

**MAX BECKMANN RETROSPECTIVE PRESENTS RARE OPPORTUNITY TO VIEW MODERN MASTERWORKS OF SYMBOLISM AND ALLEGORY****First Comprehensive Exhibition of Beckmann's Work in the United States in Nearly Two Decades****On View in Its Only U.S. Showing at MoMA QNS
June 26–September 29, 2003**

NEW YORK, June 2003—After presentations in Paris and London, *Max Beckmann* opens in its only U.S. venue at MoMA QNS on June 26, 2003 and remains on view through September 29. This is the first comprehensive exhibition of the artist's work to be seen in New York since MoMA's 1964 retrospective, and the first in the United States since 1984. Max Beckmann (German, 1884–1950) was a leading modernist painter whose prolific and notably individualistic career spanned the first half of the twentieth century. Comprising 132 works, the exhibition focuses primarily on painting—including four large-scale triptychs—and is augmented by sculptures, drawings, and prints. It features works from every stage of the artist's career, beginning with the stylish yet psychologically probing portraits and dramatic figural compositions that marked the early stages of his development and ending with the dense symbolist tableaux he produced prior to his death in New York in 1950.

Max Beckmann is jointly organized by The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Musée national d'art moderne/Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; and Tate Modern, London. This institutional collaboration enabled MoMA to gather works of art not often lent, offering a rare opportunity to view masterworks from Beckmann's entire oeuvre. The New York exhibition also includes eleven works not exhibited in Paris or London, including a triptych and several self-portraits. The exhibition is organized by Robert Storr, Rosalie Solow Professor of Modern Art, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University and former Senior Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art; Didier Ottinger, Senior Curator, Musée national d'art moderne/Centre Georges Pompidou; and Sean Rainbird, Senior Curator, Tate Modern.

Mr. Storr states, "Max Beckmann was one of the great independents of modern art. Although a man of his time, he did not fit his time, either in the largeness of his artistic ambition or in the variety and complexity of his approach. Neither a conservative nor a radical modernist, he painted the enigmas and contradictions of the twentieth century in ways that resonate profoundly in the unsettled reality of the twenty-first century. He made pictures about human passions and predicaments that are impossible to ignore and are with us still."

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Max Beckmann traces the career of a searching and dynamic artist who lived through some of the greatest artistic and historical upheavals of the first half of the twentieth century. His response to artistic challenges and to the social and political events in Germany were profoundly marked by the exceptional complexity and vitality of his art. The exhibition provides a rare opportunity to see masterworks such as *The Night* (1918–19), in which Beckmann fuses the archaic with the modern in a ghastly scene of the failed German revolution of 1918–19, as well as *Self-Portrait in Tuxedo* (1927), which depicts the artist, with heavy features frozen in an implacable stare, dressed as a dandy ready for an evening in café society. Works exclusive to the New York presentation include *The Street* (1914); *The Prodigal Son* (1918), a group of four gouaches that are rarely exhibited; *Self-Portrait in Sailor Hat* (1926); *Portrait of the Russian Actor, Zeretelli* (1927); *Hell of the Birds* (1938); and the triptych *The Actors* (1941–42).

Born in Leipzig, Germany, Beckmann studied art at the Grandducal Art School in Weimar. In 1904 he set up his own studio in Paris and then relocated to Berlin. A naturalist and symbolist early in his career, Beckmann had already achieved recognition by the summer of 1914, when at the age of 30 he enlisted in the medical corps of the German army. Serving near the front as a medic, Beckmann witnessed firsthand the violence and horror of World War I, an experience that was to radically alter his artistic approach. The no-mans-land of the battlefield haunted him, compelling him to fill his pictures with figures, architecture, and symbolic objects. He was demobilized in 1915, and his prints and paintings of that year and the year after are the first evidence of a new direction in his work. This period is distinguished by Cubist-inspired jagged edges and broken planes as well as shallow spaces reminiscent of German Gothic and Netherlandish art.

Beckmann believed the moral purpose of the artist was to depict the spiritual condition of his age. Through the 1930s he was among the painters associated with the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), a movement that portrayed the violence and conflict of postwar German society. He sought to combine certain tendencies in art with impulses in his own creative nature: realism in the service of social observation and symbolism or allegory in the service of metaphysical speculation. In *Family Picture* (1920), the customary congestion of Beckmann's compositions embodies the claustrophobia of domestic life; in *The Dream* (1921), a welter of people and things conjures up the hallucinatory surrealism of the subconscious.

