

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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"The Artist in His Studio: An exhibition of photographs by Alexander Liberman" will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art from October 29 through January 10. In 150 color and black and white photographs, 24 painters and sculptors of the School of Paris are shown at work in their studios and in the intimacy of their homes.

Extended photo essays on Braque, Chagall, Dubuffet, Giacometti, Léger, Matisse, Rouault and Villon document two generations of famous artists in their country and city studios and houses. Their palettes and work tables, the objects with which they have chosen to be surrounded, are recorded and their personalities are revealed as they were photographed at work or in conversation. In addition fourteen other artists, including Arp, Ernst, Richier and Vlaminck, are each shown.

The exhibition was selected from 10,000 photographs made by Liberman during the past twelve years. A painter and a critic whose essays on artists have been published by Vogue, he has an unusual combination of talents. This perhaps partially explains the knowledge and sympathy with which he has photographed those artists whose work he admires, the exhibition wall label states characterizing him as a Vasari with a camera. Mr. Liberman himself describes his photographs as "Documentation with an attempt to catch the mood and the atmosphere of each artist."

Most of the photographs in the exhibition are being shown for the first time and have not been reproduced. After the New York exhibition, the show will travel around the country.

Five photographs in the essay on Braque show the interiors of his country home and studio in Normandy, which Liberman likens to throne rooms of Renaissance princes. Other views of his Paris surroundings reveal numerous sources of his inspiration of his work. In the studio, Braque has rubber plants, decorated Polynesian shields, Etruscan sculpture, bits of stone. In the country, on an antique Norman chest, stands a head Hesperis, which he carved out of stone from the Varengeville cliffs, the pewter teapot that appears so often in his lithographs, an oil and vinegar set he has made of two mineral water bottles and, on a wall, Spanish roasting forks.

The ten photographs of Chagall show him not only in his home and studios in Vence, but also in New York, in Paris on a quai and at a printer's etching his illustrations for the Bible.

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The photo essay on Dubuffet includes sixteen continuity shots of the artist at work. "Of all the painters I have photographed Dubuffet was the first to break with the conventions of traditional easel painting." Mr. Liberman says "As he worked he would throw sand or gravel into the amorphous mixtures smeared over plaster board. Then with knife, trowel, rag, hand, he would shape until he finally brought to a stop the lava-like flows of earth color. I marvelled at the amount of stored-up skill that he summoned to fix the fleeting images that seemed to well up like volcanic eruptions."

The photographs of Giacometti which date from 1951 to 1955, also include a series of continuity shots taken in the Paris studio where he has lived since 1927.

"In the movement of his body one feels the weight of gravity. He springs forward as he works, steps back, scratches his hair. There is movement, even a rhythm of activity. His arms swing wide to add by touch the substance that will be form. He is seldom satisfied with what he has done," Mr. Liberman says.

Some of the photographs of Léger were taken in a sunny quiet street in Paris near the Luxembourg gardens where he worked for more than thirty years. "Inside the strong light was softened by sliding white curtains. A sensation of overwhelming color came from the red, paint-splattered floor and from the kaleidoscopic far wall covered with his own paintings in primary colors. His actual palette, three inches thick, looked like mountains and craters." Mr. Liberman says. The smaller photographs in color show his home at Gif, an abandoned inn near Paris which he bought and renovated a few years before his death. The construction in wire on a wall is Calder's portrait of Léger. Two horizontal studio interiors document his last important painting, La Grande Parade, and a large black and white decoration in tile. Seated in a chair he is studying his designs for the stained glass window of the church at Audincourt.

The photographs of Matisse were taken in 1949 and in 1951. In one, a detail of his apartment in Nice, there is a sculpture in plaster of 1907. Against the walls hang preliminary versions of the murals and stained glass windows for his chapel at Vence. The other photographs, taken two years later in Paris in 1951, show Matisse at work on a design for the dust jacket of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.'s Matisse: His Art and Public, published by the Museum of Modern Art. On a wall of the apartment appear together: Polynesian and Greek sculptures, an early and later painting, a design in pasted paper for a stained glass window and an aquatint in black and white which had just returned from the printer.

The most extensive photo essay is devoted to Picasso, undoubtedly the most photographed artist in the world. Mr. Liberman says "In Paris and in the south of France I have seen and photographed Picasso in his homes, with his family and in his studios. There is perhaps a "museum mania" in his way of living. He is a compulsive collector, most of all his own work. But the accumulation can sometimes cause despair. He once looked around the large, crammed studio at Vallauris and said, 'I am all alone. I do everything myself. No, no one helps me. I am alone. It's too much for me.'"

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The Rouault photos include a remarkable series of the 79 year old artist in conversation, 8 years before his death. "Rouault moved slowly toward a chair. He sat down and started a monologue addressed mostly to himself. My questions, like a tap, opened a stream of recollection. Age jumbled the chronology of his memory, but he had much to tell. He was often bitter. Present in all his stories and in his gestures was laughter, violent, cruel and sardonic. When the thick lips of his wide mouth stretched into a grin, a row of widely spaced yellow teeth protruded. Funny, agile movements of his hands illustrated his stories. He acted out each role, and the pantomime of mimicry suggested a Punch and Judy show. When sadness was his mood, he lowered his head. For joy he raised his head and stretched his arms. To display cunning he scratched and curled his body. He spoke, as he painted, with ferocity, compassion and humour. An understanding of the theatrical gesture was a key to his conversation as well as to his art."

The photographs of Villon include a double portrait of the eighty-four year old artist and his wife. "For more than half a century, Villon has lived in the same studio in Puteaux, a Paris suburb built on a hill that slopes gently to the Seine....There is no view, instead the quiet sadness of a garden overgrown with grass and unweeded paths," Liberman says. "My first impression of the studio was of gray austerity. There was not a single colored object to distract the spell. The cold north light was carefully equalized by cheesecloth. The light itself seemed to have a density of its own. On a high shelf a few plaster sculptures by his brother caught the dust -- nothing seems more melancholy than abandoned bas-reliefs."

Other photographs in the exhibition include: Arp with his arms encircling a large sculpture; Bazaine at work on a mosaic for the church at Audincourt; Derain at seventy-two with a self portrait painted during his fauve period five decades before; Dufy in Montmartre a year before his death in 1953; a profile of Ernst and another of his Huismes studio; two Russian artists, Larionov and Gontcharova, who have lived in Paris for fifty years in the same studio and apartment; Hartung, born in Germany, at work in his Paris studio; the Czech-born pioneer artist Frank Kupka photographed in the old suburban villa next to Villon's house where he lived until his death in 1957; Marie Laurencin, in her studio in which "only an easel and a few painter's tools intruded on the attractive serenity of a cultivated Parisienne's salon"; Manessier seated in his studio; the last photographs taken of Germaine Richier who died in the summer of 1959; Utrillo with his wife; Dutch born van Dongen in his lavish studio of another era; Vlaminck in the doorway of his house in Normandy.

Mr. Liberman came to New York in 1941 where he joined the staff of Vogue magazine. In 1943 he was appointed Art Director of Vogue and later of all Condé Nast publications in the United States and Europe. Several of his photographs are in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art and, in April of next year, he will hold the first one-man show of his paintings at the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York.

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