AHIST 3319-001 (87067)
Avant-Garde and Aftermath

Die Neue Sachlichkeit:

Architecture and Painting in Germany During the Weimar Period, 1918-1933

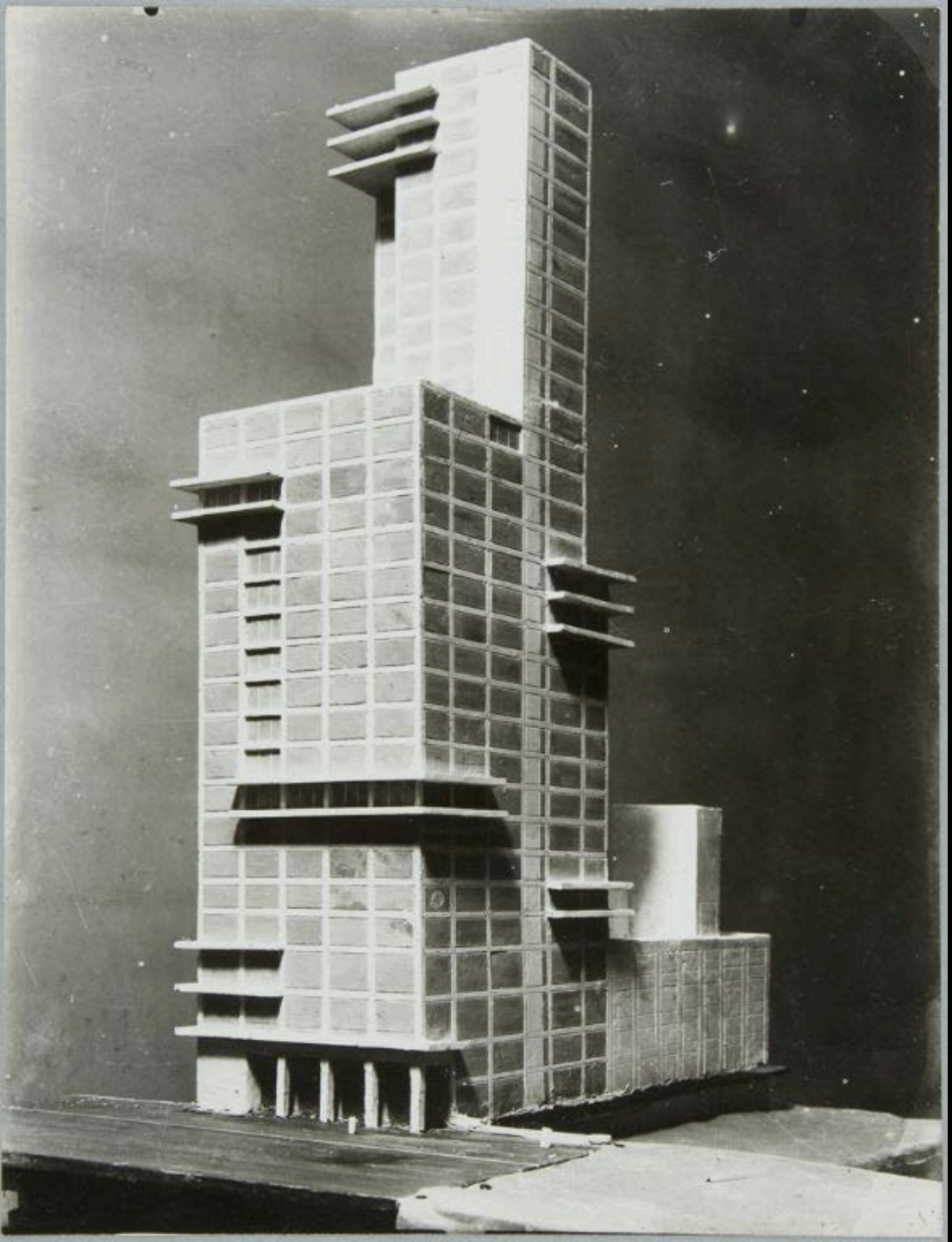
Guest Lecturer: Leigh Arnold, Ph.D.

Sachlichkeit f ~ / *reality, essentiality, objectivity, impartiality, detachment // (business-minded) matter-of-factness //* <arch> *utility, practicality // appositeness //* <arts> die neue ~ *neo.* od. *modern*

The Bauhaus building in Dessau, designed by Walter Gropius, 1925/26

Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer, Sommerfeld House, Berlin, 1920-22.

Haus am Horn, Georg Muche, 1923, Weimar.



Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer, Contribution to the Competition for the Chicago Tribune Office Building, 1922

“The expression *Neue Sachlichkeit* was in fact coined by me in the year 1924. A year later came the Mannheim exhibition of the same name. The expression ought really to apply as a label to the new realism bearing a socialist flavour. It was related to the general contemporary feeling in Germany of resignation and cynicism after a period of exuberant hopes (which found an outlet in expressionism). Cynicism and resignation are the negative side of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*; the positive side expresses itself in enthusiasm for the immediate reality as a result of a desire to take things entirely objectively on a material basis without immediately investing them with ideal implications. This healthy disillusionment finds its clearest expression in Germany in architecture.”

