

Annette Lawrence

May 18–August 6, 2000



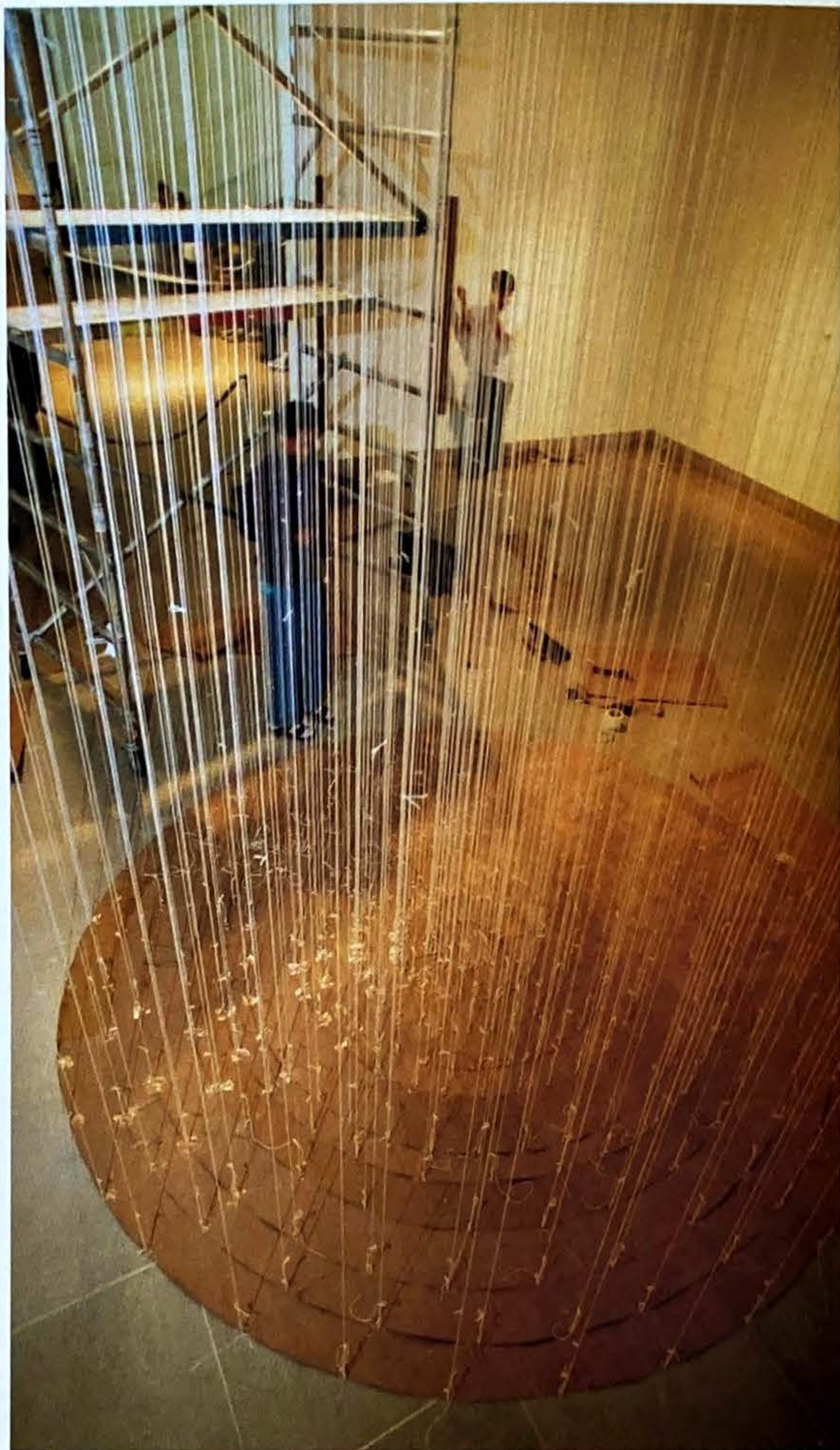
In the Northeast Quadrant Gallery of the Dallas Museum of Art, Annette Lawrence has created an installation of string, paper, tape, and glue. In a nearly alchemical transformation of these simple materials, Lawrence has constructed a mysterious, shimmering, and complex environment of string anchored to wall and ceiling that depends on the viewer's presence and perception for completion. Similar to installations by older artists such as Richard Serra and younger ones such as the late Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Lawrence's DMA installation demands a degree of engagement—physical and mental—far different from that of looking at most art in a museum environment.

Alluding to a shower of rain in the central circular column and to a boxing ring and the chords of a musical instrument (among other things) in the outer sections, Lawrence's work also evokes the place of the viewer in the room, making explicit his or her active participation in the creation of the work. By simultaneously challenging the architecture of the gallery, Lawrence has not only determined the places where a viewer can stand, she has literally reshaped the way in which the space of the gallery is perceived, all the while providing an involving, at times disorienting, but always mesmerizing experience whose associations and meanings are limited only by the viewer's own place, vision, and imagination.

Working with a team of assistants for two full days at the DMA, Lawrence installed a central column of eleven concentric circles of string stretched from floor to ceiling that radiate out from the exact center of the gallery. Using a plastic template on the ceiling to mark the location of the string and a circular brown paper construction on the floor as an anchor, Lawrence stapled lengths of string to the ceiling and then tied these lengths to the paper below. When the string ran out, Lawrence and her assistants simply tied new lengths to the old ones, creating with the resultant knots a host of "punctuation marks" in the air. Looking at the base of the column and through it, one can imagine a pool of water with raindrops splashing up from the ground, while the dense lengths of parallel string shimmer in imitation of rain falling in a neat column from the sky.

Surrounding and enclosing this column are two forms also created from parallel lines of string. In this case they are suspended in the air perpendicular to the central circular column. In one form, Lawrence centered string on each of the three longest gallery walls by attaching it to brown paper

posts roughly six feet high—the artist's own height. This form has been stretched across the gallery space to create a diamond shape, three corners of which seem to measure roughly ninety degrees. Crossing through this diamond is a rectangle that roughly echoes the square geometry of the gallery itself. Seen all at once, these two crossed forms create a sense of dislocation in some parts as the eye tries to reconcile the various parallel and dissonant lines that sail through space to create triangles and parallelograms in areas of indeterminate measure.



The artist has suggested that she had the idea of a boxing ring in mind when she thought of this construction, the string being "the ropes" against which one is thrown or rests when doing battle in the ring. Other associations are brought to mind as well: guitar or piano strings, which would seem to hum if they were strummed here, or the confines of a cage with barbed wire or other types of enforced enclosure.

Yet ultimately the work derives its mysterious power not from any one association but from being viewed in its totality. Contrasting areas and lines of string appear and disappear in

the air, and they become all the more enigmatic the longer one remains in the room observing them. Both present and absent, Lawrence's string is indeed anchored to the extremities of the room (its walls and ceiling)—this we can see. Yet as light passes through and over the string, whole sections seem to vanish, while the forms the strings create both define and escape the space in which they are installed. At certain points, angles in the corners appear to shift the room in a dizzying slant. Even the central column itself, while fully articulated by



the concentric circles, seems to fairly pulse with a subdued but present energy as we walk around it. All such apparitions, such appearances and disappearances, leave us as viewers delightfully at sea in a room full of apparently rational yet persistently puzzling circles, triangles, and square corners.

That Lawrence is able to wrest such an experience from her purposely chosen simple materials speaks of the artist's increasingly sophisticated sense of form and line. When Lawrence entered college, she wished to become a graphic designer, but she soon became more interested in the art of 1970s sculptors such as Gordon Matta-Clark, Mary Miss, and Alice Aycock. Learning of such work was a revelation to Lawrence, who saw an entirely new field of creative endeavor open to her. These artists used architecture (in Matta-Clark's case, literally) as a model for their large-scale objects and installations, a practice that Lawrence found liberating. Lawrence was also interested in the idea of mathematics, particularly in the notion of lines and grids, and the system that bears close resemblance to the notion of drawing in space (an idea explicit in the DMA installation)—geometry. Like art, geometry represented to Lawrence a complex yet defined and graspable language with which to interpret the three-dimensional world and its properties.

Envy the certainty that mathematics provides (in contrast to the inherent subjectivity of aesthetics and art), Lawrence

nonetheless chooses to work as a visual artist (and teaches art as a professor at the University of North Texas, Denton), bringing to bear her interest in mathematics as a tool rather than foil. In some of her drawings, Lawrence has used systems of lines and grids as a backdrop or compositional device to foreground her subject matter, which includes social and personal issues related to her own place and identity as an African-American woman. Portraits of her relatives from past generations and representations of her bodily cycles contain

carefully constructed geometric shapes that not only make up her art's formal basis but relate to the cyclical nature of life as Lawrence has perceived it in her own experience as heir to the past and an individual in the present.

The six string installations Lawrence has created in the past few years are perhaps her most fully and ambitiously articulated expression of her interests in mathematical systems joined with art. Working on such a grand scale has allowed Lawrence to investigate the literal degree of a person's place in the world. Lawrence has mentioned that her first sight of the Brooklyn Bridge (she grew up in Queens, New York) was one of the great experiences of her early life, which would suggest that her string installations, formally related to

the great bridge, can be seen as an attempt to re-create for others the experience of confronting something far grander and more eloquent than one's own self. Yet it is the self that is needed to perceive such grandeur and eloquence. With her meticulously and ingeniously crafted installation at the Dallas Museum of Art, Lawrence fuses space (the gallery) and matter (string, paper) to suggest infinite worlds that, were it not for ceiling and wall, might continue on forever beyond the reach of the museum. Based on the rationality of perfect circles and squares but dependent on the subjectivity of the individual's eye and mind, Lawrence's installation is, in its materials, execution, and forms, a deceptively simple work of art. Marvelous at first glance, the installation becomes all the more resonant the more time one spends in it, as its profundity lies not in its materials, nor even in its painstaking creation, but in its audience.

Charles Wylie
The Lupe Murchison Curator of Contemporary Art
Dallas Museum of Art

This essay was based on conversations with the artist between August 1999 and June 2000 and on her talks at the Dallas Museum of Art on May 17 and 31, 2000.

Annette Lawrence (born in Rockville Center, New York, 1965)

EDUCATION

- 1988-90** Master of Fine Arts, Hoffberger School of Painting, Maryland Institute, College of Art, Baltimore
- 1987-88** Graduate study in sculpture, College of Creative Arts, West Virginia University, Morgantown
- 1982-86** Bachelor of Fine Arts, Hartford Art School, University of Hartford, West Hartford, Conn.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2000** *Transparent/Opaque*, University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor
- 1999** *First Dance*, Dallas Visual Art Center, Dallas
- 1998** *Annette Lawrence: Installation*, African American Museum, Dallas
- Recent Works*, Bag Factory, Johannesburg, South Africa
- Lineage*, Gerald Peters Gallery, Dallas
- 1997** *ConText*, Women and Their Work, Austin
- 1996** *Same Way*, Gerald Peters Gallery, Dallas
- 1995** *Same Way*, Art Pace Center for Contemporary Art, San Antonio

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1999-2000** *Street Life*, Project Row Houses, Houston
- 1999** *Texas Paper*, The Gallery at University of Texas Arlington
- Other Narratives*, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston
- 1997-1998** *Art on Paper*, Weatherspoon Art Gallery UNC-G, Greensboro, N.C.
- 1997** *Finders/Keepers*, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston
- 1997 Biennial*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
- 1996** *Texas Collection, Modern-Postmodern*, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
- 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998** *Link*, Gerald Peters Gallery, Dallas
- 1995** *Re-Collections*, Project Row Houses, Houston

AWARDS/GRANTS

- Junior Faculty Research Award, University of North Texas, 1998
- Skowhegan Camille Cosby Award for African American Artists, 1996
- Dallas Museum of Art Awards to Artists, Kimbrough Fund, 1994
- Art Matters Grant, 1994
- Cultural Arts Council of Houston Artist Award, 1994
- Core Fellowship, Glassell School of Art, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1993
- Patricia Robert Harris Award (Fellowship), Hoffberger School of Painting, Maryland Institute, College of Art, 1988-89/1989-90

