

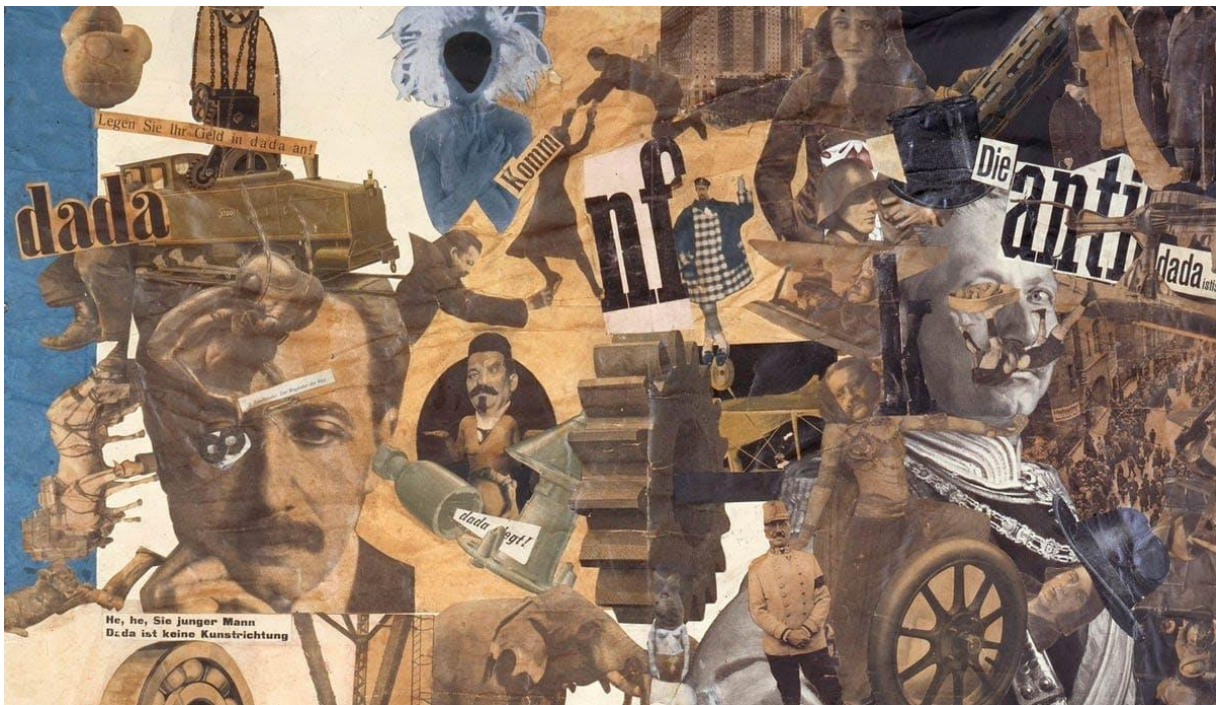
Hannah Höch:

The Life and Work of the German Dada Artist

Credit: <https://www.thecollector.com/hannah-hoch-derman-dada-artist/>

Hannah Höch is a famous German artist. She is known for pioneering the art of photomontage in the Berlin Dada. Take a look at her fascinating career!

Dec 10, 2020 • By Dea Cvetković, BA and MA in Art History



Detail from *Cut with the Dada Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany* by Hannah Höch, 1919, via Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin

Hannah Höch was a German artist connected to the Berlin branch of the Dada art movement. Dadaism started in 1916 at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, Switzerland. However, Dadaists were active in cities like Berlin and New York as well. Höch was the only female artist of the Berlin Dada. She helped establish photomontage as a typical Dadaist technique. During her career, Höch made feminist pieces and always explored ideas related to gender roles. The fact that she worked in a publishing company meant that she had a lot of experience in dealing with the patriarchal media culture of the Weimar Republic. Here, we look at the life and work of Hannah Höch.

Who Was Hannah Höch?



Love in the Bush by Hannah Höch, 1925, via Sotheby's

Hannah Höch was born Anna Therese Johanne Höch in 1889 in a small town in Germany called Gotha. She was born in a wealthy family in which her mother, according to her social status, showed interest in arts. When she was 23, Höch moved to Berlin to study graphic design at the School of Applied Arts. When World War I started, the school was closed and Höch returned to her hometown where she worked for the Red Cross.

After the war ended the German artist returned to Berlin where she met Raoul Hausmann, a fellow Dadaist and her future love interest. Höch was an independent woman who supported herself. She had a job at the Ullstein Publishing Company where she designed knitting patterns printed in ladies' magazines. Ullstein Press was a well-known company that published popular German magazines like the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* and *Die Dame*. Höch also earned money from designing book covers.

