



the watermill center  
a laboratory for performance

the watermill center

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*"the first and possibly most profound thing about the center is that it is a world away from the world."*

floris schoenfeld, the netherlands (fall residency 2008)

## the watermill center mission

watermill is a laboratory for performance founded by robert wilson as a unique environment for young and emerging artists from around the world to explore new ideas.

watermill draws inspiration from all the arts and cultures as well as from social, human and natural sciences.

watermill is a global community of artists. living and working together among the extensive collection of art, artifacts, and robert wilson's archives and library lies at the heart of the watermill experience.

watermill is a haven for the next generation of artists, supporting their work among a network of international institutions and venues that embrace new interdisciplinary approaches.



## watermill's history & future

the watermill center is the realization of an artistic spirit and vision long shared by robert wilson and his collaborators. in the 1960s, wilson founded the byrd hoffman school of byrds in his loft at 147 spring street in new york city's soho neighborhood as an entity to produce his early theatrical work. together with the byrds, wilson created legendary performance pieces such as *deafman glance*, *the life and times of joseph stalin*, *a letter for queen victoria*, and *einstein on the beach*.

in 1992, wilson founded the watermill center on the long island site of a former western union communication research facility as a continuation of his earlier downtown

living, research, and rehearsal space that brought together artists and scholars from all disciplines to collaborate on new artistic and theatrical forms. for decades, the east end has been home to some of the most important american artists such as willem de kooning, jackson pollock, lee krasner, jerome robbins, edward albee, cindy sherman, eric fischl, george condo, mary heilmann and roy lichtenstein. wilson was drawn to the site of watermill both as a hub of scientific and artistic exploration and because of the natural beauty of the surrounding area.

the center is located in water mill, new york, on the eastern end of long island, approximately a two-hour drive from new york city.



having started as a location for the annual international summer program in 1992, watermill fully developed over the following decade. with the opening of the building in 2006, the center became a year-round laboratory for performance open to artists, scholars, and the general public. watermill's programming now includes year-round residencies, education, outreach, and humanities.

the watermill center is a 22,000 square foot flexible working and living facility that includes a research library, robert wilson's archives, galleries, indoor and outdoor rehearsal/staging spaces, workshops, offices, and full kitchen/dining facilities, as well as residence areas. the watermill collection of art and artifacts spanning the history of humankind is integrated into all aspects of the building and grounds as a reminder that the history of each civilization is told by its artists.

*"the watermill center is an extraordinary place to work in a concentrated manner on projects. the working spaces are surrounded by gardens and landscape. the interventions that wilson made into the existing architecture form a clear matrix in the center of the facilities."*

- jorinde voigt, germany (watermill fall residency 2009).

future projects include an organic vegetable roof garden and an underground expansion to further the development of new work. this new space will include a fully equipped black box rehearsal space, a gallery for the estate of paul thek and contemporary emerging artists, and an expanded library and open-shelf art storage. the new underground space will span the length of the western gravel terrace. on the roof of this space, we will plant additional organic vegetable gardens that will feed our artists and engage local school students.



## scope of activity

the watermill center supports projects that integrate genres and art forms from diverse viewpoints that break traditional forms of representation and cultural specifics. through year-round residency and workshop programs, watermill annually welcomes over 200 artists from around the world. this unparalleled global residency program is complemented by educational programs with schools and other local institutions, public events such as open rehearsals and lectures, tours of the building and grounds, and seminars and symposia.



international summer program

for the renowned international summer program, robert wilson annually invites 60 to 80 artists from around the world. the program is a unique opportunity for these young artists to work with robert wilson and his collaborators as well as to create their own projects and form a community of similarly-minded peers.

with participants from over 30 nations, the international summer program is a model for global cultural dialogue and artistic community building. throughout the summer, the local community is

invited to see the workshop results and gain insight into the artistic process. watermill also presents projects developed at the center at offsite venues in order to deepen its engagement with the local community.

at the heart of the annual summer benefit is an arts festival showcasing summer participants' site-specific installations and performances. the event is regularly touted as the hamptons' premier summer event, and all funds raised go directly to supporting young artists.

