

The image features a dark, textured background, possibly a close-up of a rock surface or a similar natural material. A vertical grey bar is positioned on the left side of the frame. The text 'LEILA HOUSTON' is printed in white, uppercase letters within the lower portion of this bar.

LEILA HOUSTON

## **ABOUT**

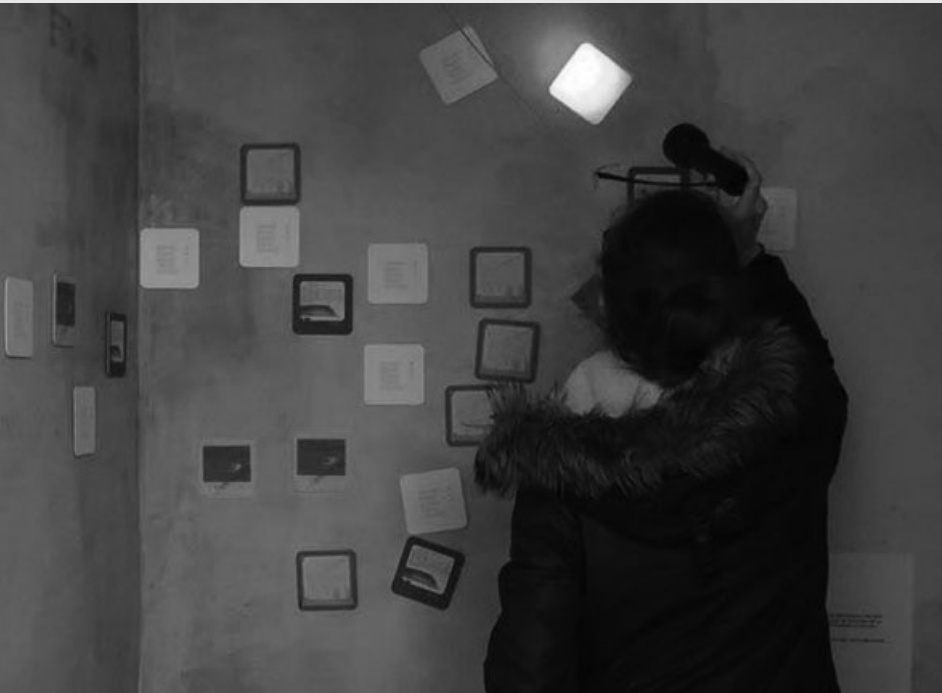
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## BIO

Leila Houston (London, 1977) is a multidisciplinary artist whose work investigates the social, political and historical aspects of a place and the impact we have on our environments.

Houston uses site-responsive installations to explore connections between the external atmosphere and the internal sensation within places, providing reflections on the language of architecture and the associations we draw through memory and the senses. Working predominantly with video, sound and structure, much of her artwork cultivates immersive atmospheres for the spectator, often inviting them to take part or contribute to the work.

Image:  
Points of Departure, 2015

# GRANTS AND COMMISSIONS

*Time for growth* (2020)

Arts Council England Crisis Fund

*Encrypted Sounds of Wellbeing* (2019)

Arts Council National Lottery Project Grant

*Water Matter and Straightening out the Petals* (2018)

Arts Council National Lottery Project Grant

Vulnerability and anxiety in today's financial climate and A Local Voice (2017)

Arts Council England Research & Development Grant

Microworld Interact (2016)

Digital Labs and Genetic Moo

*Summer Art Trail* (2016)

Leicester City Council Grant

*Conversation series and Dialogues* (2015)

Arts Council England Research & Development Grant

*Summer Art Trail* (2015)

Leicester City Council Grant

Artist of the Year Award (2013)

AA2A Artist's Access to Art Colleges

Individual Artist Fellowship (2004-08)

Digswell Arts Trust

Individual Artist Grant (1998)

Milton Keynes Arts Association

# AWARDS AND RESIDENCIES

Year of Residence (2016)  
Queen of Bradgate, Leicester

Artist of the Year Award (2014)  
AA2A

Residue Residency (2012)  
Surface Gallery, Nottingham

Sponsorship Prize (2009)  
The Great Central Gallery

# SOLO EXHIBITIONS

## 2019

Title TBC, Attenborough Arts Centre, Leicester, UK

Title TBC, May and Fearon Hall, Leicester, UK

## 2018

Straightening out the petals, Newarke Houses Museum, Leicester, UK

# SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

## 2019

Interact'19 Digital Open, LCB Depot, Leicester, UK  
Miniscule, Fondamenta Sant'Anna, Venice (collateral exhibition at 58th Venice Biennale), ITA  
Miniscule 2, Cross Lane, Cumbria, UK

