

Artist	Kirchner
Title	Self-Portrait as a Soldier
Date	1915
Medium	Oil on canvas
Scale	
Scope	Participants in War
Style	Expressionism



Subject: Kirchner briefly served as an artillery van driver in the German army in WW1. However he suffered a mental breakdown due to the trauma of war and was discharged from the army. He painted this work while recovering in a psychiatric hospital. The work is a visual metaphor for the effects of war on the mind of the individual.

Subject: Kirchner is showing wearing a soldier's uniform including a regiment number, he no longer identifies as an artist but a soldier. His is shown with one arm crippled and the other a bloody stump- Kirchner did not actually suffer physical injuries in the war so these wounds suggest he is no longer able to paint as he once did. An unlit cigarette in his mouth shows he is unable to perform even basic tasks such as lighting a cigarette. A nude female model behind him is depicted in an angular masculine way, Kirchner does not find the female attractive, showing he no longer has an interest in physical intimacy due to the trauma of war. The whole work is a metaphor for how Kirchner is now unable to paint as he had done prior to the war.

Formal features

Composition	Kirchner fills the composition, forcing us to see his tormented state. He is placed asymmetrically, suggesting imbalance and instability. A nude female figure in the background looks away from Kirchner, disinterested in him.
Colour or texture	Colour is heightened and exaggerated. Kirchner's bright blue uniform emphasises his role as a soldier, he no longer identifies as an artist. His skin is a sickly yellow and his eyes are bright blue like his uniform, they lack pupils and he appears to look vacant. Red is used throughout- we see the bloody stump of his right hand and red in the background gives the work an aggressive appearance. Black is used to outline forms in an angular manner.
Light and tone	No attempt at accurate light and tone. Kirchner uses bright colour across the image in an expressive way.
Space & depth or relief	Kirchner is forced forward towards the viewer, we are confronted by his tormented presence. The female nude behind is placed in a simplistic manner, giving the work a naive appearance.
Line/ brushwork	Forms are heavily outlined, flattening the figures to appear crude, paint is applied roughly and spontaneously to give a sense of urgency or anxiety to the painting.
Figure handling	Kirchner depicts himself in an angular manner, his face appears elongated and gaunt, as if ill. The female figure behind is angular and appears masculine rather than feminine- implying that Kirchner does not find her physically attractive- a result of his trauma.

Influence from cultural/social factors: WW1 saw fighting and death on a vast scale not seen before in history. Millions of men on both sides were killed, maimed or suffered mental breakdowns due to the horrors they witnessed on the battlefield.

Artist's involvement: Kirchner's traumatic experiences of the war were common. Soldiers would be treated in psychiatric hospitals and once they recovered were sent to fight again. However Kirchner didn't return to war, this suggests his breakdown and subsequent instability was incurable. Kirchner would eventually commit suicide in the lead-up to WW2, his work was branded as degenerate by Hitler and removed from museums in Germany.

Stylistic comment and artistic influence: This work is typical of Die Brücke- a German Expressionist movement. Kirchner and Die Brücke artists used colour, form and technique to give a sense of inner expression/emotion to their works. Themes such as anxiety, isolation, tension and social issues were popular with the Expressionists.