

Reflective Essay

As a final project for Professor Elizabeth Drummond's course *Culture and Politics in Weimar Germany* students were required to write a research paper on a topic of their choosing. An annotated bibliography was required in order for students to start the research process and begin constructing a research topic. One of our classes was held in William H. Hannon Library's Department of Archives & Special Collections early in the semester, and I was inspired by the vast collection of Max Thalmann's work, much of which has never been seen. A particular untitled piece from his series titled *Hunger!* sparked my interest in assessing the effects of World War One on German citizens and war veterans. After doing some preliminary research and consulting with Professor Drummond, I decided to focus my research paper on postwar mourning cultures in Weimar Germany, with a particular emphasis on the antiwar messages in Weimar art.

Because I was looking primarily at artistic representations of the death and mourning culture, I did need to utilize outside sources such as websites for the Museum of Modern Art, the Käthe Kollwitz Museum, and the Otto Dix Project. These websites provided the artwork that I used as primary sources as well as descriptions of the content and medium. Although I was initially interested by the work of Max Thalmann, I only ended up using one of his pieces, but I did spend numerous hours in the special collections area sifting through five boxes that contained a majority of his works. This was, however, the most unique and memorable aspect of my research process. I can specifically remember thinking about how I was holding and looking at something that very few people ever had, feeling a special connectedness to the artist himself. What this experience contributed most for me was a great sense of personal emotion in all of the

artwork I explored for the project. Often people gaze at an artwork, assess its content and move on, but I delved into the lives behind the work; the individual, very personal, influences of each artist. I attempted to understand their own experiences through their art. The connection I developed with these historical figures was unlike anything I had ever experienced and I directly credit this to my research in Archives and Special Collections.

In order to contextualize these primary sources, much of my research was done through the extensive collection of books and articles at our library. By searching the online library catalog I located a number of books using their call numbers and searching the main stacks. I often skimmed the table of contents to locate chapters covering my specific interest. Next, I employed the online database *JSTOR* for articles explaining mourning processes and the library's Onesearch for evidence that further supported my argument. Of these databases, Onesearch proved to be more helpful and expansive in its results, whereas *JSTOR* only provided me with one article that I used. The freedom that I had to research and discover along with the abundance of resources at my fingertips made this research project truly invaluable. I did, however, encounter difficulty in researching the life of Max Thalmann, which hindered my ability to incorporate him as deeply into my project as I had Käthe Kollwitz and Otto Dix. Additionally, as I developed and refined my central argument, certain sources became less relevant because their content was no longer related to my thesis.

My time spent in the Special Collections with the work of Max Thalmann is something few people have ever experienced and a memory that I will cherish forever. I am grateful for our library's exceptional collections and resources and the quality and

depth of my project is indicative of this. Overall, the research I conducted at the library was not only a tremendous learning experience, but also something that inspired and motivated me to continue to improve my research techniques.