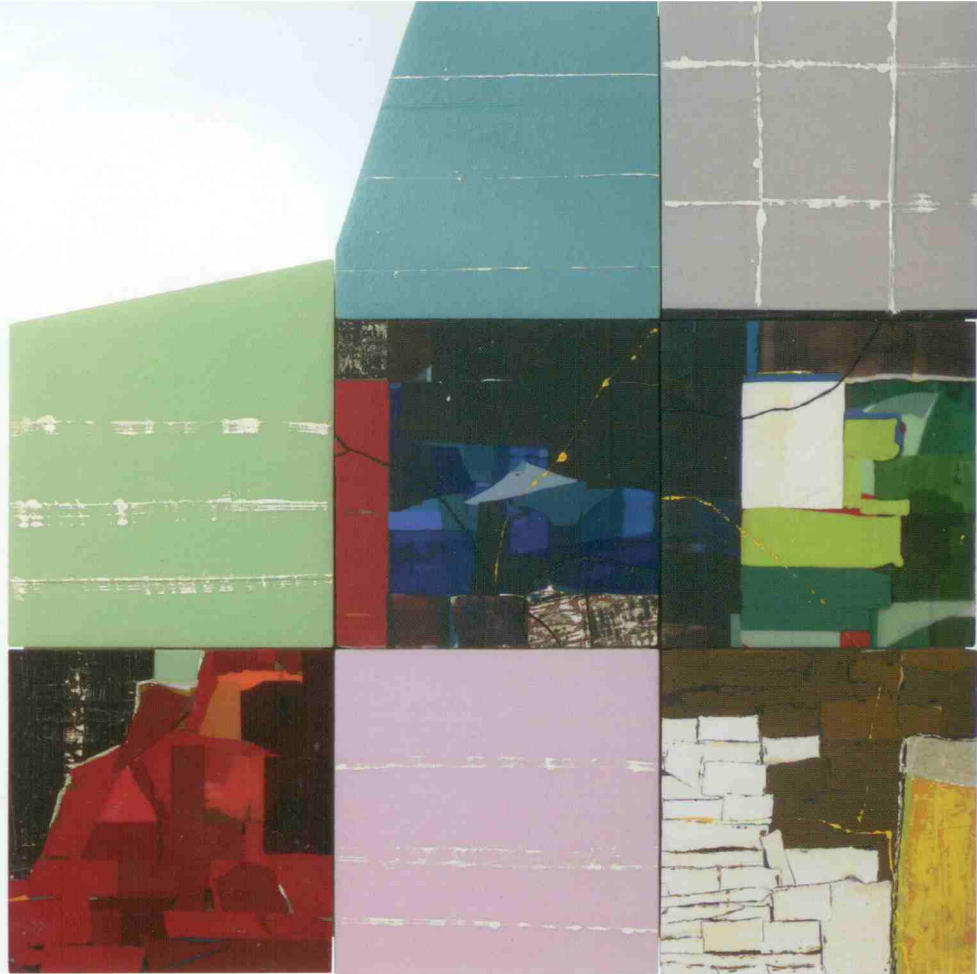


ANNEMARIE LOPEZ
discusses Brenden Scott
French, an artist who uses
the fluidity and brilliant
colours of glass to create
partly abstract imagery.



G

lass artist Brenden Scott French was “bumming around” on the beach in Queensland, looking for something to do, when he came across a course in leadlighting at TAFE. At the time he was more

interested in pursuing photography or film. But as he began to work with glass, he realised it suited his character. It can be a very spontaneous material, says French. “It has a defined chemical structure, and to an extent you know what it is going to do. But in many ways it’s very free flowing, and when I started working with it, I was also pretty free.”

While French started in a very traditional practice, he soon developed a more abstract approach. More recently his work has been compared to the painterly tradition of abstract expressionism. This shift in style has paralleled a move from leadlighting, to glass blowing, to kiln work and assemblage. A graduate of the Sydney College of Arts, and the Canberra School of Art, French is also an alumnus of the Jam Factory Glass Studio in Adelaide and was the 2001 recipient of the Lino Tagliapietra International Scholarship at Pilchuck Glass School in Seattle, Washington, USA.

