

German Expressionism and Erich Waske: The Malta Collection

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Volume I

Preface

The dissertation 'Erich Waske and German Expressionism: The Malta Collection' concerns an almost entirely forgotten artist who worked in the period and style of German Expressionism. From the first research onwards I have encountered two differing views: that of a second generation as well as second rate artist, and on the other hand that of the gifted artist who was once appreciated for his dedication to spiritual art.

Documents like a letter (which has been partially published in Erich Waske's catalogue *Gemälde und Monumentalentwürfe*) by Karl Schmidt Rotluff to Waske, led me to clearly agree with the second view. This particular letter has been written for no other reason than to praise Erich Waske's art. Considering Schmidt-Rotluffs authority as a leader of the artistic movement, such a document clearly shows that Waske was an artist of some importance and hence should not go unnoticed.

As little had been known about the artist, it was my deep to shed some light on Waske's *oeuvre* and biography by means of primary research. I consider it part of the achievement to have revealed a number of unpublished documents most of which were found in the Berlinische Galerie, a place which was kindly pointed out to me by Prof. Stahlmann. The interpreting of these often barely readable and yet important documents has revealed a lot of detail about the artist's life. This can be read in the first chapter of this thesis where Erich Waske's Biography is discussed.

No holistic account on the *oeuvre* of Erich Waske has ever been given, so that the purpose of this thesis lies partly in giving an overall view of Erich Waske's work, life and thought, which hopefully serves as a good foundation for future studies on the artist.

It was a further aim of this thesis to discuss a private collection in Malta which consists of 167 paintings by Waske. This was done not only by integrating these paintings into the text, but indeed by basing the entire discussion on the works of this collection. Apart from that a brief chapter is given about the collection itself.

I would also like to note that in addition to the various useful materials that were found in archives in Berlin, a number of paintings by Erich Waske are now known to be in the *Artothek der Berliner Künstlerförderung* (Picture Lending Library for the Social Aid of Artists) as well as the Berlin Senate.

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Volume II (omitted in this version!)

Abbreviations

DM – Deutsche Mark (German Currency After the World War)

GroBeKa/GBK – Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung (Great Berlin Art Exhibition)

NS – Nationalsozialismus (National Socialism)

NSDAP – Nazionalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei (National Socialist German Worker's Party)

RM – Reichsmark (German Currency during the National Socialist Regime)

VBK – Verein Berliner Künstler (Association of Berlin Artists)

PCM – Per Calendar Month

Translations

Entartet – Degenerated

Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung - Great Berlin Art Exhibition

Künstlerhilfe – (Official) Artist Support

Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei - National Socialist German Worker's Party

Reiskammer der Bildenden Künste - Reich Chamber of the Fine Arts

Juryfreie Ausstellung - Jury-free Exhibition

Verein Berliner Künstler - Association of Berlin Artists

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to bring to a better light and understanding the artist Erich Waske who has sadly been forgotten almost immediately after his passing away. There are several possible explanations for the artist's disappearing from the world of art, some of which seem to have their roots in the National-Socialist regime that flourished under Hitler. Avant-garde artists whose art did not accord with the social ideas of the government in content or form for example, were suppressed.

The Second World War led to the destruction of Waske's *oeuvre* and home, an experience after which his career never entirely recovered. A letter written in answer to Waske's request of an exhibition at the Haus am Waldsee states that a Waske exhibition could not be featured due to a lack of room for works on such a grand scale.¹ This is not the only instance in which an exhibition of Waske's work was refused due to the size of his works, it can hence be suggested that the artist's turn to monumental work after the Second World War might be another reason for his decline.² The size factor limited his market as much as the fact that his style no longer harmonized with contemporary currents and architecture, especially after the Second World War.³

The positive feedback in contemporary newspapers and art journal writings clearly indicate however, that Waske was indeed a highly appreciated artist. I therefore do feel that the lack of academic knowledge about this individual artist is a great loss to the vast topic of history of art where he deserves an adequate place for his contribution to the arts. It is therefore high time that this in many ways unique artist is brought back to the art world and that both his work and life are discussed in a holistic context as it has never attempted before. Apart from that, the idea is also to approach the artist from different angles and give insights into his life and art.

¹ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, Letter, Thomas Kampas/Erich Waske, 01 Dec. 1964.

² A further example is the frequent rejection by the Große Berliner Kunstausstellung (Great Berlin Art Exhibition) which was justified by the large scale of his works. This is said in a letter (found in the Berlinische Galerie) by Käthe Gläser, who replies to a letter by Waske in July 1951, in the name of the senate for education. It is claimed there that allowing Waske to use up so much space in the exhibition would be unfair towards the other participants.

³ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, Letter, Dr. Biermann-Ratjen/Herbert G. Wolgast, 29 Aug. 1962.

Even though Waske was originally from Germany, Malta has proven to be the right place for such a study specifically because a large amount of his work is found there in a single collection, waiting to be studied. I sincerely hope that this dissertation will serve as a helpful base for future studies on the subject and for anyone interested in the period of Expressionism.

Waske should be placed amongst the German Expressionists especially the *Brücke* and *Secession* sphere as will be shown. Therefore outlining the movement parallel to his development is another objective of this study.

The era filled with the misery of the social factors that came along with the horrors of the world wars could probably be called one of the most tragic art periods, which becomes evident in art itself. Expressionism, having left the first war behind fairly recently, reaches its peak in the 1920s, where one can visualize how the feeling of *angst*, which comes from the difficult political, historical as well as social situations, is reflected in the artists' works. In order to give a valid discussion on the artist the socio-political background of his time and its effects are outlined.

There were two main factors which *prima facie* led to the idea that Waske might have been to Malta. One was the luminosity, brightness and atmosphere in his work which seemed indicative of his presence in the Mediterranean. The other was the fact that he visited the islands of Sicily as is evident in many of his works. Following research, his records did not show any mention of the Maltese islands so that a journey could not be confirmed and therefore remains highly doubtful.

The first chapter of this thesis gives a detailed outline of the artist's biography and an idea about the chronological placing of his major works and commissions. It is an important base for any study of the artist, since knowing the contextual background in all the stages of his life helps to interpret paintings for which the date is known, as well as to find the chronological place for paintings of which the date is not known.

The second chapter discusses major themes in German Expressionism and its evolution, the social and political aspects as well as philosophy and religious thought that stirred the movement. There will be a constant reference to Erich Waske throughout this section with regards to Expressionism.

Following that, a concluding section will give an idea about the symbiosis of Waske and Expressionism in order to show in which ways his work benefitted from the movement and vice versa, and in how far he could be called an expressionist at all.

With the use of examples taken mostly from the Malta collection, Erich Waske is then discussed in terms of Style. Links between Waske and outward stimuli such as artistic inspiration of different art movements will be established. Direct links are relevant here such as fellow artists and his love for music which clearly penetrates his paintings. It is hence shown that Waske's style has very characteristic and aesthetically significant characteristics.

In the fourth chapter the importance of light in Erich Waske's works becomes evident, abutting on its symbolic meaning as well as the previously mentioned idea of a Mediterranean influence.

Chapter five is dedicated to the Waske collection in Malta and consists of those paintings which the whole dissertation is based upon. I would like to note here that in order to respect the collector's wish for maximum privacy no names or similar facts will be given.

For the sake of comparison and better clarification of ideas, works outside of the Malta collection from both Waske and other artists are mentioned throughout the chapters. All depictions by Waske in this dissertation however, stem from the Malta collection unless otherwise indicated.

It is furthermore important to note that the greatest amount of work that exists of the artist today stems from period of post-World War Two. Other than some original works of the artist that are scattered throughout Germany, there are less pieces existing from his early period either around the world or in the local corpus of works. Finally, in volume two, the catalogue entries made up of the works in the Malta collection can be found, and it is notable that they all stem from Waske's inheritance, apart from a number of later acquisitions as will be mentioned.

I approached this thesis by using both primary and secondary sources. The former being unpublished documents from the diverse archives. Notable interviews also took place with the owner of the Prinz-Dunst auction house in Berlin who knew the artist personally, as well as Prof. Stahlmann who currently runs the only homepage dedicated to Waske.

Searching in the right places yielded a fair number of documents which however often consisted of handwritten notes by the artist, hurriedly scribbled on rough pieces of paper. They are unfortunately barely readable, often undated and sometimes not even named so that one often could only give an approximate estimation from the context of when they would have been written; and in case of letters to whom. Some that proved impossible to read had to be unfortunately left out. In some cases I also resorted to deciphering, which could not have been done without the help of people who are acquainted with the old German way of writing. It also posed to be very difficult to find works from the artists early period because they are largely destroyed and the existing pieces are hard to allot. Secondary sources such as literature, monographs and essays were useful when discussing Expressionism as a movement and when writing about style.

It is notable for future research on the artist, that he is of Dutch descend and his name was officially changed from the native version Waask to the German equivalent of Waske, as I have come to discover only recently.

Chapter 1 - Erich Waske's Biography and Life

The expressionist Gustav Ernst Erich Waske was the son of businessman Christian Ernst Waske (born 16 Jul. 1856) and his wife Klara Ernestine Emma Hedwig (born 22 Aug. 1866). His ancestors migrated to Germany from Holland in 1680. He was born on 19 Jan. 1889, one year after his sister Hedwig Klara Agnes Gertrud. His family lived in the Spreewald,⁴ Mark of Brandenburg ever since their move from Holland three hundred years before. This changed with Waske's first school days when the family moved to Berlin.⁵ He disliked school and looked forward to every holiday which was spent traditionally by the sea in the south of France as he states in his autobiography.⁶ The peaceful hours there served not only as a relief but the sea also left a great impact on him as can be observed in his many subsequent paintings of seascapes.

After his primary education between 1895 and 1906 he entered the *Hochschule für Bildende Künste*, an art academy, from which he dropped prematurely in 1908 because he was repelled by the idea of repainting a portrait over and over again until its main characteristic becomes an empty representation, lacking any natural human emotion.

In 1909 he spent six months in Munich, and the summer in Schleissheim. According to a further statement in his autobiography he pondered more than he painted during those months.⁷ One year later he followed his conscription call and fulfilled the infantry service in Braunschweig, as was obligatory for German men. The first time that he participated in an exhibition was with *Die Brücke* painters in May in the *Neue Secession* which was a split-off from the *Berliner Secession* that worked against the conservatism of the academies from 1898 onwards and was said to be the most cosmopolitan and battle-some group of artists that tried to steer away from the academy.⁸ Their strongest characteristic was their fight against provincialism and conformism which had

⁴ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, Erich Waske/Erich Waske, 08 July 1961.

⁵ Curt Bauer, *Erich Waske*, Cologne, Galerie Goyert, 2921, 05.

⁶ Kirchner, Joachim, *Erich Waske. Mit einer Selbstbibliographie*, Leipzig, Klinkhardt und Biermann, 1921, 15.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Peter Paret, *The Berlin Secession, Modernism and its Enemies in Imperial Germany*, Cambridge/Massachusetts/London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980, 1.

plagued the German art for decades.⁹ Only twelve years later however it had already become so gridlocked and conservative itself that it did not accept or acknowledge the art of the following generation. Hence the *Neue Secession* branched off, becoming a group for itself.

Waske furthered his studies two years later during a six-month stay in Paris. He must have found the works that he encountered at the Louvre intimidating as he described their force as *erdrückend* (back-braking).¹⁰ Despite that he painted *Schiff am Meer* (Boat by the Sea) which was exhibited in the *Juryfreie Ausstellung* (jury-free exhibition) in the same year.¹¹ As the name *Juryfrei*, meaning jury-free, suggests the exhibition was not bound to a certain direction of style and hence ideal for the young twenty-three year old artist. The main aim of such an exhibition was to give any artist the chance to show and sell his work, regardless of his fame or age. The motif of the ship by the sea re-occurred throughout his career and is the first effect of his childhood experiences by the ocean which have impressed him so deeply. In 1913 he then exhibits scenes from the life of Christ with the Berlin Secession.

In 1914 Waske was also represented in the first exhibition of the *Freie Secession* (Free Secession), a further split-off from the *Berliner Secession*. As Waske reflects in a subjective account about the war¹² the dreams of an undisturbed creating which he fostered in 1914 proved to be an illusion when the first bullets were fired in Sarajevo. On 2 Aug. 1914 the day came on which Waske left everything behind in order to fulfill his duty to fight in the war. He speaks about the painful parting with his parents and the sixty-three hour ride in a train crowded with reservists that delivered him to his troop in East Prussia.

They were prepared to fight shortly after their arrival and were given their weaponry and grindstone for the bayonet which as he claimed, served as a cruel foretaste to the short range fight that soon was to take place. Upon arriving in Eydtkuhnen they found their regiment already in flames. Until 1916 Waske served at the front against the Russian artillery.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Kirchner (1921), 16.

¹¹ Bauer, Curt, *Erich Waske – Viertes Buch der Galerie Goyert*, Cologne, Galerie Goyert, ca. 1922, 6.

¹² Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, War Account 'Meine Erinnerung an die Schlacht von Tannenberg', August 1964.

The fight at Gumbinnen started on 19 Aug. 1914 following weeks of tense marches of imminently expecting the enemy. He told about the dead bodies of both sides which he had seen and the battle in which his colonel was killed. The fight ended when the troop was needed in southern Prussia where 130,000 German soldiers found themselves in front of 500,000 Russians from the army lead by General Alexander Wassiljewitsch Samsonov. After further straining marches between 25 -29 Aug. 1914 the Samsanov army was surrounded. The horrors of screaming wounded soldiers and exhausting fights in the great battle at Tannenberg are further described.

The artist ended in hospital as a result of cold food, dry bread and weeks without showers or a change of clothes. Such experiences can certainly shatter a person and there is no doubt that the artist was affected by them, even if it only transformed him from a religious person to a person that devotes his entire life to his faith and the expression of this belief in art. The 70 meter long frieze about the world war which he finally came to create twenty years later was tragically and ironically destroyed in the Second World War. There are paintings on the same theme in the Malta collection. They are examples of his re-creating destroyed artworks, and should give a good idea of what the originals looked like (**pl. 147 – 158**).

On 08 Apr. 1918 he married Ursula Charlotte Sophie Thran (1889-1948) and became a member of the *Berliner Secession* in the same year. He was represented in the *Juryfreie Ausstellung* in 1919. Waske wrote a two-page autobiography for a book by Joachim Kirchner¹³ that was published in 1921.¹⁴ In the same year he came up with the concept of the reoccurring motif of the *Apocalypse*.

