

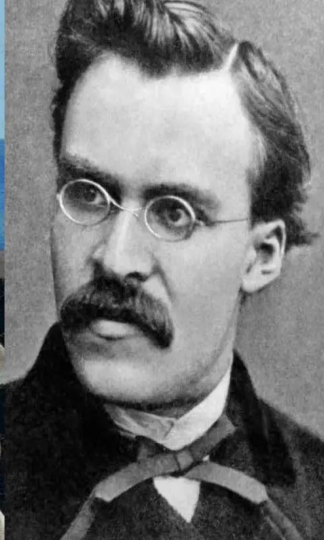
# German Expressionism

What is it and why  
is it important?



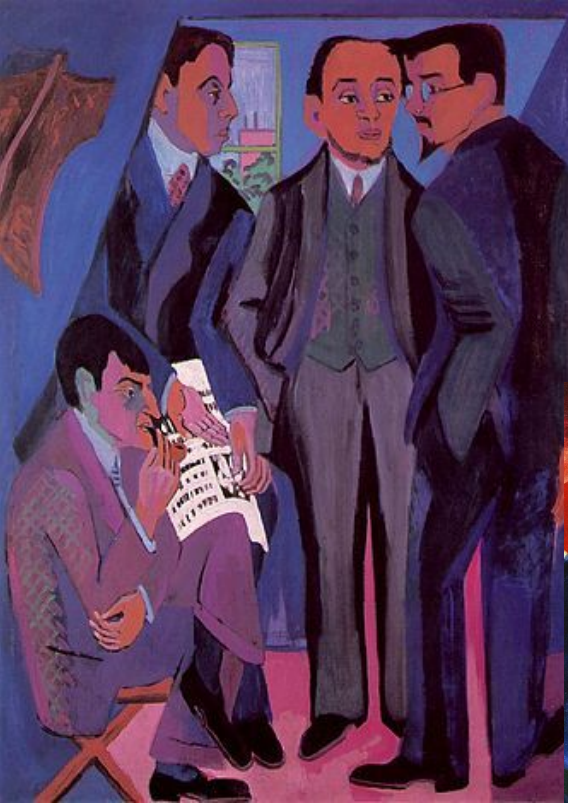
By Stella Crouch

German Expressionism was a creative movement in the early 20th century that was initially confined to Germany due to the outbreak of World War I. While the exact origin of the movement is debated, it is generally agreed that in 1905 German Expressionism emerged for the first time with a group of four German architecture students who desired to become painters as well. These students were Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Fritz Bleyl, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, and Erich Heckel who formed the group Die Brücke or The Bridge in the city of Dresden. The name of the group was taken from the famous philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche who wrote “What is great about man is that he is a bridge and not an end.”





The poster for the first “The Bridge” show in 1906 by Fritz Bleyl.



Painting of the group members by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner in 1926 or 1927

