

CHECKLIST

ANONYMOUS

Let's Get Out of the Muck!, 1924. Color lithograph on thin wove paper.

OTTO DIX (GERMAN, 1891–1969)

Relay Post, Autumn Battle in Champagne, c. 1924.

Etching on off-white wove paper. Plate 8 from the cycle *The War*.

Dead Man in Mud, 1924. Etching on off-white wove paper.

Plate 23 from the cycle *The War*.

Skull, 1924. Etching on beige wove paper. Plate 31 from the cycle *The War*.

Roll Call of the Returnees, 1924. Etching on off-white BSB Bütten paper.

Plate 49 from the cycle *The War*.

GEORGE GROSZ (GERMAN, 1893–1959)

Oh, Crazy World, You Blissful Cabinet of Freaks, 1916. Color offset print on cream vellum paper. Plate XIV from the cycle *Ecce Homo*.

Sex Murder in the Ackerstrasse, 1916–17. Photo-lithograph on cream vellum paper. Plate 32 from the cycle *Ecce Homo*.

People Are Basically Good, 1919. Color offset print on cream vellum paper. Plate XII from the cycle *Ecce Homo*.

Passers-By, 1921. Color offset print on cream vellum paper. Plate I from the cycle *Ecce Homo*.

Disrobing, 1921. Photo-lithograph on thin off-white wove paper. Plate 9 from the cycle *Ecce Homo*.

At Home with Pappi and Mammi, 1922. Lithograph.

Soirée, 1922. Color offset print on cream vellum paper. Plate IX from the cycle *Ecce Homo*.

Just Half a Pound, 1928. Photo-lithograph. From the portfolio *Interregnum*.

The Hero, 1933. Lithograph on heavy cream, wove BFK Rives paper.

LEA GRUNDIG (GERMAN, 1906–1977)

Father and Child, 1934. Etching on heavy cream wove paper.

The Exodus Begins, 1934. Etching on heavy cream wove paper.

A Family's Path, 1934. Etching on cream wove paper.

Children Play War, 1934. Etching on heavy cream wove paper.

Lovers, 1934. Etching on heavy white wove paper.

Children Play "Ghost," 1934. Etching on heavy white wove paper.

The Laundry Room, 1934. Etching on heavy white wove paper.

The Witch, 1935. Drypoint on heavy cream wove paper.

Child's Play, 1935. Etching on heavy white wove paper.

Jewish Funeral, 1935. Etching on heavy cream wove paper.

Mother and Child, 1935. Etching on heavy cream wove paper.

Tessin Landscape, 1935. Etching on heavy cream wove paper.

Tessin Landscape II, 1935. Etching on heavy cream wove paper.

After Work on the Autobahn, 1936. Etching on heavy cream wove paper.

War Threatens!, 1936. Etching on white wove paper. Plate 1 from the cycle *War Threatens*.

Children in War, 1936. Etching on heavy white wove paper. Plate 6 from the cycle *War Threatens*.

The Tank, 1936. Etching on heavy white wove paper. Plate 7 from the cycle *War Threatens*.

Downfall, 1936. Etching on heavy white wove paper. Plate 10 from the cycle *War Threatens*.

JOHN HEARTFIELD (GERMAN, 1891–1968)

Hitler and Hummel, the Same Old Trouble, 1932. Photo-offset reproduction for *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* 11, no. 45, November 6, 1932.

Soviet Construction and Nazi Construction, 1934. Photo-offset reproduction for *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* 13, no. 12, March 22, 1934.

The Teaching of the Wolf, 1935. Photo-offset reproduction for *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* 14, no. 47, November 21, 1935.

Superman in Trouble, 1935. Photo-offset reproduction for *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* 14, no. 50, December 12, 1935.

O Joyful, O Blessed, Miracle-Bringing Time, 1935. Photo-offset reproduction for *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* 14, no. 52, December 26, 1935.

When Hitler Speaks of Peace, Remember This, 1936. Photo-offset reproduction for *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* 15, no. 16, April 12, 1936.

Beef Steaks Get Out! Down with Schnitzel!, 1936. Photo-offset reproduction for *Die Volks-Illustrierte*, no. 12, November 4, 1936, back cover.

Hunger is the Best Cook, 1936. Photo-offset reproduction for *Die Volks-Illustrierte*, no. 14, November 18, 1936, p. 226.

Foreign Legionnaires Far From the Front, 1936. Photo-offset reproduction for *Die Volks-Illustrierte*, no. 16, December 2, 1936, p. 53.