Waske travelled throughout his life and spend six months in Italy in 1924 as well as an unknown amount of time in southern France in 1927, the same period in which he attended the

¹³ There is no known evidence of Joachim Kirchner being next of kin to the famous painter Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. He was the director of the Rothschildbibliothek (library), Frankfurt (Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, letter Dr. Albrecht Mohr/Erich Waske, 1970). Private correspondence throughout Waske's life shows that they remained friends ever after the writing of the biography. Waske is also known to have given Kirchner the painting 'Boot in der Abendsonne' (Boat in the Evening Sun) as a gift (Berlinische Galiere, Erich Waske Akten, Joachim Kirchner/Erich Waske, 03 July 1962).

¹⁴ Joachim Kirchner, *Erich Waske. Mit einer Selbstbiographie*, Leipzig, Verlag Klinkhardt und Biermann, 1921.

Herbstausstellung (Autumn Exhibition), which just like the *Frühjahrsausstellung* (Spring Exhibition) was held annually by the Akademie der Künste (Academy of Fine Arts), Berlin.

Furthermore he took part in the *Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung* (Great Berlin Art Exhibition) and exhibited his: *Landschaft mit Mühlen* (landscape with mills).¹⁵ His *Christ cycle* for glass which consisted of twenty parts was probably started in 1927, finished the year after and exhibited in a major exhibition at the Lehrter trainstation. Motifs of the same topic are also found in the Malta collection (pl. 97 – 103).

It was apparently done for a competition which seemingly ended unfavourably for our artist despite the exhibition manager Prof. Sauerkoehl stating that Waske's work was 'hunderttausendmal stärker' ('hundred thousand times stronger')¹⁶ than that of his competitor Cesar Klein (1876 – 1954) who was an expressionist painter as well as stage designer. In the press it was also said that it is '1000 mal traurig, dass dieses geniale Werk nicht zur ausführung kam...' ('1000 times sad, that the ingenious work has not been executed...').¹⁷

1929 was a productive year for the artist and he worked on a large triptych of the *Apocalypse. A Cartoon for Glass* of the same theme was also produced as well as a cartoon of the *Göttermorgen* (of which different versions exist in the Malta collection (pl. 18 – 24)), the choir windows of the Pauluskirche (church of St. Paul) in Osnabrück (with representations of the four evangelists), the *Christuszyklus* (Christ Cycle) and *O ihr Kleingläubigen* (O you Skepticals) for the Martin Luther Hospital, Berlin.¹⁸

¹⁵ Johannes Rohr, 'Die Große Berliner Kunstausstellung 1927', *Monatshefte für Literatur Kunst und Wissenschaft*, iii, 2 (1927), 79.

¹⁶ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, private handwritten note, Undated.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Written correspondence as well as a visit to the hospital deemed the work lost because no one of the personnel had ever heard of it.

He also won the first prize in the German competition for painting on glass during that year.¹⁹ The major show where he was represented was held by the *Kunstverein Hannover E.V* (Art Association, Hannover), and took place from 2 Feb – 24 Apr. There he exhibited works called *Mädchengruppe*, *Südliche Landschaft* and *Dünenlandschaft*, about which nothing but their name is known.

Waske probably took part in the Spring Exhibition, yet it can only be said with certainty that he did take part in the autumn exhibition together with further 155 painters. He worked on two triptychs for the Matthaeskirche (Church of St. Matthew) and created the stained glass windows for this church.²⁰

The following year, the Berlin Secession dedicated a solo exhibition to him. Other than this, documentation²¹ gives the impression that Waske was still in a financially difficult situation as he had to ask the Prussian Academy of Fine Arts for support which was granted to him in the form of a one-off amount of 80 Reichsmark.²²

Waske painted *Bergpredigt* (Sermon of the Mount) for *Sgraffito*²³ which was destroyed in the war²⁴ as well as the Gold Mosaic in the Höckerkirche (church), Berlin in 1932.²⁵

In 1933 his time in the *Berliner Secession* ended and he once again took part in the spring exhibition. The following year, he won the mosaic competition of the German Museum in Munich. He managed to paint the *Weltkrieg* (World War) 1914-18 mosaic frieze for the Tannenberg national monument²⁶ as well as 6 glass paintings for the Ehrenhalle at the Funkturm in Berlin in 1935, which were later demolished in the war.²⁷

¹⁹ *Gemälde und Monumental-Entwürfe*, probably self-published, terminus post quem 1962.

²⁰ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, letter, Curt Horn/Erich Waske, 05 Feb. 1960.

²¹ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, letter, president of the academy/cash office, 01 May 1931.

²² Reichsmark is the German currency used in the time of the Third Reich.

²³ Layers of plaster tinted in different colours that are applied to a wall.

²⁴ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, letter, Erich Waske/H. Hoefer (District Major), 04 Feb. 1968.

²⁵ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, newspaper article cutout, 'Die Kirche aus Beton und Klinkern', Unknown Newspaper, Undated.

²⁶ The Tannenberg National monument was commissioned before the First World War. Waske's work was never shown due to the outbreak of the war which led to the destruction of the monument. (Transcription of *Das*

When the Nazi regime had the power to dominate and manipulate Germany two years later, the art scene was not spared. Waske was told that he would no longer be allowed to paint if he did not stop working in the expressionist style.

Under Hitler Expressionism was mostly considered as *entartet* (degenerated) and Hitler took effective action against anything that did not correspond to the racial ideology of the Reich. He confiscated and eliminated works within public institutions. Waske was no exception to this and lost a minimum of three works, one of which was taken from the National Gallery in Berlin.²⁸

The Third Reich politics portrayed great art as that in support of the social and racial ideologies of the National-Socialist government. Such work was therefore not supposed to reflect the modern everyday life, but was rather meant to express harmonic calmness and to depict life as rural and peaceful.

Links with health and the human race were often established and German citizens and soldiers were generally glorified.²⁹ One example of this can be seen in *Reichsparteitag in Nürnberg* (NSDAP party convention in Nuremberg), showing the NSDAP- and SA-parade by Ernst Vollbehre that was painted in 1933, found in the German Historical Museum.³⁰

A further strategic move against modern art was the famous 1937 *Entartete Kunst Ausstellung* (Degenerated Art Exhibition) Exhibition in Munich where pictures that were categorized degenerative were exhibited in a clustered and highly manipulative manner. An impression of disturbed and mentally ill artists was given in the gloomy atmosphere in which the works were exhibited with negative and highly offensive statements all over the walls.

Ostpreußenblatt (Newspaper of East Prussia), 22 Feb. 1964, retrieved on 06 Mar. 2012 from: <http://www.erich-waske-galerie.de/motiverahmen.htm>.

²⁷ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, letter, Erich Waske/H. Hoefer (District Major), 04 Feb. 1968 (438).

²⁸ *Galerie Erich Waske*, 'Bildersammlung', Retrieved on 04 December 2011 from: http://www.erich-waske-galerie.de/katalog/album/slides/sonnenuntergang1931_entartet_nationalgalerie.html.

²⁹ Florida Center for Instructional Technology, College of Education, University of South Florida, 'Nazi Approved Art', *A Teachers Guide to the Holocaust*, 2005, Retrieved on 28 August 2011 from: <http://fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/arts/ARTREICH.HTM>.

³⁰ *Deutsches Historisches Museum*, 'The Collections of the German Historical Museum, Reichsparteitag in Nürnberg', Retrieved on 04 Dec. 2011 from: http://www.dhm.de/ENGLISH/sammlungen/grafik/gr93_55.html.

A letter³¹ reveals that also artworks by Waske were exhibited in this exhibition as they were categorised degenerated due to what was called *unerwünschte formgebung* (unwanted design).

A darker episode of Waske's life took place in 1939 when he was accused of being a full blooded Jew by an architect called Georges Jaster. The accusation together with the fact that his grandfather's name was Aron led to the consequence of Waske having to tediously provide certification and documentation on his family history as well as that of his wife in order to prove that he was being wrongly accused and that he was in fact of Arian descend. He in turn pressed charge against the architect.³²

Waske is recorded³³ as a member of the *Reichskammer der Bildenden Künste* (Reich Chamber of the Fine Arts) in 1943, an essential institution in the third Reich with the aim to aid artists whose art accorded with the ideologies of the government and to suppress those whose art was not in line with Nazi ideas. In order to exert control membership was obligatory for every productive artist living in Germany.

In the night of 2 Aug. 1943 Waske's apartment and atelier were damaged by a bombardment as is certificated by the NSDAP.³⁴ Amongst the *oeuvre* that he lost here, the *Christ cycle* of 1928 as well as the *Apocalypse* of 1929 was destroyed. He turned away from graphic art and aquarelle after this experience towards painting on a monumental scale. He was then evacuated in eastern Prussia in Prerow, Zingst and was once again sent to serve the home guard and the German Armed Forces.

The question of Waske's possible collaboration with the Nazi is complex. There is no documentary evidence of interrogation by the allies after the war. On the other hand there is an entry in the file index of the NSDAP which clearly states that Waske was a member (1933-1945).

³¹ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, letter, Herbert Wolgast/ErichWaske, 27 Jan. 1964.

³² Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, BG-AR 1/2012, 1-23, enactment against Geroges Jaster, 05 Jan. 1940.

³³ Bundesarchiv Berlin, RK/G91, correspondence, Landsleiter der Reichskammer der Bildenden Künste (country manager of the Reichs Chamber of Fine Arts), 24 Dec. 1943.

³⁴ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, BG-AR, 01-23, attestation by the N.S.D.A.P, undated.

Another notable point is that he had previously been attacked by Nazi-Journalists for exhibiting in collaboration with Jews, something that runs contrary to any Nazi behaviour.³⁵

Waske's financial situation further deteriorated after the war to a point where it is known that he was supported by the social welfare office with 104 Deutsche Mark every month, a support that was stopped and compensated as he entered the state-of emergency-project where he started to earn DM 250 monthly. From the 1 Dec. 1945 onwards he could not be given any more work in the name of this project.

Waske's wife passed away in 1948. He re-painted the *Apocalypse* triptych in 1949 and the twenty parted Christ Cycle was once again started during this year. He also added on another four parts that were not originally there, which is probably the reason why he finished the work in the subsequent year.

From the 26 Aug. - 23 Sep. 1950 he held a cooperative exhibition called *Malerei und Plastik* (Painting and sculpture) with Louise Stomps (1900-1988), a German painter and sculptor. In this Exhibition Waske is represented with forty paintings and two lithographs in Berlin Neukoeln.³⁶

Another show followed from 10 Apr. - 4 Nov. 1951 in the Oberlicht Hall of the Schöneberg Local council. The re-painted *Christ cycle* was exhibited here together with the *Apocalypse*. The following two years he exhibited his works once again at the same local council.

In 1953 Waske worked on a 24 x 10m Ceiling painting for the *Oberschule* (Highschool) Kreuzberg in Berlin, two scale works (**pl. 9 – 10**) of which are in the Malta collection and give a good idea about what work looked like before its destruction.

A letter from the Senate of Education on 9 Nov. 1954 promised Waske a pension of DM 250 at the age of 65.³⁷ He was however given a monthly pension of 200 DM as from 1 Dec. 1954.

³⁵ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, newspaper cutout, 'Waske in der Berliner Seccession', Dr. Eska, newspaper and date unknown.

³⁶ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, BG - AR, 1/2012, 56, invitation to the Exhibition *Malerei und Plastik*, 1950.

A figural mural for the main hall of the school for economics in Berlin, Steglitz follows as well as another Exhibition at the Oberlicht Hall in the Schöneberg local council which apparently became so popular that it was then repeated again in 1955 and 1956.

In April 1957 the artist finally got compensated with 488 DM by the government for the disruption of his career in reference with the destruction of his work in 1943, as well as the lost years in military service. His financial situation however remained severe and on 12 June 1957, he received 300 DM one-off payment by the *Künstlerhilfe*, an official artist support³⁸.

In the same year he painted the 80m Mosaic Frieze *Welterschaffung* (Creation of the World) and had an exhibition dedicated to his seventieth birthday two years later in March 1959 after which he married Hertha Gertrud Lücke (born Neumann, 24 June 1926) in May. He also took part in the *Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung* (Great Berlin Art Exhibition) and exhibited works called *Mohnblumen* (Red Poppy), *Masurischer See* (Sea in Masuria), and *Abend an der Mole* (Evening by the Mole).

In 1959 the great summarizing exhibition in the local council Steglitz was held as well as an exhibition that lasted until 27 Jan. 1960 called the *Ring-Ausstellung* (Ring-Exhibition) at the *Haus am Waldsee*.

On First June 1960 and the two succeeding years Waske gained further compensations by the government for the disruption of his career during the war, with the amounts given to him varying between 522 DM and 586 DM.

He spent a holiday in Italy in July 1961³⁹ and travelled to Brione⁴⁰ in 1962, the same year in which he sent his *Weltwarnung* (warning to the world) to the *Juryfreie Ausstellung*.⁴¹ The year

³⁷ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, BG - AR, 7/2004, 56, letter, Senator for Internal Affairs/Erich Waske, 10 Apr. 1957.

³⁸ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, BG - AR, 7/2004, 56, letter, Hans Bott (Office of the Federal President)/Erich Waske, 12 June 1957.

³⁹ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, letter draft, Erich Waske (artist)/Erich Waske, Undated.

⁴⁰ Brione is a community in the district Locarno in the canton Tessin in Switzerland.

⁴¹ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, application Juryfreie Kunstausstellung Berlin 1962, 20 Mar. 1962.

after he created a coloured design for a glass painting called *O ihr Kleingläubigen* (O You Scepticals).

He furthermore fabricated *Das Goldene Zeitalter* (The Golden Age) in 1963 and on 19 Nov 1964 became a member of the *Verein Berliner Künstler* (Association of Berlin Artists) which is the oldest art association in Germany, established in 1841. Its aim was to advocate artists financially in difficult economic times, giving them opportunities to sell their work by means of exhibitions and appealing to the government in various ways to make the lives of artists easier.

Together with the pension of his wife and his own, he lived from the amount of 843, 50 DM monthly in 1964. A letter⁴² of 1962 in which Kirchner's help to sell Waske's works is stated, it is noted that the asking price for paintings amounted to a mere 500 DM, and that people still found them too expensive.⁴³

In the years 1963 and 1964 Waske's production dramatically declined as his wife fell seriously sick as from November 1963.⁴⁴ Waske sent works to the GroBeKa in both 1964 and 1965; they were however declined in both years.

