

Hernease Davis:

Hello and welcome to The Project Space, a podcast featuring some of the remarkable artists who have participated in the Project Space Residency here at the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, New York.

The Project Space Residency has served both regional, national, and international artists for many years, providing a studio space and access to VSW facilities.

I'm Hernease Davis. I'm a visual artist and the Assistant Curator of Education and Public Programs here at VSW. For each episode, I will be in conversation with artists to discuss their background, their practice, and how the project-based residency has impacted their works.

In this episode, I'll be speaking with the artist, Lili Chin. During our conversation, we touched on how a particularly unique experience as a solo project space resident allowed her space for contemplation and experimentation.

One of the many things I enjoyed about this conversation was learning about Lili's process, and the role long walks along the Genesee River played in changing how she approached her project. During her time here, Lili traveled throughout Rochester and within our building here at the Visual Studies Workshop, so you'll hear her refer to Jessica Johnston, our director, who assisted her movement in both instances.

Lili and I also refer to installation images of the work she created while in residence. These are still works in progress, but check out her website for those latest updates. That link is in our show notes.

Lili refers to various photo processes as well, such as anthotypes and cyanotypes. Just in case you may be unfamiliar with those, anthotypes are images made from a photographic process that uses light sensitive plant materials and cyanotypes are images that are made using a photo process that involves an ultraviolet light source such as the sun.

I'm excited to share this conversation with Lili where she walks us through her interdisciplinary and sensorial approach to her practice.

Lili Chin:

My name is Lili Chin. I was a resident at the Visual Studies Workshop in July, 2022. I'm from New York City, but I also spent my teenage years in Singapore and I grew up in Oregon, so I'm from all over. I am a artist and filmmaker.

I work with many different materials. I do installation art, and my work is often concerned with nature and memory, time, and impressions of environments.

Hernease Davis:

Well again, Lili, thank you so much. I am so excited to talk with you. We were talking off podcast about where you are now. You are in Galveston, Texas at a residency. And so one of my first questions is to you, because you are someone who has a lot of experience doing residencies and speaking generally and not specifically to VSW, I'm interested in how you use residencies, what roles they play in your practice, and how your experience has been this year in particular.

Lili Chin:

Yeah, that's a lot. So residencies have become increasingly important to my practice, especially in the past couple years since the pandemic. I've been on many residencies and they really give me an opportunity to experiment and also really utilize the space and get to know the local environment that I'm visiting, so usually I'm very influenced by the environment. I like to learn about the ecology and nature surrounding the environment, but I also make use of the facilities in a residency if there is one,

which is something I really exhausted when I was at VSW. And it's really a great place for me to just step away from the crampiness of being in New York City or just the very thick rhythm that I have sometimes when I'm teaching.

Trying to juggle my academic life and my studio practice is not always that easy because my academic life can be very demanding, so I use residencies as a way to find a new environment, but also have time and space.

And I would say that VSW was really extraordinary because I had the whole building to myself. It was a quiet month, very quiet. It was so great. You could hear a pin drop. And I was lonely at first, but then it just became this whole place that I could use, which was amazing.

This year I've been doing a lot more residencies than I usually do because I'm taking a break from my academic life to really focus on my work.

Now I'm in Galveston, but since VSW I've been to two other residencies, so this is my fourth residency starting from July. So it's a lot. I did the two other residencies in Scotland, which was really amazing, and VSW was the beginning of that wave.

So I was at Rochester, then I was on the West Coast of Scotland, then on the East Coast of Scotland, and now I'm in Galveston.

Hernease Davis:

Wow. I've never been to Scotland, so I'm just going to assume that they're quite different places, even maybe the east versus west of Scotland. What have you noticed in terms of the difference in how you're working in these spaces and how you spend your time during each one, but also has there been a progression this year, but also since you do work in response to your environment, is it more along the lines of a shift?

Lili Chin:

So I don't usually stack this many residencies in a row. This is unusual. And everybody experiences residencies differently. I thrive better in longer residencies, or best. This one that I'm in is 10 months, so I'm going to be here for the long haul, which is great. And that's part of the mission of GAR, to provide really long access to artists. And VSW was a month, and then when I was at Cove Park, that was a week, and then Hospital Field, that was two weeks.

