

## Report 6: The relevance of German Expressionism today

- a) Outline the impact of German Expressionism on contemporary art
- b) Outline the impact of German Expressionism on contemporary culture more broadly.

### A Brief Introduction: Expressionism after 1945

In the post-war period, the careers of the surviving Brücke artists were restored in Western Germany, and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Max Pechstein, and Erich Heckel were all appointed to professorial positions in Berlin and Karlsruhe. It is intriguing that these artists, who had formed a rebellious avant-garde group in 1905 and who often took up emphatic anti-academic positions during the Wilhelmine era, had by the late 1940s become respectable elder statesmen of the arts establishment. In a UK context, Schmidt-Rottluff and Heckel were both involved with the Tate Brücke exhibition of 1964, and as discussed in report 4, Schmidt-Rottluff was the first Brücke artist to have a solo exhibition in the UK in 1953, at the Leicester Museum and Art Gallery.

After 1945 the artistic palettes of these 'elder statesmen' became more subtle and less intense than they had been earlier in their careers, even if sometimes the motifs of their canvases linked up with their pre-1914 Expressionist phase. In the 1950s and early 1960s, these former Brücke members were well regarded in West Germany, but were hardly influential on a younger generation, with a few key exceptions. In East Germany during the same period the art of Expressionism very slowly became recognized as an 'art of a transitional period' on the path toward true proletarian art. As a result, Schmidt-Rottluff was honoured with large exhibitions. When he died in 1976, the East German press praised him as a Western partner in the struggle against abstract art. As a professor at West Berlin's art academy, he had defended figure drawing against many of his peers who wanted to withdraw that practice from the curriculum.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, West German art students were excited by the large-scale works shown in MoMA travelling exhibitions, such as the retrospective 'Jackson Pollock, 1912–1956' and 'New American Painting'. The latter toured through Western European capitals and had a staging post at West Berlin's Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste in 1958–1959, thereby introducing Abstract Expressionism to Germany in a way that was to have important ramifications. It could be argued that these exhibitions were at least as significant as the introduction of 'Old World' German Expressionism to New York by Alfred H. Barr, Jr in 1931. Wieland Schmied has suggested that the 1950s collective art student vision of first-generation German Expressionism would become refracted through American Abstract Expressionism, and that artists who would later be referred to by some as 'Neo-Expressionists' would have their 'image of Munch made dynamic by de Kooning ... their image of Kirchner filtered through Pollock'.<sup>1</sup> This statement is certainly applicable to a youthful Hans-Georg Kern a.k.a. Georg Baselitz, who became a resident of West Berlin in 1958, a few years before the erection of the Berlin Wall.

## Georg Baselitz and Expressionism

As a student, Baselitz was both impressed by the scale and gestural freedom of paintings by de Kooning, Pollock, Kline, Guston et al., as well as by the figural and material expressivity of the art of his Saxon predecessors in the Brücke group. He was one of a few German artists to take up the woodcut again in the post-war period, ostensibly renewing the medium that was so linked to the 'Brücke style'.<sup>2</sup> His response to Brücke's legacy can be seen in such prints as *Large Head* (1966) and *New Type* (1966). In the former, possibly a self-portrait, the distorted face is riddled with indeterminate organic forms and smoke patterns; in the latter, the artist represents a strolling 'hero' before a heavily-gouged abstract backdrop, reminiscent of experimental woodcuts by Erich Heckel circa 1907, which show chiselled and splintered surfaces. In another woodcut *Untitled* (1967), Baselitz adopted a tonal chiaroscuro technique in depicting a woodsman slumped against a tree, the section of his midriff missing in the style of one of his 'fracture' paintings. On the one hand these images seem connected to Brücke-style print culture, on the other, there is a nihilistic mannerism about them which registers a rupture in that tradition.

The distorted and fragmented figures of Baselitz's work appear to allude to and ironize the Nazi obsession with perfect Aryan bodies evident in the fascist mode of 'heroic realism', and conversely, their conception of the 'degenerate' bodies of Expressionist art. These figures could also be related to the politically divided body of Germany in the post-Second World War period.<sup>3</sup> Donald Kuspit, writing in the early 1980s, said that the artist's 'mannerism was a metaphor for the situation of modern Germany, a country divided against itself, a symbol of a world divided against itself.'<sup>4</sup> During the 1980s, Baselitz made his affinity to Brücke and Munch quite explicit in paintings such as *Man with Sailboat – Munch* (1982), *Edvard's Spirit* (1983), *The Brücke Chorus*, and *Supper in Dresden* (1983). The striking aspect of *Supper in Dresden* is the way in which Baselitz refers to and synthesizes various sources to create something new. Of course, this creative magpie-like approach was also very much a feature of Brücke art. Yet the connection between Baselitz and his Expressionist predecessors is not simply one of homage. The fact that his motifs are 'turned-on-their-heads', in the manner of a Brechtian alienation device, seems to symbolize some kind of break rather than demonstrate a relationship of direct continuity between Expressionism and his oeuvre. This point notwithstanding, Baselitz has stated that he does feel 'a dependence on Munch and Schmidt-Rottluff, respect for Kirchner, and understanding for Heckel.'<sup>5</sup>

