



Höch, Hannah (1889-1978)

by Tee A. Corinne

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German bisexual artist Hannah Höch is best known for her photomontages. She assembled images--often taken from popular magazines--into commentaries on gender and politics, frequently critiquing German bourgeois culture. She also made drawings and paintings (oil, watercolor, and gouache), participated in fabric and fashion design, and created dolls.

Hannah Höch was born Anna Therese Johanne Höch into a middle-class family in Gotha, a small town in Thuringia, in 1889. Between 1912 and 1920, she studied art at the Kunstgewerbeschule Charlottenburg (Charlottenburg School of Applied Arts) and the Unterrichtsanstalt des königlichen Kunstgewerbemuseums (School of the Royal Museum of Applied Arts) in Berlin.

The position of women in European society changed rapidly during this period and the "New Woman" was a popular theme to which Höch responded in her art.

Between 1915 and 1922, Höch was involved with Austrian-born artist Raoul Hausmann (1886-1971), a married man. Although Höch wanted Hausmann to leave his wife and daughter and live monogamously with her, he refused to do so.

As members of the Berlin Dada, Höch and Hausmann developed the art of photomontage (photographic images collaged onto paper) as a tool of artistic commentary. Dada--a response to the devastation of World War I--was a tumultuous, anarchistic, nihilistic movement that flourished between 1916 and 1922 in Zurich, New York, Cologne, Hanover, Berlin, and Paris.

Höch's best known work is the 1919-1920 photomontage titled "Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany," which combines images of men (military, government, Communists, radicals), images of women (dancers, athletes, actresses, artists), pictures of man-made objects (especially gears), and words ("DADA" is repeated three times).

In 1926, almost four years after her 1922 breakup with Hausmann, Höch entered into a lesbian relationship with the Dutch writer and linguist Til Brugman (ca 1888-1958). They remained together for nine years, living in The Hague from 1926 to 1929, then in Berlin.

The two women collaborated on some projects, including a book, *Scheingehacktes* (1935), for which Höch provided the images and Brugman the text. Later, Höch would remember her time with Brugman as one of the happiest in her life, but also complain of Brugman's possessiveness. During her time with Brugman, she produced a number of photomontages depicting same-sex couples.

During the 1930s, Höch embraced Surrealism, a movement to which her style of juxtaposing disparate human and animal parts was especially well-suited.



Top: Hannah Höch (right) with Nelly van Doesburg and Piet Mondrian.

Above: A collage by Hannah Höch.
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In 1935, while still involved with Til Brugman, Höch began a romance with businessman and amateur musician Heinz Kurt Matthies, twenty-one years younger than she. They married in 1939, separated in 1942, and divorced in 1944. For the remaining thirty-four years of her life, the artist chose solitude over romance.

Although Höch's art was of a kind particularly denounced by the Nazis as degenerate, the artist managed to survive the Nazi period without suffering persecution.

During the 1940s and 1950s, Höch explored non-objective abstraction. Not only was this a popular direction in avant-garde art at the time, but it was also safer than the political and social commentaries of her earlier work. Between 1963 and 1973, she returned to images of women as her central theme.

For most of her adult life, Höch maintained close friendships with some of the leading European artists, such as Kurt Schwitters, Theo van Doesburg, and Hans Arp.

Höch died in Berlin in 1978 at the age of eighty-eight.

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About the Author

Tee A. Corinne was a photographer and writer. Her articles about lesbian art and artists appeared in numerous journals and encyclopedias. Her books include *The Cunt Coloring Book*, *Yantras of Womanlove*, *Dreams of the Woman Who Loved Sex*, *Courting Pleasure*, and *Intimacies*. She was the editor of *FABB: The Feminist Art Books Bulletin*, co-editor of the *Queer Caucus for Art Newsletter*, and member of the editorial advisory board of www.glbtc.com.