

Reviewing Realism: Eric Fischl, Will Cotton and the Legacy of American Photorealism

Stephanie Anne D'Amico

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts (Art History) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

September 2011

© Stephanie Anne D'Amico, 2011

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Stephanie Anne D'Amico

Entitled: Reviewing Realism: Eric Fischl, Will Cotton and the Legacy of American Photorealism

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Art History)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

Loren Lerner Chair

Loren Lerner Examiner

_____ Examiner

Johanne Sloan Supervisor

Approved by Johanne Sloan
Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

Catherine Wild
Dean of Faculty

Date September 14, 2011

ABSTRACT

Reviewing Realism:

Eric Fischl, Will Cotton, and the Legacy of American Photorealism

Stephanie Anne D'Amico

This thesis positions realist painting as a site of visual innovation and critical reflection in a cultural climate dominated by advanced representational technologies. Focusing in particular on the work of Eric Fischl and Will Cotton, I examine how these contemporary realist painters establish a dialogue with current visual technologies. I also posit and explore these artists' inheritance of a set of concerns from the American Photorealist painters of the 60s and 70s— a group of artists who I suggest have been misconstrued as the regressive anomaly during an otherwise avant-garde art historical moment. Through an extended consideration of the questions and visual strategies shared by Cotton, Fischl, and the American Photorealists, I demonstrate how their respective visions of “realism” reflect a critical awareness of the technological and socio-cultural changes unique to their respective historical moments.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to extend my gratitude to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and Concordia University for the generous funding that made this research possible.

A very special thanks to my family and friends for their love and support and, of course, to Dr. Johanne Sloan for her continual guidance and ingenuity.

Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	vi
Painting and Realism: Now and Then.....	1
The Real Deal on Realism.....	12
Mediation, Vision and Representation.....	15
The Binary Logic of Realism.....	26
Narrative and Staging.....	35
Conclusion.....	45
Endnotes.....	48
Bibliography.....	53
Figures.....	56

List of Figures

- Figure 1: Will Cotton. *Consuming Folly*. 2010. Oil on linen. 72 x 96 inches.
- Figure 2: Will Cotton. *Root Beer Falls*. 2002. Oil on linen. 75 x 100 inches.
- Figure 3: Will Cotton. *Ice Cream Cavern*. 2003. Oil on linen. 60 x 50 inches.
- Figure 4: Will Cotton. *Cotton Candy Katy*. 2010. Oil on linen. 72 x 84 inches.
- Figure 5: Will Cotton. *Croquembouche*. 2010. Oil on linen. 54 x 39 inches.
- Figure 6: Eric Fischl. *Sleepwalker*. 1979. Oil on canvas. 69 x 105 inches.
- Figure 7: Eric Fischl. *Krefeld Project: Living Room Scene 3*. 2002. Oil on linen. 85 x 114 inches.
- Figure 8: Eric Fischl. *Krefeld Project Redux: Bathroom, Scene # 4*. 2005. Oil on linen. 74 x 92 inches.
- Figure 9: Malcolm Morely. *SS Amsterdam in front of Rotterdam*. 1966. Liquitex on canvas. 62 x 84 inches.
- Figure 10: Jack Chambers. *401 Towards London*. 1968-9. Oil on mahogany. 72 x 96 inches.
- Figure 11: Jasper Johns. *Drawer*. 1957. Encaustic and Assemblage on canvas.
- Figure 12: James Tissot. *Young Ladies Looking at Japanese Objects*. 1869-70. Oil on canvas.
- Figure 13: Gustave Courbet. *The Stone Breakers*. 1849-50. Oil on canvas. 65 x 94 inches. Destroyed.
- Figure 14: James Rosenquist. *President Elect*. 1960-1. Oil on masonite. 89 x 144 inches.
- Figure 15: Audrey Flack. *Strawberry Tart Supreme*. 1974. Oil over acrylic. 54 x 60 ¼ inches.
- Figure 16: Andy Warhol. *Marilyn Diptych*. 1962. Acrylic on canvas. 81 x 114 inches.

- Figure 17: Audrey Flack. *Vanitas Marilyn*. 1977. Oil on canvas. 96 x 96 inches.
- Figure 18: Robert Bechtle. *Cookie Jar*. 1964. Oil on canvas. 44 ½ x 52 inches.
- Figure 19: Chuck Close. *Big Self-Portrait*. 1967-8. Acrylic on canvas. 107 ½ x 83 ½ inches
- Figure 20: Will Cotton. *Luilkkerland*. 2002. Oil on linen. 46 x 60 inches.
- Figure 21: Will Cotton. *Ice Cream Katy*. 2010. Oil on linen. 39 x 65 inches.
- Figure 22: Sol LeWitt. *Red Square, White Letters*. 1963. Oil on canvas. 36 x 36 inches.
- Figure 23: Eric Fischl. *Krefeld Project: Bedroom Scene 1*. 2002. Oil on linen. 79 x 105 inches.
- Figure 24: Eric Fischl. *Time for Bed*. 1980. Oil on canvas. 72 x 96 inches.
- Figure 25: Eric Fischl. *Stupidity*. 2007. Oil on linen. 84 x 108 inches.
- Figure 26: Cone, Davis. *Town*. 1995. Acrylic on canvas. 36 ½ x 54 ¾ inches.
- Figure 27: Robert Bechtle. *'61 Pontiac*. 1968-9. Oil on canvas.
- Figure 28: Robert Bechtle. *Foster's Freeze, Escalon*. 1970. Oil on canvas. 102 x 143 inches.
- Figure 29: Robert Bechtle. *Foster's Freeze, Alameda*. 1975. Oil on canvas.
- Figure 30: Robert Bechtle. *Agua Caliente*. 1975. Oil on canvas. 48 x 69 inches.
- Figure 31: Robert Bechtle. *Portrero Table*. 1994. Oil on canvas. 36 x 77 inches.
- Figure 32: Robert Bechtle. (Detail) *Portrero Table*. 1994. Oil on canvas.
- Figure 33: Eric Fischl. *Father and Son Sleeping*. 1980. Oil on canvas. 72 x 72 inches.
- Figure 34: Eric Fischl. *Krefeld Project: Living Room Scene 1*. 2002. Oil on linen. 64 x 89 inches.

Figure 35: Eric Fischl. *Krefeld Project: Living Room Scene 4*. 2002. Oil on linen. 63 ½ x 92 inches.

Figure 36: Eric Fischl. *Krefeld Project: Bathroom Scene 1*. 2002. Oil on linen. 85 x 114 inches.

Figure 37: Eric Fischl. *Krefeld Project: Bathroom Scene 2*. 2002. Oil on linen. 72 x 108 inches.

I. PAINTING AND REALISM: NOW AND THEN

Realistic painting occupies a monumental place in Western art history; it conjures at once a throng of Madonnas, majesties, and massacres alongside less historic domestic scenes, still lives, and depictions of peasants and workers. Although painting is sometimes misconstrued as an exhausted medium outperformed by newer and more relevant visual technologies, the medium of paint and the mode of realism continue to hold allure for contemporary artists and audiences alike. In the twenty-first century, artists of international repute are painting realistic canvases that are in dialogue with new visual technologies, often integrating the languages of film, digital photography, advertising, and gaming into their work. At the same time, it can be argued that countless formations in visual culture including the film and television screen, the billboard, and the computer interface borrow various conventions from the history of painting, chief among them the pictorial rectangle— a centuries old configuration that continues to dominate visual culture. A reading of contemporary painting that takes this into consideration helps to, first of all, dispel the medium's grossly premature obituary, but also to provide new analytical contexts for realist painting produced in the late twentieth, and twenty-first centuries.

What follows is an effort to negotiate the place of realist painting in a cultural climate dominated by advanced representational technologies such as photography, film (2D and 3D), gaming, and virtual reality simulation. Given that

the aforementioned cultural forms reproduce reality with considerable ease and accuracy, I ask: 1) why do realist oriented painting practices persist alongside of these advanced means of representation? and 2) what visual, political, and psychological possibilities does the medium of painting possess that are beyond the scope of these technologies? To answer these questions, I adopt as case studies the work of contemporary artists Will Cotton and Eric Fischl. While examining how these art practices establish a dialogue with current visual technologies, I also explore these artists' inheritance of a set of concerns from the American Photorealist painters of the 60s and 70s— a group of artists rarely invoked in discussions on contemporary painting. I argue that a reassessment of the aims and achievements of the Photorealist movement helps to illuminate the role and meaning of realism in the work of Cotton and Fischl.

Cotton is an artist in mid-career who studied in Rouen, France, as well as New York City; since the late 1990s he has been developing an artistic practice that explores what Robert Rosenblum calls “extreme temptations.”¹ Cotton is best known for his works on canvas, specifically for his decadent, eroticized, high-realist paintings of confectionary landscapes peopled by young semi-clad women who possess the slender frames, full lips, and flawless complexions endorsed by North American advertising and popular culture as the key constituents of ideal beauty. His large-scale painting *Consuming Folly* (2010), for instance, depicts two glowing, fair-skinned females seated in a heap of melting ice cream and surrounded by the artist's trademark pink cotton candy clouds (fig

1). Wearing only cupcake tiaras, the two women listlessly avert their eyes as their pale pink flesh blends with the sweet, feathery clouds that wreath them.

Cotton's oeuvre prior to 2003 consists primarily of intricate, uninhabited "candyscapes." These works, such as *Rootbeer Falls* (2002), and *Pudding Flood* (2003), make use of the same erotic signifiers that dominate his later work: phallic peppermint sticks, melting ice cream, glossy candies, in essence, a cluster of guilty pleasures (fig 2). When he introduces figures into these scenes shortly thereafter, as in *Ice Cream Cavern* (2003) or *Candy Stick Forest* (2005), they are initially secondary to the landscape or, when foregrounded, are deliberately turned away from the viewer (fig 3). More recently, these women have become the principal subjects of Cotton's paintings. In 2010, Cotton gained wide recognition for his painting of pop icon Katy Perry (fig 4).² The image, compared with his "landscapes" of the early 2000s, is visually spare and marks the beginning of the artist's simplification of his confectionary topography. *Cotton Candy Katy* (2010) can also be described as a transitional painting between the artist's early preoccupation with elaborate constructed environments, to his current concentration: female subjects, adorned in confectionary creations.

Cotton's most recent body of work explores the conventions of portraiture. He achieves a fabulous sense of play by juxtaposing stiff and serious poses that recall early French studio portrait photography with outlandish candy attire, parts of which are in fact baked and assembled by the artist. In some of these paintings, he eradicates the environs entirely, reducing the ground to a flat, black

void, as in *Rock Candy Rose* (2011), and *Croquembouche* (2010) (fig 5). The stark, spatial vacuum in these paintings simultaneously evokes Dutch Golden Age portraits and the shoddy black paper backdrops found at contemporary superstore photography studios. Both *Rock Candy Rose* and *Croquembouche* appeared in Cotton's 2011 exhibition at the Michael Kohn gallery in Los Angeles. Reviewing the exhibition for the *Los Angeles Times*, critic Leah Ollman scoffs at Cotton's "personality free brushwork" and condemns his depiction of women as "ornaments, indulgences, male fantasies of perfection and availability."³ Here Ollman isolates two important features of Cotton's practice: the seamless pictorial realism of the artist's rendering and the ideological falsehood of the image—false because it presents a surreal, erotic fiction and by extension promises an impossible gratification. While she frames these aspects of the artist's work as shortcomings, I discuss the collision of visual fantasy and photographic verisimilitude as a source of vitality within Cotton's realism.

