

A model for making



(right)

Statens Værksteder for Kunst, studio spaces. Reproduced with permission of SVFK. Photography: Benjamin Wernery.

(below)

Kirrilly Hammond, *Forest light bubbles*, 2021, lithograph and colour pencil 22 x 29 cm (image). Edition of 10. Reproduced with permission of the artist. Photography: the artist.

Kirrilly Hammond nurtures her imagination during a stint at Statens Værksteder for Kunst in Denmark.



In the Danish summer of 2021,

I embarked on a printmaking residency at Statens Værksteder for Kunst (SVFK) or the Danish Art Workshops, located on the harbour in central Copenhagen. SVFK is an extraordinary place with balcony views over the water to the buildings of Parliament¹ and in the warmer months the harbour is filled with ferries, sailing boats, kayaks and small motorboats, with people swimming just off the boardwalk in front of the workshops. It is a short walk to Nyhavn, where the colourful harbourside buildings that feature in so many Copenhagen postcards are usually teeming with tourists. It's beautiful, captivating and lively, and it's remarkable that artists, designers and conservators have been given such prime real estate.²

Housed in a grand old warehouse on Strandgade, SVFK offers facilities,

studio space and accommodation for applicants to complete art, craft, design or conservation projects. There are workshops with professional equipment for woodworking, metalwork, printmaking, photography, textiles, and ceramics, as well as a conservation lab. The facility is run by six full-time staff (including a carpenter and even a blacksmith) and a small team of consultants who manage the workshops and offer advice to anyone who requires it. About two hundred projects per year are realised in the workshops, with each project often involving two or more artists, designers or conservators.

During my residency over the course of several weeks, I had access to an amazing space with all the equipment I could wish for. The Graphic Workshop is on the fifth level, at the very top of the warehouse. It has lithography, etching and relief

presses, aquatint and etching facilities, plenty of large work benches, wet and dry areas, a graining area and more than sixty lithography stones. I also gained an unexpected benefit: I was able to glimpse into a cross-section of the art and design community of Denmark and see how a resource like SVFK enables and supports a sustainable and thriving arts sector.

SVFK is a government-funded facility and as such, there are no fees and the quarterly application rounds are open to all.³ Applications can be directed to one of two types of projects—development (with an emphasis on experimentation) or work production (with a focus on a specific outcome such as an exhibition). The original design of the workshops was carefully considered with each area's particular requirements in mind. Elements such as movable walls and work benches were

built in-house with the available expertise. This has meant that the workshops are very functional as well as adaptable to the changing needs over the thirty-five years of its existence. The generous studio spaces with their high ceilings, whitewashed walls and exposed wooden beams recall an even longer history of labour⁴ and offer a peaceful and practical environment to simply get stuff done.

The idea behind the establishment of SVFK is that artists, designers, or conservators should have optimal conditions for artistic creativity and cultural preservation.⁵ The key criterion for all applicants is that the completion of their project *requires* the space and equipment of the SVFK—things that their own studios might be lacking. During residencies, artists generally complete large projects, create prototypes or test



(left)
Bjarne Werner Sørensen, *Matrix Variations*, installation view, *Kringsýni*, National Gallery of Faroe Islands 2018. Series of unique stone lithographs, each 50 x 34 cm Zerkall 340 gsm paper. Printed by the artist on a Takach press at SVFK.

(opposite)
Bjarne Werner Sørensen, *Stenskygger*, 2002, lithograph on Rives BFK 250 gsm paper, 41 x 31 cm (image), 50 x 40 cm (paper), Printed by Jan Andersson, Steinprent, Tórshavn, Faroe Islands.

Reproduced with permission of the artist. Photography: the artist.



new ideas, rather than produce finished, saleable objects that might be better made elsewhere. This ethos is in keeping with a very Danish sense of fairness and ensures that this government-funded institution does not undercut local businesses. In the case of printmakers, the thought is that a print can be developed at SVFK, however the editioning should be done elsewhere—such as the lithographic publishing studio Editions Copenhagen, just around the corner.⁶ In reality, not every artist who produces prints at SVFK will get the opportunity to edition their work commercially. As such, there is no hard-and-fast rule that precludes editioning. However, I get the sense that applications that emphasise experimentation will be given preference over someone using the spaces for an overtly commercial outcome.

