



Fixing the World: Jewish American Painters in the Twentieth Century (Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life)

Ori Z. Soltes

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From drawing to paintings to installations, visual art in the 20th-century US has been marked by an explosion of productivity by Jews. Their work reflects profound historical and cultural issues, such as what it means to be a Jewish artist in the western tradition of Christian art, and what it means, as Jews, to be painters of the specifically American experience. Ori Soltes focuses primarily on the work of 20th-century Jewish painters to explore themes ranging from the trials of immigration, depictions of urban life and politics, renderings of the Holocaust, and the reconstitution of Judaism in recent years by feminist painters and Soviet emigre artists. The astonishing array of work represented in this book sometimes displays overtly Jewish themes and symbols; other paintings are included for their importance in the general development of 20th-century painting. Balancing individual biographies of painters, stylistic analysis, and thematic interpretations, Soltes offers a remarkable survey of 20th-century American Jewish painting. Despite the diverse range of images, themes, a common thread among most of these paintings is the concept of tikkun olam of repairing or fixing the world. Most of the artists represented here demonstrate an interest in the social, as well as the aesthetic, import of their work. We see this concern for social betterment in the urban paintings of the Soyer brothers, in the political paintings of Ben Shahn, in the Holocaust-inflected works of numerous artists, and in the more contemporary work of Joyce Ellen Weinstein decrying violence and racism. Such works of despair and repair are balanced by dozens of paintings of celebration, joyous experiments in how to convey Jewishness and Judaism on canvas into the 21st century. Concise, elegant, and sophisticated, *Fixing the World* is a teaching tool, a pleasure to read, and a feast for the eyes."

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