THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

MAX BECKMANN:

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FIGURES AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT AND ITS

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

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T

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1

1

INTRODUCTION

Beckmann's <u>Self Portrait with Red Scarf</u> 1917 is one of the great inspirations for me: the reality of his psychological states in the depressing urban dwelling. This painting has a strong revelation of Beckmann's physical and psychological experiences of the horror of war and social chaos in Germany and also his deep understanding of isolation and his awareness of the importance of individuality in the urban environment especially during times of social chaos. In Beckmann's work (mainly self-portraits and his early paintings of social gathering after the First World War), he was generally concerned with the dejection of isolation and social oppression. His great power of expressing the reality of the problems of urban society in particular the facial and physical expression of the human figures including himself in a psychological state, and how urban environment affected him socially and psychologically. This is how Beckmann achieved for allegorical composition by spatially integrating the figures into the environment in order to increase pictorial reality and to narratively reveal his direct experiences of social sickness.

For this thesis, I intend to examine Beckmann's achievement for visually strong revelation of his depiction of the psychological effect on urban people during social chaos by simply focusing on the relationship between the figures and their environment and by investigating how they were affected psychologically in a general sense in his work. In order to do this, it would be beneficial for my studio work which is on a similar subject – the

2

environmental psychology mainly isolation and enclosure. I also
share in common with Beckmann the isolation of the individual in
his surrounding in which I attempt to symbolically reflect my
ideas for my studio work.

CHAPTER I

BECKMANN'S EARLY LIFE AND BACKGROUND

Max Beckmann was born in Leipzig, Germany in 1884, the son of a prosperous flour merchant. At an early age, he developed an interest in drawing which he was more serious about than school. Many imaginary journeys enriched his artistic enthusiasm.

In 1900 he entered the Grandducal Art School in Weinmar where he stayed until 1903. He was influenced by Hans von Marees, the idealist master of the second half of the nineteenth century, who was the exponent of monumentalised Renaissance figures imbued with loftiest sentiments. (1)

When he graduated from the academy in 1903, Beckmann travelled extensively in Europe, particularly Florence and Paris: during his trip to Europe, he visited various art galleries and museums. He admired the work of Rembrandt, Piero della Francesca and Signorelli: the former for his deep human understanding, Piero for his monumentality and space mastery and Signorelli for a virile draftsmanship, design and a powerful, harsh realism which could be obviously revealed in Beckmann's work.

In Paris, Beckmann visited the great exhibition of French Primitives by which he was apparently influenced especially the celebrated Pieta of Avignon from whose formalizations, arbitrary

4

space, and Gothic expressiveness Beckmann developed his style in
the later war years.

In the following year, Beckmann spent six months in Florence,
still studying his favourite Italians, Piero and Signorelli. He
was not impressed with Italy. He moved to Berlin in 1905.

Berlin was an important and attractive city which offered many
privileges for Beckmann to crystallize his ideas. Beckmann
admired Impressionist and Post Impressionist Art especially
Liebermann, Slevogt and Corinth for naturalism and vigorous
brushwork. Therefore, he joined the Berlin Secession for its
popularity, for its liberality in Art and for its impressionism.
He had learned some elements from the outstanding progressive
impressionist artists. Some of Beckmann's first paintings in 1905
and 1906 reveal the influence of impressionist artists whom he
greatly admired.

In 1905 Beckmann had his first exhibition with the Berlin
Secession in Berlin and the Weimar Kunstlerbund which was
successful. One of the important paintings he exhibited was
"Young Men by the Sea" 1905, which brought him the important Villa
Romana Prize - the gold coins. This prize permitted him to spend
a winter in Florence. This painting reveals the influence of
Signorelli.

In the same year, Beckmann married a fellow student, Minna Tube,
from the Weimar Academy and his mother died. He painted the Death

Scenes. Coincidentally, he met the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch who encouraged him to pursue this "fantastic" style. The advice of Munch did not impress Beckmann as he preferred to work in a loose, flaky, naturalistic technique. But the influence of Munch's haunting art had been developed in Beckmann's work after 1916.

Beckmann was strongly influenced by the vigour of Corinth's work which was importantly noted for the early development of his universality and powerful symbolic quality.

The Berlin Secession, a popular German progressive artists' association, made Beckmann a member of the board of directors in 1910 but he resigned in the following year because he felt he would do better himself individually.

For the next few years, Beckmann had been enthusiastic about elaborate classical and religious themes, e.g. Cleopatra 1910, Outpouring of the Holy Ghost 1910, and Battle of the Amazon 1911. These paintings reveal the influence of Corinth and El Greco. This is the important part of the early development of the psychological relationship between the figures and their environment. During the pre-war period, Beckmann was deeply concerned with psychological problems, particularly the mass society. He worked on the lithographic illustrations using the naturalistic secession techniques.

The artistic individuality and the unique combination of subject

matter and technique made Beckmann become one of the important
artists in the modern movement in the early 20th century.

The First World War

The outbreak of the First World War had been a great change for
Beckmann's art and his style. It put a great impact on his art.
Beckmann's art during the First World War is divided into two
aspects:

1.   Beckmann's attitude toward the war within the context of his
      artistic development.

2.   The reflection of his war experiences.

For a while, Beckmann continued to do his black and white graphic
work until in 1914, when he served as a volunteer medical corpsman
in the various hospitals in Belgium and Holland. His duties gave
him sufficient direct experience of the war and its effect on
people and he remained artistically active. Beckmann had a
commission to paint murals and produced over 150 drawings and
sketches which document his war experiences.

