

THURS, MAY 1, 1986

L.A. Herald Examiner  
C3

## CLICK

## His cult exults for art deco's Erte

Chic 500 gather for stylish show by 93-year-old Parisian

By Hunter Drohojowska

**R**ight away, you could tell this opening was for the art deco artist Erte. You just had to check out the slinky, beaded costumes worn by the adoring women, the tuxedos worn by the men and the size of the assembled crowd, which numbered more than 500 Sunday night at the Circle Gallery in West Hollywood.

Erte, who is 93, is renowned as an artist whose designs translate to a variety of media, from magazine illustration — he did the Harper's Bazaar covers for 22 years — to theater sets and costumes, which he created for the Bal Tabarin and Moulin Rouge in Paris between 1934

*"We decided that living decadently has its own rewards, because you live to be 93."*

Erte fan Gwen Baker

and 1961. The sets and costumes he originated for the play "Anatole" at the Matrix Theater generated this party in his honor.

Guests gawked at jewelry in the shape of lithe nymphs, foxes or the man in the moon, set with diamond pave and emeralds. The most expensive necklace cost \$7,850. Others clamored over his renditions of the alphabet or the numbers one to 10 rendered as *mesmes fatales* with hair streaming in the breeze, ranging from \$1,000 to \$500. Mostly, they gaped at the man himself, outfitted in black pants and a shirt embroidered with a large phoenix orange and gold silk.

"It really becomes a cult following for some people," said



**OBJET d'ART:** The 93-year-old artist Erte, in a blouse decorated with a phoenix, examines a miniature art object offered for his consideration by guest Judy Lambert at opening in West Hollywood.

one observer. "People become fanatics about Erte."

Ceryl Bowman, wearing Erte drop earrings, and her husband, Robert, collect art deco — but Erte is the only artist they collect. "He dares to be different," Robert said.

Dr. Daniel Dolensky has collected 15 graphics in the last three years because "I have a house furnished all in art deco and I think he's the top. I like the style of the women, the way they hold themselves, the fashions."

Elaine and Jack Lerman, who are sportswear and fabric manufacturers known as Warren Z., confessed that they bought their first Erte just by stumbling into the gallery. "That was 45 pieces ago," Jack Lerman said with a chuckle. "It becomes a hobby. We deal with

fabric, with color and line, the kind of thing Erte does. I think he's the finest colorist I've ever been interested in. It's as modern today as the day he was born, nearly 100 years ago."

Gwen Baker, with her husband, Henry, collects both Erte originals and prints. Erte's work, she said, "reflected the very best of the wonderful decadence of the '20s." Then, she added thoughtfully, "We decided that living decadently has its own rewards, because you live to be 93."

Sally and Kevin Hutchings claimed they started collecting Erte pieces because they inspired Sally's fashion designs. "We've been collecting for 10 years and have six original gouaches and 50 serigraphs," she said.

"It's been a good investment," Kevin added.

Gloria Pall, a fashion designer in a Cleopatra wig and white sati cape, said, "He's a genius. I don't hold a candle to him."

One of the "Anatole" actresses, Kiva Lawrence, said that wearing the Erte costume helped her create the role of Annie. "The part really came to me when I was putting on the gown. I hadn't experienced that before."

Other collector/guests included Arla and J. Jay Shapiro, Robert Henley and Tom Seago of San Diego, May Sun and Guy Giarrizzo, and Dr. Jonathan and Deborah Berek. "I like a man who's alive long enough to have stood the test of time," the good doctor said.

Erte handled the crowds and the



**BUBBLY:** Erte takes a glass at his show while admirers Judy Lambert, Elaine Lerman and Jack Lerman beam.

activity with a mysterious smile and a lot of giggling when anyone talked to him. Asked how he could remain so fit and vigorous at his age, Erte said, "Activity (giggle). Artistic, because my art is my only love. And physical, too. I get plenty of exercise, 20 minutes every morning with dumbbells, and walking in Paris, where I live close to the Bois de Boulogne, and swimming when I'm in Barbados (giggle)."

Does Erte favor certain bodies of his work, or think a particular work is an overlooked masterpiece? "My works are my children," he said more solemnly. "I am a good father. I don't make any decision between

them."

Erte confessed that he is now negotiating with Rams owner Georgia Frontiere to fund a Broadway musical about his life. He also is doing the costumes and sets for a play about "Mistinguett" with Roland Petite and Gigi Jean Maire.

We wondered whether his fantastic imagery was inspired by dreams. "My dreams are mostly nightmares. I don't know why," he said.

We thought it probably was caused by attending all those opening parties.

Hunter Drohojowska writes regularly about art for the Herald.