



Dr Gerry King
Toledo blade
 2004
 cast glass
 58 x 47 x 25 cm

You have been involved with Australian studio glass from its beginnings?

Yes, it's thirty-seven years. I went to America before that. I did a post-grad degree in America and that's where I started my glass. It was a Master of Science in Education at Alfred University (1973-4). Alfred and Wisconsin (Harvey Littleton) got started [with Studio glass] at the same time and Wisconsin got the publicity. A friend once said that about Picasso and Braque. He said that Picasso was the one who got the publicity. I said he was being cynical, but since then, well... The guy who started [glass] at Alfred, Andy Billeci, was great in all ways except for self-promotion.

History is what is written down.

Yes. Everyone in glass says that Harvey Littleton started contemporary glass except Harvey Littleton. He says categorically (in his book *Search for Form*) he went to Europe and at a factory they had a bloke working a little furnace out the back. Harvey asked what he was doing and started talking. Then he [Harvey] started doing it too. I was saying to one of the American authors that everyone might say that Harvey started it, but Harvey doesn't say that. The reply was that yes, but he never likes other people saying he didn't start it (laughs).

Littleton had spoken at the American Crafts council and then started the Toledo workshops?

Yes, but before that he met Erwin Eisch, who came from Germany. Eisch came from a glass factory family. Out the back he was running a little one-person furnace making sculptural pieces. Harvey said that's where he got the idea.

You did a science post grad?

It was a funny name. The whole university was divided into two halves – science and arts. Because my degree was in Education majored in Visual Arts, it was under the

Division of Science. It is in fact a Master of Science (when people in the science field read my CV they get most upset). My original training was as a secondary art teacher.

I had heard you could do glass in America so I looked at the documentation to see which universities did that. I was involved in ceramics and the notion that you could have transparent ceramics seemed an attractive proposition. There had been another bloke from Adelaide who had gone to university in America and I saw it as a possibility. I wanted to leave Australia and do something, not just wander around. I thought I would like to study and there were three universities where you could do glass and get a scholarship. I worked my way through Asia for a month or two and (having the qualification of being able to speak English) landed a job in Japan for six months teaching English and while there did the foreign student entry exam for post graduates in American universities. There were obscure questions, but my score would have got me into any university in America (I didn't know that until afterwards). I took a month to get to America, bought a car and getting to Ohio State told them I had applied to come but had not heard a thing. They looked up my records and said they were missing the second part of my score. That would take a week. Not wanting to hang about I took two days to drive to Alfred, got close and asked directions at a service station and he said Alfred who? (laughs). A university extraordinarily well known in ceramics and glass, but twenty Ks away, unheard of.

I got to Alfred and they said they had been waiting for me with a scholarship, but now they had given it to someone else. So I had to pay for the first half of the course, then got the scholarship.

Glass offered you more than ceramics?

From the little that I knew about it (because I hadn't seen any contemporary work). In ceramics you can start with a lump and end with a form. You can do all sorts of things with colour and texture, but you can't make it transparent. If you do it in glass you have that extra feature.

How do you identify yourself as a practitioner?

If I could only have one word, then I would say 'artist'. My original intention was to be an artist. I have always been on that side of the fence, but with one foot in craft and a third foot in design, but 'artist' is my starting point. For me it's the notion of starting with an unknown and working towards a resolution, whereas to be a craftsperson (the way I use the term) is to make something with the intention of making something well. Designer (as I use the term) is someone who plans something that another person makes.

I've done all three. I've done a fairly significant amount of craft and a fairly significant amount of design, but if I were restricted to one of the three activities then I would stick to art.

You mentioned Japan.

I am taken with everything 'Japanese'. I have spent a total of a year there and in theory I should hate it. It's crowded. It's noisy. It's commercial. It is everything I don't like, but the way they 'do', I find enthralling. Everything from the finest objects in their museum to a throw away spoon is done with a deliberation few other cultures can

match. So while I don't consciously have any Japanese influence in my work, I think subconsciously I probably do. Reasonably often, it has been said to me that there is a 'Japanese-ness' about my work. I think it is perhaps simplicity of form and some individuality of colour configuration.

