

"i artist's world and
her reflections on it.



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

" I want to show Death. Death swings the lash of feminine - people, men, women, and children, bowed low, screaming and groaning, file past him."

The prominence and predominance of death in Kollwitz's thought process is clear from this diary entry of January 4 1920.

The diary entry depicts the continuous presence of death and suffering in and around the artist's world and her reflections on it. It is believed that no artwork can be devoid from the influence of its social environment . Neither are all artworks pleasant and pretty .

Work of art are heavily influenced by the time, place, and conditions the artist lives in. Her artwork are therefore a depiction of the war ridden Germany, the suffering of the people around her, death, and the condition of women at the time . Her artwork was on the victims of war, who were all the people - women, children, etc. - who could not participate in the war. The artwork under discussion, Death takes the Children, depicts the influence of the shadow of death and suffering of women in Kollwitz's world. Kollwitz was born in Germany.

She was a profound German artist who produced many lithographs, woodcuts, and drawings. She was born in 1867 in Konigsberg, Prussia and lived until 1945. Her introduction to the art form was early in childhood when she started drawing, but was formally introduced to it at the age of 14 in private art classes. She could not enroll into Konigsberg Academy, as the institution did not allow females during the time . She was married in 1891 to a physician named Karl Kollwitz and they had two sons.

They lived in a working class locality of Berlin. The subjects of her art were predominantly the urban poor who lived around her neighborhood. She took up the printing as her chosen medium as this allowed her to produce numerous, inexpensive, copies of her work. Her works are mostly in black and white. She had to face a lot of problem due to the subjects of her work before and during the Nazi era. She suffered several blows to her career due to her socialist views that led to her being removed from several positions of note.

Death had encircled her life from early childhood. As a child, she suffered from anxiety due to the death of her siblings and suffered from a neurological disorder . She writes in her diary: “ My relations with my parents were such that U said not a word about it; but what a weight there was upon my mind, for I believed myself to blame of for my brother’s death.

” Her brother’s death in her early childhood affected her deeply, but her anxiety remained within her as she was unable to speak her mind to either of her parents. Her life was marked by death of loved one and suffering and poverty in her social environment. She lost her son in World War I and her grandson in World War II .

The theme of death is predominant in all works of Kollwitz. However, her dealing with the death theme changed with her maturity as an artist and a person. Initially her paintings were etched with human suffering and death being the ultimate end. Her works are striking visions of poverty, hunger, suffering, and the darker effects of war. But her later works became for sublime that almost welcomed death. Her experiences with death as a child

and as an adult greatly affected her work as an artist . This art criticism is on Kollwitz's lithograph on wove paper called Death Takes the Children (K. S.

Kollwitz). It was made on 1934. The dimensions of the lithographs are 50. 2 by 41. 9 cm. the lithograph shows death and suffering that Kollwitz saw during the World War I and the sufferings of the working-class society. The picture depicts the suffering of children who were being seized by death. In her own words, Kollwitz states: " While I drew, and wept along with the terrified children I was drawing, I really felt the burden I am bearing

Work is supposed to relieve you. But is it any relief when in spite of my poster people in Vienna die of hunger every day?" (Kollwitz and Kollwitz 96) This entry was made in 1920 when she envisioned the image of making the print Death takes the Children. The lithograph shows death seizing at a band of children and catching one of the children. The children are not moving, as they lie petrified of death with horror in their eyes.

On the side is a woman sitting, watching balefully. In describing this lithograph, Kollwitz mentions that this woman " is not the child's mother, but the woman watching who feels everything." (Kollwitz and Kollwitz 97).

In the background, there is the image of another child fleeing death. The lithograph's main theme is death and children. The lithograph almost points towards a " spiritual significance of death" (Yates 213). In the lithograph, death is treated as the enemy trying to seize the life out of innocent children who are unable to express their horror that is only shown in their eyes.

Death is a " stranger" that comes to seize the child from the mother. In the later years with the death of her son Peter in World War I, the treatment of

death changed considerably with her drawing and lithographs showing more of proletariat's sufferings in Germany (Yates 213).

This lithograph, *Death takes the Children*, made in 1934 depicts this stage of Kollwitz's career. The lithograph is disturbing as the image demonstrates Death in a swooping cloak trying to choke the children and in the background another child fleeing. The look of horror in the eyes of the children are imminent as one lies still while the other makes an effort to ease off the fatal hold of Death on its neck. The lithograph is evident of the spontaneity in the etching of the artist as it shows a flow in the drawing with very little interruptions. The death imagery drawn in the lithograph explicitly demonstrates two aspects of her life - one is the influence of death in her life with the death of her sibling as a kid and that of her younger son Peter in World War I and the suffering of the children during the war. War is symbolized as death in this work. The lithograph does not show the horrific picture of death and human suffering, rather it portrays the suffering of the children who were being swooped away by death. Death is the villain, the perpetrator, the political institution, the war and the children are the victims.

This lithograph has a lot of symbolic meaning to it as Death can be interpreted in different forms. However, the symbolism is clear, as death becomes the usurper of the childhood of the children living in Germany during the war-trodden years.

Works Cited

Drysdale, Graeme R. "Kaethe Kollwitz (1867-1945): the artist who may have suffered from Alice in Wonderland Syndrome." *Journal of Medical Biography*, 17 (2009): 106-110 . Print. Glueck, Grace. "Art in Review: Kathe Kollwitz.

" 20 December 2002. *The New York Times*. Web. 6 April 2011

html? res= 9D05E2DD1E3DF933A15751C1A9649C8B63>. Kearns, Martha.

Kathe Kollwitz: woman and artist. New York: Feminist Press, 1976. Print.

Kollwitz, Kathe and Hans Kollwitz. *Diary and Letters of Kaethe Kollwitz*.

Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1955. Print. Kollwitz, Kathe Schmidt. *Death Takes the Children*. Lafayette Art Association.

Collections. 1934. Print. Sossan, Joanne Von. "Focus on the light instead of the shadows." *Arts & Activities*, 138(5) January 2006: 26-27.

Print. Yates, Wilson. "Kathe Kollwitz and the Question of Death." Jensen, Robin Margaret and Kimberly J.

Vrudny. *Visual theology: forming and transforming the community through the arts* . London: Liturgical Press, 2005. 207-224.

Print.