

**Jill Lloyd, “Urban Exoticism in the Cabaret and Circus,”  
from *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity*  
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By 1914, primitivism had become a central issue in the debates about modernism and modernity in German art. After the 1910 split in the Berlin Secession, when the Expressionists’ primitivism began to be acknowledged as a critical force, its relevance was questioned in both the naturalist and “avant-garde” camps of German modernism. In a controversial exchange of articles with Franz Marc in 1912, Max Beckmann condemned:

    this dependence on ancient primitive styles which in their own times grew organically out of a common religion and mystic awareness. [I find it] weak because Gauguin and the like weren’t able to create types out of their own confused and fragmented times which could serve us in the way that the gods and heroes served the peoples of old. Matisse is an even sadder representative of this ethnography museum art—from the Asian department.

Beckmann attacked the Expressionists’ primitivism for its lack of intrinsic relation to their own historical tradition. Two years later, Ludwig Meidner condemned the fake naivety of the primitivist world view. Answering the rallying call of Futurist avant-gardism, he demanded that “all the younger painters get together and flood out exhibitions with big city pictures.” He continued,

    Unfortunately all kinds of primitive races have impressed some of the young German painters and nothing seems more important to them than Bushman painting and Aztec sculpture... But let’s be honest! Let’s admit that we are not negroes or Christians of the early Middle Ages!... Why then imitate the mannerisms and points of view of past ages, why proclaim incapacity a virtue? Are those crude and shabby figures we now see in all the exhibits really an expression of the complicated spirit of modern times?

Kirchner’s Berlin street scene, *Five Women on the Street* (1913) shows his engagement with city imagery. But what marks out these predatory figures with their mask-like faces and jagged Africanized forms from contemporary city painting, is precisely the paradox of their primitivism, which goes hand in hand with their modernity. In his diaries and letters Kirchner spoke repeatedly of his desire to uncover a style of beauty appropriate to his own times and described Emil Nolde in contrast as “often sickly and too primitive.” Were the primitivist references in his Berlin street scenes merely, as Meidner suggests, a kind of counterfeit clumsiness, a use of style inappropriate to subject? Or did they represent an attempt on Kirchner’s part to visualize the complex and contradictory forces, the backward and forward looking tendencies, underlying modernity? First, we must try to answer these questions by exploring the relationship between Kirchner’s consciously modern and primitivist subjects in the Dresden years: the scenes of urban entertainment and the bathers. Then we must turn to the Berlin paintings to see how these two aspects of his work met and fused in his single, powerfully contradictory images of the street.

Two years before Meidner's attack on Expressionist primitivism, Kandinsky had approached the same subject from a diametrically opposite viewpoint. In accordance with Georg Simmel's double-edged notion of modernity, Meidner regarded the temper of his times as a positive challenge; for Kandinsky it was an unavoidable ill. Both agreed, however, that the modern mind could not replicate the innocence and authenticity of the "primitive" soul. In *Über das geistige in der Kunst*, Kandinsky admitted that, despite an affinity of "internal truths," primitive and modern artists were divided by an unbridgeable gulf:

our minds ... are injected with the despair of unbelief, of lack of purpose and ideal... This doubt and the still harsh tyranny of the materialist philosophy, divide our soul sharply from that of the primitives. Our soul rings cracked when we seek to play upon it, as does a costly vase, long buried in the earth, which is found to have a flaw in it when it is dug up once more. For this reason the primitive phase, through which we are now passing, with its temporary similarity of form, can only be of short duration.

