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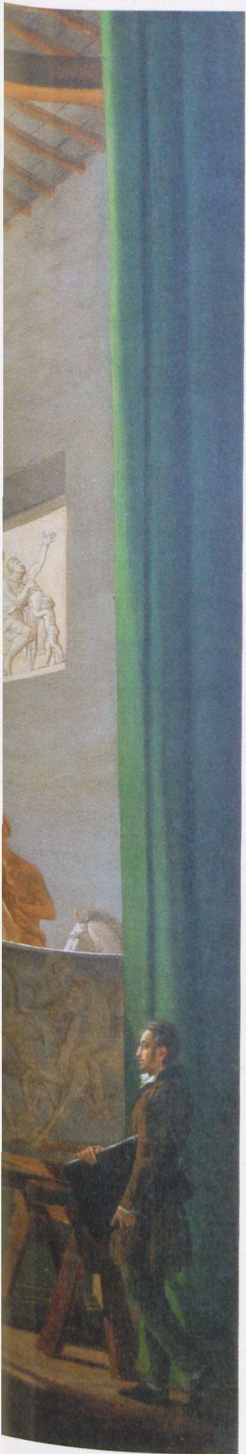
Fig. 1
Pope Leo XII visits Thorvaldsen's Studio near the Piazza Barberini, Rome, on St. Luke's Day, October 18th by Hans Detlev Christian Martens
Thorvaldsens Museum, inv. Dep.18
Oil on canvas
100 × 138 cm
1830

Workshop Cult and Workshop Knowledge

Production and Portraits in Thorvaldsen's Studio

Ulrich Pfisterer



Around 1800, the sculptor's workshop was elevated in a completely new way to become a showroom, a place equally as good for publicity as it was a privileged atmospheric locus in which to encounter the master, an experiential space for his activities and works, a visual parkour through artistic forms of production and stances, and a temple of artistic creation (Macsotay 2017a; Meyer 2017; Schindler 2019; Griener 2014; Würtenberger 1961; Jooss 2002; Mongi-Vollmer 2004; Hurley 2002; Kuhn forthcoming). Bertel Thorvaldsen's six studios in Rome played a substantial part in this development – first and foremost, the large former stable building rented from 1822 at Palazzo Barberini (fig. 1) and the private study in his living quarters in the Via Sistina (*Magazin* 1837, 435; Jørnæs 1991; Randolfi 2010; Mazzocca 2019; Busk-Jepsen 2018, 93). The sheer size alone was perceived as an indicator of artistic success but it was also able to aid his creative rivalry – if and when, for example, the Italian sculptor Antonio Canova's studio was depicted as 'much larger' as in *Courier de Gand et des Deux Flandres* on 15 January 1822: 'However, Canova's studio is much larger than Thorvaldsen's, perhaps the largest in all of Rome.' (Cependent l'atelier de Canova est beaucoup plus vaste que celui de Thorwaldsen; c'est peut-être le plus grand dans toute la ville de Rome.) (Mariuz 2019; Stocchi 2004). In any event, Thorvaldsen's rise also came courtesy of the intensified way his studio worked. His 'first' great work, the clay model *Jason* created in 1803 (the finished marble model of which would not be completed until 1828), was put on display and viewed in his workshop (partly due to a lack of alternative locations for presentation in Rome) and as such became the spark for igniting further success: 'This model drew in experts and enthusiasts and found such general acclaim that it became an object of veneration for every stranger; no one left Rome without having visited Thorvaldsen's studio' (*Allgemeine deutsche Real-Encyclopäde* 1820, 943; Guattani 1806, 143–144).

