

Tamara de Lempicka: Art Deco Icon was at the Royal Academy, London 15 May to 30 August 2004.



## Art Deco diva earns vogue status with rare exhibition

By Arifa Akbar, *Wednesday, 12 May 2004, United Kingdom.*

She was renowned as the diva of Art Deco and led the same glamorous lifestyle as the high society figures she painted. Yet Tamara de Lempicka was excluded from the artistic establishment because she was "a beautiful and emancipated woman", according to Norman Rosenthal, the exhibitions secretary at the Royal Academy of Arts.

The Royal Academy of Arts is staging the first major exhibition of De Lempicka's work, featuring 55 paintings borrowed from galleries and private collectors. Among them are works belonging to the actor Jack Nicholson, and the designers Donna Karan and Wolfgang Joop.

Mr. Rosenthal said: "She was not in the great canon of the 20th century because she was a woman and because she was incredibly beautiful. She looked and lived like Greta Garbo, and I think those things counted against her. She was overlooked in the same way someone like Frieda Kahlo was. I hope this exhibition serves to recognize just what a great artist she was and that there is a place for her in the history of 20th-century art."

De Lempicka's work came to epitomize the wealth and decadence of Paris in the 1920s and 30s. As a white Russian whose family fled the revolution and left behind their riches, De Lempicka was among the first generation of "self-made" women and became known for her portraits of strong, sexually empowered women. Her paintings include boldly drawn nudes, lesbian friends, breast-feeding mothers and portraits of Europe's social elite.

In 1928, she divorced her husband and soon afterwards sent her daughter, Kizette, to boarding school to accommodate her social and professional life. She is reputed to have had affairs with women and men. In recent times, the artist's work has been reappraised and increasingly bought by celebrities. Madonna is thought to have based her video "Vogue" on De Lempicka's work.

Victoria de Lempicka, the artist's granddaughter, said of her "second mother", who died in 1980: "She was extremely glamorous and was a jet-setter before they had jets. She travelled between St Petersburg, Warsaw, Monte Carlo and the ski resorts of Poland.

"I remember walking along a street in New York with her and people would stop and ask for her autograph. When I asked the people why they wanted her autograph, they said they didn't know exactly who she was but that she looked like she was somebody," she said.

"I think the reason [she wasn't accepted by the artistic mainstream] in her time is because she didn't fit into any artistic categories. Her paintings are a comment on the modern-day beauty of her time," she added.

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Exhibition: "Tamara de Lempicka: Art Deco Icon" ran from May 2004 to August 2004.