

## **Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Brücke Program (1906)**

With faith in evolution, in a new generation of creators and appreciators, we call together all youth. And as youths, who embody the future, we want to free our lives and limbs from the long-established older powers. Anyone who renders his creative drive directly and genuinely is one of us.

## **Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, "Chronicle of the Brücke" (1913)**

In 1902 the painters Bleyl and Kirchner got to know each other in Dresden. In addition, through a brother, who was a friend of Kirchner's, Heckel joined them. Heckel brought along Schmidt-Rottluff, whom he had known back in Chemnitz. They all worked together in Kirchner's studio. Here they had the opportunity to study the nude, the basis of all visual art, freely and naturally. Based on such drawing, they gradually began to feel that only life should provide inspiration and that the artist should subordinate himself to direct experience. Each man drew and wrote his ideas one next to the other, in a book "Odi profanum," and in this way they compared their individual qualities. So they developed naturally into a group that came to be called "Brücke." Each inspired the other. From southern Germany Kirchner brought the woodcut, which he revived under the stimulus of the old prints from Nurnberg. Heckel carved wooden figures again; while Kirchner enriched this technique by using polychromy in his figures and sought the rhythm of compact form in stone and pewter. Schmidt-Rottluff made the first lithographs on stone. The first exhibition of the group was held in its own rooms in Dresden; people ignored it. However, Dresden's old culture and the charm of its landscape provided much stimulus. Here the "Brücke" also found its first art historical support—Cranach, Beham, and other German masters of the Middle Ages. Amiet was made a member of the "Brücke" during his exhibition in Dresden. Nolde followed him in 1905. His fantastic individuality gave a new stamp to the "Brücke." He enriched our exhibitions with his interesting etching technique and learned about woodcuts from us. On his invitation Schmidt-Rottluff visited him at Alsen. Later Schmidt-Rottluff and Heckel went to Dangast. The harsh air of the North Sea induced Schmidt-Rottluff especially to develop a kind of monumental impressionism. Meanwhile, in Dresden Kirchner continued his compact compositions; he discovered a parallel to his own work in Negro sculpture and South Sea beam carvings in the ethnographic museum. The intense desire to free himself from academic sterility led Pechstein to the "Brücke." Kirchner and Pechstein went to Gollverode to work together. The exhibition of the Brücke with its new members took place in the Salon Richter, Dresden. This exhibition greatly impressed the young artists of Dresden. Heckel and Kirchner tried to relate the exhibition space to the new painting. Kirchner decorated the rooms with murals and batiks on which Heckel had also worked. In 1907 Nolde left the "Brücke." Heckel and Kirchner went to the Moritzburg lakes in order to study the nude in the open air. In Dangast Schmidt-Rottluff worked to perfect his color rhythm. Heckel went to Italy and brought back the inspiration of Etruscan art. With a commission to paint decorations Pechstein went to Berlin. He tried to bring the new painting into the Secession. In Dresden Kirchner discovered how to print lithographs by hand. Bleyl, who had become a teacher, left the "Brücke" in 1909. Pechstein joined Heckel in Dangast. In the same year both men joined Kirchner at Moritzburg in order to paint nudes by the lakes. In 1910 the "New Secession" was formed after younger German painters were rejected by the old Secession. In order to support Pechstein's position in the new Secession, Heckel,

Kirchner, and Schmidt-Rottluff also became members. In the first exhibition of the N. S. they got to know Mueller.... In order to keep "Brücke" efforts pure, the members of the "Brücke" left the New Secession. They promised each other that they would only have joint exhibitions in the "Secession" in Berlin. Following this there was an exhibit of "Brücke" work which filled the whole Gurlitt gallery. Pechstein betrayed the group by becoming a member of the Secession, and he was expelled. The Sonderbund invited the "Brücke" to its Cologne exhibition in 1912 and commissioned Heckel and Kirchner to decorate the chapel there. The majority of the "Brücke" members are now in Berlin. Even here the "Brücke" preserved its intrinsic character. Inwardly unified, the group transmits its new way of working together to all modern art production in Germany. Uninfluenced by contemporary currents, Cubism, Futurism, etc., it fights for a humane culture, which is the basis of true art. The "Brücke" owes its present-day position in art to these efforts.