Baselitz has explored art historical paths in another way, by creating loose sketchy 'remixed' versions of many of his earlier iconic paintings. In 2005, the year of the Brücke centenary, he seized upon the idea of remixing as a visual device, creating unusual variations of many of his earlier iconic paintings. The word 'remix' is suggestive of alternative music club culture. It was a helpful term for Baselitz in the sense that he could appear connected to the trends of a younger generation of artists, such as Jonathan Meese, the current *enfant terrible* of Berlin's contemporary art scene, who in many ways could be regarded as a 'Neo-

Neo-Expressionist'. But the idea of remixing or re-approaching one's own body of work in the visual arts, is not entirely novel. Baselitz may well have been inspired by Nolde's and Munch's example in this respect. Nolde was still painting powerfully, playing interesting variations on his earlier work in his eighties. Munch often revisited his earlier work, and painted *Girls on the Bridge* (1901) nearly twenty times in all. Like Baselitz after him, Munch's painting style also became loose and sketchy as he approached seventy, although this was partially as a consequence of a vein bursting in his right eye in May 1930, rather than out of any deliberate shift in style.

The exhibition *Baselitz Remix* (2006–7) was first staged at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, and an exhibition curiously entitled *The Bridge Ghost's Supper*, was held at Contemporary Fine Arts (CFA), Berlin in 2007. This centred on a 'new' work *Supper in Dresden – Remix* (2006), which refers back to his well-known painting of 1983. In the later painting, Baselitz clearly portrays four icons of Expressionism: Kirchner, Schmidt-Rottluff, Heckel and an elderly Edvard Munch, regarded by the artist as a 'corresponding member' of the Brücke group. By comparison to the 1983 work, the image of Munch and the Brücke artists in the remix painting is insubstantial (almost apparitional) as the depicted figures are formed from spermatozoa-like squiggles and ejaculatory splurges of quickly applied paint, in an approach not dissimilar to the action painting of Jackson Pollock. The represented facial features of the Brücke artists, however, are more distinct, following the process of other 'remix' paintings in intensifying physiognomy. Many chains of transmission can be traced in Baselitz's remix paintings; his art is increasingly concerned with biographical and art historical references, with Brücke occupying a central role. His recent work nods to his Expressionist heroes (both German and American), to Saxony and to himself. After the Brücke centenary and the recent hype over the New Leipzig School and Dresden Pop, the remix canvases of Baselitz once again make us reconsider the 'Germanness' of German art and the genealogy of 'new German painting' with the Brücke group placed at centre stage.

### **Anselm Kiefer, Brücke Woodcarving, and the German 'Wood Tradition': The Roots of 'Neo-Expressionism'**

One of Baselitz's early attempts at wood sculpture, *Model for a Sculpture* (1979), a work that can be compared to the late Expressionist woodcarving of Kirchner and the Rot-Blau group in the 1920s,<sup>6</sup> formed the centerpiece of the German pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1980. A carved 'Hitler-like' figure seemed to emerge organically from the roughly hacked mass of a wooden block, its stiffly raised right arm suggestive of the Nazi '*Sieg-Heil*' salute, although Baselitz argued that it was actually inspired by the African wood carving he collected. Surrounding this sculpture, and in the flanking rooms, were many of the emphatically Teutonic works by the equally controversial Anselm Kiefer. These included *Germany's Spiritual Heroes* (1973), *Parsifal* (1973); and different versions of *Ways of Worldly Wisdom* (1977-80). The 'wood' both as subject and material dominated the pavilion, which stood out as a kind of arboreal tabernacle. At this time, Kiefer's fascination with Romanticism and Expressionism, and the complex nature of the connections between German cultural history and the rise of National Socialism, was similar to that of Baselitz. Together they shared an interest in 'revisiting' Romanticism and Expressionism, in order to unpick that history.

Baselitz and Kiefer regenerated certain aspects of Romanticism and Expressionism in their treatment of wood as material and the representation of *the* wood as a locus of German subjectivity. Following a 'primitive' technique occasionally used by the Brücke artists, Kiefer initially did not employ a printing press, but made his woodcuts by rubbing the back of the paper by hand. The woodblocks used for his unique 'books' of the mid-1970s were later redeployed for inter-textual and inter-medial woodcut collages produced between 1978 and 1980, entitled *Ways of Worldly Wisdom – Hermanns's Battle* or for the series *Grane*. Archival photographs of the production of these collages reveal a certain irreverential attitude on the part of Kiefer to the medium of woodcut, with many prints littering the floor of his studio. The fact that so many versions of *Ways of Worldly Wisdom* exist, with woodblocks 're-utilized' for repeated use, subverts (in a postmodern Warholian sense), the veneration reserved by Kirchner and other Brücke members for the authenticity of the 'original' handcrafted print.