In 1965 a letter suggested that he probably accompanied his sick wife for a treatment at a health resort in the Black Forest.⁴⁵

It is certain that he held another exhibition from the 1 June – 30 June 1965 at the Schöneberg local council, after his works were declined by the GroBeKa in March.⁴⁶

⁴² Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, letter, Joachim Kirchner/Erich Waske, 31 Mar. 1962.

⁴³ It can be taken from a letter by Joachim Kirchner to Waske (Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, 1. Mar. 1962) that an average person earned approximately 1500 DM pcm at the time. This however is merely to give an idea about the value of money at the time and can in no way be taken as a statistical fact.

⁴⁴ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, letter, Herbert Wolgast/Erich Waske, 08 Dec. 1964; Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, letter, Erich Waske/Herbert Wolgast, 04 Dec. 1964.

⁴⁵ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, letter draft, Erich Waske/Joachim Kirchner, undated.

⁴⁶ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske, letter, GBK/Waske, 18 Mar. 1956.

The same unfortunate refusal occurred when he sent *Frauenkopf* (Female Head), *Winterlandschaft* (winter landscape) and *Evening by the Sea* (evening by the sea) to the GroBeKa the following year, Apart from that he spent a holiday in Mittenwald in this year.⁴⁷

In 1969 he created *Das Grosse Gericht* (The Last Judgment), and took part in the *Juryfreie Ausstellung* where he exhibited *Das goldene Zeitalter* (The Golden Age). He held a further exhibition from 17 Jan. - 16 Feb. 1969 at the *Verein Berliner Künstler*.

The following year his financial situation was still dim enough for him to need health support of 1000 DM for his sick wife which was granted to him on 23 Feb. 1970 by the protestant consistory of Brandenburg.

In 1971 Waske registered his *Das grosse Gericht* (The Last Judgement), a design of which is found in Malta (pl. 55), for the *Juryfreie Ausstellung*. The year after, he exhibits *Sonnenuntergang* (Sunset) as part of the group *Verein Berliner Künstler* at the *Freie Berliner Kunstausstellung*. As numerous works by Waske carry that name it is still impossible to tell what this particular work looked like.

The *Juryfreie Ausstellung* held 03 Apr. – 1. May 1977 is the last documented exhibition that Waske takes part in before his death on 26 June 1978 and his inhumation on 04 July of the same year.

At least two exhibitions were held after his passing away, one of which took place from Sunday 30 Aug. 1981 in the *Parkhaus, Englischer Garten* in Berlin. This exhibition was exclusively dedicated to him and showed pieces from his abatement. The *Christ Cycle* was exhibited in 1982 at the *Grosse Juryfreie Ausstellung*.

Therefore Erich Waske's early years were coined by frequent travelling journeys to the sea, something that the artist followed up throughout the rest of his life. His ponderous nature and the abandonment of his studies at the academy in favour of studying at the Louvre suggest his

⁴⁷ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, Jucunda Wagner-Weinmeister, 05 May 1966.

questioning and rebellious nature and hence two early attributes typical of artistic leaders of the Expressionist movement. One can see how heavily the political and social context had an impact on the artist's life as he suffered from financial problems ever after the war and his productivity came to a halt during his battles. These factors in combination with the loss of his oeuvre in 1943 kept him from focusing on new designs as he decided to repaint most of his work.

An example of this is the picture *Stürmische Hafeneinfahrt* (stormy port entrance) (pl. 40) of the Malta collection which dates from 1968, two such motifs exist in the *National Galerie* in Berlin dating from 1930.

Thus one is also led to question how Waske's style would have developed if he instead of repainting his destroyed works had had the chance of a continuous workflow with the benefit of focusing on other European artistic currents without interruptions. After the war Waske lived an even more reclusive life, focusing on nothing but his work.

Chapter 2 - Erich Waske and German Expressionism

2.1. The evolution of German Expressionism and Erich Waske

The term Expressionism has not always been used exclusively for a German artistic movement in the first half of the twentieth Century. This can be seen in the catalogue of the XXII Berlin Secession of 1911 where young French Fauvists and Cubists were listed under the heading of 'Expressionism'. In the book *Expressionismus - Die Kunstwende* (Expressionism, the Turning Point in Art) by Herwath Waldon, Cubists, Italian Futurists and *Der Blaue Reiter* are equally found under this term. In the book *Der Expressionismus* (Expressionism), Paul Fechter - a German Theater-and Art Critic, author and editor, finally limited the stylistic category to the *Brücke* and *Der Blaue Reiter* groups.⁴⁸

There is no clear definition of Expressionism. A good idea of the essence of the movement is expressed by Vogt and has been cited in the magazine *Art in America* in 1981: 'Expressivity – becomes synonym for an intense desire to utter, to communicate from the “universe of the interior”'.⁴⁹

In this 'interior' the author refers to the turbulences in the artist's soul which reflect the tense, hectic and deeply disturbed social order in German society at the time. The difference between Expressionism to the previous German art lies in the fact that it actively fed from actual happenings in the country and around it. It is essentially a revolt against the academism and provincialism that disturbed the Expressionists, because it produced art which they felt lacked the essence of creativity – emotion, passion and intuition.

A direct reaction of the developing art groups was hence to fill their artworks with pathos, an element which then became very characteristic for the movement.

⁴⁸ Norbert Wolf, *Kirchner*, Cologne, Taschen GmbH, 2003, 9.

⁴⁹ Donald Gordon, 'Expressionism: Art by Antithesis', *Art in America*, LXVIII, 3 (1981), 100-103.

It has been said that finding a universal definition of the movement has remained a delicate task until today. This is partially due to the fact that there was no even and parallel development in the artists and their groups. Ultimately there were too many stimuli to respond to in the contrasting German localities.

This can be seen in Waske who is no different and whose path is not linear. His honesty always made him test his own capability and led him to experiment in various techniques and different creative ways of expression throughout his development.⁵⁰

The main groups which represented Expressionism were *Die Brücke* (Dresden), *Der Blaue Reiter* (Munich) and *Die Berliner Secession*. It is important to note however, that the latter was founded long before the first Expressionist works were created and therefore went along with previous movements, especially Impressionism.

All the groups reacted to the various 'isms' of the avant-garde. The first two mainly differed in the fact that while *Die Brücke* artists worked closely knit together in a communal studio, the *Der Blaue Reiter* artist always retained a greater individuality and independency from his colleagues.⁵¹

When the first *Blaue Reiter* artists Alexej von Jawlensky (1864 – 1941) and Wassily Kandinsky (1866 – 1944) met, they had not only in common that they were able colourists, but also their affinity with the primitive earthiness of Russian Folk Art. Under Anton Ažbe⁵² (1862 – 1905), Kandinsky understood the advantages of pure colour (meaning unmixed) over the dark palettes of the academy.⁵³

Given that Kandinsky was born in 1866 one can imagine that years of art practice had already passed and therefore he had already developed a personal style when Expressionism came about. This is different with younger artists such as Waske.

⁵⁰ Kirchner (1921), 4.

⁵¹ Berry Herbert, *German Expressionism, Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter*, London, Jupiter Books, 1983, 98.

⁵² Anton Ažbe was a Yugoslav painter who opened an art school in Munich in 1891.

⁵³ Herbert, 101.

A poster for the first *Phalanx* exhibition in Munich, today in the Städtische Galerie, was based on a woodcut of 1991 and serves as a great example of Kandinsky's early graphic style. The free form of the letters and the pictorial imagery are designed in the Jugendstil idiom.⁵⁴

This epoch of about twenty years took place at the turn of the twentieth century. It is known under different names in different countries such as Modernisme, Stil Modern, Wiener Secession, or Art Nouveau.

The balancing of light and shade which is evenly distributed across the work as well as the sensibility of the undulating line make the piece characteristic of the movement⁵⁵ and the way it will be felt in many other Expressionists.

Erich Heckel (1883 – 1979), Fritz Bleyl (1880 – 1966) and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880 – 1938) were amongst the most important leaders of the future *Die Brücke* group. They chose expressive honesty over droughtmanship at a very early stage, and held that a combination of spontaneity and agitation made up the expressive force that was so fundamental to their art.

An old butcher's house was made their first communal studio. The place itself became a world of its own, adorned with their self-crafted flamboyant creations. It was free from manufactured objects which they felt were empty and lacked true creativity. Their way to work was commune-like and they often held passionate discussions about literature and philosophy in which they favoured Brion, Boudelaire, Whitman, Heinrich Heine (a 19th Century romantic Poet, Author and journalist from Germany) as well as Holz.⁵⁶

A further attribute of the early graphic technique of *die Brücke* was adopted from the post-impressionist approach of Toulouse Lautrec's (1864 – 1901) sinuous line in lithographs.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, 103 - 104.

⁵⁵ *ibid*.

⁵⁶ *ibid*, 13.

The clear black and white contrasts by Felix Vallotton's (1865 – 1925) contemporary revival of the medieval woodcut medium had further repercussions on the early graphic technique of *Die Brücke*.⁵⁷

From all the influential Post-Impressionists it was probably Van Gogh (1853 – 1890) who had the greatest bearing on the young expressionist artists. An example of this can be seen in Oskar August Macke's *Vegetable Fields* of 1911 in the Kunstmuseum in Bonn.⁵⁸

The dependence on this Dutch master apparently had no limit and was a stark point of criticism for the older aquarellist Emil Nolde (1867 – 1957), who was one of the representatives of German Expressionism. His fellow artist's harking back to van Gogh was one of the reasons why he did not intend to stay with *Die Brücke*.

There was also Edward Munch (1863 – 1944), a Norwegian Expressionist whose pictures were very personal and inspired from tragedies in his private life. He was one of the most important forerunners of Expressionism as his paintings were very much centered on man's inner instability. This and the symbolic colours applied in flat surface patterns become a vital influence on the Brücke. Berry Herbert validly says that:

His concise graphic style – a synthesis of Jugendstil form and symbolist content – also impressed them by its ability to invest the real world with the darkness of nightmare, exposing corners of the mind previously hidden from view.⁵⁹

The similarity of Munch's thought to that of the Expressionists' becomes more obvious than ever with these words, and yet they denied any influence. This was not always the case and might have been triggered by the fact that he refused their invitation to collaborate in an exhibition, together with his denial of being responsible for their brutalized forms.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ Van Gogh Museum Communications Department, 'Vincent van Gogh's Influence on Expressionism Explored in Van Gogh Museum Exhibition', *Van Gogh Museum Amsterdam*, Retrieved on 22 Mar. 2012 from: <http://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/vgm/index.jsp?page=73931&lang=en>.

⁵⁹ Herbert, 26, 28.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 28.

An alluding to Munch can be seen in the Waske's painting *Spaziergang* (Walk) (pl. 7) in its bleak atmosphere. While he was studying at the academy in 1907, *Die Brücke* lost a member because Kirchner gained in fame and is the more inventive one by 1907.

Nolde could not accept to be overshadowed by him and together with this annoyance leaves the group with the sarcastic comment that the name *die Brücke* is misleading because according to him the group should more accurately be called the 'Van Gogheists'.⁶¹ This shows how Nolde got increasingly bothered about the manic clinging to the style of van Gogh, whose great innovation was slowly turned into a 'demented and unconvincing formula.'⁶²

In the same year a fresh breeze swept through German expressionism as the effect of fauvism starts to be felt more intensely in their work. One instance of this influence can be seen in Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's 1909 *Girl under a Japanese umbrella*, Düsseldorf Kunstsammlung Nordrhein – Westfalen (fig. 1). The way Kirchner's girlfriend Dodo is here distorted and crammed into a narrow space would not have been found in a work of Henri Matisse (1869 - 1954) for example but yet the fauve influence can be seen in the flat planes of spotted colour.



Fig. 1

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Girl under a Japanese Parasol*, 1909, Düsseldorf Kunstsammlung, Nordrhein-Westfalen

⁶¹ *ibid*, 36.

⁶² *ibid*.

Matisse's suppression of illusion and his radical simplification of style were appreciated by the Germans due to his pictures' dominance of flat planes of luminous, often anti-naturalistic colour. Unlike Matisse however, the German Expressionists were not after a playful style of purity and cheerfulness. Instead they injected their work with an unconcealed nervousness, agitation, daringly brutalized emotion and troubling subject matter.

Waske's *Tänzer* (Dancers) (**fig.2**) are the clearest example of the artist alluding to Matisse as becomes very obvious when comparing it to the latter's *La Danse II* (The Dance II) (**fig. 3**).



Fig. 2

Erich Waske, *Tänzer* (Dancers), 041 x 070 cm, Date Unknown, Gouache on Hardboard, Malta Collection



Fig. 3

Henri Matisse, *La Danse II* (The Dance II), 260 × 391 cm, 1910, Oil on Canvas, Hermitage, St. Petersburg

After having left the academy in 1908, Waske travelled to Munich the year after where the young academic generation still perceived the world with impressionistic eyes. His summer stay in Schleissheim was overriding for it is here that one can see his increasingly intense and glowing colour developing.⁶³

In the meantime, further experiments in style can be seen in *Die Brücke* artist August Macke's (1887 – 1914) *Sunny Garden* of 1908 which is found in a private collection. The work can be seen as a marriage of the two French Impressionists Renoir and Seurat; Renoir being represented in natural subject matter and the latter artist in dazzling pointillism.⁶⁴ The painting is a good example of how perceptive these young artists were to external styles.

Similar to Gauguin, the expressionists became increasingly concerned with the need to counteract the suffocating traditions and moral hypocrisies of European society which they worried would threaten the 'very well-spring of life itself'.⁶⁵ This can be seen in Kirchner's various street scenes of Berlin or Paris for example, where he created a disturbing picture of artificiality.

Like the symbolist painter Paul Gauguin (1848 – 1903) before, Heckel amongst others felt the urge to run away from the city in hope to find instant renewal through the contact with nature. He hence went to Moritzburg with models in order to dedicate his time exclusively to painting. In the *Die Brücke's* works of the time one finds an aggressive and urgent subjectivity which could never be found in Gauguin's canvases. The works of this period can probably be seen as the most violently distorted of the Expressionists work and they convey the rapidness and spontaneity with which they were painted. This revealed their 'restlessness and craving for instantaneous release.'⁶⁶ Furthermore they are characterized by their unaesthetic figural forms and glaring colour which adds to the brutal effect. At the same time they convey intensity unmatched by Waske who was still in a more experimental phase.

⁶³ Bauer, 05.

⁶⁴ Herbert, 144.

⁶⁵ *ibid*, 48.

⁶⁶ *ibid*.