"wilson's guild, where one generation of artists learns from another. it is a moment of time in a world of interdependence where the arts promise an affirmative connectivity neither politics nor markets have achieved."

benjamin barber , political theorist

"bob is intensely driven to create and nothing makes him happier than nurturing that same desire for self-expression in other artists. he is generous, fearless, perpetually curious and lives each day with an open heart and mind - a very special kind of genius."

calvin klein, fashion designer

"science is the exploration of new ideas in novel forms for a deeper understanding of reality. like art it is both solo and communal. wilson's watermill center is like the best of science."

marshall nirenberg, nobel prize medicine

"fashion is theater, theater is fashion. watermill is fashion and theater."

viktor&roff, fashion designers

"watermill is the best idea to find a place in the world of arts since pierre boulez created ircam in paris. robert wilson's unique gifts and spirit provide the strong basis of a new vision of the creation and presentation of all that we think of as theatre in particular, combining all of the arts in fresh perspective."

jessye norman , opera singer

"while it exists most of all in the present, i see watermill as a link between the past and the future. i knew from the moment i stepped into the ruins that it was going to be there forever."

isabelle huppert, actress

"theater is the place where other people's dreams, lives, fantasies are shown to us and we are "the viewers". "the others" are "the performers". Installation gives us the chance to perform ourselves in the space where "the performer" is absent. we must replace him and we become "the character". to combine these two genres is almost impossible, but the moment we enter the realm of watermill, somehow we are "the viewers" and we are "the actors". how is this done? a miracle of creativity."

ilya & emilia kabakov, ukrainian artists

"performance and theater one can compare to a big family. they are tied by love and hate, and they will always need and look for each other."

marina abramovic, serbian artist

"a gesture, a flavor, a flower, light and sound... watermill is a place where you learn that theater surrounds you. I loved being a part of the watermill family. I take my experience everywhere with me."

felipe fernandez del paso,  
2002 academy award nominee  
for best achievement in art direction

"watermill explores aspects of collaboration and seeks out areas of interdisciplinary miscegenation between the visual and verbal and performative arts, and i wish i had discovered it long before i did, but i'm very happy to know it's here."

jay mcinerny, author

"inside the watermill center, all is quiet effervescence. there is life but not bustle. there is a chance to learn and to create, in a whole human setting, dreamy but realistic, playful but serious. the purpose of the exercises is clear."

dr. antonio damasio, neuroscientist

"the watermill center is not only a refuge for artists to work and collaborate on their projects. it is also a place for us, the residents of long island, to gather, ponder art, meet artists, and follow the development of ideas. it is very inspiring."

isabella rossellini, filmmaker and actress





## fall & spring artists in residence program

from september to june, watermill provides residencies for up to 20 artists or artist collectives. watermill resident artists are chosen through a competitive application process by an internationally renowned selection committee comprised of leading artists and scholars. residencies are designed to be intense and vary in length from one to four weeks based on the project's needs.

whether these residents are individual artists or come as part of a collective, the selection committee carefully considers each project for its ambition in challenging traditional performance and artistic norms and its ability to add to the next generation of avant-garde work. the program is open

to all disciplines with an emphasis on the collaborative process.

beyond the long island experience, watermill actively forms partnerships with key new york city, national and international venues such as cpr - center for performance research, americas society, new york theatre workshop, works & process at the guggenheim, arteeast, ballroom marfa, purnati center in bali, amrita performing arts center in cambodia, mass moca, berlin's radialsystem and kampnagel hamburg. watermill has also formed a partnership with the school of the arts at columbia university, nyu galatin and cuny, as well as several international organizations including the danubefestival in austria and the neumarkt theater zurich.



artist network

in addition to supporting artists while they are in residence, watermill acts as a platform for alumni artists, leading institutions, and festivals to forge new partnerships. watermill aims to be the new focal point for a growing network of like-minded institutions to offer its residents opportunities to further grow and present their work and practice.

