

Artist Talk: Annette Lawrence

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Dallas Museum of Art
Orientation Theater

[00:00:32.23]

Jack Lane: Good Evening, ladies and gentlemen, I am Jack Lane, the Director of the Museum. I'm very happy to welcome you here this evening to help to celebrate Annette Lawrence's installation in our Quadrant galleries. We would like to thank the Friends of Contemporary Art of the Dallas Museum of Art, many members of which are in this room, as well as its distinguished President, Cindy Schwartz, and our friends Nancy and Tim Hanley have also been instrumental in the hospitality.

The show has been assisted by Annette's gallerists, Talley Dunn and Lisa Brown and we thank them as well. And we want to acknowledge two fine sister institutions in our city who have presented in not too distant times Annette's installations as well, and that is the African American Museum and the DVAC, and it was the DVAC's opening where I first saw her work and it pleased me.

We are fortunate at the DMA to have in our permanent collection, several drawings by Annette that came in 1998 through the recommendation and encouragement of Charlie Wylie, who has also been the curator instrumental in persuading Annette to do an installation piece at the DMA and who has been her partner in its realization here.

[00:02:11.27]

So Charlie, I thank you for that.

I reckon that a lot of you have had an opportunity to see the piece. I think it has a wonderful life in what are, to my eyes, some of the most beautiful art spaces in Edward Larrabee Barnes' very handsome Dallas Museum of Art and I think that those spaces have been enhanced and as well as contorted by Annette's extremely interesting installation. When I first took a peek at it, before I got some of her allusive language about it, looked to me kind of like, well I was thinking of those great Star Wars drawings of Sol Lewitt that came out in the '70s and mixing them with the wonderful Italian Arte Povera artists who used, as the Europeans called it, "poor materials", but in fine ways.

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But in any event that it's a joy to see such a stimulating activation of our architecture and we are real proud that you are a North Texan and that you have done something so wonderful in our spaces. Thank you. Charlie.

Charlie Wylie:

Thanks. Thank you, Jack. I wanted to thank Cheryl Hartup who is a McDermott Curatorial Assistant who was so instrumental in the exhibition as well as not Annette Lawrence, but Anne Lawrence, who is our intern from UNT. So we have an Anne Lawrence and an Annette Lawrence, both associated with our program here.

[00:04:00.02]

And also those donors who helped us buy two of Annette's drawings, the McNarys, the Floreses, the Hanleys, and our Texas Artists Fund were instrumental in allowing us to acquire these drawings by Annette. The installation is one that has a long history in a certain sense. We began talking about it last summer when actually Annette was in Mexico. We talked over the months about what it was that Annette was going to be doing and I think you would agree the result is absolutely mesmerizing and I think it's a testament to Annette's friendship base here that we have so many people here this evening, and paradoxically the installation is really great to see by yourself.

(00:04:56)

So I urge you to come back and spend a lot of time with it because I was lucky enough to be able to do so because the way that Annette was able to -- and her able assistants were able to -- Brian and Justin and I know that there were others--who were able to install the work in two days instead of the allotted five days, so we were early, which is unheard of for a Contemporary art installation.

At any rate, Annette was born in Rockville Center, New York in 1965, for those of you who don't know her. She received her MFA at the Maryland Institute in the College of Art in Baltimore. She did graduate study in Sculpture at West Virginia University and she got her BFA at the Hartford Art School at the University of Hartford.

She has had solo exhibitions at DVAC, the African American Museum, the Bag Factory in Johannesburg, South Africa.

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Two exhibitions at the Gerald Peters Gallery, *Women and Their Work* in Austin, and at ArtPace Center for Contemporary Art in San Antonio and she has as well been in numerous group exhibitions.

Most recently, *Other Narratives* at the Contemporary Arts Museum, *Finders/Keepers* is also there and the 1997 Whitney Biennial, the 2000 version which is on view right now. Annette teaches at the University of North Texas as most of you know. She previously was a Core Fellow at The Glassell School and has been for me a wonderful person to work with.

It's one of the reasons I think that Suzanne Weaver and Jack Lane and I all treasure the field of Contemporary art is that there is nothing quite like the insights and perceptions that one can get from an artist who is working in your own time period. How they look at issues of what art history--for us art historians but also just in terms of what, as you see in this installation, what one can do with materials.

