

Hernease Davis ([00:00:10](#)):

Hello and welcome to season three of 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, and the goal of the project Space residency is to provide time, space, and resources to artists who are experimenting with photo film and media art. I'm Hernease Davis. I'm a photo-based 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. Our brand new season starts off with a sequel, Ligia Bouton, who is an artist in residence of VSW in 2022 is back on the podcast for part two of our conversation. Part one of my conversation with Ligia was actually the season one finale. If you haven't already listened to part one, I've put a link to that episode in our show notes for that first talk with Ligia, I spoke with her inside her Project Space studio. At the very end of her residency,

([00:01:36](#)):

she has been researching the work of Henrietta Swan Leavitt, who is an important, yet overlooked historical figure who worked as an early computer at Harvard where she made groundbreaking discoveries in astronomy. We'd spoke about how Ligia was using photography performance, glass musical composition and installation as an interdisciplinary approach to translate the extensive research she's done on Henrietta Swan Lovett. Because Ligia and I spoke during her residency, I knew that our conversation would need a follow-up to hear about the development of her work. In this episode, Ligia shares about returning to VSW to continue her project and many exciting developments in her work that involves another residency, a major exhibition in Denmark and a public art project. Now without further ado.

Ligia Bouton ([00:02:37](#)):

So my name is Ligia Bouton. I am right now in Amherst, Massachusetts, and I was a resident in the Project Space at VSW in the summer August of 2022.

Hernease Davis ([00:02:53](#)):

And we are speaking now, it's 2024. So it's been some time and I'm just so glad that you're here to join me again to talk back on the podcast for our part two of our conversation. And there have been some really great developments with your work that I'm looking forward to talking with and talking with you about. And so in general, I'm excited to talk about your time after your formal residency here back in August of 2022. And I say formal specifically because you did indeed return to VSW once more to continue some work after your residency. So I'd like to start with this part two to talk about what the experience was like and what did you come back to accomplish?

Ligia Bouton ([00:03:40](#)):

Yeah, so I feel like it's such an interesting moment to sort of harken back to that first conversation that we had and we were sitting in the project space and it was right as I was getting ready to leave and at the end of my residency, and I had really spent my time there developing... just ideas, but also directions around this research that I had been engaged in for a long time into the work of the earliest woman astronomer, Henrietta Swan Levitt. And so when I left VSW, a couple of things started to happen with that work and I started to work with some curators around possible exhibition possibilities for it. I had used my time at VSW to really get something started and I was using the lantern slide collections. And so suddenly about three or four months later, it really became apparent that to finish the work the way that I wanted to, I really needed the lantern slides and I needed to come back. I love to make these kinds of relationships with organizations, and I just felt it was so generous. I reached out to folks at VSW and just said, is it

possible that I could come back for a couple of days and just really do this intensive thing? And so in February of 2023, I just came tearing into town with a carload of stuff and kind of moved into VSW for about four and a half days and just spent 12, 13 hours a day taking photographs. And that's what I did.

Hernease Davis ([00:05:18](#)):

So that was an interesting thing that came up for a recent resident that we had here, someone else who tore through our archive and really dove into the work, but they're just like, oh, what if I didn't finish? I thought about you. And I was like, we have had residents in the past who need to come back and then we'll do what we can to accommodate. Because also thinking about the lantern slides, it's a really unique collection of materials and images, but especially for your work and the way you're photographing and using the material, how else are you going to do that? But come back. But I'm also curious, can you actually remind us what kind of imagery were you working with and then were there other things that you were exploring when you came back to VSW the second time?

Ligia Bouton ([00:06:03](#)):

Yeah, so I had come up with this idea. So Henrietta Swan Leavitt, she developed this theory at the time that it's now known as Leavitt's Law. She developed this way to measure distance in the universe, and she illustrated it with a single scientific paper that she wrote. It was published in 1912. And I think in a lot of my work, a lot of different artists, I am holding ideas, I'm developing projects, and then suddenly to have an opportunity for exhibition, I'm often working with that curator to try and figure out where their ideas for their exhibition meet my ideas for my project. And suddenly they presented me with the idea of trying to show somehow all 25 of these stars. And I had developed maybe five or six of them over the month that I was at VSW. And so suddenly it was like, oh wait, I am going to make 25 of these large scale kind of images, and we can talk about what kind of an image I'm talking about, but they take a lot of work. But I sort of knew I had developed a process. It was almost like the production phase of the project. I had figured out the concept, I had figured out the process, and then I just came back and just went through the production.

Hernease Davis ([00:07:29](#)):

That's interesting. Yeah, just how working with a curator and how the form of an exhibition can help solidify or concretize is the work that comes to mind, concretize what form the work takes, because when you were here, you were working with performance, music, music composition. So I'm curious as to whether or not something else in addition to working with a curator helped you solidify this process so you could come back to VSW and produce work in a more streamlined way.

