AFRICAN IMAGERY AND BLACKS IN GERMAN EXPRESSIONIST ART FROM THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

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by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As European countries chose to expand their boundaries through colonization, artists quickly noticed the artifacts brought home from the colonies, which many viewed as exotic. The German Expressionists, which included various members of Die Brücke (the Bridge), borrowed forms from African works they saw in German ethnographic museums, such as pottery, masks, and statues. When blacks appeared in German zoological gardens and held live performances, artists flocked to them to view people of African descent in person. Black models and artifacts representing their heritage were soon prominent in Brücke studios. Racism was a reality, particularly for some members of the Brücke circle, as it also was among the German populace. Although naïve and misinformed by modern standards, Brücke members were fascinated by the lifestyles and art of Africans. Artists from both groups (although mainly Brücke) were intrigued by what colonization had brought to their homeland, particularly artifacts and statuary with their highly stylized forms.

History of German Colonization in Africa

Contact between Africans and Germans began much earlier than the years of Die Brücke, as Africans were first brought to Europe beginning in the 1400s as curiosities. These “living imports” increased at the time of colonization (1884-1914), providing German artists opportunities to illustrate not only African people, but also their artifacts. Blacks usually lived scattered across Germany, but in the eighteenth century there was at least one concentration in the city of Hamburg. The first influx of Africans to Germany occurred in the eighteenth century, when slaves from the West African coast were imported to work in the West African colonies. In the nineteenth century, the slave trade continued, with Africans being transported to German colonies in Africa.

least one German village with exclusively black inhabitants called the *Mohrenkolonie Mulang* near Kassel.²

Germany’s acquisition of colonies coincided with the colonial expansion of the rest of Europe. Germany, Italy, Portugal, France, and Britain were all rivals in the “Scramble for Africa” that occurred in the last decades of the nineteenth century. By 1914, Germany would have colonies in Africa, including Cameroon, German East Africa, Togo, and German Southwest Africa (figure 1). Other German territories could also be found in the Pacific. However, during the First World War, Germany would lose these colonies as quickly as she gained them.

In 1848 the Frankfurt National Assembly discussed the possibility of acquiring colonies, citing the problem of *Auswanderung* as the reason for doing so.³ This was the term used for the massive nineteenth-century emigration from Germany. The new colonies could receive the overflow of the *Auswanderung* population, and there was also speculation that lower-class Germans would probably relocate.⁴ Some German settlements, such as those in North and South America, had already become reasonably successful.⁵ German politicians felt that the colonies would not only decrease lower-class populations in Germany, but would also prevent criminal behavior in this group, which they feared would occur.⁶

The idea of colonization in Germany was met with some hesitancy, and few interest groups supported expansion, especially Germany’s emerging industrial sector.⁷

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² Ibid, 2.
⁴ Ibid, 4.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
⁷ Ibid, 5-6.
A depression in 1873-1896 was one force that led Germany to acquire colonies, with the lower-middle class suffering the hardest.8 This depression spurred two types of colonial expansion from Germany. One, the “emigrationist” or “settlement” ideology, grew out of concern for the emigration problem and proposed the view that colonies were best used as areas for farming and settlement.9 “Economic” colonialism, in contrast, viewed colonies as trading areas and adjuncts to help boost the German economy.10

German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck shared the hesitancy felt by some groups in building African colonies. In the 1870s he rejected requests for overseas annexations for a variety of economic and defensive reasons, believing that colonies were a luxury that Germany could not afford.11 Yet in the 1880s, Bismarck began to show interest in colonizing Africa, for political reasons that would affect both Germany and her neighboring countries. Colonist and explorer Eugen Wolf told him that his version of Africa’s map had Germany in the middle, surrounded by European countries.12 Bismarck called colonization a “sham,” but an act necessary for winning elections.13 Therefore, he determined that German colonization would have both domestic and foreign political advantages.

In April 1884, Bismarck extended the Reichsschutz (the protection of the Reich) to “Lüderitz-land,” which would become German Southwest Africa.14 Between February 1884 and February 1885, Germany would then acquire Southwest Africa, Togo, and

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8 Ibid, 16.
9 Ibid, 19.
10 Ibid.
12 Ibid, 110.
14 Ibid, 110-111.
German East Africa. The Berlin Conference in 1884 through 1885 outlined guidelines for these new colonies. They discussed appropriate trade areas (starting with the Congo) and humanitarian obligations to native populations (banning slave trade and protecting missionaries). German colonies began to further develop in Africa at the turn of the twentieth century. Southwest Africa was its largest German colony in area and population, with over 14,000 Germans living there.

Like some other colonies throughout history, Germany’s were established through force. Germany was ruthless in suppressing uprisings in its colonies, particularly with the Herero of Southwest Africa. The Herero Uprising of 1904 was brutal, and thousands of victims were shot, poisoned, or forced into work camps. Cameroon, German East Africa, and Togo were also victims of violent conflicts with colonists. The leader of the Hehe in German East Africa, Mkwawa, was arrested and hanged in 1893. From 1905 to 1907, the Maji Maji Rebellion, an East African conflict involving labor disputes, led to both killings by the Germans and, among other disasters, massive destruction of crops. As Germany established a colonial administration, the few remaining African chiefs were subject to colonial laws. German colonies were still evolving by the time World War I broke out. As discussed later, Africans were enlisted to fight on Germany’s side, though this did not mean that they were considered equal to

15 Ibid, 111.
16 Ibid, 117-118.
17 Smith, 51.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
whites. The end of the war in 1918 forced Germany to surrender all of its colonies to Britain, France, Belgium, and South Africa.\textsuperscript{23}

Each chapter analyzes a different aspect of the chronology and involvement of the German avant-garde in this newly discovered colonial-era art. Their exposure, interaction, and absorption of the art of the German colonies in Africa reveal a key influence in the evolution and study of modern German art in the early twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 520.
CHAPTER II

GERMAN COLONIES AND VISUAL CULTURE

During the period of German colonization in Africa, the nation’s new territories were expanding, and visual culture was expanding as well, through means such as film, news photography, posters, picture postcards, and International Exhibitions. Aspects of German visual culture that formed particularly vivid images of Africans included cartoons, picture postcards, novels, trading cards, and print advertisements.

Satirical Cartoons

Cartoons and caricatures of blacks intended for the German public in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were numerous. The range of this imagery varied: some were satirical and racist; others were highly critical of the efforts and money Germany spent on colonizing areas of Africa. In response to the appearance of native peoples in zoos, the German satirical magazine Fliegender Blätter published two cartoons, The Whites Visiting the Blacks (figure 2) and The Blacks Visiting the Whites (figure 3, both published in 1905). In the left panel, white visitors view a self-contained display of a group of Africans. Some of the natives interact with each other, such as the children playing on the ground, some are dressed in full regalia, and others appear to be speaking with white visitors at the other side of the fence. In the background, groups of natives dance for the audience, and a cityscape can be seen faintly in the background.

If it were not for the right panel, The Whites Visiting the Blacks could be just another artist’s rendition of an ethnographic display. However, in The Blacks Visiting the Whites, the roles are reversed, and groups of Europeans are visited in a similar enclosure.

(this time in a tropical village instead of a city). A group of black visitors, some appearing in native garb, stare and laugh at both the ridiculous and mundane situations depicted in the cartoon. Some mirror their black counterparts, but are displayed (often in exaggeration) in accordance to European culture. Like the group of blacks eating and preparing food on the ground in the first panel, whites sit at the table and read the newspaper while having coffee. Women dressed for the occasion talk to the black visitors, and another woman shows visitors her baby. More interesting is the cartoon’s detailed background. Even the giraffes at the far right notice the European soldiers marching up a hill, and the circus acts.

*The Blacks Visiting the Whites* explores the inaccuracies and misunderstandings that were prevalent in ethnographic shows. The daily lives of whites are either displayed as extravagant (with Europeans wearing lavish costumes, their supposed native garb) or dull (sitting and reading). The black audience appears more amused and fascinated by the scene, having perhaps come from a simpler way of life. Even so, it must have been strange for those people in exhibits to garner so much attention for doing the mundane aspects of daily living, as seen in both panels. With so many similarities in both panels, it may be taken as a subtle statement on racial equality, but this was probably not the artist’s intent. With fences separating the races in each cartoon, blacks and whites are presented as both the opposite and the same.25

With the urbanization of Germany, the Brücke, to be discussed, developed an interest in depicting genre scenes of nature, simple lifestyles, and the countryside along with imagery of the city. Brücke members probably saw cartoons like *The Whites*

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Visiting the Blacks, which touches on ideals illustrated by Brücke members. Kirchner, for instance, illustrated images of Africans in similar situations at zoos and ethnographic shows. As revealed later, Brücke artists were also subject to stereotypical beliefs about the lives of blacks, also illustrated in the cartoons. Finally, the cartoons illustrate white people on display in a tropical village, perhaps to suggest the German interest (particularly for artists) in visiting rural or remote areas. Through these cartoons, German readers were reminded of a changing country.

As described earlier, colonization was met with some hesitancy, which was magnified as German colonies in Africa became a reality. Der Wahre Jacob, a publication aimed at Germany’s working class, published a cartoon in 1905 addressing the economic impact of colonization (“200 Million German Marks for Colonial Purposes,” figure 4). In the caricature, a group of German politicians drops a boulder with the phrase “200,000,000 Mark” over a group of oblivious Hereros.26 It addresses the colonial politics of foreign secretary Bernhard von Bülow and his advisors (who are pictured in the cartoon).27 The cartoonist ridicules Bülow’s foreign policies as a waste of money. “Gentleman, I believe the gold nugget is not big enough to destroy the damn Hereros,” Bülow tells his colleagues in a caption below the cartoon.28

At the time of this publication, the colonies were facing uprisings from native groups, including the Herero war from 1904-1907 and the Maji Maji insurrection in 1905. These conflicts did little to improve economic conditions in the colonies, and triggered major political debates within Germany: even if political parties grew to accept

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
the idea of colonies, how they were funded was a matter of debate. Bülow’s “gold nugget” is a black boulder, possibly a symbol of tainted money used for the wrong purposes. The boulder also recalls damage done at this time that was not financial, however. The Maji Maji rebellion involved several different people of southern East Africa, brought together by German taxes and enforced labor recruitment. The rebellion was organized by local religious figures (the term “Maji Maji” refers to an incantation believed to turn German bullets into water). After locals refused to work on a cotton farm, the rebellion spread quickly, but by April 1906 the war was mostly over. Groups including the Hehe and Ngoni fell victim to German reinforcements, due to disorganization and inferior weaponry. Between 75,000 and 100,000 Africans had been killed, leaving vast areas of land wasted by the Germans. Hundreds of Germans were also victims, and the colonial deficit increased phenomenally because of this conflict.

Concurrently, German Southwest Africa suffered from the Herero uprising. White settlers ignored settlement policies involving major Herero and Nama chiefs, and Southwest Africa was not prepared to suddenly enter into a European economy. The Herero’s economy was further ruined when over half of their cattle died from disease years earlier, and at the same time many Herero were moved to reservations by treaty and by force. Finally, the Herero uprising commenced in 1904, led by chief Samuel

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29 Ibid.
31 Smith, 106.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid, 107.
34 Ibid, 106-107. Many other Africans distanced themselves because of damage done from earlier conflicts.
36 Ibid.
Maherero, whose people were motivated by threats of social and economic extinction.\textsuperscript{39} Although surprised by the revolt, many German colonists were willing to employ the opportunity the war presented to destroy the indigenous political structure of the country to establish a firm colony settlement there.\textsuperscript{40} By 1906, less then twenty thousand of the eighty thousand Herero that lived in Southwest Africa before the war had remained.\textsuperscript{41} Most of the survivors had been confined to concentration camps for cheap labor (their extinction was prevented only to save the colony’s future labor supply).\textsuperscript{42} Although the Nama survived longer due to better military leadership, by 1907, they too were defeated.\textsuperscript{43}

Although the cartoon “200 Million Marks” references a brutal conflict with a suffering people (see figure 5), the Herero appear to laugh off their attack from the Germans. The money appears to be of no concern to them, but their guns suggest myths about African societies existing in a state of natural anarchy.\textsuperscript{44} The cartoon also repeats racial stereotypes and caricatures seen at this time. Instead of using the popular motifs of the noble savage or the proud warrior, the artist depicts the Herero as lazy and aloof, and references ape-like body proportions established by race scientists at this time.\textsuperscript{45} Some of them are depicted in European clothing, alluding to the popular motif of the “negro in pants,” described later on. In contrast, the well-dressed German politicians signify virtues such as orderliness and cleanliness.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, 63.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, 63-64.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, 65.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Langbehn, “Satire Magazines,” 116.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, 116.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, 115.
In the cartoon, we see the Germans sitting high above the Hereros. There is no question that this reflects a belief in racial superiority, but it may also represent the caricaturist placing the natives “on display.” They are viewed from a safe distance, reflecting the reality of blacks as entertainment. It is possible that the height difference also represents the distance the German politicians may have had from the colonies. They were far from the line of fire during these colonial rebellions. German leaders were not forgiven for these actions. As one exasperated Herero told a settler: “The missionary says that we are the children of God like our white brothers, but just look at us. Dogs, slaves, worse than the baboons on the rocks…that is how you treat us.”

**Picture Postcards, Novels, and Fears of Race-Mixing**

In Germany, the exchange of picture postcards and trading cards became more popular than plain letter writing during the period of colonization, likely because of the industrialization and commercialization of various forms of visual communication. The news and views presented in exotically illustrated picture postcards were spread worldwide. A few postcards used blacks as imagery to sell chocolate, coffee, and a variety of other products. Obviously, colonial postcards were strongly nationalist, and Germany’s successful conquests (such as her securing of German Southwest Africa) were highlighted. Illustrators of political cartoons and picture postcards usually presented negative aspects of colonial life and crude stereotypes of Africans. These lack the romanticized imagery associated with print advertisements. This negative presentation is

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48 Ibid, 117.
51 Ibid, 6-7.
52 Ibid, 7.
possibly due to the illustrator’s interest in promoting what was believed to be reality in the colonies and Germany, not selling a product through the use of attractive images.

In their home country, Germans were exposed to images of the *Hosenneger*, or the “negro in pants.” These images present Africans wearing Western clothing and conforming to the stereotypes of being lazy, uncivilized, and animal-like. Often their heads resembled those of an ape’s, and physical features, such as jaws and lips, were exaggerated.\(^{53}\) The images told viewers that even if a black person dresses in European-style clothing instead of native dress, he would never be fully civilized.

Picture postcards, in which artists illustrated racial prejudices, served as warnings to whites about the assumed dangers blacks posed. A New Year’s postcard from about 1895 featured two characters, a black man (*Hosenneger*) and a white woman (*Trotzkopf*, a stubborn or defiant person) (figure 6). A well-dressed black man with thick hair and large ears and lips kisses a white woman, who smiles shyly. He appears clumsy with his large hands and stooped position, presenting an image of fragile masculinity to viewers.\(^{54}\) In contrast, images of the white colonial gentleman presented him standing tall in a confident victory pose.\(^{55}\) This pose will be seen later in a series of colonial trading cards distributed by prepared foods manufacturer Liebig.