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

- University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, March 2000
- Fordsburg Artists' Studios, Johannesburg, South Africa, June-August 1998
- Housing Authority City of Houston, Project BRIDGE, Houston, 1992-1993
- The Community Artist's Collective, Houston, November 1990-March 1991

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

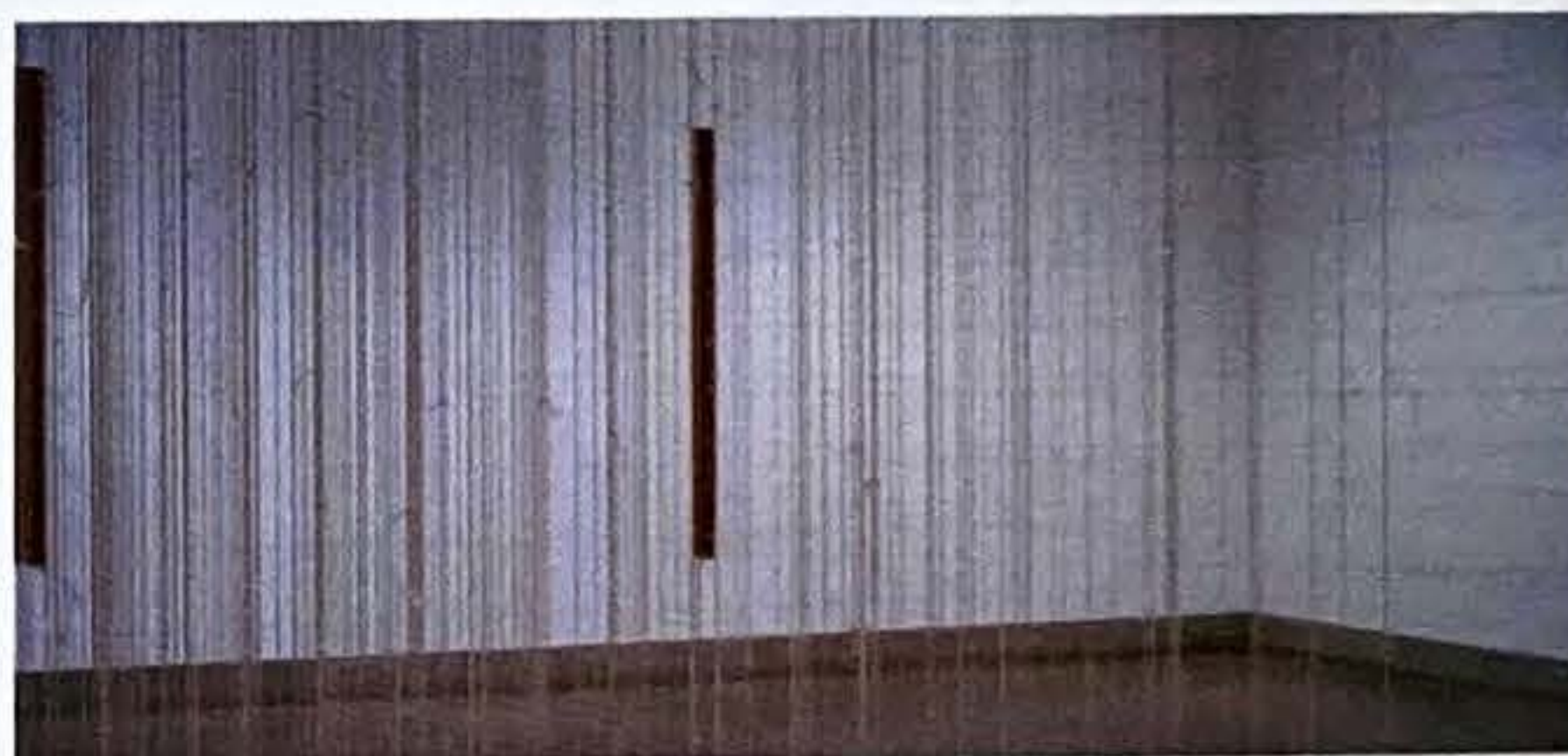
- Cantu, John Carlos. "At UMMA String Theory in Practice." *Ann Arbor News* (April 2, 2000), 3F.
- Friis-Hansen, Dana. "Other Narratives," in *Other Narratives*. Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum, 1999.
- Graves, Jen. "Family Matters." *Denton Record Chronicle* (January 15, 1998): Entertainment Chronicle, 3.
- Kutner, Janet. "Times and Tides." *Dallas Morning News* (March 19, 1997): 1C.
- _____. "Annette Lawrence at Gerald Peters Gallery." *ARTnews* (April 1998): 184.
- Phillips, Lisa, and Louise Neri. *1997 Biennial Exhibition*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1997.
- Weinstein, Joel. "Annette Lawrence: African American Museum." *ArtLies* (Fall 1998): 52.
- _____. "Mixed Media Artist Has a Line on the Ephemeral." *Dallas Morning News* (May 27, 2000): 5C.

CHECKLIST

- Untitled*, 2000
- String, brown paper, tape, and glue
- Site-specific installation for the Dallas Museum of Art's Northeast Quadrant Gallery
- Approx. 15 feet high x 30 feet wide x 30 feet long
- Courtesy the artist and Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This exhibition was made possible by the dedicated work of the following: Annette Lawrence's assistants Brian Wheeler, Justin Adian, and Jennifer Pepper; Doug Velek, Heath Bessire, and Phil Armstrong, of the Dallas Museum of Art, who assisted with the installation; Lisa Hirschler Brown and Talley Dunn, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, who provided necessary information and support for the project; and Cheryl Hartup, McDermott Curatorial Assistant at the DMA, who coordinated the logistics of the installation and saw to other crucial details. My greatest appreciation goes to Annette Lawrence, whose way of conceiving of the project was as direct and clear as the final result is mysterious and complex. She deserves all our thanks for her ingenious working methods and for the chance to live with and within her work.



All images are © 2000 Annette Lawrence.

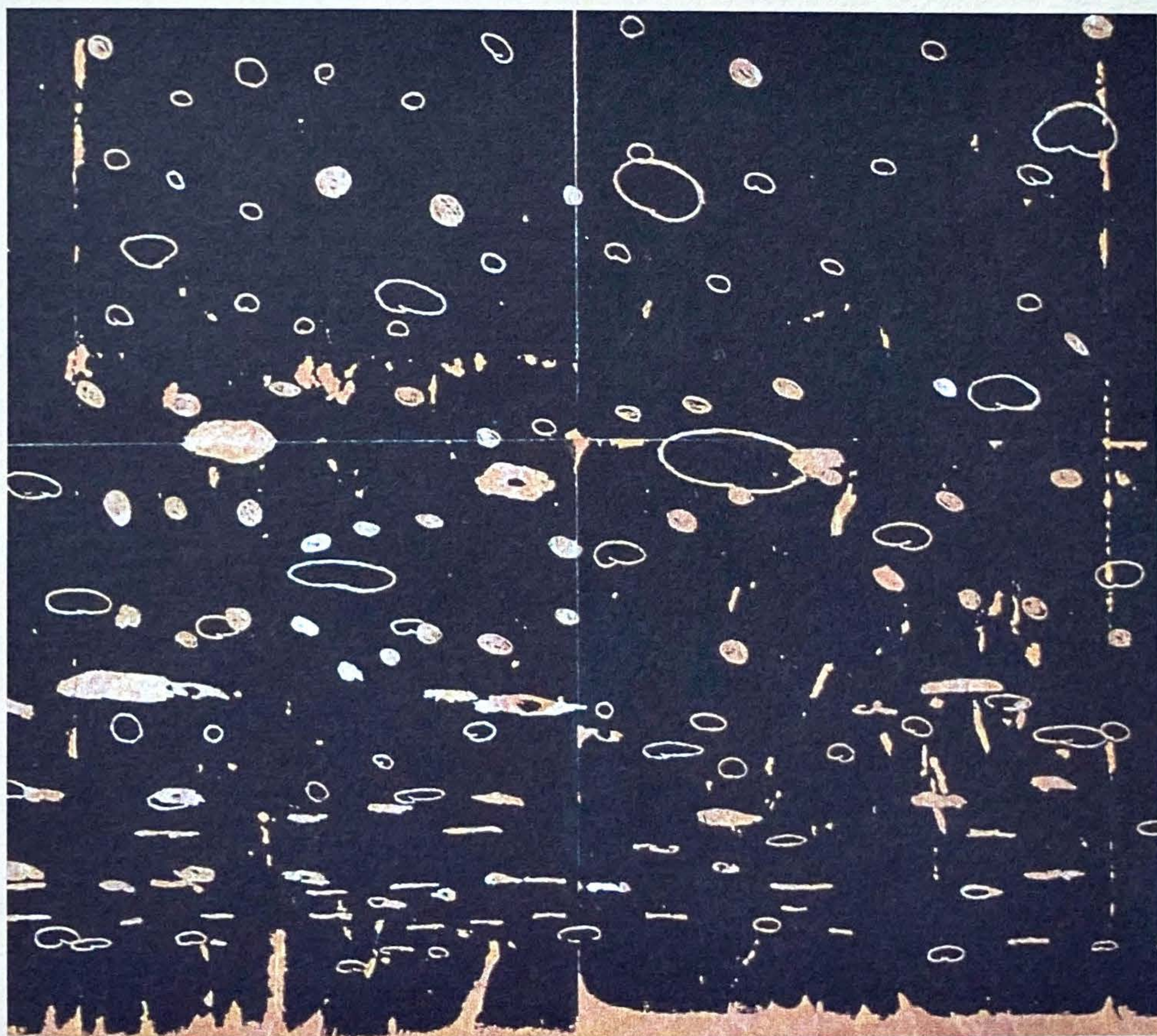
The Museum is supported in part by the generosity of DMA members and by the citizens of Dallas through the City of Dallas. Season Underwriters are Anonymous, American Airlines, Linda and Bob Chilton, the City of Dallas, Communities Foundation of Texas, The Dallas Foundation, *The Dallas Morning News*, the Dallas Museum of Art League, The Hoffman Family Foundation, Barbara Thomas Lemmon, Mr. and Mrs. Irvin L. Levy, The Edward and Betty Marcus Foundation, Howard E. Rachofsky, Deedie Potter and Edward W. Rose III, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Seay, and Southwest Airlines Co.

**DALLAS
MUSEUM
OF ART**

1717 North Harwood
Dallas, Texas 75201

audio visual:

drawings by Annette Lawrence



September 25 – December 8, 2002

audio visual:

drawings by

Annette

Lawrence

Annette Lawrence spent much of the seventh year of her life sitting in her neighbor's apartment taking piano lessons. She did not learn how to play the piano. Instead, she learned to repeat the motions of her teacher, placing her hands in certain positions on the keys and moving from note to note. Homework assignments required the student to identify keys by the letter they represent in a system of writing and to draw notes on a music staff.

