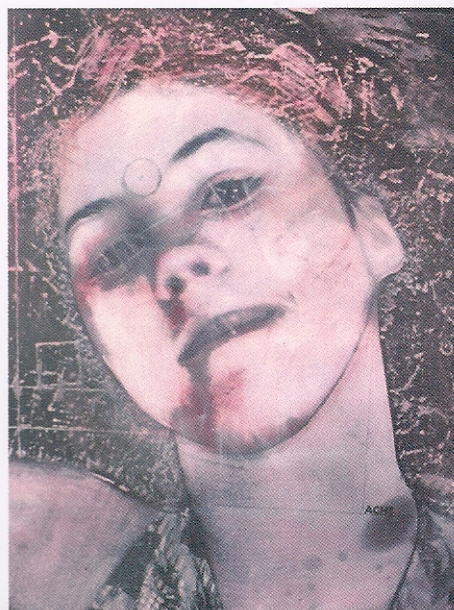
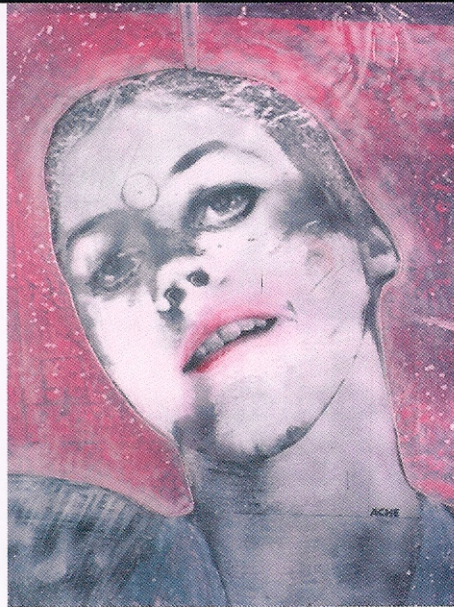
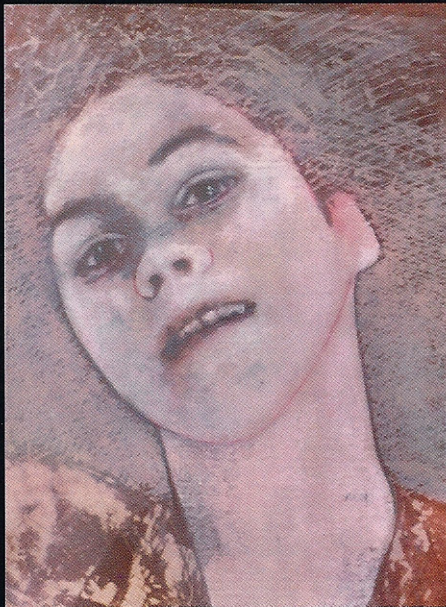


WOMEN IN THE BIBLE:

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Tricksters, Victors and (M)others



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Sue SAXON

The biblical narrative of Sarah and Hagar encompasses issues of fertility, slavery, surrogacy, status and inheritance. As the first encounter in the histories of Judaism and Islam, it resounds with tensions which reverberate through the contemporary conflict.

The words Isaac (in Hebrew) and Ishmael (in Arabic) replace the women's eyes in this face to face encounter. Their placement within the attenuated faces suggests Sarah and Hagar are only able to see each other in terms of their sons, underlining the biblical measure of a woman as her ability to produce (preferably male) offspring. The women are so close they can see the whites of each other's eyes and yet so far apart that they have in a sense, become blind to each other's humanity. The emu eggshells' dark green tones suggest the jealousy, fear, sacrifice and shifting power of their relationship while also referencing Australia, where conflicts of inheritance and possession form part of our landscape. The shattered and reconstituted eggshells, with inside and outside laid side-by-side, represent both creation and destruction.

