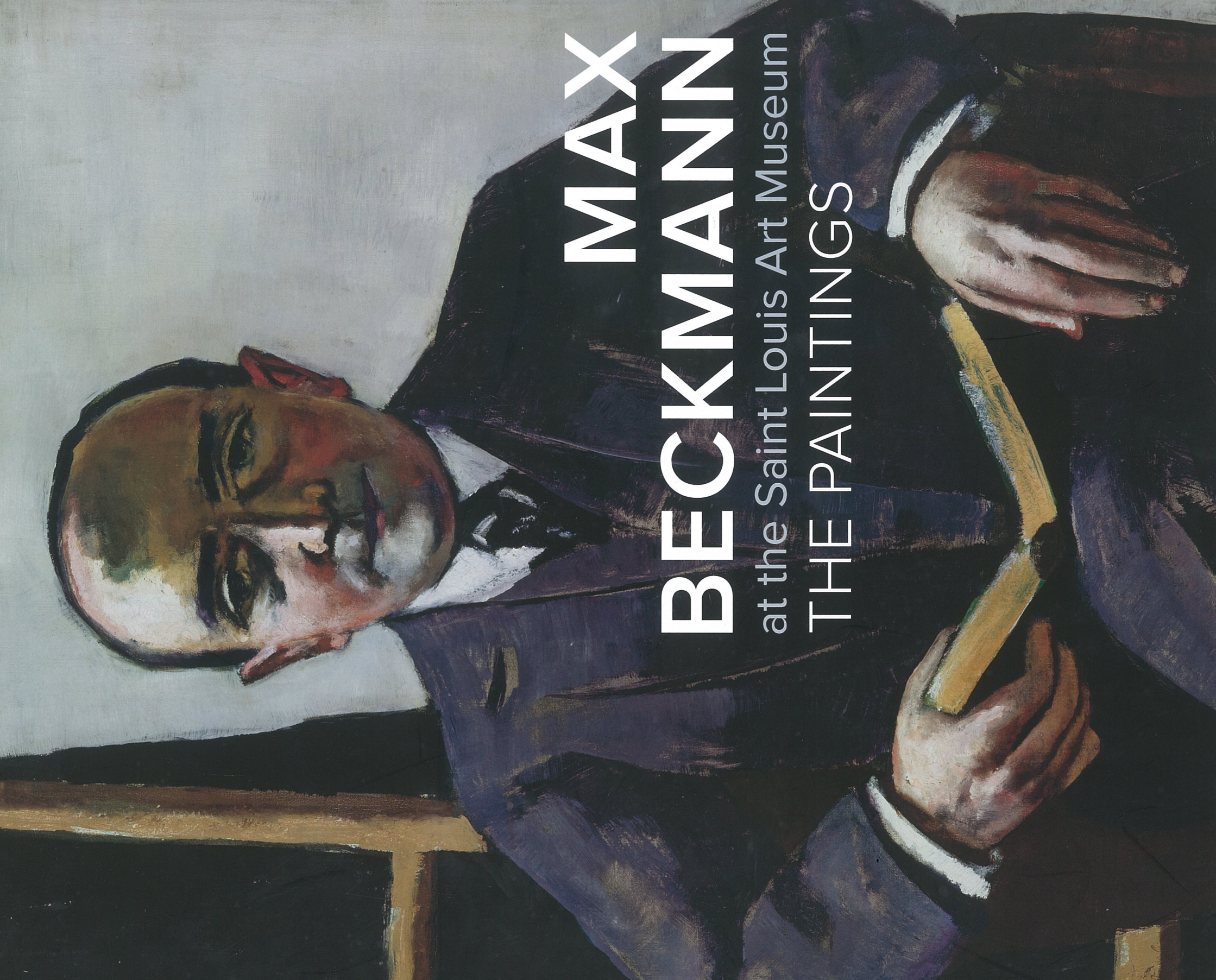




MAX BECKMANN

at the Saint Louis Art Museum

THE PAINTINGS

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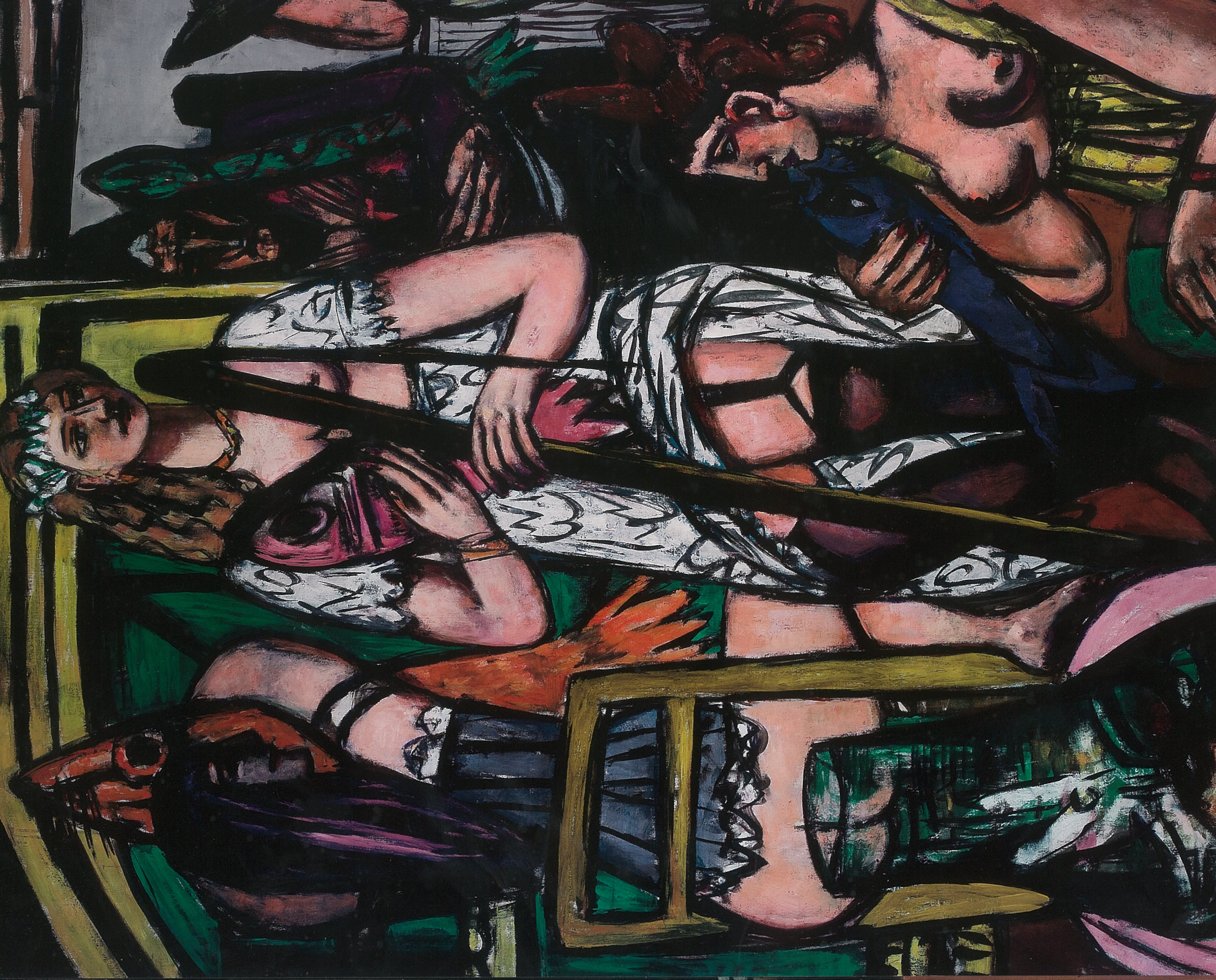
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THE PAINTINGS