Ms. Lawrence describes the physical environment of her piano lessons as "large and heavy," quite unlike the light, improvisational quality of her recent drawings. The works that comprise the exhibition *audio visual: drawings by Annette Lawrence* are, however, manifestations of those lessons. The

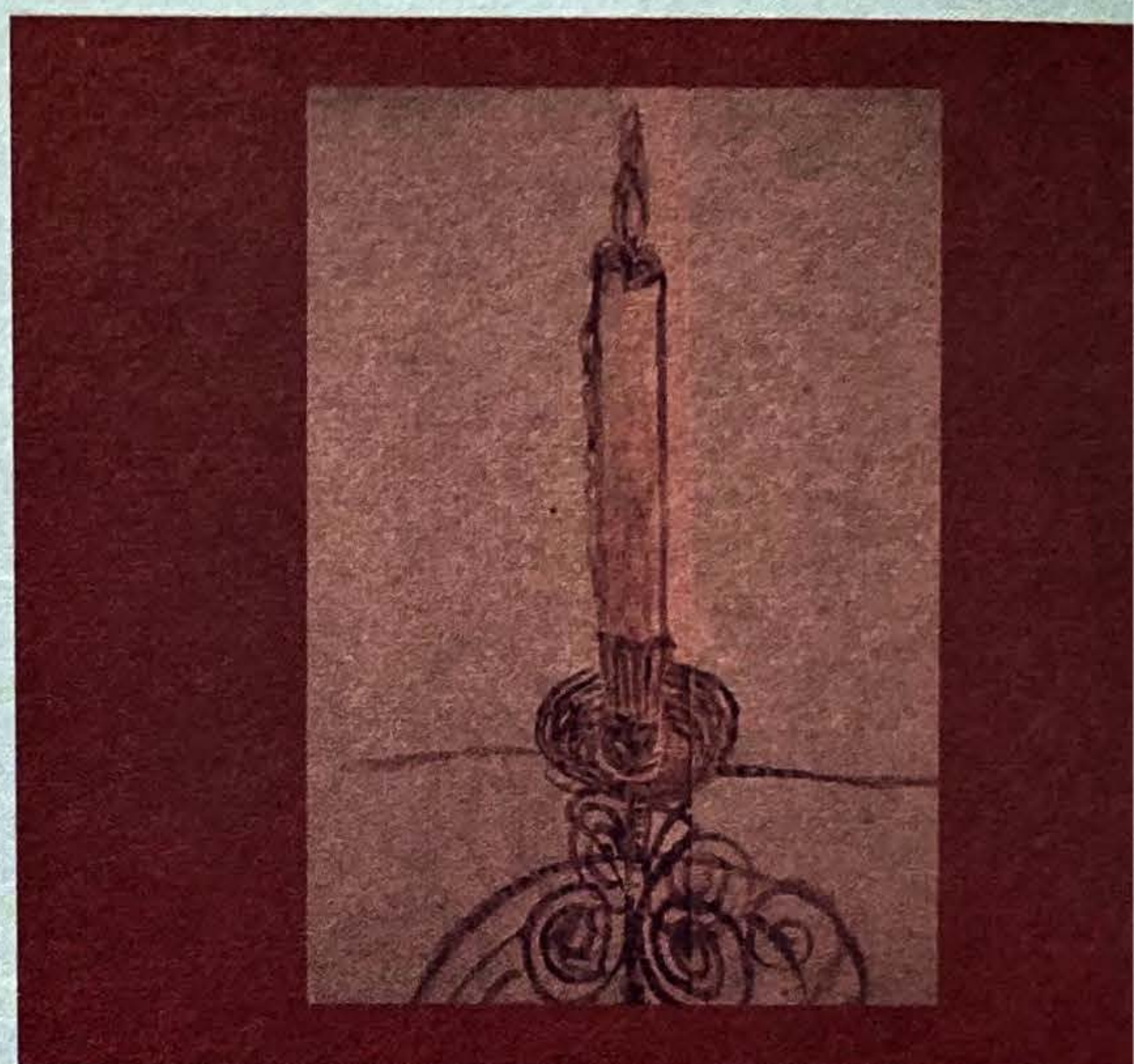
seemingly simple and subtle compositions display the effects of a piano student's repeated gestures—lines or circles populate a drawing on butcher paper. They also speak (or perhaps more appropriately, re-write) the language of music—the rigid, horizontal lines of a music staff recede into the whiteness of common office paper. Most importantly, the drawings in *audio visual* investigate the privileging of visual over aural information. They question an approach to music that depends on logic and order by literally bending and twisting music's visual vocabulary. They reveal the aesthetics of written sound by liberating notes and lines from the strict and severe structure of the music staff.

The simplicity and subtlety of Ms. Lawrence's drawings contradicts their complex processes and conceptual foundations. The artist's drawing process often involves light projection and photocopying, thus allowing her to flatten the appearance of notes and letters until they seem to lie down and curve into themselves. In many cases, she photocopies directly from the piano lesson workbook she used as a child. For *Untitled Black #2* (2001), she transforms a series of whole notes from full, round circles at the top of the page into narrow, oblong shapes and finally into thin lines at the bottom of the page. She further manipulates the image by creating a negative of the common music sheet: a heavy, black background presses white whole notes into silence. Ms. Lawrence reconfigures the pristine, disinterested music of her early piano lessons into a passionate and subjective gesture. *Untitled Black #2* looks the way music *feels*. The notes are irregular and restless, their tempo unpredictable.

The artist also reconfigures notions of time and meter, for the language of music is the language of time. Symbols and notes and lines act as minute and second hands counting out beats. In *audio visual*, however, the precise counting of a metronome is figuratively bent, inverted, and warped. For example, in a group of small drawings entitled *Isolated Lines* (2001), the artist collapses the lines of a music staff onto each other until they slowly disappear. Empty spaces interrupt and eventually overwhelm the beats normally communicated on a music staff.

audio visual includes earlier drawings that betray a similar interest in the passage of time. The “Candle Drawing Series” (1999) consists of ten drawings created once a month during the artist’s menstrual cycle and drawn with the artist’s own menstrual blood. Each month, Ms. Lawrence lit the same candle and drew it as it melted; the flow of the wax prevented her from capturing a fixed moment. While the artist glanced from the candle to the drawing paper, the movement of the melting wax changed the appearance of the candle. As a result, each drawing depicts the candle in several consecutive stages at once—an impossible “snapshot.” The series is an elaborate examination of the futile attempt to capture time, communicated simultaneously through the melting candle, the process of drawing the melting candle, and the cycles of the artist’s body. Though an apparent “still life,” the “Candle Drawing Series” is quite the opposite: an image in and of flux.

Ms. Lawrence’s time-centered works are reminiscent of Hanne Darboven’s



calendrical counting journals, with the hand of the artist emphasized in wavy, calligraphic line. The grids and geometric shapes that reappear throughout the exhibition resemble the Minimalist paintings of Agnes Martin or the conceptual installations of Sol LeWitt. The piano drawings fit into a trajectory of artists throughout the twentieth century who created abstract and Minimalist art and relied heavily on music, admiring it as a “pure” form of abstraction. The music written onto Ms. Lawrence’s drawings could be that of John Cage or Miles Davis, with sparse and irregular notes intermingling with sounds of the environment.

The work in *audio visual* occupies a space of tension. It hangs playfully on the wall attached with thin, fragile pins, floating between the wall and the viewer. Its inspiration is structure and regularity, but its form is fluid and uncertain. It balances between chaos and rationality. It rests comfortably on the precipice between audio and visual.

—Heather Murray



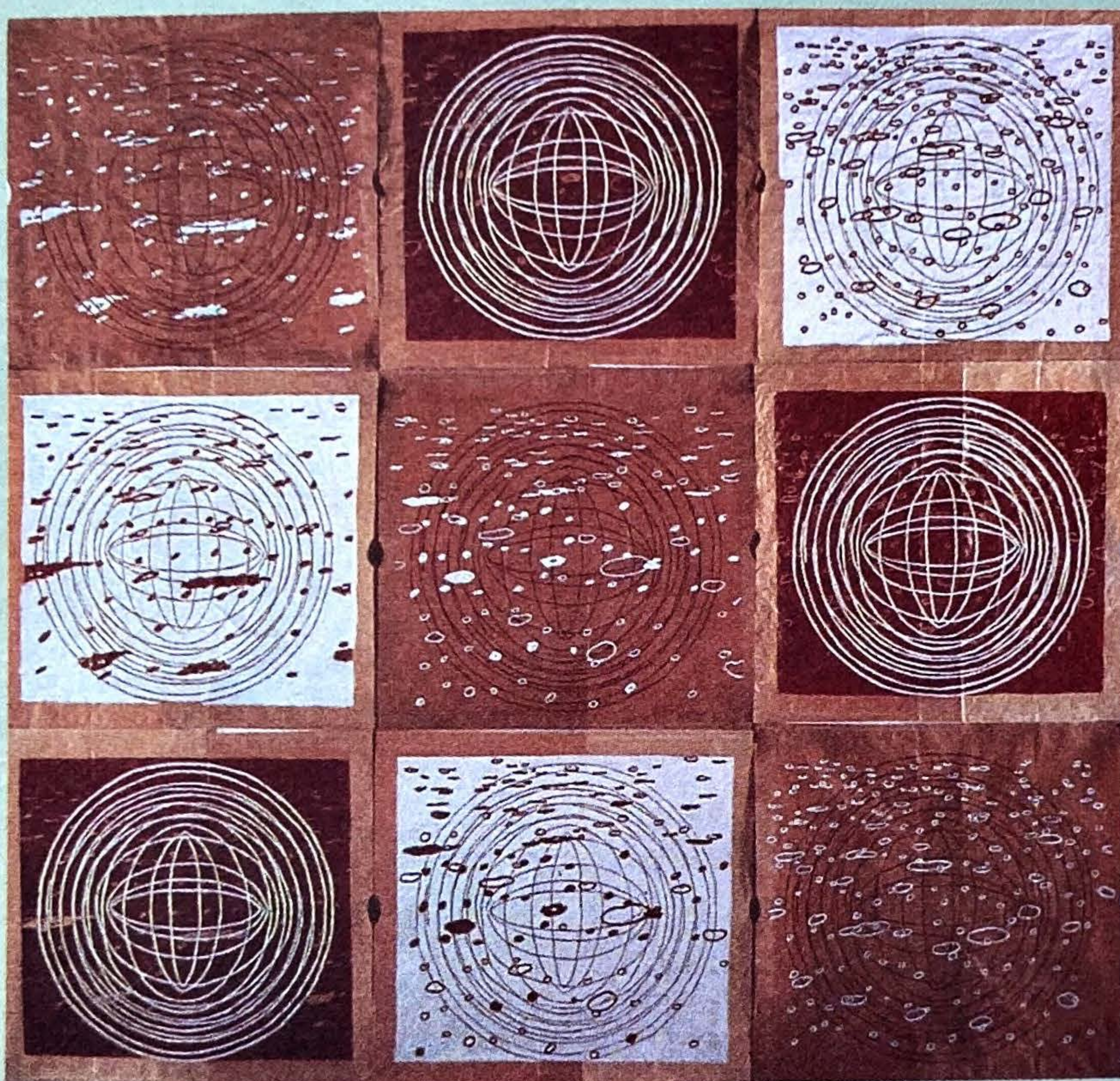
left to right: *Candle Drawing Series*, 5/27/1999, 5/27/1999, 2/13/1999

biography

Annette Lawrence, born in 1965 in Rockville Center, New York, is an artist who works in a broad range of media including drawing, painting, sculpture, installation and performance. Selected solo exhibitions include "Annette Lawrence" at the Arthur Roger Gallery in New Orleans (2001); "Transparent/Opaque" at the University of Michigan Museum of Art in Ann Arbor (2000); "First Dance" at the Dallas Visual Arts Center (1999); "Annette Lawrence" at the African American Museum in Dallas (1998); and "Recent Works" at the Bag Factory in Johannesburg, South Africa (1998). She has participated in group shows at the Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas at Austin (2002); the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston (1997); and the Whitney Biennial Exhibition in New York (1997). Her work is held in the collections of the Jack S. Blanton Museum, the Dallas Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, and the American Airlines Corporation. Ms. Lawrence earned her MFA in 1990 from the Maryland Institute College of Art, and a BFA from the University of Hartford, Connecticut. Since 1996 she is a Professor of Drawing and Painting at the University of North Texas in Denton, where she works and lives.

acknowledgements

Sincere thanks are extended to Annette Lawrence for her patience and generosity as artist, teacher, and friend. The staff of the Sweeney Art Gallery, and especially Heather Murray, who began to organize this show as a UCR graduate student and finished the project as a guest curator, deserve special mention. This exhibition was made possible with funding from the UCR Graduate Student Association, the UCR Center for Ideas and Society, and the Sweeney Art Gallery membership. Additional support was provided by the Dunn and Brown Contemporary Gallery in Dallas, Texas and by the University of North Texas in Denton. Several UCR faculty members also lent their energy and enthusiasm to the groundwork of the show: Amelia Jones and Patricia Morton, both in the Department of the History of Art, and Edgar Arceneaux in the Studio Art Department. Finally, Ms. Lawrence wishes to express her gratitude to Gail and A.C. Lawrence, her parents.



