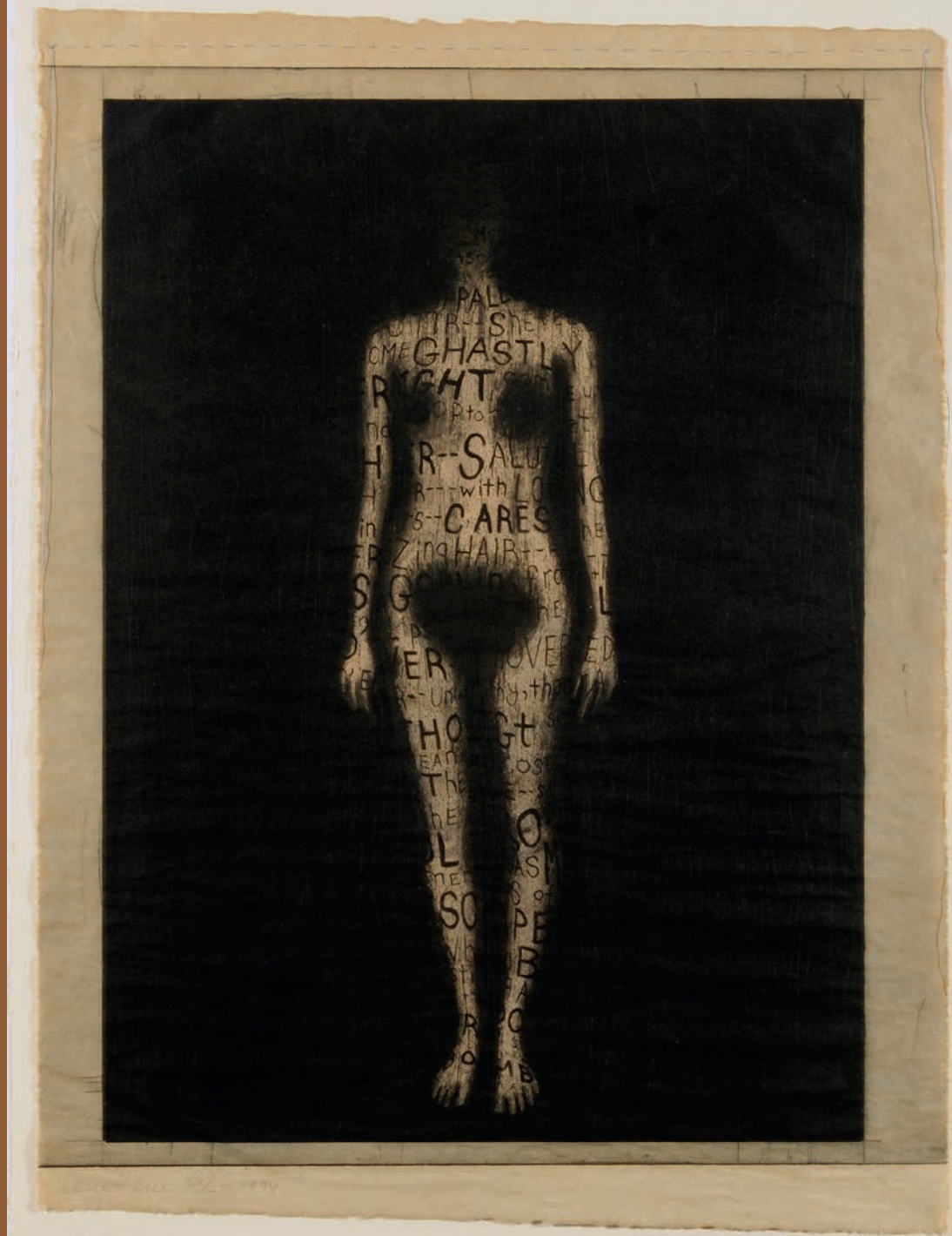


The Soul Has
Bandaged
Moments



A **SPACE** for **DIALOGUE** 100

HOOD MUSEUM OF ART, DARTMOUTH



Our interactions with the outside world change the biochemistry of our bodies and brains. After a traumatizing event, some people develop permanent changes. In Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), the body's biochemical stress response system is thrown out of balance, resulting in some combination of four characteristic behavioral symptoms: intrusive recollection (nightmares and flashbacks), avoidance (of physical spaces, people, or sense-based triggers), negative cognitions (depression), and alterations in arousal (increased startle reflex, panic and anxiety, reckless behavior). Though no pharmaceutical cure has been developed, doctors have observed patients who, through the sheer strength of human resilience, have reversed their symptoms and recalibrated their underlying biochemistry. One of the mechanisms proposed to induce this healing is the making of art. It would be inappropriate and scientifically inaccurate to imply diagnoses for the artists represented in this exhibition; however, all of the objects on view can be understood as processing some form of trauma. Through their work, these modern and contemporary artists expand the definition of trauma, validate psychological damage as a physical injury, and describe processes of healing.