– Gustave Friedrich Hartlaub
Letter to Alfred Barr, Jr. July 1929

Characteristics of New Objectivity Painting

No theory or manifesto; not so much a style as a new way of seeing

1. A new and intentional fidelity to the outlines of objects, which contrasts in particular with the mobile, expansive, generalizing manner of the Expressionists

1. Visual sobriety and acuity; unsentimental and largely emotionless way of seeing

1. Concentration on everyday things, on banal, insignificant and unpretentious subjects, betraying no aversion from what is 'ugly'

1. Isolation of the object from any contextual relationship, thus calling its identity into question

1. Static pictorial structure, often suggesting a positively airless, glassy space, and a general preference for the static over the dynamic

1. Manifest construction of a picture out of heterogeneous details which form no organic whol

1. Eradication of the traces of the process of painting, and elimination of all gestural elements which might betray the hand of the individual painter

1. A new mental relationship with the world of objects

George Grosz, *Republican Automatons*, 1920, watercolor, pen and Indian ink on card. New York, Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, Advisory Committee Fund.

George Grosz, *Grey Day*, 1921, oil on canvas. Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preubischer Kulturbesitz, Nationalgalerie.

George Grosz, *The Pillars of Society*, 1926, oil on canvas. Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preubischer Kulturbesitz, Nationalgalerie.

Georg Sholz, *War Veterans' Association*, 1921, oil on wood. Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle.

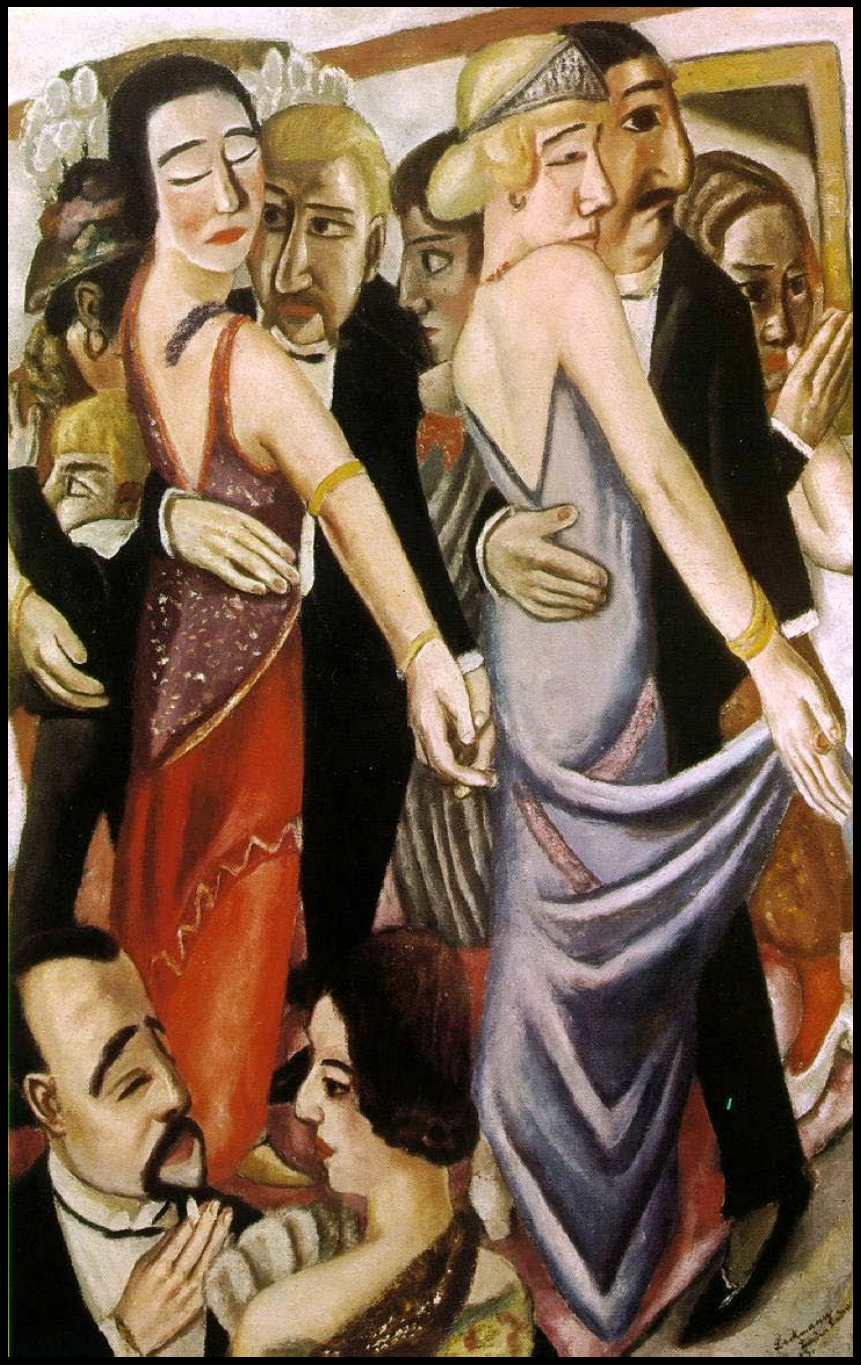
Rudolf Schlichter, *Dada Roof Studio*, c. 1920, watercolor and pen drawing. Berlin, Galerie Nierendorf.

Otto Dix, *The Salon I*, 1921, oil on canvas. Stuttgart, Galerie der Stadt Stuttgart.