Ligia Bouton ([00:08:12](#)):

Yeah, so I think this is a part of my process in general that I initially, especially with sort of trying to wrap my head around, really research driven projects that I'm... in my own practice, that I'm casting a really wide net and trying to approach that research in multiple different directions to sort of see what works. And at the end of my time at VSW, there were really two things that were really working, and that was really exciting because I had been kind of stuck for a long time and not knowing where I wanted to go with this research. And so the two things that were really working was this idea of creating portraits of these stars that Leavitt was researching as lenticular photographs. So as photographs that move, they're multilayered, it's now done through a digital process by which we sort of splice and combine multiple photographs together and then use a lens surface on the surface of the photograph to sort of create this illusion of walking around and seeing the images change.

([00:09:22](#)):

And so it's almost like an animation. And so I was working with multilayered lenticular photographs and trying to find people that could help me with the printing, but knew... I worked out at VSW just on my own, that it would work. I could figure out how to make a nine or 16 layer photograph, and I knew it was going to work. And so that was really exciting. And then I was also working with this music and I knew that it worked. And then when I left VSW, I used my time there, I had found an exhibition that I was really interested in in Europe, actually through Copenhagen Contemporary in Copenhagen, Denmark. And I had seen a lot of documentation about this exhibition, and they had a call, which I never find that I have particularly good luck with just open calls. But I decided one of the things I wanted to do with my VSW residency was see if I could develop a proposal for this call because the call felt like it was calling to me.

(00:10:31):

It felt like it was my work that they wanted. And I don't know if you ever have that moment, but I just very rarely do I feel like, oh wait, they're looking for me. And I think I sent that proposal into this call one of the last days I was at VSW, and this is also something that's never happened to me before. The curator called me 10 days later, she called me and was like, wait, this is what we were looking for. And I had this [...] of, I knew it, I knew it. You were looking for me.

(00:11:17):

And it was the lenticular photograph. So it was an exhibition that had gotten really substantial funding throughout Scandinavia to do an exhibition that was really wide ranging, thinking about how artists were interacting with science. And the way I proposed the project was really as a public art project throughout the city of Copenhagen. And so for the first couple of months, we were really actively pursuing the idea of trying to get these photographs, lenticular photographs into bus shelters and subway stations and just all kinds of public locations like that across the city. And in the end, that didn't work. And it got, as all projects I think in these moments do, it got boiled down and the curator kept coming back to me and saying, finally they said no. So now where do we go? And I'd say, how about this? Who could we approach in this?

(00:12:14):

And so finally what it got boiled down to is all of the digital screens in the airport. So for three weeks in July in Copenhagen, there were my little animated gifs of these photographs on all the arrival screens in the airport. So you'd walk into where the carousels are and every screen would be doing the thing, which was amazing, and I have some great pictures of that. But the curator also loved the photographs, the lenticular photographs themselves. And so we ended up hanging some of those as well. But you can see how I had done the proposal with five or six images and then all of a sudden she's like, great, I'll take 20. We'll do 25 digitally by March or something. And so then that's when I sort of came rolling into town again.

Hernease Davis (00:13:13):

Yeah, that's amazing. So then the 25 are, or I would say, I guess the additional 20, those are gifs or are they also lenticular prints or are they both?

Ligia Bouton (00:13:25):

They exist as both. Yeah, they exist as both. And I am really still so much in this project and I can sort of get into the weeds very quickly and talking about how they operate differently. And I am now in the process of printing all 25 as lenticular photographs. And so I am really committed now to the lenticular process. I find it does something, I haven't been able to get the digital process editing to kind of replicate what's happening in the actual physical object. And so they're not equivalent. It doesn't really work in the same way.

Hernease Davis ([00:14:02](#)):

That's interesting. I mean, because I'm curious about your thoughts on why the digital works don't work the same way as the lenticular, but I'll also say in seeing the installation images, and those are linked in our show notes so people can see your installation images. I'll say that the exhibition summary was really wonderful to read, and the title of the exhibition is Yet It Moves and it is taken from Galileo. Is that correct?

Ligia Bouton ([00:14:38](#)):

Yeah, that was the title of the exhibition as a whole was, Yet It Moves.

Hernease Davis ([00:14:42](#)):

Yeah. Okay, great. Yes, because reading the exhibition summary and hearing you speak about how you approached this call with the idea that you need my work, my work belongs here, you all are looking for me. That's also really wonderful to hear because we've had conversations in the past about challenges that you've had with curators or art professionals envisioning where your work could be or how to show your work, especially because of how varied the materials you use are in terms of mediums. And you use all these modes of making to get at and to figure out your way into a particular concept, which I find to be extremely interesting and instructive to see, especially in terms of exhibition and in terms of photography because it's a challenge, but it's also an instructive and wonderful process in and of itself. How do you show something like this together in a way that makes sense for a viewer or translates this very experimental and almost like a wandering and wonderful process?

