



K. Schmidt-Rottluff: St. Peter's fishing (1918)



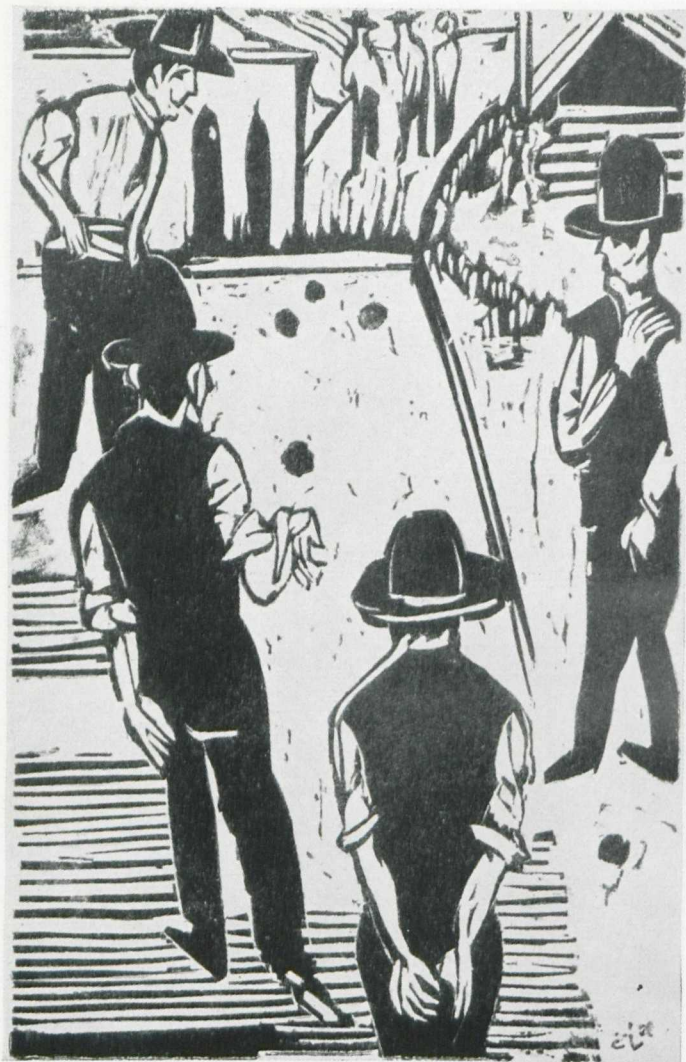
K. Schmidt-Rottluff: Emmaus' way (1918)

Modern graphic art

by G. F. Hartlaub

At the same time that western man found a way to substitute the letter press for handwriting, he also had to find a way to reproduce drawn and painted pictures of the size of the old book illumination. And thus the two oldest graphic processes were invented: woodcut and metal engraving. The lighter needle joined the burin, and etching with its variations was added to engraving in the

copper plate. And at the beginning of the 19th century lithography began to be used. It soon became evident that the various new techniques were not simply means to repeat various ways of drawing or painting, but that the material and the special way of applying the motif to be printed contributed to the appearance of the print. This is the case even where one seeks to approximate the



E. L. Kirchner: Bowling (1925)

Above, at right: The brothers Karamasow (1913)



E. Heckel: Man in the plain



colour work of the brush by using a number of differently coloured plates. The woodcut shows the influence of the process on the style the strongest, while lithography often looks like an original work with pen, brush or pencil.

