

WHAT IS EXPRESSIONISM?

Expressionism was an art movement in visual art and literature that started in the early 20th century - largely in Germany.

Influenced by philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, expressionists rejected the ideology of realism in favor of the notion that individuals possessed a unique view of the world. Expressionist artists sought to express the emotions that an event aroused within a person rather than its physical reality.

Common themes in expressionist work include isolation, anxiety, loss of spirituality, and angst brought about by the urbanization of society and the dehumanization of mankind through industrialization.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EXPRESSIONISM IN THE VISUAL ARTS

- Rejection of conventional art academy standards
- Bright, bold hues with contrasting colors in close proximity to one another
- Distorted or exaggerated figures
- Strong outlines
- Color symbolically expressed emotions

Examples of Expressionists' Artwork



Franz Marc
Die grossen blauen Pferde
(The Large Blue Horses)
1911
Oil on canvas
41.6 in x 71.3 in
Walker Art Center,
Minneapolis, Minnesota



Wassily Kandinsky

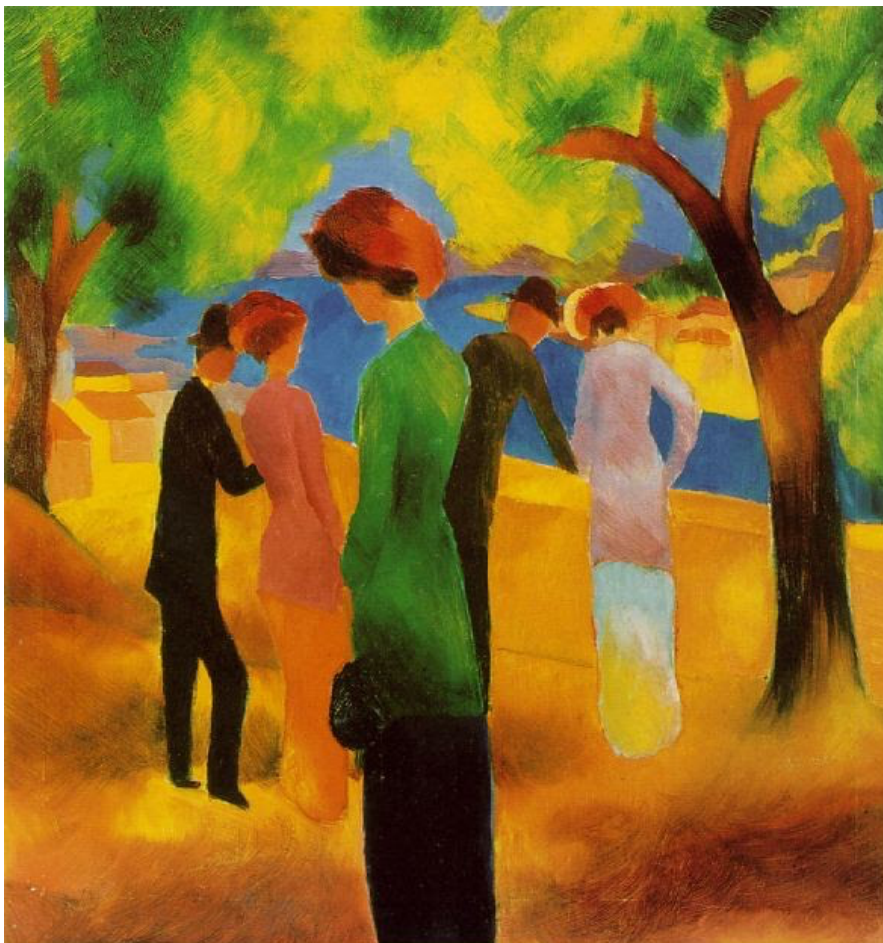
Composition VII

1913

Oil on canvas

78.7 in x 118.1 in

Moscow, The State
Tretyakov Gallery



August Macke

Dame in grüner Jacke
(Woman in a Green Jacket)

1913

Oil on canvas

17.5 in x 17.1 in

Museum Ludwig, Cologne



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

Street, Berlin

1913

Oil on canvas

47.5 in x 35.9 in

Museum of Modern Art, New York



Emil Nolde

Mask Still Life III

1911

Oil on canvas

74 cm x 78 cm

Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art,
Kansas City, Missouri

CHARACTERISTICS OF EXPRESSIONISM IN FILM & THEATRE

- Chiaroscuro Lighting - arrangement of light and dark to create dramatic shadows, used to convey sense of mystery
- Visual Distortion - extreme/dramatic makeup, unusual angles, strange costumes or backdrops, blurred movements or backdrops
- Anthropomorphism - giving human characteristics to inanimate objects
- Focus on spiritual awakening or humanity of the protagonist(s) and their suffering
- Surreal, dreamlike atmosphere
- Frequently (especially in theatre), the world and the characters are stereotypes, which talk and act in an exaggerated fashion and lack individual identity. Speech is often rhythmic, clipped, or telegraphic.

