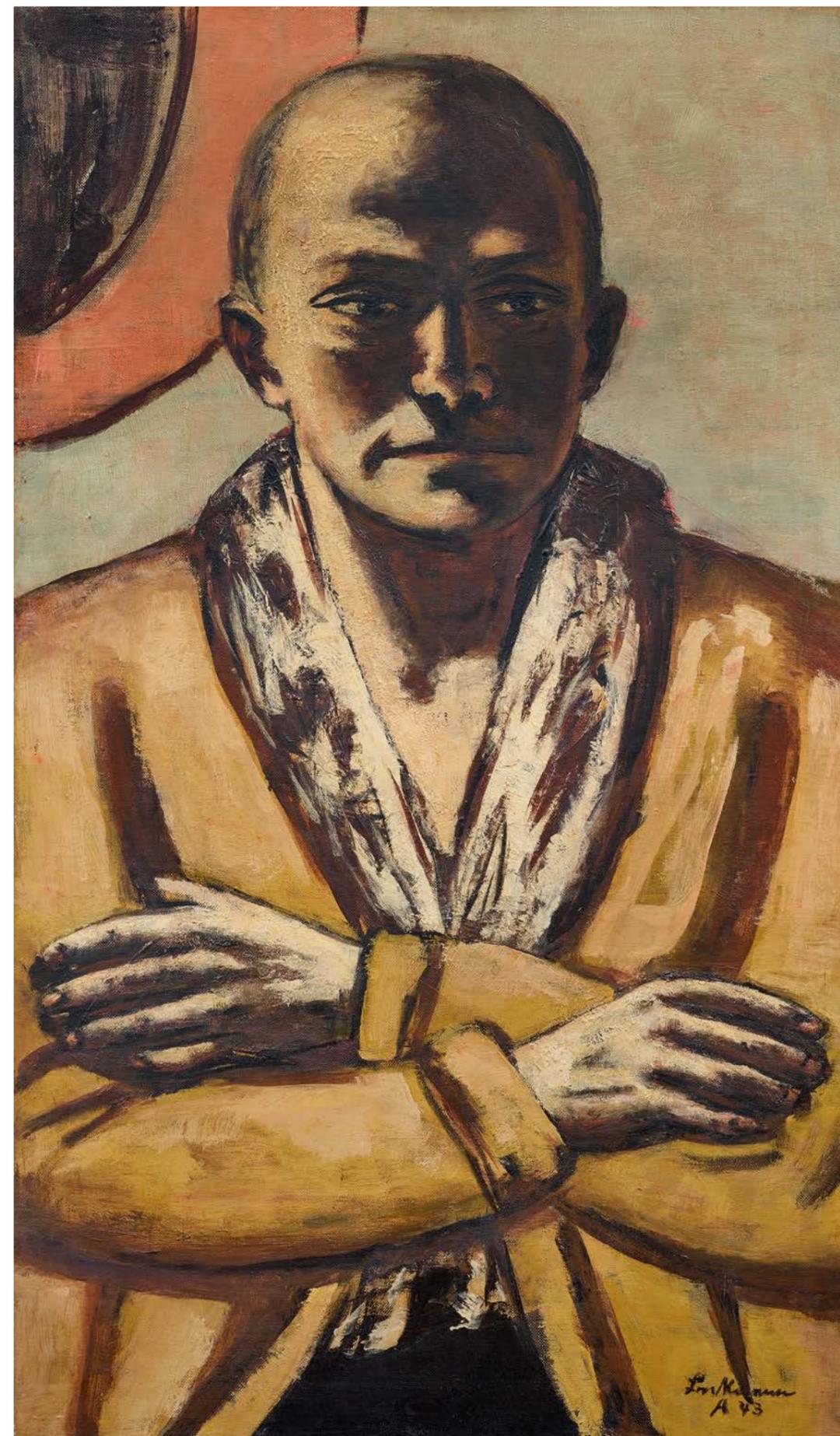




GRISEBACH

Max Beckmann
Selbstbildnis gelb-rosa,
1943 Amsterdam
Göpel/Tiedemann 645





"Departure". 1932-35. Oil on canvas. 215.3 x 99.7 cm | 215.3 x 115.2 cm | 215.3 x 99.7 cm. New York, Museum of Modern Art

Eugen Blume

In 1943, Max Beckmann painted himself in exile in Amsterdam, amidst increasing destruction, in monumental calm and beyond any mask as a redeemed man. A venture he allowed himself only once.

