

7: Fame and oblivion

In the 1930s, Julia Keilowa's career exploded. She gained acclaim among artists and buyers who were purchasing things she designed: black coffee services, cocktail sets, ashtrays, office sets. She was a person present in the circles of the Warsaw artistic elite, she participated in numerous exhibitions. In 1938, the Institute of Art Propaganda organised her monographic exhibition which we can see here in the photos by Czesław Olszewski. Keilowa also participated in World's Fairs. Her works could be admired in Polish pavilions in 1937 in Paris and in 1939 in New York.

Admirers of Julia Keilowa's work included many eminent figures. Keilowa's works found their way to the home of an eccentric painter, Teresa Roszkowska. The minister of communication, Juliusz Ulrych, furnished his apartment using items designed by her as well. We know that Witkacy bought bracelets Keilowa designed for his last love, Czesława Oknińska.

This swiftly developing career was cut short by the war. Julia Keilowa had to go into hiding, as a person of Jewish origin. In 1942 or 1943—the accounts differ—she died in the headquarters of the Warsaw gestapo. After the war she was forgotten. There are various contributing factors. Authorities at the time tried to erase the memory of any achievements of the Second Polish Republic. The factories were demolished, factory archives lost, just like Julia Keilowa's private archive. At the same time, Art Déco items started to seem old-fashioned.

The memory of Julia Keilowa reemerged at the turn of the 21st century. It was related to the rebirth of the fashion for Art Déco, as well as the increasing interest in design in general. The memory of Julia Keilowa returned, similarly to the interest in the careers of Christa Ehrlich or Sylvia Stave. A very moving object that illustrates the changing fate of the memory of Julia Keilowa is the "double crescent" platter which we exhibit in the wall cabinet. It is very damaged and deformed, because it was found in a

chicken coop. For several decades, it was used as a feeder for chickens, and now it is an item that lights up the hearts of collectors and museum curators at auctions.