

THE ISSUE OF REALISM IN  
RAPHAEL SOYER'S ARTIST PORTRAITS,  
MY FRIENDS AND THE HOMAGE TO THOMAS EAKINS

by

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## ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes Raphael Soyer's artists' portraits within the context of the nineteenth-century traditions in art to which Soyer adhered, as well as the New York art world in which he lived and worked. The first chapter will discuss his early family portraits to elaborate upon Soyer's art education, some of the sources for his interest in realist painting and the modernist trends he would have experienced as a young artist in New York City during the 1920s. The second chapter will discuss artists' portraits Soyer painted during the 1930s and 1940s. Most specifically, My Friends will be analyzed for its nineteenth-century French sources as well as its reflections of Soyer's personal friendships with fellow artists. The final chapter will analyze the Homage to Thomas Eakins and its role as an outward expression of Soyer's defense of realism in an art world dominated by Abstract Expressionism.

## INTRODUCTION

The long and prolific career of Raphael Soyer, who died in 1987 at the age of 88, was accompanied by numerous exhibitions, reviews and catalogues about his work. This literature, for the most part, has been produced in conjunction with exhibitions of his work. The most extensive writing about his paintings, for example, is Lloyd Goodrich's catalogue published in conjunction with a retrospective held at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1967. In general, these catalogues have taken a biographical approach, describing his entire career and only briefly analyzing individual paintings. Other exhibition catalogues have concentrated on his career as a printmaker, draughtsman and watercolorist, and on specific themes: such as working class girls and dancers, the female nude, New York city street scenes, and social realist themes.<sup>1</sup>

More important, are the four books written by Soyer himself. These are auto-biographical accounts which include memories about his family and their immigrant experience, memories of his artist friends and his European travels.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lloyd Goodrich, Raphael Soyer (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1967); Lloyd Goodrich, Raphael Soyer (New York: Abrams, 1972) reprints the Goodrich's 1967 text and includes excerpts from Soyer's previously published books. See Selected Bibliography for other exhibition catalogues and articles.

<sup>2</sup> See Selected Bibliography.

While not intended as scholarly exercises, these documents clearly present Soyer as he wished to be remembered. It is significant that nowhere in these catalogues has the theme of Soyer's artists' portraits been addressed. This paper will analyze Soyer's artist portraits within the context of the nineteenth-century artistic traditions to which Soyer adhered, as well as the New York art world in which he lived and worked.

Soyer's interest in portraiture is clearly expressed in the early portraits of his family. Both Dancing Lesson (Fig. 1) and Artist's Parents (Fig. 2) shed light on Soyer's art education and the development of his personal style. In addition, the pictures reveal his relationship to his family and their experience as immigrants. Soyer's early artists' portraits explore the portrait genre for its ability to convey the sitter's personality and, in a larger context, as an expression of the human spirit. A number of Soyer's artist portraits, exhibited as a group in 1941, show us the development of his personal aesthetic.

This dimension of Soyer's work culminated in the 1948 painting, My Friends. This painting also exemplifies Soyer's use of the nineteenth-century European theme of the artist-in-his-studio. The large group portrait, Homage to Thomas Eakins, painted in 1964-1965, again shows Soyer's return to nineteenth-century themes of the homage, the

artist-in-his-studio, and the time-honored tradition of the nude as well as the relationship of Thomas Eakins to these themes. Both My Friends and the Homage are expressions of the larger cultural context of the New York art world at the time of their production. While My Friends is an inward expression about the New York art world Soyer experienced in the 1940s, the Homage is an outward statement of Soyer's commitment to realism in an art world dominated by Abstract Expressionism. The Homage is, indeed, one of this century's strongest defenses of the realist tradition.

## CHAPTER ONE

## EARLY PORTRAITS

Raphael Soyer's enduring interest in portraiture is revealed in the numerous portraits he painted throughout his life. Soyer's earliest efforts focused on his family and himself. Later he painted fellow artist friends, both individually and in groups. Two early family portraits, Dancing Lesson, 1926 (Fig. 1) and Artist's Parents, 1932 (Fig. 2), tell us much about Soyer's early style and his struggle to develop a personal idiom.

Dancing Lesson depicts an intimate family scene. Soyer's sister Rebecca is teaching his twin brother Moses how to dance to the harmonica music their younger brother, Israel, is playing. On the sofa, beside Israel, is their father, Abraham, and to the right, is the partially visible figure of their sleeping grandmother. Their mother, Beyla, sits in a rocker beneath a rubber plant holding a copy of Der Tag (Day), a Yiddish newspaper.<sup>1</sup> The framed photograph hung on the light blue wall portrays the Soyer's

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<sup>1</sup> The Yiddish Masthead of the newspaper is legible (with the exception of the first letter where the page is folded over), however, none of the other writing on the page is legible.

grandparents. Soyer considered this painting significant to his development and numerous later events attest to this opinion.<sup>2</sup>

Most importantly, this painting was created after Soyer had finished his art studies which began in 1914 when he enrolled in evening classes at the Cooper Union and later at the National Academy of Design. At the National Academy (1918-1922) Soyer studied with Francis C. Jones, Charles C. Curran and George W. Maynard. Instruction at the Academy centered on instilling the tenets of traditional academicism, which extolled the flamboyant yet naturalistic style of William Merritt Chase and John Singer Sargent. Soyer learned to render the model with photographic realism and bravura brushwork.

Soyer continued his studies intermittently during the 1920s at the Art Students League where he studied with Guy Pène du Bois (1884-1958) and Boardman Robinson. Soyer's most influential teacher was Pène du Bois who was instrumental in providing Soyer with both encouragement and direction for his art. An intensely shy young man, Soyer was drawn to Pène du Bois whom he felt was essentially a shy

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<sup>2</sup> Raphael Soyer, Diary of an Artist (Washington D.C.: New Republic Press, 1977) 213. Soyer describes the painting in detail.

man as well.<sup>3</sup> With Pène du Bois, Soyer finally found a teacher he could depend on for advice and personal direction. Soyer studied with Pène du Bois for two months during the winter of 1920/1921, and again for three months in early 1923. Guy Pène du Bois was a committed realist and advocate of American art. While not opposed to modernism (he both helped organize and participated in the 1913 Armory Show), he nonetheless had little interest in Cézanne, Cubism or the School of Paris.<sup>4</sup> Pène du Bois believed that in order for art to be viable, it had to be closely connected to life.<sup>5</sup>

Pène du Bois had studied with both William Merritt Chase and Robert Henri, and Soyer's artistic credo is based on these teachings. Soyer wrote: "...if the art of painting is

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<sup>3</sup> Soyer, Diary of an Artist 212-213. Similar accounts by Soyer can be found in Raphael Soyer "Lesson: The Academy, The League, The Classroom" Arts 42 (September 1967): 35-36; Raphael Soyer, Homage to Thomas Eakins, Etc., ed. by Rebecca L. Soyer (South Brunswick: Thomas Yoseloff, 1966) 170; and Betsy Fahlman, Guy Pène Du Bois; Artist About Town (Washington D.C.: Corcoran Gallery, 1980) 27.

<sup>4</sup> Fahlman 4.

<sup>5</sup> Fahlman 6. Instead of Chase's "art for art's sake" philosophy, however, Pène Du Bois' was to adopt Robert Henri's "art for life's sake" philosophy. Pène du Bois studied with Robert Henri at the New York School of Art. Henri strongly influenced his artistic credo in both his painting and his art criticism. Guy Pène du Bois wrote art criticism for Art and Decoration, American Magazine of Art, Magazine of Art, International Studio, and many other periodicals.

to survive, it must describe and express people, their lives and times."<sup>6</sup>

Dancing Lesson is an attempt, as Soyer later describes, to portray subjects "of ordinary interest that were part of my immediate life, in a frank, almost naive manner."<sup>7</sup> This naive style has been attributed to the influence of the self-taught French primitive, Henri Rousseau (Le Douanier) (1844-1910).<sup>8</sup> Soyer, however, did not suffer a primitive or naive painter's inhibitions, which are characterized by a tight, linear style and concern with exact and particular detail. Indeed, the style of Dancing Lesson is much closer to the volumetric forms of Pène du Bois's figures. Moreover, Dancing Lesson is the painting Pène du Bois encouraged Soyer to take to the dealer, Charles Daniel, where, in 1929, Soyer held his first one-person exhibition.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Goodrich, Raphael Soyer (1967) 5.; similar quotes appear in Avis Berman, "Raphael Soyer at 80: 'Not Painting Would be Like Not Breathing,'" Art News 78 (December 1979): 42; and Stuart Preston, "Figure Paintings at ACA Gallery," Burlington Magazine 103 (January 1961): 36.

<sup>7</sup> Soyer, Diary of an Artist, 290.

<sup>8</sup> Goodrich, Raphael Soyer (1967) 8. Stieglitz, in fact, had presented the first American Exhibition of Rousseau's paintings as early as 1910. But, as Goodrich notes, Soyer's primitivism seems more genuine, the result of his urge to paint the things he knew best in a purely personal style.

<sup>9</sup> Soyer, Self-Revelment (New York: Random House, 1967) 63; See also Soyer, Diary of an Artist 213-214.

The slightly later double portrait, Artist's Parents, 1932 (Fig. 2), illustrates a radical departure from the flat style of Dancing Lesson. Executed now in the more painterly style which characterizes so much of his later work, Soyer presents a somber image of his parents seated at a table in their South Bronx apartment. Soyer's father rests his elbows on the table, leaning his head against his hand and staring off in one direction, while his mother, arms resting on the table, stares in a slightly different direction. The room is devoid of any ornamentation except for a centrally placed family photograph resting on top a simple fabric runner atop the sideboard behind the couple. Significantly these figures are alone, suggesting that all their children have grown up and are now living independent lives. Years later Soyer described his parents at the time of this painting's execution as "not too old, but frail, in an atmosphere of melancholy foreboding, for my mother was already showing signs of her breakdown."<sup>10</sup>

This sense of psychological strain in Artist's Parents reminds one of several European portraits, especially Degas's Absinthe Drinker, 1876 (Fig. 7). Soyer's first

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<sup>10</sup> Soyer, Self-Revelment 69; See also Soyer, Diary of an Artist 219. It is not clear exactly when his mother's breakdown occurred, but by 1940, the year his father died, she had already been institutionalized. See Soyer, Self-Revelment 70; and Soyer, Diary of an Artist 221.

awareness of Degas was through book illustrations he studied in the library of the National Academy of Design.<sup>11</sup> Soyer's admiration for Degas is evident in Artist's Parents. In fact, Soyer tells us, the model for the painting was Degas's Absinthe Drinker.<sup>12</sup> Soyer, who followed Degas's composition, presents a reversed close-up of the couple in Degas's painting. As Soyer writes, he wished "to convey...a mood of everydayness, like the gray mood in the Degas painting."<sup>13</sup>

Both Dancing Lesson and Artist's Parents can be interpreted in light of the hardships of immigrant life.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Frank Gettings, Raphael Soyer, Sixty-five Years of Printmaking (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982) 9. Soyer recalls "...Degas ... had a terrific impact on me. I have never tried to imitate him, but Degas is in the back of my head whenever I produce a work of art."

<sup>12</sup> Soyer, Diary of an Artist 292, and Walter K. Gutman, Raphael Soyer: Paintings and Drawings (New York: Shorewood, 1961) 30.

