

Soyer Genius on Exhibition

By JEANNE PARIS

"If the art of painting is to survive, it must describe people, their lives and times. It must communicate," so states Raphael Soyer, one of America's leading artists, whose first complete retrospective exhibition has opened for a six-week showing at the Whitney Museum of Art. It will then travel to six other museums in the country.



Jeanne Paris

It is an overwhelming exhibition of one man's expression, but it is more than that. It can be called a cross section of New York City's history, from the days of the depression to the era of the "Flower Child."

The dynamism of his work is such that even those who choose to withdraw from society, whether they be the derelicts caught up in the depression or the Hippies of today, all are awestruck into the maelstrom of the living, committee or otherwise. Because he cherishes life in all its forms, he frequently beautifies that which is most sorrowful and frequently downright sordid. The inhabitants of East Village, become bohemian intelligentsia and a simple girl of the East Side, a madonna.

The true greatness of Raphael Soyer lies in his overwhelming sensitivity. When he paints, one sees the paint on the canvas, but behind the canvas there is something greater, his feeling and responsiveness.

HE LOVES to paint women, and is drawn to many types: the unhappy ones, the hard-eyed girls of the street, the working girl or the woman withdrawn into her own world. I don't believe Soyer ever painted a happy or smiling person, with the exception of the portrait of Joseph Stella, who sits like a Buddha, with a fleeting resemblance of a smile across his face.

His many portraits of his family and friends re-



"Shopgirls" is one of the works by Raphael Soyer included in the retrospective exhibition currently at the Whitney Museum in Manhattan.

veal the ability to reach to the inner core of the person and bring the newer his personality and his character. He has painted innumerable self-portraits in the tradition of Rembrandt, for whom he has great regard. The "Homage to Eskins" is one of the greatest works of art done in this country.

Soyer long admired Eskins and using the famous Eskins' "Gross Clinic" as the background, he placed 11 of his close friends, Leonard Baskin, Edward Hopper, Lloyd Goodrich, Reginald Marsh, Jack Levine, John Koch, Edwin Dickinson, Henry Varnum Poor, John Dobbs, with his daughter and himself to one side, and his twin brother, Moses, in the center.

IN THE EARLY days of the depression, when money was an unheard of commodity, Soyer would swap his paintings for the various essentials. It became a way of life for him as well as a pleasure. He would swap a painting for a bookcase, a sweater, or painting by other artists.

He was never impressed by names and easily sold

a Walt Kuhn painting, simply because he did not care for it.

About 1934 Raphael Soyer came upon an old man using a long pole with gum on the end in an attempt to pick up a coin through a sidewalk grating. When the old man raised his head and revealed a weathered, grizzled and kind face, Soyer knew he had to paint him. In conversation, Soyer learned that the old man, Walter Broe, earned about 50 cents a day that way. He offered him 50 cents an hour to pose for him. Broe's astonishment at his good fortune made him accept immediately. He gave up flop houses to sleep in Soyer's studio, and began to enjoy living. He modeled for many of Soyer's friends. Too many sweets and good food affected his teeth, which prompted Soyer and his friends to have an exhibition of paintings, where the old man was the subject, in an effort to raise funds for a set of new teeth.

Some of the artists involved were Isabel Bishop,

Minna Citron, Reginald Marsh, William Zorach, Minna Harkavy and others. The exhibit was to no avail. Walter Broe died during the effort. Broe appeared in almost all Soyer's East Side pictures.

In the early 30's Soyer overworked his paintings, but gradually became involved with a freer use of the paint and technique, using a more impressionistic style, where he did not quite complete the paintings. It was from the 50's on that he began his new approach, expanding his palette and the size of his canvases. This is a great show.

OILS, watercolors and drawings by Raphael Soyer are being shown at the Forum Gallery, 1018 Madison Ave., concurrently with the Whitney Museum Retrospective Exhibition, as are his 50 years of prints at the Associated American Artists, 605 Fifth Ave. The director of the A.A.A., Sylvan Cole, Jr., has also edited a book, "Raphael Soyer: Fifty Years of Printmaking, 1917-1967."

THE WORKS of Alice Trumbull Mason and Her-