For my own residency at SVFK, I made use of the lithography press and ample stock of large lithography stones. My stay began with an introduction to the space and equipment by Bjarne Werner Sørensen, who has been involved with the graphic workshop for many years, firstly as an artist and now as the managing workshop consultant. Sørensen gave me an overview of the history of the workshop and its equipment, reiterating that his role was not to demonstrate or assist in the printing process, but rather to ensure everything was operating and fully

stocked.⁷ The equipment and techniques don't seem to differ greatly from Australian workshops; if anything, the processes were simplified to assist artists with a range of experience in lithography.

As an accomplished printmaker, Sørensen manages the space with an intimate understanding of the techniques, as well as being able to offer advice from the perspective of an artist. A strong focus throughout SVFK is that makers are central. There are rarely curatorial tours through studio spaces and few administrative requirements. It is purely about getting work done in a professional and respectful environment.

Sørensen's own practice encompasses painting and printmaking and his abstract images seem to flow between the two mediums, each informing the other. His paintings often feature vibrantly coloured layers of disparate patterns and mark-making. Organic, fluid lines wind their way around his compositions, at times competing with underlying geometric patterns, to create a kind of ordered chaos. Printmaking allows him to build his images with individual layers created on different stones or plates. Two images are combined to form entirely new compositions that embrace an element of chance in their formation. The process of making is laid bare in the rich complexity of his final works.

Sørensen's family is from the Faroe Islands, and he makes the trip back regularly to the mountains, steep coastal cliffs and grassy heathland of this remote part of the world.⁸ Unexpectedly, there is a lithography workshop and gallery amid this rugged, vertiginous landscape.⁹ Sørensen has connections to this workshop, as well as others around Denmark, such as the Klitgaarden Refugium in Skagen, the Grafisk Værksted in Næstved and Foreningen Danske Grafikere in Copenhagen. As such, Sørensen is well-placed to offer printmaking advice at SVFK with an informed perspective of the Danish print scene.

While I have only lived in Denmark for the past three years, it seems the more I delve, the more workshops and access facilities I find. Even a nearby library in the suburbs of Copenhagen has screenprinting and etching facilities available to the locals.¹⁰ The Hjørring Grafisk Værksted¹¹ in northern Denmark seems to have been an influential starting point for many print careers since it was founded by masterprinter Jens Christian Sørensen in 1970. Alumni have subsequently established workshops across the country.¹² The key to its influence was Sørensen's firm belief in the importance of working as closely as possible with artists, ensuring they directly participate in the technical processes, in order to achieve the highest quality prints.

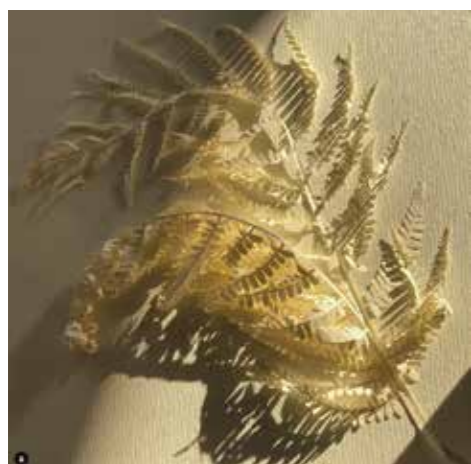
I was keen to use the lithography facilities at SVFK as they are close to home and provided the opportunity to create a new series of lithographs of my newly discovered Danish surroundings. Initially I wanted to depict the grand buildings nearby the warehouse which are steeped in history. However, once I got settled in, I found I was instead compelled to depict the Nordic forests of Bøllemosen and cold seascapes of Fanø, as well as the parklands of Søndermarken and Frederiksberg in Copenhagen, which had all captured my imagination.

