

Art, culture, politics and society: German art in an expanded field

A Colloquium & *Festschrift* in Memory of Dr. Shulamith Behr (1946-2023)
Honorary Research Fellow and Bosch Lecturer in German Art

The Courtauld Institute of Art

Shulamith Behr

(1946-2023)

**Art, culture, politics and society:
German art in an expanded field**

Colloquium

The Courtauld Institute of Art

Wednesday, 20 March 2024



Shulamith Behr (1946–2023)

The world of German art and visual culture has lost one of its most distinguished and warmly supportive scholars with the death on 7th April 2023 of Dr Shulamith Behr, an Honorary Research Fellow and former senior faculty member of the Courtauld Institute of Art, London. Shulamith was born in Johannesburg in 1946, and graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand with a BA in fine art in 1969, receiving the Henri Lidchi Prize for the top student in history of art, and attaining a first-class BA degree in history of art in 1971. From 1973 to 1978, she was a lecturer in history of art at the University of the Witwatersrand, initially under Heather Martienssen's leadership. Shulamith was an inspiring teacher and researcher, driven by principles of feminism, social justice and her anti-apartheid activism. When I made a BBC Radio 3 documentary, *Kandinsky – A Story of Revolution* in 2017, I interviewed Shulamith in the Courtauld Gallery directly in front of paintings by Kandinsky. Her evocative descriptions demonstrated a sensitivity to his techniques that went beyond the art-historical, revealing her own background as an artist.

In 1990 Shulamith was appointed Bosch Lecturer in German Art at the Courtauld. Her book *Women Expressionists* (1988) and an edited volume *Expressionism Reassessed* (1993), quickly formed an essential part of reading lists for university courses on Expressionism, and she went on to write many other key texts. In addition to developing a focus on the women artists of Expressionism, a central theme of Shulamith's distinctive research was artists and collectors in exile, affected by her own family's experiences and Lithuanian Jewish heritage. A pioneer in the field of Expressionism studies, Shulamith leaves a brilliant legacy, notably with the publication of her long-anticipated monograph, *Women Artists in Expressionism: From Empire to Emancipation* (Princeton University Press, 2022).

Professor Christian Weikop, 2023

Introduction

International experts on German modernism convene for a one-day symposium to celebrate the scholarship and pedagogical practice of Dr Shulamith Behr (1946-2023), treasured colleague, mentor, teacher and friend to so many in the Courtauld community and beyond. Behr's outstanding contribution to the understanding of modern experience through art – in Expressionism, in the apperception of exile, in excavating the critical role of women artists for modernism – is underscored through a set of meticulous research practices and inquiries she pursued with rigour across a range of media and theoretical framings. In tribute to Behr's impact and legacy, a roster of seven renowned scholars of German art in an expanded field present a range of papers covering pre-war, war-time, and post-war subjects written for this occasion, followed by further discussion in panels and question and answer sessions.

Together we reflect upon some of the artists, topics and questions that most interested Shulamith Behr, as scholars offer insight and further the history of art through the lens of her thought. Following the formal proceedings, there will be time for tributes to her legacy and contributions in the field.

Program

Welcome

Dr. Robin Schuldenfrei, Tangen Reader in 20th Century Modernism,
Courtauld Institute of Art.

Opening remarks: Dr. Shulamith Behr as teacher, mentor and colleague

Panel 1 [2:00 – 4.00pm]

Professor Dorothy Price FBA, Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art
and Critical Race Art History, Courtauld Institute of Art

Imagining the Maternal: The Shadow of Death in the Art of Käthe Kollwitz

Dr. Niccola Shearman, Independent art historian

Working Through Woodcut: Ernst Barlach and Käthe Kollwitz in the
Aftermath of WWI

Professor Christian Weikop, Modern and Contemporary German Art,
University of Edinburgh
The 'Arboreal Expressionism' of Karl Schmidt-Rottluff

Dr. Michael Tymkiw, Reader in Art History, University of Essex
Art in Exile, Ludwig Meidner, and Holocaust Knowledge

Discussion panel, questions

Refreshments [4:00 – 4.30pm]

