

Age of Turmoil

Art in Germany 1900-1923

Age of Turmoil: Art in Germany 1900–1923

Surveying a little less than a quarter of a century, this exhibition examines art in Germany during a period of radical change. Chronologically, it opens with Käthe Kollwitz's *Zertretene* (The Downtrodden) of 1900, a powerful account of the urban working class which underpinned the empire's economic success. And it ends with Max Beckmann's *Kasbek* from 1923 when hyper-inflation devastated the German economy.

In the intervening years artists in Germany responded to multiple challenges: the imperial government's hostility to the avant-garde; the fracturing of artists' groups and exhibiting societies; the outbreak of war and subsequent defeat; the collapse of the monarchy and the country's fragile experiment in parliamentary democracy. Whether seeking new directions or reacting to forces around it, art from this period is marked by rejection of the academic tradition and the expressions of new and powerfully individual responses to the changing world.

The German experience of this period cannot be divorced from the events of World War I, the centenary of which is now being observed. And while the anniversary of that conflict did not determine the selection of works in this exhibition, it is timely to consider the context in which they were made.

The German Context

Founded in 1871, the German Empire was a federation of previously independent states which came together under the leadership of Prussia following its war with France (1870–71). Federation brought an end to long-running conflicts between the Prussian and Austrian spheres of influence and the resulting stability helped facilitate rapid industrialisation. Urban centres – particularly Berlin – grew dramatically as peasants migrated to work in large industrial concerns. And while modern capital was criticised for undermining traditional, small-scale businesses, it aided the growth of a newly rich middle class which challenged the economic dominance of the traditional land-owning aristocracy.

Artistic developments in Paris were keenly felt in Germany and resulted in an influential Realist school (exploring contemporary life) and the birth of a German school of Impressionism (a style capturing momentary perceptions of physical phenomena, particularly light). Given the trenchant opposition of the emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II, advocates of these styles often found themselves excluded from events and organisations in receipt of state funds. And while Impressionism continued to antagonise powerful elements of the Berlin establishment, it could not meet the needs of the next generation of avant-garde artists.

Young artists explored ever more radical styles, notably Expressionism (a movement which sought to express humanity's spiritual life, often through bold colours and powerful lines). Revealing a new-found intensity of feeling through traditional media, including the revival of woodcut, their novel techniques confounded the contemporary assumptions on which academic art was judged. Not everyone was hostile to the avant-garde aims of artists. Some artists found support among a growing number of liberal, middle-class patrons who responded enthusiastically to their compelling work.

Max Liebermann (1847–1935) Germany

Im Garten 1910

etching and drypoint

courtesy of the Alfons and Marie Blaschke Art Trust

Following imperial federation in 1871, Berlin became home to a thriving middle class, made rich off intensive industrialisation. Within this and other cities, large urban parks were among the favoured sites of middle- and upper-class leisure.

While Liebermann had initially painted uncritical 'low-life' scenes of the rural working class, by the 1890s he and other German Impressionists had turned their attention to the city. Their middle-class clientele responded well to scenes evocative of genteel urban life.



Max Liebermann (1847–1935) Germany

Reitweg im Tiergarten (Bridle-path in the Tiergarten) 1914

drypoint

courtesy of the Alfons and Marie Blaschke Art Trust

As riders pass along the bridle-path, elegantly dressed women and young children walk in the shade of the trees.

Located in the centre of Berlin, the Tiergarten had been a contested site which the emperor used to advance his own conservative vision of the arts. There, in 1901, he unveiled the historicising sculptures of the Siegesallee (Victory Avenue) with a denunciation of the 'gutter art' of contemporary artists, including Liebermann.



Hans Meid (1883–1957) Germany

Lichtenthaler Allee in Baden-Baden
(Lichtenthaler Avenue in Baden-Baden)
1918

drypoint

courtesy of the Alfons and Marie Blaschke Art
Trust

Hans Meid's depiction of the fashionable spa resort of Baden-Baden shows a public garden in which the holiday-makers enjoy the benefits of fresh air and sunshine.

Dating from the last year of World War I, this image may seem outdated, even self-indulgent. However, it is also a poignant reminder of the self-confidence of the new elite of the German Empire which was shattered by the long war and its devastating aftermath.



Hans Thoma (1839–1924) Germany

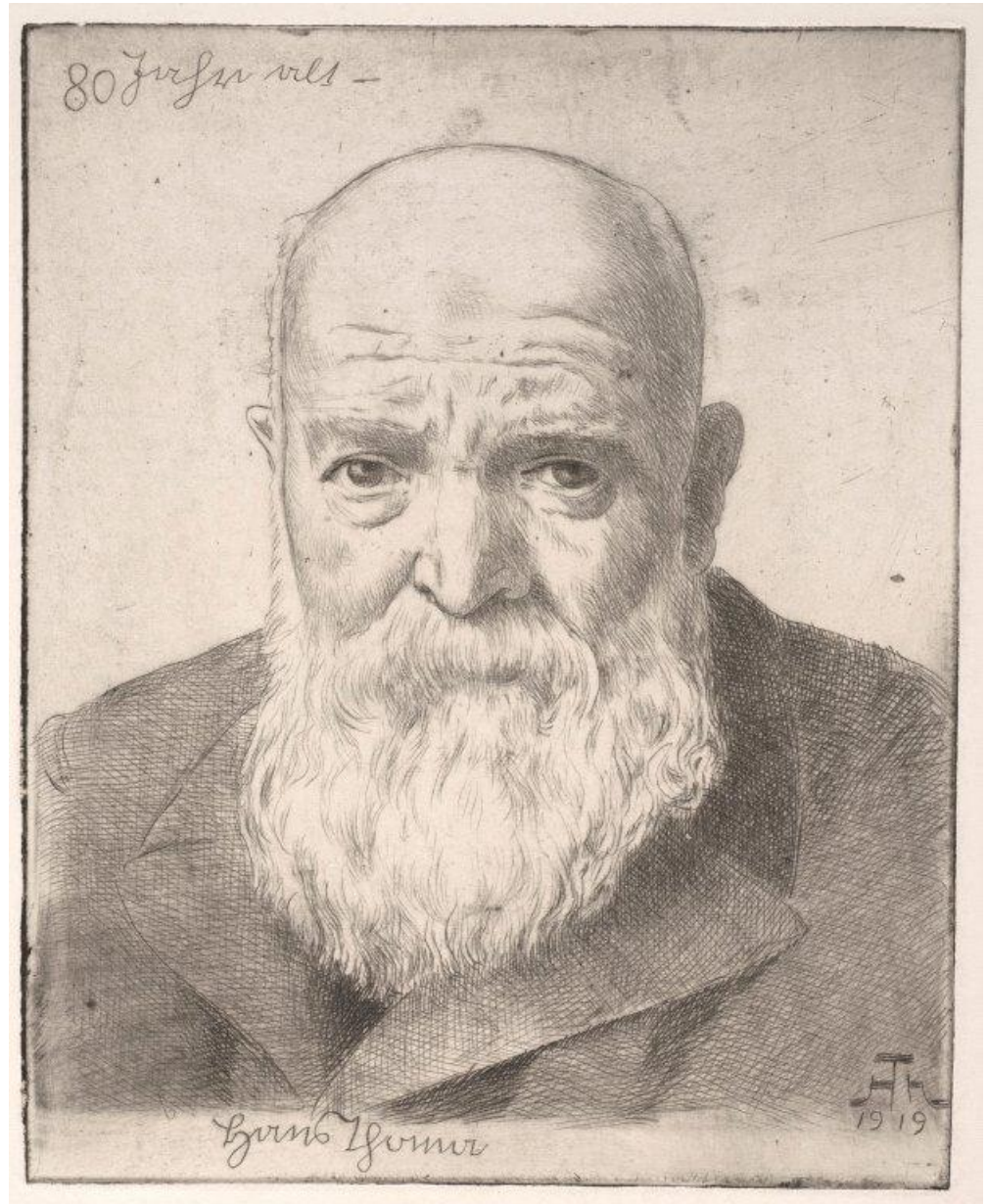
Self Portrait at Age 80 1919

etching

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

A respected teacher and director of the Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, the artist Hans Thoma has captured his own features in this frank study of old age.

Like others in the circle around Wilhelm Leibl (1844–1900), Thoma's early work showed the influence of the French Realists. Later, under the influence of the Swiss Symbolist Arnold Böcklin (1827–1901), his work became decorative and allegorical. The continuing popularity of Thoma's work highlights the scope for varied and conflicting styles within the German art scene, even then in the throes of modernism.



Wilhelm Trübner (1851–1917) Germany

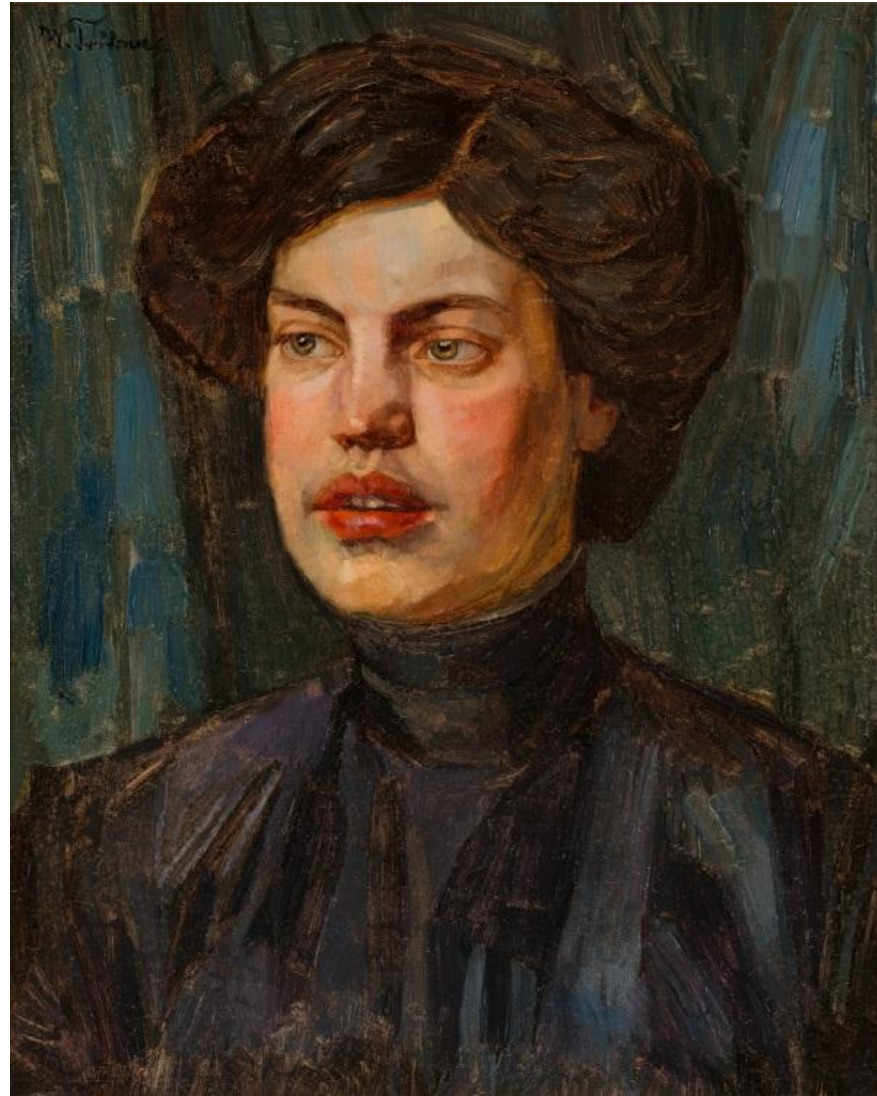
Dame in violetterm Kleid (Lady in Violet Dress) 1911

oil on canvas

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
gift of Dr Myer, 1957

As a member of the circle of the prominent Realist Wilhelm Leibl (1844–1900), Wilhelm Trübner's work was likewise influenced by the work of French painter Gustave Courbet (1819–1877), shown at the Munich International Art Exhibition in 1869.

