

# **Carole Collet**

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## **Nobel Textiles: When Craft meets Science and Sustainability**

### Context:

This practice based presentation will present, analyse and discuss the textile artifacts produced for the Suicidal Textiles collection as part of the Nobel Textiles project showcased at the Institute of Contemporary Art In London in September 2008. Nobel Textiles is the result of a collaboration between the Medical Research Council and Central Saint Martins College; where five Nobel Laureates were paired together with five researchers working in the field of textiles and fashion. This presentation will showcase "Suicidal Textiles", a collaboration between Carole Collet and Sir John Sulston.

### Research questions:

Can textile craft become the catalyst for new biomimicry design models and sustainable practice?  
Can scientific biological principles challenge our approach to sustainable design?

### Project summary:

In response to Sir John Sulston who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2002 with Sydney Brenner and Bob Horvitz, for his work on Programmed Cell Death, I designed "Suicidal Textiles", a collection of sustainable garden textiles and compost furniture inspired by the process of apoptosis in *C.elegans*. The core of the collection was inspired by the natural process of death in the very fabrication of life. At embryonic and growing stage, both plants and multi-organisms generate more cells than they need. Some cells will then naturally commit suicide in order for others to develop.

This process of programmed cell death effectively acts as a shaping and sculpting tool for all multi-organisms, including humans. What interested me in this principle is the fact that "nature" overproduces cells, then triggers suicidal behaviours to be able to fully complete a healthy specimen. So the way nature "manufactures" products is by overproducing raw materials which then effectively biodegrade until the final shape of the "product" is achieved. In the context of sustainability and textiles, where minimising resources, maximising efficiency, reducing waste are the key strategic tools, I was suddenly confronted with a very different model.

The "Suicidal textiles" collection attempts to embed this biological model and relies on using very traditional textiles techniques such as macramé and crochet to mimic cellular development and apoptosis. By using a combination of natural and synthetic fibres, the Suicidal poufs series (or compost macramé furniture) is designed to evolve over time, when the biodegradable materials will slowly disappear to reveal the final shape of the poufs.

The paper will highlight the parallel process between the fabrication of life and the fabrication of textiles, where traditional craft techniques become the key connection between science, design and sustainability. The presentation will discuss the creative and scientific journey behind Suicidal Textiles, and will use photography, video and drawings to illustrate the role of craft as a catalyst for new biomimicry design models.

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For visual references please see:

[http://www.carolecollet.com/suicidal\\_textiles/design\\_concept.html](http://www.carolecollet.com/suicidal_textiles/design_concept.html)

<http://www.nobeltextiles.co.uk>