

Photorealism

Photorealism is the genre of painting based on using the camera and photographs to gather information and then from this information, creating a painting that appears to be very realistic like a photograph. The term is primarily applied to paintings from the United States art movement that began in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

History

Origins

As a full-fledged art movement, Photorealism evolved from Pop Art^{[1] [2] [3]} and as a counter to Abstract Expressionism^{[2] [4]} as well as Minimalist art movements^{[2] [4] [5] [6]} in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States.^[6] Photorealists use a photograph or several photographs to gather the information to create their paintings and it can be argued that the use of a camera and photographs is an acceptance of Modernism.^[7] However, the blatant admittance to the use of photographs in Photorealism was met with intense criticism when the movement began to gain momentum in the late 1960s,^[8] despite the fact that visual devices had been used since the fifteenth century to aid artists with their work.^[9]



John's Diner with John's Chevelle, 2007
John Baeder, oil on canvas, 30x48 inches.

The invention of photography in the nineteenth century had three effects on art: portrait and scenic artists were deemed inferior to the photograph and many turned to photography as careers; within nineteenth and twentieth century art movements it is well documented that artists used the photograph as source material and as an aid—however, they went to great lengths to deny the fact fearing that their work would be misunderstood as imitations;^[9] and through the photograph's invention artists were open to a great deal of new experimentation.^[10] Thus, the culmination of the invention of the photograph was a break in art's history towards the challenge facing the artist - since the earliest known cave drawings - trying to replicate the scenes they viewed.^[7]

By the time the Photorealists began producing their bodies of work the photograph had become the leading means of reproducing reality and abstraction was the focus of the art world.^[11] Realism continued as an on-going art movement, even experiencing a reemergence in the 1930s, but by the 1950s modernist critics and Abstract Expressionism had all but minimized realism as a serious art undertaking.^{[7] [12]} Though Photorealists share some aspects of American realists, such as Edward Hopper, they tried to set themselves as much apart from traditional realists as they did Abstract Expressionists.^[12] Photorealists were much more influenced by the work of Pop artists and were reacting against Abstract Expressionism.^[13]

Pop Art and Photorealism were both reactionary movements stemming from the ever increasing and overwhelming abundance of photographic media, which by the mid 20th century had grown into such a massive phenomenon that it was threatening to lessen the value of imagery in art.^{[1] [14] [15]} However, whereas the Pop artists were primarily pointing out the absurdity of much of the imagery (especially in commercial usage), the Photorealists were trying to reclaim and exalt the value of an image.^{[14] [15]}

The association of Photorealism to *Trompe L'oeil* is a wrongly attributed comparison, an error in observation or interpretation made by many critics of the 1970s and 1980s.^{[12] [16]} *Trompe L'oeil* paintings attempt to "fool the eye" and make the viewer think he is seeing an actual object, not a painted one. When observing a Photorealist painting, the viewer is always aware that they are looking at a painting.^{[7] [12]}

Definition

The word *Photorealism* was coined by Louis K. Meisel^[17] in 1969 and appeared in print for the first time in 1970 in a Whitney Museum catalogue for the show "Twenty-two Realists."^[18] It is also sometimes labeled as Super-Realism, New Realism, Sharp Focus Realism, or Hyper-Realism.^[19]

Louis K. Meisel,^[20] two years later, developed a five-point definition at the request of Stuart M. Speiser, who had commissioned a large collection of works by the Photorealists, which later developed into a traveling show known as "Photo-Realism 1973: The Stuart M. Speiser Collection," which was donated to the Smithsonian in 1978 and is shown in several of its museums as well as traveling under the auspices of SITE.^[18] The definition for the ORIGINATORS was as follows:

1. The Photo-Realist uses the camera and photograph to gather information.
2. The Photo-Realist uses a mechanical or semimechanical means to transfer the information to the canvas.
3. The Photo-Realist must have the technical ability to make the finished work appear photographic.
4. The artist must have exhibited work as a Photo-Realist by 1972 to be considered one of the central Photo-Realists.
5. The artist must have devoted at least five years to the development and exhibition of Photo-Realist work.^[21]

Style

Photorealist painting cannot exist without the photograph. In Photorealism, change and movement must be frozen in time which must then be accurately represented by the artist.^[21] Photorealists gather their imagery and information with the camera and photograph. Once the photograph is developed (usually onto a photographic slide) the artist will systematically transfer the image from the photographic slide onto canvases. Usually this is done either by projecting the slide onto the canvas or by using traditional grid techniques.^[22] The resulting images are often direct copies of the original photograph but are usually larger than the original photograph or slide. This results in the photorealist style being tight and precise, often with an emphasis on imagery that requires a high level of technical prowess and virtuosity to simulate, such as reflections in specular surfaces and the geometric rigor of man-made environs.^[23]

Artists

The first generation of American photorealists includes such painters as Richard Estes, Ralph Goings, Chuck Close, Charles Bell, Audrey Flack, Don Eddy, Robert Bechtle, and Tom Blackwell.^[24] Often working independently of each other and with widely different starting points, these original photorealists routinely tackled mundane or familiar subjects in traditional art genres--landscapes (mostly urban rather than naturalistic), portraits, and still lifes.^[24]



Ralph's Diner (1982), Oil on canvas. Example of photorealist Ralph Goings' work.