This re-emergence of a 'wood-style' was often darkly deconstructive as these artists sited the collapse of cultural nationalism in the terrible atrocities committed by the Nazis in the depths of the forest. Kiefer's appropriation of the Brücke-style woodcut for his huge collages in some ways problematizes the group's legacy. It could be argued that his adoption of the medium seems to make the German woodcut in general and the Expressionist woodcut in particular complicit with the idealist tradition he is questioning. These collages that give the impression of encapsulating German collective and cultural memory, portray and occasionally name those 'men of letters' guilty of Romantic nationalism, but German artists are not necessarily exonerated through their absence. They are not named, but Kiefer's emphatic use of the woodcut is perhaps enough to signify their contribution. If this is the case, then Kiefer's position might be aligned with that of the Marxist theoretician Georg Lukács, who argued that Expressionism bore some responsibility for fascism. Yet it is ultimately uncertain how Kiefer reads the ideological edge of Expressionism, and it is this ambiguity in his work, one could say its aporetic quality, which moves the spectator to continually appraise and reappraise what the artist is visually articulating.

German artists always seem to find their way into the symbolic forest, whether the forest acts as a nurturing locale or a site of terror. After Kiefer's deconstructive arborealism of the 1970s, perhaps it seemed that the forest could no longer function as an effective visual metaphor, perhaps it was a trope exhausted through iteration and reinterpretation. However, the *Wald* appears to be utterly inextricable from German identity. Prominent German artists such as Jörg Immendorff (who has sometimes been referred to as a 'Neo-Expressionist' and was identified as such in a Saint Louis Art Museum catalogue of 1983, along with Baselitz, Kiefer, Penck, and Lüpertz), and even Gerhard Richter (more closely associated with German 'Pop' than Expressionism), connect themselves to a German Romantic tradition in their mature work. For instance, in the 1990s, Immendorff produced several large canvases featuring an enchanted wood as a backdrop. In *Malerwald* (1998) the artist depicted himself in a cartoonish manner situated in the heart of a fairy-tale forest, where the trees have ears. In this work, the artist's head transforms into a de Gheyn's globe, a recurrent motif in his work, and an allegory of history as a cycle. Cyclicity was a key idea of Immendorff's oeuvre in the last decade of his life. His giant sculpture *Elbquelle* (1999), which stands near the centre of Riesa in Saxony, alludes to Caspar David Friedrich's paintings of bare winter oaks; and his most recent artworks appropriated other iconic

images by the Romantic artist. And Richter, who like his fellow Saxon and border-crosser Baselitz, wanted to be a forester when he was young, but unlike Baselitz never expressed any affinity with the Expressionist woodcut or woodcarving tradition. During the 1960s, Baselitz once accused him of betraying his 'fatherland' for giving into the 'international' style of Pop Art.<sup>7</sup> However, with *Wald* 1-12 (2005) it seems that Richter is demonstrating a closer relatedness to the German visual canon, especially to a 'tradition that owes something to Friedrich'<sup>8</sup> if not Expressionism.

### **The Movement known as 'Neo-Expressionism'**

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the so-called 'Neo-Expressionist' movement became interpolated with an examination of first-generation Expressionism à la Brücke, both in Britain and the United States. Even as expressive abstraction seemed to lose currency under the hegemony of minimalism and geometric abstraction in the 1960s and 1970s, figuration slowly began to regain some validity and became a subject of endless discussion in the United States and Great Britain. A group of artists often referred to as 'Neo-Expressionists' gained much attention worldwide, and particularly in New York City. The search for a Germanic lineage for this new Expressionism was evident in much of the arts criticism of this period. Reflecting on the events of the early 1980s, Charles Haxthausen would write in a *Burlington Magazine* review of 1989 that the receptive climate in America for the new German art had in part been determined by the 1980 Guggenheim exhibition 'Expressionism: A German Intuition, 1905–1920', which reaffirmed links between German national identity and Expressionism.

The positive American reception might also have had much to do with what Benjamin Buchloh discussed as the reverberation of the profound influence of American Abstract Expressionism. Buchloh asked: 'Who would not be seduced by the reflection of one's own national culture in the art of a succeeding generation, especially in a different geo-political context?' In London, there was a move from new Expressionism to old Expressionism. The ground-breaking exhibition 'A New Spirit in Painting' (1981) at the Royal Academy, which capitalized from the notoriety acquired by the artists Anselm Kiefer and Baselitz at the previous year's Venice Biennale, preceded by four years the large Royal Academy survey exhibition 'German Art in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Painting and Sculpture 1905–1985', which helped to establish an aesthetic chain of transmission from Brücke to Kiefer. 'A New Spirit in Painting' included the first presentation in a non-German speaking world of the now famous German artists of that generation (Baselitz, Kiefer, Penck, Polke, Richter, etc.), artists of the Italian Transavanguardia, American painting, including both late De Kooning and a young Julian Schnabel. It also included 'British' artists whose artworks could be said to possess an 'expressionistic' quality, such as Frank Auerbach (a naturalised British citizen since 1947) who was born in Germany, but whose parents sent him to Britain in 1939 under the 'Kindertransport' scheme. Auerbach, along with Leon Kossoff, whose work also shares certain 'expressionistic' tendencies, is one of the most important figurative painters at work today. Although they are often associated with a circle of School of London painters that includes Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud and R.B. Kitaj, they can also be seen as inheritors of an Expressionist tradition that includes German artists such as Kirchner and Baselitz.