In his own paintings before 1914, Kandinsky did not fully realize the implications of this thesis. Certainly the broad notion of the primitive, which he and the Blaue Reiter artists formulated in their 1912 Almanac as a "spiritual" alternative to the materialistic emphasis of Western Realism, was too imprecise and wide-ranging to provide a significant formal model. A particular aspect like Egyptian stone reliefs could be extracted from the general concept and used in the artists' own works." But generally they had to rethink the implications of the "primitive" in terms of the stylistic possibilities of their times. For Kandinsky this involved a move towards the dematerialized forms of abstraction, but he continued to represent the battle between materialism and spirituality characteristic of his day, in terms of the subjects and iconography of his "primitive" sources. The saints and angels who populate his apocalyptic compositions are drawn directly from the biblical woodcuts and folk motifs illustrated in the Almanac. Only August Macke, in his 1912 essay *Masken* (Masks), spoke of the need to redefine the "primitive" in terms of the subjects and experiences of the present, mentioning the cinema, military marches and cabaret as modern equivalents for tribal ceremonies. His own paintings, like *Mounted Indians by a Tent* and *Indians on Horseback*, draw their primitivist subjects from the world of popular entertainment inspired by Karl May, and they come closest to die Brücke in mood and feeling. There has been a tendency to view this exotic modern/primitive subject painting as an inferior precursor to stylistically integrated primitivism, but as we have already seen in the Brücke studio scenes, attempts to apply these modernist preconceptions to German Expressionism are seriously flawed. Precisely because their primitivism had a conceptual basis which went beyond questions of formal influence, exoticism was an important constituent. It provided a rich meeting ground for elements of the "primitive" and the modern, which involved subjects as well as styles, and a network of shifting relationships between the two. Let us look first at how this occurred in the Brücke artists' consciously modern cabaret and circus scenes.

### *The Cabaret and Circus*

Themes of urban entertainment, more specifically cabaret and circus, which began to appear in the work of Kirchner, Heckel and Pechstein in 1908 had their most obvious roots in French nineteenth-century art, beginning with Daumier and continuing via Manet, Degas, Toulouse-

Lautrec and Seurat to Van Dongen and the Fauvists. Within this tradition there were of course many variants: theatre, ballet and cafe-concert became part of a rich patchwork of urban life subjects. Approaches were also varied, ranging from Daumier's and Manet's primary interest in the audience and spectators, to Degas' dramatic contrasts between the glamour of performance and the workings of back-stage life. The metaphoric potential of these subjects guaranteed their potency and lasting relevance. Themes of urban entertainment had strong Baudelairean overtones in Manet, Degas and Seurat, symbolizing the artifice both of modern life and picture making. In Toulouse-Lautrec's work, cabaret subjects crossed with the theme of outsiders: prostitutes, clowns, bohemians - drifting people on the fringes of society, who provided a metaphor for the status of the modern artist as an outsider.

There is some evidence that the first circus and cabaret subjects by the Brücke artists were inspired by French precedents. During Pechstein's study trip to Paris in 1908, he established contact with Kees Van Dongen, who probably arranged the 1908 Fauve exhibition alongside die Brücke at Emil Richter's gallery in Dresden. Van Dongen was the Fauve artist who most frequently treated cabaret themes, alongside his paintings of prostitutes, courtesans and dancers. During Pechstein's Parisian stay a one-man exhibition of Van Dongen was mounted at Henri Kahnweiler's gallery in March 1908 and he was also represented at *Les Independants* that spring. In the Kahnweiler catalogue he was described as a true master of dance and cafe-concert subjects, and in the 1908 Richter exhibition one of his exhibits was an unidentified circus artist. Reinhardt has pointed out that the appeal of these works lay in their open sexuality and in Van Dongen's sensual and lively handling of movement and color. As early as 1909 Paul Fechter remarked on the similarity between Van Dongen's and Pechstein's works, in his review of the Berlin Secession that year, writing, "Van Dongen seems to be one of the strongest talents, although this time we only sense this indirectly." Van Dongen's influence can be felt in Jawlensky's and Pechstein's paintings, notably *The Yellow Cloth*, which Fechter described as a strong piece. In 1910-11 references to Van Dongen's work continued to appear in Pechstein's paintings, such as the large-scale *Dance*, which Max Osborn described as "a group from a wild and low variety or from a bordel or the hareem of a fairy-tale prince." Echoing Baudelaire, he remarked that the central dancer was dressed with "brutal refinement," and the background (which also relates to Otto Mueller's studio decorations) showed "oriental hangings" with ornamental spikes and curves. On a stylistic level some of Kirchner's 1909 paintings like *Reclining Nude With Pipe* (1909) and *Portrait of Dodo Seated* (1909), come closer to Van Dongen than to any other of the Fauve artists. But the Brücke artists' experience of the cabaret was also on a more direct level. From the winter of 1908-9 postcard greetings began to record visits made by Kirchner, Heckel and Pechstein to cabaret and circus performances in Dresden, Hamburg and Berlin.

