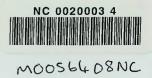
National College of Art &Design





Kollwitz

Käthe Kollwitz in the context of social & political upheaval with reference to her contemporaries.

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of History of An & Design & Complimentary Studies in candidacy for Bachelor of Design in Visual Communications.

By Ruth Martin 1991

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FOREWORD

While beginning my research for this thesis, I had hoped that this foreword would deal with the amazing events which have made history in the last year or two , particularly those events which took place in Eastern Europe and culminated in a very symbolic way in the pulling down of the Berlin wall.

I felt that perhaps we had learned something from the past two world wars within which Käthe Kollwitz strove to show war's futility. She gave her life's work to this cause by showing war's effect on people and, in that context, Berlin's new unity and peace was a sign of hope.

However, nearing the end of my research, I began to deal with the work of Dix and Grosz and their horrifying portrayals of life in war-torn Germany, in the trenches and in the cities. This research coincided with an escalation of the "Gulf Crisis" to a state of war. Its horrors became more apparent as I dealt with the images of death and destruction from the First World War period. It made my task of investigation a saddening one. Käthe Kollwitz's wish for *Nie Wieder Kreig* [Never Again War] seemed elusive.

INTRODUCTION

The working class woman shows me her hair. She lets me see the shape and form of her body through her clothes. She presents herself and the expression of her feelings openly without disguises (Käthe Kollwitz)Refl

The proletariat was her main theme.Kollwitz lived with them; she worked for them, they were her source for artistic development and, in turn,her development as a human being.

What makes a person the way she is, is a complex subject to address. To describe what makes an artist is more complex still and when trying to understand Käthe Kollwitz the two can not be separated. Her work stemmed from her devotion to, and respect for the proletariat of her day. Her development as a person was integral to her development as an artist. Her clear-headedness in regard to her subject matter and what she wanted to say was, in my opinion, instrumental to her becoming an outstanding figure in 20th Century German art.

In researching this thesis I have used some of the many books published on Kollwitz and her contemporaries as references as well as a previous essay written by myself which dealt with Kollwitz's work on an aesthetic level.

In this paper, I hope to build on past research and to show the artist as outstanding in her dedication to the proletariat as a theme, working on a personal level and a level which differed from many of her contemporaries. I will look at Kollwitz's use of social realism in depicting the real lives of real people. I will also look at her artistic and political independence and how this affected her work. I will discuss her drawing style and how it reflected her attitude towards her subject matter. I will look at its development in relation to her own personal development.

I have introduced some artistic contemporaries to help highlight various aspects of her work. I feel their place in this paper is important as they help clarify my ideas on Kollwitz and her work, giving further insight into the social context so important to the work of both Kollwitz and her contemporaries.

It is important to get a sense of how and why Käthe Kollwitz came to portray the proletariat and its bad living conditions. In so doing, we must look first at the evolution of this new class in what was a new and changing world.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The world began to see great changes at the turn of the 20th century. Industrialisation had transformed Western society. Living standards began to grow as did Europe's population. In the course of the 19th Century, the population rose from 190 million to 423 million and this led to rapid urbanisation.

Germany is an excellent example of a country where these rapid changes took place. In 1871, it was composed mainly of small towns and villages but within 40 years this changed dramatically and, by 1914, Germany had 30 cities whose population exceeded 100,000 people.

This rapid growth of cities brought with it many problems, as population growth was not spread evenly over rural and urban districts. Two things took place: the building of new towns and , more problematically, the expansion of existing towns of the mediaeval period. In the cases of these towns,

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houses were built quickly and cheaply, and as many as were possible were packed closely together. Bad planning and heavy population led to the proliferation of slums, as living conditions did not improve as quickly as the living standards set by the new industrial and social developments.

This was not the only result of urbanisation, The traditional working class, such as tradesmen and craftsmen, were joined by thousands of unskilled workers who became known as the proletariat. This was not the only class formed at this time, as those who were anxious to move up the social scale became involved in the managing and servicing of modern industry and trade and formed the middle class.

Europe, now developing in many ways, had its own established class structure and it was amidst these great changes that the German artist Käthe Kollwitz came into the world.

She was born to Katharina and Karl Schmidt in Königsberg in East Prussia (now Kaliningrad in the USSR), in 1867.

CHAPTER ONE EARLY YEARS

Käthe was born into a family that was quite different from other families of the time. Her grandfather, Julius Rupp, was a founder member of the 'Free Congregation'- a nonconformist religious movement. Her father followed in his footsteps and went further in challenging the political ideas accepted in the region in his time.

Prinz Otto von Bismarck was a right-wing military leader who had just put several states under Prussian rule and he showed a great distaste for Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto-*'The workers declaration of independence'- published in 1848. This new ideology gave those who laboured in cities their first real chance at changing the inhuman conditions inflicted upon them as a result of rapid industrialisation. Marx's ideas intrigued Karl Schmidt, Käthe's father, and he soon joined the German Social Democratic Party- the SPD.

The SPD, amongst whose founders were August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht (father of Communist revolutionary Karl Liebknecht), was strongly influenced by the ideas of Marx at this time.

Therefore, from a very early age, Käthe had access to this new philosophy of the time which was to have great consequences in the world's political history. She also had access to her parents' library, another unusual situation in the Germany of the time. In this library her early readings included Goethe and Schiller.

Already this access to new ideas and writings were influential in forming her sense of aesthetics and, indeed,

her political stance. We know that at even this very early stage she would walk with her sister Lise to the docks by the river and comment on the beauty of the *Jimkes* (dockworkers). She remarked on their strong bodies, their facial expressions and their sure basic movements. She saw them as good-natured people whose lined and furrowed brows fascinated her and, although she did not know it then, she saw in them a mysterious beauty which would remain with her all her life.

Her first art lessons were at the age of 14 after which she produced a naturalistic illustration to a poem by Friedrich Freiligrath. The poem, entitled 'The dead to the living' had an indelible effect on her. It dealt with the 'March Dead' < those killed during a protest against unjust working conditions in March 1898 by the Kaiser's Militia), summoning those who remained, to fight against capitalism.

It was around this time ,too, that Käthe became involved in political discussions dealing with the aims of the SPD. Her brother Konrad had just joined their ranks and , along with their new neighbours,the Kollwitzes, would meet to discuss politics.

At first Käthe was shy to get involved but soon joined in on discussions which included the feminist views of August Bebel - co-founder of the SPD. It is evident at this stage that Käthe had a strong base from which to develop. She was already aware of the struggle of the working class and in turn the struggle of the women of the working class. She herself experienced sexual discrimination for the first time when she made her first attempt to further her education in art. She applied to the Prussian Academy of Art and was refused entry because of her sex.

ART EDUCATION

Her art education began in earnest when she attended the Berlin Academy where she was tutored by Karl-Stauffer Bern. Bern, a noted artist and personal friend of Max Klinger who later became influential to Kollwitz's work, noted Käthes potential to excel in the graphic arts. She was at this stage, however, convinced she was a painter.