The self-portraits that Max Beckmann created during his time in exile are, above all, emblematic expressions of the spiritual crisis the artist endured in finding himself trapped in circumstances threatening his livelihood. Beckmann already had begun painting himself as early as 1933, after the Nazis' seizure of power, featuring as one of the figures in the triptych "Departure (Abfahrt)" (Göpel 412). In this three-paneled picture, which he began working on in Frankfurt am Main, he presaged the coming times of brutality and expulsion along with the prospect of their eventually being overcome. Thus, his "Departure" can be seen both as an arrival on a higher plane and a transcendental resurrection from hell on earth.

Four years later, in 1937, the artist abandoned all hope of being able to remain in Germany. Speaking at the inauguration of the Haus der Deutschen Kunst in Munich, Adolf Hitler had proclaimed a "purgative war" against the "abusers of art" (Kunstmisshandler). The following day, the repulsive Nazi-sponsored exhibition of what was purported to be "Degenerate Art" opened its doors. This was when Max Beckmann, accompanied by his

wife Mathilde, left Germany for Amsterdam, never to return. Until his emigration to the United States, Holland would remain his exile and his safe haven, although it suddenly turned into a place of mortal danger when the country was overrun by German troops in 1940.

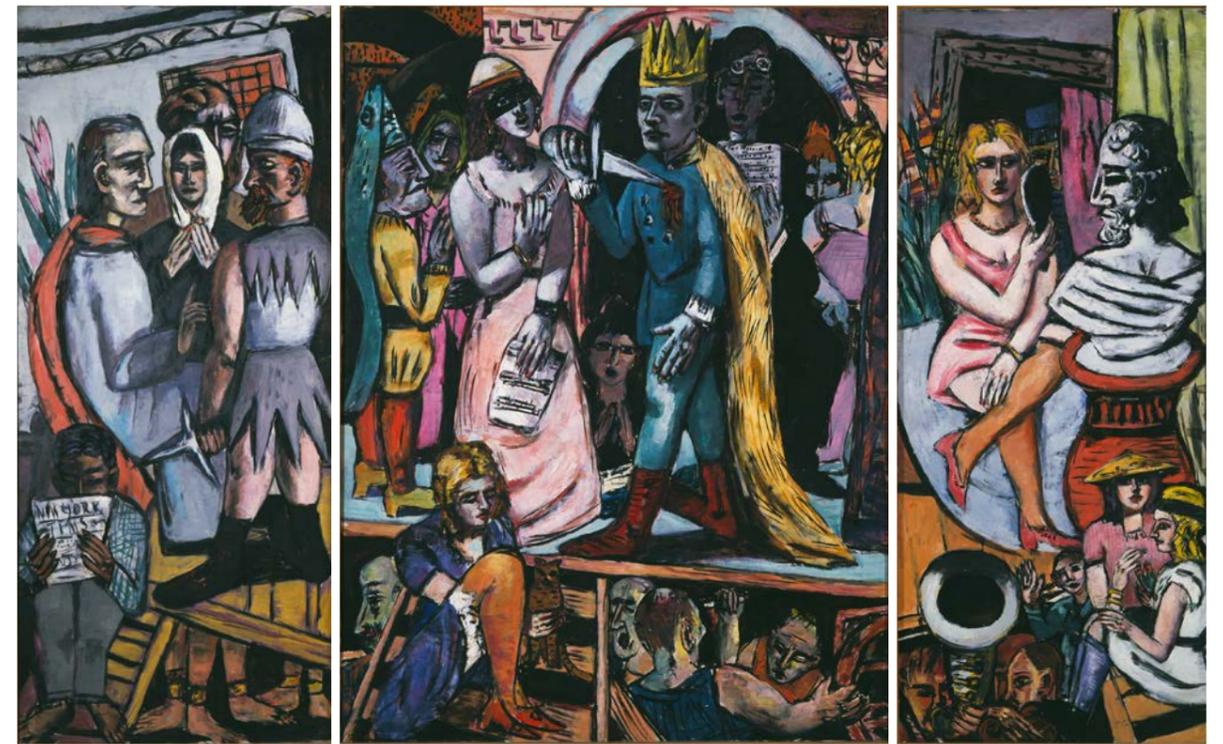
"Silent death and conflagration all around me and yet I still live," he wrote incredulously in his diary. Beckmann had to watch helplessly as the German occupiers interned Dutch Jews, among them personal friends of his, at the Westerbork concentration camp. He, too, feared that he might end up an internee. Suffering from heart disease, the artist was just barely able to avert being drafted into military service.

