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Objectivity and New Realist Painting

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OBJECTIVITY AND NEW REALIST PAINTING

(TITLE)

BY

JACKY PALMAN

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN FINE ART

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1977

YEAR

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OBJECTIVITY AND NEW REALISM

BY

JACKY PALMAN

B.A. Portsmouth Polytechnic, England, 1973

ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts in Fine Art at the Graduate School
of Eastern Illinois University

CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS
1977

This thesis describes the methods of New Realist painting (also known as Sharp-Focus Realism, Photo-Realism, Super Realism and Hyper-Realism) and its philosophy of objectivity behind the photographic approach and the choice of subject-matter. It also points out that this aim for total objectivity is ultimately unattainable.

A definition of New Realism in painting follows in Chapter One, which also deals with the factors separating it from other photographically realistic styles - the primary distinction being the constant striving of New Realism for complete objectivity.

Chapter Two deals with the influences responsible for the emergence of New Realism. Pop Art made it acceptable to use mass-produced items as subjects for paintings and introduced new techniques, taken from the world of advertising. Abstract art, which is the background common to most 'first generation' New Realists was responsible in part for the overall approach and the attention to the two-dimensional surface of the canvas. The philosophy of objectivity derives from that of a French group of writers belonging to a movement called 'Chosisme' (or Thingism) which evolved during the 1940's.

Chapter Three is concerned with the aims and methods of some of the most prominent painters associated with the New Realist movement; their subject-matter and their approach to it; and why some of them should not be labelled New Realists at all.

The artists dealt with are; Malcolm Morley, Richard Estes, Don Eddy, Chuck Close, John Clem Clarke, Philip Pearlstein, Robert Bechtle, Ralph Goings, Robert Cottingham, Richard McLean, Joseph Raffael, Audrey Flack and Sylvia Mangold.

The thesis concludes with a description of my work, which uses the photograph but otherwise could not be described as New Realist, in its methods or its subjective approach; and it reiterates the original statement that although the goal of the New Realist painters is to be totally objective, and that this is their most important distinguishing factor, they are unlikely ever to realise this goal.

This thesis is illustrated.

"Let it be first of all by their presence that objects and gestures establish themselves, and let this presence continue to prevail over whatever explanatory theory may try to enclose them in a system of references."

A. Robbe-Grillet

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PREFACE

New Realism, or, as it is variously termed, Super-Realism, Sharp-Focus Realism, Photo-Realism and Hyper-Realism has been evolving since the mid-60's. My interest in it was aroused at discovering a style of painting that, ostensibly at least, was aiming in the same direction as I was. My work has always been figurative, and had previously been heavy with metaphor and symbolism. I had reached the stage where not only did I feel that I had no new symbolic messages to impart, but that there was absolutely no need to 'say' anything, especially in the secret, surrealistic manner I had hitherto employed.

Here, then, was a group of painters who also seemed to be attempting to simply present what is, and this encouraged me to undertake an investigation, during the course of which I discovered many major differences - in technique (I use neither airbrush nor projector), in subject-matter (which in my case is invariably the human figure) and in expression of personal opinion, which should not occur in New Realist painting. Finally, though, my original observation about these paintings trying to portray nothing more nor less than what is holds true for the most part, and it leads me to consider New Realism as an inevitable and valid movement.

Serious critical recognition of New Realism is only recently becoming apparent. This is in part due to the lack of any intellectualising on the part of the artists themselves regarding their work, and in part to the failure of exhibition organisers to present any coherent explanation, in their choice of exhibits, of what New Realism

is about. This is combined with confusion on the side of the critics, who are unsure how to approach the work, since the dominance of Abstract Art for so long has, of course, led them away from evaluation in terms of subject-matter. Without an explanation, then, as to the philosophies underlying the execution of New Realism, it appears merely to be utilising utterly banal subject-matter to display technical dexterity.

The purpose of this thesis, which concentrates specifically on painting, is to clarify the intentions behind the New Realist philosophy, and to show that ultimately their objective is an impossible one.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure

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|-----|-------------------|--|
| 1) | Malcolm Morley | <u>Vermeer - Portrait of the Artist in his Studio</u> , 1968 |
| 2) | Malcolm Morley | <u>'Amsterdam' in front of Rotterdam</u> , 1965 |
| 3) | Richard Estes | <u>Cocoanut Custard</u> , 1967 |
| 4) | Richard Estes | <u>Booths</u> , 1967 |
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CHAPTER 1THE PAINTING

There are a number of different forms of representational art being produced today, and these are, for the most part, a variety of eclectic figurative styles, derived from anything between Renaissance Classicism, early Baroque realism and the Neo-Classical aspects of naturalism; not to mention Surrealism and finally Pop, all modified by the influence of photography and different colour reproduction processes.

Amongst this assortment of styles, New Realism is generally assumed to be the one that reproduces the photographic image to the most minute degree possible, and subject-matter is disregarded as no particular connection can be seen between the subjects in the various paintings. This is hardly surprising because, more often than not, a conglomerate of works are seen together with the only common denominator being their photographic exactitude. Much of this is simply a continuation of the realist tradition, with all the symbolism and subjectivity that is implied, and with emphasis on personal interpretation of the subject-matter.

New Realism can be described as such only by virtue of its struggle for dispassionate objectivity, and by the decision not to manipulate the subject-matter (photograph, post-card, etc.) for emotional purposes, but simply to transcribe the information to the canvas as accurately as possible. The definition which is rapidly becoming

the most widely accepted and adhered to describes this method of working as "that which replicates some segment of the physical environment with precision and without apparent bias, taste, emphasis or subjective deformation."¹

Of course, the inevitable choices that have to be made concerning subject-matter, its placing and order mean that the artist can never be completely objective, even though the camera can be used to a certain extent to circumvent these choices. However, the urge to distance oneself from subjective influence is the main factor which separates true New Realism from other photographically realist painting. The subject-matter is important, also. Many of the artists when questioned will stress that there is no importance attached to their subject-matter, and, paradoxical though it may seem, this is perfectly true. There is no personal importance in the trucks, the fast-food restaurants or storefronts of contemporary American suburbia which are frequently depicted. The New Realists are utilizing as objective a method as possible to present an image, of photographic clarity, of things which we unavoidably encounter every day and therefore fail to see except in terms of utility. As Richard Estes, one of the foremost painters of the New Realist group, says, "Perhaps the more you show the way things look the less you show how. . . we think they are."²

¹ William Seitz, 'The Real and the Artificial' in Art in America, Nov/Dec 1972 p. 61.

² Gregory Battcock, Super Realism (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975) p. 118.

CHAPTER 2THE INFLUENCES

Pop Art is generally seen as the movement which gave New Realism its roots, and certainly this is true of the subject-matter and method, although the approach seems rather to stem from that of the Abstract school, and the philosophy from a group of French writers called the Chosistes.

Pop, in the late 50's, took a new look at subject-matter, and made legitimate the portrayal of comic-strips, advertising and television as art. It took mass-produced items, such as Warhol's 'Campbell's Soup Cans' or Lichtenstein's cartoons (which were, of course, all commercial products, and previously considered designs rather than creations in the world of fine art) and made them into images which were in turn mass-produced. The methods employed by the Pop artists had also, up until then, been used for advertising purposes, and included the photo-silkscreen and the airbrush. The New Realists found that they could incorporate these methods, along with traditional oil paint, to achieve a perfect photographic flatness of surface.

However, the effect of Pop in taking such uniform and everyday subjects and presenting them as art was not only "a victory for commercialism, pluralism and populism over elitism"¹ but also to deliver certain ironic statements about the way our lives are run.

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Art in America, Nov/Dec 1972, p. 65

This last aspect has not continued into New Realism, which does not aspire to make statements. Any statements gleaned from the content are attributed solely to the viewer.

In order to proceed in as 'style-less' a style as possible, to avoid making any kind of judgement concerning the subject-matter, the photograph itself is treated as subject. The results, therefore, should not be considered illusionistic, as they are a transcription of a two-dimensional, not a three-dimensional image onto another two-dimensional surface. Linda Nochlin, in her essay 'Realism Now', mentions the importance of recent Abstract painting in the formulation of the New Realist style.

"The constant awareness of the fieldlike flatness of the pictorial surface . . . the cool urban tone, with its affirmation of the picture qua picture as literal fact, the rejection of expressive brushwork, or, if it exists, the tendency towards bracketing its evocative¹ implications through irony or over-emphasis . . ."

This detached approach, using the subject-matter as though it were simply a vehicle to tackle formal or textural problems, is usually accomplished with the use of a grid system, dividing the canvas into equal squares which should each then be treated with the same amount of attention, and suggests that the Abstract background common to most of the painters in the New Realist group has had much influence on them.

