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Recent Developments in Representational Painting

William Arthur Richards

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN REPRESENTATIONAL PAINTING · RICHARDS

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Recent Developments in Representational Painting

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RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN REPRESENTATIONAL PAINTING

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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in the Graduate School of
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Albuquerque, New Mexico
August, 1970

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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Continuing since its eminence in the High Renaissance during the Fifteenth Century in Europe, representation had been the predominant mode of painting until the early decades of the Twentieth Century. This form also has firm foundations in America's artistic heritage. The progress and momentum of realistic painting, however, was to a large extent eclipsed during the late 1940's and 1950's by non-objective painting, particularly Abstract Expressionism. Unexpectedly the recent decade has seen numerous artists who have shown a renewed interest in representation as a basis for painting.

This study surveys the productions of these painters, probing into their artistic ambitions, theories, as well as their methods of painting. It appears that these representationalists can be stylistically categorized but they are not held together by any awareness of being a unified or organized artistic movement. In two categories I have placed painters who may be seen as being influenced by ambitions of other more predominant art movements, during the fifties by Abstract Expressionism, more recently by post-painterly abstraction and Pop art. Another contemporary group of artists are striving for a return to direct

representation devoid of much modern rhetoric and methods. These artists are largely antagonistic to contemporary trends in art, and until recently have worked in relative independence and obscurity. In my conclusion I could not safely state that the representationalists in any of the categories formulated are creating highly significant statements about modern life or art on an individual basis. But the recent high degree of productivity and notoriety of these painters seems at least to be placing a renewed awareness on the possibilities available to representational art. The extreme polarities found in realism--now very much separated by ideological differences--for me, may breed a form of representational painting that may be vital and contemporary.

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All the arts live by words. Each work of art demands its response; and the urge that drives man to create--like the creations that result from this strange instinct--is inseparable from a form of "literature," whether immediate or premeditated. May not the prime motive of any work be the wish to give rise to discussion, if only between the mind and itself?

(Paul Valéry: Degas, Manet, Morisot)

I. INTRODUCTION

> Modern art, like modern literature and modern life, has lost much. In some directions it has more than compensated for the loss, developing its own complexity and its own--far more subjective--inwardness. But as one brought up on the past (like everyone else), I cannot help regretting what has been lost. The regret is futile, yet I believe that this nostalgia for the past, responsible though it has been for academicism, has also been a vital ingredient of the greatest advanced art of our times. The artist immune to it has that much less to struggle with, but he is also so much poorer for this immunity. A certain dosage of nostalgia, a certain twinge of academicism, the very struggle against it seems to me to have been indispensable to both Matisse's and Picasso's greatness and to have contributed to the superior largeness of their art...Not that the work of the modern artist must by any means resemble the past, but he must show some sense of it, a realization of its presence and attraction. Otherwise he dissipates himself in sheer quality and fails to impose that order and shaping which are indispensable concomitants of high art, and without which the truly cultivated spectator is left thirsty. High art resumes everything that precedes it, otherwise it is less than high.
>
> (Clement Greenberg, 1948)

Greenberg, foremost spokesman for the Abstract Expressionist movement that held reign for over a decade, was quoted in full, as I have done, in an article entitled "A Variety of Realisms" by the artist-critic, Sidney Tillim. Tillim is the major, or at least the most vocal, advocate of a movement by painters towards a renewed interest in the art of representation. He states: "Since 1961 I have

supported attempts to revive an art that in the context of modernism would be radically representational."[1] In his quest for an art that would be "radically representational" today, Tillim refuses to recognize painters who are doing anything in paint that seems a variation of older styles such as Dadaism, Surrealism, or Expressionism, or to accept much of the work that is an outgrowth of Pop art. Within these limitations set by Tillim, one wonders what has been painted, and can be painted now, that will still be relevant to current art.

In order to help answer this question I have undertaken a study of representational art of the last decade with the intention of presenting the forms taken recently in realistic art. I soon discovered that artists who can be grouped under the heading "representational," (in other words painters who maintain a strong connection with observed reality in their work, either as a means of visual expression or as an end in itself) are working in many and diverse styles. Some are doing work that could be described as extremely representational, while others are using representation that seems far afield, even antithetical to Tillim's thesis.

To prepare a survey of the various polarities found in realistic or representational art of the last decade,

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1. Sidney Tillim, "A Variety of Realism," Art Forum, 7, (Summer, 1969), p. 42. Greenberg's quote is also on p. 42.

a definition, or re-definition, of the term "Realism" must first be undertaken. This will be done--not only for the sake of clarity but as a step toward greater understanding--in order to reveal the basic differences found in representational art in the years between 1960 and 1970.

Realism, like its generally accepted opposite, abstraction, is an attitude more than a specific "look" about painting. Primarily it is an impulse--not a style--a particular way of confronting life. It is a way of seeing things as they appear,an attitude towards transforming reality as the artist finds it--without his values becoming an obstacle in this process. His view must be unromantic, with neither sentiment nor with strong personal reactions, since he, himself, then becomes the subject of the painting. The realist sees the world "as it is;" he does not cover up ugliness or amplify the beautiful. His "manner," or his manipulation of paint, must be completely under control, dictated only by what he is seeing and dictated by a strong and single impulse to transform the image from the three-dimensional world of nature, or imagination, onto the two-dimensional "world" or surface of the canvas. Upon this flat surface, (which is understood as a fundamental obstacle to overcome), the realist creates tones, shapes and forms that in their arrange-

ment correspond to some aspects of the subject. A subject when taken from reality is usually three-dimensional, thereby necessitating the creation of an illusion of its three-dimensionality on the canvas. The concern for the "integrity of the picture plane" is completely at odds with the realist's primary goals--immediately placing his work in a very different realm than much of the non-objective painting created since Cubism. Also at odds with the realist is the visual equivalent of an emotional response of the Expressionists and the intellectually distorted interpretation of the reality of the Surrealists.[2]

The realist, however, as a human being, cannot be completely without subjective responses. As much as he might strive to assimilate the complete mechanical "objectiveness" of the camera, the artist cannot rid himself of some form of personal reaction to his subject. These reactions find their visual manifestation in the realist's painting, notwithstanding the maximum effort on his part to avoid any "misinterpretation" or distortion of nature. These particular subjective reactions are, however, not his orientation; they occur beyond his control.

Whether these self-restrictive concepts are valid means of defining a way of painting, or more

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2. Justin Schorr, "Destination: Realism," Art in America, No. 1, (1964), p. 117.

exactly "a way of seeing," in the context of today's art, is at present an unanswerable question which has, however, created a stimulating dialogue between the adherents of realism and those of non-objective painting. Justin Schorr in his article "Destination: Realism," (an important aid when I began to construct this working definition of realism) makes a concluding statement pertinent to this issue:

> ...realism...does not deny the validity of man's continuing need for fantasy, emoting, abstract explorations, and their fulfillment in art. Realism has no theoretic privilege, for it is no closer to (or further from) the heart of art than any other approach. I say only that our day in history urges an upsurge of realist attitudes, that there is good, challenging and exciting work for the realist to do, entailing more difficult and rewarding developments than are usually understood. Given this job (and a dash of genius) realism will have quite a day.[3]

Two additional terms I have already used should be given greater clarification as well. "Figurative" and "representation" in many essays on art are interchanged arbitrarily with the word realism. In a general sense this usage is acceptable, but these terms carry different connotations. When one speaks of a figurative art the immediate image conjured up in one's mind is that of a work which deals with the human figure. No specific method of depicting or delineating the image is contained within the term.

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3. Justin Schorr, p. 118.

The highly abstracted work of Willem de Kooning may readily be labeled figurative, and at the opposite extreme the precisely realistic paintings by Alfred Leslie are also called figurative. Both painters use the human figure as the subject of their work, yet their end results--total visual effects--are quite radically different. Making matters of definition even more complex, certain landscape and still-life paintings have been also called figurative. So figurative is not a viable term when used as a substitute for realistic--figurative must be used as a generalizing term which encompasses all work that deals however tenuously with reality, and the artists personal interpretation of this reality.

