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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK  
THE REALIST WORLD

The present boom in photography-based realist painting—which Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst, among others, have been exploiting—gains an



unusually qualified septuagenarian recruit: Malcolm Morley. Forty years ago in New York, the turbulent master, who had dedicated himself to painting when he was a young man in prison for theft in his native England, pretty much invented Photo-Realism, with scintillating views of cruise ships, beach scenes, and a Vermeer. He abjured photography in the early seventies, just as other painters were embracing it, and worked from his own drawings of rural and jungle landscapes, war toys, and island paradises. Morley's new renditions of athletes in action, stock cars colliding, and a collapsed tenement, which are now on view at Sperone Westwater, surprise and please, with bravura force that parallels rather than represents the violence of Sammy Sosa's swing or Dale Earnhardt's fatal crash. The sport pictures are not about sports, unless painting itself can be considered one. As a response to younger dabblers in photographic painting, this show suggests John Wayne remarking to Ricky Nelson, "I'll take it from here."

—Peter Schjeldahl

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