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HIDING
MAKING
SHOWING
CREATION

The Studio from Turner to Tacita Dean

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Amsterdam University Press

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PART II

INTRODUCTION

Forms and Functions of the Studio from the Twentieth Century to Today

RACHEL ESNER

If you see yourself as an artist and you function in a studio and you are not a painter, if you don't start out with some canvas, you do all kinds of things – you sit in a chair or pace around. And then the question goes back to what is art? And art is what an artist does, just sitting around in his studio.¹

BRUCE NAUMAN

In 2012, the British artist Damien Hirst complemented his first major retrospective at Tate Modern with a live internet feed to his London studio. Visitors to his personal website were offered a view into a bare working space, containing nothing but a round piece of wood or canvas, painted black, balanced on a set of legs; a couple of chairs; and several trolleys containing materials.² On the wall directly opposite the main webcam hung a large painting of one of Hirst's colorful trademark skulls. The artist himself was nowhere to be seen; instead, two assistants, working systematically but at a rather relaxed pace, covered the round canvas with small bits of shaped metal and paint in a regular, somewhat Orientalizing pattern. A second webcam, hung from the ceiling, allowed the viewer to track their progress. But what was it we actually saw? Not the artist at work, but his idea, his *concept*, carried out by others. Hirst himself was entirely absent, represented only by his monumental finished painting, which, with its brilliant bursts of neon yellows, blues and pinks, stood out boldly against the white wall. The public's desire for knowledge of the studio and its go-

ings on is apparently undiminished, and hiding making – even as it seems to be on display – while showing creation seems to be as actual a strategy today as it ever was in the past.

Central to the following essays is the question of the nature, function and meaning of the studio for artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In how far does it differ from the studio of the nineteenth century? What new roles and connotations has it acquired over the course of the past hundred years? And, above all, what part has been played by the hiding/showing dialectic that forms the leit-motif of this volume?

The “studio *topoi*” outlined by Sandra Kisters in her introduction to the first section and their relation to the oscillating tensions of hiding making and showing creation have remained relevant to artists in the modern and contemporary periods, as the essays in Part II demonstrate. The notion that thinking takes precedence over making – that the mind is privileged over the hand – remains the foil against which both the work of art and the image of the artist are defined. The studio itself, if not as a workspace then at least as a concept, remains a determining factor, even for those who claim to undermine its discourse or leave it behind altogether.

TWENTIETH-CENTURY AFTERLIFE

The twentieth century boasts many a studio picture that continues to conform to the long-standing notion of the artist’s place of work as the private domain of the autonomous master. Paintings such as Henri Matisse’s *The Red Studio* (1911) or Pablo Picasso’s *Studio with Plaster Head* (1925) and *Artist and Model* (1928), or even the latter’s series of depictions of his studio *La Californie* from the mid-1950s, give the viewer a classic image of the studio space. Present are all the ingredients needed for identification of the painter, his artistic leanings, his links with the past and desires for the future. His traditional tools – pencils, brushes, easel, canvas, palette, plaster casts – are more or less prominently on view; there is a gallery of his work on display (finished or in progress – the latter above all a sign of ongoing creative potential³); there is no link with the outside world and the

artist himself is (still) an isolated genius struggling to give form to his thoughts and ideas.

Matisse and Picasso provide quintessential examples for the continuing relevance of notions of hiding making while consciously displaying one's creativity and artistic persona. Brassai's famous series of photographs of Matisse, taken in 1939 and later published in the photo-book *The Artists of My Life* (1982),⁴ seem at first to be designed to provide insight into the artist's working process. Tellingly, however, the first image we see shows Matisse not at work, but "deep in concentration"⁵ (fig. 1), gazing at something in the studio to which we as viewers have no access. In the following photographs, we see Matisse seated, pencil and sketchbook in hand, his nude model before him; however, either his drawing hand or the paper are carefully hidden from view, or, if the paper is exposed, it is entirely blank or placed at such an angle that whatever is on it remains invisible for us.