Artists articulate trauma differently, creating work that can be read as depicting distinct symptoms. Chaim Gross created *Dieppe, France* while reclining in an armchair, listening to classical music, and allowing images to pour out

of his psyche. Half nightmare, half reality, figures force themselves onto the page in what can be interpreted as an illustration of hyperarousal and flashback. In Käthe Kollwitz's series *Death*, figures interact with a personified death in a variety of highly emotive forms: some embrace him, some battle him, others resign themselves to his will. The repetition of death as a central figure can be understood as a manifestation of depression. In John Walker's *Passing Bells*, the use of a sheep's head as an allegory for a soldier not only articulates his dual allusion to slaughtered livestock and Christian iconography but also can be interpreted as a strategy of avoidance, eschewing the human form and the pain that a more literal image may evoke.

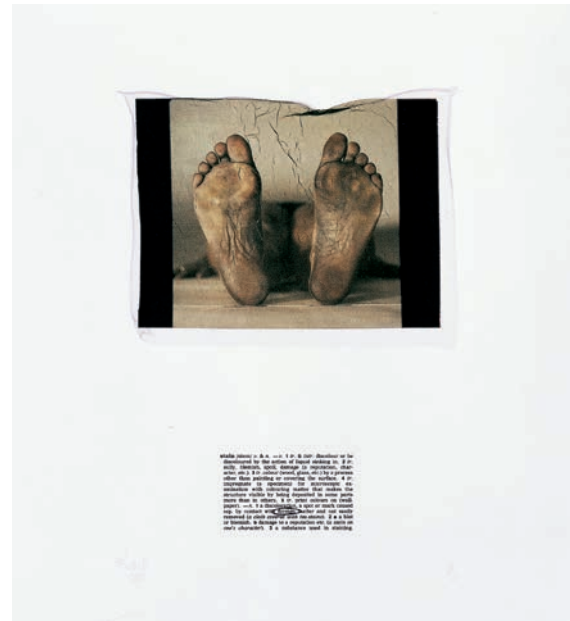
Defining the term *trauma* is problematic, as the experience of trauma is subjective. By convention, a traumatic event is defined as one in which a person experiences the threat of serious injury or death, often in contexts such as war, torture, or abuse. This experience must be so overpowering that it overwhelms the body's stress response and the mind's resilience. PTSD can also manifest after the discovery that a loved one has experienced a traumatic event. Gross, Kollwitz, Walker, Otto Dix, Ambreen Butt, and Leslie Dill produce works whose subjects meet these diagnostic criteria. Other artists question whether events that may not fit a strict definition of trauma can be traumatic nonetheless. In *Fox Tussle*, Julie Buffalohead asks how the trauma of the past impacts the present. Her work speaks to the layered trauma of her Native ancestors' forced displacement and the complicated dual American and Native identity she and her contemporaries navigate. In her *Stain* portfolio, Berni Searle asks whether daily microaggressions might build to the equivalence of a larger trauma. Growing up in apartheid South Africa, Searle may not have experienced a singular major traumatic event, but instead likely faced smaller daily traumas in the form of oppression, racism, sexism, and institutionalized cruelty. In *Miriam*, Gary Schneider asks how "ordinary" stressors, such as serious illness, may be traumatic as well. Technically classified as producing "adjustment disorders" instead of PTSD, "ordinary" stressors may generate pathologies that are, in fact, chemically similar to those of PTSD. Whether intentionally doing

so or not, these artists invoke some of the major questions in the field of neuroscience today.

The symptoms of PTSD and other trauma-related psychological disorders impair a person's ability to interact with the outside world, interfering in work, school, and interpersonal relationships. In this way, PTSD is a serious chronic illness, but it is invisible from the outside and therefore is not treated as other illnesses are. In Dill's *Front (The Soul Has Bandaged Moments)*, psychological experiences of gendered-based inequality, harassment, and perhaps abuse take physical form, leaving gaping holes where the female sex is defined. In Searle's portfolio *Stain*, the daily experiences of race-based oppression allegorically leave bruises on the most vulnerable parts of her body. In representing trauma with a physical impact, these objects can be read as encouraging the societal recognition of psychological trauma as a serious illness.

