

Female heads dominate this exhibition, specifically through Kollwitz's marked preoccupation with self-portraiture, embodying a range of emotional states from defiance to resignation, through both confidence and profound sadness. Here we see two self-portraits from 1924, when Kollwitz was in her fifties, in which she takes very different stylistic approaches, corresponding to her choice of printing method; one a naturalistic lithograph, the other, a woodcut, being more stylised and symbolic. The latter coincides with the production of the latest series partly presented here, *War*, including *The Widow* (1922), a figure she clearly identified with.

The most dramatic image of the exhibition is *Woman with a Dead Child* (1903), an etching featuring her younger son Peter, who was to die eleven years later. There is a brutality to the image, not just in its subject, but the way it is executed. Here we see three versions, each overworked variously with gold tone and wash, graphite and charcoal with a kind of restlessness. Easily they can be seen to epitomise a woman artist's fight against all odds to sustain a creative life.

Portrait of the Artist: Käthe Kollwitz is a British Museum and Ikon partnership exhibition.

Find out more

The exhibition at Ikon is accompanied by a publication including essays by Max Egremont and Frances Carey. Available from Ikon Shop and online for the duration of the exhibition.

Download Ikon's free app to find out more about our Käthe Kollwitz exhibition. Simply visit Apple's App Store and search for 'Ikon Gallery'. Spare headphones for your use are available on request. Developed with ARTiMBARC.

Sofia Hultén

I lived in Birmingham between 1976 and 1989. It's a relatively short period of time (I have now lived longer elsewhere) but it had a lasting effect on what I do. Every time I come back to Birmingham I think, "oh, I must come back to document this or that thing." It ranges from a particular kind of brickwork in the areas where I lived as a child through to things people say that are funny.

Now based in Berlin, Sofia Hultén (b. 1972) grew up in Birmingham during years of industrial decline. Her ongoing concern with manufacturing and implications of material production is summarised by three themes that connect the works in this exhibition: material literally found on the street, atomising and recasting in its own form and causality tied in a knot. The first applies to *Altered Fates* (2013), a video in which we see the artist modifying and replacing the contents of a skip: a hole is cut in a piece of plastic, a knot tied in a rope, a rubbish bag turned inside out. This evidences her desire to tread lightly, not messing too much with things in the world, controlling the causal effect of her work.

Particle Boredom (2017), seen here in the first room, at once involves a process of atomisation – through shredding and grinding – and its reversal. It is the result of latex moulds made from a number of irregularly shaped boards which the artist found on the street before reducing them to their constituent wood chip material. This was then used to recast them to replicate their former state. Hence the pun on "particle board" in the work's title that underscores the absurdity of processing what is already processed, without creating any obvious visible change.

The third theme most obviously occurs in *Speculative Fiction* (2016), which takes a common, composite structure: a street post, bicycle frame, locks, a metal hoop and paint. By multiplying and altering the arrangement, Hultén presents simultaneous histories in which the normal sequence of events is scrambled. The title, referring to a genre of science fiction, invites us to consider ideas of space time and travel, in which the temporal order of an event loops and shifts.

This unnatural narrative ties together many other works seen here. For example, there are three iterations of a drain cover, at once covered in leaves, in a state of installation and surfaced with asphalt (*Reality Plural*, 2017). Also several permutations of dropping, eating, polishing and disposing of an apple (*Nonsequences*, 2013). A reverse logic is at play in the ongoing series *Pattern Recognition* (2017), based on puzzles devised in the mid-1960s by computer scientist Mikhail Bongard, credited with laying the foundations of machine learning. Hultén says,

I was interested in the reverse engineering needed to work out the solutions. One is presented with an answer and must search for the question. The pieces are a coming together of these puzzles of perception with the workshop tool walls, for me the place of mechanical problem solving.

There are discrete works, each containing two parts; for example, the conjoined basketball rings (*Down is Up and Up is Down*, 2013) and the top part of a pair of jeans (*In the Genes*, 2014). Of the latter, Hultén says, "I was going to make a video trying on jeans found in the street, which is disgusting for some people, but it doesn't bother me." Instead, she zipped one part of the jeans with a part of her own: "for me it is about something known meeting something unknown, the strangeness and humour of that."

