



Introduction

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German Expressionism was linked to the intellectual, cultural, and political upheaval preceding the First World War and plaguing its aftermath. Intrinsically related to 19th-century Symbolism, Expressionism however looked beyond its fatalism and mysticism, and above all, beyond its representational panache. And while its exact beginnings are placed somewhere between 1905 and 1911 (the foundation of *Die Brücke* and *Das Blaue Reiter*), the end of the Weimar Republic in 1933 spelled its end as a historical artistic movement. In its less than three decades of existence, however, Expressionism asserted itself as an influential artistic style, steering all art forms towards imperative interrogation of the materialistic view of the visible world. Under the influence of Nietzschean pessimism and Existentialist doubts, and especially that of rapid developments in analytic psychology and psychoanalysis, Expressionist artists turned inwards, privileging the subjective over the objective, and feelings over reason. For them, to create was not merely to reproduce nature, but to react to the visible in a uniquely personalized fashion.

This aesthetic shift was prompted culturally by a deep mistrust in the rationalization and externalization of psychic life, and the neglect of the inner self, which had gradually become the norm in the Western world since the Enlightenment. In the wake of destroyed traditional ways of life and cultures, urban living was bound to become the new norm, which inevitably brought to bear profound feelings of alienation, foreboding, loneliness, and skepticism about the true relationship between oneself and the world. Moreover, the psychologically devastating experience in the trenches scarred deeply a great number of Expressionist artists, forcing them to question the very foundations of Western civilization.

The collection of articles in this special dossier was inspired by the city-wide celebration of Expressionism, held in 2016 in Regina, the capital of the Canadian

prairie province of Saskatchewan. The very well-attended public talks, on which the current collection is founded, were among the highlights of this unique event, bringing audiences from all walks of life in Regina with artists and academics, and giving them a chance to appreciate the art of Expressionism, including its own local brand of prairie Expressionist films, paintings, poetry and music. We are therefore extremely grateful to the editorial team of *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies* journal for making it possible for us to disseminate our thoughts and ideas internationally.