The enormous spread of graphic art, above all before the invention of photography and of photomechanical reproduction, is well known. As far as original invention is concerned, i. e., not the copying of other works of art

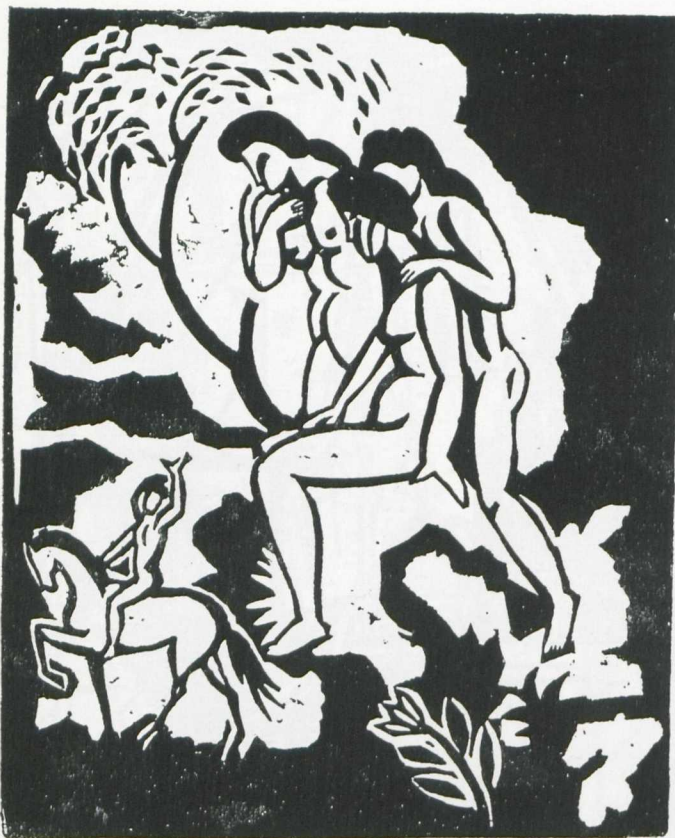


L. Feininger: Sailing-vessels

but truly original work in the medium itself, the history of graphic art shows on the whole a greater creative contribution of the Germanic and the Germano-Celtic peoples than of the Latins. In France and Italy artists whose original graphic work is of equal importance with their painting or sculpture are rare. Many Italians made designs for engravings, often also for woodcuts, and many were themselves etchers; numerous Frenchmen of the 17th to the 19th century were etchers and lithographers. But it is easier to imagine the oeuvre of Lorrain, Delacroix, Chassériau, Corot, Millet and Gauguin without their marvelous graphic work, than it is in the case of Dürer, Baldung, Rembrandt, Seghers, William Blake, or, in the 19th century and at its turn, the work of Rethel, Menzel, Klinger, Slevogt, Edward Munch and

Kollwitz. On the other hand, the Spaniard Goya — a typical painter-graphic artist — is an exception, as is also the later Redon; and such masters as Callot, who did only graphic work, are also exceptions which occur far more frequently in Germany and England.

It would take a sociological and psychological study to delve into the reason for these circumstances. The pre-eminence of the graphic element (which, of course, does not always have to be linear or black and white) in the non-Latin peoples may have something to do with the fact that graphic art as a means of expression is of primary interest to those who wish to spread an idea with a picture because they pursue a didactic, programmatic or social aim for wide circles of the population. Court painters are much less interested in such popularity, and



