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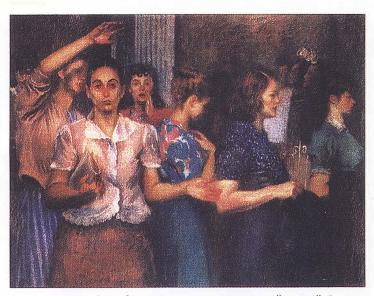
Robert Fishko, Director

## SUMMER 2005

## **Raphael Soyer**

## Forum

"Raphael Soyer: Finding America," the apt title of this moving, museum-quality exhibition, sums up Soyer's life and the achievement of his work. Soyer arrived in New York in 1912, a cultivated 12-



Raphael Soyer, Shop Girls, 1936, oil on canvas, 30%" x 38%". Forum.

member

Reviews: New York

year-old Russian Jewish émigré. Initially influenced by the teachings of Guy Pène du Bois at the Art Students League, he spent several years as a self-styled primitivist—and a good one, as was evident in the charming, curvy couple on view here in the *Dancing Lesson* (1926).

For the next six decades, he worked as a realist in a midtonal range on small and midsize canvases, producing pictures of people who stood for the multitudes: a bespectacled tailor laboring by incandescent light; gaunt men in heavy overcoats, whose faces and hunched posture embodied the Depression; a GI in a last poignant embrace before being shipped off to war.

Clearly, Soyer loved women, whom he painted as studio nudes, dancers, sub-way riders, and shop girls.

The images are uniformly sympathetic, vaguely sexual, and yet always proper. Many owe a debt to Degas, and the delicate, frothy brushstrokes have something in common with Fragonard. The unspoken influence is that of the artist's wife, who made it a point to befriend Soyer's models and blurred the boundary between chum and chaperone.

Following Rembrandt's example, Soyer often painted himself. Like the man, his self-portraits are small, focused, humane, and observant. Usually his sensitive, owlish countenance stares out from beneath a broad-brimmed hat, giving the hint of a film-noir private eye or a Walter Mitty. Throughout, these images meld a sense of the artist's time with his temperament and make both come alive.

-Gerard Haggerty