

Who is a Photorealist? No one is a Photorealist!

Who is a Pop Artist? No one is a Pop Artist!

Who is a Minimal Artist? No one is a Minimal Artist!

And so on!...since 1960.

All of those words used to group and describe artists in a genre are just words. And any and all of the true artists whose visual similarities helped to group them under those seemingly descriptive terms never did really consider themselves as part of ANY group or category. I think they all considered themselves individuals whose intellectual impetus had nothing to do with any other artist's thinking.

The Impressionists, the Surrealists, the Dadaists and the Cubists, may have had some ideas and manifestos in common, but they did know each other, were friends, or at least acquaintances and did have similar ideas about painting and art in general in their times. We do know that the Abstract Expressionists/Action painters did have their manifesto and did relate strongly to one another.

In Paris at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in New York during and just after WWII, the art world was small and centered in those cities. "Movements" then, were created by artists who were involved with each other in close knit groups having some ideas, methods and techniques in and about art in common. But, by the 60's with the dawning of globalization in media and communications and the information age, artists no longer seemed to need to be in close proximity and gathered in any one place in order to have access to, and add to ideas of others. Ideas were flowing freely and widely and individuals in scattered parts of the country and world were able to be aware of advances in art, literature and technology. Critics, curators, and dealers then began to discern similarities in visual representations occurring in varied places and brought these artists together in exhibitions, articles and in galleries.

Lawrence Alloway the well known art writer and critic coined the name "POP" art. Did Andy Warhol think of himself as a POP artist? Did Roy Lichtenstein or any of those others? I doubt it. "Minimal art" was coined in an essay about modern American art by art philosopher Richard Wollheim. What of Photorealism? I KNOW that Chuck Close doesn't think of himself as anything other than an ARTIST. Richard Estes gives NO thought to any names people use to describe his or any other's work. They, Charles Bell and Ralph Goings, Robert Bechtle, and all the others were content to be grouped as Photorealists though, for whatever commercial and publicity gains it provided. Very few really thought much about the word which I accidentally coined during an exhibition in the original Meisel Gallery at 79<sup>th</sup> and Madison Avenue in 1969. When asked by an art reviewer what I called these painters who used the camera and photographs to gather the information they needed to make the kind of paintings they were driven to make, I said, "I don't know,...maybe photographic realists...NO!, Photorealists...What do you think of that?". That weekend he wrote a review of Photorealism at Meisel Gallery.

It seems now the only ones attempting to call themselves Photorealists or any other category are the derivative and third rate practitioners who want to associate with and ride on the coat tails of the originators of one type of painting or another.

All that said, there ARE about 40 painters I have found over the past 40 years whose work has just enough in common to be able to assemble them in books and museum exhibitions in a united way. This, to show a very specific aspect of a late twentieth century painting which I believe has not only influenced much of what has come after, but has provided later artists with the tools, or “right” to USE the tools and technology of the times. This includes now, the DIGITAL cameras and computers in what I call the digital age.

Well, Photorealism along with POP, Minimalism, Neo-Expressionism, Graffiti and a myriad of so called styles and movements has persevered. There are today just a few artists associated with most of those words who are still working and of significance. All of the primary living Photorealists however are still working and producing wonderful paintings. The second and third generations including the 21<sup>st</sup> century digital age painters are bringing new imagery as well as compositional and technological advances to the genre. For the sake of history it has proven convenient to continue using the term Photorealism and it has and is being used worldwide and does help define something that has and is continuing to happen over the 50 years now.

When I wrote the first volume of this now 4 part series, I did define what qualified an artist as a Photorealist. It was pretty cut and dried and was a superficial way of defining and promoting a group of painters. I basically said that these were artists that unabashedly used and actually legitimized the use of the camera to gather the information needed to make a painting. They in most cases used mechanical or semi-mechanical or technological means of transferring this information to the canvas. They had the discipline and technical ability to utilize paint and brush to create a painting with enough detail or illusion of detail to simulate a photograph. In most cases they went well beyond what a camera and film could produce. That they had produced enough work before a certain date indicating a serious commitment to style as an ongoing pursuit and that they had begun and appeared well before, as innovators, the derivative copiers who came later upon having been shown the way.

That all still holds true. BUT as the decades wore on, it turned out that, in my opinion and experience five or six, per decade, new younger very dedicated painters appeared who brought something new to this very small and exclusive group of artists. These painters developed new imagery, vision, mood and composition. But, most important they continued to find and utilize the new and current technologies as they where invented and became available for artists. Ultimately they incorporated some very sophisticated digital cameras and computers with self-invented programming to make possible some of the most extraordinary painting in realism ever seen. The newest Photorealists, just six in the new millennium, have surpassed anything ever seen in realism. Bertrand Meniel and Tony Brunelli who became prominent in the 90's, and Raffaella Spence have captured, seen and painted more detail in their cityscape paintings than can even be seen in a photograph. They have gone beyond anything ever painted before but with sensitivity and feeling unattainable with camera and film. Roberto Bernardi is painting still life with his extensive training in old master technique and the aid of 36 mega pixel cameras and computers which will not be eclipsed by any in the foreseeable future. Yigal Ozeri, has captured

the faces and figures of young women as never been done before. Spence's aerial images of cities from helicopters and skyscrapers could not be done without the digital tools and extraordinary dedication to detail. And Peter Maier has redefined realist technology and painting with paints and surfaces not available to or even thought of by any others.

I think it is important to point out and compare 50 years of Photorealism to equal periods of other important art movements. There are today thousands of artists making abstract work, pop images, and "impressions" of what they perceive. Many are still painting academic realism and all other traditional forms of realism. The point is however, These are not the abstract Expressionists, the pop artists, nor the impressionists. NONE are connected in any way to the original painters of those styles. But

the newer painters making photorealism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are in fact still THE Photorealists. And part of a very much alive, well and continuing connected group of very dedicated artists.