Empty Nest

Susan Viguers
A swallow's nest mud and straw, lined with downy feathers in the porch eaves of our beach cottage.

For three weeks we watched.
At first all we could see were tiny squalling maws
a nest of opened clams
no heads or bodies

and birds sweeping in and out

Later, there was more than feeding.
One morning I saw a swallow
dart to the nest
and then fly away
carrying up and over the water a white downy feather.
He dropped it from his beak
and it lightly drifted, falling
but before it reached the waves
he glided down and caught it
and soared up and again dropped it
and again oh so gracefully circled down and snatched it from its fall
and then once more
and, then,

skimmed back to the eaves
and returned it to the nestlings.
Commotion increased when the fledglings were ready to fly.

They demanded food but their elders swooped around the nest.

Anxious aerial dances coming close but never to it.
Two fledglings tumbled from the edge and fluttered off.

Two remained squawking.

In the evening, when I checked the nest, all four were there.

Tough love, be damned.
That night there was a storm, but I didn't worry for they were safe at home.
The next morning, they were gone.
Empty Nest was made possible by a grant from the Women's Studio Workshop in Rosendale, NY. WSW is funded in part by the New York State Council on the Arts.

The plate lithography images were printed at the University of the Arts, Philadelphia, PA. All other processes were completed at WSW: the letterpress printing, using a Vandercook press and polymer plates, the screen printing, the papermaking, and the binding. The paper is handmade, 50% abaca and cotton, with the addition of Art Farm rye to the cover paper. The type is 13 point Optima, except for this colophon, which is 10 point.

Thanks to the extraordinary staff and interns at WSW, most particularly Chris Petrone, and to my colleagues, Loi Spencer and Mary Pheian. Thanks, also, to Allis Fox and Laura Beyer who both came up for two days to help start what for me was a major papermaking undertaking.
