

EMIL NOLDE

COLOUR IS LIFE

LEAVING CERTIFICATE
RESOURCE PACK



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INTRODUCTION

This resource pack has been designed to accompany the exhibition *Emil Nolde: Colour is Life* at the National Gallery of Ireland (14 February – 10 June 2018). The exhibition was curated by Janet McLean and Sean Rainbird, National Gallery of Ireland, with Keith Hartley, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.

The German Expressionist artist Emil Nolde was a prolific painter and printmaker. This exhibition, a collaboration between the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art and the National Gallery of Ireland, presents a bold and colourful survey of his paintings, drawings, etchings, and woodcuts. Included are scenes of Berlin café culture, calligraphic views of the River Elbe, brilliant studies made on travels to the South Seas, as well as portraits, flower paintings, and imaginative depictions of fantastical creatures in both oils and watercolours. This exhibition is the first to showcase the work of this important artist in Ireland for over fifty years. All works are on loan from the Nolde Foundation Seebüll, Germany.

The resource pack contains contextual information about the exhibition and suggested activities for students to complete before, during and after their visit. It is intended to assist students preparing for the gallery question of the Leaving Certificate Art History and Appreciation Exam and does not replace a visit to the exhibition.

BEFORE YOUR VISIT

Visit the National Gallery's website. What information can you find out about the exhibition? Is it easy to find? How is it presented? Does it make you want to visit the exhibition? Is there enough/too much/not enough information?

Do some background research on the artist, Emil Nolde. What do you anticipate the exhibition will cover? There is more information in the 'Resources' section of this pack.

There have been a number of articles and reviews written about the exhibition. Do you think it is useful to read these before you visit? Do you think reading a review will have an impact on how you view the exhibition?

Consider the exhibition's title, *Colour is Life*. How do you think the title sets your expectations for the visit?

DURING YOUR VISIT

This resource includes prompts and activities to help you explore *Emil Nolde: Colour is Life*. Remember to:

Observe & record – use a sketchbook or notebook to record your observations of your visit. Photography is not permitted in the Nolde exhibition, so it is important that you create an accurate record of your visit. You will be required to include sketches in your LC exam, so make lots of annotated sketches alongside your notes.

Form your own opinion & give examples - every visitor to the exhibition will have a different experience. We bring our own backgrounds, histories, opinions, and perceptions to viewing works of art. Age, gender, education, nationality, and many other factors will impact how we perceive an exhibition. Everyone's opinion is equally valid; there is no right or wrong. When answering the Gallery Question it is important to give your own interpretation of the exhibition, but it is equally important to back up your opinions with examples to support your argument.

Discuss – there are some elements of the exhibition and Nolde's biography that are troubling and controversial. We have included some questions in this pack for you to discuss with your classmates and teacher. These are designed for you to explore some of the issues raised by the exhibition in a safe and respectful way.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Your experience will be influenced by a number of factors that may consciously or subconsciously affect how you engage with the exhibition. Some of these will have been deliberately created by the Gallery to create a comfortable environment for viewing art (eg the lighting, the way the paintings are hung), whilst others will be unique to you (eg your mood, previous positive or negative experiences at the Gallery). How other visitors are interacting with the space will also have an impact.

Before you enter the building, note down:

- External factors: time of day; weather
- Internal factors: your mood; energy levels; how your body feels
- Is this your first visit to the National Gallery? Do you have any preconceptions about what your experience will be?
- What does the building look like?
- What is your first impression?

When you enter the building, note down:

- What can you hear?
 - What can you smell?
 - What can you see?
 - What facilities are there? (eg information desk, cloakroom, toilets)
- Is there signage, maps, information about exhibitions? How can you move around the building? Are there stairs, lifts, escalators? Are there places to sit? What else can you observe?

Make an annotated sketch of the foyer showing these elements

- Who else is in the Gallery? (eg staff, other visitors, members of your group) What are they doing? How are they interacting with the building?
- How does the Gallery make you feel?

Think critically about the elements that have been created by the Gallery. Why do you think they are there? How do they affect your experience? Do you feel any differently to before you walked through the door? Do you feel prepared and ready to view art?

Further activity

There are two entrances to the Gallery. How may your first impressions differ depending on which entrance you use?