Shorter residencies in Scotland they were really, really different, and like you said, the environment is also very different. And going from Rochester to Scotland was really, kind of like a right angle and in ways I was taking a lot of what I had experienced in VSW thinking I should transplant that to the West Coast of Scotland. But it wasn't really so fluid to do that because environments were so different.

Both of them are northern, so there's consistency, but there were incidences just in terms of things that I've been thinking about already when I was working at VSW such as human encroachment on nature and man's effect on nature.

I was looking a lot at the Genesee River and thinking about contamination in the Genesee River and silver contamination. And when I went over to the West Coast of Scotland, I was in this idyllic place that was really close to the Royal Navy. So when I looked out the window, I was observing this tranquil landscape that I thought was healing, and beautiful, and nurturing, and placid, and I realized there were submarines with torpedoes underneath.

So this conflict between man and nature is something that carried over from what I'd been observing a little bit when I was at VSW.

And then when I went over to the East Coast of Scotland, that was also really different.

The East Coast of Scotland is a lot more craggy than the West Coast, which feels lighter. There's more air. It's got subterranean ecosystem. There's rainforests on the West Coast. It was subtropical. On the East Coast is older and you see more standing stones. And when I was there, I think the more photochemical-based stuff that I had been doing at VSW had spilled over into the East coast side because I had a little bit more time.

And when I was there I was making these anthotypes where I was making emulsion from food to coat the paper and make exposures, which was similar to making these salt prints that I was making at VSW. And then I did some pit firing with ceramics.

It came in waves, but I was also in these short brackets of time where I think the shorter residencies, it's harder to really feel comfortable finding a balance between experiencing the landscape, taking it in, and then also producing the work. So now that I'm at Galveston, I'm taking everything that I did this summer, and digesting it and reweaving that into now the sunny landscape, Galveston, Texas that I've been...

Hernease Davis:

So I'm thinking about Galveston as another coastal place. Rochester in and of itself is not considered to be a coastal place, but has coasts. A body of water, the Genesee River runs right through the city, and it's on the coast of one of the Great Lakes as well.

I'm really interested in hearing about this work that you've been making in this experimentation with emulsions because I ran into your work all over the building. There's this thing called the 'chicken run'. It's a corridor that leads you from the parking lot into the building. And I remember opening up the door and seeing something in a glass container and a note that said, please don't move. And I was like, "Oh, what is this?" And I went into the dark room and found something else that was, and we're going to use the word festering or the word incubating. It was nice to encounter these things around, but I also know that you were having some issues with the process.

For our listeners, can you talk as much as you would like in terms of those materials, what you were actually doing?

Lili Chin:

I came to VSW thinking about access to 16 millimeter facilities, and I didn't immediately plan on working with alternative photographic processes, but I had been really trying to understand how to get to the basic aspects of celluloid, if you will, thinking about the substrate, thinking about the emulsion, which naturally is going to lead you to photography because if you really want to break that down, you have to get to photography first.

So I found myself doing a lot of salt prints, and really rethinking the emulsion and thinking the base that I was working with.

So to explain what I was doing, I was having to rethink the celluloid base. I had been thinking about paper prints, but there were technical problems of getting to make a paper print that would then run through a projector. That's like, down-the-road kind of project.

But I was working with taking expired film and putting it into a container with all sorts of organic materials, and allowing it to decompose and seeing what that would look like. I was also making cyanotypes that were direct cameraless films. So they were doing a lot of contact printing. So contact

printing in the sense where you would take a found object and you would mount it onto a surface that is light sensitive and get an exposure.

So I did that. I did a lot of that cameraless photography. Calling it photography is a little bit of a weird way of putting it. When you use the sun as an exposure bulb and you don't use a camera, you're getting an impression of an object, you're taking a trace of a shadow really. So I guess photography is a technical way to describe it, but I think it's a little bit more than photography if you will. I don't know what term we would call it.

It finds itself at the convergence of photography, printmaking and painting in a way, for me. It's not really one specific technical... It's a technical achievement, but you could definitely find connections with printmaking.

Hernease Davis:

Yeah. In terms of the history of cyanotype, it was originally used as an alternative to illustration of blueprints of organic organisms for scientific purposes because using this photographic medium was more accurate. It was more true to life, quote unquote, more so than those who could draw. I see it as a very rudimentary photograph, and if you break down the elements of a camera, so thinking about the substrate holding the ISO, so holding the speed of a film and then you also have the sun, sort of like the idea of a shutter is a more abstract deal.

