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What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By JASON FARAGO. Sept. 7, 2017



An installation view of "From Lens to Eye to Hand: Photorealism 1969 to Today," at the Parrish Art Museum. Credit Lindsay Morris/Parrish Art Museum

'From Lens to Eye to Hand'

Through Jan. 21. Parrish Art Museum, 279 Montauk Highway, Water Mill, N.Y.; 631-283-2118, parrishart.org

Photorealism, a painterly style that emerged in the late 1960s and privileged hyper-real depictions of mundane circumstances, had a quick rise and a quick fall: Celebrated at the seminal 1972 edition of Documenta as the next phase of Pop, the deadpan paintings of cars, diners and street corners quickly came to seem traditionalist. An ambitious museum show, reckoning with the place of photorealism within the larger history of painting, would be a welcome endeavor — and audiences who still see technical acuity as a principal marker of artistic accomplishment might lap it up. (Consider the many context-free slide shows on traffic-hungry blogs, à la "27 Stunning Works of Art You Won't Believe Aren't Photographs.")

"From Lens to Eye to Hand," on view in the Hamptons, is not that show, despite a smattering of important loans from the Guggenheim, the Whitney and the Brooklyn Museums. Its engagement with the subject is lopsided, and the presentation is dreary and overstuffed. A few lesser-known names, including the intriguing Israeli painter Yigal Ozeri, hang cheek-by-jowl with marmoreal interiors and ghastly cityscapes. Intriguing works on paper, among them some tender watercolors of diners by John Baeder, are stuck in a hallway; it is sad that the Parrish's Herzog & de Meuron-designed home, only five years old, can barely support a full-scale exhibition.

There is nothing by Franz Gertsch of Switzerland, perhaps the best of the photorealists, and Chuck Close is represented only by a pair of minor early drawings. More worryingly, more than 50 of the 76 works here come directly from the dealer Louis K. Meisel (only two donated to the Parrish, the rest borrowed from his galleries or his family's collections). It's not a mortal sin for museums to solicit dealers when necessary: Mr. Meisel did coin the term "photorealism," after all. But such loans should be judicious, and serve shows more substantial than this bantamweight effort.