



Night Journey

an interactive video installation
by
Colleen Alborough

Artist Statement

*I come to ferry you hence across the tide
To endless night, fierce fires and shramming cold*

Each day we retreat to our bed, to the place that is so private, so familiar, so intimate. It lures us with its promise of comfort, protection, and restoration. In our beds we can escape the endless traffic, incessant noise and smothering fog, into the oblivion of sleep, transported to other worlds beyond the borders of ordinary perception. *Night Journey* explores and interrogates the epic journeys we embark on when the night shuts out our visible reality and gives free rein to our hopes, fantasies, dreams, fears and nightmares.

As we lay down to rest, surrendering ourselves to a greater whole, we invite and expose ourselves to these nocturnal states of consciousness. Enveloped in a disconcerting tension between relief and defenselessness, where do we venture when we travel down these avenues to new worlds beyond our control of conscious? *Night Journey* is a 'ferry' into such a world, into the grey visions of an 'endless night'. It invites the viewer to embark on this explorative path, to open up a dialogue of exchange between states of consciousness and infectious dreams. *Night Journey* questions the grainy nature of dreaming and the seeping impact it has on the conscious state.

Night Journey is about a paradise dreamt and a paradise lost. It is about soul connections, the absolute depth of love and joy in this as well as the emotions of fear and loss when such hopes and dreams dissolve. It's about the fight against the smothering fog, the dreadful sense of being alone and being hunted by those spiritual hounds in the night.

And sometimes, in a particular moment, you find the dream, even if it is only the length of a song...



Night Journey, Installation views, KZNSA Gallery, 2005.

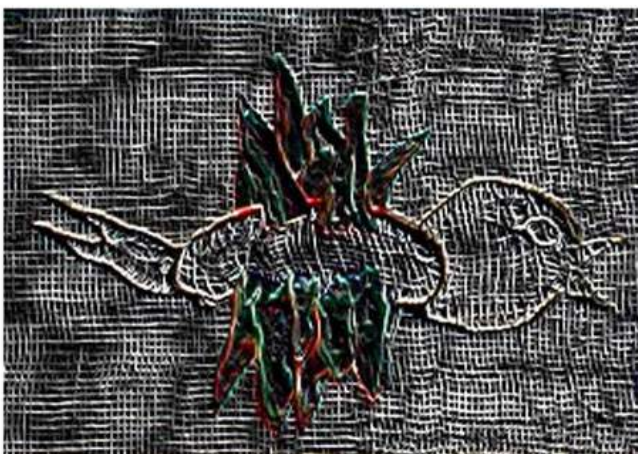
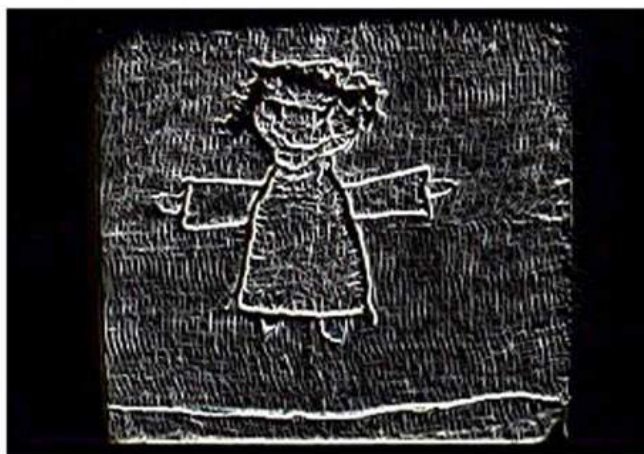
Blood Brothers by Bruce Springsteen

*We played king of the mountain out on the end
The world came chargin' up the hill, and we were women and men
Now there's so much that time, time and memory fade away
We got our own roads to ride and chances we gotta take
We stood side by side each one fighting for the other
We said until we died we'd always be blood brothers*

*Now the hardness of this world slowly grinds your dreams away
Makin' a fool's joke out of promises we make
And what once seemed black and white turns to so many shades of gray
We lose ourselves in work to do and bills to pay
And it's a ride, ride, ride, and there ain't much cover
With no one runnin' by your side my blood brother*

*On through the houses of the dead past those fallen in their tracks
Always movin' ahead and never lookin' back
Now I don't know how to feel, I don't know how to feel tonight
If I've fallen 'neath the wheel, if I've lost or I've gained sight
I don't even know why, I don't know why I made this call
Or if any of this matters anymore after all*

*But the stars are burnin' bright light some mystery uncovered
I'll keep movin' through the dark with you in my heart
My blood brother*



Night Journey, stills from digital video animation, 2005.