([00:15:55](#)):

And so I'm going to read the paragraph here and it says: "Nothing stands still. Even things we consider immutable are in constant motion within above and all around us. Motion is a fundamental premise of everything in the universe from the tiniest atomic particles to the human body and the microcosm of the stars. Recognizing glimpses, this greater moving whole is embodied in spectacular artworks, giving shape and form to complex phenomena like black holes, star formation and gravitational waves from the macro scale of expanding universe, the micro scale of atomic explosions and particle." And I love that also in terms of how you are working with Henrietta Swan Levitt and as an artist figuring out these ways of coming at such an elegant process. So even elegant thinking about elegance and its simplicity, but also in this complexity with her figuring out how to measure distance and thinking about it from this very grounded earthbound place. But then of course, she's talking about distances that our minds cannot really fathom, but she's found a solution to figuring out that and has sparked all of these wonderful other discoveries that are based off of this work. So reading that paragraph, I was like, I wonder how you saw your work being embodied and even the concept for that exhibition about movement.

Ligia Bouton ([00:17:30](#)):

So that was part of the text that was always in the descriptions of this exhibition from the very beginning when I found it. And I think this idea that the stars that Levitt was really engaged in the Cepheid variables, they are changing. And so they are in motion, they are fluctuating, they're getting big and being small again. And that my work as a result about all of Leavitt's research has really felt like it needed to be time-based in some way to have motion in it. And of course, the title of the exhibition is this sort of famous line that supposedly Galileo said in the Inquisition. So he was facing life imprisonment, possibly death from the Catholic church, from the Pope for his ideas that the earth was moving around the sun rather than the earth being still and other planets moving around us. He was in front of this panel and he recanted to save his own life.

([00:18:38](#)):

And then famously in that moment, as he turned away from the panel, he said, "And yet it moves" meaning us, like we are an ocean. And so this sort of idea of the stars in that project, and I just have to say it's one of the sort of great things that I am, I just feel so thankful for or the curators that were involved in that exhibition and their openness to me and to seeing what I was doing. And I just find as artists, not all the time, but often, we all have had experiences where we've gone to see an exhibition or heard about an exhibition and stood there and thought, oh, these are the artists that I want to be in dialogue with. And it was just an amazing thrill to be in Copenhagen and walk into that show for the first time and see my work in conversation with these artists who were really engaged in the kind of dialogues that I'm interested in having.

(00:19:45):

And then I'm just going to give another pitch. It was just so fun that they organized this huge symposium, and the person that they put me in conversation with is a woman astrophysicist who's currently at the Niels Bohr Institute, which is the big European Astrophysics Institute, Dr. Christa Gall. And her whole thing is cosmology and supernova and the origins of our universe. And I feel like my husband gets upset about this. I feel like it's like I met my soulmate. I was just sitting there looking at this woman like, oh my God, you are just the coolest. And so, yeah, she and I are still in contact and it was so fun to be there and just have conversations with people.

Hernease Davis (00:20:42):

I love that. And also, again, having this conversation between and science and actual conversations with your process and within your work, and then also putting you in conversation with scientists. I'm not surprised. You can also have multiple soulmates. You right. That's right. It doesn't have to be, so

Ligia Bouton (00:21:02):

That's right.

Hernease Davis (00:21:04):

But yeah, I think that's amazing. I love that. I think it's beautiful.

Ligia Bouton (00:21:09):

It was really beautiful. Yeah, it was really great. It was great. Yeah.

Hernease Davis (00:21:13):

Okay, I want to get into that, but before I ask more about this, I want to briefly go back because it's just stuck in my brain. I want to clarify, were the lenticular and the animated gifs installed in the same space in Copenhagen, and I also want to know any thoughts you had on the differences between experiencing and walking through or past a lenticular or an animation of these stars in that space?

Ligia Bouton (00:21:45):

So in Copenhagen, in the end, they were installed together. So there were five large scale lenticular, and they are 48 inches across, so they're printed very large. The five images represent the five kind of groups of different sizes of stars that Leavitt was looking at. And so they go from being, one of them is just two layers of imagery, at the other end, 30 layers of images. And so they have a very different effect as a lenticular image. They move very differently depending on the kind of how many layers you've got smashed together. So there were these five large images hanging in the space. And then there was also a screen that had this animation that I created out of the 25 stars together.

Hernease Davis ([00:22:37](#)):

Okay. Yeah. And so again, back to this conversation with your soulmate, I'm just very curious what about that conversation kind of clicked with you?

Ligia Bouton ([00:22:46](#)):

Yeah, I think that's such a good question. And I think about that a lot when a lot of my work has come out of archives, and a lot of it has come out of historical research. And I think there was something about this opportunity that it was like sitting across the table from somebody like Leavitt, and I know I think we talked about some of these things in the first episode of the podcast, but there were these kind of moments where I first started to do research at the Harvard Observatory where there'd just be this little kind of glimmer of something that would come up about Levitt and it would be something she said or something that she did. And I just have that moment of, oh, that is so interesting, or so just kind of human, and you saw just that glimmer, this kind of wonder and excitement and energy around a sort of passion.

