
**VARIETIES OF
AMERICAN
REALISM**



Syracuse University Art Galleries

An Informal Selection from the
Syracuse University
Art Collections

Feb. 26 - April 13, 1975

**JOE & EMILY LOWE
ART GALLERY**

College of
Visual & Performing
Arts

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

Varieties of
American Realism
An Informal Selection
from the
Syracuse University
Art Collections
organized and presented
by the
Joe & Emily Lowe
Art Gallery,
College of
Visual & Performing Arts,
Syracuse University.
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Open weekdays
except Mondays,
Noon to 5:30 P.M.,
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"Realism" is one of the oldest, most widely used and relative terms in the language of art. The reliance upon similarity to nature in the description and analysis of art may have its explanation in the physiological necessity to recognize and adapt to the outer world simply through the habitual use of sight. In any event, Western art, critics, perhaps instinctively following this habit, have applied the term "realist" to art forms from Greek and Roman antiquity to modern times, generally going on to point out the differences of quality and content that underlie the seeming fidelity to outward appearance. Within this millennial tradition, which ranges through Roman portraiture, late Gothic stone carving, the inspired Baroque canvases of Caravaggio and LaTour, through the "programmatic" realism of Courbet and the "spiritual" naturalism of Mexico's Velasco, American Realism has won a legitimate if not quite internationally honored place.

Yet, considering all the relativities of this long progression of realist styles and looking at the record from the home perspective of the native American artist and student of art can we say with precision what American realism actually is?

From the Syracuse University Art Collections the faculty and students of the Graduate Museum Training Program have selected 43 paintings from the last seventy years of this unbroken and constantly self renewing tradition in American art. They were chosen from perhaps sixty pictures considered related in some way to what has become accepted as a broadly defined American realist category — truth to observed fact. Nineteen works of sculpture were also considered but only one of these was reasonably close to the definition except for a major work by William Zorach, which could not be transported from its site at Utica College. With the aim of going beyond the generalized idea of American realism as simply "truth to fact" and additional evaluative criterion was used: "Elements of experience in the picture associated with persons or places that can be considered an authentic reflection of the American 'grass-roots' spirit, with grass-



roots defined as an "affinity for and loyalty to local neighborhood and a way of life within it."

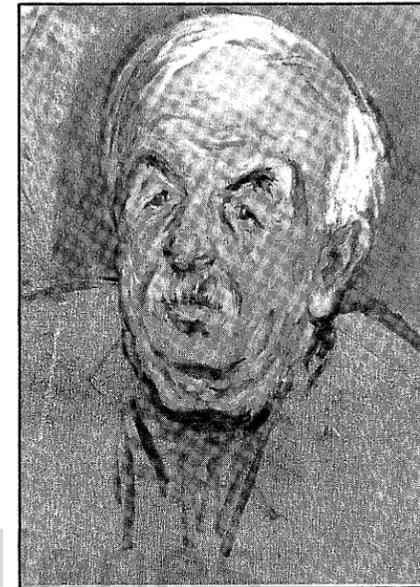
The 20th-century American pictures in the collection dealt with were unusual in the number of works of better than average quality by lesser-known artists who worked in the mainstream of American social observation during the 1930's and 1940's. Particularly did their work show interesting facets of life of the period and in several stunning cases uninhibited selection and innovative treatment of their human subjects presented in unconventional activities and off-guard attitudes. In the course of the review several outstanding works came to the fore again, such as Ernest Fiene's *Tambour* (No. 22, illustrated), Moses Soyer's *Studies for a Portrait of Ben Shahn* (No. 35, illustrated), Eilshemius' *Nude* (No. 18), Wayman Adams' *Not a Member of the Club* (No. 1, illustrated), Coulton Waugh's *Burlesk* (No. 39), and a splendid group of town, city and shore-scapes by David Burliuk (Nos. 8 & 9). These joining easily with the better known Burchfield (No. 7), Curry (Nos. 16 & 17), Sloan (No. 33), Shahn (No. 32, illustrated) and Evergood works (Nos. 19, 20 & 21), and supplemented by solid paintings of fresh inspiration by Blanch (No. 5), Bohrod (No. 6), Karfiol (No. 23), Marsh (No. 25) and Poor (No. 30) — seen either as part of a broader collection or a representation of American Realism — combine to produce, despite the lack of certain major figures, probably the second strongest unit within the overall University Collection and a painting collection of stature as a unit in itself. The "varieties" of American realism of the period which this exhibition presents are as various as one may find in the grass-roots sense of experience defined above. Thus, Raphael and Moses Soyer, Sloan, Burliuk, Vickrey, Poor, Fiene epitomize here the "realist" spirit of the thirties that quietly identifies with their everyday subjects. For want of a better term, I would identify this as "factual" or "empathic" realism. On the other hand the "varieties" also comprise more generalized conceptions of so called typical aspects of American popular life, in the country and the city, which Bradley

