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COMMUNITY STORIES

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SOUTHCOAST Artists Index

This story was collected through our partnership with the SouthCoast Artist Index, led by Ron Fortier.

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Ron Fortier

Hi, this is Ron Fortier with another episode of the In Focus Podcast brought to you by the South Coast Artist Index and graciously supported by heavily spirits imports and. We have by this time already gone over a 100 podcasts, which is quite a milestone, and we haven't even scratched the surface. We haven't scratched the surface on the living artists or what we refer to as contemporary artists, which is a whole nother discussion about people getting confused with the word. And the historical artists, which is more accurately the dead artist, which is not really a good term to use, but we are trying to record the living and the dead using their interlocutors to to give us their information. So as I I do it every podcast. I'd like to have our guests introduce themselves and spell their name, because that's always very, very useful for the historic record and with that. Go right ahead.

Rebecca Uchill

Yeah. Yeah. Thank you so much for that opportunity for this opportunity, Ron. My name is Rebecca Uchl. My name is spelled REBECCAUCHILLI am a member of the faculty in art history at U. Dartmouth CPA and I'm here speaking with you today because I'm the curator of the exhibition, Nancy Holt, Massachusetts, which opened yesterday at the time of our reporting, November 11th, 2021. In the UMass Dartmouth galleries.

Ron Fortier

That was there was quite an event. I didn't have a chance to go to the CVP, a star store location, but I did obviously show up on campus and. I always get the warm and fuzzies. You know, I I graduated from there with my BFA in. 1975. And the place has always been near and dear to my heart, that's for sure. Tell, tell us a little bit more about Nancy Holt, and I don't know why. I mean, I have a relatively good memory, but for the weirdest reason, I always thought one of Harvey Goldman's sculptures were was in the exact site. But then again, maybe maybe it was temporary because at one point I think we had a lot of temporary sightings of sculptures and then we moved on. But Nancy Holt was an amazing person and artist. Tell us a little bit about her.

Rebecca Uchill

Yeah. Well, Nancy Holt is an artist who has such a storied and extensive career that it could take us the duration of the podcast. I think even to try to scratch the surface of describing her artistic story. She's very likely best known, at least in the. Current moment for her large scale outdoor sculptural work responsive to land in the environment, most notably her her artwork sun tunnels. But her career spanned. Every medium of her time, from



concrete poetry to video art installation. She was a really important thinker. I think about the ways that art responds to its environments and contexts, including its systems. And one of the artworks on view as part of this exhibition is one of her systems, artworks, and we can talk about that a little bit more. But Nancy Holt is a person of interest to me. For many or historical reasons, but but probably to our region for some very specific. And local reasons, one of which of course being that her artwork spin Winder, which you made allusion to. Moments ago stands at our campus entrance. It was completed in 1991 as part of the Massachusetts art and public places, 1% for art program, so it was constructed using a percentage of of the budget allocated for the Dion Building. The science buildings construction. As it happens, her artwork responded to a prompt asking artists to consider making allusion to local industrial histories, including the history of, you know, the maritime industry and the textile industry, and Nancy Holt's grandfather was a New Bedford. Based practitioner within the textile industry and in fact he was the director or the head. He had different titles over time of the designing and weaving department for the New Bedford Textiles. Well, Nancy Holt also made other artworks about her relationship with her aunt Ethel, who lived in the home that Samuel Holt had occupied at 39 Locust St. so Nancy Holt is someone who allows us, as you said in your. Thoughtful introduction to think about many different inroads into the historical past and also as an artist. Whose work was so boundary defying really remains so contemporary for us as problematic. I agree as that term may be.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. Yeah, it is. People are always confused with ohh you modern. Well, let's not even get into. What modern means? Because that's all about the. Story just keeps. Getting more convoluted as as we move on so.

Rebecca Uchill

I teach that I I teach a class periodically at UMass Dartmouth called multiple modernisms where where we dig into that and that takes us a full semester and we still don't finish telling that story so. That'll be another another, another podcast sequence, perhaps.

Ron Fortier

Pattern is now. Exactly. Yeah, modern is now that's. That's what modern is. How much now? How did she come to the university where she spin window obviously was was. At the top of of her list of achievements. But how did she come to the university? Was she on faculty?

