

Hannah Höch's Photomontage-Paintings

by

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## ABSTRACT

The German Dada artist Hannah Höch is considered one of the most significant artists of photomontage. What is less discussed is Höch's continued use of other mediums, particularly watercolor, and how the two mediums of watercolor and photomontage are combined in many of her artworks.

Berlin Dada criticized bourgeois artistic groups and mediums. The Berlin Dadaists Richard Huelsenbeck and Raoul Hausmann called for new ways of engaging with the medium of painting, which resulted in the group's development of photomontage. However, other Dada artists such as George Grosz, Kurt Schwitters, Francis Picabia, and Hausmann, continued to engage with the traditional medium of painting.

Höch was integral to the development of photomontage. Like her Dada contemporaries, she also experimented with painting. She developed the new hybrid medium of photomontage-painting. I argue that Höch's photomontages are better understood as photomontage-paintings. Höch's photomontage-paintings combine the mediums of (watercolor) painting and photomontage into a singular medium. My reexamination of these works as photomontage-paintings presents a more accurate view of Höch as a multidimensional artist.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family and friends. Thank you for your continued support and encouragement. It is especially dedicated to my mother. Thank you for teaching by example and for your unwavering love and friendship.

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## INTRODUCTION

In art history discourse, Hannah Höch's artistic career is largely defined by her work in the medium of photomontage in the early 1920s. It is through these photomontages, most notably the ones produced during Höch's involvement in Berlin Dada, that Höch has garnered the most recognition in art history. What is less discussed is Höch's continued use of other mediums, especially watercolor, and how these two mediums, watercolor and photomontage, are combined in many of Höch's artworks.

In the first chapter of my thesis, I examine Höch's foundation in the Berlin Dada group's development of photomontage and its critical engagement of the medium of painting. I review the prevailing literature on Höch's art and photomontages, and look at Höch's key exhibitions of the 1920s and early 1930s. In the second chapter, I analyze how in addition to Höch, other prominent Dada artists from a variety of geographical locations engaged with the medium of painting. Lastly, in my third chapter, through an examination of the formal elements of Höch's photomontages, and considering the watercolor element within them, I claim that the photomontages should be considered photomontage-paintings. My argument is based on a formal analysis of Höch's photomontage-paintings, along with an analysis that takes into account the social and cultural context in which Höch lived.

I have created the term "photomontage-painting" to accurately describe the medium that Höch utilizes. Not all of Höch's photomontages can be considered photomontage-paintings. Her inclusion of mainly watercolor painting in combination with photomontage is the main identifying feature of photomontage-painting. However, one must also discern a painterly element in Höch inclusion and manipulation of

photomontage components. In reclassifying these works, photomontage and painting are to be read as a singular medium, and not comprised of two isolated mediums.

I had the opportunity to go to the Museum of Modern Art and The Metropolitan Museum in New York to study examples from Höch's *oeuvre*. In being able to note the variations in the brush strokes, and to see Höch's hand in watercolor, helped me to understand these works as photomontage-paintings. The watercolor elements do not show up well in photographic reproductions of the artworks. Due to the fact that she considered herself a painter, while actively engaging in the medium of photomontage, I believe that she would have welcomed this new understanding of her works.

In this thesis, I aim to answer a number of questions about this hybrid aspect of her art. Why did Höch choose to include watercolor, or hand painted backgrounds, consistently in these works? How did she make use of painting in her photomontages? How might these photomontages be redefined and viewed as photomontage-paintings? Höch's photomontages are described as mechanical, orderly, and methodical. I would like to consider their painterly aspect. Höch's artworks cannot be so firmly bound into one specific artistic category. They expand the medium of photomontage as well as the medium of painting, creating a new hybrid medium, photomontage-painting, that is unique to Höch's art.

### **The Mediums**

I define photomontage painting as a medium developed from the amalgamation of both photomontage and painting elements. This combination occurs most frequently with photomontaged elements on top of a painted background. Photomontage-painting maintains the inherent specificity of its two original mediums, photomontage and

painting. I describe photomontage-painting as a “hybrid” medium. The term hybrid in this instance refers to the result of combining two different elements together, to form a new untraditional medium. Photomontage-painting unites two seemingly different mediums, with different formal qualities, into a new medium that shares in those distinctive qualities. The type of paint used in photomontage-painting is not explicit, but watercolor appears to be a popular media, especially amongst the Dada artists.

By redefining works that were originally considered photomontages as photomontage-paintings we expand the breadth of the Dadaist’s artistic outputs. It also diminishes the geographical boundaries that have been placed around the different Dada groups. Photomontage-painting was pursued throughout many of the different Dada groups. All of the Dada artists discussed in this thesis engaged with photomontage-paintings, insofar as they combined both mediums into one within their works. However, Höch used photomontage-painting differently than other Dada artists.

Höch’s photomontage-painting emphasizes a more “painterly” quality. The term painterly, taken from art historian Heinrich Wölfflin, is a “perception which is by way of surrendering itself to the mere visual appearance and can abandon ‘tangible’ design.”<sup>1</sup> Höch’s photomontage-paintings are considered painterly vis a vis other Dadaists due to her application of the photomontage into a painting. Höch visually creates movement with her images through a unique combination of layering and tonal variations. She also utilizes the brightly pigmented nature of watercolor to enhance this painterly quality. Her photomontage-paintings can also be considered painterly due to Höch’s combination of the two separate mediums. According to Wölfflin, “seeing by volumes and outlines isolates objects: for the painterly eye, they merge.”<sup>2</sup> Höch’s work emphasizes that in



photomontage-painting the mediums must be read as one singular medium, not two separate mediums brought together on the same page. Through the combination of movement, intense coloration, and medium unification, Höch's photomontage-paintings are inherently painterly.

In examining the medium of photomontage-painting, it is essential to comprehend the qualities of photomontage and watercolor painting separately. The medium of photomontage requires a different level of commitment from the artist, and requires a higher level of engagement from the viewer. Art critic and major art collector Sergei Tretyakov defines photomontage as “whenever there is a conscious alteration of the obvious first sense of a photograph—by combining two or more images, by joining drawing and graphic shapes to the photograph, by adding a significant spot of color, or by adding a written text. All of these techniques serve to divert the photograph from what it ‘naturally’ seems to say, and to underscore the need for the viewer’s active ‘reading’ of the image.”<sup>3</sup> The particular type of photomontage used by the Berlin Dadaists was developed out of collages by the Cubists, Italian Futurists, and the early Russian avant-garde. Though photomontage developed from these other stylistically independent movements, Berlin Dada had its own unique defining characteristics and terminologies.<sup>4</sup>

There are many different components that make up the medium of watercolor. Principally, “watercolor painting is based on the transparent or glaze system of pigmentation...it utilizes the brilliant white of the paper for its whites and pale tints, and those pigments which are not normally transparent are applied in such thinned-out consistency that their effects are nearly as brilliant as those which are naturally transparent.”<sup>5</sup> There is also an opaque method of pigmentation, which achieves its whites

and pale tints through actual white pigment. Accepted definitions of watercolor painting are sweeping, as some artists consider ink washes and gouache to fall under the term “watercolor.” Watercolor painting became popular and evolved significantly in the nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century, watercolor met modernism head on, and artists were able to expand the medium and incorporate elements of it in a variety of ways. Watercolor was combined with other mediums, while it expanded to include gouache and other inks as watercolor mediums.<sup>6</sup> Watercolor was an excellent medium for modernist experimentation, a quality that would have appealed specifically to the Dada artists.

### **The Life of Hannah Höch**

Hannah Höch was born in Gotha, Germany in 1889. Her father worked in insurance, and her mother was a painter. From an early age Höch stressed her desires to become an artist. She, with support from her parents, decided to focus on “applied” arts rather than “fine” arts, as her parents felt that this was a more secure career path for a woman entering the arts.<sup>7</sup> Höch enrolled at the School of Applied Arts in Berlin-Charlottenburg in 1912. At school, Höch began her studies calligraphy, and glass design. She eventually found interest, and great success in embroidery. After a break from school during World War I, Höch returned to her schooling at the National Institute of the Museum of Arts and Crafts. There she enrolled in the graphic and book art division, where she won numerous accolades. She also began working in textile design. Likely due to her training in both textiles and book design, Höch started working on the editorial staff of the Ullstein Verlag’s handiwork division.<sup>8</sup> Ullstein Verlag was a large publishing company, and was responsible for many of the mass circulated periodicals being

produced in Germany at that time. Höch continued to work at Ullstein Verlag while exploring a variety of artistic groups and styles.

In 1915 Höch met Raoul Hausmann, and the young couple enjoyed exploring a variety of artistic styles, like expressionism before becoming fully involved with Dada in 1918. Höch's involvement with the group was influential to her career and she exhibited in many of the group's prominent exhibitions. After her breakup from Hausmann in 1922, Höch left Dada and became interested in traveling around Europe, developing an international artist style. It was during this time that she strengthened her friendships with other important artists, like Kurt Schwitters. In 1926 Höch met the Dutch poet Til Brugman and Höch moved to The Hague to live with Brugman later that same year. During this time, Höch was still frequently traveling through Europe, establishing a large group of international colleagues, and exhibiting her artworks.

Höch moved back to Berlin in 1929 and began to reconnect with her former friends and colleagues. She remained in Germany during World War II, living in a house outside of Berlin. She continued to work during this time, but was very isolated from the outside world, and her friends, as she felt targeted due to her political associations from her youth. After the war Höch exhibited frequently, and even gained international acclaim from solo exhibitions in Paris and New York. She remained in Berlin until her death in 1978.

### **Hannah Höch and the Mediums of Berlin Dada**

The first chapter of my thesis considers Höch's foundation in Berlin Dada's development of photomontage and its critical engagement with the medium of painting. I introduce Höch, her involvement in Dada, and her early contributions to the group and its

exploration of photomontage. Marc Dachy's chapter "Dada in Germany: Revolution within the Revolution" in his book *The Dada Movement 1915-1923* (Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1990), and Brigid Doherty's chapter "Berlin" in the exhibition catalogue *DADA* (National Gallery of Art, 2005), outline the social, artistic, and cultural context of Berlin during the Dada years. They provide a detailed account of the environment that Höch was working in, as well as describing the types of relationships that the Berlin Dada artists had with one another.

Primary sources, written by the Berlin Dada artists in the early stages of the movement establish the themes and ideas that Dada was supposed to represent. Richard Huelsenbeck's "First German Dada Manifesto" and Raoul Hausmann's "The New Material in Painting" discussed the development of new concepts within painting. Both Huelsenbeck and Hausmann wanted painting and art in general to be available and comprehensible to the masses. They argued for art that made direct statements on contemporary events and believed that an artist should convey his opinions on the canvas. Hausmann also emphasized the importance of introducing new materials and mediums into painting. This subsequently became part of the movement's reinvention of the medium of photomontage and collage. Both Huelsenbeck and Hausmann wanted to distance Dada from the bourgeois artistic groups of the past, by making art that appealed to everyone. The project of working to discover a new medium of painting is one that Höch engaged in for the entirety of her career. Höch's photomontage-paintings answer Huelsenbeck and Hausmann's call for this new development in the medium of painting.

Understanding Höch's participation in developing the medium of photomontage is important in understanding her desire to expand it. Though photomontage-painting is a

separate medium from photomontage, the former heavily relies on Höch's skills as a photomonteur. Höch is heralded as one of the originators of Dadaist photomontage, and her works in the medium were strikingly different from her contemporaries. Stylistically her work varies due to her precise hand in abstracting the images from their original source material. She also experimented with the layering of her photomontages, sometimes choosing a visually dense composition, while other times focusing on singular figures. Höch's work was also not as overtly political as some of the other members of the Dada group. The themes and techniques that Höch utilized in her photomontages demonstrate that she had an interest in a variety of subject matter, and wanted to challenge the boundaries around specific mediums. It is also important to examine Höch's exhibitions of the time, where she exhibited both her paintings and her photomontages. Because Höch exhibited both mediums, she did not value one over the other.

The recent literature on Höch by Maud Lavin (*Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch*), Peter Boswell and Maria Makela (*The Photomontages of Hannah Höch*) and Dawn Ades (*Hannah Höch*) stress Höch's importance as a photomonteur. While these texts mention Höch's work in other mediums, they tend to focus on her photomontages, especially those created during her time in Dada. Boswell explains "even in the field of photomontage, where Höch's reputation principally and properly rests, the works are strikingly varied. During her fifty years of production she engaged a bewildering array of styles and subjects."<sup>9</sup> He stresses her penchant for a variety of styles, but does describe the different styles and mediums she

chose to work in. When we look more deeply into the stylistic variations defining Höch's practice we can view her art in a new light.

### **Painting in Dada**

The second chapter explores the context and development of Dada painting in the Berlin group and beyond. Though painting is not traditionally discussed in regard to Dada, Höch and many other artists engaged with the medium. Through an examination of select Dada artists, Raoul Hausmann, George Grosz, Kurt Schwitters, and Francis Picabia and their engagement with painting, and painting with photomontage, we are able to identify painting as a larger area of concern in Dada. This concern is noteworthy since painting can be understood as a traditionally bourgeois medium, and many of the Dada artists were interested in eradicating the bourgeois styles and artistic groups of the past.

In examining selected works by Hausmann, Grosz, Schwitters, and Picabia, we can see similar themes and techniques that were widespread throughout the different Dada groups. Knowing that these artists were interested in painting, and were also interested in combining different mediums, we can identify Höch's work as being significant, if not, inspiring to her contemporaries. By examining the techniques and styles of Höch's contemporaries we are able to recognize that Höch's photomontage-paintings are unique to her personal aesthetic.