This portrait of an unknown sitter epitomises the richly-textured surfaces and broadly applied paint of Trübner's late work. Having rejected narrative content and academic refinement, the artist privileged his medium, arguing that artistic merit lay entirely in the manner of representation (reinmalerisch or 'pure painting') and not in the subject itself.



Max Liebermann **(1847–1935) Germany**

Self Portrait 1906

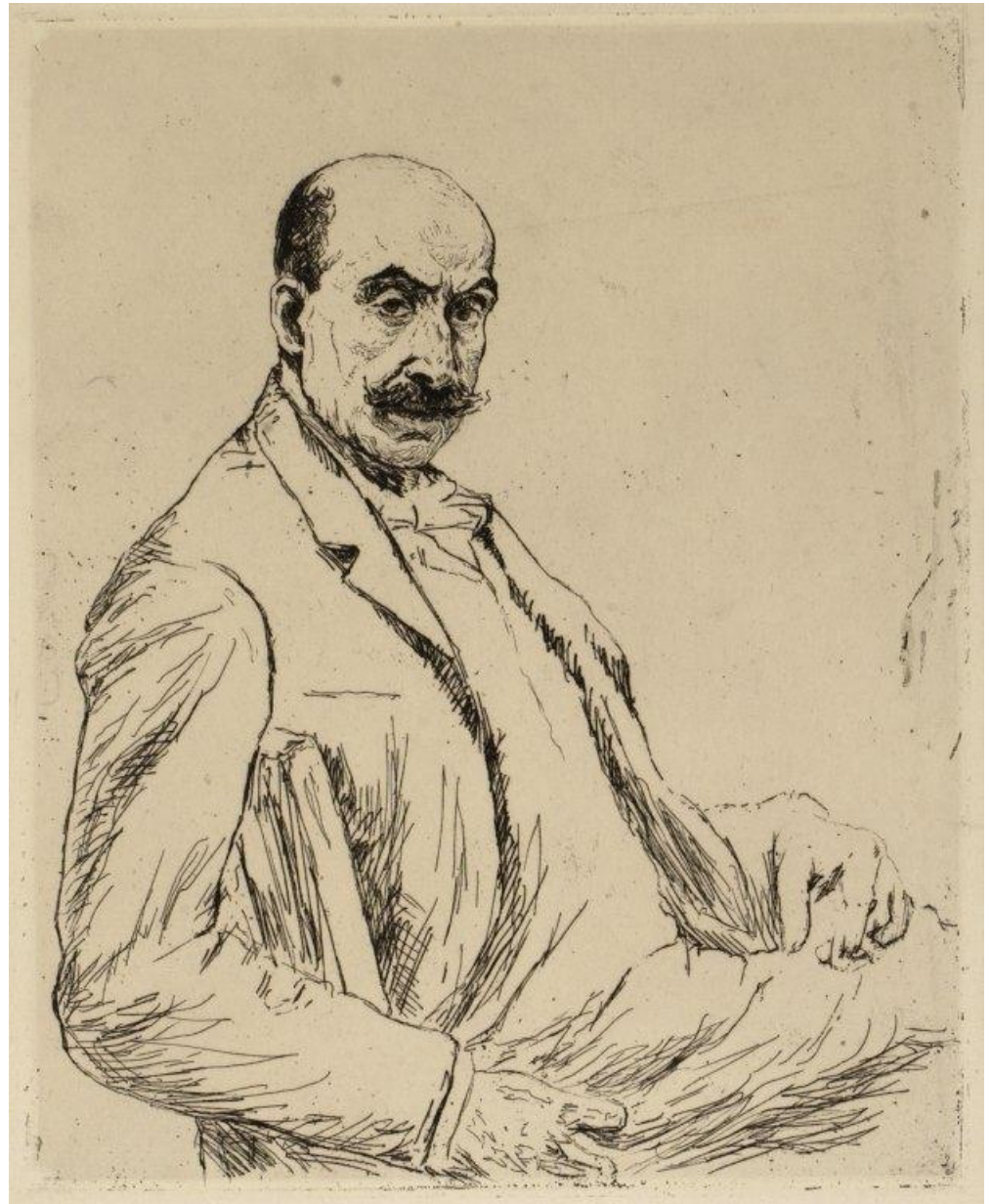
etching with drypoint

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 1955

Max Liebermann was among those who asserted artistic freedom. Incurring official wrath for exhibiting at the Paris World's Fair in 1889, in 1892 Liebermann became a member of the independent Group XI, and in 1898 helped found the avant-garde Berlin Secession.

It seems incredible now that Liebermann's Impressionist work was considered subversive by the imperial government. But for the conservative political leadership in Berlin, which favoured the historicising modes of the 19th century, modernity was best limited to science and technology.



Lovis Corinth (1858–1925) Germany

Bildness Hermann Struck (Portrait of Hermann Struck) 1911

from: *Sieben Radierungen von Lovis Corinth* (Seven Etchings by Lovis Corinth)

soft-ground etching with drypoint
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1962

A successful artist in his own right, Hermann Struck (1876–1944) instructed both Lovis Corinth and Max Liebermann in printmaking techniques. This depiction appears to show him in the act of drawing.

This portrait by Corinth was made in the year that the artist suffered a debilitating stroke which radically altered his style. Given the Impressionist quality of the technique seen here, this print seems likely to predate Corinth's illness.



Edvard Munch (1863–1944) Norway

Norwegian Landscape 1908

drypoint

courtesy of the Alfons and Marie Blaschke Art Trust

This spare vision of the Norwegian landscape points to the new and, for many, alarmingly unconventional way of seeing which was advocated by Edvard Munch and other avant-garde artists at this time.

Munch's solo exhibition at the Verein Berliner Künstler (Association of Berlin Artists) in 1892 scandalised the general membership, which, in what is now known as the 'Munch Affair', voted to close it after only one week – highlighting conflicting currents within the organisation and contributing to its split in 1898. Capitalising on his notoriety, Munch made his home in the city where he adopted drypoint in 1894.



Emil Nolde

(1867–1956) Germany

Dampfer (gr. dkl.) (Steamer [large, dark]) 1910

etching, aquatint

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
gift of Hugh M Baillie, 1952

More suggestive than descriptive, only the coil of smoke rising from the stack confirms the subject for the viewer. This depiction of a tugboat ploughing through a rolling sea is linked to a number of views of the River Elbe made during Emil Nolde's time in Hamburg in early 1910.

Dividing his time between Berlin and the flat landscape of his north-German homeland, Nolde's art remained highly individual. Initially provoking strong reactions among critics and the public alike, he was to become one of the most successful artists of his generation.



Lyonel Feininger
(1871–1956)
United States of America,
Germany

Das Schiff (The Ship) 1920

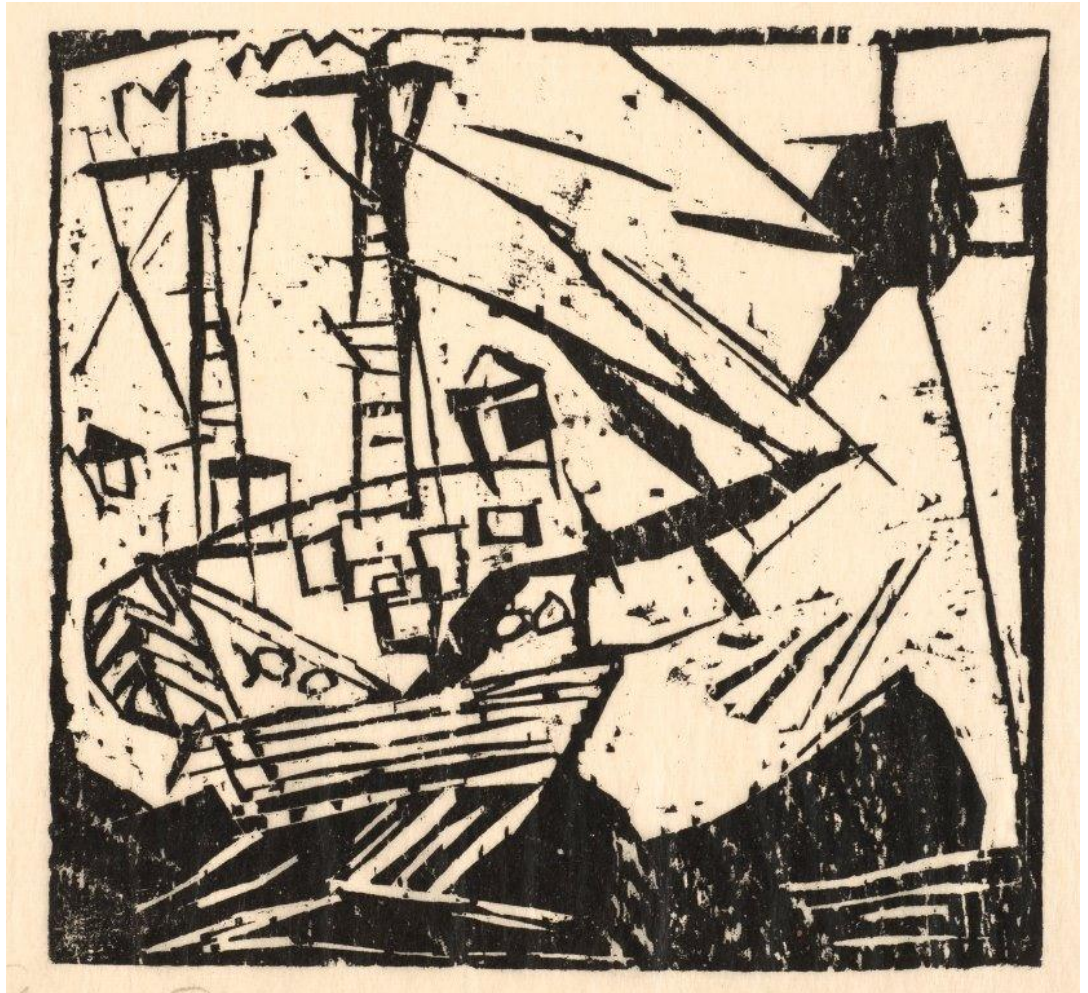
from: *10 Holzschnitte von Lyonel Feininger* (10 Woodcuts by Lyonel Feininger) c1926

woodcut

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1961

While still representational, Lyonel Feininger's woodcut explicitly rejects conventions such as perspective, instead abstracting the forms of the ship, sky and sun into jagged and suggestive lines.