watermill center collaborates with institutions such as baryshnikov arts center, performa, summer play festival, park avenue armory, cuny martin e. segal theater center, goethe institute, taipei cultural center, chez bushwick, the kitchen, lincoln center theater's directors lab, norwegian theater academy, clocktower gallery and ARTonAIR, ballroom marfa, luminato festival in toronto, danubefestival in austria, the ivam museum valencia, guild hall easthampton, parrish art museum, and longhouse reserve.





the collection, library & archives

watermill houses robert wilson's extensive art collection of over 7,000 pieces for research, study, and inspiration. comprised of pieces ranging from 5000bc to contemporary work, the collection embodies the whole of human experience and traditions in all their diversity, and can become the springboard for the work of resident artists.

wilson describes the watermill collection as a "history of mankind." art informs us about history and perished cultures. if we know where we come from, we can start to think about where we are going.

the collection is integrated into every part of watermill and defines each living and working space. as they work among the collection, watermill's resident artists and visitors are challenged to open their horizons to new practices or ideas. a respect for these works and the spaces they inhabit is a basic principle for the life of all resident artists.



*"the unique character of the watermill center: it's collection, archive, staff, the environs and local communities, were all instrumental in assisting and informing the project."*

H\*E\*R\*D, korea/ireland (watermill spring residency 2009)



the watermill library and archives house approximately 16,000 titles. highlights include artists' monographs, seminal works on tribal art, and publications by and about robert wilson. books, photographs, films, and other documents from the robert wilson archive offer a chance to explore the life and work of robert wilson and his collaborators.

tours for groups and individuals can be arranged by appointment. the study library is open to all members of the general public.



*how much, i thought, could the mechanical processes of the american theatre benefit from a stint in the paradoxical playground of the watermill center? perhaps we might regain a sense of freedom and invention that is sometimes lacking in our increasingly stressed and corporatized arts institutions.”*

gideon lester, director of the arts collaboration lab at  
columbia university school of the arts

## community programs & outreach

watermill is a center for local, as well as international communities. we open our programming to engage with individuals and groups as audience, collaborators and researchers of all ages.

## public events

each fall & spring residency creates an open event/rehearsal for the community that offers insight into their creative process. from september to june, there are more than 25 opportunities to attend a public rehearsal, lecture, reading, workshop, demonstration or other open format given by the resident artists. each event is followed by a reception and tour of the collection.

each summer, the watermill center hosts discover watermill day, an open house and community art festival where the summer participants present the artistic work developed over the summer. this day includes workshops, children's events and lectures as the entire site is transformed into a 6 acre arts festival. summer resident artists also create a site-specific performance at one of our partnering local institutions to bring watermill into the community.



## community programs

the community programming of the watermill center is guided by a volunteer community board working across outreach, education, and humanities programming while also managing the volunteer program. the community board has developed a latino outreach program to address the large, multi-cultural, and spanish-speaking population of the east end.

the watermill center encourages the artists in residence to consider community engagement as an integral part of their work. the program offers diverse ways in which the artists intersect with the local community, often serving as collaborators and performers.

the program also hosts workshops for educators, students, and school children. activities have included workshops with resident artists, educational internships, creative involvement in resident artist performances and using the center and the grounds as a platform for their own work.

the education program works with students in grades k - 12 as well as undergraduate and graduate university students. staff engage partnerships with agencies such as peconic teacher's trust as well as east end arts. the center works with public schools across suffolk county such as southampton high school, southampton intermediate school, pierson high school and pineview-old bethpage jfk high school. watermill also partners with private schools developing leading alternative curriculum such as the ross school and hayground school. watermill maintains a close relationship with the nyu-gallatin school of individualized study and school of the arts at columbia university.

