

Dreams and Nightmares: German Graphic Arts, 1900 - 1933,

November 5, 2004-January 23, 2005

"Life is a parody, a diabolical paraphrase, behind which there stands the truth, our dream... Art, you see, is nothing but the expression of our dream." Franz Marc, 1907

(Günter Meissner, ed., *Franz Marc: Briefe, Schriften und Aufzeichnungen*, 1989, p. 26; cited in Christian von Holst, *Franz Marc, Horses*. Cambridge (MA): 2000, pp. 48-49)

This exhibition highlights the visions-both dreams and nightmares-of two generations of artists who witnessed tumultuous political changes in Germany. The prosperity of the Wilhelmine Empire (1871-1918) was followed by the devastation of World War I (1914-1918), revolution in 1919, the establishment of the Weimar Republic, and the eventual collapse of this democracy with the seizure of power by the National Socialists (Nazis) in 1933.

Two artists' groups exemplify German art before the First World War: Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider) in Munich and Die Brücke (The Bridge) in Dresden. Die Brücke members sought a new harmony of life and art, taking their name from philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's description of man as a "bridge." The metaphor has various interpretations, including man bridging different shores: past and future, body and spirit, degeneration and progress. Similarly, the members of Der Blaue Reiter, including Franz Marc and Paul Klee, sought a spiritual unity in art.

The nightmares of World War I and the economic inflation that haunted the Weimar Republic prompted different reactions from artists. Former soldiers George Grosz and Otto Dix attacked the hypocrisy of the society that had sent so many to their deaths. Max Beckmann saw the world as a stage on which he merely played a role. Käthe Kollwitz became ever more involved with her impassioned images of working-class poverty and suffering.

The rise to power of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists in 1933 dramatically altered the lives and careers of avant-garde artists, including George Grosz and Otto Dix. By 1933, the dream of artistic ferment was forcibly ended and the Nazi nightmare was beginning.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Max Beckmann, German, 1884-1950
Franz Seraph Hanfstaengl, ca. 1922
Marées-Gesellschaft
R. Piper and Co., German, ca. 1922
The Big Man, from the portfolio *The Annual Fair (Jahrmakt)*, 1922
Etching and drypoint on paper
Museum Works of Art Fund 53.117.5

Whereas August Sander photographed circus people as distinct social types, Max Beckmann identified with their position as outsiders. The Fair portfolio opens with a portrait of Beckmann as a barker, rounding up customers for the "Circus Beckmann." Self-portraits are scattered throughout the portfolio, in which the fair is a metaphor for the marketplace of life. In *The Tall Man*, the artist is represented twice: as a spectator in the left corner and as the sideshow freak, presented to the audience by a caricature of Beckmann's publisher, I.B. Neumann. The fairground ride at the back is labeled "Panopticum," a comment on the visual display of the artist. Even *The Tightrope Walkers* depicts the artist, a mysterious sheeted figure precariously balancing as he steps towards his first wife, Minna.



Otto Dix, German, 1891-1969
Landscape, 1933
Pen, brush and brown ink on paper
Museum Works of Art Fund 55.099

In 1933, Dix was fired from his professorial position at the Dresden Academy and his work declared "degenerate" and a detriment to Germany's ability to defend itself. He retreated to the southern German countryside and started drawing landscapes in pen and ink that were stylistically connected to the drawings of Lucas Cranach and other German Renaissance artists. Many avant-garde artists followed a similar pattern under the National Socialists, retreating to rural areas and changing their subject matter and style, a tactic later called "inner emigration."



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George Grosz, German, 1893-1959

Man with Nude, 1933

Charcoal on paper

Museum Works of Art Fund 57.064

George Grosz, German, 1893-1959

Twilight (Dämmerung), from the portfolio *In the Shadow (Im Schatten)*, 1919/1920

Photolithograph on paper

Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 50.017

During World War I, Grosz served briefly in the army and narrowly avoided execution for desertion. His military experience motivated his communist politics and his satirical exposure of German society's hypocrisy. Here, the chaotic city streets are full of disassociated people, all of whom turn away from the armless ex-soldier selling matches, a routine sight after the war.



Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945

Mothers Protecting Their Children, 1918

Charcoal on medium weight blue-gray laid paper

Anonymous gift 1999.92

The death of her son Peter as a soldier in World War I devastated Kollwitz. In two different prints entitled *Mothers*, Kollwitz depicted women protecting their young children. The preparatory drawing (on view at top right) for the first print reveals her initial emphasis on the haggard mother at left. Only later did she add her own self-portrait to the final lithograph (on view at left).



On February 6, 1919, Kollwitz wrote in her diary: "Today on Peter's birthday I can do it. I drew the mother, who encloses both her children, it's me with my own children, born of my flesh, my Hans and my little Peter" (cited in Martin Fritsch, ed., *Käthe Kollwitz: Zeichnung, Grafik, Plastik*. Leipzig: 1999, p. 192).

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Franz Marc, German, 1880-1916
Antelope (The Antelope), 1912
Gouache and watercolor on paper mounted on board
Museum Appropriation Fund 38.135

Marc dreamed of a spiritual unity in art expressed through color, symbolism, and increasing abstraction. The contours and markings of the dreaming antelope echo the forms of the landscape, emphasizing the innocence of the creature, far removed from urban life.



Under the National Socialist government, Marc's work was declared "degenerate," and *Antelope* was seized by the government from the state collection of the Landesmuseum, Hannover. Because the Landesmuseum collection was owned by the government, this seizure and sale was a legal transaction. In 1938, RISD Museum Director Alexander Dorner, who had first bought this painting while director of the Landesmuseum, purchased it for the second time in his career, on this occasion for RISD.

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, German, 1880-1938
Sailboat at Fehmarn (Segelboote Bei Fehmarn), 1914
Woodcut on paper
Museum Works of Art Fund 51.159

From 1911 to 1914, Kirchner spent his summers on the remote Baltic island of Fehmarn, a location he considered "primitive." For members of Die Brücke, the "primitive"—whether found in African art or rural German scenes—conveyed a direct authenticity that had been lost in modern society. The rough cutting and tilted perspective of this print turns an idyllic scene into something ominous, echoing the anxieties immediately preceding the outbreak of World War I in August 1914.



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Max Pechstein, German, 1881-1955
Somali Dance (Somalitanz), 1910
Woodcut with handcoloring on paper
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.656

In his search for an alternative to industrialized Wilhelmine society, Die Brücke artist Pechstein took up aggressive lines and bold colors based on his study of art considered to be "primitive," especially early German woodcut prints and African and Pacific Islands sculpture.



Erich Heckel, German, 1883-1970
Am Strand (At the Beach), 1923
Woodcut on paper
Museum Gift Fund. In Memory of Dr. Walter Nelson 57.090

From the early years of the artists' group Die Brücke, nudes were a favorite subject: a rejection of urban society and its restraints. The popular nudist movement promoted the purity of the naked body exposed to light and air for health and exercise.



Max Beckmann, German, 1884-1950
Self-Portrait with Bowler Hat, 1921
Drypoint on paper
Gift of Murray S. Danforth, Jr. 51.511

The elements in the artist's studio have been interpreted by a Beckmann scholar as symbolic. The oil lamp represents enlightenment, and the cat the magical role of the artist in transforming reality into image. Beckmann's masklike face reveals nothing of his personality. The gentleman-artist was only one of the many roles he played.



RISD MUSEUM

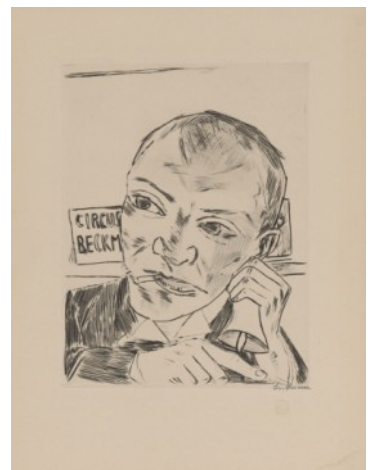
August Sander, German, 1876-1964
Circus Artists, Düren (Zirkusartisten), 1930, printed later
Gelatin silver print
Edgar J. Lownes and Walter H. Kimball Funds 84.022

August Sander had been a portrait photographer for more than twenty years when, in the mid 1920s, he re-examined his archive and started to develop the monumental project *People of the Twentieth Century*, which was intended to record all social classes and occupational types throughout German society.