Dada In Berlin



Dada—Puppen by Hannah Höch, 1919, via Sotheby's

The German branch of the movement was formed in 1917, a year after the official beginning of Dada in Zurich. The group was active until 1923. The Berlin Dada was a very political movement. Members of the Berlin Dada were either close to anarchism or communist ideals. The works of German Dadaists were inspired by their disillusionment with World War I, the new political chaos brought by the November Revolution, and the mass media of the newfound

Weimar Republic. The artists involved with the movement include George Grosz, John Heartfield, Hannah Höch, Raoul Hausmann, and Johannes Baader.

Höch was first introduced to the Berlin Dada artists by Raoul Hausmann. Hausmann was married at the time and had a child, regardless of which Höch and he started having an affair. They continued to live together until 1922. Höch was also named “the good girl” of Berlin Dada by Hans Richter.

Like many other female dada artists, Höch designed dolls made of different textiles called Dada Puppets. Her interest in textiles is also seen in her 1922 collage *Sketch for a Monument to an Important Lace Shirt* which is made from embroidery patterns.



Catalog for the First International Dada Fair, 1920, via Berlinische Galerie, Berlin

Dada artists always showed a critical approach to political and social topics, but Höch did something different. She often focused on gender-related issues in her work. As the only woman in the Berlin Dada group of artists, she had different experiences than her male colleagues.

The most important event of the Berlin Dada was the First International Dada Fair in Berlin in 1920. One of the best-known pieces made for this exhibition was *the Prussian Archangel*. The work consisted of a pig-faced man-doll dressed in a military uniform, placed hanging from the ceiling. The piece was created by John Hartfield and Rudolf Schlichter.

Heartfield and Grosz first refused to let Höch participate in the fair until Hausmann threatened to pull all his work from the exhibition. Finally, Hannah Höch exhibited eight of her works at the First International Dada Fair. In her piece *Da-Dandy*, Höch humorously addressed the masculine identity of her fellow Dadaists by mixing the words Dada and Dandy into one.

Despite objections from Grosz and Heartfield, Höch still had a number of friends in Dada circles. She was close with artists Kurt Schwitters, Jean Arp, and Sophie Taeuber-Arp. According to Höch, Schwitters and Arp were one of the few male colleagues who took female artists seriously.

