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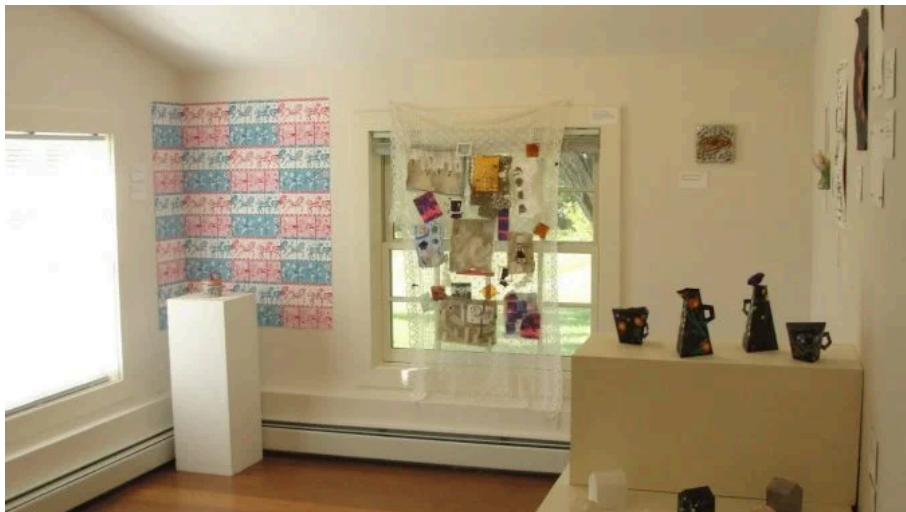
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Light / House Exhibit Opens Up at Unison Arts Studio

🕒 September 17, 2025 👤 Katherine Cross 📁 A&E 💬 0



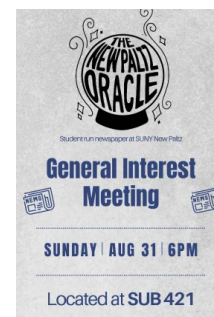
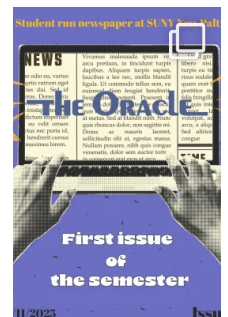
Artist Ellie Swanson's works "Infinite Carousel" and "Carousel Jar" on display in a studio at Unison Arts located at 9 Paradies Lane. The "Light / House" exhibit was a collaboration with the Women's Studio Workshop in neighboring Rosendale. Photo Courtesy of Katherine Cross

Nestled peacefully on a dead-end road at 9 Paradies Lane, Unison Arts hosts a spectacular exhibition that showcases five months of creativity and community, evoking a feeling of nostalgia. This exhibition is called "Light/House" featuring artists Ollantay Avila Alcocer, Julia Maisel-Berick and Ellie Swanson. The exhibition is currently on display and will be until Sept. 18. The three artists were a part of an internship at the Women's Studio Workshop that lasted five months. During this time,

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they lived in a house on the studio's campus and worked in the studio as well as creating art for the exhibition and exploring new techniques and mediums.

Walking into Unison Arts, it immediately feels warm and welcoming. At the front desk sits Executive Director Marielena Ferrer-Harrington, who directs viewers to the back room where "Light/House" is set up. The room is sunny with warm light beaming through the windows, art is displayed on the walls, propped about on stands and even hanging above the windows. While both the pieces and the artists' styles are unique, there is a cohesiveness to the space. You can sense that the artists have influenced and learned from each other. When asking Ferrer-Harrington about this, she says, "These girls are very authentic... I don't really know them, but you can know them through their work. So it makes me feel that I've known them for many, many years now."

The exhibition itself is small, and individual works are distributed throughout the room, rather than distinguished by artists. Close to the ceiling, art by Ellie Swanson wraps around the walls, almost like a banner. The piece is instantaneously eye-catching and is titled, "Binnewater," and it's a seven layer "silk screen" or "screen print" depicting buildings, landscape, birds, berries and sky, with a repeating pattern that appears almost as an optical illusion.