War-time shortages forced the American-born Feininger to experiment with woodcut. The rough-hewn quality of the design is here reinforced by the grain of the wood and uneven printing – a further rejection of the connoisseurial criteria by which prints were traditionally judged.



Wassily Kandinsky
(1866–1944)
Russia, Germany, France

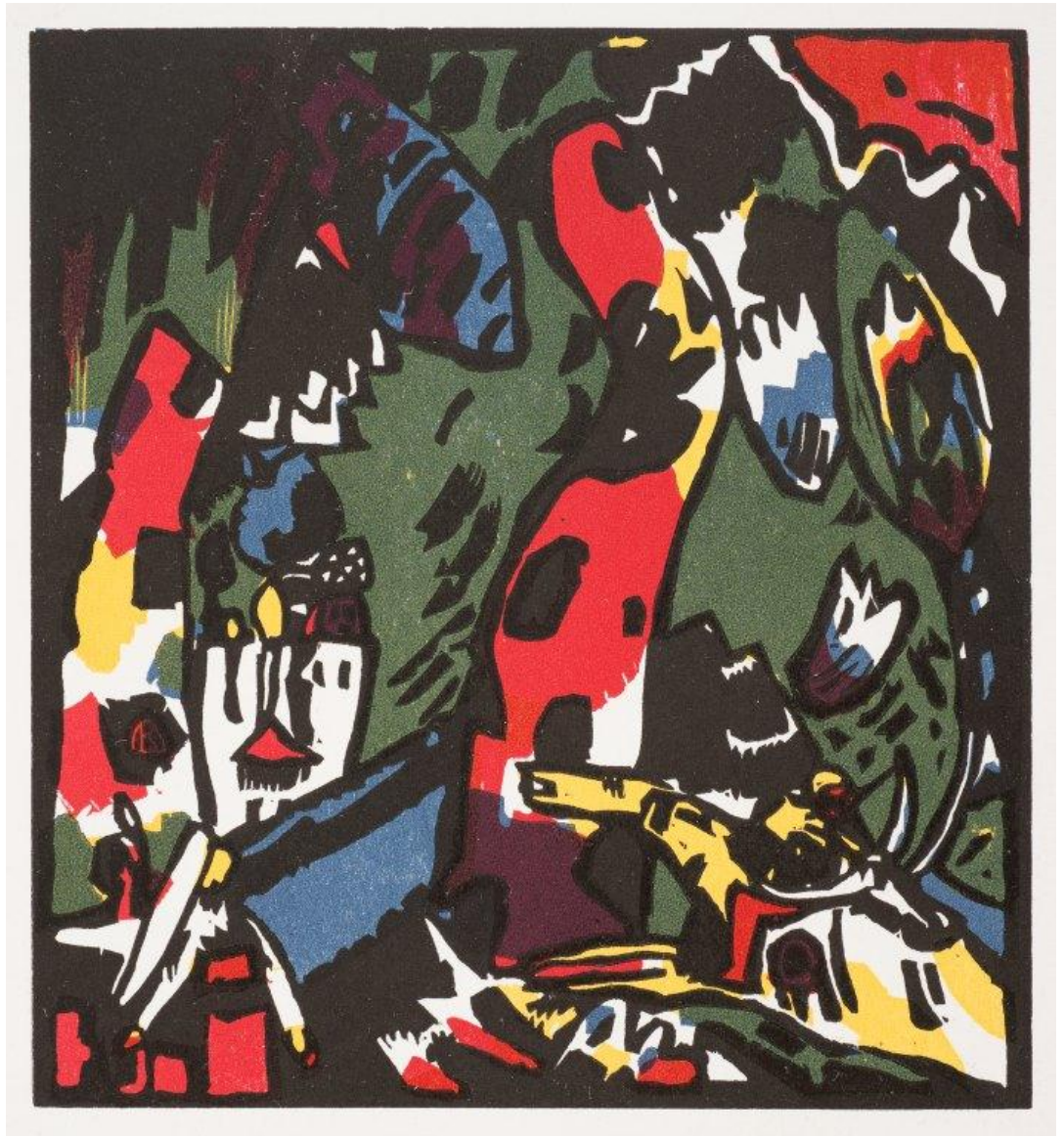
Bogenschütze (The Archer) 1908–9,
1938

colour woodcut

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1984

Wassily Kandinsky's *Bogenschütze* demonstrates the artist's move toward abstraction. While still loosely representational, this work reflects Kandinsky's increasing concern with the psychological power of colour.

With Franz Marc (1880–1916), in 1911 Kandinsky founded the Munich-based Expressionist group *Blaue Reiter* (Blue Rider), the members of which shared philosophical rather than stylistic concerns. As a Russian national, Kandinsky was forced to leave Germany by the outbreak of war, returning only in 1921 to work at the Bauhaus school of art and design.



Emil Nolde

(1867–1956) Germany

Wie Vögel (Like Birds) 1907

lithograph

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1962

In this depiction of two women in a domestic setting, the combination of outline, exposed paper and partially dissolved mid-tone creates a shimmering effect which mimics the artist's boldly coloured paintings of the same period.

Nolde was briefly (1906–7) a member of the Brücke group before joining the Berlin Secession, itself beset by division between Impressionism and the new avant-garde. The rejection of several submissions in 1910 led to the artist joining the short-lived New Secession and his vicious outburst against Max Liebermann.



Erich Heckel
(1883–1970) Germany

Mädchenkopf (Girl's Head) 1913

woodcut

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1956

With arms raised behind her, this intimately observed figure cuts a strong diagonal across the picture plane. Large areas of paper have been left blank, while boldly cut lines delineate the girl's features and limbs.

The distinctly melancholic expression on the sitter's face is consistent with Heckel's work from this time, coinciding with his move from Dresden to Berlin in 1912, and may reflect growing strains within the Brücke group, which dissolved the following year.



Hermann Max Pechstein (1881–1955) Germany

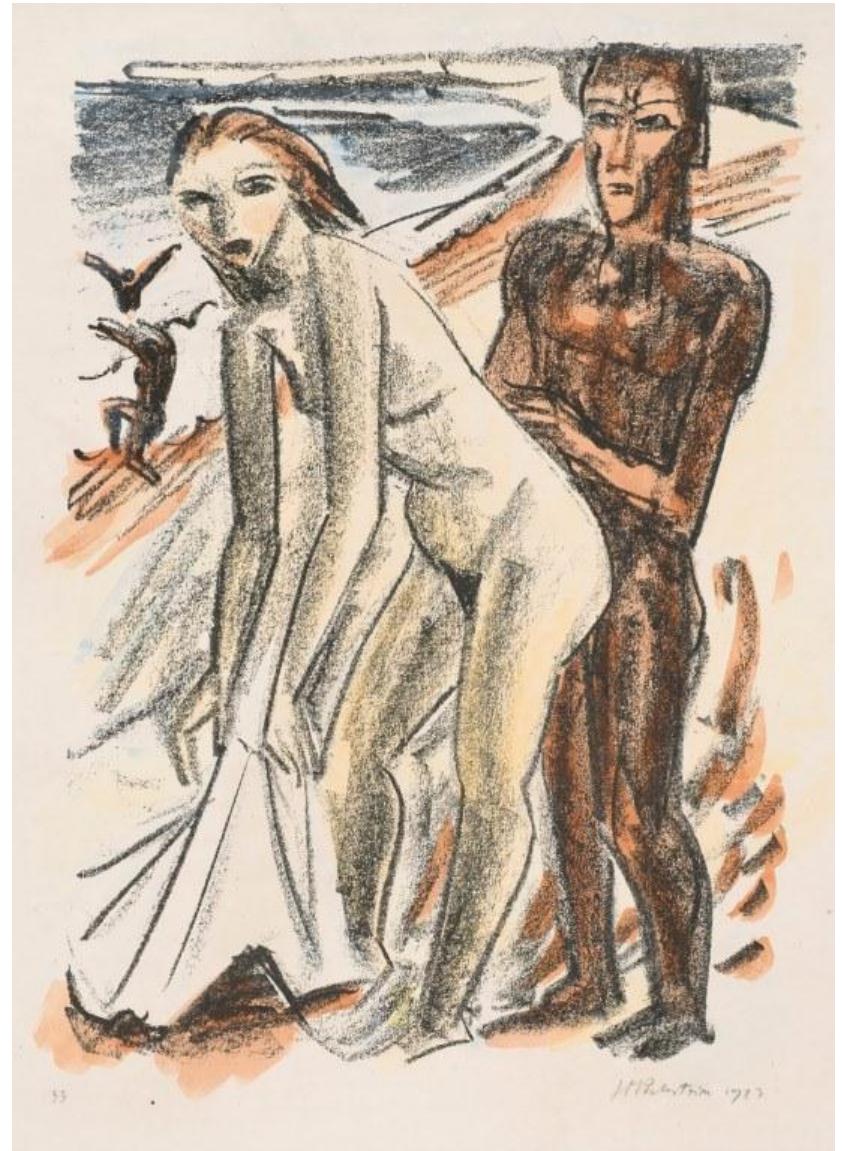
Nach dem Bade (After Bathing) 1923

colour lithograph

courtesy of the Alfons and Marie Blaschke Art Trust

As one of the Brücke group, between 1906 and 1908 Max Pechstein had frequented the lakes at Moritzburg near Dresden, bathing and studying the nude. In part a rejection of bourgeois mores, such behaviour was also allied to a key Brücke objective: to record the body in free movement.

Nudism enjoyed growing popularity in Germany at that time, seen as a means of embracing nature and the primal forces which civilisation had obscured. This interest in the 'primitive' order – shared by many of his contemporaries – saw Pechstein travel to the Palau Islands (then a German colony) in Micronesia in 1914.



