

TRUE LIVES

A New Limited Series from the Producers of *P.O.V.*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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JACK LEVINE: FEAST OF PURE REASON

Winner of the CINE Golden Eagle Award

Remarkable Documentary, Distributed by American Public Television,
Available for January - December 2006 Scheduling in Second Season of "True Lives"

Series Theme is "Radical Artists"

Before **A Farmer's Wife** and **Country Boy**, filmmaker David Sutherland made **Jack Levine: Feast of Pure Reason**, a bold and unconventional portrait of one America's leading Social Realist painters doing what he does best: skewering corrupt politicians and police, raging over social injustices, and satirizing the petty foibles of humankind. Sutherland's unique film captures the formidable artistic talent and passions of Jack Levine, whose satiric work tackles the dark side of America's political and social life.

The one-hour film will air on public television stations in 2006 as part of **True Lives**, a documentary series bringing classic documentaries to public television, from the producers of PBS's **P.O.V.** series.

Jack Levine became world famous during the 1930s for his brilliantly painted, brutally ironic visions of America and the world. His paintings have dealt with such subjects as the McCarthy hearings of the 50s, Mayor Daley at the 1968 Democratic National Convention, mob figures, international arms brokers, and even Las Vegas showgirls.

With his characteristic straightforwardness and humor, Levine peers directly into the camera and guides the viewer on a personal tour of his world. He can discuss both the brush strokes of the European masters and the physical grace of modern athletes. While watching batting practice by the Boston Red Sox, Levine remarks that he wishes there were a painter who could paint as well as Ted Williams could hit.

Underneath this humor is a finely tuned sensitivity to the social and political afflictions that have plagued America since the 1930s. **Jack Levine: Feast of Pure Reason** is the story of a rare individual who has remained true to his aesthetic soul, despite the ever-changing fad and fashions of the art business.

The film has been praised by critics as one of the finest documentaries to explore the world of the contemporary American artist. Filmmaker David Sutherland has developed an unusual style that blends traditional documentary technique with narrative film direction. Sutherland spent many weeks with Mr. Levine, liberally taping interviews and activities. He then wrote the script incorporating his favorite lines and created a “storyboard,” the comic strip-like blueprint commonly used in feature films. When Sutherland had perfected his story and assembled a film crew, Levine was directed as a professional actor might be, or as Sutherland describes it, “The subject of a documentary plays himself in a docudrama.”

Levine burst into prominence during the late 1930s when he worked for the New Deal’s Work Projects Administration (WPA). The film shows how young Jack Levine, as a leading figure of Social Realism, produced art that reflected and commented on the tumultuous issues of that era—and how he had remained steadfast in his devotion to create art that forcefully comments on our times.

The film introduces Levine as he sits alongside friend and art historian Milton Browne, while the two munch on hot dogs at Boston’s Fenway Park. Later, as Levine walks down the streets of his youth—formerly a lowly Boston slum—he explains how the squalor and travail of the neighborhood affected his creative development and passion for social justice. Levine also describes how he was inspired by the Expressionists, Bertolt Brecht and “The Three Penny Opera,” and the Mexican muralist movement. These influences helped mold an artist who could appreciate the teeming streets of a big city as well as the great artistic contributions of Velázquez, Rubens, and da Vinci.

The unusually articulate Levine is not reticent in sharing his own insightful—and painfully honest—viewpoints. Throughout his life, he has remained true to his own vision and has steadfastly refused to follow the trendiness of the art world. “I still believe that I have some mission in life to say what I think about the world. Let the avant-garde go hang!” he exclaims.

At Levine’s New York City studio, he begins a canvas with his daughter as a model. It is evident that his sharply honed talent gives him great control of the brush, as he transforms a charcoal outline into a finished portrait. His own scrupulous honesty, he says, constantly affects his work: “Many times I have felt that I would love to paint a lovely girl and have her appear lovely. But it always turns out different. It’s all right. It’s just that if you ever want you wife painted, don’t call on me, because if one eye is lower than the other, or there’s a mole on a bad place, I will love it and catch it.”

One of Levine’s most celebrated paintings from the 1930s was “Feast of Pure Reason,” which revealed the grim and threatening corruption a city much like Boston, with angry police and crooked politicians. Its title comes from the “Nighttown” sequence in James Joyce’s “Ulysses.”

