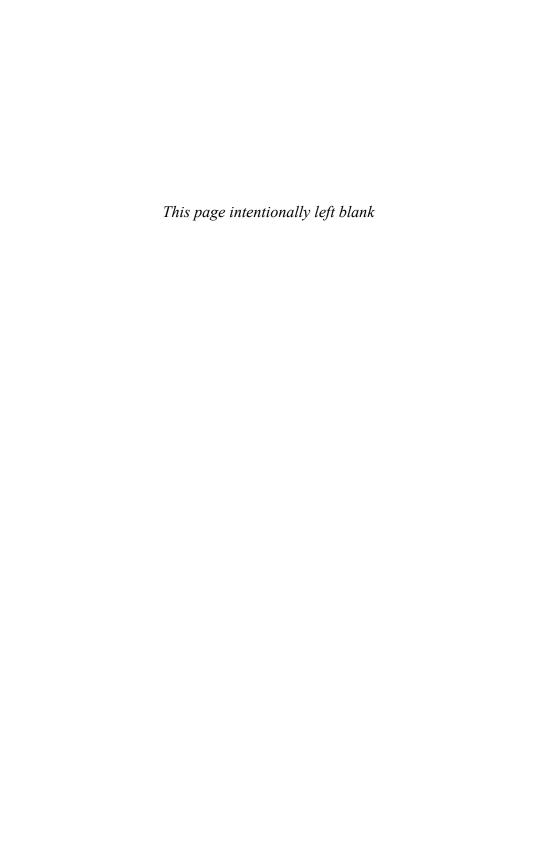


The Aesthetics of Loss

German Women's Art of the First World War

CLAUDIA SIEBRECHT

THE AESTHETICS OF LOSS



The Aesthetics of Loss

German Women's Art of the First World War

CLAUDIA SIEBRECHT





Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP, United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.

It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries

© Claudia Siebrecht 2013

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

First Edition published in 2013

Impression: 1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted by law, by licence, or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the address above

You must not circulate this work in any other form and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

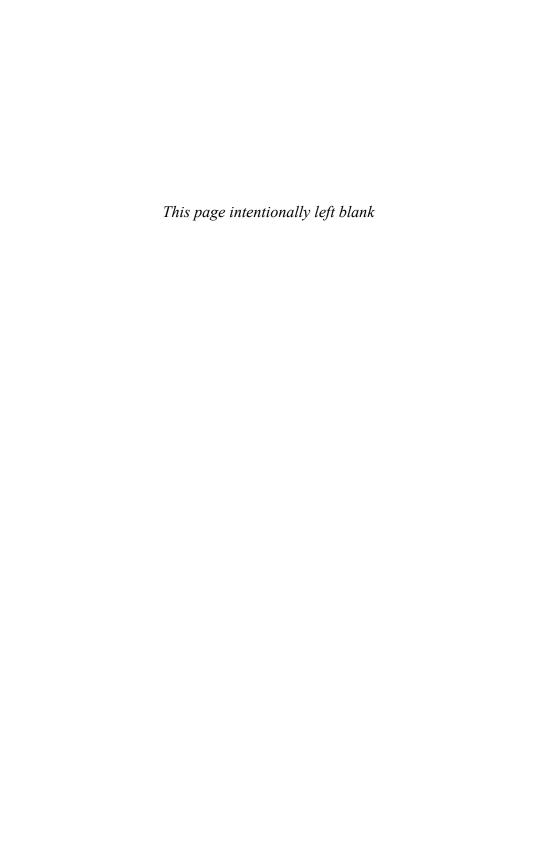
Data available

ISBN: 978-0-19-965668-4

As printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

Links to third party websites are provided by Oxford in good faith and for information only. Oxford disclaims any responsibility for the materials contained in any third party website referenced in this work.

