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Distorted Norms: German Expressionist Prints and the Legacy of the Early German Masters

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DISTORTED NORMS:
GERMAN EXPRESSIONSIT PRINTS AND THE
LEGACY OF THE EARLY GERMAN MASTERS

by

Youngchul Shin

A Thesis Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

DISTORTED NORMS:
GERMAN EXPRESSIONIST PRINTS AND THE
LEGACY OF THE EARLY GERMAN MASTERS

by

YoungChul Shin

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2019
Under the Supervision of Professor Sarah Schaefer

German Expressionism, one of the most influential art movements of the twentieth century, was the source of unprecedented experiments in printmaking. Although the works appear modern to our eyes, Expressionist printmakers drew heavily from the early history of printmaking, which emerged in northern Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The early history of the print included the development of the woodcut, the innovation of the printing press, and the invention of new printmaking techniques such as engraving and drypoint. The ways in which German Expressionists drew upon their heritage in printmaking is evident in three key ways: the revival of the woodcut, the distortion of the human figure, and social observation. Because German Expressionism embraced various styles and numerous artists, it has been challenging to clearly demonstrate how they looked back into the early German printmaking masters. However, the exhibition and catalogue for *Distorted Norms: German Expressionist Prints and the Legacy of the Early German Masters* reveals the visual connections between the two eras of printmaking and draws on two major strengths of UWM Art Collections.

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To
my parents

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Introduction

German Expressionism emerged in the early twentieth century and quickly became one of the most influential modern art movements. The artists within this movement were reacting against the major artistic styles and the aesthetic standards of the nineteenth century.

Encompassing a diverse set of artists and styles, Expressionism focused on revealing individual experiences and emotions, and was influenced by the socio-political situations that were dramatically changing the European landscape. The German Expressionists were absorbed in artistic experimentation; moreover, they aimed to share their art with a wide range of viewers. For the German Expressionists, the print offered these possibilities.

Although German Expressionism is often seen as a critical example of emerging modernist trends, artists within the movement looked extensively to the earliest examples of German printmaking for several reasons. First, the area around present-day Germany was the place where printmaking emerged in Europe, and the woodcut, in particular, flourished in this area in the sixteenth century. After the emergence of the printing press and innovation of printmaking techniques in Northern Europe, prints by artists from the German-speaking area were disseminated to Southern Europe. Because of the mobility of the prints, Southern European artists had to a wide range of Northern prints, which significantly influenced Italian printmaking.

Second, as Germany became a unified nation in 1871, questions of German national identity grew and influenced many realms of politics and culture. This ideology encouraged artists to explore what made German art particularly 'German', and especially how it could be distinguished from the styles associated with other parts of Europe, especially France and Italy.¹

Given the history of the printmaking in Europe, for the German Expressionists in the twentieth century, the print was a very German artistic medium.

This exhibition offers a visual comparison between fifteenth- and sixteenth-century German prints and the Expressionist prints of the early twentieth century. Despite the nearly four hundred years' gap between the two eras, there are significant connections between them. Although scholars have identified the connections between German Expressionism and early German printmakers in broad ways², there has been little attention drawn to this subject in museum and gallery.³ This exhibition draws on two major strengths of the UWM Art Collection and puts them in dialogue in unprecedented ways, demonstrating through strong visual comparisons the influence of early German print culture on German Expressionism.

To highlight the connection visually, this exhibition is divided into four sections: the revival of the woodcut, bodily distortion, facial distortion, and social observation. First, it shows how the Expressionists attempted to create their own styles by using the woodcut, which they considered a particular 'German' artistic medium. Second, in terms of artistic style, it offers a visual comparison, focusing on the depiction of body and face. Third, even though their reasons were different, artists of two eras shared same subject, which was the interest in lives of peasant or working-classes.

The Dawn of German Expressionist Prints

Printmaking in the Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century saw an explosion of print culture, though primarily in the commercial/popular realm and reproductive prints.⁴ This phenomenon prompted increased

interest among certain artists and audiences to explore the artistic potential of print media. In Spain, for instance, Francisco Goya (1746-1828) was one of the most important printmakers as well as a painter. His *Caprichos* series, a set of eighty plates, is considered a masterpiece of graphic art because it demonstrates Goya's experimentation with aquatint, and it reflects Goya's own emotions and the socio-political experiences surrounding him.⁵ Moreover, in particular, the 'etching revival' that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century in Europe led to an increase in the production of original etchings.⁶ In France, lithography was used more broadly used as a method to share political propaganda, decorations, publications, and commercials. Many artists explored the potential of the print as well as of painting; Eugène Delacroix (1789-1863), for example, created one hundred and twenty-six etchings and lithographs over the course of his career.⁷ In Germany, some major artists such as Max Klinger (1857-1920) acknowledged the independent aesthetic value of printmaking. Klinger's persistent commitment to prints and their dissemination was influential for the next generation of German printmakers, including Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945).⁸

However, with the exception of Klinger, by the end of the nineteenth-century Germany, few German printmakers produced original prints. Some major reproductive etchers like Peter Halm (1854-1923) and Karl Kopping (1848-194) turned to original printmaking, but at the very beginning of the twentieth century, the existing market for prints was still limited.⁹ Also, most connoisseurs and collectors of print had been trained to evaluate the aesthetics of the reproductive print, not the original.¹⁰ Their , Therefore, although one of the significant Expressionist groups, Die Brücke, was founded in 1905, the demand for their work would not emerge significantly for another decade.¹¹