During the early 1980s, Donald Kuspit, one of the principal supporters of Baselitz, Penck, Kiefer, et al., engaged in a critical battle with Craig Owens, Hal Foster, and Benjamin Buchloh over the significance of 'new German painting' or 'Neo-Expressionism'. Owens, Foster, and Buchloh had attacked the likes of Baselitz and Kiefer as reactionary and regressive artists who were 'market-focused' and who had created a 'neobourgeois' art based on obsolete conventions. This was met by a sharp defence of these same artists by Kuspit in his essay 'Flak from the "Radicals": The American Case against Current German Painting' (published in the aforementioned St. Louis catalogue). To some extent this debate reprised a much earlier contest in the history of aesthetics, one that took place in the interwar period between the Marxist theoreticians Ernst Bloch and Lukács. Just as Lukács viewed 1920s Expressionism as a bourgeois ideological current, so Buchloh attacked the critical support for German 'Neo-Expressionism' as propping-up Reaganite imperialism and fuelling art market greed. Kuspit, on the other hand, criticized Buchloh for his reductive Marxist interpretation of 'new Expressionism', in a similar manner to the way in which Bloch took Lukács to task for his formulaic understanding of first-generation Expressionism.

By the 1980s, many critics were fed up with minimalism and conceptual art, and wished to see colourful and figurative artworks by flamboyant painters. In West Berlin, young artists such as Rainer Fetting, Helmut Middendorf, or Salomé became famous by painting in a frenzied expressive manner, seemingly wanting to recover the gesture and mark of Expressionist painting. Fetting and Salomé were part of a gay and punk club scene in Kreuzberg and their paintings began to address issues of gay identity; they often represented themselves in various drag costumes, or, in camp fashion, in corsets and stockings. Fetting frequented the club, SO36, a club closely associated with the artist Martin Kippenberger, and a favourite venue of David Bowie's at the time. Considering the connection of Expressionism to a wider culture, Bowie was also rather obsessed by Brücke paintings in his Berlin years, and often frequented the Brücke Museum in Dahlem, even attempting to paint like Kirchner.

Claudia Mesch has convincingly argued that the Berlin-based 'Neo-Expressionists' or 'New Fauves' were responding to a homoerotic element in German Expressionism, particularly in Brücke paintings of bather scenes in Moritzburg.<sup>9</sup> However, as a movement 'Neo-Expressionism' was not just confined to Berlin; it was a phenomenon evidenced in the work of artists based in other German cities too; and furthermore, 'Expressionist' tendencies could be identified in artists working in the United States and Italy (where it was known as Transavanguardia) i.e. Julian Schnabel, Jean-Michel Basquiat, David Salle, Francesco Clemente, Sandro Chia et al. It was a phenomenon that as stated above, was in many respects a visceral response to the sterile cerebral qualities of 1970s conceptual art. Just like New York 'Abstract Expressionism', it was also a form of art that 'fed the market'.

Fetting and Salomé had an American counterpart in the artist Keith Haring, a 'Neo-Primitivist' whose work can also be compared to Penck's. They had come to know Haring's work earlier in the major Graffiti Art show at P.S. 1, "New York/New Wave," curated by Diego Cortez in 1981, during the time when Salomé was working there, or, in the East Village at Haring's Mudd Club exhibitions of the same year. As Mesch has pointed out, 'Cortez is an important figure who early on recognized gallery-based appropriations of street graffiti art, art like Haring's and Basquiat's, shared major concerns with Neo-

Expressionist painting.’<sup>10</sup> There is a certain chain of transmission in terms of the ‘anti-academic’ and gestural *brut* nature of Expressionism that reveals the dissolution of any high/low art distinctions, a chain that arguably starts with the radical Blaue Reiter almanac in 1911/12, and would incorporate, among other things, Hanz Prinzhorn’s hugely influential *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* of 1922 (which launched the field of psychiatric art), the artists of COBRA, *tachisme*, Jean Dubuffet and *art brut*, graffiti art / ‘outsider art’, Penck, Haring, Basquiat, and more recently Tracey Emin and Jonathan Meese. Again this shows the impact of Expressionism in a wider artistic culture. Neo-Expressionism and the rise of ‘Hip Hop’ culture, especially graffiti art, were fully contemporaneous developments in the 1970s and 1980s. In this regard, Baselitz’s recent use of the term ‘remix’ is a throwback to this early 1980s period when these two movements collided, especially through the work of Basquiat. Today, Expressionism continues to have an impact on ‘sensational’ German artists such as Meese, and British artists such as Emin, to name but two of many examples.

