

ASSESSING THE ATELIER :

“Despite decades of scholarship on historical workshop practices and radical changes in how contemporary art objects are produced, the image of the artist as solitary creator remains essentially unchanged.”

This paper considers the role of the art market as the primary factor contributing to the endurance of this perception. Looking at both historical and contemporary examples, the concept of the artist atelier is compared to the unique forefront of art making.

The model of an artist atelier, a studio with a principal master working alongside his assistants or students, can be traced back to the 14th century.¹ Traditional masters were known to host apprentices to fabricate works of art together, as a method of learning and honing skills.² It has its roots embedded in the discipline of pedagogy.³ Teachers supervised their subjects, imparting technical and stylistic knowledge to students. The aesthetic of the principal was carried forth by students. They mimicked, and to an extent even internalized by the means of repetition, the *modus operandi* as delineated by the principal. French philosopher Jacques Derrida linked this phenomenon to the term ‘ontopology’ i.e the ontological value of ‘being’ to its situation, to the stable and presentable determination of a locality, the *topos* of a territory’.⁴ The works of art produced in the process of apprenticeship were released under the name of the master. For instance, in 15th century Florence (Italy), an artist *Bottega* or workshop was common practice.⁵ It included artists and craftsmen from all over the country, having a variety of expertise.⁶ Andrea del Verrocchio was one such artist who managed a large, and very popular shop in the hub.⁷ Verrocchio was an Italian goldsmith, sculptor, and painter, who is known to have produced multiple paintings for the Medici family of Florence.⁸ Leonardo da Vinci and Botticelli, were both prodigies of Andrea del Verrocchio’s *bottega*.⁹ Da Vinci is known to have joined Verrocchio’s *Bottega* when he was seventeen when he moved to Florence with his father.¹⁰ There he learned design skills (*disegno*)

¹ Aristides, 2013

² Aristides, 2013

³ Aristides, 2013

⁴ Pigrum 2007

⁵ Wallace, 2014

⁶ Wallace, 2014

⁷ Andrea Del Verrocchio (About 1435 - 1488) | National Gallery, London, 2021

⁸ Andrea Del Verrocchio (About 1435 - 1488) | National Gallery, London, 2021

⁹ DUNKERTON, 2011

¹⁰ DUNKERTON, 2011

which included working with a variety of media.¹¹ Primarily Verrocchio's influence was shown in da Vinci's caliber as a draughtsman. In comparison, it is easy to spot the similarities in their technical training.¹² There is a heavy influence of Verrocchio in the works of da Vinci.¹³

The concept of the artist's workshop took a different form when the country of India is analyzed.¹⁴ The artist studio would prioritize hereditary factors.¹⁵ A specific network of families was included while in the practice of arts.¹⁶ For example, an Indian miniature artist of the 18th century, named Pandit Seu of Guler, trained his two sons Manaku and Nainsukh to carry on his legacy.¹⁷ Their practice grew on to being the Pahari school which served the rulers of regions extending from Basohli to Garhwal.¹⁸ The school was trained to visually romanticize the beauty of nature and amorous scenarios. Gold and silver leaf was used to adorn Pahari school miniature paintings. The female figure held certain importance.¹⁹ The women subjects of Pahari school paintings had specific facial characters.²⁰ Their nose was in line with the forehead.²¹ Their eyes were elongated, exuding a dramatized seductive quality, while their chins were narrow and sharp.²² They wore traditional attire of choli, lehenga, and transparent chunnis.²³ The narratives for Pahari miniatures were fantasist, love scenes of heroes and heroines were common.²⁴ The concept of perspective was not important to Pahari school painters.²⁵ For principal artists encouraging apprenticeship as a means to transmit a system of knowledge that aided the sustenance of their artistic legacy.²⁶ Their idiosyncratic dispositions and aesthetic ideals were preserved by their students.²⁷ Moreover, commercially and geographically it was a way for the artist's practice to grow in scale and reach.²⁸ In the case of

