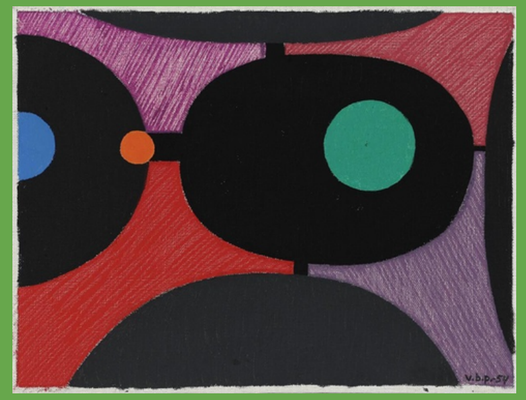
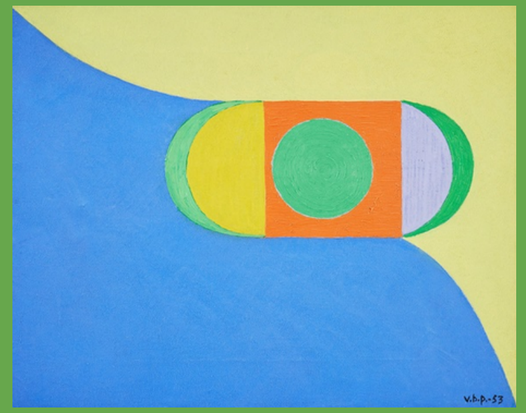
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VILHELM BJERKE-PETERSEN









INTRODUCTION



Untitled, 1946, Oil on board, 73 x 60 cm.

Vilhelm Bjerke-Petersen (1909–1957)

Vilhelm Bjerke-Petersen was born in 1909 in Denmark and grew up in an environment shaped by curiosity, debate, and a strong interest in culture. Early on, he was drawn to understanding how art worked—why images carried meaning and how modern art could express new ways of thinking. He began his studies in Denmark but quickly looked beyond its borders, searching for a more progressive artistic education.

At the end of the 1920s, he travelled to Germany to study at the Bauhaus in Dessau, where he encountered artists such as Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee. This period had a lasting impact on him. The Bauhaus emphasis on structure, abstraction, and theory gave him a framework that stayed with him throughout his career. At the same time, he became interested in Surrealism, not as something irrational or chaotic, but as a way of exploring symbols, the unconscious, and hidden connections within images. His work began to combine clear, geometric forms with more suggestive, symbolic elements.

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Untitled, 1943, oil on canvas, 126 x 90 cm.

In the 1930s, Bjerke-Petersen became a key figure in introducing Surrealism to Denmark. Through the journal *Linien*, which he co-founded, he helped connect Danish artists with the broader European avant-garde, working alongside figures such as Rita Kernn-Larsen and Wilhelm Freddie. His paintings from this period reflect both discipline and imagination—carefully constructed compositions that still leave room for ambiguity and interpretation.

What sets Bjerke-Petersen apart is how seriously he took the ideas behind the art. His book *Symbols in Abstract Art (1933)* shows how invested he was in explaining and shaping modern visual language. Throughout his career, he stayed committed to this balance between thinking and making. Even though his life was relatively short, his role in shaping Danish surrealism and bringing it into an international conversation remains significant.

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BIOGRAPHY



VILHHEM BJERKE PETERSEN, 'Self-portrait' 1930, oil on canvas

1909

1 Born in Denmark. Grew up in an intellectually engaged environment that fostered an early interest in art, theory, and modern culture.

Late 1920s

2 Began his artistic training in Denmark but soon sought a more progressive education beyond traditional academic methods.

1930–1931

3 Studied at the Bauhaus in Dessau under Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee, where he developed a strong foundation in abstraction, structure, and visual theory.

Early 1930s

4 Turned toward Surrealism, combining geometric abstraction with symbolic imagery and exploring the relationship between form, meaning, and the unconscious.

Mid-1930s

5 Co-founded the journal Linien, becoming a central figure in introducing Surrealism to Denmark alongside artists such as Rita Kernn-Larsen and Wilhelm Freddie..

1957

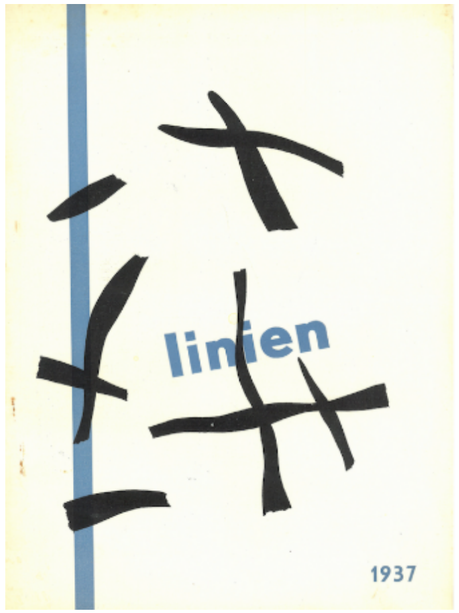
6 Died in Denmark, leaving behind an important legacy as both an artist and theorist, whose work and writings helped shape the direction of Danish and Scandinavian Surrealism.

