1980

Photo Realism

Maureen A. Howe
Eastern Illinois University

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PHOTO REALISM

(TITLE)

BY

MAUREEN A. HOWE

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN ART

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1980
YEAR

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PHOTO REALISM

by

Maureen A. Howe
B.A. Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, 1979

ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts in Fine Art at the Graduate School
of Eastern Illinois University

Charleston, Illinois
1980

ABSTRACT

Photo Realism is the principal term used throughout this paper.
I use this specific terminology, Photo Realism, so as not to confuse it
with Super Realism, Sharp Focus Realism or Hard Edge Realism. True,
many of these Realisms all mean the impecable clarity of subject matter,
but, for my purpose, I am continually using Photo Realism to make it
evident that a photograph was rendered to achieve an end result.

Using predominantly contemporary Photo Realists' beliefs and opin-
ions as my main resource material, comparisons were made of their unique
styles so as to present the various uses of the photograph through the
medium of oil. To combine painting with photography is a technique in-
corporating a mechanical device with an old medium, retaining the integ-
rity of both. In this increasingly technical society, the artist can
use technology sensitively. The use of the photograph through painting
shows constructive growth toward the development of contemporary art.
The material presented here is to show that the use of the camera does
not duplicate productions, but only makes the productions more dynamic.

The use of photographic images inspired the Photo Realists as did
traditional realistic painting. The desire to struggle with photography,
which reveals true reality in just moments, not only influenced many
artists' compositions, but provided immediate source material for many
paintings. The Photo Realist is concerned with reevaluating common
things, thus emphasizing this force by size. The emphasis of an image
heightens the ability to see, to take note of what is really being
viewed. What usually goes unnoticed is now emphasized to achieve its
aesthetic beauty, thus informing us of a beauty which is usually
ignored. This enables the viewer to inspect the painterly quality of a

production. Ordinarily, the piece would engulf the viewer with emotions,
---- now investigating the production as a sole work of art is of most
importance.

PREFACE

Photo Realism is a calculated success of personal endurance and pride. Artists in the areas other than Photo Realism can afford luxuries of much greater experimentation on and off the canvas. For the sake of time, Photo Realists must decide upon a goal and strive for it. When an artist can produce only four to six paintings a year, each one must be on target. In art, it is simply impossible to maintain a target, hit it and keep hitting it. The circumstances of time, ideals, values and opinions are considered continuously. There is a big difference between painting an identical image and painting an identical image repeatedly.

Having been interested in this facet of painting for the past several years, I have researched to find this interesting subject worth contemplation. The critical anthology of Photo Realism is based on opinions of critics and viewers. There will always be room for discussion concerning the value of such art.

As in all phases of art, there is a question of relativity. The more opinions and debates provided, the better the ability for developing a personal preference. It seems that the more questions are seemingly answered, the more questions seem to appear, thus creating a broader spectrum for conversation. This is an important topic for discussion, but one that will not be concluded with a definite answer. Individual answers are concluded through personal and professional involvement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Photo Realism is a relatively new style of painting maturing in New York in the latter period of the 1960's. Though it has brought much controversy to the world of art, few books have dealt with its substance. In my research for vital answers to my many unanswered questions, I contacted several Photo Realists personally. At this time, I would like to thank Richard Estes, Tom Blackwell, Ralph Goings, Stephen Posen, David Parrish and Don Eddy for their time, consideration and contributions.

Throughout my graduate program, there are four outstanding men who devoted their time and patience to help me achieve my goal for this degree. I would like to thank Carl Wilen, Garret DeRuiter and Bill Heyduck, with a very special thanks to Dick Moldroski for helping me develop my painting techniques.

"It is an interesting and undeniable fact that many artists of
the past were fascinated by problems of visual truth, but none of
them can ever have thought that visual truth will make a picture into
a work of art."

E.H. Gombrich

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INTRODUCTION

"In the work of the Photo Realists we are presented with a relent-
lessly factual depiction of an image which has been photographically
recorded and then painstakingly translated into paint on canvas."[1]

The artists registering these photographic images are concerned
with the act of seeing. Their ability and sensibilities are portrayed
in each individual piece, often portraying the most banal of subjects.
The aesthetic quality of reaching below the surface of the sometimes
vulgar subject is by itself poetry. The conditioning of the human eye
continuously presents our perceptions in a different light, perceiving
things as they really are. The most common physical characteristics of
a subject matter are often taken for granted in the everyday situation.
The fascination and beauty of the photo realists transpose this common
situation into a dazzling experience of reality. This often leaves a
feeling of guilt, a sense of taking a so-often-seen environment and
planting a whole new perspective on the setting. The common subject
matter used can only depict the power of art, the endearing faith the
photo realist has suggested, the belief for recording an image.

The greatest force the photo realist uses is the typical American

scene that we, as a consumer society, have fallen into. By using our

environment as a basis for a painting not only exploits art, but also

the sensibilities of our society that are seemingly made shallow by

force of habit. Ironically, the photo realist is visually experiencing

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[1]Chase, Linda, "Photo Realism: Post-Modernist Illusion," Art
International, XX (Mar/Apr, 1976), 3-4.

the directness of the world produced through reproductions. This visual

exactness is enhanced through the use of the photograph. This immedi-

ate and permanent duplication of the environment offers to the artist

a compelling moment of existence.[2]

The impact of a photo realistic painting is partially due to the

use of the two-dimensional surface. The demands of quality are time-

consuming, thus involving various accounts of accuracy. This accuracy

and momentary preciseness are threatened if not carried to their full-

est. The photograph offers the instant cool factualism needed for the

success of a photo realistic piece. The photo realists treat their

subject matter very differently, a possible attack for a critic. The

concern for common things used by the public throughout decades is a

prime subject for a theme. The need to emphasize this unconsciousness

is challenging and opposing what we, the public, find familiar. The

principles so commonly used in previous art works deal with common

human experiences. This new introduction of realism concerning common

things would, of course, be questioned as to validity, as are all new

acquaintances in our sometimes all-too-traditional society.

