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Tamara Łempicka: The Polish Contexts

Few artists of Polish origin have gained worldwide recognition of the kind that is won not only by talent, but also by being at the current centre of the world of art or by having that necessary bit of luck and fame that is often fuelled by self-promotion. With regard to the 1920s stylistics, the interest in which has been rising steadily since the early 1970s, this position was achieved by Tamara Łempicka who, despite her undocumented place and date of birth as well as her struggles with having her name pronounced properly, invariably declared herself as being Polish.¹ At the time of her debut she was listed in the catalogues of the Paris Salons as a Pole born in Warsaw, and she was described as such in the reviews and interviews of the period. She was even referred to exclusively as “this Polish woman” in the diary kept by Gabriele d’Annunzio’s housekeeper, which infuriated Tamara when it was published in 1977 because it revealed certain spicy details about her visit to the Vittoriale.²

Nationality may not be particularly significant in the case of an artist who was as cosmopolitan as Łempicka, whose art oscillated between decadent pre-Revolutionary Petersburg, inter-war Paris and artistically inspiring Italy. However, the complete lack of references to the Polish context in publications devoted to her work and life is somewhat surprising, even though they contain clues that lead to Warsaw at the beginning of the twentieth century and to independent Poland after 1918. Neither has much attention been devoted to her links with the Polish artistic milieu in Paris during the period between the

1 Information regarding the nationalities of the exhibiting artists was provided in the catalogues of the Paris Salons until the year 1940. *Tamara* (the name of a Georgian queen in the 12th century) was the name of the heroine in the romantic poem *The Demon* (1856) by Michail Lermontov. Around 1900 it inspired several paintings by Michail Vrubel, a celebrated Russian Symbolist of Polish origin. Łempicka’s mother must have been an art lover, since Tamara’s brother, Stanisław, was called Stańczyk at home; this had been the name of the 16th-century court jester who was made popular at the end of the 19th century by Jan Matejko’s historical paintings.

2 In *Tamara de Lempicka. Con il diario di Aélis Mazoyer, governante di Gabriele d’Annunzio*, introduction by G. Marmori, edited by P. Chiara and F. Roncoroni, Parma, 1977.

First and Second World War, nor to the fact that she displayed her work in the Polish sections of exhibitions held abroad.

It was Gioia Mori who encouraged me to search for the Polish contexts in Tamara Łempicka's life and art. The essay published in the catalogue to Łempicka's exhibition in Rome in 2011, of which the current text is an abridged version,³ as well as the fact that a "Polish appendix" was added to the exposition Gioia had prepared showing selected works of the members of the Polish artistic colony in pre-war Paris and the representatives of the New Classicism of the 1920s (some of whom, for instance, Słędziński, had just like Łempicka been educated in, and thus was connected with, St Petersburg), is the result of my subsequent investigation. I am hoping that the current text shall demonstrate that Tamara Łempicka's Polish connections, hitherto often taken with a grain of salt, are not insignificant and, in fact, fill in many gaps in her artistic biography.

The beginnings

When the young Tamara made her debut as a painter at the 1922 Salon d'Automne, she used the surname of Tadeusz Łempicki, the lawyer she had married in Petrograd in 1916. The letter "Ł" (read in English as "W") was impossible for the French to pronounce and was thus replaced by the plain "L"; the pronunciation of the final "cki" was also simplified by substituting it with "tzky". When signing her earlier works, Tamara had foregone the female gender and had simply written "T. de Lempitzky", hence giving the impression that she was a man.⁴ This ambivalence lasted until 1925, when she started to present herself as Tamara de Lempicka after the solo exhibition in Milan which proved to be a major turning point in her career. It should be pointed out that in the articles and exhibition catalogues published in Poland her surname appeared solely in its original form without the prefix "de", which was taken from the French but sounded pretentious in the Polish context.

A glance at the catalogues of the Paris Salons, in which Tamara participated regularly from 1922 onwards, reveals her extraordinarily high self-esteem, which was visible in the prices of the exhibited works;⁵ for example, at the 1923 Salon

3 K. Nowakowska-Sito, "Tamara de Lempicka e Polonia", in: G. Mori, *Tamara de Lempicka. La Regina del Moderno*, Milan, 2011, pp. 65–81; English version: K. Nowakowska-Sito, "Tamara de Lempicka and Poland", in: G. Mori, *Tamara de Lempicka. The Queen of Modern*, Milan, 2011.

4 E. Woroniecki in *La Pologne*, December 1923, p. 549 wrote: "The stone amazons by Mr Lempitzky are rigid and inexpressive".

5 Łempicka displayed her work at the Salon d'Automne in 1922–1923, 1925–1933, 1938, 1947; at the Salon d'Indépendants in 1923–1933 and, after the war, in 1950, 1956, 1959 and 1960; at the Salon des Tuileries in 1928–1934 and 1938. These dates are taken from the list published in H. Bartnicka-Górska, J. Szczepińska-Tramer, *W poszukiwaniu światła*,

des Indépendants, paintings by Tamara, whose career was still in its early stages, were valued at 10,000 francs each, while those by the highly regarded Marcousis (then already a *membre titulaire* of the Salon) only fetched a quarter of the price. Two years later, at the same Salon, a painting by Łempicka cost almost twice as much as a work of the already famous Kisling (estimated 6,000).⁶

Although her early works were noticed and their sharp forms and audacious, erotically charged nudes were appreciated, Tamara's critical capital was not impressive before 1925, and her work was mainly reviewed by Edward Woroniecki in the Polish magazine *La Pologne politique, économique, littéraire et artistique* (*La Pologne* in short), which was published in Paris. This was because this critic had made it his mission to mention every single Polish name that emerged on the Paris scene.