In particular, unlike in France, Germany did not have a centralized place from which disseminate contemporary art, and it took much more time to broadly share the interest in prints and build up the foundation of printmaking as an independent artistic medium.¹² Therefore, journals and local exhibitions were the major resources for acquiring knowledge of current artistic trends. New interest in printmaking increased with the actively published journals, and the emergence of 'secessionist' movements, in particular, the Munich Secession in 1893 and the Vienna Secession in 1897.¹³ These movements moved away from the standards of the official art academies, often with the support of active art dealers like Paul Cassirer who played a significant role in shifting artistic tastes and styles across Germany.¹⁴ This was the period that saw the flourishing of *Jugendstil* ("young style"), a movement associated with Art Nouveau and the new fashionable types of decorative art.¹⁵ Journals like *Jugend* and *Simplicissimus* played a significant role in disseminating the illustrations and design concepts, which were produced as woodcuts.¹⁶ These publications also introduced the public to the woodcuts of artists like Emil Nolde (1867-1956) and Ernst Barlach (1870-1938) who would become associated with German Expressionism.¹⁷ The journal *Pan*, in particular, highlighted original printmaking. Julius Meier-Graefe, the founder of *Pan*, admired French art and played an important role in conveying French modernist art to young German artists via the magazine.¹⁸ It included international artists' poems, essays, critical articles, as well as original prints; he was responsible, for example, for directly commissioning a color lithograph from the influential French artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901).¹⁹

These publications were informative resources for German artists and became guides for leading intellectuals to be trained to evaluate original prints and comprehend the new

aesthetic culture.²⁰ Moreover, they encouraged the public to consider the potential of prints as art and demonstrated how the print could be different from other artistic mediums such as painting and sculpture. The interaction between diversified prints and broader people accelerated the dissemination of prints as art.

The Pursuit of the National Identity of German Art

When German Expressionism emerged in the first decade of the twentieth century, Germany was in the process of immense socio-political and cultural change. These changes provoked German artists to define themselves as specifically “German” artists and establish styles that would be identified with the nation. The pursuit of the national identity began developing with eighteenth-century Classicist and the nineteenth-century Romantic movements. In the late eighteenth century, influential writers like Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Friedrich Schiller expressed admiration for an ideal, pre-Christian harmony between gods and men and closely examined ancient Greece.²¹ The interest was continued by the Romantics who were inspired particularly by Middle Ages and focused on the re-discovery of German myths and epic poems.²² New research on German culture from the medieval period became a fertile resource for the German artists in the twentieth century as they sought to define ‘German’ art.

Since the Napoleonic wars of the early nineteenth century, the desire to protect and build up economically, politically, and socially independent nations increased all over Europe. German-speaking states, in particular, realized that it would be necessary to create a unified nation for economic and political benefits. After two attempts, the unification of twenty-five German states (excluding the Kingdom of Austria) spearheaded by Otto von Bismarck,

succeeded in 1871. Although the German government focused on military and economic policies that extended throughout the nation after 1871, each region maintained its own institutions and local attitudes toward new artistic trends, which caused the level of support for art to differ from state to state.²³ For example, Prince-Regent Luitpold, who was the ruler of Bavaria between 1886 and 1912, put little value on art, so it was a difficult environment for artists to develop their artistic skills and earn commissions. On the other hand, Wilhelm II, who was the last German emperor and king of Prussia ruling from 1888 to 1918, had strong faith in art and its importance in German society. The region that he ruled included Berlin and Dresden, which became cultural centers of Germany in the twentieth century.²⁴

Although unified Germany ensured autonomy for each state in terms of development of its art, most regions were nonetheless in pursuit of the integrated 'German' nation. German nationalism led people to emphasize the cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic roots of the nation as a whole. At the same time, the rise of German nationalism coincided with an emerging pervasive interest in local histories and identities. German nationalism provided artists and intellectuals with a new perspective to examine not just 'German' art, but especially German modernist art.

Moreover, the strong pursuit of German identity encouraged German artists to define 'German' art and how it would be distinguished from French art. For example, Carl Vinnen (1863-1922) argued in a 1911 essay that international influences, especially the influence of French art, caused German art and culture to decline:

In light of the great invasion of French art that has been in progress in so-called progressive German art circles over the past few years, it seems to me that necessity

bids German painters raise a warning voice, and not be daunted by the reproach that only envy motivates them...What constitutes the great danger of introducing foreign art, when speculation takes hold of it?...Because let it be said again and again, a people is only driven to great heights by artists of its own flesh and blood...How can we expect the foreigners to hold us in higher esteem than we do ourselves!²⁵

Research on medieval German styles, and on early German prints, became more rigorous. In printmaking, the woodcut was one of the most salient artistic mediums that was seen as defining German art historically. Around the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics, including Carl Friedrich von Rumohr, Henrich Wölfflin, Alfred Lichtwark, and Wilhelm Valentiner insisted that woodcut was the nationalistically determined art of northern Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth century which included German-speaking areas.²⁶