Similarly, Gjon Mili's photographs of Picasso (1949) cast the artist as a god-like ("let there be light") – and speedy – magician, as the images appear to the viewer in a flash. Attempting to retrace the process by which these light-drawings have been made, we are confronted instead with the concentrated face of the artist, looming up from the same total darkness out of which, without any point of reference, these perfectly legible pictures have emerged. It is thus not making that these photographs document, but rather the artist's imaginative and creative prowess.⁶ Likewise, while holding out the promise of knowledge and transparency – the title sequence even goes so far as to claim that to understand what goes on in the artist's mind, one need only follow his hand – Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Le mystère Picasso* (1955) permits us to witness the design, composition, destruction and recreation of *The Beach at La Galoupe* but provides no insight into the painter's motivations. Instead, Picasso appears to be possessed by some unseen power that is responsible for both his creative and destructive acts, so that once again a *gap* is suggested between conception and execution; the artist and his "genius" remain a mystery.⁷ While the films of Hans Cürlis in the early 1920s had made a sincere attempt to investigate and indeed show the creative process, Clouzot and popular publications like *Life* – where the Mili photographs were first published⁸ – or *Art News*, with its series "[X] Paints a Picture" (in



FIG. 1 Brassai, Matisse in his studio, c. 1939, Private collection. © Estate Brassai – RMN-Grand Palais/Michèle Bellot

the 1950s devoted to the “heroic” artists of the New York School),⁹ perpetuated the myth of the ingenious artist, alone in his studio and in eternal struggle with himself.¹⁰ The culmination of such mystifying tendencies may be seen in the photographs and films Hans Namuth made of Jackson Pollock, which, although they do provide insight into

his painting technique, came to stand in the popular and art-historical imagination for the heroic dimension of Pollock's personality and for the artist as the quintessential "action" painter. A final example is the publication of Alexander Liberman's photo-book *The Artist in his Studio*, which appeared in 1960 – interestingly, just at the moment when artists were beginning to reject both this image and the studio itself.

NEW MODELS, OLD MYTHS

At the same time this high-Romantic image of the artist and the studio continued to be propagated, new models were also being developed – models that, however, still relied to varying degrees and in various ways on the artistic *topoi* developed over the centuries. From the 1920s onward we see the studio take on different guises and its role in the creative process become more complex. The hiding/showing dialectic takes on new dimensions, while nonetheless remaining the touchstone of artistic identity. These new models interact and overlap, creating, at least in some cases, an alternative understanding of the studio and of the artist.

THE STUDIO AS LABORATORY

The association of artists with magicians and art-making with magic, perhaps even a form of alchemy, is, as Kris and Kurz have pointed out, an ancient *topos*.¹¹ In general, this link appears to have derived from the perceived ability of the artist to create the illusion of life in his works. Coupled with the notion of the studio as *studiolo*, a place of (private) study set apart from the hustle and bustle of the traditional workshop,¹² there is a strong argument for understanding the artist's studio as a kind of laboratory, a space of experimentation as well as (or even: rather than) personal expression. In the early twentieth century, a number of avant-garde artists both perceived and used their studios in exactly this way. One of the first to do so was Marcel Duchamp, as Frank Reijnders discusses in his contribution: for Duchamp, the

everyday objects in his New York studio were not works of art, nor even at this stage ready-mades, but rather aesthetically indifferent material, instruments useful for his research into the fourth dimension.¹³ The choice of prefabricated objects obviously eliminates the question of making altogether, while the artist himself disappears behind the façade of the scientist or researcher. Somewhat later, however, both manage to *reappear* in the famous *Boîte-en-valise* (1935–1941): the ready-mades in the form of miniature porcelain reproductions, the studio itself in the form of retouched photographs, and the artist as the singular creator of this autobiographical collection.

Two of the most important figures of the De Stijl movement also employed their studios in a similar fashion. Piet Mondrian's studio at 26, rue du Départ in Paris, also discussed by Reijnders, was as much a demonstration of his Neo-plasticist principles as the pictures themselves, and – thanks to the mobility of the paintings, pieces of colored cardboard, furnishings and easels – could be continually transformed, creating ever-new compositions in space as well as in oil on canvas. Paul Delbo's photographs, published in *Internationale Revue OIO* in 1927, however, show us not the studio's experimental character, but the studio as a finished work of art and a triumphant artistic manifesto.