For Ed



Acknowledgements

This book started as a doctoral thesis at Trinity College Dublin and I would like to thank my supervisor Alan Kramer for his faith in my project from the start, his advice and support beyond the course of my PhD. A number of key conversations and exchanges have contributed to make this book what it is. Many stimulating discussions with John Horne stand out and I would like to thank him for his generosity with time and insightful commentary. I would also like to thank Jay Winter for his encouragement, for a lesson in ambivalence, and his continuing interest and support beyond my viva. I am grateful to Annette Becker, Tony McElligott, Matthew Stibbe, and Helmut Walser-Smith, all of whom have provided, at different stages, critical insights to my work. A special thanks goes to Paul Betts, who has given me much advice and who has been a very supportive and inspiring colleague at Sussex University.

I was fortunate in having been part of a community of postgraduate students at Trinity College Dublin studying the First World War, and our collective exchange of ideas and involvement in the International Society for First World War Studies and its stimulating conferences were an important foundation for this project. I would like to thank Heather Jones, Jennifer O'Brien, Catriona Pennell, Christoph Schmidt-Supprian, Daniel Steinbach, and Vanessa Ther for their friendship and moral support. Friends and colleagues who have made a difference include Paolo Brunori, Andreas Corcoran, Richard Kirwan, Nadine Rossol, and Martina Salvante.

My research project was made possible through the generous support of the Irish Research Council of the Humanities and Social Sciences and a research scholarship awarded by the German Historical Institute in London in the final year of my PhD. I would also like to thank Trinity College Dublin for a one-year research studentship and the Grace Lawless Lee Fund at TCD for a summer research grant.

The publication of a book with around fifty illustrations was made feasible thanks to the copyright-holding individuals and institutions who have been extremely helpful and generous in granting me permissions and providing me with images. I am deeply grateful to Karin Hansen and Dr Thomas Hansen; Ralf Müller; Kai von Schauroth; the *Kupferstichkabinett Berlin*, the *Staatsbibliothek Berlin*; the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* in Berlin, the *Käthe Kollwitz Museum Köln*, the *Kreismuseum Schönebeck*, the *Rheinisches Landesmuseum* in Bonn; and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC (Rosenwald Collection).

I would like to acknowledge the support offered by my new institutional home, the University of Sussex, and I would like to thank the School of History, Art History, and Philosophy for financing the coloured-plate section. My new colleagues Hester Barron, Saul Dubow, Claire Langhamer, Gideon Reuveni, Clive Webb, and Gerhard Wolf have made Sussex a welcoming and friendly environment in which this project was brought to a close.

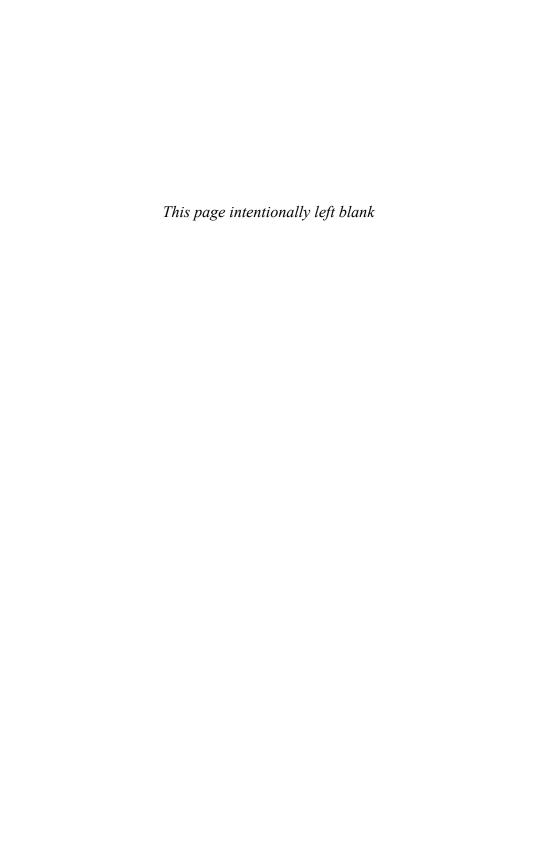
My editors at Oxford University Press, Stephanie Ireland and Cathryn Steele, and my copy-editor Richard Mason, have been supportive, professional, and a pleasure to work with.

