

Back to the Studio

On the occasion of its tenth anniversary, CalArts mounted an exhibition of alumni work that spoke primarily of the strategies whereby its graduates have achieved visibility in the contemporary art world.

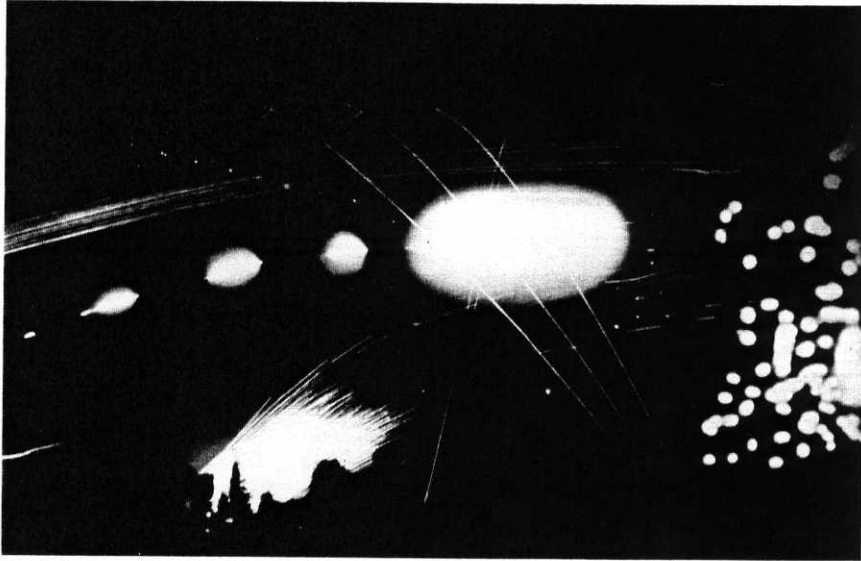
BY CRAIG OWENS

The mystique of the painter, the place where he worked, or the models he drew are only a part—albeit a significant section—of the deeper dilemma facing the modern artist: the necessity of being original, of being unique. Those artists who rebelled against standard tradition, who cast aside the absolutes of the classical past, were able to use the studio as an environment where they could commune with themselves. . . . It was not until the twentieth century, when the studio was found everywhere, even in the artist's mind, that the significance of this theme as a symbol of increasing artistic originality and uniqueness was most apparent.¹

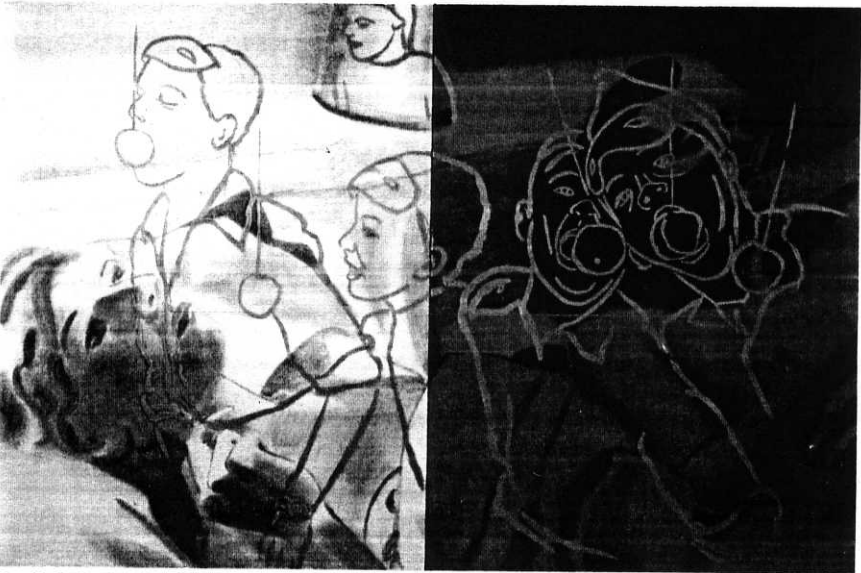
In 1967 and '68, when Dan Flavin visited a number of art schools and departments to lecture " . . . on an American artist's education . . .," he announced that the era of the artist's studio as the *unique* space of artistic production was drawing to a close:

The romance of days of belabored feeling, of precious, pious, compulsively grimy studio-bound labor by haphazardly informed neurotic "loners," often verging on mental illness, relying desperately on intuitive good sense, is passing from art. The contemporary artist is becoming a public man, trusting his own intelligence, confirming his own informed ideas.²

Since the studio functions not only as a place of production, but also of instruction, the advent of post-studio art precipitated a crisis—this was the main thrust of Flavin's address—in the training of professional artists. Art schools and university art departments had become, in Flavin's view, little more than "technical vocational training institutes" offering "formal indoctrination . . . in art historical media"—that is, in conventional studio practice. (Flavin's own work, referred to on this occasion as "recent misadventures in artistic electric lighting," demonstrates the extent to which post-studio art escapes the conventional categories, painting and sculpture, of studio-bound art.)



Jack Goldstein: *Untitled (#48)*, 1981, acrylic on canvas, 84 by 132 inches. Collection Doris and Robert Hillman, New York. Photo courtesy Metro Pictures.



David Salle: *We'll Shake the Bag*, 1980, acrylic on canvas, 48 by 72 inches. Collection Ellen and Ellis Kern, New York. Photo courtesy Mary Boone Gallery.

