



Brenden Scott French
Engine – the dissentient corpse
 kiln formed glass
 120 x 120 x 5 cm

I was working out of the furnace and have come to kiln forming, but I approach the material in kiln work through what I have learnt about the material in furnace. That is with fluid, immediate and intuitive responses. In kiln working you start working with the 'cold and brittle'. I try to bring fluidity into that process.

That is not necessarily in what I am trying to achieve aesthetically, but how I pick up and handle the material. I try to keep it pretty fast flowing. Kiln forming is accurate, precise and considered, but I go in and get it moving really quickly. The aesthetics come from that influence. A lot of the aesthetics (like the fine little details) come from that process. When a lot of people talk to you about your work you get an idea of what they focus on (what the enjoy in the work) and a lot of those conversations are about, "Those fine details you get in your work". I'm [bemused expression] – it came in the way I used the material.

Strategic planning is integrated into most kiln working. This seems the opposite.

The consideration [planning] – that is probably the intuitive thinking that you do. I am more 'doing it'. It becomes less about the material, the kiln and the process and more about creation. You know that golden moment when you are just creating.

You are not 'intellectualising'.

That [intellectualising] happens prior and prior could be two years ago (laughs). With this work I am doing now, the beginning of that was when we first spoke [Canberra Ausglass Conference, January '08] about those big wall pieces. I had only been working on that series of work for a couple of months at that time. I have been working with that work since then, but my whole conceptual framework was developed before then. Now when I am thinking conceptually, it is more about where is it going, the real practicalities of the ideas.

You work spontaneously in a method that is usually not spontaneous?

There is that idea, but I do that on the hot shop floor as well. It gets back to what thrills me about creation. It is that chance occurrence and jumping in to the unknown – getting into that void. Getting into that place where the brave act is to go where you have no idea the ‘where’, or ‘why’ of outcomes.

Felt response?

Yes. It’s an element. It’s one part. I shouldn’t say that I don’t conceptually construct since that time. New things arrive all the time and you get tired of other things. You try to work out a new scenario, a new structure in how to think and what to express. Those things occur every day.

I don’t have a structure in the sense that I’ll research at this time, I’ll make at this time, I’ll need more research, then I will have to make again. It just all jumbles in.

‘Free-fall’ requires embodied skill.

True. I think you can also do it without having the skill, but I think you get bored pretty quickly if you don’t have that skill. I know I did when I was developing my techniques. Precision was something I was really interested in. Without that goal in freeform (when I was letting myself be free) I got really frustrated because I needed to have that skill to achieve what I was after.

Flame workers seem to develop their skills to a level where they can be lost in the moment (flow).

I wonder if that has something to do with scale. Working with larger panels on the wall you can get into that thread connecting you to the work, but it is a much grander perspective.

I always thought of kiln working as very considered.

A lot of people do. There are pivotal moments in your learning. They come from all sorts of things, as well as from people. I was working with Scott [Chaseling] a fair bit and we were pre-fusing these blocks to pull murrini. We built this square kiln shelf mould. We got the bucket and poured this scrape in. It was falling at random and it was going to be fused into a block.

We both just looked at each other (having a good laugh) and said ‘Klaus’. Those experiences came through Klaus [Moje] to Scott and now I have picked up those processes as well. I am not saying ‘a bucket into the kiln’ is the way Klaus gets his colour layers, but it is those processes that are a way of getting a position, an approach which can be as random or as controlled as you want. Klaus is more controlled in the way he diamond saws all of his components and composes his final fuse, but in the pre-fuses – getting up to those components, there is a lot of experimentation. I really enjoy the elements that come from that process.

Does accident and chance play a large part in what you are doing?

[Hesitates] I know what they are, but I certainly don't see this as an accident. It is not as catastrophic as an accident. An accident is final. These I see as pivotal moments in the development of your aesthetic and in your relationship to the material in getting that aesthetic.

The more I am working, the more I am aware of where I am going. I feel that it is a bit sad, but it is true. You are much more aware of your end piece and what you have to do to get there. But I am still (at the very last moment) bringing in odd components just to generate that freedom.

Do you feel you are dealing with forces?

What sort of forces – 'otherworldly'?

Not the archangel Gabriel, but the flow of the glass – with gravity and heat, time as vectors.

