A black and white photograph of Garner Tullis in his studio. He is sitting in a chair in the center, looking towards the camera. Behind him is a long, narrow white table. In the foreground, there is a large, abstract painting on an easel. The studio has a dark, industrial feel with a boombox on a shelf in the background.

Garner Tullis
and
the Art of Collaboration

DAVID CARRIER



Lecturer in the Council of the Humanities and Class of 1932 Fellow in Philosophy, Princeton University for the Spring Semester, 1998, David Carrier is Professor of Philosophy, Carnegie Mellon University. His books include *Artwriting* (1987); *Principles of Art History Writing* (1991); *Poussin's Paintings: A Study in Art-Historical Methodology* (1993); *The Aesthete in the City: The Philosophy and Practice of American Abstract Painting in the 1980s* (1994); *High Art: Charles Baudelaire and the Origins of Modernism* (1996); *England and its Aesthetes: Biography and Taste* (1997). His *The Aesthetics of the Comic Strip* is forthcoming. Well known as an art critic, his writing has been published in *Art in America*, *ArtInternational*, *Artforum*, *Arts Magazine*, *The Burlington Magazine*, *Sculpture*, and *Tema Celeste*. He has lectured extensively at art schools, museums and philosophy and art history departments in the United States and Canada, as well as in Western Europe, New Zealand and China.

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New York City 7 January 1999
"for Ron Tarowick"

Can it be that, more than, a decade has passed since I bought your painting just trusting my eyes? It hangs on 10 White St still today. How could I know that moment would transform my life from a little Gail Berkus/Pamela Auchincloss safari into what became known as my "Robin Hood/young artists development program" for a decade? Through the thick and then the thin of difficult art seasons we survived - with ♥! You moved me to New York - pushed me to buy 10 White Street - and introduced me to these young artists in this book! How can I ever say "Thank you!!!" enough? Thanks for one of the best collaborations ever! With respect, fondest wishes, and gratitude... stay painting! Garner

collaborations go wrong, he has observed, it is almost always because an outsider – an art dealer or a spouse – has tried to interfere. Whether the artist be a famous senior figure, or a young painter or sculptor, this process is exactly the same. Splitting is an acknowledgment that printer and artist have contributed equally to the final result. Tullis tells the story of a once-famous young artist who, when it came time to split the work, just wanted Tullis to divide it evenly. As Tullis recalls, “I said ‘no, I’m curious as to what you think is the best.’ I take, you take. It’s a game. You learn about the other person’s ways of thinking that way.”

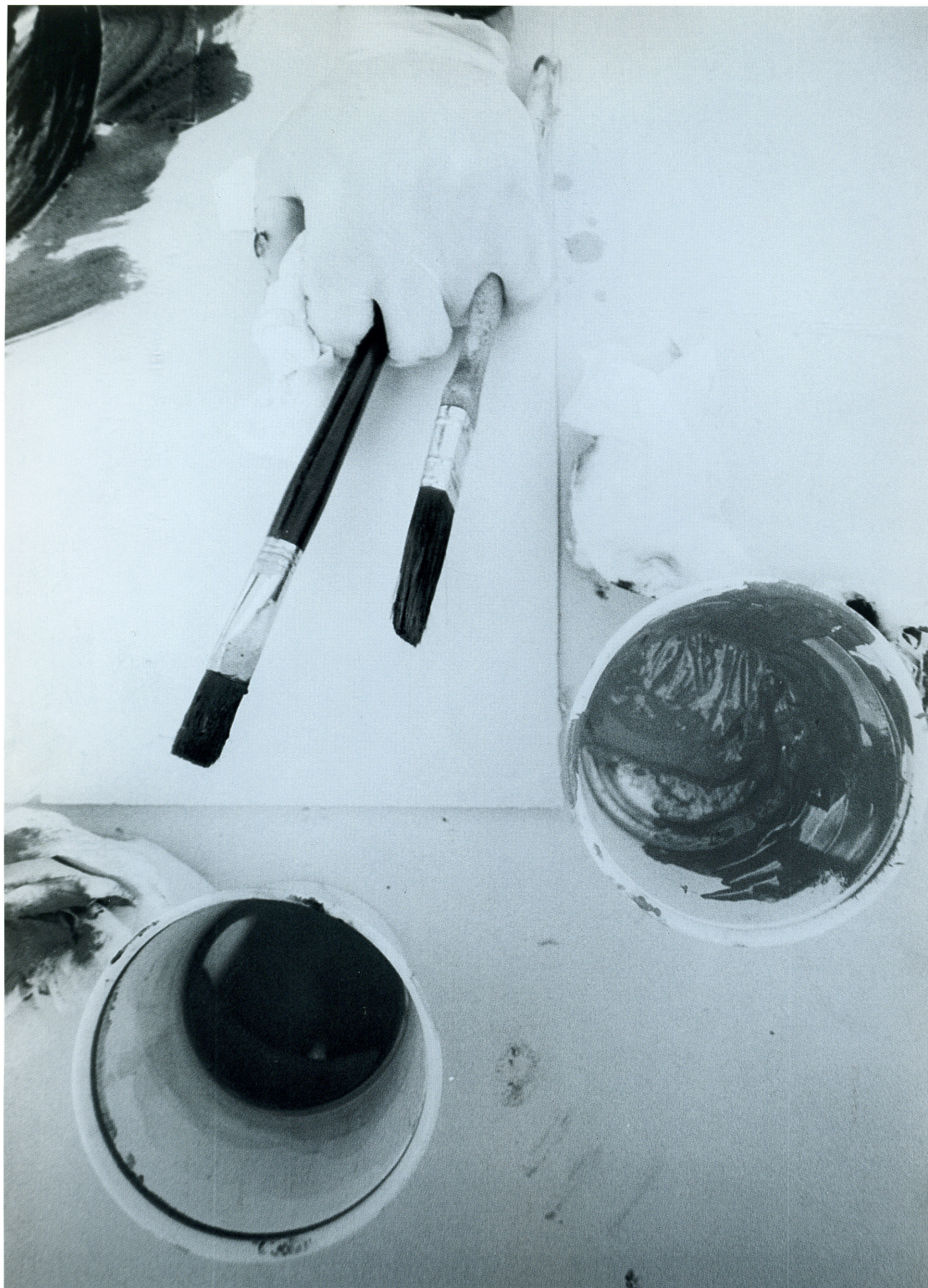
Like musical improvisation, to which it has been compared by two painters who have worked with Tullis, Peter Halley and Ron Janowich, collaboration demands an active passion for a fine balance between discipline, spontaneity, and unpredictability.⁷ Here again, the influence of Tullis’s early training in the Abstract Expressionist tradition of artmaking as process is important. Collaboration, Tullis says, “is not about making a product. It is about trusting that through the process of trading ideas, good results can be achieved.” The printer provides the facility, but much of the time he should be only “a fly on the wall,” observing but not intervening. For example, in a photograph of John Walker in Tullis’s studio, the artist appears isolated in the enormous working space, but Garner Tullis and his son Richard are nearby, ready at hand. Some artists do their best work when they are given the proper tools, and then left alone until they ask for assistance. At that moment, the printer must be ready to meet the needs of the artist with whom he is collaborating. The abstract painter David Lasry (who worked as Tullis’s printer in the late 1980s and then himself was printed by Tullis in 1989) found that the most complicated issue was learning how to offer suggestions and help without pressing them tactlessly.

