

**Stephanie Barron,**  
**Introduction to *German Expressionism, 1915-1925: The Second Generation***  
**(Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1988): 10-37.**

The notion that all the significant achievements of German Expressionism occurred before 1914 is a familiar one. Until recently most scholars and almost all exhibitions of German Expressionist work have drawn the line with the 1913 dissolution of Die Brücke (The Bridge) in Berlin or the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Peter Selz's pioneering study *German Expressionist Painting*, published in 1957, favored 1914 as a terminus as did Wolf-Dieter Dube's *German Expressionism*, which appeared in 1977.

It is true that by 1914 personal differences had led the Brücke artists to dissolve their association, and Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider) had disintegrated when Wassily Kandinsky returned from Munich to Russia and Franz Marc volunteered for war service. Other artists' associations also broke up when their members were drafted. Thus, the outbreak of the war has provided a convenient endpoint for many historians, who see the postwar artistic activities of Ernst Barlach, Max Beckmann, Oskar Kokoschka, Käthe Kollwitz, and others as individual, not group responses and describe the 1920s as the period of developments at the Bauhaus in Weimar or of the growing popularity of Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity). The years 1915 - 25 have been lost, or certainly not adequately defined, as a coherent and potent, albeit brief, idealistic period in the evolution of German Expressionism.

More recent scholarship, including Dube's *Expressionists and Expressionism* (1983) and Donald E. Gordon's *Expressionism: Art and Idea* (1987), sees the movement as surviving into the 1920s. Gordon maintains that a second generation of Expressionist literature has been recognized for years now, while similar recognition has not been accorded to the visual arts. He dates the visual side of German Expressionism along with the literary side from 1905 to about 1923.<sup>1</sup>

This exhibition and its catalogue examine the intense artistic activity that emerged throughout Germany after the First World War, particularly in the wake of the 1918 November Revolution. This activity was not confined to one or two cities. Rather, it spread from the early centers, such as Berlin and Dresden, to Barmen, Bielefeld, Cologne, Darmstadt, Düsseldorf, Halle, Hamburg, Hanover, Karlsruhe, Kiel, Magdeburg, and Munich. We shall attempt to reveal the interconnections among the short-lived groups of radical artists (some of which also had common members), examine contributions to art journals, and document the interest of the few museum directors, dealers, and critics who championed their work. These artists were for the most part outspoken political activists who sought in their work and in their associations to create a "new man" and a new society that would replace the one with which they had become so disillusioned.

In German Expressionist art there is a recognizable difference between works created before the war and those created in the postwar period. The artists included in the present exhibition were for the most part ten years or so younger than the pioneer German Expressionists; most were in their late teens or early twenties when the war broke out. Not only did many of them have life-changing wartime experiences, but they came to maturity in a Germany considered a pariah among the nations of Western Europe. Compared with the work of the first generation, the art of the second generation places more emphasis on content and

addresses social and political issues with greater frequency. The artists were to discover however that an artistic revolution was not necessarily compatible with a political revolution.

The concept of second-generation Expressionism implies a first generation: the artists of Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter, who emerged in Germany between 1905 and 1913. The first group to manifest itself in the history of German Expressionism was Die Brücke, organized by the young student of architecture Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and his associates Fritz Bleyl, Erich Heckel, and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, who were also studying architecture in Dresden. They were soon joined by Cuno Amiet, Axel Gallen, Emil Nolde, and Max Pechstein. In Dresden, and after 1911 in Berlin, they lived, worked, and exhibited together until the breakup of the group in 1913. Their manifesto of 1906 proclaimed their passion for art and a burning desire to free themselves from the constraints of social convention; they sought to establish a "bridge" to the future. They were stimulated by the art of Africa and Oceania, which they saw in abundance at Dresden's Ethnographic Museum, and by the art of Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, and Edvard Munch, which could be seen in various gallery exhibitions. Many of their most daring experiments were in printmaking, especially the woodcut, which they revived after several centuries of unpopularity among artists. The second group, Der Blaue Reiter, was founded in Munich by Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, -whose work was evolving toward nonobjectivity. Their 1912 publication, the almanac *Der Blaue Reiter*, was one of the most important books of modern art. This anthology included articles on art, music, and theater and was illustrated with photos of contemporary, Renaissance, and non-Western images. The second generation of German Expressionists took for granted the break with traditional art that had already been achieved in Dresden, Berlin, and Munich, and they drew inspiration from these examples. They knew that their work would hardly find favor with the staid academic establishment or the bourgeois art public.

The second generation suffered from war-induced disillusionment and were dissatisfied with postwar German society; they joined in with the cry for a new, classless society. They saw the war as a liberating force that had purged the old era and set the stage for a new one in which artists would be prophets. Writer Friedrich Burschell remembered that in 1919 "for... friends and myself and for millions of front-line soldiers the abdication of the German royal family and of the existing power structure meant not only the end of the senseless, murderous war, not merely salvation and liberation, but far, far more. It meant new hope, the assurance even that out of the chaos a new and better world would arise."<sup>2</sup> Berlin poet Kinner von Dressler epitomized the mood in 1919: "The war./End of a violent, lying, material epoch./Decay of the transitory body./Rising of the soul."<sup>3</sup>

In Germany the November Revolution, just one year after its Russian counterpart, was brought about by much the same disillusionment and unrest. Although not nearly as violent or as lengthy as the Bolshevik revolution, it bore similar fruit in the art world. Knowledge of artistic events in Russia reached Germany through a report in *Das Kunstblatt* (The Art Paper) in March 1919.<sup>4</sup> During the next years various artists' groups throughout Germany committed themselves to radical change and to the emergence of a new society. A number of interesting comparisons can be made between German and Russian art of this period. In both countries there was a widespread surge of avant-garde artistic activity, seen by the artists as a panacea for the social problems all around them. In Russia between 1917 and 1921 the artists were in alliance with Lenin's government. Anatoly Lunarcharsky, the new Soviet Minister for Enlightenment, used his office to support an astonishing array of avant-garde activities: theatrical performances, the establishment of museums of modern art, and the design and erection of monuments. Artists,

architects, writers, poets, and critics joined hands in the quest for a new society. Brief alliances were formed among artists, dramatists, and politicians. This heady artistic euphoria came to a halt in the mid-1920s. Ultimately both the Russian avant-garde and the German Expressionists were overpowered by totalitarian systems that attempted to wipe out all vestiges of their accomplishments.

