

# Max Beckmann, "Liebespaar" (Lovers), lithograph.

One of the most prolific self-portraitists in art history and a leading artist of the *New Objectivity* modernist movement, Max Beckmann created innumerable works that transformed the pain, anxiety, and unrest of World War I and the interwar years into arresting art, functioning both as social critique and inspired objects. Michaan's Auctions is proud to offer one such work, **Max Beckmann, "Liebespaar" (Lovers), lithograph** (\$6/800), for sale in our April Gallery Auction, held on Friday, April 19th.

The lithograph consists of a portrait of lovers, who hold each other tightly upon a blank field. The woman is positioned to the left of the man, and is above him, with her chin on the same



level as his eyes. Her right arm reaches across the man's face towards his far cheek, pulling him into her. Rendered with enlarged facial features and a small bun that descends into a curled fringe, she wears a tight necklace and a dress or shirt with thin straps and a plunging neckline, which is only lightly depicted.

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The man is partially in shadow and rendered darker than his partner but has the same enlarged features. He sports a small, well-groomed mustache, short-cropped hair, and appears to be wearing a suit or other formal wear, although it is difficult to discern. While his head is turned towards the woman, his gaze is fixed slightly down and into the distance, and her face is in profile facing the right of the frame, with eyes staring straight ahead.

This work reflects the widespread anxiety and turbulent conditions of the period in which it was made. Printed in 1921, Germany was struggling to adapt to its newly democratic system of government, with hyperinflation beginning in 1921 and continuing to worsen through the end of 1923, as well as two attempted coups by disaffected former German soldiers. These conditions, when combined with the

wartime famine during World War I and the loss of up to 2.8 million people due to war conditions, brought German society to the brink of collapse. In this work, we can see the anxiety of the times etched onto the faces of its subjects, who hold each other with blank expressions and thoughts focused elsewhere. The blank field in which the subjects are positioned further emphasizes their togetherness, which is able to momentarily hold the troubles of the outside world at bay.

This work is distinguishable from Max Beckmann's broader body of work, not only by its medium, but by its relative compositional simplicity. Typically an oil painter, Beckmann here works in lithography, creating a more informal composition and offering an insight into the artist's creative process. This work is also differentiated by its composition, which features only two

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subjects, partially rendered, on a blank field, in contrast to many of his painted works which typically contain a detailed scene compressed onto the same plane as its subjects. What remains the same is Beckmann's unique rendering of the human form, an uncanny balancing of proportions and flattening of features, which has come to define the artist's work.



Max Beckmann was born in the city of Leipzig, which at the time was part of the unified German Empire under the Kingdom of Saxony, in 1884. He showed an early inclination towards

modernism that intensified following his experiences as a medical orderly during World War I, where he began to significantly distort figures and space when compared with his previous academic orientation. An incredibly productive self-portraitist, he achieved rapid success in the post-war years, earning a teaching position at the University of Frankfurt, until the Nazi party rose to power. Dismissed from his post in 1933, over 500 of Beckmann's works were removed from German public museums as Hitler decried "degenerate art," leaving Beckmann to flee the country with his wife and settle in Amsterdam. He tried for years to procure an American visa but was unsuccessful until 1947; whereafter he taught at Washington University in St. Louis and the Brooklyn Museum School, before passing away from a heart attack in 1950 at the age of 66.

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**Max Beckmann,**  
**"Liebespaar" (Lovers), lithograph**  
(\$6/800) will be offered in Michaan's  
Auctions April Gallery Auction on  
Friday, April 19<sup>th</sup>. The sale features  
excellent furniture pieces from the Asian  
Art Department, in addition to  
important works from notable artists,  
and a number of fine jewelry pieces. The  
auction is led by the Fine Art  
Department, which will be offering oil  
paintings by George Demont Otis and

Gideon Jacques Denny, while the Asian  
Art Department offers a 12-panel folding  
screen and a hanging rug. Also included  
in the sale are platinum, diamond, and  
gold items from the Jewelry  
Department.

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