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| **Beckmann, Max** |
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| A painter, printmaker, sculptor, and writer, Max Beckmann achieved success at an early age. After studying art in Weimar and spending some months in Paris, Beckmann moved to Berlin in late 1904. Participating in an art competition there, he was awarded an opportunity to study in Florence. His prize-winning painting *Young Men by the Sea* was bought by the Weimar Museum in 1905, an unprecedented occurrence for a twenty-year-old painter.  Beckmann was admitted to the Berlin Secession in 1906 and took part in their annual exhibitions to favourable response. He worked in an academic style, painting melodramatic renditions of disasters such as the Messina earthquake in 1910, and the sinking of the Titanic in 1912, or mythological or biblical scenes. |
| Born: 1884–LEIPZIG; Died: 1950–NEW YORK  A painter, printmaker, sculptor, and writer, Max Beckmann achieved success at an early age. After studying art in Weimar and spending some months in Paris, Beckmann moved to Berlin in late 1904. Participating in an art competition there, he was awarded an opportunity to study in Florence. His prize-winning painting *Young Men by the Sea,* was bought by the Weimar Museum in 1905, an unprecedented occurrence for a twenty-year-old painter.  Beckmann was admitted to the Berlin Secession in 1906 and took part in their annual exhibitions to favourable response. He worked in an academic style, painting melodramatic renditions of disasters such as the Messina earthquake in 1910, and the sinking of the Titanic in 1912, or mythological or biblical scenes.  Until 1913, Beckmann’s work was not considered avant-garde. A controversy between him and Franz Marc in 1912 regarding the merits of contemporary art played out in the periodical *Pan,* placing Beckmann on the side of the conservative artistic establishment.  Beckmann never wanted to be classified with the Expressionists—or to be a part of any group or trend. Yet his later work, in which he developed his personal, subjective, symbolic world, must be considered with the Expressionist movement.  Beckmann enlisted in the medical corps during World War I. His war experiences wrought an enormous change in his imagery, ridding it of all sentimentality, melodrama and conventional perspective, which is replaced by shallow space; his work became simpler, more concentrated and restrained.  In 1915, Max Beckmann suffered a nervous breakdown as a result of his military service and was sent to a convalescent hospital in Frankfurt am Main. He developed an interest in the art of the Middle Ages, particularly Grünewald’s Isenheim Altarpiece and the work of Hieronymus Bosch.  He remained in Frankfurt for twenty years. In the post-war period, his style evolved to a verism that is forthright, harsh, and disillusioned.  In the subsequent thirty years, Beckmann created his own myths—personal, complicated, and enigmatic. His convictions regarding the existential tragedy of human life affected his symbols and his use of space, and caused his imagery to increase in complexity and elaboration.  Beckmann reached the height of popularity during the years 1924–1930. A monograph (the second in his brief career to date) by the leading critics Glaser, Meier-Graefe, Fraenger, and Hausenstein was published in 1924; the dealer I.B. Neumann signed Beckmann to a three-year contract in July 1925, and later that year he became a master teacher at the Städelschule in Frankfurt. In 1928, the first museum retrospective of his work was organized in Mannheim, and the Nationalgalerie in Berlin purchased his *Self-Portrait in Tuxedo.* Beckmann received fourth honourable mention at the Carnegie International in the US in 1929. Another retrospective followed in Basel and Zurich, and his first solo exhibition in Paris opened at the Galerie de la Renaissance. The critic for *Le Figaro* called him a “German Picasso.”  But in March 1933, under the National Socialist regime, Max Beckmann was dismissed from his teaching post at the Städelschule. Also in 1933, a gallery devoted to his paintings at the Kronprinzenpalais in Berlin was closed. Paintings and prints from throughout his career were included in the Degenerate Art Exhibition organized by the Nazis in 1937, which signaled the end of his career in Germany.  Beckmann and his wife fled to Amsterdam, and after the difficult war years in Holland immigrated to the United States in 1947. There Beckmann taught at Washington University in St. Louis. In 1949, he became professor of painting and drawing at the Brooklyn Museum School of Art in New York, where he remained until his death on December 27, 1950. References (Stephanie Barron)  (Selz) |
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