confiscated as part of the campaign against Entartete Kunst, including some in this exhibition. In only two weeks, many more outstanding pieces of modern art were transported from museums throughout the Reich to Munich, where the exhibition *Entartete Kunst* opened on July 19, 1937. A modified version of this exhibition was also shown in Berlin from February to May 1938.

In 1938, the confiscation of the artworks was legalized retroactively. It was explained that valuable works would be traded for “high-quality German art” or foreign currency. A few key examples were to be kept as historical examples of “degenerate art,” but all other works were to be destroyed. After World War II, some of the museums were able to rescue or repurchase works, but none has been able to repair the damage wrought by the confiscations.

Entartete Kunst exhibition in the Hofgarten, Munich, 1937, showing Room 3, with the “Dada wall.” Photo: bpk Bildagentur / Zentralarchiv / Staatliche Museen, Berlin / Art Resource, NY

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Expressionism

The Expressionist style is a European phenomenon that emerged around 1900 as a movement against naturalism. The term “Expressionist” was first applied to recent French painting but came to refer almost exclusively to German painting, sculpture, and graphic arts. Expressionism reflected a new emphasis on the importance of the individual. Art was not to come from external impressions but from the artist’s inner experience. This experience could be expressed through the use of strong outlines, bright colors, and broad brushstrokes, by the renunciation of detail, and by the choice of unusual perspectives.

The artists’ group *Die Brücke* (The Bridge), formed in Dresden in 1905, encouraged its members to work communally, whether in the countryside or in the city. As a cultural metropolis, Berlin played an important role in the reception of Expressionism at the beginning of the twentieth century. At that time, the Nationalgalerie sought to confirm Expressionism as the leading German art of the present—an idea rejected when the Nazis came to power. Emil Nolde, a party member, was surprised when his painting *The Sinner* was labeled “degenerate.” Conrad Felixmüller, a communist, destroyed a portrait he had made of a leftist politician, sparing only the man’s head. He then hid the fragment, which miraculously survived the war and today stands as a potent symbol of the persecution of Expressionism.

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938)

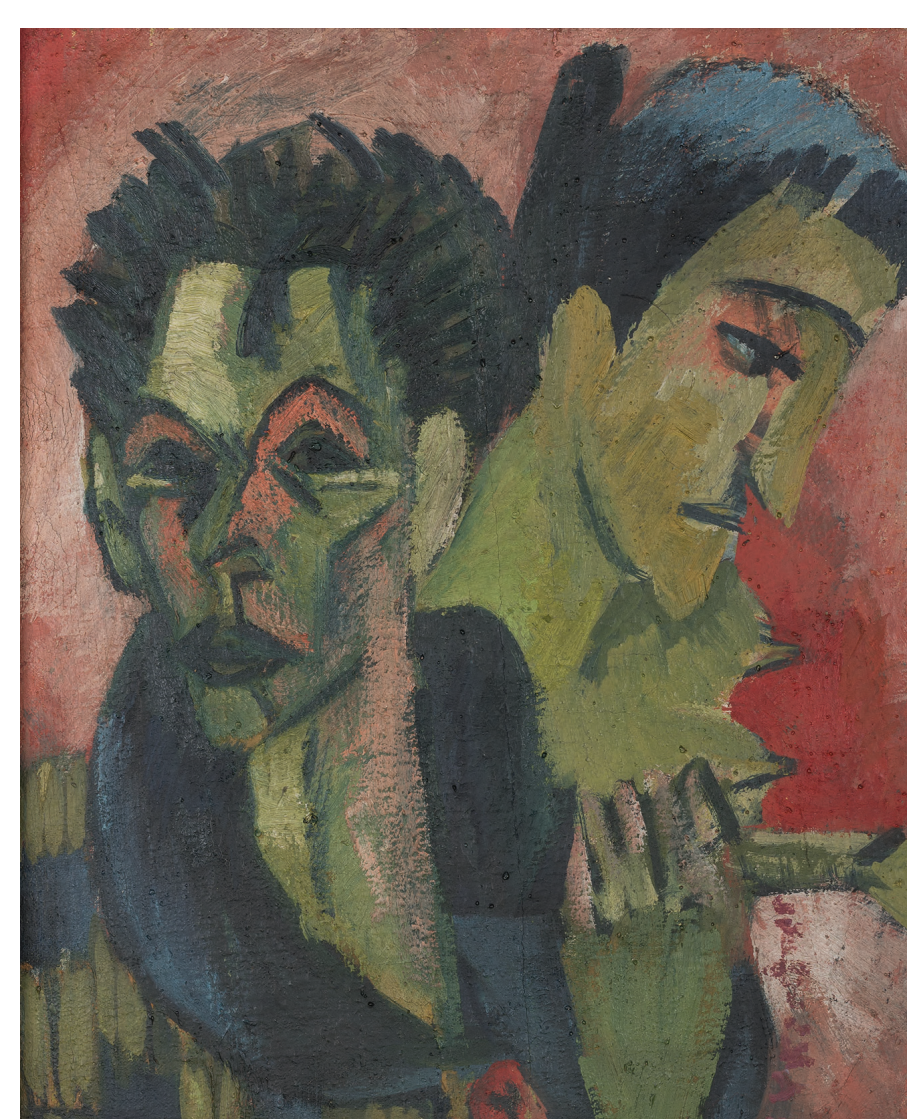
Self-Portrait with a Girl

1914–15

Oil on canvas

Acquired by the State of Berlin, 1949, B 4

In his *Self-Portrait with a Girl*, painted shortly after the start of World War I, Kirchner shows himself at left, together with his partner, Erna Schilling (1884–1945). The facial features of the two bust-length figures are simplified, harsh, and angular. The poisonous green color of the figures' skin contrasts with the red-orange hue of the background. Kirchner's Expressionist portrait reflects an intensely personal manifestation of his innermost emotions.



Emil Nolde (1867–1956)

The Sinner (Christ and the Sinner)

1926

Oil on canvas

Acquired with the support of the Friends of the National Gallery and the State of Berlin, 1999, NG 1/99

In *The Sinner*, the Pharisees at right condemn Mary Magdalene as a prostitute, while Jesus, at left, forgives her. The National Gallery acquired *The Sinner* in 1929. The director appointed at the end of 1933, Eberhard Hanfstaengl, asked the artist if he could exchange the work for another one "for political reasons." But in Nolde's estimation, the painting did not contradict the National Socialists' directive for "German art." It thus remained in the collection until it was confiscated in July 1937, to be shown shortly afterwards in several stations of the *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) exhibition.



Conrad Felixmüller (1897–1977)

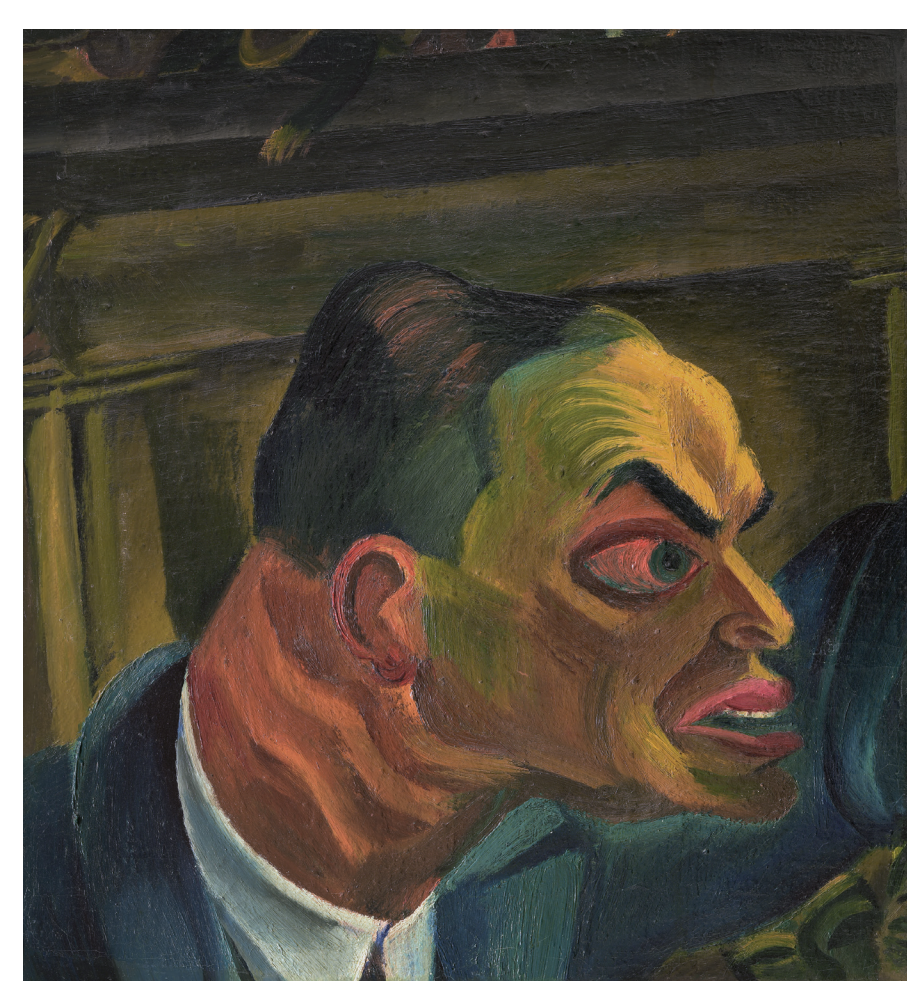
The Orator No. 1, Otto Rühle (fragment)

1920

Oil on canvas

Gift from the Conrad Felixmüller heirs, 2019, NG 2/19

At the end of the First World War in 1918, Felixmüller became a member of the Communist Party. The subject of this portrait, Otto Rühle (1874–1943), was a politician and a fiery Communist. Felixmüller portrayed the revolutionary speaker in 1920. In its original form, the painting showed Rühle haranguing a crowd of working men, his face distorted in passion. This fragment, showing only Rühle's expressive head, was all that Felixmüller saved when he destroyed the dangerously radical work of art in fear of National Socialist persecution.



Max Pechstein (1881–1955)

Seated Girl

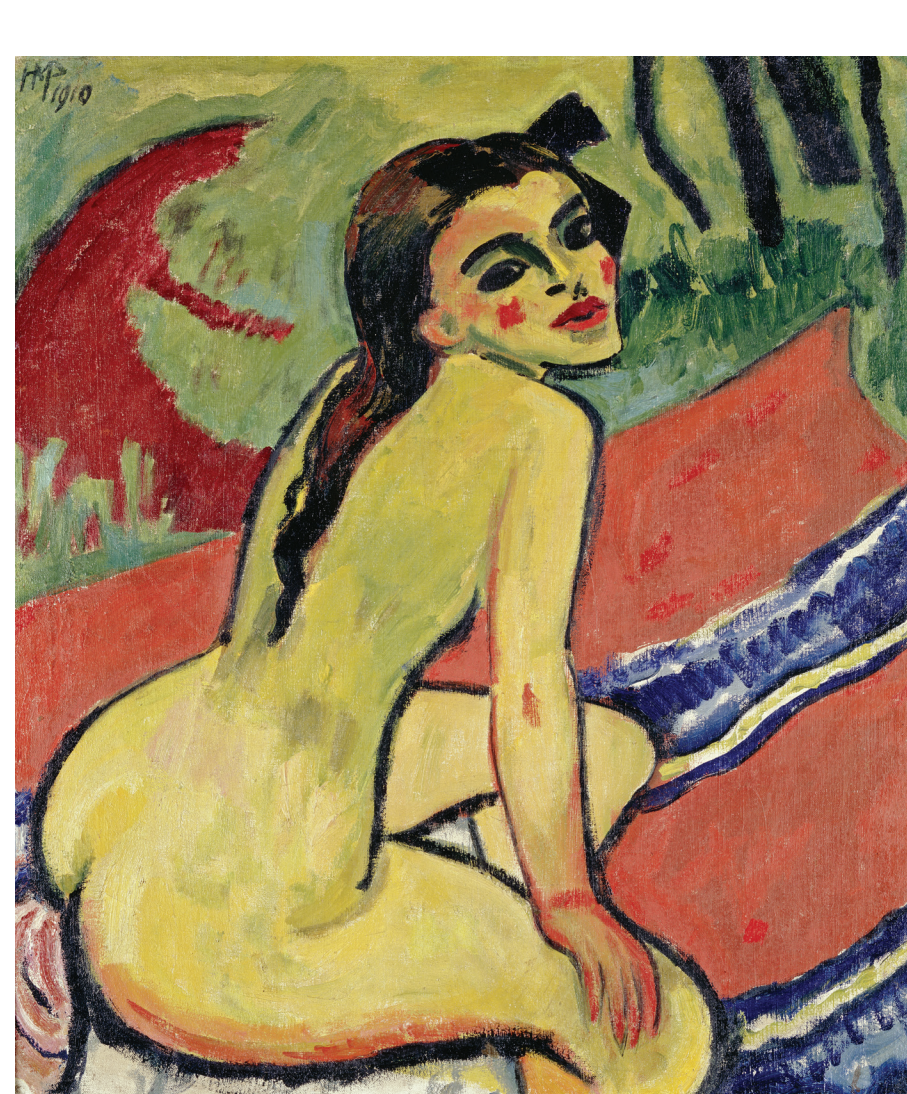
1910

Oil on canvas

Purchased from the artist for the Gallery of the 20th Century, 1948.

Donated by the Magistrate of Greater Berlin (East), 1951, A II 1068

In the summer of 1910, Max Pechstein went with the painters Eric Heckel and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner—fellow members of the group Die Brücke—to paint in the countryside near Dresden. Over a few weeks, Pechstein's works became closer to the sketchy painting style of his two colleagues, and some, like this one, also revealed the influence of the French painter Henri Matisse (1869–1954), whose work Pechstein had seen in Paris. In the 1930s, the *Seated Girl* was featured as part of a collage illustration by a Nazi theorist that sought to link Expressionist art with Communist politics.



Otto Mueller (1874–1930)

Summer's Day

c. 1922

Distemper on canvas

Purchased in exchange from the Goldschmidt & Wallerstein Gallery, Berlin, 1922. Confiscated and sold as "degenerate" in 1937. Repurchased in 1958, NG 28/58

Inspired by the simplicity of ancient Egyptian art, Otto Mueller sought and found an elementary working method, one that sought to integrate line, surface, and form. "The main aim of my endeavor is to express the sensation of landscape and man with the greatest possible simplicity," he wrote. "The art of the ancient Egyptians was and still is exemplary for me, even for the purely technical aspects." This bathing scene belonged to the National Gallery from 1922 until its seizure as "degenerate art" in 1937. It was reacquired in 1958.