Merrion Square Entrance



Clare Street Entrance

You can find out more about the history and architecture of the Gallery here: <https://www.nationalgallery.ie/history>

THE HANG

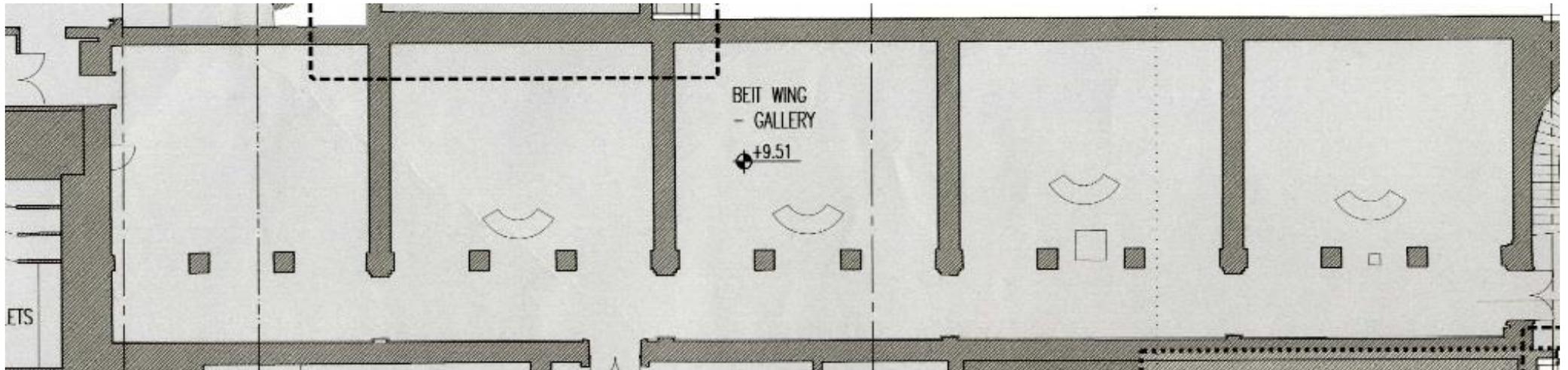
A **hang** is how the paintings in an exhibition are arranged on the walls of the gallery. This refers to both the way they are physically displayed, and the order the curator has decided to put them in. For example, an exhibition may be hung **chronologically**, where the paintings are displayed in order of when they were created; or **thematically** where they are grouped by similar subject matter. Shows may also be hung **aesthetically**, where paintings complement each other. Curators also have to take into account **practical** considerations – some paintings may be too big for certain walls or galleries.

Observe & record:

For each element consider how it affects your viewing and interpretation of the paintings.

- What are your **first impressions** of the exhibition? What is the atmosphere like? What is the temperature of the room? What can you hear? What can you smell? What can you see?
- What is the **architecture** of the gallery? What materials, texture and colours are the walls? Ceilings? Floors? Are there doors between the rooms?
- The **hang** of the paintings. What height are they hung at? Are they close together or far apart? Are they grouped? Is your eye drawn to certain paintings? How are the paintings fixed to the walls? What frames are they in? Are they glazed?
- The **interpretation**. Are there text panels? Signage? Labels? Where is the interpretation? What size is it? Colour? Design?
- The **lighting**. Is it natural? Artificial?
- The **fixtures and fittings**. Is there any furniture? Security devices? Light switches, fire extinguishers, etc? Do they enhance or detract from the paintings?
- How are **visitors** moving through the space? Are they following a set route? How are they interacting with each other?

Using the floorplan provided, sketch the layout of the exhibition. Is it hung chronologically or thematically?



National Gallery of Ireland, Beit Wing, Rooms 6-10, architectural plan

FURTHER ACTIVITY: EXHIBITING NOLDE

Nolde's work was included in the Nazi-organised *Degenerate Art* exhibition in 1937. The exhibition displayed over 650 confiscated works by modernist artists that the Nazis deemed 'degenerate', and included Cubism, Dada, Surrealism, Fauvism, and Expressionism. Works were displayed in a derogatory manner: some were unframed or hung upside-down, and slogans were daubed on the walls.



Joseph Goebbels (centre) visiting the Degenerate Art Exhibition. You can see Nolde's work in the lower left corner.
Image credit: German Federal Archives, Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-H02648 / CC-BY-SA 3.0

The Dadaist section of the Degenerate Art exhibition showing some of the display techniques used



Also in 1937, Nolde built a painting gallery above his studio. He hung his works in a dense double-row hang, stating: 'As a painter I feel compelled to work with all my might against the overly delicate aesthetic, particular that of thin, dainty Japanese taste, of hanging only one painting on a wall.' At The Nolde Foundation Seebüll, Nolde's work continues to be hung according to the artist's wishes.