<sup>13</sup> Soyer, Diary of an Artist 292. See also Fahlman 5, who writes that Guy Pène du Bois was also an admirer of French art and, as most art teachers, encouraged his students to study artists whom they admired.

<sup>14</sup> Irving Howe, World of Our Fathers (New York: Harcourt Brace Janovich, 1976) 583; and Harold Rosenberg "Is There a Jewish Art," Commentary 42 (July 1966): 57-60. Both authors have used these paintings as examples of "Jewish art," meaning an art that deals with Jewish subject matter, particularly as experienced by immigrants of New York's Lower East Side in the first half of the twentieth century. Howe writes that all three Soyer brothers' paintings (Raphael Moses and Isaac) "reflect a certain heaviness of milieu, a sense of being ill at ease in the world, the immigrant's feeling of being not 'at home'..." Howe 583.

Soyer had emigrated with his family in 1912, arriving first in Philadelphia and moving shortly thereafter to New York. The family was part of the wave of Eastern Jewish immigration that flooded into the United States from about 1881 to 1920. At the time Soyer made Dancing Lesson, he had just finished his formal art studies and was living and working in the small apartment his family shared. It seems significant that the shallow space of Dancing Lesson evokes the small, cramped South Bronx apartment his family occupied during this period. The figures of the aging couple who had fled Czarist Russia in Artist's Parents are also placed in a shallow space reflecting the physical toll exacted from immigrants living in New York in the early twentieth century.

With Artist's Parents, Soyer also explored his interest in portraying the personalities of his sitters by capturing them in moments of quiet self-absorption. Soyer's father, on arriving in New York in 1912, found work as a teacher of Hebrew on Henry Street in Manhattan's Lower East Side. The teaching profession had been (long before the Soyer's had arrived) over marketed and thus disdained, making it virtually impossible to eke out even a meager living.<sup>15</sup>

Additionally, Soyer tells of his mother's melancholia even during his childhood. She would often begin weeping silently for no apparent reason.<sup>16</sup>

Increasingly, images of isolation, alienation and self-absorption become a major leitmotif in Soyer's paintings. These images are a response to his own sense of alienation and perhaps derives from Soyer's instinctively shy and introverted personality.<sup>17</sup> The ambivalence one senses in Soyer's work--Soyer is at once close to yet set apart from his models--is one the artist consciously cultivates and refines.

Many of Soyer's closest friends, who, in turn, became life-long friends, were those he made with his brothers, Moses and Isaac (who were also artists) when they were young art students. These friends included Chaim Gross, and the

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<sup>16</sup> Soyer, Self-Revelment 25; See also Soyer, Diary of an Artist 180. Soyer conjectures that one of the reasons for his mother's sad disposition was that soon after their marriage his father lost her dowry in a lumber venture in some Lithuanian forest. He also writes of her sense of humor and her ability to raise her large family.

<sup>17</sup> Soyer, Self-Revelment 62; See also Soyer, Diary of an Artist 212.

modernists, Abraham Walkowitz and Arshile Gorky. A number of these friendships, as we shall see in Chapter 2, developed within the immigrant milieu of New York's Lower East Side and provided Soyer with the friendship and encouragement he needed to pursue his chosen profession.

CHAPTER TWO  
MY CONTEMPORARIES  
AND ELDERS, MY FRIENDS

During the late 1930s Soyer began to paint numerous portraits of artists. One result of these efforts was that at an exhibition of sixty of Soyer's paintings at the Associated American Artists Gallery in the spring of 1941, fully one-third were artist portraits. Hung as a group, they were titled "My Contemporaries and Elders."<sup>1</sup> From this unusual act of honoring fellow painters certain questions inevitably arise: What was Soyer's association with these artists and how did they affect his development as an artist? Some of the portraits were of friends, artists he had known for some time and saw often, such as Arshile Gorky and Abraham Walkowitz (Figs. 3, 4); others were artists he admired and had asked to pose for him, including well-known older men like Max Weber, John Sloan (Fig. 5) and Marsden

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<sup>1</sup> There were several reviews of this show: "Exhibition at Associated American Artists Galleries" Art News 40 (April 1, 1941): 29; "Raphael Soyer Paints 23 Artists and Some Hungering Shop Girls" Art Digest 15 (April 1, 1941): 17; "Exhibition at Associated American Artists, Portraits by Speicher and Soyer" Parnassus 13 (April 1941): 158; Review, Emily Genauer, World-Telegram 23 March 1941: sec. 8: 9; Review, Howard Devree, New York Times 23 March 1941: sec. 9: 10.

Hartley. Also included were Joseph Stella, David Burliuk, Reginald Marsh (Fig. 6), William Gropper, Philip Evergood, Milton Avery and Moses Soyer. The group of paintings formed an interesting combination of realists and modernists.

Contemporary reviews of the exhibition commented on the portraits' "dignity...they remain part of that studio environment of paint, dressing screen, and corner sink. All twenty-three of them are stamped with the mark of Soyer. They all come away with a little of his gentleness and pathos."<sup>2</sup> Another reviewer described the exhibition as follows: "Shy, diminutive Raphael Soyer has painted twenty-three of his 'Contemporaries and Elders' - not as faces but as people whom he knows as friends, honors as artists and respects as individuals.... [these] painted artists are a confident lot, the assurance of their accomplishments settling contentedly upon them."<sup>3</sup> By now Soyer had not only overcome his shyness but he had made friends with many of New York's best known artists. His willingness to exhibit this group of portraits indicates his belief in his

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<sup>2</sup> "Exhibition at the Associated American Artists" Parnassus 13 (April 1941): 158.

<sup>3</sup> "Raphael Soyer Paints 23 Artists..." Art Digest 15 (April 1, 1941): 17.

abilities and in his position in the New York art world.<sup>4</sup> All of the portraits are painted in Soyer's representational style, whether the sitter was a realist or a modernist.<sup>5</sup> Paramount was their shared profession, not the style in which they worked. In this sense, the show was an homage to the profession of painting and the pride and camaraderie he experienced with his colleagues, matters of style aside.

The likeness of Abraham Walkowitz (1880-1965), a somber three-quarter profile (Fig. 4), is an example of the modernists Soyer painted. Earlier in his career, Walkowitz had been closely associated with Alfred Stieglitz and a member of his '291' gallery. It seems unlikely, however, that Walkowitz' art influenced Soyer, who remained firmly committed to realism from his earliest training. Soyer nonetheless appreciated Walkowitz contributions to American

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<sup>4</sup> Goodrich, Raphael Soyer (1967) 16-17. Soyer had enjoyed a steady relationship with the Daniel Gallery since 1929. Even after the gallery closed in 1931 (a victim of the Depression), Soyer immediately found another dealer, the Valentine Gallery, who bought four paintings on the spot and gave him three one-man shows during the 1930s. Soyer later switched to the Associated American Artists gallery where he held his 1941 "My Contemporaries and Elders" exhibition and two more shows in the 1940s.

<sup>5</sup> These terms are used here to express the "realist" art rooted in nineteenth-century painting from Eakins to Henri and the early twentieth-century urban realists (Sloan, Bellows, etc.); and "modernist" painting rooted in European modernist painting of Cézanne, Picasso and Braque as well as the European Surrealist art and poetry that found expression in the United States during the 1940s.

art.<sup>6</sup> The two artists had first met in the mid-1920s at the Jewish Art Center, a little known club for writers and artists, on New York's Lower East Side. Soyer wrote: "Who sent me there I can no longer remember. I came with a few small, tentative pictures which I had brought back from a month's painting in Gloucester."<sup>7</sup> He showed his work to Walkowitz and the Jewish immigrant artists Jennings Tofel and Benjamin Kopman. He was accepted into their club and through the club sold a number of early paintings, mostly landscapes. This marked Soyer's first professional recognition.<sup>8</sup> Soyer seemed to think Walkowitz had stopped

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<sup>6</sup> Soyer, Self-Revelment 51-52; See also Soyer, Diary of an Artist 202-203.

<sup>7</sup> Soyer, Self-Revelment 50-51; See also Soyer, Diary of an Artist 201-202.

<sup>8</sup> Soyer, Self-Revelment 51; See also Soyer, Diary of an Artist 201-202. While he sold a few pictures there, Soyer viewed the Center as "an inbred group at the Jewish Art Center - proud, touchy, self-conscious and pretentious in its Jewishness. The painters write, the writers were involved in painting. Both Tofel and Kopman wrote books a la Neitzsche and painted mystical and confused paintings." According to Arthur Granick, Jennings Tofel (New York: Abrams, 1975) 24, Jennings Tofel (1891-1959) immigrated to the United States when he was fourteen. Early in Tofel's career he received the attention of Alfred Steiglitz. Tofel also wrote numerous essays in Yiddish for Jewish publications and for the experimental Yiddish publication Shriftn. The well-known Yiddish poets Ignatoff, Mani Leib and Zishi Landau provided the nucleus of the Jewish Art Club made up of poets, writers and painters who met regularly in one another's homes. Among the painters in the groups were Abraham Walkowitz, Max Weber, Raphael Soyer, Moses Soyer, Chaim Gross, Benjamin Kopman and Tofel.

painting by the mid-1920s for he says he never knew him to have a studio. Soyer worked hard to have Walkowitz honored, two years before his death, with the special award granted to older artists by the American Institute of Arts and Letters.<sup>9</sup>

Another group Soyer associated with in the 1920s was made up of Russian artists. This group included the modernist Arshile Gorky (1905-1948). As a friend, Gorky often visited Soyer's studio to sketch, and Soyer did a number of portraits of him. Gorky, an Armenian who came to the United States when he was sixteen, maintained friendships with other Slavic and Russian artists in New York with whom he shared a similar background.<sup>10</sup> In his

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<sup>9</sup> Soyer, Self-Revelment 51; See also Soyer, Diary of an Artist 202-203.

<sup>10</sup> Melvin P. Lader, Arshile Gorky (New York: Abbeville, 1985) 21. This group included Gorky, Raphael, Isaac and Moses Soyer, Nicholas Vasilieff, David Burluk and John Graham. Burluk and Graham have been credited with transmitting modernist ideas about art to Gorky. See also Harry Rand, Arshile Gorky, The Implications of Symbols (Montclair, New Jersey: Allenheld, Isnun, 1980) 209. Gorky was one of the few artists in the 1920s and 1930s in America who admired twentieth century European artists (Cézanne, Picasso, Braque, and Miro). In the 1940s advanced American artists were influenced by European Surrealists who came to America just before and during World War II. These artists included Jean Helion (1938); Yves Tanguy and Matta (1939); and Max Ernst, Andre Masson, Jacques Lipchitz and the poet Andre Breton (1941); and Marcel Duchamp who returned to the United States in 1942.

Diary of an Artist, Soyer reminisced about their relationship:

... He [Gorky] liked to come to my studio, which was across from where he and Agnes lived on Union Square. He would appear several times a week and sketch whomever I happened to be painting....He made many drawings of me too, and I painted and drew him whenever I had a chance. He was a fascinating subject--tall, thin, with deer-like eyes, a naive and haunted expression and blue-black hair. He had beautiful eyes.<sup>11</sup>

While Soyer admired Gorky's paintings of his family and memories of his childhood in Armenia, he was not impressed with Gorky's efforts in abstraction.<sup>12</sup> Certainly, while aware of modernism and avant-garde movements, Soyer chose his own path. There was never any thought of abandoning friends because of the style in which they chose to paint. Soyer also searched out those artists he admired. In the case of the realist painter John Sloan (1871-1951) (Fig. 5), for example, Soyer sympathized about the lack of appreciation for Sloan's later paintings.

