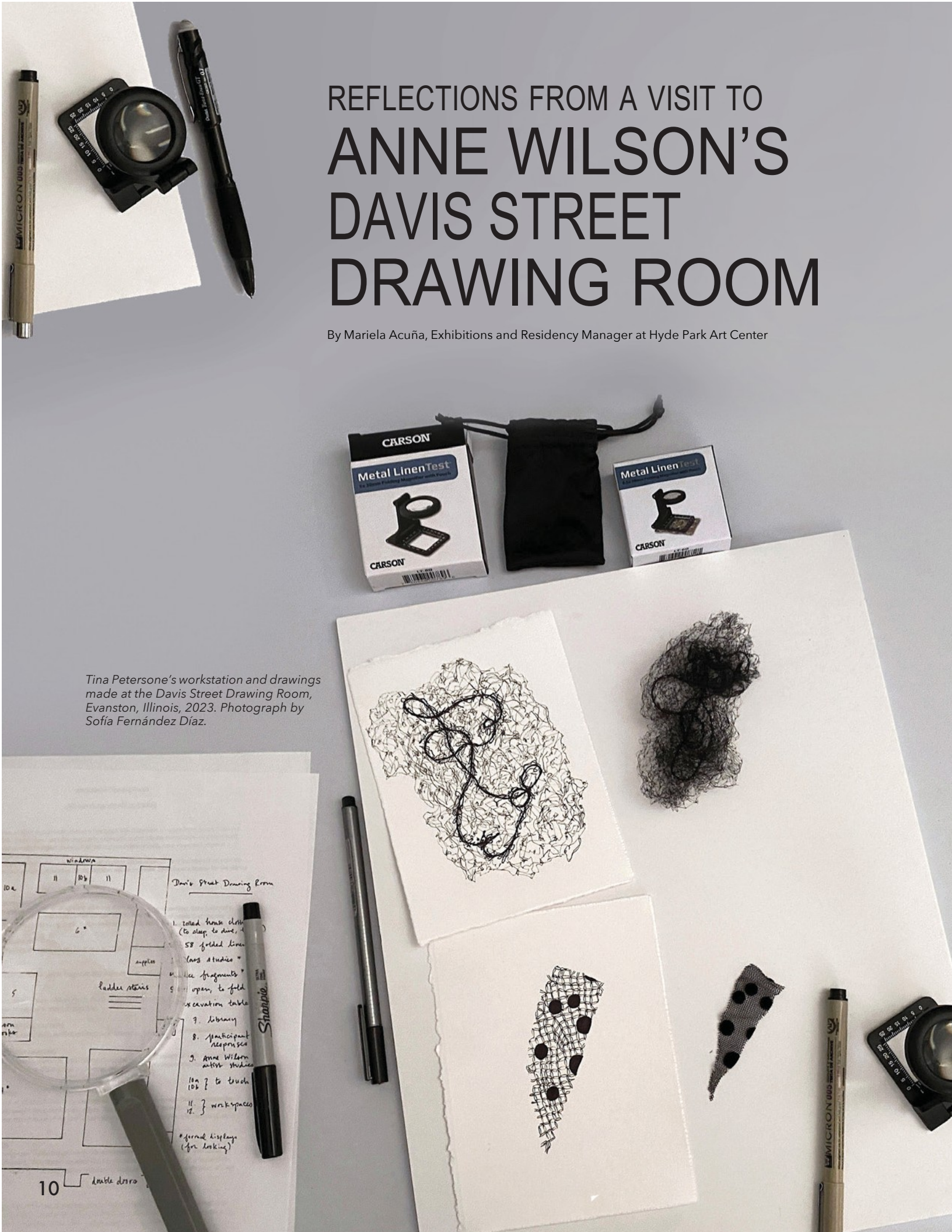


# REFLECTIONS FROM A VISIT TO ANNE WILSON'S DAVIS STREET DRAWING ROOM

By Mariela Acuña, Exhibitions and Residency Manager at Hyde Park Art Center

Tina Petersone's workstation and drawings made at the Davis Street Drawing Room, Evanston, Illinois, 2023. Photograph by Sofía Fernández Díaz.



For a year, from fall 2022 to fall 2023, the artists Anne Wilson and Sofía Fernández Díaz invited small groups of artists, scholars, curators, and writers to look intently at Wilson's delightful collection of textiles and textile fragments as part of the experimental art project, Davis Street Drawing Room. So named because the project's site, within Wilson's home and studio in an 1887 townhouse, is a beautiful sun-drenched room that Wilson believes was intended to be a drawing room. In Victorian-era homes, like Wilson's, a drawing room was meant for entertaining, and for its users (typically women) to withdraw into and, at times, to draw.

I visited the Drawing Room in November 2022 with a group of colleagues, fellow curators, and the artist Robert E. Paige. After a warm greeting, our visit began with an introduction to the history of Wilson's home and to the project, still early in its development. We were invited to observe Wilson's collection of lace fragments, rolled linen, worn fabrics, and mended clothes as well as artist studies from her decades-long practice. The archive of artist studies included handmade glass bobbins as well as hair and cloth drawings. Other textiles in the collection were inherited from Wilson's mother, aunts, or cousins. Wilson noted that many of the textiles in her archives are contemporaneous to the house, a reminder that everyday objects and their histories are both material and conceptual drivers in Wilson's practice.

In the light-filled space, the textiles were presented in carefully organized displays that were introduced by Wilson and Fernández Díaz in choreographed sequence. After the introduction, we were invited to spend time with the beautifully-arrayed materials in the room and to respond creatively by way of drawing, photographing, or writing. The act of close looking, which has been core to Wilson's practice as an artist and educator for years, is offered as a starting point. Despite my training as an art historian and previous experiences, as a museum educator, with encouraging visitors to slow down and look at artworks, sustaining my own looking required some effort.

Each visit to the Drawing Room lasts three hours and guests are asked to allocate enough time to engage fully. Participating in the Drawing Room is an exercise in being present that invites visitors to connect what we see with our eyes and what we feel with our hands to what we know and

how we know. I chose to look at and draw delicate lace fragments with a pen on tracing paper. As often happens in Wilson's practice, the materials I chose to observe became a source of inquiry. Where were they made and by whom? How long ago? How did they come to be in Wilson's collection? What were the social, economic, and technological conditions that led to their creation? And most importantly, what if we approached other objects and beings with the same care, consideration, and curiosity that the Drawing Room inspires?



Anne Wilson, Gervais Marsh, Robert E. Paige, Mariela Acuña, Tina Petersone, and Allison Peters Quinn at the Davis Street Drawing Room, Evanston, Illinois, 2023. Photograph by Sofía Fernández Díaz.

Hundreds of people have visited the Drawing Room. Wilson and Fernández Díaz steward the project's archive of participant responses, which includes approximately 450 entries including drawings, collages, poems, short stories, photographs, and more; a living record of intimate encounters and of the generative process that is close and sustained looking. It wasn't immediate, but my visit to the Drawing Room revealed to me my own humbling capacity to connect, and to see myself in relationship with things, people, and systems, near and far. During my visit to the Drawing Room, I felt connected with myself, my fellow guests and gracious hosts, the materials in front of me, and the histories that brought us together, both known and unknown.

Anne Wilson was a 2022 JRCraft Distinguished Educator in fiber, honored in Washington DC at Spring Craft Weekend.



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