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Thomas Insalaco

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By Thomas F. Insalaco
Candidate for the Master of Fine Arts
in the College of Fine and Applied Arts
of the Rochester Institute of Technology

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To

Lenny Bruce and

the very few people who think

about painting and drawing.
My objective is to investigate the relationships between figurative form in general and photographic images, and to consider how they may relate to traditional values in painting, as well as to my personal ideas about painting.

Like many painters who are working with one kind of figurative image or another I find myself saturated with images and objects produced through photographic media, whether they be the cinema, newsphotos, television, magazine, or advertising and sales materials of one kind or another.

The circulation of photographic representations of people, places, and events is so continuous and pervasive that photography as the media that surrounds us, "has become a part of our psychological habits of vision". 1

Our attitudes toward ideas and the formulation of ideas, like most things, undergo changes, modifications, and

shifts of emphasis. I will attempt to explain some of these changes and modifications with the aid of collected photographic references and to point out what the photograph, for reasons of education and cultural conditioning, has come to mean to many artists painting today.

In dealing with one kind of figuration or another I find photographic usage very widespread. Most of what is referred to in this thesis report will be directed toward figurative painting in the late 19th century up to the present developments. It is in figurative painting that I find the most direct application of photographic references, which may suggest a case of photography being the impetus for the current popularity of this form of painting. I am personally inclined to think that most figurative painters' initial motivation to paint the figure is derived from personal experiences, that many times have been arrived at through photography, although not necessarily any specific photograph.

From the outset of the Impressionist movement and slightly before it during the period of the Barbizon School,
one can observe differences developing in the procedures of certain artists. The manner in which they began to render light and dark, atmospheric qualities, and compositional elements directly related their work to some qualities of photography.

The world's first photograph was a view from a workshop in 1826, by Nicephore Niepce, a French landowner with scientific interests. Others had made "sun-prints" on paper or leather, coated with light-sensitive substances which promptly faded or turned black. On an 8 x 6½ inch pewter plate with a kind of asphalt called bitumen of judea, through a camera obscura arrangement, Niepce was able to fix an image and thus took the first true photograph.

During the sixteenth century, and slightly earlier, the camera obscura was in demand to aid drawing in perspective and to copy nature. The image thrown upon a ground glass screen by the lens was then traced by hand, and as Fox Talbot yet put it, "there was a desire to find a chemical process by which natural objects may be made to delineate themselves
without the aid of the artist's pencil". This Niepce had accomplished.

During this time work was confined to research of one type or another. It wasn't until 1839 when Daguerre announced and demonstrated his technique that photography was made public.

At first the photograph served as a substitute for what painting had been doing by being able to represent family portraits and single portraits and later made its way into illustrating paintings, topographical views and picturing landscapes. Almost as soon as they were able, photographers began to take news photos and the art of photojournalism was born.

In the beginning stages, with limited ways of printing the photographs in newspapers and magazines, the news photographer usually turned to the wood-block carver who made a wood engraving of the image which could be printed in a newspaper. With the advancement of the still photograph from 1925 to 1935, and with camera and printing processes progressing,
photojournalism began one of the greatest breakthroughs in communications, and it now has great impact on the lives of most people in this country and the developed countries of the world.

Within reportage lies the photographer's greatest strength— the power to communicate— and for the painter a great adjunct to his art.

Since its introduction the photograph has passed through phases which generally coincide with developments in painting. Many photographs suffered from a mistaken ambition to compete with contemporary thought and taste in painting. Out of this misguided effort came a sort of artificial picture making alien to the "nature" of photography. 2

The painter Paul Delaroche on first seeing a daguerreotype remarked, "from today painting is dead..." and as Delaroche knew it, it may very well have been dead; and for

Photography as a media has as much potential for expression of creative ideas as does painting. Today, this seems self-evident. Therefore, I see little need to concern myself with the apparent parallelism between photography and painting. For the artist involved in image-making no sides need to be taken. There is little need for painters to concern themselves with painting photographic likenesses or for the photographer to try to fabricate paintings. Each is capable of achieving separate ends, which may or may not relate closely to each other.

Carl Mydans speaks of photography's creativity in this way: "Once a man has been attached to it the camera immediately has a point of view... The moment the photographer selects a position from which to take his picture, even by the very stance he chooses he begins the process of expressing himself". 3

The aligning of photography with painting was a kind of merging of pictorial means, and many of the first photographers were in fact painters.

Because early photography was unable to record nature's colors, some painters recommitted themselves as colorists of photographs. In 1861 Alfred Wall, both a painter and photographer wrote a book titled: *A Manual of Artistic Coloring as Applied to Photographs*. It was a practical guide for the artists and photographers who wished to color photographs. It contained instructions for coloring photos on glass, paper, ivory, and canvas with crayon, powder, oil or watercolor. Wall made a point of stating "that to paint on a photograph is no more illegitimate than was the practice of Leonardo, Raphael, Rubens, and Titian and other masters who painted on the abozzo, that is on the monocromatic preparatory sketch". 4 Although I disagree in part with the latter premise it leads to a more constructive interaction between the painter and the photograph.

