

## LATEST

**Athletics:** It's the semi-finals of the men's 200m now. Blake in the first; Bolt in the second. And some others.

## Retrospective plucks Dodo from obscurity



The undeniably stylish early works by Dodo, below, such as *Murky Premonition* (1929) mix Expressionism with Art Deco Ben Uri Gallery

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Not only the pseudonym, but also the gender and some of the work of Berlin-born Dodo immediately recall those of her contemporary, the British illustrator Fish. Though Fish (whose real surname that was) has her collectors, she has yet to undergo a major revaluation and commemorative show. Not so Dodo, whoever she may have been: witness the new show, *The Inspiration of Decadence* at the Ben Uri, hot from Berlin.

So who was Dodo, and why is she here now? Her real original name was Dorte Clara Wolff, though for some of her life she was known by her first (and third!) married name, Dodo Bergner, having married Hans Bergner twice. In some of her later illustrative work her

name is given as Dodo Adler, Adler being the name of her second husband.

Born in 1907 into a prosperous Jewish family and nicknamed Dodo while still a baby, she was brought up in Berlin, where she went to art school, was taught by Georg Tappert, and began in a fairly conventional way, drawing for illustrated magazines, notably the entertainment magazine *ULK*.

Her fashion drawings and cover designs there are vividly evocative of the period and place, the Weimar Republic in the later 1920s. Hovering somewhere between Expressionism and Art Deco, they just about deserve to be called Decadent. The women are tall, slim and mysterious, and generally held in profile, perhaps in tribute to the arrival of the recently discovered bust of Nefertiti. This kind of profile treatment is in fact a favourite mannerism of early Dodo.

Up to this point she is undeniably stylish, but hardly very deep. The change will come in 1933, not, as one might with hindsight suppose, because of the apparently unstoppable rise of Nazism, but for purely private reasons. It was then that, already married to a husband 25 years her senior, she met the true love of her life, the Jungian psychiatrist Gerhard Adler. Unhappy in her marriage and suffering postnatal depression after the birth of her second child, she plugged into the new affair, and went with Adler to Zürich, where, meeting more psychiatrists, she found herself undergoing a complete Jungian analysis. From this emerged a whole series of large watercolours, often extremely sinister, derived from her dreams and visions while in treatment.

Back in Berlin she produced the only two works in her whole oeuvre which seem to relate to the political situation. One of them shows a long line of refugees, men and women of many divergent faiths, empty-eyed, on the road to nowhere. The other, in stark black and white, is called *Jews Looking Round*, and depicts three Jewish men, stereotypical to the point of caricature, standing on the globe with a swastika rising behind them.

Her evolution in the next few years was as complex as it was obscure. Living with Adler between Berlin and Zürich, she was married and divorced from him, had three abortions, and got involved in a lesbian affair while he continued a relationship with his former mistress, suggesting they form a *ménage à trois*. Dodo appears to have moved to England with her parents and children in 1938. There she renewed contact with her first husband and rapidly remarried him.

In London she eventually emerged from obscurity, after a fashion, designing greetings cards, illustrating children's books and doing other fairly workaday design jobs. She formed part of a group of capable, harmless émigré women illustrators, including Katerina Wilczynski, Susan Einzig and "Bettina", wife of the sculptor Georg Ehrlich. She outlived both her husbands and died, in almost total obscurity, at 91. This show is the best possible demonstration of why the obscurity should be lightened, and she restored to at least a minor place in the honourable canon of wartime émigré art in England.

*The Inspiration of Decadence: Dodo Rediscovered — Berlin to London 1907-1998 is at the Ben Uri Museum, London NW8 ([www.benuri.org.uk](http://www.benuri.org.uk)), until September 9*

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