Writing about his series of artist portraits many years later, after viewing them at the 1967 retrospective of his work at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Soyer expressed disappointment that they were painted at such a "low ebb" in

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<sup>11</sup> Soyer, Self-Revelment 99; See also Soyer, Diary of an Artist 241.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Gorky's The Liver Is the Cock's Comb, 1944 (Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Gift of Seymour H. Knox, 1956). Illustrated in Lader, Fig. 74.

his career. "Many of us," Soyer writes, "pass through a critical period during our middle years, when our work often becomes pedestrian, dull, lethargic. Fortunately, some of us become aware of this static state and are able to pull ourselves out of it."<sup>13</sup> This passage indicates a time when Soyer questioned himself about the direction of his art, and could as well have been in partial reaction to the Depression and the outbreak of World War II in Europe.

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The culmination of this series of artist portraits is the 1948 painting, My Friends (Fig. 8). This painting remained in Soyer's studio until 1962 when he donated it to the Butler Institute of American Art (Youngstown, Ohio).<sup>14</sup> My Friends offers a view into Soyer's studio, probably the

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<sup>13</sup> Soyer, Self-Revelment 95-96; See also Soyer, Diary of an Artist 238. The entry is dated July 15, 1967. He had even kept a diary while he painted these artists portraits, but he destroyed it.

<sup>14</sup> Telephone conversation with Clyde Singer, Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio, June 12, 1990. Soyer donated the painting in order to take advantage of IRS deductions. Economics aside, he was willing to part with the painting because he had taken up the personal challenge to create another large group portrait. 1962 was the year Soyer went to see the Thomas Eakins retrospective exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the year he conceived the idea of the Homage to Thomas Eakins.

one on Lincoln Square that he occupied for fourteen years until he was forced to move in 1959.<sup>15</sup> The overall tenebrous tone of the painting is relieved by the light blue sideboard on the left and the blue of Soyer's shirt on the far right. These blue highlights encompass the group, while touches of red throughout the painting--Moses's scarf, and the glasses filled with wine in the foreground--enliven the scene. From a source overhead, light streams down forming an arc that illuminates the group and accentuates the horizontality of the composition. The zig-zag path of the figures from left to right leads the viewer back to the corner of the studio where Soyer has placed himself unobtrusively and undistracted, working at his easel. In the right foreground, on a folding chair, is a bottle of wine and three partially filled glasses, implying both the social interaction of the group gathered in Soyer's studio and referring as well to the scroll, lying on the floor next to the chair, that is inscribed "Friendship is the Wine of Life." This life-affirming, even joyful, inscription

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<sup>15</sup> Abram Lerner, Soyer Since 1960 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), n.pag. Lerner discusses Soyer's painting Farewell To Lincoln Square, 1959 which he says was painted when Soyer was forced to move from the building where he had maintained a studio for fourteen years because of the construction of Lincoln Center. Farewell To Lincoln Square marks the beginning of some of the larger format paintings Soyer created from the 1960s on. It measures 60x65 inches (Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.).

contradicts the melancholic, introspective group gathered in the studio. Soyer confronts us again, as he did with Artist's Parents, with an image of people brought together by a shared feeling of disjunction, estrangement, and escape from the world outside.

Seated in the center of the studio, facing frontally and looking out at the viewer is the domineering presence of David Burliuk (American, born in Russia; 1882-1967), an early Cubo-Futurist and poet.<sup>16</sup> Burliuk had arrived in the United States at the age of forty, having already earned a reputation in Eastern Europe as a modernist. In 1910 he was invited by Kandinsky to participate in the second Der Blaue Reiter Exhibition in Munich. During the 1920s and 1930s in New York, Burliuk was held in great esteem by his fellow artists for his role in the artistic movements that preceded

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<sup>16</sup> Soyer, Self-Revelment 93; See also Soyer, Diary of an Artist 236. According to Katherine S. Dreier, Burliuk (New York: The Société Anonyme and Color and Rhyme, 1944) 94 and 105. Burliuk's first exhibition after his immigration to the United States in 1922 was held at the Brooklyn Museum in March of 1923. This first important exhibition of Russian art in New York included forty-four paintings by Burliuk. Shortly after his arrival in New York, Burliuk met Briton and Bob Chanler whose salons were open to all painters and writers and through whom Burliuk met Marcel Duchamp. Shortly after Burliuk arrived in New York he met Isadore Duncan and through her, Abraham Walkowitz. Burliuk held his first one-man exhibition in America at the Société Anonyme in March 1924.

the Russian Revolution.<sup>17</sup> Nearly two decades older than Raphael and his twin Moses, the brothers held a filial respect for the older artist. Moses's studio, like Raphael's, was always open to the older generation of artists such as Walkowitz, Weber, Burliuk and Joseph Stella.<sup>18</sup> Burliuk's placement in the composition renders him not only the focus of the painting but symbolizes Raphael's affection and esteem for him. Representing the elder artist, the benign father figure, of the group, Burliuk's large body fills the chair. Burliuk's left arm is bent and his hand rests on the arm of the chair providing the leverage needed to allow him to rise. Given the place of honor, Burliuk sits in an upholstered wing chair with claw-footed arms and cabriole legs. The ornate Chippendale-styled chair is in sharp contrast to the simple folding chairs occupied by some of the others--the one in the foreground, and the straight back chair occupied by Raphael--thus, Burliuk is physically embraced by the "younger" artists who surround him on either side.

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<sup>17</sup> Dore Ashton, The New York School, A Cultural Reckoning (New York: Viking, 1973) 24.

<sup>18</sup> David Soyer in Alfred Werner, Moses Soyer (South Brunswick: A.S. Barnes, 1970) 13.

Raphael Soyer vividly recalled his affection for Burliuk when he saw this painting anew at the opening of his 1967 retrospective at the Whitney Museum:

At the exhibition I particularly missed David and Marusia Burliuk. On one wall of the Whitney is a large conversation painting of artists, models and myself. Burliuk is pictured there, sitting venerably in the center. Another canvas shows him painting his patient wife. He would have been so pleased to see these, as if he himself were participating in the show. When I last saw him he complained softly, "Everything withers in me - my bones, my heart. Everything dries in me and shrinks."<sup>19</sup>

From Burliuk's position in the painting, the viewer's gaze travels forward to the standing figure of Moses Soyer who clasps a red scarf in his hands, and slightly behind him to the figure of the Russian-born, American artist, Nicolai Cikovsky (1894-1985), who holds a blue pamphlet.<sup>20</sup> Soyer had met Cikovsky at the Charles Daniel Gallery when Soyer first showed his work there in 1929. In fact, Soyer credited Cikovsky (along with Soyer's wife, Rebecca) with awakening him to current political events, particularly Fascism and the rise of the Nazis. Cikovsky introduced

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<sup>19</sup> Soyer, Self-Revelment 104; See also Soyer, Diary of an Artist 246. The entry is dated October 24, 1966.

<sup>20</sup> Dreier 120. Cikovsky came to the United States in 1923 after receiving word of his brother's death and his need to collect a small inheritance. As a young artist in Russia Cikovsky had been inspired by Burliuk. When Cikovsky came to the United States he sought out Burliuk; they often went on painting expeditions together.

Soyer to the John Reed Club of Artists and Writers, where Soyer first taught.<sup>21</sup>

Also, portrayed in My Friends, to Burliuk's left, is the seated figure of the sculptor and draughtsman Chaim Gross (American, born in East Austria, 1904), who sketches as he observes Soyer working at his easel.<sup>22</sup> Gross was an art student with Moses. The Soyer brothers saw a great deal of Gross in their art student days and maintained a life-long friendship with him. Like Raphael and Moses, Gross shared an abiding interest in figurative art.

Clearly, once the men in the painting are identified as Raphael Soyer's male artist friends, one is forced to ask what is the function of the two women in the scene? In the case of the unidentified female model standing half-

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<sup>21</sup> The John Reed Club of Artists and Writers, formed in 1929, was named after the journalist and founder of the American Communist Party; Reed was also author of Ten Days That Shook the World, having been an eyewitness to the 1917 Russian Revolution. In New York, artists and writers who had been meeting informally in the offices of the New Masses, discussing the role of art in the revolutionary class struggle, decided to form their own club, rent their own space and provide exhibition spaces and art classes.

<sup>22</sup> Alfred Werner, Chaim Gross Watercolors and Drawings (New York: Abrams, 1979) 55-56. Gross's family moved to Kolomyia in 1914. This city was a scene of pillage and destruction during the first weeks of World War I. In 1916-18 Gross fled with his family from the Russian terror, joining the Jewish exodus from Kolomyia. He was separated from his family but reunited with them in Austrian Silesia. Chaim and his brother, Abraham, immigrated to New York in 1921 where they were helped by their brother, Naftoli, who lived on New York's Lower East Side.

disclosed by the screen, it seems reasonable to assume that she alludes to one of Soyer's most numerous subjects, the female nude. Because she is nude and because she looks directly out at the viewer, the eye is inevitable drawn back into the recesses of the studio. Abram Lerner described this painting as an homage to Courbet's Atelier (The Studio: A Real Allegory Concerning Seven Years of My Artistic Life, 1854-1855) (Fig. 10) and the nude model appears as a deliberate variation on a theme from this well-known nineteenth-century French painting.<sup>23</sup> She recalls Courbet's metaphor of the model as the "inspiring muse." In the 1940s Soyer's art turned away from city street scenes and moved his art indoors, where he remained for nearly a decade. Soyer's interest in women increased and he became increasingly absorbed with them, both as human beings and as physical presences. Soyer's concern for women as specific individuals is demonstrated by his numerous portrayals of specific personages, such as Maureen Stapleton, and of professional models who became friends.<sup>24</sup> Soyer's fascination with the nude is perhaps a continuation from his student days as it is a subject specifically associated with academic atelier studies.

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<sup>23</sup> Abram Lerner, Soyer Since 1960 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982) n.pag.

<sup>24</sup> Goodrich, Raphael Soyer (1967) 17-18.

The seated woman in the foreground, to the left of Moses and Cikovsky, has been identified as the model Cynthia Brown, who often visited Soyer's studio. Raphael Soyer's studio was a constant hubbub of activity, filled with the coming and going of friends, artists and models visiting and working.<sup>25</sup> Cynthia Brown epitomizes the "type" of woman Soyer portrayed throughout his career; images of working girls, actresses and dancers at work or at rest, clothed or unclothed. Like Courbet, Soyer pays homage to the portrayal of unidealized observation by presenting his model in an unidealized pose and with unidealized proportions.

Both women models assert the essence of Soyer's art as that of a studio artist. But this merely obscures the true ambiance of Soyer's atelier for his studio was his "locale," a place through which life passed:

Almost everyone passed through [his] studio at one time or another -- the bum, the shop girl, the dancer, the model, the art student, the prostitute, to sit for awhile, to rest, and to talk. When a model posed, she did not become a symbol of beauty or a formal abstraction, she brought with her into the studio her life, her hopes, or her despair. In painting the studio, ... [Soyer] painted a reflection of the world.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Telephone conversation with Clyde Singer (born in 1908), Butler Institute of American Art, June, 1990. See also Milton Brown, From the Armory Show to the Depression (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955) 185.