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938)

Belle-Alliance-Platz in Berlin

1914

Tempera on canvas

Acquired by the State of Berlin, 1955, B 129

Kirchner often chose unusual perspectives for his 1914 urban scenes: in this image of Belle-Alliance Square, now Mehringplatz, in the Berlin district of Kreuzberg, he isolated and distorted a well-known space. The tilted perspective highlights the shadowy pedestrians, a stream of black stick figures. Like the dark skeletons of the trees and the stone colonnades in front, they contribute to the expressive alienation of the familiar cityscape. At the center of the space stands the nineteen-meter-high column commemorating the defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. Most of the buildings depicted in the painting were destroyed in air raids in 1945.



Emil Nolde (1867–1956)

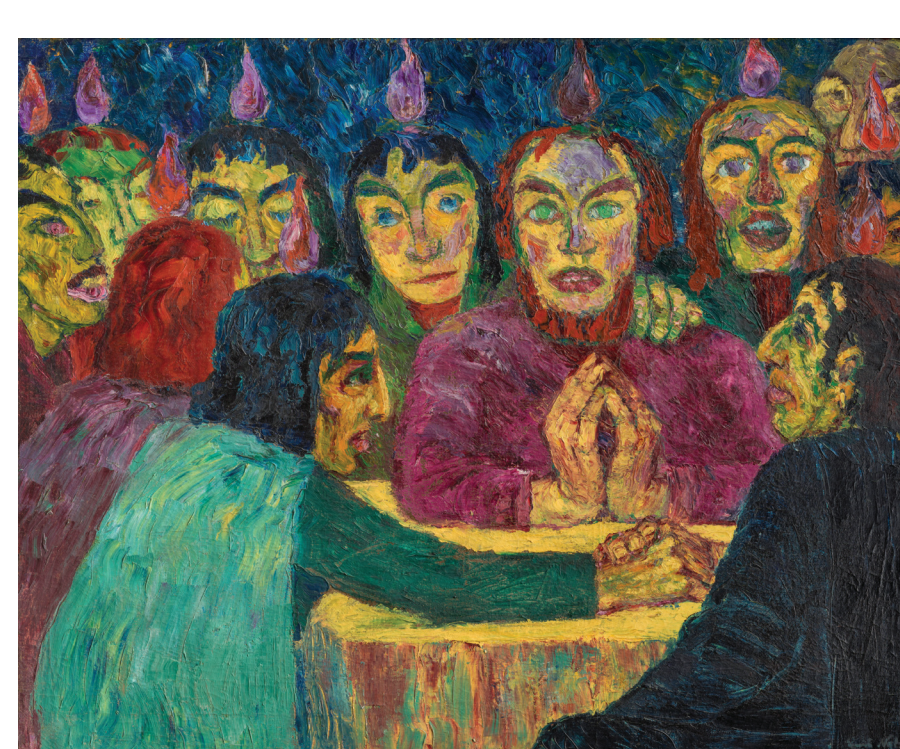
Pentecost

1909

Oil on canvas

Purchased from Kornfeld & Klipstein from the Fehr Collection, Muri/Bern, 1974, NG 7/74

Praising Nolde's religious paintings, a critic highlighted the "simplification bordering on the brutal" and "the characteristics that are exaggerated to the point of the blatant, even seemingly almost grotesque." When Nolde submitted his painting of Christ's disciples receiving the Holy Spirit to an exhibition, he was opposed by the German Impressionist Max Liebermann (1847–1935), a greatly respected Jewish artist. The ensuing debate was later reinterpreted by the artist as a fight against an allegedly Jewish-dominated Berlin art scene, notably in the autobiography he wrote in 1934, in part an attempt to ingratiate himself with the National Socialists.



Walter Gramatté (1897–1929)

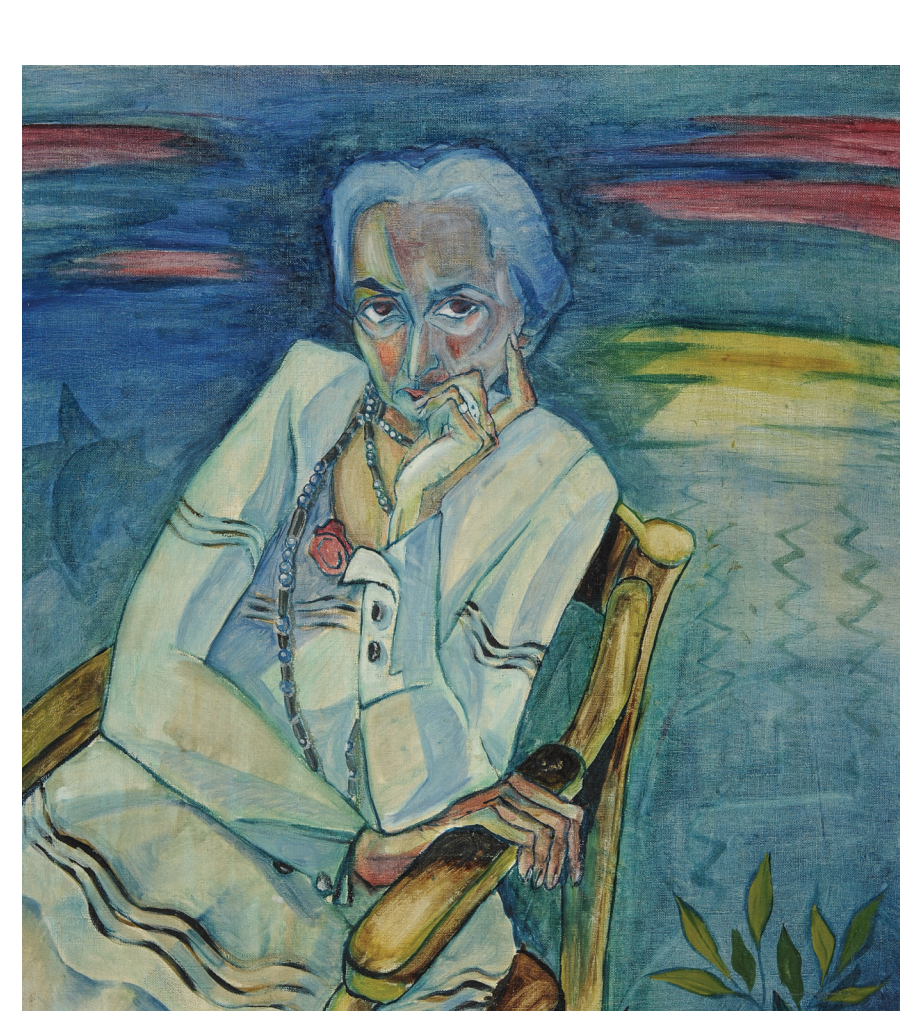
Portrait of Rosa Schapire

1920

Oil on canvas

Gift from the estate of Sonia Eckhardt-Gramatté and Dr. Ferdinand Eckhardt, Winnipeg, 1966, A IV 90

A confirmed socialist and the author of an important text on the emancipation of women, Rosa Schapire (1874–1954) was one of the first women to receive a doctorate in art history from the distinguished University of Heidelberg. From 1908 onwards, Schapire lived in Hamburg and became an important patron of the Brücke artists' group. She published an essay on Walter Gramatté's work and remained his supporter until his early death. Persecuted by the Nazis, Schapire ceased publishing and, in 1939, emigrated to London, where she was able to resume writing only in 1947.



Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884–1976)

The Green Girl

1915

Oil on canvas

Purchased from the artist's brother, Kurt Schmidt, Karl-Marx-Stadt (Chemnitz), 1969, A IV 232

Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, with Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, was one of the founders of the group Die Brücke, an artists' association taking its name from the German word for "bridge," symbolizing their link to the future. During his military service in 1915, the artist explained that he had "exaggerated heads ... as a focal point for all psyche, all expression." His *Green Girl's* face is reminiscent of a roughly carved mask. Like his fellow Brücke artists, Schmidt-Rottluff took inspiration from works of African and Oceanic art—a process condemned by the National Socialists as propagation of a foreign "racial ideal."



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New Objectivity

In 1925, the director of the museum in Mannheim organized an exhibition of paintings that turned sharply away from the spirit of Expressionism. He gave this movement the name *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) to describe artists' matter-of-fact, dispassionate approach towards their figurative subjects, drawn from the social order of the new Weimar Republic. Using razor-sharp detail, they produced sober-looking portraits, still lifes, and landscapes that precisely reflected social developments of the time. Depictions of machinery and modern inventions underscored the dramatic impact of new technologies in the world of work and everyday life.

The modern attitude to life of the 1920s also included the emancipation of women, many of whom broke with traditional female lifestyles. In the aftermath of war in 1918, women won the right to vote. Women from all social classes now moved around cafés and nightclubs without male accompaniment and chose their partners for themselves. Christian Schad depicted the so-called "New Woman" in everyday urban life with *Sonja*, now considered an icon of New Objectivity. Even though the New Objectivity style, based in figurative representation, was not expressly rejected by the National Socialists, its works often convey socio-critical and political statements.

Kurt Günther (1893–1955)

Portrait of a Boy

1927

Tempera on wood

Purchased from the artist's widow, Maria Günther, Gera, 1967, A IV 135

Portrait of a Boy depicts the seven-year-old Rolf Schoder, son of the modernist architect Thilo Schoder and his first wife, Margarete, with whom Günther was friends. After his parents divorced, Rolf lived with his mother, but in time, because she was of Jewish ancestry, it was thought safest for the boy to join his father's family in Norway. Margarete Schoder was interned with her father at Theresienstadt, the Czech waystation to extermination camps further east; though she survived, her father died there. In 1937, eleven of Günther's paintings were confiscated as part of the Nazi "degenerate art" campaign and subsequently destroyed. Emerging from his internal exile at the end of the Second World War, Günther became a professor in the East German city of Leipzig. Along with *The Radio Enthusiast*, Günther's *Portrait of a Boy* remained with the artist until his death; they were acquired from his widow in 1967 by the Nationalgalerie, East Berlin.



Christian Schad (1894–1982)

Sonja

1928

Oil on canvas

Acquired by the Friends of the National Gallery with funds from the Ingeborg and Günter Milich Foundation, FNG 80/97

The portrait of the young woman known as "Sonja," considered one of the artist's principal works, is an icon of New Objectivity and a prototypical depiction of the self-confident, emancipated woman in the Weimar Republic. With fashionably short hair, a cigarette holder between her fingers, and a packet of Camel cigarettes, a powder compact, and lipstick casually strewn on the tablecloth, Sonja displays her modernity and her independence. "Sonja" was, in fact, a woman named Albertine Gimpel, who was dismissed from her job in 1933 because she was of Jewish heritage. Moving from Berlin to Munich, she met in 1936 the painter Franz Herda (1887–1965), the son of German emigrés to the United States, whose American citizenship afforded him a measure of protection against Nazi persecutions. He managed twice to protect Albertine from deportation, facilitating her concealment from 1941 until 1945. They married in 1948, resettling in New York but returning to Germany in 1962.



Kate Diehn-Bitt (1900–1978)

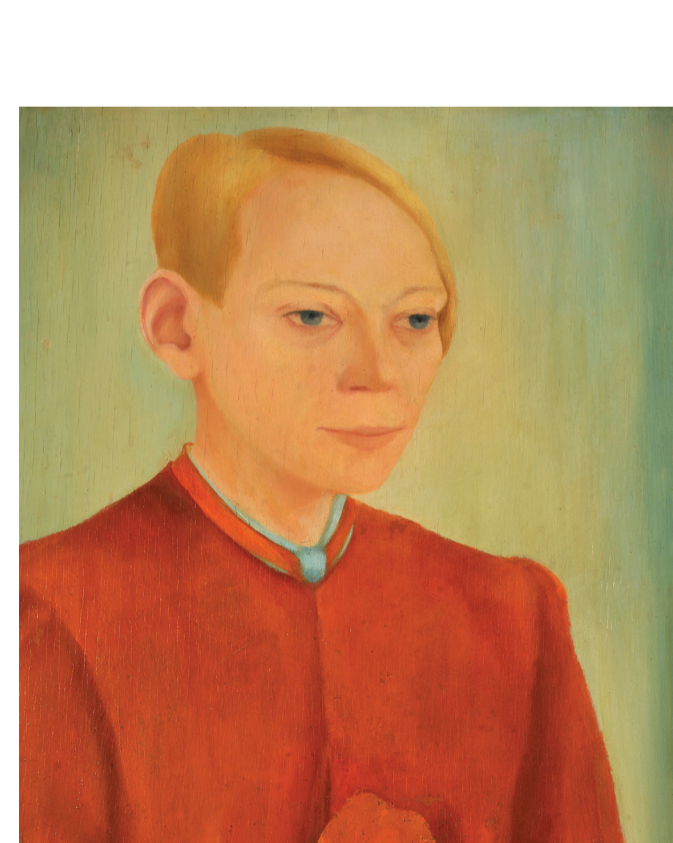
Self-Portrait with an Orange

1930–31

Oil on wood

Purchased from the artist, 1968, A IV 180

The artist's androgynous image is strangely tense, the clear and firm delineation of her face and costume enhanced by the unusual color contrast between large blocks of warm orange and golden tones and the delicate acid green of the background. In 1935, Diehn-Bitt had her first (and only) solo exhibition, in the Gurlitt Gallery in Berlin. Despite some good reviews, she was attacked by the National Socialist press, which criticized her paintings as *artfremd*—alien to the species. Since she did not become a member of the Reich Chamber of Culture, she was no longer allowed to exhibit and found it difficult to continue her artistic practice. As the daughter of a Jewish stepfather, she was also forced, for her personal safety, to sever contact with her parents.



Rudolf Schlichter (1890–1955)

Portrait of Géza von Cziffra

1926–27

Oil on cardboard

Purchased from the Meta Nierendorf Gallery, Berlin, 1948. Donated by the Magistrate of Greater Berlin (East), 1951, A III 252

Rudolf Schlichter was, along with Otto Dix and George Grosz, a member of Verism, the leftist wing of New Objectivity. A resident of Berlin since 1919, in the second half of the 1920s he portrayed artists and intellectuals such as the playwright Bertolt Brecht and other prominent members of the political left. Another subject was the Hungarian journalist and filmmaker Géza von Cziffra (1900–1989), who would later become known as a screenwriter and director, producing comedies and musicals in Nazi-occupied Vienna. Cziffra, who appears well-groomed and elegant, sits casually in the painter's Berlin studio, a book and a cigarette holder in his delicate hands. The thick Berlin telephone book sits on a chest of drawers in the background, probably as an indication that Cziffra was an extraordinarily outgoing and social person with a wide circle of contacts.



