

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
January 1995

MAX BECKMANN PRINTS

January 14 - May 9, 1995

The graphic work of Max Beckmann (1884-1950), which includes some of the most compelling prints of the twentieth century, is the subject of an exhibition on view at The Museum of Modern Art from January 14 through May 9, 1995. Organized by Wendy Weitman, Associate Curator, Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, The Museum of Modern Art, and James L. Fisher, former Curator, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, the exhibition comprises work from all periods of Beckmann's printmaking career, encompassing lithographs, drypoints, and woodcuts. The eighty-four prints are drawn entirely from the collection of The Museum of Modern Art.

In his earliest prints -- lithographs in a Post-Impressionist style -- Beckmann depicted mythological or Biblical scenes, many of which probe the complex and tension-filled relationship between men and women. In the early 1910s, the artist turned to life in Berlin as his subject and continued to explore this recurrent issue in a contemporary context.

A year in the army medical corps in 1914-15 proved to be a watershed in Beckmann's life and art. Following the experience of war, Beckmann began to focus with great intensity of vision on critical issues that may be emblematic of modern life: not only the inherent tension between men and women, but also the brutality of humanity, the alienation of the individual, and Beckmann's

- more -

own underlying belief that life itself is a tragicomic theater. It is in excruciating scenes in war hospitals that the theme of the brutality of humanity is first encountered. Beckmann's once-vital figures were now rendered with mannerist distortion, and the once-coherent space of his compositions yielded to a drastically foreshortened perspective. This change in style was accompanied by a change in medium from lithography to drypoint. The directness and angular strokes of this technique enabled Beckmann to achieve the harsh, jarring effects he now preferred.

Beckmann used the narrative potential of the portfolio to create powerful allegories. His most ambitious series, *Hell* (1919), comprises ten works that vividly depict the decadence of Berlin between the wars. This rare set is shown in its entirety in the exhibition. Beckmann's ongoing fascination with cabaret and carnival life is evident in the 1921 portfolio *Annual Fair*, a set of ten drypoints.

Although Beckmann did not begin to make woodcuts until 1920, and only produced nineteen of them, they are among his most evocative prints. He used the crudeness, immediacy, and expressionist potential of the medium to produce works that are stark and confrontational. The culmination of these works is also the largest in format: *In the Hotel (Group Portrait, Eden Bar)*, of 1924, an intimate and critical portrayal of German café society.

During the rest of his career, including his years in the United States (1947-50), Beckmann concentrated on painting. On view in the exhibition are two lithographs from his last major printmaking endeavor, the 1946 portfolio *Day and Dream*.

MAX BECKMANN PRINTS not only illuminates a highly personal vision of life, but shows us that the ideas and issues that Beckmann probed with vigor and an unstinting eye are germane to life today.

Prior to its New York showing, **MAX BECKMANN PRINTS** traveled to the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth; the Center for the Fine Arts, Miami; The Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts; and the Musée du Québec, Canada.

* * *

PUBLICATION

Max Beckmann Prints from The Museum of Modern Art, by Wendy Weitman and James L. Fisher. 104 pages. 56 black-and-white illustrations. Published by the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Paperbound, \$19.95, distributed in the United States and Canada by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, and elsewhere by Thames and Hudson, Ltd., London; available in The MoMA Book Store.

No. 6

For further information or photographic materials, contact Mary-Anne Smith, the Department of Public Information, 212/708-9750.