A. Macke: *Salutation* (1912)

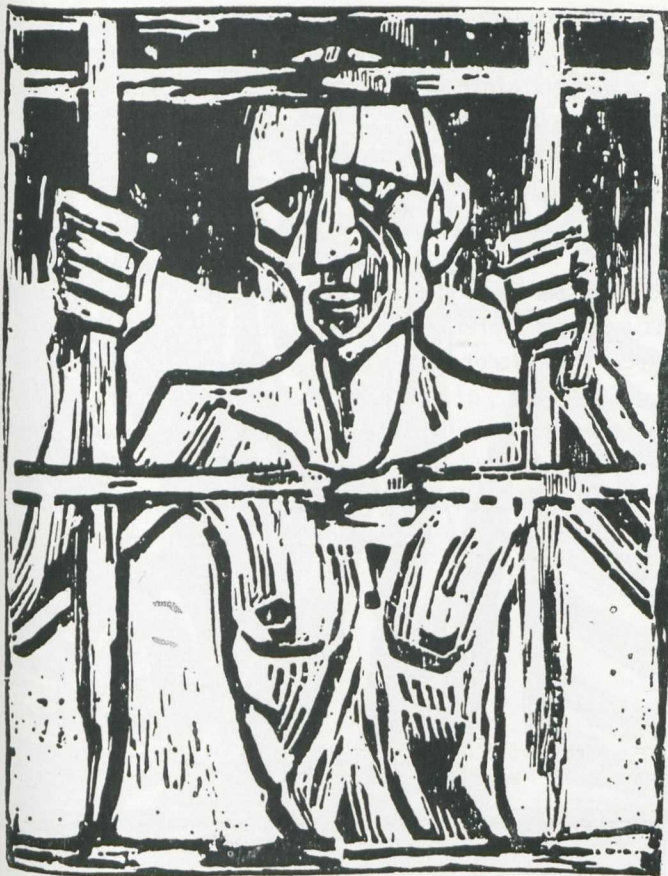
the church reserved art for its places of worship. Goya, the court painter, was secretly anti-court in his etchings; he addressed himself to mankind. Graphic art developed best in an urban burgher culture, above all in the protestant part of Europe, in the German cities of the Reformation, in the Calvinistic Netherlands of the 17th century, and later in the England and Germany of the 19th century. On the other hand, in catholic France of the bourgeois period, the progressive artists developed a *l'art pour l'art* taste in place of the courtly ties of earlier times, and this was in turn not designed to reach the masses but connoisseurs and critics. The fact that Dauter spent his entire life drawing on stone — in spite of his secret love for painting — is due not to his artistic but to his social conception of art.

The last fifty years of artistic activity, as far as modern art is concerned, re-affirm the special position of the graphic arts in Germany and the northern countries of

Europe. Most German and northern artists still belong to that universal type in whose work the graphic element is quantitatively and qualitatively equal to painting. The Norwegian Edward Munch could realize the epic of his life only as a painter-graphic artist, as was also the case with his contemporary the Anglo-Flemish artist James Ensor with his phantasies of a daemonic world. And even in the work of the two oldest German painters who abandoned impressionism, Christian Rohlf of Holstein and Emil Nolde of Northschleswig (whose art of man and nature, distance and closeness, sensuality and spirituality speaks a decidedly low German dialect) painting and graphic art remained closely connected, and the transition was work in ink, charcoal, chalk, with brush and pen. Max Slevogt was a painter-graphic artist of classic format. He was somewhat younger than Nolde and an impressionist painter far into the new century and yet indebted to the new spirit in his illustrative work. It is a matter of course that Nolde's Dresden circle before the first World War considered the graphic

H. Campendonk: *Woman with fish*





Chr. Rohlf: *The prisoner* (1918)

Chr. Rohlf: *The prodigal son* (1916)

media of the greatest importance. This circle, called the "Brücke" to signify its opposition to insular self satisfaction, wished to be a bridge to other human beings and to the future. One may recall everything that Otto Müller, E. L. Kirchner, Erich Heckel, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff have given us in woodcuts, in etchings and lithographs, not to speak of their water colours and sketches, their oil and gouache paintings, of which the oldest from the first embattled years of the "Brücke" are perhaps now beginning to appear dated. The same love for graphic expression which meant more to them than an occasional artistic attempt, was felt by artists of such divergent talents as Lyonel Feininger (of the Bauhaus circle) and even more so by Franz Marc who founded the "Blaue Reiter" group and entered into an uncharted dream-like world with his wonderful animal pictures. Again in a different way the graphic techniques were indispensable for the north German Max Beckmann who could

fulfill his main critical task — the merciless depiction of the big city shortly before its judgment by bombing — only by graphic means. It was also indispensable for the softer, more Slavic Oskar Kokoschka, not only a great delver into human psychology, but also a modern apostle of brotherly love. Finally the cosmosophically inclined poet Gustav Wolff is a painter and graphic artist for profound reasons. His symbolic woodcuts influenced by Morris and art nouveau have become more famous than his paintings. There is further young Joseph Scharl who fled to America and has found a way of symbolic expression with an extreme economy of means; and finally the surrealist Max Ernst who lives in Paris but was originally German.

