

THE ART OF COLLECTING

The lost generation still resonates

Paris still feels the presence of that era’s artists, like Hemingway

BY DAVID BELCHER

“The chief danger about Paris is that it is such a strong stimulant,” T.S. Eliot wrote of the city where he briefly lived and frequently visited.

Few would argue that point. And certainly not Eliot’s friend James Joyce and their fellow writers and artist friends who called this city home a century ago.

In the heady 1920s, Joyce was among the writers and artists labeled the “lost generation,” a phrase usually attributed to their artistic godmother, Gertrude Stein. They revolutionized art and writing in that fizzy cocktail of freedom, hedonism and creativity called Paris in the 1920s. Many were fleeing conservative Prohibition-era America or were simply ready to indulge in all life had to offer after the carnage of World War I and the 1918 influenza pandemic.

Eliot, an American who spent an academic year in Paris in 1910-11, visited Joyce, who had fled his native Ireland for Paris, during this era. Both men were enormously influenced by the city. Their favorite cafes on the streets of Montmartre and Montparnasse and the salons and galleries they attended — not to mention the city’s museums where some of their artist friends’ works now reside — were also visited by Salvador Dalí, Man Ray, Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald.

“Paris is the greatest temple ever built to material joys and the lust of the eyes,” James wrote.

For visitors to Art Basel Paris at the Grand Palais (Friday through Sunday), which opened in 1900 for the Paris world fair, straying from its Beaux-Arts grandeur offers an opportunity to explore how the city evolved artistically over the next 20 to 30 years in its tucked-away corners.

Along with the cafe life, dance halls and art salons, Shakespeare and Company, the bookstore where Hemingway and other writers often gathered, was the epicenter of the new literary elite. Run by the American bookseller Sylvia Beach (who also published Joyce’s “Ulysses,” which was banned for years in Britain and America), the bookstore was closed during Nazi occupation in 1941 and reopened closer to the Seine in 1951.

Today it is the consummate Parisian tourist trap (but at least a literary one). The tourists of 2025 seem to want to time travel to the cafes and jazz clubs of 1925, from the Left Bank to the Montmartre neighborhood in the north and from the far eastern edge of the city to the Père Lachaise cemetery, where Stein and her life partner, the American writer Alice B. Toklas, are buried side by side.

The remnants of this small group’s legacy are sprinkled throughout the city, and exhibitions in Paris and abroad this year and next speak to this legacy. Sometimes just sitting among the fruit trees and flowers in the Luxembourg Garden is enough to evoke the image of this group of brilliant misfits strolling on a fall day, before the global economic collapse in October 1929 and the rise of fascism in the 1930s abruptly ended this mythological blip in time.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Not only was Hemingway forever associated with writing about the city he adopted when he moved there in 1921 with his first wife, Hadley, but he in many ways defined the lost generation, writing some of his best works here.

Hemingway also befriended other writers and artists who came to call Paris home, some staying a few years and others for the rest of their lives. One was the Catalan artist Joan Miró, who had moved to Paris from Spain the year before. His Surrealist artwork became a sensation, and Hemingway purchased Miró’s painting “The Farm” (later bequeathed to the National Gallery of Art in Washington by Hemingway’s fourth wife and widow, Mary Welsh Hemingway).

He surrounded himself with other European artists who helped reshape what art could be, such as the embrace of Dadaism by Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray. The annual Marcel Duchamp Prize is currently exhibiting the works of this year’s four nominees at the Musée d’Art Moderne de Paris until Feb. 22. This year’s winner will be announced on Thursday during Paris Art Week.

Hemingway is everywhere in this city, and literary tours abound that retrace his footsteps. Off the beaten path is the Gare de Lyon train station, where in 1922 Hadley lost several of most of his early works (he only had one copy of each) in a suitcase that was either stolen or misplaced. He later recounted this devastating loss in “A Moveable Feast,” his homage to Paris and the promise of what it offered a young man in the Jazz Age. Upstairs is the opulent Le Train Bleu restaurant with carvings, moldings, chandeliers and 41 paintings by some of the belle époque era’s most famous artists. Jean Cocteau and Dalí dined here.

Hemingway romanticized the cafe life for millions of tourists and writers. The cafes across Paris, but most notably in the Left Bank neighborhoods of the 5th and 6th Arrondissements, are forever



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associated with Hemingway, Joyce and their wine-drinking and cigarette-smoking friends.

La Closserie des Lilas in Montparnasse, with its piano music and overstuffed oyster bar, was where Hemingway wrote “The Sun Also Rises,” his paean to the lost generation. He often held court at Les Deux Magots, often with Pablo Picasso, and at Café de Flore in nearby Saint-Germain, which are popular hangouts for tourists and locals. And near the Rue Mouffetard, where Hemingway lived in two different apartments, Joyce worked on “Ulysses” and George Orwell lived in 1928.

JOSEPHINE BAKER

It’s a big year for honoring the American-born dancer Josephine Baker, who came to Paris 100 years ago and died there 50 years ago. Her lasting image — dancing the Charleston in nothing but pearls and a banana skirt — is the stuff of legend.

Born in St. Louis, she moved to Paris in 1925, at age 19, and first danced that October in “La Revue Nègre,” a show of all-Black performers at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, which has devoted its 2025-26 season to her, with several performances honoring her legacy, including a gala earlier this month.

And “Josephine Baker, The Musical” (performed in French with no English supertitles) returns to the intimate Bobino Theater in the heart of Montparnasse through Jan. 25. Her funeral was held nearby at La Madeleine church in 1975, with some 20,000 mourners outside. She also performed for the Folies Bergère, where you can still see dance and music performances.

Baker, who Picasso once called “the Nefertiti of Now,” was inducted into the Panthéon, France’s hallowed hall of heroes, in 2021 (a plaque there honors her, but her remains are in Monaco). She played an outsized role in the French Resistance, reportedly smuggling documents in her sheet music, using invisible ink to explain Nazi military plans.

PABLO PICASSO

Picasso is probably the artist most associated with 1920s Paris. He called this city home for at least 40 years, settling permanently in 1904. He lived in both Montparnasse and Montmartre, where he stayed in the Bateau Lavoir artist studio, which still stands today (though rebuilt after a fire destroyed the building in 1970). The 25 artist studios, though not open to the public, are a cornerstone of this quiet neighborhood near the Montmartre cemetery, where such artists as Edgar Degas, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Man Ray are buried.

Picasso’s artwork is in several museums in the city, mostly notably at the Musée Picasso Paris, where a major exhibition of the permanent collection, “La Collection: Picasso Revoir,” runs through March 12, 2027.

MAN RAY

The American artist Man Ray (born Emmanuel Radnitzky) lived in Paris, in two different incarnations, for nearly 40 years, starting in 1920. He also was a major presence in cafe life, constantly observing the Parisians and documenting them in black-and-white photos that are among the most haunting depictions of Parisian life.

He is the subject of two current exhibitions, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (through Feb. 1) and at



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Creative hub

From left, top to bottom, Ernest Hemingway and the actor Gary Cooper outside a movie theater; Josephine Baker; Pablo Picasso; and Man Ray, all shown in Paris.