

ARTINFO

Photorealism Champion Louis Meisel on Bringing His Preeminent Collection to New Jersey

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"I always say, every junkie ends up selling his stuff to support his habit," **Louis Meisel** said, standing in the middle of a cavernous room surrounded by paintings from his massive personal collection. The premier dealer of photorealism — it was he, in fact, who coined the term in 1969 — Meisel has galleries in SoHo and on 57th street. Over the course of 40 years in the business, he has amassed an illustrious collection of photorealist paintings, photographs, and sculpture from 1968 to the present, and the largest grouping ever shown to the public is currently on display at **Mana Art Center** in Jersey City.

Meisel has always been a collector. He and his wife **Susan Meisel** have amassed upwards of 150 distinct collections, from 19th-century ice-cream scoops to tin toys. But his art collection remains his most prized, featuring work by founding members of the movement including **Richard Estes**, **Robert Bechtle**, and **Don Eddy**.

The Mana exhibition, co-hosted by the **Eileen S. Kaminsky Family Foundation** — the second in a series of exhibitions centered around personal art collections — juxtaposes the work of photorealists from the 70s and 80s with their present-day counterparts. An impressive selection of **Chuck Close** silkscreens, etchings, and lithographs dominate the first-floor gallery. Upstairs, work by other classic photorealists are presented side-by-side with their contemporary counterparts such as **Roberto Bernardi**, **Anthony Brunelli**, **Bertrand Meniel**, and **Yigal Ozeri**, who also helped organize the show.

It was this contrast that seemed to most excite Meisel, who is currently finishing the final edition of a four-volume tome on the history of photorealism, this one titled "Photorealism in the Digital Age." Standing in front of Bertrand Meniel's "Roaring" (2010), a rendering of a San Francisco

hillside, Meisel instructed **ARTINFO** to lean in and look at the detail of the cars on the horizon. "This painting has detail that has never been painted before the last 10 years," he said. Then, he instructed us to move to the middle of the room. "They all look the same from out here, but up close, you see — back then, they just didn't have that kind of camera."

Indeed, the recent history of photorealism is inextricably linked to the development of digital photography. And digital photography, according to Meisel, hasn't slowed the momentum of the genre: he and his partner **Frank Bernarducci** receive over 1,000 submissions from aspiring photorealist painters a year, he said, but he only discovers "five or six a decade" that make the cut into his gallery or personal collection.

When asked to define what it means to be a collector, Meisel opted to describe what a collector is not: "Someone who buys only what is popular, or what is expensive, is not a collector. Those people are investing, they aren't collecting." He looked around the gallery, hung with his hard-won holdings. "I collect."

"Our Own Directions: Works from the Louis K. and Susan P. Meisel Collection" is on view at Mana Art Center in at 888 Newark Ave. in New Jersey through January 2012.