The *Liebespaar*⁶⁷ (Couple) by Waske, a decade later however might count as the most expressive, nervous and agitated of all his figural works known.

Gauguinesque traits are also found in Jawlensky who was a German-Russian artist mostly associated with the *Der Blaue Reiter* group of Kandinsky and animal painter Franz Marc (1880 – 1916). His work *Landscape at Murnau* (**fig. 4**) is a good example of the cloisonnist and symbolist influence in 1909. These idiosyncrasies were probably acquired through a friendship with Jan Verkade (1886 – 1946), a Dutch painter who befriended Paul Gauguin and commonly used the basic cloisonnist system of ‘dark outlines, simplified forms and rich, warm colour harmonies.’⁶⁸ The elements reflect the Pont-Aven Group and can also be seen in Waske’s works *Wasser Trägerin* (Water Carrier) (**Fig. 5**).



Fig. 4

**Alexei Jawlensky, Landscape at Murnau, 050.5 x 054. 5 cm, 1909, Oil on Cardboard,
Städtische Galerie, Munich**

⁶⁷ *Galerie Erich Waske, 'Ausstellungen'*, Retrieved on 27 Jan. from: 2012 http://www.erich-waske-galerie.de/ausstellungen.htm#1950_.

⁶⁸ Herbert, 119.

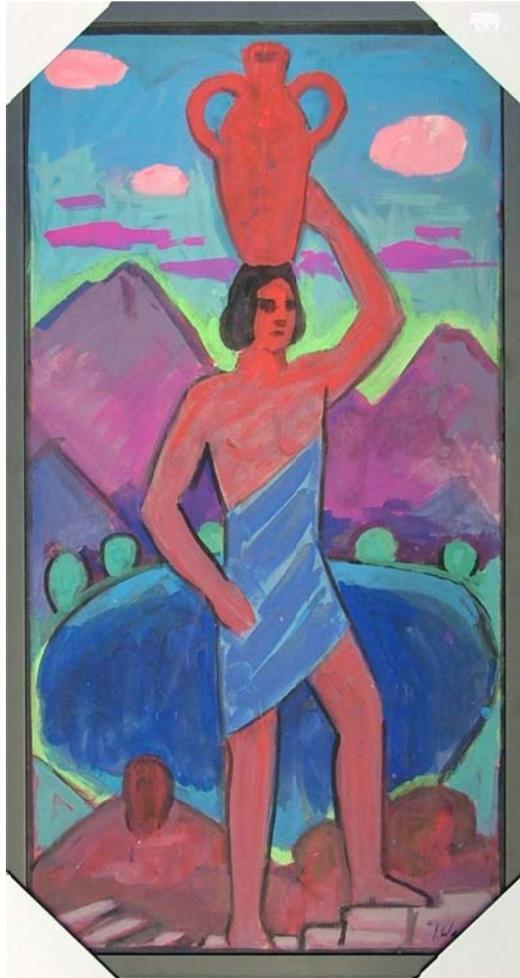


Fig. 5

Erich Waske, Wasser Trägerin (Water Carrier), 088 x 046 cm, Date Unknown, Gouache on Unknown Support

Cloissonist outlines however are not the only elements that the expressionists came to adopt from Gauguin. It was the latter's idea to return to an original state that is uncorrupted of civilization that led them to get equally inspired by primitive art such as African masks or sculptures from the south pacific islands. This can be seen already in 1908, in Kirchner's *Fränzi in front of a carved chair* in the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, where the chair looks as if directly taken from the Museum of Ethnology in Dresden.

The inspiration of African sculpture led to a greater angularity and sparseness of form in their paintings in general. This can be seen in Karl Schmidt-Rotluff's (1884 -1976) *Girl with outstretched arm*, Leicestershire museum and art galleries, 1911.⁶⁹

1912 - 1913 the majority of the Expressionist artists were split between Robert Delaunay's (1885 – 1941) Orphism and Italian futurism. Despite Delaunay's presence in the *Der Blaue Reiter* group, Franz Marc denied interest in his orphic cubism. Kirchner from the other fraction interestingly was directly drawn to and influenced by these ideas in 1912.

Having played with expressive form before his Parisian stay in that year, it seems that Waske's visit hindered him from developing to his full innovative potential at first. He was taken aback in front of the masterpieces of the Louvre, and it suddenly felt pretentious to even attempt to become a master of such quality. He concluded that his main aim for the moment should be the full mastery of nature.⁷⁰

His pictures from this period are clayey-bound, and while he so enthusiastically reverted to nature other artists were in the middle of their expressionist career. His works are '*mattfarbig*' (in matt colours) and convey '*zeichnerische struktur*' (graphical structures) according to an article of 1919.⁷¹ They show an entirely changed attitude and working method in terms of technique and perception. An extremely lyrical touch is conveyed and nature is seen in gray moods. Such dull colour can be seen in *Landschaft mit Haus und Mohnblumen* (Landscape with House and Poppy) (**fig. 6**) which is however of unknown date.

⁶⁹ Herbert, 56-77.

⁷⁰ Kirchner (1921), 5-6.

⁷¹ Hanns Schulze, 'Erich Waske – Berlin', *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, xxii, 1919, 17.

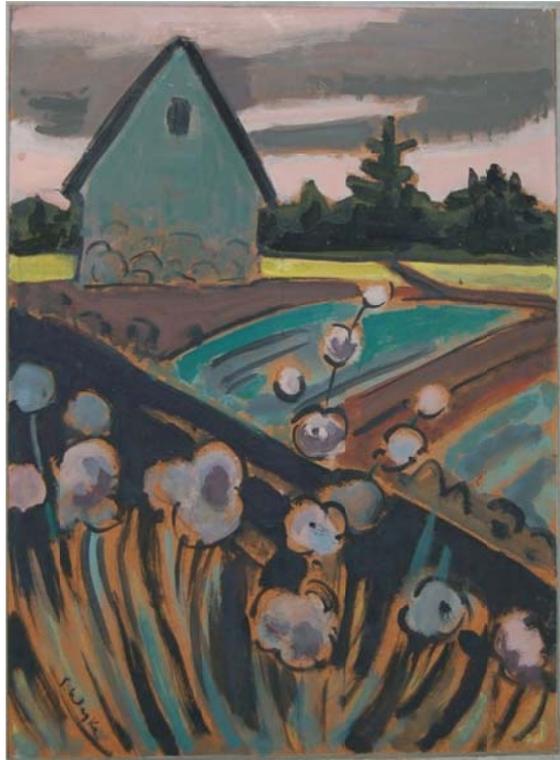


Fig. 6

**Erich Waske, Landschaft mit Haus und Mohnblumen (Landscape with House and Poppy),
Measurements Unknown, Size Unknown, Senat Berlin**

There are two different writings which refer to a Parisian work that depicts the interior of a café. One of them is Joachim Kirchner's contribution to Waske's autobiography and the other is an article by Dr. Hanns Schulze of 1919. In these texts the pictures are talked about in extremely similar ways both in description as well as formal analysis, so that it is possible that they refer to the same piece. If such is the case, the work which is described by Kirchner as the masterpiece of this period, was painted from memory just after Waske's return from Paris. This would have been done as a means of testing himself and how well he could memorise nature.

Waske here is praised for depicting the bourgeoisie guests with a memorable and splendid instinctiveness. They are spontaneously and confidently taken from fluctuating life.⁷²

Schulze makes reference to this work in saying that it was painted with 'sichere Technik, ungewöhnlich starkes Formgefühl und viel Geschmack in der Komposition' (confidence in technique, a superior feeling for form as well as a good taste in composition).⁷³ There is a rhythmic element that encloses, unifies and knits the picture together. This is an attribute which will remain in his work throughout his career.

Another picture from the period, *Blick auf Dächer* (View on Roofs) hints at cubism in terms of geometrical forms nested in space, and thus shows that his stay in Paris did not only interrupt the flow of his artistic development but also worked to his advantage by bringing a fresh breeze of creative inspiration into his working.

Likewise Erich Heckel, a painter as well as designer, and Karl Schmidt-Rotluff (1884 - 1976), who was a painter and sculptor excelled in cubist forms and hence found a new way in their personal vision of a society that lay in utter confusion.

Kirchner's attitude was probably equally pessimistic, as one can see in his harsh pictorial criticism of the chaos and artificiality behind the dynamic nightlife of prostitutes and cabaret in Berlin. Kirchner was extremely shocked about this kind of atmosphere when he first moved to the capital and expressed his views on the subject in a number of street scenes. In *Five Women on the Street*, in the Wallraf Richartzs Museum, Cologne Kirchner translates his horror onto the canvas, conveying an extreme state of nervous tension and excitement in acidic unnatural colours and serrated brush strokes. The bizarre prostitutes which are showing off the 'unflattering fashions' of the day are trapped in a radically distorted and flattened world.⁷⁴

⁷² Kirchner (1921), 6.

⁷³ Schulze, 17.

⁷⁴ Herbert, 83.

In the three years following the war Waske went through a number of artistic changes. The artist at first reverts to stylistic tendencies from his pre-war period as apparently could be seen in the now lost *Abenddämmerung am Wannsee*⁷⁵ (Twilight at the Wannsee).

However, he soon abandons the gray moods in favour of Greenish tones, which is why Kirchner in Waske's biography introduced the term '*grüne Epoche*' (Green-Epoch).⁷⁶

By this time Waske could still not release the wires of naturalism completely, and it was still impossible for him to translate his innermost onto the canvas in a free manner and without restraint.

A parallel between Waske and Schmidt-Rotluff has to be spun here, when the latter after the war dealt with his horrible experiences in woodcuts and woodcarvings. It is not however the artistic medium that links him to Waske, but the fact that he becomes increasingly religious in his themes, something that Waske reverted to after the war as well.

In favour of monumentality and greatness, Waske abandoned his almost miniature detailing that was actual before the war and increasingly simplified the forms given in nature. Unfortunately sketches and drawings from this period are lost, but it has been said that they showed this monumentality, clarity and strength of composition even more than his final works that lacked the strong contour which instead was disrupted and blurred.⁷⁷

By the end of 1917 Waske moved closer to the desired aim of free expressive design, meaning that he slowly rid himself of his formalistic concerns in order to concentrate on nothing else but to express his innermost onto the canvas. In his following development he establishes a name in the circle of his peers and friends of Expressionism.

In 1918 colouristic facets gained importance. Heavy colours such as a dry and muted reddish-brown, a heavy emerald and almost black greens, a dry yellow, pinkish-greys and

⁷⁵ Bauer, 10.

⁷⁶ Kirchner (1921), 7.

⁷⁷ Schulze, 18.

violets are whose visionary character is then heightened even more by a bright occasional cadmium, are the norm.⁷⁸

Contrary to his use of contour in 1917, his outline gets stronger and more audacious than ever in 1919. *Frau im Mondlicht* is the forerunner of the following colourful epoch and depicts a woman standing on the left side of a window, drawing the curtains aside while glancing out into the moonlight.

Apart from his colouristic mastery, Waske here intelligently tries to tone down the harshness of the vertical with the emphatic use of diagonals. The combination of the woman's arm and the flowing of the curtain create a continuous line across the picture. The line of the hair follows parallel to it for the most part and then joins into the vertical of the curtain. This compositional device supports the soft, lyrical sounds of the emotional content.⁷⁹

In spring 1919 his colours became even livelier and acquire an intense glow. The compositions start to show a new and stronger palette. Examples of this new way is the *Landschaftsvision* (Vision of a Landscape), a late version of which is found in the Malta collection (pl. 38).

Landscapes are the theme in which Waske's expressive tendencies come across most clearly. They show his abandoning of all the extra detail at the time and his aiming at getting across across a pure impression of nature.⁸⁰

The 1920s are a period in which the apex of expression in his life is reached and his picture plane gets ever shallower. In accordance with Expressionists, the artist stylizes line and in connection with colouring pushes his objects ever more towards the picture surface. He did his utmost to simplify his monumental division of picture plane, a process which above all starts in his Landscapes.

⁷⁸ Schulze, 17.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

The original *Landschaftsvision* (Vision of a Landscape) of 1921, unfortunately known from black-and-white pictures only, is an example of this. The painting shows extremely sharp mountain tops which stand in direct contrast with the round shapes of the clouds between them. This juxtaposition is another typical attribute to this creative period of the artist. The thick shaft of light as well as the hills and cloud formations show extreme simplification of form.⁸¹

His colour scheme once again changes in these years. Sharper contours and minimized modeling are the result of large areas of colour. The retina of the eye recognizes greater effects of contour by the enhancing of colouristic contrasts on the canvas. His cadmium reds and emerald greens create a cosmic glow which characterizes this period.⁸²

In the astrological magazine *Neue Sternblätter*, 1932 it is claimed that Waske is one of the rare strong and unique personalities that keep up their fame even beyond the dispelling of the movement,⁸³ and a letter by Joachim Kirchner to Waske claims that contemporary art has moved far away from an inner-religious and cosmic perception of art because of its abstract playfulness. This however is not the case with Waske who retains his spiritual idiosyncrasies throughout his work. He also says that he is happy that the press still speaks highly of Waske's expressionist style despite the strong propaganda of abstract art.⁸⁴

2.2. Social and Political Aspects of Expressionism.

The Expressionist era is formed by social and spiritual torment. The terror filled time is shown in the style of the artist's canvases by means of glaring colour and distorted figures, but

⁸¹ Bauer, 17.

⁸² *ibid*, 19.

⁸³ Gerhard Krüger, 'Das Horoskop als spiegelbild Künstlerischen Schaffens', *Neue Sternblätter*, v, 01 (1932).

⁸⁴ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, Will Grohmann/Erich Waske, 5 Apr. 1964.

it is also found in their philosophical ideas. This is shown in the feeling of *angst* and gloom on the one hand, and primitivism on the other.⁸⁵

It is fundamental to differentiate between the different periods during which Expressionism developed. The Expressionist era can be divided into the Pre-first world war or imperial Wilhelmine period; the eras in between the two Great wars, and in case of Waske the post Second World War.

The background which led to the rise of revolutionary Expressionist groups was that of a Wilhelmine Germany which with its steadily growing industrial and military power became increasingly eminent through the years. The contemporary image of early twentieth Century Prussia was that of an unscrupulous imperialism with cultural and authoritarian power.

This was pompously reflected and celebrated in the state academies and other cultural institutions such as theaters.⁸⁶ Means of heightening the prestige of the empire were excelled in the museums, giving art a sense of constant underlying political statements.