Rebecca Uchill

Yeah, she. Well, I think, you know, I'm. I'm just delighted to hear you say that, Ron, because I I think that spin Winder I I agree. Is that a really important artwork for Nancy Holt, Biographically and. It was very interesting in yesterday's events, Ron and. I were both. At the Nancy Holt, Massachusetts Symposium, which I hope we may have a chance to talk about a little bit more where we had historians, curator. Cheers artists Park Rangers foundation directors, thinkers and and most importantly, in some respects, people who really knew Nancy Holt in her life, including good friends, collaborators, and curators who worked with her very closely. Some of whom? Corroborated my feeling that spin Winder may be among her most personal artworks in in some respects, it certainly has a a real kind. Of biographical familial story behind it and the Star store exhibition that's open right now. I. I made mention of Nancy Holt's artworks about her aunt Ethel. But the Star store exhibition digs into that history a little bit more robustly than we're able to do, just on the plaque that we've recently installed outside of Spin Winder. But but the truth is, Ron, that I I would not say that maybe among our history, our historians. Or even Nancy Holt's biggest fans. I'm not sure that spin wonder would have been counted among her highest achievements. I do hope that the kind of thinking that we're doing about spin Winder can help to restore. It's significance to a kind. Of appropriate place. She came to the university, though, because we had a percent for art program, so the Massachusetts legislature had established a program that would allocate, allocate a portion of budgets for from state construction buildings for artworks and the program. The program folded in 1991 and to my knowledge I it's been I I I. Doing art history during a pandemic and having a lot of problems of access to archives is is a whole other tangle to to dig into, but there's at least one notation somewhere that indicates that



this was in fact the the last of the artworks completed for that program. The program folded in 1991. But artists would just apply to be part of. This program and. Her proposal was selected not necessarily because she had that family history. That was simply, you know, an additional kind of augmented benefit in some ways of of her application and. Or return to the region to create this.

Ron Fortier

Ohh it's to me just. Reading her biography and seeing the work. There's a a Portuguese word that's it's a very squishy wiggly word. It's so that's it's it's a longing for something. And I think my estimation because as Gombrich said, you know, the the beholders share. Little a lot of things up my my family, the French Canadian side came down from Canada to work on those in those bills. One time before my my grandfather started his cabinet business, he worked in rayon. My dad worked in cotton, and it was wonderful to to hear their arguments. They were so proud of what they did. My dad was a training instructor, he said. He taught half the immigrants in the city how to. Leave. But as I was telling one individual yesterday, I believe Stacy Lott savages the chair of the Sculpture Department.

Rebecca Uchill

And and the artist who produced the three 5050 sculpture, which is really in very interesting proximity to Nancy Holt Spin Winder.

Ron Fortier

Right. Right, right, right. Within view of it. So it was almost like a spiritual connection between the two and how she was in awe like, Oh my gosh, this is, you know, you know, you're gonna be the same environs as, as, as, as as as you. Hero. But as I was speaking with Stacy, I said, you know, I always wondered. You get 2. Competing cities won the spindle city and and they they were more, more they. They probably had more bobbins than anywhere else in the world, spinning around and New Bedford, which was known for its fine cotton lawns and per Kales, the one set of being the epitome of all fabrics, all cotton fabrics. And I always thought it amazing that. These founders, these, these. People got together in a cow pasture in Dartmouth. And said hey. We're going to build a world class university, a University of the future designed by a world class architect. It seems if you were to tell somebody that story. Without knowing without them knowing that it actually exists, they probably would look at you and say. In Dartmouth. It just doesn't. It just doesn't. Tack to to any any. Reality, I guess of sorts, but I think it was quite forward thinking futuristic, so on and so forth. So with all that in mind and seeing and seeing her sculpture, they also brought back memories. I I remember going with my dad to Brookshire Hathaway and nearly seeing him get killed by a A flying shuttle the the the shuttle went right by his ear. And landed in the column and he called me flip. She's like, oh, that. Happens all the time, but you know. All of this. You know, and that's what art does it. Becomes a touchstone. I I think and and so. I don't want to wax poetic over it, but so. I'll just let you go back to it, but it it did, it did touch me it. Did touch me.

Rebecca Uchill

Thank you. Yeah, you know, I am familiar with that with that term. I think I, I I I dated a Brazilian Portuguese speaker for a long time and I maybe it's just. Regional dialects, but I I think I I heard it pronounced like shahji like that.

Ron Fortier

So dodgy, so jaggy. Yeah. Yeah, they they throw a lot of these and. G's with. Well, it's. Like as the lack of eyes.

Rebecca Uchill

Right. So so I am familiar with the concept and I I think that's a really appropriate one as I understand that. That sort of wistfulness or nostalgia, maybe for something that like, one never even had or or, I mean, I'm not a native speaker. I'm just kind of a proxy. Sort of you. Know appreciator of the poetics of this idea. But the fact of the matter was that, you know, Nancy Holt was someone.



Ron Fortier

Right.