While studying for the next two years in the Munich Academy of Art, however, she became more aware of her graphic abilities. She had joined the 'Etching Club' where she was introduced to the print medium. She also joined the 'Composition Club' which allowed her to carry out work independently of her tutors. In this club she produced drawings to Emil Zola's <u>Germinal</u>. Her pieces received critical acclaim from a well-known artist of the time who happened to see her work in the *Glückscafé*, where the young students exhibited their work.

One of her drawings was <u>Streit Zweiter Männer im</u> <u>Wirsthaus</u>^{Fig 1}[A quarrel in a public house]. In this piece we can see her strength in creating atmosphere. In this case it is a tense one, where two men approach each other in the darkness. A young woman in the background is a nervous onlooker. Kollwitz's use of light is impressive. The dark figures seem to emerge from the blackness, highlighted by the light coming from a window. The softly smudged charcoal lends tonal quality but also a sense of tension and movement.

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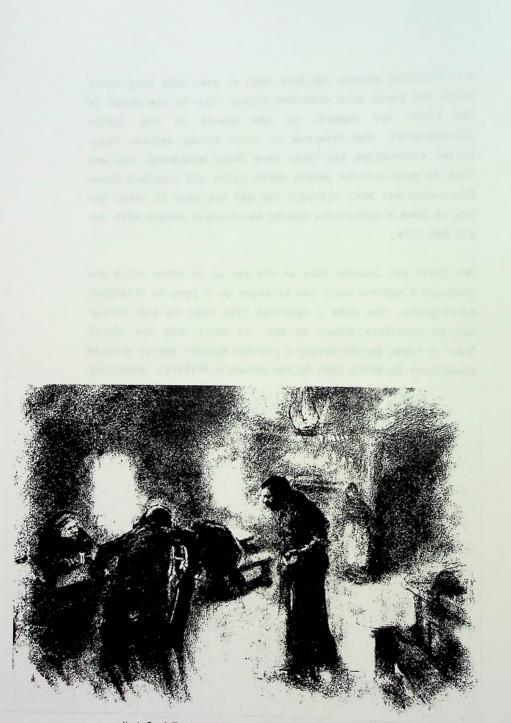


fig 1 Streit Zweiter Männer im Wirsthaus 1888 - Kollwitz

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The success of this piece along with Käthe's failure to translate it on to canvass, led her to read Max Klinger's <u>Malerei und Zeichnung</u> [Painting and Drawing]. In this manuscript Klinger wrote:

Drawing has a freer relationship than painting to the respective world, it gives fantasy wider play. The painter bodies forth optimism, but the draughtsman cannot escape his more negative vision beyond appearance. Rof 2

In this manuscript, Klinger seems to have investigated the ability of the painter to change her work constantly, redefining the world as she sees it.

The draughtsman , however, works in a more direct manner which involves preparation and the confidence to make a mark which cannot be changed.

Kollwitz began to realise that her approach was more suited to the graphic arts and soon her transition was complete. She began to devote her work to the medium of printmakingetching, lithography and later woodcuts. As she was finding her feet as an artist, she finished her schooling in the Academy and married Karl Kollwitz, her neighbour who was now a Krankenkasse Doctor for the poor in Berlin.

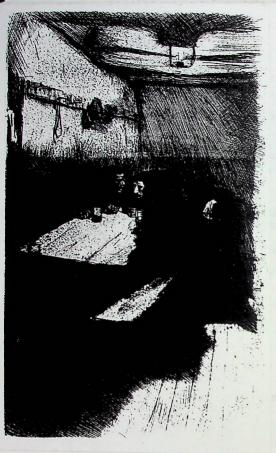
When her father heard of her intention to marry, he was worried that her career as an artist would suffer as a result. Despite the high value she gave to her father's opinions, she decided to marry Karl. In doing so, she felt she would have greater independence and a chance for a better intellectual and social life in Berlin. She felt that marriage would give her economic and emotional security and she needed this to continue her work. Ner 3 Already we can see the obstacles which stood in her way even at this early stage of her life. She was living in a society where women were very rarely successful as artists unless they were closely related to a successful male artist. She was also living in a society which believed that the married woman had certain duties and obligations to her husband over anything else she might wish to do. Despite this, she still managed to become one of the western world's leading women artists and an outstanding artist regardless of sex.

These were not the only obstacles, as after one year of marriage she was expecting her first child. She soon had to cope with her roles as artist, wife and mother.

However, soon after the birth of her first son, she attended a play by Gerhart Hauptmann which was to influence her first major series of prints. The play was called <u>Die Weber</u> [The Weavers]. It recounted the story of a group of Silesian peasants, turned linen weavers, who had revoted just 50 years earlier because of low factory wages and substandard living conditions.

Using this play as a base to work from, she began on a series of prints entitled <u>Ein Weberaufstand</u> [The Weavers' Revolt] which showed the workers initiate, execute and suffer the fate of their uprising. Amongst these workers she showed the role of women as being an active one as they participated in battle.

This series was significant as it was her first major one, and was a public statement about the working-class people whom she respected greatly. In <u>Conspiracy¹²⁹</u> and <u>The End</u> Fig 3 we see her excellent use of chiaroscuro, whose beginnings we saw in her earlier piece <u>Quarrell in a Public</u> House Fig 1. The series as a whole brings to attention the



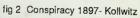




fig 3 The End 1897 - Kollwitz



fig 4 Weavers March 1897- Kollwitz

plight of the workers as they plan to attack their boss and his land.

We see the reasons for this revolt: the hunger and death suffered by the workers. However, in the last print, The End^{Fig 3}, we see that despite the presiding gloom, there is a woman standing by the door with her arms lying resolutely by her side, her fists clenched. To me this is a sign of strength and despite an inevitable grief, she seems to have the will to continue to fight for her family's rights to live a proper life.

In terms of technique, this is a good example of Kollwitz's early work which, in most cases , depicted events in a very detailed, naturalistic way with attention paid to people. Note in particular the <u>Weaver's March^{F19 4}</u>, where we see a group of people, all of whom are different; they are not a symbolic representation, but a group of real individuals.

This is an attitude which continued through Kollwitz's work. It is important because it gives us an insight into the place of people in her work. For her, they were always real people, with real sufferings. She did not wish to use them as purely decorative elements in pieces of work which would do no justice to their cause.

She finished this series in 1897 to wide acclaim by fellow artists and , importantly, by her now ill father to whom she brought the series. This recognition by her father was important. She had succeded so far in combining life as artist, wife and mother (now of two children). Her second child, Peter, was born during her work on <u>The Weavers'</u> <u>Revolt</u>. In fact, she found that his birth stimulated rather than thwarted her creativity. 'I was more productive because I was more sensual. I lived as a human being must live, passionately interested in everything.'^{Rev1} 4 In 1899 Kathe won the Gold Nedal for excellence from Max Lehrs in Dresden. From that moment she had recognition as a major artist of the country. With this new-found recognition she never lost sight of those she saw suffering around her. It must be remembered that she was living in a poor area of Berlin where her husband worked as a doctor. Therefore she encountered poverty and hunger every day as she grew to know the people who queued to see her husband.