Family, friends, and friends of friends have willingly offered me board and lodging in Berlin, Düsseldorf, Hamburg, London, Munich, Nuremberg, Stuttgart, and Vienna, and have made research trips enjoyable. I would like to thank the Madigan family for opening their home to me in Dublin and Susanne Frank for her friendship. My parents Ulrike and Friedhelm Siebrecht have been a source of unfailing support and I would like to thank them for their encouragement. My siblings and their partners Dorothee and Marcus and Philipp and Nadine have always been there and helped me where and when they could.

My greatest debt is to Edward Madigan who has been there for the best and worst parts of this project and without whom this book would not exist.

Contents

List of Figures	xi
List of Plates	xiii
ist of Abbreviations	
Introduction: War Experience, Visual Narrative, and Identity	1
1. Female Artists and Cultural Mobilization for War	23
2. The Toll of the Long War	52
3. Art and Grief	75
4. Mourning Mothers	104
5. Resurrection, Rebirth, and the Limits of Sacrificial Ideology	
Conclusion	149
Appendix I: Statistical Overview	153
Appendix II: Short Biographies	
Sources and Bibliography	
Index	185



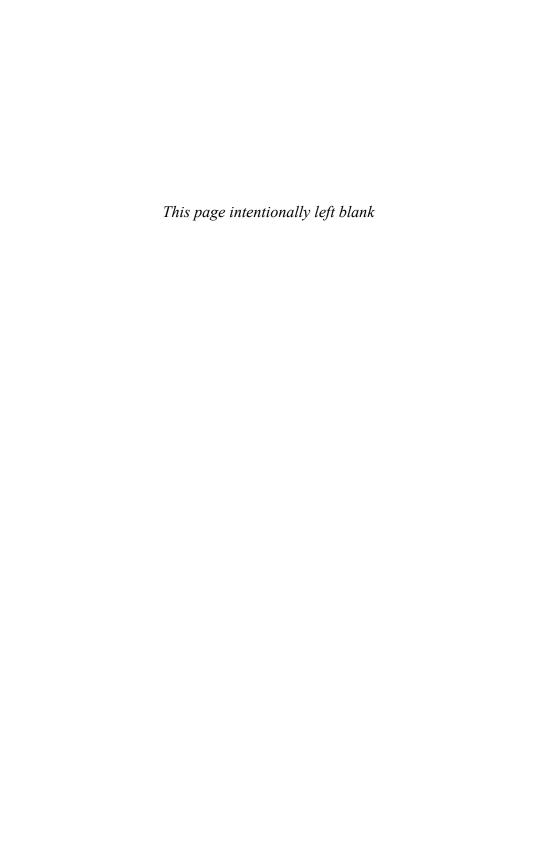
List of Figures

0.1	Käthe Kollwitz, Die trauernden Eltern (The Grieving Parents), 1932.	2
1.1	Lina von Schauroth, Einholung der Liebesgaben (Collection of 'Gifts of Love'), 1915.	33
1.2	Dora Nauth, Grenzsoldat (Frontier Guard), 1914.	38
1.3	Dora Hitz, Quo Vadis, Italia?, 1915.	42
1.4	Anni Meyer, Opfertag in Bayern (Day of Sacrifice in Bavaria), 1916.	46
1.5	Ida Carola Stroever, Helft unsern Kriegsgefangenen im Feindesland (Help our Prisoners of War in the Land of the Enemy), 1916.	49
1.6	Ilse Hoeltz, Ausstellung für Kriegsfürsorge (Exhibition for War Charity), 1916.	50
2.1	Sella Hasse, Kriegsweihnacht 1914 (War Christmas 1914), 1914.	58
2.2	Sella Hasse, Russische Kriegsgefangene mit Förderwagen I (Russian Prisoners of War with Mine Car I), 1915–16.	62
2.3	Martha Schrag, Die Pflegerin (The Nurse), 1915.	63
2.4	Sella Hasse, Die Fittiche des Todes (The Wings of Death), 1914–16.	67
2.5	Maria Caspar-Filser, <i>Toter auf Schlachtfeld (Dead Body on Battlefield)</i> , 1914/15.	69
2.6	Margarete Kubicka, ohne Title (untitled), 1918.	71
2.7	Sella Hasse, Beschwörung (Invocation), 1915.	72
2.8	Lotte Prechner, Aufschrei (Scream), 1915.	74
3.1	Sella Hasse, Heldenbeweinung (Lamentation for Heroes), 1914–18.	82