That is the usefulness of photographic aids: as a matter of recall and information for future consultation.

Photographs are in many cases more provocative to the artist today than are sketches. This is not to dismiss the enormous importance of drawing, but an artist's initial confrontation with a particular image can, and many times does come from a photo of some sort, it being selectively pulled from thousands of photographs he sees reproduced daily. Photography will undoubtably continue to improve its ability to portray the "reality" of things around us and we will increasingly accept this portrayal convinced that it is the true reality. It may be the artist's calling in the future to decipher this bombardment and make sense of this isolated, impersonalized framing of events.

Photography and its many applications to science, medicine, industry, education, television and the cinema has made photography an integral part of contemporary life and has become indispensable in our society. Next to the printed
word the photographic image is one of the most important visual influences upon painters.

The "photographic reality", as something apart from "reality", can for the artist's purposes be defined as the universal data in black and white and gray. (Although we do have color photography at present it is generally secondary, I believe, for the painter's purposes.)

For the snaphooter, a photograph is merely a mirror with a memory. Only a minute number of the millions of snapshots taken each year has any pretensions of being "art".

I would like to stress the point that the choice of photographs used by artists first stems from an interest in the visual means that record or otherwise suggests something about anything real or unreal, and that these references are not always easily discernable in terms of their influence or importance to the artist.

No matter what the painter's means are to achieve his ends, and whether a photo may be used because of its particular
mood or visual content, the real "stuff" of painting extends beyond any visual aid, and the reference photo is for me, and most always should be, a means for a visual metamorphosis. A painting must of necessity succeed in integrating the visual means and the physical demands of paint, which are many and varied, and has very little to do with photography. The working photograph should not simply be a base for over-painting. This many times amounts to little more than a smearing of the integrity of a photograph or vice-versa. Ideally one should employ every means possible and examine new theories and ideas, and through thought and conscientious efforts, arrive at an awareness of his own goals and decipher what visual aids can serve him best.

Painters like Eugene Delacroix applauded the invention of photography. In the 1820's he was among the first members of the Societe Francaise de Photographic. He felt that, "such a wonderful invention arrived so late, as far as I am concerned". Nonetheless, Delacroix was able to make use of the daguerreo-type. He had models posed and then photographed them for future study.
Degas noted a new range of possibilities in seeing movements and poses through photography. This insight brings me to consider the importance of certain optical possibilities in photography. The possibilities of exaggerating and distorting form through lens selection, or positioning various surface peculiarities of tone or texture to give heightened dynamism to space, to float objects, exaggerate limbs, to focus in on certain parts or to blur to obscurity others. For example, one can make something unique out of the ordinary, shift from a normal viewpoint to a fantastic disturbing vista. The camera's optical vision has made possible many new directions.

At times the photo and the special character of certain photographic processes have had special attractions for painters, much the same way as have styles of painting. In the paintings of Camille Corot, after 1850, a distinct change developed in his landscapes. This change is manifest in the feathery atmospheric quality of trees, which was typical of photos of this time, as they recorded the movement of tree limbs; also a silvery quality pervaded the over all imagery. Aaron Scharf
says this abrupt change in the work of Corot took place as the result of his association with a group of artists and photographers who worked in the forest near Arras, France.

There are also many examples of portrait paintings done from photographs or reproductions of other paintings. Renoir gave due credit to this aspect of the intrusion of the photograph into painting by stating that photography had "Freed painting from a lot of tiresome chores starting with the family portrait... So the worse for us, but so much the better for the art of painting". 5

Edouard Manet's use of the photograph stems from a desire to render the tonal effects of a particular moment in a particular light. Photography allows the painter to half close his eyes in order to eliminate the effects of local subject matter and local color as far as possible. Manet attempted to see the objects before him, as the camera had always seen them, as a pattern made of degrees of light.

This point is not conclusive in terms of the way in which Manet produced his paintings because the extent of his influences are many and in part reflect the painting values of several artists who preceded him, e.g., Velazquez and Goya. Manet's well-known etching of Baudelaire of 1865 was based on a photograph by Nadar. Also, another instance when Manet was aided by a photograph is in his "Execution of Emperor Maxmillian", which was painted with the aid of a photograph, and was also based on Goya's "Execution of May 3, 1808".

Edgar Degas, possibly because of his timelyness, was more influenced than others by compositions derived from photographs... "but his actual language of representation was not essentially the camera's". Degas' use of the photo outside of portraiture is most interesting in his studies of horses. His preoccupation with horses, from the race track or stays at Valpincon's estate, a foremost horse-breeding establishment, indicate his keen observation. Degas, especially in sculpture, felt but little inhibited to take advantage of

the "camera's vision". Several of Degas' representations of horses trotting and galloping were taken from Muybridge's Animal Locomotion of 1887. Besides this Paul Valery said that Degas "liked and appreciated the photograph at a time when artists disrevered or dared to even make use of them..."  

