

SAATCHI GALLERY MAGAZINE

Saatchi Gallery Magazine, 18 février 2016

On Sacred Ground: A Private View with photographer Anthony Lycett
par Alun Evans



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February 18, 2016

I met Anthony Lycett when I was interviewing 92-year-old RA painter Anthony Eyton in his Brixton studio; Lycett was there at the same time photographing him. We got chatting and Lycett, a tall, gregarious fellow, filled me in on his project – *Private View* – an intriguing long-term exploration of London- and Paris-based creatives framed within the backdrops of their inner sanctums: their studios. Where Lycett's approach differs to the run-of-the-mill artists-in-their-studios portraits is in the method he uses: taking multiple shots of the subject and the space they occupy, Lycett creates a type of photographic composition that's reminiscent in its conception to the photographic collages (or 'joiners') popularised by David Hockney back in the 80s.

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Obviously, Hockney didn't have access to Photoshop back then. But now, with the technical benefits the digital era allows, Lycett is able to seamlessly piece together his own digital version of the photographic collage, creating deep, wide-angled images that allow a viewer to become immediately ensconced in the artist's personal space; the studios and assorted paraphernalia (whether cluttered or minimal, depending on the individual artist's working practices) are discovered in the same way as your eye would take in the surroundings, leading you around the mental workings of the artists in an immediate, visceral way, as your vision flits back and forth around the picture, curious about what it will encounter next.

I later commandeered Lycett for a few hours of 'proper interview time', to talk about how *Private View* came about and where it's leading him.

Anthony, can you tell me what inspired this project?

It originated with that idea of using multiple images to create one view. When it came to the artist's studios, rather than doing a typical wide-angle view which creates more distortion, I wanted to have this grand view like a large-format camera allows. I used digital so that I could focus on the portrait and then build up the room afterwards. So I have what resembles one shot, but then people will look at it and think 'There's something not quite right here'. If I had taken it with a wide-angle lens everything would be focused, because the depth-of-field flattens everything out. Whereas with this technique, I'm controlling the amount of focus to make the subject – the artist – stand out. I want to show that the space is three-dimensional, so that the viewer feels like they're in the room. They don't see everything; they see what's within the parameters of the eye.

Do you have any specific criteria for the artists you shoot?

I'm not interested in status or this generation of celebrity. I try not to focus on just one area, so maybe I find the struggling artist and then I find one of the masters who has been very successful with his or her work. If I approach an artist like Tracey Emin or Damien Hirst, they'd probably feel I'm just after their celebrity status as an artist, rather than being more interested in the aspect of them as a human who works within the art world.

I think it's important for me to find a real mixture of generational artists, different mediums from painting, sculpture to digital, because it's still the same mind that drives the artist.

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And your photographs capture the disparity between these artists?

It's true, because some artists would be reluctant [to be photographed] because they have a home studio, so they might feel that success is driven on what you have around you. When I photographed the 2013 Turner Prize winner Laure Prouvost, she has a small studio in London Fields split with another artist. And so the studio doesn't really define whether they are a great or struggling artist, because I think the mind is still within the same structure and it's how the artists reflect themselves within this space. This is what I'm looking at: the real relationship between the artist and the space where they work.

I photographed Grayson Perry for the project and he told me that he used to have a stereotypical artist's studio before, but said that most artists who make a bit of money move out of that [type of studio] and into a white box. I felt that there was something very distinct about this. The question becomes: what elements does one artist need to be surrounded by to drive their mind and keep being creative? It's interesting to look and understand the artist in this way.

How have people generally reacted to being asked to partake in the project?

The majority have been welcoming, but it's like sacred ground when you go into an artist's studio. There are artists who don't want to have a constant stream of people coming into their world, distracting and upsetting the fluidity of their processes. This is why I can understand that certain artists, like Frank Auerbach and Leon Kossoff, may not even let their gallery into their studio. The artist has this choice and if they prefer not to have this interaction, then this is really for them to decide; it's not for me to force them. I'll only photograph people who are happy to take part and see that I'm trying to do something different.

How long do you see the project going on for?

As long as I can pick up a camera and can find willing subjects, I would carry on.

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So there'd be no endpoint?

There could be no endpoint. I'm also aware that it's not just about a specific city and there are amazing artists existing outside of London and Paris. It's just, is there something important about being within the city that defines your work as an artist? This is what I'm interested in: finding out the reasoning and the minds behind the people thinking 'Okay, I need to be in London or I need to be in Paris to succeed.' And at the moment it's been easier to sort of segregate within these cities. Even so, I could photograph an artist every day for ten of my lifetimes and I still wouldn't cover all the artists within just one city. But I'm not going to live more than one lifetime, so I have to fit it all within this one life.

Alun Evans

