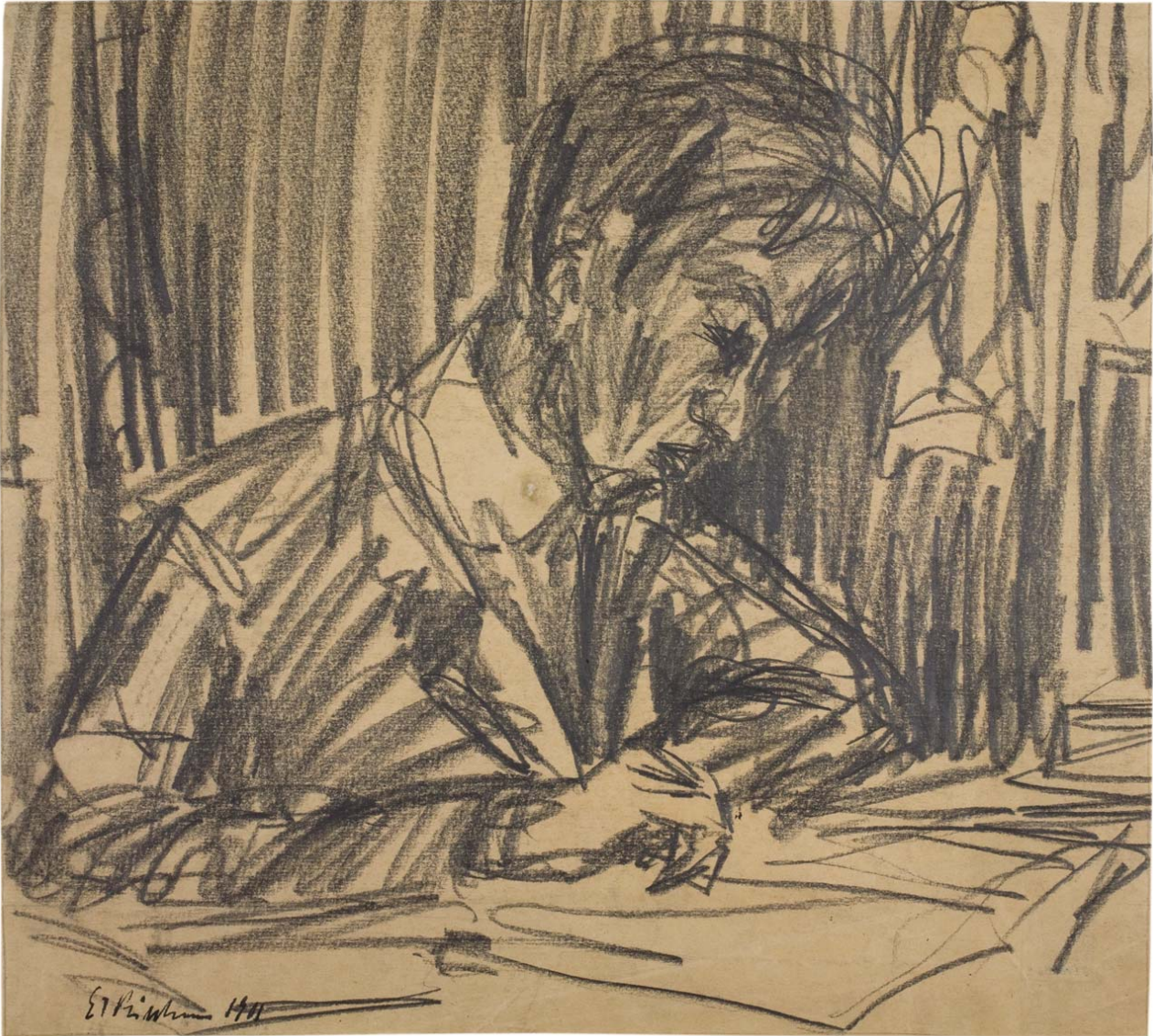


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ERNST LUDWIG KIRCHNER

1880 Aschaffenburg - Frauenkirch 1938

Self-Portrait Sketching

Black chalk and pencil on paper; 1906.

Signed and dated lower left (at a later date, probably around 1930) in pen and black ink

E. L. Kirchner 1901.

With the Basle Estate stamp [Lugt 1570 b] on the verso, bearing the annotation: *B Dre / Ba 2.*
324 x 360 mm

PROVENANCE: Estate of the artist – Auction sale, Stuttgart, Stuttgarter Kunstkabinett Roman Norbert Ketterer, 20-21 May 1958, lot 456, repr. – Ernesto Blohm, Caracas (probably acquired at the above-mentioned sale)

EXHIBITIONS: *Expressionismo en Alemania*, Caracas, Asociación cultural Humboldt – Fundación Eugenio Mendoza, no. 39 – *E. L. Kirchner, Gemälde, Aquarelle, Zeichnungen und Druckgraphik*, Hamburg, Kunstverein; Frankfurt a. M., Kunstverein, 1969-70, no. 85, repr. as frontispiece – *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner aus Privatbesitz*, Bielefeld, Städtische Kunsthalle, no. 26, repr. p.14 – *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner Privatsammlung - Gemälde, Aquarelle, Zeichnungen, Grafik*, Munich, Galerie Günther Franke, 1970, no.12, repr. p.44 – *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: 1880-1938*, Berlin (West), Nationalgalerie 1979, no. 7 [titled *Young Man Reading*].

