



# ART DECO NEW YORK

JOURNAL OF THE ART DECO SOCIETY OF NEW YORK WINTER 2020 VOLUME 5, ISSUE 1

CELEBRATING THE YEAR OF THE WOMAN

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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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Dear Deco Friends,

In January, when our journal team began discussing the theme of this year's issue of *Art Deco New York*, we decided to focus on what we thought would be the predominant theme of 2020: The Year of the Woman, commemorating 100 years of the women's suffrage movement. We started lining up topics and authors, assuming the project would be no different than in previous years.

How wrong we were! Less than two months after our first journal meeting, the world changed in ways we could not have imagined. Like everyone else, our Art Deco Society of New York (ADSNY) family faced personal and professional challenges as we all scrambled to find ways to deal with "the new normal." We questioned the role and responsibility of a small New York arts and culture organization at a time when our beloved city was among the first to set daily records for cases of the deadly virus.

Could we, should we, proceed with publishing the issue—always a challenge, even in less challenging times? Was the theme still relevant? Was this the best time to focus on the extraordinary, yet often overlooked, women who influenced the arts, architecture, and culture of the Jazz Age and the Great Depression?

It soon became clear that what ADSNY could do was offer our members and friends around the world an escape from the present to an exuberant era when the interwar years heralded hope for progress and change.

We are pleased that, despite the many challenges, the 2020 *Art Deco New York* journal has come to fruition, celebrating the Year of the Woman with a rich variety of informative, engaging articles. They bring to light notable women of the interwar period as influential and groundbreaking as their better-known male counterparts in the 1920s and 30s.

It is fitting that we dedicate this special issue to Barbara Baer Capitman, the fearless catalyst for the formation of ADSNY, and many other Art Deco societies around the globe, on the 100th anniversary of her birth.

Barbara Captiman was a community activist who started the historic Art Deco preservation movement in Miami Beach in the 1970s, when long-neglected buildings from the 1920s and 30s had fallen out of favor. Through her candlelight vigils, mobilization of the Miami community, protest marches, relentless lobbying of politicians and developers, and fearlessly taking a stand in front of bulldozers to prevent the demolition of interwar buildings, she helped create the Miami Beach Art Deco District in 1979. She then spread the word to other cities about the urgent need to mobilize to protect their own Art Deco heritage. ADSNY, incorporated in 1981, owes a huge debt of gratitude to Barbara for sounding that clarion call.

We hope you will enjoy this year's online issue, which would not have been possible without the tireless dedication and imagination of the team that worked under the most challenging of circumstances. Many thanks to ADSNY's Vice President and Editor in Chief, Anthony W. Robins; our editorial team, Alma Kadragic, Diane Nottle, Peter Singer, and Sandra Tansky; our design team; and Meghan Weatherby, ADSNY's Executive Director, for their countless hours in making this issue a reality.

All our good wishes to you and your loved ones for a safe, happy, and much better 2021.



Roberta Nusim, President

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# WHAT IS ART DECO?

BY GENISTA DAVIDSON

Though my definition of Art Deco is very personal, I'm sure it will resonate with many readers. Art Deco is exciting, optimistic, and challenging to define!

Being a lifelong traveler in search of Art Deco architecture, objects, exhibitions, and events, I have been privileged to meet hundreds of people around the world who have a different slant on and concept of what constitutes Art Deco. Apart from the recognized architectural features with which we are all

heyday. Swaffham even has a small museum dedicated to the expedition, highlighting the importance of the ancient Egyptian civilization's impact on the hearts and souls of those living centuries later.

Unquestionably, Art Deco epitomized luxury, glamour, opulence, and decadence all rolled into one. It has also been intensely interesting to see that the Art Deco label has expanded as the decades advance. Whereas it initially sought to define the decorative elements of a building or highly stylized objects, it

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**“ART DECO HAS ANOTHER ETHEREAL AND SPIRITUAL ASPECT:  
THE ABILITY TO ENTRANCE ITS BEHOLDER  
LIKE NO OTHER RECOGNIZED STYLE OR MOVEMENT.”**

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so familiar (geometry, chevrons, curvilinear features, streamlining), Art Deco has another ethereal and spiritual aspect: the ability to entrance its beholder like no other recognized style or movement. This powerful ability is Art Deco's allure because, once smitten with its endearing presence, we are then loyal to its preservation and restoration. The insurmountable joy that Art Deco brings is all-embracing and has no boundaries, uniting nations and continents.

I can remember the first time I realized its impact on me. I was seven years old, and absolutely fascinated and mesmerized by the flat-roofed house along our lane; its gleaming white façade and uniquely bulbous curved section radiated a warm, welcoming impression. The home had a neatly laid out minimalist garden with shrubbery, and the mesmerizing sunburst design on the iron gate was unforgettable. Art Deco is not just about the buildings; it defines the whole era. Hand in hand go the furniture, objets d'art, jewelry, fashions, typography; the list is endless, all showcasing Art Deco features as we know them.

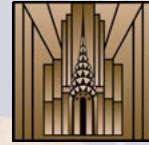
I have had a long association with the town of Swaffham, East Anglia, England where the well-known archaeologist Howard Carter was raised. Carter's famous 1922 discovery of King Tutankhamun's tomb, in Egypt's Valley of the Kings, sparked the 1920s craze of Egyptomania with the highly stylized and colorful designs freely filtering through textiles, furniture, architecture, fashion, and the silver screen during the Art Deco

now encapsulates so much more. The overarching definition of Art Deco has many facets, such as the Bauhaus with its austere functionalist clean, clear lines; Modern Classic; and International style, to name but a few. Lavish, ornamental and equally important Egyptian and Mayan Revival designs also distinguish this era. This makes it even more interesting, as often a building or object straddles styles, one feeding into the other, making it a subject of unending friendly debate.

Art Deco also conjures a feast of silver-screen stars and film sets, and entertainers like the legendary Josephine Baker and the Dolly Sisters, and the infamous Bright Young Things—the bohemian aristocrats and socialites of 1920s London. The music and dance, innovations in speed and travel, along with brightly painted tea sets and sharply angled designs all assisted in bringing the 1920s and 1930s under the Art Deco umbrella.

Finally, Art Deco is not a bygone era—it is very much alive and kicking today, the ambiance of this unique period forever radiating, for us all to enjoy. I defy anyone to walk past an Art Deco building anywhere, an Epstein Cloud Suite of British furniture, Tamara de Lempicka painting, or Jean Patou creation without a beaming smile and glowing, warm heart!

*Genista Davidson, President of the Art Deco Society U.K., is an art and social historian specializing in the twentieth century, and the author of Art Deco Anecdotes, Art Deco Almanac, and the Art Deco Traveller series of guidebooks.*



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Front Cover Decorative ornamentation above the entrance of the City Bank-Farmers Trust Company Building, 20 Exchange Place. Photo: Richard Berenholtz

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# TRADITIONAL OR MODERN? TWO SUFFRAGISTS MAKE THEIR ARCHITECTURAL CHOICES

BY ANTHONY W. ROBINS

Why do architects design buildings in one style and not another? Sometimes fashion trumps all other considerations, but sometimes there is a message to be sent, and a choice to be made of the architectural language in which to send it.

New York in the interwar years saw two approaches to architectural design: historicist and modernist. The former drew inspiration from the past, while the latter preferred to imagine the future. Architects argued the merits of the approaches, and buildings went up following each, including two Midtown Manhattan landmarks we celebrate during the Year of the Woman: Panhellenic House (later Panhellenic Tower and then Beekman Tower) at 3 Mitchell Place (John Mead Howells, 1927–28), and the Women’s National Republican Club at 3 West 51st Street (Frederic Rhinelander King, 1932–34).

The two building projects have a great deal in common. Each was commissioned by a former leader of the suffrage movement in the years following the adoption of the 19th Amendment, and each was meant to support a next step in women’s empowerment. Emily Eaton Hepburn commissioned Panhellenic House to be a club and residence for young women either in college preparing for careers or already in the workforce. Henrietta Wells Livermore commissioned the Women’s National Republican Club as an institution for the political education of newly enfranchised women. Each institution had educational aspirations, and each building housed social and residential facilities.

Yet, though built for similar purposes, under similar circumstances, and a few years apart, when it came to architectural style one building looked to the future while the other looked to the past. Perhaps surprisingly, it is Panhellenic House, the earlier one, that chose modernism. The Women’s National Republican Club, designed five years later, is a neo-Classical gem redolent of early American Colonial. Those stylistic choices have much to say about the two women and the institutions they founded.

## Emily Eaton Hepburn and Panhellenic House

Emily Eaton (1865–1956) grew up on a farm in Vermont. After graduating from St. Lawrence College, she moved with her husband, banker Barton

Hepburn, to New York City. Hepburn rose through the ranks to become president and chairman of Chase National Bank. Emily Eaton Hepburn stayed home to raise four children, but she also continued her education, studying botany and chemistry at Barnard College, and carved out a significant role for herself in the political and social life of the city.

As an active suffragist, Hepburn hosted meetings at her home, marched in parades with the likes of Carrie Chapman Catt, and traveled the state supporting the cause. Following the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920 and the death of her husband in 1922, she turned to other efforts, including, in 1930, breaking a glass ceiling in banking as what *The Wall Street Journal* referred to as “the first Wall Street woman bank director.”<sup>2</sup>

But her interests took her far beyond finance. She donated funds to her alma mater for construction of the Hepburn Hall of Chemistry, dedicated in a 1929 ceremony by no less than Marie Curie. The French government honored Hepburn for her support of Reid Hall, a residence and educational center for university women in Paris.<sup>3</sup> She directed the City History Club of New York, led the effort to restore President Theodore Roosevelt’s childhood home on East 20th Street, and placed Peter Stuyvesant’s statue in Stuyvesant Square.<sup>4</sup>

Panhellenic House brought together two of Hepburn’s passions: education and women’s professional advancement. The 1920s saw major changes in women’s roles: while in earlier generations most women college graduates became teachers, the new generation also looked to business for their working lives. As early as 1920, the New York Chapter of the Panhellenic Association—so named for the Greek-letter sororities of college life—planned a tall building combining residential and social uses specifically to shelter young women still in college or new to the workforce. The project made little progress until 1926, when Hepburn became the majority stockholder of the Association. She acquired the site on First Avenue at Mitchell Place, just around the corner from Beekman Place; she selected the architect, John Mead Howells; and she built the tower. As she later wrote, the project would “prove that women could do big business.”<sup>5</sup>



TOP TO BOTTOM:  
Construction photo of “The Panhellenic” featured on a postcard postmarked 1929.

Early postcard view of the Women’s National Republican Club. Photo: From the collection of the author

**LEFT TO RIGHT:**  
Ornamentation on the chamfered corner of Panhellenic House designed by Rene Chambellan. Photo: Meghan Weatherby

Vertical window bays tucked between uninterrupted brick piers that highlight the verticality of Panhellenic House. Photo: Meghan Weatherby

American eagles on the façade of the Women's National Republican Club. Photo: Meghan Weatherby

The spare, stone-faced façade of the Women's National Republican Club. Photo: Meghan Weatherby



The original group at the Panhellenic Association had chosen Donn Barber—a staunchly tradition-minded architect—but Barber had died in 1925. By choosing to replace Barber with John Mead Howells, Hepburn ensured that her modern institution would have a suitably modernistic home—the modernism we call Art Deco. Though Howells too had once been a traditionalist, in 1922 he had joined forces with Raymond Hood to win the Chicago Tribune competition, and the two went on to design such modernist monuments as the Daily News Building on East 42nd Street.

Howells himself described Panhellenic House as “modernistic” and in “the vertical style”—words we now associate with Art Deco:

*The simple composition of verticals, which some like to call modernistic, seems to me to be ‘indicated’ . . . for the design of steel cage buildings. It is the simplest and most straightforward clothing of the steel cage itself, in masonry . . .*<sup>6</sup>

The tower’s verticality, typically Deco, comes from its recessed vertical window bays tucked between uninterrupted brick piers rising straight to the roof. Chamfered corners on First Avenue encourage viewers to see the tower in three dimensions, rather than focus on just a single façade. The spare ornament, designed by Rene Chambellan, includes a panel at one corner portraying lush foliage perched atop an octagon, uniting the two standard Deco ornamental tropes: geometry and stylized floral patterns.

The critics gushed over the tower in architectural journals, as well as *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*—the latter called it “an outstanding example of American skyscraper architecture.”<sup>7</sup> And so it is—but it owes its existence quite as much to Emily Eaton Hepburn as to John Mead Howells. In 1931, having established Panhellenic House on

Mitchell Place, Hepburn commissioned a neighboring apartment building around the corner at 2 Beekman Place—and in so doing helped transform Beekman Place into an exclusive wealthy residential enclave. Architect Rosario Candela, though generally known for grand, traditionally styled apartment buildings, designed Hepburn’s new building as another Art Deco gem—not quite as modernistic as Howells’s tower, but unquestionably related in style. Hepburn then moved into the penthouse apartment where she lived out her days as “the Grand Old Lady of Beekman Hill.”

In 1955, shortly before her death, the *Times* profiled Emily Eaton Hepburn:

*At 90, Emily Hepburn doesn’t get around too much. She may go to Gracie Mansion for tea, sit in on a Beekman Towers board meeting, attend City History Club meetings . . . This Vermonter who adopted New York . . . built Beekman Towers [sic] and 2 Beekman Place back in the 20s, when no other real estate man [also sic] would risk money in that dead-end area . . .*

*On spring and summer evenings, when the rivers are liquid gold plate, Emily Hepburn sits in her roof garden, misty-eyed and dreamy, knowing afresh the glittering wonder of the city coming alight as the sun goes down. Then she is a white-haired dowager queen surveying her eight million subjects—scurrying ants on the pavement, under her tower.*<sup>8</sup>

### Henrietta Wells Livermore and the Women’s National Republican Club

As the *Brooklyn Eagle* described Henrietta Wells Livermore (1864–1933) in 1925:

*If the dictionary were searched for the one word that would best describe Henrietta W. Livermore, better known in Republican circles as Mrs. Arthur L. Livermore, that word would unmistakably be “pioneer.” The pioneer spirit . . . has made her the best known*

*woman in New York State Republican politics, and one of the best known in the United States . . .*<sup>10</sup>

In 1933 *The New York Times* described her as “a close friend of former Presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover . . . and a national figure for years in the campaign that finally triumphed for women’s suffrage.”<sup>11</sup> Livermore held major positions in the suffrage movement: member of the National Woman Suffrage Committee, vice president of the New York State Woman Suffrage Association, and member of the New York State Board of the Women’s Suffrage Party. Besides general leadership, she excelled as a writer, credited with so much of the movement’s literature that she became known as “Old Litt.” Her publications included *A Suffrage Training School* (1916), *The Blue Book Suffrage School* (1916), and *How To Raise Money For Suffrage* (1917).

One year after ratification of the 19th Amendment, Livermore founded the Women’s National Republican Club as “a Club House for Republican women, where they may help form intelligent political opinions, that they may be of greater service to the Republican Party and to the Nation.”<sup>12</sup> As she later wrote:

*I realized more and more that the women voters would need a long course in political education, would need an organization of their own which would build up their political morale and stimulate their interest, and that they would also need a meeting place where they could become acquainted with other women voters who had like interest and problems.*<sup>13</sup>

The WNRC was considered the first women’s political organization of its kind anywhere in the country. Herbert Hoover addressed its opening meeting, and Florence Harding, wife of the president-elect, accepted honorary membership. The Club started out in a small loft on West 39th Street, then moved



to Murray Hill.<sup>14</sup> By the end of the decade the Club had outgrown its quarters and determined to build a new home in the heart of Midtown, at 3 West 51st Street. Livermore, working with another former Club president, Maude Wetmore, piloted the project. As Wetmore wrote:

*This Club House is to be a symbol of a new movement among Republican women nationally . . . Republican women . . . have a great contribution to make and I know that as organization Republicans, the time will come when that contribution will be of great value and we will want to share in the victory of future elections.*<sup>15</sup>

Raising money for the new clubhouse—especially following the 1929 stock market crash—proved challenging, but in November 1931 Livermore announced the acquisition of the site in a meeting at the Waldorf-Astoria. As described in the *Times*: *The new clubhouse will contain a large assembly room, lounges, a library, a private dining room, and thirty bedrooms, each with a private bath. The architect is Frederic R. King . . .*<sup>16</sup>

Frederic Rhinelandt King, scion of a socially prominent family that traced its roots to Peter Stuyvesant, studied at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, and took positions at McKim, Mead & White and later at Carrère & Hastings, both firms immersed in traditionalist design. Going out on his own in 1920, he continued in the same architectural vein, along with partner Marion Sims Wyeth. For the Club, King brought in Theodore E. Blake, who, perhaps not coincidentally, “had much to do with the designing of the House and Senate Office Buildings in Washington.”<sup>17</sup>

King gave the club a spare, stone-faced façade in a neo-Classical style suggesting Georgian inspiration. Its ornament includes severe stone moldings, simple molded keystones, and a pair of American eagles. As a modern club, the building rises nine stories—but

a shallow setback at the fifth floor leaves the lower stories suggesting a Georgian-style townhouse that wouldn’t look out of place among the row houses on Washington Square.

The Club never called its building’s architectural style neo-Classical, always referring to it instead as “Colonial.” The design was specifically meant to suggest “early American history,”<sup>18</sup> matching the Club’s large collection of early American furnishings. As the *Times* reported: *The Colonial atmosphere will be carried out, down to the smallest detail of the interior furnishings. Many valuable Colonial antiques belonging to the club, and now in the . . . headquarters, will be moved shortly to the new building.*<sup>19</sup>

The contrast with Howells’s vertical tower could not be greater.

So, here we have two buildings with so much in common. Each housed a new institution that reflected the beliefs and plans of a founder prominent in the suffrage movement, eager to take the next step in women’s empowerment. Each founder cared greatly for the city’s history and the country’s—witness the Club’s furniture collection, and Emily Hepburn’s involvement with Stuyvesant, Roosevelt, and the City History Club. Moreover, each founder was prominent in Republican political circles: no sooner had Panhellenic House opened than it hosted what the *Times* called “the first rally of the Women’s National Committee for Hoover,” at which “Mrs. A. Barton Hepburn . . . will preside,” the rally to be followed with “instruction in the use of voting machines.” The same article closed by noting that “Mrs. Arthur L. Livermore yesterday warned all Republican women not to be ‘bluffed out of their right to register.’”<sup>20</sup>

And yet what different directions these two women

took when it came to their buildings’ design. The Women’s National Republican Club certainly planned for the future, with the education of newly registered women voters, but saw itself resting on the solid foundations of past glories, of its roots in “early American history”—a vision clearly reflected in its “Colonial atmosphere . . . down to the smallest detail.” Panhellenic House focused on the future too, on opening new horizons for young women, but without looking backwards—a vision mirrored in its “modernistic” tower design. And while these two buildings vividly demonstrate the architectural tug-of-war of their times, they also remind us that architectural choices reflect more than the professional proclivities of architects. They reflect their times, and they reflect their clients’ vision. And that explains how two staunch suffragists, basking in their political success and building on it for future generations, could take diametrically opposed views as to what their buildings should look like—and what message those buildings’ appearance should convey to the wider world.

