

The Studio - the Partially Domesticated, Portable or Transitory Home

Among all the interiors and buildings providing shelter and a dwelling, an artist's studio is by its very function and purpose an ambiguous space. The usefulness of this home is temporary. The roof guarantees an opportunity to work and organise a workshop and provides time for concentration and creative energy. It also makes it possible to safely accumulate various tools or instruments, sketches in the making, auxiliary works – all the projects and seemingly tiresome and yet indispensable papers that surround the artists' effort, which appears somewhat arduous despite the effective results. The roof provides isolation from intruders, noise and visual chaos. Or at least it should do so¹. Nonetheless, artists tend to treat this aspect of the studio as a different, albeit their own, space of clamour and chaos, filled with intruders, who arrive upon the authors' request, by the latter's choice and according to their imagination². On the other hand, a studio roof – to adhere to the concept of elementary space – is not a complete guarantee of home isolation and privacy. After all, an exchange of dimensions and substances is the predominant activity in all types of studios: be they a room open right through, as in a sculptor's studio, or glassed-in, with light coming from the north and set in an attic, from the nineteenth century regarded to be ideal for painters, or even in a small, half-dark *duchytynia* (a cramped *studiolo*), the source of images and concepts, visionary dreams or intellectual ideas. The exchange in question predominantly involves providing the art form with everyday reality. Measurable cubature becomes a springboard for the non-computable space of a painting, the astonishing scale of a sculpture and the conceptual game played with ideas. Essential for artistic endeavours, the commonplace or even unusual objects surrounding the artist (known for a tendency to collect just as many trifles as sophisticated valuables) turn into a part of the substance. The temporariness of a studio becomes consolidated as if in passing, through a transformation of the accidental into the irrevocable and *via* incorporation into the very structure of the work of art^{3 4}. Temporary space often assumes the form of inspiration, a leitmotif identified with this unique place^{5 6}.

The artist's stay and its outcome are intended for the temporary and provisional home due to their very principle and purpose. Artworks are supposed to leave this space, "to go among the people"; they are in motion or destined to be transported⁷. This is the objective of creation. Impermanence, however, often becomes domesticated. And if today (and not only) artworks remain with their author, forcedly congest and domesticate the fleeting and transitory quality of the studio's interior, and do not set off into the world, then they resemble children attached to their parents, growing up and aging with them (even in the best me-

aning of the term) and thus endowing temporary alternation with stabilizing substance. An artist uncertain of the fate of his works – usually non-commissioned – becomes their collector, forced to amass his own output. He transforms the studio into a gallery or a storeroom and grants it the traits of a compulsorily created collection that, even if it is copious, remains rather monotonous because it consists of the works of a single author.

Over a span of years the works held in a studio, settled down and merged with it – even though their relation was supposed to be temporary – provide it with the character of a "creator's home", while the studio as such turns into an "artist's museum" or becomes celebrated as a "temple of art". This description could be appropriate for the family homes of artists sharing the qualities of their bourgeois milieu, such as the Kraków residences of Józef Mehoffer and Wojciech Weiss, professors at the Academy of Fine Arts who, nonetheless, worked in the Academy studios to which they were entitled.

Tales about respectable "homes of creators" and "temples of art" are accompanied by oft-repeated legends of studios conceived as the sites of Bacchic or erotic excesses, witnessing both extraordinary creative momentum and the artist's helplessness or melancholy^{8 9}. Each individual story deserves a legend of its own, and together they all add the myth of extraordinariness to studio space, sometimes reasonably affluent¹⁰ and at other times movingly deprived¹¹. This interior, in which transformation, transgression and creation transpire, remains a legend also today, when the creative act has left the studio for the streets, the walls of graffiti artists or the showrooms, in which it appears in the form of an installation or a performance. It has become a "project", from the beginning to the end commissioned by exhibition or museum curators. Temporariness has become an attribute of the latest works and not of the studio. The physical space of the studio has been replaced with virtual public space. We are far from the materialization of ideas and from preserving the transient.

It would be difficult to avoid discussing the essence of the studio in the People's Republic of Poland during the 1970s and 1980s. Although studios were assigned upon the basis of administrative decisions, due to their aesthetic aura and political extraterritorial status they sometimes assumed the function of asylums of an "another life" in prevailing reality. This fact was particularly appreciated by the art milieu during the martial law period¹². Instead of the natural temporariness of an interior from which the works go further and further into the world, the studio was gaining the qualities of a centre of ideas and meetings – a place of confessions and discussions.

In the past, for instance in the Middle Ages and in the modern era, the artist was frequently a nomad among settled European clients, changing countries and places while searching for the most convenient working conditions. It would be difficult to claim that the traveller took root and settled down in the places of his temporary stay. The example of Pablo Picasso leaving behind successive residences (castles and palaces) filled with his works paradoxically combines the qualities of an established owner and a travelling conjurer. A characteristic trait of this genius, gifted with unmatched creative energy confirmed by fame and financial success, is that his studios both preserved the attributes of a transitory work place and gained the features of a museum collection. Abandoned by the author, they did not lose their links with him.

To what extent is a studio a domesticated space? Probably to the degree that it supports and does not di-

stract the moment of creation when intention changes into a work of art, when for a single instant it merges conditions, time and creative energy and seems to comprise a painting-metaphor of creation. But this metaphor collapses and loses its significance once the studio is perceived as a domesticated dwelling. This is also the case when from the very beginning the artist treats it as an alien and intentionally non-domesticated place. Apparently, such was, and still is Stanisław Wyspiański's abandoned "sapphire studio" in Krowoderska Street in Kraków¹³, probably never inviting or snug. On the contrary, the blue colour of its walls and ceiling lead us outside, into the faraway world, almost into cosmic dimensions, as does the visionary stained glass – merely designed in the studio but fulfilled somewhere else.

Footnote:

- ¹ Jacek Gaj, *Visit*
- ² Jacek Gaj, *At Adam's*
- ³ Zbigniew Szprycha, *Studio*
- ⁴ Marek Przybył, *Imaginary Portrait of Francis Bacon – Studio*
- ⁵ Olga Boznańska, *Study of the Artist's Studio in Kraków*
- ⁶ Wacław Taranczewski, *Young Painter*
- ⁷ Andrzej Okińczyc, *Packaging*
- ⁸ Jerzy Mierzejewski, *Studio*
- ⁹ Jacek Sienicki, *Studio*
- ¹⁰ Zbysław Maciejewski, *Studio of Olga Boznańska*
- ¹¹ Antoni Kamieński, *Unfinished Work*
- ¹² Barbara Skąpsza, *Night*
- ¹³ Illustration: photograph by Mirosław Sikorski



Fragment of an exhibition: *Home - the Way of Being*, City Art Gallery in Częstochowa 2009