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Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938):

Early Female Nudes in Landscapes

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Bachelor of Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2006

Director: Eric Garberson, Associate Professor

Virginia Commonwealth University

Richmond, Virginia

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Abstract

ERNST LUDWIG KIRCHNER (1880-1938): EARLY FEMALE NUDES IN LANDSCAPES

By Kathryn S. Rogge

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2010.

Major Director: Dr. Eric G. Garberson; Associate Professor, Department of Art History

This thesis examines how Ernst Ludwig Kirchner reconceived the female nude within the two contexts of Expressionism and the German nudist movement. In particular, it looks to Kirchner's early paintings, executed between 1909 and 1914, of female nudes in landscape settings to determine how Kirchner operated within and departed from the conventions of the female nude. This thesis challenges the feminist critique of Expressionist painting and Kirchner's female nudes. It also examines how Kirchner's female nudes in landscapes are complicated by the early twentieth-century development of German nudism. While these paintings are often categorized as bathers following nineteenth-century French precedent, they in fact are unique products of die Brücke philosophy.

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Illustrations

NOTE: References here are to the catalogues of Kirchner's paintings and photographs. Catalogue numbers starting with the letter "G" correspond with the catalogue numbers from Donald Gordon, *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968). Catalogue numbers starting with "S" are from Roland Scotti, *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: The Photographic Work* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006).

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Introduction: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's Early Female Nudes in Landscapes

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner was an early German Expressionist painter and a founding member of the German Expressionist art collective die Brücke. He was a major figure in Modern painting and remains one of the most recognized German Expressionists. He painted many subjects over the course of his short but prolific career, from Berlin street scenes to rural landscapes to portraits. The range of differences among Kirchner's paintings of different subjects is vast. His serene landscape settings show placid nude figures in hearty swashes of bright colors and earth tones. His bustling street scenes show angular, darkly clothed prostitutes in frantic linear strokes of reds and greys.

Due to the size and range of Kirchner's oeuvre, scholars have largely focused their studies on particular subjects such as his street scenes, or his nudes in studio settings, or his woodcuts. His styles and subjects vary too widely to allow a comprehensive overview without sacrificing attention to each subject and style in his career.

This thesis will examine Kirchner's early paintings of nudes in landscape settings. Though not as thoroughly examined as many of his other works, Kirchner's nudes in landscapes comprise a substantial part of his oeuvre. These paintings fall into four general categories: solitary female nudes, groups of female nudes, heterosocial groupings of male and female nudes, and female nudes with modern elements such as hats and umbrellas. These paintings all feature thick, painterly application of vivid color with heavily articulated brushstrokes. The figures are sometimes painted in an opaque, ashy flesh tone and sometimes in bold blues, reds, yellows, and

greens. The figures are situated in landscapes ranging from forest to seaside, tentatively identified as part of the Baltic Coast on the island Fehmarn. Their significance has been greatly understated in the literature, and the prevailing readings of them have serious limitations.

These current readings are a starting point for this thesis. The predominant feminist argument, propagated in 1973 by Carol Duncan, is that Kirchner's entire oeuvre is a direct reflection of his virility and identity as a modern male painter.¹ Other scholars link Kirchner's nudes in landscapes to the history of the female nude, particularly the French bather tradition. Still other scholars contend that Kirchner and his fellow artists in die Brücke were part of the German nudist movement.

Each reading has merit, but each also has limitations. Kirchner's handling of the nude body varies between settings, and English-language scholarship has said very little about these differences. This thesis will reexamine Kirchner's early paintings of female nudes in landscapes as works distinct within his oeuvre.

Reexamining these works as a distinct group requires several approaches. The feminist reading provides a foundation for looking at images of the female body produced by men, but in the case of these paintings it is only a starting point. Additionally, a contextual reading of these paintings establishes the particular status of the nude body, particularly the nude body outdoors, in early twentieth-century Germany and the nudist movement. A historical reading shows the way Kirchner embraced some conventions in his use of the pose as well as the ways in which he departed from artistic conventions. Each reading works to provide a more nuanced and sensitive

¹ Carol Duncan, *The Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 81-108. [The essay was originally published as Carol Duncan, "Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting," *Artforum* (December, 1973) 30-39; references here are to *The Aesthetics of Power*].

understanding of Kirchner's early female nudes in landscapes, but all approaches are necessary for a comprehensive new reading of these paintings.

Chapter 1: Kirchner, Feminism, and the Female Nude

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's paintings of nude figures in landscapes from 1909 to 1914 are some of the most complex, nuanced depictions of the body that he produced in his short life. Scholarship on Kirchner has primarily analyzed these works through comparison to other paintings from his oeuvre, contemporary French paintings, and Arcadian and Primitivist images, or conceived them as a form of proof that Kirchner was engaging in nudism. What these sources do not fully acknowledge is the meaning of visual representations of the nude body within early twentieth-century European painting, Kirchner's art circle, or the context of early German nudism. How these paintings handle the body differs from other paintings in Kirchner's oeuvre, even those produced at the same time, showing the nude body in non-landscape settings.

This thesis will examine the paintings of female nudes in landscapes through a study of what nudity might have signified to Kirchner and how the landscape setting informed his handling of the nude body. Over the course of his career, Kirchner painted many female figures in different settings with different stylistic characteristics. Some are clothed, some are nude, some are shown in interior spaces, and some are in landscapes. The way in which he handles the female body varies between works where he shows the nude in landscapes versus interior spaces. As yet the bulk of scholarship on Kirchner in English has been dedicated to his city street scenes and his nudes in interior spaces. His nudes in landscapes have largely been overlooked and are discussed primarily in relation to his other subjects. This study will disprove generalizations

made about Kirchner's handling of the nude and build new arguments specific to the early nudes in landscapes.

Feminist interpretations advance a reading of Kirchner's nudes that works for his paintings of nudes in studio settings, but not for his nudes in landscapes. The argument that all his paintings of female nudes constitute acts of sexual domination and virility was first advanced by Carol Duncan in 1973,² and subsequent scholarship has done little to address this overgeneralization. Distinction between settings is necessary to the discussion of Kirchner's early nudes because the setting affected his handling of the figure, the pose, and the angle of viewing perspective. Duncan's feminist argument is only partially supported by Kirchner's works. Recognizing the differences between the paintings of nudes in landscapes and nudes in interiors is the foundation for a larger, more nuanced reading of Kirchner's female nudes.

The meaning of nudity was not static throughout Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, particularly in Germany. Comparisons to French bather scenes are limited in that Germany was the birthplace of the nudist movement. Nude dance and gymnastics were unique to Germany at this time. Some Kirchner scholars have acknowledged nudism as a major consideration in Kirchner's paintings, but the discussion of how this affects the meaning of the figures' nudity is underdeveloped. As yet no source has tied a close study of all these considerations together as a means to better understand Kirchner's early nudes in landscapes. A contextual reading of these paintings challenges comparisons to French bather scenes and the mainstream German nudist movement.

The nude subject is one of the oldest traditions in art, and it has always been complicated by the possible implications of sexual delectation. However, the element of titillation has served

² Duncan, 1973, 84-89

to oversimplify Kirchner's paintings of nude women. The degree to which Kirchner saw his foray into the nude tradition as a means to control and sexualize the female body has been overstated and oversimplified. His female nudes in landscapes require further analysis.

This thesis is focused on the early years of Kirchner's painting career, from his first paintings of adult female nudes in a landscape in 1909 to his enlistment in the military in 1914 at the outset of World War I. Paintings produced after the war and Kirchner's subsequent depression and poor health are stylistically different and therefore not part of this examination.

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938)

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner was born in 1880 to a middle class family in Aschaffenburg, Bavaria. His family moved to Frankfurt and then Chemnitz over the course of his childhood. He went to Dresden in 1901 to pursue an education in architecture at the Technische Hochschule, which he finished in 1905 after spending 1903 and 1904 studying in Munich. Scholarly consensus, repeated in all the recent major sources on Kirchner, places his arts education in architecture and simply notes that he spent two semesters in Munich before he began his career as a painter. His lack of formal fine art training has become part of his accepted biography. Prominent Kirchner scholars, including Deborah Wye, Gill Perry, and Jill Lloyd, mention only his architectural training.

Kirchner in fact did have fine arts training. He took classes in drawing, anatomy, and figure painting while he was in Munich at the Kunsthochschule. The Kunsthochschule offered conservative arts training based on French academic models. He also received private training at the experimental Lehr und Versuchsatelier für Angewandte und Freie Kunst, founded by Wilhelm von Debschitz in 1902. He mentions his academic training in a personal letter to Will

Grohmann from July 8, 1925. The popular notion that Kirchner was self-taught as a painter is surprising, as the primary catalogue raisonné documents Kirchner's academic training and cites Kirchner's letter to Grohmann.³

Kirchner may not have been an entirely self-taught painter, but he certainly was a voracious learner. The auction catalogue from his personal library includes Walt Whitman, Friedrich Nietzsche, Franz Kafka, Immanuel Kant, and many other prominent German scholars. He was the best-read artist in die Brücke, and it was through his independent study that many of the art group's practices were born.⁴ Whitman and Nietzsche have been closely tied to Kirchner's artistic philosophy.⁵ These two writers in particular were important because their writings promoted the sort of open, sexually liberated society that Kirchner praises in his early writing. Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, published in German as *Grashalme* in 1907, and Nietzsche's Dionysian philosophy from *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) praise artistic, chaotic, passion-driven lifestyles. Both wrote of a pre-civilized utopia in which human nature is celebrated as part of nature rather than suppressed by social norms. Kirchner's contributions to die Brücke's manifesto evidence a similar outlook.

Over the course of his short life, Kirchner changed his style numerous times. He helped found die Brücke in 1905, through which he cultivated relationships with other artists, first in Dresden and then in Berlin. It was through the group that he met his common-law wife, Erna Schilling. He enlisted in the German military during World War I, although he was discharged

³ Published in Donald E. Gordon, *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 14-15. This source remains Kirchner's most authoritative catalogue raisonné. No subsequent catalogue raisonné has been published in English.

⁴ Gordon, 1968, 18, 78, citing *Bibliothek Ernst Ludwig Kirchners* (Bern, Switzerland: Auktionskatalog Galerie Jüing Stuker, 1951), Plates 1300-1890.

⁵ Renée Price, 2001, 165.

early due to mental problems. As years passed, he grew disillusioned by Germany's militarization, and his art became more violent. A car accident in 1917 left him depressed, badly injured, and unable to paint for nearly a year. Kirchner spent much of his life in and out of sanatoriums with deteriorating mental health, and he spent his last years in Switzerland. In 1938, Kirchner, then fifty-eight years old, committed suicide.⁶

Künstlergruppe Brücke, 1905-1913

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner was the eldest founding member of the German art movement die Brücke, which literally means "the bridge." The artists sought to make a seamless bridge between art and modern life, believing there to be a grave disconnect between twentieth-century society and the art world.⁷ Kirchner met Fritz Bleyl (1880-1966), Erich Heckel (1883-1970), and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884-1976) at the Royal Saxon Technical College in Dresden. All were architecture students similarly disillusioned with the conventions of art, culture, and morality as prescribed by Wilhemine society. In 1905 they established the *Künstlergruppe Brücke*, or Bridge Artists' Group, and began writing manifestos and pamphlets about art's place in modern German culture. In later years, artists Emil Nolde (1867-1956), Max Pechstein (1881-1955) and Otto Mueller (1874-1930) became active members.

Die Brücke was a radical group, vehemently anti-establishment, anti-industrialization, and anti-urbanism. They abandoned their architectural training to paint, draw, and make prints, and in 1906 the group formally announced their principles and ideals for freedom of expression

⁶ According to Will Grohmann, *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner*, trans. Ilse Falk. (New York: Arts, Inc., 1961), 7. This source remains Kirchner's most comprehensive biography; subsequent biographical accounts have focused on parts of his career rather than his whole life.

⁷ Jill Lloyd, *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 3.

and independent artistic identity.⁸ The year 1906-1907 was the only time in die Brücke's history when all of the artists were in daily contact. Kirchner did not produce a full manifesto for the group until 1913, at which point their numbers had dwindled. The publication of *Chronik der Brücke* was one of the last of the group's activities.⁹

The nude was a common subject to all the painters, and it is widely considered the cornerstone of the Brücke movement.¹⁰ Further, the female nude had become the ultimate status symbol for painters over the course of the nineteenth century; to master the female nude subject asserted the artist's training and skill.¹¹ Though the tradition of the female nude had changed over the course of the nineteenth century, it is a subject older than antiquity. The nude is as much a rhetoric as it is a subject, communicative of the artist's training and creativity. In this historical usage, the nude acts as a sign for male creativity and female subordination.¹² Showing the nude body in a variety of poses allowed painters to show their mastery of human anatomy and attention to detail. Producing many paintings of nude women in a variety of poses and settings allowed painters to demonstrate their skills.

Though die Brücke's members spent little time together as a united group, they aligned their artistic philosophies to produce similar work. In addition to circulating written manifestos, the artists gathered together in smaller groups to discuss die Brücke's shared ideology. All the

⁸ Price, *New Worlds*, 2001, 136-164.

⁹ Rose-Carol Washton Long, ed., *German Expressionism: Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism* (New York: G.K. Hall, 1993), 22-24.

¹⁰ Lloyd, 1991, 21-23.

¹¹ Van Liere made this point succinctly in this article, although the statement has since become commonplace. Eldon N. van Liere, "Solutions and Dissolutions: The Bather in Nineteenth Century French Painting," *Arts Magazine* V. 54, No. 9 (1980), 104, 113.

¹² Marcia Pointon, "Reading the Body: Historiography and the Case of the Female Nude" in *Naked Authority: The Body in Western Painting, 1830-1908* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 12-14.

painters in die Brücke painted nude women, and all of them painted nude women in landscapes. Members of the group traveled with their models, girlfriends, and colleagues in what has been overstated as participation in the German nudist movement. The first few summers were spent in Moritzburg, between 1909 and 1911.¹³ In 1911 the group relocated to Berlin and began spending summers on the Baltic coast at Fehmarn. Kirchner continued to go to Fehmarn even after the dissolution of die Brücke.¹⁴

Kirchner's Catalogue

The catalogue raisonné of Kirchner's paintings, compiled by Donald Gordon in 1968, includes 1,170 paintings in total. For the period 1909-1914 Gordon lists ninety-four paintings of nude figures in landscape settings. Of these ninety-four, fourteen include male as well as female nudes. However, four of the fourteen are studies for a larger painting. There are no paintings of adult male nudes in landscapes that do not have female nudes in them, but there are eighty paintings of adult female nudes without male figures.

