

ARTS



Ruth Oliphant, Kiln 3. Pictures Supplied

Accomplished, innovative works

Craft review

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RUTH Oliphant: From the ground up - moments inspired by the Yarralumla Brickworks. Beaver Galleries. Until November 24.

In the exhibition *From the ground up - moments inspired by the Yarralumla Brickworks* at the Beaver Galleries, Ruth Oliphant establishes her link with Canberra by focusing on one of Canberra's early heritage-listed sites - the old Yarralumla Brickworks.

Oliphant is a Canberra-based glass artist who has pursued a successful career since graduating from the ANU Canberra School of Art in 2008.

Her first solo exhibition was at the Beaver Galleries in 2009 as part of an award to encourage and support a new promising young artist.

Since then she has worked and studied overseas although she has exhibited regularly in Canberra.

It is perhaps no coincidence that Oliphant first enrolled in architecture at university before deciding to switch to a Bachelor of Visual Arts where she majored in glass.

Her grandfather was renowned architect Kenneth Oliphant and this may partly account for her interest in the spatial dynamics of architecture that has continued to inform her art practice.

Oliphant has previously

used flat panels of glass to evoke cities by focusing on aspects of their architecture - city streets and corners as well as views through windows and arcades.

The imagery was descriptive in style and used the principles of linear perspective to create a sense of spatial architecture that suggested illusionary vistas beyond the panels' flat surfaces.

It is obvious from this accomplished and mature current exhibition that the old Yarralumla Brickworks has provided a new rich and fruitful seam of inspiration for the next phase of Oliphant's work.

The Brickworks were established in 1913 and many of the bricks that built the

early buildings of Canberra came from their kilns.

Since their closure in 1976 they have presented a poignant and forlorn appearance.

The wider area of the brickworks is now about to be developed and their original appearance as a rare example of a large 20th-century urban brickworks will disappear.

In earlier works Oliphant has used linear perspective and figurative imagery to "draw" on the glass panels to evoke memories and places.

In this series of works she has used dramatic tonal contrasts to create not only spatial depth but also a moody elegiac atmosphere that is very effective in evoking the deserted industrial architec-

ture of the brickworks.

Light Study nos. 1-4 are a series of panels where the artist has successfully employed defined areas of light that emanate from a clearly defined light source to create depth and to delineate the architectural structure of the brick tunnels.

The style is more painterly than the linear descriptive style formerly deployed by the artist and emphasis is given to light as the subject of the work.

Accomplished as these panels are in concept, it is in the four *Kiln* works that image and form unite in an innovative and exciting way.

Oliphant has used the device of a half circle of glass (30 centimetres by

41 centimetres and three centimetres thick) instead of panels to echo the half-domed structure of the long kiln tunnel.

These tunnels are only partly illuminated by shafts of light.

The half gloom is beautifully captured by the way the artist has used strong blocks of colour in a semi-abstract manner to create contrasting areas of dark and light shapes that echo the domed structure of the tunnel.

This is particularly effective in the work *Kiln 3* which functions as a successful work of abstract sculpture as well as highlighting the distinctive structural footprint of the brickwork's industrial architecture.