Caricaturists toned down the African’s appeal to white women, however, preferring the stereotyped image of the “negro in pants.”\(^ {56}\) The postcard’s text reads: “Happy New Year! Nobody is good enough for you…so take this one here—he loves you

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\(^{55}\) Ibid.

\(^{56}\) Ibid, 249.
to devour.”57 This postcard is an excellent example of an artist using a picture postcard to warn whites, particularly women, to stay within racial boundaries that corresponded to the norm, and the humor specifically was designed to prevent whites from associating with blacks.58

Illustrations of relationships between the races were not limited to pairings of white women with black men. White men were also warned to resist the allure and exoticism of the black woman. In 1911, colonial official Richard Küjas published a German novel titled Von Baum der Erkenntnis (From the Tree of Knowledge) (figure 7). Küjas transformed his experiences into colonial literature, having worked in Togo from 1889 to 1895, and later Cameroon.59 The story of From the Tree of Knowledge unfolds during the years of Germany’s increasing authority in the African Togo.60 The cover illustrator had never visited the colonies himself, nor had he experience in illustrating colonial motifs or propaganda.61 Of course, it was unlikely the novel’s readers had more knowledge of the colonies than its illustrator. Nevertheless, the drawing conveys widespread colonial fantasies by introducing sexuality as the main battleground during the period of colonization.62 The cover acts as advertising art appealing to male fantasies of sexual permissiveness in the colonies.63

In the novel’s eye-catching cover, a black nude woman seduces a fully dressed white colonist. Her serpentine body intertwining them references the novel’s title. The

57 This postcard’s text may also allude to the association of blacks with animals, because the German term *fressen* refers to an animal eating.
58 Haehnel, 249.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid., 184.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
black woman is considered “forbidden fruit” to a white man. Her exoticism is enhanced by her nudity; she only wears jewelry and a feathered turban. The colonist’s body contrasts against the woman’s, both in color (his white clothing against her dark skin) and position. His attempts to pull away from her are in vain, because she appears to keep moving closer to him. With clenched fists, he tries to exercise self-control and retain composure. What the colonist fails to notice, however, is the snake making its way up his body.

The African woman is half snake and half-human, resembling a chimera. This biblical allusion warns against consuming “forbidden fruits” in the form of exotic beauty. Giving in to temptation would lead to expulsion from the colonial paradise, with female attraction a weapon in the struggle over colonial supremacy. However, the concerns at this time were not only about colonists becoming distracted from their duties. Thomas Schwarz explains that the African woman’s skin is brown, not black, as is often illustrated, indicating that she may have mixed ancestry. The chimera is a creature from ancient Greek mythology that has the features of different animals, and is used here in a crude way to discourage interracial relationships. From the Tree of Knowledge warns sternly against racial decay. In the novel, European colonizers publicly appear with African concubines, and it is not until the introduction of the “pure” wife of a German official that these relationships are met with disgust. Though the cover makes the book appear to be an erotic or fantasy novel, it warns against the dangers of black and white

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64 Ibid, 185.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid, 186.
70 Ibid.
“hybridization.” The reader is led to feel both attracted to the novel’s cover and repulsed by its content.

**Trading Cards**

Trading cards, often included with consumer goods, were collected not only by European children and youth but also adults. A few trading cards used African imagery to sell coffee, soup, and a variety of other products. Between 1872 and 1940 in Germany alone, the Liebig Company (who used the cards to sell prepared foods) had distributed multiple series by the millions. These cards, though overlooked as trivial, were important in making Europeans of all ages aware of colonization. It should be noted that while many cards appeared neutral and just showed pictures of the colonies, most reinforced racist stereotypes. For example, Liebig published a series of six cards in 1912 called “Colonies of the European Powers.” Germany’s card illustrates a seaside village in Cameroon, with palm trees and houses, and, of course, the product it intends to sell, canned bouillon (figure 8). Natives said to be from Cameroon and German East Africa wear Western outfits in their portraits. The uniformed settler pictured on the card stands overlooking the village, isolated from the Africans, and rests on a rifle. He is the only figure to stand at full length. As discussed earlier when comparing the “negro in pants” with the white settler, whites were depicted as confident and superior, and Liebig’s card is no exception.

Germany’s card in Liebig’s series does not portray blacks in a racist manner, but not all cards did so. Seelig’s Coffee Substitute printed a trading card called “Cannibals

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71 Ibid.
“Alive” sometime after 1900 (figure 9). Unlike the “Colonies” series, the figures and setting in “Cannibals” resembles a cartoon. At a carnival sideshow, a shocked audience watches as two Africans wearing grass skirts and holding a spear and shield are unveiled. The two appear more foolish than bloodthirsty, especially when viewed next to the parrot and monkey and the white performers, one of which holds a bone. The exotic was profitable, especially when the natives masqueraded as “cannibals.” At this time little or nothing was known about this rarely occurring (especially in sub-Saharan Africa) practice, but this stereotype was spread throughout the print media.

Print Advertisements

Print advertisements continued racial stereotyping for an even larger German audience. Liebig’s cards do not suggest a direct relationship between Africans and white colonists; they are depicted separately from one another. Advertisers did take advantage of the needs and curiosities of the colonist, or at least those at home fascinated by the colonies. A 1912 print advertisement for Agfa photographic products, for example, uses an ethnographic image of an African man with prominent scarification of his arms and cheek (figure 10). “Agfa photo products are tested as absolutely dependable in the tropics,” the ad reads, implying, of course, that their products will be used in those areas. The man makes no eye contact with the viewer, allowing his scars to be the main focus of the image.

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73 Ibid, 82.
74 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
The image is actually a photo etching, and the engraver took great care to exaggerate the deep and prominent scars on the man’s body.\textsuperscript{77} This process predates photography, and engravers illustrated native peoples in books and magazines many decades earlier.\textsuperscript{78} The advertisement by the famous Agfa company promises that the modern camera can now capture images without the need for an intermediary such as an illustrator; furthermore, the camera can transform anyone into an amateur ethnographer.\textsuperscript{79}

The image is another excellent example of an exaggerated and misleading depiction of the African. Many readers of this advertisement would never journey to the colonies, and while the ad promises that the cameras can be taken to exotic locations, it also offers readers a mail-order offer for an illustrated prospectus.\textsuperscript{80} Thus German readers could receive more images similar to the one in the ad, making the ad not just a medium to sell cameras but one to perpetuate colonial images and beliefs.

Advertising at the time of German colonization also emphasized trade within the colonies, particularly one 1902 trademark image made by a Swiss chocolate firm for use in Germany (figure 11). In reality, the colonial empire accounted for less than one percent of Germany’s overseas trade,\textsuperscript{81} with two major German trading companies, the German East Africa Company and the German Colonization Company for Southwest Africa. Trade with the colonies played a negligible part in Germany’s growing economy, due both to disinterest at home and because exported items became increasingly

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid, 43.  
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, 43-44. This advertisement appeared in Süsserott’s Colonial Calendar, which was aimed at colonial enthusiasts. Most were members of the German Colonial Society or its affiliates.  
\textsuperscript{81} Duignan and Gann, 26. Between 1891 and 1910 the colonial share of German exports increased only minimally.
sophisticated (mining equipment, for example, instead of beads or gin). Germany did, however, increase its attention to farming in the colonies (in particular Cameroon and Togo), and built agricultural schools and research stations. Cocoa was grown in Germany’s colonies. The Duala in Cameroon, for example, had engaged in overseas commerce since the seventeenth century, and some chiefs became successful planters of cocoa and other food crops. Meanwhile, Togo’s palm oil exports increased the small German colony’s prosperity. Even if trade outside of the colonies was not a priority, the trademark image emphasizes commerce within their boundaries.

Similar to other images produced by German firms, the image features two figures, an African and a European, arm in arm. They each support a cocoa plant above their heads. A sailing ship and crated cargo can be seen behind the African figure. These act as allegories of colonial commerce, which was believed to be crucial in the civilizing missions of Europeans. The fine details of the advertisement should not be overlooked.

German colonial commerce, although brief and with limited success, relied heavily on trading that existed before European arrivals (i.e., Togo’s palm oil trade). Germany faced more disappointment through the “civilizing” mission of trade. While Germany’s new enterprises formed a new African elite (consisting of craftsman, civil servants, teachers, and farmers), this group was not regarded as part of German society as a whole. The Herero and Maji Maji conflicts were examples of civilizing through

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82 Ibid, 191.
83 Ibid, 190-191.
84 Ibid, 160.
85 Smith, 71-72. Like Cameroon’s cocoa trade, Togo’s palm oil exports were not always under the management of Europeans. Influential African families controlled most of Togo’s palm oil trade.
86 Ciarlo, 44.
87 Ibid. In the late 1850s, the famed explorer David Livingstone explained the duties of colonists: “The two pioneers of civilization—Christianity and commerce—should ever be inseparable.”
88 Duignan and Gann, 191.
commerce at its worst, as they stemmed from labor disputes and agricultural failures.

Emil Nolde, an artist who was not shy about voicing his disagreement with his country’s overseas conquests, wrote in his autobiography *Jahre der Kämpfe (Years of Struggle)* about white employers corrupting natives:

> Natives in the European villages are insufferable, mendacious, infected…they return to their own villages, spreading the worst side effects of the white man’s culture…No white man is supposed to see this. Whoever sees it, close your eyes nicely now: “economic profit” transcends any reservations.89

Looking at the chocolate advertisement again, the white figure is seen placing his arm on the shoulder of the African, signaling Europe’s “protective arm” around Africa (if only through trade).90 Though both figures share the cocoa pods, the other arm of the black figure is holding a harvesting bowl. This is a subtle hint at the unequal distribution of labor, particularly in the cultivation and manufacture of luxury items like chocolate.91 Items like sugar, rum, tobacco, coffee, and chocolate had all been products of slave labor, and sometimes their packaging and advertising reflected this.92 Unlike the “negro in pants” advertisements, this image presents the African in native dress, with bare feet and a waist-wrap. When compared with the white figure next to him, it is obvious that this image, like other advertisements at this time, presents the European as civilized and the African as savage, although only through the difference in dress.

As noted in the Swiss chocolate advertising, the African was often depicted in colonial advertising in a position of servitude. In the first decade of the twentieth century, blacks in German advertising increasingly shoulder heavy burdens, often the

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90 Ciarlo, 44.

91 Ibid.

92 Pieterse, 193. Most of the cocoa imported into Europe since the late nineteenth century was from colonial Africa.
commodity itself, the company’s logo, or raw materials (for example, coffee beans). This can be alluded to in the cocoa ad studied here, where the African figure holds a harvesting bowl and the cocoa plants. In a trademark image from 1912 for Tinten-Sklave (“ink-slave”) ink, a silhouette of a black figure holds a large ink bottle over his shoulders (figure 12). The chains around the figure’s ankles give no doubt to the reader that he is a slave; the brand name itself probably derives itself from a colloquial term for an ink bottle. Many depictions of Africans during this time are presented with little detail (except, perhaps, the lips and hair as seen in this ad). In this ad and others, African figures are a stark black color. Ink is black, just as Africans are “black,” and the correlation obviously accounts for the designer’s thematic choices.

The inclusion of the figure magnifies the ink bottle’s importance. Though no ink bottle could actually be that size, the viewer is drawn to the heavy burden carried by the figure, which doubles over at the sheer magnitude of the product. Thus, the advertisement is able to illustrate positive attributions to its product without words, but through demeaning a human figure in order to sell a product. Like the Swiss cocoa ad, the illustrator added details to further indicate that the figure is an “African.” With bare feet and “native jewelry,” a nose ring (uncommon in reality), it was obvious to German viewers that this figure is an outsider, but its subordinate position makes it appear less shocking to them. The figure’s head and face recall the scientific illustrations of racial characteristics from that period. Silhouettes, as profiles, are particularly good at

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93 Ciarlo, 45-46.
94 Ibid, 46.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid, 47.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
capturing assumed racial features. With the absence of a white master, the viewer, no matter what his status, is the recipient of the labor through a colonial-era “virtual slave.”

While the ink advertisement depicts the labor of a colonized African, it is removed from a colonial setting, and, as determined earlier, indirectly removed from Europeans. In a colonial-era German advertisement for shaving soap, a black child holds a mirror for a white colonist (figure 13). The ad does not attempt to make the scene out of the ordinary; a colonist is simply going about his daily routine with help enlisted from an African child. Blacks have also been illustrated in advertisements for cleaning and hygiene products by alluding to white fears of blacks being dirty. White, of course, symbolizes purity, and Western advertisements for soaps took advantage of this belief. White children attempting to scrub the color off of black children’s skin were one of the more popular examples. Here, however, the black child is portrayed using drab grey colors (perhaps because he is being portrayed as the “filthier” race) and holds the mirror with no expression. Clearly, the white man is highlighted in the advertisement. This is not only because he is using the product, but also because he is in a position of authority.

Advertisements and Colonial Reality

Advertisements that depicted colonial relationships of servitude, like that of the shaving soap, reflect a hierarchy present in colonial society. Among the primal scenes of colonialism were scenes of subjection, in which native dignitaries bowed before the representatives of European authority. The tight social hierarchy inherent in colonialism was attractive and psychologically reassuring to Europeans, whose native
countries were undergoing transformation.\textsuperscript{103} It was a hierarchy based not only on color, but, as analyzed in other advertisements and in art, on distinctions such as European and native dress.\textsuperscript{104} One key symbol of colonial hierarchy was the image of the white colonist being carried by black men (figure 14). Being transported by African natives (in a hammock or seat called a \textit{tipoye}) represents the personal services colonial officials received from employed Africans in reality.\textsuperscript{105} The shaving soap ad therefore focuses on labor expected of blacks. Even if the tasks are frivolous acts such as supporting hammocks or holding hand mirrors, they are placed on par with the labors depicted in other ad examples, such as crop cultivation.

