

The Style Saloniste

•AN INTERNATIONAL SALON OF FRIENDS•

Wednesday October 16, 2019 | Diane Dorrans Saeks

Artist I Admire: Damian Elwes at Modernism Gallery, San Francisco

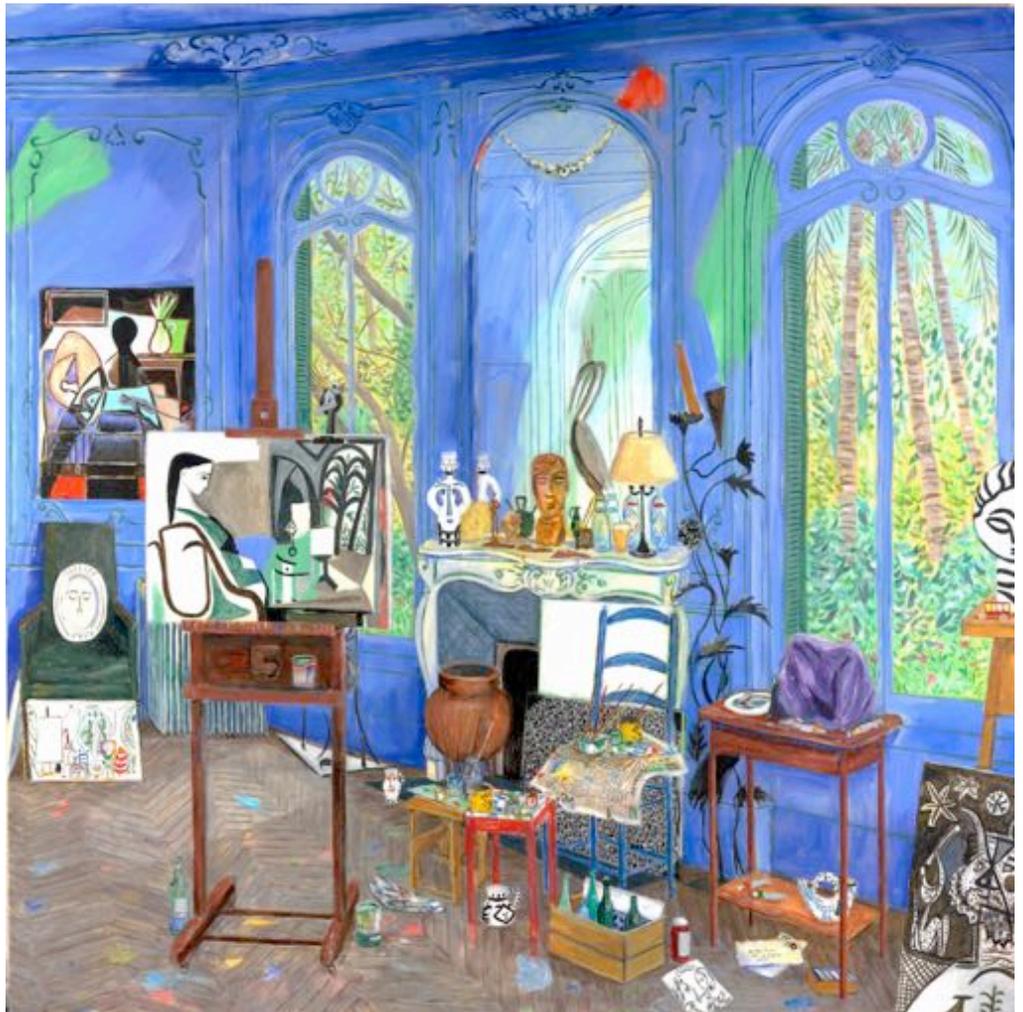
Through October 26

Damian Elwes: Artist Studios – From Picasso to Kusama

I recently had the great pleasure to meet the artist Damian Elwes, and to see his vivid and witty and fascinating paintings currently on show at Modernism.

Damian, who for decades has been studying and obsessed with artists' studios, has painted, imagined, recreated, and vividly depicted artists' studios around the world. He captures them in an almost cinematic style, and depicts major works in the vernacular of the artists. They represent moments of inspiration, but in particular they paint a portrait of the (unseen) artist in full creative frenzy.

In the Modernism show, his collection includes the imagined studios of Willem de Kooning, Paul Gauguin, David Hockney, Ellsworth Kelly, Gustav Klimt, Yayoi Kusama, Roy Lichtenstein, Kerry James Marshall, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol, and Jonas Wood. Two years ago at Modernism, he presented studios of Frida Kahlo, Cy Twombly, Lucien Freud and Richard Diebenkorn, to great acclaim.



