

# Expressionism

Early 1900's

# Expressionism

**Expressionism** was a modern movement originating in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century.

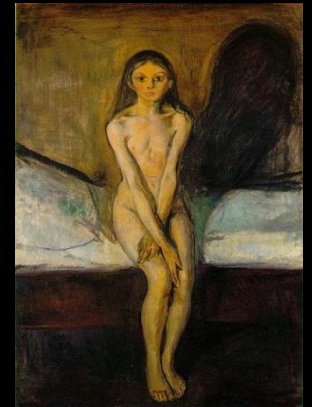
Artists during this period aimed at **personal expression** and presenting the world from a **subjective perspective**, **distorting** it radically for **emotional effect** in order to evoke moods or ideas.

Showed the world as viewed **through the eyes of people in anguish**.

Subjects are **pulled out of shape or exaggerated** and take on new, **unexpected colours**.

**Loose brushwork**

**Thick applications of paint**



# Edvard Munch

Norwegian, 1863 - 1944

The childhood of Edvard Munch was marked by **tragedy**.

His **mother died** when he was five, and one of his **sisters died** when he was fourteen.

The **fear, suffering, anxiety** and **death** of loved ones around him became the subject matter for his art.

Inherited seeds of madness from his father.

Art was a way to **express his emotions of grief**.



# The Scream, 1883



Curved shapes and colours that are **expressive rather than realistic**.

Everything is **distorted** to make you feel a certain way...there is no mistaking the fact that the person in this painting is terrified.

The body bends and twists as a scream builds and erupts from deep within.

It is a **scream** so **piercing** that the figure clasps its hands tightly over its ears.

The entire scene **vibrates** with the intensity of this scream – it **echoes** across the landscape like ripples across still water.

# The Sick Child, 1896



There is no doubt that Munch's **own suffering** contributed to his work.

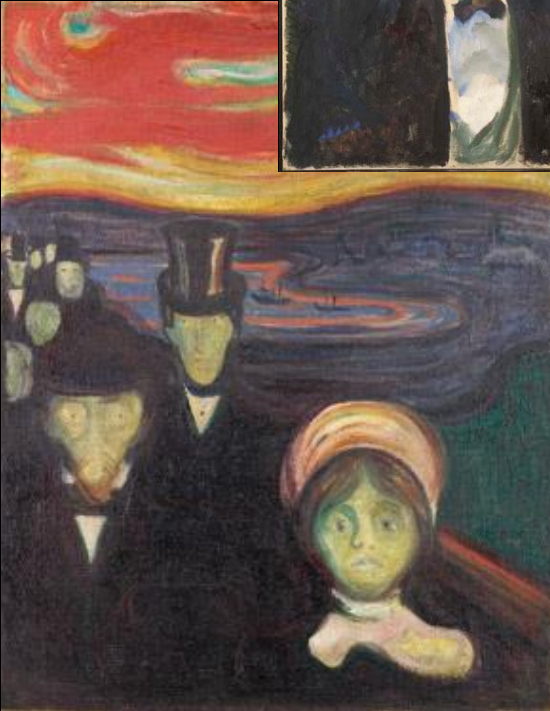
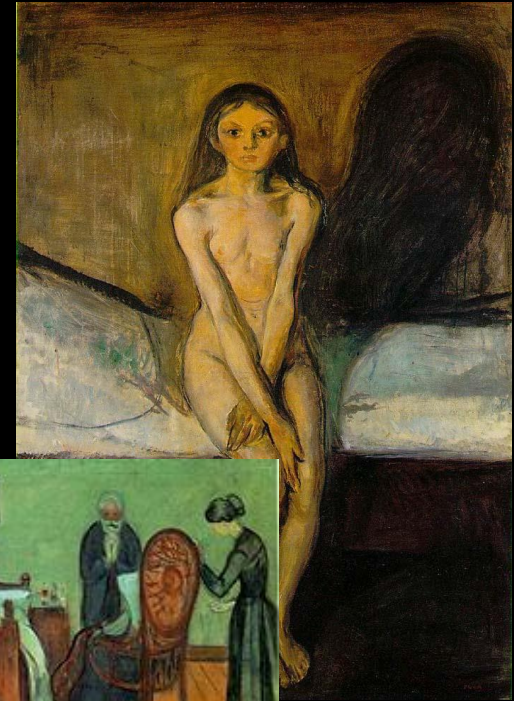
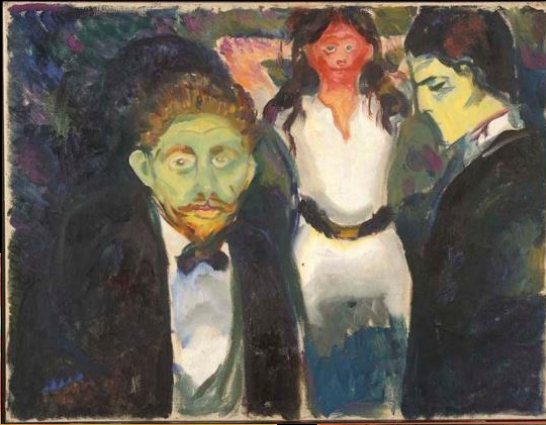
Inspired by the **death of his older sister**.