The word representational, when used to define one category of painting, designates a more limited spectrum of examples than does the term figurative. "Representational" seems, however, to function with fewer restrictions and greater flexibility, providing space for a wider field of contemporary painting than the term realism. Similar to elements in the definition of realism--but not found in the definition of figurative --the term representation reveals within it an implication of both the process involved in the artist's conceptualization of his art as well as his mode of expression.

Within the art of representation it is understood that the works must "represent" something; more exactly, they should "re-present"--transform--an image from one level of understanding (reality) to a second level (illusion). These two levels could be, respectively, observable reality--nature--and the artist's configuration on the canvas.

Understandably this process of transformation closely relates to the machine-like act of the realist, yet as I understand it, the representational artist does not aspire to the exacting limitations of the realist's credo. While the realist "places a mirror in front of nature," and refuses to bend this mirror in any way, the artist interested in representation may allow a greater emphasis on the act of transformation. The representationalist is involved in utilizing his personal interpretation when translating what he "sees" in nature to a painted image; he allows his subjective response and/or his intellectual reactions to operate in this transformation. Rather than an interest in realism for its own sake, he is concerned with developing a form of realism that becomes, for him, a personalized mode of expression. This is not to say that an art of representation must go beyond, or become more subjective, than direct realism.

What should be clear is that realism does not extend to representation, does not allow the subjectivity of the artist to emit itself.

Briefly I have attempted to present certain distinctions between the three basic terms most frequently encountered in writings on the art of representation. My definitions are far from complete in describing the subtle differentiations in meaning which each term implies. Yet I feel they will be adequate for this study. We shall encounter even greater complexities, and subtleties of meaning, in the actual work these terms attempt to describe.

II. EVOLUTION OF REPRESENTATIONAL ART SINCE THE LATE 1950'S--A SURVEY OF MAJOR TRENDS, THEIR SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Representational Artists Active During the Preeminence of Abstract Expressionism

The early practitioners of non-objectivity, abstract painting--starting with the pioneers of this form, Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian, not only advanced the ideals of their highly original theories on art, but did so by condemning or at least devaluing the conventions of representation as a valid art form. According to the art critic Lawrence Alloway, Malevich believed that "realism belonged to the under-developed centuries or to the country." Mondrian, whose early work was representational, after he developed his "pure" way of seeing nature, believed that realism was antithetical to nature's "pure visual structure." Realistic work was too specific and therefore "destroyed art's universality and spiritual elan," according to Kandinsky.[4] Advancement of their own ideals at the cost of time-honored concerns of realists seems in retrospect, a natural phenomenon. To pave their way the proponents of abstraction felt it necessary to combat their only competitor--representational art. According to Alloway,

4. Lawrence Alloway, "Art as Likeness," Arts Magazine, 4, (May, 1967), p. 34.

"...twentieth century polemics of realism versus abstraction, all the vigor, all the subsequent influence, was with the abstract artists..."[5] He draws a conclusion pertinent to any discussion comparing abstract art and realism:

> Thus, modernity, concentration, and spirituality came to be reserved for abstract art and critics have, on the whole, accepted, either as cultural reflex, or in sophisticated reworkings, these primitive views, which of course are no longer adequate to abstract art.[6]

Many critics today still hold tightly to the rhetoric of the early developers of abstraction. Because of the established anti-representational overtones inherent in these theories, criteria for criticism of current representational painting is inadequate. This inbred inability to come to terms with representational art is a weakness within the otherwise healthy artistic atmosphere existing today for creative freedom. The contemporary realist, however, does not enjoy this freedom, for he continues to assume wrongly that he is in conflict with abstract art; he must draw a strong line between representation and abstraction--as today they seem incompatible. Since this incompatibility exists there have been attempts by various groups of artists in the last decade to organize a so called "return to the figure."

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5. Alloway, p. 34.

6. Ibid.

The necessity for organization and for slogans as well--to fight the "supremacy of abstraction"--is demoralizing. There is no need for an organized "return" to the figure since in reality artists have never ceased painting the figure. Some of these "movements" have tried to indicate that abstraction is no longer an acceptable or viable mode of expression--as if to say: we must return to the figure since non-objective painting is dying. An overt attempt of this kind developed in Chicago, where the so called "Monster School," insisted that they were returning to passion, meaning and true feeling in art--supposing, it can be assumed, that abstract art had dealt with none of these.[7]

A self-promotional stance that attempts to belittle the art of abstraction for the enhancement of its own image should not be necessary today. It can only serve to widen the gulf between abstraction and representation as different, but still both valid, means of visual expression. Modern art should allow for a healthy growth of a multiplicity of styles; regarding this realization, Alloway states:

> It is this abundance, this quantity, of artists and styles both real and abstract which is <u>modern</u> about modern art, and not

7. Alloway p. 34.

> one particular slice of the cake, not one privileged corner. Simple choices of one way, are nostalgic simplifications of present experience which is nothing if not copious.[8]

Art critics have accepted the domination of abstract art. The desire of painters to create illusion, from nature or imagination, has nevertheless remained a steady impetus. In order to deal with the products of these artists, critics will have to re-investigate their criteria for evaluation and analysis, as well as re-examine their vocabulary and theories to be used for discussion of representational art. This task seems more pressing now, when innumerable approaches to representation are beginning to take form.

Much of American art before the "explosion" of Abstract Expressionism was in varying degrees colored, sometimes saturated, by European influences. In the representational vein there were artists who embodied a strong sense of independence--a demand for independence similar to that shared already on a political and economic level by most Americans. Such artists as Ivan Albright, Edward Hopper, Grant Wood, Thomas Benton and Charles Sheeler should be cited here. Albright, indeed, may have approached a form of surrealism, but without doubt a very original

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8. Alloway, p. 34.

conception of it. His is an art with few parallels in twentieth century Europe. Many artists, such as Charles Sheeler, adopted European ideas for a short time, only to eventually evolve their own personal, "American" style. Sheeler's early work dealt with a superficial realism; the surface presentation alluding to reality but with an insubstantial underlying structure. Realizing the limitation of this direction he turned to Cubism, thereby losing the surface reality but finding structure. During this phase in his development Sheeler worked as a professional photographer and believed that the role of painting was opposite to that of photography. This stance was short-lived as he began to realize through his photographs that nature followed the rules of structure he was using in his non-representational cubist painting. This discovery was the basis for the highly structured representational work of his well-known mature style.

The work of these artists along with numerous others since Thomas Eakins, and before, set a precedent for representational art in the United States. Also at work was a steady importation of work and ideas from Europe--such as the highly influential Armory Show and the intensive crusading work of Alfred Stieglitz through his gallery and writings.

Within a very short span of time American artists had many alternatives to turn to, follow, or rebel against. A great spirit of experimentation characterized this phase in the history of American painting; an awareness of art beyond the geographic borders became prevalent. The most publicized art forms at this time were involved with realism, however, until the late 1940's with the ascendancy of Abstract Expressionism. Up to this point abstraction and representation were accepted by artists as co-existing forms.

This coexistence did not continue when the "New York School" of painting began to gather a tremendous following during the 1950's. During the reign of Abstract Expressionism, representational painting "survived" on its own--seemingly avoiding any direct confrontation--though the enduring representational work was affected by the close proximity to Expressionism.

One of the first discernible representational styles which rose to a high position in art as an outgrowth of Abstract Expressionism was the West Coast movement that became known as Bay Area figurative painting. Characterized simply, the painters of the Bay Area revered an Abstract Expressionist manipulation of paint to serve realistic ends. Enduring motifs such as figures in interiors

or exterior settings, still lifes and landscapes with aggressive painterliness prevailed which entailed broad sweeping strokes of sunlit colors. A love and freedom in displacement of color is confined only by the realistic intentions of the artist, determined primarily by his selective choice of subject matter.