Withdrawing into his atelier in an old tobacco warehouse on the less frequented stille Kant part of the Rokin Canal in Amsterdam became a self-imposed obligation that protected him from breaking down. The painting he did there became far more than a mere aesthetic exercise. In a sense, his works can be seen as apotropaic missives endowed with the power to avert evil influences and addressed to the directors of the

“Selbstbildnis gelb-rosa” – a gift to Quappi



Max and Quappi Beckmann with Butchy the dog in their apartment at Rokin 85, 1947



“Schauspieler”. 1941/42. Oil on canvas. 199.4 x 83.7 cm | 199.4 x 150 cm | 199.4 x 83.7 cm. Cambridge, Harvard Art Museums

“world theater” upon whose stage humanity is trapped in a state of eternal return “beneath the mocking laughter of the gods.”²

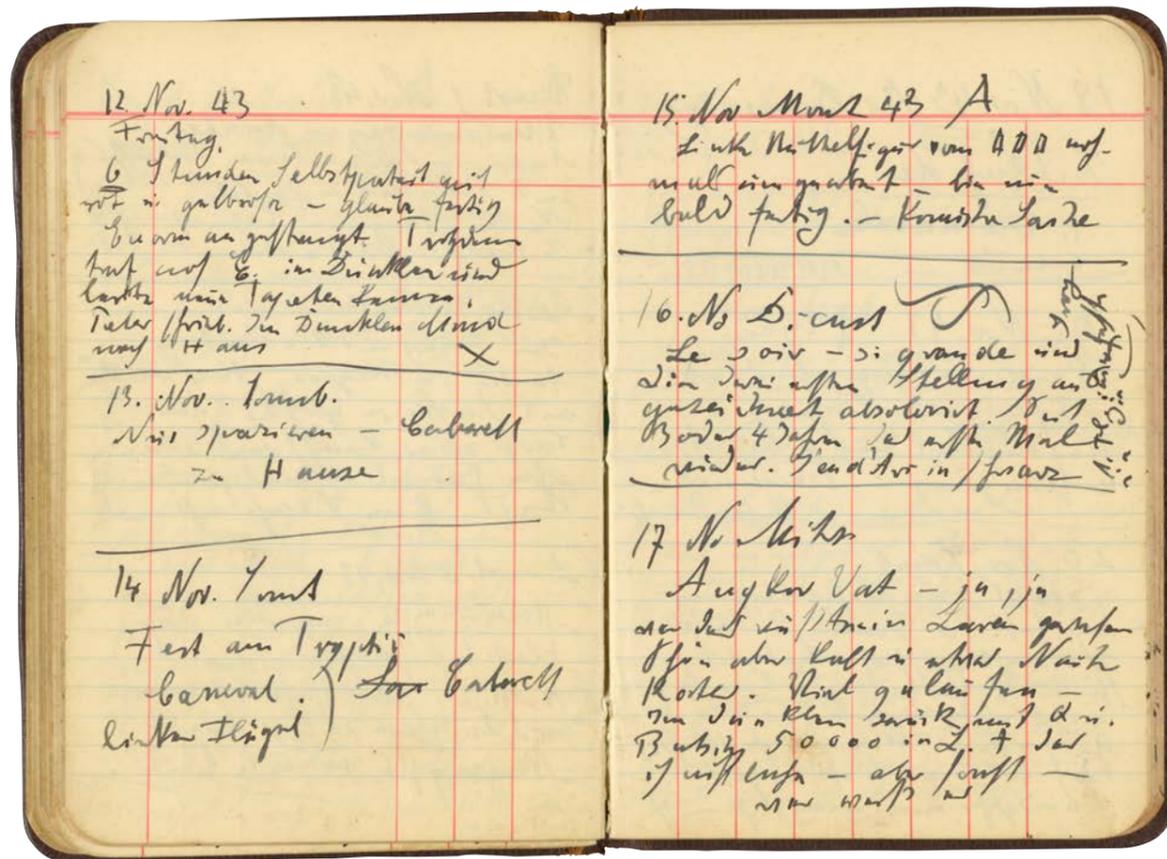
In the triptych “Schauspieler” from 1941/42 (Göpel 604), Beckmann portrays himself as an “Artist King,” a dramatic role which he would periodically revisit and reappraise with uncompromising dispassion. The question he once asked reveals his sense of belonging to this circle: “Could it be that truly unique personalities – and there are more than just a few of them – are in fact the archangels in disguise who have descended to earth, etc.? We would wish it to be so, on that day which is today and forevermore.”³ By assuming the persona of a crowned king, a recurring motif in his self-portraits, he was expressing his “monarchical principle:” the claim to exclusive sovereignty over one’s own self and the assumption of absolute responsibility for one’s own creativity. To him, his art is the *ultima ratio regis*, the final argument of the king.

