



Sergio Redegalli  
*Cascade* Brisbane  
 1988  
 laminated glass sculpture  
 12 tonnes

*The interview starts with a general chat. This leads into...*

One of the reasons that *Cydonia* [glass studio] (that is myself) is so independent is the fact that in eighties I saw there was hierarchy of the 'demigods', (of men – they were in their thirties then and I was in my teens) and it was obvious even then, that these guys weren't going to let up. They weren't going to give ground to anyone.

One of the biggest problems we had in those days was if there were five techniques (techniques everyone uses these days), those five techniques were 'owned' by those five individuals and anyone who encroached on those techniques was seen as a plagiarist. It became a real problem. I saw a lot of good young people destroyed by the power of these individuals and it really disgusted me.

I was very 'pro' Ausglass. When I saw this institutionalised self-glorification was not lessening, that the people who were joining Ausglass became part of the frenzy that was the aura of these individuals (and it was getting worse), I just walked away.

I saw that beyond a certain point, people have to question whether they [Ausglass] represent 'everyone', because if *Cydonia* [glass studio], and Sergio isn't there, that isn't 'everyone'. I was hoping there would be more people like myself, who would walk away. If it is known that we exist, then 'their' opinion can't be the whole thing.

This [*Cydonia*] studio has been running since '86. I was twenty-four when I started the company. We have never been bankrupt. Not like *Ozone* (Warren Langley), or *Nick Mount*. Those people failed, but still seem to be in positions of success, because of institutions and grants and everything else. I want to do a book documenting a lot of things. The front cover is proudly going to state, "Never sponsored by the Australia Council". This is to prove that you can be a young person and an artist and actually succeed without having to live on a 'handout' system.

That's another parallel I see – a lot of institutions are teaching the ethos that you 'ask' [for financial assistance]. Not that it is wrong to ask, but it has become institutionalised (especially with Canberra) that you go for the grant. You don't do [the work] off your own bat. You don't work hard. You don't develop a piece of equipment, or you don't work hard to buy that equipment. You ask for the money to buy it, or you get it given to you and in general, they are just buying what already exists. They are not actually advancing anything. They are not investing in something that takes them a massive step forward. They are just buying what they see other people have.

*Possibilities are contracting?*

Yes. Unfortunately one mistake I made was stepping out of the political scene and the glass scene – I stopped stirring the pot. For example, Canberra and the Glassworks Tower had a lot of money spent there and it's going to be a drain to the community for the next ten years (it is subsidised for those years). It competes against businesses like galleries and us, but people who use it are subsidised. They are in direct competition with companies like us. The only safety net we have is that the technology that they bought into that building is already ten years out of date, because the people who selected the equipment were never up to date. People like Richard Whiteley are out of date with equipment, because they work from what is already available. They are not designers of equipment.

I am the sort of craftsman who believes you have to understand how to make your paintbrush and the paint. You may not do it, but at least you have a fundamental idea of how. So then if you chose to do something, you are in control.

I am a big believer in pushing the fact that I'm an artist, a maker and I chose to work with glass as my medium, but I'm in control of what I do with the medium. I don't let the medium control me, like so many other artists out there (people who call themselves artists) that are seduced by the material. It is a very beautiful material, and even a plain vessel is beautiful. I'd never take that away from it, but *Ikea* now is selling some pretty 'shit-hot' stuff in glass.

*Mass-produced in China.*

And that company that is now doing all the 'Chilhuly' stuff. It's so funny (laughs).

*You said an artist, craftsman, maker – where do you position yourself?*

I'm all of it. I'm always 'leap-frogging'. My research paper at Uni was based on 'technology' and 'leap-frogging'. I believe the history of our craft has helped humanity big-time. Without craftspeople the simple lens would never have happened. Without the lens we wouldn't have astronomy. We wouldn't have had microscopes without the makers. It comes down to certain points in history when people, let's say Leonardo, were creative as 'scientist', 'artist' and 'doctor'. They may not have understood everything as well as we do now (because there is so much to know), but it was a mixture where one field helped the other. I believe that as a craft we played a major role in humanity. The company that produced the glass for the mirrors of Versailles is the same company that did the glass for the [Sydney] Opera House. There is good history there. I'm finding that with the last project we finished, I had to adopt techniques and technologies that are a hundred years old, but are gone because the industry has moved so far forward there is nothing left to show the equipment once used and how it worked. In some ways the irony is that the Indians and the Chinese, because

they have more 'old-fashioned' equipment (because it's available) can do more 'hands-on' work. We have lost that.

