

# Silke Raetze

“I find a certain strength in something quite feminine – it can be delicate and fragile, yet at the same time possess a power, a potency”

SILKE RAETZE fuses together a range of diverse mediums – including drawing, ink, text, needlepoint and embroidery – in works that explore universal concepts of love, loss, memory and desire. Building on her recent collection of intensely evocative (and undeniably mischievous) paper “knickers”, Raetze has moved into new territory with paintings of a disfigured classical female sculpture, and a series of text-based embroidery samplers featuring tongue-in-cheek slogans that aim to subvert female stereotypes. Raetze’s works – depicting vulnerability and power – leave the viewer hopeful and reflective, aware of life and love’s future possibilities and dilemmas. *INTERVIEW: Sarah Hetherington*

## Is Raetze a German name?

Yes. Members of my family were wheelmakers in the 16th century. It’s a shame they didn’t invent the wheel – it would have made for a better story! My German heritage is important, but I moved to Australia when I was three years old, so Australia has really had the greater impact on me.

## Where did you grow up?

The majority of my childhood was spent in the southern Sydney suburb of Engadine. I grew up as a tomboy seeking adventure.

## Which artists do you admire?

For grace: ancient Greek and Roman sculptures, such as all the different Aphrodites and Venuses. For patience: Fiona Hall’s carved sardine cans and beaded works with Tupperware. For courage: Louise Bourgeois. And, more recently, for elegance and serenity: The Lost Buddhas [1500-year old Buddhist figures unearthed in 1996 by construction workers in Qingzhou, China after being lost for more than 800 years].

## Do you take inspiration from other artforms, such as music, poetry, performance, literature or design?

Inspiration can come from the strangest places – lingerie shops, museum displays of animal specimens, Buddhist temples, the aquarium, rummage bins at old-ware shops and vintage-clothing stores.

## What influences your work?

It’s the truth about my life – the things I’m experiencing, the things I’ve learnt, the things I find beautiful, the things I hope for and dream of... or things I’ve made a mess of. For me it needs to be about the truth, otherwise what’s the point?

## How do you title your works?

Various methods. Sometimes a songwriter has been to the place you’re in before you

and has already said it perfectly so I borrow phrases from songs, such as *Unguarded Moment* by The Church. For my upcoming exhibition I’ve titled all the knicker sculptures from names given to moths and butterflies, such as *Lunar Lacewing*. Sometimes I recognise artworks that have resonated with me, as with *Aphrodite Landing*.

## Tell me a little about how the “knicker” paper sculptures take form.

I start by inscribing sheets of tracing paper with old love letters; these “infuse” the work with meaning. Layered over this I re-create the look of the lingerie’s fabric with all its intricacy and detail. Eventually they’re pinned out “specimen-style” in a box frame to try to capture that fleeting allure of an intimate moment – of a love.

## Why cover over the text so it’s barely legible? Are you trying to erase the words and their meaning?

The words and their meanings are of their own time; they hold “treasures” of the past. I use them now as foreplay... to get the piece started as they set the tone in my mind.

## How did the Home Sweet Home series of embroidery works come about?

Needlepoint practice is disappearing from one generation of women to the next. Women my age don’t sit around sewing on a tapestry or making cross-stitches anymore. I thought about the generations of women making these samplers for their homes or glory boxes and wondered what my generation would make, what I would make.

## Your upcoming exhibition, Tender Trap, will include paintings for the first time as an extension of your practice. Why have you now moved into painting?

I like to think that my practice will remain broad. I usually begin the work with an idea or a concept, and then I think about the best way to execute this concept.

## Do you think there is a feminine aesthetic or sensibility in art?

I think that it’s undeniable in a way. I base my work very much on my own experiences as a woman. I also find a certain strength in something that is quite feminine – it can be delicate and fragile, yet at the same time possess a power, a potency.

## Your work is autobiographical in the sense that each body of work reflects a different relationship or love story in your life. Do you find this honesty difficult to translate?

No, it’s where the magic is. No time is more beautiful and precious than when two human beings fall in love. The flipside of this is the demise of the love, which can be a tragedy – raw and brutal. Finding the beauty in both sides and translating it – that is poetry. I want to keep it honest and real, yet be poetic about it.

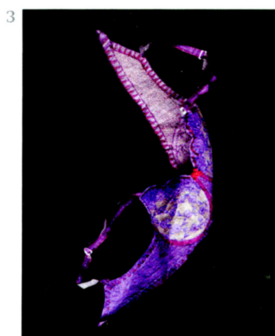
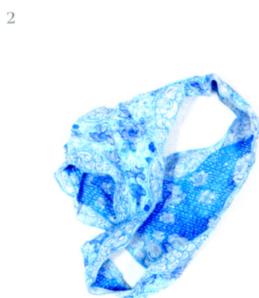
## What intrigues you about beauty, imperfection and femininity?

What intrigues me is how little I know about these things. All I know is: beauty is found in the most peculiar places, it can be found in sorrow but never in fear. Imperfection equals strength (as with dogs – a pedigree will always have more health problems than a mongrel) and is always more interesting. Perfection usually breeds doubt or apathy and, besides, does it even exist? Femininity? I like to be feminine, I feel very lucky to be a woman.

## Finally, if you could live with any work of art ever made, what would it be?

The *Winged Victory of Samothrace* [190 BC] in the Louvre. She faces the tempest in full confident stride and, although headless and limbless, her wings are flexed and she remains victorious.

*Exhibition: Michael Reid Gallery, Sydney, 15 Apr – 19 May*



1 *Racey Lacey* (2006), pen on sculpted tracing paper, 65 x 50 x 7.5cm

2 *Winter Whisper* (2008), pen, ink, pencil, paint and cotton on sculpted paper, 45 x 45 x 10cm

3 *Vineyard Bloom* (2008), pen, ink, pencil, paint and cotton on sculpted paper, 78 x 68 x 10cm



Born: 1975, Germany Studied: National Art School, Sydney Lives and works: Sydney Represented: Michael Reid Gallery, Sydney