Rebecca Uchill

Look in in life, she was she was married to and the artistic partner of. One of arguably the the most sort of like famous prominent, you know, land, environmental, conceptual artists of his moment. Robert Smithson and Robert Smithson died an untimely death. Nancy Holt's parents died also when she was very young, within just a matter of a year or two, a few years of each other. While she was an artist known for doing massive public works and working very closely, and I mean very intimately with. The construction laborers who worked on her projects, I mean, for example, the the stone Mason Al Pointer, who worked with her on two of her. Works. She did extensive, you know, hours and hours and hours of recorded interviews and transcripts with him. And in fact, as I argue in a chapter that's coming out in a book published by Western Washington University and Bruno Press, I believe that. How pointers influence actually changed the title of her artwork? Stone enclosure, rock rings? So I mean. She's, you know. She she's a a head a head. Lifter tough. You know, in the dirt, out in remote places, 2/2 of the speakers last night at the event at the Star store remembered going in different incidents out to the desert to look at hot sun tunnels with her. And in both cases, getting lost in one case had to go to the emergency room because her lips were black, you know, after. Sleeping over in the desert and sort of getting lost, having no water with them. So I mean, she's she's a tough person and. Maybe known for these kind of like large scale, highly ambitious projects, but you know still very much like a human and maybe someone who, in the absence of her, her family members maybe did have that feeling of a wistfulness or desire to, like, resuts your family connections. Maybe some of which weren't even really so close to begin with, and and in some ways that actually is the argument of this exhibition. So Nancy Holt's connection to Massachusetts, I argue in this exhibition and in the in the booklet that accompanies the exhibition. I'm not sure if you. Had a chance to grab.

Speaker

Yes, yeah, Yep.

Rebecca Uchill

One, but it's around somewhere beautifully designed, I should add by Michelle Bauers from our graphic design faculty and. I also while I'm while I'm doing this, the our core team with Alison Silin, Viera Rabbit and Shingo Furukawa, huge thanks for the massive heavy lifting that went into the exhibition. In this in this booklet I track. How Nancy Holt, you know, talks about Massachusetts. She writes about Massachusetts. She writes about Massachusetts in an essay that was commissioned by the decoration of the museum in 1979 for their exhibition catalog, born in Boston. And when she describes Massachusetts, a lot of what she describes, not all, not exclusively, but a lot of what? She describes is. Kind of New Bedford. You know, it's like cobblestone streets and like the Siemens Bethel and you know, Ryder, we just had that amazing writer show that just closed at. So she's she's thinking about Massachusetts.

Ron Fortier

Yes. Yeah.

Rebecca Uchill

And she's consolidating Massachusetts kind of into this New Bedford kind of vision. And truthfully, I believe she consolidates that vision into the vision of of the House at Locust St. when she describes. And I don't have the essay right in front of me right now. But, you know, she describes the kind of. You know, architectural features or the. The chacha is on the mantelpiece and. Then when you look. At that against, for example, her video understand in which she takes photographs from her aunt Ethel's home at Locust St. and then reformats them for the monitor using a an overscan and underscan processes. Sort of. Inserting these sort of degrees of mediation between the viewer and this, this image is sort of being. Consecrated as being so remote, so hard to access, like it



has to be reformatted over and over again, and and it over the course of this video artwork she's reading letters from over the course of 10 years of correspondence with on Ethel, where on Ethel's life is sort of narrated in this sequence of cyclical. Events of you know the the rumors. The borders upstairs are moving out. My, you know, I need a surgery. I've gotten married. My husband has now died. You know, everything sort of read the same kind of flat monotone. And kind of consolidating all of these life events and architectural features of the home. Into one kind of portrait later, of course, and maybe we can talk about this next or soon. This story of Aunt Ethel changes very tragically and and dramatically. But. But when Holt talks about Massachusetts, which she did in interviews, especially, I mean. In my research, she she really did emphasize this in interviews, you know, in the last decades of her life. She talks about how she corrects, for example, one interviewer who says, oh, you know, I think you're from New Jersey, is that correct? And she, you know, she did grow up in New Jersey, but she corrects him. She says, no, I was born in Massachusetts. She was born in Worcester County, Massachusetts. For for her family, had a home in Leominster. And as Holt tells this, and she tells it in different ways and different and. Reviews her family was her father's job, you know, located him in New Jersey, but they never bought a home, she says. They only rented because there was this idea that at some point they would be relocated back to Massachusetts. And she puts it differently in different interviews. But she says things like I had this idea that. Massachusetts was a utopia, or Massachusetts was like the promised. And which she definitely says is Massachusetts was a place where where my relatives lived. It's kind of like this homestead that she can't quite access. And so this kind of like, shoji this idea of, like, a home that no longer is with her that she can't quite access. I think is you know. Really. I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Ron Fortier

Well, I I I. Feel that completely because we have our family homes that in civic, in the gas Bay, up in in Quebec. We can sit, you know, and and we can do a virtual tour in our heads and it gets very, very emotional. It's a place you can never go back to, but you can. You're connected but disconnected. And then her thing about systems and so on and so forth, I think it's. All very, very very interesting. I mean, she was a passionate feeling person.