Eric Fischl's approach to realism, by contrast, is characterized by more frank depictions of human bodies, guided by an impartial and at times unforgiving gaze. Rather than disguise a man's bloated beer belly, or his spouse's sallow, uneven complexion, Fischl uses these imperfections as focal points in his paintings. The result is neither grotesque nor caricatural, but is more accurately described as unsettling. He achieves an uncomfortable proximity to everyday life, much like the vulgar "realism" of digital video as compared with the luxe appearance produced by the slowed frame rate of 35mm film. An established

artist since the early 1980s, Fischl began his career under the waning influence of high modernism, but gradually transitioned from abstraction to what Arthur Danto calls “a kind of realism” in the late 70s.⁴ During this time he produced two of his most recognized works: the psychologically, and sexually charged paintings *Sleepwalker* (1979) and *Bad Boy* (1981). *Sleepwalker*, perhaps Fischl’s most recognized painting, depicts a young boy in a shallow wading pool with his back to the viewer; set at night, the scene is somewhat ambiguous (fig 6). Naked and bent in a gesture of concentration, the boy appears to be masturbating in his family backyard. He faces, as a sort of audience, two empty lawn chairs that simultaneously evoke his absent parents and confirm the illicit nature of his deed.

During the 80s and 90s Fischl produced realist works that center on preadolescent sexuality, and what Danto describes as the “exclusionary character of adult and child worlds.”⁵ In the new millennium, however, Fischl shifts his focus to adult relationships while retaining an interest in narratively ambiguous and quasi-erotic domestic situations. Often working in series or cycles, he produced two well-known bodies of work in the early 2000s: *The Bed*, *The Chair*, *Waiting* and *The Krefeld Project*. In these later works, Fischl refines his rendering and adopts a more naturalistic palette; his brushwork becomes less aggressive, though still expressionistic. His strokes are now strategic; the visible drag of his brush across a woman’s spiraling arms in *Krefeld Project: Living Room Scene 3* (2002), for instance, mimics a photographic motion blur (fig 7). Through the suggestion of movement and the introduction of high-chroma colour,

the painting or “scene” — from a purely formal perspective — achieves a cinematic realism.

Despite Fischl’s interest in formalism, Danto, Rosenblum, and Robert Enright have repeatedly stressed that the formalist dimensions of the artist’s production are subsidiary to the far more engaging narrative content. Describing *The Krefeld Project*, Rosenblum writes that “each painting, especially those in wide-screen format, is like a still from a movie, but it is up to us to supply all the missing narrative.”⁶ Art historian and critic Charlotte Mullins concurs, as she posits Fischl’s *Krefeld Project: Bathroom Scene 4* (2005) as embodying the same “misplaced intimacy” that defines the opening sequence of Stanley Kubrick’s *Eyes Wide Shut*⁷ (fig 8). Unlike Cotton, who paints fantastical, glamorous and singular images, Fischl surveys the banal realities of everyday life and often produces multiple “scenes” loaded with intimations of events that may have preceded or that are about to unfold.

Both Cotton and Fischl achieved their fame as painters of “realistic” imagery and yet their respective bodies of work are marked by tremendous difference. While they are only two among many contemporary painters working with vocabularies of realism (the list is potentially a long one, but would certainly include well-known figures such as Marlene Dumas, Lisa Yuskavage, John Currin, or Elizabeth Peyton, to name only a few Americans and Europeans), Cotton and Fischl are useful to discuss in tandem for two very specific reasons. First, their vastly different pictorial tendencies demonstrate the broad scope of a

category like realism. Second, despite enormous visual differences, both Cotton and Fischl explore realism through the human figure, specifically erotic representations of the figure which, on occasion, verge on the pornographic. While Currin and Yuskavage also produce sexually-charged imagery, Rosenblum, writing on Cotton, distinguishes the former two artists from the latter, identifying in the work of Currin and Yuskavage a penchant for “willfully artificial anatomies.”⁸ In other words, Rosenblum notes that Currin and Yuskavage tend to reconstruct and deform the body in a manner that simply does not match Cotton’s unnaturally perfect but anatomically naturalistic figures or Fischl’s factual bodies. In New York, both Fischl and Cotton are represented by the same prestigious gallerist, Mary Boone, a fact which certainly lends force (if not legitimacy) to Cotton’s practice which has on occasion been criticized as ingratiating, frivolous, and kitsch. Nevertheless, my purpose is not to bridge the aesthetic gap that separates Cotton and Fischl, but rather I build my discussion of realism around these differences while also demonstrating how their artistic practices encapsulate key affinities with American Photorealism of the 60s and 70s.

In terms of their relationship to Photorealism, I do not suggest that Cotton or Fischl derive direct inspiration from specific Photorealist works or specific Photorealist artists. Instead, I locate parallel aims, approaches, and concerns in the work of Fischl and Cotton in the twenty-first century and the output of the Photorealist painters of the twentieth century. Thus, the term “inheritance” in this

project does not signal a linear development, but rather a manifestation of similar questions in two different art historical episodes, and an attempt to unravel how they are answered in their respective historical moments.

Of particular significance for both Cotton and the Photorealists is the question of how visual technologies and systems of representation shape perception. For the Photorealists, this manifests as a rigorous study of photographic language and an effort to capture on canvas how vision is mediated by the camera. Accordingly, the “systems of representation” that most interested the Photorealists were located within photographic media and included tropes like the family photograph, the magazine ad, and the pin-up. Questions of mediation are equally important for Cotton who, in the twenty-first century, draws from an expanded field of systems of representation that includes fashion photography, pornography and music videos. A second concern that I address refers to both the formal and conceptual elements of the works in question, and is what I would like to describe as a binarized pictorial logic. Here I refer to the tendency to produce works that enact powerful collisions between specific pairs of oppositional concepts, namely, authenticity and artifice, and detachment and affect. These two sets of terms have great significance within the larger history of Realism in art, as well as for the Photorealists of the 60s and 70s. The binary of detachment and affect, for instance, informs one of the primary debates within Photorealist scholarship. The cool and mechanical Photorealist aesthetic has often been cited as evidence of the movement’s essentially “detached” character,

and yet scholars such as Louis Meisel and Alwynne Mackie have argued that the Photorealist's meticulous and disciplined rendering betrays "an enormous interest, admiration and respect for the [depicted] object[s]." ⁹ Similarly, the tension between authenticity and artifice has been identified as the central visual paradox that governs the Photorealist project. As art historian and Realist scholar John L Ward explains, although Photorealism demonstrates exceptional fidelity to the visible world, "certain qualities in much of the work draw deliberate attention to its artificial nature." ¹⁰ Affected, detached, real and artificial are descriptors that appear repeatedly throughout the literature on both Fischl and Cotton. I explore how these binaries operate in their bodies of work, positing these sets of concepts as an integral part of their visual syntax and respective artistic projects.

Lastly, I want to suggest that the revival of narrative and the desire to stage events, stories, and uncertain scenes is a driving force behind the work of Fischl and his Photorealist counterpart, Robert Bechtle. Narrative is a crucial component in Fischl's performative series of twelve paintings, *The Krefeld Project*, which began with a three-day photo session at the Haus Esters, now the Krefelder Art Museum in Germany. The museum was temporarily furnished as a modern home and inhabited by two middle-aged actors who performed as domestic partners within the constructed environment. Having taken nearly two thousand photographs of the couple, Fischl produced photoshop studies for twelve large-scale paintings which were exhibited at Haus Esters in 2003. *The Krefeld project* merits discussion in the context of domestic representation and

scenes of leisure, two significant tropes within American Photorealism. Fischl's *Krefeld Project* has a particular resonance with the work of Bechtle, the American Photorealist known for his paintings of friends and family, which curator Michael Auping describes as "unparalleled in capturing the pathos and humor of the American leisure class in its various incarnations."¹¹

Since its inception in the mid-twentieth century, Photorealism has been repeatedly misconstrued as a conservative enterprise incongruously situated in the otherwise radical and innovative decades of the 60s and 70s. Aptly described by Alvin Martin as "incomprehensible in terms of period style,"¹² the 60s and 70s are nevertheless portrayed by the vast majority of authoritative chronologies of twentieth century art as dominated by performance, minimalism, fluxus, conceptual art and other explicitly avant-garde movements. In 2005, Rosalind Krauss, Hal Foster, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin Buchloh, four highly influential art historical authorities on the 60s and 70s, published *Art Since 1900: a comprehensive two-volume textbook dedicated to the last century of Western Art*. Each decade is afforded one chapter with the exception of the 60s which spans three chapters in order to accommodate the number of key art historical events, among which Photorealism is neither counted nor given even a parenthetical mention. The power of this omission is not to be underestimated; since its publication, *Art Since 1900* has been adopted as a foundational text for courses at major Universities worldwide. There are of course other reasons why Photorealism fails to register as an important episode during the artistically

diverse, experimental, and novelty-driven 60s and 70s, not least among which is the tendency of the movement's staunch supporters to focus on craftsmanship, rather than innovation, as Photorealism's chief virtue. By establishing its connection to contemporary painting, I endeavour to reframe Photorealism in a more radical light, arguing that its practitioners demonstrated considerable prescience in their exploration of the link between painting, perception and other visual technologies, while also foregrounding the role of narrative and the politics of visuality.

Though typically characterized by more radical artistic endeavours, the 60s were in fact an important moment for realism, primarily because the practice was cropping up in isolated pockets all around the globe. In America, two Photorealist schools developed independently on opposite poles and coasts, one in New York headed by Richard Estes, and the other in California with Robert Bechtle and Ralph Goings. In England, Malcolm Morley's aptitude for illustration brought an early end to his three-year prison sentence in the late 50s, landing him in the Royal College of Art. By the middle 60s, Morley was living in New York City and painting high realist works like *SS Amsterdam in Front of Rotterdam* (1966) from tourist postcards (fig 9). Before 1970, Duane Hanson and John De Andrea had begun making life-size, hyperreal human sculptures, and staging them with props in New York galleries. German artists Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke, and Wolf Vostell were exhibiting work under the heading "capitalist realism" in 1963—the very same year that Canada's Alex Colville had his first

international sell-out exhibition of works in his trademark “magical realist” style. Three years later, in 1966, Jack Chambers began his cinematic silver paintings and, before the decade was out, authored two important works: his essay “Perceptual Realism,” and the iconic painting, *401 Towards London* (1968-9) (fig 10). Evidently, realism was pressing on the artistic consciousness of an entire generation.

II. THE REAL DEAL ON REALISM

The term “realism” persistently evades simple definition; it encompasses an enormous range of production, and few are in agreement about where exactly the parameters of this concept lie. The matter is further complicated by the tendency in art history and other critical literatures to align the word “realist” with a host of surrogate terms (such as “figurative,” “representational,” or “verist”) in an effort to eschew the conservative connotations attached to plain old realism. While “figurative” and “representational” are accurate descriptors for many works by Fischl and Cotton, these terms do not share the metaphysical weight of “realism,” nor do they suggest such a proximate relation to some kind of external reality. For this reason, a secondary task of this thesis is to unpack what it means to position Cotton and Fischl within a realist tradition. Though an exhaustive reassessment of this aesthetic mode is beyond the scope of my project, I do acknowledge recent efforts to recover realism from the depths of conservatism and, by extension, to highlight the power and diversity of the term.