German artists had not all been opposed to the war from the beginning; their changing attitude toward war can be traced by studying some of the periodicals of the time: *Kriegszeit* (Wartime), *Der Bildermann* (The Picture Man), and *Die Aktion* (Action).<sup>5</sup> Articles and illustrations show how their initial enthusiasm gave way to a growing pessimism.

*Kriegszeit* was published between 1914 and 1916 by Paul Cassirer. Together with his artist friends, he supported the war as a purifying nationalist and anticapitalist force. Ernst Barlach contributed his famous lithograph *Der heilige Krieg* (The Holy War) to a 1914 issue: it shows a German patriot surging forward larger than life, an invincible warrior ready for battle. As casualties began to mount, enthusiasm for the war waned, and the magazine ceased publication. A month later Cassirer launched *Der Bildermann*. Eighteen issues appeared from 1916 to 1918, and they provide evidence of changes in the artists' attitudes. Their lithographs and poetry draw attention to the plight of homeless children and other consequences of war. Horror and disillusionment had set in. Franz Pfemfert's *Die Aktion* had appeared weekly since 1911. Like its publisher the journal was highly political. It reflected the changing views of many of the second-generation Expressionists, who began to protest against what was happening in their country and agitate for government action and reform. By 1918 *Die Aktion* had become the major outlet for their political beliefs, and they contributed to it regularly. Along with poets, playwrights, and critics, most of the major Expressionist artists—Conrad Felixmüller, George Grosz, Kirchner, Kokoschka, Marc, Ludwig Meidner, Egon Schiele, Schmidt-Rottluff—were featured.

The artists of the second generation shared with the founding generation their sympathy for the poor (whose numbers grew following the famine of 1916) and their attraction to the pulsating urban landscape as typified by Berlin. But it was the second generation who seemed filled with hope for a utopian society in which art would play an important role. The groups they formed were not dissimilar to Die Brücke or Der Blaue Reiter, but instead of manifestos that spoke only of a break with the past, they spoke of revolution. Compare, for instance, Kirchner's words in the Brücke manifesto of 1906 with those of the Novembergruppe (November Group) manifesto after the war. Kirchner wrote: "Putting our faith in a new generation of creators and art lovers, we call upon all youth to unite. We who possess the future shall create for ourselves physical and spiritual freedom opposed to the values of the comfortably established older generation. Anyone who honestly and directly reproduces the creative forces within him is one of us."<sup>6</sup>

By contrast, the Novembergruppe manifesto (1918) declares:

We stand on the fertile soil of the revolution. Our slogan is: Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity! We are uniting because we have human and artistic convictions in common.

We believe that our first duty is to dedicate all our energies to the moral regeneration of a young and free Germany....

We believe it is our special duty to gather together all significant artistic talent and dedicate it to the collective well-being of the nation .... We feel young, free, and pure.<sup>7</sup>

Herwarth Walden was one of the most important influences on the German art scene during the 1910s and 1920s. It was he who introduced much of the European avant-garde to the German artists. His Galerie Der Sturm mounted shows of Futurism and Cubism, and showed work of the Russian avant-garde. His journal *Der Sturm* (The Storm), published weekly from 1912 until 1929 and intermittently until 1932, contained influential articles on art and theater and critical essays by and about European artists, as well as providing the opportunity for many of the artists to contribute original graphics.

## Berlin

Berlin, home of both the Arbeitsrat für Kunst (Workers' Council for Art) and the Novembergruppe, and Dresden, home of the Dresdner Sezession Gruppe 1919 (Dresden Secession Group 1919), were the most fertile centers of postwar art activity. Elsewhere in the catalogue Eberhard Roters writes about developments in Berlin after the war, while Fritz Löffler discusses the Dresden Secession, presenting much information not previously available. The Arbeitsrat für Kunst, the first postwar artists' group in Germany to issue a call to all artists to unite, was a highly structured association. It held regular meetings, circulated minutes, issued manifestos, and organized exhibitions, and its members contributed to periodicals. Inspired by the Russian soviets, or councils, the Arbeitsrat was under the leadership of the architects Adolf Behne, Walter Gropius, and Bruno Taut. The group included publishers, critics, dealers, collectors, and art historians among its members, many of whom were socialists. Several members—Heckel, Otto Mueller, Pechstein, and Schmidt-Rottluff—had been members of Die Brücke

In their first proclamation of artistic principles, the Arbeitsrat made six demands, the first four of which were directed against existing Wilhelmine art organizations. They urged the dissolution of the royal academies, the Prussian Provincial Art Commission, and the state museums. They demanded an end to state sponsorship of exhibitions. They rejected current city-planning policies. They inveighed against monuments of no artistic merit in general, and against war monuments in particular. They called for the government to ensure that art would have a future in the new republic.

The Arbeitsrat distributed a questionnaire to 114 painters, sculptors, architects, critics, and art historians; the responses were widely publicized in 1919 in *Ja! Stimmen des Arbeitsrats für Kunst in Berlin* (Yes! Voices of the Workers' Council for Art in Berlin). The questionnaire included queries about the relationship between the artist and the public and addressed reform in the teaching of art, state support for artists, and the potential influence of artists on urban design, architecture, and public housing. Many of the twenty-eight whose written responses were published found the traditional academies stultifying and urged the establishment of an environment that would encourage greater spontaneity. They wanted teachers to encourage children's expressive tendencies rather than "correct" formal achievements. For many, answering this questionnaire was their most political act of the revolutionary era.

The first presentation of the Arbeitsrat was the *Ausstellung für unbekannte Architekten* (Exhibition for Unknown Architects), which called for architecture to be the unifier of all the

arts, destroying barriers between conventionally defined disciplines. Ultimately, these practices were put into effect most systematically at the Bauhaus school in Weimar.

