

PRESS INFORMATION

STÄDEL'S BECKMANN / BECKMANN'S STÄDEL: THE FRANKFURT YEARS

EXTENDED TO 29 AUGUST 2021

Exhibition annex, upper level

Frankfurt am Main, 8 March 2021. Max Beckmann (1884 –1950) is associated with Frankfurt and the Städel Museum like scarcely any other artist. He spent the longest and most important phase of his life in Frankfurt, and it was here that he produced a large share of his most important works and developed his characteristic style. The Städel Museum has been dedicated to collecting and studying his oeuvre for more than a century. It has continually acquired works by the artist since 1918 and today has one of the world's most extensive Beckmann collections to call its own.

One of the artist's most well-known and most important works, the *Self-Portrait with Champagne Glass* (1919), has recently been secured for the Städel. This icon of modern art was acquired with support from the Städtischer Museums-Verein, the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States as well as five private donors. In honour of the new acquisition, the museum is devoting a special presentation of selected paintings, works on paper and documentary material to its Beckmann holdings and the artist's Frankfurt years. The *Self-Portrait with Champagne Glass* will be the exhibition's centrepiece.

Max Beckmann came to the city on the Main in 1915, traumatized by his experiences as a medical orderly in World War I. In 1925, the city appointed him head of a master class at the municipal school of arts and crafts. Numerous views of Frankfurt, self-portraits and portraits of friends and acquaintances testify to his close ties to the city. During his Frankfurt phase, his works were presented here in eighteen solo and group exhibitions, and in 1929, the city awarded him its Grand Prize of Honour. After the National Socialists came to power in 1933, Beckmann was dismissed from his

**Städtisches Kunstinstitut
und Städtische Galerie**

Dürerstraße 2
60596 Frankfurt am Main
Phone +49(0)69-605098-268
Fax +49(0)69-605098-188
presse@staedelmuseum.de
www.staedelmuseum.de/en

PRESSEDOWNLOADS
newsroom.staedelmuseum.de/en

PRESS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Pamela Rohde
Phone +49(0)69-605098-170
rohde@staedelmuseum.de

Jannikhe Möller
Phone +49(0)69-605098-195
moeller@staedelmuseum.de

Franziska von Plocki
Phone +49(0)69-605098-268
plocki@staedelmuseum.de

Susanne Hafner
Phone +49(0)69-605098-212
hafner@staedelmuseum.de

teaching position and compelled to leave Frankfurt. In 1933, vilified as a “degenerate artist”, he fled to Amsterdam. He died in New York in 1950.

“The collection and study of the art of Max Beckmann has been a tradition at the Städel Museum for more than a hundred years. It is an extraordinary stroke of fortune that, thanks to the overwhelming joint dedication of private and public sponsors, his *Self-Portrait with Champagne Glass* has recently been purchased for the museum. The unique acquisition of this once-in-a-century work is one more testimony to the Städel’s deep sense of obligation to Beckmann’s work. With our special presentation, we would like to offer our visitors insights into the close bond that connects the Städel Museum and the city of Frankfurt with Max Beckmann”, commented Städel director Philipp Demandt.

A preview of the special presentation

The show “STÄDEL’S BECKMANN / BECKMANN’S STÄDEL: The Frankfurt Years” is divided into three sections, of which the first revolves around a theme of key importance to the artist: the self-portrait. Beckmann’s profound preoccupation with this genre is virtually unmatched among the exponents of classical modern art. He produced self-portraits in mediums ranging from painting and drawing to printmaking and even sculpture. As is evident in the selected examples on view here, self-likenesses accompanied his artistic career from his early to his late work and mirror decisive phases of his development. The highlight of this section is the Städel’s most recent acquisition, the *Self-Portrait with Champagne Glass*. Painted in 1919, it is an allegory of the interwar period and the Weimar Republic. It is the first of the artist’s self-likenesses to show him as an elegant dandy in a tuxedo at the bar of a nightclub, presumably in the Hotel Frankfurter Hof, where, according to his contemporaries, his drink of choice was champagne.

In addition to the many self-portraits depicting Beckmann as the main figure, there are also a large number of scenic depictions. Like an actor, he performs on the stages of his enigmatically symbolic compositions, playing a circus director as in the painting *The Circus Carriage* (1940), a barker as in the *Hell* series (1919), the biblical Adam as in the sculpture *Adam and Eve* (1936/1979), a casual observer, etc. In these works he combined contemporary events with general, timeless and existential themes, because self-portraiture meant more to Beckmann than just the portrayal of his personal frame of mind. It also helped him define his role as an artist in society and served him as a means of addressing philosophical issues and fundamental human conflicts, as in the drypoint etching *Evening (Self-Portrait with the Battenbergs)* (1916). The print shows the couple Heinrich (Ugi) and Frieda (Fridel)

Battenberg, who gave the artist shelter when he came to Frankfurt after serving in the war. Beckmann's demonic-looking face pushes itself between them like a wedge in their peaceful togetherness as a twosome.

