

*What do you call yourself as a practitioner?*

I call myself a visual artist. I don't think of myself as a glass artist. I use glass as a medium for things I want to create as experiences. For me the training I received in glass was very valuable in terms of gaining understanding and working through the process of materiality. That was very useful, but because I came from a performance and a writing/poetry background, I see glass (and the work that I do with glass and light) as more about an immersive, poetic experience that I am trying to create with the beholder.

It's installation work and that's very interesting in the glass world. There are lots of people who work with glass that are mainstream artists like Roslyn Piggott, where they use glass because it has specific associations that they want to incorporate in their work, but they weren't trained as glass people. I was trained as a glass person in a studio [ANU]. Basically there was a very strong grounding in cold working processes (not that I'm saying I'm a great cold-worker) in that you have a sense for surface – how you change surface and play with form – but there was a strong focus on the object as something to be put on a plinth, something collectable. Not that staff were being reductionist and that was the only thing they were going to encourage. They are actually very good in trying to have an ongoing conversation with students about what it is they are doing, what they are aspiring to, and the materiality of the context they are coming from.

*Do you see object as separate from experience?*

An object to me seems to be something that is turned in (but not always). An object is about something that is generating a sense of desire. That desire is about “wanting me, I'm beautiful, I'm here and I'm collectable”.

*You're wrapping your hands around a closed form.*

Yes, whereas what I'm interested in (and you can see this from the forms I make, because I usually don't have closed forms – I'm working with large parabolic dishes) is that notion of opening up. I use my dishes to bounce light and sound, to play with them as a vibrating surface. To play with what they can reflect – to find out what they can tell us about culture, our memory and ourselves. Those are the things I am thinking about in those glass forms.

It is an unusual reference to use, but they [the works] do have a 'performative' dimension. It is not that I am being performative, or the people who are coming in are being performative. I am sculpting time and place, playing with the space. I am playing with using objects in that space, not just saying look at me I'm the object, but for them to change the space, to change some sense of time, to change some sense of awareness for the beholder.

Using light or sound through glass is a way of deepening, or stilling people's sense of time. It might also be about playing with the associations glass has for us culturally. Glass has a long history and that is an ambiguous history in a lot of ways, because of the notion of representing the divine, or representing the capacity to reflect, or transmit pure light as a symbol for divinity. Glass itself is something that transformed us from cave dwelling (in the dark), because once we could put in windows, the notion of being outside/inside was changed by this intermediary that allowed us to look both ways.

With mirrors there was suddenly the idea that we have an awareness of self – self as an objectified other. It is those kinds of things I am thinking about.

There is a transcendental quality and a kind of magic because glass manifests light and light in some ways is the essential stuff of the universe and of being. When I first applied to do glass, I think I had done one short course in Melbourne. I had been dreaming and writing about ice for a long time. Ice and glass in some ways have similar refractive qualities. For me that is its magic – light and shadow. I have not worked with coloured glass very much. I am much more interested in clear glass, or dark glass. I have been making lots of black mirrors – playing more with those issues of refraction, the trajectories and divergences of light.

*I associate ANU with focussed European skill.*

I didn't have Klaus [Moje] and I didn't have Steven [Proctor], but they obviously have a strong history. Richard [Whiteley] carries that history. The whole place carries that history. It is imbued with it in a lot of ways. Jane Bruce was a very important interchange agent.

I'm an older student. I was in my forties when I started doing glass. The point being it is different coming in as an older student, because you all ready have a history in terms of meaning-making, and art for me is about meaning-making. Meaning-making and dialogue are the two things that interest me in terms of art. I have done a lot of work in community development. For me changing people through rational discussion wasn't working. It wasn't a useful way to engage with the world. I was involved in art as a young person in what I had done up to H.S.C. I went to Melbourne Uni and did a Bachelor of Fine Arts. I didn't know you could do 'real' art because I was the first generation of both sides of my family to go to university. It took me a long time to go back to 'hands on material' making because I was doing a lot of writing, poetry and performance work.

I started dreaming about glass and decided I had to do something about this. For me it has been a very rich thing. I am much happier making in a material way. Making with words was a destructive process in that I had to dig into myself in order to pull this stuff out, whereas making with glass and a range of other materials (metal, works on paper, work with sound and light) is much more playful and generative. The thing that is most exciting for me in making is being intuitive, playful and spontaneous. The materiality is really important.