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Gregory Battcock, Super Realism (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975) p. 115

The movement of French realist writing which has had considerable¹ philosophical influence on the New Realists is known as Chosisme. The Chosiste movement began in the late 1940's; its basic precept being escape from the preoccupation with psychological analysis and moral involvements of the traditional novel. Their concentration on materiality has

"made readers once more aware that they step daily through a world of solid objects, glowing colors . . . they have made their material seem exciting, if only in showing how important a part of our² existence the physical objects of our lives are." The progress of the New Realist movement seems almost to parallel that of the Chosistes, in that they both have a similar philosophical objective and neither are invariably, if ever, completely successful. In the case of the Chosistes, this seems to be due to their (probably necessary) exclusion of various other elements of the novel. In the case of the New Realists it is a human failure to reach the goal of total objectivity.

Alain Robbe-Grillet, who is probably the best known and most polemic author of this group, and through whose work the New Realists became acquainted with this particular philosophical approach, writes in a minutely detailed fashion. He describes meticulously each object as it occurs, attempting, by working in such a manner, to deny any meta-

¹
Chosisme - 'Thingism'

²
Ben F. Stoltzfus, Alain Robbe-Grillet (Southern Illinois University Press, 1964) p. viii

physical implications usually considered inherent in objects. In his determination to remain on the surface, even the characters are necessarily devoid of psychology or depth. He insists that his books have no allegorical meaning, although, as with the New Realist paintings, attempts by viewers are continually being made to find one; and he insists that their reality contains nothing beyond the things, gestures, words and events of the text. A strictly material reality.

This, then, is the idea that the New Realists are attempting to duplicate visually.

CHAPTER 3THE ARTISTS

Malcolm Morley is considered to be the first of the New Realists, and the Pop influence is decidedly in evidence in his earlier works.

Morley was born in London in 1932, but now lives and works mainly in New York, which is one of the two major centres in America for the New Realist movement. In the mid 60's he was making paintings of the interiors of ships and ships' dinner-parties as seen in brochures, always working from postcards and magazine photographs. These images, when enlarged, blatantly seemed to put down and to question the middle-class affluence of the scenes depicted.

He was also interested in what happens when a reproduction of a work of art is taken and transferred onto a canvas to become another painting which is to be mass-produced again (as with Lichtenstein's comic-strips). Morley made several copies of Vermeers with this idea in mind. (Fig. 1).

Later he said, "I have no interest in subject-matter as such, or satire, or social comment, or anything else lumped together with subject-matter . . . I accept the subject-matter as a by-product of surface."¹
This indicates his move away from Pop.

¹
Udo Kultermann, New Realism (Matthews Miller Dunbar 1972) p. 14

The work of Morley's which is often considered to be the first New Realist painting is that of an ocean liner. Called 'The Amsterdam in front of Rotterdam', (Fig. 2) it was painted in 1965 from a postcard. To reproduce it on canvas he divided the image up into squares - sometimes even cutting it - and covered the entire surface of both canvas and postcard save the square he was working on; from time to time even turning them upside-down, so that he was in fact working in a very abstract manner. The entire image would not be apparent until the painting was complete. This, of, course, meant that no particular emphasis would be given to one part of the canvas, and thus would qualify his work for the definition 'New Realist'.



Figure 1.

Malcolm Morley - Vermeer - Portrait of the Artist in his Studio
1968.

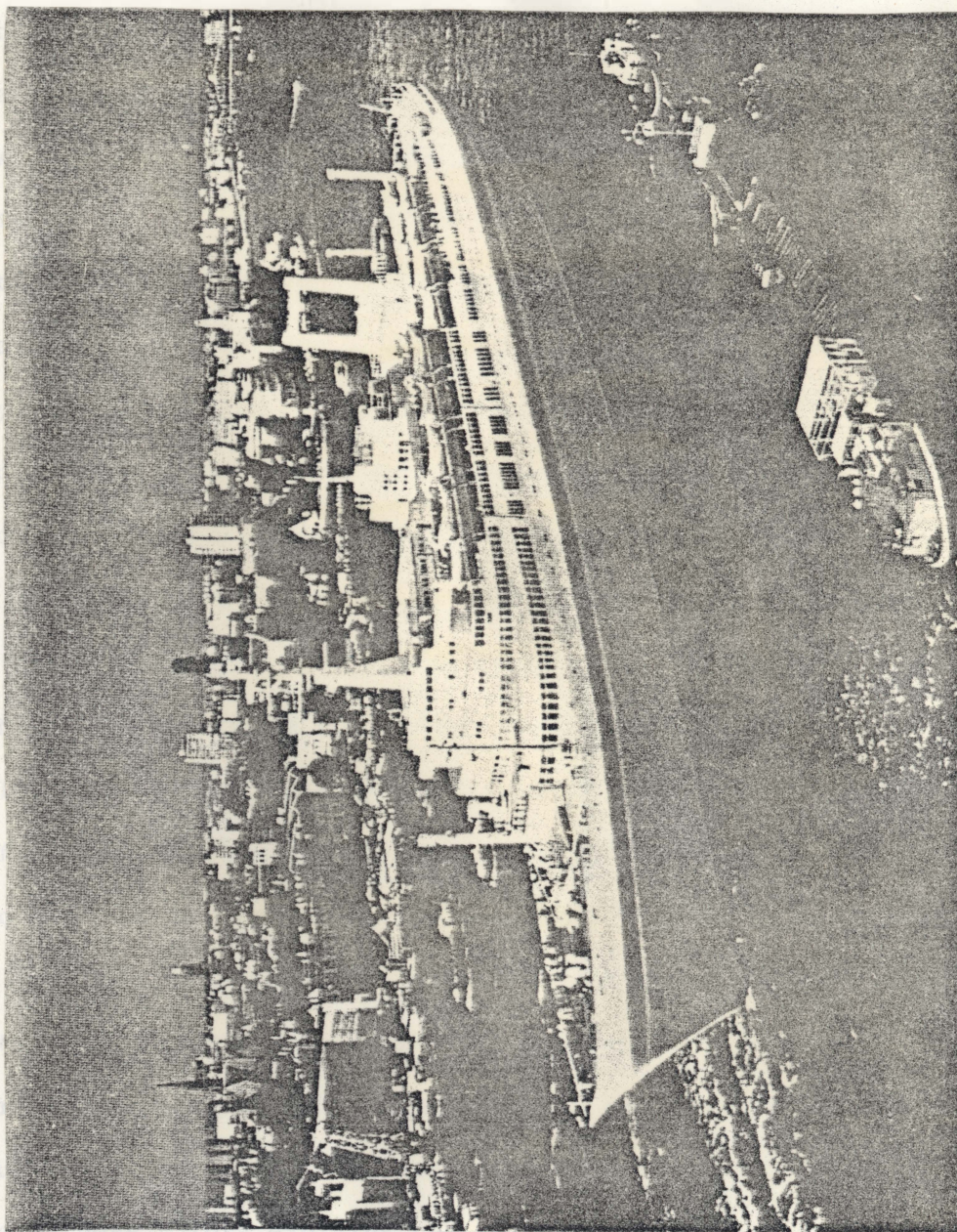


Figure 2. Malcolm Morley - 'Amsterdam' in front of Rotterdam, 1965

Richard Estes was born in Evanston, Illinois, in 1939, and attended the Art Institute of Chicago. Today he resides in New York.

Estes specialises in street scenes, store fronts and subways, with elaborate reflections as in plate-glass windows, which he paints in immaculate detail. The purpose of the photograph, he maintains, is as a sketch to be used rather than a goal to be reached; and he will sometimes use several to achieve one image, as in the painting 'Cocoanut Custard' (Fig. 3) in which can be seen both the interior and the exterior of a restaurant. The eye would necessarily focus on one plane only, to distinguish one scene from another, so by setting his camera at different focal lengths and using them all at once he successfully produces an almost abstract image composed mainly of reflections.