How Night Journey Works

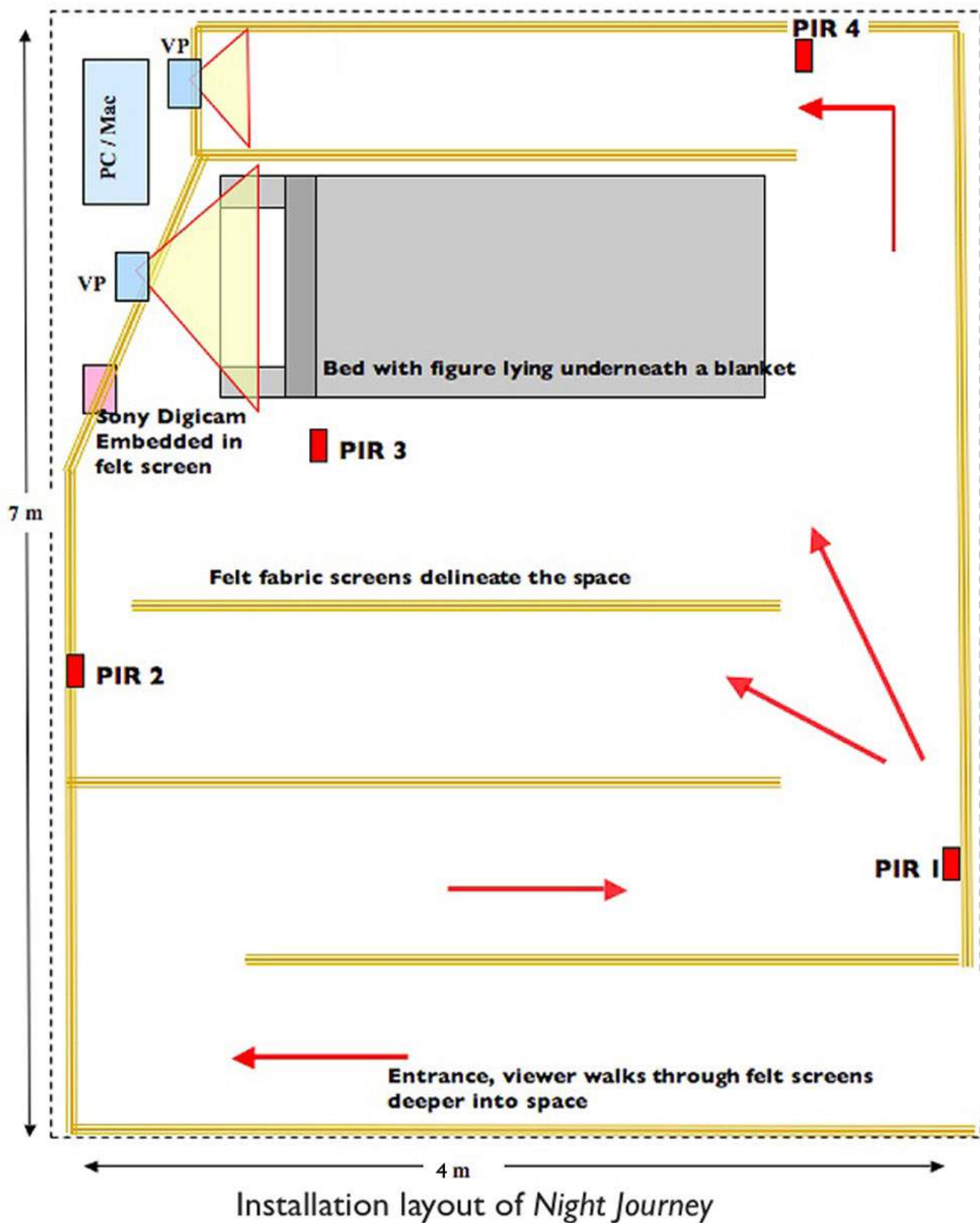
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Night Journey is an interactive, immersive video installation - it relies on viewer participation and exploration to activate the elements of the installation. Viewers are invited to enter the silent, darkened space of *Night Journey*. As they proceed through the labyrinth of handmade felt screens, their movement triggers Passive InfraRed Sensors – the type of sensors used in alarm systems found in houses and offices – which are installed within the felt labyrinth. Each sensor is connected to computer software (Max/MSP and Jitter), via a physical computing interface. As the sensor is triggered, this signal is transmitted to the software, which is programmed to activate a sound or video within the installation depending on which sensor has been triggered.