### **The Photomontage-Paintings**

In Chapter 3 I analyze a selection of Höch's photomontage-paintings. The chapter includes six works that have previously been identified as photomontages, and examples of her watercolor paintings from 1919-1935. I address Höch's most recognizable work *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in*

*Germany* (Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands) and how it too can be considered a photomontage-painting when studying its painterly qualities. I argue that through an examination of the formal elements of Höch's photomontages, and in comparing them to her watercolor paintings, the photomontages are best considered photomontage-paintings.

By examining the construction of these selected works I explain that due to Höch's combination of photomontage and watercolor, the two mediums must be understood as a singular medium. This new understanding of Höch's works opens up new interpretations of Höch's oeuvre. It also demands the viewer to see Höch, as an artist, in a new light, one that cannot be categorized under a single definition. Höch produced works that defied boundaries. The analysis of these artworks as photomontage-paintings fits into her artistic ethos. Her role as a photomonteur is equally important as her role as a painter. She is one of the greatest photomonteurs of her generation. Her greatness enabled her to push the boundaries of traditional photomontage to a new, hybrid realm. This thesis aims at not only redefining the medium of photomontage, but also to redefine an artist who continued to push the boundaries of medium itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History* (Ithaca: Dover, 1932), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Phillips, "Introduction," in *Montage and Modern Life: 1919-1942*, ed. Matthew Teitelbaum (United States: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1992), 28.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>5</sup> Ralph Mayer, *The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques 5<sup>th</sup> Edition* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1991), 327.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Finch, *Twentieth-Century Watercolors* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Maria Makela, "By Design: The Early Work of Hannah Höch in Context," in *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch*, ed by Maria Makela and Peter Boswell (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 1997), 50.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid 55

<sup>9</sup> Peter Boswell, "Hannah Höch: Through the Looking Glass," in *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch*, ed. Maria Makela and Peter Boswell (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1996), 10.



## CHAPTER 1

### HANNAH HÖCH AND THE MEDIUMS OF BERLIN DADA

Within the discourse of art history, Hannah Höch has been constructed as an influential figure in Berlin Dada, especially in regard to her ingenuity in the medium of photomontage. Höch is recognized as the creator of a few of the key photomontages of Berlin Dada. Both Höch and Berlin Dada have become synonymous with photomontage. Dada, and Berlin Dada in particular, is usually discussed in regard to its radical anti-bourgeois ideals. What is less discussed is its sustained development of painting, which is, ironically, the most bourgeois of all the artistic mediums. Painting can be considered bourgeois due to its history of being a widely accepted academic medium, and its intimate relationship with past art groups that traditionally appealed to the upper classes. Höch and many other Dada artists consistently utilized the medium of painting.

By examining how Höch and other artists utilized and theorized the medium of painting, we can identify it as a larger concern and as a unifying factor between many of the geographically different Dada groups. Through a close examination of Höch's time with the Berlin Dada group and her Weimar Era painting exhibitions, I can trace the development of her photomontage-paintings.

This chapter will also discuss Dada in a larger context, and focus on how the Berlin group engaged with photomontage, along with their concern with the medium of painting. This analysis is essential to understanding the creative environment that Höch worked in, and the central ideas and themes that were discussed within Dada. Finally I analyze the recent literature on Höch and how she has been viewed within recent art

history. I conclude that Höch can more accurately be understood as a photomonteur-painter.

### **Höch and Dada**

After participating in Dada in Zurich in 1916, the artist Richard Huelsenbeck returned to Germany in 1917 and brought back with him ideals on new ways of engaging with art. This new engagement was found in the performative aspect of Zurich Dada, expressed in the popular poetry readings, musical performances, and artistic productions at the Cabaret Voltaire.<sup>1</sup> George Grosz, John Heartfield, and the writers Wieland Herzfeld and Franz Jung got involved with Berlin Dada soon after Huelsenbeck's return. They formed the group "Club Dada." Höch joined shortly afterwards, as did Johannes Baader, Raoul Hausmann, Walter Mehring, and Otto Schmalhausen. Though Berlin Dada came to be recognized through its unique engagement with politics, the group still remained in conversation with other artists from different Dada locations. Other German Dada artists, Kurt Schwitters and Max Ernst, and French Dada artist Francis Picabia, became associated with the Berlin artists and proved to be influential contemporaries for Höch and others.

Considered to be soft-spoken and a "good girl," Höch's direct involvement with many of Berlin Dada's activities is difficult to trace.<sup>2</sup> The memoirs of Grosz, Huelsenbeck, and even Hausmann fail to recognize Höch's significance in the movement and only mention her in passing.<sup>3</sup> Though she did not sign the significant Dada manifestos, we can assume through stories recounted by Höch, and photographs, that she actively engaged in a variety of Dada events. The Dada artists participated in public lectures, poetry readings, and performances. Not only did these public displays continue

the Dadaist tradition of explosive and unpredictable performances, but they also served as a tool to create a political dialogue with a wider audience. Admittedly shy, Höch reflected back on a performance at the 1919 Dada soirée: “I was somewhat timid at the time at this debut. I gladly would have gotten out of it, since I was never in my life fond of noise. But I also didn’t want to appear cowardly, so I threw myself with resignation into what the thing...really needed, because it was my job.”<sup>4</sup> The Dada soirée was the final day of the “First Berlin Dada Exhibition.” This was the first time that Höch actively participated in a Dada event, and in which she showed some of her abstract watercolors.

Dada aimed at exposing the ridiculousness of society, especially those who lived within the upper classes. The Dada artists felt that art should be accessible to all, and wanted to do away with elite forms of art that appealed only to the bourgeois sensibility. The Berlin Dada group established itself as the most politically involved strand of Dada, which also had representation in Zurich, Paris, Cologne, Hannover, and New York. Berlin Dada developed during a complicated period in German history. Germany was suffering a humiliating defeat at the end of World War I. Emperor Wilhelm II abdicated, allowing new political parties to compete for power, and the ensuing power vacuum caused great unrest among the Berlin populace. Committees and people’s soviets started to develop as riots and fighting broke out on the city’s streets.<sup>5</sup>

Political unrest inspired Höch and the Berlin Dada artists in multiple ways. Their art was political in intent, and the spirit of the time influenced mediums that they used, which included posters, slogans, and false news items. Specifically, Höch’s photomontages from her time with the Berlin Dada group demonstrate an engagement with the politics surrounding the “New Woman” in Weimar Germany. Women were

acquiring new freedoms in society, like a more equal representation in the work force, and having the right to vote, but were still frequently marginalized by the male political and societal masses. It was also during this time that women were becoming more sexually liberated, and were legally allowed to have abortions. Höch had two abortions during her relationship with Hausmann.<sup>6</sup> Höch examines the theme of the female body in many of her works, and constructs it through many different perspectives.

When considering Dada's strict ideology against the bourgeois art of the Expressionists and other avant-garde groups it is ironic that many of the Dada artists chose to pursue painting, the most bourgeois and traditional medium of art. The Dadaists considered these artistic groups bourgeois due to their preference for creating art that appealed exclusively to a specific sect of society, the upper class. Painting remained a major concern for Höch and her Dada contemporaries George Grosz, Kurt Schwitters, Raoul Hausmann, Francis Picabia, and Max Ernst. They even exhibited paintings in the 1920 "First International Dada Fair," the most notable exhibition of Berlin Dada. While Höch was creating pieces within the Berlin Dada group she also experimented with different mediums. She created artworks that seemingly shared the concerns of Expressionism, Constructivism, Cubism, Orphism, and Futurism.<sup>7</sup> Through her work within different artistic groups, and different mediums, Höch was able to create works that were experimental in nature. While her fellow Dada contemporaries theorized the medium of painting in writing, Höch engaged with these ideals on the canvas itself. She developed photomontage-painting, a hybrid medium between photomontage and painting.

## Dada Theories of Painting

Richard Huelsenbeck's "First German Dada Manifesto" and Raoul Hausmann's "The New Material in Painting (Das neue Material in der Malerei)" are two of the most important manifestos of Berlin Dada. Both manifestos came to represent the underlying ideals of the Berlin Dada artists and how they saw Dada's place in contemporary society. Though these texts were not written by Höch nor signed by her, she engaged with the ideals of both manifestos. In this section I will analyze these texts, which contextualize the environment that Höch and her contemporaries were working in, and their subject matter. Höch's work during this time, and for the entirety of her career, reflects a deeper understanding of Hausmann and Huelsenbeck's call for a new development within the medium of painting.

The "First German Dada Manifesto" concerns the group's artistic struggles and attempts to distance Berlin Dada from the "failed" Expressionist movement.<sup>8</sup> It also stresses Dada's association with the "new medium of painting." In addition to its recitation at the Berlin Session, the manifesto surfaced in many other contexts. It was delivered as a lecture at the I.B. Neumann Gallery in 1918 and then published in *Der Zweemann* in 1919. It also appeared as a reprint in the *Dada Almanac* of 1920. That same year, a reissue of the text retitled the "Collective Dada Manifesto" gathered signatures from Huelsenbeck, Tristan Tzara, Franz Jung, George Grosz, Marcel Janco, Raoul Hausmann, Hugo Ball, Pierre-Albert-Birot, and Hans Arp, among others. Though Höch's name is not signed to this document, perhaps because her participation in many Dada events was opposed, we can assume that her presence is represented in the attribute "among others." These artists' willingness to sign their names to this manifesto

demonstrates their belief in and agreement with Huelsenbeck's expressed ideals for Berlin Dada.

Huelsenbeck begins the manifesto by stating that art is both dependent on and produced by the period of its emergence, and therefore it should not solely express this culture. Huelsenbeck openly criticizes Expressionism and exposes their concern with only making art for the bourgeoisie. According to Huelsenbeck, the Dada artist wants to incorporate all aspects of life into their works, including the "muddle of noises, colors, and spiritual rhythms."<sup>9</sup> The Dada artist is not concerned with the aesthetics of art. Dada is international because it appeals to everyone and anyone can participate in it.

The most important aspect of the "First German Dada Manifesto" is Huelsenbeck's explication of how Dada champions "the new medium of painting." This demonstrates Huelsenbeck's, and the other Dadaist's, interest in developing new concepts within painting. These new concepts can be seen in the Dadaist's desire to add new materials, to incorporate text, and to insert contemporary culture into their paintings. Art historians now consider Huelsenbeck's "new medium" to be photomontage. However, the terminology that Huelsenbeck used is particularly interesting. Huelsenbeck brings up the idea of "the new medium of painting" but he does not explicitly discuss the nature of that new medium. Most fascinating is his term "the new medium of painting," itself. Huelsenbeck did not call for a medium that defied or abolished painting, but for one that created something new within painting. This indicates that the Dadaists saw a correlation, in their literature and art, between the two seemingly different mediums of photomontage and painting.

Höch's exploration of photomontage-paintings best depicts Huelsenbeck's "new medium of painting." Her works combine recognizable elements of photomontage through the appropriation of photographs from popular cultural sources, but they still engage with the medium of painting. Höch's work bridges an important gap that is conveyed in the "First German Dada Manifesto," as she is able to create a universal art that appeals to everyone. She incorporates representations from all of contemporary society, while still maintaining an artistic quality for it to be considered seriously within the art realms that the Dada group was circulating in. The Dada artists' manifestos and printed propaganda was important to their overall ethos, but they also practiced very conventional artistic procedures. After all, they chose to hold traditional art exhibitions.

Following Huelsenbeck's reading of the "First German Dada Manifesto" at the Berlin Session, Raoul Hausmann presented his "Das neue Material in der Malerei" (The New Material in Painting). In this text, Hausmann aimed to separate the Berlin Dadaists' use of new materials such as wire, glass, and cardboard, from work with similar materials by groups that predated Dada. Like Huelsenbeck's "First German Dada Manifesto," Hausmann includes an attack on expressionist art. Both artists wanted to do away with the established conventions of art. Hausmann fully engages with the idea of incorporating new materials into his art. He himself had worked in photomontage, typography-based art, assemblage, sound and poster poems, and painting.

The title of the essay, "The New Material in Painting," suggests two very separate and interesting meanings. In the most basic sense, Hausmann was encouraging an exploration of different materials and mediums in Dada art. He, like Huelsenbeck, predicted the breadth of output that the Berlin Dada artists would create through

photomontage. Another interpretation of the title is that Hausmann calls for the Berlin artists to create a new subject matter entirely—to move away from the internal examinations of the Expressionists, and to create art that would engage politically and socially with the spirit of the time. The medium of photomontage successfully combined both of Hausmann's ambitions.

Höch and other Berlin Dada artists experimented with various materials within their photomontages. Höch's photomontage-paintings include her photomontage work while also including her hand as a painter. George Grosz too experimented with combining both photomontage and painting into his artworks. Kurt Schwitters exemplified Hausmann's ideals in his numerous collages of artifacts from daily life, brought together on the canvas. Höch's experimentation with photomontage-painting was different than her contemporaries, as she emphasized the more painterly quality of the medium. Her photomontage-paintings still answered emphatically both Hausmann and Huelsenbeck's call for further development in the somewhat outdated and out of touch medium of painting.