As time went on, dark shadows began to fall over the Artist King, whom Beckmann describes as a refugee running from death: “Searching for his homeland, but having lost

his home along the way: thus perish all of life’s great kings.”⁴ With their encrypted messages that strive to oppose the “apparent insanity of the cosmos,”⁵ Beckmann’s self-portraits are more than just a window onto his inner spiritual state during parlous times; they are also an open avowal of his will to overcome them.

This extraordinarily productive “A. period,” as Mathilde Beckmann described the couple’s exile in the Netherlands in a letter,⁶ was to give rise to over twenty of such self-portraits, some obvious, others disguised. Among these was the work begun on August 3rd, 1943, which sought to find a new perspective transcending all the artist’s self-explorations that had gone before. The project would not be completed until the middle of that following November, according to an entry in Beckmann’s diary: “6 hours on the self-portrait with red and yellow-pink – finished, I think. Exerted myself tremendously.”⁷

The work stands markedly apart from the artist’s other explorations of his inner self that came before and after. Take the older “Selbstbildnis in der Bar” (Göpel 620), for example, or “Selbstbildnis in Schwarz” (Göpel



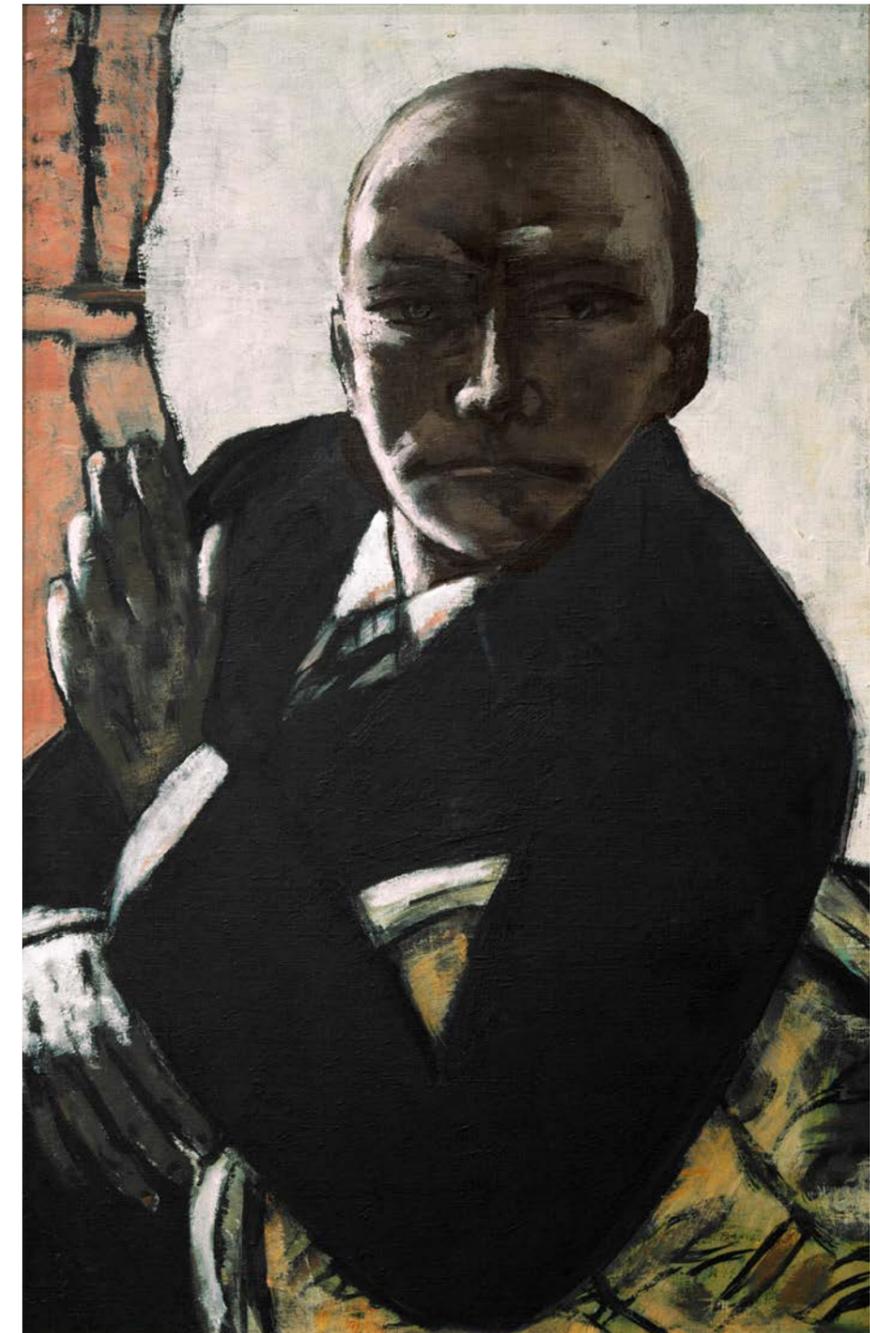
Max Beckmann. Diary entries of November 12th to 17th, 1943