The best known of these West Coast artists who utilized representational vision were David Park, Elmer Bischoff and Richard Diebenkorn. (The list could also include Paul Wonner, William T. Brown and Nathan Oliveria.) The three leading artists, originally Abstract Expressionists, did not turn to a representational style at the same time. Park was the first to make this commitment. He did so in 1950, Bischoff in 1953 and Diebenkorn in 1955.[9]

For Diebenkorn this was actually a return to figurative art, as his earliest paintings were representational. He describes his first evolution to abstraction:

> I was painting pictures of people and still lifes and interiors and what-not and surroundings, and I don't know, I started getting increasingly interested in the painting that I was doing and less so in this transient thing about

9. Norman Geske, The Figurative Tradition in Recent American Art, (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1968), "Venice 34," p. 71.

> me, and so I guess in a very kind of awkward way, I got into this kind of non-objective or embryo-action painting.[10]

Within this statement spoken informally in retrospect, one senses a certain lack of conviction or confidence concerning his initial move towards abstraction. His non-objective painting matured during study with Mark Rothko and later under the guidance of Clifford Still. Even though he changed to representational painting from abstraction later than both Park and Bischoff, Diebenkorn's decision was more noteworthy as an artistic maneuver for by 1955 he had created for himself a fairly substantial reputation as one of the better Abstract Expressionists working on the West Coast.

Paul Mills, an authority on the Bay Area figurative painters, voices the generally accepted opinion that these three painters, along with a few others, comprised one of the first "post-abstract movements." Whether their efforts could in actuality be called a "post-abstract movement" or not, it was at least a personal reaction against a mode of painting that after experimentation was found not as rewarding as had been anticipated. Mills goes beyond this personal reaction from within the artist to a much broader rationaliza-

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10. _____"Diebenkorn, Woeiffer, Mullican: A Discussion," Art Forum, 1, (April, 1963), p. 26. From a transcribed interview.

tion--with greater implications--for their rebellion:

> The real truth of the matter is that Bay Area figurative painting was in inception an apostacy of avant gardism, an abandonment not so much of abstraction in particular as of the whole power politics of style....Park, Bischoff and Diebenkorn singly and separately became disenchanted with "the heroic age of American abstraction."[11]

Possibly this is an overstatement on a matter that seems now, in retrospect, not as consequential to have created the fervor that it did. The West Coast "movement" was popularized to a large extent by the painters' rebellious attitudes--that is, their negation of abstraction for the figure. Basically the move, in retrospect, did not underline tremendous change on a formalistic level. Stylistically it was not far removed from abstraction; its "rhetoric," or methods were very similar to the "look" and "feel" of Abstract Expressionism. The decision to sustain many of the elements of "action painting" with the addition of a certain degree of illusion of reality does not appear to have been a monumental alteration. In addition we must also realize that many of the Abstract Expressionists on occasion have come close to representation, illusion or figuration. De Kooning has gone away from and back to the figure periodically. Jackson Pollock's last works exemplify a close proximity to figuration. It would seem from these few examples that the choice

11. Paul Mills, "Bay Area Figurative Painting," Art in America, No. 3, (1964), p. 43.

between configuration and non-configuration need not be so drastic a decision. Relative to this idea, Diebenkorn has in the last year evolved in a logical, or at least acceptable, progression back to non-figurative painting without essentially changing his very recognizable style.

> Earlier on he [Diebenkorn] was the only abstract painter, as far as I know, to do something substantially independent with de Kooning's touch (and it makes no difference that he did it with the help of Rothko's design). More recently he has let the logic of that touch carry him back (with Matisse's help) to representational art,...That de Kooning's touch remains as unmistakable as before in his art does not diminish the success of his change. Uneven densities of paint, as produced by smearing, swiping, scrubbing, and scumbling, had in de Kooning's own hands created gradations of light and dark like those of conventional shading; though these were kept from actually modeling back into deep space by the declamatory abruptness with which they were juxtaposed, deep space is, nevertheless, increasingly suggested in almost everything de Kooning has done lately. By letting this suggestion become a forthright statement, Diebenkorn (along with another Californian, Elmer Bischoff) has, in effect, found a home for de Kooning's touch where it can fulfill itself more truthfully, though modestly, than it has been able to so far in de Kooning's own art. [12]

The work of Willem de Kooning was an equally strong influence on the representational artists working on the East Coast. Abstract Expressionism

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12. Clement Greenberg, "After Abstract Expressionism," Art International, 6, (October, 1962), p. 25.

contained a liberating spirit in its formal development as well as its attitude towards creative procedure that influenced many artists, particularly those working in New York. Artists of all persuasions could adapt to its handling of paint, intuitive methods, directness of execution and spontaneity. Within the ranks of its initial adherents a number of painters later moved towards representation and away from autonomous abstraction bringing with them many of the characteristics of their former work. This transformation was similar to that which created Bay Area figurative painting. On the other hand, traditionally representational artists of long standing on the East Coast were at times deeply effected by Abstract Expressionist ideas. From whichever background, abstraction or representation, the artists in New York during the 1950's never formed a group as did the West Coast figurative artists. Their grappling with both the problems of Abstract Expressionism and representation, opposed or in sympathy, was carried out on an individual basis. Since most contemporary artists are alert to artistic trends and activities around them, much exchange--cross-fertilization--of ideas took place concerning the duality existing between abstraction and representation.

Leland Bell developed from abstraction based in part on Mondrian and Arp, but after coming in contact with Balthus and Giacometti he began to introduce realistic elements into his abstract compositions. The degree of his involvement with representation has steadily increased, to the level that he now works directly from models and photographs. The constant in his work has been his free brushstroke, overtones of his former abstract preoccupations. I sense in his work a strong continuing desire to come to terms with form--ideas about form--more than with content. In this sense his work is similar to aspects of Bay Area figurative art. Abstract concepts juxtaposed--polarities of "substance," paint qualities--seem to be his greatest interests. His work bears out the problems of opposing volume and flatness, generalized form and precise form, three-dimensionality and contour, space and surface to mention a few. Bell is a problem-solver; he works in series, reworking themes over and over again seemingly never "finishing" or culminating a visual idea.[13]

Paul Georges, another former Abstract Expressionist working in New York, paints directly from the model on

13. Art News, 67, (April, 1968), p. 9.

very large canvases. Like Bell, he is interested in self-portraiture and combining the artist (himself) and the model in one composition. Georges seems to be after direct representation colored nonetheless by a spontaneous brushstroke and constant reworking in the reknowned "push-pull" tradition of Abstract Expressionism. One would have to admit that Georges is not a conceptual artist in the sense that complex or intellectual ideas do not play a large role in his painting. His is an art of realism, searching for a visual equivalent in paint of his subject. His subjects are never found beyond the studio environment. In a form of monomania he constantly repaints the same motif until he has found or created what he senses as the visualization of how he sees-- a very traditional idea.

A more conceptual artist working during the 1950's who, unlike Bell and Georges, did not come from a background of abstraction is Larry Rivers. It would seem that Abstract Expressionism would be too confining for his idea-oriented art. A certain superficial resemblance to abstraction can be found in his work. Clearly visible "tracks" of his working process remain; wiped-outed images, early drawing attempts unfinished and undisguised--all these

experimentations on a painting in progress become a part of the final configuration. Rivers like many of the expressionists wants us to see his process, but unlike them, his process does not seem to have been at all painful. Instead, what he communicates is a pure enjoyment of painting and of drawing. Rivers is an accomplished draftsman in the traditional sense and does not avoid using this facility in his painting. In fact these works many times come close to being very large colored drawings executed with pigment and brush on canvas.

