In the Artist’s Studio.
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Fig. 1 Auguste-Xavier Leprince (1799–1826), The Artist’s Studio, 1826. Oil on canvas, 73 x 92.5 cm. Chazen Museum of Art, Madison, WI, 1982.58.
Interiors of artists’ studios became a popular subject in the early 19th century. They varied considerably, from representations of a purely documentary character to apotheoses centred on an individual artist. Perhaps the most famous example of the latter is Louis-Léopold Boilly’s (1761–1845) Gathering of Artists in the Studio of Isabey, from 1798 (Fig. 2). This ambitious composition has been called “a Pantheon of friends”, and it is certainly the case that in it we find most of the prominent artists, writers and intellectuals of Paris at this time, 31 individuals in all. Apart from their host, Jean-Baptiste Isabey (1767–1855), the artist Boilly is also among the figures, placed discreetly in the background. The painting was a clear statement about the role, self-image and new social aspirations of the artist. Not only the choice of friends of Isabey, but the room itself spoke volumes. It represented the latest in interior design, the work of Percier & Fontaine. It has even been claimed that the room did not yet exist in this form when the painting was shown at the Salon in 1798.

Boilly later repeated the theme of the studio, both as a social space and as a setting for a family portrait. Artists in the Sculptor Houdon’s Studio, and a variant showing the famous sculptor surrounded by his family, are two examples, but none of these paintings was as ambitious in scale as his Gathering of Artists in the Studio of Isabey. That was and remained the painting that many other French artists were forced to measure up against.

One of those artists was Marie-Gabrielle Capet (1761–1818), with her Atelier of Madame Vincent (Fig. 3). Capet was a pupil of Adélaïde Labille-Guiard (1749–1803), who was married to François-André Vincent (1746–1816). All three figure prominently in this painting. Madame Vincent is shown at her easel in the centre together with her...
husband Vincent, painting the portrait of Joseph-Marie Vien (1716–1809), the old director of the French Academy of Painting and Sculpture, here in the ceremonial robes of a senator. Vien had once taken up the cause of women artists, among them his own wife Marie-Thérèse Reboul (1738–1806), who had been elected to the Academy as early as 1757. Mlle Capet herself is the closest figure on the left, and the only one who meets the spectator's gaze. In this commemorative portrait painted in 1808, five years after Madame Vincent's death, the artist is writing herself into the apostolic succession. She had lived with her teacher and the latter's husband, and had gone on to look after the widower Vincent. A clear social and professional strategy was important to any individual artist wishing to make their mark. This particular painting differs, though, from other male-centred studio images in that the figure placed centre stage is a woman and not a man in a world dominated by men.

A desire to put oneself on the artistic map was of course key to the creation of a number of studio interiors, and that is also true of Auguste-Xavier Leprince (1799–1826). When he painted *The Artist’s Studio* in 1826 (Fig. 1), he had no doubt seen Horace Vernet's (1789–1863) representation of his atelier on the rue des Martyrs, produced four years earlier. Like Vernet, he uses anecdotal elements to add drama to the combined artistic workplace and social space. Corresponding to Vernet's scene of two artists fencing with their paintbrushes is the young artist in a blue painter's smock on the stairs in the background, who has grabbed a partisan (a type of pole arm) and is engaged in “combat” with an older colleague armed with an artist's stump and another who is using a canvas as a shield. The painting includes no fewer than seven easels and nine painters with spectators. The focus is not on a single artist, in other words, but on several different ones. The studio was in a property called “la Childebert”, after its address at 9, rue Childebert, close to what is now the boulevard Saint-Germain-des-Prés in the sixth arrondissement of Paris. Here Auguste-Xavier Leprince shared a studio with his brothers, Robert-Léopold (1800–1847) and Gustave Leprince (1810–1837). All three are probably to be seen in this interior. The young artist brandishing a partisan on the stairs may possibly be the youngest brother, Gustave, who was 16 at the time. The artist at the easel in the foreground to the far left is now considered to be Auguste-Xavier himself. Preliminary studies are preserved in the Musée Magnin in Dijon, including for the group of figures to the left (Fig. 5) and for another in the background (Fig. 6). A distinguishing feature of both the studies and the finished painting is the individual character of the people represented, showing that they were intended to be identifiable. They presumably included not just some of the main artists of the neighbourhood, but also no doubt prominent officials and collectors. Here Leprince demonstrates his eminent ability as a figure painter. He became famous in his day as one of the leaders in that field, and also appears to have been engaged by several fellow artists, such as the landscapists Alexandre-Hyacinthe Dunouy (1757–1841) and André Giroux (1801–1879), to paint staffage. This was why the young Corot drew particular attention to Leprince's capacity as a “figurateur”.

