

## CONTEMPORARY FINE ARTS

### MAX BECKMANN IN DIALOGUE

# CECILY BROWN, ELLA KRUGLYANSKAYA, DANA SCHUTZ

8 JUNE – 13 JULY 2019

**Max Beckmann's** *Die Walküre* ("The Valkyrie") is exemplary of the dialogue this exhibition stages. One of the first works he painted after arriving in the United States in 1948, it depicts Beckmann's first wife Minna Tube, who was an opera singer, as the lead in Wagner's opera *Die Walküre*. The eponymous painting of a warrior opera singer was an emancipated portrait of a woman for the time.

United States-based artists Cecily Brown, Ella Kruglyanskaya and Dana Schutz, who have each been great admirers of Max Beckmann since the beginning of their careers, respond here to the work of that "most German of all painters," as Beckmann was often called abroad. We are incredibly grateful to the institutional and private collection loans that have made this dialogue between Beckmann and three of the most exciting painters working today possible.

Shortly after his arrival in the United States, Max Beckmann wrote his "Three Letters to a Woman Painter", which he delivered to the students of Stephens College in Missouri. Here, three women painters, two generations later, pen a response. This dialogue is particularly compelling as Beckmann's influence is not overtly apparent in Brown, Kruglyanskaya and Schutz's work and each approaches his oeuvre in ways as dramatically distinct as their own practices.

The exhibition is co-organized with Siegfried Gohr, the former Director of Cologne's Ludwig Museum and curator of numerous institutional Max Beckmann exhibitions. A catalogue published by Snoeck Publishing with texts by Siegfried Gohr, Camila McHugh and Helene Hegemann and acknowledgements from Nicole Hackert will be released later this summer.

**Cecily Brown** takes Beckmann's use of the color black, with which he started contouring his figures in the late 1920s, as the starting point for her works. Beckmann's influence is present here in the brutal, almost hellish, atmosphere of her dark canvases. She calls them dark paintings for dark times. In her triptych *Green Grow the Lilacs but Lavender's Blue* she returns to the format which Beckmann began using in Berlin in 1937 and continued in the United States, to realize his most ambitious pictorial projects. For both artists, the canvas becomes a stage where tragedy and comedy unfold, which the triptych as a typical altar-piece form facilitates. In a selection of Brown's early sketches and watercolors on paper from 2012 she works directly from a handful of Beckmann triptychs held in American public collections, learning Beckmann's figures in motion and making them her own.

**Ella Kruglyanskaya's** women exude vitality: the canvas, their clothes, their curves, can barely contain them. This tension, almost a threat of explosion, is also a characteristic of Beckmann's later works. Her ladies sipping coffee, gaze askance, could be the revenants of Beckmann's many bar and café scenes. Kruglyanskaya's *Art Wench*, *Brunette* gussied up in a dirndl greets Beckmann's many women – certainly the favourite subject of each – and the painter himself at the easel in his *Self-portrait in green with green shirt*. There is something just slightly off about her voluptuous women: they are caricatures that just barely slip out of their category. She flirts with bad taste, toes the line of cliché. Is she a feminist considering psychosocial female behaviour or a formalist addressing the history of painting? Both artists are drawn to the performativity of feminine self-presentation, but Kruglyanskaya raises questions of protagonism and projection. In a playful jab, she titles a work on paper, *Outdated Fantasies*.

**Dana Schutz** draws upon Beckmann's strongly contoured figures in tight pictorial spaces to pile up the characters of her own comic-grotesque phantasmagoria. In *Mid-Day*, she brings a number of Beckmann's recurrent motifs together to jostle in a crowded boat. We see direct reference to Beckmann's *Sleeping Woman*, also on view in the exhibition, and to his triptych *Temptation*, held by the Bavarian State Painting Collection in Munich. Beckmann returned again and again to the theme of the crossing and forced departure, which sees renewed relevance in recent years. With her two portraits *The Traveler* and *Woman with a Dog*, she draws on a genre essential to Beckmann's work. The artists also share a passion for printmaking and a selection of their etchings are on view.

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