

**Max Beckmann**  
**"Sleeping Woman on the Beach"**

Max Beckmann painted the first version of "Sleeping Woman on the Beach" in 1927 in his Frankfurt studio based on a pencil sketch that he had made of his wife Quappi on a beach in Italy, probably in Spotorno, or later in the studio. In a letter, dated July 12, 1927, Beckmann wrote to Quappi: "Today I started working again on a sleeping bather, who is you."



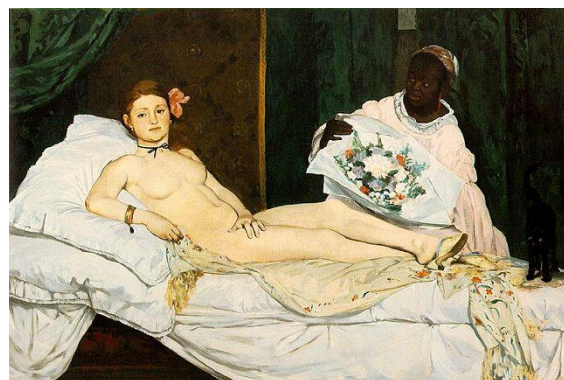
Max Beckmann. "Sleeping Woman on the Beach". 1927

The oil painting never left Beckmann's possession throughout his life. In 1950, Beckmann reworked "Sleeping Woman on the Beach", slightly simplifying its composition. The result is an arrestingly monumental image of a woman, clad in a dark bathing suit, lasciviously reclining on a white beach towel before a plain background of sand, sea and sky. Her body fills almost the entire canvas, lit by intense sunlight, creating sharp contrasts, and lending her shape a sculptural presence. A greenish black curtain on the left opens the view onto the sleeping woman's light-skinned, voluptuous body, putting creator and viewer into the position of voyeurs.

The motif of the reclining, occasionally sleeping woman goes back typologically to the theme of the odalisques and their related depictions, a reference to art history that is quite typical of Max Beckmann. Of course, the corresponding formulations in Francisco de Goya's "Maya" and Edouard Manet's "Olympia" are the most important models.

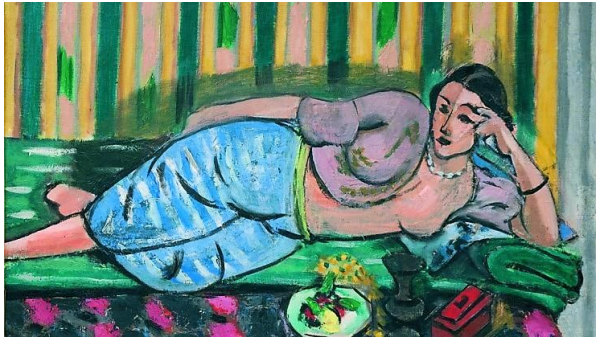


Francisco de Goya, "Maya desnuda", Museo del Prado, Madrid



Edouard Manet, "Olympia", 1863, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

In avant-garde painting, it was the paraphrases of Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso that anchored the motif in 20th-century art. For Beckmann, Matisse and Picasso in particular were the living artists with whom he wanted to compete as a contemporary and with whom he saw himself on an equal footing. It was not least this claim that prompted Beckmann to rent a permanent residence in Paris at the end of the 1920s, which he would keep until the early 1930s.



