

Hernease Davis:

Hello, after an unanticipated hiatus, welcome back 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. I'm Hernease Davis. I'm a visual artist, and the assistant curator here at VSW. The Project Space Residency has served both regional, national and international artists for many years, providing a studio space and access to VSW facilities.

This episode features a conversation between former resident Anna Kipervaser, and our Curator of Public Programs Tara Merenda Nelson. I asked Tara to guest host for this episode because of her background in experimental cinema, and because she and Anna had collaborated closely together on an evening program that occurred during Anna's residency as a part of our Salon Series called In Dialogue, where invited artists choose Materials from the VSW Archive to present alongside their work. This collaboration began a whole host of in-depth conversations between Anna and Tara about experimental filmmaking, and this podcast episode is a continuation, where we get to learn a bit about Anna's background and how she came to use the materials in her work that are so central to her practice.

One of the questions I always ask on the podcast is, where are you from? I mean it as an open question that is up for interpretation by the artist. The answer to that question for Anna is a particularly complicated one, and it also intertwines with her wonderfully layered practice and experience as an experimental filmmaker. You'll find reference links to Anna's website and information about her In Dialogue programming screened here at the Visual Studies Workshop in the show notes.

Now, without further ado.

Tara Nelson:

Hello. My name is Tara Merenda Nelson, and I am the Curator and Director of Public Programs at Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, New York, and I am excited to be here today with Anna Kipervaser, a dear friend of mine.

Anna, you want to introduce yourself?

Anna Kipervaser:

Hi, I'm Anna, and it's a pleasure to be here at VSW for this whole month, and I'm going to stay, just sit in, so don't worry. But also, it's really great to be here doing this podcast with you, Tara, thank you for having me.

So I guess to introduce myself, I don't know. I don't know what I do. I don't know who I am. I don't know where I'm from. But these days I'm living in Cincinnati and I was born in Ukraine, in Lviv, and it's unclear where I'll be after Cincinnati and when that after is, and before Cincinnati I've lived in the UAE, in North Carolina, in Indonesia, in Egypt. Anyway, it's complicated. Yeah, so that's me.

Tara Nelson:

All those places that you've lived, I think that you just described, you've been brought there through your practice as an artist. Maybe you can talk a little bit about your practice and maybe describe it for us.

Anna Kipervaser:

Yeah, that's also a complicated question. Yeah, it's true. I follow a voice, a path, magic that happens that takes me places, and not just places geographically, but places in my work. And so I went to undergrad

for painting and drawing, and I graduated in 2003, so that was 100 years ago, 20 years ago to be exact. And then I got into installation art. It just happened that whatever project I would envision would tell me what medium it wanted to be, and I've always had a very diverse practice. And so then I had an idea for a project that I thought was going to be a multimedia installation, and I'm making a narrative structure of my practice, which is also not really true, but it's an interesting thing that we humans do, we want to tell stories with the beginning, a middle and an end, so here it is.

I thought it was going to be a multimedia installation, turned into a feature documentary film, and that's how I entered cinema. And then I couldn't really stop. And so now most of my work is motion picture and these days most of it is on 16 millimeter film. Though I still work in video, I still make photographs. I don't paint these days, but who says I won't tomorrow? And sometimes cross-platform projects as well. So again, I don't know where I'm from and I don't know what I do, and it's great, the unknown is my best friend.

Tara Nelson:

You mentioned that you had a project that took you to a feature documentary and that that introduced you to cinema, you couldn't stop, maybe let's circle that moment, the "couldn't stop" and what it was about cinema that compelled you to keep going.

Anna Kipervaser:

And it's interesting, these kinds of conversations ask you to point at things and give them names, and there's not necessarily always that inside of us, so it's a really great exercise to try to do that. When I was working on the feature doc, I built a team. It happened, it turned into a doc because a friend said, I was complaining that I couldn't find funding for the multimedia installation and he said, "Ah, let's make a movie." And I was like, "I don't know anything about film," and he said, "I do and we can build a team." So I built a team and raised some money, and it turned out that I had to do most of the work. So I ended up having to learn how to shoot, learn how to do sound, more or less on the fly, and from just humans directly. And every time I would come back from Cairo, which is where the feature doc took place, I would give my footage to this amazing editor, who's still a very dear friend, and he would love it but would also, he and other people who were still involved in the team, would comment that it was all very painterly. And for a while I thought that meant it was bad and not part of the documentary canon, which that's true, but also it was the way that I saw the world. And so I also didn't want this thing to be a straight documentary, and I didn't know what I know now about cinema, obviously, but I knew I had a vision even though I didn't have words for it.