As the viewer moves deeper into the installation, so more sensors will be triggered and activate additional sounds and videos. If the viewer stands still for more than 30 seconds, the sounds and videos will stop playing and fade out, causing the entire installation to become silent again. Thus, the viewer has to actively explore the installation in order to trigger the media, as well as to ensure they see the whole sequence of the videos.

A digital video camera is also embedded in the felt screens near the bed, capturing live footage of viewers moving through the space. This footage is transmitted to the computer software, where it is merged with a typewritten poem. A slightly delayed feed of this combined video is then transmitted to a video projector within the installation, allowing the viewers to catch a glimpse of themselves within the narrative of the installation.

The viewer enters this dreamlike narrative, much like entering a movie during the middle of the story. No matter where one takes up the plot, the narrative tends to swing around again to the point where it started, as long as the viewer is willing to physically explore the space. *Night Journey* is an experiential video installation exploring an ungovernable chaos of the light and dark of other worlds.



PIR = Passive Infrared Sensors

==== = Felt screens

VP = Data Projector



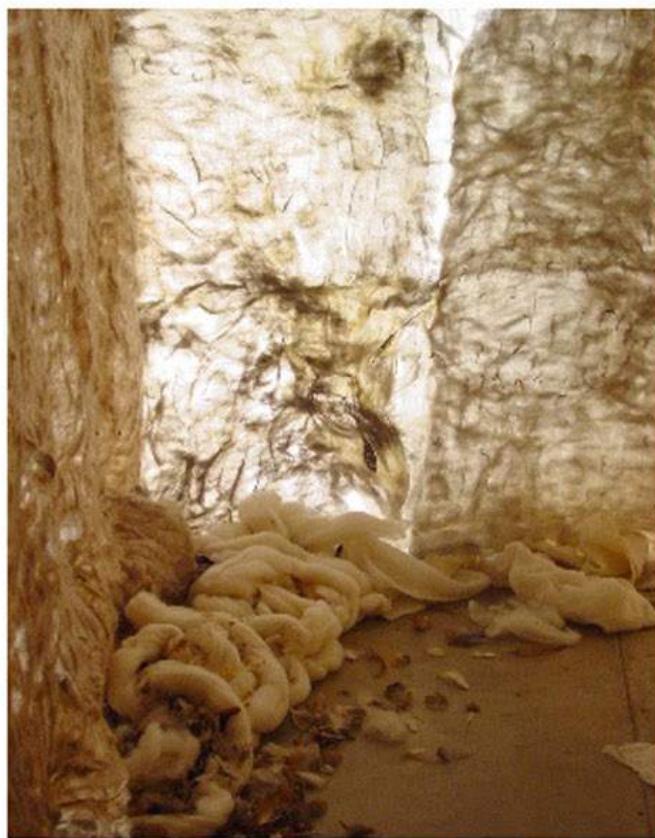
Night Journey, Installation views, KZNSA Gallery, 2005:

Projections of delayed live video feed of viewer merging into poem footage.
Strips of bandage and gauze on the floor.