So if you're making a photogram in the darkroom, for instance, the minute you expose it to light, that's the shutter speed. It's just a speed of whatever. But this idea of it shifting between these mediums, I totally agree, especially with how you were working with the containers and to even make these exposures. They felt like these tiny sculptures. When you're working with this way, you're making these physical objects and you're also making them do perhaps the things that they weren't really meant to do, so there's this really nice sculptural quality in it as well.

Lili Chin:

Yeah, I really like that you talked about the sculptural element because I would use these frames to make the salt prints. And they're very simple frames. If you wanted to make a salt print, all you have to do is coat the paper with salt and then coat it with silver nitrate and then put it out in the sun for however long that you think you need the exposure to be. But what's really important is that the frame is compressing the flat piece.

So it has to be flat in order to get a really nice contoured edge. If it's not flat, you'll get a ghosted edge. And if it's layered on top of each other, if it's a leaf that has two leaves layered on top, if you get a good exposure, you can actually, in some of the ones that I made, it's really amazing because you can see dimension. You can see dimension in the values.

There is something that feels more materially alive to me with the salt prints that not only speaks about dimension due to the values that were captured with the salt, but also the substrate that's used.

The stuff that you encountered in the dark room, that was a lot of organic leaves and stuff that I had found from the local environment to really express my impressions of the surrounding local areas that I had visited along the Genesee River.

I was walking a lot. I borrowed Jessica's bike. She was so generous. I rode her bike everywhere. But then I also would go on these long walks along the river. And walking has become a really important part of my practice now. And it does make me think of film because it deals with time, and it deals with measurement. And it deals with space.

So I would walk around and collect materials and I would film there with my 16 millimeter camera and get more realistic images that were camera based images. But I would also collect organic material from the areas. And then I would make these salt prints.

I don't know if you could see it like an abstract counterpoint to the more realistic images, but those plant materials that you encountered were found plant materials from the surrounding local environment, and I would put them in a frame after coating the paper and then put them out to sunlight and expose them.

Some of my exposures were 24 hours.

Hernease Davis:

This was with the salt prints?

Lili Chin:

Yes, it's with the salt prints. And I wasn't a salt pro. There are some people who are salt print making pros, and they probably will point out all the things that I did wrong, but I actually liked it being faint and I don't think I used a very concentrated silver nitrate solution so that's why they were faint.

And when I got the better contrasted ones, I was just like, "This is not what I'm going for," I guess because I wanted something that was a little bit more like breathing onto the surface or something, not like speaking onto the surface. There was a lot of trial and error with that and that was just really primer for working with anthotypes because when you're dealing with plant-based emulsions, you're talking about an exposure that would be a few days. Salt prints at least hold the image but anthotypes fade over time.

Hernease Davis:

So, because, it's interesting to hear you talk about time because you are also a filmmaker and I enjoy hearing filmmakers speak about film in these abstract ways or even thinking about the elements or the fundamentals of a film, or even thinking about a long walk being akin to a film or something that would bring that to mind.

So now I'm thinking about these long exposures, these 24 hours, 72 hour exposures that you're doing along those lines. Are you making any connections between how you're thinking about these walks, how you're thinking about this experimentation, and I'll just say, these photo processes that you are choosing to work with that require such time?

Lili Chin:

So it's elongated time, especially when thinking about it in terms of how long these exposures took. I was walking outside from the darkroom through the chicken run to the parking lot on a daily basis. That was my ritual, back and forth, back and forth. So the walking, there's this kind of repetition. So there's a repetition of that process that I was engaging in to make these images and trying to encapsulate it in photography is a little bit hard for me because when dealing with an image that's created, that's not with a camera, that's dealing with a long exposure, there's a lot of sensorial influence that can affect it. And you're dealing with cycles of time that deal with lunar cycles and sun cycles. So it's a way of thinking about metric counting, which is something that comes up a lot when you're working both with film because 16 millimeter film is a series of 24 images per second.

So this rhythm becomes a metric or a way of evaluating cycles, time in terms of now I'm involving the sun, so I'm thinking about the passage of time, the day. But then I can also thinking about the passage of

time when I'm going from the darkroom through the chicken run to that parking lot and back and forth. Or walking to destination and returning.