Rebecca Uchill

Right.

Ron Fortier

Only a lot of. Times you see, you see work. That that hits, you know, top Mark on top. Of the market, you know for. Recognition and so on, so forth and it's just. I don't know. There's that. That's that. I don't know. It's it's even those 3 dimensional. It's one-dimensional, but not with her. I mean, there's so much history that that's connected to it.

Rebecca Uchill

No, every her work is so profound. I actually was just today in the middle of this horrible storm. I I visited. I probably shouldn't say this on the podcast, but I'll say it anyway because the Wellesley College Campus is officially closed right now. But we we walked onto the campus very briefly to visit her.

Speaker

So you know.

Rebecca Uchill

Wild spot and I was just really struck by just. How every one of her artworks that you encounter. Just brings so much forth but but this kind of distance I I did find a quote that that I thought I I might read really quickly and then sure we could move on to systems works perhaps like, but this isn't an interview with with James Meyer which in which she said. Because in those days, if you lived in New Jersey and all the relatives lived in Massachusetts, you hardly ever saw each other. Of course I knew they existed. From hearing about them, and I knew they were connected with me through blood. But the relationship was at a distance and some of that



distance ended up in my work. And so, you know, when we see in understand, the kind of hyper mediation. Of these photographs, or the letters or in subsequent works where she actually took a still frame from the film and then mediated it even one time more than a work, she called her facsimile. Really work that kind of distancing effect. And she talks about distance and distancing effects in her built works and her constructed works. So when you start to think about that tangle of, like, the familial distance, the homestead distance, what it really is to sight yourself or pin yourself or root yourself to a place. And think about that in terms of her massive. And growing figure within the world of land, art and site specific artworks it it adds a kind of, as you say, sort of a. Human dimension to. The work that is really unique and totally hers.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, there's, there's, there's something. I mean, when you. When you consider she's using cold steel, you know a bunch of other materials that aren't exactly warm and fuzzy, and the sculpture, you know, unless it's, you know, marble and, you know, the the whole classic thing it it. It's unusual that this, this passion of hers comes through. I'm I'm I'm thinking right now of. We need this Glovers. I'm aware of the throttle the night train to to Lisbon. It's a wonderful, wonderful book and it's so it's so convincing that people actually think that I'm there. The problem actually. And Andrea Pavel, who I believe is the the, the The Who wrote the book just. Rings it you know up. Let me see if I can. I can find this one quote because it really. We lived here in the. Here and now it's a Pascal Mercier. That's that's what it is. Ohh, we live here and now everything before and in other places is past and mostly forgotten. What could what should be done with all the time that lies ahead of us? Open and unshaped. Featherlite in its freedom and lead heavy in its uncertainty. It is a wish green light and nostalgic to stand once again at that point in life, and to be able to take a completely different direction to the one which has made us who we are. And this is just like one of his, I mean this whole bloody profound. And when you were speaking about that, that popped into my head, like, right away, that she, you know, it's funny. I mentioned the word. So the others before because of subpages with the Brazilian dialect. She so much as a child, I think wanted to connect to these people. She wanted to connect to these places, but circumstances didn't allow and even back then I. Mean a long. Distance phone call. I mean, we don't even. Use that term long distance phone call. That was expensive.

Rebecca Uchill

Right, right. And so these letters, that's right. So like these, this sort of remote, I mean, I guess we've becomes unfortunately so accustomed to a kind of remote. Proximity over this pandemic in a way. But it's not, it's. Not kind of. Natural to or typical of, you know, human history. Really. And. And and I I just think it's so interesting that she talks about this distance and and specifically Massachusetts. I mean, it's a distance that's about this region and that, that that was so important for her work thereafter. I I do want to add though, because I mentioned it before, and I do hope that people will have a chance to see the. That's the the New Bedford Exhibition and the the star. So we have one exhibition about Nancy Hill and the Star store and 1 exhibition in the main campus gallery at UMass Dartmouth. And they're both important companion. Exhibitions that are circling around in different ways. Spin Winder, of course. At our campus entrance, the exhibition at at Star Store also includes the artist book ransacked, and we had a very special opportunity that was afforded to us by virtue of working with the Holt Smithson. Foundation that allowed us to create kind of a spatialized replica of the book so that people can experience the full narrative of, you know, this limited edition artists book. And here the 2nd. Part of the story about Aunt Ethel, which? Which became it. It was a very sad and tragic story, truthfully, where in later in life she suffered from elder abuse and Nancy Holt was sort of summoned back from. Working in Bellingham, WA on stone enclosure rock rings and came with her friend, the artist Ardell Lister to New Bedford to kind of check in on on Ethel and discovered this situation. I I won't tell the story because Nancy. Holt is actually. The specific in her book ransacked about creating a kind of container that tells the story in a very thoughtful and deliberate way, so I'd I'd prefer for the story to unfold, and Nancy Holt's words and tell.