<sup>26</sup> Brown 185. Brown felt the same was true for Moses Soyer as well.

The concept of the studio artist embodies a larger theme that Soyer explored, that of the artist-in-his-studio. This is the theme of Courbet's Atelier as well. Depictions of the artist-in-his-studio abounded in seventeenth-century Dutch and Spanish art and nineteenth-century artists (including Courbet) were obsessed with the theme of artistic creation. An extraordinary number of atelier paintings were produced during the nineteenth century, depicting both the studios of well-known artists as well as those of great artists of the past. My Friends is very self-consciously allied with this tradition.<sup>27</sup>

The theme of artistic creation is concerned primarily with the act of painting. Throughout his career Soyer portrayed himself working at his easel, fellow artists at work in their studios, the casual events of models dressing and undressing or at rest, and other commonplace moments in the daily life of artist's studio. The appeal of Courbet's Atelier for Soyer is to the painting's theme rather than its

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<sup>27</sup> Linda Nochlin, Gustave Courbet: A Study of Style and Society (New York: Garland, 1976) 211. Nochlin notes such nineteenth century atelier representations such as Horace Vernet's Atelier and those representing great artists of the past such as Giotto in the Studio of Cimabue which had been treated several times before 1850. For an exhaustive examination of representations of this theme in the history of art, particularly in relation to Courbet's painting, see Rene Huyge, Germain Bazin and Helene Jean Adhemar, Courbet: L'Atelier du peintre: Allegorie realie, 1855 (Monographies des peintres du Musée du Louvre, III) Paris, 1944, 20-21, cited in Nochlin 211, fn. 1.

style. My Friends is not a manifesto for realism in the way Courbet's Atelier was intended to be as it lacks the flamboyant exhibition of the artist's subjects (on the left) and his audience (on the right) that Courbet presents. Instead it reflects the daily experience in Soyer's studio; those days filled with work, friends, and models.

Cynthia Brown's presence in the work also reminds us of the strong influence of Degas upon Soyer, for her pose is reminiscent of the woman in Degas's Absinthe Drinker, 1876 (Fig. 7). The forlorn figure of Cynthia Brown conveys the same feeling of detachment and despair embodied in the Absinthe Drinker. She sits lost in thought, neither participating as artist or model, but rather as an image of the lonely individual living in an increasingly isolated urban environment. Soyer portrayed again and again this mood of lonely isolation.<sup>28</sup>

In 1967 Goodrich described the men in the painting and discussed the wine and scroll in the foreground, but he mentioned neither the models in the painting nor the fact

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<sup>28</sup> For example, in the paintings by Soyer: Intimate Interior, c. 1933 (Collection Mr. and Mrs. Irving M. Ram, Great Neck, New York); Sentimental Girl, c. 1933 (Collection Bella and Sol Fishko, New York); Reflection, 1940 (The Harry N. Abrams Family Collection, New York); and Pensive Girl, 1946-47 (Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Patron Art Friend), illustrated in Goodrich, Raphael Soyer (1972), Figures 62, 63, 133, and 168, respectively.

that it can be read as an homage to Courbet.<sup>29</sup> It is Lerner who noted the "obvious uncomfortable strain of self-consciousness in the composition as well as in the pose of the figures...it...seems to have been a joyless enterprise, more a chore than an invention."<sup>30</sup> Soyer, in fact, reworked various parts of the canvas at a later time.<sup>31</sup> A photograph of the painting included in Soyer's 1967 retrospective exhibition catalogue for the Whitney Museum of American Art (Fig. 9) shows the painting in an earlier state. The area behind the screen is painted as a blank space relieved by three white vertical bands.<sup>32</sup>

Soyer portrayed his studio walls adorned with several unidentified paintings. He later added to the painting a copy of Picasso's 1949 poster, The Dove of Peace, on the wall behind the screen. Apparently Soyer became so interested in this work that he felt compelled to include it

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<sup>29</sup> Goodrich, Raphael Soyer (1967) 17.

<sup>30</sup> Lerner n.pag.

<sup>31</sup> Per telephone conversation with Clyde Singer, Butler Institute of American Art June 12, 1990. Mr. Singer knew Raphael and was working at the Butler Institute when the painting was donated to the museum.

<sup>32</sup> This must have been a publishing error. Apparently rather than obtaining a photograph from the Butler Institute, the Whitney used an old photograph of the painting. Nonetheless, it is puzzling because Gutman's 1961 catalog on Raphael illustrates the painting with the Dove of Peace poster behind the screen.

in the background.<sup>33</sup> This inclusion is Soyer's, perhaps sentimental, homage to Picasso. It is not surprising in light of Picasso's well-known opposition to Franco and Hitler. For Picasso the dove, a universal symbol of peace and good will, was in stark contrast to the war torn years.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the stable horizontal grouping of the figures and the unifying light, the painting seems labored. The pastiche quality of the picture is perhaps due to a certain clumsiness in Soyer's combining individual studies into a larger composition. He had never worked on a canvas the size of My Friends before, and his struggle with such a large composition is evident. One may conjecture that in this, Soyer's first life-size canvas, he may well have felt daunted by the physical scale of the blank canvas.

Soyer called My Friends a "large conversation painting," whereas a 1961 catalogue of Soyer's work titled the painting Artists and Models. The titles recall another

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<sup>33</sup> According to Clyde Singer, Curator at the Butler Institute. (Telephone conversation with Clyde Singer, June 12, 1990.) The Dove of Peace addition is enigmatic with respect to Soyer's well-known opposition to abstract art. See, for example, his exchange of letters in the early 1970s with Rudolph Baranik where he writes of his task to refute abstraction. See also Soyer, Diary of an Artist 272-180.

<sup>34</sup> Perhaps Soyer was thinking of Arshile Gorky, who committed suicide in 1948 and whose work was indebted to European modernism, although there is no evidence to support this theory.

artist-in-his-studio painting that Soyer studied while working on his Homage, Fantin-Latour's L'Atelier des Batignolles, 1870 (Fig. 11), a tribute to Manet. Fantin presents Manet working at his easel surrounded by friends, both artists and critics.<sup>35</sup> The studio is filled with the accoutrement of the artist's trade; the paintings on the wall, a table to one side with a figurative sculpture and oriental jars. Likewise, Soyer portrays fellow artists painting and drawing from the model, conversing, the tools of the painter, the jar of paint brushes, the bottle of turpentine and equine sculpture which are exhibited on the sideboard, a rag that lies next to the chair in the foreground and the paintings on the wall.

The significance of Fantin's Batignolles for Soyer is the sense of isolation that permeates the painting. This sense of isolation is distinctive characteristic of Fantin's group portraits.<sup>36</sup> In Fantin's Batignolles, as in Soyer's My Friends, no two figures looks at each other. The lack of

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<sup>35</sup> Soyer, Homage to Thomas Eakins, Etc 15; See also, Soyer, Diary of an Artist 80.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Lucie-Smith, Fantin-Latour (New York: Rizzoli, 1979) 146. The author describes the painting: "Gathered around Manet are a group of artists and critics. Standing behind him is the German painter Scholderer, while seated, and apparently the subject of the portrait, is the writer Astur. The group on the right portrays, reading from left to right: Renoir, Zola, Edmond Maitre, Bazille...and finally, Claude Monet, who was included in the last moment as a substitute for someone else."

contact among any of the figures in My Friends intensifies the self-conscious strain and the overall awkwardness of the composition. For example, Cikovsky looks off in one direction, and Moses, his eyes closed, stands as if he were alone in the room. Cynthia Brown stares down into nothingness. There is an uncomfortable nearness of the figures as well; Gross is squeezed between the screen and Burliuk's large bulk, yet he seems to sit there easily in the space allotted him. Moses's position is similarly awkward, as he can neither step forward or backward without bumping into either Cikovsky, Cynthia Brown or Burliuk. Cikovsky position behind Cynthia Brown's seated form traps him in the corner of the room.

My Friends is a labored effort to present a conflation of Soyer's esteem for his friends, his profession and his debt to nineteenth-century French Realism. Yet it is this combination of themes that sets this painting apart from Soyer's earlier artist portraits. My Friends is Soyer's most mature effort, up to this time, to express his personal aesthetic. The painting stands as an affirmation, not only of Soyer's artist friendships, but of his veneration for French nineteenth-century painting. An undated painting, Self-Portrait of the Artist, with Self-Portraits of Rembrandt, Corot and Degas, presumably painted around 1940, (Fig. 12), specifically identifies Soyer's admiration of

masters of both the Dutch seventeenth century and nineteenth-century French masters. Regarding this work, Soyer wrote the following:

Once, alone in the studio as I usually was when painting myself, I began to think of the self-portraits of some of my favorite artists, and it suddenly occurred to me to paint myself in this pensive pose alongside self-portraits of Rembrandt, Corot and Degas which I had copied from reproductions. Placing myself in their company was not a delusion of grandeur, but an expression of esteem and of love for their work.<sup>37</sup>

My Friends may be seen as both auto-biographical and consciously self-referential. Did Soyer's retreat to his studio insulate him, as well, from the events of the New York art world he claimed to belong to? The final chapter of the thesis will examine this issue.

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<sup>37</sup> Soyer, Self-Revelment 103; See also Soyer, Diary of An Artist 247.

## CHAPTER THREE

HOMAGE TO THOMAS EAKINS

Today Soyer's Homage to Thomas Eakins, 1962-1965 (Fig. 13) is housed in the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. In 1968 the Hirshhorn Foundation (not yet formed as a museum) lent the picture to the National Portrait Gallery, where it was hung in the museum's lobby in conjunction with the Gallery's "This New Man" exhibition.<sup>1</sup> The Homage stands as a testament not just to Thomas Eakins (1844-1916), but to all the American artists and supporters of American art Soyer portrayed in the painting. Soyer also published a book about the painting by the same title. Compiled from personal journals kept by Soyer from 1963 to 1965, the book describes the years the artist spent painting the portraits to be included in the Homage, as well as his extensive European travels. While I do not believe that what Soyer

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<sup>1</sup> The National Portrait Gallery was founded in 1962. According to the registrar's office of the National Portrait Gallery, Washington D.C. (telephone conversation October 12, 1990) the Homage to Thomas Eakins was lent to the Gallery from September 28, 1968 to December 31, 1969. The loan was extended to late 1970 and thereafter returned to New York warehouse where the Hirshhorn collection was then housed. The painting, while not part of the National Gallery's "This New Man" exhibition was specifically borrowed to adorn the walls of its lobby. According to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden exhibition history on the Homage, it was lent for National Gallery's exhibition (personal correspondence, October 15, 1990).

wrote is necessarily a more valid explanation of the work than direct observation of the painting itself, his writings do verify certain facts and suppositions. As such, the book aides us in understanding the work, and references to it have been incorporated into the following analysis of the painting.<sup>2</sup> Soyer also asserted that writing is an extension of an artist's work and calls up such examples as "the aphorisms of Michaelangelo and Degas, the letters of Van Gogh and Pissaro, the diaries of Delacroix and Gaug[u]in [sic]."<sup>3</sup> Another reason was surely Soyer's effort to control what was written about him in order to shape posterity's view of him.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike the specific studio setting of My Friends, the setting for the Homage is indeterminate. It is an imagined space, perhaps a museum, recalling Soyer's inspiration for

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<sup>2</sup> Soyer wrote four books over the course of his career (see Selected Bibliography). He had been interested in writing since childhood, an interest he may have acquired from his father who was a Hebrew teacher and writer of Yiddish fairytales. Off and on over the years Soyer had kept a diary, writing in one for several months at a time and then destroying it (as he did with the diary he kept during the 1930s and 1940s when he painted his series of artists portraits).

