

# ART WORLD

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**RAPHAEL SOYER**—"Jose de Creeft," 1980, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 inches, at Forum Gallery, 1018 Madison Avenue, through November 21.

## Paintings Of Friends Intimate Subjects

By **BRUCE DUFF HOOTON**

Raphael Soyer still paints his friends even into his eighties in the exhibition of recent paintings at the Forum Gallery, 1018 Madison Avenue, through November 21. He is a society painter in the true definition of society as an intimate association with one's fellowmen. His fellowship as his art, like his model and predecessor, Degas', is solitary and his female and nude studies are often struck in unself-conscious moments, before they've had a chance to resume their psychic fragility.

They live in small airless, slightly colored spaces, like most of us, without the power of class or arrogance of facade. The strength of their existence, however tenuous their glance, is in the quiet continuity of their humility. Sometimes they look at one. More often they look away. They have a history of survival

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## SOYER

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and the precedence of a great sacrifice.

Soyer's people might have been brushed with a butterfly wing as though only delicate, colorful, fleeting substance could fix the transition of one moment to nothing of precious life: here a pink, there a bruising shadow; a

dusted blue wall, a white sheet slipping into gray; the fragility of change, silent cross-streets ticking away. Even Soyer's skilled drawing is matted quietly into anonymous backgrounds. Nothing will disturb the absorbed reality of his compositions, these fortifications against time.

Soyer's backgrounds, his

objects, have more substance than his humble subjects. A pocketbook is sharp-edged, a suspended sink heavy, a table corner joined, a cane handle sharply in focus, a piano keyboard definite, shoes tangibly specific. His people are never so sure, their hands almost always clasped in their laps, as

though they were praying under the table.

These paintings are themselves like prayers and will always be around as long as we weather storms, fears, bullies, and ends. Their strength is in survival and the artist knows it for in Soyer's self-portraits he looks straight at us.