Down a Dead-End Street, 1937. Photo-offset reproduction for *Die Volks-Illustrierte*, no. 11, March 17, 1937, p. 172.

The Peace-Loving Shark, 1937. Photo-offset reproduction for *Die Volks-Illustrierte*, no. 19, May 12, 1937, p. 307.

A. KEIL-GÜ (GERMAN, PSEUDONYM)

Papen "Promotes Economic Growth," c. 1932.

Color lithograph on thin wove paper. Poster for the Communist Party.

Mothers, Have You Borne Your Children for This?, n.d.

Color lithograph on thin wove paper. Poster for the Communist Party.

HÄTKE KOLLWITZ (GERMAN, 1867–1945)

In Memoriam Karl Liebknecht, 1920. Woodcut on paper.

Help Russia, 1921. Lithograph on cream laid paper.

The Widow (second version), 1922–23. Woodcut on off-white Japan paper. Plate 5 from the cycle *War*.

A Warning to be Careful at Work, c. 1924. Offset poster on tan wove paper. Published by the Government Workers' Administration, Berlin.

Brotherhood, 1924. Lithograph on heavy yellowish laid paper.

Bread!, 1924. Lithograph on wove paper.

Mothers, Give of Your Abundance!, 1926. Lithograph on cream watermarked laid paper.

The Agitator, 1926. Lithograph on white wove paper.

HERMANN MAX PECHSTEIN (GERMAN, 1881–1955)

The National Assembly: Cornerstone of the German Socialist Republic, 1919. Lithograph in three colors on thin wove paper, mounted on heavy canvas. Poster for the German Provisional Government.

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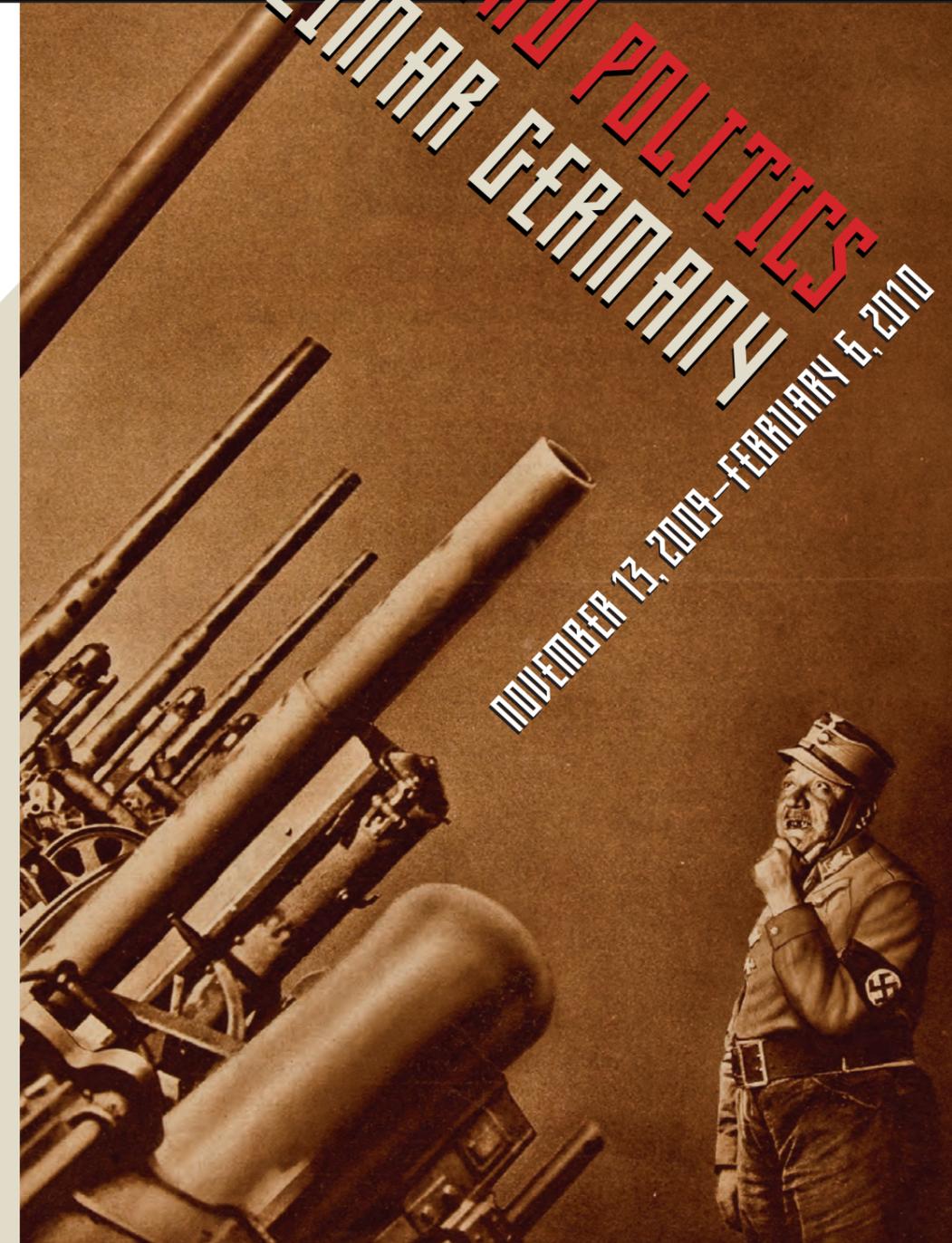
Cover: John Heartfield, *Down a Dead-End Street* (detail), 1937.