Valentiner sums up his argument as follows:

From the time of the oldest timber work architecture of the Germans, from the wooden sculpture of the German Gothic and Renaissance, from the art of the woodcut of Dürer's time, the German artist has preferred the use of wood for the expression of his ideas in architecture, sculpture, and printmaking. It is as though the structure of the rough trunk...were especially to the...German character.²⁷

These critics considered the woodcut to be the German contribution to the history of art and where the comparison between 'German' art and 'French' art should be made: the Germanic art employed more emotive and imaginative quality of the line, and the French art was more about representation and illusionism of color.²⁸

The Legacy of the Early German Printmakers

Early German prints proved the most valuable heritage in defining 'German' art and formed the cultural root of German Expressionism. In the fifteenth century, Germany and the surrounding areas were the central places from which European printmaking emerged. The earliest woodcuts were from this area. It is also where the Johannes Gutenberg, around 1493, introduced the moveable type and the printing press to the western world. The emergence of the printing press coincided with increasing demand for books, which also led to commissions for woodcut illustrations. Woodcut is a relief print process, meaning that the parts to be inked are raised up from the surface of the block. The white parts of the print have to be cut away from the woodblock. The woodcut was an accessible and easy medium to create images and reproduce them in great numbers, often alongside texts. Therefore, as soon as the printing press was introduced by Gutenberg in Germany, the production of prints and publications with woodcut-illustrations dramatically improved because it accelerated the speed of printing.

During the fifteenth century, most illustrations and woodcuts were limited to playing cards and the biblical stories.²⁹ However, when Protestantism emerged in the northern Europe in the sixteenth century, the history of printmaking started a new chapter in terms of the types of subjects represented. Because Protestantism emphasized the importance of the Bible and reacted against worshipping images like paintings and sculptures, it pushed artists and printmakers to explore other subjects like landscape, portraits, and the lives of ordinary people. For example, even artists who represented biblical subjects placed more emphasis on landscape, as we see in the works of Albrecht Altdorfer.³⁰ At the same time, because it was important to make the public understand the Bible thoroughly, 'educational' and 'informative'

illustrations of the Bible became crucial. Lucas Cranach the Elder had a strong relationship with Martin Luther and was commissioned to create prints as illustrations of Luther's publications. Therefore, the German printmaking in the sixteenth century were interacting with Protestantism, widening the potential of printmaking.³¹

German Expressionist Prints and the Early German Masters

Ernest Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938), one of the most influential German Expressionists, described the pleasure of printmaking in his essay as follows:

Perhaps what makes an artist a printmaker is, in part, the desire to define clearly and conclusively the singularly loose forms of drawing. On the other hand, the technical challenge of printmaking certainly releases powers in the artist which do not come into play in the much more easily managed techniques of drawing and painting...it is extremely exciting to rework a picture again and again over a period of weeks or even months in order to achieve the ultimate in expression and form without any loss of freshness. The mysterious excitement which surrounded the invention of printing during the Middle Ages is still felt by anyone who seriously studies printmaking down to the last detail of craftsmanship.³²

How the German Expressionists drew upon the early German masters can be explained in three key ways: medium, style, and subject. One of the most significant accomplishment of the German Expressionists was the revival of the woodcut which had fallen out of favor by the late sixteenth century after other printmaking techniques developed. In terms of style, like sixteenth century prints, most Expressionist prints distorted the figures and backgrounds. Moreover, as was the case in the earlier context, the Expressionists focused particular attention

on everyday life at a moment when the socio-political landscape had reshaped the experience of the peasant and work classes.

The Revival of the Woodcut

During the fifteenth century, even if the printed images became popular and were made actively, they were created primarily by craftsmen and artisans as illustrations, not as unique art objects. In addition, because there were multiple roles in the creation of print (designer, maker, and printer), the notion of a printmaker as an 'artist' remained vague and ill-defined. In the sixteenth century, however, a number of early printmakers, including Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) and Albrecht Altdorfer (1480-1538), regarded the medium as an artistic form rather than simply a craft or a mode of reproduction. Dürer was the most influential printmaker in this context and his work solidified the possibilities of prints as works of art. Dürer represented figures in a tactile manner with painterly pictorial qualities. Each fine line created surface, shading, outline, and even volume which could be as elaborate as paintings. Consider, for example, the detailed facial expression, illusionism of the bodies, and darkness of background in the 1509 woodcut, *Descent from Cross* (fig.1). Numerous contemporaneous printmakers throughout Europe admired his works, and his influence extended well beyond the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Although printmakers lost their interest in the woodcut because new printmaking techniques, such as the engraving, etching, and drypoint, were developed, the fifteenth and the sixteenth century was the golden age of the woodcut.

Furthermore, printmaking techniques that originated in German-speaking areas soon were disseminated throughout Europe. The development of the printing press made it possible

for printmakers to disseminate their woodcuts widely. A number of important printmakers emerged, including Lucas van Leyden (1494-1533), Albrecht Altdorfer (1480-1538), Christoffel van Sichem (1581-1658), Hans Holbein the Younger (1494-1543), and Hans Sebald Beham (1500-1550). These printmakers generally depicted tonal gradations and textural surfaces with fine lines and hatching, and ultimately had strong influence on Italian Renaissance artists. Unlike many of the northern European artists who treated the print as an original art, Italian artists generally used the print to reproduce the original artworks such as paintings and sculptures.³³ When the artists transformed a painting to a print, the northern European technique helped them to convey the three-dimensional atmosphere of a painting onto a print.