There's also this aspect of contemplation. So being contemplative, meditative, more slow kind of way of generating a record of an experience, especially now that I'm in a space where I can be for nine months. I think that contemplative activity is definitely going to be informing the work more.

Hernease Davis:

Yeah. That was one of my questions about how this translates. Can you talk about your installation practice because my interpretation of it is multimedia, multisensory. It incorporates sculpture, imagery and sound. And thinking about this experimentation you were undertaking at VSW and this exploration, I was just wondering how you use these two periods of time to translate that into a multi-sensory installation experience or how you are seeing, even the work that you're making now, evolving into that.

Lili Chin:

Working at VSW was just incredibly generative for me. I didn't have any distractions. I had this whole building to myself. I was a little bit intimidated because it was just me and the building. And then I was getting offers during the day to use more space and I was like, "Oh, my gosh. This is crazy. I have this whole place to myself." For anybody who's a listener that has not been to VSW, it's two floors and the whole basement has three different rooms, and there's a 16 millimeter room that I started out with. And then I migrated to the darkroom, and then I found myself using the chicken run and using the magic lantern room, and the parking lot.

And I was working furiously. I was working probably 12 hour days, probably 30 days in a row, really taking very few breaks.

And I think in part, it's because I knew that I had access to this kind of facility that I didn't think I would have access to after.

But in the process of working, making, generating these cyanotype and I was making phytography-based films and phytographic images where I would take plant materials and dip them in a solution and mount them onto a photosensitive surface.

So this fundamental of light and dark... So there's the parking lot that was a sun light, the bulb, and then the darkroom that was the processing chamber, and this going back and forth, that rhythm just became, again, as I said, my routine. And I would bring what I made downstairs upstairs and things would start growing in the studio.

I had a lot of equipment in the studio. I had a screen, I had rewinds, I had all this equipment accumulated in the studio alongside with some materials that I had brought that I knew that I wanted to use like an emergency blanket, because I was thinking about silver even before I arrived.

And all the film that I had accumulated and it was very much experiential laboratory environment that grew in the studio that in a way, became an echo of the darkroom downstairs. It was where all this activity was growing.

And then I had access to the other studio. Jessica so generously offered it to me, and I was like, "Whoa, okay. I have another space."

The other studio is much brighter, there's a lot of light, there's no blinds to really control the light as much, and it felt more like a gallery, so I ended up putting the salt prints that I had made there alongside with driftwood that I collected along the Genesee River and placing it into an installation that was a little

bit more formal, a little bit more directly echoing my walks along the river with objects that were found there, not so much of the laboratory environment.

And then I made the cyanotype and the cyanographic film simultaneously and I made a double projection piece. And so I used a screening room.

So there was the studio that was like the dark laboratory. There was a screening room that had the double projection that had both a dark and a light. The cyanotype was more dark and then the photographic piece was a little bit more light and it was sepia tone that was similar to the salt prints.

Then I had the, I call it the photographic studio that had all the salt prints.

I was using three spaces to show my work during open studios. I had done shows before where I've used two spaces and thought about them and in relation to each other. So this is not really new for my practice, but it was pointed out that I had been using this space similarly to my thought process downstairs and that the laboratory was like the darkroom, and the photographic studio was more like the sunlight.

And what's the bridge? Well, the screening room became the bridge because the screening room had a double projection and had one light and one dark and it was really nice. That was pointed out to me because I hadn't really thought about that before.

So there was a parallel activity that was going on that was an echoing of the ritual that I experienced that was really a transplanting of or a conversation with what I had actually experienced, that became then the expression in the installations that I presented the work with.

I have been thinking more and more about breaking down the relationship between art and life. I went to UCSD, maybe that was part of it. Allan Kaprow was teaching there a long time ago. He wasn't my teacher, but it does have that legacy.

Hernease Davis:

Can you talk about what you mean by that, breaking down art and life?

Lili Chin:

Well, I definitely do allow the senses to inform my work greatly, and I think that the experiences that I have in my daily life are very much in conversation with how I think about things in the studio.

One very, very revolutionary thing that happened in my life is that I changed my diet. So I only eat whole foods and it's a difficult thing because when I do meet up with people or have residencies where people feed me, I have a lot of food restrictions, but I've turned to nutrition and whole foods as a way to combat some health ailments that I've had. And it's been very challenging for me to go this route and take a whole foods driven lifestyle, because it is a lifestyle. And that's really changed my worldview.