As visible from these advertisements, a non-Western person rarely has a name (besides a cultural identifier such as “Congolese”), and is always portrayed as the typical representative of his people.\textsuperscript{106} The exotic figures were, in many ways, transformed into objects and child-like people subordinate to the white European colonists. Africans were isolated from their environment (the ink advertisement), or their environment was presented in a schematic fashion (the trading cards).\textsuperscript{107} Over the decades, these depictions had not changed greatly, although viewers would see less emphasis on physiognomy and more emphasis on the typical attributes and activities of African peoples.\textsuperscript{108}

Advertising and forms of entertainment such as novels and trading cards offered a romanticized notion of life in the colonies. As visible from violent conflicts with natives,
entertainment did not match reality for settlers, military members, or colonial administrators. Settlers often voiced harsher criticism of Africans, and this was not always because of racism.\textsuperscript{109} Farmers and planters in their new surroundings struggled with disease, isolation, unknown climate, market and ecological conditions, and transportation barriers.\textsuperscript{110} Pioneer settlers felt particularly negative in their outlook on colonial living, because, unlike their descendants, modern facilities such as schools and hospitals were out of reach.\textsuperscript{111}

Civilian and military administrators did not always offer sympathy toward either blacks or whites in the colonies. Often they had little respect for merchants, for example, leading to communication failures in terms of trade and commerce.\textsuperscript{112} Traditional African leaders were not always treated as inferior. German officials treated dignitaries like Europeans, especially those who came from distinguished families, and even learned their languages.\textsuperscript{113} Officers would also be in disagreement about the character of black troops. Captain Fonck, an East African officer, found that “much the same things go on among black privates as among our German soldiers at home. The men are really much the same, with their good and bad qualities.”\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{109} Duignan and Gann, 157
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid, 157-158.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid, 158.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid. The German respect for nobility was even extended to so-called aristocratic nations such as the Fulani and Tutsi.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid, 159.
CHAPTER III
DIE BRÜCKE AND AFRICAN ART

German artists at the time of colonization may have had only partial interest in the politics of European colonies in Africa, but the objects that were made by its artists attracted the German Expressionists. A group of Expressionist painters and printmakers founded Die Brücke. Although a short-lived movement (it would last from 1905 until 1913), Die Brücke’s fascination with African pieces would live on in later works by its members.

European artist interest in Non-Western art is sometimes referred to as primitivism. In general, the term “primitivism,” when ascribed to cultures outside of Europe, has had predominantly negative connotations.\textsuperscript{115} It stems from the West’s history of colonial conquest and exploitation, along with romanticized notions of “less developed” or “uncultured” societies. The art of “primitive” societies was viewed as timeless, because cultural production was based on material needs and instinctual drives.\textsuperscript{116} In addition, European artists, having experienced rapid industrialization as the twentieth century began, were fascinated by African and Oceanic societies because of their perceived simplicity. In contrast to “modern” Europe, non-Western cultures were “infantile” societies that mirrored the beginnings of Western society.\textsuperscript{117} With its racist associations, primitivism is now a volatile term.

Germans at the beginning of the twentieth century, artists or otherwise, were likely overwhelmed by ideas about cultures that were unfamiliar to them. Advertisements, newspapers, and ethnographic museums and performances further

\textsuperscript{115} Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, \textit{Cubism and Culture} (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 25.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid, 28.
perpetuated such beliefs. Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter were but a small segment of European artists that studied and admired pieces outside of the Western world.118 By 1906, the Fauves, or “wild beasts,” which included Henri Matisse, André Derain, and Maurice Vlaminck, adopted abstract forms based on a Fang mask from France’s colony in Gabon.119 Picasso, who had introduced Iberian forms in his 1906 works, had also seen African masks, and Cubism is indebted to these artifacts. Earlier, Paul Gauguin explored the concept of primitivism, recording his visits to Martinique and Tahiti (although his work had no African influence). German Expressionist groups, therefore, owe much of the African content of their work to the influence and interests of their contemporaries (whose home countries colonized Africa earlier than Germany) elsewhere in Europe.

African objects appeared in European collections as early as the fifteenth century, but they were at that time considered to be merely ethnological curiosities (displayed in Renaissance-era Kunst- und Wunderkammern, or art and wonder cabinets), not artistic creations.120 Early twentieth-century colonial exhibitions in Europe, particularly France and Germany, allowed the public to view a variety of African, Oceanic, and Mesoamerican works.121 Ethnographic museums in German cities, including Berlin, Hamburg, Leipzig and Dresden,122 were the most accessible means of studying African imagery. Brücke artists will explore these artifacts and art objects later in many of their works. When the Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde (ethnographic museum) opened to the

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118 When compared alongside Brücke pieces, works by Blaue Reiter members are not as strongly influenced by African art.
119 Antliff and Leighton, 30-32.
121 Ibid.
122 Francis Frascina, Charles Harrison, and Gill Perry, Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century (New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 73. Such museums were not limited to Germany; similar collections could be viewed in France and England.
public in 1886, for example, Germany had only begun to colonize Africa. Yet it housed almost ten thousand African objects, primarily specimens gathered from exploration expeditions by German travelers.123

**Beginning of Die Brücke**

On June 7, 1905, architecture students Fritz Bleyl, Erich Heckel, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff formed Die Brücke in Dresden. Their manifesto, *Programm*, outlined the group’s core beliefs. It made no commitment to a particular artistic style or content:

> With a belief in evolution, in a new generation of creators as well as appreciators, we call together all youth. And as youth that is carrying the future, we intend to obtain freedom of movement and of life for ourselves in opposition to the older, well-established powers. Whoever renders directly and authentically that which impels him to create is one of us.124

Heckel noted the group’s name, meaning “the bridge,” “represented no program but in a sense it led from one shore to the other.”125 At the time of the Brücke’s founding, the term was used repeatedly by other progressive German artists to reference goals of creating the art of the future while taking leave of, but not dismissing, the past.126

To them, the uninhibited and untrained artists of the African colonies were fascinating and honest, and the imagery Brücke members appropriated would lead to the styles that became associated with German Expressionism. Brücke artists sought art from cultures uncorrupted by European academic practice or of “civilization” in

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125 Ibid, 14.
126 Ibid.
Angular shapes, spiritual forces, stubby proportions, brilliant motifs, and the expressive prominence of facial features came directly from African art.\textsuperscript{128}

Germany’s rapid urbanization in 1910 through 1911 led artists to idealize peoples that came from an agrarian society.\textsuperscript{129} Dresden, home to members of the Brücke, was at the center of Germany’s most developed industrial region, having a river and a network of railroads that allowed export of materials throughout the country and continent.\textsuperscript{130} Although rural areas remained, by 1914 Germany had taken the lead in Europe in many branches of industry, including manufacturing, engineering, and coal and metals production.\textsuperscript{131}

Overseas, Germans built towns like other European colonists did before them. Southwest Africa, for example, had no cities until Germany’s arrival, and Dar es Salaam was changed from a small dying town to the capital of East Africa.\textsuperscript{132}

Back home, German artists embraced the cult of “going away,” leaving urban centers and their art institutions in favor of rural artists’ communities and peasant (Volk) villages.\textsuperscript{133} Artists’ colonies, set in the countryside, soon evolved in Germany and other European countries. At least eighteen of these groupings existed in Germany, including Worpswede near Bremen and Neu-Dachau, near Munich (one of the largest).\textsuperscript{134} Many were easily reached by rail from towns that had become highly industrialized or had reached dramatic population explosions.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid, 23.
\textsuperscript{128} Gordon, “German Expressionism,” 370.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} Heller, 15.
\textsuperscript{131} Duignan and Gann, 2.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid, 205.
\textsuperscript{133} Frascina, Harrison, and Perry, 34.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid, 34-35.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid, 35.
During the Wilhelmine era (1871-1914), the growth of industrialization and urban expansion contributed to increased feelings of anti-urbanization by Germans (termed *Kulturkritik*, cultural criticism).136 Contemporary writings, which usually praised peasant communities and condemned urban life, contributed to these attitudes.137

After German unification in 1871, many Germans became obsessed with seeking a national identity in a shared cultural heritage, leading to the cult of the *Volk*.138 Germany’s struggle with identity will be seen again when German scientists attempted to categorize the races, and when racial purity was questioned during the era of colonization.

The artists’ communities mentioned earlier were not related to and existed prior to Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter. Their goals and beliefs were not in alignment; unlike those in later German Expressionist circles, artists in rural communities trained and exhibited within traditional institutional frameworks.139 Nor did they strongly adhere to manifestos and oppositional agendas characteristic of Die Brücke.140 However, members of both Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter did connect strongly with the natural world, painting countryside and rural scenes like artists living in those areas. Some Brücke members traveled not only to rural German villages but also to countries they felt had a stronger connection to the natural and spiritual realms. Indeed, artists in these rural communities depicted the presumed simple and noble life of the peasant in much the same way Brücke members represented the similar life of the African.

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136 Ibid.
137 Ibid. An example includes Julius Langbehn’s book *Rembrandt as Educator*.
138 Ibid, 36.
140 Ibid, 18.
In city studios, particularly Kirchner’s, Brücke artists recreated the carefree lifestyle they associated with native Africans. Some attempted to “go native,” through nudism and sexual camaraderie with their models. The group’s imagery of figures interacting with nature was partially a product of projection and wish fulfillment. Members of Die Brücke imagined nature as tamed and controlled for their entertainment and pleasure. The less idyllic aspects of African and Oceanic peoples essential to their survival, such as their harsh battles with land and dependence on the weather (and of course, colonial struggles), were never depicted Die Brücke’s imagery of bohemian lifestyles. Obviously, misconceptions and exaggerations about Africans both living in their homeland or in Germany were prevalent in the Brücke group. Exposure to the romanticized imagery of the colonies associated with contemporary print advertising, combined with Die Brücke’s manifesto, undoubtedly was a reason for their beliefs.

**German Art with Africans Prior to Die Brücke**

It is important to examine images of blacks in German art prior to the formation of Die Brücke. Some of these works, created in the second half of the nineteenth century, were undoubtedly an important influence on the members of these groups. As will be studied later in Kirchner’s paintings of nude black models, the associations of blacks with savagery (particularly sexuality) were of interest to Die Brücke. Adolph von Menzel’s *The Zulus* (figure 15, ca. 1850-1852) captures an African display that, decades later, would inspire members of Die Brücke like Kirchner. Performers here dance onstage in

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141 Gordon, “German Expressionism,” 370.
142 Heller, 31.
143 Ibid.
144 Ibid.
145 The term “Zulu” is used loosely here, as are the names for many ethnic groups portrayed in live performances. As discussed later, some traveling groups identified themselves under multiple (and often incorrect) names.
front of a crudely painted backdrop consisting of various jungle animals, mimicking the poses in front of the backdrop. Dressed in ornate headdresses and grass skirts, the Zulus are each caught in a different position by von Menzel: one crawls underneath the backdrop, one sniffs the ground (a reference to a witch finder’s search, in which the person responsible for casting dangerous spells is “sniffed out”), and another with bulging eyes bares his teeth at spectators.

In London, a group of Zulus, also known as “Kaffirs,” performed these characteristic dances. By 1853, performances by a troupe of thirteen Zulus were so popular in London that they expanded to major cities in France, Germany, and Prussia. The depicted animalism and savagery of these performers is obvious, particularly the witch hunter’s, whose act horrified missionaries and colonial officials alike. The acts were, of course, exaggerated to satisfy curious patrons. At this time, however, Germany had no African colonies, but blacks were beginning to be associated with the circus, and images of them appearing at the zoo can been seen at this time as well.

Paul Friedrich Meyerheim’s images of Africans on display are more vivid in content than what members of the Brücke would illustrate when they visited ethnographic exhibitions. The Savages (figure 16, 1873) and In the Animal Hut (figure 17, 1894) both feature captive audiences and exotic animals such as elephants, monkeys, parrots, and crocodiles. The dancers in The Savages enthrall a group of children, while the old men point at their odd appearance. The display’s host provides commentary on the spectacle.

147 Ibid.
149 Honour, 140.
In the Animal Hut blends the human and the animal. As the zookeeper shows the audience the crocodile’s open mouth, an African man supports the animal on his shoulders and stares into the crowd. He blends in with the animals and is portrayed as one himself.

Children are also spectators here, and these educational displays of African savagery surely made an indelible impact on young people.\(^{150}\) Furthermore, blacks were believed to function at the level of a child and even on a different evolutionary scale,\(^{151}\) so those hosting ethnographic exhibitions took advantage of these notions. Members of Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter likely knew about this, in part due to their fascination with children’s artwork and comparison of children’s works to African and Oceanic art, as seen in writings such as Der Blaue Reiter Almanach. Kirchner even went a step further, incorporating young adolescent models in his figure studies. Some sat on carved African stools or copies of them carved by Kirchner. While European politicians justified colonial rule because African peoples were believed to behave like children, Kirchner compared the two for a different reason. Combined, children and African influences were symbols of the Brücke’s positive desire for regeneration and renewal.\(^{152}\)

Similar to Meyerheim’s images and more explicit in its racist ideology was Brücke contemporary Max Slevogt’s Victor (also called War Booty) from 1912 (figure 18). Slevogt was not affiliated with Die Brücke either, but he also painted from black models. A Somali named Hassanó modeled for Slevogt.\(^{153}\) Hassanó’s poses were unlike

\(^{150}\) Ibid, 141. The Zulus is also part of a series of scenes from the Berlin zoo that Menzel illustrated for his Kinderalbum.

\(^{151}\) Ibid, 141-142.


\(^{153}\) Honour, 240.
the frozen postures of an academic model; instead, Slevogt depicted him in ethnographic situations such as standing by a dead leopard and dancing with a lance and leopard skin.154 His studio model returns to Africa as a virile savage.155 Victor’s subject wears a loincloth (likely a garment from the painter’s imagination) and has long legs disproportionate to the rest of his body. This is probably a deliberate act to stress his importance. He carries a tall spear that cuts the painting in half. His right leg rests against his left, and his left hand rests against his hip, making the image asymmetrical. The three nude women at his right are all white, and they appear seduced by his prowess. A fourth figure hides in the shadows behind them. One woman has a rope tied to her wrist, and it is not clear where the rope comes from. The man aggressively faces the viewer, and so this painting combines both erotic desire and racial misconceptions and fears.

With World War I looming, Victor foreshadows Germany’s consideration of the use of black colonial troops, already in place by other European countries such as France.156 Germany felt that blacks in the military would overpower white soldiers, but racial parity was also considered a threat to German society itself.157 Mixed marriages had been a longstanding debate, but the white German woman was considered both an active and passive conduit of black male sexuality (both promiscuous and a victim).158 Black men were seen as uncontrollable seducers of white women, who in turn were

154 Ibid.
155 Ibid.
158 Ibid, 97.
supposedly unable to resist their exotic colonial desire for black male sexuality.\textsuperscript{159} Black troops would have easier access to white women, and in 1921 \textit{Grenzland Korrespondent} relayed the fear of racial pollution:

\ldots the Negro…is also systemically being trained to desire that which was formerly unreachable for him—the white woman! He is being urged and driven to besmirch defenseless women and girls with his tuberculosis and syphilitic stench…and abuse them in the most unthinkable ways.\textsuperscript{160}

The women of \textit{Victor} are held captive, as evident from the woman with tied wrists mentioned earlier, and the women on the ground look both enamored and fearful. The interest in racial separation would later be continued with the works of Brücke member Emil Nolde.

\textbf{Nolde}

Nolde was a member of the Brücke for about a year, and thus his style and views cannot completely be identified with the rest of the movement.\textsuperscript{161} The works and writings of Nolde reflect his extensive knowledge of other cultures. His first in-depth encounter with non-European art was in 1906 at the Folkwang Museum in Hagen, where Western works and non-European artifacts were displayed together.\textsuperscript{162} He had also seen non-European art earlier at the 1900 World’s Fair in Paris, which also had sections devoted to German colonies in Africa.\textsuperscript{163} Nolde’s South Seas journey in 1913 led him to German New Guinea, a trip intended to investigate native conditions.\textsuperscript{164} This expedition

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid, 98.
\textsuperscript{163} Lloyd, \textit{German Expressionism}, 213.
travelled via Russia, Korea, Japan, and China, allowing Nolde to collect and sketch more native objects.\textsuperscript{165} It also led to Nolde’s use of Oceanic pieces and patterns in his works.

