

Quappi, much more than *Frau Beckmann*

Leticia de Cos Martín



Max Beckmann
Quappi in Pink Jumper, 1932–34
(detail)

[\[+ info\]](#)

fig. 1

Max Beckmann

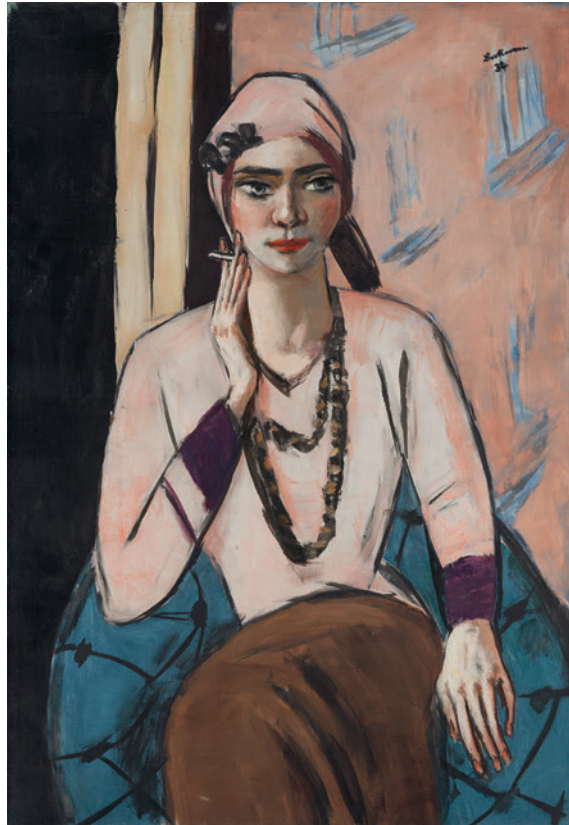
Quappi in Pink Jumper, 1932–34

Oil on canvas, 105 × 73 cm

Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza,

Madrid

[\[+ info\]](#)



‘Oh my darling, how much I love you. What an astonishing force you unleash in me. Do it now [...]. For me you are something I am unable and unwilling to express... I could, but I don’t want to. I will paint it’¹

During our preparations for the exhibition *Beckmann. Exile Figures* that opened at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in the autumn of 2018, we examined some of the recent studies published on Beckmann in order to update the information we had on the four works the museum owns by this artist, considered a leading name in German twentieth-century art. This article focuses on the delightful portrait of *Quappi in Pink Jumper*, 1932–34 [fig. 1], a painting acquired by Baron Hans Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza in 1969 from the German gallery owner Roman Norbert Ketterer and now on display in the exhibition *German Expressionism in Baron Thyssen-Bornemisza’s Collection*.

¹

Beckmann 1993–1996, vol. 1, letter 304, June 1925, p. 313 [the underlining is the artist’s own].

fig. 2

Quappi with her pet dogs Chilly and Majong, 1937

fig. 3

Quappi shortly before travelling to the United States, 1947



Before going on to analyse 'our' portrait of Quappi it is appropriate to recall a number of key facts about the artist. Max Beckmann (Leipzig, 1884–New York, 1950) is a prominent figure in the history of Western art, albeit something of a loner, defined by many historians as an outsider. Beckmann remained on the fringes of the art trends of his time (Expressionism, Cubism, Surrealism) throughout practically his entire career. He had firsthand experience of the various movements in Berlin and Paris (he lived and worked in both capitals), and his dealers kept him abreast of what was going on in New York. Yet none of the art styles he discovered tied in with his own conception of painting; besides, as a determined individualist he had no wish to belong to a group. Beckmann believed that painting should serve to express the ultimate truths of human existence: 'I am seeking for the *bridge* which leads from the *visible* to the *invisible*.'² This, coupled with the circumstances of his life – a succession of unexpected events and setbacks forced him to start practically all over again from scratch several times – explains why his oeuvre has an absolutely personal and unmistakable style and why his compositions have been described as visual hieroglyphics on account of their complexity. Beckmann's modernity stems more from this highly personal conception of painting than from formal aspects.

²

In 'On My Painting', a lecture given in London in connection with the exhibition of *20th Century German Art* at the Burlington Galleries, 21 July 1938. See Beckmann 2003, p. 229.