Glass has continued to hold his interest as an artist, he says: “Because I became creatively intrigued with the medium, its unpredictability, the possibility of play.” French says he was never particularly interested in the light-refracting qualities of the material. “I am more interested in

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its opacity and density of colour, rather than its transparency. The glass magic never got to me in that way.”

But he admits that when he began to blow glass, he was hooked. “There is a point when everything you look at, you start to think, that can be free-blown.” But even in his early work, French was never satisfied with simply making beautiful decorative objects. “My blown work was compositional, so I could construct narratives with it. Each part was necessary for the composition to work, but each part had a separate identity.” French made a series of works called *Waste Baskets*, compositions of semiabstract pieces, which also began to introduce metaphorical elements such as small, pop art-style revolvers. These objects symbolised one of his recurring themes — the destructive impulse in humanity. His recent *Predator* series (three-dimensional works resembling abstracted trucks) explores human destructiveness in terms of the politics of our use of resources, waste and our relationship to the environment.

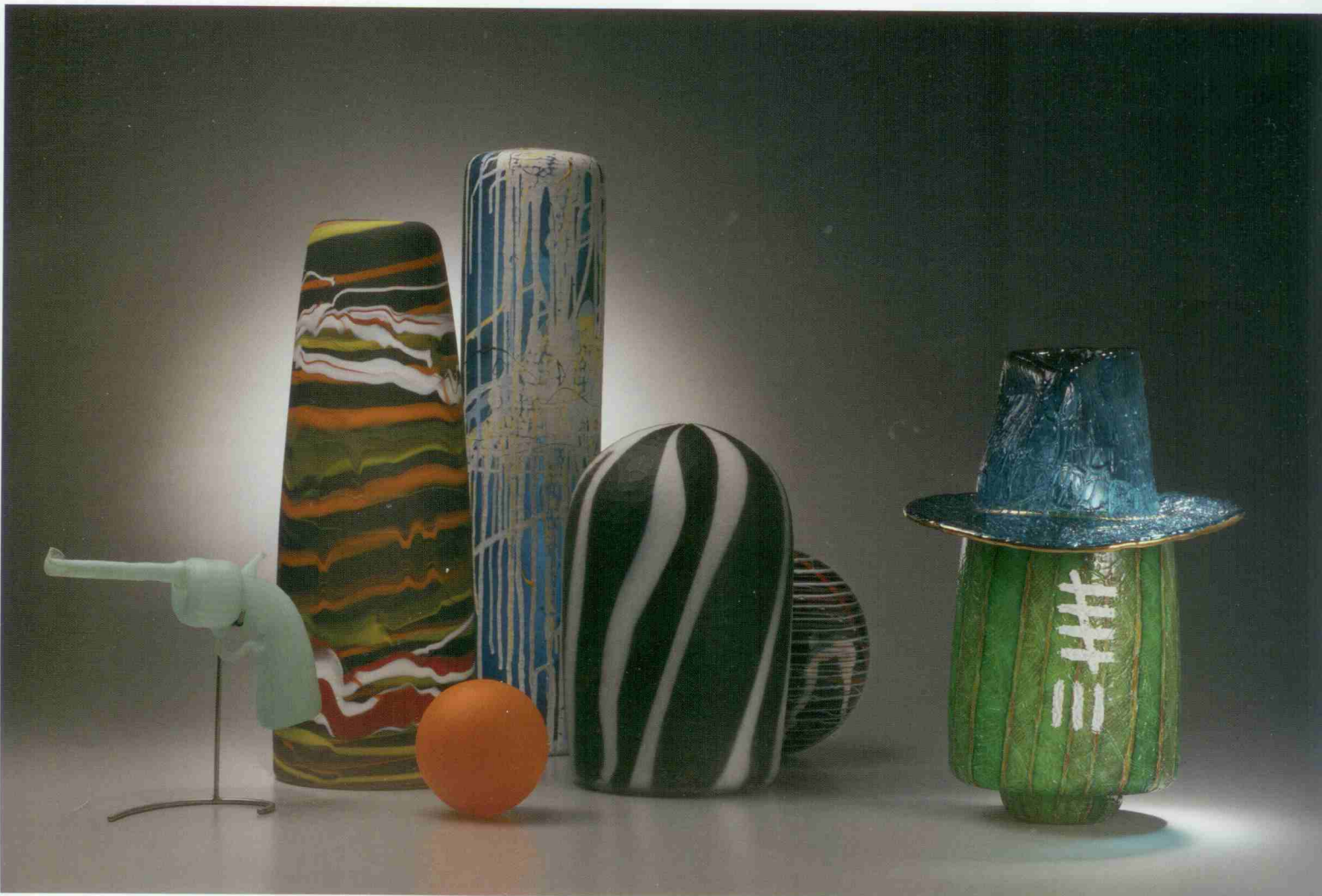
Glass, for French, has always been a problematic medium. “It’s not very sustainable. There is a lot of electricity and gas used. It relies on mining. A kilo of glass takes a huge bag of refined sand.”