In the context of the above, the decision to endorse, in 1925, a novice, although assertive, Polish artist staging a solo exhibition in the newly-opened Milan gallery, Bottega di Poesia, seems inexplicable and highly risky. In addition, it must be noted here that the Milan exhibition was an important *caesura* in Łempicka's biography, as it allowed her access to a wealthy clientele and opened up broad prospects to her. It is therefore important to examine the mystery as to how an artist who until then had been unknown to the Italian public had managed to get in touch with this prestigious gallery. The account given by the artist herself does not seem convincing, since she claimed that she had charmed the gallery owner Count Emanuele Castelbarco with her beauty from the moment they had met. The hypothesis advanced by Gioia Mori, who maintains that de Łempicka was introduced to the gallery by some influential personality, probably Marinetti, who had met her in Paris, is far more credible.⁷ In her book on Tamara, Kizette Łempicka-Foxhall quotes her mother recalling that she had found out about the Bottega di Poesia gallery through "a friend", who had given her some letters of introduction.⁸

A forgotten sculptress

Placing Tamara within the Polish context helps us to determine another possibility, besides Marinetti, as to the person who may have facilitated the exhibition that proved to be a watershed in her career. In reconstructing

kształtu i barw. Artyści polscy wystawiający na Salonach paryskich w latach 1884–1960 [The Search for Light, Form and Colour. Polish Artists at the Paris Salons from 1884 to 1960], Warsaw, 2005. In 1932–1938, Tamara participated regularly in the Salon des Femmes Artistes Modernes, cf. E. Thormann, *Tamara de Łempicka. Kunstcritik and Künstlerinnen in Paris*, Berlin, 1993.

6 At the 1923 Salon d'Automne, the painting *Perspective* was valued at 15,000 francs, which was higher than the value placed on most of the sculptures displayed there.

7 G. Mori, *Tamara de Łempicka*, exhibition cat., Palazzo Reale, Milan, 2006, p. 51.

8 K. de Łempicka-Foxhall, Ch. Philips, *Tamara de Łempicka*, Paris, 1987, p. 57.

the circle of Polish artists with whom Łempicka would have crossed her paths, some attention must be devoted to a then famous, although now largely forgotten sculptress, namely Maria Lednicka-Szczytt.⁹ At the 1923 Salon d'Automne she showed a work which she had actually created with Tamara's sister, Adrianna Gorska, who had just obtained her degree in architecture; they executed a fountain together.¹⁰

Their friendship is confirmed by the sculpture in wood by Lednicka entitled *Lady with a Dog* (Fig. 1), which was displayed at the same Salon in the following year and was identified as showing Mlle A. Gorska in Woroniecki's review of the exhibition.¹¹ In subsequent years, Lednicka and Gorska designed together fountains and monuments, which were later executed mainly in Italy.¹² The two women also collaborated on the most important work by the sculptress to have remained in Poland: the monument for her mother's tomb in the Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw which was executed in 1923 and features a *Madonna* (Fig. 2) by Lednicka in an architectural frame designed (and signed) by Adrianna Gorska.

Maria Lednicka (1893–1947)¹³ was born in Moscow and studied there. She was the daughter of Aleksander Lednicki, who was one of the most influential Polish-born politicians in Tsarist Russia, an elected representative of the Duma and, following the outbreak of the Revolution, a member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (a follower of Kerensky). She had displayed artistic talent as a child; she later studied under Vladimir Domogatskiy in Moscow, and, from 1912, with Antoine Bourdelle in Paris. She spent the war years in Russia, where she also worked as a volunteer for, among others, the Polish hospital and the committees that organised exhibitions where the proceeds from sales went to help those injured during the conflict. In 1919 she returned to Paris, and in 1922 she became a member of the Salon d'Automne. Lednicka was popular with the Polish residents in Russia during the war, and later with the Polish and White Russian circles in Paris – the same milieu that was

9 My view is fully accepted by Gioia Mori, who calls the relationship between the two artists "fundamental"; cf. G. Mori, *Tamara de Lempicka. La Reine de l'Art déco*, exhibition cat., Pinacothèque de Paris, 2013, p. 10; also: the chapter based on my investigations, «Pani Łempicka – polonaise», pp. 20–28.

10 The item is featured in nos. 1125 and 2312 of the Salon's catalogue. It is not clear if it is a single fountain arranged in two different sections or two separate works, in cement, with the same price.

11 E. Woroniecki, *La Pologne*, 1 September 1924, p. 20.

12 Lednicka "designed fountains with Górska, one of which was placed in Via Omenoni, Milan, while others were owned privately and located in the environs of the city", cf. A. Melbechowska-Luty, *Posągi i ludzie. Rzeźba polska dwudziestolecia międzywojennego* [Statues and People. Polish Sculpture in the Interwar Period], Warsaw, 2005, p. 236.

13 Fundamental information on the artist is taken from *Słownik Artystów Polskich* [Dictionary of Polish Artists] and A. Melbechowska-Luty, *Posągi i ludzie*, op. cit.; A. Melbechowska-Luty, I. Bał, *Teoria i krytyka, Antologia tekstów o rzeźbie polskiej 1915–1939* [Theory and Criticism. Anthology of Writings on Polish Sculpture], Warsaw, 2007, pp. 123–124.



Fig. 1. Maria Lednicka-Szczytt, *Lady with a Dog* (Adrianna Gorska), 1923, in *Wiadomości Literackie* 15, 1926.