Pale complexion, colourless lips, and **hopeless stare** of a child weakened and finally conquered by illness.

Beyond caring, she looks past her grieving mother to a certain, **tragic** future.

**Rough, loose** style of painting to echo anxiety and tragedy

Pictures like this **shocked viewers** when the paintings were first seen. Munch's figures seemed **crude** and **grotesque** when compared to the colourful and light hearted visions of the Impressionists, who were enjoying great popularity at the time. Munch's works, however, were in keeping with the period in which he lived, a period when writers and **artists were turning their attention inward**. Like Munch, they were interested in **exploring feelings and emotions rather than describing outward appearances**.



# German Expressionism

- Sought to portray **emotions** and **subjective interpretations**.
- It was not important to reproduce an aesthetically pleasing impression of the artistic subject matter but rather to represent **vivid emotional reactions** by **powerful colours** and **dynamic compositions**.
- There were two groups of German Expressionist movements.
  - One was called **Die Brücke** (meaning "the bridge"), led by **Kirchner**.
  - The other was called **Der Blaue Reiter** ("the Blue Rider"), led by **Kandinsky**.

# Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

- Founder of “Die Brücke” – the bridge
- Group of artists who sought to build a "bridge" between Germany's past and future.
- Believed that their **social criticism of the ugliness of modern life could lead to a new and better future.**
- **Reacted against vulgarity & moral decay of social conditions** in Germany prior to & during WW1. **Prostitution** was prevalent, and traditional **values** and **customs** were being **lost** in the mad rush to acquire material goods and seek pleasure.
- Rejected academic & traditional art as being too restrictive & unexpressive.
- Influenced by expressive works of Van Gogh & Munch.
- Style hallmarked by **expressive distortions, clashing colours, bold, rough or jagged lines, angular, simplified forms & urban subject matter.**
- Often **disturbing, emotionally agitated and hostile.**

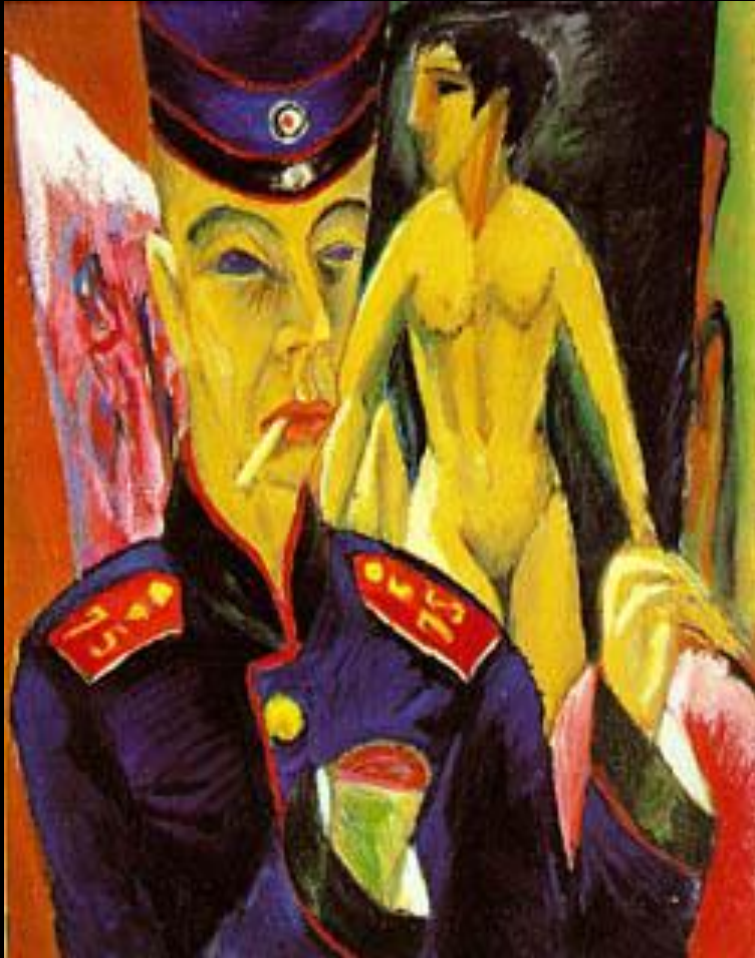




Streets of Berlin

- City prostitutes: chic streetwalkers who embody glamour and alienation and the sad reality of a culture in which everything was for sale
- Busy street, surrounded by faceless men in black, none of whom engage them directly
- Diagonals exaggerate the social angst
- Angular mask-like faces
- Vivid, unnatural colour
- Visible brushstrokes