As observed by Christian Weikop above, although the most direct impact of German Expressionism on contemporary art can be traced to its ‘remix’ by German artists of the post-war generation such as Georg Baselitz, Anselm Kiefer and the ‘neue Wilden’ during the 1980s and 1990s in particular, it continues to influence a number of other post-war and contemporary artists, performers and film-makers in a variety of ways. A selection of these and a consideration of the particularities of influence and affinitive associations between their work and those of German Expressionism are outlined below.

#### A.R. Penck and Expressionism

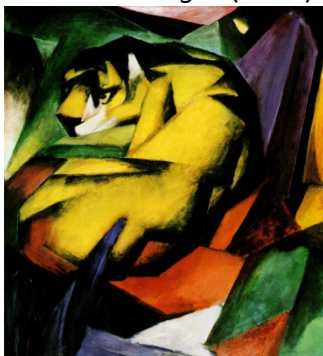
Paul Klee *Comedians’ Handbill* (1938)



A.R. Penck *The Flow of Events* (2013)



Franz Marc *Tiger* (1912)



A.R. Penck *Tiger in the Jungle at Night* (2011)



Visually the impact of German Expressionism on A.R. Penck can be seen at its strongest through the affinities in the black linearity of the late works by former Blaue Reiter member, Paul Klee. During the final decade before his death in 1940, Klee produced often large scale canvases and works on paper of simplified pictogrammatic motifs. These include works such as *Comedians' Handbill* (1938) which clearly inspired Penck's own strong adoption of similar 'primitivised' pictogrammatic motifs in much of his characteristic *strich-männchen* (stick-figure) work, as well as his more recent work from the last decade. Like Klee, Penck was also an accomplished musician, particularly jazz and musical affinities between the two artists resonate across their large-scale canvas works. A.R. Penck was born Ralf Winkler but assumed the pseudonym A.R. Penck in 1968 whilst living in East Berlin and smuggling his paintings into the West for exhibition. His choice of name was based on the geologist Albrecht Penck (1858-1945), a specialist on the Ice Age and whose works he had been reading, to which he added the 'R' for 'Ralf'. Self-taught, A.R. Penck developed a form of pictorial sign language which he referred to as *Standart*. This was an attempt to develop a visual system of signs that could function independently of any ideological tendencies. Such a process was particularly acute for an East German artist working under Socialism who was not interested in promoting socialist propaganda in his art. His work found support in the West, particularly through the Michael Werner Gallery in Cologne and in 1980 he obtained an exit visa and moved to West Germany, as it was then. In 2013 the Michael Werner Gallery showed a series of new paintings by Penck in New York, of which *Tiger in the Jungle at Night* was included. Whilst still painted in the black linear style reminiscent of late Klee, the subject matter is immediately evocative of Klee's Blaue Reiter associate, Franz Marc, famous for his animal paintings including the 1912 *Tiger* crouching amongst green jungle foliage. Penck's use of colour and line have a direct and close affinity with his Blaue Reiter predecessors, whilst his totemic sculptures such as *Self Head I* (1984 bronze), *Head W* (1984 lead and paint) and *Totem for Cologne* (1989 bronze) are immediately striking in their recollection of the 'primitivised' sculptural work of members of Die Brücke. Penck had begun carving wood sculptures in 1977, whilst still living in the GDR. He had stayed in East Germany much longer than many of his peers (such as Baselitz, Richter and Polke) who had left during the 1960s since he remained personally committed to the concept of utopian and collective politics. His sculptural practice in wood was reminiscent of the communal ideals of Die Brücke and also spoke to the German fascination with wood outlined by Christian Weikop above. Despite his commitment to collective politics, Penck's deliberate affinity with Die Brücke's ideals of individual creative freedom and non-representational form continually failed to impress the Socialist authorities who consistently refused him membership of the official association of East German artists, the Verband Bildener Künstler. After his exit to the West in 1980 Penck began to cast his wooden sculptures in metal, mainly bronze, to make them more durable. It was also an ironic response to the consumerism of the West and the buoyancy of its art market where small bronze editions sold well. During the process of casting he was careful to retain the original texture of the wood and its roughly hewn surfaces. Thus, in *Head W* (a portrait of Michael Werner), a hole in the tree trunk used for the original carving is integral to the aesthetic effect of the finished cast sculpture; "I was fascinated to have a surface that looked like wood, but was as hard as iron. That led me to cast wooden sculptures, because I could achieve an effect that was estranged from its original."<sup>11</sup> Once more, the German fascination with wood as material is carefully and



deliberately mediated by an artist of the post-war generation via Penck's sculptural practices.