Cabaret or variety acts had moved from France to Germany in the mid-nineteenth century, beginning as incidental entertainment in bars and cafes known as *Singspielhallen* (song and dance halls). Then from the 1870s, the cabaret developed in two directions: first, the popular *Tingeltangel* and secondly the high class *Varietepalast*. The acts to be seen in both were varied, ranging from song and dance to comedians, acrobats, snake-charmers, magicians and - after the British model - groups of women performers known as "sisters." The five Barrison Sisters who appeared in the famous Wintergarten variety theatre in the 1890s in Berlin were a renowned example, and their act was symptomatic of the taste of the times. Appearing in children's clothes, they evinced a peculiar mixture of naivety and lasciviousness, which is reminiscent of the note

struck in the paintings and drawings of Franzi and Marcella by Kirchner and Heckel. One of their most popular songs ran:

Papa won't buy me a Wauwau, Wauwau  
Papa won't buy me a Wauwau  
I have a little cat  
I like her like a pet  
But I want to have a Wauwau Wau.

At the end of the act they turned their backs to the audience and raised their skirts to reveal layers of frilly underwear—such as we see in Kirchner's Hamburg Dancers. While "family variety" stressed the role of comedians, acrobats and magicians, sexuality and erotica were a constant theme in the evening cabaret acts. At the lower end of the scale it was common practice for the dancers and waitresses to double as prostitutes.

The Brücke artists' postcards from 1909 onwards are a fascinating source for the history of cabaret at the beginning of the twentieth century in Germany. They record a large variety of acts ranging from cancan dancers to trapeze acts, boxing matches and jugglers. Kirchner, Heckel and Pechstein visited all types of variety and cabaret venues as their postcards refer to famous acts like the Albion Sisters, who performed at the Wintergarten, the Apollotheater and the Passagetheater in Berlin, and to more obviously down-market performances. A postcard from Kirchner to Heckel dated 8 January 1911 and posted in Berlin, depicting a dancing couple, carries the cryptic message, "the women are a bit rough."

During this period, the presence of acrobatic acts in the cabarets meant that an extremely close relationship with the circus existed, and it is not always possible to tell which Brücke works refer to circus and which to cabaret. In May 1905, for example, an advert appeared in the *Dresdener Rundschau*, advertising a new family circus-variety at the Bergkeller in Dresden, and in the *Dresdener Salonblatt* in April 1910, a review of the Zirkus Angelo reminds the public that "some variety numbers should not be missing in a modern circus."

In both circus and cabaret the Brücke artists would have seen a wide variety of "exotic" acts, which became an increasingly popular attraction during the pre-war years of colonial expansion in Germany. Reference has already been made to the crucial role played by the popular native displays at the Dresden zoo in 1909 and 1910, which sparked the young artists' imaginations and provided a vivid and romantic picture of "primitive" lifestyles. At the beginning of the century the circus also displayed natives for entertainment value. Flagenbeck in Hamburg acquired a whole Indian village for his circus, which was to be seen at the Dresden zoological gardens in April 1905. Sarrasam's circus showed Indian natives, Chinese acrobats and a Senegalese temple dancer, while the "Indianer Geo Dear" appeared at the Zirkus Angelo in Dresden in April 1910.

Although the zoological gardens were the most important source for the Brücke artists' knowledge of non-European peoples, these other forums of popular entertainment are not negligible. In 1905, the year of their group foundation, numerous advertisements for exotic acts in the cabaret featured in the local Dresden press. In February 1905 a "Hawaiian princess" was appearing at the Central Theater, and a Japanese troupe of acrobats, "the Naniwa," made a guest appearance at the Vittoria-Salon, the second major Dresden cabaret. In September that year at the Eden-Theater in Dresden-Neustadt, Otto Endlein's appearance as "a musketeer, like a gatecrasher in a Harem" must have provided the kind of visual experience that Kirchner