## 2018

Interact'18, LCB Depot, Leicester, UK  
Open 29, New Walk Museum & Art Gallery, Leicester, UK

## 2017

Walker & Bromwich: An act of Participation, Leicester, UK  
The Crash, Q Park, London, UK  
Fit the Slit, Venice Lido, Venice, Italy  
EMPIRE II, (touring exhibition) Venice (satellite exhibition at 57th Venice Biennale), Italy/  
Berlin, Germany/ Brussels, Belgium, Cumbria, UK/ London, UK

## 2014

From the 12th Floor, LCB Depot, Leicester, UK  
The Fine Art Society, Curve Theatre, Leicester, UK  
OPEN 26, New Walk Museum & Art Gallery, Leicester, UK  
The Image is the Servant II, Hansom Hall, Leicester, UK  
In Celebration of Chinese New Year, Q Park, London, UK

## 2013

The Salon, The Salon (EC Arts), Leicester, UK  
Beauville Arts, Lot et Garonne, France

## 2012

Dual, The Cutting Room, Nottingham Playhouse, Nottingham, UK  
MA & Other Postgraduates, Atkinson Gallery, Somerset, UK

## 2005

Works of Art, Sun Street, Hertfordshire, UK  
Est.1957, Maynard Gallery, Welwyn Garden City, UK

# TEACHING & EMPLOYMENT

Gallery Assistant  
Attenborough Arts Centre, Leicester, 2018-present

Install Assistant  
Attenborough Arts Centre, Leicester, 2019-present

Founder and Director  
Summer Art Trail, Leicester 2014-16

Director and Founder  
Silver Vine Arts, Leicester, 2014-present

Founder and Director  
WTS Gallery, Leicester, 2015

Artist Tutor  
Attenborough Arts Centre, Leicester, 2012-present

Artist Tutor  
Spinney Hill Primary School, Leicester, 2011

Art Workshop Leader  
Lakeside Arts Centre, Nottingham, 2010

In-house Art Workshop Leader  
Letchworth Arts Centre, Letchworth Garden City, 2009

Art Workshop Leader  
Rhythms of the World Festival, Hertfordshire, 2008

Art Workshop Leader  
North Herefordshire College, Stevenage, 2008



# EDUCATION

Masters of Fine Art (Distinction)  
De Montfort University  
2012

Bachelor of Contemporary Art  
Nottingham Trent  
2003

Foundation Art and Design  
University of Central England  
1999

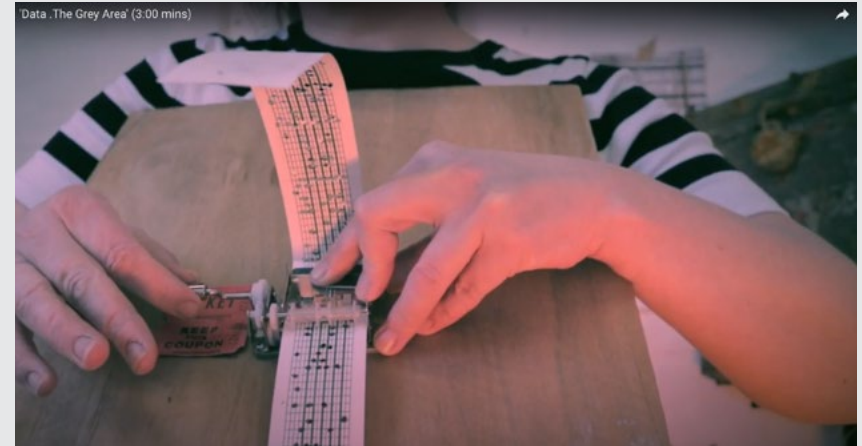
# ENCRYPTED SOUNDS OF WELLBEING

The project was conceived in the months before Covid-19 which upended the world as we know it. The project began with *Data: The Grey Area* (2019), presented in the group exhibition *Interact '19* organised by Sean Clark, which invited visitors to the exhibition to press digital touch points relating to the socio-political issues most important to them, under headings such as racism, public health, employment, education, public services and so on. This data was collected and then determined the placement of punched holes on paper tape that would be played on a music box.

