

ELLIOTT FINE ART

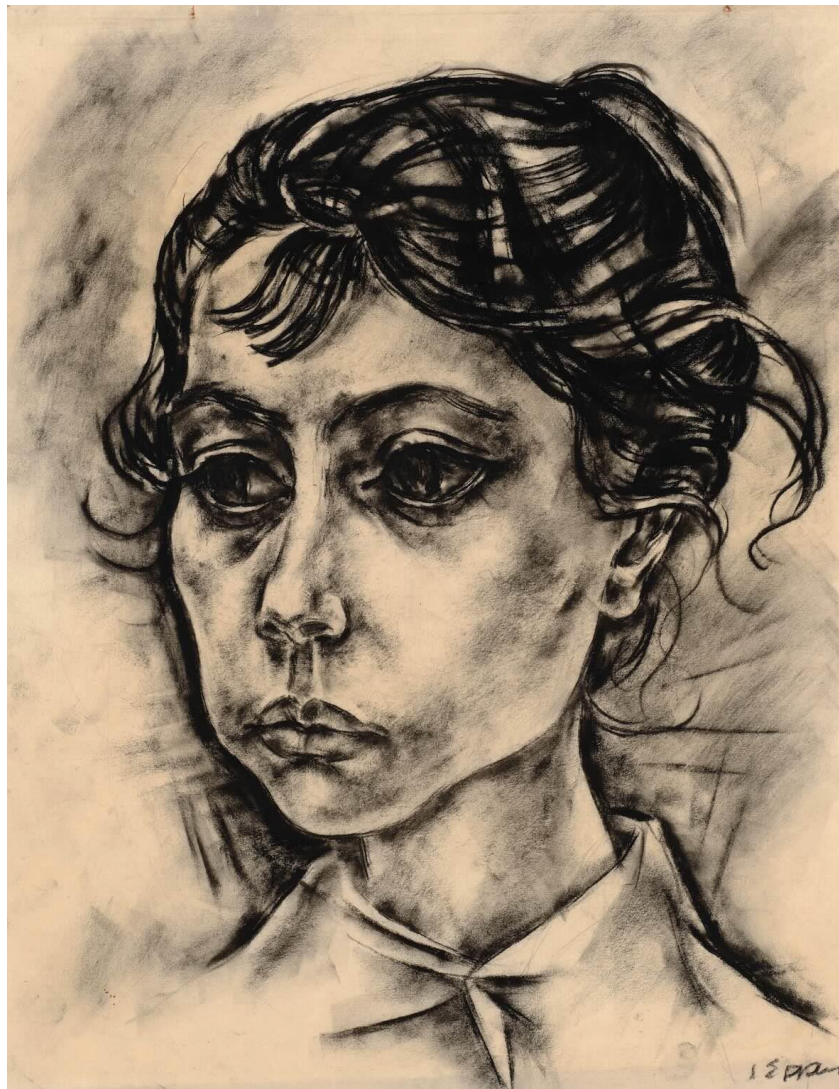
Nineteenth Century to Early Modern

Ignaz Epper
(St Gallen 1892 – 1969 Ascona)

Portrait of Mischa, the artist's wife (Mädchenkopf)

Signed lower right: *I. Epper*
Charcoal on tracing paper
44 x 34 cm. (17 ¼ x 13 ½ in.)

Provenance:
Private Collection, Zurich;
Germann Auktionshaus, Zurich, 30 November 2023, lot 264.



Ignaz Epper's portrait of his wife Mischa likely served as a study for his lithograph entitled *Mädchenkopf* (fig. 1), which was published in 1919 in the influential Expressionist journal *Genius*.¹ Founded that year, *Genius* was conceived as way of providing critical reactions to contemporary art. By furnishing examples of canonical artworks alongside essays on modern artists, *Genius* presented itself as a cultivator of good taste, publishing original prints by artists such as Karl Schmidt-Rotluff, Franz Marx, Erich Heckle and, of course, Epper, alongside literary contributions by writers including Franz Kafka, Maxim Gory, Alfred Döblin and Hermann Hesse.



Fig. 1, Ignaz Epper, *Mädchenkopf*, 1919, lithograph, 33.4 x 22.4 cm, MOMA



Fig. 2, Ignaz Epper, *Self-portrait*, c. 1918, charcoal on paper, 49.5 x 40 cm, Private Collection

Mischa, also an artist, was a frequent model for her husband. Here she is bought alive, as is typical for Epper, through hard, energetic strokes. The effect is intense, though not as claustrophobic as a many of his works from this period, where the background is crisscrossed with thick black lines (fig. 2). Peculiarly large eyes are also a common feature in Epper's portraits, providing a focal point for the composition. Rather than the crazed, protruding eyes of Epper's self-portraits, Mischa's are almond-shaped and strikingly beautiful, though still powerful.

Born in St Gallen in modest circumstances, Epper was one of the leading exponents of Swiss Expressionism. His fame is primarily based on his graphic works from the 1910s. These are often imbued with a certain pessimism about the world and explore themes such as the fragility of human existence in the face of war, political unrest and economic misery, as well as the effects of social and technological changes. At the very heart of Epper's interests, however, was the human figure, for which he developed a lifelong fascination.

¹ *Genius. Zeitschrift für wedende und alte Kunst*, Leipzig 1919, n.p.