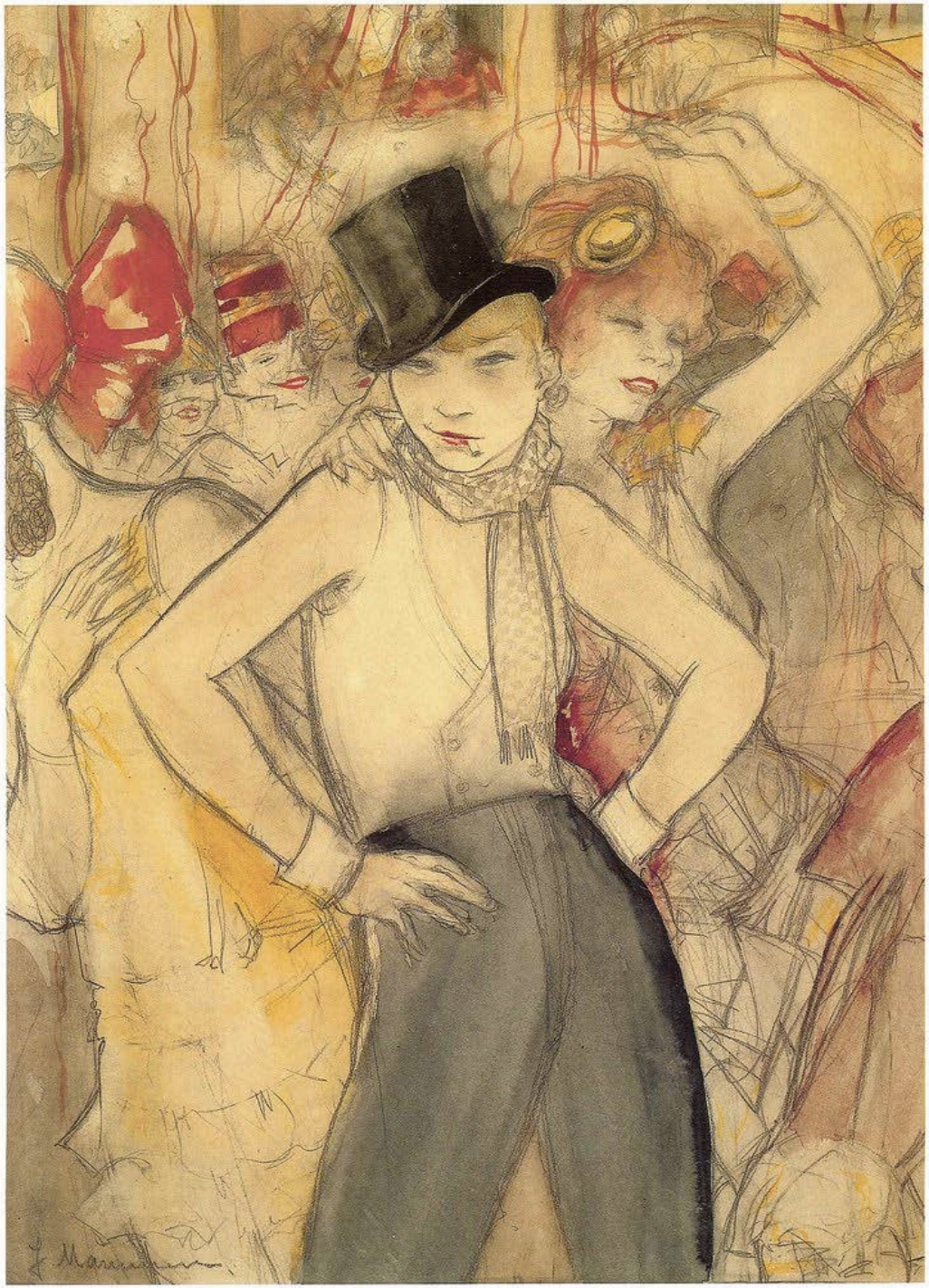
Gert Wollheim, *Taking Leave of Dusseldorf*, 1924, oil on canvas. Dusseldorf, Kunstmuseum Dusseldorf im Ehrenhof.

Otto Dix, *To Beauty*, 1922, oil on canvas. Wuppertal, Von der Heydt-Museum.

Otto Dix, *Metropolis* (triptych), 1927/28, mixed media on wood. Stuttgart, Galerie der Stadt Stuttgart.



Max Beckmann, *Dance in Baden Baden,* 1923, oil on canvas
Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemälde-sammulungen



Jeanne Mammen, *She Represents*, c. 1927, watercolor and pencil. Private Collection.

Jeanne Mammen, *The Redhead*, c. 1928, pencil drawing with watercolor. Berlin, Berlinische Galerie.

Max Beckmann, *Self-Portrait with a Champagne Glass*, 1919, oil on canvas
Private collection, courtesy W. Wittrock, Berlin.

