

Photographer Joseph Hartman is going inside the artists' studio — at least, those who let him

Joseph Hartman is capturing this moment in Canadian art with photo project Artist Studios

Leah Collins · CBC Arts · October 16, 2015



A portrait of the artist... through his studio. Douglas Walker, 2013. (Joseph Hartman)

Sure as the image folder on your phone is eating all your memory, we have our pictures taken all the time. But how comfortable would you be if a complete stranger asked to photograph the place where you live, where you sleep, where you work? No last-minute clean-up allowed, please and thank you, and he'd ultimately produce an image as big as a picture window, one that highlights every detail in the room. On Instagram, we don't share our dirty socks and dust bunnies. That photo could reveal more about who you are, and how you live, than your last hundred selfies.

That's why [Joseph Hartman](#) plans to visit 150 Canadians between now and 2017. He doesn't know them for the most part, but they're not total strangers, per se. They're his favourite

homegrown artists, painters and sculptors working around the country and abroad. And he's capturing large-format photographs of their studios for a project he calls, quite simply, [Artist Studios](#). A preview of the series, featuring Toronto area artists, is on display at the city's [Stephen Bulger Gallery](#) until October 17, and the final collection will be presented by the Art Gallery of Hamilton in 2017. A book, published by Black Dog UK, is also planned to arrive that year.



Charles Bierk, 2013. (Joseph Hartman)

"There've been a few people who said no," Hartman tells CBC Arts. He's in Newfoundland when he calls. The Hamilton-based photographer, and former apprentice of Edward Burtynsky, has been travelling through Atlantic Canada visiting several names on his wish list: [Mario Doucette](#), [Andrea Mortson](#), [Mathew Reichertz](#), [Will Gill](#). "[Some] said, 'My studio is too personal to have it photographed in this way,' which I completely understand because it's a large-format camera. When the photos get blown up you see all the details, everything is there."

But the details are what make these photos such compelling portraits, and Artist Studios is, indeed, a portrait series — one that aims to celebrate a moment in Canadian art, as curated by the photographer — even if the artists themselves are never in the frame.



Shelley Adler, 2013. (Joseph Hartman)

Hartman captures the spaces as journalistically as possible. Items are not staged, and he asks that artists are busy before his arrival so the rooms look the same as they usually would, full of the evidence of dirty work and creation. "There are interesting things in a studio: the objects that the artists' choose to surround themselves with are telling of their personalities, and also give clues as to where they get their ideas for their artwork."

View one of Hartman's studio portraits, and you're invited to piece that story together. You'll ask how this person works, sure, but also why they surround themselves with the objects they

do. What's so important about a photo, or a book, or a paint-drenched deer trophy, that they'd surround themselves with these items every day?

Take a look at this photograph, produced last year at painter James Lahey's Toronto studio.



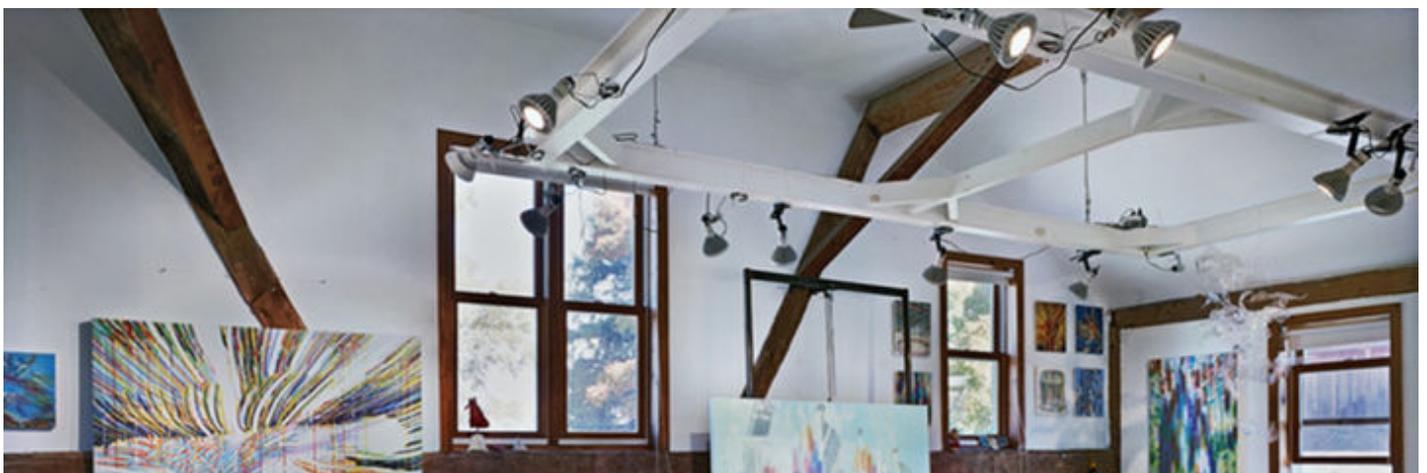
James Lahey, 2014 (diptych). "The gun — it's not a real gun, it's a pellet gun — was just there. [James Lahey] was going to take it out, but I said, 'leave it there.' I guess it's just something he has in the studio and he kind of fiddles with it. I thought it was an interesting object to have in there. I think James is the kind of person who likes a lot of toys — there's the bikes, and those sorts of things." (Joseph Hartman)

An abstraction of pink sunset-hued paint smears might compete for your attention with his paintings in-progress, a bit of literal beauty to be found in one person's process. And those motorcycles — big toys loom larger than anything else in the room. Anything except a conspicuous weapon smack in the centre of the frame. "The gun — it's not a real gun, it's a pellet gun — was just there," Hartman says. "[James Lahey] was going to take it out, but I said, 'leave it there.' I guess it's just something he has in the studio and he kind of fiddles with it. I thought it was an interesting object to have in there. I think James is the kind of person who likes a lot of toys — there's the bikes, and those sorts of things."

Every photograph brings new reasons to be curious, whether or not you're familiar with the subject's catalogue. They're voyeuristic. "Studios are very intimate, they're not something that most people get to see," says Hartman.



Kim Dorland, 2013. (Joseph Hartman)





Katharine Harvey, 2014. (Joseph Hartman)

Hartman is journaling his travels on Instagram, sharing pictures of small details via [@JHartmanphoto](#). Every stop has been a moment of discovery, he says. "Especially since I've been travelling, I don't know [the artists] personally before I show up. That's been a bit of a surprise, just actually meeting the people and how different their personalities were from what I expected."

Earlier this week, he visited Christopher Pratt, painter and Officer of the Order of Canada, in St. Mary's, Newfoundland. "I'm not sure why I was surprised, but it was very simple. It wasn't extravagant in any way. ... I guess it's a bit like his artwork in that it was minimalist in the way he had things set up."

"You never know what you're going to walk into."

Artist Studios. Joseph Hartman. To October 17 at Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto.
www.bulgergallery.com