It's changed my worldview, not only in terms of how I can socialize because I'm, I wouldn't say squeaky clean, but there are a lot of things that I can't eat. So I have to be very vigilant about what I eat and where I eat.

More so it's increasingly informed my studio practice because I'm thinking, "Well, what materials am I working with?" And even though I was pretty low toxic before, I'm trying to get as non-toxic as possible. There's the environmentally healthy aspect of it. I'd like to say that's more of a byproduct rather than a total pursuit, because I've changed my worldview because of trying to use nutrition to combat health ailments. A byproduct of that is being environmentally healthy and thinking about sustainability.

I think for me, it's informing my work hopefully in a way that is less about trying to persuade people to be environmentally conscious, but to think through the lens of using natural resources that are available in a more critical way. So that's why I was rethinking the acetate and the polyester base, rethinking the silver nitrate, and that led me down this whole journey of what I was exploring when I was at VSW.

I had always been thinking about the relationship between life and art, but this food thing has brought me down this incredible journey, so it's been good.

Hernease Davis:

I for one, am incredibly interested in process, but also how I do think of art practice in a very similar way and am trying to constantly work that into my own practice.

I've never heard it put in those particular ways of collapsing this thing between art and life, but one of the things that I was told in grad school was, if it's important to you, it will come out in the work as personal as you can get or as specific to your own experiences as you can get, you will get to those questions.

What strikes me is how you create these contemplative spaces. And that's also something that I left out of my question, in terms of this 'multisensory', that you're using this, in my interpretation of even not being able to experience the work in person, is this contemplative space that's incredibly open, but you are questioning and getting at things that are very specific.

They're abstracted in ways that I won't necessarily get it from the work, but what I do get is that you have created this space for a mind to wander or even an encounter with soundscape and even you describing walking along the river, just thinking about how you even use the sounds of water.

So it's interesting to hear that this is coming very much about these decisions that you've made in your personal life and how it has filtered into how you work with materials and how you observe your body's responses to nutrition and getting to something that really is getting at a lot of environmental questions that are especially important in Rochester, but the land of Kodak where so many of the resources here have been contaminated through that chemistry.

As an educator, sometimes it's really hard to convince students to just trust those micro decisions or those small decisions that they're making for themselves, that that is important enough.

I also had a hard time following that collapse of art and life, but I did not trust it for years until after grad school, after things in my life changed where I had to think about that again, like, "Oh, okay."

Lili Chin:

It makes things a lot easier. It's not like you're trying to be in two different drawers like, "Okay, I'm not a parent," but, "Oh, I'm being a parent and then I have to be an artist," and just those kinds of switches.

When there's more of a flow between... And I don't even think it's just for artists. I think for a scientist or somebody who works in medical field, or even somebody who works at the post office, I think all of it becomes part of a total thing. And I guess that's why I'm interested in installation because I work in a very pluralistic way.

And it's not the easiest to work with many different materials, especially if you're also working with materials that have a very strong, rich history, photography, ceramics, weaving, glass, metal. I love all these different materials. I'm just very attracted and very curious about the process of making, and it's taken me quite a while to feel comfortable with shifting and shifting and, "Oh, she's working with glass now. Oh my gosh, she was working with photography before. What's going on?"

I realized, "Hey, you know what? I grew up in Oregon and then I moved to Singapore." That's a huge shift going from the forests of Oregon to the rainforests of Singapore. And for me as a child doing that, I had to make connections between various different cultures and landscapes, and for me it was actually nature that felt consistent. The lush green in Oregon and the lush green in Singapore, that was the thing that I could find a thread, but it also forced me to push into time and think about deep time through geology, think about primitive man and lately, I've been thinking about making things that have more enduring ideas, thinking about things that relate to ancestry, or thinking about if we were talking about cycles of time, it's easier to quantify time through days and months.

I think someone, I can't remember who mentioned it. I was listening to Braiding Sweetgrass when I was like...

Hernease Davis:

I love that one.

Lili Chin:

I was at VSW, so maybe there was a little bit of that that was going on in my mind. But I started thinking, well if we count cycles of time based on generations and we give a generation about 70 years, 70 generations is like 4,900 years ago.

And if I wanted to communicate with somebody that far back, what would it take to try to communicate with someone that far back? Or if I wanted to use my art to communicate with somebody that's 10 generations ahead of me, that is... 700 sounds like a lot of time, but if we count them in generations, 10 generations, it's easier to quantify.

