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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York

J.B. Neumann Papers

II.B.1.b

0699

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

Between Heaven and Earth

"I am in constant divorce with my times, not with immortal art."
Georges Rouault (Letter to J. B. Neumann, Nov. 20, 1933)

We German intellectuals of the early twentieth century can best explain our attitude toward Georges Rouault, the great French painter of the ordeal of life in this era, by paraphrasing Voltaire's epigram: "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him."

Why should we be prepared to go so far as to "invent" a Rouault, if need be? Did we not have enough artists passionately striving to give expression to man's agony at the easel? Of course, we had the powerful Expressionist movement that had no need to look abroad for inspiration.

But we who were fighting for recognition of modern German art could never for a moment forget that Paris was the recognized international center of modern art. So an artist like Rouault, who spoke our language in the accents of Paris, was of inestimable value to us.

As a matter of fact, when I first saw Rouault's work, I detected nothing Gallic. I simply assumed that I was looking at the work of a German painter. Even when I was told that he was French, I felt very strongly that he belonged to us. That was during the first World War. Although I felt a strong kinship with the artist's outlook, I did not at once appreciate his inner creative fire and his tremendous expressive power. And in the years immediately after the war there was no chance for a closer

0700

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

look, for we were the damned Boches, to whom no one in Paris would speak or write a letter.

Still, I kept on trying. It was known that Rouault was curator of the Musée Gustave Moreau in Paris, but friends who had visited the museum told me that they had never seen him there. I had no better luck myself when, on a visit to Paris, I looked for him at the museum. When inquiries were made there, the answer was always the same: write a letter to M. Rouault. And the letters always went unanswered.

I had still made no headway when I transferred the center of my art activities from Berlin to New York in 1923. I seemed farther than ever from this baffling individual. However, the door to correspondence and direct personal contact with Rouault was opened for me three years later, when, through a friend, I obtained from Ambroise Vollard trial proofs of a group of Rouault etchings which he had published. I exhibited them in my New York gallery in October, 1926, and at the same time published an issue of my "Artlover" series with illustrations of them. I mailed a copy of the booklet to Rouault, and that was the key that unlocked the door.

The artist not only sent me an acknowledgement, but to my immense satisfaction, asked for fifty copies of that "Artlover" issue. I quickly sent them off, and he replied with an expression of warm appreciation.

It was only later, when I met Rouault in Paris, that I learned what appealed so strongly to him about the "Artlover" booklet. As he explained to me, he was especially impressed that in my publication the size of each reproduction was

0701

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

scaled according to the size of the original, whereas in most catalogues all the prints are reproduced on the same scale, regardless of the size of the originals.

My first meeting with Rouault took place in Paris in 1927, a year after my correspondence with him had begun in the manner just related. During the year which preceded our meeting, I received a whole series of letters which almost invariably began: "My father says..."—they were written, or at least begun, by his daughter Isabelle, but in most of them the neat handwriting of the daughter gave way somewhere in the middle to the almost undecipherable scrawl of the artist himself.

It was my practice to make an annual trip to Paris, and I looked forward to the meeting with Rouault as the big event of my 1927 trip. From the letters, and from my previous experiences in trying to contact him, I was prepared to deal with an extraordinary personality. At least I thought I was prepared. But I was to learn that no one can anticipate what will happen with Rouault.

Even though he was anxious to meet me, the arrangement bespoke his guarded attitude. I was not permitted to go to his workshop at Vollard's or to his home. He would come to our hotel.

So it was that my wife and I were sitting in the lobby of the Hotel des Etats-Unis, rue d'Antin, near the Opera, early one evening in June, 1927, to keep our appointment with Rouault. Since we had no idea what he looked like, trying to spot him turned into a game. Each would make a guess, but every guess proved wrong. In the midst of this game, I heard

0702

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

some one ask the hotel clerk for Mr. Neumann. I jumped up.

My wife and I saw at once that neither of us could possibly have won the guessing game of picking Rouault out of a crowd. I might have taken this man, neatly dressed in old-fashioned clothes, with a wing collar, faultlessly knotted tie and cleanly brushed Homburg, carrying a heavy briefcase, for perhaps a customs official or tax collector, but never for Rouault, the "wild man," painter of prostitutes, tragic clowns and all the world's grief.

His wardrobe, Rouault later told me, had been inherited from his master, Gustave Moreau. And Rouault's manner of dress, even at the time I first met him, still suggested the style of an earlier generation.

The three of us went to dinner at a restaurant selected by Rouault. We had a very pleasant evening.

A few days later we received an invitation through his daughter Isabelle to come to Rouault's house for dinner.

R5

The chill atmosphere of the Rouault ménage in no way affected the warm friendship which the artist maintained with my wife and me. After our return to New York, I kept up a regular correspondence with him. He was unfailingly kind and courteous, and displayed in his own inimitable way his warm regard which we deeply cherished. He would often address me as M. Jean-Baptiste Neumann. This little quirk of "baptising" a son of Israel amused me, and it also touched me. For I felt that he was underlining the tie between us by addressing me as though I belonged within the mystic fold of his own faith.

Every little gesture like that was wholly natural and spontaneous with Rouault. He hated empty decorum and false fronts, and his whole art and life were turned with all the force at his command against the hypocritical, the deceitful, and the cunning and tricky ones on this earth.

0703

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

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Every little gesture like that was wholly natural and spontaneous with Rouault. He hated empty decorum and false fronts, and his whole art and life were turned with all the force at his command against the hypocritical, the deceitful, and the cunning and tricky ones on this earth.

Rouault's simplicity as a human being was made manifest to us in other ways. Although he was already internationally renowned as

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

a painter of the first rank at the time we first met him, I was struck by the modest way in which he would inquire in his letters about the work of my wife as a fellow artist.

We were most affected when he sent as a token of his regard a Christmas greeting inscribed "to Madame Neumann." He had evidently finished and addressed a letter to us when he got the idea of adding the Christmas greeting. So he drew with a brush in Chinese ink on the back of the sealed envelope a superb little "Veronica's Veil." The head of Christ in the drawing is no larger than a postage stamp, yet it bears the grandeur, dignity and expressive power of Rouault, who, as a painter of profound feeling, is without a peer among his contemporaries. Fortunately Rouault decided to enclose the entire missive in another envelope, so that it reached us in perfect condition.

Rouault's letters were like his conversation — irrepressible eruptions, which ran in all directions on each page and often spilled over on to the back of the envelope. I employed a French secretary, ~~Celine Brevannes~~, who translated my correspondence with Rouault, and went through the ordeal of trying to decipher his letters.

When I returned to Paris in the summer of 1928, Rouault and I met like old friends. Dinners that began early in the evening ran on until dawn. He talked like a dynamo. He rarely stopped, and it all seemed like one sentence that crackled vividly through the night. Since my knowledge of French was imperfect, many details were not clear to me, but Rouault the innocent never guessed that I was not able to follow everything he said. And it was not important for me either, because he was an actor who became eloquent as he sought to unburden himself.

0705

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

At that time he was working under contract to Vollard, and often when he met me in the evening he would run through all the squabbles of the day. It was a gruelling job to try to meet the inexorable and seemingly endless demands of Vollard. Rouault would not merely retell, but would actually re-enact for me the day's happenings, playing the part of both Rouault and Vollard, changing the tone of his voice with each shift in the dialogue, and gesturing more and more excitedly as the dispute between artist and editor waxed more and more furious in the re-telling. At times he would have all the patrons of the restaurant for an audience. As the hours wore on, the audience dwindled, until finally there remained only the two of us, and one waitress. I asked how it was that they did not turn out the lights and close up. Rouault replied, "Don't worry, I come here from time to time, and they know me."

Occasionally I would break in on Rouault's monologue. At one point I asked him, "Why do you paint so many clowns?"

He replied, "But you are a clown yourself."

It was that simple.

During my stay in Paris in 1928, Rouault and I became so friendly that he began to confide in me some of the intimate details of his dealings with people in the art world. He complained that he had been bitterly exploited by a certain Mr. A--- in Paris, who had persuaded him to do a series of gouaches ostensibly for use in a motion picture of grandiose conception, something that would be comparable to Dante's Inferno. Rouault had turned over the drawings for a pittance, receiving a promise that he would be richly rewarded when the film was finished. But now, as he told me, he recognized that he had been gulled, that the "film" was merely a pretext for unscrupulously squeezing work out of him for a trifle.

0706

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

He also gave me the address of Frapier, who published many of Rouault's lithographs. The artist was thrilled when I told him that on that very day I had bought 100,000 francs (at that time $4,000) worth of lithographs by Rouault from Frapier. The release of lithographic stones to Frapier was a clandestine operation on the part of Rouault, because it would have angered Vollard, who insisted that everything from the artist's hand must go to him. But Frapier had persuaded Rouault that he was free to do lithographs for him, on the ground that Vollard had exclusive rights only to the artist's copper plates.

When I told Rouault about my purchases from Frapier, he asked whether the self-portrait was included.

I said, "Yes."

Then he asked if I knew who had posed for that self-portrait. I looked at him in utter bewilderment.

He asked me again.

I did not answer.

With a clown-like laugh he said, "My son posed for that portrait."

Rouault was immersed in the world of clowns. He often asked me whether I went to the Cirque Medrano, a favorite of his. Clowns must have appealed particularly to him because of the contrast between their surface gaiety and their inner pathos. In his work, of course, pathos reached the deepest resonance. It was in everything, in the odyssey creatures of the bordellos no less than in saintly religious scenes.

One thing struck me. Although he spoke to me about circuses and brothels, he never said anything about the church. I wondered why. It became clearer to me when Rouault sent me one day to Frapier to get a copy of his book, "Souvenirs Intimes," which Frapier had published.

0707

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

This book is a confession of artistic faith. Reading it, I realized that Rouault's religious inspiration was too much a matter of personal belief and vision for him to discuss it with others, except perhaps those intimates like André Suarès and Léon Bloy, whose creed he shared.

Or it may be that it would not more occur to him to talk to me about the nature or fitness of his religious faith than about the fit of his clothes -- which were also sacred, as a heritage of his beloved teacher Moreau.

At any rate, he did unburden himself to me with surprising frankness about his broad outlook on the world, and in this were fused all the elements which fired not only his faith, but his greatness as an artist: his profound mysticism, his hatred of oppression and injustice, his deep responsiveness to the raw brutality of life, his compassion for the beaten, and his awareness that life can be breathed into inert pigment only by those in whom the pulse of human sympathy and understanding beats strongly.

Some of his most vivid self-portraits of the pen emerged, like meteors in the firmament, in the course of our correspondence, often bursting through the most routine business.

Our correspondence became especially heavy about 1930, and remained so for several years as I tried to work out a number of projects relating to Rouault's work: exhibitions of his newest paintings and prints, publication of new prints by him, and publication of an oeuvre catalogue of Rouault's paintings.

It was in 1930 that I held the largest exhibition of Rouault paintings that I had yet undertaken. It was a two-stage affair,

0708

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

first in Munich and then in New York. In connection with these exhibitions I issued a volume of Artlover devoted to Rouault's paintings and prints. The artist was gratified by this publication, and through his efforts it was mentioned in many major books on him, including Venturi's monograph.

For the Munich exhibition I also carried out a kind of promotion unusual for art exhibitions. I put up on the streets posters in big black type announcing the show. They were printed in English in order to draw American tourists. On the posters there was also a large reproduction of Rouault's painting of the top-hatted "Uncle Sam." It was ironic that I should have tried to attract Americans with this satirical figure. However, it must be said that Rouault's conception was so different from the creation of American newspaper cartoonists that "Uncle" was probably not recognizable to most American tourists. And if he were, they probably would not have discerned the satirical intent.

Nonetheless it was there, and it was documented more than once in Rouault's correspondence with me. It seems that an American by the name of Jerome Milkman had written to Rouault asking for an autograph, and Rouault had replied with some barbed commentaries about "Uncle." The artist was so much taken with his own reply to Milkman that later, in 1930, he sent me a new version of the reply, "revised, corrected and augmented in honor of J. B. Neumann." It was a versified commentary, of which a translation is given here:

Title of a book to appear

"In these dark times Castor would still smile at Pollux."

0709

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

R11

1930

Reply to M. Jerome Milkman,
revised, corrected and
augmented in honor of J. B. Neumann

What do you want of me, Jerome,
an autograph
That is to say a little word which you say
Jerome

*

Blessed be the times when pens did not exist,
When one wrote with a goose quill,
One sharpened and re-sharpened it
Without hurrying

The most unbridled ideas piled up,
Or flew away in smoke, which was perfect,
The best ones affirmed themselves
Condensed and
Harmonised themselves

*

Ah! Jerome, I do not know
But all the evil comes you
From your Uncle Sam,
From his typewriter,
From his too-big piggy bank--
He himself is the victim of it

*

It is indeed you Uncle Sam
Who has said "Time is money"
Detestable word
It is you Uncle Sam.
Are you much happier for it?

It is very nice of me to reply to you.
For having put such detestable axiom into practice
You deserve la schlague.

But you, Jerome Milkman,
I do not consider you in particular responsible
Tell me whether I am right, boy.

Here is the note that is due,
Thirty-five lines of verse at five hundred dollars each
without delay
For the till of my little museum
Which has been empty since the execrable war.

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

Just who was to pay the "note that is due," was not made quite clear; evidently in Rouault's mind it was a burden that should have fallen on Uncle Sam as a penance for the worship of false gods. The same conception of "Uncle" appears in later letters, though in somewhat softened form. At any rate, it is ironic that this huge penalty conjured up by Rouault of five hundred dollars per line of verse for the worshippers of Mammon would barely add up, some twenty-five years later, to enough to buy a single first-rate painting by Rouault.

My success with the Rouault exhibitions in 1930 emboldened me to ask him to do some prints which I proposed to publish in editions of my own. He replied with a groan of anguish:

> Dear Mr. Neumann:
>
> I am dead, but not yet buried--dead to the proposals that you make to me--it is impossible that you should ask what you do. I have nearly five hundred plates of wood, copper, lithographs etc. to furnish A. V. over a period of years, then paintings to take up and work on again.
>
> After that, though you offer me billions, I shall be finished with lithographs and etchings, black-and-white and colored. I lie down--and I am in agony for others, numbed by A. V. and dead to lithographs and etchings for ever--you will have nothing more than paintings, water colors and drawings, even in black and white.

In effect, Rouault's commitments to Ambroise Vollard in graphic work were so vast and taxing that some of them, like the illustrations for Baudelaire's "Fleurs du Mal," never were completed. And Rouault was literally drained of all his strength by the work.

A letter which he wrote to me from Paris August 16, 1931 gives a revealing picture of the creative travail of Rouault during the long years that he was in the grip of the twelve great graphic projects for Vollard:

0711

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

> Note all this...since 1917-1918 I have been under the millstone; don't compliment me too much...I don't know too well any more what I have done. I sink in and settle into all this as others sink into their beds--then I play dead and my head functions better for it--I am giving the very best that I can. I am in a very limited field, in a sector like the soldier in his trench, but my head has been going since 1917-18--the twelve things, precious with the love that I bring ---would the subject be unworthy of me --- paper, character, etchings, wood--- mustbe wed. Others do the work in miniature first, but with me the dimensions and relations are in the brain--value of blacks and whites--play of woodcut and etchings--for the twelve works.
>
> Some one whom I don't wish to name has said, "How is this done?" So many compliments have been paid the first work. It is chance that has doneit. It is chance! dear blind one--I should have replied, a finger on my forehead.

