



"Out of the mist of the thirties emerged a new spirit - like the breath of a dragon it invaded me."

Rita Kernn-Larsen, 1940

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RITA KERNN-LARSEN (1904-1998)

La promenade dangereuse

signed with the artist's initials 'rk.l.' (lower right); inscribed 'la promenade dangereuse. 25 x 53 cm. (on the reverse), signed 'Rita Kernn-Larsen' (on the stretcher)
oil on canvas
9 7/8 x 21 in. (25 x 53.4 cm.)
Painted in 1936

£3,000-5,000

\$4,400-7,200
€3,900-6,400

PROVENANCE:

The artist's estate, and thence by descent to the present owner.

EXHIBITED:

Paris, Galerie Guggenheim Jeune, *Rita Kernn-Larsen*, 1938.

"Out of the mist of the thirties emerged a new spirit - like the breath of a dragon it invaded me."

- Rita Kernn-Larsen, 1940

The little-known Surrealist artist Rita Kernn-Larsen was born in Denmark in 1904. After a period of study in The Academy of Arts in Copenhagen, she moved to Paris in 1929, where she became the pupil of Fernand Léger. Impeccably connected within the exciting ferment of pre-war Paris, Kernn-Larsen and her husband, art dealer and journalist Isaac Grünberg, moved in the most exciting and experimental avant-garde circles. From 1935, her prominence within the Surrealist group was established and she exhibited widely in key group exhibitions throughout Europe, including the 'International Surrealist Exhibition' in London in 1936 and the legendary, scandalising 'Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme' in Paris in 1938, where her work 'Self Portrait Know Thyself' was exhibited alongside Salvador Dalí's iconic work *Lobster Telephone*.

In 1937 Kernn-Larsen was introduced to iconic collector and gallerist Peggy Guggenheim, and in 1938 was awarded a solo exhibition in her fledgling London gallery Guggenheim Jeune on Cork Street, entitled 'Exhibition of

Surrealist Paintings by Rita Kernn-Larsen'. At the opening of the exhibition, the artist wore a surrealist-style hat complete with little bells and porridge oats, which fluttered down as she moved.

The work 'La promenade dangereuse' offered in this sale (Lot 56) was included in the Guggenheim Jeune exhibition. The work, painted in 1936, is an example of the artist at the height of her surrealist powers. The work presents arresting juxtapositions of abstract, disjointed figures in a dreamlike, deserted landscape. The motif of woman as flower or plant, visible in the figure's tendril-like arms, and the use of the profile of the face, are oft-repeated motifs in the artist's works of this period. The work also clearly shows the influence of Cubist artists such as Picasso and her former teacher Léger, especially in the composition in the figures. The artist has acknowledged that it was during this time of intense intellectual and imaginative experimentation that some of her best works were executed, as she commented "the Surrealist period was wonderful. Yes...it really was the best time for me as an artist." (Rita Kernn-Larsen, 1967).

Kernn-Larsen's position as a female artist in the largely male Surrealist movement give her works a unique importance for a study of the period. Although depictions of Woman (as muse, as queen, as sorceress) are often central to Surrealist works, Kernn-Larsen's works represent an alternative perspective which includes the psychological and imaginative processes of the Woman as Artist. As art historian Whitney Chadwick has noted, the efforts of female artists in the group were thus crucial to the expansion of the Surrealist scope, as she writes, 'it became the first modernist movement in which a group of women could explore female subjectivity and give form (however tentatively) to a feminine imaginary.' (Women artists and the Surrealist Movement, 1985) As such, Kernn-Larsen's work, often overlooked in the traditional narratives and accounts of the period, are an indispensable part of continuing studies into Surrealism.

Kernn-Larsen's works are today housed in collections internationally, including in the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, and the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, among others.



Rita Kernn-Larsen