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| **Höch, Hannah (1889-1978)** |
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| Hannah Höch was a German painter and photomontagist who also worked in modern domestic handicraft, fabric and fashion design. She is primarily known for the photomontages she made during the early part of her artistic career, when she was the only female member of the revolutionary avant-garde group Berlin Dada (1916-1922). Höch’s works were, on the whole, less stridently political than those of her fellow Dadaists, who, in addition to their literary and artistic creations, conveyed their revolutionary ideas in public demonstrations and written manifestos. In contrast, Höch focused primarily on her art, often meshing the domestic realm with the public sphere of Dada. By interweaving these two seemingly disparate realms, the artist was better able to examine constructions of female identity and gender relations. Höch resided in or around Berlin for most of her life. Over the span of her fifty-two year career her style shifted from social commentary to surrealism to abstraction, a progression which makes her œuvre impervious to art historical categorization. |
| Hannah Höch was a German painter and photomontagist who also worked in modern domestic handicraft, fabric and fashion design. She is primarily known for the photomontages she made during the early part of her artistic career, when she was the only female member of the revolutionary avant-garde group Berlin Dada (1916-1922). Höch’s works were, on the whole, less stridently political than those of her fellow Dadaists, who, in addition to their literary and artistic creations, conveyed their revolutionary ideas in public demonstrations and written manifestos. In contrast, Höch focused primarily on her art, often meshing the domestic realm with the public sphere of Dada. By interweaving these two seemingly disparate realms, the artist was better able to examine constructions of female identity and gender relations. Höch resided in or around Berlin for most of her life. Over the span of her fifty-two year career her style shifted from social commentary to surrealism to abstraction, a progression which makes her œuvre impervious to art historical categorization.  File: Hoch.jpg  Figure 1.  Source: <http://i0.wp.com/www.polarimagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Hannah-Hoch.jpg> Early Life Hannah Höch was born Anna Therese Joanne Höch in Gotha, Germany. Her father was an insurance salesman and her mother was an amateur painter. At the age of 22, in 1914, Höch moved to Berlin and entered the Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Applied Arts) in the Berlin suburb of Charlottenberg, where she studied glass design with Harold Bengen and calligraphy with Ludwig Sütterlin. Her studies were interrupted by the onset of World War 1, at which time she returned for several months to Gotha and worked for the Red Cross. In 1915, Höch returned to Berlin, enrolling at the Unterrichtsanstalt des Königlichen Kunstgewerbemuseums (School of Royal Museum of Applied Arts). She entered the graphics and bookbinding program of the well-known Jugendstil artist Emil Orlik, with whom she focused on collage techniques. She also enrolled in evening figure drawing and calligraphy courses. That same year, Höch became romantically involved with the Austrian-born Dada writer and artist Raoul Hausmann, who introduced her to the literary and artistic circle of Club Dada, an avant-garde movement that was active from 1916 until 1922. The group’s members, which included Johannes Baader, Georg Grosz, John Heartfield, Richard Huelsenbeck, and Hausmann, showcased their collective activities in exhibitions, multi-media events, and demonstrations.  In 1918, Höch, together with Hausmann, invented photomontage, a technique in which photographic cutouts from mass media magazines are used as sources for constructed images. For the Dadaists, photomontage was an artistic response to the social and economic chaos caused by World War I. It also served as an anti-academic alternative to German Expressionism, the dominant art movement in Germany at the time. Höch always earned a living while involved with the Dadaists. In 1916 she was hired at Ullstein Verlag, the largest publisher in Berlin. Until 1926, she worked three days a week as a pattern designer and writer on women’s handicrafts. Career Höch’s output was prolific throughout her lifetime, but she is best-known for her work during the Dada years. Her most famous photomontage is *SCHNITT MIT DEM KÜCHENMESSER DADA DURCH DIE LETZTE WEIMARER BIERBAUCHKULTUREPOCHE DEUTSCHLANDS* (Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada through the Last era of the Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germay), 1919-1920, which captures the social and political chaos of postwar Germany.  File: Dada1.jpg  Figure 2.  Source: <https://classconnection.s3.amazonaws.com/216/flashcards/498216/png/3-1424584DC56324CA2CD.png>  This large and multifaceted work combines figures from the Wilhelmine Empire, the military, as well as leading politicians from the moderate Weimar Republic. At the lower right section of the montage are Communists, political radicals, and the Dadaists. These mostly male figures are paired with photographic fragments of active, sporty women—ice skaters, dancers, divers, and actresses—who enliven the piece both aesthetically and conceptually. With these female figures, Höch called to mind the recent enfranchisement of German women, who had been granted suffrage in 1919. The title itself suggests that women, traditionally relegated to the kitchen, could now cut through the ‘beer-belly culture’ of Weimar Germany. Cut With the Kitchen Knife, along with several other of Höch’s work, were featured in the First International Dada Fair of 1920.  