

20 Years of
Marais Press
Imprinting a Campus and Collection

Hilliard Art Museum
University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press

Published on the occasion of the exhibition *Twenty Years of Marais Press: Imprinting a Campus and Collection*, curated by Benjamin M. Hickey and presented at the Hilliard Art Museum—University of Louisiana at Lafayette, September 10, 2021, to August 20, 2022.

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ISBN: 978-1-946160-87-4

Support for this publication was provided by the Friends of the Humanities.

Photography:
All plate images courtesy of the artists. All photographs of the exhibition installation are by Jessica Harrington. All photographs in and of the printmaking studio are courtesy of Brian Kelly.

Publication design by Jeffrey Lush with support from Arrington Holmes and Amanda Abate. Copyediting by Devon Lord.

Front cover image: Brian Kelly, *Snake, Swine, Cock*, 2014

Back cover image: Brian Kelly, *52°22'9.19" N, -4°54'5.82" E*, BAT, 2021

Front endsheet: Studio shot, Marais Press, Fletcher Hall, University of Louisiana at Lafayette

Back endsheet: *Twenty Years of Marais Press* installation shot

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There is an old story about Leonardo da Vinci's time as a student in the workshop of the Italian sculptor and painter Andrea del Verrocchio that I have always loved. It was originally recorded by one of the first art historians, Giorgio Vasari, and published in his *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* in the sixteenth century. Vasari tells us that as part of Leonardo's training, he was tasked with painting the angel on the far left of *The Baptism of Christ*, a commission that Verrocchio was then completing (Figure 1). It was not uncommon for talented pupils training in Renaissance workshops to paint certain parts of their teachers' compositions like this, but according to Vasari, Leonardo's work was so superior to Verrocchio's that his teacher resolved never to paint again.

Fragments of historical narratives like these lend important insight into the different ways that artists have been trained by teachers who were themselves artists in various periods in history. While Leonardo would not go on to have any assistants finish his own paintings, other artists of the time ran studios where they trained legions of practitioners in their style. Raphael had one of the largest workshops of the era, and he often delegated sections of his own pieces to apprentice assistants after going over their paintings until they looked like his own.¹ Titian also ran a large workshop where he orchestrated numerous student assistants. They would utilize casts, drawings, and sketches that he provided to learn his painting methods. Homogeneity of style was the ultimate goal, and when pupils were successful, Titian was able to sell versions of his own canvases that they had executed as his own.²

Because we value individualism in art today, this idea of artworks being produced by a workshop that functioned as both a training ground and a production collective may seem strange. But this practice was common for many centuries and likely originated in medieval workshops, where various tasks were delegated to student apprentices based on their abilities. It would be continued by Rembrandt, who seems to have rarely collaborated with students; instead he encouraged them, like Titian, to make copies of his paintings, which he then sold as



Figure 1. Andrea del Verrocchio and Leonardo da Vinci, *The Baptism of Christ*, 1472–1475, oil on wood, 177 cm x 151 cm, Uffizi Gallery, Florence.



Figure 2. School of Rembrandt, *Rembrandt's Studio with Pupils Drawing from the Nude*, ca. 1650s, pen and brown ink, brush and brown wash, and black chalk, heightened with white, 18 x 26.6 cm, Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt.



Figure 3. Léon Matthieu Cochereau, *The Studio of Jacques-Louis David*, 1814, oil on canvas, 91.12 x 102.87 cm, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Gift of the 1993 Collectors Committee (accession no. 1993.19.1).