Max Beckmann, who had already enjoyed a period of professional success before the Great War, again achieved recognition as a painter both in and outside Germany during the 1920s and early 1930s, though his situation radically changed following the rise to power of National Socialism in 1933. The Nazi government gave orders for him to be immediately dismissed from his teaching post at the Frankfurt Städelschule. The artist's ensuing move to Berlin has been interpreted as an initial exile within Germany before he was forced into permanent exile in July 1937, when the Nazis included his work in the Degenerate Art exhibition. At this point Beckmann and Quappi left Germany, not realising that the artist would never return to his country of birth. The couple hurriedly fled to Amsterdam, where a few relatives lived. As the city was close to Germany, they were visited by the artist's son Peter Beckmann and other friends, whose special permits allowed them a certain amount of freedom to cross the border. The outbreak of the Second World War, triggered by the events of the summer of 1939, caught the couple holidaying on the Dutch coast and weighing up whether France or the United States was the best option for a permanent move. Unable to return to Paris, they remained trapped in Holland for ten long years before finally departing for the United States in the summer of 1947, where Beckmann spent the last three years of his life.³

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For a full biography of the artist see the catalogue *Beckmann. Exile Figures*, pp. 181–207 (Llorens 2018).

fig. 4

Friedrich August von Kaulbach
Portrait of Frieda Scotta, 1901
 Whereabouts unknown



4

Marie-Louise von Motesiczky was one of the leading female Austrian painters of the twentieth century. Her oeuvre includes more than 300 paintings, especially portraits, self-portraits, and still lifes, as well as several hundred drawings. She started out in Vienna and furthered her training and worked in Berlin, Frankfurt, and Paris. She was a pupil of Beckmann's and remained a close friend of his for the rest of her life. When the Nazis rose to power she was forced to emigrate to the United Kingdom.

From Mathilde Kaulbach to Quappi

It appears to have been Countess Henriette von Motesiczky (1882–1978) who began calling Mathilde Kaulbach Quappi during the year Mathilde lived with the family in Vienna while taking singing classes. The nickname Quappi derives from a corruption of the surname Kaulbach that recalls Kaulquappe, a German word for tadpole. Thereafter Mathilde would be known to her relatives and friends by this sonorous, affectionate nickname. Quappi (1904–1986) was the youngest of the three daughters of the painter Friedrich August von Kaulbach (1850–1920), a portraitist of the Bavarian court who hailed from a family of artists; a notable relative was her uncle Wilhelm von Kaulbach, who came to direct the Munich Academy of Arts, like Friedrich himself. August's second wife was Danish: Frieda Scotta (née Schytte), a famous concert violinist in her day [fig. 4]. Quappi inherited her mother's musical sensibility and received her first violin classes at just four. Her stay in Vienna with the aristocratic Motesiczkys influenced not only the young German girl's name but also her professional career and personal life, as it was during that year, 1924, that Quappi and Beckmann met in the mansion owned by her hosts on the outskirts of the Austrian capital.

Beckmann had been living in Frankfurt since he was discharged from the German army (he had enlisted as a volunteer) following a nervous breakdown in 1915. He moved in with his friends Ugi (1879–1957) and Friedel Battenberg, who generously made their studio and home available to him. He gradually carved out a place for himself in Frankfurt's society. He began frequenting the weekly meetings hosted by Heinrich Simon (1880–1941), heir and editor-in-chief of the German newspaper *Frankfurter Zeitung*, for local artists, intellectuals, and politicians. Indeed, it was at one of these luncheons that Beckmann met Georg Swarzenski (1876–1957) and Fritz Wichert (1878–1951), directors of the Städel and its Kunstschule respectively, who later offered him a teaching post at the Städel School of Arts and Crafts (October 1925). These lunches were regularly attended by the host's wife, Irma Simon, who often travelled to her native Vienna. In 1920, Beckmann accompanied her and was introduced to her circle of friends in the Austrian capital. Among them were Henriette von Motesiczky and her daughter Marie-Louise (1906–1996).⁴ Quappi moved in with the Von Motesiczky family in the autumn of 1923 and the two girls soon became firm friends.

fig. 5
Max with the three Kaulbach sisters,
1925



fig. 6
Max Beckmann and Mathilde
Kaulbach sitting on a chaise longue
with another woman (possibly
Marie-Louise von Motesiczky)

In the spring of 1924, Beckmann announced he would be visiting his Austrian friends, and that was when the artist and Mathilde met. Quappi tells in her memoirs that before her Austrian sojourn she had often dreamt of an unknown but protective male figure and when she heard and saw Beckmann she immediately recognised him as the man of her dreams. Marie-Louise owned a woodcut by Beckmann entitled *Self-Portrait* which had drawn Quappi's attention even before their first encounter.⁵