Panel 2 [4:30 – 6.00pm]

Dr Lucy Wasensteiner, author and Director, Liebermann Villa, Berlin
Grete Ring (1887-1952): Dealing in Modernism from Berlin to British Exile

Dr. Ines Schlenker, Independent art historian
Outside the Canon: Else Meidner in Exile

Dr. Glenn Sujo, artist, writer, educator
The Revealed Hand: Cathartic Marks as Evidentiary Witness

Discussion panel, questions

Close

Reception, Tributes [6.00pm]

Professor Peter Vergo (Emeritus), University of Essex

Professor Sarah Wilson, Modern and Contemporary Art, Courtauld Institute
of Art

Professor Elijah Behr, Consultant Cardiologist, St George's, University of
London

Refreshments

8.00pm END

Abstracts

Robin Schuldenfrei, Tangen Reader in 20th Century Modernism, Courtauld Institute of Art

Introduction

Dr. Robin Schuldenfrei is the Tangen Reader in 20th Century Modernism at The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London. She specializes in German modernism, with a focus on architecture, design, and the object. Her latest book is *Objects in Exile: Modernism across Borders, 1930-1960* (2024). Previous publications include *Luxury and Modernism: Architecture and the Object in Germany 1900-1933* (2018) as well as numerous articles, essays and four edited volumes, among them: *Ascendants: Bauhaus Handprints Collected by László Moholy-Nagy* (with Jan Tichy), *Bauhaus Construct: Fashioning Identity, Discourse, and Modernism* (with Jeffrey Saletnik), and *Atomic Dwelling: Anxiety, Domesticity, and Postwar Architecture*.

Professor Dorothy Price, Modern and Contemporary Art and Critical Race Art History, Courtauld Institute of Art

Imaging the Maternal: The Shadow of Death in the Art of Käthe Kollwitz

I am gradually approaching the period in my life when work comes first. When both the boys went away for Easter, I hardly did anything but work. Worked, slept, ate and went for short walks. But above all I worked. And yet I wonder whether the 'blessing' is not missing from such work...formerly, in my so wretchedly limited working time, I was more productive because I was more sensual...Potency, potency is diminishing...

(Käthe Kollwitz, diary entry April 1910)¹

Kollwitz's approach to the maternal is complex. Whilst Paula Modersohn-Becker's radical approach to the pictorial traditions of 'Mother and Child' recasts the genre in order to prise open the category of the female 'Nude', Kollwitz disrupts the conventional renditions of serene motherhood by depicting the maternal as a state of physical absorption and psychic possession. Works such as *Frau mit totem Kind* (*Woman with Dead Child*,

1903) and *Tod und Frau* (*Death and the Woman*, 1910) to name but two examples, stand outside the western cultural tradition of spiritual and dematerialized motherhood symbolized at its height by the Immaculate Conception and the Virgin birth. *Frau mit totem Kind* visualises the unspeakable pain of maternal loss whereas *Tod und Frau* hovers in that uniquely liminal space, peculiar to Kollwitz, between symbolism and social commentary. Both Kollwitz and Modersohn-Becker combine the figure of the mother with the representation of the nude – two poles of femininity that are usually kept apart, the publically available erotic body and the privately reproductive one. Taking my cue from our much missed colleague, Shulamith Behr's career-long engagement with the art and iconography of Expressionist women, this paper argues that the focus on dualities between self-portraits and nudes, nudes and mothers, visual representation and maternal origin, was bound up with conflicts around the role of the artist and that of the mother during the period in which they were working and which they both articulate in their diaries, letters and journals. Specifically, it will focus on Kollwitz's artistic creativity as being categorically bound up with aspects of maternal identity through a close reading of a few selected works.