Being amongst the oldest art-institutions in Germany the Royal Academy of the Arts as well as the *Verein Berliner Künstler* (Association of Berlin Artists), they were the two dominating entities in German art at the time. They led the art scene and dictated what good taste looked like in Germany.

Favoured at the time was a kind of nostalgic art that evoked a feeling of a happier past rather than any kind of glorification of civilization and industrialism. This conservative art carried political messages such as glorification of the imperial Germany and patriotism in General. They were ideally historical and rural works favouring darkish palettes, proper draughtsmanship and smooth translucent finish.

The Wilhelmine regime was essentially repressive, but yet its strength was largely artificial and it was indeed fundamentally weak because an atmosphere of crisis had settled onto the

⁸⁵ Helen Boorman, 'Rethinking the Expressionist Era; Wilhelmine Cultural Debates and Prussian Elements in German Expressionism', *Oxford Art Journal*, ix, 2 (1986), 3.

⁸⁶ *ibid*, 4.

daily life of its population. Everything seemed neatly organized and provided for in this society. This was nothing more than an illusion which ultimately contributed to the mood of crisis and claustrophobia.⁸⁷

In the 1800s a rise of the middle class becomes evident as a result of the effects of the industrial revolution. This led to a change in patronage pattern in the arts, where the bourgeoisie becomes a frequent buyer. Smaller easel paintings hence started to become common, a fact from which many artists benefitted. Erich Waske however excelled in work on a monumental scale and hence could not exploit this market niche to its full potential.

After the First World War the mood in Germany was that of humiliation and loss.⁸⁸ The tremendous damage left Germany paying immense compensations. This made it all the easier for the newly formed Nazi party to manipulate the population into believing that the current situation was not their own fault but that of others. The new ideology gave the German people hope, hence making them compliant to eliminate everything that they were told did not fit into the new society.⁸⁹

For the first time in years the Germans believed that the rescuing agent that had been needed to get the state back on its feet arrived. The political establishment which gave the German people so much hope at first, turned out to however be nothing more than a highly manipulative government that solved its problems with suppressing its population once it had gained trust. This was one of the factors that radically hindered German Expressionism from developing.

In the period of 1928-1951 Waske passed through the same experiences as all other Avant-garde artists did.

Art was declared *entartet* (degenerated) if it in any way worked against the idea of a pure Aryan race as Hitler had defined it. That included any kind of foreign glorification (such as

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ Stephanie Barron, *Degenerate Art, the Fate of the Avant Garde in Nazi Germany*, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991, 12

⁸⁹ Since this thesis does not provide the space for an in-depth explanation of the exact situation that led to the formation of the Nazi government, this is of course an oversimplified view.

primitivism) or distortion of form which was compared and connected to disability or nervousness which had been perceived as a dramatic and destructive disease that led to the degeneration of society.⁹⁰

Otto Dix (1891 - 1969) whose paintings showed the most disturbing experiences of the war, serves as one of the best examples as his art was placed under the different punishable categories that were considered degenerating for an artwork.

These were: barbarism of presentation, the collapse of sensitivity of form and colour, the conscious disregard for basics of technique as well as the total stupidity of subject matter- as it had been called by the NS.⁹¹

Yet, the place of art in the new Germany was debated ever since the Nazi were acclaimed. These issues were furthered by disagreements about which kind of art was the most suitable for the new governmental policies. This is radically demonstrated by the fact that Kirchner himself was surprised about the fact that the Nazi attacked his art and in fact thought that it was an error from their part until 1935.⁹²

The NS later based their standard for art on idealized figurative work and landscapes that was reminiscent of the nineteenth Century, as well as on Neoclassical and Neo-Romantic art which the *Führer* (Leader)⁹³ favoured as it was said to be racially pure and easy to understand.⁹⁴ However, there was deeper purpose to the acceptance of such art: It symbolised a certain standard for beauty which was hoped to add to the unity of the nation by projecting a moral standard to which everyone should aspire. The women and men in the paintings embodied the proper morality and sexual behavior that was requested.⁹⁵

To reach the goal of making such styles become the national art, measures to control the German cultural scene were taken. Joseph Goebbels was one of the fundamental politicians

⁹⁰ Barron, 26.

⁹¹ The abbreviation NS stands for Nationalsozialismus (national socialism), and hence for the Nazi regime.

⁹² Barron, 45.

⁹³ Adolf Hitler was commonly called *Führer* which was a name reflecting respect for his authority.

⁹⁴ *ibid*, 25.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*.

and one of the closest confidants of Adolf Hitler himself. He was also one of the most influential men with the placing of fine arts in the Reich, and the authority having nearly all cultural departments of the new government under his wing – in some way or another.

One of his contributions was the expanding of the Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda⁹⁶ (Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda) for example.

The Reichskammer für Bildende Künste's (Reich Chamber of the Visual Arts)⁹⁷ main aim lay in supporting those arts which accorded with the NS ideologies and suppressing art that rebelled against it.

Völkisch Groups originated in Germany around the turn of the century and are probably more suitably called 'radical traditionalists'. It becomes very obvious, when looking at the key elements of this art, that it fit perfectly to the ideals of the Nazi regime as it glorified the peasant, rejected all non-traditional aesthetic styles, and worked after the thought that artistic expression and blood are inextricably linked.⁹⁸

The *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* (Combat League for German culture) promoted the *völkisch* culture and worked against *Kulturbolschewismus*⁹⁹ (cultural bolshevism). Regular attacks on modern art did not however appear until the 1930s.

Important tactics by the Nazi government was the use of two types of exhibitions that were held while the *NS Kunstpolitik* (NS art politics) was not yet resolved. There were those shows that were meant to serve as examples of what the *new* German art should look like. On the other hand there was the *Schandausstellung* (Shame Exhibition) which was a propagandistic way of showing unacceptable art by placing it into a grotesque light.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ This institution controlled the press, literature, fine arts, films, theaters and music with regards to content. It also controlled mass media.

⁹⁷ Reichskammer der Bildenden Künste (Reich chamber for the visual arts).

⁹⁸ Jonathan Petropoulos, *Art as Politics in the Third Reich*, The University of North Carolina Press, 1996, 28 – 29.

⁹⁹ The Russian reference in this term connotes that contemporary modern art was negatively effected by left wing political ideas.

¹⁰⁰ Petropoulos, 31.

The largest *Schandausstellung* was the *Entartete Kunst Ausstellung* (Degenerated Art Exhibition) which in 1937 tried to show that the NS had saved Germany's moral values of marriage, chastity, the family and a steady harmonious life, by revealing what was thought of as degenerative effects in the art that was produced during the Weimar Republic.¹⁰¹

It was designed as a survey of all that was perceived harmful to society and an offence to the bourgeoisie sense of good taste. Modern art was no longer perceived as individual creativity but 'representative of something undesirable'.¹⁰²

Stephanie Barron, the modern art curator in the Los Angeles County Museum, makes a valid point in saying that despite all the damage that has been done to the art scene by elimination of artworks, forcing artists into exile and a lot of horrible other interventions, the German art was never eradicated. Collectively the works of art and the pieced together fragments of history remind us that art may be enjoyed or abhorred but it is a force whose potency should never be underestimated.¹⁰³

Besides the hateful political action against Expressionism and other avant-garde styles every artist suffered just like any person if he intermingled with Jewish people. Waske had to feel this antipathy of the public when exhibiting with the *Berliner Secession* which consisted of a large number of Jews. In an article¹⁰⁴ he was pictured like an insane person and it was said that he should have noticed the way the Jewish took advantage of him, because the general attitude was held that a Jew would never help an outsider unless they benefitted from it somehow. It was further claimed that it should have been obvious to Waske that his 'grosse Kunst'¹⁰⁵ ('great art') was only used in order to fill the rooms of the Secession in order to cover up for the mess that the Jewish artists created.

¹⁰¹ Stephanie Barron, *Degenerate Art- the Fate of the Avant-Garde in Germany*, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991, 25.

¹⁰² Stephanie Barron, *Degenerate Art- the Fate of the Avant-Garde in Germany*, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991, 30.

¹⁰³ Barron, 22.

¹⁰⁴ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, newspaper cutout, 'Waske in der Berliner Secession', Dr. Eska, newspaper and date unknown.

¹⁰⁵ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, newspaper cutout, 'Waske in der Berliner Secession', Dr. Eska, newspaper and date unknown.

As unfortunate as he might have been with such negative words about him in the press, one can grasp how lucky he really was when reading the exhibition documentation of the *Akademie der Künste* of 1932.¹⁰⁶ In those protocols¹⁰⁷ it is numerously pointed out how important it is that future exhibitions remain free from any political undertones.

Subject matter hence had to be strictly controlled. The apex followed in 1933 when the commission claimed that they have no choice but prohibit Jewish artists from taking part in the exhibition. In this case, Waske in contrast to those unfortunate artists could call himself lucky because he ultimately had the chance to show his works, even though the essence - his freedom of expression was suppressed.

It is added in the protocols that anything provocative in terms of topic and motif had to be strictly avoided. This meant that even the smallest political undertones were strictly prohibited. This of course applied especially to any critical political statements in artworks. Well known cases of government opposition such as that of the Scholl siblings¹⁰⁸ show Hitler's drastic consequences. The two university students were guillotined after being caught spreading pamphlets with harsh criticism towards Hitler (calling him a liar amongst other things). This is of course an extreme case, but it shows how the government dealt with freedom of expression and hence gives a clear understanding of why the people responsible of exhibitions were so careful. Artists were therefore restricted to paint portraits and themes of a purely artistic nature.

2.3. Religious and Philosophical Thought in German Expressionism

Regardless of the group or place they belonged to, the Expressionists always saw art as more than mere aesthetic, technique or craftsmanship. After having discussed their social and political context, it is only understandable that they were concerned with life, its meaning and

¹⁰⁶ Akademie der Künste Archiv, PrAdK, 1254, Protokolle der Ausstellungskommission, 15 June 1932.

¹⁰⁷ Akademie der Künste Archiv, PrAdK, 1254, Protokolle der Ausstellungskommission, 27 Mar. 1933.

¹⁰⁸ Hans Rothfels, *The German opposition to Hitler*, London, Oswald Wolff (Publishers) Limited, 1961, 13-14.

other branches of Philosophy as is inevitably reflected in their work. Curt Bauer wrote on Waske saying that the artist's works are amongst the clearest Expressionist examples that reflect contemporary thought.¹⁰⁹ As has been said, Expressionists spent a lot of time in heated philosophical discussions, but it is important to keep in mind that behind every individual there were different personal questions about reality.

Expressionism, Dadaism, Futurism and so on first drummed into the public consciousness an image of the artist as someone who breaks free from the ruling conventions. This avant-garde image was anticipated by Wagner and Nietzsche whose existentialist philosophy did in fact play a general role in the thought of the expressionists. Spontaneity, passion and intuition were Expressionist elements that did speak in the Nietzschean Core of Art.¹¹⁰

The primitivist philosophy of a corrupted society also accords with Nietzsche's writings. Kirchner's figures in *Nudes playing under a Tree*, which is in a private collection, are free and liberated from their civilized constraints, the effect of which is enhanced by colour.¹¹¹ This interestingly relates to a quote in Nietzsche's *Will to Power* (1906) where he says that:

Man as a species does not represent any progress compared with any other animal. The whole animal and vegetable kingdom does not evolve from the lower to the higher – but all at the same time, in utter disorder against each other... the domestication (the culture) of man does not go deep – where it does it at once becomes degeneration... The savage (or in moral terms the evil man) is a return to nature – and in a certain sense his recovery, his cure from culture...Where are the barbarians of the twentieth century?

Comparing the quote to the picture of Kirchner, one can see the relationship between the thought of the philosopher and the Expressionist painter.¹¹²

An even more direct proof of the Expressionists' Nietzschean spirit is the fact that the artist group's name *Die Brücke* (the bridge) relates to a mentioned phrase in Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra* where he speaks of a '*Brücke der Zukunft*' (a bridge to the future).

¹⁰⁹ Bauer, 4.

¹¹⁰ Jill Lloyd, 'Primitivism and Modernity: An Expressionist Dilemma', *German Art in the 20th Century – Painting and sculpture 1905 -1985*, Christos M. Joachimedes, Norman Rosenthal, Wieland Schmied (eds.). P.110Munich, Prestel Verlag (and London, Royal Academy of the Arts), 1985, 110.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

¹¹² *ibid.*

This also reflects the Expressionists inherent wish for a new age which brought about the common idea of revolution. These ideas were not however, reactions against traditional aesthetics exclusively but went further and concerned the belief that all common values and beliefs should be toppled over.

This idea explains the apocalyptic visions that are so often depicted in the art movement, and are so common in Waske's *oeuvre*. He speaks about the forming of a new world in a letter¹¹³ to the *Sonntagsblatt*, a newspaper that then printed his work *Weltwarnung* (Warning to the World) which also related to the subject.

He here speaks about his belief that the end of the world is near, and that it is the artists duty to make this apparent in art rather than to get enlaced in formalistic or aesthetic concerns: '*Die drohende Weluntergangsfahr muss auch in der kunst sichtbar gemacht warden*' ('The threat of the ending of the world must become visible in the arts too').¹¹⁴

He painted the *Apocalypse* in 1949 again after its destruction in the war, due to an inner force which evolved through the awareness that in the revelation of St. John the temporary happenings had been foretold previously and that human kind through the backslide from divine law brought Evil upon themselves. He believes that after the chaos that will come about with the formation of a new world, a peaceful era will result.

This is where his belief in monumental scale comes from. He holds that the easel painting is not sufficient to become cult and proclamation. He aims at letting the spiritual element in his works touch the viewers' soul. In a letter¹¹⁵ he quotes a phrase of Schiller's *Wallenstein* to explain that: '*nur der grosse Gegenstand vermag den tiefen Grund der Menschheit aufzuregen*' ('only great affairs will have the power to stimulate mankind's first principles'). Hence by saying that it is the most effective way a reaction in the viewer can be stirred he justifies his passion for monumental scale.

¹¹³ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, letter draft, *Waske/Sonntagsblatt* (Newspaper), 1962.

¹¹⁴ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, Kurt Lohan Tank/Erich Waske, 10 Apr. 1961.

¹¹⁵ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, letter draft, Erich Waske/Prof. Dr. Tiburtius (Senator), 25 Sep. 1961.

The media of the time repeatedly complains about the fact that a frightening amount of artists go on to busy themselves with profane things rather than devoting their work to the religious mission that every human has. In the magazine *Neue Sternblätter*¹¹⁶ Waske was praised in 1932 for being one of the rare artists to remember the 'priestly mission'.