Circus Artistes was to be part of the project's portfolio devoted to big city life, a place of decadence and degeneration, but also of entertainment. The circus people represented a romantic escape from the constraints of society; yet Sander chose as his subject not a dramatic performance in the Big Top, but an everyday scene among the caravans, where the performers were eating and listening to a gramophone. In Sander's plan for *People of the Twentieth Century*, each man or woman represented a specific social type, expressed through his or her clothing, body, and posture. Nevertheless, the ushers and performers gaze out directly at the viewer, challenging the anonymity of Sander's project.



Max Beckmann, German, 1884-1950
Franz Seraph Hanfstaengl, ca. 1922
Marées-Gesellschaft
R. Piper and Co., German, ca. 1922
The Barker, from the portfolio *The Annual Fair (Jahrmarkt)*, 1922
Etching and drypoint on paper
Museum Works of Art Fund 53.117.1



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Max Beckmann, German, 1884-1950
Franz Seraph Hanfstaengl, ca. 1922
Marées-Gesellschaft
R. Piper and Co., German, ca. 1922
*The Merry-Go-Round, from the portfolio The Annual Fair
(Jahrmarkt)*1922
Etching and drypoint on paper
Museum Works of Art Fund 53.117.7



Photography provided new technical opportunities and visions for artists. At the Bauhaus, László Moholy-Nagy (b. Hungary 1895, d. u.s.a. 1946) promoted the unique possibilities of the camera lens, some of which may be seen in Irene Bayer-Hecht's repetition of forms and use of mirrors and oblique angles in her 1928 portraits of the photographer Grit Kalin. Similarly, Umbo's *Self-Portrait on Beach* (ca. 1930) has a close-cropped, unexpected perspective and a witty play with shadow. In contrast, László Moholy-Nagy's wife, Lucia Moholy, documented the products of the Bauhaus with her *Apartment, Berlin* (1928), recording tubular steel furniture produced by Standard Möbel, Berlin, from designs by Bauhaus teacher Marcel Breuer (b. Hungary 1902, d. u.s.a. 1981). Photographers outside the Bauhaus also experimented with unusual perspectives, such as the angled street scene by Ella Bergmann-Michel or the close-cropped still lifes by graphic designer and typographer Georg Trump.

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



Dix drew constantly while a soldier in the trenches of World War I. For the tenth anniversary of the outbreak of war, he revisited these drawings to create a searing fifty-print series, *War*, which was an indictment of armed combat. A direct translation of the title would be "the man who was shot to bits," appropriate to the subject: the fragmented flesh of a dead soldier in the minefields. Dix believed that his unwavering depiction of the grotesque was a Nietzschean path to truth.

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Max Beckmann, German, 1884-1950

Franz Seraph Hanfstaengl, ca. 1922

Marées-Gesellschaft

R. Piper and Co., German, ca. 1922

Shooting Gallery, from the portfolio *The Annual Fair (Jahrmarkt)*,
1922

Etching and drypoint on paper

Museum Works of Art Fund 53.117.4



Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945

Memorial for Karl Liebknecht, 1920

Woodcut on paper

Anonymous gift 2005.142.14

Karl Liebknecht co-founded the Spartacus Union, which became the German communist party, and led the revolutionary uprising in Berlin in January 1919. On January 15, 1919, he and fellow Spartacus leader Rosa Luxemburg were taken prisoner by right-wing militiamen and brutally killed. The murders shook the dream of working-class revolution and revealed the ruthlessness of right-wing forces.

Kollwitz drew Liebknecht on his funeral bier and gradually developed this print over the next two years. In her diary she stated: "As an artist, I have the right to extract the emotional content from everything, to let it make an impression on me and to express it externally. So I also have the right to represent the workers' farewell to Liebknecht, even to dedicate it to the workers, without thereby following Liebknecht politically. Or not?!"

(Kollwitz, October 1920 entry, *Tagebücher*, p. 438; cited in Martin Fritsch, ed., *Käthe Kollwitz: Zeichnung, Grafik, Plastik*. Leipzig: 1999, p. 210).



