

INKING UP

DEBORAH KLEIN | RONA GREEN | CLAYTON TREMLETT

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BENEFACTORS GALLERY 29 AUGUST – 18 OCTOBER 2015



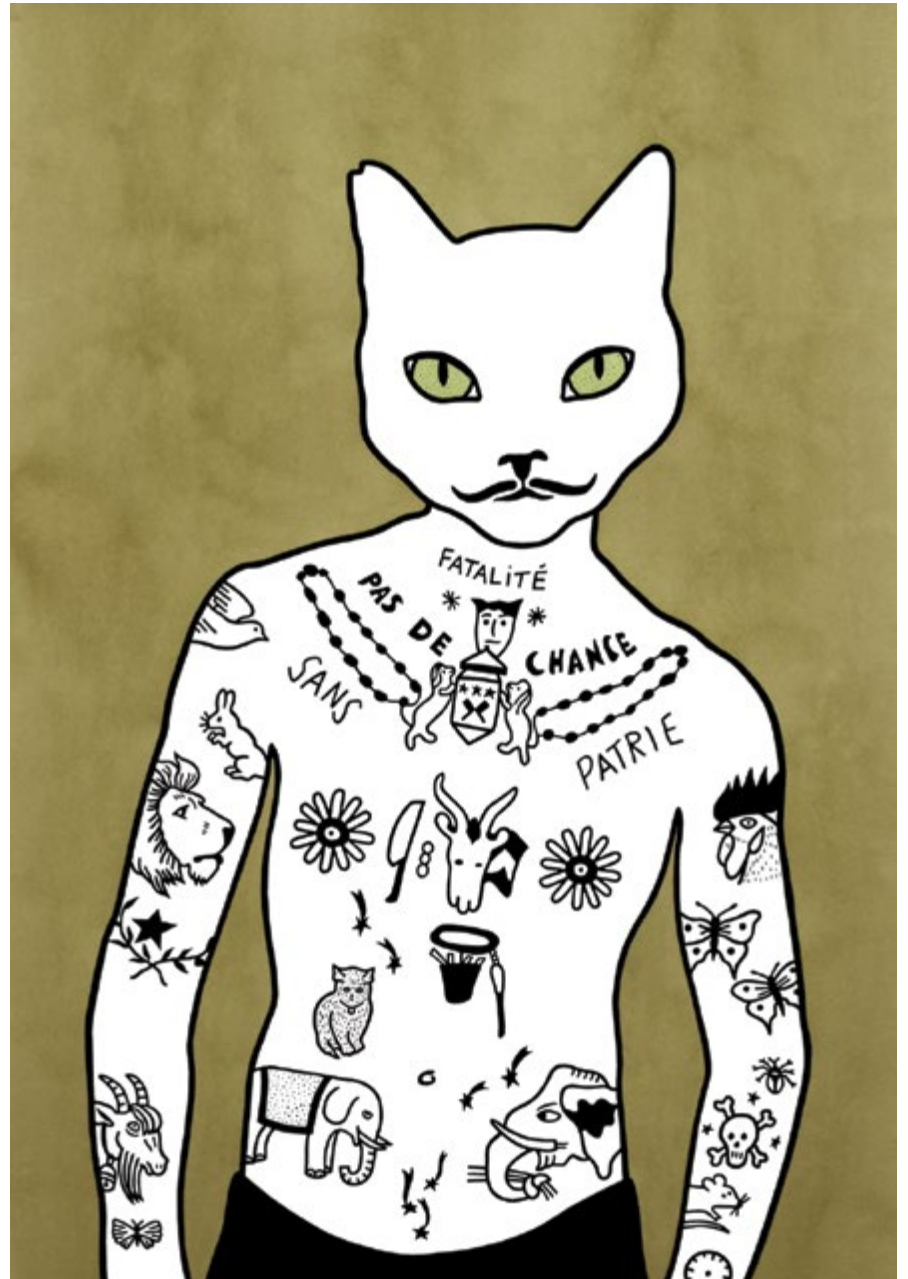
Castlemaine Art Gallery and Historical Museum

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Rona Green
The Surgeon 2010
Hand coloured linocut
108 x 76 cm
Courtesy the artist and Australian Galleries



INKING UP

A group exhibition of prints by Clayton Tremlett (curator), Rona Green and Deborah Klein

Dr. Thomas A. Middlemost

The linocut prints of the three contemporary Victorian printmakers Clayton Tremlett, Rona Green, and Deborah Klein are displayed within the Castlemaine Art Gallery exhibition *Inking up*. The works within the exhibition explore the double meanings of inking up a linoleum block for printmaking, and stylized, artistically eschewed explorations that are themselves documents on inking up or tattooing ones skin.