### **Transmission and Expression: Tracey Emin, Edvard Munch and Egon Schiele**

Whilst the impact of Expressionism on the subsequent development of a number of major post-war German artists is clearly demonstrable, as already indicated above, the diversity of its aesthetic is also noticeable in the work of contemporary artists working outside Germany. For notorious YBA artist Tracey Emin (b.1963), 'expressionism' encompasses both the direct impact of Expressionist forerunner such as Edvard Munch (1863-1944) and Austrian expressionist Egon Schiele (1890-1918), and a particular aesthetic sensibility that informs her diverse practices as an artist. These include painting, drawing, photography, sewn appliqué, sculpture, film, installations, neon text and writing. As the White Cube gallery observes, 'her art is primarily expressionistic, a cypher for memories and emotions that can be frank and poetic, intimate and universal.' Since much of her work is 'confessional', self-portraiture in multiple forms is central, speaking in particular to her interest in the sparse linearity, tortured angst and sexual explicitness within the drawings of Egon Schiele. The use of line is central to her various practices and contributed to her appointment as the Royal Academy Schools' Eranda Professor of Drawing between 2011-2013. In a published 2002 interview with Jean Wainwright, Emin elaborated on the nature and extent of her interest in Munch, Schiele and Expressionism, worth recounting in part here:

TE: The Expressionists in a certain way...thought with their stomachs...So I could relate to that...I think that Munch was sophisticated because he used emotion in art, but not in an illustrative way. In *The Scream* he is actually painting sound and this is quite a radical idea for that time, quite a conceptual idea and also to actually paint jealousy is a completely different way of understanding art. My engagement with Munch was about where he took his influences from, ancient Egypt and mummified bodies.

JW: Another artist you have mentioned in relation to your work is Egon Schiele.

TE: Yeah, I really like his drawings, he is brilliant at drawing, fantastic...

JW: In some of his drawings such as *Self-portrait Masturbating*, 1911, don't you think there are sexual references that link to your work?

TE: In that work Schiele looks like an embarrassing mime artist. Expressionism as a whole is slightly embarrassing, isn't it? It is about putting your heart on your sleeve...'<sup>12</sup>

It is the emotional vulnerability of certain Expressionists then that particularly appeals to Emin. The other major source materials for Emin's works are her own psychic and bodily experiences in which visual and narrative disclosures are bound up with intimate aspects of biography. In her 2006 autobiographical account *Strangeland*, traumatic episodes from her Margate childhood and chaotic teenage years provide the reader with a range of meta-textual information. Unexpected pregnancies and painful abortions are recounted in a narrative that is unbearably intimate and powerfully engaging whilst managing to avoid solipsism; "her stories are neither tragic nor sentimental and often deeply resonate with

their audience.”<sup>13</sup> For Emin, it is the visceral qualities of Expressionism that remain significant.

### **Invented Worlds: Franz Ackermann (b.1963) and Julie Mehretu (b.1970)**

Although the works of both German born Franz Ackermann and Ethiopian born Julie Mehretu are most commonly associated with recent trends in contemporary art that explore the affects and impacts of globalization and networked societies, both artists' works also resonate with the echoes of their modernist predecessors as a springboard for their own new and seemingly very different concerns. It is the Blaue Reiter in particular that haunt both Ackermann's and Mehretu's visual practices. Both artists produce large scale canvases filled with abstracted forms of vibrant colour connected by threads and lines that carry metaphorical and metaphysical associations. The so-called 'father' of abstraction, Expressionist artist Wassily Kandinsky famously remarked that 'when religion, science and morality are shaken (the last by the mighty hand of Nietzsche), when the external support threatens to collapse, then man's gaze turns away from the external world towards himself.'<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, Austrian artist Oskar Kokoschka described Expressionism as 'form-giving to experience, thus mediator and message from the self to the fellow-human. As in life, two individuals are necessary. Expressionism does not live in an ivory tower, it calls upon a fellow human whom it awakens.'<sup>15</sup> It is the combination of both sets of concerns, abstraction and networked communication from self to other, that also informs the works of Ackermann and Mehretu.

Ackermann is most celebrated for his explosively coloured paintings and installations that explore themes of travel, tourism, globalisation and urbanism. His first series of works, *Mental Maps*, were small scale watercolours that were produced whilst he was travelling for numerous residencies during the early 1990s and which act as his 'travel companions.' They represent his itineraries and his negotiations of 'alien' places. They also combine the idea of traditional street maps with his own translations of the local environment and they form a series of impressions of all of the major cities of Asia, South America and Australia. From *Mental Maps*, Ackermann developed his ideas into much larger scale canvases and installations comprising vibrant paintings constructed from memory in the studio, on-site drawings and photographs, wall drawings and sculptural, billboard-like constructions. According to the White Cube, 'his work frequently deals with the double side of tourism – the glamour, speed and consumption of international travel but also the detritus, architectural scarring and garbage that it leaves behind, and his installations often take on the appearance of strange advertisements for a global tourism industry run amok. The places he depicts have a generic quality, and yet they look strangely familiar: non-places where the traveller's desire replaces the local culture.'<sup>16</sup> The painted planes become spaces that must be walked through and experienced as the viewer is asked to navigate the psychedelic landscape of the work. Although such concerns are most readily understood within discourses of globalization, it is Ackermann's use of abstract landscapes painted in vibrant colour that associates him most closely to his Munich Art Academy predecessor, Kandinsky.

