

Craft Kerry-Anne Cousins

# Glass brings photography into focus

NICOLE AYLIFFE -  
STUDIO GLASS

Beaver Galleries, Deakin. Until  
June 25.

**N**icole Ayliffe is from South Australia and completed her studies in 2006 with a Bachelor of Visual Arts (Honours) majoring in glass and photography at the South Australian School of Art, University of Adelaide. Since graduation she has been a finalist in two of the Ranamok Glass Prize competitions (2005 and 2006) and a finalist in the Waterhouse Natural History Art Prize (2006).

Although Ayliffe's major interest is in glass, photography has played a large part in her art practice. She uses her photographs either as manipulated images applied to the glass surface or as inspiration for engraved designs on the glass itself. The photographs taken along Australia's coast are of the deep rhythms of nature and the patterns made in the landscape by its cultivation. Her pure, sculptural glass forms have complex passages of interior space created within them. Glass bubbles and forms within forms create optical worlds in the glass. Some of the spherical vessels look like they are open bowls. This perception is illusory as the top of the vessel is actually a flat, transparent surface allowing a view into complex interiors. A judicious selection of forms – elongated leaf-like shapes and spherical vessels – celebrate the very solidity of the glass itself. This solidity, however, is counter-balanced by the translucency of the glass and the window like views into the work's interior.

The series of works on exhibition, which Ayliffe calls *Optical Landscapes*, brings together a selection of forms and design motifs taken from her photographs of nature and subtly marries them together. The photographs are applied to the glass surface so that the glass acts as a three-dimensional optical lens through which you view the image. This works very well in *Optical Landscape - Forest no. 9* where a sense of spatial depth is achieved by viewing the avenue of trees through the lens of thick translucent glass. However, the works where Ayliffe manipulates the photographic image to capture a more abstract quality push the boundaries just that little bit more. In the work called *Optical Landscape - Coastal Grass no. 10* the lines of the grass are reduced to a linear pattern placed a little off centre on the vessel and tied to the edges of the

work's interior "bubble" to make a striking design. Another example is in the *Optical Landscape - Monstera no. 3* where the manipulated soft-focus photographic image of a leaf is encased within the interior spatial bubble of the vessel.

Ayliffe often returns to previous forms and ideas so relationships develop between one body of work and another. In a previous series (the *Optical Drawing series - 2007*) the artist used coloured stringers or threads of glass trailed over the body of the glass vessel to draw free flowing linear patterns. The use of these coloured lines may have found its latest expression in two works in this exhibition *Optical Landscape - Coastal Grasses 2, 3 nos. 12, 13*. In these two works the black coloured stringers or lines are more controlled and elegantly define the elongated form of the glass. These thin elongated forms in the exhibition are similar to those that Ayliffe used in a series she called the *Optical Colour series* shown at the Beaver Galleries in 2013. Each elongated form opens to reveal an interior globe or glass bubble. In the 2013 series the glass bubbles were made from coloured glass that provided a warm interior light within the vessel. In this exhibition the glass is left clear and the emphasis is on the engraved

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design. The very successful heavily patterned and textured designs based on the monstera plant (*Monstera 1 and Monstera 2 nos. 1, 4*), remind me of the sandblasted patterns on glass vessels from another series by Ayliffe shown at the Beaver Galleries in 2009. In the 2009 series Ayliffe drew on the interior decorating details of wall paper and textiles to recreate the memory of a family house in bold patterns on glass. In the present work the striking black designs based on a monstera plant and engraved into the glass are also bold and confident. The dramatic pattern either wraps itself around the form of the elongated vessel or flows freely around the spherical form.

But among all the works in the exhibition *Optical Landscape - Reed no. 14* is one of the more singular



Nicole Ayliffe. *Optical Landscape - Coastal Grass. Blown glass and photographic image, 30x16x7cm.*



and aesthetically pleasing. Its spherical form like an open bowl is beautifully engraved around with rhythmic bands of black marks that subtly suggest the patterns in fibre of a woven basket and the way reeds were used by early societies to make woven containers. It is a sensitive and memorable work where the glass form, its decorative design and its cultural meaning are brought together in a balanced and satisfying relationship.

Above, Nicole Ayliffe. *Optical Landscape - Monstera no. 2. Blown glass and engraved imagery, 13x18x18cm.* Right, *Optical Landscape - Forest 1. Blown glass and engraved imagery, 36x10x10cm.*