Red Ellipse, 2002

checklist of the exhibition

- Red Ellipse, 2002, acrylic & graphite on paper, 2 1/2' X 2 1/2' ea. (9 sections)*
- Isolated Notes, 2001, ink on paper, 8 1/2" X 11" ea. (9 sections)*
- Isolated Lines, 2001, ink on paper, 8 1/2" X 11" ea. (9 sections)*
- Isolated Letters, 2001, ink on paper, 8 1/2" X 11" ea. (9 sections)*
- Untitled Black #1, 2001, photocopy & acrylic on paper, 17" X 26"*
- Untitled Black #2, 2001, photocopy & acrylic on paper, 17" X 26"*
- Untitled Black #3, 2001, photocopy & acrylic on paper, 17" X 26"*
- Music Lessons, 2001, photocopy & acrylic on paper, 16" X 20" ea. (21 sections)*
- Perspective Music Lessons, 2001, photocopy & acrylic on paper, 16" X 20" ea. (21 sections)*
- 2X Perspective Music Lessons, 2001, photocopy & acrylic on paper, 16" X 20" ea. (21 sections)*
- Black Transfer, 2001, photocopy & acrylic on paper, 2' X 3' ea. (3 sections)*
- White Under Black Transfer, 2001, photocopy & acrylic on paper, 2' X 3' ea. (3 sections)*
- Pre Theory #1, 2001, acrylic & graphite on paper, 40 1/2" X 48"*
- Pre Theory #2, 2001, acrylic & graphite on paper, 38 1/2" X 48"*
- Duo, 2001, acrylic & graphite on paper, 38" X 28" ea. (2 sections)*
- Solo, 2001, acrylic & graphite on paper, 38" X 27"*
- Candle Drawing Series, 1999, mixed media on paper, dimensions vary (10 sections)*
- 11/97-11/98, 1998, mixed media on paper, 30" X 14"*
- Grid Broken Spiral, 1996, acrylic on paper, 68" X 66"*

■ SWEENEY ART GALLERY ■

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE

Sweeney Art Gallery-128
Watkins House
University of California, Riverside
900 University Avenue
Riverside, CA 92521

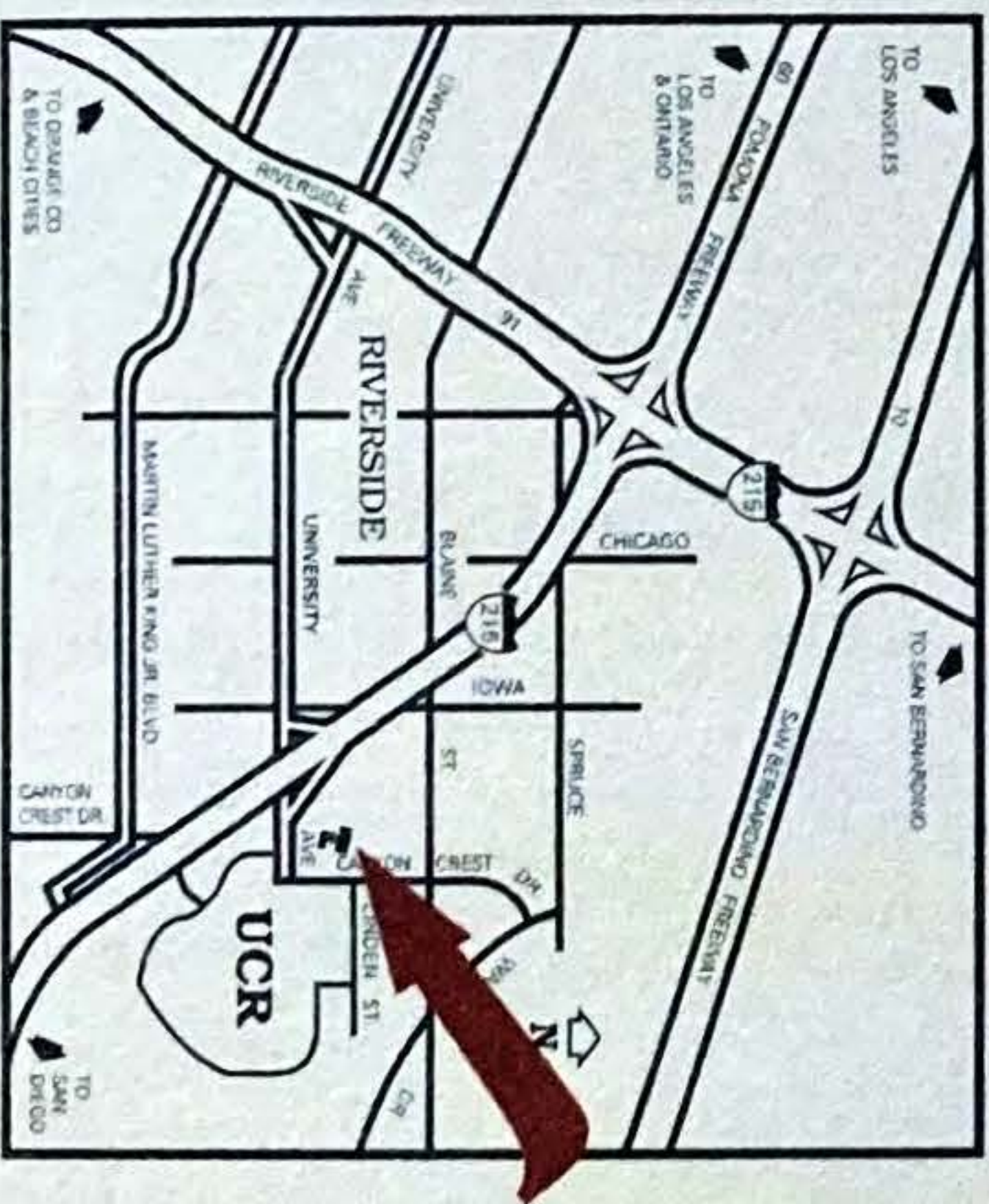
audio visual:
drawings by Annette Lawrence
September 25 – December 8, 2002

Friday, October 18
4 to 6 pm, reception
6 to 7 pm, artist's talk

Off Beat

live jazz at the Gallery
mid-November, date & time tba

hours: Wednesday–Friday 11-4
Saturday & Sunday 12-4
website: sweeney.ucr.edu
phone: 909/787-3755
visit us in Watkins House,
across from the campus on Canyon Crest Dr.



front cover: *Untitled Black #2* (detail), 2001

Drawn to the surface

The Annette Lawrence exhibit at UCR features several separate bodies of the artist's work

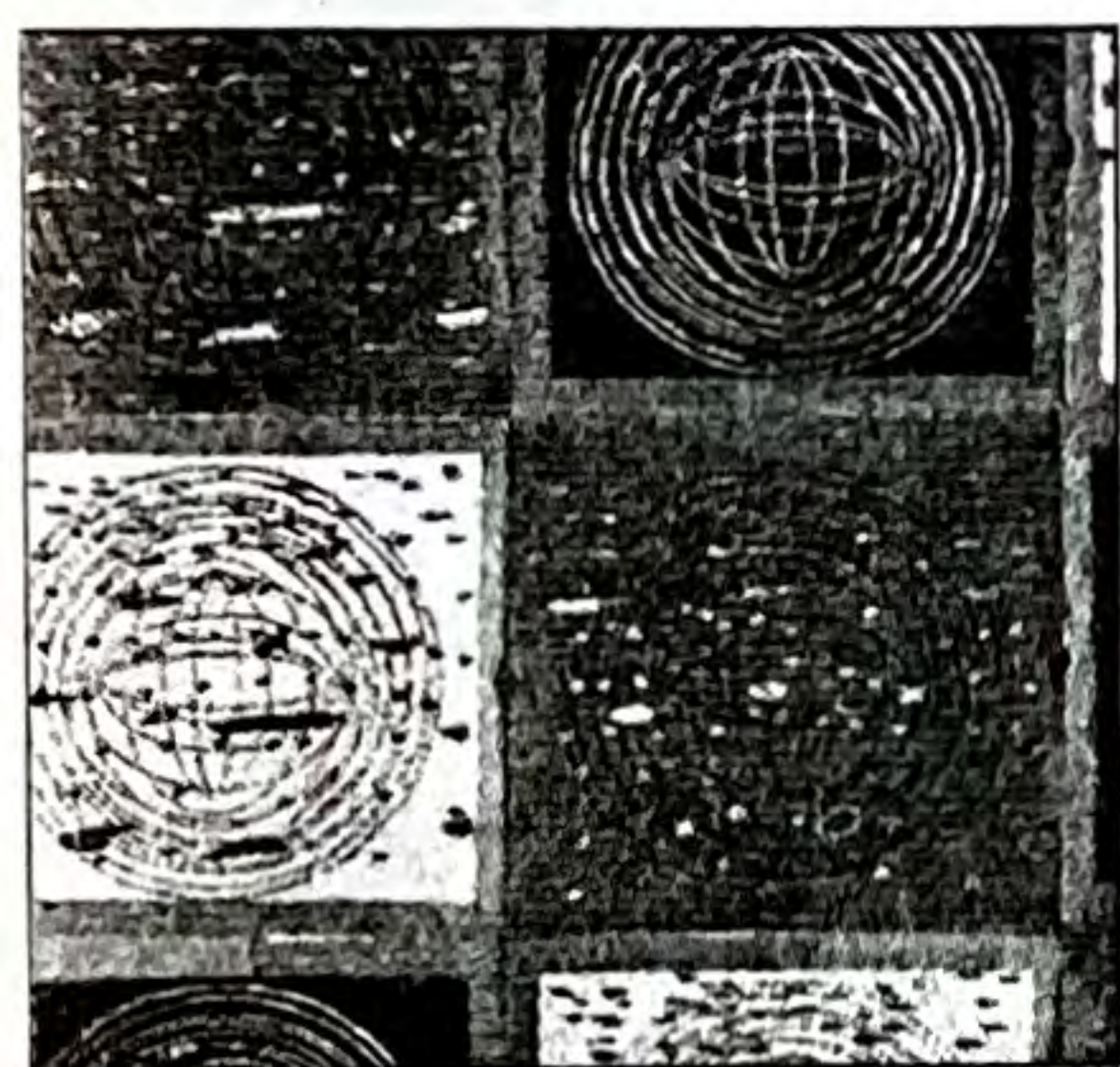
BY DEVORAH L. KNAFF
THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE
RIVERSIDE

There's something about the works of Annette Lawrence, a Texas artist who is having her first West Coast solo show at UC Riverside's Sweeney Art Gallery, that makes you want to stroke them.

Her flat, almost dull surfaces seem to draw in light, like a table polished for generations, like an old portrait whose surface is more cracked darkness than distinguishable forms, like the fur of a jaguar.

Which is odd, because her works are not particularly dark in tone. The magic in her work lies entirely in what occurs on the surface.

The Sweeney show includes pieces drawn from several separate bodies of work, including a new series by the artist. In "audio visual," Lawrence has transformed sheet music — tak-



"Red Ellipse," a sequence of nine panels in which each square contains a connection of overlapping ellipses.

REVIEW

"audio visual: Drawings by Annette Lawrence"

When: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesdays through Fridays, noon to 4 p.m. weekends, through Dec. 8.

Where: UCR/Sweeney Art Gallery, 3701 Canyon Crest Drive, Riverside.

Admission: Free

Information: (909) 787-3755.