Nickels has shown represents the artist superimposing concepts of social, historical regional or political meaning on his subjects as a way of creating popular interest in art and of guiding American popular consciousness into humanitarian or political channels in which cultural loyalties are strongly mixed. Usually called "Social Comment" painting, we have tentatively used the broader term, "social realism" because social independence usually involves searching for a factual base for cultural identity along with political and humanitarian aims. In this grouping would be such artists as Shahn, Curry and Marsh.

Within the same mid-third of the 20th century one may find in the Syracuse University Collections realist values ranging widely, if in no consistent pattern, between or outside the two categories mentioned above. These vary from direct naturalism (as with the *Red Cabbage* of Aaron Bohrod, No. 6) to the humorous, sometimes sardonic fantasy of Philip Evergood (*All in a Day's Work*, No. 19) — a comment on the Spanish Civil War, the caricatured realism, with heavy sarcasm, of Peggy Bacon, the symbolic realism of the farm and farm painters, represented in this exhibition only indirectly by the transference of the farm interior to the city, in Phillip Reismans', *Jewish Fish Market* (No. 31).

The decline of the school of direct social observation and its retreat before the Abstract Expressionist Movement of the 1950's was followed somewhat later by a new interest in subjective or psychological portraiture which may be in the realist tradition even though, under the influence of existentialism and the painting of Francis Bacon, as well as Abstract Expressionism itself, it took semi-abstract or abstracted form. Nathan Oliveira's *Running Figure* (No. 28) is a very good if smaller example of this.

In the sixties realism revived with insistent force first in the form of exact reproduction (verisimilitude) of human figures and heads, isolated or in interior settings, then in more stylized form but with neo-photographic precision in part under the influence of Pop and Op art. The large canvas of Cottingham epitomizes this phenomenon in the present exhibition.



Looking at the American Realist representation in the Syracuse University Collection, in a general way one may say that it comprises a rich *tableau vivant* of the tastes, moods, manners, interest and activities of the greatest epoch of cultural self-discovery in American art and life. It led, in combination with strong influence from Europe during and immediately after World War II, to America's generally recognized ascendancy in world art. As such it is an important focal point of our national artistic and intellectual history awaiting greatly needed curatorial study in depth and filling the gaps of major missing figures in available media. Even as it now stands it offers a firm starting point for further development as a focus for the study of the arts of the overall American world.

Special thanks are extended to the following for generous contributions which made possible this catalogue, and the invitations and reception for the exhibition's opening: Associates of the College of Visual and Performing Arts, Sallie Bailey, Katinka Brigham, James Carroll, Barbara M. Collum, Mary Liddle, Marge Mellor, Michael Recht, Karen Slotnik.

I would like to express the gallery's sincere gratefulness to the Community Board of the Friends of Lowe Art Gallery and their Chairperson, Mrs. Kendrick A. Sears for their contributions to the public presentation of this exhibition and for their support throughout the period of its organization; to Dr. Alfred M. Collette, Administrator and Mary Ann Calo, Registrar, of the University Art Collections for their cooperation and assistance in preparing the extensive materials drawn from the Collections for the exhibition; and to Professor Mary Takach and the graduate students in the Museum Training Program for their integral part in the organization of this second phase of the Syracuse University Art Collection review series.