Since Tullis’s very large studio is expensive to maintain, a certain pressure on both sides is involved in collaboration. As Jean-Charles Blais explained, “It’s not just your time, the printers are waiting.” When Kathy Muehleemann came to work in Santa Barbara in 1987, the number of prints some artists made worried her, for she works very slowly. One of what she calls “the very magical things about Garner is how he can pull away or come in as you need him.” Working in his studio, she learned to move quickly; coming back to her own space, she slowed down, but found herself thinking still of her monotypes, even those she destroyed. Like other artists who have worked repeatedly with Tullis, Catherine Lee too found that she needs to pace herself, having “every year or two years, a new project. It’s a precious situation, you cherish it, think about what special thing you can do to make the most of it. Every time something occurs that is crucial to my work.” And the painter David Row recalls how “the first day is exhilarating, and by the end (there is) so much anxiety that you pull it together.” For the artist, coming into an unfamiliar studio can be tricky. As Robert Mangold has noted, when working outside of his own studio, “you’re not sitting in your own chair, looking at your own wall. You’re a little less secure about your decisions.” The trick, as it were, is to learn how to use that insecurity and pressure creatively. Tullis recalls the story that Margrit Lewczuk told when Mary Hambleton asked her what it was like painting in Tullis’s studio. “It’s like painting naked on your fire escape in New York City,” Lewczuk replied.

Collaboration can be defined as the ability or facility to get under the skin of another person; to think as he thinks, to imagine acting as he would act. “I’ve always been curious,” Tullis explains: “I wasn’t afraid to dive off the bridge and see what happened. To see myself in, and through the skin of another,” as he describes this process, has for him been a long, hard lesson in learning to be egoless. Doing that has, he adds, “made me a better collaborator.” The printer must be able to guess what tools and paints the artist desires, and what printing techniques might work best. Being able



RON JANOWICH
Untitled
Monotype
53.5" x 40.5"
1989



Ron Janowich, New York '85. Photo Richard B. Tullis II



Born in 1939, Garner Tullis was educated at Principia College and the University of Pennsylvania, where he studied with the architect Louis Kahn; the sculptor Jacques Lipchitz; and such legendary figures of the New York school as Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, David Smith and Mark Rothko. After winning a Fulbright Scholarship which took him to Florence, he obtained a Fulbright Extension and Travel Grant for travel throughout Europe, and studied at Stanford University with Arnaldo Pomodoro and Nathan Oliveira. In 1972, he founded the International Institute of Experimental Printmaking, one in a succession of workshops which have enabled him to collaborate with such famous artists as Richard Diebenkorn, Sam Francis, Helen Frankenthaler, Robert Mangold, Kenneth Noland, Dorothea Rockburne, Robert Ryman, Sean Scully, and William Tucker as well as hundreds of other painters and sculptors, including many younger figures. The first recipient of the Ralph T. King Award for outstanding contributions to printmaking of the Print Club of Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art, he has taught at Bennington College; California State College, Stanislaus; University of California, Berkeley; University of California, Davis; and Harvard University – and worked extensively as a visiting artist in Australia, Europe, and South America. He has had solo exhibitions of his own work at the Cleveland Institute of Art; the National Museum of Art, Belgrade; the Martha Jackson Gallery, New York; and numerous other galleries and museums. His art is in the Cleveland Museum of Art; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the San Francisco Museum of Art; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; and numerous other well known public and private collections. Garner Tullis lives and works in New York, Santa Barbara, Pietrarubbia, and Ischia. This is the first book devoted to the life and art of Garner Tullis.