

WORCESTER ART MUSEUM

WITH CHILD: OTTO DIX/CARMEN WINANT AT THE WORCESTER ART MUSEUM EXAMINES THE ART OF PREGNANCY AND BIRTH

Worcester, MA—July 12, 2019—This fall, the Worcester Art Museum (WAM) will present *With Child: Otto Dix/Carmen Winant*, an exhibition exploring representations of pregnancy and birth through the works of German artist Otto Dix (1891-1969) and contemporary American artist Carmen Winant (b. 1983). Providing artistic, social, and medical context for how we view this central, emotionally charged topic, the exhibition will show works by Dix from the Museum's collection, international loans, and a newly commissioned work by Winant. The exhibition will be on view from September 21 through December 15, 2019.

With Child: Otto Dix/Carmen Winant was inspired by Dix's enigmatic 1931 portrait *The Pregnant Woman*, a hyper-realistic depiction of a model in the later stages of pregnancy. Since the work was acquired by the Worcester Art Museum in 2016, it has provoked a range of audience reactions. While some appreciate the painting's directness—an outgrowth of Dix's New Objectivity style—others are uncomfortable with the way the work presents its subject. These varied and sometimes powerful responses led Marcia Lagerwey, Guest Curator and Former Director of Education and Experience at WAM, to develop this exhibition as an opportunity to help viewers engage with and confront their own diverse thoughts on this theme.

“Considering that pregnancy is a fundamental human experience, it is shocking how it has been marginalized as a subject and often seen as taboo,” said Lagerwey. “Yet for Otto Dix, it appears to have been a subject of personal as well as artistic interest, one to which he returned multiple times during his long career. In a more contemporary context, Carmen Winant projects what makes us uncomfortable, with works that use powerful images of women in the process of labor and childbirth, making their experiences unambiguously real to the viewer. These two artists encourage viewers to embrace a subject that is not always ‘beautiful,’ in the traditional sense, and yet underscores the value of our shared humanity.”

Otto Dix

Otto Dix is an artist known primarily for his depictions of war's brutality and the societal ills that resulted from such turmoil, such as dereliction and prostitution. Considered to be one of the leading painters of the 20th century, Dix's work changed after World War I, moving

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away from Expressionism and Dada toward a more realistic, representational style. The horrors of war, combined with the social collapse in Weimar Germany (1918-1933), pushed Dix to capture life's extremities.

Throughout his career, Dix repeatedly examined the physical and emotional effects of pregnancy and birth, a theme that has received scant attention in writing and research on his career. At the time, German society viewed pregnancy and birth as a political necessity, encouraging more children as part of government policy between and during both World Wars. For Dix, the father of four children, pregnancy offered evidence of a kind of redemption. In fact, a number of Dix's drawings were done at the birth of his own children—breaking norms of the time that usually kept fathers at a distance, while daring to depict his own wife at this intimate moment.

In addition to the Worcester Art Museum's *The Pregnant Woman* (1931), the exhibition includes other paintings and prints by Dix on this theme, the last of which is *Pregnant Woman* (1966), a nude portrait of his own daughter—shown for the first time in the United States. In contrast to the 1931 work, this painting is exuberant, expressive, and colorful, with the pregnant model facing the artist directly and inviting his gaze. Also included in the exhibition is a painting by Gussy Hippold-Ahnert (1910-2003), the first time her work has been exhibited in this country. A student of Dix's, Hippold-Ahnert painted the same pregnant model as Dix, but from a woman's point of view: *Sitting Pregnant Woman* (1932) reveals the model's face, which seems to suggest a level of comfort with her late-stage pregnancy.