One particularly insightful figure on the plight of realism is literary theorist Rachel Bowlby. In the foreword to Matthew Beaumont's 2007 reader, *Adventures in Realism*, Bowlby addresses the primary misconception plaguing the concept of realism across the humanities. She explains that:

Realism normally comes stuck with one of a set menu of regular adjectival accompaniments, and whether it's gritty, or vulgar, or kitchen-sink, or photographic, the standard formulations reinforce the way it is seen as itself formulaic, something we already know about and need have no interest in exploring: it is predictable and simple, and serves only as the foil (or the cling-film) for showing up the more exotic or more complex courses that are always to be preferred to it.¹³

As Bowlby makes clear, realism is often reduced to naturalism or thought to connote the unambiguous and facile duplication of material reality. Art history provides a wealth of examples that challenge this reductive concept of realism, if not show it to be entirely false. Consider, for instance, a work like Jasper Johns' *Drawer* (1957) in which the artist literally embeds a drawer into his canvas (fig 11). As a parody of the Abstract Expressionists' high regard for authenticity and self-reflexivity, Johns includes in *Drawer* a real, "authentic" drawer, bringing the high modernist pursuit of pure, authentic, self-reflexive art to its farcical conclusion. Nevertheless, the inclusion of a *real* material object does not of necessity make *Drawer* a realist work— in fact, this work is more aptly located within the traditions of collage or assemblage. Realism, then, is not a quantifiable concept measurable by proximity to the physical world but, rather, an aesthetic mode that can yield a range of results. In this sense, nineteenth-century works such as James Tissot's *Young Ladies Looking at Japanese Objects* and Gustave

Courbet's *Stone Breakers*, as well as twenty-first century works like Cotton's *Consuming Folly*, and Fischl's *Sleepwalker* can all be equally addressed as variants of realism (fig 12 and 13).

With the notable exceptions of Linda Nochlin and Gregory Battcock, few art historians in the second half of the twentieth century focused on theorizing then-contemporary realist art practices. During the 70s and 80s, Nochlin wrote extensively on the subject and contributed to numerous anthologies and exhibition catalogues on American Photorealism —also referred to by the wider designations of “Neo” or “Super” Realism. Her work appears twice in Gregory Battcock's reader, *Super Realism*, where she lobbies for the inclusion of America's new realists among the ranks of the avant-garde. In 1971, Nochlin published *Realism*, a text which chronicles the social and artistic motivations behind Europe's nineteenth century Realist movement. While the nineteenth century is beyond the purview of my project, Nochlin's text nevertheless provides a valuable philosophical framework for understanding realism as an artistic project. She anticipates many of Bowlby's observations regarding the subjective nature of perception and the stylistic complexity and fluidity of realism.

Nochlin's *Realism* appears at virtually the same moment that Photorealism begins to gain momentum and international attention; most scholars consider the extensive display of Photorealist work at *Documenta 5* in Kassel, Germany in 1972 as the movement's peak in terms of exposure and prestige. In her text on the nineteenth-century Realists, Nochlin recounts the

famous criterion “*il faut être de son temps*,”¹⁴ and explains that for Courbet *et al* this mantra required “actual confrontation with and serious, unidealized embodiment of, the concrete experiences, events, customs and appearances characteristic of one’s own epoch.”¹⁵ With the reintroduction of topical subjects by Pop artists during the middle 60s and the consequent ousting of grand universal themes, “contemporaneity” became once again a meaningful pursuit for artists across disciplines. If many nineteenth-century Realists were inclined to explore contemporary reality through depictions of labour, it is, by contrast, the theme of leisure, which comes to the fore in the work of the Photorealists and others working under late capitalism in the 60s and 70s.¹⁶ This holds true for Fischl as well, who tends to favour human encounters situated in backyards, beaches, and bedrooms. Cotton is likewise invested in contemporaneity as is made clear in his work with Perry, a pop sensation who will occupy the limelight for, figuratively speaking, a mere fifteen minutes. While contemporaneity is at stake throughout all the modern-era Realisms in consideration, the concept is especially complex in the present artistic climate where both realism and painting must constantly negotiate the anachronistic status that is necessarily foisted upon them.

III. MEDIATION, VISION, REPRESENTATION

In 2009, the Guggenheim in Berlin hosted “Picturing America,” Germany’s first major retrospective exhibition of American Photorealist painting in nearly

thirty years; the show remains the most recent comprehensive display of the movement in Euro-America to date. My own analysis is indebted to the Guggenheim's exhibition catalogue, whose contributors offer a forward-looking perspective on the movement, positing Photorealism's ongoing relevance as a visually and politically subversive movement in twentieth century art history. In his catalogue essay, "Blank Art: Deadpan Realism in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," historian of American art, David M. Lubin argues that 60s and 70s Photorealism

was the art form that perhaps best posed the question only then emerging in media studies and information theory: how do sophisticated modern technologies transform sight (and other modes of sensory perception)? Do mechanical devices of transcription and reproduction bring us closer to reality—the world outside ourselves—or ultimately make it more remote?¹⁷

For Lubin, the Photorealist project is primarily epistemological. He argues that the movement's practitioners sought to illustrate how photographic technology informs and alters perception and, in so doing, "advanced a thoughtful deconstruction of modernity and its relevance for science, technology and empirical fact."¹⁸ Lubin goes so far as to claim that the Photorealist's ideological critique deliberately "echoed the sentiments of the antiwar New Left which condemned science and empiricism as tools of Western imperialism."¹⁹ While the politics of Photorealism are not central to my discussion, I do share Lubin's contention that the significance of systems and technologies of representation has been underestimated in the existing scholarship dedicated to the Photorealist project. Like Lubin, I move away from readings of Photorealism that emphasize

craftsmanship and virtuosity as the basis on which the movement merits recognition. I focus instead on articulating how American Photorealists in the 60s and 70s dissected conventions of imaging and explored the highly mediated nature of vision. Both of these practices are relevant to Cotton, whose exploration of mediation is likewise often overshadowed by his virtuosic realistic technique.

To perform this analysis, one must temporarily withhold questions that address *how* the paintings are made, and begin to look more critically at what it is they portray. A focus on subject matter is especially valuable when looking at the Photorealists, as they mark an important shift in artistic sensibility in relation to practices of appropriation. Repurposing imagery from film, television, and news media has been a staple of Western art practice since the 1960s. This strategy is often discussed in the context of Pop art, specifically with reference to Andy Warhol's famous silkscreens of celebrities and politicians, and his monochromatic disaster paintings of car crashes and suicides; Roy Lichtenstein's large scale recreations of the funnies; or James Rosenquist's mash-up of Kennedy, cake and Chevy in *President Elect* (1960-1) (fig 14). It is no surprise that in his chronology of American Realist painting, Ward endeavours to position Pop Art as Photorealism's logical predecessor. He claims that it was "Pop [that] suggested a different use of the photograph, one in which photographic properties substituted for personal style."²⁰ What Ward fails to mention is that Pop artists in the 60s favoured mass-circulated imagery as source material while

the Photorealists, by contrast, zeroed in on the ontological status of the photograph and often worked from their own high-quality images (or transparencies) not of stars or icons, but of friends, family, and ordinary urban landscapes. The Photorealists did not share Pop's more bombastic subject matter; they rarely, if ever, chose to depict public figures, the glitterati or overtly iconic imagery. Neither Audrey Flack's *Strawberry Tart Supreme* (1974) nor Ben Schonzeit's *Cauliflower* (1975) function analogously to Warhol's Campbell's soup cans (fig 15). Similarly, Heinz Ketchup means very different things whether it is handled by Warhol or Goings, with the latter offering what Linda Nochlin describes as simply "an instance of acute attention to individual bottles,"²¹ rather than an assertion or critique of brand identity and commodity culture. While both Pop and Photorealism appropriate images and artifacts from daily life, the Photorealists' source imagery was not mass-produced and, therefore, was not necessarily recognizable or independently meaningful to a viewing public.

The concepts of translation and migration are useful not only to distinguish between the respective aesthetic agendas of the Pop and Photorealist movements, but also to multiply the possible frames for discussing art practices that use pre-recorded imagery. The distinction is best captured by the etymology of the respective terms: the Latin *translatum* literally means "carried across" and similarly, *migrare* is closest in meaning to "moved or shifted." *Appropriare*, by contrast, is often translated as "to make one's own," suggesting a manipulation rather than a relocation of matter. As an example, consider Warhol's 1962

screenprint painting, *Marilyn Diptych* (fig 16). Here, Warhol appropriates Gene Korman's iconic photograph of Marilyn Monroe; he multiplies the image, aggressively alters the palette and simplifies the portrait into basic high contrast forms, discarding the photographic language of Korman's original and retaining only symbolic signifiers of the Hollywood icon. Contrarily, in *Vanitas Marilyn*, Flack recreates or migrates the pages from Maurice Zolotow's famous 1960 biography of Monroe, retaining the form of the book, and the legibility of the text opposite the picture (fig 17).²² Both Flack and Warhol appropriate Monroe's image, yet their different visual strategies are a textbook example of how appropriative practices differ between the Photorealists and their Pop predecessors. For Warhol, the concept and iconic markers of celebrity are at stake, but for Flack it is the image itself that is foregrounded, as she retains or "translates" the book form onto canvas. Thinking of appropriation in terms of translation and migration also helps disentangle Cotton from the legacy of Pop, as he is expressly interested in reproducing the visual language of various technologies and systems of representation rather than a pop culture iconography.

The emphasis on craftsmanship, virtuosity, and traditionalism that has worked to exclude Photorealism from the list of groundbreaking movements within late twentieth century art is a myth endorsed in equal parts by the movement's detractors and proponents. Louis K Meisel, one of Photorealism's chief theorists and collectors, began in the late 1960s a four decade long project

to document and preserve Photorealism “for a time in the future when it will be openly respected once again.”²³ In the most recent text in what is currently a four-volume series, Meisel vehemently proclaims:

Over the past two decades I have become increasingly disappointed and angry with the collapse of values and standards in art, music and literature—a trend that Ayn Rand foresaw more than fifty years ago in her influential book *The Fountainhead*. I compare the Photorealists in twentieth-century art to twentieth-century composers of music such as Rachmaninoff and to such authors as Rand herself—all valuable artists working in a traditional mode in a period favoring radical innovation.²⁴

Meisel is at least partly responsible for the tendency to map a conservative politics and aesthetic onto Photorealism and likewise for the widespread belief that the movement’s value lies primarily in its disciplined and spectacular performance of realism. Perhaps more troubling is his contention that the Photorealists represent an inherently “traditional” ethos and that they neither made nor cared to make radical innovations, pictorial or otherwise. Meisel goes on to say:

if it is too hard for most to accomplish, it is therefore elitist. The mantra is that the word *quality*, which has defined a set of standards developed over three thousand years, should be “deconstructed” and discarded in favor of all sorts of agendas—personal, political, gender, racial—that have nothing to do with the arts.²⁵

This second statement is especially perplexing given Meisel’s personal relationship with many of the Photorealists who were, according to Philip Pearlstein, “a highly educated group of artists in the sense of holding advanced degrees from major universities.”²⁶ Contrary to Meisel’s belief in the anachronistic nature of the Photorealist project, the work resonates quite strongly with the

intellectual climate of the 60s and 70s. Just as thinkers like Jacques Derrida and Susan Sontag were exploring the limits of language and intellect in the late 60s, so too were the Photorealists making their contribution to the “era of skepticism.” Lubin is clear that “Photorealism posed big questions: what is truth and how can we know it? Can we believe the evidence of our eyes? Can we trust our senses?”²⁷ Deconstruction—the purposeful dismantling of the normalized systems through which we understand the world—is in fact a major component of the Photorealist craft.

Consider for example an early and rather unassuming work by Robert Bechtle, *Cookie Jar* (1964); a painting that was once owned and eventually sold by Meisel (fig 18). The subject is banal: a man (Bechtle, in fact) faces himself in the mirror of a wooden dresser upon which a cookie jar, a letter, an empty plate and fork, a copy of *Time* magazine and a few household bottles are purposefully placed. The cropping is distinctly photographic, the artist’s reflection abruptly cuts off the top half of his face, the seeing part. Indeed, the mirror in which we view the partially decapitated artist has the uncanny square frame formation of a polaroid photograph. Moreover, the inclusion of *Time* invokes the pantheon of four-lettered American news and picture magazines including *Life* and *Look*, both of which reached their peak popularity in the 1960s. Rife with references to photography’s powerful presence in visual culture, *Cookie Jar* marks the beginning of Bechtle’s long and complex negotiation of painting and photography.

