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Robert Fishko, *Director*

JACK LEVINE

(1915-2010)

The Card Players, c.1940

gouache on paper

16 ¾ x 21 ¾ inches

signed lower right "J Levine"



Provenance

The Artist

(Midtown Payson Gallery, New York)

Private Collection, Rye, New York

(acquired from the above)

Literature

Frankel, Stephen Robert. *Jack Levine*, Rizzoli International Publications, New York, 1989, p. 34, Illustrated and p. 144, Listed.

Reference

Getlein, Frank. *Jack Levine*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, 1966, no. 21, p. 44, Illustrated (Related work shown: *The Card Players*, 1941, 15 3/8 x 13 1/4 inches)

Note

Jack Levine was born in the Boston's South End slums in 1915. He began drawing at the age of eight at the community art center as did his friend Hyman Bloom, who would also go on to be a well-known artist. By 1929, Levine was studying with Dr. Denman Ross of the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard. In 1935, Levine became employed as an artist in the Work Progress Administration (WPA). This endeavor supported him through the Depression; the vignettes of street life at that time filled his mind and would appear on his canvases as biting social commentary for the rest of his life.

Levine was capitulated into national prominence and fame in 1937 when his WPA painting, *The Feast of Reason*, was acquired by The Museum of Modern Art. Levine was

23 years old at the time. In 1939, he had the first of 3 one-person exhibitions at New York's legendary Downtown Gallery owned by Edith Halpert.

Jack Levine created *The Card Players* before being drafted into the army during World War II in 1942. It depicts a group of four balding and rotund men around a table, each puffing away on a cigar as they play a game. Their cartoonishly enlarged heads fill the composition. Levine wrote about his work from this decade in a monograph published in 1989 by Rizzoli, edited by Stephen Robert Frankel: "I divide the '40s, as most people would, into pre-war and post-war. My pre-war paintings were for the most part a continuation of what I'd established for myself during the '30s in terms of style and subject matter...A youthful kind of drama calmly expressed became more exacerbated and a frenzy set in. And of course the war seemed to me a little bit apocalyptic – to put it mildly."

Levine describes a related work from 1941 titled, *The Banquet*, now in the collection of the Neuberger Museum in Purchase, New York: "Banquet began as a doodle. I had done a drawing for my own amusement, of a young fat-faced politician addressing these very shrewd old men at a political banquet...It was just a cartoon I did, and then the painting was based on it: the same fat-faced politician standing up at a banquet table and making a speech to his cronies, all of them in formal dress...I suppose it is an indictment of these people, but it was influenced by the gangster movies being made by Hollywood around that time. I've always loved these character actors that used to play the wonderful bit parts in these films. And in this sense, it is not a bitter indictment. There's comedy too."ⁱ

ⁱ Frankel, Stephen Robert. *Jack Levine*, Rizzoli International Publications, New York, 1989, p. 34-35.