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THE MAD SQUARE

MODERNITY IN GERMAN ART 1910–37



FELIX NUSSBAUM (1904–44)

The mad square 1931

oil on canvas, 97 x 195,5 cm

Berlinische Galerie, Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst, Fotografie und Architektur

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THE MAD SQUARE

MODERNITY IN GERMAN ART 1910–37

In contrast to France and England, for example, Germany in the last decade of the 19th and first decades of the 20th centuries had no fixed cultural capital. Until the end of the First World War, the emergence of avant-garde movements in Germany was characterised by decentralisation and regionalism.

Jacqueline Strecker, exhibition curator¹

The evolution of dense, urban cities in the turbulent period of the Weimar Republic was the subject of endless fascination for artists of the time, who depicted the metropolis with intrigue, attraction, lust and loathing. The city was seen as both the site and cause of the excesses of human behaviour. Berlin was the ultimate metropolis of the time and it was an emblem of modernity in the Weimar period – restless, stimulating and ultimately fragile.

Maggie Finch²

This exhibition explores the radically varied ways in which artists responded to modern life in Germany during one of the most exciting and tumultuous periods in 20th-century history. It features works by leading artists of the era and shows the great diversity and innovation of key avant-garde movements that emerged in a number of German cities. The broad range of art represented here is linked by a shared interest in creative freedom and experimentation. With their combination of satire, observation and emotion, these works offer powerful interpretations of the often traumatic transformation of modern society from an imperial system to a brave new era of democracy and technological change.

The title – *The mad square* – is drawn directly from Felix Nussbaum's 1931 painting, included in this exhibition, depicting Berlin's famous Pariser Platz as a crazy and fantastic place. The 'mad square' is both a place – the city, represented in so many works in the exhibition – and a state of mind that gives these works their edginess. The 'square' can also be seen as a modernist construct that saw artists moving away from figurative representations towards increasingly abstract forms.

EXPRESSIONISM IN BERLIN

The starting point for the exhibition is Berlin in the heady years leading up to and at the beginning of World War I when the Expressionists moved to the metropolis to seek out new subject matter and audiences for their revolutionary art movement. Visions of the world on the brink of an apocalypse and dynamic impressions of a generation eager for war are featured with scenes of the metropolis. Anxieties about living in the modern age often centred around sexual representations of the female body, as depicted in the striking paintings by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Heinrich Maria Davringhausen, and in other works throughout the exhibition. Women are portrayed as symbols of modernity revealing the tensions between traditional female roles and the new roles for women in an increasingly urban and industrial society.

Expressionism is a term that can be used to cover a huge variety of subjects and styles in which shape or colour is exaggerated or distorted so as to express the emotional essence of a subject.

In Germany, where it was dominant in the first decades of the 20th century, Expressionism is associated with two generations of artists. The first was active between 1905 and 1911 and included artists such as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky, as well as the *Brücke* and *Blaue Reiter* groups, who were swept up by the idealism and optimism of the new century. The second generation which included artists such as George Grosz and Otto Dix, appeared in 1915 and came to maturity on the brutal battlefields of World War I.

OTTO DIX (1891–1969)

Storm troopers advancing under a gas attack

from the portfolio **War** 1924

etching, aquatint, drypoint, 19.4 x 29 cm

Australian War Memorial, Canberra

© Otto Dix/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney



WORLD WAR I AND THE REVOLUTION

OTTO DIX (1891–1969)

Storm troopers advancing under a gas attack

from the portfolio **War** 1924

etching, aquatint, drypoint, 19.4 x 29 cm

Australian War Memorial, Canberra

© Otto Dix/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney

Many artists and intellectuals in Germany responded enthusiastically to the outbreak of war in 1914, eagerly volunteering for service in the belief that it would bring cultural renewal and a rapid victory for Germany. However, this optimism soon gave way to the grim realisation of mechanised warfare's potential to tear apart humanity and civilisation.

The works represented here are by the generation of artists who experienced war first-hand. These artists turned away from the bright sunlight depicted in many pre-war Expressionist landscapes toward the representation of shredded nerves and nocturnal terror. These works show the devastating effects of war on the individual and society and depict fear, anxiety and violence.

