

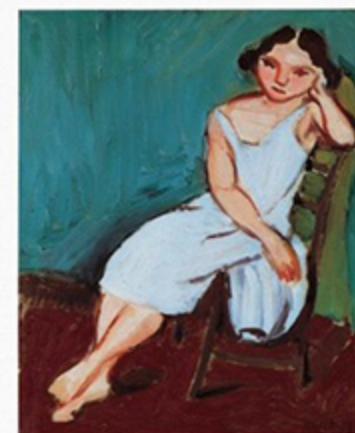
Metaphysical German Meatloaf

"What does my shadow matter? Let it run after me! I – shall outrun it. ..." This proud credo was penned in the 1890s by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Twenty years later, Expressionist artists took the philosopher they idolized at his word and outran the shadow of academic rules, bourgeois taste, and the backward-looking costume plays of Historical Revival art.

The words "expressionism" and "expressionist" first cropped up in the art literature around 1911, initially as blanket terms for avant-garde art in Europe around the turn of the century. Paul Cassirer (1871–1926), the Berlin art dealer, reputedly applied the term to the emotion-charged paintings and prints of Edvard Munch (1863–1944), in order to distinguish the Norwegian's work from Impressionism. The same word was used by art historian Wilhelm Worringer (1881–1965), in the journal *Der Sturm* for August 1911, to characterize the art of Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) and Henri Matisse (1869–1954). In the catalogue to the Berlin Secession exhibition of 1911, Cubist and Fauvist artists fell under this rubric, from Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) to the young French vanguard. In Herwarth Walden's (1879–1941) book of 1918, *Expressionismus, die Kunstwende* (*Expressionism, the Turning Point in Art*), Italian Futurists, French Cubists and the Blaue Reiter in Munich were all subsumed under this term. Yet five years previously, at the "First German Autumn Salon" of 1913, Walden had introduced the Blaue Reiter group as "German Expressionists," and thus limited this stylistic category to the German-speaking countries.

This tendency would soon become the rule. A breakthrough in this regard was Paul Fechter's (1880–1958) 1914 book, *Der Expressionismus*, which focused on the art of Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter. In the field of literature, too, the term became current around 1911, and a year later, the first "German Expressionist drama" was staged, in the shape of Walter Hasenclever's (1890–1940) play *Der Sohn* (*The Son*).

By the outbreak of the First World War, in other words, Expressionism had become almost synonymous with the German contribution to current international developments in art and literature. This national restriction took place despite the great and obvious impulses that German art received from abroad. Although many on the German scene denied such influences, cosmopolitan artists like the Russian El Lissitzky (1890–1941) and the German-French Hans (Jean) Arp (1887–1966) of Alsace saw them very clearly, while scoffing that German artists had only half-digested them. In their book *The Art Isms*, 1925, the two authors declared, "Cubism and Futurism were minced up to create mock hare, that metaphysical German meatloaf known as Expressionism." Nevertheless, the myth had long since been born; or perhaps rather, a myth that had existed since the Sturm und Drang of the late eighteenth century had received fresh



Henri Matisse
Seated Girl, c. 1909
Oil on canvas,
41.5 x 33.5 cm (16 1/4 x 13 1/4 in.)
Cologne, Museum Ludwig

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Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
A Group of Artists, 1926/27
Oil on canvas, 168 x 126 cm
(66 1/4 x 49 1/2 in.)
Cologne, Museum Ludwig

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT
Otto Mueller, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,
Erich Heckel, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff

Lyonel Feininger

Market Church in Halle, 1930



b. 1871 in New York
d. 1956 in New York

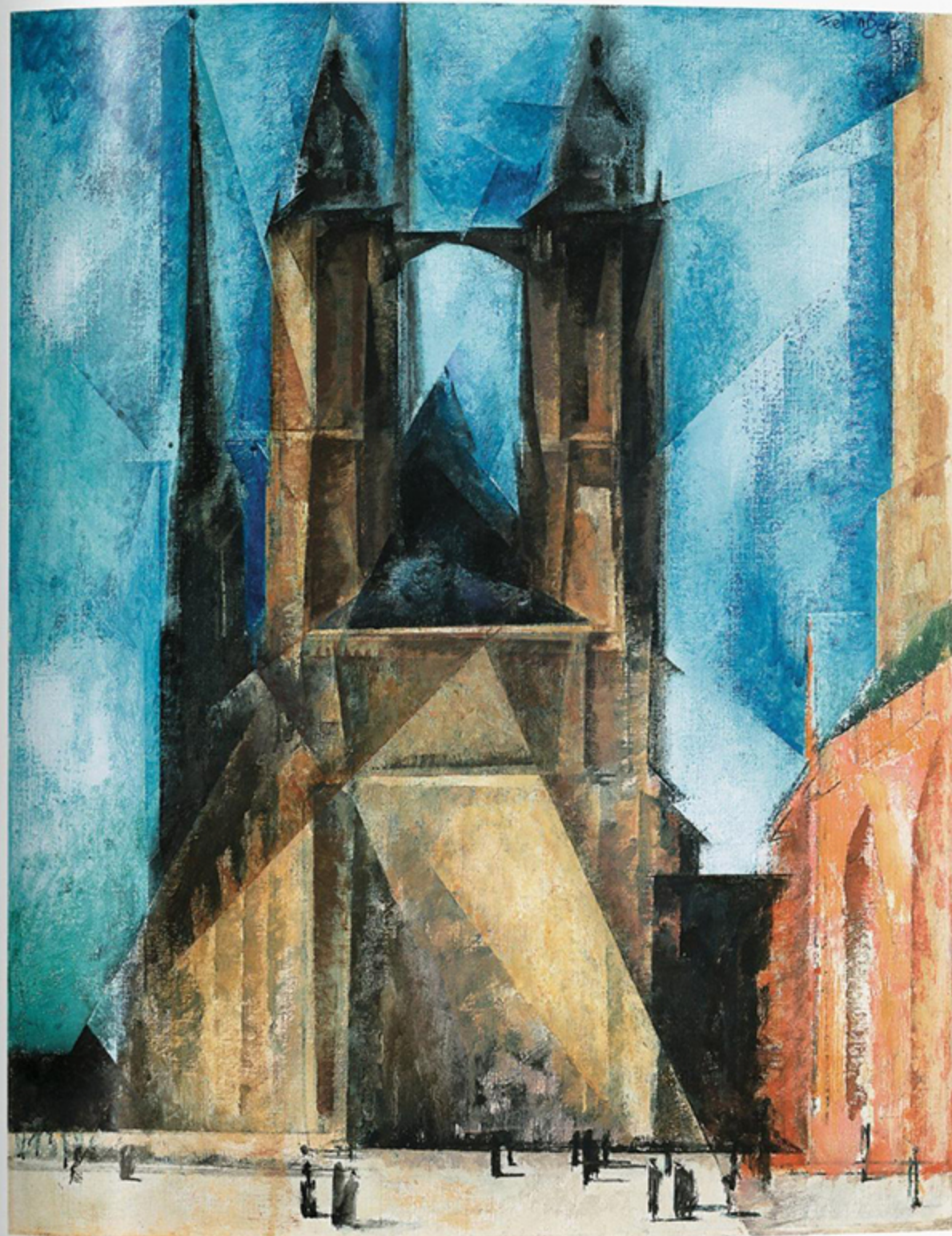
Feininger's work is almost more difficult to categorize than Klee's. The American-born graphic artist and painter, who was also a talented musician and composer, was associated with various of the German Expressionist groups without truly belonging to them. In 1912 he maintained friendly relations with the Brücke, especially Heckel and Schmidt-Rottluff, in Berlin, and the following year exhibited with the Blauer Reiter in the "First German Autumn Salon." He arrived at his typical style in 1911, in Paris, by way of a confrontation with Cubism. With its aid Feininger translated his favourite motifs – Gothic church spires, cityscapes, seascapes, sailing ships – into compositions of crystalline purity and timelessness that anticipated the Expressionist architectural fantasies of the architects' society Die Gläserne Kette (The Glass Chain) founded by Bruno Taut (1880–1938) in 1919. This is the context in which his woodcut for the founding manifesto of the Bauhaus, *Cathedral of Socialism*, belongs (ill. p. 1).

Until 1913 many of his pictures were populated by marionette-like, elongated human figures which were subsequently abandoned. Feininger employed an exaggerated perspective to engender a pictorial tectonics consisting of a synthesis of cubic, prismatically refracted, energy-charged units. His early Promenades were probably known to Kirchner, who may well have adapted them in his *Potsdamer Platz* (ill. p. 57). On the other hand, Feininger paid homage to Kirchner's paintings of Berlin cocottes in his *Birds of the Night*, 1921.