Picasso's Studio

The centerpiece and the most impressive piece of the current show is a special installation of the monumental eight-panel painting, 'Picasso's Villa La California'. Room-size and full of detail and humor and insight, it is like stepping into Picasso's world. Immersive. Meticulous. Wonderful. Go now. It is a rare and special experience.

"I choose to focus on creativity and on visionary people. For me, the studio is a metaphor. I am able to learn from watching artists making art. Why have I gone to great lengths to make studio paintings and to visit studios all over the world with their untold stories?"

“Instead of going to art school, I spent two years searching for artist studios in Paris. I asked the artists if I could make a watercolor or paintings of their workplaces. Meanwhile, I was able to learn from watching them make art.” – Damian Elwes

Damian Elwes: Artist Studio

Damian, who now lives in Santa Monica, is from a noble lineage of English artists and portrait painters, and started painting when his father asked him to ‘fill in the sky’ of a portrait while the sitter took a break.

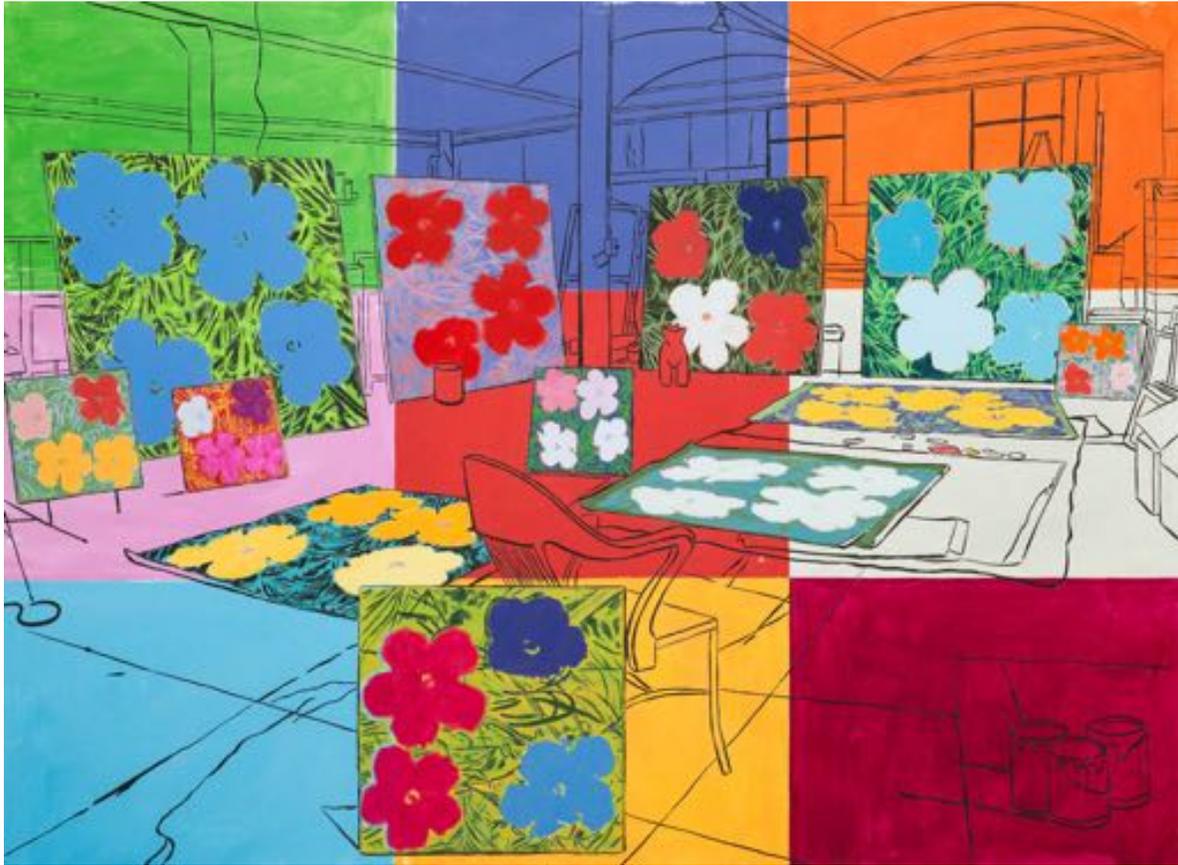
But it was not until 1984 when Elwes was living in New York that he was first encouraged and dared and challenged to paint large-scale by Keith Haring. It was at this time that Damian hung out with Haring, a renegade graffiti artist at that time, lived in his studio, and committed paint to walls and canvas and surfaces around New York. His first gallery show in London was a groundbreaking exhibit of the works of Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat at the height of their fame and creativity.



Damian Elwes



Hockney's studio



Warhol's Studio



Gauguin's studio



Matisse's studio

Artist studios, familiar from the painting studios of his father and his grandfather, became an Elwes obsession.

Soon he was in Paris studying Delacroix and Picasso and every artist who ever painted in Paris. And over the following decades (including a legendary time when he and his family lived in the remote and lovely Colombian rainforest)...Elwes was visiting, photographing, studying and painting them. He looks at ambiance, view from windows, light, ephemera and studies the paintings the artists worked on in these specific studios.

His paintings become a vibrant and evocative dialogue with the artist, and comment on a continuous era of creativity and ideas and evolution of an artist. Soon he was showing in Los Angeles, and among his early clients were Mick Jagger, Al Pacino, Anthony Hopkins, and Pierce Bosnan.

In 2007, after seven years of painting in Colombia, Elwes studied and researched Picasso's Bateau Lavoir, a time when Picasso was at his most innovative.

"I am fascinated with everything that goes into creating a work of art," said Elwes. He's a fervid researcher and studies every photograph and paintings and belongings and writing of an artist before embarking on a studio painting.

He has visited and reinvented/ reimagined the Collioure studio of Matisse, as well as Villa La Reve where Matisse lived and painted.

Next on his agenda: Damian Elwes has been invited to work and live for a year in Cy Twombly's former studio and residence near Rome. I can't wait to see the works he creates there.



Roy Lichtenstein's studio

Damian Elwes has now studied and painted the studios of artists ranging from Claude Monet to Roy Lichtenstein and Cindy Sherman and John Baldessari.

Elwes has developed a cult following, in part because the paintings unveil and reveal and recontextualize the artists and their place of work and setting. They capture historically important moments, within a framework that is accurate and architecturally correct. Even the view from the windows is period accurate.

“In historical terms, Elwes’ canvases can be seen as an invaluable contribution to the understanding and investigation and revelation of some of the greatest artists of the twentieth century,” said gallery owner, Martin Muller. “They are immersive and they capture a time, a period, a life, and moments of brilliance and breakthroughs. It’s daring. Elwes does it with great admiration, and often with a dash of wit and humor.”



Jonas Wood's studio



Kerry James Marshall's studio



Yayoi Kusama's studio

Modernism Gallery — The Architecture

Architect statement: AIDLIN DARLING DESIGN

“The design of the new MODERNISM Gallery seeks to honor both the history of the existing structure and the origins of MODERNISM itself.

The new façade of the gallery was inspired by the lithographs of El Lissitzky, one of the first artists to be shown in the thirty-plus year history of the Gallery.

A series of steel frames, planes, and lines are sculpted to create a large street front viewing portal and the primary entry into the gallery.

Within, the design creates a highly intentional and complimentary dialogue between the original structure of board-form concrete walls and wood ceiling members, and the new, crisp, white modern planes that define the walls for displaying art.

The result is intended to create a highly inspirational venue for the viewing of experimental art while pioneering one of San Francisco's up-and-coming art districts.”

— Joshua Aidlin, Principal, Aidlin Darling Design

About Modernism Gallery

Founded in 1979, Modernism has since presented more than 375 exhibitions, historical and contemporary, in media ranging from painting to photography, sculpture to performance, by an international roster of artists.



Martin Muller of Modernism

Modernism’s 1982 groundbreaking Andy Warhol exhibition — the first time the Pop artist’s work was shown on the West Coast. The show turned out to precede California’s enthusiasm for Pop art. Only one painting sold, for a minute \$20,000.

Martin Muller, who has a broad international following, has mounted for than eighteen retrospectives of the Russian avant-garde.

Historical exhibitions encompass concepts including Dada, Cubism, Surrealism, Vorticism, German Expressionism, and foremost, the Russian Avant-Garde 1910-1930.

The contemporary exhibits feature rotating shows, six to seven weeks in duration, of the nearly 50 gallery artists—including various representational and abstract modes, sociopolitical, and conceptual works—presented at both Modernism and Modernism West, as well as at art fairs in the United States and Europe.

Modernism publishes collectible books, monographs, catalogs, and fine art editions. Martin Muller is noted for his discernment and collections of art and design books, and for his eclectic gallery publications. His art and design book collection, legendary, now includes 30,000 books.

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Damian Elwes is a British artist who lives and works in Santa Monica. His work has been exhibited in galleries around the world, and he was recently the subject of a retrospective at the Musée en Herbe in Paris.

www.damianelwes.com

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