Examples of Expressionism in Film



Makeup from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*

Director: Robert
Weine

1921



Scene from
Nosferatu

Director: F.W.
Murnau

1922



Scene from *The
Cabinet of Dr.
Caligari*

Director: Robert
Weine

1921



Scene from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*

Director: Robert
Weine

1921

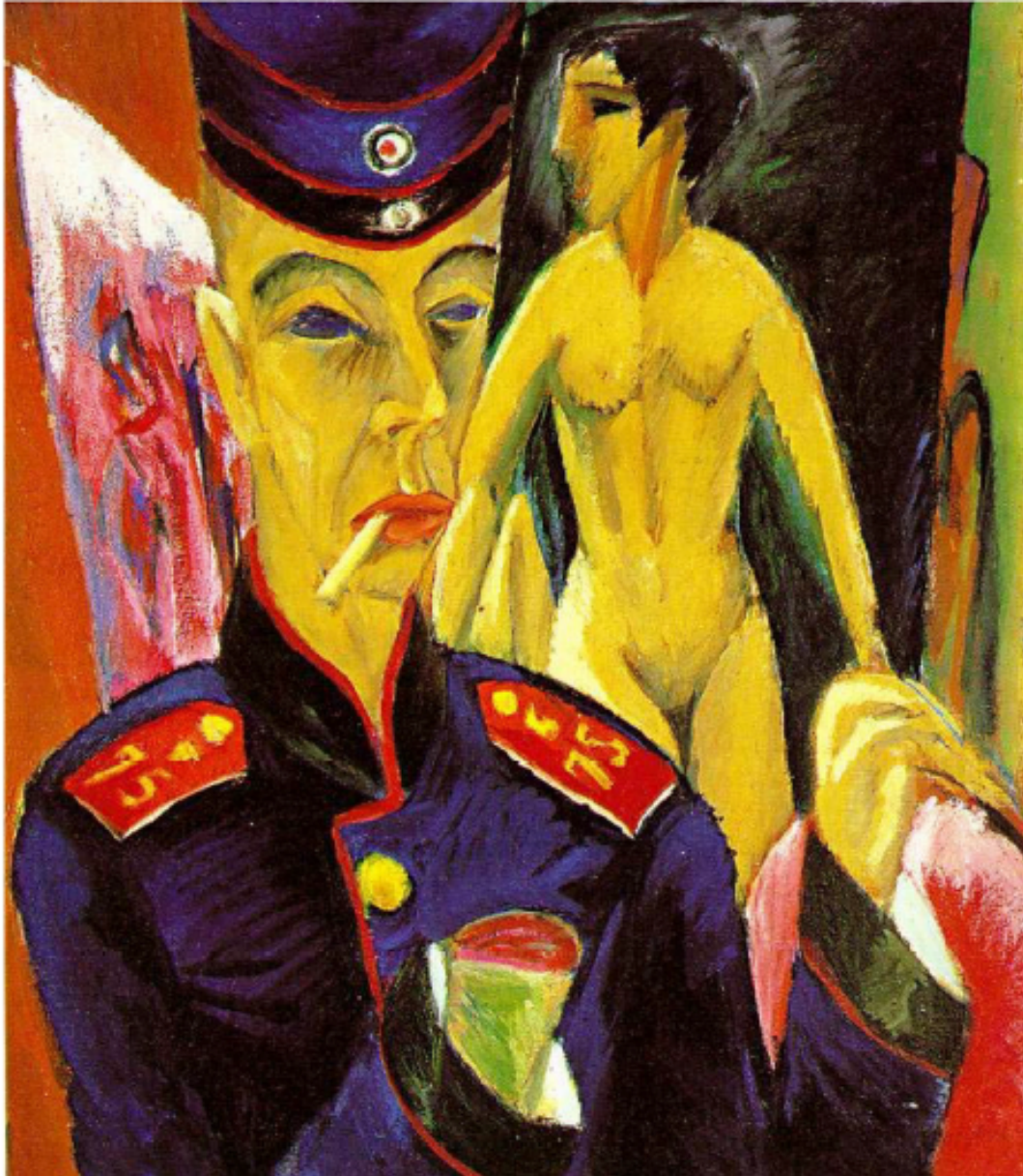
EXPRESSIONISM AND THE GREAT WAR

Prior to World War I, many Expressionist artists believed the war would be an apocalyptic event that would overthrow the materialistic society they wished to break down. Several artists including August Macke, Franz Marc, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Max Beckmann, and Otto Dix either enlisted in the German army or volunteered to be a medic or driver.