*'Spontaneous' with such a technically demanding material?*

Well yes, that is the tension of glass. Spontaneity is easier in other materials (or for me in the things that intersect with the glass).

At one point when I was making cast folded forms ('folds of time'), I was using clear glass and casting the forms upside down – so they were rippled. It was technically difficult at first (I was still learning how to make the moulds). When they came out I would do a whole lot of hand lapping. This process changed my approach to those works, from a focus on surface silkiness to a preoccupation with the luminous edge as nimbus.

Hand lapping is a really nice thing, because with me it fits the whole idea of meditation. It is a direct, haptic awareness. Sometimes you are not looking at the surface, but you are feeling it. You can feel where you are with the grit and surface work. There is always the machine (finishing or polishing machines). They are fun, more mechanistic, but even with them I am using touch to gauge surface.

*Do you find yourself 'losing' time?*

When you do that sort of work you do, yes. That is one of the few times you can have the hands on in glass. That's the difference between working in the hot shop where you have an immediate capacity to intervene with materiality as it flows. With kiln forming work however once the kiln is closed, you are stuck with the alchemy of whatever happens in the box.

It is interesting how much about glass is still based on mythology at work. Most people don't get training in chemistry, so we do not have a chemical understanding of the material we are using. We rely on those who make the glass and the people who make kilns to give us instruction without doing much to understand, or to demythologise. There are people who will not share kiln programs, or technical process details as these are seen as the 'art'. This might give you an edge in the market, although for me the journey is about creativity and that is not exhaustible. It does not matter what I do, you will go off and do what you do and that will always be different. The things that I will notice will take my practice somewhere else because what you notice will be different. It is interesting that there is this left over artist's headspace of not sharing. As an example Mel Douglas makes distinctive cold worked black glass blown forms, they have become her trademark. However anyone can (and should) use black glass – black glass is black glass. Mel does her particular surface work and that makes that stuff special, because it is her surface work. What is important is the memory and imprint of her hand, its kinetic energy in the skin and the surface of the form. That's Mel, but if you do it, it's going to be you. It is not going to be Mel. You can try to copy some of her ideas, but it is never going to be the same, because it is not coming from the essence of her being.

*As a mature age student you came with a developed aesthetic?*

Yes, a very strong aesthetic and I think that was difficult in the workshop. We had a critique session every week (part of that *Bauhaus* process). One or two of the students would have their work up and we would engage in conversations, but a lot of students did not have a language, or vocabulary to do that. Part of the workshop is to grow that, but it can be extremely difficult and painful. Once you start to have a few people at different stages of their life involved it is enriching, but also I know some of the younger ones might find it hard to deal with those aesthetics. For the people teaching it can be challenging too, because sometimes they maybe trying to change that aesthetic and mould it in a certain way (not to resemble them but) to grow it.

*As a mature age student did you perceive an attitude in glassmaking?*

I see that there's competitiveness in the 'art glass' thing in Australia. It is partly because the market is so small and the only way people get a break is that they make it in America really. That's the break, or make. There is a fostering that goes on, not in apprenticeship, but in mentoring. If staff thinks you are material of interest they will work and shape you. If you are like me and you have strongly formed ideas (and was

always doing sculpture and pushing the edge of the glass thing) then you have to make your own way. Jane [Bruce], got cross one day when I was talking about the limitations of scale, and said if you want to do something big just go and do it and I did a 'whole body' slump. That piece called *Napé*, is a transgressive work in that it borders between ugly and beautiful, and it's large for glass (2100 x 1220mm). It plays with intimacy and places we don't go to in art – the externalisation of the female body. It is often about eroticism, but not about intimacy. I am much more interested in those spaces we do not deal with, like intimacy. The sacred is another taboo area (and not just in glass).

The last piece that I did (for my Honours) was *Temenos Tempus*. It is about the inscribed sacred space. I had painted the room black and that was another 'no no'. The idea is that visual arts is all about light rather than about darkness – especially glass. What I was also doing was using the glass as large sound gongs. I had recorded them with a percussionist from the School of Music and I had made them as an octave set. You walked into a meditative space and each of those was a sonic mandala.

That notion of darkness is another form of intimacy because your ears, not your eyes are privileged, and that is a much more intimate reaction. So darkness, intimacy and the sacred (with sound focussing your awareness inwards) were things that were seen as difficult in the visual arts context.