Höch’s Dada years were formative, but she went on to chart an independent course in her work that moved beyond the politically radical topics of her Dada contemporaries. In fact, as Berlin Dada eventually self-destructed in 1922 due to internal jealousies, Höch’s painting and photomontage styles continued to evolve. Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, she produced a large number of oil paintings, watercolors, and gouaches that were influenced by leading aesthetic movements of the period, including Orphism, Constructivism, Futurism, Expressionism, and Cubism. It was with photomontage, however, that Höch was able to forge new artistic ground. After her break with Hausmann in 1922, Höch began to focus almost exclusively on female identity and gender relations. Some of her most famous works dealing with gender include *DA DANDY*, 1919, *DAS SCHÖNE MÄDCHEN* (The Beautiful Girl), 1919-1920, and *DADA-TANZ* (Dada Ball), 1922.  File: Dada2.jpg  Figure 3.  Source: <http://www.nachtkabarett.com/ihvh/img/nk\_archdandy\_da-dandy.jpg> Da-Dandy Throughout her fifty-three years of artistic production, Höch engaged in a vast array of styles and subject matter, a feat which makes her art difficult to categorize in art historical terms: anarchic Dada constructions (1918-1922), psychological portraits and investigations of gender relations of the 1920s, ethnographic montages from the late 1920s and 1930s, anti-Nazi parodies from the early 1930s, surrealist fantasies during and after the Third Reich, abstraction during the 1940s and 1950s, and a return to the female image during the 1960s. Much of Höch’s later work shares affinities with that of surrealist artists Hans Arp and Max Ernst.  During the Third Reich, Höch remained in Germany, despite the fact that she was classified as a cultural Bolshevik. By the late 1930s, she was forced to withdraw into artistic and social isolation, which culminated in her moving out of her Berlin studio (with her then husband, Heinz-Kurt Matthies) to a small house in Heiligensee, a northwestern suburb of the city. During the war years, Höch continued to create surrealistic watercolours and oil paintings and spent a lot of time collecting photographic cutouts for her photomontage file. Her works were neither exhibited nor purchased, and she maintained little contact with friends and colleagues, most of whom had gone into exile. Personal Life Höch’s seven-year relationship with Raoul Hausmann was tumultuous and painful. Throughout their time together, Hausmann was married to Elfriede Schaeffer, with whom he had a daughter. Höch wanted children and became pregnant twice during the relationship, but aborted both pregnancies because Hausmann was not willing to leave his wife. As the only woman in the ‘masculinist’ Dada group, Höch also endured, despite her artistic successes, perpetual marginalization and devaluation as an artist. In 1926, on a visit to the Netherlands, Höch met the Dutch poet Til Brugman, with whom she began a lesbian relationship that would last nine years. She lived and worked in Holland with Brugman from 1926 until 1929, when the couple moved back to Berlin. Brugman and Höch remained together until 1935, when Höch began a relationship with Heinz-Kurt Matthies, a well to do businessman 21 years her junior. The couple married in 1938, but Matthies left Höch in 1942 for her friend, the Dutch violinist Nell d’Ebneth. After Matthies’s departure from Heiligensee, Höch became increasingly isolated, both socially and artistically. She remained at her Heiligensee home after the end of the war, becoming once again artistically productive and actively involved with outside cultural events until her death in 1978. Legacy Höch’s decision to remain in Germany during the Nazi period hindered her professional career. Between 1933 and 1945, she was unable to exhibit, lost contact with her colleagues abroad, and sold few works. But already by December 1945, Höch began to exhibit again, first in the Berlin area, later in New York, Rome, and Paris. In 1968, Hans Ohff published Hannah Höch, the most comprehensive biography of the artist to date. In 1976, Höch was given her largest retrospective with 169 works in all media, organized by the Musée d’Art de Moderne de la ville de Paris and the Berlin Nationalgalerie. Höch died at the age of 88 on May 31, 1978. Since the 1970s the artist’s Weimar photomontages are regularly featured in important exhibitions and are given notable critical attention, largely by feminist critics and art historians. Her post-Weimar work, however, receives limited exposure and almost no critical examination. Timeline **1899 1914 1915 1916 1919 1922 1926 1929**  | | | | | | | |  Höch born Moves to Berlin Meets Hausmann Work at Ullstein 1st Dada Exhibition Breaks with Meets Brugman Returns w Brugman  in Gotha to study art Joins Berlin Dada Hausmann Moves to the Hague to Berlin  **1934 1935 1938 1939 1942 1945 1950**  | | | | | | |  Graves Disease Meets Matthies Marries Matthies Couple moves Matthies leaves Höch exhibits Founding member of  Thyroid operation Breaks w Brugman to Heiligensee Höch in Reinickendorf Professional Association  Inner emigration of Visual Artists in Berlin  **1957 1961 1976 1978**  | | | |  Solo exhibition Retrospective at Galerie Mammoth retrospective Dies at age 88  at Galerie Gerd Rosen, Berlin Nierendorf, Berlin: 7 paintings at Modern Art Museum of  26 collages & photomontages 53 photomontages, 33 watercolors Paris & Berlin National Gallery |
| Further reading:  (Berlinische Galerie Museum für Moderne Kunst Photographie und Architektur im Martin-Gropius Bau)  (Kaes, Jay and Dimendberg)  (Lavin)  (Makela, Boswell and Lanchner) |