Artwork created during wartime darkened and became more somber in subject matter. Their pre-war ideals were shattered by the horrors they endured on the battlefield. Macke and Marc died in the war, and Kirchner was institutionalized after a mental breakdown.

At the end of the war, surviving artists were left disillusioned about the conflict. There was a greater focus on maimed bodies and death. Artists and filmmakers violently reacted to the sociopolitical atmosphere in Germany in their work.

Examples of Post-WWI Expressionism



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
Self-portrait as Soldier

1915

Oil on canvas

27 in x 24 in

Allen Memorial
Museum of Art,
Oberlin, Ohio



Otto Dix

Sturmtruppe geht
unter Gas
vor (Stormtroopers
Advance Under a Gas
Attack)

No. 12 of 50
engravings titled *Der
Krieg*

1924

Drybrush and aquatint
engravings

19.3 cm x 28.8 cm

Copies on display



Käthe Kollwitz

Study for *Die Mütter*
(*The Mothers*), plate 6
from *Krieg* (War)
woodcut series

1921

Brush and black ink
and opaque white
paper

17.875 in x 23.125 in

Museum of Fine Arts,
Boston

EXPRESSIONISM IN THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

The period between the two world wars proved to be an active artistic period in Germany. To mass produce German propaganda during World War I, the government seized control of several filmmaking production companies and united them as UFA, which became one of the largest studios outside of Hollywood.

These films, essentially born out of the country's isolation following the war, grew in demand due to the government's ban on foreign films. However, production budgets were limited due to the decline of the German economy. Filmmakers hired Expressionist artists to paint sets and employed the use of highly stylized makeup and costumes to create a unique environment representing the subjective, distorted perspective of the protagonist while also being quite cost affordable. Directors such as Fritz Lang, Robert Weine, and F.W. Murnau created films that reflected the troubled psyche of Weimar society.

Artists from around the world, including Alfred Hitchcock, flocked to Germany to study these innovative techniques in filmmaking that would be taken back to international studios.

Examples of Expressionism in Later Films



Scene from *The Third Man*

Director: Carol Reed

1949



Scene from
Frankenstein

Director: James
Whale

1931



Scene from *Psycho*

Director: Alfred
Hitchcock

1960



Scene from *Exorcist*

Director: William
Friedkin

1973

EXPRESSIONISM IN THEATRE

Expressionism also made its way into the theatre. Plays like Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*, Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* and Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* are all significant plays in American Expressionism. *The Adding Machine* is especially a landmark in the genre. Expressionist theatre focuses on the humanity and inner quality of the protagonist. The rest of the world and characters are there to highlight the humane qualities of the hero therefore the atmosphere is at times, surreal, nightmarish and unrealistic and the characters are stereotypes or caricatures that move in exaggerated, eerie movements.

According to the critic, Reyner Banham, "The plays are to verbalize emotions rather than dramatize conflicts, an autobiographical protagonist is involved not in a plot but in an apocalyptic quest – often for his essential identity". The subject matter often associated with industrialisation, war, and dreams of the subconscious.

