

# Graceful glasswork from ANU alumni

**CRAFT REVIEW**

**ONE THREE SEVEN: STUDIO GLASS**

By Alexandra Chambers, Mel Douglas, Benjamin Edols & Kathy Elliott and Tom Rowney. Beaver Galleries. Until February 24.  
**REVIEWED BY** Kerry-Anne Cousins

These five artists have all studied at one time or another at the ANU School of Art. Alexandra Chambers, originally from Colorado in the US, continued her studies at the Canberra School of Art, graduating in 2001. Benjamin Edols and Kathy Elliott are both ANU School of Art graduates (1992) while Tom Rowney and Mel George graduated from the same School of Art in 1995 and 2000 respectively.

Rowney is technical manager at the Canberra Glassworks – a position he has held since 2006.

Chambers has had residencies at Bundanon and the Canberra Glassworks and wide experience teaching and working in glass studios here and abroad.

Edols and Elliott are life partners who have established a successful working partnership in their glass studio in northern Sydney – a glass studio where both Chambers and Rowney have been studio assistants.

Douglas has her own studio practice and is working on her PhD.

Rowney's series of five vessels are graceful elegant studies in blown glass. Their aventurine motifs and colours of brilliant greens, blues and golds give them an inner glow.

Rowney is known for working with

*Rowney is known for working with traditional Murano glass techniques and the works display his considerable skills.*

traditional Murano glass techniques and the works in the exhibition display his considerable skills. The graceful vase *Gold aventurine motif*, *black zanzirico cane work* is outstanding. It is decorated with a fine filigree pattern of black canes that are twisted together to form ribbons which enfold the glass form in a beautifully orchestrated dance of colour and light.

Edols and Elliott are glass artists of notable skill and creativity. Edols is concerned more with form while Elliott sees the glass vessel as an "inviting canvas". The *Evening Surge* series has the attractive appeal of Eastern opulence tempered by a sense of elegant restraint.

The glass forms – an urn, bowl and vase – are sensuously alive with silver leaf used to create a crackle-like surface that contrasts with the highly glossed black detailing of rim, foot and lip.

The wave motif etched into the glass forms of both series evokes Hokusai Katsushika's *Great Wave of Kanagawa*, the iconic woodblock print that is from the series *36 Views of Mount Fuji* (1829).

The rhythmic roll of the waves is



Alexandra Chambers' *Lost and Found* (above) and (below) Mel Douglas' *Inclined (black)* and *Inclined (white)*

delineated in an energetic interplay of lines, patterns and rhythms that are engraved or, as in the *Rush* series of clear sea blue vessels, also emphasised by fine white canes around each form.

Chambers constructs small glass sculptural vignettes of domestic life. She is interested in objects that are now overtaken by new technologies. *Lost and Found* is a delightful little group of a bowl of hair pins and

an accompanying hair pin twisted and discarded – an amusing reference to the days of the home perm and tamed hairstyles.

A glass mixing bowl and a set of glass beaters (*DeeDee's Sunbeam*) testify to the days of home baking.

Another work called *Sorting letters II* is of unopened envelopes stacked in a letter rack. The envelopes, in colours of white to bright yellow, are so realistic they invite touch.

Chambers cleverly walks the line between realistic model making and making work with just enough ambiguity to suggest a more subtle narrative.

The two works by Mel Douglas, *Inclined (black)* and *Inclined (white)* can seem austere – the two forms created from kiln-formed glass have a dense solidity. A closer study reveals

their linear engraved surfaces are tactile and their quiet dignified presence induces a meditative calm. Douglas has always been interested in the mediative quality of line to describe form. Continuous lines are engraved by hand onto the surface of each of her two flat black and white ovoid forms.

The contrast between the shiny surfaces of the lip of the black form and the remainder of its etched body has the optical illusion of making it look like it is an open vessel. Although the two works are individual entities they seem to belong together. Indeed, as displayed, they gently nudge each other creating a complementary harmonious balance like the Chinese symbols of yin and yang.

Douglas sees no distinction between drawing the etched lines she creates on her glass forms and creating them in glass fibres on paper in her work *Doubletake*. In this work on paper the outlines of the two sculptural forms are reproduced in a network of lines on four separate shapes in shades of grey and white. These are then placed over one another at slight angles to create different tonal and textural patterns. The relationship of the works on paper and the three-dimensional objects serves to deepen own understanding of the artist's creative process.

