

A Process of Protest: Prints and Drawings of Käthe Kollwitz, July 28, 2006–November 26, 2006

This exhibition celebrates a recent gift from an anonymous donor consisting of three drawings and sixty-three prints by the German artist Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945). The gift represents about a quarter of the artist's known prints, establishing RISD as a major center for the study of graphic art by this technically innovative and profoundly admired artist. Käthe Kollwitz's long life spanned the Empire of Wilhelm I (1871–1918), the ill-fated Weimar Republic (1919–33), and the rise and fall of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich (1933–45).

During the first year of World War I (1914), Kollwitz lost Peter, the younger of her two sons. In World War II, she lost not only her home and studio in Berlin to Allied bombing, but also her grandson, named after her son Peter. Often described as a socialist, Kollwitz never joined a political party, but remained a devoted pacifist. Although she shared some common goals with various leftist movements, she described herself as an "evolutionary" rather than a revolutionary. Throughout her creative life, Kollwitz's focus on the under classes—those parts of the population whose needs were overlooked by the government—never wavered. She wrote in her personal journal: "It is my duty to voice the sufferings of humankind, the never-ending sufferings heaped mountain-high. This is my task, but it is not an easy one to fulfill (January 4, 1920)."

Kollwitz never abandoned either her figural style or her commitment to the graphic arts. She employed etching, woodcut, and lithography with equal dedication. The rejected states, experiments with different media, and preparatory drawings on view help to elucidate the process by which Kollwitz arrived at the powerful visual rhetoric of her finished works. In her consistent transformation and reevaluation of her art, she pursued the technical and formal means by which best to arouse emotions and to exhort action.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867–1945

Self-portrait, 1924

Transfer lithograph

Anonymous gift 2005.142.12

Transfer lithography is a process by which a drawing is transferred to a lithographic stone and printed. Transfer lithographs often retain the texture of the original paper. Kollwitz employed the technique regularly after 1920. This portrait represents the artist at the age of 57 in one of many profile views.



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Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945
Seated Woman with Shawl, ca. 1924
Transfer lithograph
Anonymous gift 2005.142.15

Although this work was not titled a self-portrait, Kollwitz inserted her likeness into the image. Executed in transfer lithography, Kollwitz utilized the grain of the paper to produce a textured, rough edge, which adds to the seeming frailty and age of the figure. Kollwitz struggled against growing old for much of her life. She wrote in an undated letter in the mid 1920s: "As in everything else, I find that age is not good for much, that one becomes deafer and less sensitive. Alas, the higher up the mountain you climb, the less of a view you get. A mist closes in and cheats you of the hoped-for and expected opportunity to see far and wide..."



Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945
Help Russia!, 1921
Transfer lithograph
Anonymous gift 2005.142.16

Lithographs such as this combine all of Kollwitz's later sensibilities: the quick and "popular" appeal of lithography, the context of social responsibility, and her persuasive emotional pull. Kollwitz intended the work to be a poster printed with the words, "Help Russia!" She reduced the composition to the needy man's expressive face and the outstretched hands surrounding him.



Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945
Consultation, (sheet 3 of the series *A Weaver's Revolt*), 1906
Crayon and brush lithograph with scratching
Anonymous gift 2005.142.33

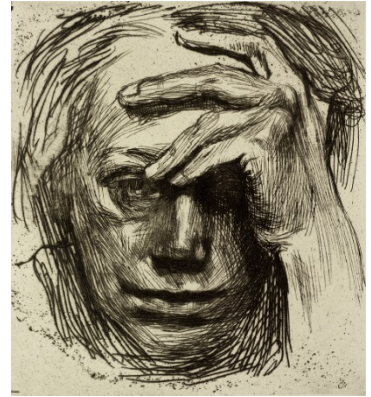
This is the third sheet of Kollwitz's first series, *A Weaver's Revolt*, a semi-narrative depiction of the historical uprising of Silesian weavers in 1844. To carry out the project, Kollwitz experimented with a number of different compositions and printing techniques, finally rejecting an etched version in favor of lithography. The print exhibits Kollwitz's early lithographic style, in which she employed short strokes reminiscent of her etching technique. After 1910, she replaced this style with that of the free, broadly drawn lithographs on display nearby.