What is your relationship to the material?

Most of the work that I call 'me' starts with an idea and an image. I have an idea of something I want to work on and then I scan around for an image the might carry that idea. Then I scan around for a technique that might allow the fabrication of image that comes to mind. Most of my ideas (although it might not be evident to the viewer) are based in cultural colonisation. This came about because I was running two careers – lecturing in curriculum theory in art education during the day and making glassworks at night. My research field was cultural colonisation and imperialism in education. I would go to a conference in Europe giving a paper on cultural colonisation and then I would go to a glass conference somewhere or other. It was all a bit much, so I thought I might combine the two. After I had gone through that skill acquisition period (making things to learn how to make them) I started to build in the idea. The starting point is the thinking, and the thinking leads to the image rather than saying, 'I want to make an image of such and such, what ideas can I tack onto that image'.

The narrative is cultural context.

Yes. The starting point will be evident to me, not necessarily evident to the viewer, although I would like the viewer to question what they are looking at. I don't like to make works that are dogmatic (it's not 'America is bad'). I want the viewer to look at the work and say, "I wonder what the hell that is about?"

Stimulate questioning?

Yes and then say, "Maybe it is about, 'capital punishment'/' maybe it's about senility', /'maybe it's about old folks homes'". I would like them to question what the work is about.

I think more often than not you can make an object serve your purpose by making it well and by having a technical finesse, so that people are looking at the image rather than the technique. Now that is not always true. Franz Kline gets a house broom and rubs it across the canvas – no technique at all (within the usual sense of the word). More often, if the technique is hidden under the excellence then the people look at the work, rather than how it is made.

You started by saying, "once you had mastered the technique".

Yes and then I didn't have to think about it. I had a group of students once who came in as an elective. They were training to be technical teachers. They were phenomenal students (the entry score for that course was higher than for medicine). You would tell them something and they would wiz off to the library and come back with something, then wiz off to their workshop and come back with something. I said to this one guy that he should grind an angle on this piece. He came back having made a jig to get the angle perfect.

You would say, “This is a metal stand holding a piece of glass” and they would say, “Yes, but the welding is rough”. “That is ‘shithouse’ welding. I would get failed if I did welding like that.” I would say, “It is not about the welding”, but it was for them. The first thing they saw was the crummy welding. I would be looking at what the work was about, while all they could see was bad welding. I took that as a lesson that you don’t want people looking at bad technique.

Another thing I learnt in Japan was the notion of the unknown craftsman. The idea was not to stamp your name on the work, but to make a work that is so good that no one cares who made it. It is the opposite of the America desire to have the name scrawled all over the painting. Also there was Shoji Hamada (he was ‘ceramics Japan’ – a national treasure) and I happened to meet him a couple of times at his studio, which was a great sensation. I saw a work of his in an extremely prestigious museum and it had a crack in it. I said to the curator, “This is by your most famous potter”. It was a little square plate and what I learnt was that they appreciated the crack as much as the non-crack. This was clay and clay cracks. It shows the character of clay. So they were appreciating the material separate to anything that we might talk about.

Is your making the visualisation of an idea, or is it this working ‘with the material’?

It is a bit of both. I have an out of focus photograph in my head. I have a sense that I can do it. I can make this thing. I’m just not quite sure what it is. I have this fairly certain idea where I’m going, but as it works through, you change your mind – I could do this, rather than that. There is a kiln accident and, “Christ, it’s not the way I planned it! It’s better than I planned”. Just keep quite about it.

You end somewhere new?

Not totally new, but a variation. Whereas you might start thinking you want to do a big red circle, in the course of making it, that might become an orange ellipse.