The disturbing subjects provide important insights into the tough economic conditions and social dysfunction experienced by many during the tumultuous early years of the Weimar Republic (1918–33). During these years, a new democratic republic was founded in the town of Weimar in central eastern Germany following the abdication of the Kaiser in 1918 and the following year of violent revolution. To make matters worse, Germany was hit by an economic crisis and crippling hyperinflation that lasted from mid 1922 to the end of 1923.

Otto Dix ... [remained] in service throughout the course of the war ... he returned again and again to active service, driven by a compulsion to experience its primal horrors: 'War is something so animal-like: hunger, lice, slime, these crazy sounds,' he later wrote, 'War was something horrible, but nonetheless something powerful ... Under no circumstances could I miss it! It is necessary to see people in this unfettered condition in order to know something about them.

Jill Lloyd³



7–12 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Respond to and discuss what is happening in this artwork by Otto Dix.

- How has the artist composed the work to create a certain effect? Consider your initial response to this work. What does the artist want you to feel? How does the composition strengthen your understanding of the artists' intention?
- Respond to the figures in the artwork. What do they represent and how are they portrayed? Create a list of words that describe the figures and discuss their literal and symbolic meanings. Consider the quote by the artist above and discuss how this artwork personifies his understanding of war.
- Research the important events occurring in society at the time. How have these events impacted on the artist and ultimately the way he approaches art making. What is the artist's point of view about these events?
- Would people today respond differently to those that viewed this artwork at the time it was created? What can today's audience bring to the meaning of this artwork?

HANNAH HÖCH (1889–1978)

Made for a party 1936

collage, 36 x 19.8 cm

Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations, Stuttgart

Photo: © Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen e.V., Stuttgart

© Hannah Höch / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney



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Made for a party 1936

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© Hannah Höch / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney

The Dada movement emerged in Zurich in neutral Switzerland in 1916, fuelled by the philosophical and political despair experienced by artists and poets during World War I. Initially centred around the Cabaret Voltaire, Dada brought together Tristan Tzara, Richard Huelsenbeck, Emmy Hennings, Hugo Ball and others to protest against what they perceived as the irrational and senseless elements of European culture. Violent, infantile and chaotic, Dada took its name from a French word for a child's hobbyhorse or possibly from the sound of a baby's babble. Its activities included poetry readings and avant-garde performances, as well as creating new forms of abstract art that subverted all existing conventions in western art.

The impact of the Dada movement was felt throughout Europe – and most powerfully in Germany – from 1917 to 1921. Christian Schad's participation in the Zurich Dada group resulted in the creation of a unique series of photograms, or camera-less photographs, together with abstract wood reliefs. In Cologne, a branch of Dada emerged through the work of Max Ernst, who produced intricate collages and staged highly provocative anti-art exhibitions. Kurt Schwitters in Hanover developed Dada-inspired works, called 'Merz' collages, through which he invented a completely new way of making art, composed from found objects taken from modern city life. Berlin Dada, which formed in 1917, took on a decidedly political tone. Though the Dada movement in Germany was very short-lived, it has profoundly influenced subsequent developments in avant-garde art and culture.

In Germany, Dada took on a more aggressively political character than it had shown in Zurich, with the Berlin Dadaists and their counterparts in Cologne ... advocating radical political change in the wake of the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II and the November Revolution of 1918.'

Brigid Doherty⁴

'Montage is the technique the Berlin Dadaists deployed in their efforts to transform the production and reception of works of art.'

Brigid Doherty⁵



7–12 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

What is Dada?

- How did this new way of thinking impact on the meaning of art? Discuss the material and conceptual practice of Dada artists and consider how they offer the viewer a new way of seeing the world. Research how contemporary artists show influences of Dada practice.
- Hannah Höch explores the role of women both as artists and in society. Analyse this artwork and discuss how the artist has expressed her point of view. Is the title significant to the meaning of the work? Compare how women were represented in the years before and after *Made for a party* 1936. Can you see similarities and differences to the manner in which they are represented?
- The Berlin Dadaists showing their interest in merging photographic and typographic imagery developed photomontage. How has photomontage strengthened Hannah Höch's body of work? Would other material practice be as effective?
- Create a photomontage based on a social or political issue you feel passionate about. Discuss if this approach offers the viewer a greater understanding of your point of view.