This shows the public acknowledgement of his religious works, and how much he was affected by faith not only in expression and thought behind paintings but also in direct subject matter.

Waske with his deeply religious works often entered the sphere of anthroposophy. This is a spiritual philosophy based on Rudolf Steiner between the late 1800s and early 1900s. In the centre of the concept lies the relationship between man and his spirituality. It involves various aspects including reincarnation and astrology, the latter of which is especially notable in the study of Waske. It includes understanding the spiritual and everything that goes beyond basic sense experience and lusts. It asks for a spiritual understanding through applying spiritual means.

This idea of the transcendental which we find in the larger cartoons can also be seen in the smaller landscapes such as *Das Grosse Gericht* (The Great Judgement) (**Fig. 7**) where the allegorical intention of the creation of the world can be imputed.

¹¹⁶ Krüger, Gerhard, 'Das Horoskop als Spiegelbild Künstlerischen Schaffens', *Neue Sternblätter*, v, 1 (1932), 1.



Fig. 7

Erich Waske, Das Grosse Gericht (The Great Judgement), 103 x 129 cm, 1968, Gouache on Cardboard

Waske's urge for eternity and the enthusiasm to see beyond all bodily never lets his urge to create quiet down. He sees every attachment to earth as an obstacle, and holds that the individual is only meaningful as part of a whole, integrating in the general cosmic happening.¹¹⁷ Waske's world is romanticized, and he himself in his entire being is one of the most concise witnesses for 'das im Deutschen Gefühlsleben so tief wurzelnde romantische Ethos' ('the romantic ethos that is so enrooted in German emotional life').¹¹⁸

The fact that his art was not accepted in most market niches and the public preferred profane subject matter from his sacred work angered him. In a letter¹¹⁹ he expresses his frustration about his situation by complaining about the fact that people prefer bullfights by Picasso to sacred works.

¹¹⁷ Kirchner (1921), 14.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, letter draft, Erich Waske/Dr. Hintermayer, 1954.

Waske's deeply religious way of thinking often clashed with the free sexuality of his fellow painters. After the war, with growing religiosity these attitudes become more extreme and due to his personal decorum he abandons any nakedness from his works unlike his *Die Brücke* colleagues. For the other expressionists representation of sexuality also served as an opposition to the technocratic and philistine world, something which was not Waske's main concern.

Waske generally elevated such themes to a higher cosmic level in trying to show the eternal unity of two loving people. He here astonishes with deep expressivity as can be seen *Menschen im All* (Humans in Space) (pl. 84).

Waske gives a good account about his ideas in a letter¹²⁰ where he shows that he held that great upheavals in art were due to the beginning of the Age of Aquarius which as he said, corresponded to the rushed technical accomplishments of civilization. The artist criticized that there had been a rush in the search for the new in the area of art as well and stressed that if an artist lacks higher wisdom, formalistic tendencies become addiction.

He believed that true elevation in art depends on the elevation of the soul. He further claims that if the noble theme is ignored the artist degrades himself to not more than a highly developed visual animal. He holds that the return to old values and the sublime is necessary and asks for the sacred and holy place and not the private collection, the salon of the connoisseur and the 'snob'.¹²¹

Waske here speaks of avant-garde currents such as abstract art which he believes have missed their aim and hence became meaningless. When he speaks of the need to return to old values he appeals to artists who got lost on the path towards religion.

He refers to any artist who busies himself with the mastery of form, banal topics of aesthetics or visual effects. He further says that the workshop adopted the characteristics of a laboratory in becoming a place of experimentation where new forms were fanatically exercised

¹²⁰ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, letter draft, 'Die Zeit und die Kunst' (D.N.Z), 17 May 1957.

¹²¹ *ibid.*

and distilled which however remains idling if the God-given does not retain the central control.¹²²

The return to old values for him is the return to the highest art and thus the making visible of the divine in virtue of a centralizing dynamic, rhythm and noble color tones. He held that these are the values that artists who lost their focus must return to and avoid the materialistic thinking which lost sight of the cult.

Despite Waske's flirting with abstract art at a later point in his life himself (**pl. 1 - 2**); there is a hand written note on his rather negative thoughts about abstract art. He utters his dislike of abstract artist's tendency not relate to tangible objects in their paintings. He disapproves of the avant-garde expectation of abstract painting which according to him has no humane relation at all which he considers problematic because all Man does remain the measure of all things.¹²³

2.4. Erich Waske's role in German Expressionism

One question that needs to be asked is how Waske fits into the scene of German Expressionism. The answer can partially be found in the media of the time and when delving into that, one quickly recognizes that he was a very much appreciated artist who was always referred to as a German Expressionist without any hint of doubt.

Joachim Kirchner in the introduction to the Erich Waske Biography¹²⁴ claims his happiness about a young German generation (the Expressionists) having found their own revolutionary art of expression. However, he also appears to be disappointed about the initially small leading group being augmented by weak and irrelevant artists which he felt had nothing to offer to the movement of originally high quality of Expressionist works. He specifically excludes Waske from this group and praises him for having found his own authentic expressionist path.

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, handwritten private note, Undated.

¹²⁴ Kirchner (1921), 3-4.

There are a number of quotes from various Newspapers which praise his authentic expressive style. The following statement has been made in *Der Kurier* and shows that Waske played a role in keeping up the style: ‘...Waske hat die expressive Kraft des Brücke Stils durch die Jahrzehnte hindurch bewahrt...’

(‘...Waske retained the expressive force of the *Die Brücke* style throughout the decades...’).¹²⁵ Another example stems from one of the leading contemporary art historians, Will Grohmann: ‘...aus dem Abgesang der Ausdruckskunst nich weg zu denken.’ (‘... impossible to think him away from the swan song of the art of expression’).¹²⁶

In the article¹²⁷ *Mut zum Religiösen Pathos* (Courage to Religious Pathos), it was said that Expressionism was maintained mostly in the ecclesiastic sphere. Waske, working a lot on religious commissions, probably had a harder time finding work than his companions who could get commissions from the private sector of the art market as well.

Erich Waske played a great role in adapting the Expressionist style to churches, making it popular in ecclesiastical circles and keeping the style alive even after the main protagonists had already passed away.

In fact Waske was not alone in his religious mission, but *Die Brücke* in general aimed for religious instauration, which is further proof for how Waske’s ideas did coincide with those of other Expressionists.

The term ‘*Abgewandter Brücke Stil*’ (Averted Brücke Style) which expresses the impact of *Die Brücke* on Waske, was given to the latter’s Expressionism by Will Grohmann who first noted it in reference to the artists land and seascapes.¹²⁸

It has been mentioned that the first and foremost attribute of Expressionism is the deep feeling of emotion in the works. This attribute is also perfectly fulfilled in Waske.

¹²⁵ *Gemälde und Monumentalentwürfe*, transcription of *Der Kurier*, 23 Sep. 1954.

¹²⁶ Akademie der Künste Archiv, transcription of *Die Neue Zeitung*, 09 Sep. 1950.

¹²⁷ *Gemälde und Monumentalentwürfe*, transcription of *Der Kurier*, 15 Feb. 1962.

¹²⁸ Günter Stahlmann, ‘Einführung’, *Galerie Erich Waske*, Retrieved on 04 Dec. 1011 from: <http://www.erich-waske-galerie.de/>

Ultimately Expressionism is one of those movements that ties artists together not necessarily by aesthetic qualities and formal character but a shared background and thought behind their works. Expressionism had its roots in different German localities so that there could develop in homogeneity. Just like Turner's picture visually does not seem to have anything to do with a Kaspar Friedrich, they are both Romantic works because they feed from similar contexts after the disappointment of the enlightenment. It is only the way how they deal with the situations and how they are then translated onto the canvas that differentiates them and the same can be said about Waske and Grosz for example, who are both victims of the same socio political background, but since every human perceives reality differently the effects that this has on their work is different. Therefore an aversion of style does not mean that Waske is any less Expressionist.

Chapter 3 - Erich Waske's Style and technique

3.1 General

Emil Nolde is the Expressionist whose colour is probably associated the most with intense luminosity. The same attribute might possibly be applied to Waske in many of his works. Nolde's greatest oils are in fact compared to Waske's colours in tempera in an article in the *Tagesspiegel*.¹²⁹

His chromatic scheme as is typical for the expressionists is rather extreme in its regular use of pure (meaning not mixed) colour in his mature works. This is clearly apparent in the works of the Malta collection. They rarely accord with reality and are far removed from any naturalism. His chromatic palette was often negatively perceived and on occasions called 'besetting' and acidic.¹³⁰ It is for example common to find bright colour schemes with blue mountains, yellow sea, pinkish violet clouds and a green yellow skies for example.

It is however, important to note that his palette was in any case strongly luminous as well as harmonious in its entirety even though it has also been described as ecstatic and hectic. Critical comments such as: '... einem krassen Grün neben brennendem Orange und sengendem Gelb ... Da erscheint dann manches zu direkt, zu laut'¹³¹ ('... glaring green adjacent to blazing orange and a torrid yellow ... The effect is seen then as sometimes too direct, too noisy') were not uncommon in the media at the time.

As has been explained in the previous chapter, the artist passed through different productive periods in which his chromatic scheme changed. Yet one of his principle colours that always remained strong and is thus noteworthy is his intense blue (especially notable in his seascapes) in which he projects all the force and intensity of his producing.¹³²

¹²⁹ *Tagesspiegel*, 16 Feb. 1962.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

¹³¹ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, cutout from an article called 'Bekenntnis und Gestalt - Erich Waske and Mme. Poulette' from an unknown newspaper of unknown date.

¹³² *Gemälde und Monumentalentwürfe*, transcription of the article 'Das Bild als Verkündung' in *Berliner Stimme*, 1962.

An interesting remark has been made by Jerrold Holmes about Erich Waske's palette in the 1930 autumn exhibition: 'Erich Waske uses pastel and depicts flowers without light, dull, and opaque.'¹³³

The picture *Neapel*¹³⁴ (Naples) (**fig. 8**) that can be found in the *Artothek der Sozialen Künstlerförderung* (Picture Lending Library of the Social Artist Support) consolidates this statement and gives a good idea about a short period of 1930's, in which his chromatic scheme was so different from the luminosity spoken of previously.



Fig. 8

Erich Waske, Neapel, 1930, Artothek der Sozialen Künstlerförderung, Berlin

¹³³ Jerrold Holmes, 'Autumn Exhibition at the Prussian Academy', *Parnassus*, ii, 1 (1930), 17, Retrieved on 22 November 2010 from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/797738>.

¹³⁴ Artothek der Sozialen Künstlerförderung Berlin (Picture Lending Library of the Social Artist Support Berlin).

As previously mentioned contouring is also a trait frequently seen in Waske's works and hence becomes an idiosyncratic quality of the artist. This can especially be seen in his portraits, where he boards his figures with strong black or gray outlines that recall Gauguin.

It is this rhythmic use of line which often gives his work a decorative, almost pattern-like appearance. This attribute is found in his *Göttermorgen* (Morning of the Gods) (pl. 18 – 14) or *Sieg des Lichtes* (Victory of the Light) (pl. 109 – 128) and often conveys a dynamic and almost hectic but yet balanced and unified element.

Waske enhanced the licit effect of rhythmic elements by accentuating the compositionally important lines and curves as well as highlighting wherever it seems necessary. The diagonals are steadied through the harmonic adjustment with vertical and horizontals alleviating the whole composition (fig. 9).



Fig. 9

Erich Waske, Sieg des Lichtes (Victory of the Light), 100 x 330 cm, 1969, Gouache on Unknown Support

Dramatic moods are also characteristic in Waske's oeuvre. No topic is spared and so is it that even a bouquet of flowers is filled with this energetic pathos.¹³⁵

The previously discussed monumentality in the pictures was a means to convey spirituality by making the viewer relate the large scale of the scenes with the greatness of God. Erich Waske focused greatly on the immediate impact that his work made on the viewer and

¹³⁵ *Gemälde und Monumentalentwürfe*, transcription of the newspaper *Tagesspiegel*, 1962.

therefore reference needs to be made to the effect of his paintings which is enhanced by particular placing.

In the newspaper *Der Kurier*¹³⁶ the show at the Schöneberg local council was described as being different from a normal exhibition because the viewer upon entering the hall would almost have to ask himself where the paintings were. It has been described that nothing of the usual display of '*privater Atelierseinfalle, die als zufaellige Gesellschaft – provisorisch und voruebergehend – auf gleichgueltigen Galeriewaenden gastieren*' ('private ideas that accompany indifferent gallery walls provisionally and temporarily')¹³⁷ could be seen. Instead the artist is said to be carefully creating a unity of architecture and painting, in a manner that gives the impression that the two entities were made for each other (**fig.10**).



Fig. 10

Photograph, Erich Waske Exhibition in the Berlin Secession, 1931

This particular article and exhibition with the *Apocalypse* on the front wall as a mural gives a good idea of the decorative character of the works and their display. It is a scheme that is

¹³⁶ Akademie der Künste, transcription of the article 'Religiöse Kunst' (Religious Art), from *Der Kurier*, 17 Oct. 1951.

¹³⁷ Akademie der Künste, transcription of the article 'Religiöse Kunst' (Religiöse Kunst) from *Der Kurier*, 17 Oct. 1951.

worked out according to impact from afar and the impact in general.¹³⁸ Another clear statement about the importance of immediate effect on the viewer is given about the mosaic frieze for the *Tannenberg-Denkmal* in a survey:

Die Entwuerfe und original grossen Teilstuecke sind von starkem, lang anhaltendem Eindruck. Die ornamenthafte, nicht Bildhafte Darstellung des Aufbruchs und Kampfes unseres Heeres kam in Herrlicher Weise zum Ausdruck. Die Wucht und groesse der Darstellung ist Masstaeblich sowie Farblich einzigartig, von monumentaler Wirkung. Die Wucht und groesse der Darstellung ist Masstaeblich sowie Farblich einzigartig, von monumentaler Wirkung.

(The design and original sized segments are of a strong, long lasting expression. The ornament-like, not picturesque design of the departure and battle of our army was expressed in an admirable way. The impact and size of the execution is unique in colour and scale, it is indeed of monumental expression).

Waske is furthermore praised for the great impact that his monumental works make from afar in a newspaper in 1951.¹³⁹ Three years later the *Telegraf*¹⁴⁰ notes his audacity for the monumental and calls him a 'Meister der Komposition' (master of composition). The given media attention shows that his efforts on effect were not done in vein but captured the attention that it deserved.