Professor Dorothy Price FBA is Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art and Critical Race Art History. Her research ranges from German modernism and Black and Asian art in Britain. All of her research is informed by an interest in the operations of race, sexuality and gender in relation to the visual. As a former Editor of *Art History*, she co-edited a number of special issues including *Weimar's Others* (2019); *Decolonizing Art History* (2020), *Remapping British Art* (2021) and *British Art and the Global* (2022). She is author of numerous books and articles including *Representing Berlin* (2003), *Architecture and Design in Europe and America* (2006), *After Dada* (2013), *Women the Arts and Globalization* (2013) and *German Expressionism. Der Blaue Reiter and its Legacies* (2020). She is also known for her curatorial work including *Chantal Joffe: Personal Feeling is the Main Thing* (The Lowry, 2018), *Chantal Joffe. For Esme with Love and Squalor* (Arnolfini 2020), *Making Modernism* (Royal Academy 2022), *Claudette Johnson Presence* (Courtauld 2023) and *Entangled Pasts 1768-Now: Art Colonialism and Change* (Royal Academy 2024).

1. "Ich rücke allmählich in die Periode meines Lebens herein, wo Arbeit an erster Stelle steht. Als beide Jungen Ostern verreist waren habe ich fast nur gearbeitet. Dann noch geschlafen, gegessen, ein wenig spazieren gegangen. Aber vor allem gearbeitet. Und doch weiß ich nicht ob einer solchen Arbeit nicht der "Segen" fehlt...und doch war ich früher in meiner so arg beschnittenen Arbeitszeit produktiver weil ich sinnlicher war...Die Potenz, die Potenz läßt nach" Käthe Kollwitz Diary entry April 1910 in Jutta Bohnke Kollwitz (hrsg.) *Käthe Kollwitz: Die Tagebücher 1908-1943* (Germany: Btb-Verlag, 2007) pp.65-66. Available in translation in Hans Kollwitz (ed.) *The Diaries and Letters of Käthe Kollwitz*, (Northwestern University Press, 1955), p.53.
2. Rosemary Betterton 'Maternal Nudes by Kollwitz and Modersohn-Becker' in *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* (London and New York: Routledge 1996), pp. 20-45.



Women Artists in Expressionism

From Empire to Emancipation

Shulamith Behr

Nicola Shearman, Independent art historian, London

Working through woodcut: Ernst Barlach and Käthe Kollwitz in the aftermath of war

In the summer of 1920, while working on a series of prints to commemorate the loss of her son in the First World War, Käthe Kollwitz (1865-1945) first saw the woodcut prints of Ernst Barlach (1871-1938) on exhibition in Berlin. 'Bowled over' by the experience, she confided in her diary that, 'Barlach has found his way and I have not yet found mine.' What she meant by this is the subject of this proposed paper. How does one assess the cathartic element to the arduous work process that, for each artist, made this the only medium suited to the expression of a personal and universal grief? And how far is it legitimate to speak of a visual empathy that occurs in the viewing of these objects?

Such questions apply on the one hand to the public audience for the prints, and on the other to a system of visual exchanges between the two artists which can be traced in their works from this point onwards. One example of this lies in Barlach's weighty Güstrow 'Angel' (the *Güstrow Memorial*, 1927), into which he worked the face of Kollwitz - supposedly without intention. Studying sculpture, prints, working drawings, and surviving print matrices, the paper will investigate what emerges as a mutual apprehension of the other's creative process. In considering evidence for what the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty would describe as 'a "visible" to the second power', the intention is to approach an understanding of the affective viewing conditions of the combined oeuvres of both woodcut and sculpture.

Nicola Shearman is a freelance art historian, specializing in German and Austrian twentieth-century art. She teaches regularly at the University of Manchester and for Courtauld Short Courses, the V&A and Morley College London. Under the supervision of Shulamith Behr, her PhD (2018) concerned the modernist woodcut print in the aftermath of the First World War in Germany. Her research interests continue to lie in histories of printmaking, in theories of perception originating in the Gestalt school and in the careers of women artists and writers; in 1920s Berlin, Vienna and in exile in the UK. Academic publications include 'Reversal of Values: on the woodblock and its print in German modernist art' in Magdalena Bushart and Henrike Haug (eds), *Sammelband zur Tagung Spur der Arbeit*, (Cologne, 2018), pp. 145-66; and 'Emotional viewing: On finding a visible relief in the German woodcut print, c. 1450-1921', in Gabriele Rippl and Juliet Simpson (eds), *Emotional Objects: Northern Renaissance Afterlives in Object, Image and Word, 1890s-1920s*, *Journal of the Northern Renaissance* special issue 2023.

