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GALERIE
Georges-Philippe
& Nathalie
Vallois

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Focus #2 - American Photorealism

33 & 36, rue de Seine
75006 Paris-FR
T. +33(0)1 46 34 61 07
F. +33(0)1 43 25 18 80
www.galerie-vallois.com
info@galerie-vallois.com

1018 Madison Ave
NYC, NY 10075
+1(646) 476 5885
www.fleiss-vallois.com
info@fleiss-vallois.com

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Proposal by Julia Wachtel :
Julia Wachtel, Wendy White,
Jason Yates

Windchimes and Prayers

05.07 - 07.25

John Baeder, Robert Bechtle, Charles Bell, Robert Cottingham,
John DeAndrea, Ralph Goings, Duane Hanson, John Salt

"Fifty years ago, the invasion of living rooms by television, the popularisation of photography and its widespread use in advertising and the press, and finally, the success of cinema, imposed what, at the time, seemed like an ultimate dematerialisation of reality by the lens-based image. Today, that revolution of the 1960s looks like a mere ripple compared to the tsunami that has swept over us since. (...)

In this uberisation of the world in which the indeterminate time of the selfie circulating on the Web is more important than our presence in a given place, it is photographs of the pages of books, posted on Instagram, that determine their success. The visual pollution that suffocates us day in and day out, in which the images circulating on the Web and social media now direct our way of seeing and being seen, is not unrelated to the new interest in Photorealism shown by a young generation of artists. Pop Art and then Photorealism, which emerged at an interval of only a few years, both initially met with a very cool response: was this a critique or a celebration of the kingdom of consumption, of generalised ugliness, of urban sprawl? Both were discredited by the 'lack of professionalism' of the artists concerned: after all, didn't these painters simply 'copy' objects and/or photographs, doing no more than blowing them up in size? What at the time



John Baeder, *Holt's Café, Boonville, 1972*

was taken for cynicism strikes us today as incredibly fresh; what was interpreted as copying has since been celebrated as painting whose complexity and formal virtuosity we are now rediscovering. That is why we need to look more closely at these canvases that look like photographic images but are, from close up, very much paintings. (...)

The half-dozen terms used for the 'Photorealist' or 'Hyperrealist' movement (...), the number of texts written about the reasons for choosing one or another of these terms, and the number of criticisms coming from the artists in the movement, make this one of the most interesting examples of a 'false' movement to be found in art history. Is it legitimate to bring together artists who, without knowing each other, worked on similar subjects using similar techniques? The many recent exhibitions and the discovery of later generations appear to validate the choice made by the critics and gallerists who invested in this gathering. The questioning of the movement – real or fake? – echoes the question raised by the movement itself, and it's no coincidence: are these paintings made after photographs merely 'cold' copies – in other words, a kind of realism – or are they the beginning of a narrative, and therefore a form of unreality? True or false images? True or false movement?"



Ralph Goings, *Shaker Detail, 1999*

Excerpts from Camille Morineau's text "Robert Cottingham's true false images" in *Robert Cottingham, Fictions in the Space Between* published by Galerie GP & N Vallois, 2019