

# PHOTOREALISM

## 50 Years of Hyperrealistic Painting

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### PLEASE NOTE!

The Museum of Ixelles will be closed from 30<sup>th</sup> May to 29<sup>th</sup> June 2016 in order to enable exhibition changeovers. Free public opening: 29<sup>th</sup> June 2016, from 6:30 until 9:00 PM

Following the success of the 2014 exhibition dedicated to the American hyperrealist sculptor Duane Hanson, the Museum of Ixelles presents *PHOTOREALISM. 50 Years of Hyperrealistic Painting*. This exhibition highlights the generation of hyperrealist painters after the Second World War. In the aftermath of Pop Art, the hyperrealists portrayed and criticized the American consumer society in a fascinating semi-photographic style.



With the support of Institut für Kulturaustausch

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By the end of the 1960s, the Photorealists were seeking their own, independent form of artistic expression by producing realistic depictions of everyday objects and scenes. Photography being considered an objective way of documenting the world, served these artists in their aim to distance themselves from the subjectivity of other art movements. They were following the path pioneered by the Pop artists, who were primarily concerned with objectively representing the worlds of everyday life and consumer culture, of mass media and advertising. The motifs ranged from close-ups of car bumpers, polished paintwork, colorful children's toys, gleaming pinball machines and candies of every conceivable

color to diner interiors and scenes of urban American life; from neon advertising signs and cityscapes to greatly enlarged portraits.

Photorealistic painting is a laborious process: Photographs are projected onto the canvas and traced in detail. With the aid of countless fine stencils or spray guns, vivid, enlarged painted reproductions of photos are created. These paintings of banal, everyday scenes and outsized consumer goods broke with traditional formats. Ever since they first appeared these images, based on photographic sources, transferred on canvas using a grid system or a slide projector, attracted a great deal of attention.



The initial effect of surprise that photorealistic pictures evoke is not their only characteristic. They are also the outcome of the artist's visual reflections and stimulate the one of the beholder. This impact got stronger and stronger over the three generations along with the development of the technical possibilities in photography.

## 1st Generation: the '60s and '70s

Eighteen important artists, who mainly worked in the United States, are generally counted towards the first generation of Photorealists. They started to paint in a photorealistic way separated from each other as they were located on the East coast as well as on the West coast.

They used analog cameras to capture their motifs and by going through the five steps of observing, seeing, photographing, selecting and painting, they brought different themes onto their canvas. Their American origin is clearly evident, since the subject is mostly referring to the American way of life and its self-image.

Tom Blackwell, David Parrish, Ron Kleemann, Don Eddy, Ralph Goings and John Salt excelled at cars and motorcycles, seen as an allegory of the American identity.

Others, like Richard McLean, Robert Cottingham, Richard Estes and Robert Bechtle tried to capture the atmosphere of American everyday life in outdoor scenes. John Baeder treated the topic of building facades and Ralph Goings became famous for his American Diner scenes.



Still lifes and interior settings were in the focus of Jack Mendenhall who presents living rooms, while Charles Bell, Audrey Flack and Ben Schonzeit illustrated still lifes in blown up formats.

Also portraits can be found as a subject of the first generation artists: Chuck Close and Franz Gertsch depicted humans in their works and John Kacere preferred to focus solely on the female body.

Regardless of the particular motif, all artists created new impressions of the American life and developed their own specific painting technique.

## 2nd Generation: the '70s, '80s and '90s

The artists of the second generation followed the movement's pioneers and their work of the 80s and 90s is built artistically upon the achievements of the first generation. In the second generation the movement became more international as artists from Europe increasingly joined. It therefore diversified and developed a different way of looking at things and of choosing subjects. Unlike their American colleagues, the European



artists decided to maintain a more neutral position in depicting themes.

Themes that have already been important for the artists in the first generation were adapted: While Gus Heinze shows motorcycles or Don Jacot likes the engagement with still lifes, street views as well as building arrangements and Diner sceneries can be found in paintings by Davis Cone, Bertrand Meniel, Robert Gniewek and Rod Penner.

Cities and landscapes remained important themes like in the artworks by Anthony Brunelli or Randy Dudley. Bernardo Torrens is the only one who is concentrating on human figure in its social environment, also with his nude females.

The artists of the second generation used similar techniques and truly altered the motifs. By developing new perspectives due to their different origins, they took the movement to a new level.

## 3rd Generation: from 2000 to 2010

All artists of the third generation make use of digital technology. Their works are characterized by precise, detailed high-definition images, which at times even raise doubt about the authenticity of the paintings.

Due to this technical development, other ways to present specific objects arose. Demonstrated by artists like Clive Head, Ben Johnson or Raphaella Spence, the emphasis now lies on the depiction of large-scale cityscapes and the skill to transfer them as accurate as possible onto the canvas, rather than carefully selected objects.

Complex ways of interpreting the paintings and of bringing compositional and technical improvement to

the genre becomes the aim of the artists of the third generation.

Additionally to the mise-en-scène of the city, the other traditional motifs of Photorealism remain in use by the third generation. Still lifes are captured by Roberto Bernardi and Tjalf Sparnaay, Peter Maier focusses on cars and Yigal Ozeri finds a new interpretation of portraits.

Especially when using these same subjects, it becomes evident how the new techniques allow the works to feature an unprecedented level of intricacy and elaboration which drives the whole Photorealism movement to full suspense. With their new media, the young artists now have unlimited possibilities in creating and optimizing their works.

The third generation reaches the aim that the first generation was striving for. By using digital photography in combination with new painting methods they create paintings as real as or more real than photographs.