The critical renegotiation of painting in light of photography is not only operative at the level of content, but also dictates the formal properties of many Photorealist works. As Linda Chase explains, “no matter how realistically painted a Photorealist painting may be, you know you are looking at a picture. There is no mistaking it for the real thing—unless of course the real thing is the photograph, which, in a way, for the Photorealist it is.”²⁸ While it may seem obvious to say that Photorealism engages with photography, scholars do not always frame this relationship as extending beyond the photograph, and often overlook the significance of the photographic apparatus in shaping this complex exchange. It is not uncommon to read about Photorealists who sought to “become” a camera by mimicking the mechanical processes of transcription performed by photographic technologies. The Photorealists’ participation in the artist-as-cyborg discourse is yet another way in which the movement firmly entrenches itself in the spirit of the 60s, reflecting a simultaneous lure and skepticism towards the emancipatory potential of technology. Recall, for example, Michelangelo Antonioni’s 1964 film *Blow-Up* and its famous protagonist, Thomas, the photographer desperate to find visual evidence of a violent crime in a series of progressively grainier and more ambiguous enlarged photographs. Despite the camera’s inability to capture any conclusive evidence, Thomas trusts his technological apparatus above all else as a source of empirical data, so much so that the tool becomes a metaphorical extension of the photographer’s body.

Within Photorealism, perhaps the best example of a highly mechanized pictorial execution is Chuck Close, the artist known for his hyperreal, larger-than-life painted portraits. Close's measured duplication of the photographic surface in paintings like his iconic *Self-Portrait* (1968) is the result of a meticulous grid transfer method developed by the artist (fig 19). Using an airbrush to eliminate any traces of his hand, Close approaches each cell on the grid as an individual painting. Because of the enormous scale of many of these works, Close's magnification is sometimes described as a kind of abstraction—in essence, a suppression of knowledge of the subject akin to the camera's supposedly objective gaze.²⁹ Discussing Close's work, art historian William Dyckes notes that “the fact that so many persist in seeing these paintings as highly factual representations of people is proof of the total assimilation of photographic syntax as visual fact.”³⁰ His point, of course, is that Close does not simply replicate the way the camera works, but also demonstrates how this viewing and recording apparatus has changed our concept of reality.

In conjunction with the Guggenheim's 2009 exhibition, “Picturing America,” Will Cotton was invited to give a public lecture. Cotton opened his address by proposing to discuss his relationship, or rather, what he referred to as his “non-relationship to Photorealism.”³¹ According to Cotton, this non-relationship rests solely on the fact that he is not interested in reproducing photographs, despite his reluctant admission that he does in fact rely on the camera to produce visual aids for his paintings. While Cotton's statement suggests that he overlooks the

subversive potential contained in the Photorealist project, the movement nevertheless offers a productive framework through which to read Cotton's work, especially in terms of his investigation of the status, meaning and mobility of images. Consider a painting like *Cotton Candy Katy* which was reproduced on the cover of *ArtNews* magazine, but also on Perry's *Teenage Dream* album, official website, and other promotional materials. One of the most important things to be said about the painting itself is that it is devoid of the more expressly fetishistic qualities of earlier works like *Luilkkerland* (2002) or *Apennine* (2009) where food and female bodies are presented in more messy, bawdy and suggestive arrangements (fig 20). Perry is depicted lying face down on a billowy mass of cotton candy, her derriere politely covered by a wisp of pink cloud, quite plainly denying the viewer access to the more graphic nudity typical of Cotton's anonymous subjects. No doubt, *Cotton Candy Katy* presents a highly sexualized image of the pop icon; however, the representation maintains enough distance from pornography to allow it to function in multiple, arguably contradictory, contexts. As a result, our relationship to the image changes depending on where we consume it. On the walls of the Mary Boone Gallery, or the cover of *ArtNews*, *Cotton Candy Katy* poses questions about the status of figuration and the nude in contemporary painting, but on the cover of *Teenage Dream*, or as a placeholder on youtube, itunes, grooveshark and other similar platforms, its critical possibilities are largely disarmed.

Since 2010, Cotton has repeatedly collaborated with Perry, photographing images that adorn her candy-scented CD leaflet, but that have also served as source material for paintings exhibited at the Kohn gallery in Los Angeles. Cotton also worked as the artistic director on Perry's big-budget music video, *California Gurls*. Discussing his role on the *California Gurls* set, Cotton jokes, "it was definitely a collaboration, there are elements that I can't take credit for, and a few elements I wouldn't want to take credit for."³² Although his tone is jovial, Cotton enforces a distinction between the relative seriousness of his work and the presumably more kitsch aspects of the music video. Cotton's sentiment becomes difficult to negotiate in light of a set of recent paintings that replicate stills extracted directly from the *California Gurls* music video. *Ice Cream Katy* (2010) for instance, recreates a popular image from the music video in which the pop star coquettishly and suggestively licks an ice cream cone (fig 21). Cotton makes very few changes to the image: he eliminates a necklace, enhances a few details in the background and substitutes a sliver of the singer's rock candy bodice with a dress made of cupcake papers. What is important is that a number of formal properties of these more recent paintings (of which there are currently only two) speak to their highly mediated quality. *Ice Cream Katy* and *Katy Sugar Beach* (2010) are more painterly in style (alluding to the fact that stills, after all, have a very limited resolution) and both works employ dimensions that reflect the music video's wide-screen aspect ratio, a fairly extreme format that otherwise does not appear in Cotton's oeuvre.

The circuit of technologies and platforms that Cotton so artfully navigates is not limited to photography, music videos and pornography. Fashion and cosmetic advertising have also informed his practice insofar as he designs attire for his models but also actively draws from the conventions of advertising in composing his paintings. Poses and the aesthetic of flawlessness all complimented by the irony of his models' near-nudity make for an interesting perspective on "the role of bodily decoration as a signifier of status and taste."³³ Ollman is convinced that Cotton's work "lacks savory counterpoint. . . . Commercially slick and sociologically naive, it doesn't critique indulgence or excess, it merely capitalizes on them."³⁴ This face-value reading of Cotton's work points to the very same problem that hindered more complex readings of Photorealism in its own time. Visual culture analysis necessitates a critique of the viewing regimes and the apparatuses through which we view images and content. By replicating the conventions of viewing that have emerged alongside of new technologies, Cotton not only performs this analysis, but paints in an idiom that helps the viewer to perform it as well.

IV. THE BINARY LOGIC OF REALISM

In 1963, Derrida first uses the term *différance* to describe the ways in which meaning is produced in written texts. Playing on the dual meaning of the french *différer*: to differ and to defer, *différance* refers to the fact that words are defined in relation to other words and, by extension, their meaning is established

by difference. At the same time, *différance* indicates that words are defined with recourse to other words, resulting in what Derrida describes as an endless “deferral” of meaning. The word itself is coined by Derrida to allude to an orthographic difference that escapes speech, as the french *différence* is aurally indistinguishable from the Derridian *différance*. Part of a larger and lifelong effort to negotiate oral and written traditions, Derrida’s deconstructive project is a primary example of the skeptical and self-aware postmodern sensibility that informs much of the creative and intellectual output of the 60s and 70s. The artistic practices typically aligned with emergent deconstructive thought are conceptual art works proper that draw on language as a medium, such as Joseph Kosuth’s *One and Three Chairs* (1965) —in which the artist displays a physical chair alongside its photographic reproduction and dictionary definition— or Sol Lewitt’s instructional wall-drawings or, better yet, his *Red Square, White Letters* (1963) which the authors of *Art Since 1900* claim literally “transforms [its] spectator into a reader.”³⁵ (fig 22).

It comes as no surprise that linguistically and epistemologically provocative works such as these have been upheld as the chief artistic conduits for postmodern thought during the 60s and 70s: LeWitt, Kosuth and many of their contemporaries in conceptual art managed to directly participate in linguistic discourses while keeping up with the novel forms and experimental presentations leading the then-contemporary art scene. In the 60s and 70s, the canvas was an unlikely site for avant-garde explorations, according to the critics and historians

who discounted the Photorealist project as retrogressive. As Kosuth claimed in a 1969 interview with Arthur Rose: “Being an artist now means to question the nature of art. . .if you make paintings, you are already accepting (not questioning) the nature of art.”³⁶ Kosuth, of course, was wrong. As Lubin explains, the Photorealists did not engage language directly but they “plunged instead into the far more ambiguous and insubstantial world of images, signs and simulacra. Yes, they produced copies of copies of copies, but what could be more postmodern, more tellingly reflective of our hyper-mediated daily lives, than that?”³⁷ As Lubin makes clear, rather than represent the problems inherent in reading, the Photorealists make a self-aware, and decidedly postmodern gesture; they take Derrida’s question and change its terms, asking not how meaning is produced in language but how visual systems produce meaning.

In his investigation of the relationship between spoken and written language, Derrida begins with the ancient Greeks and performs an extensive deconstruction of the history of western metaphysics. He argues that speech has been unjustly privileged as an immediate and pure expression of thought while writing has been degraded a secondary representation, once removed from the spoken word, and thus doubly distanced from “pure” thought. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida explains that “Immediacy is here the myth of consciousness. Speech and the consciousness of speech — that is to say consciousness simply as self-presence— are the phenomenon of an auto-affection lived as suppression of differance.”³⁸ By introducing *différance*, Derrida

begins to undo this binary, or rather shows it to be unstable by reversing the existing hierarchy in which speech is valued above writing. As literary theorist Gayatri Spivak explains in the introduction to her translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*: "the structure of binary oppositions in general is questioned by grammatology. Differance invites us to undo the need for balanced equations, to see if each term in an opposition is not after all an accomplice of the other."³⁹

Just as the project of deconstruction seeks to upset, through reversal and other strategies, the established hierarchies connected to binaries, so too do the realisms in question grapple with a fundamentally binarized pictorial logic. Rather than seek to resolve internal contradictions, I would like to suggest that these modern-era realisms derive considerable power from their aporetic nature. There are two sets of binaries that underscore the twentieth and twenty-first century realisms in consideration. The first, a tension between authenticity and artificiality, refers strictly to the craft of realist painting and its inevitable commingling of the real and the illusory. The second, affect and detachment, refers to the way in which these realisms have been theorized or, more specifically, to a set of polar opposite emotional valences that are projected, with equal conviction, onto various realist paintings.

a) Authentic/Artificial

Artifice is a term that appears almost without exception across the literature on Cotton's oeuvre. To start, he is working much like the Photorealists, in a hyper-real pictorial style, creating the illusion of deep space on what is (for

argument's sake) the flat surface of a canvas. This, of course, is a very cursory introduction to Cotton's engagement with artifice, a concept he elaborates in many directions. Cotton's paintings are not simply artificial insofar as they are illusionistic; as Ollman observes, he also juxtaposes a high-realist style with representations of female bodies whose unblemished skin and immaculate bone structure smacks of the digitally enhanced, airbrushed, and manipulated figures that populate fashion magazines. To up the ante, these "fake" beauties are paired with sweet confectionary treats, full of artificial colours and, presumably, flavours. There is also Cotton's current fixation on the patently false pop icon Katy Perry — a star whose stage pseudonym, alleged half-day hair and makeup sessions, and notorious performance of bisexuality in the billboard-topping track "I kissed a girl," have given particular force to her reputation as an artificial, manufactured pop product. Alistair Newton, writer and director of *Of a Monstrous Child: A Gaga Musical*, offers a fitting assessment of Perry: "it's just amazing, there is nothing about her that is real."⁴⁰