MARCEL BREUER (1902–1981)

Club chair (B3) designed 1925, this example produced c1928–29
nickel-plated tubular steel with dark blue oil cloth fabric, 73.5 x 77.8 x 70.4 cm
manufactured by Standard Möbel, Berlin
Collection Alexander von Vegesack

Photo: Vitra Design Museum © Estate of Marcel Breuer



MARCEL BREUER (1902–1981)

Club chair (B3) designed 1925, this example produced c1928–29 nickel-plated tubular steel with dark blue oil cloth fabric, 73.5 x 77.8 x 70.4 cm manufactured by Standard Möbel, Berlin
Collection Alexander von Vegesack

Photo: Vitra Design Museum © Estate of Marcel Breuer

The Bauhaus (1919–33) is widely considered as the most important school of art and design of the 20th century. Founded by the German architect Walter Gropius in the provincial town of Weimar – also the centre of the new republican government – the Bauhaus quickly established its reputation as the leading and most progressive centre of the international avant-garde. Gropius sought to do away with traditional distinctions between the fine arts and craft, and to forge an entirely new kind of creative designer, skilled in both the conceptual aesthetics of art and the technical skills of handcrafts. Students were assigned to a workshop – in metals, ceramics, textiles, wood, printmaking or wall painting – where they progressed from apprentice, to journeyman, to master craftsman. Key examples of the Bauhaus and its approaches are presented here.

From the outset, the school was considered to be both politically and artistically radical. In 1925, authorities forced the school to close in Weimar because of its perceived cultural bolshevism. The Bauhaus relocated to the industrial city of Dessau and in 1928 the architect Hannes Meyer took over as director. Growing political pressure forced the Bauhaus to move again, this time to Berlin in 1932. The Nazis closed the Bauhaus permanently in 1933 after police raided what had essentially become a school of architecture under the direction of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.

Both pragmatic and idealistic, the school sought contracts with industry in order to become more self-supporting, but also to fulfil the basic principal that beautifully designed objects would bring about a better world.

Karen Koehler⁶



7–12 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Is there room for functionality in art?

- With reference to the Bauhaus school debate if design objects and fine art objects are only determined by their purpose.
- Develop a case study on the Bauhaus school. Discover why they were considered politically and artistically radical and how its principles revolutionised our approach to design and art. In what way did they pose a threat to conventional thinking?
- The Bauhaus school evolved in a time when Germany became a more urbanised, industrial society. Research this time in German history and compare the Bauhaus school to art styles occurring in Germany at this time. How do they represent the society as a whole?
- Marcel Breuer developed the *Club chair (B3)*, the first modern tubular steel furniture at the Bauhaus in 1925. This revolutionary design was functional, lightweight and could be easily mass-produced. It was later named the Wassily chair after his colleague Wassily Kandinsky at the Bauhaus school. Discover other examples of the Bauhaus school from both Weimer and Dessau and make an informed opinion about the significance of Breuer's design.

LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY (1895–1946)

Berlin radio tower c1928

gelatin silver photograph, 36 x 25.5 cm

The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago

Julien Levy Collection, Special Photography Acquisition Fund

Photo: The Art Institute of Chicago

© László Moholy-Nagy/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney



CONSTRUCTIVISM AND THE MACHINE AESTHETIC

LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY (1895–1946)

Berlin radio tower c1928

gelatin silver photograph, 36 x 25.5 cm

The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago

Julien Levy Collection, Special Photography Acquisition Fund

Photo: The Art Institute of Chicago

© László Moholy-Nagy/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney

For a brief period from 1922 to 1923, Germany was the centre of the art movement known as International Constructivism. Having emerged in Russia after World War I, Constructivism developed in Germany as a set of ideas and practices that experimented with abstract or non-representational forms and in opposition to Expressionism and Dada. The Constructivists developed works and theories that fused art with technology in response to the age of the machine. They shared a utopian belief in social reform, and saw abstract art as playing a central role in this process.

