

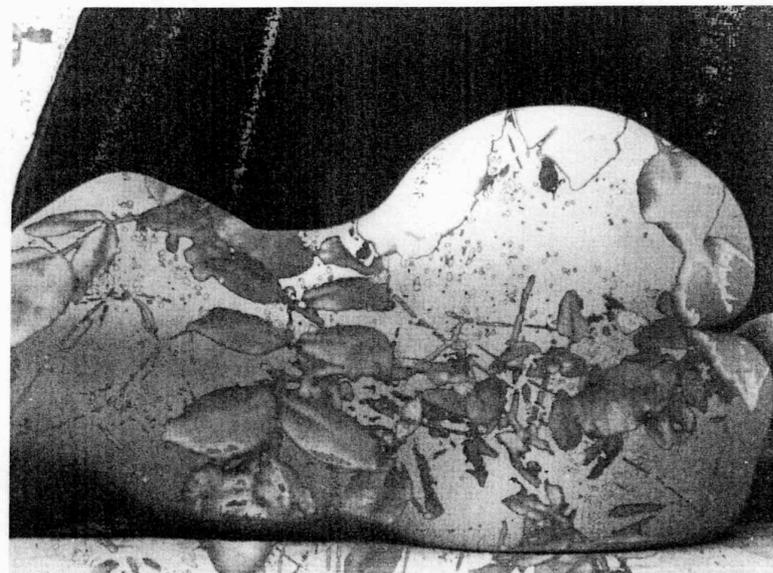
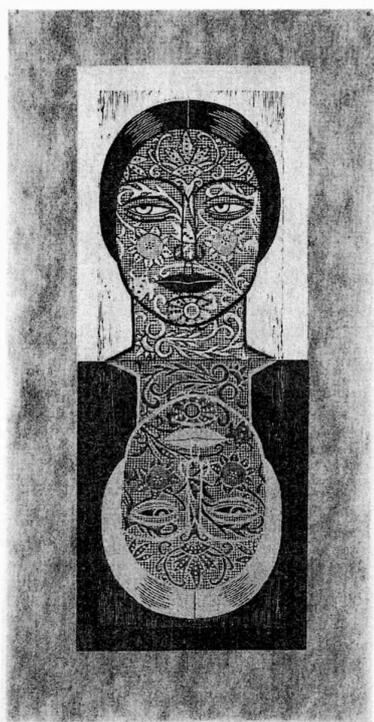
Allure: The Feminine in Print

Maroondah Art Gallery, Ringwood

Let's face it, Ringwood is hardly on the beaten track when it comes to Melbourne's cultural circuit. But if the recent exhibition 'Allure: The Feminine in Print' is anything to go by, perhaps it deserves to be.

Curator Di Waite has put together a fine exhibition. Established printmakers Deborah Klein and Heather Shimmen are shown alongside rising stars Wendy Hutchison and Marion Manifold. There is a shared concern with feminine archetypes and ideals of beauty, while the prevalence of layering denies simple stereotyping. Cloths intimate role in forging feminine identities is also commonly acknowledged by the artists; Klein prints on interfacing and silk; Shimmen employs organza overlays and floral patches; tulle finds its way into Hutchison's prints; and Manifold's screenprinted layers are strongly reminiscent of damask.

The home decor pinks, apricots, lavenders and mints belie the melancholy in Shimmen's work. Hers are the doomed heroines of folk tales and fairy stories, inhabiting the dark, grim world of spells and disease where all the girls have seven brothers and need to endure inhuman deprivations in order to prove themselves worthy. Fish hooks, safety pins and miniature witch's brooms pierce their composite faces staining them with blood. The finely engraved, eyes and lips ironically act as masks, reinforcing the heroine's muteness.



Marion Manifold
A WOMAN SLEPT
LIKE AN ANIMAL
ENSCONCED IN
IT'S SHELL, 1999
digital print

Snippets of text on 'true love' are corrupted through overlays, quickly becoming illegible, while cryptic algebraic equations seem to crawl across the surface of the prints like cockroaches. Who, or what, are B, E and V?

Klein's heroines are equally inscrutable. *Sister Act* sees the twins joined at the plait, with only the backs of the heads on display. There is something threatening in the bond, the unity of purpose, perhaps because it is so deliberate. Separation, while easily achievable, is unthinkable for these Siamese Midwich cuckoos.

Anon and *Anonyme* sport elaborate hair-dos, inspired by mourning jewellery woven from the deceased's hair. We're left guessing the sitter's identity, not that it really matters. She is reduced to a plinth for the locket hair-do, a model of decorum and protocol.

The faces in earlier works are equally composed. The normally subversive tattoo is used instead to epitomise the civilised 'lady'. Designs mimic the painstaking embroideries which were taken as a measure of a lady's worth (read marriageability,) in earlier societies, but which are still, for the most part, relegated to the lower echelons of 'craft' and 'women's work'. Like *Sleeping Beauty*, *Daughter of Time* is imprisoned for what must seem a hundred years by her tapestry roses, her modesty protected by floral garter belts and ivy.

Deborah Klein LACE FACE/LACE WRAITH, 1997
linocut on interfacing with hand stitching
123 x 61 cm, Edition of 3

Klein's and Shimmen's mastery over their mediums reflects their longer exhibiting histories. Their exquisite linocuts are supremely assured, the imagery articulate and satisfying. Hutchison's linocutting appears rudimentary in comparison, relying on tulle overlays and pastel colours to infuse the works with subtlety and nuance. The large, digital prints are more self sufficient, and, like the linocuts, evoke dismembered torsos wrapped in togas. *Fluid Edge*, in particular, suggests legs and hips, or rather their memory. Netting cocoons and corsets form luminous x-rays against rich velvety backgrounds.

Manifold digitally mirrors and multiplies hands and feet to create slightly indecent butterflies or Rorschach blots, their symmetry undermined by lace overlays. Foliage decorates solarised buttocks in *A Woman Slept, like an Animal Ensclosed in it's Shell*, and ensnares Michaelangelo's Eve in *Les Aubes* (The Dawns). The red positively glows, and alongside the stained and dismembered dressmaker's dummy in *My Mother,s Mother,s Mother Rose*, invokes women's rites of passage. Many a finger has been pricked.

Jazmina Cininas

Exhibition ran from 29 March —13 May