

New Realism Exhibit

By Alfred Frankenstein

The new show at the Oakland Museum bears the slightly painful title "4 Real," but the pain ends there.

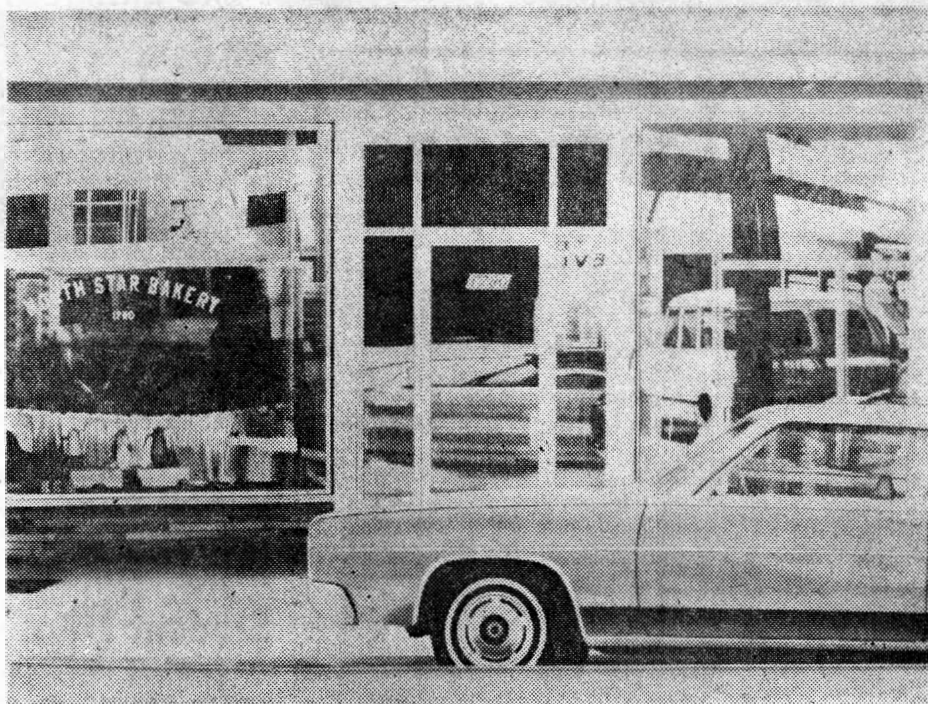
The four painters involved are all devotees of the New Realism, which means they copy photographs, color slides, and color reproductions in magazines on an enormous scale. Or at least three of them do. The fourth, Salvatore Pecoraro, has a formula of his own which doesn't fit the New Realist definition very well and is all the more significant for its individuality.

DIARY

Pecoraro's contribution consists of 365 foot-square panels on which he has painted what George Neubert calls "a diary of skyscapes" for the year 1970. Each panel represents a different day of that year. Some are clear blue, some are full of white clouds, and some indulge in the pyrotechnics of sunset. I seem to recall no night effects, doubtless because according to Neubert, Pecoraro works from color slides, and Kodachrome doesn't do so well in the dark.

All these panels add up to a single work which, if Neubert's catalogue is right, is nine feet high and 52 feet long; therefore, if each panel fills one square foot, the Pecorarian year must contain 468 days. Realism indeed!

Actually, they have placed the Pecoraro panels on either side of the corridor outside the museum's Special Gallery, where the rest of the show is to be seen; consequently it adds up to two big assemblages instead of one. Each panel is done with such sensitivity and delicacy of effect that I, at least, would prefer to see them strung out over the walls as an exhibition of separate pictures; there is something forced about their present



Chris Cross' realistic painting "North Star Bakery"

calendar-like arrangement and each would tell more successfully if it didn't have others so close to it.

ESSENCE

Neubert says "the non-interpretative transfer of the photo image" employed by all four artists "serves to cancel out content as personal expression" and allows "a literalness of subject . . . which is the essence of modernist esthetics." The exhibition seems to disagree with this statement at every point.

Jack Mendenhall's four pictures form an elegy for contemporary taste. They are all of "modernistic" living rooms, dens, and such, with cocktail bars covered in fake leopard skin, floors covered with other kinds of fake furs, lamps of fake stained glass, a stifling oversupply of overstuffed furniture, and so on. One of these paintings is called "Interior for Hieronymus Bosch," and no wonder.

Mendenhall's content is not limited to subject mat-

ter, however. He drives the color of everything just over the line; every passage is a little too bright or a little too dark, a little too red or a little too blue, and every shiny object contains a few too many polished highlights. His lushness is the thinnest of veneers striving desperately to hide an unconcealable bleak pathos.

REFLECTIONS

Chris Cross sets forth the phantasmagoria of the modern urban scene in terms of store windows, automobiles, and the confused, distorted reflections of vehicular traffic in plate glass. He does something similar with

a merry-go-round and something very dissimilar with the quiet patterns and quiet color of a back porch; whatever the subject, he relieves the literalism of his drawing with the soft textures of sprayed paint.

Frank Cyrsky not only magnifies his subjects but blows up Cross' sprayed droplets to an infinity of brushed points. His Indian boy's head fills a wall from floor to ceiling but the image is still cropped very close; by such devices, Neubert reminds us, these artists "reinforce our awareness of the artificiality of their illusionism." Still and all, Cyrsky's most effective

image comes at head-on, stark, and a little inside its frame of an old master. It is a por-

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