

AP® ART HISTORY

2015 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 7

The work on the left is Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's *Street, Dresden* (1908). The work on the right is Fernand Léger's *The City* (1919).

Both works show interpretations of the modern urban environment in the early twentieth century. Using specific evidence, analyze how the works reflect the artists' contrasting interpretations of the modern urban environment. (10 minutes)

Background

This question asks students to analyze two contrasting interpretations of the modern urban environment painted by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Fernand Léger during the early twentieth century. The intent of the question is to prompt students to consider differing artistic presentations of the same theme; in this case, the modern city.

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner was a founding member of *Die Brücke* ("The Bridge"), a collective formed by four architecture students in Dresden, Germany, in 1905 C.E. The name was influenced by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who wrote in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end." The artists of *Die Brücke* sought an authenticity of expression that they felt was increasingly lost with urbanization, and they protested the material decadence and increasingly homogenous character of capitalist society. Stylistically, *Die Brücke* found inspiration in the Arts and Crafts and *Jugendstil* movements, the so-called primitive arts, and specifically the German woodcut. A direct connection can also be made to the work of the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch, whose haunting images of love, anxiety, and death had widely circulated in print form throughout Germany.

Such ideas are present in Kirchner's *Street, Dresden* (1908), which depicts the crowded city's fashionable Königstrasse. Devoid of the architectural elements of a city, Kirchner's painting is defined instead by its figures, whose garish, unnatural presentation creates a kind of visual assault. The dissonant chorus of colors mirrors the painting's disorienting and chaotic composition. The shoppers, some of whom are cropped by the frame, move in all different directions. Other elements of the composition, such as its steep perspective and massing of forms, stress claustrophobic conditions. The paint itself is applied unevenly with bold strokes, patches of acidic color, and flat areas surrounded by heavy contour lines. All these elements combine to suggest the artificiality and heightened spectacle of the commercial street at dusk. More broadly, in this work Kirchner presents a raw, authentic, and even nightmarish urban experience that captures the agitation of modern life by depicting a place where the individual feels alone in the crowd.

By contrast, the French artist Fernand Léger offers a very different take on the theme of the city. Léger had moved to Paris from Normandy in 1900 C.E. and quickly abandoned architecture for painting, arriving at a form of Cubism inspired by Picasso and Braque. Léger was mobilized for World War I in August 1914, and his experiences as a frontline soldier, seeing some of the war's most violent conflicts, had a significant effect on his work. Many artists who had previously been enamored by the speed, dynamism, and power of machines abandoned such imagery after witnessing the technologically destructive side of war, yet Léger's postwar paintings are surprisingly harmonious visions of man and machine.

In *The City*, Léger drew upon his earlier experimentation with mechanical forms as well as the collagist elements of Picasso's and Braque's Synthetic Cubism to suggest the happy syncopation of a vibrant, humming city. Unlike the disturbing figures who dominate Kirchner's painting, humans are a small part of Léger's overall cityscape. The two figures who do appear in Léger's painting have been rendered as

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abstract, mechanical forms and painted shades of gray and black to suggest that humans operate as cogs in the city's well-oiled machine. While Kirchner's painting represents the urban environment almost solely through the image of a crowd, Léger's painting is populated with details from the city's physical infrastructure. Scaffolding around the perimeter suggests bridges and skyscrapers; ascending or descending staircases through its center evoke railroad and metro stations. Other forms resemble turbines, electrical wires, and radio towers. Unlike the discordant palette used by Kirchner, Léger's vibrant colors — yellow, blue, green, red, pink, black, and white — are meant to captivate viewers with their pulsating energy. In Kirchner's painting, distortion of forms, skewed perspective, and an inconsistent painting technique had together contributed to a feeling of uneasiness. In Léger's painting, traditional modeling is also almost entirely absent, yet depth and movement are created through a playful overlapping of forms. Large, stenciled letters that suggest signage on shipping containers, railroad cars, or advertising, create a link between Léger and earlier experiments in collage. Abstracted human figures, possibly from street signs, are playfully juxtaposed with real pedestrians. In essence, Léger attempts to capture the frenetic pace and sensory overload of the modern city — the staccato rhythm, sights, and sounds of everyday Paris in 1919 — yet he does so in a way that stands in sharp contrast to the disjointed, alienated city of Kirchner. In *The City*, Léger paints a buoyant vision of technological progress, while Kirchner in *Street, Dresden* sees the spread of urbanization as a kind of illness — an unwelcome encroachment on his idyllic vision of a pastoral way of life.