Gordon's is the only catalogue raisonné of the artist's work, and it is over forty years old. It must be acknowledged that there are problems with the dating and identification of Kirchner's paintings. Kirchner never assigned titles himself, and the titles ascribed to his works are mostly descriptive, occasionally resulting in confusion between paintings with similar subjects.

Compounding this confusion are the various translations of the painting titles from German into English. In instances where a painting has been ascribed multiple titles or shares a common title

¹³ *Die Badenden: Mensch und Natur im deutschen Expressionismus: Erich Heckel, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, August Macke, Franz Marc, Otto Mueller, Emil Nolde, Max Pechstein, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff* (Bielefeld: Kunsthalle Bielefeld, 2000), 18.

¹⁴ Jill Lloyd and Magdalena M. Moeller, eds., *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: The Dresden and Berlin Years* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2003), 17.

with another painting, this thesis will use Gordon's titles. His catalogue numbers will be given for all paintings.

Similarly, Kirchner rarely inscribed dates on his paintings when he was active in Dresden, so that most of the dating of his work occurred years later. Consequently many of his early works have been given incorrect dates. While assigning dates to his Dresden works, Kirchner also decided to "fix" these early paintings. Photographs taken previously evidence his project, wherein he painted over, reworked, and signed older works with new dates. In such cases paintings are assigned two dates; the original year of completion and the year he revisited the composition.

In 1917, shortly after Kirchner was hit by a car and gravely injured, Gustav Schiefler began the artist's first catalogue. With help from Eberhard Grisebach, director of the Jena Art Association, and Erna Schilling, Kirchner's common-law wife, who had recently been assigned power of attorney over Kirchner's estate, Schiefler took on the task of identifying each painting. Kirchner, recovering from injuries, drug addiction, and severe depression in a sanatorium, was occasionally called upon to date individual works. Perhaps due to his distressed state, he would assign dates that were years too early to be credible. In other cases the dating of the Dresden paintings fell on Erna Schilling, even though she did not meet Kirchner until after he had left Dresden for Berlin.¹⁵

Also, in instances where a date had not been ascribed, Gordon assigned one himself. Some were based on Kirchner's correspondence, studio photographs, and exhibition catalogues. For paintings with no documentation, Gordon arrived at a date by assessment of stylistic changes

¹⁵ Gordon, 1968, 27-28.

throughout Kirchner's career or analysis of Kirchner's signature.¹⁶ Both are imperfect methods. Gordon acknowledges that Kirchner's style was very experimental and does not show a linear progression of stylistic development. He also noted, both in the catalogue and in an earlier article in the *Art Bulletin*, that Kirchner's signature changed noticeably many times in his career.¹⁷ He also acknowledges that Kirchner signed many early paintings after 1918, making signature analysis an unreliable dating tool.¹⁸

Despite the problems with Kirchner's titles and dates, Gordon is ultimately a reliable source. He acknowledges the problems with dates and researched each painting as thoroughly as possible. The dates for Kirchner's paintings are an unsolvable problem; ultimately there is little point in trying to build a purely chronological argument about Kirchner's style.

Carol Duncan's Feminist Argument

Kirchner's early paintings of nudes in landscapes show very unusual gender interaction and stylization for their time period. Less sexually charged than French bather paintings, or even his own paintings of nudes in interior spaces, these paintings challenge predominant feminist readings of the female nude subject. These paintings are not entirely separate from feminist critique, for they are still paintings of nude women produced by a man and as such cannot be entirely disassociated from sexual implications. However, these paintings offer more than sexual titillation.

¹⁶ Gordon, 1968, 262-263. Donald E. Gordon, "Kirchner in Dresden," *Art Bulletin*, V. 43, No. 3-4 (Sept-Dec, 1966), 335-336.

¹⁷ Gordon, 1968, 263.

¹⁸ Gordon, 1968, 29.

There has been some engagement with Kirchner's female nudes in feminist art history, but as yet it has many limitations. Carol Duncan's feminist study "Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting" (1973) makes bold claims about the role of women in early twentieth century art. Her essay is foundational to feminist scholars' readings of modern art, and she discusses modern art from all over Europe in her analysis. She contends that while the way male artists depicted women in art changed from the late nineteenth century's *femme fatale* to an early twentieth century vision of a *femme passive*, the role of female as opposite to male remained unchanged.¹⁹ She argues that the dichotomous representations of male as culture and female as nature serve to position woman as a lower order of being. Kirchner was one of her many examples of painters who expressed this gender dichotomy. Duncan asserted that Kirchner believed in uninhibited sexual experience, both in his subject choices and aggressive brushwork. She described Kirchner's technique in violent, sexual terms, claiming that he "seems to attack his subject, a naked woman, with barely controlled energy."²⁰

Using her examples, this argument has considerable merit; however, a closer reading of Kirchner's oeuvre shows some inconsistencies. Duncan's reading was a survey of numerous artists and therefore did not allow her to fully explore each artist mentioned. Subsequent feminist readings of Kirchner have done little to further define gender in his paintings.

Excluding the nudes in landscapes from Kirchner's oeuvre would make Duncan's argument much stronger. However, the nudes in landscapes comprise a large part of his catalogue. The frequent appearance of the nude in landscape subject indicates its importance to the artist, and these paintings should not be removed from consideration of his treatment of the

¹⁹ In Duncan, 1973, 30-39. The *femme fatale*, or fatal woman, was a nineteenth-century development in art showing women as dangerous corrupting forces.

²⁰ Duncan, 1973, 84-88, 93.

nude. Subsequent analyses of gender representation in Kirchner's paintings have not worked through Duncan's reading in relation to his entire oeuvre, and instead they privilege Duncan's brief interpretation of his women as powerless sexualized objects. Looking at Kirchner's entire oeuvre requires a more nuanced feminist analysis.

One of Duncan's primary arguments about Kirchner's sexual dominance was that he painted his female figures from a sharply elevated viewpoint, as though he was standing triumphantly over his models. She claims that this looming perspective is a subversion of the nineteenth century theme of women's seductive authority, enabling Kirchner as the powerful male to exert his power over the supine female.²¹ This point certainly is evident in his paintings, but only in some cases, specifically in paintings of nude women in the studio. The viewing perspective in these paintings is focused downward, allowing the viewer to stand over the model and observe from a position of power. Duncan claims that this renders the figures powerless, allowing Kirchner to paint them in suggestive poses. These poses, she asserts, are designed for maximum sexual pleasure for the artist and the [presumably male] viewer.²² Her analysis almost sounds more like an account of sexual assault than a formal study. Though not all of his paintings of nudes in landscapes are shown at an eye-level viewing perspective, they are much less sexually charged in pose than his nudes in interior spaces.

One of the paintings Duncan discusses as a sexualized image is *Mädchen Unter Japanschirm*, 1909 (*Girl Under a Japanese Umbrella*, Fig. 1; G. 57). This painting serves Duncan's purpose well in establishing Kirchner as a virile modern painter. The supine woman gazes directly up toward the viewer. Her eyes are heavily lidded in garish blues and reds with

²¹ Duncan, 1973, 86.

²² Duncan, 1973, 85-87.

exaggerated eyelashes, and her eyes appear glassy and blank. Her bright red lips are slightly parted in what appears to be a playful smile. She cradles an umbrella in her arms while simultaneously framing her upturned breasts precisely in the center of the composition. Her hips are cast to one side, revealing a feminine hip curvature and ample buttocks. Her large necklace, and certainly the umbrella, suggest that this woman is in some way exotic, possibly even foreign. The elevated but close viewpoint suggests intimacy with the viewer, and her blank smile seems placid and acquiescent, as though she accepts her purpose as a purely sexual stimulus.

Duncan makes her point well with this example, but she misses some details. The background, which she suggests may be “another Brücke painting, or perhaps a primitive or Oriental work”²³ is in fact an indicator that this painting was modeled in Kirchner’s studio. Kirchner and his contemporaries filled their studios with African and Asian tapestries, prints, and artifacts.²⁴ This is an obvious tie to Primitivism, which was an early twentieth-century phenomenon arising from a fascination with non-Western art and otherness. With increased importation of African, Oceanic, Asian, Latin American, and Native American art and artifacts, European artists became aware of non-Western artistic practices.²⁵ The background of this painting is identifiable from photographs of Kirchner’s studio at the time as being a textile on a wall. Photographs from his studio show Japanese umbrellas similar to the one the girl in the painting holds affixed to the walls and ceiling to form a canopy effect overhead (Fig. 2; S. 18).²⁶

²³ Duncan, 1973, 85.

²⁴ Lloyd, 1991, 21-23.

²⁵ Gill Perry, “Primitivism and the ‘Modern,’” in Charles Harrison, Francis Frascina, and Gill Perry, *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1993), 5-10.

²⁶ Roland Scotti, *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: The Photographic Work* (London, Thames & Hudson, 2006), 51.

While Duncan's interpretation applies well enough to Kirchner's nudes in interior spaces (and indeed, all her Kirchner examples are interior scenes), the arguments do not apply as much to his nudes in landscape settings. The differences in viewing perspective are striking. When Kirchner paints the nude in a landscape setting, the figures are often shown at an angle suggesting that the painter is standing in front of them rather than over them. The impression that the artist (and, by extension, the viewer) is bearing down on the models is less consistent in these paintings. The women are not posed beneath the artist's gaze, in direct contradiction to Duncan's assertions. Many scholars who have examined these paintings place Kirchner's nudes indiscriminately in one category. This generalization has greatly limited the ways in which Kirchner's female nudes may be understood.

Duncan's perspective on Kirchner was more an overview of common themes she observed in his time period than anything else. Her article was about the whole of early twentieth-century art, and consequently her engagement with individual artists and even movements was underdeveloped. She only acknowledges Kirchner's role as a leader in die Brücke, leaving out the last twenty-five years of his career as an artist. Duncan perceived early twentieth century art produced by male artists to be inherently virile. To experience and express life artistically, Duncan wrote, was to be male.²⁷ Art was becoming more masculine, artists more manly by extension.

As a point of comparison, *Blau Liegender Akt mit Strohhut*, 1909 (*Blue Reclining Nude with Straw Hat*, Fig. 3; G. 87), painted the same year as *Girl Under a Japanese Umbrella*, has a completely different handling of the nude form. This outdoor nude lies on her stomach rather than her back. Her pose fully exposes her buttocks and partially reveals one breast under her

²⁷ Duncan, 1973, 84.

propped arm. Her face is somewhat abstracted, but notably without the adornment of makeup or jewelry. Her pose suggests that she is alert, observing some part of her surroundings. Perhaps the red patch before her is an abstracted book, or perhaps she is surveying some activity occurring past the visual plane of the painting. Her blue body is punctuated with bright red-orange detail, especially at the face.

Kirchner frequently used bright, unconventional colors for the skin of his nudes in landscapes. Despite his formal training in Munich, his struggles in rendering flesh tone in oil paint are evident. Though he never explained any reason for his polychromed nudes—at least, not in available texts—the brightly colored nudes in landscapes contrast starkly with his more neutrally colored studio nudes rendered in corpse-like flesh tones often accented in shadows of blue and green.

Both figures lie prone on blanketed surfaces with both their bodies and faces exposed. The artist's methods in depicting these nudes, however, differ considerably. The blue nude seems engaged in her surroundings, with an intellectual alertness absent in the girl with the umbrella. She neither shields nor attempts to conceal (and by extension, frame) her body from (or for) the viewer; indeed, that her pose conceals her breasts and pubis seems almost incidental. She is without shame or seeming awareness of the viewer. While the case could be made that the composition is centered on the figure's buttocks and the small of her back much as the breasts are central in *Girl Under a Japanese Umbrella*, it is obvious that Kirchner's handling of the female body is fundamentally different from one painting to the next. One is passive, placid, cradling her breasts toward the viewer like an offering, a serene smile playing on her pouty lips. Her pose projects an air of sexual availability lacking in the other painting. *Blue Reclining Nude*

props herself up to observe and engage her surroundings with little interest in how she herself may be observed.

Blue Reclining Nude's hat is a significant detail in the painting. Again, we see a reclining nude female contextualized with a modern accessory. Kirchner has traded a decorative Japanese umbrella for a far less exotic straw hat, but both act as cues to establish a modern time period. The figure's nudity is all the more stark and pronounced when paired with the trappings of modern life; it becomes a choice to be unclothed rather than a natural condition. This woman is engaged in her state of undress by choosing to leave on a practical accessory. She is not an allegorical or historical figure; this hat identifies her as a modern woman. Numerous photographs Kirchner took at Fehmarn show nudes in conjunction with articles of modern clothing (Fig. 4; S. 260).²⁸

This is not the case with the nude holding an umbrella. Her pose is obviously for the benefit of an acknowledged viewer. The Japanese umbrella seems more like a prop than an accessory, especially since she is holding it indoors. Additionally, the model wears a necklace and bright makeup. Tamar Garb's analysis of gender tensions in the early twentieth century suggest that modern details like umbrellas and jewelry served to tie female subjects in painting to a civilization which diminished and demeaned them. The idea of masculinity had become so important in the nineteenth century that men strove to define their manliness through a rejection of all things feminine. Therefore the modern body is uniquely gendered and defined by the social conventions which reinforce distinctions between the feminine and masculine. The ways in which artists sought to distinguish themselves as masculine men often entailed showing the female body in a diminished capacity. Paintings from this period which have nude female figures

²⁸ Scotti, 2006, 209.

wearing jewelry or other modern trappings often serve to link the figures to a civilization which demeans their existence as secondary and inferior to men.²⁹

Whether or not Kirchner included modern details as a conscious statement is not clear. However, the differences between his paintings of nudes in landscapes and nudes in his studio are clear. The functionality of the blue nude's hat operates differently as a model accessory than a decorative Japanese umbrella. Kirchner's nudes in studio settings frequently wore makeup and jewelry and sometimes were shown with manicured pubic hair. None of his paintings of female nudes in landscapes appear to have makeup or jewelry; their only modern accessories are utilitarian hats, shoes, and fabric wraps. No matter how well Duncan's arguments apply to Kirchner's nudes in studio settings, the nudes in landscape settings diminish the argument's wider application. The points on pose and angle of viewing perspective apply well to Kirchner's nudes in studios, but they do not stand as sufficient analyses of all Kirchner's paintings of nude women.

Duncan discusses the angle of viewing perspective and masculine dominance using *Turmzimmer; Selbstbildnis mit Erna*, 1913 (*Tower Room; Self Portrait with Erna*, Fig. 5; G. 312) as her example. Duncan claims that "the faceless nude stands obediently before the artist," noting the phallic symbolism of the flaming object on the table between them. Kirchner shows himself fully clothed, sitting in a chair and staring at the faceless body of his model.³⁰ She is thin with a ruddy flesh tone, and much attention is paid to a thin shadow running from her cleavage to her navel, pointing down to her exposed pubis. One hand rests on the table and the other is raised at her side, almost in a conversational gesture. She stands behind a chair opposite the artist,

²⁹ Tamar Garb, *Bodies of Modernity* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 11, 81, 147.

