

## Inside the Artist's Studio

JAMES BASSLER, HELENA HERNMARCK, AND WARREN SEELIG

Both a sanctuary and a workshop, an artist's studio is a place of inspiration and constant creation. While every artist has a different approach to their working space, those who produce textiles must also accommodate looms, dyeing vats or other medium-specific processes. For this "Spotlight," James Bassler, Helena Hernmarck and Warren Seelig—three artists included in *Sourcing the Museum*—gave The Textile Museum a special look inside their creative spaces.



Hernmarck's studio in 1994. Photo by Norman McGrath.

a two-story space shared with his wife in San Pedro, California and his current studio in Palm Springs. Having recently incorporated backstrap weaving into his repertoire, Bassler is returning to his flexible beginnings. "This allows me to treat any space as a studio," he reflected.

A large-scale tapestry artist, Hernmarck has a 1,000 sq. ft. custom-built workshop in Ridgefield, Connecticut where she shares her home with her husband, industrial designer Neils Diffrient. Diffrient designed the studio over thirty years ago using his wife's start up space in New York as a model, adding what Hernmarck refers to as her "wall of yarn." "There is nothing else like it in the world," says Hernmarck. "There are over 2,000 colors and 3,000 pounds of wool across a thirty foot wall." With four looms, and at one time



Bassler at work at his home studio in Palm Springs, Calif.; A shibori piece in progress, Bassler uses his studio walls for both his own work and collected inspirations. Photos courtesy James Bassler.

Working in studios across the country, Bassler, Hernmarck, and Seelig have adapted their homes to accommodate the unique demands of their working style. Taking his inspiration from the textile traditions of South America, Bassler often works on a human scale. As a student, he converted his bathroom into an ad-hoc darkroom. "My arrangement didn't appeal to house guests much," says Bassler. As his career as an artist and instructor at UCLA advanced, Bassler's studios also evolved—a masonry building in Oaxaca,

two regular studio assistants, Hernmarck was able to work on a majority of her large *trompe l'oeil* commissions and other artworks from her home.

Seelig's work has evolved from wall-mounted soft sculptures, to "shadowfield" installations, to the monofilament-style *Red Funnel* (on view in *Sourcing the Museum*) exemplifies. Large-scale "spoke and wheel" commissions have been borne from Seelig's studio in tandem with this creative development. It is no surprise that the 6,000 sq. ft. basement space in his Rockland, Maine home reflects this diversity. "It's a pretty lively space," says Seelig. "I have experiment stations, collections of all kinds of materials, lights to play with projection. I also have welding and woodworking equipment and looms." His commissions, often for grand public spaces, require close collaboration with an engineer and fabricator. However, Seelig says that his ideas are generated in his studio, and "weaving is still my favorite."

For professional artists that move quickly from project to project, encouraging development of ideas is equally important to physically completing works. Bassler believes the studio "is a daily reminder of what we are all about." He encourages his students to keep idea boards for their work, and his own studio walls are collaged with artworks and exhibition reminders. For Hernmarck, a clean and functional workspace encourages her process. She says, "I think a weaving studio has the potential to look extremely beautiful, and I strive to make my own a compelling milieu." With a wall of color at her fingertips, Hernmarck is able to easily source new colors to add to her tapestries as they are in process—making color itself a continuing source of inspiration. Seelig has equipped a workshop where he can play with materials—anything from colorful bubble tea straws to high-tech nylon mesh—until his sculptures achieve the delicate tension he pursues. While commissions must be planned with a team of collaborators (including his wife, a trained architect), Seelig continues to make all his scale models at home.

For many artists, nothing can compete with the tinkering and adaptation a well-equipped studio encourages.



Seelig has built a studio that accommodates different experiment stations and scale models of his large commissions, such as "Red Funnel" (above) and his "spoke and wheel" work (below). Photos courtesy of Warren Seelig.

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