Around this time, the shipbuilding and steel industries were beginning to produce great amounts of money for their owners and their country. This, however, was at the expense of those who worked in these industries. In response to the bad working and living conditions experienced by these people, various workers' unions were set up and the SPD took the workers' side in the ensuing confrontations.

Käthe was deeply concerned with the protests of the SPD and in her work for the following years she continued to represent the struggle of those who were being undermined by some of the rich of the day.

She did this in varying ways. The following are two examples. One is a drawing <u>Head of Child in Mother's</u> Hands^{Fig 5} (pencil 1900). This piece, as its title tells us, is of the head of a child being cared for and protected in a mother's hands. The child's face is carefully modelled in soft pencil; she appears delicate and vulnerable when clasped by her mother's powerful hands which in contrast are in bold strokes. We can presume this piece deals with the struggle of the working class at a very basic level as the mother and child, modelled from her husand's patients, are obviously poor in their appearance. It also shows the relationship between mother and child , which transcends class boundaries, a subject which she deals with in later vears to even greater effect. Without having to refer to The last the rowsers of they play to be which the ball





fig 6 La Carmagnole 1901 - Kollwitz



fig 7 Losbruch 1903 - Kollwitz

political or historical events, she conveys a message to us. We must look after our children; they do not deserve to live as they do. The child is not the only subject of this piece. The mother too is important. She loves her child and wants the best for her. Her life is even a greater struggle as she strives to survive from day to day.

A year later Kollwitz worked on <u>La Carmagnole in G</u>. Having read Dickens's <u>A Tale of Two Cities</u> she became enthralled by the women's stance during the French Revolution. Again she uses this chance to draw attention to the proletariat. This time she has a historical backdrop. Her son Hans modelled for the young drummer boy and the houses in the background are most definitely North German with their high, dark gables. This etching shows a crowd of women dancing passionately around the guillotine with menacing gestures. Here she is showing the strength of these women as they form their own batallions throughout the revolution which succeeds in ridding France of its monarchy and founding a Republican state.

Another historically-based piece around this time was <u>Losbruch</u>^{Eig 7} [The Storm Breaks], one of a series of prints entitled <u>The Peasant War</u>. In this piece we see 'Black Anna' a historical figure who led men into battle as they fought against the Catholic landowners of the time. In this piece, Black Anna is modelled on the artist. She appears with both feet firmly on the ground. She waves her arms, inciting the others to fight. She sways to the left as her arms follow her direction.

In style, one can see Kollwitz growing in confidence in her drawing and there is a definite loosening in comparison to <u>La Carmagnole</u>. This change and development in style continued after a short visit to Paris.

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MODERN ART IN FRANCE AND GERMANY

At this point it is important to know what was happening in the art world of the time. At the turn of the century art was beginning to change. In France, artists reacted to industrialisation leading to cubism and various other postcubist movements. They destroyed form for the purpose of analysing its properties. This was to be the case for Picasso and Braque. The French also glorified the machine: Leger painted humans who seemed to have been moulded and cast in steel.

The Germans , however, were different from the French, with the notable exception of Fauvism in which artists of both countries shared similar attitudes, and in their artistic revolution they destroyed form and colour in an emotional way to try and find a universal significance of what lay behind everyday reality. They , in turn, rejected the mechanised world and sought a deeper meaningful one.

The revolution in art in Germany resulted in the forming of the expressionist groups such as *Die Brücke* and *Der Blauer Reiter*. In this context it is important to see the steps Käthe Kollwitz made in her work up to this point, around 1911 or so.

In 1903 she created <u>Frau mit totem Kind</u> [Woman with dead child]^{F19} ^(a). This to my mind is one of her finest pieces and is a turning point in her artistic career. It is clearly a drawing of herself and her son Peter. In this powerful piece we see the beginnings of a new visual language for Kollwitz Her work is expressive and emotive in a way that differs from her French and German contemporaries who took a mostly analytical approach while Kollwitz remained on a more humanitarian level, but with a continuing development in style and attitude.



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fig 8 Frau mit Totem Kind 1903 - Kollwitz

Werner Weisbach wrote:' One of the greatest of her latest compositions is the mother hugging her dead child, completely given over to animal grief'

I find it an extremely powerful image and it is apparent that this is where Kollwitz began to disregard inessentials. She has become much freer and in using strong confident lines she is beginning to lessen detail to greater effect. This piece again shows us her way of expressing her unique feminism and socialism in daily life.

She was to continue to work alone rather than as a member of an organisation, political or artistic. Indeed with the introduction of *Die Brücke* and *Der Blauer Reiter*, she continued to work alone. She did share the heritage of German graphic tradition with *Die Brucke* and also their use of the human figure to express social realities.

She was ,however, not an expressionist, as she was and still is in my opinion mistakenly called. This expressionist movement forced her to grapple with her identity. She found herself opposed to the studio art of expressionism which for her was often too heavily based on philosophy and psychology as opposed to being involved directly with the subject matter as she was.

In <u>Frau mit Totem Kind</u>. Kollwitz deals with the tragedy of death. It is expressed in a strong, direct way. *Die Brücke* and *Der Blauer Reiter* shared in producing work that was strong and direct but the approach and fundamental ideas behind the work were ones that differed from Kollwitz's.

The artists of *Die Brucke*, Kirchner for example, expressed the sense of unease and agitation felt in the new pressures of an industrial society. The pressures were seen as

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psychological distresses and loneliness and were conveyed in a way different to Kollwitz. Figures appeared in exaggerated forms, angular and harsh. The colours too, added to their disturbing quality.

Kollwitz's work also disturbed the viewer. <u>Frau mit Totem</u> Kind is a disturbing picture but it deals with life at a more basic level. Kollwitz does not try to seek answers to how one feels psychologically in a certain situation but records what she knows as fact. Her work disturbs the viewer not by its use of colour [this peice like most of Kollwitz's work is in black and white] or by distorting the form of the human figure. It disturbs us, in its naked realism. We know that death happens and this powerful image of mother and child relates the sadness clearly to the viewer. Its content disturbs and its clarity makes it seem so much more real.

It may be true that Kollwitz shared the graphic tradition of Albrecht Dürer with her contemporaries in Die Brücke, yet this influence was in terms of printmaking as a medium. She was also different to those artists of Der Blauer Reiter whose subject matter differed greatly as did their abundant use of colour. She never joined these groups and they only served to push her forward in her own artistic quest. She continued to believe that realism was not a style but an excellent way to communicate in a direct and very real way. The last image we have seen is a step forward in terms of the directness in which we have come to recognise Kollwitz.

There is no question that Kollwitz was an outstanding artist in terms of sheer excellence of technique and in her loyalty to a social-realist approach to her subject matter, especially in the years coming coming up to the First World War.

My argument is that Kollwitz remained an outstanding artist despite the strains forced upon her during wartime. She remained loyal, to the working class and clear in her own mind of her duty to draw attention its people. Not only was she one of the best artists, in humanitarian terms, but in terms of aesthetics and sheer power she remained one of the best artists Germany has produced. She remained true to her art and developed continually.