This respect and utilization of drawing in his paintings as well as his specific and selective use of subject matter places Rivers far from the preoccupations of Abstract Expressionists. When he began painting actively he consciously set out to avoid becoming a part of the expressionist movement which he felt to be overloaded with followers and progressing at a slow rate.[14] Rivers has chosen such narrative subjects as George Washington, Napoleon, Africa, Trotsky; and he has made an extremely large painting-construction depicting the Russian Revolution. Occasionally his choice of subject matter, particularly commercial products--"Camel" cigarettes, "Dutch

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14. Fairfield Porter, "Rivers Paints a Picture, Art News, 52, (January, 1954), p. 56.

Masters" cigars--pre-dates this aspect of Pop art in the choice of everyday objects as motifs for paintings. But unlike the Pop artists who present the object as an end in itself, Rivers transforms the image to another more personally conceived realm.

Fairfield Porter is one artist who by his theories and work is probably an East Coast equivalent to the Bay Area figurative painters. In January 1955 he stated in Art News: "I want to do everything that avant-garde theoreticians say you can't do."[15] This is a strong positional stance particularly when we consider that he is an art critic himself. I do not believe that we can read his statement literally, since he is very aware of "avant-gardism" and utilizes this knowledge subtly but consistently throughout his work. The basic framework that underlies his paintings is based on traditions close to the French Realists such as Courbet, Corot and Chardin, as well as on the work of Bonnard and Vuillard.[16]

Similar to the paintings of these artists, Porter's pictures also depict his immediate environment; landscapes with figures and people in

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15. Frank O'Hara, "Fairfield Porter Paints a Picture, Art News, 53, (January, 1955), p. 38.

16. Norman Geske, p. 38.

interior settings are repeatedly his subjects. His predilection for the traditional in painting is combined in his work with an awareness of and by his close associations (as an art critic) with the ideals of Abstract Expressionism. In giving form to his rather conventional subject matter Porter utilizes the abstractionist's painterliness and involvement with the total surface, achieving these effects not only by his consistent brush-work but also by his use of color. Heedless of the natural color of the substances being represented, the color in each area has a similarity derived from the addition of white to all his pigments. The subsequent opaqueness of his color minimizes the possibilities for deep shadows and thereby creates the illusion that the scene is being flatly illuminated from the front. This is noticeable even in compositions which present a strong light source, usually sunlight, entering from one side. These practices produce an equality of emphasis on every part of the canvas which is then even further accentuated by Porter's concentration on structure and pattern rather than on volume with modeling. In essence Porter seems to be incorporating opposites into one painting: representational devices interplay with elements of abstraction. The success of this intermixture determines to a large extent

the effectiveness of the painting.

This precarious duality is a part of the sensibility also inherent in the work of Bell and Georges, somewhat less so in Rivers, and found in numerous other artists working with representation during the decade of the 1950's. With the exception of Rivers, the thematic content of their work seems relatively insignificant in relationship to the "act" of painting, composition and the visual dialogue set up by their loyalties to both the art of representation and abstraction. Formalistic concern is the aspect expressed most vehemently; naturalism is often subjected to anti-realistic visual references and affiliations.

To Sidney Tillim the work of these representational artists, with their abstract ambitions, may not be "radically representational," but they may fulfill the criteria proposed by Clement Greenberg, that artists aspiring to create "high art" must show some awareness of the art of the past--though he might add that, in this case, they show this regard too obviously in their work.

Developments in Representational Art after Abstract Expressionism

While Abstract Expressionism was slowly phased out by what has been called "post-painterly abstraction" new forms of representation also were springing up.

> ...Abstract Expressionism began to lose impetus as a style at the point when it began to win public acclaim. For the most fruitful and revolutionary decade in American art, Abstract Expressionism temporarily wedded the contradictory impulses of Cubism and Surrealism. When such an unstable compound ultimately dissolved, the opposing tendencies once more assumed their divergent paths. By 1960, these two movements were clearly identifiable as pop art and the new abstraction (termed "post-painterly abstraction" by its champion, Clement Greenberg).
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> Both post-painterly abstraction and pop art reacted against Abstract Expressionism in favor of a more impersonal, detached, and clearly articulated art.[17]

These developments away from Abstract Expressionism bear certain similarities, in form as well as in sensibility, to many of the changes taking place within representational art at the time. Even before 1960 the possibilities of content play a major role in painting of a heroic manner--implicit in Abstract Expressionism--could be seen in the borderline styles of both Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. Their paintings of about 1955 placed a great emphasis on

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17. Barbara Rose, American Art Since 1900, (Praeger 1967, p. 212.

subject matter without losing the grandness of Abstract Expressionist style. These innovations in the use of content might have been seen as a strong catalyst for representational art, but instead they led more directly to the development of Pop art which for its sensationalism over-shadowed other developments in realism.

The representational artists I will discuss are just a few among many who share certain similarities as well as differences; they are Alex Katz, James McGarrell, Philip Pearlstein, Sidney Tillim, Jack Beal and Gabriel Laderman. This list is far from complete, but does include the most consistent adherents of the art of representation working before the advent of Pop art.[18] It could be said that they are after an unequivocal revival of representational concerns in art, presented moreover, with an awareness of the realism of the past as well as the art and life of the present.

A contemporary of Fairfield Porter and Larry Rivers, Alex Katz was also painting a form of realism during the late 1950's. Some critics place Katz in the same mold

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18. A further list would have to include Rosemarie Beck, Louisa Matthiasdottir, Robert Barnes, Nell Blaine, Lenart Anderson, Bruno Civitico, Lowell Nesbitt, Wolf Kahn, Howard Rogovin, John Button, Jane Frelicher and Alice Neel.
The younger representational artists who have come upon the scene after pop art and commonly called post-Pop realists will be dealt with in a later section.

as Porter who was doing reactionary figurative work to a large extent alien to the paintings of the Abstract Expressionists. This early work of Katz was primarily influenced by the work of Matisse, Cézanne and Hartley. This influence created some limited semblances to the abstractionists: a particular aspect shared was their similar concern for the integrity of the surface of the canvas. Katz made full use of the untouched gessoed canvas as an operating visual entity by applying only light washes with these shapes loosely defined by a highly calligraphic line. In this respect his paintings have a freshness analogous to that of Larry Rivers' but contrary to the "constructed" sensation of Porter's canvases. What sets him apart from Rivers, however, is that Katz avoids re-working his initial configurations to preserve the freshness of his delicate tones which are illuminated by the white canvas that permeates all his forms.

His early works, portraits and outdoor scenes with figures, give the appearance of being quickly executed, but by 1960 Katz had begun to solidify his rendition of form and space--thereby coming closer in this respect to the work of Porter--to create paintings more closely approximating the structure conveyed in nature. Even though Katz's

forms became more volumetric, his space remained consistent with the heavy surface weight of the Cubist picture plane. What resulted were paintings that seem synthetically realistic since his shallow-modeled volumes are displaced within an equally shallow space. This "artificial" reality is further enhanced by the quality of light in his paintings which alludes to the flatness created by flourescent lights; consequently, his forms remain within the limits of a high-keyed tonal scale.

Alex Katz's most apparent change during the outset of the sixties was made in respect to the scale of his works more than to any real innovations in form. His earlier portraits were suddenly enlarged to four or five times life-size and still executed in a summary-fashion yet without his previous recourse to the use of contour line. In 1963 he seems to have asked the question, what happens to subtlety when it is magnified far beyond life-size? Through expansion he has taken his "traditional" painting into a realm of experience similar to that which one senses when looking at a large billboard at close range. In effect he is forcing the viewer to look so closely at his personages in order that he may gain a deeper penetration, or insight into the characters,

than he would capture from a more natural distance. The effect however is one of parody. In this magnification he does not actually increase the degree of intimacy; the forms are just as shallow, and personal attitudes or expressions, even wrinkles in the face, are not amplified in relationship to the increase in scale. Katz abstains from placing any significant amount of emotional nuances behind the faces; they become very large presences, simple equivalents to the "likenesses" of actual faces.