El Lissitzky developed his idea of abstract art through Prouns (projects for the affirmation of the new in art). He was committed to revolutionising all forms of art, including painting, printmaking, typography, book design, decorative arts and architecture. László Moholy-Nagy sought to create a new abstract art for a dynamic modern society. He advocated the idea that photography was a revolutionary extension of human sight and proposed that the camera was the vehicle through which artists could best capture the brave new world. The selection of photographs in the exhibition reveals widely varied attitudes towards the machine, from romantic idealism to documentary realism.

Unlike Dada, Constructivism did not attack or subvert art, but extended it in new directions through experimentation and the exploration of new technologies. Constructivists embraced the machine as a means for creating art, and were excited by the mechanical production process that had the potential to reproduce images on a mass scale.

Petra Kayser⁷



7–12 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Consider the artwork by László Moholy-Nagy.

- What does the artwork reveal to us about the artist's ideas, thoughts and interests? Is the meaning and purpose of *Berlin radio tower* 1928 clear to the viewer? Critically analyse this image and compare your conclusions with further reading of the artist's intention.
- As well as photography, László Moholy-Nagy experimented with a broad range of media including painting, printmaking, stage design, typography, sculpture and film. Research why the artist preferred to explore diverse approaches and how this benefits the artwork.
- What are the advantages and disadvantages to exploring a variety of techniques and materials? Create a body of work based on a particular theme showing a diversity of approaches.
- Abstraction and technology played an important role in developing artworks of this period. Compare German constructivists with contemporary artists that explore similar themes. How has abstraction evolved and how has technology changed the aesthetics of the art form?

MAX BECKMANN (1884–1950)

The trapeze 1923

oil on canvas, 196.5 x 84 cm

Toledo Museum of Art. Purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment
Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey

Photo: Photography Incorporated, Toledo

© Max Beckmann/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney



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© Max Beckmann/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney

The thriving sophisticated and cosmopolitan metropolis provided a rich source of imagery for artists. By the 1920s, Berlin had become the cultural and entertainment capital of the world and mass culture played an important role in distracting a society traumatised by World War I. The metropolis also came to represent unprecedented personal and sexual freedom and tolerance, and artists depicted scenes of leisure, entertainment and the city at night. George Grosz and Rudolf Schlichter portrayed Berlin's seedy underbelly. Their brilliant, yet sinister representations of brothels and sex murders seem shocking, but their intention was for art to affect social change by representing the victimisation of society's outcasts. In Frankfurt am Main, Max Beckmann depicted elaborate scenes of outsiders, such as circus and carnival performers, which became metaphors for modern city life and its social corruption.

In photography, modernity was emphasised either by unusual views of the metropolis or through the representation of city types. Contemporary debates around the question of whether a photograph could capture the psychological depth of a person were played out in the works of August Sander and Hugo Erfurth, who photographed many of the most prominent members of German society. The diverse group of works in this room portrays the uninhibited sense of freedom and innovation experienced by artists throughout Germany during the 1920s.

... every aspect of the old ways of life were being challenged by the development of the thriving cities, throwing traditional values and culture into flux.

Maggie Finch⁸



7–12 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

The city became a significant theme for artists in this period.

- Create a body of work responding to the metropolis. Think about what the city represents and how it differs from rural areas. Consider the people and the landscape and how your point of view on this theme can be represented in your art making.
- Respond to *The trapeze* 1923 in a subjective way. In your opinion is it a successful artwork? Consider the figures in the composition. What emotion are they revealing to the audience? Is this image a true representation of circus performers or is it saying something more?
- Max Beckmann was one of Weimar Germany's leading artists who embraced modernity in his artworks. Define the term modernity and its significance to this particular period. Look at Beckmann's body of work and discuss how modernity is represented in his art practice. Give a Powerpoint presentation discussing your point of view.
- Create an exhibition based on the same artworks in *The mad square*. Would you choose the same approach as the curator who focused on artists from the metropolis? Are there other ways to group particular artworks together to form a different narrative?