Fig. 2. Maria Lednicka-Szczytt, Adrianna Gorska, Monument of the Lednicki family – detail with the sculpture *Madonna* (1924), Powązki Cemetery, Warsaw, photo by K. Nowakowska-Sito.

frequented by the two sisters, Tamara and Adrianna. She was a highly regarded sculptress and a born organiser. According to Waldemar George, she was the driving force behind the artists who had put together the show *La Jeune Pologne* at the Musée Crillon in 1922.

After that year had passed, Lednicka began going to Milan increasingly more often, as she was drawn by various commissions and by her interest in Italian art (both antique and contemporary, especially the works of Adolfo Wildt). The sculptress stayed at the house of the Polish actress Jadwiga (Edwige) Mrozowska, who was married to the then-president of the Banca Commerciale Italiana, Giuseppe (Józef) Toeplitz, and hosted a salon in Milan to which she welcomed young artists and musicians. Mrozowska befriended Lednicka and became her ardent protectress, thus replacing her prematurely departed mother. Lednicka's show at the Galleria Pesaro in 1924 was so well received that she was given another solo exhibition in Milan, at a place that had long remained unidentified. It was not until a catalogue, with an introduction by Carlo Carrà, was found among materials left by Lednicka's brother to the National Museum in Warsaw that the name of the gallery was discovered: it was Bottega di Poesia (Fig. 3). The exhibition featured mostly portraits,

Fig. 3. Zofia Stryjeńska, *Boy at the Window*, the *Young Polish Villages* series [Młoda wieś polska], 1930.



including those of Prince Alberto Visconti, Edwige Toeplitz-Mrozowska, Baron Romano Avezzano (the Italian ambassador to France), Senator Ettore Conti, Count Castelbarco and the architect Alberto Finetti who had designed the interior of the Bottega di Poesia gallery at no. 14 Via Montenapoleone. Together with Finetti, Lednicka gained considerable triumph at the 1928 Milan Trade Fair: the Foodstuffs Pavilion, designed by Finetti and decorated by Lednicka with four caryatids in Vicenza grey stone (allegories of the abundance of Italy's natural resources), was greeted with enthusiasm all around.¹⁴

The above circumstances, combined with the fact that Tamara's exhibition, which ran until 13 December 1925, preceded the one that had been devoted to Lednicka, which opened on 6 January 1926, make it very likely that the sculptress, who was already known in Milan, had given her compatriot a helping hand. It is even possible that Lednicka let Tamara have the slot previously assigned to her own exhibition due to the fact that the sculptress was involved in organising the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels in Paris, which ran until 8 November. The creators of the Polish Pavilion at the exhibition celebrated their success at her studio in Rue de Seine.

It seems, therefore, that it is precisely Lednicka (perhaps in concert with her own patrons, the Toeplitz couple) who constitutes the most probable

¹⁴ The sculptress's Italian period (c. 1922–1932) was the most productive and happiest period of her life. Lednicka decorated various cruise ships, including the "Conte di Savoia", for which she executed a bust of Princess Maria of Piedmont, and the "Oceania", for which she produced a bust of Mussolini in low relief. She received many positive reviews in France, Italy and the United States, where she moved to in 1932, continuing her career under the name Maryla Lednicka.

candidate for the sponsor who recommended the young artist to Count Castelbarco¹. The founder of the gallery, himself an amateur artist, was the son-in-law of Arturo Toscanini, who was on friendly terms with the Toeplitz couple. The banker's family was in touch with Gabriele d'Annunzio; in fact, Lodovico Toeplitz de Ry, Józef's son from his first marriage, was for a time minister of foreign affairs of the Free State of Fiume occupied by the legions of d'Annunzio between 1919–1920.

The exhibition at Bottega di Poesia introduced Łempicka to an influential aristocratic clientele, a milieu with which Maria Lednicka was already well acquainted. At this time she also met d'Annunzio, and her association with him – despite a proposed sitting for a portrait which ended in an ill-fated affair – was later a source of pride for her, as she gladly showed off an impressive ring given to her by the poet as a gift.

Tamara and the Polish female artists

The Milanese exhibition was crucial to Łempicka's career not only because of the sheer size of the show, which featured no fewer than thirty works, but also because it gave her the opportunity to meet other artists who were well known in Italy despite their foreign names. This was, in particular, Jadwiga Mrozowska, the star of the Polish stage around 1900 and later an opera singer, art patron and traveller, and Maria Lednicka herself, who was riding on the crest of a wave at the time.

From 1918 to 1939, women were particularly active on the Polish art scene; in fact, among the leading artists there was a large number of sculptresses and female painters and graphic designers. Men and women were granted equal opportunities soon after the First World War due to the introduction of gender equality and to the abolition of limitations that had previously been placed on women's education. Although women had been freely admitted to the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts since its foundation in 1905, the older Cracow Academy of Fine Arts did not accept them until 1920. Some female artists, e.g. Zofia Stryjeńska, who produced paintings, book illustrations and decorative cycles, were among the most highly regarded artists of the period. The Polish Pavilion's great triumph at the already mentioned exhibition of decorative arts in Paris in 1925 was, in fact, attributed to Stryjeńska, who won the Grand Prix in four sections and was awarded the *Legion d'honneur*.

We do not know what Łempicka thought of the works of this extremely popular artist. She certainly would not have been attracted by Stryjeńska's large-scale folkloric motifs which were enlivened by a large dose of unbridled fantasy, although both women shared a daring eroticism and drew inspiration from classical art.

An echo of Stryjeńska's ideas can perhaps be found in Łempicka's work in the motif of the half-closed window in the foreground, which was an unusual compositional solution for the latter. It appears in one of Stryjeńska's paintings,



Fig. 4. Tamara Łempicka, *At the Window*, 1932, reproduced after A. Blondel, *Lempicka, Catalogue Raisonné 1921–1979*, Lausanne 1999.