LYNETTE ROTH

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Foreword

Max Beckmann at the Saint Louis Art Museum: The Paintings constitutes the first in-depth scholarly examination of the paintings in the Saint Louis Art Museum by this leading twentieth-century German-born artist. The collection of thirty-nine canvases by Max Beckmann is the world's largest. Encompassing his entire career and virtually all of the themes he explored, it provides an opportunity to examine the richness and diversity of his painted oeuvre.

St. Louis has played a remarkable role in Beckmann's career, both during his lifetime and posthumously. The artist spent nearly two years here as a professor at Washington University, finding close associations between this river city and Frankfurt am Main, where he had lived and taught. He also enjoyed a special relationship with the Saint Louis Art Museum, in particular with Perry Rathbone, the museum's director from 1940 until 1955. In 1946 Rathbone purchased the museum's first Beckmann, and in 1948 he organized the first major retrospective of Beckmann's work in the United States.

The Saint Louis Art Museum's unsurpassed collection of Beckmann's paintings is the result of the remarkable generosity of his St. Louis collectors, most notably the department-store owner Morton D. May, who in 1983 bequeathed to the museum thirty-five paintings, as well as works in other media, by the artist. In the wake of this transformative gift, the museum organized "Max Beckmann Retrospective" in 1984–85, in partnership with the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen and the Haus der Kunst, Munich; and "Max Beckmann and Paris" in 1998–99, with the Kunsthaus Zurich. In 2002 the museum acquired the Neumann-Frumkin collection of 351 prints and book illustrations by the artist, bringing the number of prints by Beckmann in the museum to 374 and making the Saint

Louis Art Museum the repository of one of the largest collections of his prints in the world. This is in addition to the collection's nineteen drawings and watercolors, four illustrated books, one textile, and one sculpture.

At the Saint Louis Art Museum, Beckmann's output is framed by an exceptionally strong collection of works by German twentieth-century and contemporary artists ranging from Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Emil Nolde to Anselm Kiefer and Gerhard Richter. The museum's contemporary holdings were published in 2003, and a scholarly catalogue on our German expressionist works is planned. In 2011 the museum installed an overview of Beckmann's major large-scale paintings in a single gallery at the museum's center, while other works by him hang in adjacent galleries alongside examples by his German and French contemporaries.

This volume is the result of many years of research on the part of its author, Lynette Roth, Daimler-Benz Curator of the Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard Art Museums, and formerly Andrew W. Mellon Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Saint Louis Art Museum. She has brought scholarly rigor and great devotion to the project, and we are grateful for her efforts. Simon Kelly, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, has thoughtfully supervised the project's development. *Max Beckmann at the Saint Louis Art Museum: The Paintings* exemplifies our ongoing commitment to the work of Max Beckmann and to stewarding the legacy that pathbreaking and generous donors such as Morton D. May have left to our museum, our city, and beyond.

Brent R. Benjamin

Director, The Saint Louis Art Museum

Preface

SIMON KELLY

Max Beckmann at the Saint Louis Art Museum: The Paintings focuses on the art of arguably the greatest German artist of the twentieth century. The Saint Louis Art Museum's collection of thirty-nine paintings—the world's largest—by Max Beckmann (1884–1950) covers the full scope of his career and is uniquely suited to highlight the diversity of his output. No other museum collection of his painted oeuvre does this to the same degree. Included in the collection are two early large-scale disaster scenes, several psychologically penetrating pictures from the 1920s, one of his great triptychs, and the last of his many self-portraits. They include figurative paintings—scenes from mythology, history, and the world of entertainment, as well as portraits and nudes—still lifes, and landscapes, all highlighting Beckmann's engagement with a number of artistic genres, as well as his efforts to challenge and reconceptualize those genres. Perhaps even more important, the paintings in the Saint Louis Art Museum reflect the remarkably complicated and traumatic historical era in which Beckmann lived, as he experienced two world wars, the rise of fascism, exile, and emigration. Thus we find the trauma of post–World War I Germany in *The Dream* (cat. 9) and an allusion to Nazi bellicosity in *The Acrobats* (cat. 19). We see too Beckmann's complex relationship with the rich avant-garde traditions of his age, such as impressionism, expressionism, cubism, New Objectivity, and even abstraction.¹ Throughout his career, Beckmann maintained his independence, mostly refusing to connect himself directly with these movements. He even took a position that might be perceived as conservative, as in his early debates with the radical painter Franz Marc.² Yet his art engaged with and reflected the newest artistic developments and thus was fully participatory in twentieth-century modernism.

This volume appears at a moment of considerable interest in Beckmann's work, particularly his output of some 835 paintings (he was also a prodigious draftsman and printmaker). Indeed, his name is often mentioned in the same breath as more established masters such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, artists with whom he saw himself in competition. Beckmann's reception has always been strong in Germany, and his work has attracted much attention in the United States.

In this country, modernism—as articulated principally by the first director of New York's Museum of Modern Art, Alfred H. Barr Jr., and the influential art critic Clement Greenberg—has centered on a francocentric canon but has nonetheless engaged extensively with German twentieth-century art. Barr for example organized an exhibition of contemporary German painting and sculpture at MoMA in 1931.³ While Greenberg developed his modernist narrative around the work of Édouard Manet and the Paris-based cubists, he also showed an openness to German art, as seen in a 1946 review of a Beckmann exhibition where he praised the “power of Beckmann's emotion” and compared his work to that of the French artist Georges Rouault, arguing for the German's superiority.⁴ Greenberg viewed the development of modern painting as a pictorial drive toward abstraction and flatness on the canvas surface. Beckmann's lifetime focus on figuration and commitment to the articulation of three-dimensional space certainly complicated his position within that approach. Nonetheless, German art—from Beckmann to Marc and from Ernst Ludwig Kirchner to Emil Nolde—has been central to our understanding of modernism. Beckmann's pivotal position within this tradition is signified by two 2003 exhibitions held in several European cities and New York.⁵

The last decade has witnessed a range of ambitious publications that have extensively expanded the corpus of knowledge concerning Beckmann's career.⁶ Building on the canonical catalogue raisonné of the artist's paintings by the artist's friend Erhard Göpel and his wife, Barbara, published in 1976, catalogues raisonnés of his pastels and watercolors, as well as of his sketchbooks, have appeared. In 2008 the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich—the other most representative museum collection of Beckmann's work—published a scholarly catalogue of its holdings by the artist.⁷ Other recent scholarship has critically evaluated Beckmann's complex position in twentieth-century art.⁸ There has been a growing number of international exhibitions of his work, often organized in terms of a particular genre in his output, such as landscape, portraiture, still life, or the nude.⁹ Beckmann's dialectical engagement with fellow modernists such as

Picasso, Fernand Léger, and Otto Dix has been explored, as has his place within a broad internationalist tradition grounded in the art of Paul Cézanne.¹⁰ Beckmann's work has also influenced contemporary artists such as the American abstract painter Ellsworth Kelly and the South African artist William Kentridge.¹¹ Thus the present catalogue appears at an important moment in the evaluation of German art and of Beckmann in particular.

