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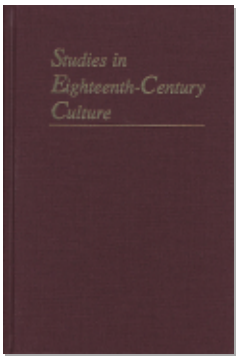

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Panel Introduction: Inside the Artist's Studio

HEATHER McPHERSON

Over the past decade, scholars have emphasized the cultural and material history of the artist's studio as a distinctive creative space and a locus of artistic identity.[1] Although the term *studio* in the modern sense entered the lexicon in the nineteenth century, its origins as a concept and as a subject for art can be traced to the Renaissance. The invention of the studio was linked to broader historical and cultural shifts, in particular the recognition of art as a creative rather than a mechanical practice and a growing preoccupation with the intellect and imagination of the artist. The particular fascination of the studio lies in its double existence as both an actual and an imagined space that was emblematic of status and taste and intimately linked with artistic identity, functioning at times as a refractive self-portrait. Although the significance of the studio in the seventeenth century has been examined by scholars such as Svetlana Alpers and H. Perry Chapman, the long eighteenth century, a pivotal period in the rise of academies and the professionalization of artists, in which exhibition culture, art criticism, and the modern art market emerged, and new categories of painting and printmaking came to the fore, has been largely overlooked.[2] The essays that follow address that lacuna by contextualizing the studio as a multi-faceted site of artistic training, experimentation, display, and social and financial exchange, blurring the lines between public and private space as well as between art and commerce.

From an interdisciplinary, historically-grounded perspective, the essays shed new light on the central role of the studio in forging and contesting artistic identity in Italy and Britain.

The first essay transports us to Angelica Kauffman's spacious, well-equipped studio in Rome where she received distinguished Grand Tourists such as Emperor Joseph II of Austria. Like other celebrity artists, her studio was a social space for entertaining guests as well as a professional working space for producing portraits and history paintings. The detailed inventory and her account book provide precious documentation about how her state-of-the art studio functioned and about the materials and tools she used, including life-size mannequins ordered from Paris. In addition to the large painting studio located on the second floor and an adjacent room for storing paintings, there were smaller workspaces on the mezzanine level; for example, a small studio with an easel and casts of antique statues and other rooms for storing equipment and antique fragments. Kauffman seems to have used the small studio to formulate ideas, make sketches, and meet informally with friends and clients. As the essay demonstrates, Kauffman's studio was a multi-purpose space equipped to handle all aspects of artistic production. It also underscores the studio's cosmopolitan dimension and its key role as an emblem of artistic identity and social status.

The second essay offers a richly contextualized reading of George Morland's last self-portrait, *The Artist in His Studio with His Man Gibbs* (1802–03), which gives unusual importance to the setting. Transforming the Old Master cliché of the learned artist in his studio into self-mocking parody, Morland confronts the viewer with an idiosyncratic image of destitution and squalor, conflating his art with his dissolute lifestyle and diminishing the high seriousness of art. The author argues that Morland's self-portraiture became a crucial site for constructing a new kind of artistic identity in Britain—that of the starving bohemian artist—paralleling depictions of bohemian writers. Through comic low-life tropes and allusions to his rural subjects, notably pigs, he invents a distinctly modern image of the studio as a platform for asserting his originality and creating his own mythology; these images speak to contemporary notions about art as the expression of the artist's unique personality and about the bleak social and economic realities of art production in the highly competitive London art market, underscoring the precariousness of the artistic profession.

Taken together, these illuminating studies of the evolving conditions of artistic creation, sociability, and lifestyle, and the fluid perception of the artist in the long eighteenth century, highlight the central role the studio continued to play. It was both a physical space for producing and displaying art and a broader cultural topos that was closely intertwined with the image of the

artist and the tensions between academic ideals and the rough and tumble commercial art world.

NOTES

1. On the history of the studio, see Michael Cole and Mary Pardo, eds. *Inventions of the Studio, Renaissance to Romanticism* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2005); Svetlana Alpers, *The Vexations of Art: Velázquez and Others* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2005). On the interface between experimental painting practices and alchemy, see Matthew C. Hunter, "Joshua Reynolds's 'Nice Chymistry:' Action and Accident in the 1770s," *Art Bulletin* 97 (2015): 58–76.

2. Sarah Monks, John Barrell, and Mark Hallett, eds. *Living with the Royal Academy: Artistic Ideals and Experiences in England, 1768–1848* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013) is a notable exception.