

Inside the Painter's Studio

Joe Fig

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"Inspiration is for amateurs. The rest of us just show up and get to work."

Chuck Close

Inside an art gallery, it is easy to forget that the paintings there are the end products of a process involving not only creative inspiration, but also plenty of physical and logistical details. It is these "cruder," more mundane aspects of a painter's daily routine that motivated Brooklyn artist Joe Fig to embark almost ten years ago on a highly unorthodox, multilayered exploration of the working life of the professional artist. Determined to ground his research in the physical world, Fig began constructing a series of diorama-like miniature reproductions of the studios of modern art's most legendary painters, such as Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning. A desire for firsthand references led Fig to approach contemporary artists for access to their studios. Armed with a camera and a self-made "Artist's Questionnaire," Fig began a journey through the workspaces of some of today's most exciting contemporary artists.

Inside the Painter's Studio collects twenty-four remarkable artist interviews, as well as exclusive visual documentation of their studios. Featured artists were asked a wide range of questions about their day-to-day creative life, covering everything from how they organize their studios to what painting tools they prefer. Artists open up about how they set a creative mood, how they choose titles, and even whether they sit or stand to contemplate their work. Also included are a selection of Fig's meticulously detailed miniatures. In this context Fig's diminutive sculpturesreproducing minutiae of the studio, from paint-tube labels and paint splatters on the floor to the surface texture of canvasesbecome part of a fascinating new form of portraiture as diorama. *Inside the Painter's Studio* offers a rare look into the self-made universe of the artist's studio. *Inside the Painter's Studio* features interviews with Gregory Amenoff, Ross Bleckner, Chuck Close, Will Cotton, Inka Essenhigh, Eric Fischl, Barnaby Furnas, April Gornik, Jane Hammond, Mary Heilmann, Bill Jensen, Ryan McGinness, Julie Mehretu, Malcolm Morley, Steve Mumford, Philip Pearlstein, Matthew Ritchie, Alexis Rockman, Dana Schutz, James Siena, Amy Sillman, Joan Snyder, Billy Sullivan, and Fred Tomaselli.

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
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From Reader Review Inside the Painter's Studio for online ebook

Enid says

I loved this. Fig asks each painter the same questions--some are what you'd expect, although most are questions that are not what one would expect, but are exactly what another painter would like to hear about: do you work in silence or do you listen to something? Do you contemplate you work standing up or sitting down? Do you clean your studio, etc. Reading these conversations got me thinking about my own work.

Gerald Thomson says

A very fascinating, inside look at 24 artists, including Chuck Close, Eric Fischl and Philip Pearlstein. Fig uses a question and answer format to find out about the artist's background, techniques and advice. Fig asks basically the same questions of all of the artists, which caused him not to pursue some intriguing lines of questioning that I, as the reader, really wanted to know more about. However, on occasion, the author would deviate from his script and then the conversation was that much more interesting. On the whole this is a wonderful look at the personalities and work habits of some of today's established artists.

Kim says

So inspiring and so practical!

The author (also an artist) brings his sensibilities to a questionnaire that is verbally completed with a variety of NY based highly successful artists. Questions about the pace of their day, advice for beginners, the history of the objects in their studio, their processes and tools.

A must read, seriously, for painters. If anything, you will find camaraderie in knowing your struggles are the same as theirs.

Philippe says

Lately lots of books have been published that provide mere mortals a peek into the boiler room of truly creative people. In that pack this book stands out although perhaps not in a totally convincing way. It was put together by Joe Fig who is a visual artist himself. Fig specializes in building exceedingly detailed miniature models of fellow artists' studios. Research is an important part of his creative process. He visits colleagues' studios and documents their working routines. This book is a collection of transcripts of these visits and conversations with painters in the wider New York area. I didn't know most of the artists with exception of a few big names.

What is distinctive is the very practical nature of Fig's interests. What paints do his interlocutors use? How late do they come to the studio? Why does the painting table look the way it does? Do they listen to music

while working? Do they have a favorite color? How often do they clean their studio and how does that affect their work? Where do they stand to contemplate a picture they're working on? These are humdrum questions that on the whole evoke humdrum responses. That's exactly the main insight emerging from these conversations: at first glance the life of an artist is in many ways as brutally monotonous as that of many office workers. One all-important difference is the feeling of vocation and the level of commitment that goes with it. And the practical details do matter. Because the process of artistic creation is, as a rule, not fueled by divine inspiration but by a relentless routine of exploration and experimentation. Artists are constantly pushing boundaries put in a very down to earth sort of way. Ross Bleckner, one of the interviewees, puts it like this: „The operative metaphor for me is that I am a scientist in a lab, on the verge of discovering something. Or I am just a hound sniffing around to catch the scent. (...) I literally don't remember how I painted a painting, and I'm forced to move ahead ... move forward or move somewhere else? I can write the process down, I can keep the painting, I can make formulas, etcetera, and two weeks later not know how to use the same thing in exactly the same way. It always fascinates me. I try to do it, to see if I can duplicate it. But there is always some mutation.” So one day they may consider a painting to be finished only to change their mind next time they come into the studio. Messing around with materials, stuff is important in detecting new angles on their work. And just being patient, keeping things in suspension. Amy Sillman: „... there's one painting that is just starting out, that's kind of fresh. And one horrible midstream one that doesn't know what it's trying to do. Then there's one that might be done that's sort of sitting there, soaking up the vibe.”