Although his expressive use of color and emotional interpretations of landscapes and religious scenes were associated with the Brücke style, Nolde was impressed by “\textit{Blut und Boden}” (“blood-and-soil”) ideals.\textsuperscript{166} Called “\textit{Volkish} thought” by historian George Mosse, this is the belief that “a race and its landscape exist in a reciprocal and mystical relationship which embodies divine truths and gives meaning to individual existence as well as to the history of nations.”\textsuperscript{167} This attitude at its best was an expression of affection for one’s own culture, and at worst the explanation for the persecution of other races.

Although Nolde later joined the Nazi party, his work was condemned as degenerate, much to Nolde’s resistance.\textsuperscript{168} “My art is German, strong, austere, and sincere,” he argued in a letter to Josef Goebbels in 1938.\textsuperscript{169} It was Nolde who had the most works confiscated at this time, but many other Expressionist works were seized or destroyed by the Nazis. \textit{Entartete Kunst} (degenerate art) described work not conforming to the goals of the Nazi party (though the term was used as early as the 1920s), mainly avant-garde art.

The \textit{Entartete Kunst} traveling exhibition premiered on July 19, 1937 in the former Institute of Archeology in Munich, concurrent with the neighboring \textit{Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung} (Great German Art Exhibition). In contrast, \textit{Grosse Deutsche}

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\textsuperscript{165} Lloyd, \textit{German Expressionism}, 217.
\textsuperscript{166} Miesel, 30.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{169} Miesel, 209.
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Kunstausstellung, exhibited in the Haus der Deutschen Kunst, featured German art approved by the Nazis. Adolf Ziegler, president of the Reichskammer für Bildende Künste (Reich Chamber of Fine Arts), oversaw both exhibits. Sections of Entartete Kunst highlighted Brücke’s interest in African sculpture and culture. Describing the group’s “barbarous” sculptural techniques, a guide for the 1938 Berlin Entartete Kunst exhibit states: “Here we are presented with the negro and the South Sea islander as the evident racial ideal of modern art. It is hardly believable that the makers of these works are men…in Germany or Europe.”

Nolde’s own extensive writings praising African peoples are nevertheless intriguing.

Nolde’s strongly held attitudes are revealed in his writings, but these beliefs about race are generally not readily apparent in his art. Nolde rejected the mixing of races, both in art and in life. In the second volume of his autobiography, written in 1934, he writes, “The absolute, pure, strong always pleased me, wherever I found it from the most primitive aboriginal or folk art to the most sublime portrayal of greatest beauty. Hybrids I never liked…all that is downright mongrel culture.” While Nolde does indeed praise the exotic, he does not shy away from also praising the art of German masters such as Matthias Grünewald and Albrecht Dürer. This may explain his brief association with the Brücke, who wished to recreate the greatness that German art once held. His interest in pure artistic forms in terms of the ethnic group that created them, however, was in conflict with Brücke’s emerging ideals.

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171 Ettlinger, 200.
A large majority of Nolde’s writings on race date from the 1930s, while he was a member of the Nazi party. Therefore, directly associating them with paintings from about twenty years earlier is problematic. As discussed later, they were written during the time of Nazism, and Nolde was anxious to write that he had always aligned with Nazi ideals. In a description of his life from the years 1902 through 1914, Nolde makes clear his anti-Semitism: he blamed his struggle for recognition on the preference for French Impressionism by Jewish artists and art dealers.\footnote{Ibid. He specifically targets Paul Cassirer and Max Liebermann.} This attitude cannot simply be blamed on resentment or economic tension; rather, it was a contributing factor to his later beliefs in racial separation and racial purity.\footnote{Ibid.} Nolde may have not been as vocal about his racism toward blacks when he painted scenes related to Africa. As Germany’s African colonies grew and artifacts found their way into his homeland, however, Nolde applied his false doctrine to another group of people.

Peter Selz argues that while some Brücke members changed their styles due to the impact of African works, Nolde did not make use of the formal aspects of these pieces.\footnote{Peter Selz, \textit{Emil Nolde} (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1963), 33.} Like his Brücke contemporaries, Nolde places African objects in his still lifes, but he also transforms African figures into new characters in his paintings. Nolde’s painting titled \textit{The Missionary} (figure 19, 1912) is a painting whose satirical imagery of an African woman and her child being approached by an outsider is subject to multiple interpretations, especially considering Nolde’s complex racial opinions that will be examined later.

European missionaries were not strangers to Africans during the period of colonization. Missionary work in Africa started around the same time as exploration of
the continent began in the late eighteenth century. Christian missionaries were already working in some areas of Africa long before they became German colonies, as was the case for German Southwest Africa. Rhenish missionaries, for example, had settled there nearly forty years before Southwest Africa officially became a German colony in 1884.

Some Africans left their home countries in part due to the missionaries. The ex-missionary Samuel Phillips Verner, for example, brought pygmy Ota Benga to the 1904 World’s Fair and later to the United States. Missionary groups are best known for educating natives, and their schools created a new class of literate Africans that expanded their colony’s labor force.

The success of missionaries in converting the colonized varied (and cannot be measured precisely), especially due to the short lifespan of Germany’s colonies. In areas where Christianity was adopted, the disappearance of indigenous religious beliefs did not always occur. Instead, Africans would often absorb certain elements of Christianity into their current practices. Even so, African churches emerged and thrived in German East Africa (in what is now Tanzania) even after World War I forced mission groups to evacuate. Translations of the Bible and church teachings required expertise from locals, leading to some Africans to question missionaries (though not necessarily the

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175 Pieterse, 64.
178 Duignan and Gann, 208.
The Catholic Church also ordained African priests in German East Africa during the war, though Catholic policy encouraged their ordination even earlier. Some traditional African leaders welcomed missionaries to their communities, because they were valuable allies in matters concerning European colonial authorities. Local ethnic groups, including the Herero, rejected colonialism while still in close contact with missionaries and their churches. Thus Africans who accepted the teachings of mission groups did so both from sincere beliefs and to gain local influence.

Missionaries also held political influence in their native countries. Although Germany’s influence on colonial policy was not as prominent as Britain’s or France’s, there are exceptions. The Catholic Church in Germany, for example, was against Bismarck’s policies until colonialism’s popularity grew with voters. In 1889, Catholic missions were permitted in Germany’s overseas empire. The Protestant missions were less hesitant in their involvement, having built schools independent of German government influence. Many missionary societies also had commercial interests, particularly in Cameroon and Togo, and some missionary personnel had connections with trading companies.

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184 Smith, 141.
185 Ibid.
186 Ibid.
187 Ibid, 142.
188 Ibid, 142-143.
As Nolde will explain in describing *Missionary*, conflicts between introduced and native religions were common. Protestant groups in Cameroon and East Africa attacked the pro-Islamic policies of these countries, and missionary Friedrich Fabri was one of the leading propagandists for a German takeover of Southwest Africa.\(^{189}\) Considered one of the fathers of German colonization, his 1879 manifesto, *Does Germany Need Colonies?*, was based not upon religious values but economic predictions. To Fabri, colonies were not only a safety net for German emigrants but also a source for raw materials and a market for German exports.\(^{190}\) Other missionaries, such as committed Lutheran Wilhelm von Estorff, found many acts against African natives deplorable. He visited Southwest Africa and found the Herero “a proud, gifted and promising people.”\(^{191}\) To him, Germany had sinned grievously by the cruelty of her conduct; the Herero were to be educated, not destroyed.\(^{192}\) *Missionary* is, therefore, a painting that stemmed from complex religious and cultural attitudes.

In Nolde’s *Missionary* image, an African woman kneels (perhaps in greeting) in front of a figure facing the viewer. She holds a jar in her hands, and her breasts are exposed. Nolde paints her body using sharp angles, and the woman’s facial features are greatly exaggerated. The eyes of both the child and the woman are enlarged, and the fullness of the woman’s lips is unmistakable. It is difficult to determine the position of the woman’s legs; she is obviously kneeling as noted earlier, but her legs curve abnormally and her feet are too large. It may be that the child is large enough to stand on the same surface as the woman, allowing his body to blend in with the woman’s. The

\(^{189}\) Ibid, 142.  
\(^{190}\) Duignan and Gann, 191.  
\(^{191}\) Ibid, 159.  
\(^{192}\) Ibid.
missionary’s toothy grin, black clothing, wide eyes, and strange beard resembling finger-like projections parody the overbearing nature of outsiders visiting an exotic culture. The two main figures divide the painting into halves, and an oblong mask can be seen to the right of the missionary. The child is carried on the back of the woman and is wrapped in her striped garment. He appears to move away from this scene.

Nolde used a variety of sources that were replicated in *The Missionary*, and because he copied real objects, many of Nolde’s images that appear to be portraiture are actually based upon still lifes. A Yoruba mother and child statue likely modeled the woman and child in Nolde’s painting, the original now lost.193 The missionary’s caricatured appearance is based upon a Korean roadside idol.194 It is unusual that Nolde would choose such an unlikely and unrelated piece to model for the missionary, but its caricatured appearance contrasts with Nolde’s modeling of the Yoruba mother and child, who are treated with respect and dignity.195 A dance mask from the Bongo of Sudan was chosen by Nolde to overlook this scene (figure 20).196 The mask’s square eyes are now larger, and its white and pink coloring makes it appear clown-like.

Donald E. Gordon speculates that the mask, which represents the woman’s native religion, overlooks the woman’s conversion with horror.197 By teaching the woman to give up her original religion in favor of Christianity, Gordon explains, the missionary is fostering the extinction of her culture.198 This painting aligns with Nolde’s high regards

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193 Gordon, “German Expressionism,” 382.
194 Ibid.
195 Ibid.
196 Ibid.
197 Ibid.
198 Ibid.
for non-Western artwork, and in his *Artistic Expression of Primitive Peoples*, he condemns the actions of people such as his missionary:

> We ‘educated’ people have not moved so wondrously far ahead, as is often said. Our actions cut two ways. For centuries, we Europeans have treated the primitive peoples with irresponsible voraciousness. We have annihilated people and races—and always under the hypocritical pretext of the best of intentions. Animals of prey know little pity. We whites often show even less.  

Because Nolde visited the South Seas, he may have viewed missionary societies in action, as Christianity had already gained a foothold there before Germans arrived.  

Around the time that *Missionary* was painted, Nolde was also producing a series of colorful, angular paintings featuring biblical scenes. The religious themes in these visually striking paintings would be revisited intermittently for the rest of his life. In his autobiography, he praises God but also feels that “art is exalted above religions and races.” As a child Nolde himself considered missionary work, but had doubts about Christianity’s validity. Even if his paintings were merely studies of biblical stories he had read as a child and not images of intense devotion, it is likely that he did not find the work of Christian missionaries worthwhile. As discussed before, this was particularly because he saw no need for whites to intermingle with Africans. 

The third volume of Nolde’s autobiography, written during the years of the Nazi rule, describes colonization as “brutal” and white men “the enemies of colored native

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200 Van der Heyden, 232-233.


202 Miesel, 34.

203 Lloyd, *German Expressionism*, 214.

204 Selz, *Emil Nolde*, 24. Nolde recollected the long winter evenings he spent as a boy reading the Bible.
peoples.” 205 Certainly, this excerpt alone would lead one to believe that Nolde finds the idea of racial superiority appalling, but Nolde explains that the actions of whites are simply the way things are; to him, it is just like the idea of the “survival of the fittest” in the natural world. 206 As discussed earlier, Nolde’s autobiography and letters are filled with strong anti-Semitic, racist, and nationalistic views characteristic of the isolated rural Germany in which Nolde was raised. 207

A 1912 ethnographic still life, *Exotic Figures (Monkeys)*, is an example of Nolde’s cruder use of African figural sculpture in his paintings (figure 21). Here black figures sit in various stages of “regression,” becoming increasingly similar to a monkey perched on a pole. 208 They resemble African woodcarvings, including the monkey, with exaggerated eyes, lips, and noses, and headdresses. This shows the extent to which conventional evolutionary values operated in Nolde’s paintings, but it probably was meant as a positive celebration of animal “vitality.” 209 Nolde was interested in the lifestyles of tribal societies, but his dissatisfaction with modern civilization involved not a rethinking of evolutionary criteria but a reinforcement of it. 210

A second painting, *Mulatto* (figure 22, 1915) is a peculiar image resembling a cameo portrait. If the title accurately describes Nolde’s model, he certainly paints her differently than a black woman or a white woman. A biracial model surely is a fascinating subject to someone against the mixing of races like Nolde, who writes in his autobiography:

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206 Ibid.
208 Lloyd, *German Expressionism*, 181.
209 Ibid.
210 Ibid.
Seen in a broad context, no race may be worse or better than another—before God they are all the same—but they are different, very different, in their stage of development, in their life, in customs, stature, smell and color, and it is certainly not the purpose of nature that they should mix with one another (i.e., interbreed).  

Scientific theories on race will be explored later, but “mongrels” (*Mischlinge*) were seen as a disruption to the hierarchies some scientists placed on race. Biracial people did not fit any specific racial category, challenging theories of racial superiority.  

In *Mulatto*, the woman has thick hair and thin eyes that mimic African masks, and a toothy smile is visible between her red lips. Nolde’s color selection is also interesting; the woman has a pink face and purple-tinged cheeks and sits in front of a reddish-orange background. Of course, this is not the first painting with strange skin color choices, but Nolde probably found choosing a skin tone for this model a challenge. Nonetheless, her bright skin exemplifies the use of vivid colors in his portraiture at this time. If Nolde wants to encourage racial separation, *Mulatto*’s colorful and delicate features do not appear to initially communicate this. Instead, he presents the woman as a curiosity, and her odd smile, coloration, and eyes, presented almost as deformities, may be his warning to viewers about the results of racial mixing. Again, his autobiography is quite clear: he had no praise for art by “half-breeds, bastards, and mulattoes.”  

Like his German Expressionist contemporaries, Nolde sketched objects of interest seen in the *Museum für Völkerkunde*, and was impressed by the simplicity in which Africans lived. He still subscribed to a mentality that encouraged separation of the races.

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In Nolde’s mind, whites should not associate with non-whites, and vice versa. As studied earlier, Nolde did not want art from those of different races to be spoiled by outsider influence just as he did not want his own race to be tainted. Yet Nolde was fascinated with the art of African and other non-Western societies, and did not understand why their art forms were usually overlooked. He praised the spontaneity of their works and the direct connection with the materials used to make these works (in other words, making objects with one’s own hands).  

Since Nolde was formerly an apprentice woodcarver, it is understandable why he sketched collections of masks and figurines and why he found woodcarvings made by non-Western artists interesting. As can be seen with The Missionary, Nolde groups together works from different cultures, placing Yoruba figures and a Bongo mask with a Korean idol. Considering Nolde’s racism, this was not any sort of attempt to bring different cultures together, but rather lumping them as the same. It is more likely that Nolde’s curiosity toward the forms and techniques of masks, statues, and other ethnographic objects was because these objects would look aesthetically suitable in his own work.

