



THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 16, 2024

MOCA PRESENTS *ORDINARY PEOPLE: PHOTOREALISM AND THE WORK OF ART SINCE 1968*

November 23, 2024–May 4, 2025

MOCA Grand Avenue



Sayre Gomez, *2 Spirits*, 2024, acrylic on canvas, 96 × 144 in. (243.8 × 365.8 cm). Courtesy of the artist, François Ghebaly Gallery, Xavier Hufkens, and Galerie Nagel Draxler. Photo by Jeff McLane.

LOS ANGELES, CA—The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) is pleased to present *Ordinary People: Photorealism and the Work of Art since 1968*, a large-scale exhibition that reconsiders the postwar art movement of photorealism. On view from November 23, 2024 through May 4, 2025, at MOCA Grand Avenue, the exhibition is organized by MOCA Senior Curator Anna Katz with Curatorial Assistant Paula Kroll. This landmark exhibition features more than ninety paintings, drawings, and sculptures by forty-four artists, largely North American, from across generations who have embraced and expanded photorealism’s representational aesthetics and the ethics of its labor-intensive techniques.

Ordinary People recovers the social art history of photorealism through an exploration of its emergence in the United States in the late 1960s, when artists began blatantly and painstakingly replicating photographs by hand on canvas. The movement is often regarded as short-lived and insignificant, but *Ordinary People* positions it as a vital and enduring impetus in art of the past fifty years that constitutes a lasting contribution to contemporary art's engagement with social realities.

While photorealism is often regarded as marking an end—of figuration, of representation, and even of painting at the close of the 1960s—this timely exhibition recasts photorealism as a beginning. Arguing for its continuous presence in contemporary art, it features both canonical and under-recognized photorealists of the 1960s and '70s, such as Robert Bechtle, Vija Celmins, Richard Estes, Audrey Flack, Duane Hanson, and Idelle Weber; reconsiders well-known figures not typically associated with photorealism within photorealist frameworks from John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres to Barkley L. Hendricks, Joan Semmel, and Amy Sherald; and identifies a contemporary reception of photorealism by younger generations of artists, including Gina Beavers, Jennifer J. Lee, Brittany Tucker, and Christine Tien Wang. Baltimore-based artist Cynthia Daignault, Houston- and Los Angeles-based artist Vincent Valdez, and Los Angeles-based artists Sayre Gomez, Alfonso Gonzalez Jr., and Shizu Saldamando have created new, large-scale work specially for the exhibition.

"Photorealism, at its core, is about seeing," said Johanna Burton, The Maurice Marciano Director of MOCA. "It invites us to look closely at the world, to linger on the familiar, and to understand that even the most ordinary moments and the people that inhabit them are worthy of attention. *Ordinary People* reframes photorealism as a movement deeply engaged with the labor of representation both in its artistic techniques and its subject matter."

"*Ordinary People* reexamines a routinely dismissed aspect of art of the 1970s that nonetheless has a forceful presence in art today. While its accessibility has often been held against it, this exhibition takes seriously photorealism's popular appeal, suggesting that it is rooted in the ways photorealists honor the *work* of making art," said Anna Katz, the exhibition's curator. "As a dizzying array of millions of images surrounds us today, exacting, handmade, realistic representation may hardly seem equipped to gain purchase. Yet, photorealism's evident investment of time endows it with a special capacity—a responsibility—to make the signal rise above the noise."

The exhibition examines the representational politics of photorealism in the context of the recent rise of figurative portraiture, considering its key place in the ongoing remedial project to repopulate the museum with pictures of people and places historically excluded or misrepresented. *Ordinary People* further highlights how photorealist artists knowingly employ a seemingly non-confrontational aesthetic to address critical issues, such as war, sexism, and inequity, drawing attention to painful historical events and social experiences that might otherwise be regarded as too difficult to confront or too easy to overlook. Photorealism's conspicuous display of demanding time and meticulous care is especially meaningful in the context of the twenty-first-century image oversaturation. Disrupting the rapid, unrelenting consumption of images that has come to define the attention economy, photorealism offers obdurately handmade objects, affording deep engagement with the visual world around us.

