

MAX BECKMANN



MAX BECKMANN

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

1915–1925

Edited by Olaf Peters

Preface by Ronald S. Lauder, foreword by Renée Price

With contributions by

Anna Maria Heckmann
Jürgen Müller

Olaf Peters
Dietrich Schubert

Elisa Tamaschke
Christiane Zeiller

With translated texts by

Max Beckmann and Heinrich Simon

PRESTEL
MUNICH • LONDON • NEW YORK



This catalogue has been published in conjunction with the exhibition

MAX BECKMANN: THE FORMATIVE YEARS, 1915–1925

Neue Galerie New York
October 5, 2023 – January 15, 2024

Curator
Olaf Peters

Exhibition Design
Richard Pandiscio,
William Loccisano / Pandiscio Green

Director of Publications
Scott Gutterman

Managing Editor
Janis Staggs

Editorial Assistant
Liesbet Van Leemput

Book Design
Richard Pandiscio,
William Loccisano / Pandiscio Green

Translation
Steven Lindberg

Project Coordinator
Cornelia Hübler

Production
Andrea Cobré

Origination
Schnieber Graphik, Munich

Printing and Binding
Longo AG, Bozen

© 2023 Neue Galerie New York;
Prestel Verlag, Munich ▪ London ▪
New York; and authors

Prestel Verlag, Munich
A member of Penguin Random House
Verlagsgruppe GmbH
Neumarkter Strasse 28
81673 Munich

In respect to links in the book,
Penguin Random House Verlagsgruppe
expressly notes that no illegal content
was discernible on the linked sites
at the time the links were created.
The Publisher has no influence at all
over the current and future design,
content or authorship of the linked
sites. For this reason Penguin Random
House Verlagsgruppe expressly
disassociates itself from all content
on linked sites that has been altered
since the link was created and
assumes no liability for such content.

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Control Number:
2023941002



Penguin Random House Verlagsgruppe
FSC® N001967

Printed in Italy

ISBN 978-3-7913-7994-4

www.prestel.com

PAGE 2: Max Beckmann. Photo: ullstein bild /
ullstein bild via Getty Images

PAGE 7: Paul Weller, Max Beckmann painting at
an easel. Photo: Tate Images © Reserved

PAGE 9: Marie-Louise von Motesiczky and Mathilde
Beckmann in fancy dress with Max Beckmann,
1920–30s. Photo: Tate Images

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Alexander Adler, New York
Selini Andres, Mannheim
Art Installation Design, New York
Mary Ellen Banisch, New York
Vivian Endicott Barnett, New York
Frances Beatty, New York
Mayen Beckmann, Berlin/Cologne
Tanja Borghardt, Bremen
Emily Braun, New York
Antonia Bryan, New York
Hendrik Bündge, Stuttgart
Matti Bunzl, New York
Sam Cameron, New York
Carla Caputo, New York
Andrea Cobré, Munich
Rosa Corral, Minneapolis
Tina Dähn, Berlin
Alexander Eiling, Frankfurt am Main
Fred Elghanayan, New York
Adina Ferber, New York
Anna-Lena Goltz, Halle (Saale)
Scott Hankins, Chapel Hill
Isabelle Harnoncourt, New York
Anna Maria Heckmann, Stuttgart
Kay Heymer, Düsseldorf
Max Hollein, New York
Cornelia Hübler, Munich
Joachim Jäger, Berlin
Oliver Kase, München
Evelyn Kelley, New York
Cait Kennedy, Saint Louis
Hulya Kolabas, New York
Hannah Korm, New York
Anna Kovacs, Waltham
Jennifer Lim, New York
Steven Lindberg, Berlin
Jill Lloyd, London
Bill Loccisano, Sarasota
Sirena Maxfield, New York
Cassie Mazucco, New York
Janet Moore, Boston
Jürgen Müller, Dresden
Pia Müller-Tamm, Karlsruhe
Hannah Murray, London
Vlasta Odell, New York