In his large paintings he has grouped these generalized figures in a setting that at least lets us know the event in which the people are participating (Lawn Party and Cocktail Party of 1965), even if we do not receive information about the figures as individual personalities. The specific environmental setting, or event occurring, is literally eliminated in his latest painting as he has cut out just the heads and shoulder areas of the figures and mounted each on a separate board. These free-standing portraits, again well over life-size (from four to five feet vertical height), are mounted on the floor perpendicularly and arranged in three rows, seemingly completely out of any context. A visual continuity is maintained by the distortion of the actual distance between

the three rows of heads. The illusion of perspective is used to visually extend the real space, that is, the heads in the furthest row are smaller than those closest to the viewer.

Alex Katz who can be said to have predicted certain aspects of Pop art in his work of the late fifties now seems to have been somewhat affected by it.[19] The banality and lack of sentiment in his choice and depiction of subject has now produced an even clearer statement about "tradional" values of representational painting--particularly the art of genre. Step by step I see in his progress a consistent attempt to expel from genre painting all its once accepted characteristics. The description of personalities, real environments, narrative content, all arranged in a tangible space have been taken to an irreducible end in this latest work by Alex Katz. All that now remains for Katz are the nebulous faces, nonentities, props from what once may have been an interesting story.

If Alex Katz is eliminating traditional values from representational painting--with a bit of humor and wit involved in his process of reduction--Gabriel Laderman, a lesser known but still very significant

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19. Sidney Tillim, p. 43.

contributor to the reinstatement of realism, is working at an opposite pole. Laderman is a landscapist in the grand manner, creating large highly articulated and skillfully painted renditions of actually observed scenes. He is also at extreme odds with numerous innovations of Abstract Expressionism. Laderman does not plunge into a painting and let it happen, but conceptualizes the work completely before touching the canvas. His premeditations are not intellectualizations but strong emotional reactions to nature. Half the battle of a painting is realized when Laderman "finds" a suitable subject. His recent images have been complex wide-angle views selected within the urban environment; he has painted such subjects as View of Florence and View of North Adams and various panoramic views of Brooklyn and Manhattan skylines. Normally he seems to situate himself looking out from a window of a relatively tall building. In fact I have not seen any examples where the point of view is from a ground level. With much searching and selectivity, Laderman, when he chooses a specific scene, paints exactly what he perceives without changing anything--relationships of shape, size or color. The only alteration I have found in his work is a slight

degree of idealization or simplification--such as a removal of some trash, people or cars normally a part of the scene.

His classical sense of composition is probably revealed more intimately in his earlier preoccupations with painting from still life groupings. Unlike his landscapes his still lifes are not found pre-set. With a sense of composition similar to Mondrian, Laderman discriminately arranges his objects and lighting to an ultimate degree of perfection dismissing the necessity for change or modification of any element in the painting. Laderman completely avoids painting the figure or indicating any sense of actual movement other than that which takes place on a formal level from plane to plane or from one color to another.

Although Laderman is not considered an avant-garde painter, and indeed, he does dwell almost exclusively on the art of the past--with his personal interpretation and perfection of the previous concerns of landscape artists--he is a vital figure nonetheless within the group of painters currently interested in representational art. With his acute sensibility and vast knowledge of the history of painting, he creates totally conceptualized statements that by their completely reactionary stance

seem relevant to today.

As exemplified by his recent work, Jack Beal is artistically situated somewhere between the polarities defined by Alex Katz, with his humorously presented portraits, and Gabriel Laderman's highly conceptual art based on nature. In his earlier work, Beal was much closer to Laderman's way of thinking as he was involved in highly complex and intricate still lifes. Beal's still lifes however are less intimate, particularly in terms of scale. Laderman's arrangements were usually of a few small choice objects in an intimate environment, while Beal would fill an ample corner of his studio with objects of all varieties and dimensions, singularly lit by a narrow and intense beam of light. These paintings, for me, become Baroque ensembles of contrasting forms twisting in and out of light, casting strange shadows, all of which culminate in visual bewilderment which can be understood only after patient deciphering by the viewer. I believe that this effort on the part of the viewer is finally rewarding--these initially perplexing environments, are acutely arranged with the sense of light transcending as well as illuminating the obtrusive interplay of of forms. This light saves the paintings from

being airless and overly heavy by revealing the tangible space existing between the objects. As is true of Laderman, Beal meticulously pre-arranged these setups aleviating the need for editing or altering parts as he composed onto the canvas.

In 1965 Beal's attention was drawn to the human figure. At that time he placed posed models in landscape settings. In one painting in particular, reminescent of Laderman's landscapes, two female nudes sit and recline, respectively, on elaborately draped couches on a rooftop with a city skyline operating as a backdrop. The figures, curiously out of context but possibly sunning themselves, seem to be an afterthought as the attention of the viewer is distracted by the complexity of the buildings in the landscape. In this sense the painting is similar in effect to Beal's still lifes --as it forces the viewer to "read" the painting from part to part. This distracting combination of numerous elements is in his later work replaced by a more simplified description of the props and space. Such a change is apparent in Figure in Black Tights of 1967 where the parts of the painting are comparatively fewer and more simplified than in his earlier figure compositions. Utilizing the

same type of lighting that his still lifes have, one partially dressed girl is seen lying on a over-stuffed mattress braced by a chaise lounge. The painting is conceived with the same penetrating eye that created his elaborate still lifes.

In addition to the simplification of the paintings in terms of choice and rendition of form, Beal has transformed his discerning realism by means of color as well. Where his earlier use of color was dictated by the objects in front of him, by 1967 in Figure with Black Tights, he painted natural matter with ultra-bright "hot" and "cool" hues. In line with this transformation of naturalism, Beal has said that he is "more interested in what the world can be than what it is now."[20] The element of color abstraction abrogates, at least for the time being, Beal's earlier concerns with the differentiation of textures in nature and how he could represent these variations with paint. Now, all his forms share a sameness produced by the similar displacement of unnatural, more synthetic, color.

Beal's paintings of 1969 move even further away from perceivable nature, and point towards a greater interest in finding abstract configurations

20. _____, "The Fantasy of Reality," Time Magazine, (April 11, 1969), p. 80.

within his immediate environment. In a sense he is returning to some of the ideas inherent in his still life compositions--the complex interaction of light and dark shapes and volumes--while embracing as well his more recent ideas concerning color and simplified forms. He has since then been working on a series of canvases derived from arrangements of tables, as a still life, resulting in images that are just barely recognizable as real entities from nature. Concerning Beal's recent developments, Sidney Tillim states:

> Color has become Beal's way of deepening a figurative statement expressively because he is unable or unwilling to reject the serialized format of the still life with figure, the figure itself being an addition to implement the expression of the still life. Gradually color, optical color at that, has inundated his compositions at the expense of his now residual subject, thus heightening the incidence of serialization and confirming the enveloping withdrawal from any true representational interest whatsoever. Of course, Beal does not have to be a figurative artist, but he was a very promising one.[21]

The double level of Beal's art--his commitment to both representation and idealized, abstracted, form and color--leaves him vulnerable to indecisiveness concerning which realm of thinking is the most important to him. Considering his most recent figurative work

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21. Sidney Tillim, p. 45.

and his current abstract tendencies, I would agree with Tillim's opinion that Beal is a potentially greater representationalist than "abstractionist" which in essence he is becoming now. This duality equates him with much of the indecision prevalent in Diebenkorn's oscillating art.

Within contemporary representational art no sense of organization seems to be apparent. There are no manifestoes to be sure, and the production of each artist occurs independent of any strong notion of a unified effort. If anyone of the numerous artists working with representation can be labeled an unofficial leader the title would probably go to Philip Pearlstein.