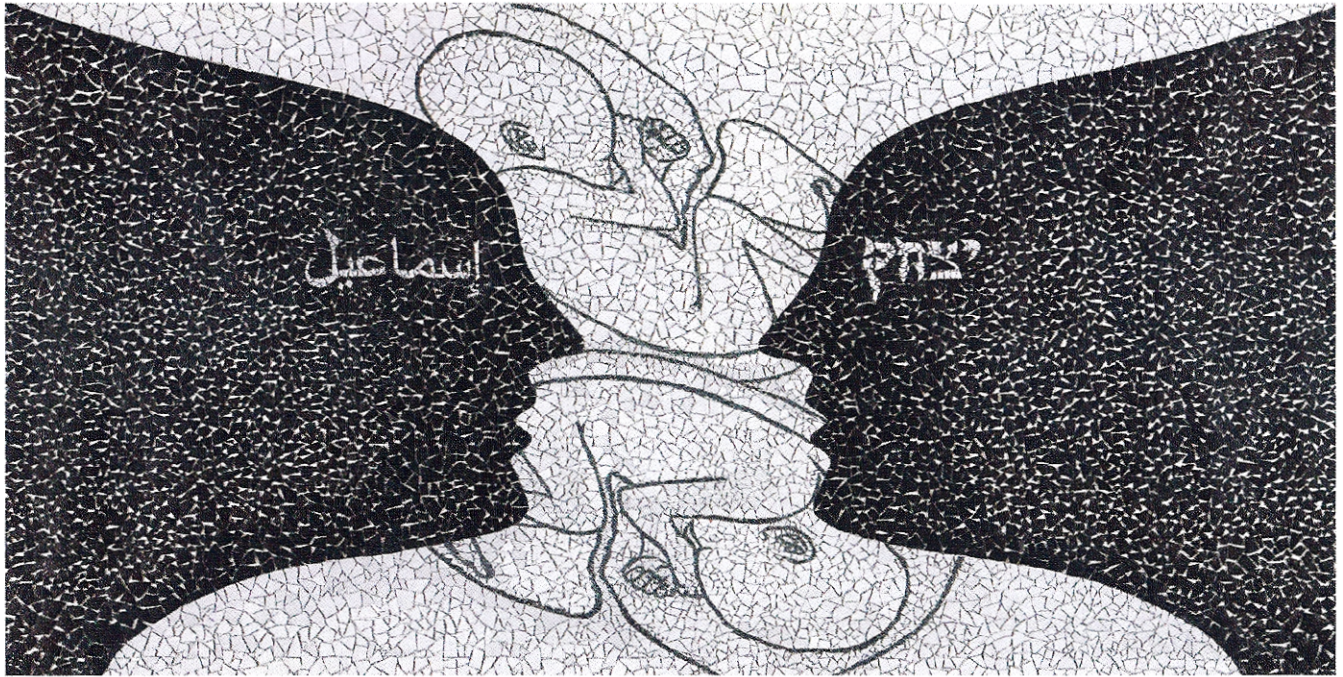
Sue Saxon has exhibited her paintings and installations in Australia and internationally. The recipient of numerous scholarships, she has undertaken residencies in New York, Paris and Budapest. Saxon's recent Masters of Visual Arts research degree at Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney University, focused on issues of Otherness, which are at the core of her practice. In 1997, she inaugurated the Jewish Museum of Australia's Contemporary Program with a body of work that drew on the elemental, symbolic and sensuous qualities of paprika, salt and flour to negotiate ideas about memory and landscape. Her work is held in private and public collections, including the Museum of Contemporary Art, the National Maritime Museum and Jewish Museum of Australia.

SARAH & HAGAR

Sarah is introduced in the Bible as the beautiful wife of Abraham. Unable to fall pregnant, she gives Abraham her Egyptian servant, Hagar, who bears him a son, Ishmael. When Sarah eventually gives birth to Isaac, the tension between her and Hagar grows. She orders Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away, leaving them to an uncertain fate in the wilderness.

According to Islamic tradition, Abraham takes Hagar and Ishmael to begin a new life in Mecca. There, centuries later, Muhammed becomes the founder of Islam. Ishmael comes to be regarded as father of the Arabs and Hagar as a faithful messenger of God.

Many modern commentators read the story of Sarah and Hagar as a conflict of class and ethnic identities, resonant with the tension of contemporary hostilities. Others consider both women victims of a patriarchal society that measured their worth solely by their capacity to bear children, and cast them as rivals rather than allies in sisterhood.



Sarah and Hagar 2009
emu eggshells on paper 68 x 100
Image courtesy the artist