



DRAMATIC: Adelaide artist Tiffany Parbs with hair extensions on her eyelashes (main photo), sun burn spelling "Raw" on her chest and tiny needles embedded around her eyes. Photos: TERENCE BROGUE

Body art with a message

By Diana Streak
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Body art is as old as human beings themselves. From the ancient practice of cicatrice in Africa to the contemporary tattoo obsession in Australia, we have been decorating our bodies for thousands of years.

Adelaide artist Tiffany Parbs is bringing her own interpretation of these customs and trends to Canberra in her exhibition *cosmetic*, which opens this week at Craft ACT.

Using her own body, Parbs, a trained jeweller, has produced images of superficial cosmetic embellishments to try and understand the psychological issues which lead people to contemplate cosmetic surgery.

The images include dramatic hair extensions on her eyelashes, clamps pulling her mouth open in a startling grimace, sun burn on her chest spelling the word "Raw" (or war spelled backwards) and tiny needles embedded around her eyes, replacing the usual texta pen to mark the guidelines for eyelid lift and eye tuck surgery.

In the work *extension*, which she describes as "very gently caressing the face when worn", she highlights the trend of hair extensions by removing them from their usual context.

"It also refers to the recent practice of eyelash transplant surgery.

"This piece is made by using hand-knotted synthetic hair and each unit took about 7½

hours of consecutive granny knots."

Parbs explores the change in public consciousness with the shift of cosmetic surgery from a social taboo to an openly discussed topic.

She also touches on the surgical processes themselves, in order to understand them better.

"About 100 years ago, it was called beauty surgery and it was socially stigmatised. In the last 40 years, it's become quite socialised and acceptable. People are able to talk about it more openly and even make recommendations on which surgeons are the best.

"The moniker . . . changed from beauty surgery to plastic surgery, but the connotations of the word 'plastic' meant it changed to cosmetic, which is much more superficial and implies no pain is involved.

"Even now the words 'aesthetic surgery' imply the surgeon is considered more of an artist, developing a signature style through the patients he treats," she said.

"The nature of the word 'cosmetic' implies a superficial embellishment, but in relation to cosmetic surgery is often a very invasive procedure which breaks through the protective barrier of the skin," she said.

"As a jeweller working in close contact with the body, I am fascinated with the changing narrative of skin surfaces and the embellishments the body absorbs over time."