I hope to show her in comparison to some of her contemporaries who dealt broadly with the same subject matter, that of the proletariat and the effects on these people in the course of Germany's troubled history.

So, following early influences at home in regards to the politics of socialism and a good art education in Munich and Berlin, we can begin to trace Kollwitz's early development as person and artist. We can see that women were important to her work as were the workers. We can also see Kollwitz in relation to the artistic background of the time, leading to the First World War. We have learned that she was independent from these movements although sharing certain aspects such as the medium of printmaking. Shortly before the First World War, she was beginning to change her style and develop it in an expressive way.

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CHAPTER TWO KOLLWITZ AND HER CONTEMPORARIES

In the years leading to the First World War, Kollwitz's world was changing at a personal level. Her sons had left home and her maternal role in the family had changed dramatically. For the first time since her student days she was left with a lot of free time. Things around her were also changing. There was a surge in nationalism and the Kaiser began giant allocations of funds to the army. This along with the critical political state which had arisen betwen the Russian, Austrian and Ottoman empires all wanting to extend their frontiers , led eventually to Russian troops being deployed along the German border, following Austria's declaration of war due to the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand.

This, in turn, led to Germany declaring war on Russia because it believed troops along the borders was a hostile act. However, Germany then used the situation to advance their troops west instead of east. They had launched a preemptive attack on the *Triple Entente* members, starting the First World War.

Kollwitz watched these events with great sadness. She spoke out against the Kaiser and war and was labelled an ardent socialist although she was not a member of any socialist party.

Both sons were fighting for Germany; they, like many others, were imbued with the idea of death for the fatherland. At this time, Käthe's work suffered as she took up a position as cafeteria helper and cook. At this stage it is worth looking at the work of one of her contemporaries in the period from before the First World War to the beginning of the Second World War. George Grosz is the artist in question. He was a soldier in the First World War but this military interlude was short-lived and he was reprieved from being shot for insubordination.

Grosz was born in 1893, 26 years after the birth of Kollwitz. A virtually self-taught artist , he worked in a style very different to Kollwitz but like many of his contemporaries shared a <u>basic</u> subject matter with her. That of course could not be avoided because of the circumstances within which all the people of Germany lived. They all experienced the same social and political upheaval with all its various results , in a personal way.

Grosz, too, for a time saw himself as a purveyor of political art in favour of the proletariat. However, in my view, the German writer Brecht put it well when he wrote in the foreword <u>Trommeln in der Nacht</u> (Drums in the night) that Grosz had discovered in himsellf:' A violent and irresistible love for a certain typical mug, which as it happened had been the mug of the ruling class'. Ref G

This was a reference to the paintings and drawings by Grosz which caricatured the bourgeosie in a distasteful way. They appeared as ugly men and seemed to be the choice of Grosz as a vehicle to vent his anger and discontent. So Grosz was confused in his loyalties, since those whom he attacked were essentially his customers; the reason for his political hostility to the bourgeoisie was not that he was a proletarian but an artist. I think what Brecht was trying to say was that Grosz's political attitude was a representation of his attitude to the public, not to his class enemy! Therefore Grosz's political motivation was of secondary importance.One could say, in this context, he was a bourgeois artist who hated the bourgeoisie. His interest in the proletariat was marginal and this can be seen in the inconsistencies in his work of which he himself was aware: 'I am a man of many facets, so why shouldn't I contradict myself?'[Autobiography and letters, after Walt Whitman]^{Ref 7}

He did ,in fact study for a while in Berlin under Ortik and while there he showed warmth towards the proletariat. He, unlike Kollwitz, did not see them as victims of society, but accepted them as picturesque groups or decorative elements who were on the periphery of society. He drew a certain amount of attention to those who did not get their fair share but never took a militant stance. I think it is evident from very early on, that his intellectual commitment was not with these people.

In <u>Unemployed Men</u>^{Fig S}, 1912, we see only representations of men who symbolise a group or stereotype. They do not really appear like real people, not in the way with which Kollwitz had such success.Perhaps this is, in turn, due to Grosz's vague interest.

He felt free to move from one topic to another. He recorded what he wanted to record and when he wanted to. This cannot really be argued against on a basic level. Everyone has the right to choose his or her direction in whatever way he or she wishes.

However for the purpose of this discussion we must remember that these times were extraordinary ones. I cannot stress enough how influential the historical background was or should have been. It is arguable whether artists should or should not have a duty to record events of the time, whether they want to or not. We have learned that Kollwitz



fig 9 Unemployed Men 1912 - Grosz



fig 10 Shut up and Sodier on (blackcloth) 1928 - Grosz



fig 11 Captured 1915 - Grosz



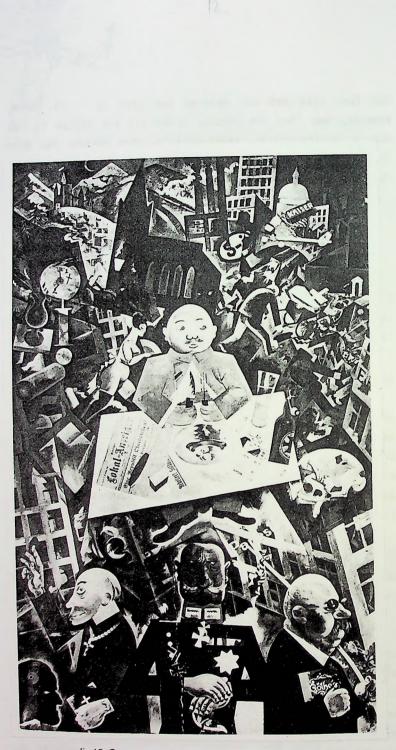


fig 13 Germany, a Winter's Tale 1917 - 1919 - Grosz

did feel this way and devoted her life to it. This, however, was her own choice. Grosz did not follow in the same direction and was reminded by a judge during the *Ecce Homo* trial, 1924, under charge of blasphemy for his piece-<u>Shut up and Soldier On</u> (blackcloth)^{Fig. 10}

The artist does not live for himself alone but in society and that working for society means abiding by certain rules set by the community. That the bounds of morality must not and should not be destroyed , not even by the artist? Ref =

I do not think Kollwitz would have totally agreed with this. The above statement leads to a type of censorship while taking regard of society and its laws. Kollwitz's sense of duty was to people while Grosz's sense of duty is a little harder to find.

Grosz spent six months in the Kaiser's army. His early expectations were ones of personal liberation and a change from the daily grind, a view shared by Otto Dix at one stage. This, however, was just an illusion. This shock manifested itself in drawings using the formal language of expressionism.

His piece <u>Captured Fig</u> '', 1915, and <u>Landscape with Dead</u> <u>Bodies Fig</u> '2, shows almost a news-report style, a documentation of death in war.