Considering that the foundation of woodcut was from the early Germanic tradition, it is not surprising that woodcut became such a powerful symbol of national art when German Expressionism emerged. German Expressionism drew upon the legacy of the early German prints, and the woodcut in particular, which corresponded to their artistic ideology.³⁴ The first organized artist group of German Expressionist artists, Die Brücke (The Bridge), is well-known for its reception of woodcut and Germanic characteristic from the early German prints. Die Brücke was founded by four young artists, Erich Heckel (1883-1970), Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938), Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884-1976), and Fritz Bleyl (1880-1966), in 1905 in the city of Dresden. They practiced their painting, drawing, and printmaking and held group-exhibitions from 1905 to 1913.³⁵ They emulated the early German prints and also experimented with the various stylistic possibilities of the woodcut, as we see with Erich Heckel's *Bathers* (fig.2) in 1912 and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff's *Kammende Frauen (Women Combing Their Hair)* (fig.3). The female figures in the two prints are very stylized with angular forms, which also reveals the

texture of the 'wood on which they worked.' The woodcut became their trademark, which they disseminated as posters and postcards.³⁶ Their experimentation with woodcut was highly influenced by the early German prints. For example, Kirchner described that he was inspired by the fifteenth-century woodcuts and engravings of Albrecht Dürer and other artists during a school trip to the Germanisches Museum in Nuremberg. Moreover, he recalled that the trip influenced on his bold idea of renewing 'German art' through the re-invention of the medieval woodcut.³⁷

Demonstrating his statement of inspiration of the early German woodcut, figures in his works are distorted, stiff, and have sharp edges, which is also found from the early German prints. He created 47 woodcuts for the 1924 publication *Umbra Vitae (Shadow of life)*, a collection of poems by Georg Heym, a German writer who was well-known as an early Expressionist in literature. *Umbra Vitae* was first published in 1912, but was re-published with Kirchner's illustrations in 1924. When the publisher, Kurt Wolf, saw Kirchner's woodcuts in 1918, he commissioned Kirchner to create the typography, binding, preface, and woodcuts. The illustration on the page containing the publisher's remark (fig. 4) has similar stylistic traits with an illustration from *Nine German Bible-Nuremberg* by Anton Koberger in 1483 (fig. 5, 6). Kirchner represented the figure with a dramatic gesture; the nude figure shows his back-side, but his legs are depicted on profile. If we look closely at the illustration of *Nine German Bible-Nuremberg*, we find that human figures are similarly oriented in multiple, impossible directions. The upper bodies in both illustrations are elongated, and legs are straight and rigid. Trees and grass are sharp and stiff, and the hills jut up sharply but appear flat with thick contours.

As German Expressionism expanded, artists used the woodcut broadly, regardless of stylistic approaches. For example, Ernst Barlach was strongly influenced by the late German Gothic style, which he frequently employed in his woodcuts and engraving.³⁸ His woodcut, *Mors Imperator (Death the Leader)* (fig.7), demonstrates the dexterity of his approach: each gouged line creates a sense of volume and texture throughout the figures and surrounding scenery.

Distortion

The early German prints had two stylistic phases, roughly divided between the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century.³⁹ The earlier prints were composed of strong heavy outlines, rounded facial types or dramatically angular types, decorative drapery, and relatively flat representations lacking volume and shading.⁴⁰ For example, illustrations for the Nuremberg Bible by Anton Koberger (1440-1513), who was the godfather of Albrecht Dürer, clearly demonstrate the characteristic of the fifteenth-century early German prints.

During the sixteenth century, diversified use of line and Dürer's contribution to the development of printmaking as an artistic medium prompted renewed stylistic approaches. Whereas the fifteenth-century style was characterized by stiffness and flatness, the sixteenth-century printmakers expanded the capacity for representing three-dimensional and detailed form.⁴¹ Background elements such as landscape and architectural space were added, and figures had more detailed or dramatic postures. Also, figures were depicted with elaborate lines in order to delineate powerful volumes and masses.⁴² At the same time, artists continued to distort figures and spaces expressively. Altdorfer's *Adam and Eve* (fig.8) of 1513 demonstrates

the kinds of shifts one sees in the sixteenth century. The gradation of surface by fine lines amplifies volumes, which make Eve's body distorted and a bit corpulent, particularly with her head and arms. The musculature of Adam's body seems exaggerated, and the trees and the snake are represented in quite bulky manner.

As discussed in the introduction, the German Expressionists focused on expressing their inner issues and personal matters. Broadly speaking, their artistic goal was not to create artworks that represented figures accurately, but that reveal the feelings and implied atmosphere of the scene. Distortion was used to emphasize what they wanted to convey to viewers and lead viewers to understand artists' perspective at a glance. For example, Emil Nolde's 1918 etching *Grossbauern (Rich Farmers)* (fig.9) depicts human figures like goblins or evil clowns by distorting their facial and bodily parts. Through this distorted and fantastic depiction of rich farmers, Nolde might have been expressing his own thoughts or emotions about 'rich farmers,' suggesting that they were greedy and negative elements of society.