Professor Christian Weikop, Modern and Contemporary German Art, University of Edinburgh

The 'Arboreal Expressionism' of Karl Schmidt-Rottluff

The art historian Gerhard Wietek once wrote, 'The significance of trees in Schmidt-Rottluff's work deserves considerable attention, for it is not only the wood itself with which he had such a close relationship, but also with its original form.' In my early scholarship on the Brücke group, which included core member Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1884-1976), I coined the term 'arboreal expressionism' to capture the artists shared passion not only for visual representations of trees and forests, but also their expressive engagement with the organic material of wood in printmaking and wood sculpture. In carving human or landscape forms, often using intense colour that appeared to seep out of the fibrous material, the Brücke artists challenged Johann Joachim Winckelmann's neoclassical notion of the aesthetic purity and superiority of Greco-Roman marble sculpture. Instead, they saw themselves as connected to a long Germanic 'wood culture' tradition, while also drawing inspiration from African and Oceanic woodcarving.

Schmidt-Rottluff's woodcuts that creatively utilized the grain of the block responded to Edvard Munch's printmaking techniques, while arguably achieving a greater simplification of form. Until 1913, as Rosa Schapire noted in her catalogue raisonné of his graphic work, the artist printed all his own woodcuts and continued to explore the surface of the woodblock to create texture and depth. From 1937 onwards, Schmidt-Rottluff's work was to feature prominently in the notorious 'degenerate art' exhibitions, only to be 'rehabilitated' after the Second World War. By the 1950s, he had become a respectable elder statesman of the Expressionist movement, hardly influential on a younger generation. His work would have an impact on a young Georg Baselitz (b.1938) though, who was a student at the Akademie der Künste in West Berlin, the institution where Schmidt-Rottluff taught. I will also discuss how Baselitz would go on to develop his own form of 'arboreal expressionism', taking his cues from Schmidt-Rottluff and the Brücke.

Christian Weikop is a Professor in Modern and Contemporary German Art at the University of Edinburgh. His research has focused on pre-1945 German art, especially Expressionism and Dada, but in the last decade he has worked more in a post-1945 field, especially on August Sander, Gerhard Richter, Georg Baselitz, Anselm Kiefer, and Joseph Beuys. His most recent book publication, *Strategy: Get Arts. 35 Artists Who Broke the Rules* (Studies in Photography, Edinburgh University Press, 2021), explored the 'takeover' of Edinburgh College of Art by artists associated with the 'Düsseldorf Scene', an important event of the 1970 Edinburgh International Festival. Christian is also Series Editor for Peter Lang's German Visual Culture.

Dr. Michael Tymkiw PhD, Reader in Art History, University of Essex

Art in Exile, Ludwig Meidner, and Holocaust Knowledge

The art of exiled artists from c. 1933 to 1945 comprised a key area of interest for Shulamith Behr—and one that raises broader methodological questions about how art-in-exile mediates knowledge about the Holocaust. In Behr's writings about the art of exiled artists, Ludwig Meidner emerged as a recurring figure: above all, for his sustained engagement with the subject matter of the Holocaust, which manifested itself most dramatically in his 1942–45 series *Leiden der Juden* in Poland. While hardly the only scholar to have explored Meidner's artistic engagement with the Holocaust, Behr did offer an unusually nuanced account of his work from the National Socialist period, with particular emphasis on how such work reveals what she calls "the different textures and methods that constitute Holocaust knowledge." This paper explores Behr's approach for teasing out such "different textures and methods," which ultimately converged around her placement of Meidner's work as an exiled artist in close dialogue with contemporary visual and textual evidence concerning the Holocaust. Through this focus, the paper seeks to ask what Behr's approach reveals about her place within the larger body of scholarship that has examined the fraught relationship between the work of exiled artists and the systematic extermination of European Jews.