Both Rona Green and Deborah Klein locate tattoo depictions on the bodies of their figures. The choice of the figure to be symbolically tattooed by the inked up linoleum block and the placement of that tattoo are essential in understanding the artwork.

Green's animals are anthropomorphized, (they take on the attributes of human form), the rabbit *Chips*, 2008, a hand-

coloured linocut 112 x 76cm., has a moustache, gold teeth, searching blue eyes, and a Southern Cross tattoo on his elongated ears. Green's animals are bipedal, and display their easily empathetic, bad attitudes; shirtless and bare knuckled; they will 'pick you' in a fight and win.

Green's exploration of the dark side of humanity may have been born from the artist upbringing in the port city of Geelong, (a quick helicopter flight) just South of Melbourne. The underbelly of society is also doggedly studied in her arts practice. Green's cats can look shifty, have limbs missing, masks, or look like they just stepped off stage. These are unrealistic animal depictions that exemplify certain types of people.

An abundant humor dwelling within these works allows the viewer to explore possibilities, like a 'Choose Your Own

Adventure' novel. Creating, a unique, imagined underclass of society without being condescending. The schema of Greens' work allows the artist to say that a particular suburban tabby is depicted, while the artists mind may be exploring the imagined persona of a Russian mobster, or a 1980's East L.A. brothel, through a pop culture lens.

The works are technical in their brilliant printmaking ability, large in scale, and similar to all of the works in this small exhibition, their initial simplicity belies an underlying complex nature.

Deborah Klein's tattoo depictions are generally on the face of the model; an extreme tattoo placement decision, which in itself heightens a viewer's interest. Facial tattoos are usually reserved for those in the tattoo industry, prison tattoos, tattoos that are forced upon individuals or gang inkings, and

certain Maori lip tattoos. Even within the U.S. military facial tattoos are banned by 'Army Regulation 670-1,'¹ which states that the face and some peripheral arm and leg; "tattoo, branding and body mutilation" is banned.

Unlike Green's recognizable and documented tattoo forms, which are generally direct borrowings from already extant tattoos, Klein's tattoo depictions are not forms that would appear on the body. Some schemas appropriate decorative patterning to represent hand work, such as *Lace Face*, 1996, 46 x 30cm., or specific icons from the artist's history or artistic progression.

Klein's faces and female body canvasses are intended by the artist to represent all times and all places, to transcend the specific and touch the universal. As the painter Tom Roberts wrote in a letter to the editor of *The Argus* newspaper in

1890 in rebuttal to the paper's general comment that art should be of all times and places: " ... by making art the perfect expression of one time and one place, it becomes art for all times and all places ... "² The almost generic female faces in Klein's work are: "signifiers of women who have either been marginalised or completely written out of history."³

The symbols inscribed on the faces are specific in as much as they funnel the artist's personal expression, are place holders for a specific time in her life; the time of making the work. They are personal statements on political or social themes. The elements or emblems used are in no way arbitrary. They are compiled through: "extensive research into the many-layered, complex language of signs and symbols"⁴

The immaculate, orderly, depiction of restrained hair, in itself, holds a

story of oppression, historic notions of cleanliness, and bound, or formally oppressed feminine forms of body placement and constriction.⁵

Humour and historical reference are also immensely important in Klein's linocuts. *St. Kilda Warrior*, 1996, 61.2 x 45.3cm., is emblazoned with the geographical icons of her early environment, a satirical comment on the gentrification of the beach side suburb: the beach, sun, sea and surf, the rollercoaster, large Luna Park face, balloons and ice cream cones of the fun park.

The work is also a recreation of: *A Young Daughter of the Picts*⁶ c.1585 attributed to Jacques Le Moyne des Morgues in the Yale Centre for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, a magnificent but minute watercolour and gouache, touched with gold on parchment, the artist has long admired.

Both are full-length images of the female body, which hold visual similarity with their background environment. Both artworks draw attention to the erogenous zones of the figures. The floral roundels of the earlier work are echoed by the ice cream and balloon depictions in the latter. The natural landscape of the Pictish work's background is also transposed through stylized flowers decoratively placed on the female form. St. Kilda and its amusements are in turn, placed upon the body of the figure in Klein's work.

The most jocular juxtaposition, in this authors opinion is the open mouthed entry to Luna Park that appears between the legs of the figure, approximating a decorative sunburst motif and palm tree surrounded gaping maw, or vagina dentata⁷; a reference that was not intended by the artist.

