

Walking



**Tight
rope**

**German = Exp
ressionist = Print
making = 1904-1928**



**Walking a Tightrope:
German Expressionist
Printmaking 1904-1928**

The Goldman Collection of German Expressionist Prints
Grinnell College Art Collection

*Curated by the Exhibition Seminar, Department of Art
under the direction of Assistant Professor Jenny Anger*

April 1 - April 21, 2002
Faulconer Gallery
Grinnell College

isbn: 0-9607182-1-4

© 2002 Grinnell College, Grinnell, IA

Title Page Image: Karl Schmidt-Rottluff,
Frauenkopf (Woman's Head), 1915. Cat. 69

Cover Image: Original woodcut by Kevin
Cannon, with assistance from Carrie Robbins

web.grinnell.edu/art/gexp
www.grinnell.edu/fulconergallery
Gallery@grinnell.edu

Contents

Foreword	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	vi
<i>Jenni Wu</i>	
Expressionism and the Print: Idealism Cut from the Block	1
<i>Matthew Johnson</i>	
The Art of Self-Discovery: Expressionist Portraiture	7
<i>Sarah Labowitz</i>	
Going Under: War and Disillusionment	11
<i>Kevin Cannon</i>	
Invoking the Crucified after the Death of God: Christian Iconography in German Expressionist Prints	15
<i>Ashley E. Jones</i>	
Salvaging the Unseen: Images of Prostitutes Lost in Scandal	21
<i>Alicia Reid</i>	
The Art Scabs: Questions of the True Accessibility of German Expressionist Prints	27
<i>Margaret G. MacDonald</i>	
Culture War Veterans: German Expressionist Prints as Historical Artifacts	31
<i>Mordecai Scheckter</i>	
Max Beckmann: An Encounter with Expressionism	37
<i>Carrie Robbins</i>	
Bibliography	42
<i>Alice Anderson</i>	
Checklist of the Exhibition	45
<i>Alice Anderson</i>	

Foreword

With this catalogue and exhibition, the John L. and Roslyn Bakst Goldman Collection of German Expressionist Prints is being presented to the public for the first time. Acquired by the college in 2001 through the generosity of the collectors and an anonymous donor, the collection is one of exceptional quality and coherence, expertly preserved and painstakingly documented by two people whose love of the works individually and as a cohesive whole it amply demonstrates. Grinnell College is honored to be the beneficiaries of the Goldmans' knowledge and connoisseurship, and is dedicated to the task of furthering scholarship in this, one of the most important areas of twentieth-century art.

With that goal in mind, and with the Goldmans' enthusiastic support, we felt it was imperative that the first endeavor to illumi-

nate the collection be student-driven, under the guidance of Assistant Professor Jenny Anger, herself a scholar of German Expressionism. Unique among the nation's liberal arts colleges, Grinnell College's Department of Art and the Faulconer Gallery jointly conduct a biannual exhibition seminar that culminates in both an exhibition and a professional-quality publication, demonstrating the institution's commitment to every aspect of a student's education. There are few challenges more daunting for a student of any age than to present his or her work for public consumption. We are proud to present the hard work of ten of our best, whose zeal and determination throughout the project have reminded us how rewarding our mission as a college museum can be.

Daniel Strong

Associate Director and Curator of Exhibitions

Introduction

Jenni Wu

To see German Expressionism is not to know it. The powerful imagery and purposeful lines that characterize our collection of German Expressionist prints represent a movement that escapes definition. As Paul Raabe writes in his contribution to the Rifkind Center's seminal volumes on German Expressionist prints, Expressionism "should not be seen...in terms of a common, unified spirit. What must be acknowledged are the disunities, the diversity of Expressionism: the dissent as well as the consensus; the opposition as well as the cooperation; the primacy of the individual in the context of sympathy for kindred spirits" (115). Indeed, at the beginning of the twentieth century, artists of groups such as the Brücke (Bridge – in Dresden, later in Berlin) and the Blaue Reiter (Blue Rider – in Munich) assumed many different roles as they used their art to push the boundaries of a world in which they were inevitably grounded. In our exhibition, we have chosen to focus on the Expressionist printmakers as tightrope walkers, as those who daringly undertook great risk in trying to rise above that ground to transform society at large.

The Expressionists did not step blindly into the fray. The philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche was among the sources that the Expressionists used to inform their journey. The ideas outlined in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-85) correspond with the Expressionists' belief that mankind, if it were willing to undertake the journey, could achieve perfection. As a tightrope walker begins his performance, Zarathustra addresses the gathered crowd in saying, "[m]an is a rope, tied between beast and overman – a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping. What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in

man is that he is an *overture* and a *going under*" (emphasis original 126-27). Seeking to secure their precarious footing in this delicate endeavor, it was the imbalance and discord of the artists that generated both the excitement and the volatility of Expressionism.