This approach to creating work informed by authentic data collected from an audience later led to the series of workshops with groups based at Charnwood Arts (Art Hub & People Making Places). Responding to the workshops a further participatory work was developed named *Coloured by numbers*, a colouring-in sheet using drawings from the groups that identified with our biological and sociological needs today, a revised look on Maslow's Theory. This later opened up to the wider the public to take part and think about our wellbeing, achievement and our goals.

Image: Still from *Data: from The Grey Area*, 2019. Video and sound, music box. Recorded sounds, edit and composition Leila Houston.

Image: *Colour-by-numbers*, 2020. The drawings used for the participatory activity sheet are the work of Neami Yohannes and Osman Yaqoub, members of the ArtHub group. Montage design by Zory Rubel. Coloured-in by anonymous members of the public. Concept Leila Houston.



[Click here to play film](#)



# ENCRYPTED SOUNDS OF WELLBEING



A video/ sound piece was also created responding to experiences of fake news & authenticity, capitalism & 'time', social media, isolation & lockdown. Continuing an exploration of combining moving images, both tender and haunting, with field sound recordings - from the everyday to the otherworldly - the film takes us right back to those first weeks of lockdown. The inner components of a music box play a gentle lullaby, generated from the data collected through that earlier work, *Data: The Grey Area*, which weaves between clips that document the ever-present news bulletins on the screens that surround us. Screens record screens; the picture quality degrades, communication is defined by detachment from others.

*The artist cycles along a canal path. We are attached to her handlebars and though our view shudders and shakes, we can see how closely she skirts the waterside edge. She pedals faster, negotiating the gentle curve and the jolting bumps of the towpath, seemingly heading downhill at speed. But it is silence that crashes into the birdsong, before returning again to the haunting strains of an eerily upbeat Wurlitzer organ:*

*There's no business like show business  
Like no business I know...  
The artist pedals faster still, chasing on  
two wheels a promise of freedom, liberation.  
Furiously propelling herself towards just that  
one cool moment of relief, we know the futility  
of her attempt even before it is affirmed  
by the glimpse of a silent, gliding swan.*

Image: Chris Barber, *There's no business like show business*, Resident Organist, The Musical Museum, 2020.  
Photo: Leila Houston.



Funded by Arts Council England

# STRAIGHTENING OUT THE PETALS



During this project, Houston reappropriated the age-old Jack in the Box, drawing on themes of inequality and poverty, encouraging the audience to revisit traditional motifs and symbols in our society and consider what they represent.

The artist contrasted recorded sounds from the rhyme 'Pop Goes the Weasel', which dates back to the 1700s and originates in cockney rhyming slang from the poor at the time pawning their coat for money in hard times (weasel and stoat for 'coat'). Swans, a symbol of elegance and fierceness and an animal owned and protected by the Crown, wind themselves around the reappropriated box.

Image: Lunar, Liminal Music Box: Between Pain and Protection, Comfort and Fear, 2018  
Sound, Arduino, wood and clay. Recorded sounds, edit and composition Leila Houston. Synth score created by Andrew Johnston. Technical support David Wilson Clarke and Dan Cowlam.



Funded by Arts Council England

# A LOCAL VOICE



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A Local Voice is in part a search for the genuineness of face-to-face interaction, a reestablishment of compassion and a step away from the strident individualism encouraged online.

Over two days, local and national people came together to take part in an installation and create a collaborative sculpture with Houston at Two Queens Gallery's Project Space. People were from all ages and backgrounds, and many had no art experience at all.

An expansive collaboration between Houston, local musicians and participants, the final work was exhibited as part of Summer Art Thread (part of City Festival) at LCB Depot and has further been exhibited as part of exhibition The Crash, London.

Images: A Local Voice, 2017  
Documentation of participatory event



Funded by Arts Council England

# CONVERSATION SERIES

Venice is one of the most visited and cherished cities in the world; its beauty, history and culture are celebrated globally.