Some people have reversed the biochemical effects of trauma by making art. This healing process may come in the form of articulating experiences, releasing emotion, or memorializing the past. In *Seen in a Trench near Cléry-sur-Somme*, Dix depicts traumatic images that sat stirring in his mind for a decade. In releasing those images, he may have found relief. Butt, in *Weeping*, illustrates a powerful display of emotion. In doing so, she breaks down social barriers to outward displays of grief and catharsis, perhaps allowing for her own healing process. Walker, in *Passing Bells*, and Schneider, in *Mirriam*, memorialize their parents and their parents' experiences, addressing the past so they can move forward. This phenomenon of intergenerational processing speaks to the collective experience of healing. Some artists use their work to continue dialogue outside of their immediate friends and family, with other artists and, in some cases, with writers. Though a prolific artist, Walker could not make work about the First World War until he saw his own thoughts mirrored in the words of poet Wilfred Owen. Leslie Dill iterates Emily Dickinson's work over and over again, generating a complex artistic response to Dickinson's poem.

"The Soul has Bandaged moments," writes Dickinson. Her narrator cycles through an exhaustive litany of emotions. First there is a



frozen fear: "too appalled to stir." Next there is an "unworthy" dread, followed by an escape, manic "like a bomb." Dickinson's soul strives for peace, for "Noon, and Paradise," yet finally, "Horror welcomes her, again." The cause of the soul's "Fright" is unknown, but her experience resonates with many different manifestations of trauma. Her pain is tangible, her injury as real as those of the body. Though in the final stanza the soul does not escape her terror, the title of the poem suggests a potential end to the pain. While the soul is bandaged in this moment, moments end, and perhaps the future holds hope of healing.

Kensington Cochran '20
Conroy Intern

CHECKLIST

Julie Buffalohead, Ponca/American, born 1972. *Fox Tussle*, 2015. Lithograph on Japanese wove paper. Purchased through the Olivia H. Parker and John O. Parker '58 Acquisition Fund; 2017.44

Ambreen Butt, Pakistani, born 1969. *Untitled (Weeping)*, number five of five, from the series *Daughter of the East*, 2008. Softground etching, aquatint, spite-bite aquatint, lift-ground aquatint, and drypoint on chine collé. Purchased through the Claire and Richard P. Morse 1953 Fund; 2009.47.5

Leslie Dill, American, born 1950; sewn by Jennifer Luk. *Front (The Soul Has Bandaged Moments)*, from *A Word Made Flesh*, 1994. Photolithograph, etching, and aquatint on tea-stained Mulberry paper, hand sewn onto Arches buff paper. Purchased through the Hood Museum of Art Acquisitions Fund; PR.995.7.3

Otto Dix, German, 1891–1969. *Gesehen am Steilhang von Cléry-sur-Somme (Seen in a Trench near Cléry-sur-Somme)*, plate 28 from a set of 50, *Radierwerk VI "Der Krieg" (War)*, 1924. Etching, drypoint, and aquatint on Kupferdruck paper. Purchased through the Jean and Adolph Weil Jr. 1935 Fund; 2013.22

Chaim Gross, American (born Austria, now Ukraine), 1904–1991. *Dieppe, France*, 1949. Pen and ink on wove paper. Gift of the artist; D.983.15.1

Käthe Kollwitz, German, 1867–1945. *Tod Greift in Kinderschar (Death Seizes the Children)*, plate 3 from the series *Tod (Death)*, 1934. Lithograph

on wove paper. Gift of Charles M. Young Fine Prints & Drawings LLC, Portland, Connecticut; PR.2004.62

Gary Schneider, American (born South Africa), born 1954. *Miriam*, 1989. Selenium-toned gelatin silver print. Purchased through the Hood Museum of Art Acquisitions Fund; PH.997.41.1

Berni Searle, South African, born 1964. *Number five of five* from the portfolio *Stain*, from the *Discolored* series, 2000. Digital print with text. Purchased through the William B. and Evelyn F. Jaffe (58, 60, & 63) Fund; PR.2002.67.5

John Walker, English, born 1939. *Passing Bells V*, 2000. Color etching and aquatint on paper. Purchased through the Claire and Richard P. Morse 1953 Fund; 2006.3.13

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The exhibition *The Soul Has Bandaged Moments*, part of the museum's student-curated *A Space for Dialogue* series, is on view at the Hood Museum of art, May 2–June 28, 2020.

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Cover image: Leslie Dill, *Front (The Soul Has Bandaged Moments)*, from *A Word Made Flesh*, 1994

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Inside left: Julie Buffalohead, *Fox Tussle*, 2015

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Inside right: Berni Searle, *Number five of five* from the portfolio *Stain*, from the *Discolored* series, 2000
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