*You are sharing a felt response with the audience?*

I would not use the word 'felt'. I'm thinking about Gaston Bachelard and the *Poetics of Space*. I am sculpting a space and time that has possibilities in it. It is not my felt experience that I am interested in. It is how open a space can I leave it for the beholder, or the listener in terms of their felt experiences. Yes, I am probably trying to trigger associations and memories. I am using vibrations both in a light and a sound form to get people to make poetic associations that resonate with their experience.

*Your practice appears wider than the referential associations within glass.*

I think it comes back to the conversation we were having earlier about the object being turned in upon itself. It is hermetic in a way, whereas my work is about opening up. I am trying to create a dialogue where you can't take the object away with you, but you have the experience. In that space there is a tracery of light, a resonance of sound and the notion of things moving (the last show had large vessels moving on motorised plinths at tilting angles), that ephemeral, changing elements that engage a range of senses.

The body of work that I am starting to tinker with now is about mirrors. Some of what I am doing is about decay. Decay is about time, the obvious marks of the history of time working on things. The mirrors that I'm making are distressed mirrors. They are not about a perfect surface that reflects everything back to us objectively. They have histories, things that are left as traces. When we look into mirrors we don't expect to find echoes there of other things, the echoes are in our minds, but I do want to have something there and I want to play around with older mirroring techniques that will have imperfections. Mirrors with ripples in the surfaces, mirrors with traces of impurities

Glass has skin and I love it because of that. You notice that if you put your fingers on the glass and put it in the kiln there is always going to be a trace left of your imprint. When glass itself melts the top surface (unless you take it up really high) will keep some sort of memory of what happened to it in that process of transformation and deformation.

I get a little annoyed (and that may be a bad word to use) when I go to look at some of the glass things at galleries sitting on plinths – they are all ‘things’ just sitting there. Some of them might be more beautiful, some of them might have prettier glass (depending on your aesthetics), some of them might have nice technical surface work, but after you have looked at them what do they say?

I don't want to possess the glass. There are some pieces that I have at home that are quite ordinary, and I keep them because of the way the light comes through them and what they do with shadows on the wall through the day. To me that is interesting. Some glass holds light in ways that is really interesting. What Richard [Whiteley] has been doing in that Czech/European way that sculpts using the interior space in glass is interesting. I am more interested in that sort of perspective.

*Richard implies forces.*

It's interesting you would see it that way. For me it's not forces. I would again say it is about memory (even though it is carved memory). It's about how things are held. It has more of a body reference for me in the sense of the spaces that are created.

*You earlier implied a commercial structure where people produce a saleable product.*

I would make the point that I don't think that is just glass. That is part of the ‘art world’ market generally. There is a market for glass, just as there is a market for art. Not all collectors or makers focus on that. There are a lot of people (especially in that technical skill area) who are in love with it because there are rhythms that are associated with it. There is a kinaesthetic energy and presence. When you are making you are so profoundly in the moment. Other times do not feel as rich as that time when you are actually making. To be fair to a whole lot of artists who are making, they are making something that is about the rhythms of their being and about the rhythms of the material and the way the synergy between those two things produces something.

*You are creating a dance movement with your hands.*

I see a dance, particularly with people in the hot shop. If you watch people in the hot shop there is a dance going on all the time. With the formal bits of kiln forming there is not such a dance. Whether you are making moulds, or whether you are using specific structures to slump or form the glass, it is much more precise, it is the degree of mechanical precision involved. People have to go through that because they have a vision. They have a notion of what they are seeking, (their ‘Grail’ in a way) and they can have a vision of that. You get it out of the kiln and has it met that vision or not? If it is ‘not’ then are there interventions that can be made at this point? Where is that going to take me? Sometimes that's your idea about the accident. Things happen that take you places.

There are things that happen inside the kiln and there are things that happen outside.

*Where do you place your practice?*

I place myself clearly along the line that I don't do production glass. I made that decision because I am older, and glass is obdurate to work. My partner is an artist as well. We are two people who are on the edge all the time because we both make quite seriously and we both make very large stuff. There are scale issues in terms of the cost of making and also the cost of storing and transporting and putting the work on show. It was never going to be easy for me to work for another glass artist doing cold working and stuff because I had already been working in places where I could get more money for work I already could do. I was moving towards this experiential work/installation and already knew that there was going to be little money in it. The money would only come if I got to the point of somebody willing to commission me for an installation for a specific gallery, or specific event like a Biennale.

