

Briefe im Kriege

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- Beckmann, Max. *Briefe im Kriege*, edited by Peter Beckmann. Munich, Zurich, Piper 1985.
- Beckmann, Max. *Briefe im Kriege*. Lübeck; Hamburg; Matthiesen, 1956.
- Beckman, Max, Minna Beckmann-Tube. *Briefe im Kriege*. Berlin; Cassirer, 1916.

Briefe im Kriege, *Letter in the War*, written by Max Beckmann during World War I, is entirely in German. Beckmann was a German medic during WWI, a poet, as well as an artist. A great number of his works can still be seen in museums today. There are three editions of this book, published in 1916, 1956, and 1984. The recipient of the letters, Minna Beckmann Tube, was Beckmann's first wife. A portrait drawn by Max Beckmann is included within the book. Their son Peter is named as a co-author of the 1984 edition. Minne is named as co-author in the 1916 edition. Today most mention of Max Beckmann is his art, which, is described by several websites, changed dramatically in style after his service in World War I.¹ In Nazi Germany he lived in self-imposed exile in the Netherlands with his second wife, Quappi.

The original 1916 collection of letters does not turn up many results online under searches such as "location" or "ownership." The original letters themselves do not exist anymore.² Since Peter helped in the publishing of the latest edition, this assumption is most likely true. I hold the UCSB 1984 version of *Briefe im Kriege*, which, as mentioned, is written entirely in German. GHDI excerpts a letter from April 20, 1915 within the book. Beckmann, clearly affected by the war, created many gruesome sketches of what he saw as a paramedic during this war.³ GHDI used this letter among various other letters from different soldiers in war to document perspectives on the war. There is a Max Beckmann Archive, comprised of more than 5,000 letters, 300 of which are in his handwriting.⁴

Max Beckmann's biographical information can be found on several websites, all of which line up reasonably, in terms of content. Born and raised in Leipzig in 1884, Germany,

¹ The Art Story Contributors. "Max Beckmann: German Painter, Printer, and Draftsman." *The Art Story: Modern Art Insight*, accessed November 13, 2018. <https://www.theartstory.org/artist-beckmann-max.htm>

² Beckmann, Max. *Briefe im Kriege*, edited by Peter Beckmann. Munich Zurich, Piper 1985. Translation by Harold Marcuse. P. 76.

³ GHDI, Dr. Chickering, Roger. Accessed November 13, 2018. http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=809

⁴ Die Pinakotheken. "Max Beckmann Archive." Accessed December 3, 2018. <https://www.pinakothek.de/en/research/max-beckmann-archive>

Max Beckmann was trained at the Weimar Academy in 1900-1903.⁵ Serving as a medic in WWI, Beckmann's art changed dramatically from exposure to the maimed and dead soldiers, resulting in art filled with horrifying imagery.⁶ "The horror of mutual annihilation, the misery of the wounded, but also human love and touching in the shadow of war - Beckmann drew what he saw, and described in letters to his wife Minna Tube what moved him."⁷

In Nazi Germany, Beckmann was labeled a "cultural Bolshevik" and forced to give up his artwork to the Germans, as well as resign from his teaching position at the Art School in Frankfurt.⁸ After the war, Beckmann moved to the United States with his second wife Quappi, and eventually died of a heart attack in 1950.⁹ Today his legacy is more focused on his artwork, rather than specifically *Briefe im Kriege*, as seen in museums in the United States and Germany. His most famous piece, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (1917), represents the dramatic change he went through during his time in the war. "The carnage broke him,"¹⁰ and he was discharged for severe nervous breakdowns and hallucinations.¹¹ *Briefe im Kriege*, translates to Letters in War, and indeed the book is a collection of letters, written to his first wife Minne, from 1914 to the end of 1915. The context of the publication of the book is his discharge from the war, which took place in 1915,¹² and it was published a year later in 1916.

Other sources that discuss Beckmann are mostly art journals, delving into the context surrounding Beckmann's art. A journal comprised of several authors cite Beckmann's and Tube's 1916 edition in their bibliography, most likely alluding to his sketches as seen in *Briefe*

⁵ "Max Beckmann: German Painter" *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Accessed November 13, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Max-Beckmann>

⁶ Britannica

⁷ Beckmann, Max. *Briefe im Kriege*, edited by Peter Beckmann. Munich Zurich, Piper 1985. Translation by Harold Marcuse.