Critics like Ollman have marshaled these facts in support of the claim that Cotton's work is "so artificial and superficial that it begs for an ironic gloss."⁴¹ No doubt, the paintings are dressed in thick candy-coats, however, there is at the same time a relationship to "the real thing," and a pursuit of authenticity that governs Cotton's practice and adds a critical dimension to his purportedly "flat" artistic project. He paints from life, designs dresses for his models and very often bakes the cakes that serve as props in his paintings. His fictive landscapes are

created in the real world, as he constructs elaborate sets for his paintings, often building full-scale candyscapes for his models to inhabit. In his work with Perry, he captures the reality of spectatorial conventions initiated by new visual technologies and systems of representation such as the music video. At the same time, he underlines the fact that these new system and conventions are founded entirely on a set of illusions that include the painted faces and fabricated identities of pop stars. Lubin, in his assessment of the Photorealists, credits these artists with a similar accomplishment, explaining that:

By re-creating the appearance of a photograph on canvas, the Photorealists implicitly challenged the truth-value of photography—and empiricism itself—as an unmediated, unbiased record of reality. . . . Photorealism suggests that realism, photographic or otherwise, is never anything more than an artifice, a construction, and that its underlying positivism, its fetishistic faith in quantifiable facts, is a form of cultural self-delusion.⁴²

Evidently, a reading of Cotton's work as utterly and uncritically artificial fails to meaningfully consider the work. For both Cotton and the Photorealists, artifice is a means to gesture at the fundamental inaccessibility of total pictorial truth in a highly mediated visual universe. Both realisms demonstrate that an articulation of the limits of truth is in fact the nearest once can come to reality. In what is a truly Derridian reversal, the established hierarchy is turned on its head and artificiality—once the bastard term of authenticity—is now the condition of its possibility.

b) Affected/Detached

I have in large part focused on the 60s and 70s as a period of rapid and radical change, a “scary and exhilarating time,” to borrow Danto words.⁴³ However, this explosive moment in cultural history boasts a curious internal paradox. Specifically, this “exhilarating” epoch characterized by limitless intellectual and creative possibilities was, as Sally Eauclore notes, a time when “it [was] fashionable to be understated, unengaged, and dry.”⁴⁴ Detachment, in fact, has been pinpointed by countless scholars as characteristic of a great deal of the creative output of 70s. Commonly cited examples include the cool, static and spare images of the new topographers, the psychologically impenetrable protagonists of Godard or Antonioni and, according to gallerist Ivan Karp, the “totally cold, objective, [and] unemotional” work of the Photorealists.⁴⁵

It is during this moment in the 70s when Fischl begins his career as a “realist” painter. Summarizing Fischl’s transition from abstraction to figuration, Rosenblum explains that:

From the late 1970s on, he has been recording, in what appears to be a detached, objective manner, the facts of American life around him, facts that most often resemble candid snapshots of comfortable middle-class suburbanites going about their commonplace business.⁴⁶

Fischl’s ambiguous and emotively neutral figures are perhaps the primary reason why descriptors such as “detached,” “objective” and “impartial” are so often applied to his paintings. *The Krefeld Project*, for example, offers very little in terms of overt affect. The protagonists never directly gaze at us, instead, the couple is depicted in various states of quiet contemplation, their attention typically resting on something that lies beyond the visible frame. Assessing Fischl’s

production through to the early 2000's, Rosenblum concludes that it is "ambivalence [that] typifies all of Eric Fischl's paintings."⁴⁷ The tense but uncertain imagery of *The Krefeld Project*, which of necessity invites multiple interpretations, epitomizes Rosenblum's observation. The semi-dressed man's defeated posture in *Bedroom Scene 1* (2002), for example, can be equally read as an expression of sexual rejection or an instance of physical exhaustion (fig 23).

While the relationships and interactions between figures in Fischl's paintings are often ambiguous, many of his works share a rather sardonic tone. In fact, when Danto describes Fischl's pictures of suburban life, he claims that "they seem to express a certain moral anger."⁴⁸ Here he refers to bizarre works like *Time for Bed* (1980) in which a presumably dysfunctional family shares a physical space and yet each member appears to be in total psychological isolation (fig 24). Even Rosenblum concedes that,

Fischl's suburban upbringing provided him with a backdrop of alcoholism and a country club culture obsessed with image over content. . . .He first received critical attention for depicting the dark, disturbing undercurrents of mainstream American life.⁴⁹

This latent criticism is not unique to Fischl's early production. Many of his more recent beach scenes cross the limits of impartiality into what could only be described as critical territory. A work like *Stupidity* (2007), even without its heavy-handed title, is satirical in its presentation of a deflated, quasi-farcical middle-aged man (fig 25). On the far right of the canvas, the flabby grey-haired fool slumps forward, alone on a beach and oblivious to the storm that appears to be

brewing in the distance. He sports a pair of ill-fitting striped swim shorts that match in colour the exterior of a watermelon; coupled with his loose, protruding mouth he is the picture of doltishness, an early hominid sure to be weeded out by evolution as he advances without heed into what looks like a potentially fatal tempest.

Even if we choose to reject the previous reading of works like *Stupidity*, and insist upon the cool, removed tone that characterizes Fischl's work, it is impossible to overlook the emotional impact of this raw, direct, and uncompromising realism on a scale that is really quite heroic. The reality of human bodies and the banality of human relationships writ large is affecting in spite of the detached, standoffish and psychologically impenetrable characters that populate Fischl's canvases. Michael Auping notes the very same contraction in the work of the Photorealist Robert Bechtle:

The mystery in Bechtle's work lies somewhere at the edges of his seemingly neutral gaze. A master of the deadpan, he creates images so familiar we have a hard time seeing them, let alone interpreting them. There are no specific political agendas, philosophical pretensions, or spiritual overtones. Yet they carry an ineffable mystery about the meaning of a good—if not heroic—life in our time.⁵⁰

Thus, the work is simultaneously grandiose and modest, affected and detached. By attempting to peg the precise emotional disposition of the work in question, much of the scholarship has overlooked the subtlety with which these artists visually demonstrate that meaning is founded on contradictions that are indissoluble and are, perhaps, better left unresolved. After all, the power of Fischl, Cotton and the Photorealist lies in their ability to converse with the terms

of our visuality which is of necessity binarized, fractured, multiple and contradictory.

V. NARRATIVE AND STAGING

Since the invention of photography in the mid-nineteenth century, painters have worked with and against this advanced representational technology to redefine their power and purpose as visual artists. For scholars like Chase, Photorealism represents a significant moment in this nearly 200 year long exchange, as it is the first instance where painters explicitly acknowledge the photograph as source material, effectively reclaiming their power in what had otherwise been seen as a losing battle.⁵¹ While Photorealism certainly contributes to this discourse, the rise of colour television in the 60s as well as the introduction of the blockbuster film in the early 70s suggest that the Photorealists were in dialogue with an expanded visual field that included not simply still images, but also motion pictures. Movie theaters regularly appear in the street scenes of the 60s and 70s, but gained even greater momentum in the 1990s when artists like Davis Cone began focusing on film house exteriors, even rendering posters and popular film titles including *Silence of the Lambs* and *Eyes Wide Shut* (fig 26). From a psychological perspective, the image of the theatre exterior communicates a fundamental inaccessibility, implying that painting is somehow barred from participating in the formal possibilities of the motion picture. While the exteriors painted by Cone and others indicate an engagement

with film, I would like to suggest that Bechtle, as early as the 1960s, was finding ways to breach this impasse without directly portraying movie theaters. Instead, Bechtle was integrating narrative and other formal strategies germane to cinema into his paintings.

Bechtle's oeuvre contains two distinct categories. The first category is desolate car-lined streets and crossroads of his Bay Area neighbourhood; the second category is images of close friends and, primarily, family. In both categories, Bechtle returns again and again to familiar people and places, compiling a visual history that can be traced through paintings made, in some cases, decades apart. The artist's numerous paintings of his family in particular function as an elaborate narrative that is not unlike a family photo album. In this way, Bechtle's entire oeuvre invites us to not only project stories onto individual images but also to cultivate narrative relationships between paintings. While the artist's motivations remain a speculative matter, it is worthwhile to consider the ways in which Bechtle's sustained focus on particular subject matter permits paintings to function—not unlike film or television—as a time-based medium.

In 1969, Bechtle introduces his family to the public with a painting called *'61 Pontiac* (1968-9) in which the artist, his wife Nancy, and their young son and daughter are shown gathered in front of the family vehicle (fig 27). The family's stiff and composed postures coupled with the artist's firm, paternal grasp on the boy's head immediately locate this image within the realm of amateur family photography. The high-noon sun bathes the scene in intense light, causing

Nancy's blunt overgrown bangs to cast a heavy shadow over the top third of her face. One year later, the artist paints *Fosters Freeze Alameda* (1970) (fig 28). Bechtle is absent from the scene or, more likely, is serving as the father-photographer on this particular family outing. His children, though they appear to have grown, are unmistakable. His wife, however, is almost unrecognizable—her dark hair is pulled back, and her eyes are covered by a pair of sunglasses. Nancy is a curious figure in these early paintings; she is the family member who changes the most between paintings and, despite Bechtle's obsession with capturing perfect likenesses, her face is almost always obscured. In 1975, the family appears at another *Fosters Freeze*, this time in Escalon. The children are much older, and the daughter is seen for the first time wearing reading glasses. Nancy, now blonde, (or possibly a different woman altogether) hides her face yet again behind a pair sunglasses (fig 29). That same year, Bechtle paints the family at *Agua Caliente* (1975), his wife now sports a short dark curly crop, her face turned away and covered, as usual, by sunglasses (fig 30).

There is an entire dissertation yet to be written on the gaze in Bechtle's oeuvre. His presumably cool and removed paintings are imbued with affect; they do not objectively write reality but instead inscribe a patriarchal narrative about who has the power to perceive, and to dictate /render reality. Nancy is repeatedly denied the power of the gaze, transformed from subject to object, and quite literally bound by the artist's inscriptive act—a kind of writing which Derrida calls “the law of the father.”⁵² In *Fosters Freeze Escalon*, Bechtle's own sunglasses

rest on the picnic table were his family sits, connoting both his presence in the scene and his authoritative, unobstructed gaze. At the same time, it is possible to argue that Nancy is in fact a powerful figure because she consistently alludes us. Looking back at these paintings, it is impossible to tell whether we are faced with a series of spouses, or simply a string of new hairstyles. Nancy's mutable identity coupled with the token scenes of family outings, vacations, and new cars, heightens the tension in what is otherwise picture-perfect suburban imagery. It also multiplies the possible narratives we can project onto the images; we can envision violent domestic squabbles that are the cause of Bechtle's constantly changing spouse, or the cold suburban affluence behind her frequent salon visits. In actual fact, the artist and his wife separated in 1980, and their divorce was made final in 1982. Bechtle would later marry art historian Whitney Chadwick, who he paints with himself in *Portrero Table* (1994). In a bold symmetrical composition, the couple sits equidistant on opposite ends of a long dining table, both of their fully-illuminated faces gazing directly at the viewer. (fig 31 and 32). The image suggests a level power dynamic, for even if Bechtle takes the photo and renders the scene, it is Chadwick, the art historian, who now has the power to write Bechtle's story.

On a formal level, Bechtle's use of projection also merits closer consideration. What is on the one hand, a simple transfer method is, on the other, a loaded gesture. While Bechtle frames his use of projection as a means to achieve greater accuracy, it is impossible to ignore the way in which this strategy

positions the canvas as akin to the screen. As Bechtle himself notes, “it gives a sort of flicker to the surface.”⁵³ Similarly, Auping writes of Bechtle’s work that “in its most technical manifestations, it resembles high-definition television on stretched canvas.”⁵⁴ In the last fifty years, screens have exploded as sites for storytelling. Movie screens, televisions, and now the computer interface are more than ever the sites on which stories are delivered to contemporary audiences. In many ways, Bechtle foreshadows the significance of the screen in visual culture—yet another way in which the Photorealists’ seemingly out of touch project converses with relevant visual technologies but also turns out to be on the leading edge of major developments in visual culture.

