

J.F. Willumsen's visionary life's work at ARKEN

From 2 June the Danish artist J.F. Willumsen's major works can be seen at ARKEN. The exhibition *J.F. Willumsen - Colours & Frames* invites the public on a colourful tour of Willumsen's uncompromising life's work, but also adds new aspects to our picture of the well known artist.

Jens Ferdinand Willumsen is in a class by himself in the history of Danish art – recognized for his stylistic new departures, but an eternal outsider on the Danish art scene. Throughout seven decades Willumsen created ground-breaking works distinctive in their radical formal idiom and intense colour palette. In a collaboration with J.F. Willumsens Museum ARKEN is showing a comprehensive exhibition of all the major works from the museum's unique collection, including iconic works such as *A Mountain Climber*, *The Riddle of the Heavens*, *Bathing Children at Skagen Beach* and *The Wedding of the King's Son*. The exhibition highlights Willumsen the pioneer and his innovative use of the flood of images from popular culture.

Pioneer and provocateur

Willumsen's works repeatedly stirred up heated debate on the Danish art scene. Among other things a small engraving of the artist's pregnant wife and a luxuriantly burgeoning ear of corn aroused great indignation in 1891 because of the picture's procreation symbolism, but the exhibition became a real crowd-puller. Willumsen was highly aware of his outsider position and cultivated the role of the anti-hero in self-dramatizing, humorous self-portraits. In his efforts to develop the critical, liberating potential of art Willumsen was a radical precursor of later movements. However, his intensely coloured universe and 'staged' works resonate strongly with the spirit of our own age, in which the borderline between then theatrical and the natural is more fluid than ever before.

Theatrical tales

The inspiration from the popular culture of the era seems omnipresent in Willumsen's oeuvre. Many of the works can be read like animated sequences in a roll of film or like a comic strip. Light, action and explosive motion burst from the canvas. Willumsen's well known dance trilogy, where his partner the dancer Michelle Bourret appears in three different roles and theatrical environments, illustrates Willumsen's interest in dynamism and drama. The parallels with the new media of the age – photography, film, the comic strip and not least its heroes such as Prince Valiant and Superman – are striking.

A new side of Willumsen

ARKEN's exhibition embraces the whole of Willumsen's ground-breaking oeuvre and shows the breadth of his mastery of methods and materials. In recent years Willumsen has attained cult status among collectors and artists, and a more general interest in his characteristic artistic style and development has followed. ARKEN's exhibition shows a new side of Willumsen and unfolds his visionary view of the popular culture and new media of his

time. Willumsen collected and organized motifs from popular culture and his own photographs in folders of cuttings – a unique and personal picture archive that can also be experienced in the exhibition. *J.F. Willumsen - Colours & Frames* runs from 2 June 2018 to 13 January 2019.

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