Carmen Winant

Carmen Winant, the Roy Lichtenstein Chair of Studio Art at The Ohio State University and the mother of two children, is best known for her large-scale collages, typically made from clippings of found images of women. Using extracted images of women's bodies in different situations, Winant encourages viewers to react, and to challenge preconceptions of "appropriate" presentations of the female form. Winant's 2018 Museum of Modern Art installation *My Birth* displayed over 2,000 pictures of women giving birth. Winant's bold work draws attention to the overwhelming commonalities of these photos, which were often taken for promotional purposes for birthing books or classes. The newly commissioned work for the Worcester Art Museum expands on these themes. Inspired by

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Dix's *The Pregnant Woman*, Winant's immersive, multi-media piece, *Ha Hoo...Ha Ha Hoo* brings another woman artist's voice to this universal topic.

Related Programs

In addition to an exhibition tour with artist Carmen Winant on the opening day, Museum programming will provide a venue for telling stories about pregnancy and birth in a variety of ways, including writing, oral storytelling, and drawing. Pregnancy can be both painful and joyful, embarrassing and celebratory, or all simultaneously. Moreover, one in three women has endured the pain of miscarriage, a pregnancy story that is also about death—stories that, like postpartum depression, often go untold. To engage with these personal narratives, the Museum will invite members of the central Massachusetts community to submit drawings, paintings, prints, and photographs about their own experiences—both from the perspective of the observer (male or female) and the actor in the drama, the pregnant woman. This community exhibition, which will be displayed from **September 26 – December 15, 2019**, will provide an opportunity for people to share and reflect upon the diversity of their experiences. Individuals interested in submitting works to the show can contact Elizabeth Buck at ElizabethBuck@worchesterart.org.

As part of its monthly Master Series Third Thursday program, the Museum will present a discussion on “Images of Women during the Weimar Republic” and “Images of Maternity in Otto Dix” on **Thursday, October 17 at 6:00 p.m.** Presenters are Ute Tellini, former editor of the *Woman's Art Journal* and author of *Images of Women During the Weimar Republic in Germany*, and Michelle Vangen, Ph.D. Art History Professor, Kingsborough Community College, CUNY. The program is free with Museum admission.

“The Trouble with Pregnancy: A Forum on Art and Reproduction,” will be held at WAM on **Friday, October 18**. This day-long event will delve into women's social, political, and medical conditions, highlighting issues that are still relevant today. The forum is organized in partnership with the following organizations: Department of Family Medicine and Community Health at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester County Poetry Association, and Worcester State University. Admission is free.

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This exhibition is part of the Deutschlandjahr USA 2018/19—year of German-American Friendship. This initiative is funded by the German Federal Foreign Office, implemented by the Goethe-Institute, and supported by The Federation of German Industries (BDI).

About the Worcester Art Museum

The Worcester Art Museum creates transformative programs and exhibitions, drawing on its exceptional collection of art. Dating from 3,000 BC to the present, these works provide the foundation for a focus on audience engagement, connecting visitors of all ages and abilities with inspiring art and demonstrating its enduring relevance to daily life. Creative initiatives—including pioneering collaborative programs with local schools, fresh approaches to exhibition design and in-gallery teaching, and a long history of studio class instruction—offer opportunities for diverse audiences to experience art and learn both from and with artists.

Since its founding in 1896, the Worcester Art Museum has assembled a collection of 38,000 objects: from the ancient Near East and Asia, to European and American paintings and sculptures, and continuing with works by contemporary artists from around the world. WAM has a history of making large scale acquisitions, such as its Medieval Chapter House, the Worcester Hunt Mosaic, its 15th-century Spanish ceiling, and the Flemish *Last Judgment* tapestry. In 2013, the Museum acquired the John Woodman Higgins Armory Collection, comprising two thousand arms and armor objects. It continues to commission and present new works, such as 2017's installation of the interactive *Reusable Universes* and *Organic Concept* works by Shih Chieh Huang.

The Worcester Art Museum, located at 55 Salisbury Street in Worcester, MA, is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; and the third Thursday of every month from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Admission is \$16 for adults, \$6 for children 4-17, \$14 for seniors 65+ and for college students with ID. Admission is free for Museum Members and children under age four. On the first Sunday of each month, admission is free for everyone. Museum parking is free. For more information, visit worchesterart.org.

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