Rouault's cutting irony, attributing to "chance" the results of his Herculean efforts, was, of course, typical of his response to the philistines, whom he scorned. He summed up the same attitude more bluntly in a letter to me dated April 30, 1931:

> It's all the same to me whether my canvases have any market value. The only true: spiritual--the other, changeable as the weather.
> I don't struggle against commercialism.
> I despise it--to be bought by X,Y,Z--
> What do all those prices matter, dead soul?
> Our carniverous ones know how to judge only by success or by prices.

Despite its irony, Rouault's remark on the role of chance does throw light on the tumultuous creative process within him. In painting he would work with sweeping fury to release this inner force; so much so that, as he told me, when he worked in water color he had to lay the paper flat on a table and stand over it--otherwise the torrents of color would have streamed right off the paper.

Unbridled vehemence with the brush, unyielding grip on the inner vision, a sense of lonely isolation, and contempt for the

0712

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

world of affairs, stand out as boldly hewn facets in the following self-portrait which he penned for me in the early nineteen-thirties:

Dear Sir:

I have spent my life wanting to give pleasure
to others and I am less known,
Or at least no better known
than the unknown soldier
Who has never told us his feeling about everything
he sees and hears---I have preserved within myself
everything which struck my understanding as a child--
I remain more savage than the pre-Colombians--more
bloodthirsty but in my heart very Christian in spirit.
My country is between heaven and earth--and the poor
in spirit who consider themselves discerning critics--
isn't is so Monsieur Mauclair?-- have not yet
perceived it.

When a critic "places" me Castor smiles at Pollux
in the clear night.

In another letter of the same period Rouault offers an equally vivid insight into the inner recesses of his being:

For my art is savage baroque, like the Devil--
I should say religious--in the eyes of contemporaries
who have lost the faith. They no longer believe
in anything--neither in spirit nor matter.
They go along, nose to the ground--seeing nothing,
wanting no more of sorrow--joy does not dwell in them--
but sneers and enervation.
Anything rather than suffer--say these faithless ones--
And I say anything rather than not suffer, but without
ever seeking it out--Besides I have attained fulfillment
and do not have to make any imprudent wishes.

It was our mutual interest in the project for a catalogue raisonne of Rouault 's paintings that kept our correspondence going in those years. Although he felt compelled finally by the pressure of other ties and commitments to break off the project before it could be brought to fulfillment, so long as he saw the possibility of going forward with it, he applied himself assiduously to helping me get photographs and the necessary data on his works.

0713

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

He was extremely exacting about having his paintings well photographed, and showed undisguised scorn for photographers who falsified the light values in their photographs of his work. As in his conversations, so in his letters, in the midst of routine details about the catalogue, he would suddenly turn to his inner voice, attuned to his inmost torment, sounding now plaintively like a melancholy reed or woodwind, and now resounding like a trumpet on Judgment Day. Once having unburdened himself, he would as suddenly revert to the routine matter at hand.

All the main themes resound, as in a symphony, in a six-page typed letter, dated November 2o, 1933, replete with changes and corrections in Rouault's hand, which begins and ends with the business of photographs for the catalogue raisonné. In between, Rouault unburdens himself, now with a wistful, lyric note about the lonely life of the neglected artist, how with biting sarcasm about the heavy-handed rendering of his forms by artisans in the printmaker's craft, and now the familiar barbed thrusts at "Uncle Sam." This is how the artist speaks:

> I am not as strong as I once was as the result of miseries too long endured, misery of the body, misery of the spirit, in times so carniverous.
>
> The artist disappears into thin air,
> His manager collapses
> In the green field of hope;
> Only his little hat
> Remains attached to the silver birch
> That Corot would have loved to paint;
> The artist, having seen
> And heard enough,
> Disappears noiselessly into thin air.
>
> I am less strong physically, and much stronger in the spiritual sense. I have had some terrible aggravations with the big graphic works, things that cannot be explained with words, but if I dont croak from it, I shall have my revenge--these vexations do not come from me but from the fact that I am not edible--I am not made for big editions,

0714

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

nor to be interpreted by little teams that vulgarize me.

> They wander over my modelling
> They polish it up and smooth it out
> when there is strong modelling, and when there is
> scarcely a trace, they dig in like oxen in the furrow...
> It will soon be the swan song.

For all his "savage barbarism," Rouault was too civilized a person to vent his spleen on any individual, but I have always had the impression from the phrases used in this letter -- the references to being "interpreted," and to digging in "like oxen in the furrow,"--that the wood engravings done by Aubert and other craftsmen after drawings by Rouault were a source of particularly acute dissatisfaction to the artist.

After breaking off his complaint about the craftsmen who worked on his plates and woodblocks for Vollard, Rouault in this same letter of November 20, 1933 sounds another favorite theme -- his outlook as an artist:

> I have never worked like those who call themselves European or Universal, before having been of their own modest, obscure little village, and before having discerned dream and reality joined together in sorrow...

The line of Rouault's thought is lost at this point in an impenetrable thicket of crossed-out and inserted words. But the general sense of it can be untangled: Rouault believed passionately that unless deeply rooted in the immediate surroundings, an artist's pretensions to universality are vain and empty. From the tangled lines of this paragraph there can also be extracted an allusion, familiar enough in Rouault, to the need of an artist to seek out a vision of the beautiful, regardless of the total incomprehension of those around him, of urbane or rustic folks or of critics; a

0715

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

vision of beauty that is secret, and may be hidden in the deepest sorrow or the most profound grief. Although the phrasing, elisions and additions form too involved a pattern to permit one to extricate a clear, simply articulated thought, the aspects noted are unmistakably discernible. The letter then continues:

I work for a secret God
A terrible God
A jealous God
Who wants my heart
And my spirit for him--and the very least of my sighs, the terrible old God of painting who is demanding like the devil; there is pedantry in saying it, but perhaps it is only in saying it, thinking it, and practicing this law that my salvation lies

diurnal cry nocturnal

Dream and reality-- in times so utilitarian, Uncle Sam, who would believe it but I who have so misunderstood you.

Would it be you, Uncle Sam
Mystery
Who will honor me
In my despoiled works;
You who used to say
"Time is money?"

But so many others also say it today that it is bad grace on their part to reproach you for it.

J. K. Husymans has written: Edgar Poe was born in Boston to the shame of America--I am not sure it was Boston; I read all that when I was a novice.

At this point in the letter the theme of Uncle Sam's spiritual deficiencies, resulting from excessive preoccupation with money, becomes enlaced with the complaint about the inadequacies of most photographic reproductions of Rouault's paintings:

Would it be you Uncle Sam, who will make some photographs that are not undesirable, that do not upset all the values of my works; you that overproduction has killed...

Dear photographers
I beg you, do not make black
What is red,
Or immaculate white
What is azure blue
Or antique ultramarine.

0716

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

Uncle Sam,
Don't make a fool of me
While trying to honor me.

Be loyal
There is sometimes honor
In serving Uncle Sam,
Lonely man,
So impoverished
In Spirit
Who agonizes and perishes
Alongside the heathen
Who are dying of surfeit
And believe themselves in good health.

I have a horror of modern mechanization.

Chemistry and Mechanics
Melanchoy idols
Chemistry and mechanics
Sinister idols

In his letter Rouault recalls that the above verse was the legend of one of his prints in the series on "War,", in which Death squats and blows on a weak flame, while preparing some frightful mixture. And this reminiscence quickly moves him to exasperation over the shortcomings of publishers and artisans in graphic work:

More than ever, before the emptiness of the morons of publishing and engraving
Here I am alone
Perhaps made more knowing
In my art and life
By so many secret miseries
Embraced sometimes without great joy.

If from the ever growing difficulties I do not croak before having brought my original engraving to the point of my painting, let it be said that I regret nothing; for this imagined evil, which consists of seeing everything that I have set up with the help of others collapse lamentably, can be a great good; but I would have accepted the most humble mission in the spirit of the old craftsmen whose names no one knows.

How much time lost—sometimes I have the impression that so many boors think only of quick and purely material success, if you can call that success.

While my blood flows
Drop by drop
From a mortal wound
~~From by mortal wound~~

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

> They sneer, or they would sneer if I spoke like this, and they would guffaw still more if I croaked--I am in constant divorce with my times, but not with immortal art.

Rouault demanded so much of others because he demanded even more of himself. It is not surprising that he was perpetually tormented by the problem of bringing each engraving up to the original point of departure--a work done with the brush; for in the paintings themselves Rouault was always restlessly striving for a more intense realization of his vision. And when he was finally liberated from the Vollard print projects, and could turn his main energies toward painting again, he took up many paintings that had been put aside years earlier, and worked them over and over to bring them nearer to what he saw in his mind's eye.

With Rouault's decision that he would not be able to carry out the project for a catalogue raisonné with me, our correspondence lapsed. From it I have attempted to extract what is of broadest significance for the art world: his boldly drawn portraits of his inner self, his broadly outlined views of life, and his observations on the great graphic projects which absorbed so much of his energies over so long a period.

These are all fundamental aspects of the artist in relation to his word and his world. But Rouault, like all great artists, is a richly diversified personality. And no handful of letters can encompass the innumerable facets of his being. It seems appropriate, therefore, to evoke other phases of his interests, particularly his artistic culture, with the following quotation from his book, "Souvenirs Intimes:"

0718

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

...Daumier and Courbet have become famous, as men of advanced views; each of them had temperament, and in each of them the love of painting, whatever may be said, was neither ordinary nor common.

In art, ones when one hears the problem of form discussed. Oral or written solutions abound. It is with the tip of the brush that one best resolves these problems...

Cezanne, like Daumier, dares to display current pictorial honesty. Painting can be summed up in so few essential traits.

The fairies are not dead, but they have taken refuge in new forms. The stars are never extinguished; it is we who make them shine in the firmament of our loving heart or in our aroused spirit. The telegraph, electricity, ultra-violet rays, aerial flights, crossings of the Sahara, tomorrow perhaps submarine voyages; so many good and evil fairies are still captive there, to serve us or perhaps to do us evil turns; and the primitive forces which we pretend to master sometimes avenge themselves.

If Raphael came back today, do you think that he would do exactly what he did at another time? Isn't it worth more to extract a pale reflection from the least human spectacle than to re-edit the vain appearance of a perfect beauty of which we often perceive only the appearance.

?..It is not a question of denying classical beauty nor of forgetting the friezes of the Parthenon, but on the contrary of not accepting a fundamental vulgarization of ancient things that one admires.

Watteau, Chardin, Daumier, Courbet, Cezanne, Corot, permit me for an instant to bring you together on one point. Is it not better to seek in a human subject a modest pretext for singing one's own song; grand subjects have nothing to do with the matter, but only the gifts, the force, the love of him who treats them...

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

SORROW AND CHAMPAGNE

On a spring day in the year 1912 an imposing figure of a man stopped into my gallery to see the exhibition of prints by Edvard Munch. Before me loomed a Germanic giant, ~~with very bad teeth~~.

He introduced himself — the artist Max Beckmann.

"Oh," I said, "You are the man who has three paintings in the Secession exhibition." I was strongly impressed by his appearance. As we talked about artists and their eternally unsolved problems, I felt honored that I, a mere beginner in the art business, should be visited by one of Paul Cassirer's "gang."

I wondered whether this might be a malcontent — an artist dissatisfied with his place among the lesser lights in this galaxy of Cassirer, the biggest art dealer in Germany.

After Beckmann left, I hurried across the street to the Secession exhibit to study his paintings. The contemporary artists were in good company there, for Cassirer had brought an impressive display of the initiators of modern art. There were four important Van Goghs, ten canvases of Rousseau le Douanier, and five recent Picassos.

In contrast to most of the artists, who had sent paintings in the modern mode, such as simple still lifes, Beckmann had put his main effort into an enormous canvas in the grandiose tradition of Michelangelo, Rubens and Delacroix. It was the "Battle of the Amazons," filled with life-size figures clashing in fierce combat. In this work, I thought to myself, the "young giant" is out to challenge the "Big Three" - Liebermann,

0720

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

Slevogt and Corinth. One other thing struck me about the painting. It was heroic, but it was utterly lacking in the thunderous self-assurance, the almost Olympian grandeur of the masters that had inspired Beckmann. In the old masters, the fury spent itself in the conflict of external forces. In Beckmann's battle scene, it remained somehow locked up, producing a strong sense of inner torment. I did not suspect at the time how deeply tormented Beckmann's entire creative life was to be, nor how deeply I would be caught up in it.

Within a few weeks Beckmann came back to see me. He brought two small copper plates which he had etched. Now Beckmann had swept aside even the veneer of mythology — for I had felt that it was no more than a veneer in the "Battle of the Amazons." Here was modern life in the raw — in one etching, nudes in a brothel, drunken revellers on a street — I might add, not care-free but very deeply agitated"revellers". I was impressed with Beckmann's forthright expression. I bought the two plates and prepared to publish more of his etchings.

Not long afterward Beckmann reappeared with a half-dozen new plates. They seemed to me inferior. I did not hide my disappointment. Beckmann became very angry, walked out and slammed the door. It looked like the end of things between us.

For a very long time I saw nothing of him. In the meantime I was drawn into contention against his dealer, the redoubtable Paul Cassirer, who was the driving force behind the Secession. This was the only major organization of progressive artists in Germany, and Cassirer controlled it so tightly that discontent inevitably spread among the participating artists. In 1912, a rebellion against Cassirer had begun within the organization. My

0721

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

sympathies were with the rebels, for I felt that the Secession was beginning to suffer from hardening of the arteries, and badly needed rejuvenation.

About that time Cassirer came to my gallery, took hold of my lapel and said, "I can see, you want to become the second Cassirer." I pushed him back and said, "You are wrong, I want to become the first J. B. Neumann."

The following year Corinth broke with the Secession in protest against Cassirer's narrow policy, which had resulted in the exclusion from the 1913 exhibition of a considerable number of artists worthy of consideration. Instead of exhibiting with the Secession, Corinth joined with a group of rejected artists who held their own exhibition under the title "Die refusierte Secession." This group started a law-suit against the Liebermann-Cassirer group which had retained possession of the Secession Name and quarters. The legal action was successful, and Cassirer, Liebermann et al. were compelled to yield the name "Secession" to the Corinth group, which installed Corinth as president in its new headquarters.

In 1915 I accepted an offer to become director of the Secession, with the understanding that I should be on the jury and have the right to introduce new talent. But I soon discovered that I would have to battle to obtain fulfillment of the understanding. When the jury met to consider work for the twenty-seventh annual exhibition, the artist members of the jury, despite the agreement with me, tried to shut out many new artists. Time and again I was compelled to stage a protest walk-out. Then Eugen Spiro would come running after me and say, "Come back, they will accept the artist."

0722

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

I was very much disturbed by this tendency of the Secession to become a market place for a carefully restricted group, with ro interest in encouraging new talent. This was exactly what I had fought when Cassirer had held the organization in his pocket, and now it was happening all over again after the successful revolt against him.

Under the circumstances I felt that I had no choice but to become the "Trojan horse" of the Secession. With my own gallery in the front of the building, I tried to capture the public for more advanced artists than the Secessionists entrenched in the rear. For the Secession was settling into a conservative repetition of Impressionism, with no new creative impulse.

But a year later, in 1916, the "Trojan horse" was hoisted right out of the citadel of the Secession and sent to the front in the uniform of the Austrian army. Once I was out of the way, the Secession jury proceeded to ignore completely the pledge to foster new talent. For that reason, when I returned from the army, I had no more to do with the Secession.

