

# Expressionism

Early 1900's

# Expressionism

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

While Post-Impressionism was all about the effect of the subject matter and colours on the viewer, the 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.

Before the Expressionist period artists showed people in anguish, just as they would appear to a rational, objective viewer. With Munch and the other Expressionists, this changed. They showed the world as viewed **through the eyes of people in anguish**. When seen that way, the colours and shapes of familiar objects change. Trees, hills, houses, and people are **pulled out of shape** and take on new, **unexpected colours**.

# Edvard Munch

Norwegian, 1863 – 1944

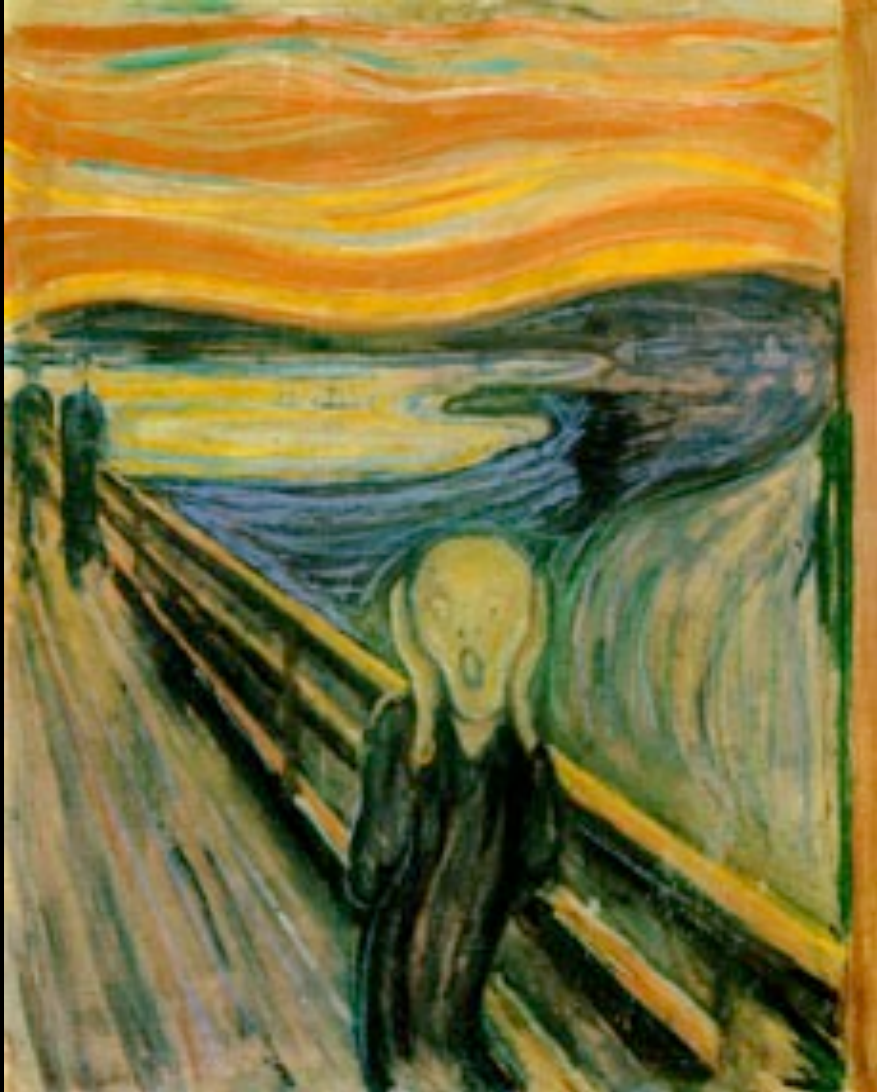
The childhood of Edvard Munch was marked by **tragedy**.

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

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



# The Scream, 1883



Munch used 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 Sick Child, 1896



How much his **own suffering** contributed to his work can be seen in this painting. He returned to this subject several times in paintings and prints and was no doubt inspired by the **death of his older sister**. In the painting, Munch captures the 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**.

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

In reaction and **opposition to French Impressionism**, which emphasized the rendering of the visual appearance of objects,

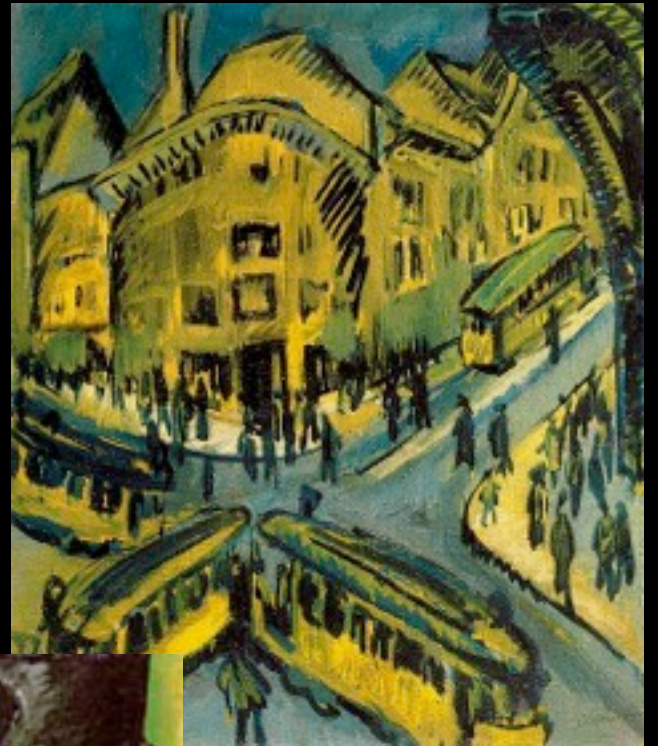
It was not important to reproduce an aesthetically pleasing impression of the artistic subject matter but rather to represent **vivid emotional reactions by powerful colours and dynamic compositions.**

One was called **Die Brucke** (meaning "the bridge"), led by **Kirchner**. The other was called **Der Blau Reiter** ("the Blue Rider"), led by **Kandinsky**.

# Die Brucke (The Bridge)

- Founded by **Kirschner**.
- Sought to build a "bridge" between Germany's past and future. Die Brucke expressionists 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.
- 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**.





# Der Blau Reiter (The Blue Rider)

- Der Blaue Reiter sought **vivid expression but not the hostility of Die Brücke group.**
- Kandinsky and his followers were more spiritually inclined than the Die Brücke 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