For me, I reckon I have a short time (another thirty years or so), so I really want to concentrate on manifesting the things that are deeply interesting for me. I am committed to play. There is the playtime and there is the time for getting the objects made that I need for the installation experience. Then there are all those other elements to be organised for that installation experience. These may be recordings, or there may be organising the technology – motorised lights, or motorised bases. It is responding to how I see what is happening to the materiality of the glass and what is happening to that as form. Then it is responding to the other elements that I require in sculpting that space.

*Are you working outside the glass culture?*

I suppose am an 'out-rider'. There are 'out-riders' in the glass world. Deirdre [Feeney] is a little bit an out-rider. She knows the object is what people are fetishising, but really she is interested in the video as well. The last exhibition in Brisbane was taking those forms (the Houses) and what you were seeing there was the projection, not so much the object. It will be interesting to see what she does when she comes back from France.

I don't make objects. I make experiences. I don't belong to the *Canberra Glass Centre* community scene. I go there and pay for the facilities when I need them. I have lots of friends in glass still. We have contact, but I am not based somewhere where there are people working along side me. People cannot see what I am doing until they come to the gallery.

The term 'outrider' is pejorative. There is an 'in' culture, as in the fold, but I have to say that Richard Whiteley comes to every exhibition I have and he tries to get other people to come along. We have nothing in common in the types of works that we do. It happens that outriders can have influence, as the mainstream are doing more 'object' things it is less likely they are going to influence what I'm doing, but they are taking some aspects of what I am doing and thinking about them in terms of their practice I think. There is an influence in having people like Deirdre Feeney, and Lee Mathers playing with other media and there are people outside the community like Roslyn Piggott who have always done that.

People in glass do look at other media. There are people in glass in Australia who have gone through the institutional studies and are culturally literate. They are

watching a lot of other people around the world. There are also people who have come with their own cultural histories like Masahro Asaka. People who sculpt in stone influence him, because he has come from that history in Japan. He is playing with glass and trying to force it to deal with some of those preoccupations that come within Japanese culture – nature, water, stone and time.

*Both Richard [Whiteley] and Andrew [Lavery] thought 'university culture' was developing a different type of practitioner.*

I think that is true. If you look at glass historically there was a crafts focus on technical ability. In the institutional context the workshops focus on the larger arts setting. Now some people pick that up and run with it and it does influence their practice. They may be making glass objects, but they are making them with a referencing context that is quite different and they play with the elements of that context. Even within the object they are playing with them. I am thinking about Ruth [Oliphant]'s work that was on at Beaver Gallery a while ago. That's got a Dickensian quality for me and for me it's playing with the whole idea of the diorama, a sculptured theatrical space – a mini-installation. It is not about sculpting the space around, it is the space internally, within the object.

The whole idea of feminist practice in terms of arts making generally has been fairly influential particularly in the School of Art in Canberra (it is very strong in the print media workshop). It was there also in glass, not so much from Richard and Jane who were aware of it, but a lot of the women going through were having those kinds of conversations. In some ways glass has an interestingly contested gender background. If you think about hot glass it has always been a masculine area and in terms of the art glass market women have been more in the kiln forming, casting area. (There are a lot of competent women blowers around.)

*There seems to be a much higher proportion of female students. It hasn't always been so.*

No it hasn't. That's a bit of a shift. I think there is a couple of things happening there. It is not particular to glass. It has to do with the whole shape of the economy. There is no one saying that it is easy to make a living in art glass these days. There are much easier ways to make money. In terms of masculine identity it once may have been cool playing with hot glass (for some it still has that delightful magic), but it is actually hard to justify a career path in it, especially in a retracted economy. People in Australia survive by teaching, or by going overseas and doing a whole lot of stuff. It is financially tricky for everybody.

The problem in our area (visual arts) is that you get associated with a particular kind of product. This is your distinctive thing that you make. It is a brand and then you shift that and it always has to be a gradual shift so as to not scare your market. Mathew Curtis is a really interesting bloke because he has all those amazing technical skills around blowing and cold working and at the same time he does really big sculptural objects that push the boundaries between glass and straight sculpture. He is clever about using components to up scale. He almost has that respect in a sculpture (not glass) context.