So anyway, so I kept shooting in that way and a lot of things I wouldn't show the rest of the team and wouldn't end up in the feature. And then I started just shooting elsewhere and putting things together because watching him edit, I then learned how to edit, or I started to feel like, "Oh, a human can do this, and I am also a human and I can do that." And so I started editing and I wouldn't show these short little beauties to anyone because I didn't know or think that they were worthy or that they were allowed or that they were anything, anything. You know how it is. And then at some point, I ended up in grad school and I ended up working with this really great human, David Gatten, who made me feel comfortable enough to ask if I could show them to him, and then that's it. Here we are.

Tara Nelson:

And these are the painterly pieces, the ones that were described by others as... And I say painterly because that's, to me, a little bit of a trigger from the inside of, I think, experimental cinema. And

nothing against that term, but it, to me, points... I feel like it's not necessarily derogatory, but somewhat naive, which is okay, but I think it's usually spoken by those outside of the experimental cinema world, and it's like they're kicking you out a little bit of their narrative form into, "You don't belong here. You go over there where there's abstraction and painterly-ness." Which is kind of, again, having been kicked out myself, I think it's actually a badge of honor.

But maybe a little bit more about that. Those pieces, I don't need you to necessarily describe them per se, but what did David Gatten, who is an experienced experimental filmmaker, what was that conversation with him like? What did he see? What did he show you about that practice and what door opened for you?

Anna Kipervaser:

Yeah, I want to touch base on the derogatoriness of that, of what I was being called, and also about those pieces. Nobody saw those pieces until I showed them to David. So when I was being called a painterly shooter, it wasn't about those pieces particularly, it was about everything I was bringing back from Cairo. And so mainly B roll, because A roll was very simple. And even then the way that I would frame shots, I would get talked to. And I felt that same way, I felt like I was being talked down to, kicked out, but I also didn't know what the hell I was doing, so I trusted what I was being told.

But then because I kept making stuff and, in this form, in this cinematic form, and I didn't know what I was making, but I knew that I couldn't stop and it had taken over my life. I started seeing only in motion picture. And so when I went to grad school, I thought I was going to grad school, I applied to grad school when I woke up in Indonesia after three weeks being sick and mostly unconscious and thinking I was going to die, and I was like, "Hmm, I think it's time to apply to grad school."

And so I applied to a few programs and then got into the thing I thought was my top choice, and then also got into Duke, which I applied to as a lark, because who wants this creature at that kind of school? And I got in, and then I got some funding, and I was like, "I'll go there." And I didn't really know anything about the... When people apply to grad schools, they know why they want to go there and they know who they want to study with. That's not how I make my decisions. So for better or worse. So I went and I thought I was going to work on an interactive documentary component of Cairo (in one breath), because interactive documentary was a thing back then, and Duke had a computational component to the experimental and documentary arts program, and the film was still in post-production so very quickly I learned that that isn't what's going to happen.

And in the first semester, I saw this object in a room, and this is a roundabout way of answering your question, I'm sorry. So I saw this object in a room and it looked like a rephotographing device, and there was a digital camera on one side, a bellows, and then a thing where there was light and maybe film would go in a thing. And I saw a student, a member of my cohort, using it one day, and I was like, "Okay, so she's digitizing film. Okay." And then a couple of days later, I'm obsessive, so I kept thinking about this object, and I asked a friend, who's still a very close friend, Libby Striegel, what that thing is, she was a very experienced filmmaker, and she said, "It's an optical printer." And I said, "Cool. So does it only do film to digital or can it do film to film?" She said, "It can do both." I said, "So is this one set up only? And I can't..." She said, "Take it apart."

And she knows that I like taking things apart. And so I took it apart, and then I went and got film from her and made photograms on 16, and I hadn't touched 16 before at all, and I made photograms. She told me times for processing with the chemistry that was in the darkroom, which I didn't use, I used the bathroom in the MFA studio, and then I put that into the gate and I took off the camera, which I couldn't get it off the bellows, so I took the bellows out as well, and I used extension tubes. I didn't know what the hell I was doing, but I optically printed. And then the next day I sought help from, David was not on

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campus at the time, so I didn't know him. He was only teaching spring semesters. So I sought help from Josh Gibson who took the bellows off the digital camera, helped me understand what this really was doing, and then I didn't shoot film for a long time.

Then second semester, in David's class, I saw experimental films because he was teaching Experiments in the Moving Image for the MFA, and the room was always full with community members too. And so I saw experimental films and after the second session, I came up to David and I said, "Can I make movies, I guess the way that I paint?" And he said, "Yes." And I said, "Okay, can I show you the things I've been making?" And he said, "Yes." And then we had a meeting and he generously sat through so much of my work and talked, we talked for hours, and he was just pure light and all smiles and very supportive. There was no criticism, there was no feedback to be given in this stage, and he knew that. And now looking back on it, I know that, but then I just didn't know, and he just gave me permission just to do what I wanted. And that was it. And that was the beginning of the mentorship that began then.