Beckmann's drawings and sketches provided a wealth of information
about what he saw and experienced during the war. To him, the war
was the greatest catastrophe but he was an eager participant,
positive, even enthusiastic in his attitude toward the conflict.
After seeing a destroyed town for the first time, he strongly
desired to experience still more and was happy about it. With

7

great satisfaction, he was positively getting to know what the real war was actually like and all the moods and possibilities of what happened during the war. His experiences of the war were strongly visual and musical by seeing the landscape and towns being devastated and lit up intermittently by the flashes of bombs and grenades which was a sort of an apocalyptic spectacle. Even though Beckmann got frightened several times and had nightmare experiences from having seen casualties with great horror, he was quite pleased that there was a war. (1)

Apart from the war scenes in the destructed towns and field hospitals and morgues, Beckmann constantly sketched his fellow soldiers eating, drinking, dancing and in the shower. Every aspect of their lives fascinated him. It shows that Beckmann was vitally aware of the relationship between the soldiers and their action and their surroundings. It was a sort of psychological experience in which he attempted to reveal what he witnessed, the moods of and psychological effects on the soldiers and the masses in a realistic way by sketching confrontingly.

The catastrophe of world war had made a great impression on Beckmann as it deepened his artistic experience particularly when he encountered people. This vigorous illusion psychologically strengthened his role as an observer of reality and greatly affected his artistic career when his painting became based exclusively on observed reality, on direct experience. Before the war broke out, Beckmann used to deal with modern philosophy, theology and literature and was clearly conscious of the great

8

traditions and accomplishments in the history of art. He was concerned with the serious themes, mainly themes of human action such as The Destruction of Messina 1909 and The Sinking of the Titanic 1912. These paintings are noted for pictorial structure and complex composition and Beckmann was generally concerned with the overall pictorial narration of human disasters particularly the vital revelation of human action and its movement and scale.

His confrontation with the war enriched his thematic interest in a subject matter such as human action. He became more realistic and privileged in his ideas and concepts. His imagination had become more clear as he reached for the most momentous subjects drawn from everyday life in Europe: war, destruction and chaos. What he experienced of the reality of war had given him an opportunity to create a monumental composition in his work.

Here is a paragraph of a letter in which Beckmann writing to his wife told her about his observational experiences of the war:

> "Outside, the wonderfully sublime clamour of
> battle. I walked outside through hands of wounded
> and weary soldiers who came from the battlefield
> and I heard this peculiar, terribly sublime music.
> It is as if the gates to eternity had been torn
> open when one of those great salvo resonates over
> here ... I would like to be able to paint this
> noise." (2)

This paragraph reveals how enthusiastic Beckmann was about what he observed of the reality of what happened during the war. It also stresses that he had a strong desire to paint an integrated image

of the figures and the battlefield lit up by the flashes of bombs and grenades.

When Beckmann produced a few preparatory sketches for a painting of the Resurrection , he probably had witnessed the horror of corpses and dying bodies in the destructed towns and landscape. While he experienced this, he possibly imagined the corpses being resurrected.

Unusually, Beckmann had little fear but, "a strange feeling of security", which he reported as he produced drawings while grenades exploded nearby. It reveals that he was keen to confront the realities of the war in order to build up the clear pictorial images he wanted to express in his painting particularly the specific qualities of the apocalyptic composition.

One of the most important visual experiences of the war Beckmann ever had was that he had seen the corpses being thrown out of the graves which had been completely devastated by grenades. The graves were ripped open, and coffins lay around in extremely awkward positions. The grenades had indiscreetly exposed the ladies and gentlemen, and bones, hair and bits of clothing peered out at cracks in the damaged coffins. (3) Consequently, Beckmann's observational experience of the physical relationship between the human figures and their surroundings in a tense,

psychological state had been broadened. He became more visually sensitive to what happened to people physically and psychologically during the battles.

Therefore, the war actually enriched Beckmann's artistic activity. Although Beckmann liked to play the role of the enthusiastic, aesthetically sensitive observer, hungry for experience (3), the realities of the war were more frightful and sinister than he expected. Consequently, Beckmann was gradually affected by these experiences and ended up with a nervous breakdown. As his health deteriorated, he was forced to leave the army in 1915 when he moved to Frankfurt.

The First World War had the great effect on Beckmann both personally and artistically. His style and concepts had been obviously changed. As a result of what he witnessed, the suffering, dying and misery in the war, added an inner depth to his work. He painted a very famous picture The Night 1918-19, which made him an important painter of the twentieth century. This painting reveals the horror of war that Beckmann had witnessed both physically and psychologically.

Between The Wars: 1918 - 1939

When the First World War ended, Beckmann produced a series of paintings: The Night 1918-19, Family Picture 1920, Costume Party 1920, The Dream. These paintings reveal Beckmann's psychological experiences of the First World War and a big difference from the

paintings he did before the war.   He was a greatly changed person

and so also was his style.

While Beckmann produced the many etchings of his self-portraits,

environment,   society   and night-life,   he simplified his style to

geometrical arrangement and form in order to express the figures

and space more closely which brought him close to George Grosz.

Beckmann   intended his   revelation of what he witnessed the

suffering,   dying and misery in the war to be more vivid,   direct

and obvious.   Consequently,   the expression of the figures and

their   moods   in   these paintings is   more   realistic   and

characteristic in a greater psychological state.   He consciously

attempted to disclose the veiled image of the psychological

relationship   between   the   figures   and   their   surroundings

particularly space and form which he narratively intended to build

up as a pictorial reality. He was fully conscious of space which,

for him, was a metaphysical locality.

