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Daniel Seghers (1590–1661) and Erasmus Quellinus the Younger (1607–1678), Flower Garland with the Standing Virgin and Child, c. 1645–50. Oil on copper, 85.5 x 61.5 cm. Purchase: Wiros Fund. Nationalmuseum, NM 7505.

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In the Artist's Studio. Auguste-Xavier Leprince and the Studio Interior as an Artistic Strategy

Magnus Olausson Director of Collections



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.



 $Fig.\ 2\ Louis-L\'{e}opold\ Boilly\ (1761-1845), \textit{Gathering of Artists in the Studio of Isabey}, 1798.\ Oil\ on\ canvas, 72\ x\ 111\ cm.\ Mus\'{e}e\ du\ Louvre,\ Paris,\ RF\ 1290\ bis.$

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",¹ 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.² 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*, ⁴ and a variant

showing the famous sculptor surrounded by his family,⁵ 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.6 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.7 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 Chil-



Fig. 3 Marie-Gabrielle Capet (1761–1818), *The Atelier of Madame Vincent*, 1808. Oil on canvas, 69×83.5 cm. Neue Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, FV 9.

debert", 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).8 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.9 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).¹⁰ 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".11

The same year that Auguste-Xavier Leprince painted this studio interior with himself at the easel, he died at the age of



 $Fig.~4\ Auguste-Xavier\ Leprince\ (1799-1826), \textit{Studio\ Interior\ with\ Artists\ Working}, 1820.\ Oil\ on\ paper\ mounted\ on\ cardboard, 25.5\ x\ 34.5\ cm.\ Purchase:\ Sophia\ Giesecke\ Fund.\ National museum,\ NM\ 7509.$

only 27. In just a few years he had managed to fit in a surprising amount, ever since his successful debut at the Salon in 1819. The very next year he had tried his hand at the subject of a studio interior, possibly the one he later depicted on the rue Childebert. In the oil sketch recently acquired by the Nationalmuseum (Fig. 4), we see a corner of a studio with a warming stove, evoking associations with the large interior. ¹² The number of painters is the same,

nine. 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 National-museum 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. 5 Attributed to Auguste-Xavier Leprince (1799–1826), *The Artist in His Studio*. Oil on canvas, 38.3 x 36.7 cm. Musée Magnin, Dijon, 1938F4.



Fig. 6 Attributed to Auguste-Xavier Leprince (1799–1826), *Studio Interior*. Oil on canvas, 33.5 x 25 cm. Musée Magnin, Dijon, 1938F3.

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:

- 1. Sylvain Laveissière, "L'Atelier d'Isabey: un Panthéon de l'amitié", in *Boilly: un grand peintre français de la Révolution à la Restauration* (exh. cat.), Annie Scottez-De Wambrechies (ed.), Musée de Lille, Lille 1988, p. 52.
- 2. A comprehensive study of the painting can be found in the recently published monograph and very extensive catalogue of Boilly's work, written by Étienne Bréton and Pascal Zuber, Louis Léopold Boilly 1761–1845, vol. I, Paris 2019, pp. 171–187.

 3. Cf. Iris Moon, The Architecture of Percier and Fontaine and the Struggle for Sovereignty in Revolutionary France, London 2016, p. 73–74.

 Bréton and Zuber (2019, pp. 178 f.) also comment
- **4.** Musée Thomas Henry, Cherbourg-en-Contentin, inv. no. 835.94.
- 5. Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris, inv. no. PE 63.
- 6. Heather Belnap Jensen, "Picturing Paternity:

The Artist and Father–Daughter Portraiture in Post-Revolutionary France", in Interior Portraiture and Masculine Identity in France, 1789–1914, Temma Balducci, Heather Belnap Jensen and Pamela J. Warner (eds.), Farnham 2011, pp. 38 f. 7. Cf. Horace Vernet 1789–1863 (exh. cat.), Académie de France, Rome, and École supérieure des beaux-arts, Paris 1980, p. 68. Like many other artists, such as Théodore Géricault, Vernet had a studio "in this new quarter called Nouvelle Athènes. This became a new cultural melting pot in Romantic Paris" (see Thierry Cazeau, "Les artistes dans la Nouvelle Athènes", in Paris romantique 1815–1848 (exh. cat.), Jean-Marie Bruson (ed.), Petit Palais, Paris 2019, pp. 363–374.

- 8. Alex Privat d'Anglemont, "La Childebert", in Paris anecdote, Paris 1854, p. 197. The street no longer exists, having been swept away in Baron Haussmann's redevelopment of the city in 1866.
- 9. According to the museum's own catalogue, the



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

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).

11. Paul Galassi, Corot in Italy: Open-Air Painting and the Classical-Landscape Tradition, New Haven and London 1991, p. 62, n. 85.

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).

13. Purchased from Stephen Ongpin Fine Art, London, spring 2020, as "19th Century French School".