

'THERE IS ONLY LOUISE BROOKS!'

BY MARIA ROSE

The fascinating thing about Louise Brooks is how her legend has endured despite a relatively short lived and low key film career. It is a tribute to her star quality that ninety years on she is regularly held up as an icon of the silent era and she still graces the pages of many fashion magazines as a perfect encapsulation of the 'flapper' look. Her popularity only continues to grow amongst film and fashion fans even though she never made the transition to talking pictures and spent decades in obscurity; even people without an interest in these fields are probably familiar with her unique image, the black bob that has been copied to by many ingénues since and been alluded to by film makers like Godard and Jean-Pierre Jeunet in their female protagonists.

As a fan of 1920's culture and of Louise it is a real treat for me to be putting together a display of the Bill Douglas Centre's Brooks items; though not as numerous in period memorabilia as her contemporaries like Garbo and Dietrich, due to her modest career and subsequent defiant exit from Hollywood, there is still plenty to illustrate why she still holds such appeal. Her literary leanings are also represented by her own autobiography/ Hollywood memoir *Lulu In Hollywood* (EXE BD 29088), a fascinating, gossipy, yet intelligent read and an insight into why she has become infamous for her controversial and tart manner. For anyone with an interest in early Hollywood it gives an insiders account of the key players and ambience of the time, if it is perhaps a little coloured in from her own personal opinions.

One very amusing article I found is a postcard of Louise posing with two curious looking toy dogs (EXE BD 85096), hand tinted with garish green and pink; one can almost imagine Louise's own indignation at such an item, in all its twee glory. A more flattering and theatrical representation can be found in *The Picturegoer* March 1929 (EXE BD 22455); in a still from *The Canary Murder Case*, Louise crouches, fearful in a scanty bird costume with a background of a noir-ish shadow hand reaching over her.

She is of course mentioned frequently in Lotte H. Eisner's's classic text *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (EXE BD 44718) for her work with G.W. Pabst in the 1929 silent films *Pandora's Box* and *Diary of a Lost Girl*. These are the films for which she is most admired now and she exhibits the acting abilities that Hollywood's minor roles never gave her opportunity to display, not to mention her sheer beauty and engaging on-screen presence. It is these two films that brought about her revival in the 1950s and has put her in the league of screen legends – a status that could have been lost to her after her split from Paramount and her thankless post-silent era career.

The biography *Louise Brooks* (EXE BD 15368) by Barry Paris is an extensive overview of her whole career and legacy and contains photographs of the

star, well-known and some unfamiliar but all enchanting, including those from later life, gin-soaked but with the same radiant smile and expressive eyes.

Louise Brooks: portrait d'une anti-star (EXE BD 45789) by [Roland Jaccard](#) takes an entertaining and irreverent look at her life and times and examines her impact on popular culture, including the salacious comic style stories by Guido Crepax with its saucy Brooks inspired lead character. Louise, ever controversial even in old age, thought the outrageous stories were magnificent and kept a framed picture of the alter-ego on her wall, even claiming that Crepax was one of the few people in her life who had truly understood her. They are not for the easily offended but are a fitting tribute to a woman never bound by convention or restraint and how easily her image translates into stylized illustration confirms just how striking and abiding her beauty was.

To quote film historian Henri Langlois 'There is no Garbo! There is no Dietrich! There is only Louise Brooks!'