



QUICK VIEW:

Synopsis

Max Ernst was a German-born Surrealist who helped shape the emergence of **Abstract Expressionism** in America post-World War II. Armed with an academic understanding of Freud, Ernst often turned to his work—whether sculpture, painting, or collage—as a means of processing his experience in World War I and unpacking his feelings of dispossession in its wake.

Key Ideas / Information

- Ernst's work relied on spontaneity (juxtapositions of materials and imagery) and subjectivity (inspired by his personal experiences), two creative ideals that came to define Abstract Expressionism.
- Although Ernst's works are predominantly figurative, his unique artistic techniques inject a measure of abstractness into the texture of his work.
- The work of Max Ernst was very important in the nascent Abstract Expressionist movement in New York, particularly for **Jackson Pollock**.

DETAILED VIEW:

Childhood



Max Ernst was born into a middle-class family of nine children on April 2, 1891 in Brühl, Germany, near Cologne. Ernst first learned painting from his father, a teacher with an avid interest in academic painting. Other than this introduction to amateur painting at home, Ernst never received any formal training in the arts and forged his own artistic techniques in a self-taught manner instead. After completing his studies in philosophy and psychology at the University of Bonn in 1914, Ernst spent four years in the German army, serving on both the Western and Eastern fronts.

Early Training

The horrors of World War I had a profound and lasting impact on both the subject matter and visual texture of the burgeoning artist, who mined his personal experiences to depict absurd and apocalyptic scenes. This subversive tendency remained strong in Ernst throughout his career, as the world is literally turned upside down in many of his works. Returning to Germany after World War I, Ernst became a leader of the Dada movement in Cologne while maintaining close ties with the Parisian avant-garde. He began creating his first collages in 1919, reworking mundane materials such as manuals on botany to create stunning, fantastical images.

Mature Period



In 1922, Ernst left his first wife to flee to Paris, where he remained until 1941. In this time, Surrealism came to displace Dadaism with the publication of André Breton's "First Surrealist Manifesto" in 1924, and Ernst became one of the movement's founding members. He developed the technique of frottage (the French word for "rubbing"), laying paper on the floor and rubbing over it with pencil to create the textural effect of wood. This emphasis on the contact between materials, as well as transforming everyday materials to arrive at an image that signified some sort of collective consciousness, would become central to Surrealism's ideal of automatism. This idea that the random and free interaction between artist and material produces an image of the artist's subconscious and inner state proved vital to Abstract Expressionists, particularly Jackson Pollock.

Late Period and Death

War and Fascism followed Ernst to France, and he was sent to internment camps three times before escaping to the United States in 1941. Ernst found his third wife in Peggy Guggenheim, the flamboyant socialite and patron of the arts, who gave her husband prime access to the art scene of New York City. It was here that Ernst, along with a circle of European Surrealists, began to inspire the emergence of Abstract Expressionism in a concrete way. Not before long, Ernst moved to Sedona, Arizona with his fourth wife, the American painter Dorothea Tanning. Ernst and Tanning moved back to France in 1953, where Ernst worked until his death in Paris in 1976.

Legacy

Max Ernst achieved a rare feat in the life of an artist, which is to establish a glowing reputation and critical following in three countries (Germany, France, and the United States) in the span of his career. Although Ernst is an artist who is better known by art historians and academics than by the general public today, his influence in shaping the direction of mid-century American art (particularly Abstract Expressionism) is easily recognizable.



THE ARTIST'S INFLUENCE ON ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM MOVEMENT

Max Ernst's arrival in New York during World War II (1941), along with other European

avant-garde painters such as Marcel Duchamp, electrified a generation of American artists. Ernst's rejection of traditional painting (as symbolized by the classical style of his father's work) in favor of his own unique techniques (collage, frottage, grattage) captivated young American painters, who similarly sought to forge a fresh and unorthodox approach to painting. He had a particularly strong effect on the direction of Jackson Pollock's painting, who became interested in the collage aspects of Ernst's work, as well as his tendency to use his art as an externalization of his internal state.