³⁰ Duncan, 1973, 88.

which does not cover her body. His hand is placed next to him on the bench, either bracing him to lean toward her or gesturing her to come sit beside him. The perspective is more level than in *Girl with a Japanese Umbrella*, but in the tight space of the studio, with ceiling close overhead and narrow walls, there is a strong sense of intimacy with the figures. The room does not appear large enough for the figures to even walk around the table. Duncan does not mention that the model, Erna Schilling, is Kirchner's common-law wife, although that detail does not particularly disprove her point. This painting shows a clear sense of a gender binary, with the role of female as sexual object and male as controlling force clearly in place.

Duncan clearly saw the studio nudes and built her argument with them. Although she does not engage Kirchner's nudes in landscapes in her argument, the sources she cites suggest that she may have been familiar with them.³¹ Her foundational text's interpretation of Kirchner's gendering of the nude has informed subsequent texts, which share her focus on interior scenes.

Kirchner and the Modern Female Nude since Duncan

Feminist scholars such as Griselda Pollock have not significantly reworked Duncan's perspective on die Brücke or investigated Kirchner's paintings further, nor have Kirchner scholars such as Gill Perry and Deborah Wye dedicated a concerted effort to update this partial perspective on his paintings. In other sources on Kirchner, his nudes in landscapes are discussed briefly, if at all, and only in the context of other elements of his career.

Griselda Pollock, a prominent feminist art historian, has published many examinations of how artists depict the female body and how viewers respond to paintings of female bodies. In

³¹ Duncan, 1973, 108. Sources include Bernard S. Meyers, *The German Expressionists* (New York) 1957; C. S. Kessler, "Sun Worship and Anxiety: Nature, Nakedness, and Nihilism in German Expressionist Painting," *Magazine of Art* (November, 1952) 304-312.

particular, she draws attention to the tendency for paintings of nude women to presume male viewership. Pollock briefly restates Duncan's reading of Kirchner in a section on modern male painters' approach to the female body. She does specify that she is speaking about Kirchner's female nudes in the studio setting, although she does not mention any other nudes in his oeuvre as a point of comparison.³² Pollock finds the assumption of roles, that women pose and men observe, problematic. Like Tamar Garb, Pollock interprets the gender roles prescribed in early twentieth-century Europe as bases for the often unbalanced visual representation of the sexes. Though her argument is more focused on French examples, she finds the way men were able to express themselves as modern painters by painting the female nude distressing. Particularly, she objects to the lack of balance, that women could not similarly assert themselves as successful modern artists using the male body. She attributes this asymmetry to the fundamental differences between male and female gender ideals in the late nineteenth century, which celebrated male sexual dominance and feared bold women.³³

Gill Perry is the only Kirchner scholar to address the feminist critique directly in *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century* (1993), in a section on Primitivism and modern art. One of Perry's primary concerns is Kirchner's engagement with art-historical motifs and methods. She deals mostly with Kirchner's nudes in interior spaces and how the containment of the interior spaces makes the models seem unaware of the artist's gaze, but she makes some mention of the nudes in landscapes and how their settings complicate gender relationships. Her focus on Kirchner's landscape nudes revolves wholly around paintings featuring both male and female nudes, leaving paintings without gender interaction out of her

³² Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1999, 179.

³³ Griselda Pollock, 53-55.

analysis entirely. Perry's is the closest examination of gender and Kirchner's nudes in landscapes that has been published, yet it is too brief to be considered a corrective to Duncan's overgeneralization.

Kirchner's nudes in landscape require a more nuanced feminist reading. They are pictures of nude women, which in itself entails some virile implications, but they show women in less sexualized poses wearing no makeup or jewelry. These nudes read books and talk amongst themselves. These paintings use conventional poses and common subject matter to show something new. They require a more sensitive feminist reading which considers the history and context of these paintings.

The Nude Female Body in Art in the Early Twentieth Century

The meaning of the nude body in European painting changed dramatically in the nineteenth century. In Germany, the nudist movement attempted to reconcile the nude body with modern life. The unclothed body was less taboo in early twentieth-century Germany than in other parts of Europe, not just in art, but in social settings. French academic traditions, such as the tendency from the late nineteenth-century onward to favor female subjects, certainly reached German art academies. However, the social acceptance of the nude body through nudism made German artists aware of the body as an active, social, and natural subject.

The female nude is necessarily the primary focus of this study. The male nude was favored at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but it had declined in popularity by mid-century. The male artist now concerned himself with the female body. Though the male nude remained part of academic art training, the female nude became increasingly common as a

painting subject. By the end of the century, the term nude had come to imply a female body.³⁴ While Kirchner painted nude men in some of his paintings, he painted nude women in many more.

Nineteenth-century French painters first took on the female nude subject in the guise of a modern Venus. Eldon Van Liere observed that artists gradually removed Venus's symbolism and replaced it with soft flesh. First there was the idealized goddess figure, a sort of modern Venus upholding artistic traditions but without the need of an allegorical or historical title to justify the body's nakedness.³⁵ Slowly the goddess imagery dissipated, and as the nude became a more generalized figure, painters sought less to justify the subject with symbolism or narrative imagery.³⁶ Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres illustrates this point with *Venus Anadyomene* (Fig. 6), 1848, and *The Source* (Fig. 7), 1856. The paintings show nude women in almost identical poses, but with different imagery and significance. Toward the end of the century the male painter took on the female subject more aggressively, featuring women in more supine, passive poses. Dominance over the female subject had become the standard for establishing credibility as a painter, and the dominance of the subject often entailed dominance over the figure.³⁷ Van Liere indeed comes to many similar conclusions as Duncan, although he does not mention her in the article or list her as a source in his notes.

Margaret Werth's *The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art, Circa 1900* reaffirms many of Van Liere's points on the dissolution of Venus imagery. Additionally, she addresses nineteenth-century French private scenes. These paintings were supposed to subvert the notion of

³⁴ Van Liere, 1980, 104.

³⁵ Van Liere, 1980, 104, 106; Pointon, 1990, 15-16.

³⁶ Van Liere, 1980, 104, 107-108.

³⁷ Van Liere, 1980, 113-114.

public versus private realms, showing women undressing and bathing. They evoke a sense of voyeurism for the viewer, so that in looking at them viewers are entering the figures' private space.³⁸ Many of these paintings also impart Primitivist sensibilities, showing the female body in a sexualized, animal context. However, French bather paintings generally still followed the conventions of the female nude pose. This private realm is relevant to Duncan's argument on the virility of twentieth-century painting.

Kirchner's early works are often discussed with comparisons to contemporary French works. His nudes in landscapes are frequently compared to Fauve paintings and other scenes of bathers. While Kirchner was certainly aware of French bathing scenes, he did not replicate them exactly. His figures are often near a body of water, but they are seldom actually bathing. Because the titles of these paintings are neither consistent nor documented, whether he called the figures in his paintings nudes, bathers, or something else entirely is impossible to determine. One of the most common comparisons is Paul Cézanne's *Large Bathers*, 1906 (Fig. 8). In 1909 Kirchner made sketches after Cézanne's bather paintings, some of which had been published that year in the Danish magazine *Kunstbladet* and others which he had seen at a Cézanne exhibit at Paul Cassirer's gallery in Berlin that November.³⁹ This establishes his familiarity with the French artist's work. The extent to which this painting relates to Kirchner's own works will be examined more closely in the last chapter.

Kirchner's work does not directly follow the French bather tradition, nor does reference to that tradition fully account for his handling of the nude in the landscape. Conventions for posing the nude female body range back much further in art history than late nineteenth-century

³⁸ Margaret Werth, *The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art c. 1900* (Berkeley: University of California, 2002), 1-3, 15.

³⁹ Lloyd, 1991, 113.

France. Though the French bathers were his immediate predecessors, their poses had been repeated through centuries of representation. Kirchner would have been aware of these conventional poses and the ways in which the female body was painted from his academic training in Munich.

Conventions of the Pose

The angle of viewing perspective and pose are the primary differences between Kirchner's paintings of nude women in interior spaces and nude women in landscapes. The feminist critique of the female nude subject has largely focused on these elements. The poses of Kirchner's nudes in landscapes merit closer study for feminist analysis and comparison to French bather scenes. Kirchner's early paintings of nude women in landscapes are often discussed as they pertain to the canon of the nude female image, which has been discussed at length by Nanette Solomon and Lynda Nead. The history and meaning of conventional poses adds to the reading of Kirchner's nudes.

Art historian Nanette Salomon established a feminist analysis of pose conventions in an important essay titled "The Venus Pudica: Uncovering Art History's 'Hidden Agendas' and Pernicious Pedigrees" (1996). She gives a history of various conventional nude poses and considers their sexual implications. The most easily recognizable of these conventions is what Salomon calls the *pudica* pose, wherein the nude figure covers her body, particularly her breasts and pubic area, with her hands. Solomon observes that this pose, despite its outward modesty,

also draws attention to the covered parts of the body.⁴⁰ The *pudica* pose is among the most common and recognizable poses used for the nude female body.

It is significant that none of Kirchner's female nudes in landscapes pose this way; the nudes are unashamed of their nudity and make no effort to cover themselves. While he uses common posing motifs in many of his paintings, such as the recumbent female nude or the nude raising her arms over her head, he eschews conventions which imply modesty or shame about the body. His poses for female nudes in landscapes neither overtly display nor coyly obscure the female body. Kirchner never speaks about posing the female body in any of his letters or manifestos, but it is curious that he used so many traditional poses for the female body over the course of his career but omitted the *pudica* pose entirely from his paintings of nudes in landscapes.

Poses for the female body were highly conventionalized by the early twentieth century, drawing from Classical prototypes and favoring body positions which expose the body for visual delectation while maintaining a sense of propriety in the figure. This is to say that classical poses are suggestive, but not overtly erotic or lewd. Most of these poses avoid exposing the vulva, either by means of drapery, foliage, or the *pudica* pose. Conventional poses instill a sense of comforting familiarity, allowing the viewer to look at the nude body without voyeuristic invasiveness.⁴¹ The ways in which Kirchner engaged and did not engage with the traditions of posing the female nude in his early female nudes in landscapes distinguishes his works from

⁴⁰ Nanette Salomon, "The Venus Pudica: Uncovering Art Histories 'Hidden Agendas' and Pernicious Pedigrees," in Griselda Pollock, ed., *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (London: Routledge, 1996), 70-71.

⁴¹ Anthea Callen, *The Spectacular Body: Science, Method, and Meaning in the Work of Degas* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 84-86.

those of his French contemporaries. His engagement did not wholly embrace or reject conventions of the female nude.

The nude female subject in painting is often seen as a way to aestheticize and idealize the female body. Lynda Nead discussed the nude as a theoretical construct in her 1992 publication, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality*. She used Kenneth Clark's uncritical acceptance of aestheticization in *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (1956) as a starting point to discuss the nude subject as a means of regulation. Nead conceived the notion of the nude form as a metaphor by which artists can control the foreign female body, containing it within conventions of pose, although she had little to say about specific pose conventions.⁴² Her primary argument, that all posing of the female body by a male artist frames the female body as an object of aesthetic pleasure,⁴³ is oversimplified. The extensive variety of poses the female body may take in a painting renders it impossible to make the same determination for all paintings. Nead's argument has some merit, but it does not recognize that the impact of different poses sexualizes the body to different degrees.

Nead's argument provides a larger context for Duncan's critique. Duncan argues that Kirchner's nudes are a modernized form of patriarchal control. Both scholars see pose and viewpoint as principal mechanisms for exercising that control. These mechanisms are clearly at work in some of Kirchner's paintings of nude women and less so in others.

An analysis of pose and viewpoint builds a strong contrast between Kirchner's studio and landscape nudes such as *Girl Under a Japanese Umbrella* and *Blue Reclining Nude in a Straw Hat*. The differences in pose affect how the viewer's eyes scan the composition, framing each

⁴² Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 5-7.

⁴³ Nead, 1992, 104.

body. With *Girl Under a Japanese Umbrella*, the figure lies on her side with her arms folded at her waist to frame her breasts without obscuring them. She faces directly forward. Her legs jut forward and her hips tilt to provide an ample view of her buttocks, which form the largest element in the composition. Her breasts and buttocks are shadowed in a contrasting color, drawing attention to the curves of her body. Her limbs, the studio setting, and the shadows all frame the torso at the expense of the rest of her body. The *Blue Nude* is also lying prone with her buttocks exposed, but on her stomach. Her head is lifted up, but facing away from the viewer, and her breasts are obscured by her arms. She has a bright red face and bright red shoes against an otherwise blue body, directing attention to her feet and face rather than her breasts and buttocks. Her body is not framed by bent limbs or dark shadows, giving equal attention to the extremities and torso. Both figures lie diagonally with their heads at the top right and their legs at the bottom left of the composition, but *Girl Under a Japanese Umbrella* has a more sexually suggestive pose. The pose frames the body as an object of sexual delectation in a way that *Blue Nude*'s pose does not.

Kirchner's interior scenes are much more suitable examples than his landscapes for establishing pose as a form of containment. In his interior scenes, women are shown from an elevated viewpoint, as though the viewer is bearing down upon the prone figure. Poses are outwardly sexual and provocative. There are elements of modesty, where the figures attempt to shield their bodies in the *pudica* pose, and there is an element of raunchiness in the paintings in which they do not cover themselves. The nudes in landscapes are shown in a very different way. They are shown on an equal plane of vision, on equal ground with the viewer. They pose without modesty or shame; their nudity seems almost incidental.

Conclusion

Given the breadth of its generalizations, the feminist argument initially advanced by Carol Duncan has serious limitations, and it is insufficient for the specific analysis of Kirchner's paintings. That Kirchner or the other members of die Brücke produced paintings that inherently dominate women by rendering them unclothed was, to the artists, not the point. In the context of die Brücke philosophy, the subjects' nudity was intended to show their freedom from moralistic society, not oppress them as sexual objects.⁴⁴ If die Brücke's literary choices are any indication, Kirchner and his contemporaries were inspired by more than their own virility. The virility of the artist is only a partial reading, and arguably it is inherent in any female nude painted by a heterosexual man. However, die Brücke's ties to nudist philosophy complicate their use of the nude subject. The artists practiced a form of nudism which romanticized the removal of one's clothes as a form of liberation and an opportunity to reconnect with nature.⁴⁵ In this light the female figures seem less exploited than Duncan claims. Given the context of nudism and the wide acceptance it enjoyed in Germany, Kirchner's paintings should not be reduced to pure sexual delectation.

