None of my inventions came by accident. I see a worthwhile need to be met and I make trial after trial until it comes. What it boils down to is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration. (Thomas Edison, 1929)

Sweating is an involuntary bodily action, an automatic response to heat, to strenuous work or exercise, to feeling nervous, angry, fearful or embarrassed. What, then, might it have to do with the deliberate work of making art or, more specifically, making paintings? Is painting really such hard work, or such a source of nervousness, fear, embarrassment that it causes the artist to break into a sweat? If Charlie Hammond's new series of paintings insist over and over again on a relationship between sweating and the activity of putting paint on canvas, they don't do so in order to valorize painting as strenuous, masculine, heroic labour, as a spontaneous or automatic process, or even as an especially anxious endeavour. Nor do they utilize any of the usual tropes of labour-intensive painting, being neither especially large in scale, intricately detailed or heavily worked, or painstaking in illusionistically concealing the work that has gone into their making. Instead of any of this they present painting as a persistent effort, sustained across days and weeks in the studio, to work out how paintings might work today, and what relationship, if any, they might have to other forms of work. *The Sweats* is seriously absurd and absurdly serious, as perhaps any artworks that reckon with work in our time must be.

No exemplary or anatomically coherent working body is pictured in *The Sweats*, but because they all incorporate a representation of effort – the repeated motif of a right-angled arm and armpit, stained by cloud-like sweat patches – they make work and working their subject. The work thus evoked is an anonymous and seemingly interminable toil, the character and aim of which is never quite specified. Those figures that do appear in the collaged canvases are composite and caricature-like entities, pieced together from the fragments of other works. Might these pictures, then, embody the work that an artist does to realize and rework an idea, to extend it in a series, to make an exhibition of it, and to put his work back into the world?

Sweat could be read as a mark of sincerity here – you are not just going through the motions if you break into a sweat, you are really working, you really mean it, you really feel it. Interestingly, Clement Greenberg was prone to using sweat as a metaphor for the authentic artistic struggle, noting of Hans Hofmann that 'for fifteen years he hardly picked up a brush but drew obsessively – as he says, to 'sweat Cubism out',' and of the 'colour field' painters that they 'sweated their time out' before enjoying commercial success.[1] Hammond's paintings should indeed be read as embodying an entirely sincere, committed approach to the daily

work of painting, but they don't treat sweat, as Greenberg's rhetoric seems to, as the mark or guarantor of authenticity. In *The Sweats* the sweaty reality of work is reduced to a mere *sign* for work. As Roland Barthes notes of the sweating faces in the 1958 film *Julius Caesar*, sweat, once treated as a sign, is ambiguous: "it presents itself at once as intentional and irrepressible, artificial and natural, manufactured and discovered."[2] This ambiguous play between sincerity and simulation, nature and artifice, in *The Sweats* allows Hammond to avoid some of the embarrassing pitfalls into which painting can fall when it tries too earnestly to picture itself as work, or to picture the work of others.

The repeated rectilinear arm motif in Hammond's paintings performs the seemingly modernist work of emphasizing the shape of the canvas, which it rhymes and repeats over the paintings' surfaces, at times to almost late Cubist effect. But these paintings do not insist on a distinction, crucial to many foundational accounts of abstraction in art, between the specialness and autonomy of artistic creation and the alienated character of ordinary work. Consider Meyer Schapiro's account, for example: 'Paintings and sculptures … are the last hand-made, personal objects within our culture. Almost everything else is produced industrially, in mass, and through a high division of labour. Few people are fortunate enough to make something that represents themselves, that issues entirely from their hands and mind, and to which they can affix their names. The painting symbolizes an individual who realizes freedom and deep engagement of the self within his work.'[3] Hammond displaces the special status of artistic work by indexing it to a marker of undistinguished, quotidian effort, of the daily grind. Sweat is, in these works, the solvent that appears to dissolve the separation between artistic and non-artistic labour, without, however, reconciling the two or resolving the tension between them.

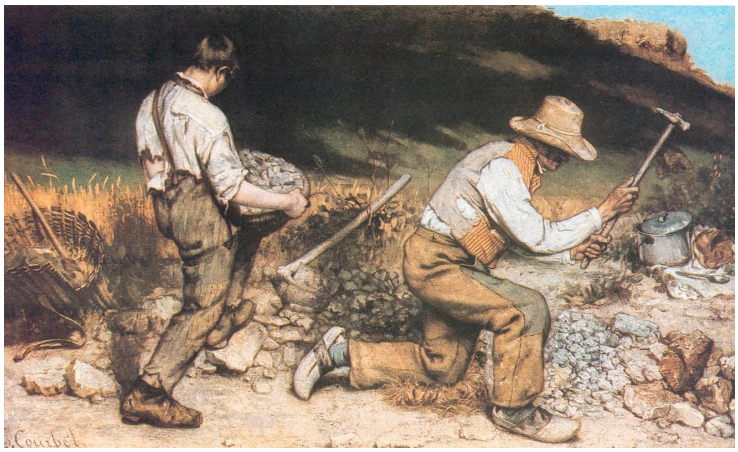
To make the artist into a worker, and work the subject of art, has been a goal of various types of realist painting. But celebration of, or sympathy with, the figure of the worker is easily compromised by the obvious contrast between the kinds of labour depicted and that which produces the depiction. In a debate that resonates with the themes of *The Sweats*, T.J. Clark and Michael Fried offered contrasting readings of the relation between manual labour and artistic labour in one of art history's most notable realist depictions of work, Courbet's 1850 *The Stonebreakers*. This painting shows a young boy and an elderly man, each dressed in ragged clothing, working on the construction of a new road. It is given formal coherence by the arrangement of the worker's limbs at right-angles, something echoed in Hammond's new works, though not, I think, in any deliberate reference to Courbet.