Ordinary People contends that the popular appeal of photorealism is not based in dazzling, virtuosic technique, but rather in its work ethic. It reframes photorealism as a teachable, learnable skill, akin to sign painting, commercial illustration, billboard painting, and tattoo artistry. Citing photorealism's emphasis on labor, the exhibition proposes that photorealism is widely appreciated because it demystifies the creative process and celebrates hard work.

PUBLICATION

The exhibition is accompanied by a 256-page scholarly catalogue co-published by MOCA and DelMonico Books. *Ordinary People: Photorealism and the Work of Art since 1968* is edited with text by Anna Katz and includes contributions from Gabriela Rodriguez-Gomez, Karin G. Oen, Dhyandra Lawson, and Cynthia Daignault. The publication is designed by Jessica Fleischmann of Still Room.

SUPPORT

Ordinary People: Photorealism and the Work of Art since 1968 is organized by Anna Katz, Senior Curator, with Paula Kroll, Curatorial Assistant, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

MOCA PRESENTS *ORDINARY PEOPLE: PHOTOREALISM AND THE WORK OF ART SINCE 1968*

Page 3 of 4

Lead support is provided by The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation and Margaret Morgan and Wesley Phoa.

Major support is provided by the MOCA Projects Council.



Generous support is provided by [arts.gov](https://www.arts.gov), Kathi and Gary Cypres, Tim Disney, Susan and David Gersh, Suzanne and David Johnson, Karyn Kohl, Heather Podesta and Stephen Kessler, Carolyn Clark Powers, Scantland Family, and Terri and Michael Smooke.

Additional support is provided by Karen Hillenburg, Cliff Einstein, Wonmi Kwon and Nancy Kwon Merrihew, Nancy Kwon Merrihew, Laurent and Corrine Opman, Christopher V. Walker, Wonmi Kwon and Nancy Kwon Merrihew in honor of Lillian Lovelace, and Marilyn P. Loesberg.

Support for the exhibition catalogue is provided by Mary and David Martin / MADWORKSHOP.

Exhibitions at MOCA are supported by the MOCA Fund for Exhibitions with generous funding provided by Michael and Zelene Fowler, Jordan S. Goodman + The Goodman Family Foundation, The Earl and Shirley Greif Foundation, and Pamela West.

ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Founded in 1979, MOCA is the defining museum of contemporary art. In a relatively short period of time, MOCA has achieved astonishing growth; a world-class collection of nearly 8,000 objects, international in scope with deep holdings in Los Angeles art; hallmark education programs that are widely emulated; award-winning publications that present original scholarship; groundbreaking monographic, touring, and thematic exhibitions of international repute that survey the art of our time; and cutting-edge engagement with modes of new media production. MOCA is a not-for-profit institution that relies on a variety of funding sources for its activities.

Current:

[Josh Kline: Climate Change](#)

MOCA Grand Avenue

On view through January 5, 2025

[Olafur Eliasson: OPEN](#)

The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

On view through July 5, 2025

[Wonmi's WAREHOUSE Programs](#)

WAREHOUSE at The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA
through November 16, 2024

Upcoming:

[Ordinary People: Photorealism and the Work of Art since 1968](#)

MOCA Grand Avenue

November 23, 2024-May 4, 2025

[MOCA Focus: Ana Segovia](#)

MOCA Grand Avenue

November 23, 2024-May 4, 2025

MOCA PRESENTS *ORDINARY PEOPLE: PHOTOREALISM AND THE WORK OF ART SINCE 1968*

Page 4 of 4

###

MEDIA CONTACTS

Danielle Bias
Chief Communications Officer
dbias@moca.org

Elizabeth Cooke
Cooke PR
elizabeth@cookepr.com