Fränzi Reclining by Erich Heckel in 1910



Franz Marc, The Large Blue Horses, 1911

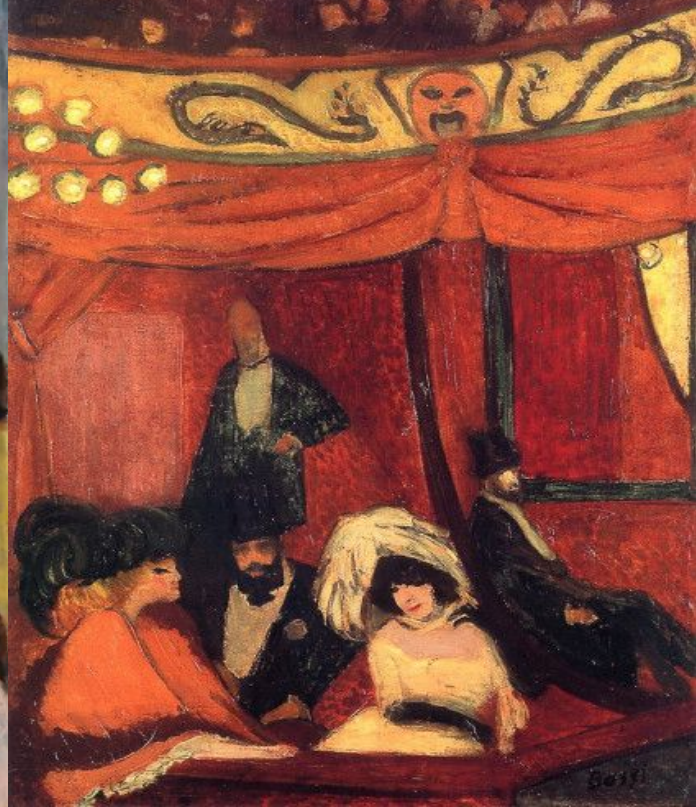
# Der Blaue Reiter or The Blue Rider

Der Blaue Reiter or The Blue Rider was a group made up of the Russian artists Wassily Kandinsky, Alexej von Jawlensky and Russian-German-Swiss Marianne von Werefkin as well as the German artists Franz Marc, August Macke and the Swiss-German artists Paul Klee for their exhibitions and publication activities. Active from 1911 to 1914 in Munich the group got their name from a frequent motif in Kandinsky's works, a horse rider.



# Other notable artists outside of the two art groups:

The Italian painter Erma Bossi.



# The German artist Otto Gleichmann



# The German painter Paula Modersohn-Becker.

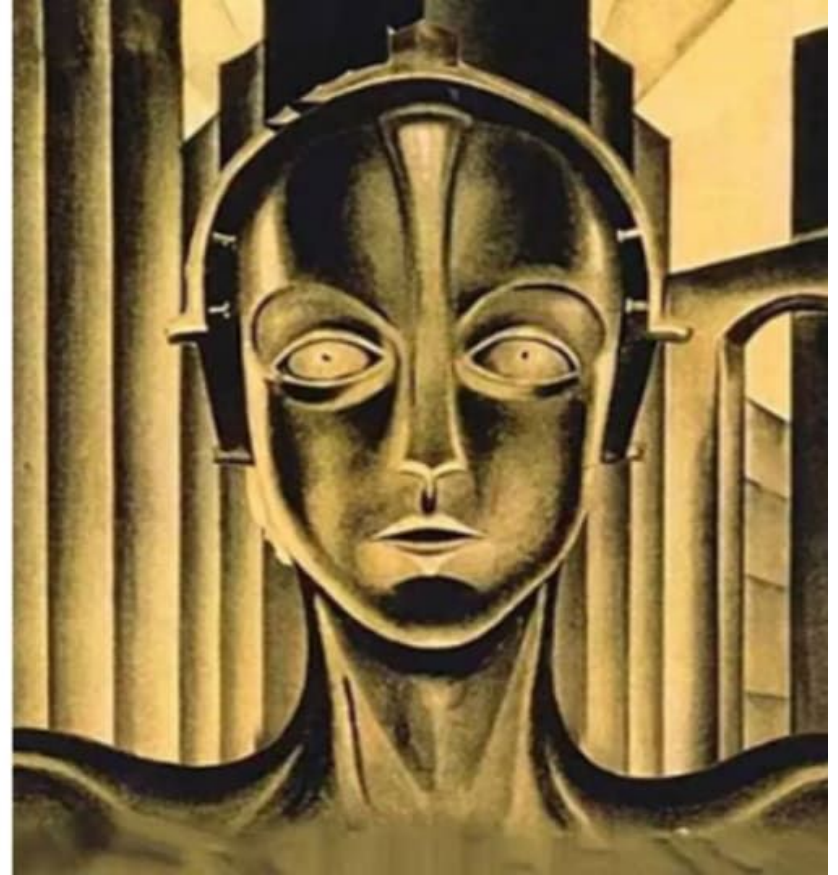


Can anyone think of any German Expressionist films?