Two Tasks for Students

1. Identify specific evidence from each work that reflects the artist's interpretation of the modern urban environment.
2. Analyze how the two works reflect the artists' contrasting interpretations of the modern urban environment.

Points to Remember

This is a comparative analysis question that emphasizes differences rather than similarities; in this case, two artists' contrasting interpretations of the modern urban environment. As such, students must analyze how the two works are different. A response that analyzes only one of the two works is not, by definition, an exercise in contrast.

The highest score a response can earn if it analyzes the artist's interpretation of the modern urban environment in only one work is 2 points.

The artists, titles, and dates of the paintings are provided in the question.

Evidence may be defined as either visual or contextual or both.

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Question 7 (continued)

Scoring Criteria

4 points

Response demonstrates thorough knowledge and understanding of the question.

Using specific evidence, the response clearly and accurately analyzes how the works reflect the artists' contrasting interpretations of the modern urban environment. The response may include minor errors that do not have a meaningful effect on the analysis.

3 points

Response demonstrates sufficient knowledge and understanding of the question.

Using specific evidence, the response accurately analyzes how the works reflect the artists' contrasting interpretations of the modern urban environment. However, the response may be somewhat unbalanced — with a stronger analysis of either Kirchner's *Street, Dresden* or Léger's *The City*, although both are represented — and/or may include minor errors that have some effect on the analysis.

2 points

Response demonstrates some knowledge and understanding of the question.

Using evidence, the response accurately addresses how the works reflect the artists' contrasting interpretations of the modern urban environment, but the discussion of that evidence is less analytical than descriptive. It may be overly general, simplistic, or unbalanced. For example, the discussion of Kirchner's *Street, Dresden* may be mostly accurate whereas the discussion of Léger's *The City* may include errors that affect the response.

OR

Using specific evidence, the response clearly and accurately analyzes how one of the works reflects the artist's interpretation of the modern urban environment.

NOTE: This is the highest score a response can earn if it analyzes the artist's interpretation of the modern urban environment in only one work.

1 point

Response demonstrates little knowledge and understanding of the question.

The response demonstrates some general familiarity with the issues raised by the question by attempting to address how either or both works reflect the artists' contrasting interpretations of the modern urban environment. However, the response is weak, overly descriptive, and/or contains significant errors.

0 points

Response demonstrates no discernible knowledge and understanding of the question.

The student attempts to respond, but the response makes only incorrect or irrelevant statements. The score of 0 points includes crossed-out words, personal notes, and drawings.

— This is a blank paper only.

7. The work on the left is Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's *Street, Dresden* (1908). The work on the right is Fernand Léger's *The City* (1919).

7A11

Both works show interpretations of the modern urban environment in the early twentieth century. Using specific evidence, analyze how the works reflect the artists' contrasting interpretations of the modern urban environment. (10 minutes)

Kirchner was a founding member of Die Brücke and a pioneer of German Expressionism. In his many paintings of city streets, he uses harshly contrasting, unnatural colors to create a sense of alienation and unease. In *Street, Dresden*, for instance, Kirchner paints the women's faces orange and green, with dark slashes for eyes. The street is a bright, ghostly pink. He uses bright orange outlines to accentuate certain areas of the painting and bring the viewer's eye across it. The viewpoint in this work is that of someone standing still in the middle of a busy street, which is an impossible position in most cities. The colors, style and composition create the effect that, despite the crowds of people all over the canvas, the viewer is still out of place and alone.

Fernand Léger's city is far more abstract than Kirchner's, and more cheerful. The composition features a number of vertical blocks of colors to convey the effect of being surrounded by skyscrapers. Unlike L, which focuses mostly on the people, R uses focus more on the iconography of a city, imitating street signs, buildings, and lettering found in a city street. The human figures in R are more flat and abstracted than those in L. The colors are also brighter and more childlike, featuring lots of black and white blocks as well as red, blue, yellow and green. R is an image that tries to evoke the crisp, industrial clarity of a city, while L deplores its lack of humanity.

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7B.1.

Both works show interpretations of the modern urban environment in the early twentieth century. Using specific evidence, analyze how the works reflect the artists' contrasting interpretations of the modern urban environment. (10 minutes)

During these times urban life was on the rise. It wasn't THE industrial revolution, but there was new technology, innovation, and a general carelessness around every corner. These two paintings by Kirchner and Léger conflict these positive and enthusiastic views of urban life. Kirchner's view is the most extreme. The people are colored in murky and foreboding off-whites, muddied oranges, bleached pinks, and unsettling green tones. The colors are barely mixed if at all and the faces are barely distinguishable. The sickly greens apparent everywhere make the piece almost too harsh to look at. In "Street, Dresden," Kirchner is portraying the discomfort and suffocation he feels in the modern urban life. Even the empty street space is filled with specs of ugly pinks and greens. Fernand Léger's "The City" is much less visually unsettling. It's vibrant and busy while still maintaining a dark and subdued feeling. There is nearly no empty space as on the canvas and has the feeling of being overwhelmed at the booming and busy environment.