And I was struck--I haven't written my essay yet because I was waiting for the work to be finished--but I am struck now in thinking about what I am going to be writing by the complete ingenuity that this installation manifests and the way that it's both there and not there; it's present and absent, the allusions are numerous. I don't want to give them away; I think everyone should form them on their own.

However, I am confident that in the coming months, I hope that all this will return to this installation. It's very, very gratifying to see, and now that the Johns show is up and our Richter work is up and we will reinstall the Minimalism gallery now and Annette's show is up we have our four quadrants back.

[00:08:06.16]

And I think they all look smashing and I think Annette's installation is clearly among great company in that. I would like to introduce the artist and my friend, Annette Lawrence.

Annette Lawrence: Thank you. Well, thank you all for coming tonight. I have a few acknowledgments then I'll just begin with slides. I want to thank Charlie Wylie and Talley Dunn, Lisa Brown, Sue Graze and Diana Block, Brian Wheeler, Justin Adian, Doug Velek, Heath Bessire, Phillip Armstrong and Jennifer Pepper and that's the curator, my dealer, people who helped me make the show.

Also the Friends in Contemporary Art and the Hanleys and A.C. Lawrence, he's here visiting from New York--that's my dad. I will just begin showing images and I want to leave a lot of time for discussion at the end. I am going to begin with work from my residency in Johannesburg, South Africa. I have to get used to these controls here.

(00:09:50)

I am starting with a drawing -- I usually work with text. That's what most of my work deals with and this piece is the *20th Century* counted in decades and I made a slide of the text and I am projecting it there, drawing it on a brown paper.

[00:10:11.10]

This series of slides just shows the progression of the work developing. It was triptych; each section has three decades on it. That's the studio I worked in in Johannesburg. It was June and July 1998 and it's winter there, since they're on the opposite side of the world. So there is a space here, you can see kind of corner. I photographed the studio everyday or every other day.

At some point while I was there I got a fingerprint on the lens of my camera. I wasn't really aware of that so there's a few blurry shots. It goes away after I realized that it was there. So there is one -- one of the sections is completely black, the middle one is checkered and the last one is completely white.

I realized while I was in Johannesburg working on this, it took about five weeks to do it, that painting is really very antisocial. I was in the studio painting while the world was going around out there in Johannesburg.

So there, it's complete and there is real photographer shots of it, not mine. There was a woodcut made of this when I got that at Print Press in Denton and Stan Brady [?] was the printer that initiated that.

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I don't think he realized it would take an entire year to cut the blocks and run the print. I thought, when he ask me to do it, I said, are sure you want to do a woodcut and he said, oh yeah, yeah we could do that.

That's a different version of the same work, it's called -- it's also called *20th Century*. I am playing with how we talk about time. There's 19 of

each number. There is 19 tens, 19 twenties, 19 thirties and that makes the 20th century. This is the installation in Johannesburg. There was about 15 artists working in a warehouse space called the Bag Factory and it was a foyer area that wasn't really used and that's where I had my show.

I used string there for the second time. The first piece I did with string was in Houston in 1994, so this was the second one in 1998. And I wanted to fill the room; I wanted to just occupy the center of the room. So I've made a circle and attached it with a string and there's rafters, which you can see.

And this piece, I wanted you to feel like if you pull the string at the bottom, it would fly, it would just lift off the floor. The wall on the other side, it was already black so I worked with what was there, I added the circles in that cross section there.

And this work was about presence and absence. I wanted to put a female figure into the space. It was very male and I bought the jumpsuit because the neighborhood where my studio was, it was a light industrial area and everyone wore that, that was what everyone had on, so I had to have one.

[00:14:05.25]

The piece in the faculty show now at North Texas has a reworked version of the same work, of this jumpsuit, the drawing and the shoes. The shoes went in late in the process of making this installation, and that was just again to give sense of presence in that space. Some of the other artists there thought of this as a Star Trek beam-me-up machine.

I documented that work digitally, so I brought home a CD rather than those pages of slides. Now the slides you are seeing are taken from my snapshots that I took and that's the invitation that I sent out, that's my fingerprint on a brown paper bag. Brown paper bags are not readily available in Johannesburg, I was just real surprised to find they used plastic. They only had brown paper for bread.