In those years I still had little contact with Beckmann. When I did run into him in Berlin, we exchanged only casual greetings. He was probably still smarting from my rejection of his etchings.

At the outset of the war he had volunteered as a medical orderly. His early enthusiasm for the cause of German arms is well known through the publication of his letters to his wife. But his disillusionment soon bit into his graphic plates with appalling bitterness. And he became very outspoken in his hatred of the war. I recall that after I was drafted and sent to the front in 1916, I was put into a fright one day when I received

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

an open postcard: "If you don't find a way to get out of this mess, you are the biggest fool in the world!" And it was signed: Max Beckmann. I feared that he might be shot if this were discovered. However, nothing came of his indiscretion.

Before being called into military service in the Austrian army, I had had a chance to see the effect of the war on Beckmann's art. For Beckmann had sent almost fifty new etchings of war scenes to the annual spring exhibition of graphic arts at the Berliner Secession in 1915. Very few artists had such a penetrating approach. I was tremendously impressed, and wrote him a letter expressing such strong admiration and praise that he immediately visited me to show his gratitude.

I bought quite a number of new plates from him and prepared a big exhibition of his graphic art, consisting of one hundred ten prints and one hundred drawings, which was held in November, 1917. I had the very good fortune to be released from the army in time to be back in Berlin for this exhibition.

I asked Beckmann to write a brief foreword for the catalogue of this exhibition. This is what he wrote:

single space →

"The editor of this catalogue has asked me to give some account of my work.

"I do not have much to write:

"To be the child of one's time.

"Naturalism against your own Self.

"Objectivity of the inner visage.

"My heart goes out to the four great painters of manly mysticism: Maclensskirchner, Gruenewald, Breughel and van Gogh.

Max Beckmann"

0724

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

Not only his writing but his conversation too was highly condensed. He seemed to speak in aphorisms — bitter, even cynical. He was, of course, seared by the war — as a medical orderly he had lived day and night with the most pitiable victims of the carnage, and his copper plates were deeply scarred with a devastating bitterness.

In addition, his position as an artist was a source of dissatisfaction that had been gnawing at Beckmann ceaselessly. True, since several years before the war, he had been accepted and represented by the leading art dealer in Germany, Paul Cassirer. But Beckmann was held in reserve by Cassirer, for whom the French moderns came first, and then the "Big Three" of contemporary German art: Liebermann, Slevogt and Corinth. If Cassirer bought the work of Beckmann too, it was primarily because he recognized the latent potentiality of this aggressive young artist, and thought it the better part of wisdom to keep a string on him. So he bought up the work of Beckmann and put it on ice. This rankled deeply in Beckmann.

Even Cassirer's publication in 1912 of Hans Kaiser's biography of Beckmann, announced as the first in a series on "Artists of Our Time," had misfired. The series had begun and ended with the Beckmann monograph. And very few copies of the book had been sold. Cassirer was dissatisfied. And since his investment in Beckmann was still small, he was not inclined to wage a strenuous uphill battle for the artist.

In these circumstances Beckmann felt neglected. From my first acquaintance with him, when he had complained to me that he was like a step-child in the house of Cassirer, I had felt that perhaps Beckmann was preparing the way for an approach to

0725

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

me to take over as his representative in painting and promote his work more actively than Cassirer was willing to do. But I was not ripe for that. Much as I admired his graphic art, I was not yet "sold" on Beckmann as a painter. I was too deeply involved with Munch and "Die Bruecke". So I had not encouraged what I regarded as overtures.

However, the 1917 graphic exhibition brought us closer together. I began to make trips to Frankfurt, where Beckmann had his studio and was working hard at painting. There I was able to see that Beckmann the painter had undergone a great transformation. From his very start as a painter Beckmann had been an artist in conflict. On the one hand he refused to follow in the wake of the "Big Three," Liebermann, Slevogt and Corinth; and even in his early naturalist cnavases he had put his own twist, as much as to say, "See, I do not paint like them." On the other hand, he was unwilling to accept Munch, Picasso with all his "isms" or Franz Marc, with whom he held public controversies in magazines. As for Kandinsky and Beckmann, they were like water and oil. For years Beckmann had been so busy warding off "alien" influences that he had been unable to find himself as a painter. At least, so I thought.

But in the course of frequent visits to Frankfurt, I became more and more convinced that Beckmann was at last finding himself. I was enormously impressed by the "Self-portrait with the Red Scarf," now in the museum at Stuttgart, and by the "Deposition from the Cross," which is in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Gift of Curt Valentin

I began to understand and appreciate Beckmann's power as a painter. We soon came to a mutual understanding and concluded a contract by which I became the representative for all his

072b

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

production. And so it was to remain for fifteen years until the Nazis put an end to it.

One day, not long after we had reached our new agreement, Beckmann appeared with a roll of thin paper under his arm. It was a gruesome, frightening vision. I stood there bewildered. I didn't dare say a word. I felt shell-shocked. Never had I seen art of such venom, such bitterness:

Scene I: a soldier under a street lamp, his face a battered waste of flesh with great empty hollows where eyes once shone, his arm a lifeless stump. In the background two more war-cripples dangle spider-like on their crutches. The foreground soldier is accosted by a civilian — Beckmann himself — who touches the stump with one hand while with his other hand he points toward himself, as though the soldier's blank orbs could take in the gesture. It was a proclamation of self-guilt. It seemed to say, "We are all guilty," all responsible for this horror. It was thus that Beckmann explained his intent to me.

illust I

Scene II; a street full of people drained of all human warmth. An armless, legless war veteran is literally thrust aside by the indifferent crowd.

II

Scene III: a mad maelstrom — a ghastly orgy of sex and the carnage of war.

III

Scene IV: prayers and empty stomachs — a gaunt vision of the hunger that stalked Germany.

IV

On and on this panorama of horrors swept through scene after scene, building up to a crescendo of human agony, and then dropping off to the "quiet" torment of the tenth and final drawing: "The Family." Yes, this was the post-war family: Beckmann,

V

0727

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

literally wild with inner tension, counter-posed to his mother-in-law, while in the foreground his son Peter, decked out in soldier's helmet, grimaces idiotically as he shakes a pair of grenades at his father.

This was the aftermath of the war.

And this was "Hell." Beckmann had so titled the series. He had even prepared an elaborate title page from which the artist leers sardonically at the spectator, a real Mephistopheles. Above the portrait, in Beckmann's own script: "Die Hoelle - Grosses Spektakel in Zehn Bildern von Beckmann." It was indeed a grand spectacle. The impact of these drawings, which Beckmann had done on thin lithographic paper for transfer to the lithographic stone, was heightened by their huge size. The format was 86 by 62 centimeters. Below the title-page self-portrait, Beckmann had written the following:

"Wir bitten das geehrte Publikum naeher zu treten. Es hat die angenehme Aussicht sich vielleicht 10 Minuten nicht zu langweilen. Wer nicht zufrieden bekommt sein Geld zurueck.

Der Verlag J. B. Neumann, Berlin."

("We beg the esteemed public to step closer. There is the agreeable prospect that for perhaps ten minutes you will not be bored. Any one not satisfied will get his money back.

J. B. Neumann, Publisher, Berlin.")

There it was, complete. In bringing this series for my inspection and approval, Beckmann had made sure in advance that I was cornered. I surrendered.

As I prepared to publish this portfolio of horrors, I slowly came to a more positive understanding of the demonic

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

force that was driving Beckmann. We have Dante's "Hell," and that of Bosch and Breughel; why not Beckmann's, I thought. His "Hell" surely has its own justification, I realized. For the medieval hell could be escaped by the virtuous, but there was no escaping the hell that had engulfed us all.

Beckmann's inner need to project this tortured vision upon the outer world became clearer to me. To publish his lithographs of "Hell" was like lancing an abcess.

I resolved, too, that there should be a popular edition of his series, so that this extraordinary work could be put within reach of people who could not afford original lithographs. I therefore issued the whole series as a book of photo-lithography at the modest price of two marks. But there was no popular response. And I was compelled to give away most copies of this edition of one thousand to persons who were willing to take them.

The original prints were all the most shocking in their impact because of their huge size, and many art patrons took offense when I offered them. Not a single copy was sold, and today I know of only one complete portfolio in existence, in the collection of the Minneapolis Institute of Art. I have no idea what happened to the others which I left stored in Germany.

I soon observed that all my visits to Frankfurt fell into the same pattern. I would come to the large studio; the walls were bare. The big room was completely empty except for a tattered old black plush fauteuil, which was so dear to Beckmann that he even dragged it to America some twenty years later. By gesture he would command me to sit in the arm chair. Then he would pace the floor, cigarette in hand, while I sat humbly waiting. His

0729

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

latest canvas would be standing against the wall, turned away from me. The silence would last at least ten minutes, perhaps twice that long. Although he was only three years older than me, Beckmann acted toward me as though he were fifty years my senior. I never dared open my mouth until he broke the silence. He always started the conversation in the same way. Staring at me as if I were a piece of cellophane, he would begin:

"Na. Wollen Sie meinen neuen Schinken sehen?"

("So. Would you like to see my new ham?")

I would just nod.

Then he would turn the canvas around.

Then another long silence, longer than the first one. For I felt that I must study each painting long and intently, since he expected of me not just idle comment, but serious criticism. Without a crystal-clear opinion, I would have evaporated in his presence. In these meetings I felt myself pitted against him. I had to struggle to impress him with my existence. And I was afraid of him. At a later time I recognized that his hard-boiled manner masked a certain fear of me. But that was long afterward.

Thus I would sit in the anxious seat for what seemed a year. Perhaps a half-hour would pass. Then he would say, "Well, it's time to go and eat."

We would go either to a very cheap bistro, where rough characters stood about and spit on the floor, or to the Frankfurter Hof, the finest hotel in the city. Whether in the bistro or in the Frankfurter Hof, his first order was for "Sekt" — champagne. He would drink the entire bottle, never offer me a drop. It is true that I was not born for champagne. And he really needed it to relieve the heavy strain of our sessions in

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

the studio.

Again I would wait for his signal to speak. When I talked about his work, I was able to convince him that I was not just a picture peddler, that I could give him a serious analysis of his work. My talk and the champagne both served to lift the dead mask of fatigue from his face — for he always put in an exhausting ten-hour day of utmost concentration at his easel — and he would become more cheerful. I would speak in measured fashion. I dared not blast out my opinions. There was great anxiety and fear on both sides. But as he mellowed, he would give voice to his rising confidence that we two would conquer the world with Beckmann's art.

Our discussions of his plans were literally endless. In the restaurant or bistro, it would always turn out finally that we were the last guests, as the talk ran far into the night. Or if the discussion took place in the studio, he would pace the floor like a field marshal, thinking out his strategy aloud. I was to be his adjutant in carrying out his schemes, a subordinate rank, if you will, but a post that he never would have entrusted to me had he not been convinced that I was particularly qualified by my sympathetic understanding of his character and worth as an artist.

Ambitious as Beckmann was, and unshakable in his conviction that he would eventually win recognition as a first-rate artist, he was still a realist. Frankfurt was a retreat for him after the bruising defeat of his early years in Berlin. Berlin remained his ultimate objective — in Germany, that is, for his ambitions already overreached the frontiers of his homeland. He was thinking of London, Paris, all Europe. But the realist

0731

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

Beckmann knew that at the moment he could not even think of a frontal assault upon Berlin, the acknowledged art center of Germany. Lying back in his provincial retreat, he was building up his base of operations in Frankfurt, and making preparations to invade other provincial centers. Only after success in the provinces could he safely approach Berlin again. No doubt, it was to assuage his hurt feelings and ease his impatience that he would spit out his contempt for the Berlin that he was so anxious to capture.

No detail was too small for Beckmann to overlook in his plans. This publisher must be won over: he could help. We must get around that art critic: an implacable enemy; etc.

Even when my visit would come to an end, and I would prepare for the long return trip to Berlin, a train ride of ten hours, Beckmann would still be running on with his plans. So he would continue the discussion by mail.

Thus, in March, 1920, when he was in a fever to get his campaign for recognition under way, he wrote to me:

> "Dear Herr Neumann:
>
> As we parted yesterday I had the feeling that something had been left unsettled; what it was, I myself did not know, since I was still quite tired from the night before.
>
> "Afterward it came to mind. It was the theme Berlin or Cologne as the first station on our common Way of the Cross, and perhaps also path of joy. As I have not worked for a day, and thus have had time to think about less important things, I have for my part come to the final conclusion that it should be Cologne. I believe that you were right in your initial idea and that it must be executed thoroughly. Berlin must come last. This corrupt nest without temperament is worth no more. Cologne is newer, fresher, and at the moment, even livelier."

I promptly answered his letter, promised to do my utmost to arrange the exhibition of his work in Cologne, gave him a

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

brief chronicle of the latest doings in the Berlin art world — its daily fare of rivalries, intrigue and petty bickering — and sought to hearten him with some words of appreciation for his stubborn, courageous effort to realize his great potentialities.

~~[illegible]~~, On November 7, 1920, ~~he replied with~~ I received the following letter:

"My dear Herr Neumann:

I just want to thank you for your very kind letter. Now I have been floundering about in my work all day long like an imbecile and have so drained myself that unfortunately I can not find any clever and amusing words. Anyhow, you can believe me that your letter gave me great joy. I believe that your perhaps excessively good opinion of me will not cause me to lose my self-critical capacity. For your faith in me strengthens and inspires me, and through it you will have a part in my work. I believe that you will be glad to hear that the "Dream" is coming along well and begins to satisfy me. For me this means a great deal, because I am generally in a state of deepest vexation. And I may well be again tomorrow. But today I see it as clearly as though I were asleep.

By the way, I also understand your work and value very highly your intense activity (Nervenleistung). I know what it is to root around among so many confused works, and to push your way through an endless mass of stupidity, lack of understanding and intrigue, and not lose courage and faith in something whole. You too have something whole within you. The loneliness in which we both live comes from the fact that there are so few whole human beings. Most of them are mere pygmies. This is what is miserable. What is splendid is that we know something of each other. This is strengthening. And so, forward. Courage. I thank you once more, dear Herr Neumann.

Always your Beckmann

As soon as I am free of 'The Dream' I will finish 'The family.'" We shall certainly see each other again before Christmas, and then we shall discuss thoroughly the eventual exhibition."

And thus we went on expanding our plans with every meeting and every letter.

During one of my visits to his studio, when, according to the customary ritual, he had offered to display his "neuen Schinken"

~~painting now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.~~

0733

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

and I, of course, had eagerly accepted, he placed before me a big canvas in which I appeared as large as life in a clown's costume, standing beside a melancholy musician also in carnival dress, his friend Mrs. Battenberg, in whose house in Frankfurt he was then living.

I was dumbfounded. For six months he had been laboring to bring forth this conception of "The Carnival," and there had never been so much as a hint that he was working on me.

Beckmann had long been talking of the "inneren Gesichte." Nothing struck me so forcibly in this picture as the impression that he had really done my portrait "from within." He had brought to the surface a deep melancholy of which I myself had not been fully aware until I stood there before the canvas "mirror" which Beckmann had put before me. Sensing my reaction, he said to me, "I was always soaking you up!" Now I realized that he really had been looking through me!

I felt honored that my portrait appeared together with that of his good friend Mrs. Battenberg. But I had no illusion that Beckmann had wanted to "honor" me. That sort of gesture was entirely alien to him. It was simply that he had frequent occasion to study me in his penetrating way, and that he had found in me suitable expressive material for his conception of "The Carnival," in which brooding melancholy is the leit-motif.

