



When Roy Lichtenstein's retrospective opened last month at the Tate Modern in London, one of his muses wasn't there to pay gushing homage to the late pop artist.

"I have a surrogate baby of my own," New York-born Erica Wexler says of her haunting debut album, *Sunlit Night*, much of which is about her relationship with Lichtenstein, the man famous for bringing cartoon imagery into high art. She was his mistress for three years, from 1991 to 1994, when she was 23 and he was 68. "He had an arrangement with his wife," she says of the artist's wife of 29 years, Dorothy Herzka.

Erica, now 44, whose haunting voice is a cross between KD Lang and Karen Carpenter, was trying to get her singing career off the ground back in 1991, when she met the artist. She decided to leave the relationship when she sensed that her energy was feeding Lichtenstein's work instead. "He liked women like his paintings - women who were demonstrative, emotional, crying, weeping. I think he liked emotional depth in women because he couldn't express it himself."

In 1994, Wexler, the daughter of screenwriter Norman Wexler, who wrote *Saturday Night Fever*, decided she had to end the affair. "I wasn't interested in living in his shadow. And any woman would be in his shadow."

In ancient times, the muse was a divinity, an invisible gust of divine wind that blew through the human being who was lucky enough to be the object of her attention. Later, muses became known as women who inspired men to produce great art, usually living their own lives in self-sacrificing obscurity. The major requirements were to be beautiful, and silent. Think of Marie-Thérèse Walter, Picasso's ill-used major muse, whom he met when she was 17 and he was 45. The Spanish painter became rich during his lifetime and yet every day, during the Occupation, he made her

Source of inspiration

What's it like to inspire great art? Only a handful of women really know the answer to that question. **STEPHANIE THEOBALD** examines the evolving role of the modern muse.

traipse round to his studio in Paris to beg for 5 kilos of coal. He refused to marry her and yet she felt she couldn't live without him. In 1973, four years after he died, she committed suicide.

In the 1960s, the "power behind the throne" concept got a fresh spin when

muses who operated in the sphere of rock n' roll became known as "groupies". Women in the Los Angeles area during the later part of this decade, such as Butter Queen, Suzy Creamcheese, and Cynthia Plaster Caster, made a career out of lighting up the lives of musicians at the end of a hard day.