



43

MAGAZINE

Best of the best artists of 2021

ARTWORK INTERNATIONAL

Connecting Artists to the World | New Mexico, USA

Interview with Samantha Furgason, President



AWI Offices in Santa Fe, New Mexico

ARTWORK International INC is the only company of its kind on the planet. Established in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA in 1998, AWI functions as an artist's advocate, providing broad-based career development services to a limited number of exceptional artists and arts-related entities around the globe.

At AWI, we build art careers using immense creativity, free press, new media, traditional methods, and decades of experience. Created to address the need for development, management, and promotion for visual artists and art-related businesses, the company has grown to provide this expertise to arts experts, organizations, publications, and artists worldwide.



Samantha Paige Furgason at AWI with Colette Hosmer "Pig Teats" in the background

What was the inspiration to create Artwork International?

I have only ever worked in the visual art field. When I was Associate Director of the last contemporary art gallery in which I worked before launching ARTWORKinternational INC, I noticed something missing in the gallery system at large. Bunny Conlon, my mentor, instilled in me that galleries are to function as the artist's advocate - true patrons and supporters of the artists they represent. I was taught old-school, à la Leo Castelli. Since I was "raised" this way, I was stunned to look around and see that we were one of very few galleries approaching the business of art in this manner. The majority of galleries are no longer promoting their artists to other galleries, museums, and the global press. Couple this with the fact that the organization of the business aspects of artists' careers are generally not their bailiwick. Creating art is a full-time job; the administering of an art career

is also a full-time job. There was a void. This became the seed for AWI.

Are you also an artist yourself? Are any of your family members artists or artistically inclined?

My mother is a career artist, and my brother is a sculptor and a brilliant metal fabricator.

While I am artistically inclined, I am not practicing. My father's genius is in business. He can make anything work. My grandfather often said he had the Midas touch! It makes sense that I have an interest in the combining of art and business.



Catherine Eaton Skinner, Bird Screen II (Gya Gye XCIV)



Kathleen Frank, Donner

What do you love most about your job? Was this what you have always wanted as a child? If not, what was it?

I love giving people good news! Every time we have a success, an accomplishment on behalf of a client, it is gratifying to inform him or her. It is fulfilling that our hard work triumphs so that we enrich our artists' careers. The art business is one of the most difficult in which to succeed. Cracking the code absolutely thrills me. After a lifetime in this business, I am figuring it out. We are succeeding in the many different avenues in the visual arts: museums, galleries, global residencies, collectors, press, grants, and funding.

What is the biggest dream for Artwork International?

To continue to crack the code of the art world, all the way to the highest reaches, on behalf of our clients. When I was young, I got to spend long days hanging around the contemporary gallery and massive outdoor sculpture garden where my mother worked.

Situated in the countryside right outside of Santa Fe, New Mexico, Shidoni was a magical place to me. It had nine acres of sculpture and a creek running through the property, as well as a foundry. In the thousands of hours that I spent there, I learned all about bronze casting, different media, the artists who showed there, and about the business of art itself. It was my first realm of knowledge. I was extremely proud to know the things that I did, and I would tell them to anyone who listened!

Visual art was my destiny! There is no doubt about it. I was nurtured in it; it is foundational to me.

Who is your favourite artist of all time? What do you love most about him or her?

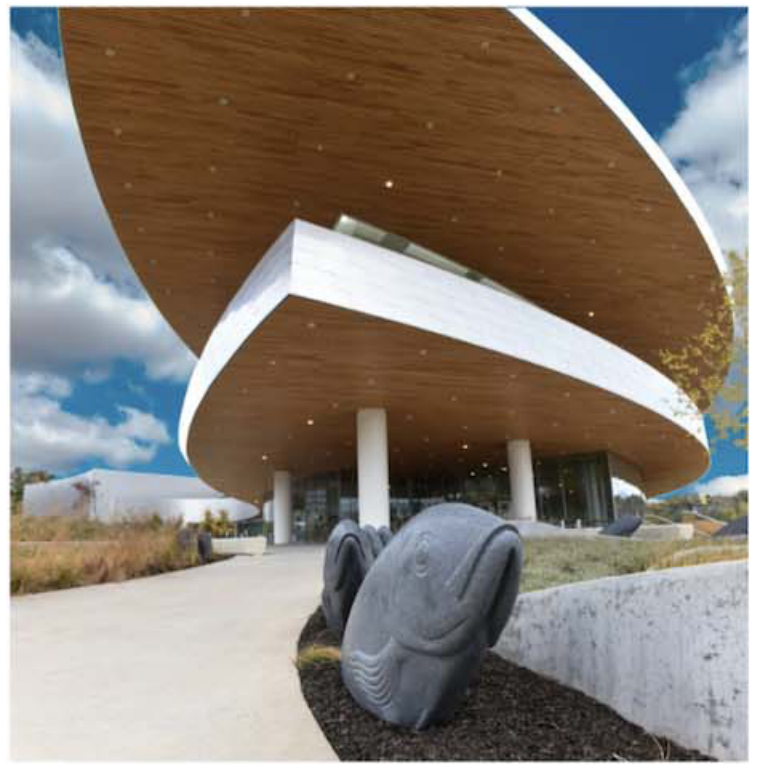
Wow! This is a massive question. But I have to say, my favorite painter is Cy Twombly. I have had the great privilege to visit the Menil Foundation in Houston, Texas on a few occasions. They have the Cy Twombly Gallery on site. In addition to a 70-foot piece that he created for the space, they exhibit his "Pond Series."



