

In the early twentieth century, when Germany was convulsed by the upheavals of industrialization and two world wars, Käthe Kollwitz forged an art of social advocacy that radically centered on the experiences of women. Active in Berlin from the 1890s through the early 1940s, she was unflinching in her pursuit of raw emotional honesty and in her efforts to bring visibility to the hardships of the working class. Focusing on themes of grief, love, motherhood, and resistance, Kollwitz created unprecedented visions of female protagonists with the will and agency to revolt as well as mourn and protect. “I am content that my art has *purposes*,” she wrote. “I want to have an effect in this time, in which people are so confused and in need of help.”

Though she initially studied to be a painter, Kollwitz quickly turned to drawing and printmaking as more effective for social criticism. Drawing, which artists often use to capture their most immediate or unvarnished ideas, aided her impulse to engage strong feelings. And prints, which are produced in multiple copies, made it possible for her images to circulate widely. Her most monumental print projects are four portfolios, all represented here, dedicated to narratives of social injustice. From 1909 Kollwitz also worked in sculpture, as yet another means of memorializing both pain and love.

Kollwitz’s intensive creative process is documented across many studies and hand-corrected working proofs. Together these sequences map the artist’s practice of incessantly searching and adjusting, of immersing herself in her subject matter in order to bring its emotional and political force viscerally forward.

Organized by Starr Figura, Curator, with Maggie Hire, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Drawings and Prints, The Museum of Modern Art.

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We invite you to explore the accompanying publication, *Käthe Kollwitz*, which is available in the Museum Store.

For related content, programs, and audio, visit moma.org/kollwitz.