

Simon Dinnerstein

Phillip A. Bruno

I still now recall, thirty-six years later, the initial impact photographs of Simon Dinnerstein's *Fulbright Triptych* made on me. What struck me was the ambition, the self-confidence and almost arrogance of attempting to create such a compelling and stunning work demonstrated by an unknown, at that time, contemporary painter.

The huge central panel depicts a black, horizontal artist's working table with various brushes, knives, scissors, engraving tools, and a copperplate. Above it are two windows open to the village of Hessisch Lichtenau, Germany, where the artist and his wife Renée resided during his Fulbright grant in 1971. The view is of the main street of the village with blue sky beyond. Colors, tones, and precision convey a serious intensity.

This image is an homage to all artists' studio space. Pasted and pinned around these windows are many postcards and photographs of masterpieces of the past which have appealed to and inspired Simon. To its right a vertical panel represents the painter seated with his hands clasped between his legs looking directly at the viewer.

Balancing this vertical panel which is almost seven feet high, is its partner, depicting Renée and Simone. Renée, seated, holding their child, commands an equal amount of space as her husband. Their heads are level on either side of the composition. There is, too, an overall geometry disrupted by the random scattering of sixty reproductions and postcards on the studio walls which give hints of Western art history. It reminded me of Flemish masters of centuries past.

The scale of this *Fulbright Triptych* is a declaration of Simon's self-confidence, a statement of "I have arrived." No doubt I sense a great ego. Simon had come to the gallery by walking off the street, yet so impressed was I with photographs of the *Triptych* in its entirety that I thought his work was appropriate for a one-man exhibition at the Staempfli Gallery, of which I was co-director. When I showed the photos to George Staempfli he agreed, and we subsequently arranged to visit Simon's studio in Brooklyn to see the original. Simon explained that it was not yet finished, yet George and I were in agreement that we would give him a show, focused around the

Triptych. Our gallery's commitment to the work, Simon later told me, "had something of a magic, fablelike quality for him."

As finances were of concern to Simon, it was agreed that the Staempfli Gallery would purchase the *Triptych* and pay Simon a monthly sum over a two-year period until the painting was completed. It was to be the highlight and focal point of the Dinnerstein exhibition in January and February 1975. Subsequent to the exhibition and publication of the catalog, the *Triptych* received the Rome Prize.

The blackness of the central worktable anchors the painting's very symmetrical composition. The three figures—intense and sculptural—stare out at the viewer. Wife and baby emit a medieval calm; the tranquility of a Madonna and child.

William Hull, then director of the Penn State University art gallery, saw the *Triptych* and asked permission to have it sent to his museum for possible purchase. I am happy to say that today it forms part of the museum's collection of contemporary American paintings. Congratulations, Simon!