



Installation shot of Mel Douglas's exhibition at Beaver Galleries, Canberra



Alternative view of 'Between the Lines' at Beaver Galleries, Canberra

MEL DOUGLAS between the lines – studio glass

Beaver Galleries, Canberra, 23 January – 18 February, 2008

MEL DOUGLAS is a young Australian artist whose austere glass vessels demonstrate an aesthetic refinement well beyond her years.

A locally trained artist, who graduated from the ANU Institute of the Arts with 1st class honours in 2000, Douglas has been awarded several accolades for her work during her short career, and she exhibits both in Australia and internationally with merit. A mere two years out of art school in 2002, she won the prestigious Ranamok Prize, and to prove she was no one-hit wonder, followed this up with the internationally acclaimed Lino Tagliapietra Prize of Young Glass at the Glasmuseet Ebeltoft, 2007. With these achievements in mind, it is not hard to see why, at only 30, she can boast a place in the collections of the National Gallery of Australia and in the Corning Museum of Glass in the US.

This latest body of work on display



'Rise 2', 2008, blown, cold-worked and engraved glass, 22 x 39 x 39 cm

at Beaver Galleries does not veer from her established practice of creating elegantly simple, process-informed vessels which invoke an awareness of time, space and light. The artworks on show at Beaver demonstrate a refinement of earlier investigations of form and surface qualities that result in a thematically tight and uniform show.

Upon entering the gallery space

the audience is met with a collection of mid-scale works that present an elegant but monolithic presence. Unusually, the artist subordinates the usual showcase qualities of glass – light and colour – in favour of sanded-down matte surfaces which are more akin to a ceramic medium than glass. The result, in conjunction with the organic forms of her grey-scale pieces, offers a subtle sense of metamorphic materials. Grey-scale works, such as *Overlay 3*, consist of enclosed vessels that bring to mind the monolithic totems of the past, such as Stonehenge.

Other works, such as *Warp and Weft*, are more domestic in scale. With this work, as in others, repetition is a tactic employed by the artist to create a sense of harmony, and conforms to the mathematical, and by association, neoclassical notions of purity and measured beauty. A cool palette is introduced in these works as a pleasant relief to the minimal black-and-white which dominates the single pieces in the show.

Douglas's vessels venture beyond the everyday notions of contain-
'*Overlay 3*', 2008, blown, cold-worked and engraved glass, 37 x 37 x 31 cm



'Two States 2', 2008, blown, cold-worked and engraved glass, 37 x 36 x 36 cm

ment and function with her larger black glass vessels, allowing us to peer into their glossy interior. Works such as *Rise 2* possess surface qualities that reflect light on the inside, and absorb it on the outside, allowing this simple form to operate as a vortex of light. Additionally, the surface of every piece is meticulously engraved with linear, topographic marks which meditate upon the journey our eye takes around these careful forms.

This exhibition also introduces us to wall panels, a new way of working for Douglas, that are akin to embossing and further her investigations of drawing on glass. A pair of white panels, *Open Field 3*, sets up a particularly perceptive dialogue with the formal white gallery wall upon which it is hung using only rhythmic marks to differentiate between the two.

Mel Douglas's mark making subtly draws us in with exquisite intricacy, and the core of her works are distillations of experience. Hence the viewing of such subtly crafted objects demands our attention beyond the momentary, and sensitises us to the artist's own experience of crafting and looking.

Sarah Vandeeper