Max Beckmann at the Saint Louis Art Museum: The Paintings is authored by Lynette Roth, Daimler-Benz Curator of the Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard Art Museums. Roth has devoted herself to this project from her arrival in 2008 at the Saint Louis Art Museum as an Andrew W. Mellon Post-Doctoral Fellow. She worked on and completed the book after her fellowship ended in late 2010, when she assumed her current position. Like any project of this magnitude, the catalogue has required not only extensive research, observational skill, and measured analysis, but also devotion, patience, and stamina, all of which Roth possesses. We are grateful to her for this monumental accomplishment.

The volume contains detailed and definitive entries on each of the paintings in the collection, most featuring relevant comparative illustrations. The entries situate the works within Beckmann's career and life, present extensive iconographical and formal analysis, summarize treatment by previous scholars and critics, and trace provenance. For each painting, a separate section provides inscriptions, alternative titles, selected marks and labels, comprehensive lists of the literature on it and the exhibitions in which it has appeared, and related works. The entries are arranged chronologically in six chapters, each headed by an introduction that considers Beckmann's works in the context of the period under discussion. Organized around place, the chapters highlight the locations of central importance in Beckmann's career. We move from Berlin (Chapter 1) to Frankfurt (Chapter 2) to Paris (Chapter 3) to Amsterdam (Chapter 4) and finally to St. Louis (Chapter 5) and New York (Chapter 6). This structure enables us to consider Beckmann in a national context as a German, and also, transnationally, as both a European and American artist. On the one hand, we see the artist's evolving relationship with his German homeland, moving from his controversial displays at Berlin Secession exhibitions in the 1910s to his official triumphs, such as his first major retrospective at the Kunsthalle Mannheim (in 1928) and a gallery devoted to his art at the Nationalgalerie, Berlin (1932–33).¹² We then witness his marginalization with the rise of the National Socialists, culminating in the “Entartete Kunst” exhibition of 1937, when his work was declared “degenerate” and “culturally bolshevik.” Alongside this German history, we are introduced to the artist's relationship with Paris in the late 1920s and early 1930s and his deliberate efforts to forge in the art capital of

Europe a new market and public for his work and to compete with the other great masters of the age, such as Picasso and Matisse. We then turn to Beckmann's exile in Amsterdam during and after the war, a particularly difficult period that nonetheless proved to be his most artistically productive. Finally we see Beckmann's relationship with American painting in the late 1940s and the tensions between his resolutely figurative work and the emergence of abstract expressionism. Woven into this chronological structure are examinations of Beckmann's engagement with various genres, such as the eleven portraits in the collection, which span his career; the six still lifes from his final two decades; nine landscapes; and several nudes.

Scholars writing on Beckmann in the 1950s into the early 1980s, such as Peter Selz and Charles Haxthausen, explored the complexity of symbolic and metaphysical resonances in his work.¹³ Recent postmodernist perspectives have reflected more socio-political approaches, considering for example the artist's complex relationship with National Socialism, including his problematic links to Nazi Party officials or sympathizers in the 1930s.¹⁴ There have also been valuable gendered readings, focusing on Beckmann's attitude toward women, and examinations of his relationship to popular culture, such as his fascination with jazz.¹⁵ *Max Beckmann at the Saint Louis Art Museum: The Paintings* explores the diversity of readings of Beckmann's art, provides a balanced summation of these varied interpretations, and posits new ways of understanding the work. The catalogue also provides fresh insight into Beckmann's artistic process and the complexity of his painterly practice. Every painting has received detailed technical analysis by Saint Louis Art Museum conservator Paul Haner, in close association with Roth, which has resulted in fascinating new information on Beckmann's working methods. To cite only two examples, X-rays demonstrate that the ocean liner in *Sinking of the Titanic* (cat. 7) was originally depicted upended, with much of its massive hull already underwater. Revealed beneath *Carnival Mask, Green, Violet, and Pink (Columbine)* (cat. 38) is a portrait of a prominent figure in the German art world, Fritz Wichert, painted in the 1920s and thought to have been destroyed. Alongside this technical analysis, the catalogue also historicizes Beckmann's work by placing it within the context of contemporary critical debates such as those of the late 1920s in which his painterly style was compared to the art of the School of Paris as well as to that of the Austrian Oskar Kokoschka.

The book traces Beckmann's evolving public and private identity, as well as his developing intellectual interests. As his diaries and notes (as well as his extensive library) show, the artist was deeply literate and cultured. Even as a young man, he was highly conversant in the philosophy of Goethe, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche.¹⁶ Later on he became increasingly

drawn to the writings of the theosophist Helena P. Blavatsky, reading (and annotating) her *Secret Doctrine* (1888) at least six times between 1934 and 1950. From her he probably derived his oft-quoted assertion that he aimed in his art to “render the invisible visible.” He also studied Hindu mysticism and the Kabbalah. These interests manifest themselves fully in the complex symbolism of his art (particularly in his later work) and in his development of a very personal iconography of kings, fish, sirens, and bellboys, as well as characters from the circus, carnival, and theater. Considered together, they reveal that, alongside his concern for the *vita contemplativa*, Beckmann always maintained an enthusiasm for the *vita activa*. Charming holiday films that his second wife, Mathilde (Quappi) Beckmann, made in the late 1920s record the artist skiing at St. Moritz, swimming on the French Riviera, and playing tennis (interestingly, he played left-handed and painted right-handed). To the end of his life, he was a vigorous hiker.

