

## UnRaveL V.1 – catalogue essay:

There are certain artists who not only test our sense of reality outside of a narrative context but also replace it with the disorientating disjunction of time, space and form. Such work is touched by the sublime – which by its very nature operates beyond the realm of narrative, the vastness of its imminence totally defeating narrative bounds[1].

*UnRaveL* by collaborative DavisThomas, is work that does challenge our sense of reality outside of a narrative, as it can manipulate the viewer's basic perceptions of time, space and the materiality of the object. *UnRaveL* is part of a series Sub-Line by Brisbane artists Adrian Davis and Lubi Thomas. Upon entering the gallery space the viewer is confronted by a large steel A-frame that supports a five thousand metre roll of recycled paper that is mechanically fed through a conveyor belt onto the floor of the gallery. This purpose-built mechanism is purely driven by function. It is the kinetic energy of the object that activates time and space and has the potential to evoke varying physical and psychological responses in the viewer.

DavisThomas typically work on a large scale combining immense sculptural components with ephemeral elements that enable them to explore temporality through processes of transformation. In the installation *Soundish* a large inverted dome of ice was suspended above a metal dish. As the ice melted the water dripped into the basin, which by design amplified the sound. This process of transference was recorded and projected onto a screen in the background. As a result, not only did the documentation become reinscribed as part of the work, it was also reflexive in its attempt to recapture the beginning of the work and its subtle processes of change through time.

In *UnRaveL* a tension is created between the durability of the mechanism which is unyielding and the pliable nature of the paper. It is likely that over the duration of the exhibition the quality of the paper will deteriorate as it comes into contact with the floor and is crushed by its own weight as thousands of metres unravel. However, the ability of the viewer to perceive any transformation of the materiality of the object or how it alters the space is challenged. The machine is programmed to unroll the paper one metre a minute, which literally creates a temporal line. At every moment *UnRaveL* approaches the boundary between finite and infinite. This liminality means that spaces in-between the beginning and the end are impossible to retain in one's mind as the unravelling is continuous and yet so slow it is almost imperceptible.

*UnRaveL* creates a sensorial environment to convey meaning rather than solely relying on vision or intellect. The hum of the electric motor, the metallic rub of the rollers and the quiet rustle of paper heighten the viewer's awareness of the automated sculptural form and how it is systematically filling the space with paper. At night the work is lit from below by a single floor mounted light. The resulting shadow play highlights the edges of the paper and creates a visual slip between physical actuality and a form of drawing.

DavisThomas have considered every aspect of *UnRaveL*, from each component of the mechanical structure to the type of paper selected and how it flows into the space. *UnRaveL* is designed to have a strong aesthetic quality to draw the viewer in and hold them long enough for other considerations to become manifest. The contemplation of the structure and how it functions can easily transcend into an imagining of dangerous possibilities. Like Serra's monumental sculptures of the 70s and 80s that prompted the viewer to consider stability as an illusion, *UnRaveL* creates a feeling of unease that can be connected with the sublime experience, that akin to levitating on the edge of an abyss[2]. The placement of a large object in a small space triggers a corporeal response, as the weight and scale of the structure can potentially seem threatening, a feeling perhaps exacerbated by the fact it is not anchored to the ground.

While paper as an everyday object does not represent a threat in itself, its unstoppable flow directed towards the viewer as they enter the space could take on a menacing aspect. The compact nature of the paper while on the roll will transform as it unravels and expands into the space of the gallery. This transference of volume invites the viewer to consider the quantity of paper left and to imagine the possibility of not only the space being engulfed by paper but also themselves.

Once activated the end result is ultimately unknown, as is the reaction of the viewer. This uncertainty has the potential to challenge boundaries established in art between the viewer and the object. The paper could fold upon itself or spread out, but as there is no means to contain its flow excepting four walls, the work can alter the way in which the viewer navigates the space. If the paper spills out into the doorway of the exhibition space it will present the question of whether to push the paper aside in order to enter or remain on the outside looking in.

*UnRaveL* is not about setting the boundaries of experience but rather puts into play a proposition that enables incidental relationships to unfold. This is reflective of the philosophy of DavisThomas whose work encourages people to find their own conclusions and ways of engaging with their work. This approach provides an opportunity for the audience to consider the individualised nature of the viewing experience of art and how this is manifest not only internally but how it also impacts upon the way they react in the space.

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[1] Roy Exley. 'Tending the abyss: the sublime edge in recent art'. *Contemporary Visual Arts*, 19, 1998, p34

[2] Roy Exley. 'Tending the abyss: the sublime edge in recent art'. *Contemporary Visual Arts*, 19, 1998, p36.