

Testsite 04.4-Annette Lawrence and Annette Carlozzi, with Ana Sisnett

Fluent-Collaborative

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The collaboration between artist Annette Lawrence, writer Annette Carlozzi and poet Ana Sisnett is nothing less than a harmonic convergence—a fortuitous merging of the gifts of three very articulate, thoughtful and mature artists. Mutual respect and understanding are infused in the visual, conceptual, literary and aural components of the work, producing a nearly seamless outcome. Conceptually, the project represents a compact, ten-year reprise of Lawrence's installation work, integrated with commentary by Carlozzi—a seasoned curator and writer whose poetic response to Lawrence's work was performed and recorded by Sisnett. Visitors are invited to follow the thread of the three women's elliptical conversation.

Ninety-five balls of bleached cotton string form four soft arcs that seem to want to join and become two concentric circles. The length of each row was determined by the rhythm of Carlozzi's words on Lawrence's past decade of artistic production. In turn, the words are fine-tuned in Sisnett's performance, presented on a continuous loop that melds the beginning and end of the poem just as the shapes on the wall move the viewer's eye in a spiral.

Lawrence, as usual, relies heavily on the systematic exploration of personal history through the use of humble materials—postal tape and string. She weaves her collaborators' contributions into this ephemeral world. The artist quite literally contributes a repository of past installation materials to the project: each ball suspended on the wall at *testsite* is the veteran of one or more prior works.

These measures of string have been stretched, anchored and tied in galleries including Dallas' African American Museum, the Dallas Museum of Art, University of Michigan Museum of Art, the Glassell School of Art and the Sweeney Art Gallery in California. In each case, string was manipulated in response to the site; the artist reorganized each space, putting passersby inside on a controlled path with the unerring skill of a giant spider. As each exhibition ended, string was rolled into fist-sized balls and stored. Here at *testsite*, as is her habit, Lawrence invented a simple hanging system, using clear, wide patches of tape to mount the balls, creating a stair-step pattern—a shiny, subtle shift of light on the wall. The hard edge of the tape contrasts with soft threads, which dangle from each ball.

Lawrence's elliptical arrangement responds to 95, the poem written by Carlozzi. The poem's first stanzas describe Lawrence's earlier works:

Ephemeral geometries—
Taut, crisp, yet pliant.
Visible (but just),
Just, and humble, too.

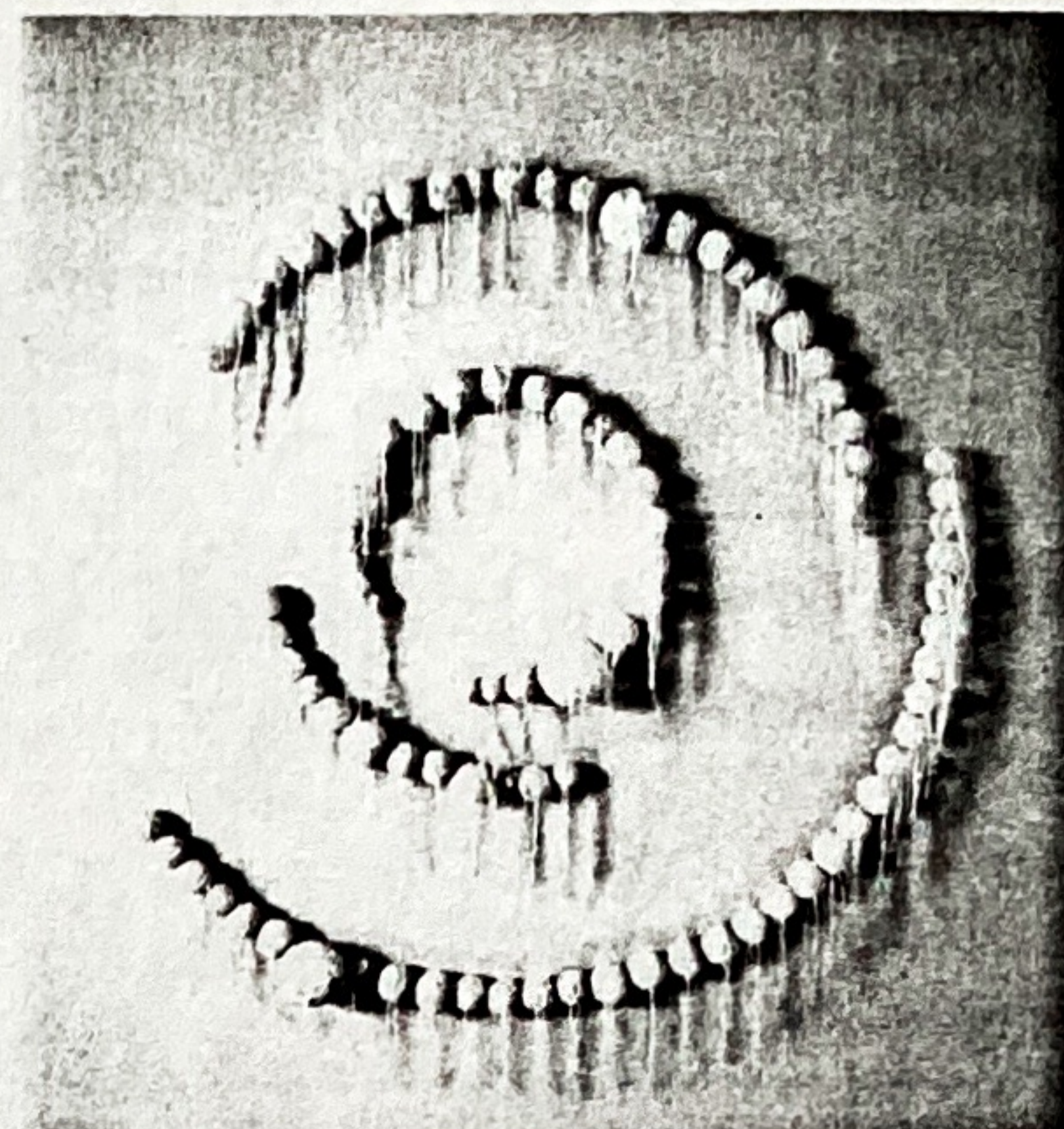
Color prints depicting several of these previous installations are available on the coffee table at *testsite*. With these keys, visitors can knowledgeably travel through time, following the thread of Lawrence's career while sitting in the physical presence of the remnants of these projects.

