

# FROM THE VAULT: LEARNING WITH THE MARTIN MUSEUM PERMANENT COLLECTION

## Educator Materials | Pre Visit Background Reading

**Collection Spotlight:** Käthe Kollwitz: The Hammer That Shapes Reality

**Featured Artist:** Käthe Kollwitz (German, 1867–1945)

**Time Period:** Late 19th to early 20th century

**Medium:** Etching, lithography

**Audience:** Grades 9–12, College-level

Käthe Kollwitz used her artwork to create a fortress against death. Beginning in 1897 with her series, *Ein Weberaufstand [Revolt of the Weavers]* up until her death in 1945, she produced a prolific output of graphic artworks, that included *Bauernkrieg [Peasant's War]*, *Sieben Holzschnitte zum Krieg [Seven Woodcuts on War]*, *Proletariat, Tod [Death]*, and *Saatfrüchte sollen nicht vermahlen werden [Seed for the planting must not be ground]*,; in addition to several protest posters, and memorial sculptures.

The work of Kollwitz largely focused on the deep emotional connection between mother and child, along with the vulnerability of this relationship, as threatened by famine, violence, and war. Having lost her youngest son, Peter, during World War I, it deepened her sense of tragic loss and rejuvenated the strength of women as mothers. She gave a new voice and increased visibility for women right's during the Weimar Republic, 1918- 1933. Kollwitz was a strong voice and visionary for the proletariat.

Her views and actions created awareness of the value of life, and the associated power that women had, not only over their own bodies, but additionally, to speak up and protest the atrocities that were claiming the lives of a younger generation.

Even while Allied bombing was leveling Berlin in 1943, destroying Kollwitz's home and studio, she continued to work, in exile, in the small village of Nordhausen, southwest of the city. As the war and

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bombings intensified, Kollwitz retreated to Moritzburg, to live out the last year of her life, dying just four months before the end of World War II. With a great deal of her life's work destroyed, either by the Nazi- Entartete Kunst [Degenerate Art] campaign in the 1930's, and the later bombings during the war, she passed without worldly possessions, but honorable in spirit.

In her diaries, Kollwitz wrote, "Every war is answered by a new war, until everything is smashed. That is why I am wholeheartedly for a radical end to this madness...Pacifism simply is not a matter of calm looking on; it is work, hard work. But some day a new ideal will arise and there will be an end to all the wars..."