

BACKGROUND READING FOR PRESENTERS

Ernst Kirchner - Hockey Players

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner was born on May 6, 1880, in Aschaffenburg, Germany. Kirchner entered the Technische Hochschule (Technical College) in Dresden in 1901 to study architecture. In 1903-4 he studied painting in Munich. His visits to the museums and exhibitions in Munich and a short stay in Nuremberg, where he saw Albrecht Dürer's original woodblocks, made him decide to become a painter. After his return to Dresden he formed Die Brücke, with his new friends Fritz Bleyl, Erich Heckel, and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff. Theirs was a polemical program, calling on all youth to fight for greater artistic freedom against the older, well-established powers.

In November 1905 Die Brücke exhibited their work - watercolors, drawings, and woodcuts - for the first time. The idealism and enthusiasm of Kirchner and the other young Brücke artists can be measured by their extraordinary production. The rapid development of their personal styles was partly a result of their frenetic activity in their studios, as well as the production of woodcuts, lithographs, and an incredible number of drawings. In his search for an increasingly simplified form of expression, Kirchner was strongly influenced, as were his colleagues, by the art of the Oceanic and African peoples. When the group relocated to Berlin in 1910-11, Kirchner's response to the confrontation with the metropolis resulted in the bold works that epitomize the hectic life in Berlin.

At the outbreak of the First World War Kirchner volunteered for the army, but he could not stand the discipline and constant subordination. He suffered a nervous breakdown and was temporarily furloughed and moved to a sanatorium, where he was able to complete several important paintings and the color woodcuts to illustrate Chamisso's story of Peter Schlemihl (1916).

In 1917 Kirchner moved to Switzerland, where he was supported by the collector Dr. Carl Hagemann, the architect Henri van de Velde, and the family of his physician, Dr. Spengler. He slowly recovered, while continuing to work on paintings and woodcuts. In 1921 he had fifty works on view at the Kronprinzenpalais in Berlin, which were praised by critics and established his reputation as the leading Expressionist. In 1925-26 he made his first long trip back to Germany. His intense work on paintings, woodcuts, and sculpture expanded to include designs for the decoration of the great hall of the Museum Folkwang in Essen: work never to be completed, since the Nazis seized the museum in 1933.

From 1936 onward Kirchner was increasingly disturbed by news of the Nazis' attack on modern art, occupation of Austria, and ban on the exhibition of his work in Germany. The stress of these circumstances and the onset of illness led him to destroy all of his woodblocks and some of his sculpture and to burn many of his other works. On June 15, 1938, he took his own life."

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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Kirchner painted “Hockey Players” in 1934. It is a good example of his strong interest in line and color. He probably created this while he was in Switzerland where they enjoy many winter sports.

1. Can you describe what kinds of things you see in the painting?
What does your eye see first? Next?
2. Do these hockey players look like any you have seen today?
Do Kirchner’s hockey players look modern or dated?
Could they fit in any time period?
3. Are the positions of the hockey players true-to-life or exaggerated?
What does the artist use to suggest action?
4. What do you suppose is the purpose of the straight lines composing the shadows?
Do the stripes in the uniform design add or detract from the feeling of movement?
What about the pale blue and pale yellow stripes in the background?
5. The picture seems to be divided into 3 basic color areas. Do you see them?
Why do you suppose Kirchner did this?
What else helps to divide the picture and give it balance? (hockey sticks)

SUGGESTED EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

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Gesture drawings

Materials: Paper, pencils

Choose models from the class and have them pose in various action positions. Have students draw figures in those positions. Scribble drawings or stick figures are fine. The stress should be placed on capturing the gesture and movement and not in a perfectly rendered drawing. Have students take turns making poses.

Gesture Figures

Materials: construction paper, glue, pre-cut shapes to make figures (1 large circle, 1 rectangle for the body, 8 small rectangles for arms and legs)

Discuss real figures and how people move and bend. Using student models in action poses, have students place cutouts to form the pose. After several "models" have students make their own pose with the cutouts, making sure that the pose is possible. Students may glue final pose on construction paper.

5 Dot Action Figures

Materials: Paper, pencils

Students make 5 dots on a piece of paper. Make sure the dots are far apart. Using these dots as your guide, make stick figures of people running, jumping, falling, or any other action positions.