This mixture is evident in Man, Woman, and Cat (figure 23, 1912). Nolde places these ethnographic fragments into theatrical encounters lifted outside of time and place. This colorful painting of a male and female figure facing each other is based on sources from Cameroon (the male is from a Cameroonian throne, figure 24) and Nigeria (the cat comes from a carved Nigerian door, figure 25). Her triangular nose, lips, breasts, and yellow skirt sharply contrast with the rounder and curvier elements seen in

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214 Gordon, “German Expressionism,” 382.
216 Ibid.
the male, whose clothed body accentuates his round headpiece and carried bowl. These contrasting elements alone suggest that this couple, along with the crudely painted green cat, come from different cultures and were selected by Nolde for their formal qualities.

Nolde’s use of illustrations of works from multiple cultures is not limited to the above works; his *Maskenstilleben* (mask still lifes) series of four paintings includes masks from South America, Mexico, and the South Seas, taken from various locations throughout the *Völkerkunde* museum.\(^{217}\) It is evident that Nolde studied multiple cultures in detail, and a portfolio of sketches from the Berlin Ethnographic Museum documents his visits. It can be chronologically ordered according to size, style, and relationships with dated paintings, allowing viewers to follow Nolde’s developing and changing attitudes during his museum visits.\(^{218}\) For example, his earliest drawings, from 1911, are simple outlines in pencil of objects from Mexico and Peru such as pots and jewelry.\(^{219}\)

Later, Nolde used colored crayons to sketch figurative drawings, such as a Yoruba figure, leading to his painted still lifes (figure 26).\(^{220}\) He praises the authenticity of the hand-made sketch over mechanized reproductive techniques.\(^{221}\) As mentioned before, it reminded him of how African pieces were created: “Our age has seen to it that a design in paper has to precede every…useful object…The products of primitive peoples are created with actual materials in their hands, between their fingers.”\(^{222}\)

Blaue Reiter artists juxtaposed cultures and styles in their works as well, although Nolde was not affiliated with them, and their interest in African art was not as intense.

\(^{217}\) Lloyd, “Emil Nolde’s Drawings,” 382.
\(^{218}\) Lloyd, “Emil Nolde’s ‘Ethnographic’ Still Lifes,” 100.
\(^{219}\) Ibid.
\(^{220}\) Ibid.
\(^{221}\) Ibid.
\(^{222}\) Ibid.
This group, active from 1911 to 1914, also was without a unified theme or style, concerning it self mostly with the inner desires and the spiritual lives of artists. Its main founders were Franz Marc and Vasily Kandinsky, and the group’s members held two exhibitions. Marc himself described “savages,” but not in reference to African natives. They were, to him, German groups like the Brücke, whose “dreaded weapons” were their “new ideas.” Nolde makes comparisons between Gothic and African art, and medieval pieces are prominently illustrated in the Der Blaue Reiter Almanach. He copied pieces in the Völkerkunde museum with crayon, like the Yoruba figure, suggesting a shared interest with Blaue Reiter in children’s artwork. Nolde, other members of Brücke, and Blaue Reiter artists embraced the vitality and freshness that the artwork produced by children provided. Der Blaue Reiter Almanach juxtaposed works as diverse as Bavarian glass paintings and Russian folk art with statuary from Cameroon and paintings from China. Nolde also had an interest in the decorative arts, and single sketches made at the Berlin Ethnographic Museum helped create Still Life with Wooden Figure (figure 27, 1911). Nolde adds flowers and a Peruvian clay pot to place the African figure in an even more foreign setting.

Organizing works in the ethnographic museums at this time was not an exact science, and some works were poorly categorized. The director of the Berlin Ethnographic Museum, Adolf Bastian, acknowledged such chaos in an 1877 guidebook.

224 Ibid, 61.
226 Lloyd, German Expressionism, 174.
Worried that obtained pieces were in danger of theft or damage, he argued that artifacts should “be quickly collected and secured in museums,” even if the objects could only be stored in “magazine-like arrangements.” To him, acquisitions needed to be given priority over creating a comprehensive display of existing pieces. By 1900, the Berlin museum was still in disorder, and visitors were greeted with crowded display cabinets and walkways (figure 28). In many of the halls, pieces from unrelated countries and ethnic groups were presented as neighbors. It was an unfortunate departure from the fanfare surrounding the museum’s opening in 1886 as the world’s first freestanding ethnographic institution. This is especially unfortunate because the museums began to attract an even broader audience during the first decade of the twentieth century, particularly younger visitors, the working class, and those with little education. Such disorder reveals the lack of appreciation and knowledge seen in correctly displayed and categorized artifacts. Furthermore, the displays indicate a complete lack of concern for aesthetic issues.

Nolde takes note of confusing museum displays in his autobiography. He found the collections in the Berlin Königgrätzer-Strasse museum, for example, too crowded, and furthermore organized not by aesthetic criteria but by scientific methodology. African works were arranged in the manner of an evolutionary model and viewed as a

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228 Ibid.
230 Ibid.
231 Ibid. Bastian is considered the father of German ethnology, having travelled not only to African countries but also around the world.
232 Penny, *Objects of Culture*, 144-145.
233 Gordon, “German Expressionism,” 381.
scientific curiosity, while certain other works, such as the Asiatic collections, were actually evaluated according to aesthetic criteria.\textsuperscript{234}

**Race Research**

Pseudo-scientific research analyzing the differences between the races may help explain why the ethnographic museums were organized in such a manner. All major races were said to have distinctive mental and physical characteristics, and during the early twentieth century, German academic circles based their judgments on non-Western societies using these racial theories.\textsuperscript{235} During World War I, German scientists and anthropologists took advantage of the non-European prisoners of war to help develop these theories. Much earlier, in 1775, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, from the University of Göttingen in Hamburg, used these proposals to classify human beings into three groups: Caucasian, Ethiopians, and Mongolians.\textsuperscript{236} Blumenbach’s opinions on race changed throughout his career. He fell in love with a black woman he met in Switzerland, and later noticed that facial angles in a painting of “four African heads by van Dyck” did not match standardized diagrams, especially those by Dutch anatomy professor Pieter Camper.\textsuperscript{237}

In 1791, Camper measured the facial angles of human and animal heads (physiognomy), making his studies the first to use scientific instruments to measure supposed racial differences (figure 29).\textsuperscript{238} Africans had a smaller facial angle, similar to apes, with a large jaw and small cranium; therefore, they were believed to be the lowest

\textsuperscript{234} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{235} El-Tateb, 34.
\textsuperscript{236} Pieterse, 46.
\textsuperscript{237} Ibid, 46-47.
\textsuperscript{238} Pieterse, 46.
and most primitive race. In contrast, Blumenbach found his caricatures unlike real Africans, and maintained that Africans were not inferior in their mental capabilities.

This did not mean that racial studies were discontinued, however.

In the 1906-07 Politisch-anthropologische Revue, physician and race theorist Ludwig Wilser describes blacks as a human subspecies: “The black race (‘Homo niger’) includes the darkest and in their physical and mental development most retarded humans.”

In Nolde’s Exotic Figures (Monkeys), one can see similarities to the angled faces, and it is probable that Nolde knew about current and older racial theories.

It is evident, therefore, that the study of race in Germany was well in advance of the period of colonization. As illustrated in works by the German Expressionists and their predecessors, beliefs about Africans varied, and race theory in Germany had a peculiar history. When the nineteenth century began, race became a subject for scientific specialization at the University of Göttingen. Germany’s emphasis on race theory has been explained by frustrated nationalism; since the German nation did not yet exist (until 1871), emphasis was placed on the Germanic race. Notions borrowed from Romanticism emphasized that the language and music of a people reflected their essence, and their nation was the source of all truth. Race and kind (Geschlecht) were considered “scientific” terms for people, nation or community. Until the 1930s, the terms “race,” “nation,” and “people” were synonymous in European discourse.

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239 Ibid.
240 Ibid, 47.
241 El-Tateb, 36-37.
242 Ibid.
243 Ibid.
244 Ibid.
245 Ibid, 47-49.
246 Ibid, 49.
can explain Nolde’s racist and strongly pro-German thinking, and the mixture of cultures seen in his works and in ethnographic displays and performances.

In Brockhaus’ Konversations Lexikon (figure 30, 1901), the viewer is presented with detailed images of Africans grouped together (Afrikanische Völkertypen). Numbered and classified, the figures recall images of animals or plants seen in field guides. In the Lexicon image, the peoples are presented both as belonging to distinct cultural groups and as homogeneous. In the bottom third of the illustration, for example, the people are all grouped in the same setting. However, it does not make “Africa” appear to be a country of one culture. As revealed during Germany’s struggle for identity during colonial times, the ethnology in the first half of the century was largely racial, with little detail on actual peoples. However, even if there are misinformation and stereotypes in the Lexikon, it is a first step in identifying Africa’s unique cultural history. It is a notable image if only for the face in the upper right corner, a black man in Western clothing, who stands out against the natives in turbans, holding shields, and wearing animal skins or only partial clothing. This indicates that colonization was well underway at the time of the Lexikon’s publication. In fact, colonial ethnology of the latter part of the century went beyond the usual classifications.

Knowing the colonized is one of the fundamental forms of control and possession, with knowledge of said cultures circulated primarily via images. Another lexicon, Knaurs Konversations Lexicon, was published in 1931 (figures 31 and 32). Though printed after the period of German colonization, it similarly categorizes various peoples in its entry on Menschenrassen (human races). Facial and full-body profiles characterize

247 Ibid.
248 Ibid, 94.
249 Ibid.
the entry. Some people, namely those said to be African, are depicted without clothing, but others are in native dress. The last row of facial profiles is particularly notable, due to its inclusion of mixed-race peoples. Its last entry, *Bastard: Weisser-Hottentotten*, undoubtedly (and crudely) acknowledges the changed racial populations in Germany’s former African colonies.

The varying quality and availability of non-Western artworks (in Germany or elsewhere) has been attributed to a variety of causes. Indeed, until about the 1950s, the availability of high-quality pieces was purely accidental, that is, the souvenirs and curiosities brought home by visitors and missionaries may or may not have had any significance.²⁵⁰ Some pieces were even considered “war booty,” particularly some detailed bronze heads and plaques and carved ivory tusks from Benin City.²⁵¹ These pieces, some of which were torn from the palace walls, were removed from the city by British forces during a brutal expedition in 1897.²⁵² Some Benin artifacts later appeared in German museums via British merchants and antiques dealers.²⁵³ Believed to be superior in craftsmanship than anything produced in Europe at the time, the Benin pieces challenged current evolutionary theories about race held by ethnologists.²⁵⁴ It is important to note that pieces taken from colonized locations were later sold to help finance a country’s colonies, as was the case with the British Benin carvings.²⁵⁵ Thus ethnographic museums had pieces in the collections that may have not only been stolen originally, but also used as fundraising devices.

²⁵¹ Penny, Objects of Culture, 71.
²⁵² Ibid.
²⁵³ Ibid.
²⁵⁴ Ibid.
²⁵⁵ Ibid, 75.
When members of the Brücke saw wooden African figures in ethnographic museums, in Germany or elsewhere, the objects were probably made quite recently, and so they represented only the tail end of a culture’s history. This is because pieces made from wood are unlikely to withstand tropical climates; furthermore, many ritual objects were disposed of when no longer needed. With colonization changing the landscape of some African countries, this danger was also heightened. Many older pieces have survived, of course, mostly due to preservation (many pieces from drier climates are intact because of this), or because of a piece’s religious or cultural importance. Therefore, the origins of various Brücke members’ combinations of various cultures are based partially on how their works were obtained, organized, and presented to the public.

**Kirchner and Heckel**

Kirchner was a founder of the Brücke and, like Nolde, had made sketches of African pieces. The first non-Western works he saw, however, were not from Africa. Somewhere between 1903 and 1905, Kirchner saw an illustrated image of decorated roof beams from the Oceanic island of Palau at the Dresden Ethnographic Museum, which led to his discovery of non-Western art. He reports that the figures “displayed exactly the same formal language as my own.” However, the formal quality of this art was not what attracted Kirchner at first, and like the other German Expressionists, Kirchner was attracted to the assumed spontaneous and uninhibited efforts of the natives. As the exotic lifestyle and collections of Gauguin and the bright images and foreign influences

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256 Rubin, 21.
257 Ibid.
258 Ibid.
259 Ettlinger, 192.
261 Ettlinger, 195.
became better known in Germany through exhibitions, Kirchner’s work and the walls of his studio changed to match these surrounding influences.\textsuperscript{262}

Kirchner had black models in his studio, but he was subject to the white myths about blacks at this time, particularly regarding their fabled sexual prowess and vitality.\textsuperscript{263} This was not a new phenomenon, since blacks were employed as models from as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century despite the associations of their color and appearance with ugliness.\textsuperscript{264} In 1909, black circus and cabaret performer Milli debuted as a graceful nude in \textit{Milli Telling a Story} (figure 33).\textsuperscript{265} In this candid sketch, Milli appears at ease in Kirchner’s studio. In 1911 Kirchner photographed Milli and fellow performer Sam in his Dresden studio (figure 34).

Sam’s physique (looking much like the man’s in \textit{Victor}) mirrored long-standing attitudes about black male models. Those with well-developed, muscular physiques were regarded by artists as fine specimens of virility whose physical strength and agility compensated for assumed deficiencies in intellect.\textsuperscript{266} Both performers pose much like a “living sculpture,” and resemble the artifacts collected in the artist’s studio more than actual models in the photograph.

Numerous erotic lithographs of the models were later made, but Kirchner’s goal was not to sell pornography. Instead, Kirchner was advocating the “immediacy and authenticity” the Brücke advocated.\textsuperscript{267} The “authenticity,” of course, is based upon the positions in which Kirchner directed the models to pose, and the aforementioned myths,
but nonetheless their passionate and uninhibited nature matched the interests of Kirchner and the Brücke group.

Kirchner did not study works of African origin at first, in part due to the collection of the Dresden Ethnographic Museum and the geographical limitations of the Brücke members, who lived and worked in Dresden until 1910 when most moved to Berlin.268 A 1907 guidebook explains that the museum’s focus was on collections from the Pacific Islands and the South Sea region, due to space limitations.269 Kirchner’s letter to Brücke artists Heckel and Max Pechstein in 1910 references parts of the museum that apparently had reopened: “…it is refreshing and enjoyable to see the marvelous bronzes from Benin, some examples of Mexican Pueblo art and Negro sculptures.”270

There are few references to African art by Brücke painters prior to the move to Berlin, and Kirchner’s claims to having seen these pieces earlier probably stem from illustrations from members of Blaue Reiter271 or images by other painters interested in African figurative sculpture such as Matisse.272 His earliest exposure to African art would therefore best be described as a secondhand experience. Furthermore, Kirchner misdated drawings made at the Dresden ethnographic museum, suggesting a concurrent interest in African art with the Fauves.273 In actuality, this is not chronologically accurate,274 and the use of African styles in art cannot be attributed to any single Brücke member.

