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Inside the Artist's Studio

About the author: Millie Walton is a London-based writer. Her work has appeared in The Guardian, Burlington Contemporary, Flash Art, and Wallpaper, among other publications. She also writes fiction and poetry and is the founder of Babe Station, an ongoing research project exploring the relationship between motherhood and making art. [More about Millie](#)

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For art collectors, entering an artist's studio can be an intimate and enriching experience. It offers a chance to glimpse the creative process, understand the artist's environment, and to see pieces in various stages of completion. This guide provides insights into the role of the studio, etiquette for studio visits, and tips for buying directly from artists.



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Myth versus reality

Artist studios have long fascinated audiences. They evoke images of creativity, offering what seems like a peek behind the curtain into a space where art is born and ideas take shape. However, the romanticised idea of a studio – space cluttered with unfinished canvases, worn brushes, and the remnants of a bohemian lifestyle – is often far from reality. While such an image may resemble Francis Bacon's famously chaotic London studio, many artists today work in environments that are highly practical and attuned to their specific needs.

For some, studios are essential spaces outside the home; for others, they are integrated into daily life. The London-based artist Makiko Harris, who works across painting and sculpture, recently made the decision to move to a combined studio and living space to reduce her daily commute and lower her costs. 'It's more like I live in my studio rather than my studio is in my home. It's a really particular time in my life where I can do this: I don't have a partner or a family. I think if I were living with other people it would be really difficult to have this kind of living arrangement and so I felt like it was a special moment and I should seize the opportunity to give it a go,' she says.

By contrast, for Libby Heaney, who is known for her work with advanced technologies, the separation of work and home life is essential. 'Even though I work a lot with digital tools, I can't work from home: it's bad for my mental health,' she says. 'I need a space where I can experiment with different things.' She notes that she's fortunate to have a larger-than-normal studio in London. But, as in many big cities, rising costs and the scarcity of dedicated studio spaces mean that many artists end up sharing or going without an adequate set-up for long periods.

Christiane Pooley, a Paris-based Chilean artist represented by Perrotin, sees the studio as more of a 'psychological state' than a physical place. 'When I'm at the studio, I feel an urgency to work,' she explains. 'I like to be alone, but I recognise the importance of studio visits both for collectors and artists. Some people who come can notice something that makes you see your work differently.'

Meanwhile, Sinta Tantra, a London-based, Balinese-British artist represented by Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, embraces both seclusion and sociability within her studio. She has installed a kitchen in her space so she can cook for herself, her assistants, and visitors. 'The idea of food and connecting people with sharing is really important to me,' she explains. 'It links to my public art practice, which is about art and the everyday, and how the two can coexist.'

Planning and etiquette for studio visits

Studio visits offer collectors a unique opportunity to see the artist's creative process up close, but such visits are also highly personal for the artists. Many artists are open to visits, but timing and approach matter. Tantra, for example, prefers the visits to be organised through her gallery which manages follow-ups on sales and commissions. 'There might be times when I'm very busy with paintings and can't accept visits,' she notes, underscoring the importance of respecting an artist's working rhythm.

Heaney, who does not have gallery representation, welcomes studio visitors with a genuine interest in her work, though she's selective about whom she invites. 'If it was just some random dude on Instagram, I'd probably say no,' she says, adding, 'Obviously I'm a woman on her own in her studio, so there is always a safety consideration.' Harris, who has also had male visitors approach her under the pretence of being interested in her work, emphasises that 'when it's a studio visit, people need to respect that it is a workspace and provide value in turn to the artist by asking questions and showing interest even if they don't collect on the spot.'

Farnaz Gholami, a painter who is currently based in Oman and working from her home while caring for her baby, appreciates knowing the intentions of visitors beforehand so that she can prepare the space by getting out relevant works.

Similarly, Rita GT, who works in a converted train station, expects collectors to have some knowledge of her practice before they visit. However, given her studio's location along Spain's Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route, she occasionally gets unexpected visitors and buyers.

Irish artist Emmet Kierans, who has a space managed by the Bomb Factory Foundation in London, prefers to put away unresolved pieces if he doesn't feel ready to talk about them yet, while Pooley views all paintings that are in her studio as works-in-progress. She advises that visitors should 'ask permission before photographing anything,' especially if they intend to post images on social media.

Buying directly from the studio

For collectors, studio visits can sometimes lead to opportunities to buy work directly. Understanding an artist's relationship with galleries is key here. Artists like Pooley or Tantra direct all sales enquiries through their galleries, while others without representation handle sales personally. Is there room for negotiation? It depends on both the artist and the particular situation.

Heaney, for instance, mentions that 'the art world tends to give discounts to collectors who are supporting artists more regularly,' and she is open to offering discounts for those purchasing multiple works. She explains, 'The whole thing is about relationships and connection. How can I support the collector in the stories they want to tell around their work?'