Kurt Günther (1893–1955)

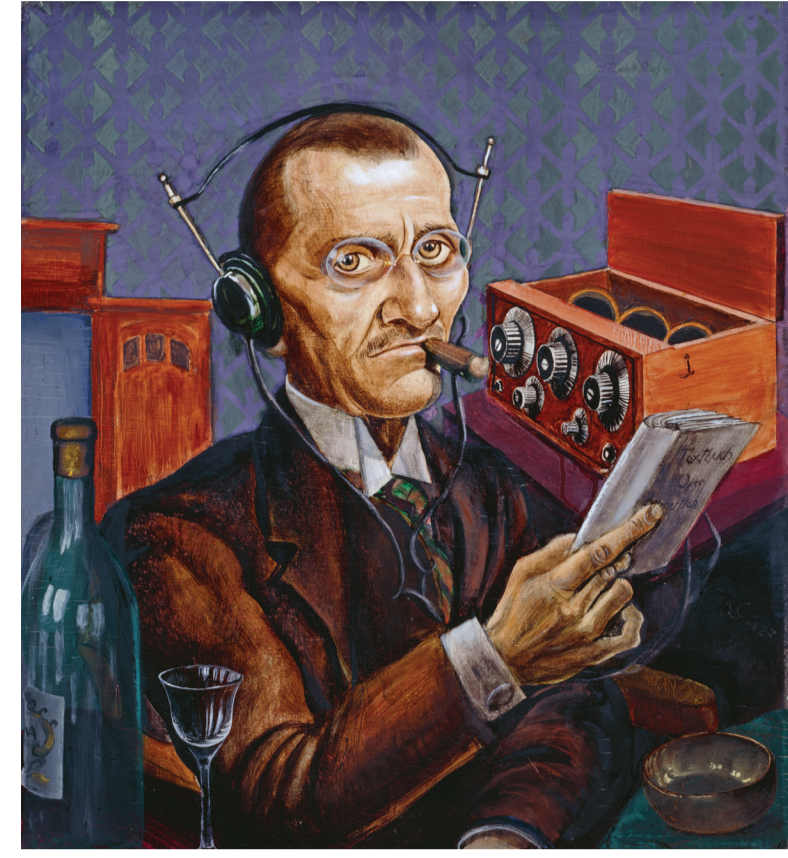
Radio Enthusiast

1927

Tempera on wood

Purchased from the artist's widow, Maria Günther, Gera, 1967, A IV 134

In this amalgam of portraiture and genre painting, the subject is a certain Mr. Schreck, a paraplegic confined to a wheelchair who lived in a room on the lower floor of Kurt Günther's building. German radio began broadcasting for the first time in 1923 and became the central motif of many New Objectivity paintings. Günther's portrait can be understood in the words of one critic: "a Sunday bourgeois, fed up with the world, has walled himself in between a wheezing radio, jammed headphones, a bottle of red wine, an opera libretto, and a cigar: a vengeful bachelor idyll of our era, a defensive, sparkling, musical fortification." At the same time, however, the effect of radio can also be understood in a positive sense, as a boundary-breaking medium with the potential to educate the populace and shape society. Only a few years later, however, radio became one of the principal organs of National Socialist state propaganda.



Carlo Mense (1886–1965)

Double-Portrait (Rabbi S. and Daughter)

c. 1925–26

Oil on canvas

Donated by the heirs of Dr. Ismar and Käthe Littmann, NG 2/22

Carlo Mense, who came from a deeply religious Catholic merchant family, seems to have become interested in Jewish culture through his military service in Poland and Russia in 1916–17. Mense took part in the Mannheim exhibition *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) in 1925 and was appointed to the Art Academy in Breslau, an important center of Jewish life. His double portrait of a rabbi and his daughter was acquired by the prominent lawyer Ismar Littmann and his wife Käthe, patrons of the arts and cultural leaders in Breslau's Jewish community. Forbidden by the Nazis to practice law, his cultural activities curtailed, Littman died by his own hand in 1934, leaving his widow to sell their collection under duress to survive. *Double-Portrait (Rabbi S. and Daughter)* was purchased by the Nationalgalerie in 1935; it was restituted in 2022 to the Littmanns' heirs, who in turn gave it back to the museum.



Wilhelm Lachnit (1899–1962)

Worker with Machine

1924–28

Oil on wood

Purchased from Max Lachnit, the artist's brother, Dresden, 1964, A IV 27

The subject of Lachnit's *Worker with Machine* is Kurt Frölich, a typesetter for the Saxon Communist Party daily newspaper *Arbeiterstimme* (Worker's Voice) and a party functionary. *Worker with Machine* is a programmatic "double portrait" in which the machine stands as an equal to the man, an allegory of the utopian state of nonalienated work. The machine is by no means a "slavish" depiction of an existing apparatus that the entrepreneur controls and the worker operates, but rather a structure made up of mechanical elements that Lachnit freely improvised, a technical symbol of the freely creative spirit, a true alter ego of the creative worker. In contrast with the optimism of his portrait, Kurt Frölich met a tragic end: he was imprisoned in the Colditz concentration camp in 1933 and, after his release, was tortured to death in 1941 during a Gestapo interrogation.



Curt Querner (1904–1976)

Self-Portrait with Stinging Nettle

1933

Oil on cardboard

Purchased from the artist's widow, Regina Querner, with funds from the GDR Cultural Fund, 1983, A IV 472

In 1930, Querner joined the Communist Party and became, along with such painters as Wilhelm Lachnit, a member of the Association of Revolutionary Visual Artists of Germany. Querner lived in a proletarian district of Dresden near an employment office, where he saw firsthand the fate of the out-of-work. A Communist Party meeting in a bowling alley in Dresden on January 25, 1933, ended in a shootout with police, leaving nine dead and eleven seriously injured. Querner's *Self-Portrait with Stinging Nettle* was created after this bloodbath: the stinging nettle in the artist's hand can be read as a symbol of resistance in the face of menace. "My little 'self-portrait,'" the artist wrote, "has an aftertaste that not everyone likes. But that makes it a perfectly good picture. I am more attached to it than to anything else."



Franz Lenk (1898–1968)

Amaryllis

1930

Egg tempera on canvas on wood

Purchased by Eduard Freiherr von der Heydt for the Association of Friends of the National Gallery, 1930, A IV 202

The viewer of a picture must “feel authenticity. He must unconsciously feel the wind in the landscape, smell the scent of fresh fields. He must feel like wandering into my picture,” wrote Franz Lenk in 1930 in an article entitled “What I Want.” The nod to conservative tradition in Lenk’s painting technique—here, for instance, employing egg tempera on canvas mounted on wood—would soon delight the National Socialists. In 1933, the new government appointed Lenk professor at the United State Schools for Fine and Applied Art in Berlin and named him, from 1933 to 1936, a member of the Presidential Council of the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts. He used this official position, however, to show solidarity with ostracized artists. In 1935, the painter withdrew into “inner exile.” He refused to participate in the *Great German Art Exhibition* in 1937 and resigned from his teaching position in Berlin to protest the defamation of his colleagues.



Georg Schrimpf (1889–1938)

Radio Station

1933

Oil on canvas

Transferred by the Ministry of Science, Art, and Education, 1935

In the year *Radio Station* was created, Schrimpf was appointed associate professor at the State Art School in Berlin, which would be renamed the State University for Art Education in 1936. Though living in the Prussian capital, in this landscape the artist shows Bavaria, specifically the countryside where he had grown up, near Munich. While previous paintings of this subject seemed almost idyllic, here there is a more evident reference to the existence and intervention of humans—in the presence of the electric radio wires overhead. Although the surroundings are still painted in a romantic manner, the two red electric pylons dominate the picture, symbols of modern communication and German technological accomplishment. Purchased by the Prussian Ministry of Science, Education, and Culture in 1934, the work was transferred to the Nationalgalerie in 1935.



Franz Radziwill (1895–1983)

The Harbor II

1930

Oil on canvas

Purchased from the artist, 1932, A II 763

At the beginning of the 1920s, Radziwill developed a style of representation that became known as “magical realism” or “surreal objectivity.” This painting commemorates the encounter that took place in Bremerhaven in March 1930 of the sister ships Bremen and Europa—which the shipping company Norddeutscher Lloyd had built for its route to New York. In this dynamically cropped view from below, the ships’ huge hulls, emblems of a new era, seem to crush the graceful sailors. The ships were a source of national pride: both Bremen and Europa set records on their first Atlantic crossings, eclipsing the ship Mauretania, the pride of Britain’s Cunard Line. Their success was a triumph for a Germany shaken by economic crisis.



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International Avant-Gardes

German art dealers were instrumental in the promotion of foreign art in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Herwarth Walden founded a magazine and gallery called *Der Sturm* (The Storm) in Berlin. A strong supporter of the Expressionists, he also promoted the writings and graphic art of the Viennese architect Adolf Loos and painter Oskar Kokoschka. In Munich, Heinrich Thannhauser held a groundbreaking exhibition of Vincent van Gogh's paintings in 1908 and first showed the Blue Rider group in 1911–12. The following year, his Pablo Picasso exhibition was the most ambitious display of the artist's work outside of France. At the same time, the influential dealer Alfred Flechtheim opened his first gallery in Düsseldorf and eventually expanded to Berlin, Frankfurt, Cologne, and Vienna. Working closely with the German expatriate dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler in Paris, he represented the Cubists, not only Picasso but also Georges Braque.

All three of these dealers—whose portraits are exhibited here—suffered attacks from the public and the press for the artistic convictions that led them to promote international avant-gardes on an equal footing with German art movements. They also suffered because they were Jewish; all were forced to leave their native land when the Nazis came to power. The vanguard art that they championed—whether German or foreign—was the first to be targeted as “degenerate” in 1937.

Louis Corinth (1858–1925)

Heinrich Thannhauser

1918

Oil on canvas

Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, AP 2017.01

Heinrich Thannhauser began his career as a draper and tailor before founding an art gallery in Munich in 1904; he hosted a landmark exhibition of over ninety works by Vincent van Gogh in 1908. From 1909, Thannhauser's Moderne Galerie was at the forefront of culture, showing works by German artists in addition to French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings. In 1911, Thannhauser organized, with Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, the first exhibition of the Expressionist group *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider), which—along with *Die Brücke* (The Bridge)—would come to dominate the history of early modern German art.

These painters, as well as the Italian Futurists, became a focus of the gallery around 1913, around the time that Thannhauser participated in the first major modern exhibition in the United States, the famous "Armory Show." In the same year, he presented the first comprehensive exhibition outside France of the works of Pablo Picasso—who was then still in the throes of his Cubist explorations. Corinth's rapidly executed portrait of Thannhauser expresses the energy and intellect that made the man such a successful dealer.



Alexej von Jawlensky (1864–1941)

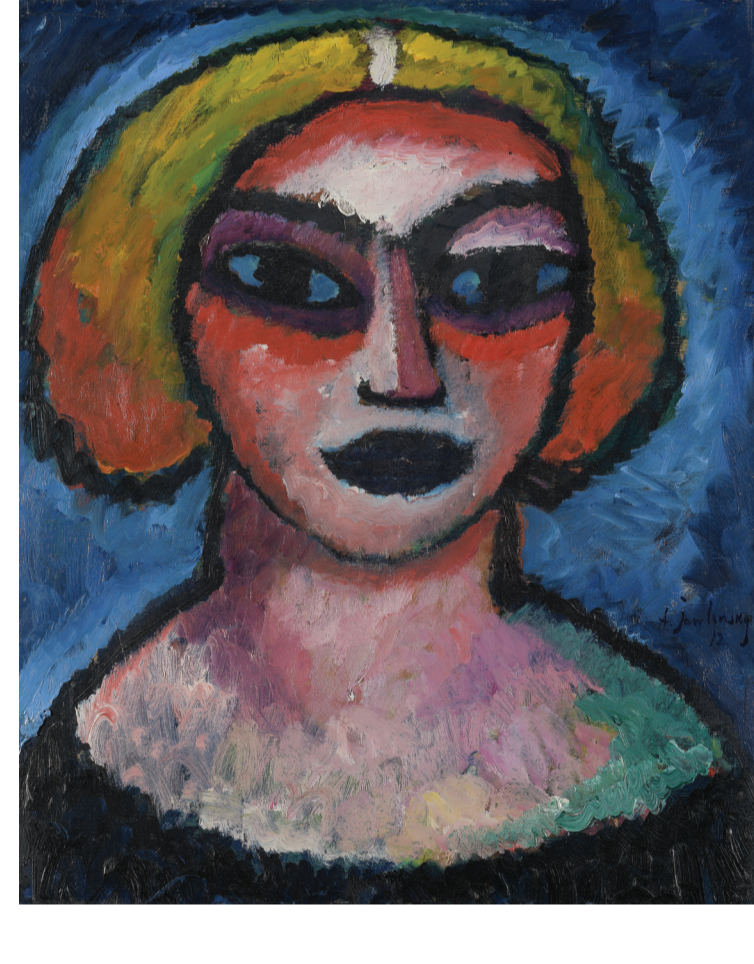
Head of a Woman

1912

Oil on cardboard

Acquired by the State of Berlin, 1959, B 439

The Russian Alexej von Jawlensky studied at the Art Academy in Saint Petersburg. With the painter Marianne von Werefkin, also a Repin student, and other artists from Saint Petersburg, Jawlensky moved to Munich in 1896 and lived in Germany for the rest of his life, except for the years 1914 to 1920. From 1910 until the beginning of World War I, Jawlensky painted dozens of women's heads in a more or less square format. In these works, a clear outline typically sets the figure apart from the background, while the colors of the woman's hair and skin vary greatly. With the painters Werefkin, Wassily Kandinsky, Gabriele Münter, and Franz Marc, Jawlensky was a founder of the artist's group *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider), which held its first exhibition at Heinrich Thannhauser's Munich gallery in 1911.



Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)

Woman Sitting in an Armchair

1909

Oil on canvas

Purchase from Industriekredit AG, Zurich, 1980, NG 1/80

By 1909, Picasso's probing of the Cubist style was advancing steadily. The artist was so pleased with the direction taken in this painting that he had postcards made of it, sending one to the American collectors Leo and Gertrude Stein with "Friendly greetings from the author." Picasso's art was admired in German avant-garde circles after 1913, when his works were first seen in Munich at Heinrich Thannhauser's Moderne Galerie and paired with African sculptures in Berlin at Otto Feldmann's Neue Galerie. More successful exhibitions, notably at the Galerie Flechtheim in Düsseldorf and Berlin, followed in the 1920s and early 1930s. Still, reproductions of Picasso's works were ridiculed in the polemical 1928 book *Kunst und Rasse* (Art and Race), the blueprint for the 1937 campaign against "degenerate" modern art.

The Nationalgalerie in Berlin acquired its first Picasso, a late Cubist still life from 1924, through the patrons' association in 1930 and held onto it through the first purges of "undesirable" works. To stay in line with Nazi Party aesthetics, however, the Picasso was sold in 1939.



William Wauer (1866–1962)

Herwarth Walden

1917 (cast 1963)

Bronze

Purchased from Edmund Kesting, Birkenwerder near Berlin, through the

German Domestic and Foreign Trade (DIA), 1963, NG 24/63

Artist, writer, and director William Wauer portrayed the equally multitalented Herwarth Walden, a musicologist and pianist who had founded a magazine, *Der Sturm* (the storm or blast). From 1912 onwards, Walden promoted Expressionism, along with Cubism and Italian Futurism, in his Berlin Der Sturm gallery. Oskar Kokoschka, whose works are exhibited nearby, was one of his leading artists. Walden, who was of Jewish descent, emigrated to the Soviet Union when the Nazis came to power. In Moscow, his support for radical, vanguard movements led officials to suspect his activities; he was eventually arrested and died in prison in 1941.



Otto Dix (1891–1969)

The Art Dealer Alfred Flechtheim

1926

Oil on wood

Acquired by the State of Berlin, 1961, NG 46/61

Alfred Flechtheim (1878–1937) was one of the most influential—and polarizing— German gallery owners of the 1920s. Initially based in Düsseldorf, beginning in 1921 the Jewish art dealer opened branches in Berlin, Frankfurt, Cologne, and Vienna. At first, he thought little of the painter Otto Dix, but by 1924 he saw him as a great talent. This portrait, made in 1926, is a complicated tribute from painter to dealer. Flechtheim’s nose and ears appear overscale, and his clawlike hands seem to be taking possession of a Cubist still life in the style of Georges Braque and a nude drawing reminiscent of Pablo Picasso. Three aspects of Dix’s image of Flechtheim—its clichéd Jewish physiognomy, demonstration of devotion to French art, and suggestion of greed—are anti-Semitic stereotypes that the National Socialist regime would later use in its attacks on the dealer.

In 1933, Flechtheim fled Germany for France and eventually Britain, where he died, deprived of his paintings and his fortune, in 1937. His portrait had remained with Dix and stayed in the artist’s possession until it was purchased by the Nationalgalerie in 1961.



Fernand Léger (1882–1955)

The Two Sisters

1935

Oil on canvas

Purchased from the Stephan Hahn Collection, New York, 1979, NG 3/79

By the 1930s, a preoccupation with the mechanized city that had dominated Léger’s works of the 1920s had given way to an engagement with the human figure. The two statuesque women that Léger depicted in 1935 in cool grey against a lemon-yellow background are based on his mechanical-constructive figures from the First World War, but softly undulating outlines have replaced strict geometry, and the bodies have become more like organic forms. In this shift, Léger was in line with the trends of the time, which favored simplicity, monumentality, and the return to the object. First promoted by the German-born dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler in Paris before World War I, Léger was one of the artists later collected and endorsed by such German dealers as Heinrich Thannhauser and, most particularly, Alfred Flechtheim. In 1937, six works by Léger were confiscated from German museums in Breslau, Erfurt, Göttingen, Hanover, Mannheim, and Saarbrücken as “degenerate.”



Henri Laurens (1885–1954)

Crouching Woman

1922

Limestone

Acquired by the State of Berlin, 1966, B 798

Crouching Woman first belonged to Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, a German-French art historian who set up his own gallery in Paris in 1907 and became the most important representative of the Cubists. During World War I, Kahnweiler’s gallery stock was sequestered by the French government and sold. Starting over, he operated under the name Galerie Simon until 1940, when he went into hiding. During the Nazi occupation of Paris, Laurens’s work would have been unwelcome: his *Sleeping Woman* had been seized from the Staatliches Museum Saarbrücken in 1937, classified as “degenerate,” and destroyed.



Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978)

The Great Metaphysician

1945

Oil on canvas

Acquired by the State of Berlin, 1965, B770

In 1917, in the midst of World War I, de Chirico created one of the main works of the *Pittura metafisica* movement, a painting he entitled *The Great Metaphysician*. A modified second version of the composition followed in 1925, used as a model for a third example, with more variations, exhibited here. Shortly after the Nazis came to power in 1933, Hermann Göring officially accepted fifteen modern Italian paintings into the national collections. Although several works by de Chirico were included, none was of the stature of the artist’s 1917 *Great Metaphysician*, a painting equaled by few works in the artist’s oeuvre made after the First World War. This distinction would have been evident to de Chirico himself, who, in painting the Berlin canvas at the end of the Second World War, decided to falsely date it to 1916, aware that works from his past were more valuable than those of his present.



Jacoba van Heemskerck (1876–1923)

Picture 56 (Dutch Mill)

1916

Oil on canvas

Purchased from the Gallery Nierendorf, Berlin, 1960, NG 6/60

A prominent figure in her native Netherlands, Jacoba van Heemskerck met Herwarth Walden in 1913, on the occasion of the *Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon* (First German Autumn Salon), the exhibition of international modern art Walden had organized. From that year on, she was represented by Walden's Berlin gallery, *Der Sturm*. In fact, Heemskerck became the most frequently represented woman artist in *Sturm* exhibitions; in *Der Sturm* magazine, the number of her published woodcuts was surpassed only by Oskar Kokoschka's works. A perceptive friend of van Heemskerck described her *Picture 56* as "a representation of the rising power of restless work, and the happiness and peace that it, when completed, grants."



Marianne von Werefkin (1860–1938)

Procession near Ascona

c. 1924

Oil on cardboard

Acquired by the State of Berlin, 1962, B 540

Marianne von Werefkin was born Marianna Vladimirovna Veryovkina, the daughter of a Russian noble army officer. After the death of her father left her financially independent, she moved to Munich with her partner, the painter Alexej von Jawlensky. It was in Werefkin's circle that, in 1909, the Expressionist group *Neue Künstlervereinigung München* was formed, the precursor to the *Blaue Reiter* group formed by Wassily Kandinsky, Gabriele Münter, and Franz Marc in 1911. With them, and with Jawlensky, she exhibited under the auspices of the *Galerie Thannhauser* in Munich and *Der Sturm* in Berlin. By 1914, however, Werefkin and Jawlensky were forced to leave Germany, then at war with their native Russia; they emigrated to Switzerland, where Werefkin eventually settled in the bohemian enclave of Ascona.



Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980)

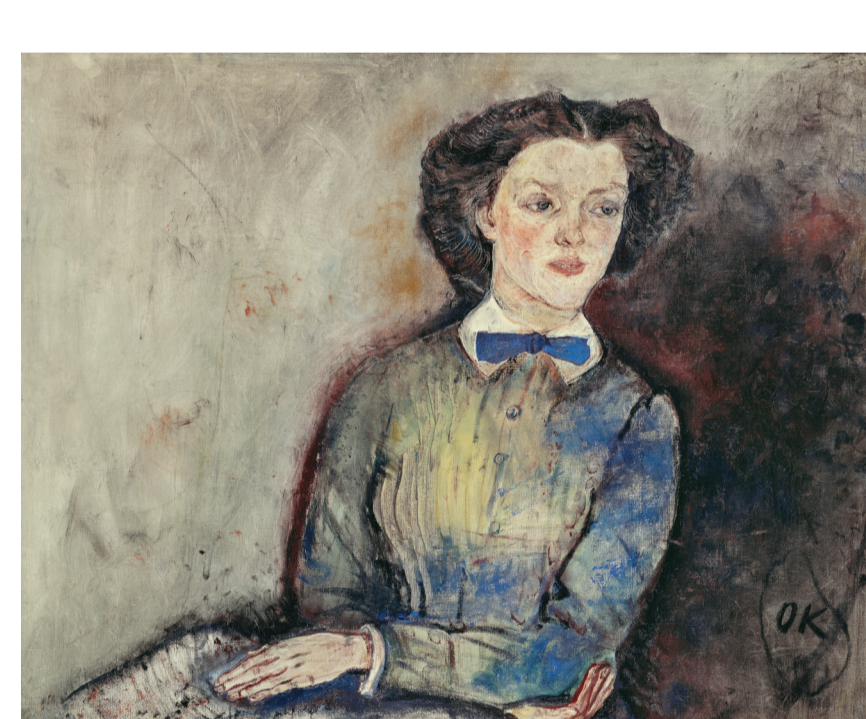
Portrait of Bessie Bruce

1910

Oil on canvas

Purchased from the Paul Cassirer Gallery, Berlin, 1926. Lost after war-related removal in 1946. Repurchased from private collection, New York, 1971, NG22/71

In the winter of 1909–10, the architect Adolf Loos, whose portrait is shown nearby, took Oskar Kokoschka to Lake Geneva, where he had arranged several portrait commissions for the artist. Loos had met the English dancer Elizabeth (Bessie) Bruce (1886–1921) in 1905 in the Viennese cabaret *Tabarin*—where she performed the cakewalk dance with the *Barrison Sisters* from New York—and had begun a relationship with her. She had fallen ill with pulmonary tuberculosis in 1909, and Loos, who had built the *Villa Karma* for a doctor not far from Lake Geneva, sent her to Switzerland to recuperate. The deep shadows on the right side of the painting, as well as the seams that look like scars on the chest area of the dress, can be interpreted as indications of the endangered health of Loos's partner.



Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980)

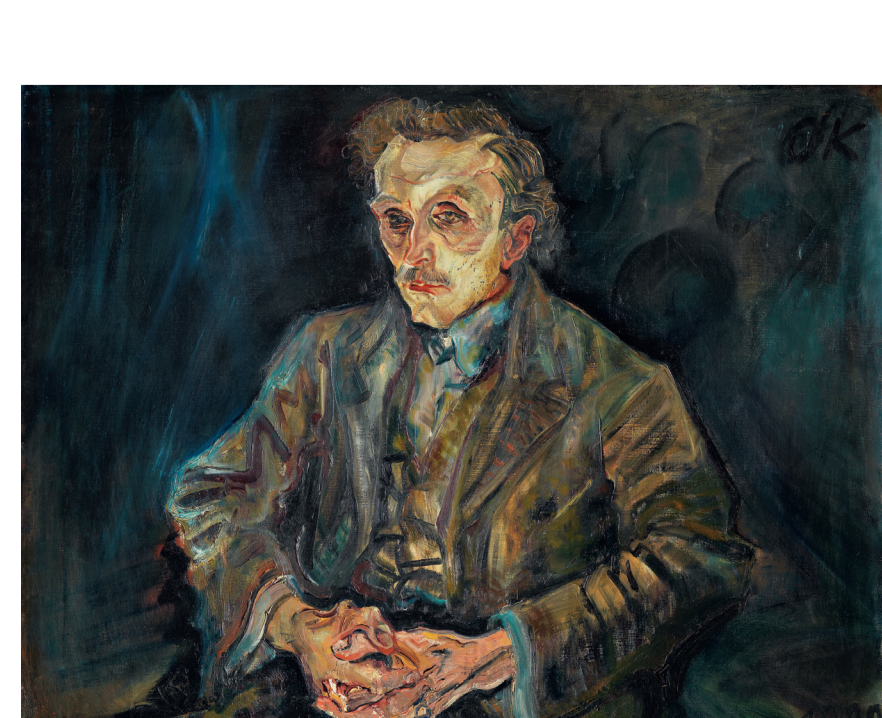
Portrait of Adolf Loos

1909

Oil on canvas

Purchased from the Ernst Arnold Gallery, Dresden, 1925, All 448

The vanguard Viennese painter Gustav Klimt greeted the twenty-two-year-old Kokoschka, still completely unknown, as "the greatest talent of the young generation." The press mostly denounced the painter as a "Bürgerschreck"—a provocateur to the middle classes—but collectors acquired drawings, and the internationally known Austrian architect Adolf Loos (1870–1933) pushed the painter to devote himself entirely to free, "revolutionary" art, which "must not please," as Loos expressed it in his seminal essay "On Architecture," published by Herwarth Walden in 1910, the inaugural year of *Der Sturm*. The portrait of Loos is an example of how Kokoschka understood this ethos of truthfulness, which abandoned verisimilitude to show the glowing intensity of inner expression, fed directly by its conflict with the external, socially bound decorum of the person portrayed.



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Modes of Abstraction

Over the course of the early 1900s, as the figure was abandoned in favor of simplified or schematized subject matter, the elements of line, shape, and color became increasingly independent pictorial elements. In the minds of artists and architects, the principle of abstraction, as a new and universal language, was in sync with a modern vision of society.

An important laboratory of abstraction in Germany was the Bauhaus, a state art school opened in Weimar in 1919 by the architect Walter Gropius, who aimed to design and construct a better post-war world. The Bauhaus faculty included some of the most important artists, architects, and designers of the modern age, among them Lyonel Feininger, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, and Oskar Schlemmer.

Unfortunately, many people were either skeptical of or even hostile to abstract art. Under the National Socialists, the Bauhaus and other progressive academies were shuttered, and eventually most abstract art was denounced—including works by almost every artist in this gallery.