Ron Fortier

Thing, but a couple.



Rebecca Uchill

Of things. Firstly, it is a real New Bedford story. It doesn't begin and end with Nancy Holton inside of just one house at Locust St. in fact, at our event last night, one of the daughters of Foster Herman, who was the lawyer who was involved. With on Ethel and basically saved on Ethel from this horrible situation came to the event and you know. For her, she she remembered the story of these two girls, that sort of show because they are Dale and Nancy. What were very young at the time, who showed up and were part of this kind of rescue campaign and of course had no idea that it had been, you know, memorialized in this artist book. The first artist book. Apparently that was published by by printed matter. One of the most important artists presses around, so I mean a really important artwork that of course, as we know, I mean art and life are totally connected. And New Bedford is kind of the very in. Important grounds for this work, but these are stories about our community. It's the story, it it. It is a real, really bad bird story. And it touched the lives of many people and and it's at the end of that book ransacked that Nancy Holt says. About the house that the House, I'm just going to read in her words, this House, which has now been twice the subject of my art, is my physical connection with genes and blood and family history. All the memories of the whole family reside now only in the House, which has passed into other hands. And in myself, the last member of the family.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, that's and and and and. Is that thing about spaces and places. There's another one, too. That was kind of interesting. Is that the connectivity, you know, evolved from a a bunch of people who were. Has to leave Plymouth Colony. For various reasons. And they found their own their own niche. They pretty much took over the Nantucket whaling. Endeavors by their fortitude, by their foresight, by their, you know, genius so on and so forth. And yes, they. Created this thing where everybody wanted. Everybody has a a ship, a willing ship. Captain, everybody you know has wants that connectivity and for some reason that seemed to have been the. The history of the Gentry in town and the mills, no one really spoke about the mill owners as much as they did. The mill operatives. And but that. Was the poor? The poor's connection to the city, but it was a natural evolution from whaling to textiles, from textiles to apparel, and now I think the heir apparent is the art community, the the creative community is now. In those buildings and keeping keeping this whole history alive. And so she really had a she really had a finger on everything. And again, I think driven by the fact that maybe throughout most of her life, she always wanted to be somewhere else. And, you know, she wanted to be in the Bedford. She wanted to be here, she there was this, this incredible. It was just a small little bits that she had a little taste that she had in this area. She just. They say there's a, you know, Taiwan, you can, you can talk about. Taiwan and and and and. In in you know various levels you know, tell wild wine to tell wild food, but there's also that sense of place. I I I remember asking my cousin Roland. I said, you know, next time we go up there, I said I've got to get. I've got. To get a bag of dirt, you know, small bag of dirt and he's and I said I I you probably think it's it's crazy and he said. No, we all have one.

Announcer

Yeah. Yeah. Well, Nancy Holt.

Rebecca Uchill

Was was very invested in like local materials. And that means. Not only like for example locally sourced stone or or cement or concrete fabricated, locally sourced, you know.

Ron Fortier

Right, right, right, right, right.

Rebecca Uchill

But but also, you know like industrial materials like the local industrial materials and so in the electrical system exhibition that's up at the main campus. This is one of her systems artworks and Nancy Holt systems artworks are



such a fascinating. Body of work also so rich and so much. To be explored. There, but these works would look at sort of the infrastructural built environments and call attention to certain features that maybe we. And by we I mean like. Modern to contemporary Western civilization have tended.

Ron Fortier

Right.

Rebecca Uchill

Hideaways so one of my favorite works by the whole you know that I'm aware of, but have never seen and in. Fact it's no longer. At this weapon, it's not built, it's not accident in that sense is a work called Catch Basin in which she was invited to create a work for for a public park and sort of responded to a drainage problem. You know, a pool of water that was kind of collecting in the park. She created this. Really dynamic drainage system through Patch Basin that it's not a celebrate. I mean she. She may even have called it a celebration. I'm not sure, but it's not. It's not, you know. A triumph of the drainage system. It's it's a functional drainage system that is also kind of aestheticized and built. And I I think it sort of is so ingenious that it defies every genre. Like is it art, is IT infrastructure? Is it a park like where does it begin? And end like. How much of this part can we think of? Of as being drainage catch basin. Rather this work and you know my students and I talk about this like what do we usually. Do with our dreams. We like hide, we like embed them. We hide like a secret, like a dirty secret that we have a drainage system when in fact it's kind of like a remarkable and necessary thing, at least for like the way that we live.

