



FEBRUARY 2014

Big Trees, Small People

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner | *Fir Trees*



VISIT THE BMA
and see *Fir Trees* in
German Expression-
ism: A Revolutionary
Spirit on view through
September 14, 2014.

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (German, 1880–1938).
Detail, *Fir Trees*. 1919. Color woodcut. 24 ⁷/₁₆
x 13 ³/₁₆ inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art:
Board of Trustees Fund, BMA 1950.109

In the hush of a deep, dark forest, where huge trees tower overhead, a person can feel very small. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner must have known such a feeling after moving to a village in the Swiss Alps far away from the crowded cities where he had lived for many years. Surrounded by mountains and fir trees, Kirchner captured the mystery of the forest in his paintings and prints and tried to express what he felt, as well as what he saw, while walking in the woods. In this print, Kirchner exaggerated the height of the trees to convey how he felt in their presence, and dared to color the tree trunks a brilliant blue.

To make his woodcut, Kirchner probably cut three separate blocks of wood. Black ink on the first block made the sky dark and created black shadows between the trees. A second block added blue for the pile of rocks and the tree trunks that soar upward to the clouds. A third block created all the greenery of the woods and forest floor. With these three colors, plus the unprinted white of the paper, Kirchner created the impression of a dense forest. If we look closely, we can spot three solitary figures making their way along a white footpath that winds through the trees like a bright ribbon. One of them uses a walking stick to keep from stumbling. These tiny figures, infinitesimally small when compared to the trees, make the forest seem to grow taller right before our eyes. And the blue makes us wonder if these fir trees might have been touched by a bit of magic.

CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Make a list of ten terrific words that mean “really big.” Then list ten words than mean “really small.”

What sounds might you hear in Kirchner's forest? How do they differ from the sounds of a city?

Use your imagination and write a story or fairy tale about how the trees in this forest became blue.

Kirchner has been called an “Expressionist” artist. What do you think he is expressing in *Fir Trees*? Compare Kirchner's expressive use of color in *Fir Trees* with his *Flower Beds in the Dresden Gardens* in the June 2009 issue of Art-To-Go:

artbma.org/educators/atg/pdf/ATG_06-09.pdf

PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.

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