



asks Mila Kunis, pointing in awe at an intricate drawing of hyacinths by Maria Sibylla Merian at the Getty Center in Los Angeles. I begin to answer jokingly that I can, but choose not to, when I am interrupted by a loud thump—like a bird colliding with a windowpane.

“Oh Jesus Christ!” she says.

Kunis’s forehead has smacked—with what I assume is a significant amount of force based on the sound—into the glass protecting the rare 17th-century illustration.

“There’s glass there,” grumbles a security guard with a gift for the obvious lurking in the corner.

“I realized that the hard way!” says Kunis, wandering off and giggling hysterically. “I am the clumsiest person you’ll ever meet. Ever!”

This petite, winsome 25-year-old brunette wearing flip-flops and ripped jeans, prone to bumping into and tripping over things, is clearly an unlikely candidate for an action-film assassin. Nonetheless, she’ll be starring this fall opposite Mark Wahlberg in the video game-inspired shoot-em-up, *Max Payne*. It’s a bit of a departure for the comedic actress, who played the spoiled and superficial Jackie Burkhart on *That 70’s Show*, lends her voice to the homely character Meg on *Family Guy*, and recently lit up the screen as the romantic rescuer of the dumped Peter (Jason Segel) in *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*.

“It’s not only a departure, it’s just absurd. OK?” Kunis tells me. In *Max Payne*, she’s outfitted with five-inch heels, leather pants, a bustier, and a very large gun. “And mind you—” she says, “I walk into glass, I trip. I’m the clumsiest assassin you’ll ever meet in your life. There’s one part where I’m supposed walk over a metal shelving unit thing, and my heel went right through it, and I’m like AGGHH! And I fall. And you hear me scream...”

“So you did your own stunts?” I ask.

“By accident!” she replies. “I’m the worst fighting assassin. I think on screen it will look good, but in real life, with my 10-pound gun...it was the hardest job I’ve ever done!”

Did she enjoy her new gun-wielding empowerment?

“I killed so many people!” she says, excitedly. “Well, only like six or seven. I wasn’t allowed to go on a full on rampage, but I was really good with aiming the gun.”

We amble from the exhibition of nature and entomological drawings to a show of August Sander photographs taken in Germany in the late ’20s and early ’30s. Kunis—who immigrated to America from Ukraine with her family when she was

nine years old—begins to imagine herself and her ancestors in many of the photos.

“Hey! It looks like my grandma and grandpa!” she says excitedly, pointing at a photo of an elderly German couple. “Well, not really. But they’re cute. I love old people.”

She eyes a portrait of two vintage Ringling Brothers circus girls and declares, “This is me!” Then she launches into a mock circus act: “Welcome to Ringling Brothers!” she announces, while ushering an imaginary audience into a tent, singing like a carnival calliope—“Dah dah dada-dada da-da da dah...”

Then another photo prompts her to say, “That could have been my family. Totally my family, like from a teeny village—not in Germany but in Ukraine.”

As a child “fresh off the boat” from Ukraine, Kunis learned English watching Bob Barker on *The Price is Right*. Early on, she started taking acting classes in Beverly Hills and landed the role on *That 70’s Show* at age 14. Her parents, both scientists, quickly realized that academia was not her *raison d’être* and reluctantly let her pursue acting. “When I was 12 they would say, ‘Are you sure you don’t want to quit acting? Are you sure?’ They were the opposite of stage parents.” In turn, she reluctantly agreed to graduate from high school to make them happy. “I sent out my college applications, I took the stupid fucking SATs, I got into all the colleges I wanted to get into, I went to orientation and that was that. End of story.” Her parents gave her the OK to pursue acting and defer college, as it turned out, indefinitely, which suits her just fine. “I really love reading and learning; I just don’t like doing it on someone else’s time.”

In real life, as in her performances, Kunis conjures an ebullient, uninhibited, innocent little sister who might be just a little bit naughty. Her on-screen sexuality is still somewhat playful, naïve. Maybe it’s her enormous, glossy doll eyes—one brown, one green due to a condition called iritis—or perhaps it’s her unabashed klutziness that I find so charming as we walk into another room, now playing a spontaneous game of “What Celeb Does This Photo Look Like?” I point to a shot of four young German boys and remark that the guy on the left looks remarkably similar to her current co-star, Mark Wahlberg. Mila gasps.

“Stop it! It is!” she says, punching my arm for emphasis, like Elaine to Jerry. “And that looks like, what’s his name? *Jurassic Park*?” she asks.

“Jeff Goldblum?” I answer.

“A young Jeff Goldblum! It’s like the weirdest brat pack ever!”

I point out the guy on the right side of the photo and try to lead her to my discovery, “Michael Pitt?” she asks. “Who were you thinking?”