



Raphael Soyer, Self-Portrait, 1964. Pencil, 9 3/4 x 7 1/4". Courtesy Forum Gallery.

RAPHAEL SOYER

This year marks yet another opportunity, and perhaps the best to date, to sample in its various forms the work of Raphael Soyer. A comprehensive survey of his prints as well as a selection of his recent paintings is being shown at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington; and now, as a welcome complement, 100 Soyer drawings and watercolors are on view at the Forum Gallery.

It is of course fitting that at least part of his recent production (for the most part these pieces date from the '60s and '70s) should be shown in New York where, at the age of 82, Soyer continues to live and practice. The city, and especially its people (either individually or in groups, on the street or inside), has been a central theme of his art for over six decades; and so it remains. Also much in evidence are other familiar Soyer subjects: portraits of friends, such as artists José de Creeft and Chaim Gross, and the Beat poets Ginsberg, Orlovsky, and Corso; portraits of Soyer himself, now time-worn, but still quizzical and bemused; and his remarkable renderings of the female nude.

Although the show is large, it does not overwhelm. On the

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contrary, one comes away with a feeling both relaxed and intimate. This sense of the familiar is due not only to Soyer's persistent investigation of a limited number of themes, but to the character of his technique as well. His late style is very special indeed, and one of the revelations of this show. It is more abundant, as it were, than his earlier manner, yet curiously reticent, characterized by a nervous, delicate line which constantly stops and starts again and which shapes forms through nuance rather than description. In some respects it bears close comparison with the meandering yet precise line of Degas' drawings, whose influence Soyer has acknowledged. Perhaps Soyer's description of Degas' work may be appropriately applied to his own: "serious, honest, quiet, workmanlike." (Forum, September 11-October 2)

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