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[2]*Ibid.*

ES TIS NU YUK CITY?

If Photo Realism can claim a genius, he is Richard Estes. His
large canvas turns a decaying dirty New York street scene into a re-
freshingly flawless portrayal of the urban environment. His cityscapes
maintain an atmosphere concentrating on reflected storefronts. The
refracted forms of the enormous window frames baffle the eye, giving a
maze of information with edges of objects disappearing and reoccuring
throughout the composition. "In such composition, the foreground and
background tend to change places. What is NOT in the picture, (accord-
ing to formal principles of perspective) is what we see in the picture."[3]
The essentially contradictory information almost defies belief. The
composition almost appears as a mirage of signs, cars, steel and chrome,
inside the store and out. The Photo Realists have a quality of portray-
ing all the minute details that are fascinating, so intriguing that
you achieve a sense of belonging. The viewer is confounded by the ac-
curacy of color, the impecable clarity and the complexity of the image.
The conviction of the viewer is determined through the professional
control of the medium.

Estes, an Illinoisan by birth, went to New York after studying at
the Art Institute of Chicago and soon fell into the stream of painting
that was currently acceptable. As Estes has stated in numerous maga-
zine interviews, he refers to Antonio Canaletto when making a compari-
son to his own work. Canaletto was an eighteenth century painter who
made extensive use of the camera obscura when creating his paintings.

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[3]Said by Gregory Battcock.

The distortions imposed by this instrument are often visible in his
work. This would suggest a close parallel with Photo Realism's use of
photography. Like Estes, Canaletto was a painter who represented soci-
ety very accurately without ever suggesting any close social involve-
ment. His busy figures appeared to be engrossed in their daily activ-
ities, but represented to us entirely emotionless. Photo realists con-
vey a separate detachment in a different way by the same refusal for
comment. One reason why Photo Realism met with such a poor initial
reception from established critics was because it reminded them immedi-
ately of a kind of art of the realist's tradition. The first impulse
was to dismiss any undesirable kind of counter-revolution against what
was accepted as "art." The issue turned not only on Photo Realism, but
on the apparent attempt to rival photography. The nineteenth century
was a battle of art versus photography. O.J. Rejlander used multiple
negatives to make imitations of Salon paintings of the time. Various
artists from Delacroix onward made use of photographs as an aid in paint-
ing, though they were usually reluctant to admit it. The attraction of
the photography seemed overwhelming. It seemed excellent, but the faith-
fulness to the model continued the rivalry.

The academic salon painters used the photograph for another purpose
as well. The urgent social message the salon painter created a psy-
chological mood realized through a smooth technique. The use of the
photograph enabled the salon painters to sharpen the focus adding visual
interest in their pieces. The actions and gestures were more readily
absorbed at a glance, but this narrative impulse gave the picture a
glacial surface. This surface was picked up on by the Surrealists,
such as Salvador Dali in the 1920's and 30's; however, it seems to be

Richard Estes, Bus Reflections, 1972 Acrylic on canvas,

38 x 50 in.

used more openly and honestly by the contemporary photo realists. Reality needs to speak for itself if it intends to be viewed honestly. Richard Estes once remarked that "the real trouble with Pop Art was that it made too much comment."[4] Any style of art that an individual feels is right and which he is best at deserves his defense.

Richard Estes believes that, like all movements in art, Photo Realism is not here to stay. The Impressionist style hardly lasted more than ten years. He feels he has always worked more or less in the same way and pointed out that Degas, Eakins and Cezanne used photographs. The tormented critics, etc., mulling over the problem of using photographs, only tend to illuminate their lack of real experience with the problem of painting as opposed to the dogma of criticism.

Estes has a unique, almost witty philosophy of his experience with life. In giving answers regarding this thesis, he told me to always expect a surprise. He announced his theory of conclusion: to always come to a logical and inevitable conclusion in everything you can find out and then assume that that will probably be the farthest from the truth.

Estes, once a figurative painter, admits to using photographs after getting out of school, basically because of the lack of accessible models. He then became involved with photographs of groups of people in a crowd. He was not satisfied with this technique as it became much too literal. His paintings could be read as a story and

[4]Smith, Edward Lucie, Super Realism (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1977), p. 22.