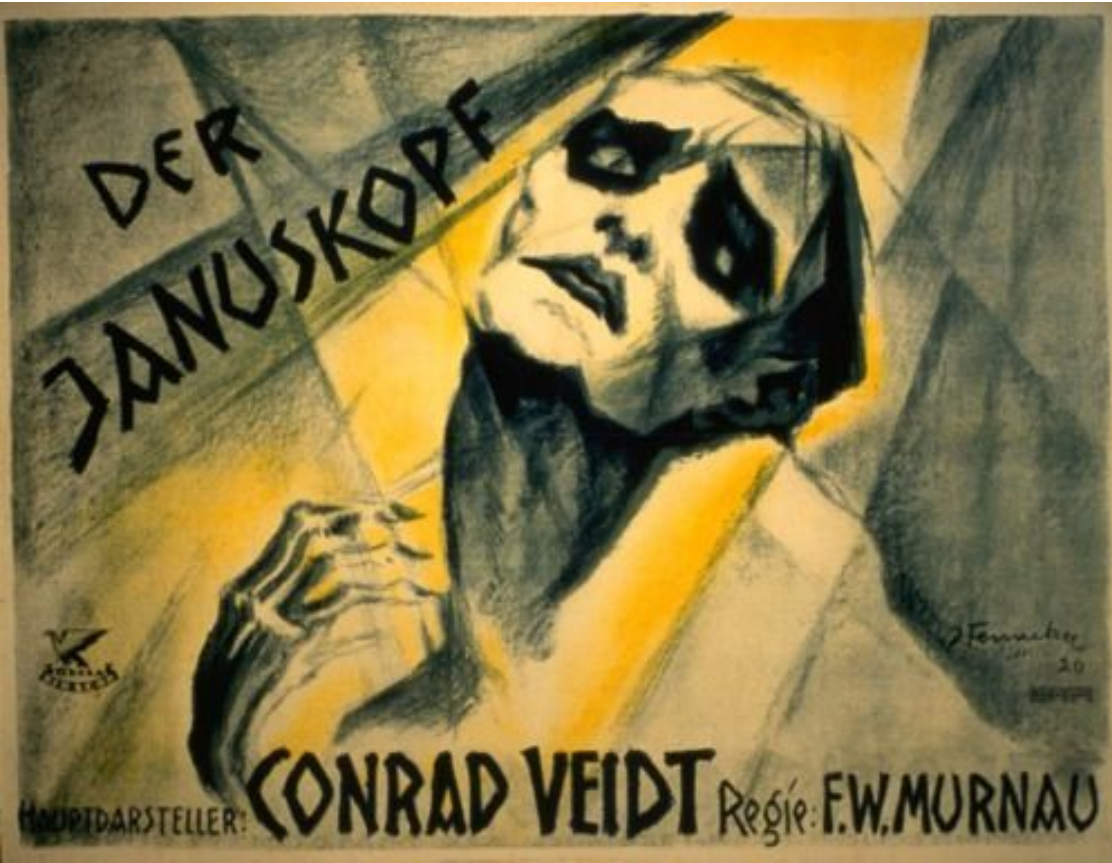




# German Expressionism in Cinema



# More Examples:



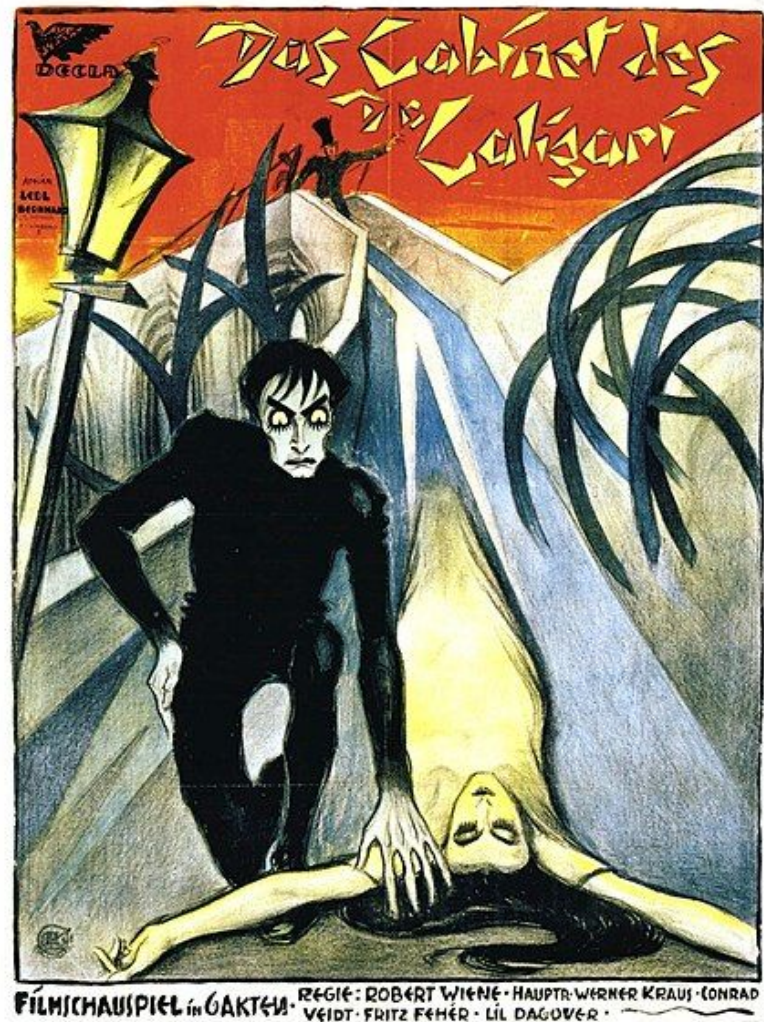
Der Januskopf or The Head of Janus in English is a lost film from 1920 released by Decla-Bioscop AG, the same production company that made The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari and many other classic German Expressionist films. It