<sup>3</sup> Soyer, Homage to Thomas Eakins, Etc. 5.

<sup>4</sup> This attitude is further demonstrated by the numerous publications, books and magazines, written by or about Soyer in which he reiterates virtually verbatim key writings and phrases about himself and his art. The footnotes cited throughout this thesis are evidence of this practice.

the painting, the 1962 retrospective exhibition of Eakins's work which Soyer saw in Philadelphia.<sup>5</sup> Rather than an intimate group of friends gathered in Soyer's studio as portrayed in My Friends, he presents (with the notable exception of Lloyd Goodrich) a group of artists with similar attitudes towards realism honoring one of their own. Soyer selected the artists to be pictured on the basis of their admiration for Thomas Eakins. These artists include Soyer, in the far left background, and his brother, Moses, in the center front row. Others reading from left to right are: Leonard Baskin, Edward Hopper, Lloyd Goodrich, Reginald Marsh, Jack Levine, John Koch, Edwin Dickinson, Henry Varnum Poor and John Dobbs. Mary (now Mrs. Arnold Lieber), Raphael Soyer's daughter, is behind him holding a tray of drinks. Figure 14 is a key to the figures portrayed in the Homage.

In addition, Soyer depicted four Eakins paintings. The three in the background are: The Gross Clinic, 1875 (which is in the center), The Salutat, 1898 (to its left), William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River,

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<sup>5</sup> The Eakins retrospective was organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. in 1961. It traveled to the Art Institute of Chicago, 1961-62, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1962. The exhibition catalogue was written by Lloyd Goodrich, one of the major figures in Eakins scholarship. Goodrich's first study of Eakins, Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work, was published in 1933. This was later expanded into a two volume study in 1982, Thomas Eakins (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University) for the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

1908 (to its right). In the foreground, revealed in the book open on the table, is the fourth Eakins painting, the portrait of Walt Whitman, 1887. The Homage is composed from Soyer's individual portraits (with the exception of Reginald Marsh in which instance Soyer used his 1941 portrait of Marsh). Soyer wrote very little about the individual sittings and made only a few references to individual sessions.<sup>6</sup> From these sessions Soyer made ten preparatory portraits from life and three group compositional sketches.<sup>7</sup> Once again Soyer looks to a French nineteenth-century model, this time to Henri Fantin-Latour's Homage to Delacroix, 1865 (Fig. 14). What are we to make of this group of artists and the Eakins paintings Soyer decided to portray? While ostensibly an homage to Thomas Eakins, Soyer's painting was consciously composed to make an aesthetic statement about realism's place, past and present, in American art.

By examining the individuals selected to sit for Soyer's Homage it is possible to see how Soyer projected his

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<sup>6</sup> Soyer, Homage to Thomas Eakins, Etc. He writes about Hopper (pp. 17-122), Dickinson (pp. 164-169), Levine (pp. 137-140), Baskin (pp. 23-26), the copy of the Marsh portrait (p. 168), and a comment about his daughter, Mary, posing for him (pp. 174-175); See also Soyer Diary of an Artist, for Hopper (pp. 70-75); Baskin (pp. 75-78); Levine (pp. 140-142); Dickinson (pp. 152-154); Marsh (pp. 156-160); and Mary (pp. 154-155).

<sup>7</sup> All the studies also belong to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. A small version of the Homage is in the Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia.

aesthetic statement. The central and most prominent face in the Homage, however, belongs to Lloyd Goodrich who had other important connections to Eakins. The only non-artist of the group, Lloyd Goodrich looks directly at the viewer.

Goodrich, although he had studied art from 1913 to 1915 at the Art Students League (his most influential teacher there was Kenneth Hayes Miller) and then briefly at the National Academy of Design, is better known for his art criticism and for his distinguished career at the Whitney Museum of American Art, where he held a number of positions, including that of Director from 1958 to 1968. Goodrich was an ardent and eloquent champion of American art. In the 1920s, Goodrich worked as editor for The Arts, a national publication devoted to promoting the works and ideas of independent American artists. Goodrich's interest in Thomas Eakins began in the early 1920s when he reviewed the Metropolitan Museum of Art's memorial exhibition of Eakins's work in 1923 for The Arts. Goodrich also assisted Alfred Barr in selecting the Eakins's paintings for the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition Homer, Eakins and Rider (1930). The Whitney Museum of American Art published Goodrich's seminal 1933 catalogue raisonné on Eakins which grew into Goodrich's two volume tome on Eakins published in 1982. Goodrich's involvement with Soyer on the Homage was more than as Eakins's biographer, for although Soyer is silent on the

extent of Goodrich's input about the painting, we know Goodrich made a number of recommendations; for example, Goodrich encouraged Soyer to include Leonard Baskin.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Goodrich, attuned to the art historical implications of the homage tradition, also encouraged Soyer, as an artist, to include himself in the painting, stating that all great homages of the past had included a self-portrait.<sup>9</sup>

Five of the artists who sat for the painting: Moses Soyer, Henry Varnum Poor, Jack Levine, Edward Hopper and Reginald Marsh, along with Raphael Soyer, had all signed the "Statement" published in Reality: A Journal of Artists' Opinions which was sent to the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA).<sup>10</sup> In it they expressed their concern over "...the fast-spreading doctrine that non-objectivism has achieved some sort of aesthetic finality that precludes all

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<sup>8</sup> Soyer, Homage to Thomas Eakins 23; See also Soyer, Diary of an Artist 75.

<sup>9</sup> Goodrich, Raphael Soyer (1967) 25.

<sup>10</sup> Responses to Reality's "Statement" were published in the editorial section of Art Digest; See Rene D'Harnoncourt, et. al., "Open Letter to Reality," Art Digest 27 (May 1953): 3; Editorial "Language of Reality," Art Digest 27 (June 1953): 5; Letters to the Editor "Language of Reaction and/or Reality," Art Digest 27 (July 1953): 3-4; Otis Gage, "The Reflective Eye," (editorial), Art Digest 27 (July 1953): 6; and Letters to the Editor, "'Reality-ites' Secede," Art Digest 8 (August 1953): 3-4.

other forms of expression."<sup>11</sup> As a short-lived periodical, published in three issues from 1953 to 1955, Reality was spear-headed by Raphael Soyer in frustration over what he perceived to be a growing predominance of interest in non-objective art among museum and gallery owners in New York.<sup>12</sup> In light of the activities of these artists with Reality, the painting becomes a summary of Soyer's life-long efforts to defend and promote American realist painting.

Seated behind the table on either side of Goodrich are the well-known realist painters Edward Hopper (1882-1967), on the left, and Reginald Marsh (1898-1954), slightly behind Goodrich and to the right. Soyer surely perceived both artists as representing the best of the Robert Henri tradition. In the late 1920s, Marsh (along with Soyer) was associated with the Fourteenth Street School, a group of painters who found their subjects in the street life around

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<sup>11</sup> Abstractionists employed similar ploys to get attention. For example, "The Irascible Eighteen" gathered in protest against the artistic policies of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in 1951. Artists included Richard Pousette-Dart, Theodoros Stamos, William Baziotes, Willem de Kooning, Max Ernst, Adolph Gottlieb, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, Ad Reinhardt, James Brooks, Hedda Sterne, Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko, Robert Motherwell, Bradley Walker Tomlin.

<sup>12</sup> Soyer initiated the informal meetings with artists in early 1951. The Statement was published in the first and third issues of Reality. Copies of Reality are preserved in the Archives of American Art, Roll 867, frames 454-473 (in vol. 1 the Statement appears on frame 454; in vol. 3 the "Statement" appears on frames 463-464); See also Manuscript Collection of Cornell University, Acc. No. 2566.

Fourteenth Street and Union Square in New York.<sup>13</sup> Many of these artists also had studio spaces in Union Square, as did Marsh and Soyer, who had previously been neighbors in a building overlooking Union Square Park.<sup>14</sup>

While close in age to Soyer, Marsh had been dead nearly a decade by the time Soyer began his Homage. Soyer's model for Marsh was his 1941 portrait of the artist which Soyer borrowed from the Detroit Institute of Arts (Fig. 6). It was the same portrait Soyer had exhibited in the "My Contemporaries and Elders" exhibition in 1948. Marsh had a personal interest in Eakins, for he had visited Mrs. Eakins in Philadelphia in 1948 when he purchased two Eakins paintings from her. Marsh had also lent Lloyd Goodrich \$500 in order for Goodrich to embark on his 1933 book on Eakins.<sup>15</sup> Soyer's esteem for Marsh is revealed in the

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<sup>13</sup> Brown 182-183. In the late 1920s a group of artists emerged in New York around the most influential teacher since Robert Henri, Kenneth Hayes Miller. These artists developed an "urban counterpart to American Scene realism." The group included Miller's most outstanding students--Isabel Bishop and Edward Laning. Among others in the group were Morris Kantor and Moses Soyer.

<sup>14</sup> Soyer, Homage to Thomas Eakins, Etc. 174.

<sup>15</sup> Goodrich, Thomas Eakins, vol. 2, 280. The two paintings Marsh purchased were the portraits of Archbishop Falconio and General Grubb. For posthumous exhibitions of Thomas Eakins see Goodrich, Thomas Eakins, vol. 2, 273-284. See also Lloyd Goodrich, "'About a Man Who Did Not Want To be Written About': Portraits in Friendship of Thomas Eakins," Arts Magazine, 53/9 (May 1979): 96.

article he wrote for the third issue of Reality following Marsh's death. This article is quoted verbatim in Soyer's books and describes the pose Marsh held for Soyer's 1941 portrait of him:

I remember painting a portrait of him. After half an hour of posing he could not bear being inactive and so he took a small copper plate, concealed it in his hand and, while holding the pose, managed to make an etching of me at the same time.<sup>16</sup>

Soyer held Edward Hopper in awe. Hopper sat for Soyer in 1963, four years prior to Hopper's death. Soyer endeavored to capture Hopper's height and what Soyer called Hopper's "granitic head" and "morose" personality. Soyer's descriptions of Hopper during these sessions is deceptive: "I was flattered and even moved that this seemingly unfriendly and aloof old man posed for me so willingly and patiently."<sup>17</sup> He makes it sound as if they barely knew each other, when, in fact, they had known each other for many years.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Soyer, "Reginald Marsh," Reality: A Journal of Artists' Opinions 3 (Summer 1955): 5. Copies can be found in the Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C., Roll 867, Frame 466. See also Manuscript Collection of Cornell University, Acc. No. 2566; Soyer, Homage to Thomas Eakins, Etc. 174-175; and Soyer, Diary of an Artist 158-159.

<sup>17</sup> Soyer, Homage to Thomas Eakins, Etc. 22; See also Soyer, Diary of an Artist 74-75.

<sup>18</sup> Soyer and his wife "would dutifully make a yearly visit to the Hoppers, climbing the four steep flights up to their home on Washington Square..." Soyer; Self-Revelment 104-105; See also Soyer Diary of an Artist 248-250.