this was not his hopeful intent. He began taking pictures of the urban
scene, but painting all human figures out. He feels that the people are
much too distracting. While returning to New York to display his work
(he does a lot of painting in an unknown part of Maine), he primarily
seeks interesting structural architecture portraying the emphatic geo-
metrical shapes in his pieces. He often takes his camera and shoots
early morning subjects on Sundays when fewer people appear on the streets
of New York. Taking several pictures of the same subject or area gives
a detailed scope of different lighting and placement of the composition.
Each view represents different things that can happen in a painting,
thus being able to choose the most effective. He does not try to re-
produce the photograph on canvas; he only uses the photograph to pro-
duce the painting. Estes feels it is impossible to even pretend to
do this kind of artwork by setting yourself up in front of it. The
great thing about the photograph is that you can stop things in one
instant. The photograph and the painting are completely separate ob-
jects. The painting is more controllable than the photograph. Often
the photograph is very inconsistent; that is, sometimes it flattens
things out and sometimes it does not. In a painting, more depth can
be introduced by sharpening a line or painting an object completely
out; something that cannot be done in a photograph. Control of a
painting dominates control of a photograph. The majority of photo
realists do not simply "copy" a photo. The flexibility and clarity of
a painting are just enhanced by the use of the camera. The ability to
see everything in actual focus is an asset used by most photo realists.
The eye clearly records an image at one particular point, but, with
the aid of a photograph, the image is completely in focus at a given

time. Estes paints with a full in-focus quality. He feels the impact
of feeling to the viewer is greater if clarity is apparent throughout.

Mr. Estes continues his study by selecting several photographs
and makes them into slides. He then projects his photos onto a wall
to enhance some details for an upfront view, but no direct projection
onto the canvas takes place. The large geometrical structures are first
penciled in; then, with a switch of the slide for further specific de-
tails, the final drawing becomes clear. Upon completion of the out-
lined drawing, he begins painting a particular point which intrigues
him most. This starts his time-consuming project in the right direc-
tion. Estes does not work from one corner of the canvas painting his
way across to the other side, but works on all parts of the canvas
giving a unity to the piece. He feels the "pulling together" of a
painting produces an easily read conformity. He has his "on" days
where the paint will "listen to his brain", making it do exactly what
he wants it to do. At other times, the paint does not listen so
readily; therefore, he feels the "off" days can be hidden if the
painting has been worked over the entire canvas.

When asked as to what is the main problem in painting, Estes re-
plies, "the real problem with painting is how to get the damn paint to
do what you want it to."[5] Estes believes that critics often read more
into a piece than it really says. The art magazines do not always en-
joy painting for its aesthetic appearance, but rip it apart for a story.
Anything that is worth a debate in conversation has fulfilled its
duty. If Photo Realism or any art, for that matter, was not worth

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[5]Letter from Richard Estes.

controversy, then the accomplishment was not achieved. There will always be a deliberation over good art. Disagreements and outrage are far from unusual in a modern movement. Artists are always the first, loudest and most accusative in anything new and original in art. In 1906, Paul Signac, a modern painter and member of the avant-garde, claimed that Matisse had "gone to the dogs" after painting The Joy of Life. Scandal was just as evident when Matisse attacked Picasso's new painting, Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, asserting it to ridicule in the modern movement.

"Contemporary art is constantly inviting us to applaud the destruction of values which we still cherish, while the positive cause for the sake of which sacrifices are made is rarely made clear."[6]

The central point of attacking a photo realistic piece is the photograph, not the painting. This is the chief difference from a traditionally realistic piece. The photo realist has changed the artist's relationship to his subject matter; the photograph both registers this change and helps to accomplish it. The photo realist replaces the personal interpretative vision with the visual fact. This is the whole essence of the art of a photo realist.

As mentioned earlier, traditional realism and Photo Realism do not differ terribly. What differs is the philosophy behind the motive. There is a continuous question of what is art. The definition of art cannot be set by law; therefore, boundaries will continue to overlap and ethical rights and wrongs will continue to grow. Even traditional realists were not completely realists, but they dealt with partial

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[6]Battcock, Gary, ed, Super Realism (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975).

reality. Until the photo realists, the representational paintings were
seen precisely through visual feelings capturing these individual per-
ceptions. For example, Constable attempting to capture the "laws of
nature" or the Impressionists seizing the "effects of light." This
was the sole artist's attempt to incorporate reality, rather than re-
ality itself. One thing that can never be completely objective is the
particulars of translating reality onto a two-dimensional plane. To
circumvent this choice, the photo realist makes use of the photograph.
The changing world bestows accessible inventions; the use of these in-
ventions, as long as they are not abused, can only enlarge their uses.
The subject material the world offers lies in the artist's ability of
transformation. The way in which the end product is read is in the
frame of the viewer. The artist only recreates the world from his
own unique experiences. The prime intent has not been the subject of
a painting, but how man is related to it. The nature of our reactions
to the painting is what an artist strives for, not the reactions to
the physical world. The particular historical position of the photo
realist is his re-evaluation of things, which sometimes is misread, or
confused with devaluing the traditions of art and the role of the
artist.

BLACKWELL BLOOMS WITH BIKES

Renewing our visual satisfaction with the everyday surroundings in which we live is the belief of another well-defined photo realist, Tom Blackwell. This Chicago-born man has taken great interest in stating the possibilities and advancement of Photo Realism. His style reflects true belief in his goal. A conversation with Mr. Blackwell can only substantiate his duty and faithfulness to his work. After attending Lane Tech High School in Chicago, his family moved to California and he entered the military service. Upon completion of the service, he wanted to continue his art interests by attending college, but the finances were unavailable. He began to attend every art show imaginable; thus his appearances and interests became very evident in his paintings and achieving a knowledge of the current trend in the art world and what the art consumers and critics were looking for. Through acquaintances at shows, he was asked to exhibit at the Roy Parkson Gallery in Los Angeles. Through museums and his knowledge of accessable books, he showed an interest in the then popular abstract art, but his heart was always leaning toward realism. Continuing his abstract work was by way of the times. Not to be involved with some form of abstract painting was tantamount to declaring yourself an idiot. Abstract expressionism was in the air, being taught in all the schools and seen in all the magazines. Kline, DeKooning, Pollock, Guston, Motherwell et al were the Gods.[7] Blackwell was also being

