



JOSEPH KLEITSCH (1882-1931)

Portrait of Hedda Nova

oil on canvas

34 x 23 in. (44 3/4 x 33 3/4 x 3 1/2 in.)

c. 1920

11491

PROVENANCE:

Private Collection, California

EXHIBITION:

Pasadena, California, Pasadena Museum of California Art, *The Golden Twenties: Portraits and Figure Paintings by Joseph Kleitsch*, March 5, 2017–August 6, 2017, Curated by Patricia Trenton

LITERATURE:

Patricia Trenton, *JOSEPH KLEITSCH: A Kaleidoscope of Color*

Patricia Trenton, *The Golden Twenties: Portraits and Figure Paintings by Joseph Kleitsch*

This is the Portrait of Hedda Nova, painted by Joseph Kleitsch. The film industry provided plenty of commissions for Kleitsch, as he was contracted with the prominent LA dealer Earl Stendahl as an in-house portraitist at the time. Hedda was born Hedda Puscewski in Soviet Russia, what is now Ukraine. She became a silent film star, though she never transitioned into talking films due to her thick Russian accent. During the height of her acting career, she was still working hard on learning to speak English. She was married to American actor and director Paul Hurst from 1919 to 1953 when, sadly, he committed suicide after being diagnosed with terminal cancer. This portrait depicts Hedda in a lovely black and gold gown with gossamer sleeves. As a silent film actress, trained to emote without words, it is easy to imagine that her expressive eyes and dramatic hand at her chest are telling the viewer a story.

Joseph Kleitsch was born in Banad, Hungary, and began painting at the age of seven. He studied in Budapest, Munich and Paris and became an accomplished portraitist before immigrating to the United States, settling in Cincinnati, Ohio. Between 1905 and 1909, he lived and painted portraits of prominent businessmen in Denver, Colorado, as well as Mexican President Francisco Madero in Mexico City. He returned to the Midwest in 1914, exhibiting at the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1920, he and his wife, Edna, settled in Laguna Beach, where the village scenery — people along the eucalyptus-lined streets, flowers blooming in alcove gardens, and the pensive tranquility of the beach and isolation of the locale — became fresh subjects for him to depict on canvas. Unlike many landscapists of the time, Kleitsch was prone to reflect the spirit of the coast through its people — figures. His townscapes have the precision of photographs.

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