

TOM MOORE

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The medieval morality play, whose characters personify human vices and virtues as well as the dubious institutions of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe, is just one, but arguably the foremost, of several historical archetypes that serve, collectively, as a useful backdrop for a short commentary on the work of Adelaide glass artist, Tom Moore.

Moore's all-floating, motoring, posturing, and occasionally levitating pageants of idiosyncratic social intercourse, comprise an imaginary world in which figures are realised in blown and hot-worked glass and set within low-budget, mixed-media scenic locations.

Despite their absurdist humour, Manga-like fantasy and daffy demeanour, Moore's glassy theatres of evolutionary chaos are underpinned by a philosophical seriousness and concern for the ecological fragility of the planet. These are no superficially comedic tableaux, although at first glance they might appear as such, given the sleepy-eyed, mutant weirdness of the artist's fish-faced, carrot-nosed, potato-headed, capsicum-bodied successors to the time-honoured Everyman stereotype; the universal man or woman on the brink of an uncertain journey in a world populated, with ratbags and rogues intent on causing mischief to society and environment alike.

Elsewhere, Moore's pageants have invited comparison with the vegetal heads of the sixteenth-century Italian painter, Giuseppe Arcimboldo; and with the hybrid creatures of Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* (c.1500); or else with the nonsensical illustrations of Edward Lear. Such is the evocative reach of Moore's latter-day surrealist manner that all these references are equally valid.¹

Technically speaking—and in a country where achievement in the idiom of kiln-formed glass² is cited as our nation's main claim to international fame in the context of the studio glass movement³—Moore concentrates on blowing and manipulating glass in the venerable Venetian manner, using internal patterns of 'threads' and 'ribbons' that hark back to the Renaissance.

Moore's sensuously worked glass forms also recall various styles of lampworked ornament,⁴ but most conspicuously they evoke, albeit on a much larger scale and with far less detail, the colourful little figures made in Nevers, France from the sixteenth century onwards.

That said, for all his glassblowing skill, Moore's mastery of historical technique is 'lightly worn' and never compromises the fundamental spontaneity and satirical impact of his imagery, with its pendant spanners and hammers, *vetro a fili* and *vetro a retorti* patterns, fish-cars, and the ubiquitous tufts of lurid green foliage without which no Moore panorama would be complete.

In his *Metamorphoses* (8 AD), Ovid tells of a topsy-turvy world after a great flood, when 'all was sea' and, in consequence, fish were

caught in the topmost branches on a tree, anchors were found in meadows, dolphins dwelt in woods, wolves swam with sheep, and strange waves pounded mountain peaks. The disorientation of Ovid's imagined world, we might say, is not unlike the subtly menacing, metamorphosed world of Tom Moore's imagining.

1. See Julie Ewington's essay 'Moving Right Along' in *Moore is More*, exhibition catalogue, JamFactory Contemporary Craft and Design, Adelaide, 2009.

2. The technique of fusing and forming glass in a kiln as opposed to shaping an object by blowing molten glass at the end of a blowpipe.

3. Glass objects made by independent artist-craftspersons as opposed to factory production by glassmakers working to a designer's specifications.

4. The technique of shaping objects by manipulating clear or coloured glass rods ('at the lamp') that have been softened over a small flame.