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[7]Letter from Tom Blackwell.

swept up in the excitement. Realistic painting was a completely dead issue and was seen as retrograde with little interest and certainly not a direction to pursue one's work. Blackwell was a very gifted draftsman with a problem of wanting to work with drawing realistic imagery. There did not seem to be any place where his style of imagery could fit in, but, determined to make his mark, he became interested in the surrealists, particularly Max Ernest, Tchelichev and Magritte. It seemed a way in which he could use the unconscious, the accidental in his work, thereby relating it to abstract expressionism and still being figurative. Out of the diverse influences, he forged a style. It could be described as a kind of biomorphic abstraction with figurative elements, half plant and half figures. For a few years, this style kept his interest until he found himself in a rut. The major abstract painters that Blackwell admired seemed to be doing basically what he identified as signature or trademark paintings. That is, you could walk into a room and immediately identify a certain style of painting tagging it to a specific artist. Blackwell felt that it seemed too sterile for an artist to be identified in that way. Fortunately, Pop Art came along and changed all that. He was very excited with Pop Art being a legitimate way of being figurative and of having all the attributes of an abstract painting. Jim Rosenquist was a big hero of Blackwell's because he felt that Rosenquist was the best painter of the Pop movement. Pop Art led to the use of photographs in Blackwell's work.

In 1968, he began working seriously and exclusively from the photograph. He admits to doubts of using the photograph, but, after working seriously, he feels that no one who has ever painted seriously

from a photograph can have any illusions about it being easy. Black-
well feels it is terribly important to be well-grounded in all areas
of painting before committing your intent to Photo Realism. With 12
years of photo realistic experience, Blackwell believes that problems
are not avoided by using a photograph, as some may think, but, quite
the contrary, more difficult. For an example, when painting a photo-
graph of something, it's outdoors and the environment is changing con-
tinually, cars are passing by, etc.; it is a certain time of the year
and the leaves are a particular direction. With most photographs,
you are going to have to compromise between foreground, middleground
or background being in or out of focus. If there is a large object
or objects in the foreground or middleground, then the background will
be slightly out of focus and the information will be sketchy, blurry
or approximate. This is where you have to deal with that as a painter
and bring your skill and experience to bear on it, draw upon your own
powers of observation of what things look like, of how other painters
have dealt with that particular problem, make something painterly out
of that photographic image. It is not like painting from life where
you can concentrate on that specific background. You will never be
able to get that same scene back, the light will be different, things
move, seasons change. Since you are working photographically, you
are dealing with much more specific issues, such as that particular
light and that particular day. At the same time you use a photograph
to derive an image, you also bring a new standard of dealing with that
image to bear. The stakes are very different. A new aesthetic is at
work and no one will approach it in the same way. If ten photo real-
ists were given the same photograph, ten different interpretative

Tom Blackwell, <u>Bleeker Street Bike</u>, 1973 Oil on canvas,

75 x 48 in.

Tom Blackwell, <u>Main Street</u>, 1973-74 Oil on canvas,

96 x 60 in.

paintings would occur with ten individual sensibilities, with some

considerably better or more interesting than others. Working from a

photograph assures you or guarantees you of nothing. All it means is

that you are starting from a different point than traditional realists,

but you are aiming at different goals.

Now at the age of 41, Blackwell is always striving for a "tight"

composition. The clarity and trueness can only be exposed through his

rigid control of the brush. He previously used the grid system in

which he would block off his canvas into equal squares and then block

his printed photograph accordingly. The consumption of time changed

his technique into (unlike Estes) projecting his image directly onto

his canvas. This process enables Blackwell to lay a detailed drawing

down before beginning his project. With his Pentax camera, Blackwell

captures his own subject matter, at times purposely incorporating a

blurred extreme foreground in which an airbrush could be used, as seen

in his 1974 Queens Boulevard. He feels uncomfortable with an airbrush

at hand and uses it only out of necessity, often laying a painted area

down first and then glazing the paint slightly. Queens Boulevard was

taken from the artist's car capturing a street scene of late after-

noon traffic. The strange transformations undergone by colors and

surfaces in the late afternoon seem perfectly recorded. The experi-

ence of the automobiles clustered together is very familiar, yet the

scene is terribly banal. The sense of place seems unimportant as to

the sense of time. The piece is enhanced with the vibrating antenna

that is a mere blur in the center of the composition, first recorded

by his camera and put to compelling use by the artist.[8]

When beginning the actual tedious work of filling in the painting, Blackwell starts with shades of grey, breaking up the white canvas. This basicness must be completed before he can begin working on the larger relationships of color. He calls this "contrapuntal painting", playing off one area against another to bring correct clarifying values into proper focus. The color is then applied in varying degrees of the values underneath. At times, Blackwell makes a substitute of one color for a better, clearer color. He does not deliberately choose to make a bad color arrangement just because it shows up in the photograph. This is an aesthetic choice between a painter and just a copyist. He works on one painting at a time, with his favorite painting always being the one that he is engaged in at the time. His daily routine of rising early and painting throughout the day sometimes carries on for months. If he is lucky, he can produce up to three paintings in one year, keeping a daily diary of this work.[9] His huge canvases add to the impact of his work. Presently, he works in Petersbourgh, New Hampshire at his home, flying to New York frequently to work with a friend in a printmaking studio. Between paintings, he enjoys working with watercolors which also portray a photo realistic approach, though oil painting is his main interest. He feels an artist

[8]Lamagna, Carlo M., "Tom Blackwell's New Paintings," Art International, XX (December 1976), 3-4.

