

Glass art surges with ‘disturbing’ emotions

May 21, 2020



“Ocean deep I”, blown and cut glass

*craft / “Benjamin Edols and Kathy Elliott: Online Exhibition”, at beavergalleries.com.au until May 24. Reviewed by **MEREDITH HINCHLIFFE**.*

AFTER experiencing something “extremely stressful” five years ago, glass artists Benjamin Edols and Kathy Elliott, wanted to capture the disturbing emotions that followed the event, and put them into their work.

But due to the constrictions of COVID-19, Beaver Galleries, in conjunction with Edols and Elliott, decided to present their works in an online only exhibition.

The artists have been making the work for many months and it was agreed this was a better option than postponing the show. Both glass artists, they work on each piece together and then separately. After jointly developing the concepts, Edols goes to the hot shop to blow the forms, and Elliott then carves the design into them.

Seeing such beautiful objects on a computer screen does not do them justice.

Edols and Elliott have worked together for many years. Five years ago they faced a major upheaval in their lives together which caused extreme stress, particularly to Elliott. She had nightmares of being confronted by tidal waves, of being deluged by overwhelming surges of water.

These large works, inspired by this stressful event, are tall, and, for example “Release”, (Catalogue 1), is 68cm high. Elegant in form, its bowl is heavily carved. A turbulent ocean crashes against a rugged, mountainous shore, somewhere in the distance. The carving is layered and the water is defined by green and blue canework.

“Crescendo”, (Catalogue 3) is in cobalt blue which darkens towards the top of the narrow neck. Again, the bowl is heavily carved, with high waves crashing into each other, known as interference. One wave crashes over another and viewers can imagine the surging white spray on the crests of the waves.

The fifth work, "Roaring Deep" (Catalogue 5) is 33cm high and the carved wave takes up more than two-thirds of the bowl. If this was a wave towering above me in my sleep, I would be terrified: it is almost vertical with another wave suspended to follow quickly. Green cane work swirls its way around the base.



"Menace tide", blown & cut glass

Perhaps the most threatening work is "Menace", (Catalogue 2). The deep carving rises halfway up the clear glass and evokes the Japanese wood cuts of the 19th century, particularly "The Great Wave off Kangawa". The wave is caught just as it begins to drown whatever is underneath. One feels sure this wave is a powerful force, with destructive powers.

The fourth work, "Ocean Deep" (Catalogue 4) is a bottle form with straight sides and a tiny neck. For me this work adds a feeling of calm into the other four works. The carving – which covers the form – is not so tumultuous but eddies and flows around it.

Canework follows the carving giving it lively colour and energy. The ever-present waves are not threatening.

Each of these works have tension, and contained and controlled kinetic energy. However, it's necessary to zoom into the surface of each work to see it to full advantage.

Edols and Elliott are important Australian glass artists, who have given their audiences such a great deal of pleasure for many years. On the Beaver Gallery website, after an image of each work, there are several images showing the artists at work. Edols is in the Canberra Glassworks hot shop, and Elliott is in their Sydney studio engraving the surface. These are useful for those who may not be familiar with the processes the artists use. They also give an idea of the sizes of the works: consider the weight that Elliott is holding up to the grinding stone.

I wonder how difficult it would have been for someone to walk around and video each work, with one of the artists talking about each piece. The video could go right into the surface, as one would if seeing it "in the flesh".