Beckmann’s fascination with arcane mythology and intellectualism is complicated by his savvy business acumen and, as Roth notes (see especially Chapter 3), his very conscious efforts to construct a strategy for showing and selling his work in Germany and abroad. This included several periods in which the artist held back his art from exhibition in order to develop it to his satisfaction and also to create an element of suspense and surprise for audiences. Roth provides intriguing information on his prices, which did not compare to those for the art of established French modernists (the Folkwang Museum, Essen, for example paid two hundred thousand marks in 1927 for Manet’s *Portrait of Faure as Hamlet*). Nonetheless, Beckmann’s prices were often considerably higher than those of other prominent avant-garde artists such as Kirchner.¹⁷ The prices of many of the paintings in St. Louis can be traced in Beckmann’s three extant account books; they range from 1,200 marks for his early portraits to the inflationary sum of 30,000 marks that the dealer J. B. Neumann paid for *The Dream* in 1921. The artist’s exile in Amsterdam deeply affected sales of his work, as he largely lost his patron base in Germany and found that the Nazis were selling his art to non-German buyers for very low amounts. He also sold his work cheaply, particularly to the New York emigré dealer Curt Valentin. Even in America in the late 1940s, Beckmann’s prices were lower than what he had received at his commercial height in Germany two decades earlier.¹⁸

Max Beckmann at the Saint Louis Art Museum: The Paintings highlights the rich collecting history of Beckmann’s art in St. Louis. In the Introduction, Roth explores the remarkable support that Beckmann received from the department-store magnate Morton D. May, who created the world’s largest private collection of the artist’s work, much of which he bequeathed to the Saint Louis Art Museum in 1983. May was part of a sophisticated network around Beckmann in St. Louis

in the late 1940s, a network in which Perry Rathbone, then director of the City Art Museum (the institution’s name changed in 1972), figured prominently. Not only was Rathbone instrumental in bringing Beckmann to the city (the artist accepted a teaching position at Washington University), but in 1946 he also purchased the first Beckmann to enter the museum’s collection, *Young Men by the Sea* (cat. 21). The art historian H. W. Janson also bought a Beckmann painting, *Artists and Vegetables*, for Washington University that same year.¹⁹ This patronage built on an existing tradition of Beckmann collecting in St. Louis. Joseph Pulitzer Jr. was among the first American collectors to buy the artist’s work, acquiring *Portrait of Zeretelli* (1927; Fogg Museum, Harvard Art Museums) as early as 1939, as well as three other paintings by the artist at a later date.²⁰ Pulitzer considered acquiring the artist’s magisterial triptych *Departure* (fig. 24), but he did not do so.²¹ The foresight and perspicacity of these men is the principal reason for the exceptional collection of Beckmann’s paintings in the Saint Louis Art Museum.

The Saint Louis Art Museum has also played a central role in establishing Beckmann’s standing by organizing several major exhibitions over the decades. In 1948 Rathbone oversaw the first major retrospective of Beckmann’s work in the United States, an initiative in which the artist was fully involved.²² Beckmann indeed knew the museum collection well, referring in 1950 to its “beautiful treasures.”²³ In subsequent years, there were prominent displays of Morton May’s collection of works by Beckmann and the German expressionists, including a major traveling show around the country in 1960–63.²⁴ May himself organized an extensive tour of his collection in Europe in 1968–69, which played a major role in reestablishing Beckmann’s reputation, especially in his native land. In the wake of the 1983 May bequest, the museum organized the landmark “Max Beckmann Retrospective” on the occasion of the centenary of the artist’s birth. This 1984–85 exhibition was organized with Munich’s Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen and Haus der Kunst. Also seen at Berlin’s Nationalgalerie and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, it explored the artist’s diverse output in all media.²⁵ In 1998–99 the museum organized “Beckmann and Paris,” a partnership with the Kunthaus Zurich, focusing on the artist’s complex relationship with the French capital and its modern artists.²⁶ His work has also been situated within the context of contemporary German art through exhibitions such as “German Art Now” (2003), which have foregrounded the museum’s rich holdings in this area.²⁷

Max Beckmann at the Saint Louis Art Museum: The Paintings aims to communicate to both scholarly and general audiences information and scholarship—at once analytic and factual, biographical and technical, new and definitive—specifically about the museum’s thirty-nine canvases but also the artist’s overall achievement. Beckmann had an elevated

sense of art's purpose, affirming in his final public speech, delivered in St. Louis in the summer of 1950: "Art, with religion and the sciences, has always supported and liberated man on his path. Art resolves through form the many paradoxes of life, and sometimes permits us to glimpse behind the dark curtain that hides those unknown spaces where one day we shall be unified."²⁸ We believe that this publication succeeds in shedding light into "those unknown spaces" while underscoring the sense of mystery that contributes to the depth and greatness of this artist's complex work.

NOTES

My thanks to Sabine Eckmann and Lynette Roth for their comments on a draft of this essay.

1. The New Objectivity movement, in its return to realism, had a problematic relationship with the avant-garde tradition but nonetheless can be considered as having made an important contribution to this tradition.
2. See Max Beckmann, "Thoughts on Timely and Untimely Art" (1912), in MB, *Self-Portrait in Words* 1997, pp. 113–17.
3. New York 1931.
4. Clement Greenberg, "Art [review of exhibitions of works by Max Beckmann and Robert De Niro]," *The Nation* (May 18, 1946), p. 610, cited in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 80–81.
5. See Paris et al. 2002–3; London/New York 2003.
6. Zeiller 2010 (sketchbooks). See also Beckmann/Gohr 2006 (watercolors and pastels).
7. See Billeter et al. 2008. The Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, has thirty-seven paintings by Beckmann. This collection, despite its impressiveness, does not possess the chronological range of the Beckmann paintings at the Saint Louis Art Museum. There is, for example, nothing from the years 1907 to 1921 in the Munich museum.
8. See in particular Washton Long/Makela 2009, MB, *Self-Portrait in Words* 1997 also remains essential.
9. In 2011–12 three exhibitions were mounted in Europe: on the artist's landscapes (Basel 2011–12), on his portraits (Leipzig 2011–12), and his association with the United States (Frankfurt 2011–12). An exhibition on Beckmann's still lifes took place at the Hamburger Kunsthalle in 2014–15 ("Max Beckmann: Die Stilleben").
10. See Munich 2012 (on Picasso, De Kooning, and Beckmann), Cologne 2005 (Léger and Beckmann), and "Dix/Beckmann. Mythos Welt," at the Kunsthalle Mannheim, in 2013. Anabelle Kienle, "Cézanne and Beckmann: 'A Powerful New Pictorial Architecture,'" in Joseph J. Rishel and Katherine Sachs, eds., *Cézanne and Beyond* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2009), pp. 307–26. The latter exhibition focused on twentieth- and twenty-first century artists who were influenced by the work of Cézanne; Beckmann's art played a central role in this narrative. The reinstallation of Beckmann's work at the Saint Louis Art Museum in 2011–13 by the present author also placed his work within the context of the French tradition, juxtaposing his still lifes with examples by Picasso and his nudes with works by Matisse.
11. See Ellsworth Kelly, "Boston, Beckmann and After," in London/New York 2003, p. 237; and William Kentridge, "Beckmann's Death," in *ibid.*, pp. 181–84.