Paul Klee (1879–1940)

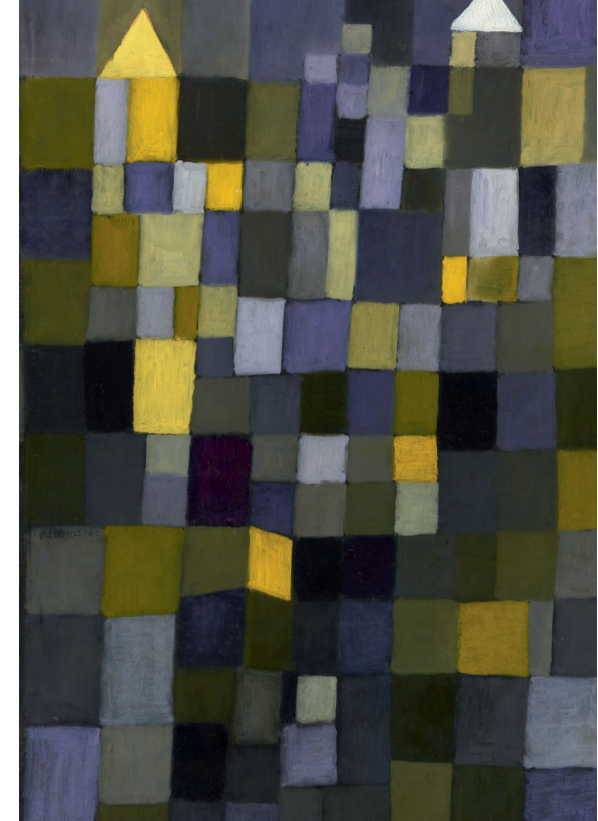
Architecture

1923

Oil on hardboard

Purchased from the Galerie Renée Ziegler, Zurich/Zollikon, 1968, NG 7/69

The Swiss-born painter Paul Klee taught at the Bauhaus in Weimar and Dessau from 1921 to 1931. He taught in the workshops for glass, bookbinding, goldsmithing, and weaving, ran free painting courses together with Wassily Kandinsky, and made a significant contribution to the basic education of young Bauhaus students with his lectures on “artistic form theory.” For the music lover and talented violinist Klee, music played a major role in his artistic work: in *Architecture*, the “tones” of the colors find their analogy in sound, as does the rhythmically orchestrated composition and the ascent from dark to light reminiscent of a scale. Klee taught in Düsseldorf from 1931 until he was denounced by a Nazi newspaper, investigated by the Gestapo, and dismissed, at which point he left Germany for Switzerland.



Paul Klee (1879–1940)

Ships Departing

1927

Oil and drawing ink on canvas

Purchased from the Galerie Michael Hertz, Bremen, 1967, NG 22/67

Like *Architecture*, the 1927 *Ships Departing* was created while Paul Klee was living in Dessau as a Bauhaus master. In the maritime scene, he fused the tradition of the seascape with the romance of a painting of night. With sails hoisted, the small fleet of four ships sets out into the dark sea. The black of the night swallows up even the horizon; only the faint cone of light from the blue full moon allows waves to be seen at the bottom right. Klee left Germany on Christmas Day 1933 and went to his native Switzerland. Through the 1930s, he continued to work steadily, his paintings increasingly glyphic, seemingly untied to physical things. He died in 1940. Despite his Swiss birth, he was considered an artistically radical exile by the governmental authorities, who awarded him citizenship only after his death.



Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944)

Hornform

1924

Oil on cardboard

Acquired by the State of Berlin, 1953, B 90

Between 1922 and 1933, Kandinsky, who was born in Moscow and trained as a painter in Munich, worked as a master at the Bauhaus. Under the influence of his colleagues there, his painting, previously characterized by free, gestural abstraction, began to incorporate more geometric forms. In the context of his rationally designed pictures of the 1920s, *Hornform* stands out for its lively, narrative aspect—it is a playful reference to the workshops for architecture, design, music, and theater at the Bauhaus. In 1924, the year *Hornform* was painted, elections in Thuringia led to a right-wing state government that, with support from the National Socialists, cut the Weimar Bauhaus’s funding in half, forcing the art school to move to Dessau.

In the same year, the art impresario Galka Scheyer founded the group *Die Blaue Vier* (The Blue Four) to promote the works of Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Alexej von Jawlensky, and Lyonel Feininger in the United States. (The name was reminiscent of the Expressionist art initiative *Der Blaue Reiter*, which Kandinsky co-founded in 1911–12.)



Gabriele Münter (1877–1962)

Abstraction

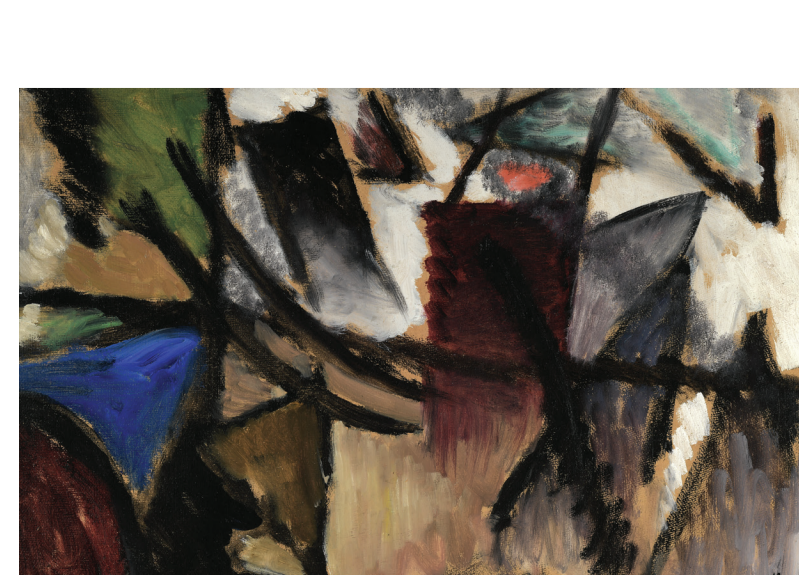
1912

Oil on cardboard

Acquired by the State of Berlin, 1955, B 72/20

Born in Berlin and trained in Düsseldorf, Gabriele Münter spent nearly two years in the United States—visiting extended family in Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri—before returning to Germany. In Munich, she met the Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky, with whom she entered a relationship both personal and professional. With Kandinsky and Franz Marc, Münter organized the first exhibition of *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider) in 1911 at the Munich gallery of Heinrich Thannhauser. This picture is Münter’s first abstract painting, in which black lines and colored areas correspond with an earlier depiction of a tea party.

On the left, at a window with a green curtain, two triangles in ochre and blue relate to Münter’s face and blouse; a visitor, reduced to a black shadow, occupies an armchair signified by a patch of dark red upholstery. Other lines and shapes denote an empty rocking chair, a cupboard with a red bouquet of flowers, and pictures on the wall. At right, a series of lines, exaggerated and at the same time obliterated by a patch of brilliant white, represent Kandinsky and another guest.



Hannah Höch (1889–1978)

The Mosquito Is Dead

1922

Oil on canvas

Acquired by the State of Berlin, 1955, B 68/5

Hannah Höch, who became known as a Dadaist thanks primarily to her collages and photographs, took up elements of Giorgio de Chirico's *Pittura metafisica* in her painting when she began to turn to figurative representations that combine Surrealism and New Objectivity. The painting *The Mosquito Is Dead* was created at a critical moment in 1922, the year of her final separation from the Dada writer and collage artist Raoul Hausmann, with whom she had had an emotionally intense—and very draining—relationship since 1915. In 1920–21, she had become acquainted with Italian modernism, both on a trip to Italy and through *Das junge Italien* (Young Italy), one of the many exhibitions of vanguard artists held at the contemporary-art annex of the Nationalgalerie, installed in Kronprinzen-Palais in Berlin, which opened in 1919 and was closed by the Nazis in 1937.



Marg Moll (1884–1977)

Dancing Couple

c. 1928

Brass

Purchased by Jürgen Vollmers, 2016, NG 19/16

Marg Moll and her husband Oskar were among the most cosmopolitan artists in early twentieth-century Germany, moving between Germany and France and befriending such figures as Henri Matisse and Constantin Brâncuși. *Dancing Couple* is part of a series of works Moll created after she discussed metal-casting processes with Brâncuși in Paris in 1928. From the mid-1920s onwards, Moll moved towards simplified forms and depersonalized figures, employing smooth polished metals. Though her works were denounced as “degenerate” by the Nazis, Moll survived the war in Berlin, but her home and her collections of art were destroyed by bombs.



Emy Roeder (1880–1971)

Mare and Foal

1919

Bronze

Transferred from the Ministry of Science, Art, and Education to the National Gallery, 1936, B I 595

Emy Roeder's works often depict themes of feminine sexuality or motherhood. She was one of the founders of the radical *Novembergruppe* (November Group) in 1918, and when women were at last admitted to the academies after the First World War, she was offered a position as a “Master Student.” The Deutscher Künstlerbund, the association of German artists dedicated to artistic freedom, awarded Roeder a prestigious prize fellowship in Florence in 1936. When one of her 1918 works was featured in the exhibition *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) in 1937, the sculptor decided to remain in Italy and did not return to Germany until 1949.



Lyonel Feininger (1871–1956)

Teltow II

1918

Oil on canvas

Purchased from the artist in exchange for Vollersroda III, 1921. Confiscated as “degenerate” in 1937. Seized after 1945 on the premises of the art dealer Bernhard A. Böhmer and handed over to the National Gallery (East), 1949, A II 332

Léonell Charles Feininger, who would later call himself Lyonel, was born to German parents in New York in 1871. At the age of sixteen, he came to Germany and trained as a draftsman at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin. His encounter with the works of the Cubists transformed his vision; as an advocate of an international style, he became one of the first professors engaged at Walter Gropius's Bauhaus, in 1919.

In these years, the architecture of German cities and towns became a dominant subject in his paintings and works on paper. Here, under a green-brown sky, a church tower ascends from the steady rise and fall of warm brick-red roofs, to which cool, delicate blues lend a spiritual dimension. In the last year of the First World War, the balance might seem to signal the desire for silence and self-reflection. *Teltow II* was acquired by the National Gallery in 1921 and remained in the collection until it was seized as “degenerate art” in 1937. It was recovered after the war and returned to the museum in 1949.



Georg Muche (1895–1987)

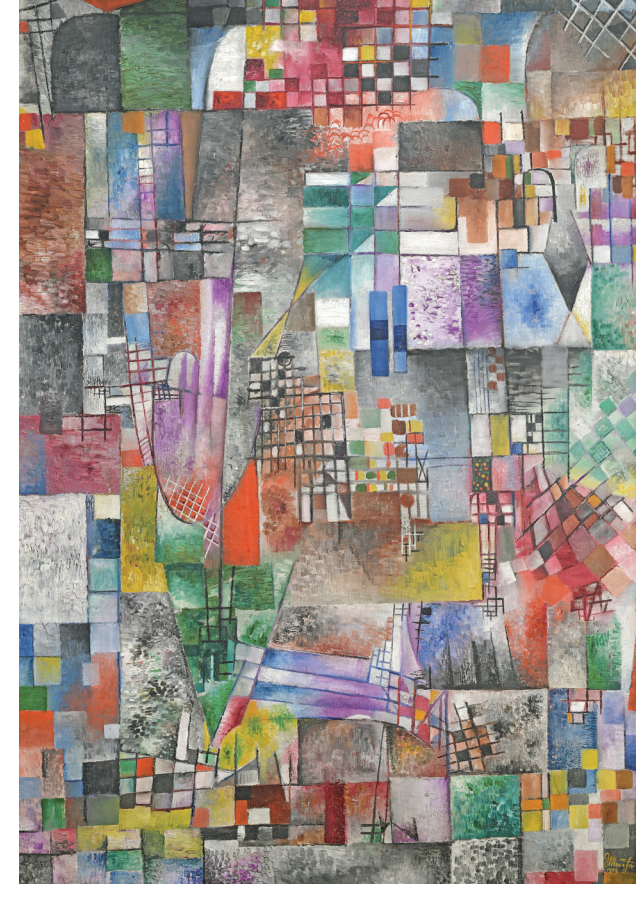
Picture with the Grid Motif in the Middle

1919

Oil on canvas

Acquired by the State of Berlin, 1966, B 842

Georg Muche's preoccupation with color, along with his attempt to achieve absolute abstraction through condensed energy, found favor in the Expressionist circles around the Berlin gallery Der Sturm. Muche created his first grid pictures in 1916. He had completed several of them by 1917–18, when he was sent to the war front, having volunteered for military service in 1914. After 1919, Muche fell into a crisis provoked by his war experiences. When Walter Gropius invited him to come to the State Bauhaus in Weimar as a master, Muche joined such artists as Lyonel Feininger, Oskar Schlemmer, and Paul Klee, whose works are exhibited nearby. Muche later lost his professorship at the State Academy for Art and Applied Arts in Breslau in 1933 but was able to continue teaching at private art schools. Nevertheless, in 1937 several of his works were confiscated as "degenerate."



Otto Möller (1883–1964)

City

1921

Oil on canvas

Purchased from the artist, 1961, NG 69/61

At the time of the political revolution that took place in November 1918—at the close of World War I—a call went out: "The future of art and the seriousness of the present hour forces us, the revolutionaries of the spirit (Expressionists, Cubists, Futurists), to unite and join forces. We therefore urgently call upon all those artists who have broken the traditional mold to declare their adherence to the Novembergruppe (November Group)." The painter Otto Möller answered the call.

In *City*, a vibrant painting that combines elements of Expressionism, Cubism, and Futurism, he exalts the metropolis of Berlin and its signs—signs from street traffic, architecture, and advertising that glut the senses. Rhythmically staggered rectangular fields form a facade pattern that optically protrudes and recedes. This is overlaid by neon letters, advertising a "HOTEL," a "CAFE," and a "BAR," as well as "CIGA[RETTEN]" by "MANOLI," and the liberal "Ullstein" press and the newspaper "[Berliner Lokal-]Anzeiger" from the nationalist-conservative Hugenberg Group. Möller then placed his own initials, "OM," and thus himself, in the middle of it all.



Willi Baumeister (1889–1955)

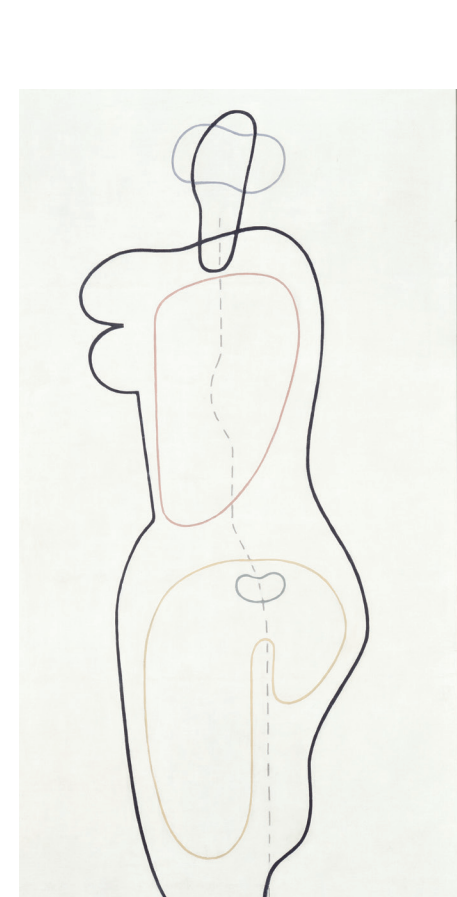
Woman

1930

Oil on canvas

Acquired by the State of Berlin, 1951, B 61

The painting *Woman* summarizes central themes of the 1920s—abstraction of the human figure, constructive order, the exploration of diametrical forces, the relationship between surface and volume—with formulaic economy, while at the same time testing a new, organic formal language. Although painted in oil, the composition's reduction to a few lines and colors resembles a drawing: the flowing contours of the convex female body have themselves become the theme of the painting. While the black outer line draws a profile, the organ-shaped lines inside examine three-dimensional mass. The dashed vertical line can be seen as the central vertical axis as well as the path of human digestion, leading from the mouth and esophagus through the cleansing kidney before exiting the body. Baumeister liked the painting: it hung in his workroom in the Städelschule in Frankfurt, where he held a professorship from 1928 to the time of his dismissal in 1933.



