

Women of Distinction

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Benton Kidd

Curator of Ancient Art



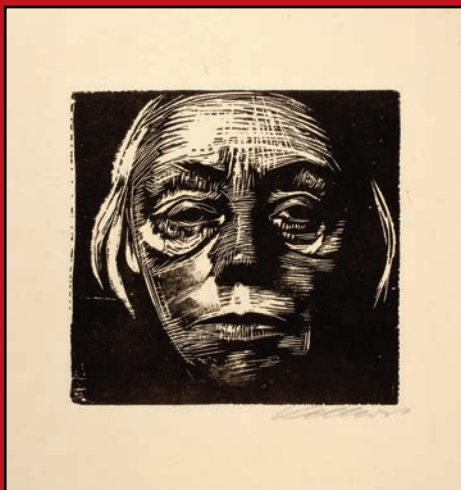
Hans Brosamer (German, ca. 1500–1554)
Katharina von Bora Luther, ca. 1520–1552
Woodcut on paper (71.116)

The youthful, idealized female nude captivated artists as far back as ancient Greece, when the sculptor Praxiteles created a now-legendary nude image of Aphrodite. While recapturing the erotic mystique of the Praxitelean goddess has enthralled artists for two millennia, others occasionally sought a more realistic beauty, one apart from the classical ideal. By the mid-nineteenth century, a growing number of European artists rejected the classical tradition outright, and continued pursuing alternative forms of beauty.

This focus exhibition highlights portraits of nine women spanning in date from the sixteenth to twentieth centuries, with subjects ranging from young to mature, from humble to affluent, from famous to anonymous. Rather than unrealistic fantasies of perfected beauty, these images are linked by a candor of portrayal and a beauty inherent in strength, wisdom, and maturity.

Among the works included is a woodcut of Katharina von Bora whose resolute love for theologian Martin Luther led to their marriage, which challenged centuries of Church dogma. The careworn face of Käthe Kollwitz is represented in a self-portrait revealing the artist's profound sorrow and spiritual weariness, while we gaze upward at an anonymous sharecropper empowered with heroic beauty by Elizabeth Catlett. Another portrait depicts an aging Native American, whose delicately rendered face is suffused with a gentle solemnity by Kenneth Miller Adams of the Taos Society of Artists.

Other subjects of the exhibition include an elegant, posthumous etching of author Harriet Beecher Stowe, a French aristocrat whose engraved portrait affirms her marital fidelity, and a photograph of Surrealist artist Leonora Carrington, whose remarkable personality and artistic style are adeptly merged into one composition by photographer Carole Patterson. ■



Käthe Kollwitz (German, 1867–1945)
Selbstbildnis von vorn
(self-portrait from the front), 1923
Woodcut on Japan paper
Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (90.126)



Elizabeth Catlett (American, 1915–2012)
Sharecropper, 1952
Linocut on paper
Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (2003.8)



Kenneth Miller Adams (American, 1897–1966)
Francisca, 1957
Lithograph printed in black ink on paper
Gift of Harry and Ann Cohen (85.136)