





Eugen Blume **A tense calm in exile – the beach as a stage for life's uncertain twists**



Among the magnificent paintings created during Beckmann's Amsterdam period, the small-format image *Hängematte* of a woman reclining in a suspended hammock (Tiedemann 622) hardly seems to carry much weight. Erhard Göpel – contemporary witness, friend of the artist, and deeply knowledgeable connoisseur of his oeuvre – couriered this small work into safekeeping in 1943. What was it about the picture that so interested this man, whom Beckmann valued highly as a sounding board? Being as familiar with Beckmann's visual vocabulary as he was, he must have been intrigued by this bold composition. Although we cannot properly describe it as a sketch or draft, the work comes across as a trial run for a larger version. With its sense of tension and spatial accentuation, the image exerts a surprisingly monumental effect. Possibly, this was the harbinger of a new conception of form.

On a hammock, hung between two posts on the beach, reclines a woman covered with a beach towel, her breasts exposed and her arms folded beneath her head. Her body, all the way to her feet arranged in parallel, is aligned with the curve of her hanging bed. We may not notice him at first, but behind her to the left is a man lying in a deck chair under an open beach umbrella. He, too, has his arms behind his head and his legs stretched out long before him. No doubt, this is a couple, possibly even Beckmann and his wife, enjoying one of the beaches of Zandvoort or Scheveningen. These resort towns near Amsterdam were recurring motifs for Beckmann during his exile in Holland, as well as the places where he could relax and unwind. On September 3rd, 1942, the year of the painting, he noted in his diary, "Was in Zandvoort by myself, felt fresh and almost young again like I haven't in a long time. Too bad you can't hold on to that." Perhaps it was during one of these trips to the beach that Beckmann observed the scene in question. Human figures and the sea were two subjects that would continue to fascinate him until the end of his life. Already in 1902, he painted his first seascapes, albeit devoid of people. And as late as 1950, the year of his death, he was revisiting *Schlafende am Strand*, which he had originally created in 1927 (Tiedemann 826).

The economy of detail in the 1942 beach scene prevents any attempt to identify the subjects or the location. This said, men and women and the sexual relationship between them are never observed in an innocuous fashion in Beckmann's iconography. If we examine the picture under these auspices, it loses the presumed quotidianity of a mundane beach scene. The emphasis on the erotic is reminiscent of the game played by Goya with his *Maja* shown both clothed and in the nude. Beckmann, for his part, pairs his seductive woman with a man. Still, the dominance of the female is strikingly obvious here, whilst the male is doubly hidden, once by the woman's body and once more by an umbrella, which seems to shield him against any temptation. This hidden figure placed deep in the background, yet athwart the picture plane lends the scene an irritatingly threatening quality. Leaning to the left, it seems as if it were being rolled out of the image by an unseen force. It unsettles the reclining figure's calm, as if signaling an existential threat – which was exactly what Beckmann and his wife Mathilde were facing daily during their exile in Amsterdam.



# 7 Max Beckmann

Leipzig 1884 – 1950 New York

## “Hängematte”. 1942

Oil on canvas. 24 × 36 cm (9 ½ × 14 ⅛ in.).

Lower right signed, inscribed and dated (faintly legible): Beckmann A[msterdam] 42. On the upper stretcher bar on the left a label of Galerie Curt Valentin, New York. Catalogue raisonné: Tiedemann 622 (<https://beckmann-gemaelde.org/622-haenge-matte>; query date 21.4.2023). [3137] Framed.

## Provenance

Studio Max Beckmann / Erhard Göpel, Munich (taken over as courier 23. March 1943) / Private Collection, Wassenaar (for safekeeping) / studio Max Beckmann (return) / Mathilde Q. Beckmann, New York (until 1986; meanwhile on commission at Curt Valentin) / Beckmann family / Private Collection, Austria

EUR 300,000–400,000

USD 326,000–435,000

## Literature and illustration

Erhard and Barbara Göpel: Katalog der Gemälde. Volume I: Katalog und Dokumentation. Volume II: Tafeln und Bibliographie. Bern, Kornfeld and Cie, 1976, cat. no. 622