Estes uses a projector to look at the slides, but says he does not project onto the canvas - he uses a grid, like Morley. He had Abstract Expressionism as a background, common to most of the New Realists, as claims this as one reason for their preoccupation with surface and the cold, uncommitted way in which they look at things. In connection with the timeless quality of his work, Estes mentions the fact that with inanimate objects, such as cars, there is no particular difference in appearance whether they are moving or still, whereas we associate certain images with the movement of the human figure which would indicate something temporal and detract from this timelessness. This explains the rare and unremarkable incidence of people in Estes' paintings; when they do appear they are totally integrated with the surroundings, and of no more importance. (e.g.Fig.4)

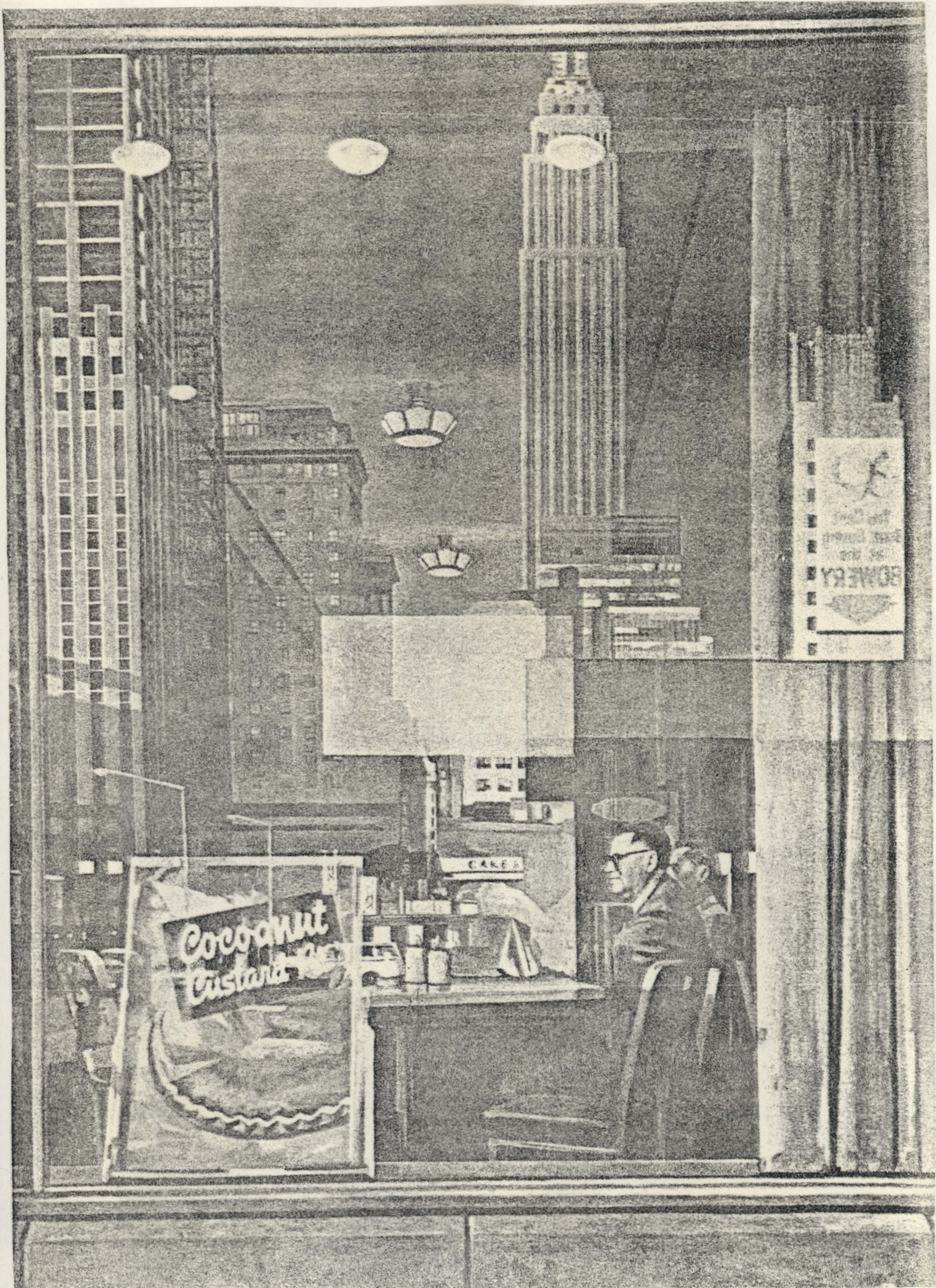


Figure 3. Richard Estes - Cocoanut Custard , 1967

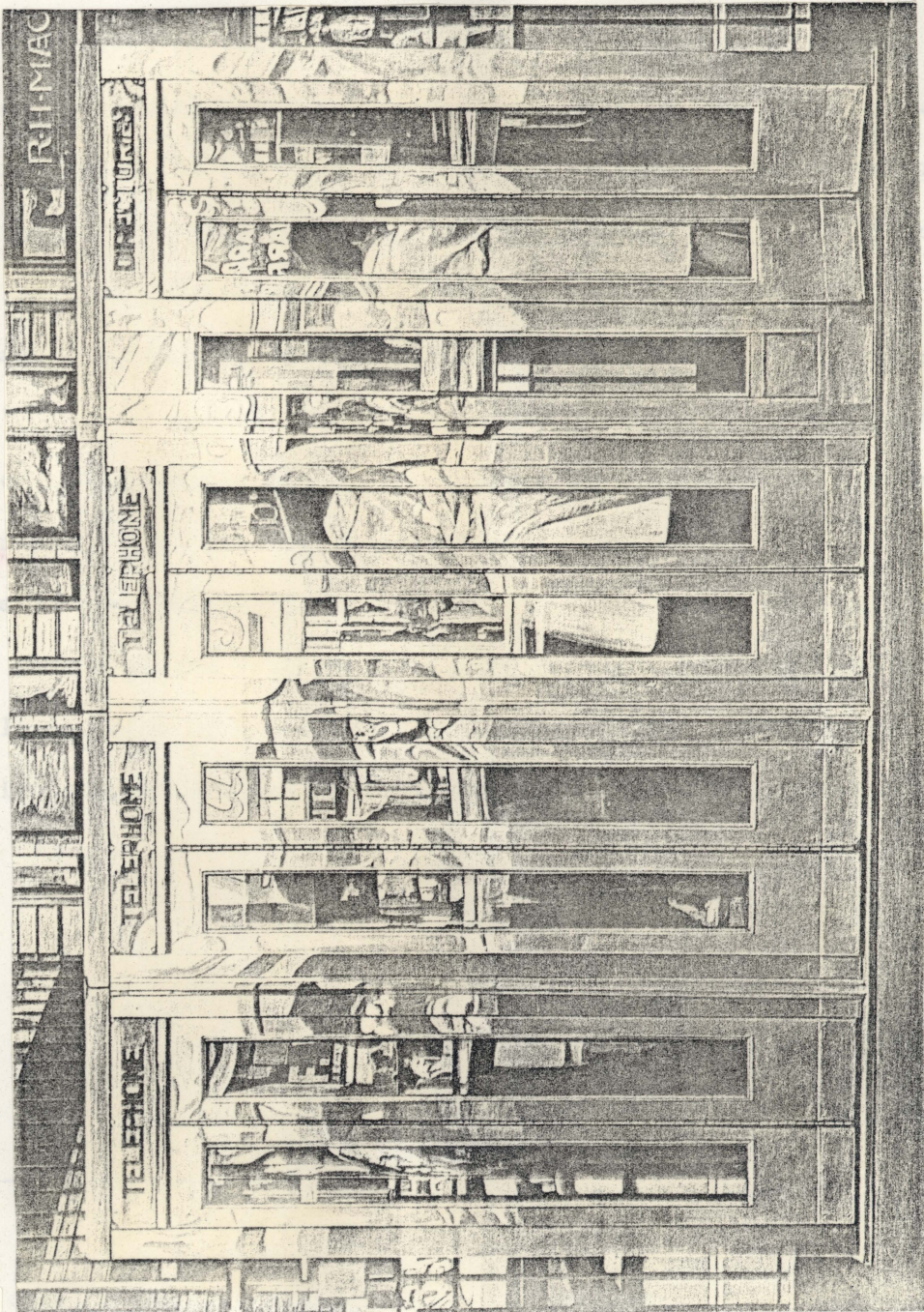


Figure 4. Richard Estes - Booths , 1967

Don Eddy, who was born in 1944, also lives in New York City, and was a professional photographer before he started painting full-time. Earlier he worked on cars and motorcycles doing custom-paint jobs - a preoccupation with motor vehicles which seems to have remained with him. Like Estes, he uses many photographs to achieve one painting - usually of cars in showroom situations - and says that he is interested "in the tension created between the integrity of the surface of the canvas and the illusory space."¹ This is demonstrated in 'Private Parking' (Fig. 5) - a painting of a Volkswagen seen through a mesh fence. The fence criss-crosses the entire surface of the canvas in diagonals and stands for the 'integrity' of his statement.

He is also interested in logical and illogical space, such as happens with a window - it can be looked through, or looked at, or seen only in terms of the objects reflected in it. Any interpretation of meaning through subject-matter, says Eddy, is unintentional.

1

Art in America Nov/Dec 1972, p. 76



Figure 5 (bottom picture) Don Eddy, Private Parking X 1971

Above are two of the photographs incorporated into the final painting.

Born in 1940, Chuck Close, another New Yorker, is probably the Most talked about, though not the most important of the New Realists. Actually, he has said that he does not think New Realism exists as a movement and dissociates himself from the label.

