

E L I Z A B E T H   T U R K



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T H E   C O L L A R S

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H I R S C H L   &   A D L E R   M O D E R N

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## P R E F A C E

Continuing a long-standing tradition of exhibiting important American sculpture, Hirschl & Adler Modern is proud to present *Elizabeth Turk: The Collars*. This installation, featuring sixteen intricately carved marble sculptures, marks not only the artist's first solo exhibition with Hirschl & Adler, but also the first time that this exquisite series of collars will be shown as a complete body of work.

Turk's collars are the culmination of her desire to create a series of "delicately monumental" sculptures, a project the California-based artist has been contemplating since her initial experimentation with marble in the mid 1990s. Turk has chosen the collar as her sculptural metaphor, yet this series invites us to explore further, as Turk has, a more complex system of relationships between that which is man-made and that which is natural and organic.

Inspired by both her studies of the sciences and by patterns found in nature, and motivated by the paradox of pairing the fragility of lace with marble's intrinsic strength, Turk has pushed the technical boundaries of this medium. She has deftly transformed solid 400-pound blocks of Sivec and Carrara marble into delicate and ostensibly ephemeral works of art that stimulate us both visually and intellectually.

Thanks are due to our guest author who provided the ultimate words to accompany and contextualize Turk's exquisite *oeuvre*. And with respect and admiration, we thank and congratulate Elizabeth Turk, who has tirelessly honed and expanded this series over the past five years in order to share her unique vision with a wider audience. In turn, the artist wishes to thank the Chiarini Family of Santa Ana, California, who generously provided studio space for three years to enable her to bring this project to completion.

S H E L L E Y   F A R M E R

E L I Z A B E T H   F E L D

Hirschl & Adler Modern



*Collar #12, 2005*

Marble, 27½ x 20 x 11 in.

cat. 9

OPPOSITE: FRONT VIEW

ABOVE: BACK VIEW



## SYSTEMS & PATTERNS



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:

*Collar #13*, 2004

Marble,  $3\frac{1}{2} \times 14 \times 20$  in.  
cat. 10

*Collar #14*, 2004

Marble,  $3 \times 12 \times 20$  in.  
cat. 11

*Collar #6*, 2003

Marble,  $7\frac{1}{2} \times 12 \times 14\frac{1}{2}$  in.  
cat. 3

OPPOSITE:

*Collar #14*, 2004

Marble,  $3 \times 12 \times 20$  in.  
cat. 11

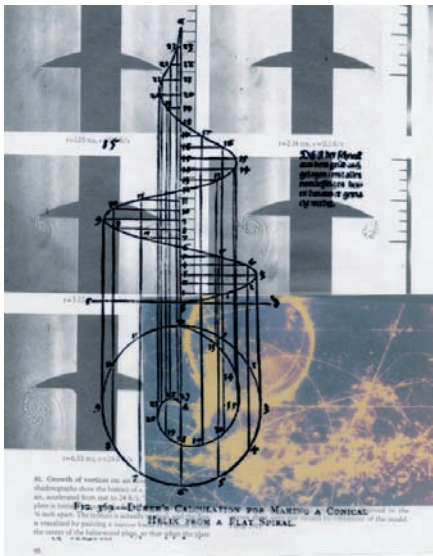
The sheer physicality and beauty of Elizabeth Turk's marble sculptures is at first almost overwhelming. With every viewing angle the stones' structural planes change, shifting the quiet weave and wrap of the marble forms. Passages of thinned marble dissolve in light, yielding translucent folds and clefts. These are qualities of the material which Turk, a supreme craftsman, exploits and manipulates. She speaks of pushing the limitations of the stone, understanding and protecting its fissures while releasing its strengths through the rigorous carving of complex forms and patterns. In many ways, Turk's patterns seem innate to each particular piece of marble, as though she has tapped into a hidden pre-existing structure—one that has survived for centuries, only now to be revealed and rendered permanent.

