

---

Potsdam, January 15, 2018

***Max Beckmann: The World as a Stage***

February 24 to June 10, 2018

**From the early 1920s the work of Max Beckmann (1884–1950) was characterized by motifs dealing with performers: vaudeville and fun fair acts, acrobats, clowns, and actors. Beckmann viewed this thematic area as an expression of the metaphorical concept of the world as a stage, thereby positioning his work in line with the Baroque tradition that viewed world events as a play directed by a higher power. *Max Beckmann: The World as a Stage* is the first exhibition to focus on this central theme in the work of the painter.**

Max Beckmann is one of the exceptional painters of Modern Art. In the 1920s he was associated with New Objectivity. Later, he was classified as an Expressionist, a movement that received early international notice, through his use of black contours and glowing colors. Many of his famous triptychs are held in museums in the USA. Among others this includes the Actors triptych from the Fogg Museum at Harvard University, which is a centerpiece of the new exhibition at the Museum Barberini.

Max Beckmann's paintings, sculptures, and prints frequently depict scenes that occur on stage or behind the scenes. These include vaudeville and circus acts, actors in their dressing rooms, or showmen at fun fairs. In addition, Beckmann created self-portraits showing himself in the guise of a clown or performer. Picasso also placed artists among travelling performers to demonstrate how they were able to turn their unerring gaze on humanity from the margins of society.

For Beckmann, the role of spectator was also an opportunity to comment on world events and process his own personal experiences. The painter felt obligated to be a fair-minded commentator, a contemporary who aspired to illustrate life on the streets and reveal social discrepancies. He had observed great suffering as a medic in the First World War. He belonged to a generation that had lost its belief in the governing order. They called into question personal sovereignty, which Beckmann expressed in the figure of the fool. With this comparison, he captured the essence of a generation that had experienced little choice in their fate and who questioned the notion of free will.

In light of his personal experiences and the dramatic events taking place on the world stage—in 1933 he was dismissed from his teaching position at the Städelschule in Frankfurt, in 1937 he went into exile in Amsterdam—Beckmann viewed the world as a stage that symbolized current events. He searched for truth behind the masquerade. Circuses and the theater provided him with a template: Life is a balancing act for everyone—not just trapeze artists, and actors are not the only ones who play various roles.

---

In addition to Beckmann's motifs, his composition and painting techniques are evidence of his pageantry. In the 1920s, he began to construct his images like proscenium arch theaters. Figures and objects protruded out toward the viewer against a flat plane. The more brilliant the colors and the freer the painting style, the more planar and modern the images. He highlighted the physical in his expressive paintings. Through the sculptural, modelled forms, the motifs speak directly to the viewer's senses. Beckmann developed his own way of addressing his audience through the use of various gestures and provocative themes. They challenge the viewer, retaining their relevance to the present day.

The exhibition brings together 112 loans from museums and private collections in Germany and abroad including the Nationalgalerie in Berlin, the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, the Tate, London, and the Saint Louis Art Museum. Among the works on display are also two large triptychs from American collections which have rarely been shown in Europe.

The exhibition is held in cooperation with the Kunsthalle Bremen, which has one of the largest Beckmann collections in Germany. The exhibition can be seen there from Sept. 30, 2017 to Feb. 4, 2018.

Exhibition curators are Dr. Eva Fischer-Hausdorf, Curator of the Kunsthalle Bremen and Dr. Ortrud Westheider, Director of the Museum Barberini.

The catalogue is based on an academic conference which was held on March 29, 2017 at the Museum Barberini. It was published by Prestel Verlag and includes 224 pages with essays by Dr. Eva Fischer-Hausdorf, Dr. Sebastian Karnatz, Prof. Dr. Irene Pieper, Dr. Lynette Roth, Dr. Ortrud Westheider, and Dr. Christiane Zeiller among others. The catalogue is available at the museum shop for € 29.00 and from regular booksellers for € 39.95.

**Press contact:**

Achim Klapp, Marte Kräher  
Museum Barberini  
Humboldtstr. 5–6, 14467 Potsdam, Germany  
T +49 331 236014 305/308  
presse@museum-barberini.com  
www.museum-barberini.com