*Creative technical solutions?*

I try to never be limited. If I don't have something, I'll make the equipment to fulfil the aim of the artwork. I never modify the artwork to fit the limitations of my equipment.

*It then comes back to a brief?*

Some briefs are my own – for my own personal work. That's driven by my passion of wanting to be the biggest, and to be different – in the sense that everyone is copying everyone to a certain degree. There are some very good people who have got content in their work and then there are a lot of people I call 'plinth artists' who just fit into a safe routine of making something that will sit on a box in a gallery to be sold. These works fit a scale. Scale is then a limitation – how big is their studio, how big is the glass they can carry, how big is their kiln, how big can they cold work. Historically there are limitations in glass and in general I try to break through them. My ideas are not going to be limited by the technology.

Part of the idea (it doesn't always happen) in this studio is, after all these years of running this business; the business gives me the money so I can make my work as an artist without needing to sell. By removing the need to sell my artwork I removed the issue of desperation.

*There is the issue of artwork as a commodity – developing and protecting your product.*

Yes, for example Maureen Cahill started the first glass department [Sydney College of the Arts] in Australia. Maureen is underrated in the history of glass. Somewhere at sometime it was accepted that Klaus Moje came into this country and 'then there was glass'. 'There was never fusing before Klaus Moje'. Yet all of us were doing it at Sydney College before Klaus Moje arrived. Maureen taught me about textural glass. I was doing textural glass before Warren Langley started *Ozone*, but history was high jacked. My way of dealing with these issues was to set my goal to bankrupt Warren Langley and to get rid of *Ozone*. I achieved it and *Ozone* is gone. *Axolotl*, its remnant, is almost gone too.

Because of Maureen I don't go as gung-ho with certain people, but with Klaus my aim (especially with the new machine that I have got) is to be able to ground and polish fairly large surface areas of glass and large areas of *Bullseye*. There are designs that I have for vanities that are of the same standard and quality of Klaus's gallery pieces – how he cuts and fuses pieces – everything from round vessels to taller pieces and then cold worked them. They're going to be replicated in vanity tops.

Artistically that's my way to express myself. It places a person and a technique in the correct position. It is a bathroom product – it is a vanity.

*You are being subversive?*

Yeah. I'm putting certain things where they are meant to be. There is always a history to something and everyone has a role to play and people who did what they did in the seventies have an important historical role, but they can't just keep milking it. Every other person can fuse lines and dots, but it comes down to some essence in those lines and dots.

*This is a 'formal' aesthetic, or a nice design piece?*

Yes and that is where it should stay. Recognise it is a design piece. If ten of us were in a room and we were all given certain colours, we would all come up with the same general format, because that's what we would do as makers. In looking at certain fused pieces or glass works, I don't put much value in someone saying they are 'high art' pieces. They are beautiful designer pieces. They are well-manufactured craft pieces. People can love them, want them, buy them, appreciate them and cherish them as a purchase, but it doesn't make them high art.

It seems in glass, compared to every other field, a vessel has more worth than a sculpture, or a painting. It's like we in glass skip the realities of the world by staying separate, and we don't want to be critiqued the same way as the others.

*We are saying we are special, yet we still want to be accepted within the wider field?*

We belong in that field. We want to be in that field, but we are not prepared to take the blows, the critique – from the general public, or the institutions. Not that anyone needs any institution, because I would like to think that my place in the world will be judged in fifty years time. In fifty years time I will be dead, but then Cydonia might be equivalent to Tiffany. That will only happen by someone looking at the history. There is so much of the work out there that has a place in the community.

[Break in interview]

I have a lifetime of things I want to make. It is just getting the time. I have this idea of an installation with all these 'world penises' (cut as shapes by our machine) as flags where you could say "There are the big pricks, or there are the little pricks – but they are all pricks". I can do it. I have the machine to make it a slick installation.