Theo van Doesburg also treated his studio as a laboratory, as demonstrated by Matthias Noell. His investigations into new ways of depicting objects and space are carefully documented in a number of photographs of his early studios, these images themselves then serving as research tools and building blocks for the next phase of experimentation. The artist here visualizes and documents his thinking process, if not his actual making. The photographs of his last studio, in Meudon, by contrast, must be read as manifestos of the ultimate failure of his ten-year effort to unite painting and architecture. Here, one might say, the hiding/showing dichotomy is reversed.

Although never stated as such, there can be no doubt that the Surrealists saw their studios as fulfilling an experimental function – one need only think of the elaborate games of *cadavre esquisse* played in them – and, in the immediate postwar period, it was the barn-like space of Jackson Pollock's studio that propelled him towards painting with the canvas on the floor. Francis Bacon, however, was explicit in

his understanding of his extremely messy studio as a catalyst to his work, stating “chaos breeds images to me.”¹⁴

That some contemporary artists view their studios in a similar fashion is demonstrated by Sarah de Rijcke. Although created by a professional photographer rather than the artists themselves, the documentation of the studios of residents at Amsterdam’s Rijksakademie are viewed by the subjects not as fixed records, but rather as active interfaces that mediate between past, present and future work. As with Van Doesburg, the photographs provide new resources and materials, facilitating ways of ordering and arranging information. While, following the stipulations of the artists themselves, revealing little of the creative process, they nonetheless show how the studio can be a catalyst to production, rather than a showcase for the artist as autonomous individual. The notion of the studio as a laboratory for individual or collective projects has also been promoted by museums and exhibition spaces, which in recent years have offered artists locales for research of varying sorts, ranging from the Royal Academy’s Artists’ Laboratory series to the City of Dreams by the British artists’ collective Stanza (2010)¹⁵ to Thomas Hirschhorn’s social experiments in the suburbs.

THE STUDIO AS STAGE

The studio as the stage of self-realization and self-presentation is more or less inherent in every self-portrait in which the artist appears in his working environment, from Rogier van der Weyden’s *Saint Lucas Painting the Madonna* (1439) through Rembrandt’s *Self-Portrait in the Studio* (1626–28) to Courbet’s *The Artist’s Studio* (1855). The hiding making/showing creation dialectic is clearly an essential ingredient of such images, made manifest to various degrees and in differing forms as the centuries progress. The treatment of this trope in modern and contemporary art, in particular the ways in which it has been used for the expression of artistic identity, exhibits elements of continuity with the past, but also seems at times to challenge, if not to entirely overturn, more traditional notions of artistic activity and the possibilities for its representation.

The self-consciousness with which modern artists have approached the staging of their persona and work in the studio and their efforts to retain control over their image as it enters the public domain are legend. Classic examples include August Rodin as he worked together with Edward Steichen, or Francis Bacon and the many photographers and filmmakers who attempted to document his studio and his painting practice, instances where there can be no doubt that the masking of making and the demonstration of artistic genius were paramount – in the case of Bacon undoubtedly despite the best efforts of those who visited him.¹⁶ Notwithstanding the fact that Constantin Brancusi's studios appears, both in his own photographs and those of others, to be purely a working space – it is messy, dusty, apparently full of tools and materials – closer inspection reveals the incredible care with which the (mostly finished) sculptures have been staged. The artist himself, when he appears, sits calmly, his hands idle; in one instance, he poses with an enormous saw and a block of marble, but even here the promise of “showing making” turns out to be an illusion: in order to actually operate the saw, two men would have been required, so that once again it is the individual and heroic artist who comes to the fore (fig. 2).¹⁷ Although one might argue that where the creative act is deliberately staged as a public event – as in the cases of Georges Mathieu in the 1950s and Yves Klein in the 1960s – process is finally revealed,¹⁸ both the process itself and the artist, who is here a kind of impresario, are nonetheless fetishized.