The screen has proliferated as a significant representational site in the twenty-first century. By extension, cinema and its conventions of representation have become more and more prominent in the visual vocabularies of contemporary realist painters. Fischl is an especially important example, not simply because he works in a cinematic scale and ratio, but because his practice has long demonstrated an investment in narrative, staging, and film form. As early as 1983, art historian Sandra Paikowsky identifies the use of cinematic devices in Fischl’s paintings, including the psychologically charged close-up of *Private Beach* (1981), and the crane-shot implied by the birds-eye-view perspective of *Father and Son Sleeping* (1980). (fig 33)⁵⁵ These compositional tactics mark the beginning of Fischl’s ongoing investigation of the transposition of

film grammar onto canvas— an investigation that reaches new heights in *The Krefeld Project*.

Unlike Bechtle, whose work fixates on the photographer's gaze, Fischl explicitly crafts *The Krefeld Project* in the image of the cinema. Within the multi-phase project, Fischl functions as a director of actors, a set designer, a photographer (or cinematographer), a screen-writer and an editor. He cast actors for the project, and after making twelve paintings sourced from more than 2000 images, he reinstalled the work within the Krefelder art museum. The photographic language that Bechtle employs is one where subjects acknowledge the camera (directly or indirectly), they smile or pose in pursuit of a singular so-called "Kodak moment." The paintings that make up *The Krefeld Project*, by contrast, record interstitial moments of boredom, doubt and quiet reflection – moments that fill the gaps between the events and cultural milestones (birthdays, marriages, anniversaries, vacations) that typically populate family albums. In this way, *The Krefeld Project* is intensely voyeuristic. Where Bechtle foregrounds his role as perceiver, Fischl erases his presence as recording subject and shows the Krefeld couple performing private daily rituals of hygiene and sex as though no one were watching.

The massive quantity of source photographs also situates the Krefeld Project in the era of the digital point and shoot, a technological change that inevitably cheapened the value of the once rare "Kodak moment." More importantly, the collection of 2000 images reinforces the reading of each "scene"

as a film still, as it becomes possible to envision the larger series of images that, if stitched together, would form a loosely continuous narrative sequence. Shown together, the twelve isolated scenes become a short film or montage onto which viewers can project a range of possible narratives. By exhibiting the finished cycle of paintings at the Krefelder Museum, Fischl also heightens the immersive aspect of his project. Guests of the 2003 exhibition viewed the various scenes installed in the same space that had served months prior as the project set. The “return” of the images to their place of origin is a particularly interesting exhibitionary strategy, especially in relation to the trend towards increasing immersion in popular cinema. In film, the current trend is optical immersion, as evidenced by the explosion of 3D blockbuster films in the last five years. Fischl uses a psychologically immersive tactic, a strategy that is arguably more nuanced, as many theorists have argued that current 3D technology is fundamentally incompatible with film form and requires the reinvention of film grammar to achieve its desired effect.

Although Fischl functions as an invisible voyeur (much like a surveillance camera), he plays a vital role in writing the Krefeld narrative. In an interview with Ilka Scobie, Fischl described his process as follows:

I actually used actors. And a Swiss actress. In order to get them to act, I had to give them problems, like, she wants a hundred dollars from him but won't tell him why and he has to figure out why she wants the money. I took still photographs of them. If the problem I came up with didn't give them excitement, then there were no photographs.⁵⁶

Fischl's role in dictating the couple's interactions is important because it demonstrates that *The Krefeld Project* not only creates a narrative but that the process is also guided by narrative. Whereas Bechtle sought to capture or document his family, Fischl writes a visual story that is grounded in fictional characters and scenarios and, moreover, is propelled by the process of improvisation. His invented domestic dramas are yet another reminder of the complexity of realism, and the extent to which fabrication is, as Spivak wrote, an "accomplice" to its opposite term, verism.

Similar to the manner in which Cotton builds elaborate candy-lands for his models, Fischl also selected and led the installation of props and furniture in what would become the couple's temporary domicile. The Krefeld set is furnished in modern design, accented by recognized artworks by prominent twentieth century figures like Richter, Warhol, and Bruce Nauman. We can infer that the Krefeld couple is fairly affluent and must, by extension, hold in mind how their social status (albeit imagined) shapes the meaning of "ordinary life."⁵⁷ Distinctive props that appear throughout the series allow the viewer to map psychological associations onto various spaces. These include the woman's deep red dressing gown, the canopy bed, the hand-held shower head and the tall yellow vase which appears once in broad daylight, beside the stark naked male protagonist, and another time in the background of *Living Room Scene 4*, suddenly smaller and less significant (fig 34 and 35). Through the doors in *Living Room Scene 3* we catch a glimpse of the dining room where two other scenes

play out. The same bathroom is depicted twice, once as a bright shared space and another time as a menacing and claustrophobic interior. In *Bathroom Scene 1*, the female protagonist stands alone, rinsing her face with a handheld shower-head whose pipe abruptly cuts off and does not connect to any plumbing apparatus (fig 36). The white colour and peculiar shape of the device mimic an oxygen mask, further transforming the space into a site of threat, recovery, violence, or perhaps a secret euphoric huffing session. In this context, the woman's sidelong glance in *Bathroom Scene 2* becomes a guarded reflection on her presumably earlier escapade (fig 37). In *Bathroom Scene 2*, the hand-held shower-head is much more clearly articulated; the space is rendered with greater stability and is shared with her unsuspecting husband whose mental absence is hinted at by his distant gaze and the heavy line that separates the couple.

Bathroom Scene 1 and *2* are not unique in this respect. The entire series invites us to develop contradictory psychological associations with the rooms, props, and the characters themselves. The tension and uncertainty that characterizes much of the Krefeld imagery recalls the work of yet another realist painter, Edgar Degas, evoking in particular his enigmatic piece, *The Rape*, sometimes referred to simply as *Interior*. *The Rape* is a dark and perplexing scene. The painting depicts a tall man standing in front of the closed door to a dimly lit bedroom where a comparably small woman appears to recoil, the short sleeve of her night gown slipped and revealing a bare shoulder. The bed is neatly made and an open suitcase sits on the night table, possibly suggesting an

attempted escape. The man's presence is threatening, his hands are firmly placed in his pockets and he wears a disapproving look. While the context and relationship between the figures is open to interpretation, the scene almost certainly reads as the preface or epilogue to physical violation.⁵⁸

Unlike Degas's scene of clear-cut dominance, the Krefeld paintings present a constantly shifting power dynamic. The couple's respective degrees of dress rarely match, and nudity throughout the series can be interpreted as a marker of vulnerability. In this context, the Krefeld woman's red dressing gown becomes representative of a liminal state: neither dressed nor naked, neither in nor under command. These are the visual cues that inscribe the home as a site of constant negotiation, but with no clear victor. The space of the home also functions as a metaphor for the inner states of its inhabitants and, despite Fischl's penetrating gaze on the private lives of Krefeld couple, the series seems to suggest that the interior space of the mind is not so easily surveilled. The narrative unfolds in an associative manner, and there are multiple threads that we might choose to guide us through the series, including emotions, time of day, or even the physical exhibition layout. While the numbered scenes suggest one possible chronology, *The Krefeld Project* is ultimately characterized by temporal, spatial, and psychological indeterminacy.

Both Fischl and Bechtle characterize the painting process as time-based. As Auping explains: "In painstakingly transcribing slides onto canvas, Bechtle converts what is for him an instantaneous process, the taking of a picture, into

one that is slow and meditative, the making of a picture.”⁵⁹ Fischl too conceives of painting as something that “arrives at [a] frozen moment through accumulation.”⁶⁰ The shared notion of an accumulative creation is at least one reminder that both artists, while engaging with other systems of representation, are simultaneously working to establish or strengthen the place of painting within the broader scheme of visual technologies. Appropriately, Rosenblum observes that although the Krefeld Project is intensely cinematic in concept and execution, “the way whole sections sink into the dark, or the light unexpectedly catches a figure, or how both appear in the same motif; these are points that can only emerge in the medium of painting.”⁶¹ For Fischl, as for Bechtle, it is the questions and possibilities that are unique to painting that come to the fore in an extended investigation of other visual technologies.

VI. CONCLUSION

In spite of arguments to the contrary by Kosuth and his many critical allies, I am prepared to rest my case that realist painting has been a source of continued innovation since the 1960s. Reflecting on the American Photorealists, Nochlin explains that “Courbet’s nudes could never have looked like Pearlstein’s or Beal’s or Leslie’s. How could they, since they were painted before the invention of the close-up, the flood lamp, or phenomenology?”⁶² The emphasis on invention is essential, as it reminds us that realism is not universal, and that technological, social, and philosophical change all have the power to shape

perception. Even more importantly, Nochlin's observation reveals that movements in culture, politics, and technology are not the hangmen of realist painting, but are in fact the driving forces behind its continued relevance.

Drawing on examples from both the past and the present, I have tried to show the unique value of painting in terms of its ability to address how visual technologies and systems of representation shape perception and, by extension, how these changes inform what a realist practice might look like. At the same time, I have entrenched Photorealism more firmly within its historical moment, illustrating, with the help of scholars like Lubin, how the Photorealist project aligns with emergent postmodern thought of the 60s and 70s. In particular, I have emphasized the internal contradictions that govern the realisms in question, pointing to the ways in which various paintings reveal the fluid, contradictory and binarized nature of our visuality. I have also underlined the significance of narrative for both Fischl and Bechtle, specifically as a strategy to converse with film and television, introducing a sense of duration into what has typically been conceived of as a static and two-dimensional artistic practice.

To return to the idea of inheritance, it is important to reinforce that while a great deal of this text strives to revise the legacy of the Photorealism, I do not intend to suggest that all photorealistic painting is of necessity avant garde. Many of Meisel's "core group" of Photorealists continue to paint in the same way they did in the 60s and 70s but this project has lost its force in a moment where advanced representational technologies are ubiquitous and where the truth value

of photography has been largely depleted. The inheritors of the Photorealist legacy then are not the torchbearers of the original style, but rather artists like Cotton and Fischl who are leveraging the critical possibilities of realism to interrogate perception, spectatorship, and the status and circulation of images in the highly mediated visual culture of the twenty-first century.

Even when deployed for seemingly different purposes, realism as a pictorial mode has the capacity to draw our attention to the systems of representation and the conventions of imaging and of viewing that are unique to our particular moment. As Cotton's adaptation of the visual syntax of music videos makes clear, realism is ideally positioned to reveal the constructed ways of seeing that are often accepted as visual fact. In much the same way, the Photorealists' extended investigation of photographic syntax worked to question the supposed objectivity of film-based visual technologies. Considered together, Cotton, Fischl and the Photorealists demonstrate that the power of realist painting has never been in its ability to reproduce the world exactly as it is, but rather, in its ability to create contexts in which social, political, or pictorial realities can be called into question.

Endnotes

¹ Robert Rosenblum, "Notes on Will Cotton," *Will Cotton: Paintings and Works on Paper* Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, 4 November- 21 December 2005. 8.

² Born Kathryn Elizabeth Hudson to a religious family in California in 1984. Hudson rose to prominence in 2008 with her fourth studio album titled *One of the Boys* which was recorded under the stage name "Katy Perry." *Teenage Dream*, Hudson's second album as Katy Perry topped the Billboard 200 upon release in August 2010.

³ Leah Ollman "Will Cotton at Michael Kohn" *Los Angeles Times: Culture Monster* 3 Feb 2011 <<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2011/02/art-review-will-cotton-at-michael-kohn-gallery.html>>.

⁴ Arthur C. Danto "Formation, Success, and Mastery: Eric Fischl Decade by Decade" in *Eric Fischl 1970-2007* New York: Monacelli, 2008. 14.

⁵ Danto 18

⁶ Rosenblum (2005) 12

⁷ Charlotte Mullins *Painting people: figure painting today* D.A.P./Distributed Art Pubs. 2006. 70.