It is tricky if you are a glass artist because there is a degree of resentment in the other workshops at the ANU and other places because glass has been seen in the past few

years to be trendy and overpriced. The 'golden child' thing, but obviously at some point it is going to fall off the pedestal.

*If the market has a narrative it resists change.*

Narrative is a very good word for it. That is, the issue there is an expectation versus what you are interested in and where you want to move with your art practice.

*Andrew was talking about wanting to educate a market.*

That's true, but I don't know if they push that enough. It is an interesting point. I know from working in other places that lots of gallery owners see that as partly their job (more in the mainstream art scene). Part of their job is to educate and take the public, or their central patron base, along on a journey, so they start to open up and build a more sophisticated arts literacy. Now I don't know if we have done a very good job of that in glass.

It is interesting for me. I started off with people not understanding what I was doing (that's in glass). A lot of people outside glass loved the big slump thing that I did because it was representational, but I have never been interested in representational art. In the stuff that I have been doing for the last few years I have found I have been able to make more resolved experiences. The objects made are more resolved to deliver those experiences. I can see now that I have turned people around in Canberra (with a curatorial following outside of glass). It is always upping the ante, but I have been taking some similar forms to those big parabolic black mirrors and I have used them in a range of settings over the last three years with different installations. There is now sophistication in my work that is engendering confidence in the capacity to deliver the experience.

*Is there a prejudice against glass in the broader curatorial environment?*

No, I don't think so. I don't get a curatorial bias against glass. I think all arts are in transition. Artists have always been involved with technology. We have always pushed the edge of what we can do with technology and we are always embracing it. There is something between embracing it and having a context where you have a reliable capacity to deliver the experience you thought you were trying to shape. At the moment we have had disconnect in what galleries offer to support that. They don't provide very good multi-media infrastructure, or spaces that can be used in a more flexible way than in traditional galleries (where they just have objects). I think that is starting to shift and I think people's literacy in terms of installation generally is gradually changing and improving.

I think glass practice is broadening. The thing that is good is that the community is fairly open. Particularly in Canberra (I don't know as much about Sydney) we have actually had a number of international people who have come and have done either undergraduate, or post-graduate stints. There are conversations that go on across space and time. Lene Lunde is back here [in Australia] at the moment. Lene was trained at *Kosta Boda* from sixteen. She is actually in Canberra at the moment doing a residency at the glass centre and she may be doing a little teaching with Andrew at Sydney College of the Arts. She has done the 'classic' training in glass blowing and stuff, but has always moved towards doing things that are on the edge of glass, using installation, video, playing with the traditional and the subversive.

*The importance of the name of your works?*

Yes, I do name my works. I do think about the naming of them. I think it is my attachment to my poetry background really. To me words have resonances as well. Sometimes people may think they are a bit pompous (*Temenos Tempus*, an inscribed sacred space, cut off from ordinary time, but for me it was perfect for what I was trying to do). The last show that I did at ANCA was called *Abyss*. That wasn't perhaps the best name for the show, but you have to throw your hat into the ring so far out before the show (eighteen months before). I had been working with black mirrors. My work is about journeys in uncertainty into darkness and opening yourself up to what that darkness offers. The show that is going to Melbourne is called *Al Khala*, which is Arabic for the void.

*These are issues of the sublime?*

Yes. That is when I think of the issue of scale. That is really important to me. These works on the walls [National Library windows of dalle de verre] are huge. In some ways I love this kind of scale. A lot of glasswork (because it has the legacy and history of usage about it is domestic like vases) is smaller scale. The work that I do is big (vessels a meter wide). It is as big as I can manage with the kiln forming. It is in relationship to my body and the technology available. It is not scale simply for the sense of scale, but scale because it is about the sublime, or the poetic.

The sublime is a bastardised word in the art world at the moment because it is very out of fashion again. But the sublime is underpinning my preoccupations with what I make.

*Can deep involvement lead to a 'loss' of time?*

That happens a lot when you are making. It is not just in glass for me, it is anything that I am doing that is creative. I was making a whole series of work with bitumen and mica and you look up and it would be three hours, or five hours later. The last body of work that I made from Melbourne wasn't actually all glass. It was part of a group show and I had a whole lot of clay faces that I made and sealed in vacuum-sealed bags that I hung with genetic analysis on the reverse side. All the hands-on activity of making those meant you could be there for hours without realizing it. You don't think about food or water. You are just doing it.