

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

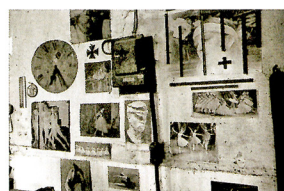
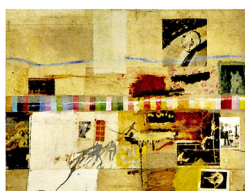
CULTURED DOUBLE VISION

Two former MoMA curators get out of the museum and into the gallery.

BY IAN VOLNER

John Elderfield and **Peter Galassi** were colleagues for nearly 35 years at the Museum of Modern Art in New York—Elderfield was a longtime curator at the museum and held several positions during his tenure, including chief curator of painting and sculpture; Galassi, who started out as a curatorial intern at the museum, held the position of chief curator of photography for 20 years. Now

working as independent scholars, they've teamed up once again for a show at Gagosian Gallery, an ambitious survey of paintings and photos—occupying two of Gagosian's New York galleries—that draw on the curators' distinct yet complementary perspectives to reveal how artists look at the creative process. We sat down with Elderfield and Galassi to get each of their sides of the story.



From left, Jean-Léon Gérôme's *Working in Marble or The Artist Sculpting Tanagra*, 1890; Robert Rauschenberg's *Small Rebus*, 1956; Jeff Wall's *Picture for Women*, 1979; Lee Friedlander's *Raoul Hague's Studio, Woodstock, New York*, 1990; Thomas Eakins's *Two Pupils in Greek Dress*, 1880s.

JOHN ELDERFIELD

"In the Studio: Paintings," Gagosian, West 21st Street

The initial idea for the show was yours—where did it come from?

John Elderfield: I'd been thinking about this subject for a long time, and what's interesting to me is that we all take the fact that many artists work in studios just as a matter of course. Over the last few decades, however, there's been a post-studio movement, artists feeling they don't need to be in them. So I became intrigued as to how the whole idea of the studio really started. In parallel, I've been seeing paintings and photos of studios that look very different at different times. I was interested in trying to bring these things together.

What do painters' images of their studios tell us about their practices, and how have they changed over time?

JE: Images of artists in their environments were popular as early as the 16th century and continued through the 19th century. There were lots of studio paintings—with models, students and patrons and even as educational places. Then you get into the 20th century, and the focus shifts to the walls of studios, rather than whole studios—work by Lichtenstein, Guston, Johns and others. Altogether, when you look at these paintings, you can't help but think how different it all is from what we think artists do. I think the popular idea of the artist in the studio is somebody who works by him or herself and produces work, which is then taken out and sold or exhibited. And we know that this was not the case in the past. Before commercial galleries existed, work was sold from studios. Paintings of studios are often filled with people, patrons and visitors. Rubens had a balcony built so that people could watch him work. These are places of personal expression, but they're also social places.

You both spent a lot of time on the museum side. How is it different doing a show like this at a private gallery?

JE: When I did shows at MoMA, they had great borrowing power—people tend to be generous to MoMA because they want to borrow from them. But in a project like this, you can't borrow *Las Meninas* or the great Vermeer studio scene in Vienna. But having some work by lesser-known artists has turned out to be great—I think it's exciting that people will go to Chelsea and see a studio painting by an utterly obscure French painter from the mid-19th century. Sometimes the limitation is an impulse to be more creative.

PETER GALASSI

"In the Studio: Photographs," Gagosian Madison Avenue

When did John first approach you about the show?

Peter Galassi: This is something he's been thinking about for years, even when he was still at MoMA—we'd talked about it back then. It never took concrete form there, but when he decided to do it at Gagosian, he basically just called me up and said, "Hey, do you want to do a photographic component?" Originally, we were going to try to do them both at the downtown gallery, but then that didn't work out space-wise.

What is the place of the artist's studio in the history of photography, and how does your show explore that?

PG: Well, in painting, this isn't a new issue. Some of the greatest paintings ever made belong to this unbelievable tradition of studio paintings. But in photography, I had to do a certain amount of head-scratching. My own belief is that the greatness of photography is that it's out there in the world—photographers don't usually have studios, just dark rooms. And while there are lots of photographs of artists' studios, some of them can be very boring, except for when they can tell you about the artist. So, we've organized the photos into three sections: The first is about the studio as an arena for posing (inside actual studio-like photographers' spaces with a few fashion pictures, portraits and nudes); the second section is simply artists' studios as seen by photographers; and the third one is mainly about artists putting up pictures on their walls and the photographs encouraging a conversation among the pictures. That sort of corresponds to the "wall" section of John's show.

Was it more challenging for you to work in a private setting?

PG: I was uncertain when we started whether working in a private setting was going to be a problem. But it wasn't. We had a lot of lenders, and none of them said no to a piece I asked for. In some ways it's easier in a private setting. If you're going to show photos with explicit sexual content at MoMA, you have to put them in a room with a label or something. But here, I don't have to worry about that. There are a few of those pictures in this exhibition—which is crucial because in the end, this is a show that's about displaying yourself, about inventing a persona.