Richard Pandiscio, New York
Natasha Perine, Chicago
Olaf Peters, Halle (Saale)
Katja Plankenhorn, Karlsruhe
Carina Plath, Hannover
Ernst Ploil, Vienna
Sami Rama, Branford
Mark Ramirez, Toledo
Esther-Maria Rittwagen, Lübeck
Jerry Rivera, New York
Stella Rollig, Vienna
Bridget Rymer, New York
Puppa Sayn-Wittgenstein, New York
Andreas Schalhorn, Berlin
Jackie Scalisi, New York
Mark Schlesinger, San Antonio
Dieter Scholz, Berlin
Rachel Schumann, Cologne
Antje Seeger, Halle (Saale)
Luise Seppeler, Berlin
Elizabeth Szancer, New York
Elisa Tamaschke, Berlin
Michele Tayler, Houston
Christina Végh, Bielefeld
Nara Wood, Cobb
Yagna Yass-Alston, New York
Christiane Zeiller, Munich
Jack Zinterhofer, New York
Will Zinterhofer, New York
Tom Zoufaly, New York

CONTENTS

8 Ronald S. Lauder
Preface

10 Renée Price
Foreword

BECOMING BECKMANN

14 **TRANSCENDENTAL OBJECTIVITY**
Max Beckmann's Modernity Olaf Peters

34 **FROM SECESSIONIST TO INDIVIDUALIST**
Max Beckmann's Career and Reception, 1913 to 1925 Anna Maria Heckmann

48 **CREATIVE CREDO, 1918–20** Max Beckmann

51 **PLATES**

FROM WAR TO STABILIZATION

102 **THE WAR AS CONCLUSION AND NEW BEGINNING** Christiane Zeiller

110 **SELF-PORTRAITS AS DRAFTSMAN**
Beckmann with the Sketchbook Dietrich Schubert

130 **SMASHED GLASS**
Max Beckmann's Print Portfolio *Hell* Elisa Tamaschke

154 **THE ARTIST IN THE STATE, 1927** Max Beckmann

158 **PLATES**

218 **MAX BECKMANN**
Artlover J.B. Neumann

224 **MAX BECKMANN** Heinrich Simon

BEFORE AND AFTER

246 **"A WILD, CRUEL, SPLENDID LIFE"**
**The Young Max Beckmann, Friedrich Nietzsche,
and the Problem of German Modernity** Jürgen Müller

266 **REFLECTED MODERNITY**
Max Beckmann's Late Work Olaf Peters

286 Checklist

292 Selected Bibliography

298 Index

304 Photograph and Copyright Credits





PREFACE

Max Beckmann is truly a giant of modern German art, someone who stands outside of any single category. He was a visionary, a man who captured not only the times he lived in, but someone who could see the future—see what *could* happen and what *would* happen.

I still remember the first time I encountered a work by Beckmann as a teenager in a midtown gallery here in New York. It was a triptych and I instantly saw the power and the strength of this extraordinary artist. I went right out and purchased every book I could find on Beckmann because I was so curious and wanted to learn more about him. This coincided with my growing interest in German and Austrian art.

It has been my good fortune to acquire a number of works by the artist over the years. The first extraordinary Beckmann painting to enter my collection was *Galleria Umberto* (1925). This work is incredibly prophetic in that it contains imagery of things to come. We see an Italian flag sinking into the water as if it is drowning; we see a dismembered figure, suggesting the torture during the Fascist era; there is a crystal ball offering a glimpse into the future and bugle sounding a warning. Think about this for a moment. In 1925, Mussolini had been in power for just three years and it would be another 20 years, two full decades of chaos, before the Italian dictator would meet his ignoble demise. Yet the painting anticipates both the rise and the downfall of Fascism in Italy along with all the turmoil in between. It is a mesmerizing picture, with a bizarre, dreamlike quality that makes it unforgettable.

The highlight for me, though, was the opportunity to acquire, with a fellow collector, the incredible *Self-Portrait with Horn* (1938), which Beckmann painted while he was living in exile in Amsterdam. It's interesting to note that Beckmann left Germany in 1937 on the day after Hitler's radio address on what he called degenerate art. This painting, which had once been in the collection of the artist's friend Stephan Lackner, seems to sum up so much about the experience of refugees, torn from their homeland and forced to establish himself in a new, unfamiliar environment. The horn also announces a warning about the rise of Nazism and intolerance. Because of the clarity and power of this painting, we can still hear that warning today.

