

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

ARTFORUM

“In The Studio: Paintings”

Zoë Lescaze



*Thomas Eakins, William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River, 1876–77, oil on canvas, 20 1/8 x 26 1/8".*

**GAGOSIAN GALLERY | 522 WEST 21ST STREET**

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Studio paintings are seductive. They invite us to enter the sites of creation, extending the tantalizing hope that doing so will demystify the process. Then they thwart our expectations. From Brueghel to Brancusi, Daumier to de Kooning, curator John Elderfield has mined the centuries for artists’ paintings of their ateliers, plucking fifty-odd works from far-flung museums, foundations, and private collections and setting them in the gallery like precious stones. The variety is mesmerizing. When models appear, they range from relaxed and sexy (Henri Matisse) to anguished (Lucian Freud). The rooms themselves can be oases or prisons.

A self-referential playfulness courses throughout: These are the spaces where art is made, not the art itself, yet the rooms become that too. They offer intimate insights, but they also omit and obscure. In several studios, stretched canvases are turned to face walls. In Carl Gustav Carus’s *Das Atelierfenster* (Studio Window), 1823–24, we see the back side of a painting propped in the window. Is the artist hiding it from us? Or showing it off to the world? It feels like a fitting metaphor for the tension between exhibitionism and opacity charging these works.

No matter how stylistically busy or spare, neoclassical or cubist, these images all pulse with a sense of vital necessity. A round table dominates *Pink Summer*, 1975, a large, bubble gum–hued oil painting by Philip Guston. It and most of the objects lying on it are sketchily outlined in red, but half a sandwich, a bunch of brushes, and a watch get more tonal attention. All the artist needs, they seem to say, is food, tools, and time. In the background, a half-obscured head in profile suggests a sphinx sinking into the sand. But these studio paintings are not Ozymandian monuments to vanity, bound for the ash heap of history. Elderfield presents an eloquent argument for their profound and complicated value, fueling their enduring allure.