

FOREWORD

No one could accuse Simon Dinnerstein of being a fashionable artist. Not at the time he began, not now, and not at any time in between. Leafing through the catalogue of his mature work that now spans two decades, one is struck immediately by his total disregard of prevailing taste, his apparent disinterest in the visual arguments of advanced art circles, and, conversely, by his single-minded concentration upon the development of a highly personal, creative pursuit. Well before his thirtieth birthday, the young artist was already in possession of the technical means and the spiritual motivation that allowed him, in the late sixties, to set out on a very lonely road toward assertion of his role. It was clear to him that it had to be played outside of the enchanted circle within which current art and art criticism was enclosed.

It is difficult therefore to find an appropriate stylistic designation for Dinnerstein's contribution. He is a "realist" in the sense that intense observation, particularly in his earliest work, produced meticulous accounts of things, people, and nature. He was obviously fascinated by objects strewn around the glum habitations of proletarian surroundings. As with his portraiture of the same period, narrative qualities predominate, but not to the exclusion of other aspects that could be called "expressionist" if one wished to designate thereby a visible concern with an inner reality that so visibly protrudes onto the smooth surfaces of his walls and facades. This concern is also mirrored in the mercilessly detailed features of his models. Likewise, in his rendition of flowers, trees, and botanical elements in general, Dinnerstein's preoccupation with inwardness at times assumes an almost magic intensity that approaches the category of "fantasy." And finally, the painter's surfaces are so deliberately arranged, often with obsessive symmetry, and so carefully calculated with respect to structural ratios, that the term "constructivist" also would come to mind were it not wholly preempted in art historical parlance by abstract imagery. It is evident, therefore, that Dinnerstein's dominant realism is significantly enriched by every principal departure in twentieth-century painting.

There is in the painter's development a discernible movement from dark to light, from an oppressive crowdedness to an unfolding ampleness, from the wholly particular to the somewhat more general, and from a relentlessly unbending truthfulness to a sense of flowing grace. Such a progression is not hampered, nor does it appear to be willed. On the contrary, the artist seems reluctant to shed the rawness of his youthful images, recalling them often in his later work as if to reassure himself of the validity of his point of departure. But he does arrive eventually at considerable effort, at flower still lives and renditions of exotic femininity in idealized surroundings that are far removed from the puritanism of his earlier mood. The joyful light that breaks, tentatively enough, through an undertone of menacing darkness may be seen as a gradual retreat from nightmarish pressures.

Comparable developments are not unknown in the history of art, nor is the artist unaware of that history. Within it, he is easier located and more at ease than in the more limited precincts of avantgardism. It will be of real interest to follow Simon Dinnerstein's art as it evolves further.

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