268 Ettlinger, 196.
269 Ibid.
270 Ibid.
271 Ibid.
272 Donald E. Gordon, “Kirchner in Dresden,” The Art Bulletin 48, no. 3/4 (September-December 1966): 348. By late 1908 and early 1909, Kirchner saw the works of Matisse in person at Paul Cassirer’s Berlin gallery, and at the Berliner Secession exhibition. Perhaps not coincidentally, many of Kirchner’s depictions of black models and African art are dated from around this period.
274 Gordon, “Kirchner in Dresden,” 335-336. Kirchner also signed and dated some of his works significantly later (sometimes almost a decade) after they were produced. His hospitalization following the war and the tendency of critics around 1910 to minimize his work (preferring Pechstein’s) are other plausible reasons for dating inaccuracies.
Kirchner’s dates, because of their inaccuracy, cannot be used as proof that he adopted African forms before other artists did the same. His sketches of objects in the ethnographic museum in Berlin are also notably less compelling than the carvings and paintings done in his studio, where the inspiration of non-Western art led not to forms to be copied but rhythm and emotional immediacy.\(^\text{275}\)

Despite these inconsistencies, Kirchner’s works developed tremendously after his exposure to pieces from African cultures. Brücke’s graphic portfolio in 1910 reveals his departure from Matisse-inspired curvilinear shapes and introduces angular, straight-line forms, influenced in part by similar features in Cameroon sculpture.\(^\text{276}\) Statuary was of particular interest to Kirchner, who imitated it in his own sculptures, woodcarvings, and paintings. His numerous pen and ink sketches were the foundation of these works (for example, *African Sculpture* from 1910, figure 35). The works of Erich Heckel, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, and Max Pechstein also contain images of African carvings. Like Nolde, Kirchner also referenced characteristics from unrelated cultures. There are both African and Oceanic characteristics in some of his works. This widespread following is in part due to the publication of Carl Einstein’s *Negerplastik* in 1915. Ideas held by the German Expressionists about African sculpture were popularized by Einstein’s book, although it focused on French Cubism. African sculpture was seen primarily in terms of formal analysis, although its religious function is acknowledged.\(^\text{277}\) Furthermore,


\(^{276}\) Gordon, “Kirchner in Dresden,” 355.

*Negerplastik* praises the “intensity of expressiveness” that surpassed most artists at this time, and studies the principle of plasticity in African sculpture and its related impacts.\(^{278}\)

References to non-Western styles are apparent in the woodcarvings of Brücke artists around 1909, with Kirchner and Heckel exploring African sculpture earlier.\(^{279}\)

These two artists made small sculptures in clay and pewter, and many of Kirchner’s sculptures from 1909-1910 (part of the early Dresden years) are now destroyed or missing.\(^{280}\) While living in rural Switzerland in 1919-1920, Kirchner compared himself to African woodcarvers because he carved his own furniture. A chair that he stained with oxblood even reminded him of a chief’s stool from Cameroon.\(^{281}\)

Kirchner’s *Dancer With a Necklace* from 1910 is a painted wood figure that exemplifies direct contact with the materials used to create it (figure 36). The wood on this figure has not been smoothed out, and there are sharp edges adjacent to flat surfaces on the figure’s body. The outline of the woman’s hand, for example, is sharply cut, but her palm appears flat. Originally a two-dimensional relief, *Dancer’s* angles and rectangular shape suggest the original piece of wood it came from, and it is an interesting example of how Kirchner’s sculpture evolved from two to three-dimensional form.\(^{282}\) Its appearance is further enhanced by the woman’s twisted figure; her torso and hips bend unnaturally to face the viewer. Her painted face and necklace are now lost.\(^{283}\) This figure, however, does not appear to specifically represent a woman of a particular ethnic group (by the 1920s, Kirchner would also carve Caucasian figures while borrowing

\(^{278}\) Ibid.

\(^{279}\) Lloyd, *German Expressionism*, 67.

\(^{280}\) Ibid, 72-74.

\(^{281}\) Gordon, “German Expressionism,” 399.

\(^{282}\) Lloyd, *German Expressionism*, 75.

\(^{283}\) Ibid.
African styles). His carved studio furniture and stools, known from photographs, paintings, and drawings, relates directly to Cameroon’s sculpture, also seen in the Dresden Ethnographic Museum.284

African statues have been copied in German Expressionist sculpture before, but it appears that the figures play a more important role as a decorative element in the studios of the artists and as props or still life objects. Kirchner’s *Nude Girl in a Bath* (figure 37), 1909) is a woodcut that illustrates a chieftain’s stool from the Cameroon (figure 38). This stool is not as intricate as the original that Kirchner had copied, and it can be seen that the level of importance assigned to these artifacts varies. The woman’s pointed toes, heels, and shoulders allude to African sculpture. Although she is probably white, her large hips and buttocks suggest the exaggerated features sometimes adopted by Brücke artists of black females.

Heckel’s similar painting, *Girl with Pineapple* (figure 39, 1910), also places two graceful nude women against an exotic backdrop, likely in the Dresden studio. One woman kneels next to a wooden stool Kirchner carved after a Cameroon model.285 The kneeling woman’s smile mimics that of the stool’s animal support, and the pineapple evokes nature and culture (a tropical fruit and European delicacy, respectively).286 Unlike Kirchner, the exotic and modish are related and not opposed.287 Of course, even though the stool is probably by Kirchner, it is still a minor part of the scene. Heckel learned about Africa and its art from his brother who had lived there,288 and, like

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284 Ibid.
286 Ibid.
287 Ibid.
Kirchner, studied from black models and carved figures from wood. His 1908 woodcut, *Sleeping Black Woman*, fills the picture plane with a black model that acts as a living sculpture (figure 40). Both Heckel and Kirchner will repeat this imagery in similar paintings of dancer Nelly (Heckel’s model) and Milli. In *Still Life with Mask* (figure 41, 1912), two items sit in the corner of a room: a round mask from Central Africa (possibly southeastern Congo) overlooks woven calabash from the Cameroon Grasslands.

In contrast to Heckel, Kirchner depicts a European woman with exotic figures again in *Seated Woman with Wood Sculpture* (figure 42, 1912). Here Kirchner’s lover Erna has a mask-like face that blends with the figure to her right, although she obviously is in a modern setting and wears modern clothing. The urban woman acts as an interface between traditional and modern societies. Imagery of the modern European woman contrasted against African and other non-Western artifacts might comment on how far European society has come, and Jill Lloyd explains that contemporary women’s fashions were advertised next to traditional costumes and headdresses to compare civilization and savagery.

For the majority of German Expressionists, African artifacts acted as ethnographic studies with two functions: they expressed their admiration for the cultures they came from and served as still life additions. Kirchner’s studio, as discussed earlier, was surrounded with ethnographic objects. In 1928, he contemplated the meaning of decorative art as it pertained to “modern” and “primitive” peoples:

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289 Lloyd, *German Expressionism*, 68. Describing his roughly hewed pieces, which are similar in form and execution to Kirchner’s, Heckel notes: “I would never have been able to carve hard wood without the emotion that one must encounter in Africans.”


292 Ibid, 155-156.
What does ‘decorative’ mean after all? The more art progresses, the more clear this distinction becomes, and with it the disdain for certain works of art that serve practical ends. Today we’ve almost reached the point where the necessity and justification for decorative art are denied. But primitive peoples the world over only knew this form of art, because they lacked the context to ‘hang’ other forms—a house or a room.293

Kirchner’s words echo those of Nolde’s. Africans lived simpler lives than Westerners, and their mostly functional objects reminded artists of the beginnings of their own cultures. Nonetheless, the ethnographic still lifes of Nolde and Pechstein depict objects that have been divorced from their original uses. As illustrated in Nolde’s Man, Woman, and Cat, figures from multiple cultures were often placed together. In African Wood Sculpture (figure 43, 1919) by Pechstein, an arrangement of figures, probably from a museum display, sits bathed in warm light. With a nondescript background and only a small red flower in the corner as a decorative element, the image is as mysterious to the viewer as are the original uses of these statues. All five statues readily visible in the image differ in color and carving style.

**Schmidt-Rottluff**

To Nolde, the idea of converting Africans to Christianity was futile, and it was best that Africans be left to their traditional religions. However, another Brücke artist, Schmidt-Rottluff, used African art objects in his illustrations of Christian subjects, particularly masks. Traditional beliefs and Christianity were combined, at least in theory. Schmidt-Rottluff’s Four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (figure 44, 1912) are brass relief images painted in oil for the 1912 Sonderbund chapel exhibit in Cologne.294 Schmidt-Rottluff’s contribution to the chapel combines an “indigenous

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294 Ibid, 60.
primitivism” (Gothic metal reliefs of religious subjects) and African sculptures.\textsuperscript{295} The chapel’s exhibition catalog describes the exhibition heading towards “the ubiquitous return to the primitive, be it Gothic art, the sculptures of barbarous peoples, or ancient pictures of Saints.”\textsuperscript{296}

According to Gordon, a dance headdress from the Ekoi probably influenced Schmidt-Rottluff’s relief (figure 45).\textsuperscript{297} The headdress, from the Berlin Ethnographic Museum, is a wooden head covered with animal skin.\textsuperscript{298} The flattened lips and misshapen eyeholes share the same characteristics of each panel of \textit{Four Evangelists}. Gordon speculates that the unique characteristics of each of the four evangelists may also represent the Brücke members (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are Heckel, Schmidt-Rottluff, Pechstein, and Kirchner, respectively).\textsuperscript{299} However, Matthew’s eyes resemble the closed eyes of the Ekoi headdress, and John’s eyes the eyeholes overlaying the headdress.\textsuperscript{300} Gordon sees African features in Mark’s flat nose and prominent lips and Luke’s bit of hair and larger lips.\textsuperscript{301} The faces in each relief are so varied that it is possible that Schmidt-Rottluff may have used other objects to illustrate \textit{Four Evangelists} (for example, it is also possible that a more angular figure influenced John’s image, and a curvier one for Luke). Again, this is pure speculation by Gordon. The mask-like structure of \textit{Four Evangelists}, however, does allude to Schmidt-Rottluff’s biblical woodcuts.

\textsuperscript{295} Ibid, 60-61. This is similar to Blaue Reiter’s interest in Medieval art.
\textsuperscript{296} Ibid, 61.
\textsuperscript{297} Gordon, “German Expressionism,” 384.
\textsuperscript{298} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{299} Ibid, 385. Gordon equates the four Brücke members to “evangelists of a new art.”
\textsuperscript{300} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{301} Ibid.
Although other Brücke artists were successful woodcutters, Wilhelm Niemeyer wrote in *Denkschrift des Sonderbundes* how “none of them…has occupied himself with this technique with such exclusiveness, energy, and therefore with an ability fully adequate for the material as Schmidt-Rottluff, whose art, even his painting, really strives toward wood sculpture.”302 Between 1917 and 1919 Schmidt-Rottluff, strongly influenced by his interest in African sculpture, made twenty woodcuts of New Testament subjects.303 Like the wood used in carvings that inspired him, the quality of the wood was an important determining factor in the quality of the piece.304 Bodies, faces, and hands were cut into the wood to emphasize a series of rapid gestures and movements.305 Schmidt-Rottluff’s lack of round forms and sharp, angular ridges reflect his interest in statues with similar forms.

The face of the far right figure in *The Three Kings* from 1917 (figure 46) is possibly derived from a Fang reliquary (figure 47), and it may also have been intended to represent the black Magus.306 This long, triangular face can also be seen elsewhere, for example, in the faces (particularly Christ’s) of the figures of *Road to Emmaus* (figure 48, 1918). Schmidt-Rottluff likely discovered the Fang head in Einstein’s *Negerplastik*.

A Congo Teke piece was also illustrated in the book (figure 49).307 The woodcut *Apostle* from 1918 (figure 50) derives from both this illustration and a female figure from the Berlin Ethnographic Museum.308 *Apostle’s* face exemplifies the Brücke members’

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303 Ibid.
304 Ibid.
305 Ibid.
306 Honour, 238.
308 Ibid, 395. The Berlin Ethnographic Museum describes the female figure only as a “fetish figure.” This term is often misused and is yet another example of the museum’s incorrect categorization of pieces in its collection at this time.
use of more than one piece in its creation, as well as the modification of features seen in
the original artifact. The man’s beard, while rounder in the woodcut, sits at the bottom of
his chin like the Teke figure, and his lips are round and full. His forehead is broad, and
his nose is diamond shaped, also like the figure, but the eyes are much narrower.

In *Negerplastik* Einstein writes that African sculpture is characterized by its
“religious” purpose and its “cubic space perception.” Schmidt-Rotluff’s woodcuts and
sculpture were true to the volumetric logic and structural articulation of African art, but
in responding to African statues he also varied the facial and body proportions. It is
the religious imagery that Schmidt-Rottluff has completely changed.

**Pechstein**

Max Pechstein was a Brücke artist whose career was similar to that of Kirchner’s.
He also spoke highly of the Palau and its roof-beams. A 1914 visit to Palau, deemed
“paradise” by Pechstein, led him to denounce colonialism just as Nolde had. The
sketches he brought home, however, show no trace of native artistic influences.
Pechstein, like Kirchner, did work with black models, but in the urban setting of the
cabaret and not as native figures. Along with the Dresden Ethnographic Museum, the
cabaret and circus brought exotic acts and peoples to members of the Brücke.

Pechstein studied black models for *Somali Dancers* from 1910, an image
combining the traditional and contemporary (figure 51). This painted woodcut evokes
not only native dance rhythms and clothing patterns, but also modern abstraction in the

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309 Ibid.
310 Ibid.
311 Ettlinger, 196.
312 Gordon, “German Expressionism,” 390.
313 Ettlinger, 196.
use of alternating black and white shapes.\textsuperscript{315} The red, brown, white and black background recalls the decorative patterns used in the studios of Kirchner and Pechstein. Odd and crude proportions are evident in \textit{Somali Dancers}. The drummer on the far left, for example, has a small head and arms obscured by the drum. The figures’ long, slit like eyes resemble the sculptures studied and copied by Die Brücke, further suggesting that Pechstein and other artists likely depicted characters taken from carvings as well as life. Both the drummer and the two middle figures wear white gowns that strongly contrast against their skin, while the one playing an instrument on the right wears a black gown.

Though their skin is solid black and their lips are red and protruding, Pechstein’s image is a positive portrayal of Africans. His black dancers and musicians, deeply engrossed in the performance, became vehicles for high culture.\textsuperscript{316} Other images of blacks performing, however, were strictly in contemporary settings.

\textsuperscript{315} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{316} Ibid.
CHAPTER IV
WHERE DID GERMANS SEE BLACKS?