The painting, The Night obviously reveals Beckmann's and the

world's growing concern with such problems and his ability to

create the powerful evidence of the increasing portrayal of pain

and torture which expressed his own anguish. The elements in this

painting were shown in their actual form and then developed into

more symbolic shapes.

There is no evidence to explain how Beckmann changed from the

basically representational techniques of his pre-war secession

pictures and war etchings to the new angularity, the strident

12

emotionalism, and the generally medieval archaism of the new style. Beckmann was probably influenced by Gothic painting which is noted for its emotionalisms, its angularity of form, and the projection of space.

Beckmann intended to concentrate on images of groups of people being virtually packed tightly to manifest the reality of his existential experience of what he witnessed, i.e. the mass of people suffering from the lack of freedom of their existential individuality in the group. He attempted to exaggerate the pictorial images of the figures in the group in order to increase a psychological state of the inhumanity of the groups of people in a horrific scene of urban devastation and human suffering and the struggles of the individuals for their identity.

The oppressive reality of the crowded group reflects illness and lust, love and hate which are associated with war. In the crowded space, isolation within the group represents the individual's sense of loss and isolation within the social environment. As a result of Beckmann's consciousness of the isolation of the individual in the urban society, he produced many characteristic self-portrait paintings.

In 1925, Beckmann went to Frankfurt where he became a professor at the Stadelsches Knunstinstut. The seven years of the nightmares on which he thematically focused for painting were over when he went to this city. The period of his stay in Frankfurt was peaceful with enjoyment of social activity including the

13

night-life and carnivals which became the important subjects Beckmann worked on for painting mainly the parties, sports and dance halls. It made him aware of the vitality of social contact within his environment. He also used the carnivals for his self-portraits and his occasional companion. The peacefulness in Frankfurt increased his visual awareness of the objects and environment both natural and man-made. At the same time, Beckmann became interested in ancient and classical mythology. There is coincidentally a parallel development in Picasso's work of the 1930's. There was a neoclassical trend in European art at the time which probably represented evasion and freedom from social-political chaos, Beckmann's style became easier and less tense.

During this period, the New Objectivity - Neue Sachlichkeit was developed to reflect the social turmoil within Germany. This new artistic movement emerged from Expressionism, particularly Der Blaue Reiter and Die Brucke and Munch's Frieze of Life, Nolde's religious and Dionysiac work, Kirchner's Berlin street scenes and Kokoschka's psychological portraits. Beckmann disapprovingly considered Expressionism being mismanaged and immature especially for colour and subject matter being used in a great exaggeratingly and over excitingly way, and lack of interpretation of the image of reality. He quarrelled with Marc and Kandinsky whose style and subject he considered was something to do only with aesthetics for fey colours and purely elemental abstraction.

Beckmann searched for new, truly progressive forms for his pictorial ideas which he intended to focus on the objects as main

14

subject matter to represent the tangible part of reality. He attempted to indicate the character of the existential object in order to build up a pictorial reality effectively. In painting, he struggled for the existence of realistic objects. For him, painting is a way of creating reality with real elements, both object and space which are visually tense in his paintings. During the period of New Objectivity, Beckmann produced a series of paintings of landscape and still life.

As a result of having spent many years of peacefulness in Frankfurt, Beckmann got many opportunities to studiously explore the elements and characters of the individual objects and their surroundings, and to increase his awareness of the spatial relationship between the object and its surroundings. He simplified his compositional studies of the objects, environment and portraiture both group and individual, including self-portraits. It made him aware of his surroundings and its relationship with people socially. Therefore, he achieved the overall composition of the social paintings of the group in environment both interior and exterior. He had several trips to Paris where he studied the composition of Cezanne and the lonesomeness of Rousseau.

When the National Socialists came to power in 1933, Beckmann lost his professorship at the Frankfurt Art Academy. He moved to Berlin where he wished to remain anonymous and for his life to be more private for his safety. As an individualist, he hated social masses and all regimentation. He could not believe that

true German culture which he loved would be over-whelmed by Nazism. All the Arts in Germany had been re-organised by the Nazis who wished creative activities to be strictly channelled and easily supervised. Hitler who was strongly anti-Jewish attempted to purify German Art and culture:

> "Cubism, Dadaism, Futurism, Impressionism, etc.
> have nothing to do with our German people ... They
> see the living figures of our people only as
> degenerate cretins, they see or "experience"
> meadows as blue, skies as green, clouds as
> sulphuric yellow ... "visual disturbances" should
> be eradicated..." (4)

An exhibition of the work of Beckmann which had been scheduled for spring 1933 in the Erfurt Museum was not allowed to open. Later, all public and private galleries were forbidden to exhibit so-called "degenerate art".

Nazis organised the "Deutsche Kunst" exhibition which included a large portrait of Hitler that was the high point of the exhibition. Beckmann's self-portrait painting of 1917 was included too but it was one of the lower points. In this painting, he appears grim, tortured by self-doubt and by the horror of a world at war and it was seen as the portrait of a degenerate subhuman.

16

In 1937 there was an alternative "Entartete Kunst" exhibition of
so-called degenerate art in the Munich Arkaden which contained 730
works of Modern Art from 25 German museums. Many famous artists
like Klee, Grosz and Kokoschka exhibited their works there. This
was the highest achievement of German Modern Art.

