

*The Torchbearers*: Sarah Bodman talks to Natalie Renganeschi about WSW's upcoming anniversary and travelling exhibition

Women's Studio Workshop (WSW) in Kingston, NY, USA celebrates its 50th birthday this year with a touring exhibition, new artists' books being published and a jam-packed Summer Institute programme of paper, print and book classes over July and August.

WSW was founded in 1974 by artists Ann Kalmbach, Tatana Kellner, Anita Wetzel, and Barbara Leoff Burge as a studio workspace championing women's art practices. Their aim at the time was to embed women's art within mainstream art history by offering access to creative spaces. WSW supports all women and trans, intersex, nonbinary and genderfluid artists in residencies and internships. Classes, studio rentals, and public events are open to all.

Originally occupying a two-story house (1974-1979) with the etching studio in the living room and papermaking in the attic, WSW has evolved over the years into the respected and supportive organisation it is today, having resided in its new space since moving there in 1980. In those early years WSW offered screenprint, offset and photocopy design and printing services for artists and not-for-profit organisations alongside developing community and outreach programmes encouraging women artists in the production and exhibiting of printed artworks and publications. Over time WSW has expanded its studios, having welcomed over 1,000 artists through the doors, offering extensive facilities in etching, screenprint, letterpress, papermaking and pulp-printing and book production. Natalie Renganeschi of WSW says of their specialisms: 'One recent notable use of our papermaking facilities is *Erebid/Materia* by Michelle A M Miller, made entirely of handmade paper that was pulp-painted using stencils. Additional imagery and text were added through screenprint and letterpress. Handmade paper also played a huge role in the production of *Golden Lotus* by Colette Fu, featuring a pop-up lotus of handmade paper created from lotus root, Kozo, and cotton fibres.'

More recently risography has been added to the mix. As Natalie explains: 'Right now the riso machine (affectionately named Lt. Uhura) is being used for the artist's book *gender liberators* by Sky Syzygy, printing on over a dozen different colours of paper, and hand-marbled on all six exterior sides. Next up is a project from upcoming artist-in-residence Caroline Kern, then some intensive workshops this summer!'

Artists are supported through a comprehensive calendar of regular opportunities including an Artist's Book Residency Grant, the BIMA Grant for Indigenous Artists, Art-in-Education Workspace Residency and an Art-in- Education Artist's Book Grant plus awards supporting parents with young children or concentrated studio time for mature artists. 'We find it really fulfilling when an artist has a transformative experience in our studios. The gift of uninterrupted time and resources to create art in a supportive environment can have a deep impact on someone's artwork and career. It's an incredible honour to witness these transformations. We love watching the cross pollination of ideas and long-lasting relationships that form between the artists (established and emerging) who come to work and live at WSW. Each new cohort brings a fresh energy and perspective to our studios.'

Over the years WSW has published bookworks by artists such as Carol Barton, Phyllida Blumel, Nancy Chalker-Tennant, Zarina Hashmi, Karen Kunc, Radha Pandey, Clarissa Sligh, Emily Speed and Erica Van Horn. Books produced at WSW have been included in numerous touring exhibitions from *Hand, Voice, & Vision: Artists' Books from Women's*

*Studio Workshop* curated by Kathleen Walkup in 2011, to 2024-2025's *A Radical Alteration: Women's Studio Workshop as a Sustainable Model for Art Making* curated by Maymanah Farhat. This new exhibition examines WSW's history as an organisation that has given a voice to marginalised communities in the USA as part of its remit of artistic production. This summer it tours to Bainbridge Island Museum of Art (BIMA, Washington, USA) and Women's Studio Workshop before moving on to Minnesota Center for the Book then the National Museum of Women in the Arts (Washington, D.C.) this autumn. From the print studio at WSW Natalie adds: 'We are preparing for two new resident artists arriving next week and are busy making plans for the exhibition to make its stop in our gallery this summer! We can't wait for our Summer Art Institute workshop participants to see it in person.'

'We are so proud of our accomplishments over the last half century; we have shed patriarchal definitions of gender to expand who we serve, published almost 300 books, hosted over 1000 artists, and have paid \$1.2 million directly to artists in the last 10 years in the form of grants, stipends, payments for services, and royalties from book sales. We can't wait to see what the next 50 years will bring!'

<https://wsworkshop.org>