Turk's conceptual interest in the interrelationship of rudimentary patterns and structures has been a preoccupation for many years. She has sought out and discovered connections between systems and their variations across all disciplines. Establishing linkages between patterns that are found, innovated, or created recalls Alois Riegl's late-nineteenth-century analysis of the history of ornamentation, in which he attempts to trace the origins of basic designs and patterns. Riegl's formalist premise is based on the idea that motifs are developed and worked out over time, and thus each form or ornament has an aesthetic history tied to a specific cultural context. Thus, in looking closely at such motifs, we can discover past or repeated elements and the formal variations that may emerge in the future. Explaining the development of vegetal ornament in Greek vase painting, Riegl writes, "the alterations, elaborations, and variations encountered on the blossom motifs of Hellenistic and Roman tendril ornament should not be seen as the crowning achievements of the preceding development but as the first signs of the fundamental innovations to follow."<sup>1</sup> Riegl emphasizes that such changes are driven by an individual artist's creative strength as well as by a wide range of external influences, including cultural, social, political, and economic factors. As a result, not every design concept is successful, and thus, as he notes, certain decorative patterns "fall away," never to enter the permanent vocabulary of historical ornamentation. Riegl's analysis stresses the connection between cultures as if to imply an underlying universal "well" from which all societies draw and ultimately base their forms of ornamentation.<sup>2</sup>





Artist's Sketchbook



Artist's Sketchbook

OPPOSITE:

Collar #17, 2005  
Marble, 17 x 18 x 9 in.  
cat. 13

This central idea of an overarching connectivity, not only between cultures and societies, but also with the natural world in its artistic manifestation, is the basis of Elizabeth Turk's patterns. Her motifs are her own interpretive variations on patterns of physical development, organic forms, and man-made structures. In the fundamental structures of our physical world, she has discovered the repetition and modification of certain basic components or design structures. Natural/man-made, organic/inorganic—Turk takes these groupings, ranging from anatomical to botanical to mathematical, and finds visual relationships within and across these deeply varied classifications. She establishes formal relationships between seemingly unconnected or disparate elements of our world, finding linkages amongst the most remote subjects, translating them not to patterns of ornamentation but to marble manifestations of our physical, chemical, and anatomical world.

Turk maintains what she calls a "sketchbook" (p. 6) composed of individual pages replete with personal observations, magazine clippings, and photocopies of textbook diagrams and illustrations. Studying these sheets, one begins to see what Turk sees: connections and relationships; organized complex patterns underlying superficial randomness and chaos. The sketchbook thus serves almost as an index to Turk's sculptures; through text and image, she seems to have worked out these visceral relationships in preparation for their translation into stone.

On one sheet, the variation of twisted, curvilinear patterns of ram and goat horns are cleverly paired with other similar spirals, but most impressively with Albrecht Dürer's calculation for transforming a flat spiral into a conical helix. Looking at Dürer's carefully executed drawing, it is hard not to make the leap several centuries forward to one of the most profound pattern discoveries of our time: the double helix of DNA. This simple pattern of geometry becomes part of our scientific and visual vocabulary, signaling Turk's most basic premise: we are surrounded by interrelated patterns and systems—of thought, of physicality, of communication.

In one of her most elaborate juxtapositions, Turk pairs the dynamic and irregular patterns of zebra hides with the geometric black-and-white ornamentation of an ancient clay vessel; she then overlays textbook diagrams of the vessel's surface on which mathematical equations of motion have been worked out. This





*Collar #7*, 2003  
Marble, 16 x 13½ x 12 in.  
cat. 4

OPPOSITE: FRONT VIEW  
ABOVE: BACK VIEW

material is collaged over magazine aerial photographs of snowfall patterns in the high-altitude regions of South America, on which Turk has written textual clues such as “external v. internal,” “pattern v. environment.” Here again, in pulling together seemingly unrelated elements of our physical, natural, and intellectual existence, she provides visual proof of the symbiotic relationships inherent in our world. The micro-patterns she detects provide the basis for her work as she culls ideas and forms, absorbing and innovating them ultimately to memorialize her perception of our essential existence.

