

The Performance of the Artist in Homer's *Iliad*
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Hephaistos is the only god in the *Iliad* who has to work for a living. It is in Book XVIII of the *Iliad* that the audience gets a glimpse of Hephaistos performing his labor as he fashions the shield and the armor for Achilles per Thetis' request. In his workshop, however, creating prestige objects of luxurious metals, Hephaistos is depicted as both a hero and an artist. Through the gesture of physical labor Hephaistos creates these objects: gesture that is both performative and creative. As he creates the shield of Achilles, Hephaistos brings a story to life with images just as the poet brings a story to life with words. The objects that Hephaistos creates are prestige items for the heroes and the deities of the *Iliad*. But in addition to being prestige objects, these things are also the indexical remnant of a performative process on the part of the craftsman. It is the index of the performance that the hero takes in the form of armor and a shield, yet it is the objects that are venerated rather than their creator. This relationship between the artist and the art object within the context of Homeric epic is explored by the twentieth century American painter, Cy Twombly, in his abstract interpretation of the *Iliad*, titled *Fifty Days at Ilium*. In this piece, Twombly engages in a dialogue with the text of the *Iliad* as well as the performative process through which a craftsman produces his creations and the performative process through which the poet performs the poem. In this paper I intend to examine the language used in the *Iliad* to describe Hephaistos' activity, placing emphasis on the physical gestures and movements of the craftsman at work and compare it to Cy Twombly's *Fifty Days at Ilium*.