

# PORTRAIT OF RITA LYDIG, 1910

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BOLDINI, Giovanni  
20th Century  
Italian

**PORTRAIT OF RITA LYDIG**, 1910

Dimensions: 11 3/4" x 8" (29.2 x 20.3 cm)

The sitter in the present drawing is Rita de Alba de Acosta Lydig (1880-1929), a descendant of the Dukes of Alba. She was first married to millionaire William E. Stokes, whom she divorced after four years of marriage. In 1902, she married a retired United States Army Captain, Phillip M. Lydig, whom she divorced in 1919. She was a famous beauty who spent time in New York, Paris, and London, and counted Edgar Degas, Auguste Rodin, Leo Tolstoy, Sarah Bernhardt, Ethel Barrymore, and Claude Debussy among her friends. Mercedes de Acosta, Lydig's younger sister, had a well-known affair with Greta Garbo. According to Acosta, John Singer Sargent remarked to Isabella Stewart Gardner that Rita was herself a work of art (Acosta p. 6). While this may have been the case, Lydig formed her own art collection, housed in a Renaissance-style mansion built by Stanford White on 52nd Street between Park and Madison Avenues in New York. A luxury volume published in 1913 featured reproductions of her art collection and the well-appointed rooms of her mansion.

Near the end of her life, Lydig was engaged to Reverend Percy Stickney Grant, rector of the Church of the Ascension at Fifth Avenue and 10th Street. The engagement was broken off in 1924, Reverend Grant died shortly after, and Lydig spent enormous sums to overcome her grief. In 1927, Lydig published a didactic (and perhaps cathartic) memoir of sorts about the disastrous lives of millionaires who marry without love, called *Tragic Mansions*. The income from the book was seized to cover her debts. Lydig experienced her own tragedy: she sold off her home (then at Washington Square) and its contents, declared bankruptcy and died at the Gotham Hotel shortly after, at the age of fifty.

Boldini captured Lydig's likeness numerous times in her heyday prior to World War I. The Lydigs, who regularly traveled to Paris, commissioned portraits in oil from Boldini: a double portrait of the couple (*La Passeggiata al Bois*, 1909, Boldini Museum, Ferrara, Italy) and a portrait of Rita Lydig (1911, private collection). A drawing of Lydig in graphite and watercolor can be found in the collection of the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, and several sketches and prints of Lydig can be found in the Boldini Museum.

In the present drawing, Lydig's back is turned toward the viewer, her left arm akimbo. Her pose is similar to that in her photograph by Baron Adolph de Meyer published in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1917. Boldini captured the delicate lines of Lydig's famous face: her fine, upturned nose and her small, pointed chin. The glamorous Lydig was known for her large and eclectic wardrobe, which undoubtedly included the marvelously wide-brimmed hat in the present drawing. She wears one of her signature swan-necked blouses, which she also wore for Boldini's painting, *La Passeggiata al Bois*, as well as for her portrait by Ignacio Zuloaga (1912) and for her sculpture by Malvina Hoffman (1928).

Boldini began painting society portraits in the mid 1870s. By the 1890s, he specialized in portraits of famous beauties. His elegant, elongated lines suited the fashionable dames of the Belle Epoque. The present drawing is typical of his drawings of ladies from the first two decades of the twentieth century. His drawings are similar to those of Paul Helleu, a good friend of his who also drew a portrait of Lydig (Acosta p. 37). Other friends included James Abbot McNeil Whistler, Edgar Degas, and John Singer Sargent. Boldini settled in Paris in 1871 and from 1886 until his death rented a small house from Sargent. He actively participated in the Salons and in the Universal Expositions of 1889 and 1900 held in Paris. His demand as a portraitist declined after World War I.

*References:*

Mercedes de Acosta, *Here Lies the Heart* (New York, 1960), ill. n. p. (paintings of Lydig by Zuloaga and Boldini, sculpture by Malvina Hoffman, photo by Baron de Meyer). Cecil Beaton, *The Glass of Fashion* (Garden City, NY, 1954).

Christian Brinton, *Exhibition of Paintings by Ignacio Zuloaga Under the Auspices of Mrs. Philip M. Lydig*, (New York, 1916), ill. p. 139 (portrait of Lydig by Zuloaga).

Andrea Buzzoni and Marcello Toffanello, *Museo Giovanni Boldini* (Ferrara, 1997), ill. pp. 192, 196, 387, 391 (sketches of Lydig), p. 489 (drypoints of Lydig).

Piero Dini and Francesca Dini, *Giovanni Boldini 1842- 1931: catalogo ragionato*, vol. 3, part 2 (Turin, 2002), ill. p. 455 (two paintings of Lydig).

*Illustrated Catalogue of the Rita Lydig Collection* (New York, 1913).

“Mrs. Rita Lydig Dies Unexpectedly at 50,” *New York Times* 20 October 1929, 1.

*A Singular Elegance: The Photographs of Baron Adolph de Meyer* (New York, 1994), ill. p. 12 (photograph of Lydig for *Harper's Bazaar*), p. 97 (photograph of Lydig for *Vogue*).

Annette Tapert and Diana Edkins, *The Power of Style: The Women Who Defined the Art of Living Well* (New York, 1994), ill. p. 19 (sculpture by Malvina Hoffman).

*Provenance:*

Rita Lydig to Dr. John Colin Vaughan, circa 1920, by descent to current owner

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Portrait of Rita de Acosta Lydig, Giovanni Boldini. Medium: oil, canvas. artist-boldini. Follow. Unfollow. boldini italianart giovanniboldini impressionism. 254 notes. Rita de Acosta Lydig by Adolf de Meyer; Paris, ca. 1913. A central figure in Edwardian society. Her fabulous flair was immortalized not only in de Meyer's photographs, but also in the work of many other artists, including Sargent and Rodin. ladylabsinthe. Follow. Unfollow. Rita de Acosta Lydig Adolf de Meyer 1910s. 12 notes. Loading... Show more notes. Portrait photograph of Mrs. Rita Lydig, 1925. In 1921 Lydig announced her engagement to Reverend Percy Stickney Grant, rector of the Church of the Ascension. Their wedding plans were broken off in 1924 when Bishop William Manning refused to authorise the marriage, citing Lydig being a divorcée with two living former husbands. Rev. Grant died shortly afterwards, leaving his personal fortune to the woman he had hoped to marry, and Lydig spent large sums of money on fashion, art, furniture, and other objects to overcome her grief.[10] Heavily in debt, she was forced to sell her Washington Square Museum Quality Oil Painting on Canvas. TITLE: "Portrait of Rita de Acosta Lydig". ORIGINAL ARTIST: Giovanni Boldini. "Portrait of Rita de Acosta Lydig" by Giovanni Boldini is a 100% hand-painted oil painting reproduction on canvas painted by one of our professional artists. Our experienced artists start with a blank canvas and paint each and every brushstroke entirely by hand! Giovanni boldini oil painting reproductions. Global Wholesale Art is the premier source for exquisite hand-painted Giovanni Boldini oil painting reproductions on canvas at wholesale prices. All of our Giovanni Boldini oil paintings are 100% hand-painted on canvas by our skilled artists and are absolutely magnificent!