The Cabaret

European artists had illustrated urban entertainment venues such as the cabaret in the late nineteenth century. Historically, blacks had influence on European music as early as the eighteenth century, when Moors performed in military and court orchestra as percussionists. \(^{317}\) Aside from slave or servant, the earliest role blacks played in white society was that of the entertainer. \(^{318}\) The Cake Walk, for example, was originally a plantation dance from the United States. Blacks imitated whites and their rigid forms of dance (i.e., marches and parades), and the dance was one of the first forms of black entertainment to become popular outside of the black community (figure 52). \(^{319}\) In 1902-03, cakewalk troupes toured Europe, and the dance became popular in Paris, London, and Berlin. \(^{320}\) Reviews from a Berlin dance hall describe a cakewalking black dancer, accompanied by two white partners, as “perverse,” but audience members “enthusiastically clapped their hands to the beat.” \(^{321}\)

Kirchner’s *Negro Dance* from 1911 (figure 53) reflects the increasing interest in the Dresden cabaret, whose exotic acts during the years of colonial expansion in Germany attracted members of the Brücke. \(^{322}\) Heckel, Pechstein, Kirchner, and Nolde all

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\(^{317}\) Pieterse, 136.
\(^{318}\) Ibid.
\(^{319}\) Ibid, 137.
\(^{320}\) Ibid.
\(^{321}\) Astrid Kusser, “Cakewalking the Anarchy of Empire around 1900,” in *German Colonialism, Visual Culture, and Modern Memory*, ed. Völker M. Langbehn (New York: Routledge, 2010), 99. Interest in black entertainment continued to grow after this. The birth of the Jazz Age in cities such as New York and Paris after World War I, particularly around 1920, is an example.
\(^{322}\) Lloyd, *German Expressionism*, 88.
recalled seeing dancers from other countries such as China and India, with Nolde in particular inspired by the “negro cabarets.”

*Negro Dance* is an intimate image, painted at an overhead perspective. A choreographer frames the lower half of the dancers with his arms and head. Two spectators are pushed into the lower right-hand corner of the image. Kirchner has effectively frozen the dancers in time, and their tangled arms and legs and twirling gowns bring the viewer to the cabaret. The painting’s small and quick brushstrokes are particularly noticeable in the dancing women. Kirchner has gently dabbed on their thick hair, and their heavy facial features, particularly the right woman’s eyes, have been quickly sketched. It is possible that Kirchner used the term “negro” as a catch-all term to describe the dancers. Jill Lloyd cites several different national origins of German cabaret performers during this era. Not all of them were from African nations. Many images of black figures thus far have much darker skin than Kirchner’s study. Whatever the race, the image of the dancing couple is an excellent example of the Brücke’s fascination with exotic arts in all forms.

**The Zoo**

The zoo, as illustrated by earlier artists, was another locale where members of the Brücke could see Africans. Before World War I visitors to German and Austrian zoological gardens saw ethnological exhibitions intended to represent foreign cultures. The zoos’ human exhibits were an extension of the ethnological museum, and were

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323 Ibid, 91.
324 Ibid, 90-91, for example, a “Hawaiian princess” and an “Indian” dancer.
replaced in the late 1920s by the film travelogue. Africans themselves were as much a curiosity as their art.

There were important social and political reasons for these ethnographic displays. European countries educated the public about the areas colonized through their exhibits, and the superiority of Western societies. Displayed peoples were often supplied by wild animal importers and placed in exhibits; the 1900 International Exposition in Paris featured a “Congolese Village” for visitors to explore. Berlin’s 1896 German Colonial Exhibition featured an array of villages (resembling a “visual encyclopedia”) populated by German East Africans, Togolese, Herero, and Pacific Islanders (figure 54). Similar ethnographic villages were also visible at the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago, and the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris. Near the second half of the nineteenth century, a model for human exhibitions at the zoo had developed, stressing their racial elements (there were more “negro villages” than “ethnic shows”). Although his first exotic troop was a Sami family (an indigenous Scandinavian people) and not African, showman and zookeeper Carl Hagenbeck enjoyed enough success with this new model that he exported his shows out of Germany. By 1894, sixteen Congolese were present at The World’s Fair in Antwerp (the first fair in which Africans were present), and some fell ill or died. While some ethnic groups, such as

326 Ibid, 36.
327 Ibid, 9-10.
328 Antliff and Leighton, 40-41.
331 Ibid.
332 Pieterse, 95.
those from the coastal regions of West Africa, were familiar with European conventions, those from sparsely populated and remote locations arrived in Germany naïve about local customs. Hagenbeck was keenly aware of colonial policies. When Cameroon became a German colony in 1884, for example, Hagenbeck and his family “did not pass up the opportunity to take advantage of the good circumstances” to educate crowds about the new territory. As their popularity grew, photographs of performers in traveling shows like Hagenbeck’s began to circulate (figure 55). Although unthinkable today, these exhibitions introduced many Europeans and Americans to an unfamiliar part of the world.

Some Africans put on display became well-known: the 1906 display of Ota Benga, a Congolese pigmy on display in New York, drew both curiosity from the Bronx Zoological Park’s visitors and condemnation from African-American ministers. Trapped between two worlds, Benga took his own life after performing a dance. Saartjie Baartman, the “Hottentot Venus,” was displayed nude in London, and became an emblem of black sexuality during the nineteenth century. Often the peoples on display could hardly be called typical Africans; many had physical anomalies that fit the racial stereotypes held by their exhibitors. This is particularly true of Baartman, whose abnormally large buttocks and genitals led to public scandal and reinforced beliefs about black women’s sexuality.

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333 Bruckner, 135.
334 Ibid, 132.
336 Blume, 227.
337 Gilman, 38.
338 Lindfors, 231.
Like zoo animals, people from faraway countries ate foods, performed tasks, and lived in housing considered appropriate for them.\textsuperscript{340} Some were even categorized incorrectly; the same troupe could be from one colony in France and a different one in Germany.\textsuperscript{341} A woman named Tioko, from an Ashanti display at the Vienna Prater, found her surroundings cold and damp, her new manner of dress absurd, and her hut “only fit for dogs.”\textsuperscript{342} Europeans were sometimes critical of ethnographic shows as well. Opponents compared the practice to slave trade.\textsuperscript{343} Even as early as 1900, the \textit{Völkerschau} was no longer deemed a venue for scientific inquiry, but an entertaining sideshow intended to bring in money.\textsuperscript{344}

Kirchner’s interest in African peoples was also inspired by these zoological exhibitions. In 1909 a series of sideshows came to the zoological gardens in Dresden, beginning with a group of Sudanese natives.\textsuperscript{345} Selections of ethnographic artifacts were presented along with the natives, and in 1910 Kirchner sketched several dancers at an “African village.”\textsuperscript{346} \textit{Head of a Negress} and \textit{Drawings of Performers in the African Village} (figures 56 and 57, both 1910) record a visit to the exhibit. \textit{Drawings of Performers} and \textit{Head} are crudely sketched and colored, making it quite obvious that Kirchner was drawing from models that were constantly on the move. Nonetheless, he was not simply recording a sideshow act, as the more detailed \textit{Head} suggests that Kirchner singled this woman out for her portrait. She resembles the right woman in

\textsuperscript{340} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{341} Bancel et al., 33. Travelling exhibitions would often name themselves after colonies owned by the country in which they performed.
\textsuperscript{342} Gilman, 38.
\textsuperscript{343} Bruckner, 142.
\textsuperscript{344} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{345} Lloyd, \textit{German Expressionism}, 30.
\textsuperscript{346} Ibid, 30-31.
Negro Dance somewhat, particularly in the angle of her head, and the African village certainly was in Kirchner’s mind later on in his depiction of blacks.

Just as the German Expressionists brought African art on display into their own art, they brought imagery of the African into their art, whether or not they were “on display.” The woman’s expression is certainly thought provoking, and Kirchner has effectively captured her lost in thought. Other dancers fade into the background with little details, as if the woman is blocking out her surroundings. Does she enjoy performing and the attention it brings, or is she recoiling at the fact that she is believed to be at the same level as a wild animal? A 1910 report about another Dresden exhibition (“Captain Köster’s Ethnographic Exhibition”) further explains the political and social motives of these shows: “In order to awake and to support interest and understanding for our colonial ambitions in the broad mass of the German folk…the exhibition is intended to render colonial ideas convincing and to have an educational effect.”

African Women: Models and Performers

Black women were subjects of particular interest to Kirchner and Heckel. Kirchner revisits circus performer Milli in Milli Asleep from around 1909 or 1910, whom he painted with memories of Gauguin and Tahiti in mind (figure 58).

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348 Ettlinger, 195. Milli’s position is similar to that of the figure in Matisse’s Blue Nude (figure 59, 1907), a painting that also copied African figures and environments (and may have been viewed by Kirchner at Cassirer’s gallery). Her blue-tinted skin, for example, may be in reference to the Tuareg people of North Africa, who used indigo dyes that stained the skin. Matisse himself also visited Biskra, an oasis in the North African desert. Unlike Blue Nude, however, Kirchner places the female figure outside of a natural setting such as a tropical landscape.
skinned model, Milli adds to the outlandish flavor suggested by the background. She appears to sleep on exotic red, blue, and black fabrics. The zigzagged background creates a tropical atmosphere, and the white figure on the right, actually part of a painting without any exotic décor, complements the dark imagery of the scene. Milli delicately rests her left arm on her calf, while resting her head against her right hand. Presented by Kirchner as a “primeval” and “natural” presence in the studio, Milli appears at ease in her constructed environment. Kirchner’s main points of exaggeration in Milli’s portrait are her light pink lips and nipples. He has also used hard outlines to exaggerate her body, and her breasts recall the breasts of Nolde’s female Yoruba figure. This again references Kirchner’s erotic images of blacks and beliefs about unbridled black sexuality.

Two paintings, Portrait of a Woman by Kirchner (figure 60, 1911) and Nelly by Heckel (figure 61, 1910) are companion paintings featuring Milli and Nelly. They are more modest depictions of black women than previously seen. In both Kirchner and Heckel’s paintings, the women wear modern fashionable clothing and sit behind still life items such as vases and fruit bowls. The backdrops in both images consist of Heckel’s studio curtains decorated with rolling hills. In Kirchner’s painting, there are female bathers, presenting a sharp contrast to Milli’s conservative attire. In Heckel’s image, the contours of Nelly’s body match the contours of the hills and fruits, which function as a type of body metaphor, suggesting that which her clothes conceal. Kirchner’s updated image of Milli is in stark contrast to her nude image made the same year. Her face is now

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349 Ibid.
350 Honour, 237.
351 Heller, 33.
352 Honour, 238.
353 Lloyd, German Expressionism, 36.
more seriously composed and her expression more self-conscious.\textsuperscript{354} Her left hand either reaches toward the idyllic nude scene, either to reestablish contact or to push herself away from it.\textsuperscript{355} The black performers brought a living “primitive” presence in the Brücke studios, without being forced to conform to European ideals.\textsuperscript{356}

\textit{Black Dancing Woman} is another performer Kirchner depicted nude, although not in an overtly erotic manner (figure 62, 1905 or later). \textit{Black Dancing Woman} is probably from an ethnographic performance, judging from her seductive appearance and the portrayal of African women in actual shows. Native Africans on exhibit were sometimes nude or wearing little clothing (again, based upon what Europeans believed or heard about Africans, true or otherwise). Peter Altenberg’s anthology \textit{Ashantee} (which had in its contents an interview with native Ashanti Tioko) from 1897 describes what it is like to see exotic women on display. Young Ashanti women and girls were exhibited in the Prater park in Vienna, where Altenberg observed their “hysterical” dances.\textsuperscript{357} Furthermore, like Kirchner’s model, the Ashanti women wore thin and revealing garments.\textsuperscript{358} Peeking out at the viewer, the thin dancing woman appears to be part of an African display like the Prater’s, as others behind her look on. A second clothed woman frames the left region of the painting, who distances herself from her audience like the woman in \textit{Head of a Negress}.

\textsuperscript{354} Heller, 33.  
\textsuperscript{355} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{356} Ibid, 32.  
\textsuperscript{357} Gilman, 36-37.  
\textsuperscript{358} Ibid, 38.
CHAPTER V
WORLD WAR I AND THE END OF THE COLONIES

War Breaks Out

We live at a time when all primitive conditions and peoples are perishing; everything is being discovered and Europeanized. Not a single small region of primordial nature (Urnatur) with its original inhabitants remains intact. In twenty years all will be lost.359

Expressing his disappointment with the colonists after a 1914 New Guinea trip and alluding to Bismarck’s early motivations, Nolde worried that “everything works for economic advantage, and so a special, uniquely beautiful world is lost forever.”360 Yet Germany’s African colonies were beginning to unravel at the time of Nolde’s travels.

War broke out in Europe in 1914, but the German colonial empire found itself ill-equipped and financially struggling. The colonies were geographically isolated, and the German colonial forces were too weak to outnumber any of their rivals.361 The troops in German colonies in Africa numbered only about 7,000 in 1912; British, Belgian, and Portuguese possessions each boasted twice that amount or more.362 Togo became the first colony to fall, with Cameroon lasting until 1916, when it was overrun by a joint British-French expedition.363 Hostilities in Southwest Africa were different; here it was essentially a “white man’s war,” with Germans surrendering to South Africans after geographic obstacles prevented their retreat.364

359 Gordon, “German Expressionism,” 388.
360 Ibid.
361 Duignan and Gann, 216.
362 Ibid.
363 Ibid, 217.
East Africa became the only region where German troops held out until the end of hostilities in Europe.\textsuperscript{365} Again, Germany was outnumbered, especially in technological advances pioneered by British forces such as mechanized armor, observation planes, bombers, and airborne ambulances. However, Germany’s \textit{Schutztruppe} boasted a diverse group of soldiers. Commander Lt. Col. Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck trained the \textit{Schutztruppe} as a single unit. The first racially integrated force in modern colonial warfare enlisted not only Africans such as the Hehe and Nyamwezi, but also white settlers well adjusted to the country and its local conditions.\textsuperscript{366} Not surprisingly, however, superiority in men, material, and sea power led the British to conquer the richest and most important German colony in 1917.\textsuperscript{367}

Under the terms of the peace treaty of Versailles in 1919, Germany surrendered all claims to her former colonial empire, even though she campaigned to have the colonies returned.\textsuperscript{368} This settlement prevented the emergence of a Germanophone Africa linked to central Europe by ties of language, commerce, and administration.\textsuperscript{369} Many settlers lost all their wealth, and colonial officials became unemployed and returned to Germany.\textsuperscript{370} For them and for Germany as a whole, colonization proved to be an economic failure. Basing their action on a wartime propaganda campaign that was designed to show that the Germans had mistreated their subjects, the Allies turned the colonies into Mandates of the League of Nations.\textsuperscript{371} A large German population

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{365} Ibid, 218.
\item \textsuperscript{366} Ibid, 219.
\item \textsuperscript{367} Ibid, 222.
\item \textsuperscript{368} Smith, 232.
\item \textsuperscript{369} Duignan and Gann, 222.
\item \textsuperscript{370} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{371} Smith, 232.
\end{itemize}
remained in Southwest Africa, but most Germans in Cameroon and East Africa were expelled, with some retuning in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{372}

**Hannah Höch After the Colonies**

Colonization and groups such as Die Brücke were in Germany’s past as the 1920s began. However, imagery of blacks had not yet disappeared, in fact, it resurfaced in ways not explored by German artists only a decade or so earlier. Ethnographic museums, human zoos, and other means in which Germans were exposed to colonization like advertisements all played a significant role in sustaining the colonial image from the postwar years to the 1930s.\textsuperscript{373} Many colonial figures still had influence in Weimar politics as well.