It is also Kandinsky in particular that one can read in the lyrical spaces of Julie Mehretu's large-scale canvases through her use of floating triangles, arcing lines and explosive vectors.

Gestural paintings are made with layers of built up acrylic paint which are then overlaid with thicker streams of paint, pencil, pen and ink. What is particularly interesting is that Mehretu borrows the formal devices of high modernist abstraction to create works that resonate profoundly with contemporary experiences of globalised urban existence. Her large layered map-like drawings, diagrams, architectural forms, urban planning grids are overlaid with clouds of abstracted marks and lines that create an experience of frenetic energy, a maelstrom of colours, shapes, forms and lines. In works like *Dispersion* (2002), a centrifugal structure is established with whiplash lines, small and colourful rectangles and dense scribbles that look as though they have been blasted apart, leaving a void in the centre of the canvas. The meaning of the work remains ambiguous. Is the blue airplane flying through the detritus in the bottom left an allusion to the attacks of 9/11; attacks which tore a physical and a metaphorical hole into the fabric of Western culture paralleled by the void in the centre of the composition? Or is it a symbol of quick and easy escape from the chaos of the world it is leaving behind? Is the 'dispersion' of the title, dispersion of people or of cities? Perhaps both. Whatever the final choice of interpretation, it is ultimately the alienation of the individual amid the forces of globalisation that motivates Mehretu's grand essays in colour, line and motion.

### **Expressionist Legacies in Dance and Film**

It is by now hopefully clear from the selected examples above that German Expressionism has had huge and lasting impact on the development of global visual art practices throughout the twentieth century and well into the present. This report will now conclude with a few remarks concerning other forms of transmission, lineage and influence. It will do this through a consideration of film and performance. As indicated in Lot 1, Expressionism in Germany was not confined to the visual arts alone and indeed by the 1920s, Expressionism as an aesthetic had migrated from the fine arts into other art forms such as dance and performance as well as popular culture and mass entertainment, especially film.

#### **Dance**

Whilst Expressionist artists had heralded Nietzsche for his celebration of the artist as prophet in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883), artists and performers of both the pre-war and the Weimar era found fuel in Nietzsche's promotion of dance in *Zarathustra* and in *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872). The cult of movement symbolised Weimar Germany's sense of modernity. Expressionist dance or *Ausdruckstanz* was made popular in 1920s Germany by Rudolf Laban's former student Mary Wigman (1886-1973). With Laban, Wigman developed a concept of dance as spiritual expression in which gesture was a representation of the inner life, in much the same way that Kandinsky had conceived of abstraction as the sign of the spiritual. For Wigman, every sensation could be danced and driven to absolute form through a drive of opposites in dynamic struggle – light and dark, life and death, fear and joy, dissonance and harmony and so on. Her most famous dances were the Witchdance (*Hexentanz*) developed in 1914, *Sacrifice (Opfer)*, *Dance of Death (Totentanz)* and the cycle *Ghost Dances (Gespenstertänze)*, (all developed in 1917). Wigman's lasting legacy was her approach to both choreography and pedagogy. Having founded the *Wigman-Schule-Dresden* (the Wigman School Dresden) in 1920, she worked to qualify young dancers with an acknowledged and specific dance diploma where none had existed previously, as well as to develop her own experimental choreography.

The other famous Weimar dance practitioner, who had studied under Rudolf Laban a few years after Wigman, was Kurt Jooss (1901-1979). Jooss developed a concept of *Tanz Theater*, or Dance Theatre in which music and dance formed an integral performance narrative rather than separate roles. Jooss disliked plotless dances and preferred themes that addressed moral issues. Naturalistic movement, large-scale unison and characterisation were used by Jooss to address political concerns of the time. *The Green Table* (1932) is perhaps his most popular important anti-war dance. In 1927 Jooss founded the Folkwang Tanzschule in Essen, after having been involved in several previous schools. Forced to flee the Nazis in 1933, Jooss and some of his artistic collaborators eventually ended up in England, opening a dance school at Dartington Hall in Devon from 1934 until 1942. In 1949 he returned to Essen in Germany and continued to teach. It was during this period that the Wuppertal Tanztheater choreographer Pina Bausch (1940-2009) studied with him.

