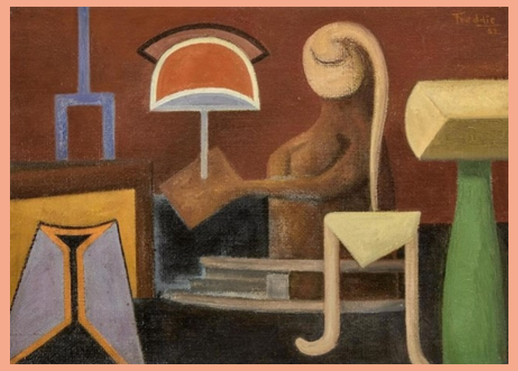
freddie







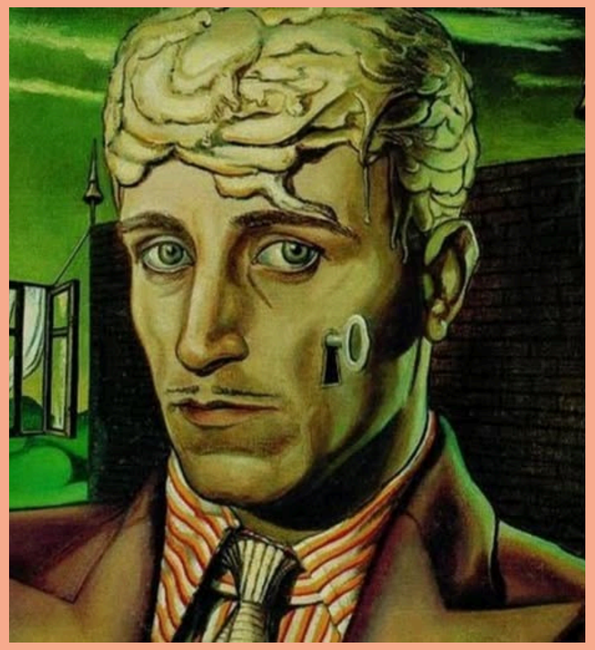








WILHELM FREDDIE



INTRODUCTION

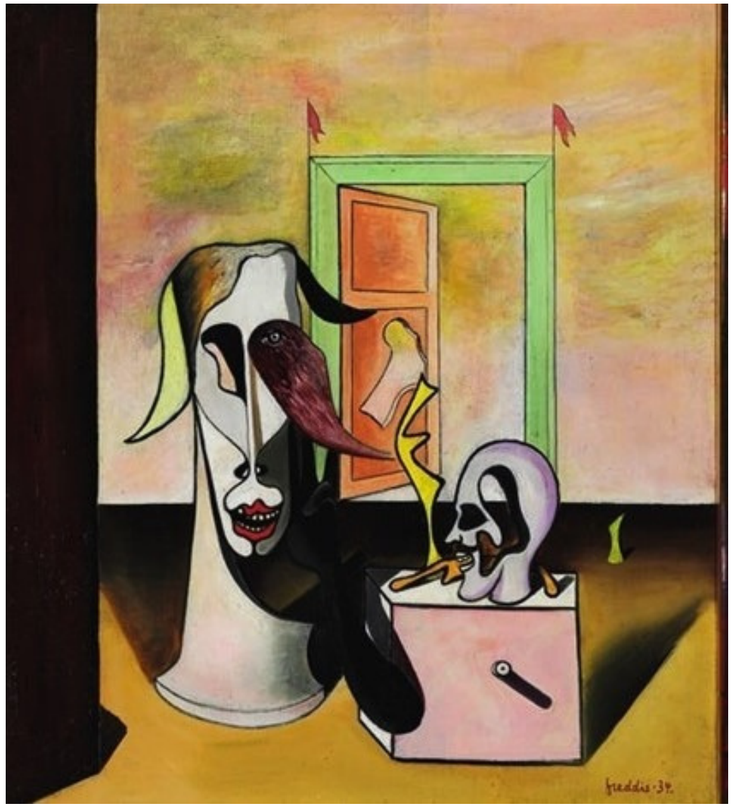


Aften, 1943, oil on canvas, Size, 80 x 60 cm.