Michael Tymkiw is Reader in Art History at the University of Essex, where he began in 2015 following a postdoctoral fellowship at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz - Max-Planck-Institut. Michael received a BA from Yale University and a PhD in Art History from the University of Chicago, where he also earned an MBA. Michael's research largely focuses on issues of spectatorship in modern and contemporary art and visual culture, and his writings include *Nazi Exhibition Design and Modernism* (2018) and articles in various journals such as *The Art Bulletin*, *Art History*, the *Journal of Design History*, and the *Oxford Art Journal*.

Dr Lucy Wasensteiner, Director, Liebermann Villa, Berlin

Grete Ring (1887-1952): Dealing in Modernism from Berlin to British Exile

The Berlin-born Grete Ring (1887-1952) was among the best-known and most successful art historians and dealers of her generation. She was among the first women to complete a PhD in art history in 1912; following stations at museums in Munich and Berlin she joined the Berlin dealership of Paul Cassirer in 1919. She became known as the “art historical heart” of the business, exhibiting and selling works – among others – by Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, George Grosz, and by Oskar Kokoschka, with whom she shared a lifelong friendship. Following the death of Cassirer in 1926 she took over his business together with her colleague Walter Feilchenfeldt. In 1928 – in London to promote an exhibition of Oskar Kokoschka – Ring was described by the Yorkshire Post as “the only woman art dealer in Europe of real importance”.

In 1938, at the age of 51, Grete Ring was forced – on grounds of her mother’s Judaism – to depart Berlin for British exile. She remained based in London until her death in 1952. This talk sets out to explore Ring’s career and her network between Berlin and London. It asks what has survived of her extraordinary work, what role exile played in obscuring her legacy in the post-war years, and the extent to which her life and work can today be reconstructed.

Dr Lucy Wasensteiner is director of the Liebermann Villa in Berlin. She studied law at Bristol and Oxford Universities and completed her MA and PhD in art history at the Courtauld Institute under the supervision of Shulamith Behr. Her research explores the art of German-speaking Europe from 1871, National Socialist cultural policy and its international implications, UK-German cultural relations and provenance research. She has previously worked as an Associate Lecturer at the Courtauld Institute of Art and between 2018 and 2020 as a Lecturer in the Art History Department of the University of Bonn. Her recent publications include *Twentieth Century German Art: Answering “Degenerate Art” in 1930s London* (2019) and *Sites of Interchange: Modernism, Politics and Culture between Britain and Germany 1919-1955* (2021).

Dr. Ines Schlenker, Independent art historian, London

Outside the Canon: Else Meidner in Exile

'There are plants that thrive everywhere, when you transplant them, but I could never grow new roots.'¹

In her magisterial *Women Artists in Expressionism* (2022) Shulamith Behr has explored not just the contribution of women artists to avant-garde art in early twentieth-century Germany but also the reasons why they "disappeared from the text" after 1933. Else Meidner (1901-1987) is another example of the mechanisms at work that excluded women artists from the canon.

Else Meidner had already set out on a promising artistic career in Weimar Germany when she was forced to emigrate to Britain with her husband, the painter Ludwig Meidner, in 1939. In London she struggled to gain an audience for her art. In an environment where modern German art was almost entirely neglected, both her style and subject matter marked her out as "different". After 1945, when modernist abstraction triumphed, her adherence to figurative art marginalised her further. Despite some limited artistic success, she increasingly suffered from loneliness and depression. Even during the last third of the twentieth century, when women artists of her generation "reappeared", as Shulamith Behr highlights, Else Meidner remained virtually unknown. Her large oeuvre of paintings, drawings and prints as well as poems, shaped by the experience of exile and lack of artistic recognition, still awaits critical appreciation.

Ines Schlenker is an independent art historian with a research focus on National Socialist, "degenerate" and émigré art. *Hitler's Salon*, her study of the officially approved art in the Third Reich as shown at the *Great German Art Exhibition*, was published in 2007. She wrote the catalogue raisonné of the paintings of the Vienna-born émigré Marie-Louise von Motesiczky (2009) and co-edited the artist's correspondence with the writer Elias Canetti (2011). Recent publications include *Capturing Time*, a study of the life and work of the émigré artist Milein Cosman (2019), and *Chagall* (2022). She is a member of the committee of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies.

