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Unravelling Encounters

To unravel is to investigate that which is perplexing, entangled and mysterious. Each of the artists in *Unravelling encounters* has a nuanced material language that reveals the physical processes of undoing, remaking, gathering and unfolding. Their work alludes to a multiplicity of entangled meanings associated with the spiritual and psychological process of unravelling. This disentanglement can be an uncomfortable state of transition, as it requires us to deconstruct tightly bound beliefs, but it is significant for our personal growth and development. Through our collective unravelling, we have the potential to develop a deeper perception of ourselves and weave new narratives.

There is a considered restraint in the manner these artists deconstruct and disentangle. They pull apart to seek clarity, discover and create a new. The process of unravelling is made visible in Lucia Dohrmann's unwound and rewoven canvases. Her works reveal time-intensive processes where she grids precise mathematical patterns onto the canvas, stains them with earthy and neutral tones, only to unpick and unravel the threads.

Dohrmann's *Reflections series, 2022* comprises twin works created from a single canvas painting that has been unravelled. The horizontal weft threads of one painting have been carefully undone to reveal the 'warp painting', while the remaining loose threads have been reassembled to create a 'thread painting'. They reveal an ordered balance within their duality. In *Reflections I - warp, 2022* the intertwining pattern comes undone at the midpoint. The tear-drop shapes of Venetian red shimmer in a sea of green oxide, and fade as they unravel. The same circular shapes stretch and extend in *Reflections I - weft, 2022*. There is a muted softness in the resulting works where the arabesque patterns dissolve and distort as they mirror one another. Dohrmann plays with the expanded field of painting, searching beyond the surface of the canvas to draw attention to the structure and the space it occupies. There is a measured restraint in her process as she reveals slow systems of growth, decay and renewal.

'the subconscious is ceaselessly murmuring and it is by listening to these murmurs that one hears the truth'

– Gaston Bachelard



5.

Sonja Porcaro's installation *Murmur/Mormorio, 2022*, evokes a fence, trellis, musical staff and abacus. The vertical posts and horizontal wire rods pay homage to the geometric abstractions of Agnes Martin, while the looped objects sprouting from the structure are an ode to the postminimalist interventions of Richard Tuttle. The formal play of horizontal wires is interrupted with tenderly arranged loops of felt, shoelaces, and cotton spools. All objects are imbued with biographical references as Porcaro explores the idea of 'unravelling' as it pertains to memory, family history, and the skills learnt and passed down to successive generations. The trellis structure alludes to gardening, a much-loved past-time of Porcaro's Italian family. It is a nod to growing fruit and vegetables, and the shared activity that has brought parents, grandparents and now her daughter together.

Murmur/Mormorio denotes softly spoken utterances, whose meaning is yet to be grasped, as well as a murmur of the heart. This can refer to poetic stirrings of emotion but also a life-threatening health condition. Porcaro's interest in translation and meaning comes from learning Italian as her first language.

The fragile arrangement of shoelaces, cotton spools and looped felt alludes to the first attempts at speaking, writing or learning. It is the loops and spaces between that hold the potential of things in Porcaro's work.

In Nicole Clift's *Monkey grip, 2022* a chain of S-shaped links hangs from the ceiling. They linger like a kiss, a scolding hiss or an over-resounding Yesss! The links precariously hang by their own weight as they seemingly stretch as they near the ceiling and floor. The suspended letters in blue biro ink are based on Clift's handwriting plucked from the pages of her journal. She describes this work as an 'augmented form of this studio language scaled up'. The chain is reminiscent of the childhood 'Barrel of monkeys' game that creates a continuous loop of interdependence. One idea scrawled in a journal can be inconsequential but often leads to another. The delicate balance of open links is also a reminder of tentative connections between words and their meanings.

As broken infinity symbols, the links in Clift's chain speak of contradicting forces that are needed to maintain a balance. In the novel of the same title,

Helen Garner wrote of both love and drug addiction as a tension between destructive desire and the self-preserving instinct to let go. These opposing impulses reoccur throughout Clift's work. In tandem with *Monkey grip*, are the wall-mounted notebook pages printed in charmeuse silk. In scanning the pages they become archival documents, preserving the hastily scrawled notes and fleeting ideas. *Methods for detecting air (Daisy), 2022*, records Clift's experiments with looped ribbons, threaded and suspended on piano wires. The photographs were taken of the wall in her former studio, a site of possibility. In her series of intaglio prints, mark-making documents the pace of slowly ruled and quick spontaneous looped lines. All these works record and remake the fleeting into something more enduring and tangible.