In addition to her position as Curator of American & Contemporary Art at the Blanton, Carlozzi has served as curator and director for a number of museums throughout the country and produced projects with a number of well-known artists. Carlozzi has also written numerous catalog essays and articles about contemporary art. But in this case, the requisite distance between writer/curator and artist was erased in favor of shared process. Like Lawrence, for whom counting and marking time is a hallmark of her conceptual practice, Carlozzi counts her words, making this tally part of the poem. Visitors read "34" after the first stanza, which has precisely 34 words in it, "60" as the first and second stanzas end. She continues to write, to count, to comment, until she reaches "95" and the cycle begins again.

Conspiracy theorists might speculate that Ana Sisnett was tapped to read and record Carlozzi's words because of the way her name appears to be a variation of "Annette" or, perhaps, simply because she is a friend of the artist. But Sisnett was clearly chosen for the sonorous quality of her voice and expert phrasing, which mesmerize any listener who takes time to sit quietly on the sofa wrapped in sound, following Carlozzi's words on paper and glancing, from time to time, at those pale, precariously positioned balls of twine.

The project turns in on itself again when the words of the poem begin to describe not installations that came before, but Lawrence's current work.

"hush"...
we become the space
(with interruptions).
A web of words:
Time repeats
The breaks, the inconsistencies,
Subtle but celebrated.



Annette Lawrence, 2004
Installation view at Testsite

Partial credit for the collaboration's success, of course, goes to *Fluent-Collaborative*, which routinely brings together an artist and writer and gives them free rein to interact within director Laurence Miller's home. This is, to my way of thinking, the most successful collaboration produced to date, as well as the least intrusive within the site. The living room—pale, changeable gray walls, ebony-stained oak floors and two simple, charcoal-gray love seats in front of a fireplace half-clad in dark granite—quietly accepts the work.

For this project, unrelated art objects belonging to Miller have been left hanging on the walls and shelves, including an early Casey Williams photograph, a delicate Marcel Dzama drawing, a Nancy Graves print and several Julian Onderdonk paintings. These similarly pale, calm works seem to enter into conversation with Lawrence's piece, while not detracting from the roughly eight-square-foot wall that serves as the backdrop for her balls of string—or from the pleasing sounds that permeate the room.

In the next room, catalogs written by Carlozzi about Lawrence and others are available for perusal. This educational component feels exactly right but unfortunately, the continuous loop of Sisnett's recorded voice makes concentrating on Carlozzi's insightful writing difficult. And if there is an outright flaw in the installation, it is in the absence of additional information about—or recordings by—Sisnett, whose voice plays such a significant role.