"Beckmann is unthinkable without Berlin" – admirer of Beckmann in 1913

"Beckmann *is* the new Berlin." – Julius Meier-Graefe, 1924

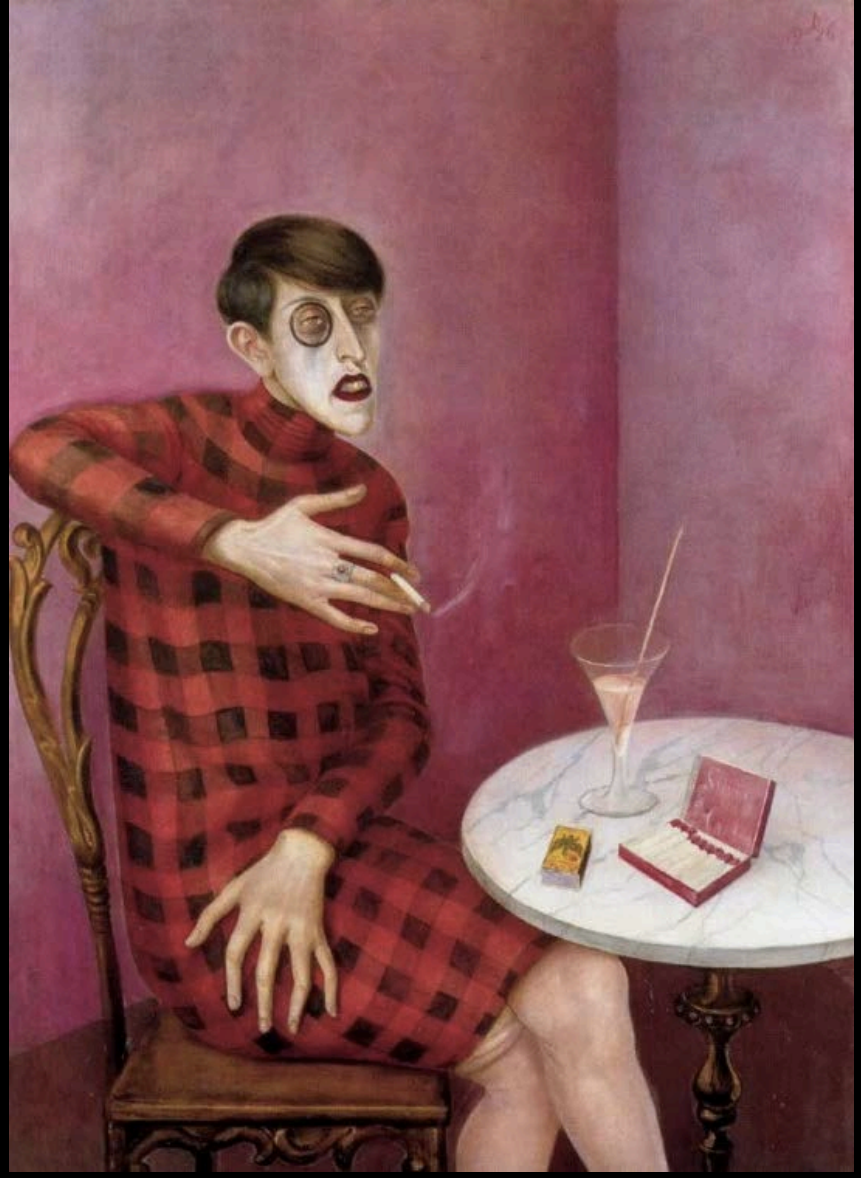
Max Beckmann, *Self-Portrait in Tuxedo*, 1927, oil on canvas
Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Christian Schad, *Self-Portrait,* 1927,
oil on wood
Private Collection

Christian Schad, *Count St. Genois d'Anneaucourt*, 1927, oil on wood. Private collection.

Christian Schad, *Agosta, the Pigeon-Chested Man, and Rasha, the Black Dove*, 1929, oil on canvas. Tate London, long-term loan from Private Collection.

Christian Schad, *Sonia*, 1928, oil on canvas. Private Collection.



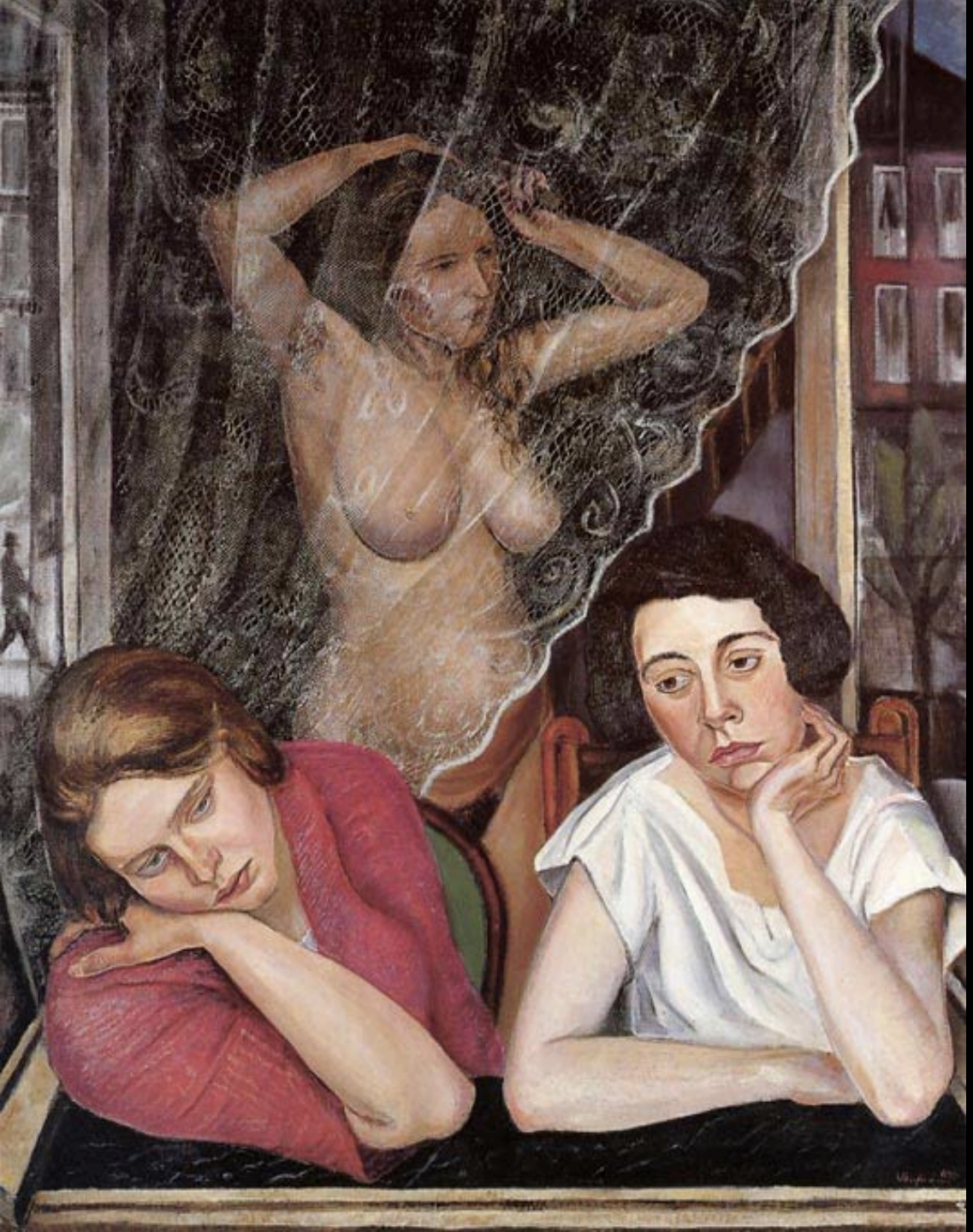
Otto Dix, *Portrait of Sylvia von Harden*, 1926, oil and tempera on wood. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

