

Expressionism in art | analysis



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How is expressionism defined? By the concept behind the paintings of this movement or can you really define a movement that was based on freedom and self expression. Expressionism was a cultural movement grown within a number of different art forms including poetry, literature and painting. The word expressionism is the main piece of information best describing the theme of the movement, the word expression been used to describe a facial movement to portray a mood or feeling. An artist of the expressionist movement is just recreating the expressions we paint on our faces into a emotional painting that evokes their inner most feelings, enforcing there own visualisation through an emotional response to the worlds representation. An artist of the expressionist movement aims to paint not the reality of something but instead it's interior perception. Expressionism originated in Germany at the start of the 20th century with many artists breaking away from realism and developing their work to create this new movement. Artists including Edvard Munch, Fritz Bleyl, Erich Heckel, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Emil Nolde, Max Pechstein and Otto Mueller where the artists who founded and stared within the expressionist movement.

Expressionism was a deliberate manifestation of post-impressionism (Zigrosser, C. 1957 p. 5) using the same degree of representation of painting in that they where not concerned with the form and shape of what they where painting. Many expressionist painters looked upon the work of Vincent Van Gogh, influencing there work with many expressionist painters gaining inspiration from ' Starry Night' which represents many of the fluid movements within expressionist paintings. Influences from ' starry night' can be found in that of Edvard Munch's work as the paint flows across the

painting in the same manner. The difference was that impressionism was a recreation of what the artist saw, creating a suggested impression of the object or figure not an emotional response. The movement of expressionism was instigated mainly by the paintings of Norwegian artist Edvard Munch who was the forerunner of expressionist artwork and helped to develop and influence expressionism in Germany and parts of central Europe. Highly influencing many expressionist painters and leading the development of the two major expressionist groups De Brücke (The Bridge) and Der Blaue (The Blue Rider) Reiter. Munch's work was mainly based on his life experiences with his work sometimes quite disturbing and violent. Munch most famously known for his series of paintings titled 'The Frieze of life'. Many of his paintings been fuelled by his troubles in life through the death of his family in particular the painting 'The Scream' (1893). In which it depicts his social anxieties within life and nature. The original title given been 'The Scream of Nature'. The fluid movements of paint within the painting and the vivid deep colours are used to express the feelings of despair and terror. The true nature of the painting is described within the short story written by Munch that is referred to as a description of his inspiration. 'I was walking along a path with two friends – the sun was setting – suddenly the sky turned blood red – I paused, feeling exhausted, and leaned on the fence – there was blood and tongues of fire above the blue-black fjord and the city – my friends walked on, and I stood there trembling with anxiety – and I sensed an infinite scream passing through nature' Although as do many other expressionist painters this is not a literal meaning instead describing his personal experiences within life.

Expressionism is 'the emotional experience in its most intense and concentrated formulation. Their key note was the exploration- of man's inner life' (Zigrosser, C, 1957, p. 5). Munch and Van Gogh inspired many artists and lead four German artists to create an expressionist group called The Brücke. This group, located in Berlin included Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Fritz Bleyl, Erich Heckel and Karl Schmidt Rottluff. The intention being to 'revolutionise the course of German art and profoundly to influence the nature of German Society' (Whitford, F, 1970. P34). The Brücke were the first to be wholly expressionist painters, revolutionising art and breaking away from the aesthetic criteria that had been set by their predecessors. In the development of the modern world and increasing industrialisation and urbanisation; originated a revolt in favour of the new expressionist movement and intense inner vision. Expressionism sought to separate man from society and break away from status and create a new group who were Avant- Garde. The group started out in mainly woodcuts and prints developing their work into paintings and rejecting the conventional traditional artwork of the classical and impressionist movements. The artist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner was said to be the founder of the group within the group it is clear that each artist has influenced each other with many of the artist's paintings involving sweeping slashes in a jarring movement across the painting. Many of Kirchner's paintings were of the night life and consisted of nudes and figure compositions. 'My goal was always to express emotion and experience with large forms and simple colours and it is my goal today' (Zigrosser, C. 1957. p15). One famously known painting by Kirchner is 'Bathers at Moritzburg' (1909) shows the spontaneity of the brush strokes used and the loosely drawn figures seen in many of this

group's art works. It is also visible that there is an influence in many expressionist paintings from Gauguin as he uses bold colours to express a certain situation and the mood and atmosphere of the place, this can be seen especially in his painting- ' Eve -Don't Listen To The Liar' (1889). This Painting could be considered to be an early expressionist painter as the atmosphere of the painting shows a certain level of anguish and despair that the viewer portrays and picks up the underlying emotions of the painting.

Expressionism started to develop and a new group of expressionist painters where formed, they labelled themselves ' Der Blaue Reiter' (The Blue Rider) as did Die Brücke they rejected their classical legacy and turned to nature and the primitive (Little, s. 2004. p104) . Der Blaue Reiter group consisted of Alexei Von Jawlensky, Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc and many more, the group came together years after Die Brücke when a painting of Kandinsky's was rejected from an exhibition. This group focused on the spirituality of art and expressing their work in a imaginative way that would sometimes in the work of Kandinsky would represent childhood memories of fairy tales. After moving to Germany their work developed further and some would later describe the work of Kandinsky as abstract expressionism and was the front runner and inspiration of many abstract painters. The work of Jawlensky is mainly figurative and shows signs of cubism, in many of his paintings and other of the group links to other art movements such as cubism and fauvism can be seen. Kandinsky developed his work further and created a more modern take on the more traditional expressionist paintings. One early piece by Kandinsky is ' The Blaue Reiter' (1903) which was created to form colour harmonies that which would purify the soul and would

be a connection between music and painting, this theme is in many of Kandinsky's paintings. Kandinsky was known for having synaesthesia where he would see music as colours. ' Music is the ultimate teacher' (Kandinsky). Kandinsky's work became more abstract with him becoming interested in colour analysis and geometrical elements became an important component of his paintings. This can be seen in one of his most famous paintings ' Transverse line' (1923) in which he used shapes and loose aggressive lines across the painting to express his feelings at the time but without using any direct connection between his personal life and the painting. Kandinsky was an important turning point in the revolution of art as many abstract painters still take inspiration and admiring his work.

Expressionism was a movement defined by freedom and self expression, a way for artists to express their feelings- not directly, but through art.

Expressionism was an important movement in the arts as it created and developed into many different art movements and has and still inspires many artists.