has been described by Bela Lugosi biographers Gary Rhodes and Bill Kaffenberger as being "among the most sought-after lost films" because of its small but star studded cast of Lugosi, Conrad Veidt, Magnus Stifter, Margarete Schlegel and Margarete Kupfer.

# *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*



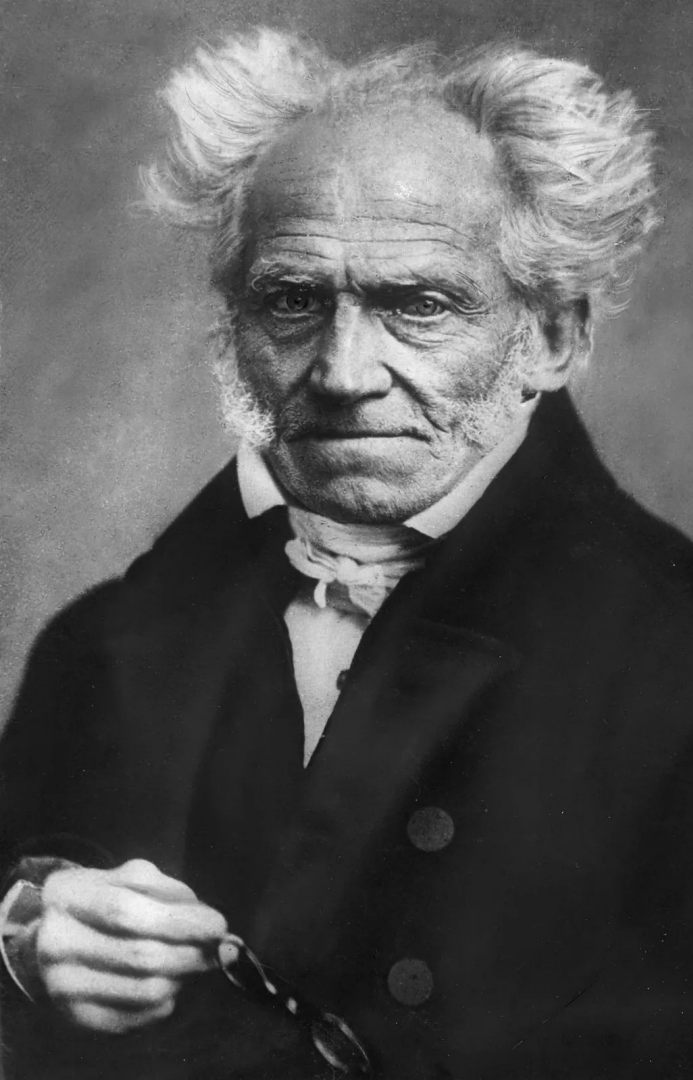
# What makes it so special?