Is there a hierarchy of materials?

I don’t think there is ultimately any top material. It is what you can do with it that is more important than what it is itself, but for me personally, glass is my prime material. I have change one hundred percent from where I started. I was getting tired of clay – I was teaching clay during the week, teaching night class a couple of nights a week and doing exhibition work on the weekend. I continually had clay under my fingernails – literally and metaphorically. I was frustrated with the process, because you would make clay things by throwing the pot one day, two or three days later you would trim the bottom, a week later you would bisque fire it, a week later you would glaze fire it. Then I came across glass blowing where it is all over in twenty minutes, plus it is transparent. That was the appeal of being able to sit down and make the work in one go, rather than in steps and stages (and it was transparent).

Why is ‘transparent’ significant?

It was because no other material offered me transparency. It was the unique thing about it. That offers you internal and external form at the same time. But now I work in long laborious processes and they are frequently opaque. So that immediate attraction didn’t last. I’ve come back to transparency more recently, but the majority of my work is opaque and long and laborious in process.

Is there the element of light?

Obviously. You see because of light, so the way the light reacts with the glass is everything. One thing that might explain that clearly is that in the early days of glass when people were having good photographs taken, the photographs were better than the work. You would look at a photograph in a catalogue and think that it was incredible, fantastic. Then you would go to the show and it was mediocre. There were the old tricks (you still see them occasionally) of having a reflection of the work off black acrylic so you can't tell where the work stops and where the reflection starts. You ask how on earth did they do that, then you find out they didn't do it. So light is everything. It all exists in the context of the light. You can arrange the glass to impact upon the light. It is a stunning quality.

Returning to the historic development. There was Littleton and the Toledo workshops?

There were Americans doing it before him. You actually get this from his book (*Search for Form*). The start point is not generally recorded in the history of contemporary glass. In America there were a few (I have forgotten their names) that were doing kiln experiments, but it wasn't given a lot of credence. Littleton had started a public movement, and Erwin Eisch in Germany was making works in the Littleton mode (as it were) several years before Littleton even thought about it. The start point in Australia is said to be when people came back from America.

What was the order of this?

The precise order you can track down. Do you know the book *The Story of Studio Glass* by Finn Lynggaard. [The Story of Studio Glass: The Early Years, a Historic Documentation Told by the Pioneers. Copenhagen: Rhodos International Science and Art Publishers, 1998]. There is an extensive chapter on the origins of Australian glass, which I think is the most authoritative writing on this (although I did write it myself - laughs).

Without being tied down to exact dates the people who came back from the US and Maureen from England, and the Americans who were bought over, is sort of recognised as the beginning. But there was a prior history. There were leadlight people who wanted to get away from the flat sheet of glass bound by lead. One of their ideas was to kiln form a bit of glass and there was Leonard French with his *dalle de verre* ceilings.

I think Caulfield was probably the first to offer a class in the university. I did track it down, but I am not sure. There are the definitions too, like what is 'a class' and what is 'a course' and is a weekend workshop a course. People fudge things as best they can – speaking anonymously of someone who said they had a subject all written up and approved by the board – but hadn't taught it. So don't tell me they had the first class, because it was only on paper. Everyone likes to write themselves into the centre.

Was there a comradary?

Yes it was like today. In public there's comradary. In private – not so much.

I'm interested in the 'ownership' of techniques and forms.

That's very much the case, especially in America. If you list all the big name American glass people, especially from the beginning, they have a technique. They are the best person in the world at that particular narrow technique. They do it so well and it is so identified with them that no one else can do it without actually engaging in plagiarism.

Plagiarism?