This special function of the self-portrait is also evident in the artist's key work of printmaking, *Hell* (1919), featured in the second section of the show. By way of drawing, etching and lithography, Beckmann had found his way to a distinctive new formal language. Angular, reductive forms had come to define the pictorial structure. The artist broke up the space in virtually cubist manner, introducing perspectival warps and distorted dimensions that create a quality of dynamic instability. Executed the same year as the *Self-Portrait with Champagne Glass* – and exhibiting close formal links to that work –, the lithographic cycle *Hell* reflects Beckmann's experience of a post-war world come apart at the seams. The title page, displaying a self-portrait of the artist as a funfair crier, is followed by ten enigmatic scenes of a manmade 'hell' interweaving symbolic/allegorical elements with references to real contemporary events and venues, for example the assassination of Rosa Luxemburg and the Frankfurt nightclub "Malepartus". Beckmann executed the unusually large-scale *Hell* compositions in chalk on paper. These drawings were then transferred to lithographic stones by way of a special process and, on commission from the gallerist J. B. Neumann, printed by the C. Naumann company in Frankfurt.

The third section of the presentation is devoted to Beckmann's life in Frankfurt. A map of the city shows not only where Beckmann lived and worked, but also where he liked to spend leisure time and where his most important contacts were to be found. It was in the city on the Main that the artist developed to become an artist of international standing. He had connections to leading figures of Frankfurt's press, industry and cultural politics. His circle of friends and collectors included the industrialists Walter and Käthe Carl, the publisher Heinrich Simon, then Städel director Georg Swarzenski, the journalist and author Benno Reifenberg, the journalist Käthe von Porada, the patron of the arts Lilly von Schnitzler, the art historian Fritz Wichert and many others. This section of the show accordingly features such works as the painted *Portrait of the Carl Couple* (1918), the lithograph *Portrait of Georg Swarzenski* (1921) and historical photographs of sites in Frankfurt. On his daily walks, the artist moreover explored the city, which he portrayed in a striking series of townscapes such as *Ice on the River* (1923) and *The Synagogue in Frankfurt am Main* (1919).

During the artist's years in Frankfurt, the Städel Museum amassed the world's largest public Beckmann collection. It acquired the majority of the works directly from his studio and with municipal funds. Georg Swarzenski, the director of the Städel at the time, first purchased works by Beckmann in 1918 for the Städtische Galerie – the municipal gallery affiliated with the Städel. By 1931, Swarzenski had expanded the contemporary collection to encompass a total of thirteen paintings and more than a hundred works on paper by the artist. Once the Nazis were in power, however, the museum was compelled to remove Beckmann's paintings from its walls and relegate them to storage. Then, in the summer of 1937, nearly the entire Beckmann holdings were confiscated by the Reich ministry of propaganda as part of the "Degenerate Art" campaign. After World War II, Swarzenski's successor Ernst Holzinger and Günther Franke – Beckmann's gallerist at the time – assembled works from private collections to stage a Beckmann exhibition. Franke donated several prints to the Städel on the occasion. A major milestone in the museum's endeavour to reconstruct its lost Beckmann holdings was the acquisition of nearly 170 works on paper from the large print collection of the artist's friends Fridel and Ugi Battenberg in 1949. One year after the artist's death, the city of Frankfurt made its first post-war purchase of a Beckmann painting – the *Circus Carriage* (1940). The Städel has continued to expand its Beckmann collection ever since. Comprising 11 paintings, 2 sculptures, and several hundred works on paper, this collection is today once again one of the world's largest.

Curators: Dr. Alexander Eiling (Head of the Collection of Modern Art, Städel Museum), Dr. Regina Freyberger (Head of the Department of Prints and Drawings from 1750, Städel Museum), Dr. Iris Schmeisser (Head of Provenance Research and the Historical Archive, Städel Museum)

**STÄDEL'S BECKMANN / BECKMANN'S STÄDEL:
THE FRANKFURT YEARS**

Exhibition dates: 9 December 2020 to 5 April 2021 – extended to 29 August 2021

Curators: Dr. Alexander Eiling (Head of the Collection of Modern Art, Städel Museum), Dr. Regina Freyberger (Head of the Department of Prints and Drawings from 1750, Städel Museum), Dr. Iris Schmeisser (Head of Provenance Research and the Historical Archive, Städel Museum)

Location: Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

Information: www.staedelmuseum.de

Visitor services: +49(0)69-605098-200, info@staedelmuseum.de

Opening hours: Tue, Wed, Fri, Sat, Sun + holidays 10.00 am–6.00 pm, Thu 10.00 am–9.00 pm

Admission: 14 EUR; free for children under 12

Advance ticket sales: shop.staedelmuseum.de

Catalogue: A catalogue edited by Alexander Eiling, Regina Freyberger and Iris Schmeisser is being published in conjunction with the exhibition. With forewords by Sylvia von Metzler and Philipp Demandt, 94 pages, 15 EUR

Podcast STÄDEL MIXTAPE: The first episode of the new podcast STÄDEL MIXTAPE is dedicated to art and cultural historical questions concerning Beckmann's "Self-Portrait with Champagne Glass" and combines them with a suitable soundtrack. To be found everywhere where podcasts are available and on mixtape.staedelmuseum.de (in German)

Audio tracks on Max Beckmann: Learn more about the six most important Beckmann works in the Städel collection with the aid of texts, images and audio tracks available now on our Highlight App, staedelmuseum.de/app-offer

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