*Technology enables you to realise an idea?*

And it makes it affordable. In reality, as a maker you have to be able to afford what you 'perceive'. The thing is that if I want to make this show (and let's say I'm not going to sell it) I would like to think I have the money, but if it is going to cost me thirty thousand dollars to do, it then I have to wait. But if all it is going to cost me ten dollars and I'm going to create a really good show, that helps. It is still important to have a piece that is slick. Where the blank of the penis is a tight form. Where it looks well manufactured, so people aren't judging the craft process. It's not part of the issue. They are not going to say, "Oh, look at that, there is a bubble there" – all that disappears because craft is perfect. Then hopefully people see the pricks on the floor, and how you are playing the game.

*When virtuosity (or lack of skill) doesn't stand between the viewer and the work? When craft is not the issue?*

Or people not recognising that the mistakes are wonderful. I am constantly researching and I am quite comfortable in saying that as a studio, we are about seven years ahead of the competition. Anything that I come up with now, we are seven years ahead of the market. Before I was being stupid and spending a whole lot of money at *designEX*, or the *Home Show* and showing the opposition all our future stuff. I stopped doing that and it is better, because now I have all these great ideas I can show private clients when we need to, and it develops from that. The ideas aren't then distributed worldwide. That includes those

Chinese photographers who come through the shows so that six months later it is coming in by the container load.

*I was talking to Warren for a previous project and he said his promotional images showed up on rival Chinese brochures.*

We've had that too. There is no ethics. There is no shame. However, his images from Ozone after it went bankrupt are still being used by him and by Axolotl to gain profit without going to the receivers for a value. Everyone skirts that line.

*Your strength lies in your technology being seven years ahead?*

With product development, I could show you one of our recycled products. It is a very simple product, but a very beautiful product. It is a platter of recycled toughened glass that we laminate, so it is safety rated. Now we take this to another level. It could go into a large scale we could shape, or mill. It is going to fit into an architectural scene, not a gallery scene. It gives people the ability to create something private for windows that is different from textural, or fused glass, and we can do it large scale. It can be water-jet cut. It can be CNC cut. If I want to take it into my sculptural work, it could be easily shape-cut. I could put it back to back and have *Frosty the Snowman* sculptures if I wanted to do that.

*Your technology is giving you a vocabulary.*

Yes, and the other thing is I like working larger scale. The nudes that are on the roof, each one use to take me seven to eight hours to cut, now I have a machine that does it in less than forty-five minutes with no glass loss. It means that I now have three extra days to do something else. If I want to do a life-size kangaroo silhouettes (I wanted to do Koala Bears and Kangaroos in San Francisco) and place them around the bushland in San Francisco, because they've got bigger gumtrees than we do. It comes down me not having the two weeks it would take, but if I put two days towards something that is going to be fun, well that is great. I can do it. It has just given me that edge to just have a bit more fun and to realise some things that I want to do.

*You give the impression of someone highly competitive, with a strong business sense – you're shaking your head?*

No, I'm agreeing with that. It always goes hand in hand. You need the client. It doesn't matter how many great ideas I come up with, at a certain point you need to take it to the next step by finding the client who wants to use it.

*That comes back to the cash flow?*

That comes from private clients. Commissions are good. I don't trust the tender system – especially since Langley won the *Tower Project* in Canberra. That showed the flaws in the system. This is politics. Unfortunately every time I think the world has grown up, that the glass fraternity has matured, I dabble again. I did that because people said try it, but Maureen said from the very beginning don't bother because Langley's got it. I said, "No, I want to believe we are better than that".

We had a great presentation, but we weren't even short-listed. We had references from Tony Rossi who is the senior architect for *Petal Thorpe* who did the swimming pool for the Beijing Olympics. We had the best glass engineer and the best fibre optic engineer, who we

have used for years in professional jobs that we have done. Not craft jobs, but real jobs with real clients. Langley got short-listed with four other people. We made a complaint and one of those people pulled out, but we were trying to get rid of Langley, not the other guy who used our images on his website. My issue with Langley is the bankruptcy of his ex-company owing so many people. Too many people suffered. Because he got out of it by six months he thinks he is clear. As a businessperson I don't think that is morally correct.