And that explains why the clown's face is not daubed with make-up paint in the customary fashion. It would have obscured the artist's intent as he tried to depict the clown as the "child of his time (Kind seiner Zeit). The two models were obviously

0734

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

chosen because they were attuned to the spirit that Beckmann was trying to project. As if to underline that, the artist himself joins them in this scene. For it is Beckmann who appears in the lower right hand corner of the canvas in the guise of an acrobat lying on his back balancing a huge horn with his feet, his left hand holding a fan, his face concealed behind a monkey's mask. Despite the disguise, his intimates recognize Beckmann in the delineation of his right hand, which is in itself truly a "portrait."

In this intimate grouping, the mask stands out as having a special symbolic meaning for me. For in all my years of close association with Beckmann, he maintained a wall of reserve from which he never fully emerged.

Realizing that this was no trifling effort, but rather a major work of the painter, I was at first worried, for I knew that he would set a big price on it. But this was no way to approach a picture that had been brought forth in struggle and with tremendous effort. I knew that I must simply accept it as one accepts an "act of God." I said to the artist, "You set the terms, and I will take it."

In the same year Beckmann did another painting, a much smaller one, "The Family," which is likewise strongly impressed with his spirit of inner brooding. Characteristically the artist is lost in his own thoughts as he reclines on a small sofa, his left hand clutching a horn. His wife's face is seen only partly, reflected in a mirror which she holds as she prepares her toilet. His mother-in-law's face is likewise hidden -- covered by her hand, to indicate that

0735

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

she is withdrawn into the scriptures which lie on the table before her. The maid servant is reading a newspaper, and Beckmann's son Peter, stretched out like a frog on the floor, is lost in the comics.

By no accident, every figure in the canvas is wrapped up in himself. In effect, the scene has nothing to do with the circumstances of Beckmann's daily life at that time. The figures have been brought together by the artist only to remain apart, each following his own inner flame, like the candles that flicker throughout the canvas. The painting has an almost Gothic intensity. I brought it to America when I first came here, and it is now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

The inspiration of medieval art, transmuted by Beckmann into the spirit of post-war Germany, is strongly felt in five little paintings on heavy parchment, "The Prodigal Son" series, done in 1921. These paintings are likewise a treasure of the Museum of Modern Art.

At that time, I began to include in my modest little publications, the Bilderhefte, the paintings in which, I felt very strongly, Beckmann was emerging as a mature artist of great expressive power. In April, 1921 I brought out Part I of the Bilderhefte, in which were reproduced the first six oil paintings that I had acquired from Beckmann: "The Night," (1918), "Self-portrait with Champagne Glass" (1919), "The Synagogue" (1919), "Women's Bath House" (1919), "Portrait of Mrs. Battenberg" (1920), and "Carnival" (1920). In addition to the paintings, thirty-three graphic works of Beckmann were reproduced.

Part II of the Bilderhefte, likewise dedicated entirely to

0736

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

Beckmann's work, appeared in December, 1922. In it were reproductions of thirty etchings and the following four paintings: "The Family" (1920), "The Dream" (1920), "Still Life with Apples and Flowers" (1921) and "Park Landscape" (1921).

The two last-named paintings give evidence of a change of mood in Beckmann which had become marked by 1921. The dregs of post-war bitterness seem partly drained away. But Beckmann, of course, did not change his sardonic view of life, as is evident in his letters:

"Dear Herr Neumann,

Thanks so much for all the different signs of your activities and I wish you everything good. I was quite sick at the formal opening of my exhibition, a terrible grippe with high fever. But on the principle of the locomotive I expelled the fever after three days, and have already been out of the house twice. It seems that I am condemned to live longer. Funny feeling to be so sick. For years there had been nothing like that. So it was a sensation for me. The prospect of peace in death was an amusing eventuality; easier to bear with than the feeling that I might have to be sick for a long time. Now it is over. In the next few days I'll be getting back to work. I hope all this furore of exhibiting gives you pleasure. It's all very distant for me, and it's good that it is so. I am burning to do new pictures.

Your Beckmann"

No less typical is another letter of this period:

"My dear Herr Neumann,

I thank you heartily for your dear concentrated letter of Sunday. Certainly you are right in what you say about the whole swindle that grips Germany today. In spite of all, this will not hold us back from doing what we believe to be right. In the last analysis it is a matter of our own amusement. One should not deceive oneself that one does something for others. One does everything for himself. But--and this is the only beautiful thing in life--it is beautiful, if only one finds one or two persons, who are akin to oneself in feeling. That itself is enough. And for the sake of that, the whole Klamauk (fol-de-rol) that we set loose has its "egoistic" justification.

0737

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

That it may bring money (eventually) is necessary, but not the main aim. I believe you feel this way too..."

Beckmann could talk about the "eventual" prospect of money coming in, but I could not wave it away so lightly. The painter must be supplied with the material means to bring his dreams to life: pigment and canvas, bread and meat, and any number of other necessities, including that essential lubricant of the soul--champagne. And it was up to me to keep him supplied.

The day-to-day needs would have to be met for years and years until a break-through could be made which would put the artist on a self-sustaining basis. Since this was completely beyond my means, I had to find a financial backer for Beckmann. To expect to find a rich man who understood and wanted to support such an artist was too much. The best I could hope for would be to persuade some man of means that Beckmann was a "good investment." By the most itensive efforts I won over to the cause a wealthy Jewish dealer in hops. He supplied the substantial monthly advance to support the artist, and in return became the owner of the paintings which I kept in my gallery for sale. For many years he was the mainstay of Beckmann. And when he occasionally wavered, which was hardly surprising, since he took everything on faith from me, I had to rally him by administering another dose of my own faith in Beckmann. Fortunately it remained very strong.

However, recognition and sales came so slowly that I felt the need of a bold stroke to hearten our hops dealer for the long pull ahead. The chance came when, for personal reasons, I undertook a trip to the United States.

In this venture I sensed at least a thin hope, hardly more

0738

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

than that, for America seemed very remote, and especially remote from modern art. Like so many Europeans, I had a mental picture of America as a land that was all frontier, raw and wild. Nevertheless, I still thought there was a better chance of interesting the "cowboys" in Beckmann than there was of making headway with Parisian collectors, who had their Picassos and their Braques, not to mention their lingering distaste for "the Boche."

My project for promoting Beckmann in America was given impetus by the publication of an important book on the artist, brought out in Munich by the publisher Reinhard Piper, one of the early admirers of Beckmann. Four writers contributed to the book: Curt Glaser, Julius Meier-Graefe, W. Fraenger and W. Hausenstein, who later became German ambassador to France. I had been given the first copy off the presses.

There were other inducements to visit the United States. One day an American had come into the gallery, looked at his watch and said, "I have just ten minutes. What can you show me in modern art?"

"Nothing," I replied. "But let me know where you are going, and I will bring you photographs."

He introduced himself--Scofield Thayer, editor of The Dial, and publisher of the portfolio "Living Art," then printed in Germany. We arranged a meeting in Vienna, and there I showed him photographs and other material. Very enthusiastic, he encouraged me to come to the United States and promised to be of assistance.

Another suggestion had come from Dr. W. R. Valentiner, director of the Detroit Institute of Art, who was then visiting

0739

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

in Berlin. He was planning to send on tour through the United States an exhibition of German Expressionist art, and held out the prospect that I could take charge of the exhibition.

Then too, there were other elements of attraction. In 1921 Katherine Dreier had send me the report issued by the Societe Anonyme, of which Marcel Duchamp was already then a member of the executive committee. Finding my gallery mentioned several times in this impressive publication, and quite unaware that it had made little impact in America, I complacently felt that I was known in America, and that this would make things easier for me. I was strengthened in this agreeable illusion by Oscar Bluemner, the politician-architect-painter, who visited my gallery in Duesseldorf in 1921 and strongly urged me to come to New York. He had even followed up this personal appeal with a number of letters. It was not hard to get the impression that they were just waiting for me over there.

By the time I was ready to make the trip to New York, I must have been a bundle of exaggerated hopes and dreams, wrapped around a core of genuine misgivings. Beckmann was in a state of pure unadulterated optimism over the new prospects. He was brimming with high hopes.

And so I set out, carrying under my arm the new Piper book, which was to be the text of my sermons on Beckmann on my mission—nach Amerika!

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

My first trans-Atlantic venture was surrounded with plenty of hazards. To begin with, I faced an impasse on currency exchange. In 1923 Germany was in the throes of the ruinous post-war inflation, and the government had clamped a tight prohibition on export or exchange of marks. Without some means of converting marks into dollars, I could not make the first move.

By a curious twist, the way to America was opened up with the "help" of Beckmann's bitterest enemy, Franz Marc. I had the good fortune to sell a painting by Marc to a collector who had an account with the Guaranty Trust Co. in New York, and he agreed to give me the purchase price of $2000 in the form of a draft on the New York bank. Thus I solved the immediate "dollar problem."

But that was the least of it. I had to make arrangements for the conduct of the art business in Germany during my indefinite stay in America. This was all the more delicate because the hops dealer insisted on suspending financial support for Beckmann until he could get some idea of how my venture abroad was likely to turn out.

I turned over the representation of Beckmann to a young man, Günther Franke, whom I established as the director of a new gallery which I opened in Munich. Franke from then on was to be a most ardent, enthusiastic fighter for Beckmann's work.

I put Karl Nierendorf in charge of the Berlin gallery, hoping that he would get along with Beckmann. But I was not quite sure about Beckmann's attitude toward Nierendorf.

But that hardly gave me pause. After all, I was convinced that I had to make a big leap for the rainbow, and bring back the pot of gold for Beckmann. That didn't seem too hard. Had I not been given the warmest assurances by people who counted in New York?

0741

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

And was I not the ambassador to America of one of the greatest German artists?

It did not take long after my arrival in New York to discover that my credentials were not recognized. Beckmann was "nobody" and I was less.

I had been living in the clouds, floating along on a rococo dream of an easy descent into the waiting arms of American art enthusiasts. But I came down hard on the sidewalks of New York.

It was soon apparent that it would take a full year of "reconnaissance" just to become acquainted with the situation. So, I figured, it was up to those I had left in charge in Germany to keep things going until I could catch on in New York. But my affairs were going badly in Germany too.

My uneasiness about Beckmann's attitude toward Nierendorf, which I had brushed aside in the warm glow of optimism, soon proved to be only too well-founded. Nierendorf was a close friend of Dix and Kandinsky, and made a big fuss over them. That was an unpardonable sin to Beckmann, whose first law for his art representative was Jehovah's commandment "Ye shall have no other gods besides me."

I was also aware that to Beckmann, long inured to expensive living habits, the lack of a guarantee of a substantial monthly income in this period would be a source of dissatisfaction. But I figured that somehow we would muddle through.

What a blow it was, then, to hear that Beckmann had pulled out on me and gone back to Cassirer's camp! I could hardly believe it. But there it was in black and white--a whole batch of newspaper clippings I had received by mail from Germany --reviews by the leading Berlin critics of a big Beckmann exhibition at the Paul Cassirer Gallery! This was rank treachery!

0742

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

It rankled all the more in me to find that every critic generously gave me credit for my efforts to gain recognition for Beckmann. For example, Lothar Brieger had written in the January 9, 1924 issue of B. Z. (Berliner Zeitung):

"...For years J. B. Neumann, who recently departed for America, had carried on an indefatigable, if not always successful battle for Beckmann, and his efforts must be recalled in any talk about the success of this work..."

Similar sentiments were expressed by Max Osborn in the Vossische Zeitung on the following day. Fritz Stahl and Curt Glaser, who had felt that Beckmann had prematurely shown immature paintings in the Secession exhibitions a decade earlier, were agreed that Beckmann was now a ripe, mature painter.

These press comments only made me more bitter, for I felt that I was being robbed of the fruits of my efforts. I wrote Beckmann some hot letters accusing him of double-crossing me by entering into a contract with Cassirer and with a young dealer by the name of Zingler in Frankfurt. Of course it was very handy to have a dealer right in Frankfurt, always at the back and call of the imperious painter. I could just see Beckmann barking out directives by the hour.

My copies of the letters that I sent Beckmann were later lost during the upheaval of the Second World War. But I recall that I wrote to him in great indignation. He wrote back and assured me that I was entirely in the wrong, that it was I who had done him the gravest injustice. Since Beckmann's letters have been preserved, we can let him speak for himself:

9-8-24

"Dear Herr Neumann: You are putting youself in a position where you are drawing an entirely false picture. When you left for America, you gave a

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

firm promise to be back not later than January for the Cassirer exhibition. Then after several months I was informed that you were not coming. Simultaneously with this information I should have received from you a fully clear picture of our financial relations. But nothing was said of that, other than vague, indefinite hints.

Without my consent you had turned over the entire business in Germany to a man with whom, you were quite aware, I would never be able to work closely, and who without further ado had figuratively thrown me out, inasmuch as he put Dix and Kandinsky in my place. So I was left without any firm support. I must assume that you too had plenty of money troubles; otherwise you would have sent me at least a definite promise, as a substitute for anything else.

I beg you to think over once more who is in the wrong. If after all these things I still feel bound to you by friendly ties, and forgive you for attacks that I would never forgive anyone else, you can see that I judge you more objectively and correctly than you do me. I know that you have had a very hard time, but for this very reason it was impossible for me to make requests or demands of you for things which in this situation could only be raised by you yourself. In view of the bad financial situation which exists at the moment, I could not possibly make myself dependent on whether you would buy a picture from time to time. If I had not concluded the contract, I would not have either to go hungry or depend entirely on your pocket. I do not believe that either would have been pleasant for you. It was not possible to bring you into the contract as third party in view of the small sum involved, and furthermore everything had to be rushed, for the rapid depreciation of the currency brought ever nearer the danger that I would get nothing at all. Had I waited only three weeks longer, both Cassirer and Zingler would have refused to enter into any contract. Now this little sum is the only certain thing I can count on. I am not a burden on your pocket, and the future lies ahead of us.

If you are really my friend, you can do no otherwise that grant that I am right. You put me in a dreadful position of uncertainty. I have rescued myself from it as best I might. So now stop playing the injured one, my dear friend.

You know as well as I do that we are dealing with something very broad, that takes many years to carry out in its full scope. To achieve this slowly is possible only by iron consistency in work on your part and mine. Here in Germany you spend too much strength on sex affairs, to have been able to put to use the measure of strength

0744

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

measure of strength and intelligence, in accordance with your gift and talent. I hope and even believe that your storm-and-stress period is over, and that over there you have struggled through to become the man of rich life-experience and confident command of the world, that I need; a man whose word is clear and forthright, whose dreams are no longer castles in the air. In short, a man who had been transformed from a gay, capricious phantom into a solid positive being. That's what I expect of you.

Furthermore, as for myself, I feel that for the first time I am now so developed that I can take the most indifferent or the most interesting matter and make out of it the painter's music that I want. I spend two weeks in Italy on the Adriatic Sea and saw there wonderful things, which I shall now bring into realization. I am painting portraits, still lifes, landscapes, visions of cities rising from the sea, beautiful women and grotesque monsters; bathers and female nudes. In short, a life. A simple, real life—without thoughts or ideas--filled with colors and forms out of nature and out of myself—as beautiful as possible. This will be my work for the next ten years. And I hope that you will participate in it and thus lend me your support. In the next two years—actually now it's only one and a half—we will both show what we are capable of achieving. Work with devout intensity. Then we shall see what each has to offer the other in new-found strength...In London political life seems to be brightening considerably and it looks as though better times are ahead. Now I hope at last to receive a reasonable and really friendly letter from you, dear Herr Neumann. Write soon...