Through the comparison of the depiction of female bodies from the two eras, the same manner of distortion becomes more evident. For instance, Heinrich Aldegrever's 1525 etching *Ornament with a Triton carrying two Nereids* (fig.10) and George Grosz's 1919 lithograph *Dr. Benn's Night Café* (fig. 11) demonstrate the shared approaches to stylistic distortion with respect to the female form. A female figure by Aldegrever, who was an expert at producing ornaments and costume studies,⁴³ emphasizes the fleshiness of the female body by using extremely round lines to highlight certain features—the nereid on the left, for instance, displays voluptuous breasts and a plump belly. Like Aldegrever, Grosz adventurously distorted and emphasized female body parts. Although Grosz used simple contouring and little modeling

to create three-dimensional perspective, he nonetheless concentrated on representing the particular characteristics of the female body, much like Aldgrever.

Distortion is also heavily present in portraits from two eras. The German Expressionist prints and the early German prints share exaggerated facial parts to reveal personalities and feelings of sitters strongly. Even though there is the same stylistic feature in prints from both eras, they have different manners of using distortion because the purposes of the portraits were very different. In the sixteenth century, the demand of portraits was increasing between nobles. For instance, Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor from 1508 to 1519, was interested in disseminating his accomplishments, his power in finance and politic, and his life history all over his realm.⁴⁴ He realized that prints were a more efficient way to save money and time for spreading out his words and he could add pictorial images like portraits for each print. His preference for prints to describe him and his accomplishments established the trend among the nobility and wealthy.⁴⁵ Commissions for prints containing the noble's portraits and what they wanted to show off quickly became popular. Therefore, prints from the sixteenth century often include surroundings and characteristics of sitters, but not always a detailed depiction of their faces.

For the German Expressionists, portraits were often created for very different purposes. Most significantly, it became means of depicting the emotions and personalities of sitters. Moreover, the self-portrait was significant for the German Expressionists as it offered a window into their inner experiences, which was at the core of German Expressionism.⁴⁶ Therefore, the artists were absorbed in unveiling the inner matters of sitters by detailed depiction of facial

expressions; in these examples, unlike in the sixteenth-century context, surrounding environments are generally absent.

Hans Sebald Beham's sixteenth-century *Cleric with Cross* (fig.12) and Ludwig Meidner's *Portrait of Dr. Victor Heinrich Klinkhardt (III)* (fig.13) from 1920 demonstrate the similarities between the eras. The portraits offer a great amount of individualized detail but have exaggerated facial parts and appear slightly distorted. The cleric by Beham has double eyelids and a line under his eyes, showing his popped-up eyes and deepened eye-sockets, and eyebrows with a V-shape, suggesting determination and perhaps a bit of an irritable personality. Like the cleric, Dr. Victor Heinrich Klinkhardt has deeply set eyes that reflect the light, and Meidner even described the figure's eyelash hair by hair. Moreover, Meidner seems to have exaggerated facial elements subtly to emphasize the figure's emotion and personality: Klinkhardt's eyebrows, like the cleric's, convey a determinate and strict attitude.

Social Observation

The observation of peasants is a notable subject for both the early German masters and the later German Expressionist artists. Although there were different socio-political and cultural factors for each era, this tendency demonstrates how they were parallel together and regarded that interactions with ordinary people around them was important.

The Protestant Reformation heavily criticized the over-influence of the Pope and Catholic Church and put more value on individuality in religious life. Coinciding with the innovation of the printmaking press, Protestantism became rapidly prevalent everywhere in German-speaking countries. The Protestants were skeptical about the luxurious religious

artworks that they saw as encouraging the public to worship Christian images like paintings and sculptures. The subjects of printmakers were limited mostly to religious images until the Reformation, after which artists started to diversify their subjects to appeal to wider audiences or avoid conflict with Protestant ideologies. The early German printmakers produced landscape, portraits, and scenes of the ordinary world around them.

During the first half of twentieth century, Germany experienced dramatic changes. Because of the industrialization, huge numbers of people started to move to the big cities like Berlin, which caused urbanization at an extremely high-speed. These changes led artists to pay attention the new scene of the cities.⁴⁷ The intense atmosphere of city-scenes was depicted through distorted figures and backgrounds, including architectures. Moreover, just before and during two world wars, the artists had witnessed and experienced the unstable political climate, and the German Expressionists revealed the feelings and events through the disformed figures, which demonstrated the situation effectively.