([00:23:53](#)):

And then, I hate to put it in these terms, but sort of meeting some of these scientists, I had that same moment of just looking at them and thinking, God, this is so exciting what they're doing, what an incredible world that we live in, where someone's passion becomes this thing and they're just doing this incredible work and holding these incredible ideas. And it just really was exciting. And I suddenly realized, oh, there's sort of a new way to go about this maybe is not so much starting in the archive, but starting with the people who are here. And I think that's a sort of new idea. And this sounds silly, it's not a new idea. There are lots of artists who've done it, but for me it's sort of a new idea of, yeah, this person isn't dead. I can just talk to them about it.

([00:24:55](#)):

I just mean it's very exciting. There's something about, and as you and I have talked about this before, I think all of these things for me are always that moment of seeing the world as bigger and more wonderful and more weird and more exciting than what I am experiencing or have access to. And so suddenly something opens and I see a different world, and it's just very exciting to stand at the door of those different worlds and get to respond or reflect or whatever.

Hernease Davis ([00:25:32](#)):

Yeah, it really is wonderful to hear that that experience opened a bit of that door because it still is this, I dunno, yeah, sort of this humanizing, but what I'm getting at or what I think is really wonderful to hear about is how this is opening you up for relationships. I think your work is already a relationship with archive, with Henrietta Swan Leavitt's work, and with all of that, it's, I think process and art practice is that kind of relationship. And I still kind of think of this in how I think about your practice and also how you've communicated about your practice, but this wonderment and this wonder, and even in this relationship and being, because honestly, I was not expecting you to be like, oh, wow, you're kind of like a Henrietta Swan Leavitt. Because it's not, it's not necessarily that it's a woman who is a scientist, but is this person in particular who is a scientist who you were prepared with when you were talking to, that it's not necessarily about representation of gender or even the representation of gender in science, because women in science are everywhere, but that it is about this particular click between the two of you and that this is something that's opened you up to this new idea that...

([00:27:08](#)):

I know. Yeah, sure. Whatever. But you've been in the archive and also you've expressed this desire to have known Henrietta Swan Leavitt, even thinking about your work and embodying her in performance and the dress that you made while you were here, I thought of that as such a, oh gosh, I use the word wonderful way too much when I talk about your work, but just sort of these strategies and these ways of

getting to know, how do you get in and you're using your own sensibilities. You can kind of think about it as, You're alive. In many ways, it is a one-way conversation with this sort of finite material or with the finished life or whatever, but it is constantly still in motion and moving, especially with how she's situated in history and has how her memory has been buried. And also even thinking about the archive and how the archive itself is not this finite finished thing that it is even in itself, a representation of social constructs around what's important, who's important, who gets to be documented, and who gets to be noticed, and even idea of what documentation looks like. So I think of it as this outgrowing organic way that I've observed in your practice that I just think it's just wonderful that you sort of are now connecting with this live human person and what happens when you're with this alive human person who is in motion and is doing wonderful things, and you are also doing wonderful things and this collaboration or this friendship, it's exciting. It's exciting to imagine or even to not know what's going to come of this.

Ligia Bouton ([00:28:53](#)):

That was an amazing, I dunno, that was an amazing synopsis of some of the things that I think about. I think we went all the way from performance into representation and equity issues, and that was amazing. I just... incredible. I was following you as you said, but each time you started talking I was sort of moving in different directions. That was great. Okay. Wow. Amazing.

Hernease Davis ([00:29:27](#)):

Thanks Ligia.

Ligia Bouton ([00:29:30](#)):

Oh my gosh. Yeah. I started out that conversation, you were talking about performance and how performance has been a part of my work and thinking about music, but also thinking about ways that I've made costume. I sort of have to call it kind of what it is. I go back and forth between calling wearable sculpture. It's really costuming, it's, I make these sort of funny costumes sometimes. And I think about that a lot in terms of the idea of embodying something is actually quite important to me and the idea of putting my body into dialogue either with material or with narrative.

([00:30:15](#)):

And then there's this really interesting idea about when you are in costume and when you are trying to embody a different experience, the thing that you are actually reflecting upon is your own experience and the limits of your own body. And it's not about becoming somebody else. It's always about being in your body in this very real way and immediate way. And I think about this with children, about imaginative play and things like that. What does that space do? And I know there's a lot of stuff that's been written about it, but just this idea when I take on somebody like Leavitt and I'm thinking about her and I made that dress and I'm wearing it, it's not about wanting to be her. It's about sort of trying to figure out maybe the moments where we intersect or where is the limit of the body and feeling that, yeah, I think that idea of opening a door into another world and getting to sort of stand at the edge and look.

Hernease Davis ([00:31:21](#)):

Yeah, I think it's such an intimate way of connecting and also letting them be who they are and letting them remain and then seeing like, okay, so how can I move towards and intersect? I think it's wonderful. Okay. So that actually brings to mind glass. There's something that you said about looking, and I went back to our conversation around lenses because you did another residency before the exhibition started in Copenhagen, and that was at the Penland Winter residency. Can you talk about that residency and how you used it as well?

