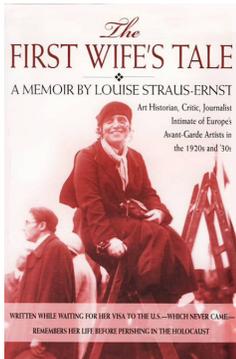


# ART OF DISSIDENT



## Case Study: Louise Straus Ernst, art historian/critic 1893 – 1944

Louise Straus received her PhD in art history *magna cum laude* from the University of Bonn in 1916. During her university days she met the artist Max Ernst and in spite of differences in their backgrounds—she from a conservative Jewish family and he from a conservative Catholic family, the two married in 1918.

Louise was the family's first bread-winner as she worked in the Department of Antiquity and Sculpture at the Wallraf-Richartz Museum. She was briefly Director of the Department of Antiquity until her work with the avant-garde around dada and the *Gesellschaft der Kuenste* brought her into conflict with her employers.

Louise started her career as a freelance journalist in 1920 coinciding with the birth of the Ernsts' son Jimmy. In 1922 Max Ernst left her and their son Jimmy to pursue a *menage a trois* with Paul and Gala Eluard in Paris.

Fortunately Louise had the personal resources and connections to build a successful career as an independent art critic and writer. She wrote for well-established papers, did radio broadcasts and contributed significantly to the Rhenish art scene as spokesperson for the cutting edge in art and architecture.

In March 1933, after the fire in the *Reichstag* (the German Government building), the Nazis increased persecution of intellectuals. At 3 a.m. in the morning, three SS men appeared at Louise Straus' apartment in Cologne. According to reminiscences by Jimmy Ernst, then 13 years of age, they searched through his mother's clothes and papers, threw books and art objects off shelves, went through drawers, lifted the mattresses off all beds and finally left with Louise's passport. Louise gave her landlord notice, retrieved her passport and left with Jimmy for Paris.



Louise supported herself as best she could but in the decade from 1933 to 1943 as a German Jew in France she faced deprivations, moves, hiding, short internments in Drancy and false hopes. Although her son Jimmy lived in the USA from 1938 and her

ex-husband Max Ernst was there with the help of Peggy Guggenheim, neither gathered enough support to enable her emigration. Immigration laws in the USA, Canada and elsewhere were harsh towards Jews trying to escape Nazi dominated Europe.

Louise was captured in France in 1943; deported to Germany and murdered in 1944. She was with a thousand people on the next-to-last train to Auschwitz.

Straus-Ernst. *The First Wife's Tale*. New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 2004

Ernst, Jimmy. *A Not-So-Still Life*. New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1984

*Stolpersteine* or stumbling blocks are obstacles, (something in the way). They were started as a project by the artist Gunter Demnig as memorials to remind of the people deported and then killed by the Nazis.