(00:15:10)

So I am back in States and this is the African American Museum in Dallas. I worked with Phillip Collins doing installation there and the first thing that happened was we built in wall that was 12 x 12 feet with an 18 inch

wide and 6 feet tall opening. In the slides it doesn't look like a square but it really is.

I used the circle that was on the floor in Johannesburg to make the arch on the wall-- here on the right, I mean on the left. So there is some of that work, you know, transferring to this work as well as the drawings.

[00:16:05.02]

My intention in this installation was to mirror the architecture of the space. And I am just tying knots into these eye hooks and string. The eye hooks go right into the wall and then on this side, I had trouble with the wall. It's probably two inches of paint on that wall, so the eye hooks didn't stay in it and as I was making tension on the string, they would just come flying out of the wall. And I had to have my friend [inaudible] to help me build this armature to stabilize it all.

I worked about four days on that, night and day. This string had little tape labels to keep myself organized and I didn't initially think I would leave them there, but I liked them in the end so they added some texture.

And it was kind of like a tunnel and at the top, when you entered it was nine feet tall and at the bottom, it was three feet tall. So the idea was that small people could walk the distance, but large people would have to sort of bend down to get to the end. And lots of people did go all the way to the end and when they came out it was, you know, there was this sort of straightening up that happened. It was kind of interesting.

And the shoes are the same -- there are there for the same reason too, to evoke a presence in the space, same shoes. I think they're in this piece in UNT right now and they are officially retired, I won't wear them anymore. I did wear them after this for a couple of years. These are the professional photographer's shots of this one.

[00:18:12.01]

So the next installation is at DVAC, just kind of around the corner and DVAC built a new building and then invited me, Brian Wheeler invited me to do an installation there. And so the building wasn't made until kind of close to the opening, it wasn't complete, and the first time I saw the room that I was going to be using was filled with furniture. So -- but the next time it was emptied out, but this was the sketch that we just in conversation drew and understood between us what would happen with the work.

That is a ring made out of electrical conduit—can you see the ring kind of hanging in space there? So we just made this contraption and Brian actually drilled each of the holes by hand, there is about 900 holes altogether, those circles are 16 feet wide, so we strung them and then raised the bar and attached it to the ceiling there. There's grids and circles in this building, there's circular corners on several corners of it, which are really beautiful.

So I decided to do this, the making of -- you know for this installation.

[00:20:01.18]

Since most of this is unknown, how it actually happens, try to demystify it little bit.

This piece is called *First Dance*, that's the title, and it's called that because as we were moving these pieces of the string that are, I think they are 12 feet, well they were 20 feet -- 24 foot long pieces of string--because they went up and down in one piece and that required lots of really large movement and so I called it *First Dance* and because it was the first thing in that space.

So you can walk through this one. They're an opening set. You can pass through it and be on the inside of it. The same as the African American Museum except there was only one way in and out of that one and this one had several ways in and out. And this is the unmaking of the piece. I will go through it kind of fast.

I think of these, what happens as these come apart, as drawings. There's marks that are left and those balls of string, we just ball the string back up and put it in a box. Those pieces of paper were attached with foam sticking tape, double-sided.

Here's some other work with three circles. This one is called *Unborn*, and these are from the next few slides are going to be from a series called *Drawing Blood* that marks the process -- the passage of time by the processes of my body. This one is *Unborn*, it's from '97 and the other is 1998 it's untitled.

[00:22:03.14]

In the new work of this series I decided to use an image of a candle because in each drawing there is the same set up, I do it in the same set up and there is the always a candle there. So I decided to use the candle in these and draw it in various stages of burning.

These are the drawings from 1999, and there are some other works on paper. This is *3708 Utopia Parkway*, that's the title. It's the house where Joseph Cornell lived. I went to a show at the Menil Collection and there was a show of correspondence or exchanges between Duchamp and Cornell and there are a lot of letters with his address on it. So I wrote it down. The next time I went to New York, my father picked me up from the airport and I said if you wanted to do something, let's go find his house. So we went driving around, we eventually found it.

These are photocopy transfers. There is just three of those and the next few are a group of drawings I did in the summer of '99 and the one on the checkered one is called *Nouns and Verbs* and the one here on the left is called *Deluxe*, and that one is called *Supreme*.