[9]Chase, Linda, "The Photo Realists," Art in America (Nov/Dec 1972), 73-90.

should, at all times, be experimenting with different media other than his emphasis, thus always increasing his knowledge of experience.

Blackwell believes an artist should not <u>live</u> art solely, but should engage in outside activities to keep from narrowing his scope of observance. He is active in jogging, horseback riding and fictional reading which relieve him from his day to day routine. This release only accentuates his anxious desire to "get back to painting."

Mr. Blackwell gave one statement that would motivate a soon-to-be artist. With no formal art instruction from a college, Mr. Blackwell has made his mark in the crowded art world. His belief in the way to become successful is simply to <u>believe</u> in yourself. He says that the people in the art world are always looking for answers, too, so they take chances. It is untrue that you will not become successful if you did not attend an art school or university. You <u>can</u> become an artist without formal training. The key word is observance. Keep your eyes and ears open at all times, learning every minute. He accentuates the need for determination over a long period of time. Listen to ideas and opinions, do not throw them out, but incorporate them in your own personal beliefs. The more research that is gathered can only enhance your knowledge and personal beliefs, constructing a better judgement of how and why you believe in Photo Realism.

Tom Blackwell, <u>Queens Boulevard</u>, 1974 Oil on canvas,

75 x 85 in.

UP CLOSE WITH CHUCK

In the late 1960's, a man arose out of the New York scene with a decision to paint portraits as a subject matter using a photo realistic technique. Chuck Close was the only man who based his working habits on skin, which in the early movement of Photo Realism, seemed absent. (Mr. Close does not believe in movements in art, only in time spans.) In a way, he, too, has side-stepped the many problems of facial painting, as he treats his subjects as objects rather than beings. Comparing his subject matter to the more prominent cityscapes of many of the photo realists, Close uses his own personal friends as subject matter. I asked him during our phone conversation why he chose to paint people he was continuously in contact with. He feels painting people in which the public could emotionally respond to was only defeating the exact purpose he was trying to get away from.[10] Painting people who are not familiar to the public leaves a questioning air of feelings and strengthens the painting for its painting qualities. Close constructs his objects on monumental-size canvases. He feels this one technique is overpowering to the viewer, bringing the viewer up close to the painting in awe-stricken disbelief. At a distance, one is first taken in by the head and how factual the object appears, but, moving closer to the painting, you become aware of the vast amount of information the artist has supplied. At this point, a viewer recognizes the real content. Upon viewing a Chuck Close painting, one is astonished at the details recorded which were translated through the careful application

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[10]Letter from Chuck Close.

of the paint. The closeness revealed an almost abstraction of colors running into each other. Through the nine foot by nine foot scale, the brilliance of the highlights fades into the flatness of the surface. When this scale was used by abstract expressionists, the brush marks were also increased, making the scale actually the same. Close uses small "marks" (as he calls them) on the enormous scale. He was one of the first painters to use an enormous scale without using correspondingly enormous strokes.[11]

Close works with a photographer, but does not take the actual pictures himself. He sets up his models and then lets a professional photographer do the shooting. He says he owns some photographic equipment, but feels rather inadequate to supply his own photographs. To enhance these God-like heads, he has the photographs taken at an unusually unique angle. In viewing his paintings, the head is not tilted back, but the photographer is shooting from a 3/4 view. It is not a front on, eye to eye view, but a slight under-the-nose shot. This position constantly poses interesting painting problems which fascinate Close. The pictures are never taken to flatter the subject, but simply kept as cool as possible without any facial expression existing. These purposely avoided expressions strengthen the viewer's impact, thereby decreasing an emotional tie which would be evident if a smile appeared. Repeatedly, the subject's eyes are fixed on the camera lens which Close feels gives the viewer a disturbing sensation. This fixed stance of the eyes can only be recorded photographically.

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[11]Battcock, p. 151.

Close _wants_ the viewer to realize he was working from a photograph when constructing a painting. It is amazing how people record images into their heads. Viewers want to see a painting of a person as an _actual_ person. When using a camera that mom and dad bought you for your 14th birthday, you ignore the imperfect blurred vision of the snapshot. This is exactly what Close would capitalize on. When flipping through the Sunday paper in search of the sports statistics, the viewer overlooks the haziness of a photograph, only capturing the image. Again, this is exactly what Close wants you to recognize in his amplified paintings. He wants his work to be viewed as a _photographic_ representation of an individual rather than a _factual_ representation of a person. Close feels that this technique is a means to understanding more about what we _actually_ see, so a Chuck Close piece is not a truthful vision. The vocabulary of art is expanded through techniques such as these. The reality of a camera is not so true as a viewer may believe. Recording images exactly as we see them in everyday life is not possible.