Fig. 5. Tamara Łempicka, *La Polonaise*, 1933, reproduced after A. Blondel, *Catalogue Raisonné...*

Boy at the Window (1930, Fig. 3), from the popular series entitled *Młoda wieś polska* [Young Polish Villages], which was also reproduced on postcards and then, two years later, in Łempicka's *At the Window* of 1932 (Fig. 4), in which we also see a similar pot of flowers. Although folklore was not in Łempicka's taste, in 1933 she made three small oils on wood panels featuring the bust of a woman enlivened by a flowered shawl; these are *La Polonaise* (1933, Fig. 5), of which an aquatint is also known to exist, *Paysanne polonaise* (*Kizette*, 1933) and *Jeune fille au foulard*.¹⁵

The compositions by Łempicka and by other Polish female artists of the interwar period display some similarities, even if we take into consideration works that were created at more or less the same time that would tend to exclude any mutual influence. Such similarities exist in the engraving *Self-Portrait on the Telephone* (Fig. 6) by Wiktoria Goryńska¹⁶, and a painting

¹⁵ Those works are numbered B.182, A, 151 (*La Polonaise*), B. 183 (*Paysanne polonaise, Kizette*), B. 184 (*Jeune fille au foulard*) in the catalogue of Łempicka's oeuvre by Alain Blondel. Cf. A. Blondel, *Tamara de Łempicka. Catalogue raisonné 1921–1979*, Lausanne, 1999. The coloured print *La Polonaise* (*The Polish Girl*), A. 151, was sold at an auction at the "Rempex" Auction House in Warsaw, in 1997. It shows a girl with *Kizette*'s features wearing a folk shawl and holding an open book.

¹⁶ Wiktoria Goryńska took part in various exhibitions devoted to female artists, including the 2nd International Exhibition for Women Artists organised in 1934 at the Institute

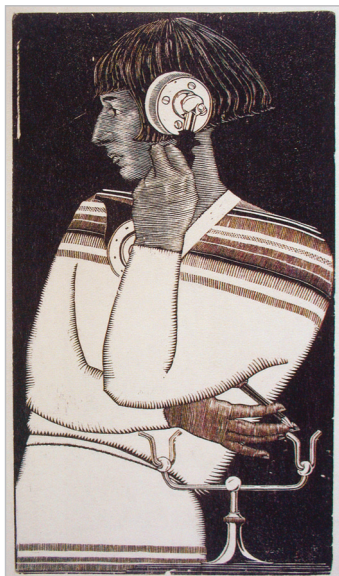


Fig. 6. Wiktoria Goryńska, *Self-Portrait on the Telephone*, 1930, National Museum in Warsaw.



Fig. 7. Tamara Łempicka, *Au téléphone II*, 1930, private collection, reproduced after G. Mori, *Tamara de Lempicka*, exhibition catalogue, Palazzo Reale, Milan, 2006.

executed the same year by Łempicka. Goryńska's portrait of a young woman in a fashionable pullover, with short hair and a lithe figure (the artist practised fencing), holding a telephone receiver in one hand and a pencil in the other, is one of the most interesting depictions of a modern woman. This makes it reminiscent of Łempicka's well-known *Au téléphone II* (Fig. 7), which features the same motif. However, the character of Goryńska's engraving contrasts with the exaggerated feeling of Tamara's canvas, which was inspired by the atmosphere of Hollywood movies of the period.

The "Polish" Paris

In the article devoted to Łempicka in *Vanity Fair* magazine in 1927, the artist was described as the "Parisianised Polonaise" who had caused a sensation at the last two Salons.¹⁷ Unlike the researchers contemporary to her, the later scholars seem to have devoted little attention to the complex artistic scene of

for Art Propaganda in Warsaw by the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, and *Świat kobiety* [The World of Women] that opened at the same venue in May 1939. Her works won many awards, including the silver medal at the Exposition Internationale des Arts et Technique in Paris in 1937.

¹⁷ *Vanity Fair*, 1927, p. 47.

which Tamara was a part, which was a large melting pot of artists from various countries who congregated in the Montparnasse quarter; for example, in the chapters of her book dedicated to Łempicka's Parisian period, Laura Claridge says almost nothing of her contacts with the artistic circles on the Left Bank. This lack of in-depth studies on the relationships between the various national circles existing in Paris at the time, with their network of connections and reciprocal exchanges, makes it more difficult to accurately reconstruct Tamara's circle of acquaintances.

In fact, Claridge only cites Tamara's friendship with Mojżesz (Moise) Kisling, with whom she shared a love for portraiture and nudes rendered modern by fashionable makeup, and a passion for the high life. She makes no mention of Łempicka's connections with other artists of Polish origin, such as Zygmunt Menkes, Alicja Halicka, Mela Muter, Roman Kramsztyk and Leopold Gottlieb, all of whom were also excellent portraitists. The fact that they were all Polish Jews probably prompted Kizette's unwarranted comment: "Tamara may have been Polish, but she wasn't Jewish".¹⁸

Kramsztyk and Gottlieb were members of the Rytm [Rhythm] group in Warsaw (1922–1932) and worked between that city and Paris. A similar path was followed by Henryk Kuna, who is referred to by Gioia Mori when she described one of Łempicka's most interesting works, *Rhythm* (Fig. 8). Mori draws a comparison between the body of a central figure in Tamara's painting, a sculpture by Kuna bearing the same title, which was displayed at the entrance to the Polish Pavilion at the 1925 exhibition of decorative arts in Paris, and the head of the figure *The Head of Fujita* by Leon Idenbaum.¹⁹ The fact that both works were known to Tamara attests to her contacts with the Polish members of the École de Paris.