A direct outgrowth of the Arbeitsrat für Kunst was the association of architects formed by Paul Gösch, Wenzel Hablik, Wassili and Hans Luckhardt, Hans Scharoun, and Bruno and Max Taut, and known as Die Gläserne Kette (The Glass Chain). Due to the poor economic situation and the severe shortage of building materials, these architects were not receiving commissions. They were the most frustrated of the Expressionists as they were unable to build their buildings. Instead, they produced a series of sketches and drawings for utopian buildings, largely based on the symbol of the crystal, which they saw as the representation of innocence: for them an ideal building would have been constructed entirely of glass. Bruno Taut urged his associates to be imaginative architects; he hoped that a new architecture would emerge, born of a spiritual revolution. This never happened: very few buildings actually survive from the Expressionist period. The Einstein Tower by Erich Mendelsohn (1919) was one of the most impressive Expressionist buildings actually constructed.

The Novembergruppe was founded by Cesar Klein, Moriz Melzer, Pechstein, Heinrich Richter-Berlin, and Georg Tappert, Pechstein and Tappert being members of the first generation. Its emphasis was on the pictorial arts rather than architecture. Calling upon all Cubists, Futurists, and Expressionists, the Novembergruppe encouraged writers, poets, painters, architects, and composers to join. They sponsored several exhibitions and spread their ideas through catalogues and such periodicals as *Der Kunststoppf* (The Artpot), *Novembergruppe*, and *Die Schöne Rarität* (The Beautiful Rarity). Initially the Novembergruppe supported official policy by creating posters for the Publicity Office of the Rat der Volksbeauftragten (Council of People's Delegates), as the new coalition government of Social Democrats and Independents called itself. Their strident graphics urged a return to work and public order and the convening of a national assembly to realize the aims of the revolution.<sup>8</sup> Some posters warned against strikes, others exhorted voters to go to the polls.

In 1919 the pamphlet *An alle Künstler!* (To All Artists!) was published by the Novembergruppe. Pechstein's cover lithograph depicts a man clutching his heart; behind him lies a city engulfed in flames, from which the new society is to arise. The pamphlet was a compilation of statements, poems, and prints by fourteen artists, including Lyonel Feininger, Klein, Meidner, and Tappert: Pechstein's article "Was Wir Wollen" (What We Want) was the central piece: "The revolution has given us the freedom to express and to realize wishes we have had for years. Our sense of duty tells us that work for us alone must be done by us alone. We demand this and we do this without ulterior motives, keeping our eyes only upon the ideal goal: the realization of our historic destiny to attain global awareness."<sup>9</sup> Pechstein argues against an academic attitude and maintains that the artists want to educate the populace to increase their sense of public-spiritedness. His article ends with the claim that a socialist republic might provide the answer to the ills of society:

We hope that a socialist republic not only will make the situation in the art world healthy but will create a unified art epoch for our generation. The beginning of a new unity of people and art will be heralded on the basis of craft, with each artist working in his own fashion. Art will no longer be considered, as it has been in the past, an interesting and genteel occupation for the sons of wealthy loafers. On the contrary, the sons of common people must be given the opportunity, through the

crafts, to become artists. Art is no game, but a duty to the people! It is a matter of public concern.<sup>10</sup>

Meidner, whose involvement with the second generation is discussed in Roter's essay, contributed a passionate plea "To All Artists, Poets, and Musicians." He writes: "We must decide in favor of socialism: for a universal and unceasing socialization of the means of production, which will give every man and woman work, leisure time, bread, a home, and the presentiment of a higher goal."<sup>11</sup> Meidner hoped the revolution would radically alter the economics of the art world, a hope Max Pechstein, shared by many of his fellow artists. He also urged that artists become involved in politics.

The failure of the Novembergruppe to attain its revolutionary goals became so obvious that a splinter group was formed by the artists Otto Dix, Grosz, Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Höch, Rudolf Schlichter, Georg Scholz, and others, many of whom were also interested in Dadaism. They exhorted the Novembergruppe to remember the ideals with which it had begun and urged a recommitment to the proletarian revolution.

Although Grosz was a member of the Novembergruppe for a short time, the majority of his searing commentaries on Weimar society and its rampant corruption were created outside the group framework. Like Dix, Grosz had enlisted for military service despite his marked antiwar sentiments. His experiences soon reconfirmed his horror of combat, and following an honorable discharge in 1911 he began chronicling his abhorrence of Berlin society. His vocabulary of chaotic scenes of crime and passion, of obscene officers, injured soldiers, and leering prostitutes in dark streets was increased and sharpened by his observations during the war and afterwards. He created a veritable cascade of paintings, prints, portfolios, illustrated books, and illustrations for radical periodicals, such as *Die Aktion*. A painting like *Selbstmord* (Suicide) probably reflects the artist's state of mind following his release from the army.

An urban landscape like *Metropolis* or *Explosion* almost seems to explode before the viewer's eyes: the city becomes a teeming inferno with leering figures rushing wildly from place to place. Bathed in a red light, Grosz's Berlin is the epitome of the "big city landscape" of second-generation Expressionism. *Metropolis* exemplifies the anarchy of postwar Germany. The scene is Friedrichstrasse, site of the Central Hotel, which Grosz had already depicted in lithographs: beggars, prostitutes, cigar-chomping profiteers, cripples, and convicts intimately glimpsed create a maelstrom of misery and depravity. This dynamism of the city owes much to the rhythms of Italian Futurism.

## Dresden

After Berlin, the city most closely associated with second-generation Expressionism is Dresden, the birthplace of Expressionism. After the war a lively art scene revolved around the academy, Galerie Arnold, and Galerie Emil Richter. Fritz Löffler has noted that this second phase dates back to two exhibitions at the Galerie Arnold: the van Gogh show in 1912 and the presentation of artists from Galerie Der Sturm in 1913.<sup>12</sup> Dix and Felixmüller became the pivotal figures; they were joined in 1916 by Kokoschka, who moved to Dresden to teach at the academy. Kokoschka, however, had the status of a guest while he was in Dresden and never had the impact of either Dix or Felixmüller.

