

Space to grow

Jennifer Bastian becomes the third Thurber Park artist-in-residence
by [Linda Falkenstein](#)

October 2, 2024



Bastian explores grief and memory through the fiber arts.

"There should be 20 of these across the state," says [Jennifer Bastian](#), the 2024-26 Thurber Park artist-in-residence, of the two-year-long studio residency based out of the park just off Fair Oaks Avenue on Madison's east side. The program, under the auspices of the Madison Arts Commission and The Bubbler at Madison Public Library, began in 2019 and provides a Madison-based artist with studio space, rent-free. "I'm excited to make this my studio that I go to [regularly]," says Bastian, who has been making do with a storage space and working mostly out of her home. "I haven't had a space this large, ever, or where I can be messy, which I am very excited about."

The program grew out of a lack of art space in Madison and a desire to "demonstrate how we can use other kinds of spaces for art production," city of Madison arts program administrator Karin Wolf [told Isthmus](#) at the program's inception. The studio was created out of an underused park storage shed. The previous artists-in-residence have been Eric Adjetey Anang and Ash Armenta. Bastian takes the reins this month.

The opportunity is "incredible," Bastian says, in part because Wisconsin lags far behind other states in arts funding, last year ranking last: "We have a scarcity mindset — especially in Wisconsin. What little arts funding there is, we are encouraged to hoard." Bastian rejects that attitude and hopes to use the residency to collaborate with and "help other artists as well, because if they succeed, I succeed."

Bastian's training centered on photography, with a bachelor of fine arts degree from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and master's degrees in photography and intermedia studies from UW-Milwaukee. She co-founded the all-ages nonprofit art space Communication on Milwaukee Street in 2018, recently stepping down from the director position there to spend

more time on her own practice. Her recent work has centered on grief, in particular as it relates to COVID-19, and attempting to address how the pandemic isolated everyone — but especially those who are neurodivergent or have disabilities.

She has focused on memory and remembrance utilizing fibers (quilting) and wax sculptures. She hopes to use the space at Thurber Park to work on larger sculptures, including cement casting.

While the residency is primarily aimed at giving an artist studio space, there is also a public-facing aspect. Bastian hopes to use surveys to connect with residents around Thurber Park to see what they're interested in, noting she feels especially connected to the area because of the work she did at Communication not far away.

Her residency kicks off with an open house on Oct. 5 from 10 a.m.-noon in the studio, 3325 Thurber Ave. Bastian will also hold a weekly open studio from noon-2 p.m. Wednesdays, starting Oct. 16, with drawing, collage and fibers on hand for mixed media making, but visitors are welcome to just chat with Bastian about her work, too. She's also scheduled Grief Circle workshops on Nov. 16 and Feb. 8 at 10 a.m. Modeled on the old-fashioned sewing circle, participants will sew and discuss grief and support especially among other makers. More sessions are scheduled for spring.



Bastian: 'I'm excited to make this my studio.'