

**Exhibition Title:**

*'Of Essence and Lace Trimmings'*

**Artist:**

Marion Manifold

**Date:**

Friday 9<sup>th</sup> August – Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> September

**Place:**

Fremantle Arts Centre  
1 Finnerty Street, Fremantle, WA. 6160  
Ph 08 9432 9555 Fax 08 9430 6613  
[Fac@fremantle.wa.gov.au](mailto:Fac@fremantle.wa.gov.au)  
[www.fac.org.au](http://www.fac.org.au)

**Catalogue Essay:**

*'Of Essence and Lace Trimmings'*

In her latest series of prints artist Marion Manifold continues the exploration of the nature of feminine beauty begun in her previous works: *My Mother's, Mother's Mother - Rose* and *'a finely boned, beautiful face Botticelli would want to paint...'*

In *'Of Essence and Lace Trimmings'* she searches for an eternal feminine essence through embellished etchings which arise from reminiscences of women in her family to contemporary friends and imaginary women, all of whom she places firmly in the Victorian age. In the manner of that era, Manifold raises spirits, capturing their essence between the repeated etched black Chantilly lace patternings, overlaid with amorphous silhouettes and trimmed with wisps of tulle, jet beads, feathers, faille, cord and covered buttons—notions redolent of Victorian mourning. Manifold says:

Beauty expresses an ideal in my work, but underlying there is always a sinister, melancholic tone... I also employ the double, doubling or repetition and patterning in my work in a Freudian sense. It is simultaneously an assurance of immortality, but it also becomes the uncanny harbinger of death.

Hauntingly beautiful, the images themselves spring from a kind of haunting. They are inextricably linked to Wiridgil, the magnificent old Western District homestead in which Manifold lives, a house which remains possessed by the past and the people who once lived there. Stride down cavernous corridors and you'll enter rooms unchanged for generations. Overblown paper roses blanch in vases on the mantel. Faded wallpapers and trims echo the rose and lace motifs of Manifold's earlier works. Like Miss Havisham's wedding cake, the cream bedroom furniture drips with ornamentation. Open drawers and the fripperies of past residents remain—a china hairbrush here, a fur stole there, lace collars, lingerie, hats, shoes, studs, fancy dress and gloves. Unfasten a box

and you'll find at your feet a folded, pink silk and net gown. Watch the fabric crumble at your touch, see it dissolve into a shower of confetti sized pieces dancing across the room. All that remains are the trimmings—the hand made oyster coloured beads and pearls.

Manifold journeys along the halls of Wiridgil. She moves through arches shaped like giant keyholes; she unlocks the secrets of past identities. She rifles through the abundant fading remnants of ancestors and friends, seeking to re-construct the essential, the eternal elements. It is the jet beads, the pearls and trimmings, the faded photos which have raised the essence and beauty of the women she has named: Adela, Alice, Anne, Audrey, Beatrice, Clarice, Elizabeth, Eugenie, Gala, Harriet, Holly, Janet, Julia, Kerry, Madeleine, Mariana, Mary, Philomena, Rosa, Stella and Thelma. Manifold, through her art, is the medium by which these women of the past are confirmed and endure.

Gail Watson  
Victorian Creative Writer and Poet

### **Artist statement:**

#### *'Of Essence and Lace Trimmings'*

Exploring the realms of modern identity, specifically feminist identity, Christine Battersby writes that there is a 'need to register how 'object' and 'subject' belong together – and change together.' (Battersby 1998. 128). Battersby examines Theodor Adorno's writing in which he compares the forgotten differences 'the eternal' to 'the lace trimmings on a dress,' that is, the eternal can be grasped through the trimmings.

My etchings re-interpret this poetic notion searching for forgotten differences, the eternal, in the pursuit of feminine, rather than specifically feminist, identity. Although there is no explicit female 'body' in these etchings, a feminine essence is still existent between the trimmings. The delicate Chantilly lace background is superimposed with silhouette forms that are contrasted by the decorative 'trimmings' – beads, feathers, braid and bows... There is a sense of ominous beauty.

In making these etchings I searched for memories and their essence amongst the assorted lace trimmings that have been passed on to me. Working from my great grandmother's sewing box, I resurrected snippets of lace, amongst other things, using a magnifying glass and digital processes to interpret old photos of my grandmother's wedding gown, my great grandmother's lace jabot, and her daughters' crochet collar and feather adorned hats. I look into the now lost faces that stare toward, or just off center of, the viewer, and I see traces of myself in them. I look deeper, into the lace trimmings, to fathom the essence that accompanies the now stilled faces.

Some other works were made with the thought of current friends and relatives in mind, to distil their essential quality. 'Kerry', a friend I went to school with, bought a green (her colour) beaded motif when I was buying beads. Using historically catalogued antique designs, I superimposed ideas to come up with what I thought she would wear in the 1800s. And then my imagination and intuition took over, and I started to create unknown women from the past...

Reference:

Battersby, C. (1998). *The Phenomenal Woman*. Routledge, New York.

Marion Manifold, 2003

**Catalogue Captions:**

**Inside, left hand side.** '*Of Essence... Mary*', etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.

**Inside, right hand side.** '*Of Essence... Harriet*', etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.

**Logos:**

FAC logo City of Fremantle

**Acknowledgements:**

The artist gratefully wishes to thank Harley Manifold, Gail Watson, Thelma John and Holly Storey and FAC staff for their help with this project.

Photography and design by Harley Manifold

**Catalogue Paper:**

300gsm

Glossy

Full Colour

The whole sheet is A4

When folded at the left hand SIDE, it becomes A5.

Opens like a book

**Catalogue Files:**

Adobe PhotoShop and Adobe Illustrator.

**List of Works (on a separate paper rather than in catalogue):**

1. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Adela*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.
2. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Alice*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.
3. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Anne*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.
4. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Audrey*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.
5. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Beatrice*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.
6. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Clarice*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.

7. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Elizabeth*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.
8. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Eugenie*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.
9. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Gala*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.
10. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Harriet*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.
11. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Holly*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.
12. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Janet*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.
13. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Julia*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.
14. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Kerry*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.
15. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Madeleine*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.
16. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Mariana*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.
17. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Mary*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.
18. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Philomena*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.
19. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Rosa*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.
20. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Stella*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.
21. '*Of Essence and Lace Trimmings*' – *Thelma*. etching & trimmings, 50.5 x 38.5 cm.

All works are on BKF Rives 280 gms.