Tara Nelson:

I find it really compelling and comforting, and I just feel simpatico with your experience of being given permission. And I think that's something I myself, and have, also having worked with a lot of experimental filmmakers, find is part of their path, not really having exposure in a mainstream way, even as an artist, I think this film practice gets compartmentalized and it's difficult to contextualize and challenging to show correctly. So you need to find that place and find that door that opens and walk through it, and then the community or the individual, whatever it is, who can take you to the next place. And it's often a combination, for myself and others, I think, and what you've described, of some sort of curiosity around technique and technical aspects. I think film and moving image, there's just something extremely familiar, in some ways, but accessible maybe too, for those of us who have this type of curiosity around the mechanics of perception, because the projector illustrates the mechanics of perception. The film camera illustrates the mechanics of perception, and of course they're just sexy things.

And then to see what they can show us through the actual light image, motion, sound, cadence, juxtaposition, all those things that occur on screen in an experience of experimental film, it's a trigger for some of us to just say, "Where do I go next?" And luckily, some of us, you included, find our David Gattens or whoever that mentor is who guides us to the next place.

So you quickly, I think, become savvy and technically adept at the optical printer and also at shooting 16 millimeter film. Talk a little bit about what you were working on and we'd like to hear more about your actual films and bodies of work, maybe your first, not necessarily your first experimental film, but where that took you when you started to use these devices and apply them to your own work.

Anna Kipervaser:

Those doors are sometimes humans and sometimes they're layered throughout time, after a while. And I was shooting digitally at the time, mainly, and then there was more asking David strange, funny questions. "David, can you show me how to use the camera?" And then we have a workshop for everybody, and then, "David, the splicer, it's a really sexy object, can you?" And he's like, "Yeah, let's have a workshop," and then things take off. But while that was all happening, it dawned on me that, in 2001, when I was in a residency in New York during my junior year of college, on Halloween, you know me and Halloween. On Halloween, I went to Anthology Film Archives to experience a full day, I didn't get tickets for the full day, but to experience a full day magical show where Mike Patton, John Zorn, Dave Lombardo and other musicians were doing a live soundtrack to some of Kenneth Anger's footage on Crowley.

So actually, no, not on Crowley, on LaVey. And so I spent six hours there, and I don't remember if it was 24 hours or 12 or 18, but it didn't connect right away. But as I continued to work in and learn about the history of experimental film, and it wasn't the name Kenneth Anger because that name did not stick with me, and it wasn't seeing that work again because I still have never seen that work again. But something allowed those dots to connect and for me to realize that, okay, so the things I've been interested in film and otherwise have led to this moment, and then finding out that Maya Deren is Ukrainian and that the Bolex was invented by a Ukrainian immigrant, that all continued to reaffirm my love and my passion.

So a lot of the work in the beginning was digital because, as I said, I could not stop making stuff. And then when I started shooting with the Bolex, I was shooting... My practice is, the way that things are created is varied. So some work I make from beginning to end knowing what will happen, or thinking that I know what will happen. And somewhere I'm just, I'm out in the world shooting all the time, and suddenly some shots will pop into my mind that I've already captured that need to be with the shot that I just captured, and then I'll go and edit. And so when I started shooting 16, I didn't have any notion of creating finished work. I was just exploring the device, but I wasn't doing it to explore the device. I was loving it and seeing the world with it, and I took it everywhere.

And I got into a conference in... The conference was in Amsterdam, and I went to Finland and to Switzerland as well on that trip. And I needed to go to the Arctic Circle, I had been needing to for many, many years, so this was an opportunity to, and I brought the camera, and I brought the camera everywhere I went. And now, 10 years later, I'm using some of the footage that I captured on the very first rolls that I shot. And some of that footage ended up in films that happened in 2017, "And By The Night" and "When It Is Still," some of the same footage that was in "And By The Night".

And so sometimes films happen like that, and sometimes films happen very much in the studio. And so to relate back to the optical printer, me and the optical printer became savvy with each other. Like I said, I'm obsessive, and there was this device in the MFA studio building to which I had 24-hour access, and I had my own little cubby, and the beast was in its own room, but the room also had a Steenbeck, a digital projector, and it was also used as a conference room. So when visiting artists would come, the room was occupied. When people would be on the Steenbeck, the room would be occupied. When people would be watching on the digital projector or testing their own films, occupied.