Examples of Expressionism in Theatre



Scene from Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal*

Jobsite Theatre

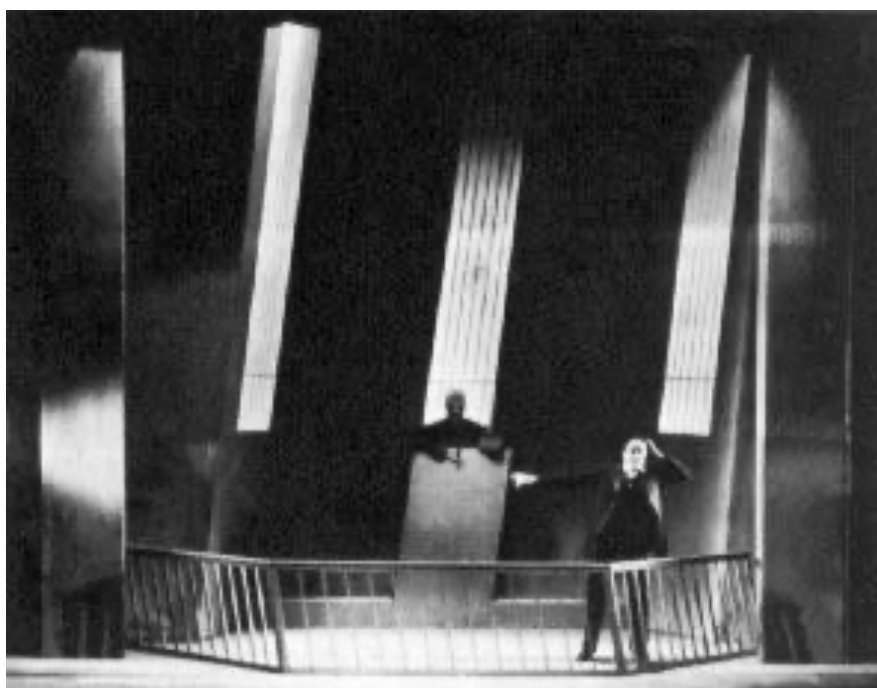
2005



Scene from *The Hairy Ape*

Old Vic Theatre, London

2015



Scene from *The Adding Machine*

Gerrick Theatre

1923

THE LASTING IMPACT OF EXPRESSIONISM

In the 1930s when the Nazis rose to power, Hitler condemned the work of several artists as degenerate as a part of a larger cultural "cleanse". Hundreds of works of film, paintings, sculptures, and books were seized and destroyed. Artists were subjected to sanctions and were often dismissed from their jobs. They were prohibited from selling, exhibiting, and sometimes from even producing work.

Many artists fled Germany for various parts of Europe and the United States and continued to work. Several other artists remained in Germany out of fear of reprisals against their families or died before the end of the Nazi regime.

Due to artists being spread around the world or silenced at home, the movement largely died out. However, its ideology and style remained a major influence on artists. This influence can be seen in artwork by post-Expressionists and neo-Expressionists as well as in the monster movies of the 1930s, film noir of the 1940s-60s, and sci-fi films such as *Blade Runner* and *The Hunger Games* today. Tim Burton's filmography contains elements of Expressionism such as highly stylized makeup and costumes, bold color schemes, and dramatic shadows.

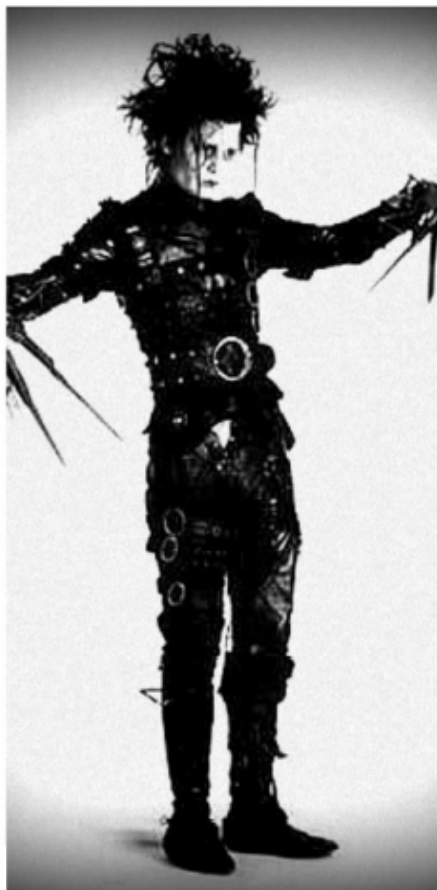
Examples of Expressionism in Modern Films



