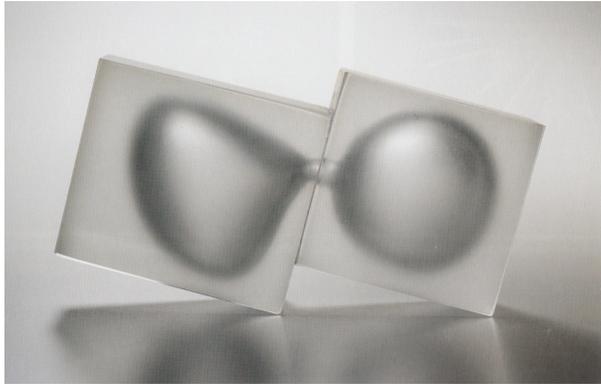


At the time of this interview Gabriella Bisetto was Lecturer, School of Art, Architecture and Design, University of South Australia

The main body of this conversation was my description of my involvement in visual arts post-graduate courses at Sydney College of the Arts. I took the opportunity to widen the conversation to gain Bisetto's comments on theory and practice.



Gabriella Bisetto
Exchange #7
2007
5 x 10.5 x 3 cm

If you were doing post-graduate work what issue you would engage with?

I think for applied artists and glass artists in particular, the knowledge that accompanies the process of making is hard to articulate. I haven't done my masters and I've said to students there is a sense that if I am going to spend that much time writing it is going to have to be good. It is a bit like choosing a career. You could write one masters then write another. Ten thousand words is not much research. It is light.

Part of me has that agony of what to choose. It is not what am I going to choose to focus on for that period of time, but more that idea of being able to distil what it is you are really interested in. There is such a broad breadth of knowledge behind what you do that the main agony (I would imagine) is choosing which direction, which path, which line am I going to choose [to research].

This is a thing about research, if I think about scientists – one of my friends was doing research into a very particular biological part of a blowfly and her job involved vitamising blowflies to find this enzyme. I remember thinking, is it that specific? But that's why science is recognised as an area for research, because there are probably a million things unanswered about a blowfly so you may need a million people to do research on each aspect of that blowfly. It is the same for the human body, or molecular study, or anything. There must be so many unanswered questions about particular things. So the magic is masters students often come in and get directed to areas that have vacancies, areas that are unexplored and asked can you spend two years really working this out for us?

The interesting thing about a masters in visual arts (which is a much newer approach) is that idea of saying what's unexplored about what we do. What new understanding, or language do we need to discuss, but often it is the science background that predefines the parameters set.

I may often joke, but I'm one of the few people who would say I would really like to read your Masters paper, or PhD paper and people go "Really?" Another thing is that people who write a masters paper then say, "don't read it, you wouldn't be interested". Part of me thinks that if I wouldn't be interested possibly it is because the information is not actually relevant. The person has chosen a topic because it suits a criterion they need to fulfil for the masters. It will be a tick on the paperwork, but part of me thinks that anyone involved in practice should be interested in that very detailed delineation of a process. There is a whole lot of research that has been done. There are synopses and there are hypothesises all presented in a paper and that has to be interesting. You would hope that it would be really valid.

Science has it all over us when it comes to that language. Painting and sculpture have it all over us. I am part of the masters by coursework program, but I can tell you when we have critiques I have to sit back and smile when I listen to my colleague talk about the parameters of painting because the discussion and the language is so historically based. It describes the idea of space with an incredible body of literature behind it. The idea of phenomenology (and all of that) has come in a way through painting and sculpture. It hasn't come from glass. It hasn't come from ceramics. We have a different history.

That's why I really like people like Simon (whose surname I forget) talking about the 'tacit' knowledge. That is so intrinsic to the process of making and in a way what a beautiful masters paper in actually addressing what we do. This is our process and then to write and talk about the relationship of creativity through that response. That is so perfectly relevant.

Gaining insight.

But he is also offering knowledge. Part of me sees great value in that. Also with ceramics, or glass, or jewellery a lot of the language we would use to describe, or find those relationships are sculpturally based. They are based in ideas of formal qualities.

I was marking yesterday and I came across an article with Garth Clark quote. He had been apparently lecturing to a 'glass' audience and a lot of people were asking why their work was not being considered as contemporary art and he had said, "Well why don't you make some?" The fantastic thing is he knows he has put all these noses out of joint, but these guys have to appreciate what it is they do.

There was an article a few years ago. Josiah McElheny was the first glass artist (calls himself a glass artist, not a sculptor, not an installation artist) to get a work into (I think) the Whitney Museum. It was a national collection that has Kiky Smith's work. It may have heaps of work made out of glass, but amongst sculptors – Josiah McElheny was the first glass artist. I thought, Wow! Maybe that was five or six years ago, but I found it humbling and daunting. That is the interesting thing – to categorise your self as 'other'.