In 1916, under the leadership of the twenty-year-old Conrad Felixmüller, a group of young Expressionist artists banded together to exhibit at the Galerie Arnold, which had been the venue of the early Brücke exhibitions. A year earlier Felixmüller had traveled to Berlin, where through Meidner he had met the leading writers of the day: Johannes Becher, Wieland Herzfeld, Alfred Wolfenstein, and Willi Zierath. In his memoirs, Felixmüller writes: "Through this circle, and above all through Raoul Hausmann, I came to Franz Pfemfert—it was an antimaterialistic group, revolutionary not for the sake of aesthetic questions but in a social and political sense."<sup>3</sup> Felixmüller returned to Dresden and there worked with writer-architect Hugo Zehder to organize their fellow artists into a group that would be political like the Novembergruppe and the Arbeitsrat für Kunst in Berlin. The original Dresdner Künstlerschaft (Dresden Council of Artists) represented a broad spectrum of the Dresden artistic world. Shortly thereafter the more radical artists broke away and again under Felixmüller's leadership founded the Dresdner Sezession Gruppe 1919. The membership and activities of the group are discussed fully by Löffler, who was associated with the art scene in Dresden for more than fifty years. What emerges is a picture of intense activity, particularly in the years 1919-21, led primarily by Dix and Felixmüller, both of whom convinced many others to join with them (Fig. f. The attitude of the young artists is expressed by the poet Walter Rheiner in his introduction to the catalogue of an exhibition the new group staged at the Galerie Emil Richter in 1919: "The painters who now make their entrance are young. Heralds of a new world. They are the hunted, tormented, blissful, dithyrambic prophets of the Wonder of Wonders.... They call out to you .... Don't look for what your eye, your all-too-weary eye expects to see .... That world of yours is failing apart! Can't you see? ... Turn from your blindness! School the eye! School the spirit! You are human and this is about you."<sup>4</sup>

In 1919 Behne insisted in an important essay on the revolutionary nature of Expressionism, notwithstanding that it was being increasingly accepted by the bourgeoisie. While the art of the Secession members covered the spectrum from Expressionist through Futurist to Dada, the underlying element was the struggle for an art that would contain within it the power of the newly awakened postwar spirit. Yet, unlike the two groups in Berlin, the Secession was not as precisely defined in its aim or as programmatic in its activities. The radical periodical *Menschen* (Mankind), published by Heinar Schilling and Felix Stiemer, featured prints and poems by members; it also contained some important writings by leaders of the group, including the article by Behne. Felixmüller's image of the "new man" first appeared as the logo of the periodical, founded partly as an alternative to *Der Sturm* and *Die Aktion*. Its policy was one of idealism, and the periodical supported art, literature, graphics, music, and criticism. The first comprehensive essay on the new Dresden group was written by Will Grohmann in 1919 and appeared in the Dresden periodical *Neue Blätter für Kunst und Dichtung* (New Journal of Art and Poetry), which was sponsored by the Galerie Emil Richter. Grohmann's essay was intended to draw attention to the new group—to introduce its members—and not to stress its planned reforms or revolutionary aims.

Certainly the best-known member of the Dresdner Sezession Gruppe 1919 was Otto Dix. Although he joined at Felixmüller's urging, he did not share the latter's commitment to radical politics. Known today primarily for his *Neue Sachlichkeit* work from the years after 1925, Dix created a significant group of paintings, drawings, and prints during the years 1915-25. These early years were of extreme importance in his coming to terms with his traumatic wartime experiences. Like many other German artists, Dix had at first had a positive approach to the war, believing that the upheaval would sweep away the old order and usher in a new age. Like

Beckmann and Grosz he voluntarily enlisted in 1914, subsequently serving at the front in Russia and France. These experiences are the basis for several hundred drawings he executed on the battlefields and for much of his work in the subsequent decades. On his return from the front, he began to depict his experiences in a new style, a fusion of Futurism and Expressionism, deploying powerful colors with bold strokes. But it was not until 1924 that he created his antiwar epic *Der Krieg* (War), a portfolio of fifty unforgettable etchings and aquatints. With needle and acid he literally corroded the surface of the plate and conveyed both the physical and the moral destruction that he had witnessed. *Der Krieg* stands today as one of the monuments to the horrors of modern war.

Felixmüller left Dresden after joining the Communist party in 1919. In 1920 rather than use his recently won Saxon State Prize for its intended purpose, travel to Rome, he visited the Ruhr District and studied the life of the coal miners. Shocked by the high unemployment he saw there, and feeling that he could contribute something worthwhile by making the miners' plight known, Felixmüller executed several powerful paintings, drawings, and woodcuts in the early 1920s. "To do this," he writes, "to show the toiling proletarian, I was reduced to the simplest forms, to reproducing simple, organic things that could be comprehended in their natural, their human and their social context.... The violence of the situation permitted the forceful character of the woodcut."<sup>5</sup> These images were hailed as among the best work of the period. In one of the earliest monographic articles on Felixmüller the playwright Carl Sternheim wrote in *Der Cicerone*: "This Killer ... peeled the mask from the faces of his contemporaries ... and in his paintings there appeared for the first time the proletariat, hitherto passed over in silence."<sup>6</sup> Felixmüller continued to draw on his Ruhr experiences for his illustrations for *Die Aktion*. But by the mid-twenties, he had turned his back on Expressionism, and until his death in 1977 he created sweet, intimate portraits and landscapes.