And I am doing that circle pattern over and over again on the spiral that says race and sex.

[00:24:06.00]

And it's sort of my response to how we have commodified race and sex-- the extent to which they have been commodified, both of them. And this -- that's the interior of the University Of Michigan Museum Of Art, and it's the next place I did an installation, that was in March, 2000.

And this -- the photograph has a -- that's a Sol Lewitt piece on the walls which wasn't there when my work went out. This is the only photograph they had on the space and I had never been in this space. This is the first time I did an installation somewhere that I'd never been. So I just traced in drawing, then I did these sketches. Because the space is sort of dramatic, I wanted to do something that I felt theoretical.

And I sent them the first drawing and after I thought about it for a while I thought it was kind of skimpy. So I added circles and there ended up being nine circles all together. So I arrive at the space, the Sol Lewitt is gone. Those are my tools on that cart right there, there is a box of string, a bucket of acrylic medium, some Velcro and a roll of paper. This is the same shot--I began on a ledge and shot this space from there.

So the first thing I do is roll the paper out and draw circles on it and start cutting it out. I had about 15 people working with me on this installation. It took an entire week and I worked the whole time and they just took shifts.

[00:26:04.20]

So there is the circles completed. That's about 20 by 20. 20 feet across, 20 feet down, and the balcony is probably 20 or 25 feet up. We started to string it after the circles were done, and this string, that one you just can't see.

So after the first circle, we did a few strings and the next day we came in and the whole thing, the paper, just lifted up off the floor—oop, technical problem. So I ended up using packing tape to tape it down to hold down it. The Velcro, just for your information, Velcro, if you have self-adhesive Velcro, it doesn't stick to packing tape.

So just so you know, in case you need to know that, but the packing tape will stick to paper and so we just attached it, we went, we did a hard line thing. So that what you see in the other room really grew out of this experience. Again this work, it felt like dancing, we had to move really slowly to weave the string through the other string. When I installed this piece we started from one side and we just moved in one direction which is what I thought we should do for this, but I was talked out of it and it turned out it was much more complicated then it needed to be. But it was fun to make it and everyone was really focused while we were doing this.

There was not chatting or talking or joking, we just we were talking like this, it's like "put it over that one. Which one? That one. This one? That one." That was all we said.

[00:28:04.21]

The whole time there was no other conversation. There was one guy -- the guy in the right side, the guy at the top, his name was Josiah, he was a golfer. So he could really see from where he was looking all the way to the floor and tell us which string to go over and under, and he was right often. He would get it right so... I thought, how can I have you work with me all the time? He is a history major; he's not even an artist.

But the other students, there was engineers, there was an economics guy, there were some work study. They just worked at the museum, so

they ended up doing this tying of string for a whole week. I think they got tired of doing it, but they never complained.

There's a lot of these I am just kind of going to go through them. We're out of my snap shots and into the real photographer's documentation of the work. The lights are supposed to be down little bit on this. When I saw it before I left it looked like it was growing from the inside. This is some crew shots, these are some the students I worked with standing behind it. So these are details of the knots. It was really like a circus tent. You kind of have that feeling and again the knots in this work came directly of these knots. That's how it attached at the balcony.

[00:30:00.13]

There is 32 knots in each connecting point. This is the de-installation photos. I wasn't able to go to Michigan to take it down, so they did it for me and documented it. They are making of balls of string, really meditative. That's just the template by itself. It didn't look that wrinkled. I think over the week that was up the humidity might have affected the paper. Then they are taking the paper off the floor. That's without the paper.

It's a really beautiful marble floor. There is the floor by itself. This group of students, they were like three or four year olds they are, I could say I have a school for little kids there, and they came through in the beginning of the installation and they went back to their class and they drew pictures of the work.

So that's Sarah's drawing. I don't know which one of them is Sarah. And this one is Steve's and that's Max on that side. I am inspired by these. I kind of wish I did them. This is the last two slides. This is the shoes of Kevin and Kirsten and Ann, they are just playing around and there are some balls of string. I just really love that photograph, so that's last slide.

[00:32:06.14]

So I will answer questions about these slides or about the piece or whatever.

Audience Member: I noticed some knots, [inaudible].

