

Public Abstract

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Gothic Art and German Modernism:

Max Beckmann and "transzendente Objektivität"

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Graduation Term Fall 2005

This study explores the characteristics of Max Beckmann's art in the context of German Expressionist art and Modernism in the beginning of the 20th century, focusing on the utilization of traditional religious motives, inspired by Northern Gothic art. Beckmann painted *The Descent from the Cross* in 1917, at the highpoint of the German Expressionist art movement. Allusions to the influence of a heightened emotionality and physicality of Nithard's *Isenheim Altarpiece* can be found. It has been suggested that Beckmann sanctified the secular by using religious symbols in his painting, however, this paper examines Beckmann's secularization of the sacred in order to humanize and show what he understood as "transzendente Objektivität," manifested in his art statement *Creative Credo* (1918).

Through the examination of the role of art and the artist in the Gothic period and its influences on Beckmann's art, *The Descent from the Cross* is interpreted in the context of post-war Germany art philosophical writings such as Wilhelm Worringer and Friedrich Nietzsche.

Beckmann historicized and individualized the religious scene in favor of the viewer's capability to emphasize with the figures surrounding Christ, in comparison to Gothic art and its focus on Christ. Beckmann utilized well-established traditional symbols such as the Cross in order to establish objectivity in his work. Also, Beckmann's painting constructed a popular notion of national identity and memory within the potential viewer.