> Pearlstein has written that he is trying to paint by literally following Cézanne's famous advice to see the figure as if it were an apple. He goes on to say that he chose the unclothed human figure for his subject because it is the most interesting combination of form and shape readily available to him and that he uses professional models because they readily lend themselves to this kind of depersonalization.[22]

Philip Pearlstein utilizes a form of direct representation in the production of his large figure compositions. Since the early sixties he has unrelentlessly investigated the infinite possibilities of arranging one and two nude figures within simple

22. William F. Midgette, "Philip Pearlstein: The Naked Truth," Art News, 66, (October, 1967), p. 76.

studio settings onto the canvas. He aims primarily for effectively composed organizations of three-dimensional volumes stationed within real space as well as for a statement concerning our perception of the human figure. This two-pronged presentation is more apparent in Pearlstein's art than with the more subtly conceived work of Laderman. Laderman's presentation of compositional ideas and a way of perceiving nature does not approach the severity of Pearlstein's incursion on our sensibilities. Pearlstein's compositions are strong, even monumental, yet the severeness of his expression is most forcefully manifested by his interpretations of the human form.

He sees the nude as a combination of "interesting" forms and shapes without any allusion to its personality or qualities of "human-ness." Pearlstein seems to actually go out of his way to avoid the associations inherent in the conventionalized way of seeing the human figure as an idealized form--or as a perfection of nature. The figure has gone through countless distortions for the sake of expression in the history of art, and therefore we should be prepared to accept almost any new interpretation of the nude that is less than idealistic. Pearlstein's art is direct

observation without obvious abstraction, showing us by extreme realism on an over life-size scale, how the human body really looks. Within the context of his convincing realism this uncompromising view of the figure is often very unflattering. William Midgette explains his interpretation of how Pearlstein presents the figure and its subsequent affect on the viewer:

> The unsparing view of an unclothed human being as a pile of soft forms upsets us all, for none of us regard ourselves as simply a pile of soft forms.[23]

Pearlstein reminds us often in his work that he is taking a depersonalized view of the figure. For reasons of composition he frequently paints the models from a very close range thereby allowing inordinate distortions of anatomy to occur. A leg may seem to literally extend itself beyond the picture plane while the rest of the body is situated more comfortably back in space. This practice of observing the figure at a very close range results in anatomical croppings in unexpected places--heads and feet, particularly, are missing from many of his figures. A further dehumanization of his figures occurs by Pearlstein's painterly treatment of flesh corresponding exactly to his treatment of

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23. William F. Midgette, p. 76.

the objects or props surrounding the figures.

Pearlstein in his personal method of climically analyzing the volumes and shapes of figures pllaces great care and attention on the interplay of llight and shadows falling across the models. In morre conventional ways of painting the figure thesee shadows are not depicted, since in many instamces they distort or conceal the underlying form off the body. Pearlstein purposely and thoroughly ressearches all the nuances of shadow that he sees, regardless of the ambiguities they may create in the paimting.

In essence, Pearlstein is an uncompromising realist as I defined it in the introduction. He not only achieves effective compositions in the two and three-dimensional sense, but also forces us to visualize the human form in a new light, "...we end by questioning not them [the paintings], but ourselves."[24]

Until recently Pearlstein has subjected only professional models to his critical scrutiny. In his latest show in New York he presented his renditions of figures along with some portraits. Essentially nothing has changed stylistically, other than the fact that the "models" have become recognizable people wearing clothes. His acute

24. William F. Midgette, p. 78.

objectivity continues now more pointedly on folds of clothes rather than on folds of the flesh. This change may lead to paintings that present personality nuances as well as visual nuances.

Closely related to Pearlstein stylistically is Alfred Leslie who, after achieving a notable reputation as a younger Abstract Expressionist, turned to a representational approach in 1965 with a tremendous black and white self-portrait--shown during that year's "Whitney Annual of Contemporary American Painting." Besides the surprise of his sudden change of style, this painting was shocking in its visual impact. The standing self-portrait is twice life-size and presents the figure from the level of the knees to the head. The rendering of the tonality of the figure creates an unusual sense of chiaroscuro with the light source coming from in front of the canvas--as if emanating from the position of the viewer. The monolithic pose of the figure, starring down on the viewer, is further monumentalized by a consistent alteration of prespective. Each section of the figure is painted separately at eye level which creates an unusual spacial ambiguity. Is the figure depicted from above, below or at eye level? Leslie's realism is as lucid as Pearlstein's, and he seems to be

striving for a similar expression of monumentality. Leslie achieves this through an insistence on severe frontality, as well as scale, and on a psychological level, through his dramatic unnatural light which places the figures beyond the realm of genre or traditional portraiture.

Before going on to the work of James McGarrell and finally to a recent development in representational art, the post-Pop realists, some general comments are in order. The artists just discussed, Katz, Beal, Laderman, Pearlstein and Leslie, were all working in New York, and with the exception of Leslie had shown serious commitments to representational art by the early years of the 1960's. They share at least one common denominator that groups them together stylistically as well as philosophically. These artists fundamentally conceptualize their paintings within the limits of a representational space, a space that is derived from nature. This type of space was first conventionalized during the Renaissance, developed as a scientifically-based equivalent or illusion of reality.

Sidney Tillim seems to accept this same criteria that I used in formulating this list even though it may disqualify countless artists who merely use aspects of representation in their work. In his

quest for a "production of an authentic new episode in the history of representation," Tillim cites these artists just mentioned as coming the closest to his ideal for a "new realism" with, however, one major drawback.[25] Beyond the qualification that these artists should paint within the boundaries of a representational space and a concept of form equal to this space, Tillim insists on a further concern that would produce an art which would be "radically representational in the context of modernism." Tillim promulgates a return to the idea of a representational art that incorporates a monumental narrative subject matter. He finds that this aspect is for the most part ignored by contemporary representational painters. It has already been shown that the realists are using discernible subject matter, and on a different level the idea of monumentality is being explored by both Pearlstein and Leslie. The keyword, therefore, in Tillim's concept seems to be "narrative." Before discussing the difficulties and possibilities of Tillim's theories we should investigate what the new wave of realists are doing currently, and how their work relates to this concept of a narrative-oriented representational art, but first James

25. Sidney Tillim, p. 42.

McGarrell.

In a review of his first one-man show in Manhattan an art critic portrayed McGarrell as "...a lineal descendant of Fuseli and a blood brother of Bacon."[26] This comment points out an essential disparity between McGarrell and the West Coast painters with whom at times he has been equated with. His framework is similar--the use of interior-exterior settings--and to a large degree McGarrell shares with the Bay Area the common emphasis and utilization of color and pattern.[27]

Beyond a similar use of an underlying formal structure and motif, McGarrell is independent from these painters, as well as the East Coast painters I have already discussed, by capitalizing on the idea of drama operating in painting. His figures are not "posing" in the same sense that they do in the work of Georges, Beal and Pearlstein. McGarrell's figures are not just formal entities or props, but seem to interact in both rational and irrational fashions, acting in some undisclosed psychodrama. Norman Geske describes to what extent the rational and the irrational interplay functions in McGarrell's paintings:

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26. Art News, 56, (March, 1957), p. 57.