Turk’s choice of an article of clothing as the sculptural metaphor through which she expresses her ideas is an important one. The implication of something one wears, or takes on like a mantel, mentally orients the viewer within her carefully articulated environment. And as the artist has chosen to install the sculptures at heights approximating an average man or woman, walking amidst the slender Cor-Ten pedestals and marble collars makes us a part of the installation itself. Moving closer to each piece to examine its intricate carving, we are further compelled to consider Turk’s intellectual thesis of connectivity and interrelatedness.

*Collar 7* (cat. 4, pp. 8,9) and *Collar 8* (cat. 5) were begun in late 2001 and 2002, respectively, and finished in 2003–04. Informed by the social and political events of 9/11, they are responses against that moment in time—the fragility of life manifested in the hardness and stability of the marble. These are some of her most delicate and intricate patterns, recalling the supple organic forms of plants and flowers; yet as if to prove their inherent strength, they are enmeshed in harder, almost rib-like structures. Tendrils grow amidst bone-like trellises only to be further laden with swells of drapery—a flourish of man-made beauty crowning this expression of defiance and strength.

As if recalling sketchbook notations, *Collar 9* (cat. 6, pp. 12,13) sets forth in stone the friction between what Turk identifies as *pattern v. environment*. Although the sculpture was started earlier, Turk worked on it in earnest throughout 2004 upon her return from an artist-in-residence program in Kyojima, Japan, a suburb of Tokyo. The upper-half of the piece has the appearance of a harness or yoke of some type, a protective armament used in ancient battle. However, the sculpting below this solid mass of marble is a carefully carved grid-like structure overlaid with fragile, slender vines that cross over and wrap around a chain-link





Collar #5, 2003  
Marble, 8 x 6 x 5 in.  
cat. 2



Collar #4, 2002  
Marble, 6 x 4½ x 5 in.  
cat. 1

OPPOSITE:

Collar #16, 2005  
Marble, in two parts  
3 x 22 x 16 in.; 2½ x 14 x 12 in.  
cat. 12

lattice. Turk explained that this pattern developed from her observation of the consistent use of rectilinear concrete forms throughout Japan in its architecture and municipal infrastructure. She recalls seeing these “grids of concrete everywhere” and “flowers that were peeping up through the grids” as if to manifest Turk’s thesis of the relationship and interaction between man-made and natural systems and patterns. The highly structured and deliberate manner of the collar’s front belies the less-ordered back, yielding instead to a more chaotic sensibility implying that these two seemingly contradictory modes can and do co-exist.

With each collar we are asked to move beyond the purely aesthetic and consider Turk’s motivations. Riegl contended that artistic intention or *Kunstwollen* was the origin of new ideas, implying that the artist was the true source of creativity and innovation, while being necessarily informed by external conditions. Essentially, Turk makes this same artistic argument as she draws ideas from her surroundings yet relies on her unique creative formulations to guide the manipulation and ultimate expression of the motifs as well as the medium. As viewers, we note the repetition and innovation of patterns and thus become active participants in the conceptual dialogue that is the basis of the installation itself. Our thoughts inform the sculpture (as it informs us), and our interaction becomes integral in acknowledging not only Turk’s development of a body of forms or designs, but also her intellectual premise of a perpetually evolving, fundamentally linked system of visual communication, expression, and ideas.

E.L.R.

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1. Alois Riegl, *Problems of Style, Foundations for a History of Ornament*, transl. by Evelyn Kain (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 208.
  2. Ibid., p. 41.





*Collar #10, 2005*  
Marble, 17 x 19 x 8 in.  
cat. 7

ABOVE: BACK VIEW  
ABOVE RIGHT: FRONT VIEW

*Collar #9, 2004*  
Marble, 33 x 29 x 16 in.  
cat. 6

ABOVE: BACK VIEW  
OPPOSITE: FRONT VIEW







## CATALOGUE



*Collar #6, 2003*  
Marble, 7½ x 12 x 14½ in.  
cat. 3

*Elizabeth Turk in her studio, 2004*

1

*Collar #4, 2002*  
Marble, 6 x 4½ x 5 in.  
*Illustrated p. 10*

2

*Collar #5, 2003*  
Marble, 8 x 6 x 5 in.  
*Illustrated p. 10*

3

*Collar #6, 2003*  
Marble, 7½ x 12 x 14½ in.  
*Illustrated pp. 4 and 15*

4

*Collar #7, 2003*  
Marble, 16 x 13½ x 12 in.  
*Illustrated pp. 8 and 9*

5

*Collar #8, 2004*  
Marble, 24 x 16½ x 16 in.