In <u>Landscape with Dead Bodies ^{Fig 12}</u>, 1915, we see what seems to be a factory, some houses and a group of dead men and a horse lying in the foreground. It was most definitely expressionist in the visual sense, in terms of its execution. It has almost a childlike quality to the drawing as we see representations of people and buildings. It seems to state its case in a factual way, not really involving the viewer in an emotional manner - one of the basic aims of the expressionists and indeed of Kollwitz. In <u>Captured^{F+4}9</u>¹¹, 1915, his style is less bold and direct. It shows troops who have presumably been captured and are marched through the countryside. He records the event in a factual way in a scratchy pen-and-ink style.

A reminder of the death and destruction is given by the presence of a dead soldier lying with his sword by his side. It appears almost like a war newsreel item. We collect information from the drawing but are left with no real emotional feeling about the human elements of the scene.

These two pieces are good examples of Grosz's use of technique. He moved through various styles in his time, gleaning from them things he felt might help him in expressing and visualising his ideas. It is clear that elements of the expressionist language were used in these pieces. Grosz later used photo-montage and collage to help in his representations of people. Kollwitz had developed her own visual language that differed in its representation as it portrayed people as living , breathing human beings. It was a lengthy process for her but she never gave up on it.

Grosz began to move on to larger paintings such as-<u>Germany. a Winter's Tale 13</u>, 1917-1919, one of his most famous pieces.

In this piece we see the coming together of different ideas and arguments. It is a blend of brothel, factory, front parlour, church and barracks. It is a montage in the sense of its varied and juxtaposed images and it gives us an idea of how Grosz saw the 'city'. He seemed to see it from two angles. From one, he admired its technological achievement, its speed and its excitement and from the other he shows his distaste for hypocritical men who had secret desires for crime and chaos and for a civilisation heading towards its own destruction. In the centre of the painting a man, symbol of the German bourgeoisie, sits nervously at his dinner table. Below him are the pillars of society; the church, army and school. The world reels around the central figure, as a sailor, a symbol of the revolution (Kiel-mutiny) and a prostitute complete this assemblage of chaotic images.

Grosz's involvement with the Dadaist movement is also evident in this piece, its random and anarchic composition and its use of collage as well as seemingly unstructured typography are clues to this fact.

Again Grosz attacked the bourgeoisie but not on behalf of the proletariat, they do not seem to enter the matter and seem unimportant to him at this moment in time.

Kollwitz's view of the city was a different, more personal one, one that was learned from living in the centre of Berlin's slum area where overcrowding along with bad working conditions were prevalent.

As good an artist as Grosz was, he was outstanding with regard to his pieces from 1914 to the end of the First World War.As far as being true to oneself as an artist, I find Kollwitz remains outstanding.

At the same time, Grosz had completed <u>Beauty, thee 1 want to</u> <u>Praise 14</u>, 1919, a piece depicting more scenes of a corrupt society. Meanwhile Kollwitz had just finished her memorial to Karl Liebknecht the leader of the German Communist Party who, along with Rosa Luxemburg, was murdered by the *Freikorps* (secret police) in January 1919. It was Kollwitz's first attempt at woodcut following an exhibition of Barlach's she had visited; she wanted to emulate his style. The result was a striking piece. Following two years



fig 14 Beauty, thee I praise 1919 - Grosz



fig 15 The Communists are dying and the exchange rate goes up 1920 - Grosz



fig 15a Memorial to Karl Liebknecht 1919/1920 - Kollwitz

on preliminary sketches and research into Liebknecht's letters, she had used woodcut to tremendous effect. It provided the perfect solution with its large areas of black. In contrast to these black areas there appeared sharp, simple white lines. Again we see her disregard all inessentials in her work which served as a memorial to the dead Communist leader.

It is important to note that this piece was done following the death of her youngest son Peter in 1914 at the Belgian front. She would never fully recover from his death but had resolved to keep on working using Peter as her guide and inner inspiration.

Grosz also continued to work and his response to the killings of Liebknecht and Luxemburg can be seen in The Communists are Dying and the Foreign Exchange Rate Goes up^{Fig 15}, 1920. In this Grosz shows the bourgeoisie, dining on good food and drinking fine wine. They are oblivious to the death and destruction that is taking place beside them. We could also presume from this piece that these men could in fact see the death of the Communists and are celebrating with a meal as they think of their rewards in terms of profit.

As we look through the works of Kollwitz and Grosz, one thing is apparent. Kollwitz never depicts the class which is under attack in Grosz's work. Grosz uses caricature to depict the middle classes, while Kollwitz uses social realism to portray the result of the greed and profiteering of the middles classes on the proletariat.

Therefore although both are dealing with the same period of time and indeed in this case, the same event, we can see two artists approaching the same subject from two very different perspectives. Kollwitz's memorial to Liebknecht shows a calmness and serenity as the mass of figures stands united in its sorrow at the loss of its leader. Grosz's <u>The Communists are Dying</u> and the Foreign Exchange Rate goes up^{Fig15} deals with this situation in a very different manner.

The overall feeling is one of chaos ruled over by the rich who are safe from all things violent or poor. He seems to portray a Marxist interpretation of history-middle class versus working class and this is made more convincing by the facial expressions used for those who order the murders and those who carry them out. Indeed, the title of this piece comes from a sentence from Rosa Luxemburg's <u>Junius</u> <u>Broschüre</u> of 1916.

Grosz seems to be making an overt political statement based on the politics of Communism. Yet Kollwitz's memorial to Liebknecht does not seem as overtly political in a party political sense, but appears to be on a more personal level as she shows human grief over the death of the Communist leader. I feel she still holds on to her political independence even at this stage.

Having said that Grosz's work centred on the bourgeoisie. there is one piece of his in which his intention was to champion the cause of the workers with the aim of paying tribute to their struggle. The piece is found in the portfolio <u>Im Schatten</u> [In the Shadow] and is titled-People in the StreetFig 16. Intentions aside, we see , in my opinion, precisely what the title says, people in the We also see the factories with their dirty smoke street. and the tenement buildings to the east. However we do not of the people, their struggles and see the lives yet again representations or hardships.Instead we see stereotypes of the proletariat.