### **Höch and Photomontage**

It is necessary then to trace Höch's introduction and involvement with the medium of photomontage. Höch worked with photomontage and photomontage-painting, the latter being a traditional photomontage with painted elements included. The hybridity of photomontage-painting relies heavily on Höch's hand as a photomonteur. Varying accounts exist as to who exactly developed the medium of photomontage in the Berlin Dada movement and how they did so. Höch's first interaction with the medium occurred



when she was vacationing with Hausmann in Usedom, Pomerania. They found a composite lithograph depicting soldiers on the wall of almost every house they visited. The bodies of the soldiers were identical, but their faces had been replaced with photographic images of the men of that particular household.<sup>10</sup> Grosz and John Heartfield also have contradictory stories that discuss their involvement in the discovery of photomontage.<sup>11</sup> Though the artists' individual stories differ, they agree that photomontage developed out of their encounters with materials from the mass media and popular culture.

Höch's photomontages are unlike others produced at the time in Berlin Dada. Due to her perspective as a woman in Weimar Germany and her experience working for magazines, her photomontages have a distinct energy and movement. Maud Lavin describes Höch's photomontages as "violent and enthusiastic, shocking and ironic, whimsical and witty."<sup>12</sup> Her photomontages playfully alternate between the biting political and the purposefully feminist, and sometimes both within the same piece. Though Höch brought a feminine voice to the issues of Weimar Germany, she also engaged with some of the same themes as the other male Berlin Dada artists. Her photomontages produced between 1918 and 1920 had deep political undertones, as she reproduced the images of many political figures in Berlin.

Her most iconic work, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany* (Schnitt mit Küchenmesser durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoch Deutschlands) was created during the height of Berlin Dada in 1919-1920. *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* is packed with images of German political figures, as well as figures from popular culture in the early twentieth century. Höch juxtaposes

these figures with images of machine parts, animals, and text. Visually this work exemplifies chaos, while still maintaining a certain level of organization. *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* can be read in two individual parts, shown by an imaginary division created by Höch's grouping of like characters. The upper right corner of the piece is considered the "Anti-Dada" section as it unites representations of the new German government, the former Empire, and the military. In the "Dada" corner, the lower left, Höch pasted images of Communists, radicals, and her fellow Dadaists. Höch combines these images with images of actresses, dancers, artists and athletes, which give movement to the figures and to the work.<sup>13</sup> On the bottom right of the work, Höch included a map highlighting the European countries in which women were allowed to vote. The map is located where Höch, or any artist, would traditionally sign their name. Höch thereby aligns herself with women's suffrage. Generally this work deals with Höch's intention and excitement over the possibility of women becoming involved with politics. This eventually "cuts" through the dominate male "beer belly" culture of Weimar Germany.

New technologies of the 1920s also impacted Höch and other Berlin Dada photomonteurs. Developments in photography, mass printing, and new film technology, all shaped the subject matter and techniques used in photomontage. Machine-like objects and mechanical landscapes appear in many of Höch's photomontages. This machine-like quality, combined with grotesque imagery, also referred the use of machines in World War I and the casualties that technology generated on the front lines. Her composite-images make the viewer uncomfortable. This can also be seen in her grotesque images, with their imaginary and surreal landscapes. She manipulates the fragments of photomontage to create hybrid like creatures. The viewer is able to identify specific

elements of each image, but not the entire image as a whole. Höch's photomontages raise interesting questions about the fragmentary aspect of the construction of societal ideas and values.

Another of Höch's popular motifs in her photomontages is androgyny. She used androgynous figures that represented a state of being half male, and half female, while not necessarily being human. Her work tends to speak from the perspective of the margins of society. Höch created a series of photomontages entitled *From an Ethnographic Museum Series* that used images from ethnographic museums to comment on the issue of otherness. The series, begun in 1925 and continued into the early 1930s, placed the androgynous, hybrid figure on a podium for the viewer to gaze upon like a piece in a museum. Höch's blurring of the lines of sexuality liberates the female spirit while subjugating male cultural dominance of the time.

The expansive output of periodicals in Berlin during the Weimar Republic served as rich source material for Höch and the Dada artists. By using images culled from mass media, Höch hoped that viewers of their photomontages would recognize not only the original images but also their original context. Höch collected images from magazines, sometimes saving them for years before using them in her art. Popular culture publications served artists in another capacity: small political publications designed for circulation amongst the masses published many Dadaist photomontages. In its relationship with photomontage, Berlin Dada provides interesting artworks that comment on and critique the very pop-cultural components on which they relied for both their medium and their audience.

Though she is best known for a few photomontages created in the height of the frenzy of Berlin Dada, Höch continued to represent and explore distinctive subject matter. Her post-Dada photomontages tend to be less overtly political and focus more on the position of femininity. Curator Peter Boswell describes Höch's theory of photomontage best when he states, "the practice of photomontage was a voyage of exploration, a continuing journey into the new, the possible, the fantastic."<sup>14</sup>

Photomontage is one element of the more specific medium of photomontage-painting. The themes and techniques that Höch utilized in her photomontages demonstrate that she had an interest in depicting a variety of subject matter, and actively attempted to dismantle the limitations around specific mediums.

### **Höch's Photomontage-Painting Exhibitions 1919-1935**

Höch's sole artistic identity as a photomonteur is complicated by the fact that she continuously exhibited her photomontages, paintings, and her photomontage-paintings. The exhibitions that Höch participated in during the Weimar Republic indicate which works Höch felt best represented her as an artist. From 1919 until 1935 Höch participated in a variety of group exhibitions, and associated with both the Dada group and the November Group.<sup>15</sup> She held her first solo exhibition in 1929, solidifying her status as an important figure in the hybridization of photomontage-painting.

Höch's contributed to two Dada exhibitions, "First Berlin Dada Exhibition" in 1919 and the "First International Dada Fair" in 1920. At the "First Berlin Dada Exhibition" exhibition at the I.B. Neumann gallery, Höch exhibited her first artworks as a Dadaist. In it she showed a selection of her abstract watercolors. This choice demonstrates Höch familiarity with the medium, and it sets a precedent for Höch's

practice as a painter. The exhibition also shows an acceptance of the exhibiting of the bourgeois medium of painting in a strictly Dada context. This trend would continue in the largest and most important exhibition of Berlin Dada.

The “First International Dada Fair” opened in 1920 in Dr. Otto Burchard’s gallery. The exhibition displayed 174 works that epitomized and defined Berlin Dada. Among the Dada works exhibited were prints, sculptures, pamphlets, objects, ephemera, posters, and paintings by more than 25 artists. Höch submitted at least eight works to the exhibition. The gallery space itself was rather small. The exhibition was not considered a commercial success. The organizers of the exhibition hired a professional photographer to take photos of the event, and pictures of the “First International Dada Fair” were published in illustrated weeklies. Therefore the exhibition did receive some praise from critics, but more notably it succeeded at spreading Dada message all over the world.<sup>16</sup>

Höch exhibited her now most famous work, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, for the first time at this exhibition. This was also the first exhibition in which Höch displayed her new combined medium of photomontage-painting. The critic Adolf Behne singled out Höch’s works in *Die Freiheit* (The Freedom), and called them “splendid collages.”<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, Höch and her fellow Dadaists chose not to display their works according to the measured modern tradition in which pieces hang one by one, each isolated on its section of wall. Instead, artworks crammed the gallery walls at the “First International Dada Fair.” Utilizing an old-fashioned, perhaps even a bourgeois method of display, the Dadaists hung multiple works on different levels of every wall. The visual overcrowding added to the exhibition’s frenzied, salon-like atmosphere, producing an overwhelming

environment in which the viewer would feel completely overtaken by Dada thought and art.

Paintings were shown at the “First International Dada Fair.” Oddly, a few of these works were hung on top of one another. Otto Dix’s now-lost oil painting, *War Cripples [45% Fit for Active Service]* (Kriegskrüppel (45% Erwerbsfähig)), was displayed with two additional photomontages hung on top of it.<sup>18</sup> The first photomontage hung on top of Dix’s oil painting was from *Jedermann sein eigener Fussball* (Everyone His Own Soccerball), now attributed to George Grosz and titled *Gallery of German Male Beauty, Prize Question: “Who Is the Most Beautiful?”* (Galerie deutscher Manneschönheit, Preisfrage “Wer ist der schönste?”). The other was Grosz’s montage painting *A Victim of Society* (Ein Opfer der Gesellschaft) (later renamed Remember Uncle August, the Unhappy Inventor). This strange installation of montages on top of a painting in effect creates a single montage, comprised of three distinct artworks. This installation shows that the Berlin Dada artists were actively engaged in experimenting with different mediums, especially that of photomontage and painting. The positioning of these pieces, with photomontage lying on top of painting, raises interesting questions. Were the Berlin Dada artists elevating the status of painting by making it into a collage? Were they playing with a general hierarchy, placing the new medium of photomontage on top of the bourgeois medium of the past? This interplay of mediums proves that the Berlin Dada artists were interested in the relationship between painting and photomontage, and that painting was a much larger consideration for these artists than had been previously discussed.

Höch's departure from Berlin Dada in 1922 coincided with her separation from Raoul Hausmann. She began traveling and eventually moved from Berlin to the Hague in 1926. During this time She strengthened her relationship with Schwitters, and other "international" artists forming a network of European Avant-Garde artists. Höch's relationship with Schwitters was influential to her artistic production following her departure from Dada. She visited Schwitters and his wife in Hanover in 1923. Schwitters treated Höch more as a colleague and peer than a doting supporter of his genius. Schwitters and Höch collaborated artistically numerous times during the 1920s and early 1930s. In 1923 Schwitters reproduced one of Höch's drawings in the first issue of his *Merz* journal. Höch also created two grottoes for his *Merzbau* architectural structure. Reproductions of Höch's works can be seen in multiple issues of *Merz*. Their artistic relationship was in part due to a shared "respect for formal and aesthetic issues. Together they painted natural landscapes while Schwitters practiced his tone poems and made assemblages from driftwood."<sup>19</sup> Schwitters' encouragement and support helped Höch to become more confident in showing her works publicly.

Höch received her first solo exhibition at the Kunstzaal De Bron in the Hague, in 1929. The architect Jan Buijs organized Höch's solo exhibition. It consisted of approximately fifty paintings, watercolors, and drawings.<sup>20</sup> This exhibition assessed Höch as an individual artist, and for the first time it allowed her work to be viewed and understood within the context of her own aesthetic. The catalogue foreword to the exhibition is especially noteworthy. Höch writes:

I would like to blur the firm borders that we human beings, cocksure as we are, are inclined to erect around everything that is accessible to us. I paint pictures in which I try to make this evident, tangible. I want to show that

small can be large, and large small, it is just the standpoint from which we judge that changes, and every concept loses its validity, and all our human gestures lose their validity. I also want to show that there are millions and millions of other justifiable points of view beside yours and mine...I should like to make what seems impossible appear possible; I should like to help people to experience a richer world so that they may feel more kindly towards the world we know.<sup>21</sup>

This statement confirms several important themes in Höch's work, especially in regard to her desire to break through the traditional boundaries set upon art. Höch writes that she should not be defined by, or placed into, one simple category. At this time in her career, Höch successfully engaged with different mediums, and with a variety of themes: politics, women's suffrage, femininity, and ethnographic issues to name a few. Höch's call not to erect boundaries around her work indicates her desire for her artworks to be considered in conversation with one another, without the confines of strict definitions.

Höch also participated in the "Film und Foto" international exhibition in Stuttgart in 1929. The Württemberg office of the German Werkbund organized the exhibition. It highlighted innovations in photography, film, commercial photography and photomontage by 191 artists. The exhibition traveled internationally until 1931.<sup>22</sup> Höch entered at least eighteen photomontages in the exhibition, and critics singled out a few of them as being noteworthy. In 1929 photomontage had become a mainstream medium and was used as an advertising tool. Its modern look and ease of application appealed to the contemporary consumer. This transition made photomontage more popular, and iconic in mass culture. Grosz, Heartfield, and Schwitters also participated in "Film und Foto." John Heartfield occupied the majority of an entire room. The exhibition is interesting as it was international and recognized works in the medium of film and photography. Höch, who only showed what is traditionally known as her photomontages, was identified as a



German painter on its checklist.<sup>23</sup> Thus, one can conclude that Höch was actively engaged in the overlap of these two mediums. Many of the photomontages that she exhibited may in fact be better understood as photomontage-paintings. The fact that she chose to self-identify as a painter within a large photography show indicates that there is greater complexity in her artistic identity, and in her oeuvre.

Höch had another solo exhibition entitled “Aquarelle en Fotomontages door Hannah Höch.” It was held at the Galerie D’Audretsch in the Hague, and it ran from November 15 until December 14 in 1935. This was Höch’s last exhibition until after the end of World War II. Little is known about this exhibition, other than in it, Höch exhibited both her traditional watercolor paintings and her traditional photomontages. As She produced both photomontages, and paintings, it is only natural that Höch would want to exhibit them together. This exhibition highlighted Höch’s work in photomontage-painting, since she carefully curated the pieces that were included. Her self-identification as a painter while exhibiting photomontages, and her playfulness with mediums, prove that Höch did not value one medium over another. Through her photomontage-paintings and exhibition practices Höch rebelled against a system of strict boundaries for art mediums. A consideration of Höch’s photomontage-paintings, allows viewers to enter a consideration of medium that she would have wanted.

### **Recent Literature**

The rejection of Höch by her Dada contemporaries in the history of Dada created precedent for how Höch was initially considered in the history of art. Though there were a few important exceptions to this, Höch’s popularity did not rise until the early 1980s. Since then, there has been focus on Höch’s involvement with Berlin Dada and her work

as a photomonteur. Most Höch scholars prefer to analyze her oeuvre by breaking it into specific time groups of production. Höch's work after leaving Berlin Dada is not as frequently discussed, nor is her work in other mediums. Limiting the scope of her work does a great disservice to an artist that was actively producing for 70 years.