captured in his contemporary illustrations to *The Arabian Nights*. These cabaret acts continued throughout the Dresden years (in February 1908, for example, Javanese girls danced at the Vittoria-Salon), and in Berlin a rich scala of exotic performers were recorded in the pages of the *BIZ* before 1914. Photographs of these acts show that few genuine non-European performers appeared. In January 1910 the "snake-dancer" "Miss Harrison" was to be seen at the Berlin Passagetheater, followed by Makara, the "Javanese" snake-charmer, whose photograph also appeared in the *Dresdener Illustrierte Neueste*. In February, a sister performer met a sorry fate: "beautiful Mirka ... a snake-dancer who was recently overcome by her snakes during a performance and killed." In May 1912 the "Indian" dancer Roshanava, daughter of an English colonial official, was appearing at the Eispalast in Berlin; she was followed in June by Tortola Valencia, "a new Egyptian dancer who is presently enjoying huge success on the European stage." In August "the Egyptian snake dancer All'Aida" made her debut. It was this kind of act that inspired Ludwig von Hoffman's *Exotic Dance*, illustrated in *Kunst and Künstler* in 1908. Indeed, popular dance routines also drew romantically on non-European examples. In 1909 the new and fashionable "Apache Dance" was illustrated in the *Dresdener Illustrierte Neueste*, and described as "the dance of an Apache with his lover... the very basic feelings of this class of mankind are symbolically expressed."

These cabaret, circus and variety acts were an important source for the Brücke artists' concept of primitive exoticism, because they occurred right at the heart of urban entertainment. A photograph of the famous Tortola Valencia on a donkey in Hyde Park, which appeared in the *BIZ* in July 1912, shows how these dancers, just like non-European natives, were seen to occupy a mediating zone between the primitive and the modern: in this case she appears in a collage of photographs between "King David of Uganda, the ruler of the powerful Central African Empire who is presently on a tour of Europe" and the Austrian military traitor, Colonel Redl.

There is much evidence that *die Brücke* were fully aware of this aspect of cabaret and circus. In the first volume of his autobiography, *Das Figene Leben* (1931; *A Life of His Own*), Emil Nolde, who began to draw and paint cabaret subjects in 1910, records how he spent his wages visiting the "song and negro cabarets" the north of Berlin at the turn of the century." Postcards from Heckel, Pechstein and Kirchner record Chinese jugglers, Russian dancers and exotic belly dancers. For example, a postcard dated 6 May 1911 to Heckel's dancer girlfriend Sidi from "Ernst and Erich," records "Chinese and then an Indian dancer," in the Flora Variete in Dresden, which Berndt Hünlich has related to a particular show beginning on 3 May 1911: "Tschin Maa's 8 holy 'Chungusen,' world famous Chinese juggler and magic ian. What's more – Ruth St Radjhah, Indian dancer and a terrific opening program." This summer a variety act in the garden at Hammers Hotel in the Augsburger Strasse must have been particularly attractive, as both artists returned to see the performance again. On 10 May 1911 Heckel drew the Chinese "Waterjuggler" on a postcard to Sidi, writing, "once again in the Flora today. The Chinese are really good, the costumes wonderfully colorful." Kirchner made a drawing and lithograph of the "Indian" dancer that summer and similar subjects recur in contemporary graphics and paintings: for example, Kirchner's *Turkish Ballet* (1911), *Indian Dancer* (1911), *Negro Dancer* (1909-20) *Negro Dancer* (1910-11) and *Negro Dance*. In his *Indian Dancer in Yellow Skirt* (1911) from the Flora Variete, we also see an exotic background stage. Similar subjects were taken up by the New Secession artists after 1910: at the Cologne Sonderbund in 1912 George Tappert exhibited two such paintings, *Mulatto* and *Negro Operetta*.

Some paintings and drawings include decorations in variety theatres which make obvious reference to exotic, non-European models. Kirchner's *Panama Girls* (1910) and *Variete* (1911)

show decorations inspired by Indian and Far Eastern art, which also influenced the ornamental backdrop in Pechstein's oil painting *Cabaret*. Non-European art was actually used in cabaret acts. A backstage photograph of Ernst von Wolzogen's Buntes Theater c.1901, which made guest appearances in Dresden in 1905, shows a shadow puppet performance underway in Javanese style. A postcard from Pechstein to Heckel dated 19 January 1910 depicting a shadow puppet behind a fashionable woman's head probably records a similar act. As I have already suggested, Mueller's studio decorations were influenced by exotic cabaret sets.