“6 hours on the self-portrait with red and yellow-pink – finished, I think. Exerted myself tremendously.”

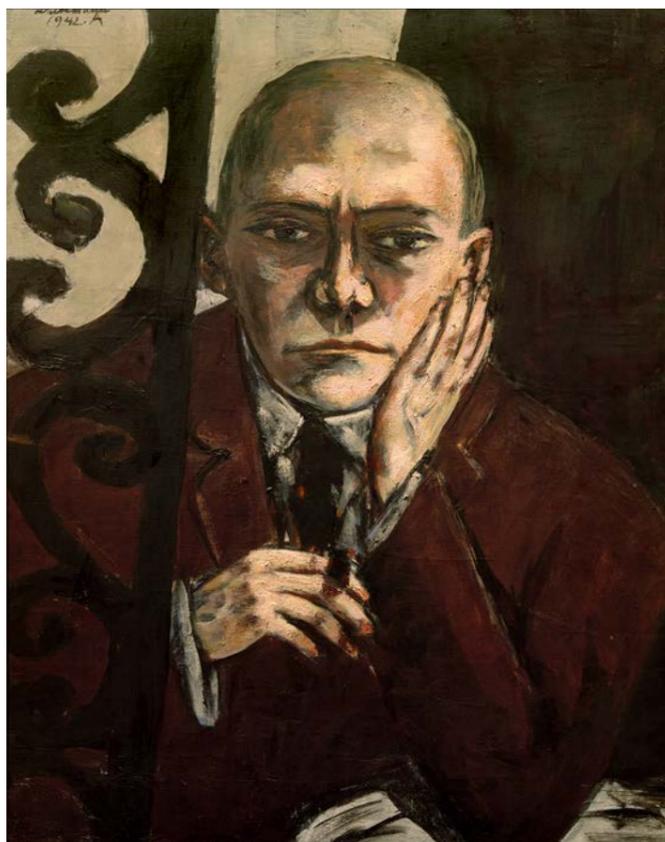
655) from late 1943, which was consciously conceived as the former’s counterpart: In them we see Beckmann as a keen observer who haunts the pubs of Amsterdam after a day’s work. The symbolic attribute of these “anthropological” excursions is the burning cigar in the subject’s right hand. Neither image makes any attempt to conceal the artist’s “ignominious way of life”⁸ or his fear of a life devoid of meaning.

