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Sacha Kolin (1911-1981)

Two abstract works, private collection

Kolin's eccentric story is another of an artist once connected and widely exhibited who has been forgotten as a footnote in art history. Most of what is known today of her life and work is due to a 2008 book by Lisa Thaler who came upon a work of Kolin's 10 years earlier and became fascinated by how such a widely-shown artist could have fallen into total obscurity.

Kolin was born in Paris and lived in Argentina and Vienna before moving to Paris in 1933 to study under Rodin's assistant. She exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1934-36.

With the rising threat in Germany, she and her family came to New York where they lived in luxurious residences.

Kolin maintained high-end taste and an expensive lifestyle long after she could no longer afford it. A prolific artist and by any account very successful at promoting her work, she participated in countless exhibitions and was acquired by many museums. The latter was clouded by the fact that Kolin was active in a scheme to sell artworks at discounts to wealthy collectors who would donate them for higher tax value to museums. This practice later led to numerous investigations.

In the end Kolin's story takes on an increasingly tragic turn as she bartered artwork to keep up with mounting expenses including rent (never compromising her lifestyle), eventually lived in squalid conditions with her dogs, and died aged 69 of cancer. Her artworks, still part of the collections of great museums, crashed in value. The two works above sold for merely \$150 in 2020.

Was Kolin a "great" artist? Most historians would say her lack of staying power is among other evidence that she was not. But she was a scrappy survivalist, facing the uphill challenges of other females artists of her day and in her own way made a career of her art, even if it was not one to emulate or with a great legacy.

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Bio: "Look Up: The Life and Art of Sacha Kolin," Lisa Thaler, Midmarch Arts, 2008

