5. APPROPRIATED IMAGE PROJECT

With the advent of photography, our way of viewing and recording the world changed. Till then, painting, drawing, graphic arts had been the primary means of holding and presenting a “vision” While the “death of painting” has been an annual cry since photography’s inception (why need to translate a scene into paint when photography can freeze the actual moment of seeing?), painting has not died. Instead, it has used photography both as a source material and as an impetus to broaden the definition of the possibilities of painting.

The broadened subjects and meanings of painting can be traced through the development of modern and post-modern art. The tie between painting and commercial commodities (Warhol or Allan McCollum), the purity of painting as primary (Reinhardt or Mondrian), the “bad painting” of the 80’s, are all, in some part, reactions to the access, ease and impact of photographic images. These images, whether in advertising, home snapshots, film or TV, are a prevalent part of our reality. It makes sense then that in “painting from life” photographs can serve as subject. In some cases, the still photo has replaced the still-life.

The best paintings from photographic material explore and exploit photos strengths and characteristics instead of using photographs as a crutch to avoid painting from life. These paintings embrace the actuality of the photo, the look, the gloss, the distortion (Paschke, Wojnarowicz, Tansey). They use photography as away of seeing, a way of scrutinizing reality (Chuck Close, Leon Golub). They use photography for its aura, its potential for nostalgia, for its “memory”, for its illusion (Christopher Brown, Gerhard Richter).

For this project, use appropriated images as a starting point for your paintings.

Consider what you want to say through your painting and determine if there are images (and implications associated with images) that will work for your subject.

Consider the role of the image. What does it say beyond its literal information; what does it signify?

For instance:

The Marlborough Man
= cigarettes
= American ideal of the rugged individualist
= market propaganda / manipulation “buy our brand and you will be associated with this ideal.”

You could decide, then, to do a painting that is socio-politically oriented and talk about market manipulation of society. Or, in a very different style, you could do a painting that reveled in the American romantic ideal and explore what this means to you.
William Crow used photographs found in his grandfather’s attic in order to explore his relationship to his family and his identity as a young, gay man. The photos were starting points for paintings that combined images and collaged elements (wire, rusted metal, nuts and bolts). The paintings had the impact of a “scrapbook” and a sense of personal archeology, of looking back to understand the present.