Anthony W. Robins, ADSNY’s Vice President, is a historian, writer, and educator specializing in New York architecture. A 20-year veteran of New York’s Landmarks Commission, he has a passion for Deco that is reflected in his most recent book, *Art Deco New York: A Guide to Gotham’s Jazz Age Architecture*.

Endnotes:

1. Much of this history is based on the Landmarks Commission’s Panhellenic Tower Designation Report prepared in 1988 by my former colleague Gale Harris.
2. “Daring To Be A Woman in Finance,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 17, 1930, p. 4.
3. “Mrs. A.B. Hepburn, a Civic Leader, 90,” *The New York Times*, August 16, 1956, p. 25.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Isabel Savelle, *Daughter of Vermont: A Biography of Emily Eaton Hepburn* (North River Press, 1952), p. 132.
6. John Mead Howells, “The Verticality of the Skyscraper,” *American Architect* 134, December 20, 1928, pp. 787–810.
7. “Beauty Invades the Community House,” *The New York Times*, December 30, 1928, p. 66.
8. Meyer Berger, “About New York,” *The New York Times*, June 1, 1955, p. 35.
9. Much of this history is based on the author’s nomination of the building to the National Register of Historic Places.
10. “Delivering the Vote’ Is Real Secret of Political Power, Says Mrs. Livermore,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 4, 1925, p. 97.
11. “Mrs. A.L. Livermore is Dead in Yonkers,” *The New York Times*, October 16, 1933, p. 17.
12. From Livermore’s opening speech to the club membership in 1921; “Alumnae Notes,” *Wellesley Alumnae Quarterly*, April 1921, p. 203.
13. Henrietta Livermore, “Presidents’ Reports,” *The Guidon – A Political Review*, February 1931, p. 8.
14. “Women’s National Republican Club to Open Its New Home, Feb. 11,” *The New York Times*, February 3, 1924, p. RE2.
15. *Ibid.*
16. “Republican Women Are Ready to Build,” *The New York Times*, November 11, 1931, p. 24.
17. “Theodore E. Blake,” *The New York Times*, July 4, 1949, p. 13.
18. “A National Club for Republican Women,” *Republican Woman*, October 1927; cited by Catherine E. Rymph in *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006), p. 47 (footnote 23).
19. “Final Work Under Way on Home for Republican Women’s Club,” *The New York Times*, March 4, 1934, p. RE1.
20. “Women Turning to Registration All This Week,” *New York Herald Tribune*, October 7, 1928, p. 21.

# SUFFRAGETTE CITY: EMPO



in the late nineteenth century with the dawn of the bicycle craze. At the time, it was generally considered inappropriate for women to ride bikes. Long skirts interfered with pedaling and could easily get caught in the gears, but men also considered the activity unladylike and brutish. Further, it was considered indecent for women to travel without a chaperone, and many husbands worried that a taste of freedom might encourage their wives to engage in risqué behavior. But women wanted to ride, and bicycle manufacturers recognized the business opportunity. To advertise their ladies' models, companies hired many of the best French posterists, who accepted—even glorified—the woman rider. This anonymous artist shows a well-heeled lady out for an afternoon jaunt on her Guyot cycle. The cameo lets us know that it's also a great racing bike, but it's almost an aside to the stylish lady at center. Widely disseminated images of liberated women made the activity more publicly acceptable, which in turn made shorter skirts and bloomers permissible, and—most important—offered women empowerment, independence, and a hunger for progress.

In Paris, entertainers and cabaret stars like Josephine Baker and Mistinguett awed audiences with their brazenly seductive performances. Posters became a crucial form of advertising for the cabaret, and artists like Paul Colin and Charles Gesmar elevated the printed promotional materials to a timeless collector's item by depicting the stars as grandiose, whimsical, and seductive, as in Gesmar's "Rags to Riches" design for Mistinguett. But these images also heralded a new era of design that differentiated itself from Art Nouveau with monotone backgrounds, punches of bright color, geometric angles, and experimental typography. The poster reflected the currents of change in 1920s and 30s culture and the development of a new aesthetic language—now called Art Deco—based on creative innovations that were taking place in architecture, fashion, and jewelry.

As women took drastic steps in transforming their roles and lifestyles, posters helped normalize what society at large considered inappropriate. Ernst Busch's *Curaçao Senglet*, originally released in 1910 and reprinted with a slightly different composition in 1920, embraces a deviation from acceptable women's behavior of the time. In the book *Plakate aus alter Zeit* (Old-time posters), Karl Wobmann and Marianne Bernhard write, "The girl is not particularly attractive, rather she is arrogant, sullen, and carelessly dressed . . . even the

Coco Chanel. Greta Garbo. Josephine Baker. Zelda Fitzgerald. Icons of the Jazz Age and the flapper lifestyle, these women were rule-breakers: cigarette-smoking, cocktail-sipping, scantily clad, self-empowered rebels. The end of World War I and the stock market boom boosted their confidence; women now had the security they needed to make further strides in politics, culture, and life at home. But the 1920s and 1930s were not all pearl necklaces and ruby-red lipstick. This was an era of negotiation for women's rights. And posters, by some of the finest posterists in the United States and abroad, played a significant role in changing perceptions of women's place in society.

By 1920, 23.6% of American women worked outside the home, a notable departure from the traditional housewife role. That year, "Congress established the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau to protect the rights and needs of women earning wages . . . Advertisements were targeting women in the 1920s, which indicates that companies recognized that women did have buying power."<sup>1</sup> By and large, these advertisements promoted beauty products and home goods, thereby reinforcing an outdated expectation of women's roles. This was not unique to American advertising; posters from around the world shared similar messaging. Marcello Dudovich's 1926 *Sàpis* poster depicts a modestly stylish housewife happily ladling soup into a bowl. And in 1935, domesticity proliferates, as in Luciano Mauzan's *Persil*, in which grinning housewives proudly hoist their laundry detergent from behind the clotheslines.

Despite this tendency toward traditionalism, an alternative current swelled. In France, though the first women's suffrage organization dated to 1876, women didn't win the vote until 1944. But they experienced an important cultural shift





# POWERING WOMEN THROUGH POSTERS

BY JESSICA ADAMS & JACK RENNERT

rose, carelessly dropped to the floor, has lost some of its petals . . . The bartender and her admirer have both left. In 1910, no lady would have let herself be seen clothed so carelessly and sitting in a bar drinking alone. The poster recalls a hangover, and it is actually anti-advertising that attracts the viewer's attention through its lack of slick features. A blonde beauty drinking a cup of golden liqueur—that is nothing unusual, but a wicked night owl dressed in black is something else again. The viewer wants to drink what she is drinking!<sup>22</sup> A woman of the era, groomed by social mores and patriarchal expectations, might not have been able to imagine herself drinking alone at the bar, but this provocative poster could convince her otherwise through its daring approach.

Today, the Jazz Age is nearly synonymous with speakeasies and smoking, but tobacco use among women was a new phenomenon. In 1917, the American Tobacco Company created the first advertisement that targeted women smokers; by the 1920s, designs featured stylish and sociable women, including celebrities like Amelia Earhart. In turn, women adopted smoking not only as a fashionable trend, but also as a political assertion of power and a signifier of membership in this new era of womanhood.

The 1920 *Miss Blanche Cigarettes*, by an unknown artist, certainly captures the allure: the redheaded lady, in her angular pose, casually blows smoke rings that hover above her gown and the perfectly Art Deco cushions beneath her. By contrast, another advertising tactic toned down the glamour to appeal to the average woman. Emilio Vilá's 1925 *Batschari Cigarettes* applies the aesthetic appeal to a more modest muse who can be viewed as nearly blasé about the whole thing, but her tender gaze, following the wisps of smoke to create the brand name, strikes the perfect chord of wistful appeal. In an altogether different approach, the 1933 *Cigarettes Sato*, by an unknown artist, dramatically infuses the femme fatale with an otherworldly exoticism that manages to feel simultaneously elusive and enticing. Certainly the Art Deco smoker provided much fodder to posterists.

A cigarette and a cocktail go hand in hand at the speakeasy, but Prohibition squelched any alcohol advertising in the United States and parts of Europe. Instead, posters advertised other venues where an unsanctioned libation might be found: balls, jazz clubs, and cabarets. Georges Barbier's 1922 design for

#### OPPOSITE PAGE TOP:

Anonymous, *Femmes Républicaines!* 1927.

As Cartelists and Socialists deny women the right to vote, women are asked to lead campaigns at home against the SFIO to exercise and maintain their political voices.

#### BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT:

Marcello Dudovich, *Sàpis*. 1926.

Luciano Achille Mauzan, *Persil*. 1935.

Anonymous, *Cycles Guyot*. c. 1920.

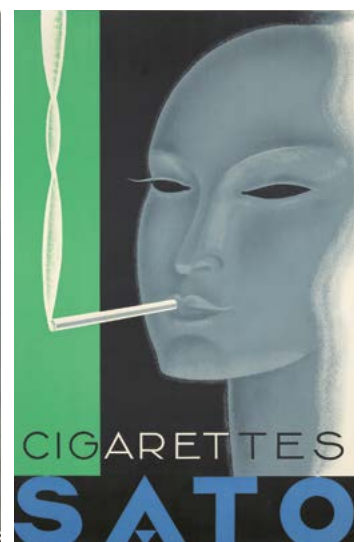
Charles Gesmar, *Mistinguett*. 1925.

Ernst Busch, *Curaçao Senglet*. 1920.

Anonymous, *Miss Blanche Cigarettes*. 1920.

Emilio Vilá, *Batschari Cigarettes*. 1925.

Anonymous, *Cigarettes Sato*. 1933.





**TOP ROW LEFT TO RIGHT:**  
 Georges Barbier, *Bal des Petits Lits Blanc*. 1922.  
 Julius Ussy Engelhard, *Mode-Ball*. 1928.  
 Julius Ussy Engelhard, *Bal-Paré*. 1926.  
 Natalia Goncharova, *Grand Bal de Nuit*. 1920.

**BOTTOM ROW LEFT TO RIGHT:**  
 Dorette Müller, *Bal des Artistes Floreal*. 1925.  
 Robert M. Jones, "Iron Clad" Hosiery. 1931.  
 Federico Ribas-Montenegro, *Bally Chaussures*. 1924.  
 Anonymous, *Donne a Braccetto*. c. 1922.

the *Bal des Petits Lits Blanc*—an iconic image of the era—shows a stunning flapper decked out in contemporary fashion: short bobbed haircut, a scandalously low-cut form-fitting dress, diamond jewelry, and a theatrical fur-trimmed cape. In Germany, the Deutsches Theater in Munich hosted a number of riotous artists' events and balls; Julius Ussy Engelhard captures the glamor and the fashion in his 1926 *Bal-Paré* and in his 1928 *Mode-Ball*.

In each of these—and in hundreds more—a seductive woman is the central focus. In the hands of a woman designer, though, the ball announcement only hints at the female body while prioritizing experimental line and shape to create an intoxicating composition overall. Natalia Goncharova's 1920 *Grand Bal de Nuit* is one such design; she employs a Cubist style unusual in posters at that time to create an abstract scene that might suggest couples under a tree, but certainly evokes the impression of a vivacious soirée. Strasbourg-born Dorette Müller created few posters, as she was also a journalist, playwright, poet, and women's rights activist. It's a shame she couldn't carve out more time to design posters; her 1925 *Bal des Artistes Floreal* showcases a masked nymph amid oversized, candy-colored flora in a true visual treat of graphic force.

Fashion was, of course, central to the flapper's identity. She discarded convention and wrote new rules for dressing. First, abolish the constricting corset! Coco Chanel pioneered the sporty, casual aesthetic as a new feminine style—and an antithesis to the corseted silhouette. Lingerie was embraced as a more comfortable alternative that also looked sexy; Robert M. Jones' 1931 "Iron Clad" Hosiery shows a woman at ease in a lacy bra and thigh-high stockings.

Next, the flapper did away with long, cumbersome dresses. As exemplified by the bicycle craze transformation, women's fashion adapted to fit their needs. While the flapper didn't require bloomers to shimmy, she did require higher hemlines to dance to jazz music—and this offered the bonus benefit of finally revealing her legs in public. The apparel was also cut wider, lower, and looser for mobility, which also offered women an opportunity to adopt androgyny. "The emergence of the boyish figure as the ideal of feminine beauty may seem to belong to the history of fashion, but contemporaries regarded this figure as the symbol of the new morality, a sign of the transition from a sexually and socially heterogeneous society to one that was unisex, uniform, and classless."<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the flapper cut off her long locks in favor of the boyish bob. Despite all this stripping away of female convention, the flapper chose to add new symbols of womanhood: piles of opulent jewelry, ornate hats, massive fur coats, slinky silk robes, and plenty of makeup. Women now embraced cosmetics—previously reserved for prostitutes and actresses—as a way to reframe their features and reclaim their physical beauty, leading in turn to the rise of the cosmetics industry as we know it today.

Posterists reflected the image of the new woman back to the populace. Federico Ribas-Montenegro gives us a lithe woman in a fringed drape dress that reveals her lingerie in his 1924 *Bally Chaussures*. *Donne a Braccetto*, an anonymous design from circa 1922, presents two ladies strutting in their newest acquisitions, which elongate their bodies, straighten their curves, and borrow a bit of men's tailoring while remaining smartly feminine. Ludwig Hohlwein knows that the independent lady about town needs a great umbrella to match her nice dress, as in his circa 1927 *Zum Guten Kleid*, which makes an attractive argument for androgynous dress, while Franco Barberis shows in his 1929 *Candee* that rain gear can still be feminine and fun. This survey of women's wear, from risqué to practical, proves that new options abounded for women.

Department stores influenced by the Parisian aesthetic were built internationally, allowing consumers from all locales and income levels to shop the newest lines. The textile industry exploded with factories, which further expanded the breadth of items available and offered a wide selection of sizes and styles. The mail order catalogue provided another point of access to the masses by bringing Parisian-inspired fashions straight to consumers' homes. The flapper style, initially a form of revolt against the disappointments of World War I, became a commodity aesthetic.

Women also flexed their independence through traveling, either solo or in the company of girlfriends. The bicycle and the automobile both granted the woman traveler a sense of freedom, and the rise of aviation broadened the destinations and the experiences available to women. This technological boom led to a surge of travel posters in the 1920s and 30s, many of which feature a lady adventurer as their subject. Paul-Henry Lafon's 1920 *Le Tourisme Moderne* is a victorious example of this feat: a pioneering lady, dressed in the latest fashions, stands boldly atop the earth while she surveys all the modes of transportation available to her. The world lies at her feet, and she is calling the shots. Similarly, William Welsh's 1936 *Pullman/Vacation Lands are Calling* centers on a stylish globetrotter who takes advantage of her leisure time to paint. This American railway company often promoted its travel options to women, and many woman-focused designs were created for the company over the years.

Jean Dupas' 1933 *Go Out by "General" Bus* employs his characteristic Modigliani-inspired women enjoying a picnic in an Edenic garden. "Many of the posters published in this period bore more than a fleeting resemblance to up-market fashion illustrations. This was not accidental, as many advertisers and companies (including the London Underground) were well aware of women's growing interest in active involvement with fashion."<sup>4</sup> Dupas was well versed in fashion; he created illustrations for *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* and designed posters for the American department store Arnold Constable. The women here



TOP ROW LEFT TO RIGHT:  
Ludwig Hohlwein, *Zum Guten Kleid*. c. 1927.

Franco Barberis, *Candee*. 1929.

BOTTOM ROW LEFT TO RIGHT:  
Paul-Henry Lafon, *Le Tourisme Moderne*. 1920.

William Welsh, *Pullman/Vacation Lands are Calling*. 1936.



are decked out in the latest fashions; one wears a collared shirt with a tie in a chic appropriation of menswear. The only man present is a kind of Adonis whose only purpose, it would seem, is to provide the ladies with anything they might need during their gathering. In Dupas' world, the tables have turned: women control their leisure, and the housewife has been replaced by a manservant.

By contrast, the British artist Dora M. Batty presents a more traditional housewife in her circa 1929 *By Underground/From Country to the Heart of Town* for the London Underground. Whereas male designers often idealized the feminine subject, women designers tended to take a more practical approach: though still running errands on her own, Batty's lead woman is bundled in winter clothing while shopping for groceries.

Edward Eggleston provides an American perspective on the modern woman in his circa 1935 *Pennsylvania Railroad/Atlantic City*. This unaccompanied young woman, happily waving to her friend (or perhaps inviting us, the viewers, to join her), sports a very modern swimsuit. In the 1930s, the development of latex and nylon made possible more form-fitting pieces with straps that could be lowered for tanning—which must have been a relief after decades of uncomfortable suits meant to hide as much skin as possible.

The Kodak Company fully embraced the intrepid traveler with an iconic poster series featuring the "Kodak Girl." She often appears taking in the world blissfully alone, as in René Lelong's *Kodak*. One needn't understand the history of women's liberation to feel her utter joy and emancipation.

The Y.W.C.A., founded in 1858 as the first American women's organization, launched initiatives ranging from wartime support to athletics. Anita Parkhurst's circa 1924 *Y.W.C.A./The Friendly Road* aims to reinforce the crucial value of sisterly bonds. Two young, fashionably dressed travelers exhibit a tender camaraderie as they embark on a journey together.

As women's rights expanded, the issues of child care and maternal support came to the fore. Jessie Wilcox Smith illustrated dozens of tender moments between mother and child. In her 1925 *Suppose—Everybody Cared!* she rallies for donations to treat children in need through the Welfare Federation of Philadelphia. It's a powerful statement: a woman designer drawing attention to the often neglected issue of child care.

From travel to politics, the current of change ran through the Art Deco era. "The Art Deco image is clearly less homogeneous than the Art Nouveau one, encompassing as it does the elegant Parisienne, the caricatured star, the boudoir baby, Ballets Russes opulence, Cubist lines, photographic collage, neo-classical massiveness of volume and geometric simplification. Yet it is always clearly recognizable because of the style, stylization and stylishness that bring unity to its diversity."<sup>5</sup> Read between the lines of a poster, and you'll discover an entire world beneath the surface.

TOP ROW LEFT TO RIGHT:  
Jean Dupas, *Go Out by "General" Bus*. 1933.

Dora M. Batty, *By Underground/From Country to the Heart of Town*. c. 1929

MIDDLE ROW LEFT TO RIGHT:  
Edward M. Eggleston, *Pennsylvania Railroad/Atlantic City*. c. 1935.

René Lelong, *Kodak*.

BOTTOM ROW LEFT TO RIGHT:  
Anita Parkhurst, *Y.W.C.A./The Friendly Road*. c. 1924.

Jesse Wilcox Smith, *Suppose—Everybody Cared!* 1925.

