

GEORGE NAKASHIMA WOODWORKER, ARTS BUILDING
1847 Aquetong Road
New Hope
Bucks County
Pennsylvania

HABS PA-6783-E
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PHOTOGRAPHS

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
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ADDENDUM TO:
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GEORGE NAKASHIMA WOODWORKER, ARTS BUILDING & CLOISTER

HABS No. PA-6783-E

- Location: 1847 Aquetong Road, Solebury Township, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, 18938.
- Owner: The property is owned by Mira Nakashima Yarnall, and Kevin Nakashima the daughter and son of the original owners, George and Marion Nakashima.
- Present Use: It is currently being used as a space to display artifacts associated with George Nakashima, including his architectural renderings and furniture. The cloister is available as guest housing.
- Significance: The Arts Building was completed in 1967 in the International Style and was constructed as an art gallery and museum to display the works by Ben Shahn the well-known mural painter, photographer, and social activist; it continues to be used to display Nakashima's work. It is significant for its International style design that combines elements of traditional Japanese architecture, and for its hyperbolic paraboloid roof and mosaic tile mural designed by Ben Shahn and executed by the Gabriel Loire stained glass studio in France. The tile mosaic was built in eight sections and transported back to New Hope for installation on the west wall in 1972.
- Description: The Arts Building, constructed in 1967, has a hyperbolic paraboloid plywood roof and walls constructed of concrete block, stone, and poured concrete. The building is about two-and-a-half stories tall and measures approximately 36' x 40'. Large sections of the west and south sides are glass windows. Along the west wall on the first floor of the building is a tile mosaic designed by artist Ben Shahn. The south side of the building has two entrance doors, one near the southwest corner and the other large sliding doors leading out to the covered walkway. The interior of the building features a cantilevered floating staircase that leads to a mezzanine. The staircase has no outside rail and no risers, and the ends of the steps are secured deeply into a thick stone wall.

Connected to the arts building by a covered walkway, the cloister is a small, one story, rectangular-shaped building that includes a bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen. Nakashima intended the cloister to house visiting craftsmen from Japan. Walls are constructed of cement block and has a shed type roof covered with asphalt. There are three wood entrance doors with horizontal glass panels. The interior features rice paper screens over windows, exposed beam ceilings and plaster walls. The cloister was constructed concurrent with the Arts Building, sometime between 1965 and 1967 and is also International in style.

History: The Arts Building was constructed in 1967 specifically to display the works of Ben Shahn, the well-known mural painter, photographer, and social activist. George Nakashima and Ben Shahn became friends in the 1950s. George Nakashima designed an addition on Ben Shahn's house in the New Deal community of Roosevelt, New Jersey, and Ben Shahn purchased furniture from George Nakashima. From 1967 to 1969, Ben Shahn's art was sold at the Nakashima studio in New Hope and in the Arts Building following its construction. Ben Shahn sketched a tile mosaic that he proposed for installation on the west wall of the Arts Building. Unfortunately Shahn passed away in 1969, prior to its execution by the Gabriel Loire stained glass studio in France. The tile mosaic was built in eight sections and transported back to New Hope for installation on the west wall in 1972.

Among the extraordinary features of the Arts Building is its hyperbolic paraboloid roof design and its soaring roofline with exposed beams, its open space interior, and expansive glass walls. Particularly noteworthy interior features include its cantilevered stairway, handcrafted by Nakashima, with steps resembling the edges of the milk house table embedded into the stone wall. Perpendicular to the Arts Building is "the cloister," a series of bedroom, bathroom, and service kitchen that Nakashima intended to house visiting craftsmen from Japan, although that goal was never realized.

See George Nakashima Woodworker Complex, HABS No. PA-6783 for more information about the historical and architectural context.

Sources: James A. Michener Art Museum, *George Nakashima and the Modernist Movement* (essays by Steven Beyer and Matilda McQuaid). Doylestown, Pennsylvania: James A. Michener Art Museum, 2001.

Mira Nakashima. *Nature, Form & Spirit: the Life and Legacy of George Nakashima*. New York: Abrams, 2003.

Historian: Catherine C. Lavoie, HABS, 2012