

ARKEN

PRESS RELEASE

MAJOR GERDA WEGENER EXHIBITION AT ARKEN

7 November 2015 – 16 May 2016 (extended until 8 January 2017)

The painter and illustrator Gerda Wegener aroused a furore in Denmark, but was fêted in Paris because of her sophisticated line and her elegant portraits of women. Now ARKEN presents the biggest exhibition so far of works by the pioneering artist whose life and works strike a chord in our own time.

Gerda Wegener (1885-1940) was a woman ahead of her time. It was not in the cards that this minister's daughter from eastern Jutland would become Denmark's foremost exponent of Art Deco and one of the most colourful personalities of her time. In 1904, she married the landscape painter Einar Wegener (1882-1931) who today is better known as the trans woman Lili Elbe. Paris was to be the city where they unfolded their artistic careers. There the couple lived a fashionable life, enabled to a great extent by Gerda's success as a portrait painter and an illustrator for the leading fashion magazines. Decadent, frivolous Paris also made it possible for them to live out their controversial love affair in which playing with gender and identity became the central focus.

A tale of metamorphosis

La Vie Parisienne, *La Baïonnette* and *Le Rire* – Gerda Wegener's technically superb and sometimes daring drawings could be found in the leading French periodicals of the time, and often it was her spouse who posed for her. The depictions of Lili are quite central to Gerda Wegener's oeuvre. Gerda Wegener idealized Lili's tall, elegant figure, the gloved hands and the wistful face crowned by a succession of wigs. But outside the canvas too Einar dreamed of merging with his wife's depictions of Lili. He was unhappy in his male body and Gerda supported her husband in having the operations done that were to effect the physical transformation from man to woman, but ended in Lili's early death.

Renewed topicality

ARKEN's exhibition is a tribute to a strong artist whose works and extraordinary life strike a chord in our own time. With 178 works the exhibition will be the biggest ever of her work – and one of the first at any art museum. While in Paris Gerda Wegener won great recognition and fame – among other things three of her works were incorporated in the Louvre's collection and are today at the Centre Pompidou – she never achieved the same status here in Denmark, because she was a woman, because she also expressed herself in commercial mass culture, and because her ambivalent sexuality and the story of her marriage were too difficult to relate to.

The exhibition at ARKEN emphasizes Gerda Wegener's artistic range and distinctiveness, and at the same time tells the story of a love between painter, muse and model across the traditional gender identities.

Major film about Gerda and Lili on the way

The turbulent story of Gerda Wegener and her transgender spouse, muse and model also forms the framework for the major film *The Danish Girl*. In the title role we see the Oscar-winning actor Eddie Redmayne, and Gerda is played by the Swedish actress Alicia Vikander. The film will have its Danish premiere in February 2016.

The exhibition about Gerda Wegener can be seen at ARKEN in the period 7 November 2015 to 16 May 2016. (Extended until 8 January 2017)

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