However, the altered significance of the sculptor's workshop from around 1800 cannot be understood solely from the continually increasing pretensions and self-staging of Thorvaldsen and his fellow artists, or from the new role the original-sized plaster models played in the work process and the expansion of the studio into an exhibition space, a move categorically expedited by Canova (Myssok 2010; Bätschmann 1997). This new-found attention on the place of sculpture production was also largely due to the public's change in expectations. They were now searching for a direct experience of art, and the uplifting presence of the 'originals' (Griener 2010; Meyer 2006). Sure enough, parallel to this came significantly enhanced background knowledge (or at least an increased interest) with respect to sculptural materials, implements, techniques, theories and works. Yet the beholders' new knowledge resulted less from direct information about the praxis and more from reading and this was supplied through various new (partly illustrated) types of literature, which had been progressively

published and in demand since the second half of the 18th century: treatises on materials, implements and working methods used in the sculptor's profession; printed reproductions of works as well as the depictions of works and biographies of individual artists; and, not least, precursory travelogues and reflections on visits to sculptor's studios (Kase 2010; Sedlarz 2010). These factors, which had hitherto never been viewed together, must necessarily be understood within the scope of their mutual dynamic. Only then can the new interest in the sculptor's workshop from 1800 and especially the interest in Thorvaldsen's studio as a temple of exhibited creativity and art production be understood.

The sculptor's studio as a cult locus

The sculptor's workplace as a prime locus and motif was, of course, not discovered until around 1800. In antiquity, the goddess of love brought Pygmalion's artfully contrived dream woman to life in his studio. And the working reality of Greek sculptors was parodied as early as Lucian's *Dream* (second century CE). In Renaissance Florence, we are able to locate the workshops of the masters, beginning with Donatello and Ghiberti, and anecdotes from this working milieu have also been handed down to posterity (Stoichiță 2011). In the late 16th century, artists as well as sculptors, Federico Zuccari and Alessandro Vittoria alike, conceived their artist houses, workshops and collections as programmatic loci of art and recollection (Jürjens 2019; Schweikhart 2001, 259–260). And representations of professions also exist from this time – in prints, only the Swiss-German 16th-century artist Jost Amman's *Book of Trades* (1568), the Dutch 17th-century engraver and painter Jan van Vliet and the Dutch 18th-century engraver Jan Luiken are referenced (fig. 2) (Souter 1818; Mohrmann 2010). Other depictions of sculptors in their workshops intended to convey above all aesthetic norms and allegorical content: for instance, a design by the French painter François Boucher from the 1750s, engraved and published in Augsburg by the German engraver Johann Georg Hertel, in laud of a successfully modelled portrait bust of Louis XV, in fact celebrates the ruler himself (Lock 2010) (fig. 3). However, it is also no coincidence that in the art literature of antiquity Alexander the Great visited solely the studio of the painter Apelles, out of his three preferred artists in painting, sculpture and stone-cutting (Eickelkamp 2016). Above all it is the artists who knew how to stage themselves as courtiers and intellectuals in their workshops; the sculptors remained secondary. Thus there does not seem to be any portrait of an early modern sculptor that shows him in the wider context of his workshop (Kanzenbach 2007). If the persons

Fig. 2
The Sculptor (from a series of 18 trades and professions)
by Johannes van Vliet
Private collection
Etchings
21 × 16 cm
1635

Fig. 3
Sculptor with bust of Louis XV
by Johann Georg Hertel
after a design by François Boucher
Private collection
Engraving
38 × 25.8 cm
Augsburg 1750s

Fig. 4
Ludwig I of Bavaria Visits Thorvaldsen's Studio near the Piazza Barberini, Rome by Ricciardelli
Thorvaldsens Museum, inv. D1771
Pencil, brush and brown ink on paper
28 × 35.1 cm
1829

portrayed are not rendered in the moment of inspired creation and (draughtsmanly) design, then one sees them modelling or carving a detail of the figure. Even in rare examples, such as the portraits by Italian artist Baccio Bandinelli or the Flemish Italy-based artist Giovanni da Bologna (Giambologna), the depicted works hardly refer primarily to the workshop and work process.

