**Art between the Wars**

**Western Europe**

**Dada** or **Dadaism** was an art movement of the European avant-garde (artistic elite, French for “advance guard”, noted for its experimentation and innovation) in the early 20th century. Many say Dada began in Zurich, Switzerland in 1916, spreading to Berlin shortly thereafter but the height of New York Dada was the year before in 1915. To quote Dona Budd's *The Language of Art Knowledge*,

“*Dada was born out of negative reaction to the horrors of World War I. This international movement was begun by a group of artists and poets associated with the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich. Dada rejected reason and logic, prizing nonsense, irrationality and intuition. The origin of the name Dada is unclear; some believe that it is a nonsensical word. Others maintain that it originates from the Romanian artists Tristan Tzara’s and Marcel Janco's frequent use of the words "da, da," meaning "yes, yes" in the Romanian language. Another theory says that the name "Dada" came during a meeting of the group when a paper knife stuck into a French-German dictionary happened to point to 'dada', a French word for 'hobbyhorse’*.”

The movement primarily involved visual arts, literature, poetry, art manifestoes, art theory, theatre, and graphic design, and concentrated its anti-war politics through a rejection of the prevailing standards in art through anti-art cultural works. In addition to being anti-war, Dada was also anti-bourgeois and had political affinities with the radical left.

In the 1920’s in Paris, Dada led to **Surrealism**, a cultural movement whose aim was to "resolve the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality." Artists painted unnerving, illogical scenes with photographic precision, created strange creatures from everyday objects and developed painting techniques that allowed the unconscious to express itself or a philosophical idea.

The founder of **Surrealism** is considered to be André Breton, who had trained in medicine and psychiatry before World War I. During the war, Breton served in a neurological hospital where he used Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic methods with soldiers suffering from shell-shock.

During the 1930s, the Surrealist idea spread from Europe to North America, South America, Central America, the Caribbean, and throughout Asia, as both an artistic idea and as an ideology of political change.

Politically, Surrealism was Trotskyist, communist, or anarchist. The split from Dada has been characterized as a split between anarchists and communists, with the Surrealists as communist. Breton and his comrades supported Leon Trotsky and his International Left Opposition

**Germany**

**Art of the Third Reich** is the officially approved art produced in Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1945. Upon becoming dictator in 1933, Adolf Hitler gave his personal artistic preference the force of law to a degree rarely known before. Only in Josef Stalin’s Soviet Union, where **Socialist Realism** had become the mandatory style, had a state shown such concern with regulation of the arts.

In the case of Germany, the model was to be classical Greek and Roman art, seen by Hitler as an art whose exterior form embodied an inner racial idea. It had, furthermore, to be comprehensible to the average man. This art was to be both heroic and romantic. The Nazis viewed the culture of the modernist culture of Germany right after World War I with disgust. Their response stemmed partly from conservatism and partly from their determination to use cultural propaganda.

The reason for this, as historian Henry Grosshans indicates, is that Hitler "saw Greek and Roman as uncontaminated by Jewish influences. Modern art was an act of aesthetic violence by the Jews against the German spirit. Germany after World War I had become a major center of avant-garde art. It was the birthplace of **Expressionism** in painting and sculpture, the **atonal musical** compositions of Arnold Schoenberg, and the jazz-influenced music of Paul Hindemith and Kurt Weill. Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*brought expressionism to cinema. Hitler viewed many of these innovations as Jewish, even though, few of the artists were actually Jewish. But Hitler took upon himself the responsibility of deciding who, in matters of culture, thought and acted like a Jew.

The supposedly "Jewish" nature of art that was indecipherable, distorted, or that represented "depraved" subject matter was explained through the concept of degeneracy, which held that distorted and corrupted art was a symptom of an inferior race. By propagating the theory of **degenerate art**, the Nazis combined their anti-semitism with their drive to control the culture, thus consolidating public support for both campaigns.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_art#cite_note-6) Their efforts in this regard were unquestionably aided by a popular hostility to Modernism that predated their movement. The view that such art reflected Germany's poor condition and moral breakdown after World War I was widespread, and many artists acted in a manner to overtly undermine or challenge popular values and morality.

**Soviet Union**

**Socialist realism** is a style of realistic art that was developed in the Soviet Union and became a dominant style in other socialist countries. Socialist realism uses realistic art to further of the goals of socialism and communism. Although related, it should not be confused with **social realism,** a broader type of art that realistically depicts subjects of social concern. Unlike social realism, socialist realism often glorifies the roles of the meek and working class and the struggle for its emancipation.

In conjunction with the **Socialist Classical** style of architecture, socialist realism was the officially approved type of art in the Soviet Union for nearly sixty years. All material goods and means of production belonged to the community as a whole; this included means of producing art, which were also seen as powerful propaganda tools.

In the early years of the Soviet Union, Russian and Soviet artists embraced a wide variety of art forms. Revolutionary politics and radical non-traditional art forms were seen as complementary. In art, **Constructivism** flourished. In poetry, the non-traditional and the avant-garde were often praised.

This, however, was rejected by some members of the Communist party, who did not appreciate modern styles such as **Impressionism** and **Cubism** since these movements existed before the revolution and were thus associated with "decadent bourgeois art". Socialist realism was, to some extent, a reaction against the adoption of these "decadent" styles. It was thought that the non-representative forms of art were not understood by the proletariat and could therefore not be used by the state for propaganda. Alexander Bogdanov argued that the radical reformation of society to communist principles meant little if any bourgeois art would prove useful; some of his more radical followers advocated the destruction of libraries and museums. Lenin rejected this philosophy, deplored the rejection of the beautiful because it was old, and explicitly described art as needing to call on its heritage: "Proletarian culture must be the logical development of the store of knowledge mankind has accumulated under the yoke of capitalist, landowner, and bureaucratic society." Modern art styles appeared to refuse to draw upon this heritage, thus clashing with the long realist tradition in Russia and rendering the art scene complex. Even in Lenin's time, a cultural bureaucracy began to restrain art to fit propaganda purposes. Leon Trotsky's arguments that a "proletarian literature" was un-Marxist because the proletariat would lose its class characteristics in the transition to a classless society, however, did not prevail.

Socialist realism became state policy in 1934 when the First Congress of Soviet Writers met and Stalin's representative Andrei Zhdanov gave a speech strongly endorsing it as "the official style of Soviet culture". It was enforced ruthlessly in all spheres of artistic endeavor. Artists who strayed from the official line were severely punished. Form and content were often limited, with erotic, religious, abstract, surrealist, and expressionist art being forbidden. Formal experiments, including internal dialogue, stream of consciousness, nonsense, free-form association, and cut-up were also disallowed. This was either because they were "decadent", unintelligible to the proletariat, or counter-revolutionary.