The work is listed in the Ernst Ludwig Kirchner Archives, Wittrach/Bern.

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner was one of the founders of the artists' association 'Die Brücke' and probably its most prominent member. The group came together in Dresden in 1905. Their aim was to break with convention and reject the superficialities of academic tradition, creating a new form of expression that was to be *unmittelbar und unverfälscht – immediate and genuine*. Kirchner studied under Hermann Obrist in Munich in 1903. Obrist's objective – *to provide deeper expression and enhancement of the individual instead of rapid impressions*¹ – was probably one of the fundamental tenets of 'Die Brücke'.²

The young 'Brücke' artists used their lodgings both for living and for working – as studios where they met informally to practise sketching after a nude model in brief 'quarter-hour' sessions. The intention was to capture a pose or an atmosphere within a very limited timescale. As their models changed their poses often, it was necessary to work fast and economically to capture the essentials of the situation.³

¹ [...] *Statt rascher Impressionen vertiefte Expression und Steigerung des Wesens zu geben.*

² See Hermann Gerlinger on a stylistically related drawing titled *Portrait of a Young Man*, c.1905-6. In *Die Maler der Brücke. Sammlung Hermann Gerlinger*, exhib. cat., Schleswig-Holsteinisches Landesmuseum Schloß Gottorf, Stuttgart 1995, p.132. Kirchner wrote the group's manifesto in 1906.

³ See Magdalena M. Moeller in *Von Dresden nach Davos. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Zeichnungen. Die Sammlung des Brücke-Museums Berlin*, Munich 2004, p.16.

Kirchner uses broad, emphatic chalk lines to delineate the seated figure of a young man. He is depicted sketching at a desk. Behind him is a wall and in the background a barely discernible female figure. The sheet is extensively worked, with the exception of untouched areas at the lower edge. These barely touched areas denote the flat surface on which the young man is working – as if granting him space in which to expand and implement his ideas. The figure portrayed is no less a figure than Kirchner himself. But what is particularly striking about this early self-portrait is the artist's viewpoint. He has not adopted the frontal view common in self-portraiture but has chosen to depict himself in profile.⁴ His clothing and features are captured in rapid, vibrant strokes. He portrays himself, as in many other self-portraits, in a dark suit with a high, round white collar. His distinctive head with the thick hair and arched eyebrows melds with the space around him. In this self-portrait Kirchner consciously showcases his own image as he focusses on the drawings before him. This objectivization of his artistic identity recurs in two later self-portraits executed in 1919-20.⁵ They are depictions of the artist par excellence, engrossed in the creative process.

A portrait sketch of the same period titled *Portrait of a Young Man* (1905-6) – probably depicting Fritz Bleyl, a co-founder of 'Die Brücke' – is stylistically very close to the present sheet and shares much of its linear severity [Fig.1]. In 1937 Kirchner sent the drawing to the art historian and curator W. R. Valentiner, who was living in the United States, with the comment: *Great forms in hard light and determined expression*. It too bears the annotation '1901' added by Kirchner at a later date. Valentiner, who was an excellent scholar of Kirchner's work, questioned the dating with the comment: [...] *if it is dated correctly*. Kirchner often pre-dated his works to manipulate the reception of his art.⁶

The present sheet clearly demonstrates Kirchner's indebtedness to the work of Edvard Munch. Galerie Arnold staged an exhibition of Munch's graphic works in Dresden in 1905-06. His approach to the medium of woodcut and use of the wood surface and grain as essential elements of the image deeply inspired Kirchner in his own prints. Munch's intense exploration of psychological and emotional states and his predilection for flowing contours are echoed in Kirchner's drawings.

We would like to thank Prof. Dr. Günther Gercken for his help with this catalogue entry.

⁴ Comparison with other Kirchner self-portraits and photographs reveals striking similarities in terms of physiognomy and clothing. We would like to thank Professor Günther Gercken, Lütjensee and Dr. Lucius Grisebach, Zurich, for their kind assistance.

⁵ *Self-Portrait Working [Selbstbildnis bei Graphischer Arbeit]*, 1919-20, pencil on paper, 473 x 383 mm, Brücke Museum, Berlin, inv. 81/04 and *The Painter, Self-Portrait*, 1919-20, oil on canvas, 90.8 x 80.5 cm, Gordon 576, Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe.

⁶ See Gerlinger, exhib. cat., op.cit. (see note 2).

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Fig. 1: *Portrait of a Young Man*, c. 1905-6. Black chalk on paper, signed and dated *E.L. Kirchner 01*.
282 x 238 mm, Hermann Gerlinger Collection, Würzburg.