However, in the 1943 work, Beckmann seems to defy the spirit of resignation that threatens to engulf him, eschewing his usual somber hues, and paints himself in surprisingly bright colours. The dominant black is missing, for example, while the yellow fabric and bright fur trim of his attire – possibly a dressing gown – suggest the environment of

a home or a studio. Except for the truncated red frame of a mirror, there is no hint of an interior; the artist intentionally has positioned himself outside of any social context. Nor does the image contain any reference to the global turmoil that prevailed in 1943, or to Beckmann’s exile in Amsterdam, in a country forcibly occupied by foreign troops. There is a kinship with two earlier self-portraits: “Selbstbildnis im Bademantel mit schwarzer Kappe” from 1934 (Göpel 391), in which the artist wears similar clothing and assumes a comparable posture, and the second version of “Selbstbildnis mit Trompete” from 1938 (Göpel 489), which features a similar facial expression. However, in the work from 1943, the hands resting flat over crossed arms seem to betoken



“Selbstbildnis in Schwarz”. 1944. Oil on canvas. 95.2 x 60.5 cm
Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen



"Selbstbildnis in der Bar". 1942. Oil on canvas. 90 x 70 cm. Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

an attitude of prayer. Beckmann's gaze and his knowing, ever so subtle smile are directed at something in the far distance to the left, past the viewer, that seems to be accessible solely to the inner eye, without any symbolic clues giving an indication of what it might be. In the words of Erhard Göpel, who visited him frequently during this period, it is as if "the world... had become transparent"⁹ for him. By his general appearance, garbed in traditional orange-yellow, with his nearly bald head and arms in a position found in meditational practice, Beckmann reminds us of a Buddhist monk. The self-portrait expresses a yearned-for inner peace and a figuration, in the face of crushing circumstances, of monastic hope: "If only, at long last, one could be truly detached."¹⁰ Following this logic, the mirror floating in the background like a heavenly body

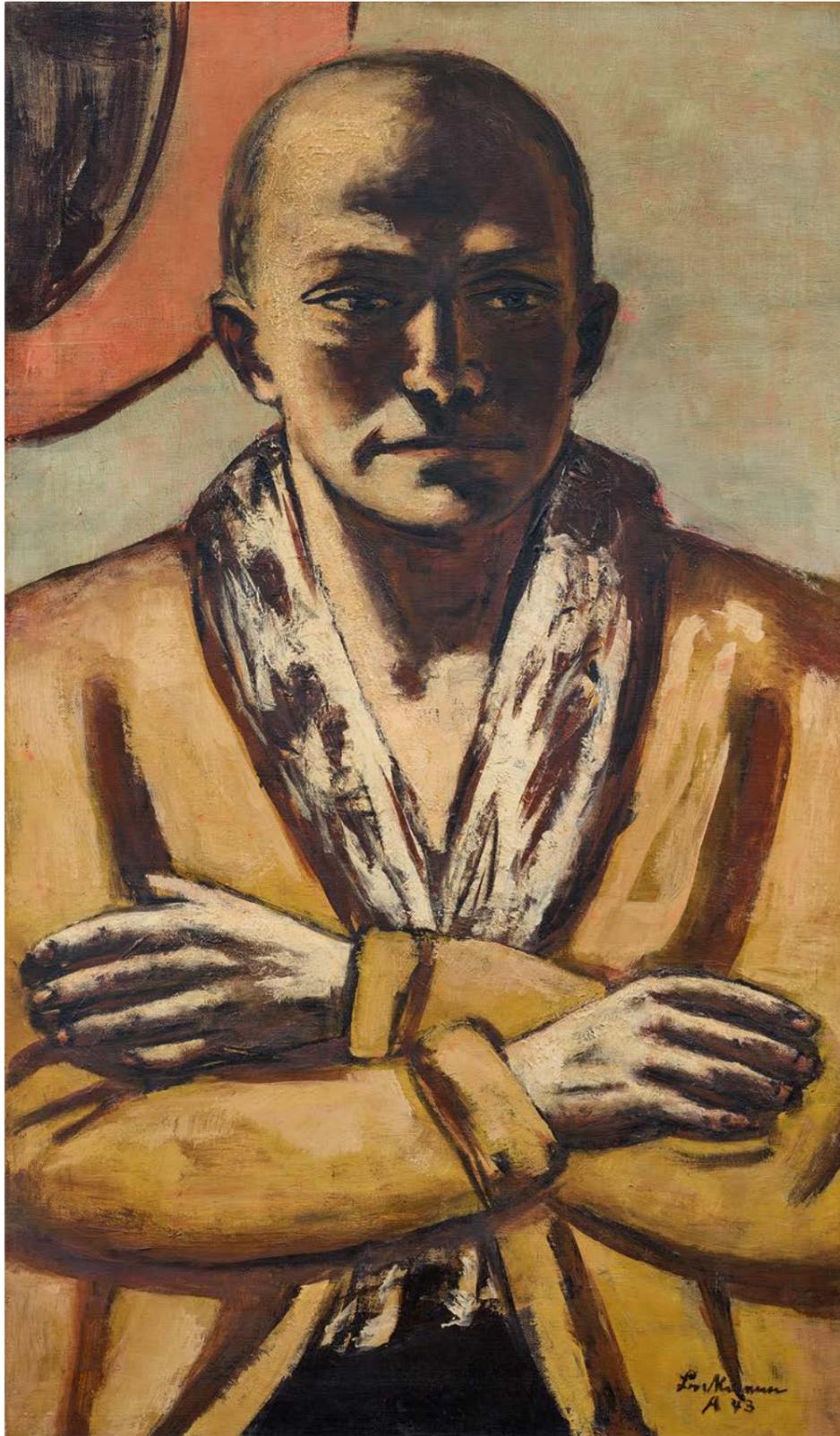
can be understood as an allusion to one of Buddhism's Five Wisdoms, that of "Mirror-Like Awareness." In this state of consciousness, all customary modes of perception and value judgments are abandoned.¹¹ The mirror serves as the gateway to eternity itself.