This is 'real world' business, not the 'craft/government' mentality (that is still small in its own way) – craft/ government of the Australia Council through to the Craft Council – and the grant systems within that. The people in those systems are still the same grouping of people. The judges know that small group of people. The people who make the decisions are their peers. For example, back in the eighties when the Crafts Council was giving grants, the grant was written in such a way that practitioners with more than two years experience could go for the grant. OK, I'm only new; I can't go for the grant because I have only been around for two years. The next year it was practitioners that have three years experience. The following year it was practitioners that have four years experience. Hello, doesn't anyone see this (laughs)? I laughed because it happened four years in a row. Can't anyone see that it is the same people getting grants? The grant was changed every year. It was dirty like that all the time, but because they were the people within the system, you couldn't do anything about it.

*The people I've spoken to within the system don't appear as people who would do that.*

They're not. There are honest people in there. Again we are talking about almost thirty years ago now. When the game cleans up and people try to take back control, things get done properly. Magazine articles get written properly. Unfortunately there are not enough people with integrity, and those are often women. They don't always get heard. This is not saying there is lack of strength because they are women; it's that the barriers are greater for them. Take Maureen, I love her to death but she is a 'fence-sitter'. She'll have her say about things and wonder why she is being hurt. That's because she puts herself in the shooting range. She has the ability to stand up and say something and she doesn't, because she has the belief common sense and justice will prevail. That doesn't happen. Then again people get older. They get tired. People get established. They get comfortable. They have more important things – kids, husbands, someone's sick. At a certain point politics is not as important anymore. You get on with your work. That's what Maureen says to me – get on with your work and stop fighting. You can, but it drives me insane watching this still happening.

It's still happening now. That Canberra Institution [the Glass Centre] is an example of a fantastic idea gone amok. It is set up in the middle of nowhere and now the reality is that two main players involved in the set-up hate each other over a house gazumping. When one family member shafts another, you have a major feud and it's split the Canberra community down the centre. It will be interesting to see if it survives.

I'm a bit older. I remember the *Meatmarket* in Melbourne. Now that was a facility as good as the Canberra facility, but it failed. It failed because people milked it and put nothing back. I've got all the documents for that [Canberra] facility. The Government will be funding that for another eight years, putting hundreds of thousands of dollars every year to keep it going, no matter what good, or bad the decisions they make are – as far as I'm concerned that is not good policy. That means anyone can hire those kilns (I'm proud to say mine are bigger. I've got the length and the width to outdo them).

There is a lack of communal respect. Some of the teachers (like Stephen Skillitzi) in the past really loved being teachers, especially the ones in South Australia. They were real gentlemen (like David Wright). They really believed in their art and passing on knowledge and working with people. Maureen was the same. She was never shy about not knowing. If there was anything she didn't know she would help find someone to help out. She never pretended to know everything about glass, but she never compromised her ideas. Even if she didn't know how to make it, she would find the people to help solve the problem.

That was because she was secure in herself. Her ideas were sound. Making the glass was only part of it, and she never compromised the idea for the glass. That was the way I was educated. They were my views. I saw people I respected act upon their ideas. Sydney College was very open as a sculptural studio. I felt comfortable being a sculptor, even though we specialised in glass. We had to be in a special room because the equipment was there, but we weren't that different. The fine arts students from painting and sculpture weren't bagging us out.

Then Maureen got tired and people like Whiteley step in. The first despicable thing that I saw (I was still part-time then) was when Maureen asked to be told when the grants came in for the lecturers, because she was eager to do some work. Whiteley did not tell Maureen – he went for it and got it himself. That stuff really pisses me off, and I have stayed pissed off because it is wrong. There has to be a level of respect given to the people who were there first. Whiteley made it up the ladder. He worked Sydney College for everything he could get. He destroyed the old Sydney College of the Arts. All the money we spent years raising when I was there as a special fund to buy equipment, he wiped out by paying his mates as special lecturers/visitors in the first six months, because he believed you should be paid as an artist. We were the only department at the college who had those funds, because it had been set up so long ago. That kept us that little bit ahead, because you could buy fibre, or Bullseye, or casting glass for someone who was teaching it, or for experimenting. His mentality was 'plinth art' and there would be a grant, or money coming. You don't have to do it yourself.

