

## **Andrew Baldwin. void. studio glass**

Beaver Galleries

81 Denison Street, Deakin

Tuesday – Friday 10am – 5pm

Saturday – Sunday 9am – 5pm

Exhibition continues until 25 March 2014

Like many of Australia's top glass artists Andrew Baldwin completed his undergraduate studies at the Canberra School of Art. Baldwin acknowledges the then Head of the Glass Workshop, Stephen Procter, as inspirational and integral to his subsequent development and to his successful career working with his chosen medium. The artist has an impressive cv that includes, among many other milestones, his being selected on a number of occasions for the prestigious Ranomok Glass Prize. His work has been shown in galleries in Japan, Singapore, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Europe. **Void** is his first solo exhibition with Beaver Galleries.

The works in the exhibition are divided into two series – *void* and *murrini*. The former is characterised by swathes of delicate linear decoration, the latter by a meshed network of lozenge-shaped forms. Both series use a lush blue for the decoration and the artist certainly takes advantage of the innate tonal qualities of this to highlight the stark contrasts with the transparent and opaque glass walls of the vessels which they adorn.

Broadly-speaking the forms used could be said to be vessels with variations within that class across the range of the exhibition. The strongest forms include the elegantly attenuated "void 3", "void 9", "void 13" and the quietly restrained "murrine 1, 2 and 3".

"void 3" is a proud and confident piece. The dense band of lines is wrapped around the centre of the vessel leaving two lateral areas of transparent glass on either side. The band embraces the totality of the base and the rim and flows into the interior space (or does it?). It is an insertion of restrained energy that activates the surface while concurrently giving definition to the form. Visual ambiguity is cleverly employed by the artist in the way in which the viewer is not certain of the direction of the linear flow. For the artist whether the flow is from the outside in or vice versa is irrelevant. Baldwin keeps his options open in favour of instilling a marvellously lyrical rhythm into this work. While the band is visually commanding, the individuality of its component lines is not denied. Indeed, their role in creating the whole is actively celebrated. The scraggly ends (or beginnings) of the lines are not avoided by the

artist and the floating freedom they present is particularly titillating cue into the creative processes taking place here.

The vessel form is endemic in man's history across millennia and across different cultural manifestations. It is something familiar and holds many associations. Its use by contemporary artists tacitly acknowledges its history and indeed overtly accepts this. Baldwin clearly acknowledges the role of the vessel as simultaneously container and contained in the naming of the "void" series. "void 9" is both exemplar of the varieties implicit in the vessel form, in the refined articulation of its shape and the dexterous inclusion of decoration into the body of the vessel. Decoration here is veiled by the opacity of the glass walls. The band of lines plays a similar role to that in "void 3". The form is again given definition by the lines but their placement within the opaque walls denies them the same visual clarity as in the previous piece. This is in keeping with the more enclosed character of the shape of "void 9" and is a subtle reference to the spatial activity within the walls. The nuanced contrasts of muted blues with the opaque glass offer an attractive alternative to the crisp transparency of the clear glass used in other pieces.

In "void 13" Baldwin has achieved a wonderful expression of the combination of contained space and simultaneous movement. The centrality of the open oval of transparent glass is surrounded by a beautiful web of intertwined lines that appears to rotate around the void. The movement is almost musical in the way the artist has enclosed his lines in an eloquently simple yet absolutely appropriate form.

In the "murrine" series there is less formal variety than in the above. This is not at all detrimental and in fact asserts the familial characteristics of the series. The form is simple and not unlike the individual motifs that constitute the decorative network that embellishes it. Essentially, oval or circular with the tops sliced off, each form, as in the "void" series, is a vessel. The internal spatial configuration is more enclosed and decoration here is all-over and does not serve a role in defining form. Rather it encloses, but it is open enclosure since each element is in itself an open form, a graphic outline clearly two-dimensional.

In 'murrine 1" the individual lozenges are somewhat freely delineated so that any notions of uniformity are denied. This individuality means that although they might sometimes gently physically nudge their neighbour they are invested with a liberating visual autonomy that gives a graceful overall rhythmical flow to the piece. The openness of the individual motifs combined with the transparency of the glass vessel imbues a remarkable sense of lightness to this work, a lightness reinforced by the draped, veil-like quality that the lozenges in their totality hold and by the fact the we see through this work. Conversely the latter quality can dissipate the physical presence of the transparent glass to the extent that the impression that one is viewing a freestanding open mesh container is not inescapable. Whatever, the viewer is constantly moved through and around this delightful work in which visual and spatial activity is not in any way constrained. Others in this series display the

same qualities as seen in “murrine 1”. The use of opaque glass is also present. In this series the declaratively assertive decoration maintains its integrity and sits happily with the forms.

It may be a given to say that an exhibition of glass is about light. This exhibition is certainly about that phenomenon but it is also about colour and form, and the transformative power of the artist to combine these three in his unique and personal aesthetic language.

Peter Haynes