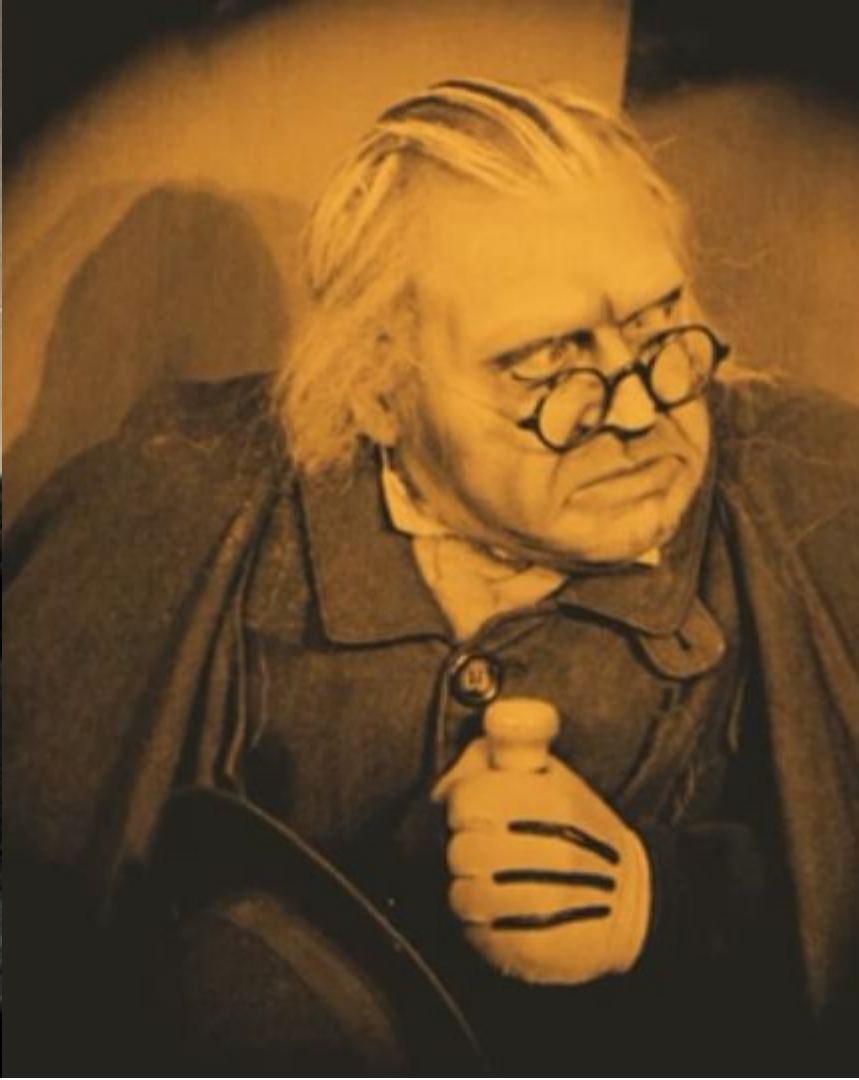
- Considered one of the first German Expressionist film.
- The first horror film.
- One of the first to employ a prologue and epilogue combined with a twist ending.
- One of the first films to utilize Expressionist set design.



