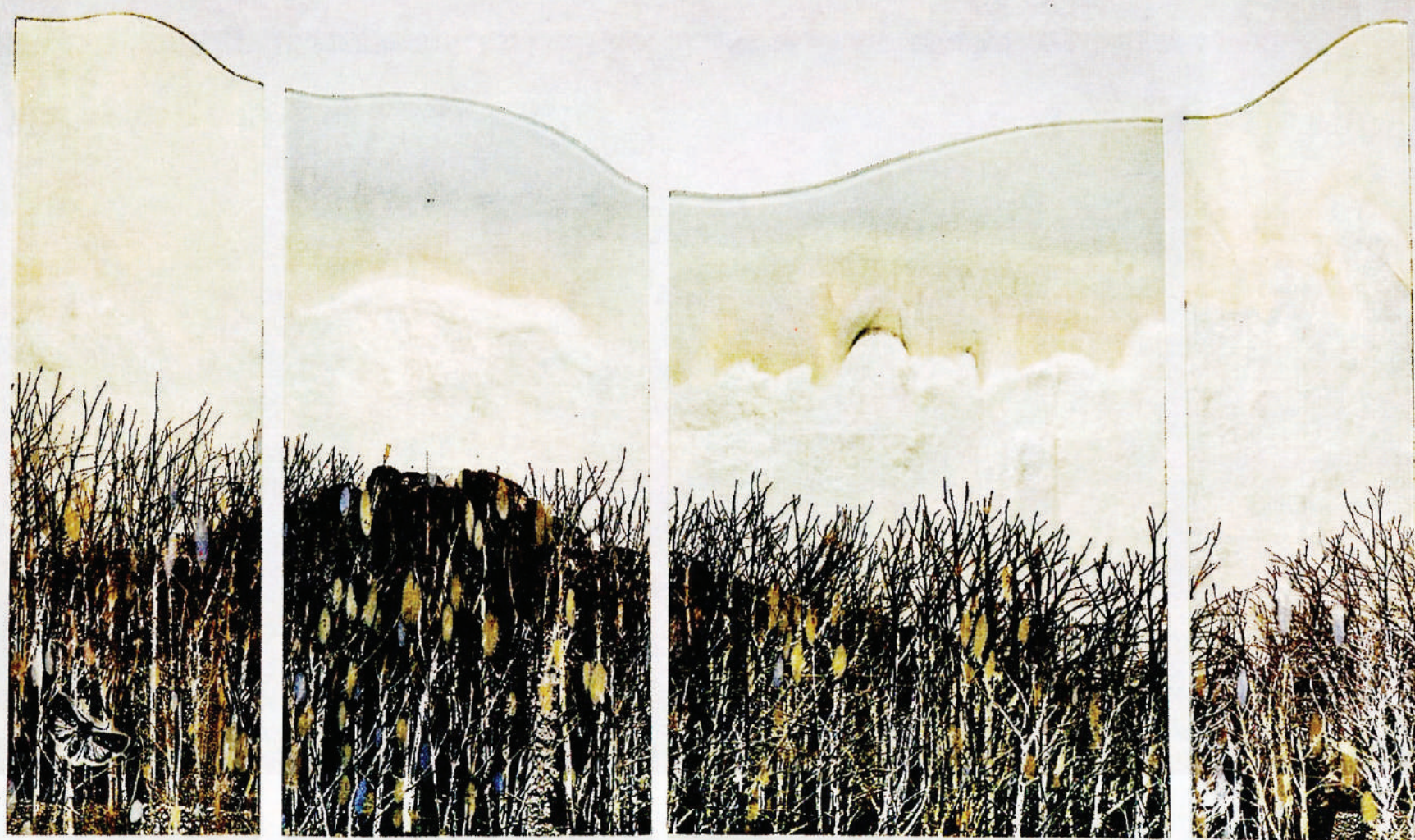


Arts



CRAFT REVIEW

A GRAIN OF GOLD - STUDIO GLASS BY HOLLY GRACE.

Beaver Galleries. Until March 17.
beavergalleries.com.au

BY Kerry-Anne Cousins

Holly Grace's work evolves from a poetic concept of the landscape – a concept in which the landscape is revealed by light rather like the atmospheric images conjured up in old magic lantern slides.

Yet her vision of the natural world is tempered by the knowledge that landscapes can also be inhabited and changed by human settlement. These two ideas are brought together in the artist's exhibition at Beaver Galleries.