3.2	Käte Lassen, Trauernde Frau vor Düne (Mourning Woman at Dune), 1916.	84
3.3	Käthe Kollwitz, Weinende Frau (Crying Woman), 1918.	85
3.4	Ottilie Roederstein, Kummer (mit landschaftlichem Hintergrund) (Grief [with Scenic Background]), 1918.	86
3.5	Ottilie Roederstein, Kummer (Grief), c.1916.	87
	Sella Hasse, Der Gram (Die Entbehrung) (Grief [Deprivation]), 1917.	88
	Käte Lassen, Frauenzug (Women's Procession), 1914–18.	92
	Sella Hasse, Frauen in der Kirche (Women in the Church), 1918.	93
	Lotte B. Prechner, Trauernde in der Kirche (Bereaved in the Church), c.1918.	94
	Martha Schrag, Klage (Lamentation), 1916.	95
	Margarethe Goetz, <i>Untitled</i> , 1917.	97
	Eva Schmidt, Verlassenes Grab (Abandoned Grave), 1915.	101
	Gerda Luise Schmidt, An die deutschen Frauen und Mädchen (To the German Women and Girls), 1918.	110

4.2	Käthe Kollwitz, <i>Das Bangen (Anxiety</i>), 1914.	115
4.3	Käthe Kollwitz, Stehende Mutter, Säugling ans Gesicht drückend (Standing Mother, Pressing Infant to her Face), 1915.	117
4.4	Dora Brandenburg-Polster, Frauenopfer (Women's Sacrifice), 1915.	118
4.5	Sella Hasse, Mater Dolorosa auf den Schlachtfeldern (Mater Dolorosa on the Battlefields), 1916.	120
4.6	Auguste von Zitzewitz, Den Müttern (To the Mothers), 1918.	122
4.7	Katharina Heise, Beweinung (Lamentation), 1918.	123
4.8	Hannah Höch, Pietà, 1918.	124
4.9	Otto Dix, Mater Dolorosa, 1918.	127
5.1	Ottilie Roederstein, <i>Das Schweißtuch der Veronika (The Veil of Veronica</i>), 1918.	133
5.2	Mizi Otten-Friedmann, Es ist vollbracht (It is Accomplished), 1918.	135
5.3	Käte Lassen, Kriegsinvalide, Unter den Linden Berlin (War Invalid, Unter den Linden, Berlin), 1919.	137
5.4	Sella Hasse, Kriegswitwe (War Widow), 1918.	140
5.5	Käthe Kollwitz, Die Witwe (The Widow), 1918.	141
5.6	Käte Lassen, Die Witwe (The Widow), 1919.	145
5.7	Luise Deicher, Witwe (Widow), 1919.	146
5.8	Martha Jäger, Eure Kinder brauchen Frieden und Brot. Darum Frauen: Wählt! (Your Children Need Peace and Bread. Therefore Women: Vote!), 1918.	147

List of Plates

- Plate 1. Katharina Heise, *Tod dem russischen Bären (Death to the Russian Bear*), 1916.
- Plate 2. Lina von Schauroth, *Liebesgaben an die Front* (Gifts of Love to the Front), 1916.
- Plate 3. Magdelena Koll, Bremer Soldatenheime (Bremen Soldiers' Homes), 1917.
- Plate 4. Lina von Schauroth, Der Soldat (The Soldier), 1915.
- Plate 5. Katharina Heise, Krieg (War), 1916.
- Plate 6. Katharina Heise, Trauerzug (Funeral Procession), 1916.