⁸ Wikipedia, "Max Beckmann" accessed November 13, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max_Beckmann

⁹ Wikipedia

¹⁰ Southgate, M. Therese MD. *Beckmann's "Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery."* Accessed November 13, 2018.

<http://www.phs.poteau.k12.ok.us/williams/APAH/readings/Beckmann's%20Christ%20and%20the%20Woman%20Taken%20in%20Adultery,%20JAMA%20Feb.pdf>

¹¹ Southgate

¹² Southgate

im Kriege.¹³ By translating some excerpts from his letters, Beckmann wrote in a very poetic fashion, so much so that even Google Translate (which is very literal) reveals a beautiful selection of words. I would select Beckmann's work as a primary source as it not only describes the war firsthand, but also reveals the emotions that some soldiers had shared. The mature writing and sketches that came from Beckmann result from the emotional trauma that he experienced, which is shared by various soldiers on all sides.

“Es war Mittag, als ich durch die glühendheiße Allee nach Hause fuhr. Fast lautlos glitt ich dahin, durch die zer störten Ortschaften. Kein Mensch. Alles verkrochen vor Hitze und Mittag.”¹⁴
 “It was noon when I drove home through the glowing hot avenue. Almost silently, I glided through the ruined villages. No human. Everything crept up with heat and noon.”

When the term “Max Beckmann” is typed into the German nGram, it frequently reveals information similar to that in the narrative above. His artwork does not gain popularity until after WWI. His name drops off almost completely in the 1940s, during Nazi Germany. There is a spike around 1960, possibly hinting at the publication of the second edition of *Briefe im Kriege*. The spike in the 1980s may be done in part to the publication of the third and final edition, Peter Beckmann's 1984 edition of his fathers' work. In American English, his name is hardly mentioned at all before the 1930s, spiking in the late 1960s. This may hint once again at his artwork, which gains more popularity after his death. Where in Germany his name was mentioned more after WWI, the United States gives more focus to Beckmann in the years following WWII when he was living in New York.

¹³ Swarzenski, Hanns. Rathbone, Perry T. Muller, Hannah B. *Max Beckmann 1948*, No. ½ 1948, (p.1-114).

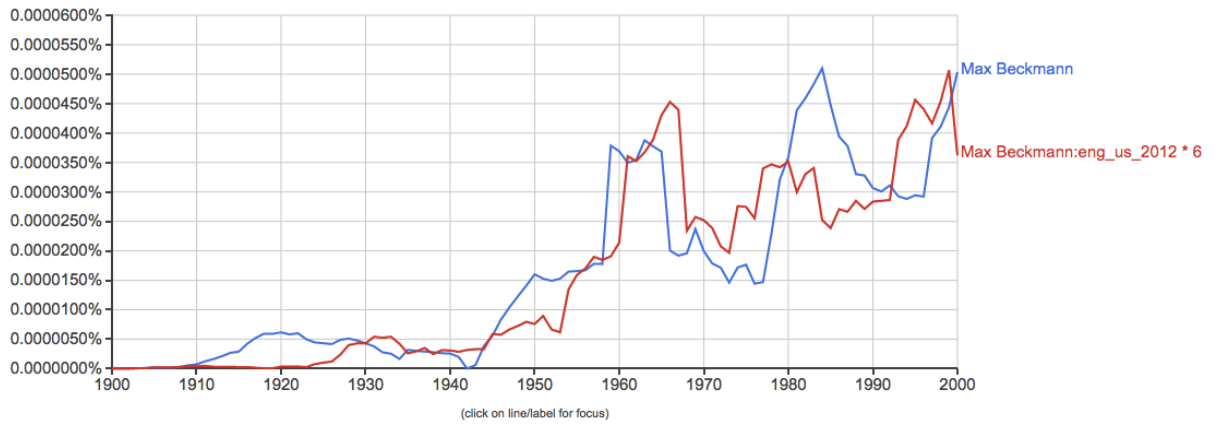
¹⁴ Beckmann, Max. *Briefe im Kriege*, edited by Peter Beckmann. Munich Zurich, Piper 1985.

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Bibliography

Beckmann, Max. *Briefe im Kriege*, edited by Peter Beckmann. Munich Zurich, Piper 1985.