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LINIEN AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

Vilhelm Bjerke-Petersen played a central role in shaping Danish Surrealism, both as an artist and as a theorist. In the mid-1930s, he co-founded the journal Linien, which became a key platform for introducing Surrealism and abstract art to Denmark and connecting it to the wider European avant-garde. Working alongside artists such as Rita Kernn-Larsen and Wilhelm Freddie, he helped establish Surrealism as a serious modern movement. His role, however, was distinct—he approached Surrealism not just visually, but intellectually, focusing on structure, symbolism, and meaning.

This is reflected in his book Symbols in Abstract Art (1933), where he argued that abstraction and Surrealism were closely linked. Through both his writing and Linien, he helped define a more controlled, analytical form of Surrealism within a Scandinavian context.



"Linien", 1937 edition



BJERKE PETERSEN, SYMBOLS IN ABSTRACT ART. Copenhagen 1933

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EVOLUTION OF ARTISTIC STYLE AND THEMES

Early Period — Bauhaus and Abstract Foundations (late 1920s–early 1930s)

In his early work, Vilhelm Bjerke-Petersen focused on structure, geometry, and the principles of abstraction. His studies at the Bauhaus in Dessau had a lasting impact, introducing him to the teachings of Kandinsky and Klee, where form, color, and composition were understood as carriers of meaning. During this period, his paintings are precise and controlled, built from clear geometric elements rather than representation. At the same time, he began to explore how abstract forms could suggest psychological or symbolic content, laying the groundwork for his later engagement with Surrealism.



Surrealistic composition, ca. 1931, oil on canvas, 46 x 59 cm.



Komposition, 1931, watercolor and gouache, 48 x 60 cm.

EVOLUTION OF ARTISTIC STYLE AND THEMES

Middle Period — Surrealism and Symbolic Language (mid-1930s–1940s)

In the mid-1930s, Bjerke-Petersen turned more directly toward Surrealism, becoming a central figure in the Danish movement through the journal *Linien*. His work from this period combines the clarity of abstraction with symbolic and dreamlike imagery. Rather than embracing the chaotic or theatrical aspects of Surrealism, he developed a more structured approach, where forms remain balanced and deliberate. His compositions often feature floating shapes, signs, and spatial tensions that suggest hidden meanings without becoming fully narrative. This period reflects his belief that abstraction and Surrealism were closely connected, both offering ways to access deeper layers of thought and perception.



Composition with woman, 1938, oil on canvas, 65 x 101 cm.



Livscykeln, 1943,, oil painting on canvas, 160 x 150 cm.



Surreal composition, 1945, oil on board, 65 x 81 cm.

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EVOLUTION OF ARTISTIC STYLE AND THEMES

Late Period — Synthesis and Conceptual Clarity (late 1940s–1950s)

In his later years, Bjerke-Petersen refined his visual language into a more simplified and conceptually focused form. His compositions became clearer and more reduced, with fewer elements and a stronger emphasis on balance and order. While symbolic content remained present, it was expressed with greater restraint, often through subtle relationships between shapes and space. His work from this period reflects a continued interest in the connection between art and thought, maintaining a careful balance between intuition and structure. Rather than dramatic shifts, his late work shows a steady consolidation of ideas developed throughout his career.



Komposition, 1947, oil on canvas, 50 x 60 cm.



Untitled, 1947, oil on canvas, 27 x 35 cm.



Composition, 1955, oil on canvas, 46 x 38 cm.

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INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS & VISIBILITY

Vilhelm Bjerke-Petersen's international presence developed early and was closely tied to his role within the European avant-garde. Through his time at the Bauhaus, he established connections with leading modern artists.
In the mid-1930s, he actively brought international Surrealism to Denmark. In 1935, he organised the major exhibition *Cubism = Surrealism at Den Frie Udstillingsbygning*, presenting artists such as René Magritte, Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, and Meret Oppenheim, marking a key moment in connecting Danish art to the international movement.
At the same time, Bjerke-Petersen exhibited abroad and gained recognition within the wider Surrealist network. He participated in important international exhibitions, including the *Surrealist exhibition in London* (1936) and the landmark *Fantastic Art, Dada*, Surrealism exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.
His international visibility continued after the war. In 1947, he exhibited at Galerie Maeght in Paris, supported by figures such as André Breton and Marcel Duchamp, confirming his position within the international avant-garde.
Beyond exhibitions, his influence also spread through publications and networks. Through journals such as *Linien* and *Konkretion*, he maintained active contact with international artists and thinkers, helping to position Danish Surrealism within a wider European context.



