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| **Artist** | Ernst Ludwig Kirchner |
| **Title** | Berlin Street Scene (MOMA) |
| **Date** | 1913 |
| **Medium** | Oil on canvas |
| **Scale** | 120.6 X 91.1cm |
| **Scope** | URBAN LIFE |
| **Style** | German Expressionism, Die Bruke |
| **Patron** | - |
| **Location** | Museum of Modern Art, New York City |
| **Function** | Comment on current politics of the times |

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| **Formal features** |
| **Composition** | Kirchner depicts a busy street scene as men and women walk down the sidewalk. Kirchner paints two women in the central foreground and their figures take up a large portion of the canvas, making them the focal point of the piece.  |
| **Colour or texture** | The woman on the left wears a purple dress, a pop of colour which contrasts with the mostly black clothing of the men that surround the pair. The street is painted in a bright pink colour, almost as though imitating a red carpet. Kirchner uses some anti-naturalistic colour in this piece including the skin of the figures which varies between shades of pink and orange as well as the blue and pink shades in the scenery. The anti-naturalistic tones are common in the [German Expressionism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Expressionism) and his other work during this time period. |
| **Light & tone** | Light and tone is not overly emphasised in this painting. Colour is used in place of a realistic depiction of light and shadow, similar to the fauves. Intense use of black, creates tension within the scene. White fur and feathers on the clothes of the women attract attention to them as the focal point. |
| **Space & depth or relief** | Not an accurate depiction of space & depth, flat appearance for the canvas, linear perspective where men in background appear smaller (some sense of depth).The tilting downward of the perspective and the opposing diagonals in the brushwork create distortion and a sense of motion. The viewer feels confronted with the people in the street, as if they about to spill off the canvas and into our space. |
| **Line or brushwork** | Kirchner paints with loose and visible brushwork. The brushwork creates a sense of motion, allowing for an aspect of hustle and bustle to be added to the street scene.  |

**Use or development of materials, techniques & processes:**

The charged atmosphere and energy of the city was felt in an expression of acute perspectives, jagged strokes, dense angular forms, and caustic colour.

The canvas here is used in order to convey a feeling of anxiety, to resemble the underlying mood of imminent danger that was present in Berlin at this time, the upcoming to World War 1, by means of brushwork, perspective and colour.

**Stylistic comment and artistic influence:**

Kirchner had been a founding member of the German Expressionist painting group [Die Brücke](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die_Br%C3%BCcke). The artists banded together in 1905 in Dresden with the goal of creating a bridge between art from the past and the modern world.

 Die Brücke developed "a common style characterized by compositions of flat areas of unbroken colour, a radical simplification of form, and the use of glowing, unmixed colours applied with fluidity."

Kirchner claimed to have artistic independence in the style of his work, but influence from earlier [avant-garde](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avant-garde) movements is visible. The choice of bright and un-naturalistic colours resembles the work of the Fauves.

Matisse was known throughout his career for painting female figures, a trend that Kirchner also adopts in his own work.

Influence from the ideas of primitivism here, in simplification of figures, also the almond eye (man on right)

Image: 

**Influence from technological factors:**

Motor vehicle, the front of a car, typical of the time is seen in the background, contributes to the modernity of the scene as cars were a modern innovation.

**Critical text quote:**

"Vital eroticism"

Groups manifesto – a generation "who want freedom in our work and in our lives, independence from older, established forces.”

“Spontaneity and sincerity” (Kirchner)

**Influence from cultural/social factors:**

Kirchner created this painting in a period of loneliness and insecurity shortly after the Brücke group disbanded in 1913, due to the competitive art world in Berlin, at the time the Europe’s third largest metropolis. Which led Kirchnir into a lonely period of his life.

The luxury and anxious energy in painting also serve as a commentary on a pre-World War I German culture, as Kirchner believed increasing political tensions further detached urban individuals from society.

Expressive brushwork, jagged lines, strong diagonals, lurid colour palette bring out an uncomfortable and unbalanced atmosphere. It is Kirchner’s strong sense of the here and now, it reflects an ethos in which no consideration was given to the consequences that might come the next day, year, or decade - decadence and ignorance live freely, in a shallow, modern day society where everything, including love is for sale.

**Influence from political factors:**

Kirchnir and the Die Brucke group were largely influenced by the philosophical works of Nietzsche – nihilism.

Street was painted shortly after Kirchnir moved to Berlin, where he was overwhelmed with the animosity of the rapidly developing city, where the main focus of daily life for the bourgeois society was glamour and presentation – Kirchnir digs at the bourgeoisie and their way of life as they disregard the happenings of the future, in their greed for the present.