

EDUCATION KIT

MODERN HISTORY SUPPLEMENT

Support material & questions for NSW Modern history syllabus

www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/education



Art Gallery of New South Wales

6 August – 6 November 2011

THE MAD SQUARE

MODERNITY IN GERMAN ART 1910–37

Key features and issues:

- successes and failures of democracy
- nature and role of nationalism
- changes in society

Students will learn about:

- the emergence of the Democratic Republic and the impact of the Treaty of Versailles
- political, economic and social issues in the Weimar Republic to 1929
- rise of the Nazi Party (NSDAP) from 1923

Relevant HSC question types:

- To what extent was democracy successful in the period 1918–29?
- To what extent did social tensions contribute to the failure of democracy in Weimar Germany?
- How did changes in society contribute to the rise of Nazism?

Modern history supplement:
Paul Kiem, History Teachers Association Australia

© 2011 Art Gallery of New South Wales
www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au

WEIMAR PERIOD ART AS HISTORICAL SOURCE MATERIAL

Choose a number of examples of artistic expression from the period or choose artworks when visiting the exhibition. For each, respond to the following questions:

1. Describe what is shown. What sort of response does it arouse?
2. What do you think the artist was trying to convey? What issues come through?
3. Are the images reassuring or disturbing?
4. What events of the time may have influenced the artist?

Study a number of artworks and answer these questions:

1. Are there any common themes?
2. In documenting aspects of German society, were the artists attempting to influence society or were they just experimenting?
3. How do you think different sections of German society of the time would have reacted to these artworks?
4. How useful are these artworks to historians attempting to understand tensions in Weimar society and how these tensions may have influenced events?

VOCABULARY

alienation, avant-garde, classical, conformity, consensus, cosmopolitan, conservative, disturbing, decadent, dysfunctional, German, internationalist, modernist, modernity, nationalist, polarisation, radical, reassuring, rural, traditional, urban



DISCUSSION

Evaluate the view that Nazism's success was built, in part, on a reaction to the perceived evils of modernity and an internationalist outlook evident in the art of Weimar Germany.

RESEARCH

- A. Provide simple definitions with very brief historical context for the following terms:
- avant-garde
 - Bauhaus
 - Constructivism
 - Dada
 - Expressionism
 - metropolis
 - modernity
 - New Objectivity
 - zeitgeist
- B. Research an artist working in each of the following creative fields in Weimar Germany:
- Art
 - Filmmaking
 - Architecture
 - Design
 - Writing

For each artist complete the following:

- Examples of work or major exhibitions
- Characteristics or content of work
- Your responses to their work

- C. Use the internet to find and research examples of art from the Nazi period and compare them with art from the Weimar period.

For example:

- Compare the designs of Albert Speer with those of the Bauhaus school.
- Compare the films of Leni Reifenstahl with those of Fritz Lang.

OTTO DIX (1891–1969)

Storm troopers advancing under a gas attack

from the portfolio **War** 1924

etching, aquatint, drypoint, 19.4 x 29 cm

Australian War Memorial, Canberra

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

- Describe what is shown. What sort of response does it arouse?
- What view of war is presented?
- Why would such an image arouse differing reactions in Germany in the 1920s?
- How useful is this image to historians attempting to understand tensions in Weimar society and how these tensions may have influenced events?
- To what extent was the artist documenting attitudes within German society? To what extent was he confronting attitudes?



MARCEL BREUER (1902–1981)

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

Photo: Vitra Design Museum © Estate of Marcel Breuer

- Describe the chair. Is it classical, modern, decorative, functional?
- Explain why this design is characteristic of the Bauhaus school.
- Find out when Bauhaus evolved. What were its main principles? Who were its leaders?
- Why do you think the Nazis were hostile to the Bauhaus school?



ROBERT SENNECKE (1885–1940)

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

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

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

- Describe what is shown. What sort of response does it arouse?
- Explain characteristics of Dada. How does it contrast with more traditional art forms?
- Find out when Dada evolved. To what extent was it a response to the conditions of post World War I Germany?
- How useful is this image to historians attempting to understand tensions in Weimar society and how these tensions may have influenced events? To what extent was the artist documenting attitudes within German society? To what extent was he confronting attitudes?