Overall the figure's pose is of stability and strength, echoed by the upright spear in the figure's right hand, and a bold hair and earring choice. whilst the eyes turn to the left, possibly towards the artist's future, for this is an image related to her early life.

Notably of the two attributes at the figure's feet, the crushed Victoria Bitter, (V.B.) beer can is a ubiquitous sign of the general populous at play, by the seaside, beer and rubbish being the ever present partners in an Australian day out.

Inking up is the title of Clayton Tremlett's artists' book within the exhibition. The leather bound, 25 x 19cm., book is in the style of a prison ledger and includes 16 linocut images cut from the source material of period photographs of inmates from the Castlemaine gaol. The photographs, form part of a similar ledger at the public records office

used as a form of identification for said inmates.

The linocut images are paired with further linocuts, made by the artist of tattoo designs. Tattoos were mentioned in the original ledger and these recreations, give the viewer a visual representation of the similarity between the early tattoo form and that of the present day. Letterpress and hand written text with further identifying information and details, as appears in the original ledger, is also included.

Another linocut by Tremlett: *Imaging Ned*, 100 x 70cm. reimagines the police wanted poster of Ned Kelly's visage, (recently popularized by the street artist Regan Tamanui, or HA HA) as a portrait of the artist aged fifty: A 'selfie' through time. To show the similarities between beard styles over a one-hundred year period. The artist states he has an

“interest in retelling history by examining what was there and looking at it again to see how we have evolved or not.”⁸

Tremlett seems to be visually describing the recording systems of control through surveillance. In this case he depicts the recording and documentation of identifying marks and noted features to record at the time of segregation a societally judged malcontent. *Inking Up* is a refabrication of the procedural recording and storing of information. Both the myriad of access, and widespread redistribution of information that is now possible could not be fathomed in between 1892 and 1902 when the original ledger was constructed. Something for all of us to muse upon while our internet history is being logged by business for marketing, and every keystroke, or walk down a city street is imaged and kept by bureaucracies for an unknowable, possibly changeable time due to the policy whims of government.

A dedication to the printmaking medium of linocut, use of the human body as canvas, and an underlying interest in history binds these Inked Up artists' together. The historical theme of this exhibition delves deeply into the differing artists methods, their unique vision and possibly their beliefs. Delving into the history of pop-cultural depiction, animal rights, early Anglo feminist depictions or the identifying marks on regional Victorian prison inmates provides a context for our current society, and an insight into everyday life.

(Endnotes)

- 1 AR 670-1, 3-3 “Tattoo, branding and body mutilation policy, c. Tattoos or brands, regardless of subject matter, are prohibited on the head, face (except for permanent makeup, as provided in paragraph 3-2b(2)), neck (anything above the t-shirt neckline to include on/inside the eyelids, mouth, and ears), wrists, and hands, except Soldiers may have one ring tattoo on each hand, below the joint of the bottom segment (portion closest to the palm) of the finger. Accessing applicants must adhere to this same policy.”
- 2 Roberts, T., Letter to the editor, *The Argus*, 4 July 1890, p. 10; trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/8414472 accessed 20 August 2015.
- 3 Klein, D. email to the author dated 20 August 2015.
- 4 Klein, D. email to the author dated 20 August 2015.
- 5 The early ‘Tattooed Faces and Figures’, series of which ‘Lace Face’ was a small part, was made before the artist formed an interest in Memento Mori items of jewelry; containing skull forms, and plaits of hair, or detailed, intricately constructed images made with hair.
- 6 <http://collections.britishart.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3658134> Accessed 18 August 2015.
- 7 The religious or folkloric nightmare of emasculation and eviscerated male genitalia by a toothed vagina.
- 8 Tremlett, C., email to the author dated 12 August 2015 9:53pm.



Deborah Klein
Tattooed Face no.1 1995
Linocut
44.5 x 30cm
Edition 15



Deborah Klein
Lace Face 1996
Linocut
46 x 30cm
Edition 15



Deborah Klein
St. Kilda Warrior 1996
Linocut
61.2 x 45.3 cm
Edition 15

Deborah Klein
Corporeal/Ethereal 2012
Linocut
60 x 50 cm
Edition 23





No. 23501



Clayton Tremlett
Patrick Mullin 2015
Linocut
18cm x 12 cm

Clayton Tremlett
Boxing Man 2015
Linocut
13 cm x 12 cm



Clayton Tremlett
Alfred Horsley 2015
Linocut
18cm x 12 cm

Clayton Tremlett
Ship 2015
Linocut
13 cm x 12 cm



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