Beckmann had read the discourses of the Buddha at an early stage and we know from his diaries that he meditated regularly.¹² "More than once, Max told me that he would have liked to have become a monk and to have led the life of a hermit," wrote Mathilde Beckmann in her memoirs.¹³ Thus, in the midst of mounting chaos and destruction, the artist painted himself in an attitude of monumental calm – as one who, having set aside all masks or personae, had truly achieved a state of transcendent release. It is a daring venture he permitted himself only this once.



"Selbstbildnis mit Trompete (rotgestreift)". 1938. Oil on canvas. 110 x 101 cm. New York, Neue Galerie.

¹Max Beckmann. Tagebücher 1940-1950, compiled by Mathilde Q. Beckmann, edited by Erhard Göpel, Munich 1955, entry for September 9th, 1940. ²Diary entry of July 4th, 1946. ³Quote from Erhard Göpel, Max Beckmann in seinen späten Jahren, in idem, Max Beckmann. Berichte eines Augenzeugen, Frankfurt am Main 1984, p. 73. ⁴Diary entry of January 19th, 1943. ⁵Diary entry of July 17th, 1950. ⁶Letter of January 26th, 1951 to Erhard Göpel, in: Hefte des Max Beckmann Archivs 16, edited by Christian Lenz on behalf of the Max Beckmann Gesellschaft, Beiträge 2019, frontispiece. ⁷Diary entry of November 12th, 1943. ⁸Diary entry of August 10th, 1949. ⁹Göpel 1984, as in footnote 5, p. 69. ¹⁰Diary entry of November 4th, 1943. ¹¹Mirrors are recurring attributes in Beckmann's oeuvre; they often stand for vanity, but also for the boundary between our mortal lives and the hereafter, or as a symbol of knowledge, truth, etc. ¹²Fritz Erpel was the first to refer to this monkish attitude in "Maske des Buddha". Cf. Fritz Erpel: Max Beckmann. Leben im Werk. Die Selbstbildnisse, Henschel Verlag, Berlin 1985, p. 84. ¹³Mathilde Q. Beckmann: Mein Leben mit Max Beckmann, Munich, Zürich 1983, quote from Erpel 1985, ibid.



Lot 19^N
 Max Beckmann
 Leipzig 1884 – 1950 New York

„Selbstbildnis gelb-rosa“ 1943

Oil on canvas. 94.5 × 56 cm (37 1/4 × 22 in.).

Signed, inscribed and dated lower right: Beckmann A[msterdam] 43. On the middle bar of the stretcher labels of the Curt Valentin Gallery, New York, and from the exhibition Paris 1968 (see below). Göpel/Tiedemann 645 (online catalogue raisonné, query date 16.10.2022). [3431] Framed.