I have been pleased to support exhibitions of Beckmann's work over the years, whether at the temporary branch of The Museum of Modern Art in Queens (2003) or in a pairing with Otto Dix at the Neue Galerie (2005). The current exhibition explores the early years of Beckmann's career, from the time of his traumatic experiences during World War I through his success during the Weimar Republic, and finally to the period in which he was driven into exile. All have shown important facets of an individual who gathered the tumultuous events taking place around him and converted them into extraordinary works of art.

The curator for this exhibition is Olaf Peters, who has organized several critically acclaimed shows for the Neue Galerie, including "Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937" (2014) and "Berlin Metropolis: 1918–1933" (2015–16). He has been aided by Richard Pandiscio and Bill Loccisano, who designed the exhibition, and by my longtime associate Tom Zoufaly, who oversaw the installation. Together, they bring to light the gifts of an artist who seemed to sum up, and to transcend, the times he lived in. Museums and individuals in the United States and Europe generously provided key loans, helping to create a full representation of this singular artist. I trust our guests will enjoy experiencing Beckmann as much as I have since first encountering his work more than 50 years ago.

Ronald S. Lauder
President, Neue Galerie New York



FOREWORD

Max Beckmann is one of the outstanding painters of the twentieth century. By presenting a monographic exhibition of his work, the Neue Galerie New York is fulfilling a longstanding goal. The museum's extended collection includes central works by Beckmann, such as the major portfolio of prints *Die Hölle* (Hell, 1919) and the early political allegory *Galleria Umberto* (1925). These works represent the point of departure for this project. The basic thesis of the exhibition is that Beckmann, after the profoundly disturbing experience of World War I, managed to advance to a new pictorial conception. The painter both assimilated his experiences and connected to concurrent developments in art. Indeed, our exhibition offers an in-depth look and invites a close reading of key works of these formative years.

There have been several exhibitions on Beckmann in the last couple of years. Ours is different, however, in focusing on this particular time period and his artistic approach. For many of his contemporaries, Beckmann came to epitomize the latest evolution of representational painting. In 1925, when he was 41 years old, Beckmann emerged as the crucial figure in the exhibition "Die Neue Sachlichkeit: Deutsche Malerei nach dem Expressionismus" (New Objectivity: German Painting after Expressionism) in Mannheim, even though he would later distance himself from that term. This turning point marks the endpoint of our exhibition and explains its restriction to the years from 1915 to 1925.

The exhibition gathers together some of the masterpieces of Beckmann's art including the outstanding paintings *Fastnacht* (Carnival, 1920, Tate, London), *Der Traum* (The Dream, 1921, Saint Louis Art Museum), and *Die Barke* (The Bark, 1926, Private Collection). Our show offers the unique opportunity to experience these works together and to reflect on the genesis of Beckmann's mature style of painting.

A key step to Beckmann's transformation was his focus on religious topics in paintings around 1917-18. They are centrally important in this context and we are proud to display three key examples from major public collections. They reveal his stylistic development but also outline the painter's horizon of interpretation as he sought to portray his own era using the pictorial formulas of the Passion of Christ and other biblical themes.

Around 1920, Beckmann was intensely preoccupied by the social and political fault lines of the era. That is why his work of this phase was considered verism and associated with the leftist wing of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*—something that is often forgotten today. Beckmann himself spoke of his art in terms of "transcendental objectivity." The subjects of these works prepare the ground, in terms of both form and content, for Beckmann's later paintings.

The Neue Galerie exhibition and the catalogue are not just about the bolstering of his stature as an artist from 1915 to 1925, but also about the seminal energy he brought to his work at the time; the artist himself repeatedly returned to this phase over the course of his career. The self-referential aspect of Beckmann's work thus comes clearly into view. It is our aspiration to contribute to a deeper understanding of Beckmann's artistic productivity.