Not all of Beckmann's paintings of the 1920s evoke anxiety. Some display his intense enjoyment of life's pleasures and hurly-burly, as do the majority of the still lifes and landscapes he painted throughout his career. The beach scene in *Lido* (1924) depicts bathers on the beach and frolicking in the ocean. In *The Bark* (1926), Beckmann playfully illustrates a collision between a man on a small sailboat and a group of young people in a rowboat. Other works of this decade reflect Beckmann's fascination with life's theatricality, including *Double Portrait Carnival* (1925), *Portrait of the Russian Actor, Zeretelli*, and, more mysteriously, *Galleria Umberto* (1925), Beckmann's homage to the dreamscape still lifes and city views of the Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico. Beckmann also infused his numerous self-portraits—a genre he returned to throughout his career—with such theatrical elements as costumes and masks.

By the late 1920s Beckmann had established himself as one of Germany's most important painters. He visited Paris regularly until the late 1930s, and his work by this time, although retaining its wholly unique character, reflected a dialogue with his School of Paris counterparts, including Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Georges Rouault, Fernand Léger, and Georges Braque. In 1932, when Beckmann began the first of his nine completed triptychs (a tenth was left unfinished at his death), his fame was at its height. The symbolic representation of torture and exile in *Departure* (1932–33) foreshadowed the calamity that was to affect Germany and most of Europe. By 1933 Hitler had come to power, and Beckmann had been stripped of his professorship at the Art Academy in Frankfurt. In 1937, when the Nazis denounced modernism in their propagandistic survey "Degenerate Art," Beckmann was the most heavily represented artist. The day after the exhibition opened, Beckmann fled to Amsterdam, where he lived in obscurity but painted with desperate energy, developing a personal mythological treatment of a world in crisis.

In 1946, Beckmann accepted an offer to teach at Washington University in St. Louis, and following a brief sojourn in France, he immigrated to the United States, where he spent the last three years of his life. Although greatly respected by those familiar with his achievement, he was not widely known. In 1949, after a teaching stint in Colorado, the 65-year-old artist moved to New York, assuming a post at the Brooklyn Museum Art School. In 1950, despite the gradual deterioration of his health, he remained hard at work in his studio, producing a last burst of paintings, among them the tragic but forceful *Falling Man* (1950) and the wary *Self-Portrait in Blue Jacket* (1950).

SPONSORSHIP

The exhibition is made possible by Joan and Preston Robert Tisch. Generous support is also provided by AOL Time Warner Inc. and The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art. An indemnity has been granted by the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. Additional funding is provided by Stadt Frankfurt am Main. The accompanying publication is made possible by The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art. The accompanying educational programs are made possible by BNP Paribas.

TOUR

The exhibition was previously shown at the following venues: Musée national d'art moderne/Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (September 10, 2002–January 6, 2003); and Tate Modern, London (February 12–May 5, 2003).

PUBLICATION

This exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, which includes numerous essays that shed new light on Beckmann's work and examine his influential role in the development of modernism during the first half of the twentieth century. It includes essays by noted critics and historians; contemporary artists Leon Golub, Ellsworth Kelly, and William Kentridge; and the exhibition's organizing curators. The authors cover such topics as Beckmann's early work, his portraits and self-portraits, his triptychs, and his Frankfurt cityscapes, as well as cultural politics in Germany

leading up to World War II and the artist's exile in Amsterdam. It is available at The MoMA Stores and online at www.momastore.org. 9 ¾ x 11"; 296 pages; 174 color and 40 black and white illustrations. Hardcover price: \$65.00. Paperback price: \$35.00.

RELATED EXHIBITION

Concurrent with the *Max Beckmann* retrospective, the Neue Galerie presents *From Expressionism to the Bauhaus: Highlights from The Museum of Modern Art*, an exhibition of paintings, drawings, and design objects from MoMA's permanent collection. The exhibit, which opens on June 27, is organized by the Neue Galerie in conjunction with the curatorial staff of The Museum of Modern Art and remains on view through September 15. In keeping with the mission of the Neue Galerie, the exhibition focuses on works of early twentieth-century German art. Among the featured artists are Otto Dix, Lyonel Feininger, George Grosz, Hannah Höch, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Paul Klee, August Macke, Franz Marc, Otto Mueller, Emil Nolde, Christian Rohlf, Oskar Schlemmer, and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff. The presentation also includes objects by the German designers Peter Behrens, Marianne Brandt, Marcel Breuer, and Wilhelm Wagenfeld.

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