Beckmann spent four years in Berlin (1933 - 1937). He was very
isolated but he was a strictly private person and almost glad to
be forgotten. His life in Berlin was unpleasant as this city was
in poverty and misery. The reality of Berlin under Hitler's
regime was a twentieth century city of corruption and loneliness.
This was the most difficult period of his life. Being an
anonymous individual, Beckmann became aware of the individuality
of people in the crowded city. He produced one of the most
important works, a triptych of Departure of 1933 which symbolized
leaving his country on the road to freedom. While working on it,
evasion and freedom played a big part in his mind and he was
considering emigrating to a neighbouring country, either France or
Holland. But he chose Amsterdam and stayed for ten years before
finally emigrating to the United States. During his stay, he was
increasingly isolated but it strengthened his ideas and enriched
his psychological experiences of social-political chaos. This is
the final part of the period of his life and work I intend to
focus on for this thesis.

FOOTNOTES

(1) Beckmann and the First World War – writing to his wife in May
     1915 Max Beckmann Retrospective

(2) Beckmann and the First World War Max Beckmann Retrospective

(3) As above

(4) Lackner, Stephen Beckmann p. 26-27

18

THE DEVELOPMENT OF BECKMANN'S IDEAS AND HOW HE WAS INFLUENCED

Beckmann's art and style including subject matter and painting techniques kept changing from time to time during his entire artistic life. It is mainly due to the consequences of the many changing environment and societies in which Beckmann found himself, and also the First World War and the power of Nazism. I intend to concentrate on the psychological side of his art and how he was affected socially in order to expand the investigation to a certain point in his artistic development.

In the early twentieth century, Germany was a repressed society with moral views which were beholden to the sense of decency of the Victorian age. Beckmann discovered raw emotions and unsuspected depths. He boldly explored the early Impressionism particularly the work of the Fauves for strong , lively colours.

Beckmann had been influenced by many artists throughout the entire period of his artistic life mainly depending on the changes of his environment and his personality. These changes can be reflected in his work in each period.

Firstly, Beckmann's trip to Florence and Paris was the important early part of his artistic development when he admired the work of Rembrandt especially the self-portraits and for the deep

understanding of humanity and the isolated role of an artist. Rembrandt and Beckmann shared a common concern in their self-consciousness, the self-portraits and also, in particular, Biblical Drama and Bourgeois Farce - for example, Rembrandt's painting Blinding of Samson 1636, and Beckmann's The Night 1918-19. In self portrait paintings, they used similar techniques of tones and lights to reflect their characters and personalities.

In Florence, Beckmann had been impressed by the work of Piero Della Francesca - Constantine's Dream, a wall painting in the Church of S. Francesco, Arezzo. Painted in 1640, for dramatic light and composition of the group in a certain mood and a static manner which is partly similar to some of Beckmann's work like The Artist and His Wife 1925; The Loge 1928; and Self-Portrait with Horn. In Beckmann's allegorical paintings, the composition of the group is less formal and more psychological than Piero's in terms of spatial relationships. Piero's is interesting for the relationship between the figures and their surroundings in a formal manner and in their symmetry. Luca Signorelli's painting School of Pan (early sixteenth century) is objectively similar to Beckmann's work, Young Men by the Sea of 1905 and also 1943. The influence of Signorelli played a great part in his entire artistic life.

When Beckmann returned to Germany from his tour, he was influenced by Impressionist work of Liebermann, Slevogt and Corinth for naturalism and vigorous brushwork. He joined the Berlin Secession and attempted to explore new ideas and searched for interesting

20

subjects to enrich his ideas. He withdrew from the art movement to concentrate on his own art.

When the First World War broke out, Beckmann witnessed many horror scenes and encountered the reality of the war including the psychological effect on the suffering and dying people in which he was interested for his art as he searched for internal reality. After witnessing the war scenes, he focused on social matters and the environment for his visual sources and awareness of humanity from which became a big part of his thematic paintings. These were greatly simplified and developed into more symbolic shapes to characterize the psychological state of the figures in distorted proportions.

Beckmann was not politically oriented but intended to respond to the violence and cruelty. The late 1910's and early 1920's work are examples of the revelations of these nightmare experiences. For these paintings, he was greatly influenced by the late medieval artists like Bosch and Bruegel for the spatially distorted relationship between the figures and their surroundings in social chaos in which a person expression was found but the other influence like late Gothic and Cubism added to his interest especially for the jagged shapes and delimited spaces. These inspirations can be found in the painting of 1917, <u>Descent of Jesus and Woman Taken into Adultery</u>. Beckmann attempted to express the image of the deformed figures in the distorted, claustrophobic interior environment in order to achieve the multiple viewpoint.

The Night 1918-19, and The Family Picture 1920, are the great examples of the reflection of his battle for human reality of a definition of reality. Beckmann used the late medieval depictions and material in terms of emotive qualities and their closed composition which he intensively studied, particularly in his expressions of suffering.

When Beckmann went to Frankfurt, his style and subjects became easier and moderated so that it allowed him to have more time for his studies of composition and painting techniques. After spending seven years in Frankfurt, he moved to Berlin, which made him aware of the psychological environment and the individuality of people in the crowd where he sensed isolation and loss of identification of individuality. In Berlin, the city of existential chaos, Beckmann recognised that this city was the arena and rather a twentieth century depressed urban society but in fact Berlin was an important catalyst to his imagination as the role of the artist as witness and participant. His fellow artists, Grosz and Dix had in common the subject matter of social chaos and their interpretations of the problems they were concerned about in urban society contributed to the New Objectivity.