Always your Beckmann"

So once more I was on trial, but at least the compassionate judge was willing to grant me a reprieve, provided only that I solemnly promised to "go straight" from then on.

Although Nierendorf's name is not mentioned in the letter, he is, of course, the one indicted by Beckmann for having "figuratively thrown him out by putting Dix and Kandinsky in Beckmann's "place." To turn from the "figurative" to the facts, poor Nierendorf was anxious to get along with Beckmann, but as the letter states, Beckmann "could not" work with him.

It was not until the following year that my financial situation improved sufficiently to make possible a trip to Europe.

0745

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

Beckmann was still anxious that I return for a meeting. He hoped to reach a new understanding that would make me his standard-bearer once more. He made this plain in the following letter:

Frankfurt, May 23, 1925

Dear Herr Neumann,

Many thanks for your little letter. It sounds very interesting. I am very glad that, according to all appearances, your situation has improved. I now find it necessary and right that you should make a trip here, so that we can talk fully about everything. I will surely keep my promise to inform you fully first, either orally or in writing, before I commit myself to anyone. You know that I still consider you the person who is closest to my art and whose fate is somehow interwoven with mine...Meanwhile I have done some very beautiful things. My form has become clearer and freer without losing its precision, and, favored through several happy circumstances, of which I shall tell you in person, I am now moving along the road toward the fullest harmony, and I believe that we shall meet there. Now listen, dear J. B. Very soon I shall be faced with the question of deciding between Cassirer and you. Therefore it is urgently necessary that you either come over here or else send me in writing a very definite, concrete contract on which I can further build my future. You know where my heart and hope are. But naturally it is necessary that I know something definite, so that I shall have the strength to refuse other offers. So I ask you urgently for a comprehensive, precise outline of the financial possibilities that I can have through you, reckoning from March, 1926. It is only a short time until then and we therefore must decide soon. Please give me your answer quickly.

Most heartily yours,
Beckmann

Meanwhile, Beckmann had been busying himself, as always, with art-politics. The highest goal for him, as for every German artist, was to see his work hanging in the Kronprinzen Palais, the modern wing of the National Gallery in Berlin. This was a not unreasonable expectation, all the more so since many mediocrities had already been admitted. But to find favor it was necessary to bow and scrape. Beckmann, of course, was above this sort of thing.

0746

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

And just because he was such a positive personality, he antagonized the director of the National Gallery, Ludwig Justi, who vowed that he would never accept Beckmann's work, which he thoroughly disliked.

But Beckmann, the Stuermer, was determined to batter at the gates until he could break them down. With his usual astuteness he devised a plan to use Julius Meier-Graefe, Germany's leading art critic, as the battering ram in his assault on the Kronprinzen Palais. Meier-Graefe had declared his support for Beckmann's work by contributing an essay of appreciation to the Piper monograph which appeared in 1924.

In view of Meier-Graefe's immense prestige, it was decided to utilize his sixtieth birthday as an occasion on which his friends would present a Beckmann canvas to the National Gallery in Meier-Graefe's honor. This, it was calculated, would really put Justi on the spot, and he would have no choice but to accept the painting. To soften up Justi's resistance, Meier-Graefe was to launch a storm of criticism of the museum director for his unjustified hostility to Beckmann.

A brief note to me from Beckmann gave indication not only that the Beckmann campaign was developing according to plan, but also that relations between Beckmann and me were really on the mend after the quarrels of the preceding year:

"Dear Herr Neumann:

I am coming on the tenth or eleventh of this month to Paris and will be very happy to see you. We have much to talk about. Very interesting things are happening here. Meier-Graefe is finally storming against Justi on my account; and there is a great deal more to report, but everything verbally.

Your Beckmann"

0747

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

Our meeting in Paris was very gratifying to both of us. I had money in my pocket once more, and felt ready to cope with the problem of satisfying Beckmann's needs, which was no light matter. Beckmann was basking in the warmth of his impending second marriage, to the daughter of the famous portrait painter, Friederich August von Kaulbach. He was planning a four-week honeymoon in Italy, with visits to Rome, Naples and the seashore, and he was already dreaming of painting a whole new world of radiance—a far cry from his tormented visions that had arisen only a few years earlier from the ruin and horrors of the First World War.

In this pleasant atmosphere it was not hard to reconcile our differences, and we once more came to a good understanding, formalized in a big new contract which satisfied Beckmann.

For Beckmann, those days in Paris were "very amusing," as he wrote me not long afterward. Beckmann was even "amused" at the artistic efforts of the leading painters of Paris, for he confided to me in the same letter that he had the feeling "that Paris is no longer competition for us."

Although I could hardly share this extraordinary estimate, it came as no surprise to me. For I recalled that when Beckmann had first been sent to Paris in 1904 as a promising nineteen-year-old artist who deserved the chance to study there, he had returned to Berlin after a mere sixth months and declared, to the general astonishment of Berlin art circles, that no one had anything to teach him in Paris.

In any event I looked upon his mood of utmost self-confidence as a healthy sign. This was the first time in more than a decade

0748

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

of my acquaintance with Beckmann that I had seen him in such a sustained, exalted mood. His letters of the period were brimming with enthusiasm. On August 26, 1925 he wrote to me:

> "...I am delighted and full of hope and just as convinced as you are about our common forward strides toward success. I shall be especially delighted if you will keep me posted about the further course of your affairs. They interest me now as my very own, and I can assure you once more that your old relationship to me is now fully restored; that you are gradually becoming a part of my life, and it is no longer thinkable to separate you from the further course of my development. And by this I naturally mean, for all time. You will not regret your almost fatalistic faith in me. My will, now set entirely free, is building up uncanny power for further advances. My chief works are coming only now!
>
> I thank you dear J. B. Neumann.
> Let me hear from you soon.
>
> Your Max Beckmann
>
> P.S. I am completely of your opinion about Paul Cassirer. If he doesn't want it, we shall let him go."

These were highly productive years for Beckmann. He turned out an abundance of canvases, pastels, drawings and graphic arts, in an easier and more colorful vein than he had ever struck before. He himself credited his new-found marital happiness with giving his art a new life. He wrote to me in 1926:

> "My marriage is thusfar extraordinarily happy. And it will remain so. I am now just a painter."

Actually, Beckmann liked to think of himself as more than "just a painter." In his self-portraits of the period, he sets forth an image of a very worldly, elegant gentleman in dinner jacket (for example, the self-portrait in the Busch-Reisinger Museum of Germanic Culture at Harvard University). This, of course, was an idealized image, since Beckmann was by nature rough and clumsy.

0749

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

Even when he was under Parisian influence, he never attained the finesse and elegance of French painting.

Beckmann's portrayal of himself as a European of high fashion must be understood in the light of the social ambitions which he nourished even while despising them. His vacations were spent in the most fashionable and expensive resorts in Italy, Holland and Switzerland. But at these resorts Beckmann always remained an outsider, a critical observer. Even his personal appearance and manner were anything but ingratiating. This was so typical of Beckmann!? He even confided to me, after attending a state dinner at which Hindenburg had been present, that he himself would not be averse to being elected President of Germany.

The new social life amidst the titled aristocrats of Europe, to which he had gained access through his second marriage, led Beckmann into some strange situations. He undertook to do a portrait of one of his new acquaintances, the Italian Duchess of Malvedi. It would be hard to say who was more taken aback by the outcome—the artist or the noble lady. The Duchess, who had been looking forward to one of those slick, vacuous society portraits that are considered the caviar of culture by the "social elite," was repelled by the misshapen physiognomy created by Beckmann's brush. Her friends twitted her about it, and she was anxious to forget the whole thing as quickly as possible.

Beckmann was quite unprepared for the aversion of the Duchess and her circle to his canvas, for he was convinced that the painting was reality itself. And it was. But Beckmann overlooked the fact that it was a reality different from that of the portraits he had painted fifteen to twenty years ealier. In his early portraits, painted under the influence of traditional naturalism, an obvious

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

physical resemblance to the subject was a pronounced feature of his work. As he developed into a strongly individual painter of his inner vision, naturalism was subordinated to the inner demands of Expressionism, in his portraits no less than other subjects. Thus there developed a widening gap between the Beckmann concept and the conventional notion of a portrait. As a result, while Beckmann was convinced that he was continuing to paint nothing but reality, the subjects of his portraits felt that he was committing mayhem.

The experience with the Duchess of Malvedi was by no means unique. Time and again Beckmann did portraits of notables, only to have them rejected. They were successful paintings, and were always sold as readily as still lifes or landscapes by Beckmann. But they were not "successful portraits" in the conventional sense.

Yet throughout his life Beckmann never doubted that he was highly qualified as a portrait painter. He simply failed to recognize to what extent his own law of artistic development had led him from subordination to the subject to imposing his own vision on the subject.

For the mature Beckmann, the conflict in portraiture was resolved only when he painted his own portrait. Since he was always struggling to project an inner emotional state, his self-portraits were outstanding, for he was imposing Beckmann on Beckmann, and thus attained his own identity.

While Beckmann was having his troubles with the socialites of Europe, I was trying to get him established in America. On April 12, 1926 at the New Art Circle I opened the first exhibition of Beckmann's art in the United States. About half an hour after the opening, the tower of the newly-constructed Sherry-Nether-

0751

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

land Hotel burst into flames. Now, I must confess to a strong streak of mysticism within me, and I could not but wonder whether this fiery spectacle had some special portent for my new venture.

My reaction at the time is recorded on a newspaper clipping which I rediscovered many years later. On the margin of an advertisement published by the management of the Sherry-Nehherland, assuring its clientele that everything was going according to schedule despite the fire, I noted that the fire had started right after the opening of the Beckmann exhibition. I also wrote: "A spectacle such as I have never before seen. Is the fire in honor of Beckmann? Who knows?"

The art critic of the New Yorker, Murdoc Pemberton, recalled the incident in a foreword he wrote for an issue of "Artlover," in which I reprinted many of Pemberton's articles on my art activities. In the foreword, recalling his first impressions of me, Pemberton wrote:

> "...Another first impression was one of downright pity. I had been at the thankless task of trying to interest my countrymen in the simpler phases of an exciting game for several years. I had passed through the naive phase of the convert, where I thought that I had come upon some glory hitherto hidden from an anxious world that only awaited my drum beating, and had come to the rows of plowing over the much-tilled ground. Neumann, however, was still in the naive phase. No immigrant gazing at the skyline of the harbor was even more enthused than J. B. Neumann entering the American art market. He seemed to have been reared on the stories of the Sunday supplements and the latter-day Horatio Alger sagas. And no wonder. He arrived about the time of the Sherry-Nehterland fire.
>
> Here was one of the world's costliest, highest and fanciest buildings, not even open to the public. And just for fun, evidently, the mad Americans touch a match to it. If, like the writer, you were around in those days, you will understand Herr Neumann's joy. (I was lucky enough to be passing in a taxi when the blaze started at 8:20 and so had a front seat until 3 a. m.) Well, Mr. Neumann got in just in time for the fire. While more fire engines than there are in Europe sat around helpless, unable to reach above the twentieth story, most of us ran to the 'phone to let our friends in on the party. But Mr. Neumann ran to the cable office, sending hourly bulletins to the folks

0752

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

back home. I am afraid that the Sherry-Netherland fire gave him a wrong impression of us and set up a pattern of behaviour that he has found difficult to break."

Despite my belief that the Sherry-Netherland fire was a favorable augury for Beckmann, the first New York exhibition of his work was certainly no success. At best, it raised a spark here and there among a handful of enthusiasts. But the attendance was very small, and there were no sales. However, after ten years of plugging for Beckmann, I was not to be disheartened by one more rebuff.

I prepared another exhibition of Beckmann's paintings for the following year, and devoted a special issue of my publication "Artlover" to the 1927 exhibition. Fifteen canvases were reproduced in this issue of "Artlover," on the cover of which was the artist's "Self-portrait with Cigarette," of 1923, now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art. (~~Get from my files DET. SHERRY-NETHERLAND~~) loAcy

And now there began to appear signs of an awakening to the importance of Beckmann's art. Up to this point I had been able to get his work shown only by pressing it upon art institutions and galleries. Now requests began to come in to me.

Interest was rising in Germany as well as in America. In 1928 the exhibition held in our Munich gallery under the direction of Gunther Franke created a favorable impression. The well-known art critic Wilhelm Hausenstein contributed a foreword to the illustrated catalogue of this exhibition.

It was clear that a turning point was at hand. Ironically, it was just when things began to look so promising for us that a new row broke out between Beckmann and me. It was ironic but nevertheless it was inevitable. The hopeful outlook was just the

0753

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

thing that made the ambitious Beckmann restless about the one point in our agreement which dissatisfied him, the Berlin representation in the hands of Karl Nierendorf. With the help of Meier-Graefe and others, Beckmann had forced his way into the National Gallery against the stubborn resistance of entrenched conservatism, and he was convinced that with the right push he would sweep ahead to a real triumph. He was equally convinced that he would not get it from Nierendorf.

So, once again, he bolted, this time to the Berlin art dealer Alfred Flechtheim. Once a successful wheat merchant in Duesseldorf, Flechtheim had become an enthusiastic collector of modern art, an intimate friend of Picasso and Juan Gris, and a promoter of the Sonderbund Ausstellung in Cologne in 1912. Wanting to devote all his time and energies to art, Flechtheim had given up the wheat business, had started an art gallery in Duesseldorf, and then moved his gallery to Berlin.

Although I well understood the grounds for Beckmann's new revolt, I could hardly be pleased at being confronted once again with a fait accompli. Of course I let him know how I felt about it, but I knew that there was nothing to do but adjust to the new situation. It was evident that Beckmann did not want to break with me, but rather to reorganize with new forces. Admiring Flechtheim's capacities and his forcefulness, I felt that he could supply the added force to drag the cannon up over the mountain, so to speak, if only we could all pull together. So I was prepared to acquiesce.

Meanwhile Beckmann, who never had time to observe the niceties in his personal relations, went ahead full tilt and arranged an exhibition at Flechtheim's in the spring of 1928.

0754

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

In June of that year he sent me a letter urging me to lay aside my grievances and suspend judgment on our differences until we should meet again. Then he told me that things were moving in Berlin, that the National Gallery had acquired another of his paintings besides the one given in honor of Meier-Graefe, that the Flechtheim exhibition had been satisfactory, and had gotten a good press. Meier-Graefe's lengthy article in the Berliner Tageblatt and the review of Curt Glaser in another Berlin newspaper bore witness to the rising star of Beckmann.

But the big break for Beckmann came in the 1929 Carnegie International, where he was awarded honorable mention for the now famous painting, "The Loge." Characteristic of the critical reaction was Henry McBride's comment in the magazine "Creative Art:"

> "...Beckmann has shown before this in New York at the New Art Circle but never winningly. It was noticed that he was forcible but there was such unattractive morbidity in his matter that it was thought he was suffering from after-the-war defeatism. There is no hint of defeat, however, in his present group, and no vulgarity to speak of, but on the contrary a dynamic impact from his brushes that even Picasso might envy. He therefore practically makes his American debut in this exhibition in Pittsburgh and becomes a personage to be reckoned with..."