List of Abbreviations

BDF Bund deutscher Frauenvereine

DA Dehmel-Archiv, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg

DDP Deutsche Demokratische Partei
DTA Deutsches Tagebucharchiv
DVP Deutsche Volkspartei

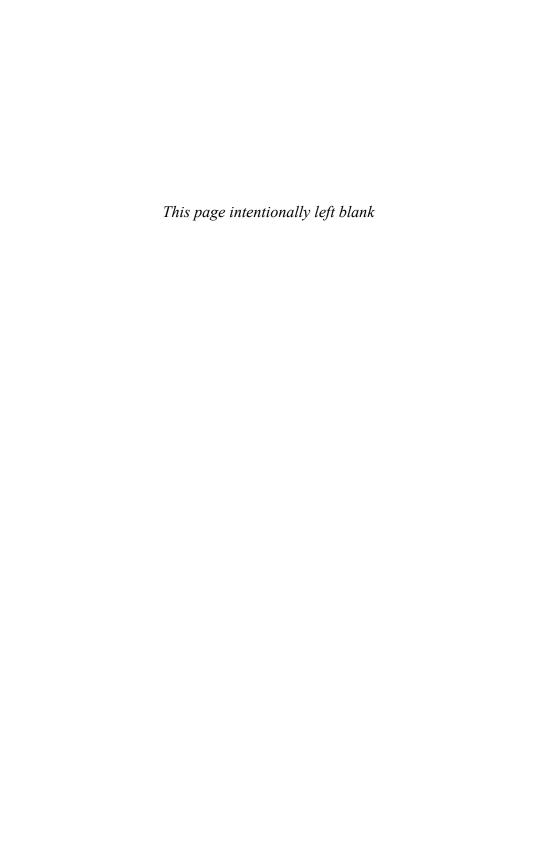
Eph Ephesians

GDR German Democratic Republic

GSPK Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz

HLA Helene Lange Archiv
IWM Imperial War Museum
LAB Landesarchiv Berlin
NFD Nationaler Frauendienst
NL Nachlass (personal papers)

SAdK Stiftung Akademie der Künste, Berlin
SPD Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
Stellv. Genkdo Stellvertretendes Generalkommando
VdBK Verein der Berliner Künstlerinnen
V4terländischer Frauenverein



Introduction

War Experience, Visual Narrative, and Identity

In August 1932, Käthe Kollwitz unveiled her sculpture Die trauernden Eltern (The Grieving Parents) at the German military cemetery at Eesen Roggeveld in Flanders, where her son Peter, who was killed at the front in October 1914, was buried (Fig. 0.1).¹ The occasion was a moment of public commemoration, but it also had a deep personal significance for the renowned artist, who had conceived of the idea of creating a memorial to her son just weeks after she learnt of his death.² As her diaries and letters from the time reveal, Kollwitz was grief-stricken by her loss, and the process of creating the memorial was a painful one that was frequently interrupted by periods during which she felt overwhelmed by emotional distress and daunted by the magnitude of her self-appointed task. She often doubted that her art could adequately reflect the nature of her son's sacrifice, was tormented by the artistic challenge, and feared that she might not be able to complete her work. This distress resulted largely from the struggle to find meaning in her son's death, a theme that features heavily in her correspondence with her elder son Hans.³ As she writes in her diary and letters in December 1914, Kollwitz initially sought to design a memorial to honour the sacrifice of her son and his generation and to express gratitude to the German war dead for what they had given. 4 Yet ultimately The Grieving Parents focused on the bereaved and their emotional anguish and it embodies her personal experience of loss. The sculpture now stands facing over twenty-five thousand German war dead and, situated in close proximity to buried British and Belgian soldiers of the First World War, the humility of her design captures an enduring sense of sorrow over death in war.

For Kollwitz, the installation of the memorial was a highly symbolic event, reuniting a bereaved mother with the remains of her fallen son. During the war years, the artist had not been able to visit her son's grave in Belgium and her request for the repatriation of his body, like almost all such appeals, was rejected. The desire to be in charge of, and near to, the material remains of the dead has been a consistent

¹ Today both Peter's remains and the statues are at the German military cemetery of Vladlso in Flanders where they were moved according to the German Belgian War Graves Agreement of 1954.