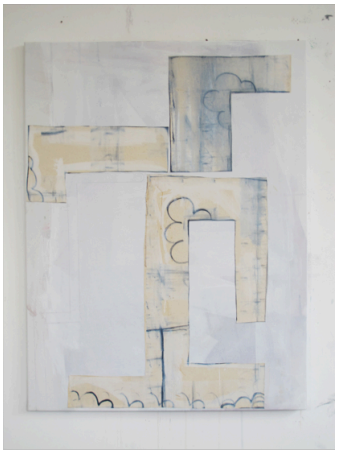
For Clark, *The Stonebreakers*, 'an image of labour gone to waste, and men turned stiff and wooden by routine,'[4] is remarkable not only because it presents work without recourse to narrative or drama, but also because he thinks Courbet recognized his own class-based 'radical incomprehension of the psychology of the working man' and therefore anonymized his subjects to negate any 'conventional bourgeois reading in terms of a personal tragedy or a generalized, but 'individual,' dignity of labour'.'[5] In this and other works from this prolific period of his career, Clark argues, Courbet touched on the presence even in the countryside of class conflicts, to the displeasure of an urban bourgeoisie who preferred to imagine it as a rural idyll. Not only do we find alienated workers in the countryside, but also the *bourgeois de campagne*: 'he had, it seemed, evolved; at times he could even be unconscious of his bourgeois status and its demands. One day he could wear the black dress-coat; the next, the peasant smock.'[6] (The peasant smock, even more alien to the urban art world of today than it was to the Paris Salon in the mid-nineteenth century, makes an appearance in *The Sweats*).

Fried, in contrast, sees the key issue not as Courbet's tact in relation to the specific class politics of the French countryside, but rather how *The Stonebreakers* pictures alienated labour whilst also being 'a densely corporeal metaphor for an act of painting that involved an equivalent to the perfect reciprocity between production and consumption that in Marx's economic theory defined nonalienated labour.'[7] For Fried, *The Stonebreakers* is ultimately 'a representation … of absorption in work.'[8] Specifically, it is an allegory of the painter's absorption in *his own* work: 'I propose that the figures of the old stonebreaker and his young counterpart may be seen as representing the painter-beholder's *right and left hands respectively:* the first wielding a shafted implement that bears a distant analogy to a paintbrush or palette knife, the second supporting a roundish object that might be likened to the (admittedly much lighter) burden of a palette.'[9] Is it too far-fetched to see something of this in *The Sweats* too, some sense that it is indeed the artist's own work that is allegorized by all those sweaty arms? In any case, by making the absorption of sweat into clothes function as the sign of absorption in work, and by allowing free reign to the humour inherent in the idea of a painter seeing a hammer and a sieve as his arcane tools, Hammond moves decisively beyond the terms of Fried's modernism.

If the works are about painting, they are also pointedly about painting's uncertain relationship to a transformed world of work. Amongst the phenomena Boltanski and Chiapello identify with what they term the 'new spirit' of 'networked capitalism' is 'the extension to an ever greater number of wage-earners of the lack of any distinction between time at work and time outside work, between personal friendships and professional relationships, between work and the person of those who perform it'.[10] The freedom, autonomy and creativity once identified

with artistic work, and which are implicit in Fried's notion of absorption, are now recuperated as the prerogatives of capital. This, above all, is what makes the effort to think about art as work such a sweat-inducing business. The works in *The Sweats* make no explicit reference to these transformations, and indeed have a formal and metaphoric vocabulary which seems to look back to archaic forms of manual labour, most clearly in the suggestions of agricultural implements and clothing which appear in several paintings. However, this collapse of the distinction between work and worker forms the backdrop to *The Sweats*, which continues Hammond's practice in recent works of alluding to the personages, attitudes and lexicons which emerge from this 'new spirit' and its spurious progress. In response, the works suggest, we can only keep working.





[1] Clement Greenberg, 'Hofmann, 1961; 'Taste,' 1983
[2] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 28
[3] Meyer Schapiro, 'The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art,' *Art News*, vol. 56, no. 4, Summer 1957, pp. 36-42
[4] T.J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1982), p. 80
[5] *Ibid*, fn. 6, p. 178
[6] *Ibid*, p. 152
[7] Michael Fried, *Courbet's Realism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 262
[8] *Ibid*, p. 103.
[9] *Ibid*, p. 105.
[10] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Gregory Elliott, (London: Verso, 2005), p. 422