And so I found myself wanting to just be with the optical printer, and I eventually moved it into my cubby with the caveat that if anybody needed it, to let me know. Which was, it took a while to get there, but then me and the optical printer just spent 24/7 together. The first thing that I started on it, I'm still working on, and it's a long form, multipart project translating or transliterating the Quran from Arabic to visual, and reclaiming visual as a language and asking the question of how do these spiritual revelatory experiences happen? Do they happen from semantic meaning? Or do they happen from juxtapositions of sounds, of letters, of components? And then in time, does time have something to do with it? So that's how me and the optical printer fell in love. And then I started to edit other types of movies, movies that I'd shot in the world, using the optical printer.

Tara Nelson:

I think the experience of seeing the world through the lens, or understanding image and time in the way that film cameras and optical printers can allow you to, it's just, again, a really compelling part of being a filmmaker in this form, in this tradition or in this style, in this painterly style. Just kidding. But I appreciate that understanding of your experience with those particular devices, and also how these films are culminated and cultivated over time, how long it takes and what happens in the process of

making film in this way. You also work in the darkroom, you process all your own film, pretty much. No, almost.

Anna Kipervaser:

Some.

Tara Nelson:

Many things. So you've trained, or been trained, and learned different darkroom techniques as well. When the film is made, when you're shooting or when you're experiencing that moment of pulling the trigger or clicking the shutter, a certain image is made inside of your mind, and then that's not always the image that happens and that comes out. But I'm also interested in how finding the image and manifesting the image connects to a concept like the one you've just talked about, about visual language, about the series that you're working on with the Quran. Could you talk a little bit about that in the process? And when those decisions get made, how they get made, that's something that really requires a lot of attention and patience. So maybe you could talk a little bit about your experience with that part of the process.

Anna Kipervaser:

The darkroom is an integral component to that, you're right. I spent a lot of time in the darkroom, I've spent a lot of time in the darkroom at VSW, and so happy to. It's definitely a happy space. And part of it might be that I want to look at everything in every space I'm in, and I want to interact with everything, and I get distracted easily and happily. And when I'm in the darkroom, everything is dark and there is hyperfocus and vigilance and everything has to be exact, and there have to be only controls with one variable. And so always that question has always been interesting to me and plays into my work. But in the darkroom, things are revealed because of this setup. And so I process all my own black and white, and I process as neg.

I've only processed black and white reversal once, which is kind of weird because I process color reversal all day every day, and I'm a fan. But I don't process color neg for various reasons. But my color reversal is often, these days while I'm at VSW, my Ektachrome is... I'm running tests for this project that I'm working on here. And I thought originally that I wanted the whole project to be on Ektachrome, so the film component of it, because there's a digital component of it, but then it would end up as a print. So I thought that everything would be on film and processed by me. But as you said, the process of making and interacting with the medium talks, and I think that's any medium, I don't think it's specific to ours. It's always been the case for me, "the best laid plans", right? And new ideas form.

So I might enter into one of these projects that starts off as not just very intentional, but very structured, and with maybe what I think I know what it will look like. And then I process the first roll and I find out, oh man, nope, doesn't do what I thought it would do. It might look like what I thought it would look like, but it doesn't do what I thought it would do. Okay, well I have to try something else, and then I try something else maybe without having an idea, but knowing that I need to. And then while doing the thing I'm trying, then something else will come. So it's very much interactive relationship that I have with the medium and I think that's the same for a lot of artists.

So with the Order of Revelation, it's the same. I thought that I was going to create this alphabet utilizing pattern based logic, patterns that I could create. And then I shot some of that and I realized that human made patterns, they're not talking and they're inappropriate for this project. And so I thought about fire, and then I filmed fire in motion, thinking that I could create strips of negatives each that correlated to a

letter in the Arabic alphabet. And the fire wasn't interesting at all to look at as... it was going to be a black and white film no matter what. So I was just filming candles, I wasn't starting fires, unfortunately. So there wasn't many striations or variation in what happened, so the different strips of negatives wouldn't be different enough to call themselves individuals, to be able to be combined. And I knew I was going to be putting it together on the optical printer, and then I just went to the JK, JK optical printer.

So as we said, it's a rephotographing device and you can stick film into the gate and have light project through the film, and then you look through basically a macro lens, created through bellows, into the Bolex viewfinder to see what you see on the film. And you can choose to zoom in, you can choose to make effects with filters or other, you can set it in focus and out of focus, whatever. And so I was just spending time with the optical printer and I started putting objects into the gate area or near the gate area, and started photographing them in and out of focus and in motion. And through that play, it came to me that obviously this is how the alphabet is formed. And so I treated those strips as these events that turned into filmstrips that I captured on film, I turned those into each letter in the alphabet, and then I would stick them into the optical printer gate and rephotograph those in sequence to form words.