Hermann Max Pechstein (1881–1955) Germany

Badende VII (Bathers VII) 1912

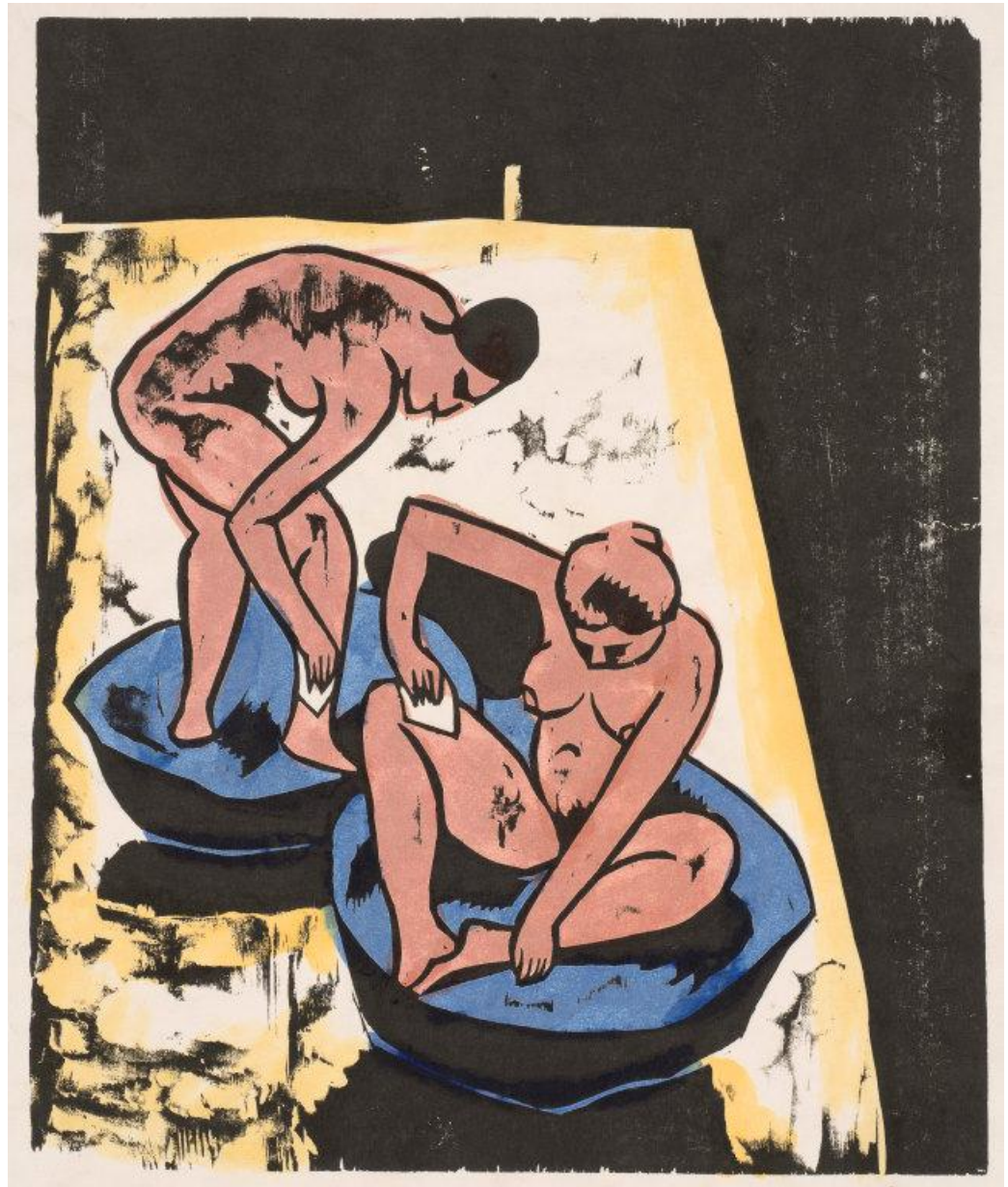
hand-coloured woodcut

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 1963

Max Pechstein's crisply defined figures undertaking the prosaic act of washing reject the graceful, allegorical bathers of the past. Unsentimental and voyeuristic, this composition isolates two nudes within a shallow, stage-like space.

This print was made in the year that Pechstein was expelled from the Brücke group for breaking with its collective exhibition policy by showing work at the Berlin Secession. The artist's decision may reflect the growing internal tensions which followed the relocation of its members from Dresden to Berlin between 1908 and 1911.



Christian Rohlfs (1849–1938) Germany

Kleines Paar (Little Couple) c1915

woodcut

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Seemingly devoid of narrative, the two figures sway across the picture plane, their heads sympathetically inclined. Such sharply delineated, abstracted forms are representative of Christian Rohlfs' late, expressionist style.

Following conventional academic training, Rohlfs became a successful painter of landscapes en plein air (in the open air). Inspired by the work of Vincent van Gogh and the artists of the Brücke, Rohlfs' late conversion to Expressionism highlights the powerful attraction it exerted and, by extension, the exhaustion of the academic tradition.



Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945)

Among the best known German artists of her generation, Käthe Kollwitz demonstrated a humanitarian concern which was rarely matched at that time. Married to a doctor who tended to the poor of suburban Berlin, Kollwitz encountered at first hand the deprivation that accompanied the rapid industrialisation of the German economy after imperial federation.

As peasants flooded the cities from the countryside, long-standing social bonds were severed, creating a new and effectively disenfranchised population that formed the backbone of the socialist political movement. In the 1897 work that first brought her to national attention, Kollwitz's *Ein Weberstand* (A Weavers' Revolt) pointed to the growing social crisis through reference to *Die Weber*, a play by Gerhart Hauptmann (1862–1946) in the controversial Naturalist style (detached observation of life) that referred to an uprising in 1844. Kollwitz's links to avant-garde literature highlight the significance of her socially critical work, which contrasts markedly with the subjects and style of contemporary German Impressionism.

Following the 1918 revolution, in 1919 Kollwitz was admitted to the Prussian Academy of Arts. Formerly the reactionary tool of the Prussian and imperial governments, Kollwitz' admission to the Academy points to the rapid changes that occurred at the end of World War I. Under pressure from the new National Socialist government, Kollwitz was forced to resign from the Academy in 1933.

Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945) Germany

Die Gefangenen (The Prisoners) 1908

from: *Der Bauernkrieg (The Peasants' War)* 1908

etching, engraving, soft ground
etching

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Käthe Kollwitz's bound prisoners have been compared to the sculpture of Auguste Rodin (1840–1917). With emotions ranging from despair to resignation, the confined, muscular figures form an undulating line across the picture plane.

The boy slumped across the rope barrier, at right, was modelled on Kollwitz' son Peter who was killed early in World War I. Kollwitz never entirely recovered from the loss which only reaffirmed her commitment to social and political critique.



Käthe Kollwitz

(1867–1945) Germany

Hamburger Kneipe (Hamburg Tavern)
1901

etching, engraving, soft ground
etching

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1956

To the music of an accordion, two drunk men embrace for an uncertain dance in a darkened tavern. They are watched by a woman who, doubled over with laughter, likewise loses her cares in the bottle.

Late in life Käthe Kollwitz admitted that she initially found a certain beauty in her working class subjects. But exposure to the lives and living conditions of her husband's poverty-stricken patients drove her to create the uncompromising records of social inequality for which she soon became famous.



Käthe Kollwitz

(1867–1945) Germany

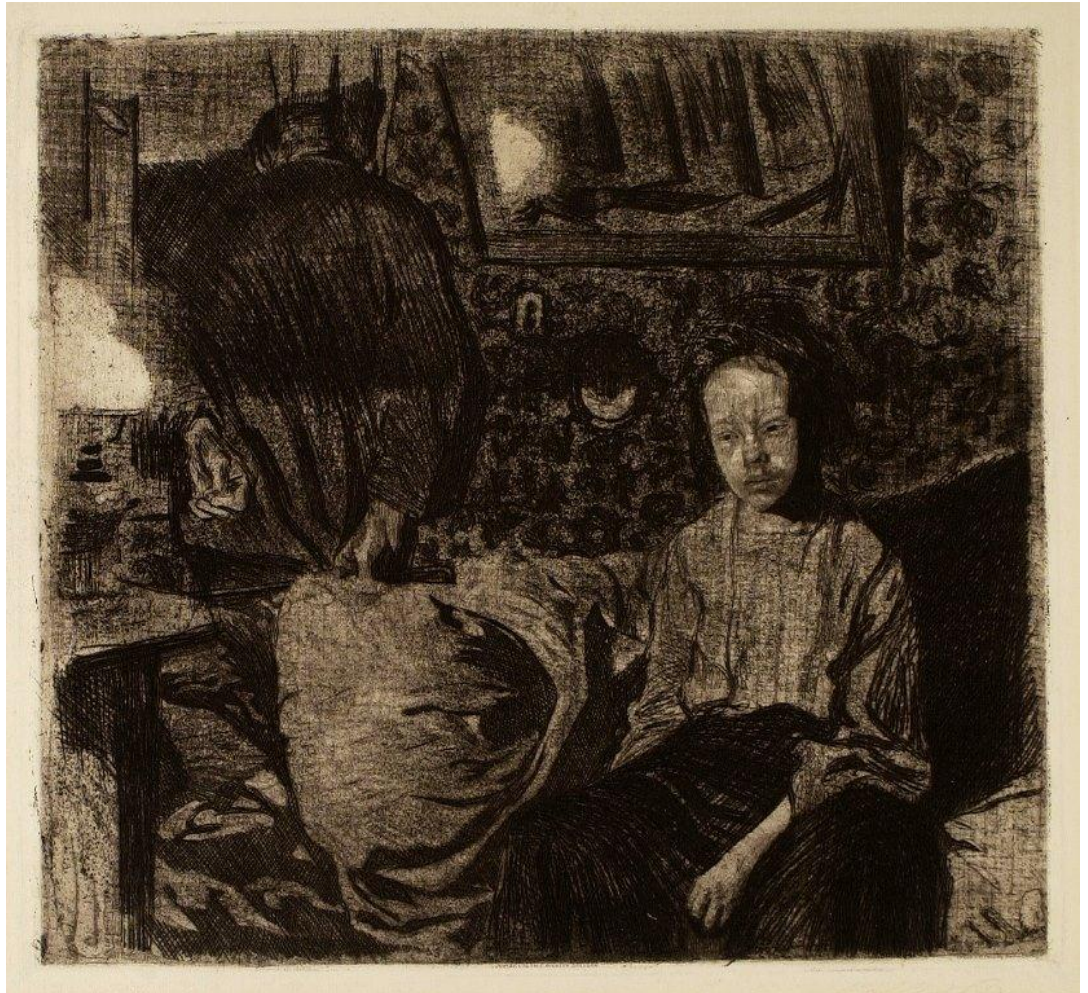
Junges Paar (Young Couple) 1904

etching, engraving, soft-ground
etching

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki,
purchased 1956

Using herself and her husband as models, Käthe Kollwitz composed a scene of palpable emotional tension. Confined within a shallow and cluttered domestic space, the two figures are unable to face one another. The clenched fist of the male speaks of the turmoil written on the face of his female companion.