Sydney College is recovering. I'm really happy about that because the glass community needs a sculpture studio that specialises in glass. Then going to Canberra he does the same thing there. Whiteley is involved the Canberra Towers [Glass Centre]. With his wife it is a little bit incestuous and now he is involved with the guy from Ranamok [Andy Plummer] and they are setting up this glass facility up at Brookvale. So Whiteley is involved in setting up this in direct competition with Canberra. I can see wanting to have fingers in everything, but there is no idea of the destruction being created. Andy has the money to create something that could be quite special, but I am so over trying to clean up the mess. People like Andy will just have to learn. Whiteley is going to run out of Australia.

*This is politics.*

Inbreeding is dangerous. Remember those same people will then go over to America where they are the ones asked to lecture, or be a guest speaker. They know the same small community over there. America is not as dangerous, because there are more of them. Uri [visiting glass artist/student] is a fine example. I told him it was dangerous to come here [Cydonia] because by hanging around us he was putting himself in a 'position'. He has taken the view that he can cope, and he likes being here and seeing the other side of the fence, where it's not just the small studio, but has the architectural side. He has appreciated going to sites and seeing the process of architectural work.

*You have no trouble in moving between your creative, experimental approaches and architectural briefs?*

I'm a good designer. I could have been an architect, but I chose not to. I chose to be in the crafts, because I loved ceramics (I did a glass and ceramics major). I still have all my clay stuff, but I never play with it. One day – you never know.

I can draw, even now having to relearn CAD at my age (forty-seven) – I'm border-line (never formally trained). I look at computer games and it's, "God, how do they do that?" There is a generation that has grown up with finger dexterity we just don't have. It's fantastic. Their brains are wired in a different way. The next step is a computer that you can talk to.

*There is no compartmentalising in your thinking?*

No, and that is because I had an exceptional high school education. It was a public school (Muirfield High School), but we were experimental. We started in year 7. We were the first year and then the top year all through. I helped write the constitution for the school when I was in primary school. It was a very special time. We had a real rapport with the teachers. We got to experiment. There was a very good design course we were experimenting with and it trained us in a way that is now being used in university. It was exceptional. I was at the right place at the right time with very enthusiastic teachers. Then I was lucky, because when I got to college and started first year (with all the minor studies), I stumbled into glass and discovered the glasscutter.

One of the things that gave me that quantum leap on everybody else was sculptural work for three years with acrylics and kinetics (my 'frozen moments'). I was actually stacking acrylics into shapes to show kinetic form. They developed from coloured cardboard that I was sticking together. It went from solids to the acrylic. Gluing and cutting acrylics is far harder than working with glass. Then all of a sudden – glass, it cuts like butter. You don't cut yourself as much as you do with acrylic and it glues together beautifully. I had three years of concepts that I translated straight into glass. They went straight into the gallery and were selling.

*What formal elements were you working with?*

Kinetics, movement – when you stack it, back then there were some people from the sixties doing cut and stacked glass, but they were very structured, Germanic massed blocks, while very quickly I got into cutting shapes and forms that Maureen [Cahill] appreciated. It was very different, because everybody was doing blown forms, or lead lights, or copper foils. In Australia I had a unique field.

It was a technique the others hadn't done. I wasn't treading on the feet of the five men that had control of the other techniques and I just kept going my own way. That was all the way to the pieces that were photograph for Vogue, and from that John Truscott selecting me for the Expo sculpture. I was twenty-seven when I did the Expo sculpture and that really pissed off 'the system'.

*You were a choice made from 'outside' the glass community?*

Yes totally, because John Truscott selected me from a magazine image. He rang me and asked, "Sergio can you make this three meters high?" I said, "Sure not a problem". But if the

decision had been made inside the glass community, I would not have got it. Someone else would have got it, attempted it and failed.