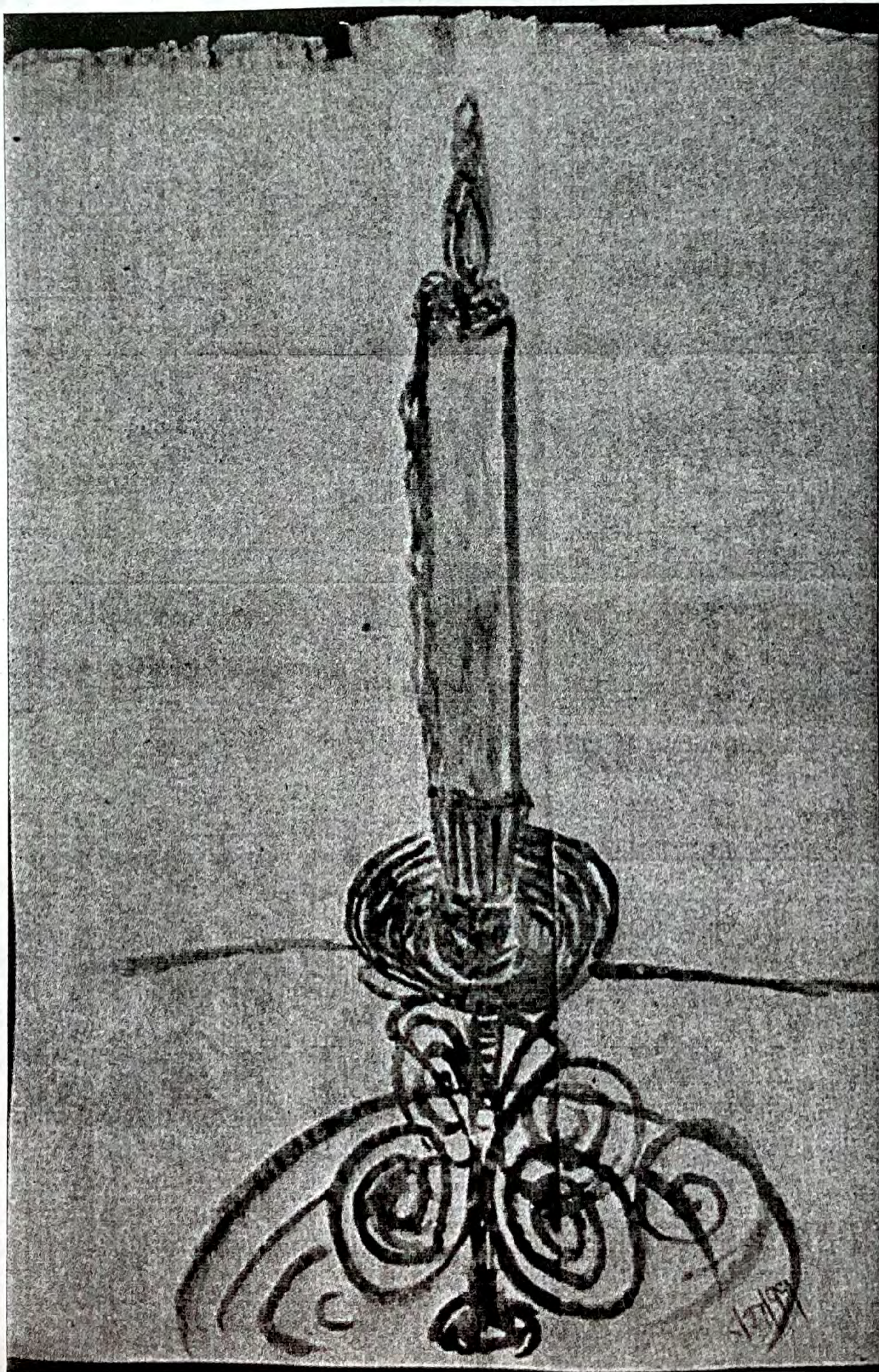
On the Internet: sweeney.ucr.edu/

en from her own childhood piano lessons — into an investigation of the ways in which we attempt to capture sound on paper and the ways in which sound itself is transformed by our attempts to freeze it in time.

One piece that covers an entire wall of the gallery consists of sheets of enlarged musical notation — as if the repetitions of a child's practice had come to life. At the edges of the work, the notes subside into blank paper, as if they were truly music falling into silence.

It's an intriguing representation of

PLEASE SEE ART, F7



UCR/SWEENEY ART GALLERY

The exhibit also includes works from other series, including pieces from Lawrence's 1999 "Candle Drawings."

THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2002

F8

ART

CONTINUED FROM F8

sound in a medium that has nothing to do with sound, with notes twisted and torqued on the page to express something of the aural life that they might have if actually played.

The work is almost painful, for we have the impression of music trapped in a universe in which only sight matters. This is related in some way to that curious attraction that the surfaces of her work possess. It is as if she had someone reduce the world into a visual representation that exists only at that impossibly thin meniscus where the eye meets the surface of an artwork.

One can't help but wonder how the piece would play to those who cannot hear. It seems such a perfect translation of sound into a visual medium for those who know what music sounds like: It would be fascinating to know what it might convey of the world of music to those who cannot experience a piano's voice firsthand.

The exhibit also includes works from other series, including pieces drawn from Lawrence's 1999 "Candle Drawings." The work is in fact a series of drawn candles — this much is obvious. What is not obvious is that the works have been drawn in the artist's own menstrual blood and that both the subject and the medium are for the artist emblems both of time's passing and the deeply human desire to depict that passage.

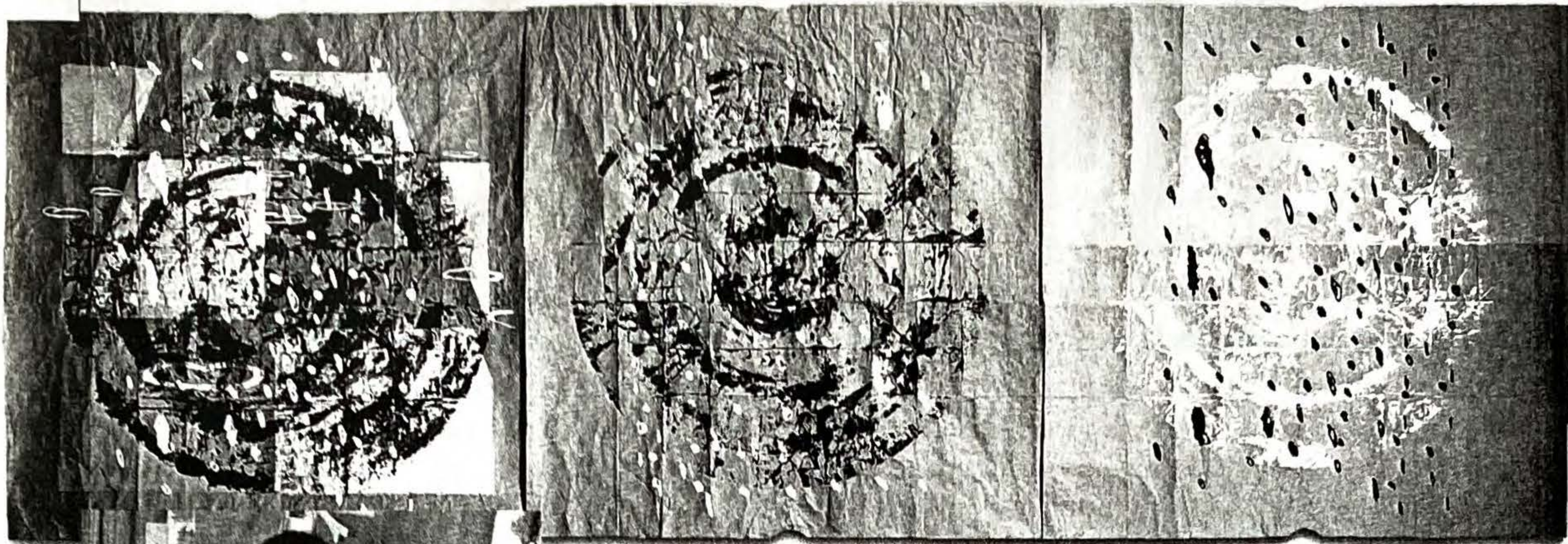
The candle in each image is the same one, lit by Lawrence each month. The candle melts before us, shifting in front of our eyes even as it shifted before the artist's eyes, even as her body changed.

The conjunction of the candle, which burns and dissolves in a purely linear way and the artist's body — which both ages in a linear fashion but also renews itself each month, provides a complex

metaphor for the ways in which humans consume and are consumed by time.

Still other works are almost entirely abstract, such as the large piece titled "Red Ellipse" that seems to be a sequence of nine panels — arranged rather like a

cosmic tic-tac-toe board — washed in white and a sort of corally-brown. Each square contains a concatenation of overlapping ellipses that might be atomic structures or planetary orbits — things either too small for us to see in reality or far too vast.



LEFT: Artist Annette Lawrence, shown in her home studio, teaches at UNT.

UNRAVELING THE ARTIST

*The enigmatic art of Annette Lawrence
connects to her past*

by Steve Carter | photos by John Smith

Annette Lawrence, an artist who's equally comfortable drawing, painting, sculpting or creating an installation, is reluctant to single out one medium as a favorite mode of expression. "Well, there's just a few materials ... brown paper, acrylic paint; black, white, indigo and iron-oxide red specifically," she answers. "And string, packing tape, and Velcro.

"Those are just a few things I actually use."

Missing from the list, however, is one key element, an essential clue to understanding the scope and thematic nexus of her work: time.

Whether she's chronicling her childhood music lessons in "Piano," a recent exhibit at Dallas' Dunn and Brown Contemporary; tracing her ancestors in "Lineage," a series of 13 drawings; or creating a string sculpture installation in a gallery, university or abandoned row house; there's a poignant evanescence of temporality that connects the dots of Lawrence's art.

"I think it's what we have, you know?" Lawrence suggests. "That's pretty much it, so I'm really interested in how that is recorded, and the way that stories are told, what stories get told, and what's an important enough story to tell. And having real small things that are regular occurrences, and observing those things seems to me to

be a worthwhile thing to do," she says, echoing the metaphysics of Blake's "to see a world in a grain of sand."

A native New Yorker, Lawrence discovered art when she took a drawing class at age 12. "I just liked the activity, enough to commit to it," she recalls. "In that class, I said, 'this is what I want to do,' and that was it. I've done it ever since."

After high school, she completed her bachelor's of fine arts degree in sculpture at the University of Hartford in Connecticut; she earned her master's of fine arts, in painting, at the Maryland Institute College of Art. Having lived on the East Coast her whole life, the artist was ready for a warm climate, a change of scenery, and thought it might be nice to be near Mexico. She had heard Austin's praises sung by students she had known in graduate school, so she made it her first destination.

Within a few months, job opportunities called her to Houston. Adjunct teaching at the University of Houston and Houston Community College kept her busy, but she was able to maintain a studio practice and exhibit regularly. In 1993 and 1994 she was a Core Fellow at Houston's Museum of Fine Arts Glassell School of Art, a nationally acclaimed Artist-in-Residence program.

After five and a half years in Houston, she moved to Denton and the University of North Texas' studio arts faculty in 1996. Soft-spoken and articulate, teaching painting and drawing agrees with her, as does "the opportunity to talk about art all day."

Earlier this year, Dunn and Brown Contemporary in Dallas presented "Piano," a one-person exhibition of Lawrence's recent paintings and drawings. The genesis of the series is rooted in the artist's childhood, specifically her seventh year, when she was subjected to eight months of piano lessons.

"I didn't like the lessons, I didn't find it satisfying musically," she remembers. "There was a real disconnection between the written part and the reading and the technical stuff that didn't connect to sound; there wasn't any listening involved, it wasn't emphasized."

Lawrence had been mulling over the idea of a large-scale project which involved musical notation as a visual language, and had been searching for manuscripts of John Coltrane and Thelonious Monk, but without success. While visiting her parents, she found the inspiration she needed: her piano lesson book, a musical journal from her childhood. "It had been in my parents'

piano bench for almost 30 years. It made sense to me — it was my own handwriting, at the age of 7, and it was music notation...The printed version of a score, to me, doesn't feel very musical. But handwriting has a different feeling altogether, more of a lyrical, visual presence. It was like one of those moments — 'eureka!'