² Diary Käthe Kollwitz, 1 December 1914, Käthe Kollwitz, 'Die Tagebücher, 1908–1943', ed. Jutta Bohnke-Kollwitz (Berlin: Siedler, 1999), p. 177.

³ Jutta Bohnke-Kollwitz, ed., Käthe Kollwitz: Briefe an den Sohn, 1904–1945 (Berlin: Siedler, 1992).

⁴ Käthe Kollwitz–Hans Kollwitz, 18 December 1914, in Bohnke-Kollwitz, ed., *Käthe Kollwitz*, p. 92; Diary Käthe Kollwitz, 3 December 1914, Kollwitz, 'Die Tagebücher, 1908–1943', p. 177.



Fig. 0.1. Käthe Kollwitz, *Die trauernden Eltern (The Grieving Parents*), 1932. Vladslo, Belgium, author's photograph, 2012.

feature of human responses to death throughout history.⁵ Scholars highlight the anthropological function of burial rites in aiding the living in their attempts to come to terms with bereavement and accept permanent separation.⁶ Yet the upheaval of war means that the exact location, time, and circumstances of a soldier's death are often difficult or impossible to reconstruct. Death often came as a very sudden shock in the First World War, as in other conflicts, for families received the news in a telegram, post factum, and without being able to perform any rites or rituals to ease the transition. The precise details regarding a man's death at the front were generally not conveyed in the official death notification but often communicated by his comrades, and the violent nature of wartime death frequently hindered and prevented the recovery or burial of soldiers' remains, thus obstructing closure.⁷ This wartime separation of the mourner from the dead had a fundamental impact on private civilian mourning.

⁵ Gail Holst-Warhaft, *The Cue for Passion: Grief and its Political Uses* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 15.

⁶ Luc Capdevila and Danièle Voldman, War Dead: Western Societies and the Casualties of War (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 114; Douglas J. Davies, Death, Ritual and Belief: The Rhetoric of Funerary Rites (London and Washington, DC: Cassel, 1997); Douglas J. Davies, 'Burial Rites', in Encyclopedia of Death and Dying, ed. Glennys Howarth and Oliver Leaman (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 67–9.

⁷ Holst-Warhaft, *The Cue for Passion*, pp. 78–123.

Introduction 3

Some women stoically adapted rituals of bereavement to the circumstances of the war, or invented new customs that met their emotional needs. While Kollwitz tried to find comfort in the thought that her son was buried along with his comrades in Belgium, the geographical distance to his grave clearly added to her burden and prolonged her grief. The unique circumstances of wartime loss prompted the artist to develop her own rituals of bereavement, which included turning her son's former bedroom into a shrine that she routinely visited and decorated.8 His bed, she wrote in February 1915, had become something of a substitute grave. On birthdays and religious holidays, she would regularly bring seasonal flowers to his room, and take time to grieve and reminisce. Women in other belligerent countries were also greatly distressed by the distances that separated them from the remains of their male relations. 10 In France, the official regulations regarding the burial of the war dead caused much civic discontent, and some women clandestinely exhumed and reinterred the remains of fallen relations.¹¹ For Kollwitz, installing a permanent representation of herself in the cemetery where her son was buried allowed her symbolically to transcend the wartime separation of the mourner from the remains of the fallen soldier.

Yet overcoming dislocation was not the same as overcoming bereavement. The overall spirit of the memorial and body language of the mother and father figures, as Kollwitz referred to them, testify to the continuing presence of grief in Kollwitz's life, eighteen years after her son's death in Flanders. The mounted female figure is a grieving mother on her knees, hunching forward with her arms folded over her chest. Her gaze is fixed on the ground, near to the spot where her son now shares his final resting place with nineteen of his comrades. Although the mounted male figure, representing the father of the soldier, kneels by her side, the two are neither touching nor comforting each other. They are not represented as a unit, but as two individuals, emotionally isolated and wounded by their loss. The sculptures show the private agony of mourners lost in their own pain, exposing the all-encompassing nature of grief and individual trauma that was not, and could not, be shared, even with a spouse. Kollwitz and her husband Karl had travelled to Belgium for the unveiling of the memorial in 1932 and, in her diary, she described the moment when she very consciously recognized herself in the female figure, on her last visit

Susan R. Grayzel, Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War (Chapel Hill, NC, and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 239–40; Jay Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural

History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 22-8.