The portrait of an artist and his workshop are only to be found occasionally, for example a painting from 1830 by the Danish–German painter Hans Detlev Christian Martens and a drawing from 1829 by the Italian engraver Fabio or Luigi Ricciardelli for Thorvaldsen's workshop in Rome (fig. 4), and a painting from 1840 by the Danish–American painter Joachim Ferdinand Richardt for the studio of the aged Thorvaldsen at Schloss Charlottenburg (Cesareo 2008; Mazzocca 2019; Ferando 2010). Tellingly, this was also the case for Thorvaldsen's biggest rival, the Italian sculptor Antonio Canova, to whom the Dane in other respects owed many suggestions – from effective workshop operations, via the use of plaster models, to the dissemination of his own working concepts in print. Besides the pen and ink drawing by Francesco Chiarottini from 1786 that captures an interior view of Canova's studio with two visitors – without the master himself however – there is only one other known ideal representation of the studio, one featuring the sculptor working on an over-sized *Theseus* statue, painted around 1819 by the Messian artist Letterio Subba (fig. 5). All other genre portrayals of Canova in his studio (most of them with female models) were evidently not created until after his death, in 1822, and these occurred after the two pictures of Thorvaldsen in his Roman workshop. Ultimately, the example of Subba is therefore especially significant because it was a pendant to a now missing counterpart featuring Thorvaldsen in his studio working on the *Three Graces*, which was the earliest known portrayal of this subject; thus right from the beginning, comparing the most renowned sculptors in Rome was a major motivation for these studio paintings (Cesareo 2008).

Besides these two rivals, around 1804 the French painter Louis Léopold Boilly painted two versions of a scene featuring the famous French sculptor of his day Jean-Antoine Houdon, in his studio, in front of an audience, modelling, on one occasion, a portrait bust and, on the other, a male nude (Tillier 2014). Since neither was translated to print, it remains unclear as to how knowledge of these paintings was disseminated. In an intentionally caricatured ink-wash drawing by the German artist Johann Heinrich Füssli of 1773/1774, which shows the Swedish sculptor

Johan Tobias Sergel in his 'Roman studio' with an auger at his grouping of Cupid and Psyche, other objectives took priority – not to mention the question of who got to see the drawing (Tesan 1991). In any case, what was known, in Rome, was the printed catalogue of antique statues from 1768 by the Italian sculptor-restorer Bartolomeo Cavaceppi, which was anticipated by a view into his Roman workshop ('studio') showing various moments working on pieces that were due to be renovated (fig. 5). The idea for this unusual concept for a picture may well be explained by the significance that Cavaceppi attached to the technical demands in restoring fragmented statues: he underscored this too in his treatise on correct restoration methods, which precedes the series of copperplate engravings of statues he had restored (Cavaceppi 1768–1772; Meyer and Piva 2011).

Beyond these occasional early examples, a general reappraisal of the sculptor's workshop around 1800 can be deduced from the interest that a half sentence in the second-century CE Greek traveller and geographer Pausanius's *Description of Greece* (5.15.1) found on locating Phidias's workshop: it has been deliberately preserved in Olympia for posterity and shown as an attraction to strangers. This information, commonly known since the 16th century, is now increasingly mentioned in discussions about Phidias (Millin de Grandmaison 1806). A short time later, from the 1810s, it was believed that the meagre information on Phidias's workshop could finally be appreciated in the sense of a religious place of worship for his artist geniuses: 'The house where the master lived, near the Temple of Jove, and the studio where he worked were preserved for religious purposes. In the middle of the workshop, an altar was erected dedicated to all the gods, apparently because Phidias had depicted them all. Never has a great talent been recognized in a more dignified manner.' (La maison que ce maitre habitait aupres du temple de Jupiter, et l'atelier ou il travaillait, furent religieusement conserves. Au milieu de cet atelier fut eleve un autel, consacre à toutes les divinites, apparemment parce que Phidias les avait representees toutes. Jamais de plus nobles recompenses n'honorerent plus dignement un beau talent.)