¹¹ DUNKERTON, 2011

¹² DUNKERTON, 2011

¹³ DUNKERTON, 2011

¹⁴ VAIDYA, 2008

¹⁵ VAIDYA, 2008

¹⁶ VAIDYA, 2008

¹⁷ VAIDYA, 2008

¹⁸ History Of Indian Art Unit – I (B) Pahari School Of Miniature Painting, 2020

¹⁹ History Of Indian Art Unit – I (B) Pahari School Of Miniature Painting, 2020

²⁰ History Of Indian Art Unit – I (B) Pahari School Of Miniature Painting, 2020

²¹ History Of Indian Art Unit – I (B) Pahari School Of Miniature Painting, 2020

²² History Of Indian Art Unit – I (B) Pahari School Of Miniature Painting, 2020

²³ History Of Indian Art Unit – I (B) Pahari School Of Miniature Painting, 2020

²⁴ History Of Indian Art Unit – I (B) Pahari School Of Miniature Painting, 2020

²⁵ History Of Indian Art Unit – I (B) Pahari School Of Miniature Painting, 2020

²⁶ History Of Indian Art Unit – I (B) Pahari School Of Miniature Painting, 2020

²⁷ History Of Indian Art Unit – I (B) Pahari School Of Miniature Painting, 2020

²⁸ History Of Indian Art Unit – I (B) Pahari School Of Miniature Painting, 2020

Pahari school, by the 1780s students moved to the region of Kangra.²⁹ This way students of the Pahari school dispersed to find new terrain to incur income. Pandit Seu of Guler's artistic lineage spread, also gaining the patronage of the ruler of Kangra.³⁰ There was an eventual evolution of style as time passed. The Pahari school in Kangra developed to be the Kangra style.³¹ Nevertheless, it was the Guler family names, especially that of Pandit Seu and his son Nainsukh which to date, holds the glory of the Pahari school miniatures.

In contemporary times, the tradition of an artist's career as the foreground to the behind-the-scenes of their workshop continues. Blue-chip artists, who have a wide-spread art practice and aim to produce on a sizeable scale, hire a team for support. There is an evolution of the artist workshop from the renaissance Bottega to an Assembly Line. For example, if one considers the practice of the artist, Kehinde Wiley, recognized for his portrait of President Barack Obama, situated in the National Portrait Gallery. In 2006, Wiley set up a studio in Beijing (China) to hasten the production of works and satisfy market demands.³² Similarly Louise Bourgeois, a modern artist famous for her large-scale sculptures, also took the help of assistants to assemble works such as 1999 bronze, stainless steel, and marble sculpture 'Maman'.³³ An artist's team learns the ways of the artist to achieve targets. This is no different from the work of a surgeon who is assisted by a surgical first assistant and nurses in an operating suite, or a director of a film who is served by an entire crew. Contemporary artist Subodh Gupta compares his methodology of art creation to that of an architect. In an interview, he explains the numerous hands on deck, for the construction of a building. Architectural design is an entity driving the ideation for aesthetics and functioning of the built form. Nevertheless, its design is also dependant on the masons who lay the foundation and brick, the painters who restructure the interiors as well as the glazier responsible for laying down the fenestrations on the facade. They are all directed by the drawings planned and approved by the architect. The vision for the conceived work belongs to the architect. Gupta suggests an artist's practice is no different. An artist's workshop is a means to use collective force to reach a single derivation. The realization of his large-scale stainless steel installations must be designed, fabricated, and assembled by a team. Although, the incepting concept is Gupta's intellectual property.

Contemporary art practitioners face a post-studio condition, where the process and creation of art spill past the artist's studio. It breaks beyond the barricades of two-dimensional works of art to embrace over-the-top scaled site-specific installations, works of performance and dance as well as the socially charged concept of relational aesthetics. For example, Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija's *Untitled (free/still)* is a work of relational aesthetics. For this work, he puts together a wooden

²⁹ History Of Indian Art Unit – I (B) Pahari School Of Miniature Painting, 2020

³⁰ History Of Indian Art Unit – I (B) Pahari School Of Miniature Painting, 2020

³¹ History Of Indian Art Unit – I (B) Pahari School Of Miniature Painting, 2020

³² Beam, 2012

³³ Beam, 2012

structure that includes a rudimentary kitchen. Tiravanija cooks a meal in the kitchen, specifically rice and curry, and invites visitors to the space.³⁴ The communal feasting and ancillary interactions become the work of art.³⁵ In this way, Tiravanija's work of art was not only facilitated by his assistants or the chefs behind the making of the curry and rice but also the making of the work depends on the part-takers who indulge in the meal.³⁶ *"In every one of Rirkrit's situations, Rirkrit himself is not indispensable. He can show up or he doesn't show up, and he builds his work that way,"* says Laura Hoptman, curator of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art.³⁷ Therefore, even when the art-making extends beyond the walls of a studio or workshop, resting in the palms of individuals beyond the periphery of the artist, even then the artist is the solitary creator.³⁸

Over time, the art market has evolved. Patrons have shifted from religious institutions to monarchs and currently rest in the hands of entrepreneurs or celebrities. The values — social, commercial, and ethical, of the art market, have changed. Moreover, the mode of creation has drastically shifted with the rapid growth of digital media. Regardless, the functional dynamics of historical workshop practices equate to the mass production of contemporary art objects. The technique may be different, but essentially the image of the artist as a solitary creator remains unchanged. Consequently, the art market can not be the primary factor contributing to the endurance of this perception. This is a model found in several other industries merely replicated in the world of art.

³⁴ Allen, 2012

³⁵ Allen, 2012

³⁶ Allen, 2012

³⁷ Allen, 2012

³⁸ Allen, 2012

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