The sequential shots of Muybridge, says Valery, "rendered obvious the errors that all the sculptures and painters had committed when they had represented the diverse movements of the horse".  

The superimposed image had a positive value in pictorial representation about 1880. Predominently important was the large series of consecutive motion studies taken by Muybridge using a battery of cameras which made successive exposures. The resulting images, which were produced for both artists and physiologists, created a new understanding of motion.

A more accurate technique for taking sequential images was devised by the American artist Thomas Eakins, and about this time in France by Etienne Jules Marey. Both photographed

7. Paul Valery, Degas Dansa Dessin, p. 79.
8. Ibid., p. 82.
with only one camera; recording the image that was stretched out in a kind of expanded accordion of time.

This kind of procedure influenced the Futurists Balla and Boccioni in their search for visual means for representing motion. Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase" reflects a similar debt to the early discoveries in photography. Artists as diverse in style as Degas, Messiner, Remington, and Francis Bacon have used Muybridge's chronophotos as references.

There is expressive potential in Muybridge's studies of motion beyond the recording of human and animal movement. Several good examples can be seen in the work of Francis Bacon. From many of Muybridge's studies came themes of horror and nightmare as translated by Bacon.

At times the photograph simply serves the artist as a record of the visible world, either as a rememberance of a particular time and place in the present, or it may extend his knowledge into an area otherwise inaccessible, as would be the case in a portrait of a person who lived in the past.
Many painters are also indebted to photography as a supplier of detailed information and compositional suggestions. Ben Shahn has said "Photography gives those details you think you'll remember, but you don't; details that I like to put into my paintings". These "details" may also serve to stimulate the artist because they may suggest a person, place, or event which may have been a part of the past, or serve to epitomize the character of something that has importance to the artist at present, although the actual photograph is a record of something quite different. The imagery, the "detail" can be transplanted into a different world, with a different intention.

Personally, the use of photography in my work has meant different things at different stages of my artistic development. When I first began to draw and paint it was a great challenge to try to reproduce photographic likeness, but as I developed, photographs began to suggest things to me, and instead of trying to copy a likeness in a photograph I began to look at the subtle things a photograph might imply
and to look at the psychological implications certain images might evoke, which really weren't apparent to the average viewer who looked at the image as a "matter of fact". It is in the transformation that photographic references have strength for me.

As a young art student I was involved in painting abstractions based on photographs of Baroque paintings. As I worked abstractly, with references from the past, I began to feel a need for a more personal imagery that incorporated both the qualities of contemporary life, and which reflected something very personal to me. This led me to begin working from family album photographs which were selected from hundreds of snapshots in my family's typical collection of photographs. In conjunction with using snapshots from my family album I began working from photographs of the immediate members of my family which I took myself. There was an important change in procedure when I began posing the subjects myself. Instead of choosing a photograph from many, I began to have preconceived ideas about what the images should look like before I took the
photographs. This is a very important point because the photographs then became more personally meaningful things. I was very much involved in my work. Working with the images of the people closest to me seemed to inherently give my work valid content.

Plates Number One and Two were both done from photographs I shot myself. Most of the elements were calculated before the photographs were taken and therefore the resulting images were largely programmed to create certain moods and feelings.

This intense personal imagery became very trying and difficult for me to work with. Because of the very close relationships between me and the subjects in my work (my wife and child, and my mother and father) I became stifled and tight. My methods of applying paint seemed to become too tight and restrictive. As a result I began to search for images that could be developed into more universal themes. In conjunction with this I became very interested in trying to create a sense of animation and movement in figurative form.
I arrived at a new direction by looking at many images (photographs) I had collected for some time. They were images that had some qualities of movement in them initially.

My first involvements with these new ideas were directed toward small studies of groups of people (Plates Three through Seven). These group compositions seemed to create many new and unforeseen problems for me. I began to realize how complex the problems would be when more than one figure was involved in a composition. Trying to create movement with several figures interacting at the same time set up many contradictions. Yet as a result of these small studies I was led into my current direction which is painting individual figures involved in some kind of movement which relate to and interact with an environment of one kind or another: currently, it relates to a figure and an automobile. I have concentrated on this theme because I have found a very exciting relationship between the hard inanimate form of the automobile and the human form. The female form in particular attracted me because of the somewhat erotic implications the images seem to evoke. There is a definite
relationship between the female form and the hard mechanical apparatus of contemporary machines. While I am not sure what the relationship is, I am sure that there is one; and a very important one to be sure.

My three latest paintings (Plates Eight through Ten) were done from photographs I have taken. They were purposely posed to incorporate several elements I thought I wanted. The images could only be planned to a limited point because of color reproduction (which I had no control over since they were printed commercially), and because of the unpredictability involved in shooting figures moving through space at a limited number of shutter/aperature settings while yet obtaining the exact amount of "blur" that I desired.

The results of my experiments with a new approach to theme and content seem to work reasonably well. I hope to extend these ideas into new directions, but I will continue to work with the format of a single figure interacting with mechanical objects or environments until this suggests a new direction to me.
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