Nead's argument would suggest that Kirchner's nudes in both settings are contained by their poses and dehumanized by the artist's rendering of their bodies. However, there are undeniably compositional differences between the two types of images. Even if there is a degree of masculine virility to any painting of a female nude by a male painter, the multitude of other considerations in looking at these images make Nead's and Duncan's arguments seem incomplete.

⁴⁴ Long, 1993, 22-24.

⁴⁵ Lloyd, 1991, 110.

Ultimately, Duncan's argument about the virile emphasis of early twentieth-century European painting is hardly unfounded, and many of Kirchner's paintings support her conclusions. The argument that the female nude in any context is a form of domination also has merits. However, Duncan's feminist reading of Kirchner's early nudes in studio settings must not be applied as a blanket statement to all of Kirchner's paintings.

Additionally, the meaning of the nude as a subject is not static throughout the history of its use. The implications of a naked female body in art depend on historical and social factors. Contextual framing mechanisms serve as a starting point for looking at these images. The status of the female nude subject, the French bather motif, the handling of the figures' pose, and the German cultural phenomenon of nudist philosophy must all be considered in a thorough reading of these paintings. Too often, scholarship has chosen one starting point, but all of these elements are essential for placing Kirchner's early paintings of female nudes in landscape settings into context.

Chapter 2: Kirchner and Nudism in Early Twentieth-Century Germany

The nudist movement was gaining popularity in Germany when die Brücke first formed as a group. Particularly in large cities, Germans were reading manifestos and joining sanatoriums to commune with nature and free the spirit. The members of die Brücke would have been aware of the nudist movement and its philosophical roots. Recent scholarship has acknowledged ties between members of die Brücke and nudist philosophy, although there are limits to existing documentation of the members' involvement with the nudist communities in Dresden. Still, the prevalence of the movement and its vocal apologists would not have escaped Kirchner's attention, and photographs he took at Fehmarn document his and die Brücke's engagement with nudist culture.

This chapter examines the ways in which Kirchner's engagement with German nudism may have informed his reconception of the female nude in a landscape. Understanding the history of nudism is essential to analyzing the relation between nudism and Kirchner's early works. The history and context of the nude body in early twentieth-century Germany support a more refined reading of Kirchner's female nudes in landscapes.

Nudism and die Brücke Scholarship

Major studies on Kirchner have included some discussion of his early female nudes in landscapes, but few have effectively placed these works in the context of German nudism. Deborah Wye, Gill Perry, and Jill Lloyd offer the most recent and thorough considerations of

Kirchner's early nudes, though none makes a strong case for the figures as nudists. Deborah Wye's *Kirchner and the Berlin Street* (2008) attributes die Brücke's attention to the nude to the artists' philosophy of open sexuality, discussing the relaxed poses of the figures and their seeming lack of modesty as indicators of a less sexually reserved atmosphere. However, Wye focuses mainly on nudes in studio settings as an extension of the sexually-charged nonwestern decorations of Kirchner's studio, only briefly acknowledging his early landscape settings as evidence of his Arcadian vision of nature. She makes mention of non-studio nudes in her footnotes as well, but she does not elaborate beyond acknowledging her sources.⁴⁶

Gill Perry's essay, "Primitivism and *Kulturkritik: Worpswede* in the 1890s" from the 1993 anthology *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century*, ties Kirchner and his contemporaries directly to the early German nudist movement and other social movements of the early twentieth century. Hers is the most direct tie between Kirchner and nudism, but she only briefly suggests that die Brücke was a nudist group and she does not provide primary sources.

Jill Lloyd provides a more thorough examination of die Brücke artists' nudes in landscape settings in *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity* (1991), describing them as a return to nature with roots in the late nineteenth-century French phenomenon of bather scenes. Her detailed study of early twentieth-century German literature and nineteenth-century racial anthropology leads into a historical overview of nudism. Although she provides a fairly detailed account of German nudist philosophy, she does not fully explore the specific terminology associated with the various branches of the philosophy. Nevertheless, she is the only

⁴⁶ Deborah Wye, *Kirchner and the Berlin Street* (NY: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 36, 43.

Expressionism scholar to acknowledge how complex the movement really was, with some attention to the multitude of interpretations nudist philosophers promoted.

Die Brücke ideology can be found in an anthology written by various members called *Odi profanum*, a journal-like account of each member's ideas and beliefs on art filled with woodcut illustrations of nudes and landscapes. Each painter wrote passionately about the importance of finding their inspiration in their own lives and the world around them. Kirchner and his contemporaries praised Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and Nietzsche's Dionysian theory as promoting a more natural lifestyle. All argued for a world with fewer taboos, a world where open sexuality would be accepted as no more vulgar than the germination of plants. Their trips to Moritzburg and Fehmarn were pilgrimages to reconnect the naked body to nature, to revel like prehistoric man in his natural habitat.⁴⁷

That said, there are few documented ties between nudism and die Brücke. Lloyd effectively places Emil Nolde's wife in a nudist sanatorium in Dresden in 1907, one year after Nolde had joined the group, confirmed by correspondence published in an article by Paul Reece in Brian Keith-Smith's *German Expressionism in the United Kingdom and Ireland*.⁴⁸ She also mentions Kirchner's trips to Fehmarn in *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: 1880-1938*, a book she co-wrote with Brücke Museum curator Magdalena Moeller in 2003.⁴⁹ The rest of her claims are unsubstantiated by her notes. She points out the foundation of a few nudist and nature societies to which die Brücke was geographically proximal, but there are no documents to suggest that

⁴⁷ Kirchner, *Chronik der Brücke*, in Peter Selz, "E. L. Kirchner's 'Chronik der Brücke,'" *College Art Journal* Vol. 10, No. 1 (Autumn, 1950), pp. 50-54.

⁴⁸ Jill Lloyd, *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 108. Paul Reece, "Edith Buckley, Ada Nolde, and 'Die Brücke': Bathing, Health, and Art in Dresden, 1906-1911," in Brian Keith-Smith, ed., *German Expressionism in the United Kingdom and Ireland* (Bristol: University of Bristol, 1986), 22.

⁴⁹ Lloyd and Moeller, 2003, 17.

membership in die Brücke overlapped with membership in any of these societies. Lloyd also acknowledges that die Brücke's paintings show different activities than the nudist groups around them practiced. She further claims that Kirchner blended the colors of female figures with the landscape more than he did male figures, but she only provides one example. None of her other illustrations support this argument, nor do the other paintings from Gordon's catalogue raisonné.⁵⁰

Curiously, Lloyd's analysis of individual Brücke paintings and woodcuts draws exclusively on French precedents and, more abstractly, Primitivist philosophy. *Odi profanum* is not mentioned in her discussion or notes. The landscapes are examined as evidence of Kirchner's interest in Primitivism and anti-urbanism. Lloyd's discussions do not effectively combine the elements of German historical context and artist biography to make a clear statement about die Brücke and the nudist movement.

Perry and Lloyd have established that Kirchner and his contemporaries were engaging in some manner of nude activity at the inception of die Brücke. The members of the group and their friends took numerous mixed gender trips to Fehmarn to sunbathe, dance, draw, and photograph their exploits in the nude.⁵¹ The source linking die Brücke most incontestably to nudism is Roland Scotti's *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: The Photographic Work*, which features dozens of photographs from Kirchner's collection showing him and his friends roaming the German countryside in the nude. *Badende in der Ostsee auf Fehmarn, Sommer, 1913* (*Bathers in the Baltic Sea on Fehmarn, Summer 1913*, Fig. 9; S. 22) shows nude women splashing in the waves on one such trip. Others such as *Nina Hard und Erna Schilling, badend im Sutzibachtobel*,

⁵⁰ Lloyd, 1991, 114-115.

⁵¹ Lloyd and Moeller, 2003, 17.

Sommer 1921 (Nina Hard and Erna Schilling bathing in Sutzibachtobel, *Summer 1921*, Fig. 10; S. 103) and *Akte im Wald, um 1929* (*Nudes in the Woods, circa 1929*, Figs. 11-14; S. 336d-g) feature nude women leaning on trees and rocks, dancing, and walking through wooded areas together.⁵² Kirchner scholars Jill Lloyd and Gill Perry have simply called this an exercise in *Nacktkultur*, or rather the German nudist movement, linking such behavior to pastoral *Volk* life and to the early-twentieth-century language of the nudist movement. The history of the German nudist movement complicates the exact meaning of each of these terms.

Scholarship on German Nudism

The most recent scholarship on nudist history in Germany is Chad Ross's 2005 book, *Naked Germany: Health, Race, and the Nation*. Ross focuses on the terminology of the movement and its pre-Nazi racial concerns. He does not discuss nudist art or photography; rather, he is presenting a sociological and historical analysis. The publications by Karl Toepfer, including "Nudity and Modernity in German Dance, 1910-1930," from the *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, published in 1992, and his subsequent book, *Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture, 1910-1935*, published in 1997, are also critical sources for understanding the meaning of nudism as a modern phenomenon. Toepfer focuses primarily on dance and the athleticism of the nudist movement, with some discussion of nudist photography as it pertained to illustrations for nudist exercises. Though the sources are eighteen and thirteen years old, they remain the most thorough analysis in English of German nudist publications and ideologies as well as the only nudism studies that discuss nudist imagery in any detail. Particularly in his article, Toepfer explains how nudist groups sought to change the meaning of

⁵² Scotti, 2006, 58, 210.

the body, either through corporeal or cinematic engagement. His discussion of the pose in nude dance is especially relevant to an understanding of the body's range of symbolism across the scope of nudist philosophical discourse. Klaus Theweleit's 1977 book, *Male Fantasies, Vol. 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History* also offers a detailed account of gender relations in Germany leading up to World War I and analyzes German nudist terminology. Another source critical to this study is a 1994 anthology published by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimenber, called *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, which features translations of major articles by philosophers and commentators from the early twentieth century. This book provides access to nudism publications that are otherwise impossible to find in the United States.⁵³

Social Reform in Germany, 1870-1910

At die Brücke's inception, Germany as a nation-state was less than forty years old. Germans have long had a history of reluctance toward developing a stronger sense of nationalism at the expense of their fierce regionalism. The Germanic peoples built their identity regionally dating as far back as the Roman Empire, embracing the roots and traditions of smaller communities. To form an all-inclusive national identity struck many as abandoning regional roots. Main government efforts were focused on industrialization to build the economy. There were many dissenters to this movement, reluctant to adopt the new national identity and the

⁵³ Karl Toepfer, "Nudity and Modernity in German Dance, 1910-1930," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, V. 3, No. 1 (July, 1992), 60-64; Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 18-38; Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimenber, eds., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 671.

industrial commerce-based economy developing throughout the German empire, including the nature-loving members of die Brücke.⁵⁴

In the nineteenth century modern European nationalism focused on industry and social respectability. The new German national government embraced this identity faster than its newly united citizens. In a time of rapid social and political change, restraint and moderation were essential in controlling society.⁵⁵ The German government quickly began urbanization, and a rapid population boom ensued in Germany's larger cities. Reluctant as Germans were to unite as a single nation, the economic changes of the new state necessarily entailed some German identity changes, which in subsequent years would come to be collectively called *Lebensreform*.⁵⁶

There was much debate over what distinguished Germans from other Europeans at the turn of the twentieth century. The differences between what the newly nationalistic German government propagated regarding morality and what people actually practiced were many. The contrast between public image and private activity was pronounced. At the turn of the twentieth century, many younger Germans wanted to reclaim the human body and experience life without morally prescribed inhibition. Open sexuality was the rising generation's revolt against the hypocrisy of the preceding generation in what was called the German Youth Movement.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century: A History of Germany, 1780-1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 270-271, 303-304, 313-317; Maiken Umbach, "Memory and Historicism: Reading between the Lines of the Built Environment, Germany c. 1900," *Representations*, No. 88 (Autumn, 2004), 28-30; Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: Free Press, 1950), 414.

⁵⁵ George L. Mosse, "Nationalism and Respectability: Normal and Abnormal Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Sexuality in History Issue (April 1982), 221-224, 227.

⁵⁶ Ross, 2005, 1.

⁵⁷ Mosse, 1982, 233-234.

The German Youth Movement was an education-based reform movement which began in 1896, although they called themselves *Wandervogel* after 1901. They embraced their Teutonic roots, rejecting capitalism and socialism in favor of an ostensibly more organic social order.⁵⁸ Numerous German artist groups and communes in the early twentieth century adopted elements of the *Wandervogel*.

In the 1890's, Germany began developing artist communities which celebrated their escape from urban institutions by starting rural communes and embracing non-Western art. These communes were eager to experience all that nature had to offer, studying "primitive" and tribal cultures. Among the most famous was the *Worpswede* movement, founded in 1884, which cultivated artists and writers alike in a communal setting.⁵⁹ Kirchner did not permanently relocate to a rural area when he began painting, but he took many pictures showing that he and the members of die Brücke frequently took trips to the German countryside to paint *en plein air*.⁶⁰ It was through these pilgrimages that Kirchner began painting nudes in landscape settings.

Counter-culture movements in Germany such as die Brücke saw these pilgrimages to the countryside and rising *Volk* mentality as a way to return to a pre-civilized conception of the world. Some called it a return to Eden. The goal was to eliminate all traces of modern society and live simpler lives. However, since it is not possible for even the heartiest of pre-civilization apologists to completely cast off their own civilized upbringing, the mission of these groups was always in part subverted by some modern bias.⁶¹ Die Brücke may have claimed to have cast off

⁵⁸ Mosse, 234.

⁵⁹ Gill Perry, "Primitivism and the 'Modern,'" in Charles Harrison, Francis Frascina, and Gill Perry, *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 34.

⁶⁰ Lloyd and Moeller, 2003, 11.

⁶¹ Perry, 1993. 34.

their clothes to shed the trappings of society, but they brought modern cameras to document their experiences.⁶²

Nudism in Germany, 1890-1910

The nudist movement was another voice in this debate. *Nacktkultur* (naked culture) or *Freikörperkultur* (free-body culture) was part of German society well before World War I, originating as early as 1870. Karl Toepfer, in his study of nude dance, argues that there is no one singular ideology to explain nudism. *Nacktkultur* is more a blanket term for a broad spectrum of interpretations of the philosophical discourse on the body than a singular movement. The exact meaning of nudity to each subset varies, as do the activities propagated as appropriate for nude behavior.⁶³

The term *Nacktkultur* was coined by nudist and social commentator Heinrich Pudor around 1903, who published such foundational works as *Nackende Menschen* (*Naked Men*, 1893) and *Nacktkultur* (*Naked Culture*, 1906). Pudor was among the earliest voices promoting nudism in Germany.⁶⁴ His focus from the outset was on social reform, vegetarianism, and simple living.⁶⁵ Pudor believed that culturally accepted nudity would act as a means to reunite nature with civilization and allow people to be more comfortable with their bodies (and by extension, themselves). He argued that clothes were unnatural, suggesting that people were increasingly ashamed of their bodies as the impulse to cover oneself implied discomfort with the body in its born state.