Ligia Bouton ([00:32:06](#)):

Yeah. So Penland of course, is the very famous craft school in North Carolina. North Carolina. I had always known about Penland in the back of my head. I knew that I needed to come back to VSW to use the lantern slides. But one of the things I had been doing with the lantern slides is very carefully layering glass objects on top of them and then photographing through the glass to capture these distorted images of the lantern slides below. So I also knew that in the creation of this now much larger series, I needed glass objects and I had made the ones I was using in my residency at VSW, I had blown them previously and brought them, I wasn't sure what I was going to do with them, but I had brought them with me. And I was interested in glass as a medium in this project because all of Leavitt's work was looking at photographs on glass plates.

(00:33:12):

And so all of the photographs that were taken at Harvard were on glass plates. And so glass as a medium felt just really important. And then of course, a telescope is just a stack of glass that is held together in a tube. And so just thinking about this as the medium through which we are communicating about the stars, literally we are looking at the universe through this earthbound material, and then we're collecting the information on the surface of this same material. So it had to all be glass oriented, which is where the lantern slides came in. And so I applied for a residency at Penland because in the winter they teach these incredible classes. You can go there for a semester, you can go there for a couple of weeks, but they teach these incredible craft classes and they have this incredible facility in the winter, in January, they don't have classes, so they bring in a small group of artists who have dedicated to the idea that they will just work independently using the facility.

(00:34:20):

So I went to Penland. I had been glassblowing for about a year, but I didn't know a ton, but I knew kind of how to get myself set up. And I'm not doing hot shop glass blowing what you see on Blown Away or the TV shows and stuff. I'm doing what's called lantern works, so, lamp works. So I'm sitting in front of a torch, so it's more sort of handheld size and I'm working independently by myself. And Penland was amazing. It was also unbelievably intense, incredible craftsmen to be in a room with some of the world's, literally artists from all over the world, so some of the most, well-known, but also most incredibly skilled glass artists in the world. And to feel very inadequate and also to kind of be on a mission. And so at Penland, it was very snowy and cold. There were about 40 or 50 other artists there in all the different studios.

(00:35:29):

And I was very antisocial. I did not meet anyone. I didn't talk to anyone. I would get up at six o'clock in the morning, I would be at the Glass studio at seven. So I wanted to be the first person there. I would always try to do the most difficult thing that I was going to try and do all day in that first hour and a half before anyone arrived because when you're working in a communal studio like that, and in glass, when it breaks, it's like [kssh], and everybody pauses and looks around, which is great because people get cut and burned and it's great that there's a community of people there with you. But I would always try to do the thing that I was worried I was going to just mess up in the morning when nobody was there.

(00:36:23):

And I literally blew glass for two and a half weeks from seven in the morning until nine o'clock at night. And then I would go walk back to the little room that I was staying in, make myself something to eat, get into bed and pass out. It was unbelievably intense and I blew over a hundred pieces of glass in that two week period, and I blew them in these series that matched the lantern slides that I was sort of envisioning they would go onto. And then I packed 'em all up. I drove home. I was home for about four days, and then I drove to VSW and took all the photographs.

Hernease Davis (00:37:04):



So you were on a tear. I also remember you talking about how you figured out the shape or the type of glass that you needed in order to make the types of images that you wanted. So going into Penland with that in mind, that's really incredible to be able to just go in there with an idea because you didn't have a lot of time at that residency.

Ligia Bouton ([00:37:28](#)):

So it became these very compressed blocks of time where I really knew that I needed to get something accomplished. And I've never really worked in that way before, but it was really an amazing experience and it was really all towards getting this series finished, or at least it's not, it is finished now, but I mean finished as in all of the raw imagery taken so that I could then edit it all together.

Hernease Davis ([00:37:55](#)):

Amazing. Yeah, that's amazing.

Ligia Bouton ([00:37:57](#)):

I just wanted to say, because we are talking about VSW and about the incredible resource of the residency, there such a different experience to do two large residencies like that. I think I had said to you when I was at VSW that because I have kids and I have a teaching job that I had not been on a residency for years.

([00:38:24](#)):

I am embarrassed to say how many years. It was so many years. And so suddenly I had these two residencies and they were so different. And what they did for the work that I was trying to make was so different. To be in one that's very material specific, very VSW was also kind of material specific that I was there to use. I was wanting to use the archive, but at Penland it was just glass, glass, glass, glass people, glass conversation. And of course, to be the one weird artist that's like, oh, I'm not going to show any of these objects, I'm just making them to take photographs was just weird. People would just look at me and be like, who are you?

Hernease Davis ([00:39:15](#)):

And I'm so glad you brought up the difference because I personally am not familiar with the Penland residency, but I am familiar with larger residencies where you're surrounded by other artists because a contrast of VSW is essentially we are your community, the staff. It's just a smaller group of people. We're all artists who are on staff and faculty. No one's staring at you all day and being like, what are you making over there? Or not in a huge gang room where you're all working together. Yeah. I'm kind of curious, can you say more about what that was like in terms of the difference?