The studio has also, however, become the stage for what, at least at first glance, appears to be a resounding critique of just these notions of art, art-making and the artist. Despite its alleged dismissal by conceptual, land and performance artists, since the 1960s the studio has been the arena for a critical inquiry into artistic identity, whereby hiding and showing again play a crucial role. Bruce Nauman's early studio films, the subject of Eric de Bruyn's essay, for example, are as much about failure – of the body, of the Romantic notion of the artist, of tradition and traditional art-making – as anything else. By exposing his artistic practice in this manner, Nauman also unmask the long-standing ideology of the studio as the artist's comfortable *habitus* and the artist as someone endowed with special skills, whether manual *or* mental. As De Bruyn puts it: “The studio has become



FIG. 2 Constantin Brancusi, Brancusi working on the *Colonne sans fin*, c. 1924–25, Paris, Musée national d'Art moderne-Centre Georges Pompidou. © Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Adam Rzepka

spectacle: showing has trumped hiding.” What this means for the status of the artist remains unclear, but the films in any case clearly map a moment of crisis on several fronts.

It would seem, however, that this unambiguous reversal of the hiding/showing paradigm is highly unusual. Following in Nauman’s footsteps, Matthew Barney sought to undermine his manual facility by placing various physical limitations on himself in his series of studio performances entitled *Drawing Restraint*, executed in different media between 1987 and 2007. This disciplining of artistic labor seems initially to divest the act of creation of its magical properties: the artist is no longer a thinker, but a doer, and the studio no longer a *studiolo* but a gym. Nonetheless, while “making” seems to be the subject, what is actually being promoted is the creative act itself, here the result of an abstract but nonetheless highly personalized artistic force. The heroic (male) artist thus remains central.¹⁹ Similarly, while Paul McCarthy’s *Painter* of 1995 ostensibly challenges all aspects of

the studio and the myth of the artist as transcendent genius, revealing both masculinity and artistic identity to be inherently unstable, the relentless self-referencing of both the video and McCarthy's other work around the subject of the studio – most notably *The Box* (1995) – serves to reinstate the traditional function of the romantic *atelier* as symbolic and representative space.²⁰

THE STUDIO AS A WORK OF ART

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the studio has functioned as more than a workspace; very often it has been transformed into a – at times autonomous – work of art in itself. It seems that it was particularly at the moment when artists began both to criticize the traditional studio and, allegedly, to leave it behind – declaring with Daniel Buren that the studio was where the artist found himself at any given moment²¹ – that the studio and the work of art came more and more to coincide. In such works, the difference between the private domain of the studio and the public domain of exhibition is often erased. The studio as a site of production becomes itself an object of display, with interesting consequences for the hiding/showing paradigm.

The studio as work of art and as exhibition can overlap in many ways, some more critical than others. Designed to help her overcome her six-year “painter's block,” Tracey Emin's 1996 studio performance in Galleri Andreas Brändström in Stockholm ostensibly promised the revelation of practice and a deconstruction of the myth of the artist. For two weeks, visitors to the gallery could observe Emin through a series of fish-eye lenses fixed to the wall that separated the studio from the gallery space; they watched as she engaged in various activities – from talking on the phone to taking up poses reminiscent of her male predecessors to painting in the nude. The voyeuristic aspect and the artist's relentless focus on herself made the work less a parody of the traditional trope of the studio as the isolated sanctuary of artistic genius than a restitution and, ultimately, appropriation of it. Similarly, Rirkrit Tiravanija's *Tomorrow is Another Day* (1996) – a recreation of his New York working and living space – opens up the studio to the everyday and the public gaze, but in the end reveals

nothing but the artist at its heart, who styles himself here (and elsewhere) not only as magical master-chef but as a kind of savior and bringer of social cohesion.

