



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Legal records relating to the
estate of Mathilde Beckmann

Archives of American Art
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Legal records relating to the estate of Mathilde Beckmann
Identifier:	AAA.rathpert
Date:	[ca. 1959-1997]
Creator:	Rathbone, Perry Townsend, 1911-2000
Extent:	2 Linear feet
Language:	Undetermined .

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated 1998 by Perry T. Rathbone, executor of the Beckmann estate.

Restrictions

Use of original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archives' Washington, D.C., Research Center. Contact Reference Services for more information.

Biographical / Historical

Rathbone (1911-2000) was executor of the estate of Mathilde Beckmann (ca. 1904-1986), the widow of painter Max Beckmann. The suit and counter suits over her estate began just after her death in 1986 and related to re-writing in 1982 of Mrs. Beckmann's original will of 1975, in which Hedda von Kaulbach Schoonderbeek--her elder sister and only surviving relative--was primary benefactor, as well as the disposition of several works of art by Max Beckmann to the National Gallery of art and other museums.

Biographical / Historical

The new will made Mrs. Beckmann's caretakers, sisters Betty Sue Robinson and Mary Dent the primary beneficiaries, leaving Schoonderbeek with just {dollar}5,000 of the multi-million dollar estate and excluded most of the recipients of works of art altogether. In 1985, almost all of Mrs. Beckmann's property was transferred to the Robinson sisters, and in February 1986 Mrs. Beckmann was moved by the Robinsons to Florida, where she died just a few weeks later. In June, Perry Rathbone and Frederic Houston, as executors of the original will, Schoonderbeek, and a friend, Richard Keoseian, filed suit in Surrogate's Court in Manhattan. Although the suit was successful in challenging Robinson and Dent, it spawned several bitter and protracted counter suits, which finally concluded in 1997. By then most of the initial parties were deceased, and the bulk of the estate spent on attorney's fees.

Scope and Contents

Records kept by Perry Rathbone pertaining to the lawsuits and counter suits over the multi-million dollar estate of Mathilde Beckmann, widow of the painter Max Beckmann. Included are: documents of the U.S. District Court in Manhattan, the New York Surrogate's Court, and a State Court in Florida; correspondence, various wills and codicils to wills of Mathilde Beckmann; testimony of art experts; and supporting material, including clippings, exhibition catalogs, slides and photographs. Much of the material consists of photocopies sent to Rathbone as executor of Mrs. Beckmann's original (1975) will.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Artists -- Legal status, laws, etc. -- United States
Decedents' estates -- New York (State)
Law and art -- United States

Names:

Beckmann, Mathilde Q.
Beckmann, Max, 1884-1950