

Paula Modersohn-Becker, *Girl with a Wreath of Flowers* (c. 1901)

Abstract

Paula Modersohn-Becker (1876-1907) was one of the most important representatives of early German Expressionism. As a woman, she was barred from attending the official, state-run art academies. She thus trained in private academies in London and with the prestigious Society of Women Artists in Berlin. In 1893, she saw an exhibition in Bremen featuring works by members of the nearby Worpswede Artists' Colony. Modersohn-Becker went away from the show deeply impressed. Following the example of the French Barbizon school, artists Fritz Mackensen, Otto Modersohn, Fritz Overbeck, Hans am Ende, Carl Vinnen, and Heinrich Voegeler had come together in a north German village to live among the rural population and create art that, in contrast to academic atelier painting, took its inspiration directly from pure, unadulterated nature. For some time, Worpswede's reputation as an "artists' colony" served as a magnet for other creative talents, including Gerhart Hauptmann, Thomas Mann, Rainer Maria Rilke, and the sculptor Clara Westhoff. In 1898, Modersohn-Becker settled in Worpswede. Two years later, she left for the first of her four stays in Paris, where she took additional courses at a private academy and first became acquainted with the paintings of Paul Cézanne, who would eventually become one of her most important artistic influences. After returning to Worpswede, she married her fellow painter Otto Modersohn. In 1907, she gave birth to a daughter and died of complications shortly thereafter at age 31.

It was only after Modersohn-Becker's death that her work became known to wider audiences. Even her Worpswede colleagues first recognized her talent at the end of her life. In 1913, the first exhibition of her work was held in Bremen. Thereafter, interest in her work rose appreciably among collectors and museums, and in 1927 Bremen opened the Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum. Later, the National Socialists defamed her art as "degenerate" and had it removed from the museum. After the Second World War, there was a renewed interest in her work, which was systematically studied and honored in numerous large retrospectives.

Source



Source: Paula Modersohn-Becker, *Mädchen mit Blumenkranz*, oil on wood, c. 1901. Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Nationalgalerie/SMB/Jörg P. Anders

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