Back in her studio, Lawrence pored over the pages, eventually developing a methodology for manipulating the raw material. In an effort to make the works move, she explains that "I made slides and projected them and started drawing them at a very

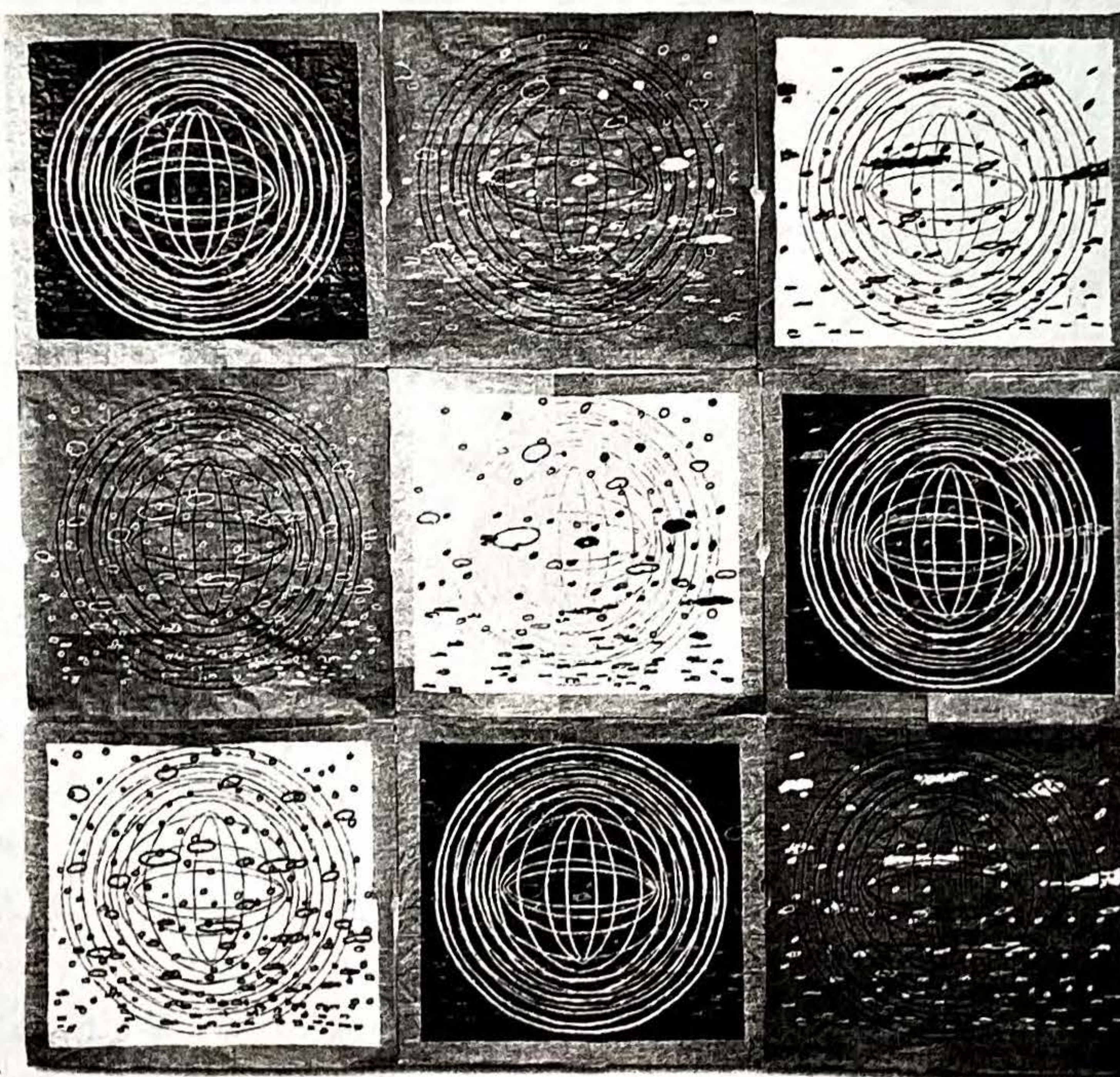
sharp angle, which caused the page to shift a little, and then I did it again. So I have these two perspective shifts in the series." The overall effect of the "Music Lessons" collection, some 63 pieces in all, and which dominated a wall at Dunn and Brown, is breathtaking — shimmering, mysterious and strangely familiar.

The artist is nationally known for her string installations, which have graced museums in Dallas, Houston, Ann Arbor and elsewhere. Using only postal cord, brown paper, fabric fasteners and packing tape, Lawrence weaves a site-specific geometric sculpture of monumental proportions.

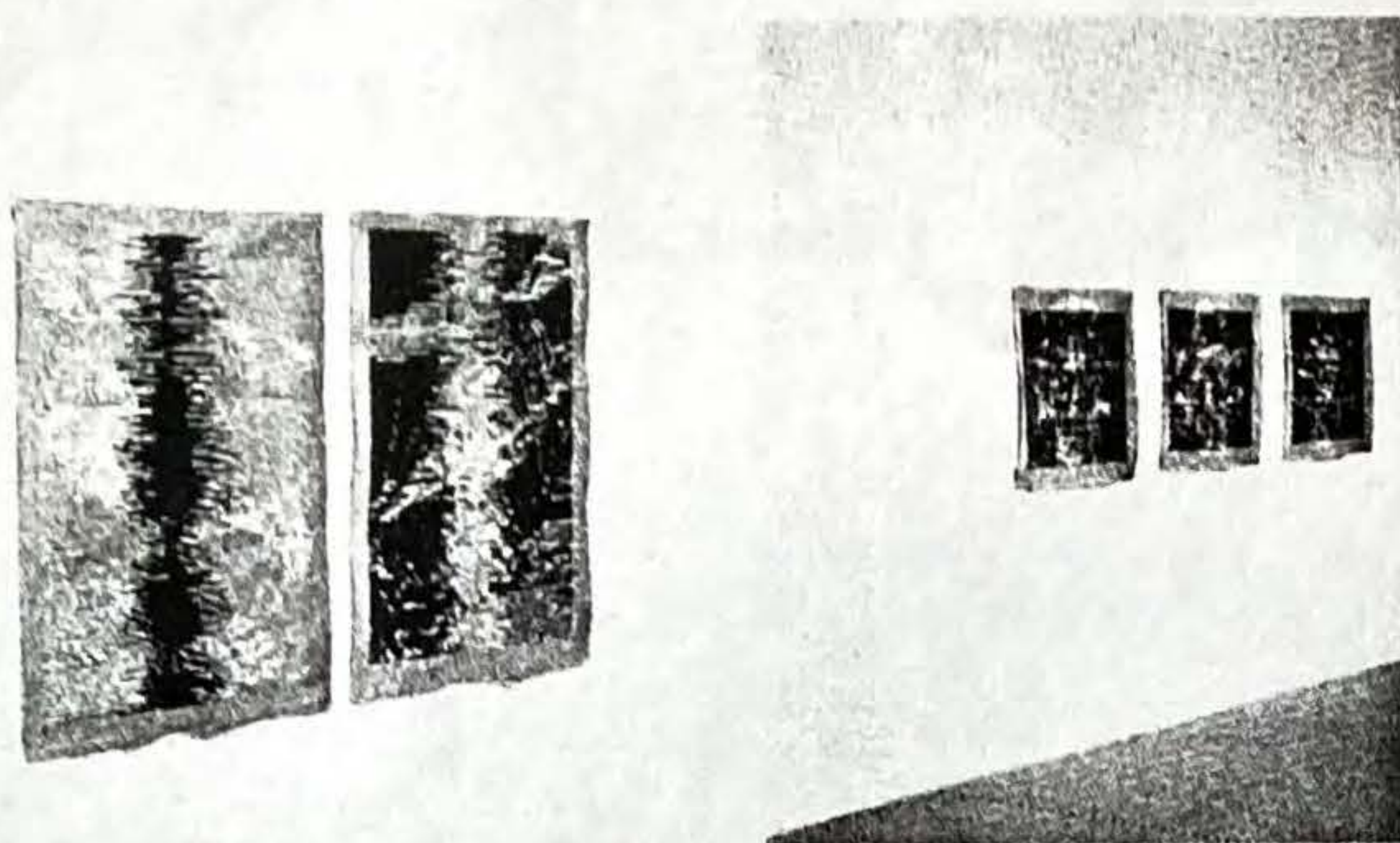
The end results have reminded some viewers of the Brooklyn Bridge, a boxing ring, a stringed instrument, or light diffused by prisms; it's impossible not to be awestruck. "I'm responding to the architecture, and usually the space is quite large," she explains. "I want the piece to make you experience that particular place differently than you ordinarily would."

An exception to the grand scale of most of the string pieces was an early installation

in an abandoned "shotgun" row house (a style which features a central hallway, with roots in Africa, the Caribbean and the South) in Houston, as part of "Project Row Houses." Organized by Houston artist Rick Lowe, her contributions to the project had an "in-your-face" immediacy that demanded viewer collaboration. "Those spaces were nice and compact; when you're in there you have to interact with the string somehow," Lawrence notes. "You have to move in the space in a certain way, and that's what the string work is about, more than the size — how you have to physically be there."



ABOVE: "Red Ellipse" from the Piano exhibit formerly housed at Dunn and Brown Contemporary.



ABOVE: The key to the "Piano" series? Childhood music lessons.

Despite the apparent abstraction of some of Lawrence's work, there's always a unique significance underlying it, at once personally relevant and universal. Her paintings and drawing frequently incorporate dates, symbols, mathematical allusions, and text; grids, geometric patterns and spirals are also part of the artist's language. Her fascination with the passage of time, and the commemoration of it, has given wing to "11/97-11/98," "Moons," "The Ancestors and the Womb," and "Lineage." In the latter, she explored her family history in a series of portraits; superimposed on each was her own silhouetted likeness — the artist as observer, creator and heir.

Widely acknowledged as one of the most important artists of her generation, Lawrence has been celebrated nationally and internationally; most significantly she was included in the 1997 Whitney Biennial Exhibition in New York. In addition to the Core Fellowship from the Glassell School of Art, she was the recipient of the Camille Hanks Cosby Fellowship for African-American Artists from the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. She also has been an artist-in-residence at the Fordsburg Artists' Studios in Johannesburg, South Africa, and through the Texas Commission on the Arts. Her exhibitions are numerous and widespread, from Dallas to New Orleans, Houston to Johannesburg and New York.

In the near future, look for a string installation at Dallas' McKinney Avenue Contemporary, group shows in San Antonio, Fort Worth, and the occasional lecture or workshop. Lawrence has applied for a grant for free studio space in New York City. If she's awarded the grant, she could return to the East Coast for a time.

"There seems to be interest developing in my work in New York," the artist says. And although the possibility of a New York studio is an exciting one, she admits ruefully to dreading the winter. "I can't tell you how much."

a very selective
consignment showplace

•
eclectic and one of a kind
pieces of art, furniture,
accessories, and gifts
•

2914 oak lawn ave

dallas, tx 75219

214. 219.5656

www.mydulce.com

Dulce
interior consignment showplace
& Art Gallery



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

Fluent-Collaborative

Rebecca S. Cohen

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.