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PRINTS AND POLITICS IN WEIMAR GERMANY

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THE TROUT GALLERY / DICKINSON COLLEGE

The period between the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II in November 1918 and Adolf Hitler's seizure of power in January 1933 was one of great creative element in Germany. Expressionism, which had dominated the German avant-garde before World War I, survived into the early 1920s, merging with various newer trends. The Dada movement, founded in 1916 by a group of expatriate artists disgusted with the war effort, brought its free-form iconoclasm to bear on the postwar German political situation. Dire social and economic circumstances seemed to demand a more pragmatic and realistic aesthetic, and by 1925 the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) was widely hailed as the principal mode of the decade. However, German artists in the 1920s were united less by a single style than by their overriding concern with humanitarian themes: this was one of the few phases of modern art that valued content above form. Today, when contemporary artists are again turning to overtly political subjects, a look back at Weimar Germany offers a useful object lesson about the capabilities and limitations of socially motivated art.

Prior to 1914, Expressionism was essentially apolitical. Its partisans considered themselves aesthetic revolutionaries, but harbored no allegiance to a broader social revolution beyond a vague disdain for the Philistine bourgeoisie. The Expressionists' attempt to attain spiritual enlightenment through art was largely inner-directed. They banded together in small factions to protect their creative autonomy against the diluting impact of an often hostile majority, rather than out of any communal impulse. World War I, in which many artists fought and not a few died, accustomed its participants to group activity and created a body of shared experience. The patriotic fervor rampant in the early months of the war faded as battlefield horrors were compounded by the shocking incompetence and corruption of the military establishment. The war in effect taught artists to collaborate and encouraged them to question authority.

In the heady days following the 1918 revolution, it was easy for the Expressionists to imagine that the new age they had courted was at last dawning and to turn their formerly internal quest outward. Many now tacitly assumed that there was, after all, a connection between radical art and radical politics, and that their inchoate hatred of the bourgeoisie had legitimate class roots. Identifying themselves with the proletariat and taking their cue from the recently founded Russian socialist

state, artists felt a duty to offer guidance and inspiration to the masses. Many participated in the flurry of activity preceding the first general elections, scheduled for January 1919, which officially established the new republic's Constituent Assembly in the city of Weimar. Three major artists' coalitions — the *Novembergruppe* (November Group) and *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* (Working Council for Art) in Berlin, and the *Dresdner Sezession* (Gruppe 19 in Dresden)— were formed during this period with the purpose of shaping future cultural policy.



George Grosz, *Oh, Crazy World, You Blissful Cabinet of Freaks*, 1916.



A. Keil-Gü, *Mothers, Have You Borne Your Children for This?*, n.d.

The faith that artists had placed in the infant republic soon proved to be hopelessly idealistic, as did their goal of rousing the masses through revolutionary art. The masses did not, as it turned out, understand avant-garde art: they found it comical or worse still, personally insulting. Despite the artists' anti-bourgeois posturing, the proletariat readily recognized them as members of an alien cultural elite. Those who hoped that the new regime would provide more artistic freedom than its predecessor were quickly disappointed, and artists such as George Grosz were repeatedly dragged into court for various offenses against propriety. Establishing a pattern that was to persist and intensify in years to come, the ruling *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD) was noticeably more hospitable to the entrenched military and industrial establishment than to its estranged cousins in the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD). Both before and after the 1919 elections, uprisings by the left were brutally suppressed by the *Freicorps* (Free Corps), a right-wing paramilitary organization supported by the government. A number of key leaders—most famously Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg—were murdered. Disillusioned, many artists retreated from organized political activity. The *Arbeitsrat* disbanded in 1921 and the *Dresdner Sezession* in 1925. While the *Novembergruppe* lingered on until the 1930s, it had lost its political edge by 1922.