It is especially significant that a number of German sculptors — Ernst Barlach, Lehmbruck and Gerhard Marcks — have been able to create for themselves, aside from their sculpture and their drawings, a special graphic





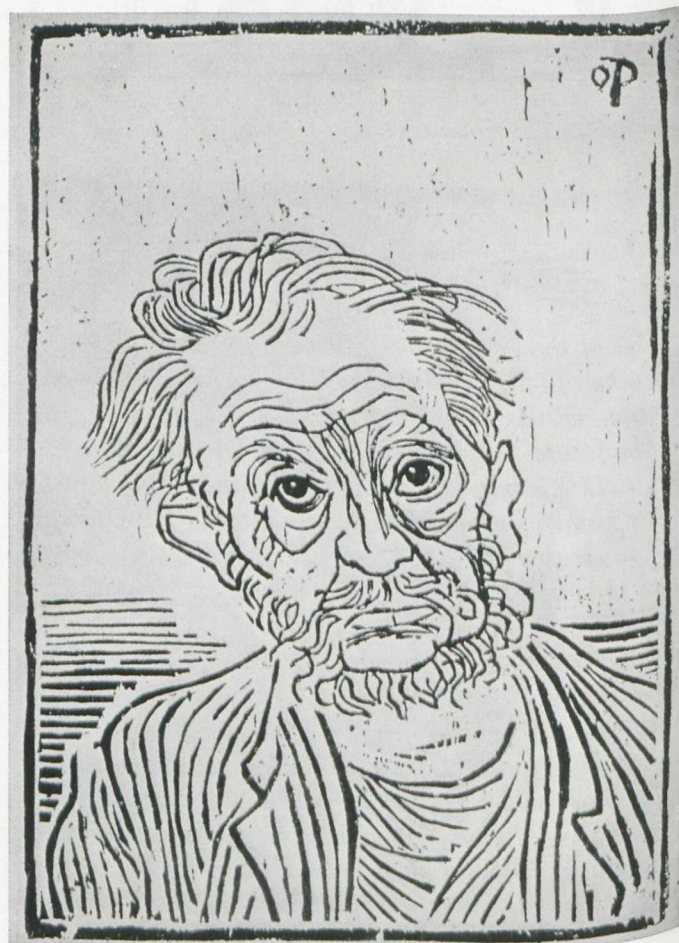
L. Meidner: Listener (1919)

language with which they can say things which they cannot express as sculptors and which have their own meaning. Again, this same interest is not shared by any of the contemporary French masters. Wonderful occasional pieces are always done in the graphic media, but there are only a few Frenchmen who can be considered painter-graphic artists: perhaps Georges Rouault who wants to preach a sort of social gospel with his graphic work, and even the manifold graphic work of Georges Braque cannot compete with his painting.

But even taken by itself, modern German graphic art deserves our attention because of its special characteristics. It is worthy of discussion even when compared to the 19th century, because in spite of Richter, Rethel, Menzel, Leibl, Klinger and Corinth the 19th century did

not produce graphic art of such concentration. Let us recall the sparkling illustrations of Slevogt for the classics of world literature, or the wonderful woodcut landscapes of Switzerland by artists of the circle of Kirchner, the work of the highly talented Rudolf Schlichter, or recall what Otto Pankok was able to accomplish in landscape and portrait etchings, and we will feel justified in speaking of a new historic "hour" of German graphic art. Perhaps the constellation was particularly favourable because postimpressionist painting tended toward graphic effects. The decorative paintings of large planes by the Paris "Fauves", of a Matisse, a Marquet or Dufy — but also of the somewhat later "Brücke" paintings — often look like large colour woodcuts or coloured lithographs, or they look like drawings or etchings because they retain a sketchlike quality instead of the perfection of the old

O. Pankok: Barlach's portrait (1942)





E. Barlach: Ghastly scene

masters. Naturally this affinity was also visible in France; aside from the masters mentioned above, one need only think of Vlaminck, Derain and also Picasso. But because of national characteristics and tendencies the same constellation found more fertile soil in the Germanic countries than in the West.