Absolutely, yes. You can do something and be wrongly accused of plagiarism, or you can do something and correctly be accused of plagiarism. Michael Glancy was a student of Chilhuly and he told me the story of blowing one day in class and Chilhuly said he would have to give it up, because he would never be any good at it. He thought that was right, so he got other people to blow forms for him that he would sandblast extremely deeply (above 6mm) and then electroform. You got these works that are so different from everyone else's work. They became popular and they sold well. Now you can't do anything like that without looking like 'a Glancy'. He has stamped himself on the technique, and all the young Americans have done that. Some of the work is not so good. It doesn't fit neatly into art, or design, or craft, but the technique is so identifiable.

It becomes artefact and that person's signature?

Yes. I am engaged as a consultant from time to time and I did one for the Queensland Department of the Arts (strangely is called the Arts Office). In so doing I went to every glassmaker in Queensland I could locate. I was taken to this one guy by people in the know (the Director of the Fusions Gallery – clay and glass). They said come and meet this guy, so I did. He welcomed me and said come in and see my collection. He showed me his 'Klaus Moje' (it looked like a Klaus Moje) and so on. He had taken the images and techniques and reproduced them and he was proud of it. "Look, I can do this and it is as good as a Klaus Moje." That was proud plagiarism. These were plates he was selling at a local venue. They were as close he could get copies – a very proud "my technique is as good as his".

Individuality is what it has been about for the last fifty years or so. When someone walks into a gallery they are going to buy your piece, or my piece. I would rather it was mine, so I am not going to tell you all the secrets as to how I made mine. I am going to tell you enough to leave you not knowing what I am talking about. People will have different values. If one has a mind that thinks of plagiarism as the lowest activity in which one might engage, then you do everything possible not to do something that might be seen as influenced by someone else, but other people don't care. There is a guy in Western Australia who makes work that looks like mine. I said, "G'day mate, that looks like mine". He said, "Yeah, it does, doesn't it".

In the end it comes back to the object?

That's the 'unknown craftsman'. This tea bowl (or whatever) is so excellent we don't really care who made it, and the person who made it as an act of meditation, has tried to remove himself and just work with the clay. Not mar it by putting their personality on it. That's the exact opposite to the basic American mode, where it is all about putting your signature on it. No one can mistake 'a Glancy', or 'a Chilhuly', or whatever else.

Is glass object self-referential (referring to the 'history' of contemporary glass, rather than to general contemporary practice)?

I would agree fully. There are a couple of factors. One is that you have this hypothetical artist, who has this extraordinary high reputation as a glass sculptor, but who can't get his work excepted into a second rate sculpture gallery because there is a prejudice against anything that is tainted with the thought of 'craft'. It is illogical because you look at metal sculpture, or stone sculpture in that gallery – it might be as well fabricated as the glass sculpture. So glass people have been pushed together to some extent by that external force.

But also there is an internal force. People all want to discover this new field, so they worked off each other – someone set up a gallery and someone set up a publication. This glass community grew and exists. Now if you've got this great piece of glass you want to sell, would you take it to the general sculpture gallery, or would you take it to this highly reputable glass gallery? You are going to take it to the glass gallery, because you know they have clients coming in who are looking for glass. They would very, very seldom go in looking for something else. Maybe they might be looking for a painting, but are not totally committed to the idea. They go in there – and buy your glass sculpture.

An implication that the client has preconceptions?

People who may buy things (and some of them could be described as collectors, some as the public) often have a preconception of what they might buy. It might start with a blank spot on their wall. What might they put there? What exists – paintings, prints, or tapestries? They will probably end up with a painting. Other people go in looking for a piece of glass and you just have to fulfil their other criteria.

That is disproved a little bit by where I exhibit in Adelaide (*Aptos Cruz* just up the road). It is a combination establishment. It has modern Italian furniture, Chinese antiques and they run a business as interior designers out of the same building. They have paintings on the wall and my work with bits and pieces of other people's glass at some times.

Decorative arts?

Yes, but it is not quite decorative arts. Furniture is one of their big movers, both for individuals and designers who have the contract to do the foyer of a hotel or something. While they are there (and everything up there is expensive, so these people have money) they say, "What is that?" "That is a famous glass artist". Then they buy it. That is an exception to the rule of exhibiting in a glass gallery.

