

HANS HENRIK LERFELDT

ÅRHUS 1946 – COPENHAGEN 1989

“My special area is: the fear that steals in as laughter.”

Hans Henrik Lerfeldt had the above epigraph printed at the bottom of his visiting card, which he gave to the artist Jens Jørgen Thorsen (1932–2000) when they met for the first time. The whole text on the card, and a tenderly surrealistic prose poem from Thorsen to Lerfeldt, can be read in a small pamphlet on the artist published by the Galerie Asbæk.

Hans Henrik Lerfeldt’s childhood was dreadful. He lived part of it in devastated postwar Berlin, was adopted into a strict religious home, and was passed on to various children’s homes by his adoptive father, a clergyman. Moral prejudices and suppressions, guilt, and defiance, together with the impressions from a series of periods subsequently spent as a psychiatric patient lay like heavy clouds over Lerfeldt’s short life and left their mark on his art.

From 1965 to 1970, Hans Henrik Lerfeldt attended classes in the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Art, where one of his teachers was the architect and graphic designer Gunnar Biilmann Petersen (1897–1968); he also took classes at the School of Graphic Art with the great Danish graphic artist Palle Nielsen (1920–2000). At the beginning of the 1970s, Lerfeldt became deeply preoccupied with surrealism and was especially inspired by the controversial painter Wilhelm Freddie (1909–1995), who had introduced the figurative aspect of this artistic movement into Denmark.

Lerfeldt went in for the provocative and the repulsive, placing great emphasis on the sexual. Woman as a fetish object was a recurrent theme in the artist’s suggestive, dreamlike art of the subconscious. His motif universe included accurate details of various parts of the body—sexual organs, hair, women’s legs with garters and high-heeled shoes, whips, and oversized insects, all executed with a photographic precision that both created an illusion of reality and established a cool distance. In order to achieve the greatest realism in his surreal arrangements, the artist introduced details from his considerable collection of pornographic pictures.

A rather different range of motifs emerged in a number of paintings executed in Berlin in the 1980s, which Lerfeldt based on old photographs of people, including himself as a child. A profound interest in jazz played a great part in Lerfeldt’s life and inspired him to paint a series of portraits of musicians, such as Duke Jordan (1922–2006), Bill Evans (1929–1980), and his favorite, Chet Baker (1929–1988). He even drew up a complete discography of the latter’s music. In 1985 he made a demonic portrait poster of Karen Blixen (Isak Dinesen, 1885–1962) for a commission from Dansk Bogtjeneste.

Hans Henrik Lerfeldt exhibited in many different venues, though mainly in Denmark, for instance at Charlottenborg 1968–1970, in Kunstnernes Efterårsudstilling 1968–1969, and Corner 1970–1975, in addition to various other group exhibitions. He has had solo exhibitions in various galleries, including the Galerie Asbæk in 1978, 1980–1981, and 1985 and in museums such as Ribe Kunstmuseum in 1981 and Sønderjyllands Kunstmuseum in 1985.

A photograph in Jens Jørgen Thorsen's book showing Hans Henrik Lerfeldt in a pub in the center of Copenhagen provides the impression of an intelligent, disturbingly obese, and not particularly happy man.

S.L.

LITERATURE: Virtus Schade in *Kunst*, 2, 1970, pp. 42–44, 46ff; Jens Jørgen Thorsen, *Hans Henrik Lerfeldt*, Copenhagen 1981; Ove Mogensen (ed.), *Hans Henrik Lerfeldt Erotisk symbolisme i Danmark*, Sønderjyllands Kunstmuseum, Tønder 1985 (with an essay by Maria Marcus); Marianne Barbusse Mariager in *Weilbach*, vol. 5, Copenhagen 1996.