Fig. 5
The Sculpture Studio of Bartolomeo Cavaceppi
In: *Raccolta d'antiche statue busti bassirilievi ed alter sculptura restaurate da Bartolomeo Cavaceppi sculture romano. Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome*
Rome 1769

Fig. 6
Studio des Antonio Canova by Letterio Subba
Museo Messina
Oil on canvas
70 × 60 cm
ca. 1819

(Michaud 1823; Millin 1817). This new interest also quickly prompted new subject matter for painting, the visit of Pericles and Aspasia in the studio of Phidias the sculptor, as likely depicted for the first time by Italian artists Gaspare Landi and Giovanni Demin in 1811/1812 and in 1821/1822, respectively (Farinella and Panichi 2003, 41–48).

Set against this background, one can understand if and when the 'Nordic Phidias' Thorvaldsen now appeared in his Roman studio, received visitors there and was recorded in workshop pictures. Or as the *Damen Conversations-Lexikon* from 1838 outlined it:

> 'Near to the Palazzo Barberini in Rome, one sees a resplendent artist's studio which is almost always patronized by art-loving travellers from all corners of the civilized world. It is the sacred artist's workshop of the mighty master of sculpture T[horvaldsen], in which he currently only models in clay, but has the design executed under his very eyes. The absolute priest was to come from the far north, who in Canova's […] smiling native land led the art of the chisel with Germanic sternness, illuminated by the suns of the south at the hand of the Roman Graces, into the grandiose cathedral of Nordic majesty' (Herloßsohn 1838, 119).

In a Ricciardelli drawing, the sculptor is seen receiving the Commander's Cross of the Bavarian Crown on 18 February 1829 from Ludwig I (fig. 4), Marten's painting records the visit of Pope Leo XII on the Feast Day of Luke the Evangelist (18 October) in 1826 (fig. 1) and the memoirs of the German painter Louise Seidel, already record pope Pius VII's visit to Thorvaldsen's studio apartment in Via Sistina. And it is immediately evident here that the model of Alexander the Great's visit to Apelles's workshop was transferred to the sculptor's studio (Uhde 1874, 223–224; Pfisterer 2012). So not only were Thorvaldsen and sculpture as a whole ennobled by the presence of the powers that be; through the historical example of Phidias, these also proved conversely to be a reference to a sculptor's studio that had been recently upgraded to a cult locus.

A comparison of the two views of Thorvaldsen's large studio created just a short time apart makes it clear that the designs and plasters had been moved about here and there over the course of the works. What's more, the spatial dimensions and the arrangements of the statues in the picture of the Pope's visit appear far too large, too orderly and too composed to have corresponded to the actual situation in the former stable. The painter Martens described in letters from 1827 and 1828 how he changed the space and display of the statue to the benefit of his composition concept, so that the significance of the event and a kind of allegory of the Greek-Christian visual arts became discernible (Hillerup 1829, vol. 2, 169–170; Thiele 1831-1856, vol. 2, 131–132; Jørnæs 1991b). Even though Martens himself, at the bottom right of the work, is depicted with a portfolio of drawings under his arm in order to verify as an eye witness the 'truth' of the rendering, it was the painting's intention to use visual manipulation to reveal the message of the studio much clearer than an actual walk through the workshop ever could have, a move likely done in entire accordance with Thorvaldsen. However, he did not own the painting, even though his collection focused in particular on renderings by artist legends and art theoretical content – Martens sold the work to the Danish king instead (Thimann 2018).

Ultimately, the fact that in Thorvaldsen's painting of the Pope's visit, one of his workers

– in the centre of the picture and in front of the Pontiff – is carving a monumentalized marble vision of *Mercury as Slayer of Argus* reminds us, even in this constructed view, that when visiting a workshop, it is part of its very essence to be confronted with the sculptural work processes, materials, implements and preliminary stages of the finished sculpture – and above all, the final plaster models after which a marble version could be commissioned. Over the course of the 18th century, an intensified interest and knowledge in these objects, which of course had always existed in the workshop in principle, developed within the public. The reassessment of the sculptor's studio as a place of artistic production from 1800 did not result solely from artists' aspirations of ennoblement, from the cult of the genius and from recourse to ancient artist legends. Visitors to the workshop were now also prepared for and sensitized to the appreciation of the material and technical aspects of the sculptural working processes in a new way, courtesy of books.