27. Norman Geske, p. 93.

> Significantly, the irrational element in McGarrell's work is contained within a plausible setting of human artifacts. Within this setting the scrambling of forms and actions and props can be mad enough for the most dedicated devotee of free association, but it is still inside the normal context of experience. Its virtue as a pictorial statement is in its hypothetical character. It challenges one kind of rationality in favor of another by setting up whole new methods of response to the act of seeing and the object seen. It redefines a whole new vocabulary of elements: indoors, outdoors, light, dark, air, and water.
>
> The effect upon the observer is frequently that of a performance by a dazzlingly skillful magician, a master of legerdemain. Things happen before your very eyes with such ease and flourish that the conclusion of the act has come and gone before you know it, to be superseded by another feat of fooling the eye. It would appear that McGarrell does not believe in facts as fixed or immovable, that instead he is in a state of constant visual query. What is happening, where, when and why? It is an exhilerating and exhausting exercise in the intellectualization of visual experience. It is a game, a dance, a text, a revelation.[28]

In the paintings of McGarrell we see the artist's subjective response to reality expressed through the juxtaposition of the fantastic with the understandable. Among the New York representationalists this manipulation of an imagery from unconscious sources, or conscious distortion of real entities, does not occur. In their

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28. Norman F. Geske, pp. 93-94.

paintings the form within the picture outweighs the content. Often in McGarrell's work we confront a situation where an event seems to be occurring, stated with implications that the viewer responds to from a level beyond that of the purely visual. He provokes our involvement with a suggestion of a possible narrative, but he does not completely reveal the private mysteries involved. Along with the ambiguity in narrative definition, his form is also at times suggestive, not highly defined. His paintings combine clearly rendered forms and spaces with more impressionistic, less articulated, areas.

McGarrell's fantasies have continued to the present largely independent of the tendencies in art which have moved along toward minimalistic austere visual statements in post-painterly abstraction as well as the attitudes formulated in Pop art. These developments, particularly Pop art, have nurtured some new interpretations of realism that have become unofficially signified as post-Pop realism.

Recent Developments in Representational Painting Influenced by Pop Art

The label "post-Pop art" was put forth in an article written in May of 1967 by Lawrence Alloway, and has since then continued as a viable term in much of the writings on recent representational art in the various journals of contemporary art criticism. In his attempt to give a working definition of the term, Alloway places emphasis on the fact that there are basic similarities and differences in Pop art and post-Pop art with both modes referring to modern life--particularly the urban environment. Pop art's references to the environment are either "literal (the incorporation of hardware into the work of art) or highly conventional (in the sense of trademarks and flattened signs, including lettering)."[29] He further points out that the source of the Pop artist's motif contains within the painted transformation evidence which shows that it was borrowed--"even a bent can was clearly Campbell's as well as Warhol's."[30] The complexity which results between the various sign-levels, the image of commercially produced objects within the context of hand-made art, produces, in Alloway's terms, "a situation in which the

29. Lawrence Alloway, p. 37.

30. Ibid.

environmental references and the formality of the work of art are simultaneously maximized."[31] The "environmental references" transformed into art--in this case painting--are not as "simultaneously maximized" in post-Pop art. The degree of immediacy is diminished in post-Pop art where the original source material, or "environmental reference," is not as apparent, often made more subtle or ambiguous through the process of transformation. What is similar, however, are the common references to banal, synthetic or prefabricated subject matter (such as art reproductions, "snapshot" photographs or illustrations in magazines). In fact, we will see that the majority of post-Pop realists work with photography in one form or another.

Malcolm Morley works directly from photographs. Literally Morley's work is photographic realism, not merely using photographs as a source housing certain visual information but seen as a goal in itself. The effective painting for him is one that depicts a photograph as a visual entity without his altering the particular image of the picture in any way. Concerning this attitude Morley states:

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31. Lawrence Alloway, p. 37.

> I have no interest in subject matter as such or satire or social comment or anything lumped together with subject matter. I like the light in Corot. There is only Abstract Painting, I want works to be disguised as something else (photos) mainly for protection against "art manhandlers." I order the source photo by phone by describing the surface configuration such as, "Send me up a four-color print that has small details in one part and a larger detail in another (like sky)," I accept the subject matter as a by-product of surface. I work against the theory of constancy, i.e., the grass feels green when walking in a park at night. That's why I paint upside down.[32]

Nonetheless, his choice of subject matter has been consistent, following a logical pattern within the context of marine imagery. His earliest works derived from photographic sources were of old Navy uniforms, destroyers, and tourist ships (<u>"United States" with N. Y. skyline</u> and <u>"Amsterdam" in front of Rotterdam</u>), followed by paintings of cabin interiors and other views on board these tourist ships. His photo-sources were usually the highly retouched reproductions from cruise literature.[33]

More recently his scenes have switched from the sea to similar recreational events on land--as James Mellow describes them:

> The scenes are banal--everyone's worst Kodachrome fantasies: the happy American family at Daytona Beach, all congealed smiles, the glories of a golf tournament

32. Morley, Malcolm, <u>Sao Paulo 9</u>, (Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1967), p. 89.

33. Lawrence Alloway. "Malcolm Morley Paints a Picture," <u>Art News</u>, 67, (Summer, 1968), p. 43.

> with a barrier of spectators in bright holiday garb spread out along the greensward.[34]

These can be read as imitations of life, but also Morley has become interested in making imitations of art:

> ...Morley's exhibition features a huge, gratingly inaccurate reproduction of a reproduction of Vermeer's The Artist in His Studio... It alerts us to a distinction we ought to hold on to, for where our usual ideas about realism are apt to stress photographic accuracy, the realist artist is more likely to be telling us "lies like the truth."[35]

Malcolm Morley is certainly not the only post-Pop artist trying to emulate the qualities of a photograph or magazine reproduction. Richard Artschwager and Charles Close are equally involved with a unswerving reverence for the illusionism of a photograph, without desiring to expand or enhance its qualities or limitations. Needless to say, man is not as objective as a camera, and consequently each artist has developed his own peculiar working methods to achieve as much objectivity as possible. Morley in his quote states that he paints upside down. In addition he "squares-off" both the painting and the photograph by applying a similar grid pattern and cuts the resulting segments of the photograph in

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34. James Mellow, "Realism and Company," Art International, 13, (April, 1969), p. 37.

35. Ibid.

order to facilitate copying each square (upside down or sideways) individually. In this way he sees each area as a finite entity without being overly conscious of what it represents. Before painting an area he tapes the corresponding grid square of the photograph onto the canvas near the working space, enabling him to match the images as precisely as possible. His methods minimize the importance of, and may be antithetical to, the norms long accepted for "correct procedure" in painting a representational picture.

Artschwager has also painted "photographs." He chooses subjects which are equally banal, and probably even less interesting than Morley's, such as high-rise apartment buildings and suburban-type ranch houses, (the latter taken from the standardized view seen in housing development brochures). Beyond the fact that he has recently combined his photographic realism within the structure of his minimalistic sculpture, Artschwager differs from Morley in that he has developed a quasi-mechanical technique for achieving the likeness of a "grainy" photograph. (Also they are monochromatic whereas Morley's are painted with a full range of colors.) Briefly described, he paints various grays equivalent to the photograph onto the rough side of a sheet of masonite and then applies a thin over-all coat of black paint that settles in

the valleys, or recessed areas, creating a mottled halftone effect.

Literally enlarging the realism of a photograph as well as representing a dissociated attitude towards the subjective and intellectual preoccupations of traditional representational art are the huge frontal portraits of Charles Close. Deliberately using motifs as bland and banal as Morley's and Artschwager's, Close derives his images from close-up "snapshots" of faces.

> For him as well as the others who make use of photography, the camera's most valuable asset is its inability to make hierarchal decisions. As Close says, "The camera is not aware of what it is looking at. It just gets it down."
>
> This concern with non-hierarchal, overall composition is the strongest bond that unites Close to the other new realist or post-Pop artists.[36]

The degree of his amplification of scale (an eight by ten inch photograph is enlarged to as much as eight by ten feet) separates him from both Morley and Artschwager. What he wants to present most of all is the multitude of details on the face (such as hair, pores, and texture of flesh), that are recorded in the searching scan of a photograph. Close is not concerned with the overall flatness of the picture but, instead, attempts to reveal through enlargement the differences in clarity captured

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36. Cindy Nemser, "Presenting Charles Close," Art in America, No. 1, (January-February, 1970), p. 98.

by the camera. He painstakingly examines the variations of focus inherent in how a camera "sees." He states his objectives rather directly:

> My main objective is to translate photographic information into paint information. The large scale allows me to deal with information that is overlooked in an 8x10 inch photograph without becoming too fussy.[37]

Close came to realize that through his own observation of nature, he could not visually analyze as accurately the in-focus and out-of-focus differentiations to the degree possible with photography.