Edouard Roditi's 1959 interview was one of the first to spark an interest in Höch's work. The interview continued the tradition of limiting the extent of Höch's contribution to how her work intersected with the male Dada artists. The interview is full of questions about recounting stories of Grosz, Hausmann, and Schwitters. In 1968 Höch was included in William Rubin's MoMA exhibition "Dada and Surrealism Reviewed" where she was only one of two female artists to be included. Höch was also recognized for her possession of a vast majority of the Berlin Dada archives at her home in Heilgensee. Not only had she kept many important artworks, but she also saved years of correspondence between the artists. Her archives now belong to the Berlinsche Galerie.

Throughout the 1990s Höch's popularity continued to grow in the United States. Maud Lavin's *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: the Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (Yale University Press, 1993) was the first English text dedicated solely to Hannah Höch. Lavin's book follows Jula Dech's 1981 book *Schnitt mit Küchenmesser DADA durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoch Deutschlands: Untersuchungen zur Fotomontage bei Hannah Höch* (Lit Verlag). Both texts examine Höch's artistry through studying her largest photomontage, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*. Both Dech and Lavin can be attributed to shedding light on Höch as an independent artist that was worth examining separately from her male contemporaries. The scholars can also be credited with establishing the system of looking at Höch's artistic output through her photomontages, and they

probably assisted in making *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* Höch's most recognizable artwork. Lavin focuses her book on an analysis of the representations of women and the social constructions of femininity in the Weimar Republic. Höch's representation of gender, especially female gender, is essential in understanding her desire to do away with boundaries. If one considered the types of boundaries that Höch had to break through during the entirety of her career, her defiance through her artwork takes a more personal tone. Lavin's analysis of Höch through gender methodologies allows scholars a better understanding of the society in which Höch was working in.

In 1997 The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota held one of the first Höch retrospectives in the United States. The exhibition, *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch* would also travel to two of the most renowned art institutions in the United States, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The research done by organizer Maria Makela, and Kristin Makhholm for the exhibition catalogue has made this text an invaluable resource in studying the chronology of Hannah Höch's life. The scope of the exhibition is limited to Höch's work in photomontages. Exhibition organizer and curator Peter Boswell mentions that Höch worked in other mediums in the exhibition catalogue. The complexity of Höch's entire career is condensed in to one chapter, and the importance of Höch's time after the end of Berlin Dada gets lost within the overall text. This exhibition did include Höch's photomontages from later in her career, which look drastically different from her work produced in the 1920s. In the director's foreword, Kathy Halbreich states, "this exhibition is the first comprehensive survey in the United States of Hannah Höch's most influential body of work, the photomontages."<sup>24</sup> This statement is slightly problematic. By claiming only a

select portion of Höch's oeuvre is influential, it devalues the rest of her work in other mediums. Knowing that Höch did not favor one medium over the other, one can argue that all of her artworks are influential, and her artistic output needs to be viewed as a whole to understand its full impact.

The most recent publication on Höch is Dawn Ades' *Hannah Höch*. The exhibition catalogue corresponds to an exhibition of the same name that was shown at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 2014. This exhibition promises a new understanding of Höch's artistic career, as Ades chose not to include the term "photomontage" in its title. This text does include examples of Höch's writing on a variety of subjects. Being able to read Höch's own words, in full text format, is valuable to understanding her as an artist when viewing her work. Most importantly, the catalogue includes the foreword to Hannah Höch's first solo exhibition at the Kunstzaal De Bron. As stated previously, this foreword establishes Höch's ethos as an artist and as a person, through her desire to remove the boarders that have been erected around everything. Ades' catalogue attempts to remove some of the boundaries that have been traditionally placed around Höch's work. Director of the Whitechapel Gallery, Iwona Blazwick accurately states in the catalogue's foreword, "Beyond holding up a fractured mirror to the sociopolitical changes around her, however, Höch's aesthetic also transcends history. Her formal experimentation offers a liberating and poetic excursion into the farthest reaches of the imagination."<sup>25</sup> Though this text does incorporate more information regarding Höch's explorations into other mediums, it does not fully eradicate the boarders that have been erected around analyzing Höch's oeuvre.

The tradition of viewing Höch's work by the different mediums used limits the conversation that can be had about Höch's larger artistic intent. Her paintings and photomontages were made simultaneously, and therefore should be examined in dialogue with one another. The discourse on Höch begins to change when we reexamine some of her traditional photomontages as photomontage-paintings. Then we can actively see Höch's desire to break down the boundaries formed in art and in life come to fruition within her artworks. If we reconsider the ways in which we view Höch, and Berlin Dada we can begin to ask more important questions. In reconsidering a selected number of Höch's photomontages as photomontage-paintings we can give more agency to Höch as an artist. Photomontage-painting exemplifies Höch's direct engagement with the theorizing on painting that was being discussed by her Dada contemporaries. Painting itself was a much larger concern for Dada. If the Dadaists, and the Berlin group in particular, were so concerned with separating themselves from bourgeois art, why did so many Dada artists continue to work and engage with the bourgeois medium of painting? Hannah Höch was more than a photomonteur; she was also more than a painter. She, and some of her Berlin Dada contemporaries, utilized the mediums of painting and photomontage in many of their artworks, sometimes simultaneously. This element and its significance are rarely discussed. Analyzing the importance of painting to the Dadaists, and to Höch's photomontage-paintings, opens up a new interpretation of Höch and of Dada itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Leah Dickerman, “Zurich” in *Dada* (Washington DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 19-26.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Richter also characterized her as having “a slightly nun-like grace” and a “small precise voice” see Hans Richter, “Dada: Art and Anti-Art” (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 132.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Boswell, “Hannah Höch: Through the Looking Glass,” in *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch*, ed. Maria Makela and Peter Boswell (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1996), 7.

<sup>4</sup> Kristin Makholm, “Chronology,” in *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch*, ed. Maria Makela and Peter Boswell (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1996), 188.

<sup>5</sup> The terminology “people’s soviets” references the types of council-like political groups, that were originally inspired by the soviets from Russia, that developed out of the political unrest during Germany’s removal of its imperial form of government see Eberhard Kolb, “The Weimar Republic” (London: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>6</sup> Maud Lavin, *Cut With the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontage of Hannah Höch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 27.

<sup>7</sup> Boswell, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Huelsenbeck’s assertion that the Expressionists had failed is due in part to two questions he posed in the “First German Dada Manifesto.” He asks, “Has expressionism fulfilled our expectations of such art, which should be an expression of our most vital concerns? Have the expressionists fulfilled our expectations of an art that burns the essence of life into our flesh?” He answers both questions with “No! No! No!” For Huelsenbeck, the Expressionists failed due to their inability, in his mind, to create art that was socially engaged. Richard Huelsenbeck, “First German Dada Manifesto” in *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 258.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>10</sup> Hannah Höch, “Hannah Höch” in *Dialogues*, ed. Edouard Roditi (San Francisco: Bedford Arts Publishers, 1990), 69.

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<sup>11</sup> There are two separate accounts of Grosz's introduction to the medium. First he describes the anticipation of a new medium, but does not explicitly discuss any elements of photomontage. The other version tells of Grosz sending care packages and postcards montaged with explicit material, which would have otherwise been confiscated if their messages had been conveyed with words and not pictures. John Heartfield aligns himself as the first Dada photomontage artists through his own postcard photomontage work. Brigid Doherty, "Berlin Dada," in *Dada*, ed Leah Dickerman (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Lavin, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Maria Makela, "Exhibition Plates 1-25 The Dada Years," in *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch*, ed. Maria Makela and Peter Boswell (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1996), 25.

<sup>14</sup> Boswell, 10.

<sup>15</sup> The November Group was an organization of artists named after the failed German Marxist revolution of November 1918. They aimed to bring a new unity in art, architecture and crafts, and to bring the artist closer to the worker. They held numerous public exhibitions throughout the 1920s. The group was unified based on their political affiliations rather than sharing a cohesive artistic style. Leading figures of the November Group were: Max Pechstein, César Klein, Walter Gropius, Erich Mendelsohn, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Hans Poelzig, and Bruno Taut; El Lissitzky, Lyonel Feininger, Otto Müller, and Heinrich Campendonck; Gerhard Marcks and Rudolf Belling; and László Moholy-Nagy.

<sup>16</sup> The "First International Dada Fair" photographs were published in weeklies from Amsterdam, Milan, Rome, and Boston and received coverage from more locations around the world, Prague, Paris, London, New York, Buenos Aires, and El Paso, Texas. Doherty, 99-100.

<sup>17</sup> Makhholm, 189.

<sup>18</sup> Marc Dachy, *The Dada Movement* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1990), 106.

<sup>19</sup> Makela, 65.

<sup>20</sup> Makhholm, 194.

<sup>21</sup> Hannah Höch, "Catalogue foreword to Hannah Höch's first solo exhibition at the Kunstzaal De Bron, The Hauge," in *Hannah Höch*, ed Dawn Ades (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2014), 140.

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<sup>22</sup> *Stationen der Moderne: Die bedeutenden Kunstaussstellungen des 20. Jahrhunderts Deutschland* (Berlin: Berlinische Galerie, 1988), 237.

<sup>23</sup> Boswell, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Kathy Halbreich, "Director's Foreword," in *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch*, ed. Maria Makela and Peter Boswell (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1996), 4.

<sup>25</sup> Iwona Blazwick, "Foreword: The Beauties of Fortuity: Hannah Höch (1889-1978)," in *Hannah Höch*, ed Dawn Ades (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2014), 140.



## CHAPTER 2

### PAINTING IN DADA

Hannah Höch and many other Dada artists engaged with the medium of painting during the apex of the Dada years. These artists' efforts in painting are not usually discussed in regard to their impact on art history. Höch reflected on this convention in 1959: "This is an aspect of Dada art that is never mentioned today. However subversive our aesthetic doctrines, we still believed in acquiring, by training, the traditional skills of an artist."<sup>1</sup> Raoul Hausmann, George Grosz, Schwitters, Francis Picabia, and Höch actively worked in the medium of painting in Dada, while also engaging with other mediums. This overwhelming number of examples we have of paintings by Dada artists is somewhat shocking due to Dada's alleged anti-bourgeois ideals. Therefore we can conclude that painting was a larger concern to the Dada artists, and that Höch was a major contributor to the Dadaist conversation on the medium of painting.

This chapter examines the context and development of Dada painting, also beyond the Berlin group. It discusses how specific Dada artists explored the medium of painting. The chapter will define Dada painting through an examination of selected Dada artists and examples of their work. I will examine Hausmann and Grosz from Berlin Dada, Schwitters from Hanover Dada, and Picabia from Paris Dada. With the exception of Schwitters, all of these artists exhibited at the "First International Dada Fair." Therefore Höch would have been familiar with their work.

An analysis of Cologne Dada and particularly Max Ernst's contribution to photomontage-painting should be pursued in future studies. Though this analysis is important, I have not included him in this thesis due to the overwhelming breadth of his

oeuvre, and an inability to do it justice in a few paragraphs. This topic merits its own chapter. Ernst exhibited with Höch and the other Berlin Dada artists in the “First International Dada Fair” in 1920. Höch’s collage title, *Dada-Ernst*, a reference to the artist himself, implies at least knowledge of the artist and his participation in Dada. During the height of Berlin Dada, Ernst was also experimenting with different mediums, working in collage, painting, and paintings with collaged elements, like his *Ambiguous Figures* (1919-1920). Ernst was an important influence on Dada painting, including Höch’s.

In visually examining the examples of Dada painting, I seek to provide substantial evidence that Höch and her Dada contemporaries influenced one another in this medium and will also show that Höch was a major part of the context of the Dada group. I will highlight individual techniques used by the artists in their work, comparing those techniques to Höch’s. I will also discuss common themes explored by the Dada artists in painting. Lastly, I examine a selection of paintings by Hausmann, Grosz, and Schwitters that also include photomontage elements. Through a close examination of the combination of photomontage and painting by other Dada artists, we can see how Höch’s photomontage-paintings are distinctive and innovative within Dada.

### **Raoul Hausmann**

Hausmann and Höch engaged with similar mediums and artistic styles throughout their creative and personal relationship. They began dating in 1915, and it was during their turbulent relationship that the two artists eventually became involved in Berlin Dada. Both artists came from similar backgrounds and studied at prominent art schools in Berlin. What is crucial in understanding their mutual influence is their combined interest

in other forms of art. This shared interest can be seen in their participation in expressionistic art prior their development of Dada. Initially Hausmann favored figurative expressionism, while Höch experimented with abstract compositions.<sup>2</sup>

Hausmann's initial approach to Dada was philosophical, and it originated from his relationship with the psychoanalyst Otto Gross, and the expressionist writer Franz Jung. Through the ideas of Gross and Jung, Hausmann developed the idea of "destruction as an act of creation."<sup>3</sup> Hausmann wrote key Dada texts like his significant essay, "The New Material in Painting." His role as *Dadasoph* inspired many of his Dada contemporaries in reconsidering the ways in which different materials can be used to create art. His writings encouraged the Dada artists to create works that had a greater meaning and served a specific societal purpose. Hausmann also assisted in organizing key Dada events, that helped spread the word of Dada ideology to the masses. Hausmann is credited for vouching for Höch's acceptance in some of the early Dada events and exhibitions.<sup>4</sup> Her participation in these early events introduced her to other influential Dada figures and their ideals.

