



## Exquisite Dreams: The Art and Life of Dorothea Tanning

**Amy Lyford**

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Amy Lyford's interpretive biography *Exquisite Dreams* covers artist Dorothea Tanning's life and remarkable range of work.

Born in 1910, Tanning recalled her Galesburg, Illinois, childhood as being a "good one." She later found a job at the public library and was fascinated by books classified "immoral"; she read them with curiosity, eager to discover their "spell-binding" content.

Primarily self-taught, Tanning felt confined by academic training and disliked the categorization of artists. After a brief art education in Chicago, she moved to New York and became a freelance illustrator. This book includes her fashion advertisements for Macy's; such commercial work shows early surrealist influences, as with bare tree branches adorned with fur hats and elegant purses held by disembodied, gloved hands. In Tanning's 1944 painting *Rêve de luxe* or *Dream of Luxury*, money-filled purses are nestled within oyster shell halves. Lyford details her elusive yet purposeful versatility and her incorporation of "popular culture, advertising, literature, film, and the messiness and pleasures of a vivid, engaging social life into her art." Rich images of Tanning's works are featured alongside photographs of the artist that capture her playful sense of glamour.

Though Tanning produced surrealist art and was married to Dadaist and surrealist Max Ernst, she also created abstract pieces and worked in collages, printmaking, and soft sculpture installations. Her surrealist inspirations, as with the 1942 self-portrait *Birthday* and 1952 work *The Guest Room*, combine her superb eye for detail with otherworldly, unsettling backdrops. Her later paintings, including *Insomnies*, depicted ethereal and sensual abstractions, showing how she relished in the "alchemy" of painting and the "surprises" that emerged during the creative process. She also wrote poetry, was involved in movie production, and penned two memoirs before her death at the age of 101.

With revelatory eloquence, *Exquisite Dreams* chronicles Dorothea Tanning's unique and faceted artistic career.

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