Figure 4. Circle of Thomas Eakins, *Students dissecting a cadaver at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts* (taken during the time that Thomas Anshutz and Thomas Eakins worked together at the Pennsylvania Academy), c. 1882, photograph, 11 x 17 cm, Thomas Anshutz papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

his own.³ In addition to making such reproductions, Rembrandt had his pupils sketch directly from the model, a facet of training that can be seen in a drawing that shows him engaged in this activity while surrounded by his students (Figure 2).⁴ He also retouched paintings produced by those learning from him and sometimes made corrections directly on their works.⁵

Rembrandt's slightly older contemporary, Peter Paul Rubens, also trained many disciples. In fact, he was so overwhelmed by the number of practitioners who wanted to learn from him that he had to turn more than a hundred away. Unlike Rembrandt, however, he did not often correct the drawings of his pupils and would only occasionally redraw the contour of a figure painted by someone in his workshop. For Rubens, learning the classical art of the past was key, and he supervised his students carefully to insure they could eventually assist in the production of his large paintings.⁶ This pedagogical tradition was carried on by Jacques-Louis David, the most influential teacher in European art from the late eighteenth through the early nineteenth century (Figure 3). Like Rubens before him, David rarely made corrections directly on his students' works, and he constantly advised them to study antiques and the greats from the Renaissance. He became known as a master whose training embodied a tradition that went all the way back to Raphael and, as such, he attracted beginning artists from all over Europe. Letters written by his pupils reveal that he was a demanding teacher, but also one who loved his students like they were his own children.

In David's studio, the emphasis was always on drawing from the model, an aspect of pedagogy that connects him back to Rembrandt, but also forward to the late-nineteenth-century American realist Thomas Eakins, who was himself an important teaching artist. During his time at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, he tried to refocus the training on a rigorous study of the human figure, one centered not only on painting from models but also on intensive anatomy lectures and dissections of human and animal cadavers (Figure 4). He was convinced that students learned best if they understood the body from the inside out, thus he deemphasized the kind of reproduction

of paintings and copying of antique casts that had been a vital element in artistic training for centuries. In addition, he was one of the first to adamantly assert that women should have equal access to artistic education, and he held his female pupils to the same high standards as those for the men.⁸

Such innovations continued among leading artists who were also teachers in the twentieth century. From the numerous students who developed novel art practices under the tutelage of Kazimir Malevich in Vitebsk (Figure 5) to those who took Vasily Kandinsky's classes on abstract forms at the Bauhaus in the 1920s, many modern artists created their most important works while training others. Throughout history, students have served an integral function for teaching artists, acting as collaborators and assistants, carrying on the techniques of their masters, and producing copies of pictures that would help disseminate diverse styles. Too often we lose sight of the fact that many of the world's most famous printmakers, painters, and sculptors were also great *teachers* who, in addition to producing groundbreaking works of their own, also carried on traditions of artmaking across hundreds of years.



Figure 5. Kazimir Malevich (center) and UNOVIS students at the Vitebsk station, June 5, 1920, photograph © Album / Alamy Stock Photo.

Endnotes:

¹ John Shearman, "The Organization of Raphael's Workshop," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 10 (1983): 47.

² Hans Tietze, "Master and Workshop in the Venetian Renaissance," *Parnassus* 11, no. 8 (December 1939): 35.

³ Walter Liedtke, "Rembrandt's 'Workshop' Revisited," *Oud Holland* 117, no. 1/2 (2004), 54.

