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WEEKEND Arts FINE ARTS LEISURE

Raphael Soyer

'Finding America'

Forum Gallery
745 Fifth Avenue, at 57th Street
Manhattan
Through tomorrow

A realist painter who established his reputation during the Depression era with poignant vignettes of shop girls, office workers and other urban types, Raphael Soyer (1899-1987) hewed to his modest documentary vein throughout the major art-world movements that followed.

This show ranges from early work

of the 1920's, done in a deliberately faux primitive style, like his vivacious 1927 watercolor of a vaudeville scene, to a 1953 canvas depicting seamstresses measuring dress dummies in the garment center.

Soyer was at his best catching the facial expressions and body language of people engaged in mundane activities: the numbingly absorbed look of a tailor working his sewing machine; the faraway, dreamy stare of a half-dressed model, observed unaware as she waits between fittings; the glazed, unhopeful countenances of men downing coffee at what might be a Bowery mission.

As his own subject, he maintained a humble presence, seen in several portraits of himself at work. If Soyer's range and vision were far more limited than those of his great predecessor Edward Hopper, his paintings and drawings still give a nostalgic glimpse of a certain passage in the life of working-class Manhattan.

GRACE GLUECK