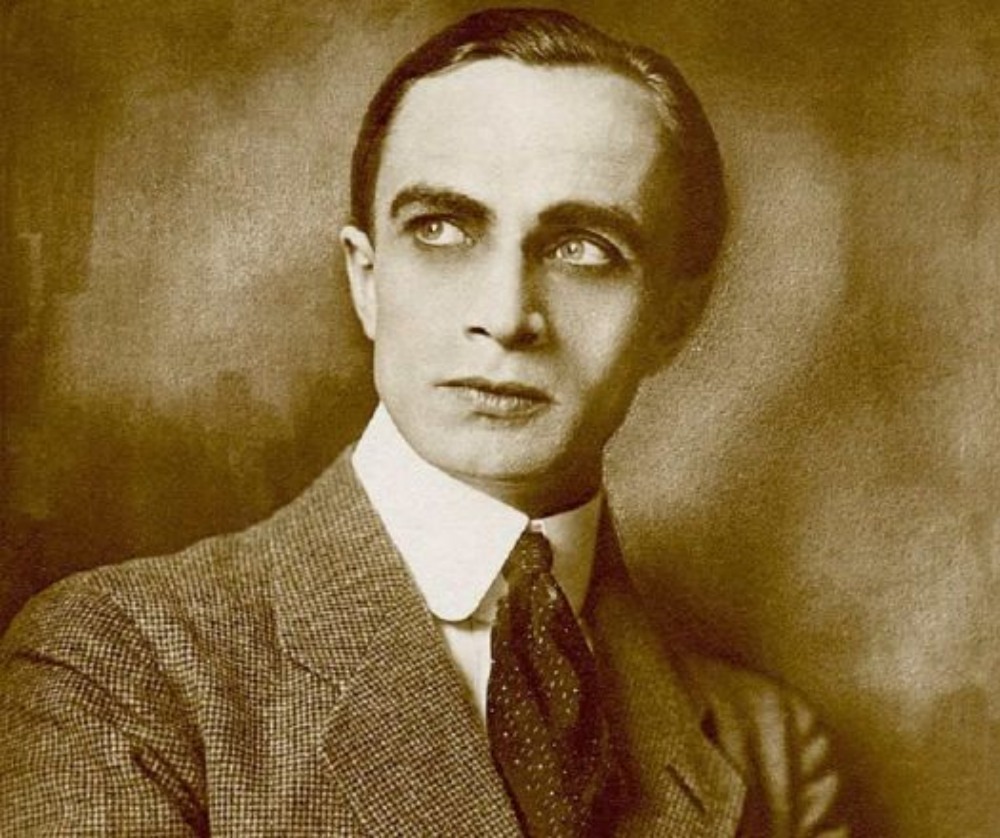
# Fun Facts about The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari

- Writer Hans Janowitz claims he had the idea for the film when he was visiting a carnival one day. He claims to have seen a man lurking in the shadows. The next day he heard that a girl had been brutally murdered at the carnival. He went to the funeral and saw the same man lurking there as well. While he had no proof that the strange man was the murderer, he had his suspicions. He fleshed the whole idea out into his film.
- The final sets and atmosphere of the film were based as much on low-budget practicalities as it was on creative inspiration and expressionism. Electricity was strictly rationed following WWI, so director Robert Wiene ended up simply painting light beams on backdrops. Shooting on severely confined sets forced him to use unusual camera angles.
- The physical appearance of Dr. Caligari played by Werner Krauss was inspired by portraits of the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer.





## How these actors lives diverged after the film...



Conrad Veidt vehemently opposed the Nazi regime. By March of 1933 Joseph Goebbels had imposed a "racial questionnaire" in which everyone employed in the German film industry had to declare their "race" to continue to work. When Veidt filled out his questionnaire, he answered the question about his rasse (race) by writing Jude (Jew). Veidt was in fact not Jewish, but his wife was, and Veidt would neither renounce and separate from the woman he loved nor collaborate with the regime as many others did. Veidt was also a known bisexual, which was something else the Nazis could use against him.