Annette Lawrence: If we run out of string while we're stringing along, we just tie another piece on and keep going. So it's intentional. Sort of. Like if we didn't run out of string there would be no knots.

Audience Member: Can you talk about how the string connects to the text?

Annette Lawrence: Let's see. Well, it's lines. I think it has some relationship there and I think of it as lines of communications sometimes, too, so maybe that's it. I have to think about it some more.

Audience Member: Could you just talk about your choice of materials, the history of the brown paper as a material?

Annette Lawrence: Okay, I started using brown paper in 1990 in grad school, and the way that-- this kind of a long story, but I'll make it short. I was covering a wall in order to paint on bamboo, the bamboo had slats in it and I didn't want the wall to be destroyed. So I covered the wall with brown paper and ended up really liking the paper—what happened, the drips of the few of bamboo slats was way more interesting than what I was making on the bamboo.

So that's how I started using the paper and now ever since I have been just drawing on it in black and white paint and it's almost like ground, it's kind of the color of skin it has a lots of references in African American culture.

[00:34:05.21]

Brown paper bags have been used for all kinds of things from hair curlers to just carrying food and all kinds of stuff.

I like the color of it, I like the many colors of it, and the texture. It is really tough paper. It's real common material but it has a lot of strength. Did you want to know about other materials or just brown paper?

Audience Member: How about the strings?

Annette Lawrence: Oh the string. That's my favorite kind of string, that's -- it's just cotton cord, it's postal cord and to be real corny, brown paper bag is just tied up in strings. And it also has a great--it's really flexible because it's wrapped around itself that's yeah.

Audience Member: What about your color palette and choice of black and white paint and the covering kind of that question is obviously (Inaudible) didn't have a lot of black panels (Inaudible).

Annette Lawrence: Okay. The black and white was initially to just keep things clear. I just wanted to have a real high contrast. Some of it relates to power,

relationships, relates to racial relationships. It can be about male/female, it can be about just yin and yang and there's all kinds of references in there, spirit material. And math, well, in high school I made a choice between spending time doing math and spending time doing art and I chose art. So the math kind of has taken a back seat, but there is -- I like the idea of solving of problems.

[00:36:05.18]

In math you draw the answers so it's really connected to kind of what I do because I use text in my work.

I am solving problems visually, that's what you do in math. It's real conceptual and there is no question about whether or not it is what it is. In math the conceptual piece is what it's about, it's about process and you don't have to defend it. In art you have to kind of hold your ground and say yes this is Art, yes it is, yes it is. Not as much as before I think there is still that kind of dialog that goes on.

Audience Member: Given your origins are really in New York and (Inaudible). Can you talk about the various influences from either or both places in having (Inaudible).

Annette Lawrence: Well, New York is where I grew up, it's the place of my childhood, so it's like any place else that you might grow up to me and I feel like I own it because when you are a kid somewhere, you own that place. And I've never really been interested in living there as an adult. So as soon as I could, I left. I also I really don't like cold weather at all. So I moved to Texas because it's warm here and I think that art is basically the same everywhere. It's same in Texas as it is in New York. Artists who are my age and younger and a little bit older are thinking of the same sorts of things, looking at the same art magazines, watching the same movies. So that the physical distance doesn't really matter that much. Am I answering your question?

[00:38:01.21]

Audience Member: Have your structural and three dimensional pieces impacted the way you do two dimensional pieces and drawings and if so, how?

Annette Lawrence: Well I thought about that a little bit a while ago. The two dimensional work doesn't make any illusion of space at all, it's very flat. The only way I play with space is in layers in the drawings. The three dimensional work is all about space. It's all about physical space. So they feed off of each other because I keep them really separate in my mind and I think that the

three dimensional work, the pieces you can walk through, also play a lot with layers. So that's where they might bridge each other.

Audience Member: Can you talk about how your work exists between the two polarities of nature and technology. Where does your work [inaudible] in that relationship?

Annette Lawrence: Well, technology mirrors nature I think, you know, it sort of tries to do what nature does, that might be the answer. My work is intentionally very low-tech because it makes it possible for me to do it without a lot of help because I am not real technical, but then again thinking of ways to use paper to hang string on a wall to make a line that's 35 feet long in space, it's sort of technical. I don't know. I didn't answer that, sorry.