far from offering a panacea for the world's ills, the new Germany presented a compendium of its worst failings, which were dutifully catalogued by the nation's many artists. As unemployment and inflation skyrocketed, the streets grew crowded with beggars and crippled war veterans, who served as inescapable reminders of society's inequities. The war itself, as depicted by Otto Dix, was a metaphor for the moral and spiritual debasement of humankind. The parameters of personal interaction had seemingly been reduced to murder and rape (or most tellingly, a combination of the two), and prostitution became emblematic of an age in which everything had a price. The betrayal of the suffering masses by a wealthy, exploitative elite was the particular obsession of George Grosz.

German artists in the 1920s were motivated by a combined desire for objective reportage and effective communication. The term *Neue Sachlichkeit*, as much a matter of attitude as style, pertains equally to the scathing caricatures of Grosz and the slick "magic realism" popular later in the decade. Eschewing the capitalist

marketplace traditionally served by exhibitions, artists sought to reach a wider audience through prints, broadsheets, and illustrated journals. Among the most innovative of these were the publications put out by Wieland Herzfelde, often in collaboration with his brother John Heartfield and Grosz. The creation of works for publication prompted artists to adopt a spare, monochromatic style. Photo-montage, a derivative of Cubist collage practiced by numerous Dadaists, was Heartfield's special forte. Such techniques, which minimized the imprint of the artist's hand, were a protest against the bourgeois individualism associated with painting.

As broad-based groups such as the *Arbeitsrat* fizzled, artists maintained varying degrees of political involvement according to their personal predilections. Most active were the dedicated communists, such as Dix and Grosz, who in 1924 formed a new *Röte Gruppe* (Red Group). Käthe Kollwitz, on the other hand, avoided affiliation with any one party, though she often designed posters for causes she considered worthwhile. Among these causes was the *Internationale Arbeiterhilfe* (International Workers' Aid, or IAH), which was founded in 1921 to raise money for famine-stricken Russia and was directed by the Berlin office of the Soviet Comintern. The IAH organized cultural exchanges between Germany and the communist motherland and, starting in 1925, published the influential *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* (*Illustrated Workers' Paper*, or *AIZ*), for which Heartfield designed many striking covers. In 1928, the communists founded yet another cultural group, the *Association Revolutionärer Bildender Künstler Deutschlands* (ARBKD), whose members included Lea Grundig and her husband.

Few first-rate artists joined the ARBKD, whose hard-line stance chafed all but the most pliant creative spirits. This tendency toward ideological extremism reflected a polarization that was consuming German politics. As the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP, or Nazi) gained strength partly through strong-arm tactics but also with the democratic support of the electorate—the public was presented with an apparent choice between fascism and communism that left little room in the middle. Had the SPD and the KPD been willing to cooperate, they would probably have had force sufficient to defeat the Nazis; by refusing to compromise, they helped bring Hitler to power. No modern artist, even those few who supported the Nazis, was spared from the assault on culture, which ensued. Grosz, Grundig, and Heartfield were among many who emigrated; others, like Dix and Kollwitz, stayed behind but were forbidden to work.

That Hitler's triumph came as the culmination of over a decade of left-wing, socially engaged art is a bitter irony, but it should not be interpreted as a blanket indictment of the political efficacy of art. Some German artists had true working-class backgrounds, but most maintained little contact with the proletariat they claimed to champion, and thus their efforts to reach that public were probably doomed from the start. Furthermore, the intransigence of the governing parties—left, right, and center—had a progressively paralyzing effect. Censorship, the vicissitudes of an unreliable economy, the increasingly dogmatic ideology of Stalinist Russia, and the inability of the Weimar government to countenance reform all conspired to deny artists a practical voice. Art can move people, but it works most effectively on an individual, rather than a group basis. That is why the legacy of Weimar Germany remains important today—not only for what it shows us about a bygone era, but for what it reveals about ourselves and the panoply of human suffering that remains ever with us. ■

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