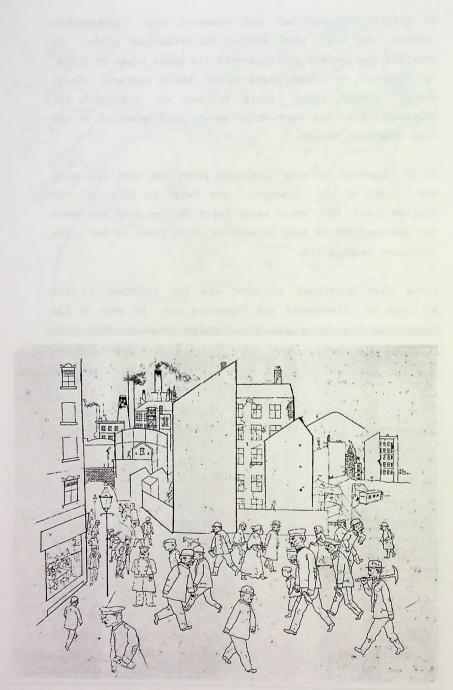


fig 16 People in the street 1923 - Grosz

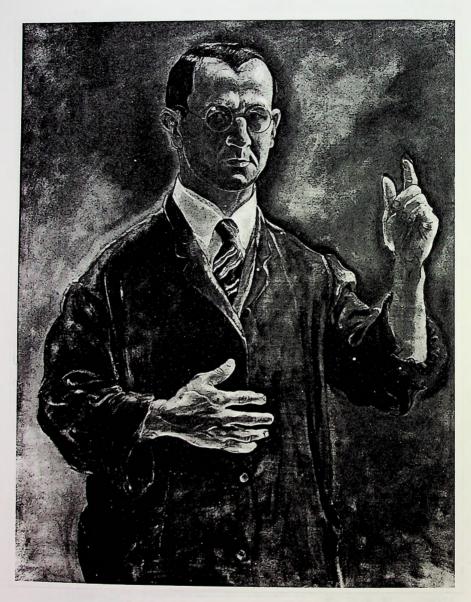


fig 17 Self Portrait as a warner 1916 - Grosz

We see figures dressed in working clothes and carrying various implements, tools, etc. We see people whose worries and problems are not revealed to the viewer but instead are hidden, as if they do not exist, therefore the few drawings which Grosz executed with the class struggle as their theme cannot hide the fact that by the mid twenties Grosz had finally changed from a fighter for the class struggle to a bourgeois moralist. This is reflected in his <u>Self Portrait</u> as <u>Warner</u>^{Fig 17} in 1926. In it he raises his finger in a warning to the viewer. He appears as a teacher, one who wants to emphasise the role of the artist as he sees it, reforming and influencing others.

However, he later contradicts himself when in the early 1930s he found that he no longer wanted an effect on society, but merely to depict it. Perhaps the confusion and chaos we see in his work is also an indication of his position as an artist. Perhaps this confusion as to whether he had a duty to society or not, or that he should just depict rather than influence society, filtered through to his work. Not only was he dealing with a complex society but with his own complex identity as an artist. Perhaps his preoccupation with his role as artist is what made him different to Kollwitz.

Her artistic development seemed more natural and uncluttered. Perhaps her closeness to people was the key to the strength of her work and its clear direction and definition. Kollwitz was not involved in artistic circles and was not a frequenter of the artistic parts of Berlin or elsewhere. This isolation almost probably acted in her favour. She did not have to worry about any pretentions or where her work should fit in, regarding movements and so on. We know that she very rarely met in cafés with colleagues I feel that she was free , then to develop as a person who used her artistic talent in a well-formulated path. She was, I believe, not consumed with the idea of being an artist as I feel Grosz had the tendency to do.but was instead interested in her own responses to the world and its events around her and how she would relay these responses and ideas into visual pieces.

Having the proletariat as her main interest as she lived with them every day, lessened the confusion. She knew exactly the suffering and injustice suffered by these people. She saw it every day as impoverished men and women visited her home with their sick children. She did not have to worry about political parties and their aims. Her politics remained with the people. She would remain devoted to them and this devotion as well as the independent artistic stance cleared the way for her work to develop in terms of content and style.

Following the First World War Kollwitz felt committed to these people. She undertook several posters to highlight the starvation of thousands of children not only in Germany but in other countries that had suffered.

She also worked on a series of woodcuts dealing with the futility of war. In these she expresses her personal abhorrence for war through <u>Die Eltern</u>[Parents]^{F19} ¹⁸ which shows mother and father kneeling on the ground as they huddle together in grief.

The piece deals with her own personal grief over the death of her son but also gives insight to the global slaughter which took place and which she hoped would never happen again.



fig 18 Die Eltern 1923 - Kollwitz



fig 19 Die Mütter 1922/23 - Kollwitz



fig 20 Self Portrait with Artillery helmet 1914 - Dix

had matured into a Again this shows how her politics persistent faith in eternal change rather than in a specific and too often violent revolution. She combines in this piece, herself, the relationship between child and mother, the life of the proletariat as they stand huddled but united, death as a force rather than an evil, and finally war. It acts as an extremely powerful anti-war statement. sculptural quality is evident as the figures Again its seem to come forward out of the large black area which emcompasses them. The individuals are characterised in detail with lines that are as simple as possible. The emphasis is on faces and the by now famous 'Kollwitz hands'. These hands surround the children as the women work together to defend them.

This series of prints is one of the most important German anti-war documents, comparable in significance with Otto Dix's famous graphic series which, like hers, appeared in 1924.

Dix, another contemporary of Kollwitz was born in 1891. He studied at the Dresden Art Academy and enthusiastically volunteered for active service in 1914. Like Grosz, he dabbled in various styles and techniques, he was influenced at certain times by van Gogh and the Italian futurist movement.

During the First World War he saw himself as a warrior and painted a number of self portraits depicting himself in his soldier's uniform. One example is <u>'Self Portrait with Artillery Helmet'Fig</u> 20. In this piece he is decked out in his military attire, his artillery helmet with its bright finishings and his jacket with its bright braiding and buttons. Dix peers furtively from beneath his helmet. He seems to think he posesses an inner fire and like another of



fig 21 Self Portrait as a Soldier 1914 - Dix

his self portraits <u>Self Portrait as a Soldier^{Fig 21} he seems</u> to appear like a wild animal.

He felt compelled to go to war.As in the case of Grosz it was an escape from the daily grind but more importantly to Dix, he felt that by going, he would be part of , and experience the philosophy of Nietzsche whom he had read extensively.

Nietzsche's philosophy dealt with the power of life, procreation and death.and in building up and tearing down, in growth and decay as necessary to the survival of the species. Therefore Otto Dix felt that he would miss the sight of people in an unleashed state caused by war and in missing the experience of seeing the full characteristics of being human.

Dix said in an interview:'I needed to experience all the depths of life for myself that's why I volunteered'[©]

Dix went into the war to experience this birth and death, growth and decay and Nietzsche's view of the world as a Dionysian cycle, his experience of war was coloured by this philosophy. This is reflected in the 600 or so scenes he recorded in tense, excited lines while there were pauses in battle. They show a view of the war that contradicted his later typical anti-war theme.

At this stage of the war in which Dix acted as an NCO and commander of a machine gun platoon, his drawings mostly done in black chalk on a grey paper, seemed to show the war as a primal experience and almost a natural thing. In these pieces we see soldiers locked in combat. Their bodies entwined as they fight hand to hand. They seem to emerge like children from the womb. They appear as organic elements as they rise up and then fall to their death and become part of the earth again.

In <u>Going Over the Top 22</u>, 1917, we see the soldiers on the advance, they leap over the brow of a hill They are on the attack. Here his technique is expressive, yet it shows the confusion and chaos that is found Grosz's work, but it is executed in a different manner.

Again in <u>Dying Warrior 23</u>, 1919 we see the death of a soldier against the backdrop of large rock formations. We see the soldier's wounded chest and his anguished face as he falls back to meet the earth and his own destruction.