⁸ Regina Schulte, 'Käthe Kollwitz. Das Opfer', in *Die verkehrte Welt des Krieges. Studien zu Geschlecht, Religion und Tod* (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Campus, 1998), pp. 121–3.

⁹ Käthe Kollwitz-Hans Kollwitz, 10 February 1915, in Bohnke-Kollwitz, ed., Käthe Kollwitz, p. 102. ¹⁰ On Italy, France, the US, and Australia see Oliver Janz, 'Zwischen privater Trauer und öffentlichem Gedenken. Der bürgerliche Gefallenenkult in Italien während des Ersten Weltkriegs', Geschichte und Gesellschaft 28 (2002), p. 560; Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, 'Corps perdus, corps retrouvés. Trois examples de deuils de guerre', Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales 55, 1 (2000), pp. 47–71; John W. Graham, The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s: Overseas Grave Visitations by Mothers and Widows of Fallen U.S. World War I Soldiers (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland & Company, 2005); Joy Damousi, The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 10.

to the cemetery before her return to Germany, as the most memorable and meaningful one of the entire trip: 'I stood in front of the woman, saw her—my own—face, cried, and stroked her cheeks.' Kollwitz had thus succeeded in capturing her disconsolate grief in art. By casting her innermost emotions into Belgian granite, the most well-known female artist of her generation both commemorated and eternalized her bereavement. The sculpture is a monument not only to Kollwitz's fallen son, but also to her own grief.

In choosing the figure of a disconsolately bereaved woman to represent herself, Kollwitz was drawing on an aesthetic tradition that had been developed by female German artists throughout the First World War. While the unveiling of the memorial in 1932 demonstrates both the lasting repercussions of the conflict and the abiding intensity of maternal grief, the memorial in its completed form is an evolved artistic response that represents a transition within Kollwitz's own long journey of mourning. Yet the story of her bereavement, and the conception of her artistic response to it, begin in 1914 and belong to the broader history of women's loss and women's art during the First World War. This book examines the work produced by a group of over thirty female artists, including Wismar-based Sella Hasse, Dresden-based Martha Schrag, Katharina Heise from Schönebeck near Magdeburg, Käte Lassen, Ottilie Roederstein, Lina von Schauroth, and the later Dadaist Hannah Höch. The chapters that follow trace the artistic output and personal experiences of these artists during the war years and examine the thematic evolution of their art from visual expressions of outspoken support for the war to more nuanced, ambivalent, and distraught testimonies of loss and grief. Female artists did not act merely as detached observers of the conflict; they saw themselves as very engaged witnesses of, and participants in, war. A number of them experienced personal trauma when they lost close relations, sons, fiancés, or husbands on the fighting fronts. Others participated directly in the war effort as nurses or auxiliary military personnel. Although a variety of experiences and ideas are expressed in women's wartime art, coming to terms with violent mass death and the ordeal of bereavement stand out as the central motifs.

The Aesthetics of Loss is a cultural history of women's artistic responses to the First World War in Germany that locates their rich visual testimony in the context of the civilian experience of war and wartime loss. Historical codes of wartime behaviour and traditional public rites of mourning led women to redefine cultural practices of bereavement and question existing notions of heroic death and proud bereavement through art. This book argues that female German artists developed a unique aesthetic response to the war that both expressed emotional distress and served to re-imagine the place of mourning women in wartime society. Wartime sacrifice often engendered acute personal conflict as women faced the challenge of reconciling their emotional pain with their loyalty to the soldier and their own commitment to the national cause. The personal moral economy of the war, just like its public conventions, caused tensions, stress, and ambivalent feelings that

¹² Diary Käthe Kollwitz, 14 August 1932, Kollwitz, 'Die Tagebücher, 1908–1943', p. 669.