The term ``Expressionism'' can be used to describe various art forms but, in its broadest sense, it is used to describe any art that raises subjective feelings above objective observations. The paintings aim to reflect the artists's state of mind rather than the reality of the external world. The German Expressionist movement began in 1905 with artists such as Kirchner and Nolde, who favored the Fauvist style of bright colors but also added stronger linear effects and harsher outlines.

**The bridge to the future**

Die Brücke (The Bridge) was the first of two Expressionist movements that emerged in Germany in the early decades of the 20th century. In 1905 a group of German Expressionist artists came together in Dresden and took that name chosen by Schmidt-Rottluff to indicate their faith in the art of the future, towards which their work would serve as a bridge. In practice they were not a cohesive group, and their art became an angst-ridden type of Expressionism. The achievement that had the most lasting value was their revival of graphic arts, in particular, the woodcut using bold and simplified forms.

The artists of Die Brücke drew inspiration from[van Gogh](http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/gogh/),[Gauguin](http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/gauguin/)and primitive art.[Munch](http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/munch/)was also a strong influence, having exhibited his art in Berlin from 1892. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938), the leading spirit of Die Brücke, wanted German art to be a bridge to the future. He insisted that the group, which included Erich Heckel (1883-1970) and Karl Schmidt-Rottluf (1884-1976), ``express inner convictions... with sincerity and spontaneity''.

Even at their wildest, the Fauves had retained a sense of harmony and design, but Die Brücke abandoned such restraint. They used images of the modern city to convey a hostile, alienating world, with distorted figures and colors. Kirchner does just this in *Berlin Street Scene*(1913; 121 x 95 cm (47 1/2 x 37 1/2 in)), where the shrill colors and jagged hysteria of his own vision flash forth uneasily. There is a powerful sense of violence, contained with difficulty, in much of their art. Emil Nolde (1867-1956), briefly associated with Die Brücke, was a more profound Expressionist who worked in isolation for much of his career. His interest in primitive art and sensual color led him to paint some remarkable pictures with dynamic energy, simple rhythms, and visual tension. He could even illuminate the marshes of his native Germany with dramatic clashes of stunning color. Yet *Early Evening*(1916; 74 x 101 cm (29 x 39 1/2 in)) is not mere drama: light glimmers over the distance with an exhilarating sense of space.

Die Brücke collapsed as the inner convictions of each artist began to differ, but arguably the greatest German artist of the time was Max Beckmann (1884-1950). Working independently, he constructed his own bridge, to link the objective truthfulness of great artists of the past with his own subjective emotions. Like some other Expressionists, he served in World War I and suffered unbearable depression and hallucinations as a result. His work reflects his stress through its sheer intensity: cruel, brutal images are held still by solid colors and flat, heavy shapes to give an almost timeless quality. Such an unshakeable certainty of vision meant that he was hated by the Nazis, and he ended his days in the United States, a lonely force for good. He is perhaps just discernible as a descendant of Dürer in his love of self-portraits and blend of the clumsy and suave with which he imagines himself: in *Self-Portrait* (1944; 95 x 60 cm (37 1/2 x 23 1/2 in)), he looks out, not at himself, but at us, with a prophetic urgency.