When Nazism came to power, Beckmann left his country for Amsterdam where he developed the symbolic images of cruelty, torture, propagandism and social chaos and worked on the triptychs to reflect his recent experiences in Germany under Hitler's regime.

Beckmann's Psychological Attitude towards his Urban Environment

To Beckmann, urban environment was a powerful force of existence
as it added greater reality to his depiction of the human figures.
Beckmann saw his immediate environment mainly as a stimulant. He
was interested in the psychological effect of the environment on
the people in a crowded city which may contribute an understanding
of how urban environment affected people psychologically and
socially in relation to Beckmann's work. The environment in
Beckmann's paintings creates the feelings and the moods in a
psychological state which have inspired me profoundly.

Self Portrait with Red Scarf (1917) is one of the examples of why
I am interested in Beckmann's work. In this self-portrait
painting, he apparently appears to be the victim of the oppression
of the urban society. Another example of Beckmann's painting of
the psychological tension in the crowded environment is
Family Picture (1920), which reflects lack of freedom and of
quiescence in urban dwellings.

This painting reveals Beckmann's interest in the psychological
interaction within a group particularly the physical restriction
of movement and the facial expression and the mood in an awkward
spatial context.

The Graphic allowed Beckmann to depict the tensions and he
increased the psychological statement by creating a mood of
intensity as a result of sharpening angularity and harsh

23

transitions between black and white areas. This graphic technique reflects his response to the incitement of Meidners for giving honest expression to the unique problems of modern city life. It also marks an important development in Beckmann's search for objects.

Beckmann's depiction of the modern city as social sickness is revealed in the painting, The Night 1918-19, which reflects the egotism of sexuality. The post-war years of the social-political chaos are generally responsible for the tendency of human brutality and moral insensibility. It is an obvious revelation of a relevant connotation of sadistic aggression and the horror of the sexual murder in the psychological tensions in the cheerless mass urban dwellings caused by economic instability and lack of social recuperation.

As a result of Beckmann's psychological experience of being an individual in the crowded city, he was increasingly aware of the individuality and isolation of the people in the city which was advantageous to him. He became involved in the state of the individual which he attempted to enrich by his depiction.

Beckmann's depiction of the individual expressed the convenience of having freedom, of being anonymous in the crowded urban environment. His empiricism of being alone in the city helped him to get to know who he was and to find his true interests.

24

The existence of the individual can be poignantly lonely when in a crowd. Being in a crowded environment, the individual could experience the discontented isolation and increase his self-consciousness. Beckmann's attitude to the existential loneliness of the individual (1) could conjunctively be a struggle for self-realisation, for being a matter of life and death.

As an individualist, Beckmann became aware of the fact that the length of time being spent with people could result in a severe loss of his consciousness of substantiality. He said, "The more time I spend with people, the more unreal I seem to myself." This quotation reveals how anxious Beckmann was of avoiding of incorporation with the mass of people and he shared George Grosz's passionate hatred of collectivism as the greatest threat to mankind.

George Grosz is an important component in the influence of Beckmann's expression, of his observational experience of the psychological effects on the masses in the urban society. Beckmann attempted in his graphic works to irritate the psychology of the individual and the dynamic of his relationship to the urban crowd.

Beckmann's relationship to Berlin was crucially complex particularly in the crowd. He was aware of the mysterious interaction between the individual and the crowd. To him, Berlin was an unpleasant city and a hostless urban society. His attitude to this city was extensively negative for its cold rudeness and

25

snobbery. He described it as corrupt and spiritless. His depiction of Berlin was full of post-war chaos, hypocrisy and misery. The existential experiences of Beckmann in Berlin, the city of dejection, reveals a clear image of his embodiment of twentieth century man's tragic destiny. In Beckmann's depiction of Berlin, it was an existential hell in which the individual must struggle to find his true salvation. Berlin offered himself the privilege of the role of an observer of the problems of urban society which was an important stimulant to his imagination, his way of spectating this unfriendly modern city as an abstract concept symbolizing the existential trauma of the twentieth century.

Beckmann was fully aware of the characters of the urban people and of how they were affected socially and psychologically, particularly their facial expressions and moods. Berlin was surrounded by poverty and misery, violence and murder, the arrogant socialites of nightclub life, the patriotism of politically active groups and the domestic dejection of the blocks of urban dwellings. The assimilation of this typical city life of the early twentieth century can be revealed in Beckmann's work.

Family Scene 1918 is one of the examples of the psychological and social problems of urban domesticity.

The streets in the city were ones of social disillusion in which the suffering, deprived and exploited masses mutually alienate and violate each other in a vicious dance of death. These places

26

contained the cripples, beggars and prostitutes being arrogantly rejected by several elegant bourgeoise even though they needed to be acknowledged for the reality of their existence. This depressed picture of the suffering people in the city is Beckmann's profound concern for the social problems within the urban society which is reflected in his many graphic works and paintings.

Beckmann used to go to cafes and bars in Berlin in order to relieve his nightmares. In these public places, Beckmann got the opportunity to study people unobserved. The facial expressions of the individuals in pubs, cafes and public transport intrigued him. To him, it was a symbol of the mask. As a result, he turned to the symbolic world of the carnival, circus and the stage in order to make more complex philosophical statements about the ineffable mystery of human existence.

The public transport takes a considerable part of Beckmann's interest - the stream of people, their moods and their whims, the excitement of travel, the busy to-and-fro of life, the joys and sorrows. (2). This contributed to his imagination for the facial expression and movement of people and how the motion in the urban environment affected them.