Using a grid system, like Morley, within which to work, he maintains that he uses the photograph simply because it sets up certain problems he has to deal with, which, he has decided, are necessary to him. The reason he uses a head instead of, for example, a tree, he says, is that, ". . . I'm a lazy person and would tend to let myself get by with things. If the color was slightly off, or the texture of the bark of a tree was wrong, who would notice? I would not be as tough on myself when it comes to certain color problems etc. People are important to other people, so they're important to me."¹

The important factor Close has in common with the other New Realist painters is that although he employs the human face which is, of course, unusual, he applies the paint to all areas of the canvas with equal intensity, and works on such a large scale (up to nine feet in one dimension) that, he believes, one tends to be forced into looking at one area at a time, which makes one see it in a very abstract sort of way. He is, however, unlike the painters who use the photograph merely as a document for information, much more closely concerned with the way the camera sees. That is, he strives to imitate rather

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Art in America , Nov/Dec 1972 p. 76

than to correct the monocular vision of the camera (as opposed to our binocular vision) as well as utilising the fact that in extreme close-up, parts of the face will tend to fade out of focus, while a central portion (for example, the eyes) will be crisply in focus and every thing in front of that will seem to leap from the surface. (Fig. 6)

In an essay on Close by William Dykes, Dykes says,

"The fact that so many persist in seeing these paintings as highly factual representations of people rather than as photographic representations of people is proof of the total assimilation of photographic syntax as fact."¹

¹
Arts Magazine , Feb. 1974 p. 29

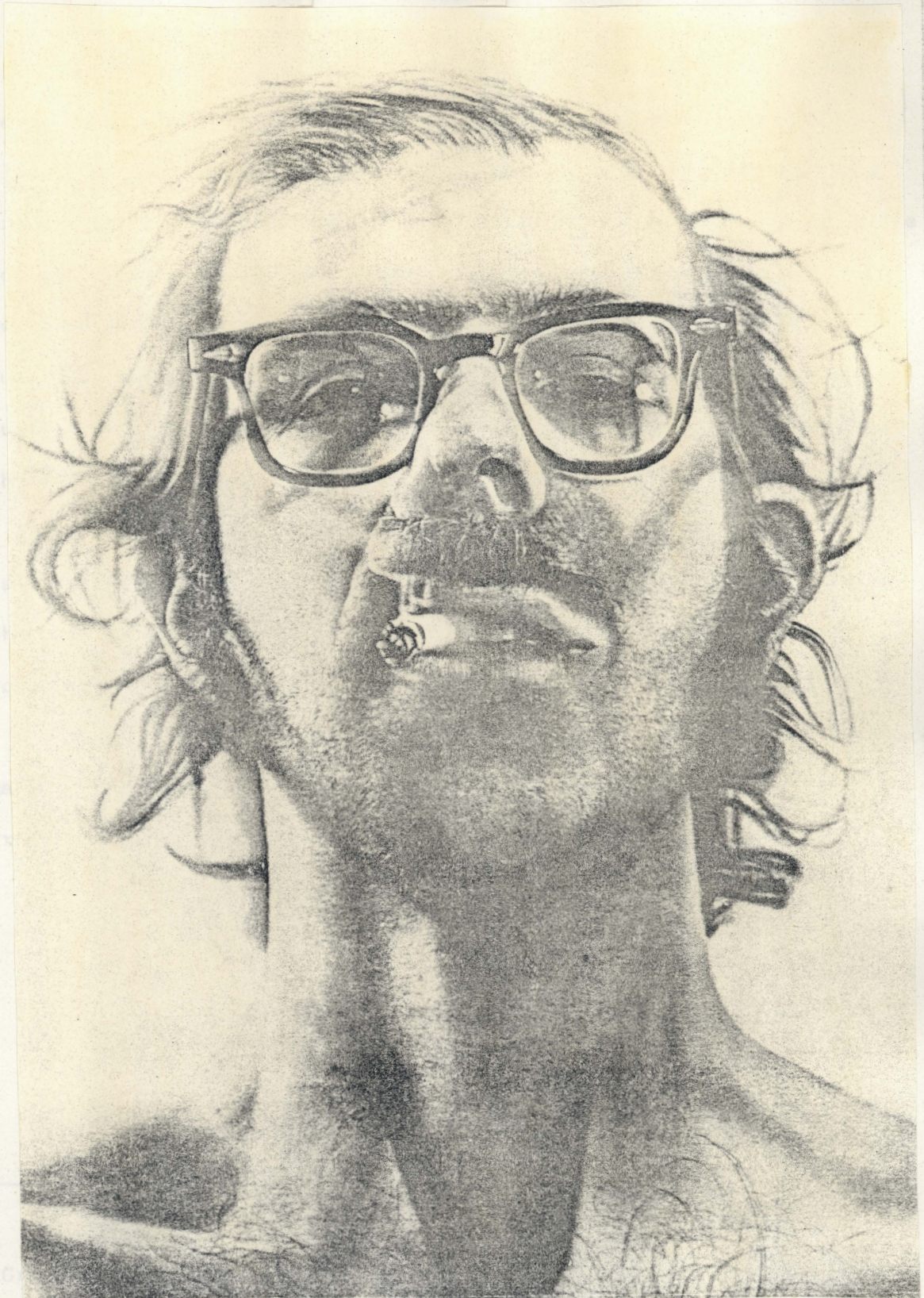


Figure 6. Chuck Close - Self Portrait , 1968

John Clem Clarke, born in 1937 in Oregon and now living in New York, also paints the figure, but has nothing whatever to do with Close. He has always been included in any major list of New Realists and originally, like Morley, he made copies of old masters, pursuing the concept of translating onto canvas a two-dimensional reproduction of a two-dimensional painting of a three-dimensional image, which is in tune with the New Realist idea. He would make stencils of the reproduction from the projected image, which he would then cut out and spray through onto the canvas, to give a rough, rather vulgar effect. (There was, in fact, a small group interested in what was called 'the camp depreciation of high art'.) He now, however, continues to follow the same procedure using photographs of his friends posing in the positions of old masters (for example, 'The Three Graces', Fig. 7).

He has obviously become too engrossed in the humour of the subject-matter. His works have been called "put-on references to the pastoral¹ tradition", and cannot be seriously considered as New Realism.

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Gregory Battcock, Super Realism , (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975) p.129



Figure 7. John Clem Clarke - The Three Graces , 1970

Born in Pittsburgh and living in New York, Philip Pearlstein is probably the only major painter connected (erroneously) with this group who claims to have no dependence on the photograph for his work. "It never occurred to me that people could work from photos", he pompously proclaimed, "because I never had any difficulty drawing or painting."¹

Pearlstein paints models in his studio from life, using a very photographic approach in his formal placing and viewpoint. The only similarity he shares with the New Realists is the cold, unemotional way he treats the image, giving the figures no more consideration than their surroundings, and stressing this by invariably chopping off the head or part of the body with the guillotine of the frame (see Fig. 8) His figures suggest nothing more than the problem of translating volume into two dimensions, and in this respect lack the photographic reality of New Realism.

¹

Art in America , Nov/Dec 1972 p. 66.



Figure 8.

Philip Pearlstein -

Models in the

Studio , 1967

On the other side of the country in California, which is the other major centre for New Realism, the more important painters are Bechtle, Goings, McLean Raffael and Cottingham.

Robert Bechtle was born in San Francisco in 1932, and he thinks that the 'bland, bright' Bay Area light supports the idea of neutrality which he, and indeed all the others, are trying to achieve.

He paints by projecting the image and drawing outlines, and then continues to work from the image projected by a table-top viewer. In his paintings, which are usually of cars and houses in suburban surroundings, no area, he maintains, should receive more attention than another.

In an interview, when asked if the 'overallness' of New Realist painting was an important part of it, he replied,

"Yes, because the sky is just as important a component of that surface as what is done in the face. Each area, at least in theory, has to receive an equal amount of attention. Of course, you may spend more time and energy painting the face than you will painting¹ the sky, but that shouldn't show when the painting is finished."

He continued, saying that this is to avoid editorialising about the relative importance of the objects in the paintings.