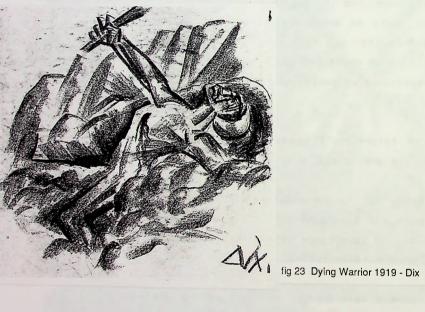
These works, however, do not show the grotesquely mangled and deformed corpses that are so characteristic of his later etching sequence War of 1924. It is true that Dix initially succumbed to the fascination of war and he did not refect on what lay behind or beyond it. However this repression of the horrors of war he witnessed every day over three years or so did have its effect on him. It was not until many years after the war that he was able to face these horrors and bring them out into the open.

In his early drawings, made at the front, the titles were Soldier, Direct Hit, Going over the Top , War and so on.

They seemed to be a response to the war within which he was engulfed and had no escape. In his war series done at the same time as Kollwitz's his work had more precise titles and they were executed in a more defined way. This would lead us to believe that Otto Dix had experienced the scenes which he depicted in this later series, for example _The <u>Madwoman of Sainte Marie-a-Py</u>^(*), \odot ²⁴ The individuality of



fig 22 Going over the top 1917 - Dix







these faces and figures were entirely missing from his earlier work.

Dix's anti-war etchings come from a different war experience from that of Kollwitz. While Dix showed the atrocities of war in showing death which in turn acted as fodder for life (maggots and worms living off the remains of a dead soldier). Kollwitz showed the economic and social effects on those who did not fight in the war but who also suffered in the cities. Dix's work as a contemporary to Kollwitz differs greatly. In terms of being true to himself as an artist, Dix perhaps had more success than his counterpart Grosz. I gather this purely in terms of Grosz and his contradictions, however, and perhaps this is too general, as he appeared to be true to himself in his own eyes, acknowledging his own contradictions.

Dix's stance on the war changed over a period of time and his work with it. His work shows his state of mind and the image of death which he had to live with for the rest of his life as his dreams of war life haunted him.

In <u>Dead Sentry</u>^{Fig 25}, we see the decaying remains of a sentry, his gun still clenched in his fist. His body is dead, yet life continues as he is infested with living creatures which feed from him. It is interesting to note that Dix's etchings of this time are executed in detail where his earlier drawings were loose and more direct. In opposition to this, Kollwitz's earlier work was executed somewhat like Dix's later work, in forms of technique and detail. She then moved on to a bolder, freer style. This might suggest in the case of Dix that he was in fact starting again, re-examining events and images of the past and in doing so reverted to a more accurate and detailed look at figures, people and so on. In re-examining these events through his art, he begins to see War in its reality. its horror, its death and destruction and as this realistion becomes more clear, his confidence in relaying his new-found realisation increased.

It seems as if his artistic development like his own human development went through a stage of being untrue to himself.

The art which he produced during the war was, like himself, in a type of dream-state, as he tried to black out the reality of the war. So too his development as a person was thwarted and in a sense , this process had to begin again after the war. So it is difficult to compare Kollwitz and Dix in terms of attitude to their work. Dix's experiences were very different to Kollwitz even though both suffered the inhumanity of war. They are comparable in showing at some stage or other a strong anti-war stance. In terms of power of their work, Dix's relies heavily on its the content. Its ugly images of decaying humans, the strength of Kollwitz's work relies to some extent also on content but her technique enhanced the subject matter's directness, Her work for me personally lingers in the mind as the strongest reminder of war and its futility. This may seem that unusual following the sight of Dix's images but as horrendous as they are , they do not have for me that real human element that is so evident in Kollwitz's work and which is vital to the feeling that the viewer is left with, having looked at the work.

Although Dix's images make you writhe with disgust, I do not feel in personal contact with the subject as it seems too particular, too biological. The emotional element is lacking somewhat and I think this has a lot to do with the way in which it is executed and thought out. Many of Dix's etchings from the war series, as I have said, before were recollections of past events. Perhaps his preoccupation with accurately remembering the places and people made his interpretation different. We must remember that Dix as an artist, experienced the war like no other, he was in the front line and this intensity and closeness to the war was obviously an over-riding influence on him and so his work homed in on the soldier as victim and perpetrator. The war had changed nothing he had hoped for, but had instead changed people, himself included and the environment.

Kollwitz's view of the war was different in the obvious sense that she was not seeing it from the front line. This probably helped in making her work less confused. She did have a certain distance from it and was able to calculate from very early on, the war's futility and that the young were being used to an unjust end and their vitality and youth should be used to greater effect in establishing a peaceful society.

Although war has been commonplace throughout the world's history, death, along with birth are the universal elements on this earth. Death is not only a biological state as depicted in Dix's or Grosz's work for that matter. It is also the loss of a person, someone who was born into a family, someone who has lived a life full of experiences and has played a part in the life of the world.

Death is a loss not just experienced by the victim but by those who knew her or him. I think that this universal emotion at the loss of a loved one is what Kollwitz conveyed in her series of prints on death.

These prints are her last great series. It is composed of eight profoundly moving lithographs depicting death. These lithographs to my mind are the greatest depiction of death in this abstract sense. In these prints we see, not a dead corpse or a biologically dead body but instead we see people in various situations meeting with death which has its own strong presence in each print.

The powerfulness of these images show Kollwitz at her best, her long life with its devotion to her work has provided us with these extremely strong amnd moving images.

Along with Dix, Grosz too pictured death on occasions. His images were for the most part flat images of figures lying down, motionless. These images of death were different to those of Kollwitz. Grosz's style was more reportative, Dix's more chilling and gruesome while Kollwitzs work remained again on a personal level.

Perhaps this view of life and death that Kollwitz shared with us in her work was different to Grosz and Dix because of her sex. Perhaps from this point of view we can find an answer to her approach when comparing her to both Grosz and Dix. It is true that Dix's and Grosz's styles and approaches differed from each other but they still portrayed events involving death in a clinical way.

Kollwitz was a woman and a mother of two children. Perhaps the fact that she nurtured these children inside her and brought them into the world, created a different viewpoint from that of Grosz and Dix. She perhaps could find a closer relationshp between life and death as a cycle and in a way different to Dix's view, which came in turn from Nietzsche and Grosz's view which seemed distanced and intellectual. The last print in the 'Death' series is <u>Ruf des Todes' 10 26</u> [The call of Death] and it is the most amazing piece of work. By this year, 1935, she had reduced detail even



fig 26 Ruf des Todes 1934 - Kollwitz



fig 27 Tod packt eine Frau 1934 - Kollwitz

further without losing her sense of realism. In this piece we see the hand of death as it enters the picture. It beckons the figure who appears to be the artist, yet it is half man in appearance. The figure seems to accept its fate. Death is a comforting hand waiting for the figure to join it. The fluidity and strength of the figure is beautiful, we can sense the movement of this person as he/she moves closer to death. This lithograph shows us a human being , breathing and moving on the verge of death. We get a sense of anticipation and acceptance of death as it comes to this old person. It is very spiritual and we seem to sense the future journey of this person to another life.

