



VISUAL ARTS
by ANTHEA BLACK

Experiments writ large

>>PREVIEW

DITDAHDITDIT

Runs until February 10

TRUCK Gallery

What happens when an artist's series of experiments are writ large in the gallery space?

TRUCK's ditdahditdit asks us to play at unravelling the coded visual languages of three artists – but this is no Morse code, and the resemblance to legible texts is thin. The clues to decipher the works are instead found in their familiar and modest beginnings: the dictionary, scribbly doodles and watching ants.

While the show is a playful look at how artists use reading, writing and drawing within their studio practices, cute typographic experiments don't make an appearance. Even the literary traditions of concrete poetry that are often dry and cerebral deconstructions of language are absent from this tactile show of texty works. It's a territory that seems too obvious within these fusions of contemporary art and literature or text-based practices.

It's particularly apropos that the majority of works are drawing and paper-based, and yet each artist displays a surprising willingness to break out of the formal constraints of the page. All these projects are provisional experiments conducted as a guess-and-test play with materials and processes, and here we get to see them unfold.

Chris Gillespie's video-traced ants walk over pristine sheets of paper, Kyle Beal's cut-paper works spill out as the page is cut into words and multiplied into shadows. Angela Silver's deconstructed books become animated sculptures in their undoing. Together the three artists manipulate the form of the texts and drawings up off the page -- mapping, shaping and flaying out into 3D or time-based forms – and make materials that are usually quiet and reserved into formally unruly ones.

Kyle Beal gets a deluxe chunk of gallery space, where his arrangement of papercuts plus photos next to text-drawings are like fleeting experiments with the connectedness between each work. The meandering group of works form into equations where we can trace lines of investigation between his objects. Seeing a cheeky statement like "drawing collapsed on its own logic" next to object-doodles that float in antigravity around the paper-edge in Marginal Drawing, his studio process proposes a temporary suspension of logical language and interpretation, or a guess-and-test streaming together of media, snippets of text and images.

Beal's lone photo reads more like an extended sketch, as does the Wonderful World of Ants video by Chris Gillespie. The video sets up a pseudo-scientific experiment where the artist's collection of information follows closely behind the ants as they carry on with their day-to-day business. Here the studio space becomes a magnifying glass to those sights that might be rendered imperceptible by bigger projects. Sometimes we see the shadow of Gillespie's hand looming over the ants. The ants stop and start as the dotted line does and as Chris redraws their path, we get a distinct sense that he's fucking with them.

A symbol of collective and highly organized work, the patterns and behaviours of the ants in the studio become yet another code to unravel. Watching the video confirms that, yes, the title is at least a little ironic. The world of ants is actually a little dreary, and they wander around unproductively confused, yet still determined, on their paths over the vast expanse of paper.

While much of the show reads like a privileged glimpse at an experiment in progress, Angela Silver's overwhelming mass of shredded dictionaries is the weightiest work in the show. The finality of these destroyed books splayed out in the gallery like thousands of tiny paper tentacles conjures censorship, book burning and hidden information. Despite these darker associations, the texture and shape of the paper appears in such a radically new form that it's also a beautifully sensuous work. By changing the book's form, we experience the loss of conventional meanings and uses of the text. What happens when a definition pokes out of the word detritus? Seeing through these new layers of a book and having to grasp for meaning between the shredded pages questions our physical relationship to reading.