FORUM GALLERY

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Robert Fishko, *Director*

RAPHAEL SOYER
(1899-1987)

Jackson Park, c.1930
oil on canvas
11 x 26 1/2 inches
signed lower left "*Raphael Soyer*"



Provenance
The Artist
Pensler Galleries, Washington, D.C.
Forum Gallery, New York (since 2005)

Note

"New York is my country"
_Raphael Soyer

In 1972, on the occasion of a solo exhibition at Forum Gallery and the release of the 349-page monograph for Raphael Soyer published by Abrams, *The New York Times* art critic, John Canaday, and a photographer accompanied Soyer through parts of the city that meant most to him for an article published in the newspaper on October 25th titled "Raphael Soyer, Dean of Realists Sees New York as 'My Country'."

Canaday followed Soyer, "avoiding fashionable areas, to the Lower East Side with the Wlliamsburg Bridge as the focal point of the area where (Soyer) first lived and worked as an artist and where, it is obvious, his heart still lies," he reported. Arriving at the eastern end of Delancey Street, Soyer told Canaday, "I used to be able to set up my easel right in the middle of this street."

Raphael Soyer was born on Christmas Day in 1899 in Borisoglebsk, Russia. In 1912, at the impressionable age of twelve, Raphael Soyer left Russia with his family, traveling to the United States to settle in Manhattan. Raphael and his twin brother, Moses, enrolled in drawing lessons at Cooper Union in 1914. Four years later, Raphael enrolled in the National Academy of Design and later, studied with Guy Pène du Bois (whose own teacher had been famed Ashcan School leader Robert Henri), at the Art Students League.

Pène du Bois encouraged him to be himself and paint what he knew, his family and his environment. Raphael Soyer took this to heart, rejecting the strict academic style of the time for a more personal pictorial language, rooted in the people and locations of New York.

When the stock market crashed in 1929, America saw a drastic reshaping of its cities. Shantytowns, or Hoovervilles, named after President Herbert Hoover and built by and for the homeless, sprang up about the nation. In New York City, they were found on the Great Lawn in Central Park ("Hoover Valley") and at Riverside Park along the Hudson ("Camp Thomas Paine"). Near where Soyer commonly painted and not far from the Bowery Mission where New York City's homeless converged for food and shelter, were the Hoovervilles known as "Packing Box City" on Houston Street and "Hardlucksville" on the East River, which by August of 1932 sheltered about 450 men living in sixty shacks occupying two blocks on East 9th and 10th Streets.

Soyer adapted to the new hardships by painting content deriving almost solely from his sensitive and sympathetic awareness of the grim social issues of the times. His painting style evolved into a new, modern "Urban Realism" wherein Soyer painted the beggars, bums, homeless workers as he saw them on the streets of New York's Union Square, the Village, Fourteenth Street and the Lower East Side. Concurrently, he continued to paint New York locations as he saw them, including *Jackson Park*, painted around 1931.

Jackson Park depicts the scene observed by Soyer from the end of Jackson Street in New York Lower East Side as it meets the East River.

In 1946 for a monograph on his work published by American Artists Group, Soyer recalled, "I shared my first studios with other young artists away from home and school. We roamed the streets of New York together., sketching the piers, the bridges, and the El Structures…In 1929, the year of the crash and the beginning of the Great Depression, my first one-man exhibition was held at the Daniel Galleries…Mrs. Force of the Whitney Museum bought *New York Street Scene* and one painting sold to the Howald Collection of Columbus Museum, Ohio."



Raphael Soyer
New York Street Scene, c. 1929
Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art