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Photography
REBORN
IMAGE MAKING IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Jonathan Lipkin

AVATARS

Today, the very nature of what constitutes a photograph is open to debate. Once, the definition was quite clear: an image created through the photo-mechanical process of exposing film to light, then processing the film to create a photographic print. Creating a photographic image without a subject was simply not possible; although the Photo-Realist painters of the 1960s painstakingly painted canvases that at first glance looked like photographs, closer inspection uncovered their true nature. Today, computer programs are able to create images that appear photographic, although they have no true “subject.” And, because they are composed of the same “stuff” as digital photographs—binary digital information—it is more difficult to distinguish the two. Early attempts at computer modeling were quite crude, but recent advances in hardware and software have been able to create images that are indistinguishable from photographs taken with a camera.

KEITH COTTINGHAM, *UNTITLED (TRIPLE)*, FROM THE SERIES *FICTITIOUS PORTRAITS*, 1993. DIGITALLY CONSTRUCTED PHOTOGRAPH, 46 X 38 INCHES. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

“Though cloaked in photographic reality, the series *Fictitious Portraits* have no actual models; rather, they are Selves who have no reach beyond the two-dimensional. But their very appearance in photographs convinces us to believe that they exist in the world as we do. The artifice in this is laid bare as the more closely the fictive figures are scrutinized, the more they begin to visually deconstruct. They mimic and contradict at once the veracity of photographic reality.”

—Keith Cottingham



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