

Craft Kerry-Anne Cousins

Alpine passion overwhelms works

Solitude: Studio glass by Holly Grace. Beaver Galleries. Until November 6.

Holly Grace was born in Western Australia and has had a very successful career since graduating with a Master's Degree in Glassmaking from Monash University in 2004. She has had valuable experience in working in glass studios in Australia, Denmark, Sweden and Scotland.

In 2010 Grace won a Pilchuck Glass Scholarship to study at the Pilchuck Glass School in the US with additional residencies there in 2012 and 2013. She was also the recipient of the Thomas Foundation Artist in Residence (TFAiR) award at the Canberra Glassworks in 2012 and 2014.

Glassmaking remains a craft to be learnt from working alongside other master glassmakers as studio assistants. The need to be constantly learning, working and teaching in other studios and glass centres seems to be part of a glassmaker's peripatetic life at least in their early careers.

A lot of hot glassmaking by its very nature is a collaborative effort and Holly Grace acknowledges this by thanking her gaffers Tom Rowney, Annette Blair and team at the Canberra Glassworks.

In Grace's first exhibition at Beaver Galleries in 2007 she exhibited her leaf forms, spheres and sets of bottles. These were decorated with motifs of bare branches in relief (the *Canopy* series). The spherical glass balls were in clear glass while the leaf forms and bottles were characterised by deep jewel-like colours that glowed from within the forms.

Over the 10 years since, Grace has followed these themes, using images of the landscape in even more intense and



Dusk by Holly Grace in Solitude at Beaver Galleries. Photo: David McArthur

picturesque detail as well as exploring the concept of an inner light and illumination coming from within the glass form itself. The forms of the glass objects have not changed much and Grace seemed to have found variations on the sphere, the cylinder, cone and shallow open vessels as sufficient vehicles for her imagery.

Later when she began thinking of the landscape as a panorama, she extended the panoramic imagery across curving glass panels and across related groupings of cylinders and bottles (the *Panorama* series).

In this exhibition Grace has exhibited work that reflects her growing preoccupation with the alpine and sub-alpine landscape near Thredbo in the Australian Alps. This is an area of landscape that does not appeal to everyone – its scraggy trees and low scrub need perhaps more intimate contact.

Most people come to an appreciation of its

unique beauty by walking the mountain trails as Grace has done. She seems to have developed a deep love and understanding of this area which is communicated very strongly in this body of work. On her walks she has come across crude mountain huts, initially erected as pioneer dwellings or as shelter for cattlemen but used also in later years as a refuge for bush walkers. Inside is always the ubiquitous billy – each one unique and bearing the marks of its use in its dented sides and twisted wire handles.

Grace has been inspired by these huts to make small glass models of them (*Oldfields Hut*, 17 by 38 by 21 centimetres). Constructed individually of glass sheets their interiors are lit by warm LED lights. On the walls of these model huts are etched images from both old and contemporary photographs with depictions of the huts in situ in the landscape – sometimes with their former

human inhabitants. When they are lit from inside, these images are projected onto the surrounding area like slides on a screen.

The glass *Billy Can* series have wire handles fashioned to reproduce each individual billy that Grace discovered. These billy cans are double-sided with images of the Alpine landscape decorating their exterior surfaces. Their interiors are richly gilded in gold so that they glow with a deep golden light.

No one can doubt the fine workmanship and the passion Grace brings to this new development in her work. However, the huts and the billy cans are a little too prescriptive and suffer perhaps from being conceived out of a much too personal passion.

For me they lack the detachment necessary to work through the particular to the universal that is displayed so eloquently in the other work in the exhibition. It makes me hope that Holly Grace will also continue to make work that is as breathtakingly beautiful as the *Panorama* landscape series represented in the exhibition by a small group of works.

The groups of five cylindrical forms (*Nightfall no. 11*) continue Grace's interest in the moods of nature and light. In these works the landscape is sensitively captured with all the subtle nuances of the light at dusk. The outlines of the trees are silhouetted against a blue/grey sky that changes as it deepens from the rim to the base of the vessels. These works are a stunning example of the artist's ability to communicate the beauty of the light.

However it is the large vessel (*Dusk no. 18*) that for me is the outstanding work in the exhibition. It is a demonstration of the artist's ability to work with imagery and light so that they are sensitively attuned to the form of the vessel creating in *Dusk* a work of expressive poetry and beauty.