The exhibition was conceived and has been organized by Prof. Dr. Olaf Peters, who has taught art history in Halle an der Saale University since 2006 and is an esteemed Member of the Board of Trustees of the Neue Galerie. He also has organized the exhibitions "Otto Dix" (2010), and the trilogy "Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937" (2014), "Berlin Metropolis: 1918-1933" (2015-16), and "Before the Fall: German and Austrian Art of the 1930s" (2018) for the Neue Galerie. His thesis at the University of Bonn was a broad monograph on Beckmann, and he is one of the leading experts on the artist. Prof. Dr. Peters, together with his fellow authors Ms. Anna Maria Heckmann, Prof. Dr. Jürgen Müller,



Max Beckmann, his wife Quappi, and his dog Butschy in front of *Blind Man's Buff* with Perry Rathbone, director of the City Art Museum of St. Louis, 1948. University of Colorado Photolab Collection, no. 1975, Art Department, Max Beckmann Show. Archives, University of Colorado at Boulder Libraries

Prof. Dr. Dietrich Schubert, Dr. Elisa Tamaschke, and Dr. Christiane Zeiller, brings fresh perspectives to Beckmann's complex, sometimes difficult, and multilayered art. All of these contributors deserve our sincere thanks.

We are most grateful to the host of institutional and private lenders who made our exhibition possible, including Ms. Katie Ziglar, Ackland Art Museum; Mr. James Rondeau, The Art Institute of Chicago; Dr. Bernhard Maaz, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen Pinakothek der Moderne; Mr. Richard Armstrong, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; Prof. Dr. Christoph Grunenberg, Kunsthalle Bremen; Dr. Johan Holten, Kunsthalle Mannheim; Dr. Dagmar Korbacher, Kupferstichkabinett Staatliche Museen zu Berlin; Mr. Matthew Teitelbaum, Museum of Fine Arts Boston; Dr. Glenn D. Lowry, The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Dr. Alexander Bastek, Museum Behnhaus Drägerhaus; Dr. Yilmaz Dziewior, Museum Ludwig; Ms. Josefa Simon; the Acacia Corporation; Dr. Christiane Zeiller; Ms. Mayen Beckmann; Dr. Gannit Ankori, Rose Art Museum; Dr. Min Jung Kim, Saint Louis Art Museum; Mr. Klaus Biesenbach and Dr. Joachim Jäger, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Neue Nationalgalerie; Dr. Maria Balshaw, CBE and Ms. Frances Morris, Tate Modern; Dr. Adam M. Levine, Toledo Museum of Art; and Ms. Alejandra Peña-Gutiérrez, Weisman Art Museum. We also offer our thanks to those lenders who wish to remain anonymous.

Every major loan exhibition needs the support of friends and trusted advisors. Among these for the Neue Galerie were Frances Beatty, Mayen Beckmann, Isabelle Harnoncourt, Lukas Minssen, Puppa Sayn Wittgenstein, and Wilfried Utermann. We offer them our gratitude.

I wish to thank Richard Pandiscio and Bill Loccisano of Pandiscio Green for their wonderful contributions to the design of our exhibition and of this catalogue. The tireless staff of the Neue Galerie deserves to be acknowledged as well, including Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer Scott Gutterman, Director of Curatorial and Managing Editor of Publications Janis Staggs, Manager of Curatorial Liesbet Van Leemput, Chief Registrar and Director of Exhibitions Stacey Traunfeld, Associate Registrar Julie Jung, and Director of Communications Michelle Perlin.

And once again, we must express our deepest gratitude to Ronald S. Lauder, the co-founder of our museum, whose enthusiasm, vision, and generosity for the arts is boundless. He has been a collector of work by Max Beckmann for several decades. The Neue Galerie is his gift to the world, and bringing this museum to life is our great privilege.

Renée Price
Director, Neue Galerie New York

BECOMING BECKMANN

- TRANSCENDENTAL OBJECTIVITY
- FROM SECESSIONIST TO INDIVIDUALIST
- CREATIVE CREDO, 1918–20
- PLATES





Max Beckmann in his Berlin studio in front of *Sinking of the Titanic*, 1912. © Oliver Baker, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Deutsches Kunstarchiv, Nürnberg, NL Schmidt, Doris