Meng Zhang often uses the material language of malleable forms to observe, record, and reflect the actions of daily life. In *Container No 1 - 9, 2022* a series of cast concrete objects rest on wooden blocks and hand-dyed mats. The sculptural forms show traces of the cardboard and Styrofoam packing they were cast within. They are like fossils of the *Amazon* delivery age, but instead of newly

purchased goods, the hollows offer glimpses of fingertips, knuckles, and toes. The appearance of these appendages is jarring. They suggest acts of violence but also speak of the tenderness of a soft touch, toes curled in moments of pleasure or pain. A protruding stem is all that can be seen of a Valentine's Day rose buried within. Through the casting process, Zhang preserves these intimate moments, but by embedding them in concrete, there is tension between what is hidden and what is revealed to us.

Unravelling encounters proposes a series of dialogues between the artworks as a way of disentangling their potential insights. These relationships create tensions between the process of creation and destruction, which in turn reflects our own conflicting desires. To encounter these works is to meet with the unknown aspects of ourselves, and in doing so, we are forced to reconfigure our positions. Perhaps it is only when something becomes undone that it can be reconstructed in a meaningful way.

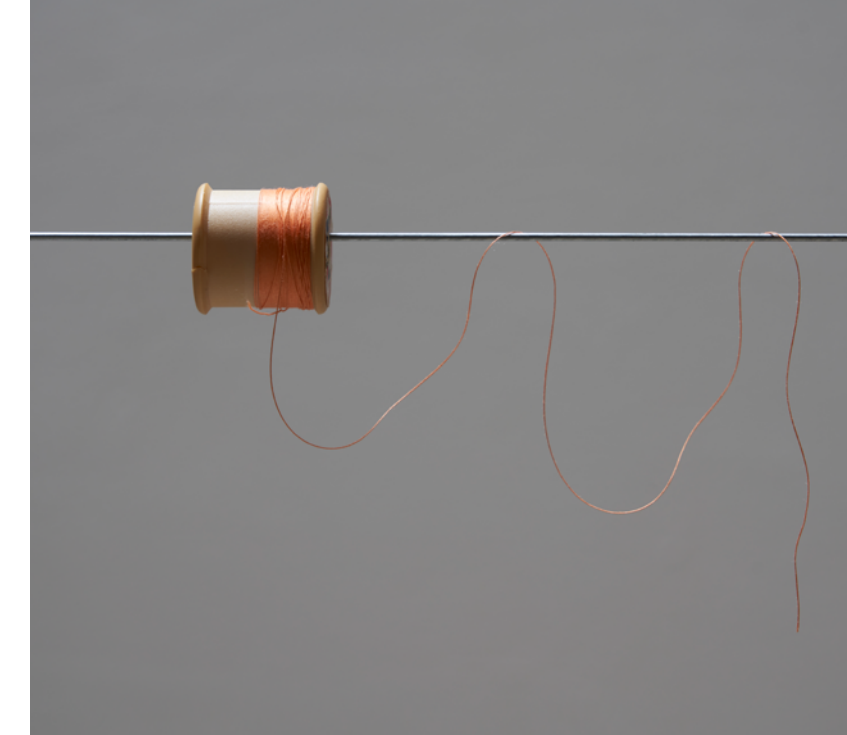
Suzanne Close

Notes:

Bachelard, Gaston, 2014. *The poetics of space*. Penguin Classics.
Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, 2013. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Bloomsbury Revelations. London, England: Bloomsbury Academic.
Garner, Helen, 1977. *Monkey Grip*, Penguin Group (Australia), reprinted: 2008.



6.



Cover: Nicole Clift, *Monkey grip, 2022*, powder coated copper, 6 x 340 x 0.2cm, Photography: Rosina Possingham

- Lucia Dohrmann, *Reflections I – Weft, 2022*, acrylic on canvas, aluminium bar, unravelled, knotted, 100 x 60 cm. Photography: Emma Dohrmann
- Nicole Clift, *Methods for detecting air (Daisy), 2022*, Kodak Portra 35mm photo on 160gsm coated paper. Image courtesy of the artist.
- Sonja Porcaro, *Untitled, 2022*, shoelace, billy button, dowl, glass bottle, plaster. Photography: Sam Roberts
- Meng Zhang, *Tube No 1, 2022*, cast concrete object, 10cm x 10cm x 7cm. Photography: Sam Roberts
- Lucia Dohrmann, *Reflections II – Weft, 2022*, acrylic on canvas, aluminum bar, unravelled, knotted, 100 x 60 cm. Photography: Emma Dohrmann
- Meng Zhang, *Container No 4 and 5, 2022*, concrete and plaster, seeds, rose flower, Size 22 x 8 x 10 cm. Photography: Sam Roberts

Back Cover: Sonja Porcaro, *Murmur/Mormorio (detail), 2022*, 5 meter installation. Photography: Sam Roberts

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Unravelling Encounters

Light Square Gallery
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10 March 2023