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*RAPHAEL SOYER

Forum



Installation view of Alberto Giacometti's portraits of his brother, Diego, 1949-60. Sidney Janis.

portrait executed in 1957 his alterations left a mountainous and grimly affecting accretion of paint on the canvas above Diego's much diminished head.

Giacometti's two-dimensional works, especially the drawings, reveal the important influence of Cézanne, not only in Giacometti's broken, feathery line, which recalls Cézanne's draftsmanship, but also in certain subjects—of the still-life compositions and, in particular, of an untitled 1954 drawing that strongly recalls Cézanne's card players.

But it is his sculpture that remains Giacometti's most important achievement. In the unfolding drama of a finlike bust of Diego, whose aspect changes radically with the viewer's every move, or in the more constrained presence of an attenuated standing woman clenched around her irreducible vertical axis, Giacometti left his most tantalizing and difficult legacy.

While the selection of work at Janis was unquestionably superb, its installation was

in some respects troubling. The sculptures, paintings and drawings were clustered first by medium and then by theme, disregarding chronology. This arrangement commendably emphasized the remarkable consistency of Giacometti's vision once he reached his mature style. Less successfully, the three main sculptural groups—standing figures, including single women and figures rooted in plazas and squares; figures in action, pointing, walking or riding a chariot; and busts of Diego—were backed against walls, so that the viewer confronted them as a series of tableaux. While the modesty and informality of this arrangement was in keeping with Giacometti's ethics and did cozily suggest a studio rather than a gallery, it tended to confuse issues central to the work. The loss of critical distinctions between solitary and grouped figures was the more unfortunate since it is precisely the problem of fixing an object in space that possessed Giacometti throughout his career.

—Nancy Princenthal

THE MODEL in the studio remains a central theme in Soyer's work. Avoiding glamorous or seductive poses, he allows each figure to assume a natural position, sitting on a wooden chair, lying on a cot or undressing before a folding screen. For example, the young model of *Woman Sitting* (1982) leans forward facing the viewer, her small breasts pendulous above her arms, which are planted firmly on her knees. The flesh color, a dirty ochre shadowed with olive green, is reflected in the white drapery on her lap, and then the flesh color changes abruptly as knees modeled in pink and violet emerge below the cloth. The seemingly drab and old-fashioned color becomes dramatic and riveting in the hands of a master.

In *Red Skirt* (1984), the model is more distanced from the viewer, her full figure seen in profile as she sits sideways on a plain wooden chair and stares into space. The sense of isolation is emphasized by an empty chair pushed against the wall in the background. The woman's blue-black blouse and dull-rose skirt just manage to hold their own against a sea of brown and violet brushwork that forms the bare wooden floor and the wall and threatens to engulf the lonely form.

In other works, an area of vibrant color may be introduced. The lush pink of a satiny slip being taken off, a cherry-red blouse or a violet sweater in combination with a blue-black skirt is expertly realized yet kept subservient to the model's pensive mood. The fact that the setting, the props and even the pose may be familiar fades from memory as we contemplate the sadness of a single person.

—Ruth Bass



Raphael Soyer, *Red Skirt*, 1984, oil on canvas, 50 by 42 inches. Forum.