Though the movement is primarily associated with painting, Duane Hanson and John DeAndrea are sculptors associated with photorealism for their painted, life-like sculptures of average people that were complete with simulated hair and real clothes. They are called *Verists*.^[24]

Since 2000

Though the height of Photorealism was in the 1970s the movement continues and includes several of the original photorealists as well as many of their contemporaries. According to Meisel's *Photorealism at the Millennium*, only eight of the original photorealists were still creating photorealist work in 2002,^[25] nine including Howard Kanovitz.

Artists Charles Bell, John Kacere, and Howard Kanovitz have died; Audrey Flack, Chuck Close, and Don Eddy have moved in different directions other than photorealism; and Robert Cottingham no longer considers himself a photorealist.

Newer Photorealists are building upon the foundations set by the original photorealists. Examples would be the influence of Richard Estes in works by Anthony Brunelli or the influence of Ralph Goings and Charles Bell in works by Glennray Tutor. However, this has led many to move on from the strict definition of photorealism as the emulation of the photograph, and the artist Clive Head now actively disassociates himself from the term, even though he has been closely associated with photorealism in the past.^[26]

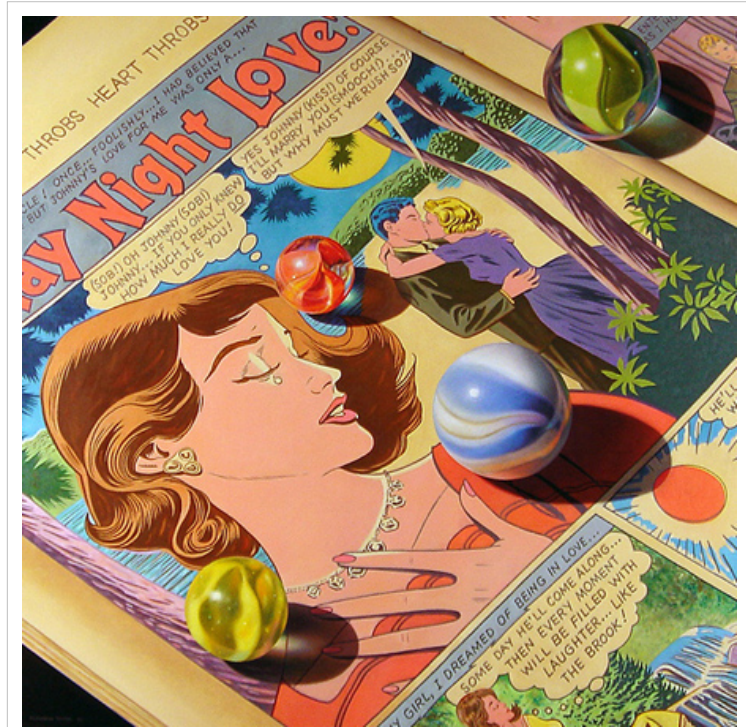
Photorealism is also no longer mainly an American art movement. Starting with Franz Gertsch in the 1980s Clive Head, Raphaella Spence, Bertrand Meniel, and Roberto Bernardi are several European photorealists that have emerged since the mid-1990s.^[7]
[27]

The evolution of technology has brought forth photorealistic paintings that exceed what was thought possible with paintings; these newer paintings by the photorealists are sometimes referred to as "Hyperrealism."^[7] With new technology in cameras and digital equipment, artists are able to be far more precision-oriented.

List of Photorealists

Original Photorealists

- Significant artists whose work helped define Photorealism:



Dream of Love (2006), Oil on canvas. Example of Photorealist Glennray Tutor's work.

- Robert Bechtle^[24]
- Charles Bell^[24]
- Tom Blackwell^[24]
- Chuck Close^[24]
- Robert Cottingham^[24]
- Don Eddy^[24]
- Richard Estes^[24]
- Audrey Flack^[24]
- Ralph Goings^[24]
- Howard Kanovitz^{[28] [29]}
- John Kacere^[24]
- Ron Kleemann^[24]
- Malcolm Morley^[24]
- David Parrish^[24]
- John Salt^[24]
- Ben Schonzeit^[24]

Photorealists

- Significant artists whose work meets the criteria of Photorealism:

- Linda Bacon^[27]
- John Baeder^{[24] [27] [31]}
- Roberto Bernardi
- Arne Besser^[24]
- Anthony Brunelli^[27]
- Hilo Chen^[24]
- Davis Cone^{[27] [31]}
- Randy Dudley^{[27] [31]}
- Franz Gertsch^{[27] [31]}
- Robert Gniewek^{[27] [31]}
- Gus Heinze^{[27] [31]}
- Gottfried Helnwein^[30]
- Don Jacot^{[27] [31]}
- Charles Jarboe^[32]
- Noel Mahaffey^[24]
- Dennis James Martin^[27]
- Jack Mendenhall^{[24] [27] [31]}
- Kim Mendenhall^[27]
- Betrand Meniel^[27]
- Reynard Milici^{[27] [31]}
- Robert Neffson^[41]
- Jerry Ott^[24]
- Rod Penner^[27]
- Denis Peterson^{[33] [34]}
- Cesar Santander^[35]
- Raphaella Spence
- Robert Standish^[36]
- Paul Staiger^{[37] [38]}
- Bernardo Torrens
- Glennray Tutor^{[39] [40]}
- Idelle Weber^[24]

Post-Photorealists

- Clive Head

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