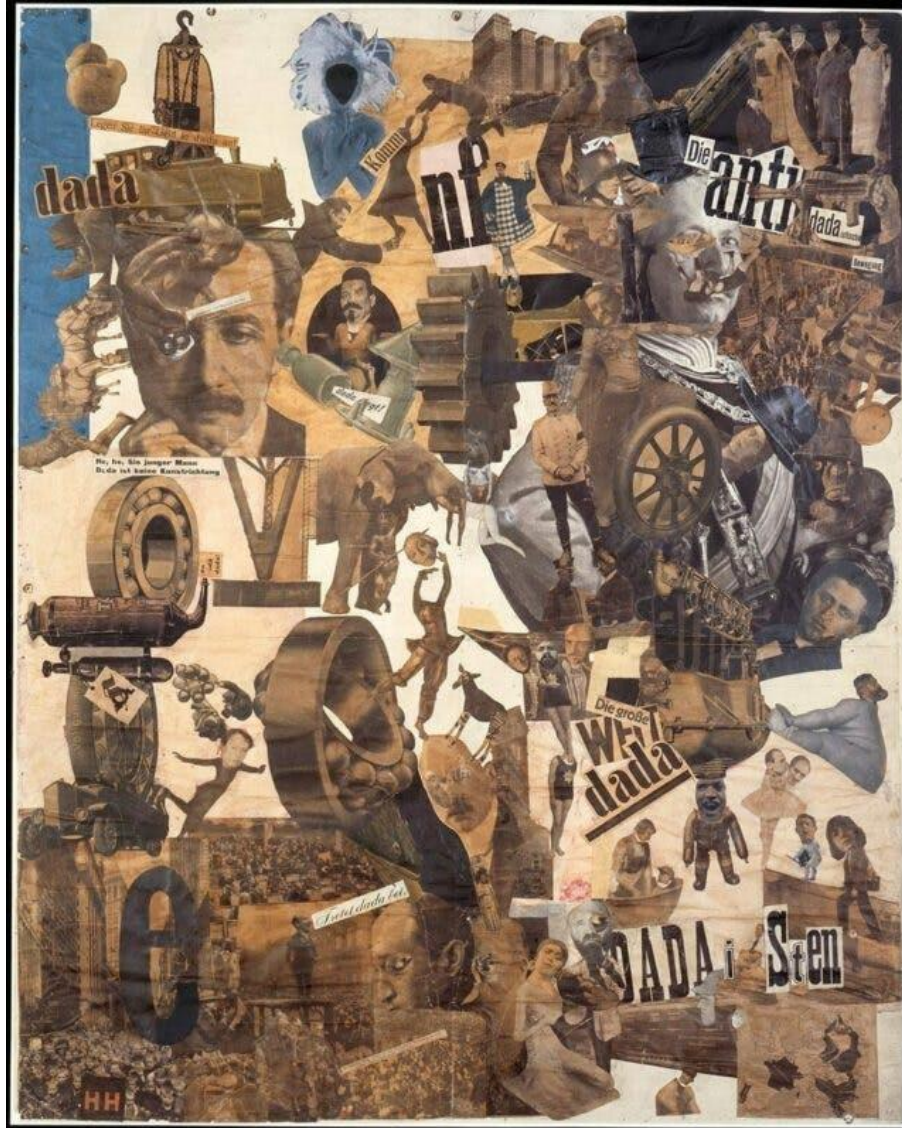
Photomontages Of The German Artist



And Shadows by Hannah Höch, 1925, via Sotheby's

Dadaists in Berlin often created photomontages. The technique was similar to collage. In photomontages, photographs and cut-outs from newspapers were used to create new artworks, that in the case of Dadaists carried a political message. During the Weimar Republic, which lasted from 1918 until 1933, there was a growing number of the printed press which inspired artists to use this material in their works.

Hannah Höch and Raoul Hausmann started making photomontages while they were on vacation at the Baltic Sea in 1918. Both Höch and Hausmann viewed photomontage as a type of static film. The Berlin Dada artists like Höch, Hausmann, Heartfield, and Grosz all used the technique. Höch describes photomontage as “a new magical territory where freedom is the first prerequisite.” She continued practicing the method of photomontage for five decades, even after the end of Dadaism. Her most famous photomontages are however the ones done during the Berlin Dada period.



Cut with the Dada Kitchen Knife Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany
by Hannah Höch, 1919, via Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin

One of Hannah Höch's most famous works is a 1919 photomontage *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Last Weimar Beer Belly Cultural Epoch of Weimar Germany*. The German artist's feminist views are visible when looking at the humorous title of the work. The scissors Höch used are named after a kitchen knife, pointing at the space typically related to women. In this photomontage, Höch glued together images of film stars, dancers, artists, and figures like Karl Marx and Albert Einstein. Höch also showed her clear feminist message by adding a map in the bottom right corner that showed European countries where women had the right to vote.

From An Ethnographic Museum Series Of Photomontages



Indian Dancer: From an Ethnographic Museum
by Hannah Höch, 1930, via MoMA, New York

In a series of photomontages named *From an Ethnographic Museum*, the German artist mixed media images with images of tribal art. The series consists of seventeen photomontages created between 1924 and 1930. Höch was inspired by her visit to the Ethnographic Museum in the Netherlands. In a work from this series named *Indian Dancer*, the artist combined a photograph of the actress Renee Falconetti and images of wooden masks from Cameroon.

Another photomontage from this series named *Mother* shows a pregnant woman whose face has been replaced with a mask belonging to the Kwakiutl tribe.

In this series, Hannah Höch combined the old with the new, the familiar and the foreign. She also asked the question of who creates beauty standards and who decides what is it that we consider beautiful. Höch could have also wanted to show women as the Other by mixing them in the photomontages with art that was considered 'primitive' or oriental by the Western culture.

The German artist also used images from mass media for her 1934 project named *Album*, which consists of around a hundred pages with 421 taken from magazines.