### **Other Artists' Groups**

After political differences among its members led to the dissolution of the Dresden Secession in 1925, several artists joined groups in Dusseldorf, Berlin, or Darmstadt. Dix had established connections in Dusseldorf while visiting Felixmüller, then painting in the Ruhr. Felixmüller urged Dix to move to Dusseldorf and to continue his studies at the academy under Heinrich Nauen. In 1922 Dix received an invitation from the art dealer Johanna Ey which made possible his move from Dresden. "Mother Ey" ran a bohemian artists' club, through which she financially supported her artists, encouraged them to meet each other, and sold their paintings. [...] Whether galvanized by artists, architects, writers, dealers, or museum directors, [such] groups proclaimed in lofty terms that the world after the war had to be a different and a better place to live in, a place in which the arts would play a more significant role. What each of the groups found out, some more quickly than others, was that this idealism did not in fact bear up under the pressures of exhibitions, publications, and gatherings composed of such a diversity of artists.

### **The War**

The war, whether experienced firsthand or not, inspired at least five graphic portfolios, each on a different aspect of the conflict but all using the printed medium and the multiple images of the

portfolio to convey a potent message. Dix's *Der Krieg*, executed in 1924, represents an attitude different from that of his drawings done at the front in 1915-16. Appalled by the renewed jingoist sentiments spreading throughout Weimar Germany, Dix offered his sobering, searing, and penetrating images, which stand as one of the most convincing antiwar statements, not unlike Goya's *Los Desastres*, to which they have often been compared. Dix spares no detail in conveying the unrelenting physical nature of war. Images of mutilated bodies, decaying limbs, and men weighed down with equipment describe the combat; fleshy prostitutes pursued by sex-starved soldiers show another side of war; and bombed landscapes, moonlit minefields, and barren night scenes complete a cycle of images of the ravages of war. A second graphic cycle, *Krieg* (War) by Kollwitz, also done in the 1920s, consists of seven stark woodcuts. Inspired by the death of her youngest son Peter at the beginning of the war, she conveys in each print the pain and sense of loss felt by those at home: widows, mourning parents, mothers protecting their children from conscription or offering them forth; these are also the victims of war. A third portfolio is Pechstein's *Somme 1916*, published in 1919. Pechstein enlisted in 1916 and during his tour of duty saw some of the heaviest fighting, including the battles of the Somme and Ypres. His experiences there on the French front led to his group of eight lithographs, which show a German soldier grappling with a many-headed mythical beast, reacting to a bombing carrying a wounded comrade, and comforting a dying victim. The last image is of a crippled veteran awkwardly tilling his garden. In 1916-17 Adolf Uzarski created his set of twelve lithographs *Der Totentanz* (The Dance of Death), in which skeletons loom over the battlefield, are destroyed in a burst of fire, or engage in combat. A very different point of view is represented in the cycle *Das Leiden der Pferde im Krieg* (The Suffering of Horses in the War) by Otto Schubert, who depicts war through the eyes of the cavalry horse.

The war significantly affected the graphic and painted work of other artists as well. Gert Wollheim made a number of pencil sketches while in the trenches and in the 1910s and 1920s several paintings of trench warfare. [...] Wollheim's most ambitious work was his 1919 triptych *Der Verwundete* (The Wounded Man), of which only the central panel remains: blood spews forth from a gaping hole in the belly of a mortally wounded victim. Another painting *Der Verurteilte* (The Condemned Man) shows a blindfolded man who awaits death barefoot and bound to a post. It is as somber in its implications as *Der Verwundete* is in its explicitness. Images by Otto Gleichmann, who had served on the fronts in France and Russia, share this mood. A reflection of his wartime experiences, *Der Erstochene* (Stabbed Man) depicts a casualty who appears enveloped by the ground on which his already decaying body lies. A member of the Hannoversche Sezession (Hanover Secession), Gleichmann also exhibited with *Das lunge Rheinland* in Dusseldorf.

The impact of the war was not captured exclusively by those who served at the front. The sixty-nine-year-old Christian Rohlf depicts an anonymous prisoner trying to escape from captivity in his woodcut *Der Gefangene* (*The Prisoner*) of 1918.

## **The Revolution: Political Posters and Periodicals**

As the war drew to its bitter end, hunger and despair were rife throughout Germany. Military defeat and economic collapse were making themselves felt. Deserting soldiers roamed the streets and added to the chaos. The country was ripe for change. On November 9, 1918, Kaiser Wilhelm

He fled to Holland, and a few days later announced his abdication. The stage was set for a revolution that would replace the old regime with a system in which the leaders were to be responsible to parliament. A coalition government of the moderate Social Democratic party and the more radical Independent Social Democrats was set up. Elections were called for January 1919. In the intervening period many artists became politically active, some for the first time, trying to stimulate action, strengthen opinions, or alter the social conscience. Posters were the visual weapons in the struggle of the working class against the rich. In marked contrast to the censorship that had been so strictly enforced during the kaiser's reign, German cities now became a riot of colors and slogans as strident messages covered every available wall space.

Among the most traumatic events of the period were the brutal murders in Berlin of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, leaders of the abortive Spartakus (communist) Revolution. Liebknecht was the son of the Social Democratic party founder Wilhelm Liebknecht; Luxemburg was a prominent Polish socialist. Liebknecht was shot while "trying to escape" from the police. Luxemburg was beaten to death; her corpse, thrown into the Landwehrkanal, was only recovered four months later. Kollwitz and Felixmüller were moved to create memorials of very different types. In his 1919 lithograph *Menschen fiber der Welt* (Mankind above the World) Felixmüller sought to celebrate the apotheosis of the two leaders as if they were a pair of ascending lovers. Kollwitz, who had been asked by Liebknecht's family to make a deathbed sketch, responded instead to the communal grief of the numerous mourners who gathered for the funeral. She worked the scene first as a drawing, then in lithography, and finally in her newly learned medium, the woodcut, with which she was able to convey most effectively her feelings about the intensity of the sorrow. With its emphasis on the mourners, this print came to stand for the aspirations and desperation of the working class, to whom Kollwitz felt strong ties. Berlin, the capital of Prussia and the German empire, was the focal point of the most intense radical activity immediately following the November Revolution. A writer for the contemporary journal *Das Plakat* (The Poster), which was devoted to illustrations and descriptions of contemporary posters, describes the city scene in the months between November 1918 and January 1919: "The paper flood set in .... Berlin's streets were a riot of orgies of color, the houses exchanged their gray faces for an agitated mask .... The resourceful poster pasters advanced .... With brush and glue-pot, like ghosts in the night, they carefully pasted their posters so high that they could only be reached with mountaineering equipment."<sup>7</sup> The first wave of posters, many of which were created for the government's Publicity Office, called for the creation of a national assembly to assure the revolution its due."<sup>8</sup> Many artists involved with the Arbeitsrat für Kunst or the Novembergruppe contributed posters to the cause.