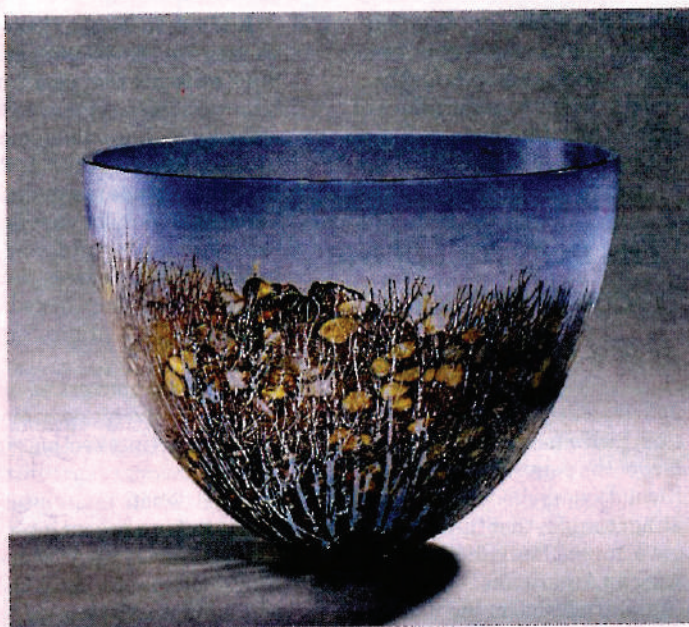
Grace has noted that it was when she first began working as a glassblower at the Glasmuseet in Ebeltoft, Denmark that she began to observe the landscape in a more intense way. Growing up in the coastal area near Perth, she was struck by the contrast of this environment with the densely wooded forests of Denmark and the effect of winter and snow on vegetation and sky.

It was the sublime nature of the light and its ability to illuminate these landscapes that were significant for the artist. Light has continued to be an important component of the artist's work in glass.

Grace began making photographic records of these Danish landscapes. Initial impressions of Danish woodlands in winter are found in her early imagery where trees denuded of leaves become dark tracteries of lines engraved against pale translucent glass.

Later Grace was drawn to the Australian Alps. In this high country in the wintry months, snow covers the ground and tree branches are etched against grey silver skies. Among the mountains the artist discovered the abandoned dwellings of early settlers who lived in these areas.

They left behind poignant remains of their



lives – household artefacts like kettles, saucepans and tins. To the artist these relics of domesticity are a reminder of people making a haven against the forces of nature.

In the exhibition at Beaver Galleries the two strands of the natural landscape and settlement are represented by several works where the artist reproduces in glass the actual artefacts of kettle, saucepan and tins she found. Records of settlement – letters and documents – are also reproduced on some of the glass objects – not to be read legibly but as a symbolic mark of human presence.

In *A Miner's Haven - Kettle* Grace has fashioned a glass kettle and decorated it with images of a wooded hut. The kettle has an interior light source so that it glows like a lamp from within, projecting the shadow of the hut from the kettle onto the wall like a magic lantern slide.

In another work, *Lovenest in the Sallee's - Billycan*, there is also an internal light source giving the glass a deep red glow like the comforting warmth of a welcoming fire. In *Gavel's Hut - Saucepan* a gold leaf interior

Works by Holly Grace, clockwise from top, *The Tempest*, *Alpine Ash* and *First Light*, can be seen in *A grain of gold* at Beaver Galleries.



inside the glass saucepan suggests its function of providing warm food.

These sculptural objects in glass are quite literal works with a strong sense of a narrative. It is, however, in Holly Grace's depiction of poetic and romantic landscapes that the artist's talent for evoking atmospheric effects in glass is given full play.

Grace does not use a large repertoire of forms – bowls, cylindrical vessels and a wall panel. In several works bands of trees are etched and cold worked into the glass and ornamented with a number of metallic finishes.

Their branches outlined in delicate tracteries of branches make patterns against a pale sky. In *Dusk II* dark trees form a frieze around the bowl emphasised by a soft grey/blue band around the rim. The linear patterns of the trees can be seen through the translucent glass so that the images seem to transcend the physical boundaries of the vessel.

In an outstanding work, *First Light*, the glass vessel is decorated with images of

trees set against a pale sky. The light that falls on this iridescent sky changes due to the natural light in the gallery. It brings an ever-changing display of colour to the work. Another outstanding landscape, *The Tempest*, is depicted on four glass panels. In these panels the trees flow frieze-like across a horizon and spread their branches across a gilded white gold background.

The glass objects and wall panel are joined by small glass wall sculptures of bogong moths, bent-wing bats and flame robins. Created in glass, coloured by metallic leaf and etched patterns these small jewel-like sculptures look like they have just escaped from the artist's landscapes that surround them.

Holly Grace's work has continued to develop and mature not only in content but in her mastery of so many of the decorative techniques and skills of glassmaking. The artist has been able to successfully convey her own sense of wonder at the properties of light and its ability to create not only the many moods of nature but also the poetic landscapes of the imagination.