It was in 1968 that Marcel Broodthaers first transformed his studio on rue de la Pépinière in Brussels into a “museum”; the *Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* would eventually encompass twelve “sections,” appearing over the course of several years at different locations.²² Like other conceptual artists of his generation, Broodthaers’ aim here was to demonstrate that the work of art only comes into being in the public sphere and in the context of highly specified group relations. One of the museum’s incarnations was the *Section Cinéma*, an ever-changing installation of the artist’s working space at Burgplatz 12 in Düsseldorf, which functioned at the same time as an open-ended exhibition. What was shown here was not a reified, autonomous “work of art,” but rather creation’s constitution in the social process of museum and exhibition display. Something similar was accomplished in the artist’s *Salle Blanche* of 1975 (fig. 3), a “reconstruction” of his rue de la Pépinière studio as a museum object, which simultaneously undermined its own mythic status through artistic clichés stenciled onto the walls and photographic reproductions of the studio’s furnishings. As Beatrice von Bismarck shows, Tacita Dean’s *Section Cinema (Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)* (2002), which “documents” Burgplatz 12 as it is today, extends Broodthaers’ strategy to include the formation of the artist as author and, indeed, as a celebrated figure of art history. As she records what is left of Broodthaers’ activities – fetishizing the remnants of making – it becomes clear that what is here being enacted is the process of recognition that takes place within art historical discourse. As von Bismarck writes, in Dean’s work, “Hiding the artistic working processes here makes the processes of the production of the artist even more visible.”

As the quotation from Bruce Nauman cited as an epigraph to this introduction indicates, uncertainty is the condition of the artist after Duchamp – above all, uncertainty about what to do with oneself in the studio and therefore uncertainty about one’s artistic identity. It is thus not surprising that Nauman continues to seek inspiration in the studio itself, with all its myriad connotations, most recently in his six-hour-long video *Mapping the Studio I* (Fat Chance John Cage), of 2001.



FIG. 3 Marcel Broodthaers, *La Salle blanche*, 1975, Paris, Musée national d'Art moderne- Centre Georges Pompidou. © Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/All rights reserved

Drawing on the centuries-old tradition of the empty studio as a form of self-portraiture,²³ which posits an intimate connection between the artist's self and the studio space, the studio here becomes the work of art and, simultaneously, as if by magic, its own author. Nauman may be absent, but his studio is alive, not just with mice and a cat, but with the artist's own traces – the minimal shifts in the objects in the studio over the course of the video – so that the space comes to stand for him as the creating subject. Acknowledging the dilemma of the modern

artist, Nauman also makes it the foundation of his practice; in so doing, he of course once again reinstates the myth of the artist as genius or magician, only, however, to undermine it again almost instantly through the irony of his imagery.

A related, but also finally rather different answer to the identity crisis that has plagued artists since at least the 1960s, is offered in the work of Gregor Schneider, discussed in the contribution by Wouter Davidts. Schneider's *House ur*, an obsessive and ongoing replication and transformation of the German artist's living and working space, is also an exploration of the question of "inspiration" (what to do with oneself in the studio) and the anxiety caused by the lack of self-evidence in contemporary artistic practice. While Nauman accepts the consequences of the post-medium condition that condemns artists to nothing but perpetual reflection on their own doings, however, Schneider opts for radical action. His answer to the uncertainty of the modern artist, his not knowing "what to do," Davidts writes, is to elevate doing to a higher, if somewhat neurotic, form of thinking. Schneider is motivated by a desire for results and a kind of Protestant work ethic – making for making's sake. The artist is a doer, a deranged handyman, and no longer Balzac's mediator, the man who produces masterpieces without seeming to be occupied.

As the essays in this section show, throughout the twentieth century, and even into the so-called post-studio era, the studio, with its many connotations, tropes and *topoi*, has remained the foil with and against which artists have thought through questions of production and identity. The paradigmatic issue of the relationship between thinking and making, and what role these should play in creation and (self-)presentation, thus remains relevant to this day.