Jessica Adams is an artist and writer based in Brooklyn, New York. She received her MFA from Pratt Institute and has been the Editorial Director at Rennert's Gallery since 2018.

Endnotes:

1. *Flappers: A Guide to an American Subculture*, by Kelly Boyer Sagert. California: Greenwood Press, 2010. p. 20.
2. *Plakate aus Aller Zeit*, by Karl Wobmann and Marianne Bernhard. Zurich: Varia Press, 1986. p. 28.
3. *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs*, by Billie Melman. London: Macmillan Press, 1988. p. 5.
4. *London Transport Posters*, ed. by Michael F. Levey. Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1976. p. 135.
5. *Art Deco: Posters and Graphics*, by Jean Delhaye. London: Academy Editions, 1977, p. 15.

All Photos: Posters Please, Inc., New York City

# WOMEN ARCHITECTS IN THE EARLY MODERN WORLD

BY ROBIN GROW



One of the enduring myths about interwar architecture is that it was exclusively a male domain. While a majority of architects were men, women in fact exerted a fair amount of influence on architecture in the Art Deco period. But their contributions have often gone largely unnoticed, and only recently have the roles they played been fully recognized.

Aspiring women architects certainly suffered discrimination and prejudice, and they had to overcome many barriers. Many men in the profession, or in a position to award contracts and commissions, firmly believed women incapable of undertaking the tasks and working the long hours required.

Many architectural design schools in the early twentieth century generally limited admission to men. For those women who were admitted, it could be a lonely existence. Women graduates often found it difficult to find positions. Those who did often spent most of their time on drafting tasks and were the first to be laid off when business was slow, not unusual in the Great Depression. In the workplace, they often suffered discrimination (cultural, racial, and gender-based), and often they were not welcomed into professional associations—when not actively excluded. Even if potentially admissible, many could not afford the fees, given that their wages were generally lower than those of their male counterparts.

Women from well-to-do families obviously had advantages in obtaining qualifications. Theodate Pope Riddle (1868–1946) from Farmington, Connecticut, hired faculty members to tutor her in architecture. Many aspiring women architects relied on family connections to enter the profession. Less affluent women had virtually no access.

Social, economic, political, and cultural conditions varied across the countries where women sought opportunities and advancement. Some pockets of enlightenment existed in the world of architecture. The Bauhaus in Germany, seen as a progressive academic institution, declared equality between the sexes and accepted both men and women students. However, despite this generally unheard-of level of opportunity, most women at the Bauhaus studied fields considered more gender-appropriate, such as weaving. Countries going through large-scale social change, such as Palestine (present-day Israel) provided opportunities for women architects who were leaving strife-torn Europe in the 1930s. Recha Charlotte “Lotte” Cohn (1893–1983), who left her native Germany in 1921, played a major role in Israel’s building history over the next few decades.

Large cities undergoing massive rebuilding (such as San Francisco) or expansion (such as New York) also provided many openings for aspiring women architects, as did expanding universities. An outstanding example of this may be seen at

**TOP ROW LEFT TO RIGHT:**  
Theodate Pope Riddle, American, 1868–1946.  
Photo: Hill-Stead Museum

Recha Charlotte “Lotte” Cohn, German,  
1893–1983. Photo: 1924

Marion Manley, American, 1893–1984.

Gertrude Comfort Morrow, American,  
1888–1983. Photo: Environmental Design Archives  
Exhibitions, courtesy of Inge Horton

Aino Mandolin Aalto, Finnish, 1894–1949.

Elizabeth “Lisl” Scheu Close, American, 1912–  
2011. Photo: 1955

**BOTTOM ROW LEFT TO RIGHT:**  
Marion Mahony Griffin, American, 1871–1961.

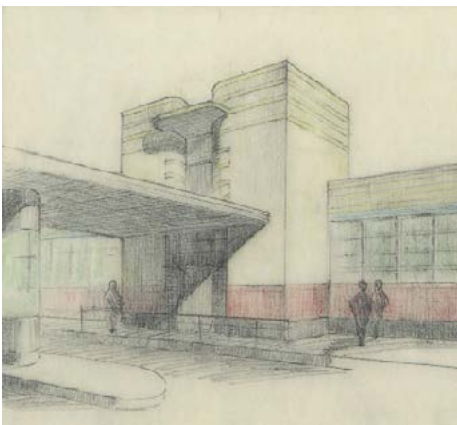
Elsa Gidoni Mandelstamm, German-American,  
1901–1978.

Genia Averbuch, Israeli, 1909–1977.

Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, Austrian, 1897–2000.

Elisabeth Scott, British, 1898–1972.

Julia Morgan, American, 1872–1957.



**TOP TO BOTTOM:**

The Kaete Dan Hotel (1932) in Tel Aviv, Cohn's first major project.

Rendering of Marion Manley's student club at the University of Miami.

Two designs for the Golden Gate Bridge toll plaza. Sketch by Morrow & Morrow.  
Photos: Environmental Design Archives, Irving & Gertrude Morrow Collection

the University of Miami, where Marion Manley (1893–1984) left a considerable mark.

Opportunities sometimes arose in government work, although some countries would not employ women in the civil service or passed over highly qualified women for promotion into senior positions. With the arrival of World War II, governments engaged many women architects to design military structures and later to work on postwar reconstruction schemes.

Many women gained entry to the profession by marrying another architect, which enabled them to share professional roles and even juggle child-care—though it can often be difficult to determine who did what in these partnerships. Gertrude Comfort (1888–1983) married the architect Irving F. Morrow, and the couple set up the firm Morrow & Morrow in San Francisco. From 1925 to 1940 the Morrows collaborated on many projects in the San Francisco Bay Area, including the design of the geometrically stylized Art Deco towers, walkways, railings, and lighting for the Golden Gate Bridge. In Finland, Aino Mandolin (1894–1949), who qualified as an architect in 1920, married Alvar Aalto in 1923 and participated in the design of his earlier buildings, often contributing to their interiors, as in the Villa Mairea (1937) in Noormarkku. Elizabeth “Lisl” Scheu Close (1912–2011) had difficulty finding employment after graduation until she followed her classmate William Close to Minneapolis. In 1938, the two started Close & Scheu Architects. To avoid the scandal of living and working together without being married, they wed one afternoon during their lunch break. They contributed a number of designs to the University Grove district of Falcon Heights, Minnesota, renowned for its large collection of innovative houses.

As in other professions, architectural firms often required women architects to resign if they chose to marry. Like their contemporaries in other professions, they often just neglected to tell anybody of their new status. In firms other than their own, women rarely became partners or senior members. They often saw their work subsumed into designs signed off by the firm's male partners and rarely received recognition for their work in architectural journals. A prime example was Marion Mahony (1871–1961) from Chicago, who worked for Frank Lloyd Wright in 1895 after being dismissed from the employ of her cousin, the Chicago architect Dwight Perkins, during an economic downturn. She met and married another Wright employee, Walter Burley Griffin, who in 1911 won the competition to design Australia's new capital in Canberra. The couple completed many wonderful Modernist designs in Melbourne and Sydney, as well as in India. After Walter's premature death in 1937, Marion returned to

Chicago. Highly regarded for her distinctive renderings of projects, for many years she was thought of merely as a highly talented artist. Recent examination of established histories, however, has revealed her extensive contributions to the designs emanating from the studios of Griffin, as well as Wright, and she has finally stepped out of their shadows.

Women architects who established their own firms often hired only other women, at least at first. Some collaborated with other women architects, as in the stylish Café Galina for the Levant Fair in Tel Aviv in 1934 by Genia Averbuch and Elsa Gidoni Mandelstamm. Averbuch left a major mark on Tel Aviv in 1934 when she won a design competition for a municipal plaza, Zina Dizengoff Circle, that became the city's central public space and symbolized its modernization. The surrounding buildings achieved a high degree of unity with similar Bauhaus-style designs, including one by Averbuch. Mary Gannon and Alice Hands formed America's first woman architectural partnership in New York in 1894 and became noted for designing innovative, low-cost apartment buildings. They spent much of their time on site, where they likely

encountered the same problems as other women who supervised construction. Building sites were rough-and-tumble environments, full of explicit language and reluctance among construction crews to take instructions from women. The architects had to learn how to mix it up with the boys, to give as good as they got, and to earn the respect automatically accorded to male architects.

Another form of attitudinal discrimination arose from the perception that women architects should be concerned mainly with women's aspects of buildings, such as kitchens, children's rooms, or pediatric wings of hospitals. This limited their scope and bemused some women architects who had never cooked a meal and had no interest in children or domestic affairs. However, women could have a positive influence on domestic design. A fine example is Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky (1897–2000), the first woman architect in Austria. Combining design with functionality, she was a pioneer of social housing in Vienna and Frankfurt, and she won acclaim in 1926 for her Frankfurt Kitchen using a unified concept, designed for efficiency and economy.

**LEFT COLUMN TOP TO BOTTOM:**  
John Cushman Fistere, "A Place for Everything in Place (a house planned by a woman architect, Gertrude Comfort Morrow)". *Ladies Home Journal*, May 1939. Photo: Environmental Design Archives, Irving & Gertrude Morrow Collection

Ward W. Willits house, Highland Park, Illinois, 1902. Watercolor and ink rendering by Marion Mahony Griffin. Photo: Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation/Frank Lloyd Wright Trust

**RIGHT COLUMN TOP TO BOTTOM:**  
Aino Mandolin and Alvar Aalto Villa Mairea façade.

The Faulkner House or Lippincott House in the University Grove district of Falcon Heights, Minnesota. Designed by Close & Scheu Architects for Ray Faulkner, E. Ziegfeld, 1938.

Genia Averbuch, Elsa Gidoni, and Selchomo Ginsburg, Café-Restaurant at the Levant Fair, Tel Aviv, Palestine, 1934. Photo: Library of Congress

## A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING IN PLACE

By John Cushman Fistere  
Architectural Editor of the Journal

A house planned by a woman architect, Gertrude Comfort Morrow, in the plan of which the smallest fact of housekeeping is recognized.

PROBABLY no man could have planned this house. It knows too much about housekeeping, too much about brooms, dish towels, aprons, extra blankets and phonograph records. It reflects an intimate knowledge of what goes on in a home, from the minute the alarm clock goes off in the morning until it's set again at night. One of the 745 houses submitted in the *JOURNAL's* small-house competition, it received no award, but lots of praise from the jury, and even greater praise from Grace Pennock, Alice Blinn, Ann Ratchelder, and others on the *JOURNAL's* staff who know what makes a housekeeping home.

Gertrude Comfort Morrow, of San Francisco, planned it—and planned it, undoubtedly, from experience. The numbers tell most of the story—a "place for everything in place." But there are some other things about it that even a male can appreciate. For instance, in a customary house the bedrooms are temporarily not remote enough from the living room, but here the closets constitute excellent sound-proofing. And incidentally, though far from accidentally, Mrs. Morrow has really elevated the closet to its proper place of importance. Like the plan of the cross-ventilated kitchen too. It has a table for children's meals, chairs for a neighbor's daytime visiting, and, as Mrs. Morrow points out, she has run the cabinets to the ceiling to provide extra storage space for "supplies bought at sale prices." Which is certainly housekeeping architecture. The garage is much more than a place to keep the car too. With a little additional width and a few more feet in length, space has been set aside for bicycles, sleds, garden tools, trunks and a workbench.

But apart from its practical virtues, the house has livable virtues as well. The good-sized living room opens up onto a terrace that really doubles the size of the living room. Flanking the fireplace are shelves for books, games, a built-in radio and phonograph, a cabinet for linens, and a special shelf for magazines. All the bedrooms are large enough for twin or double beds, and all of them are away from the street, facing the quietest of the rear. There are two bathrooms, one having a shower instead of a tub. The house has no basement, the laundry and heater room being combined in one service area just off the kitchen.

As designed by Mrs. Morrow for construction in California, the house had dish wood siding and a flat roof. However, with her permission, we have altered the exterior somewhat in order to make it more adaptable to other sections of the country.

1. Clothes closets in bedrooms.
2. Scaled linen, and bath supplies.
3. Closet for cleaning equipment.
4. Closet with shelves for linens.
5. Sewing machine under shelves.
6. Children's books, toys, games.
7. Book cabinet and shelf for magazines.
8. Seat and desk for a telephone.
9. Stationery, games, blankets, etc.
10. Made for plates in kept here.
11. Books on above inside shelves.
12. Fireproof food storage space.
13. Space for radio, phonograph.
14. Shelf for phonograph records.
15. Shelves for games, magazines.
16. Built-in dining-alcove table.
17. Bureau for sitting-table linen.
18. Storage space over 14, 15, 17.
19. Cupboard for table service.
20. Sideboard, and china storage.
21. Serving basin, utility drawers.
22. Front entry, opens on porch.
23. Mail, general storage space.
24. Closet for umbrellas, rubbers.
25. Coat and hat closet in entry.
26. Space for cleaning machine.
27. Refrigerator under sink shelf.
28. Sink, cooking equipment below.
29. Linens, mats kept under sink.
30. Three dish-storage chests.
31. Place for housekeeping desk.
32. Small rack for staining trays.
33. Mop, sponge, general supplies.
34. Range, steam-heating location.
35. Pot closet, exhaust fan above.
36. Storage, room over 23, 24, 25.
37. Ladder-shed to reach shelves.
38. Miscellaneous equipment closet.
39. Water heater and storage tank.
40. Heater, air-conditioning unit.
41. Handy package-delivery shelf.
42. Laundry supplies above shelf.
43. Washing machine, laundry tub.
44. Reception for electric iron.
45. Washbasin, sink, ironing board.
46. Clothes-deter hung at ceiling.
47. Garbage can, sunk below the ground.
48. Bicycles, coats, etc. here.
49. Terrace furniture kept above.
50. Storage bin for fireplace fuel.
51. Front's car covered above 10.
52. Handy location for workbench.
53. Tied locker under workbench.
54. Large closet for garden tools.
55. Life pond in corner of garden.
56. Terrace overlooking the patio.





How did women running their own firms win contracts in a commercial world run largely by men, often within an old boys' network? Women often lacked the necessary contacts to gain commissions, although some were assisted by their family connections. While design competitions were generally open to all, judging panels were generally all-male. Women were often unable to win large-scale commissions and were left to concentrate on modest projects.

Though many women architects resigned the profession prematurely, defeated by systemic discrimination, others found success. The British architect Elisabeth Scott (1898–1972) designed the imposing Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon, completed in 1932. In Australia, Mary Turner “Mollie” Shaw (1906–1990) found it difficult to complete her architecture studies at the University of Melbourne and instead became an architect via articulated studentship.\* She worked for various architectural firms in Australia (1931–1936) and the United Kingdom (1937) and traveled through Europe, meeting many key Modernist architects. In 1938 she entered a partnership with the Modernist architect Frederick Romberg, who left Europe, and from 1939 to 1942 they produced some of Melbourne’s most celebrated blocks of apartment buildings, including the Newburn Flats, South Melbourne (1939).



One of the most prominent, successful, and acclaimed women architects, Julia Morgan (1872–1957), ranks among California’s best-known architects. After graduating from the University of California, Berkeley, in civil engineering, she went to Paris intending to study architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts. After initial refusal, she became the first woman ever admitted. Following graduation, she returned to San Francisco and opened her own office, undertaking a broad range of commissions: residential, ecclesiastical, commercial, educational, and institutional.



Morgan’s works include such acclaimed American classics as Hearst Castle overlooking San Simeon Harbor, and the Berkeley Women’s City Club (now known as the Berkeley City Club hotel). Known for its use of concrete, with steel-reinforced concrete walls and ceilings that were artfully fashioned to look like wood, the finished club building delighted its many members, who had insisted on a woman architect. Morgan also completed many designs for institutions serving women and girls, including a number of Y.W.C.A. locations.

Many women found success during the interwar period in such professions as interior design, furniture design, photography, painting, sculpture, murals, textile design, and graphic design. Continuing research into the world of interwar architecture will no doubt accord more women their proper place in the era’s architectural history.

**TOP TO BOTTOM:**

**TOP LEFT:** Frankfurt kitchen pictured in magazine *Das neue Frankfurt* 5 / 1926–1927.

**TOP RIGHT:** Mary Turner “Mollie” Shaw, Newburn, Queens Road, Melbourne, Romberg & Shaw, 1939.

Royal Shakespeare Theatre. Photo: RIBA Library Photographs Collection

Pool at Berkeley Women’s City Club.

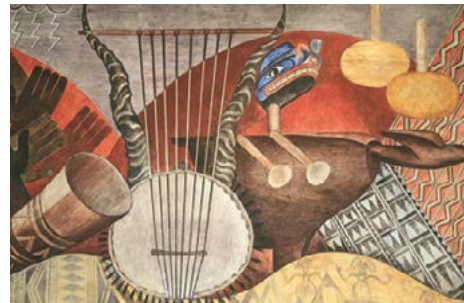
Robin Grow is the President of the Art Deco & Modernism Society of Australia (ADMMSA) and author of the award-winning *Melbourne Art Deco* (2009). He has researched and written extensively on the interwar era and presents papers locally and internationally. He is active in the preservation of Australia’s interwar buildings, and a number of structures have been landmarked as a result of efforts of ADMMSA.

\*An articulated studentship or employee is someone in Australia, the UK, India, or Canada who is studying to be an architect and put under the supervision of someone already in the profession; usually for two years. This is a similar process as what is used in the legal profession and may be compared to being a low-paid intern for a company in the US. Trainees are obligated to sign a contract agreeing to the terms of being an articulated clerk.



# WOMEN OF ART DECO

BY KATHLEEN MURPHY SKOLNIK



Open a book on Art Deco design and you're likely to find such iconic names as Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann, Paul Frankl, Paul Manship, Demètre Chiparus, Edgar Brandt, Jean Dupas, René Lalique, Kem Weber, Jean Dunand, and Raymond Loewy—all men. Were there any female Art Deco designers? The answer is yes, there certainly were, although only a few of those who were acclaimed in their time—French textile and fashion designer Sonia Delaunay, British ceramicist Clarice Cliff, Irish-born architect and furniture designer Eileen Gray—remain well recognized today, even among historians of art and architecture. Many more have been forgotten, overlooked, or overshadowed by a better-known spouse. Yet during the age of Art Deco, women were well represented in the fields of mural painting; textile, silver, and furniture design; graphic arts; sculpture; and even industrial design. New York buildings and museums are filled with their work. Here's a small sampling of the women whose contributions to New York's Art Deco legacy may still be seen today:

Lucienne Bloch (1909–1999) painted murals in New York in the 1930s through a work relief program for artists, part of the Federal Art Project (FAP) of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Her father, Ernest Bloch, an internationally renowned classical composer, brought his family to the United States from Geneva, Switzerland, in 1917. The Blochs initially settled in Cleveland but moved to San Francisco in 1925 when Ernest became the director of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

At age 15, Lucienne Bloch attended the Cleveland Institute of Art. She continued her education in Europe, primarily in Paris, where she took classes at the École des Beaux-Arts and studied sculpture with Antoine Bourdelle and painting with Andrée Lhoté. Back in the United States by the early 1930s, she worked as an assistant to the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera. Bloch may be best known for the 1933 photograph she surreptitiously took of Rivera's ill-fated *Man at the Crossroads* in the lobby of the RCA Building in Rockefeller Center before the mural's destruction.