Karl Holtz's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (fig. 14) from around 1920 and Lucas van Leyden's *The Musicians* (fig.15) from 1524 demonstrate the connection between the two eras in terms of subject matter and stylistic approach. Karl Holtz (1899-1978) was an active illustrator and cartoonist during both world wars, and his works usually depict the city-scenes around him and the influence of the wars or people related to it. His *Berlin Alexanderplatz* exemplifies his style, not leaving any empty space in the scene and distorting the human figure. It also demonstrates concordance with earlier prints like those of van Leyden (1494-1533), a Dutch printmaker who was highly influenced by Mannerism and whose works feature dramatic and distorted figures, detailed costumes, and technical virtuosity. *The Musicians* depicts two figures whose faces

were portrayed with emphasis on their noses, lips, and eyes in order to show how they focus on playing and tuning. Also, through slight distortion and meticulous details of their costumes, instruments, grounds, and rocks, van Leyden allows the viewer to feel like they are in the middle of two musicians' preparations for performance. Holtz also depicted his figures with unnatural ratio and emphasized facial elements to demonstrate how ordinary people are indifferent and busy in the city life. It is not surprising that his figures are distorted if we consider that many of his works were caricatures on newspapers and flyers, which selected particular elements of figures and emphasize and distort them. Moreover, like *The Musicians*, Holtz depicted the architecture in detail, even the stores' signs, and made the scene full of figures and backgrounds. Both prints share the same perspective of the subject matter, the interest in ordinary people, and the manner of stylistic distortion.

Conclusion

This exhibition visually demonstrates how the German Expressionists drew upon their cultural legacy, particularly that of the early German printmaking masters. Prints from the two eras share the distortion of figures and interest in lives of ordinary people around themselves. Moreover, the German Expressionists brought back the interest in the woodcut, which had fallen out of favor after the late sixteenth century. Although it would be considered as a natural phenomenon that the German Expressionists looked back their own German heritage, it was highly influenced by the socio-political elements in complex ways.

Considering that German Expressionism embraced various stylistic approaches, it is difficult to generalize the German Expressionist styles and compare it to the early German

prints. However, there are certain points that the selected prints of the exhibition share in terms of style, medium, and subject. Because these similarities are evident, this exhibition offers the compelling visual evidence that demonstrates how the German Expressionists examined the early German masters and created their own styles based on the legacy of the early printmakers.

FIGURES



Figure 1. Albrecht Dürer, *Descent from Cross*, 15th century, Woodcut, Gift of Emile H. Mathis II in UWM Art Collection (2012.002.0005)



Figure 2. Enrich Heckel, *Bathers*, 1912, Woodcut, in UWM Art Collection (1973.011.01)



Figure 3. Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, *Kammende Frauen (Women Combing Their Hair)*, 1912, Woodcut, in UWM Art Collection (1973.011.03)



Figure 4. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Umbra Vitae*, 1924, Woodcut, in UWM Art Collection (1972.113.01)



Figure 5. Anton Koberger, *Ninth German Bible-Nuremberg*, 1483, Woodcut, in UWM Art Collection (1972.191.02)



Figure 6. Detail: Anton Koberger, *Ninth German Bible-Nuremberg*, 1483, Woodcut, in UWM Art Collection (1972.191.02)



Figure 7. Ernst Barlach, *Mors Imperator (Death the Leader)*, 1919, Woodcut, in UWM Art Collection (1972.009.01)



Figure 8. Albrecht Altdorfer, *Adam and Eve*, 1513, Wood engraving, Gift of Emile H. Mathis II in UWM Art Collection (2012.002.0017)



Figure 9. Emil Nolde, *Grossbauern (Rich Farmers)*, 1918, Etching, in UWM Art Collection (1972.184.01)



Figure 10. Heinrich Aldegrever, *Ornament with a Triton Carrying Two Nereids*, 1525, Etching, Gift of Emile H. Mathis II in UWM Art Collection (2012.002.0015)



Figure 11. George Grosz, *Dr. Benn's Night Café*, 1919, Lithograph, Gift of Janet and Marvin Fishman in UWM Art Collection (1993.018.03)



Figure 12. Hans Sebald Beham, *Cleric with Cross*, 16th century, Woodcut, Gift of Emile H. Mathis II in UWM Art Collection (2012.002.0021)



Figure 13. Ludwig Meidner, *Portrait of Dr. Victor Heinrich Klinkhardt (III)*, 1920, Lithograph, Gift of Janet and Marvin Fishman in UWM Art Collection (1993.018.02)



Figure 14. Karl Holtz, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, n.d., Lithograph, Gift of Janet and Marvin Fishman in UWM Art Collection (1993.018.06)



Figure 15. Lucas Van Leyden, *The Musicians*, 1524, Engraving, Gift of The Gershan Family in UWM Art Collection (2001.001.47)

¹ Eric Storm, *The Culture of Regionalism: Art, Architecture, and international exhibitions in France, Germany, and Spain, 1890-1939* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), 73.

² Linda C. Hults, *An Introductory History, the Print in the Western World* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 582.

³ Recent major exhibitions of German Expressionist prints include *Defiance Despair Desire: German Expressionist Prints from the Marcia and Granvil Specks Collection*, which was mounted by the Milwaukee Art Museum in 2003, and *German Expressionism: the Graphic Impulse*, which was held at the Museum of Modern Art in 2011. As a major exhibition of the early German prints, *Origins of European Printmaking: Fifteenth-century Woodcuts and Their Public* was mounted at the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. in 2005. The exhibitions included a number of prints by German Expressionists or the early German prints, but it did not put German Expressionism in dialogue with the past like the early German printmaking masters.

⁴ Hults, *An Introductory History*, 504.

⁵ Carl Zigrosser, *Prints and Their Creators: A World History* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1974), 58.

⁶ Frances Carey and Antony Griffiths, *The Print in Germany, 1880-1933, the Age of Expressionism* (London: British Museum Publications Ltd., 1984), 13.