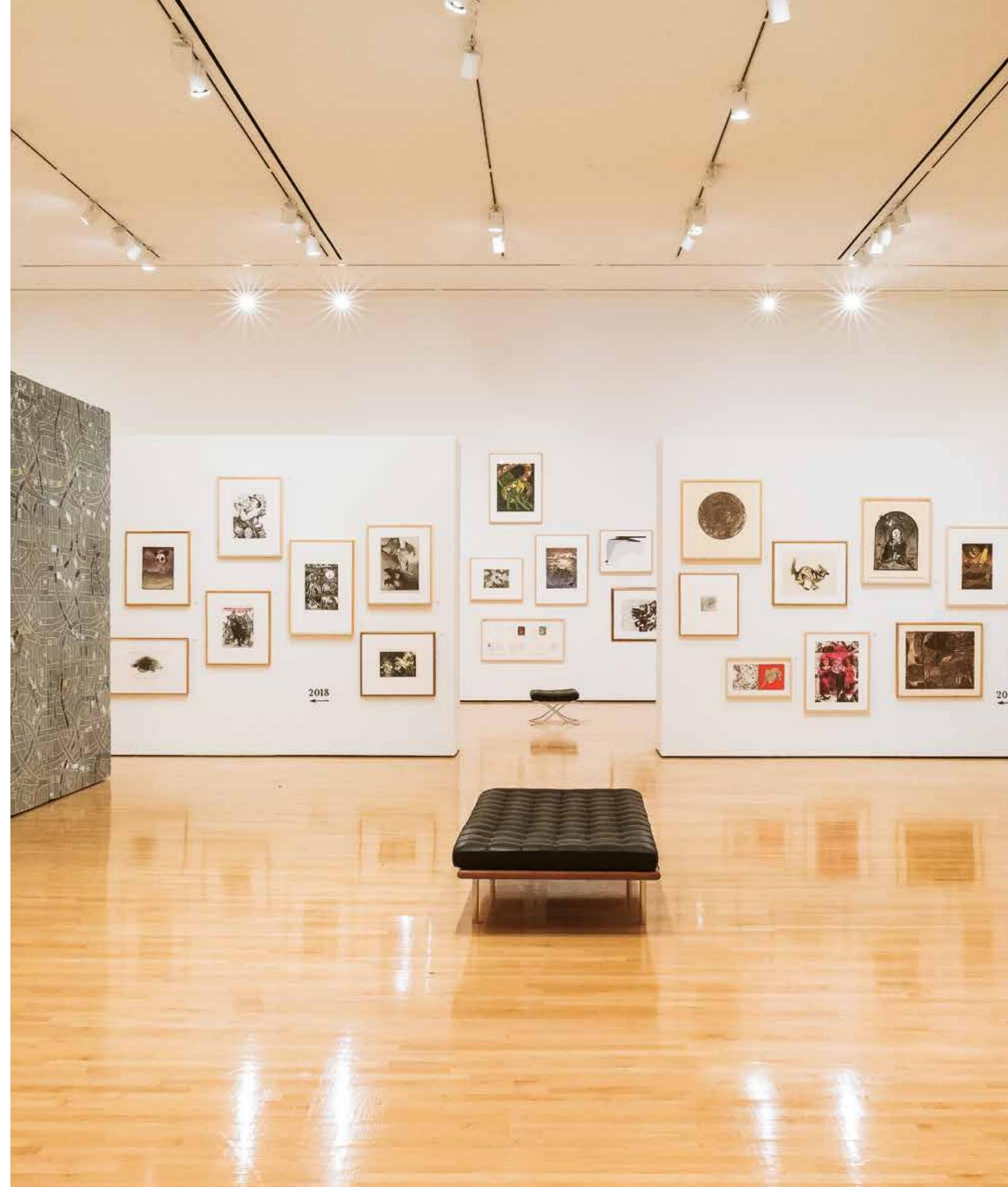
⁴ Michiel C. Plomp, "Rembrandt and His Circle: Drawings and Prints," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 64, no. 1 (Summer 2006): 31–32.

⁵ Liedtke, "Rembrandt's 'Workshop,'" 57.

⁶ Anne-Marie Logan, "Rubens as a Teacher: 'He may teach his art to his students and others to his liking,'" in *In His Milieu: Essays on Netherlandish Art in Memory of John Michael Montias*, eds. Amy Golahny, Mia M. Mochizuki, and Lisa Vergara (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 248–55.

⁷ Betsy Rosasco, "Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg's *Ulysses Fleeing Polyphemus*: A Painting by a Danish Student of Jacques-Louis David in 1812," *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University* 65 (2006), 25–29.

⁸ Sidney D. Kirkpatrick, *The Revenge of Thomas Eakins* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 217–32.



Right: Installation view, Hilliard Art Museum