Stanton L. Catlin
Director of Art Galleries
and Museum Training Program

Above: No. 35. Moses Soyer. *Studies for Portrait of Ben Shahn*, detail.

Cover: No. 22. Ernest Fiene. *Tambour*, detail.

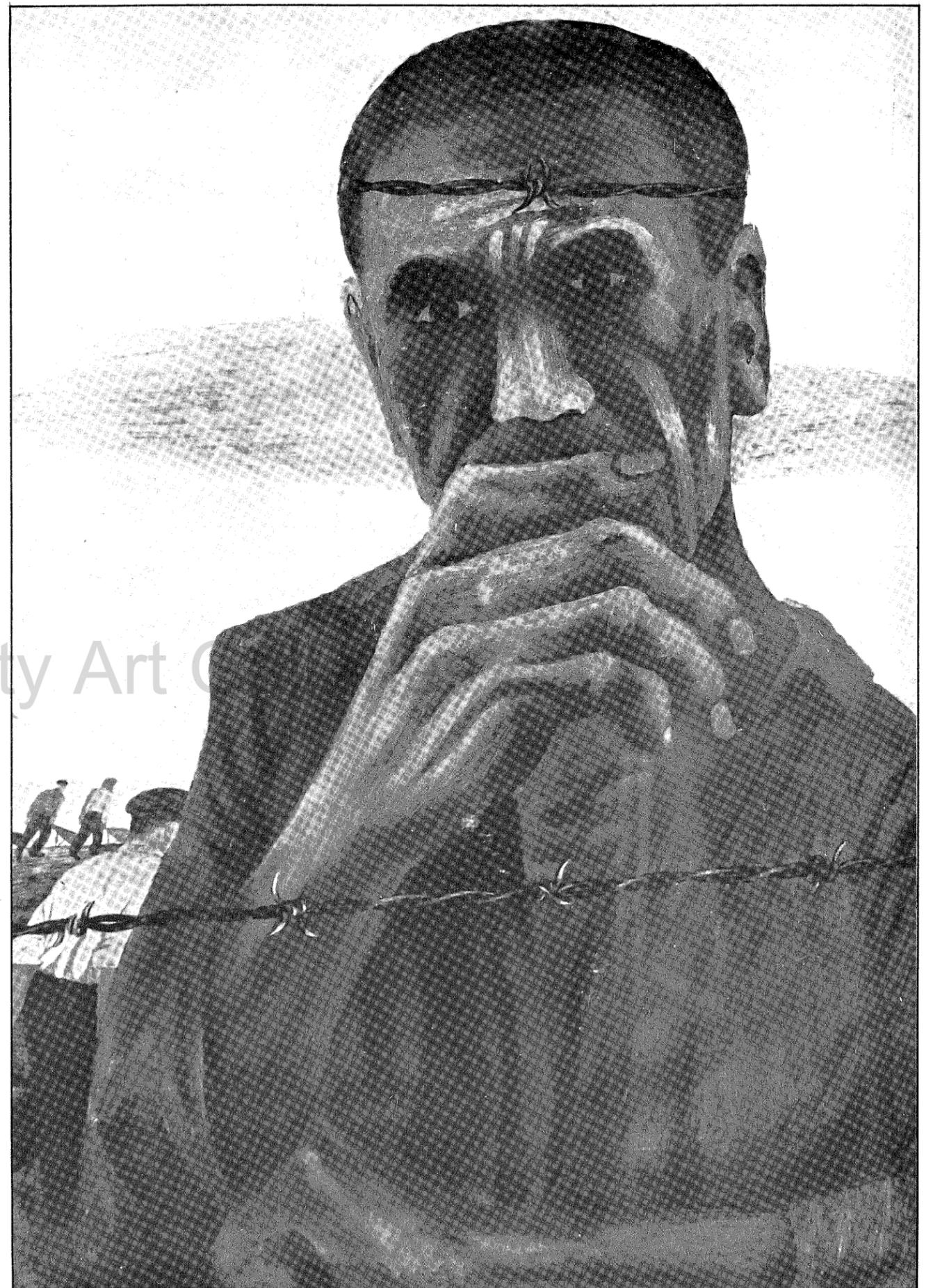
Left: No. 1. Wayman Adams. *Not a Member of the Club.*, detail.