Pina Bausch's *Tanz Theater Wuppertal* remains one of the most influential contemporary dance companies today. Although Bausch died in 2009, her company continues to perform regularly around the world, having recently had a successful London season at Sadler's Wells in February 2014. With her unique style, a blend of movement, sound, and prominent stage sets, and with her elaborate collaboration with performers during the development of a piece (the style now known as *Tanztheater*), she became a leading influence in the field of modern dance from the 1970s onwards. She is the direct successor of the tradition begun by Kurt Jooss and developed from his training under Laban. Her dance company remains extremely popular and influential today not only in the realm of dance but in film and performance more broadly. One of the major themes of her work was relationships in which she engaged in a very specific process for creating emotions through improvisation and the memory of the dancer's own experiences. She would ask personal questions-about parents, childhood, feelings in specific situations, the use of objects, dislikes, injuries and aspirations. From the answers she would then develop gestures, sentences, dialogues, and scenarios. The dancer is free to choose any expressive mode, whether it is verbal or physical when answering these questions and it is with this freedom of expression that the dancer feels secure whilst delving deep inside their own vulnerabilities. The impact of Bausch's expressive process and methods can be seen in other forms ranging from David Bowie's *The Glass Spider* tour in 1987 to Pedro Almodovar's 2002 film *Talk to her*.

## **Film**

Within popular culture, it is perhaps Expressionist film and its legacies that are the most widely understood medium for the transmission of an aesthetic of Expressionism that remains culturally influential today. The Weimar era was the pinnacle of Expressionist film making in Germany with classics such as Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1919/20), F.W.Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926) and *M* (1931), to name but a few of the most successful. Unexpected camera angles, dramatic lighting and dark shadows, theatrically stylized stage-sets, anti-naturalistic acting styles, melodramatic make-up and costume design coupled with outlandish plots, uncanny atmosphere and unconventional compositions, all contribute to the distinct aesthetic of Expressionist film. Subjective viewpoints conveying alienation, mystification, disharmony, hallucination, dreams, extreme emotional states and destabilization are also characteristic features. In Wiene's *Caligari* for example, stylization functions to 'express' the distorted viewpoint of a

madman: we see the world as the insane narrator does and the film becomes a projection of his vision. *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* was one of the first commercially successful films to employ the use of flashbacks as well as pioneering the 'twist ending.' Expressionist films like it as well as those listed above, were able to construct a self-contained aesthetic, a symbolic world of the imagination which was radically detached from the everyday. Hollywood recognised the potential and German actors, writers and directors were first coaxed to Los Angeles during the late 1920s. A second wave of emigration after Hitler's ascent in 1933 completed the transfer of Expressionist elements into established Hollywood genres. The pessimistic, cynical and often intensely violent visions of modern life that characterised 'film noir' were developed by directors such as Fritz Lang in films such as *Ministry of Fear* (1945) and *While the City Sleeps* (1956). The legacies of this can be seen in the film noir of the 1940s and 1950s, the psychological tension in films by Alfred Hitchcock, Orson Welles and more recently David Lynch and the gothic theatricality of Tim Burton.

---

<sup>1</sup> Wieland Schmied, 'Beispiel und Sonderfall: Kunst in Berlin, 1945–1970' in Kynaston McShine (ed.), *BerlinArt, 1961–1987* (Exh. cat., Munich, 1987), p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of Baselitz's use of the woodcut see 'Georg Baselitz: Artist and collector. An interview with the Honorary Royal Academician by Dr Christian Weikop', <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/112>

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion on this topic, see John-Paul Stonard, *Germany Divided: Baselitz and his Generation*, British Museum, London, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Kuspit, *The New Subjectivism: Art in the 1980s*, Michigan, 1988, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> Baselitz, cited in Thomas Wagner and Katrin Wittneven, *Georg Baselitz: The Bridge Ghost's Supper*, Berlin, 2007, p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> See Weikop, <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/112>

<sup>7</sup> See Michele Leight, 'Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting', in [www.thecityreview.com/richter.html](http://www.thecityreview.com/richter.html)

<sup>8</sup> See Jeanne Anne Nugent, 'Interview with Gerhard Richter, May-June 2006', in Ulrich Bischoff, Elisabeth Hipp, and Jeanne Anne Nugent (eds), *From Caspar David Friedrich to Gerhard Richter: German Paintings from Dresden*, Cologne, 2006, p. 113.

<sup>9</sup> Claudia Mesch talk at 'American Reception of German Painting after 1960', CAA Chicago, February 13, 2014, a session chaired by Christian Weikop.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Cited in *A.R. Penck* (exhibition catalogue) Berlin: Die Nationalgalerie; Zurich: Das Kunsthaus, 1988, p.61.

<sup>12</sup> Jean Wainwright 'Interview with Tracey Emin' in Merck, Mandy and Townsend, Chris (eds.) *The Art of Tracey Emin*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2002, pp.195-196.

<sup>13</sup> [http://whitecube.com/artists/tracey\\_emin/](http://whitecube.com/artists/tracey_emin/)

<sup>14</sup> Wassily Kandinsky in Lindsay, K. and Vergo, P. (eds.) *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art* vol. 1 (Boston Massachusetts: University of Michigan Press, 1982), p.139.

<sup>15</sup> Oskar Kokoschka 'Edvard Munch's Expressionism' *College Art Journal* XII, 1953, p.32.

<sup>16</sup> [http://whitecube.com/artists/franz\\_ackermann/](http://whitecube.com/artists/franz_ackermann/)