Bloch's first FAP commission came in 1935: a series of five murals titled *The Cycle of a Woman's Life* for the recreation room of the Women's House of Detention at 10 Greenwich Avenue in New York (an Art Deco building by Sloan and Robertson, 1932). For the first mural she selected a theme that she felt would resonate with the inmates. As she explained, "Since they were women and for the most part products of poverty and slums, I chose the only subject which would not be foreign to them—children—framed in a New York landscape of the most ordinary kind. It could be Uptown, Downtown, East Side, or West Side—any place they chose. The tenements, the trees, the common dandelions were theirs."<sup>1</sup>

That mural, a fresco titled *Childhood*, depicted a racially diverse group of mothers and children together in a playground bordered by tenements and factories. The New York City skyline rose in the dis-

**TOP LEFT:** Detail of Lucienne Bloch's *Evolution of Music and Musical Instruments* mural in George Washington High School's music room. Photo: Works Progress Administration.

**TOP RIGHT:** Lucienne Bloch's *The Cycle of a Woman's Life* mural for the Women's House of Detention.

**BOTTOM LEFT:** Detail of Lucienne Bloch's *Evolution of Music and Musical Instruments* mural in George Washington High School's music room.

**BOTTOM RIGHT:** Detail of Lucienne Bloch's *Evolution of Music and Musical Instruments* mural in George Washington High School's music room.

ance. Bloch later wrote that the inmates pretended they had adopted the children in the mural and even gave them names.

Work ceased during the winter months to prevent the fresco from cracking as it dried. The project never resumed, leaving the remaining four murals—*Schoolroom*, *Adolescence*, *The Working Woman*, and *Romance*—unexecuted. *Childhood* was lost with the building's demolition in 1974.

*The Evolution of Music*, the fresco Bloch painted in 1938 for the upper wall of the music room of George Washington High School in Washington Heights, remains extant, restored in 1991 through the Municipal Art Society's Adopt-A-Mural program. Bloch attended the rededication and provided some insight into her approach to the mural's design: "When I came into the room for the first time . . . I asked myself, 'What in music is visual?' . . . I went to the library and while there I suddenly realized that music is composed of sound waves. So I made an oscillating pattern to run through the whole fresco and tie it together. . . . That's visual."<sup>2</sup> A series of parabolic curves unifying the panels of the mural represents the oscillating pattern she described.

Bloch saw music as an instrument for fostering racial and ethnic harmony. To express this belief in the mural, she incorporated instruments from different cultures and performers from various parts of the world, like the Balinese cymbals and dancers depicted in one panel.

Bloch's musically talented family members also appear in the mural. Her sister, a devotee of early medieval music, plays the lute and her father composes a musical score. Another celebrated figure from the world of music, Leopold Stokowski, provided a model for a white-haired conductor leading a symphony orchestra. The references to medieval and classical music are followed by a tribute to jazz, with top hats, musical instruments, and black hands wearing white gloves clapping to the beat. A high school choir composed of singers from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds occupies the panel above the doorway.

In the years that followed, Bloch continued to paint frescoes in collaboration with her husband, Stephen Pope Dimitroff, a Bulgarian immigrant who was once Rivera's chief plasterer. She also worked in a variety of other mediums, including photography, lithography, and sculpture. After living for a time in Flint, Michigan, Bloch and Dimitroff moved to Gualala, California, in 1965. She died there in 1999 at the age of 90.

Gwen Lux (1908–1986) may be best known for her controversial nude figure sculpture of *Eve* for Radio City Music Hall, but she did her first work in Chicago, where she was born Gwen Wickerts. She studied in Detroit with Mary Chase Stratton, the founder of Pewabic Pottery, and attended the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston before traveling to Yugoslavia to study with Croatian sculptor Ivan Mestrovic. She met and married another of Mestrovic's students, Hungarian-born

Eugene Van Breeman Lux, with whom she collaborated on her early commissions.

The Luxes' first joint project was a series of relief sculptures for the McGraw-Hill Building on Michigan Avenue in Chicago, an Art Deco building completed in 1929. Relief panels depicting signs of the zodiac occupy the spaces between the windows of the fourth level, while images of mythological figures—Diana with a deer, Atlas bearing the weight of the world on his shoulders, and Helios with the horse that draws the chariot of the sun—decorate the floor above.

Gwen Lux's first major solo commission was her larger-than-life cast-aluminum sculpture of *Eve* for Radio City Music Hall. *Eve's* primordial form, clutching an apple, appears to be in the process of evolution. Radio City's impresario, Roxy Rothafel, did not approve of *Eve* or of two other nude female figures created for the hall, Robert Laurent's *Girl and Goose* and William Zorach's *Dancing Figure*. He called them lewd and lascivious and ordered two of them, Lux's and Zorach's, removed for opening night. A public outcry led to their return.

Lux's later projects included *Power and Direction* for Eero Saarinen's Styling Administration Building at the General Motors Technical Center in Warren, Michigan. Her sculpture *The Four Freedoms* covered the back wall of the main dining room of the SS United States. She created *Birds in Flight* for the Northland Mall in Southfield, Michigan, and sculpted figures personifying *Day and Night* for Edward Durell Stone's 1950 renovation of the auditorium of

the Victoria Theatre in Times Square. In 1973, Lux moved from Detroit to Honolulu, where she died in 1986.

Radio City Music Hall also houses the best-known works of the textile designer Ruth Reeves (1892–1966). Born in California, Reeves studied at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, the San Francisco School of Design, and the Art Students League of New York. She spent several years in the 1920s studying with Fernand Léger at the Académie Moderne in Paris. Her time there exposed Reeves to early twentieth century avant-garde artistic movements like Cubism.

In 1930 the W&J Sloane Company, the interior decorating and home furnishings store, commissioned from Reeves a series of textiles jointly submitted to the International Exhibition of Decorative Metalwork and Cotton Textiles sponsored by the American Federation of Art and held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The designs were printed on various types of fabrics related to their intended use, such as wall coverings, tablecloths, curtains, and upholstery. Reeves's designs included narrative works called "personal prints," based on her own life or the lives of friends. One of these, *American Scene*, celebrates everyday American work, sports, and family activities. Another design for Sloane's, *Manhattan*, includes skyscrapers, factories, switchboard operators, ocean liners, airplanes, and even the Brooklyn Bridge and the Statue of Liberty. *Electric*, a bold geometric design printed on gray billiard cloth felt, was described as "ideal for the aluminum furniture which a radio room in a contemporary manner seems to demand."<sup>3</sup> Sloane's, which didn't



**TOP LEFT AND CENTER:** Detail of the zodiac relief sculptures by Gwen Lux for the McGraw-Hill Building on Michigan Avenue in Chicago. (Top Left: Aquarius; Top Center: Aries; Right: Libra)



**FAR RIGHT:** Gwen Lux's larger-than-life cast-aluminum sculpture of *Eve* for Radio City Music Hall





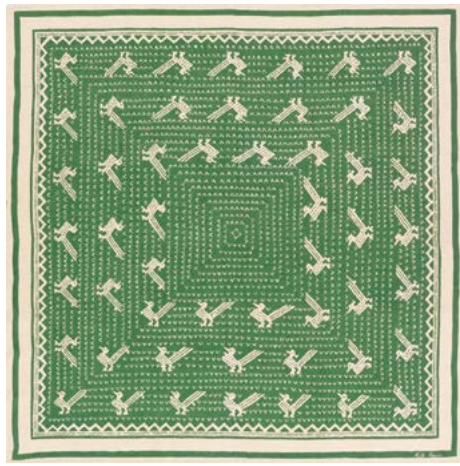
see Reeves's textiles until they had been printed and delivered, was not very pleased with her unconventional, Cubist-inspired designs. The textiles didn't sell very well, and Reeves never again designed for Sloane's.

Reeves's commissions for Radio City Music Hall included a carpet for the grand foyer, *Still Life with Musical Instruments*, which incorporates Cubist-inspired images of guitars, banjos, clarinets, saxophones, piano keys, accordions, and harps in shades of gray, gold, rust, cream, and black. Her other design for the Music Hall, a sepia-toned textile, *History of the Theatre*, adorns the auditorium's rear and lower side walls; it includes musicians, singers, actors, equestrian performers, ballet dancers, and a high-stepping chorus line.

In 1934 Reeves spent three months in Guatemala as a Carnegie fellow studying native textile and clothing design. The following March, an exhibition of more than 100 Guatemalan costumes and textiles she had acquired, along with 35 original designs inspired by her travels, opened in the RCA Building in Rockefeller Center. After closing in New York, the exhibition toured the United States for two years.

During the Great Depression, Reeves and Romana Javitz, a curator at the New York Public Library, conceived the Index of American Design, produced under the auspices of the FAP. Reeves supervised the index in 1936 and 1937. The project employed some 400 artists who produced more than 18,000 images, primarily watercolors, of traditional American crafts from the colonial period through the end of the nineteenth century, including glassware, ceramics, costumes, textiles, metalwork, toys, and furniture. Objects illustrated ranged from weather vanes and tavern signs to quilts, Shaker furniture and carousel animals. The images were intended to provide visual references for contemporary artists looking to develop a distinctively American artistic output.

In 1956 Reeves received a Fulbright scholarship to study the craft traditions of India. She served on the



All-India Handicrafts Board and as handicraft advisor to the Registrar General of India and remained in India until her death in 1966.

Ilonka Karasz (1896–1981) may be better known than other woman designers of the Art Deco era, but the broad scope of her talent is not always recognized. Her extensive body of work includes illustrations, textiles, rugs, metalwork, lighting, ceramics, furniture, and wallpaper.

One of the first women to study at the Royal School of Arts and Crafts in her native Budapest, Karasz immigrated to the United States in 1913, while still a teenager. Settling in Greenwich Village, she became part of a community of artists interested in modern design. Her illustrations began appearing in avant-garde magazines, including one with the intriguing title *Playboy: A Portfolio of Art and Satire*. Karasz remained involved in graphic design throughout her career. Her best-known works in this field are the nearly 200 *New Yorker* covers that she designed from the mid-1920s to the mid-1970s.

During her early years in New York, Karasz participated in textile design competitions sponsored by the fashion publication *Women's Wear*, and some of her early designs were commercially produced. In the late 1920s and 1930s she designed textiles for several leading firms, including F. Schumacher & Company and Cheney Brothers.

Karasz's furniture and silver designs frequently figured in model rooms at exhibitions of modern American design organized by artists' associations, galleries, and department stores in the wake of the 1925 Paris Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes. For the 1928 American Designers' Gallery exhibition, she designed the catalog cover and created two entire rooms: a studio apartment filled with multipurpose furniture and a nursery infused with bright colors and geometric forms. For the 1929 American Designers' Gallery, she designed a dining room with a table that could be folded and placed against a wall for easy storage.



**TOP LEFT:** Carpet for Radio City Music Hall (USA), 1932; Designed by Ruth Reeves (American, 1892–1966); wool; H x W: 93 x 93.5 cm (36 5/8 x 36 13/16 in.); Gift of Mrs. Robert Blasberg in memory of Robert Blasberg; 1987-69-1. Photo: © Smithsonian Institution

**TOP CENTER:** Tablecloth (USA), 1930–39; Designed by Ruth Reeves (American, 1892–1966); linen; Warp x Weft: 89 x 90 cm (35 1/16 x 35 7/16 in.); Museum purchase from General Acquisitions Endowment and Friends of Textiles Funds and through gift of Eleanor and Sarah Hewitt, Robert C. Greenwald, and the Estate of Florence Choate; 1995-103-1. Photo: © Smithsonian Institution

**TOP RIGHT:** Coverlet, *Electric* pattern; designed by Ruth Reeves; 65.2016.6. Photo: © Smithsonian Institution

**BOTTOM RIGHT:** Print, Cover of *The New Yorker*, *The New York World's Fair*, September 2, 1939; Designed by Ilonka Karasz (American, b. Hungary, 1896–1981); USA; offset lithograph on paper; 30.2 x 22.2 cm (11 7/8 x 8 3/4 in.); Gift of Anonymous Donor; 1960-207-18. Photo: © Smithsonian Institution

**TOP LEFT:** Vase, 1928; Designed by Ilonka Karasz (American, b. Hungary, 1896–1981); silver-plated metal; H x diam.: 19.8 x 10.6 cm (7 13/16 x 4 3/16 in.); Museum purchase from Decorative Arts Association Acquisition and General Acquisitions Endowment Funds; 1993-111-1. Photo: © Smithsonian Institution



**TOP RIGHT:** Serving dish, Taunton, Massachusetts, USA, c. 1938. Designed by Belle Kogan (American, 1902-2000), Manufactured by Reed and Barton. Gift of Daniel Morris and Denis Gallion, 1993-134-14. Photo: © Smithsonian Institution



**CENTER RIGHT:** Bowl (USA), c. 1928; Designed by Ilonka Karasz (American, b. Hungary, 1896–1981); electro-plated nickel silver; H x diam.: 4.8 x 8.1 cm (1 7/8 x 3 3/16 in.); Museum purchase from Decorative Arts Association Acquisition and General Acquisitions Endowment Funds; 1993-111-2. Photo: © Smithsonian Institution



**BOTTOM:** Red Wing Pottery produced almost 2,000 styles of glazed art pottery between about 1929 and 1967. This 1960s mandarin orange ceramic compote from the Prismatic line was created by Belle Kogan, a nationally known industrial designer who turned out the first of her 100 Red Wing Pottery commissions in 1939.



One of Karasz's lesser-known talents was her skill as a mapmaker. Her cover designs often included maps, and she also designed maps for several books, including the 1926 publication *New York: Not So Little and Not So Old* by Sarah M. Lockwood.

For most of her life, Karasz lived in Brewster, New York, with her husband, the chemist William Nyland. She died in 1981 at her daughter's home in Warwick, New York.

Belle Kogan (1902–2000) was among the few women of her time to achieve success in industrial design, a field dominated by men in the 1920s and 1930s. Born in Russia in 1902, Kogan immigrated with her parents to Allentown, Pennsylvania, at age four. During her senior year of high school, she opted to take a course in mechanical drawing—not surprisingly, the only woman in the class.

After graduating, she taught the course while saving money to attend Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. She made

it to Pratt but soon had to return to Pennsylvania to help with the family jewelry business.

In 1932, with a retainer from Quaker Silver, she opened her own practice, Belle Kogan Associates, on Madison Avenue in New York. Her early clients included the Bakelite Corporation, for which she designed distinctive bangle bracelets with oblong dots injected during the manufacturing process. Her long client list included Red Wing Pottery, for which she designed more than 400 pieces from 1938 to 1964. She also designed serving dishes for Reed & Barton, lighters for Zippo, and melamine dinnerware for the Boonton Modeling Company.

Kogan maintained her practice in New York until she closed the office in 1970 and moved to Israel, where she established a studio for KV Design. She retired two years later and remained in Israel until her death in 2000 at age 98. In 1994 Kogan became only the second woman to receive the Personal Recognition Award from the Industrial Designers Society of America.

These five talented designers represent only a fraction of the women who made their mark on the Art Deco era. They and many, many others—Loja Saarinen, Elsa Tenneshardt, Greta von Nessen, Ellen Manderfield, Grete Marks, Marguerita Mergentime, Henrietta Reiss, Eva Zeisel, and Marie Zimmerman, to name but a few—attest to the fact that Art Deco design was not just a man's world.

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**Endnotes:**

1. Lucienne Bloch, "Murals for Use" in *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1973), p. 76.
2. "Music and Art," *The New Yorker*, November 18, 1991, pp. 40–41.
3. Catalog, *Exhibition of Contemporary Textiles – Ruth Reeves*, W.J. Sloane, 1930.

# WOMEN OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

BY TAMMI LAWSON

In the decade from 1910 to 1920, New York's Black population rose by 66 percent. African Americans were arriving by the thousands to escape terrorism and persecution in the Jim Crow South. Harlem beckoned the new migrants with an abundant supply of apartments left empty by over-development. Black people wanted jobs, education, and the opportunity to fully realize their citizenship. Harlem was the headquarters of newly formed civil rights organizations dedicated to economic empowerment, equality, and social justice; they assisted new residents with job placement and housing. Harlem also became a Black cultural mecca where creative activity flourished and young Black people were inspired to pursue their dreams of becoming writers, musicians, and performing and visual artists.

The confluence of Black intellectuals, ingenuity, and opportunity made Harlem the epicenter of political activism and creativity, ushering in an unprecedented Black cultural explosion known as the Harlem Renaissance. It lasted from approximately the end of World War I through the mid 1930s.

Though many are familiar with the men whose works are now synonymous with this era, fewer know the women whose works were just as revolutionary.

Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller, Augusta Savage, and Selma Burke were formally educated artists whose aesthetic was shaped by the Afrocentrist ethos of the Harlem Renaissance and who exhibited their works in New York during that time. The careers and reach of these women contributed to the shaping of a long Black arts movement before and beyond the formal period known as the Harlem Renaissance.

The sculptor Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller began her career in Philadelphia at the turn of the twentieth century. Although Fuller's early career predates the Harlem Renaissance, her artistic influence is foundational to many artists identified with that time. She was born in Philadelphia in 1877, and unlike many African Americans of the nineteenth century, Fuller was raised in a successful middle-class family of entrepreneurs who nurtured and encouraged her artistic talents. She studied dance, attended art classes, and frequently visited the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. She was one of the few African Americans selected to attend the J. Liberty Tadd Art School in a program for gifted and talented students.

While still a teenager, Fuller exhibited at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. As a result of an honorable mention at the Exposition, she was awarded a scholarship to study at what is now

the Philadelphia College of Art. For her senior project she created a thirty-seven-foot bas-relief, *Procession of the Arts and Crafts*.

In 1899 she traveled to Paris to study at the Académie Colarossi and the École des Beaux-Arts. Her career flourished under the influence of the sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois, a founder and leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). With a readership of 100,000, the NAACP magazine, *The Crisis*, articulated the organization's ethos to a wide range of subscribers and exposed them to the work of artists and writers. Fuller first met Du Bois in Paris in 1900 when he was organizing the exhibition on Black American culture at the American Pavilion of the Paris Exposition. To help promote her career, he included her in the exhibition. He believed all art was propaganda that could be used to uplift the Black race, making it the role of the artist to create positive imagery that would inspire and lead to social uplift. World's fairs allowed the Black community to set the record straight and let global audiences interested in the fair know of their contributions.

In Paris, Fuller met the sculptor Auguste Rodin, who also became a mentor. Her work became more introspective and emotive, and her style became associated with the Symbolist movement. The literary work of Edgar Allan Poe and Sigmund Freud also influenced her use of imagination and ability to create a feeling of unease. She designed works that led the French press to call her "the delicate sculptor of horrors."