I have a long-held fascination with depicting the quality of light in both urban and rural environments. Living in Scandinavia has provided the opportunity to attempt to capture the soft northern light through oil painting and printmaking. Lithography is a technique that enables experimentation with the drawn image, where quite different states of the same image can be developed and printed. Time in the graphic workshop at SVFK allowed me to investigate how different qualities of light could be achieved through counter-etching, re-working the stone and experimental use of colour. The residency provided precious time to focus entirely on my practice, to be able to play with various print techniques and to allow new ideas for the next series to germinate. In the end I produced about ten different prints that I would later exhibit locally and also send back to my gallery in Canberra.¹³

My three weeks at SVFK was a relatively short period compared with other projects that can be up to six months in duration. However, it was a very productive time with access to an entire printmaking workshop. I shared the facilities with only one other artist, Amanda Betz, who divided her time between experimental relief printing using found natural materials, and making intricate paper constructions in the large, adjacent light-filled studio.

Betz was working towards two exhibitions in Copenhagen—one with DKoD (Danske Kunsthåndværkere & Designere, the association for Danish artisans and designers) and the other at Format Art Space. She had amassed a collection of leaves, moss, twigs and other objects, which she experimented with by printing them in relief to achieve intricate textures, which she then layered with collage elements.

Her paper sculptures are made with a combination of laser cutting, meticulous folding, and careful placement to create delicate three-dimensional reliefs that mimic nature with their papery fern fronds and feathers. Betz's multifaceted practice is informed by her background as an architect and incorporates various design projects, including a lightshade for the iconic Danish lighting company, Le Klint. SVFK's studio provided the perfect space to showcase her latest works and finalise



(top)
Statens Værksteder for Kunst,
(view from the balcony).
Photography: Kirrily Hammond

(above left)
Owen Armour, *Death Knell*,
2021 (detail), steel, concrete galvanised
iron, aluminium, paint and concrete,
98 x 140 x 40 cm (approx.).
Reproduced with permission of the artist.
Photography: Brian Kure

(left)
Amanda Betz, *Bregne (Fern)*,
2021, paper, 40 x 30 cm (approx.)
Reproduced with permission of the artist.
Photography: the artist

(opposite)
Statens Værksteder for Kunst,
wood workshop.
Photography: Kirrily Hammond

a commercial design for paper Christmas decorations that were to be produced by another Danish design company, Ferm Living. In working across different art and design projects, developing prototypes and producing experimental artworks for exhibitions, Betz fulfilled several of the key criteria for SVFK applicants, as well as its *raison d'être*; that is, to support and ensure the relevance and longevity of professional arts and crafts practice in Denmark.¹⁴

One of the unique things about SVFK is the access to facilities and advice across multiple disciplines. Artists whose practices incorporate a range of materials and techniques can work in multiple workshops during their stay. A sense of community between the different workshops is fostered through the regular Friday drinks and cake (sadly cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions during the time I was in the Graphic Workshop). There is also an annual dinner for all the artists who have accessed SVFK throughout the year. This is a special night that is hosted by the small team of staff who cook an elaborate dinner, make the cocktails, and even set up the dance floor.¹⁵ It was here that I met many artists from a diverse range of disciplines. The two textile artists at my table, Annette Andresen and Berthe Forchhammer, had both completed projects for local churches during the year. Andresen's was a printed textile piece for an altar and Forchhammer's a woven pulpit rug, which they were able to realise with the screenprinting facilities and large looms available in the textile workshop. I also met the collaborative duo Katrine Malinovsky and Randi Jørgensen who had undertaken various large projects in the metal and wood workshops of the SVFK. One was the design and construction of *The Village* (2014), an immersive installation that featured in the 19th Biennale of Sydney on Cockatoo Island.

For the most part, SVFK is filled with Danish artists and designers. However, there are a few internationals in the mix, including the Australian-Swedish artist Owen Armour, who has lived between Denmark and America for more than 12 years. He has held multiple residencies at SVFK over that time and has worked across different areas, including the ceramic and graphic workshops, to suit his multi-disciplined practice. From March until June 2021, he worked in the metal and wood workshops to produce sound and sculptural installations for exhibitions in Copenhagen and New York. Using industrial materials such as concrete, steel and aluminium, he created rigid structures that were punctuated with solid forms and had the ability to conduct vibrations

and sound. Like percussive scores and instruments rolled into one, the various components coalesced to create quite ephemeral and delicate soundscapes.

