

Solo show a glass act

To and fro - studio glass: Erin Conron
Beaver Galleries until February 26.
Reviewer: Kerry-Anne Cousins

For an exhibition of some sophistication and skilful assurance, it is surprising to find that it is not the work of a more mature artist. This is in fact Erin Conron's first solo exhibition since graduating from the ANU Canberra School of Art in 2007, although she has exhibited widely in group exhibitions in Canberra, Sydney and Germany.

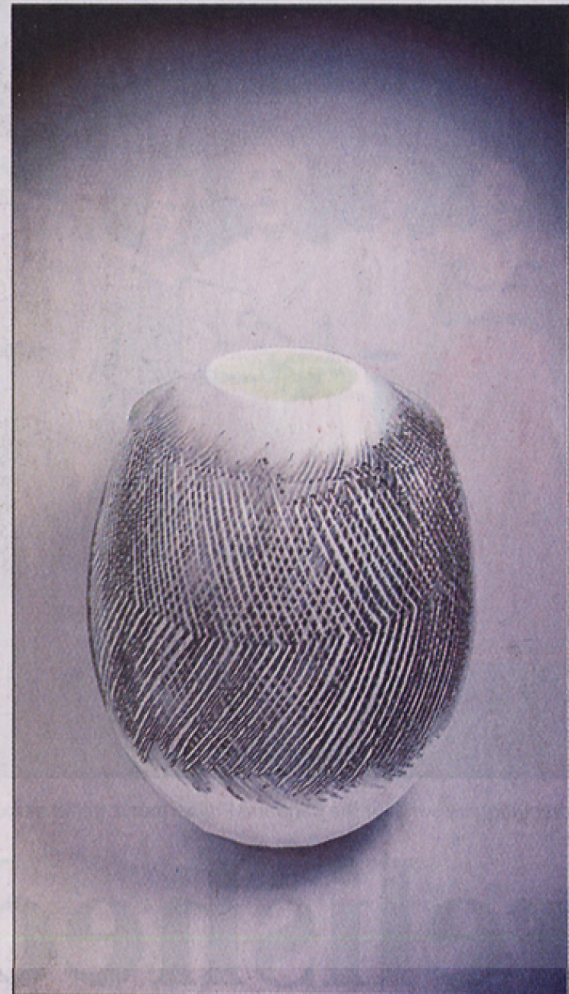
Conron has also been a finalist in two prestigious awards - the 2008 Ranamok Glass Prize and the 2011 Waterhouse Natural History Art Prize. She won last year's McGrath Emerging Artist Award from the Capital Arts Patrons Organisation.

Conron begins with a simple blown round or ovoid glass shape. She then wraps this shape in layers of glass, like the layers of an onion. These become part of a complex form with multiple view points. In some vessels these layers are sliced into so that the complicated layering is revealed: in others one can see through the layers of clear glass to the complex heart within. Most of the latter forms are oval or round with only small apertures at the top and range in size from 11cm to 25cm in height. One of the most elegant forms is *Network No. 14* where there is a more tapering line to the neck of the vessel than a simple cut aperture in the top.

Marks are painted in enamel on the glass layers in uneven vertical lines that form linear blocks, meeting and gently overlapping with each other.

It is interesting to find that one of Conron's recent exhibitions - at the M16 Artspace in Griffith in 2011 - was with painter Linzie Eillis, as there is a tactile painterly quality to the mark-making in her work. In their uneven chalky-like fragility they remind me of the body line paintings by Emily Kame Kngwarreye, in particular her body painting series of 1996 in the Museum of Modern Art in Sydney. These works, with their origin in Kngwarreye's own Dreaming, are based on the painting of the body for ceremonial purposes. In a sense the marks made by both artists - Kngwarreye and Conron - signify time and place, bringing back collective cultural memories through personal expression.

Conron sees her mark-making as



MAKING A MARK: Erin Conron's *Untitled* and *Mesh#1* typify her technique of layering glass shapes with even more glass.

signifying the layers of personal experience that make up individual and collective memory. However, in her three-dimensional forms she is able to play with interior and exterior space using the different layers of glass to provide, through changing view points, a dazzling variety of optical illusions. In the context of these very sophisticated optical effects, the handpainted marks can sometimes sit a little uneasily with the remote and detached perfection of the glass forms.

In addition, Conron works in black, white and grey tones and within a restricted range of forms so that the exhibition can appear at first glance to be rather austere. But there can be beauty in the discipline of austerity and these indeed are works that have an inner resonance and complexity.

Particularly of note are three works of the works on show: *Reveal No. 1*, *Mesh#1 No. 3* and *Entwine #2 No. 6*. These are probably the less-complex, visually, of the works but I found I responded more to their reliance on the mark-making than I did to those forms that relied on their complex glass layering.

In *Reveal* and in *Mesh#1*, the glass forms are covered with soft lines in blacks and greys that have an affiliation with the natural world like marks drawn in the sand. This gives them a warmth that is attractive. In *Entwine#2*, white lines are drawn over the black form that has a sgraffito effect, bringing a pleasing texture to the very black shiny surface of the vessel.

What Conron is doing in glass is using marks in a way that is more

commonly found in other media such as textiles, painting or ceramics. Yet in making these marks on glass, the artist brings to these works a very different quality. She is not just using these marks as a decoration on the surface of the form but also in its interior layers, giving each mark a three-dimensional edge so it appears to float in space.

In exploiting the very materiality of glass - its hard reflective surface and its transparency - and contrasting it with the fragility of the painted line, Conron demonstrates a sensitivity to glass as well as a sense of graphic design.

She has demonstrated that she can not only create a concept for a body of work but she also has the creative discipline to work impressively within its parameters.