

GAGOSIAN



Cy Twombly's studio through Sally Mann's lens

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Remembered Light, Untitled (Maroon Carpet), 1999, Inkjet Print, 8 x 10 inches, 20.3 x 25.4 cm, © Sally Mann. Courtesy Gagosian.

Many of us visualize an artist's studio as a sacred place, where magic happens, new ideas are being conceived and – at times – masterpieces come to life. Rarely do we have the opportunity to go to a beloved artist's studio and therefore sense their human side. Because an artist's studio does not only evoke the process of creation, but also moments of their everyday life, of what inspires them, how they work, what objects they love, how they keep their personal space.

The exhibition *Remembered Light: Cy Twombly in Lexington* has just opened at Gagosian Gallery and the occasion offers us a double experience. We acquire access into the world-class artist's studio through Sally Mann's lens, an outstanding photographer, one of the most important of her generation. They were very close friends and their long-lasting relationship is captured in Mann's photographs, which are nothing like a realistic depiction of the space.

Her tender point of view lingers in his studio and captures moments in a way only a friend who has visited the space lots of times can focus on details, record interiority, and all the little things that compose Twombly's special personality. Her photographs were taken during a quite large time span, from 1999 to 2012, a year after his death. As she herself has noted, these are photographs taken in the spur of the moment, with a very relaxed mood and no intention of being shown to the public.

Even without Twombly's actual presence in her frames, she vividly evokes his energy in the traces of his work, in the paint drops on the walls and the floor, the dirty cloths and newspapers, in previous artworks' contours on the walls. Rarely does she take pictures of actual works created by Twombly, she usually prefers their traces. Which is the case, for example, with *Untitled (Maroon Carpet)* 1999, where the canvases loosely hanging from the walls or half-wrapped lying on the floor are equally important as the ordinary maroon carpet, the cheap false ceiling and the fluorescent lamps hanging from it. Mann's almost disturbing sincerity feels like visiting Twombly's spirit as he often walked on the line between high/classic art and cliché or kitsch.



Sally Mann: Remembered Light: Cy Twombly in Lexington, Installation View ©Celia Psychi. Courtesy Gagosian

What is surprisingly interesting is the humbleness of the studio: an open space that used to be a shop in downtown Lexington, nothing in proportion with Twombly's importance. Chaos and order take turns in the photographs progressively depicting the space's transformations within a decade. There are various objects, often of little value, that he liked collecting, his mail, a white plastic outdoors chair, rolls of his sketches, notebooks, mountings for his sculptures, a row of tins holding his paints and brushes, piled books, photographs taken in Italy. The space gradually fills up, almost suffocatingly, to the point that several photographs make you think that there is no space for one to move around in there. Others focus on something absolutely banal, like sockets, or the air-conditioning.

The undisputed protagonist though, as the exhibition's title denotes, is the light. Mann captures it warm and idle, as it comes through the Venetian blinds, she follows it through different times of the day, in its shadows and reflections on the wall and on the floor, she often lets it deform her frame with *contre jour* in order to depict a dream-like space.



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The warm light of the South, in the small town of Lexington, Virginia, is another link between the two artists. The love they shared for their hometown, a place surrounded by mountains, quiet and simple with all the typical characteristics of a town in the South, made Mann stay there forever and Twombly visit it each and every year during the last decades of his life, virtually sharing his time between Lexington and Rome, his second home.

Twombly managed to express and give shape to inner feelings, he always discovered new ways of expression breaking all conventions of art. His exuberant and intense brush movement followed a motion coming from inside towards the outside, thus letting figurative art behind from early on, both in his paintings as well as in his sculptures.

The fact that Gagosian had presented an exhibition of Twombly's polaroids in the past has been an insightful sequence of events. Because we had then had the chance to follow the artist's creative view through a series of ethereal, dreamlike images of closely shot flowers, objects and interiors. A practice that is certainly less known than his paintings and sculptures, which offered us a glimpse of his inner world. His amazing photographs, straightforward and frivolous, must have influenced Mann's point of view, who considered Twombly to be her mentor in some ways.

We now have the opportunity to penetrate even deeper into his personality through the traces of his life and the fragments of his outstanding work. Mann has always depicted in an almost disarmingly simple way what she loves the most that is her children, her homeland, and nature. She now creates images imbued in the melancholy of everyday life's private moments, as well as images expressing the decadence and degeneration time causes.



Sally Mann: Remembered Light: Cy Twombly in Lexington, Installation View ©Celia Psychi. Courtesy Gagolian

Here, she points her lens directly to the space inhabited by a beloved person and to what he left behind. During his lifetime the space is full of his energy and creativity. But after his death, the *Remembered Light* series – even though giving a first impression of being a low key expression, as low key as absence can feel at times – it actually becomes an elegy on the study of memory, loss and nostalgia.