However the artist was not only showered with praise but was also harshly criticized for stylistic problems. This can be seen in a letter¹⁴¹ by the *Akademie der Künste* (Academy of Fine Arts) where it is said that an exhibition of the artist must be refused on stylistic grounds. It is noted in the letter that Waske falsely claims his works to be monumental whereas they are too decorative to be called that. The author of the letter tries to explain that grand scale and a large format do not automatically stand for monumentality. Unfortunately there is no truly monumental work on display anywhere at the moment. Therefore it is impossible to take into account this effect on an actual wall. The various positive statements by authorities like Will

¹³⁸ *ibid.*

¹³⁹ Akademie der Künste, transcription of the article 'Religiöse Kunst' (Religious Art), from *Der Kurier*, 17 oct. 1951.

¹⁴⁰ *Gemälde und Monumental Entwuerfe*, transcription of *Der Telegraf*, 09 Oct. 1954, 24 Jan. 1954.

¹⁴¹ Archiv der Akademie der Künste, PrAdK 0756a /PrAdK 0948, letter, praesident of the academy/Ulrich Nebst, 25 Jan. 1937.

Grohmann are, an even more reliable source in this case, than the single comment by the president of the academy of the arts.

Additionally Waske is criticized for confusing the rawness in his works with force and strength, another opinion on which the academy apparently stood alone.

Waske worked almost exclusively in gouache after the war, as the Malta collection shows where works in pastel and charcoal are an exception. Due to his financial difficulties after the war he painted on practically any medium that he found, including reverse side of poster-advertising.

An important part to the understanding of Erich Waske's working method in portraiture is played by a draft for a letter¹⁴² to Mr. Fisch in which the artist himself claims that he needs a ten minute session with his model and can then finish a final piece without any further sessions. *Bozzetti* and scale-drawings are limited to studies for murals and the fact that no drawings or sketches for portraits are known in his oeuvre, might suggest that Waske did not prepare preliminary drawings at all.

He probably drew the outlines directly on the canvas and coloured it in without the sitter. The fact that he needed only ten minutes for sketching seems to prove this point as much as a comment made in the book by the Galerie Goyert, where it is said that he painted from memory which is a notable skill that he has acquired in years of copying nature.¹⁴³

His rapidity in drawing, skillful draughtsmanship and sureness of line which can be observed throughout his oeuvre leads to the conclusion that Waske was an overall confident worker.

In the magazine *Monatshefte für Literatur Musik und Kunst*¹⁴⁴ the artists painting *Landschaft mit Windmühlen* (Landscape with Windmills) is described as handling the brush with broad, bulky strokes that slide across the picture surface. This kind of work can be seen especially from the artist's mature phase onwards.

¹⁴² Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, letter draft, Erich Waske/Mr. Fisch, Undated.

¹⁴³ Bauer, 7.

¹⁴⁴ Johannes Rohr, 'Die grosse Berliner Kunstaussstellung', *Monatshefte für Literatur Kunst und Wissenschaft*, iv, 2 (1927), 84.

3.2 Influences on Waske

Waske's art is deeply rooted in music and the art of playing the piano as well as the cello.¹⁴⁵ He has been described as a passionate musician who started playing the piano at the young age of six years and later on great public events and places such as the Warsaw Philharmonie,¹⁴⁶ one of the oldest music institutions in Europe. He greatly admired and played the works of Liszt, Verdi, Rachmaninov, and Eduard Grieg, apart from his absolute favorites, Wagner and Hugo Wolf.¹⁴⁷

This seems to have given him profound creative power and the fine understanding for sound waves in music enhanced his feeling for tonal styles and colour symphonies. This can be seen in a direct comparison between his art and music that is given in a newspaper of 1951 where it is said that '... Waske baut mit Farbblöcken, die er Kühn und sicher aufeinandertürmt, wie mächtige Akkorde einer Symphonie, eindringlich in ihrer tiefen Ausdruckskraft'¹⁴⁸ ('...Waske uses colour-blocks which he builds boldly and confidently on top of each other, like mighty chords of a symphony, haunting in their deep expressiveness').

A picture of 1921 called *Liebende im Schnee* (Lovers in Snow) which is today lost but known from black-and-white pictures further portrays a clear connection with music, aside from the couple that strolls in a snowy landscape.

Curt Bauer, the author of the book on Waske by the Galery Goyert says that '*Dieses Bild ist Musik*' (this picture is music) and goes on by claiming that it is a sound-harmony detached from everything representational.

He speaks of sound waves that are translated onto a two dimensional surface which connects all the parts of the work. It is a play of swinging lines that reflect each other from the mantle of the walking woman, to the arm of the man which is recalled in the movement of the

¹⁴⁵ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, letter, Carl Wildt/Erich Waske, 18 Oct. 1961.

¹⁴⁶ Berlinische Galerie, letter draft, Erich Waske/Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, undated.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with antiquity merchant Prinz-Dunst; Bauer, 5; Franz Servaes, 'Der Maler Erich Waske', *Unknown Journal*, vol. unknown, 22 (1920).

¹⁴⁸ *Gemaelde und Monumentalentwuerfe*, transcription of *Der Tag*, 17 Oct. 1951.

trees in the landscape.¹⁴⁹ Another article speaks of 'Bilder (die man) hören kann' ('pictures (that one) can hear').¹⁵⁰

An entirely different line was drawn between Waske and modern constructivism as well as the artist Franz Mark in an invitation to a Waske exhibition.¹⁵¹ The point of comparison between the three is his tightened picture structure and the fact that he symbolically translates his view of reality onto the canvas. He is said to be moving toward these movements after several blows of faith. Whether this is because Waske was influenced or whether the congenialities are due to the similar contexts which naturally led to the evolution of the same ideas is debatable.

The suns in Waske's landscape are of particular importance as they can be connected to those of Schmidt-Rotluff in their heaviness as well to those of Otto Dix in structure (**fig. 11 - 12**). The brush strokes of both Waske and Dix are loosely and broadly applied. Charcoal drawings by Waske that were exhibited at the Schöneberg local council were said to show an influence of Schmidt-Rotluffs conciseness in an article in the *Tagesspiegel* in 1962.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Bauer, 18.

¹⁵⁰ Berlinische Galerie, Br-AR 7/2004 56, Franz Servaes, 'Der Maler Erich Waske', Unknown Journal, vol. unknown, 22 (1920).

¹⁵¹ Berlinische Galerie, Erich Waske Akten, invitation to Exhibition 'Painting and Sculpture, Erich Waske and Luise Stomps'.

¹⁵² *Tagesspiegel*, 16 Feb. 1962.



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

Fig. 11 - Erich Waske, Sieg des Lichtes (Victory of the Light), 078 x 108 cm, Date Unknown, Gouache on Paper

Fig. 12 – Otto Dix, Sunrise, 051 x 066 cm, 1913, Oil on Paper, Stuttgart, Private Collection

The power of Waske's colour which lies in extreme luminosity that glows even in darkness must be compared to both Van Gogh's intense pure colour as well as the Fauve's luminous quality that is best represented by Matisse. The fact that Waske has been to Paris means that he has in all probability seen works of the *Fauvists*.

It is not however only the focus on colour which connects him to the art movement, but the way in which he divides his pictures into plains of colour as is most evident in his interior scenes as well as landscapes, that can in this regard best be compared to the works of Andre Derain (1818 – 1954) as can be seen when comparing Erich Waske's mountain's in *Violette Segel* (Violet Sails) (**fig. 13**) with the rock formations in Derain's *Landscape near Cassis*, 1907 (**fig. 14**).¹⁵³

¹⁵³ MoMA, the Collection, 'Landscape near Cassis', Retrieved on 14 Oct. 2011 from: http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=79375

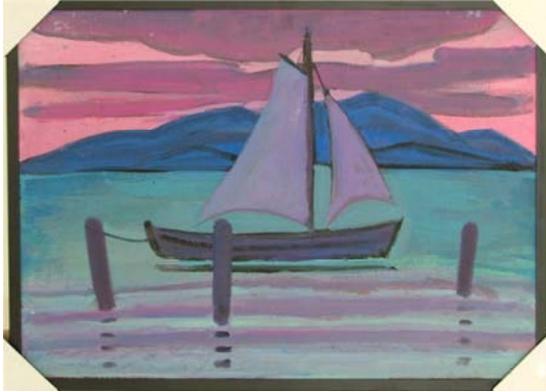


Fig. 13



Fig. 14

**Fig. 13 - Erich Waske, Violette Segel (Violet Sails), 069 x 094 cm, Date Unknown,
Gouache on Cardboard**

**Fig. 14 – Andre Derain, Landscape near Cassis, 46 x 54.9 cm, 1907, Oil on Canvas,
New York, MoMA**

The two-dimensionality is of course found in other early Expressionist works as well as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's *Nude behind a Curtain* (**fig. 15**). This work in fact can not only be compared to Waske regarding flat plains of colour, but also in terms of figure type whose ochre colour with black hair can be seen in Waske's *Südsee* (**fig.16**).

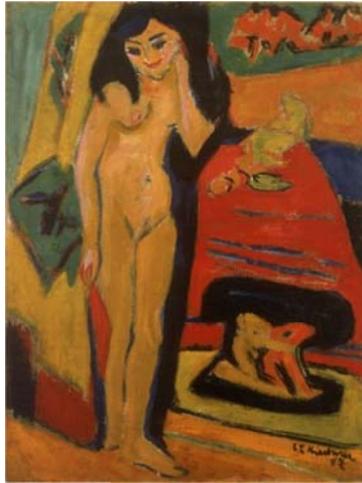


Fig. 15

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Naked Girl behind a Curtain, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands

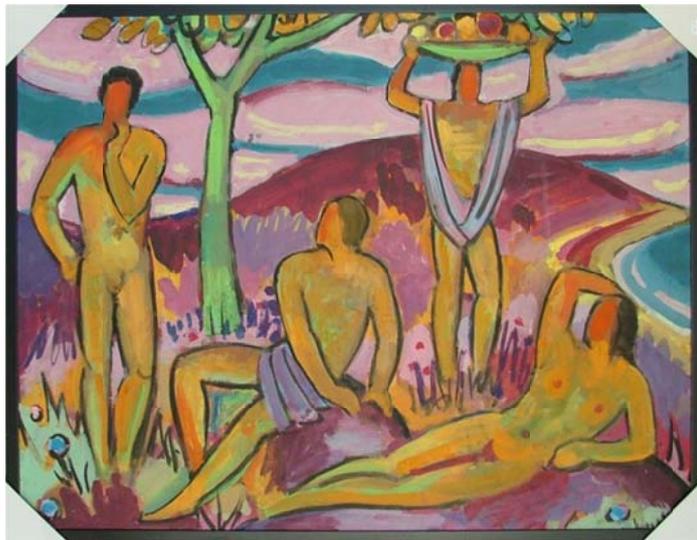


Fig. 16

Erich Waske, Südseelandschaft mit Jünglingen (South Seas Landscape with Younglings), 082.5 x 104 cm, 1963

As has already been shown, Waske's work adheres to various other artists as well as influence by other aspects such as philosophy and his passion for music. Apart from that, there are also typical idiosyncratic elements of Expressionism such as an affinity with primitivism that are debatable in his art.

The problem with primitivism and Waske is that his paintings and his statements seem to contradict. Paintings like *Südseelandschaft mit Jünglingen* (South Seas Landscape with Younglings) do seem to speak in a primitivist idiom in their simplicity. When regarding this work one can see a strong affinity with Gauguin's Tahitian works which are essentially primitive as both artists make their longing for an original state which is uncorrupted of civilization as well as a unity of man and nature visible.

In a letter¹⁵⁴ Waske speaks of his fellow expressionist artist Max Pechstein (1918 – 1955), saying that he paints primitive animalistic creatures with 'fetten Negerlippen' (fat niggerlips) – clearly a sentence which connotes objection. *Prima Facie*, the letter seems to express dislike towards the current stylistic tendencies of Primitivism. This seems implausible however when regarding the fact that Waske himself indulged in such elements.

Since Waske's relationship and attitude towards the Nazi regime is equally controversial, it can be argued that his disrespect in this phrase is not inclined towards the application of primitive art, but against the African race in general. One ultimately needs to keep in mind that Waske lived in a country in which people were manipulated into believing that Caucasians were superior humans. The fact that Waske has been a member of the NSDAP seems to support this hypothesis. Contrary to that however, Waske is known for having collaborated with Jewish people on a regular basis, a fact which he had been largely criticized for by the media. What let Waske to such a comment is hence still entirely debatable.

Waske's division of picture surface into plains of colour has been compared to Matisse and his fauve colleagues while the cloissinostic sharp contour of his works has been connected to Gauguin. These are general traits of artists working in the Expressionist style. Both of these

¹⁵⁴ Berlinische Galerie, letter draft, Erich Waske/Unknown, undated.

idiosyncrasies can not only be linked to the named influences however, but also to the woodcut medium which many Expressionists worked in.

Therefore Waske does share many characteristics with the leading Expressionist artists. How clearly Waske does fit into this epoch is once more shown when comparing his *Frauenportrait* (Portrait of a Woman) (ca. 1970) (**fig. 17**) with Jawlensky's *Schokko with flat hat* (1910) (**fig.18**) in terms of unnatural colour as well as simplification of facial features and lack of detail.



Fig. 17



Fig. 18

Fig. 17 – Erich Waske, *Frauenportrait* (Portrait of a Woman), 052 x 040 cm, Date Unknown, Gouache on Unknown Support

Fig. 18 – Alexei Jawlensky, *Schokko with flat Hat*, 75 × 65.1 cm, 1910, Oil on Cardboard Mounted on Canvas, Private Collection

It is the idea of subordinating correct drawing and naturalism to the expression of the artist's emotion which manifests itself in the nervousness and stylization of the pictures which Waske

takes up from the Expressionists. It is the exploiting of form and colour which he uses as the means to the end of Expression. This ties him to his local contemporaries of *Die Brücke*.

Even though Waske's work speaks in a language of innovation in the 1920's he remains a second generation artist who worked in a scene that had stylistically already been determined by the great leaders of the movement. Yet he seems to be outstanding as a painter as regards to luminosity of colour.

Traits like Waske's dispensation of distortion and *ugliness* in favour of giving his pictures a kind of patterned and balanced rhythm make his work very characteristic. This can be connected to his love for music which manifests itself in rhythmic lines. It is only one example of how various stimuli leave their effect on Waske's work.

