

Craft review Kerry-Anne Cousins

Colourful, varied and rewarding body of work

WESTERN RIDGE - STUDIO GLASS BY BRENDEN SCOTT FRENCH.

Beaver Galleries. Until August 6.

Brenden Scott French, now based in Adelaide, is well known in Canberra.

After obtaining his initial degree at the Sydney College of the Arts, his honours year was completed at the Canberra School of Art in 2003.

He has had several residencies at the Canberra Glassworks and his work has been exhibited here as a finalist in the Ranamok prize exhibitions.

His last solo exhibition at the Beaver Galleries was in 2012.

As with most glass artists, he has been peripatetic, taking up several residencies abroad including a residency at the Northlands Glass Centre in Scotland.

In 2001 he was the recipient of the prestigious Lino Tagliapietra International scholarship that enables artists to study at the Pilchuck Glass School in Seattle.

His recent residency at Western Ridge in the Barossa Valley in South Australia has given rise to this latest and most varied body of work.

Scott French works with glass and colour. It could almost be said he orchestrates colour with the eye of a painter. His patterns of multi-coloured glass dance across surfaces with intensity and brilliance. In several works, notably in *View from window - Koonunga*, the glass surface appears to have the viscous surface of oil paint.

His *View from Window - perpetual*, a work that from a distance appears as a panel of yellow glass, reveals on closer inspection to be a more complex constructed surface that is enlivened by white highlights looking as if they were applied with the flick of a brush.

Depictions of landscape are at the core of the artist's practice of studying the land-

scape not only as a record of its geographical and natural features but also as part of an evolving process of change. Wall and free-standing glass panels delineate landscapes in colourful abstract or figurative designs.

In this exhibition there are examples of both aspects. Scott French's work in *Western Ridge - upon reflection* is strong and confident.

The changing nature of the landscape is suggested by the distortion of the image through the dislocation of its mosaic patterning. This landscape panel is back to back with another panel where abstract shapes suggesting change and development obliterate the land's natural features in a cacophony of colours, shapes and colours.

In another work, *View from a window - north south east west*, the artist continues with his series of views from windows.

The window is a framing device for his

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abstract arrangements of lively colour and irregular geometric patterns in glass.

The artist organises his designs with a confident sense of placement and understanding of colour that gives a satisfying sense of underlying order and harmony.

In his "book" series Scott French has also been exploring densely packed glass mosaic-like surfaces of intense colour. Referencing this series is a small but imaginative work, *Book of consequence vol 24*.

The glass block echoes the form of a book however to my eye the coloured canes of glass that make up the mosaic pattern take on the appearance of a bookshelf with colourful uneven rows of stacked books.

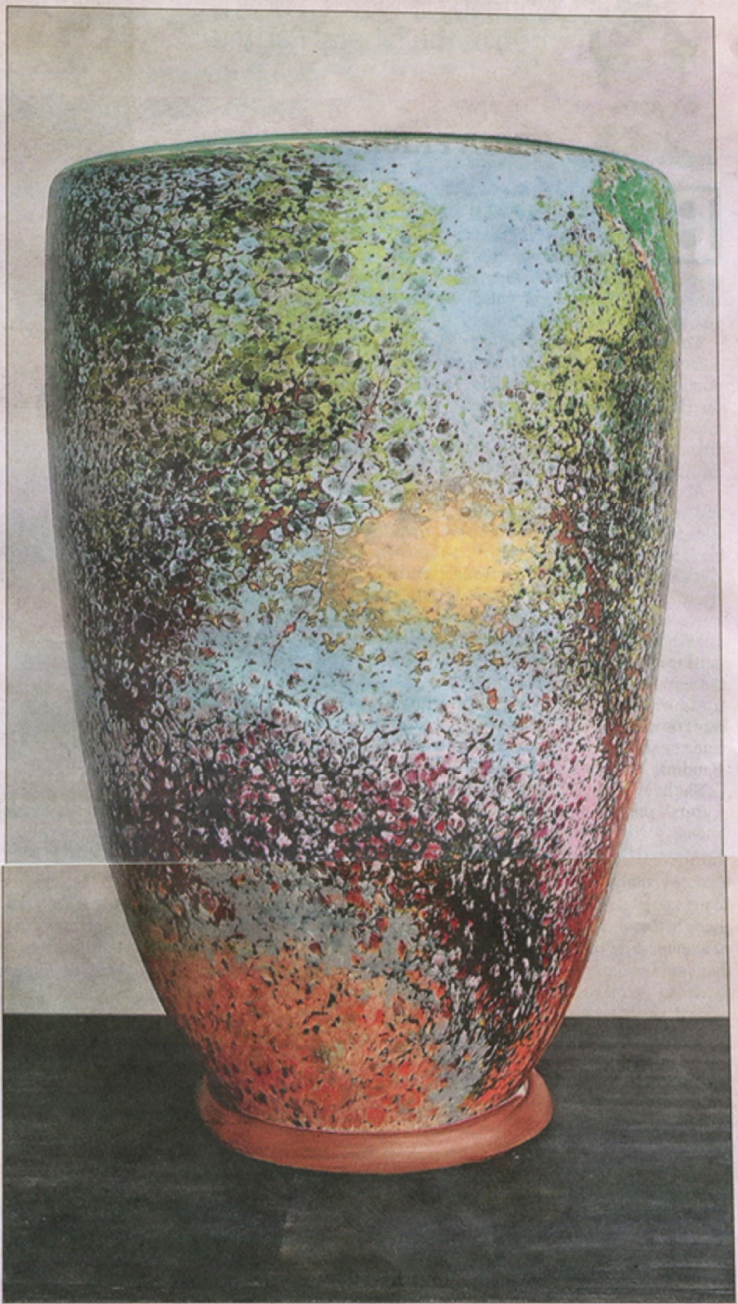
The surprise and indeed the highlight of the exhibition was for me the three pate de verre glass vases (*Vase - geological storage facility nos. 1-3*).

They are beautiful, romantic and unlike anything I have seen previously of the artist's work.

In the past Scott French has made a series of antique-style funerary-inspired vessels and there are other open vessel forms in the exhibition but these particular vases seem more related stylistically to the early 20th century age of decorative glass. Pate de verre (or glass paste) is where granules of coloured glass are placed into moulds before firing. The finished glass can have a special characteristic grainy quality and allows subtle gradations of colour.

In these vases Scott French has conjured up an imaginative landscape where forms emerge from an indistinct ethereal background of soft colour reminding me of the work of French symbolist artist Odilon Redon (1840-1916).

Western Ridge is a very rewarding exhibition. The judicious selection of work presents an insight into the art practice of one of Australia's foremost contemporary glass makers.



Brenden Scott French, *Vase - geologic storage facility 3*, in *Western Ridge* at Beaver Galleries.



Brenden Scott French's work, *Western Ridge - upon reflection*, at Beaver Galleries.