After the First World War, and especially after France offered military assistance to Poland when the Soviets invaded it in 1920, Franco-Polish relations were remarkably cordial, not only on the political but also on the cultural level. Associations and institutions were established in each country to promote the culture of the other, and the first and foremost of these was the Association France-Pologne, which was formed in 1919 under the *aegis* of the Polish Foreign Ministry, on whose initiative the French Institute was established in Warsaw in 1925. The Association France-Pologne also published the already mentioned monthly magazine *La Pologne*, which came out in French from 1920 to 1934, and in which the critic Edward Woroniecki's column *L'Art polonaise à Paris* was featured from 1922 to 1931. This was the milieu that Tamara frequented. The author of an article which appeared in the Warsaw magazine *Świat* wrote about the Paris successes of the "woman from Warsaw" [Łempicka] who "is

18 K. de Łempicka-Foxhall, op. cit., p. 127, thus suggests that her mother was not forced to leave Europe in 1938. However, if Baron Kuffner's Jewish origins are taken into account, there certainly were grounds for such a decision. Perhaps Kizette wished to protest against the tendency to identify the École de Paris solely with Jewish artists.

19 G. Mori, *Tamara de Łempicka. Paris 1920–1938*, Florence, 1994, p. 51.



Fig. 8. Tamara Łempicka, *Rhythm*, 1925, private collection, reproduced after G. Mori, *Tamara de Łempicka*, exhibition catalogue, Palazzo Reale, Milan, 2006.

extremely well liked at the Polish Embassy. She is excellent propaganda for us on the international market in Paris”.²⁰

Tamara’s sister, Adrianna Gorska, also kept in touch with the Polish circles. Together with other architects she sat on the committee of the 1937 Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques in Paris, and was responsible for the execution of the work in the Polish Pavilion. She had also realised some designs in Poland, and it is known that immediately before the outbreak of the Second World War she and her husband Pierre de Montaut came to Warsaw to design some cinemas for Pathé Natan.²¹

The painter Wanda Chełmońska, who was in Paris in the 1920s, remembered both sisters well and wrote of them: “Tamara Łempicka, who came across as hard and ruthless in her paintings à la Słeńdziński, was an extremely beautiful young blonde. She and her architect sister organized interesting parties at their home, which were very snobbish and classy, with furniture and servants in the latest style”.²²

20 Garrick, “Warszawianka – atrakcją wystaw paryskich” [Warsaw Girl – an Attraction at the Paris Exhibitions], *Świat*, 1932, no. 2 (9 January), p. 8.

21 Kizette de Łempicka-Foxhall, op. cit., p. 127.

22 W. Chełmońska-Boczkowska, *Wspomnienia. Rękopis* [Memoirs. Manuscript], Zbiory Specjalne IS PAN w Warszawie [Special Collection at the Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw] inv. no. 1760/2, k.6. Wanda, the daughter of Józef Chełmoński, frequented the École des Beaux-Arts (1914–1916), then, like Tamara, studied under Maurice Denis and André Lhote. I am grateful to Professor Joanna Sosnowska for having drawn my attention to the passage concerning Tamara.

The studies devoted to Łempicka do not even make reference to her belonging to the Cercle des Artistes Polonais à Paris, which was founded in 1928 by the sculptor August Zamoyski, a society whose members included Józef Pankiewicz, Henryk Gotlib and a group of female artists, such as Halicka, Muter, Lednicka and Janina Konarska.²³ It was actually as an exponent of this society that Łempicka participated, in 1929, in the General National Exhibition (Powszechna Wystawa Krajowa, PWK) in Poznań, where she won a bronze medal for the works she had displayed. The PWK is generally described as an international exhibition, but in reality it was a major national one which brought together all of the Polish provinces on the tenth anniversary of the country's having regained its independence. The vast section devoted to the arts featured at least 2,500 works. In the following years, Tamara continued to show her paintings with the other members of the Cercle des Artistes Polonais, as is documented in a note that appears in a 1930 issue of the Berlin magazine *Die Kunstauktion*.²⁴

It should be pointed out that she also took part in international exhibitions at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, displaying her work twice in the Polish section (28th International Exhibition, 17 October to 8 December 1929; 30th International Exhibition of Paintings, 15 October to 6 December 1931). Her participation in the International Art Exhibition organised by the College Art Association in 1933 is not recorded, but in this show she displayed various works side by side with ones by Roman Kramsztyk, Rajmund Kanelba, Mela Muter, Dawid Seifert and Eugeniusz Eibisch. She also exhibited her paintings alongside works by Olga Boznańska and Alicja Halicka in the prestigious exhibition *Les Femmes Artistes d'Europe* at Jeu de Paume in February 1937.

Tamara in Poland before 1939

In an interview published by *Kobieta Współczesna* [Contemporary Woman] magazine in 1932, when asked for her assessment of contemporary Polish art Łempicka diplomatically avoided giving a direct answer by saying: "Art knows neither fatherland nor borders".²⁵ She was certainly familiar with the works of Polish artists, which could have been known to her both through the many reviews and reproductions in the press and through the Paris exhibitions. But she could also have seen them in Poland, where she often went to visit her

23 *Dział Sztuki*, PWK Poznań, 1929, exhibition cat. The section devoted to the Cercle des Artistes Polonais à Paris featured works by, among others, Leopold Gottlieb, Alicja Halicka, Bolesław Czedekowski, Janina Konarska, Maria Lednicka-Szczytt, Tamara Łempicka, Mela Muter, Józef Pankiewicz and August Zamoyski. The catalogue contains two paintings by Łempicka: no. 1160 – *Romana de la Salle, fille du Duc de la Salle*; no. 1161 – *Kizette* [known as *Communiant*].