Hopper had studied first with William Merritt Chase and later with both Kenneth Hayes Miller and Robert Henri. Soyer's teacher, Guy Pène du Bois, had been a fellow student with Hopper at the Chase School. Hopper was also a member of the editorial board of Reality magazine. In addition, there is a personal affinity between the two men's work as both Soyer and Hopper shared a love of New York City, both in terms of subject matter, as well as a place to live.

Seated in front of the table are, reading from left to right, Leonard Baskin (born in 1922), Moses Soyer (1899-1974), Jack Levine (born in 1915), and Henry Varnum Poor (1887-1970). Soyer first met Baskin in the early 1950s. Baskin's attraction to Eakins was not clear to Soyer and he did not see any relation to Eakins in Baskin's work. Soyer felt Baskin was attracted to Eakins personally rather than artistically:

His [Baskin's] preoccupation with Eakins is revealed in a series of etchings which Baskin made of him, imaginary portraits of different periods in his life, showing movingly his industry, integrity, persistence in his strivings in the fact of rejection. To Baskin, Eakins represents a tragic figure. He showed me a photostat of a photograph of Eakins in his late years, and said, 'Look at his eyes!' And his eyes were big, wide-open, and seemed to me at that moment, terribly sad.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Soyer, Homage to Thomas Eakins, Etc. 23. The series is illustrated in American Prints in the Library of Congress, A Catalog of the Collection, compiled by Karen F. Beall (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1970) 44, Nos. 5-10.

In the center foreground sits Soyer's twin brother, Moses. The brothers were very close and Moses's central foreground position is surely a conscious form of homage to his brother.<sup>20</sup> Like Raphael, Moses also had a studio in New York and they spoke to each other on the telephone daily, sometimes more. Moses's son, David, recalls:

...the staccato, predictable, nearly toneless telephone conversation with Raphael:  
 "Hello...What's new?...Talk louder...Who have you seen?..." A brief exchange about the paintings each is working on, who is posing, some art or family gossip and then goodbye until the next call: "...What's new? ... Talk louder..."<sup>21</sup>

On Moses's right sits Jack Levine whom Soyer first met in the early 1940s. Raphael Soyer writes:

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<sup>20</sup> Werner, Moses Soyer, with a memoir by David Soyer (South Brunswick: A.S. Barnes, 1970) 31-36. As children Raphael and Moses were determined to have careers as artists. Together they enrolled in the free evening classes at the Cooper Union and later in the fall of 1918, at the age of 18, they entered another free school, the National Academy of Design. For Moses the break from the academic training came when he attended the Ferrar Art School (Ferrar was a recently executed Spanish anarchist--the school was very left wing) located in Spanish Harlem. At the school Robert Henri and George Bellows offered criticism to the students. Moses was impressed by Henri who illustrated his points with Daumier illustrations in The Liberator, a progressive periodical that succeeded The Masses. Daumier's ability to convey honestly and sympathetically the plight of proletarian life greatly inspired Moses, who shared his copy of The Liberator with his brother. The brothers, aware of the similarity in their work, eventually decided to study at different schools. Raphael we know studied at the Art Student's League, Moses enrolled in the Educational Alliance located on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

<sup>21</sup> David Soyer in Werner 12-13.

I privately place him (Levine)...in the category of those whom, because I admire them, I shy away from knowing as intimately as I think I could know them. I had this feeling toward Guy Pène du Bois, who was my teacher, and later toward Kuniyoshi, Hopper, and a few others.<sup>22</sup>

Levine also participated in Reality. An abridged version of a speech Levine had given at a Symposium, "Modern Artists on Artists of the Past," held at the Museum of Modern Art, April 22, 1952, was published in the magazine's first issue.<sup>23</sup> Levine's paintings emphasize a satirical commentary on contemporary life, and he shared Soyer's concern for expressions of the human condition. Levine, like Soyer, also found inspiration in the great masters of the past.

In the right-hand corner, slightly behind Levine, is Henry Varnum Poor. Soyer's relationship with Poor began in the early 1950s when Soyer called the first meeting of artists that eventually published the short-lived periodical Reality. Poor wrote the lead article for the first issue

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<sup>22</sup> Soyer, Homage to Thomas Eakins, Etc. 139; See also Soyer, Diary of an Artist 139.

<sup>23</sup> Jack Levine, "Man is the Center," Reality 1 (Spring 1953): 5; See Archives of American Art, Roll 867, Frame 458; and the Manuscript Collection of Cornell University, Acc. No. 2566.

which summarized the origins of the group.<sup>24</sup> This was perhaps enough of an incentive to include Poor, an eclectic artist, who worked in traditional media such as oil, pencil, ink, charcoal, chalk, watercolor and pastels, as well as in less traditional areas such as fresco and ceramics and architecture. Poor also signed, along with Hopper, Soyer, Levine and seventeen other artists an April 1960 letter to the Whitney Museum of American Art "protesting what they perceived to be its bias toward nonobjective art."<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, many years after Poor's death, Soyer wrote an introduction for the exhibition catalogue published in conjunction with Poor's posthumous retrospective at the Pennsylvania Museum of Art. Soyer saw Poor as an artist belonging "to the living and ever renewable American realist tradition with Homer, Eakins and Hopper."<sup>26</sup>

Beneath the William Rush painting are the seated figures of Edwin Dickinson (1891-1980) and John Koch (1909-1978). Dickinson was a student of William Merritt Chase's at

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<sup>24</sup> Henry Varnum Poor "How This Group Began" Reality 1 (Spring 1953): 6; See also Archives of American Art, Washington D.C., Roll 867, Frame 459; and the Manuscript Collection of Cornell University, Acc. No. 2566, and Soyer, Diary of an Artist 227.

<sup>25</sup> Harold E. Dickson, Henry Varnum Poor 1887-1970, A Retrospective Exhibition (University Park: The Pennsylvania Museum of Art, 1983) 89.

<sup>26</sup> Dickson 7.

the Art Students League for two seasons and has taught at the League, and other schools, since 1945. Goodrich also published an exhibition catalogue on Dickinson for his 1966 exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Koch, next to John Dobbs one of the youngest artists portrayed in the Homage, hosted the April 1960 meeting for the group associated with Reality magazine that drafted the letter to the Whitney Museum of American Art. It was yet another meeting to organize a protest over what these artists perceived to be the predominance of "gobbledegook influences" of abstract art at the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art.<sup>27</sup>

The paired profile images of Soyer's daughter, Mary Lieber, on the left and John Dobbs (born 1931), a student of Jack Levine's, on the right frames the group.<sup>28</sup> Mary Lieber

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<sup>27</sup> Gail Levin, Edward Hopper, the Art and the Artist (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980) 304. Comments such as this indicate the breach that occurred among New York artists over the merits and dominance of realist and abstract artists. The Whitney Museum of American Art was the most conservative of all of the New York Museums (which include MoMA, the Metropolitan Museum of Art) and the only museum exclusively devoted to American art.

<sup>28</sup> John Dobbs studied at the Rhode Island School of Design; Brooklyn Museum of Art School with Gregorio Prestopins and at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture with Jack Levine. His active teaching career includes the Brooklyn Museum of Art School (1956-59); New School of Social Research (1965-); City College, New York (1970-71); John Jay College of Criminal Justice (1979-); and the Art Student's League (1982-83); he has had one-man shows at the ACA Gallery in New York 1964, 1966, 1968, 1970, 1972, 1975, 1980 and 1983. Who's

reminds us of the figure of Cynthia Brown in My Friends. Cynthia Brown can be read as a metaphor for the constant visitors to Soyer's studio and their shared conversation over drinks. Mary Lieber evokes Soyer's many paintings of working girls, dancers, scenes of the commonplace and everyday. Mary Lieber is a distinct reminder that, like My Friends, the studio was Soyer's life; he had no need to go to the streets for life travelled through his studio.

Like Henri Fantin-Latour, who painted a still life to allude to personal subject matter in his Homage to Delacroix, Soyer, in his Homage paints a portrait of his only child, Mary Lieber, serving drinks. While Soyer writes that he included his daughter for compositional purposes only, surely he is making a reference to his personal life. Embraced by a loving wife and daughter, brothers and sisters and their families, Mary Lieber's simple act of serving drinks to her father and his colleagues evokes the emotional support and devotion Soyer received from his family throughout his life. Mary Lieber's profile pose evokes as well the sense of quiet and introspection so prevalent in Soyer's paintings of working women and dancers.

Soyer deliberately places himself inconspicuously in the left background. This placement conveys much about

Soyer as a person. Locating himself in such an innocuous position perhaps signifies the artist's unassuming and introverted personality. This introspectiveness is part of the auto-biographical quality that occurs throughout Soyer's oeuvre. Reflecting upon his career, Soyer acknowledged that much of his work was a continual re-creation of himself:

It's always self-portraiture, always autobiographical.... Your work is what you are. You look at the world through yourself...my people are introverted people, dissociated from one another even when they're painted together....I always paint myself appearing introverted. Painting myself is like talking about myself, but I never make myself entirely like myself. I always appear older-looking, or unshaven, or all alone. It's the result of looking a little more deeply....It's impossible to escape oneself. You are yourself, no matter what.<sup>29</sup>

While in many self-portraits Soyer incorporates the device of the hand on his cheek to infer his introspective and self-reflective personality, in this instance the pose has the opposite effect. Soyer's head is tilted up at an assertive angle and he looks out at the viewer with raised eyebrows, as if to be say "This is who I am. This is what I stand for."

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The Homage was intentionally polemical and reactionary.

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<sup>29</sup> Israel Shenker, "Raphael Soyer: 'I Consider Myself a Contemporary Artist Who Describes Contemporary Life,'" Art News 72 (November 1973): 55.

Both Soyer's efforts in writing--his books and particularly Reality--and the Homage painting were reactions against the triumph of Abstract Expressionism. Soyer's art and life centered around human interests and values. As a humanist Soyer perceived Abstract Expressionism as a degradation of the human spirit.<sup>30</sup> Like Courbet's Atelier, his "swan-song for realism," the Homage, for Soyer, is "Realism's Last Stand."<sup>31</sup> Realist art in the 1950s was considered a harbinger of conservatism and Abstract Expressionism was hailed for its originality.

Nonetheless, throughout the 1940s and 1950s there remained an audience for realist art. During the 1950s, for example, despite what Soyer claimed in later interviews, he was hardly ignored, nor did he lack patrons. While there may have been some drop off in shows, Soyer still exhibited

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<sup>30</sup> Patricia Hills, The Figurative Tradition (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980) 109-111. Hills, however, reminds us: "In discussing this nomenclature [humanism] what we must not forget is that ... postwar abstractionists shared with figurative artists a humanist bias. However, the concept of humanism--the belief in the dignity of man and in human values as well as the awareness of human limitations--was also in the process of transformation. Whereas the figurative artists in the 1900-1940 period shared an optimistic belief in progress and social justice, the mood of many humanist artists, including abstract painters, changed to one of pessimism, defeatism, and individual alienation, a mood which lasted well into the early 1960s and still lingers today."

