

Arts

Glass artist shows distinctive voice

CRAFT REVIEW

SOMEWHERE FAMILIAR.

By Annette Blair. Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Tues to Fri 10am-5pm; Sat and Sun 9am-5pm. Until Sunday, September 2.

BY Kerry-Anne Cousins

The exhibition *Somewhere familiar* by Annette Blair was a surprise.

I thought I was familiar with Blair's work so I had been expecting to see glass that was sombre in hue with themes and images that were a little predictable. However, I was greeted with an exhibition full of colour, excitement and innovation.

This is a discernible step forward in the artist's practice. While she has remained true to the original concepts that informed her earlier work, she has been able to carry her ideas into new areas in glass - exploring more refined imagery, forms and colour. This has meant developing the ideas that constituted the intimate personal approach of previous work into a more universal and sophisticated visual language.

Blair has always been attracted by nostalgia for the past and what constitutes her own personal memories of her close family and friends. Her early work was largely centred on the memorabilia of everyday objects that, like relics, come to be imbued with the essence of the person that has used them.

The year 2013 is notable for a series of works by the artist with titles such as *As you left it*. In these works, she recreated in glass

She has matured and developed in an impressive way.

the utilitarian objects such as paint tins, hammers and oilcans left behind in the shed by her grandfather, and the mixing bowls in her grandmother's kitchen.

Other family members and friends were also represented by objects recreated in glass. Sometimes, like memorial images, these were joined by painted portraits in enamel on glass.

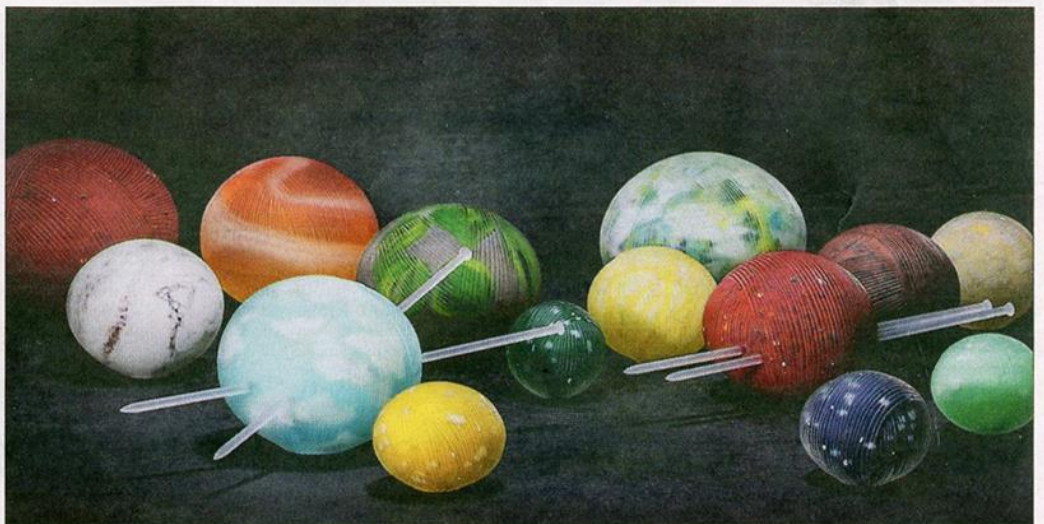
In the work *As you left it (in the Shed) 2013*, the glass objects created in black coloured glass were readily identifiable and the image of Blair's grandfather painted on the glass dome that covered the objects reinforced the personal nature of the work. The dark glass and the dome suggested a *memento mori*. It was as if a moment in time had been frozen within a time capsule.

In the current exhibition the mixing bowls and handyman's paraphernalia found in her grandfather's shed have been transformed by the artist into painted glass objects that have moved from a literal representation to a more abstract concept.

In the two recent works on display - *Vestige #6* and *Vestige #7* (studies of domestic relics) - the objects have been liberated from imprisonment and assume a new identity. The autonomy of these forms is reinforced by the abstract patterns in predominantly blue, black and white glass enamel paint that flow seamlessly across them. The forms still suggest their origin as household objects but now function successfully as a more abstract sculptural still life.

In a similar manner, the mixing bowls that appeared in the earlier 2013 work *As you left it (in the kitchen)* have been transmuted into freestanding large vessels (*The View Outside*) or nestling collections of bowls (*Nurture* and *Nest*).

The large single free-standing bowls are



Works by Annette Blair, clockwise from top, *Vestige #6* (a study of domestic relics); *The view outside*; *Collection of warmth*; *Nest*.

striking in contrast to the more understated presence of Blair's earlier more intimate work. In the large vessel *The View Outside* (25.5cm x 35cm x 35cm) the surface is decorated with images of wisps of white clouds drifting across a blue sky. These images combined with the light blue of the sky create a carefree mood that may relate to the artist's childhood memories but the vessel's meaning more broadly remains open to interpretation.

The several sets of bowls that nestle into one another are particularly attractive. In *Nurture* they have been lovingly painted with images of soft green leaves, clouds, willow

grass and childhood scribble patterns.

Another series of works are grouped together in what the artist calls *Collection of Warmth*. Small glass spheres in various sizes (between 8cm and 18cm in diameter) have been painted with linear and coloured patterns that suggest balls of wool although they also function as colourful glass spheres. Some of these balls are pierced through with glass knitting needles subtly suggesting the presence of unknown knitters who have just laid down their work.

Annette Blair is a 2004 graduate from the ANU Canberra School of Art and works at Canberra Glassworks. Since graduating she

has built a successful career as an artist, teacher and gaffer (glassblower) in the glass-making world. At present her own glass practice centres around her glass studio at Burra near Canberra.

Somewhere familiar is a key exhibition of work by this artist who has found her own distinct voice. In a sense she has broken free of a personal sense of nostalgia for the past but, instead of discarding it, has found the creative and technical skills to carry her original inspirational concepts into a new body of work. In doing so, she has matured and developed in an impressive way which indicates great promise for the future.