A week after their marriage in April of 1933 Veidt and his wife “Lilli or Lily” emigrated to Britain before either could be persecuted. In Britain he dedicated himself to roles in anti-nazi films. In 1941 they emigrated again, this time to the United States to aid in the British attempt to make films in the US that would persuade the then neutral and largely isolationist country to join the war against the Nazis. Even after leaving England, Veidt was concerned over the plight of children cooped up in London air raid shelters, and he decided to try to cheer up their holiday. Through his lawyers in London, Veidt donated enough money to purchase 2,000 one-pound tins of candy, 2,000 large packets of chocolate, and 1,000 wrapped envelopes containing presents of British money.



Realising he would be typecast by Hollywood to only play Nazis he stipulated in his contract that they must always be villains. Some of Veidt's most famous roles are ones in which he played a Nazi such as Casablanca and Nazi Agent. Veidt smuggled his parents-in-law from Austria to neutral Switzerland, and in 1935 he managed to get the Nazi government to let his ex-wife Radke and their daughter move to Switzerland. He also offered to help his wife Felizitas' mother, Frau Radke, of whom he was fond, leave Germany. However, she declined. A proud, strong-willed woman who was attached to her home country, she declared that "no damned little Austrian Nazi corporal" was going to make her leave her home. She reportedly survived the war, but no one in the family ever saw her again.

Lily Veidt's nephew Ivan Rado gave the CVS founder James H. Rathlesberger his ashes along with Veidt family papers and memorabilia. The CVS motto "Courage Integrity Humanity" honored qualities the legendary film star exemplified while claiming to be "only an actor."

# Werner Krauss



Prolific in the first part of the 20th century in theatre and then film Krauss then collaborated the Nazi's on films such as *Jud Süß*, *Robert Koch* and *Die Entlassung*. He was an ardent Nazi and anti-semite. Krauss was so admired by Goebbels and Hitler that they appointed him as a cultural ambassador of Nazi Germany.

After the war, Krauss was made to leave Mondsee near Salzburg and was expelled from Austria. He also was banned from performing on stage and in films in Germany. His films were proscribed and he was ordered to undergo a denazification program from 1947 to 1948, whereafter he could return to Austria to become a naturalized citizen. In 1950, he returned to performing playing *King Lear* at the Ruhr Festival in Recklinghausen. However, in December his performance with the Burgtheater ensemble at the Kurfürstendamm Theatre in Berlin was met with protest. In 1951 Krauss was awarded German citizenship again. Ultimately, he was “rehabilitated” to the extent that he was invited to German film festivals and even recognized by some for his work and contribution to German cinema.

# Lil Dagover



Lil Dagover had an illustrious career on the stage and screen spanning from 1913 to 1979. She is often referred to as the most famous and well respected actresses in the Weimar Republic. With the advent of talkies Dagover stopped acting in foreign films and began only appearing only in German films with the exception of *The Women from Monte Carlo*. When she returned to the Germany she avoided most political events. She mainly appeared in costume musicals and comedies during World War II. In 1944 she was given the War Merits Cross for entertaining Wehrmacht troops on the Eastern Front and on the occupied Channel Islands of Jersey and Guernsey. While she remained apolitical she was one of Adolf Hitler's favorite actresses and she often attended dinners and events as Hitler's guest.

## Where does this leave us now?



German Expressionist cinema has made a significant impact on contemporary cinema, with a unique visual style that can be found from American blockbusters to small animated short films. Some filmmakers and artists that are associated with the a modern movement inspired by German Expressionism are Tim Burton, Ridley Scott, Werner Herzog and more. While German Expressionism may not be at the forefront of art or culture in the 21st century but its influence can undoubtedly still be felt.