

# Schwules Museum\*

Press Release | Special Exhibition

## "So, It's A Girl" Homage to Erika and Klaus Mann

From October 28, 2016 until January 30, 2017



There have been previous exhibitions on Klaus Mann (1906–1949), the *enfant terrible* of the literary Mann family, which explore his role as a prominent representative of gay culture and literature in the early twentieth century. But our exhibition "*So, It's a Girl*": *Homage to Erika & Klaus Mann* – curated by Wolfgang Theis – will be the first to examine both Klaus's life and work, together with that of his famous older sister Erika, in a programmatic venue such as the Schwules Museum\*.

Here, Erika Mann (1905–1969) will be deliberately placed at the center of the story. She was the prototype of a modern, emancipated "New Woman": she raced cars, had several lesbian affairs with prominent lovers, and her relationship with her homoerotically inclined father, Thomas Mann (1875–1955), was particularly close. Early on Erika and Klaus passionately opposed the rise of the Nazis. They took up the fight against Hitler as a self-assigned task which they would pursue more intensively in exile through theater, cabaret performances, and lectures. Erika campaigned tirelessly for the USA to enter the war against Nazi Germany and worked, against all odds, as a female war correspondent. Klaus worked as a journalist, writing anti-fascist articles for his own magazines as well as for the US army newspaper. The first part of the exhibition is devoted to the life of the "famous Mann twins" (as they were known in the US) and follows them until the lonely death of Klaus on May 21, 1949 in Cannes, where he died of a drug overdose.

The second part of the exhibition focuses on Erika's relationship with her father, Thomas Mann, and her management of his estate, as well as her brother's. Erika is responsible for their posthumous fame and the publication of Klaus' best-selling novel, *Mephisto*. She is also responsible for the publication of the novel in Germany, despite protests from the heirs of Gustaf Gründgens, a gay actor and Nazi theater star to whom Erika was temporarily married and who stands at the center of the 'devilish' *Mephisto* story.

"*So, It's A Girl*": *Homage to Erika & Klaus Mann* deals with the sexual orientation of the siblings in a matter-of-fact way, neither scandalizing it, nor ignoring it, like many Mann-shows in the past have done. The exhibition will also explore Thomas Mann's struggle with his role as a homophile man who brought biological children into the world. In this context, the show will discuss the way Thomas Mann's family dealt with his homoerotic fantasies, as well as the question of how much the homoerotic art on display in their

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Munich home effected the children's development. One of these art works was a painting by Ludwig von Hofmann (1861–1945). In 1913, Thomas Mann bought the homoerotic Hofmann painting *Die Quelle (The Wellspring)* for his office, where it hung until his death. This particular painting hangs in the Thomas Mann Archive in Zürich today, and unfortunately, despite many requests, has never been loaned to the Schwules Museum\*, probably for fear of the "queer" context. The exhibition will show a comparable Hofmann original, which was loaned from the Kunstmuseum Tempelhof–Schöneberg. The exhibition will also showcase Erika Mann's documents, letters, and texts from the Monacencia archive in Munich.

*"So, It's a Girl": Homage to Erika & Klaus Mann* runs from October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016 until January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017 at the Schwules Museum\*. The exhibition is curated by Wolfgang Theis in cooperation with the Monacencia Munich. Additional support is provided by Irmela von der Lühe und Uwe Naumann. This exhibition continues the series of our previous Mann-family shows, where Golo and Thomas Mann were each presented with solo exhibitions.

There will be an accompanying program with readings and lectures. The schedule of events will be announced on the Schwules Museum\* homepage. The exhibition is in German and English. There will be no exhibition catalog.

You can find downloadable press images by Rinaldo Hopf [here](#).