In a letter dated late November 1924, Beckman wrote to '[...] the painter Marie Louise von Mo...te...ky, Piz, and the singer Hildegard von Kaulbach, whom they call Quapp...'⁶ Although they do not bear an exact date, some of Beckmann's first letters written to Quappi in the spring of 1925 still survive. In them he already refers to her as his girlfriend: 'That is how I feel your love and that is how I love you. My little one, up until now you were a stranger to me in this world'.⁷

⁵ Beckmann 2018, p. 9.

⁶ Letter to Marie-Louise von Motesiczky and Quappi, late November 1924. In Beckmann 1993–1996, vol. 1, p. 261.

⁷ Letter to Quappi (undated). In Beckmann 1993–1996, vol. 1, p. 265.

fig. 7

Villa Kaulbach in Munich, where Quappi spent her childhood and their wedding was held

8

Peter Beckmann earned a PhD in medicine at Berlin in 1935. During the war he was a medical officer with the Luftwaffe. From 1943 onwards, he directed several clinics in Bavaria, becoming specialised in cardiology and rehabilitation therapies. He also devoted himself to his father's works, as both administrator and author of publications on Beckmann, and as a founding member of the Max Beckmann Gesellschaft in 1953. His publications include: *Max Beckmann* (1955); *Max Beckmann. Sichtbares und Unsichtbares* (1965); and *Schwarz auf Weiss. Max Beckmann. Wege zur Wirklichkeit* (1977).

9

Letter to Minna Beckmann-Tube, 25 August 1928. In Beckmann 1993–1996, vol. 2, p. 123: 'Of course, I too am willing to meet up with you in Nuremberg, though I think it would be nicer for us both if it were in Paris. [...] I've told you thousands of times how seriously I take our friendship. We can carry on helping and strengthening each other: free of all conventionalism. Be my good, dear big boy and come [...] Behave and don't torment me any more with your silence or refusals, be yourself truly, like last time. Do say yes... my dear, I beg you, please [...]'.

10

According to Lilly von Schnitzler, one of Beckmann's requirements for marrying Quappi was to be able to carry on seeing his first wife. Copeland 1997, p. 327.



A year after they met (the day he was discharged from a Viennese clinic after being treated for breaking his left hand), Beckmann asked Quappi, 20 years his junior, to marry him. The wedding took place in Munich on 1 September 1925 at the impressive Villa Kaulbach [fig. 7]. That afternoon the couple set off on their long honeymoon, visiting Rome and Naples and later Viareggio.

Quappi was Beckmann's second wife: in 1906 he had married Minna Tube (1881–1964), a former classmate at Weimar, who bore him a son, Peter Beckmann (1908–1990), in 1908.⁸ In 1915, when Beckmann returned from the front, the couple decided to part ways professionally and personally, albeit remaining on very good terms and in permanent contact. The artist continued to paint portraits of Minna even after he married Quappi.⁹ They also kept up regular correspondence until the death of Beckmann, who attached great importance to his first wife's opinions and advice on his art.¹⁰ On a personal level, Beckmann seems to have confided in Minna about his state of mind and health – impressions that he did not always

fig. 8

The couple posing in swimsuits on the beach, 25 September 1928



11

In a letter dated 28 August 1926, Minna Beckmann-Tube tells Günther Frank she saw Max Beckmann before he left for Paris and ended up 'feeling sorry for him': 'Today he has written that afterwards he had a complete breakdown'. Tellingly, Beckmann does not mention this emotional tension in the letters he sends to Quappi. In Beckmann 1993–1996, vol. 2, p. 319.

12

'If you wish to have a career [...] I will give you freedom, but then we won't be able to stay together. [...] I need all or nothing from you'. In Beckmann 1999, p. 12.

13

Diary, 16 December 1947: 'In the afternoon, Q. played the violin at Zunia's house'. In Beckmann 1965, p. 105.

14

Diary, 25 December 1947: 'Quappi played the violin'. In Beckmann 1965, p. 106.