When his father died in 1939, Levine found himself painting Hebrew Bible themes, including a series of works on the kings and sages of Israel. But he also continued to produce works in the Social Realist style.

After serving in the Army during WWII, Levine turned his satiric eye to military officers. A general’s opulent homecoming in his painting “Welcome Home” shows “the big slob who is vice president of the Second National Bank and the president of the Chamber of Commerce, only now he’s been in the Army. I couldn’t say that sort of thing while I was in the service. This was my way to howl,” he told reporters at the time.

“Welcome Home” later traveled to the Soviet Union with a U.S. State Department- sponsored art exhibition. But the painting drew the fire of the witch-hunting House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Levine survived an appearance before HUAC, wisecracking on the absurdity of the charge that his work was unpatriotic, with such quips as: “Here we were corrupting all those Russians towards Communism.”

With the rise of Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s, Levine's popularity declined. Levine is an outspoken critic of the art world, which he says has become increasingly "corporatized," with artists more interested in profit than art. Today, he says, the art business is controlled by a handful of investors and gallery owners.

Jack Levine: Feast of Pure Reason has been hailed by critics for its incisive look at one of America's most important but little-known artists. *The Los Angeles Times* called it "thoroughly engaging," and *The Boston Herald* placed it on its "Ten Best" list.

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About the Filmmaker:

DAVID SUTHERLAND Producer/Director

David Sutherland, born in Boston and trained at the University of California Film School, has won over 100 international awards and citations for his films. He is best known for his intimate documentary portraits of unconventional subjects

Sutherland wrote, directed, produced and edited the groundbreaking series **The Farmer's Wife**, which aired on PBS over three nights in 1998 and drew over 17 million viewers. The six-and-a-half hour "Frontline" series, about a Nebraska farming family in crisis, was hailed by *The Chicago Tribune* as "one of the extraordinary television events of the decade." Sutherland's other PBS credits include **George Washington: The Man Who Wouldn't Be King**, for "The American Experience"; **Paul Cadmus: Enfant Terrible at 80**, a portrait of the gay social satirist and painter; **Feast of the Gods** for the National Gallery of Art about the mystery surrounding a painting by Titian and Bellini; **Halftime: Five Yale Men at Midlife**, about five men from the class of 1963; and **Out of Sight**, a portrait of a blind cowgirl; and **High Energy**, about physicist Melissa Franklin which for the series "Discovering Women."

Sutherland's next project for PBS is the six-hour film **Country Boys**, a portrait of two teenage boys coming of age in eastern Kentucky's Appalachian hills, which airs on the "Frontline" series in January 2006.

Credits:

Producer/Director:	David Sutherland
Assistant Director:	Edward Korvin
Screenplay:	David Sutherland, Nancy Sutherland, Theresa Cederholm
Editor:	Mavis Lyons Smull
Executive Producer:	Theresa Cederholm
Associate Producers:	Cynthia Dickason, Paul Taylor, Karen Uehla
Creative Director:	Nancy Sutherland
Cinematographer:	Joseph Seamans
Music Composer:	Edward Korvin
Music Arranger:	John Simon
Sound Recording:	George Shafnacker

Cara Mertes is the Executive Producer of **True Lives**. The series is produced by American Documentary, Inc. Major funding for **True Lives** is provided by the Tides Foundation.

American Public Television (www.aptonline.org)

For 44 years, American Public Television (APT) has been a prime source of programming for the nation's public television stations. APT distributes more than 10,000 hours of programming including *JFK: Breaking the News*, *Simply Ming*, *Globe Trekker*, *Rick Steves' Europe*, *Julia and Jacques Cooking at Home*, *Battlefield Britain*, *Jungle*, *America's Test Kitchen*, *Lidia's Italian-American Kitchen* and classic movies. APT is known for identifying innovative programs and developing creative distribution techniques for producers. In four decades, it has established a tradition of providing public television stations nationwide with program choices that enable them to strengthen and customize their schedules.

American Documentary, Inc. (www.americandocumentary.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. The producers of *P.O.V.* and *P.O.V.'s Borders* online (www.pbs.org/pov), AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, on line and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback, to educational opportunities and community participation.

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