

The Melbourne Screen Studies Group and the Melbourne Women in Film Festival (MWFF)
Proudly Presents a Public Talk by
Dr Deborah Jermyn, Reader in Film & Television, University of Roehampton, London

**About time: Ageing women, (in)visibility and the 'old lady revolution' in
Fabulous Fashionistas (Bourne, 2013)**

**Tuesday 17th April, 6.30-8.30pm
RMIT University, Swanston Academic Building: Bldg 80,
Level 11 (Rm 010), 445 Swanston St, Melbourne**

Note: The event will begin with a screening of *Fabulous Fashionistas*

In September 2013 the TV pages of the UK press went into something of a tailspin following Channel 4's broadcast of Sue Bourne's documentary, *Fabulous Fashionistas*, in the prestigious 'Cutting Edge' series. The film followed the stories of six women, with an average age of 80, who had rejected the cultural imperative to relinquish their interest in style and sartorial pleasure as they aged, to instead continue to pursue distinctive wardrobes and the gratifications of clothes shopping. Evidently this account of ageing women refusing to disappear into the background struck a major cultural chord, and the very fact of a group of women at this time in their lives being given a dedicated show on national TV was widely noted as striking, memorable, unfamiliar television.

In this talk I will examine the reception and significance of *Fabulous Fashionistas*, drawing on extracts and analysis of the film itself, its UK media coverage, and original interviews with director Sue Bourne and two of the film's subjects, Sue Kreitzman and Bridget Sojourner. A number of the film's 'stars' bear witness to the uncommon experience of becoming recognised 'public figures' as *older women*; that is, at precisely the time in their lives that women are expected to forego their (already delimited) voice and any claim to being a subject of interest in the public world. I examine the powerful tension at stake here, in that it is precisely by continuing to abide by the standard script of femininity in some respects (cf a devotion to one's appearance), particularly within the contemporary zeitgeist of postfeminism, that they gained their '15 minutes'. Yet they did this so energetically and thoughtfully that they have come to fulfil an activist function, becoming recognisable spokeswomen speaking out against ageism and sexist/ageist stereotypes. Kreitzman's cautionary adage in the film - 'Don't wear beige: it might kill you' - has become a pithy rallying call for older women to resist the pressure to retreat into the margins of society, while Bourne's documentary has been embraced for being at the vanguard of a seemingly burgeoning media trend to at last address the creeping cultural invisibility that envelops women as they age.



Deborah Jermyn is Reader in Film & Television at the University of Roehampton, London, where she is Co-Director for the Centre for Research in Film & Audiovisual Cultures. She is the author and editor of ten books, including *Sex and the City* (2009) and *Prime Suspect* (2010), many of which have focussed on issues pertaining to women, feminism and popular culture. In recent years, much of her work has centred on representations of ageing femininities, including her co-edited collection, *Women, Celebrity & Cultures of Ageing: Freeze Frame* (2015). In 2017 she published *Nancy Meyers* for the Bloomsbury 'Companions to Contemporary Filmmakers' series, the first book-length monograph on the director. Her next book project is an exploration of transatlantic romance in popular culture.