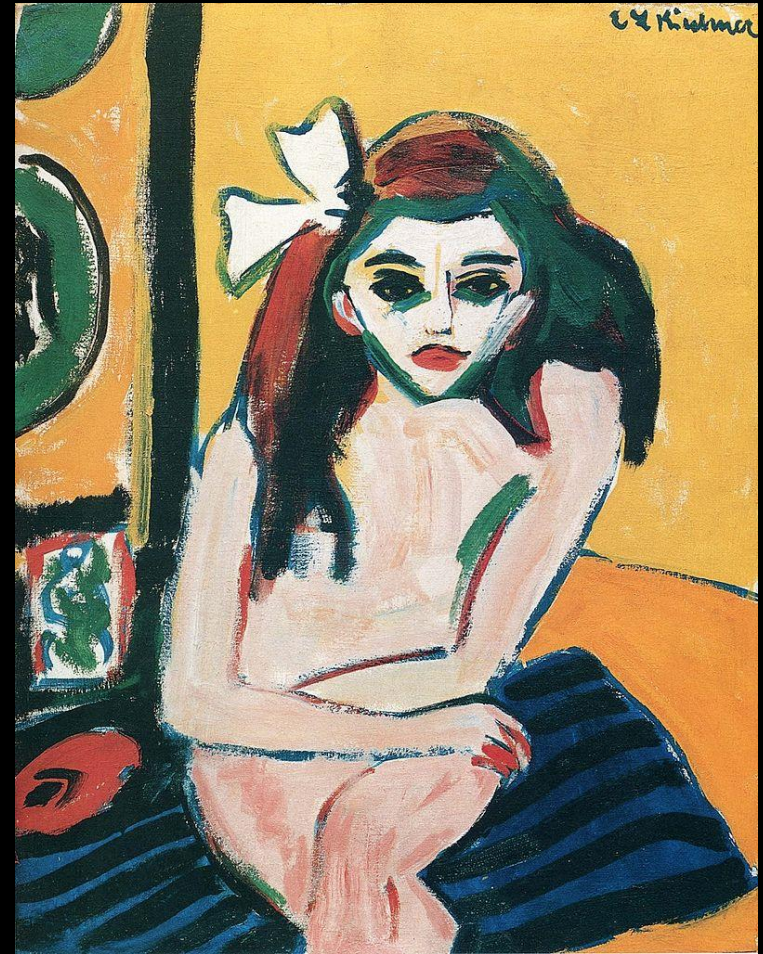
# Self Portrait as Soldier



- Self portrait in studio, wearing military uniform, severed hand = symbolic of personal trauma, self harm, and German's calling him a degenerate
- Personal psychological distress experienced during his time in the military
- Reluctant soldier, desperately avoiding service (discharged because of heavy alcohol and drug use)

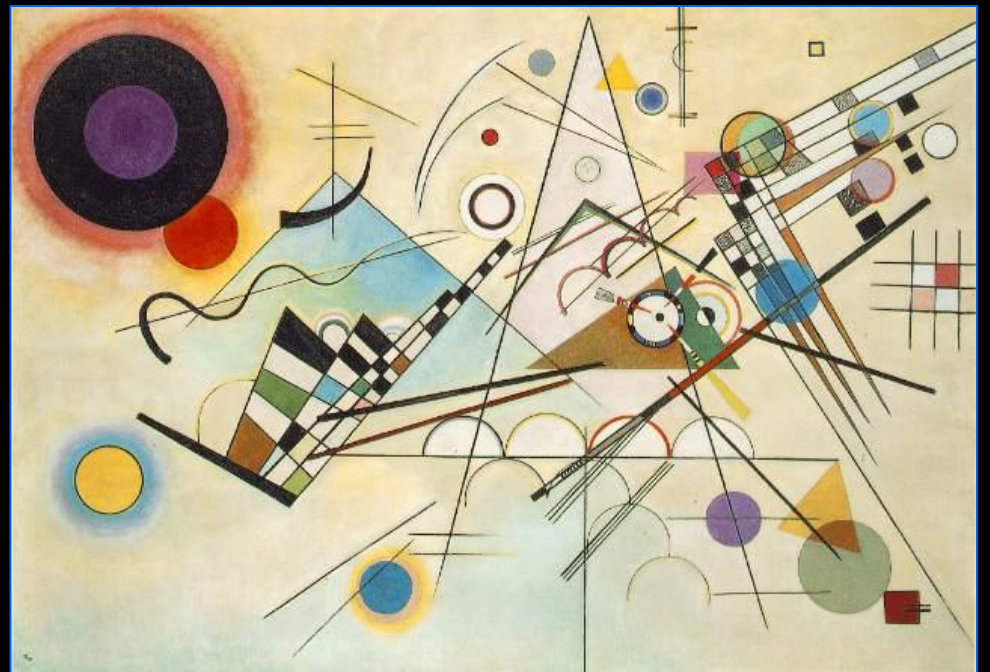
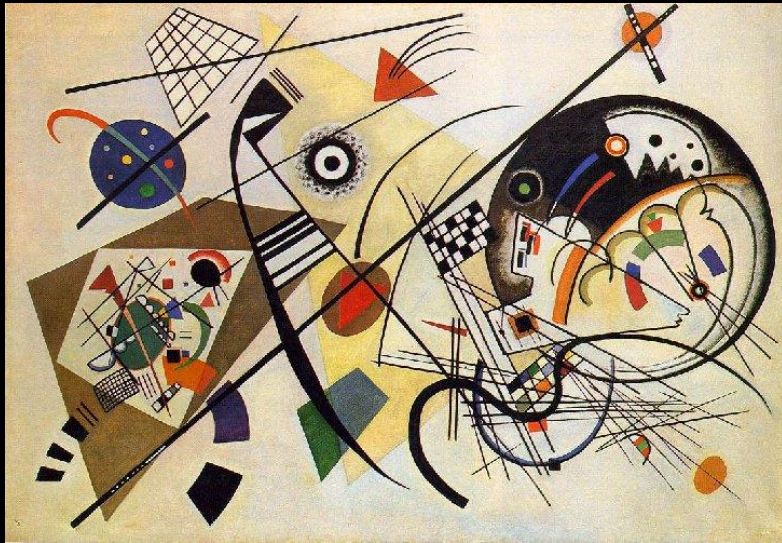
# Marcella, 1910