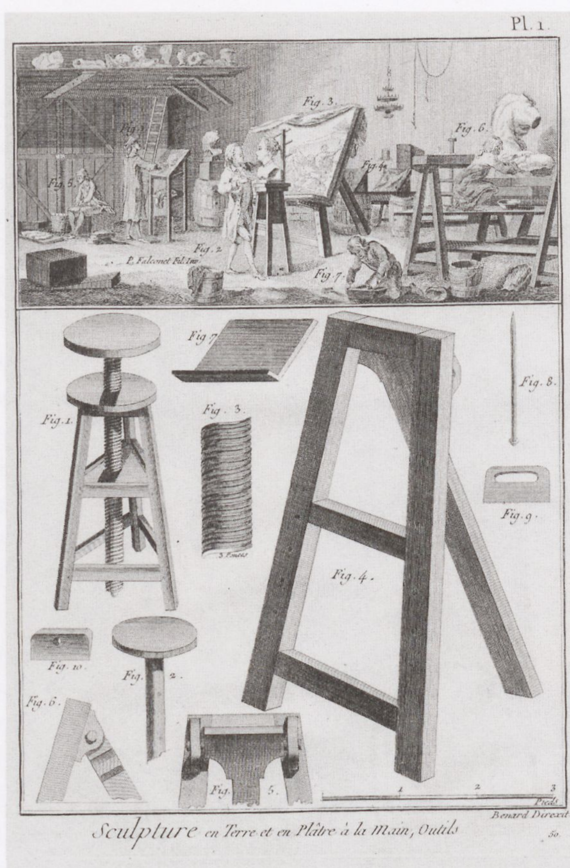
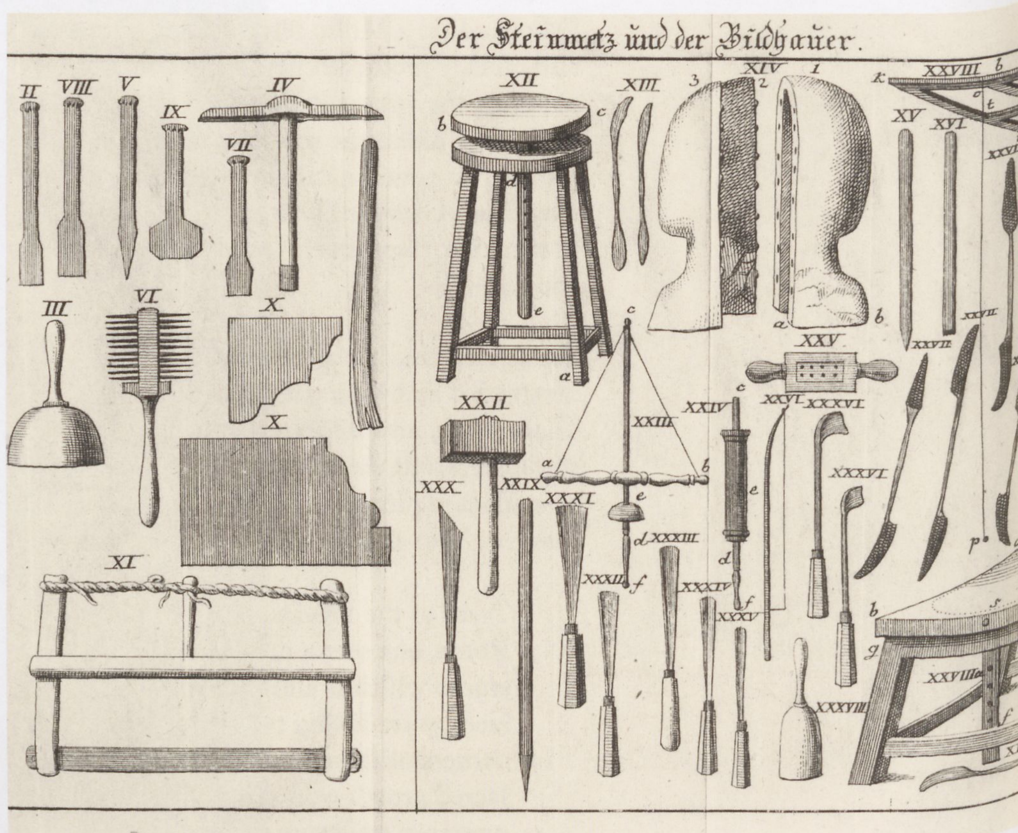