12. The room, installed in the Kronprinzenpalais (the modern-art annex of the Nationalgalerie), was opened on Feb. 15, 1932, but was deinstalled the following year, following the ascent to power of the National Socialists.
13. See Selz 1974; and Haxthausen 1985.
14. Georg von Schnitzler, the husband of Beckmann's patron Lilly von Schnitzler, was not only a Nazi but was also involved in the production of chemicals used in concentration camps. I am grateful to Sabine Eckmann for this information. Apparently, Lilly von Schnitzler, calling the artist a genius, recommended him to Joseph Goebbels unsuccessfully. Erhard Göpel, the artist's friend and later the author (with his wife) of the 1976 catalogue raisonné of his paintings, confiscated art for the Nazis in Amsterdam. Although relatively unpolitical, Beckmann was ready to be supported by a range of patrons, including Nazi sympathizers, as well as Jews. Among the former were Rudolf Binding, whose portrait he painted in 1935, and the right-wing conservative Prince Carl Anton Von Rohan (see intro. to Chap. 3). According to Frank Druffner, the artist probably also met the German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop at least once. Frank Druffner, "Max Beckmann Paints a Poet in 1935: The Intellectual and Artistic Atmosphere in Early Nazi Berlin," lecture, Kemper Art Museum, Washington University, St. Louis, Oct. 8, 2013.
15. Munich 2012; Marsha Morton, "'Painted Sounds': Music in the Art of Max Beckmann," in Washton Long/Makela 2009, pp. 135–64.
16. For Beckmann's library, see Beckmann/Schaffer 1992. For a useful summary of his literary interests, see Anabelle Kienle, "Max Beckmann's Reading," in Bern 2006, pp. 152–53.
17. Kirchner for example asked five hundred to one thousand marks for paintings by him on view at the Kunstverein, Jena, in 1917.
18. In 1949 Beckmann sold *Large Picture of Women. Fisherwomen* (cat. 30) to Curt Valentin's Buchholz Gallery, New York, for \$1,200. For other prices, see for example cats. 15, note 14; cat. 25, note 10; cat. 35, note 6.
19. The university acquired this work from Buchholz Gallery, New York.
20. These are *Souvenir of Chicago* (1948; Göpel 759), which Pulitzer acquired in 1948; *Masquerade* (cat. 29), which he purchased in 1957; and *Portrait of Louise Pulitzer* (1949; Göpel 781), which he acquired in 1950.
21. See Marjorie B. Cohn, *Classic Modern: The Art Worlds of Joseph Pulitzer Jr.* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Art Museums, 2012), pp. 193–95.
22. St. Louis et al. 1948. The retrospective exhibition, comprising 132 paintings, drawings, and prints, was organized by the City Art Museum, where it opened. It then traveled to the Detroit Institute of Arts; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; the Baltimore Museum of Art; the Busch-Reisinger Museum, Cambridge, Mass.; and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.
23. Max Beckmann, "Speech for Friends and Faculty During Commencement Week Activities," Washington University, St. Louis, June 5, 1950; see MB, *Self-Portrait in Words* 1997, p. 319.
24. St. Louis 1960; Los Angeles et al. 1960–63.
25. St. Louis et al. 1984–85.
26. Zurich/St. Louis 1998–99.
27. See Cornelia Homburg, ed., *German Art Now* (London: Merrell, in association with the Saint Louis Art Museum, 2003). See also Jack Cowart and Siegfried Gohr, *Expressions: New Art from Germany: Georg Baselitz, Jörg Immendorff, Anselm Kiefer, Markus Lupertz, A. R. Penck* (Munich: Prestel, in association with the Saint Louis Art Museum, 1983).
28. MB (note 23), p. 320.

Acknowledgments

LYNETTE ROTH

My primary task as the Andrew W. Mellon Post-Doctoral Fellow in Modern Art at the Saint Louis Art Museum between 2008 and 2010 was to research and write an in-depth publication about the museum's collection of thirty-nine paintings by Max Beckmann. While many of the paintings are well known and many—such as his mysterious *Carnival Mask* or death-defying *Acrobat on the Trapeze*—have graced the covers of monographs and exhibition catalogues, never had the collection been examined in its entirety and in the context of the artist's nearly fifty-year career. Thus the book's approach is historiographical; six chronological chapters provide not only an informative framework for the Saint Louis Art Museum's holdings, but illuminate the works' role in the development of Beckmann's oeuvre and its reception.

I am grateful to Saint Louis Art Museum director Brent R. Benjamin for his support of this undertaking, apparent prior to my appointment by the display of Beckmann's *Portrait of Curt Glaser* (cat. 12) outside his office. Charlotte Eyerma oversaw my initial work on the project with wisdom and enthusiasm. Her successors, Andrew Walker and Simon Kelly, supervised it with dedication. I am grateful to them, as well as to many former colleagues at the museum: Eric Lutz and Ann-Maree Walker for our regular Tuesday Beckmann “print club”; David Conradsen, Sid Goldstein, Philip Hu, Monika Jankowiak, Judy Mann, Sydney Norton, Tricia Paik, Zoe Perkins, Matthew Robb, and Elizabeth Wyckoff for sharing their expertise and for their support; Kurt Christian and his installation team for patiently providing access to the collections, as well as excellent insights into art they know so well. Emmeline Erikson's and Janeen Turk's previous work on provenance and condition reports provided a solid basis for further research. For their contributions to the project, I am indebted to museum research assistants Amy Clark, Genny Cortinovis, Molly Moog, and Francesca Wilmott; interns Lauren Downing, Rebecca Levy, Caroline Manganaro, Pia Pocalnik, Stephanie Ruse, and Katherine Sedovic; and outside researchers Danielle Johnson and Kris Lipkowski. Special thanks go to research assistant Nathan Stobaugh, whose close attention to detail greatly benefited the individual entries and

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Such a large undertaking is, of course, the product of many years of research beyond the museum's walls. Beginning with Germany, I would first like to thank the artist's daughter-in-law Maja Beckmann and granddaughter, Mayen Beckmann, for their unwavering support of this project, for the access they gave to archival materials, and for imparting their intimate knowledge of his work. In Munich Christian Lenz, Helena Pereña, Eva Reich, and Christiane Zeiler at the Max Beckmann Archive, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, deserve special mention, as does Barbara Göpel.

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Fig. 1. St. Louis previews "Max Beckmann: A Retrospective Exhibition," City Art Museum, St. Louis, 1948. Saint Louis Art Museum Archives.

Introduction

I hope to establish a Beckmann room at the St. Louis Museum which some day will attract people from all over the world such as the Prado for El Greco and in Venice for Tintoretto.

MORTON D. MAY, 1955¹

With thirty-nine paintings by the artist, the Max Beckmann collection at the Saint Louis Art Museum is the largest in the world. The museum purchased one work early in 1946, but its holdings stem primarily from the 1983 bequest of local department-store magnate Morton D. May, who supported and befriended Beckmann during the artist's final years. Other benefactors include Louise and Joseph Pulitzer Jr.; the American artist George Rickey and his wife, Edith; and Beckmann's émigré dealer Curt Valentin. The museum also owns nearly four hundred works on paper by the artist.² As May imagined in 1955, the collection today draws researchers and visitors "from all over the world."