In Beckmann's work, he attempted to integrate human beings into scenes of architecture in order to reveal the psychological effects on people when they were surrounded by certain types of buildings. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge the

psychological effects of the buildings on the urban people in the work of Beckmann.

FOOTNOTES

(1)   Sarah   O'Brien-Twohig: Beckmann   and   the   City
       Max Beckmann Retrospective p. 91-110.

(2)   As above.

CHAPTER III

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FIGURES AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT

IN BECKMANN'S WORK

Beckmann was conscious of the reality of environment which is the power of existence that surrounds things. In Beckmann's depiction of environment there is the conflict of object and space. The objects are close together, their solidity is set against a limited space, there is initial chaos, the scene of all that is extra-human. Revelationally, Beckmann was obviously aware of the existence of environment and its space and of the physical relationship between environment and space. The locality of object is a metaphysical matter between environment and space.

In the composition of the objects in Beckmann's paintings, he stressed how dreadful space was by which the mind has been preoccupied. Creating a picture surface, he intended to transpose the three dimensions to the plane as a result of his defence against the limitlessness of space. Therefore, painting becomes a weapon in the struggle for existence. (1).

Beckmann's method of arranging the proportions of the objects in a human order can be marked out by a spiritual arithmetic. Beckmann says "My dream is to change the idea of space, the optical impression of the world of objects, through a transcendent arithmetic of my inwardness." This quotation reveals how

conscious he was of spatially locating the objects in their surroundings by creating reality with real elements in order to reveal the manifestation of visibly existential reality.

In the paintings he was mainly concerned with the tension between object and space as a result of his achievement for imposition of volumes and hard contours of each object to represent the existential character of individuals in relation to each other in their surroundings in order to dramatise the subject of the picture, particularly the pictorial chaos of figural assemblage in a claustrophobic enclosed environment.

Beckmann attempted to manifest the maximum vitality of a tightly packed group of people by expressing a certain style in order to characterize the psychological state of the human figures in a room. Consequently, he transformed his art to be rougher, more ordinary, more vulgar in order to reflect his psychological experiences of the war and social chaos in the city.

Beckmann was aware of the disadvantages of the individual in the social group and the struggles between individual people due to the lack of freedom. This is a result of the compulsion of the individual in the group to be free, the mass of humanity becomes the individual's enemy.

The expression of Beckmann for the international chaos in which the individual is subject to existential conditions (2) is found in compositional and structural aspects of his work by

30

manipulating a pictorial composition of the individual being left no room for movement and being tightly squeezed together in the claustrophobically tiny spaces. The consequences of creating a tightly compressed pictorial construction are the location of the individual in the small spaces, points of views that are shifted against each other to distort the objects, and marked "disorderly" arrangement. These are appropriate visual symbols. (3).

Beckmann's main aim in the irregular perspective view of a room is to attempt to increase the psychological state of a group of the figures and is a reflection of social oppression in the urban environment. The harshness of urban society is the occurrence of the social-psychological discontent that gravely affected people which Beckmann intended to manifest through its reflection into a pictorial composition in a greater reality. The lack of daylight is one of Beckmann's achievements for expression of the separation from the outside world.

The lack of support to the individual in the crowded space and isolation within the group becomes an oppressive reality. The severe restriction of space left the individual with little opportunity of moving to the other parts of the area within the room. This symbolizes lack of freedom in the urban environment socially and politically. Beckmann's expression of the vitality of emblem for lack of social freedom is that the figures are being welded together into an unchanging pictorial composition to manifest the effect of frozen "happening" (4) to create a revelation of a modern, almost existentialist feeling for life.

31

The existence of the homelessness of modern urban man, his sense of being lost is the indication of the confusion of the surroundings. It reflects Beckmann's experience of being isolated and lack of pleasant domestic feelings in the large city. His Self Portrait with Red Scarf is one of the particular examples of the dejectedness of isolation.

The sense of oppressive closeness is now primarily derived from the physical nearness of the individuals to each other rather than from the space. The social chaos in the urban environment reflects the lack of physical freedom and the claustrophobic image of the mass of people within a society which symbolizes spatial restriction and the exclusion of free choice of action and individual decision and of open relationships.

The main image of the suffering people in the urban environment is violence such as maiming and torture, and the psychological expression of the victims and the form of a compulsory sexual union in the night. The night symbolizes the hell of humanity and the impossibility of evasion.

This is the consequence of how aware Beckmann is of the spatially psychological relationship between the human figures and their environment in particular by the creation of the image of brutality. He attempted to revealingly strengthen the implications of negative symbolism directly from his physical and psychological experiences of the dejection of the urban society.

Firstly, I want to concentrate on the selected series of self portraits of Beckmann as a sequential revelation of self; in artistic terms, of style and substance. In the self portraits, I intend to examine the psychological state of Beckmann, the self portrait and his surroundings, in order to reflect his experience in the war, the social-political chaos and how he was affected. The surroundings can create an impression of the facial expressions and the moods of Beckmann. It is essential to scan at the degree of light and how big space is in the surrounding in which the self-portrait is to search his inner truth and also his ways of posing. The essence of intensive investigation to an over-all pictorial composition of the relationship between Beckmann's self-portrait and his background is to disclose the truth and meaning. His self-portrait could be narrative and evidential as Beckmann attempted to visually reveal the direct reality of what happened to him during his lifetime and how he was affected psychologically. How can you tell the difference between two self-portraits – Self-Portrait in Florence 1907 and the self-portrait of 1917 There is only a ten year gap between them but you can notice the differences. There must be various reasons why they are obviously dissimilar to each other. The consequences of the difference mainly depend on the changing environment and how he was affected circumstantially and what influenced him. One of the earliest self-portraits, painted in Florence in 1907, is more conventional and more pre-modern than the later self-portraits like Self-Portrait with Red Scarf 1917. The first self-portrait reveals how confident and calm Beckmann was. He posed as a courteous gentleman smoking proudly and standing in his black