Wilhelm Freddie (1909–1995)

Wilhelm Freddie was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1909 and became one of the most provocative and unconventional figures in Scandinavian modern art. Largely self-taught, he developed his artistic vision outside traditional academic structures, pursuing an independent path from an early age. His interest in modern culture, psychology, sexuality, and the subconscious led him toward the international avant-garde, where he found inspiration in Surrealism and its challenge to established social and artistic norms.

During the 1930s, Freddie emerged as a central figure in Danish Surrealism alongside artists such as Rita Kernn-Larsen and Vilhelm Bjerke-Petersen. While many Surrealists explored dreams and symbolism, Freddie pushed the movement in a more radical direction, creating works charged with eroticism, political commentary, and psychological tension.



Smilets land (Le pays de sourire; The land of smiles), 1934, oil on canvas, 96 x 86 cm.

His paintings, objects, and performances often challenged conventional ideas about morality and censorship, resulting in both public controversy and official intervention. In 1937, several of his works were confiscated by Danish authorities, cementing his reputation as one of the most daring voices in Nordic modernism.

What distinguishes Freddie is the intensity of his imagination and his refusal to separate art from life. His imagery combines precise technique with startling juxtapositions, transforming familiar objects and figures into symbols of desire, freedom, and transformation. Throughout a career spanning more than six decades, he continuously reinvented his practice, working across painting, sculpture, film, performance, and graphic art. Today, Wilhelm Freddie is regarded as one of the most important representatives of Scandinavian Surrealism, celebrated for expanding the boundaries of artistic expression and bringing an international avant-garde spirit to Danish art.

freddie

BIOGRAPHY



A smoking man (Self portrait)
Signed G.A.N. Executed around year 1930.

1909

1 Born in Copenhagen, Denmark, into a middle-class environment where he developed an early interest in drawing, literature, and modern culture.

Late 1920s

2 Began exhibiting as a young artist and increasingly rejected academic traditions, seeking more experimental forms of artistic expression.

Early 1930s

3 Discovered Surrealism and became involved with the Danish avant-garde, developing a highly personal style that combined dream imagery, symbolism, and provocative social commentary.

Mid-1930s

4 Established himself as one of the leading figures of Danish Surrealism. Participated in the groundbreaking Linien exhibitions and exhibited alongside major international Surrealists, including Salvador Dalí and Max Ernst.

1937–1940s

5 Gained notoriety when several of his works were confiscated by Danish authorities for alleged obscenity. The controversy cemented his reputation as one of Scandinavia's most radical and uncompromising modern artists.

1995

6 Died in Copenhagen after a career spanning more than six decades. Today he is regarded as one of the most important figures in Nordic Surrealism, celebrated for pushing the boundaries of artistic freedom and experimentation.

SHAPING DANISH SURREALISM

During the 1930s Wilhelm Freddie helped introduce the movement's ideas to a Scandinavian audience through exhibitions, publications, and collaborations with artists associated with the Linien group. Freddie developed a distinctly Danish interpretation of Surrealism that combined technical precision with psychological intensity, symbolism, and social critique.

What distinguishes Freddie is his willingness to push Surrealism beyond dream imagery and into questions of personal freedom, sexuality, and modern identity. His paintings frequently feature unexpected combinations of objects, fragmented figures, and symbolic forms that challenge conventional ways of seeing. One of the most famous examples is *Sex Paralysappeal*, a work that caused one of the greatest scandals in Danish art history. By transforming familiar household ornaments into unsettling and provocative symbols, Freddie explored themes of desire, repression, and psychological conflict. Through works such as this, he treated the unconscious not merely as a source of fantasy, but as a force capable of questioning social norms and cultural values.

Freddie helped position Denmark within the broader European avant-garde. His work demonstrated that Danish Surrealism was not simply an extension of the Paris movement, but a distinctive Scandinavian contribution that combined intellectual rigor, artistic experimentation, and a willingness to confront the boundaries of modern society.



Sex-paralysappeal (1936)

EVOLUTION OF ARTISTIC STYLE AND THEMES

Early Period — Experimentation and the Discovery of Surrealism (late 1920s–mid-1930s)

In his early years, Wilhelm Freddie explored a variety of modernist influences before fully embracing Surrealism. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he was largely self-taught and developed his artistic identity outside academic institutions. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, his work moved away from conventional representation toward increasingly symbolic and dreamlike imagery. Encounters with international Surrealism convinced him that art could serve as a vehicle for exploring the unconscious, desire, and psychological experience. His paintings from this period already reveal the themes that would define his career: transformation, eroticism, and the challenge to social conventions.