At first glance Close's paintings look like extremely large photographs; the same is true of Morley's and Artschwager's on a smaller scale. Theirs is an art of exacting realism--of capturing the "reality" of a two-dimensional photographic print.

Doing work with photography similar to that of the three artists just mentioned, Howard Kanovitz makes three-dimensional life-size environments composed of flat illusionistic cut-outs of people and objects, backdrops meticulously painted to look like actual walls, and real found objects. For example, in one of his "combines" he creates a

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37. Cindy Nesmer, "An Interview with Charles Close," Art Forum, 8, (January, 1970), p. 51.

three-dimensional illusion of an artist's studio which is in fact an arrangement of flat shaped canvases painted so as to allude to actual space and proportion.[38]

Robert Bechtle should also be noted in this context. He is an artist who works directly from photographs derived from various everyday suburban scenes. Along with Richard Estes and others who utilize photographs to a large extent, Bechtle would readily be accepted into the representational camp (of Tillim, Pearlstein, Beal, and Laderman, etc.) if he did not limit himself to the photograph's equalized surface that, when translated into paint, remains essentially flat.

John Clem Clarke, Wayne Thiebaud and Mel Ramos are often lumped together with the other post-Pop artists though in my opinion they seem to be only partially related to post-Pop ideals. They bring into their art certain qualities that make their work peculiar and independent statements that resist being easily stereotyped or classified.

Wayne Thiebaud was labeled a Pop artist as early as 1962 when he exhibited his luscious depictions of ice cream cones, pies and other edible delicacies. These subjects coincided

38. James Mellow, p. 37.

with similar motifs emerging contemporaneously in Pop art. The difference between Thiebaud and the Pop sensibility was one of attitude:

> ...Thiebaud lacked the ambivalent and near hysterical attachment of Pop artists to the things they painted. His beautiful colors and warm textures, his careful compositions showed a fascination with his subject matter that was appreciative, not condescending.[39]

Thiebaud's choice of subject matter in particular as well as his self-conscious and facile manipulation of paint keeps him from being classified as a straight representational painter. On the other hand, he encompasses within his sensibility the enjoyment of working with composition, texture of paint, and space --formal concerns--that set his work apart from the characteristics of post-Pop art.

A blend of representation and Pop operates in the paintings of Mel Ramos, but possibly not as emphatically as in Thiebaud's work. He takes Thiebaud's sensuality and iconographic ties to Pop art into the realm of eroticism. His females, of the highly retouched variety found in Playboy, are placed in combination with oversized commercial products or labels and more recently with exotic animals. These later paintings do not merely suggest eroticism but illustrate it by showing the figures and beasts in sexual play. His message

39. Gerald Ackerman, Figures--Thiebaud, (Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1965), introduction.

obviously goes beyond the surface image. One does not sense this when viewing Morley's "reproductions" of reproductions.

John Clem Clarke, like Morley, works from reproductions though Clarke limits his choice to prints of old master paintings. Superficially his utilization of a prefabricated motif would equate him with post-Pop concerns, but his paintings are not an exact duplication of the model. By a complex technique involving the use of a projector, stencils, rollers, and spray gun he renders the basic shapes found in the reproduction, with the result being far from exact duplication. In essence a new greatly simplified and generalized form has been translated through the framework of an older form. The difference between these forms is mainly visual--not resulting in parody, but rather in a technically contemporary restatement.

If we can place these artists under the general heading of post-Pop art, the definition of the term can not be understood as a stylistic deviation from Pop art. Particularly if we compare it to the major change taken in the art of painting from Abstract Expressionism to Post-Painterly Abstraction. At least when post-Pop is compared to Pop art they show a tendency, superficially, of sharing a common

starting point--the continuing concentration on the urban environment, its products, tastes, fantasies and recreation. Compared also to representational art of this decade, the work of most of the painters involved in post-Pop realism is basically anti-formalistic and contrary to both the traditional and contemporary concerns of representation.

III. CONCLUSION

In this presentation and discussion of the major facets that have developed in representational art from the late 1950's to the present, I found it difficult to include all the significant artists working with representational forms. These painters have also been affected in varying degrees by other trends in contemporary painting which have been vying for pre-eminent postions. This was the case particularly in the decade of the 1950's with the interchange of ideas concerning form and content between Abstract Expressionism and figurative art. Even though representational artists did not organize themselves at this time, other than the small group of artists involved in the Bay Area figurative movement, a relative consistency of style did exist. During the early sixties representational art, with the advent of Post-Painterly Abstraction and Pop art, began to polarize away from any sense of a unified style. An effort to create a categorical presentation of the representational artists of the sixties could only be completed now, in retrospect, since these artists developed quietly on a largely individual basis, their work obscured by the more sensational movements of the last decade. It has

only been recently that representational art has been dealt with in a retrospective manner by museums and critics. My approach became a matter of searching out and dealing with these painters individually and from that position ascertaining their basic similarities and differences.

From my investigations some conclusions may be drawn that seem pertinent to grasping the complexities of the varied forms representational art has taken and may continue to take. I sense a tendency in representational art toward becoming more independent of non-objective impulses, placing itself for itself, or being utilized as a means for personal expression. It does not see content and form as separate entities --"the separating of art into visual display, on the one hand, and literary content or description on the other."[40] Post-Painterly Abstraction as it progressed to a kind of minimalistic state became far removed visually from the apparent concerns of representation. The attitude inherent in Minimal art of depersonalization seems to have been accepted, on a conceptual level, by both Pearlstein and Morley--admittedly in very different ways. If these two artists can share this same sensibility--which is a basic characteristic of our mass-media technological era--and still create

40. Lawrence Alloway, "Art as Likeness," Arts Magazine, 4, (May, 1967), p. 35.

vastly different paintings, utilizing contrary aspects of representation, it signifies for me a healthy state in painting. Both Pearlstein and Morley are aware of the traditions of representational painting and are supporting different, but equally important, positions as to its credibility today.

As I have noted, Sidney Tillim is critical of many of the forms which developed within representational art during the last decade. His desire has been for a modern equivalent to grand "historical" painting, rich in narrative content, and an embodiment of a "new idealism" that concerns itself with contemporary life. It was his essay discussing this idea that partially inspired my interest in studying contemporary representational art. Tillim found that the prominent interests among the representational artists favor form over the concept of narrative content, and that the post-Pop realists are too involved in a dilution of Pop ideals as well as being basically anti-representational.[41]

From my survey I can only conclude that his criticism narrows the possibilities for a reinstatement of narrative content to a mode of painting that would have to be almost completely traditional in form. His criteria set up practically insurmountable

41. Sidney Tillim, "A Variety of Realisms," Art Forum, 7, (Summer, 1969), p. 42.

borders between artists aspiring to representational art for its own sake, and post-Pop artists who fundamentally are using representation as a means to another end. Tillim discounts the possibility that post-Pop painters may be making pertinent visual statements on contemporary life. He seemingly bases his opinion largely on a criticism of these artists' acceptance of mechanical methods and unconventional representational means--such as the reliance on photography--and their sympathy with the Pop esthetic.

Contrary to Tillim, I sense a concern among the post-Pop realists for ideas which operate in, at least, a quasi-narrative fashion. It appears to me that representationalists are basically concerned with abstract ideas which are far removed from narrative or social comment. Therefore, I conclude that an unrestrictive interplay of ideas should occur between the formal concerns of representation and post-Pop's new methods of social commentary which should continue to foster even more original forms of representational art.

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