August Sander, *Journalist Sylvie von Harden,* c. 1920.

George Grosz, *Portrait of the Poet Max Herrmann-Neisse*, oil on canvas. Mannheim, Stadische Kunsthalle.

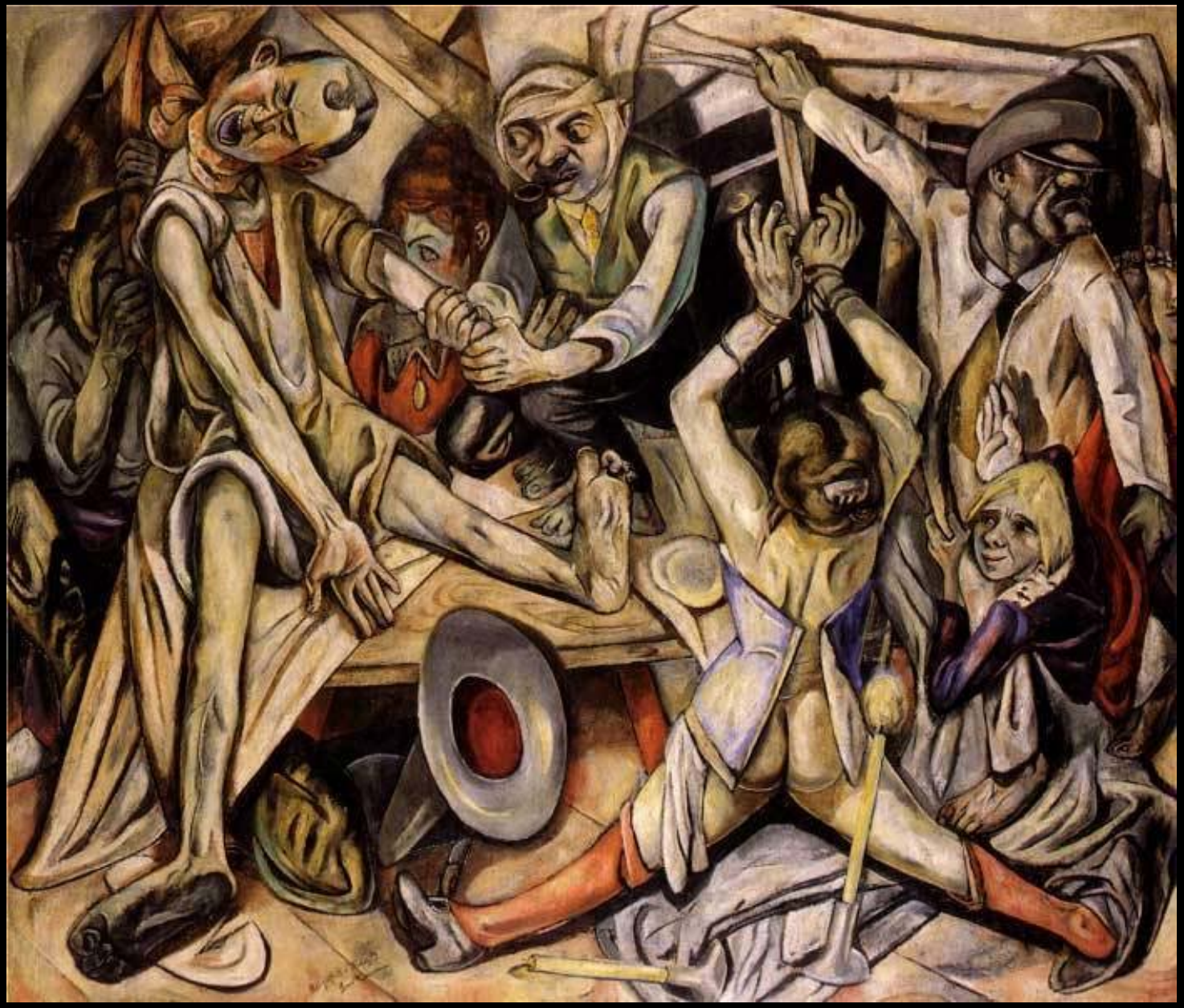
Karl Hubboch, *The Cologne Swimmer*, pencil and watercolor. Mannheim, Stadtische Kunsthalle.