<sup>31</sup> Mahonri Sharp Young. "American Realists of the 1930s, Leaning Left," Part IV. Apollo n.s. 113 (March 1980): 117.

actively. For example, he participated in the Whitney Annuals from 1934-1972 and the Carnegie Annuals from 1935-1950. He also held one-man shows in New York at Associated American Artists Galleries in 1941, 1948, 1953. Soyer also won many awards in the 1950s. For example, he won the Corcoran Gold Medal and First Clark Prize in 1951, the Art: USA First Prize for Painting in 1959, and The Coliseum, New York, First Prize For Painting in 1959. Soyer also taught at the New School for Social Research, New York from 1957 to 1962 and was awarded the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award of Merit in 1958.<sup>32</sup>

Patronage for Soyer's Homage came from of the wealthy industrialist and avid art collector, Joseph H. Hirshhorn (1889-1981), who purchased the Homage including all of the studies for it, even before the painting was completed.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Goodrich, Raphael Soyer (1967) 28.

<sup>33</sup> Abram Lerner, "Joseph Hirshhorn 1899-1981" [obit] Art News 80/10 (December 1981): 133-134. Joseph Hirshhorn (1889-1981) immigrated to the United States as an adolescent and became a wealthy industrialist. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden was presented by Hirshhorn to the nation as part of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. in 1966. It opened in 1974 as the capital city's first museum devoted exclusively to modern art. See also Abram Lerner, Introduction, in The Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden (New York: Abrams, 1974) 11-24. By the 1930s Hirshhorn's interest had transferred to early 20th century European modernist. His collection, clearly defined by the 1950s, was strong in American painting with representative paintings of European art of the early 20th century; sculpture was international and covered a broader time period. Hirshhorn's acquisition of Eakins began with the purchase of the Charles Bregler

In a letter from Soyer to Hirshhorn, Soyer wrote:

I am so pleased that you have acquired my paintings of the Homage to Eakins project. Secretly I had hoped all along that you would do so because more than anything I wanted these canvases to be part of a great collection....And since I know that you, too, are a great admirer of Eakins, it gives me heart to bring to completion this group of paintings.<sup>34</sup>

In terms of inspiration for Soyer's Homage, the most direct source for Soyer's composition was Henri Fantin-Latour's Homage to Delacroix, 1865 (Fig. 15).<sup>35</sup> Soyer studied this painting on his trip to Paris in June of 1963. He also studied Fantin's Corner of the Table, 1872 (Fig. 16) as well as Fantin's L'Atelier Des Batignolles (Fig. 11), as noted above. Soyer's Homage is based upon both the

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collection in 1961. According to Sheldon Reich (personal communications with Abram Lerner, Director of the Hirshhorn when it opened and for many years thereafter) Hirshhorn did buy representational art. For example, in the late 1960s he bought works by Randall Davey. In addition, both Hirshhorn and Lerner were interested in Jewish artists and in Jewish American culture.

<sup>34</sup> Soyer, Homage to Thomas Eakins, Etc. 176; See also Soyer, Diary of an Artist 160-161.

<sup>35</sup> Soyer also mentioned another painting by a Spaniard named Jose Gutierrez Solana which he says he saw in a Skira publication. Soyer describes the paintings as "a simple and direct composition consisting of a long, rectangular table with men seated along both sides." I have been unable to identify the publication or the artist. Perhaps Soyer misspelled the name or did not remember the name correctly. Soyer also studied other old master group portraits such as Rembrandt and Franz Hals, and compositions by Veronese and Caravaggio. Soyer, Homage to Thomas Eakins 114; See also Soyer, Diary of an Artist 130-131.

pictorial traditions of the homage and the theme of the artist-in-his-studio. The tradition of the homage painting, a celebration of artistic achievement, dates back to seventeenth-century Italy.<sup>36</sup> Fantin's painting is rooted in late nineteenth-century concepts of "La Glorie" as it was elaborated by Félix Descuret: "a burning desire, ... almost always cruelly thwarted, to live surrounded by admiration, by the recognition of men, and to pass one's name to posterity."<sup>37</sup> Fantin-Latour's Homage to Delacroix was a comment on the artist's indignation over the lack of

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<sup>36</sup> Douglas Druick and Michael Hoog, Fantin-Latour (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1983) 169. The authors point to La Galleria Buonarroti (1615-1642), the small palace of the Buonarroti family in Florence in which a hall was built and decorated in honor of Michaelangelo. The patron of the gallery was Michaelangelo's great-nephew, Michelangelo Buonarroti il Giovane (1568-1647), a poet and dramatist. For a history of the gallery see Adriaan Vliegenthart, La Galleria Buonarroti: Michelangelo e Michelangelo il Giovane (Trad. dall'olandese di Giorgio Faggin, 2nd ed. Firenze: Istituto universitario olandese di storia dell'arte, 1977).

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Druick 167 (La Médecine des passions, Paris 1841, p. 572). Soyer describes his 1963 visit to Paris during the city's celebration of Delacroix which marked the one hundred years since his death. A number of Delacroix exhibitions were on display and the house Delacroix had lived was converted into a museum containing his memorabilia. Soyer visited all of the exhibitions to examine and admire the Delacroix studies, paintings and murals; he was particularly interested in how Delacroix conceived his large paintings, especially how he enlarged his ideas from small sketches. Delacroix painted separate detailed studies for the figures in his larger compositions. This practice was adopted by Soyer for his Homage. Soyer, Homage to Thomas Eakins, Etc. 27-28.

official governmental recognition accorded to Delacroix's funeral. Like Fantin, Soyer felt Delacroix had been deprived the respect and glory that was his due.<sup>38</sup>

Soyer borrows many compositional devices from Fantin's Homage to Delacroix albeit with some interesting variations. Soyer writes about the feeling of unity and intimacy Fantin creates by the use of chiaroscuro. Soyer's own composition, for which he had made only a few tentative sketches of at this time, will have no such unity. Instead, as Soyer wrote, the light will be the harsh flat light characteristic of Soyer's work.<sup>39</sup> It is a lighting style that recalls nineteenth-century experiments in photography and the hot "flash bulb" effects like those achieved by Manet and Degas. This lighting style is also a feature of twentieth-century American painting via Robert Henri who painted in a Manet-like portrait style.

Instead of Fantin's single-figure portrait of Delacroix, centered in the composition to indicate the painting's subject, Soyer depicts Eakins's Gross Clinic (Fig. 17). While ostensibly a portrait of Dr. Gross, it also depicts an actual surgical procedure and Eakins has also included his self-portrait seated to the right

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<sup>38</sup> Druick 168-169.

<sup>39</sup> Soyer, Homage to Thomas Eakins, Etc. 15.

(viewer's left) behind Dr. Gross. Soyer embellished this self-portrait device, thus embodying a complex variety of ideas into his painting by his deliberate placement of Eakins's best known and most controversial painting, The Gross Clinic, in the center background of his Homage. Eakins was passionately committed to portraiture, most specifically the portrayal of persons who reflected the very best in their professions. Dr. Gross was one of the leading surgeons and teachers of surgery of his day. The renown of The Gross Clinic would likewise have appealed to Soyer as a means to strengthen the message of his own painting.<sup>40</sup>

Soyer's choice of The Gross Clinic conveys his own interest in portraiture. The Gross Clinic, rejected by the Philadelphia Centennial art exhibition of 1876 because of its veristic treatment of a surgical procedure, was instead hung among the medical exhibits in the sections re-creating a U.S. Army Post Hospital. Thus, Soyer's interest in this painting is in its total realism, its concern with life expressed by Eakins as the knowledge and work of a scientist concerned with saving life. By including a painting that had been rejected by his contemporaries and which caused Eakins so much humiliation whenever it was exhibited, Soyer

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<sup>40</sup> Lloyd Goodrich, Thomas Eakins. Vol. 1 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982) 121-138.; See also Elizabeth Johns, Thomas Eakins, The Heroism of Modern Life (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) 46+.

was able to make a similar statement about the rejection of realist painting during his lifetime.

Just as Eakins continued to follow his own path and paint portraits, likewise, Soyer continued to paint representationally even when abstract art became the dominant mode. Many of the artists portrayed in the Homage had matured between the two World Wars and no doubt felt a similar sense of isolation from the New York art world as they watched the Abstract Expressionist style of painting seemingly eclipse all other styles.<sup>41</sup>

By including Eakins' paintings of the Salutat and William Rush (Figs. 18, 19), Soyer is able to reinforce his own love of the human body, especially the female nude. Both paintings recall Eakins's struggle to have life classes allowed at the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts during the 1870s and 1880s as well as Eakins's affinity with Rush for his own bold portrayal of the female figure.<sup>42</sup> The Salutat was one of a series of prizefighter paintings Eakins began

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<sup>41</sup> See Hills, The Figurative Tradition 109. The term "Abstract Expressionists" was first used by Alfred H. Barr in Cubism and Abstract Art (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936) 64-72, to describe the work of the German Expressionists. The New Yorker critic Robert Coates coined the term "Abstract Expressionists" for the modernists of the 1940s, Harold Rosenberg used the term "action painting" to emphasize the gestural techniques artists employed, and the term "New York School" has more recently become common coin.

<sup>42</sup> Goodrich, Thomas Eakins vol. 2 (1982) 149-151; See also Elizabeth Johns, Thomas Eakins 85.

in 1989. Eakins's prizefighting pictures clearly anticipate the urban realists paintings of the 1910s, especially the fighting scenes of George Bellows.<sup>43</sup> Like Soyer, who was interested in his models as friends and as personalities, Eakins befriended a number of prizefighters, such as Billy Smith, the model for the Salutat.<sup>44</sup> The large audience scenes Eakins's painted for this series are actually a collection of small portraits of friends who would drop into the studio for a visit, and Eakins would say "Stay awhile and I'll put you in the picture."<sup>45</sup> They are all images of unidealized realism.

Eakins's William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River painting allowed Soyer to convey their shared interest in the artist-in-his-studio theme, which was embodied earlier in Eakins series of paintings on the William Rush theme.<sup>46</sup> Soyer did not show the early 1877

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<sup>43</sup> Goodrich, Thomas Eakins vol. 2 (1982) 247, prizefighting at this time was not yet acceptable as a leisure time diversion for high society or for women.

<sup>44</sup> Goodrich, Thomas Eakins vol. 2 (1982) 145.

<sup>45</sup> Goodrich, Thomas Eakins vol. 2 (1982) 147.

<sup>46</sup> Other Eakins painting of the William Rush theme include William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River, 1877 (Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Thomas Eakins and Miss Mary Adeline Williams); and William Rush and His Model, probably 1908 (Honolulu Academy of Arts; Gift of Friends of the Academy, 1947), both are illustrated in Goodrich, Thomas Eakins vol. 1 (1982) Fig. 64 and vol. 2 (1982) 265, respectively.

version of this painting, but rather the 1908 version painted when Eakins was 64 years old for obvious reasons. Given Soyer's knowledge of Goodrich's scholarship, he consciously selected the later version as a comment on his own age, for Soyer was approximately the same age as Eakins when he painted his Homage. Most of the elements of Eakins's early version, however, remain the same in the later picture. Rush, an early Philadelphian and one of America's first professional sculptors was commissioned in 1809 to depict an allegorical fountain figure for the Benjamin Latrobe designed city water-works in Centre Square. The model for Rush's water spirit was supposedly Louise Van Uxem, the daughter of a friend of Rush's who was also a member of the water-works Committee.<sup>47</sup> The William Rush theme incorporates a number of Eakins's personal interests including his desire to convey his connection with his native city of Philadelphia; his admiration for one of the city's early artists whom he admired; and his admiration for a woman who was not a professional model but who was nonetheless willing to pose nude for an artist in a prudish era.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Goodrich, Thomas Eakins vol. 1 (1982) 145-157.

