

Alpine magic evoked

Holly Grace - *Translations* - Studio Glass

Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin.
Hours: Tuesday-Friday, 10am-5pm, Saturday-Sunday, 9am-5pm. On until March 20.

Reviewer: Kerry-Anne Cousins

Holly Grace is a glass artist who uses imagery inspired by nature. In doing so she creates works that capture the attention of the viewer by their quiet beauty and distinct sense of the uniqueness of place.

The works in this exhibition are technically innovative and contemporary in form yet the skill of the artist in using the luminous and transparent qualities of glass brings to mind the intensity of the light-enhanced colour in medieval stained glass. Grace's cultivation of the special golden glow of sunlight and autumnal hues in works such as the *Porcupine Ridge series No. 7* is a subtle reminder of the ability of 20th century Art Nouveau glass artists to create a romantic ambience through the use of iridescent colours and subtle tonal values.

Holly Grace has spent considerable time travelling in Europe, in particular Sweden, Denmark and Britain. In her earlier career she drew inspiration from the photographs she had taken during these travels,

particularly in Scandinavia. These photographs became the basis for a series of works in 2005. Among them were the *Sweden Landscape* bottles series where photographic images were transferred on to clear glass forms and worked using sandblasting and etching to enhance and define their patterns.

Later in her career, in works shown at the Beaver Galleries in 2010 and 2011, and in *Translations* her current exhibition, she has turned her attention to the Australian landscape. In these works the images are taken from photographs from her travels in the Australian Alps.

Her imagery is, as the artist has stated, the abstract interpretation of nature's architecture. However, the designs on the glass made from patterns of tree canopies, snow gums, leafless winter branches and surrounding bush are not so much abstract as eminently readable. They provide an evocation of a magical alpine world where branches are etched against a cloudless sky and trunks of trees are outlined as if against a white snow-covered landscape.

The colours the artist uses are seemingly restricted to a woodland palette of greys, browns and blacks. However, in some works there is the introduction of a wider range of colours including yellows, subtle

greens, and blue grey hues. The latter tones predominate in a recent work called *The Church Yard*, which is a departure for the artist from the natural environment with the introduction of the image of a church - a symbol of early settlement in the hitherto untamed landscape.

Grace orchestrates colour and the metallic glint of silver and gold leaf skilfully in a sometimes complex layering of patterns. Delicately coloured passages of great beauty are enhanced by the light that plays across the textured surfaces so that the glass vessels seem to glow with light from within.

Her glass objects are sculptural and include tall cylindrical forms, squat arrangements of bottles, bulbous globes, shapes taken from wine glasses and wide open bowls.

Grace has also begun to use the idea of curved glass panels in two works, *Porcupine Ridge Panel No. 6* and *Thredbo Valley Panel No. 16*, on which she creates her images in a more direct use of glass as a two-dimensional "canvas".

In particular, her long narrow cylinders seem to hold the images within them, their colours iridescent like the colours one finds in old bottles dug up after a long time.

The bulbous glass forms that were seen in miniature in the artist's 2007 *Bonsai Series* have now become either completely globular in shape or are attached to a tall stem.

In the work *Canopy 1 No. 18*, the bulbous form on its stem seems to be uneasily balanced and its precipitous existence is a detraction from its graceful imagery. In like manner, in

the group of works, *Forest Goblets Nos. 1-4*, the awkward goblet shape does not enhance the imagery; however the wide open bowls continue to

exert their attraction. In *Canopy Bowl No. 2*, among Grace's most successful works, the imagery of strongly delineated tree branches

seems to reach out from the bottom of the bowl across the surface of the form in a graceful dance that marries beautifully form and design.



SCULPTURAL: *Porcupine Ridge*, a four-piece set, above, and *Canopy vessel 2*, left, both blown and sandblasted glass with powders and metal leaf.