

SuperRealism

Abstraction was embraced by artists worldwide and spiralled off in many different directions, as we have seen. (For example **Bridget Riley** and **Victor Vasarely** developed **Op art**, an optical extension of abstraction. Where **Pop Art** had reflected the fashions of American society, **Op Art** actually started a whole fashion itself, when the images were used by **Mary Quant** the clothes designer in 1960s London).

In the 1970s we begin to see **Realism** in art become more fashionable again. It is easy to say that this was a backlash against abstraction and the modernist directions in art, but in truth, the tradition of **Realism** never really went away. It is present in Art history from **Giotto** in 12th century right through to **Ron Mueck's** sculpture in 2006.

We looked at **Social Realism** in the 1920s and 30s. Other examples would be:

1920s

Georgia O'Keeffe (USA) *Black Iris III*

Tamara de Lempicka (Poland) *Duchesse de la Salle*

Charles Sheeler (USA) *City Interior*

Christian Schad (Germany) *Self Portrait with Model*

San Pietro di Cagnaccio (Italy) *After the Orgy*

1930s

Grant Wood (USA) *American Gothic*

Ben Shahn (USA) *Sacco & Vanzetti*

Diego Rivera (Mexico) *Detroit Industry Murals*

1940s

Edward Hopper (USA) *Sunday Morning*

Giorgio Morandi (Italy) *Still Life*

Frida Khalo (Mexico) *Self Portrait with Cropped Hair*

1950s

Francis Bacon (UK) *Screaming Popes*

Anne Redpath (UK) *Still life Interior*

1960s

Gerhardt Richter (Germany) *Olympia*

Pop Art (USA/UK) **Warhol/Wesselman/Rosenquist.**

In the **1970s** the realists found favour again, becoming more fashionable. They never again really take prominence in the art world, but they do compete on equal terms with the ever-widening range of visual art forms. The public will always be in awe of those who can most accurately reproduce reality in any art form. As always, critics will find something negative to say about most forms of art and realist artists are most often criticised for a 'lack of

imagination'. Look at these more contemporary examples and decide for yourself if that is true:

David Hockney (UK) *Peter*, 1968
Peter getting out of the Pool, 1966
Chuck Close (USA) *Big Self-Portrait*, 1968
Audrey Flack (USA) *Shiva Blue*, 1973
Werner Tubke (Germany) *Working Class & Intelligentsia*, 1972/3
Duane Hanson (USA) *Woman with Shoulder Bag*, 1974
Franz Gertsch (Germany) *Marina Putting Make-Up on Luciano*, 1975
Richard Estes (USA) *Double Self-Portrait*, 1976
Philip Pearlstein (USA) *Female Model on Eames Stool*, 1978
Charles Bell (USA) *Gumball*, 1983
Jeff Wall (Canada) *The Thinker*, 1986
Lucian Freud (UK) *Leigh Bowery*, 1992
Ron Mueck (UK) *Dead Dad*, 1996

Richard Estes (Built Environment)

Looking closely at **Richard Estes'** *Double Self-Portrait*, 1976:

Estes' paintings are not trying to tell any kind of story, there is no '**narrative**', in fact with very few exceptions, there are no people. Instead, he is playing with his fascination for the scenes he sees **every day**. Contemporary **cityscapes** in which everything, initially, looks perfect, photographically realistic. The closer we look, however, the clearer the reasons for calling these images '**Super**' **Real** become apparent.

In real life, and indeed in photography, we can only focus on one small area at a time. Everything around that is slightly out of focus, becoming more so the further away it is from you, the viewer.

For centuries artists have struggled to create this reality, or at least a convincing illusion of it, in their artworks. **Linear and arial perspective**, invented in the 15th century, were developed specifically for this purpose.

Richard Estes denies this artistic truth in his paintings. Everything is equally crisp.

"I don't believe photography is the last word in realism", he said. "I don't like to have some things out of focus and others in focus because it makes it very specific what you are supposed to look at and I try to avoid saying that. I want you to look at all. Everything is in focus."

The effect is that depth is challenged. Although **Estes** often chooses scenes with strong **linear perspective**, (a lot of disappearing into the distance), this is strangely distorted by his method. Effectively everything is **on the surface** and, at first you can't quite make out what is wrong with the images, and it can be quite tricky to work it out until you look for this technique. Bizarrely, although the results from the two artists are completely different, this is exactly the same effect that **Jackson Pollock** strived for, keeping everything entirely on the surface of the canvas, with his '**action**' drip paintings.