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March 19, 2025

GEORGE GROSZ 1893-1959

FÜR DEN UNGLÜCKLICHEN IST DIE KLEINSTE FREUDE GROSS

Watercolor, gouache, reed pen and pen and ink on paper. 1928

60 x 46 cm

Signed "GROSZ" lower right,

inscribed lower edge "40 Für den Unglücklichen ist die kleinste Freude gross"

and inscribed illegible lower left "No...."

Provenance:

Studio of the artist, Berlin, 1928

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Irving Cohen, Palm Beach, Florida

Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, auction 3292, December 15, 1971, lot 60

Ketterer, München, auction 11, May 27-29, 1974, lot 695

Private Collection, purchased from Galerie Valentien, Stuttgart, 2017

The Berlin Street scenes of Grosz, executed in the years 1925 until 1932, the year before he left Germany, belong to the most important component in his oeuvre of these years. His preferred subjects are people of all different kind who fill the streets of the busy metropolis. There is the rich next to the poor, the properly dressed businessman on the way to his office or on his return home, while prostitutes are roaming the street.

Differences couldn't be more striking: A serious looking businessman with his briefcase in his arm, a posh looking lady in a fur coat, a good maid on a shopping trip, and a dutiful traffic policeman – and then this dirty looking run-down vagrant with his hip flask in his jacket pocket. He discovered something in the street gutter. Probably a cigar butt. With guilty conscience, the guy tries to pick his treasure behind the back of the policeman. Nobody takes any notice of this nobody, however, the artist does.

Gruesome is the outcome of the First World War. The German Empire was bankrupt. However, there were, without any doubts, winners: a lot of war profiteers, among them industrialists and speculators. On the dark side of life there were the losers, the poor guys, the unemployed, the war cripples. In many of his drawings and watercolors, Grosz denounced the screaming injustice of his time and made it also public in books and political magazines.

Other works by Grosz of these years emphasize the common attitude of the Germans, that the lost war needed revenge as it was undergone by Hitler when he started an even more gruesome and felonious war in 1939.

Grosz started the work with watercolor, working wet into wet, defining the composition, and finished the work with quick decisive strokes of the reed pen and pen and ink, and again with the use of watercolor and some gouache.

Ralph Jentsch



I herewith confirm that the work shown in this photograph is an original work by GEORGE GROSZ (1893-1959) and that it will be included in the forthcoming catalogue raisonné of works on paper by GEORGE GROSZ.

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