

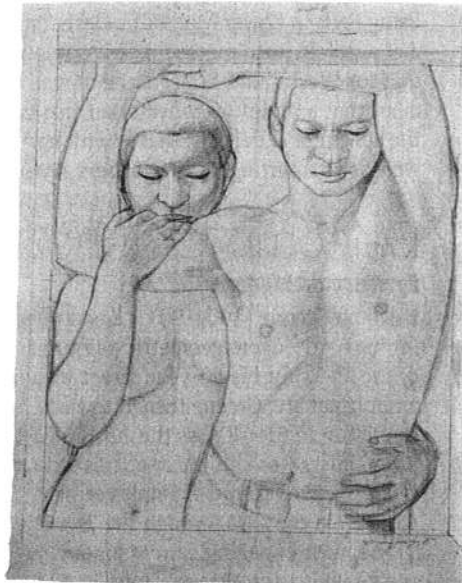
## George Tooker

**National Academy Museum  
and DC Moore**

Two concurrent exhibitions—one a concise retrospective at the National Academy, the other a group of working drawings at DC Moore Gallery—offered a rare opportunity to revisit this American master. George Tooker's resonant paintings filled with urban alienation and angst earned him a sizable reputation in the late 1940s and early '50s. With the rise of Abstract Expressionism, however, his immaculately crafted images of figures frozen in silent interiors and landscapes plummeted from favor. In today's more eclectic environment, Tooker's contribution can be appreciated again. The retrospective was curated by Robert Cozzolini of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, which co-organized the show with the National Academy and the Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio.

Tooker was one of an international array of artists who turned to figuration in the wake of Surrealism, but he was also a product of the Art Students League, a bastion of social realism. His interest in the nature of the psyche and social injustice fueled his search for images that were mythically potent and politically sensitive. One of Tooker's best-known works, *The Subway* (1950), shows figures imprisoned in an urban hell, and his *Government Bureau* (1956) depicts faceless drones shuffling through a claustrophobic labyrinth.

Images of distress recur throughout Tooker's oeuvre, but many later works explore themes of love, reconciliation, and birth. In *Lovers I* (1959) two figures braid into one, while in *Embrace of Peace II* (1988) a group of men and women join in spiritual and social harmony.



George Tooker, *Study for "Window VI,"* 1962, graphite on paper, 25" x 20". DC Moore.

Tooker's empathy for humanity is evident in the working drawings included in both exhibitions. They reveal the artist's understanding of the human body, his feeling for its masses and curves. In *Study for "Window VI"* (1962), the arc of a woman's arm rhythmically echoes the contours of her male companion's torso. Her hand presses the biceps of his raised arm, which brushes her lips as it sweeps up protectively to frame her face. In an age of irony, such images of love are rare.

—Nancy Grimes

*"George Tooker: A Retrospective"* is on view at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts through April 5.