Nolde presenting his work to friends in his Painting Gallery
Image credit: Nolde Stiftung Seebüll
<http://www.nolde-stiftung.de/en/painting-gallery/>

Nolde's Painting Gallery today at The Nolde Foundation Seebüll
Image credit: Nolde Stiftung Seebüll



How would you display Nolde's work? Sketch your ideas. Why have you chosen this hang?

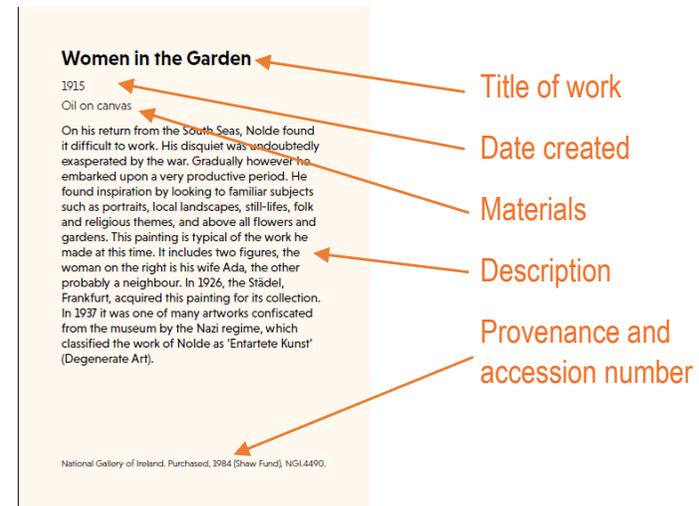
INTERPRETATION

Exhibition text is skilfully written to convey complex information in a clear and accessible way, within strict word counts. A curator will often do a great deal of contextual research about a work or artist that they then have to condense into a short amount of space. When someone visits an exhibition, they don't want to read a book on a wall! The curator will have to decide what they have to leave out, as much as what they will write. This process can be very difficult, but curators have lots of practice in writing in this particular style. The text will also be proofread by a number of different people who will check for accuracy, clarity and style. The final text that you see in the exhibition will have gone through lots of drafts and edits before it is printed.

There are different layers to exhibition text. In the Nolde exhibition there is:

- An introduction panel for the whole exhibition
- Room titles
- Labels for each artwork or group of artworks
- Audioguide commentary

The labels are written in a set format. Why do you think this information is included? Is there anything more you would like to know about the painting? Is there any information you don't think should be included?



Further activity

Choose one of the paintings from the exhibition and write your own label. Think about:

- What is the most important piece of information you want to share with the visitor? Put this first.
- Use active rather than passive language.
- Don't just describe what's in the painting – include something that the viewer can't see for themselves.
- Use language a 10 year old would understand – keep it clear, accessible and interesting.
- Prompt the visitor to look deeper at the painting – you might want to ask a question.
- Remember to stick to the word count – maximum of 80 words for the description.

THE ART

Nolde was a **German Expressionist**. German expressionism was an early twentieth century German art movement that emphasized the artist's inner feelings or ideas over replicating reality, and was characterised by simplified shapes, bright colours and gestural marks or brushstrokes.

COLOUR

In expressionist art, colour in particular can be highly intense and non-naturalistic, brushwork is typically free and paint application tends to be generous and highly textured.

Observe & record: Make annotated sketches of how Nolde uses colour and expressive brushstrokes in his paintings

SUBJECTS

Nolde captured lots of different subject matter including rural life and landscapes, travel pictures, metropolitan scenes, religious and spiritual subjects, portraits, still-lives, and images of fantastical figures.

Discuss: Does Nolde's style change when painting different subjects?

MATERIALS

Nolde worked in a variety of materials and techniques including oils, watercolours and printmaking.

Observe & record: Find one example of each type of work and make illustrated notes of the differences

TWO NAMED WORKS

In the LC exam you will be asked to discuss two named works in detail and use sketches to illustrate your answer. Whilst you are in the exhibition space, use this time to make detailed notes and sketches of two of Nolde's works. Nolde's work is under copyright restrictions so you may not be able to find images of the works online after your visit, so it is important you take down as much detail as possible.