15

Letter to Quappi, end of May 1925. In Beckmann 1993–1996, vol. 1, p. 284.

share with Quappi.¹¹ The letters Beckmann wrote to his first wife from the United States are strikingly frequent and expressive, and evidence how he opens up his heart to her. The painter expected both of his wives to devote themselves fully to him, as he felt that in a marriage it was enough for one of the spouses to be an artist.¹² It is significant that after they married Quappi only played the violin in private, for relatives and friends,¹³ and on special occasions (such as at the Rathbones' home on Christmas Day 1947¹⁴), and that Beckmann never portrayed her with a violin, though he did depict her beside other musical instruments.

'With you beside me I will be able to create very beautiful things that are necessary to humans, like Mozart's music'.¹⁵

Beckmann longed to find a partner and meeting Quappi seems to have been a revealing experience for him: 'Perhaps you are the only true friend I have in this world and I, yours [...] Perhaps you don't have the slightest idea of what you mean to me. I will tell you. You are my last hope of making any sense of this life it has befallen us to live, whose absurdity and insanity nobody sees as clearly as we do. A sense which we would banally call "fortune" or harmony. I have got to know many people and many women, yet until now I have not found a single woman with whom I believed it was possible to live, even if I was very much in love. [...] Only with one woman

fig. 9

Quappi by a car, about 1930



16

Letter to Quappi, 16 June 1925. In *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 306, 307, and 308.

17

Letter to Quappi, 9 October 1925. In *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 22.

18

Quappi had a driving licence – which was unusual at the time – and her own car in Frankfurt, which she used to chauffeur Beckmann to and from the studio. It was the same in New York.

19

'When we lived in Europe, I used to clean his palettes and brushes for him. He showed me how he wanted me to do it in his Frankfurt studio'. In Beckmann 1980, p. 146.

20

Letter to Quappi, 26 May 1925. In Beckmann 1993–1996, vol. 1, p. 277.

21

Diary, 25 January 1948: 'Last night I read Weininger and had a long talk with Quappi on death, morality, and immortality'. Beckmann 1965, p. 108.

22

The female name Cinthya or Cynthia originated in Ancient Greece and its mythology. It comes from the Greek word *Kynthia*, meaning from *Kynthos* (Cynthus), a mountain on Delos. Its meaning is 'from Mount Cynthus, goddess of the moon'; this epithet was applied to the moon goddess Artemis, who according to legend was born on that mountain. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cynthia>, accessed September 2018.

23

In Pillep 1990, p. 61.

can I find the last and most genuine harmonies of the world (if they really exist, that is)'.¹⁶ 'Oh, my darling, sweet little Quappi, come and rescue me from painting soon. Once again it wants to swallow me up'.¹⁷ Quappi was essential to Max for the rest of his life – not only because she played the perfect part of the 'artist's wife' who takes care of household affairs, deals with 'paperwork', and ensures the creator has peace of mind¹⁸ (she even cleaned his palettes and brushes for him),¹⁹ but because Beckmann considered her to be his equal: 'What you write about the self-portrait is fabulously correct. You are not only adorable and full of infinite charm, no, you are clever too, little Quappi!'²⁰ She undoubtedly made essential contributions to their discussions on painting, topical questions, and especially the major issues of mankind.²¹ After they married, Beckmann often called her Cynthia in allusion to Artemis, who was associated with the moon.²²

Quappi's role during the years of exile in Holland and the United States was equally decisive: 'Well, do you think that I could have endured this without Quappi? She is an angel sent to me so that I can accomplish my work'.²³ Mayen Beckmann, the painter's granddaughter, stated during the opening of

the Beckmann exhibition in 2018 that Quappi, a girl who had been raised 'like a princess', managed to overcome adversities and act bravely during the years of great hardship the couple spent in Amsterdam, enduring severe material and financial shortages and living in semi-hiding. Equally notable was her support during the first months when Beckmann was teaching in Saint Louis, as Quappi accompanied him and acted as an interpreter until the artist was proficient enough to give his classes in English:²⁴ 'I regularly accompanied Max to class, because he had asked me to be his interpreter, which was a true honour for me. In general Max was not very interested in teaching in words and preferred to help the students solve their problems with a brush or charcoal in his hand and to make corrections directly on the canvas they were talking about. When he wished to express a specific idea in words or considered it necessary to answer a question, it was my job to convey or clarify his opinion'.²⁵ Quappi dealt with all the correspondence in English, which increased greatly when the couple arrived in the United States. And we also have her to thank for the few existing images of Beckmann in movement as she filmed him during their travels and while he was working.²⁶

24

Diary, 27 February 1950. In Beckmann 1965, p. 205.