Audience Member: Can you just explain briefly, this may be giving away your secrets, how - - the paper that hold the strings, how that's constructed, how you actually thought of it first?

[00:40:10.06]

Annette Lawrence: Well, this is the first installation where I have brown paper actually holding the string up and it's glued on the wall with Elmer's glue. I made a template, cut the paper and what's attaching it to the wall is Elmer's glue. And there is holes on the edges that are punched with the hole punch there, re-enforced with packing tape. And there's two kinds; the wide kind is just a simple piece of paper and narrower kind is folded. The folded one was something that was a solution to a problem we were having.

After the first day of installing, the way I originally thought those corners would work didn't work at all; it was really pathetic and looked bad. So I slept on it overnight. I actually went to Home Depot and bought something and then slept on it and decided not to use the stuff we bought and just came up with the idea to fold the paper and make a kind of a rigid deal, yeah.

Audience Member: Do you do models for each installation?

Annette Lawrence: I haven't made any three dimensional models and really the little sketches that you see that's it, I just know. Actually I don't know. I don't know and I just make mistakes and fix them. And sometimes--I haven't had a problem that I couldn't fix yet so far. If I don't get to your questions I am sorry I am just kind of looking around the room.

Audience Member: Can you talk about containment and exclusion when you create an installation?

Annette Lawrence: Okay, she asked if I will talk about containment and inclusion and exclusion in the work and in which work the drawings or this 3D stuff?

[00:42:09.17]

Okay, I think every piece has been so that you can enter it. So I am really interested in that interaction and having access to the work where you physically have to pass a barrier, you have to make a decision to pass it and in the DVAC piece here was this hesitation, people get to the edge and then go in and then be happy because they did.

So there is some sort of -- the art rules kind of keep people from doing things like going into a piece. I think this piece has more of that than probably the others. You can't enter the circle, but you enter around the circle, you can actually walk through the room and those horizontal lines that are reminiscent of a boxing ring or telephone wires or clothes lines and there is a few different things I am referencing there. Am I answering that okay?

Audience Member: Does the circle mean anything for you or is it purely a formal concern?

Annette Lawrence: The circle means continuity and just a continuation of life and things and it is also formal. It's just the simple way of making a shape that -- it's a container, also.

Audience Member: When you're doing your circles in the string, is there any certain number of strings going around the circle -- it seems like there is three circles and they are all -- [inaudible].

[00:44:08.13]

Annette Lawrence: Each circle has 32 holes punched in it. The circles are divisible by four. I just do across through the circle and then divide it in half, divide it in half until it feels like the right amount of times and it ended up it being 32 holes punched.

Audience Member: You're defined as a contemporary artist, what does that mean to you [Inaudible]?

Annette Lawrence: Did everybody hear that? I am defined as a contemporary artist and she asked how do I define that. Well I guess the definition would mean that I

am alive, living right now. I think that it has to do with the time and the time -- it means now I guess.

Audience Member: What were you thinking about -- you had mentioned some other artists you were thinking about when you went to school, initially, who are they and how do you think they have come about and influenced what your installations are all about?

Annette Lawrence: Charlie's question is, who are my influences? Well, the conversations that we've had—I'll just repeat those. When I was a freshman in art school, we had a course called Theories and my teachers were all really process-oriented 1970s guys and they showed a lot of Gordon Matta-Clark, and Alice Aycock and Mary Miss.

[00:46:05.13]

Michael Singer and Charles Simonds and I can't think of who else.

Those artists were -- I went to school initially to be a graphic designer and those -- the works of those artists were what made me switch my major to sculpture. I was really interested in the fact that—oh, and Robert Smithson-- they were making things that were ephemeral, they were earthworks, or they were just process oriented. Even if they were objects, they were outside, so they had to deal with elements of nature and you could walk on them and be with them, those very large things. That's how the installations I think, they have grown out of that and the fact that you can interact with them in ways. These need protection. They can't really be outside although I have done some things outdoors. I just accept that nature is going to interact with them and grass is going to grow. I did a piece of where that was part of it--where it started out being a flat plain and it ended up being mounds because the grass grew through this burlap. Does that answer that question? Okay. Anything else? Alright let's have a good time, thanks for coming. Thank you.