I don't think I totally answered your question about art and life, but I think it's beginning to feel more comfortable with the things that I'm attracted to.

Making decisions in a studio is a huge part of our practice. Making decisions, going shopping, what to eat, what book to choose, what movie to watch, that's all part of decision making too. And that's all part of being alive. Maybe that allows people who are trying to find more of that comfort of breaking down the division between art and life.

One doesn't have to strive for it. One is already doing it. Because I too fell into the trap of trying to articulate what it means to be around a body of water that's contaminated with silver nitrate. I found myself shooting around the river. I was like, "How do I make sense of all this contamination and talk about it through the lens of environmentalism?"

I called the DEC, I was on the phone with so many different bureaucratic departments and I found myself trying to become a journalist and I was like, "I'm not a journalist." And my translation of it was becoming a little too literal. And so when I leaned into a more experiential edge, I became a lot more comfortable with that voice. My work is also multisensory because I think a lot about the body, how my body has really regenerated after becoming more dependent on nutrition.

But if I look through the lens of the body - and when we're working in the darkroom, we can't see, so we have to touch everything and feel where the thing is, how hard it is, how soft it is.

I remember sometimes I would get the emulsion, because I'm processing 16 film, I get the emulsion side and the base side mixed up, so I'd have to put the film between my lips and do that test, which side is going to stick, so I'm using all my senses to try to make this.

There's a teaching, there's a wisdom, there's a language, there's cognitive thinking within that, that doesn't get appreciated as much as empirical evidence that we learned in academia.

When I work with materials and there is a whole collective use of my body, of all the senses, then I can understand better.

And I guess one thing that made me feel more comfortable with that also is that I've been reading a book called *The Living Mountain* by Nan Shepherd. She's a Scottish writer. I was in Scotland, so I was really enamored with the landscape there.

If you ever have a chance to go, I totally recommend it, especially if you like rocks. But it's beautiful and the people are really nice. But there's this area called the Cairngorm Mountains, just a very, very beautiful area. Nan Shepherd wrote about the Cairngorm Mountains just after World War II.

And the book is written in a very sensorial way, and a byproduct of her writing is environmentalism, but she doesn't write with a voice to talk about the mountains, to be an environmentalist, or to persuade people to be environmentally friendly. She writes it with a very direct experience, both of the splendor as well as the challenges of being in a very tough environment.

There's a lot of snow and how it can really affect the body. And there's a writer that wrote the afterword named Robert Macfarlane, and he wrote that even though her writing does have an environmental edge, her delivery is so sensorial that it doesn't feel preachy or overtly persuasive.

I'd rather my work be coming from a direct experience to express some of the things that are meaningful to me rather than coming from a place that's like, "This is a critique of this."

Initially when I was examining the river from such a critical standpoint, I found myself getting stuck in this literal translation. And once I gave space and removed myself from that and gave some space to allow things that I've observed even intuitively or coincidentally like a walk, there was more space in there. There's more breathing room for some of those intuitive interpretations to speak louder.

Hernease Davis:

I'm back and forth between Brooklyn and Rochester. I'm based in these two places. I do not have a long history in Rochester, but as you were speaking, I was thinking of how it leaves me more space to think about the history of people, but not necessarily within the context of just Kodak, but this everyday experience, these smaller moments that would get negated, or neglected, or dismissed when there is a more didactic slant to a message, because a lot of those experiences are incredibly important in how people engage with the environments or how people even become interested or even grow in rage, or anger, or worry. Those things are sometimes put to the wayside because they're not actionable things.

All of those experiences accumulate to present in a way that would make one concerned and would make one concerned to the point of action, but because there are all these other complicated and small things that factor into how do you make this decision or how do you get to this opinion, it doesn't just happen out of thin air or the ether, and it also doesn't happen or isn't created out of the most obvious things.

It really is these small and incredibly valuable moments. The challenge is seeing those things as being valuable.

Lili Chin:

This might be the benefit of being a minority. Not only am I Asian, but having this weird background of being American and then going to Asia. This is the reverse immigration, but I'm also left-handed, I'm a twin. I'm born on a cusp of Virgo and Libra. It's not the best that I suffer for whatever reason. Just even taking being left-handed for example, I don't know, you're probably right-handed.

