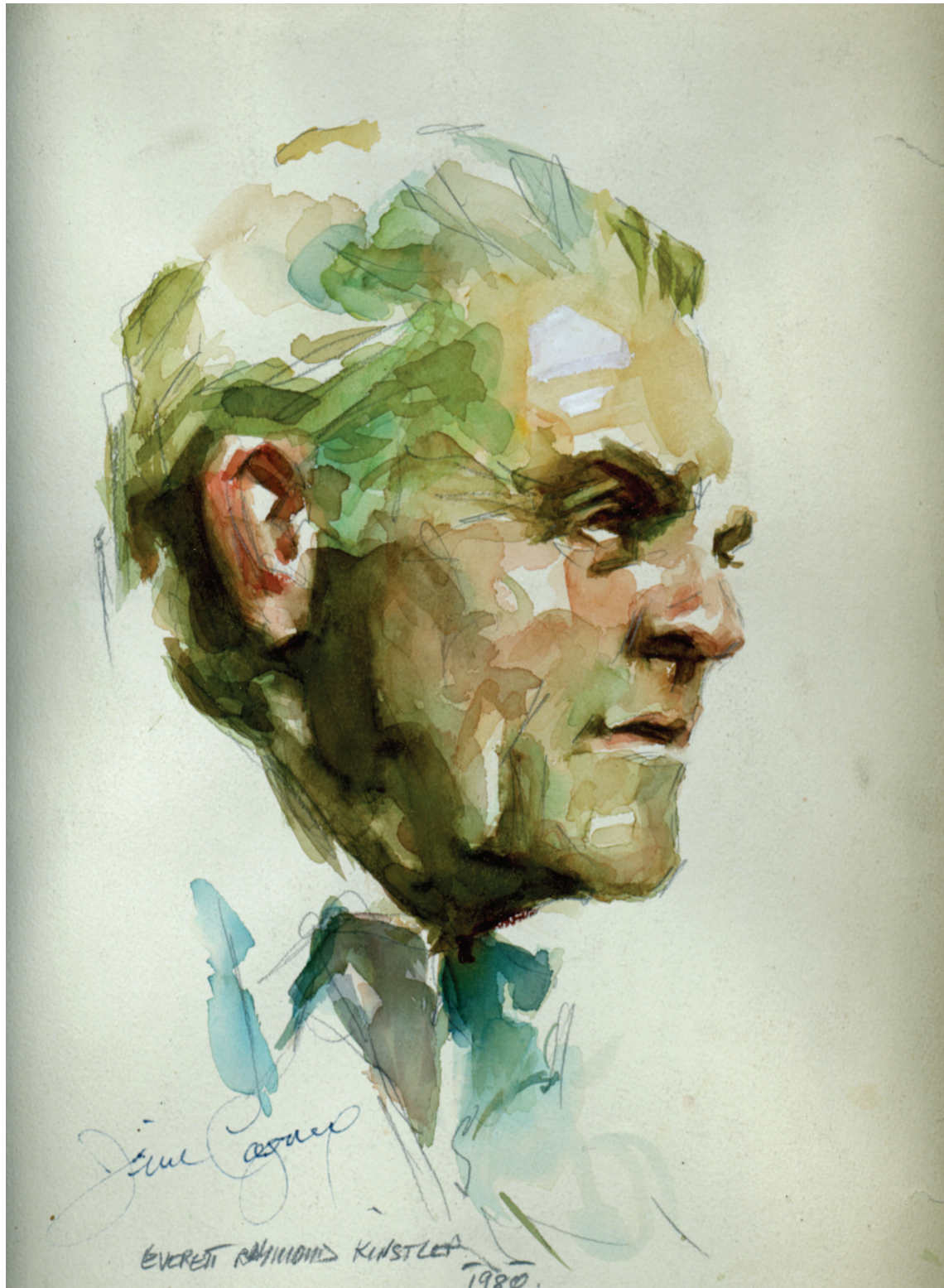


James Cagney

Actor (1899 – 1986)



James Cagney by EVERETT RAYMOND KINSTLER, 1980

Cagney was born in a room above his father's saloon on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. He graduated from Stuyvesant High School in 1918 and briefly attended Columbia, returning home upon the death of his father during the flu pandemic.

He started tap dancing as a boy and was nicknamed "Cellar-Door Cagney" after his habit of dancing on slanted cellar doors. Like his father, he was an amateur boxer, and was runner-up for the state lightweight title. Cagney began his Broadway career in the chorus of *Every Sailor* and then appeared in another musical, *Pitter Patter*. Also in the chorus was 16-year-old Frances "Billie" Vernon, whom he would marry in 1922. They were married till his death in 1986.

He landed the lead role in the 1929 play *Penny Arcade*, receiving rave reviews, and Warner signed him on at an initial \$500 a week, three-week contract to reprise the role. This was quickly extended to a seven-year contract. Cagney's first film was *Sinner's Holiday* in 1930, the first of 68 he would make.

Cagney's seventh film, *The Public Enemy*, became one of the most influential gangster movies of the period, and the scene in which he smashes a grapefruit into Mae Clarke's face is one of the most famous moments in film history. In 1938, he received an Oscar nomination for *Angels With Dirty Faces*, and won an Oscar in 1942 for his portrayal of George M. Cohan in *Yankee Doodle Dandy*. He was nominated a third time in 1955 for *Love Me or Leave Me*. Cagney was declared by Orson Welles as "maybe the greatest actor to ever appear in front of a camera."

In 1956, Cagney took on one of his rare television roles starring in ROBERT MONTGOMERY's *Soldiers From the War Returning*. This was a favor to Montgomery, who needed a strong fall season opener to stop the network from dropping his series. In 1969, seven years after Cagney retired, Montgomery proposed him for the Century.

In 1984, Ronald Reagan awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Cagney died at his farm in Stanfordville, New York; his close friend President Reagan gave the eulogy at the funeral.

