



'Leaf Forms', 2003, partially mould blown glass, with a six-colour overlay tallest form 65 cm



'Clearing - Leaf Forms', 2005, partially mould blown glass with sandblasted tree branch imagery, overall dimensions 55 x 45 x 20 cm

PHOTOS: ADRIAN LAMBERT

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Holly Grace

AND THE SCANDINAVIAN DESIGN AESTHETIC

Over the past decade Holly Grace has acquired new and challenging techniques which she has developed further in accordance with the demands of her own artistic vision.

Profile by Gordon Foulds.

ALTHOUGH Holly Grace was born in Perth, Western Australia and now lives and works in Canberra, she has gained an international reputation owing to the time she has spent studying in Sweden, Denmark and the UK. She has made many trips to these countries in order to further her studies and continues to work with and be mentored by some of Europe's leading glass makers. The quality of her work does indeed reflect this. Like many artists before her and no doubt many more in the future, Holly Grace began her working life in one occupation which she enjoyed for a period of time but then decided that she wanted to do something creative, and went on to achieve renown in the arts. She enjoyed

her art studies in school and following year 12 she studied Fine Art at Claremont School of Art, but dropped out after the first year and decided that her future lay in the hospitality industry in Perth. She spent almost a decade there and enjoyed the experience, but eventually decided that her future lay elsewhere. She returned to her studies in Fine Arts at Curtin University for a further year and then discovered glass in 1996. This was the great turning point in her life and Grace knew that she had found her future life's direction. She enrolled at Monash University in 1997 where she gained her BA in 1999, followed by First Class Honours in 2000, and her Masters Degree in 2004. She says that she valued the considerable good for-



'Sweden', landscape bottles, 2005, mould blown glass, sandblasted imagery, 7-piece set, Clearing exhibition Perth Galleries, 45 x 140 x 25 cm

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'Winter - Sweden', 2006, landscape bottles, blown glass with glass powder, frits and metal leaf, sandblasted landscape imagery, 45 x 115 x 10 cm



PHOTO: ADRIAN LAMBERT

'Autumn - Ebeltoft', 2006, landscape bottles, mould blown glass, glass powder, frits and metal leaf, sandblasted imagery, four-piece set, overall 45 x 115 x 10 cm



PHOTO: DAVID MEARTHUR

'Autumn in Tarnaby', 2007, landscape bottles, blown glass with glass powder, frits and metal leaf, sandblasted landscape imagery, 45 x 115 x 10 cm

tune during this period of working with such glassmaking luminaries as Nick Wirdnam and Pam Stadius.

Since that time, Grace's career has acquired enormous momentum. She has had numerous solo exhibitions and participated in many juried group exhibitions throughout Australia and overseas, including Italy, Canada, Japan, Singapore, Korea, England, Holland, the US, Germany and Taiwan. She received her first international grant from the Australia Council in 2002 for a six-month mentorship with Viki Noorman Koefoed in Denmark. The following year she was awarded a one-month residency at the Glasmuseet at Ebeltoft, Denmark as well as another mentorship in the UK with renowned glass artist Neil Wilkin. Grace returned to Ebeltoft again in 2004 to be mentored this time by the Danish artist Tobias Mohl. She describes these periods as being most beneficial to her professional development, and has returned there on five occasions to be mentored by the Ebeltoft glass artists.

Looking at Grace's development over a number of years, it is interesting to see the way her work has progressed. In the past, her leaf forms have been considered to be her hallmark product. Originally seeming to be made with just one colour, they were in fact made by mixing a number of hues to create the finished work. She now regards these exquisite pieces as her "production work", which indicates that this aspect of her practice has achieved a high standard. Works in this series are partially moulded and blown, and are sought after wherever they are seen, with Gaffer Studio Glass in Hong Kong ordering more than 50 at a time. *Leaf Forms* exemplifies this series which remains as popular today as when she first developed it during the time that she spent being mentored by Viki Noorman Koefoed at Bornholm Glas and Keramikskolen in Denmark in 2003.

In April 2004 Grace received a second Australia Council grant to develop new work. This enabled her to create a new body of work using the photosensitive sandblasting technique which she now employs for all her exhibition pieces, and also to develop the experimental use of moulds for making multiple forms based on Nature. She had a year to make the work and it was during this time that she was mentored by Tobias Mohl and Neil Wilkin. At the same time, she also developed four new bodies of work which were shown in her first solo exhibition, "Clearing", held at Perth Galleries in 2005.

For this show she developed the *Leaf Forms* in a different way by making them transparent and using her newly acquired techniques, adding sandblasted images of foliage

and tree forms, boughs and branches. *Clearing Leaf Forms* was one of the first pieces for which she began experimenting with the photo-resist technique and sandblasted images. For these pieces she used photographs that she had taken in Denmark. Included in the same exhibition was the group *Sweden-Landscape Bottles*, also moulded blown glass with sandblasted imagery. A rather historical group, these are the first set of landscape bottles that she made for the "Clearing" exhibition, and are based on images of a mountainous area in Sweden near the small skiing village of Tarnaby. A set of seven landscape bottles titled "Sweden" and her first set of Bonsais were acquired by the National Gallery of Western Australia. The work that Grace produced during this period marked a major breakthrough in her professional career, opening new avenues in her work which allowed her to combine her developing passion for photography with her newly acquired glassmaking techniques.

In *Skelton Leaf Forms* the foliage is depicted in beautiful subtle autumn tones. Made in 2006, she had just developed the technique of glue chipping. These pieces have the images of their skeletal vein structures sandblasted onto their surfaces; this sandblasted image is then glue chipped wherein rabbit skin glue is applied to the surface of the glass which finely chips the glass, creating an effect that is also known as "flower icicles". It is a method long used in the making of decorative architectural glass.