Revisiting an earlier composition from 1893, this depiction of a young couple in a deeply troubled relationship has its origins in *Jugend (Youth)*, a controversial but critically acclaimed play in the Naturalist (detached observation of life) vein by Max Halbe, published in the same year.



Käthe Kollwitz

(1867–1945) Germany

Die Pflüger (The Ploughmen) 1906

from: *Der Bauernkrieg* (The Peasants' War) 1908

etching, aquatint, softground etching, drypoint

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1982

For want of either horses or oxen, two peasants draw a plough through a field. While Käthe Kollwitz' series *Der Bauernkrieg* referred to the peasants' revolt of the 1520s, this depiction of exploitation resonated with her contemporaries.

Like other prints in this series, *Die Pflüger* incorporates technical innovations which Kollwitz created in order to generate both tone and texture in her images. Such intuitive developments placed the artist at the forefront of avant-garde printmaking.



Käthe Kollwitz

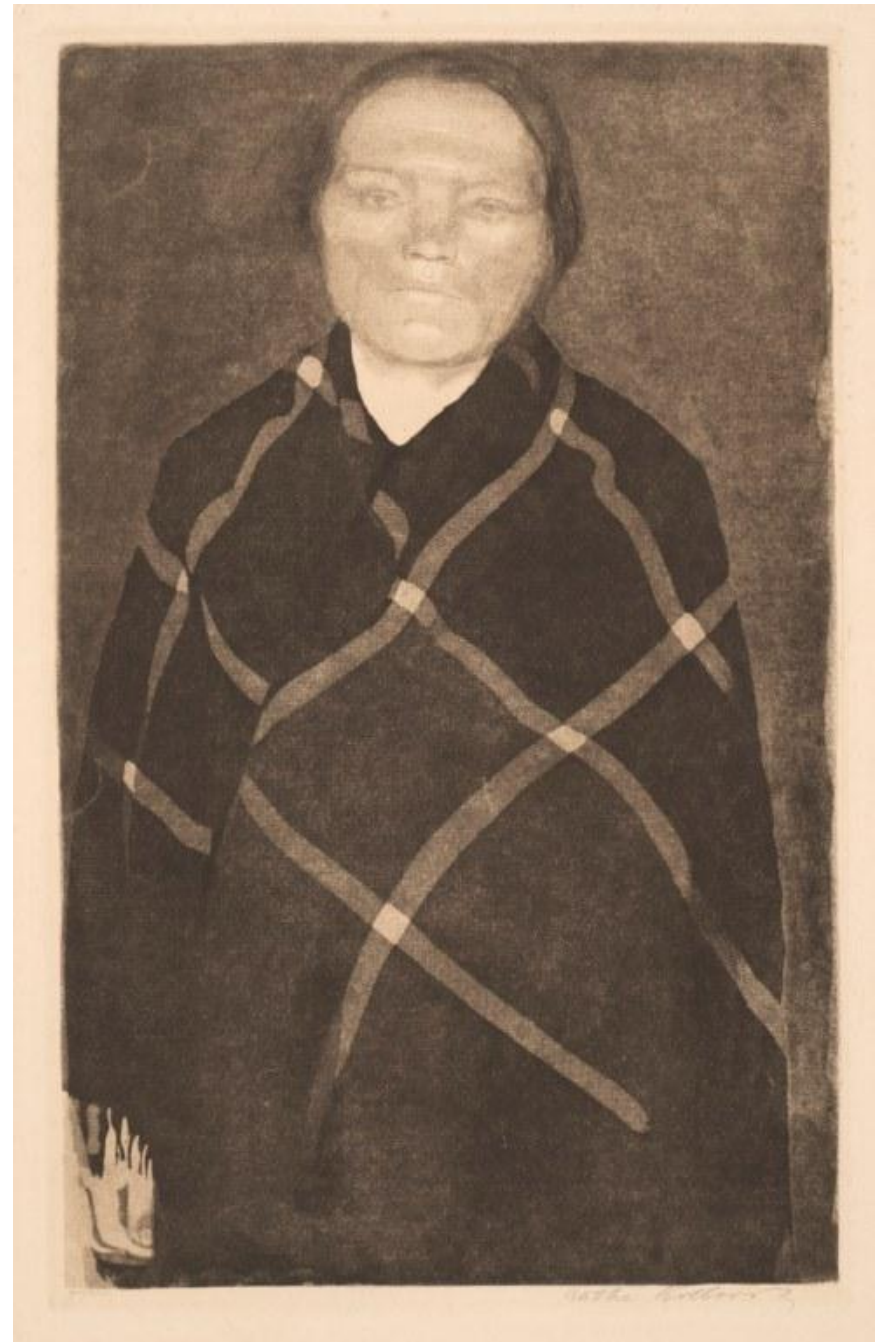
(1867–1945) Germany

Arbeiterfrau (Working Woman) or Schwangere Frau (Pregnant Woman) 1910

etching, aquatint, softground etching, burnishing
courtesy of the Alfons and Marie Blaschke Art Trust

Wrapped in a tasselled blanket and with a resigned expression on her broad face, this picture of a young woman has all the qualities of a portrait, though not one which conforms with the prevailing elite tradition.

By focusing her attention on the lot of the working class, Käthe Kollwitz provoked the ire of conservative artistic circles. For her depiction of an 1844 uprising, she was famously denied a gold medal at the Great Berlin Art Exhibition in 1898. Despite her undoubted success, she was only admitted to the Prussian Academy of Arts following the Revolution in 1918 – the first woman to be so.



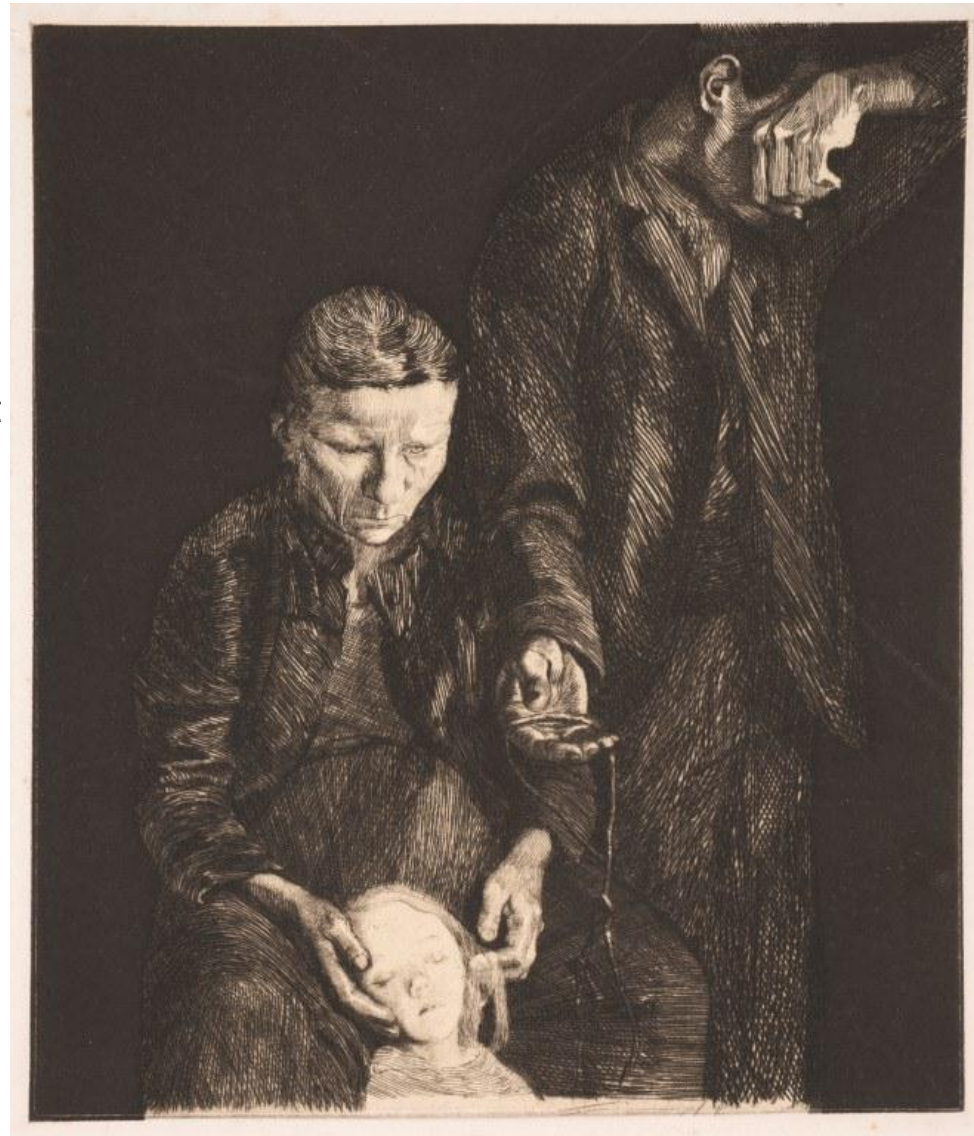
Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945) Germany

Zertretene (The Downtrodden) 1900

etching, engraving, aquatint, drypoint
courtesy of the Alfons and Marie Blaschke Art
Trust

The evocative title of this print only hints at a still darker narrative: claspimg her lifeless child in her lap, the bereaved mother is handed a noose by her grieving husband. What this implies remains unclear.

This richly printed impression sets the grieving pair against an unrelieved black background, suggestive of their overwhelming despair. Representative of the growing, disenfranchised working class, this family stands proxy for all those exploited during Germany's rapid industrialisation.



Wilhelm Lehmbruck (1881–1919)

With conventional academic training, Wilhelm Lehmbruck's transition from classical to highly individual and expressive sculptural forms would mark him as one of the leading European avant-garde sculptors. Lehmbruck exhibited in Germany, France and, in 1913, at the groundbreaking Armory Show of contemporary art in New York.

Leaving Germany for Paris in 1910, Lehmbruck was inspired by the work of leading French sculptors including Aristide Maillol (1861–1944) and Auguste Rodin (1840–1917), resulting in important developments in his own work. In 1911 he decisively rejected the constraints of conventional academic realism and his increasingly attenuated figures demonstrate heightened psychological awareness.