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Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945
Self Portrait, hand at forehead, ca. 1910, published 1918
Etching and drypoint
Anonymous gift 2005.142.38

Kollwitz was 43 in 1910. In this self-portrait, like most of those after 1900, she concentrated on her face and hands, representing herself without indicating a setting. She was fascinated with the expressive qualities of hands throughout her life, having admired the works of Old Masters such as Albrecht Dürer, whose compositions of hands she studied at the Kupferstichkabinett (Cabinet of Prints and Drawings), Berlin. She wrote in her personal journal, “only the total attitude and the face and hands speak to me.” [Entry of October 15, 1919]



Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945
Self-portrait at a Table, ca.1893, published 1921
Etching, drypoint, aquatint and spit bite
Anonymous gift 2005.142.39

Printed self-portraits were a mainstay of Kollwitz’s artistic practice. In this night scene, completed when she was twenty-six, she experimented with aquatint for only the second time, employing it for the dark, textured areas surrounding her face and body. Although the aquatint was likely not intended to be so deeply bitten, its rich surface contributes to the dramatic quality of the print.



Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945
Run Over, ca. 1910
Graphite
Anonymous gift 2005.142.50

Around 1910, Kollwitz turned away from historical imagery toward more socially critical works. This drawing acts as a preparatory design for the etching (seen below). Two parents, hunched over in misery, carry their dead child after an accident. In the print, a crowd of stunned children surrounds them. Kollwitz evokes the metaphorical “invisibility” of the lower classes, which are literally and metaphorically run over by governmental neglect and the increasing momentum of modern culture.



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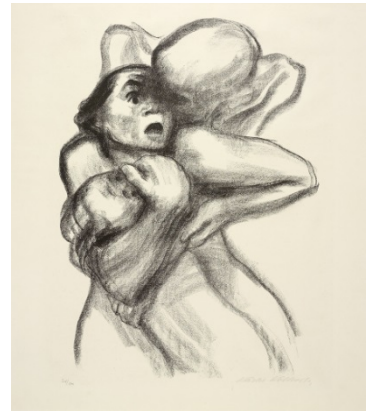
Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945

Death Seizes a Woman, from the portfolio *Tod (Death)*, 1934

Crayon lithograph on paper

Anonymous gift 2005.142.7

For the majority of her prints after 1920, Kollwitz turned to lithography, a technique that she felt communicated her ideas in the most straightforward manner. Her final print series, *Death*, is the culminating expression of the artist's lifelong dialogue with the subject. Her expressive draftsmanship and economy of means contrasts with her earlier lithographic technique (an example is on display in the case in this gallery), and creates a devastating impact.



Max Liebermann, German, 1847-1935

The Midday Meal, (appeared in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*), 1888

Etching on paper

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 24.426

Max Liebermann was a painter and printmaker whose work, heavily inspired by French Impressionism, was alternately celebrated and maligned by his countrymen. In 1899, he became the leader of the Berlin Secession, an artist's group of which Kollwitz was a member. Kollwitz fit well with the Secessionists because of the prevailing mode of socially oriented imagery promoted by Liebermann and contemporaries like Adolph von Menzel. This etching, with its subject of working-class men conversing at a table, has many similarities to the style and subject matter of Kollwitz's *Consultation* in this case.



Adolph von Menzel, German, 1815-1905

Head Studies, ca. 1882-1884

Crayon on wove paper

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 28.114

Adolph von Menzel was one of the most respected German realist artists of the 19th century. A keen and close observer, he recorded his surroundings and acquaintances in thousands of drawings. In 1872, he spent several weeks at the vast smelting works in Königshütte, Upper Silesia, making drawings of the iron-production process and the townspeople. This sketch may date from that period. Menzel's socially oriented imagery and his masterful drawing technique were important influences on Kollwitz.



