

## The Expression of the Times in the Works of the German Artist Kaethe Kollwitz

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### Abstract

**Kaethe Kollwitz is one of the most famous German painters in the 20th century. Her works are of profound realistic and epochal significance. Most of her subjects are suffering, hunger, exile, disease, struggle and death. Most of the characters in her works are the insulted and damaged working people. The picture of the work has tragic color, but it does not simply show tragedy, but reflects the conflicts and great social contradictions in real life.**

### Keywords

**Kaethe Kollwitz; Expressionism; Reality; Self Portrait; Humanistic Care.**

### 1. Introduction

Kaethe Kollwitz lived in a turbulent era full of suffering, especially in the early 20th century when the society was extremely dark. Except for a few countries, most countries and regions in the world were shrouded in the shadow of war and poverty. In this era, it often brings artists a lot of creative inspiration, so artists will choose many social problems as the main theme in the process of artistic creation. In such a specific era, Coleridge uses her works to listen to the voice of sadness, despair and loneliness in the world. She uses the reality in front of her eyes as the content of her painting, and uses her sad feelings. It is necessary to appeal to the audience, communicate with the world with reason, and remind the world with works.

Art is the response of reality. Art creation originates from life, but it is higher than life. Most of her works of art depict the people at the bottom who have experienced the hardships of war. Her works of art have a clear style and are full of humanitarian concern for society and human beings. This has a great relationship with her life experience, which mainly shows the life of some poor people who suffer great pain physically and mentally, and contains profound social intention. In the form of the picture, the visual impact is very strong, so that viewers can see and feel the pain of the people. Therefore, her works of art contain a strong spiritual power, which comes from the concern and understanding of life itself, life and destiny.

### 2. The creative theme of Kollwitz's expressionism

The theme of anti war will be considered first in her works. The death and destruction brought by war and the crime caused by the end of war are all reflected in her works. It is the various problems in her environment that make her constantly create, which makes her works always keep fresh vitality and appeal. With humanism as the main body, Kaethe Kollwitz created a multicultural fusion. Her works can be divided into three categories: the first category is anti oppression, which expresses the resistance of the poor in the world; the second category is anti war and anti hunger; the third category is self portrait. She never bowed her head in the face of fate and bravely advanced in the face of ideal. In order to give these suffering people strong strength to fight against the unfair fate, mother, child, war and death became the constant themes in Coleridge's art. In addition, in his works, the tragic experience of the characters is full of compassionate humanitarian care, which makes these works of art full of high appeal at any time, and is a cultural treasure of the world.

None of the Contemporary German artists can look at the poor people's lives as well as the Kaethe Kollwitz, and show them with enthusiasm. Roman Roland of France said of Coleridge: "the works of

Kaethe Kollwitz Coleridge are the greatest poems in modern Germany, which reflect the hardship and grief of the poor and the common people." The spiritual connotation of a work of art is the subjective spirit of an artist. Only when an artist infuses his feelings and emotions into his work and tries his best to integrate the form, shape, color, brushwork, etc. of a painting with the spiritual connotation, can such a work have vitality and appeal.

Many artists will integrate their personal experience into their works of art when they create art. For painters, they will leave one or two personal self portraits, so as to hide their own evaluation or show their lifelong pursuit through self portraits. Compared with other artists, Kaethe Kollwitz is very fond of self portraits. She has left many self portraits, so self portraits have become one of her most important creative themes. From a young girl student to an old woman in her seventies, she has been asking herself critically. In the face of self, her self portrait not only failed to beautify herself to a certain extent, but also "uglify" herself to a certain extent. Among her many self portraits, the tired and old look always accounts for the majority. The analysis of his self portraits is helpful for us to understand his rich life from many aspects.

### **3. On the creative techniques of Kollwitz's expressionism**

Kaethe Kollwitz does not care about its value and status in the history of art. Her purpose of woodcut is not art itself, but to speak and shout by means of works of art. It depicts those peasants whose lives are broken, turbulent and poor, and describes the disillusionment, pain, cry and resistance of human beings. Kaethe Kollwitz examines the development of German Society from different perspectives. She dares to shout and resist. From the perspective of women, she examines the destruction of war on young life. She uses paintbrush as a weapon of resistance. Her works perfectly embody the unity of form and content, as well as the combination of thinking and art.

Both in terms of artistic language and structural language, Kollwitz fully embodies her loving features, her rough and simple expression techniques, and her endless power. The main feature of realistic creation is to pay attention to reality and objectivity. Her works express anti oppression and anti war thoughts by describing the cruelty brought by social unrest and war, and satirize the dark real society. Whether it is to expose and resist the dark reality, or to sympathize with and support the poor working people, Kaethe Kollwitz expresses it incisively and vividly with his unique artistic language. She also has a unique style in characterization and painting techniques. People read out her inner feelings in her works, and even read out the disasters, terrors and struggles experienced by human beings in her era. Kaethe Kollwitz grasps the essence of life phenomenon and integrates spiritual connotation with her works. Her works make everyone with social conscience feel heartbroken and uneasy, presenting a kind of formal beauty integrating structural language, artistic language and the unique forms of expression of print, which touches the audience and pushes realistic print creation to a new height.

