

Leonor Fini (1907-1996)

Fini was a much talked-about figure in the French and international art world. In her youth she spent time in the intellectual salons of Trieste, at the time an international, cultural city where giants such as James Joyce and Italo Svevo found inspiration. But for most her life she lived and worked in Paris. She was an autodidact: to study and master human anatomy she spent hours in the mortuary rather than the sofas of the academy. Fini was friends with many artists, including Picasso, Max Ernst and Henri Bresson Cartier.

Fini had a three-way relationship with the Italian diplomat-cum-artist Stanislaw LePri, who, like Fini, was difficult to pin into a certain style, and the Polish literary Constantin Jelenski. The two men were not, however, her only housemates: Fini had dozens of Persian cats around her. Indoors you rarely see a photo of her without a cat in her arms. In the Cat Cabinet you can find many of her works, from cheerfully colored cats to highly detailed portraits of cats. The women depicted in the paintings have that iconic mystique characteristic of Fini's work.

Fini has more to her name than just paintings. As a designer, she worked on productions of ballet and films, and she illustrated publications by Shakespeare and Edgar Allan Poe, among others.

Fini is generally considered a surrealist. Nature, mythology and transience are common themes in her work. The cats play a prominent role as well, as you can see, for example, in the works *The Crowning of the Happy Cat*, and *La Liseuse*.