And so following simple arithmetic logic that transforms with each surah, which is chapter, and also following the rules of the recitation of the Quran. And so those overarching rules of the recitation of the Quran never change and the order in which I'm translating is one of the orders that is believed to be the order in which the Quran was revealed, because that's a contested question. There are multiple schools of thought on this. So I'm following one school on this and so those things don't change, but my simple arithmetic logic, it remains simple, it remains arithmetic, but the base number changes with each chapter. Things happen as I'm shooting and then something shifts and the thing transforms and it becomes something totally different than intended at the beginning. And so this happens with every section that I make.

Up until this coming section that I need to start, I've been treating those strips as negatives, and so then when I rephotograph, I get positive, which has been really useful to me because then I go in the darkroom and I process it using the negative process and I see what it really looks like, and then I project. But it's a problem for many reasons, including that in order to make an exhibition print, I have to make an internegative and then make a print. And it's also a problem because of how the optical printer works. And with frame line, without getting into the weeds on this, I finally decided to, even though it was a question, and this is why I haven't moved into... The last section I made was in 2017. I've created different loops from surahs inside of that section. But it's been hard to figure out how to fix that and I've been resistant to treating the strips as positives to create negatives.

So eventually I contact printed them to turn the strips that are the alphabet into positives, and then be able to rephotograph them to negative. And I haven't started this next section because I know it will be a completely different interaction and also a completely different result. And the contact printing didn't turn out, didn't make the strips look the way that I wanted them to for various reasons, specifically the frame line question. So I had to actually rephotograph them on the optical printer. So this project continues to be monopolized, monopolized by the optical printer. I can't break up with him. We're in love.

Tara Nelson:

It's interesting to hear that process and also that it's an ongoing process related specifically to that project and the idea of this visual vocabulary and the title, of course, having roots in the historical significance of Order of Revelation, but also, I think, the title relating directly to the revelation through ordering of images and through finding that what you're calling arithmetic logic or divine arithmetic too, there is that's specifically 24 frames per second juxtapositions of three frames of this, to 12 frames of

that, to all the variations you can have with on-off in terms of densities of light. All of that is the basis of what, I think Daniel Barnett's book, we've discussed a little bit, movement as meaning in experimental film.

I'm going to paraphrase and probably forget a couple of things, but I know specifically the baseline and something that's spoken to me in that book is where the mind can move, there is meaning. And the challenge in working with film and film projection is to find those mind movements. So when you say you go back to the darkroom or you film fire and it's just not doing it, it's not right. To me, that references this. What's not right is the movement of the mind isn't happening, it's something isn't... is sticking. And he goes on in the book to describe what the basic elements of abstract film.. in experiencing experimental film is rhythm, cadence, juxtaposition, and duration, and those are the elements that we work with to think through in these frame by frame elemental forms.

But it's really having to break into music. And of course, I think, I'm not a musician myself, but I appreciate sound and how sound can really just elevate and can really be broken [into]. But when we really put the microscope on what's going on in music and in sound, it's this exponential world, all of duration, juxtaposition, cadence. And I do think what you're doing with this visual vocabulary is analogous to what happens, I think, in maybe abstract sound or even noise, where we can find these frequencies, and how do we do that and where do those happen?

Anna Kipervaser:

Exactly. To your point, yesterday I was speaking with Yi Cui who had her Salon here the other day, and Yi is incredible. And I showed her the section of the Order of Revelation that screened here at my Salon, thank you. And we talked about how many characters there are in languages, and she told me that in Chinese, it's infinite, potentially infinite. Because we're talking about grammatical structure, because the grammatical structure of Arabic is really what drew me into these questions. And so the combination of structure and holy text and the revelatory experience and revelation that comes from order and the order in which the Quran was revealed, all of that was how this project was born. And the limit of how many letters there are in the Arabic alphabet allowed this process to occur. And then her saying infinite number of characters opened a whole other door to walk through and to imagine. So yeah, with different constraints come different possibilities and different doors of infinity.

Tara Nelson:

Doors of infinity.

Anna Kipervaser:

Doors of infinity.

Tara Nelson:

Here we go.

Anna Kipervaser:

This is our collaborative project.

Tara Nelson:

Well, you got to keep this. Yeah. Well, let's close that door for a moment and return to finity. You've had a unique experience here at Visual Studies Workshop in that you had a Salon, meaning you were part of

our Salon Series, so specifically you were part of the In Dialogue Series in which we invite practicing filmmakers to dialogue with the archive here at Visual Studies Workshop, as well as a dialogue with maybe some films outside. So the baseline of that is to invite filmmakers to curate their own work in relationship and in conversation with works that may be influential or tangential or counterpoints to, and it's always a really interesting experience for me as the curator to work with the visiting artist who has mined our archive here, and one by one see, where does this take us and how does this work with your own work? The program was exceptional. Maybe we can post notes from that program here in the podcast.