GEORGE GROSZ (1893–1959)

Portrait of Walter Mehring 1926

oil on canvas, 110 x 78 cm

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

Photo: © Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp © Lukas-Art in Flanders vzw
© George Grosz/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney



NEW OBJECTIVITY

GEORGE GROSZ (1893–1959)

Portrait of Walter Mehring 1926

oil on canvas, 110 x 78 cm

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

Photo: © Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp © Lukas-Art in Flanders vzw
© George Grosz/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney

By the mid 1920s, a new style emerged that came to be known as Neue Sachlichkeit or New Objectivity. This term took its name from an exhibition organised in 1925 by Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub, director of the Kunsthalle in Mannheim. Hartlaub defined the features of this new tendency as the sharpening of the artist's gaze, a sober concentration on the external appearance of the subject and a sense of emotional detachment. He identified two variations of this style which he labelled as 'right-wing' and 'left-wing'. George Grosz, Max Beckmann and Otto Dix were referred to as the 'left-wing' artists, or Verists, because they were committed to the truthful representation of their subjects. The 'right-wing' was a group of painters based in Munich including Alexander Kanoldt, Carlo Mense, Georg Schrimpf and Heinrich Maria Davringhausen.

Many artists felt the need to return to traditional modes of representation after experiencing the atrocities of World War I and the harsh conditions of life in post-war Germany. Portraiture became a major vehicle of expression for this group of artists, with its emphasis on the realistic representation of the human figure. Artists mostly chose their own models rather than seeking out commissioned portraits. The purpose of these portraits was to create a picture of the era by portraying people who helped to shape Weimar culture.

The room in which he finds himself is not clearly defined and transforms into the unknown, into a kind of sky. Storm clouds threaten in the top left of the picture where the cigarette points to a planet, circled in red. Does Mehring suspect an impending disaster?

Mathias Eberle⁹

The urban resident, male or female, remained the most prominent figure, the most important model, and it was not until Hitler and Stalin came to power that the farmer became a notable subject in painting again. In the metropolis of the 1920s, artists painted portraits of colleagues, secretaries, doctors, photographers and fashionable women, who all stood or sat as models as well as businessmen, actors, dancers and writers. The milieu in which these artists mingled were the middle-class circles – they were not interested in suburban or rural idylls, or in the lives of the upper classes.

Mathias Eberle¹⁰



7–12 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Analyse this artwork by George Grosz.

- What is your initial response and how does it make you feel? Look carefully at the composition and arrangement of form. How does the background enhance the narrative in the painting? Research George Grosz and Walter Mehring and form an opinion about whether the artwork is a true portrayal of the artist and the sitter.
- New Objectivity artists sought to champion the objective portrayal of reality. What does this mean? Consider the structural and historical aspects of this art making approach. Have New Objectivity artists been successful in their aim?
- How are Weimar artists personally affected by the experiences that surround them? Build a case study on this topic and specifically discuss New Objectivity artists and their response to the world around them. Why did they choose this particular subject matter and artistic style? Compare with other artists in the exhibition.
- Identify the left wing and right wing artists of this art style. Distinguish the differences and choose an artist to appropriate. Create a portrait painting of someone significant in your life and curate a class exhibition including extended labels and catalogue text. Can the audience recognise the variations of this style?

GEORG SCHÖDL (ND)

A view of the 'Dada wall' in room 3 in the Degenerate art exhibition held at the Archäologisches Institut, Munich, 19 July – 30 Nov 1937

Courtesy of the Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California



POWER AND THE 'DEGENERATE ART' EXHIBITION

GEORG SCHÖDL (ND)

A view of the 'Dada wall' in room 3 in the Degenerate art exhibition held at the Archäologisches Institut, Munich, 19 July – 30 Nov 1937

Courtesy of the Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California

POWER

By 1929 many modern artists in Germany sensed a prevailing loss of direction in avant-garde art and were simply unable to sell their work after the crash of the stock market in New York. This crisis of modernism had already begun by the late 1920s and dramatically worsened in the 1930s. The sharp decline in artistic production was exacerbated by the deteriorating political situation and the onset of the Great Depression, which resulted in mass unemployment and poverty across Germany.