Some of the Brücke drawings and paintings depicting cabaret and circus subjects also refer on a stylistic level to non-European art. In Kirchner's drawing *Panama Girls* the same jagged, articulated movements and gestures which also appear in his 1909 sketch for the woodcut *Bathers Throwing Reeds* recur. In front of the exotic "Eastern" cabaret decorations the girls appear as Palau-like figures, as if he is playing off his own contemporary interests in non-European art, Ajanta and Palau, against each other. The exotic "oriental" emphasis of the cabaret provided an important stimulus for the persistence of Eastern styles alongside the Brücke artists' "tribal" primitivism, and it is not too far-fetched to presume that Kirchner's enthusiasm for the "Indian" dancer at the Flora in May 1911 related closely to his contemporary interest in Griffith's book about Ajanta cave painting. This mixed style recurs in contemporary cabaret subjects by Heckel such as *Dancers* (1910/2), where the repeated movements are inspired by the dance routine in part, but the frieze-like effect is reminiscent of the Palau carvings and, in this case, Egyptian stone reliefs.

It is in fact likely that some of the exotic routines in contemporary cabaret would have provoked ready associations with non-European art. A postcard from Kirchner to Sidi dated February 1912 shows a *Dancer doing the Splits*, with the message "Today I saw my first full splits." The spectacle seems to have brought to mind the large, carved gable-figures in the round over the entrance to Palau club houses, as Kirchner depicts the dancer in a similar way. In May 1912, during their Cologne visit, Heckel and Kirchner reported to Sidi that the variety was "not much to write home about." Kirchner's drawing shows three women dancers in a style closely related to his Ajanta drawings, as if the exotic act once again brought the wall paintings to mind. Indeed, many of Kirchner's 1911 drawings after the Ajanta illustrations in Griffith's book show exotic figures dancing and playing musical instruments. The most fruitful way of looking at the relationship between the exoticism of the pre-war cabaret and the Brücke artists' attraction to non-European art is in reciprocal or correlative terms. Certainly the exoticism of the cabaret helped form and shape their notion of the primitive, and in turn the visual and stylistic influence of non-European art fed back into their depictions of the acts.

On the most obvious level it was the real exoticism of the cabaret that made it a relevant source of inspiration and a subject for Brücke primitivism. As I have aimed to show, this link was well established by the first decade of the century, when the cabaret performer Patty Frank was assembling his impressive collection of North American Indian art, which formed the core of the Karl May museum in Radebeul in 1928. It is also likely that some of the more far-reaching implications of the cabaret in its literary form related to the primitivism of die Brücke on a deeper level. At the turn of the century, cabaret began to attract the attention of many intellectuals and artists who saw in its lively and popular status an opportunity for artistic reform. Julius Bierbaum's novel *Stilpe* (1897) recounts the story of a bohemian hero who founds a literary variety theatre, Momus, with aspirations to renew the relationship between art and life through the energy, free sexuality and immediacy of the cabaret. Stilpe writes with enthusiasm about his program for Momus:

The Renaissance of all arts and the whole of life with Tingeltangel as a model!  
What is art today? A colourful glittering cobweb in the corner of life. We want to  
throw it as a golden net over the whole people and the whole of life. Then  
everyone will come to us in the Tingeltangel, they will flee the theatres and  
museums as anxiously as they flee the churches and we shall dance in a new  
culture. . .

Bierbaum also made a selection of contemporary German poetry, the *Deutsche Chansons*, including poems by himself, Richard Dehmel, Arno Holz, Detlev von Liliencron, Frank Wedekind and Ernst von Wolzogen, for use in a future artistic variety theatre. In his preface to this collection he related his aspirations for a literary cabaret to contemporary *Jugendstil* developments in the visual arts: "The whole of life must be conquered by art. Painters are making chairs today with the ambition that they shouldn't be something to admire in museums but really use, without compromising their sense of quality. This is how we want to write poetry, not just to be read in solitude but to be sung by a crowd looking for action."

The idea of merging art and life in *Jugendstil* fashion and affecting a mutual regeneration was also discussed at the time with reference to dance. Carl Einstein, in an open letter to the dancer Napierkowska, written on the occasion of her appearance at the Berlin Wintergarten in January 1912, continued the attack on the narrow confines of conventional intellectualism: "While our eyes forgot all those books and their intellectual offerings, we watched a body that was self-sufficient and awoke stirrings in us... art and life met, as if in a whip which the sun caresses and which moves and dances in the wind."

