

# COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Tamara de Lempicka (Warsaw 1894 - 1980 Cuernavaca)

*Study for the Portrait of Ira Perrot, 1930.*

Graphite drawing on tracing paper

16 x 11 cm (6 1/4 x 4 3/8 in.)

Signed lower right 'T. DE LEMPICKA'

## Provenance

Collection Yves et Françoise Plantin (acquired from the artist);

Sale, Millon & Associés, Paris, 25 March 2025, lot 97.

Accompanied by the original certificate of authenticity issued by Yves Plantin.



This preparatory graphite study captures the sensuous silhouette of the figure that would become Lempicka's celebrated *Portrait of Ira P.* painted that same year (1930, Fig. 1). Dating from her peak years of international acclaim and drawn from the collection of noted Lempicka scholar Yves Plantin, it offers a rare insight into both her creative process and her intimate relationship with her lover, muse and confidante Ira Perrot.

Worked in graphite on translucent tracing paper, it fixes the principal silhouette of the sitter, the angled head, the forearms, the lower body and the armful of calla lilies. The bounding, almost cinematic rectangle and the swift indications of drapery all speak to a stage in which the final composition was secured before the chromatic *élan* of the oil. The lilies will reappear in the painting as brilliant white trumpets against a sweeping red shawl. Notably, the vigorously hatched clumps of grass in the study are suppressed in the final panel, where Tamara opted for a more neutral foreground dominated by the sweeping fall of the gown, enhancing the work's urbane polish.



Tamara de Lempicka, *Portrait d'Ira P.*, 1930, oil on panel, 100 x 65 cm.  
Private collection.

Preparatory works are constitutive of Lempicka's method. As explained by curator Furio Rinaldi: "Tamara's design process was rooted in the practice of drawing. [...] On paper, she studied and fine-tuned all elements of the composition, up to very detailed head studies for her famous portraits".<sup>1</sup> The numerous surviving sheets show her systematic reliance on small graphite studies to define the contours and to calibrate the architecture of the picture plane

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<sup>1</sup> Furio Rinaldi, "Why Do I Keep Hearing About Tamara de Lempicka?", Yale University Press Blog, 30 October 2024.

before committing to oil. Notably, other preparatory sheets for the composition are known, including a reverse study that was recently offered at Sotheby's and another one in a private collection (Fig. 2).

The sheet belongs to a moment of apex visibility for Lempicka. Having divorced Tadeusz Lempicki in 1928 she consolidated an international clientele.<sup>2</sup> Her first American visit in 1929, with exposure at the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh and praise from *The New York Times* critic Edward Alden Jewell, widened her market even as the 1929 crash erased much of her earnings. Back in Paris she opened her first one-person show in the city at Galerie Colette Weil in spring 1930 and established herself in the modern studio at 7, rue Méchain, designed by Robert Mallet-Stevens.<sup>3</sup>



Tamara de Lempicka, *Study for the Portrait of Ira P.*, 1930, pencil on paper, 19.5 x 12.5 cm. Private collection.



Tamara de Lempicka, *Study for the Portrait of Ira P.*, 1930, crayon on paper, 27 x 21 cm. Private collection.

Ira Perrot was a French poet and one of Lempicka's closest companions and muses in these years. She

appears in several paintings and drawings of the later 1920s and early 1930s. In the finished portrait, Ira's body, sheathed in white satin, is at once statuesque and sensuous. The present study already captures the arabesque of the forearms enclosing the flowers, the slight torque of the torso leaning against the edge, and her eyes escaping the viewer's own, seemingly unaware of the voyeuristic gaze that her pose invites. Her portraits were "very fine emotional caricatures," registering the subtle provocations and social codes of the milieu she herself inhabited; Ira Perrot, confidante and lover, was central to that theatre.<sup>4</sup>

The present drawing carries distinguished provenance from the personal collection of the artist's pre-eminent specialist Yves Plantin.

<sup>2</sup> G. Néret, *Tamara de Lempicka: 1898–1980, déesse de l'ère automobile*, Fontenelle 2016, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> See A. Blondel, *Tamara de Lempicka: a Catalogue Raisonné 1921–1979*. Lausanne 1999.

<sup>4</sup> K. de Lempicka-Foxhall and C. Phillips, *Passion by Design, The Art and Times of Tamara de Lempicka*, New York 1987, p. 52.