- Provocative depiction of young girl
- Intense gaze, heavily made-up face
- Unnatural colours
- Self-conscious body language
- Rapid sketching technique to capture the “soul” of the subject
- Inspired by Munch’s painting



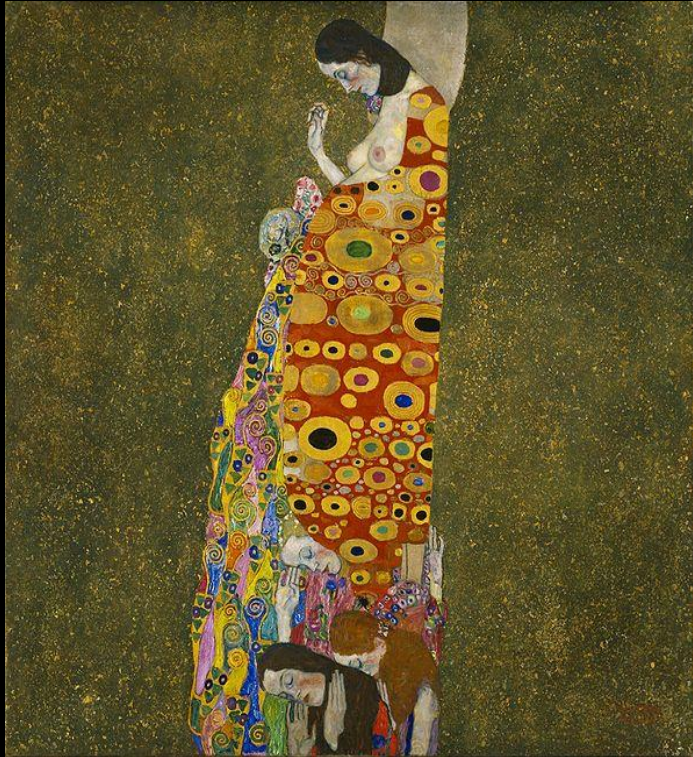
# Kandinsky

- Founder of the “Blaue Reiter” – Blue Rider
- Sought **vivid expression but not the hostility of Die Brucke** group.
- Kandinsky and his followers were more **spiritually inclined** than the Die Brucke group (and had close ties with a new sect of religious philosophy, known as theosophy).
- They believed in the **connection between visual art and music**; the **spiritual** and **symbolic associations of colour**; and a **spontaneous, intuitive approach to painting**.
- Eventually **Kandinsky** completely abandoned the necessity of using subject matter that referenced the natural world. He was the **first artist to create completely non-representational paintings**.



# Gustav Klimt

- Leader of the Austrian Expressionism
- Personal **obsession** with **women**, and **dark, erotic scenes** and well as **life, death, sickness** and **old age**
- Went through a golden phase
- Inspired by Byzantine mosaics



# The Kiss, 1907

- Gold leaf – byzantine mosaic influences
- Sensual embrace and body language
- Sensuality of the bodies covered up by decorative cloaks
- Decorative patterning
- Passionate