In the fourth print from the series<u>Tod Packt eine Frau</u> [Death seizes a woman]^{Fig 27} again we see death meeting with someone in this case a woman.who appears not to be resigned to death in the same way as the figure in the last lithograph.

Death here appears in full as a figure towering over the frightened woman. He seems to whisper to her ,her fate. She clutches her child but we know that death will succeed. The sense of form in this piece is again amazing. The tension created is frightening. I feel a certain uneasiness when I see it, yet a sense too of its power and Kollwitz's ability to capture a movement so poignant as this. Again its simplicity is its key; bold and direct it is a fearful image.

Death was under the constant scrutiny of Kollwitz through her life. Despite her preoccupation with it she was not gloomy in her outlook on life. Death served only as a reminder of the good that could be found. This good was found in the case of Kollwitz in her family and her now deepening love for her husband Karl.



fig 28 Tod, Frau und Kind 1910 - Kollwitz



fig 29 Saatfrüchte sollen nicht vermahlen werden 1942 - Kollwitz

Death always seemed to highlight for Kollwitz people's ability to love. Whereas Grosz's satirical images grew from hatred, Kollwitz's grew from love.

Even in <u>Tod Frau und Kind</u>[Death, Woman and Child]^{Fig 28}, 1910 where we see the artist as model, the death of the child despite its sorrow seems to show the unique bond between mother and child. In this moving image where both figures lie horizontally in the page, the child apparently seems to be drifting away from his mother who holds him in her arms. Although the mother has lost her child, they appear not as two figures but one. Their faces pressed tightly together, the mother's love for her child is shown in the mothers face who tries to hide her grief.

Having completed her series of prints on death Kollwitz was nearing her 70th birthday and battled against old age. By the year 1940 she was finding it increasingly difficult. Her husband Karl had died following along period of illness. Hitler now running a dictatorship had launched Germany into another World War with which Kollwitz's grandson Peter was killed. Her stance remained the same. She was against the war and against Hitler and his government. Despite visits from the Gestapo while her husband was still alive, she continued to work. She never saw her work on public display after 1936 when the work was taken out of various exhibitions by the Nazis. This did not stop her. The bombings and more men slaughtered did not stop her. In 1942 she produced her last graphic Saatfrüchte Sollen nicht Vermahlen Werden [Seed for the Sowing must not be Ground] Fig 29 The title came from a line from Goethe whom she had read all those years ago. In this piece we see the mother and child relationship again. She was now 75 years of age and still felt her duty to work for the oppressed. This lithograph was designed to oppose the call-up in 1942 of juveniles to serve as anti-aircraft auxiliaries in the armed

forces of the Third Reich. It shows again a woman protecting her children underneath her cloak as she looks on in defiance.

Romain Rolland wrote: 'This woman with her great heart has taken the people into her mothering arms with sombre and tender pity. She is the voice of the silence of the sacrificed.'^{Rof} 'O I have to agree with this statement and Kollwitz's rich legacy of work which she has left to the world is a testament to it.

Käthe Kollwitz died in April 1945, four months before the end of the Second World War. She died while staying with the young sculptor Margaret Böning following the bombing of her home in Berlin. She died without possessions but not without her dignity.

In summarising, the two World Wars had an immeasurable effect on the world itself and on the life and work of Käthe Kollwitz. The deaths of her son and grandson helped strengthen her conviction against war

In examining the development of her work, I used the work of Grosz and Dix as comparative studies. From these comparisons two important points arose. In the case of Grosz, I found that his approach involved the use of caricatures to portray the middle class while Kollwitz used a social-realist technique to portray the working class.

In Dix's case his work on death during the First World War differed from that of Kollwitz in that it was clinical and biological, lacking the human element of emotion evident in Kollwitz's prints. In trying to answer the question as to why she approached her work differently, I argue that her femininity may have had a major role to play.

I have looked at the print work of Kollwitz, whose later pieces showed sculptural aspects which led her to carry out three-dimensional work in her later life. I found that throughout her artistic career, her artistic and political independence gave her a clear direction.

In short Kollwitz was an outstanding artist of her time.

CONCLUSION

Kollwitz wrote, near her death, that the war acompanied her to the end. So too did her wish to devote her life's work to people, to people and their sufferings through poverty and deprivation and to people and their relationships with each other through their lives in a time of great upheaval.

Kollwitz was clear in her aim. She knew how she felt for these people who were called the proletariat. She knew they suffered unjustly. Having one subject within which she immersed herself gave her the direction to develop her work in a way that was outstanding in comparison to the contemporaries I have mentioned, Dix, Grosz and members of Der Blauer Reiter and Die Brücke. She treated her work at a personal level. By this I mean the level which embodied the person as an individual among a mass of people.

Her clarity of thinking was transferred to the page in a similarly clear and direct way. She , above any other could convey her ideas, expressions, hopes and aspirations through her work.

This knowledge of self purpose was not as strong in Dix and Grosz and therefore lowered in my opinion their impact on society then and now. Although Kollwitz's images were from a certain period of time and dealt, in many cases, withcertain events, there is a universal and timeless quality to her work as it deals basically with human life and death.

'NIE WIEDER KRIEG'. [NEVER AGAIN WAR] Fig 30 Kollwitz, 1924..

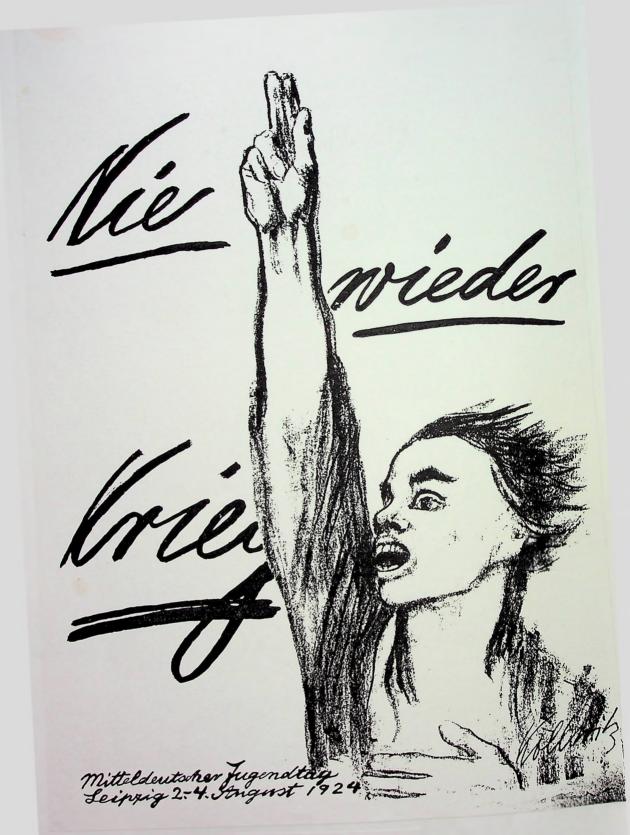


fig 30 Nie Wieder Krieg 1924 - Kollwitz

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