Hannah Höch, associated primarily with the Berlin Dada movement, also presented imagery of blacks in her photomontages. African objects and the lives of their artists equally fascinated the Dadaist movement.\textsuperscript{374} Her images were similar to those borrowed by German Expressionist movements. She used African sculpture from the ethnographic museums, often merging and manipulating the pictures, and, in turn, the cultures. Using the influences from colonial era advertisers and publishers, she depicted harsher realities of colonial life in her collages. In her changed world, however, Höch emphasized political and gender matters that would not have been of interest to Brücke members. Her emphasis on the black woman is particularly intriguing.

\textsuperscript{372} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{373} Brett M. Van Hoesen, “Weimar Revisions of Germany’s Colonial Past: The Photomontages of Hannah Höch and László Moholy-Nagy,” in *German Colonialism, Visual Culture, and Modern Memory*, ed. Völker M. Langbehn (New York: Routledge, 2010), 199-200. Partially due to nostalgia, ethnic shows did not completely decline; see, for example, a Stuttgart ethnographic show poster from 1928 (figure 63).
\textsuperscript{374} Dada, an anti-art and anti-establishment group, was a short-lived movement that had followers in cities such as Zürich, New York, Berlin, and Barcelona. Dadaist performances and pieces by members such as Marcel Janco, Tristan Tzara, and Richard Huelsenbeck were notable for their inclusion of African poetry, masks and music (particularly *Chants Nègres* and *Dances Nègres*).
Höch’s photomontage series “From an Ethnographic Museum” was an almost
decade long series exploring not only the Western artist’s love of the exotic, but also of
the politics surrounding the use of African pieces in European art. Höch’s
photomontages are associated primarily with women and their changing roles in postwar
Germany. In *Mother: From an Ethnographic Museum* (1930), a heavily pregnant
woman’s face is superimposed with a mask (figure 64). A delicate woman’s eye rests on
the mask’s right side, possibly to highlight the woman’s femininity. Höch transforms the
woman into a symbol of exhausted maternity, a pressuring issue during this time, because
of the challenges unwanted pregnancies and births placed on working class women.375
Maternity and fertility have long been themes associated with African figures, but in
*Mother*, pregnancy is not romanticized. Höch’s politics related to race and ethnography,
however, are not entirely clear. She used images of exhibited objects almost exclusively
to comment on contemporary European gender definitions.376

Höch’s montages in “From an Ethnographic Museum” may have had satirical
significance, but she applauded the works of the German Expressionists. “The expansion
of ethnographic research at that time only took in the ‘primitives,’ especially Negro art.
The German Expressionists manifested this often in their paintings. I enjoyed
experimenting in a less serious, but always precise, way with this material,” she writes.377

One image, *Negro Sculpture* (figure 65, 1929), recalls the stereotype of equating
African art and artists with children and children’s art. Höch has placed a carved African
head (an ivory pendant mask from Benin) over a manipulated image of a baby’s body.

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375 Maud Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (New Haven,
376 Ibid.
377 Ibid, 163.
Like *Mother*, one eye has been replaced with the made-up eye of a woman. The figure is placed on an odd pedestal made from a claw and the leg of a stool. The head is larger in proportion to the baby’s body, giving it proportions similar to reality, despite the missing limbs. Höch uses the frame within a frame in this and other images in “Ethnographic Museum.” Combined with the claw and pedestal, the frame comments on the categorization and display of people as objects, particularly in relation to ethnographic shows. Like members of Die Brücke, Höch usually placed emblematic images in settings that refer to the ethnographic museum (or other settings such as the studio), not to their original context.378

Höch’s distorted combinations of cultures are often presented as white women with heads taken from African art, but her montages also feature Indian and Asian works. This recalls the mixed figures used by Brücke members such as Nolde (*The Missionary*, figure 19, and *Man, Woman, and Cat*, figure 23) and Pechstein (*African Wood Sculpture*, figure 43). Two montages, *Half-Caste* (figure 66, 1924) and *Love in the Bush* (figure 67, 1925), explore the still-present controversy of race mixing, especially, in the case of *Love in the Bush*, between African men and white women.

In *Half-Caste*, Höch places a black and white photograph of a dignified African woman, who also appears in Höch’s *Scrapbook* series that includes multiple ethnographic photographs.379 The woman’s hair has been cut away by Höch, with some white areas left in place, and her mouth has been replaced with the tiny lips of a white woman. Höch has also emphasized the woman’s jaw line. Her combination results in a somewhat

378 Ibid, 173.
379 Ibid, 151.
androgynous African figure that appears absurd in this context.\textsuperscript{380} Her new lips are out of proportion with the rest of her face, with her eyes, chin, and nose appearing especially large. It is now challenging to look at Höch’s portrait, especially because it is difficult to determine the woman’s original expressions without seeing her mouth for emphasis. The addition of white features to a black person’s face creates an oscillating effect, because the viewer cannot reconcile the features associated with the different races and cultures in one face.\textsuperscript{381}

*Love in the Bush* was one photomontage by Höch that was more directly connected with colonization. Like her other compositions, she uses disproportionate cutouts representing both sexes and multiple races. A young African boy, with the limbs of an adult white person, embraces a white woman with his oversized limbs. The woman’s mouth and eyes are wide open in excitement, and her legs, attached to the bottom of her head, are those of an adult white man’s. She is presented as a contemporary German woman, with her hair cut in a short, modern style. Grass and reeds surround the couple. The photomontage’s title even suggests the association with blacks as animals or savages, hence the addition of the grass. This piece was displayed at the 1931 Berlin Photomontage exhibition, where it would have contrasted sharply with the mostly matter-of-fact advertising photomontages surrounding it.\textsuperscript{382} Undoubtedly, Höch was aware of earlier uses of advertising featuring blacks and Germany’s African colonies, and the explosion of print advertising at that time as well.

In “Weimar Revisions of Germany’s Colonial Past”, Brett Van Hoesen admits that Höch’s *Scrapbook* and *Ethnographic Museum* series primarily exemplify an

\textsuperscript{380} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{381} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{382} Ibid, 193.
uncritical engagement with the lingering legacy of German colonialism.\textsuperscript{383} However, she believes that \textit{Half-Caste} and \textit{Love in the Bush} did not ignore the political and racial controversies in the Weimar Republic. They deal with the Rhineland Controversy, a conflict that played an integral role in shaping postcolonial Weimar.\textsuperscript{384} This was initially a postwar domestic territorial dispute concerning Germany’s reallocation of land to France and Belgium.\textsuperscript{385} It soon grew into an international crisis fueled by racial politics and fears of racial mixing, explicitly illustrated by Höch in both montages.\textsuperscript{386} Germany launched a propaganda campaign called \textit{Die schwarze Schmach} (“The Black Disgrace”), in reference to France’s internment of colonial soldiers along the Rhine, particularly those from North Africa.\textsuperscript{387} Newspapers and a poster campaign perpetuated this, like other racial issues, visually and linguistically.\textsuperscript{388} As expected, these stories were usually shocking and bizarre, warning readers of cannibals that wore the remains of their victims and beheaded German soldiers.\textsuperscript{389}

\textit{Half-Caste} references another aspect of the Rhineland Controversy: the ongoing fears of racial mixing, particularly between black soldiers and white German women.\textsuperscript{390} With its mixed racial features, Höch’s montage suggests hypocritical behavior in regards to race and gender in the Weimar Republic. Delegate Luise Zietz, for example, addressed the German parliament in May 1920, protesting the racist language used against the French colonial population stationed in the Rhineland and the related

\textsuperscript{383} Van Hoesen, 210.  
\textsuperscript{384} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{385} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{386} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{387} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{388} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{389} El-Tayeb, 48.  
\textsuperscript{390} Van Hoesen, 210. In the 1920s, children born to German mothers and African fathers were known as the “Rhineland Bastards.” They were later targets of forced sterilization.
disavowal for women’s issues implied in the conflict.\textsuperscript{391} According to Zietz, the government was quick to pinpoint issues of rape and sexual abuse on the part of colonial soldiers along the Rhine.\textsuperscript{392} However, the same acts that German Freikorps members committed against German women, and by German troops in the colonies, had been overlooked, prompting Zietz to describe colonial politics as a “history of atrocities and oppression of colored peoples.”\textsuperscript{393}

In slight contrast to Zietz’s agenda, Höch’s photomontages satirize the exaggerated outcries concerning Rhenish women’s attempts to engage in romantic relationships with colonial troops.\textsuperscript{394} Höch’s exaggerated proportions and crude cutouts mimic these misconceptions and confusions. At the same time, the white woman in \textit{Half-Caste} hides behind the shame of racial mixing. Even medical journals expressed their concern about the fate of those with mixed-race heritage, with one asking its readers: “Shall we silently endure that in future days not the light songs of white, beautiful, well-built, intelligent, agile, healthy Germans…but the croaking sounds of grayish, low-browed, broad-muzzled, plump, bestial, syphilitic mulattos?”\textsuperscript{395}

\textit{Love in the Bush} further evaluates the politics of the Rhineland Controversy. Its humorous imagery significantly contrasts with imagery in the press presenting colonial soldiers as menacing threats.\textsuperscript{396} Known as \textit{Kulturträger} (upholders of culture), the caricatures, which appeared as early as 1917, transformed the soldiers into menacing monsters resembling apes and committing horrific crimes.\textsuperscript{397} German satire magazine

\textsuperscript{391} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{392} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{393} Ibid, 210-211.
\textsuperscript{394} Ibid, 211.
\textsuperscript{395} El-Tayeb, 49.
\textsuperscript{396} Van Hoesen, 212.
\textsuperscript{397} Ibid.
*Simplicissimus* published some of these cartoons, and was not shy in its mockery of Zietz’s political positions. The magazine published a poem dedicated to her, and placed it near one of the crudest images depicting blacks at the time.\(^{398}\) Titled “Black Occupation,” an ape with a soldier’s hat carries off a nude white woman, whose limp body makes her appear to neither resist nor succumb to his advances (figure 68). “A disgrace for the white race—but it is happening in Germany,” the caption reads.

Höch’s photomontage disarms these characterizations, as she has done in her other montages to intercept, disrupt, and reinterpret the visual policies of the press.\(^{399}\) Van Hoesen speculates that *Love in the Bush* wittingly references sexual relationships between German men and native women at colonial outposts.\(^{400}\) The montage depicts the opposite, but Höch’s mixing of body parts (men’s legs attached to a female head and women’s legs attached to a male) makes this interpretation plausible. Regardless, race mixing and interracial relationships went hand-in-hand with gender concepts during the colonial era.\(^{401}\) Although government propaganda concentrated on rape, a survey among women who had borne children by African soldiers revealed that only one had been raped, a fact that was ignored.\(^{402}\) Unlike the propaganda, Höch references a relationship where nobody appears particularly victimized. These photomontages subtly suggest the hypocrisy of German colonial policies touted by both male administrators and women’s leagues, especially in the attempts to counter the Rhineland occupation.\(^{403}\)


\(^{399}\) Van Hoesen, 212.

\(^{400}\) Ibid, 212-213.

\(^{401}\) Ibid, 213.

\(^{402}\) El-Tayeb, 49.

\(^{403}\) Van Hoesen, 213.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

Surviving imagery of blacks and African culture is invaluable at showing viewers Germany’s cultural exchanges as the twentieth century began. Even though Germany has lingering ties to African nations now, it is challenging to pinpoint the goals of Brücke and pre-Brücke artists when they portrayed blacks and African culture. Die Brücke dissolved in 1913 and World War I followed, with many members called to serve.

“Primitivism” is now a pejorative label for works originating from many different nations and peoples. Western scholars now study African works in the context of their cultures and countries of origin. Ethnographic shows are now unethical, and ethnographic museums have since moved away from their warehoused appearance. Colonial-era advertisements and other aspects of visual culture are often blatantly racist. What does the modern viewer of Brücke art gain from viewing works made in such a remarkably different era?

With the exception of Nolde, Brücke members did not explicitly discuss racial or political matters during the group’s active years. Like Germany as a whole, they were exposed to stereotypes and myths about blacks, mostly through the advertisements and imagery around them. Brücke’s portraits of Africans, however, are significantly different from the rest of Germany’s depictions of blacks.

Both Brücke and concurrent German artists were exposed to blacks and African culture through limited means. Brücke members held African sculpture in high enough regard to include it in their studio portraits and still-lifes. Significant amounts of sketches

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404 Namibia, formerly German Southwest Africa, has a minority of German speakers and residents with German ancestry.
(from Nolde and Kirchner) of pieces from ethnographic museums lead to evidence that these pieces were not just an add-on or an afterthought to Brücke compositions. They were another means of expression to attain their artistic goals. For example, pieces from Nolde’s Missionary (figure 19) now reference German culture at the time as it related to missionary work in the colonies.

Ethnographic shows were intentionally shocking to their viewers. Von Menzel may have exaggerated the features of the African dancers in The Zulus (figure 15), but he probably was not far off in depicting the absurdity of many ethnographic shows. The same could be stated about Meyerheim’s zoological images. Kirchner’s sketches and paintings, however, reveal more of the reality of these shows. Though he and Pechstein did illustrate performers at the cabaret and ethnographic shows, his images of Milli, Sam, and Nelly uniquely remove them from the role they usually played in German society. The performer Black Dancing Woman (figure 62) may not be in a dignified role, but Kirchner still illustrates her without the crudeness of Zulus.

While pseudo-scientific anatomical diagrams and visual culture presented harsh stereotypes of blacks, many artists such as Kirchner, Schmidt-Rottluff, Pechstein, and Heckel presented dignified images of Africans. Black models are not placed in an obscene setting like Slevogt’s Victor; instead they adopt the Brücke lifestyle by posing in the studio and mingling with its members (as in Milli Telling a Story, figure 33). Sam and Milli may be nude in some paintings and Kirchner was again subject to beliefs about black sexuality, but Milli, along with Pechstein’s image of Nelly, is also realistically posed in Western clothes instead of African-looking costumes. Blacks were still outsiders in German society, but Brücke members embraced ideas outside stereotypical
beliefs. Although none of the Brücke images could be considered an anti-racist statement, they are an attempt to present blacks and African culture outside of their usual settings and roles. Soon after, Höch would use her satirical montages to attack long-standing belief systems regarding racial mixing.

Artists in the German Expressionist group Die Brücke lived in a world that was changing. Rapid growth of mass media lead to widespread imagery of colonies and the colonized. Furthermore, the world that they knew was expanding through colonization and the imports that resulted. It is no wonder that European art with non-Western influences was growing in interest during the early years of the twentieth century. To the modern viewer, African influences in German Expressionist art reflect the beginnings of a global society as European countries attempted to expand overseas.
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