Made at about the same time was a series of landscape bottles where she began to experiment with colouring and texturing on outside surfaces with glass powders, frits and metal leaf. These included *Autumn-Ebeltoft*, using imagery from the Ebeltoft region of Denmark, and *Winter-Sweden* based on pictures the artist took of Tarnaby in Sweden. Grace says this enabled her to experiment with layering effects with the image and the quality of the glass that allows it to be both transparent and opaque, creating a viewing portal into the internal dimensions of the vessel. This in turn allows her to create a more complex three-dimensional image with these forms, both internally and externally, through the use of subtle contrast and colour within each piece.

Continuing with her love of Sweden, in 2008 she made a different looking group of bottles titled *Tarnaby-Sweden*, using glass powder, frits and metal leaf surfaces and sandblasted landscape imagery. However, her affection for the Scandinavian countries in no sense diminished her love for her own country. Like all Australians, she was deeply shocked and saddened by the Victorian bushfires of 2009



PHOTO: DAVID MEARTHUR

'Bonsais' (detail), 2007, blown glass, glass powder, frits and metal leaf, sandblasted imagery, three-piece set, overall 30 x 120 x 20 cm

and produced a magnificent series which she based on images of the burned and blackened landscape of Kinglake. In *Kinglake Landscape Bottles* she finds both the look and the feeling of this great disaster. Despite the almost total destruction of the landscape, there is a savage beauty, and an ugliness too, in what remains. In these pieces, she has created a very powerful sense of the burned landscape, the lingering smoke and the feel of overwhelming awe that these, and other bushfires, leave in their wake.

In 2009 she continued to produce a number of works inspired by the beauty and the grandeur of the landscape. She has a great affection for Thredbo in NSW, and goes there for rest and renewal. It is a place for communion with nature and the landscape, and her "Canopy" series reflects this sense of renewal. Her *Canopy Cylinders* and *Canopy Vessels* reflect her love of this part of the country, and are inspired by the beautiful snow gums of the region. After Christmas 2009 and New Year's Day, 2010 Grace



PHOTO: DAVID MEARTHUR

'Canopy Bowls', 2009, blown glass with glass powder, frits and metal leaf, sandblasted imagery of snows gums, two-piece set, 7 x 70 x 55 cm



PHOTO: DAVID MCARTHUR

'Ramshead Peak', 2010, landscape bottles, mould blown glass with glass powders, frits and metal leaf surfaces, sandblasted imagery, two-piece set, overall size 65 x 50 x 10 cm. Gaffed by Tom Rowney

'Charlottes Pass', 2010, blown glass with glass powders, frits and metal leaf surfaces and sandblasted imagery of snow gums, four-piece set, 48 x 60 x 12 cm

wasted no time in returning to work, and had already created some major pieces in the first two weeks of the year. *Ramshead Peak* consists of two related works showing the slope of the earth as the viewer might imagine walking up a hill and seeing the sky and the horizon behind, and the trees, the foliage and the undergrowth along the way. The two interrelated pieces contain their own narrative. *Charlotte Pass* may be as detailed and fine a landscape as is possible to create within the disciplines that Grace has set herself. Consisting of four blown cylinders with glass powders, frits and metal leaf surfaces, the four works contain sandblasted imagery of snowgums. Both *Ramshead Peak* and *Charlotte Pass* are located in the Snowy Mountains and show the artist's dedication to this part of the country and to the landscape generally. She wishes to acknowledge the ongoing assistance given to her by Tom Rowney who gaffed most of these Australian pieces, and Brian Corr who gaffed the "Canopy Bowls".

Grace says that her photographs, and the images that she makes from them, are now an integral part of her glass practice. As they come together on the glass surface they provide her with inspiration for both the colour and the



PHOTO: DAVID MCARTHUR



PHOTO: DAVID MCARTHUR

'Tarnaby-Sweden', 2008, landscape bottles, blown glass, frits and metal leaf, sandblasted imagery, five-piece set, 65 x 140 x 10 cm. Gaffed by Tom Rowney



PHOTO: DAVID MCARTHUR

'Canopy', 2009, blown glass cylinders with sandblasted imagery, 3-piece set, overall size 60 x 80 x 60 cm. Gaffed by Tom Rowney

form within her work. She thinks of the glass as being comparable to a three-dimensional canvas allowing her to play with the images and explore them for the inherent qualities that are unique to glass, such as its transparency, its opacity, its interaction with light, and its ability to be formed by hand. Her recognition and respect throughout the world of studio glass has been attained over a relatively short period. She has made every effort to seek and gain opportunities to further her skills, both in Australia and overseas. She has learned new and demanding techniques and once having acquired them, has developed them further according to the lights of her own artistic vision. No doubt her spirit of enquiry in the mid 90s will carry her into a long and fruitful future.



Holly Grace

'Skeltos', 2006, leaf forms, sandblasted pattern and glue-chipped surfaces, two-piece set, overall dimensions 60 x 45 x 20 cm

Sculpture at the School of Contemporary Art at Edith Cowan University, WA, from 2003 to 2005, and held the position of Director of the Board of management of FORM, formerly known as Craftwest from 2004 to 2006. She was artist-in-residence in the Glass Department of Monash University, Melbourne in 2007. She has attended workshops and lectures at glass conferences both here and overseas whenever possible, continually adding to her skills base, and exhibits regularly in both solo and mixed shows. In a relatively short period of time Holly Grace has enjoyed a successful and eventful career.

Gordon Foulds

Holly Grace is represented by Beaver Galleries in Canberra (www.beavergalleries.com.au), who will be exhibiting her work at SOFA Chicago, USA, 4 – 7 November, 2010.



PHOTO: ADRIAN LAMBERT