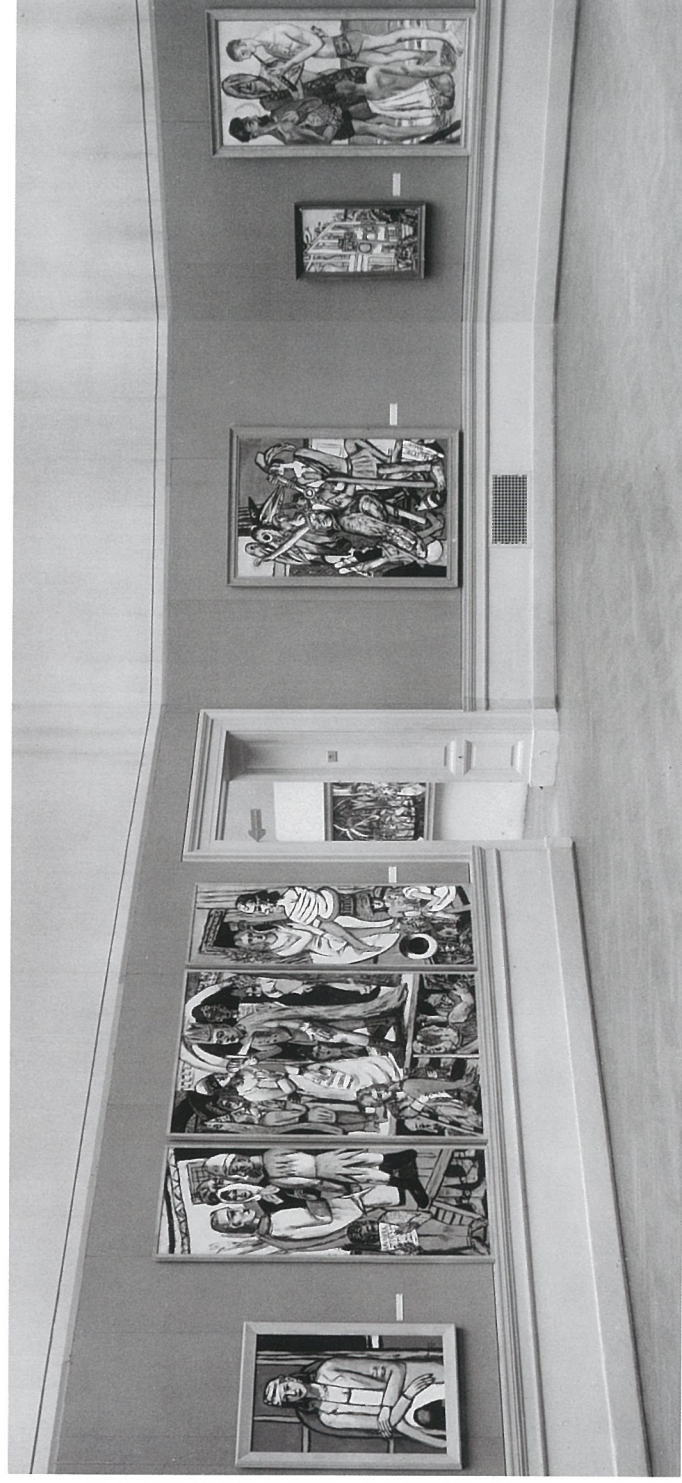
The paintings in the Saint Louis Art Museum span Beckmann's entire career, offering an overview of his life and artistic development. Born in Leipzig in 1884, the artist was at the center of the Berlin art scene prior to World War I. After the war, he lived in Frankfurt and eventually accepted a teaching position there. By the late 1920s, Beckmann had achieved considerable success in Germany and was actively seeking recognition for his art in Paris. Like many of his contemporaries, he lost his teaching post in 1933, when National Socialist cultural policy began to target those who made and supported modern art, and he returned to Berlin. His work was defamed, removed from municipal collections, and, beginning in 1937, prominently featured in the notorious traveling exhibition "Entartete Kunst" (Degenerate Art). That year Beckmann left Germany and spent the next decade living and working in exile in Amsterdam. In 1947 he accepted a teaching position in St. Louis at Washington University. He died of a heart attack in New York City only a few years later, in 1950. He was sixty-six years old.

In addition to a representative survey of Beckmann's oeuvre, the Saint Louis Art Museum collection provides

insight into the reception of his work and of modern German art in the United States during and after World War II. American institutions, museum directors and curators, and collectors such as May were major catalysts in establishing Beckmann's reputation in this country. As evidenced in an array of exhibitions and publications, in the late 1930s and early 1940s American enthusiasm for Beckmann's art, like that of many of his expressionist contemporaries, increased in inverse relationship to its defamation by the National Socialists (see Chapter 6).³ The sale abroad of work vilified by the Nazis; Beckmann's promotion by German-born dealers, headquartered above all in New York; and, finally, the emigration of the artist himself were major factors in this rise in interest as well. After the war, the American embrace of Beckmann's work also played an important role in Germany's re-engagement with his oeuvre. As Hans Belting said, "It was the Americans who rediscovered him."⁴

The City Art Museum

In May 1948, the City Art Museum, which in 1972 was renamed the Saint Louis Art Museum, held the first major exhibition of Beckmann's artwork in the United States. More than eight hundred visitors crowded into the first-floor galleries on opening night (see fig. 1).⁵ The artist and his second wife, Mathilde (Quappi) Beckmann (hereafter, Quappi Beckmann), who had recently moved to the city, were also present. Organized by the museum's director, Perry Rathbone, the selection of paintings, works on paper, and illustrated books was on view in five galleries normally dedicated to American art (see figs. 2–3). The retrospective was the largest solo exhibition at the museum since one devoted to work by Pablo Picasso was mounted a few years earlier. Rathbone later described the opening as literally "stunning" the audience. "There was almost none of the light-hearted chatter, none of the exchange of off-hand easy comment that usually introduces such an affair. Instead there was almost a hush . . . the pictures were doing the talking."⁶



Figs. 2–3. Installation views, “Max Beckmann: A Retrospective Exhibition,” City Art Museum, St. Louis, 1948. Saint Louis Art Museum Archives.

Ever since St. Louis hosted the 1904 World's Fair, which included the first twentieth-century exhibition in the United States of art from Germany, the city, with its significant German population, had been a center for the promotion of the visual art of that nation.⁷ Even prior to the 1948 retrospective, Beckmann's art had been featured in numerous exhibitions in St. Louis.⁸ In 1930, for example, the City Art Museum showcased a group of works from the annual international exhibition organized by the Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, including Beckmann's prize-winning *The Loge* (1928; Göpel 287, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart).⁹ In 1939 he was represented in a traveling exhibition highlighting the work of artists defamed by the Nazi regime.¹⁰ Rathbone, who had directed the City Art Museum since 1940, had a long-standing interest in German art. He visited Beckmann in his Amsterdam studio (see cat. 21) in 1947 to begin laying the groundwork for the retrospective exhibition before the artist ever set foot in the United States.¹¹