⁶² Scotti, 2006, 15.

⁶³ Toepfer, 1992, 65-66.

⁶⁴ Lloyd, 1991, 108.

⁶⁵ Ross, 2005, 1.

Freikörperkultur, or FKK, became the more common term in the late 1920s and early 1930s as a means of separating the nudist movement from an erotic stigma that *Nacktkultur* had accumulated in the early years of nudism.⁶⁶ Though the term *Nacktkultur* does not semantically suggest sexual nudity, the erotic nudist movement of the 1920s changed the use of the term enough to create the need for a new word for nudism. FKK remains the most common and least contentious term for describing nudism today.

Nacktkultur also sought to revitalize nudity as a modern expression while retaining its primeval significance.⁶⁷ Nudism apologists claimed that, of all the European nations, Germany and the German people were most in tune with nature. Perceived as coming from a robust and hearty form of peasant stock, or *Volk*, the German people were held to be uniquely tied to the earth and thus aware of their surroundings as a nature-intensive people. In an early article called “Nackende Menschen, Jauchzen der Zukunft,” (“Naked Man, Rejoicing the Future”) Pudor went so far as to claim that in the Middle Ages it was common for the Germanic peoples to eschew clothing during the work day.⁶⁸ Pudor does not provide any sources documenting feudal nudism. His point, however, was that the nude body should be a symbol for progress and virtue, rather than a vulgar display of one’s capacities as a sexual animal.⁶⁹ Thus originated the German nudist movement, in which Germans celebrated their bonds with nature by shedding the clothes that connected them to modern society.⁷⁰ Many nudism philosophers made unsubstantiated claims

⁶⁶ Ross, 2005, 13.

⁶⁷ Karl Eric Toepfer *Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and the Movement in German Body Culture, 1910-1935* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 6-7, 30-32.

⁶⁸ Heinrich Pudor, “Nackende Menschen, Jauchzen der Zukunft,” *Dresdner Wochenblätter* (1893), 23ff, in Kaes et al, 1994, 671.

⁶⁹ Lloyd, 1991, 108-109.

⁷⁰ Toepfer, 1997, 7-13.

that many Germans had gone about their daily lives in the nude during the medieval period, and that clothing was not worn compulsorily in provincial communities. One early twentieth-century anthropologist, Karl Bücher, made the argument in his book *Arbeit und Rythmus (Labor and Rhythm, 1896)* that the rhythm of the German body in action had been part of Germanic culture for centuries, carried on through ancient work songs and chants. Bücher sought to forge historical ties between an active, conscious body and overall civil productivity.⁷¹ This allegedly historical ideology appealed to many Germans seeking a return to their roots. Increasingly, philosophers were writing manifestos in praise of nudism, claiming that clothing acted as no more than a disguise to sequester the human body from its rightful position in nature. Clothing was believed to degrade the body and stifle one's sense of unity with the earth.

The earliest forays in nudism in Germany were promoted as healthy activities that brought people closer to nature and built immunity to disease, particularly tuberculosis. Physicians promoted *Luft und Licht Therapie* (air and light therapy) to ward off disease.⁷² The historical ties touted by early nudism advocates and the health benefits lauded by German doctors were critical in the early stages of German nudism for building a national following.

However, the early German nudists struggled to establish themselves. At its outset, nudism was a largely urban movement, and its members exercised their engagement with nature inside enclosed sanatoriums. Membership was costly and exclusive, stratifying the classes. The movement was touted as an intellectual one, and it discouraged sexual associations by strictly regulating male-female interaction within nudist facilities.⁷³ Nudist institutions insisted at great length that their celebration of the body in an undressed state was all about engaging one's mind

⁷¹ Bücher, *Arbeit und Rythmus* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1896), 413.

⁷² Toepfer, 1997, 30.

⁷³ Toepfer, 1997, 34.

and body with the earth. Sex within these communities was considered taboo, and nudism apologists were adamant in their insistence that it was possible to be a nudist without looking at others in any sexual sense.⁷⁴

To divert attention from the erotic implications of group nudity, nudism promoters encouraged fitness as the primary goal of nudist culture. These nudist groups stressed the importance of exercise, particularly in non-contact forms of recreation. Women were largely tied to dance, whereas men were encouraged to experiment with gymnastic exercise. The fitness culture was promoted to recast the reputation for nudism from *Luft und Licht Therapie* that associated nude sanatoriums with sick people.⁷⁵

A pioneer in establishing the sorts of exercise appropriate for nudist recreation, Hans Surén, was among the first widely recognized authorities on German nudism. Many of the rigid sex-segregation rules began at his instigation.⁷⁶ Surén struggled with gender interaction throughout his publishing career. His methods and ideologies were primarily geared toward men, but he made a point to include illustrations of nude women demonstrating nudist exercises alongside those showing men in his publications, which include *Der Mensch und die Sonne* (*Man and the Sun*, 1924) and *Deutsch Gymnastik* (*German Gymnastics*, 1925). Although he sex-segregated exercise sessions within the community to avoid an overtly erotic atmosphere, he recognized the homoerotic implications that might drive potential male members away if he did not incorporate women in his plans.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Toepfer, 1997, 48.

⁷⁵ Toepfer, 1992, 68.

⁷⁶ Toepfer, 1997, 33-34.

⁷⁷ Surén, 1925, in Anton Kaes et al, eds., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1994), 678.

Another major early voice linking nudism and body movement was Wolfgang Graeser. He believed that in order to understand one's body as an extension of one's identity, one must see the body in an active state. In his 1927 book, *Körpersinn (Body Sense)*, he wrote that without consciously engaging and observing one's own body, it was not possible to be wholly self-aware.⁷⁸

Another element common to many nudist groups at the time was the idea of racial purity. Many Germans sought to revitalize their individual bodies to build up a stronger, more vigorous Aryan race. One of the loudest voices in prewar German nudism, Richard Ungewitter, wrote extensively about the importance of nudism to the preservation of a healthy marriage and a thriving Aryan race.⁷⁹ Most famously, he published *Nacktheit und Moral (Nudity and Morals)* in 1906 and *Nacktheit und Kultur (Nudity and Culture)* in 1907. Both argued for the necessity of German racial homogeneity. He believed that capitalism and socialism were both distractions which only weakened the German people as a superior race.⁸⁰

German historical and sociological texts go to great length to analyze the relationship between the German nudist movement and the rising national interest in racial purity. Germans believed that in order for a nation to succeed every member must be at his or her best in every way. For the individual, this meant balancing the three elements of body, mind, and spirit. Racial differences were believed to muddy the waters of progress, as the bodies of others were

⁷⁸ Wolfgang Graeser, "Körpersinn [excerpt]" *Gymnastik/Tanz/Sport, München* V. 2 (1927), 12, 47 in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg, eds., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1994), 680.

⁷⁹ Toepfer, 1997, 37.

⁸⁰ Ungewitter, *Nacktheit und Moral*, 1906, from < <http://www.michis-seiten.de/seite154.html>>.

perceived to be different and therefore inferior to the Germanic *Volk*.⁸¹ Some later nudist sanatoriums only accepted blond members, in an effort to create a more stratified gene pool.⁸²

To Kirchner and die Brücke, nudism was not about race or Aryanism. Kirchner's photographs include images of African-descended nudes dancing and posing in the same fashion as white nudes.⁸³ Additionally, his paintings featuring polychromed bodies in blues, greens, oranges, and yellows, and reds diminish the idea of racial difference. This is a major distinction in establishing how Kirchner's engagement with nudism differed from mainstream German nudism in the early twentieth century, a difference little acknowledged in the scholarship.

Another, less acknowledged contingent within German nudism were the feminist nudists. The founder of feminist nudism was an American physician, Bess Mensendieck, who practiced medicine in Vienna and published primarily in German. Feminists focused heavily on exercise and activity following the 1906 publication of her first book, *Körperkultur der Frau (Women's Body Culture)*. In 1931 she published her only nudist tract intended specifically for English-speakers called *It's Up to You*, restating her argument for feminist nudism and the importance of proper exercise. Other publications include *Bewegungsprobleme (Movement Problems, 1931)*, *Funktionelles Frauenturnen (Functional Women's Gymnastics, 1923)*, and *Anmut der Bewegung im Täglichen Leben (Grace of Movement in Everyday Life, 1929)*. Women in particular were encouraged to dance nude, as well as use Mensendieck's book illustrations as a guide for the "correct" ways to carry themselves.⁸⁴ Mensendieck's principles were actualized in Germany by numerous followers who branched off into subsets, such as Fritz Giese, Hedwig Hagemann, and

⁸¹ Ross, 2005, 4, 17.

⁸² Toepfer, 1997, 37.

⁸³ Scotti, 2006, 43-45.

⁸⁴ Mensendieck, *Körperkultur der Frau*, 1906, in Kaes et al., 1994, 476.

Dana Menzier. A common thread among all of these practitioners, however, was the idea of the body in motion. Feminist nudism staunchly rejected idle nudity as it evoked a more overt eroticism than did rigorous activity directed toward improving one's health.⁸⁵

In its first years, from the 1880's through until the 1910s, German nudist philosophy was very involved with the body in motion. Surén and Mensendieck, for all their differences of opinion on the importance of women's involvement to the nudist movement, were champions of the same exercise-based theories. First, it built up a stronger German nation to promote vigorous exercise, which was imperative to the racial underpinnings of the movement. Second, by keeping the bodies active, nudism apologists hoped to divert attention from the sexual implications of public nude exposure. Sanatoriums developed exercise programs to keep the sexes separately occupied without much opportunity to intermingle.

Modern moralizing was not without contradictions; beauty was idealized as a virtue transcending sexuality. Particularly, the beautiful, purified body was believed to personify a beautiful nation. This construct of the chaste nude is problematic. Sex and politics are inextricably connected; humans may see beautiful nude bodies as symbols of nationalistic success, but there is always a possibility of sexual stimulation. By the end of the 1910s, a younger generation sought to acknowledge sexuality without social discomfort, thereby reclaiming sexuality and eroticism as natural human properties.⁸⁶ Significantly, Kirchner and die Brücke embraced this more sexually-charged philosophy of nudism both socially and artistically some ten years before it became common practice.

⁸⁵ Toepfer, 1997, 40-48.

⁸⁶ Toepfer, 1997, 65-67.

Die Brücke's Nudism

The members of die Brücke did not see nudism as a briskly athletic, sexless phenomenon. They read the nudist manifestos and envisioned a different kind of nudism that found the rigid fitness-based, sex-segregated communities and theories too academic to unite cultured man to untamed nature. Die Brücke members were part of a smaller group of nudism enthusiasts who took celebrating their natural bodies as part of the earth more literally. Instead of joining up with any of the urban sanatoriums to undress in desexualized piety, they brought groups of dancers and models with them to the German coast and photographed themselves braving the elements in the nude. Their nudism was a more literal return to nature.⁸⁷ Kirchner took a series of photographs at Fehmarn called *Tänzerin im Wald, um 1929 (Dancer in the Woods, Circa 1929, Figs. 15-21; S. 334b-h)* showing a nude woman in dancing shoes stretching and dancing with such fervor that her limbs are out of focus.⁸⁸ Other photographs show groups of nude figures dancing, dining, swimming, and playing on rocky hillsides.

There were a few groups from which die Brücke members drew ideas. They embraced some philosophies and methods from mainstream German *Nacktkultur*, namely, the idea that being nude was a celebration of nature and the body's connection to the earth. They also had similarities to some philosophies of artist communes like the *Worpswede* artist and writers' colony and the idea of painting *en plein air* away from urban life. Die Brücke members made trips to Fehmarn as part of the nature-centered rhetoric of the *Wandervogel*.⁸⁹

At the time, nudists who participated in this *Worpswede-meets-Nacktkultur* philosophy were in a small minority. This movement has been called erotic nudism because it was the only

⁸⁸ Scotti, 2006, 203-204.

⁸⁹ Lloyd and Moeller, 2003, 17.

contingent willing to acknowledge and perhaps even celebrate that the gathering of nude human bodies carries sexual connotations no matter what rules or activities are prescribed.⁹⁰ So-called erotic nudists particularly gathered around lakes, rivers, and swimming pools for added sun exposure.⁹¹ Thus *Nacktkultur* was complex in its duality. It purported to return the body to its free and natural state from a time before body awareness, but it operated within a Modern cultural context. German culture by the early twentieth century was implicitly and inextricably aware of nakedness and its inherent eroticism as an unconventional pastime. The return to nature, idyllic as it may sound, was in many ways impossible.

Die Brücke's first forays into socializing nude in Moritzburg and painting nude female figures in landscapes coincided with the beginnings of nude dance. Die Brücke was not directly involved in the nude dance movement, but there are marked similarities which merit acknowledgement.

Both mediums entail an element of spectatorship of the nude body; their nudism involves a clothed audience. Dancers performed before audiences, and paintings hung in museums and galleries. The audience element was a departure from the mainstream nudist movement which railed against spectatorship and titillation. That discourse was centered on engaging the active body as a tool of modern progress by which sexuality becomes a secondary property to the body's true meaning. The exact meaning of the body's modern purpose varied by philosopher, but it is clear that the fitness activities of early nudist sanatoriums were not conceived to be spectator sports.⁹² The degree to which Kirchner considered the audience for his paintings of

⁹⁰ Toepfer, 1997, 48.

⁹¹ Mosse, 1982, 236.

⁹² Toepfer, 1992, 60-64, 67.

nudes in landscapes is impossible to determine; however, his decision to display and sell those works in his art shows indicates that he was aware of the audience on some level.

The other, more striking similarity between Kirchner's nudes in landscape and nude dance is the balance or imbalance of the sexes. While nude dance and nude figure paintings featured women, early nudist groups were dominated by men. The decline of the male nude as an aesthetic subject in the nineteenth century made public displays of male nudity unpopular. As early nudist movement leaders experienced from the outset, the balance between promoting nudism as a homosocial activity without cultivating a homosexual undercurrent was a challenge for sanatoriums.⁹³ Paintings of male nudes in landscapes appeared before male nude dancers, but even after male figures appeared, images of female bodies were far more common in both dance and painting. While nude dance was promoted as a means to liberate the body from the social and physical constraints of clothing, elevating the body to a form of aesthetic beauty beyond erotic appeal, the spectacle of dancing nude women was invariably a source of titillation. Nude dance companies often struggled with legal troubles, accused of pornography.⁹⁴ Toepfer argues that the impact of eroticism was tempered by the even attendance of male and female spectators at nude dance performances, which bolsters heteronormative assumptions about women and the homoerotic assumptions about men in early nudism.⁹⁵ That males might be aroused by the sight of other male bodies but women would not be aroused by female bodies was an assumption common to early nudist philosophers. Early nudist leaders such as Hans Surén were constantly reworking their promotion of nudist activity due to the concern that men might be aroused at the

⁹³ Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, 1994, 678.