25

Beckmann 2018, p. 55.

26

Diary, 14 September 1944. In Beckmann 1965, p. 25.

27

Quappi Beckmann poured her anger into her diary in a heated mix of English and German on 22 May 1953: '*City Night* was not accepted for loan at the City Art Museum St. Louis, "because it is *full* of symbols (like Phallus) and it would shock the public!" This what Buster [Morton D.] May told me yesterday. Oh God—how is this possible. The bed posts—the ladder (etc?) people of today read the Freud-explanation of those symbols in painting. . . ! I was furious and sad. These idiots with their brains poisoned by that damned Freud. Nothing of this is true in the painting! ! My God—how stupid and dirty they are!!!' In Rewald 2016, p. 126.

28

Ibid., p. 132.

After Max died in 1950, Quappi devoted the rest of her life to supervising and taking care of the painter's artistic legacy, acting with determination when required.²⁷ Though perhaps she was not always guided by objective criteria, as it was recently pointed out that certain passages were omitted from the artist's diaries of 1940–50 when they were published, most likely because Quappi possibly considered them too personal and unsuitable for publication. Quappi made very good decisions too, such as in 1975 when she gifted the *Argonauts* triptych to the National Gallery in Washington together with other works by the artist with the condition that she would not have to part with them until her death. During the 36 years that separated Quappi's death from her husband's, she kept the artist's ashes in an urn beside the triptych.²⁸

The Thyssen Quappi

fig. 10

Max Beckmann
***Quappi in Grey*, 1948**
 Oil on canvas, 108.5 × 79 cm
 Private collection



**‘Goodness, what beautiful portraits I will make of you.
 But for me to do that, you must be with me fully’.²⁹**

In 1983 Quappi commented on the Thyssen portrait: ‘Sometimes a garment inspired Max Beckmann to do a portrait of me... For this painting it was a pink jumper interwoven with steel-grey and metal thread and a matching hat. I fully remember that he painted the portrait in Frankfurt. I bought the jumper and hat in a shop near the Frankfurter Hof hotel and he immediately painted the picture’.³⁰ Beckmann was a sybarite who was fascinated by luxury hotels, expensive cigars, and elegant, smartly dressed women. ‘My darling, what lovely outfits I am going to buy you. There are marvellous ones here... you will dress very sophisticatedly’.³¹ On another occasion he commented: ‘Q. has been to the hairdresser’s, so beautiful! [...]. One feels so much better with nice things’.³² Beckmann often bought his wife clothing and accessories during his frequent travels. ‘Max brought me back a pretty suit and a chunky silver bracelet with amethysts, a piece signed by Spratlin, a famous Mexican silversmith’.³³ And during the trip they both made to Chicago the artist wrote in his diary: ‘While outside it was freezing cold and windy, we went to buy nice things for Quappi from department stores and lingerie shops’.³⁴

29

Beckmann 1993–1996, vol. 1, letter 289, 2 June 1925, p. 289.

30

Beckmann 2018, p. 83.

31

Beckmann 1993–1996, vol. 1, letter 280, 23 May 1925, p. 271; *Diary*, 18 March 1944: ‘As gifts I’ve brought Armagnac, a tie, and taffeta for Quappi, with some flowers’.
 In Beckmann 1965, p. 21.

32

Diary, 28 June 1949. In Beckmann 1965, p. 174.

33

Beckmann 2018, p. 79.

34

Diary, 17 January 1948. In Beckmann 1965, p. 111.

35

Rathbone 1964, p. 80.

Quappi appears in as many as 55 compositions including individual and group portraits and drawings. Many of them were given the title of the name or colour of one of the garments she was wearing, such as *Quappi with White Fur* (1937), *Quappi in Blue and Grey* (1944), *Quappi in a Green Blouse* (1946), and *Quappi in Grey* [fig. 10], the last picture the artist painted of his wife. According to Perr T. Rathbone,³⁵ she did not actually sit for any of them, even though it seems as though she did.



fig. 11
Mathilde Beckmann standing with a cigarette in her hand in front of a self-portrait of Beckmann with crossed arms
Tate Archive

fig. 12
Max Beckmann
Quappi smoking in an Armchair, 1927
Charcoal and white chalk, 423 × 533 mm
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin,
Kupferstichkabinett