Self-Portrait in Florence 1907

90 x 90 cm, oil on canvas

Self-Portrait with Red Scarf 1917

53 x 39 cm, oil on canvas

dress against the bright background in the vertical composition.
The light green landscape represents freedom and peace to
symbolize the calmness of Beckmann. But the figure is not
integrated with the background as he is a proud, aloof visitor.
There is not much evidence that this background affected him
psychologically. The background that surrounds Beckmann staring
at a viewer is spontaneously panoramic to reflect the initiation
of the portrait. In profound contrast to this painting , Self-
Portrait with Red Scarf 1917, shows Beckmann as haunted and
anxious surrounded by a claustrophobic interior with large window.
The facial and gestural expression of Beckmann is a greater
psychological state as a result of the catastrophe of war. This
portrait is more expressive and psychologically stronger than the
previous one. It also reflects the influence of Munch's haunting
art. Unlike the Florence self-portrait, the suffering figure is
well integrated with the strange lighted background in particular
to creation of realistic narration. Beckmann, seemingly being
compelled by tiny space, alertly watches and gestures with his
hands restlessly in a difficult position to symbolize the lack of
freedom during the war. Now you have seen the differences between
these two self-portraits. Therefore, the consequences of
differences mainly depend on how Beckmann was affected
psychologically during the periods of life.

Self-Portrait as a Medical Corpsman, 1915, another psychologically
expressive self-portrait in the Rembrandt style is against a
neutral grey background to emphasise his facial expression and the
revelation of his experience as a medical volunteer in wartime.

Self-Portrait as a Medical Corpsman 1915

55.5 x 38.5 cm, oil on canvas

The face shows a heavy strain which led to a nervous breakdown. This is a result of psychological stress during the war.

Self-Portrait in Tuxedo, 1927, is remarkably similar to Self-Portrait in Florence, twenty years earlier. Again Beckmann is egocentric and aloof. he looks like an academic or a politician in a natural repose. Symmetry in the background symbolizes security to reflect the confidence of Beckmann in peaceful Frankfurt where he held a professorship and had a good amount of time for compositional and observational studies. The face is partitioned into symmetrical patches of light and shadow. (5). The overall composition of this painting, the easy background and the relaxing portrait, reveals that his stay in Frankfurt was pleasurably peaceful and the simplified pictorial structure is well balanced. The strong contrast of black, white and brown gives a feeling of clear stylization.

The psychological experience and isolation of Beckmann in Berlin under Hitler's regime is strongly revealed in Self-Portrait with Horn, 1937. This is his first year of being an exile. The dark composition creates a sense of loneliness and solitude and increases the psychological statement of Beckmann's facial and gestural expression in order to strengthen the revelation of his depressing experience. Beckmann, playing with the horn, is surrounded by a tiny black space to reflect his strong desire to be securely hidden and strictly anonymous. The horn symbolizes German Romanticism and also represents his desire for evasion and freedom from the oppression in his native country. Beckmann's self-portraits are therefore important for the

38

Self-Portrait in Tuxedo 1927

141 x 96 cm,oil on canvas

Self-Portrait with Horn 1937

110 x 101 cm, oil on canvas

revelation of social chaos in the early twentieth century which affected him psychologically. This is evidenced by the spatial relationship between his self-portrait and his surroundings. This is more complex in his multi-figural composition paintings.

In the complex multi-figural composition paintings, Beckmann, as an individualist, was particularly interested in the individual and the character of each figure and how each of them was affected by each other and their own surroundings. Now let us study the psychological relationship between the figures and their surroundings and within the individual figure.

One of the most famous of Beckmann's psychological paintings is The Night, 1918-19, which is the obvious revelation of the artist's depiction of what has happened in the world. The nightmarish fantastical composition of this painting presents us with a tragic world view that blends the artist's obsession with emptiness and the horror of war with his bias towards objective realism.

First, Beckmann's obsession with emptiness. He once wrote that "the foreground of infinite space always needs to be filled in order to conceal its frightening depth." (6). He attempted to reduce the privilege of the figures' freedom of movement and placement and to create a claustrophobic feeling of the over-crowded room to reflect the social oppression and lawlessness during the years after the First World War. This painting shows the new symbolic realism combined with vertical space projection and it also exhibits similar proportional and expressive

The Night 1918–19

138 x 152 cm, oil on canvas

distortions. The composition is arranged around with the figures in a geometrical manner in order to achieve the multiple viewpoint, increase the volume of the individual object and reach an integration of figures and space. Beckmann intended to simplify a geometrical composition of the picture by increasing the psychological state of the figures, both victims and aggressors in an expressive style. The expression of the figures is gestural to symbolize the unlimited lawlessness of sadistic torture and corrupt.

In another claustrophobic painting, Family Picture, 1920, Beckmann attempted to manifest the depression of urban family life during the social chaos in the early post-war years. The restriction of space in a room left the family little opportunity of freedom of movement which symbolizes social oppression. The motionlessness of the figures manifestly reveals quiescence and loneliness in the urban dwellings. In this figural painting, a man lying on a bed holding a horn was probably Beckmann himself to reflect his participation with the cheerless people and his understanding of how suffering they were. There are some objects, probably to symbolize the inner privileges, for instance the positive thoughts and feelings, to create a sense of mental mitigation. For example, the pleasant objects, say the kite on the left corner of the composition, the candlelights on the table, the plant in the right corner, are a symbol of hope and give a feeling of relief. The kite represents freedom and the possibilities of evasion from social oppression for instance. Beckmann attempted to interpret the reality of the domestic dejection in the urban dwellings.