<sup>48</sup> Goodrich, Thomas Eakins vol. 1 (1982) 147.

Finally, there is Eakins's portrait of Walt Whitman, 1887 (Fig. 20). Goodrich holds open his book on Eakins to a page illustrating Eakins's portrait of the poet as if to emphasize the numerous correlations between Whitman and Eakins. Both men's art was based on their perceptions of the realities of contemporary America: its people, their daily lives, occupations, and pleasures, and democracy--the belief in individual rights regardless of rank, privilege or social distinctions. Eakins's concern, however, was with specific individuals, whereas Whitman's concern was with the mystical and prophetic expansiveness and an all-inclusive democratic spirit.<sup>49</sup>

For Soyer, including the Whitman portrait is a direct reference to Realists' (and Soyer's own) humanistic outlook and concern for human dignity. The Whitman portrait is, perhaps, a subtle comment as well to artists, not included in the Homage, such as Robert Henri and other early twentieth-century realist painters who found inspiration in the poetry of Walt Whitman.<sup>50</sup> Soyer may have consciously

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<sup>49</sup> Goodrich, Thomas Eakins vol. 2 (1982) 28-29.

<sup>50</sup> Hills, The Figurative Tradition 59 and note 1, Chapter II, 172. Joseph J. Kwiat "Robert Henri and the Emerson-Whitman Tradition," PMLA 71 (September 1956): 617-36. Kwiat, Hills writes, quotes Sloan, who said to the former in 1948: "Henri...was my father in art. I got my Whitman through him. Whitman's love for all men, his beautiful attitude toward the physical, the absence of prudishness...all this represented a force of freedom...I liked what resulted

elected to portray a poet, as he had (and would) portray portraits of young contemporary poets such as Diane de Prima, Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso.<sup>51</sup>

There are other personal and psychological implications in Soyer's Homage as well. As noted in Chapter 2, Soyer assimilated into his works the most distinctive feature in all of Fantin's group portraits: Not one of the sitters looks at each other. The psychological implications of this are significant for they point to Fantin's sense of personal isolation.<sup>52</sup> This detachment is also one of the most forceful emotional components of Soyer's Homage. It emphasizes as well Soyer's dislocation from the New York art world in the 1950s.

Eakins's obscure placement in the Gross Clinic is echoed by Soyer who locates himself half-way up on the far left-hand side of the composition. The individuals Soyer gathered together for his Homage recall as well the

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from his descriptive catalogues of life. They helped to interest me in the details of life around me."

<sup>51</sup> Village East Street Scene, 1965-66 (Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Edward L. Neustadter, Rye, New York), includes portraits of all three; Diane De Prima and Minnie, 1965 (Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Dalton Trumbo), and others. Illustrated in Lerner, Fig. 4, and Goodrich, Raphael Soyer (1967) 68, respectively.

<sup>52</sup> Lucie-Smith 17. The author also notes this sense of personal isolation prevails perhaps even more so in the artist's well-known flower pieces.

conversation group convention in painting.<sup>53</sup> The artists and writers portrayed in the Homage were committed to American realist painting and their presence contributes to the sense of alienation they experienced due to the predominance of Abstract Expressionism over the last two decades. Realist artists felt they were being ignored by New York museum directors and curators, critics, and gallery dealers who, they asserted, were showing abstract art to the exclusion of all other styles. However, a statistical count of the number of non-objective to realist works being exhibited at the major New York institutions reveals that, in general, the New York museums were very even-handed, and there was little cause for justifiable accusations of bias.<sup>54</sup> But in terms of the press and gallery dealers, also very visible tastemakers, issues of fair representation is more questionable. In retrospect it is clear from Reality's letter to MoMA that Realist artists were aware of the ideological bias of MoMA's officers that has come to be identified with the use of Abstract Expressionist art as a

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<sup>53</sup> The origin of this convention is the sacra converzatione, which originated in Italy in early Renaissance religious painting.

<sup>54</sup> Greta Berman and Jeffrey Weschler, Realism and Realities: The Other Side of American Painting (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Art Gallery, 1982) 5.

weapon of the Cold War.<sup>55</sup> During the 1940s and 1950s MoMA, and the Whitney, exhibited a mix of traditional art and avant-garde art, although Abstract Expressionism and related methods made faster headway and finally dominated MoMA's "American" shows. At MoMA these consisted of its "Fourteen Americans" shows, selections from twelve to eighteen artists whose work was shown in six exhibitions from 1942 to 1967. Although in 1942, sixteen of the eighteen exhibitors presented some form of recognizable imagery, by 1944, only one-half of the "Fourteen Americans" retained realist imagery. From then on abstractionists were the majority.<sup>56</sup>

The glaring countenances of the impressive gathering of realist painters portrayed in the Homage makes a self-

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<sup>55</sup> For an in depth discussion of this idea see Max Kozloff, "American Painting during the Cold War," Artforum II, no. 9 (May 1973): 43-45; Eva Cockroft, "Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War," Artforum 12, no. 10 (June 1974): 39-41; Serge Guilbaut, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983); John Tagg, "American Power and American Painting: The Development of Vanguard Painting in the U.S. Since 1945," Praxis, no. 2 (1976): 59-79.

<sup>56</sup> Berman and Weschler 6. The authors note that by 1956 the gestural realism of Larry Rivers and Grace Hartigan presented the only remnants of the "real world" in the MoMA's "Twelve Americans" exhibitions. The authors write that the Whitney Annuals during the 1940s and 1950s "were remarkably fair in showing both continuing realistic trends and the new abstraction, with the proportion of abstraction steadily, but never overwhelmingly, increasing during those years, as more artists took up the non-objective styles. The radical character of the Whitney annuals was often in the mind of the beholder."

conscious statement to the New York art world. My Friends was an introverted expression of Soyer's life as a New York artist, while the Homage must be regarded as public expression of Soyer's personal aesthetic and his need to take a final stand when creating a work for posterity.

In the past Soyer's numerous paintings of working class girls and dancers, both nude and clothed, and his artist portraits had aligned him with the "studio painters" genre of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>57</sup> By the end of the 1940s, however, painting had polarized into mimetic and nonmimetic forms. By the mid-1950s modernism had become the predominant mode in the form of Abstract Expressionism. Against this background, the Homage, which remains Soyer's consummate effort in the group portrait, is a self-conscious response to the years Soyer spent among New York's art world and the final visual statement of Soyer's artistic credo, his sense of pride in his profession, and his conception of his role as artist.

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<sup>57</sup> Patricia Hills and Roberta K. Tarbell, The Figurative Tradition and the Whitney Museum of American Art, Paintings and Sculpture from the Permanent Collection (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980) 71.

## APPENDIX: ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1. Raphael Soyer, Dancing Lesson, 1926. Oil on canvas, 24x20 in. Collection of Renee and Chaim Gross, New York, New York.



Fig. 2. Raphael Soyer, Artist's Parents, 1932.  
Oil on canvas, 28x30 in. Collection of the Estate  
of Raphael Soyer.



Fig. 3. Raphael Soyer, Arshile Gorky, 1940. Oil on canvas, 20x16 in. Collection Rebecca Shulman, New York, New York.



Fig. 4. Raphael Soyer, Abraham Walkowitz, n.d.  
Whereabouts unknown (private collection?)



Fig. 5. Raphael Soyer, John Sloan. Oil on canvas, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Singer.



Fig. 6. Raphael Soyer, Reginald Marsh, 1941. Oil on canvas, 20x16 in. Detroit Institute of Arts, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. David A. Epstein.



Fig. 7. Edgar Degas, Absinthe Drinker, 1876. Oil on canvas, 36-1/4x22-7/8 in. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Fig. 8. Raphael Soyer, My Friends, 1948. (the final version) Oil on canvas, 70x60 in. The Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio, Gift of the Artist.



Fig. 9. Raphael Soyer, My Friends, 1948 (the earlier version). Illustrated in Goodrich, Raphael Soyer (1967) 47.



Fig. 10. Gustave Courbet, The Studio: A Real Allegory Concerning Seven Years of My Artistic Life, 1854-1855. Oil on canvas, 11'10" x 19'7-3/4". The Louvre, Paris.



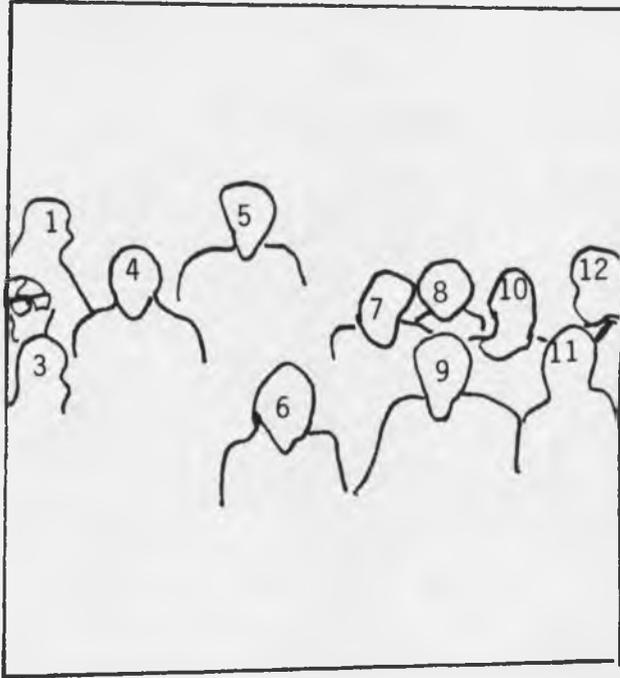
Fig. 11. Henri Fantin-Latour, L'Atelier des Batignolles, 1870. Oil on canvas, 80x107 in. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Fig. 12. Raphael Soyer, Self-Portrait of the Artist, with Self-Portraits of Rembrandt, Corot and Degas, c. 1940. Oil on canvas, dimensions unavailable. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Emil Schlesinger, New York, New York.



Fig. 13. Raphael Soyer, Homage to Thomas Eakins, 1964-1965. Oil on canvas, 88x80 in. Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.



- 1 Mary Leiber
- 2 Raphael Soyer
- 3 Leonard Baskin
- 4 Edward Hopper
- 5 Lloyd Goodrich
- 6 Moses Soyer
- 7 Reginald Marsh
- 8 John Koch
- 9 Jack Levine
- 10 Edwin Dickinson
- 11 Henry Varnum Poor
- 12 John Dobbs

Fig. 14. Key to Raphael Soyer's Homage to Thomas Eakins, 1964-1965.



Fig. 15. Henri Fantin-Latour, Homage to Delacroix, 1865. Oil on canvas, 63x98-3/8 in. The Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 16. Henri Fantin-Latour, Corner of the Table, 1872. Oil on canvas, 63x88-5/8 in. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Fig. 17. Thomas Eakins, The Gross Clinic, 1875. Oil, 96-78. Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



Fig. 18. Thomas Eakins, Salutat, 1898. Oil, 49-1/2x39-1/2 in. Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts, Gift of Thomas Cochran.



Fig. 19. Thomas Eakins, William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River, 1908. Oil, 36-7/16 x 48-7/16 in. The Brooklyn Museum, Dick S. Ramsay Fund.



Fig. 20. Thomas Eakins, Walt Whitman, 1887-1888.  
Oil, 30x24 in. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine  
Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

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