Ligia Bouton ([00:39:49](#)):

Yeah. I think VSW, I think I had been working on the research on Leavitt for about two years at that point. And I was just really finding myself trying to figure out, I just was really still struggling with understanding what she had done, understanding what she had accomplished, understanding how I might even possibly begin to make something that would have any value in relationship to this incredible thing that she had done. And it was just that silence and to sit in that wonderful project space room and just be with all of my research for 28 days or whatever. It was just this really intense experience of silence and how important that was that I just really committed to working through it. And I spent a lot of time in there just literally banging my head against the wall, trying to figure out what I was doing.

([00:40:55](#)):

And then Penland was the opposite that I went there with a very clear plan. I had bought a ton of material to take with me, so I had all this glass with me when I arrived. I have been working with a glassblower here locally where I live. She and I had talked a great deal about the plan and technically how I was going to accomplish the things I wanted to accomplish. So I literally hit that campus with this, I am here to do this thing, but even with a limited number of people, Penland can be a very social place. I think very much about communal meals, and there are big parties that happen. And even in the winter there was some of that happening. I kind of purposefully was like, I can't do that. I need to just do this thing and I'm really here to accomplish this thing. And I find it's, especially for sculptors and other artists who are making objects, it's another way to use the residency system because it's about looking for specific opportunities that afford you something you don't have access to in your everyday life.

Hernease Davis (00:42:13):

Yeah, because glass is so specific and also intensive in terms of the material and the equipment you need to do it, even the expertise, I find it to be one of the more dangerous processes to be a part of, and also just emotionally intense and so physically taxing. I even think about the times when I've done residencies with a large amount of people. And at this residency, I was the one who was away constantly in the dark room by myself. Everyone found a water hole, and everyone over lunch would talk about the best water hole that they found. This is in Vermont in the summer. And so it was sort of like a release. Maybe they'd work in their studios for, I don't know, however long. But it also was important for people to have fun and relax and do all that stuff. And I eventually did that, but it took me some time because I also came in with an idea, I need to get this done. I don't know what I'm doing and I need to spend some time figuring it out. But I guess I'm wondering about what was it like to have this compact amount of time and also to be around other people who maybe were having a more social experience there.

Ligia Bouton (00:43:35):

Yeah. I think what I want to say first is that throughout all the studios at the end, they have a sort of day when you sort of walk around and look at, you could go visit other people. They're incredible jewelers and book makers and textile artists and people working at an incredible high level of craft and conceptual engagement, and really people who know what they're doing. And then I think there are artists who also kind of really like that social thing as well. Yeah, I think I tend to be kind of a homebody when I'm at home. And so it was hard for me to navigate or to think about doing both. I just couldn't imagine where I would get the energy to meet new people and engage in that sort of social interaction. And in some ways, I think there are artists who are there who might say that I didn't take advantage of everything that Penland could be, but I think that for me, I really saw it as my opportunity to create this body of work that then I knew that I needed for these next photographs.

(00:44:42):

And so I just committed to that and I learned so much, and I really felt a kind of independence in the Glass studio by the end that I didn't have when I arrived. And it was just a very different kind of experience. I think there are times in our lives and we're in a collective experience, and we gain an incredible amount of understanding from that. And then there are other times in your life when you're just on a journey by yourself, and I was really at Penland. I felt like I was just on a journey by myself, and I had moments where I felt a little, should I be trying to leave the studio at nine 30 and go stand in that crowded dance party? And I just was like, oh, I could just go back to my room and eat something and go to sleep, and I just did that instead.

Hernease Davis (00:45:41):

I know for sure that so many people can relate to that. I, for one, can relate to that. It is what it is and how you need to use that time. I think it's instructive to even talk about that. Yeah, no, residencies are tools

and there communities, and there are those residencies out there that give you the flexibility to use it as you need to. Right. I'm interested in hearing about a current project that you're working on now, which is also a public project. So going from your installation and exhibition experience in Copenhagen, and you're now working to exhibit work in another kind of public space. So can you talk about that?

Ligia Bouton (00:46:26):

Yeah, it is going to be slightly different, but it is the same project. So I think of it as the final installation of the lenticular photographs of these stars that I did at VSW working through penland, and then were exhibited in a smaller form in Copenhagen. And when I got back from that experience, I had this moment of, okay, what next? If I could show this project in its completed form in the way that I really want to show it, where would I want to show it? And I kept coming back to the original proposal that I'd put out for Copenhagen about putting these star images, these lenticular star images in public spaces, and that idea of just people coming upon them or learning something about Leavitt through this experience of seeing one of them or many of them. And so I was thinking about the incredible program that's run through the New York subway system and public transportation in New York City of art that is throughout those stations.

(00:47:35):

And I thought, oh, Henrietta Leavitt, she lived in Boston. She died there. She's buried there. She's this incredible figure for that community. And I thought, oh, I wonder in Boston what the MBTA does and what their art process is. And so I started looking, and it's not really up and running. They have had programs in the past, and I think they are hoping to get more of that kind of stuff going in their stations in the future. There are totally different kind of system than in New York. There wasn't really a transparent way for me to pitch the project to them. And so I just started making phone calls and I just started calling people. And at the MBTA and every person, I'd sort of go through the kind of line of, I'd get somebody on the phone and they'd say, oh, no, before I'd even start, they'd say, oh no, this is actually the person.