The success at Pittsburgh put Beckmann in seventh heaven. He wrote to me from Frankfurt December 2, 1929:

> "My dear J. B.--
>
> Yes, yes, the Lord has blessed you; that is beyond doubt--now then, let's not allow this opportunity to slip by! Through the Carnegie Institute I received all the newspapers from America, and know what is happening. The most important is surely this McB., (New York Sun) whose name I don't know, whose article you also sent me. It would be very good if you could hold tight to this man--but I don't have to tell you that. In my opinion you must persuade him to write

0755

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

a little book about me, to be published in New York--
that would be very important. I believe he is the
right man for us and extraordinarily sympathetic..."

Beckmann at that time stood on the threshold of success. He arrived only a year later, with the great retrospective exhibition of his paintings at the Kunsthalle in Basel. This was truly a landmark in the life and development of Beckmann. I had the exhibition photographed as it was displayed on the walls, and am very proud that I was able to publish in the "Artlover" volume on Beckmann which I brought out in 1931, a permanent record of the appearance of the great Basel exhibition. The twelve plates on the Beckmann display, illustrating the arrangement of more than seventy canvases, give a very good idea of the power of Beckmann's painting when so impressively displayed.

The Basel exhibition really opened the doors for Beckmann. It was followed within a few months by an even larger one in Zurich, where there were 221 items on display including graphic works. For the year 1931 alone, the "Artlover" volume on Beckmann listed the following exhibitions of his work: at the Galerie de la Renaissance in Paris, the New Art Circle in New York, the Galerie J. B. Neumann and Guenther Franke in Munich, and the Galerie Flechtheim in Berlin.

Beckmann's reputation rose still higher as a result of the exhibition of German Painting and Sculpture held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1931. The museum director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and I travelled together in Germany to select the works to be shown in this exhibition. The eight paintings by Beckmann gave him a larger representation than any other German artist, and the strong impression made by his work showed that he merited it.

But the crowning touch to Beckmann's triumph came in Paris.

0756

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

He had been living in the French capital for three years, and there he had considerably mellowed in his outlook on life. The 1931 exhibition moved the French critic Philippe Soupault to write an enthusiastic account in the magazine "La Renaissance," and to top it all, the Luxembourg museum bought Beckmann's painting "The Woodcutters." After winning such acceptance in the international capital of modern art--what more could one ask?

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0757

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

Beckmann could not long enjoy his success in serenity, for the world economic crisis was casting a deep pall over life, and of course, the art world could not escape it. But Beckmann was not one to knuckle under to unfavorable circumstances. He was ready to fight. People must be given to understand that he had more, a great deal more to say, and they must be prepared to receive it. He expressed his views in his usually emphatic way in a letter to me from Garmisch, Germany, March 1, 1932:

> "It is necessary, dear J. B., that we hear from each other once more. It would be very lamentable if our work should not be brought to completion because of this ridiculous world crisis. Why, that would mean that the art dealer is there only so long as there is money to be made. This idea must not be allowed to come between us, and I cannot believe that you wish it. Believe me, my strength is now ten times greater, and we still have twenty years or more ahead of us, to place people before a new reality. It is precisely now that we are needed more than ever, and I shall force people to return to art--for their own salvation. My work is far from finished, and I still regard you as the most suitable representative that I know. Shall twenty years of work together be allowed to collapse in a ridiculous mood of panic? That would be very regrettable..."

For all Beckmann's fist-shaking, the tide of adversity could not be so easily turned. Ironically, just when he was ready to "force" people back to art, Germany was on the verge of being forced out of civilization.

Although Beckmann was not immediately affected in his personal life when the Nazis came to power in 1933, it was impossible for us to carry on our old relationship under the "new order" in Germany. In Munich, the birthplace and headquarters of the Nazi movement, my name had to be dropped immediately from the J. B. Neumann-Guenther Franke Gallery. But Beckmann would still remain under suspicion so long as I, a Jewish art dealer, was handling his work abroad.

0758

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

While Beckmann was under pressure in Nazi Germany because of his ties with me, I was under pressure from anti-Nazis in America because of my connection with him. In fact, I recall that the art dealer Joseph Brummer stopped me in the street one day and reproached me for continuing to represent a "Nazi" artist like Beckmann.

Of course I knew this was utterly absurd. But I also had to recognize that it was becoming impossible for Beckmann and me to continue our old relationship in the new world situation. I therefore decided that, particularly for his protection, all contact should be cut off.

But there was no estrangement of sympathies, and I never had the slightest fear that Beckmann might turn away from me under the influence of the "brown pest" that had fallen upon Germany.

Convinced as he was that the ultimate reality was what the artist could extract from his inner vision, Beckmann continued to work manfully in Germany, trying to remain oblivious of the Nazis, whom he thoroughly despised.

After the enforced break with me, his work was taken over by the "Aryan" Buchholz Gallery in Berlin, which was directed by Curt Valentin, former assistant to Alfred Flechtheim. Marked out for special hatred by the Nazis because he was a Jew and a leading sponsor of modern (in Nazi parlance "Bolshevistic") art, Flechtheim had been forced to flee from the moment the Nazis took over. He took refuge in England, where he later died in dire proverty and misery.

Although Beckmann was not molested by the Nazis, it was inevitable that in the long run his position in Germany would be destroyed by their virulent propaganda campaign against "Kunstbolshewismus." This campaign rapidly gained momentum in the

0759

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

mid-nineteen thirties. As a result of it, the Buchholz Gallery, which had at first passed muster because its personnel was "Aryan," now fell into disfavor through its sponsorship of "Bolshevist" (modern) art. As it became evident that the Hitlerites were determined to strangle all progressive culture in Germany, Buchholz decided to establish a new gallery in New York under Valentin's direction. Thus Beckmann was provided with a foreign outlet once again as his homeland was being sealed off from his art.

By 1939 the Nazis had carried their campaign so far that they had removed some of the finest examples of modern art from German museums to be put up for sale at auction in Lucerne. This was done under the pretext of "purging" the museums of "degenerate" art. Had they appointed a committee of experts to make a selection of the best in modern art, they could scarcely have done better. The Lucerne sale included Van Gogh's self-portrait inscribed "A mon ami Paul Gauguin," a Tahitian scene by Gauguin, four superb Picassos, three major works of Matisse, a Modigliani portrait, two Vlamincks, three Chagalls, and the work of such outstanding German artists as Liebermann, Corinth, Franz Marc, Kokoschka, Barlach, Lehmbruck, Kirchner, Hofer, Klee, Feininger, Dix, Grosz and others. Beckmann was honored by the inclusion of three canvases, two from the Staedel Galerie in Frankfurt and one from the Wuertembergische Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart.

As the Nazis tightened their grip on the home front on the eve of launching the Second World War, Beckmann was compelled finally to recognize that it was impossible to live, even in a shell, in a no longer recognizable Germany. He made a trip to Paris, returned briefly to wind up his affairs, and then in 1939 left Germany again, never to return.

0760

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

Most of the paintings done by Beckmann during the years that I had sponsored his work were left behind in the gallery in Munich which I had placed in charge of Guenther Franke when I left for America in 1924. The real owner of this work was the Jewish hops dealer whom I had persuaded to be Beckmann's financial backer so many years before. He had been tolerated by the Nazis for a number of years because his operations were useful for the beer industry. But in 1939 he had been forced out. In the settlement prior to his departure for England, Guenther Franke acquired the large collection of Beckmann paintings, and they have been his fortune ever since.

Meanwhile I was able once more to be of some service to Beckmann by helping Curt Valentin to prepare for his first exhibition of Beckmann's work in the new Buchholz Gallery in New York, which he acknowledged in his exhibition catalogues.

To see Beckmann's work on display once again aroused my old enthusiasm, and since I was able through Valentin to renew contact with the artist, I wrote him a letter giving my reaction to his latest work. His reply, from Paris, March 3, 1939, was a heartening assurance that our friendship was as strong as ever. He wrote:

"My dear J. B.:

Thanks for your letter of February 23. I answer it only now, because I have been so very busy with my work. I have been in this charming little city already since October of last year. I was especially delighted with your letter because I regretted a certain misunderstanding, with which our last meeting wound up. But I think that each of us knows how we stand fundamentally in regard to each other, and that there is nothing to be changed. I am delighted that the pictures at Valentin's pleased you, for in spite of many separations, I still hold very much to your judgment. Here in Paris quite a number of people are interesting themselves in me, and I consider that the possibility is not to be excluded that I shall win some influence. In any event everything requires time, and naturally, above all, quiet in international politics.

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

"Well, the most important thing in any event is that one is alive and continuing as intensively as possible to transform this ghost-world into the reality of a picture--the sole true reality which is to be found. To be more real than life itself is surely the utmost that a man can achieve, and I practice this alluring profession every day. I have a great deal ahead of me--and you? I hope also. Somehow, we human beings must succeed in breaking through to a real existence. This is the sense of life and of work.

"I should like to look into your suggestion to come to America for good, since this country has always struck me as the fitting place to spend the last part of my life. If you could manage to have me called to a post somewhere, even a very modest one, I would leave at once, in spite of the fact that I like it here quite well..."

After a brief return to Germany to wind up his affairs, Beckmann left Germany for good, as he informed me in a letter from Paris dated May 1, 1939:

"...Now I am back in Paris, where I shall settle finally in August. I have found friends here, who are genuinely concerned for me, who obtained permission for me to stay here, and do other things for me. My exhibition at Poyet's (in the former galleries of Paul Guillaume, who is already in Paradise) had unfortunately to be postponed because my "friends" in Germany are once more misbehaving. But that doesn't matter, because P. is still interested in it.

You now have the great World's Fair over there, and it would be very nice if you would let me know how is the Barr exhibition of modern art, where my 'Departure' (Abreise) is to be ~~hanged~~ hung. I am very much interested in l'Amerique, and I shall one day end up there. (You should inform me too about New York art-politics.) I am once more very deep in work, strengthened by the South and by a new productivity which astonished even me.

Eh, my dear J. B., we will still do something. Let me hear from you soon.

Always your
Beckmann"

But "we" were never really to do anything together again, even though we were to see each other often enough many years later. As far as I can recall, I was never able to answer the above letter. The curtain soon fell: a seven-year blackout between Beckmann and me.

Because of his "friends," as Beckmann caustically referred

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

to the Nazis, his plan to "settle finally" in Paris was shattered, just as their "misbehavior" had brought the cancellation of his exhibition at Poyet's in Paris, for the Nazi outrages, whipped up to a fever point on the eve of war, had caused such a revulsion in Paris against all things German that no Parisian art dealer had the courage to show the work of a German artist, however anti-Nazi he might be.

Against the background thunder of jack-booted Nazi legions on the march, Beckmann withdrew from Paris to Amsterdam, and there he lived out the war, surviving the blitz and the German occupation. Recalling the postcard which he had sent to me at the front during the First World War, I can well imagine the bitterness he must have vented against the Nazis as they unleashed a second and greater horror. It must have been strong stuff indeed, for his wife Mathilde Quappi Beckmann, tells us in the foreword to his diaries ("Max Beckmann, Tagebuecher, 1940-50," published by Albert Langen-George Mueller, Munich, 1955) that her husband had kept a diary ever since 1925, but when the German army invaded Holland in May, 1940 he hurriedly burned everything he had written up to that date except two or three pages which Mrs. Beckmann secretly saved. Thus some very valuable documentation on Beckmann has perished.

In the diaries which have survived from the occupation and post-war periods, the first reference to me is recorded under the date October 1, 1945: "J. B. Neumann has arisen from the grave of the past." I have no idea precisely what this remark refers to, but possibly it is an allusion to his having heard something about me from another person.

0763

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

On February 20, 1946 he made another nostalgic notation. Recording a visit by Curt Valentin, who bought several paintings, Beckmann further noted: "Time passes--twentysix years ago it was J. B. Neumann and one was considerably younger."

Another year passed, and Beckmann fulfilled his prophecy of earlier years. He came to America, where he was to remain for the rest of his life. Curt Valentin had secured a teaching post for him in the art school affiliated with the City Art Museum of St. Louis, and Beckmann was whisked out there almost immediately upon his arrival in New York in September, 1947. Two months later he returned to New York for a visit, and we had our first reunion after more than fifteen years. It was at a cocktail party at Valentin's.

In December, 1948 Beckmann passed through New York en route to Amsterdam, where he was to settle his affairs before coming back to America. In his diary for December 30, 1948, besides listing his social activities for that day, Beckmann made the notation "grosses Theater von J. B."

This cryptic remark refers to a very painful discussion between the two of us. Beckmann had settled down for one of our old-style talks. He told me that he had no complaints about the situation that Valentin had built up for him. He had a good teaching post. There were plenty of social contacts. Pictures were being sold. All kinds of honors were being paid him in St. Louis. Scarcely a year had passed since his arrival, and already the City Art Museum of St. Louis had held a notable restrospective exhibition of his work, which had also been shown in the museums of Los Angeles, Detroit, Baltimore and Minneapolis.

Beckmann had all this, but he wanted something more. He

0764

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

thought I could once more promote his work.

It was a very awkward situation. Valentin had everything in his hands, and I could not picture myself as a fifth wheel. I tried to explain that Valentin, a very effective business man, could do ten times as much for him as I could.

Beckmann was too much the realist not to be aware that Valentin would not take me in to share in his successful venture in Beckmann's art. Yet Beckmann wanted somehow to get me back into harness to pull for him. He wanted me to go out and lecture on his art, to promote an understanding of his ideas, which I had followed so breathlessly and anxiously as they first unfolded more than thirty years before.

But things had changed. On the one hand I felt shut out of Beckmann's triumph, after battling so hard for so many years in his behalf, and I was somewhat embittered about that, not against Beckmann, but against publishers and dealers who had once acknowledged my activities, but had later acted as though I had never existed.

On the other hand, I too had changed. Could I recapture the new-born enthusiasm that I had first felt for his work over thirty years earlier? I could not step back into my diapers. I felt like a grown man now. The years had brought irreversible changes. I still thought as highly of Beckmann as ever. But now I had a new attachment. I was completely absorbed in the art of Paul Klee. This was utterly unlike my relationship with Beckmann. It involved no close personal association. I did not have to sit and be scrutinized, to go through such ordeals as I had in Beckmann's studio in Frankfurt and on so many occasions since then. I did not have to respond to an endless stream of directives. I did not feel like a slave.

0765

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

But how was I to explain this? I tried to evade. But that was impossible. We had always been frank with each other.

FinallyI said haltingly, "I have not the strength. It is not the same thing."

It was one of the most painful situations I have ever been in during my life. I felt like a traitor.

Beckmann could do nothing but express his disappointment. He said that he saw that I now had Klee and the abstract artists, and that I was no longer the man that he had always counted on.

There were no harsh words, and no harsh feelings, between us. But that did not make it any less painful on that evening of "grosses Theater von J. B."

We parted friends, and we remained friends, though life had swept us beyond the days, the tense, exciting days of struggling together.

It was just two years later that he succumbed to a heart attack. Illness prevented me from attending the funeral. In our youth we had pledged each other that neither would attend the other's funeral.

Afterward I went to see his widow, Quappi. She wanted to show me his large tryptich "The Argonauts."

I said, "Quappi, let me help you."

"Oh, no," she replied. "For years, I always helped Max show his paintings. It was only when you came that I had to get out of the room."

* * *

0766

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

SCHLUSSGESANG } l. c.

Time has added an epilogue to my Beckmann story. In the summer of 1957 I made a tour of Germany's art museums. Everywhere I found Beckmann well represented. Works of all periods were to be seen in the museums of Berlin, Cologne, Hamburg, Frankfurt and Munich. But in Munich I experienced a veritable miracle -- it was in the new house of my former apprentice, clerk and partner Günther Franke. He had actually made a reality of a dream I had long cherished.