Oskar Schlemmer (1888–1943)

Nude, Woman, and Approaching Figure

1925

Oil on canvas

B 149

After taking up his position at the Bauhaus in Weimar in 1921, Schlemmer concentrated his art on depictions of the human figure. In 1925, he completed his theoretical text "Man and Art Figure" and expanded his observations on the interaction between man and space. In his list of "Themes: nude and clothed figure, next to each other, against each other, crossing each other, half right, left, diagonally," he outlined the subjects of his work at that time, made concrete in *Nude, Woman, and Approaching Figure*. The human image formulated by Schlemmer—perfectly proportioned, formally abstracted, and de-individualized—expresses his striving for ideals and universality; the approaching figure may symbolize an enigmatic future. Schlemmer was an influential teacher at the Bauhaus in Weimar from 1920 to 1929, when he left to join the academy in Breslau. There he painted the work for which he is best known in North America, the famous *Bauhaus Staircase*, now at New York's Museum of Modern Art.



Rudolf Belling (1886–1972)

Head in Brass

1925

Brass

Purchased from the art dealer Alfred Flechtheim, Berlin, 1928. Confiscated in 1937 as “degenerate.” Seized in 1947 on the property of Bernhard A. Boehmer, Güstrow, and handed over to the National Gallery (East), 1949, B I 480

What today appears to be an elegant, melancholic image of a woman—somewhere between Art Deco and New Objectivity—began as something else entirely. In 1924, the artist began modeling a life-size Madonna and Child but reduced the design until only the head remained. The *Head in Brass*, acquired by the Nationalgalerie in 1928, then formed a counterpoint to other, more abstract sculptures by Belling installed in the museum’s annex for modern art in the former Kronprinzen-Palais (Crown Prince’s Palace). The National Socialists confiscated Belling’s sculptures in 1937 and exhibited them in Munich as “degenerate art.”



Oskar Nerlinger (1893–1969)

The Early Train

1928

Casein tempera on canvas

Purchased from the artist, 1963, A IV 20

“I needed harder air, a harder rhythm of life,” Oskar Nerlinger wrote. “Berlin was the only option.” In Nerlinger’s paintings, the city was a gigantic machine and a recurring theme; he used extreme perspectives and simultaneous representations to illustrate the dynamics of the mechanized world of work. In *The Early Train*, a dark, vaulted freight station with the word BERLIN in red letters rises in the center. Locomotives with freight cars and a red steel radio tower with a bright spotlight play against the people who, formed from a few black lines, stream faceless from all sides to their workplaces. Suppressing his Communist politics under the National Socialists, Nerlinger entered an “internal exile,” continuing to exhibit and to provide illustrations to various publications. A professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin after World War II, he lost his position in 1951 because of his Communist beliefs and emigrated to the GDR (East Germany), where he worked for the rest of his life.



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Politics and War

The First World War's economic and social consequences shaped the attitude to life in 1920s Germany. The war's survivors often processed their own traumatic experiences in art; reparations to be paid by Germany caused great economic hardship. Still, the events and consequences of the war strengthened the cause of modernism. At first, Expressionism seemed best able to give formal, physical form to the world's trauma. In time, young avant-garde artists of many stripes formed artists' groups with a political and social commitment. In the liberal republic that emerged after 1919, artists such as George Grosz and Käthe Kollwitz gave free rein to social criticism.

The Weimar Republic also saw the rise of nationalist, militarist, and anti-Semitic associations that strictly rejected the new democratic order. These groups argued for a powerful resurgence of the German Reich, personified by figures of heroic masculinity—like the sculptor Georg Kolbe's larger-than-life, bronze *Descending Man*. Artists who remained in Germany faced daunting, sometimes life-threatening challenges in their opposition to the National Socialist dictatorship, most particularly in the years of the Second World War, from 1939 to 1945. Bravery and resistance were to be found even in defeat. Horst Strempele's *Night over Germany*, painted in the winter of 1945–46, depicts the horror of the Nazi regime's persecution of its people. The painting was rarely shown to the public in the first decades of the post-war period, however, when individuals and institutions were unable or unwilling to remember the Nazi terror.

Wilhelm Lehmbruck (1881–1919)

Fallen Man

1915–16 (cast by 1972)

Bronze

Purchased from the artist's son, Guido Lehmbruck, Leinfelden-Oberaichen, 1979, NG 5/790

Lehmbruck was asked to enter a competition for a heroic statue of the legendary Siegfried, to be placed in a cemetery in his native Duisburg. Lehmbruck declined to enter the competition, instead sculpting the *Fallen Man*, now one of the most famous sculptures of the period, rightly interpreted as a memorial against war rather than a monument to valor. In 1916, Lehmbruck emigrated to Switzerland and waited there for the war to end. Months after the Armistice, having been elected to the Prussian Academy of Arts, he returned to Germany; he committed suicide at the end of March 1919. Under the Nazis, most of his works were seized from German museums, labeled "degenerate."



Rudolf Schlichter (1890–1955)

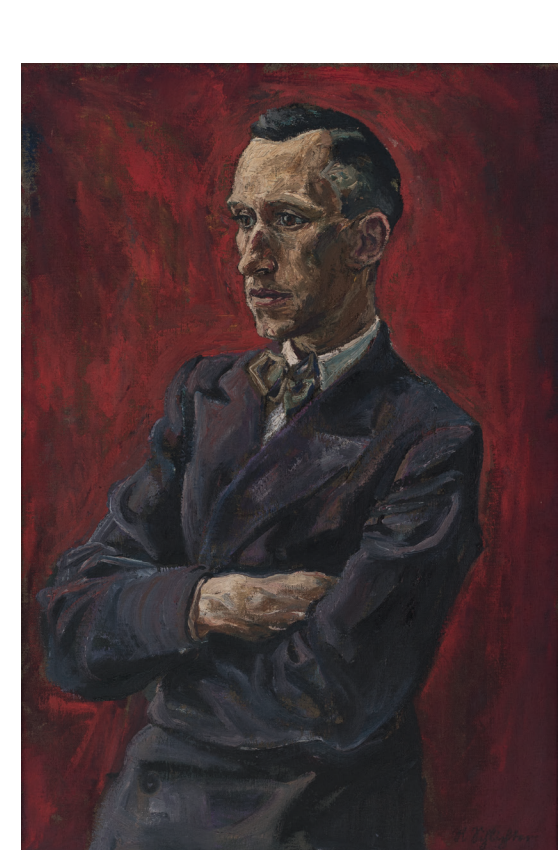
Portrait of Ernst Jünger

c. 1929–30

Oil on canvas

Acquired from the artist in exchange for the *Portrait of Henri Guilbeaux*, 1933, A II 699

At the end of the 1920s, Rudolf Schlichter had given up the communist beliefs and socio-critical stance that had marked his 1926 *Portrait of Géza von Cziffra* (shown in the exhibition's second room), turning instead to Catholicism and nationalism. The subject of this portrait, Ernst Jünger (1895–1998), was known in military and nationalist circles through books such as *Storm of Steel: From the Diary of a Shock Troop Leader* (1920), *The Battle as an Inner Experience* (1922), and *Fire and Blood* (1925). In them, he openly spoke out against humanism and democracy and promoted a soldierly society, one prepared to make sacrifices. In April 1933, reacting to a new political climate, the painter traded the conservative writer's portrait to the Nationalgalerie in return for his 1929 portrait of the Berlin correspondent for the French communist newspaper *L'Humanité*—a painting that had just become politically risky. Schlichter's sensitivity to his reputation was acute: after Ernst Jünger had complained that in the Nationalgalerie likeness "the sense of the intellectual overwhelms the composition," the artist painted another portrait of the tough-minded writer, this time posed bare-chested in front of a rugged, rocky cliff.



Josef Scharl (1896–1954)

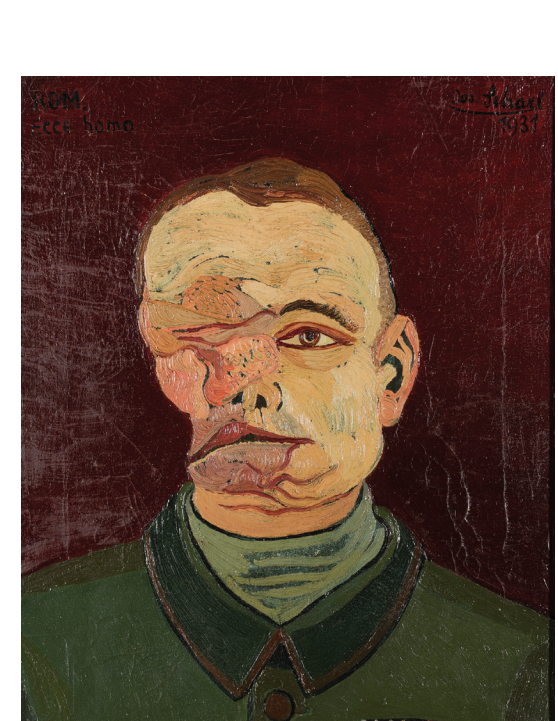
Ecce homo

1931

Oil on canvas

Acquired by the Friends of the National Gallery, 2009, FNG 140/09

Josef Scharl's small, moving portrait of a veteran from World War I, whose face is grotesquely disfigured by a war wound, may have been inspired by the book *War against War*. In that 1924 publication, the anarcho-pacifist Ernst Friedrich documented the horrors of war by publishing photographic portraits of wounded and mutilated soldiers. The painting's title quotes Pontius Pilate, who presented the tortured, thorn-crowned Jesus to the people to decide his fate with the words *Ecce homo*—Behold the man. Scharl transferred this mandate to the interwar present. The two halves of the veteran's face embody seeing and not seeing: seeing the past war, going blind because of it, and heading towards the next war with an open eye, his face a corporeal expression of the experience of conflict. Man sees himself—*Ecce homo*, indeed—in this situation and is called upon to confront a moral dilemma.



Alice Lex-Nerlinger (1893–1975)

Field-gray Yields Dividends

1931/1961

Casein tempera on canvas

Purchased from the artist with funds from the Cultural Fund of the GDR, 1967, A IV 119

The First World War made Alice Lex-Nerlinger a staunch pacifist and critic of capitalism. The painting *Field-gray Yields Dividends* was developed in the years in which her art directly coincided with her political commitment. A World War I soldier wearing the field-gray (*feldgrau*) uniform of the German army has become entangled in a barbed-wire barrier; his deformed death's head is visible behind his helmet and dislocated gas mask. The work's title and its motif indict industrialists and statesmen who gained advantages for themselves through weapons production and war policy. When the picture was shown in the "War" section of the annual *Great Berlin Art Exhibition* in the spring of 1932, it became the target of the Nazi propaganda press.

The work in the National Gallery is a replica of the 1931 original; Lex-Nerlinger herself probably destroyed the first version, along with many other works in her studio, fearing reprisals from paramilitary Nazi storm troopers. After 1933, she and her husband Oskar were subject to suspicion, harassment, and even arrest.



Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945)

Tower of Mothers

1937–38 (cast after 1958)

Bronze

Purchased from a private collector, Berlin, with funds from the Cultural Fund of the GDR, 1984, B III 227

As a woman, Kollwitz had trouble gaining acceptance in Berlin's conservative art scene, dominated by imperial taste, but after the First World War, Kollwitz became the first female member of the Berlin Academy of Arts and was awarded the title of professor. The artist's son had died in the war; in *Tower of Mothers*, women form a circle to protect their children. By the late 1930s, Kollwitz's pacifism and her experiences during the increasingly militaristic Nazi era brought urgency to the theme. At the end of 1938, she proudly showed the brand-new sculpture in an exhibition held by her studio community in Berlin. It was removed at the instigation of the government.



Lovis Corinth (1858–1925)

Armor in the Studio

1918

Oil on canvas

Donated by Dr. Otto and Ilse Augustin, 1992, NG 7/92

Corinth's hallmark bravura brushwork became looser still after the stroke he suffered in 1911; but it was with complete control that he created some of his most important work in the last fifteen years of his life. *Armor in the Studio* dates from the last year of the First World War. With an expressive, form-dissolving gesture and a consummate broad brushstroke, Corinth throws the pieces of armor down, disjointed and shattered. But the painter does not interpret his motif as a superficially illustrative one, as a simple metaphor for the experience of war or a symbol of personal failure. Rather, he treats the metal surfaces primarily as a painterly problem. He paints around their curves, plays with highlights and shadows, and crowns the picture with blood-red color accents.

In his last decade, from 1915 to his death in 1925, Corinth served as president of the Berlin Secession; at the time of his passing, he was revered as a great modern master. In the next decade, under the Nazis, nearly three hundred of his works were stripped from German museums.



Rudolf Belling (1886–1972)

Max Schmeling

1929

Bronze

Purchased from the artist, 1936, B I 592

In 1929, Rudolf Belling portrayed the boxer Max Schmeling (1905– 2005), who would be heavyweight champion of the world between 1930 and 1932. Belling's more abstract works found no favor with the National Socialists, and for some years the artist lived in the United States. He returned to Germany in 1937 to rescue his son—endangered because his mother was Jewish—and escape to Istanbul. In that year, Belling's bronze of the heroic boxer was displayed in the *Great German Art Exhibition* in Munich's House of German Art. At the same time, his *Head in Brass*, on view nearby, was denounced in the exhibition of "degenerate art." To resolve this contradiction, the Nazis removed the *Head in Brass* from display.