Vilhelm Bjerke Petersen: The Dictators and the Ideals , 1935. Collage. Canica Art Collection. Photo: Steinar Gjessing, Vilhelm Bjerke Petersen / VISDA.



"Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism", 7 December 1936 – 17 January 1937. Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

PUBLIC ART

In 1930, Bjerke Petersen created murals for the Birkerød State School, where he himself had been a pupil alongside Mortensen and Bille, and also created art for Højdevangen's School on Amager. Bjerke Petersen sent an application regarding his work at Højdevangen's School to the New Carlsberg Foundation in 1930, meaning that the foundation deliberately chose to support a clearly 'revolutionary' project.



Vilhelm Bjerke Petersen: Decoration from Birkerød Statsskole: 'Sport', 1930. Detached mural painting, 170 x 237 cm. BRANDTS, FKM/2252/6.



Vilhelm Bjerke Petersen: Decoration in Højdevangen's School, 1932-39.

He worked on these murals for a long period of time, extending from 1932 to 1939, thereby preceding, by five years, other similar projects such as Mortensen's now-lost art for the kindergarten Husum Børnehus and the art created for Sophus Bagger's (1848–1943) kindergarten in Hjortøgade in the Østerbro district of Copenhagen, done by Asger Jorn and several other artists from the Høst group, including Carl-Henning Pedersen (1913–2007), Ejler Bille, Richard Winther (1926–2007), Else Alfelt (1910–74) and Egill Jacobsen.

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NOTABLE AUCTION RESULTS

“Blodets dans (tilbedt exhibitionisme)” (The Dance of the Blood - Worshiped Exhibitionism)

Art Historical Context

Blodets dans (tilbedt exhibitionisme) (The Dance of the Blood – Worshiped Exhibitionism) belongs to Vilhelm Bjerke-Petersen’s Surrealist period of the 1930s. During these years, he worked to merge abstraction with symbolic imagery, creating compositions that are both structured and psychologically suggestive. The work reflects his interest in the unconscious, desire, and inner drives, but unlike the more theatrical French Surrealists, his approach remains controlled and conceptually grounded. It also connects closely to his theoretical ideas, where form and symbol function together rather than in opposition.

Auction Result

The painting achieved approximately $39,333 at auction in 2021, marking the highest recorded result for the artist to date. This strong performance highlights the rarity and desirability of Bjerke-Petersen’s early Surrealist works, particularly those from the 1930s. While his broader market remains relatively accessible, with average prices significantly lower, key paintings from this period continue to attract increasing attention from collectors.

"Phantom of the night"

Art Historical Context

Phantom of the Night (1935) belongs to Vilhelm Bjerke-Petersen’s most concentrated Surrealist phase, when he was actively developing a visual language that merged abstraction with symbolic imagery. Works from this period often balance clarity of form with psychological tension, using simplified shapes and spatial contrasts to suggest dreamlike or subconscious states. Painted in 1935, the work sits at the moment when Danish Surrealism was being actively defined through Linien, reflecting both international influence and Bjerke-Petersen’s own controlled, analytical approach to the movement.

Auction Result

The painting was offered at Bukowskis with an estimate of 60,000–80,000 SEK and achieved a hammer price of 340,000 SEK (approximately $32,000–$33,000), significantly exceeding expectations. This strong result places it among the artist’s higher auction performances..

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MARKET & COLLECTING



“Blodets dans (tilbedt exhibitionisme)” (The Dance of the Blood - Worshiped Exhibitionism), 1936, oil on canvas, 100 x 130 cm

HOW COLLECTORS VIEW VILHELM BJERKE-PETERSEN’S WORKS

Market Position and Auction Performance

Bjerke-Petersen’s market remains relatively focused but stable. His highest auction result is $39,333 USD, achieved in 2021 at Bruun Rasmussen for *Blodets dans (tilbedt exhibitionisme) (The Dance of the Blood – Worshiped Exhibitionism)*.

Over the past years, his paintings have averaged around $9000, while works on paper have averaged approximately $1000. Prices vary widely depending on size, medium, and period, ranging from very modest sums to over $39,000.

Appeal for Contemporary Collectors

Bjerke-Petersen’s work bridges abstraction and Surrealism, offering a more controlled and conceptual alternative to the dominant narratives of the movement. His international exhibition history further strengthens his position, with participation in major shows such as *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* at MoMA (New York, 1936–37), the *International Surrealist Exhibition in London* (1936), and the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme in Paris* (1938), as well as *Le Surréalisme en 1947* at Galerie Maeght. He also exhibited at the Museum of Non-Objective Art in New York.

In addition, his role as an organiser—particularly the *landmark Kubisme = Surrealisme exhibition in Copenhagen* (1935) and the *Linien exhibition at Charlottenborg* (1934)—highlights his importance not just as an artist, but as a key figure in bringing international Surrealism to Scandinavia. This combination of artistic, theoretical, and historical significance continues to attract collectors seeking depth, context, and long-term relevance.



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