

Joey Kalafut, *Child in Need*.Marianna Pitman, *Natural Beauty*.Michele Piascik, *Moving Again II*.

# The POWER of Images

**Nancy Petrella**

There are several key components that drive my teaching. Among them is my desire to inspire my students to become responsible, global-minded citizens ready to embark on the quest to find common threads of humanity. I also want to inspire my students to think for themselves, while reflecting upon their own circumstances and expressing their ideas and opinions as individuals. These are the factors most relevant in the design and discussion of this unit.

## Global Education

As I became more immersed in broadening my own thinking, I became involved in programs that were geared toward global education. As one program led to another, I eventually found myself in a seminar about East Asia. It was there that I had an epiphany about the relationship between Eastern and Western art and culture. This was the link that I was looking for, the link that spoke to me on a personal level.

My previous knowledge of Eastern art didn't go much beyond traditional

Chinese and Japanese images. I had included them in my usual classroom discussions. We had also discussed *Speed Racer* and *Kimba, the White Lion*, which were the Japanese cartoons of my youth, and more recent Chinese cinematic features like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Still, there was nothing that spoke to me on a personal level until I discovered the Chinese avant-garde through a seminar.

## The Chinese Avant-Garde

Being a huge fan of Käthe Kollwitz and the German expressionists, particularly Die Brücke, I recognized the significance of the Chinese avant-garde and its relationship to Western art immediately. These artists focused on social awareness, and their work stylistically resembled the works of German artists. The Chinese avant-garde artists were at their peak during the 1930s and 40s, and the influence of Käthe Kollwitz on them was undeniable.

## Käthe Kollwitz

Much of Kollwitz's work focuses on the struggles in the lives of ordinary people. She depicted people and their circumstances in caring and power-

ful images that expressed issues such as inadequate nutrition, health care, housing, and war. Concerns surrounding women and children were especially important to her. Her medium of choice was printmaking, in part because she found printmaking to be an effective and relatively inexpensive way to get her message out, especially to people who could not afford to buy art.

The common thread running from Kollwitz through Die Brücke to the members of the Chinese avant-garde was the notion of art as a reflection of society. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and the other members of Die Brücke created images that related their feelings about events of their time. This meant that they were often portraying people and events in a less than favorable light. There were things going on around them, such as war, with which they disagreed.

## Lu Xun

Lu Xun was a Chinese writer who had seen the successful use of the woodcut medium by German artists. He recognized that Kollwitz used it to disseminate information to large groups

of people and realized that it could be used the same way in China. He put in motion the Chinese woodcut revival and recruited young artists to study in a school that he helped to create.

Through a book, *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement* by Xiaobing Tang, I learned that the connection between Germany and China had begun earlier than I had thought. Prior to the woodcut revival, there had been several Chinese artists who had studied and lived in Germany. There were also artists who continued to live in Germany until the Japanese invasion forced them to return home. These artists already had in mind ideas for the reform of art education in China. While Xiaobing Tang seems to downplay the role of Lu Xun, his influence on the movement is evident.

The Chinese avant-garde artists created images that criticized their own nationalist government and their oppression by Japanese invaders. They also created images that dealt with the

poor treatment of women in China.

In my unit, after learning about the Chinese avant-garde and the German

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artists who influenced them, my students worked from the big idea of social awareness to develop ideas for their own images, using charcoal, chalk

pastels, opaque watercolors, and/or linoleum prints. The resulting images speak for themselves. 🌀

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## NATIONAL STANDARD

*Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas.*

## WEB LINKS

[www.meredithmiddle.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC\\_ID=84341@type=u](http://www.meredithmiddle.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=84341@type=u)

[www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520249097](http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520249097)