

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

FOURTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215/842-6353

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CONTACT: Tina Coplan  
Liz Kimball  
(202) 842-6359

## NATIONAL GALLERY SPOTLIGHTS WORKS BY ERNST LUDWIG KIRCHNER

### AS PART OF GERMAN CULTURAL FESTIVAL

Washington, D.C. -- Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: Paintings, Drawings, and Prints, highlighting more than forty major works of art by this German expressionist master, will be on view from May 3 through August 16, 1992 at the National Gallery of Art. The exhibition will run simultaneously in the East Building with Käthe Kollwitz, which features approximately one hundred prints, drawings, and sculpture by the German artist renowned for the powerful social content of her imagery.

Both exhibitions are part of the Tribute to Germany, a Washington-area cultural festival coordinated by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and supported by Robert Bosch GmbH, Daimler-Benz, The Deutsche Bank Group, Mannesmann AG, Miles Inc., Siemens, Thyssen AG, and The Federal Republic of Germany. Lufthansa German Airlines has provided transportation support for the festival.

"This celebration bridging the arts provides a timely opportunity for reexamining the work of two quite different German artists active in the early part of this century," said J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery of Art. "It also underscores the Gallery's commitment to collect and display German art of the twentieth century."

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While the Käthe Kollwitz exhibit presents an extensive overview of the artist's achievements through rarely seen works borrowed from around the world, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: Paintings, Drawings, and Prints offers a more concentrated survey drawn from the Gallery's holdings and from eight private American collections.

The twelve paintings and sixteen drawings, watercolors, and pastels in the exhibition will survey Kirchner's art, along with thirteen major woodcuts, lithographs, and drypoints. Celebrated as one of the twentieth century's greatest graphic artists, Kirchner experimented with a variety of printmaking techniques. He is acclaimed for the creative, direct way he used the distinctive texture and characteristics of different media as part of his designs.

Born in 1880, Kirchner was a founding member of the artist's group in Dresden called Die Brücke (The Bridge). Although they espoused no specific aesthetic program, the young artists were passionately committed to artistic freedom, breaking with the past, and portraying the contemporary world around them. From 1905 until 1913, when the group disbanded, its members created remarkably original paintings--nudes, landscapes, portraits--characterized by simplified forms and intense colors.

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Among the paintings from the Brücke period in the exhibition are the richly impastoed Two Nudes (1907) that suggests the early influence of Van Gogh and the brilliantly colored Green Houses in Dresden (1909/1910). Otto and Maschka Mueller in the Studio (1911), the portrait of Kirchner's fellow Brücke artist and his wife, will be displayed to reveal on the reverse side a painting of Kirchner's young model Marcella. Important graphic works on view from this period include brilliantly colored pastels as well as his famous color lithographs Russian Dancers (1909) and Performer Bowing (1909).

The artist moved to Berlin in 1911 and responded intensely to the life of the great city. A unique pairing of two major paintings of cabaret dancers, one from 1911 the other from 1913, will be joined by Kirchner's greatest pastel, Two Streetwalkers (1914), as well as his most famous woodcut, Five Tarts (1914).

When the first World War broke out, Kirchner enlisted in the field artillery. Because of a mental and physical breakdown, he was discharged in 1915 and went to Switzerland to recuperate. Kirchner lived and worked near Davos until his death in 1938.

There he painted in a variety of tightly structured geometric styles, such as in The Visit (1922) and in his sympathetic portrayal of Swiss peasant life, The Reaper (1919/1920), both on view. Three paintings and several prints and drawings are included in the exhibition from these later years, when Kirchner's style evolved from the angular, tension-filled shapes of the Berlin period to broad patches of brilliant color and blocky forms, conveying a greater sense of tranquility.