

# Artist sews up her views on impossible perfection

AT FIRST glance, Silke Raetze's cross-stitches are a fine example of the domestic arts. But her needlework may not be to your nanna's delicate tastes.

On each needlework Raetze has cross-stitched the words "Free to choose" followed by three options for self-improvement to the face, breasts and what she delicately described as "the hair down there".

*Free to Choose (Hair)*, pictured, has the words Brazilian, laser and bikini stitched across the fabric. "It's sort of ironic because I've written 'free to choose'," she said.

Yet the message behind Raetze's cross-stitches, part of her *Elegant Surrender* show that opens at Michael Reid gallery in Elizabeth Bay on August 3, is stark—modern society sets impossible standards of beauty in the face of inevitable decay.

"The way you are is not OK," she said. "Everything about you needs to be amended and the option to be yourself, as nature intended, is absent from the list of

options. And I think that option is absent generally from our society."

*Elegant Surrender* also features several paintings of female figures, with their limbs severed and heads replaced with feathers and flowers.

These surreal works also explore what Raetze said is an engineered concept of beauty. "Women are relentlessly sold an

idea of beauty that sets impossible standards of flawless and age-defying perfection," she said.

"The fact that we fight against it with surgeries and Botox and fillers and implants; for me that goes against the natural order of things. I find that quite ugly."

Raetze admits it is difficult to resist this pressure, pointing

out: "I'm not a natural blonde any more. I think it's just healthy to question it every now and then."

Raetze has long explored notions of beauty although in *The Mayflower Series*, exhibited last year at Hazelhurst gallery, she created cross-stitches exploring her experiences with online dating, which ended happily in marriage.

"She has an original visual language," Raetze's gallerist Michael Reid said.

"I know of no other female artist in Australia who is exploring—in this manner—her views on physical perfection and imperfection."



**iPad**

See a photo gallery of Silke Raetze's upcoming *Elegant Surrender* exhibition.