On the far wall there is another piece of the same medium, titled "Infinite Carousel." This captivating piece is a checkerboard of bright pink and blue carousel ponies on their poles. Below it, a jar with the same blue pony on it sits on a stand. The jar, titled "Carousel Jar," is ceramic and a completely different medium, but almost perfectly matches the silk screens above it. This corner of the room is bright and playful, the ponies and colors perfectly evoking childhood memories of fairs and carnivals.

Swanson's art in this exhibition is colorful, intricate and complex. Swanson graduated from the University of Vermont in 2021 with a BA in Studio Art. Swanson's bio at the studio states, "She enjoys making interactive, whimsical pieces that present fantastical narratives." Taking one look at her art, it's clear that this sentiment rings true, as her creations are absolutely fantastic and whimsical.

On another wall, the same photograph is pinned up three times. The photograph itself is of a man holding a baby, presumably father and daughter, next to a table of food. Each rendition of the photograph is distorted and layered with textiles, imagery, and paint. The photos are formatted on handmade cotton and denim paper. The piece is titled, "My



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First Thanksgiving: A Triptych” and is by artist Julia Maisel-Berick. A Triptych is a set of three panels side by side that create an image. Looking at this piece is like viewing someone else’s hazy memory; it is a glimpse of childhood and family, and feels like looking into a scrapbook. Maisel-Berick currently lives here in the Hudson Valley, but was born in Los Angeles.

Her bio describes her composition as being guided by second hand and repurposed materials and highlights her skillset as a multi-media artist. Another beautiful piece of hers hangs above one of the windows. Titled “A Family Album: Undone,” it is a long piece of lace that filters the light coming into the studio and it is sporadically covered in a variety of media. Handmade paper with cut and distorted film is attached to it, as well as a collaged fabric girl, paintings of candles and birthday cakes, a crumpled flyer of lamb cuts, various fabrics and a carousel pony that seems to match the art of Swanson. The piece is a montage of memory, you could spend a lot of time with this piece and still notice new details. Maisel-Berick is clearly a master of multimedia, and her use of many textiles only enhances the feeling of hazy memory and nostalgia.

Amongst the colorful pictures and silkscreens, a black and white block print stands out; this is the work of Alcocer. The block print depicts a white van driving away with the words, “Mas Dios muestra su amor para con nosotros, en que siendo aún pecadores, Cristo murió por nosotros. Romanos 5:8” printed on the back. The quote is a bible verse about humans being innate sinners and how Christ died for us.

Alcocer, while she is not religious herself, had seen this van when she was in Texas, and it had caught her eye. Alcocer said “I’m really interested in writing about ornamentation and design and the ways that we signal identity to others through the use of symbols and language.” The block print is haunting in a way; it has both an ironic and ominous air to it. Alcocer’s art in this exhibition is nothing short of incredible.

A piece that grabs attention is made up of clay tiles that fit together in five separate sections to form an image of her dog Beno. The piece is sgraffito, a technique in which the artist carves into underglazed clay to create an image. Alcocer discussed this piece and how she learned sgraffito in a class in Kingston. Her projects are an exploration of different media, “It feels like I’m more so doing material research,” she says. Alcocer is not only an artist but an eloquent writer. Some of her pieces have prose incorporated into the art, one example is a ceramic vase that has the words “Everything is precious and that is my burden” carved onto it.

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Alcocer was born in Texas and moved to Rhode Island to attend the Rhode Island School of Design. She is now here in New Paltz for her internship and thrived so much that she chose to extend her stay. When asked about how location influences her art, she mentions the trees here in the Hudson Valley: “The light that kind of filters in through the leaves, I find it really beautiful. I’m really interested in light as symbolism and a motif, and, yeah, lightness just always kind of keeps cropping up in my work. So, hence the title of the show.”

Alcocer speaks about the experience of being at Women’s Studio Workshop for five months, and how working with the other artists not only influenced and inspired her, but the artists formed a friendship and connection. “Ellie, Julia and I were super close, and it was such an honor to work with them, live with them, and learn from them,” Alcocer said. She explains how they helped each other through this complicated political time and were even there for each other through breakups. Alcocer said, “We all come from across the country, so, you know, like, kind of also getting to know the Hudson Valley together.”

One of the most magical things about this exhibition is the friendship they formed, which is manifested in their art. You can see where they explore similar mediums, learned from each other and influenced each other’s styles. This exhibition is not only an accumulation of five months of hard work, but it is a showcase of friendship between three incredibly talented artists.

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