¹
Art in America , Nov/Dec 1972 p. 74

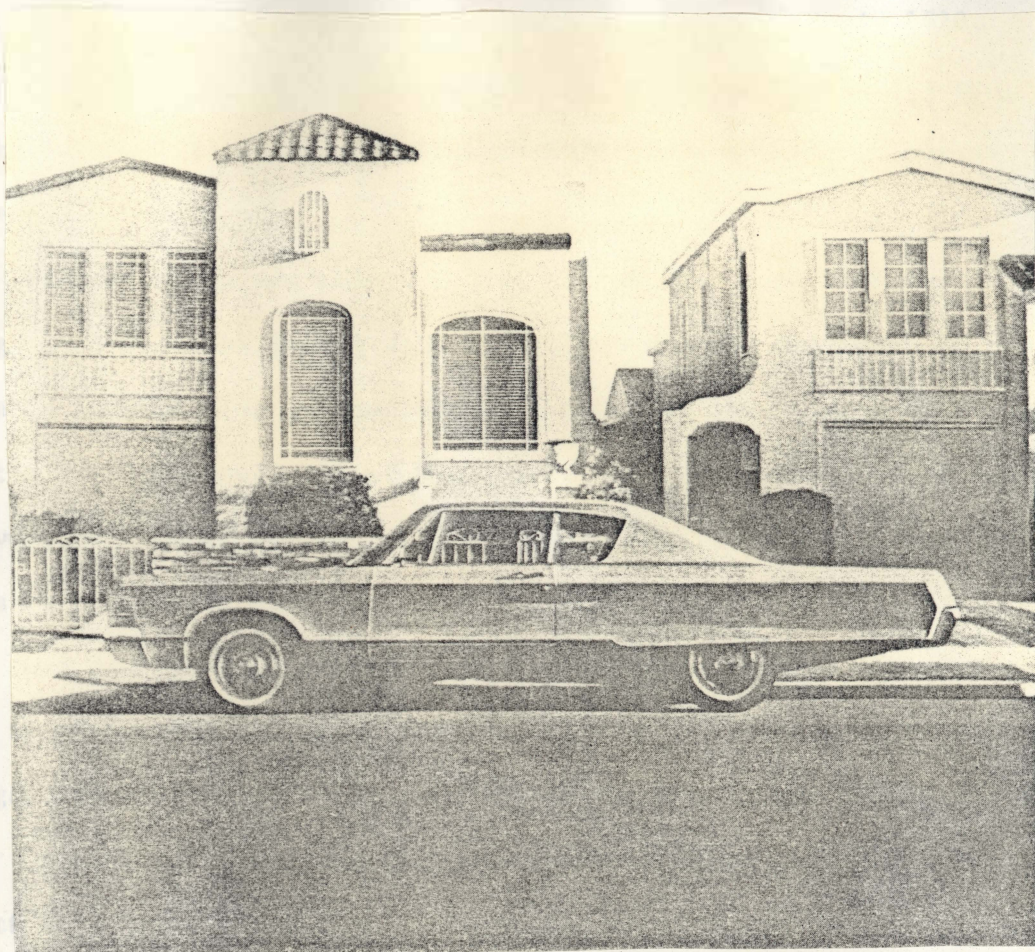


Figure 9. Robert Bechtle - '67 Chrysler , 1967

Ralph Goings lives in Sacramento. Goings was born in 1928, which makes him one of the oldest members of the New Realist group, and he is also, together with Richard Estes, one of its archetypal members.

His paintings are mainly of trucks and fast food restaurants (Fig. 10) which he paints with meticulous detail, and again he can probably be most closely compared with Estes in his 'categorical clarity' and the total depopulation of his scenes. Goings' areas of reflection, however, tend to be concentrated in several small sections, whereas Estes is completely involved in reflection (compare Fig. 11 with Fig. 1)

The standardised packaged uniformity which abounds in American life seems to be simply accepted and put down on canvas as it is, and Goings says that he is interested in the subject-matter making a statement (incidentally) about the importance of these things and the effect they have on our lives - regarded, as they generally are, in a purely utilitarian manner.

He admits that he finds it impossible both to compose his images and be objective at the same time, but, insofar as he is able, he approaches his work with the true democratic detachment of a New Realist.