Due to their romantic relationship during the peak of the Dada years, Höch and Hausmann impacted each other's artistic careers. In a 1959 interview Höch recounted her artistic relationship with Hausmann:

Hausmann remains in my eyes the artist who, among the early Berlin Dadaists, was gifted with the greatest fantasy and inventiveness. Poor Raoul was always a restless spirit. He needed constant encouragement in order to carry out his ideas and anything at all lasting. If I hadn't devoted much of my time to looking after him and encouraging him, I might have achieved more myself.<sup>5</sup>

Hausmann's role as one of the main organizers of the 'First International Dada Fair' and his personal and creative relationship with Höch demonstrate how closely the two worked together during those years. They are even celebrated as the originators of the new medium of photomontage. It was during a vacation that they took together that they claimed to have discovered the motivation to construct photomontages.<sup>6</sup> It is difficult to separate them during the early Dada years as we can assume they were crucial to one another's creative process.

Aesthetically, Hausmann's oeuvre is quite different from Höch's. Hausmann's call for a "new material in painting" compelled him to blur the lines of visual arts by combining materials in innovative ways, and emphasizing the aesthetic quality of sound art. His creations included sound poetry, paintings, collages, reliefs, and assemblages. Like Höch, Hausmann produced watercolor paintings and created works that combined both watercolor and photomontage elements. Unlike Höch, the combinations of the two mediums in Hausmann's work are not seamless, and the distinction between his hand as a painter and a photomonteur is noticeable.

Hausmann's *Dada Triumps* (Dada siegt) is a 1920 collage that combines both watercolor and photomontage elements. The composition depicts an interior space occupied by a variety of montaged components. The structure of the room, the floor and walls are painted elements. Hausmann's play on the "interior" is seen in the general space that these objects occupy. It is also shown in the images displaying the interior of the human body, the exposed brain and anatomy image on the wall. Hausmann includes a photograph of himself in an overcoat, highlighting the oddity of a man dressed for the outdoors, standing inside of a room. A large painting sits on a stand against the back wall,

but instead of a painting of a traditional landscape, Hausmann montages a photograph of a landscape into the composition. The room that Hausmann creates represents the interior bourgeois thought process that was common in expressionism, the movement that he became adamantly opposed to after 1917.

*Dada Triumphs* combines traditional Dadaist themes. Hausmann includes different forms of texts: two displays of the name of the work itself, “Dada siegt” (Dada Triumphs), notifying the viewer of the overall theme of the piece. At the center of the artwork Hausmann includes the word “DADA,” which is positioned over an image of a map of the world. Hausmann aligns Dada thought with the world, reminding the viewer that Dadaism is an international movement that appeals to the masses. Dada also appears on the painted watercolor ball on the floor. This could be Hausmann’s subtle nod to the group’s first photomontage from the newspaper “Everyone His Own Soccerball” in 1919. It could also represent a specific type of motion seen in some other Dada artworks, specifically Höch’s.

Another theme of *Dada Triumphs*, also used by Höch and other Dada artists, is the machine. This piece is laden with images of cold metallic machinery. In the foreground of *Dada Triumphs*, Hausmann includes images of a typewriter and what appears to be a cash register. These two objects speak directly to Hausmann as a Dadaist. He wrote and spoke about the great disservice of artists that only thought about their art in regard to how it would be remembered in history, or how their art could be valued on the market. The Dadaists’ fascination with the mechanical directly intersects with their desire to make art accessible to all. New mechanical technologies were expanding the types of mediums they were utilizing, like the development of photography in the early

twentieth century. These developing technologies were also helpful in spreading the word of Dada. Through advances in printing, the Dada artists were able to produce their own periodicals that were publically disseminated. They were therefore able to increase visibility of their art and manifestos.

Hausmann's use of watercolor is more direct than Höch's. He adds his photomontage elements against the watercolor background. The watercolor and the photomontage are two separate units, forcefully combined together to speak on behalf of Hausmann. The watercolor background provides the setting from which the viewer is able to read the photomontage elements more clearly. Höch utilizes the mediums differently in her photomontage-paintings, as the two elements are combined together to create a cohesive medium. This cohesion can be seen in Höch's *Equilibre*. The watercolor background seeps into the middle of the two figures that have been constructed through montaged photographs. *Equilibre* illustrates the typical background space that Höch favors, a vacant background created with limited pigments that do not explicitly depict a physical space that could be seen in reality. In *Dada Triumphs* we can still see Hausmann's preference for more figurative modes of expression, versus Höch's more abstract blending of painting and photomontage.

*Dada Triumphs* was shown at the "First International Dada Fair." We can see from a photograph of the installation that *Dada Triumphs* was installed in the same corner as Höch's notable photomontage-painting *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*. Displaying these two works so closely together would allow the viewer to notice the similar themes that appeared in Dada artworks. It also would have allowed the viewer to compare the ways in which Höch and Hausmann integrated watercolor and photomontage elements

into their art. Höch was obviously familiar with Hausmann's work, and *Dada Triumphs* in particular, as it was hung beside hers at the first large exhibition of the Dada group. Common themes, and the use of watercolor also appear in other Dada artworks by artists who participated in these large exhibitions.

### **George Grosz**

George Grosz was an overtly political member of Berlin Dada. Mostly known for his satirical ink drawings, his paintings are also considered to be quite significant. Höch and Grosz had a complicated relationship during this time. Grosz frequently objected to her participation in many of Berlin Dada's largest events and did not value her as a contributing member of the group.<sup>7</sup> Thankfully Grosz lost on this count and Höch was included along side of him in many exhibitions. Grosz's unyielding opposition to Höch is strange due to their similar backgrounds. Both Höch and Grosz studied at distinguished art schools in Berlin during their early years as artists. They also spoke openly about their past experiences working with traditional subject matter.

Though Grosz enjoyed painting traditional landscapes, his drawings and paintings that commented on daily life in Berlin brought him the most notoriety. Grosz used his art to affirm his politics and the downside of society. Grosz co-authored the essay "Art is in Danger" with Wieland Herzfeld, a German publisher and writer. In it Grosz describes his personal artistic interests:

High art, so far as it strove to portray the beauty of the world, was of less interest to me than ever—I was interested in the tendentious painters, the moralists: Hogarth, Goya, Daumier, and such artists. Although I was very occupied with the lively discussions taking place at that time among the young art movements, and received many a formal stimulus from them, I could not share the general indifference of these circles toward social conditions and current events. I drew and painted out of opposition and

attempted in my work to present the world in all its ugliness, sickness, and untruthfulness.<sup>8</sup>

Grosz strove to create “Tendency Art.”<sup>9</sup> He thought that art should stand for something more than aesthetics. He believed that due to their active role in society, artists are ultimately tied to comment on contemporary culture. Artists either make a statement in art by making direct associations, or, they declare their opinions in not making any statement at all. Grosz’s text does not emphasize his preference for any specific medium, nor does it make claims to transform the medium of painting, like his contemporaries. Grosz’s impartiality to one medium is seen throughout his oeuvre, as Grosz worked in a variety of mediums during his lifetime.

Höch remembered Grosz as an artist “capable of feeling very deeply, but who preferred to conceal his sensitivity beneath the brittle and provocative appearance of a dandy.”<sup>10</sup> In comparison to other Dada painters, Höch believed there was “more fantasy, wit, humor or tenderness in the works of Grosz.”<sup>11</sup> Höch and Grosz ran in similar social circles and participated in many Dada exhibitions. The two were selected to participate in the “Film und Foto” exhibition in 1929, both exhibiting works in the medium of photomontage, even though they were both considered painters at the time.

Like Höch, Grosz utilized watercolor in many of his works. George Grosz’s “*The Convict*”: *Monteur John Heartfield after Franz Jung's Attempt to Get Him Up on His Feet* (“Der Sträfling”: Monteur John Heartfield nach Franz Jungs Versuch, ihn auf die Beine zu stellen) is an example of Grosz’s experimentation with combining photomontage and watercolor. Like Hausmann, Grosz uses watercolor to create a background for his montaged elements. This work is another interior scene, though



Grosz's montaged elements are more sparse. The "convict" stands in the middle foreground of the work. His body is mostly constructed in watercolor elements. Grosz creates the details of his coveralls, his shoulders and right arm with montaged photographs of blue fabric. According to the title, the convict is to represent John Heartfield, but he better resembles Grosz himself. The figure's face is shown in profile, with one menacing eye staring out at the viewer.

Grosz's choice to use watercolor is interesting as "watercolor offers the greatest possible freedom of painterly—as opposed to linear—expression for it is essentially a medium of color, not line."<sup>12</sup> In *The Convict* the entire work is outlined with thick black lines, a technique frequently employed by Grosz. He was able to counteract the inherent nature of watercolor; its soft pigments, and slight tonal variations by including a strong linear element. Interestingly Grosz chose to incorporate an outline of the convict's genitalia. This is crude and Grosz would have employed it as offensive to some. Perhaps Grosz attempts to counter the emasculation that results from being locked away. The Dada machine motif reappears in a reproduction of a machine replacing the convict's heart.

The room that the convict is in is almost empty. The window is opened to a street scene with rows of buildings, and one is a delicatessen. The ominous phrase "Viel Glück im neuen heim" (Good luck in the new home) reminds both the convict and the viewer that this room is his new residence. The pleasures of freedom, wine and good food are out of reach, just outside the window of his confinement.

Grosz's watercolor elements in *The Convict* provide a background to the photomontage elements. The medium brings an element of lightness to the works, which

balances out the intense and severe subject matter, making the content more visually palatable for the viewer. The transparency of watercolor allows Grosz's hand as a painter to be emphasized. He is able to achieve the textures he desires through the sedimentary nature of the medium of watercolor itself. The granular texture of the paper is still visible through the lightness of the watercolor pigment. Höch also relies on the inherent nature of watercolor to make slight formal variations in her photomontage-paintings, but in a less figurative manner. Watercolor and photomontage appear as separate elements in *The Convict*.

Grosz created full watercolor paintings that resemble traditional Dada photomontages. Grosz's *Republican Automats* (Republikanische Automaten) combines popular Dadaist photomontage themes and elements to create an optical illusion of mediums. Once again we see references to the advancements of technology, seen in the machine gears in the foreground, in combination with typography. Grosz creates depth in this work through his modeling of geometric forms, in the cylindrical appendages of the figures, and the perspective he is able to create with his modeling of the buildings in the background. The textual elements, and the flattened machine gears at the bottom of the composition, visually complicate the depth Grosz is able to create through the geometric rendering of the background.

The medium of watercolor speaks to Grosz's philosophy as a Dada artist. The transparency of watercolor reflects Grosz's desire to make art that was transparent about his opinions on politics and society. He was able to manipulate the medium and forcefully make it succumb to have a more linear quality. Grosz's hand as an artist is important to his artworks. He inserts his intentions both aesthetically, and culturally

directly into each artwork. This makes the viewer not only recognize Grosz work as being visually unique, but they would also identify his distinctive voice as an artist. Höch's use of watercolor in her photomontage-paintings, relies more on the traditional aesthetics of the medium. She emphasizes its subtle tonal variations, gentle transitions, and delicate use of pigments in her compositions. However, she utilizes these watercolor elements in non-traditional ways, by not replicating transitional landscapes or backgrounds that are constructed from reality.

### **Kurt Schwitters**

Though Schwitters was associated with Hanover Dada, he did have great influence and correspondence with many Berlin Dada artists, especially Hausmann and Höch. Like Höch, Hausmann, and Grosz, Schwitters was an academically trained artist. He is best known for his work in collage and assemblage, which he labeled "Merz."<sup>13</sup> His love for traditional painting techniques continued throughout his long career. He worked in the medium of painting numerous times, painting traditional subject matter to earn money.<sup>14</sup> Like Höch and Hausmann, Schwitters was influenced by other avant-garde groups, especially Expressionism. It was through his inclusion in Der Sturm Gallery that Schwitters was introduced to the Berlin art scene.

Though Schwitters was active in Berlin during the early stages of Berlin Dada, he was not embraced by many of the Berlin Dadaists. He had little interest in creating art that responded to contemporary politics, and preferred to engage with traditional mediums. Schwitters developed a creative relationship with both Hausmann and Höch. After Höch left the Berlin Dada group in 1922 she continued to collaborate with Schwitters. They formed a very unique bond, as Schwitters considered Höch an artistic

equal, a camaraderie that she did not have with the majority of her Berlin contemporaries.<sup>15</sup> Their closeness was in part due to their shared “respect for formal and aesthetic issues. Together they painted natural landscapes while Schwitters practiced his tone poems and made assemblages from driftwood.”<sup>16</sup> Schwitters encouraged Höch’s own continued experimentation with a variety of mediums as they shared a desire to expand the boundaries of those mediums.

Schwitters’ work as a publisher for his magazine *Merz* speaks to his ideology as an artist. *Merz* was known for bringing together artists of different artistic groups like Dada, De Stijl, and Constructivism. This creative synthesis established his preference for collaborating with different artists and his preference for experimenting with varied artistic styles. In his 1920 text “Merz” Schwitters explains his artistic style and his personal journey as an artist.<sup>17</sup> He begins by describing the simplicity of creating paintings from nature. Schwitters claims that the skills required to paint directly from nature can be taught through the study of perspective, anatomy, and color theory.<sup>18</sup> Schwitters discusses his transition from traditional painting to abstraction: “I abandoned all reproduction of natural elements and painted only with pictorial elements. These are my abstractions. I adjusted the elements of the picture to one another, just as I had formerly done at the academy, yet not for the purpose of reproducing nature but with a view to expressionism.”<sup>19</sup> “Merz” establishes Schwitters’ unique aesthetic within Dada, and he makes a point of separating his ideology from Huelsenbeck’s Dadaism. Schwitters understood Dadaism position against art and culture, whereas his abstract artworks are created solely for the purpose of art. His interest in expanding mediums through the interplay of different materials is something that Höch shared. Schwitters considered his

adjustment of different materials as “a step in advance of mere oil painting, for in addition to playing off color against color, line against line, form against form, etc., [he played] off material against material, for example, wood against sackcloth.”<sup>20</sup> His lack of preference for a specific medium aligns with Höch’s own ethos.