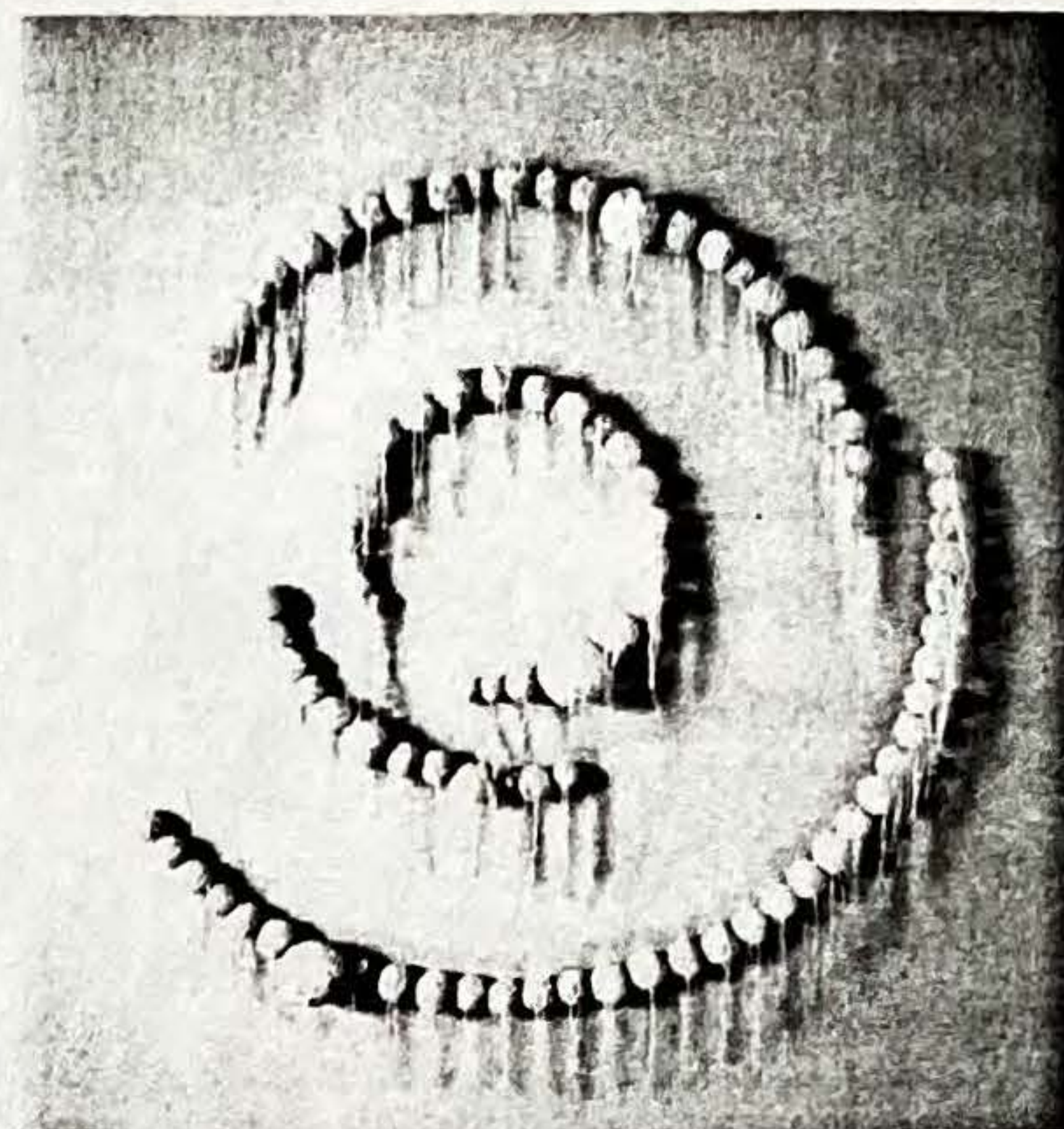
Color prints depicting several of these previous installations are available on the coffee table at *testsite*. With these keys, visitors can knowledgeably travel through time, following the thread of Lawrence's career while sitting in the physical presence of the remnants of these projects.

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.

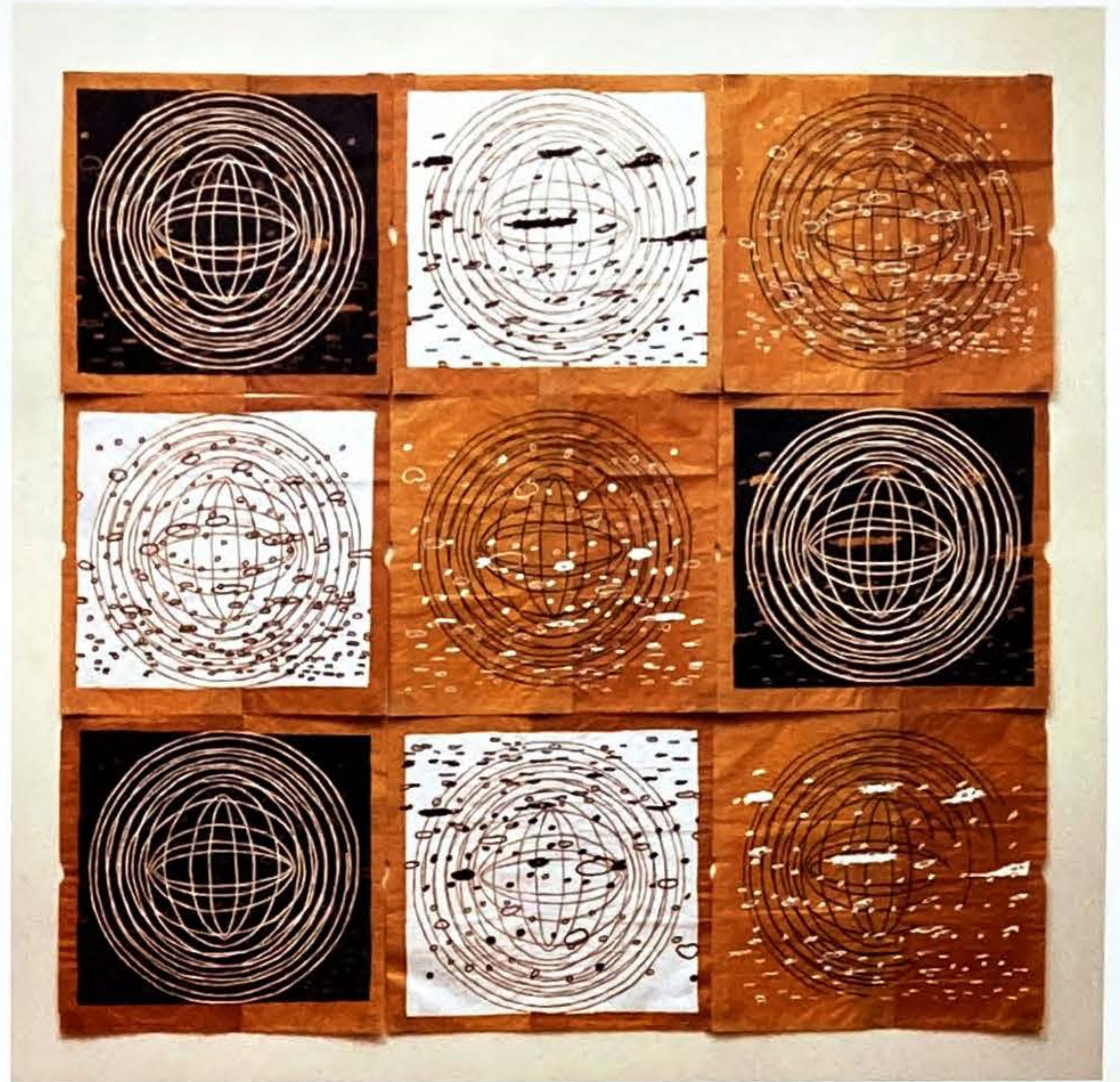
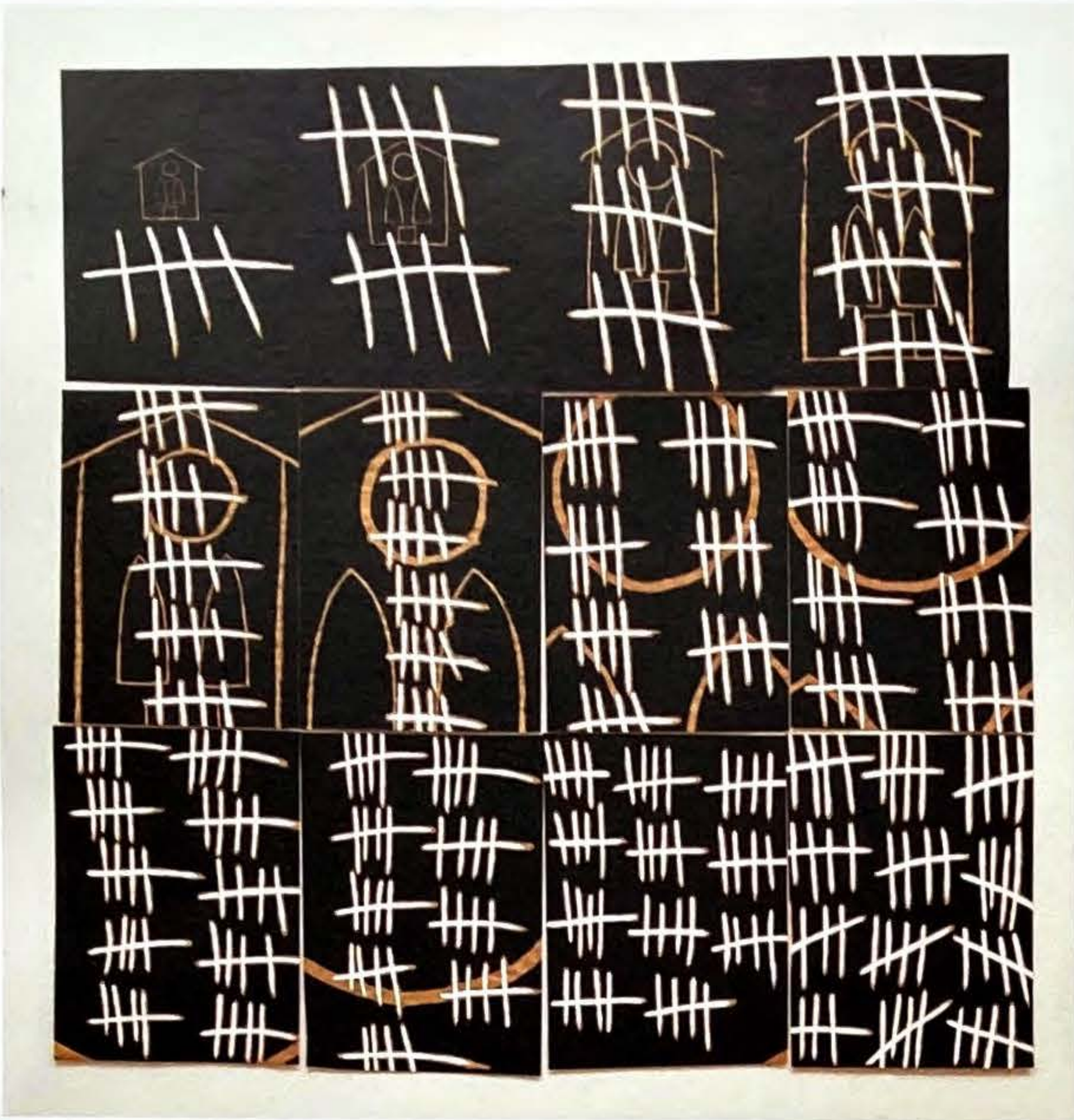
In the next room, catalogs written by Carlozzi about Lawrence and others are available for perusal. This educational component feels exactly right but unfortunately, the continuous loop of Sisnett's recorded voice makes concentrating on Carlozzi's insightful writing difficult. And if there is an outright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

CONVERSATION **PIECE**

Conduit's Annette Lawrence survey traces her ever-evolving artistic fascinations, a journey that's far from over.