"Via Dolorosa", 1935, Oil on canvas, 46 x 66 cm.



Relief, ca. 1927–1928,
painted wood, 31 x 24 cm.

EVOLUTION OF ARTISTIC STYLE AND THEMES

Middle Period — Radical Surrealism and Provocation (mid-1930s–1950s)

The mid-1930s marked Freddie's most influential period. As a leading figure in Danish Surrealism and an active participant in the Linien circle, he developed a highly personal visual language that combined technical precision with startling and often provocative imagery. His works featured fragmented bodies, unexpected object combinations, and symbolic references to sexuality, politics, and freedom. Unlike the quieter Surrealism of artists such as Rita Kernn-Larsen, Freddie deliberately sought confrontation, using shock and absurdity to challenge accepted moral values. The confiscation of several of his works by Danish authorities in 1937 only strengthened his reputation as one of the most radical voices in Scandinavian modernism.



Badende (Bathing Girls), 1947, oil on masonite, 35 x 27 cm.



Befrugtning, 1944, oil on masonite, 121 x 91 cm.

EVOLUTION OF ARTISTIC STYLE AND THEMES

Late Period — Freedom, Fantasy, and Artistic Reinvention (1960s–1990s)

In his later career, Freddie retained the imaginative spirit of Surrealism while working with greater freedom across different media. His compositions became more playful and inventive, often combining fantasy, humor, and erotic symbolism in ways that reflected a lifelong fascination with transformation and human desire. Rather than repeating earlier formulas, he continually reinvented his imagery, producing paintings, sculptures, graphic works, and performances that blurred the boundaries between art and life. This late period demonstrates Freddie's enduring commitment to artistic freedom and confirms his position as one of the most original figures in twentieth-century Scandinavian art.



Dobbeltportræt (Double portrait), 1967, oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm



"Paris' dom" (The Jugdement of Paris), 1986, Oil on canvas, 116 x 147 cm.

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INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS & VISIBILITY

Wilhelm Freddie's international reputation was established through his active participation in the Surrealist movement during the 1930s. He exhibited alongside major international artists including Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, René Magritte, and André Breton. Through the Linien group and its exhibitions, Freddie helped connect Denmark to the broader European avant-garde, bringing international Surrealist ideas into a Scandinavian context while developing his own distinctive visual language.

In 1936, he was included in the historic International Surrealist Exhibition at New Burlington Galleries in London, one of the movement's most important presentations outside France. The following year, his work appeared in Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, a groundbreaking exhibition that introduced Surrealism to a wider American audience. Freddie also participated in Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme in Paris in 1938, placing him among the central artists associated with the movement at its height.

Freddie's international profile continued to grow throughout his career. His work has since been included in numerous retrospectives and museum exhibitions across Europe, and today he is recognised as one of the most significant representatives of Danish Surrealism. His continued presence in major collections and exhibition histories confirms his importance within both Scandinavian and international modern art.



Poster for the International Surrealist exhibition, London, 1936, designed by Max Ernst



Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism (1936-37) Exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art in New York

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NOTABLE AUCTION RESULTS

Wilhelm Freddie — Nej, nej, vi sover ikke på gulvet (No, No, We Don't Sleep on the Floor)

Art Historical Context

Nej, nej, vi sover ikke på gulvet (1936) was created during the height of Wilhelm Freddie's Surrealist period and reflects the artist's central role in shaping Danish Surrealism. Painted in the same year as the landmark International Surrealist Exhibition in London, the work exemplifies Freddie's fascination with dreams, desire, transformation, and the unconscious. Characterized by unexpected juxtapositions and meticulously rendered forms, the painting demonstrates how Freddie adapted international Surrealist ideas into a distinctly Danish visual language.

Auction Result

sold at auction for **€472,320** (including buyer's premium), significantly exceeding its estimate of €30,000–40,000. The result represents one of the strongest auction performances for a Surrealist work by Wilhelm Freddie and reflects growing international recognition of Danish Surrealism within the broader history of twentieth-century modern art.