Yes – if there is inconsistency there, if you are using a different kiln, or there is different temperature. Those things you become aware of as well. If you want the end result, you have to control all of those things. I try to release that control issue. I don't want to have control in the material – in what it does. I want to minimise that. I can't arrogantly say that I want to step completely away from it. That would be ridiculous in a sense, but I want to minimise it as much as possible.

To what end?

To what result – in the work, or in the way I work? If you have been looking at something for three months. Looking at it and constructing it, thinking about the kiln (what temperature, how many firings), all these things, looking and looking – well you get quite bored. I just don't want to be bored in my work. I want to finish the piece, walk away from it then come back to it and still find something in it that is really intriguing.

I don't want that to stop, so I that sense I will try not to be reductive in my practice in any way (in my approach to work). That gets me into trouble – overworking, just not knowing when to stop. You have a mistrust of your emotions and your actions. When you really just let things go there is a mistrust that you have to deal with when you are allowing chance. It is a fine line to say, "Okay, where was I in control of that and what was my desired outcome compared to the outcome that I got?" Is it an issue if those are totally different and I had nothing to do with the work at all?

I think that is where I was getting with that 'mistrust'. I don't know if it is confidence. If you jump of the cliff, are you ever confident in the fall? Is there ever a point where all the things are in the right place and it is going to be okay? I don't know if you are ever in that position. I don't 'doubt' and that is because I have a real conviction in the process I have developed and the relationship I have with the material. They may not be heavily 'intellectualised', or researched reasons, but I definitely have a strong belief in the way I approach the material and knowing what I want to witness in the end result. I know what I want to witness and what drives me into the next work. But I definitely have to be aware that there is a lot of doubt that comes from that. I have to live with a lot of doubt in my own work.

Apparently with time you get wiser, but I don't know.

You are breaking with stereotypical responses to glass.

I use to consider that a lot, but I have just developed my own approach now and that's how it is. I am not looking at it in a subversive way anymore. I used to think there had to be a reaction to the stereotyped conceptions – there has to be, because that's what makes things right (oppositions). I don't think like that any more. Maybe I am at a period where I don't have the time to be that antagonistic.

I am happy at where the work is going. I always want to bring in more transparency. (I have used opacity in the material always, always.) That is not for more light, because I am intrigued without bringing light into work, which is really dense (without the ease of transparency). There is luminosity in total darkness. Obviously I use a lot of colour.

It is the perception of light. The belief that there is light there, but there really isn't. My desire to bring in some transparency is not to bring light into the work.

How are you seeing light if it is not there?

It is an illusion. I don't really understand light. I have never understood why people say they are working with light. I understand refraction and reflection. I can look at chemical equations and see why colours are the way they are. But I can't say that I understand what light is. I don't use what I know of light to get the effect of depth and life. I always look at it as a flat surface. It is on the very first surface that I put all the elements that create the perception of light – depth and refraction. But it is a flat surface.

Why not a canvas?

I don't know. I ask myself that question. I think that is where the character of the material comes in. I understand glass. I have been working with it. It is hard to say if I had just picked it up now, whether I would change. I made a decision fifteen years ago and I don't know why I didn't start painting way back then, but I didn't. I started working with glass and I was intrigued. It is something that suits my character.

It has a monumental stone-like quality that is luminous in a depth you don't get with paint.

Friends say that about some work, but I don't know.

Maybe it's the continuation of where you are in the moment?

At that moment, yes. I read and I forget most things unfortunately. I am also aware of the fact that my awareness of my practice is momentary, because of that forgetfulness. It is not forgetfulness; it is just that I am more intrigue by the next moment. It is not difficult to see that is the psychology that I live with. The theory of that has been well written.

Your works on the wall of the Glassworks in Canberra are large.

Yes the 'engine' there on the wall is quite large. It is two metres square. That is not the biggest piece that I have made. In the thickness of the material and the scale of the panels (it is three panels, not thirty), the scale in its manufacturing is pretty large. That one was an adventurous piece. One panel is 1.2 x 1.6 meters by 15 millimetres kiln formed. That was momentary decision making. I want this in three panels. How am I going to arrange it?

Also it works to the facility. It was made to the possibility of having access to those kilns at the Glassworks. It may have been egotistical, but it was how big would the kiln allow me to make it. At that moment it was a really good chance to push my practice, my understanding. I was lucky because the materials came with the Proctor Fellowship. I got funding to buy materials and I just spent it. I donated the piece to the Glassworks and I think it works on that wall.