Despite the activities of the City Art Museum—including annual exhibitions of local artists, students, and faculty—and the strength of the fine-arts program at Washington University, St. Louisans in the 1940s were, in general, highly skeptical of modern art.¹² Shortly after Beckmann's arrival, he was asked to jury the annual Missouri exhibition, a display that, as in years past, caused considerable discussion in the community for its modernist tendencies.¹³ The Pulitzer Publishing Company launched the first television broadcast in the city in February 1947, and from the outset, its station, KSD-TV—one



Fig. 5. Marsden Hartley (American; 1877–1943). *Driftwood on the Bagaduce*, 1939–40. Oil on canvas; 76.6 x 102 cm. Saint Louis Art Museum, gift of Morton D. May, 387:1955.

of only seven in the country at that time—brought broadcasting technology to bear on the visual arts by promoting them to a growing audience. In a weekly program, the City Art Museum held interviews, showed and discussed artworks, and invited artists (including Beckmann's close St. Louis colleague Fred Conway; see cat. 34) to demonstrate techniques live in the studio.¹⁴ Even though the station's broadcasting radius was only sixty-five miles, Rathbone wrote enthusiastically about the initiative's effectiveness.¹⁵ A program broadcast from the museum's galleries about the exhibition "40 Masterpieces from the Collection of the City Art Museum," which included Beckmann's *Young Men by the Sea* (cat. 21), was the first of its kind. "The Director and a member of the staff discussed the exhibition informally, moving from picture to picture, actually giving the audience the impression of a personal visit to the gallery."¹⁶

One year after KSD-TV was launched, Rathbone appeared with Beckmann and his wife on the station to discuss the artist's work and promote the 1948 retrospective (see fig. 4).¹⁷ The exhibition signaled St. Louis as a forerunner in the recognition and promotion of Beckmann's art in America. After a successful run in St. Louis, the exhibition was shown at seven venues across the country: Detroit, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Baltimore, Cambridge, Minneapolis, and Boulder. As the exhibition traveled widely, so did the artist. In just three years, Beckmann was a guest lecturer and instructor at numerous institutions nationwide, from Mills College in California to the Boston Museum School. The artist's writings of these years—his three-part lecture "Letters to a Woman Painter," in particular—were not only important pedagogical resources but became central to interpretations of his art.¹⁸ The campaign to create an American public for modern art through exhibitions, new technologies, and educational initiatives all enhanced Beckmann's growing reputation.

KSD-TV	
The St. Louis Post-Dispatch Television Station	
PROGRAM SCHEDULE	
WEEK OF MAY 17, 1948	
Monday, May 17	
3:00	Associated Press News and Views.
3:15	"World Glimpses—Mexico" (Film).
3:25	Carl McIntire's "Hobby Showcase."
3:40	"Square Dance Medley" (Film).
3:50	Russ David Entertains.
4:05	Musical Film.
4:10	Man on the Street Interviews.
4:20	Animated Cartoon.
4:30 to 5:00	Ruth Hughes' "Guest Register"—Philco Dealers.
7:00	"Television Teen Town," starring Russ Severin —Stewart-Warner Dealers.
7:40	Animated Cartoon.
7:50	Fox Movietone Newsreel—Camel Cigarettes.
8:00	"Tele-Quiz-Calls," with Harry Gibbs and Dottie Bennett —Union Electric Company.
8:30	"Revenge on the Range" (Film).
8:40	Bob Ingham's Sports Interviews.
8:50	Film.
9:00	Russ David's "Teen Bar"—Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company.
9:15	NBC Television Newsreel.
9:30	Associated Press News and Views.
9:40	Film.
9:50 to 10:00	City Art Museum Program—Mr. & Mrs. Max Beckmann with Perry Rathbone.

Fig. 4. KSD-TV Program Schedule, Week of May 17, 1948. Detail. KSD-TV Channel 5 Archives, St. Louis.

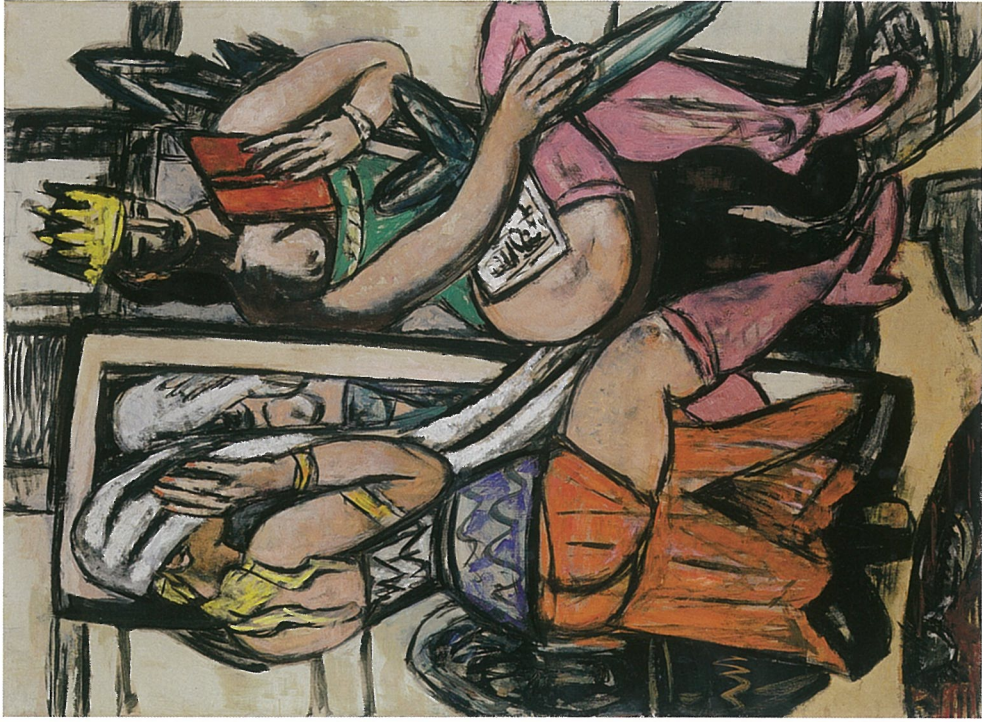


Fig. 6. Max Beckmann. *The Actresses*, 1946. Oil on canvas; 160 x 120 cm. Göpel 728. Kunsthaus Zurich.