George Grosz (1893–1959)

Pillars of Society

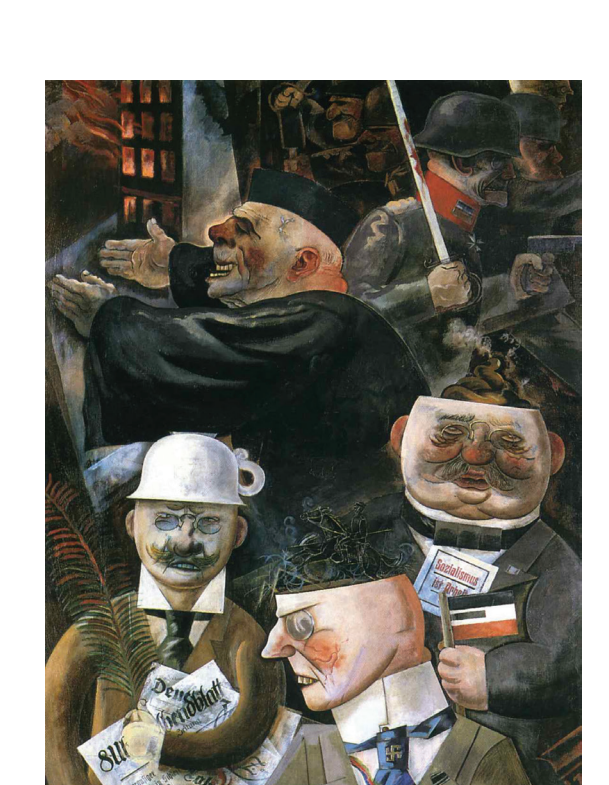
1926

Oil on canvas

Purchased from the Galerie Meta Nierendorf, Berlin, 1958, NG 4/58

In the aftermath of war and revolution, the Berlin-born Grosz became a fierce social critic, satirizing the military, the church, and the capitalist establishment of the Weimar Republic. His 1926 *Pillars of Society* is one of his masterpieces. Behind a bar-room comrade with a scar and a swastika, representatives of the press and politics, the church and the military are gathered. Lifting the skulls of these state representatives, Grosz exposes "the elite of humanity as de facto pigs," as Bertolt Brecht saw it.

In the foreground of the painting is an earless judge, obsessed with fantasies from his time as a cavalryman. The delegate of the press holds a palm of peace in his hand, but it is stained with blood. The publisher wears a chamber pot as a hat; beside him the excremental brain of a member of parliament is literally "steaming." The military chaplain with a less-than-trustworthy face preaches peace while he covers the crimes of the Freikorps and Reichswehr behind his back. Such biting caricatures made Grosz a target of the Nazis; violently opposed to their politics and their tactics, he left Germany for the United States before they came to power in 1933.



Bernhard Kretzschmar (1887–1972)

Social Climbers (House Painters)

1939

Oil on canvas

Purchased from the artist's estate by the Ministry of Culture with funds from the GDR Cultural Fund for the National Gallery, 1977, A IV 387

An apparently everyday scene is in fact a commentary on the political situation in Germany. Two painters have "come up in the world" on their ladders, working on a bookshop promoting Fascist literature. In the shop's window, beneath a map of Europe, books bear the likenesses of Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler, who would change that map. Hitler, a failure as an artist, was called a "house painter" and regarded as a social climber by the establishment. Small background details controvert the painting's foreground theme: a cyclist signals a left turn; a rooftop chimney sweep is a symbol of good luck. In 1937, Kretzschmar's works were stripped from museums as "degenerate." During the war years to come, the painter would devote himself to innocuous themes with messages so dispassionate that they can be understood, in retrospect, as covertly political.



Max Lingner (1888–1959)

Mademoiselle Yvonne

1939

Oil on canvas

Gift from the artist to the German people, 1949. Presented to the National Gallery by the State Commission for Art Affairs, 1952, A III 235

Lingner worked in Paris as an illustrator and art director for *L'Humanité*, the widely read newspaper of the French Communist Party. After the Nazis occupied France, he was arrested but escaped, obtained false papers, and supported the French Resistance, returning to Germany after the war. The bold image of his friend, Mademoiselle Yvonne, conveys Lingner's awareness, as he wrote, of "the importance of the French woman in public life, in party life, in illegality, the resistance movement and in the fight for freedom and peace I have often glorified her cheerful confidence, her passionate heroism with pen and brush." Yvonne, a fellow member of the Resistance, was arrested, tortured, and deported to Auschwitz, where she is thought to have died in the spring of 1943.



Karl Hofer (1878–1955)

The Black Rooms (Version II)

1943

Oil on canvas

Acquired by the State of Berlin, 1953, B 2

Like many other pictures from the Nazi era, the painting *The Black Rooms* is permeated by uncertainty, anonymity, and a sense of indefinite doom. Hofer painted the picture in 1943, after his studio in Berlin, where he had lived since 1919, was burned down in a bombing raid. The preceding decade had been torturous, as Hofer struggled to survive, professionally, under Nazi rule. From the ashes of his studio, he recreated a lost 1928 painting, *The Black Rooms*, working from photographs and against the horrific backdrop of wartime Berlin. If the first version of 1928 was a warning, a tragic marking of economic hardship, social misery, and political disorientation in the Weimar Republic, in this version from the war year of 1943, the drummer's call beat even louder, with new notes of meaning.



Renée Sintenis (1888–1965)

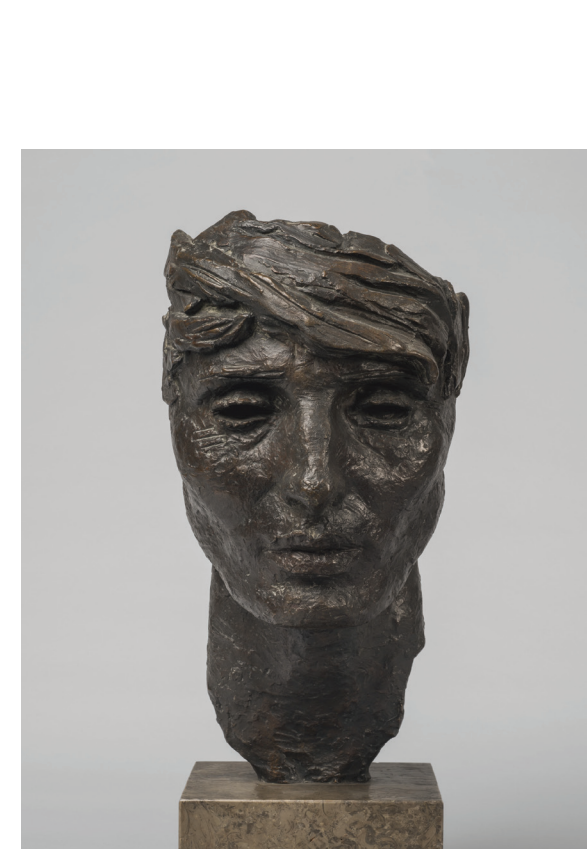
Self-Portrait

1931

Bronze

Transferred from the Ministry of Science, Art and Education, 1932, B I 535

Renée Sintenis became an artist after modeling for Georg Kolbe, whose *Descending Man* is exhibited nearby. In 1920s Berlin, her life and work were featured in society papers; with fashionably short hair and androgynous bravura, she embodied the archetype of the modern woman of the Weimar Republic. While Sintenis was at the peak of her career in 1931 with her appointment to the male-dominated Prussian Academy of Arts (as the second female sculptor after Käthe Kollwitz), the Nazis' seizure of power in January led to her dismissal from the Academy due to the Jewish origins of her grandmother. Remarkably, Sintenis was not affected by a work or exhibition ban, and her apolitical sculptures were also spared from the "degenerate art" campaign.



Georg Kolbe (1877–1947)

Descending Man

1939–40 (cast 1940)

Bronze

Probably transferred from the Senate of Berlin to the National Gallery (West), 1950s, B51/70

Georg Kolbe is the preeminent German sculptor of the first half of the twentieth century. By the 1930s, the dignified classicism that was Kolbe's signature style became, in turn, the model for the idealizing statuary commissioned by the Nazi government. The *Descending Man* was cast in autumn 1940. In 1941, it was sold from the *Great German Art Exhibition* to Walther Funk, the Reich Minister of Economics since 1938 and President of the Reichsbank since 1939. It is unclear whether the large bronze was displayed at the Reichsbank, at the ministry, or at Funk's home; even the circumstances of its arrival at the Nationalgalerie are unknown.



Horst Strepel (1904–1975)

Night over Germany

1945–46

Oil on burlap

Purchased from the artist for the Gallery of the 20th Century, 1948.

Donated by the Magistrate of Greater Berlin (East), 1951. A III 257

In 1947, *Night over Germany* was hailed as a masterpiece “whose accusation stirs, whose silence speaks,” the “altar of the Hitler era.” The painting's brutal reckoning with National Socialism sought to expose the crimes committed by the Reich. In the central panel, the artist processed his own experience of the concentration camps' barbarism. The left wing depicts civilians' fear during the nights of bombing; the right shows the terror of a hidden Jewish family. Only the predella, showing the resistance in the underground, hints at a vague hope of liberation. Processing of Nazi terror was problematic in the war's aftermath. Strepel was asked to remove the word “Jew” from the depiction of the hidden family. One of the main works of artistic engagement with the Nazi state, the painting disappeared into storage for decades.



Karl Kunz (1905–1971)

Germany, Awaken!

1942

Oil on plywood

Donated by the artist's son, Wolfgang Kunz, Berlin, 2015, NG 5/15

Arrested in 1933 for giving aid to a Jewish professor, Kunz was banned from working as an artist. Returning to his hometown of Augsburg, he took over his father's woodworking business but secretly continued to paint on plywood panels found in the shop, easily hidden from view. In this painting, possibly inspired by Allied bombing raids in 1942, a dying man, woman, and child lie near a toppled wooden statue with a cross stabbed into its heart. From the rooftop of a fragmented building or from the sky, a man falls or leaps headfirst into the depths. To a dangerous subject Kunz gave a dangerous title, calling his painting *Germany Awaken!*, a quotation from the anthem of the Nazi storm troopers—deftly turning the phrase as a warning and call to action against the very forces that had first employed it.



Theo Balden (1904–1955)

Beaten Jew

1943

Lead and bronze

Purchased from the artist, 1976, B III 161

Born Otto Koehler in 1904 in Blumenau, a German-founded city in Brazil, and raised in Berlin, the sculptor and graphic artist took the false name Theo Balden when, after his arrest by the Nazis, he fled Berlin to Prague and, after the German army invaded Czechoslovakia, to England. Balden linked his art to his experiences in exile and to current events. In January 1942, imposition of the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question” took the persecution of Jews in the German Reich and the territories it occupied to a new, cruel dimension, mandating their deportation and extermination. It is certainly no coincidence that Balden—who had himself been interned as an enemy alien by the British—created his haunting sculpture *Beaten Jew* a short time later, in 1943.



Erwin Hahs (1887–1970)

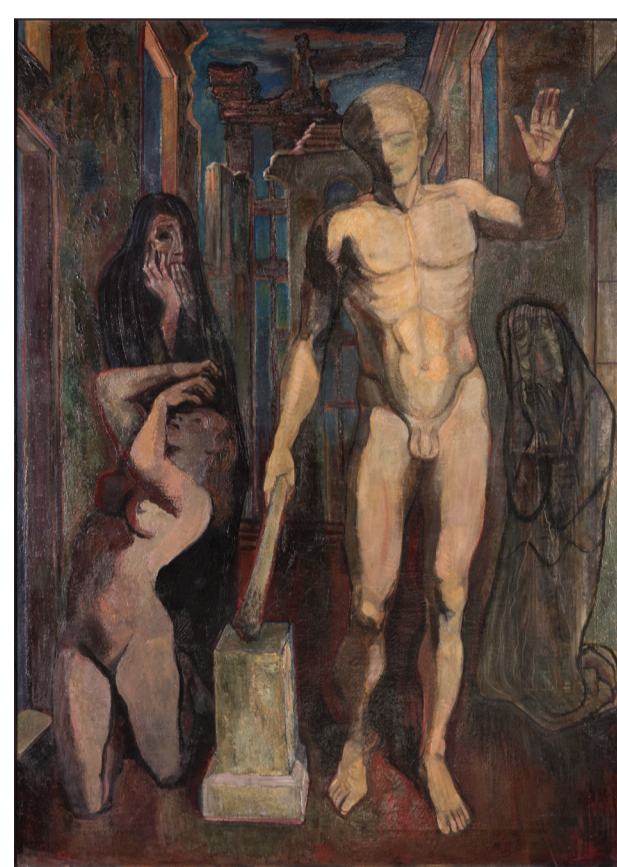
Great Requiem

1944–45

Oil on canvas

Purchased from the artist's widow, Iris Hahs-Hofstetter, 1977, A IV 344

Hahs lost his professorship when the Nazis came to power. At first, he kept himself afloat with odd jobs and donations from friends, eventually finding work as an art teacher at a high school. Remarkably, in 1944, he was commissioned to paint a large portrait for the school's auditorium to mark Adolf Hitler's fifty-fifth birthday. He decided to show burning houses in the background, their evocation of disaster an unmistakable criticism of the Führer. After the painting was removed from view, Hahs repainted it, surrounding a celebrated Roman sculpture with three desperate female figures who mourn and pray, echoing depictions of the lamentation of Christ. Christian motifs complement the quotation from antiquity, the whole masking the face of the toppled dictator, still present—and visible, with the help of technology—beneath the painting's surface.