⁹⁴ Further information on censorship in early 20th century Germany can be found in Sherwin Simmons, "Ernst Kirchner's Streetwalkers: Art, Luxury, and Immorality in Berlin, 1913-16," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 82, No. 1 (March, 2000), 1-52.

⁹⁵ Toepfer, 1992, 64.

sight of each other's nude bodies in a homosocial nudist environment. No such worry is expressed about females deriving sexual pleasure from seeing the nude bodies of other women. That there is so much concern for possible attraction between men interacting as fellow nudists engaged in a common activity, yet no concern for possible sexual attraction between women even when they interact as clothed spectator to unclothed performer, is evidence of long-standing bias.

This bias allowed for the female nude image to thrive in Europe despite the rigid nineteenth-century gender order; though an object of sexual delectation, the female body was believed to only inspire heterosexual stimulation. The male nude image was problematized as a possible source of homosexual curiosity, a social taboo in Europe and seen as a threat to conventional social roles. The general acceptance of the nude female image allowed Kirchner to experiment with the subject in a variety of poses and scenes. Kirchner's own oeuvre shows this same imbalance; of his ninety-four paintings of nudes in landscapes only eleven had male figures in them. He painted no male-only scenes, only heterosocial groupings.

Kirchner's works with men and women interacting, such as *Badende in Moritzburg*, 1909/1926 (*Bathers at Moritzburg*, Fig. 22; G. 93) showed social situations that would have been uncommon among early twentieth-century nudists. When he first painted *Bathers in Moritzburg*, nudist groups heartily discouraged heterosocial nude activities. Eventually, the separation of sexes stopped being the center of conflict between nudist subsets, and by the end of World War I the generalized anxiety about gender interaction in nudist communities had decreased considerably. A more relaxed form of nudism gained popularity over the early nudist exercise camps.

Nudism after die Brücke

Kirchner was supportive of nudism and, late in his career, he even produced a series of drawings after a nudist dance troupe in preparation for a never-realized mural.⁹⁶ Kirchner claimed his interest in depicting nude dancers was rooted in his fascination with how light and shadow play on the undressed form.⁹⁷ These are the only paintings that openly tie him to any one nudist group.

In the decade following World War I, Kirchner's more direct approach to nudism became less taboo and more commonplace. It should be noted that Kirchner and his friends were not the only nudists at the turn of the twentieth century exploring a direct communion between body and earth; however, their erotic nudist approach was less commonplace and less accepted when they first began. It was only after World War I that German nudism became common outside enclosed spaces.

In the 1920s, there were many publications promoting and celebrating erotic nudism. The work of Lotte Herrlich, a photographer from Hamburg, celebrates the inactive nudist, showing the human body in the posture of mundane tasks.⁹⁸ The activities Herrlich documents in her photographic series are a far cry from earlier decades of nudist photography extolling rigorous exercise. According to Toepfer, her rhetoric came largely from *Worpswede* philosophy and the paintings of Worpswede artist Heinrich Vogeler. Her photographs, like his paintings, show a more restful, domestic form of nudism. Drawn into *Worpswede*'s unorthodox communal

⁹⁶ Toepfer, 1992, 88.

⁹⁷ Toepfer, 1997, 71.

⁹⁸ Early collections of Lotte Herrlich's photography include *Edle Nacktheit: Zwanzig photographische Aufnahmen weiblicher und männlicher Körper nach der Natur*. Dresden: Aurora, 1920; *Neue Aktstudien: 12 Aufnahmen in echtem Kupfertiefdruck nach Orig. Photogr.* (Text: W. Bronisch), Hamburg: Verlag W. Heldt, 1924.

rhetoric, Herrlich shows nudism in a much less rigorous manner than that propagated by early philosophers like Hans Surén and Heinrich Pudor.⁹⁹

Conclusion

Kirchner's engagement with nudism has been overstated due to careless use of terminology. While the members and associates of die Brücke were certainly nudists in some sense, the terminology commonly applied to their activities does not accurately portray their involvement with the movement.

The term *Freikörperkultur* is often used in conjunction with die Brücke's activities and the nudist movement at large. It is a term to be used carefully, however, as it has implications from its use in subsequent years. German historian Klaus Theweleit clearly establishes the *Freikorps* as a rigid pre-Nazi group of radicals in *Male Fantasies, Vol. 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, Histories*, published in 1987.¹⁰⁰ The rigorous exercise and promotion of racial exclusivity coupled with rigid discomfort with sexuality were documented through soldiers' letters from the 1920s through the 1940s.¹⁰¹ In recent years it has come to be used as a synonym for nudism, but its historical baggage—particularly around the time Kirchner was producing nudes in landscapes—makes this a problematic term.

Indeed, even the term *Nacktkultur* is a bit misleading in analyzing die Brücke's openly erotic approach to the nudist movement. Certainly the term is too wide and inclusive. Gill Perry is the most recent Brücke scholar linking Kirchner and his contemporaries to a movement that

⁹⁹ Toepfer, 1997, 48-49.

¹⁰⁰ Theweleit, 1977, 18-20.

¹⁰¹ Theweleit, 1977, 37.

only marginally included them.¹⁰² Certainly, die Brücke's engagement in nude recreation constitutes a part of early twentieth-century body culture in Germany, but their engagement is inconsistent with the term's implications at the time. Kirchner and his colleagues were no more practicing nudism with dancers and prostitutes at the beach to somehow purify a new Aryan order than Surén's order of nudists were doing gymnastics routines in homosocial enclosures to free themselves sexually.

The terms of the early German nudist movement have been used superficially to tie die Brücke to *Freikörperkultur*, but they overstate the group's engagement in the actual social practice of nudism. Many of their actions can loosely tie die Brücke to the German nudist movement as a whole, but their involvement was more within their art movement than within the developing social practice.

Indeed, if one is to interpret Kirchner's nudes in landscape settings as nudist scenes, the role of the female figures changes. The consideration that these women, as figures in early twentieth century Germany, may be nudists contradicts the gender reading of these figures as purely objectified women. Nudism, broadly defined, was a cultural experience rooted in philosophical considerations which gained popularity in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century. These women are not being shown as cultureless if they are nudists, but as educated members of society. Scholarship cannot prove that these figures were conceived as intellectually driven nudists, but the interpretation cannot be ruled out.

Despite die Brücke's distance from the mainstream nudist movement, nudism is an essential part of the reading of Kirchner's early paintings. The development of nudism and nude dance were ways in which German images of the body differed from those in the rest of Europe.

¹⁰² Perry, 1993, 34-35.

Nudism affected the perception of the body and encouraged philosophical discourse on the nude body. This is radically different from the way other countries in Europe perceived images of the nude body at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Chapter 3: Kirchner's Nudes in Landscapes 1909-1914

Kirchner's paintings of nudes in landscapes have not received as much attention from scholars as his city scenes and studio nudes. Often generalizations about his oeuvre as a whole are based on his better known works, and the analyses are not universally applicable to other works from his highly prolific career. Some scholars have discussed Kirchner's bathers as a German answer to the late nineteenth-to early twentieth-century French bather. This is also problematic, as such comparisons too often simply identify sources for Kirchner's paintings and discount the ways in which his nudes differ from French examples. Kirchner's female nudes in landscapes, then, fall somewhere between modern French bathers and his nudist photo series. The relationship between Kirchner's paintings and contemporary examples has been overstated while the compositional differences have been understated.

The principal consideration in understanding these paintings is Kirchner's posing of the female body. His paintings of female nudes in landscapes have some conventional elements which evidence his fine art training, but they differ from other examples in the assertiveness of stance. The figures in these paintings crouch, stand, engage in eye contact with each other, and interact with their surroundings. In his paintings of female nudes in interior settings, the handling of the female figure within the composition is starkly different. The poses tend to be supine, passive, and less engaged. The overall alertness of the figures in landscapes and their engagement with their setting sets them apart from Kirchner's female nudes in interior spaces.

As this is the largest stylistic difference, it is necessary to examine how the pose functions in landscape spaces.

The following analysis of Kirchner's early paintings of female nudes in landscapes begins with a close reading of the images themselves, focusing on the figures' poses and stylistic properties. Comparisons to similar works and photographs from Kirchner's oeuvre will serve to complement analysis of the works and establish the context of the nude within Kirchner's frame of reference.

The paintings in this study are not discussed chronologically. First, since the dates of some of these paintings are weakly established in Kirchner's catalogue,¹⁰³ it is inadvisable to look for strong patterns based on a potentially inaccurate chronology. Second, the motifs do not show any discernable shifts between 1909 and 1914 within the common subject of nude in landscape. There are no significant changes in the poses and viewing perspective. The only identifiable possible change over time appears to be stylistic; Kirchner slowly moved from polychromed skin to yellow skin and from curvy rounded figures to thinner, more angular bodies.¹⁰⁴

The lack of discernable chronological development also suggests that Kirchner was not working through pose conventions as an academic exercise. Kirchner used both traditional and non-traditional poses interchangeably between paintings throughout his career. He may have been interested in the academic and historical traditions for posing the female nude, but it does not appear that he increasingly rejected or embraced conventional poses between 1909 and 1914.

¹⁰³ Gordon, 1968, 27-29.

¹⁰⁴ Gordon, 1968, 90.

These paintings will be ordered in analysis by pose, starting with the most conventional. This serves to draw attention to the pose as the greatest formal distinction between Kirchner's nudes in landscapes and his paintings of other subjects. The posing of Kirchner's figures is significant not only in comparing works within his oeuvre, but also in comparing his works to other paintings of the female nude. Certainly there is an element of establishing the artist's identity; mastery of the female body and its full range of movement showed the painter's skill. Mastery of conventional poses would showcase his formal training. The ways in which Kirchner engaged and did not engage with the traditions of posing the female nude in his early female nudes in landscapes distinguishes his works from his French contemporaries, as the following examples will show.

Kirchner's Female Nudes in Landscapes, 1909-1914

Halbakt mit erhobenen Armen, 1910 (*Half Nude with Raised Arms*, Fig. 23; G. 160) is one of Kirchner's most conventionally-posed nudes, with more detail in the woman's face than many other works. Also, the figure is only half-nude; the bottom half of her body is wrapped in some sort of blanket or towel. Her skin is not painted in flesh tones, although the grey looks more lifelike than many of his earlier works' blue, green, and orange figures. The woman lowers her chin and purses her lips as she secures her hair on top of her head. Kirchner has added more detail to the background, with leaves at the top and some large flowers at the bottom left of the composition. Her aquiline nose and ruddy elbow are treated with as much detail as her breasts, and there is some attempt at modeling with the use of more lifelike shadow placement. Still, however, her breasts are the central element in the composition.

The pose Kirchner employed in this painting was very common at this time, popularized in nineteenth-century France but drawn from Classical sculpture. Anna Chave has laid important groundwork for analyzing this Venus-like pose.¹⁰⁵ The pose dates back to ancient Greek sculpture, based on the myth of Aphrodite's birth from the ocean waves, and it shows the newly born goddess lifting her arms over her head to wring water from her hair. The best-preserved ancient examples are ancient Roman marbles, including *Crouching Venus* (Fig. 24), a second-century Imperial Roman copy of a Hellenistic Greek sculpture currently housed in the Louvre. The crouching figure's right arm is raised over her head rather than over her bosom. The same subject and arm positioning were used in the Renaissance by artists such as Giorgione in 1509 with the recumbent *Sleeping Venus* (Fig. 25) and Titian with *Venus Anadyomene* (Fig. 26) in 1525, who stands with arms raised to wring her hair. In the nineteenth century, Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres favored Titian's standing pose in many of his paintings, including *Venus Anadyomene* (Fig. 6), 1848, and *The Source* (Fig. 7), 1856, both with their arms raised over their heads. The standing pose also appears in Théodore Chasseriau's *Venus Anadyomene* (Fig. 27), 1838, and William-Adolphe Bouguereau's *The Birth of Venus* (Fig. 28), 1879, which both feature Venus standing in water with her hands lifted toward her hair. The nineteenth century did not completely disregard the recumbent Anadyomene pose, either. Alexandre Cabanel's *Birth of Venus* (Fig. 29), 1863, and Chasseriau's *Sleeping Nymph* (Fig. 30), 1850, show reclining female nudes almost floating over their settings with their arms over their heads in a gesture reminiscent of the original Venus pose. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Venus Anadyomene pose became popular well beyond its mythological attribution. As Van Liere suggested in

¹⁰⁵ Anna Chave, "New Encounters with the *Les Desmoiselles d'Avignon*: Gender, Race, and the Origins of Cubism," *Art Bulletin*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (December 1994), 605.

“Solutions and Dissolutions,” the pose outlasted its classical attributes.¹⁰⁶ Gustave Courbet employed a similar pose, showing a woman emerging from the water with her arms over her head in *Woman in the Waves* (Fig. 31), 1868. These nineteenth-century figures, for all the stylistic differences between the painters, all have placid faces, with their bodies turned forward and their arms raised to better display their breasts and smiling faces. This artistically-sanctioned display of sexual availability in the sometimes allegorical female has an altogether different effect than Kirchner’s more subdued half-nude in spite of the conventional posing of the raised arms.

This pose remained common in early twentieth century French painting. Gill Perry identified the Venus Andromene pose in a brief discussion of Pablo Picasso’s *Desmoiselles d’Avignon* (Fig. 32), 1907. She did not compare it to any Kirchner works, but she did compare *Desmoiselles* to paintings by Ingres and Fauvist André Derain.¹⁰⁷ Derain used this pose similarly in the figure to the far left in *Bathers* (Fig. 33), 1907. The female nude casts her head down and raises her arms over her head in a fashion very similar to Kirchner’s half-nude. Her eyes are cast to one side, her hair is up, and she even has a similar wrap slung over her hips.

Another contemporary example, also painted in 1907, is the central figure in Picasso’s *Demoiselles d’Avignon*. This figure was Chave’s starting point in her discussion of the Venus pose. The central figure raises her arms in the exact same manner, but to an entirely different effect. Rendered in hard angles with Cubist or perhaps proto-Cubist distortions, she looks quite different from Kirchner’s half-nude at first glance. However, there are some striking similarities. Picasso’s figure has her arms raised above her head in what Perry first identified as the “Venus

¹⁰⁶ Van Liere, 1980, 105.

¹⁰⁷ Perry, 1993, 113.