Fig. 7
Collection of plates from the *Dictionnaire des Beaux-Arts, faisant partie de l'Encyclopédie Méthodique*, 1805.

The sculptor's studio and the public's newly found knowledge

Ever since schooling and education became reoriented towards (presumably) ancient standards in the 15th century, basic skills in dealing with the visual arts increasingly became a part of the sophisticated canon of knowledge (Pfisterer 2003). From the early 17th century, additional information and advice on 'Talking about Art' became available in a series of printed pocket books. The French writer René François, also known as Étienne Binet, likely went the furthest in his widely published *Essay des merveilles de nature et des plus nobles artifices*, first issued in 1621 (François 1622, 309–316). Following a short listing of the various types of sculpture, some tools (where one may well be in doubt as to whether their function was made clear) and materials, Binet provided his readers above all with a three-page summary on the correct discourse on sculpture, using sample sentences taken from (classical) literature. This form of interaction with sculpture, however, made a decisive shift with the release of André Félibien's *Des principes de l'architecture, de la sculpture, de la peinture ... avec un dictionnaire des terms* of 1676 (2nd edition 1699): the French art writer now embraced exclusively and in depth the production techniques of painting, architecture and sculpture – the latter alone on 80 pages of text and 15 plates of etchings. The reasons for this – a quest for the complete scientific compilation of all areas of human activity and the accompanying specialist terminology, of academic standardization and training but also the hope of an increase in general education and skills – cannot be elucidated further here (Germann 1997;