*You found a vocabulary that was outside the 'ownership' of the glass establishment?*

Yes, that's right and I've stayed outside. By the time I'd finished the sculpture 'Cascade', I already knew that I could have made it twice as big for the same amount of money, but three months before we had no idea and *Dale Corning* wouldn't even say what I did was workable. Now twenty years down the line the sculpture is still there. Of course, when I was twenty-seven I never thought twenty years down the line. Getting it from Brisbane to Adelaide on the back of a truck was a feat in itself. That was part of the brief. It had to be moved.

*It's interesting that with glass you went with kinetics and mass and not light.*

No, light refraction is normal. It is something that I am taking for granted, because it is part of the vocabulary – it happens, but by being able to create mass and volume in stacking, it instantly shattered the restrictions on size. Because I was assembling, I freed myself. I could get into a space and go so many meters high. I wasn't restricted to a plinth.

*You are also released from restrictions of blowing, annealing, kiln size.*

Annealing still comes into it because you can actually create stress by gluing glass. If you use loctite you can actually create stress with compatible glass. Do that by having the glass either warmer, or colder than average, assembling it and then going back to normal room temperature. Then put a polarised sheet behind it and wear sunglasses and you will see the design of dots of stress. These are all part of my vocabulary. I know I can do it. I know the limitations.

What got me was that I did this beautiful work and then Danny Lane in England started doing similar stuff, but because of the European market he skyrocketed over us. Part of that was that the hierarchy never supported me. While I did all this great work in Australia I never got asked to do a talk in America (I gave a talk at Ausglass once). No one in America knows about me, because the people who talk about Australian artists are these demigods who can stifle you.

It is only that there are search engines and we have been around so long that people like Uri find out about us (plus the fact that Uri's teacher worked part-time here). Now it's a generational thing. Someone that I knew when he was younger opens a network.

*Then 'created histories' are really important to you?*

The truth will come out. I guess I'm looking at it as a cultural truth. There are the people who write the history, like for example the Keith Cumming's book – the last one has Warren Langley through it as if Warren Langley (with Ozone) is the only person in Australia who has ever done textural glass. With Keith there was the first book in the eighties and I think he's done two books since. It was the last one that had Langley all the way through. It will be interesting who is there if there's ever another book. At the end of the day it will come down to whose work is sitting out there in people's houses in twenty or thirty years. A lot of Langley/Ozone works have been removed from the city over the years and most of my works are staying in the buildings, because they were more of the architecture. They were designed to be more part of the building and that quality remains. Langley's glass was money and trend.

My problem is trying to re-educate a lot of the designers and architects not to be limited to playing in sand pits. The irony was that everybody copied that technique and they made a really good product into a really bad product – all the way to the Chinese ripping it off. Here were a few squiggles sold for a lot of money and it was easy to rip off. The damage to us was that architects saw glass as that 'Ozone thing'. It was old hat and a bad experience and they didn't want to have any other dealings with 'glass' people. We are still repairing that damage. The luck is that we have been around so long that there is a new generation of architects that don't remember those bad things. It is not just the wounds healing; there is a new generation who never saw the wounds in the first place.

The reason we did all the glasswork (I cut like mad for two days and finished these forms) for Hassell Architects, was it was our way of staying in touch. It was a fantastic installation that took up huge wall area. We met some good young architects. Hopefully they will see we are passionate enough to do this (even though it's just shaped mirrors).

*Coming by another path and working cooperatively with architects and designers...*

And young people, for example we are close to the Enmore TAFE. Most students are scared to ask for samples. We encourage them to come in here to have a look and to take samples away and they remember. I remember companies that said, "Yes, take this". They were the companies I worked with. These young people are no longer eighteen, they are thirty, thirty-five and associates of their companies and they remember the goodwill.

It is so important to have relationships and someone to talk to you and treat you seriously. We have a really healthy reputation. We use all the big glass companies and they know we use all of them, but they don't see us as dangerous, or in competition with them. We are value adding. In most cases they know I push Australian made, Australian owned and that we export and fly the Australian flag. When it comes to the textural side, we are almost 100% Australian content. Glass materials to kiln design – everything. Not important to the art world, but important in that we can do it from here.