Exhibition History

The painting has an extensive exhibition history dating back to its creation. It was first exhibited at Dansk Kunststævne, Odense (1936), followed by the controversial Surrealist exhibition Træk gaflen ud af øjet på sommerfuglen. Sex Surreal in Copenhagen (1937). It subsequently appeared in Freddie's major solo Surrealist exhibitions in Copenhagen, Aarhus, and Odense between 1940 and 1941, where it was reproduced in the exhibition catalogue. More recently, the work was included in the important retrospective Freddie at Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, and Liljevalchs Konsthall, Stockholm (1989–1990), confirming its significance within both Freddie's oeuvre and the history of Scandinavian Surrealism.



Nej, nej, vi sover ikke på gulvet (No, no, we don't sleep on the floor), 1936, Oil on canvas, 64.5×84.5cm

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NOTABLE AUCTION RESULTS

Wilhelm Freddie — Den himmelske og jordiske kærlighed (Celestial and Terrestrial Love)

Art Historical Context

Den himmelske og jordiske kærlighed (1941) belongs to a mature phase of Wilhelm Freddie's Surrealist practice, created during the years of World War II when his imagery became increasingly focused on themes of desire, transformation, and the relationship between the spiritual and physical realms. The painting reflects Freddie's enduring interest in Surrealism as a means of exploring hidden psychological and emotional realities. Through symbolic forms and carefully orchestrated visual relationships, the work examines the tension between earthly experience and transcendent aspiration, a recurring theme within both international Surrealism and Freddie's own artistic vision.

Auction Result

sold at auction for **€85,800** (including buyer's premium), substantially surpassing its estimate of €15,000–20,000. The result highlights continued collector interest in Freddie's Surrealist works, the growing international appreciation of Danish Surrealism within the wider history of twentieth-century avant-garde art.

Exhibition History

The painting has a well-documented exhibition history spanning several decades. It was first shown in Freddie's important Surrealist exhibitions in Aarhus and Odense in 1941, before appearing in Stockholm in 1946. In later years, it was included in the London exhibition Where Has Freddie Been? (1972) and the museum exhibition Wilhelm Freddie och Sverige at Norrköpings Konstmuseum (1986). The work was formerly owned by fellow Danish Surrealist Vilhelm Bjerke-Petersen, who acquired it directly from Freddie, further underlining its significance within the circle of artists responsible for establishing Surrealism in Denmark.



Den himmelske og jordiske kaerlighed, (Celstial and terrestrial love), May 1941
Oil on panel, 27,5 x 21 cm

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MARKET & COLLECTING



"Surrealistic composition, 1946, oil on canvas, 35 x 27 in. (88.9 x 68.6 cm.)

HOW COLLECTORS VIEW WILHELM FREDDIE'S WORKS

Characteristics Valued by Collectors

Collectors are drawn to Wilhelm Freddie's unique blend of technical precision, Surrealist imagination, and psychological intensity. His paintings often combine meticulously rendered objects with unexpected juxtapositions, creating images that feel simultaneously dreamlike and unsettling. Recurring themes of desire, transformation, freedom, and the unconscious give his work a provocative energy that continues to resonate today. Unlike many Surrealists, Freddie frequently challenged social conventions directly, making his paintings both visually striking and intellectually engaging.

Position in the Nordic Modernist Market

Wilhelm Freddie occupies a central position within Danish Surrealism and is widely regarded as one of the movement's most influential figures. His work is represented in major Scandinavian museum collections, including the Statens Museum for Kunst and the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, and has been featured in important exhibitions in Copenhagen, London, Paris, Stockholm, and New York. Through his participation in landmark international Surrealist exhibitions alongside artists such as Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, and René Magritte, Freddie secured a place within the broader history of European Surrealism.

From a market perspective, demand for Freddie's work has grown significantly as interest in Surrealism continues to expand internationally. A notable result is Nej, nej, vi sover ikke på gulvet (1936), which sold for **€472,320**, dramatically exceeding its estimate of €30,000–40,000.

Appeal for New Collectors

Freddie's work appeals strongly to collectors interested in Surrealism that is bold, imaginative, and historically significant. His paintings combine visual sophistication with themes that remain relevant today, including identity, sexuality, freedom, and the power of the subconscious. While major museum-quality works command substantial prices, smaller paintings, works on paper, prints, and graphic works can still be found at more accessible levels, providing entry points for new collectors seeking an important figure within Scandinavian modernism and international Surrealism.



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