⁷ Zigrosser, *Prints and Their Creators*, 64.

⁸ Carey and Griffiths, *The Print in Germany*, 11.

⁹ Carey and Griffiths, *The Print in Germany*, 13

¹⁰ Carey and Griffiths, *The Print in Germany*, 13

¹¹ Carey and Griffiths, *The Print in Germany*, 13

¹² Robin Reisenfeld, "Cultural Nationalism, Bruke and the German Woodcut: the Formation of a Collective Identity," *Art History* 20, no.2 (June 1997): 291.

¹³ Stephanie Barron, *German Expressionism: Art and Society*, ed. Stephanie Barron and Wolf-Dieter Dube (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1997), 29.

¹⁴ Starr Figura, ed., *German Expressionism: the Graphic Impulse* (New York: the Museum of Modern Art, 2011), 21.

¹⁵ Brenda Richardson and Herschel B. Chipp, *Jugendstil & Expressionism in German Posters* (Berkeley: University of California, 1965), 7.

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- ¹⁶ Carey and Griffiths, *The Print in Germany*, 14.
- ¹⁷ Carey and Griffiths, *The Print in Germany*, 14.
- ¹⁸ Jill Lloyd, "Brücke: National Identity and International Style," in *Brücke: The Birth of Expressionism in Dresden and Berlin, 1905-1913*, ed. Reinhold Heller (New York: Neue Galerie, Museum for German, 2009), 60.
- ¹⁹ Carey and Griffiths, *The Print in Germany*, 14.
- ²⁰ Reisenfeld, "Cultural Nationalism," 292.
- ²¹ H. -J. Hahn, *German Thought and Culture from the Holy Roman Empire to the Present Day* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 88.
- ²² Hahn, *German Thought and Culture*, 96.
- ²³ Barron, *German Expressionism*, 29.
- ²⁴ Barron, *German Expressionism*, 29.
- ²⁵ Vinnen 1911, 2-16; cited in Rose-Carrol Washton Long, ed., *German Expressionism: Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1993), 6-8.
- ²⁶ Reisenfeld, "Cultural Nationalism," 298.
- ²⁷ Valentiner 1920, 467; cited in Long, ed., *German Expressionism*, 140.
- ²⁸ Reisenfeld, "Cultural Nationalism," 298.
- ²⁹ Peter Schmidt, "The Multiple Image: the Beginnings of Printmaking, between Old Theories and New Approaches," in *Origin of European Printmaking: Fifteenth-Century Woodcuts and Their Public*, Peter Parshall, Rainer Schoch, National Gallery of Art, and Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg (Washington: National Gallery of Art, in Association with Yale University Press, New Haven, 2005), 40.
- ³⁰ Ziggrosser, *Prints and Their Creators*, 22.
- ³¹ Leona E. Prasse, "Prints by Lucas the Elder in the Museum Collection," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 24, no.2 (February 1937): 19.
- ³² Ernest Ludwig Kirchner, "Concerning Kirchner's Prints"; cited in Victor Miesel, *Voices of German Expressionism* (N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 24-25.
- ³³ Hults, *An Introductory History*, 165.

³⁴ Hults, *An Introductory History*, 582.

³⁵ Reinhold Heller, "Brücke in Dresden in Berlin, 1905-1913," in *Brücke: The Birth of Expressionism in Dresden and Berlin, 1905-1913*, ed. Reinhold Heller (New York: Neue Galerie, Museum for German, 2009), 13.

³⁶ Reinhold Heller, "Brücke in Dresden in Berlin, 1905-1913," in *Brücke: The Birth of Expressionism in Dresden and Berlin, 1905-1913*, ed. Reinhold Heller (New York: Neue Galerie, Museum for German, 2009), 36.

³⁷ Reisenfeld, "Cultural Nationalism," 289.

³⁸ Shane Weller, ed., *German Expressionist Woodcuts* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994), ix.

³⁹ Ziggrosser, *Prints and Their Creators*, 9.

⁴⁰ Ziggrosser, *Prints and Their Creators*, 10.

⁴¹ Hults, *An Introductory History*, 77.

⁴² Hults, *An Introductory History*, 97.

⁴³ Ziggrosser, *Prints and Their Creators*, 24.

⁴⁴ Jeffrey Chipps Smith, "German Art in the Sixteenth Century, an Introduction," in *Renaissance & Reformation: German Art in the Age of Dürer and Cranach* (New York: Prestel, 2016), 33.

⁴⁵ Smith, "German Art in the Sixteenth Century," 33.

⁴⁶ Barron, *German Expressionism*, 25.

⁴⁷ Stephanie D'Alessandro, "Life 'Through the Eye' Weimar Prints and Visual Experience," in *German Expressionist Prints: the Marcia and Granvil Specks Collection, Milwaukee Art Museum*, ed. Terry Ann R. Neff (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Art Museum; Manchester: Hudson Hills Press, 2003), 46.