In the introduction to her important book, *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity*, Jill Lloyd illustrates the instability inherent to the movement, writing that "[t]he pendulum of Expressionist emotion swings widely, and in between man walks on a narrow ledge, on a bridge or a tightrope, suspended between conflicting possibilities" (vii). Through its attempts to escape from the oppression of the established society and its artistic conventions, and its pursuit of an art capable of propelling social evolution, Expressionism left its mark on everything from painting and literature to dance, cinema, and architecture.* This exhibition, *Walking a Tightrope: German Expressionist Printmaking 1904-1928*, highlights the Expressionists' special affection for the print and its potential, and comments on the discrepancies that sometimes existed between the Expressionists' lofty ideals and reality.

Arming themselves with the accouterments of printmaking, the Expressionists waged their campaign against their artistic contemporaries, emphasizing the German heritage of the medium while simultaneously abandoning all of its precedents. In his essay, **Expressionism and the Print: Idealism Cut from the Block**, Matthew Johnson explores the Expressionist printmakers' enthusiasm for their chosen printing processes, which he describes. In the print media, overlooked by other artists of the time, the Expressionists saw the means through which their ideals could potentially be realized. Sarah Labowitz, in **The Art of Self-Discovery: Express-**

isionist Portraiture, investigates how reflections of these utopian ideals appeared in Expressionist portraiture. By depicting themselves and others, the Expressionists embarked upon an exploration of human nature, an examination that they hoped would lead to enlightenment for all. It was with this hope for the renewal of society that many of the Expressionists entered into World War I (1914-18). However, as Expressionists inevitably experienced destruction, not rejuvenation, hope turned to spiritual devastation. Kevin Cannon's essay, **Going Under: War and Disillusionment**, chronicles the changing emotions that accompanied and followed the traumatic turmoil. The war and the revolution that followed in Germany marked a definite turning point in some of the ideals of the movement, and changed the career paths of many of the artists who struggled to cope with their implications and aftermath. The war period also witnessed a resurgence of spiritual themes in Expressionist prints.

While the religious imagery of artists such as Emile Nolde and Max Pechstein may seem to contradict their espousal of Nietzschean ideas, Ashley Jones, in **Invoking the Crucified after the Death of God: Christian Iconography in German Expressionist Prints**, illustrates the weaving of ideals that allowed these artists to straddle both Christianity and a philosophy that had earlier proclaimed the death of God. Bridging this distance with seemingly little effort, the Expressionists were blind to other potential pitfalls, some of which become apparent only with the distance of years. With the eyes of a modern viewer, Alicia Reid uses her essay, **Salvaging the Unseen: Images of Prostitutes Lost in Scandal**, to question the vantage point of Otto Dix's and George Grosz's portrayals of female prostitutes. As our temporal removal from the movement allows us to recognize problematic aspects of Expressionism, such as those that stem from depictions of women and "the primitive," it also allows us to evaluate how well the Expressionists succeeded in reaching and moving their desired audiences. Focusing on the accessibility of prints and print portfolios, Margaret G.

MacDonald assesses the relationship between artist and consumer in her essay, **The Art Scabs: Questions of the True Accessibility of German Expressionist Prints**.

Despite critic Wilhelm Hausenstein's 1919 article "Die Kunst in diesem Augenblick" ("Art of this Moment"), a death proclamation for the movement that read, "as far as the arts and crafts are concerned, Expressionism has long since been exhausted" (qtd. in Long 282), the Expressionist prints have maintained a life of their own, sometimes under improbable circumstances. Mordecai Scheckter's essay, **Culture War Veterans: German Expressionist Prints as Historical Artifacts**, argues that the movement's prints have gained a unique historical significance by surviving the destruction that permanently silenced many works of art beginning with Adolf Hitler's seizure of power in Germany in 1933. Recognizing each print as a distinct artifact reemphasizes the singular efforts made by individual artists swept up in the broader movement or under the expansive label of German Expressionism. Carrie Robbins uses the example of Max Beckmann to remind us that Expressionists did not necessarily flock together or perch on the same tightrope. In her essay, **Max Beckmann: An Encounter with Expressionism**, she uses the contradictions found within one artist's career to illustrate the complications that were present within the movement as a whole. She also connects the existence of the Expressionists to our own, citing Beckman's encouragement that we resist succumbing to the horror in the world. Like all tightrope walkers, continuously traveling between points of safety, we are advised to remain steadfast in our efforts, even when the footing seems unsure. Just as Nietzsche's tightrope walker, who falls to his death, receives not criticism, but honor for undertaking so bold a feat, the German Expressionists must be applauded for the art that represented their attempt at crossing.

*See Barron and Dube for a compendium of essays exploring all of these fields.