

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



In the Studio: Photographs

In the Studio: Paintings

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Jacek Malczewski, "Melancholia (Melancholy)" (1890 – 94). Oil on canvas, 54 3/4 × 94 1/2." Muzeum Narodowe w Poznaniu, Poznań. Fundacja Raczyńskich. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery.

Seeing an artist's studio is exciting: what admirer of Caravaggio wouldn't enjoy a glimpse of his workspace, as it is imaginatively reconstructed in Derek Jarman's 1986 film? By going behind the scenes, we learn about the private life of a creative person, in a way that deepens our knowledge of their art. Often, of course, the studio also was and is a gallery, a place for displaying or selling works. This spectacular museum-scale exhibition reveals a great deal about studios through a wide variety of work—it has 150 photographic works by 40 artists uptown, and 50 paintings and works on paper by 40 artists, displayed downtown. There is also a massive two-volume catalogue containing fully illustrated essays by the curators, Peter Galassi and John Elderfield (who were assisted by Anna Page Nadin and Lauren Mahony), which could stand on its own as a substantial art historical contribution. As Elderfield explains in the catalogue, the idea for the show came from David Sylvester's observation that Jeff Koons's studio was like that of Rubens, with lots of assistants. Looking at art's development with reference to the history of studio practice, this exhibition both presents familiar works in an original, suggestively novel context, and draws attention to other little known images, some by unfamiliar artists.

How very various these photographs shown uptown are! You see Josef Sudek looking through (and into) his studio window, a vast accumulation of books and paraphernalia on his desk; outside, a curved tree stands in the garden courtyard, a humble, indeed homely setting for this

ambitious artist. Helmut Newton's "Self-Portrait with Wife and Models, Vogue Studio, Paris" (1981) reveals a nude female model in the foreground while also showing a reflection of the photographer and the legs of a second model in a mirror. The reflected images seem to come from a different world, both because of the clichéd eroticism and simply because the carefully calculated position of the mirror, which in many old master paintings of the studio brings the artist into the picture. Newton is clearly an artist who loves to make high-society photographs. By contrast, Lucas Samaras's two nude portraits of art world friends, David Whitney and Jasper Johns, resolutely refuse any erotic allusions, or any celebration of these men as celebrities. The color photographs, made between 1978 and 1980, show claustrophobic settings even more cluttered than Sudek's studio, scenes reminiscent of a thrift shop.

And there are two very different photographs of Andy Warhol's studio: Richard Avedon's great "Andy Warhol and members of the Factory, 30 October 1969" (1969), in which 12 of the actors and actresses appear, some clothed, others nude, with Warhol at the far corner; and Stephen Shore's "Andy with Mirrored Disco Ball" (1965–67), which shows Warhol alone in the Factory. Warhol, who so needed (or exploited) other people to make his art, ultimately was a lonely person—in that way, Shore's photograph reveals the man behind the myth. Ron Kitaj, by contrast, was a terminally bookish artist, a lover of painted allegories, who lived in the world of old master and early modernist art. Lee Friedlander's "R. B. Kitaj's Studio, London" (1998) nicely complements another Friedlander photograph, "R. B. Kitaj's Studio, Los Angeles" (2001), in which the viewer looks over Kitaj's shoulder as he views a book with reproductions of paintings by Ingres.

Numerous images, including some of the paintings displayed downtown, represent or present the process of art making. As Elderfield observes in his essay, there are two distinctly different depictions of studios. Many paintings, especially most of the pre-modernist pictures, show the artist at work in the studio, in staged scenes not unlike those found in studio photographs. Other works, however, are self-reflexive, more about the act of making, or what Elderfield calls "painting up against the wall." This refers to art designed so that "a painting could itself be thought of as a display wall as well as a representation of one." Best examples include Roy Lichtenstein's "Artist's Studio" (1973), which represents a studio with fragments of paintings after Matisse and Picasso, and some of his own earlier works. The artist is not present in this curiously impersonal image of a studio, as if Lichtenstein's paintings are stand-ins for the artist himself and had a life all on their own, sufficient enough to animate his studio activity.

"Two Palettes in Black with Stovepipe (Dream)" (1963) is an exceptionally strong work by Jim Dine, in which two paintings of enlarged palettes are linked to a stovepipe, which runs out of the painting into a plain black canvas hung on the adjacent wall. If Lichtenstein shows the products of the studio, minus the activity required to make them, Dine shows some of the practical apparatus from his studio, which in this installation comes to constitute the finished, self-sufficient work of art. And there is Jacek Malczewski's strange masterpiece "Melancholy" (1890–94), in which a mob of Polish historical figures imagined by the artist pour out of the painting and spill into the depicted studio, dwarfing the painting itself as well as the artist who sits, at the bottom right, holding a paintbrush. Where Lichtenstein and Dine isolate components of the studio and artist's activity, Malczewski suggests that the process of imagination can far extend beyond the mere physical artifact.

A somewhat similar analysis applies to Diego Rivera's "The Painter's Studio or Lucila and the Judas Dolls" (1954), in which the crowded studio contains a reclining female model, several large dolls, and a papier-mâché dove. This *paloma* alludes to the nickname of his wife, Frida Kahlo, who died the year this painting was made. Here, again, the artist presents his studio as

the site of his imagination, a visually rich setting containing the materials that are waiting to be assembled in his art. In a small photograph in the catalogue, we see Rivera in this scene, though he is absent from the painting.

I have visited studios that were as crowded as Sudak's or Samaras's, and I have known artists who have as many books in the studio as Kitaj. What I ultimately found most challenging, however, were the paintings by Lichtenstein, Dine, Malczewski, Rivers, and some of the other artists which didn't just depict the studio, but offered pictorial presentations of the activity of art making. Photographers show what studios look like, while some painters present images of the creative processes taking place there. This is just one dimension of this marvelous, multi-faceted revisionist account of art history, a reliably generous exhibition which will no doubt enhance our collective experience in as yet unpredictable ways.