

The image features a bold, abstract graphic design. The background is a mix of bright pink and black shapes, creating a dynamic, layered effect. The text is centered and reads: 

**STAGING THE  
STUDIO (THE  
CHOREOGRAPHY  
OF CUTTING)**



The image features a bold, abstract graphic design. The background is a mix of solid black and vibrant pink shapes. A large, irregular pink shape dominates the left and bottom-left areas, while a large black shape occupies the top-right and bottom-right. The text 'SALLY SMART' is centered in a bold, pink, sans-serif font. The word 'SALLY' is on the top line, and 'SMART' is on the bottom line. The letters are thick and blocky, with a slight shadow effect. The overall composition is dynamic and modern.

# SALLY SMART



The Margaret Lawrence Gallery is excited to present *Staging the Studio* by Vice Chancellor Fellow Sally Smart. Whilst Sally's investigations of the body, cultural heritage and pedagogy have been shown in Australian and international museum contexts, they have a special resonance here, within an art school. We are indebted to Professor Glyn Davies, Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, the External Relations staff and the Directorate of the Victorian College of the Arts for their assistance in bringing this project to fruition. We thank Vikki McInnes for her thoughtful commentary and warmly congratulate Sally on this ambitious and imaginative drawing together of themes that are at once personal and shared, localised and global.

Dr David Sequeira, Director, Margaret Lawrence Gallery

Sally Smart conceives of the studio space as analogous to a rehearsal space—a site where she can choreograph the myriad ideas and elements that form her work, and test their formal and material concerns. At a given moment the constituents might include performers, puppets, pirate ships or philosophers, with associative images and texts connecting or unravelling in various states of construction and reconstruction. Movement and process are described and documented in image and film, by drawing and mapping, but especially through cutting—a transitional and transformative process she employs to yield change. And, as Smart has noted: as a feminist artist, this is political.

Much has been written about Smart's studio—the physicality and the psychology of the space as well as her methodologies and processes.<sup>1</sup> It's a charged space and one that is in constant flux, shifting its character, its orientation and seemingly even its boundaries according to the projects that are being prioritised inside. It's a very compelling space from which to consider Smart's practice with its rich array of source materials and works in process. Moreover, the studio is a particularly salient context given this current project is presented at the Margaret Lawrence Gallery, itself embedded among the studios of emerging generations of artists at the Victorian College of the Arts.

Since the late 20th century there has been an institutional tendency toward post studio practice—incorporating some of the strategies and approaches by which artists have embraced art making beyond the confines of traditional studio spaces. That universities have attempted to formalise these inclinations is hardly surprising because if art students don't require a studio in which to work, one can imagine the numbers that might be squeezed through art schools. Lecture theatres could be full of aspiring artists and universities might produce artists in the same manner and measure as they do lawyers or accountants. However, the post studio condition does not reflect the realities and desires of most artists, nor those of the art school. (Smart was one of the notable alumni who advocated alongside the *Save the VCA* campaign of 2010 to ensure the studio remained at the front and centre of institutional pedagogy.) Of course, this studio is not precisely the space called into question through post studio critique, nor is it the practice that Daniel Buren condemns as creating 'objects that complement our society of exchange and market value.'<sup>2</sup> It is not the ivory tower of the creative genius who works away in solitude, nor is it the factory where numerous assistants realise the work of the master. Rather, the studio considered here is a physical rendering of an artist's everyday practice, a site of agency and a framework for integrating and connecting.

The studio has become something of a curatorial trope in recent years, reaching a zenith at this year's Venice Biennale where the most resonant works were situated in or emerged out from the artist studio: Dawn Kasper's *The Sun, The Moon, and The Stars* (2017); Lee Mingwei's *The Mending Project* (2009-17); Olafur Eliasson's *Green light – An artistic workshop* (2016-17) and Xavier Veilhan in the French Pavilion, among others. Most compelling, though, was *Flora*, the exquisite 2017 film by Teresa Hubbard

and Alexander Birchler, which marries the facts and fictions of Alberto Giacometti's little known American lover, Flora Mayo. In his review of Flora, the American writer, curator and colleague of Smart, Gregory Volk wrote:

It's also not just art but the life of this studio that is so important: Flora chopping wood to make a fire in the cold morning; pouring milk into a dish for the hungry cat who laps it up; weeping on the bed. Flora sways and Giacometti twists as they dance together to a jazz record; a shot of their scruffy shoes moving across the floor is utterly endearing. The two share a meal, with wine, and playfully smash a hard-boiled and raw egg together, not knowing which was which (Flora has the hard-boiled one). You feel their ardor and delight. And you can't help but think that here, or in a similar place, is where Flora really belonged: in a studio, as an artist.<sup>3</sup>

It is not simply the commitment of early modernist Mayo to her studio that circles back to the contemporaneity of Smart in hers, but also the absolute porosity between the art and the lives that occupy these spaces. Smart recounts banging on the door of her artist husband's studio, which was then located next door to hers, and handing over their newborn son (himself now an artist) when it was Smart's turn for uninterrupted studio time. Social gatherings, curatorial visits and business meetings all take place among the work, while days and nights disappear into each project.

Ultimately, of course, it is the making—and the overlapping and unfolding processes engaged in the making—that remains at the core of this studio. Smart's practice of creating installations through the physical action of pinning and repinning collaged elements to the studio wall is performative in its nature and performed over time. For Smart, the process of creating an artwork in the studio is embodied within the work and the process becomes the artwork itself, with each work proposing a new space for her ideas inhabit. Staging the Studio represents the process—and the progress—of numerous interrelated and ongoing bodies of work. More than simply staging the studio, however, the exhibition brings Smart's long-standing commitment to feminism, pedagogy and notions of the avant-garde into a direct relationship with interrogations taking place within the art school studios today.

Vikki McInnes

Vikki McInnes is managing editor of Art + Australia at the Victorian College of the Arts and co-director of Sarah Scout Presents.

1. Included among the many texts discussing Smart's practice by way of her studio are: Emily Cormack, 'Where I work: Sally Smart', *Art Asia Pacific*, Issue 69, Jul/Aug 2010; Anna Mad-eleine, 'The Pedagogical Puppet', *Art Almanac*, March 2013; Rebecca Gallo, 'Sally Smart: Piece By Piece', *Vault*, Issue 14, May 2016.
2. Daniel Buren, 'The Function of the Studio Revisited' in Jens Hoffmann (ed.), *Documents of Contemporary Art: The Studio*, Whitechapel Gallery/The MIT Press: 2012.
3. Gregory Volk, 'Now and Then: The Rediscovery of Flora Mayo', *Hyperallergic*, <https://hyperallergic.com/382724/flora-teresa-hubbard-alexander-birchler-swiss-pavilion-venice-bien-nale-2017>, accessed 10 September 2017.

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