

# HYPERALLERGIC

## Wandering the Artist Studios of Dumbo

Open studios events allow a type of intimacy with an artist's work that is rare.



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Maria Berrio, "Wildflowers" (undated) at Smack Mellon Gallery (image courtesy the artist)

After a few years making the trips on the merry-go-round of open studios around the city, I find that the enjoyment I get tends to be twofold: discovering new artists I hadn't known about before and running into artists whose work I am already familiar with, but whose studios I had not previously visited. I especially like the latter experience because it feels like in an open studio context the heat under the pan is turned down and neither the artist nor I need to be as performative in our roles. I can just engage chit chat, or discuss what the artist's latest projects are, or bring friends along and introduce them to the work and see through their eyes what is marvelous or surprising about the work.

When I ventured out to the Dumbo district for their open studios event last weekend I genuinely enjoyed myself, in both respects. Among the new artists I discovered were [Stefan Killen](#) at 68 Jay Street, whose pinhole, black and white photography has a

misty, ethereal, almost nostalgic pull. Then, over at Smack Mellon I got to meet [Christie Neptune](#), whose video work (I discovered while writing this) I have seen before and was very impressed by. In her studio, Neptune had images that seemed to be about deconstructing the artifice of studio photography by giving the viewer a cutaway perspective of the artist among her studio tools and appurtenances.

Down the hall from Neptune, I ran into the painter [Maria Berrio](#), who was only showing projected images of her work since the space was still working its way back from an unfortunate flood that had occurred months before. Berrio's work is magpie, riotously colorful, with human figures almost always facing the viewer in a demeanor of watchful awareness. Her scenes mix the magical and the mundane in ways that are just riveting. [Samantha Keely Smith](#) at 68 Jay Street combined portraiture with her rambunctious fictional landscapes to create images of faces that teetered on the verge of dissolution.

At the Sharpe Walentas Studio Program, [Laura Bernstein](#) took the figure into macabre territory with her explorations of the idea of the cuckold. As she told me, in Shakespeare's work men whose wives were unfaithful sprouted horns in their bodies, so she sculpted figures that represent what that nightmare might look like embodied.



Christie Neptune "Exposing My Limits behind America's Curtain" (2018)  
at Smack Mellon gallery (photo courtesy the artist)

Among the artists I already knew, I was thoroughly delighted to run into several of them at Sharpe Walentas. [Derek Fordjour](#), whose painting work with cheerleaders and professional athletes [I've written about](#) and continues to strike me as timely and insightfully conceived, was there. I was glad to meet [Brandi Twilley](#) for the first time, having written on her 2017 [deeply felt show at Sargent's Daughters](#). One of Twilley's current projects is a series of portrait paintings of Kellyanne Conway, which depict this infamous counselor to the current president morphing into an increasingly wretched appearance.

Lastly, I ended up at the studio of [Narcissister](#), an artist whose reputation precedes by a good country mile. She makes work that is focused on the female body transgressing the implicit rules of women's social comportment that aim to police clear distinctions between the genders. Her work is forceful and confrontational but also sexual in a way that stymies shame. In an image tacked onto her studio wall she says she uses for inspiration, a male doll has his head lost in a woman's vagina, I also see the comic in her who wants to laugh at our silly, moribund patriarchal mores.

I ran into several other artists while making my visits, and that too is an added boon to my open studio jaunts. It's key, I realize, to have these moments of contact with artists that feel both intimate and freeing.

*[Dumbo Open Studios](#) took place Saturday, April 28 and Sunday, April 29 around the Brooklyn waterfront, and was free and open to the public.*

