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Arpad Domjan (Budapest 1905-1939)

Portrait of a woman; portrait of a woman in profile
(on reverse)

Signed and dated (upper left): 'Domjan / (1)935'

Oil on panel

15 ³/₄ x 12 ⁵/₈ in. (40 x 32 cm.)



Provenance

Private collection US, until 2022.

The artist Arpad Domián was a hidden talent in the Hungarian art scene between the two world wars. The son of the chief notary of Alsódabas, he grew up in the local registry offices and later in the Domián mansion in Gyón. On the advice of his drawing teacher, he applied to the Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest where he was the pupil of Bertalan Karlovsky. His talent soon has attracted the attention of the international art world: "Domián is a new star", wrote Dr. János Jajczay in 1937, "we expect a lot from him." But he never had the chance to fulfil his promise, he died tragically young, unexpectedly in 1939, of Addison's disease.

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In 1936, he made his debut at the jubilee exhibition of the Kunsthalle (Budapest) winning the Halmos prize. The following year, his painting *Past and Future* was purchased by Prince Pál Esterházy, the founder of the recent painting prize. The young artist used the prize money he received to travel to the French capital. "In Paris," wrote Zoltán Pipics in his obituary, "he came into contact with the Bourbon princely family through the Halász family of Dabas, who from then on constantly supplied him with portrait commissions in their splendid palace near the Madeleine, acknowledging his artistic talent with a princely fee. Meanwhile, he had also exhibited at the Paris Salon several times, and the French press remembered him with the highest praise." He had promised to send two small pictures from Paris for the winter exhibition to the Kunsthalle in Busapest, but he was unable to do so. Domián captured the sitter of the present picture with breathtaking realism reminiscent of the *New Objectivity* (Neue Sachlichkeit), a movement in German art that arose during the 1920s as a reaction against Expressionism. As its name suggests, it offered a return to unsentimental reality and a focus on the objective world, as opposed to the more abstract, romantic, or idealistic tendencies of Expressionism. The style is most often associated with portraiture, and its leading practitioners included Christian Schad, Otto Dix, and Lotte Laserstein (fig. 1). Their mercilessly naturalistic depictions, sometimes reminiscent of the meticulous processes of the Old Masters, frequently portrayed Weimar society in a caustically satirical manner.



Fig. 1: Lotte Laserstein, *Im Gasthaus*, 1927, oil on panel, private collection.