

30 THE EMOTIVE OBJECT

THE ARTWORK ELICITS AN EMOTIONAL RESPONSE

The work of art can itself become an emotive force. When the artist seeks to create a powerful emotional reaction in the viewer, the enterprise is referred to as “expressionist.” A variety of approaches and techniques can be used and combined to achieve this.

- **Exaggeration or distortion of the form of the subject**

The artist might elongate, twist, compress, stretch, or otherwise distort the subject, creating an uneasy relationship to a normal realist representation.

- **Use of disturbing subject matter**

The artist might depict subjects that incorporate emotionally charged themes, such as violence, alienation, and sexuality.

- **Use of heavy and very physical line**

A heavy, wide line can carry a sense of weightiness and even brutality.

- **Severe angular shifts**

The creation of acute angular relationships between elements in a painting or sculpture tends to bring about a dynamic sense of unease.

- **Use of strong and non-natural color**

This can cause a visceral response in the viewer.

- **Heavy and stressed surfaces**

The surface of the painting or sculpture can be made to feel stressed through heavy impasto, energetic brushing, or the addition of other materials into the paint.

HISTORY

Modern expressionism begins with Vincent Van Gogh and was taken up by the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch. A broader Expressionist movement began in Germany early in the twentieth century. Its principal exponents were Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938), Erich Heckel (1883–1970), and Max Beckmann (1884–1950). In France, the work of Georges Rouault (1871–1958) and Chaim Soutine (1893–1943) also followed expressionist lines. In the 1980s, a Neo-Expressionist movement emerged, again primarily in Germany, championed by artists such as Anselm Kiefer (1945–) and Georg Baselitz (1938–).

See also: *Touch Communicates* on page 196; *Texture* on page 190; *Linear Basics* on page 104

1 Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938)
Qualen der Liebe, 1915, Color woodcut from two blocks on wove paper, 13¹/₁₆ × 8⁹/₁₆ in (33.2 × 21.7 cm)

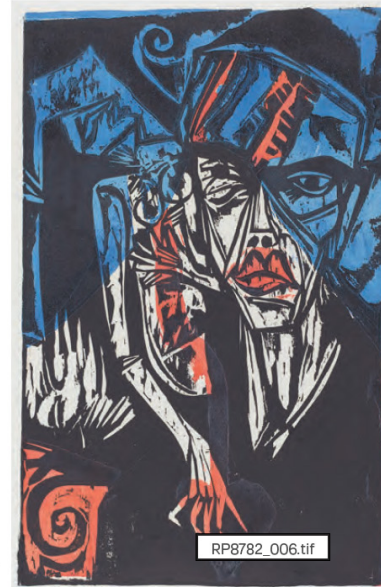
Kirchner uses distorted form, unnatural color, and a dynamic angular composition to create a work that projects a powerful and disturbing energy.

2 Edvard Munch (1863–1944)
The Scream, 1893, Oil, Tempera and Pastel on Cardboard, 36 × 28⁷/₁₆ in (91.4cm × 73.3cm)

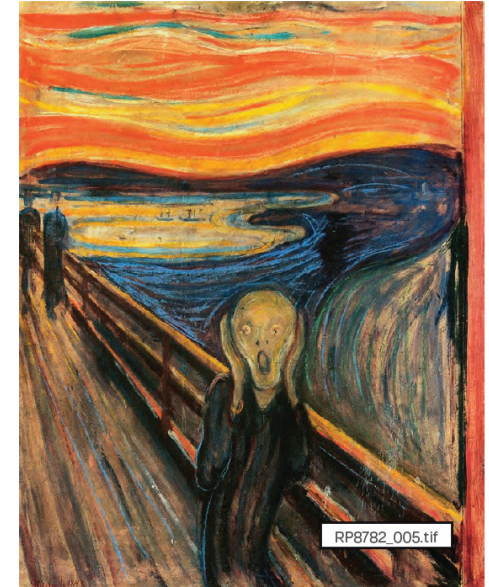
Munch uses a heavy and brutally insistent line in combination with distorted form and unnatural color to create one of the most famously disturbing images of the modern era. The deliberate flattening of the image allows the artist to connect the line running through the right side of the figure with the lines running into the landscape, thereby combining the two elements in an unnerving fashion.

2 Vincent Van Gogh (1853–90)
Wheatfield with Cypresses, 1889, Oil on canvas, 29 × 36³/₄ in (73 × 93.4cm)

The artist uses heavy line, abrupt angular changes, and exaggerated color to create a sense of energetic movement and unease.



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