



**TITLE:** *Das Stiftsfräulein und der Tod*  
(*The Canoness and Death*)  
*Eine Novelle von Alfred Döblin (A Novella by Alfred Döblin)*

**ARTIST:** Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

**DATE:** Created 1912, Published 1913

**SIZE:** 9 ¼ x 7 1/16"

**MEDIUM:** Woodcuts on cream hammered laid paper, part of a novella with five pages of illustrations



#### ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner was born in Aschaffenburg, Germany in 1880. He studied architecture at Dresden Technical University from 1901 to 1905 and painting for a semester at the Arts Academy in Munich. On June 7, 1905, he formed an artistic group known as "Die Brücke" with three friends, the aim of which was to call on the younger generations of artists to fight for freedom in art forms, production, and expression against those who were older, more established, and more powerful. Kirchner was often regarded as the leader of the artistic group, but in 1913 when he was asked to compose a history of Die Brücke, the result was considered to be too egocentric by the other members. The group dissolved later that year.

When the First World War broke out Kirchner joined the army. Shortly after joining, however, Kirchner suffered nervous breakdowns and was moved into a sanatorium. The self-portraits and woodcuts he created during his time there are often considered the highlights of his career. Between 1925 and 1926 Kirchner began intense work on paintings, woodcuts, sculpture, and the decoration of the great hall of the Museum Folkwang in the city of Essen. His work was cut short in 1933 when the Nazis seized the museum, marking a downturn in Kirchner's life. He became increasingly upset with news of Nazi destruction of modern art and their request for him to resign from the Berlin Academy of Art. On June 15, 1938 he committed suicide after burning and destroying much of his own artwork. He is respected today as a modern artist whose group, Die Brücke, helped build the foundation of the Expressionist movement.

#### SOURCES

Berlin: The City as a Body, The City as a Metaphor

[http://www.stanford.edu/dept/german/berlin\\_class/people/doebelin.html](http://www.stanford.edu/dept/german/berlin_class/people/doebelin.html)

Studio Notes: Brief History of the Woodcut

<http://www.1000woodcuts.com/Studionotes/history.html>

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/K/kirchner.html>

Ketterer Kunst; Kirchner, Ernst Ludwig

<http://www.kettererkunst.com/detailse.php?obnr=111000245&anummer=377>

MoMA; The Collection

[http://moma.org/collection/browse\\_results.php?object\\_id=107157](http://moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?object_id=107157)

#### CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

Alfred Döblin is best known as the most talented writer of the German Expressionist movement. Though Döblin studied and practiced medicine, he began writing in the middle of his life and gained critical acclaim in 1908 among the Expressionists in Germany. As a writer, Döblin believed that any portion of a text should be able to stand alone, independent from the piece as a whole. This idea comes to life in his novella, *Das Stiftsfräulein und der Tod (The Canoness and Death.)* This was the first written piece Kirchner ever illustrated. Each of the illustrations in the collection can be taken as separate works of art, an aspect which Döblin surely would have appreciated. *Eine Novelle von Alfred Döblin* is the title page of the novella, the first of five pages of illustrations. The writing on the title page, designed by Kirchner, roughly translates as "Alfred Döblin, *The Canoness and Death*, cuts by E.L. Kirchner, publishing company A.R Meyer."

#### MEDIA DESCRIPTION

Woodblock prints are one of the older forms of art. They were initially used in Egypt and China to stamp clay or wax. The process of printing on paper was popularized in Japan during the 6th century. Printing as an art form began to decline in the 16th century as it evolved into a means of art reproduction rather than creation. It was revived, however, in the 19th century as artists began to experiment with the process to increase detail. Kirchner's *Das Stiftsfräulein und der Tod* was done on laid paper. Laid paper has a ribbed texture and can be created by hand or by a machine.

#### VOCABULARY

**Expressionist Movement:** Expressionism originated in Germany at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The goal of this modernist movement was to distort reality to create an emotional response. Expressionism began in literature, but was prominent in dance and movies as well. Expressionism in painting was often characterized by vibrant colors or strong value contrasts and agitated brushstrokes.

**Novella:** A story with a short or compact plot; a short novel or a long short story.

**Canoness:** A canoness is a member of a Christian community of women living under Catholic rule but she does not take vows. Other translations define canoness as "maiden."

