



Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884-1976), *Rising Moon*, 1912, German. Oil on canvas. 87.6 x 95.2 cm. Courtesy of The Saint Louis Art Museum, St Louis, Missouri (<http://www.slam.org>); bequest of Morton D. Day.

Karl Schmidt-Rottluff's *Portrait of Emy and Rising Moon*

M. Therese Southgate, M.D.

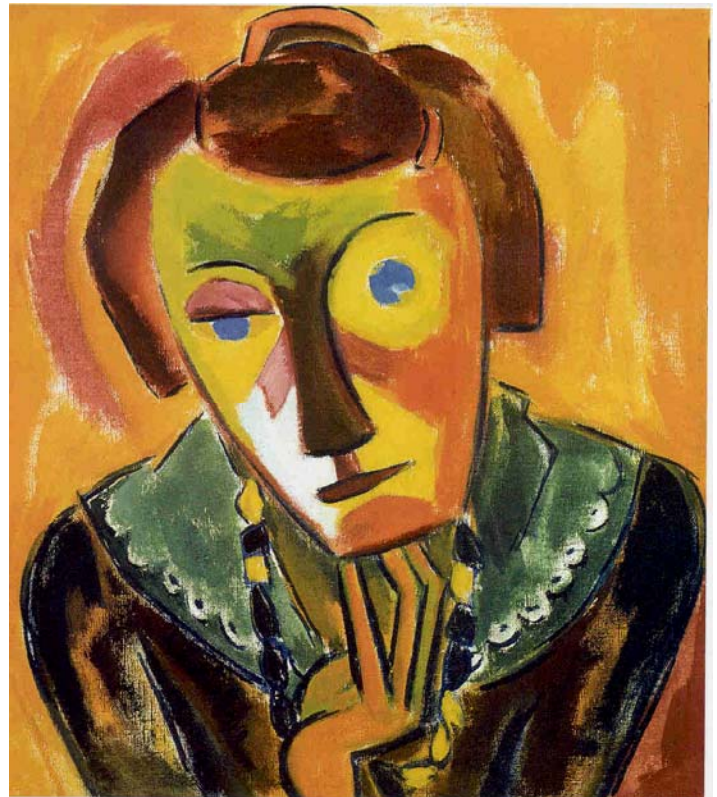
The day was memorable. On June 7, 1905, in the old and beautiful city of Dresden, four young architecture students, fed up with "establishment" art, founded a group that they hoped would carry the visual arts—in particular painting and printmaking—well beyond the old limits into new, uncharted territory. Unfettered by tradition, they would unite art and life, themselves and their work forming the bridge. At age 21, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884-1976) was the youngest. It was also he, inspired most likely by Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*, who gave the group its name, Die Brücke ("the bridge").

Die Brücke lasted only until 1913, when it was formally dissolved because of tensions among its members, but it had a

lasting effect on German art, especially on a new style called Expressionism. Self-taught as painters, the young students had been excited by the works of van Gogh, Munch, the Fauves, and Cubists, even by the Art Nouveau movement. They made their canvases bold and colorful; they flattened the monumental forms, often outlining them in black, and crammed them into tight, airless spaces; a sense of claustrophobia threatened to burst the frames. Schmidt-Rottluff, in particular, was also influenced by the angular forms of African and Oceanic art in which deep expression could be conveyed in a few well-placed angles, even without color .

Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884-1976), *Portrait of Emy*, 1919, German. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh bequest of Morton D. Day. (<http://www.ncartmuseum.org>); bequest of W. R. Valentiner.

In 1912, not long before the group disbanded, Schmidt-Rottluff painted the landscape *Rising Moon*. It is typical of his work at that time: architectural, monumental, colorful, distorted. Seven years later he painted *Portrait of Emy*. A war had intervened, he had lost (though temporarily) his creative drive, Die Brücke was no more, he had turned from landscape to figure painting, he had married. Yet in this portrait of his wife, the colors are strikingly similar to those of 1912. However, where once he chose from the blue end of the spectrum, he now chooses from the hot, red and yellow area. His expression has gone from cool to hot, from night to day, from the moon to the sun. A sense of brooding pervades both pictures, but where the landscape broods more or less peacefully in the moonlight, Emy's brooding is more agitated, almost electric in its feeling.



Her chiseled, angular features give Emy more the character of a sculpture or an African mask, a medieval icon made modern. But it is the eyes that are the most arresting feature. Penetratingly blue, one is opened wide, the other half lidded. They express a tension, perhaps, a desire to see, a desire for truth, but one coupled with a simultaneous fear of knowing. Likewise, the tension may also express a wish to reveal herself and a simultaneous fear of doing so lest she be rejected. Emy expresses the universal human dilemma, yet remains as mysterious as the moonlit valley between the mountains.

Schmidt-Rottluff's career continued for another nearly 60 years. In the 1960s, he provided the initiative for the Brücke Museum in Berlin. He died in West Berlin on August 10, 1976.