Note

- Title of work
- Date
- Materials
- Information included in the label

Sketch & annotate

- How the painting is hung (is it high, low, close/far away from other works, make a note of other works nearby)
- Lighting
- Wall colour
- Frame
- Interpretation (where is it positioned, what does it say, how does it affect your viewing of the work)
- The formal elements of the painting (shapes, colours, textures, etc)

RESOURCES

Q&A WITH JANET MCLEAN, CURATOR OF EUROPEAN ART, 1850–1950

Tell us a bit about yourself and your job

I am one of five curators working within the Gallery's Collections Department. I am responsible for the acquisition, interpretation, and display of modern European paintings and sculpture. My day to day work varies greatly. I co-ordinate displays of the permanent collection and develop temporary exhibitions such as *Nolde: Colour is Life*. These projects can be short-term (a matter of months) or long-term (take up to 4 years). On a daily basis I interact with conservators, art-handlers, library staff, colleagues in Education and Press. My work also brings me into contact with academics, curators from other institutions, art-dealers, and auction houses. While I do get the opportunity to travel for my job, for the most part it involves a lot of time in the gallery - looking, reading, and writing.

How did you get your job? (Any advice to students who are interested in a career in galleries/museums)

Although I did not grow up around art or with access to any art galleries, I was interested in pictures and stories from early childhood. Like many people, my first introduction to art was through books, magazines, illustrations, and dust-jackets. I didn't know there was such a job as a curator when I was in school. When I mentioned that I wanted to study History of Art at third level my teachers tried to talk me out of it and into studying law as they believed it would be a "waste of my marks" and not lead to a job!

After A-Levels, I ignored my teachers' advice and did a BA in History of Art & English Literature at Trinity College Dublin. Straight after that I did a one year MA in Art History at the Courtauld Institute. There I focused on art of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A year later I began studies for a PhD in Art History but ultimately did not complete it. I was working full-time (to live) and studying part-time – it was difficult and draining to juggle both in terms of time and funding. In the early part of my career, I spent many years doing part-time, voluntary, and low paid jobs in order to gain experience. Before coming to Dublin my jobs included working in the National Portrait Gallery bookshop, cataloguing for the Art Fund, Assistant Curator at the Watts Gallery Compton, Curatorial Assistant at the Palace of Westminster, and Research Curator for Paintings & Sculpture at the Royal Academy of Arts, London. Working in both large and small organisations has broadened my experience and helped me gain a good overview and insight into how arts organisations work.

I think the key elements a curator needs are curiosity, empathy, a keen interest in connecting the past to the present (& future), an interest in communicating information and ideas to varied audiences, and the ability to work alone and within a larger team.

There is no way to sugar-coat it, if you want to be a curator you have to be very focused on your goals. It is very competitive. However I count all my experiences as useful and think I am fortunate to have a job that I love and that I am interested in after office hours. It is a way of life to me.

What was your role in the development of the exhibition

I was one of the three co-curators of this exhibition. My input was largely logistical on this occasion. I visited the Nolde Foundation at Seebüll, Germany, with the other curators and helped to select the works of art for the show. I assisted in planning the hang, overseeing the lighting, and

writing labels. With the Exhibitions Services team we coordinated the design elements (provided by an external design company) to tie in with the look and tone of the exhibition. I gave input towards and helped to edit the script for the audio guide (again, produced by an external company). Once the exhibition opened I was very involved in speaking to Press about Nolde and his work. I also gave talks, tours, and lectures relating to the show.

What was the idea behind the exhibition?

Nolde's work is not widely known in Ireland or in the UK. The last Nolde show held in Ireland was in 1964, when 12 of his paintings were exhibited at the Royal Hibernian Academy. The last exhibition of his work to be held in the UK was at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1995.

From 1937-1945, much of Nolde's art was confiscated by the Nazis who both sold it and destroyed it. Furthermore, a great number of his works on paper were destroyed by Allied bombing during the Second World War.

The Nolde Foundation in Seebüll, owns around half of the existing Nolde paintings and works on paper. The National Gallery of Ireland and Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art were given the opportunity to borrow works from this collection.

In terms of finance and logistics it is very helpful when works of art on loan come from one venue. It cuts down on administrative and transport costs etc., which would be prohibitive if the art came from numerous venues. Not only did the Nolde Foundation lend the works of art, it was exceptionally helpful in providing information and expertise about Nolde and his work. This enabled us to show a wide range of Nolde's art spanning across his long career.

Who were the target audiences for the exhibition?