⁸ Rosenblum (2005) 9

⁹ John L Ward, *American Realist Painting 1945-1980*. London: UMI Research Press, 1989. Studies in the Fine Arts: The Avant-Garde, No. 60, 270.

¹⁰ Ward 345

¹¹ Michael Auping, "A Place in the Sun" *Robert Bechtle: A Retrospective* California: U of California P, 2007. 43.

¹² Alvin Martin, "Modern Realism is Really Real Modernism: Contemporary Realism in Context" *Real, Really Real, Super Real: Directions in Contemporary*

American Realism March 1- April 26, 1981. San Antonio: San Antonio Museum of Art, 1981. 15.

¹³ Rachel Bowlby, Foreword to *Adventures in Realism* ed. Matthew Beaumont. Malden: Blackwell, 2007. Xi.

¹⁴ It must be of its time

¹⁵ Linda Nochlin. *Realism*. Middlesex: Penguin, 1971. 105.

¹⁶ There are other nineteenth century artists who, though not directly involved with the socio-politicized Realism of Courbet, Millet *et al*, can still be classed under the rubric of realist painting. The Impressionists deserve to be noted here primarily for their pursuit of a phenomenological realism rooted in perception that is not unlike the Photorealist project. Claude Monet in particular also shares with the Photorealists an interest in his immediate friends and family as subject as well as a taste for scenes of leisure rather than labour.

¹⁷ David Lubin, "Blank Art Deadpan Realism in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Picturing America: Photorealism in the 1970s* ed. Valerie Hillings, March 7 -May 5, 2009. Berlin: Deutsche Guggenheim, 2009. 55.

¹⁸ Lubin 49

¹⁹ Lubin 49

²⁰ Ward 278

²¹ Linda Nochlin, "The Flowering of American Realism" *Real, Really Real, Super Real: Directions in Contemporary American Realism* March 1- April 26, 1981. San Antonio: San Antonio Museum of Art, 1981. 27.

²² The text reads as follows: About four or five months after she moved into the orphanage, she fell into a depressed mood. It came on during a rainy day. Rain always made her think of her father and set up a desire to wander. On the way back from school she slipped away and fled. She didn't know where she was running to and wandered aimlessly in the slashing rainstorm. A policeman found her and took her to the police station. She was brought back to Mrs. Dewey's office. She was changed into dry clothes. She expected to be beaten. Instead

Mrs. Dewey took her in her arms and told her she was pretty. Then she powdered Norma Jean's nose and chin with a powder puff.

In 1950, Marilyn told the story of the powder puff to Sonia Wolfson, a publicity woman at 20th Century Fox and then confided. "This was the first time in my life I felt loved - no one had ever noticed my face or hair or me before".

Let us assume it even happened in some fashion. For it gives a glimpse as the powder goes on and the mirror comes up of a future artist conceiving a grand scheme in the illumination of an instant - one could paint oneself into an instrument of ones will! "...Noticed my face or hair" - her properties - " or me..."

²³ Louis K. Meisel, Linda Chase. *Photorealism at the Millennium* New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002. 8.

²⁴ Meisel 7

²⁵ Meisel 7

²⁶ Phillip Pearlstein "A Concept of New Realism" *Real, Really Real, Super Real: Directions in Contemporary American Realism* March 1- April 26, 1981. San Antonio: San Antonio Museum of Art, 1981. 37.

²⁷ Lubin 53

²⁸ Linda Chase, "The Not-So-Innocent Eye: Photorealism in Context" *Photorealism at the Millennium*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002.15.

²⁹ Nochlin (1981) 27

³⁰ William Dyckes "The Photo as Subject: The Paintings and Drawings of Chuck Close" *Super Realism: A Critical Anthology* ed. Gregory Battcock. New York: EP Dutton, 1975.152.

³¹ Will Cotton "Picturing America: Artist Talk" Deutsche Guggenheim 4 February (2009) [podcast] <http://www.deutsche-guggenheim.de/assets/audio/podcast_02042009_en.mp3>.

³² Will Cotton, Untitled Artist Talk. *Christie's*, New York 21 September, 2010.

³³ Press Release. "Will Cotton: January 14 – February 26, 2011" Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles.

³⁴ Ollman 2011

³⁵ "1968b" in *Art Since 1900* ed. Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Benjamin Buchloch, Yves-Alain Bois. Thames and Hudson, New York, 2004. 528.

³⁶ Arthur R. Rose, "Four Interviews," *Arts Magazine* 43:4 (February 1969) 23.

³⁷ Lubin 49

³⁸ Jacques Derrida *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak, Baltimore: JHUP, 1974 166.

³⁹ Gayatri Spivak preface Jacques Derrida *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak Baltimore: JHUP, 1974. lix.

⁴⁰ Conversation with the author.

⁴¹ Ollman (2011)

⁴² Lubin 51

⁴³ Danto 13

⁴⁴ Sally Eacuclaire. *The New Color Photography* New York: Abbeville, 1981.76.

⁴⁵ Ivan Karp, "Rent is the Only Reality" *Super Realism: A Critical Anthology* ed. Gregory Battcock, New York: Dutton, 1975. 27.

⁴⁶ Robert Rosenblum, *Eric Fischl: The Krefled Project*, Kerber, 2004. 19.

⁴⁷ Rosenblum (2004) 18

⁴⁸ Danto 13/14

⁴⁹ Rosenblum (2004) 17

⁵⁰ Auping 44

⁵¹ Chase 11

⁵² Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York & London: Routledge, 1994).

⁵³ *Artist at Work: Robert Bechtle*.
<http://kqed02.streamguys.us/anon.kqed/spark/305_Robert_Bechtle.mov> 17 August 2011.

⁵⁴ Auping 36

⁵⁵ Sandra Paikowsky, *Eric Fischl: Paintings*. 16 March- 9 April 1983. Sir George Williams Art Galleries. Concordia University, Montreal. 4.

⁵⁶ Ilka Scobie. "Inside Man"
<<http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/scobie/scobie7-21-09.asp>> 17 Aug 2011.

⁵⁷ Others have commented that the Krefeld Project departs from a hetero-normative conception of "ordinary" life. In response, Toronto-based photographer Jessica Thalmann begun in 2011 a queer re visioning of Fischl's Krefeld Project.

⁵⁸ For further interpretation on Degas's *Interior*, see: Theodore Reff (1976). *Degas: The Artist's Mind*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harper & Row.

⁵⁹ Auping 60

⁶⁰ Robert Enright, "Fischl on Fischl" *Eric Fischl 1970-2007* New York: Monacelli, 2008. 92.

⁶¹ Rosenblum (2004) 24

⁶² Linda Nochlin, "Realism Now" *Super Realism: A Critical Anthology* ed. Gregory Battcock. New York: EP Dutton, 1975. 117.

Bibliography

Arthur C. Danto, Robert Enright, Steve Martin. *Eric Fischl 1970-2007* New York
Monacelli 2008.

Auping, Michael. "A Place in the Sun." in *Robert Bechtle: A Retrospective*
California: U of California P, 2007.

Beck, John. "Visual Violence in History and Art: Zapruder, Warhol and the
Accident of Images." in *American Visual Cultures*. David Holloway, John
Beck ed. London: Continuum, 2005.

Bolwby, Rachel. foreword to *Adventures in Realism* ed. Matthew Beaumont
Malden: Blackwell, 2007.

Chase, Linda. "The Not-So-Innocent Eye: Photorealism in Conext."
Photorealism at the Millennium New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002.

Cotton, Will. Untitled Artist Talk. *Christie's*, New York, 21 September, 2010.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak, Baltimore: JHUP
1974.

Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning
and the New International*. trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York & London:
Routledge, 1994.

Eauclaire, Sally. *The New Color Photography* New York: Abbeville, 1981.

-
- Enright, Robert "Desiring Ambiguity: The Art of Eric Fischl" *Eric Fischl 1970-2007*. New York: Monacelli, 2008. 27-29.
- Henry, Gerrit. "The Real Thing" *Super Realism A Critical Anthology* ed. Gregory Battcock. New York: Dutton, 1975. 3-20.
- Karp, Ivan. "Rent is the Only Reality." *Super Realism: A Critical Anthology* ed. Gregory Battcock, New York: Dutton, 1975. 21-35.
- Kempf, Jean and Chaliflour, Bruno. "Towards Postmodernism: Post World War II Photography in America from Committed to Solipsistic Art." in *American Visual Cultures*. David Holloway, John Beck ed. London: Continuum, 2005.
- Lubin, David M. "Blank Art: Deadpan Realism in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Picturing America: Photorealism in the 1970s*. Valerie Hillings. ed. March 7 -May 5, 2009. Berlin: Deutsche Guggenheim, 2009.
- Martin, Alvin. "Modern Realism is Really Real Modernism: Contemporary Realism in Context" in *Real, Really Real, Super Real: Directions in Contemporary American Realism* March 1- April 26, 1981. San Antonio: San Antonio Museum of Art, 1981.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. "Showing seeing: a critique of visual culture" *Journal of Visual Culture* 2002 1:165 -181.
- Mullins, Charlotte. *Painting People: Figure Painting Today*. D.A.P./Distributed Art Pubs. 2006.

-
- Nochlin, Linda. *Realism*. Middlesex: Penguin, 1971.
- Nochlin, Linda. "Realism Now" *Super Realism: A Critical Anthology* ed. Gregory Battcock New York: EP Dutton, 1975. 111-125.
- Nochlin, Linda. "The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law II" *Art In America*. 61 (November - December 1973).
- Ollman, Leah. "Will Cotton at Michael Kohn" *Los Angeles Times: Culture Monster* 3 Feb 2011 <<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2011/02/art-review-will-cotton-at-michael-kohn-gallery.html>>
- Paikowsky, Sandra, *Eric Fischl: Paintings*. 16 March- 9 April 1983. Sir George Williams Art Galleries. Concordia University, Montreal.
- Rogoff, Irit. "Studying Visual Culture." in *The Visual Culture Reader* ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed. London: Routledge, 1998. 14-26.
- Rose, Arthur R. "Four Interviews," *Arts Magazine*. 4:43 (February, 1969) 22-23.
- Rosenblum, Robert. *Eric Fischl: The Krefled Project*, Kerber, 2004.
- Rosenblum, Robert. "Notes on Will Cotton." Will Cotton: Paintings and Works on Paper Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles November 4-December 21, 2005. *Super Realism: A Critical Anthology*. ed. Gregory Battcock. New York: EP Dutton, 1975.
- Ward, John L. *American Realist Painting 1945-1980*. London: UMI Research Press, 1989. *Studies in the Fine Arts: The Avant-Garde*, No. 60



Figure 1: Will Cotton. *Consuming Folly*. 2010. Oil on linen. 72 x 96 inches.



Figure 2: Will Cotton. *Rootbeer Falls*. 2002. Oil on linen. 75 x 100 inches.



Figure 3: Will Cotton. *Ice Cream Cavern*. 2003. Oil on linen. 60 x 50 inches.



Figure 4: Will Cotton. Cotton Candy Katy. 2010. Oil on linen. 72 x 84 inches.



Figure 5: Will Cotton. *Croquembouche*. 2010. Oil on linen. 54 x 39 inches.



Figure 6: Eric Fischl. *Sleepwalker*. 1979. Oil on canvas. 69 x 105 inches.



Figure 7: Eric Fischl. Krefeld Project: Living Room Scene 3. 2002. Oil on linen. 85 x 114 inches.



Figure 8: Eric Fischl. Krefeld Project Redux: Bathroom, Scene # 4. 2005.
Oil on linen. 74 x 92 inches.



Figure 9: Malcolm Morely. SS Amsterdam in front of Rotterdam. 1966.
Liquitex on canvas. 62 x 84 inches.



Figure 10: Jack Chambers. 401 Towards London. 1968-9. Oil on mahogany. 72 x 96 inches



Figure 11: Jasper Johns. Drawer. 1957. Encaustic and assemblage on canvas.



