

ART NEWS : FEB. 1988

now executive director of the municipal Landmarks Preservation Commission. Restoration price tags range from \$2,500 to \$275,000.

National ties account for many of the adoptions to date; Italian- and Polish-American groups rushed to the aid of monuments depicting their homelands' historic figures, and French-born Michel Roux, the importer of Grand Marnier liqueur and a supporter of the arts, adopted *Joan of Arc*, a 1915 bronze by Anna Hyatt Huntington, through a charitable foundation bearing his product's name. An autumn rededication ceremony marked the salvation of the Maid of Orleans from the ravages of acid rain and graffiti with renditions of *La Marseillaise* and *The Star-Spangled Banner*, along with speeches by the French ambassador, city officials, and feminist leader Gloria Steinem.

The program has enabled the current congregations of what were once New York's abolitionist churches to adopt a monument to clergyman and slavery foe Henry Ward Beecher. One donor called looking to help a piece by a woman sculptor (a Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney was located in Stuyvesant Square). And then there's the expatriate Texan who was intrigued by the title of Tony Rosenthal's *Alamo* (1966-67) in Cooper Square: he agreed to support its cleaning and repainting even after he learned that the avant-garde black Cor-Ten steel cube bore little resemblance to Davy Crockett's last stand.

But what of the orphans that remain? Officials have pledged to look harder to find them foster parents, but they note a hesitance to adopt works at less glamorous Manhattan locales or isolated sites in New York's outer boroughs.

One overlooked piece, however, has gained from the spontaneous spirit of Grand Marnier's Roux, who was so moved by Parks Commissioner Henry Stern's remarks at the *Joan of Arc* rededication, he says, that he promptly agreed to sponsor the *World War I Bronx Victory Monument*, a 1925 bronze by Jerome Connor that sits near the heavily traveled Moshulu Parkway. Explains Roux, "I am an emotional man."

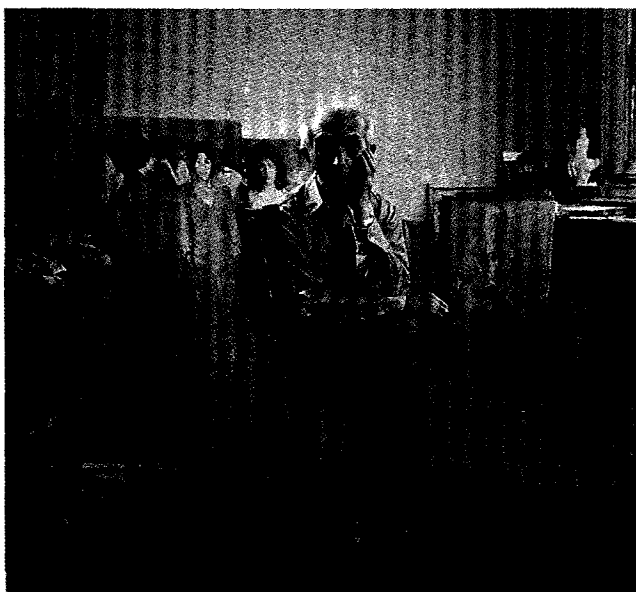
More rescue missions may be forthcoming, says Cohen, who sees a general "renaissance of interest in sculptural heritage." A second group of monuments in New York could gain from future attention, she says, and groups in Boston and Chicago are starting their own versions of the program. —John Herzfeld



Rescued: *Joan of Arc*, 1915, delivered from the ravages of time by the Grand Marnier Foundation, which "adopted" the statue.

*HE WORE HIS HEART ON HIS SLEEVE

The passing of Raphael Soyer from the American art scene on November 4th is especially poignant. The death of this gentle man and distinguished artist was not only a personal loss to those who knew him and to the art world, but it was also an intimation of the passing of a generation that helped bring American art into the 20th century—from provincialism to world dominance. Born in Russia on December



Raphael Soyer in his studio: it was not realism but humanism and the evocation of emotion that attracted him.

25, 1899, as the 19th century was closing, he stands as a paradigm of a group of American artists who had come to the United States in the early years of this century as immigrants, or who were the children of immigrants, and who, in the next decades, added an important ingredient to the American cultural melting pot.

Arriving in this country as a teenager, he and his twin brother, Moses, were already dedicated to becoming artists. It was predictable that, brought up as they were in the ghettos of New York City, they would emerge as urban realists in the late '20s. It was during the great Depression, with its attendant economic and social crises, that realism, both regional and urban, emerged in force and achieved ideological focus. Raphael and Moses, and their younger brother, Isaac, were active within the general matrix of urban realism and the more politically motivated social realism.

The Soyers were sometimes confused with one another because they had some obvious superficial mannerisms in common and their subject matter overlapped. Especially during the '30s and the war years, Raphael and Isaac both moved closer to social realism, expanding their horizons to include contemporary social themes, such as unemployment, homelessness, and poverty. Yet Raphael and Moses shared a general preference for the studio picture. Raphael's affinity was to Jules Pascin, who was then in the U.S., and like Pascin, he transformed the studio picture from an exercise in formal organization into a metaphor for the human condition.

With time, Raphael's focus was increasingly confined to the studio except when he did large-scale paintings symbolic of an idea, such as *Homage to Thomas Eakins* (1964), or of an era, as in *Fairwell to Lincoln Square* (1959). Within this apparently narrow self-imposed frame, he managed to capture a broad spectrum of life. His studio sometimes looked like a staging area for an off-Broadway production, including all sorts of characters—fellow artists, friends, students, Bowery derelicts, would-be dancers, young actresses—or models in all shapes and sizes, nubile or pregnant, and in various stages of undress.

