

DE ACOSTA, MERCEDES (1893–1968)

Mercedes de Acosta was born in New York City on March 1, 1893 into an immigrant family of means. The youngest of eight children, she became a substitute for her mother's desire for a son and grew up believing herself to be a boy. The youngest sister of Aida de Acosta, the first woman to fly an airship, throughout her life de Acosta identified as Spanish, Cuban and American. An important figure in the café society of the late 1930s, de Acosta influenced a generation of public figures who challenged sexual politics, refused conformity with sexual norms, and saw themselves as their own unique invention. She was a poet, novelist, playwright, scriptwriter, and set and costume designer, thus, an important figure within New York theater circles, European literary circles, and the Hollywood movie colony. An individual of many talents, de Acosta is remembered, not so much for her artistic and literary contributions, but as the supposed lover of Isadora Duncan, Eva Le Gallienne, Greta Garbo, and Marlene Dietrich. Resented by many of her former acquaintances, de Acosta's memoir, *Here Lies the Heart*, was published in 1960.