Schwitters’ affection for playing with different mediums is apparent in his *Merz* paintings. An early example of his experimentation with mediums and materials is Schwitters’ 1919 collage *Picture with Light Center* (Bild mit heller Mitte). The collage is comprised of watercolor and oil paint, pencil on board, and other collaged materials including newspaper cuttings, stamps, and torn paper. The most notable characteristic of this collage is its overwhelming size (84.5 cm X 66.7 cm). *Picture with Light Center* points to Schwitters’ direct transformation of nature painting into an abstract exploration of light and color through new materials. Like traditional painting, the collage depicts nature through its organic development of light in the center of the piece. This work is more representative of Schwitters’ earlier works as it still appears to be constructed methodically, and less according to the laws of chance, a technique Schwitters experimented with later in his career.

Schwitters also chooses muted colors that are found in nature. He then builds up the surface of the board by adding layers of thick paint, and pasted on paper. The paper, specifically the newsprint, adds a fascinating dimension to the work. The text itself flattens the surface of the collage, creating two-dimensionality. However, the way in which Schwitters layers and tears the paper adds dimension to the collage, taking it into the third dimension, in extending the artwork off of the board and into the viewer’s visual space. Schwitters’ hand as an artist is noticeable in *Picture with Light Center*, as he

included hand written text and scribbles in various locations on the collage, specifically in the upper and lower right corners. This collage demonstrates his penchant for extending the medium of painting to include other mediums and materials while maintaining the original integrity of painting.

*Picture with Light Center* was exhibited at the Der Sturm Gallery in Berlin in 1919 and again in 1921.<sup>21</sup> We know that Höch visited the gallery frequently during those years as many of its exhibition catalogues can be found in her archives.<sup>22</sup> We also know that Höch and Schwitters met in 1919 for the first time, so it is possible that Höch would have been familiar with this piece, and would have had the opportunity to discuss it with Schwitters.

A fascinating comparison can be made between the work that Schwitters was doing in discovering new ways to utilize materials, and the very traditional landscapes that he painted throughout his entire career. Höch collected about 27 of Schwitters' artworks throughout her life. Amongst her collection are examples of his landscapes in oil, like his 1913 *Farmstead with Geese*. During his career Schwitters produced nearly as many naturalistic paintings as he did collages. Schwitters felt that these paintings were important enough to exhibit alongside of his abstract collages, as he did in his 1927 comprehensive traveling exhibition, "Große Merzausstellung."<sup>23</sup> Schwitters and Höch favored experimenting with different materials, and did not favor one medium over another, choosing to exhibit a variety of artworks over their careers. Their mutual interest in creating landscape paintings proves that painting remained a major concern for both artists.

Schwitters' skepticism toward the politics of Berlin Dada solidified his creative relationship with Höch, as her work went beyond that theme early on. Perhaps they felt an artistic kinship that arose from their position on the periphery of Huelsenbeck and Grosz's Dada. Schwitters appealed to Höch because he wanted to continue to make art that continued to identify itself as art; this ideology aligned with her personal artistic views. They continued to collaborate during the years leading up to World War II, and travelled together. Höch's works were reproduced in issues of "Merz" and she created two grottos for his architectural structure *Merzbau*. Schwitters' fondness for experimenting in and combining traditional and untraditional mediums sets him apart from his Dada contemporaries. His focus on the aesthetics of his artworks and not their social implications pushed the boundary of mediums. His creative and collaborative relationship with Höch is important when considering both of the artists' output during the 1920s and 1930s.

### **Francis Picabia**

Höch's artistic relationships and her scope of influence was not limited to the borders of Germany. Her aesthetic appealed to Hanover Dada, through Kurt Schwitters. It also found inspiration and guidance from the work of some of the Paris Dada artists. Francis Picabia is one of the few artists who had a significant impact on many different areas of Dadaism, though he is mostly known for his time with the New York and Paris Dada groups. Picabia traveled to New York in 1913 to accompany his works that were being shown in the Amory Show. Photographer Alfred Stieglitz gave Picabia a solo exhibition at his gallery 291, which inspired Picabia's proto-Dada and Dada magazine *391*.

During a trip to Zurich Picabia met the artist Tristan Tzara and was intrigued by his radical ideas. The Zurich artists, including Huelsenbeck, were intrigued by Picabia's mechanomorphic artworks that had been produced in New York years earlier. Though Picabia was more involved with Dada events in Zurich and Paris, a selection of his works were included in the "First International Dada Fair" in Berlin in 1920. Picabia's influence can also be understood through the ways in which the other Dada artists adopted his ideas on art and culture in contemporary society.

During this period Picabia wrote extensively as he was a prolific poet. He wrote many texts commenting on the spirit of Dadaism. In his 1920 "Cannibal Dada Manifesto" Picabia speaks against the pretentiousness of the art world. Picabia proclaimed:

DADA, as for it, it smells of nothing, it is nothing, nothing, nothing.  
It is like your hopes: nothing.  
Like your heaven: nothing  
Like your idols: nothing  
Like your politicians: nothing  
Like your heroes: nothing  
Like your artists: nothing  
Like your religions: nothing.<sup>24</sup>

Picabia had notions similar to that of the Berlin Dada artists, as both questioned the value of art within culture, and who had the right to determine it. He concludes his "Cannibal Dada Manifesto" by saying, "In three months my friends and I will be selling you our paintings for plenty of francs."<sup>25</sup> This is an odd critique, as Picabia was very much a part of the art market, selling some of his cubist works years earlier in 1913 in New York.<sup>26</sup> There is a performative component to Picabia's texts, as his words always seem to address an audience. His writings at this time do not stress a preference for a particular medium, nor does he call for innovations to any particular medium. Picabia's texts call



for the artist to abandon all notions of fame and fortune, and to create art that appeals to a personal aesthetic. To him, that aesthetic is nothingness. For Picabia, art was more of a performance and therefore could not be a commodity. He aimed at exposing the banality of traditional avant-garde movements that favored art that did not adhere to the idea that like-minded artists had to have the same stylistic qualities to constitute a “movement.”

Picabia’s collage *Tableau Rastadada* created in 1920 is one of his first forays into the traditional methods of collage. What is striking about this papier-collé with ink composition is its overtly feminine imagery. Picabia highlights a female leg with three images of woman’s shoes, highlighting not only the power of the female form but also of modern consumer culture. *Tableau Rastadada* noticeably resembles the photomontages of Hannah Höch around the same time, like her 1920/1921 collage, *Dada-Ernst*. Both works emphasize the female body through striking images of legs. Picabia chooses to handwrite the text in his collage, whereas Höch is more known for using clippings of printed text. Höch’s preference for seamlessly montaged images is not seen in *Tableau Rastadada*, as Picabia exaggerates the cut-and-paste element. Since many of the Dada artists, even from different geographical locations, were in communication with each other, their shared references are more than coincidental.

Picabia created *Machine Turn Quickly* (*Machine tournez vite*) in 1916 and revisited the piece again in 1918. In it two large machine gears dominate the entire canvas. The composition is essentially a painting with a small collage component. It is comprised of brush and ink, with watercolor and shell gold pasted on paper. Picabia comments on femininity and masculinity as the gears are labeled “femme” and “homme.” The smaller gear is the “female” one, while the larger one is “male.” Machine motifs

became very popular in the different Dada circles; Picabia's machine drawings were an important influence. The title, *Machine Turn Quickly*, calls to mind the movement that Picabia hoped to portray through the golden strands he added to the gears. They appear to reference the gear's previous movements, calling to mind the image of Duchamp's *Nude Descending A Staircase, No 2* (which was shown at the Amory Show in 1913). The medium of painting allowed Picabia to focus on movement within the artwork, something that traditional photomontage lacked. Höch replicated this type of movement in her photomontage-paintings by treating photomontage elements as painting.

Picabia's treatment of painting, especially in the background is distinctive. Unlike Hausmann, Grosz, and Höch, Picabia makes no attempt to place the objects in his painting into a setting. He places his two mechanical gears against a dark black background devoid of line, and shape. Picabia's choice to focus only on the two gears of the machine thus inspires the viewer to analyze the gears in relation to one another. He isolates and emphasizes the movements of the gears by making them the central image of *Machine Turn Quickly*. The title of the work suggests movement in and of itself, but it also alludes to the idea that these gears are apart of a much larger machine. By essentially erasing the machine with black pigment, Picabia is able to create more tension and movement within the gears themselves. This tension demonstrates his skill as a painter, and his aptitude at combining non-painting elements, like the gold shell, that also contributes motion to the work. *Machine Turn Quickly* can be read as foundational in the development of combining new materials, and photomontage, within painting. This work predates Höch's use of watercolor and photomontage.

Picabia did not favor a particular medium. His time with New York Dada, Zurich Dada, and Paris Dada allowed him to try different mediums without having to make conclusive statements on a singular preference of a visual style. However, Picabia was emphatic in allowing his artworks to represent a specific playfulness. He believed “art is not a dogma and a religion...art is a joy.”<sup>27</sup> His artistic lightheartedness reflects in the movement Picabia is able to create in many in his compositions. This open playfulness also appears in many of Höch’s photomontage-paintings. She was able to address serious topics while playfully engaging with the medium of photomontage-painting.

Dada painting is difficult to define, as it represented different things to different artists from varying geographical locations. However, Dada painting remains a major aspect of Dada artistic production. Art history has favored the developments in new mediums, photomontage and ready-mades for example, when reflecting back on Dada’s importance. In considering how these artists—Hausmann, Grosz, Schwitters, Picabia, and Höch—experimented with the medium of painting, we can see another aspect of avant-garde innovation. Every artist had their own motivations to continue working within painting during the height of their Dada years, but the technique of working with new materials within the medium of painting was common to the group. Höch took this idea and extended it past simple experimentation with the relationship between materials and mediums. She eradicated the boundaries of traditional mediums. Schwitters did much the same thing and titled his new creation “Merz.” Though Höch did not identify and label these works as a new medium, I call her artistic innovations her “photomontage-paintings.”

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah Höch, “Hannah Höch” in *Dialogues*, ed Edouard Roditi (San Francisco: Bedford Arts Publishers, 1990), 73.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>3</sup> Amanda L. Hockensmith, Sabine T. Kriebel and Isabel Kauenhoven, “Artists’ Biographies” in *Dada*, ed Leah Dickerman (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2006), 471.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Boswell, “Hannah Höch: Through the Looking Glass,” in *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch*, ed Maria Makela and Peter Boswell (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1996), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Höch, 70.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>7</sup> Boswell, 7.

<sup>8</sup> George, and Wieland Herzfeld, “Art is in Danger” in *Dadas on Art* ed Lucy Lippard (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1971), 80.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>10</sup> Höch, 72.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Walter Koschatzky, *Watercolor: History and Technique* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 7.

<sup>13</sup> “A definition of *Merz* as a neologism chosen by Schwitters to designate his personal strategy as a creator in several media. He invoked it widely though most of his career, yet avoided any ultimate definition, all the while resisting its assimilation to the concept of Dada” see Roger Cardinal and Gwendolen Webster *Kurt Schwitters* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2011), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Hockensmith, Kriebel and Kauenhoven, 485.

<sup>15</sup> Maria Makela, “By Design” in “The Photomontages of Hannah Höch” ed Maria Makela and Peter Boswell (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1997), 65.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>17</sup> Translated version by Ralph Manheim. First appeared in *Der Ararat*, Munich 1921. See Robert Motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1951).

<sup>18</sup> Kurt Schwitters, “Merz” in *The Dada Painters and Poets* ed Robert Motherwell (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1951), 58.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Karin Orchard and Isabel Schulz ed *Kurt Schwitters: Catalogue Raisonné 1905-1922* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2000), 223.

<sup>22</sup> Makela, 53.

<sup>23</sup> Dorothea Dietrich, *The Collages of Kurt Schwitters: Tradition and Innovation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 61.

<sup>24</sup> Francis Picabia, “Cannibal Dada Manifesto” in *Dada*, ed Rudolf Kuenzli (London: Phaidon Press, 2006), 246.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Picabia’s *La Danse à la Source* (The Dance at the Spring) sold to Chicago based lawyer Arthur J. Eddy on March 7<sup>th</sup> for \$400. See Milton W. Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), 124.

<sup>27</sup> William A. Camfield, *Francis Picabia: His Art, Life, and Times*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 145.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE PHOTOMONTAGE-PAINTINGS

Hannah Höch's experiments in working across the mediums of painting and photomontage created a new hybrid medium. This medium depended on her precise work as a photomonteur as well as on her skill as a painter. Compared to the work of the Dada artists, Höch's use of paint within her photomontages is unique. In this final chapter I will focus on the formal analysis of select photomontage-paintings by Höch. Whereas art historians previously identified these works as photomontages, these works are instead painterly, hybrid photomontage-paintings.

