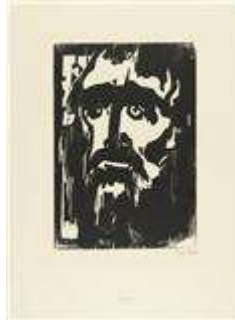


Emil Nolde, His Career As a Printmaker

by Erick Anderson



The early portions of Nolde's career were defined by his struggle to earn the freedom to work as an independent artist. He worked as a furniture designer and later taught industrial design at Saint-Gallen Craft Museum.

After winning his initial independence, Nolde studied at several schools across Europe including Académie Julian in Paris, where he first discovered impressionist painting and took interest in exotic cultures. At this point, Nolde married Ada Vilstrup and changed his last name from Hansen to that of his home village in northern Germany.

In 1906, he was invited to join the influential group of young expressionists Die Brücke. He worked as a member of the group for a year before moving on independently. But he did stay in contact with them. His early graphic art was influenced by Die Brücke whose members utilized the woodcut's bold, jagged possibilities as a powerful, primitive medium of expressionism. Nolde's most notable contribution to the movement is his woodcut, *The Prophet* (1912), an emotionally charged, dramatic image utilizing the strong contrast of the woodcut and its rough line quality.¹

But not all of Nolde's graphic work is indebted to Die Brücke. In keeping with his strongly independent mindset, Nolde's printmaking largely developed independently of Die Brücke. His early etchings reflect less primitivism and exhibit a more technically ambitious style. His etchings after he left Die Brücke also demonstrate an expressive but more intricate style, and less primitivistic subject matter. His etching, *Steamer* (1910), is a strong example of his style at the time.

In 1913, Nolde joined an ethnographic and demographic trip to Asia where he enthusiastically studied the exotic cultures he encountered. Though his trip did not yield any contributions to his graphic work, it represented a turning point in his career.² Upon his return, which was forced earlier than expected due to the outbreak of world war I in 1914, he had developed a profound distrust of colonialism and the modern world in general, which encroached on the pure, child-like expressions of primitive cultures. From that point forward, he focused his subject matter on images of nature, of religious significance, and of the unaffected cultures he had fallen in love.

The strongest period of Nolde's career came in the 1920s when his work gained widespread attention. In 1921, Nolde's biography was published by Max Sauerlandt, and a

large exhibition of his work was given in 1927 in celebration of his 60th birthday.

The 30s marked the beginning of the turbulent, latter period of Nolde's career as the political unrest that would eventually lead to the outbreak of World War II began to grow in Germany. In 1931 the Prussian Academy of Arts accepted him as a member, but then asked him to leave two years later by a growing National Socialist contingent. Soon after exiting the academy, Nolde made a mislead attempt to join the Nazi party, presumably for nationalistic reasons. He was evidently no racist as he demonstrated an obvious passion and respect for primitive cultures.

His bid at political security failed miserably as he soon became a prime target for the Nazi's efforts to cleanse Germany of so called "degenerate" art. Many of his paintings and graphic works were removed from galleries across Germany, and in 1937 many of his works were featured prominently in the Nazi's infamous Entartete Kunst, a mock exhibition devoted to the ridicule of "degenerate" art.

During the 40s, the Nazis continued to remove work from Nolde's studio, and he was banned from engaging in any artistic activity. Anything that he produced had to be done in utmost secrecy. So it is understandable that Nolde did no graphic work during this time, but instead painted a series of small watercolors, some of the most poignant and beautiful of his career.

After the war, he continued mostly as a painter and watercolorist. Although he rarely returned to the graphic arts during the final decade of his life, he did receive two notable awards for his past graphic work, one at the Venice Biennale of 1950, and another in 1952, the French order Pour le mérite. Emil Nolde died in April of 1956 at the age of eighty-eight.

Notes

1. See Buchheim p. 22 for more information on the development of the expressionist woodcut.

2. See "Emil Nolde" at oxfordartonline.com for more information on Nolde's trip and the paintings and drawings it inspired.