As *Market Church in Halle* shows, by this time Feininger's facetting had achieved a rigorous tectonics and intrinsic monumentality. Between 1929 and 1931, on the invitation of museum director Alois W. Schardt, the artist spent several periods of months at a time in Halle to paint a series of city views. Like other examples from this series, the Munich painting has a subtle transparency of colour that reflects not only an adoption of the Orphist colour system of Delaunay but an affinity with international Constructivism, which paralleled Feininger's teaching activity at the Bauhaus, first in Weimar from 1919 to 1925, later in Dessau to 1932. At the Bauhaus, the rational, constructive principle was allied with Expressionist ideals à la Blauer Reiter. As a result, Feininger joined with Jawlensky, Kandinsky and Klee in 1924 to form a successor to the Munich group, The Blue Four.

Feininger has depicted the *Market Church in Halle* from a vantage point that relegates its characteristic spired facade and flying buttresses to the background, and brings the massive late-Gothic nave diagonally into the foreground and to the left edge, like a conglomerate of vectors and dynamic prisms. The complex is rendered in subdued translucent colours of luminous clarity, forming a Cubistically reduced structure shot through with lines, rays and facets. In the refractions and vibrations, interpenetrations, overlappings and mirrorings of forms, the synaesthesia of painting, architecture and music has achieved an overwhelming polyphonic effect, as of light-pervaded space. "Where I used to strive for movement and restlessness," said the artist, who emigrated to the U. S. in 1936, of such pictures, "I now attempt to sense and express the complete total calm of objects, and even the surrounding air. 'The world' that has moved farthest from reality."

Market Church in Halle, 1930
Oil on canvas,
102 x 80.4 cm (40 1/4 x 31 3/4 in.)
Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Pinakothek der Moderne



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

Artiste (Marcella), 1910



b. 1880 in Aschaffenburg
d. 1938 in Frauenkirch, near Davos

Kirchner, criticized Max Beckmann, was never able to escape the influence of French art, something Kirchner himself loudly denied throughout his lifetime. Yet he was already intrigued with Post-Impressionism while still a student of architecture in Dresden, and briefly in Munich. After taking his engineering degree, he became a convert to painting and, on June 7, 1905, joined Bleyl, Schmidt-Rottluff and Heckel to form Die Brücke in Dresden. Now it was the agitated brushwork of van Gogh that left a deep impression on the four. In 1908–09 the Fauves, or “savages,” electrified the young German artists, above all Henri Matisse, to whom Galerie Cassirer in Berlin devoted an exciting retrospective. Kirchner marvelled at Matisse’s brilliant, flat colour-fields and began to adapt them to his own approach in untiring experiments. They taught him never to entirely lose conscious formal control under the pressure of spontaneous expression. As a result, Kirchner’s art developed into one of the most tension-charged of any twentieth-century European painter.

In view of this involvement, it becomes clear why Kirchner should have been primarily interested in the aesthetic, decorative aspects of Matisse’s art. In the midst of the formal turbulence and agitation of the Brücke repertoire, of which he was a pioneer, Kirchner nevertheless continually concentrated on a stylization of the planar composition, a rational reduction and clarification of visual vocabulary beyond all sheer expressiveness, as seen in *Artiste (Marcella)*.

From early 1910, two adolescent sisters, Marcella and Fränzi, reportedly the daughters of an artist’s widow who lived in Kirchner’s neighbourhood, began to play an important part in the lives of the Brücke artists. Thanks to their willingness to pose in the nude outdoors, the two girls became the painters’ favourite models, and like others before them, likely had a more than platonic relationship with them. The present portrait, which probably represents the fifteen-year-old Marcella, is one of Kirchner’s most impressive paintings. It is characterized by intrinsic monumentality and ludicity. The girl has assumed a relaxed pose, one leg drawn up, her head resting on her right hand. The setting is pervaded by a relaxed, introverted mood that is underscored by the cat asleep in the foreground. The apparently so simple effect of the painting should not deceive us as to the refinement of the composition and its skilled disposition of planes. The motifs are arranged on a diagonal, leading from the lower left to the upper right. Smooth, homogeneously opaque colour areas, limited to a few intense hues including a dominant green, and closed contours lend a graceful rhythm to the composition. The unusual, high vantage point, from which the figure is seen diagonally from above, was a brilliant idea on Kirchner’s part. It brings the girl close to the viewer, yet at the same time, it shows her turning away as if to escape from any voyeuristic gaze, puts visual and existential distance between model and viewer.