Here's the Answer, What's the Question? is organised in collaboration with Museum Tinguely, Basel.

Find out more

The exhibition at Ikon is accompanied by a publication including an interview with Sofia Hultén. Available from Ikon Shop and online for the duration of the exhibition.

Anna Molska

Anna Molska (b. 1983) explores socialist utopias through film in order to comment on modern life, in this instance that of the industrial worker. Her twelve minute film *The Weavers* (2009) is based on Gerhart Hauptmann's 1892 play of the same name, about the 1844 rebellion of Silesian weavers against poverty and harsh working conditions.

Here, the play is retold with untrained actors in the context of a working mine in the Silesian region – a retired Polish miner is the protagonist – in order to assert its contemporary relevance. Notably, the film lacks any depiction of the revolt itself. According to Molska, her intention is to eschew narrative convention of the play by sidestepping the central event, like "removing fear from a horror movie".

Hauptmann's play is also the subject of a number of prints by Käthe Kollwitz which are being exhibited on the first floor.

Associated Events

Talk – Käthe Kollwitz

Wednesday 20 September, 6–7pm – £3

Booking essential

Join author Max Egremont, for a discussion of Käthe Kollwitz's life-long relationship with her birthplace, the historic city of Königsberg, home of the philosopher Immanuel Kant and an outpost of the enlightenment.

Ikon at Centrala

Unit 4 Minerva Works

158 Fazeley Street, Birmingham B5 5RT

Thursday 2 November, 6–9pm – FREE

Booking essential

Marking the centenary of the October Revolution, Ikon has partnered with Centrala on an evening of talks and films. Polish artist Anna Molska discusses her film, *The Weavers* followed by a screening of Ralf Kirsten's 1987 film *Käthe Kollwitz: Images of a Life*. In association with Centrala and Behind the Curtain.

Sofia Hultén in Conversation

Wednesday 15 November, 6–7pm – £3

Booking essential




Enjoy a discussion on Sofia Hultén's current exhibition, referencing popular science and science fiction with friend and graphic designer James Langdon. The galleries will be open between 5–6pm for visitors to enjoy the exhibition of drawings, films and sculpture, before the talk.

Find out more

Visit the Resource Room where you can find a selection of books, audio and film.

If you have any questions about the exhibition please ask the Information Assistants in the gallery.

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Ikon Gallery
Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HS
0121 248 0708
www.ikon-gallery.org

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Exhibition Guide

Käthe Kollwitz

Portrait of the Artist

13 September – 26 November

Sofia Hultén

Here's the Answer, What's the Question?

13 September – 26 November

Anna Molska

The Weavers

13 September – 26 November

Käthe Kollwitz

Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945) was a leading artist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, renowned for the emotional power of her printmaking, drawing and sculpture. This exhibition, a selection of works from the British Museum complemented by loans from a private collection and the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, demonstrates her extraordinary conflation of technical virtuosity, artistic sensibility and poignant subject matter.

Born in Königsberg (now Kaliningrad), Kollwitz lived in a poor working-class district of Berlin for most of her life. Experimenting with printmaking partly because it was a reproducible art form that could reach a wide public, her mastery of graphic art quickly established her reputation in Germany, then abroad, most notably in Russia, China and the United States.

This exhibition looks at Kollwitz's work through the exploration of three themes: her social and political commentary, self-portraits and portraits of working women, and the role of an empathetic and suffering mother.

The first of these is traceable through a series of six plates, *A Weavers' Revolt* (1893–97), of which one lithograph and two etchings are shown here. They were inspired by Gerhart Hauptmann's play *The Weavers* (1892), ostensibly about the failed revolt of Silesian weavers against mechanisation in 1844. Her next series (published in 1908) took the subject of the early sixteenth century Peasants' War, with particular focus on the dynamic role of one of the rebels, Black Anna.

A revolutionary spirit is similarly captured in *The Carmagnole*, a single print from 1901, based on Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) set in London and Paris during the French Revolution. Transposed onto a German street scene, Kollwitz includes a group of mostly women dancing around a guillotine.



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