TRANSCENDENTAL OBJECTIVITY

MAX BECKMANN'S MODERNITY

Olaf Peters



URNS AGAINST AVANT-GARDE

Max Beckmann adopted early on a position against the artistic avant-garde and did not shy away from public controversy when doing so. In 1912 he had a public dispute with Franz Marc of the *Blauer Reiter* (Blue Rider).¹ What artistic concept—which Beckmann was already associating with the term *Sachlichkeit* (objectivity) at this point—was the artist trying to realize in opposition to the avant-garde that was advancing toward abstraction? How did the painter define himself in relation to the latest developments in modern art? In the context of the famous so-called “Bremen Art Dispute” of 1911 led by Carl Vinnen,² Beckmann rashly dismissed Henri Matisse as one of the “untalented persons” and recommended instead painters of the late nineteenth century such as Wilhelm Leibl, Max Liebermann, and Adolf Menzel as “instructive artists”³ [Fig. 1]. Beckmann did so, however, without siding with Vinnen, a Worspeweder painter who adopted a conservative, *völkisch* (racist-populist) position.⁴ How did Beckmann integrate into his own creations artistic concepts that he had publicly rejected and then transform them into order to develop them? These questions will be addressed in what fol-

lows and in the other essays in this catalogue in order to explain the growing rift as well as the continuity that are manifest in his oeuvre. It distinguishes the early work from the work from 1915 onward and then also characterizes the later development after 1925. The decade between 1915 and 1925 mediates between two larger blocks of pictures and itself represents such a block, one that is without question a summit in German painting of the twentieth century.⁵

The famous controversy between Beckmann and Marc flared up already in 1912.⁶ In the journal *Pan*, Beckmann argued for "*Sachlichkeit*,"⁷ and polemicized against Fauvism, Primitivism, and Expressionism. Above all, Beckmann took aim at the increasingly clear trend to abandon the representational image: "What is feeble and overly aesthetic about this so-called new painting is its failure to distinguish between the idea of a wallpaper or poster and that of a 'picture.'"⁸ The fundamental artistic conflict between, on the one hand, his own Impressionist painting style, which was ill-suited to mastering the large, sometimes sublime subjects (Crucifixion, shipwreck, earthquake) he chose and, on the other, his dismissive reaction toward the contemporaneous trends of the avant-garde, made it necessary for the artist to thoroughly rethink his own position. The literary scholar and theorist of the avant-garde Peter Bürger rightly called him a "thinking artist," because he was trying to fathom the problems of painting not just in practice but also in theory.⁹

Beckmann had reached a dead end and had to reformulate his approach to painting¹⁰ if he wanted to assert himself in the continual battles of the artistic field.¹¹ Following his encounter with the latest European painting at the "Herbstsalon" (Autumn Salon) in Berlin in 1913¹², and the fundamental criticism of

Beckmann's earlier oeuvre as "geriatric"¹³, and the outbreak of World War I in 1914, which was like a catalyst for the fundamental stylistic transformation of his work.¹⁴ He had to react to this and tried to situate his own concept on the threshold between a planar, stylishly decorative and a spatial one, which he understood as a dichotomy. Influenced by Rembrandt van Rijn, Francisco Goya, and the early Paul Cézanne, he emphasized spatial depth in his art: "As for myself, I paint and try to develop my style exclusively in terms of deep space, something that in contrast to superficially decorative art penetrates as far as possible into the very core of nature and the spirit of things."¹⁵ That did not, however, keep Beckmann from productively reworking the so-called decorative art he loathed and integrating it into his visual cosmos, for example, by making use of the achievements of Cubism in pictorial autonomy.

World War I, in which Beckmann volunteered as a medical orderly, prompted the painter to find a new form of objective perception and representation. Initially, Beckmann proudly reported to his wife, Minna Beckmann-Tube, on his daily experiences in the war.¹⁶ He soon abandoned that. The experience of combat radicalized modern artists in their manner of aesthetic expression and techniques in both form and content, and so too Beckmann.¹⁷ That meant a break with his early painted work; Beckmann only achieved a unique artistic style because of the war. The process of transforming and breaking away from his early monumental Impressionist paintings can indeed be followed in a sometimes-oppressive way in his paintings, his drawings, and his letters from the field.¹⁸ It is not so much the personal existential threat—Beckmann was hardly at great risk in his activities as a medical orderly—as it was the experience of horror in the face of death and mutilation that

1. Max Beckmann, *Self-Portrait (Laughing)*, 1910, oil on canvas. Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin. Photo: akg-images