Fig. 8
Handwerke und Künste in Tabellen by Peter N. Sprengel 1772



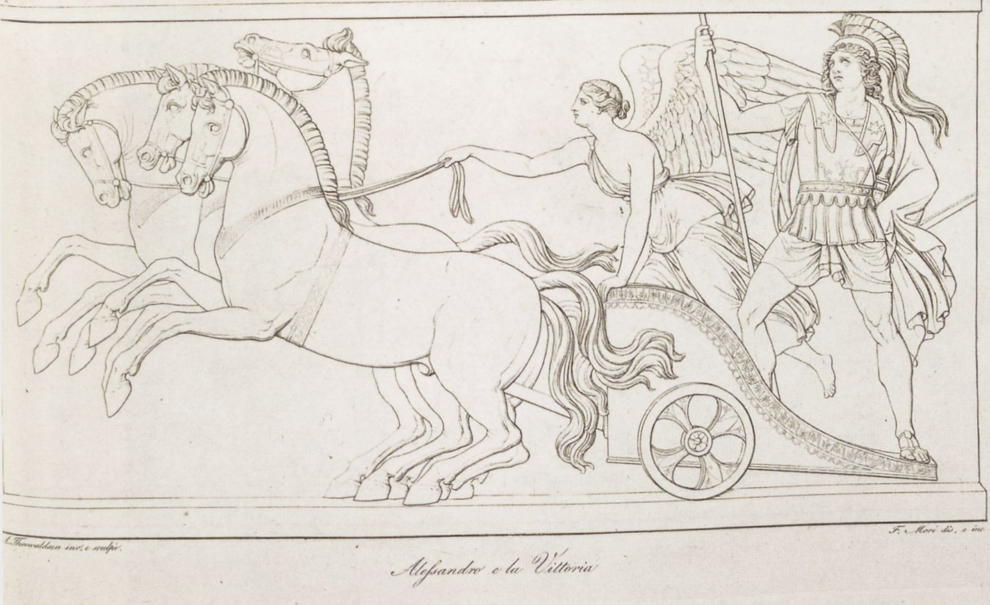


Fig. 9
Scene from the Alexander frieze, in:
*Le statue e li bassirilievi inventati e scolpiti in marmo dal cavaliere Alberto Torwaldsen disegnatied incise dai Riepenhausen e da Ferdinando Mor*i, Rome 1811, plate 37.
Etching after the relief of Bertel Thorvaldsen.

Holert 1998). Crucial to this shift, however, was the release of a large number of other illustrated publications, which was indicative of the wide interest. In the *Encyclopédie* (and its subsequent publications), the entry on sculpture is accompanied by numerous plates with views of workshops and various implements (*Encyclopédie M*éthodique 1791, 309–389, 761–768; *Dictionnaire de la pratique des beaux-arts 1788, appendix*; Pernety 1757; Piva 2017) (fig. 7). In 1764, 93-140, 1772 and 1830 alone, illustrated volumes on sculpture were published in German-language compendiums of crafts and arts (Halle 1764, 93-140; Sprengel and Hartwig 1772, 85–224; Matthaey 1830) (fig. 8). Similar publications were also available in France (the Académie in Paris was a decisive influence in the engagement with the manual aspects of the arts and the crafts), England and Italy, where Francesco Carradori's *Istruzione elementare per gli studiosi della scultura* (1802) presented the profile of an ideal sculptor's studio for the very first time (Carradori 1979, plate XV).

Visitors to Thorvaldsen's studio were primed in terms of materials, tools and processes not just in general through these publications; from 1811, numerous collections of Thorvaldsen's engraving works were also published (Canova had already popularized his contrivances through prints). The plaster model of the 17.5-metre long Alexander frieze, for example, which was displayed on a longitudinal wall of the studio, was likely known to many visitors from literature, starting with the very first print publication of Thorvaldsen's works by the brothers Franz and Johannes Riepenhausen and Ferdinando Mori (Riepenhausen and Mori 1811) (fig. 9), and the first monograph of the Alexander frieze by Francesco Garzoli (Garzoli 1829; also Misserini 1831; Schorn 1835; Bussi 1827 in Randolfi 2010, 79–80; *Courier* 1822, 1). The encounter with Thorvaldsen and his sculptures in the workshop was a recognition of his work, at least partially. For it was also an adopting of the aesthetic visual denominations carried out on the profile engravings in front of the works themselves ('profile' being the key word) (Jørnæs 1991a; Kurbjuhn 2014; Kanz 2017) . From 1831 came additional, comprehensive Thorvaldsen biographies, fulfilling a three-fold expectation of life, genius and work in the studio. Or, as an anonymously published travelogue formulated it: 'Thorwaldsen and his works had solicited my admiration to such a high degree; the writings on him were so full of interesting remarks and he had so many elicitations of praise bestowed upon him that when my business led me to Rome, I had no more urgent wish than to see Thorwaldsen' (*Magazin* 1837, 495).

However, whereas in the third volume of his *History of Sculpture … in Italy …* (*Storia della scultura dal suo risorgimento in Italia sino al secolo di Napoleone …*) in 1818 Leopoldo Cicognara had placed Antonio Canova as the new pinnacle and exponent of the 'fifth epoch' of Italian sculptor tradition since the revival of antiquity by Nicola Pisano (Cicognara 1818, vol. 3, 199–323), Thorvaldsen's art is presented and perceived differently – as a new endeavour by a Nordic artist, one that was overcoming these traditions, to recreate sculpture in Rome once more to a standard prevalent in antiquity. Evidence of this can be followed in Thorvaldsen's first plasters transported to Copenhagen – *Ganymede* and *Hebe* – which arrived there on 10 September 1825 with the brig *St. Croix* and were installed from April 1826 in the local academy and studied by the emerging generation of artists as if they were antique statues. An anonymous painting in which a very young illustrator is studying a seated nude colleague revealed an early reaction to the arrival of these works (fig. 10). Here, Thorvaldsen's Greek goddess of eternal – or forever regenerating – youth, Hebe, and the 'most beautiful of all mortals', Ganymede, appear to guide us like inspirational figures and patron saints of this newly blossoming art in Copenhagen (see Kuhn 2020). This nude study is reminiscent, incidentally, of another motivation, at least of the male visitors of Roman (sculptor) studios: the erotically