Figure 12: James Tissot. Young Ladies Looking at Japanese Objects. 1869-70. Oil on canvas.



Figure 13: Gustave Courbet. The Stone Breakers. 1849-50. Oil on canvas. 65 x 94 inches. Destroyed.



Figure 14: James Rosenquist. President Elect. 1960-1. Oil on masonite. 89 x 144 inches.



Figure 15: Audrey Flack. Strawberry Tart Supreme. 1974. Oil over acrylic. 54 x 60 ¼ inches



Figure 16: Andy Warhol. Marilyn Diptych. 1962. Acrylic on canvas.
81 x 114 inches.



Figure 17: Audrey Flack. Vanitas Marilyn. 1977. Oil on canvas. 96 x 96 inches.



Figure 18: Robert Bechtle. Cookie Jar. 1964. Oil on canvas. 44 ½ x 52 inches.

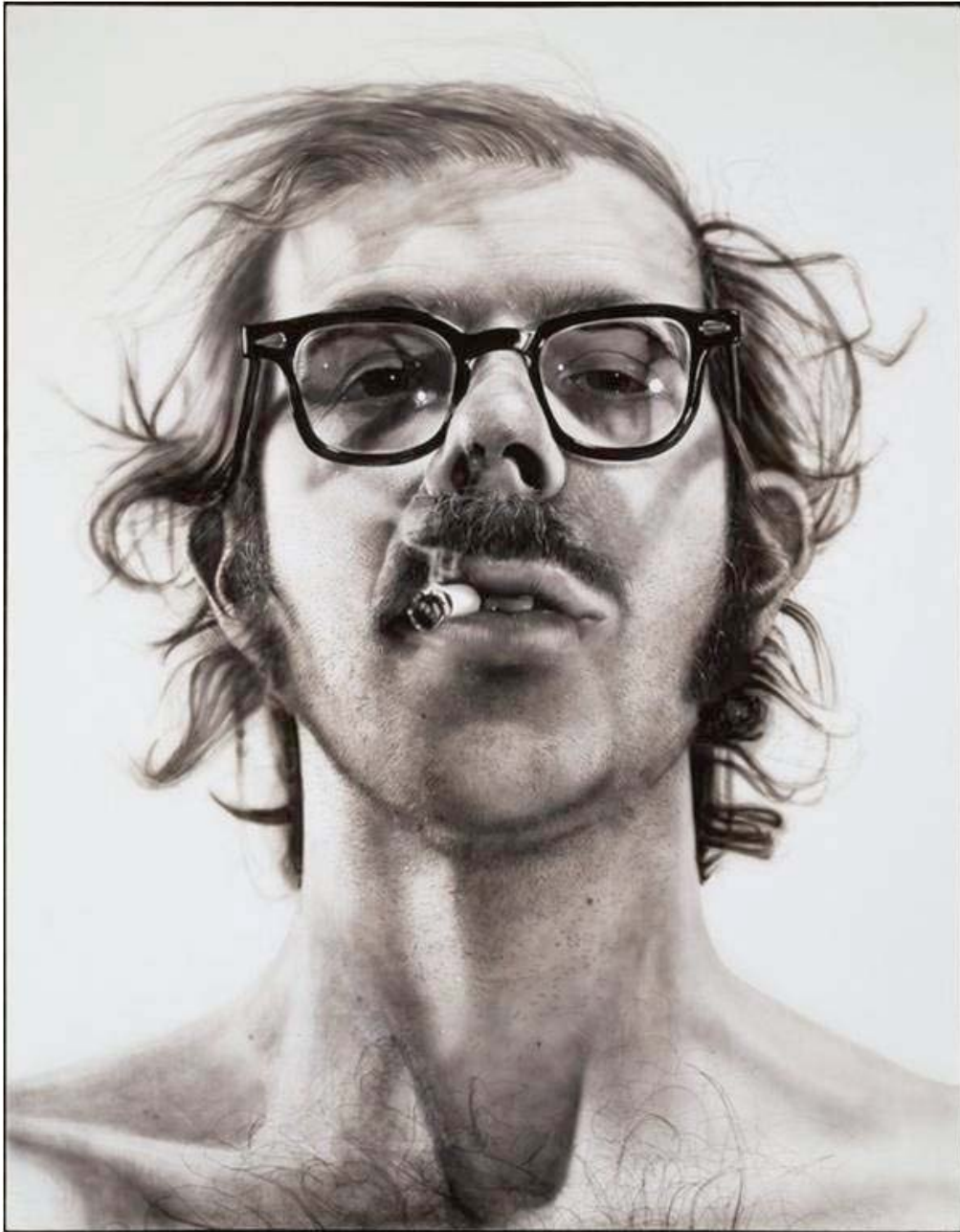


Figure 19: Chuck Close. Big Self-Portrait. 1967-8. Acrylic on canvas. 107 ½ x 83 ½ inches.



Figure 20: Will Cotton. *Luikkerland*. 2002. Oil on linen. 48 x 60 inches.



Figure 21: Will Cotton. *Ice Cream Katy*. 2010. Oil on linen. 39 x 65 inches.

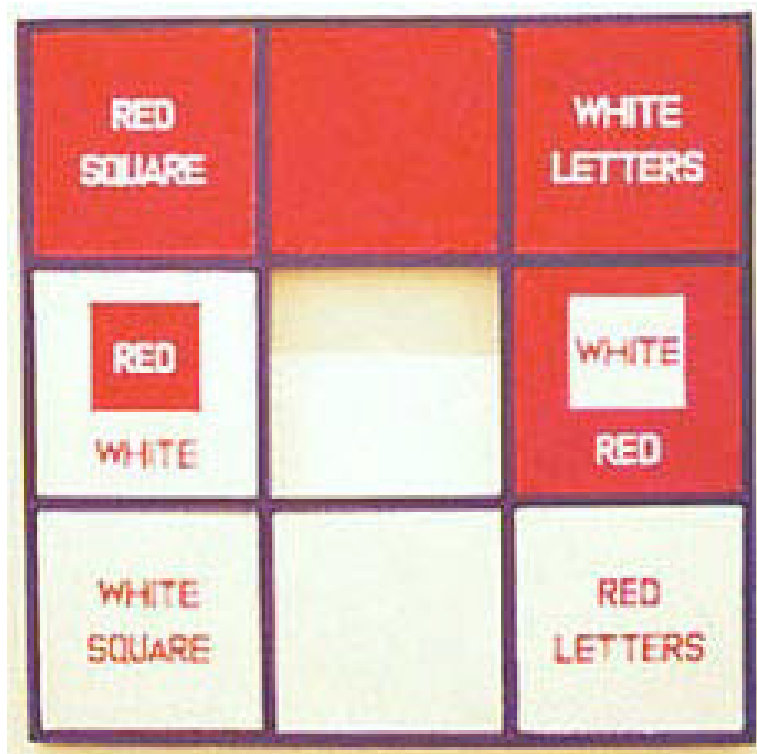


Figure 22: Sol LeWitt. Red Square, White Letters. 1963. Oil on canvas. 36 x 36 inches.



Figure 23: Eric Fischl. Krefeld Project: Bedroom Scene 1. 2002. Oil on linen. 79 x 105 inches



Figure 24: Eric Fischl. *Time for Bed*. 1980. Oil on canvas. 72 x 96 inches.



Figure 25: Eric Fischl. *Stupidity*. 2007. Oil on linen. 84 x 108 inches.



Figure 26: Davis Cone. *Town*. 1995. Acrylic on canvas. 36 ½ x 54 ¾ inches.



Figure 27: Robert Bechtle. '61 Pontiac. 1968-9. Oil on canvas.



Figure 28: Robert Bechtle. Foster's Freeze, Escalon. 1970. Oil on canvas. 102 x 143 inches.

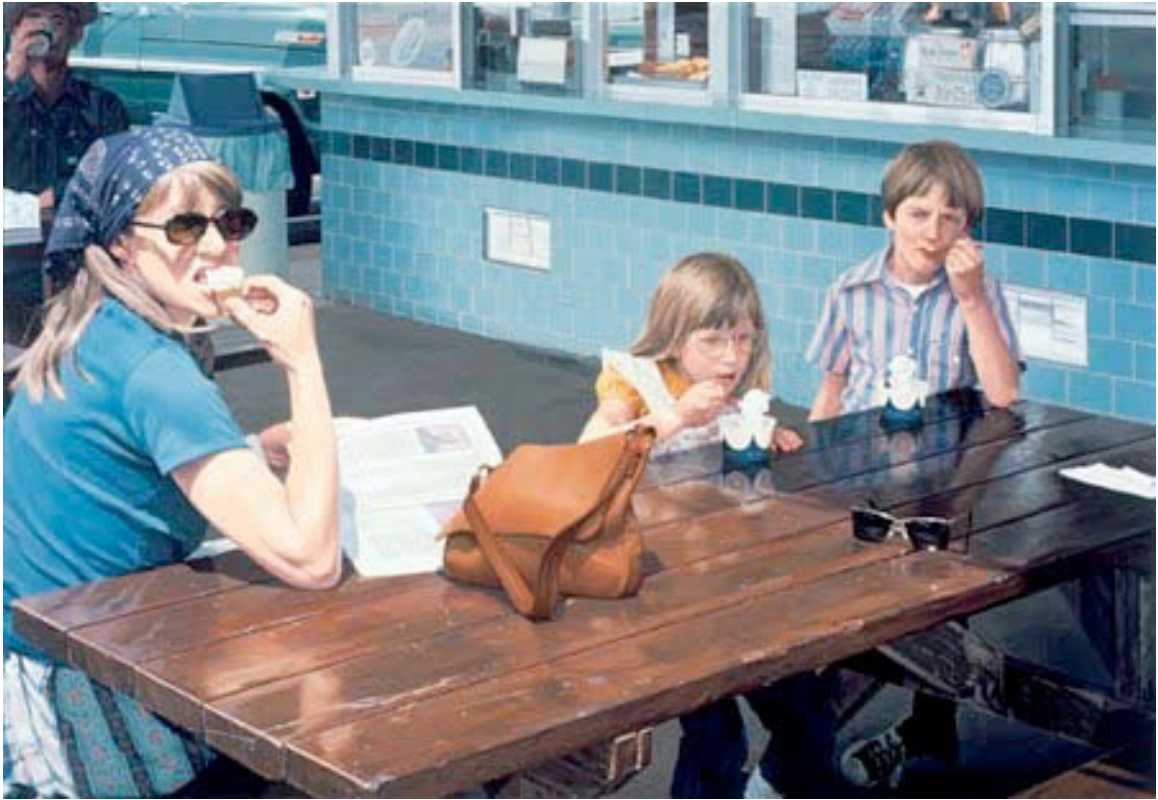


Figure 29: Robert Bechtle. *Foster's Freeze, Alameda*. 1975. Oil on canvas.



Figure 30: Robert Bechtle. Agua Caliente. 1975. Oil on canvas. 48 x 69 inches.



Figure 31: Robert Bechtle. Portrero Table. 1994. Oil on canvas. 36 x 77 inches.



Figure 32: Robert Bechtle. (Detail) *Portrero Table*. 1994. Oil on canvas.



Figure 33: Eric Fischl. Father and Son Sleeping. 1980. Oil on canvas. 72 x 72 inches.



Figure 34: Eric Fischl. *Krefeld Project: Living Room Scene 1*. 2002. Oil on linen. 64 x 89 inches.



Figure 35: Eric Fischl. *Krefeld Project: Living Room Scene 4*. 2002. Oil on linen. 63 ½ x 92 inches.



Figure 36: Eric Fischl. *Krefeld Project: Bathroom Scene 1*. 2002. Oil on linen.

85 x 114 inches.



Figure 37: Eric Fischl. *Krefeld Project: Bathroom Scene 2*. 2002. Oil on linen. 72 x 108 inches.