Upon her return from Paris, she once again enrolled at the Pennsylvania Academy to study ceramics with the portraitist Charles Gaddy. For the 1907 Jamestown Tercentennial Exposition, Du Bois chose Fuller to create a sculpture to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, making her the first African American woman to receive a federal commission. Unlike Thomas Ball's *Emancipation Memorial* sculpture that centers on Abraham Lincoln, with an enslaved person kneeling at his feet, Fuller's *Emancipation Proclamation* shows three figures emerging: one is downtrodden, another stands tall and proud, and the last is depicted taking a step forward.

In addition to Du Bois's influence, Fuller's politically active family and Dr. Alain Locke, Rhodes Scholar and Harvard-educated philosopher, informed her work. Locke called on African American artists to look to Africa to create positive imagery, believing that exposure to African art would encourage them to reclaim their cultural heritage. He contended that this would create a new style with the same impact Modernism had on European avant-garde artists, and he understood that the visual arts were a potent vehicle to counter derogatory stereotypes of Black people. With these influences, Fuller's art became increasingly more culturally representative and political. In 1919 she sculpted an homage to Mary Turner titled *Mary Turner (A Silent Protest Against Mob Violence)*. The previous year, a distraught and pregnant Turner had tried to stop the lynching of her husband. The white



LEFT: Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller, *In Memory of Mary Turner: As a Silent Protest Against Mob Violence*, Sculpture, Painted Plaster, 1919. Photo: Museum of African American History, Boston and Nantucket, 220

RIGHT: Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller, *Ethiopia*, Sculpture, Painted Plaster, c. 1921. Photo: Museum of African American History, Boston and Nantucket, 220

**THIS PAGE:**

**LEFT:** Augusta Savage working on *Lift Every Voice and Sing (The Harp)*. Photo: Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

**RIGHT:** Augusta Savage, *Gamin*, Sculpture, Painted Plaster, c. 1929. Photo: Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Benjamin and Olya Margolin

**OPPOSITE PAGE:**

**LEFT:** Selma Burke, posing with a bronze plaque of the late U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, which she completed shortly after his death on April 12, 1945. Photo: National Museum of the U.S.

**RIGHT:** Selma Burke, untitled portrait head. Photo: Peter A. Juley & Son, Archives and Special Collections, Smithsonian American Art Museum



mob hung her by her feet, cut her baby from her womb, and stomped on it. These vicious deaths galvanized the African American community nationwide and set off a series of silent protests led in New York City by Marcus Garvey and the organization that he founded, the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Through the use of closed form, a bowed head, and a face obscured by shadow, Fuller rendered the figure of Turner fittingly mute—a metaphor for the silent UNIA march, and for the silencing of her people by means of mass murder and brutality.

Her most recognizable work, *Ethiopia Awakening (The Awakening of Ethiopia)*, has been on display at various times at the 135th Street branch library in Harlem, (now Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.) The life-size bronze depicts a female mummy with her wrappings unwinding, as if coming out of bondage, the face of Ethiopia tilted slightly upward, symbolizing that African Americans have awoken from their slumber and are ready to move forward.

In the 1920s Fuller continued to be a cultural force, participating as both a juror and an exhibitor in the Harmon Foundation's periodic juried exhibitions, from 1927 through 1935, at the 135th Street branch library. Founded in 1922 by the philanthropist William E. Harmon, the foundation fostered appreciation and created awareness of African American artists and their work. The Harmon Foundation's exhibitions traveled the United States, giving national exposure to African American artists who otherwise would not have had a venue to exhibit. The artists won cash prizes and medals in such categories as painting, sculpture, and drawing. Today, Fuller's sculptures are recognized as possessing deliberate Afrocentric and political qualities that embody the Harlem Renaissance philosophy of the New Negro: the concept that one would stand up, be outspoken, demand equality, and combat negative stereotypes of Black people.

One of the most influential and important artists of the Harlem Renaissance was the sculptor, arts

administrator, and cultural activist Augusta Savage. She was born in Green Cove Springs, Florida, in 1892, the seventh of fourteen children. An artistic child, she began making sculpture from natural materials around her, such as abundant red clay. Unlike Fuller, Augusta Savage was discouraged and severely disciplined for making "graven images" that her evangelical father considered sinful. Perhaps to get away from her parents, as a teenager she married and started a family. The marriage was cut short by her husband's sudden death, which forced Augusta to move back home. In high school her talent was rewarded when she was offered a salary to teach clay modeling. After remarrying, she began studies at Tallahassee State Normal School (now Florida A&M University).

In 1919 Savage's sculptures were exhibited at the West Palm Beach County Fair, where she won a blue ribbon. Impressed by her talent, the fair's superintendent, George Graham Currie, gave her a letter of introduction to his friend, the noted frontier sculptor Solon Borglum, and encouraged her to move to New York City to pursue her dream of studying art. Divorced, she arrived in New York in 1921 with the letter and less than five dollars. Since the artist was talented but broke, Borglum suggested she enroll in Cooper Union, the merit-based institution, where her talent propelled her through the undergraduate program in only three years.

Degree in hand and living in Harlem, Savage was surrounded by writers and poets, among them Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Claude McKay. For artists, New York was a desirable place where their work could easily be created and seen. But it was in Harlem, a city within a city, that African American artists could congregate as a community, a circle of creatives working toward affirming themselves as a viable group of artists and scholars. Savage began to receive commissions to create busts of prominent African American figures, including Du Bois, Garvey, and the diplomat and writer James Weldon Johnson.

In 1923 Savage earned a scholarship to study in France at Fontainebleau, but the award was rescinded once the selection committee learned she was Black. Crushed but determined, Savage embarked on an aggressive letter-writing campaign to appeal the committee's decision. Although she encountered a multitude of setbacks, she continued to exhibit with the Harmon Foundation in New York, in Baltimore, and in Philadelphia at the Sesquicentennial celebration. In keeping with New Negro philosophy encouraged by Alain Locke, Savage created sculptures of neighborhood residents and family members celebrating African American physiognomy, while simultaneously dismantling negative stereotypes of Black people. One of her most notable sculptures was *Gamin*, a bust of her nephew as a street urchin, sculpted with full lips, a mischievous smile, and a tilted cap. The work won a Julius Rosenwald Fellowship (one of the most important sources of funding for Black visual artists in the 1930s and 40s), and a Carnegie grant, enabling her to study in Paris with Félix Beuneteaux at the Grande Chaumière and with French sculptor Charles Despiau. In Paris she hit her stride, and successfully exhibited *A Woman of Martinique*, an untitled nude at the Salon d'Automne, and *African Figure* at the Société des Artistes Français.

Upon her triumphant return to Harlem, Savage established and managed several art schools to share what she had learned in Paris, fulfilling a need for art classes in the community. Students included Jacob Lawrence, Norman Lewis, and Morgan and Marvin Smith. She exhibited *Gamin*, *Laughing Boy*, and *Woman of Martinique* at the Spring Salon, Anderson Gallery, and the Tenth Annual exhibition of the Salons of America, and *Realization* at the Architectural League. She co-managed the Uptown Art Laboratory and opened her own art school, the Studio of Arts and Crafts.

Savage collaborated with the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Harmon Foundation to open the Harlem Art Workshop in the 135th Street

branch library. Her popular classes outgrew that space and moved to a townhouse at 306 West 141st Street, known simply as “306.” It operated like a think tank where noted African American writers and artists gathered to discuss issues and concerns affecting Black communities. Contributing to these robust discussions were the writers Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Countee Cullen. In 1934, she was the first African American elected to the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors (now the National Association of Women Artists). Recognizing the success of her students and the management of her art schools, the WPA’s Federal Art Project (FAP) funded her move to a larger space, allowing her to open and become the Director of the Harlem Community Art Center. The Center enrolled 1,500 students and became the model for WPA art programs nationwide. Savage taught and trained the next generation of leading African American artists, often hiring her former students as teachers.

In 1935 Savage co-founded the Harlem Artists Guild with the artists Charles Alston and Norman Lewis. The Guild addressed the concerns of Black artists and fought for jobs and assignments in the FAP, which the Artists’ Union—a New York City organization that influenced job assignments in the FAP—had not been extending to Black artists.

In 1939 Savage opened the first Black-owned and operated commercial art gallery in the United States, the Salon of Contemporary Negro Art, representing established artists including Richmond Barthe, Meta Fuller, Selma Burke, and Beauford Delaney. Her gallery survived for only a season, but she fulfilled yet another dream and contributed to her community.

In 1937 she was commissioned to create a sculpture for the 1939 World’s Fair in Queens, New York—the crowning achievement of her career. She created her most notable work, *Lift Every Voice and Sing (The Harp)*. The theme was taken from a poem written by James Weldon Johnson that was set to music by his brother, the composer J. Rosamond Johnson, and

known as the “Negro National Anthem.” The design of the ambitious 16-foot plaster sculpture took the form of a huge harp “With human figures of varying heights not unlike the strings of a harp. At the front of the composition was a male figure kneeling on one knee with arms extended holding a scroll at each end. On this scroll were the words, ‘lift every voice and sing.’” Without funds to preserve it, the work was bulldozed during the dismantling of the fair.

After building a viable art career, teaching thousands of students, and mentoring several successful artists, Savage faced a string of disappointments. She was replaced as the Director of the Harlem Community Arts Center, and when funding from the FAP ended, so did her support. In the 1940s she moved to Saugerties, New York, where she worked as an assistant to a cancer researcher. Savage continued to sculpt, although she had few commissions, and taught art to children in summer camps.

Another noted artist associated with the Harlem Renaissance, Selma Burke, was born in 1900 in Mooresville, North Carolina. Like many other African American families during the period, hers left the South and settled in Philadelphia. Burke’s father was a well-traveled chef who worked on international ocean liners, and her uncles were missionaries in Africa who sent African art home to her. She grew up with these objects and, as a result, had an appreciation and knowledge of African cultures. Although she grew up surrounded by African art and showed an early talent for art-making, she was encouraged to become a nurse by her mother. After high school, Burke attended Women’s Medical College in Philadelphia (now Drexel College of Medicine), earning a degree in nursing. She gained employment as a private nurse to a wealthy heiress and traveled extensively with her, regularly attending the opera and other cultural events that further exposed her to the arts and privileged circles.

In 1935 Burke moved to New York to pursue her dream of being a sculptor. She studied with Augusta

Savage at the Harlem Community Art Center. She also joined the Harlem Art Guild and in 1936 won a Rosenwald Foundation grant and a scholarship to attend Columbia University. After graduating with her MFA, she traveled to Europe to study with the French sculptor Aristide Maillol and the Viennese ceramicist Michael Powolny. She returned to teach sculpting at the Harlem Community Art Center and began exhibiting her work. Along with Savage and other artists, she showed at the Downtown Gallery, founded by the visionary collector Edith Halpert, on East 51st Street. Burke also became romantically involved with the celebrated Harlem Renaissance writer Claude McKay, who introduced her to his circle of literary friends including James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes and the playwright Eugene O’Neill.

Burke excelled at creating portrait busts of famous Americans. Her sculptures of the 1930s are classically-styled figures enlivened by bold, sensuous forms. In 1945 she entered a national contest and won the commission to create a portrait of President Franklin D. Roosevelt for the 10-cent coin. Burke’s design is credited as the model for the engraver John R. Sinnocks’s famed profile that made it onto the dime. The President did sittings for over two years while Burke perfected his image. Her portrait of Roosevelt was displayed at the Recorder of Deeds Building in Washington.

In 1949, after McKay’s death, Burke married the architect Herman Kobbe, and they settled in Pennsylvania, where she opened an art school modeled after Augusta Savage’s Harlem Community Art Center. Savage’s mentoring of Burke and exposing her to the Harlem art community were invaluable to her career.

These three artists—Fuller, Savage, and Burke—faded from public view in the postwar decades. Burke retired to small-town Pennsylvania; Savage moved to upstate New York, and Fuller wound down her career in Massachusetts. Yet today we recognize their prominence in Harlem’s Black cultural renaissance of the early twentieth century: they shaped not only the sculptural mediums in which they worked, but also perceptions of the American artist at home and abroad.

Tammi Lawson is the curator of the Art & Artifacts Division of the Schomburg Center where she manages a collection of 15,000 items that visually document the Black Diaspora. She specializes in the preservation of cultural heritage materials, museum collections, and digital curation.

Endnotes:

1. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division, The New York Public Library. “African American population in selected cities 1900-1920” New York Public Library Digital Collections.
2. *Unbroken Circle: Exhibition of African-American Artists of the 1930’s and 1940’s* (New York, NY: Kenkeleba House, 1986).
3. Lisa E. Farrington, *Creating Their Own Image: the History of African-American Women Artists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 108.



# TAMARA DE LEMPICKA: AN INTERVIEW WITH THE ICON

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**A**DSNY president Roberta Nusim interviewed Marisa de Lempicka about her great-grandmother, acclaimed painter Tamara de Lempicka. Together with her mother Victoria, Marisa manages the Tamara de Lempicka Estate, devoted to protecting and enhancing the legacy of one of the twentieth century's most important women artists.

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**RN:** How does Tamara's art reflect her life?

**ML:** Tamara grew up in Warsaw, Moscow, and St. Petersburg, and lived through the Russian Revolution, the 1929 crash, the Spanish Civil War, and two world wars. Always forced to look for new horizons and opportunities, she eventually moved to Paris, Beverly Hills, New York, Houston, and finally Mexico. Because of her creative instincts, Tamara's subject matter and style constantly evolved in response to her times and surroundings.

**RN:** How did she get started? How did she get to Paris?

**ML:** My family has some of Tamara's earliest paintings and sketches. As a young girl, she experimented with watercolors and pencil drawings, realistically depicting flowers, her family, and the Polish countryside. In 1918, following the outbreak of the Russian Revolution, Tamara fled to Paris with husband Tadeusz Lempicki, staying there till 1939. Studying at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, she perfected her draftsmanship and the craft of oil painting. Unable to afford to pay models, she painted family members, neighbors, and friends.

**RN:** Which artists and designers inspired her?

**ML:** Renaissance artists, including Botticelli and Michelangelo, and later artists such as Caravaggio for his use of light. She was drawn to El Greco's bright colors; she experimented with Cubism. Critics have compared her to Ingres, the French Neoclassicist. She also found inspiration in the era's fashion, architecture, cinematography, photography, and ads. An avid reader of magazines and newspapers from around the world, she followed the latest trends. Her friends included designers like Marcel Rochas, Coco Chanel, Madame Grès, and Rose Descat; they would offer her some of their most beautiful creations to wear at her art openings and events.



By 1925 Tamara had developed her own style. The paintings she's famous for today are from 1925–38, before she moved to the U.S. The quintessential Art Deco painter, she depicted her characters with a blasé urbanity and haughty gazes; they are independent, contemporary, modern, even a little cold—the “modern man” and “modern woman” in the era of skyscrapers and the Machine Age. Her palette included vermilion red, metallic green, Renaissance blue (as she called it), and shades of black, white, and gray. She boasted, “My goal is never to copy, but to create a new style of clear, luminous colors and to feel the elegance of the models.”

In the 1970s she recreated some of her most important works of the 1920s and 30s. I think that at the end of her life, she wanted to relive her most famous era, when she was young and beautiful. I remember sitting in her bedroom in Cuernavaca. In her late seventies she still had her magic, passion, and determination. She was wearing a painting smock and one of her oversized hats, standing by a large window (she only painted with natural light) focusing on her painting. I could smell the oil paint in the air as she was trying to recreate that vermilion red she had used for the lips of the sensual women she painted in the 20s.

**RN:** Who are some of the best-known subjects of her portraits?

**ML:** In Tamara's own words from *Passion by Design*, by my grandmother Kizette de Lempicka-Foxhall,<sup>1</sup> “I painted kings and prostitutes, those who inspire me and those who make me feel vibrations.” Her models and clients included the nobility and high society of Paris, Milan, and New York.

She also frequently painted Kizette, in works like *The First Communion*, which received a bronze medal at Poland's 1929 Poznań International Fair, and *Kizette en Rose*, purchased by the Musée d'arts de Nantes in 1928.

She enjoyed painting people whose beauty and style captivated her. One of these was Rafaela, whom Tamara approached in the Bois de Boulogne in Paris. As Tamara related the story, while taking her usual morning stroll, she suddenly noticed a woman walking some distance in front of her, at whom everyone coming in the opposite direction stopped to stare. Curious, she walked quickly past her and then saw why everyone stopped: she was the most beautiful woman Tamara had ever seen, and she knew she must paint her. And she did for an entire year, producing seven magnificent paintings, including the very sensuous *La Belle Rafaela*, which *The Sunday Times Magazine of London* called “one of the most remarkable nudes of the century.”

**RN:** How did her commissions come about?



# IC ARTIST'S GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER



**ML:** Her commissions frequently came through contacts made at parties and social gatherings. One important early contact who transformed her financial situation was Dr. Pierre Boucard. She was commissioned to create some of her most iconic works for his family and charged a small fortune for them. Later Baron Raoul Kuffner commissioned Tamara to paint his lover, the Spanish dancer Nana de Herrera. He became one of Tamara's biggest collectors and, after the death of his wife and Tamara's divorce, became her husband.

In October 1929, a commission from industrialist Rufus Bush brought Tamara to the United States for the first time. Having discovered the artist's work while strolling past a Paris gallery, Bush commissioned her to paint a portrait of his fiancée, Joan Jeffrey, as a wedding present. Jeffrey was the granddaughter of Thomas B. Jeffrey, the automobile manufacturer who made the first Ramblers. Bush was the son of Irving T. Bush, builder of Bush Terminal in Brooklyn and Bush Tower on W. 42nd Street. Tamara admired Manhattan's skyscrapers, for her the ultimate in modernity, and used the towers of Midtown for the painting's background. She continued to use skyscrapers as backdrops for portraits she painted later in Europe, like *Adam and Eve* and *Portrait of Madame M.*

The Bushes were married for only a few years and when they divorced Mrs. Bush put the portrait in

storage. It remained forgotten for almost 60 years, until Mrs. Bush's daughter read about it in my grandmother's book: *Passion by Design*, and found it. The painting sold at Christie's in 2004 for \$4.6 million, breaking the artist's record at the time.

**RN:** Which artists and designers did she influence, past and present?

**ML:** Tamara has influenced artists in fashion, the beauty industry, photography, literature, music videos, and theatre. In the 1930s she collaborated with Revlon on a campaign for a new lipstick. In 2016, she was the inspiration for Shiseido's Clé de Peau Beauté product line, Fearless Beauty. Armani and Lanvin created dresses inspired by the stunning satin blue dress in *The Musician* and the gorgeous emerald-green gown in *Lady in White Gloves*.

