

Kathe Kollwitz's art techniques and subjects

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Introduction

Kathe Kollwitz, born in 1867, was one of the most prominent female art expressionists of her time. She gave visual form to the issues of society's injustice and suffering and brought them into the limelight for others to note. Being raised in a middle-class family that was politically progressive, Kollwitz relished the support her family offered and availed it to pursue her ambitions for art. In 1889, Kollwitz fell in love with a medical student and got engaged to him. Although her father suggested she prefer art over marriage, persuading and sending her to Munich to progress her studies further in the discipline of Art. After graduating in 1891, Kollwitz returned to Berlin and married Karl Kollwitz, her fiancé.

Kollwitz was studying both printmaking and painting, however she realigned her focus towards printmaking at the start of the year 1890. This was majorly reflective of the influence she got from her fellow artist, Max Klinger, who became a major inspiration towards her development in the field of printmaking. She saw the underlying potential in print due to its capacity to translate and convey messages through social commentary. Another prominent factor for her preference towards print included the fact that they were inexpensive and could be reprinted countless times for people to read.

Discussion

As an inspirational art expressionist of her time, Kollwitz spent most of their life dedicated to creating drama, capturing emotion in the forms of etchings, lithographs, and woodcuts. Most of the aforementioned were in black and white. Among the models she took inspiration from included the working-class patients under the care of her husband. Many of the subjects she focused on reflected both World War I and World War II. She was saddened by the sights of loss and suffering many people faced, much shaken by losing her son to World War I and soon after the loss of her grandson to World War II.

Kollwitz earned much fame based on the wrenching subjects and her virtuoso technique, gaining her popularity throughout the Western World and Germany. However, this fame also attracted a lot of criticism, forcing her to resign as the first female professor while serving in the Prussian Academy in 1919. The Nazi government's influence soon grew to the extent of forbidding her to exhibit her art (Barron et al., 1997). In her final years, she created sculptures made out of stone and bronze, featuring the subjective and aesthetic values embodying the two-dimensional value of her work. Most of her work was later destroyed at the time of the Berlin Air Raid in the year 1943. Kollwitz evacuated

and relocated to Moritzburg, a town situated outside of Dresden, which became her final resting place.

From an analytical perspective, the engraving directly into the picture of a mother and her dead child was then applied with colors consistent with different shades of grey, black, and white. She uses a unique etching style, adding diversity to the tone, accompanied by the use of shadowing and imprints in a bolder form. Employing different forms of darkness, she uses strong lines while accommodating them by leaving out whiter spaces. This amplifies the contrast between the values of light and dark colors, making the image more prominent and bringing forth the portions reflective of light. Kollwitz has engraved the image above onto either wood, lino, or metal.

Adding color to the picture with the use of different shades, Kollwitz imbues it with elements of emotion and influence while engraving it on paper or canvas. The painting “Mother and Dead Child” portrays the time of the German Expressionism Art Movement (Zigrosser 1969). An analytical perspective of the painting reveals the motherly figure, fully naked from her head to the tip of her toe, holding a child in her arms while sitting down cross-legged. The pictures exhibit a strong embodiment of an emotional image within itself. The mother’s hair and part of her forehead are visible, while she is in a sitting position with her legs in a flat position, one leg parallel to her body, whereas the heel of one foot facing an inwards direction, particularly pointed towards her face. Her other foot is placed on her left knee, over her lower thigh. The right leg is positioned in such a way, to provide support for her child, her hands are gripping around the torso of her child, holding the child up.

Visual Analysis

Kollwitz employs different forms of thin and thick lines, imbuing texture, expression, and form into the picture. She has closely paid attention to the value of each line etched into the painting. She has used a unique form to give texture to the faces by distinguishing them with a preferred selection of a different line thickness. The placement of dark areas brings about a special focus on the depiction of eyes embodying sadness or exhibiting roughness on her hands. Kollwitz uses a different approach towards negative spacing in her work (Rukeyser 1968, 99-105). In this picture, she is found to have represented the two figures pressed closely together while adding negative space around the edges to keep the viewer’s attention locked on to the painting. This points towards her craftily eliminating the use of personal space in the picture. The use of color in the picture brings an intensity towards the emotional value embedded in the representation of the figures. The use of emphasis highlights the smart use of value, line, and space, which brings forth attention to the emotions in the picture.

Analyzing the background reveals the importance of adding shadows in various places to evoke power into the image. The direction of the light source is evident to be from the left by analyzing the portions of the body being hit by it, necessarily shining onto the woman and the child in portions that provide an artistic effect it. The way the female figure is displayed exhibits that she has been in this state due to the circumstances of her actions. The woman appears to be in a deep saddened state.

From a close analysis of the pose, it is evident that the emotional stature of the woman provides a clue into the feelings a mother goes through, as she holds on to the very life she gave birth to, now lifeless and dead in her arms. Kollwitz has rendered this piece in an excellent form, providing evidence of Kollwitz's personal experience towards the feelings a mother would go through since she lost her son in World War I and her grandson in World War II. The picture holds a meaning so well embedded that it cannot be judged in a quick glance but requires a viewer to bring themselves close to what a mother feels and the emotions she bears at the loss of her child. The best aspect of the picture is in relation to this picture revealing the loss Kollwitz felt at the loss of two of the closest lives to her. The loss of her child and then of her grandchild, both of which cannot be replaced, and she's forever lost herself in the sadness of it.

Conclusion

Kathe Kollwitz, who has been best known for her expressionism in art, produced many wonderful and meaningful art pieces. She devoted herself to pursuing art and finally settled on continuing to printmaking art forms. Kathe Kollwitz was greatly criticized by the Nazi government and removed from her position as professor at Prussian Academy. She continued working on creating sculptures for the rest of her life. One of the major inspirations towards her development in the field of printmaking was her inspirational fellow artist, Max Klinger. She saw the underlying potential in print due to its capacity to translate and convey messages through social commentary. Among the models she took inspiration from included the working-class patients under the care of her husband. Many of the subjects she focused on reflected both World War I and World War II. Most of her work was later destroyed at the time of the Berlin Air Raid in the year 1943. Kollwitz evacuated and relocated to Moritzburg, a town outside of Dresden, which became her final resting place.

The painting of *Mother and Child*, painted by Kathe Kollwitz, is a representation of a mother holding a dead child in her arms while displaying the emotional feelings of her loss. The picture holds a meaning so well embedded that it cannot be judged in a quick glance but requires a viewer to bring themselves close to what a mother feels and the emotions she bears at the loss of her child. The best aspect of the picture is in relation to this picture revealing the loss Kollwitz felt at the loss of two of the closest lives to her. The loss of her child and then of her grandchild, both of which cannot be replaced, and she's forever lost herself in the sadness of it. The picture is a true representation of one of her best works yet.

Works Cited

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