

GAGOSIAN



SALLY MANN *Remembered Light: Cy Twombly in Lexington* GAGOSIAN GALLERY, 976 MADISON AVENUE SEPTEMBER 22 – OCTOBER 29, 2016

David Carrier



Sally Mann, *Remembered Light, Untitled (Angled Light)*, 1999 – 2000. Gelatin silver print. 20 × 24 inches. Edition of 3. © Sally Mann. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery, New York.

What can you learn about a famous artist from photographs of his or her studio? *In the Studio: Photographs*, a 2015 Gagosian Gallery exhibition, showed Richard Avedon's photograph of Andy Warhol and members of the factory; Hannah Wilke's *S.O.S.—Starification Object Series* (1974 – 82), showing herself covered with chewing gum sculptures; Henri Matisse photographed by Brassai while drawing a model in 1939; and, of course, Cindy Sherman in one of her great *Untitled Film Stills* (1979). Some of these photographs show the processes of art making, while others present the artist active in the studio, sometimes with a model.

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The photographs in Sally Mann's exhibition *Remembered Light: Cy Twombly in Lexington* are radically different. For a dozen years, towards the end of his life, Twombly worked half the year in Lexington, Virginia, the small town where, like Mann, he was born. In these photographs (mostly black and white) of intense light that often blurs the features of the objects in frame, the artist himself never appears—though once we see his slippers. His materials and some sculptures are captured, but never a full view of any of his larger paintings, which surely must have been in this studio. Indeed, this show is an exercise in the art of tactful indirectness. The margins of Twombly's studio attract Mann as, I imagine, the margins of everyday visual life attracted Twombly.

Imagine trying to learn about Twombly's art solely from these photographs. One would see closed Venetian blinds, with intense sunlight coming through; tubes of pigment, and drips of paint, sometimes onto newspapers covering the floor; and images of the studio walls, often with the paintings removed. Most of these pictures are whiteout scenes, close-up views, flooded with light. "All perception is selection, and all photographs—no matter how objectively journalistic the photographer's intent—exclude aspects of the moment's complexity." (Sally Mann, *Hold Still: A Memoir with Photographs*) Fair; but how then are we to understand this selection of details in her great friend's studio?

Nowadays most fashionable contemporary photographs in galleries are very large—large though to compete with the paintings. Mann's photographs, however, are physically small—the largest one is twenty-by-twenty-four inches. Beginning in 1999, Mann was inspired by Twombly's art to create works, which are strikingly unlike his. Creativity is ultimately very mysterious, if only because the gap between an artist's inspirations and his or her work can visually be almost incomprehensible for an outsider. What did Twombly draw in from his surroundings in Lexington? And what did Mann learn from his presence, his friendship (and his art) about how to create these pictures? These queries are perhaps unanswerable, as Mann says in the catalogue: "You always want to leave a question behind." And that she has done, for these photographs are strange enough to matter in this marvelous, very subtle exhibition.