Elegance, a certain shyness, and a natural grace are characteristics of Mathilde's image and personality. A good example of this combination of psychological and physical traits is the portrait in the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza where there is not only a formal similarity between the image and the model but also a clear wish on the artist's part to convey her personality. Mathilde is portrayed three-quarter length sporting the abovementioned dusky pink V-necked jumper and a tobacco-brown skirt. A headdress made of the same fabric as the jumper and a two-strand necklace of large beads (probably glass paste, a new material the Art Deco movement brought to jewellery) complete her outfit. Quappi is presented to the viewer as the prototypical modern woman that emerged in the 1920s: a woman who feels free, sports a garçon-style haircut and comfortable clothing, wears a new type of jewellery, and, like men, enjoys smoking in public. A charcoal drawing of 1927 [fig. 12] shows her in a similar attitude but in an even more carefree and worldly pose.



fig. 13
**Max Beckmann sitting on
 an armchair**



fig. 14
**Mathilde Q. Beckmann
 Max and Mathilde Beckmann at the
 Dining Table in their Living Room
 Table, Rokin 85, 1937**
 Pencil, watercolour, and Indian ink
 on paper, 24.3 × 32 cm
 Private collection

The composition of *Quappi in Pink Jumper* revolves around the figure seated on a deep-buttoned blue armchair.³⁶ The background, resembling a backdrop, is patterned wallpaper a very similar colour to the subject's jumper.

The initial execution date, 1932, indicates that the portrait was painted in Frankfurt at the Steinhausenstrasse number 7, the couple's home until 15 April 1933, when, as mentioned previously, Beckmann was dismissed from his job at the Städel school. This circumstance was a setback for the painter, then at the height of his career. At the time he enjoyed great renown in Germany and also in Paris, where he had already had one-man shows at the Galerie de la Renaissance in 1931 and at the Galerie Bing in 1932. At the beginning of 1933, Ludwig Justi, the director of the Nationalgalerie, had opened a room hung exclusively with works by Beckmann at the Kronprinzenpalais – a major privilege for a living artist – though it was closed in early July on the orders of the recently

36
 I have not been able to confirm whether this is the same armchair of which Beckmann was so fond that he even took it to America, as Neumann recalls in 'Confessions of an Art Dealer', quoted in Rewald 2016, p. 10: 'The big room was completely empty except for a tattered old black plush fauteuil, which was so dear to Beckmann that he even dragged it to America some twenty years later'.



fig. 15
Detail of the signature and date of the painting

fig. 16
Photograph of the state of *Self-Portrait with Horn* in 1937 before the artist retouched it
Photo, Marc Vaux in Max Beckmann cat. *The World as a Stage*, Kunsthalle Bremen and Museum Barberini, Potsdam, 2018, p. 31

37

While he was painting his “*Self-Portrait with the Horn*” in 1938, there appeared a dreamy, entranced smile which delighted me when I saw it in his studio; alas, one day he had changed his mien on the canvas almost to one of bitterness’. In Lackner 1969.



fig. 17
Max Beckmann
Self-Portrait with Horn, 1938
Oil on canvas, 110 × 101 cm
Neue Galerie, New York, and private collection

appointed Nazi government. Fearing reprisals, the couple decided to move to Berlin, confident that the big city would provide them with a certain amount of anonymity and allow them to lead a more peaceful life and go more unnoticed than in Frankfurt, where Beckmann was very well known. It was then, in 1934, that the artist retouched this painting and changed the initial date – still recognisable – writing the new figure on top of it [fig. 14]. Although restorers’ studies are not conclusive in this respect, according to testimonies of the period Beckmann may have transformed the smile Quappi originally wore into a more restrained gesture with closed lips to reflect the worries that must have plagued the couple in such uncertain times. Leaving Frankfurt caused Beckmann great sadness as it had always been his favourite city. This was not, however, the only instance of such a change. His own smile has evidently been modified in the *Self-Portrait with Horn* of 1938³⁷ [figs. 16 and 17].



fig. 18

Max Beckmann**Quappi in Pink and Purple, 1931****Oil on canvas, 110 × 70 cm****Whereabouts unknown**

