

# ANNA WALINSKA



*Two Women, pastel on paper,  
14 1/2 x 11 inches, c.1928*



*Blue & Green, oil with palette knife on paper,  
6 3/4 x 5 1/4 inches, 1950*

*After "Shunga", watercolor on paper, 9 x 12 inches, 1984*



*Odalisque & Friend  
oil on canvas,  
25 x 30 inches, 1951*

PARIS – NEW YORK – BURMA  
paintings, drawings, collages, 1928–1984

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Paris–New York–Burma:  
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**Two Women**, ink on paper,  
12½ x 9½ inches, 1930

**Emily with Guitar**, oil on canvas,  
30 x 20 inches, 1932



FROM THE TIME SHE ATTENDED the Arts Students League at the age of 12, Anna Walinska dreamed of going to Paris to study art. But her father, a self-made Russian immigrant labor leader, wanted his daughter to attend college, and he refused financial support. Undeterred, Walinska boldly invited the owner of the leather goods company where her father worked to lunch. She told him she needed \$2,000 to cover expenses for a year, and proposed an arrangement—if he would provide the funds, she would paint him a copy of a masterpiece. The man wrote a check on the spot.

Sailing off to live in Paris at the age of 19, Walinska later said, “in the time of Matisse, Picasso, and Schoenberg’s music, the time of Hemingway’s *Moveable Feast*, is indicative of a certain kind of daring and adventurousness that I’ve always had.”

It was 1926. Walinska lived on the Left Bank, studied with André L’Hôte and at the *Grande Chaumiere*, and spent many hours at the Musée Luxembourg perched on a ladder, copying Paul Baudry’s “La Fortune et le jeune enfant” for her benefactor. Many months later, when she returned home to New York with the painting, her father was so impressed that he promptly reimbursed his boss and kept the work for himself. Walinska returned to Paris for the remainder of the decade, exhibiting original work at the *Salon des Independents* and developing



**Cain & Abel**, casein on paper,  
20¾ x 44¾ inches, 1956

**Gallery Scene**, ink on paper,  
10¾ x 8¾ inches, 1936



what she termed “the *calligraphy of line* that stayed with me from then on.”

In 1935, now an exhibit curator for the Federal Arts Project and determined to bring a French sensibility to the New York art world, Walinska opened the Guild Art Gallery at 37 West 57th Street. Arshile Gorky had his first New York one-man show at the Guild, where Walinska also exhibited the work of Raphael Soyer, Boris Aronson, and Theodore Roszak, among others.

While continuing to paint, the London-born Jewish artist appeared in the Yiddish Theatre, performed with a Flamenco dance troupe, and served as Assistant Creative Director of the Contemporary Art Pavillion at the 1939 World’s Fair. The people and places in her life—her family, the musicians, dancers, political figures—became part of Walinska’s paintings, both figurative and abstract. Her portraits of prominent artists of the New York School are found in major museum collections—including those of Gorky in the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the Johnson Museum at Cornell, drawings of Mark Rothko in the National Portrait Gallery and the Magnes Museum in Berkeley, and portraits of Louise Nevelson in both the National Museum of Women in the Arts and the Magnes.

Walinska journeyed around the world in 1955, with stops in France, Italy, Spain, Israel, India, Japan, and a four-month sojourn in Burma—where prime minister U Nu sat for a portrait and instructed the artist in Buddhism. She



**Musician, Rangoon**, pencil on paper,  
27 x 17 inches, 1955

showed local artists how to make an easel and stretch canvas, and they in turn introduced her to the hand-made Shan paper that became central to her collages from the late fifties into the eighties. In the sixties, she visited Israel and began her study of the Kabbala. Her travel diaries are found in the Archives of American Art.

In her later years, Walinska created a large body of work on the theme of the Holocaust, long before there existed museums and memorials where this work might hang for people to view it. Paintings from this series were not seen until a one-woman exhibition at the Jewish Museum in 1957, and were eventually exhibited as a group of 122 works at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in 1979. Walinska’s

Holocaust work was shown in Eastern Europe for the first time in 2000, posthumously, at the Ghetto Museum at the Terezin Memorial in the Czech Republic.

As she had all her life, more than ever towards the end, Walinska painted to explore and express. She was close to 80 when she began a series of works on paper inspired by the erotic Japanese *shunga* prints of the 17th century. By the time of her death in 1997, she had produced more than 2000 works on canvas and paper, created with oil, watercolor, charcoal, pastel, casein, ink, assemblage, and any combination of materials that intrigued her.

Her work, Walinska wrote, “sought to convey the spirit of a search without boundaries.”



**Harlequin**, charcoal & gouache on paper,  
30 x 22 inches, c.1928