

Kabarett: Scenes from 1920s Berlin

*Yes, it was strange, wonderful,
a time worth living in and in everyway a time worth retelling.
The fact that it ended so badly, that a storm of blood,
hatred and misery swallowed it all up...
That cannot dull the bright memories...
As we look back with you
this experience has made us richer and more mature.*

Thomas Mann

Defeat at the end of WWI set Germany on a new course. The financial reparations imposed by the Treaty of Versailles placed a severe economic burden on the country and the embarrassment of defeat demoralized its citizens. As part of the negotiations with the Allies, Kaiser Wilhelm was forced to abdicate in 1918. This marked the beginning of the Weimar Republic in Germany, and a time known as the "Golden Twenties." This shift created an instability that paired decadence with poverty, debauchery with conservatism, and free thought with a fearful intolerance that culminated in the rise of Hitler. Berlin, Germany's capital city, epitomized the conflicting realities that defined this inter-war period.

Kabarett: Scenes from 1920s Berlin evokes the memory of the city's golden age with its landmarks, its sensuality and its dark corners. Visit the kabarett, its musical satire and sexual daring. Stroll by the café, the hub of artistic and intellectual thought. You will be confronted by a whorl of newspapers, posters and advertisements, echoing the voices of a booming city. Peek into the windows of film and fashion each an impression of their time. The depths of poverty, prostitution and political unrest that lurk around each corner remind us; all that glitters is not gold.

The spirit that haunts Weimar Berlin has two faces born from the same body. Freedom, insecurity, creation, and desperation are intrinsically linked in this moment that forever changed the course of the 20th century.

If you enjoy this exhibit, visit The Feldberg Collection: Self Portraits from 1920s Berlin, a series of rarely seen artworks with a history as unique as the period that produced them. The Feldberg Collection will be exhibited this May at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery in Hart House at the University of Toronto.