Anna, would you talk a little bit about the program, the experience of the In Dialogue conversation that you did, and also maybe even the Salon screening that night?

Anna Kipervaser:

First, I want to say that, I've said this to you 100 times, you're probably sick of it, but this was one of the happiest days of my life. The screening ended and I was like, "Tara, I can die happy now." It was amazing. It was amazing. And while we had seen the work that was in the program, we had never seen them all together. And there were a couple films that we hadn't seen in a long time, period. And so it was an incredible process collaborating with you, and not just in structuring the program, but also in looking at the archive. And I chose, I don't know, 100 films that I wanted to look at, and we didn't have the time nor the need to really look at hundreds of them, but that's where my interests were. And so we spent a lot of time choosing and we trusted our intuition and trusted each other to go down this rabbit hole.

And we chose anchor films of mine, but then we found films in the archive that spoke to those films, and then that sparked other ideas for connecting threads. And then we pulled films from my own oeuvre and pulled other films from the archive that then spoke to those, and then we spoke with films from Canyon Cinema. And so that whole process, I love programming and I love finding these connecting threads and learning what they are, because I might have an idea in my head, and then that idea communicates with the ideas in your head, and then a new thing forms from that. And then when we see them in person, live, on the date of the salon, it becomes something totally different, and this time it was big and incredible and really, really moving.

Tara Nelson:

I don't want to go title by title necessarily, but we definitely opened the program with a direct address educational film where it was meant for, I think, school children or maybe people who are going to have a meeting about expectations of perception. We perceive things the way we want to. And it was a little bit of humor, but definitely the type of film that is found in our 16 millimeter collection characteristically, is this sort of educational film. And then a few other archive pieces that really reflect, again, that public use educational film past, including a film called, it was called Sacred Rights-

Anna Kipervaser:

-Divination by Animal Tracks.

Tara Nelson:

Divination by Animal Tracks, by Hermann Schlenker. And that film observes an African divination ceremony happening. And then what happens in the program is we start to, I think, pay attention in a certain way, that film in particular has a rhythmic soundtrack and no narration so I felt very, that type of

listening, the visual listening that we're talking about, was encouraged through that film. And then we arrive in a whole new landscape in which the audience is prepared, has had a little warmup, done some thinking, and now has been put into somewhat of a trance through that journey in the first part of the program.

So within this program, we are conditioned, maybe is the word, but prepared in a certain way to receive these just amazing messages and visual experiences that happen in the latter part. How a Sprig of Fur Would Replace a Feather is a visually exciting, maybe you talk a little bit about that film, but observation of an archive of taxidermied animals, and also biological-

Anna Kipervaser:

Specimens.

Tara Nelson:

Elements.

Anna Kipervaser:

Specimens, elements.

Tara Nelson:

Thank you. Yes. But also extremely colorful, also using motion. And again, I felt in that moment I was just in a trance and just accepting whatever visual stimulation was coming into me. And then we get to a part in that program that became very emotionally, I think heavy would be a word, but also-

Anna Kipervaser:

Powerful.

Tara Nelson:

Powerful, thank you. Exactly. With *Mujer de Milfuegos* by Chick Strand, and *Time Being* by Gunvor Nelson. And the program culminated with *in ocula oculorum* by Anna Kipervaser, which is just a celebration, I think, of visual stimulation. It was an explosion like fireworks go off. So that's when we say the program, I don't necessarily need to talk contents movie by movie or film by film, but as an experience in a room, and it was everyone there was with it. And I remember the lights coming on and all of us just looking around like, "What just happened? Here we are." And I don't remember much else after that, honestly, I know we had a conversation, but I cannot remember.

Anna Kipervaser:

Conversation was great. The conversation was great.

Tara Nelson:

I was just floating.

Anna Kipervaser:

Yeah. I think it was incredible. And *Divination* by Animal Tracks, you brought up, it wasn't one that I had found in the archive when I was looking. And you mentioned it, and I don't remember how it came up,

was it conversation or was it a different film that we had watched? One of mine, one from Canyon, one from the Archive. I have no idea. But you had brought it up and then we watched it and we were like, yes. And so in the sequence of the program, the Order of Revelation happened, then Divination by Animal Tracks, and then How a Sprig of Fur Would Replace a Feather, which I think was the arc that allowed the rest of the program that had the emotional impact that you spoke of to occur. Because the Order of Revelation, while it's silent, it has visual sound, and also it moves the mind, like Daniel Barnett says, and it takes you somewhere else.