Fleeing Paris for Berlin immediately before the outbreak of war, Lehmbruck volunteered for the army medical corps in a bid to avoid military service. Despite being active in German artistic circles, in 1916 he left for Switzerland where, with the support of the Impressionist painter Max Liebermann, he was able to settle. Overcome with depression, Lehmbruck returned to Berlin in early 1919 where he was admitted to the Prussian Academy of Arts shortly before committing suicide in March of that year.

Despite his short career, Lehmbruck's highly individual style represented a comprehensive break with the sculptural traditions of the past. His spare and poignant sculptures from the years of World War I are compelling accounts of the loss and emotional damage inflicted on his generation.

Wilhelm Lehmbruck (1881–1919) Germany

Kleine Sinnende (Contemplative Girl)
1911

terracotta
Mackelvie Trust Collection
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1968

A sculptor trained in the classical tradition, it was only after his move to Paris in 1910 that Wilhelm Lehmbruck broke with academic realism, opting instead for an emotionally expressive abstraction of form.

Initially inspired by the work of French artists Aristide Maillol (1861–1944) and Auguste Rodin (1840–1917), Lehmbruck's sculptures came to have a melancholic and self-contained quality. This appears to reflect his own introspective character and, during the war years, his despair at humanity's incomparable cruelty.



Wilhelm Lehmbruck (1881–1919) Germany

Liegendes Weib mit Männerkopf
(*'Hochgebirge'*) (*Reclining Woman*
with Man's Head [*'High Mountains'*])
1910–19

drypoint

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1962

Wilhelm Lehmbruck's prints date from after his move to Paris in 1910. Whereas the artist used drawing to develop sculptural concepts, his drypoint prints are generally fully-resolved compositions.

Often printed posthumously by his estate, Lehmbruck's prints are seductive in their simplicity, revealing the same essence of form which became apparent in his late sculptural work.



Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884–1976)

One of the founding members of the influential group of Expressionist artists, die Brücke (The Bridge, 1905–13), Karl Schmidt-Rottluff was at the centre of the artistic rebellion against bourgeois mores and the cultural conservatism of the imperial government. Together with the other founders of the Brücke, Fritz Bleyl (1880–1966), Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938) and Erich Heckel (1883–1970), Schmidt-Rottluff sought a new means of artistic expression which privileged individual intention and unmediated pictorial responses to artistic stimuli.

One of the notable undertakings of the Brücke was the revival of the woodcut technique of printmaking. Identifying woodcut as an essentially German tradition, the members of the Brücke looked past the technical refinement of Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) and his school to the markedly angular work of his predecessors.

Seen here, Schmidt-Rottluff's own woodcuts from the period 1911–17 reveal his mastery of the technique. Boldly defined, with large expanses of printed and bare paper, and making active use of the grain of the block, Schmidt-Rottluff's woodcuts are dramatic testimony to the artist's power of invention. Figuration is tempered by abstraction which reveals the artist's enthusiasm for what was then understood as the 'primitive' arts of Africa and the Pacific which members of the Brücke had encountered in German museum collections.

The prints seen here came to the Gallery by way of gift from the estate of Dr Rosa Schapire (1874–1954). An early supporter and historian of the Expressionist movement, and author of a 1924 *catalogue raisonné* of Schmidt-Rottluff's graphic work, the Jewish Schapire fled Germany just two weeks before the outbreak of the World War II, taking with her a sizeable part of her important collection of Expressionist art.

Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884–1976) Germany

Akte (Nudes) 1913

woodcut

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1956

In the ethnographic museums of Dresden and Berlin, members of the Brücke group were exposed to the pictorial and sculptural forms of non-European societies. Revealing the decisive influence of the 'primitive' arts of Africa and the Pacific, this composition shows two nudes traced with powerful outlines and block-like intimations of modelling.

The mask-like faces are reminiscent of those seen in Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*, 1907, highlighting the shared interest among Western modernists in the work of their non-European counterparts.



Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884–1976) Germany

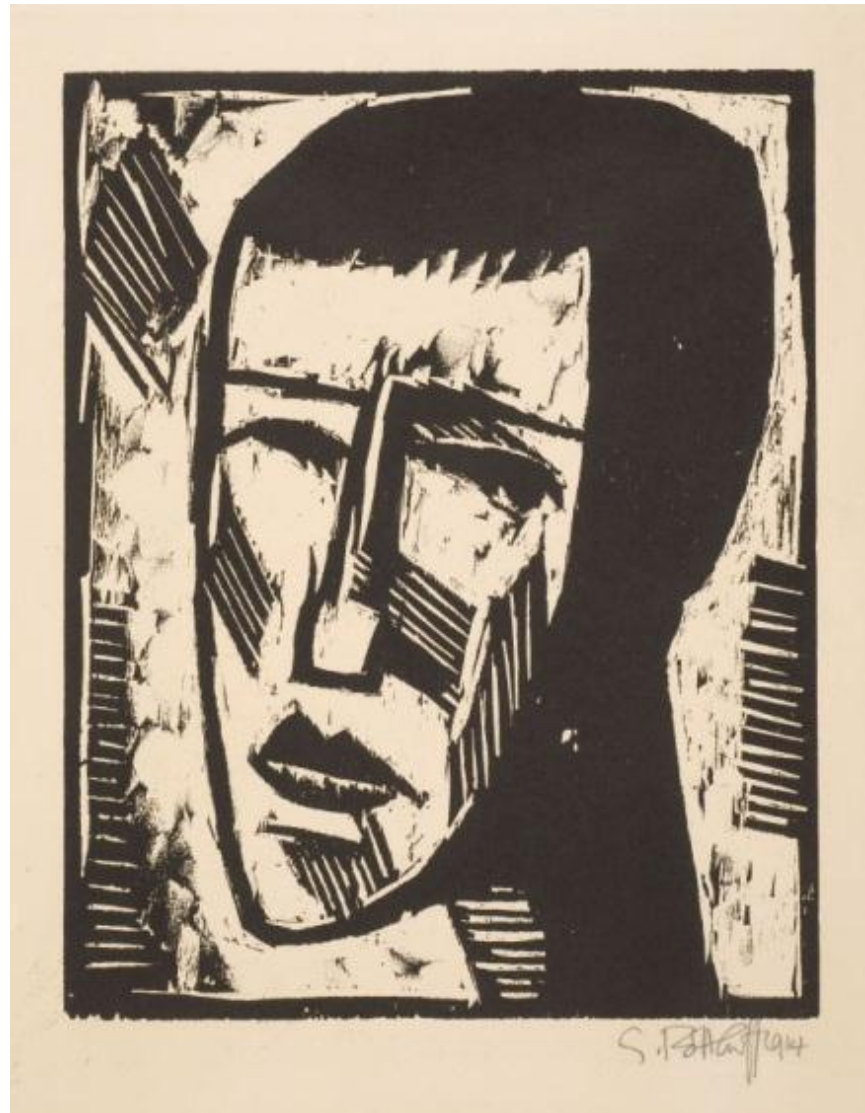
Jünglingskopf (Head of a Youth) 1914

woodcut

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1956

This monumental head shows clear evidence of Karl Schmidt-Rottluff's interest in the material culture of Africa and the Pacific. While the head can be read as a three-dimensional object, the strong outlines and block of unmodulated shadow flattens the composition.

Largely self taught, Schmidt-Rottluff was free to seek innovative solutions to formal problems in his art. The style of cultural artefacts from non-European cultures appealed as a radical departure from the stultifying tradition of academic art which Schmidt-Rottluff sought to avoid.



Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884–1976) Germany

Melancholie (Melancholy) 1914

from: *Zehn Holzschnitte von Schmidt-Rottluff* (Ten Woodcuts by Schmidt-Rottluff) 1919

woodcut

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1956

With hunched shoulders and a sideways glance, the central figure is ill at ease. Enhancing the sense of dislocation, the dishes on the table and the female figure in the background suggest that the setting may be a bar or cabaret.

Nineteen fourteen marked a high point in Schmidt-Rottluff's production of woodcut prints. The following year, the artist began active military service, during which time he made only a small number of works.



Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884–1976) Germany

Die heiligen drei Könige (The Three Kings) 1917

from: *Zehn Holzschnitte von Schmidt-Rottluff* (Ten Woodcuts by Schmidt-Rottluff) 1919

woodcut

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1956

Quite unlike the bearded magi of traditional Christian art, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff's three wise men are abstracted and distinctly sculptural. Showing the angular forms then central to his work, this print also reveals the artist's debt to the 'primitive' cultures which he encountered in the collections of ethnographic museums.

This print dates to the period when Schmidt-Rottluff was on active service on the Eastern Front but was not published until after the end of World War I.



Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884–1976) Germany

Köpfe II (Heads II) 1911

woodcut

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1956

Of the members of the Brücke group, it was Karl Schmidt-Rottluff who committed the most creative energy to the exploration of the woodcut. This dramatically scaled image illustrates his mastery of that medium.

The forms are defined by bold outlines in silhouette against exposed paper, faceted with mid-tones which reveal traces of the gouge (a wood-cutting tool). Only the grain of the wood relieves the otherwise monotone background against which the two figures are isolated.



The First World War and Beyond

The declaration of war in August 1914 was greeted with enthusiasm by many of the young artists represented in this exhibition. Disenchanted with contemporary society, they believed that war would restore to the West those primal forces which historically were considered to have animated the cultures of Africa and the Pacific and hence were admired by many of the avant-garde in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. But while the emperor had promised his troops a short conflict, the first total war of the industrial age soon dispelled whatever romance may have been attached to battle.

Artists serving on the front lines witnessed the effects of powerful artillery, aerial bombardment and chemical weapons. The consequences of the war formed the subject of many powerful and disturbing works of art. August Macke (1883–1914) and Franz Marc (1880–1916), leading members of the Munich-based Expressionist group *Blauer Reiter*, died in the conflict. A number of artists suffered nervous collapse and were withdrawn from the frontline, subsequently becoming vigorous critics of the conflict and the system which had brought it into being.

Following a mutiny in the German navy and the collapse of the imperial government, the war ended in an armistice on 11 November 1918. The peace settlement, including massive reparation payments, battered the badly damaged German economy which succumbed to hyper-inflation in 1923. Artists of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity, an unsentimental and often satirical representational style) cast their critical eye on legendary post-war Berlin, with its glamorous nightclubs and cabarets, instead recording their society during the brittle experiment in liberal democracy under the short-lived Weimar Republic (1919–33).

George Grosz
(1893–1959) Germany,
United States of America

Hinrichtung (Execution) 1915–16

from: *Kleine Grosz Mappe* (Little Grosz Portfolio) 1917

lithograph

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 1962

A satirist and pessimist, George Grosz's contempt for the hypocrisy of imperial Germany was given full expression in his art. In this composition he points to the collaboration between church and state: as a priest blesses a condemned man, an executioner prepares to wield his axe – a medieval tool suggestive of the brutal times in which the artist lived.