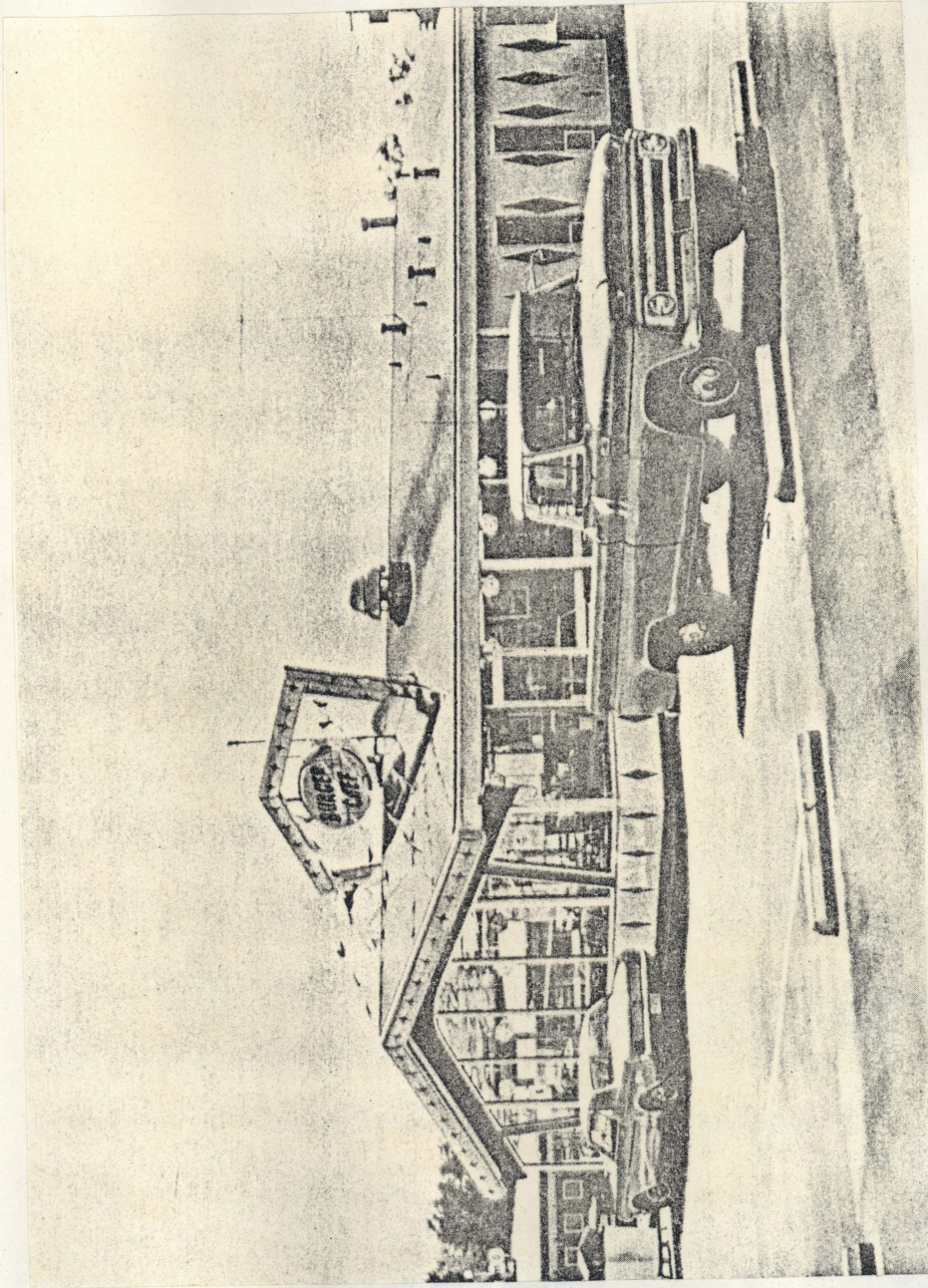


Figure 10. Ralph Goings - Burger Chef Chevy, 1970

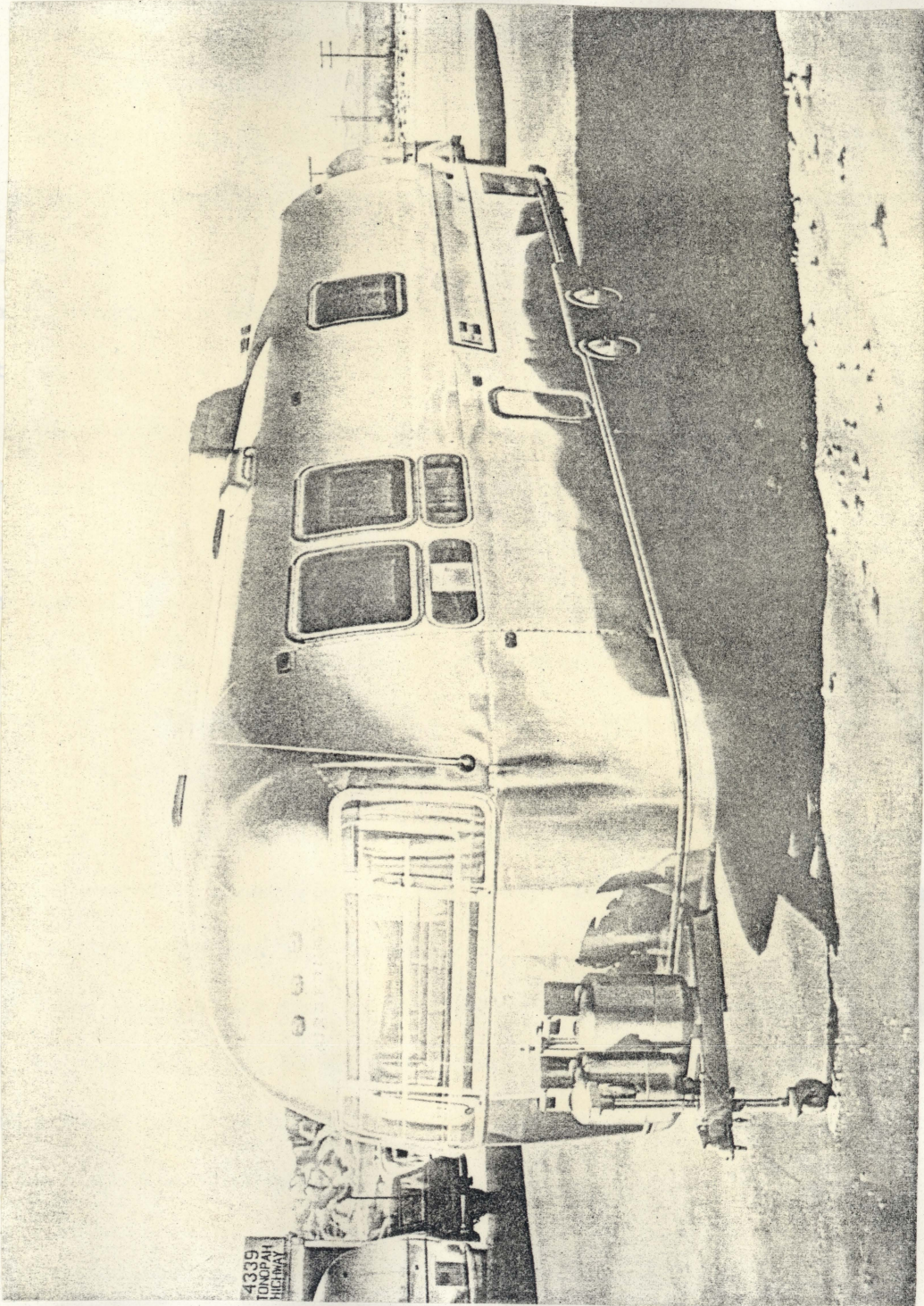


Figure 11. Ralph Goings - Airstream Trailer, 1970

Robert Cottingham was born in 1935 in Brooklyn, New York, and until 1972 was living in Los Angeles. He then left America and now resides in London, England.

Common to the style, he forsakes the human figure in preference for street artifacts, and the subjects in most of his work are the lettering and shape of 1950's-type neon signs on shop façades. He was an art director in advertising before he became a painter, and thinks that the commercial approach influenced his painting technique.

Unlike many of the other New Realists Cottingham does not use spray or airbrush, or even masking-tape, and his paintings do not generally involve such minute detail that the photograph is of paramount importance. He uses it, he says, simply to isolate the image more clearly, and indeed it is quite apparent that he deliberately composes with the viewfinder for effect. An example of this is 'Art' (Fig. 12) - a painting of a neon sign with the word chopped off after the letter 'T' - obviously for humourous reasons. This humour battles with the abstract appearance of the total image and the overall evenness of style which New Realism demands.

When asked if he was interested in including figures in his paintings, he replied, "No, to me the things I pick out to paint say more about a man than a painting of a man. Who made this thing, who put that sign up - it's a statement in itself."

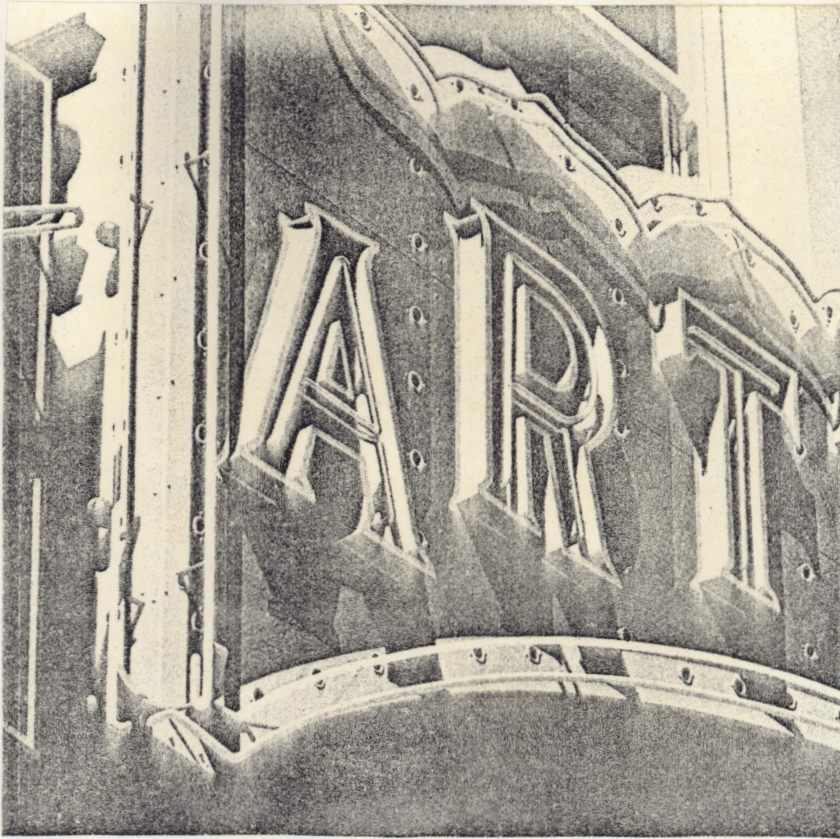


Figure 12. Robert Cottingham - Art , 1971

Richard McLean was born in 1934 in Washington and now lives in California in the Bay Area, in close proximity to both Bechtle and Goings.

His paintings are of very posed photographs taken from magazines of horses - mainly in show situations with their owners. He often invents the colour himself from a black and white original.

It has been said that he is making some kind of statement about the people who own the horses because of the manner in which he paints them - often giving them a rather grotesque look (for example, Fig. 13) - but of course he argues this point and mentions an instance,

"I remember running across a picture not too long ago that had a midget in it. There was also a very fat guy holding a horse too. They just happened to be the owner and trainer of the horse. The physical peculiarities would have called too much attention to themselves - and so precluded my doing the picture. I prefer the people not to be too interesting." ¹ He says his paintings are so posed because he wants it to be very obvious that they are pictures of pictures, and sometimes he will, like Morley, use a border around the edge to clarify this.

Although he is always categorised as such, McLean's blatant and repetitive compositional devices and his emphasis of detail specifically on the figures, making them of more significance than the surroundings, prevent him from fulfilling the New Realist definition.

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Art in America , Nov/Dec 1972 p. 83

