

International SWANs Celebrates 21st Year of 'Supporting Women Artists Now'

BROOKLYN, NY, UNITED STATES, October 2, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- International SWANs (iSWANs) has and will always be dedicated to empowering women artists. This year we are celebrating our 21st Birthday. Learn how SWAN as the acronym for "Support Women Artists Now" came to be.

In June 2002, a Chicago-based writer named Jan Lisa Huttner became enraged by an article she was reading in The New York Times. Jan had never heard of the "Celluloid Ceiling" before, but she immediately realized the devastating impact the underrepresentation of women in the film industry had, not just on women filmmakers, but on women in audiences everywhere. So, she did something she had never done before; she wrote a letter to the editor of The New York Times.

And when The Times published it, a movement began which is now known as International SWANs.

Jan reached out to her friends in AAUW-Illinois (American Association of University Women) and the response was immediate. Two years later, on October 2, 2004 at Illinois Valley Community College, AAUW-Illinois



Kim Benziger (center) with Linda Henning-Cohen & Jan Lisa Huttner in Bloomington, IL. (4/28/07) Photo Credit: Donna Sproston



Jan Lisa Huttner (center) with members of the FF2 team at our last Manhattan meet-up pre-Quarantimes. (2/29/20) Photo Credit: Richard Bayard Miller

announced the birth of its new WITASWAN project (Women in the Audience Supporting Women Artist Now). Jan, as the newly appointed Director of College & University Relations, spent the next two years traveling from campus to campus all around Illinois, spreading the word.

With Marla Kim Bensiger (President of AAUW-Illinois) and Linda Henning-Cohen (Program Vice President) providing the funding, Jan's advocacy took root. She encouraged people to think of art as a dyadic relationship: women in the audience need women to create works of art that speak to their experience as women, and women artists need women in the audience to show up, support, and amplify their work. Jan encouraged women to think of WITASWAN as the vehicle for this win/win relationship.



Jessica Bond at check-in for SWAN Day Sweet 16 at the Chicago Cultural Center. (4/28/24) Photo Credit: Bonnie McGrath

In 2007, the AAUW-Illinois Board invited Martha Richards (Executive Director of WomenArts) to do a joint program with Jan at the Spring Convention scheduled for April. Together, Jan and Martha began to picture something grand: a global celebration of women artists. This dream became a reality on March 29, 2008, with the launch of the first International SWAN Day.

Under Martha's ardent administrative leadership, thousands of SWAN Day events were held in 36 different countries from 2008 to 2020, including film screenings, gallery crawls, music concerts, and panel discussions. Each gathering helped push the world a little closer to gender equality in the arts.

In 2012, Jan relocated to Brooklyn and launched a new blog called FF2 Media (www.ff2media.com). She created a team of women (mostly students and recent college graduates), dedicated to reviewing every film either directed and/or written by women that opened in Manhattan, week after week after week. Their commitment ensured women filmmakers were seen, heard, and remembered. Then came March 2020...

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the art world to a halt. Women artists faced even greater challenges than ever before, but Jan and the FF2 Media team didn't retreat, they evolved. FF2 Media expanded to embrace all expressions of women's artistic endeavors in five (often overlapping) categories: Applied Arts, Cinema Arts, Literary Arts, Performing Arts, and Visual Arts.

Virtual events sprang up: a 50th anniversary tribute to Lady Sings the Blues; an International Women's Day Q&A for The Power of the Dog; a Zoom tour of NYC painter L.C. Armstrong's studio; a conversation with Canadian folk group Germaine; and even a celebration of Queen Anne Boleyn's legacy. Meanwhile, Martha retired, stepping back from her role as Executive Director of WomenArts, at which point Jan moved back into the leadership role.

As the world reopened, in-person events returned. In 2023, the 15th Annual NYC SWAN Day returned to the SVA Theatre in Chelsea with short films and a Q&A featuring Academy Award-nominated actress Estelle Parsons.

In 2024, SWAN Day marked its Sweet 16 by honoring the legacy of painter Margaret Keane, best known for her haunting "Big Eyes" portraits. The celebration included a special conversation with Larry Karaszewski, Golden Globe-winning screenwriter of Big Eyes, and the film's set photographer Leah Gallo.

And in 2025, the 17th annual celebration honored Demi Moore for her transformative role in Coralie Fargeat's 2024 film The Substance.

What began as an audacious letter has become an international movement, all championing one truth: when women in the audience support women artists, everyone benefits.

iSWANs will celebrate its 21st birthday on Wednesday December 10, 2025 – International Human Rights Day – with a party in Brooklyn that will be livestreamed worldwide via YouTube.

International SWANs® is powered by FF2 Media®, an all-woman online publication and advocacy team, hosting events and publishing features, interviews, news, and reviews since 2008. Jan Lisa Huttner is the Editor-in-Chief of FF2 Media®. SWAN®, International SWANs®, Support Women Artists Now®, and FF2 Media® are all registered trademarks owned by FF2 Media LLC.

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