

TALES FROM THE CITY: New York

words JONATHAN T.D. NEIL

May I make a distinction between what we might call 'lifestyle' and 'studio' artists? These are gross generalisations to be sure, but as the cult of the artistic 'persona' has come increasingly to stand in for, if not in front of, any kind of artwork (no matter how inadequate that last term may seem as a covering concept), it would appear that some categorical exercise, however ill conceived, could be useful at the present moment. I blame *New York Magazine* for inspiring this latest bit of impromptu pop theorising, as two of its articles from the January issue 'introduced' the magazine's readership to the artists Terence Koh and Dash Snow (with fellow artists Ryan McGinley and Dan Colen making appearances as the managers and handlers in the business of Snow and Co.) as the New York artworld's latest 'downtown', outré offerings. As profiles, the articles make the pair sound like interesting-enough characters, but their art would seem to be noteworthy (and notably expensive) by sheer dint of that fact, which is to say by the lifestyles they seem to lead.

Julian Schnabel
comes to mind as a
lifestyler; Peter
Halley as a creature
of the studio.
Rirkrit Tiravanija
probably managed a
perfect synthesis of
the two by inviting
the public into the
studio for a meal

I should note that the latter of my two opening categories, the 'studio artist', has been much maligned of late, and at least since the 1960s, when minimalist object-making gave way to experiments in and on the environment by figures like Robert Smithson and Michael Heizer. That

moment may well provide some historical grounding for the 'lifestyle' distinction I'm pursuing here, though, by which I mean it was also the moment of Warhol's Factory (a point the editors of *New York Magazine* are quick to make as well), or at least its first iteration (a point those same editors miss). This is important: even though Warhol became the centre of gravity around which so much aesthetic activity appeared to orbit, the Factory maintained much of its own identity through its various incarnations (as with the *Argo* of myth). Like Warhol, the 'lifestyle' belonged to the Factory itself - to a place, not to a person (perhaps Andy was more of a 'studio artist' than we might first suspect).

Likewise, we should remind ourselves that minimalism was no solitary creature of the studio either. It owed the articulation of its phenomenological character to the influence of experimental dance and performance work practised by figures such as Simone Forti. But minimalism, or the discourse surrounding it at least, countered the potential for its artists to take centre stage by embarking on a campaign of 'subjective detumescence' (a phrase I take from Denis Hollier). In the wake of 'The Irascibles', shunning the limelight was simply the thing to do.

This impulse has waxed and waned in the intervening years. Julian Schnabel comes to mind as a lifestyler; Peter Halley as a creature of the studio. Rirkrit Tiravanija probably managed a perfect synthesis of the two by inviting the public into the studio for a meal, which was something like life itself, but with only the most demotic stylings (every New Yorker secretly lives on Thai food). At present, though, Tiravanija's 'participatory aesthetic' has given way to a mode of cooler-than-thou posturing, no matter how innocently undertaken, which makes the solitary artist under lock and key in the studio begin to appear that much more avant-garde.

Because for the lifestyle artist there can be no public, only publicity, which functions to keep us entertained, but at bay. Nevertheless, if we are to laud the life lived aesthetically, if now is indeed the time of the 'lifestyle' artist, I have only one question to ask: Don't socialites do it better?