Hanna Nagel, *Half-Naked Woman in front of a Printing Press*, 1929, pencil and watercolor. Karlsruhe, Irene Fischer-Nagel.



Arthur Kaufmann, *Three Girls at the Window*, 1927, oil on canvas. Dusseldorf, Stadtmuseum.

Max Beckmann, *Family Picture*, 1920, oil on canvas
The Museum of Modern Art, New York



Max Beckmann, *The Night,* ,1918-19, oil on canvas52 3/8 x 601/4 in.
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf

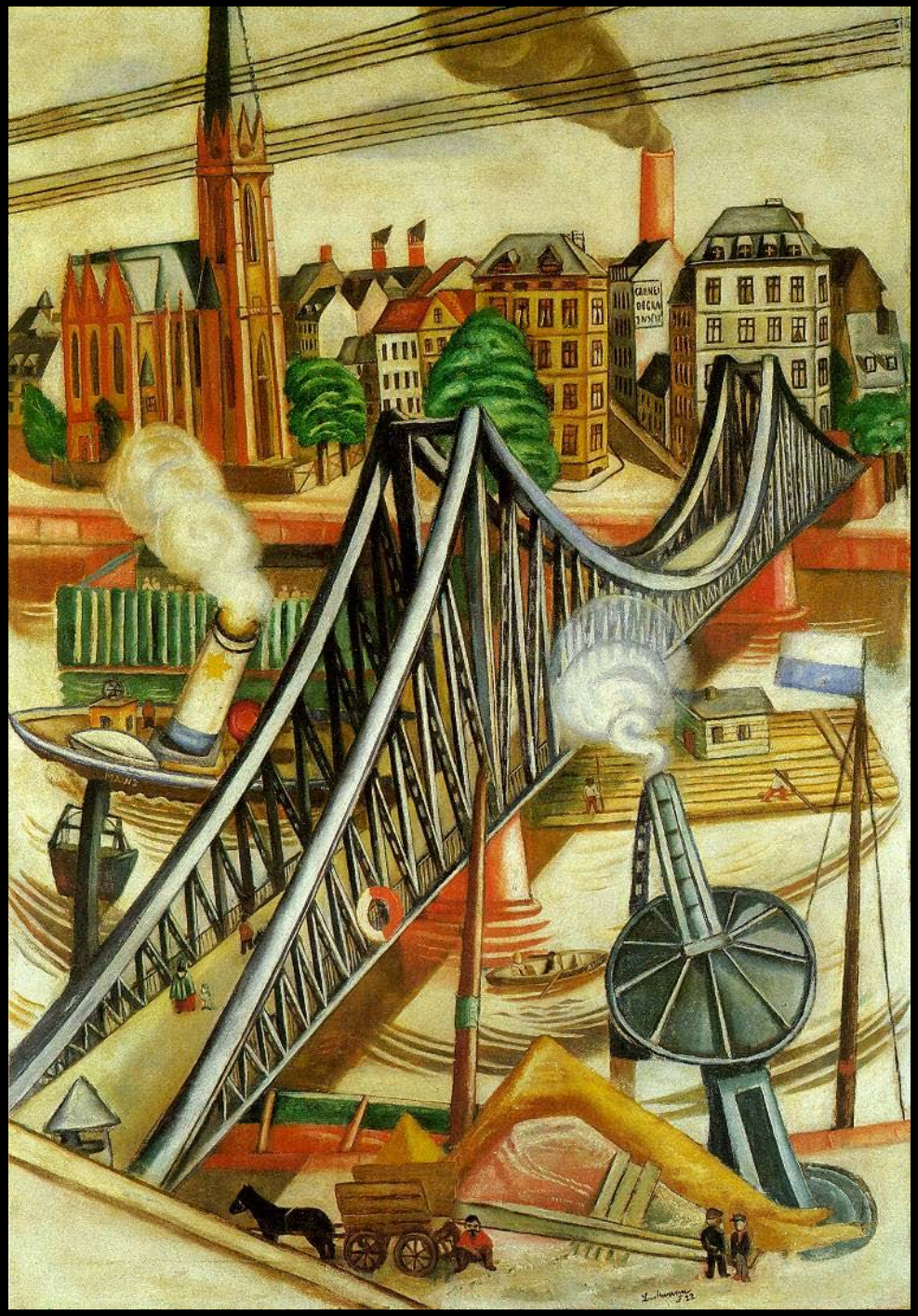
Max Beckmann, *The Dream,* 1921, oil on canvas
St. Louis Art Museum

Max Beckmann, *Black Irises*,1928, oil on canvas
Collection R. N. Ketterer, Campione, Switzerland

Hans Mertens, *Still Life with Household Articles*, 1928, oil on canvas. Hanover, Sprengel Museum.

Georg Sholz, *Cacti and Semaphore*, 1923, oil on hardboard. Munster, Wes†falisches Landesmuseum fur Kunst und Kulturgeschichte.

Rudolf Dischinger, *Gramophone*, 1930, oil on plywood. Frieburg, Stadtische Museen Freiburg, Museum fur Neue Kunst.



Max Beckmann, *The Iron Footbridge,* 1922, oil on canvas
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf

Hanns Kralik, *From My Window,* 1930, oil on canvas. Dusseldorf, Stadtmuseum.

Max Beckmann's "Creative Credo" (September 1918)

I paint and I'm satisfied to let it go at that, since I'm by nature tongue-tied and only a terrific interest in something can squeeze a few words out of me.