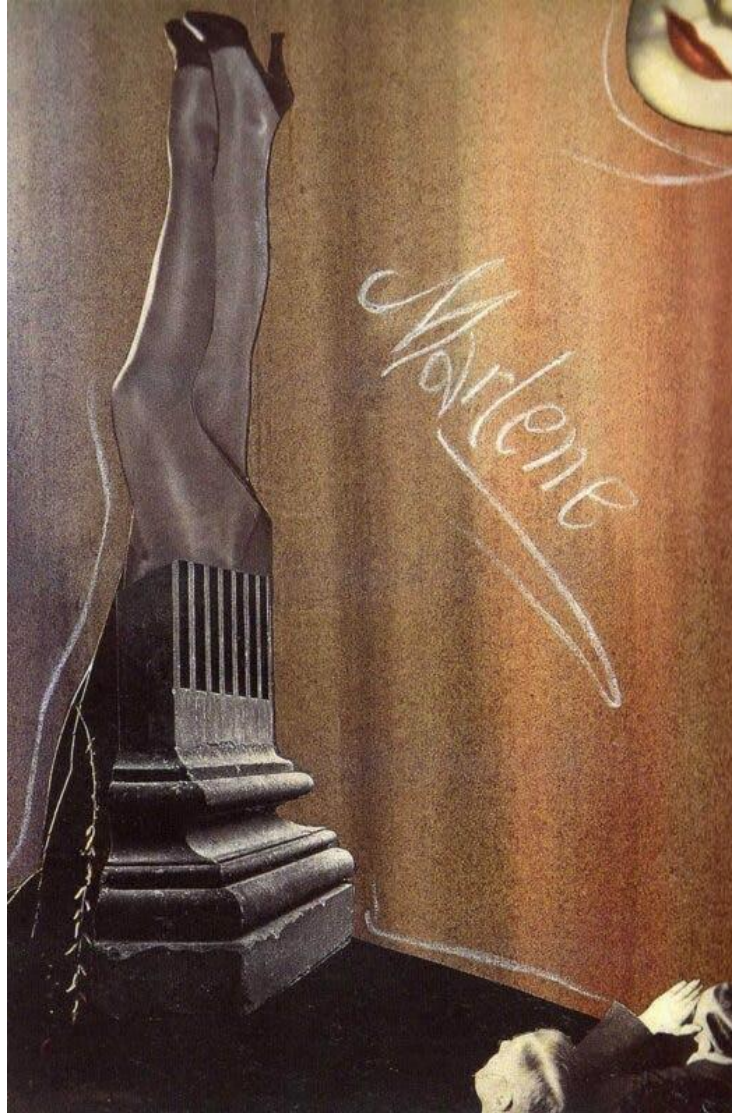
The New Woman Of Weimar



Raoul Hausmann und Hannah Höch, 1920, via Berlinische Galerie, Berlin

In her works, Hannah Höch also examined the idea of the New Woman, or *Die Neue Frau*, which emerged in the 1920s. The New Women were independent, sexually adventurous, dressed in androgynous fashion, and led a non-traditional lifestyle. The New Women were also supposed to be equal to men, though in practice that didn't turn out to be completely true. The so-called New Women of Weimar were symbols of modernity. They were confident, fashionable, smoked cigarettes, and went to nightclubs.

In the press, The New Woman was frequently represented as masculine or androgynous. So, Höch explored the ideas of what it was that made women – women and men – men. Was it the way they dressed and carried themselves, or was it their rights or lack of rights? In her work, Höch mixed female and male figures together, blurring the lines between the two sexes.



Marlene by Hannah Höch, 1930, via Christie's

Höch's photomontages were made out of images taken from the mass media. Since she worked at the Ullstein Publishing Company and created content for the female readers, the German artist had a good insight into how the media treated women. In her 1920 photomontage *Beautiful Girl*, we see a female body presented as an object or a commodity. Here the German artist showed the New Woman as a machine placed next to other consumer goods such as BMW signs. Many Dadaists, both in Berlin and New York, were fascinated by the idea of man as a machine, so Höch's choice to show a human being as a cyborg isn't all that surprising.

Gender is also addressed in her 1920 photomontage *The Father*. In this work the head we see is male, but the body consists of cut-out female parts. The female body of the father is also holding a baby.

In her piece *Marlene*, women's legs are glued to a base of a column. In a way, *Marlene* is presented as a monument of sexuality that two men at the bottom right corner gaze at.

Hannah Höch After Dada



Portrait of Hannah Höch and Til Brugmann photographed by Raoul Hausmann, 1931,
via Berlinische Galerie, Berlin

After breaking up with Hausmann and the ending of Dada, her next important relationship was with the Dutch poet Til Brugman which lasted for nine years. Höch met Brugman while vacationing with Kurt Schwitters and his wife in 1926. Höch's photomontage *Vagabunden* from the same year might refer to her relationship with Brugman. In this piece, we see two women holding hands and traveling together.

When Hitler rose to power in 1933 many avant-garde artists, including Höch, were named Cultural Bolsheviks. Exhibitions of their work were also forbidden. Höch's upcoming exhibition at the Bauhaus in Dessau was canceled. The new political climate influenced the decision of many artists to leave Germany. Höch, however, stayed and moved to a house in the suburbs of Berlin. She married a businessman Kurt Matthies who was twenty years younger than her. This age difference between the two partners was quite unusual for the time, but so were most of Höch's intimate relationships.

It is safe to say that Höch created a body of work that is very important for understanding the media culture of the Weimar Republic, German gender identities, and gender relations inside the Berlin Dada movement.