With the use of a 190 mm lens, Close exaggerates the focus by restricting the depth of the field. This alters the appearance of the subject enough to give a somewhat narrower look to the head. In viewing his subjects, take note of the out-of-focus nose, a point closest to the viewer, thus logically making it the most in focus normally. This portrays a sense of the eyes being in focus at the level of the plane with the nose and ears out of focus. The result is striking. The human eye is used to supplying its own focus and adjusting it so we can visually enjoy the entire image at once. The normally blurred

effect sometimes seen in a photograph, such as a barrette pulling back a strand of hair, is accentuated in his paintings. He sometimes "goes a little overboard" to draw attention to a particular area.

Close was labelled as a photo realist not because he enjoyed painting from a photograph, but for a reason of discipline. He attended the University of Washington in Seattle and did his graduate work at Yale University. Figure painting had not been taught at the schools he attended; therefore, a problem was posed. Anything involving a challenge immediately involved Close. The abstract expressionism he had learned in school offered a style of freedom, so to jump to the other end of the pole, the camera could offer him a precise model of very controlled obedience.

Mr. Close works with color in a unique fashion. In his large New York studio in 1966, he constructed a 26-foot long canvas. This experimental canvas was the basis for most of the techniques he uses presently. No white paint was used, only black. He used every instrument imaginable for applying paint. At one point, he inserted an eraser into a drill and took off paint he did not want. Among his experiments, he used an airbrush for the ability of absence of brush marks.[12] Close incorporates this technique somewhere in all his present paintings. From 1967 to 1970, he used only black and white paint; just another problem posed and solved. Deciding to reintroduce color into his work, he introduced another challenge of another photographic process called dye transferring. This complicated process is simply breaking an image up into three colors—red, blue and yellow—and their

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[12]Ibid., p. 156.
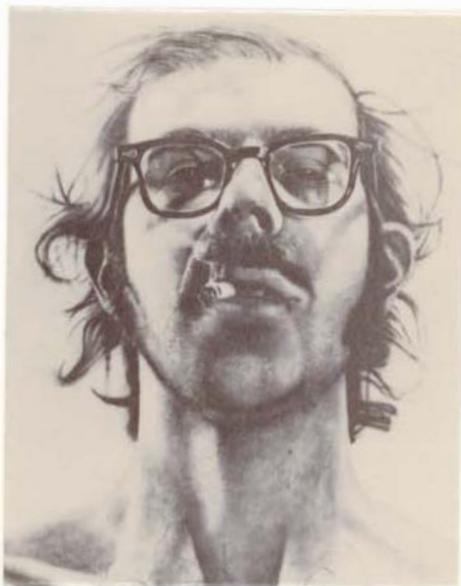
Chuck Close, Self Portrait, 1968 Acrylic on canvas,

100 x 90 in.

intermediate combinations. He started at the top of an image, working his way to the bottom staying within specified areas. This is not a familiar feat, but it is presented so as to show just another one of the unlimited abilities with the use of the photograph. Close continued to use color, but not as the usual "learned" color relationships were presented. Photographs and magazine photographs are never true to color. After being processed, a photo in a printshop is divided into three basic tints. The rest is guesswork and, after a number of copies are run off, the strength of ink applied varies. Close never follows the same color pattern as in a photograph. For example, if a gray is seen in a photo, Close uses a reddish-gray or a bluish-gray, anything to trump up the color. He paints much like a Pop artist would with color, only not to such a striking degree.

Mr. Close gave a closing word of advice as heard from his sculptor friend Robert Sierra. He says that you always want to separate your work from someone else's. Photo Realism enables you to do this with its wide range of uses. It is different and relatively new, subjecting it to changes and exploration. After all, originality is the name of the game. He compares art to a Y in the road. When you come to a big Y in your art career, take the hardest route because 98% of the people always take the easiest way.

Having presented three photo realists who use the same instrumental device, the photograph, one discovers that they produce three distinctly different end products. Richard Estes uses his application of the initial drawing differently from Tom Blackwell. One projects his image onto the wall next to his canvas while the other projects his image directly onto his canvas. Estes has a unique quality about his paintings,

no emotional materialistic involvement, and Blackwell paints scenes

which he encounters every day, like his bank parking lot in Queens

Boulevard. Chuck Close is noted for his out-of-focus range and com-

pletely figurative paintings. His canvases employ a large scale, just

as Estes and Blackwell, but notably more so because of the one cen-

tered image. All of these men do have something in common geograph-

ically. They base their homes predominantly in New York.

GOINGS GETS GOINGS

The East Coast presently applauds another active photo realist, Ralph Goings. Goings was born in California where he taught high school and college art while pursuing an art career. The northern California man began his paintings from photographs when he was an abstract painter, basically to identify shapes, forms and colors more readily. Enjoying working from a photograph, Goings eventually viewed the photographic qualities more seriously and started painting more detail. Having moved to New York, his painting style continued to grow until his present day photo realistic qualities appeared. His subject matter is very simple and basic, something identifiable to the entire public such as his 1978 Still Life with Straws. Goings believes that a replica of the world around us gives us a much more truthful statement about the artist and his abilities, rather than some conjured up imaginary image. My correspondence with Mr. Goings makes me believe that his personal touch is important. The interest the man holds for the society as a whole shows through the paintings. He has a deep concern of what makes America tick and projects this feeling through much of his subject matter.[13]

Concerned with the photograph, Mr. Goings believes that the camera is just as important as the other tools of painting, such as a paintbrush or a tube of color. His numerous composites of slides and prints are as valuable as a sketchbook or preliminary drawing. He

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[13]Letter from Ralph Goings.

feels that the camera is not an isolated part of painting, but just another means of the whole process. He prefers working from photographs because the camera deals with the problems of translating a three-dimensional form into a two-dimensional image. The camera does it in an impersonal, non-artful way that is of most interest to him. He feels that making a two-dimensional painting from a two-dimensional photograph (source) is the point--not a criticism, not an issue. The way the camera sees provides a wealth of new visual aspects for painting to explore. The interest of the visual possibilities of a subject matter not generally considered for its aesthetic potential is intriguing. Goings is fascinated by the places and things we daily use that are arranged by function. This random kind of order provides him with continuously exciting formal possibilities for a painting.