24 Cf. G. Mori, *Tamara de Lempicka*, exhibition cat. Palazzo Reale, Milan, 2006, p. 184.

25 I. Zasławska, "U Tamary Łempickiej. Z cyklu: pracownice paryskie" [On Tamara Lempicka. From the "Paris Ateliers" series], *Kobieta Współczesna*, 1932, no. 38 (20 November), p. 753.

family and to sort out various issues concerning her divorce from Tadeusz or Kizette's future. In the case of the former, there issues consisted in an annulment of marriage, since the Catholic ceremony had been held in the Chapel of the Order of the Knights of Malta in Petrograd. However, the place and circumstances surrounding the marriage were questioned by Claridge, which led scholars to doubt the accounts given by Tamara herself.

Yet even if we were to allow Tamara's tendency to embroider the facts, there is nothing to attest to the fact that, as Claridge holds, the chapel was closed during the period in question and that Tadeusz belonged "to the Dutch Reformed Church in Poland".²⁶ Instead, documents show that the Chapel of the Order of the Knights of Malta was active at that time, and the fact that the marriage took place there appears to be confirmed by Tadeusz himself, since he graduated in law at the University of Petrograd where, in 1908, Polish students had founded the "Sarmatia" academic association, of which Tadeusz himself could easily have been a member. The solemn meetings of this elitist body were actually held in the Chapel of the Knights of Malta, so it is not unlikely that the young lawyer chose to be married there. Moreover, Łempicki was a Catholic at the time of the marriage. Claridge tells us he was a Protestant, but he did not convert to that faith until 1934, when he married Irena Spiess, who belonged to the Evangelical Reformed Church.²⁷ In Poland during the interwar years those wishing to marry a second time would often convert to Protestantism.

Tamara's tendency to gloss over the less pleasing aspects of her life led her to paint a negative picture of Tadeusz's second wife. Irena may not have been as beautiful as Tamara, but she belonged to Poland's financial and social elite, which certainly aroused envy in the artist, who was prey to all forms of snobbery. Irena's brothers, Ludwik and Stefan Spiess, were the owners of the Tarchomin pharmaceutical company, which was the largest in Poland, and also great music-lovers and patrons of the arts.²⁸ The Spiess family enjoyed the friendship of famous writers, such as Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, and of composers, especially Karol Szymanowski, who also benefited from their financial support.

26 L. Claridge, *Tamara Łempicka. Między art déco a dekadencją*, translated by E. Hornowska, Poznań, 2001, p. 73. It is not clear exactly what the author means by the "Dutch Reformed Church". There are two branches of Protestantism in Poland: the Evangelical Reformed Church (Calvinist) and the Evangelical-Augsburg Church (Lutheran), but neither of these was referred to as "Dutch".

27 Irena's father, the industrialist and doctor of pharmacy Ludwik Henryk Spiess, was of Evangelical-Augsburg faith, while her mother Jadwiga Simmler was a member of the Evangelical Reformed (Calvinist) Church, cf. J. Szturc, *Ewangelicy w Polsce* [Evangelicals in Poland], Warsaw, 1999.

28 The Spiess family were of German origin and had become Polonised. Irena's grandfather, Józef Simmler, was a well-known painter who produced portraits of Warsaw's elite in the nineteenth century.

Kizette's memoir makes it clear that Łempicka visited Poland at least three times between the end of 1927 and the beginning of 1928, in a vain attempt to win back her husband. It is amazing, therefore, that the press made no mention of her being here, as she was no ordinary figure and certainly did not pass unnoticed. The only trace of her Polish visits is found in the memoir by Irena Krzywicka, a writer and militant proponent of sex education, who scandalised the contemporary public opinion. Krzywicka recalled a very special New Year's Eve in Warsaw: at eleven o'clock in the evening "the beautiful socialite Mrs Łempicka" phoned to invite her and her husband to an impromptu party given by the Counts Ostrowski "at their fine residence at the end of Miodowa Street" – a party that was "a huge success".²⁹

When Łempicka's triumphs in Paris had begun to resonate, people also started talking about her in Poland. This was certainly thanks to her contact at the *La Pologne* magazine, which was also distributed in Warsaw. Articles about her also appeared in other magazines, such as *Świat* [The World], *Światowid*, *Kobieta Współczesna* [Contemporary Woman], *Sztuki Piękne* [The Fine Arts], *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* [Illustrated Weekly] and *Kurier Warszawski* [Warsaw Courier], which attests to the lively interest the Polish press had in her oeuvre. Photographs of her works were often accompanied by a brief comment on her Paris career and by a photo of the artist. Sometimes her works also appeared on the cover of the publication in question (Figs. 9, 10).

During one of Tamara's stays in Poland, a journalist from the Warsaw magazine *Świat*, who signed himself as "Garrick", conducted an interview with her entitled "Warszawianka – atrakcją wystaw paryskich" [Warsaw Girl – an Attraction at the Paris Exhibitions]. After describing, in detail, Tamara's looks and her fashionable outfit, the journalist provided other information which was, however, incorrect; for example, he (or she) wrote that "her first painting was displayed at an exhibition devoted to the Rhythm [Rytm] group", and that one of her works was shown at the Zachęta gallery in Warsaw – an erroneous statement that was subsequently repeated elsewhere.³⁰ In fact, the second comment is not confirmed by the catalogues of the Zachęta [Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts]. On the date that the interview was published, namely 9 January 1932, one of Łempicka's works was, in fact, on show in Warsaw, but at another gallery, i.e. at the Institute for Art Propaganda (Instytut Propagandy Sztuki, IPS). The work was *W porcie* [In the Harbour], an oil painting displayed at the exhibition entitled Salon Zimowy [The Winter Salon].³¹

29 I. Krzywicka, *Wyznania gorszycielki* [Confessions of a Corruptress], edited by A. Tuszyńska, Warsaw, 2002, p. 285. The palace is situated at 8 Miodowa Street.