Pechstein's poster *Erwürgt nicht die junge Freiheit* (Don't Strangle Our Newborn Freedom), of 1919 for instance, is a rather straightforward plea for an end to civil war. His powerful color lithograph *An die Laterne* (To the Lamppost) warns against anarchy and terrorism. The suggestion of violence in the print is emphasized by the blood-red flags and the red splashes surrounding the hanged man and in the fists of the demonstrators.

Some of the most compelling posters were distributed by the anti-Bolshevik groups. They used images of gorillas, skeletons, and vultures depicted in gaudy, horrific yellows and reds to frighten the public to attention. These artists sought a coalition, a united Germany, as illustrated in Klein's *Arbeiter. Bürger. Bauern. Soldaten* (Workers. Citizens. Farmers. Soldiers). In addition to making posters, many artists created covers for widely circulated broadsheets, pamphlets, and periodicals. "Between 1918 and 1925, 122 different literary journals of varying longevity were published throughout Germany; most of these were liberal to radical in bias. Of

these 122, fifty-three were founded after 1918 and folded before 1925.<sup>19</sup> The periodicals were able to respond instantly to current events. Their titles reflect the youth and vigor of their makers: *Neue Blätter für Kunst und Dichtung* (New Journal for Art and Writing), *Das Neue Pathos* (The New Pathos), *Neue Jugend* (New Youth), *Der Neue Pan* (The New Pan), *Neues Deutschland* (New Germany), *Die Freude: Blätter einer Neuen Gesinnung* (Joy: journal of a New Disposition), *Das junge Deutschland* (The Young Germany), and *Das junge Rheinland* (The Young Rhineland). Guenther discusses many of the lesser-known journals in his essay. From Berlin, Bielefeld, Darmstadt, Dresden, Dusseldorf, Hamburg, Hanover, Heidelberg, Munich, and Saarbrücken came periodicals with titles such as *Die Aktion*, *Der Anbruch* (The New Beginning), *Die Dachstube* (The Attic Room), *Feuer* (Fire), *Kündigung* (Herald), *Menschen*, *Die Rote Erde* (The Red Earth), *Die Sichel* (The Sickle), *Das Tribunal* (The Tribunal), *Der Wurf* (The Venture), and *Der Ziegelbrenner* (The Brickmaker). Together they form an important part of the history of postwar German Expressionism, for it was in these periodicals that the artists, writers, publishers, and poets were able to join together most effectively to sound their cry for a new society and for a new role for creative people.

### Urban Problems after the War

While for some artists the war was a major influence, for others the terrible situation prevailing in the cities afterwards provided the necessary spark. Postwar inflation caused the German mark to plummet from a prewar exchange rate of 25 to the dollar to 162 to the dollar in June 1920. By 1923 the currency had collapsed completely: in April a dollar was worth 10,000 marks; on July first, 160,000 marks; by August, 4.6 million marks. By November 20 the equivalent was 4.2 trillion marks! Unemployment was widespread, hunger and malnutrition rampant, the middle class virtually wiped out. Beggars and crippled veterans selling matches became familiar figures.

Dix's *Die Skatspieler* (The Skat Players) of 1920 shows three mutilated veterans, former officers, playing cards in a gaslit pub. So deformed are they by their injuries that they are forced to play with prosthetic hands or with their mouths or feet. Little is left of these maimed figures, yet even the fragments—the Iron Cross, the carefully parted hair—recall an earlier world. Collaged elements, such as the newspapers on the walls, heighten the sense of realism. In 1918 Beckmann returned, shattered by his experiences as a medic, to find misery and chaos in Berlin. In his monumental canvas *Die Nacht* (The Night) and in the portfolio *Die Hölle* (Hell), also 1919, he depicts disabled veterans, beggars, prostitutes, and profiteers, searing representations of Germany in 1919.

The widespread famine of the early 1920s led in 1921 to the founding of the Internationale Arbeiterhilfe (International Workers' Aid), a nonpolitical program to end hunger. The IAH was founded by Willi Muenzenberg with the encouragement of Lenin to try to match the services offered by the Red Cross and the American Relief Administration, both of which had sent aid in the disastrous Russian famine of 1921. Grosz (Fig. 28), Albert Einstein, and George Bernard Shaw were among the sponsors of the IAH, whose headquarters were in Berlin. The organization reported directly to the Soviet Comintern. Many artists were affiliated, encouraged by theater director Erwin Piscator, who served as secretary of the appeal to artists. Among those participating were Peter Böckstiegel, Felixmüller, Otto Gnebel, Wilhelm Rudolph, and Seiwert. For two years they supported the IAH through contributions of works for sale or poster designs. The IAH laid the groundwork for a network of communication between Germany

and Russia. Other connections were established when an international committee of intellectuals was formed; exchange visits of German and Russian artists and writers ensued.

### Turning to Religious Subjects

In the late 1910s and early 1920s many artists seemed to abandon purely political subjects and turn to familiar religious imagery instead. These depictions were infused with the Expressionists' intensity of color and emotion, contemporary events often masqueraded as sacred subjects, and the artists used African and Oceanic motifs for additional effect. Certain religious images became metaphors for the sufferings of the German people. The mystical and ecstatic aspects of theology appealed to many of these artists, and they appropriated familiar symbols and iconography. The mocking of Christ, the Crucifixion, the Last Judgment, and St. Sebastian figure frequently in the repertoire of the second generation; rarely do we find images of redemption or of the Resurrection or Ascension. *Das Jüngste Gericht* (The Last Judgment), as depicted by Dresden Secession artist Walter Jacob is a powerful contemporary updating of a traditional image, complete with a bold portrait of Dix on the left, yanking a woman by the hair as she resists being pulled into an abyss. The figure of St. Sebastian came to stand for the people of postwar Germany beset by the ceaseless travails of hunger, inflation, and political chaos. Karl Albiker represents the martyred saint in a powerful oak sculpture seen in the round, his frail body pierced by a wooden arrow. Willy Jaeckel, Schubert, and Dix also turned to St. Sebastian as a figure emblematic of the times. These images are powerfully direct and often convey a loss of faith on the part of the artists.