Above: No. 5. Arnold Blanch. *Flower Makers*, detail.

Right: Ben Shahn. *1943 A.D.*, detail.

Below: No. 41. Harold Weston. *Searching.*, detail.



CATALOG

- Wayman Adams (1883–1959). *Not a Member of the Club*. oil on canvas. 32 1/2 x 27 1/2 inches. signed lower and upper left. gift of Mrs. Wayman Adams. SU 5902
- Boris Artzybasheff (1899–1965). *Llewellyn Thompson*. gouache. 12 3/4 x 9 inches. signed middle right. gift of the artist. SU 65.425
- Boris Artzybasheff (1899–1965) *Television Actress*. gouache. 14 x 12 inches. signed lower right. gift of the artist. SU 65.407
- Peggy Bacon (1895–). *Henry McBride*. 1934. pastel. 24 x 20 1/4 inches. not signed. gift of the artist. SU 64.376
- Arnold Blanch (1896–1968). *Flower Makers*. 1932. oil on canvas. 36 1/4 x 50 1/8 inches. not signed. purchase: Jalonack Fund. SU 63.02
- Aaron Bohrod (1907–). *Red Cabbage*. 1961. oil on panel. 17 1/2 x 23 1/2 inches. purchase: Jalonack Fund. SU 62.05
- Charles Burchfield (1893–1967). *August Evening*. 1917–1956. watercolor. 50 x 29 inches. signed and dated lower left. purchase: Jalonack Fund. SU 65.16
- David Burliuk (1882–1967). *Fish Woman—Cortez*. oil on canvas. 20 x 24 inches. signed lower right. gift of Martin Foundation. SU 64.03
- David Burliuk (1882–1967). *South Ferry*. 1923. oil on canvas. 32 x 45 1/2 inches. signed and dated lower left. on permanent loan from Frank Kleinholz. SU 72.581L
- Marvin Cherney (1925–1966). *Annie Abrams*. 1964. oil on canvas. 42 1/2 x 35 1/4 inches. signed upper right. gift of Mr. Joseph Kahn. SU 64.149
- Nicolai Cikovsky (1894–). *Two Dancers*. oil on canvas. 32 1/2 x 26 inches. signed lower right. purchase: Jackson Fund. SU 68.156
- Charles Coiner (1898–). *Connemara Churchyard, Ireland*. acrylic on board. 25 x 33 1/2 inches. signed lower right. SU 66.109
- Robert Cottingham. *American Hi-Fi*. 1971. oil on canvas. 77 x 77 inches. not signed. partial University purchase. SU 71.294
- Lee Brown Coye (1907–). *A Friend has Passed Away*. gouache. 19 x 28 inches. signed lower right. gift of Alfred T. Collette. SU 66.220
- Alfred Crimi (1900–). *Key West Fisherman*. 1934–1935. fresco. sight 40 1/2 x 30 1/2 inches. signed lower right. gift of the artist. SU 71.15
- John Stuart Curry (1897–1946). *The Gospel Train*. 1929. oil on canvas. 40 x 52 inches. signed lower left. gift of Henry Crown. SU 57.01
- John Stuart Curry. (1897–1946). *Hogs Killing a Rattlesnake*. 1925. watercolor. 20 1/4 x 27 1/4 inches. signed lower right. gift of Harry Wickey. SU 64.06
- Louis Eilshemius (1864–1943). *Nude*. oil on canvas. 36 x 20 inches. gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Schaeffer. SU 66.86
- Phillip Evergood (1901–1973) *All in a Day's Work*. oil on canvas. 25 x 39 1/2 inches. signed lower left. gift of Harris J. Klein. SU 69.171
- Phillip Evergood (1901–1973) *Portrait of the Kleinholz Family*. 1953. oil on canvas. 42 x 33 3/4 inches. signed and dated lower right. on permanent loan from Mr. and Mrs. Frank Kleinholz. SU 72.579L
