

Abridged interview with Wayne Pearson: 20/06/06

Subject: Australian kiln glass with specific reference to 'style' and glass artists Deb Cocks, Warren Langley, Jessica Loughlin and Richard Whiteley

*What led you into collecting glass?*

I think you have to have a collecting gene. Some people collect things and some people don't. I collect things. I collected stamps and shells and things when I was young.

First of all I like blue glass. The first things I collected were little things that weren't too expensive, then I took the plunge and bought an expensive piece, but it is difficult to tell why you get the bug.

*An aesthetic?*

It was the blue and the translucence – the water-like qualities.

*Qualities of water or sky or something spiritual?*

Well, if you like. I grew up in North Queensland and we spent a lot of time on the Barrier Reef during our holidays, so I always like the colours, I still do – all the varying shades of blue from aqua up through to that really dark ink blue.

*Hints of a landscape?*

Yes, seascape. I like landscape, but seascape particularly. It is a feeling of happiness that I use to get. My happiest times were when I could just sit on the jetty at Green Island and look out at the sea. I like all the natural things that come with it as well, the fish and the birds etc. It reminds me of my childhood and really happy times.

*A trigger to memory?*

Yes.

*But you could have just as easily collected stamps?*

I do. There is parallel collecting, and my house is full of things. I'll need a new house soon. I like books and I've got lots of books and I've got lots of CDs. I've got lots of Australian stamps. I've got all sorts of things.

*What would you want someone to understand looking at your glass collection?*

I don't collect for others, and I don't often show people. I collect for myself, so I don't show a lot of people. It is not that I don't want to, but my house is my domain. Some people come in and I always show it to them. A lot of people know I collect glass. I like people to know there is such a thing as Australian glass and how good it is. I like to promote it. Various people get various things from my collection when I let them look at it and it is nice to hear what they like, what their favourite piece is.

*You are open to their interpretation of it?*

Yes, they just look at it and it's interesting when they say, "That's my favourite in the collection". One of my friends likes to tell me he has 'red-spotted' one of my pieces when I die. He says, "Don't forget, I've red-spotted that one".

*Are there things they say about the glass?*

Most people don't know why they like it, they just say, "I like that one".

*It triggers a range of things?*

Yes. I've asked, "Why do you like that?" It would probably be interesting to find out.

*Is there something that identifies Australian glass?*

It is difficult to say, because I know who's Australian; I can recognize most of them. I'm prejudiced, because I know what they do, and what they are doing at the time. It's difficult to remove that knowledge.

*You would recognize the individuals, rather than recognize the nationality?*

Yes. I don't know whether you could with a lot of them. Some that are Italianesque in look like Murano glass and if you see it next to other people who do 'Murano' you probably wouldn't be able to pick it apart, but some others are quite distinctive.

*That probably answers the question about signature style.*

Well not an Australian signature style, but individual people yes definitely. I can walk around and say nine times out of ten, who that is (of the leading people anyway). The lesser lights that I am not so familiar with, I probably couldn't. The ones that are really up there at the top, nine times out of ten I could say what is what. I pick them in galleries overseas. I just cast my eye over them and say that's Australian.

In every facet of the arts, people have a signature style, whether a musician or a painter or a sculptor – you recognize some characteristic. What that is I don't know, but it enables you to recognize them, have some familiarity with them. It allows them to really refine it, to become as good as they can in some particular area.

The bad thing is that sometimes it limits people progressing. They just stick with the same thing year in and year out without changing in any way, but you can also change within a style.

*Commercially success can trap you?*

I'm sure that is so. People want to buy what they're use to. Just as people want to hear a hit from sixty years ago, even though the poor old musician is sick to death of playing it.

*Are you implying familiarity?*

I'm sure that comes into it. This is all subconscious stuff. You don't think about it consciously. A lot of these things you really don't know the answer to because you don't think about them.

I'm an anatomical pathologist, and we work basically in pattern recognition, so I think there is a lot of that in it as well. You are happy with yourself for being able to recognize something.

*You feel happy putting something into context?*

Yes, having a visual memory, which I've got.

*The material demands something?*

Yes. I like to know how they do a thing, not just that that piece of glass is beautiful.

*That is a craft element.*

Definitely.

*I'd guess you like that personal relationship.*

Yes. I like small scale, not the big picture. It's nice to meet the artist, to see what they do as well. I quite enjoy that. Some people like to keep a distance.

*Coming back to some sort of relationship?*

Yes. It didn't start off like that. I just bought pieces without knowing anything about them, but years ago there was a memorial exhibition on at *Quadrivium*. A whole lot of people had supplied pieces. I went down to that and it was interesting putting faces to what people had made.

*The works become triggers for something more?*

Sometimes, but not always. Sometimes it is whatever it is that makes you think something is beautiful or attractive – an aesthetic. But some things are triggers.

*You have a very personal relationship to what you collect?*

That developed. I'm interested in how they do things, so I go to things to see how they do it. It is fascinating to me.

I've said most of it. A lot of it I don't know. I haven't answered, because it's like asking, "Why do you like how those three bars of music?". Something 'keys' in. It's probably biochemical. It goes into your brain and it fits in like a key and releases chemicals that make you feel nice. However you chose to explain it.

A really hard thing to explain, and perhaps people shouldn't explain it and just say that I really just don't know.

One of the other things I like about glass as well is that it is three-dimensional. You can pick it up. It is not just stuck up against a wall. With a painting you are limited. You can't walk around it, but glass you can turn around. It is often asymmetrical. You can put it in different light and see how it looks.