

Photo Realism

As a full-fledged art movement Photorealism evolved from Pop Art, and as a counter to Abstract Expressionism as well as Minimalist art movements, in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States. Photorealists use a photograph, or several photographs, to gather the information to create their paintings, and it has been argued that the use of a camera and photographs is an acceptance of Modernism.

Charles Thomas "Chuck" Close (born 1940) is an American painter, artist and photographer. He makes massive-scale photorealist portraits.

Working from a gridded photograph, he builds his images by applying one careful stroke after another in multi-colours or grayscale. He works methodically, starting his loose but regular grid from the left hand corner of the canvas. His works are generally larger than life and highly focused.



Close, *Big Self-Portrait* 1967-68



Close, *Susan* 1971



"One demonstration of the way photography became assimilated into the art world is the success of photorealist painting in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is also called super-realism or hyper-realism and painters like Richard Estes, Denis Peterson, Audrey Flack, and Chuck Close often worked from photographic stills to create paintings that appeared to be photographs. The everyday nature of the subject matter of the paintings likewise worked to secure the painting as a realist object." G. Thompson: *American Culture in the 1980's*

Richard Estes (born 1932) is regarded as one of the founders of the international photo-realist movement of the late 1960s. His paintings generally consist of reflective, clean, and inanimate city and geometric landscapes.

Estes stayed true to the photographs he used. Beginning around 1967, he began to paint storefronts and buildings with glass windows and, more importantly, the reflected images shown in these windows. When his paintings include reflections of stickers, signs, and window displays, they are always depicted in reverse.



Estes, *Telephone Booths* 1968

Estes's paintings were based on several colour photographs of the subject, with the reflections, changing with the lighting and the time of day. While some amount of alteration was done for the sake of aesthetic composition, it was important to Estes that the central and the main reflected objects be recognisable, but also that the evanescent quality of the reflections be retained.

Robert Bechtle (born 1932) is an American painter who has lived nearly all his life in the San Francisco Bay Area, and whose art is centred on scenes from everyday local life.

Bechtle is considered to be one of the earliest Photorealists. Working from his own photographs, Bechtle takes inspiration from his local San Francisco surroundings, painting friends and family and the neighbourhoods and street scenes, paying special attention to automobiles.



Robert Bechtle, *Alameda Gran Torino* 1974

His brushwork is barely detectable in his photo-like renditions, which reconstruct the colour, and the light of a commonplace scene. Peter Schjeldahl wrote in *The New Yorker* that in 1969, when he first noticed a Bechtle painting, he was “rattled by the middle-class ordinariness of the scene.” As he looked more closely, he discovered “a feat of resourceful painterly artifice” that he gradually realised was “beautiful.” The article concludes: “Life is incredibly complicated, and the proof is that when you confront any simple, stopped part of it you are stupefied.”

John Salt (1937) is an English artist, whose greatly detailed paintings from the late 1960s onwards made him one of the pioneers of the photorealist school. Salt was born and brought up in the Sheldon district of Birmingham. His father was a motor repair garage owner, whose stepfather in turn had been a signwriter painting stripes on the bodies of cars. As a young boy Salt was encouraged to draw and paint, and at the age of fifteen he gained admittance to the Birmingham School of Art.



Salt, *White Chevy – Red Trailer* 1975

Salt's pictures generally feature wrecked cars and decrepit mobile homes in semi-rural locations in the United States. They are produced from photographs by projecting transparencies onto canvas and using an airbrush and stencils to reproduce the colour – a painstaking process that can take up to two years to complete.

Ralph Goings (1928 – 2016) was best known for his highly detailed paintings of hamburger stands, pick-up trucks, and California banks, portrayed in a deliberately objective manner.



Goings, *Ralph's Diner* 1982-3

"In 1963 I wanted to start painting again but I decided I wasn't going to do abstract pictures. It occurred to me that I should go as far to the opposite as I could. ... that projecting and tracing the photograph instead of copying it freehand would be even more shocking. To copy a photograph literally was considered a bad thing to do. It went against all of my art school training... some people were upset by what I was doing and said 'it's not art, it can't possibly be art'. That gave me encouragement in a perverse way, because I was delighted to be doing something that was really upsetting people... I was having a hell of a lot of fun..."

Ralph Goings's technique includes painting with a brush on canvas, the same technique used in most classical art. He began in the 1960s taking photographs of real scenes and over the years transitioned to taking photos of scenes set up in his studio, where he could control all elements of the process. He then works from the photograph to the canvas and uses the photo less and less as the painting takes on its own character. Also similar to classical art, the paintings focus on a single light source.



Ralph Goings, *America's Favourite* 1989

In *Ralph's Diner* (1982), the light streams in from the window and creates interesting reflections and shadows in the retro diner. The ceiling reflects the light unevenly, and the sleek lines of the countertop are accentuated by the shiny reflections. There are shadows in the right hand side and on the left, in discreet areas, making it more realistic and three dimensional.