Provenance

Mathilde „Quappi“ Beckmann, New York (gift of the artist) /
 Private Collection, Switzerland

Estimate on request

Exhibition

Portraits (1925–1950) by Max Beckmann. New York, Catherine Viviano Gallery, and Cambridge, Massachusetts, Institute for Technology, 1957, cat. no. 1, ill. / Max Beckmann. Das Portrait. Gemälde, Aquarelle, Zeichnungen. Karlsruhe, Badischer Kunstverein, 1963, cat. no. VIII, ill. / Max Beckmann. Paris, Musée National d'Art Modern; Munich, Haus der Kunst, and Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1968/69, cat. no. 81, ill. / Max Beckmann. Selbstbildnisse. Hamburg, Kunsthalle, and Munich, Staatsgalerie moderner Kunst, 1993, cat. no. 23, ill. / George Grosz. Berlin – New York. Berlin, Neue Nationalgalerie, and Düsseldorf, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, 1994/95, cat. no. I.33, ill. p. 72 / Musen, Maler und Modelle. Kampen, Galerie Pels-Leusden, 1996, cat. no. 3, p. 50, ill. p. 51

Literature and illustration

Benno Reifenberg and Wilhelm Hausenstein: Max Beckmann. Munich, R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1949, cat. no. 527 / Edith Hoffmann: Expressionism: not a German but an international style. In: Art News, November 1957, vol. 56, p. 40–43, 56–58, here p. 57, ill. p. 40 / Eliot Clark: New York Commentary. In: The Studio, vol. 155, 1958, p. 60, ill. / Peter Beckmann (ed.): Max Beckmann. Sichtbares und Unsichtbares. Stuttgart, Belser, 1965, ill. 31, p. 83 / Friedhelm Wilhelm Fischer: Max Beckmann. Symbol und Weltbild. Munich, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1972, ill. 1 / Friedhelm Wilhelm Fischer: Der Maler Max Beckmann. Cologne, DuMont Schauberg, 1972, p. 70 / Erhard and Barbara Göpel: Katalog der Gemälde. 2 vols. Bern, Kornfeld and Cie, 1976, here vol. I, cat. no. 645, and vol. II, ill. pl. 232 / Hildegard Zenser: Max Beckmanns Selbstbildnisse. Munich, Schirmer Mosel, 1984, ill. 49 / Erhard Göpel (ed.): Max Beckmann. Tagebücher 1940–1950. Munich, Piper, 1984, p. 64, 66, 67, 73, 74 / Fritz Erpel: Max Beckmann. Leben im Werk. Die Selbstbildnisse. Munich, C.H. Beck, 1985, p. 362, no. 183, ill. 196 / Die Gemälde der Nationalgalerie. Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 1996 (CD-ROM) / Hans Belting: Identität im Zweifel. Ansichten der deutschen Kunst. Cologne, DuMont, 1999, p. 165–167, ill. p. 166 / Stephan Reimertz: Max Beckmann. Munich, Luchterhand, 2003, p. 358–360 / Hans Belting: Max Beckmann, peintre allemand. In: exh. cat.: Beckmann. Paris, Centre Pompidou, Galerie 1; London, Tate Modern, and New York, MoMA QNS, 2003, p. 61–69, here p. 67 and ill. p. 68 (not exhibited) / Christian Lenz: „Schön und schrecklich wie das Leben.“ Die Kunst Max Beckmanns 1937 bis 1947. In: exh. cat.: Max Beckmann. Exil in Amsterdam. Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, and Munich, Pinakothek der Moderne, 2007/08, p. 33–105, here p. 82, ill. 39, and p. 83 (not exhibited)



Meet the artist of the century
Max Beckmann.

Max Beckmann's "Selbstbildnis gelb-rosa"
from 1943 is coming up for sale
on December 1st at 6pm in Berlin.

Contact our specialists for Modern Art

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Beckmann's "Selbstbildnis gelb-rosa" will be shown in

New York
5th - 10th November 2022
18 East 64th Street, Suite 3F, New York

Berlin
23rd - 30th November 2022
Grisebach, Fasanenstr. 25

Auction in Berlin 1st December 2022, 6pm

“More than once, Max told me that he would have liked to have become a monk and to have led the life of a hermit,”

Quappi Beckmann

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