

Craft Review Kerry-Anne Cousins

Through the glass brightly

Held Within - Annette Blair and Jeremy Lepisto. Beaver Galleries. Until November 26.

The works of Annette Blair and Jeremy Lepisto in this exhibition are very different visually, yet as artists, they share certain similarities.

Both Blair and Lepisto use glass as a medium for expressing ideas that interest them. They "contain" their ideas within glass boxes or glass domes and they use the glass surface as a "canvas" on which to draw their images using either glass enamels or glass frit. The ideas they investigate become part of a body of work with each series of works contributing to a continuous narrative.

Held Within is Canberra artist Blair's first exhibition at the Beaver Galleries. Blair is a 2004 graduate from the Australian National University's School of Art and has established a successful career. She has been the recipient of several grants and as a finalist her work has appeared in five Ranamok Glass Prize exhibitions.

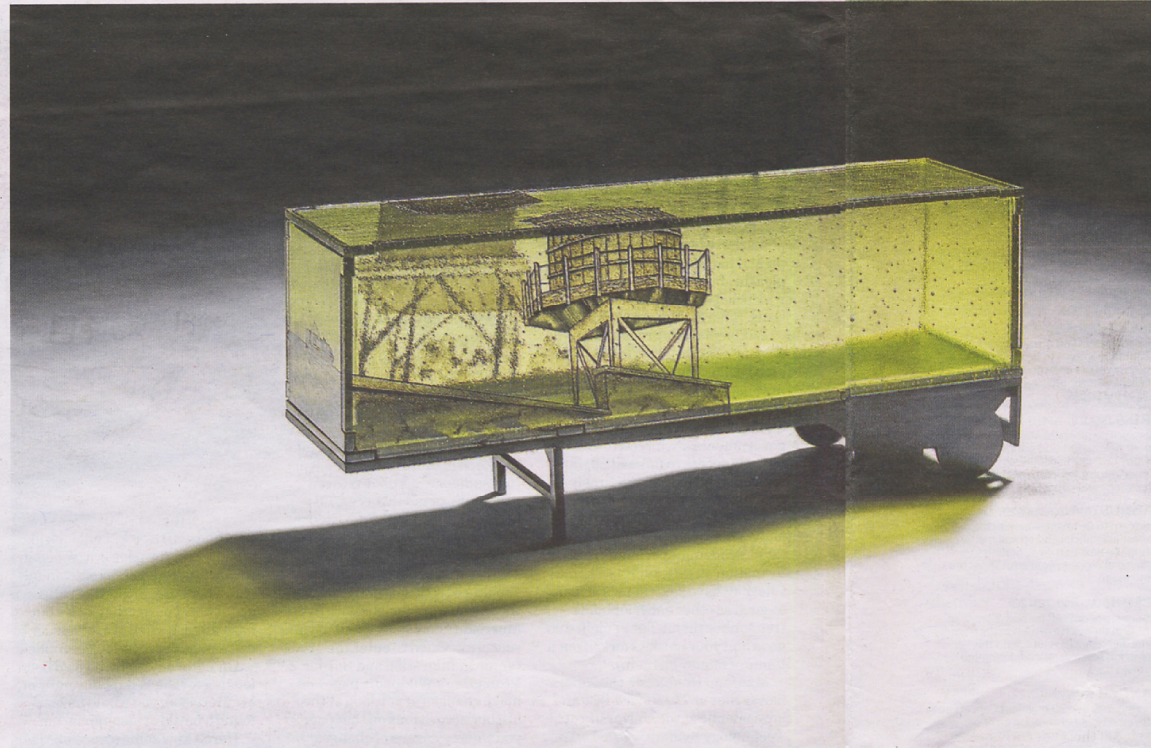
Lepisto has studied, trained and worked in the United States and the United Kingdom. In 2009 he and his partner Mel George came

to Australia. They have both been active at the Canberra Glassworks establishing professional careers here as well as maintaining professional links overseas. Lepisto is studying for his PhD at the ANU.

His early exhibitions at the Canberra Glassworks and the Beaver Galleries (2008-2010) were an introduction to his visual world. It is a world based on the artist's interest in the concept of enclosure, containment, transport and the supply of goods on an industrial scale.

Lepisto's glass containers and glass blocks are based on transport crates and containers; his sculptures in steel reference storage warehouses and his model trailers-modes of transport. These objects are placed in the context of the urban environment conjured up by the drawings the artist makes of industrial landscapes.

The fine draughtsmanship of these drawings delineates the tangled wires, the warehouses and architecturally divided spaces of urban life. Our society is dependent for its survival on this system for the supply of goods and our needs and wants can be bound up in their complicated transport networks. In the case of the cargo cults of Papua New Guinea and in



the delivery of emergency aid to disaster hit areas, many hopes and anxieties depend on their safe arrival.

Lepisto in his professional capacity has worked with all manner of materials. In works in the exhibition *Of Import*, 2011, he combined glass with fabricated and powdered steel. In his current *Compile* series in this exhibition he has used only steel to make three-dimensional sculptures based on the serrated roofs of warehouses. The colours are in subtle tones of blues, greys and greens. These assembled units are like super-

sophisticated Lego pieces. Their simple forms make them attractive and the temptation to pull each piece apart from its neighbour and reassemble them is almost irresistible.

The numbers for each work are based on the international transport code system used to identify and locate shipping containers. These sculptures are accompanied by four works from the *Trailer* series referring to the trailer end of a road haulage truck where the goods are loaded. The drawings depict the urban landscape and are drawn on the

surface of the glass containers so that they appear to be held within the glass itself.

The artist's work in *Held Within* relates significantly to his previous series, however the small selection in the exhibition makes it somewhat difficult to appreciate it in its wider context.

Blair has also made a connection between actual glass objects and visual imagery. She has placed her carefully crafted black glass objects within the kind of glass domes that in Victorian times held specimens of the taxidermist's skill or examples of nature arranged as

decorative art. The Victorians preserved mementoes of once-living things in these glass domes as if in a transparent time capsule. In this sense, Blair has also used the form of the glass dome to preserve the memories of people she has known through a selection of objects that relate to them. The titles, *As You Left It (in the sitting room)* for example, suggest that the person themselves has gone and these inanimate objects are what remains.

On the glass of each dome, Blair has continued her practice of painting the faces of those



Glazed: (Left) Jeremy Lepisto - *Local reserves*, glass with steel. (Above) Annette Blair, *Still Life #2*, blown and carved glass. Photo: Rob Little.

represented by the objects enclosed inside. These actual size objects in black glass are carefully arranged as still life groupings. In their precision and beauty, one is reminded of the work of glass artist Wendy Fairclough who also evokes the absent human presence in domestic objects.

In some ways, these domestic groupings of mixing bowls, spoons and jugs joined by more handyman collections of paint tins, brushes and oil cans - are elegant and pristine.

From an aesthetic point of view this gives them all a common

neutrality so that they do not take attention away from the painted portrait on each dome. However, from an emotive point of view, this sophisticated elegance seems at variance with the warm intimate portraits of the individuals that accompany each work and who were the "owners" of the objects.

Blair's work is always interesting and this is no exception but earlier works such as *Keith* in 2005, *139,282 cups of tea* in 2007, and *I never knew you* in 2010, were more convincing in evoking the sense of nostalgia the artist is attempting to elicit in her work.