

NEW EXHIBITION:

FRITZ SYBERG. ART AND LOVE

20 February – 10 May 2015



Mother with child, 1898-99. Statens Museum for Kunst

FRITZ SYBERG FAMILY PAINTER

Ploughed furrows, cattle and the hilly landscapes of Funen; we know Fritz Syberg as a Funish artist and a painter of peasant scenes. But with the exhibition *Fritz Syberg. Art and Love*, Ordrupgaard reveals another, more private side to the painter – a side that revolved around his home and family.

Fritz Syberg (1862-1939) was a central figure in the flourishing artistic milieu that grew up around Kerteminde in the early 1900s. Today, his characteristic fields and hills represent the epitome of the old Danish rural countryside. But Syberg was more than just a peasant painter and nature lover.

The family painter

Marked by a harsh upbringing in straitened circumstances, Syberg sought throughout his life to find harmony in the home. His father died young, his mother took up with a drunken shoemaker, and Syberg had to work as a swineherd at a young age to support his siblings. But against all the odds, he fought his way up from his difficult beginnings. He trained as a painter, and when the economic and artistic future began to brighten, he married Anna Syberg and raised a family. In the couple's home, he painted his wife and children and conjured up a harmonious picture of their life together that was very far removed from his childhood afflictions. Later, not without reason, he acquired the nickname "the family painter".

Denmark's answer to Carl Larsson

In a large number of works, Syberg turns his gaze away from the open farmland landscapes towards the low-ceilinged, cozy living-rooms of the home. Here we find

simple, carved furniture in the rustic style, quiet meals, a caring mother and young children playing: the good life in simple, beautiful interiors. This is a concept that is reminiscent of the universe of Syberg's Swedish painter colleague, Carl Larsson, whose work Syberg had seen, for example at the Great Industry, Agriculture and Art Exhibition in Copenhagen in 1888. Syberg's works from the home take the form of small, life-affirming glimpses of daily life, carried out with a finesse and meticulousness that we do not find in the often monumental and powerful rural landscapes for which he is otherwise known.

The great tales and the free life

The family is also portrayed in other forms, for example providing the models when Syberg illustrates the fairytales of Hans Christian Andersen. Syberg could recognise his own miserable childhood in the writer's background, and Andersen's *Story of a Mother* and *The Ugly Duckling* became personal tales of destiny for him – tales that he drew into his home and private sphere. Conversely, he later moved the private sphere out of the home when the family began spending their summers in the open air at Fyns Hoved, where they lived a free natural life, with a couple of primitive wooden huts as their only dwelling. As part of the exhibition at Ordrupgaard, one of these huts will be reconstructed.

Art and love

When Syberg died at the age of 77, he was the country's best-paid artist and stood at the height of his life's work, not just as an innovator in Danish landscape painting, but also as a masterful and modern family painter. With the exhibition *Fritz Syberg. Art and Love*, Ordrupgaard presents a more nuanced view of the painter and reveals the lesser-known facets of his extensive artistic activities, with a special focus on the artist's home and family as motif.

Syberg and Ordrupgaard

Fritz Syberg. Art and Love is part of Ordrupgaard's series of exhibitions focusing on the artist home in the modernist period, and is an extension of the museum's current exhibition, *Carl Larsson. The Good Life*. Ordrupgaard also has a special relationship with the Funish Painters, as the museum's founder, Wilhelm Hansen, was a friend of Anna Syberg's brother Peter Hansen, and was an enthusiastic buyer of the group's works, which can be seen today in Ordrupgaard's permanent collection. Previously, in 2013, the museum has presented the exhibition *Anna Syberg. A Feel for Flowers*, and in 2011 *The Dispute on Art. Artists from Funen*.

The principal loaner to the exhibition is the Johannes Larsen Museum in Kerteminde.

NB! A press meeting will be held on 19 February at 11am. To register, contact mahoja@ordrupgaard.dk

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