

ARTS

Craft review Kerry-Anne Cousins

Poetry in glass

Holly Grace. *The Real and the Imagined*. Beaver Galleries. 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Until November 4.

The glass dome was a popular decorative feature of the Victorian parlour. Objects such as taxidermy, butterflies, shells and paper flowers were captured under a glass dome. Moss, ferns and rocks were also arranged to create miniature landscapes.

The use of the glass dome also had a quasi-scientific appeal. It encased but also focused attention on the world of nature within.

Holly Grace's earlier work in her landscape series (Beaver Galleries, 2010) created a contemporary version of the glass dome. Images of the landscape seemed to be contained within it like preserved fragments of memory caught in time.

In her latest collection, Grace's previous readable images of nature, such as mountains, vegetation and trees, have



become more abstracted, the larger vista minimised into a micro-world of details of texture and pattern. She has always regarded her photographic images as an integral part of her art. In recent years, she has begun photographing with a macro lens.

In an album with the exhibition, there are two main groups of photographs – the larger landscapes of mountain areas of Victoria, and more intimate close-ups of the texture of rocks and bark. Both viewpoints play an important part in her current works.

A recent residency at the Pilchuck Glass School in the United States led her to reflect on the relationship between landscape, imagination and memory in her glass

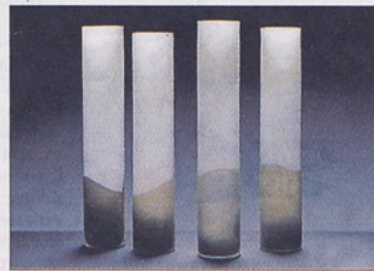
practice. In September, she was awarded a six-week Thomas Foundation Residency at the Canberra Glassworks. She worked with a team of glass artists who acted as her gaffers and assistants in producing the glass forms for this exhibition. She was able to explore cold-working glass with a collection of glass grinding tools that came with a lathe she acquired in Austria. With the development of these skills, Grace's glass has become more complex in its surface treatment, and her landscapes have become more abstract.

Her glass forms are made up of two parts – there is an inner core of glass at the heart of the vessel. A second layer of glass is cupped around it and is peeled back to reveal large areas of the original surface. However, it is the upper layer that the artist engraves to make her intricate textural surfaces.

Grace regards this exhibition as charting the research and processes she undertook during the Glassworks residency. The series of *Sketches I-VI* and the *Studies I-VI* are exemplars of the artist's exploration of the transfer of patterns onto glass and engraving them. Some of the works, such as the glass cylinders (*Sketch II No. 10*), are delicate clear glass vessels with patterns like ice crystals around them. The large, clear globular vessel (*Sketch VI No. 9*), with its tiny opening, is especially successful and its shadow casts a delicate lace-like pattern reminiscent of a perforated doily.

Smaller glass globes proved to be a sympathetic surface for Grace's exploration of colour and texture using glass powders, metal leaf and glass paint. *Study V No. 20* has a remarkable surface with beautiful passages of iridescent colours and textures.

The Veil is among the larger works. Its longitudinal form is constructed of two



Complex surfaces: Grace's *Imagined Landscape III* and *IV* feature sandblasted glass.

panels of glass. The simple construction reveals the concept behind the artist's use of two layers of glass in her more complex forms. The rear panel has a band of heavily textured and coloured glass that appears to float behind the first. The surface of the first panel is corrugated like a wave, bringing movement and surface interest to the textured panel behind, so it appears to be moving like marks made in the sand by wind.

The *Imagined Landscape* series brings colour into the glass itself. The artist wanted to achieve the effect of translucent watercolour washes of colour. There are three large works, *Imagined Landscapes I, II, VI*, which are based on squat, bottle-like forms. Although the deep richness of their colours and textures is beautiful, I found their forms rather static and heavy.

In contrast, where form and decoration seem to be most in harmony is in the elegant *Imagined Landscape III, No. 3*. This is an amber glass bowl with its form etched with a delicate filigree pattern. The pattern swells unevenly around its sides, so it appears as mountains rising above the horizon. Although its pattern obviously owes its origin to Grace's photographs of the texture of bark, it also has a connection with her photographs of the landscape around Batty Spur and Disappointment Ridge in Victoria. In these photographs, dark foreground scrub is silhouetted against mountain ranges. In her interpretation in glass, a band of etched textural marks around the lower part of the vessel reproduces this dark silhouette against an upper, more translucent section.

Holly Grace has always brought a poetic sensibility to her work, which remains even though her images have become more abstract. The glass surfaces of her vessels have more textural significance since her residency at the Canberra Glassworks.