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Max Beckmann, German, 1884-1950
Franz Seraph Hanfstaengl, ca. 1922
Marées-Gesellschaft
R. Piper and Co., German, ca. 1922
The Snake Charmer, from the portfolio *The Annual Fair (Jahrmarkt)*,
1922
Etching and drypoint on paper
Museum Works of Art Fund 53.117.10



Umbo, German, 1902-1980
Silver gelatin print, ca. 1930
Gelatin silver print
Gift of Manny and Skippy Gerard 2003.148.12



Irene Bayer-Hecht, American, 1898-1991
Grit Kalin, 1928
Gelatin silver print
Gift of Dorothy and Eugene Prakash 1989.126.3

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Irene Bayer-Hecht, American, 1898-1991
Grit Kalin, 1928
Gelatin silver print
Gift of Dorothy and Eugene Prakapas 1989.126.4

Lucia Moholy, Czech, b. ca. 1900
Interior, ca. 1930
Gelatin silver print
Gift of Dorothy and Eugene Prakapas 1989.126.23



Georg Trump, German, 1896 - 1985
Untitled, 1928-1929
Gelatin silver print
Gift of Dorothy and Eugene Prakapas 1989.126.42

Georg Trump, German, 1896 - 1985
Untitled, 1928-29
Gelatin silver print
Gift of Dorothy and Eugene Prakapas 1989.126.43

Ella Bergmann-Michel, German, 1895-1971
View Down into Street, ca. 1920-30
Gelatin silver print
Gift of Dorothy and Eugene Prakapas 1989.126.21

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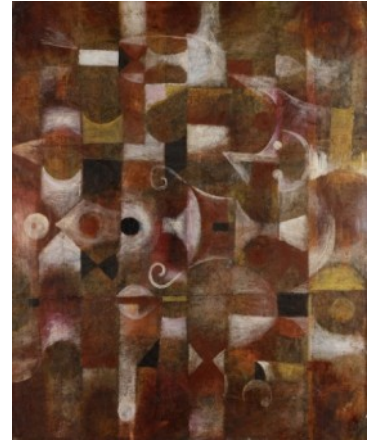
Paul Klee, Swiss, 1879-1940

Recto: Columbarium of the Ochsenfrosch Family (Urnenstatte der Familie Ochsenfrosch), 1922

Oil paint on paper

Anonymous gift in memory of William Warren Orswell 46.470A

Klee was a member of the Blaue Reiter group and later a teacher at the Bauhaus. Here the artist divided the picture plane into a series of geometric shapes in a rhythmic exploration of color and form. The silhouettes of the funerary urns in the sepulchral vault (columbarium) evoke the central mystery of death.



Paul Klee, Swiss, 1879-1940

Verso: Untitled, ca. 1919-20

Oil paint on paper

Anonymous gift in memory of William Warren Orswell 46.470B

When painting Columbarium, Klee reused a cardboard mount on which he had previously depicted a standing figure. After pasting a thin layer of tissue over the earlier image, Klee then started Columbarium. In the early 1960s, conservators discovered the earlier image and carefully removed the cardboard mount to reveal the figure which had been invisible for decades. The figure is similar to Klee's images of a standing magician done in 1919 and 1920, often interpreted by scholars as mystical self-portraits.



Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945

Study for Unemployed; verso: Self-Portrait and Standing Woman, ca. 1910

Gouache and ink on grey paper; verso: graphite on grey paper

Mary B. Jackson Fund 62.113

In 1923, Germany experienced a terrifying economic inflation. Vast numbers of workers were unemployed and their families starving. The recto of this sheet has a preparatory drawing for the woodcut *Unemployed*, one of three in the series *The Proletariat*, published in 1925. Working from dark to light tones, Kollwitz brought out the despair and hunger experienced by millions. The artist may have been



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thriftily reusing a sheet from an earlier drawing. The verso reveals a contemplative self-portrait and a quick study of one of the working-class women Kollwitz so often depicted.

Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867-1945
Mothers II (Mütter), abandoned state for the series *War*, 1931
Lithograph on paper
Anonymous gift 2005.142.60



Max Beckmann, German, 1884-1950
Franz Seraph Hanfstaengl, ca. 1922
Marées-Gesellschaft
R. Piper and Co., German, ca. 1922
The Tightrope Walkers, from the portfolio *The Annual Fair (Jahrmarkt)*, 1922
Etching and drypoint on paper
Museum Works of Art Fund 53.117.8