In the life style and art of die Brücke, the *Jugendstil* aspiration to affect an interchange between life and art had been transferred to the private world of the studios and developed via the primitivist impetus of the studio decorations. Interestingly, Max Pechstein's 1910 paintings of dance subjects share ambiguous locations—possibly a cabaret stage, or possibly Mueller's studio. In Heckel's drawing *The Rehearsal* he depicts a dance rehearsal in his studio; the gestures of the dancer rhyme with those of the surrounding carved figures and mirror reflections, echoing the shape of the rounded hills in the decorative wall-hangings behind.

Another shared aspect of Brücke primitivism and the discussion around the cabaret at the beginning of the century, was the influence of Nietzsche. In *Zarathustra* Nietzsche stressed the liberating and regenerative powers of dance to debunk and renew fossilized bourgeois values. In Ernst von Wolzogen's *Überbrettel* cabaret in Berlin and Wedekind's *Elf Scharfrichter* in Munich, satire and political cabaret were used to effect a Nietzschean attack on bourgeois society, although they continued to attract middle-class audiences. All these associations must be held in mind when we look at cabaret images by Brücke artists. It was not until 1911 that they became involved in literary cabaret in Berlin, when Schmidt-Rottluff and Heckel designed programs for the Neo-Pathetische Kabarett, and Kirchner drew scenery for Simon Guttman's pantomimes. At this stage their mutual Nietzschean affiliations would have become obvious.

Like their early Dresden cityscapes, the depictions of cabaret and circus scenes by Kirchner, Heckel and Pechstein before 1911 are relatively straightforward, and seldom display the richness of visual association and compositional planning we find in the studio paintings. In drawings like *Dancer with a Blue Dress* (1908) or paintings like *Czarda Dancers* (1908-20) and *Tightrope Walker*, Kirchner relishes the color and movement of the cabaret acts, often building the pictures around intense juxtapositions of complementary colors. Occasionally he picks up on

the potential for sexual abandon in the cabaret scenes, a subject of current interest in the studio and bathers subjects. His drawing *Hamburg Dancers* shows the dancers with legs splayed and underwear showing in an attitude of full-blooded sexual abandon, very different from the titillation of the Barrison Sisters.

It is the intensity of expression in these paintings, with their planes of bright contrasting colors, animated compositions and extreme gestures, that infuse them with a spirit of Nietzschean vitalism, a "coming alive" of the image which we have already observed as a transforming force in their early *Jugendstil*-oriented drawings and graphics. The recurrent motifs of dancers throwing up their legs and tightrope walkers, which feature in both Kirchner's and Heckel's cabaret and circus scenes, are also Nietzschean images. In *Zarathustra* the tightrope walker is used as a metaphor of transformation in a similar way to the bridge, and in the chapter "Of The Higher Man", Nietzsche writes: "Lift up your hearts my brothers, high! higher! And do not forget your legs, too, you fine dancers; and better still, stand on your heads!... You Higher men, the worst about you is; none of you has learned to dance as a man ought to dance—to dance beyond yourselves!"

Reinhardt suggests that Kirchner's cabaret and circus paintings may also have been influenced by literary descriptions like Martin Beradt's *Tagebuch eines Dekadenten* (1909; *Diary of a Decadent*). But there is no reason to suppose a direct influence, and it should suffice to say that a large number of fictional publications with similar themes appeared in these years. Hermann Bang's *Die Vier Teufel*, (1911; *The Four Devils*) and Felix Hollander's *Der Eid* (1911; *The Oath*) are two further examples. It is more relevant, considering the tone and intensity of pictorial realization, to consider seriously the recurrence of Nietzschean motifs.

