



# Bohemian Rogue: The Life of Hollywood Artist John Decker

*Stephen C. Jordan*

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Artist John Decker was born in Germany in 1895, but found his fame in Hollywood during the 1930s and '40s. At the age of 13, he was abandoned by his parents in London, where he found work painting scenery for the theatre circuit. Taken under the wing of a talented forger, Decker developed a remarkable ability to recreate works by the old Masters—a skill that helped land him in jail, but also brought him thousands of dollars throughout his life. After stowing away to America in 1921, Decker became a caricaturist for a New York paper. In 1928 he left for Hollywood and became friends with many of its biggest names, including John Barrymore, Errol Flynn, and W. C. Fields.

Though Decker struggled to find film work as an artist and set designer, his drawings appeared in numerous publications from coast to coast. He was commissioned to do paintings of, among others, the Marx Brothers, Greta Garbo, Mickey Rooney, and Charlie Chaplin (who bought twelve of his portraits). Eventually, Decker's paintings were exhibited in Rome, New York, and Los Angeles, and his creations graced museum walls alongside many of the great artists, including Van Gogh, Rembrandt, and Daumier. Stories on Decker, his art, and his exhibitions, appeared in all the major newspapers, as well as such magazines as *Esquire*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*.

With all of his amazing talent—and scandalous exploits—it's surprising that the name of John Decker isn't more familiar today. In *Bohemian Rogue: The Life of Hollywood Artist John Decker*, author Stephen C. Jordan seeks to resurrect this forgotten figure of 20th century art. Jordan delves into the mystery of a man who overcame a difficult childhood and notorious apprenticeship to become a respected artist (and outrageous party-giver) in Hollywood. *Bohemian Rogue* chronicles the relatively brief—but eccentric—life of this neglected painter, caricaturist, and sculptor.

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