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FC 11

Both works show interpretations of the modern urban environment in the early twentieth century. Using specific evidence, analyze how the works reflect the artists' contrasting interpretations of the modern urban environment. (10 minutes)

The work on the left uses color in a fauvist manner. The colors chosen elicit fear and make the viewer unsettled. Faces on the left of the painting are facing away and a couple faces on the right are staring at the audience blankly. This artist may see the growing urban environment as ~~ominous~~ forbidding. The artist ~~in~~ ^{of} the right image creates a collage-like painting with images that remind him of the city. The colors and images make the painting busy, like a city, and celebrates its culture and growth. The artist also includes cube-like men on stairs among his collage, accepting man's presence in the city.

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Overview

This question asked students to analyze two contrasting interpretations of the modern urban environment painted by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Fernand Léger during the early twentieth century. The intent of the question was to prompt students to consider differing artistic presentations of the same theme; in this case, the modern city.

Sample: 7A

Score: 4

Using specific evidence from both works, the response clearly and accurately analyzes how Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's *Street, Dresden* and Fernand Léger's *The City* reflect the artists' contrasting interpretations of the modern urban environment. The response clearly establishes the context of Kirchner's work by identifying the artist as "a founding member of Die Brücke and a pioneer of German Expressionism." The response notes, "In his many paintings of city streets, he uses harshly contrasting, unnatural colors to create a sense of alienation and unease." The response cites specific evidence from the painting by stating that "Kirchner paints the women's faces orange and green, with dark slashes for eyes." The response analyzes the artist's interpretation of the urban environment by explaining, "despite crowds of people all over the canvas, the viewer is still out of place and alone." Turning to Léger's *The City*, the response states that "Léger's city is far more abstract than Kirchner's and more cheerful," citing "vertical blocks of colors to convey the effect of being surrounded by skyscrapers." In addition, the response points to "the iconography of a city, imitating street signs, buildings, and lettering." The response analyzes the contrasting interpretations by noting that Léger "tries to evoke the crisp, industrial clarity of a city," while Kirchner "deplores its lack of humanity." In this way, the response demonstrates thorough knowledge and understanding of the question.

Sample: 7B

Score: 3

Using specific evidence from both works, the response accurately analyzes how Kirchner's *Street, Dresden* and Léger's *The City* reflect the artists' contrasting interpretations of the modern urban environment. The response explains the context of the works as a time of "new technology, innovation, and a general liveliness around every corner." The response analyzes Kirchner's expressive use of color by citing "murky and foreboding off-whites, muddy oranges, blemished pinks, and unsettling green tones." The response then cites the "sickly greens" as evidence that the work is almost "too harsh to look at." The response observes how "Kirchner is portraying the discomfort and suffocation he feels in modern urban life." By contrast, Léger's city is "less visually unsettling" as well as "vibrant and busy." Léger conveys "the feeling of being overwhelmed at the booming and busy environment [*sic*]." The response is somewhat unbalanced in that the analysis of Léger's work is shorter and contains less evidence than the analysis of Kirchner's *Street, Dresden*. In this way, the response demonstrates sufficient knowledge and understanding of the question.

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Question 7 (continued)

Sample: 7C

Score: 2

Using evidence from both works, the response addresses how Kirchner's *Street, Dresden* and Léger's *The City* reflect the artists' contrasting interpretations of the modern urban environment. The response begins with a minor error by connecting Kirchner's use of color with Fauvism, a contemporaneous movement. However, the response correctly describes how the "colors chosen ellicct [*sic*] fear and make the viewer unsettled." Rather than analyzing Kirchner's use of color, the response then describes the positions of the faces in the composition. The discussion of Kirchner's work concludes with the correct assertion that the artist "may see the growing urban environment as forbodding [*sic*]." In addressing Léger's work, the response describes it as "a collage-like painting." The response states, "The colors and images make the painting busy, like a city, and celebrates its culture and growth." While the response gives correct interpretations of both works, it provides simplistic evidence and is more descriptive than analytical. In this way, the response demonstrates some knowledge and understanding of the question.