'... embracing banality is very much the point of what Goings does. He wants to tell us that the most ordinary things are well worth looking at—provided that we have the discipline to look at that property, on their own terms and for their own sake. After all, this is precisely what Vermeer does in the View of Delft. Why should Goings be ashamed to follow his example?' Edward Lucie Smith: *Catalogue Essay* 2004



Baeder, *John's Diner with John's Chevelle* 2007

John Baeder (born 1938) is best known for his detailed paintings of American roadside diners and eateries. The interest in small towns across America began when, as a student at Auburn University in the late 1950s, he made frequent trips between Atlanta and Alabama, which drew his attention to rural landscapes and roadside diners; and he started photographing old cars and other relics with a Baby Brownie camera.

Duane Hanson (1925 – 96) was known for his realistic works of people, cast from live models in various materials, including polyester resin, fiberglass, Bondo (an automotive filler), and bronze. His work is often associated with the Pop Art movement as well as hyperrealism. His sculptures, cast from actual people, were made of fiberglass, and painted to make the revealed skin look realistic, with veins and blemishes. Hanson then clothed the figures with garments from second-hand clothing stores and theatrically arranged the action. Clearly these works contained strong social comment, and can be seen as modern parallels to the concerns of 19th-century French Realists such as Honoré Daumier and Jean-François Millet, artists Hanson admired.



Hanson, *Woman Eating* 1971



Hanson, *Man on a Bench* 1977

While the earlier works tended to be more contained spatially, the later figures had no clearly defined boundaries separating them from the viewer. They quite literally inhabited the viewer's space—with amusing results at times, as in the cases of *Man on a Bench* (1977) or *Photographer* (1978)

Although detractors may liken his work to figures in a wax museum, the content of his sculptures is more complex and subtly expressive than that normally found in waxworks.

Carole A. Feuerman (Born 1945) is one of the three pioneers of Hyperrealism in figurative sculpture, along with Duane Hanson and John de Andrea, although of a younger generation. Dubbed "the reigning doyenne of super-realism" by art historian John T. Spike, Feuerman is known for her lifelike portrayals of swimmers.



Feuerman, *The Midpoint* 2017

Born in 1958 to German parents in Melbourne, Australia, **Ron Mueck** grew up in the family business of puppetry and doll-making. In 1996, he was asked by (his mother in law) Paula Rego to make a small figure of Pinocchio for her group exhibition *Spellbound: Art and Film*, at the Hayward Gallery, London.



Mueck first came to public attention with his sculpture *"Dead Dad"*, a portrayal of his recently deceased father at roughly half-scale, and made from memory and imagination. Mueck's sculpture (which is highly 'realistic' but disrupts expectations by over or undersize scale) responds to the minute details of the human body, playing with scale to produce engrossing visual images. It can often take more than a year to create a sculpture. His subject matter is deeply private, and is often concerned with people's unspoken thoughts and feelings.

Man in a Boat is half life size.

Mueck, *Man in a Boat* 2002



Mueck, *Boy* 1999

Mueck, *Mask II*

This large sculpture (77x 118x85cm.) is thought to be a self portrait. Made in fibreglass it accurately reproduces the pores and texture of flesh.



Mike Gorman (born 1938) is a key figure in the burgeoning Photorealist movement of the late 1960s. He creates arresting visual images, which delight and provoke in equal measure, in a figurative, photorealist idiom, with an immediately identifiable style. His subject matter is both aesthetic and political.

Michael Gorman's work explores a profound fascination with shifting cultural boundaries and the clash of old and new, ancient and modern, traditional and contemporary.

Gorman, *Strangers at the Villa Medici* 1974



This painting by **Rob Ward** (born 1949) reproduces the effect of a soft focus photograph of objects on his studio shelf.

Rob Ward, *Untitled*

Beyond Photorealism

Clive Head (born 1965) is often, mistakenly classified as a Photorealist painter. It is suggested that he has moved beyond old-fashioned Photorealism.

One of the primary differences between Head's painted realities and the reality of everyday life lies in the way space is defined. Head does not present a vista or view like a camera, he shows an entire environment over time.

The end point of his paintings is never to recreate an image of a specific location, but to invent an artificial world that convinces the viewer of its own independent reality. There is a complex relationship in Head's paintings, between their resemblance to somewhere we might know, like a London street, and Head's insistence that we are in fact looking through a framed 'window' at another reality.

In interviews Head has always insisted that the language of realism he uses is not the same as the language of photography, and it is true that his paintings do not resemble photographs. Indeed, Head has been consistently critical of the futility of painters copying photographs.



Clive Head, *Thinking About George Braque* 2012-13



Clive Head, *L'Après-midi d'une Femme* 2017

Very early on Head developed a realist style of painting, often mistaken for Photorealism, but his most recent work has moved firmly away from this. Even when producing ostensibly realist paintings Head always maintains that his work is not concerned with the visual appearance of the world, but with the full sensual experience of being in a particular place over a period of time. In recent work this has led to overtly composite or layered images, in which time and movement play a more significant role than the creation of something that can be mistaken for a photographic snap shot.