After 1911, cabaret and circus subjects were used by Kirchner as a sign of his commitment to modernity. His woodcut illustrations for Herwarth Walden's newly founded magazine *Der Sturm* in 1911-12 mostly showed these subjects, and he used his woodcut *Dancers in the Eispalast* (1911) as the design for the title page of a planned magazine, *Zeit im Bild*. After 1912 the free, swinging movements of the earlier scenes are often replaced by a tighter, jerky geometry, particularly in the woodcuts, so that the figures appear almost wooden and marionette-like. Similar stylistic developments can be seen in paintings and drawings of other subjects at this date, associated with Kirchner's experiments with Cubist style after 1912. In paintings like *Circus Rider* (1914) and *Blue Artists*, a Cubist multi-viewpoint is pushed to radical expressive extremes—bird's-eye and worm's-eye views are combined with frontal presentations. These clashing viewpoints suggest the actual experiences of spectating in the circus, like sensations of vertigo, which are written into our observation of the paintings and are inscribed in Kirchner's subjects. In this way he uses conceptual pictorial devices to bring his paintings closer to visual and emotive experience. Elsewhere in the later variety and circus scenes like his large drawing *At the Variety* (1911) Kirchner frames us off from the spectacle by including spectators inside the scene, making us reflect on our own act of observation. The most sophisticated treatment of this kind of device occurs in Nolde's 1911 cabaret scenes like the engraving *At the Cabaret II*, which taps a complicated, ambiguous mood, involving an ironic exchange of roles between actors and spectators. This reflects Nolde's critical attitude to the artificiality and role-playing involved in city life. Erich Heckel's *Clown with a Doll* (1912/9) also presents a more complex mood, reflecting some of the tragi-comic implications of clowning. Generally the shift that can be observed in the treatment of cabaret and circus themes from 1908 to 1914 moves from an intensely direct, celebratory and "alive" handling of theme and style to a more circumspect, self-conscious mode, including on occasion an element of ironic distancing between spectator and



spectacle. Kirchner's *Circus Rider* and *Blue Artists* provide a unique combination of direct emotional effects and distancing devices by taking as their subject the complex mixture of involvement and voyeurism we experience as spectators.

The shift from relatively straightforward to more complex pictorial treatment, relates to the rich and multifold associations of the cabaret during this period. While cabaret was seen in literary and intellectual circles as a symbol of reform and renewal it also came to symbolize a pace of living, an engagement with the rush and excitement of the city in pre-war Germany. In her autobiography, *Eine Tür steht Offen* (1954; *A Door Stands Open*) the actress Tilla Durieux described her experience of the cabaret and nightclubs: "Lunapark, Halensce, Palais de Dance—one-step and wooden leg... it was as if everyone was suffering from an unconscious anxiety - driven to enjoy life, to laugh, to mess around, before the outbreak of horror."

Also within the apparently popular and simple framework of cabaret performance there were rich opportunities for irony and nuance. Style in cabaret relied on setting off one mood against another in ironic juxtaposition, and this determined the popular as well as the sophisticated literary cabaret. The Barrison Sisters' child-like clothes acted as a piquant foil to the prurient tone of their act, and the exotic trappings, snake-charmers and belly dancers set off the mood of urban sophistication. Internal contradiction as an ironic device also characterized the performances: an article in the *BIZ* in September 1911 advertised, "a very unique Curiosity, ..a white Negress who is presently performing in a Berlin entertainment palace." The following month an article described the influence of British and American black comedy on the historical development of clowning. Originally the clown had performed acrobatic acts during the intermission, but by 1911 his musical and acrobatic talents were set off against his foolish appearance, and he often used an elegant woman or gentleman as a foil. What is important here, and worthy of our attention, is the method of internal juxtaposition and polemical definition in the cabaret form, which we shall find recurring frequently in our analysis of the relationship between primitivism and modernity in the art of *die Brücke*.

Interestingly, contemporary observers regarded the double-edged references to primitivism and modernity in *die Brücke* art in negative and positive terms. For example, Richard Stiller's review of their second exhibition at the Emil Richter Gallery in Dresden in 1909 suggested that "it is time to follow a particular artistic goal single-mindedly, instead of flirting in a half-barbaric half-civilized manner- for nothing but that manner's sake." But in 1920, Max Osborn's commentary on the Berlin phase of *die Brücke* regarded the implicit paradox of their primitivist modernity in a more favorable light. He wrote: "the uncompromising modernity of their intentions and their outlook found rich nourishment in this city, this genuine product of the times. This may seem to contradict the impulse to return to a primitive and absolute state ... Civilization should be overcome—but through civilization, together with civilization." [...]