## lectures and seminars

through the year watermill invites distinguished scholars and leading specialists from across the fields of art and humanities to share their insights with the young artists and the general public. lecturers in the past have included marina abramovic, george soros, dr. daniel stern, marianne faithful, roselee goldberg, dr. james watson, dr. antonio damasio, dr. richard leakey, dr. richard sennett and bernice johnson reagon.



watermill center also partners with leading academic and cultural institutions to foster an expansive art, science, and humanities dialogue with the local community. all lectures are free and open to the public. watermill is engaging in a conference on science and the arts, and has hosted among others the nylon conference of nyu and goldsmith college that brings together young sociologists from the us and the uk under the leadership of richard sennett.



the founding of the watermill center

i came to new york in the 60s and lived and worked with a group of like-minded artists and other people. every thursday i had an open house inviting the community, guest artists and intellectuals from all fields of study. all of my early work was developed there. i first imagined watermill as going back to the soho of the 60s, a factory of ideas, a haven and a platform, a shell and an incubator. something that encourages people to have an exchange.

to be able to create something of significance, you have to know and respect your own background, and at the same time be open to a larger community.

watermill also has to be about one thing first and then it can be about a million things. theater is one of the most

powerful and richest cultural languages that can and should incorporate all the arts and sciences. go to india, go to japan, to indonesia, to germany, to poland, brazil, russia, or mali; in these countries and every country you will find a rich and extremely diverse tradition for theater. theater gives us the freedom to dream who we are. everything you can think of is true.

everyone is unique, and the strength of watermill is to be open to this diversity and use it as a source of inspiration. there is no one way of doing anything and many contradictions are admissible under the shared commitment to tolerance and understanding.

at watermill, we should always do what no one else is doing.

robert wilson  
founder and artistic director

board of directors

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ann lewis (*in memoriam*)  
tatiana platt  
simon de pury  
katharine rayner  
elka rifkin  
(*chair, community board*)  
roberta sherman  
robert wilson

selection committee

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kristy edmunds  
jonathan safran foer  
roselee goldberg  
alanna heiss  
xavier le roy  
albert maysles  
michael morris  
gérard mortier  
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maren otto  
michael otto  
lou reed  
isabella rossellini  
richard serra  
cindy sherman  
tom waits  
richard von weizsäcker

watermill staff

robert wilson, *artistic director*  
sherry dobbin, *director*  
jorn weisbrodt, *director*  
andrei nadler, *director of finance*  
natascha theis, *director of special events*  
noah khoshbin, *curator*  
joseph bradshaw, *archive manager*  
nixon beltran, *center manager*  
andrea fabry, *senior grants manager*  
dmitry komis, *art & auction manager*  
tj witham, *communications manager*  
kristin fabrizio, *humanities coordinator*  
lorien reese, *residency & program coordinator*  
pinki patel, *executive / special events assistant*



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page 2 the watermill center 2009, photo lovis dengler / page 3 the watermill center 2009, lovis dengler / page 4 the watermill center 1990 / page 7 maria jose arjona a line of thought, a line of action, a line of..., watermill spring residency 2009 / page 8 the watermill center 2008, photo lesley leslie-spinks / page 10 international summer program 2010, photo lovis dengler / page 13 mentors, artists and visitors of the watermill center (laurie anderson, lou reed, harvey keitel, lisa de kooning, marina abramovic, andrey bartenev, jorn weisbrodt, norah jones, rufus wainwright, martha wainwright, ishmael reed, isabella rossellini, salman rushdie, dominique sanda lucinda child, philip glass), photos by pavel antonov, georgia oettker, lovis dengler and others / page 14 bb chokra, open house presentation fall 2010, hronn axelsdottir / page 16 artists in residence, photos by: pavel antonov; hronn axelsdottir; lovis dengler / page 18 the rehearsal space, photo lovis dengler / page 19 jonathan meese 'marlene dietrich in dr. no's ludovico clinic - dr. baby's erzland', watermill summer artist 2008, photo lovis dengler / page 21 the watermill collection and archives, the watermill library, photos lovis dengler / page 22 penji stone, photo lovis dengler / page 23 borneo ladder, lovis dengler / page 24 watermill summer benefit 2010, lovis dengler / page 26 education and outreach program, photos by lovis dengler hronn axelsdottir and unknown photographer / page 28 antonio damasio, lecture summer program 2010, photo lovis dengler / page 29 marina abramovic, lecture summer program 2008, photo daniel von behr / page 30 community open house 2010, photo lovis dengler / page 33 yochai matos flame (gate), watermill summer artist 2009, photo lovis dengler.



