

GERDA WEGENER

(Hammelev, 1886 - Frederiksberg, 1940)

The cigarette

signed, lower left

pen and black ink, gouache

180 x 255 mm

Provenance:

Private collection, Paris

Gerda Wegener (née Gottlieb) was a Danish illustrator and painter, and one of the most significant woman artists to emerge from Copenhagen's Kunstakademiets Kunstskole for Kvinder (the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts' School of Art for Women) at the turn of the 20th century. Born in rural Jutland, the daughter of a vicar, she became celebrated for her depictions of fashionable urban women and femmes fatales, first in an Art Nouveau style and later in Art Deco. Infamous during her lifetime in both Denmark and France, where she lived from 1912, Wegener's career has been reassessed in recent years not only for her artist talent, but also for her depictions of women and for her unconventional marriage to the transgender painter Lili Elbe (née Einar Wegener). Their lives inspired the film The Danish Girl (2015), which traced their relationship, the emergence of Lili's identity and her gender transition in 1930.

This playful and intimate work is characteristic of Gerda's Parisian illustrations. Immersed in the city's bohemian milieu, she and her husband moved among artists, dancers, and performers. When a model once failed to appear, Gerda asked Lili to pose in her place and don women's clothing, an act that led to the discovery of Lili's true identity. Lili became Gerda's most frequent subject, her likeness recurring throughout the artist's work. In Paris, Lili lived openly as a woman and was often introduced by Gerda as Einar Wegener's cousin. Between 1930 and 1931, Lili underwent a series of pioneering gender-affirming surgeries, the first of their kind, which ultimately led to her premature death.

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