How often in past years had I thought of accumulating the work of Munch, Beckmann, Rouault and Klee to see how it would compare with the great names of the past. Günther Franke has had the imagination and the tenacity to carry out this idea, in the face of the greatest obstacles, with the work of Beckmann. He has made a most suitable building in the Nibelungenstrasse into a veritable Beckmann shrine.

I was literally struck speechless by the power of these paintings. Of course, it was a very personal experience to feel again the fresh impact of works which had once been the very center of my life, from which I had been separated for decades: chefs d'oeuvres like "The Night" and "The Carnival", which have been fully described and illustrated in this book. It was indeed a revelation.

This re-discovery of Beckmann was for me true fulfillment. But it was not just my private ecstasy. After all, I had the evidence before my eyes. In the leading museums of Germany, Beckmann held unrivalled pre-eminence over all modern German artists.

Then I had to think back to America, where recognition of Beckmann has grown impressively since Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

0767

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

very courageously bought two canvases from me, "The Family" and "The Old Actress", at a time when nobody in New York wanted German art. What has happened to "The Old Actress" I do not know, but as the gift of Mrs. Rockefeller, "The Family" became the nucleus of the Beckmann collection of the Museum of Modern Art. Many other Beckmann masterpieces have since been added, including the gouaches of the "Prodigal Son" series, also bought from me by Mrs. Rockefeller and presented by her to the museum; the "Deposition from the Cross" bequeathed by Curt Valentin; and the "Self-portrait with Cigarette" given by Franz H. Hirschland.

My tour of Germany in the summer of 1957 convinced me as never before that Beckmann is the giant of German modern art. I have no doubt that he will live as the German Picasso.

0768

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

Introducing The Miracle

The ancient Egyptians were sun-worshippers. Modern art collectors are Klee-worshippers. The world has never seen anything like it. Fifteen years after his death, the works of Klee bring stratospheric prices, and even so, they are just about unobtainable. The slighest scrap from his hand will draw a crowd of frantic bidders.

And this is no mere narrow cult of a handful of wealthy art patrons. Paul Klee is so widely popular that there are more color postcards of his work than of any other modern artist. Of the four internationally known artists with whom I have been associated, it must be said that Munch has a predominantly Norwegian-Germanic audience, Beckmann a German following only, Rouault a very wide following of fanatics, but Klee has the whole world after him.

My story about Klee must begin with a double confession. First of all, I must admit that I never anticipated that the fever for Klee would run so high within my own life-time. Had I suspected it, I might have managed to hold on to at least one of the three hundred works of Klee which have passed through my hands. More than that, when I made by initial acquaintance with Klee's art, it was not exactly "love at first sight." In fact, I even made fun of Klee.

That story goes back to the early nineteen-twenties, in Germany. It was in the famous Glaspalast of Munich, where preparations were going forward for the annual exhibition of some two thousand pieces of contemporary art. I was there with Max Beckmann, helping him arrange the display of his large canvases in one of the biggest exhibitions rooms. In an adjacent

0769

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

little room, a man with a pipe in his mouth was hammering nails into the wall, hanging up his tiny pictures. When I say tiny, I mean some were no bigger than a postcard. Beckmann threw a contemptuous glance at Paul Klee hanging up his diminutive scrawls and snorted: "And this you call art!"

I took my cue from Beckmann. At the dinner arranged by the directors of the Glaspalast exhibition for the participating artists, I put on a performance that was to leave me no peace of mind for many years afterward.

We were all seated in a Munich beer cellar, which was lighted only by candles. When the dinner began, I had the malicious notion of making fun of Klee. I took the bill of fare, which was printed on hard, coated paper, and held it over a candle until it was heavily smudged. With a toothpick I made a drawing on the smudged surface of some trees and little figures in the manner of Klee. I even added a fair resemblance to Klee's signature. When I showed it to my neighbor, he laughed and passed it on to the next person. My efforts to recover it failed, and it soon made the rounds of the table and, to my great embarrassment, came into the hands of Paul Klee, sitting opposite me. I'll never forget Klee's voice, when he asked, in the gentlest tone, "Who made this nice Klee picture?"

The memory of this painful incident hung like a cloud over my later awakening to an understanding of Klee's art. Even when I arranged my first Klee exhibition in my Berlin gallery, I felt constrained to advertise it modestly, in order not to irk my prima donna, Max Beckmann. However, when I moved to New York, I felt free to look at Klee's art with my own eyes, and my enthusiasm rapidly increased.

0770

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

The United States was then virgin territory as far as Klee was concerned. There was no appreciation for him. I would occasionally show one of his paintings in my New York gallery. The first reactions were on a very primitive level. Almost every layman would begin with the same words: "Really, my child can do the same thing!" Or the question would be asked: "Is he trying to imitate children's work?" Or again, "Does he do all this with his tongue in his cheek?"

Taking account of this universal tendency among laymen to find his art "child-like," Klee in a conversation with a friend made a very penetrating analysis of the differences which set the conscious, mature artist apart from the child. He said, "...the artist overwhelmingly concentrates his consciousness on the formal side, on the structure of the picture, while the subconscious, which has to do with content, remains in the background. It is quite different with a child. He is indifferent to the formal structure of his picture. It emerges out of unconscious certainty, out of inborn instinct, while he is bringing the idea of the picture into being out of the content. In observing children's work, the artist is interested in the crystallization of content into formal structure -- of the original instinct -- while the layman sees only the content, and immediately compares it, without regard to the formal structure, to real pictures. He then identifies the divergences and speaks -- mild and forgiving -- of primitive capacities that must first be developed."

After a number of years in which I showed single works of Klee from time to time, I had the good fortune in 1930 to get hold of some fifty Klees. I was on the point of launching the first

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

major Klee exhibition in America. But instead of putting up the paintings in my gallery, I phoned Alfred Barr Jr. and proposed that they be shown at the newly founded Museum of Modern Art, of which he was director. In my gallery only a few hundred people would see them, but at the museum they would have an audience of thousands. Mr. Barr sent some of the trustees over to have a look at the pictures. Soon I received word that the exhibition was accepted.

It was fascinating to mingle with the crowds at the Museum, and to hear the arguments, for and against. I spent many hours in this way, feeling the pulse of public reaction. The exhibition created a real stir. Alfred Flechtheim and I, who were responsible for this affair, could see that the ice was broken.

To mark this auspicious occasion, I made a gift to the museum of "The Mocker Mocked," its first acquisition of a Klee.

I was determined to follow up this successful venture with a major effort toward bringing the work of Klee to the U. S. A. To do this it was essential that I become the artist's representative for the United States. But I shrank from asking him because of my continued embarrassment over my conduct at the Munich dinner. Finally, in 1934, I wrote to him, expressing my profound regrets over that incident, and asking for the right to represent him. I also asked for an article he had written.

I received the following reply:

Bern Obstbergweg 6
16 III 34

Dear Mr. Neumann:

Your truly friendly letter has given me the greatest joy. I too recall with pleasure our personal meeting and all other relations. I know nothing about your arrogant looks. When you stood up for Beckmann

0772

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

so whole-heartedly, this could only please me. Therefore there is no other reason not to fall into your open arms, than the fact that this can no longer happen directly, but only roundabout through the Gallery Simon in Paris. If you accept this detour, and if Kahnweiler would like to work with you, then fine. In any event, we wish every success for your new gallery.

Your Klee

Regarding my contribution to "Creative Confessions," I have only my own author's copy.

The kindly tone of this letter was typical of Klee. Of all the artists I have met in my life, he surely was the most modest. He never asked for an exhibition. He never spoke of his work. He never offered anything for sale. He spoke little himself, giving everyone else a chance to speak. He only smiled in a very friendly way. When he was asked to explain a picture, he would say, "Look at it."

All this came not from indifference but from a deep inner understanding and certitude. He knew his uniqueness. And he never expected to be understood. From year to year he found more friends who were happy to take home a little water color, a drawing or a painting. He never made a fuss about the price. But he would be likely to ask, "Do you think it is too much if I ask a hundred marks?" I am convinced that every buyer must have blushed, knowing what a modest price would satisfy Klee.

Even with the impetus given by the 1930 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, Klee's success in America was no over-night affair. Many collectors were won over only through a very gradual process of assimilating the subtle values of his art. While I was first in the field in this country, two other art dealers who came

0773

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

over from Berlin later than I did, Karl Nierendorf and Curt Valentin, also played a major role in propagating the art of Klee.

Of the many extraordinary experiences I had in promoting an understanding of the artist's work, one of the most gratifying concerns a close friend of mine, Franz H---. In his collection were works of El Greco, Cezanne, Van Gogh and others. I thought Klee would fit into that company very well, but he couldn't see it that way. In fact, when he came to my first Klee exhibition, he said frankly that he didn't see anything there that he would like to have.

Since we were good friends, I didn't hesitate to emphasize the virtues of Klee which were still not apparent to him. One day, while dining at his house, I again mentioned the picture I had especially in mind for him, "Cat and Bird."

His wife protested, "You always talk to Franz about the picture. Why don't you show it to me?" I replied that I would be very happy to send the picture on approval, so that she could see it.

On my next visit I found Mrs. H---full of enthusiasm for the Klee. Her husband agreed that she must be right, and they promptly bought it. It was one of the most expensive Klees, selling for $600 at a time when most were priced about $300. Mrs. H---'s enthusiasm for the painting grew steadily after it became part of their collection. At the time of this writing, I have several customers anxious to buy the "Cat and Bird" for $30,000, but the H---'s would not think of parting with it.

One of my few untoward experiences occurred early in 1936, when I sent fifty oils and water colors to the Wadsworth Atheneum In Hartford, Connecticut for a showing scheduled to run three weeks.

0774

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

At the end of the first week I went up to Hartford to have a look, and found that all the pictures had been taken down because they had aroused so much antagonism. Since then I have helped arrange many Klee exhibitions in all sections of the United States, but the Hartford experience has remained unique.

While I have been concerned with Klee's art for nearly four decades, there have been two periods of most intensive activity— the period from 1935 to 1940, when I was the artist's representative here, and the period from 1949 to 1952.

I held the first Klee one-man show in my own gallery in New York in March, 1935 at 509 Madison Avenue, in the same building where Alfred Stieglitz presided over "An American Place." It was held in two stages, first a showing of oil paintings, followed by a display of water colors. There were very, very precious things in that show, and they slowly found buyers. When I say "precious," I am not talking like a gem dealer. For I recall that one of the finest Klee water colors was sold out of that exhibition for the modest price of one hundred dollars to Perry Rathbone, now director of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Many other collectors obtained Klees of the best quality at these prices.

In 1939, when the Museum of Modern Art opened its new building, I decided to celebrate that event with another Klee exhibition in my gallery. I planned to publish a special volume on Klee in my "Artlover" series, and wrote to the artist to ask for a few words of his to serve as foreword. I received the following reply:

Klee,
Bern Kistlerweg 6,
9 January 1939

To Mr. J. B. Neumann
543 Madison Avenue
New York City

0775

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

K8

My very esteemed Mr. Neumann:

I must really excuse myself, and I should be able to do it. But it doesn't always succeed. Your letter was very lovely, and it is bad that I haven't answered it. But, a) b) c) d) etc. a) I am not a writer, and since a certain time my wife has taken over all writing for me, at my direction.

For I am a painter, and one who is always struck by ideas. Since I am no longer a youngster, I should still like to bring to completion the last things that are possible for me. That requires a constant readiness to utilize the favorable moment. In short, the utmost concentration.

Besides that, I didn't have so much reserve strength, and today I have even less.

Perhaps that is enough for you to be good to me again.

The stupid thing that must be added is that I cannot fulfill yourwish. For a second saying like the one at that time for Zahn doesn't exist.

My heartiest thanks for the third volume of Artlover.

You are right, things are going horribly in the world. And I think just as you do about Flechtheim's breakdown.*

But it is still possible for pictures to be created, and that gives us support and more than that: the insight that suffering can be fruitful.

With many heartfelt greetings
Your Klee

It occurs to me that you have one of my pictures, "The Shepherd" boarding with you. What has really become of it? Excuse me if I am out of order in asking about it.

My 1939 Klee exhibition, held at the Neumann-Willard Gallery during May and June, was another rare selection of works of the finest quality. It was the last exhibition obtained directly from the artist himself, for he died the following year in Lugano.

Not long before the artist's death, Karl Nierendorf, who had been my partner in Berlin, came to New York. Since he had a very close personal friendship with Klee and Mrs. Klee, I felt it proper that he should be given the representation of Klee in America, and an arrangement was made to that effect. Nierendorf

*Alfred Flechtheim, the Berlin art dealer, a refugee from Nazi persecution, died miserably in London.

077b

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

set to work with great energy to prepare his own publication on Klee.

Following Klee's death, Nierendorf arranged a memorial exhibition at the Art Students League as well as a memorial program which was presented January 7, 1941. Works of Klee's favorite composers, Bach, Mozart and Beethoven were played by the pianist George Martin, a talk on "The Art of Paul Klee" was given by the artist Stefan Hirsch, and I delivered the eulogy.

Before the end of 1941 Nierendorf had achieved publication of his large book on Klee, to which he contributed the biography and James Johnson Sweeney the foreword. It was brought out by the Oxford University Press in New York, and contained sixty-five full page illustrations and two silk screen color reproductions.

After Karl Nierendorf's death, Kurt Valentin flew to Bern and reached an agreement with Mrs. Klee to take over the representation, an arrangement which had my blessings. Valentin went to work with an energy that I could not possibly have matched, and created a real boom. And he must be given credit, not only for a good business sense, but for a truly creative approach to Klee. In my opinion, Kurt's little catalogues for his Klee exhibitions belong to the most precious publications on art in the United States. Of the same rare artistic quality is Curt's publication, issued at Christmas time in 1950, of the beautifully illustrated "Eulogy of Paul Klee" by Andre Masson.

After the war the Klee boom rose to an unprecedented pitch. In 1950 the Museum of Modern Art held its second large exhibition of his work, a display of more than two hundred items. In connection with the exhibition a symposium was held at the museum, in which

0777

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

Marcel Breuer spoke as a friend and associate of the artist; I spoke as a friend and connoisseur, Ben Shahn as a fellow artist, Edgar Wind as iconographer and amateur of Klee. Andrew C. Ritchie was moderator. Marc Chagall and his wife were at the symposium. Afterward Mrs. Chagall came up to me and said, "Your talk was like a prayer."

To celebrate the big event at the museum and the seventieth anniversary of the artist's birth, I held an exhibition of my own at 41 East 57th Street during December, 1949 - January, 1950. It consisted of works of Klee brought over from Europe and never previously exhibited in the United States. I followed this up with another in May, 1950. And in the spring of 1952, I exhibited thirty-seven of Klee's most important paintings, which I had just brought over from Europe. This was my swan song as far as Klee exhibitions were concerned, for it was becomming more and more difficult to find works which I could offer for sale, and I was not interested in holding loan exhibitions.

Reviewing this activity, I can look back and say that I have brought three hundred important paintings by Klee to America and placed them in museums and collections here. This is a source of no satisfaction to Klee's admirers in Europe, who feel that I have carried too many of his works away. But I do not feel remorseful. For I am sure that sooner or later most of them would have gravitated to America under the magnetic attraction of the dollar, just as so many works of other modern masters have.

