

BAR
Américain

'LE TUMULTE NOIR'

PAUL COLIN - JOSEPHINE BAKER



A brief introduction to the artworks in Bar Américain

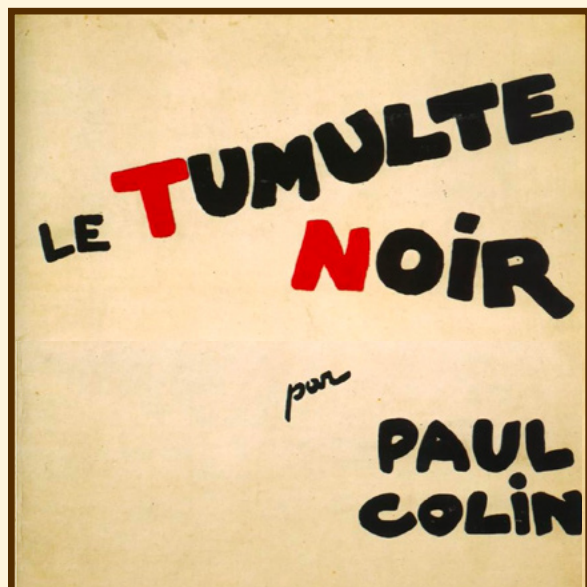
As the Jazz Age swept through Europe there was no question that Paris was at its centre.

And no other artist has quite the same association with this time than the legendary Josephine Baker and her troupe of dancers, known as 'La Revue Nègre', who took the city by storm in 1925.

Adorning the walls of Bar Américain is one of only a few full sets of Paul Colin's lithographs, entitled 'Le Tumulte Noir' – a homage to Josephine Baker herself.

Here, we delve a little deeper into the history of these artworks and contemporary social context, as well as Baker's enduring cultural impact.

THE ARTWORKS



'Le Tumulte Noir' is a portfolio of 45 hand coloured lithographs created by French artist Paul Colin. Published in January 1927, the original edition sold out within a day and was hailed by the Parisian press as a "masterful work".

Quite literally translated as 'The Black Craze', the prints capture a complex intercultural moment and can be seen as a reflection of the way in which Parisians consumed jazz music – with its roots firmly embedded in Black culture – as well as being a homage to Josephine Baker herself.

Seen as a contemporary reflection of the time, the artworks serve as a reminder and demonstration of the cultural forces which Josephine Baker and her contemporaries had to reckon with, and as such offer those who see them today an opportunity to reflect on what has changed within our society – and perhaps what still hasn't.

Baker's famed energetic dancing style, particularly her performance of the Charleston, is captured throughout the artworks in a way that both appears and feels truly dynamic. It could be said that she never posed for Colin in the traditional sense, rather that the artworks embody and represent the dance itself.

Besides Baker herself, the artworks also capture the patrons of the Montmartre Club and other famous performers and contemporary celebrities, some of whom were even Josephine Baker lookalikes.



JOSEPHINE BAKER

A BRIEF HISTORY

An accomplished dancer, activist and World War II spy for the French Resistance, Josephine Baker was just 19-years-old when she first brought her 'La Revue Negre' to Paris.

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1906, Josephine was immersed in the world of theatre and performance art from birth, with her parents often bringing her on stage during their performances. The success they craved never came to fruition, and when she was just 15 she ran away from home to perform with a dance troupe – and it is here where her natural talent began to shine through.

And in 1925 she moved to Paris to pursue her dreams of being on stage and flee the Jim Crow laws which enforced racial segregation across the southern states of America.

Often considered to be the most successful African American performer in French history, 'La Josephine' was a talented singer as well as dancer; and she rivalled Mary Pickford for being the most photographed female celebrity of the time, and earned handsomely for her art.

After many years living and performing in Paris, she returned home to America, where she became a vocal figure in the civil rights movement and consistently refused to perform at segregated venues. Throughout her life, Baker also attracted attention for what she termed her 'rainbow family' – over the years she adopted 13 children from all over the world.



Performing right up until the end of her life, she gave her final sell-out performance at the Bobino Theatre in Paris to an adoring crowd just days before her death in April 1975. Scores of fans lined the streets of Paris on the day of her funeral, when she was the first woman ever to be given a military burial.

Today, Baker's impact on French culture is being further immortalised, as she is set to become only the sixth woman – and first black woman – to receive a state burial at the Pantheon in Paris.

PAUL COLIN

THE ARTIST WHO HELPED LAUNCH JOSEPHINE BAKER'S CAREER

A young and relatively unknown artist at the time, specialising in caricature and line drawing, the poster Colin created to accompany 'La Revue Negre' in 1925 catapulted him into the spotlight – and helped launch his career as the go-to designer of the Jazz Age and beyond.

Ultimately, this collaboration between Colin and 'La Josephine' as she was often known, led to the pair becoming lovers.

Although this did not last, they maintained a lifelong friendship, with Baker contributing a foreword to Colin's published portfolio version of 'Le Tumulte Noir'.

Over the course of his career, Colin was a sought after talent thanks to his unique Art Deco style, designing more than 1,900 posters, myriad theatre and film sets, and costumes – yet 'Le Tumulte Noir' is perhaps still the defining work of his career.



THE JAZZ MOVEMENT IN THE CITY OF LOVE

Paris during the Jazz Age – or Les Années Folles as it was known in France – is famed for its café culture, salons, late-night dancing, absinthe drinking, anything-goes culture.

A hotbed of creativity, the ‘City of Love’ attracted the leading artists, writers, performers and intellectuals of its time, who congregated in the city’s many cocktail bars and cabarets – with Pigale in Montmartre being one of the foremost locations where Jazz was enjoyed almost nightly.

Having welcomed in many African Americans who fought alongside French soldiers in World War One, the Harlem Renaissance influence is palpable in the evolution and embrace of Jazz in Paris. And it is here where it truly became an art form, influencing all aspects of society and culture... from fashion to art, literature, cinema and much more.

Today, Paris is still strongly associated with the Jazz Age, and here at Zédel our Brasserie, Bar Américain and Crazy Coqs cabaret venue are all influenced by this timeless, jubilant era.



References and further reading

For those interested in finding out more, please see the following sources which were consulted when putting this piece together:

[CMG worldwide – The Official site of Josephine Baker](#)

[National Women’s History Museum \(USA\) – Josephine Baker biography](#)

[National Portrait Gallery of Singapore – Le Tumulte Noir](#)

[Christie’s – Paul Colin, Le Tumulte Noir](#)

[Smithsonian Journeys – Paris through the African American Experience](#)

[University of Manchester, Rylands Collections – Curious Find – Le Tumulte Noir](#)