Two Dark Realists: Käthe Kollwitz and Nick Sousanis

Alex Teasdale

The primary author is the individual who drafted the first version of this section; a section that could have been modified since it was originally published.

Käthe Kollwitz's collective life art work and the book *Unflattening*, written by Nick Sousanis, are very similar in the way they open you up to the darker realities of life. Both individuals don't take meaningful topics lightly and each spent a large amount of time sculpting their views through their life's work. Although one might consider it hard to believe Kollwitz's visually artistic lithographs could possibly be that similar to a book; this is no novel. *Unflattening* is closer to an existential adult comic filled with illustrations that take up a majority of the pages. Kollwitz huge influence on Sousanis' art work is evident because how Sousanis depicts the suffering of humanity using similar detail and dark colors to reflect there dark views of the world.

Kollwitz was far from a peasant. Growing up in a relatively well-off family in 19th century Germany, she never worried about having enough money to get by. Her father was a house builder and involved in socialistic politics. He helped inspire her first great works of art by exposing her to many peasants he hired to work for him. Kollwitz saw the intense suffering that encompassed this line of work and realized how a majority of the people around her lived. Expressing the hopelessness of these people in the form of art interested her more than prosperous figures.

Kollwitz translated these intense feelings of sympathy by depicting people's suffering with accentuated features of sadness. It is especially clear in the lithograph "Poverty," one of a series of lithographs about the peasant weavers of the time revolting to try to better their situation. When observing this lithograph, one can see figures in a room surrounding a small child on his death bed. The whole lithograph is as dark as possible; only showing high detail on the depicted people's suffering faces and on the baby's bed which is intended to be the focus of the lithograph. Their bodies are mostly black shading without much clear detail. This keeps the focus of the depiction on the suffering. The simplicity functions by giving attention to the meaning of the art more than anything else. This is the same approach taken by the author of *Unflattening*.

In *Unflattening*, Sousanis repeatedly drew humans in a dark, undetailed, but powerful way. He illustrated them with a clear anatomy of the basic human form, but missing basic details. He didn't include much of a face besides the basic geometry of the nose and indentations where appropriate.
accentuating where a mouth and brow line would be. Sousanis also posed them to have a tight posture of insecurity and worthlessness by making them bow their heads to the direction of the floor. Without much detail to look at, one only can think of the bigger picture of human suffering when looking at them.

Kollwitz’s world view and art work were ground breaking in the 19th century and an inspiration to Sousanis; helping him form the book he has written in the 21st century.

Suggestions for Further Reading