And Europe has hardly been left denuded of Klees. The artist's total production ran to some nine thousand items. He kept very precise, meticulous records of his work, listing every-

0778

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

thing in an account book. Each of his works was dated and numbered, so that it is possible to determine his exact production for each year. He also had his own code, in Roman numerals, by which he classified his works according to quality. These notations were made on the works with a very light pencil mark, so that it remained barely noticeable. Works which he thought were especially choice, and which he did not want sold, were marked SCl, which meant "sonderklasse," or special class.

Klee and his wife also resorted, in late years, to the practice of listing many of his works at rather high valuations. This did not mean that he had lost the modesty which had been so significant a trait in him. For he had no serious intention of selling his work at those high prices. On the contrary, the high prices were intended to frighten off buyers, for Klee had lost the desire to sell.

But later, when the estate was settled after the death of Frau Klee, these notations boomeranged against Klee's son Felix. For the Swiss government claimed a huge inheritance tax based on the notations, despite the fact that they did not represent a level of prices established for Klee's work by actual sales. Felix had no means of meeting the government claims, but an arrangement was made for deferring payment for ten years. However, that did notend his difficulties. There were all sorts of conniving elements trying to profit by the liquidation of the estate, which it would take the pen of a Flaubert to describe adequately. From some quarters there were launched some unsavory accusations against Felix, but I felt that in this situation he should be supported.

I went to see him, and discovered to my distress that the

0779

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

art of Paul Klee awoke no responsive chord in his son, for there was not a single original work by his father in Felix Klee's apartment--nothing but a little portfolio of color reproductions. But once the estate was settled, Felix Klee underwent an amazing transformation. Fortified with the "good book," the journal of his parents, which provided him with a list of everything done by his father, complete with dates and titles, he set himself up in truly pontifical style as the authority on the art of Paul Klee. Such are the minor miracles wrought by time and the inheritance laws.

Of course many collectors, avid for something by Klee, are blithely unaware of the existence of the "good book," and naively shop around for a Klee with an eye mainly to the price. This has led to some sorry experiences. I recall one collector, a rather conceited fellow, who used to come rather often to my gallery with his wife to look at the Klees. They had only one complaint -- my prices were too high. So they looked elsewhere. Finally they informed me that they had bought five of the finest Klees in London.

I had always planned to go to see these acquisitions, but somehow I never managed to find time for it. One evening I met the couple at a party. It was a few minutes before midnight. I asked if they would permit me to come home with them to look at their Klees. They readily consented. In their luxurious apartment the five paintings made a striking impression.

It so happened that just that week I had gotten my first eye-glasses. I put them on and examined the first picture closely. I had the feeling that it was phony, but I didn't want to make any rash judgments. So I turned to the second, then the third,

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

fourth and fifth. I was unable to suppress a very peculiar feeling. My host, who could not but notice how my initial enthusiasm had waned, asked, "What has happened to you? You look so strange."

There were other people with us, and I did not want to make any remarks in their presence. So the two of us went into the kitchen and I asked, "Where did you buy these 'Klees'?" He mentioned one of the leading London galleries.

I said, "This is very strange. All five pictures of yours seem to be forgeries."

"It is impossible," my host protested.

"I don't want to argue with you," I replied, "but it is my duty to tell you this, because if it is a reputable gallery, you will be able to get your money back." This was an important point, for fakes are generally sold by fly-by-nighters who disappear after the sale. On the other hand, a reputable dealer may unwittingly be involved in the sale of a forgery, and must be prepared to make good in such a case.

Chagrined as he was by my grave doubts about his "Klees," the collector recognized the need for verification. The pictures were sent to different dealers in Europe for their opinions, and finally also to the Klee Society in Bern. The unanimous verdict was "fake." And the good people got their money back. Amen.

From my own experience , I had good reason to be most wary in handling Klees. For a very subtle piece of deception had been practiced against me. This was done by an artist in America who was an ardent admirer of Klee. Upon the eve of making a trip to

0781

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

Europe, I had consented to let him keep a fine Klee gouache of mine during my absence.

After my return, I called for the picture, took it home and hung it up. But something was amiss. After a few days, I began to feel funny about the Klee. It didn't quite tally with my remembrance of the picture that I had left behind when I went abroad.

I started to play Sherlock Holmes. In the guise of paying a social visit, I went in the company of a friend to the house of the artist whom I had lent the Klee. My friend asked for a cigarette. The artist had none but offered to go out and buy some. The moment he left, I began a frantic search of the studio, rummaging through everything. In a portfolio leaning against the wall, there was my Klee! In substituting a fake for my genuine Klee, the artist had tried to make the deception work by cutting away the painting from its cardboard mount, leaving me the original title, date and signature in Klee's own hand, all of which were on the mount. But as a devout Klee-worshipper, I wanted not only the trimmings but the picture itself.

When the forger returned with the cigarettes, I sent my companion away and I remained alone with the artist. I said, "You know, you did a very criminal thing, and I could prosecute you, but I have no desire to do that, so I'll take my Klee, and yours will be torn up in twenty pieces and returned to you."

This proved a very valuable lesson for me. I became more and more aware that among pictures offered to me, or sold at auction in New York, there were many false Klees. Over the years, people have brought pictures to me for verification. And I have had to disappoint many of them.

0782

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

Klee offers a special problem because of his extraordinary versatility. You could easily put together an exhibition of genuine Klees, each of which would appear to have been painted by a different artist. On the one hand, this lends a special piquancy to collecting Klees. A collector can continue to acquire Klees -- if he can find them-- without feeling that his acquisitions are repetitious. In fact, I know one collector in the United States who has two hundred Klees. On the other hhand, because of the extreme creative variability in Klee's production, only the connoisseur can feel the artist's hand in each of his productions.

Art historians and critics have already found much to say and will doubtless say a great deal more about Klee's art. As for me, I am not numbered among the analyzers. And I do not regret it. When I stand before an original Klee, or when I lecture on him with the aid of colored slides, I am amazed (who) I am carried away by the picture and identify myself with it far more than with the work of Munch, Beckmann or Rouault, of, for that matter, any other artist, except El Greco and Cezanne. I do not know how to account for this extraordinary experience, the product of nearly forty years' preoccupation with his work. But for me it is the key to my attitude toward Klee.

For those who must find their own way to an understanding of this unique artist -- as every one must -- Klee has left many writings with helpful notes on his ideas of creation.

If we now try to answer the question -- why all the clamor over Klee? -- perhaps the simplest answer will, in the end, be most satisfying: he was one of the pure in heart, who put his heart into his work.

0783

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

NEW BEGINNINGS

Every one likes to return to his first beginnings in life. After the Second World War, I was extremely impatient to see the European scene where my ideas and activities in art had first taken form. As soon as passports were available I took off. Berlin was still closed to American visitors, so I went to Munich, which had been my second center in Germany.

I went to the famous Briennerstrasse, where my gallery had been located. This was no longer a thriving city scene. There was nothing but a desolate field of rubble. No wonder! My gallery had stood directly opposite the Brown House, headquarters of the Nazi movement. Allied bombers, in raining destruction down on the house of the Hitlerites, had inevitably pulverized the surrounding buildings.

Two years later, I was able to visit Berlin once more. There I had an experience very similar to that in Munich. The two buildings in which I had begun my art business were likewise completely demolished. But I found art business flourishing in Berlin. There were a number of new galleries and they were very active.

Everywhere I found new faces. None of the generation that had

0784

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

come up during the first World War had survived. I felt like Rip Van Winkle. And some of the new art dealers, learning who I was -- a man of 1910 -- were astonished that I did not have a venerable white beard. But they were very warm and kind to me.

The art dealer Gerd Rosen, on meeting me, insisted that I come to his house. There he showed me, displayed on several bookshelves, all the portfolios I had published in Germany in the early days. I felt deeply gratified that my efforts had not been lost sight of by those who had come after me.

I had similar heart-warming experiences in Hamburg, Frankfort, Darmstadt and other cities. There were offers of partnerships in art galleries. In Darmstadt they even proposed to create a new civic art center, and offered me the post of director. Naturally I was deeply affected. So were my wife and my son, Peter. In fact, they took fright when they heard of the offer. I found it so tempting that I tried to work out a half-and-half plan, whereby I would spend six months of each year in Darmstadt and the other six months in New York. But my family would not hear of it. They were completely rooted in the United States, and they would not tolerate my living with one foot in Germany and one foot in America.

I was compelled to face the fact that although I could still visit Germany, I could no longer re-establish my art activities there. New York, which I had regarded as an outpost when I first arrived a quarter century earlier, must henceforth be my sole base.

And what of my activities in New York? When I first came to

0785

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	Neumann	II.B.1.b

to the United States in 1924, it was with the thought of gaining broader recognition for the artists I had already promoted in Germany. But once I decided to settle in New York, I became no less concerned with sponsoring new and unrecognized American artists. The story of these activities is a volume in itself, and since the volume is already filled in the various numbers of "Artlover" which I have published in New York as the sequel to my Berlin "Bilderhefte," I shall not repeat that story here. Suffice it to say that in bringing modern European art to America, I did not find America itself barren, but ~~have~~ found many artists worthy of support, and I can point to a very long list of exhibitions in which I have shown work by many outstanding American artists.

It goes without say that here in America, just as in Europe, I was drawn toward art that had a distinctive individual character, and was repelled by technical slickness that masked an inner emptiness. In the course of my activities here I have learned much about the national character of this country through my intense interest in the art of the "primitives," the Sunday painters and the anonymous local artists who have created works that will never go down in the art histories as great masterpieces, but which preserve for future generations the savor of life in America, especially the rural America that has already in large measure disappeared.

It is amusing to note that as interest in modern art, which had its sources in Europe, grew in America, it stirred new interest in all kinds of primitives, including the home-grown American variety. Thus a movement which began in an atmosphere of sophisticated

0786

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

internationalism has spurred a keener interest in this once-neglected phase of the national heritage in America.

My interest in this field brought me into contact with one of the most interesting personalities I ever met among art collectors, Maxim Karolik of Boston, whose collection of American paintings, 1815 to 1865, has been presented to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. A memento of my interest in Americana is the extraordinary work of an anonymous painter, "Meditation by the Sea," which Mr. Karolik obtained from me.

The rise by leaps and bounds in the demand for primitives has been a startling thing, which has caused much wonderment. I recall a conversation with a collector who was amazed that Grandma Moses could acquire so much fame and command such impressive prices, running into several thousand dollars for a single painting. He asked, in a challenging manner, whether I could find a primitive who could be built up that way. I replied by telling him the following story. Once I served as chairman of a jury of selection for an art exhibition in Rochester, New York. Whenever I serve in that capacity, I make it a pratice to select some work in the exhibition and buy it, as a modest token of support for the artists. On that occasion I bought a contemporary primitive that I found very attractive. As I remember, it cost eighty dollars. Photo

A few weeks later I received a letter of thanks from the artist, who concluded his little note: "By the way, it might interest you to know that I am a brother of Grandma Moses."

When I had finished this little account, the collector asked me, "Well, why didn't you buy up a lot of this artist's work and make a big thing of it?"

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0787

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Neumann	II.B.1.b

"Because," I replied, "I have my own primitive to promote — Israel Litvak." Then I told him the story of how I took up Israel Litvak. I was at the Brooklyn Museum, talking to the director. A man came in and spoke to the director: "I am Israel Litvak. I did this picture with crayons. If you like it, I shall do more."

The director replied, "I can do nothing for you. But this man seated here is J. B. Neumann, the art dealer. Perhaps he can help you."

Israel Litvak soon came to my gallery with more pictures done in crayon. I liked them and bought some. He kept returning, month after month. One day an artist who met him in the gallery asked, "Do you also paint in oil?"

"What do you mean, oil?" asked Litvak.

The artist took him to his studio and showed him how to paint in oil. I did not see Litvak for a long time after that. But, about six months later, he appeared once more in the gallery, this time with an oil painting under his arm.

"I have done a painting of Times Square," he announced.

As I looked at it, he proudly pointed to each characteristic feature of the scene, the Hotel Astor, the Paramount building, and so on down the line.

"But," I asked, "How could you do a painting of Times Square and not put in a single advertising sign?"

"And why should I put in the advertising? Do they pay me?"

* * *

To return to the situation in the mid-twenties, when I first arrived in New York, interest in modern art was not so obvious as it is now. At that time modern art was still on the defensive. There was no museum of modern art.

0788

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But strong forces were at work. I recall that in my "Artlover" I re-published a significant paragraph which Forbes Watson had written in the May, 1926 issue of the magazine "The Arts":

> There is an opening in this great city for such an enthusiast as Mr. Barnard to start a museum dedicated to modern art. The Metropolitan is greatly in need of a branch museum of modern art. An amateur who would construct our own period as devotedly as Mr. Barnard has a portion of the medieval period could soon shake hands with immortality, and win the gratitude of his generation. New York now has a museum of mediaeval art. Heaven send it a museum of modern art, so that folks may see what is going on in the world."

Mr. Watson's appeal to heaven was answered not long afterward when a group of angels got together and founded the Museum of Modern Art. I helped hang the first exhibition, which was held in the Heckscher Building. Thus began a pleasant and gratifying relationship with the museum which has continued ever since.

My friendship with Alfred H. Barr Jr., who has been with the museum since its establishment, dates back even beyond the founding of the museum. I remember that a few years earlier he had come into my gallery and I had shown him a Corot landscape, which he asked to borrow to show his students at Wellesley College, where he was teaching art history. They were so much taken with the Corot at Wellesley that they wanted to acquire it as a permanent possession. Some time later Alfred Barr wrote me that he was very happy that a number of art patrons had contributed to raise the $2500 to purchase this little gem for the college.

After the Museum of Modern Art got under way, I helped in whatever way I could to obtain works of art that were sought as loans from German collections and museums, and the collaboration with Alfred Barr proved a very agreeable experience which strengthened our friendship.

0789

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In the years that followed I had the good fortune to see a number of the artists whom I sponsored win their way to very strong recognition in such institutions as the Museum of Modern Art and other museums in America and Europe. Several years before the Museum of Modern Art was founded, I sent the young American sculptor Alexander Calder to Paris to work, and also gave him an exhibition in my Berlin gallery. In those days Calder did playful figures in wire or wood. Later he devised the "mobiles" which have become world-famous.

Another artist with whom I was closely associated was Vasily Kandinsky. Just twenty-two years ago I held an exhibition of his ~~[illegible]~~ work in New York. Since then his reputation has spiraled upward at dizzying speed.

But I shall not continue with a list that could be extended considerably, lest I be accused of excessive name-dropping. I should like to wind up my story, however, by referring to one more artist, who has not yet gained such widespread acceptance--Benjamin Kopman. For many years I have sustained my faith in the art of Kopman. And I look on it as a reward for that faith that I have been able, with the generous assistance of the director of World House Galleries, Herbert Mayer, to hold a major exhibition of Kopman's work in 1958, which proved to be an outstanding success. So I hope to go forward in the spirit that Kopman summed up so effectively in his introduction ~~to the~~ for The catalogue of his recent ~~exhibition~~ show at World House Galleries:

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Well here I am; in everybody's judgment (except perhaps my own) I am an old man. And yet I am devoting myself to that primal emotion which was kindled ~~in my~~ in my youth, the love for the world, for people and trees, for the sky and the earth, dreaming of these now as in my distant past, and paying tribute to God and his important creations with words and images.

Because we live in an age of speed some people who never cared for art turned away from my work using the ~~the~~ excuse that it has not moved fast enough. They do not realize that the very speed they so admire now will fly them by, and they will remain wondering what has happened.

In my seventieth year I am most grateful to fate that it has endowed me with patience and a sense for timelessness.

February
New York 1958.

0791