In 1925 in Switzerland – where the mentally and physically shaken Kirchner had retired to a farm near Davos in the last year of the war – he was confronted by original works by Picasso. Their masterful exercises in Cubist faceting tempted Kirchner for a time to make his own attempts at rational pictorial composition. As a result, Kirchner’s oeuvre as a whole came to represent both poles of the Expressionist potential: an emotionally-charged, gestural art in heightened colourism and a taming of the expressive through conscious control over pictorial means.

Artiste (Marcella), 1910
Oil on canvas, 100 x 76 cm (39¼ x 30 in.)
Berlin, Brücke-Museum



August Macke

Lady in a Green Jacket, 1913



b. 1887 in Meschede, Sauerland
d. 1914 in Perthes-les-Murlus, Champagne

August Macke, one of the most highly regarded German artists of classical modernism, was a wanderer between two worlds. Although his name is inevitably mentioned whenever the topic of Expressionism comes up, emotional excess was not his thing. His art evinces neither the explosive forms, garish colours or primitivism of the kind the Brücke painters loved, nor the sociocritical subjects of Dix, Felixmüller or Grosz, nor the brutal ugliness with which the Expressionists enjoyed provoking the philistines. Quite the contrary. Macke preferred to depict civilized urban scenes, well-kept streets and parks, cafés and shop windows, people on an evening stroll – and above all, colourful women's fashions.

In terms of palette and lyrical approach to nature, Macke's works resemble those of Marc, with whom he was befriended from 1910. Yet he did not share Marc's pantheism despite the fact that he, too, was impelled by the vision of an earthly paradise. And although Macke maintained close contacts with the New Artists Association of Munich and contributed to the *Blauer Reiter* Almanach in 1911, he was sceptical of the mysticism indulged in by Kandinsky, or even by Schoenberg. This may explain why after moving to Bonn in 1911, he never trod the path to abstraction, apart from a few experiments in watercolour and drawing.

Yet there was another new frontier he explored with great success, the frontier that ran between French and German painting. Like no other Expressionist, Macke translated the language of French art into German. And he began to do so at an early date. Already between his studies at the Düsseldorf Academy and a brief stint at the painting school run by Corinth in Berlin (1907–08), Macke immersed himself in French Impressionism and Cubism, which were later supplemented by impulses from Fauvism. But what shaped him above all was his contact, beginning in 1912, with Delaunay, which soon led to oils and watercolours of an expressive yet wonderfully harmonious character, always based on impressions of nature, and always taking the effects of light as their point of departure.

This is confirmed by one of Macke's major works, one of the first done after he and his family moved to Hilterfingen on Lake Thun. *Lady in a Green Jacket*, painted on a well-nigh square format, exudes compositional balance. The lady of the title is not only slightly shifted out of the central vertical axis, she is faceless – i. e., exemplary, like all of Macke's figures of that period. Her gracefully elongated figure is flanked by four smaller figures, farther in the background; a couple each to her left and right, walking towards a wall, and behind them a panorama with river valley and houses simplified in the early-Cubist manner of George Braque. The light-flooded foliage of the trees grows together at the top to form a roof accented in greenish-yellow, their limbs regularly branching in a compositional device perhaps taken from the writings of Leonardo da Vinci, in which Macke immersed himself at that period. The whole is suffused by an enchantment that recalls Romantic paintings by Caspar David Friedrich, with whom Macke shared a penchant for figures seen from the back. Spatial values are coordinated with principles of planar order and brought into a fine-tuned equilibrium. Compositional rhythm is established by prismatically broken hues, transparent, vibrating colour contrasts which themselves seem to be the source of light. When Macke set out in 1914 with Klee and Louis Moilliet (1880–1962) on their now-legendary Tunis journey, he had already long developed that sense of colour which Klee hoped he would find in North Africa.

When the First World War broke out Macke donned a uniform, and was killed only a few weeks later. In his touching obituary his friend Marc says: "Of us all, he gave colour the brightest and purest ring, as clear and bright as his entire character."

Lady in a Green Jacket, 1913
Oil on canvas,
44 x 43.5 cm (17 1/4 x 17 1/8 in.)
Cologne, Museum Ludwig