Höch's combining of watercolor and photomontage within the same composition is so frequent throughout her oeuvre that it cannot be considered a coincidence. I chose examples to analyze that adhered to specific criteria. The artworks I analyze in this chapter date from 1919-1935. I selected this time period because it was the time of Höch's active participation in Dada. It also includes the years following Dada when she explored different forms of artistic expression. The works I chose also had to combine both watercolor and photomontage within the same composition. The artworks I discuss in this chapter do not represent an exhaustive list of Höch's work that can be considered photomontage-paintings. However, I believe these works represent a new hybrid medium and demand a new interpretation of Höch's art. I will also examine selected watercolor paintings that Höch created during the same time period that mirror the effects of photomontage. Through an examination of these watercolors I will establish that these works can best be described using terminology traditionally used for photomontage.

I will also answer the following questions: how do Höch's photomontage-paintings engage with Dadaist theories on painting and the relationship between mediums? How did she make use of both watercolor painting and the photomontage-painting? In answering these questions by means of selected works, I will demonstrate that Höch moved fluidly between different mediums in her photomontage-paintings.

### **Watercolor Paintings**

An analysis of Höch's watercolors allows us to separate preconceptions about Höch's artistic identity as a photomonteur. It helps us understand her experimentation in different mediums. By studying Höch's work in the medium of watercolor we are able to suppose why Höch chose watercolor to combine with her photomontages. I selected the watercolors I discuss here due to their compositional similarities with the medium of photomontage. These similarities allude to Höch's challenge to the strict borders that are erected around mediums within modern art.

While Höch created some of her most recognizable photomontages at the height of Berlin Dada, she was also painting. Höch's 1920 painting *Mechanical Garden* (Mechanischer Garten) was completed the same year that she exhibited her photomontages in the "First International Dada Fair." *Mechanical Garden* (watercolor, gouache and India ink) reflects Höch's preference for complex and detailed compositions. Höch creates a machine world, composed to invite the viewer into the frame. However the viewer is unable to recognize any elements in the "garden" as natural. Höch and the other Dada artists at this time preferred such machine imagery. A similar combination of the theme of man and nature can be seen in work of other Dadaists like Francis Picabia.<sup>1</sup> Höch creates visual chaos within the composition in

juxtaposing two dissimilar elements. The painting's title references a garden and evokes images of lush greenery, created through a palette of greens, blues, and browns.

However, Höch uses this palette to create a landscape of mechanical parts. She shows restraint in her colors, as she emphasizes the coldness of machinery through traditionally cool colors, while not using silver and greys. She then integrates both the "mechanical" and the "garden."

Höch invites the viewer into the artwork through a railroad track that begins in the right corner of the foreground and recedes through one-point perspective. The train track creates an illusion of movement within the piece and points to the evolution of technology itself. The train tracks also allude to a garden path, but in Höch's garden the visitor is greeted by menacing machine parts, not foliage. *Mechanical Garden* emphasizes Höch's preference for bizarre compositions that make the viewer feel uncomfortable. Höch replicates this uneasiness in many of her photomontages and photomontage-paintings. She creates fictional scenes and figures through the use of recognizable montaged photographs. Höch's compositions shockingly juxtapose the known with the unknown, and the predictable with the unexpected, to forward a new reading of particular subject matter.

Another remarkable example of watercolors Höch produced during this time is her 1921 *Study for Man and Machine*. The composition (watercolor and pencil on paper) depicts a human figure comprised of multiple machine parts. The machine-figure appears to be working on a separate machine, as its strange hand reaches out through the use of a coil to touch the machine in the foreground. Höch emphasizes the geometric quality of individual parts of the human-machine. She constructs the face through basic rectangular



shapes, painted with bright blocks of color. *Study for Man and Machine* exemplifies Höch's use of the transparency of watercolor to enhance different textures. These different textures act as separate elements brought together by the hand of the artist. They do not appear to be a cohesive painting. In exaggerating the pencil outlines of the objects on the page, Höch makes the composition look montaged together. *Study for Man and Machine* uses the foreground/background composition that Höch favors in many of her photomontage-paintings. The subject matter, usually a montaged creation, sits atop of a solid backdrop of concentrated color. In this work, the subject matter is not created through photographs but through Höch's subtle variations in watercolor.

Höch's choice to work in watercolor, and to combine watercolor and photomontage, is significant. Watercolor can be considered a convenient medium. It is an ideal medium for a traveler, as the pigments are packaged compactly and they only require the addition of water to activate the colors. This accessibility would have been helpful to Höch after she left Berlin Dada, as she spent time traveling around Europe, making and exhibiting her artworks. Watercolor also makes possible the addition of highly concentrated color with photographic images that were (traditionally) limited to black, white, and sepia tones. This limited tonal variation is also seen in the text clippings that Höch liked to include in some of her artworks. Watercolor's subtle tones and its translucency allowed Höch to develop multifaceted backgrounds through a rich color palette.

### ***Cut with the Kitchen Knife***

*Cut with the Kitchen Knife Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany* (Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser durch die letzte Weimarer

Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands) is Höch's most famous artwork, and is arguably one of the most recognizable Dada photomontages. But reading *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* as a photomontage-painting transforms how we look at it, in addition to many of Höch's works that were previously considered photomontages. Höch incorporated watercolor in this piece, which is rarely discussed; nor is her choice to use different types of photographs to visually create slight variations in her images. The composition appears manic, but in reality it is another example of Höch's methodical approach to composition and to the construction of imaginary scenes. Höch not only uses watercolor to emphasize a painterly quality in this composition. She also paints with the photographs, manipulating them like a painter controlling the length of her brush stroke.

*Cut with the Kitchen Knife* is one of the largest works that Höch produced. The artwork is usually analyzed through the context of the politics of the Weimar Republic, and through issues of femininity. *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* is visually filled with images of the German political world, as well as with figures from popular culture in the early twentieth century. Höch juxtaposes these figures with images of machine parts, animals, and text. *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* can be read through its quadrant-based composition.

The upper right corner depicts "representatives of the former Empire, the military, and the new, moderate government of the Republic."<sup>2</sup> The viewer recognizes these figures as those who are in opposition to Dada, as they are labeled "die anti dada" (the anti Dada).<sup>3</sup> Moving clockwise, to the bottom right, is the pro-Dada section, which includes the physical representation of many of Höch's Dada contemporaries like Raoul Hausmann and John Heartfield.<sup>4</sup> This section is labeled "Die grosse Welt dada" (the

great Dada world) on the bottom right.<sup>5</sup> Traditionally, the lower right corner of artworks are reserved for the artist's signature. Here Höch instead places a map of Europe, highlighting the countries achieving women's suffrage, which included Germany.<sup>6</sup> This placement aligns Höch with political liberations of women in Europe. It also announces herself as a "New Woman" of the Weimar Republic.<sup>7</sup>

The bottom left corner of *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* shows multiple images of crowds of people. The words "Trete Dada bei" ("join Dada") float above the crowd, seemingly spoken by a figure addressing the masses. He invites people to join Dada. In the top left of the photomontage is a large image of Albert Einstein. Multiple images of machinery appear behind his head, possibly representing the productivity of intellect. Once again we see the word "Dada" pasted on an image of train in the top left, above Einstein's head, aligning the group with intellect and progress.

The majority of the figures that are represented in *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* are pasted photographic images. However, Höch includes an image of Wilhelm II (top right corner, in the anti-Dada section) that is a painted portrait. This is the single largest representation of a figure in *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*. Höch suggests that the medium of painting is associated with an older institution, in aligning it with an ousted political figure and the traditional subject matter of portraiture. This implication is interesting as Höch herself utilizes painting, specifically, watercolor, within this piece. She uses watercolor in sections of the background. On the left side of the work watercolor is used on the thin blue strip that finishes the left corner, and on a lightly colored square directly underneath the blue segment. It is also seen in another lightly colored square on the bottom right corner. Watercolor adds color and texture to the background, but Höch does

not use it to construct a landscape in which to place any of the figures. Perhaps Höch aligns the traditional methods of painting, and the strict boundaries associated with it, as a tradition that needs to be re-envisioned, but not the medium itself. Höch presents this new vision through her photomontage-paintings.

Höch creates a painterly composition through her manipulation of photographs. She plays with dark and light tonal variations within the photographs to create depth. She also uses different types of source materials— photographs, newspaper, and magazines—to create variations with the composition, like a painter uses different shades of the same color. Even the placement of the figures on the page creates a fluid movement that allows the eye to advance through the image and absorb it section-by-section. Traditional photomontage tends to appear static, as the composite photo-figure appears pasted onto the background. In *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, Höch depicts active female bodies, gymnasts and dancers, to introduce movement. She reduces the static effect of photomontage by combining it with painting and by treating it like painting as well.

*Cut with the Kitchen Knife* can be understood as one of Höch's first forays into the medium of photomontage-painting. Her comfort with painting, photomontage, and photomontage-painting, can be seen in her desire to exhibit these works in early Dada exhibitions. *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* is Höch's most visually dense photomontage-painting. As she continued to work with the hybrid medium she found greater balance between watercolor and photomontage elements. Höch became bolder in her incorporation of watercolor and photomontage, which can be seen in her other photomontage-paintings. This artwork is an early example of Höch's ability to push the

boundaries of traditional mediums, and to manipulate them to better represent her personal artistic ethos.

### ***The Dream of His Life***

Höch continued to experiment in the medium of photomontage-painting. In 1925 she created *The Dream of His Life* (Der Traum seines Lebens). The most striking thing about this work is the intense coloration of the background. Höch utilizes bright, warm tones there. These vivid pinks, and oranges draw the viewer inside of the artwork. We can see that Höch here fully embraces the combination of watercolor and photomontage in the same composition. Höch's experimentation between mediums is successful, as this piece relies equally on its concentrated watercolor background, and the hand-colored photographs. *The Dream of His Life* is one of the best examples of Höch's abilities as a painter-photomonteur.

In *The Dream of His Life* Höch highlights the artistry of her artwork and of the subject matter she depicts. She adds wood grain frames around these female figures. Interestingly, these frames do not just highlight the model but also fragment her body in different locations. The frames are made from montaged photographs of wood grain frames, which appear heavy next to the delicate paper background. Höch includes a traditional label with the artwork's title. She introduces photographs of the same woman, but each image varies slightly. The female figure adjusts her stance and the placement of her hands. These subtle variations add movement to the composition, as the images suggest time-lapse photography. However, Höch fragments every image of the female model in *The Dream of His Life*. This is achieved by physically cutting the image (seen on the top right figure), by inserting the wood frame, which bisects the figures (seen on

the figures on the left of the composition), and, finally, by obscuring parts of her body, hidden with the width of the frame (seen on the figure on the bottom right). The frames also add movement to the composition by creating a visual line for the eye to follow, starting underneath the title label. Höch's ability to create movement within photomontaged elements is unique to her aesthetic as a painter-photomonteur. She paints with the photographs, to create rhythmic variations between seemingly similar images.

Höch also uses brushstroke to create a dreamlike background for these figures. She employs the traditional photographic technique of hand-coloring. Höch adds color to the flower bouquets on the model's head and to her dress. She adds pastel blues, pinks, yellows, and greens, to create slight variations in the photograph. Hand coloring was predominately used in the middle to late nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, before color photography had been developed: "Hand-coloring was considered not just acceptable but essential to enliven the pallid tones of daguerreotype and paper portraits, as well as some scenic views. Because both photographers and the public believed that images in color were more artistic and more natural."<sup>8</sup> The hand-colored element in this piece further emphasizes the unity between photomontage and painting. Höch continues the incorporation of color, from the vivid background onto the black and white photograph itself. This seamless continuation highlights the hybridity of photomontage-painting. Höch's playful combination of mediums in *The Dream of His Life* reflect on the types of advances that Raoul Hausmann and Kurt Schwitters were making in exploring new materials in painting. She successfully unites the traditional medium of painting with the more modern medium of hand-colored photography and photomontage to create her new hybrid medium.

This experimentation can also be seen when comparing Höch's integration of watercolor in *Cut With the Kitchen Knife* with that in *The Dream of His Life*. Where the former hints at the delicacy of watercolor, the latter unabashedly displays the medium's brilliance. Höch uses this to her advantage in *The Dream of His Life*, in creating a dream-like environment. The figures seem to float within a pink and orange haze. The choice of pronoun in the title is significant, as Höch chooses to classify the subject matter as the dream of "his" life. Is Höch indicating what she believes to be the feebleness of male desire? "His" gaze and intentions may be set upon this dream woman, but she does not appear whole to him. She is fragmented, imperfect, and complicated, like a real woman. Höch may also have chosen an ambiguous title. Is this a photograph of a dancer during a performance, striking poses on a stage? Or, is this a personal dream, and the use of the pronoun "his" shocks the viewer and complicates the reading of the subject?

### **"From An Ethnographic Museum" Series**

Höch's "From an Ethnographic Museum" Series is comprised of around 20 works that were created between 1924 and the early 1930s. Höch utilized numerous watercolor elements in the artworks of the series, resulting in some of the best examples of her photomontage-paintings.<sup>9</sup> The series, like the majority of Höch's subject matter, is riddled with complex interpretations. A general reading of the "From an Ethnographic Museum" series discusses how these images engage with "othering." It deals with issues of the female body, the problems with ethnography, and the harms of the conventional gaze. Selected works in this series highlight Höch's ability to move beyond photomontage or painting artworks to those that are photomontage-paintings.