Armour plays an active role in the local art scene, exhibiting in art institutions as well as artist-run spaces such as Torreloft¹⁶ and Vermilion Sands.¹⁷ He also runs his own gallery space Stereo Exchange,¹⁸ which features a diverse selection of international practitioners including ceramicists, printmakers, painters, designers, sound artists and photographers. As the gallery director and curator, Armour deliberately pairs two disparate practices together for each exhibition, exhibiting specific works that make for an eclectic and fascinating exhibition program.



When you tap the surface of SVFK, there is a complex network of professional artists and designers working across many fields with links to creative communities and facilities across Denmark and beyond. There is a central database of all practitioners and more than 2000 of their projects, which serves as a useful ongoing resource for others who may be looking for specific skilled professionals.¹⁹ The number of posts on social media that credit the support of SVFK demonstrates the breadth and quality of the projects produced there.²⁰ In addition, the workshops also host regular seminars, technical courses, artist talks and panel discussions for a broad range of participants, and offer full open-house during Kulturnatten, the annual exposé of cultural institutions across Copenhagen.

In general, Danish artists are very engaged in the international art scene and Denmark is certainly renowned for its design. Most households seem to value well-designed chairs and other domestic objects,²¹ with lighting being an all-important element to create the necessary

sense of cosiness or *hygge*. There is definitely a demand for art and design objects, and facilities like SVFK play an important role in making sustainable careers in the sector possible, by offering very practical support. By providing the necessary space and equipment, SVFK enables artists to both experiment and produce work for a wide range of projects that connect to many parts of the community. Its continuing existence demonstrates a belief in the importance of creative people and their role in society. I count myself very fortunate to have been given access to this fantastic resource situated in a central historic part of Copenhagen. My time there not only gave me the opportunity to experiment and make prints, it also connected me with a myriad of like-minded people and gave me a sense of optimism and enthusiasm for forging my own artistic path in this part of the world.

Notes

1. Think the Danish series *Borgen*—that tower where Birgitte Nyborg contemplates the political tally needed to become Prime Minister has an outlook to SVFK.
2. SVFK has been in this location since 1986 and during that time there have been attempts by authorities to re-purpose the building for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to relocate the workshops to Helsingør (a small town to the north). However, the cost of establishing something equivalent has proven prohibitive and so the small team at SVFK remain and continue to provide unique opportunities for artists and designers alike.
3. While the SVFK facilities are primarily intended for use by those residing in Denmark, it is also available as a resource for international artists or designers to facilitate their exhibitions in Danish museums and galleries.
4. The history of these spaces 'that have always been associated with work' was written about in Peter Michael Hornung's article 'Kunstens fødeklinik', as well as in Marianne Grendahl's book *Skaberrum*, both published in 2005.
5. 'Our goal: excellent working conditions', page 8, *The National Workshops for Art and Crafts*, 1989.
6. The printers freely offered advice and even some extra paper when I sought a second opinion on a printing problem.
7. It is expected that artists are fully proficient in the workshop they have applied for, or they can hire their own technician or masterprinter, and student applications are not accepted.
8. The Faroe Islands are an archipelago of 18 islands in the Northeast Atlantic that are a self-governing part of the Danish Realm.
9. <https://www.steinprent.com>
10. <https://bibliotek.kk.dk/vaerkstederne> Another workshop that continues to play an important role in the Danish print community is Fyns Grafiske Værksted in the city of Odense. <https://www.fynsgv.dk>
11. <https://hgv.dk/>
12. Jan Andersson was a former leader of Hjørring Grafiske Værksted before establishing his workshop Steinprent in The Faroe Islands in 1999. Niels Borch Jensen also trained with Sørensen in 1971 before establishing his own workshop in Copenhagen, now known as Borch Editions.
13. <http://www.beavergalleries.com.au/>
14. 'The National Workshops institution is also intended to contribute to the preservation and development of professions traditionally associated with the fine arts, crafts or industrial design', Mission, page 1, *The National Workshops for Art and Crafts*, 1989.
15. These annual dinners date back to the establishment of SVFK, and were initiated by the first Director, Ulf Horak.
16. <https://www.ursuscollective.org/>
17. <https://vermilionands.net>
18. <https://stereoexchange.dk/>
19. <https://svfk.dk/project>
20. The most commonly used tags are #statensvaerkstedforkunst or #svfk
21. There is even a dedicated section for listing designer chairs in most Danish home & contents insurance policies.

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