BY STEVE CARTER



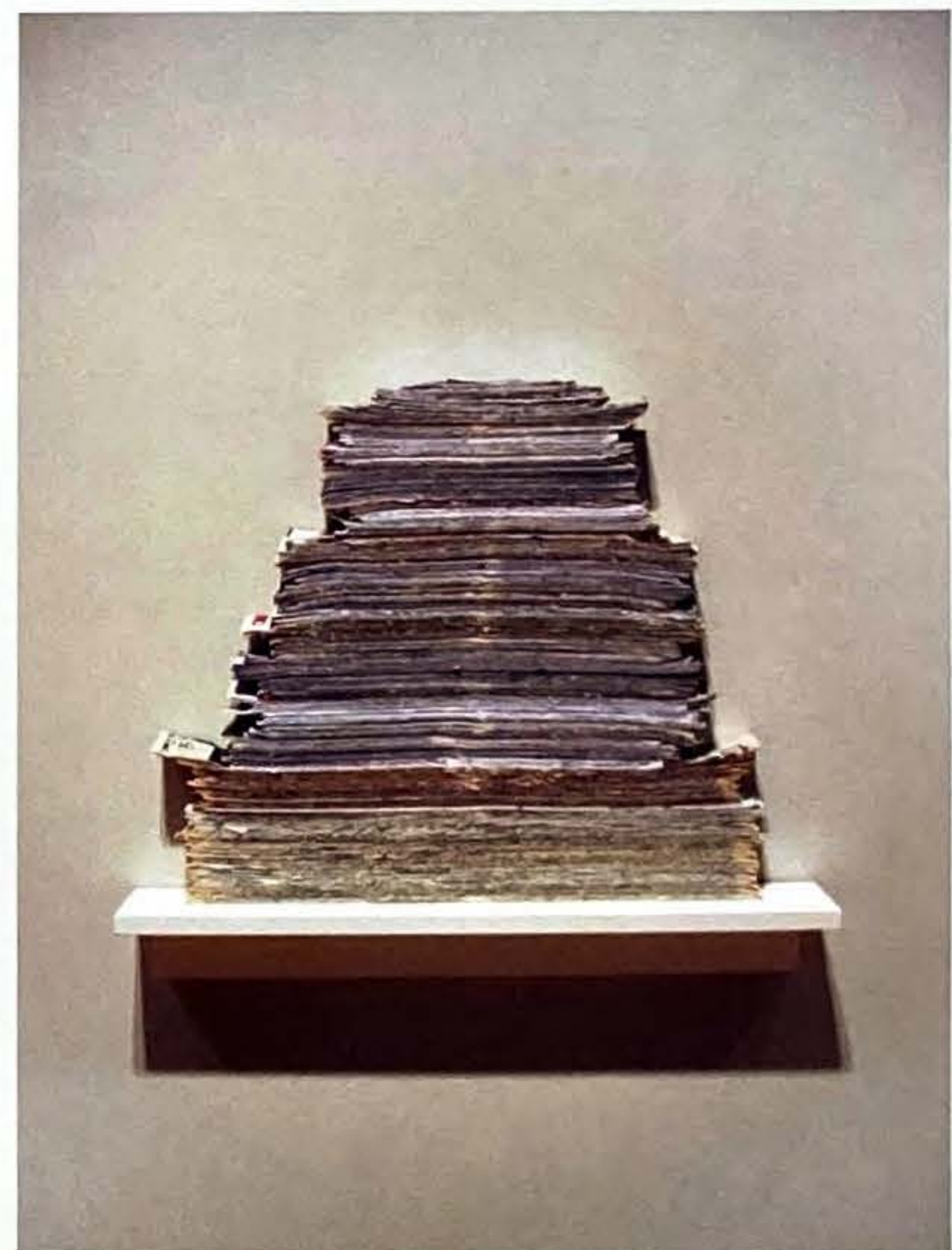


A career survey mandates an artist to revisit, reassess, and process their history. It's a family reunion, time travel, chapters on parade, a greatest hits collection. In the case of Conduit Gallery's upcoming Annette Lawrence survey, *Indeterminate Conversations*, featuring works from 1990 to 2006, it's all of the above, a celebration of Lawrence's restless explorations; the exhibit runs from October 9 through November 13.

"Each of the pieces has been shown before, but never together, so I'm wanting to see what that looks like, when they're in conversation with each other," Lawrence says. And the intriguing title? "I really like the word 'indeterminate'—it means that something has value that can't exactly be named, and it leaves things open. I think that's how conversations ought to be," she says with a laugh.

Indeterminate Conversations marks the artist's third solo show at Conduit; she's been with them since 2016. A New York native, Lawrence has lived in Denton since 1996 and is a faculty member at the University of North Texas' College of Visual Arts and Design. When she recently accepted a visiting faculty position at Vermont's Bennington College, she invited Conduit owner/director Nancy Whitenack to her studio to review her earlier work, sowing the seed for this survey. In her two visits, "We just went through everything," Whitenack says. "It was clear to me after the first visit that we had to do something with this—it merited doing something serious. So I suggested to Annette that we do a survey show, and she was all for that." Surprises in reviewing the 16 years of output? "The early work was really quite bold," Whitenack observes. "She used a lot of black and white, and images were drawn at a larger scale and then outlined, most always done on brown paper. There was an intensity to the images."

The earliest work in the show dates to 1990, an epic piece that was Lawrence's MFA thesis at the Maryland Institute College of Art. *Wallpaper* originally comprised 18 panels, but in this iteration, it's limited to nine. Even in its edited form it's stunning; Lawrence

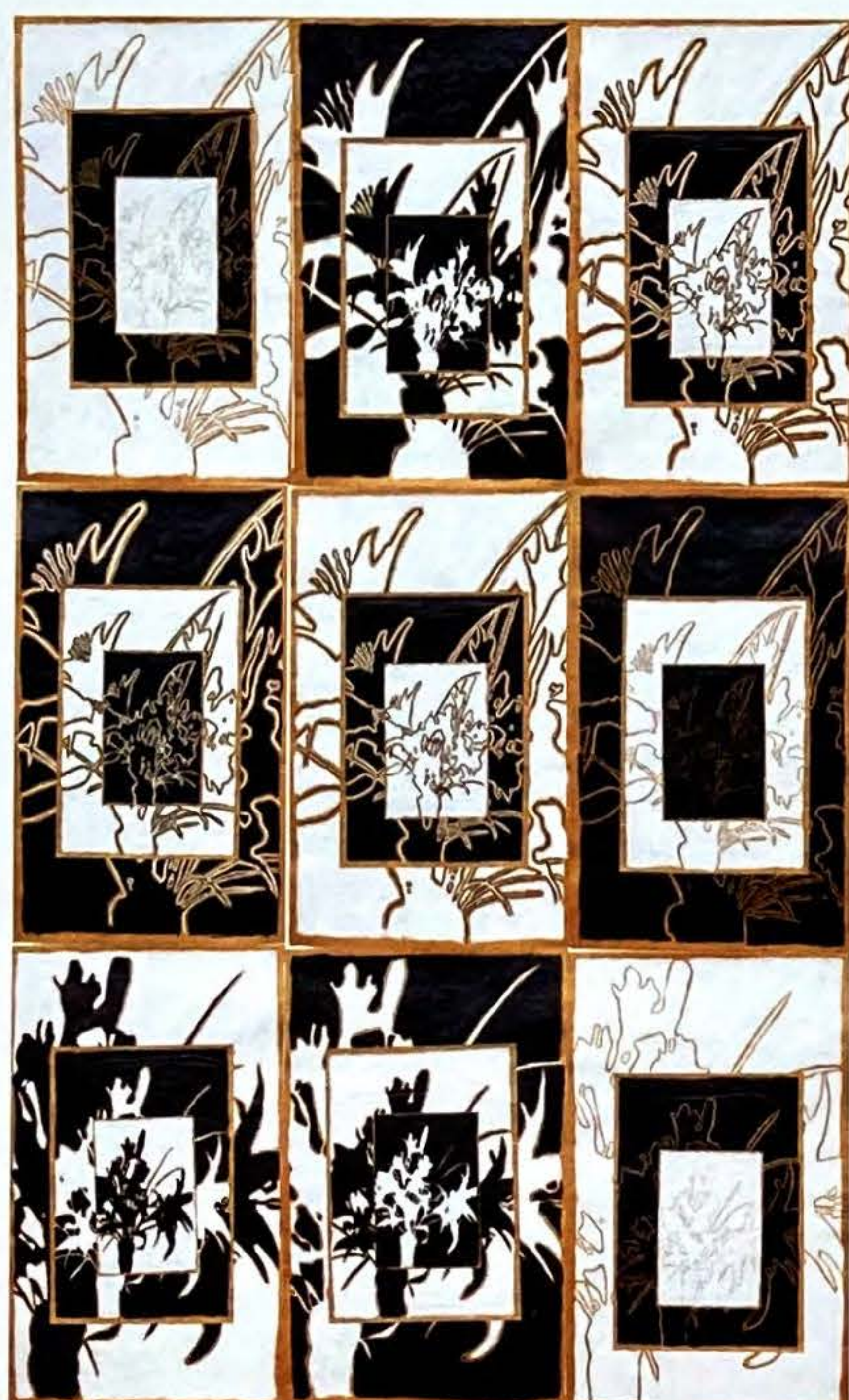


Above, left to right: Annette Lawrence, *Phoenix*, 1996, acrylic and graphite on paper, 78 x 74 in. Photograph Tesa Morin; Annette Lawrence, *Indigo Ellipse*, 2004, acrylic and graphite on paper, 88.5 x 93 in. Photograph by Kevin Todora. Below: Annette Lawrence, *Free Paper 6 / 06*, 2006, paper, glue, and wood, 27 x 25 x 2 in.



Annette Lawrence, *The Ancestors and the Womb I*, 1995, paper, acrylic, and pencil on wood, 48 x 36 in.; Annette Lawrence, *The Ancestors and the Womb III*, 1995, paper, acrylic, and pencil on wood, 48 x 36 in.; Annette Lawrence, *The Ancestors and the Womb V*, 1995, paper, acrylic, and pencil on wood, 48 x 36 in. All exhibited in the 1997 Whitney Biennial. Courtesy of the artist and Conduit Gallery.

manipulating an image of a flower's shadow through theme and variations. Looking back, she acknowledges *Wallpaper* as a seminal turning point in her practice. "I think of it as the origins of my using systems as a way of generating work," she assesses. "At the time it was just an idea—one thing led to the next led to the next. Now I see that that's really how I work...I'm always turning this thing I'm looking at—looking at it *this* way, turning it a little more, looking at it *that* way."



Annette Lawrence, *Wallpaper*, 1990, acrylic and graphite on paper, as shown 150 x 114 in. Courtesy of the artist and Conduit Gallery.

Phoenix, (1996), is a starkly somber commemoration of the epidemic of Black church burnings that plagued America in 1995 and 1996. The piece's black fields are populated with symbols—simplistic icons of churches and people—and strewn with cross-like tally mark counts in fives. Lawrence was outraged by the lack of outcry the arsons garnered, and *Phoenix* was her response. "Why wasn't this being treated like an act of terror?" she recalls thinking. "What number of burnings would make it a crisis—100? 200? But with each one of these instances, the communities rallied together and supported each other and proved that the church is not the building—the church is the people."

A representative trio of Lawrence's 10-piece *The Ancestors and the Womb* (1996) is on view as well; the work was included in the 1997 Whitney Biennial. The three portraits aren't traditional, but rather silhouettes of the artist's grandmother on brown paper. A circular grid of dates chronicling Lawrence's menstrual cycle shares the page. It's transgenerational portraiture—part ancestry, part selfie. "It's the relationship between the unborn and those who have passed away, in the tradition of Yoruba," she explains. "You come from and go to the same place." The patterned background reflects her grandmother's quilts, and it's also a coded nod to the quilt communicating of the Underground Railroad.

Although her undergrad degree is in sculpture, Lawrence has worked nearly exclusively in two dimensions. In fact, the Texas Commission on the Arts named her 2021 State Artist of the year, Visual Artist, 2-D. But 3-D has stayed with her, and *Free Paper 11-05*, (2005) and *Free Paper 6-06*, (2006) are playful reminders. The wall sculptures are curiosities composed of precisely stacked strips of unsolicited mail and glue, each representing one month's accumulation. They're wonders of evanescence, monuments to insignificance, their profiles suggesting pre-Columbian pyramids. Lawrence has a long-established practice of repurposing materials into art—junk mail, brown paper bags, stacks of lists, childhood notebooks, journals, and more, the quotidian detritus of existence, the passage of time sacramentally memorialized. "I'm trying to elevate the thing that we take for granted, and also to see what *is*," she admits. "'Value' is a very subjective word, but it's assigned, and maybe too quickly, without enough consideration." Slow down and consider *Indeterminate Conversations*. **P**