Nowadays whenever I listen to painters who have a way with words, frequently with real astonishment, I become a little uneasy about whether I can find language beautiful and spirited enough to convey my enthusiasm and passion for the objects of the visible world. However, I've finally calmed myself about this. I'm now satisfied to tell myself: "You are a painter, do your job and let those who can, talk." I believe that essentially I love painting so much because it forces me to be objective. There is nothing I hate more than sentimentality. The stronger my determination grows to grasp the unutterable things of this world, the deeper and more powerful the emotion burning inside me about our existence, the tighter I keep my mouth shut and the harder I try to capture the terrible, thrilling monster of life's vitality and to confine it, to beat it down and to strangle it with crystal-clear, razor-sharp lines and planes.
[…]
The war has now dragged to a miserable end. But it hasn't changed my ideas about life in the least, it has only confirmed them. We are on our way to very difficult times. But right now, perhaps more than before the war, I need to be with the people. In the city. That is just where we belong these days. We must be a part of all the misery that is coming. We have to surrender our heart and our nerves, we must abandon ourselves to the horrible cries of pain of a deluded people. Right now we have to get as close to the people as possible. It's the only course of action that might give some purpose to our superfluous and selfish existence – that we give people a picture of their fate. And we can do that only if we love humanity.

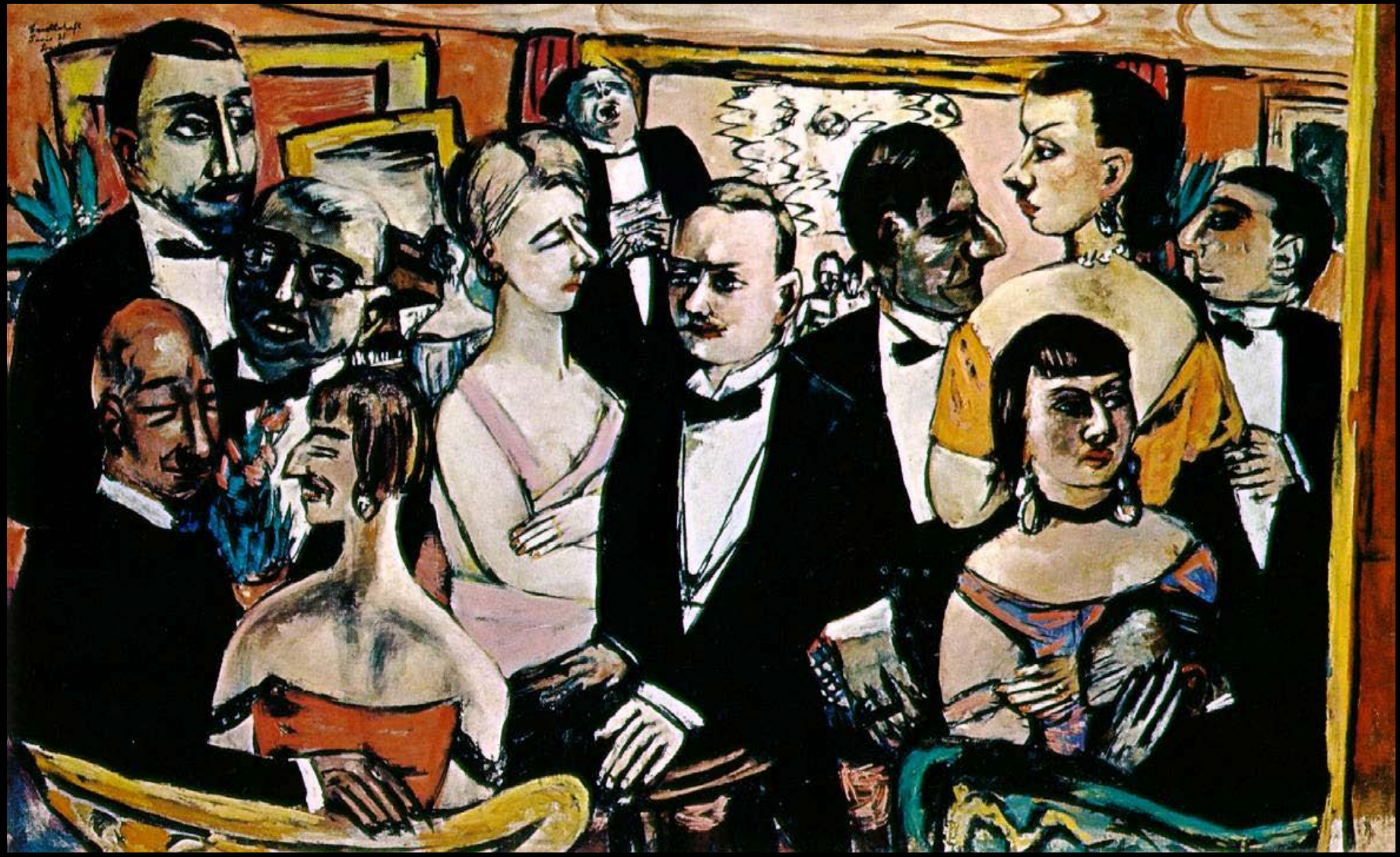
Actually it's stupid to love humanity, nothing but a heap of egoism (and we are a part of it too). But I love it anyway. I love its meanness, its banality, its dullness, its cheap contentment, and its oh-so-very-rare heroism. But in spite of this, every single person is a unique event, as if he had just fallen from Orion. And isn't the city the best place to experience this? They say that the air in the country is cleaner and that there are fewer temptations. But I believe that dirt is the same wherever you are. Cleanliness is a matter of the will. Farmers and landscapes are all very beautiful and occasionally even refreshing. But the great orchestra of humanity is still in the city. […]
Complete withdrawal in order to achieve that famous purity people talk about as well as the loss of self in God, right now all that is too bloodless and also loveless for me. You don't dare do that kind of thing until your work is finished, and our work is painting.