This period of economic instability and political extremism marked a turning point for modern art. Artists realised that their situation was becoming increasingly precarious as the National Socialists expanded their power and launched their brutal campaign against modernism. After the seizure of power by Hitler in 1933, modern artists were forbidden from working and exhibiting in Germany. Their works were confiscated from leading museums and then destroyed or sold cheaply on the international art market. Artists were either forced to leave Germany or retreat into a state of 'inner immigration'; sometimes, as in the case of Felix Nussbaum, they died in concentration camps.

'DEGENERATE' ART

The *Degenerate art* exhibition, held in Munich in 1937, represented the culmination of the National Socialists's assault on modernism. Hundreds of works by leading painters and sculptors of the Weimar era were selected for the show which aimed to illustrate the mental deficiency and moral decay that had supposedly infiltrated modern German art. The works were displayed haphazardly with derogatory slogans to further discredit and ridicule modern art. Over two million people visited the exhibition in Munich, while far fewer saw the Great German art exhibition held nearby in the Nazi-designed House of German Art, which sought to promote what the Nazis considered as 'healthy' art.

Though many masterpieces of modern art were lost or destroyed through the 'degenerate' art campaign – which saw the confiscation of thousands of works from museums and private collections – many survived and are now held in collections around the world. The final section of this exhibition brings together a small group of these works to celebrate the achievements of these artists and their great contribution to modern art.

... modernist art and culture was still perceived as a danger because of its potential to remind people of the free and democratic past of the Weimar Republic, which led to the intensification of the systematic 'cleansing' of German museums, libraries, universities and art schools.

Uwe Fleckner¹¹



7–12 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

How is an artwork reflective of its culture?

- Does cultural history become a contributing factor in the development of art? Consider post war German artists and their response to culture. Have they been affected by this significant period in time?
- Consider the quote by Uwe Fleckner and discuss the power of the art form. Why did art of the Weimar republic pose such a threat to the National Socialists?
- Though the *Degenerate art* exhibition was aimed to discredit modernist artists, why was it better attended than the Great German art exhibition that was described as showing 'healthy' German art? What does this say about society at the time and do you think audiences today would react in the same way?
- Write a newspaper article about the *Degenerate art* exhibition. Critically analyse the artists represented and the arrangement of the artworks on display. Discuss the significance of this exhibition and how this was embraced by society at the time.

ROBERT SENNECKE (1885–1940)

Opening of the First International Dada Fair held at the Otto Burchard Gallery, Berlin, 30 June 1920

archival photograph

Courtesy of the Berlinische Galerie, Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst, Fotografie und Architektur, and Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin

1910

- Berlin's population doubles to two million people

1911

- Expressionists move from Dresden to Berlin

1912

- Social Democratic Party (SPD) the largest party in the Reichstag

1913

- Expressionists attain great success with their city scenes

1914

- World War I begins
- George Grosz, Oskar Schlemmer, Otto Dix, Ludwig Hirschfeld Mack, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Max Beckmann and Franz Marc enlist in the army

1915

- Grosz declared unfit for service, Beckmann suffers a breakdown and Schlemmer wounded

1916

- Marc dies in combat
- Dada begins at Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich

1917

- Lenin and Trotsky form the Soviet Republic after the Tzar is overthrown

1918

- Richard Huelsenbeck writes a Dada manifesto in Berlin
- Kurt Schwitters creates Merz assemblages in Hanover
- Revolutionary uprisings in Berlin and Munich
- Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicates and flees to Holland
- Social Democratic Party proclaims the Weimar Republic
- World War I ends

1919

- Freikorps assassinates the Spartacist leaders, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg
- Bauhaus established in Weimar by Walter Gropius
- Cologne Dada group formed
- Treaty of Versailles signed

1920

- Berlin is the world's third largest city after New York and London
- Inflation begins in Germany
- National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) founded
- Kapp Putsch fails after right-wing forces try to gain control of government
- First International Dada Fair opens in Berlin

1921

- Hitler made chairman of the NSDAP



Left to right: Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Höch (seated), Dr Otto Burchard, Johannes Baader, Wieland Herzfelde, Margarete Herzfelde, Otto Schmalhausen, George Gros and John Heartfield

1922

- Schlemmer's Triadic ballet premieres in Stuttgart
- Hyperinflation continues

1923

- Hitler sentenced to five years imprisonment for leading the Beer Hall Putsch
- Inflation decreases and a period of financial stability begins