The target audience is our general gallery visitor. Everyone is welcome! Our Education team work hard to make exhibitions as inclusive as possible. They design resource material and programmes of events to appeal to varied audiences and help them to get the most out of the exhibitions.

What were the learning objectives for the exhibition? (What are the key things that you'd like visitors to learn from the exhibition?)

To introduce visitors to Emil Nolde, his life and work.

To teach them more about Expressionism.

To enjoy looking at the art.

How did you choose the works in the exhibition?

We decide to arrange the exhibition thematically rather than by a strict chronology. Nolde addressed similar ideas and themes repeatedly over several decades, so this seemed a more manageable way to organise and display his work. We decided on 5 key themes –

- **Heimat** [i.e. the idea of homeland]
- **Metropolis** [Hamburg and Berlin]
- **Conflict & Ecstasy** [War, Religious themes]
- **Travels, 1913-14** [South Seas]
- **Nature & Fantasy** [Gardens, Sea, 'Unpainted' pictures]

The idea of colour (as suggested by the exhibition title) is a motif that runs right through Nolde's life, work, and each of the five key themes. As well as including oil paintings we were very keen to show works on paper (watercolours, prints, drawings) to give a sense of Nolde's range and versatility as an artist. He was a hugely prolific and experimental artist so

we had to be strict with ourselves; by adding too many themes we would dilute the visual impact of the show. It was important too to show that Nolde was a singular artist. Although he has often been categorised as a “German Expressionist” or a member of “Die Brücke”, we felt that it was important to show that although he had artistic interests and influences (e.g. Vincent van Gogh, James Ensor, Edvard Munch) he was very determined to be true to his own vision and ideas. Much of this is tied up with his ideas about national identity and nature.

Do you have a favourite work in the exhibition?

I don't have a favourite work in this exhibition. Overall I find Nolde's prints and drawings fascinating as with such simple materials he could do so much. Strangely, despite there being so much colour in the show I am drawn by the monochrome works or those with sparse colour - the calligraphic Hamburg port scenes, the Berlin café scenes. It is fascinating to see how Nolde could do so much and convey an atmosphere with just a few marks. Perhaps they offer a quiet respite from the brashness and boldness of some of the larger more intense paintings.

What was the biggest challenge?

The biggest challenge was making the selection as there were so many works that we would have liked to have included.

Another challenge was lighting the works of art. The works on paper have to be lit at a lower level than the paintings. If they are hung too close to each other, balancing the light levels can be problematic.

Aside from that the exhibition came together very seamlessly. We had a manageable lead in time of roughly 2 years. The support of the Nolde Foundation, our colleagues in the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, and here in Dublin made the process relatively easy.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Works on paper

Something unusual about the exhibition is that all the works on paper will be exchanged for other similar works on the 14th May. Usually works on paper cannot be shown for more than roughly a three month period as they are prone to fading and discolouration. Our exhibition runs for slightly longer than this period so the Director, Sean Rainbird suggested that we have a second batch of works held in storage and make a swap.

Selecting the works on paper for each of the two time-periods involved dividing the pictures by theme, appearance, and by physical format (i.e. landscape/portrait) in order to make for an easy transition on the rehang day. This took quite a lot of time and planning.

The Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art will show all the works on paper at once as it has a larger exhibition space and the duration of its exhibition run is within the recommended time frame.

Frames

Nolde favoured simple black frames for his paintings. Almost all the paintings on loan from the Nolde Foundation have black frames (or very dark brown frames). When hanging the show we found that the paintings look exceptionally well in these frames as the black borders allow the colours to appear more vivid.

All the works on paper on loan from the Nolde Foundation are framed in standard wooden exhibition frames. These are made by the Nolde Foundation in a number of prescribed sizes and the pictures are mounted to fit them. When these pictures are not on loan/display they are stored in boxes in their mounts but unframed.

EMIL NOLDE: CONCEPTS AND CHALLENGES

Emil Nolde (1867-1957) was a complex and controversial figure. He lived through a tumultuous time in world history, including two World Wars, and a period of shifting change in art history. It is not possible to include everything here, and a timeline of Nolde's biography can be found on the Nolde Foundation's website: <http://www.nolde-stiftung.de/en/nolde/biography/>.