The new graphic style is closely connected with expressionism which played a larger role in Germany than in France where only Georges Rouault can truly be said to belong to this style. To be one-sidedly expressive (and that is after all what being an expressionist means) is to aim for simplification, for the relentless intensification of colour and form, to stress the subjective psychic view of the world (which often takes on an almost religious cast). All the smoothness of the old masters, all social

polish is avoided, and the inner spiritual life is released from the crust of civilization. This instinctive expression is like early religious art. The graphic arts were better suited to express this new attitude than the detailed naturalism of the earlier generation. Munch who translated the older modern French painting into a new nordic idiom, was the first expressionist. German graphic art is unthinkable without him, but the Germans absorbed his idiom and developed something new and original out of it, each artist after his own personal fashion.

The most decided change took place in the German woodcut, a technique which is negligible in France. Gauguin, Vallaton and others had prepared the change from the academic line and tone cuts of the xylographs after designs by artists to the flat wood cuts cut by the artists themselves. However, it was Munch and his German

successors (to whom we must add Franz Masereel with his picture stories of social content) who dared to advance from the decorative to new realms of truly eruptive originality of expression.

Etching was not so radically new, but it also conformed to the desire for the elemental by avoiding decorative polish and interesting mixed techniques, such as Klinger had used, and by seeking instead the rough, the new territory, the proletarian or anarchical, social criticism and often even the dangerous depths of psychology. It was similar with lithography, which is unthinkable without the big city posters of Lautrec but which took on a particular North German heaviness and solidness — especially in the work of Nolde.

M. Beckmann: *The Battenbergs* (1916)



M. Beckmann: *Dostoevski* (1921)

At right: G. Grosz: *The drama of the school-boy*

Compared with what is called German expressionism in the widest sense of the word the other directions which followed it contributed little to graphic art. We are referring to verism or the so-called "Neue Sachlichkeit" which once more brought to light the mysterious resistance of the object (only too easily dissolved in the intoxication of the expressionists) or, very close to it, "magic realism" which was a forerunner of the German version of surrealism. One might put Max Beckmann in this group, but he actually is a very vital cross between the drastically realistic and a secret spiritual element. Or the cool, nervous, over-intelligent Rudolf Grossmann, a man of great experience and virtuosity in the dry point





O. Kokoschka: *Bach's cantata* (1914)

technique. The much talked of George Grosz was more of a social critic in his drawings than a graphic artist in the more specific sense of the word. The same is true of his friend, the very imaginative Rudolf Schlichter, who was of a mysteriously protean nature and of great capability. It is remarkable that through the interest of surrealism for the antiquated and musty certain artists found a diabolical liking for the long overcome technique of wood engraving (Max Ernst, Fabius Gugel). Everything that has to do with abstract art has very little to do with graphic art, because in general graphic art remains connected with the object, with direct communication. All the more remarkable are the graphic experiments of Willy Baumeister in an abstract and semi-abstract manner.

The second world hour of German graphic art — this is what we dared to call it. In the first, in Dürer's time, it

was the copper engraving and the wood cut that spread German artistic genius over the world. To this day we are represented in foreign collections primarily by the graphic art of the old masters and much less by painting. Of newer and newest German art even graphic art has been taken up only with great hesitation by foreign countries — with a few exceptions such as the Swiss Paul Klee (who, however, cannot really be classed as a graphic artist), Lyonel Feininger and Max Beckmann. Nevertheless the new German graphic art may yet be called upon to be the bridge for our artistic endeavours to the world.

A. Kubin: *The old fisher* (1942)

