

**Painting Two:****Kirchner, self-portrait with a soldier, 1915**

1937 – Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party held a large-scale art show in Munich. This art show was named “Die Ausseitung ‘Entartete Kunst’ otherwise known as the Degenerate Art show. The works displayed included that of Ludwig Kirchner.

Symbolic – Kirchner’s work, ***Self-portrait as a soldier***, shows the immense human struggle, it depicts emotion, pain and brutality at the hands of war. This dramatic painting, however, would have been laughed at and automatically disregarded, shunned and spurned by not only Hitler but also by the entire Nazi regime, **This artwork’s emotional connotations and suggestions regarding weakness within the human spirit allow conclusions that Hitler would have negatively valued the symbolic suggestions within the piece. For example, the lack of a hand, suggesting that Kirchner had no hand, but that he was so mentally crippled from the war that he can no longer function normally, let alone paint. Kirchner’s main aim in art was to represent “tension-filled depictions of city life, penetrating psychological portraits, sensual interpretations of naked men and women”<sup>8</sup>, this concept was very far from Hitler’s need to depict German perfection, glorified figures and suggestions of the restraint and perfect neo-classical movement. Hitler’s regime valued the concept that all Germans must be depicted as perfect, this can be seen through propaganda posters placed throughout Germany claiming the Aryan race to be the best in the world; this concept was greatly challenged by Kirchner’s piece as he explored human emotion and inner conflict. This, Hitler would have seen as weakness, hence Kirchner’s symbolic suggestions of mental breakdown would have been greatly disliked by Hitler.**

Kirchner was a major part of the expressionist art circle based in Munich, Die Brücke. Die Brücke itself was a group of artists all fascinated with the concept of using artwork to depict emotion and feeling whilst disregarding beauty and attractability, obviously this concept of “new age art” went highly against what Hitler valued within art in regards to the fact that their views were simply the polar opposite. Hitler himself enjoyed aesthetically pleasing well-painted works that contained restraint, conformity and renaissance suggestions. Kirchner, however, was fascinated with the new ways in which art could be challenged, morphed and created in order to depict strong and often controversial messages. **Clearly this was a concept that went against Hitler’s views of the role of Art. It is due to Hitler’s obvious dislike of anything from the Die Brücke group that he would have negatively valued Kirchner’s piece. Although many saw and still see Kirchner’s work, *a self-portrait as soldier* to be revolutionary and groundbreakingly human, Hitler and his Nazi party greatly disapproved and disregarded, to an immensely negative extent, the artistic value throughout this piece, simply due to the fact that they saw the role of art to be something that idealised and glorified the human race.**

This painting would have to be highly negatively valued in regards to the connotations it contains about politics, this painting is purely emotion-based, Kirchner is attempting to share with the viewer how tormented and lost he is after fighting in the first World War. As well as being a metaphor for his loss of sanity and happiness, the hollowness within Kirchner’s

<sup>8</sup> Rose Carol Washon Long, German expressionism, university of California press. Pg 22  
© NZQA 2015

eyes also act as a disregard to the government, by wearing a military uniform throughout the piece Kirchner is mocking and shaming the government, asking why they would send people to war let alone why they would even go to war as a country. Kirchner is blatantly being politically controversial, although this concept fits into the early modernist art movement, this does not fit into the concept of Nazism, therefore Hitler would have negatively valued this painting to an extreme extent. The Nazis treated this painting with immense disregard, in regards to its emotional subject matter; the Nazis shunned and rejected the work. This brutal suggestion of war and politics from Kirchner would have been seen as an advertisement against war by the Nazis therefore they would have further wanted to remove it from sight.

2