1. Else Meidner in Josef Paul Hodin, *Aus den Erinnerungen von Else Meidner*, Darmstadt, 1979.

Dr. Glenn Sujo, artist, writer, educator

The Revealed Hand: Cathartic Marks as Evidentiary Witness

'The hand means action: it grasps, at times it would seem to think (...) [Hands] are the instrument of creation (...) an organ of knowledge.'¹

'Human creations are easily destroyed, and science and technology, which have built them up, can also be used for their annihilation.'²

Hands register residual knowledge of traumatic injury that, when translated into marks and traces, pictorial-scriptorial hieroglyphs, have the unerring capacity to communicate the range and nuance of voice, thought and embodied feeling. In his essay *In Praise of Hands*, art historian Henri Focillon describes hands as this 'other intelligence'.

By contrast, Freud's remarks on humanity's destructive capability, written after the Great War, reveal an underlying tension between the drive toward individual creative freedom and civilization's demands for conformity, the latter foreshadowing the totalitarian State's inimical control over the individual. The graphic cycles of Max Slevogt, Jakob Steinhardt and Ludwig Meidner portend an imaginary of terror, their re-actualization and re-enactment becoming what one Auschwitz survivor described as 'landscapes of the metropolis of death', in a reference to the concentrationary universe as a whole. A wave of less well-known graphic cycles produced by Lea Grundig, Leo Haas and Ludwig Meidner among others, during and after WWII, affirms an unusual capacity to know, name and, for brief moments, overcome extreme suffering. What surprises is not that their visions witness the end of civilization, but that they describe the often perplexing or unexpected fact of our survival.

Dr. Glenn Sujo: Polemical contributions to the recovery of drawing language in art education and an attention to the discourses of visual culture after the Holocaust are underpinned by a vibrant studio practice. These activities inform discussion of 'Art of the Holocaust: Perplexity, Meaning' in *The Cambridge History of the Holocaust*, Cambridge University Press (forthcoming); 'Yehuda Bacon: The Cursive Hand' in *The Cold Shower of a New Life: The Post-War Diaries of a Child Survivor*, Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2019; 'Müselmann: A Distilled Image of the Lager' in *Concentrationary Memories*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2014. Earlier curatorial projects included: *Legacies of Silence, The Visual Arts and Holocaust Memory* (Imperial War Museum, London, 2001); *Artists Witness the Shoah* (Graves Art Gallery Sheffield, 1995); and, *Drawing on these Shores: A View of British Drawing & its Affinities* (Brighton & Bath Festivals, national tour 1993-94). For a full account, see www.glennsujo.com.

1. Henri Focillon, *La Vie des Formes* (The Life of Forms in Art) 1934.
2. Sigmund Freud, *Die Zukunft einer Illusion* (The Future of an Illusion) 1927.



Käthe Kollwitz (1867 -1945)
Studies of the artist's left hand, c. 1891
pen and ink wash, 320 x 238 mm
Reproduced by permission of The Trustees of the British Museum

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Shulamith Behr (1946-2023)

Art, culture, politics and society: German art in an expanded field
Colloquium held at The Courtauld Institute of Art, Vernon Square, Penton
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Wednesday 20th March 2024

The event was organised by The Research Forum, Courtauld Institute of Art,
London

Convenors: Dr. Robin Schuldenfrei, Dr. Glenn Sujo

Speakers: Professor Elijah Behr, Professor Dorothy Price FBA, Dr. Ines
Schlenker, Dr. Robin Schuldenfrei, Dr. Niccola Shearman, Dr. Glenn Sujo,
Dr. Michael Tymkiw, Professor Peter Vergo, Dr Lucy Wasensteiner, Professor
Christian Weikop, Professor Sarah Wilson.

A collection of essays written for this occasion will form part of the planned
memorial publication or *Festschrift* reflecting the range of subjects and
original research presented here. Voluntary contributions toward the
production of this volume are greatly appreciated and will be duly credited.

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Forum Team

This event will be recorded and made available online
[YouTube.com/@TheCourtauld](https://www.youtube.com/@TheCourtauld)

Notes