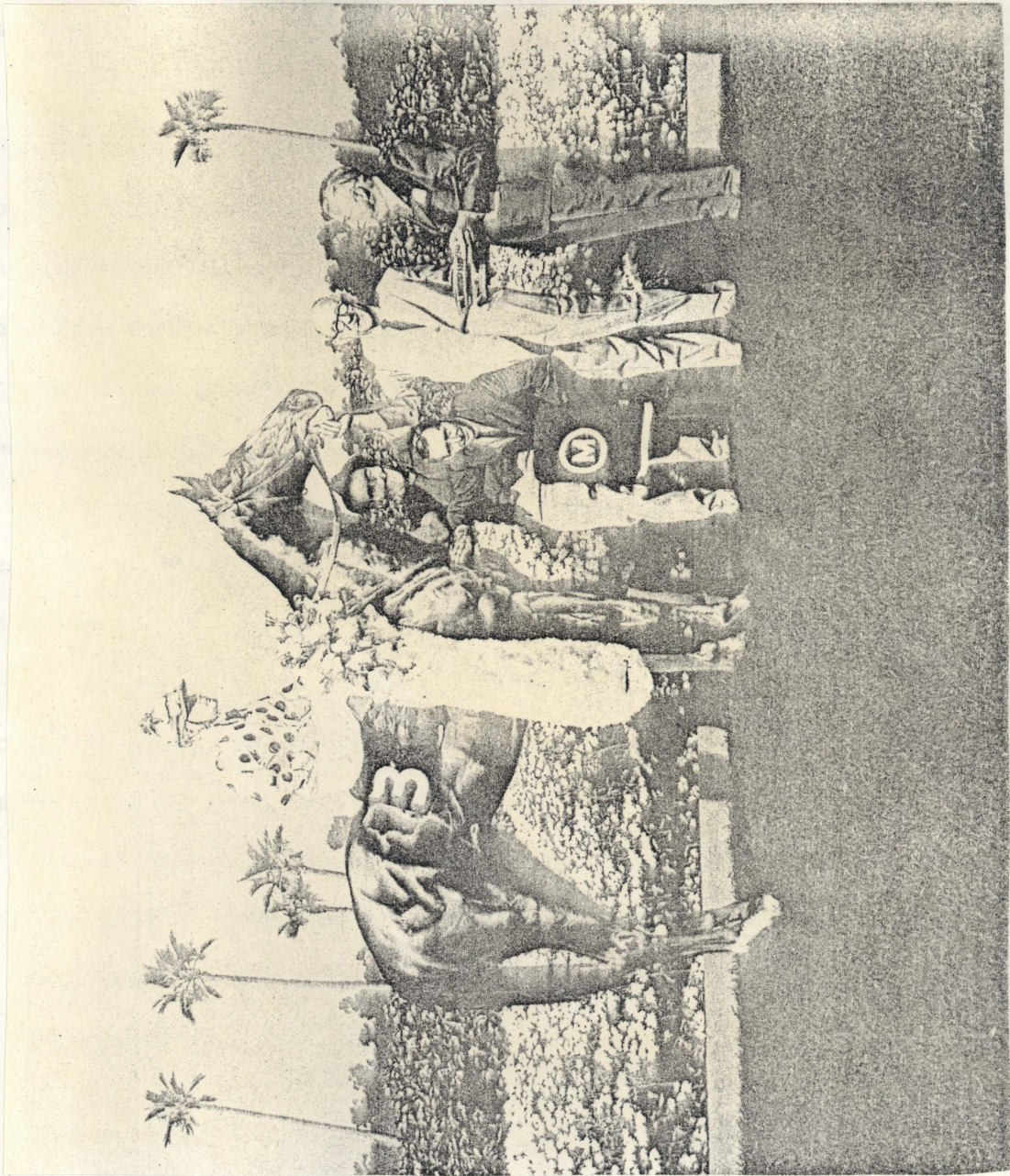


Figure 13.

Richard McLean -

Untitled, 1969

Joseph Raffael was born in 1933 in Brooklyn and now lives in San Francisco.

"It's subjective to have a face," was his reply when asked in a 1966 interview why he did not paint facial expressions, ". . . I try not to . . . depend on exaggerated (facial expressions) for an easy definition of the mood or character of the painting . . ." ¹ This indicates that although he may approach the whole painting with equal attention, he is nevertheless too emotionally concerned not to be choosy and subjective.

His paintings are huge heads of humans or animals, or of close-up sections of leafy areas or water; all treated with a jewel-like delicacy.

He appears to paint with a brush and he uses oil paint, but works from photographs and uses the grid system much of the time. His emphasis is on love and the animate. In a recent statement he said,

"I feel that every bit of anything has its own life, its own worth and value. Therefore I treat it all with equal love, equal life-exchange and I know it's all the same, therefore I give it equal ² attention."

¹
Arts Magazine, Nov. 1966 Vol.41 No. 1

²
Gregory Battcock, Super Realism (New York; E.P. Dutton, 1975) p. 59

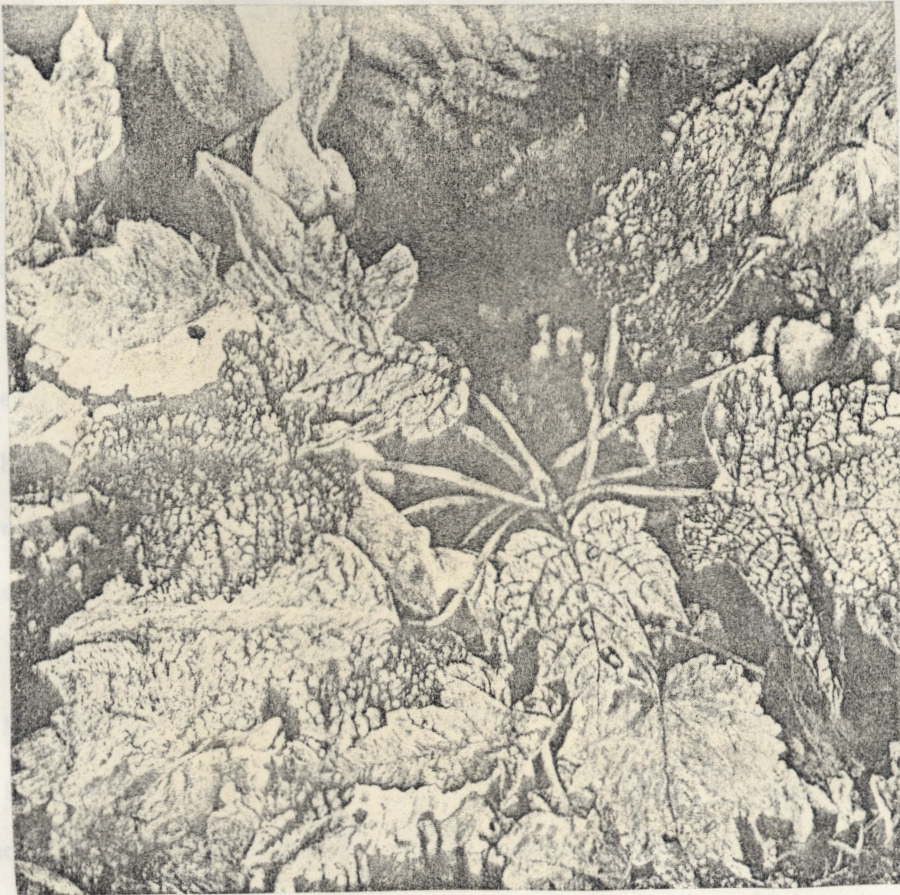


Figure 14. Joseph Raffael - Autumn Leaves, 1970

There are few American women associated with the New Realist group. They are perhaps on the whole too subjective in their approach, which is certainly the case in the work of Audrey Flack, who has commanded more attention than most.

Ms. Flack is a New Yorker, born in 1931.

Her technique is that of a New Realist, but her attitude is far from it. She is wholly interested in her subject-matter, and says that the objects in her paintings are there because they are important to her, either because she grew up with them or because she was otherwise involved with them.

Her earlier paintings were a kind of 'realist protest' - one was called 'Protest March' (1969). Another, 'Kennedy Motorcade', was painted from a photograph taken immediately before Kennedy was shot. "The frozen photograph", she says, "lets me study what is taking place in a given moment, minute or hour - more intensely and for a longer period of time than I can in the actual world of reality."¹

She first began to use slides when given an important commission at which time she discovered that it could help her and save time, too. From there she became involved in colour and light and the way that colours could be mixed on the canvas itself using the airbrush to make transparent glazes, in the same way that Close had done.

Obviously, technique has influenced her choice of subject-matter, as she is now more interested in very detailed enlargements of

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Udo Kultermann, New Realism (Matthews Miller Dunbar, 1972) p.19

cluttered surfaces containing personal paraphernalia with a lot of glittering and reflective areas, which are particularly suited to airbrush treatment.

Flack rejects the efforts of the New Realists to be totally objective about their subject-matter, saying it is impossible to be so.