The artists frequently turned to wood, either in sculpture or woodblock, to convey their images of anguish. Pechstein, for example, weary of politics by 1921, turned to the Lord's Prayer for an elaborate hand-colored portfolio of twelve woodcuts *Das Vater Unser* (The Lord's Prayer). He returned to Gothic renditions of frontally aligned subjects depicted with angular lines. One can look at his depictions of "Give us this day our daily bread" and "Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done" and relate them to the widespread famine, the end of the war or the beginning of a new age; one feels that Pechstein has made a well-known religious tradition more topical.

One of the most potent graphic cycles is the series of woodcut illustrations by Dresden Secession artist Constantin von Mitschke-Collande for Walter Georg Hartmann's allegorical book *Der begeisterte Weg* (The Inspired Way). Hartmann tells of a young soldier who experiences the beginnings of the revolution, the funeral of Liebknecht, and the outbreak of street violence, during which he is killed. His spirit does not die: it wanders through revolutionary Germany, observing. Mitschke-Collande focuses on the religious salvation promised in Hartmann's text. He combines images from the Crucifixion and the Revelation of St. John (for instance, the horsemen of the Apocalypse) to intertwine Expressionist religious imagery and a message about the revolution. The illustrations are a symbol of the political and spiritual awakening of the second-generation Expressionists. They reflect the crossroads that many artists felt they had reached.

Mitschke-Collande's style also reflects that eclecticism of the second generation. Another powerful portfolio with religious subject matter was produced by Brücke artist Schmidt-Rottluff after he returned from the war. In 1918 he executed a group of nine black-and-white woodcuts, *Christus* (Christ), a series of ecstatic images of the life of Christ. One of the key

pictures shows Christ with the legend *Ist Euch nicht Christus erschienen?* (Has Christ not appeared to you?) emblazoned across the bottom of the page. On his forehead is inscribed the year 1918, signifying a new beginning. Expressionist writer and Schmidt-Rottluff biographer Grohmann says of these religious images: "The striving for the supernatural appeared to be the reverse side of radical socialism, the expression of a psychosis awakened through war and revolution."<sup>21</sup>

Other images of Christ's suffering were used by Otto Lange, a member of the Dresdner Sezession Gruppe 1919. In a series of hand-colored woodcuts Lange created masklike faces carved from the woodblock with nervous, energetic strokes: the Mocking, the Deposition, the Flagellation are portrayed in angular forms.

## Abstract Expressionism

In the same way that they turned to spiritual, religious, or mystical subjects, the second-generation artists were drawn increasingly to the depiction of states of mind. Walter Gramatte executed a series of illustrations for the novella *Lenz* by Georg Büchner, which tells the story of a young man in eighteenth-century Germany who is torn between his search for God and the unrelenting suffering that thrusts him toward atheism. Gramatte's prints convey the sympathy that he and his fellow artists felt for this questing soul.

Expressionism began to show an apocalyptic or ecstatic coloration in the work of several artists after the war. In 1919 Johannes Molzahn published "Das Manifest des absoluten Expressionismus" (The Manifesto of Absolute Expressionism) in *Der Sturm*, in which, with highly charged language, he proclaimed the destruction of the old order and the rising of a new order in the aftermath of destruction: "We want to pour oil onto the fire - fan the tiny glow into flame - span the earth - make it quiver - and beat more fiercely - living and pulsating cosmos - steaming universe."<sup>22</sup> Molzahn propounded the notion of "abstract Expressionism," and in his paintings and prints of 1919-20 he used a series of intersecting circular bands, reminiscent of both Robert Delaunay and the Futurists, whose work was also exhibited at the Galerie Der Sturm.

In his essay [elsewhere in this catalogue] Stephan von Wiese discusses the international nature of the Expressionist movement and its connections with other avant-garde art of the time. He argues that the abstract variant of Expressionism has long been overlooked, and that it is precisely this aspect that is of importance in viewing Expressionism in an international context. By the early 1920s several artists of the Novembergruppe had developed a style that combined the intensity of color of Expressionism with the forceful lines of Futurism and Cubism's fracturing of the surface plane. The closing words of the manifesto of the Novembergruppe were: "We send our fondest greetings to all those artists who have heard the call and feel responsible - Cubists, Futurists, and Expressionists. Join us!"<sup>23</sup> This new kind of Expressionism was infused with an awareness of international developments, examples of which were regularly shown by Walden at Galerie Der Sturm. Otto Möller, Hans Siebert von Heister, and Fritz Stuckenberg represent the tendency.

Much of the sculpture of the second generation shares this attraction to abstract or emotive subject matter which evinces connections between Expressionism and other international styles. In his 1919 sculpture *Dreiklang* (Triad), for instance, Rudolf Belling relies on Cubist principles of the breakup of space and the importance of voids. In 1919 Herbert Garbe

created several sculptures with two abstracted figures representing traditional themes, such as sleep, love, and death; in all these works a common element can be found in the adherence to Cubist principles of fracturing surface planes and in the emphasis on a single, clearly identified subject. His *Gruppe des Todes I* (Group of Death 1) of 1919, which owes much to Wilhelm Lehmbruck's sculpture, is a successful attempt to combine exaggerated movement and Cubist geometry. The architectonic structure of the composition serves to emphasize the emotional quality of the figures and to stress the allusion to the figure of Christ nailed to the cross. Garbe's figures display that unmistakable combination of Expressionism and Cubism that Roters has called "Cubo-Expressionism."<sup>24</sup> Richard Horn's sculpture *Aufbruch/Erwachen* (Departure/Awakening) which owes much to Archipenko, creates in plastic terms a sense of exploding or emergence from a solid form, in much the same way as Oswald Herzog's sculptures *Ekstase* (Ecstasy) and *Geniessen* (Enjoyment) of 1919. In Herzog's work the human form increasingly dissolves and individual characteristics become less and less defined; ultimately, the figurative world disappears altogether. He often draws his titles from the sphere of music: harmony, adagio, furioso. A sculpture such as *Geniessen* is a transformation of architectural elements into a composition that conveys emotion.<sup>25</sup>