30 Garrick, *Warszawianka – atrakcją*, op. cit., p. 8. [...] "One of my canvases is now on show at the Zachęta gallery; here it can be viewed by critics and lovers of painting".

31 *Wystawa dzieł sztuki pod nazwą „Salon Zimowy”* [Art Exhibition Entitled "The Winter Salon"], catalogue, Instytut Propagandy Sztuki, Warsaw, 13 December 1931 – February 1932, no. 126: Tamara Łempicka, *W porcie*, olej [In the Harbour, oil].



Fig. 9. Cover of *Kobieta Współczesna*, 1932, no. 38.



Fig. 10. Cover of *Świat*, 1933, no. 28.

A close examination of the Zachęta catalogues does not confirm the hypothesis once put forward that Łempicka exhibited there in 1928.³²

Unfortunately, nothing is known about Łempicka's paintings that were in private collections in Poland prior to 1939, and it can only be assumed that some of them were. Tadeusz, at least, must have owned a few, but his apartment at no. 6 Aleja Róż burnt down during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944.³³

The war fortunes

Łempicka left Europe in 1938 and on the eve of the war found herself in the United States in the company of her second husband, the Hungarian baron Raoul Kuffner, who had managed to sell his estates and evacuate valuable art collections, imperilled by the impending war as much as by his Jewish origins.

³² This information appeared first in the biographical note on the artist in *Artystki polskie* [Polish Female Artists], exhibition cat., The National Museum in Warsaw, Warsaw, 1991. The same information is repeated in the catalogue of the Washington exhibition (*Voices of Freedom*, cf. note 52).

³³ The information is taken from A. Iwaskiewiczowa, *Dzienniki i wspomnienia* [Diaries and Memories], ed. by P. Kądziela, Warsaw, 2000, p. 356. Irena Spiess was a friend of the writer Jarosław Iwaskiewicz and of his wife, Anna.

Once on the American arena, Łempicka focused on active self-promotion. Yet the image of the “baroness with a brush”, greedily seized upon by the press and nourished by photographs of the artist dressed to look like a Hollywood star, not only produced this much-desired celebrity, but also caused ironic comments.

In addition, from the moment of her arrival in the United States, Łempicka enjoyed the unceasing attention of the local Polish-language press. During the 1940s, her participation in charity events was extolled.³⁴ Her patriotic feelings compelled her to become involved, together with her daughter, in aiding Poland’s struggle against the occupying forces. In 1940 she organised a collection to aid the British-American Ambulance Corps. She also joined the Woman’s Emergency Corps; she headed the Department of Education and in February 1942 was promoted to the rank of Staff Sergeant.³⁵

Always involved in war relief actions, Łempicka donated the proceeds from her exhibition in New York in 1941 to the Paderewski Fund for Polish Relief. Photographs taken by Nicholas W. Orloff during Łempicka’s solo exhibition at the Julien Lévy Gallery show her standing in front of her work *Ucieczka* [The Escape], accompanied by the wife of film and theatre director Otto Preminger. Both ladies are wearing characteristic brooches with the Polish Eagle, which were sold at the Paderewski Testimonial Day. The event, endorsed by Eleonore Roosevelt, was accompanied by a collection in aid of occupied Poland and gathered many aristocrats and members of the intelligentsia from both America and Europe. It also drew many art world celebrities, of which ample proof is given by another photograph in which Salvador Dalí was captured in conversation with Łempicka (Fig. 11).

In the post-war years, Łempicka continued to readily emphasise her origins and promoted her native country in a manner that was typical of post-war stabilisation. Her beauty tips and culinary advice, still happily published by the American press, include such statements as “Poles should be proud not only of their history and culture, but also of the Polish cuisine”.³⁶

Reception of Łempicka’s art in Poland after 1945

In this period Poland was separated from the rest of Europe by the Iron Curtain. Łempicka’s art, which depicted the world of the Roaring Twenties – still fairly recent but spiritually very remote – appeared to have been

34 The Polish newspaper *Nowy Świat* (15 April 1941), published in New York, mentioned Łempicka’s participation in the Paderewski Day auction in connection with her exhibition on Manhattan.

35 Cf. G. Mori, *Tamara de Łempicka. La Regina del Moderno*, op. cit., p. 52. A photograph of Tamara wearing a uniform appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* on 5 February 1942.

36 *New York Journal-American*, 26 November 1961.



Fig. 11. Tamara Łempicka and Salvador Dalí during the “Paderewski Day” at the exhibition *Tamara de Lempicka*. Baroness de Kuffner, New York, The Julien Levy Gallery, 18 April 1941, photo by N. W. Orloff, private collection, reproduced after G. Mori, *Tamara de Lempicka. La Regina del Moderno...*, Rome, 2011.

irrevocably consigned to oblivion. Yet the revival of her painting, which sprang from renewed interest in Art Déco that had begun to spread in the 1960s, as well as the reverberations from her retrospective at the Galerie du Luxemburg in 1972, resonated in Poland to a certain degree. This was mainly thanks to the critic Szymon Bojko who, in the process of studying the fortunes of Polish artists abroad, was the first to note the sensational comeback being made by Łempicka. While preparing an essay on Polish artists in America, he gathered a considerable amount of material on the artist, which he later donated to the Instytut Sztuki PAN (Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences) in Warsaw. The scholar published various short texts on Łempicka;³⁷ his largest essay appeared in the volume entitled *Z polskim rodowodem. Artyści polscy i amerykańscy polskiego pochodzenia w sztuce Stanów Zjednoczonych w latach 1900–1980* [Polish Roots. Polish Artists and American Artists of Polish Origin in American Art from 1900 to 1980], published in Toruń in 2007.