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Ernst Barlach, German, 1870-1938
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
Paul Cassirer
Woodcuts for Goëthe's Walpurgisnacht, 1923
Woodcuts
Museum Works of Art Fund 52.027

The book consists of one scene from Johann Wolfgang von Goëthe's drama *Faust*. The scene, entitled *Walpurgisnacht (Walpurgis Night)*, is named after a night in May when witches were thought to meet with the devil. In the drama, Mephistopheles tempts Faust to assume a young and sexual body and throws him into the arms of a naked young witch. Barlach's reductive, expressive cutting and broad areas of black were the inspiration for Kollwitz's venture into the woodcut technique.

Otto Dix, German, 1891-1969
Otto Felsing, 1891-1969
Shot to Pieces (Zerschossene), from the portfolio *War (Der Krieg)*, 1924
Etching, drypoint, and aquatint on paper
Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 74.099

Like Kollwitz, Otto Dix completed a print cycle on the theme of *War* in 1920. He exhibited it alongside Kollwitz's series at the International Antiwar Museum in Berlin. While Kollwitz focused upon the sacrifices of those left at home during war, Dix's 50 etchings depict war's victims through scenes of horrific action, grotesque physical impairment, and devastation. A war veteran himself, Dix employed satirical realist caricature to emphasize physical and moral deterioration and to problematize male aggression.

North Wall

Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945
Memorial for Karl Liebknecht, 1920
Woodcut on paper
Anonymous gift 2005.142.14

While experimenting with her memorial to Karl Liebknecht in etching and lithography, Kollwitz attended an exhibition of works by Ernst Barlach (German, 1870-1938). A book of woodcuts by Barlach may be viewed in the case in this gallery. Kollwitz wrote:

"...I saw something that knocked me over: Barlach's woodcuts. Today I've looked at my lithographs again and seen that almost all of them



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are no good. Barlach has found his path and I have not yet found mine. I can no longer etch; I'm through with that for good." [Journal entry of June 25, 1920]

Kollwitz sold this woodcut, her first, in an unlimited edition at the *Worker's Art Exhibition*, Berlin, in 1920. The composition of men hunched in mourning over the body of the fallen revolutionary brings to mind a Christian Lamentation.

Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945

Maria and Elisabeth, 1929

Woodcut on paper

Anonymous gift 2005.142.25

After a visit to the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin, Kollwitz wrote in her journal:

"I saw a beautiful Filippo Lippi—Mantegna—Van Der Goes, and a painting by an unknown of around 1440: the Trinity [the painting is now attributed to Konrad Witz]. To the right you see the meeting of Mary and Elisabeth. They stand facing one another, dressed in wide mantles, which enfolded the whole into one group. They are holding their mantles open, and in their swollen abdomens you see the coming children, Jesus and John. The faces are earnest and dedicated. How beautiful it all was. It lifted me out of the daily dreariness of politics." [Entry of February 1922]

For the present print, Kollwitz carved on a softer wood than previously. The soft wood allowed her to use a file on such details as the women's necks and fingers, lending the composition a sculptural quality with almost no use of actual line.

Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945

The Four Mourners (Die vier Trauernden), ca. 1919, published 1933

Etching, aquatint, sandpaper, reserve, and softground with imprint of laid paper on paper

Anonymous gift 2005.142.28



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Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945

Mourner (Der Trauernde), published 1933

Etching, aquatint, sandpaper, and soft ground with imprint of laid paper

Anonymous gift 2005.142.35

Kollwitz created works memorializing Liebknecht in etching and lithography before deciding that woodcut was the most appropriate technique. These two etchings are fragments printed from Kollwitz's original etching plate. The copper plate was cut in two in 1933 to create two separate compositions and then each section was printed.



Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945

The Widow II, from the portfolio *Krieg (War)*, 1922

Woodcut on paper

Anonymous gift 2005.142.5

In August 1924, Käthe Kollwitz exhibited her suite of seven woodcuts, *War*, at the International Antiwar Museum in Berlin, a new museum founded by the anarcho-pacifist Ernst Friedrich. Kollwitz's cycle portrays war entirely from the perspective of the home front, highlighting the sacrifices of mothers and children. She described her search for the most appropriate medium for the subject:

"I initially began the war cycle as etchings. Came to nothing. Let it all lie. Then I tried with transfers [transfer lithographs]. There too almost never satisfying results. Whether the woodcut will do it? If that too doesn't, then I have proof that it lies only within myself. Then I simply can no longer do it. In the torment of all these years small oases of joys and successes!" [Journal entry of June 25, 1920]

War was one of a number of graphic cycles on the theme completed by various German artists in the early 1920s, including a series by Otto Dix, which was exhibited alongside that of Kollwitz.



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Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945
The Volunteers, from the portfolio *Krieg (War)*, 1921-1922
Woodcut on paper
Anonymous gift 2005.142.6

On October 11, 1916, Kollwitz wrote in her journal in anguish about her dead son Peter's readiness to volunteer for war:

"Are the young really without judgment? Do they always rush into it as soon as they are called? Without looking closer? Do they rush into war because they want to, because it is in their blood so that they accept without examination whatever reasons for fighting are given to them? Do the young want war? Would they be old before their time if they no longer wanted it? This frightful insanity—the youth of Europe hurling themselves at one another."

In this composition, the willing young men are led by Death, who beats his battle drum. The unifying rainbow at the top, usually a symbol of hope, does little to dispel the dissonance achieved by the ambiguous facial expressions and jagged cuts at the composition's bottom.



Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945
Fight in the Pub, (rejected print for Émile Zola's novel *Germinal*), 1904?
Etching, sandpaper and soft ground with imprint of Ziegler's transfer paper
Anonymous gift 2005.142.19

This rare combinatory-technique print is also one of Kollwitz's first ventures into color printing. The sheet derives its subject from Émile Zola's realist novel about miners, *Germinal* (1885). It depicts two men fighting over the novel's heroine, Catherine, in a tavern interior. Kollwitz pressed sandpaper and Ziegler's transfer paper into the soft ground of the copper plate to achieve a grainy, dotted pattern; after this she formed the image by etching. In this rare second state of the print, Kollwitz added the yellow tone with a lithographic stone. She abandoned the subject of *Germinal* after 1904.



Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945
The Battlefield, from the portfolio *Bauernkrieg (The Peasant's War)*, 1921
Etching, drypoint, aquatint, sandpaper, and softground with imprint of ribbed laid paper and Ziegler's transfer paper
Anonymous gift 2005.142.2



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Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945

City Outskirts, 1901

Combination algraphy (aluminum plate) and copper plate intaglio

Anonymous gift 2005.142.34

This print is a rare example of Kollwitz's combinatory technique, where she employed intaglio and planographic printing processes in the same work. The draftsman-like black lines of the figures were printed from a planographic aluminum plate (algraphy), while the textured white highlights were printed from an intaglio copper plate. The paper adds a third color to the composition, creating an impressionistic moonlit pathway with a warm golden glow, a rare moment of tranquility in Kollwitz's work.



Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945

Outbreak, from the portfolio *Baurenkrieg (The Peasant's War)*, 1921

Etching, drypoint, aquatint, reserve and softground with imprint of 2 fabrics and Ziegler transfer paper

Anonymous gift 2005.142.4

The theme of women as revolutionaries pervades *Peasant's War*. Kollwitz was inspired by historian Wilhelm Zimmermann's book, *The Great German Peasant War*, particularly his description of Black Anna, a peasant woman who incited the revolt. In this print, the large, central figure of a woman propels the men into a run with the force of her own energy. Kollwitz chose to position the figure with her back to the viewer, poised at the edge of the picture plane, a strategy that both universalizes her and engages the viewer in the action. In this ninth of eleven states, the texture of cloth fabric, pressed into a soft ground, can be discerned throughout the plate.



Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945

Arming in a Vault, ca. 1902

Charcoal, graphite and crayon on heavy brown paper

Anonymous gift 2005.142.49

This drawing for sheet four of the *Peasant's War* cycle depicts the peasants as they prepare for battle. Kollwitz used graphite, charcoal, crayon, and wash to create a composition of sweeping diagonals. The slant of the ghostly figures that rises to the left balances the vaulted ceiling of the church at right.



Kollwitz made two prints after this initial design. The first, a trial proof, is a three-color lithograph. The other, the last print of the edition, is done in intaglio technique. As evident when comparing the two prints, Kollwitz experimented with the composition in two directions.

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Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945

Arming in a Vault, sheet 4 of the series *Peasant's War (Bauernkrieg)*, 1906, published 1921

Two-color etching, drypoint, aquatint, and soft ground with imprint of Ziegler's transfer paper

Anonymous gift 2005.142.56

Kollwitz's method of working a copper plate has been the subject of much discussion among artists and scholars. It is likely that she laid a sheet of paper over a copper plate prepared with soft ground; she then drew on the paper with a hard pencil, producing a soft, grainy texture. Kollwitz also impressed the soft ground with fabric and Ziegler's transfer paper. Her use of transfer paper to create a minute, overall dot pattern on many of her intaglio prints has often been mistaken for photolithography. A close look at this sheet will reveal the dots created by this innovative technique.



Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945

Arming in a Vault, rejected version of sheet 4 of the series *Peasant's War (Bauernkrieg)*, 1918

Crayon and brush color lithograph with scratching on paper

Anonymous gift 2005.142.57



Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945

Run Over, 1910, published 1924

Etching and soft ground with imprint of laid paper and Ziegler's transfer paper

Anonymous gift 2005.142.58



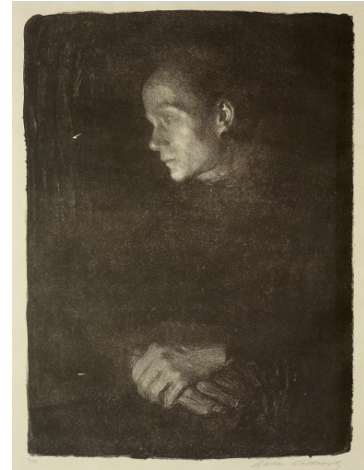
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Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945

Working Woman in Profile towards the Left, 1903, published 1918

Crayon and brush lithograph with scratching on paper

Anonymous gift 2005.142.22



Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945

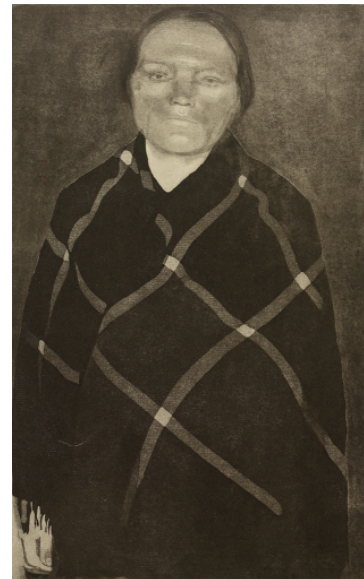
Pregnant Woman, 1910, published 1921

Etching, drypoint, aquatint, and softground with the imprint of laid paper and Ziegler's transfer paper

Anonymous gift 2005.142.52

Around the time she made this etching, Kollwitz wrote in her personal journal about pregnancy, a subject she pursued in both graphic arts and sculpture:

“I imagine the following sculpture as utterly beautiful: a pregnant woman chiseled out of stone. Carved only down to the knees so that she looks the way Lise [Kollwitz’s sister] said she did the time she was pregnant with Maria: ‘As if I am rooted to the ground.’ The immobility, restraint, introspection. The arms and hands dangling heavily, the head lowered, all attention directed inward. And the whole thing in heavy, heavy stone. Title: *Pregnancy*.” [Journal entry of September 1, 1911]



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Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945

Bust of a Working Woman with a Blue Shawl, 1903, published 1906

Crayon and brush lithograph, scratched, on blue stone on paper

Anonymous gift 2005.142.55

