

KARLA DICKENS

The Museum of Brisbane presented “In loving memory I found the black virgin” by Karla Dickens from 9 October – 24 December 2009 as part of Brisbane’s celebration of 150 years since the establishment of the city as a municipality, with Indigenous people of the region being celebrated and honoured.

Dickens’ art is concerned with feminine power, tradition and the power of personal narrative. The deaths of two family members provided a catalyst for the artist and are hovering presences, figuratively and literally, in her vividly coloured mixed-media works... that explore personal and profound influences that pulse with intensity and energy.

Information from Museum of Brisbane

Karla Dickens was born in 1967 in Sydney without any connection to her history and Aboriginal heritage (she is from the Wiradjuri people). The process of moving from childhood to the present was a colourful and, at time, destructive journey of self discovery. Her paintings are homes to memories.

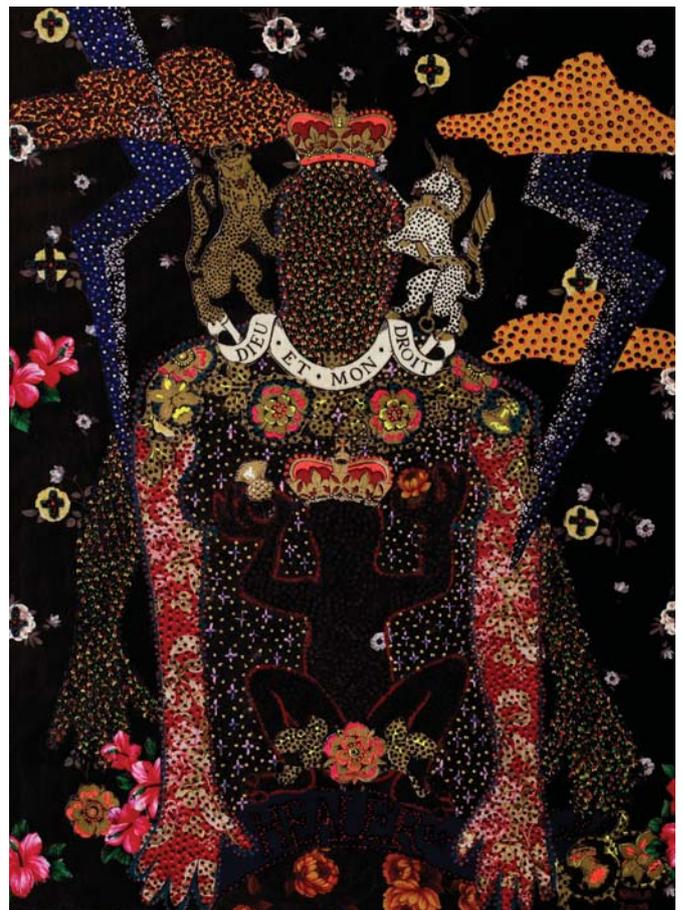
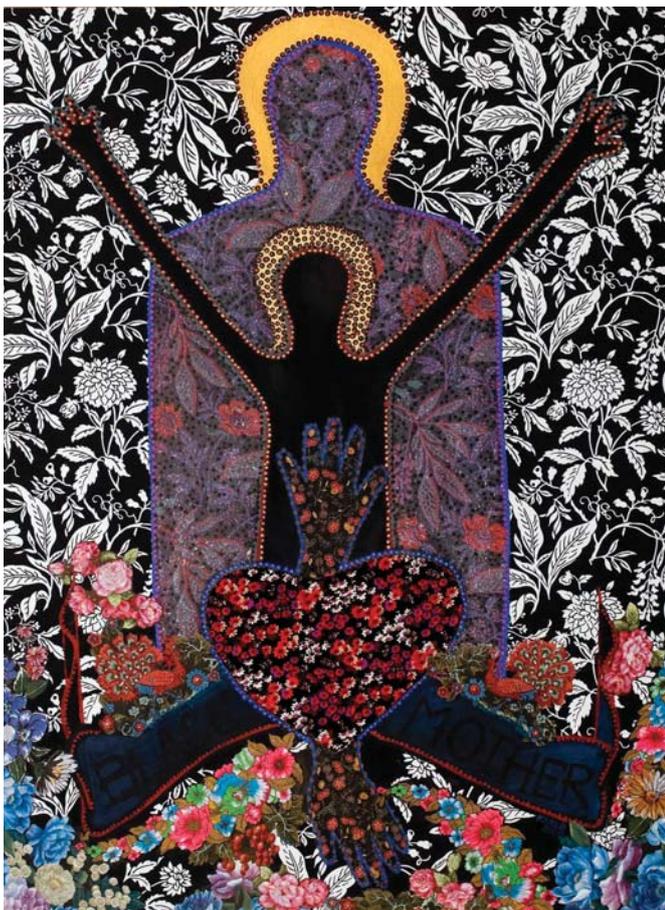
I guess the most important lesson I’ve learnt over the years is the fact that no matter what colour, sexual preferences, age, how much money you have in the bank, whether you’re ready or not, death will touch us all – felt and respected.

Karla’s Aboriginality and sexuality do profoundly inform her work yet her insight and breadth of artistic practice both embrace the notion of identity politics deeply and always touch on the universal human experience. Her work truly fosters an intra and cross-cultural dialogue through the forum of contemporary art. *From Conversations with a Crow, written by Djon Mundine O.A.M. for Art Monthly, August 2008*



Currently Dickens lives in Goonellabah, NSW and works in a wide range of techniques including painting and sculpture, noting that her intense collage gives depth to the flatly painted images. Thus her recent work involves richly ornamented and collaged paintings which use retrieved or scavenged textiles that come with a complex history of use and sentiment.

The Black Madonna is a protector and guardian of the outcast.... Coloured Women all around the world find identification and strength in the beauty and darkness of her skin.





Opposite page top, *BLACK MOTHER I* (2009) 40 x 40cm. Bottom of page *BLACK MADONNA VI* at right, also *BLACK MADONNA IV* (2009), 92 x 102cm. Michael Shapter photographer. This page, left 'honor' (2008) 60x 60cm; mixed media on canvas and 'conversation' (2007), 92 x 122cm; images by Cal McKinnon. Below, Karla Dickens in her studio.

Shadows and Crows appeared in my paintings for a body of work *LOVING MEMORY* in 2007; the work embraces death, dying and grief. At times my shadows represent my ancestors, the shadow making the absent becomes present.

"In this age of slick and seamless imagery, it is more than refreshing to behold the work of an artist who revels in the texture and artifice of the painted collage; an artist who has, in fact, refined her use of this medium with considerable ingenuity and stunning effect over the years...

"Loving Memory" is of course, an allusion to death, from the words often found on epitaphs or in obituaries. Yet Karla is, in the active sense, also *loving memory*, holding dear the presence of ancestors, history, memories of dreams, loved ones and lived experience. *The crow gives me strength to fly above my shadows....* Maurice O'Riordan, May 2008 – from the exhibition catalogue.