Bottom right: Video camera in installation capturing video feed of viewers.



This page: *Night Journey*, Installation views and close-ups of felt screens, feathers and wool, KZNSA Gallery, 2005.



Night Journey, Installation views, KZNSA Gallery, 2005.
Close-ups of felt screens, feathers and wool



felt-making process and close-ups of felt screens

Alternate Installation in gallery with high ceiling



The Premises installation configuration view with correct lighting



Installation views revealing steel cabling structures and gauze and muslin layering



HAUNTED TERRITORY

COLLEEN ALBOROUGH BALANCES SUBJECTIVE ARTISTIC EXPRESSION WHILE STILL ENGAGING THE VIEWER IN AN EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL MANNER, WRITES CATHERINE GREEN

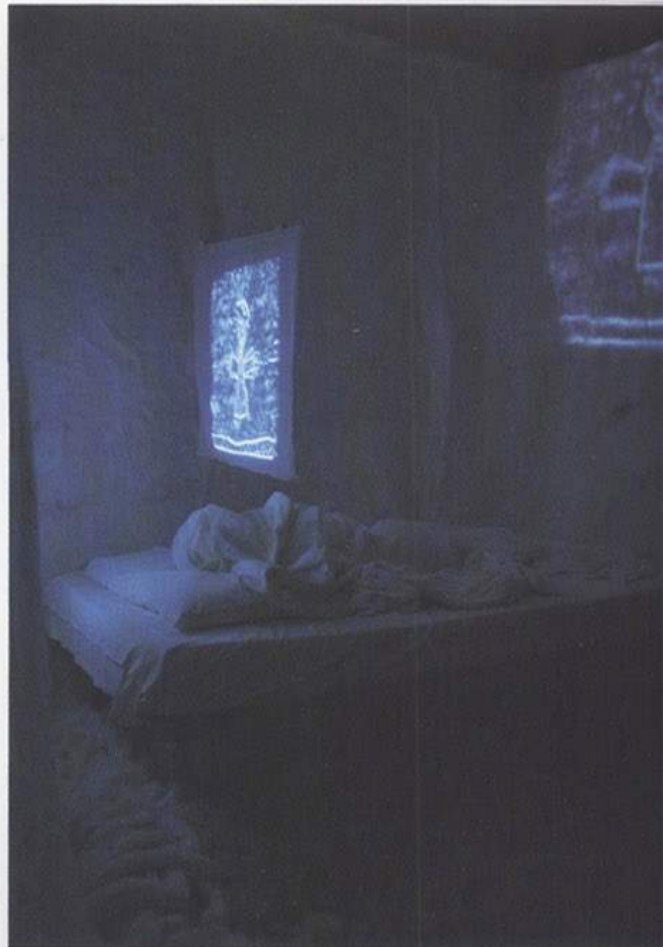
Colleen Alborough is Art South Africa's ninth Bright Young Thing for 2007

It was perhaps fitting to encounter Colleen Alborough, a digital artist, through the technological form of email correspondence. However, what became apparent in learning about her work and process is that technology is only one tool in this Johannesburg artist's varied media palette. Alborough's work personifies her broad range of activities and interests. "I work in a variety of mediums, focusing on multimedia installations" she writes in a recent artist statement. "I am very interested in creating experiential installations, that encourage the viewer to explore and interact with the work in order to complete the narrative of the installation."

To master the digital medium is a perilous task. Generally, work of this nature is poorly conceptualised and gallery's struggle with its presentation. This in turn deadens its reception and discourages interaction. Given that art is a sensory activity that involves more than just sight, the challenge for the digital artist is to create an environment that allows the powerful undercurrents of their work to be realised. Alborough has tackled these issues with a sophisticated awareness, employing a diversity of expression.