“Buster plus Beckmann: Magnificence!”¹⁹

When Beckmann arrived in St. Louis, collections of modern art in the city were still a relatively recent phenomenon.²⁰ Awareness of modern German art had grown steadily since the late 1930s, but the majority of American museums and collectors still privileged French art. Not long after the Beckmanns settled in St. Louis, the artist wrote to Minna Beckmann-Tube, his first wife, about the city being a stronghold for the “French moderns” Georges Braque, Picasso, and Georges Rouault.²¹ While Beckmann was dismayed that buyers paid significantly less for his art than that of his Gallic contemporaries, the lower prices of his works contributed to their salability.²² Despite the incredible lengths to which May went during his lifetime to promote modern German art, he nonetheless claimed, “I don’t necessarily like the Germans better than the best of the French . . . but I was able to collect the Germans because I was the only one interested in them for years.”²³

Founded in 1877 by David A. May, a German-Jewish immigrant, the May Department Stores Company—along with its local flagship store, Famous-Barr—was a St. Louis institution by the 1940s.²⁴ Born in 1914, the founder’s grandson Morton D. May, known as “Buster,” quickly rose through the ranks of the business to become general manager of the Famous-Barr operation in St. Louis in 1950 and, just one year later, president of the May Company. May’s interest in art collecting began in 1941, when he built his first home and “began to acquire a few little things to fill it.”²⁵ The International Style residence, since destroyed, was designed by Chicago architect Samuel A. Marx. Marx, who was married to May’s aunt Florene, was also



Fig. 7. Pablo Picasso (Spanish; 1881–1973). *Pitcher and Fruit Bowl*, 1931. Oil on canvas; 130.2 x 194.9 cm. Saint Louis Art Museum, bequest of Morton D. May, 932:1983.

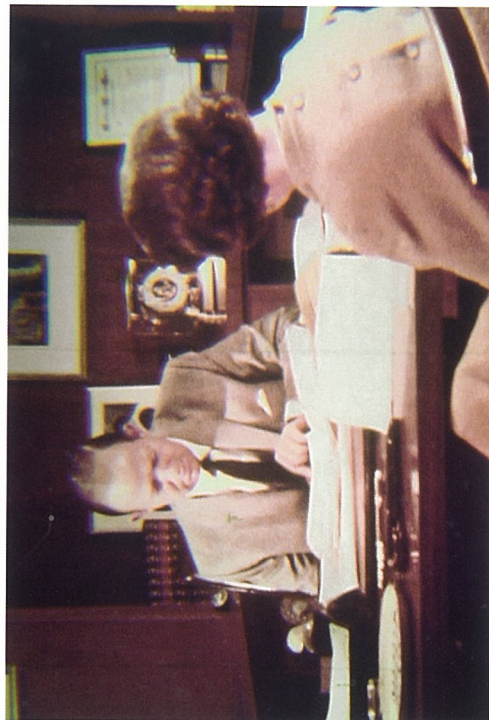


Fig. 8. "Man of the Year: Morton D. May," [St. Louis] *Globe-Democrat Sunday Magazine*, December 27, 1959. St. Louis Mercantile Library, University of Missouri-St. Louis.

a collector and inspired the young man to buy pre-Columbian art for the new residence.²⁶ It was only after serving in the navy during World War II that May felt he "really started to build a collection."²⁷ Among the artists represented in May's collection were St. Louisan Joe Jones, American modernists Stuart Davis, Marsden Hartley (see fig. 5), and Karl Knaths, as well as the Mexican painter Rufino Tamayo, whose work was popular among St. Louis collectors of the period.²⁸ Even though the walls of May's house were soon filled, he continued to collect. The painter Maurice Freedman—who had seen a major Beckmann retrospective in Paris in 1931 (see Chapter 3)—was the first to suggest to May that he consider the art of the German painter for his collection.²⁹ "Beckmann was virtually unknown in this country," May later recalled, "so we had a hard time finding his work."³⁰ A New York gallery that did feature modern German art was J. B. Neumann's New Art Circle. One of Beckmann's dealers in Germany, since 1923 Neumann had avidly promoted the artist in the United States.³¹ In 1948 May saw a Beckmann canvas, along with eight others by expressionist painters, at Neumann's gallery, but he

bought nothing.³² Rather, that year he made his first purchase of work by the artist, *The Actresses* (fig. 6), from Curt Valentin's Buchholz Gallery, also in New York.³³ Valentin, like Neumann, was Jewish; he left Berlin for New York in 1937, five years after Neumann had settled there permanently. Both dealers played a key role in establishing an American market for Beckmann's art. Of course, at this time May's reputation as a collector of German art was not yet established. Upon hearing that the retailer had purchased *The Actresses*, Beckmann referred to him in his diary as "Picassomay," referencing the collector's acquisition, a few months earlier, of the Spanish artist's *Pitcher and Fruit Bowl* (fig. 7).³⁴

In 1949, in order to meet Beckmann in person, May arranged for him to do his portrait (cat. 32). The retailer also began to paint around this time.³⁵ "With Beckmann's encouragement I began painting myself, and after the portrait was finished he became so interested in my work that he volunteered to come to my studio once a week to criticize my paintings."³⁶ An accomplished photographer, May referred to himself as an "avid Sunday painter," admitting that he had "little technical



Figs. 9, 10, 11. Top to bottom: Morton D. May; May in his studio, Clayton, Missouri; and May in his office at the May Department Stores Company, St. Louis. Stills from the film by Charles Guggenheim (American; 1924–2002), *German Expressionism in the New World*, 1964. Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, Berlin.

skill.”³⁷ The sessions, or “corrections,” as Beckmann called them, continued even after the artist left St. Louis for New York later that year (see fig. 35/1). May, who often went to New York on business, would take several canvases on the plane for the artist to critique, often also buying new paintings by Beckmann during these visits.

After Beckmann’s death, May continued to make acquisitions, developing a reputation as the foremost American private collector of modern German art, with an emphasis on Beckmann and Brücke expressionists. By 1955 May owned nineteen Beckmann paintings, and, by the following year, twenty-six.³⁸ A year and a half later, his Beckmann collection totaled thirty-eight, with canvases ranging in date from 1908 to 1950, the last year of the artist’s life.³⁹ As May’s collection grew, he stored a large portion of it on the walls of a carriage house on his new suburban Clayton property, which also functioned as his painting studio.⁴⁰ When in 1959 May was named the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*’s “Man of the Year” for “services in [sic] behalf of the civic, cultural, recreational, and economic betterment” of St. Louis, the newspaper published a photograph of him at his easel surrounded by some of the most significant German paintings of the twentieth century (fig. 8).⁴¹

German Expressionism in the “New World”

In 1964 a leading documentary filmmaker, Charles Guggenheim, made *German Expressionism in the New World*. The film traces the reception of Beckmann in the United States, beginning with the failure of his first solo exhibition (in 1927 at Neumann’s New York gallery) to garner attention for the artist. While Beckmann’s reputation in the United States had grown steadily beginning in the late 1930s, the film cites the 1948 St. Louis retrospective as having essentially turned the tide for the painter and, with him, his contemporaries.⁴² Guggenheim’s studio produced at least two scripts for the feature. An initial draft reveals that the film was to focus as well on other key American supporters, such as Rathbone and Alfred H. Barr Jr., director of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, from its founding in 1929 to 1943. Barr’s groundbreaking 1931 exhibition “German Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art” featured eight paintings by Beckmann. Edited down by slightly more than half by its sponsor, the Federal Republic of Germany, the film’s final version instead presents May as the personification of American enthusiasm for Beckmann in particular and for modern German art in general.⁴³ May is seen examining slides as a collector/connoisseur (fig. 9), at his easel as an artist/pupil (fig. 10), and in his office as a businessman/patron (fig. 11).

May did not read German and thus acquired knowledge of German artists and movements from conversations with