

Abridged interview by Jeffrey Hamilton

Reference also Lorraine Kloppman, *Creative Glass-Engraving* p39-42. Craft Arts No.10 1987

[Talks of family, being away from her family attending schools from the age of eight, growing up in England, attending finishing school in Switzerland and being with Land Army in England WWII. Includes earlier private tuition with German Expressionist painter Martin Bloch, life running a farm, having children and painting murals over the walls. In 1956 she came to Australia as young mother in a migrant family with four children living in shared accommodation with friends. When her children were all teenagers, she divorced.]



Anne Dybka
Parrot Cameo Vase
1995
cameo
30 x diam. 13 cm

Worked in decor factory. There a Mr Hose produced glassware that was decorated. Here she had her first experience working with glass. This was where Rudolf (later her partner) worked as a decorator.

In Melbourne she started up a ceramics studio/showroom Glenferrie Road mentored by Rudolf who was good at picking talented people who could further his aims. Eventually came up to Sydney and had a big studio in Seville street, near Parramatta.

I forgot all the years at Crown Crystal. That's where I met Vladimir Tishy. Vladimir was a Czech, who fled the communists. Everywhere he went he used to have his documents with him. It was a long time before we could persuade him to put his money in a bank. Vladimir was a very good artist with Crown Crystal.

According to your biography you joined Crown Crystal in 1970 and you were there six years.

I designed decoration on the glassware. I used to hand paint so I could really see what they looked like. I used glass paint and fired it on.

Was the ceramic business with Rudolf successful?

Yes it was, very successful. Vladimir made beautiful murals. He was really the core of it. This was after I left Crown crystal. We made tiles using crushed glass as a glaze [points to lamp stand]. That lamp stand, Rudolf made that and he made the bowl in the other room.

Contemporary work for the time.

I was to decorate things and I did some murals. I made the eight white horses for somebody in Elizabeth Bay.

Now Rudolf just runs a factory. Moulded things and sells them like Tupperware, so he has abandoned all artistic purpose.

I left Rudolf and that business to established my own business in the Rocks. I never started to engrave until I was in my forties. I started at Crown Crystal. They bought me some equipment and I did some horrible things there. I went over to the technical library and I got out Steuben's beautiful work and that inspired me. I couldn't put those books down. They were researching non-breakable glass at the time.

I had my own studio but I had to eventually share it with Tishie. Tishie was a Czech and he never looked around to see what I was doing. He was just concentrating on what he was doing.

Others at Crown Crystal were jealous that you had your own studio?

Yes they were. But Snow's [Harris] daughter, Lesley, she wasn't. Snow was in charge of production at Crown No. 2 factory.

Who actually trained you in engraving?

I went over to the technical library in Crown and I found the books on Steuben. I loved them and I sort of taught myself. There was nobody to teach you in Australia. Johnny Vargent who was in the cutting and polishing department, he was originally an engraver in Russia. He gave me a few tips. He's dead now too. When I got very good he turned nasty, but eventually he came around and was nice again.

Anyway in started engraving and started my studio here. My early work was pretty horrible. If I could get it back I'd smash it. You get better with many years practice. I did commercial engraving for V.I.Ps. Eddy [future long term partner] came down from the north and heard of an engraver here and he made himself know to me. He was trained as a brilliant cutter in London, but as soon as he finished his training he went to London Regents Park zoo and became a keeper. Then he wanted to see where the animals came from so he left the zoo and went off wandering. He wandered all around the Middle East..

You went to Europe a little while ago [2005]?

Yes, I went to the Glass Engravers' Symposium, at Kamenický Šenov in the Czech Republic. It was very interesting. There is a school for engraving there. They start

them at about fourteen years of age. They're very expert, but they tie them down with tradition. They find it difficult to escape from that. I remember Warren Langley formed something with newspaper and they were furious. They said you don't do that! (laughs). They were all hidebound with tradition. I think we are lucky in Australia. We don't have that. We're all free, aren't we?

There was a man who came to study with Helmut Hebel. Helmut would never let him speak to anybody (other artists). When he was released to go back to Austria or whatever, he rushed around all the other artists and looked at their work. He came to me. Poor man - Helmut Hebel was convinced that everyone had telescopes on him, but we never thought about him one year to the next. There is a tradition in Europe that people copy other people.

I don't think there is any point in secrecy, because however you teach people, they'll never be the same as you, never. They will go their own way. So I don't believe in keeping things close to your chest. Give out everything. I like to see people succeed. Mikki Kubo has an exhibition in Melbourne at Kirra Gallery, and I'm very pleased about that.

What were some of the awards you have received?

I got the Order of Australia for my lifetime work. I also got the one hundred thousand dollar Keating Australia Award. [also talks of long time activism with Eddy and Milo Dunphy in environmental/conservation issues tending to a pessimistic outlook]

Some of your work has celebrated environmental richness.

I try to make it so people know what it looked like in years to come when these things have vanished. I hope my work lasts. In the end we are judged by what we made. The art is the most important in the end. We judge other civilizations by what they have made. The artists are eventually the most important people.

[In Adelaide receiving the Ausglass lifetime achievement award] I told them as artists they had a responsibility. They have to make things that will last through the centuries. A lot of things now will not last. They are just temporary things.

I think the craftsmen are the real artists now. I think the painters are horrible. We had artists in the Rocks for instance, they were dreadful, but the craftspeople make beautiful things. The woodworkers, the tapestry people, the stain glass people - they all make beautiful things.

Sometimes 'fine art' can be used as an excuse for having no craft.

That's right. When I learnt painting we had to grind up our colour. You had to learn the craft of painting. The old master's must have learnt it.

So the emphasis on 'concept'...?

That's bad. Anybody can conceive things. I am often asked how I did something, but I don't remember. I just did it - just as you go. I think to concept and the finished work are at war. The finished work is to do with skill. Unless you are a master of your craft, you are not free to do what you want to do and have it come out as you wanted it to.

You have to be master of your skill. You have to master what you do, or it is just accident - accidental art!

Do you see a place at all for accidental art?

No, an accident is not deliberate. You conceive something and you make it.

There are many contemporary artists who value the accidental mark.

(laughs) Well, it's an accident! It's not skilful.

Politics has not come into your work.

I don't like politics. I think it has no place in art. We are in contact with the Minister of the Environment all the time. That does enter into it. Mr Howard is not for the Arts, Mr Keating was.

You are very critical of artwork that is temporary, that doesn't last.

You should make works that last because many hundred years later they will look at what we made and judges on that. All the things that are temporary will have gone.

(talks of contemporary film and the tribal nature of humanity)

Visual arts are visual language. You can't put them into words and all these people who explain things, they are wasting their time. A lot of fine arts are therapeutic. People get out of themselves, but they can't explain it to anybody except themselves. No, I think the eternal truth comes through generations. The cave paintings, through like a thread, it's always surfacing. Why do we like a primitive thing against a commercial thing? Because it's got spiritual force.

That's why I'm against computer graphics in a way, because you left your hand off it and it doesn't have any force. You have got to have spiritual force behind your work. Once you lift your hand off something it is soulless. It's just commercial.