Amy Nelder, Shaken Not Stirred



Nina Tichava, Into the Blue Again, Lantern Series



Colette Hosmer, Wellspring, Hancher Auditorium



Lex Lucius, Malibu

The installation is all-encompassing. You feel immersed in the dark green, deep and murky waters. After standing and viewing one of the pieces for some time, I realized that it had text on it. The writing is scrawled, like the person who wrote it was in great despair, falling down as they held their brush. As I stood there deciphering, a poem emerged:

and in the ponds broken off from the sky
my feeling sinks, as if standing on fishes.

It made me weep. I stood there crying for a long time, in the middle of the museum. I still am not certain why it struck me so deeply, but the confluence of the painting's mood and the disquieting text had a visceral impact. An overwhelming experience. I went back a few years later and stood in front of the same painting, and it made me weep again! It is the only time an artwork has made me cry. As such, I give it "my favorite" status.

Years later I learned that it was an excerpted poem by Rainer Maria Rilke.

How do you choose your artists for curation? Do you have a gut for finding or filtering?

Since our inception in 1998, we have had a waiting list. We limit our number of career artist clients to only seven (plus a few project clients that we have worked with for these 24 years), hence the wait! In the earlier days, I used to be wooed by status and prestige. Whether or not I would have a piece by that artist in my personal collection was my criterion.

That yardstick would make the decision for me. My view became far too narrow. As the years have gone by, I have learned that there is only one true judge of an artist.

The artist makes that judgment themselves. If an artist truly believes that they are "real," creating with their whole heart, pushing boundaries, and evolving, unencumbered by the viewer or the market, then that is the truth. By that criterion, I have encountered very few "real" artists in my life. So, I choose in this way:

1. The artist believes that they are "real."
2. We have an excellent and trusting relationship.
3. I am able to fully stand behind the person and their work.

How was being a director of AWI pre-COVID and at present? Was it very different? How so?

As a team, we at AWI are working harder than we ever have in our 24 years (and we were already working hard!). I owe so much to my colleagues here (Audrey Oglesby, Anne Kennedy, Isaac Hernandez); they each possess immense and unique strengths. It truly takes a village!

We learned a very valuable lesson during the “Great Recession” of 2008. At that time, everyone retracted. Artists were scared. The bottom fell out of the market. I was hearing from museum director friends that their desks were empty, the hundreds of portfolios for review had ceased arriving! Artists had stopped making submissions. We decided at that time that, unlike what it appeared, this was actually an incredible opportunity. We had a rapt audience. While everyone else withdrew, we went forward guns a-blazin’, even though we were also scared as hell!

When COVID struck, though we were uncertain, we went full steam ahead. The museum and gallery folks were still there, but their doors were closed. They had no clientele coming in and no physical exhibitions. We seized the opportunity to make connections, build relationships, and get our clients work in front of these global art world eyeballs. Miraculous things happened, like an instant direct dialogue with the Executive Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. I have found that the opposite of what everyone else is doing is often the path to success. No, it is not the path of least resistance. Quite the opposite.



Bette Ridgeway, A Tango in Red

What do you think would the world be without people, organisations, etc. who support artists?

I will substitute the word “artists” with “creatives” in order to answer this question. The world without creativity would be unbearably bleak. We may not have survived as a species.

Creativity encompasses so much! Theater, performance, visual art, literary art, music, food preparation, design, architecture...If an artist only creates in their studio for themselves, no one else ever gets to appreciate and experience the work. Galleries are vital for this reason. Museums hold our history, and our future. “Real” art is a direct and current commentary coming from our societies and cultures. It is the true voice of the people. Real art can be honest. The voice of humanity.



Natalie Christensen, open to new ideas

What do you think makes Artwork International different from all the others?

There is no one else doing what we do. We are a one-of-a-kind organization. We direct our clients' careers, and we implement that direction on their behalf. AWI oversees every growth aspect, down to the tiniest detail. We offer all-encompassing support – the nuts and bolts of the business side of an art career - so the artists can focus on their creativity.

Thank you so much for your interest in AWI, and these brilliant questions! Our interview has been a pleasure! Onward!



Jeff Corwin, Bozeman Montana



Mark Yale Harris, Crush



Pascal Pierme, Origines Ocean Key 7

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