



ALEXANDRA GILLESPIE
IN COLLABORATION WITH SOMAYA LANGLEY

COLLARS

Collared

...a collar is a thing that goes around the neck of a person, animal, or object...

Whether it be a crisply starched and ironed collar, a scruffy paint splattered striped pastel collar, or a zebra print shirt dress collar - a seemingly fragile textile fragment exudes a strong personality. A history is presumed, a position is assumed, a performance appropriate to status, wealth and office is expected. Simultaneously obvious and nuanced, the collar is embedded with wide cultural knowledge and reveals quirky sub-cultural significance.

Alexandra Gillespie and Somaya Langley's collaborative exhibition of twenty highly individual collars are presented at the actual height of the previous owner from neck to feet. Arranged spatially in conversational groups, these highly fetishised personal adornments create an absent crowd, a crowd that speaks to both us, and each other, visually and audibly. Here coexistence is paramount as collars internal relationships interweave with the sensibilities of exhibition visitors.

Others such as Rafael Lozano-Hemmer utilise the absent crowd in their work. *Standards and Double Standards* (2004) creates a brooding and uneasy atmosphere by suspending fifty belts at waist height and having them rotate automatically to follow the movements of audiences in the exhibition space. The singularly unremarkable objects in multiple provoke a sense of surveillance and paternal authority, encouraging visitors to either subvert that authority and play with the movement, or submit to its intent and quickly move themselves on.

Langley's and Gillespie's artforms engage us far more intimately and viscerally with phrases garnered from the collars original owners - significant others in the artist's lives - friends, family, colleagues and other artists. These text snippets are projected from within the textures and patterns that once caressed a treasured ones' neck. One collar in the group lights up and a corresponding spatialised phrase whispers or reverberates around the room. Then another responds, and another, moving the narrative around the group, then from group to group, with random sequencing ensuring endless associations.

Some, such as the *A SECURITY BLANKET* green knitted collar, signify an immediate relationship with tightly emotionally bonded text, object and sound. Yet the intriguing yellow cotton of *A CHINESE RESTAURANT*, or the square embroidery detail on white of *PALM TREES, SUN, IN L.A.*, make us wonder. It is these less obvious connections that extend an open invitation to the exhibition visitor to interweave our own memories and linkages within the works constantly shifting narrative.

Like the flexible electroluminescent strips slipped between the collars' fabric layers to emit intimate phrases in cool white light, the artists slip us emotionally and intellectually between the unconscious, the coincidental and the considered. Collars resonates with subtle tales and intense recollections, generating intricate textures of identity and connection from a seemingly simple thing that goes around the neck.

Dr Melinda Rackham
March 2009



Collars - Alexandra Gillespie in collaboration with Somaya Langley
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Canberra Contemporary Art Space Gorman House

Electronics and programming by Ben Lippmeier.
Alexandra Gillespie is currently a PhD Candidate, School of Art, Photography and Media Arts, ANU supported by a College of Arts and Social Sciences Scholarship. This collaboration began at Create_Space, the 2005 Australian Network for Art and Technology media laboratory held in Melbourne, Australia.

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MOUNT MAJURA
VINEYARD

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All images courtesy of Alexandra Gillespie 2007/2008. Above: Collars Prototype. All other images: *Collars* installation view and details.