*You've moved out of the small community?*

We are the weird artists they find amusing when Alex (or others in the past) and I visit. We are a refreshing side to the industry. We are at a crossroads right now, where some of the big firms have actually bought equipment getting them closer than ever to design and they haven't got an idea how to cope with this. I said you pay me to design the samples for you and then you own the samples you then market. What they want me to do is design, make and market it myself. I explain that I am too small and I'm too vulnerable, because I will take my great idea, use my machine, show it once and then get ripped off. They have to understand they have to pay for design.

With these machines (imagine giant bubble jets) the potential in the art world, especially with layering and multi work, is second to none. That's another example of industry and art leap-frogging. An Israeli company has developed these oversized bubble jets for glass to do what was done by hand. What was 'craft' size is now 'architectural' size.

*Design is the edge that you have?*

We have always had that. That image I put on the glass is my image. You could do a hundred different things just as easily as the same thing one hundred times.

*So by the time comes in from China by the shipload you have moved on through four new ideas.*

The same as our technology. We have named all the original textural glass the 'Organic' range. (Some people – that's all the plebs, call 'textural glass' 'slumped glass'.) The new range we call our 'Impress' range. That product has come from seven years of experimentation and I classify it as Chinese proof. I can change and manipulate the designs so fast that the Chinese can never make a container load of it.

The Italians have solved the Chinese plagiarism problem in furniture by making furniture ranges like fashion. They bring out a summer and winter range. White goods and sanitary companies are doing the same thing. The only way to beat the Chinese is to out-design them. Buy the time it is copied it is out of fashion.

If I can protect myself from the Chinese, I can protect myself from the locals who do the same thing.

*If you move around like this how do you establish a market identity?*

It makes it very hard to advertise. That has been our biggest problem, but you never become stereotyped, or old fashioned. The essence of the studio is that we are creative and able to come up with the next point of difference as opposed to having a product for five years that no one wants.

*This brings into focus 'style on a plinth'.*

That is another issue I have. There are a lot of successful artists/sculptors/glass people. Then the galleries start buying them. This artist then has so many orders, because every gallery around the world wants a piece. So for the next four or five years they are making that piece. They don't move on. The problem is that everyone around the world sees the same ten people in every gallery. That's what is sold. That's what you need to collect. After five years that artist hasn't moved on, hasn't created the next thing and they're floundering. A fine example is Nick Mount after Bungaree. He decided to go back to one of the craft shows. He had pieces there that were lame and badly made. People who were his students and had been practising artists for years and had started successful businesses had their pieces there and their work and his were chalk and cheese. He hadn't moved on.

Rob Knottenbelt is another example, a nice man, but he went through that water-jet period and on the other side of it there was nothing left. It was amazing that these people just didn't see the trap.

*I've seen those selling the same thing after twenty, or thirty years.*

But where are they? They are still working from their backyard, or they have to use a facility. There are flame workers who can do it and be comfortable making a bread and butter line. They have been able to secure it, because no one else is going into it because it is not as easy as it seems. The technique protects them, or the cost protects them.

What it costs us to run a business like this every day would probably scare the living daylights out of most craftspeople. We don't make things for other artists, but because I've known Cedar Prest for a long time, we did. Cedar got a commission in Brisbane to make a

textured glass piece. (The reason I don't let other people use the facility is that we should be getting those jobs.) She had a design that was really simple (we do it every day and fast). She dithered over this thing and something we would do in three hours took four days, but for her it was a really important commission. It was large for her, but it wasn't even the full capacity of our kiln. It showed me that we take things for granted and just get in there and do it. While others get one commission, we might be doing three or four of every week. It's chalk and cheese.

*The implication is that you are not going to make a living as an artist without these economies of scale, or without grants, or teaching...*

Or working in a café. I chose not to do those things.

*I have no interest in moving to this industrial level.*

But we don't compared to a factory. We're still boutique. We're still small compared to the technology in the big factories now. We're tiny. We're the 'interesting people' they like coming around because we dress funny and add a bit of spice to their day.

We are keeping the truer side of the material in our hands. The bigger factories lose money if people handle a piece of glass more than two times. We handle a piece of glass thirty times. It is what they used to do, but with injury, scratching, they have taken it out of the hand and therefore the factories a very efficient.