Chapter 4 - Erich Waske and Light

Discussing the matter of light in the oeuvre of Erich Waske is a very difficult task, especially in connection with the Mediterranean. Whilst there is a large number of works in the Malta collection, there is only scarce knowledge about what his earliest works looked like. Apart from the works in Malta and the other few in private collections there are further pieces known to be in government institutions such as in the *Artothek der Sozialen Künstlerförderung* (picture-lending library for the social aid of artists) in Berlin. Moreover, photographs of his early works are often of poor quality, in black and white and therefore insufficient in order to determine Waske's development in terms of light.

It was Waske's Sicilian landscapes and the luminosity of his paintings which sparked the idea of Waske possibly having been to Malta. Unfortunately archival research brought only futile results in this case because his presence on the island could not be proven.

Yet having regarded the brightness of his land and seascapes *prima facie*, speculations about colour scheme and use of light came about. A discussion of Waske and Mediterranean light proves once again to be an almost impossible task because it can be taken from his biography that he has been to Italy in 1924. The artist then was thirty-three years of age and a frequent traveler throughout his life. Therefore it is possible that he has been to Italy before. Trying to find a turning point in his art based on lighting at that point in time would therefore be faulty if this was the case.

Since there is a picture of Morocco known from 1909 it is possible that he visited the place sometime during that year or before. He had therefore experienced bright Mediterranean light rather early, which again possibly affected his work. His known painting from Morocco however, with its intense violets and yellows shows an interest in the play of complementary

colours rather than his experience of Mediterranean light. In this painting of a castle, the artist already uses strong and pure colours, and there is almost no hint at chiaroscuro modeling.

In the book *Erich Waske*, a clear connection is found between Waske's presence in the Courtland Split and his use of light. It is claimed that his changeful play of light on large areas is detached from everything objective and becomes a symphony of light touched by the cosmos.¹⁵⁵

Waske however makes use of light in different ways throughout his oeuvre and often gives it symbolic meanings, especially in his religious works. The first certainly dated work here is *Offenbarung* (Revelation) (**fig. 19**), where an angelic figure appears in the top half of the painting. A thick beam of light coming from his mouth illuminates darkness together with the rays of light coming from the bright circle out of which the figure appears. The contrast between the darkness and the bright light (which reveals birds previously hidden in darkness) is harsh. This juxtaposition of light and dark probably leads to the desired dramatic effect.

¹⁵⁵ Bauer, 16.



Fig. 19

Erich Waske, Offenbarung (Revelation), Lost

A clear symbolic focus on the sun becomes apparent in a *Dünenlandschaft* (Landscape of Dunes) of 1918 (the whereabouts of which is unknown). The work depicts a combination of seascape and landscape with a ship whose hull points toward the sun with the calculated sun rays dividing the sky.¹⁵⁶

Regarding a few works of 1920, one can see Waske developing his style. He moves from naturalist tendencies which can be seen in his *Hausschluchten* (Gap of Houses) (**fig. 20**) to pictures where he juxtaposes plains of colours reaching flatness rather than three-dimensionality that would be gained through rendering light and shade. This can be seen in his *Akt am Meer* (Nude by the Sea) (**fig. 21**). The brightness in this picture however might reveal the inspiration of the locality where the photo was taken.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid*, 10 - 11.



Fig. 20

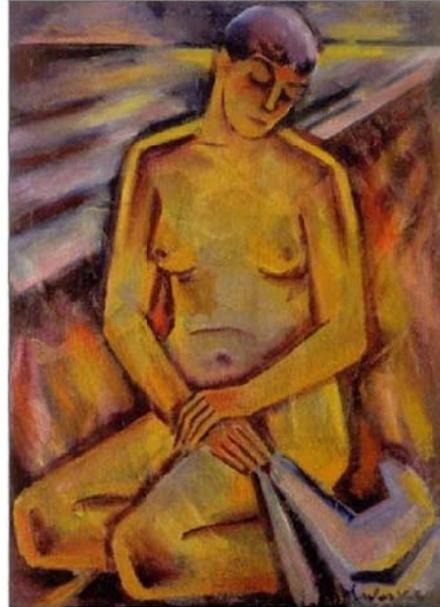


Fig. 21

Fig. 20 - Hausschluchten (Gap of Houses), 1920, Untraceable

Fig. 21 - Akt am Meer (Nude by the Sea), 1920, Untraceable

Another painting of the same year called *Gotteswelt* (The World of God) which is known through photographs, once again shows the sun illuminating mountains with sunrays pushing through thick clouds towards a starry bright sky. Given the theological name of the piece this once again shows how clearly he identifies god with light.

Ultimately he continued painting works in the fifties and sixties in which light varies from dull atmospheric luminosity that one would call typically northern to the bright light that was previously interpreted as Mediterranean.

Interesting are the seascapes, some of which are with figures, which show the force of light sparkling and reflecting on the sea and objects involved. This can be seen in *Sonnenuntergan* (Sunset) (**fig. 21**) which seems very Mediterranean in the character of light.

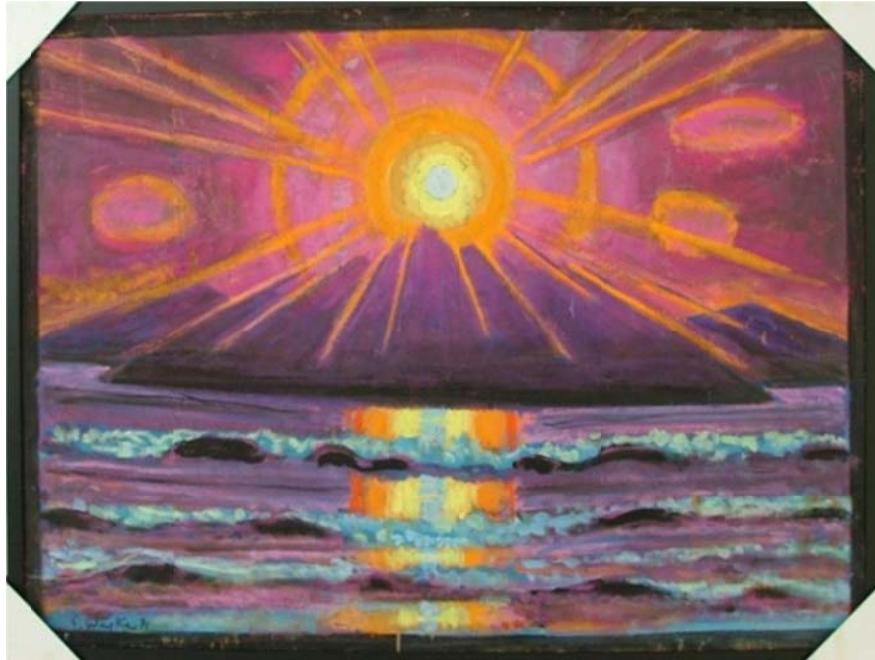


Fig. 22

Erich Waske, Sonnenuntergang (Sunset), 056 x 074 cm, 1973,

Gouache on Unknown Support

An interesting comments about a combined Waske exhibition however, in the article *Bekennniss und Gestalt* of an unknown newspaper, argues against the idea of Waske's light being Mediterranean. Here Waske is compared to the second artist of the show, Mme. Poulette. While his colours are said to be too 'direct', 'noisy' and 'glaring', Mme Poulette's are described as 'lighter' and, most significantly 'more Mediterranean'.

Ultimately it would be too vague to speculate that Waske's strong and intense light stems from his visit to the island of Sicily. Apart from that his work at times is too stylized to give any statement about the lighting at all.

His symbolic use of light in works can especially be seen in the twenty-one *Siege des Lichtes* (Victories of the Light) (pl. 109 – 128) that are present in the Malta collection. In these works

Waske depicts heroic and dynamic battles with the winning party having a bright sun in the background, probably implying that god is leading their way.

In the *Göttermorgen* (Morning of the Gods **(Pl. 18 – 124)**) the eternal father is generally silhouetted against a huge bright sun. The guiding light is generally portrayed fighting its way through the darkness.

Therefore one can conclude that light was one of the main aspects of Waske, especially when religious themes were concerned. This kind of symbolism is also found in his sea and landscapes, which often do have religious implications as well, as they often allude to religious themes. In those it is especially questionable whether his strong emphasis on light and luminosity was therefore due to the impact of the Mediterranean, or whether it was a technical trait used to enhance a spiritual message.

Chapter 5 - The Erich Waske Collection in Malta

The history of the Erich Waske collection started with the acquisition of *Drei Südsee Frauen* (Three Women from the South Seas) (pl. 131). The work caught the collector's attention due to its south sea motif which he found especially appealing since having himself a passion for the place. He was very much elated therefore when finding such a suitable substitute for a wished for but financially hardly reachable Paul Gauguin. He managed to acquire the work for 3900 Euro in December 2006, and it is the work that ultimately triggered his interest in the artist himself, leading him to search for further works.

The search for art by Erich Waske proved to be fruitful when further works were found in the Galerie Maulberger in Munich. After thorough inquiry and extremely persistent digging, the collector was made aware of the fact that the gallery had a large amount of the direct inheritance by the artist at its disposal. Numerous negotiations after resulted in the Malta collector acquiring each and every work that the gallerist had in his possession.

This means that a substantial number of works were brought to Malta at once, and so it became that, together with at least the three later acquisitions of *Schiffe und Dampfer* (Ships and Steamer) (pl. 74), *Schwarzweiss Landschaft* (Black and White Landscape) (pl. 36) and *Blick in die Ferne* (Glance into the Distance) (pl. 143) the Erich Waske collection in Malta reached a number of 158 works. The fact that these works date to the early period of Waske's work, ranks them amongst the very earliest that the collection possesses. The corpus of works in Malta can otherwise largely be dated to his post war period.

The works were then transported to Malta, being the country where the collector is currently residing. Numerous pieces arrived in dire need of restoration that varied from occasional to extensive areal flaking of colour in the individual works. Many sea- and landscapes were touched in Malta, others which are still in storage are still waiting to be restored.

Some works are privately displayed rather than in storage. Those works were framed and now decorate the walls of rooms which were purchased exclusively for Art. The two largest walls of four in the asymmetrically designed room are decorated with Waske pieces, which

move chronologically from left to right. The fourth wall is adorned with other Expressionist artists. Given the purpose of this place, one can imagine that the natural lighting as well as the artificial lighting facilities absolutely work in favour of the paintings. The comfortably luminous light though subdued does not give a dim or gloomy impression at all. On the contrary the works are bathed in light in a consistent manner which emphasizes a sense of unity and harmony, but especially enhances the luminosity of Erich Waske's works.

There are various subjects represented in the collection that can be divided into *Göttermorgen* (Morning of the Gods), *Siege des Lichtes* (Victory of the Light), Religious works, Seascapes, Genre works, Landscapes, Portraits, War Scenes and a rubric of others depictions whose subject exists only once such as an interior view out of a window with clouds (pl. 85). Parts of these are scale works and sketches as in the case of the ceiling painting in the *Oberschule* (Highschool) of Berlin, Kreuzberg.

The war scenes depict soldiers in battles, marches, and farewells as well as in agony due to injuries. They tell the story of the battle at Tannenberg of the First World War which he wrote about in his diary. They give a good idea of what the planned works for the previously mentioned Tannenberg Monument looked like.

An overview of the portraits which represent mostly women shows that Waske always approaches this theme in a very similar manner as regards to formal elements. Apart from one exception they are all frontal or in three-quarter positions with accessories such as flowers in their hair. They are painted in planes of unnatural colour which are par excellence examples of Waske's typical luminosity, brightness and pureness of colour which is reminiscent of the fauves. Apart from those female portraits there are also works where he depicts himself.

The few genre works are depicting rural working life such as a farmer with his horse or his wife attending the fireside.

The collection is a great example of Waske's later working periods, since it is largely constituted of repainted post-war works. Together with the few early works, the collection is a great example of the stylistic and spiritual development of a German Expressionist artist.

Various attributions to Erich Waske have been made by Ebay providers. These often show a completely different language of the artist making authenticity doubtful.¹⁵⁷ These are examples of undated works which vary from icon-like paintings to entirely abstract works. If these however, turned out to be autograph one would be a great step closer in understanding Waske's experimental phases. Such a painting in the Malta collection would hence round up the the artist's development, giving a holistic idea of the artist's story.

¹⁵⁷ As is said in the Waske homepage, many of those providers drew back their works after the editor started asking investigative questions.

Conclusion

Through the Study of Erich Waske's life and art one comes to terms with the impact that socio political situations had on the artist, as can be read in the first two chapters of. The example of Waske mirrors the way in which the entire young generation of German Expressionists was conditioned by the context they lived in.

It is a fact that apart from various circumstances and obstacles, Erich Waske latched onto what he regarded as his religious mission and with that, did not develop his style fundamentally, especially after the war. This can be seen especially when comparing him to artists like Wassily Kandinsky who despite being twenty-three years older made much greater leaps in his development.

Waske was however a prolific worker and it is important to keep in mind that he acted according to his urge and belief that the world must be faced with the apocalyptic visions that he thought would soon become reality.

Nevertheless Waske is another important piece of the puzzle that can add to the story of German Expressionism. He took part in the earliest Expressionist exhibitions. Upon regarding his work in the twenties, as well as the little that is left from his early periods a degree of innovation has to be admitted.

An overlook over the newspaper articles in which he is generally praised, shows that he was valued not only by the general public but authorities such as the well-respected Will Grohmann, which further shows that he was an artist of appreciable ability.

Apart from that, the nature of the artist's art has been laid out in outlining his development and explaining influences reaching from literature to other artists. Matisse's luminosity (after a period of dull colours in the 1930's) has become evident as well as clear affinities with primitivism, for example.

A particularly important attribute in Waske's art is his affinity with light and its meaning as it is a re-occurring theme in his art. He studies it and injects it into his paintings as powerful symbolism as can be seen in the motif of 'Victory of Light' for example. He makes use of it in showing the power of God from the beginning of his career as a painter as can be seen innumerable in the works of the Malta collection.

Reference to these and other Malta works has been made reference to throughout the thesis. Furthermore an account of the collection has been given and its span can also be seen in Volume II, where each work is depicted and catalogued.

This thesis has shed some light onto an almost entirely forgotten artist. It has only scratched the surface however, and I strongly feel he deserves further investigation about his art and life due to the large Malta collection, but also due to his part in German historical culture. I sincerely hope that this thesis serves as a good starting point for further study.

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