The letters and sketches by Max Beckmann in his time during WWI, sent frequently to his wife, Minne, with a gap in 1915.¹⁵ The letters have been edited by the couple, and Beckmann's sketches are on several pages in the latest 1985 version. Beckmann describes the war as he saw it, as well as how it affected him. His sketches represent times in which he could not describe what he saw in any other way. The writing he uses is poetic, each letter revealing more about the author, as well as the brutal world he found himself in. His son, Peter Beckmann, has an afterword that reveals the context of Beckmann's writing. Translated by Harold Marcuse, Peter reveals that his father wrote to his wife often, many times drawing what he saw if there were no words to describe the catastrophes he saw.

The Art Story Contributors. "Max Beckmann: German Painter, Printer, and Draftsman." *The Art Story: Modern Art Insight*, accessed November 13, 2018

Goes into a great amount of detail of Beckmann's early life, where he acquired his painting skills, and his time in the war. It gives a narrative of Beckmann's life, his history of his wives, and his time in Nazi Germany, and his eventual immigration to the United States in 1947.¹⁶ The website, being centered around art, focuses mainly on his artwork, such as how it changed dramatically after his time in the war. *Briefe im Kriege* is hardly mentioned.

Die Pinakotheken. "Max Beckmann Archive." Accessed December 3, 2018.

<https://www.pinakothek.de/en/research/max-beckmann-archive>

An expanding archive created for Max Beckmann's work, constantly being updated with gifts and new acquired material. The archive was created for research into Max Beckmann's life, and includes thousands of letters, lectures, pictures, and newspaper cuttings mentioning Beckmann. The archive also updates the catalogues of all the materials included, keeping the archive up to date.

¹⁵ Beckmann, p. 78.

¹⁶ Beckmann, translation by Harold Marcuse.

Southgate, M. Therese MD. *Beckmann's "Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery."* Vol. 287, No. 6. February 13, 2002. Accessed November 13, 2018.

Southgate provides an in depth look into one of Beckmann's most famous pieces of art. As an art historian, Southgate mentions the background in which Beckmann was greatly affected by the gruesome events in the war, and how his artwork changed. Interestingly, the United States as well as Germany (as seen in the Ngrams) frequently mentioned Beckmann in the years following WWI, and mostly after WWII. This implies that his artwork gained more of an audience due to what influenced his art. The painting as well as his sketches gain more popularity due to the sheer depth they provide, the story they carry, and the emotion within the art.

Wikipedia, "Max Beckmann" accessed November 13, 2018.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max_Beckmann

The American version of Beckmann's history, described on Wikipedia. The German version provides much more detail, however, as this webpage entry tends to follow once again the pattern of his art. This implies that his artwork is incredibly famous in the United States, which left more of an impact than his letter.

Beckmann, Max. "Soldiers Describe Combat IV: Max Beckmann (September 14, 1914-June 12, 1915)". GHDI. Munich 1993. Translation by Jeffrey Verhey. http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=809

A translation of one of the letters by Max Beckmann, which described what he saw during the war. The letter mentions his son, Peter, who was sick at some point. The letter described the area Beckmann was in as grim. He wrote about the wounded, which as a medic, Beckmann dealt with many. He also wrote about wanting to get away, to run as far as he could.

Swarzenski, Hanns. Rathbone, Perry T. Muller, Hannah B. *Max Beckmann 1948*, No. 1-2 (1948), (p.1-114) (JSTOR).

An anthology that discusses the art work of Max Beckmann. The anthology cites *Briefe im Kriege*, and within has several art works, including the sketches during WWI by Beckmann. *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* makes an appearance. What is interesting about this is the edition of *Briefe im Kriege*, as it is cited as the 1916 edition, a somewhat rare book. The

reason for this is the journal is written in 1948, before the death of Beckmann, and far before the publishing of the 1956 and 1984 editions.

“Max Beckmann: German Painter” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Accessed November 13, 2018.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Max-Beckmann>

Britannica offers a historical narrative of Beckmann’s life, describing his time at school in his early life as well as his later years. The page continues describing his time in WWI as a medical corpsman. The art he creates in this period is dark and filled with horrid imagery. The page pays close attention to his dealings with the Nazi party, as well as the imagery found in his sketches. His art remains quite famous, and it popular in the United States, as many of these websites focus explicitly on the spiritual nature of his art, and the influences he used to create.

Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery by Max Beckmann.



A sketch by Max Beckmann, found in Briefe im Kriege (1984).