Hernease Davis:

I'm also lefthanded, so I know.

Lili Chin:

Oh, my gosh. Look, a leftie like us.

You know.

Hernease Davis:

Yes, I know.

Lili Chin:

That's a good starting point.

Hernease Davis:

Yes.

Lili Chin:

We all know we got to sit at the corner of the table and that specific corner...

Hernease Davis:

Exactly. There's only one part of the aisle you can sit in, and the way we write and everything, it's embedded. Where I sit on the train to come up to Rochester, I'm left-handed, how am I going to move my very, very dominant arm to do the things that exist in the world that's not made for people with this dominant arm.

Lili Chin:

Yeah, yeah. So you already start paying attention to something that is against normal.

Hernease Davis:

Yeah. This is so true.

Lili Chin:

Oh, wait a minute, I can't sit here. I can't sit at this desk because this desk is for righties.

Hernease Davis:

Yes.

Lili Chin:

But I guess what I'm saying is that maybe that situation has enabled me to already notice that I'm in an alt space. So well if I start paying attention to that and allowing, I'm going to veer off back into art making, it's if I start paying attention to things...

For example, when I brought all the equipment into the studio, I wasn't necessarily thinking of allowing it to be part of a laboratory environment or even part of this installation that I was creating. But over time I was just like, "Okay, well I really want to allow this equipment to be part of the space."

So it's also allowing the process to inform the making and has now spilled into what's going on in my studio in Galveston. I'm doing a bit of weaving, weaving with film, weaving with string and I had to do a direct warp onto my loom, and I had this ladder inside of my studio because I didn't have a proper way to prepare my loom. So I had to use the ladder and I was stretching out string into my studio and I was like, "Wow, this is cool," and it probably will show up in an installation.

But last year I was doing wood firing with a kiln and I really like making ceramics with atmospheric environments, so using organic materials to affect the glaze color of the clay, or something might break, and then I'll repair and conserve it. I was doing this wood firing for the first time and to do wood firing is really involved because you literally have to fire this kiln with logs of wood until it goes over 2000 degrees.

So you're doing this for a few days and it's a real commitment. There's a whole sensorial experience of trying to make that happen with the body.

The clay itself is also taking in a record of that environment. It seems like I might be jumping between materials. There's always a consistent flow as I move from material, to material, to material.

Hernease Davis:

I think that's really wonderful and it makes total sense to me. But anything that you want to say in closing or in conclusion about how you see the trajectory of your work?

Lili Chin:

So I talked a lot about the body, but also the external environment is also thinking about that and how that's a factor, whether it's a controlled environment that's man-made by the individual such as putting chemicals into a processing tank, so that's a controlled environment, or whether it's the individual in a different environment. I'm in Galveston and it's 90 degrees and everybody else is 50 degrees.

But I think also how natural elements have an effect on the subject matter is something that is going to be informing my work continually. I think I was thinking a lot about sunlight and how sunlight affects photochemical and sensitive surfaces.

Last year I was thinking a lot about heat, and it seems like everywhere I've been going this year has been a lot of water, a lot of coasts. Coastal environments have been really an influence to me.

And thinking about man's relationship with nature, and the encroachment that we have on nature, and how we can live alongside wildlife and plant life without having such a heavy footprint. It's not so much that I want to have my work be overtly critical about it. Because I'm thinking about relationships between the individual and then the individual society and then maybe the cosmic, it's like, how do these echoes across micro-macro occur as parallels? Does that make sense?

Hernease Davis:

Yeah. All right, Lili, thank you so much.

Lili Chin:

Oh, thank you.

This transcript was exported on Dec 20, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Hernease Davis:

This has been really wonderful to talk to you. And I'm still recording. It's almost two hours.

Lili Chin:

I don't think anybody would listen all two hours of it, but I think that's great.

Hernease Davis:

Okay, great. Yeah, I'll send it to you.

And there you have it. I encourage you to visit Lili's website to see her updated works. Her site is lilichin.org.

As for the Visual Studies Workshop, please visit us at vsw.org where we have information about the project space residency, upcoming events both in person and online. And follow us on Twitch and Instagram at the Visual Studies Workshop.

And feel free to send me an email at herneasedavis@vsw.org. Thank you so much for listening to this conversation with artist and current Galveston Artist in Residency resident, Lili Chin.

Stay tuned for the next episode and until then, please take care. Bye.