charged hope of encountering a female model there, for which Rome, in contrast to the north, was so renowned (Schadow 1802, 346; Mildenberger 1991).

The fact that northern alpine art connoisseurs thought more in terms of a 'revival' of culture after 1800 than along traditional lines is exemplified in the travelogue (1821) of the Irish traveller and author Lady Morgan, alias Sydney Owenson, who visited the Florentine studio of the sculptor Lorenzo Bartolini, among others. It became clear how intensively the collected portraits there were viewed in terms of the sitters' physiognomy, character, income and nationality: 'The studio of a sculptor is always a delightful place to visit: that of signor Bartolini is particularly so to an English traveller, because it is a "brief abstract and chronicle of the times" and country to which he belongs; where a physiognomist might give a lecture on British heads, from subjects supplied by those three great councils of the nation – the House of Lords, the House of Commons, and Almack's. […] Independent of the extraordinary fidelity of the likenesses they are eminently precious as specimens of the perfection to which modern sculpture has arrived, at an epoch so near to that of its revival from a state of absolute degradation' (Owenson 1821, 137–138). Thorvaldsen's Roman studios must soon have been comparable to a 'hall of fame' of living and deceased luminaries and travellers of Rome in view of the growing number of portrait commissions. The attraction here must have been not only the walk-through beforehand and the discussion of the depictions but also, for potential future clients, in seeing which portrait collective they would join and in what pose, style and accoutrements they would be immortalized. Naturally, this provoked extremely critical evaluations: 'He [Thorvaldsen] is an ugly Christian, every way mean in appearance, without the least expression of intellect, – even in the bust, which, in imitation of Canova, he modelled of himself. Thorwaldsen has, however, according to some, the fault – according to others, the merit of being a most wretched bust-builder, witness the one he took of Lord Byron, to the great disappointment of every English pilgrim that beholds it at his studio. Still however, lords and ladies sit to him, and rows of fair skulls with their formal little side curls, which look so barbaresque in marble, bear witness of the artist's occupation more than of his talent' ('Galleries and Studios in Rome' 1824, 126).

By this time at the latest, the new functionality and publicity of the sculptor's workshops and artist's studios had become a self-evident part of Roman landmarks. Now there were not only directories and listings in the guides specifically on the city's artist studio's (Keller 1824; Melchiorri 1834, 656; Le Grice Count Hawks 1841); based on the workshops, one could now even compare the characters of the artists and their works in Rome with the whole of Europe: 'While [the French painter François-Pascal Simon, Baron] Gerard is famous for the aristocratic tone of his studio and [the French painter Anne-Louise] Girodet[-Trioson] for the splendid confusion of his own, which [the Italian painter Vincenzo] Camuccini has elevated even more, Thorwaldsen still lives, simply and utterly scornful of everything outside, in his quiet apartment on the Via Sistina' (*Das Inland* 1830, 303; Birkedal Hartmann 1991, 129). Even in comparison to this conspicuously private modesty, Thorvaldsen's large workshop at Palazzo Barberini was if not the most spacious then at least the most important artist's workshop in Rome (after Canova's death in 1822, in any case), a place that contributed decisively to the altered view of the sculptor's studio as a temple of art and creativity.

Fig. 10
A young artist at the Academy draws a nude
by unknown artist
Private collection
Oil on canvas
57 × 51 cm