

PAULA MODERSOHN-BECKER

1876 – 1907

A radical modernist who saw the world in a new way

“I want to paint human beings who breathe and feel and suffer and love.”

– Paula Modersohn-Becker



TIMELINE

- 1876**
Born in Dresden, Germany
- 1892**
Begins art training in Dresden
- 1898**
Studies in Paris
- 1899–1906**
Lives and paints in Worswede artists' colony
- 1906**
Travels to Paris again
- 1907**
Paints many powerful self-portraits while pregnant
- 1907**
Dies in childbirth aged 31

THE ARTIST

Paula Modersohn-Becker was one of the earliest women artists to break away from tradition and create a bold new kind of modern art.

She was a pioneer of Expressionism and a key figure in the Worswede artists' colony in northern Germany.

Paula had an extraordinary ability to see people and nature with honesty and empathy. She painted from life with deep feeling and created some of the most intimate self-portraits in art history.

Her life was tragically short, but her influence on modern art was immense.



A SUCCESSFUL CAREER

- Recognised in Germany during her lifetime
- Member of the Worswede artists' colony
- Exhibited widely across Germany
- Admired by peers including Rainer Maria Rilke
- Influential on future generations of artists

HER ART

Paula's paintings are intimate, modern and deeply felt. She used rich colour, simple forms and expressive brushwork.

Her subjects—self-portraits, mothers and children, peasants, landscapes—reflect her deep connection to everyday life.

She had a remarkable ability to capture the inner life of her subjects and to explore themes of identity, womanhood and nature with courage.

LOOKING BEYOND THE MYTH

Because Paula died young, her work was often seen as the promise of talent rather than the achievement of a great artist.

For many years, her contributions were overshadowed by male colleagues and by changing art movements.

We should remember her because she was a visionary artist who helped pave the way for modern art.

MASTERPIECES: SIX WORKS THAT SHOW HER GENIUS

Self-Portrait, c.1906



Mother and Child, 1906



Self-Portrait (Pregnant), 1906



Landscape, 1905



Still Life with Flowers, c.1905



WHY HISTORY OVERLOOKED HER

- Art history focused increasingly on a canon dominated by male artists.
- Expressionism was later dominated by male figures.
- Many of her works remained in private collections.
- Scholars did not recognise her pioneering role until later.
- Only recent research has restored her rightful place in art history.

History did not deliberately erase her. Shifting priorities and limited recognition pushed her into the background.



WHY HER WORK MATTERS

- A pioneer of modern art and Expressionism.
- Her work broke new ground in showing real life and real feeling.
- She painted women's experiences with honesty and depth.
- Her self-portraits are among the most powerful in art history.
- She continues to inspire artists today.



DID YOU KNOW?

Paula Modersohn-Becker painted more than 800 paintings and over 1,000 drawings in just over ten years.



WHERE TO SEE HER WORK

- Kunsthalle Bremen, Germany
- Modersohn-Becker Museum, Bremen
- Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal
- Städel Museum, Frankfurt
- Private collections worldwide



CONTEMPORARIES FOR CONTEXT

- Edvard Munch 1863–1944
- Gustav Klimt 1862–1918
- Egon Schiele 1890–1918
- Wassily Kandinsky 1866–1944
- Ernst Ludwig Kirchner 1880–1938

Paula Modersohn-Becker belonged to the new generation of artists who changed the face of modern art.

“I want to paint what I see and what I feel – not what others expect me to see.”

— PAULA MODERSOHN-BECKER