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EST. 1817

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Alexandre Yevgenievich Yakovlev or Iacovleff
(Saint Petersburg 1887–1939 Paris)

The Dance Hall

Signed (?) on the reverse of the original canvas
'Iacovleff' and signed or inscribed with the artist's
name and location on the frame and stretcher
'Painted by Alexandre Iacovleff; Charleston, S.C.,
USA'

Oil on unlined canvas

26 x 20 in. (66 x 50.8 cm.)



Provenance

By descent to the artist's sister, Alexandra Yakovleva, Paris.
Acquired from her by a private collector in 1978.
Private collection, Rhode Island, USA, until 2020.

Exhibited

(probably) Pittsburgh, Carnegie Institute, *Paintings, watercolors and drawings by Alexandre Iacovleff*, 1938, no. 105 'Negroes Dancing, South Carolina.'

(probably) New York, The Grand Central Art Galleries, *Memorial exhibition of the works of Alexandre Iacovleff*, 1939, no. 57 'Negroes dancing.'

The attribution of this work has been confirmed by Olga Glebova on the basis of a high-resolution digital image. She has pointed out the existence of a related watercolour by the artist, signed and dated 1936, which was likely exhibited Pittsburgh, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Department of Fine Arts, *Paintings, Watercolors, and Drawings by Alexandre Iacovleff*, January 6 - Feb 3, 1938, no. 105 (fig.1). Another exhibition of Yakovev's work was shown at The Grand Central Art Galleries, New York in 1939, where there were several works from his American series. Our painting may be the same as their catalogue no.57 "Negroes dancing", which was painted in South Carolina.

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Alexander Evgenievich Yakovlev (also Iacovleff or Jacovleff) studied at the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg, where he was taught by Dmitry Kardovksy. It was there that he met his friend and fellow artist, Vasily Shukaev, with whom he travelled to Italy and Spain in 1913. This was to be the first of many travels for Yakovlev. A member of the revived *Mir iskusstva* group of Russian artists, he was much admired by one of the movement's founders and leaders, Alexander Benois, who praised the young man's talent. Following a period of military service during the First World War, Yakovlev earned a travelling scholarship to the Far East in the summer of 1917, and visited Mongolia, China and Japan. He was in Peking during the outbreak of the October Revolution, and was never to return to Russia. After some years in Peking, where he was particularly captivated by Chinese theatre, Yakovlev travelled across Mongolia and Japan, making drawings and sketches of the people and sights he encountered, some of which were exhibited in Shanghai in 1918. He settled in Paris in 1919, and the following year an exhibition of his drawings and paintings of the Far East, at the Galerie Barbazanges in Paris, made his name and established his reputation as an *artiste-voyageur* and a superb draughtsman. Yakovlev took French citizenship and worked on commissions for decorative mural and fresco paintings for the homes of such private patrons as the Duchesse de Gramont and Prince Yusupov. He continued to travel, however, and later kept a studio in Capri.

In 1924 Yakovlev was invited by the industrialist André Citroën to join 'La Croisière Noire' - a motorized expedition, sponsored by Citroën and led by Georges-Marie Haardt, to cross the African continent from Algeria to Madagascar – as its official artist. Between 1924 and 1925 the artist made hundreds of paintings and drawings of the people, animals and landscapes that the expedition encountered on its route, which were later developed into finished works in his studio in Paris. These were exhibited, to considerable critical acclaim, at the Galerie Jean Charpentier and the Pavillon de Marsan at the Louvre. In 1928 Yakovlev sent an exhibition of his work to Moscow, and three years later he joined a second Citroën expedition; the trans-Asiatic 'La Croisière Jaune' from Beirut to Peking. Departing in April 1931, the expedition crossed Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, the Himalayas and the Gobi Desert before arriving in Peking in February 1932. The artist's painting and drawings from 'La Croisière Jaune' were again shown at the Galerie Jean Charpentier in Paris in 1933.

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The following year Yakovlev accepted a position as the director of the painting and drawing department of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, where he remained until 1937. Writing on the occasion of an exhibition of the artist's work in New York in 1936, the art historian and director of the Fogg Art Museum, Edward Forbes, noted that '*In his earlier work Iacovleff's interest was largely in structure and draftsmanship...But in his constant evolution his interest and studies have developed also in the field of colour. His reputation has grown to be international, but even twelve years or so ago Sargent said to me that he thought Iacovleff was one of the two greatest living draftsmen.*'¹ Although successful exhibitions of his work were held in Washington, D.C., New York, Charleston and Pittsburgh, the artist missed Europe. Not long after his return to Paris, Yakovlev died of stomach cancer, a few weeks before his fifty-first birthday.

The present painting was executed during a stay made by Alexander Yakovlev in Charleston, South Carolina in 1935. The following year, an exhibition of the artist's work at the Knoedler Gallery in New York included three drawings entitled *Josephine* (Camden, South Carolina), *The Black Plumber* (Camden, South Carolina) and *Cariabell* (Camden, South Carolina).

The Dance Hall was in the possession of the artist's younger sister, Alexandra Yakovleva (1889-1979), an opera singer who, with her mother, escaped Russia after the Revolution and settled with her brother in Paris. From 1949 until her death thirty years later, Yakovleva taught at the Conservatoire russe Serge Rachmaninoff in Paris.

1. Edward W. Forbes in New York, M. Knoedler & Company, *A. Iacovleff*, exhibition catalogue, 1936, unpaginated.

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Fig. 1: Alexander Evgenievich Iacovleff, *Dancing, South Carolina*, watercolor and ink on paper, 1936, private collection.