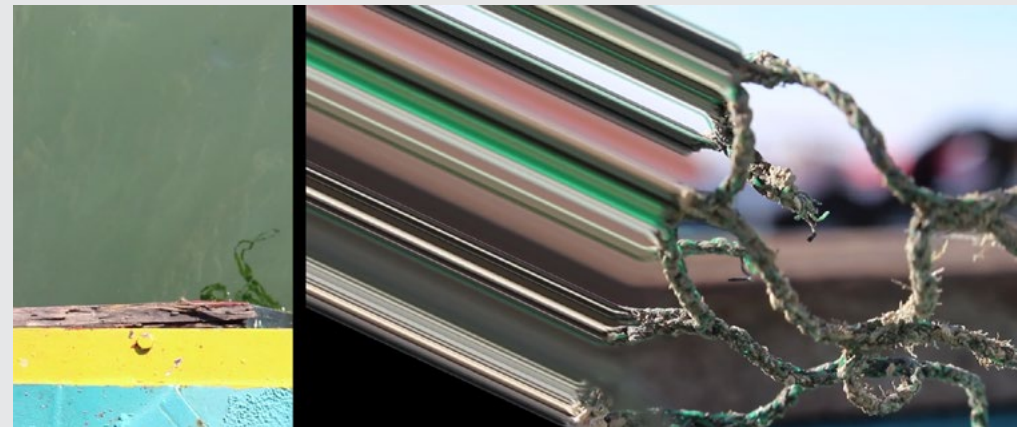
In Venice: Conversation Series III, Houston broadened her consideration of the relationship between people, place and history in this multi-layered work; exploring how communities can be shaped, empowered, fragmented and distorted by the arrival of newcomers and its perspective of them.

Continuing on from her previous video installations, which examine place and the essence of it, Venice: Conversation Series III used recorded discussions drawn from the heart of the Venetian community. Via interviews with friends and locals in the city, the piece drew parallels between the issues in Italy and Houston's home in the UK, with discussions centred around cuts to public funding and the impact of this on a society.

Alongside visuals capturing the fibres of Venice's environment, the work invited people to remember the truth of a setting that has been so embellished. Venice: Conversation Series III considers how beauty, creativity and authenticity of a place will survive when a place's economy threatens to become the place itself - rather than its foundation.

"Has it become a Disneyland? Do the visitors get what they should be getting from it?"

Image: Venice: Conversation Series III, 2017  
Film still (3.01 mins)



[Click here to play film](#)

# DIALOGUES

Immersing her audience in carefully cultivated atmospheres, Houston used site-responsive installations to reflect on how we form ideas of society, history and culture. Utilising sensory experience and space, Houston's work spans from the political to the philosophical, providing unique perspectives on themes of community, vulnerability and people's connections with spaces.

Dialogues invited its audience to examine the minutiae of their daily lives, showing the influence of the seemingly small, subtle and vulnerable.

Image 1:  
Investigating the Centre, 2015

Image 2:  
Points of Departure, 2015



Funded by Arts Council England



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# INVESTIGATING THE CENTRE



A site-specific work, Investigating the Centre was presented at Summer Art Trail (2015) in a derelict room above The Queen of Bradgate pub.

Recordings of a pub discussion were played on four speakers surrounding a large table, inviting visitors to sit and listen in. Centred around cuts to public services, the discussion explored how pubs could offer a centre for communities, should community centres be forced to close.

This work draws on both the personal and the political - Houston's own first family home was a large community centre in London, which her parents ran for 11 years before it was eventually demolished.

Image 1:  
Investigating the Centre, 2015

Image 2:  
Investigating the Centre, 2015  
Installation still: audio, empty photo frames,  
video projection of "Wullie" Craigmillar Playscheme  
film, table, x4 chairs





# POINTS OF DEPARTURE

Points of Departure was a site-responsive installation exploring the relationship between community and space, focusing on how people leave traces in a place and collectively form its identity.

Points of Departure uses recordings of the visitors, conversations and artwork made during Houston's residency at The Queen of Bradgate pub in Leicester to investigate how particular places can provide a centre for exchange and inquiry in a society that is becoming increasingly insular.

Image 1 & 2:

Points of Departure, 2015

Installation still

Interactive maze in 4 sections (wood, vinyl flooring, paper diary entries):

Section 1 - Beer mats, velcro, UV pens, torch

Section 2 - Monitors, video, audio

Section 3 & 4 - x5 sound triggers (floor pads)