Ron Fortier

Right.

Rebecca Uchill

Now we could probably do better with the with our water waste, frankly. But but Nancy Holtz electrical system is one of those works. So it's a work that uses bent conduit sort of spatialized into an immersive electrical installation to call attention to just the facticity of electricity and electrical systems. And. Electrical circuits that surround us within our building environments. And did you have a chance to see the? The show.

Ron Fortier

Yes, yes, yes, I did. I I was. I had to be very aware as I told one of your tenants. I said, I wonder how many of those light bulbs are gonna get kicked out by accident because you're mesmerized by something. And then and then your your feet, you know, you know, you pay attention where your feet are and you might just kick out one of the bulbs. So it's kind of makes it. Dangerous in a way in in a good way it it gets, it gets your senses heightened and you're really paying attention to what's going on. There's there's another thing about about her work. What? What was her religious and spiritual background? Cause I'm getting like, like a Zen vibe from her. Quite a bit.

Rebecca Uchill

Well, before we go there, I just want to say the just back to the back to this idea of the local materials, just really quickly that that you know for electrical system, right, electrical system. Obviously she's using like the normal normative materials of you know.

Speaker

Right.

Rebecca Uchill

Went on to it. But you know in in her time, you know, she was using bulbs with, you know, these filaments inside of them that were kind of like typical. Will light bulbs for the contemporary that you know today's installation and you know you can imagine that creating a posthumous exhibition of the work that is so site specific, created by an



artist that's not alive means, you know, working very closely with the experts at the foundation who. Are the people that represent the estate and represent her prerogatives and wishes and her artwork? For the present day. So. And they've been thinking a lot about electrical system in particular because it was recently installed in Ireland at was more and now this is our. This is the first posthumous presentation of it in the US that has been exhibited since 1982. So the light bulbs. Now our environmentally friendly bulbs and you know there's a lot of good reasons to do that, but they, but we did work with these kind of like boutique artsy. Bulbs that would not be kind of typical normative right though, even though ones in her original time might have been a little bit more like that.

Ron Fortier

These are the.

Rebecca Uchill

And so, you know there there's a little bit of interpretation, I guess you know that. Has to happen. In her absence now, because she's no longer alive, I mean, everything you sort of speculated before is true and you know very thoughtful of you to be, you know, thinking about her relationship to the local and the relationship to the kind of like. You know, like everyday material, but what does that mean? You know, what about, you know, 200 years from now, when, like, we don't even have light bulbs? You know, I mean, what? What will that be? You know, how how will it be adapted? That's a question for the future. To your question about her spiritual practice, this is not something that I personally.

Ron Fortier

Right.

Rebecca Uchill

Study about her so I can speak to it only a little bit, but it's it is something that that there are people that study her spiritual practice or know her well as friends in her life that would be able to say more. She was right. I do know that she was an active practicing Buddhist. And that she was very spiritual in her life. And there, I'm not sure if you were with us yesterday when people talked about a poem that she wrote where she sort of traced during the course of the day, her, her behaviors as a feminist, as a Mystic. And as an artist. A conundrum for me, of course, cause I'm like, well, you know, it starts to ask a lot of questions about like, can you be all three things at once? I mean, in the graph you can be one day I guess anyway. So it's a different topic, but.

Ron Fortier

Right. Right.

Rebecca Uchill

Very interesting. It's a totally interesting question. It's not one that. I can speak to.

Ron Fortier

Right, right.

Rebecca Uchill

A lot, but I am sure you're picking up on something in in her practice there.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, and and and the fact too that, that George Miller, who was my sculpture teacher there at UMass who. Was a phenomenal person. I really didn't appreciate him until years after his death. He's got something to me that. I didn't see. In me and then her Cummings, who is. Still, you know. To this very day, you know he's in the studio right now and they sort of speak throughout the whole Zen, the whole Zen thing. Together, but I really. Really felt



that in her work, you know that that that, that, that sense of place to tell why the sense of materials I, you know, I remember, you know her telling us you know some of the Japanese sculptors would go and chain themselves to a tree and tie themselves to a tree because that's the tree that they chose to make this sculpture and that they wanted the spirit of the tree. To know that that they were not going to die, that they were going to be transformed from one thing to another thing. It was very important to feel their energy and so on and so forth. Now a lot of people might. Think that that's a bunch of Hulu or whatever. You know, let's we just. Put it under the category of. Process I mean and. You know, there are people who have process. That is just. Well, almost not understandable, but I just got a really, really good vibe from her. That's, that's for sure.

