



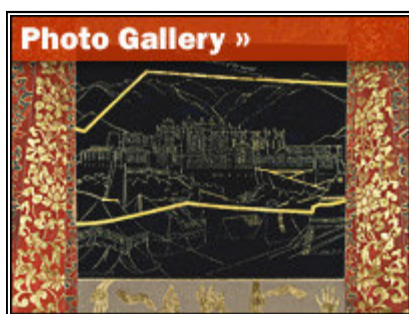
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Arts & Culture

Apprenticeship, Illumination in a Modern-Day Atelier

by Margot Adler

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Weekend Edition Saturday, April 12, 2008 · In a tiny studio in a modest house in East Hampton, New York, artist Ellen Frank is reviving a method of artistic creation that's usually associated with the Renaissance. It's the atelier, a workshop where apprentices learn the skills of a master by working with that artist on his or her original works.

"I think we bring back an intimacy of mentorship and training, where the apprentice or intern learns directly from the experienced artists," Frank says of her atelier.

"It is not teaching through critique ... it is teaching through saying, 'Yes,' and 'Why not try this,' and 'Yes, can you push this further?'"

Ellen Frank

Frank specializes in illumination, an ancient art that attaches precious metals, like 22-carat gold or silver, to a painting or manuscript. Four of her illuminated paintings, part of an ongoing work called "[Cities of Peace](#)," are presently being shown at the Tria Gallery in Chelsea, in New York.

"Illuminated manuscript itself is a marriage not only between word and image, but it's a marriage between the flawed human and the divine perfection," Frank instructs her apprentices.

Apprenticeships in Frank's studio usually last several intense months, during which the young artists work side-by-side with Frank in the creation of commissioned work — most recently three illuminated pages for a book for Passover.

The apprentices participate in all aspects of the paintings, from research to design and execution, and even have a hand in some of the business initiatives related to Frank's foundation, including writing grants and

arranging showings.

In return, apprentices get credited for their work, and their names always travel with the paintings when they are shown in galleries. But it's the lessons on artistic technique that really drive the atelier.

"It is not teaching through critique," Frank explains. Rather, "it is teaching through saying, 'Yes,' and 'Why not try this,' and 'Yes, can you push this further?'"

Frank believes that the disappearance of ateliers over the centuries has meant the decline of technique and craft, and she points to the progress made by her apprentices as evidence of the knowledge and skills that the atelier setting can impart:

"Interns actually become better at technique than I am, they become able to achieve things because they do it, and do it, and do it, and their learning curve is very steep," she says.

Frank says her plans for an illumination atelier started years ago, around her kitchen table and tiny studio, but her real dream for the future is an open atelier where all kinds of people — not only professional artists — can come and learn.

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