Legendary *Vogue* photographer Steve Meisel recreated Lempicka's style when photographing Madonna for a Louis Vuitton 2009 ad campaign. Musician Florence Welch was photographed by Karl Lagerfeld for the cover of her single *Shake It Out*, looking as if she just stepped out of a Lempicka Art Deco portrait. Madonna has been one of Tamara's biggest fans and collectors. She incorporated elements of Lempicka's unique aesthetics into her music videos *Express Yourself* (1989) and *Vogue* (1990), where her silhouette echoes Lempicka's Cubist,

## LEFT TO RIGHT:

*The Musician*, 1929. Blue dress used as inspiration for designs by renowned fashion houses.

Tadeusz Lempicki, 1928. Collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Publicity photograph of Tamara de Lempicka.

*Kizette en Rose*, 1926. Portrait of the artist's daughter whom she frequently painted.

*Lady with Gloves*, 1930. Collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

geometric style. The video *Open Your Heart* (1986) opens with oversized images of *La Belle Rafaela* and *Andromeda*.

Her life story has inspired novels, including *The Last Nude* by American writer Ellis Avery. Canadian John Krizanc wrote the play *Tamara* (1987) about her meeting with Italian writer Gabriele D'Annunzio. A new musical, *Lempicka*, inspired by Tamara's life—especially in Paris, and including the period when she painted *La Belle Rafaela*—opened at the Williamstown Theater Festival in 2018 to great reviews and public reception. Plans are being made for a Broadway run.

**RN:** How do you think Tamara's living in Paris at the height of Art Deco influenced her art?

**ML:** Art Deco influenced her art and she influenced Art Deco. Tamara was an avid reader and a sponge for culture and new trends. She was inspired by important elements of the Art Deco style, such as sleek geometrical forms and urban landscapes, which can be seen clearly in her paintings from this era. Her style was clean, precise, and elegant. Demand for her portraits grew, and she was able to command large sums for them, enabling her to personify the modern woman—a woman of her era with her sleek blonde hair, red lips, and lacquered nails; her eternal cigarette; her independent lifestyle; and her fashionable clothing, by some of the top designers of the era, including Madame Grès, Coco Chanel, Edward Molyneux, and Schiaparelli. She drove a sports car, she managed her career as well as her finances, and she lived life in Paris as she pleased.



Tamara socialized with Chagall, Foujita, Kiesling, Van Dongen, Marie Laurencin, the Comtesse de Noailles, and André Gide. They would gather at the cafes in Montparnasse like La Rotonde, Brasserie La Coupole, and Café du Dôme to discuss art, politics, and philosophy.

**RN:** *There weren't many celebrated women artists in her time. How was she received by the art world during her active years? Was she a victim of any anti-feminist sentiment?*

**ML:** During her lifetime I don't think she was a victim of anti-feminist sentiment. In my opinion, this happened later with art historians. How many famous women painters can we name? I don't think this is because women artists are less talented than male artists. It's because art historians have included very few women artists in the art historical canon. But this is changing. Many prestigious museums are now presenting exhibitions of artworks by women, new books are being written, and we are discovering and rediscovering some fantastic women artists.

I think the reason Tamara is not usually included in the canon is not only because she is a woman, but because her art does not fit any particular art movement.

**RN:** *During her lifetime was she able to support herself from sales of her works?*

**ML:** Yes, by 1920 her portraits commanded up to 50,000 francs, or \$500,000 in 2020. By 1928, age 30, she had already accumulated a million dollars, \$15 million in 2020.

**RN:** *Who holds most of her art today? Where can her works be seen?*

**ML:** One of her biggest collectors is Madonna, who owns five of Tamara's most important paintings, including *Andromeda or The Slave*, *Nana Herrera*, and *Woman with Dove*. Others include Jack Nicholson; Carlos Slim Helú, the Mexican business magnate; and Tim Rice, lyricist of *Evita* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*; as well as Donna Karan; Barbra Streisand; and German designer Wolfgang Joop.

Museums holding her works include the Musée d'Art Moderne and Centre Pompidou in Paris; Musée d'arts de Nantes; the National Museum of Warsaw; the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; the National Museum of Women in the Arts; in Washington, D.C.; and Museo Soumaya in Mexico City.

Since her death in 1980 there have been twelve retrospectives of her work—in Japan, France, Spain, Mexico, England, Austria, South Korea, and Italy.

**RN:** Does her work frequently come up for auction? Can you talk about important recent sales?

**ML:** Her works at auction always break records, especially the past two years. The three most important recent sales have included *La Musicienne*, from 1929, which sold at Christie's for more than nine million dollars, well over the estimate of six to eight million and *La Tunique Rose*, from 1927 sold at Sotheby's for more than \$13 million, also well over the estimated price of \$6 –\$8 million. *Portrait de Marjorie Ferry* from 1932 sold at Christie's in February 2020 for \$18.8 million, which after the buyer's premium comes to \$21 million and makes Tamara de Lempicka's works the second most expensive by a woman artist after Georgia O'Keeffe.

**RN:** Are there family stories passed down through the years that you can share about her?

**ML:** I think one of the things that remain with me about Tamara's stories is how one small act can change someone's life and how important it is for everyone, especially for women, to have family support and encouragement. I say this because Tamara's life was transformed after Clementine, her maternal grandmother, a formidable woman, took her to Monte Carlo and then Italy for a vacation. While in Italy they visited museums in Florence, where she fell in love with Renaissance paintings. Clementine always believed in Tamara.

When Tamara was a young teenager, her aunt Stefa took her into her home in St. Petersburg and opened a whole new world for her, with visits to the Mariinsky Theatre ballet or the opera, taking her to parties with the elite of society at the Winter Palace (the Hermitage), buying her wonderful Parisian-made dresses, and lending her jewelry from her fabulous collection.

Another woman who influenced Tamara immensely was her sister, the architect Adrienne Gorska, whom she loved and admired very much. Adrienne was one of the first women of her day with an architect's diploma. When Tamara ran out of money after selling the jewels she brought from Russia, and Tadeusz refused to get a job, it was Adrienne who suggested Tamara start painting as a way to support herself. Adrienne reminded Tamara how talented she had been as a little girl. Tamara took her advice and signed up at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. After just a few years, she became the most requested portraitist of her day.

While Tamara spent countless hours at her easel producing the fabulous paintings we know today, it was Malvina, Tamara's mother, who took care of Kizette. If Tamara had not had a grandmother who had encouraged her to be independent, in an era where women were still considered the property of



**OPPOSITE PAGE:**  
**TOP LEFT:** *Autoportrait (Tamara in the Green Bugatti)*, 1929.

**TOP RIGHT:** *Portrait of Mrs. Boucard*, 1931.

**BOTTOM:** *Portrait of Marquis d'Affitto*, 1925.

**THIS PAGE:**  
Bar in the artist's New York penthouse at 322 East 57th Street, from 1942 to 1961.

men; if she hadn't had an aunt who showed her the finer things in life; if Adrienne hadn't reminded her of her innate talent; and if she hadn't had a mother willing to help when she needed an extra hand, Tamara would not have become self-sufficient and successful in her career.

**RN:** Does her Paris home still exist? Is it open to the public?

**ML:** It still exists but can't be visited by the public. My mother and I were fortunate to see it while in Paris for Tamara's exhibition at the Pinacothèque de Paris in 2013. The owner of the studio was kind enough to invite us for tea. It wasn't painted in the sleek grey color Tamara had picked and it did not have the fabulous Art Deco chrome furniture Tamara and her sister Adrienne had designed, but the magnificent floor-to-ceiling window, where Tamara used to paint, was still there. I had goosebumps when I saw it. I could imagine Tamara standing by her easel, in her smock, passionately painting, with her brush in one hand and her cigarette in the other. On the second floor—the bar area or smoking room—was exactly the same, with its polished walnut and chrome design. This is where Tamara entertained guests. She learned about "the cocktail hour" during her trips to the United States and adopted the American custom, which was hugely popular with her clients and patrons.

We are in the process of creating a private museum in Tres Bambús, Tamara's home in Cuernavaca, in collaboration with the local government and renowned Mexican sculptor Victor Manuel Contreras, who was Tamara's closest friend in Mexico. This project is very close to my heart, since I have so many wonderful childhood memories of visiting Tamara and Kizette in this fabulous residence. We very much hope this dream comes true, to protect the home Tamara loved so much. It has breathtaking gardens and views of the Popocatepetl volcano, where, according to her dying wish, Tamara's ashes were scattered by Kizette and Victor.

**RN:** Why do you think Tamara Lempicka's work continues to have such great appeal today?

**ML:** Tamara's artwork reflected her captivating personality; it's as if part of her soul is alive in her paintings. Each relates a story, giving the impression that there's an intriguing secret behind the image. That was Tamara's personality—her desire to intrigue, to leave an aura of mystery about her life and her work. In her own words, "I was the first woman to paint clearly, and that was the basis of my success. From one hundred paintings mine will always stand out and so the galleries began to hang my work in the center because my painting was attractive; it was precise, it was finished."<sup>2</sup>

If you are interested in limited-edition, estate-certified serigraphs or would like to learn more about Tamara's feature length movie, please contact Marisa de Lempicka at [mdelempicka@gmail.com](mailto:mdelempicka@gmail.com). The sale of these serigraphs helps the estate keep sharing Tamara's artwork and legacy.

Endnotes:

1. Quotation cited in Kizette de Lempicka-Foxhall, *Passion by Design: The Art and Times of Tamara de Lempicka* (Abbeville Press, 2020).
2. 2 Ibid.

All Photos: © All Photos and Paintings Tamara de Lempicka Estate. [TamaraDeLempickaEstate.com](http://TamaraDeLempickaEstate.com).

# EXPLORING DECO IN . . . HILDRETH MEIÈRE'S MANHATTAN

BY ALYSE MAHOOD



The prominent American artist Hildreth Meière undertook more than 100 major commissions from leading architects for projects across the United States. Her impressive career extended from the mid-1920s until her death in 1961. You can still see Meière's designs today at sites throughout the country, but New York City boasts some of her most significant works.

Meière worked during a time when the established art world recognized few women artists. Her innovative style speaks for itself, as evidenced by the numerous awards she received throughout her career. In 1956, she became the first woman to receive the Fine Arts Medal from the American Institute of Architects, who labeled her a "master of murals." Today Meière is known as one of the most distinguished Art Deco muralists.

She often broke the rules, willing to experiment and take risks with new materials and techniques. She worked in a wide variety of media, including glazed ceramic tile, glass, and marble mosaic; wood inlay; metal relief; oil on wood panel; terracotta; raised and gilded gesso; and stained glass. Her versatility with respect to both style and material set her apart from the rest.

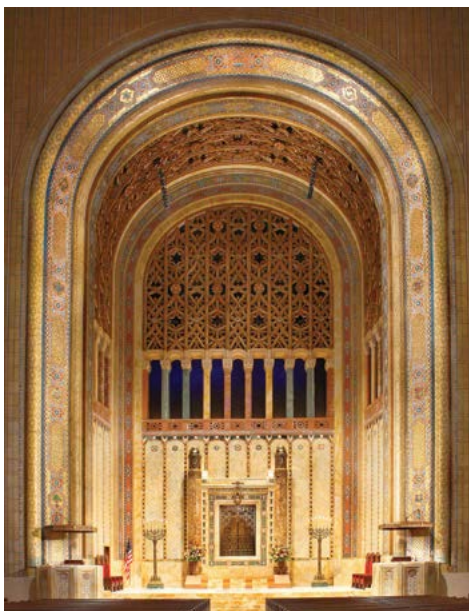
Meière's designs are integral to the architectural spaces for which they were created. She believed that a "good mural should be something that cannot be taken away without hurting the design of the building. If a building can look as well without it, it shouldn't be there in the first place."<sup>1</sup>

Alyse Mahood is the Director of Communications for the International Hildreth Meière Association.

Endnote:

1. Mary Kimbrough, "She Finds an Education in Her Art," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 14, 1955.

Photos: Color: Hildreth Meière Dunn ©2020; Black-and-white: Hildreth Meière Family Collection



1. Temple Emanu-El, 1 East 65th Street, Main Sanctuary: Glass mosaics, 1929.

Meière's mosaics cover the eight-story round-arched bimah (raised area) at the east end of the sanctuary as well as the Ark, the repository of Torah scrolls, on its far wall. Her Byzantine-style design, executed in radiantly colored glass and glimmering gold-leafed tesserae, weaves Art Deco interpretations of Jewish symbols into an elaborate geometric pattern.



2. Saint Thomas Church, 1 West 53rd Street, Book of Remembrance cabinet, 1935. Paint, gesso, and gold enamel on wood.

Meière painted angels on the cabinet housing the Book of Remembrance, which lists people and events associated with the parish's development.



4. Radio City Music Hall, 1260 Sixth Ave, 50th Street façade: *Dance, Drama, and Song*, 1932. Bronze, chrome-nickel, steel, aluminum, copper, enamel.

These three roundels, only two of which are pictured here, illustrate the classic stage arts hosted by the Music Hall.



3. St. Patrick's Cathedral, 14 East 51st Street, Lady Chapel altar: *Annunciation*, 1942. Inlaid marble.

Set within a curving rose-vine pattern, the trefoil surrounding the figures echoes the openings of the large lancet windows high above the altar.



5. Rockefeller Center concourse (opposite 1211 Avenue of the Americas): *Radio & Television Encompassing the Earth*, 1932. Original, mixed metal and enamel.

This monumental sculpture measured 18 by 35 feet. Though the original for the West 49th Street façade of Center Theater was lost when the building was demolished, Rockefeller Center commissioned sculptor Gary Sussman to create a smaller replica of the work using Meière's watercolor sketch.



6B. Apse: *Christian Virtues*, 1929. Glass mosaics.

Meière designed eight panels set into the Siense-marble string course below the chancel windows separating the upper and lower parts of the apse. The panels depict birds and animals symbolic of Christian virtues and behavior.



8. Former Irving Trust Building, One Wall Street: The Red Banking Room, 1931. Glass mosaics.

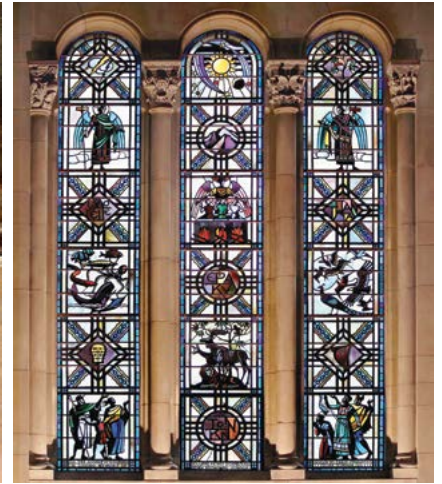
Architects Voorhees, Gmelin, & Walker commissioned Meière to consult on the color and scale of the Red Banking Hall. The breathtaking space, with its walls and ceiling covered in shimmering glass mosaic, displays Meière's talent for creating drama solely through the use of color, starting above the marble dado with an oxblood red that slowly flows into a scintillating orange at the ceiling.

6. St. Bartholomew's Church, 325 Park Avenue



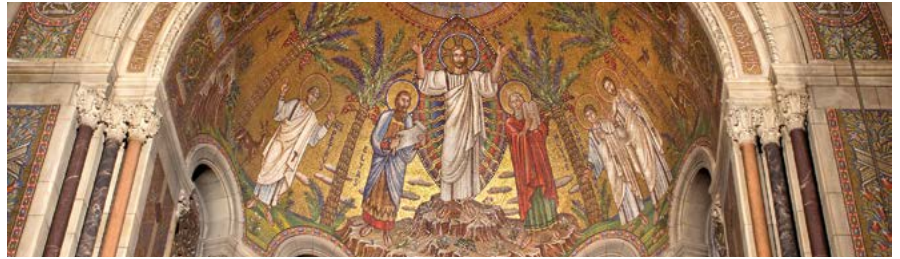
6A. Narthex, domes: *Six Days of Creation*, 1930. Glass mosaics.

This design offers an Art Deco interpretation of the church's Byzantine style. The cycle begins with Day One in the northernmost dome and alternates chronologically between the north and south ends of the narthex.



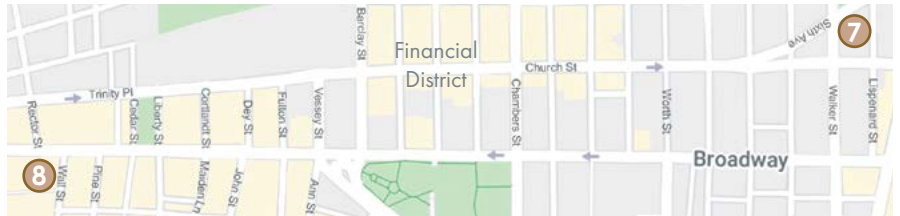
6D. Clerestory: windows, 1948–56. Stained-glass.

Meière returned to St. Bart's for these last commissions. The four windows were intended to advance the vision of St. Bart's as "a unique example of twentieth-century Byzantine art in America."



6C. Apse half-dome: *Transfiguration*, 1929. Glass mosaics.

In another Art Deco interpretation of the church's Byzantine style, Meière portrayed (Mark 9:2, 4). The composition itself refers to early Byzantine mosaics and icons.



7. Former AT&T Long Distance Building, 32 Sixth Avenue



7A. Main lobby, ceiling: *The Continents Linked by the Telephone & Wireless*, 1932. Tile.

This ceiling mural reflects the building's purpose as a hub of global communication. Two messengers at the center of the ceiling hold telephone and telegraph wires that extend to personifications of Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia.



7B. Main lobby, wall: *Telephone Wires & Radio Unite to Make Neighbors of Nations*, 1932. Tile.

Meière's map of the world shows the continents separated by oceans but connected by wires.

# BREAKING BARRIERS: AMERICAN WOMEN PHOTOGRAPHERS OF THE 1920S TO THE 40s

BY MARGARET DENNY



Women with cameras were on the forefront of world events in the early twentieth century. Their presence would be noted in many genres: documentary, portraiture, architecture, advertising, and photojournalism. These women covered events that affected the nation, its citizens and ultimately the world, capturing the moment's cultural mores and transitions. Many opened portrait studios where they profiled individuals in the fine and performing arts, as well as literary, notable and political figures. Some documented strife and struggle, the landscape and people affected by the Great Depression, while others traveled great distances photographing architecture, manufacturing, and industrial growth. More than a few documented the sacrifices and tragedy of wartime on the home front and on the battlefields. All the artists profiled below—and there were many more—set an example for women photographers to follow.

From the 1870s to the late 1880s, photography schools in New York offered courses for women. By the early twentieth century, aspiring photographers enrolled at the Clarence H. White School of Photography at Columbia University. Besides acquiring knowledge of the medium through professional institutions, this new generation of women included many who obtained advanced education at colleges or universities. The four women profiled here documented the era spanning two major social and political upheavals: the Great Depression and World War II.

## Berenice Abbott

Born and raised in Ohio, Berenice Abbott (1898–1991) attended Ohio State University, then moved to New York, initially to study journalism but eventually switching to sculpture and painting. In 1921 she traveled to Paris, where she pursued her interest in sculpting for several years, studying with sculptor Emile Bourdelle. There, a chance meeting with the American-born avant-garde photographer Man Ray presented Abbott with an opportunity to work as a technical assistant in his studio, even though she had no previous training. She eventually opened her own portrait studio with an expanding clientele that included artistic and literary figures, among them Jean Cocteau, Max Ernst, James Joyce, and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

In 1925, Abbott met the photographer Eugène Atget, and she photographed him the following year. By then, Atget had created 10,000 images of Parisian storefronts, doorways, arcades, public spaces, private gardens, and everyday people pursuing daily activities. After Atget's death in August 1927, Abbott raised money to purchase the artist's negatives and prints, eventually bringing them to the United States, where she promoted his work among private collectors and institutions. In 1968, she sold his collection to the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

By 1929, Abbott had returned to New York, where she opened a portrait studio and turned her attention to recording the city's rapidly changing panoply: buildings, shop fronts and street activity.



Her association with Atget led to her interest in architectural photography. During the 1930s, Abbott documented Manhattan from the dizzying heights of its skyscrapers—in *Night Scene in Manhattan* (1936), the city's lights dramatically emphasize its modern architecture—to vernacular street scenes such as *Barclay Street Elevated Platform*, which invite comparisons with the paintings of Edward Hopper. These photographs, noted for their bold forms and strong contrasts, and made under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), culminated in the exhibition and book project *Changing New York*, published in 1939.

Abbott had a long, productive career, photographing across genres, from portraiture and architecture photography to scientific investigation. She continually sought niches in photography that stimulated her interest in the medium, but as a single woman supporting herself, she also sought avenues that provided financial support. By the late 1930s, Abbott began experimenting with scientific photography, eventually becoming editor of *Science Illustrated* magazine. Her interest in scientific education developed when she worked with a commission of scientists and teachers to improve the illustrations in science textbooks.

### Thérèse Bonney

Like their male counterparts, women photographers undertook a variety of commissions to remain economically viable. Inspired by the industrial forms, fashions and décor of Modernism featured at international exhibitions, photographers recorded the latest design developments. In 1919, American-born Thérèse Bonney (born Mabel Bonney, 1894–1978) traveled to France after studying at the University of California, Berkeley, Radcliffe College, and Columbia University.

After completing her Ph.D. at the Sorbonne in 1921, Bonney settled in Paris to promote a cultural exchange between France and the U.S. In collaboration with her sister Louise and widowed mother, Addie, she formed Bonney Services, an international press agency that operated well into the late 1930s. In the beginning, Bonney hired a photographic staff. She then began taking her own photographs, initially concentrating on photographing design inspired by the 1925 Paris Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels moderne, such as the dressing table designed by Léon Jallot.

Drawn to Paris's artistic circles, Bonney made influential and stimulating friends: Gertrude Stein, Raoul Dufy, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and others

she photographed. Her connection with Eugène Cardinal Tisserant of France allowed her access to the Vatican City resulting in her book of photographs *The Vatican*, published in 1939.

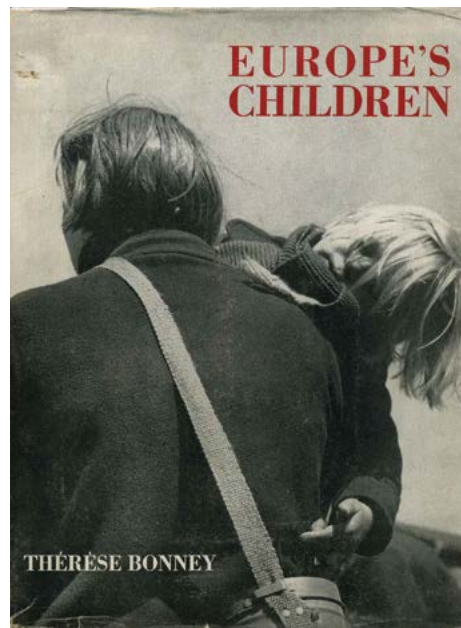
Among her diverse subjects, Bonney's World War II reportage is remarkable yet underrecognized. In 1939, having traveled to Finland to photograph preparations for the 1940 Olympic games, she was the only foreign photojournalist on the scene when the Soviet Union invaded in November. The traumatic events surrounding the Russo-Finnish war (1939–1940) materialize in her tireless and sympathetic recording of the hardships of women and children. For her rescue work in Lapland, which experienced five days of bombardment, she received the White Rose of Finland award.

In the summer of 1940, Bonney frequently found herself under fire, in England during the Battle of Britain (the Blitz) and in the Battle of France. When the Germans threatened Belgium and France, Bonney helped evacuate refugees living near the French-Belgian border. Positioned at the Ardennes when the German military broke through the border, and as the official photographer assigned to the head of the French Army, Bonney pursued the ever-shifting front. She was the only foreign photographer at the Battle of the Meuse and accompanied the Ninth Army in its retreat.

The aftermath of the war in France and Spain and its effect on civilians remained her focal point: the struggle among the innocent to survive the lack of food, medicine, heating, and the most basic supplies. Bonney conducted what she termed "truth raids" to chronicle the situation of everyday citizens. She traveled to the United States several times, seeking relief aid for Europe's war victims. In 1940, she mounted an exhibition of 200 photographs, *War Comes to the People: History Written with the Lens by Therese Bonney*, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Library of Congress in Washington. Her photographs appeared in *Vogue* and *Collier's*, newspapers, and her books *War Comes to the People* (1940) and *Europe's Children* (1943). She also delivered lantern slide lectures, describing how the world conflict affected innocent people. The publications, exhibitions and lectures in the U.S. earned Bonney a Carnegie Corporation grant to continue her research in unoccupied France.

### Dorothea Lange

Social, cultural, and political events shaped the opportunities and career development of women photographers, especially the Great Depression



#### OPPOSITE PAGE:

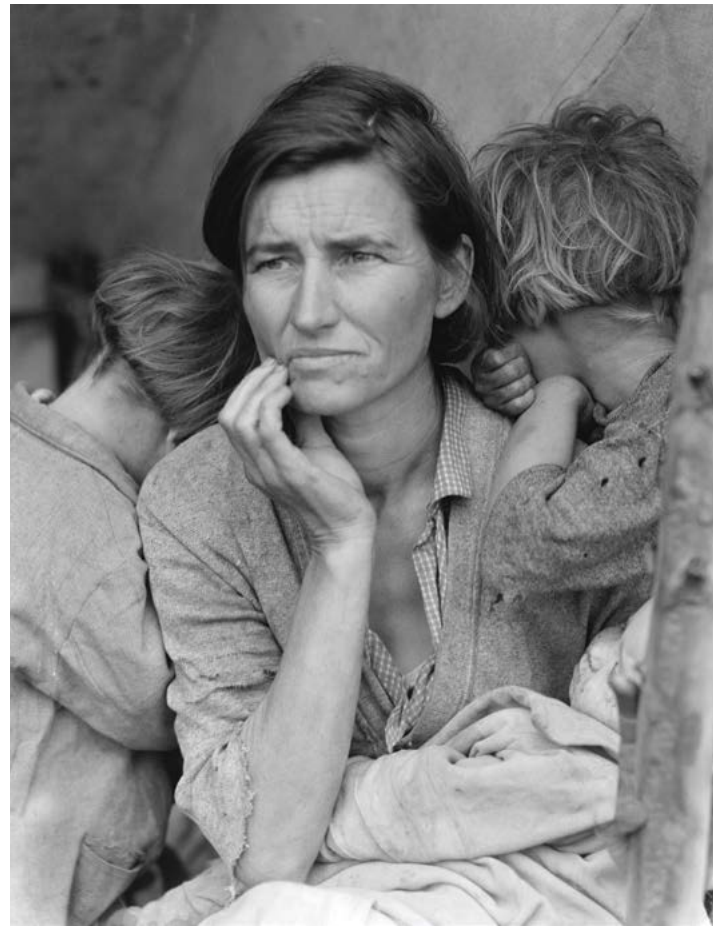
TOP: Berenice Abbott, *Night Scene in Manhattan*. Photo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [reproduction number e.g., LC-USZ62-108760]

BOTTOM: Berenice Abbott, *Barclay Street Elevated Platform*, 1933. Photo: Museum of Contemporary Photography, Gift of Maxine and Lawrence K. Snider

#### THIS PAGE:

LEFT: Thérèse Bonney, *Dressing Table designed by Léon Jallot, 1925-35*. Photo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [Reproduction number e.g., LC-DIG-ppmsca-19361]

RIGHT: Thérèse Bonney, *Europe's Children*, 1943. Photo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, reproduced courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, [Reproduction number e.g., LC-USZ62-123456]



**THIS PAGE:**

**TOP LEFT:** Dorothea Lange, *Pregnant migrant woman living in California squatter camp, Kern County, 1936*. Photo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [Reproduction number e.g., LC-USF34-009033-C]

**TOP RIGHT:** Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother: Nipomo, CA, 1936*. Photo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [Reproduction number e.g., LC-DIG-fsa-8b29516]

**BOTTOM:** Dorothea Lange, *Daughter of migrant Tennessee coal miner. Living in American River camp near Sacramento, California, 1936*. Photo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [Reproduction number e.g., LC-DIG-fsa-8b38518]

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Margaret Bourke-White. *George Washington Bridge, 1933*. Photo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [Reproduction number e.g., LC-USZ62-76063]

leading up to World War II. Dorothea Lange (1895–1965) remains one of the most renowned women photographers who specialized in documentary photography for print media. Born in Hoboken, New Jersey, at age seven Lange contracted polio, which left her with a limp; she tried hard to compensate for her disability. When she was twelve, her father left the family. These circumstances consumed her with bitter memories and honed her sympathetic vision toward others. After attending public high school in New York and deciding to become a photographer, she apprenticed in the studio of Arnold Genthe, who had gained fame for his soft-focus imagery of San Francisco’s Chinatown. In 1917, she studied photography with Clarence H. White before traveling west to San Francisco with a girlfriend. Subsequently, Lange opened a portrait studio catering to an affluent clientele. By the early 1930s, however, her attention turned to the many homeless and unemployed people she saw outside her studio whose lives were affected by the Depression.

A California rural relief project photographing migratory workers was one of Lange’s early assignments with the Farm Security Administration headed by Roy Stryker. Her photographs from this period include *Pregnant migrant woman living in California squatter camp, Kern County* and *Daughter of migrant Tennessee coal miner living in American River camp near Sacramento, California*.

Driving home one day, having noticed a sign that read Pea-pickers Camp, she turned her car around to investigate. There she found a destitute mother with two young children and an infant in a lean-to tent. Lange took several shots from a distance, moving in closer until she obtained what is considered by many the quintessential photograph of the Great Depression: *Migrant Mother: Nipomo, CA, 1936*, taken that day. This image of an impoverished mother (Frances Owen Thompson), surrounded by her children, gazing out



beyond the viewer with determination and courage, illustrates Lange's innate capacity to penetrate beneath appearances, concentrating on gesture and expression. Her iconic photograph appeared in the *Survey Graphic* and was reproduced in multiple news outlets, prompting public sympathy and governmental relief. Later in the decade, Lange traveled with her husband, Paul Schuster Taylor, an economics professor at Berkeley, to the drought-stricken Southwest, documenting the migration it caused. The resultant publication, *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion* (1939), features quotations from the subjects photographed.

When the United States entered World War II, Lange undertook government assignments for the Office of War Information (OWI) and the War Relocation Authority (WRA) in collaboration with Ansel Adams. Together, in what Lange considered her most difficult assignment, they documented Japanese Americans on the West Coast forced to relocate to internment camps.

### Margaret Bourke-White

Many of the women photographers of this time worked for print media, including newspapers, magazines and books. Margaret Bourke-White (1904–1971) was the first staff photographer for *Fortune* and one of the first four staff photographers for *Life*, where she gained a worldwide reputation as a photojournalist. Throughout her career, she authored numerous articles and wrote or co-authored ten books illustrated with her photographs. Like many of her colleagues, Bourke-White studied at the Clarence H. White School of Photography. Her interest in the medium had developed earlier, however. She recalled childhood experiences in the Bronx and New Jersey with her father, Joseph White, a mechanical engineer and amateur photographer, accompanying him on factory visits when she was only eight years old; nature

walks in search of photographic subjects; and developing prints in the family bathtub.

In 1930, on assignment in Germany for *Fortune* magazine, Bourke-White traveled alone to the Soviet Union intent on documenting industrialization during the implementation of Stalin's Five-Year Plan, an initiative begun in 1928. Her reputation as an industrial photographer and her modernist approach, which complemented Soviet formalist aesthetics, contributed to her success in documenting the country's industry and people over three successive years. *Fortune* ran eight images in its February 1931 issue, and later that year, the American Russian Institute in New York exhibited her photographs to coincide with the launch of her book *Eyes on Russia*.

The portfolio that served as Bourke-White's passport to Russia comprised photographs made after her graduation from Cornell University in 1927 and subsequent move to Cleveland, where her family then resided. The city's industry inspired her, notably the construction of Terminal Tower, the manufacturing district along the Cuyahoga River known as the Flats, and, most important, the production of steel at the Otis Steel Company. Bourke-White's photographs of Otis Steel appeared in the company's stockholder brochure, attracting the attention of *Time* magazine publisher Henry Luce. He invited her to New York to photograph for *Fortune*, his upcoming magazine for business leaders.

By monumentalizing modern industry as in *George Washington Bridge*, Bourke-White gained advertising commissions with manufacturers, among them Buick and Chrysler. After documenting the Chrysler factory in Detroit, she rented studio space at the top of the company's Manhattan headquarters,





Oscar Graubner, *Margaret Bourke-White atop the Chrysler Building*, c. 1930. Photo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [Reproduction number e.g., LC-DIG-ppmsca-19361]

where she made the photograph *Gargoyle of Chrysler Building Tower*, 1930, and was photographed, by her assistant, Oscar Graubner, while perched on its iconic ornamentation. A self-portrait, taken inside her studio designed by her friend the noted industrial designer John Vassos, reveals the stylishly clad photographer posed with her camera equipment in front of streamlined cabinets.

Bourke-White's affiliation with Luce's publications continued when she became the first photographer hired for the new illustrated weekly *Life* magazine, a position she held for over 20 years. Her monumental photograph, *Fort Peck Dam, Montana*, appeared on the cover of *Life*'s premier issue of November 23, 1936. Her photographs showcased the human effort involved in the project and gave hope to Americans mired in the Great Depression.

Aerial photography became an important documentary tool for Bourke-White, who admitted,

"... airplanes to me were always a religion." In 1935, Trans World Airlines, Pan American, and Eastern Airlines commissioned her to take promotional photographs for their advertising campaigns. In spring of 1942, the Pentagon sent Bourke-White with credentials to the U.S. Air Force in England to document America's entry into World War II. Her arrival, accredited to the Eighth Air Force, coincided with the first 13 heavy bombers, the B-17s, Boeing's famous Flying Fortresses.

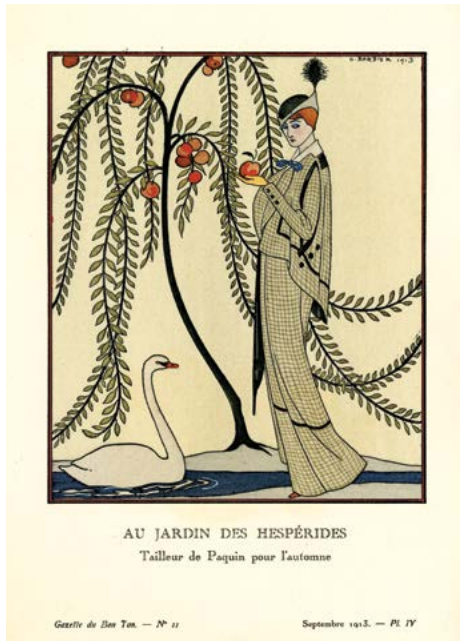
Although women had not previously been permitted to go on bombing missions, on January 22, 1943, after months of negotiating, Bourke-White accompanied a squadron of B-17s on a raid to destroy El Aouina airfield at Tunis, a prime German airbase. From the lead aircraft, she photographed crew members, the planes, and their target. Later that year, she was the first woman photographer attached to the U.S. military in Italy photographing artillery preparations and infantry raids as the allied armies pushed the Germans northward. On one surveillance mission in a Piper Cub, she and her pilot were nearly ambushed by four Focke-Wulfs. Bourke-White's documentation of the Italian campaign, Germany's collapse, and the liberation of German concentration camps in 1945 was published in her books *They Called It Purple Heart Valley* (1944) and *Dear Fatherland Rest Quietly* (1946).

From the 1920s to the 1940s, women's achievements in photography reached new pinnacles. Now women approached photography and navigated its institutions for a multitude of reasons: some applied photography in their everyday careers in studio portraiture, photojournalism, fashion, and advertising photography, and in historical and scientific studies. Photography provided compelling visual examples of their aspirations at the time, thereby affording positive and inspiring models to other women on a large, diverse scale that had never been available before. More broadly, the visual expression of women photographers influenced the tastes, aspirations, and goals of a new twentieth-century woman.

An independent photo historian specializing in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photography, Dr. Margaret Denny, Ph.D., has taught history of photography at colleges and universities in Chicago and presented at national and international conferences. Her publications include "Mrs. Alfred Broom's Interesting 'Snap Shot' Post Cards" in *Soldiers and Suffragettes: The Photography of Christina Broom*, exhibition catalog, Museum of London, (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2015). She was co-curator of *Margaret Bourke-White's Different World* exhibition at the Cornell Fine Arts Museum, Rollins College, Winter Park, Florida, May 24–August 26, 2018, and wrote two articles for the accompanying catalogue. Her essay "Viewing and Display: Pre-Photography to the 1970s" appears in *The Handbook of Photography Studies*, Gil Pasternak, editor, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019).

# WOMEN IN FASHION BETWEEN THE WARS

BY EMILY ARBUCKLE



The years between the two world wars may have been the most prolific era for women fashion designers in the whole of the 20th century. Names like Jeanne Lanvin and Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel rose to prominence in the Art Deco years and 100 years later are still regarded with recognition and admiration. While many of the most sought-after fashion houses in previous eras had been run by men, throughout the 1920s and 30s women grabbed the reins, and the history of fashion in this period can be readily viewed through the lens of their work.

The women's fashion that defines this period resulted from a less confining silhouette popularized in the decades leading up to the 1920s. Designers deeply influenced by the Ballets Russes and "orientalism" frequently used sumptuous fabrics and rich colors, but the new shapes are where we truly begin to see a more modern woman take form. Although male designer Paul Poiret often gets credit for freeing women from the corset, women designers such as Lady Duff Gordon, Madeleine Vionnet, and Jeanne Paquin were also on the forefront of this more unconfined fashion movement of the 1910s.

During these years, straighter lines and light, romantic, flowing fabrics ended the reign of the exaggerated S-curve look popularized by the Gibson girl aesthetic. Waistlines rose to just below the bust, a silhouette known as the Empire waist, and hemlines rose to the ankles. These changes in aesthetic laid the groundwork for the trends we associate with the 1920s and 30s, and many women were leading the charge.