1924

- Hitler writes *Mein Kampf* while in prison
- Reduction of reparations under the Dawes Plan

1925

- New Objectivity exhibition opens at the Mannheim Kunsthalle
- The Bauhaus relocates to Dessau

1926

- Germany joins the League of Nations

1927

- Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* released
- Unemployment crisis worsens
- Nazis hold their first Nuremberg party rally

1928

- Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's *The threepenny opera* premieres in Berlin
- Hannes Meyer becomes the second director of the Bauhaus

1929

- Street confrontations between the Nazis and communists in Berlin
- Young Plan accepted, drastically reducing reparations
- Stock market crashes on Wall Street, New York
- Thomas Mann awarded the Nobel Prize for literature

1930

- Resignation of Chancellor Hermann Müller's cabinet ending parliamentary rule
- Minority government formed by Heinrich Brüning, leader of the Centre Party
- Nazis win 18% of the vote and gain 95 seats in the national elections
- Ludwig Mies van der Rohe becomes the third director of the Bauhaus
- John Heartfield creates photomontages for the Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung (AIZ)

1931

- Unemployment reaches five million and a state of emergency is declared in Germany

1932

- The Nazis increase their representation in the Reichstag to 230 seats yet are unable to form a majority coalition
- Mies van der Rohe moves the Bauhaus to Berlin
- Grosz relocates to New York as an exile

1933

- Hindenburg names Hitler as chancellor
- Hitler creates a dictatorship under the Nazi regime
- The first *Degenerate art* exhibition denouncing modern art is held in Dresden
- Mies van der Rohe announces the closure of the Bauhaus
- Nazis organise book burnings in Berlin
- Many artists including Gropius, Kandinsky and Klee flee Germany
- Beckmann, Dix and Schlemmer lose their teaching positions

1934

- Fifteen concentration camps exist in Germany

1935

- The swastika becomes the flag of the Reich

1936

- Spanish civil war begins
- Germany violates the Treaty of Versailles
- Olympic Games held in Garmisch-Partenkirchen and Berlin
- Thomas Mann deprived of his citizenship and emigrates to the United States

1937

- German bombing raids over Guernica in Spain in support of Franco
- The Nazi's *Degenerate art* exhibition opens in Munich and attracts two million visitors
- Beckmann, Kirchner and Schwitters leave Germany
- Purging of 'degenerate' art from German museums continues

NOTES

1. Jacqueline Strecker, *The mad square: modernity in German art 1910–37*, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney 2011, p 25
2. Maggie Finch, *The mad square ...*, p 200
3. Jill Lloyd, *The mad square ...*, p 36. Otto Dix quote cited by Reinhold Heller, 'Otto Dix', Grove Art Online, Oxford University Press 2009, www.oxfordartonline.com (accessed Dec 2010)
4. Brigid Doherty, *The mad square ...*, p 78
5. Brigid Doherty, *The mad square ...*, p 83
6. Karen Koehler, *The mad square ...*, p 118
7. Petra Kayser, *The mad square ...*, p164
8. Maggie Finch, *The mad square ...*, p 195
9. Mathias Eberle, *The mad square ...*, p 231
10. Mathias Eberle, *The mad square ...*, p 227
11. Uwe Fleckner, *The mad square ...*, p 260

Timeline compiled by Jacqueline Strecker and Victoria Tokarowski from the following sources: Catherine Heroy 'Chronology' in Sabine Rewald, *Glitter and doom: German portraits from the 1920s*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, exh cat, 2006, pp 39–46; Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg, eds, 'Political chronology', *The Weimar Republic sourcebook*, Berkeley 1994, pp 765–71; Jonathan Petropoulos and Dagmar Lott-Reschke 'Chronology' in Stephanie Barron, *'Degenerate Art': the fate of the avant-garde in Nazi Germany*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, exh cat, 1991, pp 391–401.

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Issues for consideration: Leeanne Carr, coordinator of secondary education programs

Research: Camilla Shanahan

Text: Jacqueline Strecker, exhibition curator AGNSW (unless noted otherwise)

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