# IT'S NOT YOU, IT'S THE WATER THROWER

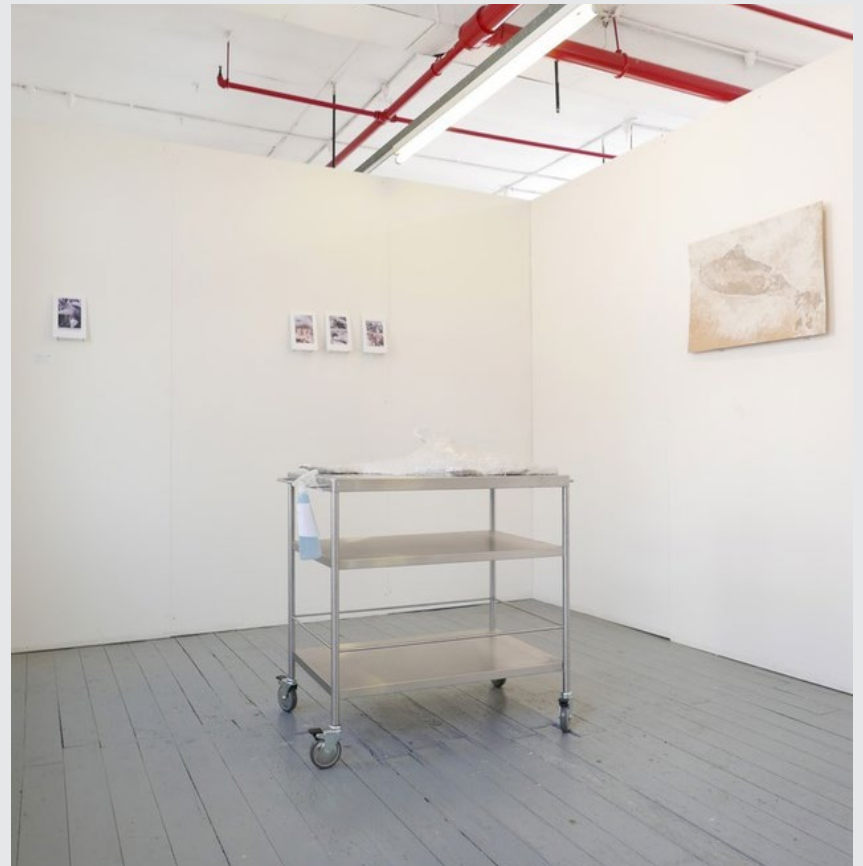


It's not you, it's the water thrower examined our treatment of the vulnerable, the impact we have on one another and the permanent impact on our society as a result.

Over 10 days during Leicester's Summer Art Trail (2016), the public were asked to assist in keeping a clay sculpture wet by spraying water onto it. On the final day impressions by the gallery staff and visitors were dried and set, forming the final piece.

Image 1:  
It's not you, it's the water thrower, 2016

Image 2:  
It's not you, it's the water thrower, 2016  
Wet clay, photography, metal trolley and water  
Photo credit Andrea Jaeger



# THEY BELIEVED THE RIVER DID SING

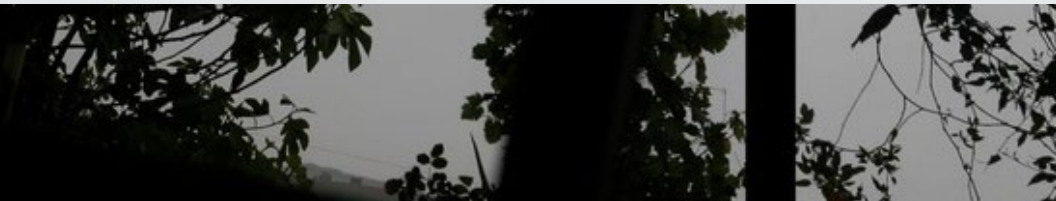
Houston looks at why we ascribe feelings to places in *The River Did Sing*, a video installation using sound and light to investigate how we draw meaning from our senses and associate them with our surroundings.

Shown as part of her Masters of Fine Art at De Montfort University (2011-12) the work itself creates layers and echoes, showing Houston's recurrent exploration of inside and outside space. Using sites in Leicester, the work presents an intense yet serene, circular, industrial, quietly haunting theme; whilst encouraging the spectator to consider subjects of society and industry.

Image 1 & 2:  
*They believed the river did sing*, 2014  
Film still (5.22 mins)



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# AM I LOSING YOU OR HAVE YOU LEFT ALREADY?



[Click here to play film](#)

A lake, insects, a thunderstorm and a damp apartment are explored, sometimes appearing as a panel painting, coming together in moving synchronicities.

Am I losing you or have you left already? is a video installation that encourages the viewer to go beyond the image presented, creating internal sensations with only close-ups and surround sound.

Image 1:  
Am I losing you or have you left already?, 2013  
Film still (17 mins)

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