The point I want to make there is that these people get educated to the idea of glass in the gallery. Whereas, more commonly they are already thinking about glass before they walk through the door. The reason this situation works for me is much more mechanical. There is an enormous amount of horizontal space when you are exhibiting furniture. I have eight or so works on display on a given day whereas if you are not actually exhibiting in a gallery you may have one work on display and the rest are all in the storeroom.

What response are you hoping to get?

I would hope they would think there is more here than immediately meets the eye. They can see that it is tall and it is blue and it is that shape. But I want them to sense

something more here. I would want them to think there is an internal integrity to the work, which they will have to ponder.

You're using a language?

I'm not happy with the word 'language', but I don't have a substitute for it. Certainly my intention is to tap into cultural entities. I have to consciously (and perhaps unconsciously) make all the formal considerations as everyone else when making a visual work.

You have added a huge circle of cultural context.

Much to my commercial disadvantage I believe. If you look at what sells well (particularly in the American market, but also here probably) it is the immediately identifiable. My work changes so frequently that people say, "Who the hell is that?" Whilst I sell works, I believe I could sell more works if I just stuck to the one thing. Toots Zynsky is the classic example. She has only ever made one work. She just does it hundreds of times. You walk into SOFA (or somewhere) and you say that's a good *Toots Zynsky* over there, but I won't buy one this year. You come back next year and there's another good *Toots Zynsky*, so I will buy one. I think the American market works that way because of the size. But if I exhibit this one year and they say that's pretty good, but I won't buy it. Then next year I exhibit this [different work] next year, it's, "I've never heard of him" – no reputation.

Collectors want a consistent narrative?

Yes. Primarily they are not buying the object; they are buying the narrative (I'd say the C.V.) "This work is shit, but it is made by Chilhuly." I had this similar experience at the National Gallery of Australia decades ago. They had this group of glassworks. They didn't know what they were, where they came from, or how they happened to have them. They asked me to come and have a look at them to see if I could identify them. We went to the storerooms in Queanbeyan and as we were walking through the ceramics storeroom to the spot where these were held, there was this ghastly, ugly little teapot (it looked like gristle). I winced as I went by and the curator saw me and said, "Yes I know. We would never show it, but it is so seminal to that guy's development, so we collected it". Excellence is not always the first criteria.

There are a number of the American collectors I have met in their houses. They have this superb work, the best work you could imagine and next to it is a terrible piece of rubbish. They are not buying aesthetically, or for any sense of excellence there. They bought the superb work because of the C.V. and the rubbish work because they like it. Someone actually said, "I'm a bit embarrassed about this. It is one of the first things I collected and I got it at some flea market, but I just love it" (it's a pig dancing on it's hind legs) "and over here is my Chilhuly".

This work at the National Gallery I identified was an American exhibition brought to Australia ten years prior to the day I was looking at it. It had been brought out by the Australia Council and was toured around Australia then they gave it to the National Gallery without any paperwork. The thing that intrigued me at the time (and why I am telling you about it now) is that there wasn't one single piece there good enough to be chosen for an exhibition now. Ten years after it had been chosen the field had moved on so much there was no longer one that could be chosen.

Normally when I see my old work I am embarrassed by it because I always think I could have done this, or I should have done that. It's just occasionally I see an old work and think O.K., that was successful.

Naming your pieces?

I often start off with a name and make the piece to it. Sometimes I have a vague notion of a name, and someone has said to me that I must get my names out of the Thesaurus and yes I do (laughs). More commonly I have the name before the image, but if I haven't got the name, at the end of process I think to myself I want something a bit like – 'hate', but 'hate' is not a good word. What's a word like 'hate' and I look in the Thesaurus and see 'dislike'. That is what I actually do.

But is the work itself something you couldn't express in words?