His studies were mostly of women, what he called his "dished-eveled girls." They were not so much posed as caught in some trivial act of combing their hair, straightening a stocking or unhooking a brassiere. His art was built of splintered

* fragments of time, nuances of psychological insight, painted with consistent freshness and acuity. Among them are brilliant portraits, from Arshile Gorky to Edward Hopper, passing as genre paintings. Raphael was one of the finest portrait painters of our time.

He revered great painting, especially by his own particular heroes of the realist tradition—Rembrandt, Degas, Eakins. But it was not their realism that attracted him; it was the underlying humanism, the psychological perception, the evocation of emotion. Raphael found it difficult to reconcile Degas's humanity as revealed in his art with his anti-Semitism. He refused to hear any criticism of Eakins. I could never convince him that Winslow Homer could stand comparison with Eakins. He saw Homer as too cool, a camera eye.

Raphael wore his heart on his sleeve—proudly. He was, in a sense, the last of the Ashcan School painters. He was actually closer to John Sloan than to the second generation of Ashcan painters—Bellows, Du Bois, Hopper, Stuart Davis, and Glenn O. Coleman—or to his own contemporaries, like William Gropper or Reginald Marsh. Raphael was never involved with the muscularity, the drama, or the hurly-burly of life, nor was he a critic or a satirist.

He was perhaps closer to Hopper than to any of the others. They shared a concern with loneliness in modern urban society, but whereas Hopper treated it as a drama of alienation, Soyer saw it in less stark terms. Though his figures seem alone and isolated in space, they are not exemplars of psychological anomie. They seem for the moment taken out of normal social context, poised between past and future, sadly self-absorbed but, by the very nature of gesture and environment, not really alienated. It may be Hopper's sharp indicting light and Soyer's warm suffusing glow that make the difference. That particular Ashcan warmth has gone from American realist painting, which is now again on a run—clear-eyed, sharp-focused, physical, powerful, formal, unsentimental, and as Raphael would have put it, uncommitted.

In a historical sense Raphael may have lived beyond his time, but so do many great artists—Ingres, Rodin, Monet. Soyer kept faith with his beliefs. Gentle and shy as he seemed, he was an intellectual and moral tiger. The course of history, the weight of criticism, and the fickleness of taste did not move him. He stood his ground, went to his studio every day to paint, and made an effort to keep in touch with the art world and with young artists, even though he was increasingly frail. Still, his art continued to grow more powerful, more moving, truer. His was the ultimate victory of the artist over history.

—Milton W. Brown



JOHN BLAISDELL

Christina Orr-Cahall: bringing a different style of management to Washington's largest nongovernment museum.

Washington, D.C.

ROOM AT THE TOP

This month, Christina Orr-Cahall becomes the new director and chief executive officer of the Corcoran Gallery and School of Art. She comes to Washington from California, where since 1981 she has been chief curator and director of the art division of the Oakland Museum (there are also divisions of history and natural science).

Orr-Cahall, 40, is one of a handful of women, including Sylvia Williams at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art and Anne d'Harnoncourt at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, to attain top positions at major American museums. Orr-Cahall suggests the number is growing: "Boards of directors are increasingly able to reach the conclusion that women are capable of heading large, complex institutions."

Observers agree that Orr-Cahall has her work cut out for her at the Corcoran. In Washington, at least, the city's premier private museum is perceived as a floundering institution. The museum and school have been without a permanent director for nearly a year, since Michael Botwinick left to join Knoedler-Modarco S.A., a New York dealer in historical European and American art. The museum has been without a curator of contemporary art since Ned Rifkin left for the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in the fall of 1986, and the art school has been without a permanent dean since midsummer that year.

Reached by phone at the Oakland Museum, Orr-Cahall sounded unfazed by the challenges and chores ahead. "There's a lot to do at the Corcoran in terms of working with the board to clarify the institution's image and to do long-term goal-setting for the museum and the school," she said. "I'm very intrigued by the relationship of the museum and the art school still working together in the late 20th century, and how that can be developed."

For the moment, though, fund-raising and filling the vacancies are Orr-Cahall's top priorities. The new director hopes for "more acquisitions through gifts and purchases, more involvement with contemporary art, and a more dynamic relationship between the museum and the school."

An Americanist with three graduate degrees from Yale, including a Ph.D. in art history, Orr-Cahall is "very impressed with the Corcoran's collection, especially their American collection."

Having taught art history herself, as assistant professor of art history and museum studies at California Polytechnic State University at San Luis Obispo (where she also served as director of the University Gallery from 1978 to 1981), Orr-Cahall "would welcome time to talk to students and do some lectures."

Over the years, the Corcoran has taken a good bit of heat from area artists, who feel that, as the city's largest nongovernment museum, it should be responsive to their needs. For them, Orr-Cahall's appointment holds some signs of encouragement. Although Orr-Cahall insists that she doesn't see a "heavy curatorial role" for herself at the beginning of her tenure, she points out that at Oakland she organized "young-artist and overlooked-artist shows. It's something I enjoy."

How does Orr-Cahall feel about being the Corcoran's ninth director in less than 20 years? "If you look at the statistics, that's not so staggering," she ventures, pointing out that in the past 15 to 20 years the average tenure for an American museum director has been only four and a half years. Although she admits that the Corcoran's situation is "not healthy," she sees it as an inevitable result of the museum world's having become "more complex."

While acknowledging the challenges ahead, Orr-Cahall is optimistic, and her particular perspective may prove to be the medicine the venerable institution needs. "Women have a different style of management," she says. "Over the years, I have come to believe that women tend to treat staff more as individuals and to take more time to support staff creativity, which adds to the strength of the institution. At times museums can really benefit from that change."

—Alice Thorson