Francis from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*

Director: Robert Weine

1921



Edward from *Edward Scissorhands*

Director: Tim Burton

1990



City View from *Metropolis*

Director: Fritz Lang

1927

City View from *Batman Returns*

Director: Tim Burton

1992



Silhouette from *Nosferatu*

Director: F.W. Murnau

1922

Silhouette from *Vincent*

Director: Tim Burton

1982



Exaggerated makeup and costumes in *The Hunger Games*

Director: Gary Ross

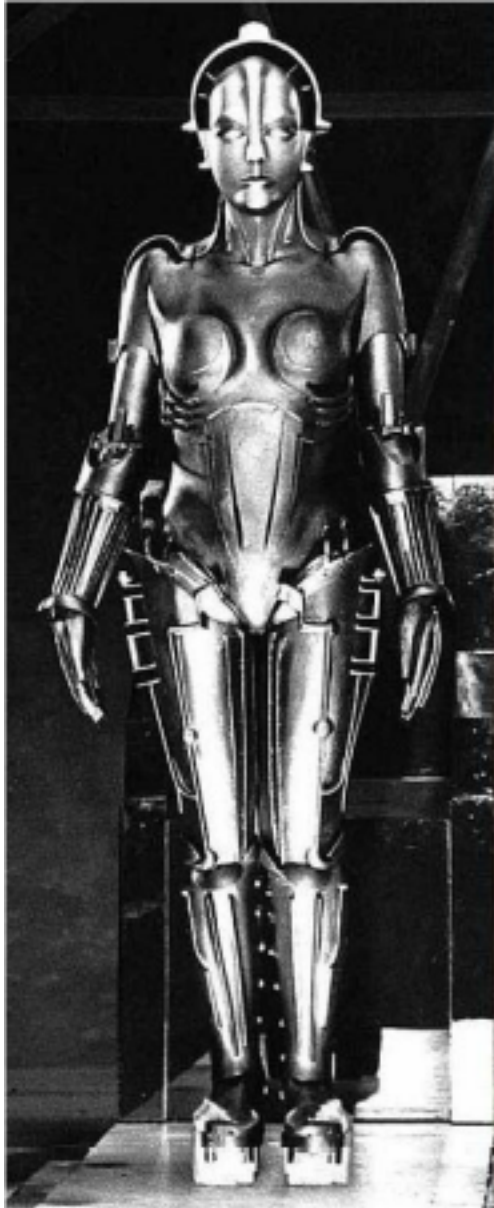
2012



Scene in *Blade Runner*

Director: Ridley Scott

1982



Robot from *Metropolis*

Director: Fritz Lang

1927



C3PO from *Star Wars*

Director: George Lucas

1977

ELMER RICE



Elmer Rice (1892-1967) was an American playwright and novelist. Often innovative in style, his plays reveal a concern with individual freedom confronted by the tyranny of impersonal institutions and destructive passions.

Elmer Rice was born Elmer Reizenstein on Sept. 28, 1892, in New York City. After 2 years of high school, he began working at the age of 14. He passed the regents' examinations and entered the New York Law School, from which he graduated *cum laude* in 1912. He passed the bar examinations but decided to try writing instead. His play *On Trial* (1914) was a resounding success. In 1915 he married Hazel Levy. Although not a member of any political party, Rice inclined toward socialism. After World War I he spent 2 years in Hollywood before moving to East Hampton, Conn.

Following *On Trial*, he had several plays produced in New York, but it was not until *The Adding Machine* (1923), an expressionistic tragic-comic portrait of dehydrated man, that he showed his true power. Two more plays, written in collaboration, were produced before he directed his powerful *Street Scene* (1929), a realistic presentation of environmental influences on character relationships. It won the Pulitzer Prize. *The Subway* (1929), a rather underrated play much on the order of *The Adding Machine*, had a short run. In 1930 he published a novel, *A Voyage to Purilia*, and had an unsuccessful production of *See Naples and Die*. But in 1931, *The Left Bank*, dealing with American expatriates, and *Counsellor-at-law* enlarged his reputation.

The impact of the Great Depression and Rice's trip to Russia and Europe in 1932 was manifested in the controversial *We, the People* (1933). After the production of *Judgment Day* and *Between Two Worlds* (1934), Rice excoriated New York critics and announced his retirement from the commercial theater. Nonetheless, between 1935 and 1938 he served with the Federal Theater Project, published a novel, helped organize The Playwrights' Company, and had his *American Landscape* produced.

After his divorce in 1942 Rice married Betty Field. During the war he worked for the U.S. Office of War Information, was active in the American Civil Liberties Union, and was president of the Dramatists' Guild. *Dream Girl* (1945), a psychoanalytical fantasy, was his final popular success. His novel *The Show Must Go On* appeared in 1949.

Rice's final work included essays, *The Living Theatre* (1959); an autobiography, *Minority Report* (1963); and additional plays. He received an honorary doctor's degree from the University of Michigan in 1961. Divorced again, in 1966 he married Barbara Marshall. He died of a heart attack on May 8, 1967.