## The End of Expressionism

By 1923 many of the artists who had joined the various groups had become frustrated with the prospects of their politically oriented activities ever bringing about a radical change in society. They found that the working class, rather than supporting their efforts and joining with them, had in fact nothing but scorn for them. Although many artists continued to decry social injustice and the ineffectiveness of the new regime in remedying the most pressing problems, the concerted group efforts, which for a short time had been so intense, dissipated as the artists became disillusioned with politics. It became impossible to sustain the ecstatic, heady commitment and frenetic pace. The artists had come to the realization that organized activities were not going to effect the desired radical changes in society, and many of them chose to go their own way. What replaced this spent force of Expressionism was a new, more realistic style, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which made its first public appearance in Mannheim at the Kunsthalle when Gustav Hartlaub organized a show in 1925.

That year Felixmüller, on hearing of the suicide of his friend, the poet Rheiner, painted *Der Tod des Dichters Walther Rheiner* (Death of the Poet Walther Rheiner). The death of his friend caused Felixmüller to return briefly but intensely to the Expressionism he had by then abandoned. Rheiner had been a member of the circle of poets and painters in Berlin and Dresden that included Becher, Felixmüller, Hausmann, Herzfeld, Meidner, and Pfemfert. To evade conscription, Rheiner, like Becher, had taken cocaine; his apparent addiction saved him from the draft. Felixmüller later said of him: "Despairing at his lack of success, and in great financial difficulties, he had distanced himself from all his friends. Cocaine became his consolation."<sup>26</sup> In 1918 Rheiner wrote *Kokain* (Cocaine), in which he described the life and suicide of an addict in Berlin. Rheiner, who was only thirty, jumped from the window of an apartment in Berlin, clutching his needle in his left fist. Felixmüller captures the stark contrast between this wild gesture and the poet's rather pedestrian surroundings, geranium-filled window boxes and lace curtains, which the poet pulls aside as he leaps into the pulsating urban nightscape of Berlin.

Felixmüller, portrays himself in the figure of Rheiner, as if to say a final farewell to an era that had passed.

NOTES:

1. Donald E. Gordon, *Expressionism: Art and Idea* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. xvi, 217.
2. Friedrich Burschell, "Revolution," from *Memories* (Munich, 1918-191, cited in Paul Raabe, *The Era of German Expressionism* (New York: The Overlook Press, 1974), p. 147.
3. "Der Krieg./Ende einer gewaltigen, lügenhaften, mattenellen Zeit./Verfall des verganglichen Körpers./Aufsteig der Seele." Klner von Dressler, "Einführung," *Menschen* 4, nos.38-45 (May - June 29, 1919), p 5.
4. "Das Kunstprogramm des Komissariats fir Volksaufklärung in Russland," *Das Kunstblatt* 3, no. I (March 1919), p.91.
5. For a thorough discussion of German periodicals of the era see Orrel P. Reed, Jr., *German Expressionist Art: The Robert Gore Rifkind Collection* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 206- 56.
6. Victor Meisel, *Voices of German Expressionism* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1970), p.13.
7. *Ibid.*, pp.169-70.
8. Joan Weinstein, "Art and the November Revolution in Germany 1918-1919," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1986, p.3.
9. Meisel, *Voices*, pp179-80.
10. Max Pechstein, "Was Wir WoUen," in *An Alle Künstler!* (Berlin, 1919), trans. Meisel, *Voices*, p.179.
11. *An Alle Künstler!*, p. 7
12. Private communication, November 1987.
13. Conrad Felixmüller, cited in Frank Whitford, *Expressionist Portraits* (London: T3iames and Hudson, 1987), p.136.
14. *Sezession Gruppe 1919* (Dresden: Verlag ERichter, March 1919), p. 7.
15. Conrad Felixmüller, in *Conrad Felixmüller, Legenden 1912-1976* (Tübingen: Ernst Wasmuth,1977), p.12.
16. Carl Sternheim, *Der Cicerone* 5 (October 1923)
17. Ernst Carl Barer, "Das politische Gesicht der Strasse," *Das Plakat* 10, no. 2 (March 1919), p.166.
18. Weinstein, "Art," p.31. The torch in the lower right-hand corner of many posters and pamphlets indicates that they were sponsored by the Publicity Office. For a fuller description of this period, and especially of its politics, see Weinstein's dissertation.
19. Ida Katherine Rigby, "Expressionism and Revolution 1918 to 1911," in Reed, Jr., *German Expressionist Art*, p. 303.
20. John Willett, *Art and Politics in the Weimar Period* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), pp. 71, 86,97.
21. Will Grohmann, Karl Schrmidt-Rottluf f (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1956), P 90.
22. Johannes Molzahn. "Das Manifest des absoluten Expressionis mus," *Der Sturm* 10, no. 6 (1919), pp. 90 -91. For a discussion of this and Molzahn's abstract expressionism see Rose-Carol Washton Long, "Expressionism, Abstraction, and the Search for Utopia in Germany," in *The*

*Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, 1986), pp.109-17.

23. Meisel, *Voices*, p. 170.

24. Eberhard Rotors, *Berlin 1910-1933* (New York: Rizzoli, 1981), p.109.

25. Karin Breuer, "Herzog" in Stephanie Barron, ed., *German Expressionist Sculpture* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, 1983), p. 100.

26. Conrad Fellxmuller, as cited in Whitford, *Expressionist Portraits*, p.118.