No, I think that must be so, if it has validity. Otherwise there is no real purpose to it. When I was at the university (a CAE those days), they were trying to cut everything and they looked at art education. I said, "You can't cut art education, because it is important". The guy looked at me and asked, "In what way is it unique? Come back and tell me when you have an answer to that." He was a philosopher, and he was actually on my side.

This is the question you have to answer. Why can't we make do with music education? Why do we need visual arts education? The work, to have its ultimate validity, must offer something unique. You should not be able to do this in words, music or dance.

Your work is intellectual.

I would hope to think it has an intellectual underpinning. That is certainly the intention. Occasionally I make works just for fun. I might want to make a blue bowl because I like blue and that is the end of the story. That is for fun, or on order, but generally my intention is to start with an intellectual precept and build upon it.

(I hold up a tea bowl) If I hold up this object is your response aesthetic, or literary?

That has no content apart from it being a tea bowl from Taiwan. I take the definition of art as work that has content beyond all of the apparent aspects. Beyond the words, beyond the image, beyond the faceting, beyond the colour, there is an intellectual content.

In something as controlled as your work you would still hope it draws something more from the viewer?

I would be pleased if it did that. I would be displeased if they said, "Oh, that's pretty". It was a pretty piece of glass before I started. Glass is attractive. The great problem with working with glass is that – it is attractive in itself. People can just respond to the attractiveness and not get beyond that, or as the artist you might not get beyond the attractiveness. It is an easy option – blue sells.

People will buy the easy option. People will buy kitsch.

Yes. When ceramics was really big in England and was very highly regarded, I was talking to one of the leading ceramicists. I said, "We are doing glass in Australia and the funny thing is that the terrible works will sell more easily and at a higher price than the good works". He said, "Yes, it was like that with ceramics in England, but gradually the market became educated. The terrible works faded away and people started buying the good works". I guess there is always that hope.

Glass usurped ceramics?

Usurped it in many ways. Before I left Australia to do glass, in the Crafts Council of South Australia (then Crafts South) 80% of the members were from clay. After that it went down to 10%. If you check now I don't know what it is, but then clay was it. Then textiles came second, but over decades it changes. Students coming to a university course in the field of crafts would want to do clay and you would say, "Well you can also do jewellery" and they say, "Why would I want to do jewellery?" Now all over Australia there is trouble getting students into clay courses. They have cut the staff by 50% in many places and have cut lots of courses completely. One ceramicist lecturer has suggested it is that students don't want to get their hands dirty anymore. That is not as silly as it may sound, because in the eighties students were working on computers. It was exciting and jewellery was exciting, because you had this stuff that was so well made, but with clay you were 'puddling around'. That was a mood change. At the same time in art education the class was reduced from the double lesson and the half class, to the full class single lesson. With that you can't do clay, but you can get out your computers and design a poster. There was that mechanical aspect to it.

In the glass community technical skill has increased dramatically. Other changes?

There have been changes of intention. When I first started in clay (I was a first year/second year student in art school and they said teach clay) craft was a radical way of addressing art. There was a great woman teaching craft. She taught textiles and bookbinding and all that type of thing. "I am not going to make a sculpture, I'm going to make a pot" was a radical thing to say. There was controversy in the lunchroom (laughs). That approach of craft being a valid thing to do led into glass to some extent. So just the fact that you were using glass was a radical thing to do. It was a point of great attention.

I think a lot of the purpose at that stage was to make art as in sculpture, but in order to do that you had to make vessels. You had to make craft, because you found you couldn't control the glass at all until you had learnt these skills. It started off with that bifurcated approach – some people wanted to make sculpture and some people wanted to make vessels. It has grown in those two directions, but they have subdivided a bit. The people who want to make pure sculpture are very few. The people who want to make decorative sculpture are very many. The people who want to make craft have almost died away. The people who want to make high-level craft are in a preponderance, and then there is the ultra-high level craft, which is also in a preponderance.