Around this grisly scene, men in top hats and frock-coats (civil servants or businessmen, and perhaps intended to represent war profiteers) go about their business, seemingly unconcerned.



Oskar Kokoschka
(1886–1980) Austria,
Czechoslovakia,
United Kingdom, Switzerland

Gethsemane 1916

lithograph

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1963

Oskar Kokoschka's *Gethsemane* is a disturbing depiction of Christ's betrayal by his disciple, Judas – the enormity of which is clear to see on both their faces. Wounded on the Ukrainian front in 1915, Kokoschka's experience of inhuman savagery doubtless informed the emotional intensity of this work.

This print was published in *Der Bildermann* (The Picture Man), a fortnightly periodical which reflected growing public dissatisfaction with the war. That journal replaced the nationalistic *Kriegszeit* (Wartime), which was also published by Paul Cassirer, and to which leading artists had contributed patriotic images.



Lovis Corinth (1858–1925) Germany

Christus am Ölberg II (Christ on the Mount of Olives II) 1914–15

drypoint

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1956

Lovis Corinth's Christ stares upward, imploring god to take from him the 'cup' of his suffering. His companions sleep on the ground around him, oblivious to his torment and the drama unfolding in their midst.

Reflecting the righteous claims made on both sides of the conflict, and the spiritual crisis the war provoked, Christian subjects had renewed currency during World War I. Such themes were especially pertinent after initial sentiments of enthusiasm had been tempered by the brutal reality of total war.



Louis Corinth

(1858–1925) Germany

Im Schutz der Waffen (Protected by Weapons) 1921–2

etching

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1961

In this etching, Louis Corinth revisited the composition of an oil painting from 1915. That work expresses feminine vulnerability and the powerful resolve of her male defenders. The allusion to war-time Germany is clear.

As a political conservative and monarchist, Corinth's decision to return to this subject may reflect his disaffection with the country's new political structure – particularly the ongoing social and economic crises that plagued the early years of the German Republic.



Lovis Corinth (1858–1925) Germany

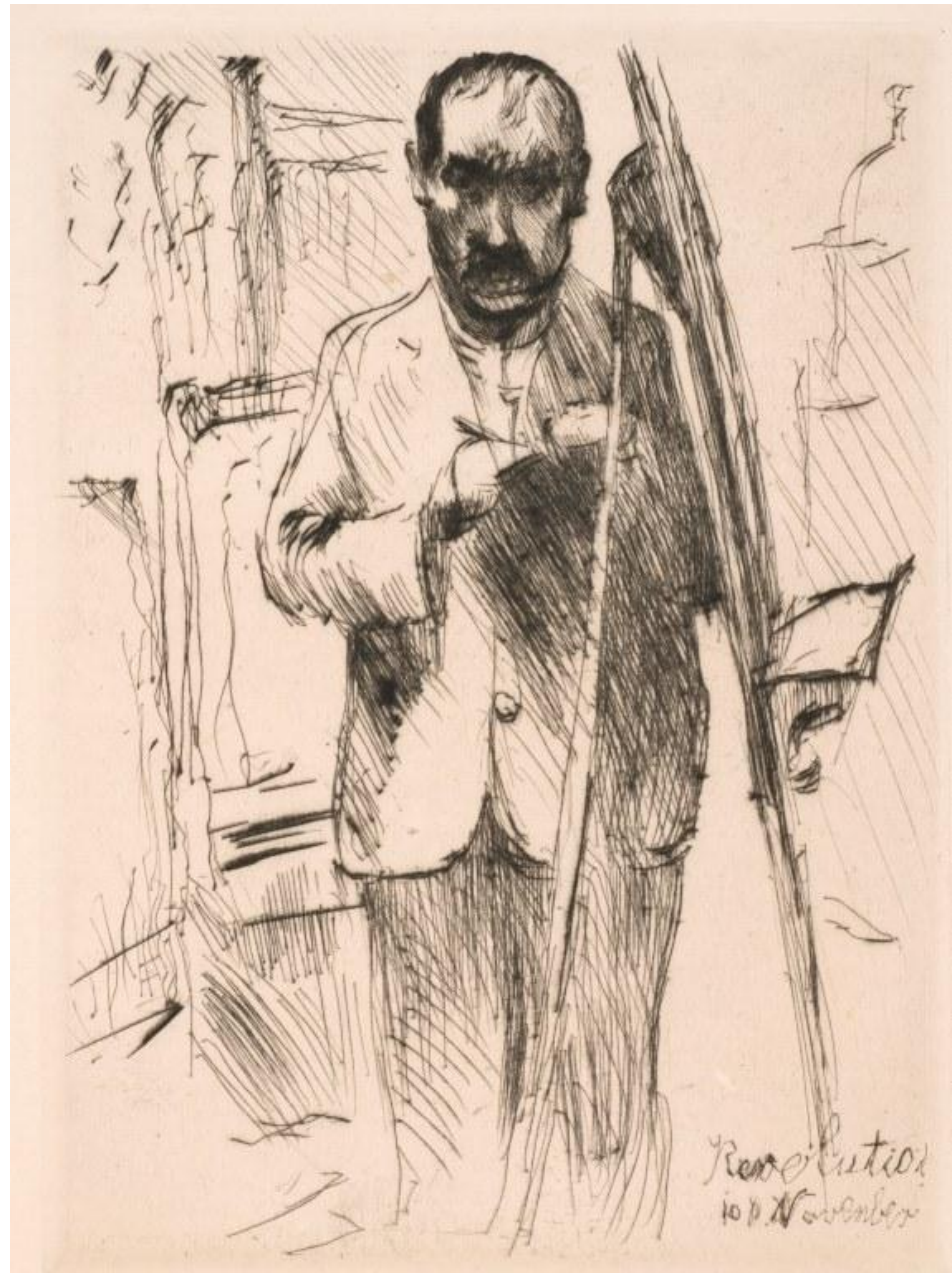
Selbstbildnis an der Staffelei (Self Portrait at the Easel) 1918

drypoint

courtesy of the Alfons and Marie Blaschke Art Trust

On 9 November 1918 the Imperial Chancellor, Prince Maximilian of Baden, announced the abdication of the German Emperor, Wilhelm II. Later that same day the socialist politician Philipp Scheidemann unilaterally declared Germany a republic.

In his studio during the following day, and standing self-consciously behind his easel, Lovis Corinth marked the radical shift in the country's political landscape with a revealing self portrait. In the lower right corner the ominous word 'Revolution' is inscribed above the date.



Hermann Max Pechstein (1881–1955) Germany

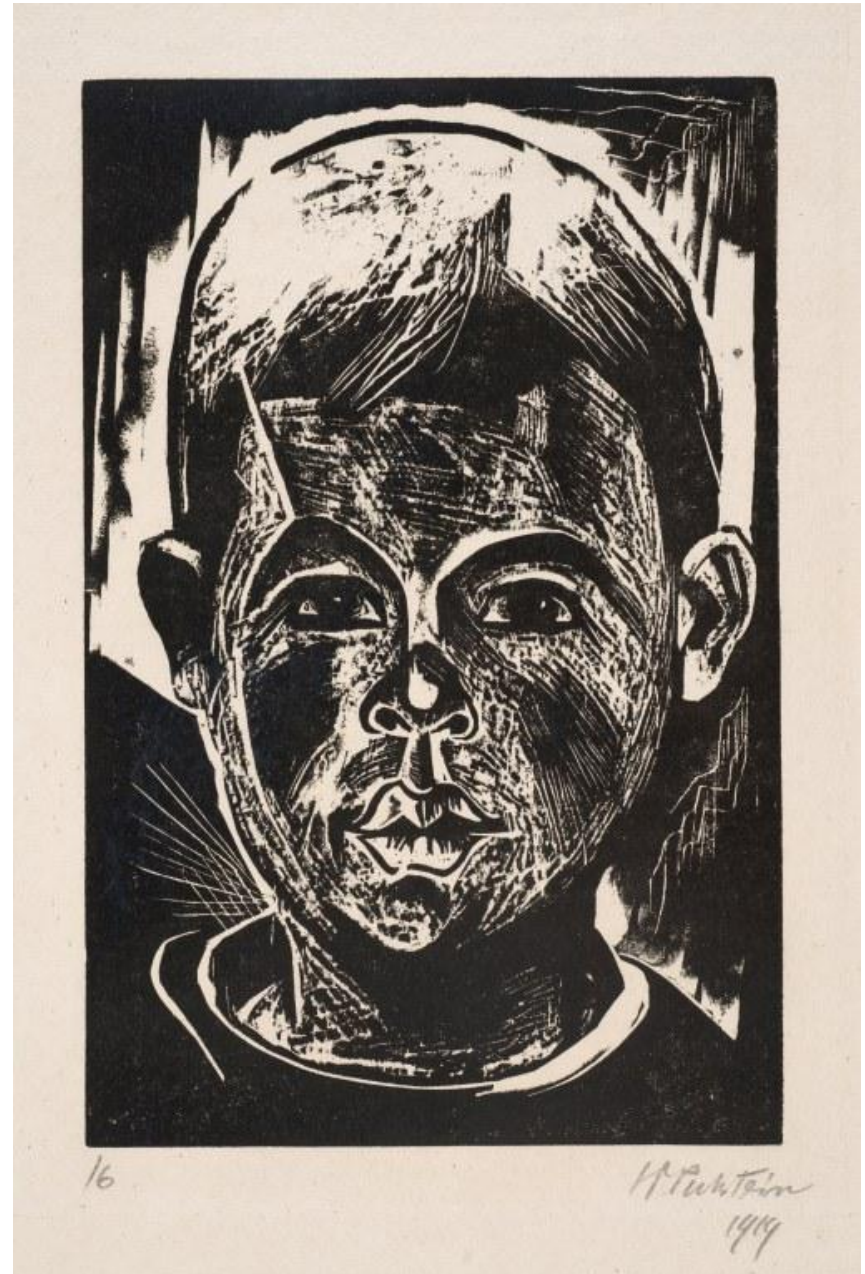
Kinderbildness I (Frank) 1919

woodcut

courtesy of the Alfons and Marie Blaschke Art Trust

An arresting portrait of Max Pechstein's young son, Frank, this woodcut combines massed hatching and strong contrasts between heavily printed and exposed paper. Half-tones, such as the ridge of the nose, were formed by partial (and perhaps unintended) contact between the paper and the lower surface of the gouged wooden matrix.

Pechstein's intimate subject contrasts with his concurrent revolutionary activities. A leading figure in the radical November Group and the Working Council for Art, Pechstein worked to overturn the arts infrastructure of imperial Germany.