Rebecca Uchill

Well, the day. That we spent yesterday made it easy to get a good vibe. It was really wonderful to have so many people in one place thinking about her work. We had everything from, you know, Ranger Andy Schnitzer, a park Ranger, you know, contextualizing her spin Winder artwork. Against the backdrop of the New Bedford textile industry to which it makes reference, and for those who didn't see it, I suppose it should be mentioned the reason why we're talking about it making these references to the textile industry is because it's form resembles a machine. From the textile industry and in my opinion. It very it very. Closely resembles machinery that was in the knitting studio at the New Bedford Textile School, which is an argument that I draw out a little bit in the exhibition, but also because she embedded artifacts from the New Bedford. Textile industry in the foundation of the sculpture. But everything from you know, Ranger Ranger Andy, you know, to the electrical engineering students who were involved in adopting electrical system for our campus installation and worked with the Holt Smithsonian Foundation on that topic. But. So and also Alina Williams, the the curator who? Did the magnificent, you know, life retrospect, you know, sort of end career, as it turned out, retrospective of Nancy Holt's work called sight lines, which. Had it not been for Elena Williams organizing this exhibition in this book, I mean we, our scholarship and knowledge of Nancy. What would be? So, so much poorer than it than it is she she created just such just an amazing volume and roster of information and reflections. On hole in her work, it's it's such an incredible thing that she did. But to have? All of these people that knew her and worked with her in one room, I think made it really easy. To have this feeling and and so and also people that responded to her like Stacy got Savage with her sculpture or, you know, young upcoming engineers just graduating from college who chose to work on Nancy Holtz history as their engineering capstone.

Ron Fortier

Or when he was. So I mean, from when she was as they used the term coming up. It's never been easy for women. It it's. The multi, you know the multi titles you know, wife, mother, you know all those all those attachments, all those labels, all those tethers and and to be a a sculptor. To be an artist, there are other women artists who made it on their own. But there were many as well, who were collaborators with their also artist husbands. So there's a there's a there's been a societal shift that's been going on. So probably now I think maybe society is looking at her with fresher eyes than they did. I'm. I'm sure you know, she she probably got a bunch of, you know, construction worker. Types were kind of wondering what the hell you know, but. Say, hey, the money's. Good, you know.

Rebecca Uchill

Well, when I mean I I want to I I do want to know. I think that I do hope things are changing but I you know, I think it's sadly not unusual that Nancy Holt is is having this surge of interest in her work now.

Speaker

You know.

Rebecca Uchill

Well, after her death. You know, there are Warren O'Grady, you know, just had her major exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum helmet off Clint. I mean, when you really think about women artists who are being celebrated



now it, you know, it's at the end of or after the end of their lives. So yes, I think things are changing. But in her life, I yeah, I think it is accurate to say that her, her career was occluded by the career of her more famous husband, Robert Smithson. And. He predated her in death, and of course she had a longer career and. A I think. An equally, if not more interesting career in. In many respects, I mean, certainly there were more years of it and more opportunity for it to change. But you know, she she often had to self subsidize her. You know, Smithson would have, you know, big Muckety muck gallerists and others, you know, investing in the work and, you know, Nancy Holt was doing scrappy fundraising and, you know, and and it's sometimes she talks about and sometimes she doesn't, but it's there. It's like latent under the surface is the fact that she kind of had to hustle. She talks about sun tunnels, for example, as this kind of managerial project. You know where she and so and so you're absolutely right. That leads to her. She talks about this in her essay about Sun. Tunnels that led her. Into relationships with like you said, construction workers for example. I mean there there's so much to be said about this. It's it's almost like dangerous to start getting into this or fear but but but she. But but let it suffice for now to say that she actually wrote about it. This idea of extend the extension of herself, you know, through the work labor and collaboration of others. And it's complex. It's it's sometimes is even a little uncomfortable for me, I have to say to think about another human is like the instrument of your desire. Or like like. Is it a person or like a tool you know but but yes, she was. She was often and I did not know her in life. But last night we heard from people who did know her very well throughout her artistic career and she was very often very closely involved with. Not only the people that worked on the creation of these, you know, massive, constructive, constructive works. But also like local personalities from, you know, the cowboy bar that's literally the name of the bar at the town closest town over from Sun Tunnels for example. And I think she was someone by all accounts, who was actually really interested in working. Across like region class professional title. And so on and so forth. But I never knew her. I mean, this is what I've heard from from her, but a really interesting.

Ron Fortier

Right.

Rebecca Uchill

Person got in that way.