After a two-year correspondence with Kizette, Bojko succeeded in meeting Łempicka before she died in 1980. He was the driving force behind the biopic made by Tomasz Pobóg-Malinowski in 1981 and broadcast on Polish television, but all traces of that film have been lost. The Polish premiere of the play *Tamara* by John Krizanc, performed in the Studio Theatre in Warsaw in 1990 (pre-premiere Los Angeles, 1984), also resonated widely. Following these events, the artist acquired a place in the Polish collective consciousness. From the beginning of the 1990s this process was strengthened by sensational news that started to appear in the popular press concerning the presumed

37 S. Bojko, “Tamara de Lempicka”, *Art and Artists*, 1980, vol. 15 (June), pp. 6–9.



Fig. 12. Tamara Łempicka, *Znużenie* [Lassitude], c. 1925, National Museum in Warsaw, photo by P. Ligier.

rediscovery of her works or the record sums for which her pictures were sold at auctions abroad and, increasingly often, in Poland.

Łempicka's life and work have been described and popularised extensively in two books, one by Gioia Mori and the other by Laura Claridge, both of which were translated into Polish.³⁸ These volumes have reawakened interest in the painter, who is nevertheless represented in Polish museums by only one work, *Znużenie* [Lassitude, c. 1925], which the National Museum in Warsaw acquired in 1979 from the family of the critic Edward Woroniecki (Fig. 12).³⁹

Polish art historians have never allowed Łempicka's name to be forgotten, however, since 1974 it has appeared in seminal studies focusing on artistic life and the circle of Polish artists in Paris.⁴⁰ Inspired by the surge of interest

38 L. Claridge, *Tamara Łempicka. Między art déco a dekadencją*, op. cit.; G. Mori, *Tamara Łempicka. Paryż 1920–1938*, translated by H. Borkowska, Warsaw, 2003.

39 The Mazovian Museum in Płock [Muzeum Mazowieckie w Płocku] purchased in 2014 also her *Still Life*.

40 Cf. *Polskie Życie Artystyczne 1915–1939* [Artistic Life in Poland, 1915–1939], edited by A. Wojciechowski, Wrocław, 1974, *Polska Bibliografia Sztuki 1901–1944* [Bibliography of Polish Art, 1901–1944], edited by J. Wiercińska, M. Liczbińska, vol. 1, part. 2, Wrocław, 1976. Łempicka is mentioned in publications devoted to Polish artists who participated

in female artistic production, an exhibition devoted to Polish women artists titled *Voices of Freedom*,⁴¹ organised by the National Museum in Warsaw and curated by Agnieszka Morawińska, opened in Washington in 1991. The show featured several canvases by Tamara Łempicka, undoubtedly also due to growing interest in the “Déco diva”, as she has recently been dubbed.

In conclusion, it may be said that the cosmopolitan nature characteristic of not only her work, but of the artist herself require that studies concerning her likewise move in diverse directions and cover various fields. The multiplicity of individual “national” and local visions that intersect and enrich one another will help to complete our knowledge of Tamara Łempicka by creating an even more credible and complete image of her. In the current essay I attempted to demonstrate that the Polish context is an essential and integral part of that image.

(Translated by Susan Ann White and Klaudyna Michałowicz)

Abstract

The fact that Tamara Łempicka was listed in the catalogues of the Paris Salons as a Pole evoked little interest in the research on her life and work. Neither has much attention been devoted to her links with the Polish artistic milieu in Paris during the period between the First and Second World War or to the fact that she displayed her work in the Polish sections of exhibitions held abroad.

In the process of a detailed investigation, the author of the current essay attempts to reveal the importance of her relations with the Polish world of art. Among the most important, especially at the early stages of Łempicka’s career, was the role of the Polish art critic Woroniecki, as well as her forgotten friendships with Polish artists, such as the sculptress Maria Lednicka, who probably played a crucial role in arranging Łempicka’s first solo exhibition in Milan in 1925.

The article also offers a concise review of her contacts with the Polish members of artistic Paris of the 1920s and 1930s, and of Łempicka’s presence on the Polish artistic scene and in the press before, during and after the Second World War, although many other aspects still remain unexplored.

In conclusion, it may be stated that the cosmopolitan nature that was characteristic of not only her work, but of her as an artist requires that studies concerning her go in diverse directions and cover various fields. The multiplicity of individual “national” and local visions that intersect and enrich one another will help to complete our knowledge of Tamara Łempicka by creating an even more credible and complete image of her. The aim of the current essay, however, was to demonstrate that the Polish context is an essential and integral part of her image.

in the Paris Salons, such as: H. Bartnicka-Górska, J. Szczepińska-Tramer, *W poszukiwaniu światła, kształtu i barw. Artyści polscy wystawiający na Salonach paryskich w latach 1884–1960*, Warsaw, 2005, and in three volumes by Tadeusz Dobrowolski, *Nowoczesne malarstwo polskie* [Modern Polish Painting], where Łempicka is cited in connection with the Cercle des Artistes Polonais à Paris (Wrocław, 1964, vol. 3, p. 256).

41 *Voices of Freedom: Polish Artists and the Avant-Garde 1880–1990*, exhibition cat., National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington D.C., 1991.