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APPENDIX: EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Introduction

1. Anton Koberger
Ninth German Bible-Nuremberg,
1483
Woodcut
UWMAC 1972.191.02
2. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
Umbra Vitae, 1924
Woodcut
UWMAC 1972.113.01

Niche

3. Enrich Heckel
Woman Washing, 1912
Woodcut
UWMAC 1973.011.01
4. Karl Schmidt-Rottluff
*Kammende Frauen (Women
Combing Their Hair),* 1912
Woodcut
UWMAC 1973.011.03

The Woodcut Revival

5. Hans Holbein the Younger
Moses before the Burning Bush,
1525/26
Woodcut
Gift of Emile H. Mathis II UWMAC
2012.002.0059
6. Simon Hüter
The Ark of the Covenant, 16th
Century.
Woodcut
Gift of Emile H. Mathis II
UWMAC 2012.002.0060
7. Ernst Barlach
Mors Imperator (Death the Leader),
1919
Woodcut
UWMAC 1972.009.01

8. Albrecht Dürer
Descent from Cross, 15th Century
Woodcut
Gift of Emile H. Mathis II
UWMAC 2012.002.0005
9. Lucas Muller Cranach the Elder
Christ before Pilate, 16th Century
Woodcut
Gift of Emile H. Mathis II
UWMAC 2012.002.0043
10. Virgil Solis
Adoration of the Shepherds, 16th
century
Woodcut
Gift of Emile H. Mathis II
UWMAC 2012.002.0070
11. Enrich Heckel
Bathers, 1912
Woodcut
UWMAC 1973.011.01
12. Lyonel Feininger
Bark and Brig at Sea, 1918
Woodcut
UWMAC 1972.045.01

Bodily Distortion

13. Heinrich Aldegrever
*Ornament with a Triton Carrying
Two Nereids,* 1525
Etching
Gift of Emile H. Mathis II
UWMAC 2012.002.0015
14. Albrecht Altdorfer
Adam and Eve, 1513
Wood engraving
Gift of Emile H. Mathis II
UWMAC 2012.002.0017
15. George Grosz
Dr. Benn's Night Café, 1919
Lithograph
Gift of Janet and Marvin Fishman

- UWMAC 1993.018.03
16. Max Beckmann
Der Zeicher in Gesellschaft (Rudolf Grossmann) The Artist in the Company, 1922
 Drypoint
 UWMAC 1972.010.01
17. Anton Koberger
Page from Bible, 1483
 Woodcut
 UWMAC 1972.191.01
18. Emil Nolde
Grossbauern (Rich Farmers), 1918
 Etching
 UWMAC 1972.184.01
19. George Grosz
The End of a Perfect Day, Barracks Interior, n.d.
 Drypoint
 UWMAC 1972.056.01
- Social Observation
20. Hans Sebald Beham
The Peasants' Feast, 1537
 Engraving
 UWMAC 1972.012.01
21. Hans Sebald Beham
The Peasants' Feast, 1537
 Engraving
 UWMAC 1972.012.02
22. Lucas Van Leyden
The Musicians, 1524
 Engraving
 Gift of The Gershan Family
 UWMAC 2001.001.47
23. Käthe Kollwitz
March of the Weavers, 1893-1897, published 1931
 Etching
 Gift of The Gershan Family
 UWMAC 2001.001.031
24. Karl Holtz
Berlin Alexanderplatz, n.d.
 Lithograph
- Gift of Janet and Marvin Fishman
 UWMAC 1993.018.06
25. Karl Holtz
Arbeitslose (Unemployed), 1920
 Lithograph
 Gift of Janet and Marvin Fishman
 UWMAC 1993.018.05
- Facial Distortion
26. Ludwig Meidner
Portrait of Dr. Victor Heinrich Klinkhardt (III), 1920
 Lithograph
 Gift of Janet and Marvin Fishman
 UWMAC 1993.018.02
27. Oskar Kokoschka
Paul Westheim (Kopf), 1923
 Lithograph
 UWMAC 1972.160.01
28. Hans Sebald Beham
Cleric with Cross, 16th C.
 Woodcut
 Gift of Emile H. Mathis II
 UWMAC 2012.002.0021
29. Hubrecht Goltzius
Portrait of Emperor Henricus IV, 1557
 Chiaroscuro etching and woodcut
 Gift of Emile H. Mathis II
 UWMAC 2012.002.0056
30. Edvard Munch
Portrait of Andreas Schwarz, 1906
 Drypoint
 Gift of Emile H. Mathis II
 UWMAC 2012.002.1598
31. Christoffel van Sichem
David Ioris, 1606
 Engraving
 Gift of Emile H. Mathis II
 UWMAC 2012.002.0067
32. Ludwig Meidner
Untitled, 1920
 Etching
 Gift of Mr. Bert Rubenstein

UWMAC 1980.025.08

Prints Quiz

33. Albrecht Dürer
The Nativity, 15th century
Woodcut
Gift of Emile H. Mathis II
UWMAC 2012.002.0008
34. Max Beckmann
Stadt Ansicht mit Eisenem Steg
(View of Frankfurt with Iron
Footbridge), 1923
Drypoint
UWMAC 1972.011.01
35. Albrecht Altdorfer
The Circumcision in the Temple, 16th
century
Wood engraving
Gift of Emile H. Mathis II
UWMAC 2012.002.0016
36. Ernst Barlach
Untitled, from *Ein Steppenfahrt*,
1912
Lithograph
UWMAC 1972.008.01