Ron Fortier

I mean it's it's. It's the other thing too. If you have a an independent, strong independent woman. The B word pops up. Yeah, because if you know if if she's going to take no prisoners, not to be another was holding her ground holding sway over a situation. There's always that thing that's that's lingering. It's like with, you know, all of a sudden now African American art is a big thing now and and that seem to have been on the rise. And BLM kicked in. And really, you know, pour gasoline on that. But I also remember back in grad school when Southwest artists, you know, Schonder Garcia, those those, those Native American artists. It was, it was a fraction of pan. Unfortunately it was. It was the thing. Now I think we're seeing much more gender. You know, especially artists. Historical artists, dead artists. I was starting to see more. More. They didn't change. Their art didn't change. Society has changed. The values have changed, culture has changed, more ways have changed. Whatever the world has changed. But not the work, the work stays. The same it's like. From our history students.

Speaker

OK.

Ron Fortier

The PA time. You've probably seen it a dozen times. Yeah. Yeah, that's what it is. All right. Have you ever really looked at this? Does it? Does it ever ring? You know, it's unfortunate. I had a friend whose son passed away tragically, quickly, suddenly and tragically in, in, in the past couple of weeks. And. If you know I remember Gombrich saying. Look at that face of the. Virgin no parent should suffer this pain of of of surviving their children, and this is a woman who by myth, if that's what you want to go myth. OK. This is a woman who knew this was



going to happen. And this is the moment the prophecy came true. And and and that it's when you when you think of it that way, all of a sudden it becomes so poignant and it's like spin like that you see it and you know you really don't know the history behind it. Sometimes you do have to have that background. Brought into the work, I think.

Rebecca Uchill

Yeah. Yeah. Well, we had a really great opportunity and especially and I know we should wrap up in a moment, but we had a great opportunity with a grant from the Henry Luce Foundations American art program that was very specifically. To think about collection objects and reinterpretation. Of collection objects and we're not abum, but we have some collection objects and one of them is spin Winder and that how we can understand and interpret this collection object through so many means. I have to say, you know, there's probably we'll. Have to leave. Some ideas on the table here, but this idea that you know we may be in a moment of like allowing our our histories to expand like the tent post.

Ron Fortier

Right, right.

Rebecca Uchill

Of what we allow to. Be considered part of the Canon of our history at minimum, minimally, as, as you say, acknowledge the existence of various viewpoints and positionality. Yes, I think that's like the minimum that can happen, and hopefully a lot of other things can happen. In addition to that. But expanding, let's say you know different viewpoints and perspectives on one artwork and one artists contribution to public art infrastructure of our region. And I think it's really important and I'm I'm just so pleased to have been able to share this project with you today. And I hope we can welcome you back soon.

Ron Fortier

It's like help people. You know each one. Of these episodes is just the page. There are. There are guests who have, you know, chapters and and volumes and a. Complete a complete. Set and you know, as we evolve on, it will be wonderful, especially to, you know, later on historians cause all all of all of these episodes are being archived. The wedding museum's database. And as Michael Lapedes, the digital manager for the Wayne Museums, loves to say, they will be held in perpetuity. So that that's a that's a fantastic thing. Yeah. I'm gonna wrap it up because I, you know, this is a subject where the more you speak, the more I get to learn about her, the more I start making connections in my own mind. And there's there's there's so much more possibilities on that campus. So many more possibilities and we have gone from a cult of personalities unfortunately, and what's unfortunate about that is that those personalities, once they pass on their legacy, just becomes frozen. So if we can have a different kind of culture that that allows their, their drive, their vision to you know, keep going that that would be wonderful. It's very much like like Nancy Holt, any final words?

Rebecca Uchill

Come on down, UMass, Dartmouth campus Gallery and UMass Dartmouth Star story University Art Gallery now through January 23rd at the University Art Gallery, now through December 10th at main campus and then select Sundays through January 16th.

Ron Fortier

Right. And this is 2021 for. Those of you listening in the future? Those listening in perpetuity.

Rebecca Uchill

Great. So so the people 200 years from now, you can know that one question from the past was. What? What did? You do with the electric bulbs for electrical. System very interested.



Ron Fortier

To it's kind of weird that the bulbs, I mean when you. Speak about that alone, I mean. You know when this was designed? More than likely they could have been either incandescent or they could have been industrial kind, you know like. Sulphur. Phosphorus. I mean, there's a couple of a couple of those heavy duty industrials. But now that this chic bulb is actually so total totally retro. The chic bulb is the Edison bulb. Even even the new, very, very energy efficient bulbs have a throwback because you can see the.

Speaker

Mr. sorry.

Rebecca Uchill

That that's sort of the point that I was. Thinking exactly exactly.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, yeah.

Rebecca Uchill

Yeah, when I'm done, check it out. It's it's very interesting. And Ron, thank you so much for having me on.

Ron Fortier

Rebecca Mitchell, thank you so much. This has been great, and we're gonna wrap this up and thank you for joining us and. Once again, you've been listening to the In Focus Podcast brought to you by the South Coast Artist Index and graciously supported by Heavenly Spirits imports, and be kind to each other and we'll see you next week. Bye bye.