Ernst Barlach

(1870–1938) Germany

Kindertod (Child's Death) 1919–20

woodcut

courtesy of the Alfons and Marie Blaschke Art Trust

The choice of medium – the stark black and white of hard-edged woodcut – emphasises the emotional intensity of the burial of an emaciated child. Devoid of ceremony, the interment is set against the backdrop of a mass grave and the mournful tolling of a bell.

Ernst Barlach's composition responds to the poverty and famine that struck Germany in the aftermath of World War I. His impassioned social critique made him a favourite of his contemporary Käthe Kollwitz.



Ernst Barlach

(1870–1938) Germany

Wandernder Tod (Wandering Death) 1923

lithograph

courtesy of the Alfons and Marie Blaschke Art Trust

This image has its origins in the medieval Dance of Death, the often darkly satirical depictions of the Grim Reaper harvesting rich and poor alike.

However, despite incidental details such as the pipe and slouch boots there is no humour in Ernst Barlach's image: in the midst of economic collapse, and closely following the recent war, Death stalked the German landscape, gathering to him the innocent victims of poverty and famine.



Max Beckmann (1884–1950) Germany

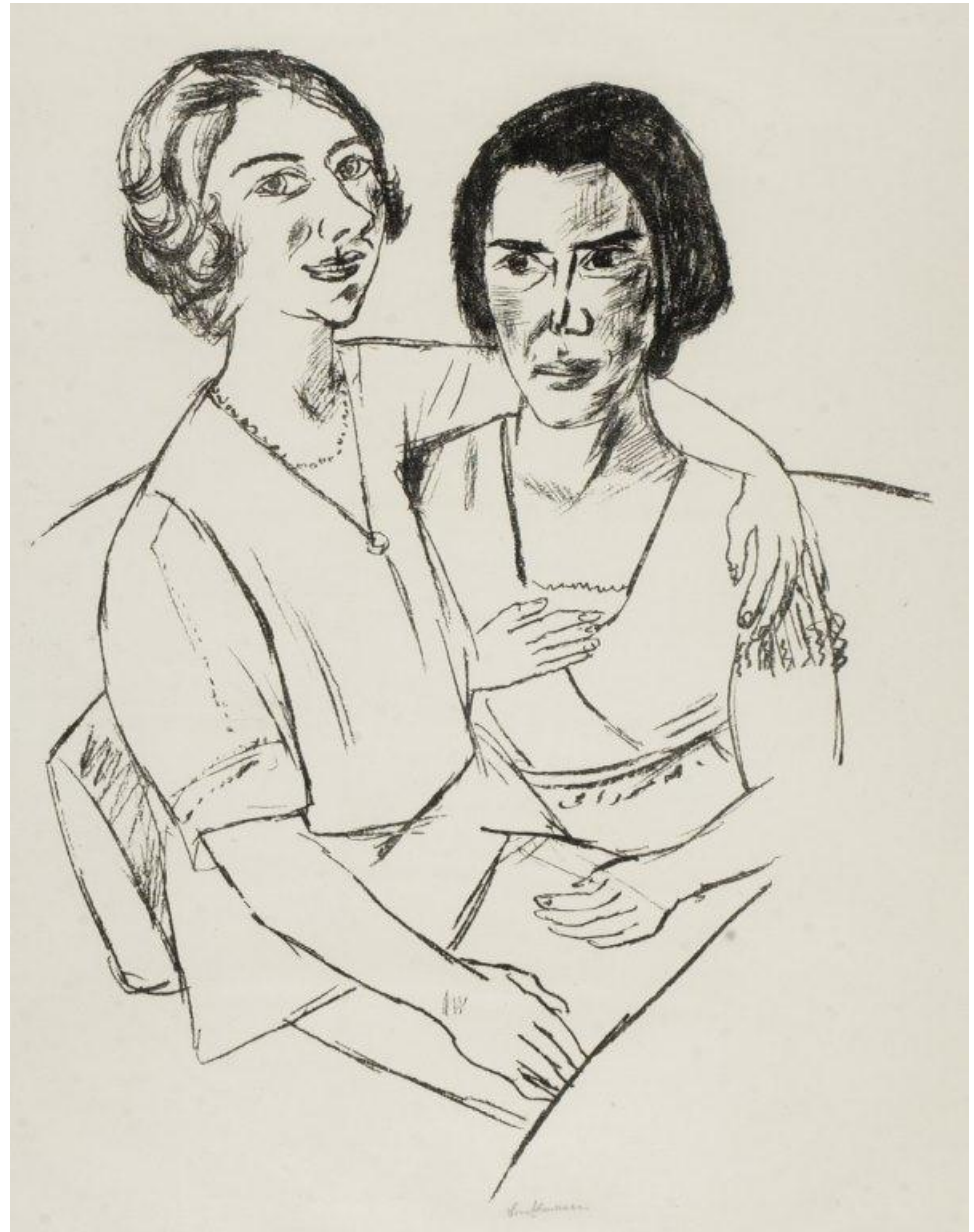
Zwei Frauen (Two Women) 1922

lithograph

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1961

From the anxious expression of one sitter to the assertive familiarity of her companion, this composition exudes tension, both between the sitters and between them and the observer.

Max Beckmann's uncompromising depiction of the two women uses the linear construction of Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity), a successor movement to Expressionism. Representing a return to realism, Neue Sachlichkeit expresses the pessimism and unflattering honesty of artists in post-war Germany.



Max Beckmann (1884–1950) Germany

Kasbek 1923

drypoint

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 1963

In this depiction of his friend 'Naila' (the economist Dr Hildegard Melms), Max Beckmann gestures toward the cabarets and nightclubs of Germany's Weimar Republic (1919–33), of which Kasbek was one.

Educated and independent, Naila was one of the Neue Frauen (New Women) who exemplified the political and cultural change witnessed in large urban centres such as Berlin. And while the Neue Frauen are part of the mythology surrounding Weimar Germany's 'golden age', it should be remembered that such women remained in a minority and came into direct conflict with conservative elements in society.



Wassily Kandinsky
(1866-1944) Russia,
Germany, France

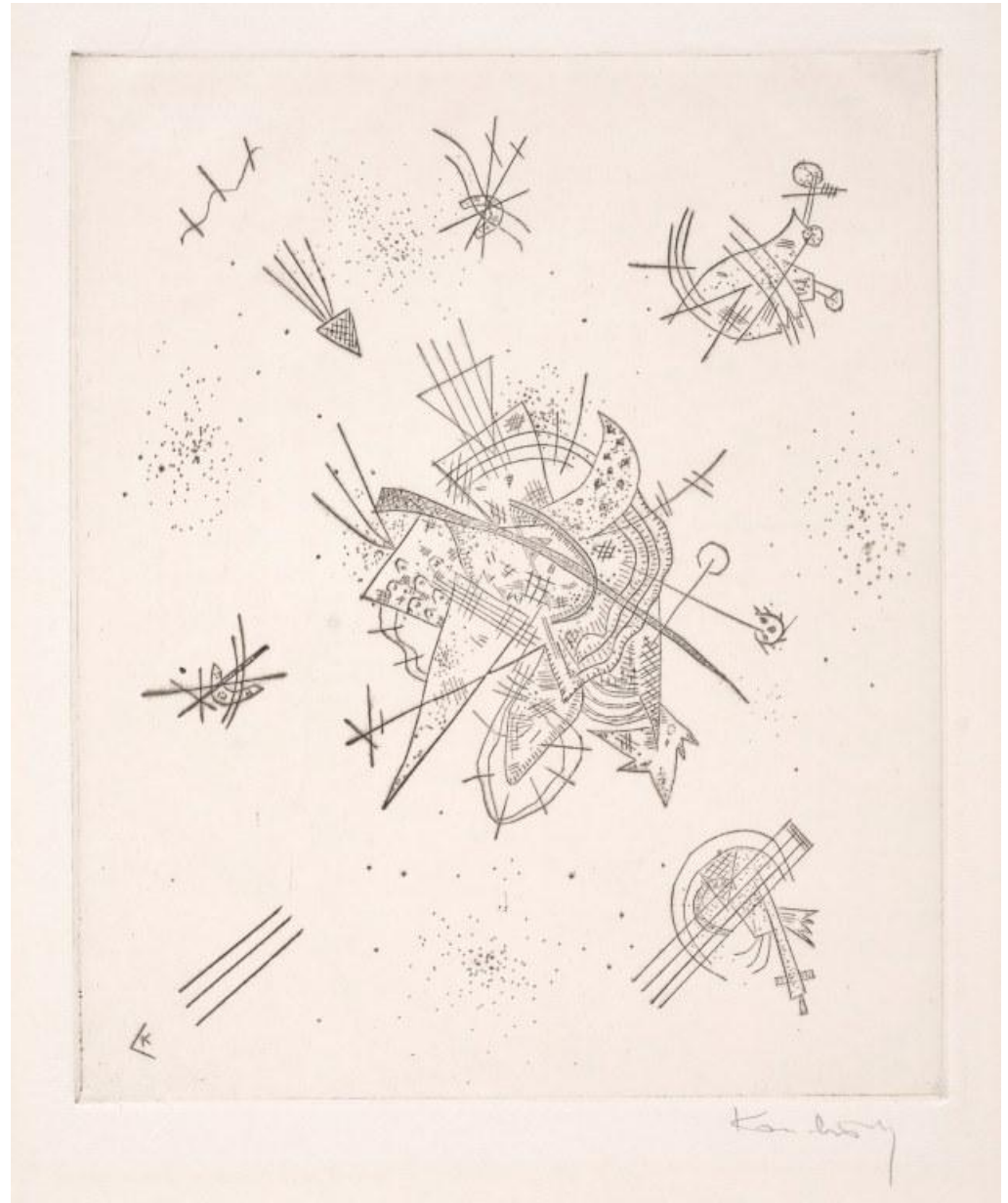
Kleine Welten X (Little Worlds X) 1922

from: *Kleine Welten (Little Worlds)*
drypoint

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1956

Wassily Kandinsky is regarded as one of the central figures in the transition from representation to abstraction in European art. Following his departure from Germany in 1914, he continued to produce representational imagery even while pursuing ever greater abstraction in his art.

Published in 1922, when he took up a teaching position at the Bauhaus school of art and design, Kandinsky's *Small Worlds* portfolio of 12 prints in different media reveals a subjective interpretation of wholly abstract forms.



Reference information

This information is supplied for education and research purposes only

To reference the information in this PowerPoint:

Mathew Norman (curator) *Age of Turmoil* wall and label text, Auckland art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki 2014

For images please include:

Artist, *Title*, date, medium, collection

e.g.

Wassily Kandinsky, *Bogenschütze The Archer*, 1908–9, colour woodcut, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki