

“In the Manner of Tamara Lempicka”


An Invitation to Artists

from the President, Dr. Jack Devine, and the Exhibitions Committee to paint in the manner of Tamara Lempicka for the June 2026 Themed Show

In the Spring of 2024 a musical play based on the life of Polish artist Tamara Lempicka (1894-1980) opened on Broadway at the Longacre Theatre. Titled “Lempicka,” the musical only lasted for two months before closing. The play was criticized for not being historically accurate, but that couldn’t have been the only reason for its lack of success. After all, “Sunday in the Park with George” was loose with the facts about George Seurat. Perhaps Broadway wasn’t ready for a woman as romantically voracious as Tamara. With an appetite for life as large as hers, perhaps it was difficult for the playwright to portray her as a relatable modern woman. Ticket buyers stayed away in droves, but from all reports the play did at least convey the beauty of her artwork.

Quite simply, Tamara Lempicka is regarded as one of Art Deco’s most celebrated artists. For me, researching Tamara’s eventful life has been like immersing myself in the drama of European war and revolution (think of Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*). At the age of 20 Tamara married prominent Polish lawyer Tadeusz Lempicki in Saint Petersburg, Russia. With the onset of the Russian Revolution, they quickly moved to Paris. With her husband unable to find work, they lived for a while from the sale of family jewels. The birth of a daughter in 1919 strained the couple’s resources, at which point Tamara decided to become a painter. With some training at the Saint Petersburg Academy of Arts (the revolution having ended), her first paintings were still lifes and portraits. The turning point in her career came with the exhibition of her paintings in Paris in 1925 at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, which gave its name to the style Art Deco (“Deco” from “Decorative”). And there was a turning point in her personal life, too, as affairs and flirtations (with men and with women) led to a divorce from Tadeusz in 1928 and an eventual marriage to Austro-Hungarian Baron Raoul Kuffner in 1934. She quickly became known in the press as “The Baroness with a Brush.”

Tamara’s portraits and highly stylized nudes of the 1920s were quintessentially Art Deco. Art Deco was all about geometric motifs and bright, bold colors. One of her best-known paintings was her *Self-portrait in a Green Bugatti* (1929), painted for the cover of a German fashion magazine to celebrate the independence of women. I really like *Young Lady with Gloves* (1927). The elegant green dress and the gray gloves symbolize glamour, of course, but it’s the gloves (the gloves!!) that convey the image of a strong, self-assured woman. The woman in the painting is wearing “gauntlet gloves.” The long length signifies strength and power—not for nothing were they designed like the medieval armored glove that was thrown down to initiate a duel.



With the outbreak of World War II, Tamara and her husband moved to the United States. Here she painted celebrity portraits, as well as still lifes and, in the 1960s, some abstract paintings. Her work fell out of fashion in the post-war years, but made a comeback in the late 1960s, with the rediscovery of Art Deco. She moved to Mexico in 1974, where she died in 1980. I was living in Mexico City in 1974-75 doing the research for my Ph.D. thesis. I wish I had known about her work, for I would have certainly wanted to meet her. A lost opportunity.

The Exhibitions Committee joins me in hoping that the artists invited to this show truly immersed themselves in the glamor and vitality behind Tamara's beautiful Art Deco portraits and still lifes. Artists' list and awards will be shared June 13.

We hope you will also join us for a special screening of "The True Story of Tamara de Lempicka & the Art of Survival" , an internationally acclaimed feature documentary directed, written and produced by Julie Rubio. Screening date is Saturday, June 27 at 2pm in the Ocean City Library's Lecture Hall. It is a free event, but we suggest you RSVP.

Dr. Jack Devine, President

Ocean City Arts Center 's Exhibitions Committee

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