Different from Munch's lyrical knife touch and other expressionism woodcut's free and passionate emotional knife touch, Kaethe Kollwitz pays more attention to how to transform the unique composition style created under the control of maternal consciousness into the picture form composed of black and white language. Therefore, the treatment of language and form in Kaethe Kollwitz print creation is to communicate with the emotion he wants to express. From the unique perspective of a mother, Kaethe Kollwitz starts from his own experience and pays attention to the survival and mental state of more mothers around him at that time, so as to find an extremely sensitive pulse of the times and effectively convey the voice of the whole era.

### **4. An analysis of the works of Kollwitz's expressionism**

Kollwitz's art expresses the wishes of the majority of the people. She once wrote: "my works are not pure art, but they are art. I agree that my art has a purpose. In an era when human beings are so helpless and seeking help, I want to play a role. Everyone does their best, that's all She poured her emotions into the two sets of prints, the Weaver's resistance and the peasant war, and created "a tragic image that reached the peak in the history of the German people's revolution." The artistic effect

achieved by her works is the display of her personality in her works. These two sets of works enable her to obtain a stable and clear position in both artistic life and social life. From an objective historical point of view, Kathe Kollwitz created an objective and real scene of struggle by using real emotion, attitude towards art and enthusiasm for print creation.

In the six works of the Weaver's revolt, Coleridge depicts a group of workers marching and demonstrating with different expressions. They only had some simple weapons in their hands, such as hoes, axes and sickles. By depicting these simple weapons, Coleridge not only expressed the weakness of the workers' strength, but also showed their spirit of no turning back for survival. Let us once again feel the strong spirit of resistance of weavers under the pressure of hard life.

In the seven works of the peasant war, four of them depict the image of a woman, not so much a peasant woman as a mother to express her support for the peasant war and comfort after the defeat of the war. This view of motherhood has always been a symbol of her artistic thought. Coleridge's prints are full of aggressive force, which makes people dare not look directly at them, because when they see these works, they seem to see their own ugly human nature and actions, but they can not be ignored. It seems that there is a kind of soul catching charm, which firmly grasps the soul of every viewer. Her pictures are full of the breath of death and destiny.

## 5. The influence of Kollwitz's expressionism on his works

Kollwitz's prints are inspired by real life. Her works are highly coherent, full of distinct class characteristics and indomitable spirit. The themes of her works are mostly chosen from the characters and scenes in reality. In this way, these paintings can easily arouse the resonance of the broad masses of working people, and also can bring them confidence and inspiration. Realistic paintings expand the scope of the subject matter of works of art. The ordinary working people who have been at the bottom of society are regarded as the main body of works of art. Because of this, the Chinese public can also have a profound resonance. Lu Xun, the great proletarian revolutionist in China, highly praised the paintings of Kaethe Kollwitz and introduced them into China as important works reflecting the proletarian spirit and Marxist thought. Kaethe Kollwitz's works shine with the light of humanism, which has deeply affected the past of Chinese realistic print creation, and will certainly affect the present and even the future of Chinese realistic print creation.

In the Chinese environment at that time, she and her works entered China, which helped the Chinese people wake up their self-consciousness, broaden their horizons, and ignited the blood of the Chinese revolution. At the same time, she also influenced many Chinese printmakers and encouraged their revolutionary confidence. The humanistic care reflected in her printmaking works has also influenced many young Chinese printmakers, helped them find the direction of learning and encouraged their confidence in creation. Since then, China's new print has entered a period of rapid development, and gradually linked China's revolutionary struggle with China's print creation. China's new print has become the propaganda weapon of China's revolutionary struggle, which makes the revolutionary ideas spread rapidly. Kaethe Kollwitz's works transcend time and space, country and nation, and still have a strong artistic charm.

## 6. Conclusion

Kollwitz's artistic achievements tell us that as an artist, we should go deep into the real life and express the voice of the people and the real world. This kind of art is vivid and real. Only in this way can it be deeply rooted in the hearts of the people and stand the test of time. Excellent works of art should not only have a unique perspective and profound spiritual connotation, but also have appropriate formal language. Kollwitz's works perfectly show her perception of life, treasure of family affection and love, and respect for life. The pictures in her works accurately present the artist's emotional consciousness through reasonable form arrangement, forming a strong and distinctive artistic style.

All his life, Kaethe Kollwitz insisted on his own artistic thought, fighting for art and for the people. Although she lived a hard and simple life all her life, she left the most precious spiritual wealth to the

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people all over the world through her print works. Her works are branded with a profound brand of the times, but still shine with a high realistic spirit and humanistic spirit through generations. She is worthy of being a great Print Artist in the modern art world, and her works are worthy of recognition. The artistic value and rich connotation of the works are worthy of more attention and deeper exploration.

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