The same year that Auguste-Xavier Leprince painted this studio interior with himself at the easel, he died at the age of
they are generally shown in the open air. By a fortunate coincidence, the Nationalmuseum has been able to supplement its acquisition of this studio interior with a study drawing of one of the artist’s friends. It shows a young man in a painter’s smock working with great intensity at his easel (Fig. 7). They seem to be sketching from a live model or from plaster models available in the studio. Could these in fact be the same young men, now neatly dressed in frock coats, who we later see in blue artists’ smocks? This study was no doubt painted from life. It subtly captures the light in the studio and the concentration of the young painters. Artists engaged in study turn up from time to time in Leprince’s sketch albums, now in the Louvre, though there they are generally shown in the open air. By a fortunate coincidence, the Nationalmuseum has been able to supplement its acquisition of this studio interior with a study drawing of one of the artist’s friends. It shows a young man in a painter’s smock working with great intensity at his easel (Fig. 7).13

The ambitious studio interior with some thirty figures which Leprince painted the year he died was a commemorative por-

Fig. 4 Auguste-Xavier Leprince (1799–1826), Studio Interior with Artists Working, 1820. Oil on paper mounted on cardboard, 25.5 x 34.5 cm. Purchase: Sophia Giesecke Fund. Nationalmuseum, NM 7509.
trait of the three brothers and their immediate circle, designed to impress, but also with an element of humour. In contrast to that painting, the Nationalmuseum’s small, sketchy oil study on paper is to be regarded as a kind of reportage image. Here, individual features are unimportant. What has caught the artist’s interest, rather, is the actual situation, the creative moment. This smaller painting shows the intensity with which the young artists are engaged in their study, with pencil and drawing board at the ready. It is thus truly documentary and comes as close to the creative process as many of the intimate study drawings in the artist’s sketch albums.

Notes:
4. Musée Thomas Henry, Cherbourg-en-Contentin, inv. no. 835.94.
5. Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris, inv. no. PE 63.
9. According to the museum’s own catalogue, the
painter at the easel to the far left is now considered to be Auguste-Xavier Leprince (see Les Peintures françaises, catalogue sommaire illustré, Emmanuel Starcky and Hélène Isnard (eds.), Paris 2000, p.129).

10. The finished painting belongs to the Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA (inv. no. 1982.58, gift of Harry and Margaret P. Glicksman, Juli Plant Grainger, John S. Lord and Earl O. Vits Endowment Funds and Norman Bassett Foundation Fund).


12. Purchased at the Salon du Dessin at the Galerie Terrades, Paris, in November 2019. The gallery in question had in turn acquired the painting from Ader, Hôtel Drouot, 19 December 2018, lot 178. According to available information, the work belonged to the artist’s estate and was sold as lot 140, “Intérieur d’un atelier de peintres”, in his estate sale (Notice des tableaux, dessins […] dont la vente, par suite du décès de M. Xavier Leprince, artiste peintre, aura lieu le lundi soir, 12 mars 1826 [sic] et jours suivantes […], Paris 1827). The same studio setting served as a backdrop to the exoticising figure studies Leprince made of a bearded man in oriental costume (Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 2003.42.39, The Whitney Collection, Gift of Wheelock Whitney III, and Purchase, Gift of Mr and Mrs Charles S. McVeigh, by exchange, 2003), and of a young man in Greek dress (Sotheby’s 18 October 2001, London, The Greek Sale, lot 4).


Fig. 7 Attributed to Auguste-Xavier Leprince (1799–1826), An Artist Seated at an Easel, 1820s. Pencil on paper, 136 x 110 mm. Purchase: Hedda and N. D. Qvist Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMH 10/2020.