Anadyomene” pose. Picasso’s central figure wears a wrap around her waist, like Kirchner and Derain’s figures. This nude pose was among the most prevalent motifs in early twentieth-century European art, and its academic conventions had become so standardized that they are present in examples from all over Europe.

This is likely a pose Kirchner would have seen in his days at the academy in Munich. However, there are differences between Kirchner’s half-nude and Derain’s and Picasso’s figures beyond stylistic handling. Picasso’s figure stares out directly toward the viewer, indicating that she is aware of the viewer’s gaze on her body. The pose then becomes purposeful, provocative, and the interior setting further evidences a conscious sexual awareness lacking in Kirchner’s and Derain’s nudes. The biggest difference between Kirchner’s and Derain’s nudes is more subtle. Derain’s nude is shown from an elevated perspective, as though the viewer is looking down on the bather from a higher vantage point. Kirchner’s is on equal ground, shown as though the viewer is standing directly before the figure at close proximity. The sense of voyeurism is greatly diminished by the sense that, as the viewer, one stands next to this figure in a landscape, rather than peering down on her body from above.

Kirchner’s half-nude’s pose resembles that of a figure in one of Kirchner’s photographs, *Tänzerin im Wald, um 1929* (*Dancer in the Woods, Circa 1929*, Fig. 34; S. 334b). The dancer, shown in full, wears modern shoes. She stretches her arms over her head, tilting back to reveal her breasts. Her facial expression is serene, neither making eye contact with the viewer nor particularly avoiding it; she appears unaffected by the photographer’s gaze. Her hair is tucked up in a style similar to the *Half Nude*. This photograph is one of eight known pictures of a model dancing in the woods. Though some are blurred by apparent motion, each has a posed quality, as if the dancer were pausing mid-performance.

Karl Toepfer has analyzed the connection between nude dance and photography. Slowing movements to demonstrate clear poses was common in early twentieth-century dance photography, and Toepfer discusses the posing as a means of acknowledging an intended audience. The selection of posed, rather than active candid shots shows the demonstrative nature of nude dance, that these poses and movements were intended to be seen by others.¹⁰⁸ This audience distinguished nude dance and nude painting from the German nudist movement, but the introduction of nude dance photography would have allowed Kirchner to witness a greater variety of poses than academic examples depict. Unfortunately, with the lack of published photographs or films showing German nudist dance, the extent of similarities in the movement of dancers and Kirchner's models is indeterminable.

Zwei rosa Akte am See, 1909/1920 (*Two Pink Nudes at the Lake*, Fig. 35; G. 89) is another painting with conventional poses, this time showing reclining figures. These nudes face directly outward, appearing to make eye contact with the viewer. Their pink bodies are a closer approximation to flesh tone than many of Kirchner's early works, although the opaque pink and white layers do not realistically resemble skin. One woman lies on her back, revealing her breasts and pubic region. The composition centers on her vulva. A darker area is painted in a loose triangle that suggests the woman's pubic hair. The woman's breasts and genitalia are more detailed than her face. Another woman sits beside her, also exposing her breasts and pubis. Her face is garishly colored in primary colors, with a mouth that is slightly askew and hollowed eye sockets. The abstraction around the eyes makes it unclear whether they are staring forward at the viewer. A small pair of modern red shoes lies next to the women, and a blue river to the right of the composition gives some sense of setting.

¹⁰⁸ Toepfer, 1992, 61-62.

Pairs of recumbent bathers were also common to paintings by the twentieth century. Showing a seated nude and a reclining nude allowed the painter to show his ability to paint the body from different angles. Similar poses appear in paintings in the nineteenth century, such as Jean-Léon Gérôme's *The Harem Pool* (Fig. 36), 1880. The subject of this earlier Orientalist harem painting is far removed from Kirchner's beachside pink nudes, but the Neoclassical example shows one woman reclining with another seated beside her in proximity to a pool of water. The pairing of a supine female figure with a seated female figure in bathing scenes is a common composition in nude painting. This painting is thematically more similar to Ingres's *Turkish Bath* (Fig. 37), 1862, which has many nude female figures in a dizzying array of poses, but the basic principle is the same. Painters pair poses to show how well they understand the body.

A pastel drawing by Edgar Degas called *Two Bathers on the Grass* (Fig. 38), 1890-1895, shows such a scene. Two women are side by side on a grassy surface. One sits on a blanket, leaning forward to examine her toes. The other lies on her stomach with her head turned toward the seated figure. They lie on white blankets, visible beneath their rounded bodies, their dark hair either cropped short or secured close to their scalps. One's face is completely obscured by its downward tilt, the other is partially covered by a raised arm.

Paul Gauguin's *Are You Jealous?* (Fig. 39) shows a similar pose, with one reclining and one seated figure. The bright colors echo some of Kirchner's early explorations in color, although Gauguin's involvement with the Arcadian vision of Primitivist nudity far exceeds Kirchner's. The seated figure is in the foreground, head turned in profile, with one knee raised. The other figure lies on her back with a hand over her stomach, eyes closed to the sun. Both have tied back their hair and one wears a garland of flowers like a crown. They appear to be reposing

on a sandy shore, with a brightly colored body of water to the left and a windswept tree behind them. The seated figure is resting on a brightly colored garment.

Again, for all the similarities the effect of each painting is quite different. Degas, like Derain, shows his bathers from a downward angle, standing over the seemingly oblivious figures. They are virtually faceless, with the emphasis on the texture of their bodies and the grass below them. No modern elements tie them to the present. Unlike Kirchner, Degas did not change his handling of the body between settings; the poses of his bathers in landscapes and prostitutes in brothels are often quite similar. His poses show a less sexualized view of the female body. One figure in his painting picks at her toes, an unrefined action suggesting that perhaps her feet—and by extension, other parts of her body—are unclean.¹⁰⁹ Gauguin's painting is replete with Polynesian imagery, the dark skinned Tahitian figures are shown with a sense of exoticism lacking in Kirchner's pink sunbathers.¹¹⁰

Kirchner took numerous photographs of his female friends sunbathing at Fehmarn. One such photo, loosely titled *Lotte Kraft-Rohner, Erna Schilling, und unbekannte Frau, um 1929* (*Lotte Kraft-Rohner, Erna Schilling, and an unknown woman, circa 1929*, Fig. 40; S. 336i) shows three women lounging on some beachside rocks. One standing figure stares directly out toward the viewer, although her face is blurred. The other two stare off in different directions, seemingly oblivious, although the visual engagement of the standing figure suggests that they would all have been aware of Kirchner's presence with the camera. The two seated figures are relaxed, neither covering nor drawing attention to their nakedness. A shirt hangs from a tree

¹⁰⁹ Callen, 1995, 74, 86.

¹¹⁰ Stephen F. Eisenman, *Gauguin's Skirt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 129-132; Perry, 1993, 28-30.

branch behind them, further indicating their modernity and that their nudity is a conscious choice.

Drei Akte im Wald (Three Nudes in the Woods, Fig. 41; G. 44), 1909/1920, believed to be Kirchner's first painting of nudes in a landscape setting,¹¹¹ shows three female nudes by a tree. They are painted in non-flesh tones, with one woman orange, another blue, and the other green, their bodies forming a loose triangular composition. The unearthly colors and lack of modeling make these women's bodies appear stocky and flattened. The faces are reduced to basic features, and the faces of two women are hardly visible. The central blue figure's face is just a red smudge, with primary attention given to her posterior and her left hand gesturing toward it. It appears as though one finger is lodged between her buttocks, and the green figure is looking toward the blue woman's gesture. The orange figure is, like the blue woman, facing away to expose her buttocks, with one outstretched arm exposing her right breast. The green figure is the only one facing forward, and one shoulder projects at an unnatural angle to expose both her breasts. She is also the only seated figure, with a blue blanket beneath her. Aside from the tree, there is no sense of a scene or activity which might give a reason for these women to be outdoors.

Paul Cézanne's *Large Bathers* (Fig. 8), 1906, also depicts female nudes in a landscape. Their bodies are ochre and the landscape is rendered in painterly daubs of slate blue and dark greens. Their bodies are arranged in a pyramidal composition with a void at the center. As in Kirchner's painting, the figures are shown in multiple poses, with some standing, some sitting, and some reclining. This painting is the most commonly-drawn comparison for Kirchner's nudes

¹¹¹ Gordon, 1960, 57.

in landscapes, and Jill Lloyd effectively demonstrates that Kirchner was aware of Cézanne as an artist, reproducing Kirchner's sketches after Cézanne paintings.¹¹²

Another, less commonly made comparison is Henri-Edmond Cross's pointillist painting *The Shaded Beach* (Fig. 42), 1902. Compositionally, this painting is more similar to Kirchner's three nudes, particularly in its idyllic foreground. Four nude figures compose a triangular formation in the foreground, converging on a massive tree. One reclines with her body pointed forward and her head pointed down, two sit facing the lake behind them, and one stands in profile against the tree with her hands clasped behind her back. The standing figure's pose is reminiscent of the blue figure in Kirchner's painting. Like his seated green figure, Cross's reclining figure is perched on a blanket.

Despite some initial similarity in motif, composition, and setting, Cézanne and Cross handle the figures in their paintings very differently. Cézanne's figures have even less facial structure than Kirchner's, and none of the figures in Cross's painting have developed facial features. Cézanne's and Cross's figures' proximity to water clearly identifies them as bathers, whereas Kirchner's painting does not include a body of water. The reason for their nudity is made less apparent by the surroundings. They are also shown much closer to the foreground, creating a sense of intimacy absent in the more tableau-like French paintings. Cézanne's figures in the background are bathing in the water, with those in the foreground leaning in toward some central activity involving the white field between seated figures. Further, the figures are handled in the exact same manner as the surrounding setting, with no extra detail or attention paid to

¹¹² Lloyd, 1991, 113.

figures over vegetation.¹¹³ Cross's nudes appear to be emerging from the water and sunning themselves on the shore, as much part of the scenery as they are engaged in the surroundings.¹¹⁴

Kirchner's nudes simply appear to be engaged in conversation.

A photograph similar to Kirchner's painting, also called *Lotte Kraft-Rohner, Erna Schilling, und unbekannte Frau, um 1929* (*Lotte Kraft-Rohner, Erna Schilling, and an unknown woman, circa 1929*, Fig. 43; S. 336q), shows two standing figures and a seated one. They appear to be in conversation, perhaps even laughing. A figure wearing modern shoes brushes her arm, covering one breast in the process despite her general lack of modesty. Another stands with a hand poised at her shoulder, but not covering her breasts. The seated figure has her hands by her sides and both feet planted firmly in front of her. Seated in profile, she also seems generally unconcerned by her lack of clothes. There is no giant tree in this painting, although branches peak out from between rocks at the rightmost edge of the composition.

Zwei weibliche Akte unter Bäumen (*Two Nude Women Under a Tree*, Fig. 44; G. 255), 1912, shows two women in a field. The body type is the narrower, less modeled shape that Kirchner favored later in his career. Their skin is ochre and their hair is black, which became standard in his subsequent nudes. One stands, appearing mid-stride, with a hand raised to her breast. She does not quite cover her breast; the hand almost points toward it more than it conceals it. The other woman leans forward, her gut protruding over her legs as she extends her arms forward. She does not have articulated hands or any facial features. The relationship between the women is completely ambiguous. They may be interacting somehow, but there is limited engagement between them. The background more closely resembles *Half Nude with*

¹¹³ Mary Louise Krumrine, *Paul Cézanne: The Bathers* (New York: Harry M, Abrams, Inc., 1989), 16, 25.

¹¹⁴ Werth, 2002, 198.

Raised Arms than either previous work, with more attention paid to the lush grasses and branches. The sky is dark, with dark blues and a bit of red, perhaps indicating that this scene takes place at night. There are no clothes to indicate their modernity or context clues for their location. Kirchner does not provide a strong sense of purpose for these women; it is unclear why they are undressed or under a tree at night.

There are not many examples showing similar poses to the ones Kirchner chose here. The closest is Henri Matisse's *Bathers with a Turtle* (Fig. 45), 1908. This painting is extremely unusual in its choices of pose and setting. The stooping, squatting figures are rendered in a fairly non-sexualized manner. Matisse's figures appear childlike, poised with curious faces and infantile stances over the tiny russet turtle. Roger Benjamin has characterized this as part of Matisse's rejection of academically polished paintings, as he found the idealization of the human body to be meaningless and unrealistic. Matisse used conventional poses, but he stopped short of idealizing bodies in an academic manner.¹¹⁵ Though labeled bathers, the setting is ambiguous. They stand on a green foreground, with only a line behind them to distinguish between sky and sea.¹¹⁶ The figures appear to float in space, particularly the seated one at right who has no chair but rather appears to hover over the green foreground. However, Kirchner takes care to place his figures in a recognizable landscape with lush vegetation. Unlike Matisse's curious figures, Kirchner's nudes do not share in any apparent activity. They coexist but do not engage one another within the composition. This painting, more so than the others in this study, looks like a snap shot from his photographs at Fehmarn.

¹¹⁵ Roger Benjamin, "Expression, Disfiguration, Matisse, the Female Nude, and the Academic Eye," in Terry Smith, ed., *Invisible Touch: Modernism and Masculinity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 77-78.

¹¹⁶ Smith, 1997, 231.

Indeed, Kirchner made many photographs with groups similar to the one in this painting. For example, *Akte im Wald, um 1929* (*Nudes in the Woods, Circa 1929*, Fig. 46; S. 336e) shows a pair of women standing before an enormous tree in a clearing. They are shown from a distance, their bodies dwarfed by the massive tree. Like the painting, this image lacks clothing or architecture to establish a sense of modernity, but the bodies are still rendered without much attention to conventions of the female nude. The figure in the foreground stands with her back to the camera and her arms crossed in front of her, exposing her buttocks and upswept hair. Another woman stands behind her, neither covering nor flaunting her body. She appears to be in mid-stride. A blur behind them may be a crouching figure or a shrub or perhaps even a pile of clothes. The nudity of these figures seems completely incidental. None of the figures seems aware of the viewer.

While some of Kirchner's figures are posed conventionally, the great majority of his nudes in landscapes more closely resemble his seemingly unposed photographs from Fehmarn. The bodies are neither on display nor under wraps so much as they are coexisting with the landscape. His frequent inclusion of modern shoes, hats, and garments are the only context these figures have to frame them.

