

“The only thing we have, the reality of our dreams in the pictures,” wrote Max Beckmann in his diary on April 4, 1946.<sup>1</sup> Dreams are a constant dimension in Beckmann’s emotional world. They turn up in numerous diary entries and other textual sources with various nuances and levels of meaning. Dreams pervade his sense of reality and permeate his pictures. They connect, relativize, and construct authentic worlds of their own. “The dreamlike of our existence simultaneously with the unutterably sweet illusion of reality,” is how he summarizes it in 1940. He also spoke of the “metaphysics of materiality.”<sup>2</sup> Beckmann’s metaphor of dreams has different dimensions from the dream-like world of Klee’s artistic thought and work. Klee’s drawings and pictures internalize the balance between consciousness and intuition, the dialogue between the ego and the world as an autonomous field of perception, in which dreams create a vague zone for a mysterious pictorial world. For Beckmann, dreams are a sign of existential drama.<sup>3</sup> His style is rough, bold, and energetic—and at the same time full of vitality and tenderness.

Dreams: a field of activity without intellectual protection, an inspiring, impulsive program of contrasts vis-à-vis superficial reality, an instinctive precautionary measure against demands from the affirmative images of the external world. The pictures filter and create an autonomous reality in which the ambivalent world of life and experience has a place. People, situations, and things feature as experienced through art, in pictures that move in an intermediate stage of unending dimensions of feelings, perceptions and reflections: “dreams of the night and dreams of the day slip away . . .”<sup>4</sup> “[D]reams of nonsense and dreams of distance.”<sup>5</sup>

Beckmann’s pictures produce, reflect, and invent “dreams,” in a setting that is at once realistic and artificial, individual and objectivized. Beckmann’s “dreams in the pictures” intrude questioningly, challengingly, disquietingly, subversively, and anarchically in the socially accepted and standardized balance of forces: visual worlds that counter the disrupted balances and unstable ordering systems of the exterior world with their unconventional, innovative, conceptional force. They are the provocations of dreams, the “unreally real things,”<sup>6</sup> whose visual realisms and refractions are about the insecurity of a creative human existence.

“Illusion of time and space”

“Very enjoyable day that actually started out rather melancholy . . . then gradually built up to a dream-like condition, reaching a remarkable conclusion with Butchy and a misty winter morning.”<sup>7</sup> This diary entry describes a “mood picture” of a day experienced as a wave of indeterminate sensations that link contrasting perceptions to one another. Indeterminate conditions characterize Beckmann’s view of things and situations. On a summer’s day in 1917, Klee talks of the “impression of timelessness . . . , that very nice balance of existence, an act of standing where scarcely a breath should stir. All activity is just mechanical then, an illusion. All that matters is just