The people who are often much admired are those that can do a work that has all of the excellence of a craftwork, some of the excellence of a sculptural work and they can do ten of them a day, or ten a week. I call it 'high-end production'. A lot of the work that is exhibited in art galleries (in inverted commas perhaps, but 'art' galleries) is just high-end production. It is good work. It is nice. It has all sorts of good qualities, but you

go around the corner and in the next gallery there will be another one. The colours change but everything else is the same.

And what is the danger in calling one thing another?

That's a good question. I think first of the expression, "If you are not careful to say what you mean, you'll end up meaning what you say". That is the principal danger. Another danger is that high-end production undercuts sculpture (sculpture being the word for 'art glass') because it has more immediate attraction and it is cheaper too. Will I buy this challenging work at twenty thousand dollars, or this extremely attractive one at five thousand dollars? I admire anyone who makes a living from such work, but it is undercutting the more challenging work.

Educating the public in the wrong way?

Yes, just towards the attractiveness of glass. Glass has climbed up a bit towards sculpture, but it is undermined.

You went from furnace to kiln work and stayed there?

I did a bit and it was fun and I did a bit more. Then I started to get serious about it. One day I had a particular experience. I had large sheet of black Bullseye on the table and I had cut some strips of red. I put them down and walked away, then I came back and looked at them. That red black dynamic was so great that I made some works from that. That was the early days when the image was the starting point.

In order to make the works I had to learn a bit of flame working and all that type of thing. I got involved in what I could do, but then I got involved with works that started with an idea and end up in an image. It is not easy to do that on the end of a blowpipe.

Bullseye?

Bullseye have been a very intelligent company. They were making sheets of glass and they find out people are crushing them to make frit, so they start selling frit. Then they find people are combining sheets to make big blocks, so they start selling blocks. They have been really clever. As part of the process they talk it up, but they also support the industry and that doubles back on them. They would be a wonderful study for someone investigating business.

The response of others to your work?

Yes, when you are standing behind them. I haven't had that experience for a long time, but it was one of my seminal experiences back in the late seventies when I was making works from the *Reclining Bottle* series. People were exhibiting glass in art galleries (the sign on the door was *Art Gallery*). The work being exhibited was glass from a furnace, but it was a bottle. Why have we got the bottle in an art gallery? Not only was it a bottle (but as glass blowers are want to do), the neck had been stretched to make this beautiful sensuous form with the diameter so thin you could not get water into it. It was a bottle that would not contain.

It was my interest as part of the seventies art/craft debate. I had made some 'bottles', but to make them conspicuously 'non-bottle' I had them reclining rather than standing.

To make them even more so I divided the body into two pieces. To me it was a bifurcated bottle, but people looking at it were saying, 'This one over here with the legs on it'. Yes, it is bifurcated like the legs from the torso, but there is no suggestion of a knee, no suggestion of a foot. People were saying 'leg' and some were even suggesting they were pornographic. I started playing with them seeing how much you could suggest without actually doing, to see how people described it. I made works a bit more like the human body, but it wasn't a body at all. It was inferred. I was working from the audience reaction back into the next series.

That seventies 'art/craft' debate is still going on.

It is, but there was an intensity then. It was every bloody meeting.

There is 'that question' – why aren't we in the Art Gallery?

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Barry Pearce, Head Curator of Australian Art (we studied together). I was there one day and I said, "Barry this gallery should collect glass". He said, "We don't do that". End of story – "We don't do that!" That is typical of many situations. It is categorisation. We don't collect glass. It is like that art/craft debate saying that's a work of craft because that person making it was very concerned with how they made it. You'd ask, "And the painter wasn't?"

Donald Brook was here at Flinders and he organised these seminars (he never went himself). His graduate students ran them and it was essentially, "Stop! You haven't got the theory worked out yet. We will let you know when you can start again" (laughs).