Gender Relationships in Kirchner's Nudes in Landscapes

Duncan and Nead both discuss the facture of painting as symptomatic of a masculine gesture, where the artist leaves traces of his workmanship. On the nude form, such traces become an act of virility, leaving gestural traces from the artist on the female body.¹¹⁷ The assessment of brushwork seems to be the least subjective observation on Kirchner's early works, and the only

¹¹⁷ Nead, 1992, 58; Duncan, 1973, 85.

assessment which applies to all his paintings, regardless of subject. His brushwork is consistent between his paintings of nudes in landscapes and nudes in interior spaces, with thick, gestural strokes of bold color both on the figures and throughout the background. His aggressive line work is common to all of his paintings between 1904 and 1910.

If we are to agree with the feminist argument that Kirchner's brushwork is an act of sexual dominance over female subjects, it must be noted that he renders male figures in the exact same way. In fact, his painting style is consistent in rendering not only male and female bodies, but also landscapes, cityscapes, and interior spaces. Given the consistency of his handling between subjects, it is impossible to determine whether he intended to contain the female body through the rough gestural quality of his paintings. The criticism of his brushwork is fundamentally problematic in its presumption of artistic intent.

Additionally, some of Kirchner's nude scenes in landscapes include male figures handled with the same style and sensibility. Duncan acknowledges Kirchner's mixed gender scenes briefly, describing the nude males as appearing idle and self-conscious.¹¹⁸ This is a strange assessment, given without examples, for a group of paintings that frequently did not include any facial articulation beyond minimal trace features. She saw the men as uncomfortable and uninvolved, but examples, such as *In das Meer Schreitend (Striding into the Sea, Fig. 47; G. 262)*, 1912, show male nudes engaging in the same activities as the women. Her lack of examples makes it unclear whether she was looking at landscape scenes or studio scenes for this analysis.

Striding into the Sea, one of Kirchner's later paintings of men and women nude in landscape settings, shows a man walking hand in hand with a woman into green waves. This

¹¹⁸ Duncan, 1973, 96-96.

painting shows a more strongly delineated style, with black outlines around the figures and waves and hash marks in place of modeling and shadow. Their bodies and faces are shown with equal attention, with very little difference between the features of each. Behind them on the beach is a reclining figure. The curvature of the hips suggests that it is a female, although there is not enough articulation to be sure. This figure lies prone on his or her stomach, buttocks exposed, resting his or her head on one hand and staring off into space away from the other two figures. Behind the beach is a rocky bluff with round boulders and sharp-peaked grassy dunes. Against an indigo sky in the far distance there is some sort of architectural structure, perhaps a lighthouse, placing these figures in a modern context.

This is a significant and often overlooked element to Kirchner's nudes in landscapes. Both the man and woman are nude, handled with the same brushwork and shown on the same plane with neither in a dominant position. His male nudes first appear in the 1910s and are curious in light of the scholarship on Kirchner's handling of the female nude. The male nude in *Striding into the Sea* has the same reduced facial features, almost identical to those of the female next to him. While the standing nude woman's body is at the center of the composition, the two figures are rendered in the same style, with limited modeling and exposed genitals. There is a reclining nude behind the two primary figures, and the hip curvature suggests that it is probably a woman, although there is no obvious differentiation as the figure lies on his or her stomach with a hand covering his or her face. This image could easily be representative of Germany's nude beaches which Kirchner and his contemporaries were known to frequent.¹¹⁹ Such an image of two nudes coexisting visually without a clear sense of relationship or identity was evidence of

¹¹⁹ Perry, 1993, 80; Lloyd, 1991, 102-129.

the society die Brücke's manifestos discusses.¹²⁰ No one is in charge and no one is ashamed to be nude; rather, they seem complacent and comfortable together.

Just six years before Kirchner finished *Striding Into the Sea*, Henri Matisse painted *Le Bonheur de Vivre* (Fig. 48). Kirchner would have known this painting from its widespread if not particularly complementary reputation.¹²¹ While the French and German styles are quite different, there are some similarities in the colors and handling of form. The background is a palette of greens, yellows, oranges, and pinks, in softer tones and applications than Kirchner's but with a similar patterned effect. Like Kirchner's painting, there are points in the landscape and on the figures outlined thickly with much darker tones. In fact, there is even a group of nudes in Matisse's painting who are dancing and playing under the shade of trees, similar to the social grouping in Kirchner's painting. The figures are mostly in pink, but there are also bodies rendered in blue, yellow, green, and orange. Despite all the commonalities, there are many visual differences, most of which relate to differing philosophies on the body between each artist's art circles and, as noted by Donald Gordon, Matisse's tendency to abstract the proportions of figures in his paintings.¹²²

One of Kirchner's photographs, posthumously titled *Badende in der Ostsee auf Fehmarn, Sommer 1913* (*Bathing in the Baltic Sea at Fehmarn, Summer 1913*, Fig. 9; S. 22) shows a scene similar to *Striding into the Sea*. Two figures, a male and a female, are wading side by side in the waves, standing as equals and shown from the same angle, with another female to their right, crouching with her buttocks exposed. There are enough compositional differences to rule out the

¹²⁰ Price, 2001, 136-164.

¹²¹ Werth, 2002, 180-186.

¹²² Gordon, 1968, 57, 73-74.

photograph as a reference image for the painting; however, this image serves to show Kirchner's use of geographical settings similar to those he shows in his landscape paintings.

Another painting from this time period showing male and female nudes together in a landscape is Cézanne's *Bathers* (Fig. 49), 1879-1882. A group of bathers gathers before a lake. Painted in his signature brushy style, the figures do not have faces and are distinguishable primarily by the articulation of sex organs. Van Liere points out that Cézanne has positioned the female figures lower in the composition, huddling on the ground. The male figures stand tall, but the female figures always appear bound to the earth. Van Liere attributes this to an artistic power struggle to contain the female body and strip it of its symbolic and sexual power over men.¹²³ Krumrine further examines Cézanne's paintings of bathers as a means for the artist to confront and control femininity. The roughness and slovenliness of the figures suppresses their femininity.¹²⁴ This is a significant departure from Kirchner's scene of man and woman striding side by side.

Kirchner's Models and the Pose

Kirchner's paintings of nudes in landscapes are posed more casually than his nudes in studios or the French bathers, as though the viewer has simply stumbled upon them. Their poses almost look like snapshots of die Brücke's beachside nude expeditions. The degree to which Kirchner directed their poses is, to a large degree, unmentioned in the scholarship. Jill Lloyd is the only American scholar to discuss these particular nudes as models.

¹²³ Van Liere, 1980, 113.

¹²⁴ Krumrine, 1989, 33, 106.

It is well established that Kirchner posed models in his studios for the street scenes. Lloyd also claims that by 1913 Kirchner was producing wooden sculptures to stand in for models in his paintings, and that he took reference pictures for some paintings.¹²⁵ Additionally, some of his paintings were exceedingly large, making it improbable that Kirchner painted them *en plein air*. The largest of Kirchner's early nude in landscape paintings measure over six feet tall, with as many as 15 figures in them. For these paintings it is likely that he made sketches and took photographs to use as references in his studio.

Kirchner never mentions in any of his published letters or journals where he painted each of his nudes in landscape settings. It is possible that some were painted in the studio and others were painted at Moritzburg and Fehmarn. Gerd Presler studied Kirchner's models in *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: Seine Frauen, Seine Modelle, Seine Bilder*, but the focus is on the biographies and personal relationship each model had with the artist more rather than their professional relationships as model and painter. He does, however, quote a passage from Kirchner's diary wherein the artist claims to be taking his friends and models to Moritzburg so that he can paint outdoors.¹²⁶

Scotti provided visual proof that at least some of Kirchner's nudes in landscapes were executed *en plein air* with three Fehmarn photographs from 1929 showing the artist standing before his models with a small canvas and his tools. Labeled simply *Akt und Zeichner im wald* (*Nude and Artist in the Woods*, Fig. 50; S. 336a), *Zeichner im wald mit zwei Modellen* (*Artist in the Woods with Two Models*, Fig. 51; S. 259), and *Zeichner im Wald mit drei Modellen* (*Artist in the Woods with Three Models*, Fig. 52; S. 258), these photographs show Kirchner standing

¹²⁵ Lloyd, 1991, 125.

¹²⁶ Gerd Presler, *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: Seine Frauen, Seine Modelle, Seine Bilder* (Munich: Prestel, 1998), 26.

before his models, separated by only a few feet and his easel.¹²⁷ These photographs show a completely different relationship between the artist and his models than his paintings of himself with nude models in his studio. Gone is the aggressive virility of *Turmzimmer; Selbstbildnis Mit Erna, 1913* (Fig. 5) and the suggestive brushwork. Kirchner stands on equal ground with his models, at an intimate but chaste distance. These photographs certainly do not prove that all of his paintings were produced outdoors, but they show the artist interacting with his models in a landscape setting on level ground. Strikingly, many of his photographs are labeled with the names of the people in them. None of the paintings of nudes in landscapes are ever given proper names, even if their poses are similar to photographs labeled with models' names; rather, the paintings are understood to be generic nudes.

What is never clearly stated is whether he chose their poses. Some of his paintings appear more academically posed, while others with more seemingly spontaneous poses may well have been painted from candid snapshots or sketches. In the Fehmarn photographs he appears more observational than directorial, but the pictures only show the painter at work. Without photographs or written records of how Kirchner set up for those sessions it is indeterminable whether he posed them first or directed them as he worked. A study of his sketches may provide more insight as to his posing methods, but the incredible volume of his drawings, for which no *catalogue raisonné* exists, makes it impossible and imprudent to make any determinations without undertaking an exhaustive study.

¹²⁷ Scotti, 2006, 209, 211.

Conclusion

The status of the nude image by the time Kirchner began painting female nudes in landscapes was one of great importance. First, it had become established as the quintessential subject for asserting one's artistic ability within academic painting. Kirchner did not complete fine arts training, but Donald Gordon has effectively placed him in academy classes for two terms—certainly long enough to learn the academic significance of the nude subject and the academic conventions for it. Additionally the nude was of increasing importance in German society, with the rise of nudism and its philosophers. Although Kirchner's experiments with nudism are outside the mainstream movement, he was aware of the discourse on nudism and benefitted from living in a country invested in redefining the nude body's place in civilization. The status of the nude image is also well established as a major point of focus for die Brücke, both in painting and in their incorporation of social nudity within the group as a means of escaping the social constraints of modern life.

Past scholarly assessments of Kirchner's work have not so much been wrong as they have been incomplete. The predominant feminist argument laid out by Duncan for the virility of early twentieth century painting is founded in strong examples, as are Lloyd and Perry's arguments on Kirchner's awareness of Primitivism and French bathers. However, both approaches are incomplete in their analysis of Kirchner's paintings. The posing and perspective employed in representing a female nude change the context of viewership, and neither element is consistent between Kirchner's different settings for the female nude. Similarly, the stylistic elements which distinguish Kirchner's paintings in landscapes from others in his oeuvre also separate his work from contemporaneous paintings of the nude in Europe.

Conclusion: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's Early Female Nudes in Landscapes

This thesis has shown that each prevailing reading of Kirchner's early nudes in landscapes has limitations. Kirchner's early nudes in landscapes are among his most striking works. Though previous scholarship has diminished their importance and understated their meaning, these paintings comprise a substantial part of his oeuvre. They are stylistically different from his paintings of nudes in interior settings and merit individual consideration. This thesis has considered prevailing scholarship and drawn some new conclusions.

The feminist argument applies to his interior scenes, but falls short of explaining the nudes in landscapes. Duncan's foundational article omits a large part of Kirchner's oeuvre in overstating the masculine domination depicted in his works. Kirchner's nudes in landscape settings are more than demonstrations of virility. The range of differences between his nudes in landscapes and his paintings of nudes in interiors are worth consideration.

The history of the nude image is certainly important to the understanding of Kirchner's paintings, but its significance is limited. Kirchner received a year of academic training in painting, and some of his paintings use traditional poses for the female nude. However, he does not use the *pudica* pose in his landscape nudes and some of his paintings show figures in non-traditional poses. Particularly since there is no written record of his thoughts on the history of the nude and academic painting, the significance of his partial engagement should not be overstated.

Kirchner engaged some of the same themes as contemporary French painters, but not all of them. Comparisons to Cézanne, Gauguin, and Degas have many limitations. Though they all

employ many similar poses, Kirchner's style and compositions are strikingly different. The examples in chapter 3 show that Kirchner was not merely painting after French models.

The German nudist movement had bearing on how Kirchner and his German contemporaries saw the body, but the ties between die Brücke and nudism have been oversimplified. Die Brücke's involvement in nudism was outside of accepted practice and does not relate directly to the philosophies guiding the movement at the onset of the twentieth century. However, the national acceptance of the nude body in Germany and the propagation of the nudist movement affected them to a degree. Even as counter-culture nudists, die Brücke saw the human body differently than other European painters. The body, to die Brücke, was more than a means to showcase the artist's skill and titillate viewers. The body was also a symbol of German culture and ideological freedom from societal rules.

Future research on these paintings could take a variety of directions. An analysis of Kirchner's drawings, woodcuts, and etchings of female nudes in landscapes would greatly expand knowledge on Kirchner's use of this subject. There is no catalogue of Kirchner's drawings or graphic works, but they appear to be very similar to his paintings. Much of the feminist reading focuses on Kirchner's aggressive facture; his graphic works share the subject matter but are without the textural quality.

There is also a need for a new catalogue raisonné. Gordon's 1968 catalogue is outdated and out of print. A newer source which revisits Gordon's findings from Kirchner's letters and written records with a fresh perspective, as well as a more reliable list of his works, is necessary for further study of his oeuvre. Such an undertaking would require extended on-site research in Dresden and Berlin.

This thesis has shown that Kirchner's early female nudes in landscape settings are distinct from his paintings of other subjects and settings. The gender relationships are ambiguous, the paintings are equally comparable to French bathers and German nudist dance, and his selection of poses is richly complex. Though they are often overlooked or underestimated, these paintings constitute some of Kirchner's most compelling works.

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Vita

Kathryn Suzanne Rogge was born on December 17, 1984, in Newport, Rhode Island. She graduated with honors from Princess Anne High School, Virginia Beach, Virginia, in 2003. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Art History with a minor in history with honors from Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, in December, 2006. During the summer of 2006 she attended the Virginia Commonwealth University Artists' and Writers' workshop at the Glasgow School of Art in Scotland. While working on her Master's degree at Virginia Commonwealth University she presented at two architectural symposia at the Virginia Historic Society, in 2007 on Alexander Thomson's St. Vincent Street Church and in 2008 on the history of the *kline*-style sofa. She worked as a gallery associate for Quirk Gallery in Richmond, Virginia from 2007 until 2009 and was lead curator for their permanent installation of art jewelry. For the academic school year of 2007-2008, she was the assistant director of the Visual Resource Center at Virginia Commonwealth University and helped to digitize, restore, and catalogue the university's slide collection. She tutored at New Bridge Middle School in Henrico County, Virginia from 2009 to 2010.