The scale came out of the moment?

Yes and that moment delivered me an opportunity to consider. I always saw my blown work as multi-perspective and as large composition of really awkward objects together, but it was always seen two dimensionally. They were composed from a perspective. I was always working on that flat surface. That was my first real go at moving my objects to the wall. Your vision determines the scale you are working on.

My sculpture is determined from a picture plan, which is troubling because you have multiple picture planes when working from those compositions.

Do you name your pieces?

Yes. I name them throughout the work. I won't name something beforehand and make something for a name. I generally have working titles, or working words, or working ideas. It is closer to the end that I really consolidate. The words give me something to look (hesitates) for. They have been really important to me. Some of the doozies that you come up with (laughs) are the concepts you come up with during the construction of the work. I think I am pretty practical in that sense. I want them to locate, but they are always a bit philosophical in their outlook, and a bit esoteric (like *The Illuminating Presence of Absence*).

That is felt response like 'The Warmth of Flowers'. I thought you were going to say, 'Two Chooks and a Dog'.

As much as I say I am practical, I am not that practical (laughs). I live in my mind a fair bit. I wander in and out of reference to what I am doing. Sometimes I am really intrigued about what other people say about the way I think. At the moment I am totally lost on the practicality of 'today being Tuesday and at 3:00 I have to be'. The schedule is getting too tight to have time to dream. As I was saying before, it really slips by me very quickly.

Are the responses people have to your work different to your responses?

People are always trying to find 'beauty'. That is something I am always struggling with. What they see is what they feel appeals to them.

They read things in the work that you don't read?

Yes, but I don't think that is really important. A good example is *The Predators*. I have been focussing on having a landscape on the back of this truck. I see it as pretty aggressive – grabbing a resource and saying, "See you later". A lot of people see it and start getting really dreamy about trips that they took through the country. There is that obvious aesthetic there, but I am not putting the landscape on the back of the truck to show the beauty of the landscape.

Once you have made the object others can project into it.

And I am really happy for that to happen.

When coming back to works you have previously made, does your response surprise you?

I'm always surprised. Sometimes I go, "Oh God", but maybe my experience being what it is now, I am starting to produce works that I am happy with. I am getting a lot happier with the works I am putting out. Over the last few years the works that I reacquaint myself with I have been happy with. I am also realistic. I can look at them and go that was one of the first pieces, when I was developing that and there are all of these things in there, now I'm making these. It wasn't bad. It was really good at that time. It was a developmental piece in this line of work.

What issues would you draw to the attention of someone entering glass?

I am sure that most students (and most people) believe they are doing what they want to do. I am not so sure whether the curricula are really promoting that. There is a structure there. A curriculum states this has to be and that has to be, but I am not sure if there is a real promotion of the essence of that relationship between the material and yourself. Maybe it is not possible at that time. Coming at it fifteen years after school I am probably looking at that too critically.

Relationship between material and self implies individualism?

I want to see character. I want to see personality in work. I know in my own work that difference is something that is really important. I have a problem when I stop feeling, stop seeing difference and when I start seeing elements in work and processes in work that obviously haven't come from an intense relationship, but have come from referencing some thing. I am trusting in my own judgement when I see those things and I might be wrong, but when I see that other kind of work being developed (pulls face). It is not necessarily that I want to see individual works that I have never seen before; it is just that I want to see character in the approach to technique and in the approach to material.

With traditional Japanese ceramic object, the maker's individuality is not important.

I still look at those objects (we have some of those at home). They are quirky little things, but they hold that essence of the object there. Even though I want to look at works showing the individual, I can also approach them from the work, removing myself from the viewing of it. I can still appreciate works that do that, but how they

came to be that is still dependant on the character of the maker. It just becomes more and more subtle.

How would you label yourself?

I am still learning. 'Apprentice' totally. I see myself as beginning. There is so much more for me to know. Show me the way (laughs).

Apprentice infers a master, which seems wrong, or maybe glass is that master.

And possibly it is. For me at the moment we are just feeling each other out. I think I have committed to staying in the class. I was talking to a friend half an hour ago and they were saying, "I just don't know. What am I doing? Why am I making?" I have gone through that and might go through it again, but at moment I have come through. Now I am passionately making. I am not questioning why.