Ernesto De Fiori (1884–1945)

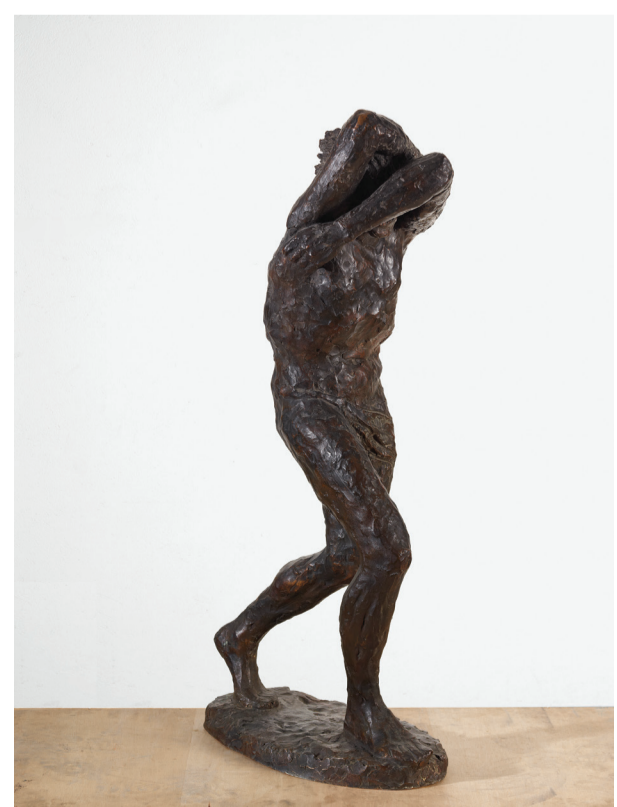
The Fleeing Man (The Desperate Man)

1934

Bronze

Found in Berlin's Osthafen in 1948 and handed over to the National Gallery for safekeeping. Donated by the Magistrate of Greater Berlin to the Gallery of the 20th Century (East), 1951, B I 656

Born in Rome, De Fiori had a successful career in Berlin as a sculptor of the ideal human figure but above all as a portraitist, represented by the dealer Alfred Flechtheim. Though he did leave Germany for Brazil in 1936, it was only on his arrival in South America that he decided to stay there. Despite the loss of Alfred Flechtheim's sponsorship due to the dealer's persecution and flight, the sculptor still had powerful advocates; he did not have to fear a professional ban or for his personal safety. *The Fleeing Man* may refer to the plight of many of his fellow artists, but it is probably not a "self-portrait."



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Before and After

A final gallery presents important artists of German modernism who, under the restrictive conditions of the Nazi regime, took different paths in life and artistic attitudes of adaptation, flight, or resistance before and after the Second World War.

Such a painter as Max Beckmann, prominently represented in the collection of the Nationalgalerie in 1930, was dismissed from his professorship in Frankfurt in 1933. After hearing Adolf Hitler condemn modern art in a broadcast speech at the 1937 opening of the *Great German Art Exhibition*, the artist left Germany for Amsterdam, hoping to find his way to the United States. Only after the war's end was he able to leave Europe for America. Banned from exhibiting by the Nazis, Ernst Wilhelm Nay emerged from internal exile to participate in a post-war rebirth of German painting.

To cope with the shifting winds of political change, artists were sometimes forced to adapt their styles, change their own avowed ideologies, or even attempt to rewrite their biographies. Franz Radziwill, for example, whose realist art had supported the Nazi government, repainted his *Flanders* after the war to camouflage its original subject. Conrad Felixmüller, who had been forced to destroy a compromising painting in the 1930s, made a second version of it, to restore history that might have been lost.

Ernst Wilhelm Nay (1902–1968)

Stormy Waves (Sea at Night)

1935

Oil on canvas

Acquired by the State of Berlin, 1949, B 5/1

Between 1934 and 1937, Nay created a stylistically reductionist series of works showing dunes and fisherman, where dynamically interlocking silhouettes represent a world that blocks out the irrelevant and conveys the comforting idea that even something threatening can be meaningful. Nay's work was condemned as "degenerate" during the Nazi era, making it hard for him to sell many paintings. During the war, he lived as a mapmaker in Le Mans, France. After returning to Germany, he established himself as one of the most successful contemporary painters in the country. *Stormy Waves* probably survived the war in Germany, first stored in the artist's attic and then most likely moved by the artist's wife to a safer location before a bombing destroyed the artist's studio. In July 1949, it was one of the first purchases made by the Gallery of the 20th Century after its re-establishment in West Berlin.



Ernst Wilhelm Nay (1902–1968)

Fishermen in the Surf

1937

Oil on canvas

Purchased from the estate of Carl Hagemann, Frankfurt am Main, by the Galerie Anne Abels, Cologne, 1959, NG 3/59

In 1937, the National Socialists confiscated ten paintings by Nay from museums. Two of them were on display at the shameful exhibition *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art), and the painter himself was banned from exhibiting. However, Nay received a scholarship from Edvard Munch, which enabled him to spend three months on the Lofoten Islands in Norway, where he created large-format watercolors. Back in Berlin, Nay processed them into a series of paintings. The "Lofoten Pictures," from 1937 and 1938, take up the theme of the previously created "Dune and Fisherman Pictures," such as *Stormy Waves*. In addition to the fishermen, their boats, and the surging sea, the towering cliffs of the Norwegian fjords can now be seen. Nay's color palette also expanded; bright green, yellow, and orange tones now found their way into his paintings. With an expressive style, Nay heightened the natural events to a restless, broken rhythm of elemental force.



Max Beckmann (1884–1950)

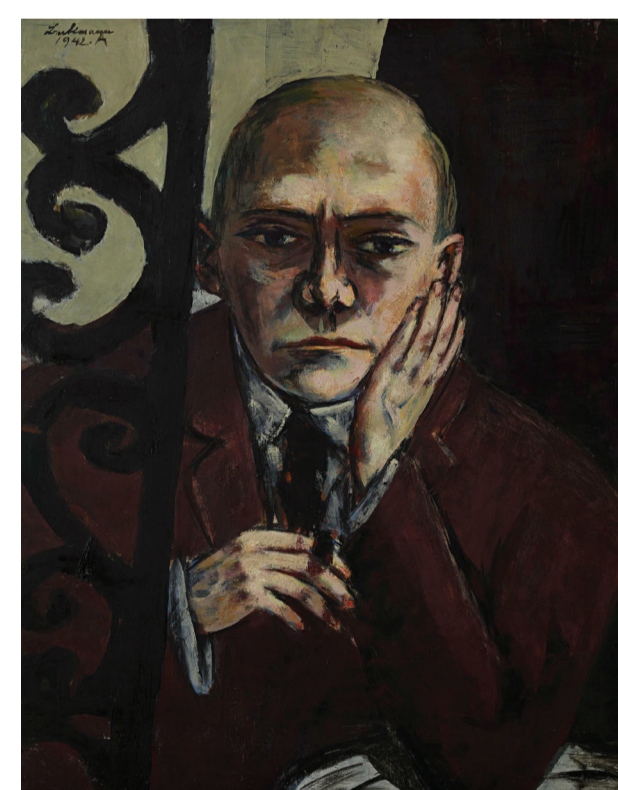
Self-Portrait at a Bar

1942

Oil on canvas

Donated by Barbara and Erhard Göpel, 2018, NG 1/18

In 1937, when the Nazis seized more than five hundred of his works from German museums, Beckmann and his wife left their homeland for Amsterdam. His hope was to obtain a visa to come to the United States, but he was repeatedly denied the right to emigrate. In 1940, when Germany invaded the Netherlands, he found himself once again under Nazi rule. In this self-portrait from 1942, Beckmann casts himself as melancholic, head in hand. When Beckmann last worked on the painting in December of that year, he noted in his diary that English planes and "death [rage] outside." In the summer, he had also recorded the deportation of the Amsterdam Jews. Two years after war's end, Beckmann was able to come to the United States, teaching for several years in St. Louis. He died in New York in 1950.



Max Beckmann (1884–1950)

Portrait of the George Family

1935

Oil on canvas

Acquired by the State of Berlin, 1954, B 95

Beckmann shows the actor Heinrich George (1893–1946) with his wife Berta and son Jan. With the actress Charlotte Habecker, he is rehearsing Friedrich Schiller's *Wallenstein*, a drama about loyalty, betrayal, and murder. Before the Nazis' rise to power, George was a leading light of the left-wing Berlin theater. Accommodating the new regime, he continued as a star after 1933, acting in racist and propagandistic films; he appeared in *Wallenstein* with the sponsorship of Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels. Beckmann may intend Jan's hand gesture—the "sign of the horns"—as a warning against bad fortune; the family dog is ominously black, the color of the uniforms of the much-feared paramilitary Schutzstaffel, the SS. After the war, George was arrested by Soviet occupying forces and died in custody in September 1946 at Sachsenhausen, the former Nazi forced labor camp.



Max Beckmann (1884–1950)

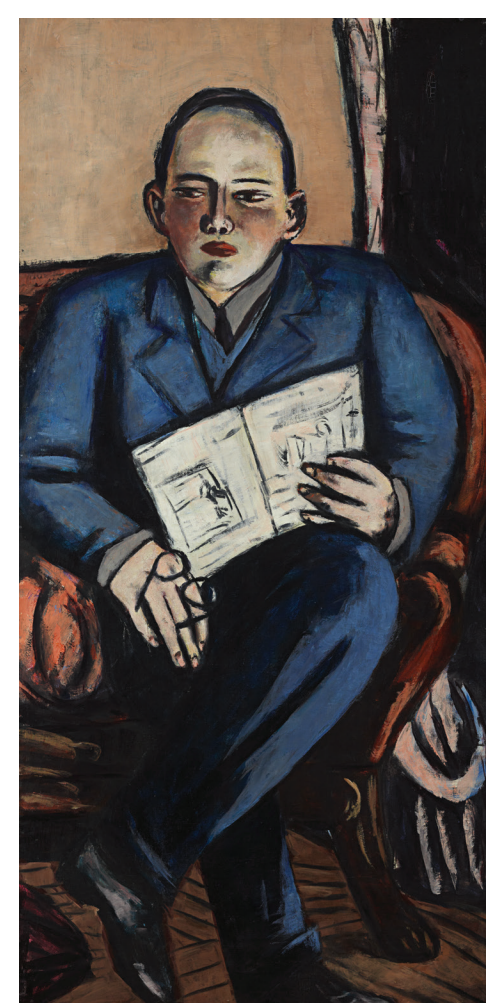
Portrait of Erhard Göpel

1944

Oil on canvas

Donated by Barbara and Erhard Göpel, 2018, NG 2/18

The art historian and journalist Erhard Göpel first met Beckmann in Paris in 1932. A supporter of modern art, Göpel nonetheless worked on behalf of Nazi art thieves operating in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. He was in Amsterdam for this purpose in 1942, when Beckmann painted this portrait. There he played an important, supportive role for Beckmann—smuggling some of his paintings into Germany—and for Beckmann’s wife, who almost saw him as a son. But Göpel exploited the Beckmanns’ friendship and, in 1943, extracted from the painter a self-portrait, probably the *Self-Portrait at a Bar*, exhibited nearby, that had been dedicated to the painter’s wife. Beckmann’s innocent, boyish image of Göpel stands in stark contrast to the reality of his wartime activities, the memory of which was suppressed after 1945, as the historian and his wife compiled the first scholarly catalogue of Beckmann’s work.



Franz Radziwill (1895–1983)

Flanders (Where to in This World?)

1940–50

Oil on canvas on plywood

Acquired with the support of the Association of Friends of the National Gallery, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Cultural Foundation of the States, 2012, NG 11/12

The first version of *Flanders (Where to in This World?)* showed the almost idyllic lowlands of Flemish Belgium and the Kemmel mountain range, strafed by a group of Luftwaffe fighting planes. After the war, Radziwill revised the painting. He added bombers on the right and airplanes on the left, which probably depict the American escort bomber Lockheed P-38 “Lightning.” In the most drastic alteration to the composition, Radziwill added an illusionistic crack running through heaven and earth, converting magical realism into perplexing apocalyptic surrealism. Radziwill’s career was marked by ideological shifts between left and right, his works alternately denounced and praised by his fellow Nazis. At last, in the denazification process of 1949, Radziwill was classified as “exonerated.”



Salvador Dalí (1904–1989)

Portrait of Mrs. Isabel Styler-Tas (Melancolía)

1945

Oil on canvas

Acquired by the State of Berlin, 1958, B 359

When the painter and his model met, both were exiles. The Catalan surrealist Salvador Dalí fled Paris for the United States in 1940, becoming a society portraitist in his exile. Isabella Tas (1887–1971), daughter of a Jewish gem merchant, was fifty-eight at the time of the portrait and had emigrated to Beverly Hills from Amsterdam. In a reference to Renaissance portraits and landscapes, Dalí confronted the sitter with a bizarre rock massif whose contours correspond to her own bust portrait. The learned pictorial program was intended to flatter the sitter, who was perceived as a tough personality that covered up her melancholy with a pompous demeanor. In 1957, she married Herbert Georg Stiehler of Munich, an opportunist who had “Aryanized” the textile firm of a Jewish family and, in the process, had changed his name to Styler.



Conrad Felixmüller (1897–1977)

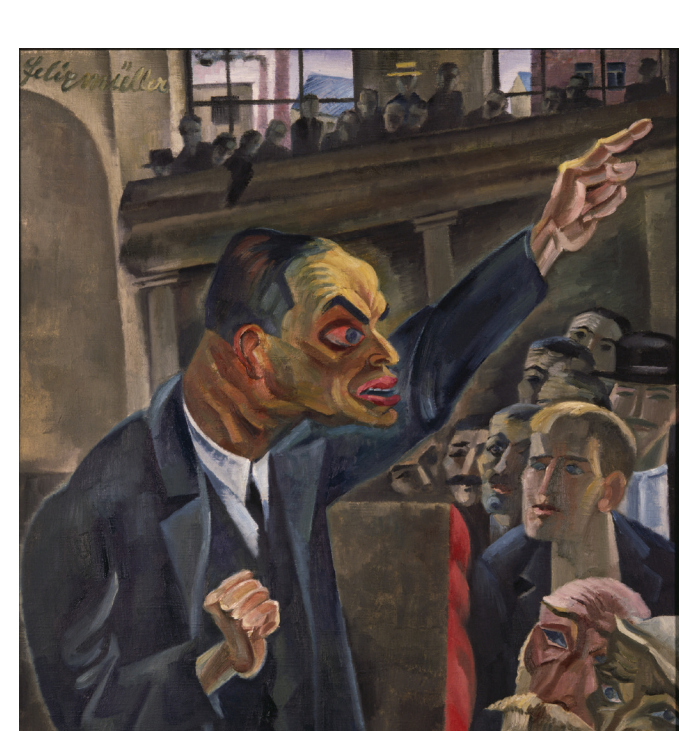
The Orator No. II Otto Rühle

1920/1946

Oil on canvas

Donated by the artist’s son, 1977, A IV 372

The first version of this painting, offered to the Nationalgalerie in 1929, was not accepted, and remained with the artist. Fearful of political reprisals by the National Socialists, Felixmüller took the extraordinary step of destroying his own work, retaining only the vivid visage of the radical Rühle. From 1933 until the end of the Nazi era in 1945, Felixmüller hid the fragment—shown in the first gallery of this exhibition. On the basis of the fragment and archival photographs, he created this replica in 1946. In 1977, the painter’s son Titus donated this second version, entitled *The Agitator*, to the Nationalgalerie of the German Democratic Republic in East Berlin; the original fragment followed in 2019, a gift from the Felixmüller heirs to the Neue Nationalgalerie.



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