And it's the first of the films that creates so much flicker that you are transformed, in the program. Not just visually, but your body transforms. And it was only a seven-minute section, but then following that with Divination by Animal Tracks, with the trance-like soundscape and with the trance-like experience inside of the film that we were following. And the film, I think, is really unique. There is not a story with these educational, anthropological, ethnographic films. There's usually a story about a people, there was none of that. And it was still clearly an ethnographic film, but we don't really learn, we are with, which I think is really special. And then after that, we move into a film where animals, some of which are taxidermied, some of which come from my freezer, and with biological specimens and elements that live with me, we moved to the creatures from whom the divination was taking place. So I think that arc is what then brought us into pure experience. So it was incredible. Every movement inside of this program was really meaningful to me.

Tara Nelson:

Yeah, I said I didn't remember the conversation, but I do remember for the first time having audience speak to program. It's a rare thing when the Q&A happens and they speak about this experience of a program, which to me is a huge success of a program. And ideally, that's the conversation I usually want to have. Obviously we can go film by film, or why did you, and how did you, but to me, a much more interesting conversation is about program and about experience of program and thinking through choices and thinking through, how did this film touch that film? And how did it touch me? And where was I with it?

I really enjoy working with artists In Dialogue Series because exactly that is, I think, forefront, program, experience. And sometimes it's a matchy-matchy, actually almost never, almost never, because I don't think artists really think that way. And often curators and programmers and audiences are doing that, and I think the In Dialogue Series allows us to create this rhythmic, or whatever the approach is, but to think through program and to present program in dialogue with the artist's work.

Let's talk about what you've been working on here during your residency at Visual Studies Workshop.

Anna Kipervaser:

Yeah, I am a person who works on multiple things at the same time, and that's just always how it's been, and it allows me to focus on one thing and allow the other projects or other ideas or other experiments or the questions to be floating freely in my mind without pressure. And something happens in that time period, something happens for the thing I'm focused on, and something happens for the other work. And so what I had proposed to work on at VSW during the Project Space Residency was to work on this project that I had envisioned called Context of Perception. It's crazy when you have a title before you have the film, and I've always known how dangerous that is for me, but I can't not follow it, it's a question.

And I hadn't made any moves towards this project. I had only had it in my head. And the idea was exploration of color through various types of cameras. So through various gauges, various film stocks,

and various digital sensors. So because I work in both 16 and digital, but I don't work in 8 or Super 8 and I don't work in 35. So I wanted to expand that question and wanted to see how things differ. And my control was color-aid packets and so they're packets that one uses to learn color theory. And I remember them from art school, and they're the basis of color, and they're so beautiful. They are so rich and vibrant. And so I wanted to photograph in the order in which they came in the box. And so I photographed them on 16 and photographed them on digital.

And I looked, and as I was photographing them, and I wanted to do one frame at a time. As I was photographing on 16, I realized, "Man, the multiple film stocks isn't going to work, for practical reasons, for logistical and financial reasons, and also because that won't really answer the question in the way that I'm asking it because I want it to work." The other film stocks that exist are negative. So then I would have to send to the lab and come back and then worry about how they deal with color and their chemistry. And so I decided to stick to one film stock. And then when I was thinking about the order, it was really jarring. And I'm a fan of flicker films, a huge fan, and I've made several. But this kind of flicker, when I was watching these tests, was taking me from one world into another way too quickly, and I didn't really have an answer. And so I stepped away. I didn't really step away. There were things I needed to do in the darkroom that are related to other projects.

And so I was processing in the darkroom, and then you and I played with the contact printer, and there were things to explore here that I continued to get more and more involved in. And then I came back to this "context of perception" project, and I'm making it on the animation stand, so it's another rephotographing device. The camera looks down, there are lights, there's something to photograph, and that's how *A Sprig of Fur Would Replace a Feather* was made, and that was my first animation stand film. And now all I do, it feels like, is spend time on the animation stand. And the optical printer, and I'm in love with them, and that relationship allows... When you form that kind of bond, and when you're spending so much time together, you learn new things and then ideas come because of these objects, because they're not just objects, they're beings that you learn how they work and then how you work responds to them, and then it's a symbiotic thing.

So anyway, when I was photographing the colors in a different order, I was moving them out of the frame, while looking through the frame, and I realized, "Oh, that could be interesting, the moving of the color." And then I've been playing with focus and playing with the way that the colors are ordered, and I've landed on a specific method, and I think I know how the film is structured now, and that will probably change again. So I'm open to everything. So while this project has transformed the core of it, the question about color and perception, is now some other question that is about color and perception. So it has remained the same and has changed in ways that I would never have predicted, but that always happens.

