

Really Real Photorealism

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Can you guess which one is a photo and which one is a painting?



Quartet by Ralph Goings

If you're going to do a painting that looks exactly like a photo, why even paint it? When asked this question in a written Q & A, photorealist painter and octogenarian Ralph Goings responded, "What I'm about is making paintings, and my camera is one of the tools I use. It's the artist's job to take the painting beyond the photograph."



Real Photo



Painting

A California native with a master of fine arts degree, Goings has been painting diners, ketchup bottles and trucks — this blogger's beloved Americana — for decades. "My fascination with the condiment containers," he says, "lies in the way light plays on them." His paintings are so beautiful, and so lifelike, that we wanted to see the photos that inspired them. The pictures that he dug up were, no surprise, really great. And he took them all.

Picture Show: Has anyone ever told you you're a great photographer? Did you ever consider pursuing it?

Ralph Goings: I doubt that anyone ever used the word "great," but people who come to my studio seem to enjoy looking through my files. ... I consider myself a self-taught "picture taker. " I've always been fascinated by the way photographs capture the effects of light on space and form — the camera doesn't seem to care about "things, " but what light does to them. The camera can record effects that the naked eye can't perceive. Also, I just like the idea of capturing images. "Taking" photographs is fun. ...



Real Photo



Painting

Photographs are not the subject of my paintings. They are the source of visual information ... an armature to build the painting on. The painting is made of canvas and wood and organic materials (pigments, glues, solvents, etc.) and exhibits an obvious touch of a human hand. Paints are malleable materials and applied by hand.

Do you paint diners because you frequent them? Or the other way around?

Everything I paint is something I want to see painted — ordinary, everyday things and places. I guess I have a rather romantic fascination with diners and cafes and the people who eat and work in them.

Over the years there has been a kind of organic progression through the subjects I've painted: the truck series came first ... as seen near fast food eateries; then viewed through windows of cafes, inside looking out. Once inside, my attention switched to the eatery interiors and the people inside; then finally, I began to concentrate on the countertop arrangements of condiments and food. My fascination with the condiment containers lies in the way light plays on them.

Can you describe your process — from composing a photograph to finished painting? How long do you spend on each work?

The diner paintings were the most detailed and usually took a month or more — I'm talking eight hour a days.

Yes, the painting begins with the photographs. ... Once photos (slides) are taken, it's back to the studio for sessions with the slide projector reviewing the results of our search. Several slides of a subject that seemed to say "paint me" are selected and 8x10 prints made. The slide is projected on a canvas or watercolor paper and is roughed in with pencil.

Actual painting begins with thin, sketchy underpainting to adjust the drawing and composition, and establish colors. The prints from the slide are used for reference during painting, and at a certain point (don't ask me how I know when), the photograph is put aside and the painting continued until it looks "right."

Why photorealism?

If the painting and the photograph were placed side by side one can readily see (I would hope) that, though they both depict the same slice of reality, they are not the same. I guess I might compare it, in my case, to the difference between a musical manuscript (a work of art) and the performance (also a work of art). Perhaps what I'm doing is making one work of art in order to make another. Sounds pretty lofty and highfalutin doesn't it?

Not at all. Goings has been painting his whole life, documenting our culture in the form of art. Museums are already working to acquire it. [View more condiments](#) on his Web site.

<http://ralphgoings.com/>