6

*Collar #9, 2004*  
Marble, 33 x 29 x 16 in.  
*Illustrated pp. 12 and 13*

7

*Collar #10, 2005*  
Marble, 17 x 19 x 8 in.  
*Illustrated p. 12*

8

*Collar #11, 2006*  
Marble, 28 x 20 x 11 in.

9

*Collar #12, 2005*  
Marble, 27½ x 20 x 11 in.  
*Illustrated on cover,*  
*pp. 2 and 3*

10

*Collar #13, 2004*  
Marble, 3½ x 14 x 20 in.  
*Illustrated p. 4*

11

*Collar #14, 2004*  
Marble, 3 x 12 x 20 in.  
*Illustrated pp. 4 and 5*

12

*Collar #16, 2005*  
Marble, in two parts  
3 x 22 x 16 in.  
2½ x 14 x 12 in.  
*Illustrated p. 11*

13

*Collar #17, 2005*  
Marble, 17 x 18 x 9 in.  
*Illustrated p. 7*

14

*Collar #18, 2005*  
Marble, 3 x 12 x 17 in.

15

*Collar #19, 2005*  
Marble, 9 x 18 x 18 in.

16

*Collar #20, 2006*  
Marble, 49 x 2 x 3 in.

Born

1961Pasadena, California

Education

1994M.F.A., Rinehart School of Sculpture,  
Maryland Institute, Baltimore, MD

1983B.F.A., International Relations, Scripps College,  
Claremont, CA

Solo Exhibitions

2004*VantagePoint III Elizabeth Turk The Collars:  
Tracings of Thought*, Mint Museum of Art,  
Charlotte, NC

2003*(Know) Fly Zone*, Installation, Santa Ana, CA

2001*A Memorial to Nature I, An Installation by  
Elizabeth Turk*, Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum,  
Santa Barbara, CA

1998*Elizabeth Turk*, Hemphill Gallery, Washington, D.C.

Selected Group Exhibitions

2004*3 Solo Projects: Jane Mulfinger, Ross Rudel, Elizabeth  
Turk*, Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design,  
Los Angeles, CA

2003*Matter and Matrix*, Ruth Chandler Williamson Gallery,  
Scripps College, Claremont, CA

Rat-Powered Film Festival, Santa Ana, CA

2002Japan Bank Building, Hiroshima, Japan,  
collaboration with Koso Haranka and Kirara Kawauchi

2000*New York—Classicism—Now*, Hirschl & Adler Galleries,  
New York, NY

1998*Objectivity-International Objects of Subjectivity*,  
Contemporary Art Center, Virginia Beach, VA

1997*From Here*, Baumgartner Gallery, Washington, D.C.

*A Sculpture Show*, Grimaldis Gallery, Baltimore, MD

1996*Louis Bourgeois: Elizabeth Turk*, Baumgartner Gallery,  
Washington, D.C.

*A Sculpture Show*, Grimaldis Gallery, Baltimore, MD

*Fresh Out*, Maryland Art Place, Baltimore, MD

*Superbia*, Washington Project for the Arts,  
Washington, D.C.

Grants, Residencies, Awards, and Fellowships

2003McColl Center for Visual Art, Artist in Residence,  
Charlotte, NC

2002Kyojima Artist in Residency Program, Tokyo, Japan

2001California State University Fullerton, Artist in Residence,  
Fullerton, CA

2000Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant

New York City Art Commission Award for  
Excellence in Design

John Michael Kohler Arts & Industry Program,  
Artist in Residence, Sheboygan, WI

1994Amalie Rothschild Award

Selected Public Collections

Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

National Museum for Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.

Weatherspoon Gallery, University of North Carolina at  
Greensboro, NC

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Elizabeth Finger

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COVER

*Collar #12*, 2005 (BACK VIEW)  
Marble, 27<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 20 x 11 in.  
cat. 9

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