Before beginning his painting project, Goings takes his Canon A-1 35mm super electronic with Kodachrome 64 film and begins driving his car. During his drive, Goings simply takes all sorts of photos. The subject matter serves as a prime importance to the success of a painting. The specific image is chosen for what it is rather than its compositional elements. The environment that surrounds a particular image is also important. For example, many times a fine building appears with a lot of shimmering glass windows and sleek polished chrome, but, in the reflection of the large glass window, is a dirty street--an overhead super highway with grotesquely written grafitti on the concrete.[14] Needless to say, this scene would make for a rather unattractive picture.

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[14]Cottingham, Jane,"Techniques of Three Photo Realists: Ralph Goings", American Artist,Feb 1980, pp. 64-95.

While taking numerous shots, everything is taken into consideration. The selection the right slide (or slides) is very time consuming. Often he will select more than one slide as each captures specific qualities of a detailed area. Goings projects his image onto his no larger than 4' x 5' canvas. He still stretches his own canvases as no one else can get them tight enough. The actual drawing of the image onto the canvas takes a day. His working time consists of seven days a week, each day being at least eight hours. Goings wants the drawing to be as impersonal and unartistic as possible. The drawing is only a guide for when the painting begins. After completion of the drawing, he feels relaxed and free to paint his heart out. This is where another good aspect of the use of the photograph comes in. He does not worry about the weather outside; it could be pouring down rain, but it will not control his painting habits--he paints on.

Goings has changed his style considerably over the last 15 years. When first beginning to use the photograph to achieve an exact corresponding image, he did not change or alter anything at all from photo to canvas.[15] As time passed, his viewpoints altered to only using the photograph as a reference. Goings now adds and subtracts images, makes substitutes for color patterns and even rearranges the subject matter. The main concern is to have a clear photograph from which to work. If a painter can see all the detail within a photo, then the possibilities of the image are unlimited.

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[15]Ibid., p. 95.

Ralph Goings, Twin Springs Diner, 1977 Oil on canvas,

48 x 64 in.

Ralph Goings, <u>Still Life with Straws</u>, 1978 Oil on canvas,

28½ x 30½ in.

Ralph Goings, <u>Kentucky Fried Chicken</u>, 1973 Oil on canvas,

48 x 68 in.

In conclusion, Goings stresses a point to remember when painting from a photograph or a slide (that is, your reference material)--"the reference material should always be your servant, never your master."

PURE PARRISH PAINTING

David Parrish, unlike the majority of other photo realists, makes his home in Huntsville, Alabama; however, much of his work is shown through the Janis Gallery in New York. Parrish seems to work in a unique, orderly fashion intrigued by machines, reflections and close-up visions. Up to this point, the photo realists presented have taken their photographs and painted subject matter that can be viewed as a whole picture. An entire scene such as a Goings' Kentucky Fried Chicken piece or an Estes cityscape is an image that you can find yourself walking into. Parrish is a close-up painter, collecting photographs of detailed parts of things. A motorcycle painter at heart, Parrish is not only fascinated by the abstract qualities it provides, but the psychological message of the contemporary symbols of speed, freedom and danger. The work is constructed in one manner, but is composed in another way in order to suggest that the painting is a mere excerpt from something which has been viewed in a continuously flowing way. This technique is seen in only a few other photo realists, such as

Don Eddy who views his subject matter not only magnifiably, but

repetitiously. Ben Schonzeit also sees his subject matter intensely,

but with out-of-focus qualities. A lesser known photo realist,

Franz Gertsch, views his subjects with unbelievable clarity.

Parrish's daily schedule is pretty mundane. Self-discipline leads

to inspiration so that he works at least eight hours a day, beginning

at eight and continuing until he can find a convenient stopping point,

a seam where he can pick up the next day. He works with oils and

brushes, so the stopping point is important because of drying time and

color matching. Maintaining an even emotional climate is important in order to keep the painting's emotional character alive through weeks and months of work. In his recent paintings, Parrish is interested in charging them with more color and movement by retaining their overall smoothness. As seen in Yamaha '78, he emphasizes the reflections seen in the windshield and diminishes the machine itself. The distortions that occur in the windscreen allow a freer hand in color and gesture and produce a shallow, layered effect that approaches abstraction. He tries to push the image as closely as possible to abstraction without losing the realism.[16] The finished paintings are much less photographic, but retain certain photographic effects such as hot spots, out-of-focus areas and double images. Parrish describes his painting not as work, but fun. The fun is not in making the photographic replica or using tricks, fooling the eye into believing you are seeing a photograph by finding new ways to use an old medium, oil on canvas, without reverting to those devices of highlighting, color mixing and composition that have traditionally meant realism.