Alborough's recent exhibition at the Premises Gallery was a rigorously conceptualised body of work. Nocturnal states of mind, ambivalent and shifting in tone, formed the conceptual framework for the exhibition. The exhibition included her interactive video installation *Night Journey* (2005–present), an immersive and emotive environment. Previously exhibited in earlier iterations at Johannesburg's Substation and Durban's KZNSA galleries, it led the viewer through a darkened maze. Each turn triggered a sensor that played various recordings, night sounds that tapped into primal emotive states. The passage led to a small room where a bundled figure lay on a bed; gauze screens installed above the figure were used to project dreamy visuals with poetic narratives. Alborough further included live feed of viewers negotiating the maze into her animation sequence, embedding cameras into felt screens for the purpose. The result was a psychic space of dreams, nightmares and insomnia, a space that was both visceral and vague.

Experiencing the maze of *Night Journey* was an unsettling experience. It forces the viewer to engage with physical and psychological space. While the soft walls, littered debris of gauze, feathers and dull lighting created a womb-like environment that was comforting and restorative, the bodily texture of the installation also became repellent and foreign. The soundtrack of overlaid sounds, coupled with the typing of text on the screens was overwhelming, prompting psychological retreat. Similarly, the flicker of red alarm sensors and



the image of oneself in the animation evoked a sense of vulnerability – it also cued South Africa's pervasive security culture.

The tactile walls of *Night Journey*, a work that functions to release, disclose and acknowledge topical issues without becoming didactic, were composed of handmade felt, laboriously processed by the artist. This labour intensive approach is almost ritualistic, what Alborough terms "a rite of passage", a contemplative birthing process through which the final work is realised. The medium retains traces of the emotional and physical intensity of the process that continues to build on the work's meaning beyond the completion of the work. Generally, Alborough's work stems from an introspective and intensely emotional creative process, which she views as "a form of psychic survival". Her work process allows her to engage with her relationship to the creative, social and psychic space in which she lives.

"The art making process, to me, is incredibly important and where I believe the transformative powers of art lie," she says.

Alborough's choice of media, which has previously included photography and her distinctive concertina-style artist books, is determined by its ability to "communicate some form of human emotion". Her skill emerges in the way she balances subjective artistic expression in a manner that still engages the viewer in an emotional and physical manner.

Catherine Green is an art historian and writer based in Johannesburg

About Colleen Alborough: A digital multimedia artist based in Johannesburg, Alborough completed her BA (Fine Arts) with distinction at the University of the Witwatersrand, where she is currently completing a MA (Fine Arts). She has presented two solo exhibitions this year, an untitled solo show at The Premises Gallery and *Before the Time* at Pretoria's Outlet gallery. Group shows include *the drift between* (2005), *6 on a scale of 1-10* (2002) *Interart/Interact* (2001). Alborough was one of four artists selected to participate on the KZNSA Gallery's Young Artists Project in 2004.

Colleen Alborough,
Night Journey,
2005 to present,
mixed media
installation – detail
from version
shown at The
Premises Gallery,
June 2007

Colleen Alborough: BIOGRAPHY

Colleen Alborough is a digital multimedia artist and visual arts educator living and working in Johannesburg. She completed her BA (Fine Arts) with distinction at the University of the Witwatersrand, where she is currently completing a MA (Fine Arts).

“I work in a variety of mediums, focusing on multimedia installations. I am very interested in creating experiential installations, that encourage the viewer to explore and interact with the work in order to complete the narrative of the installation. My artmaking process frequently involves ritualistic, labour intensive methods of production, such as felt-making. I use these methods to construct environments that attempt to embody some form of psychic reality.

My work is experimental and uses both traditional sculptural, video and animation footage as well as interactive elements. My aim is to push the boundaries of technology in the attempt to create installations that communicate some form of human emotion. I see and use technology as an additional artistic tool to express my creative visions.

As an artist, my artistic projects aim to assist in making visual arts more accessible to the general public, thereby creating more awareness about the visual arts, new media and installation art. My artworks create an explorative space that opens up a dialogue with the viewer, asking the viewer to question issues around identity, memory, social interactions and responsibilities and the exploration of self.

As a lecturer, I encourage experimentation with traditional art media and new technology. I emphasise the importance of not allowing the technology to overwhelm one when embarking on a new media creative project. I firmly believe in the transformative power of the art process and encourage my students to engage and develop their own creative language.”