- Phillip Evergood (1901–1973) *Self Portrait*. 1920. oil on paper. 13 3/4 x 10 inches. signed "To Herman Baron my first Self portrait with deep affection." gift of Mrs. Ella Baron. SU 64.366
- Ernest Fiene (1894–1965). *Tambour*. oil on canvas. 44 1/4 x 34 3/4 inches. signed lower right. purchase from the artist. SU 64.226
- Bernard Karfiol (1866–1951). *Babette*. 1934. oil on canvas. 36 x 54 1/2 inches. signed lower right. University purchase. SU 64.52
- Ernest Lawson (1873–1939). *Spring*. oil on canvas. 25 x 30 inches. gift of Huntington Harris. SU 62.19
- Reginald Marsh (1899–1954). *Three Figure Composition; Two Figure Composition (verso)*. watercolor. 22 1/2 x 18 inches. signed lower left. gift of Rodney L. White. SU 66.179
- A. Henry Nordhausen (1901–). *Ballerina in Gold Chair*. 1963. oil on canvas. 48 1/4 x 24 inches. not signed. gift of Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Newhouse. SU 64.299
- A. Henry Nordhausen (1901–). *Model Resting*. oil on board. 19 1/4 x 27 inches. signed lower left. University purchase. SU 69.52
- Nathan Oliveira (1928–). *Running Woman*. 1960. oil on canvas. 42 x 40 inches. gift of Norman Rose. SU 65.270
- Philip Pearlstein (1924–). *Two Models*. oil on canvas. 40 1/4 x 56 inches. signed lower left. gift of Benjamin Weiss. SU 64.115
- Henry Varnum Poor (1888–1970). *Portrait of Ruth Reeves*. ca. 1934. oil on canvas. 62 3/4 x 30 inches. signed upper right. gift of the artist. SU 68.301
- Philip Reisman (1904–). *Jewish Fish Market*. 1932. oil on board. 27 x 40 inches. signed lower right. gift of Harry and Maria Wickey. SU 66.479
- Ben Shahn (1898–1969). *1943 A.D.*. tempera. 30 3/4 x 27 3/4 inches. signed lower right. gift of Chancellor William P. Tolley. SU 60.34
- John Sloan (1871–1959). *Gloucester Harbor*. 1916. oil on canvas. 29 x 31 inches. University purchase. SU 62.61
- Moses Soyer (1899–1974). *Men of the Waterfront*. 1942. oil on canvas. 10 x 24 inches. signed lower right. gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Shaeffer. SU 66.85
- Moses Soyer (1899–1974). *Studies for Portrait of Ben Shahn*. oil on canvas. 36 x 30 inches. signed lower right. gift of Julius Pinelas. SU 69.137
- Raphael Soyer (1899–). *Young Couple at a Table*. oil on canvas. 30 x 30 inches. signed lower right. gift of Julius Pinelas. SU 65.152
- Eugene Speicher (1883–1962). *Nude*. oil on canvas. 30 x 28 inches. signed lower right. University purchase. SU 65.205
- Robert Vickery (1926–). *Old Woman*. egg tempera on canvas. 25 3/4 x 19 3/4 inches. signed lower left. gift of the artist. SU 68.298
- Coulton Waugh (1896–). *Burlesk*. oil on canvas. 30 1/2 x 24 1/4 inches. signed lower left. gift of the artist. SU 68.125
- Leslie Weiner. *Portrait of H. Rapp Brown*. 1968. oil on canvas. 88 x 33 inches. retained from Student Show.
- Harold Weston (1894–). *Searching*. 1949. oil on canvas. 24 x 29 inches. signed lower left. gift of artist's estate. SU 72.29
- Andrew Wyeth (1917–). *Schooner Aground*. ca. 1940. watercolor. 16 1/2 x 29 inches. gift of Mrs. Dudley W. Rockwell. SU 67.79

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