NOTES

- 1 Coosje van Bruggen, *Bruce Nauman* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1988), 14.
- 2 See <http://www.damienhirst.com/live-feed>. (Accessed 6 April 2012).
- 3 Beatrice von Bismarck, "Künstlerräume und Künstlerbilder. Zur Intimität des

- ausgestellten Ateliers," in: Sabine Schulze (ed.), *Innenleben. Die Kunst des Interieurs: Vermeer bis Kabakow*, exh. cat. (Frankfurt a.M.: Städelsches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie, 1998), 318.
- 4 Brassai, *The Artists of My Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 129–133.
- 5 The caption to the image on p. 139 reads: "Deep in concentration in his studio. (1939)."
- 6 Michael Klant, *Künstler bei der Arbeit, von Fotografen gesehen* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz Verlag, 1995), 166.
- 7 Bismarck 1998, 319.
- 8 *Life Magazine*, 30 January 1950.
- 9 See Caroline A. Jones, *Machine in the Studio. Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 51–52.
- 10 Jones 1996, 1–59.
- 11 Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist. A Historical Experiment* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1979), 61–90.
- 12 Michael Cole and Mary Pardo (eds.), *Inventions of the Studio. Renaissance to Romanticism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).
- 13 See also Herbert Molderings, "Nicht die Objekte zählen, sondern die Experimente. Marcel Duchamps New Yorker Atelier als Wahrnehmungslabor," in: Michael Diers and Monika Wagner (eds.), *Topos Atelier. Werkstatt und Wissensform* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2010), 21–44.
- 14 See Sandra Kisters, "Orde in de chaos. Het atelier van Francis Bacon," *Kunstlicht* 28/2–3 (2007) 14–18. Bacon made similar statements in numerous interviews, the most important being David Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 190.
- 15 See <http://www.stanza.co.uk/laboratory>; <http://www.royalacademy.org.uk/exhibitions/artists-laboratory>. (Accessed April 6 2012).
- 16 On Rodin and Bacon see, most recently, Sandra Kisters, *Leven als een kunstenaar. Invloeden op de beeldvorming van moderne kunstenaars* (Ph.D. diss. VU University, Amsterdam, 2010), chapters 8 and 10.
- 17 On Brancusi's studio and the photographs see Marielle Tabart, *L'Atelier Brancusi*, exh. cat. (Paris: Center Pompidou, 1997); Marielle Tabart (ed.), *Brancusi Photographe*, exh. cat. (Paris: Center Pompidou, 1977); Elizabeth Brown, *Brancusi photographs Brancusi* (London: Assouline, 1995).
- 18 See Monika Wagner, "Der kreative Akt als öffentliches Ereignis," in: Wagner and Diers 2010, 45–57.
- 19 Julia Gelshorn, "Creation, Recreation, Procreation. Matthew Barney, Martin Kippenberger, Jason Rhoades, and Paul McCarthy," in: Wouter Davidts and Kim Paice (eds.), *The Fall of the Studio. Artists at Work* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2009), 142–147.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 154–159.
- 21 Daniel Buren, "Entretien avec Phyllis Rozenzweig," in: Jean-Marc Poinot (ed.), *Les écrits* vol. 3 (Bordeaux: Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux, 1991) 358. See also

Wouter Davidts, "My Studio is the Place where I am (Working)," in: Davidts and Paice 2009, 63–81.

22 Jürgen Harten and Peter-Klaus Schuster (eds.), *Marcel Broodthaers. Cinéma*, exh. cat. (Düsseldorf: Kunsthalle Düsseldorf/Berlin: Nationalgalerie im Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, 1997), 132–172; Rachel Haidu, *The Absence of Work. Marcel Broodthaers, 1964–1976* (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 2010), 163–209; Benjamin Buchloh, "The Museum Fictions of Marcel Broodthaers," in: A.A. Bronson and Peggy Gale (eds.) *Museums by Artists* (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1983), 39–56; Douglas Crimp: "This is Not a Museum of Art," in: *Marcel Broodthaers*, exh. cat. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center/New York: Rizzoli 1989), 71–92.

23 See Rachel Esner, "Presence in Absence. The Empty Studio as Self-Portrait," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 56/2 (2011) 241–262.