In a lecture delivered on 9 May 2009 as part of the *Portraits of Women* series,³⁸ Guillermo Solana recalled that *Quappi in Pink Jumper* was known for a time as *Die Amerikanerin* (*The American Woman*).³⁹ This is how Beckmann refers to his wife in a letter of 13 March 1950 to his son Peter.⁴⁰ It was probably because in havoc-stricken Europe Quappi seemed to Beckmann to represent the image of American actresses and singers – free, sure of themselves, resolute, and independent; women who do not hesitate to gaze straight at us, unafraid to seem arrogant, and smoke unhurriedly, taking delight in the sensuality of the gesture. This type of woman is found in the works of many of Beckmann’s contemporaries [figs. 19–23], among them, naturally, Picasso and Matisse. Although Beckmann did not identify with any of these artists and certainly did not aim to be like them, he could not help taking an interest in their successes and artistic ideas.⁴¹ As Didier Ottinger notes, Beckmann had established himself in Paris with the intention of carving out a place for himself on the local art scene so that his art could be compared with that of the other great twentieth-century artists who had made Paris synonymous with modern art.⁴² This attention to, and knowledge of, the oeuvre of Matisse and Picasso can be traced in many of his paintings, which have an undeniably French air. A good example is the Thyssen portrait of Quappi. Matisse’s influence is visible, for example, in the colours of the background decoration and in the use of pronounced contours to delimit the various areas of colour. These black outlines recall those of Matisse, and although Beckmann’s are more blurred, they are handled with the same mastery. As Paloma Alarcó points out,⁴³ black is very important in Beckmann’s oeuvre, both in the abovementioned contours and in the elongated black patches that often appear beside figures. It is not known what they are: door spaces, perhaps?

38

The lecture is available online at <https://www.museothyssen.org/actividades/ciclo-conferencias-retratos-mujer-coleccion-thyssen-bornemisza>.

39

In Nemitz 1948, pl. p. 52 (as ‘Portrait of an American Woman’).

40

Beckmann 1993–1996, vol. 3, letter 982, p. 314.

41

Diary, 6 January 1950. In Beckmann 1965, p. 202. He visited the Metropolitan Museum and wrote in his diary ‘Beckmann beside Klee and Picasso’.

42

Ottinger 2002, p. 17.

43

See <https://www.museothyssen.org/coleccion/artistas/beckmann-max/quappi-sueter-rosa>.



fig. 19
Pablo Picasso
*Young Woman holding
a Cigarette*, 1901
Oil on canvas, 73.7 × 51.1 cm
The Barnes Foundation,
Philadelphia



fig. 21
Kees van Dongen
*Portrait of a Woman with a Cigarette
(Kiki de Montparnasse)*, c. 1922–24
Watercolour on paper, 495 × 354 mm
Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza,
Madrid
[\[+ info\]](#)



fig. 20
Henri Matisse
Portrait of Greta Moll, 1908
Oil on canvas, 93 × 73.5 cm
National Gallery, London



fig. 22
Herbert von Reyl-Hanisch
Portrait of the Artist's Mother,
1930



fig. 23
Rita Angus
Self-Portrait, c. 1937
Oil on canvas mounted
on panel, 49 × 40 cm
Dunedin Public Art Gallery



fig. 24

Max Beckmann
Self-Portrait in Tuxedo, 1927
 Oil on canvas, 139.5 × 95.6 cm
 Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger, Museum, Harvard, Association Fund

fig. 25

Max and Quappi at the opening of the artist's retrospective at the City Art Museum of Saint Louis, 1948

44

Llorens 2018, p. 52.

45

Beckmann 1980, p. 145.

46

See <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/04/04/obituaries/mathilde-beckmann.html>

Windows? Corridors? They are found, for example, in *Quappi in Pink and Purple*, 1931 [fig. 18] and in *Self-Portrait in Tuxedo*, 1927 [fig. 24]. Tomàs Llorens holds that this device helps draw the figure away from the background and project it forwards.⁴⁴ Quappi stated in her memoirs that black was very characteristic of Beckmann's painting and that he commented that he sometimes mixed it with Prussian blue and sometimes with other colours, depending on the desired tone.⁴⁵ With respect to Picasso we find similarities in the type of woman, her gesture, the arrangement of the composition, and also in the deformation of the figure's anatomy. Our Quappi's left arm is shorter than her right one and she has excessively long fingers that accentuate her elegance. These three masters of painting have something else in common that is easy to overlook because it is so evident: none of them abandoned figurative painting, despite their modernity.

Mathilde Beckmann died of a lung infection at the age of 82 in Jacksonville (Florida) on 31 March 1986.⁴⁶ Her ashes and those of Beckmann – which, as stated earlier, she had kept – were mixed and scattered over the Atlantic Ocean. ●

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