(00:48:35):

So then I'd set up something with that person and get them on the phone. And once I got to the point where I was giving the kind of elevator pitch of the project and would get through, okay, Harvard Observatory underrepresented woman that did this incredible research, who should have gotten the Nobel Prize, probably nobody knows about her, and I've made this whole project based on her research, people would be like, oh, okay. And for the first couple of conversations, it was all basically like, okay, I'm not the right person, but you should really be talking to somebody, so let's figure out who you should talk to. And then I'd talk to the next person. And each time the conversation just got longer and more in depth, and then longer and more in depth until finally I found the collaborator that I'm working with at the MBTA now who was in the design group at the MBTA amazing sort of public service that these people are doing for the city.

(00:49:42):

And this incredible collaborator just turned to me and said, oh, we should think about it for this particular space. And so the space that we're working with is the Kendall MIT station, so both sides of the Kendall MIT station. It's on the headline in Boston. Both sides of our recently sort of under renovation, and they just finished the southbound side, and they're starting in March, April of 24, the northbound side of that station. And so there's going to be a temporary entrance to the station for about a year. And so all 25 stars printed, lenticular prints will be installed in that space. And it's a kind of long hallway that leads you out onto the platform. And then there's a kind of lobby space up above where you'd enter from the street. The lenticular photographs are printed, everything from the large stars are 48 inches across. The smaller ones get down to about 24 inches across, and then up in the main lobby area. I wanted something that was really interesting from the street. And so the lenticular printer and I printed an eight foot mural that is

lenticular. It's tiled, and it's one particular star, but it sort of acts as a key to the entire project for some really specific reasons. But it is an eight foot lenticular photograph.

Hernease Davis ([00:51:28](#)):

Wow. Yeah. That's incredible. But also, I think it's really, it's just so smart to call and to make those phone calls, because again, it's sort of thinking about the call that you answered in Copenhagen. It's like, no, you need my work. And so this needs to be there specifically.

Ligia Bouton ([00:51:48](#)):

And that's something that I learned from that, that there is this sort of moment where you suddenly realize this sort of perfect union of your idea with whatever the exhibition or the mission of the space is, and suddenly it just feels like, oh, this is perfect. And so coming out of that, I knew that I wanted to show all 25 together in Copenhagen. It was just five of the stars printed as lenticular, and I just had this vision of all 25 together. And the other thing that's perfect about this space, so a couple of things, again, it's the narrative of her that is so important. And then I think for the MBTA people and the folks over there, it was this idea that suddenly in this moment they have this temporary space. It's brand new, it's white, it's empty, it's calling out for this, and then it's in a community.

([00:52:51](#)):

So if you imagine it there in Kendall Square, it's like right across from MIT. And so although the amazing folks at the Harvard Observatory who I'm also working with on this project, were sort of saying, oh, we wish it was closer to us. It also is a group of people who might also be interested in this as I hope it'll resonate with a lot of people, but that there's a kind of audience there that feels like they might really respond to it and be interested in it. And then lenticular photographs are not in motion. They are still images. They are made to appear in motion by our motion, and so that it's a transit hub and that you will walk through that space. Your movement will put everything in motion. And that I think everyone got immediately. So I started after the phone calls and I kind of got the first couple of people, I just started driving to Boston, and I would say, why don't I come and meet with you and I can bring some of these and you could see it and hold it and we could talk about it. And so that once that started to happen, people were just like, okay, yeah, let's go. What are we doing? Let's find a time. And so that was also the thing and the whole penland conversation of how I'd much rather be in bed than out talking to people and meeting new people. It's hard to make the phone call, and then it's hard to get in the car and drive two hours to convince somebody of something that they might not want.

([00:54:35](#)):

But it's always worth doing, I think any kind of time-based material, but all materials, it's so much different to put that thing in front of somebody.

Hernease Davis ([00:54:44](#)):

And it is that way, especially with material photographs. So photographs that need to exist as material and not necessarily digitally or experience to a screen or something like that. And I see that with a lot of your work, and I noted that in your studio space when you're here, that this is the kind of work that needs and wants to be experienced in person. And translating that a lot for even curators or even people who are more literate in terms of visual material and even photography, it's a whole different thing to actually experience it in person. So it is so worth that, and especially with, I've been seeing a lot of lenticular prints lately and also see that in some of the works of my students. And so it's interesting to see the various ways that people use them, but often more so than not that it's about the animated characteristics of a lenticular print rather than paying attention to how it really is about the viewer moving with the print or having to move in order to experience whatever is happening in the image.