French has been accused of turning his obsessive angst about these issues into an art form in itself, though this may be changing. “I hate to say it, but I think you can make more difference in other areas: writing, journalism, even another art medium. If you want to make a political statement, there are better ways of doing it than using glass to make objects and have an exhibition.”

Above: Brenden Scott French, *Engine—The dissentient corpse*, 2008, kilnformed glass, 120 x 120 x 5cm. Photograph Grant Hancock.

Opposite top: Brenden Scott French, *Predator—Fictitious landscape*, 2009, kilnformed wheel engraved glass, 70 x 32 x 8cm. Photograph Grant Hancock.

Opposite bottom: Brenden Scott French, *Waste Basket No 8—with lid and contents*, 2007, blown, hot sculpted glass, 100 x 60 x 40cm. Photograph Grant Hancock.





French says he has become more accepting of the limitations of glass and admits it is perceived by many as a decorative medium. He is reluctant, therefore, to suggest what he might want people to find in his work, but confesses: "I'd be happy for them to see conflict and yet a spirit of survival. My work has always celebrated the ability, the will of life to survive and adapt in a conflicted environment. I also like people to think about the conflict of the material use. But there is a dialogue there. I don't want to beat up on it."

French says he doesn't have any answers for how we should better use energy or resources. "I just point to a problem, a conflict, here it is, look at it, think about it."

His more recent wall panel landscapes draw on more personal experiences and memory. "When I go back home, to Queensland, I am staggered to see the area where I grew up is the landscape I am creating now." French says he is creating a nostalgic landscape. "It's abstracted, but there's a low lying horizon, hills, pastures and fields in the foreground. The colours I use are wet colours."

French does not pre-draw or sketch his designs, but composes with glass. "I pre-fuse coloured pieces in a kiln. I look at how the glass moves, the flow of it. That gives me the lie of the land. Then I reassemble it. I construct foreground and perspective by picking out key colours, then I put the pieces back in the kiln and re-fire them. The process is intuitive, but something like a mosaic."

In these works French has started to introduce abstracted images of houses such as elevation and floor plans. The house represents, he says, "the will to create a space, security, a home, in the landscape".

Perhaps these new themes are not so surprising. Brendan is now the father of 11-month-old twins. He laughs: "Adaptation and survival are very real to me."

Brendan Scott French is represented by Sabbia Gallery, Sydney. He will be exhibiting at BMG Art, Adelaide, 24 June–16 July 2011. □

Top: Brenden Scott French, *Cargo-Two Parcel Lament*, 2010, kilnformed glass, 118 x 23 x 4cm. Photograph Grant Hancock.

Above: Brenden Scott French, *Tectonic Trace*, 2011, kilnformed glass 104 x 72 x 4cm. Photograph Grant Hancock.