*Completed Fall 2011, Sophie Alsop*

## BRAND NEW TITLE PAGE

### Activity Lesson Plan: K-5

**Session Activity:** The Kirchner print is a combined title page and illustration based on a novella written by Alfred Döblin. In this activity students will select their favorite books and create such title pages. The students can use Kirchner's piece as an example of the way a title page can become a work of art itself. Begin the process with the print by Kirchner as well as a title page of a book everyone in the class has read. As a group, go over the parts of a title page, such as the title of the work, author (s), and information about publication. Then compare and contrast the title page by Kirchner and the title page of the book the class has already read – according to the points/questions in the Activity Procedure.

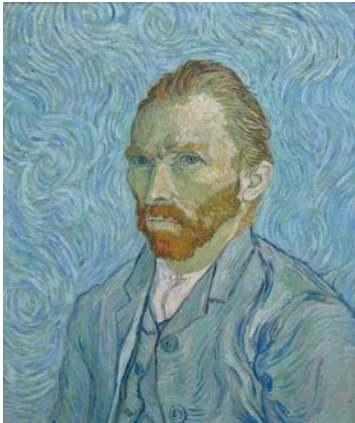
#### Objectives:

Students will create illustrations or title pages of books of their choosing.

**Materials:** familiar books, paper, a copy of Kirchner's title page as an example, and any appropriate combination of the following: construction paper, paint, crayons, colored pencils, markers, computers.

#### Activity Procedure:

1. Describe both title pages. What do you see?
2. Are the letters of the text of each drawn by hand, made with a computer, or created in another way? Note: the Kirchner letters were made using a woodblock print method. Describe the lettering. Is it unusual in any way? Why do you think this text is used?
3. Describe the images on the title pages. What do you see? Do they tell you anything about the story of the book? Note: encourage any interpretation of the *Döblin* image since the story would be overly sophisticated for the elementary level.
4. Have students choose familiar books and create their title pages.
5. Let students plan what medium or media would be appropriate for the image and text. Note: If students have access to computers, they might plan aspects like font, color, and size of font.
6. Share illustrations with the class and talk about each student's interpretation.



## WHAT'S BEHIND THE ART?

### Activity Lesson Plan: 6-12

**Session Activity:** After serving briefly in WWII Kirchner was committed to a sanatorium. The work he created during this time is considered by many to be the best of his career. This activity will explore the effect that mental instability may have for some artists and the way it is reflected in their artwork.

**Objectives:** Students will spend time considering what is behind a work of art, what the artist's intention was, and what he or she may have been thinking as he or she created the work. Students will then write a research paper or put together a comparable presentation on one of the following topics.

#### Class Discussion Topics/Possible Topics for Research:

1. Compare two works of art, such as Kirchner's *Eine Novelle von Alfred Döblin* and **Vincent van Gogh's *Portrait of the Artist, 1889, oil on canvas, 25 ½" x 21 ¼"*, shown to the left.** Find the similarities and differences between the two artists and their two works of art. Focus on their mental health problems, the motivation behind their works – practical and personal – and the way their problems may have influenced their styles.
2. Pick one artist from the list below (or another artist of choice) and analyze his or her body of work as a whole. Answer the following questions, as well as the last question in #1. What are some common themes throughout the artist's body of work? What aspects of the work stayed constant? What changed over time? From the information you have, is there a noticeable change as the artist's mental health status changed? Whether or not the artist is considered an expressionist, does it seem the artist was trying to express a certain feeling, or not at all?

#### Artists sometimes identified with or definitely identified with mental diagnoses:

Walter Anderson (a local Gulf Coast artist), Edgar Degas, Paul Gauguin, Francisco Goya, Edvard Munch, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Diane Arbus

#### SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS (K-5) Big Idea: Critical Thinking and Reflection

Enduring Understanding 1: Cognition and reflection are required to appreciate, interpret, and create with artistic intent. VA.4.C.1.1 Integrate ideas during the art-making process to convey meaning in personal works of art (from Grade Level 4).

#### SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS (6-12) Big Idea: Critical Thinking and Reflection

Enduring Understanding 1: Cognition and reflection are required to appreciate, interpret, and create with artistic intent. VA.912.C.1.1 Integrate curiosity, range of interests, attentiveness, complexity, and artistic intention into the art-making process to demonstrate self-expression (from Grade Level 912).

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