FORUM GALLERY

The Fuller Building, 41 East 57th Street, 7th Floor, New York, New York 10022
gallery@forumgallery.com (212) 355-4545 www.forumgallery.com

Robert Fishko, *Director*

RAPHAEL SOYER
(1899-1987)



Eighth Avenue, 1977
oil on canvas
50 x 32 inches
signed lower right "*RAPHAEL SOYER*"

Provenance

The Artist and His Estate

Exhibited

Raphael Soyer: The Shape of Human Dignity, Wichita Art Museum, Wichita, KS, September 11 – October 16, 1988

Raphael Soyer (1899-1987): American Master, Forum Gallery, New York, NY, February 10 - March 4, 2000

The American Dream, Kunsthalle Emden, Emden, Germany; presented jointly with the Drents Museum, Assen, Netherlands, November 19, 2017 - May 27, 2018

Note

"My art is representational by choice. In my opinion, if the art of painting is to survive, it must describe and express people, their lives and times. It must communicate…I consider myself a modern artist or rather an artist of today…because I am influenced by the thoughts, the life and the aesthetics of our time. I am also an inheritor of many great painters who proceeded me and made tradition living, on-going and ever renewable like nature itself, by finding dynamic, contemporary and personal ways to depict and interpret *their* life and *their* time."
_Raphael Soyer

ADAA member

Humanity was **Raphael Soyer**'s subject, and the language by which he chose to express it was his own unique, painterly realism. From within the epicenter of the heated debates about what art is and is not, and how art should and should not look that took place in New York throughout the 20th Century, Raphael Soyer became famous for his unwavering commitment to humanist representation, leading him to be dubbed the "Dean of Realists" by John Canaday writing for *The New York Times* in 1972.

Soyer's thematic focus was the dignity and strength of character of the individual. As a central figure of the Fourteenth Street group of artists in the 1930s, Soyer painted the victims of the Great Depression as he witnessed them in New York - men existing without hope, begging, sleeping in parks and under bridges, dependent on missions for food and shelter. Simultaneously, Soyer was drawn to representing women, a subject of unwavering interest throughout his long career.

Soyer once highlighted an article about his work written by Carl Zigrosser, first Curator of Prints and Drawings at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, that he believed understood his objectives well. Soyer quotes Zigrosser:

> "He has caught and fixed more completely than anyone else a certain type of young womanhood peculiar to the Big City…a working girl, not a debutante, sometimes sturdy, sometimes with a wistful charm, always self-reliant…always with some spark of individuality glowing within her. There is seldom anything posed or artificial in his pictures…He portrays them in the intimacy of a homely and instinctive gesture…No need for him to travel far. He portrays what is at hand, the familiar scenes, his relatives, his friends."

In the 1950s and in his middle age, Soyer took a studio on Second Avenue in the East Village of Manhattan where he met an inspiring cast of characters - the Beat poets and writers, artists, musicians, single mothers holding biracial babies, working women, and the youth and hippies of a new decade of social change who he came to know as he frequented the streets outside his studio. They became the subjects of his paintings with street scenes featuring the youth of the times emerging from his palette, including *Eighth Avenue* painted in 1977.

McGill's obituary notes "Mr. Soyer was known to his friends as a quiet and gentle man of firm resolve. His long devotion to realism in no way lessened his lifelong interest in the art and issues of his time. He was a friend of vanguard artists and writers ranging from Arshile Gorky to Red Grooms and Allen Ginsberg, and it was a hallmark of his career that Mr. Soyer was frequently found at the center of New York's artistic and cultural ferment."

Following the opening of Soyer's retrospective at The Whitney in 1967, Jeanne Paris wrote for the *Long Island Press*: "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 swept into the maelstrom of the living…Because he cherishes life in all its forms, he frequently beautifies that which is most sorrowful…The inhabitants of the 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."