Tara Nelson:

So the artist, Bill Brand, a giant in our field of experimental filmmaking and also optical printing, BB Optics, shout out. In the 1970s, he did a trilogy of films consisting of three titles, obviously, *Rate of Change*, *Angular Momentum*, and *Circles of Confusion*. And the basis of those films conceptually was to develop a study of pure color based on the notion that film is essentially change and not motion, which, when he was here, we have a couple of those films in our archive and when he was here last October, we had some conversations around. And I'm just really, when you mentioned the experience of moving the color and how the color, the change was somehow where the mind moved. It was this, not just looking at the color for X number of frames or observing or whatever color does to us, but watching it change, and change in a very, I've seen the film that you were working on, and it's not just red to green, it's orange to a little more orange. It's this, but you can see it pass, and it definitely has this something

inside, just screams out, "Yeah, ooh." So I'm really interested in maybe how that connects this idea of change, and specifically our experience of color is something that's maybe happening for you too, and something another way.

Anna Kipervaser:

Yeah, in organizing and reorganizing these color strips that look like paint chips, I found, each time I reorganize them, I have a new way of working. And right now I'm settled on one way that organizes them, not by hue, but by shade, so all of the colors that are available. And they're different in different shades. So some shades only have three colors available, and some shades have 24, and everything in between. And so I think that's very interesting. And the question of change going from one color to another, with X number of frames, without the motion of my hand pulling it out of frame, it's still change, but it's not gradual and slow. It is five frames of yellow-orange, and then switch to five frames of orange, versus - let's say muted -versus going muted or pastel or vibrant or hue.

Also, 30 frames, because in the way that I have it structured right now, it will start with five frames per color, and then in we move through different shades, and we end up with 37, 39 frames, I think is the largest, before we start to move into the hand question. But then after you've moved through this film, in my head, because it's not done, I'll learn more as it keeps going. And you called this method inductive the other day. And yes, and I'm very, very excited about this. You called this method inductive the other day, and it is, but I had never heard that term or thought of it this way, but it is, I'm asking a question, finding an answer, and then that is not an answer, it's just a door. And then more doors open, and the thing reveals itself through this process.

So after you've been with this film with color shifting on a dime, but slowly as in from yellow to red very slowly, and you've moved from five frames per all the way to 39 frames per single color, you then move to this hand motion that will vary in speed, but the change happens gradually and it's kind of like a reveal. And it's moving from right to left. Left is out of frame, and because I'm doing it by hand, also I'm messing up often. And that becomes interesting too. The way that the color exits is not the same each time. So that's where my excitement is right now, that's where the juicy stuff is.

Tara Nelson:

And we have arrived back at the idea of Order of Revelation, then the reveal, and in what order do we experience and where are those moments within the ordering and within the revealing that bring us to the next movement?

Anna Kipervaser:

And that do something for us. And Sprig, How a Sprig of Fur Would Replace a Feather, that is exactly the question. That film, I shot it a handful of times before it became what it is, and it was always the question of order. And you talked about the relationship of color in that film too, and it's the being or the biological element in relationship to its background color, but also in relationship to the being that came before it and the being that comes after it, and how those movements relate to each other through the film. So I find myself continuing to ask these questions and being really engaged and compelled by this question of order and revelation. Yeah.

Tara Nelson:

Well, I'm very grateful to you as a artist that you're doing this work, and as a person who has curiosity in this way, but also as a curator and as someone who works in the visual arts, to have the opportunity to

work with another artist who is asking these questions and doing this work, because it is, as we've heard, quite a lot of labor and has a financial aspect to it too. But it's hopefully we can continue this practice and keep this spark alive and ask these questions just about human perception and what is meaningful and keep connecting through that. I think we lose sight sometimes as artists and in the arts field of this core question, is we need to speak to the human experience and understand ourselves better. And even in the abstraction, why does color matter? But it does. Let's keep finding out and pouring over the questions and making these beautiful works of art and beautiful mistakes along the way.

Anna Kipervaser:

And being moved throughout.

Tara Nelson:

That's right. Well, thank you, Anna. It's been a great conversation and a great visit here at Visual Studies Workshop, and we hope to stay in touch and see where this process is going to take you next and where this film arrives.

Anna Kipervaser:

Thank you, Tara, and thank you for having me on this podcast, and also at Visual Studies Workshop. It's the best. Thank you, thank you.

Hernease Davis:

And there you have it. I encourage you to visit Anna Kipervaser's website to learn more about her practice. That link is in the show notes. To learn more about the Visual Studies Workshop, please visit us at vsw.org where we have information about the Project Space Residency and our current artists and residents. Keep following us on Twitch and Instagram at the Visual Studies Workshop, and feel free to send me an email at herneasedavis@vsw.org. This podcast is funded in part by the New York State Council on the Arts and with the support of New York State Legislature. Thank you so much for listening to this conversation between Tara Merenda Nelson and Anna Kipervaser. In the meantime, please take care. Bye.