



Otto Dix (Gera 1891 - Singen 1969)

Self-portrait with hand, 1968

Litho on Velin

320 x 245 mm

Signed, titled and dated

Artist description:

Wilhelm Heinrich Otto Dix was a German artist, painter, print maker and watercolorist. His depictions of mechanized warfare and post-war Berlin continue to shape our impressions of the Great War and Weimar society. Along with George Grosz, Dix was one of the more important figures in New Objectivity. While Grosz delved into the shadows of modern society, Dix stared into the abyss. Three themes dominate much of his art: the Modern War, the Aftermath and Femmes Fatales.

At the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, Dix volunteered for the German army, but after 1918, he depicted his horror of the war and its consequences relentlessly in several monumental works. Nevertheless, during an interview in the 1960s, he expressed that he would not have wanted to miss that experience.

In the 1920s, his aversion to prevailing clichés developed into sarcasm, through which he provoked the bourgeoisie. In his works, he aimed to expose societal injustices and depict the ugliness that polite society preferred not to see. Numerous themes were drawn from contemporary societal situations, as seen in paintings like "War Cripples" (1920), where Dix portrayed a procession of severely injured veterans that was far from a heroic parade of German soldiers. Similarly, in "Old Couple" (1923), he unabashedly showed the withered nudity of an elderly couple in intimate embrace. His depictions of prostitutes shocked the public with their explicit portrayal of their physical and social conditions. Apart from his mother and sometimes his wife Martha, Dix never depicted women as beautiful, innocent, or seductive. The mention of Otto Dix often evokes images of battlefields strewn with corpses, devastated villages, war invalids, and brothel scenes featuring worn-out prostitutes and shady pimps.

Dix studied at the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts (1919-1921) and joined the New Objectivity movement along with artists like George Grosz. In 1925, he exhibited with 30 other artists in Mannheim during the first exhibition of this new movement. He worked in Düsseldorf (1922-1925) and Berlin (1925-1927), where he aimed to highlight societal injustices in his paintings. During this period, he painted his famous portrait of "Sylvia von Harden." He then returned to Dresden to teach (1927-1933) and painted one of his masterpieces, "Metropolis" (1927/28), a triptych depicting modern life and its darker aspects.

When the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933, Dix was dismissed from his position at the Art Academy, among other reasons, because his art was deemed a threat to the moral state and militaristic attitude of the German people. He soon faced an exhibition ban as well.

Dix's works were labeled as "Entartete Kunst" (Degenerate Art) during the Third Reich because they did not conform to the Aryan ideal propagated by the NSDAP. Some of Dix's works were included in the major exhibition of "Entartete Kunst" in Munich in 1937. In 1937, Joseph Goebbels ordered the confiscation of 260 works by Dix. Many of these works were auctioned in Lucerne. Those that could not be sold were burned in a Berlin fire station in 1939. Works like "War Cripples" and "Trench" were destroyed in the flames, but Dix managed to save one of his most monumental works, "The War," by storing it in a mill.

Despite these events, Dix continued to live in Germany. He left Dresden and first settled in Singen and then in 1936 in Hemmenhofen near Gaienhofen on Lake Constance. The decision to remain in Germany, despite limited opportunities to work as an artist due to his lack of membership in the Reich Chamber of Culture, is referred to as "Innere Emigration" (internal exile). Dix was not alone in this choice; many artists and intellectuals made similar decisions. Throughout these years, even during the war, he would regularly visit Dresden.

Between 1933 and 1945, Dix primarily painted landscapes, drawing on the tradition of the romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich. Although he preferred to paint people and cities, his forced relocation to the rural Bodensee and the restrictions imposed by the Nazis compelled him to focus on landscapes. He kept a low profile and painted works that would not offend the Nazis. However, in his religious scenes, such as "The Temptation of St. Anthony," he did reference the Nazi regime. In 1945, the 53-year-old Otto Dix was conscripted into the Volkssturm. He was captured in France and ended up in a camp with 6,000 others in Colmar. Once his identity became known, he was allowed to work as an artist in the camp. He returned to Hemmenhofen in 1946.

In the post-war years, Dix remained an outsider, avoiding the prevailing Socialist realism in the GDR and the abstract art dominant in West Germany. However, he was honored with various awards in both countries.

Otto Dix passed away in 1969 from a cerebral hemorrhage.