(00:56:08):

And so it's not necessarily this transition, but it is this embodiment of this motion and how we are engaging with it in another sensorial way that we are participating. And it also, I think, adds to understanding of cefi stars or even how you can relate to this as being something that's about distance and motion, especially, again, the form, but also the place that you're thinking about getting from one place to another, and you're probably connecting going to see someone. So there are all these levels of connection and movement and distance and purpose that are really, I just think it's such a wonderful container, if I can say that a container to put this work in. It's just so great. Yeah.

Ligia Bouton (00:56:57):

Thank you. While you were talking, suddenly, I was like, oh, this is episode three is to talk about experiential photography, because suddenly you're talking, and I was thinking about your work and how materially based your work is and how it's all about the presence of that material in the space with you at the same time that it also is drawing upon the history of image making through the photographic process, and yeah.

Hernease Davis (00:57:27):

Oh my god. But you need to be there. You are necessary in this process. You are necessary. Totally. I love that connection, and I know it, it's totally, it's sometimes super subconscious for me, but I know that that's also what draws me. Those are the aspects that I feel like I do connect with in work, and especially with photographic work and especially photo material, because I also, I just like, oh, I just love it so much and it's so necessary in my practice. But yeah, thank you for pointing that out.

Ligia Bouton (00:57:58):

Yeah.

Hernease Davis (00:57:59):

Oh my gosh. Yeah. Next conversation. Yes, because in my head, also thinking about next conversation because I'm like, okay, so then when can we see this? When does this happen? When does installation finish? And of course, I would love some dates so we can hold onto that.

Ligia Bouton (00:58:16):

Yeah. So what is complicated right at this moment is that the work is all done, the space is done. I think we're working towards finalizing actual installation dates, but I do not have an official date that the Kendall MIT temporary entrance will open. I think what we're talking about is sometime around April 1st, and that the work will be installed sometime around March 1st. So that's where we're headed right now.

Hernease Davis (00:58:48):

Yeah. Yeah. That sounds like a whole other thing, because working with construction.

Ligia Bouton (00:58:54):

Oh, I think I mentioned this to you, to just to do a big public project like this, I've never done anything like this before, is I just feel like the amount of email that I've sent or the way that I've had to embrace email as a part of my process has been something new, and I'm looking forward to getting back to making little things in my studio.

Hernease Davis ([00:59:20](#)):

Yeah, yeah. No, but this is a great, it's such a unexpected outcome on my end, not necessarily for you, but it's such, to me, it is also a very unique experience. Of course, we've mentioned the New York public subway system and well, their transit line period, that this is a thing that happens, that there are public works by artists, but also it is also a very unique and distinct way of thinking about work and making, especially because you have to work with city authorities and working with other people who are not necessarily entrenched in the art world. And there's a lot of collaboration through email with these other facets that you have to now think about that are different from an exhibition with a museum or a gallery.

Ligia Bouton ([01:00:21](#)):

And navigating it all has been a thing. But I will also just say people are so generous, people are excited. You're sort of saying, I'm going to bring something interesting. And everybody's like, oh, Ligia, yeah, come on, let's talk about this. And I'm like, yes.

Hernease Davis ([01:00:37](#)):

I love that. I love it.

Ligia Bouton ([01:00:38](#)):

Yeah. Great.

Hernease Davis ([01:00:40](#)):

Well, is there anything else that you would like to say or anything else that you'd like to share as we close here?

Ligia Bouton ([01:00:51](#)):

I feel like we covered so much rna. I just want to say thank you as always. These conversations are just so exciting and fun for me. And what, I don't know, what a gift to me to get to think about my process in this way with you. And yeah, thank you.

Hernease Davis ([01:01:10](#)):

Oh, you're welcome. And thank you. Honestly, I'm just really grateful for your generosity. And also, I really, really love your process, and perhaps it is because I can relate to it in my own work, but it is always a joy to hear you talk about where your work is going or how you've come to ideas and how you've opened yourself up to exploration in such a way, especially with so many varied materials. For me, it's a rare experience in the photo sphere, so I'm just really appreciative of you sharing your process with me and on the podcast. Yeah. Yeah. Thanks so much.

Ligia Bouton ([01:01:48](#)):

Yeah, thank you.

Hernease Davis ([01:01:51](#)):

And there you have it. For more information about Ligia, her work and those installation images, please visit her website. The link is in the show notes. I'm also reposting the helpful references that Ligia shared that provides more information about Henrietta Swan Leavitt's work, as well as that of other early women computers at Harvard. To learn more about the Visual Studies Workshop, please visit [us@vsw.org](mailto:us@vsw.org) where we have information about the project space residency and our current artists and residence. Our application for the upcoming 2024-2025 residency period is currently open, and applications are due

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April 5th, 2024. Keep following us on Twitch and Instagram at the Visual Studies Workshop, and feel free to send me an email at [herneasedavis@vsw.org](mailto:herneasedavis@vsw.org). This podcast is funded in part by the New York State Council on the Arts, with the support of New York State Legislature and by the Leonian Foundation. Thank you so much for listening to this conversation with the artist Ligia Bouton. And in the meantime, please take care. Bye.