Touching the material is very important. It is trying to keep what was a hundred years ago still within our grasp, otherwise we are going to fall into the same trap that in the nineteen twenties and thirties killed the glass movement. The craftspeople that were there became unemployed, factories closed down and that basic knowledge disappeared. We had the glass movement rekindled in the seventies asking how did they do that and trying to pick up the pieces. We have photos, we can see the object, but how did they do it?

We are actually going through the same thing, but on an architectural level. This last lot of work for Chowder Bay is a whole lot of bevelled work. When no one could do it, we did it. It was border-line, because if we didn't have certain equipment we wouldn't have been able to do it. It was how to mix high-tech CNC [computer nomological control – 3D vector imaging] with low-tech hand. To put the two together is part of being a craftsman.

[Sergio shows examples of restoration glass cobblestones recreated as to take light into basements.]

*You love doing this type of work?*

I love it because I learn. Even if someone brings in an old Lalique piece and we restore it. I love the restoration, or the repair, because I learn how things were done. There are some pieces on the table from Murano. That piece was valued at thirty-five thousand dollars and the insurance company was happy to pay us four thousand dollars to restore it. It is stuff that we have because we have the equipment to be able to restore these pieces.

I don't say no to people. If a little old lady comes in with a chipped wine glass I will help her. I don't think we need to be so egotistical as artists that we can't do that as a service. Again you learn. You feel the old material. You see how it was made. You see how the crystal cut was done. I am always eager to see these things from history. Actually right now I'm

collecting pressed glass. If I can see something for fifty cents, or a couple of bucks, I'll buy it no matter what it is, because the technology is taken for granted.

Going back to the glass blocks, apart from the restoration, I see this as potentially a huge business in Sydney, because there are so many of them in the city to restore and I have a lot of ideas for creating a new generation of the same thing, to bring lighting into homes. This is a 'green' concept to make homes more energy efficient. This is not a window, but it brings in light, controls its direction and adds a sculptural element.

Those cast blocks and the cast iron work went out of vogue because glass became bigger. I guess I'm just going back to where they dropped off, because there was so much more that you could do with that product, especially now with CNC work where you can mill out frames.

*Interview ends and Sergio comments*

I think what you are doing will be very interesting, because they [glass practitioners] are not seeing where they are – the trap they're in. They just think of their world. The winner is the one that controls the history. They think it is about fifty years before the truth comes out. It's like that now with the Vietnam War debate. In some ways with the glass history we are getting close to the point where we get the truth about the history and the way things panned out. Part of that is seeing the work, where is the work, whose got the work?

One of the things that you can look at is – what isn't in a collection and why? This is something to research. If you look at the National Collection, it was only because of one piece in that collection Dennis [Clifford] past to Maureen, that Wagga Wagga bought one of my old pieces. Prior to that they never did. They were going to buy a piece of mine, but Warren Langley and a few others said don't buy his work, he'll never become anything and I still remember another line that was given to Maureen overseas when Dante Marioni accused me of being a plagiarist of Warren Langley's work and Maureen was furious. That's the power of these people.

My strategy is that there can't be truth to that collection [National Glass, Wagga] if there is a hole in the collection. Not being there is as powerful as being there. If this sculpture Maureen sold of Sergio Redegalli's is on the Web, then history can't be controlled as it was before. It is more open. Those people can't control as easily as before.

I'm interested to know whether Wagga Wagga, or the PowerHouse will one day see their folly. Their charter is to collect the history. We are one of the longest running studios in Australia and they don't have a single piece of ours, not even anything we did for the Olympics. We had the licence for the Olympic games and we made a beautiful range of giftware. They don't have one. They just don't see this studio, because it doesn't 'fit' into that group they know – the group that's in the books.

*[General conversation]*

It is not as though they are proactively going out and knocking someone like me, but they have the power not to say anything. They can strangle anyone, or anything by not mentioning them. Even if that person is fantastic, that institution, or that body not recognising their existence does damage. It is their lack of receptiveness to the greater side of what is possible that does the damage. They are not doing anything illegal, but they are not doing what they are meant to be doing – that is fostering a comprehensive viewpoint.