Höch's photomontage-painting *Mother* (Mutter) from 1930 depicts a "mother" whose face has been replaced with an image of a Northwest Coast Kwakiutl mask. The mother figure is taken from a photograph that fellow Dadaist John Heartfield took of a pregnant proletarian woman.<sup>10</sup> Höch removes the mother's very pregnant belly and alludes to this woman's condition through her slumped shoulders. She then montages a photograph of an eye over the mask. The eye looks out directly at the viewer. By cutting a hole in the mouth of the mask, Höch leaves the mother's pursed lips exposed. Höch juxtaposes the celebratory nature of the mask with the longing thoughtfulness of the pregnant woman. This juxtaposition is a poignant example of how women were supposed to feel while being pregnant compared to the reality of how they actually felt.

Though Höch removed indicators of this woman's pregnancy by editing out her growing stomach, she alludes to it through watercolor. The striped background transcends the figure of the woman. Höch creates the illusion of the woman's pregnant belly through her use of tonal variations of watercolor. She uses dark shading around the area of the torso, which gives the area depth and suggests roundedness. That modeling, in combination with Höch's strategic cut under the breast line, gives the impression that the woman's engorged breasts are resting on a curved object. The deep warm colors invite the viewer, encouraging sympathy with the plight of the pregnant woman. The woman and the mask are objects of the traditionally male, dominant gaze. This critique of the dominant gaze is represented in how ethnographic objects were photographed and displayed in the early twentieth century, and how this woman was photographed and her image used by a male photographer. In *Mother*, watercolor and photomontage are not two



separate mediums appearing simultaneously on the page. They unite to become a single powerful medium.

This unification of mediums can also be seen in the piece *Strange Beauty* (Fremde Schönheit). Here, Höch depicts a scene that is very recognizable in the art historical canon. She montages together an image of a reclining nude, but instead of including the figure's impish head, she attaches an image of a mask. The mask looks coquettishly at the viewer, superimposed with a cutout of spectacles and enlarged eyes. This "strange beauty" returns the viewer's gaze in her somewhat grotesque one, potentially making the viewer uncomfortable. Through her use of watercolor, Höch creates the impression that the reclining figure is lounging on an actual object. She uses the same type of modeling seen in *Mother* to build an idea of a cushioned bed. Höch uses stripping again, this time horizontally, to imply shapes and lines that do not actually exist on the page. The illusion that Höch creates hinges on her ability to perform the perfect cut when extracting her images. By cutting away a portion of the leg and the arm Höch creates a line on the nude's body that produces movement. Where the photomontage ends, the watercolor immediately begins, creating a seamless unity of medium, within a photomontage-painting.

Another example of photomontage-painting from this series is *The Sweet One* (Die Süsse). The 1926 work demonstrates Höch's preference for using brightly pigmented watercolor. The vivid reds, oranges, and yellows appear painterly, as Höch allows the colors to blend together and create movement on the paper. *The Sweet One* features a composite image of a modern female's legs, a mask from the former French Congo, and the body from an idol figure of the Buschongo tribe.<sup>11</sup> Höch also includes

images of Western body parts, seen in the hand that grazes the idol figure, and the pouty lips. As in many previous works, Höch includes a singular image of an eye. In *The Sweet One* the eye does not meet the gaze of the viewer, but looks past the viewer. Höch's predilection for displaying only a few selected figures in each artwork in the "From an Ethnographic Museum" series is pleasing to the eye. It is a departure from Höch's earlier works like *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, where the page was packed with images and figures from contemporary culture.

In focusing on a limited number of images in each work, Höch draws attention to, and experiments, with figure and ground. The watercolor in *The Sweet One* not only supplies an imaginary ground for the figure to stand on, but it also provides perspective so the viewer can imagine the figure in physical reality. By placing these typically strange hybrid figures into a landscape with depth and perspective, Höch alludes that these characters are real. She strengthens this illusion by keeping most of the proportions of the montaged body the same. Höch frequently keeps the compositions of the body analogous to the shape of real human bodies. This quality is what makes Höch's figures, and artworks so alarming. She depicts figures that look similar to the body shapes that we see daily, but includes an unusual element that makes the viewer genuinely reconsider what she is looking at.

Höch's interest in figure and ground can also be seen in her 1929 work *From the Collection: From an Ethnographic Museum No. IX* (Aus der Sammlung: Aus Einem Ethnographischen Museum Nr. IX). This piece depicts two strange composite figures. She composes male images alongside the female body parts and ethnographic objects. In *From the Collection: From an Ethnographic Museum No. IX*, Höch plays with forced

perspective. She depicts two figures that seem to be standing next to one another. Höch creates distance in painting a solid orange square at the bottom of the work. She cuts off the left figure's legs mid-calf to make it appear as though it were standing behind the right figure. She uses her familiar methods of representation by keeping the body proportions natural. However, in order to create the distance needed to provide perspective, the left figure's body is depicted as being smaller. Its mask-head then appears much larger in comparison. The photomontage and watercolor elements in *From the Collection: From an Ethnographic Museum No. IX* are best addressed when they are viewed in relation to each other. Neither medium is more important than the other in this piece, as they work in conjunction.

### **Conclusion**

It is a disservice to Höch and to the images she produced if we only analyze them through the lens of photomontage. Höch purposefully chose to incorporate watercolors in a large number of her works, implying that this medium was important to her. In considering these works as photomontage-paintings, we liberate them from one-sided analysis and read them in a new light. Without consideration of watercolor as an element equally important as photomontage in her oeuvre, these works lose their complexity, as landscapes, in depth, and in bright variations of color. Viewing photomontage and watercolor as separate elements limits our reading of different subject matter that Höch presents in these artworks. When we unify the two mediums, these artworks transcend earlier interpretations.

Since Höch wanted to “blur the firm borders that we human beings, cocksure as we are, are inclined to erect around everything that is accessible to us,” we can see why

she would have wanted to expand the boundaries of two separate mediums.<sup>12</sup> When reading a selection of her works as photomontage-paintings we reconsider Höch as an artist. We remove the singular label of photomonteur from Höch's place in history, and instead reintroduce her as the multidimensional artist that she actually was. Höch considered herself a painter and a photomonteur, but above all, she considered herself an artist who wanted to surpass the limitations that surrounded her. By broadening her work we are able to recognize her true contribution to Dada and to the art world: a desire to do away with traditional, imposed conventions and to create an art that appeals to one's own personal ethos.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Boswell, "Hannah Höch: Through the Looking Glass," in *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch*, ed by Maria Makela and Peter Boswell (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1996), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Makela, "Exhibition Plates: The Dada Years," in *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch* ed by Maria Makela and Peter Boswell (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1996), 25.

<sup>3</sup> Brigid Doherty, "Berlin," in *Dada*, ed Leah Dickerman (Washington DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 107.

<sup>4</sup> Maud Lavin, *Cut With the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontage of Hannah Höch* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 19-22.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

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<sup>7</sup> The “New Woman” represented new roles that women were playing in the Weimar Republic. Women were more frequently employed at this time, traditionally working in jobs dealing with new technologies. They were also more sexually liberated at this time. Many women in the Weimar Republic had access to birth control and abortions, even though they were still technically illegal. They were also major consumers. They spent their new money on fashionable clothes, new shorter haircuts, cigarettes, and cinema tickets. The image of the “New Woman” became a popular cultural icon, and images of this type of woman appeared frequently in mass media. See Marsha Meskimmon and Shearer West, eds *Visions of the ‘Neue Frau:’ Woman and the Visual Arts in Weimar Germany* (Aldershot, ENG: Scolar Press, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 1997), 595.

<sup>9</sup> Not every artwork in “From an Ethnographic Museum” series has watercolor elements. Some display photomontages pasted onto colored paper, and other various blank backgrounds. These works are not considered photomontage-paintings, so they will not be addressed in this thesis.

<sup>10</sup> Makela, 105.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>12</sup> Hannah Höch, “Catalogue foreword to Hannah Höch’s first solo exhibition at the Kunstzaal De Bron, The Hauge,” in *Hannah Höch*, ed Dawn Ades (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2014), 140.

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have examined how a group of Höch's artworks made between 1919 and 1935 are best understood as photomontage-paintings. I argue that due to Höch's involvement with Berlin Dada, and her creative relationships with her contemporaries, she was also interested in experimenting with the medium of painting. The first new medium to come from these ideas was photomontage. Höch took her exploration of that medium a step further. In 1934 she discussed the idea of an art form that grew out of photography: "the peculiar characteristics of photography and its approaches have opened up a new and immensely fantastic field for a creative human being: a new, magical territory, for the discovery of which freedom is the first prerequisite. But not lack of discipline, however. Even these newly discovered possibilities remain subject to the laws of form and color in creating an integral image surface."<sup>1</sup> This quote hints at the exciting results that Höch created through her experimentation in photomontage, as she loosely describes her photomontage-paintings. The photographs, and the indexical quality of the image, are based on the inherent characteristics of photography. Höch then adds her hand as an artist, creatively manipulating those characteristics, and adding watercolor to invigorate the image. This new hybrid medium transformed photomontage and pushed it beyond any other Dadaist interpretation of it.

Höch's place on the periphery of the Dada circle, due to her being one of the only women in a male dominated group, actually allowed her more freedom to develop her own voice within the medium of photomontage. Not as overtly political as some of her other contemporaries, Höch utilized her place as a woman in the Weimar Republic to draw her own conclusions in her artworks. Höch was not publically involved in the grand

manifestos of the Berlin Dada artists, and chose to engage with her innovative ideas on the canvas. This may be why Höch chose to include a significant amount of text in her earlier photomontages; she was able to express her opinions in a space over which she had total control. Though her name is not directly associated with the Berlin Dadaist's essays and theories of art, she engages with these ideals directly in her works. She too expressed a desire to work beyond the traditional bourgeois art groups of the past, and emphasized the importance of creating art that had greater meaning.

Many art historians have addressed the importance of Höch as a photomonteur and as a female voice in the predominantly male Dada group. Her work in other mediums is, mostly discussed in regard to her work after her departure from Dada. The desire is to assign her to a specific artistic group, and her oeuvre to a specific style; yet this is not an accurate view of her art. She defies classifications and labels. In fact, Höch is best known for works that do not accurately describe the breadth of her art practice. She is known as a Berlin Dadaist, but she spent only a short time actively involved with the group. She is famous for her photomontage, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, which looks strikingly different to any other work she produced. We are able to gain a better understanding of Höch as an artist by studying her works that have been believed to be less important.

Though revolutionary in style, Höch's works address many of the same themes as her contemporaries. Like Hausmann, Grosz, and Picabia, Höch was interested in the intersection between man (or in her case, woman), nature, and machine. Technology remained an important image for the Dadaists, as it represented many elements of their contemporary lives. When combined with other grotesque images, Dada's images of technology symbolized the machinery of war and the cold, impersonal nature of culture.

But technology also represented a progression of ideas and technologies that were revolutionizing the art world for the Dadaists, like advances in photography and mass printing. Höch was interested in expanding the medium of painting by introducing new materials, as was Schwitters. Through their ability to experiment while still upholding traditional academic forms—line and color for example—they created their own mediums. Schwitters put forward his *Merz* collages, and Höch her photomontage-paintings. Their close friendship and artistic collaboration needs to be recognized for its importance, and for its impact on both of their careers.

Höch's photomontages are photomontage-paintings, a combination of watercolor painting and photomontage. This combination of mediums cannot be ignored because it appears so frequently throughout her oeuvre. This combination can be seen in the art of many of Höch's Dada contemporaries, but she was able to incorporate them differently, stretching the confines of photography while playing with its evidentiary quality. Höch creates dystopian environments through suggestive images and object that do not exist in real life. The figures she creates from composited photographs cannot exist outside of her imagination, as they are typically made from contradictory forces: combining male and female elements, or ethnographic objects and real body fragments, for example. She then places these figures before backgrounds that are not descriptive, but are suggestive of a reality. They infer a specific time and place, but ultimately it is left up to the viewer to make these assumptions. Höch is able to create these illusions through her artistic mastery of photomontage and painting. She paints with the photographs, as she montages the background with watercolors. The relationship she establishes between the two mediums in her works is so strong one medium cannot be considered without the other.



By viewing them as straight photomontage, the photomontage-paintings lose half of their identity and half of their understanding. The piece becomes just a singular photomontage lifelessly standing against a brightly colored background, devoid of movement and purpose. In many ways the watercolor element brings the photomontage to life. Höch expressed her desire to “blur the firm borders that we human beings...are inclined to erect around everything that is accessible to us.” We can therefore recognize her interest in moving beyond the set boundaries of one medium.<sup>2</sup> The hybrid medium of photomontage-painting is more accurately aligned with Höch’s philosophy of art.

My thesis brings up topics that merit further research. A study of Max Ernst’s work in watercolor, his influence on the Dada artists, and his theory and interpretation of artistic medium would be invaluable. A further exploration might focus on the development of the medium of watercolor within the avant-garde. Another important topic would be an examination of the use of the medium of watercolor within German culture, and of how artists prior to Höch utilized it. It would furthermore be helpful to research the pedagogy of painting at prominent art schools in Berlin. Höch, Hausmann, and Grosz attended prominent art schools in Berlin around the same time, understanding the school’s curriculum might reveal a proficiency for particular mediums. Researching this specific training in painting would help answer the question of why the Dada artists and Höch in particular chose to paint in watercolor. Höch’s photomontages and even the scope of her artistic output need to be more fully addressed; I have only begun this task in this thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> “Nekolik poznámek o fotomontáži,” in *Stredisko* 4, no. 1, 1934. *Stredisko* was a Czech avant-garde journal. Later republished in Maud Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 219-20.

<sup>2</sup> Hannah Höch, “Catalogue foreword to Hannah Höch’s first solo exhibition at the Kunstzaal De Bron, The Hauge,” in *Hannah Höch*, ed Dawn Ades (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2014), 140.

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