Family Picture 1920

65 x 100 cm, oil on canvas

The colourful imaginative painting, The Dream, 1921, is probably one of the most amusing paintings Beckmann ever did. Beckmann's main purpose is to interpret the abstract vision into physical reality, to reflect his nightmare experience of urban society. The central part of this composition is the young, innocent girl just arriving from the country. The girl has lost her way in the heartless big city and is surrounded by the frightening people, a beggar, a prostitute and aggressive men. The figural composition is a reflection of the typical depiction of casually social mixture of many different characters being compelled together undesirably and unpleasant grottiness in the claustrophobic urban environment.

The Dream is in certain respects a complementary picture to Carnival, 1920. The painting, Carnival, is one of the important in the revelation of the psychological tension Beckmann establishes between his protagonists and their environment and clearly expresses a diametrically opposed evaluation of man's relation to the harsh reality of post-war Europe. His highest achievement for being expressive in his figurative painting is the psychological manipulation of space. Two standing figures portrayed as the clowns, the friends of Beckmann, represent the inner truth in order to avoid disclosure. According to Beckmann, the clown in the carnival was, "the objectivity of the inner face" which he attempted to show the idea concealed behind the appearance of reality. This is the main consequence of how aware Beckmann was made of the fantastical world of the clowns which turned him to the more explicit symbolizm of the circus,

45

The Dream 1921

184 x 87.5 cm, oil on canvas

Carnival 1920

183 x 87 cm, oil on canvas

fairground and variety show in order to comment on the arbitrariness of life. (7). The character of a clown interested Beckmann for the privilege of being mysterious.

As Beckmann's interest in the mysteriously wonderful world of the carnival and in being remained strictly anonymous, he produced the double portrait Carnival: Pierette and Clown 1925. These figures actually are the artist and his wife to symbolically represent their private marriage. The red curtain behind the two figures dressed in carnival costumes is a symbol of concealment. The composition and its colour creates a pleasant feeling of unity and harmony.

Another theatrical painting of the couple The Loge, 1928, reveals Beckmann's enthusiasm in theatre particularly the lights and the influence of Rembrandt for the same purpose. This painting is tonally similar to Self-Portrait in Tuxedo to reflect Beckmann's pleasant times in Frankfurt of which Night-Life is a symbol. The calmness and tranquillity of the figures in the stark contrasts of light and shadow represent the peacefulness of Beckmann. In the composition, a lady sitting looking out from the balcony beyond her male companion in the background gives a sense of protection and security. The gentleman is compositionally part of the background as a result of confidence of the lady which reflects Beckmann's confidence.

48

Carnival: Pierette and Clown 1925

160 x 105 cm, oil on canvas
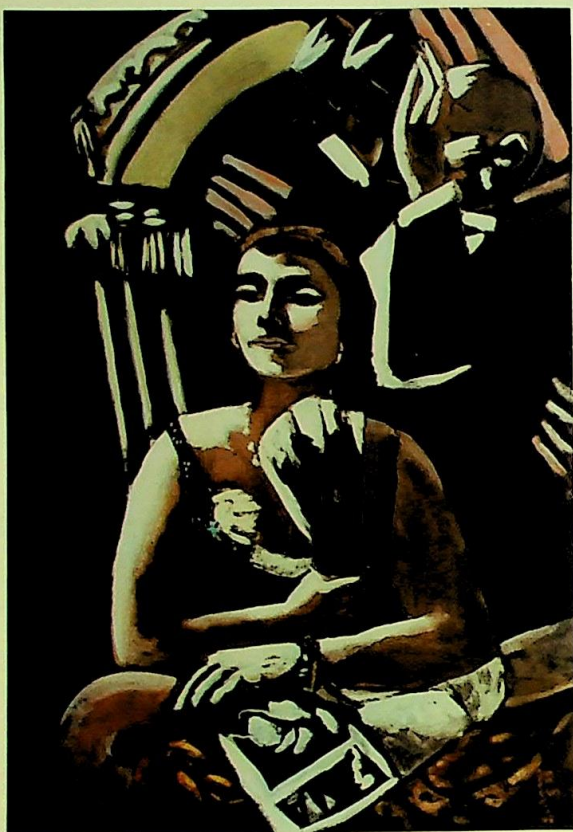
The Loge 1925

130 x 85 cm, oil on canvas

These works are what I intend to basically concentrate on the obvious relationship between the figures and their environment by searching for Beckmann's achievement in simplifying a pictorial composition allegorically and spatially in order to realistically increase the psychological state of the figures in the early twentieth century Germany.

FOOTNOTES

(1) Werner Haftmann, <u>20th Century Painting</u>, p. 268

(2) Carla Schulz-Hoffman, Bars, Fetters, Masks <u>Max Beckmann Perspective</u>, p.15-53.

(3) As Above.

(4) B. S. Myers, <u>The German Expressionists</u>, p.246.

(5) Stephen Lackner, <u>Beckmann</u>, p. 98.

(6) Stephen Lackner, <u>Beckmann</u>, p. 82.

(7) Sarah O'Brien-Twohig, <u>Beckmann - Carnival</u>, p.17

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