At the end of each encounter Fig moves away from the practical details and asks his interlocutors for their personal motto and the kind of advice they would give a young artist that is just starting out. That's when things get a bit blander. Most artists like to talk about their methods but they're not into big ideas. So it usually boils down to something like ‚be sociable’, ‚be committed’, ‚have a sense of urgency’ etc. On the whole that part of the conversations is not very insightful.

Conversations vary in length. Some artists clearly relish the opportunity to talk about their way of working, others are less forthcoming. Fig inserts pictures of the actual studio locations into the transcripts which is a great help in visualizing what the artists are talking about. Each interview is preceded by a full-page picture of the model that Fig made of the studio. The models are so lifelike that it took me a while to grasp that they were not pictures taken in real-life situations. At the end of the book Fig includes a fictional interview with himself. It feels very contrived and should have been omitted.

It's hard to rate this book. It's down to earth approach is refreshing up to a point. But after a while the chatter about paints and tables starts to become slightly wearisome. The fact that Fig relies on the same set of questions throughout reinforces this impression. It's probably not a tome to read through cover to cover. Rather a night table book to dip into once in a while. I'd give it 3,5 stars rounding up to 4.

Bridgette Guerzon Mills says

I really enjoyed this book as it gives a glimpse into the working lives of professional artists in and around NYC. This is not a technical book. It is a book by an artist interviewing other visual artists about how their studios are set up, what their day to day work day is like, how one goes about titling a painting, etc. I particularly liked the last two questions he asked every artist- do you live by a certain motto and what advice would you give to a young artist.

Nan says

Voyeurism-- what can I say. As a painter, a new painter, I always wonder what other artists day to day process is. This book was quite fascinating for it asks the same set of questions to a variety of artists so you get a feel for their creative world. Sometimes the ego's and desire for privacy makes the book just fall short but it still pulls you in. My favorite question asked was to tell the story of their painting table -- interesting.

John Teehan says

The checklist-style of interviewing was a little limiting and sometimes ran afoul of an artist's approach to process, but overall it's a very enjoyable and worthwhile book if for no other reason than to present the variety in workspaces employed by many talented artists. It's rather NY-centric. I'd like to see a version that covers artists from various parts of the country--or even the world.

The "mixed media" 3-d dioramas of the various studios are kind of neat. Some of the pictures are startlingly lifelike. The photographs of the actual studios make the book.

Brian says

For those interested in the intricacies not only of contemporary painting, but of a contemporary painting practice, there is no book quite like this. Joe Fig (whose weirdly completist miniature models of artist spaces appear throughout the texts) devises an unlikely interview to be delivered to each artist in the book, with questions ranging from, "When contemplating your work, do you sit or stand?" or "What time do you wake up in the morning?" I am constantly telling my students not to look at other artist's resumes for a magic formula -- and although you could argue that this book feeds into that, it's so damn interesting. If you're a nerd, that is.

Harry says

This book features some of my favorite contemporary artists. I thought it might be interesting to hear what they have to say, and that the technical slant of this book would reveal interesting techniques.

Unfortunately, every painter in the book is given pretty much the same questionnaire about their studio ("How long have you have your painting table?") and there aren't a lot of follow-up questions. So I felt like I do while I listen to NPR's Terry Gross--like there are a lot of missed opportunities. Just as the interview gets interesting, it's on to a different pre-programmed question.

That being said, there are some jewels in here and I did learn about some new materials to try. And Joe Fig makes sculptures of his subjects' studio spaces that are charming and featured throughout the book.

F.J. Commelin says

inspirational book.

Ghostponygallery says

Awesome! What works is work--what any artist needs to know. Beyond that, an engaging look into the regular lives of artists and their studios. What you may miss is that the photographs are not actually of the artist's studios, they are miniatures of the artist's studios created by the author of the book as that is his art. Delightful on many levels.

Dan says

I love this stuff. I've been sort of obsessing over artists' routines, creative process and work spaces. This is full of photos and great, basic interviews.

Jana Bouc says

LOVED IT! Very inspiring book. Filled with photos of artists' studios and interviews with them...what could be better?! So many of the artists had wise things to say about making art, about the life of an artist and about being true to oneself. Seeing the small, crummy studios (as well as fabulous ones) that some of the successful artists have shows that having the perfect studio is NOT the key to making successful art.

Stacie says

I am not a painter, but I do have a fascination with the creative process - no matter what form it takes. This is a beautifully compiled book with photographs of painters in their studios that perfectly complement the artists' interviews. The interviews and photographs are a byproduct of Joe Fig's own work; he creates small-scale sculptures of artists' studios. Through his research, he came up with a formula of questions - everything from "when did you consider yourself a professional artist?" and "what advice do you have for young artists?" to "what paints do you use?" and "how long have you owned your painting table?" The interviews offer a glimpse into each artist's world, and coming from a writer's perspective, I couldn't help but find parallels between the two processes.

Sheree says

An interesting peek inside a number of famous painter's studios. Now I'd like to see a follow-up of modern famous and not-so-famous artist's studios. Always good for inspiration and organization tips!