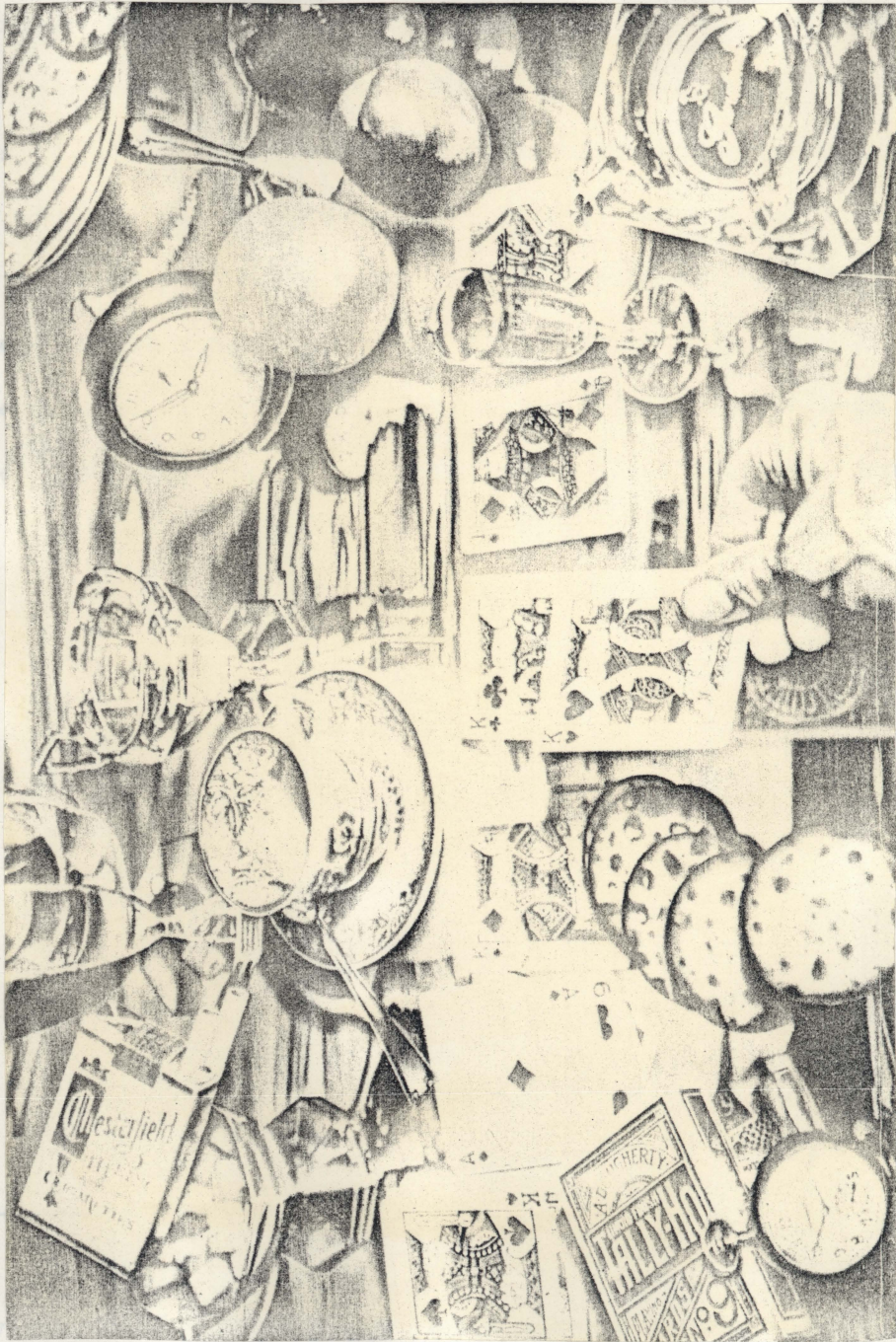


Figure 15. Audrey Flack - Solitaire, 1974

Another New Yorker, Sylvia Mangold, was born in 1938.

She paints huge, painstakingly detailed depictions of floors, almost exclusively. Sometimes the floorboards are bare and sometimes strewn with laundry or underwear. She has, in fact, as Linda Nochlin describes, ". . . devoted herself to exhaustive probing of the phenomenology of the floor . . .", and does fulfill the New Realist definition in her approach to her work. Its most interesting aspect, and one which she constantly pursues, is the fact that the floor usually covers the whole or most of the canvas, setting up a dichotomy between the surface of the canvas and the perspectival recession of the floor.

¹

Gregory Battcock, Super Realism (New York; E.P.Dutton, 1975) p. 74

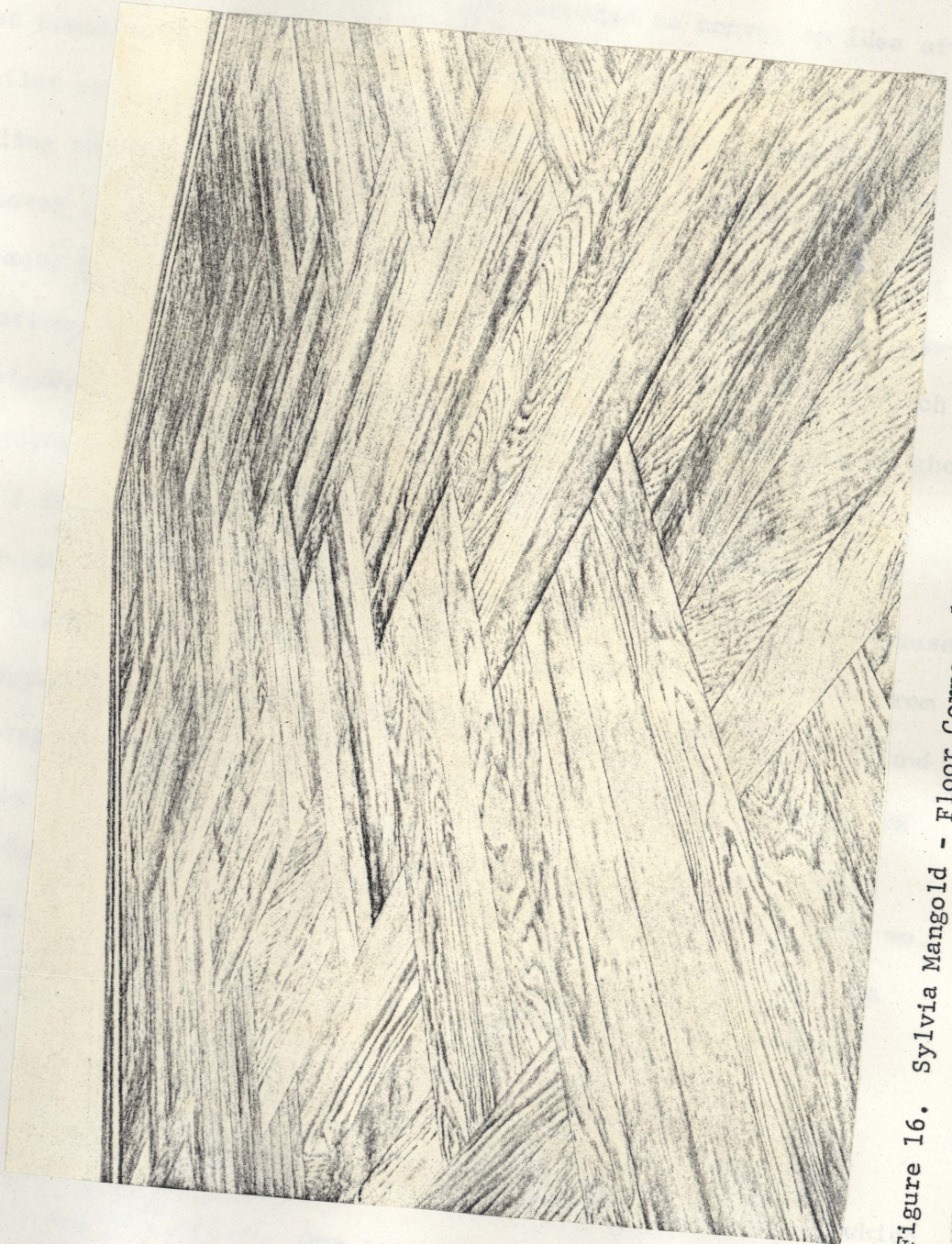


Figure 16. Sylvia Mangold - Floor Corner, 1969

CONCLUSION

The artists mentioned here are intended to convey an idea of what constitutes New Realism. There are many others working in a similar way, and all succeed to a greater or lesser degree in fulfilling the definition. Of course, many of them have no interest whatever in doing so; but this urge to aim for total objectivity is the only factor separating realist painting from being simply a continuation, technologically updated, of the representationalism which has plodded along, side by side, with changing art movements throughout the centuries.

I am not objective in my approach. I consciously and conscienciously choose my subjects because they appeal to me and because I feel I will enjoy making my subjective interpretation - albeit from a photograph - onto canvas. Although the surroundings and background exist with the definite definite purpose of describing or suggesting something about the figure, they are attended to in less precise detail than the figure itself, which is of paramount importance to me. I use the photograph as an aid, not as an object in itself, and the pleasure in applying paint with a brush prevents me from using the mechanical aids of the New Realists.

However, although these factors prevent me from being a New Realist myself, I am in sympathy with their philosophical ideals, which I share to a certain extent. One accomplishment of this movement, in their attempt at depersonalisation, which I find particularly admirable

is an extension of Pop Art's move away from elitism toward a more collective vision.

Of course, the uncompromising nature of New Realism's aims makes it fairly evident that they are most unlikely ever to be fully realised. In the end, it seems, the criteria of the true New Realist are no less ideal than others, since a state of absolute objectivity must, by definition, always lie beyond the realm of human achievement.

Perhaps the underlying attraction to the work does not arise from the technical accomplishment and the amazing verissimilitude which is displayed, but from the fact that behind it is this fundamental striving toward an unattainable ideal.

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