Henri Matisse, "Odalisque au coffret rouge", 1927, Musée Henri Matisse, Nice



Pablo Picasso, „Nu couché“, 1932, Musée Picasso, Paris

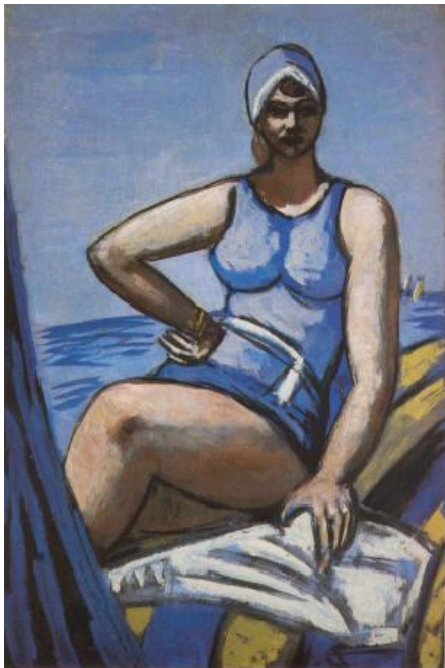
The sitter is Beckmann's second wife Mathilde Kaulbach, known as "Quappi", whom he met in Vienna in 1924. The marriage in Munich followed in 1925, and this connection was obviously a great gift for Max Beckmann, because he repeatedly expressed his happiness about his marriage and emphasized the importance his wife had for his artistic work through her support. Beckmann wrote to I. B. Neumann in 1925: "My strength has increased tenfold due to the considerably more favorable human circumstances in which I now live, and I am of an intensity and freshness that I have never had in my life." And to the same recipient, the painter confirmed in a letter dated January 1926: "My marriage has been exceedingly happy so far. And it will remain so. I'm just a painter now."



Max Beckmann, „Sleeping Woman on the Beach“, 1927, Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig

Beckmann went on numerous trips with Quappi, especially to the sea in Holland or to Italy and France. In 1926 they visited the Italian Riviera and Spotorno, in 1927 they went via Ravenna to Rimini. In a drawing probably made in 1927, now in the Museum of Fine Arts in Leipzig, Beckmann anticipated the composition of the "Sleeping Woman on the Beach". However, three circumstances suggest that the scene depicted does not refer to the trip to Rimini in 1927, but reflects the stay in Spotorno in 1926. Because the letter from Beckmann quoted at the beginning, which obviously refers to the painting and the preliminary drawing, was sent from Frankfurt before leaving for Italy.

Secondly, Beckmann notes in his list of paintings from 1927 that he began the work on July 13, also before leaving for Rimini. In addition, the artist has deleted an entry in the list of paintings from 1926, according to which the painting was started on September 27th - i.e. after his return from Spotorno. So it is obvious that Beckmann began the composition for the first time in 1926 and then stopped work for the time being. In line with the third, there is a beach picture by Quappi that is very similar in subject, composition and color scheme, the origin of which is confirmed by a photo from Spotorno in 1926, which certainly served as a template for this painting.



Max Beckmann, „Quappi in Blue in the Boat“, 1926, Würth Collection, Künzelsau



Quappi Beckmann in Spotorno, 1926, Photography

The 1926 gouache on paper "Quappi in Blue in a Boat", which also shows Quappi Beckmann in a beach and bathing scene, and which Beckmann also reworked in 1950 in New York, but now with oil paints, is practically a sister picture to "Sleeping Woman at the beach". Here, too, the composition of the dominant female figure is focused to a certain extent in an environment that is only very briefly sketched, and her physical quality is suggestively emphasized by the diagonal composition and the strong contours.

The fact that Max Beckmann revised his own works again at a much later point in time, as in the present case, is inherent in his working process and his idea of painting. Even the first state of very many paintings is not the result of a linear painting process, but Beckmann often painted by repeatedly correcting and overpainting the resulting image partially or completely. This process, which is quite often strenuous for Beckmann himself, sometimes seems almost like a struggle with the painting, which is clearly shown in his numerous comments on such work processes and resumptions, until the artist allowed himself the liberating judgment that the work was now finished.

In this search for the ideal implementation of his pictorial idea, layers of paint are created producing a depth that is very typical for Beckmann's paintings, until the superimposed palimpsests of the formulation result in a sharpening of the depiction that satisfies Beckmann. The revisions of earlier works from the 1920s and 1930s, which Max Beckmann carried out in the USA from 1947 on, should also be understood in this way. Basically, this is an expression of the ongoing preoccupation with a painting, and the never-ending struggle with the finally valid composition is a characteristic of the creative process that Beckmann shares with many modern artists.

After Max Beckmann's passing, "Sleeping Woman on the Beach" stayed in the possession of his widow Quappi until her death in 1986. Catherine Viviano, the art dealer who handled the artist's and Quappi's estate, kept it until her death in 1992, after which the painting entered a renowned German collection, where it remained until 2016.