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[16]Letter from David Parrish.
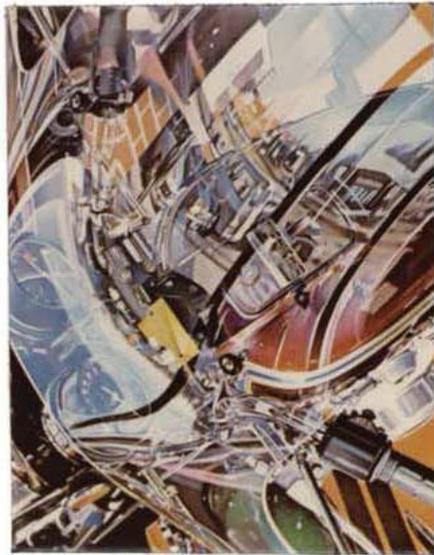
David Parrish, <u>Yamaha</u>, 1978 Oil on canvas,

40 x 50 in.

Don Eddy, Silverware for M, 1975 Acrylic on canvas,

40 x 55 in.

Ben Schonzeit, <u>Produce</u>, 1971 Acrylic on canvas,
80 x 108 in.

Franz Gertsch, <u>Making Up</u>, 1975 Acrylic on cotton,

92 x 136 in.

HOWE REAL IT IS

With many professional influences, my emphasis in Photo Realism began in 1977. From that point, my personal commitment and destination is striving for complete clarity. The "sharpness" in a painting defines this clarity.

Before beginning a painting, I must first find my ideal subject matter with which I feel comfortable to work. My subject matter generally consists of storefront windows, motorcycles, etc., anything dealing with reflective surfaces. Taking several pictures of various environments enables me to select my desired direction. After deciding upon a particular photograph, the print is blown up into an 8" x 10" print. This helps me to see my subject matter more clearly. Indeed, this often takes away some of the quality of the print, but I reinforce that quality with my own chosen color.

My canvas size varies, but no less than a 16" x 20" canvas is chosen. After gesso is applied to the canvas, the beginning drawing takes place by first gridding the area. This technique ensures that no details will be dropped. When working on a very large canvas, the grid is used so as not to "lose" oneself in the massive white area. After many hours of well-defined drawing, the first application of oil paint can begin. I mentally divide my canvas into sections, always providing a convenient stopping point. Usually beginning in the upper left hand corner and working my way through a particular section, I am constantly looking at my print for the correct color. Many times substitutions for colors take place if one color pattern laying next to another is aesthetically undesirable.

Presently, I am leaning toward clarity to the point of abstraction; that is, taking photos of close up realisms and emphasizing the abstraction of the piece without losing the recognizable reality of that subject. This technique provides an interesting and intriguing visual assessment of the end product.

Photo Realism is a style of painting which involves understanding, creative thought, visual aesthetics, self-discipline and patience. Because of the time devoted to a specific painting, one must fully believe in its technique. To reach out and make the viewer aware of his environment is very important; Photo Realism aids in that visual experience.

It is my hope to continue painting in the field of Photo Realism by inventing, testing and utilizing new techniques that may benefit my specific style.

National Bank, Fabrics and Crafts, 1979 Oil on canvas, 36 x 28 In.

Maureen Howe, <u>Fabrics and Crafts</u>, 1979 Oil on canvas,

16 x 20 in.

Maureen Howe, Finish Line, 1980 Oil on canvas,

30 x 36 in.

CONCLUSION

A great asset of Photo Realism is not only to tell us about new things, but to help us recognize what we already know. Comparing the photo realists mentioned throughout this paper, we find various techniques achieved through the use of the photograph, relating to each other in clarity, discipline and sometimes subject matter, but not in replica. Without the use of the photograph, these great pieces of art might never have existed. The magnified reflections and sometimes near abstractions of images created lend access to not only the rigid defiance of the artist, but also of the camera lens. For an artist to repeatedly take a stance in front of a reflective storefront window day after day is, without question, impossible. Impossible at least to achieve any magnificence as they have thus far shown. Many, many variables are to be considered, making the problem depleting. These variables include lighting, weather which takes in a wide range of disadvantages, color changes, placement and even texture. Because of the continuous clarity and preciseness, a one-day sitting would also be unthinkable.

This type of art is not new, at least, not completely. All art is a spin-off from a previous movement. Pop Art, prior to Photo Realism, involved men such as Malcolm Morley and Mel Ramos, who are now contemporary Photo Realists. All the Photo Realists had at least one hero: Estes with Canaletto, Goings with Vermeer, Blackwell with Max Ernest, Cottingham, not previously mentioned but well acclaimed with Hopper, etc. These professionals in the art world all admired masters of various times and movements. They did not pop up and

become famous without first acquiring knowledge of what had been

achieved in the art field already. These artists continued to study

and even idolize where art came from and where, of course, it is going.

The fields of art have continued to grow with no definite starting or

stopping point from one style to the next. The circles continue to

intersect each other involving Photo Realism from Abstract Expression-

ism to Conceptual Art to Pop Art.

The emergence of Photo Realism is one that is important, and a

growing phenomenon increasing the interest in photography, but one that

is not threatening to painting. It is simply one articulation of the

desire to deal with external data in an individual's pursuits. How

the subject matter information is gathered is not universally signif-

icant; it is only significant in relation to the specific concerns of

the individual gathering it. The photograph is not appropriate to all

areas of art, but, in Photo Realism, the use of photography is perfect-

ly appropriate and justifiable.

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