Max Ernst's son, Jimmy Ernst, became a well-known German/American Abstract Expressionist after the war, and helped to cement his father's involvement in the formation of the movement, as he provided him with access to all of its key players, including Pollock and De Kooning.

ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

Below are Max Ernst's major influences, and the people and ideas that he influenced in turn.

ARTISTS	CRITICS/FRIENDS	MOVEMENTS
 <p>André Masson</p>	 <p>André Breton</p>	 <p>Dada</p>
 <p>Paul Klee</p>	 <p>Paul Eluard</p>	 <p>Surrealism</p>
 <p>Marcel Duchamp</p>		
 <p>Yves Tanguy</p>		
 <p>Hans Arp</p>		

**INFLUENCES
ON ARTIST**



Max Ernst

Years Worked: 1891 – 1976

**INFLUENCED
BY ARTIST**

ARTISTS	CRITICS/FRIENDS	MOVEMENTS
 <p>Robert Rauschenberg</p>  <p>Jackson Pollock</p>  <p>Willem De Kooning</p>  <p>Barnett Newman</p>	 <p>Peggy Guggenheim</p>  <p>Werner Spies</p>	 <p>Surrealism</p>  <p>Abstract Expressionism</p>



Jimmy Ernst

Quotes

"Painting is not for me either decorative amusement, or the plastic invention of felt reality; it must be every time: invention, discovery, revelation."

On his collages: "I was surprised by the sudden intensification of my visionary capacities and by the hallucinatory succession of contradictory images superimposed, one upon the other, with the persistence and rapidity characteristic of amorous memories."

"The role of the painter . . . is to project that which sees itself in him."



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Major Works:



Title: Ubu Emperor

Description: Like many of Ernst's paintings during his Paris period (1922-1941), Ubu Emperor resembles a collage in painted form. The artist's knowledge of Freudian theories, familiarity with myth and extreme wit are reflected in this early painting, which is now considered proto-Surrealist due to its strange juxtapositions.

Year: 1923

Materials: Oil on canvas

Collection: Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris



Title: Forest and Dove

Description: Forest and Dove exemplifies Ernst's pioneering "grattage" technique - the painting equivalent of frottage - where he scraped paint across the canvas to reveal imprints of objects beneath. The small dove within the menacing forest that threatens to consume it is a familiar motif in Ernst's work, referring to his dispossession after the war.

Year: 1927

Materials: Oil on canvas

Collection: Tate Modern, London



Title: Loplop Introduces Loplop

Description: The bird figure Loplop was Ernst's alter ego. This painting shows not only the artist's fascination with mythology and the primitive as subject matter (as exemplified by the bird), but also his formal interest in attaching different materials to the canvas. Both of these impulses would prove vital to the work of Jackson Pollock.

Year: 1930

Materials: Oil and various materials on wood

Collection: Private collection



Title: L'ange du Foyer ou Le Triomphe du Surréalisme

Description: The creature in Ernst's L'ange represents one of his most menacing, as its dynamic form commands the entire canvas against the backdrop of an ominous sky. The title, which positions this figure as representation of an angel and also of the triumph of the Surrealist movement, is a testament to Ernst's wit.

Year: 1937

Materials: Oil on canvas

Collection: Private collection



Title: Europe After the Rain

Description: Ernst's epic Europe After the Rain is an abstracted landscape that offers an apocalyptic vision of the post-war world. Here Ernst used another collage technique called decalcomania, in which gouache is pressed onto a canvas using paper, which produced a multilayered effect.

Year: 1940-1942

Materials: Oil on canvas

Collection: Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut



Title: Vox Angelica

Description: Vox Angelica is a culmination of the techniques the artist pioneered throughout his career, intermixing panels of grattage, collage, and decalcomania. Made while Ernst was in New York, Vox Angelica typifies the sort of work the artist was creating while exchanging ideas with young Abstract Expressionists such as Pollock.

Year: 1945

Materials: Oil on canvas

Collection: Private collection