In this resource we have highlighted some of the more problematic aspects of Nolde's history. It may affect how you interpret and respond to Nolde's work, and raises the important question: **can you separate the artist from their art?**

Nolde's background

Emil Hansen was born on 7 August 1867, in the village of Nolde, close to the German-Danish border. He changed his surname to Nolde when he got married in 1902. He came from Schleswig-Holstein, an area with contested borders that connects and separates Germany and Denmark. The population of the northern Schleswig was predominantly Danish, whilst the southern Holstein was predominantly German. When Nolde was born, the whole of Schleswig-Holstein was part of Germany as the result of two wars with Denmark. In 1920, a referendum was held in Schleswig to decide where the



Map of Schleswig-Holstein showing the modern Danish-German border

border between Denmark and Germany should fall. The northern part of Schleswig voted overwhelmingly to become Danish, whilst the southern part remained German. As a result, the village of Nolde became Danish.

Emil Nolde was born into a rural, farming community. The fourth of five children, his mother was Danish and his father was German. They were devout Protestants, and the only book in the house was the Bible. He grew up speaking rural dialects of both Danish and German, however he never felt comfortable speaking either. His Danish sounded like it was taken from the Bible and he felt like people were laughing at him, whilst he was mocked for his rural German dialect.

While the history of the area is complicated, it helps to contextualise Emil Nolde's identity, as the love and concept of **Heimat (homeland)** is a central theme in his work. This theme is explored in **Room 6** of the exhibition.

Discuss: How do you think Nolde's background affected his political views?

Nolde and National Socialism

National Socialism is more commonly known as Nazism. Hitler's party was officially called the National Socialist German Workers' Party. Nolde joined the Schleswig branch of the Nazi Party in 1920. In 1933 he contacted the Reich Propaganda Ministry to inform them that the artist Max Pechstein was Jewish. This was totally untrue, however when Pechstein contacted Nolde to demand a retraction, Nolde refused. In 1934 he released his autobiography *Jahre der Kämpfe* (Years of Struggle) which described Nolde as spearheading the fight against Jewish domination of the German artworld. Nolde's *Martyrdom* triptych painted in 1921 (**Room 8**) includes anti-Semitic depictions of Jewish people.

In 1937, however, the Nazis turned against Modernist art of all kinds, and confiscated over 5000 works of art they deemed 'Degenerate'. Nolde was

the artist most affected by this seizure, which included 1000 of his works. His work was prominently featured in the *Degenerate Art* exhibition, which openly mocked Modernist art. In 1941 he was banned from painting and purchasing art supplies.

Despite his work being attacked by the Nazi's, Nolde continued to support the party until 1945, writing to Goebbels on a number of occasions to reiterate his support for the party, and campaign in support of his art. He continued to paint in secret, producing 1300 'Unpainted Paintings' on scraps of paper, using watercolours instead of oils in order to not leave an incriminatory odour. You can see some of Nolde's Unpainted Paintings in **Room 10** of the exhibition.

Discuss: Nolde's work was censored by the Nazi's, however his anti-Semitism and support of Nazism have led some to argue that the Gallery should not display some of his art. Do you think that art should be censored because of what a person thought or did? How may this discussion connect with the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements today?

Nolde and colonialism

Nolde travelled to the South Pacific in 1913-4 and visited Papua New Guinea. At the time, the island of New Guinea was colonised by Germany, Britain and the Netherlands. Nolde accompanied a government expedition, however he wasn't there in an official capacity and was free to work as he wished. In New Guinea he painted portraits of the indigenous people and landscapes (**Room 9**). Nolde's portraits, as in much of his work, don't focus on the subjects as *individuals*, but as racial *types*. In line with the way that the world was viewed by colonial powers at the time, Nolde's worldview became increasingly racialised and racist. He focused on racial characteristics of people and never named or individualised them.

Nolde did, however, condemn the affects of colonialism on New Guinea. In 1914 he wrote to the German Colonial Office opposing the destruction of the landscape and 'the rape' of indigenous cultures.

Discuss: How does Nolde depict people in his paintings? Are they named individuals? Or do they feel more like 'types'? Hint: look at the titles of the works.

Did you find out about Nolde's past before you visited the exhibition? Does his biography affect how you viewed the paintings?

Can you separate the artist from their art?

EDUCATION PROGRAMME

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive Education & Public Programme. Pick up a paper leaflet outside the exhibition, or find out more on our website: <https://www.nationalgallery.ie/explore-and-learn/emil-nolde-public-programme>

The programme has been designed by the Gallery's Education Department to support the exhibition and enable a range of target audiences to engage with it at their own level.