

**Opening address by Wendy Stavrianos at the launch of  
*DEBORAH KLEIN – OUT OF THE PAST 1995-2007*, Castlemaine  
Art Gallery and Historical Museum, April 5, 2008.**

Frederic Sommer, photographer, said “Life itself is not the reality. We are the ones who put life into stones and pebbles.”

Deborah Klein's reality is her own. She breathes life not into stones and pebbles, but into the mysteries and the links that lie beneath the fragments of a female world.

Hair landscapes - plaiting, coiling, ordering - has become a language in the works. Objects become signs. They are all a part of the mystery of female. A female ‘Out of the Past’ ageless portrayal, yet a contemporary.

A woman is often compared to a set of rooms in a house where all doors open, where those who need access to her can freely do so. Yet deep in the house lies one room, the secret room where only she will enter. Deborah's work invites you to ponder on that idea of the secret part of that hidden room. There is a celebration of the intensity of those mysteries in these powerfully iconic paintings.

Hair whispers and winds its codes of meaning, its hidden language of joining, twisting and binding. Combs’ ornamental patterns become shields or gates which bar entry. They are barriers to tantalize the viewer. The blue and red teeth speak of the slow burning of desire, held in check or of absolute restraint, the holding of an image in perfect balance. There is precision here. Time is a part of that precision. Time in the work of art has been lost in many ways. Deborah's work invests lovingly in time, with her pearly surfaces, lacy intricacies and silky tassels. We are drawn into the experience of sensuality of each brush stroke. This in turn creates the gaze of reverie, a state of ecstasy, that only a silent meditative looking produces in the human brain.

There is a feeling in this age that I call the 'quickenings'. It's spinning out of control. Artists rebel against this shallowness, this turning away from depth and the concept of unfathomable mystery. They dig deeply, finding the divine in a moth's wing or a single pearl.

The true artist seeks subjects of enduring value. To rebel also against the overwhelming volume of 'messages' and images to which we are exposed in this time. Deborah's art is of this enduring kind. She has rejected our preoccupation with novelty in this age, with subjects that appeal to marketing experts. The beauty of the human and natural world is captured, held in these timeless images with subtle suggestiveness to other times, other cultures. Nothing in these works is explained in the way many artists today are so didactic in their approach.

Deborah knows how to seduce you with her work. The eyes in the works become masks and moths. The moths become eyes, part of female disguise. The turned head is waiting. Women know what waiting is! The turned away head becomes a mask. When it turns

towards us, it is still masked. We the viewers are kept in suspense as if the narrative, a secret language, is yet to unfold its mystery. The viewer becomes the voyeur or the witness to the unfolding.

If we think of the black brutal mask of Nolan's Ned Kelly, stark in the landscape, Deborah's masks are in the extreme contrast to Nolan's, yet they are both about protection, protection in different forms. This time we are living in a time of great technological change. The young embrace it naturally. The older generations struggle to keep up or resort to what they know. There is a great vulnerability in this time, a need for protection.

I wonder about artists like Nolan, Tucker, Deborah Klein, myself and others who grew up around that St Kilda area and how that impacted on their work. I remember the strong warnings, the danger in the environment (mostly the dirty old men); not to drink out of the water fountains on my way home from St Kilda Primary. St Kilda was pure and bizarre theatre in the 1940's - all fuel for active imaginations.

Artists that still use the brush, that draw with the timeless materials, that still take time and spend endless hours on a single strand of hair, are rare, and we must treasure these artists and treasure the stillness and their intimacy and this knowing, this silence that helps us all stop to gaze in wonder to listen to the voice of deep imaginings.

The Belgian artist Rene Magritte said "Art evokes the mystery without which the world would not exist."

I would highly recommend a long gaze at these beautiful, iconic works. I recommend also the very impressive catalogue and informative catalogue essay by Guest Curator Diane Soumilas.

Thank you, Deborah.