One such designer was Lady Duff Gordon, whose fashion house, Lucile, was based in London. At the start of the 1910s Lucile had already adopted the high waistline for her designs and would use draped fabric for a romantic silhouette. Gordon also gave names to many of her dresses and was not afraid of infusing a little sexuality, going so far as naming one of her designs "The Sighing Sound of Lips Unsatisfied." The designer herself was no stranger to scandal; Lady Duff Gordon, a survivor of the Titanic, found herself seated in the infamous first lifeboat, which left with only twelve passengers even though it was built for forty.

Much like Lucile, Madeleine Vionnet's designs relied on draping fabric directly onto a model, a technique she mastered during her time at another woman-led fashion house, Callot Soeurs. In 1912, after years of working for other designers, Vionnet opened her own atelier, which unfortunately had to close in 1914 at the outbreak of World War I. While Lady Duff Gordon left Lucile Ltd. by the mid-20s, Madeleine Vionnet reopened in 1919 and became a mainstay of the fashion industry through the 20s and 30s. Vionnet was known for her technical skill and craftsmanship in construction. While many designers would work more off the concept rather than the construction, Madeleine Vionnet spent years working in a variety of couture

LEFT: George Barbier. *In the garden of Hesperides. Tailored suit for autumn by Paquin. Gazette du bon ton: arts, modes & frivolités. Number 11. September 1913. Plate IV. TT500.G35.1913.09.4.*

CENTER: J. Dory. *Creation by Jenny. Les Idées Nouvelles de la Mode. Number 5. Plate 14. 1925. TT500.13.1925.5.14.*

RIGHT: Charles Martin. *The Garden Rose. Dresses by Jeanne Lanvin. Gazette du bon ton: arts, modes & frivolités. Number 7. Year 1922. Plate 55. TT500.G35.1922.1.55.*



**LEFT TO RIGHT:**  
 Madeleine Rueg. The closed door. Evening gown by Madeleine Vionnet. *Gazette du bon ton: arts, modes & frivolités*. Number 3. Year 1924-1925. Plate 18. TT500. G35.1924.1925.18.

Artist unknown. Creation by Chéruit. *In the countryside. Très Parisien: La Mode, le Chic, l'Élégance*. Number 5. 1925. TT500. T7.1925.5.9.

Artist unknown. Creations by Chanel. *Très Parisien: La Mode, le Chic, l'Élégance*. Plate 7. May 1933. TT500.T7.1933.05.7.

George Barbier. *Vichy (II) or The Puppet Game*. Creations by (left to right): Callot, Jenny, Paquin, Martial et Armand, Callot, Doeuillet, Lanvin, Lanvin, Paquin, Lanvin. *Gazette du bon ton: arts, modes & frivolités*. Number 8-9. Summer 1915. Plate 3. TT500. G35.1915.8-9.3.

Artist unknown. Creations by Schiaparelli. *Très Parisien: La Mode, le Chic, l'Élégance*. Plate 12. May 1933. TT500.T7.1933.05.12.

Artist unknown. Creation by Lucile. TOP: Amethyst. *Très Parisien: La Mode, le Chic, l'Élégance*. Number 11. 1923. TT500. T7.1923.11.9.

houses honing her skills. She is best remembered for the advent of the bias-cut dress. This technique cuts fabric diagonally, allowing it to drape in a manner that follows the body's contours without the need for other fitting techniques, such as darts. The bias-cut would be used heavily throughout the Art Deco years and beyond.

Many other female woman designers of previous decades continued to set trends after the war. In 1913 Jeanne Paquin became the first woman to receive the Legion d'Honneur in recognition of her contributions to the economy of France. Paquin had a practical element to her work, promoting comfort alongside beauty, which allowed her to push fashion toward modernity, and to remain relevant well into the 20s.

Besides her status as the first major couturière, Paquin was also known as a fashion icon in her own right. Her success and celebrity set the stage for other designers, like Gabrielle Chanel, to make a name for themselves as both couturières and style icons. Chanel started out designing hats after receiving requests from women who coveted the styles she had made for herself. In 1913 she opened a new shop selling her fashion designs, proving that she could do more than millinery. The utility and understated style of her pieces made them especially attractive to clients during wartime, and her popularity continued to grow into the 1920s. Chanel's simpler designs, which look classic in today's context, were quite modern for the time.

One of the most notable fashion trends in the 1920s was la garçonne, known to many as the flapper

look. This aesthetic favored youth and comfort over more ostentatious designs of the past. La garçonne (which loosely translates as "the boyish woman") often dressed in androgynous styles or looks suggesting sportswear, displaying the more active lifestyle women led in the years following the war. Chanel, who at the helm of this movement often wore and designed menswear-inspired looks, was fond of using jersey fabric in her designs, and for years wore the short hairdo associated with the 1920s. Though Chanel's is the most common name to arise when discussing la garçonne, she certainly was not the only woman fashion designer promoting this style.

Women designers continued to dominate the fashion industry throughout the 1920s. At the 1925 Paris Exposition des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes, the namesake of Art Deco, a number of the exhibitors in the fashion pavilion were woman-led houses. Lanvin, Paquin, Chéruit, Callot Soeurs, and Jenny, to name a few, exhibited there to much acclaim. One of the exhibitors who had a large impact was the artist Sonia Delaunay.

Delaunay was a designer and painter who, along with her husband, Robert Delaunay, pioneered the art movement called Orphism, a term coined by Guillaume Apollinaire—the poet, art critic, and friend to the Delaunays—to describe the couple's version of Cubism.

Delaunay's textiles, much like her paintings, featured bold colors and geometric patterns referring to her Ukrainian and Russian upbringing as well as the Cubist movement then revolutionizing modern painting. Delaunay titled her display at the 1925



Exposition "Boutique Simultané." She had often described her paintings as "simultaneous contrasts" to describe her use of color and would come to describe her fashion similarly. Photographic evidence suggests that Delaunay's dresses also had some of the shortest hemlines on display at the Exposition. Her clothing was popular not only because of her painterly perspective but also because of her designs' modern silhouettes.

Delaunay's work shows how closely tied fine arts and fashion had become, a union further evidenced in the work of Elsa Schiaparelli, an Italian designer who rose to fame in the second half of the 1920s. In 1927 Schiaparelli debuted her Trompe L'Oeil sweater, which featured a bow design woven into the sweater to appear like a collar. This design became one of her most famous, along with her collaborations with artist Salvador Dalí, who often worked with Schiaparelli to bring surrealist elements to her garments.

Schiaparelli's playful designs contrasted starkly with her rival Coco Chanel's little black dresses and boyish cuts. In a 1931 *New Yorker* article, Janet Flanner wrote about Chanel, "She says the only fabrics which take color perfectly are wool and cotton, especially cheap cotton—one of the many professional views held by her which have pained her rivals." While Chanel's practicality is what set her apart, Schiaparelli's eccentricity was her calling card. Besides partnering with Dalí, Schiaparelli hired many surrealist artists, including Méret Oppenheim and Jean Cocteau, to design accessories for her. Schiaparelli truly considered fashion an art form; witness her witty and colorful designs.

Many designers saw their ateliers close with the onset of World War II. Chanel closed her doors in 1939 and wouldn't reopen until 1954. Vionnet also closed in 1939. Schiaparelli, while not shuttering her business, was forced to flee France and move to New York temporarily.

When it came to successful and innovative woman fashion designers, it might seem the baton was passed from Paris to New York in the 1940s. But even during the Great Depression American women had made names for themselves in fashion designs.

Muriel King began her career as an illustrator for fashion magazines and department stores. When she began designing her own clothes, King used her skill not as a dressmaker but as an illustrator. At the urging of friends she began her own business and by 1932 had opened her couture salon in New York, which would thrive even during the depths of the Depression. Thanks to her career as an illustrator, the detail in her sketches allowed the dressmakers she employed to understand the intention in her designs. In 1935 King began designing for Hollywood films, as did many American and European designers of the time. Thanks to the international reach of Hollywood, the film industry would significantly bolster the attention paid to Americans in the realm of fashion.

While there were successful American woman designers before World War II, attention turned to them even more when women in the United States could no longer obtain French fashions because of the German occupation of Paris. The American designer Claire McCardell found success in the late

1930s and gained in popularity throughout the war, much as Chanel had during World War I. McCardell will be forever associated with the pioneering of American sportswear. Bonnie Cashin and Tina Leser earned their acclaim after the war and remained successful well into the middle of the twentieth century. Although many of the most idolized designers of the post-World War II years were men like Christian Dior and Jacques Fath, the American fashion industry and its women designers had finally gained some well-deserved recognition.

The years leading up to and between the World Wars—a golden age for women fashion designers—brought some of the most iconic styles in the history of fashion, along with some of the most outrageous personalities. While many well-regarded men also worked in fashion, during this period it is the women who captivated audiences and gained celebrity. Women will always have an important place at the table in any era of fashion history, but there was something truly special about the reign of women during the Art Deco period that remains unrivaled.

Emily Arbuckle serves as the Curator of Rare Books and Journals at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) Library's Unit of Special Collections and College Archives. She has been a Special Collections Associate with FIT since 2016 and previously worked in a number of fashion- and arts-related archives. She holds a Master of Science in Library and Information Science from Pratt Institute and a Bachelor of Arts in the History of Art and Architecture from DePaul University.

All Photos: Courtesy of Fashion Institute of Technology, SUNY, FIT Library Unit of Special Collections and College Archives

# CALENDAR

A reminder to our readers:

Please note that because of the pandemic, dates and admissions to exhibitions and events may change to reflect safety considerations. Please consult the websites included in each listing for the most current information.

Ongoing **Diego Rivera: Frescoes**  
Philadelphia Museum of Art  
Philadelphia, PA  
[PhilaMuseum.org](http://PhilaMuseum.org)

Ongoing **Reginald Marsh**  
Museum of the City of New York  
Online  
[MCNY.org/exhibition/reginald-marsh](http://MCNY.org/exhibition/reginald-marsh)

Ongoing **Worth & Mainbocher:  
Demystifying the Haute Couture**  
Museum of the City of New York  
Online  
[MCNY.org/exhibition/worth-mainbocher](http://MCNY.org/exhibition/worth-mainbocher)

**JAN 10** **Flores Mexicanas: Women in Modern Mexican Art**  
Closing  
Dallas Museum of Art  
Dallas, TX  
[DMA.org](http://DMA.org)

**JAN 12** **The Mechanics of Fame: Ralph Walker vs. Voorhees, Gmelin, and Walker**  
Art Deco Society of New York  
Online  
[ArtDeco.org](http://ArtDeco.org)

**JAN 23** **Sydney's Art Deco Heritage: Architecture and Lifestyle**  
Art Deco Society of New York  
Online  
[ArtDeco.org](http://ArtDeco.org)

**JAN 24** **Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, and Mexican Modernism**  
Closing  
Denver Art Museum  
Denver, CO  
[DenverArtMuseum.org](http://DenverArtMuseum.org)

**JAN 31** **Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925-1945**  
Closing  
Whitney Museum of American Art  
New York, NY  
[Whitney.org](http://Whitney.org)

**FEB 1** **Monday at the Movies: My Man Godfrey**  
Art Deco Society of New York  
Online  
[ArtDeco.org](http://ArtDeco.org)

**FEB 11** **Paul Manship: Ancient Made Modern**  
Opening  
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art  
Hartford, CT  
[TheWadsworth.org](http://TheWadsworth.org)

**FEB 13** **I Love New York! Valentine's Virtual Tour of Downtown Deco**  
Art Deco Society of New York  
Online  
[ArtDeco.org](http://ArtDeco.org)

**FEB 14** **Circus and Suffragists**  
John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art  
Sarasota, FL  
[Ringling.org](http://Ringling.org)

**FEB 24** **Deco Radio: The Most Beautiful Radios Ever Made**  
Art Deco Society of New York and Art Deco Society of Washington  
Online  
[ArtDeco.org](http://ArtDeco.org)

**FEB 27** **Walk This Way: Footwear from the Stuart Weitzman Collection of Historic Shoes**  
Opening  
Taft Museum  
Cincinnati, OH  
[TaftMuseum.org](http://TaftMuseum.org)

**FEB 28** **Guggenheim Collection: Brancusi**  
Closing  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum  
New York, NY  
[Guggenheim.org](http://Guggenheim.org)

**MAR 6** **Radiant Suns and Rising Dragons: Japanese Art Deco**  
Art Deco Society of New York  
Online  
[ArtDeco.org](http://ArtDeco.org)

**MAR 12** **Modern Look: Photography and the American Magazine**  
Opening  
The Jewish Museum  
New York, NY  
[TheJewishMuseum.org](http://TheJewishMuseum.org)

**MAR 14** **Cubism in Color: The Still Lives of Juan Gris**  
Opening  
Dallas Museum of Art  
Dallas, TX  
[DMA.org](http://DMA.org)

**MAR 17** **Restoring Art Deco with EverGreene Architectural Arts**  
Art Deco Society of New York  
Online  
[ArtDeco.org](http://ArtDeco.org)

**MAR 30** **Art Deco 101: Murals of the New Deal Era**  
Art Deco Society of New York  
Online  
[ArtDeco.org](http://ArtDeco.org)

**APRIL 11** **Upper West Side Art Deco Virtual Tour**  
Art Deco Society of New York  
Online  
[ArtDeco.org](http://ArtDeco.org)

**APRIL 21** **Selling Good Design: Promoting the Modern Interior**  
Art Deco Society of New York  
Online  
[ArtDeco.org](http://ArtDeco.org)

**APRIL 23** **Cast in Chrome: The Art of Hood Ornaments**  
Opening  
Car & Carriage Museum, The Frick Pittsburgh  
Pittsburgh, PA  
[TheFrickPittsburgh.org](http://TheFrickPittsburgh.org)

**MAY 1** **Chelsea Art Deco Virtual Tour**  
Art Deco Society of New York  
Online  
[ArtDeco.org](http://ArtDeco.org)

**MAY 12** **Art Deco Posters and the work of E. McKnight Kauffer**  
Art Deco Society of New York  
Online  
[ArtDeco.org](http://ArtDeco.org)

**MAY 23** **Automobiles and the 1920s and 30s**  
Art Deco Society of New York  
Online  
[ArtDeco.org](http://ArtDeco.org)

**JUNE 3** **A Wounded Fire: Queerness in Black Publications from the Harlem Renaissance**  
Art Deco Society of New York  
Online  
[ArtDeco.org](http://ArtDeco.org)

**JUNE 12** **Roaring Twenties: The Life and Style of Marjorie Merriweather Post**  
Opening  
Hillwood Estate Museum  
Washington, DC  
[HillwoodMuseum.org](http://HillwoodMuseum.org)

**JUNE 13** **Art for the Community: The Met's Circulating Textile Exhibitions, 1930-40**  
Closing  
Metropolitan Museum of Art  
New York, NY  
[MetMuseum.org](http://MetMuseum.org)

**JUNE 19** **American Hotel: The Waldorf-Astoria and the Making of a Century**  
Art Deco Society of New York  
Online  
[ArtDeco.org](http://ArtDeco.org)

**JUNE 26** **Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars**  
Opening  
Portland Museum of Art  
Portland, OR  
[PortlandArtMuseum.org](http://PortlandArtMuseum.org)

The Art Deco Society of New York brings you

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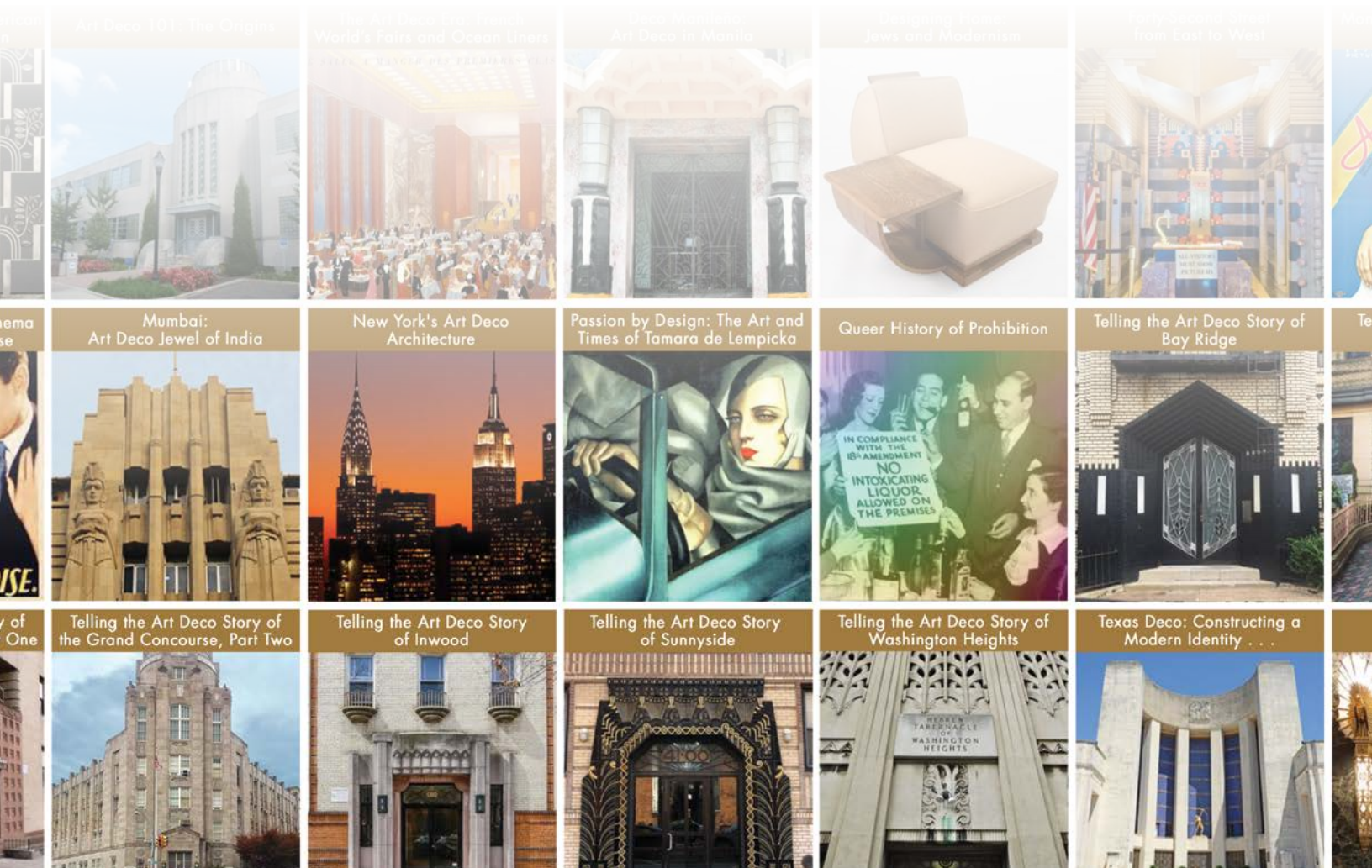


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