I certainly hope we are finished with much of the past. Finished with the mindless imitation of visible reality; finished with feeble, archaistic, and empty dcoration, and finished with that false, sentimental, and swooning mysticism! I hope we will achieve a transcendental objectivity out of a deep love for nature and humanity. The sort of thing you can see in the art of Mäleßkirker, Grünewald, Brueghel, Cézanne, and van Gogh.

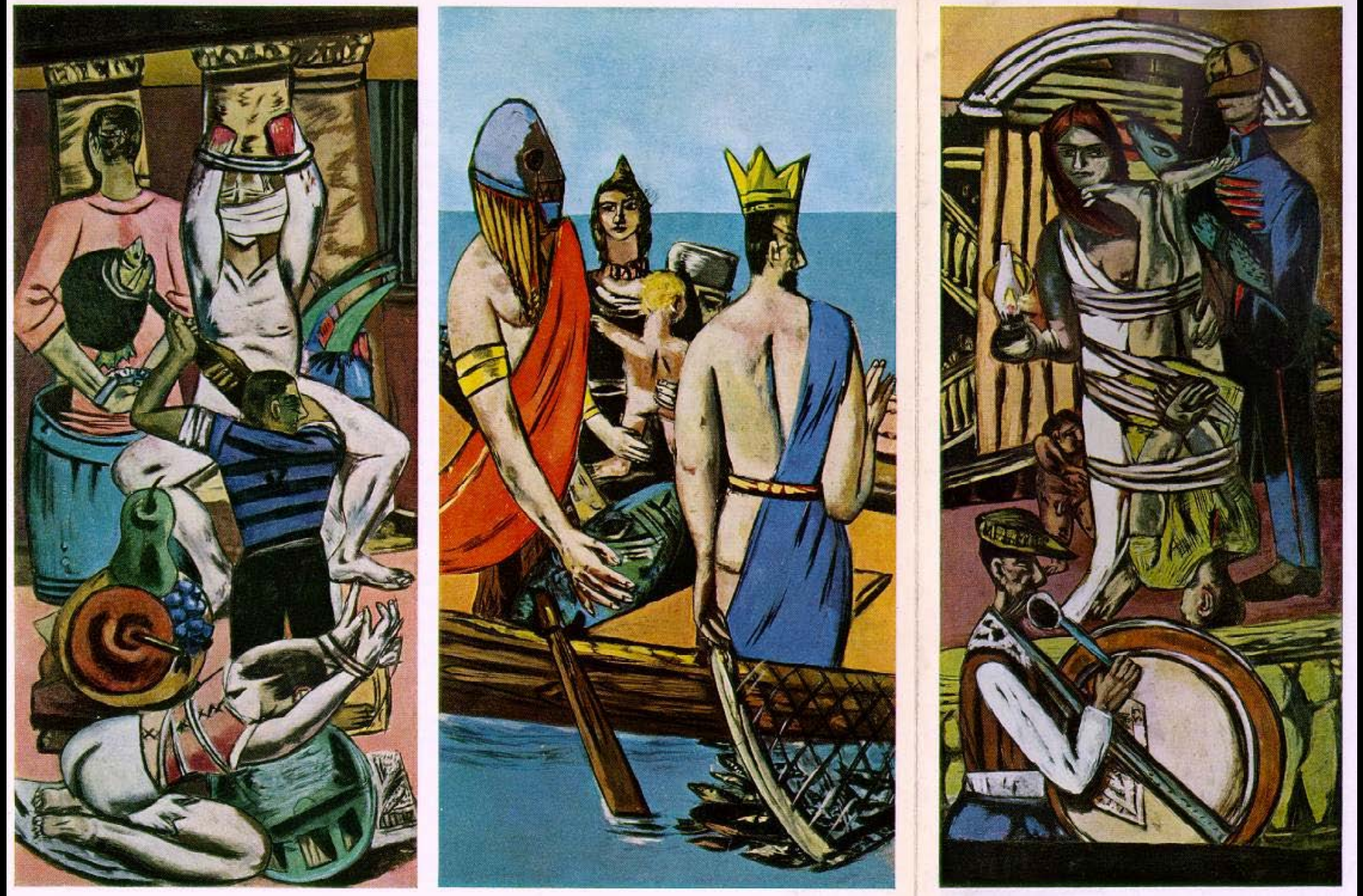
Perhaps with the decline of business, perhaps (something I hardly dare hope) with the development of the communistic principle, the love of objects for their own sake will become stronger. I believe this is the only possibility open to us for achieving a great universal style.

That is my crazy hope which I can't give up, which in spite of everything is stronger in me than ever before. And someday I want to make buildings along with my pictures. To build a tower in which humanity can shriek out its rage and despair and all its poor hopes and joys and wild yearning. A new church. Perhaps this age may help me.

Max Beckmann, "Creative Credo," *Self-Portrait in Words*, 181-185



Max Beckmann, *Party in Paris*, 1931 (reworked in 1947), oil on canvas
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York



Max Beckmann, *Departure*, 1932-33, oil on canvas triptych,
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Felix Nussbaum, *The Damned*, 1944, oil on canvas. Osnabruck, Kulturgeshichtliches Museum.