

NOT BACKLIGHT

*“... both illuminated and revealed,
darkened and dramatised.”*

By Kirsty Francis

NOT's artistic motivations pulsate with a deep sense of environmental consciousness through which he interrogates global trade and reciprocity, politics, power and greed, surveillance and data mining. With concern for the commodification of trade and the manipulation of mined resources, NOT looks at the consequences of these activities on the environment, on human existence, and the future.

For *BACKLIGHT*, his second solo exhibition at Kronenberg Mais Wright in Sydney, NOT presents a body of work that is both fragile and strong in material composition offering a symbolic meditation that juxtaposes the fragility and resilience of the natural world explored through the medium of glass. *The China Syndrome (nuclear family)*, 2022, brings together a collection of objects illuminated in the fluorescent yellow-green glow of uranium glass, now discontinued. Within this still life narrative, we see the sweet and sour fruits of our pleasure such as grapes and a lemon, and those of our demise – seed heads of the opium poppy, the lifeless body of a tiny bird – near extinction as a highly sought-after delectable, and candescent slumped organic forms, including a Blackwood tree stump cast in recycled television screen glass and uranium.



The China Syndrome (nuclear family), 2022, kilnformed cold-worked discontinued uranium glass, 20 × 154 × 64cm



Name your poison, 2022, cold-worked and sand-etched handblown coloured furnace glass, 26 × 18 × 18cm (each)

A series of *Blackwood* photographs amplify the growth patterns, cracks, and crevices of the stump with variations of light: cathode, neon, phosphorescent, and blacklight. “When an object is backlit, its form is both illuminated and revealed (a mobile phone or computer screen), darkened and dramatised (a movie monster or Rembrandt’s *The Night Watch*). Such impulses are contradictory, highlighting a simultaneous desire for darkness and light, the effects rendered through human manipulation with a deliberate if at times disguised intent,” NOT explains. *In delerium, walking through the neon lights (New Territories)*, 2022, an installation of radiant coloured glass rods (recycled) filled with noble gases symbolic of a forest of bamboo, is “warning us how something which spends much of its time underground (bamboo) can burst with noxious energy when conditions become unchecked, not unlike a nuclear spill,” he says.

Australia has one of the largest natural deposits of uranium, amounting to a third of the world’s resources. The Parliament of Australia website states: “Australia currently exports about 10,000 tonnes of uranium oxide per year from three operating mines.” It also says, “The future of Australia’s uranium industry will depend on the balance achieved between environmental concerns surrounding nuclear power, proliferation issues and the possible greenhouse gas emission benefits of using uranium as a fuel.”

Despite being labelled as clean energy with zero emissions released into the atmosphere, the by-product of uranium-derived energy is highly toxic radioactive waste that must be carefully contained and stored to avoid nuclear fallout. Over 430 nuclear powered reactors currently operate across thirty countries, and since 1942 when the first reactor was built, upwards of 100 nuclear disasters have occurred releasing radioactive material into land, water, and the atmosphere.



Five point palm exploding heart technique, 2022, glazed basalt and polished discontinued uranium glass, 9 × 21 × 12cm

On a positive note, NOT explains: “At the heart of *BACKLIGHT* is glass – now, ironically, being celebrated by the UN, in this International Year of Glass, for its environmentally sustainable and life-affirming properties (scientists are currently utilising glass as a way to stabilise nuclear waste through a process of vitrification). By contrast, *BACKLIGHT* reveals an artistic medium that is more contradictory and volatile: a material made of molten form through cooling, harnessing fragility and strength, darkness and light.”

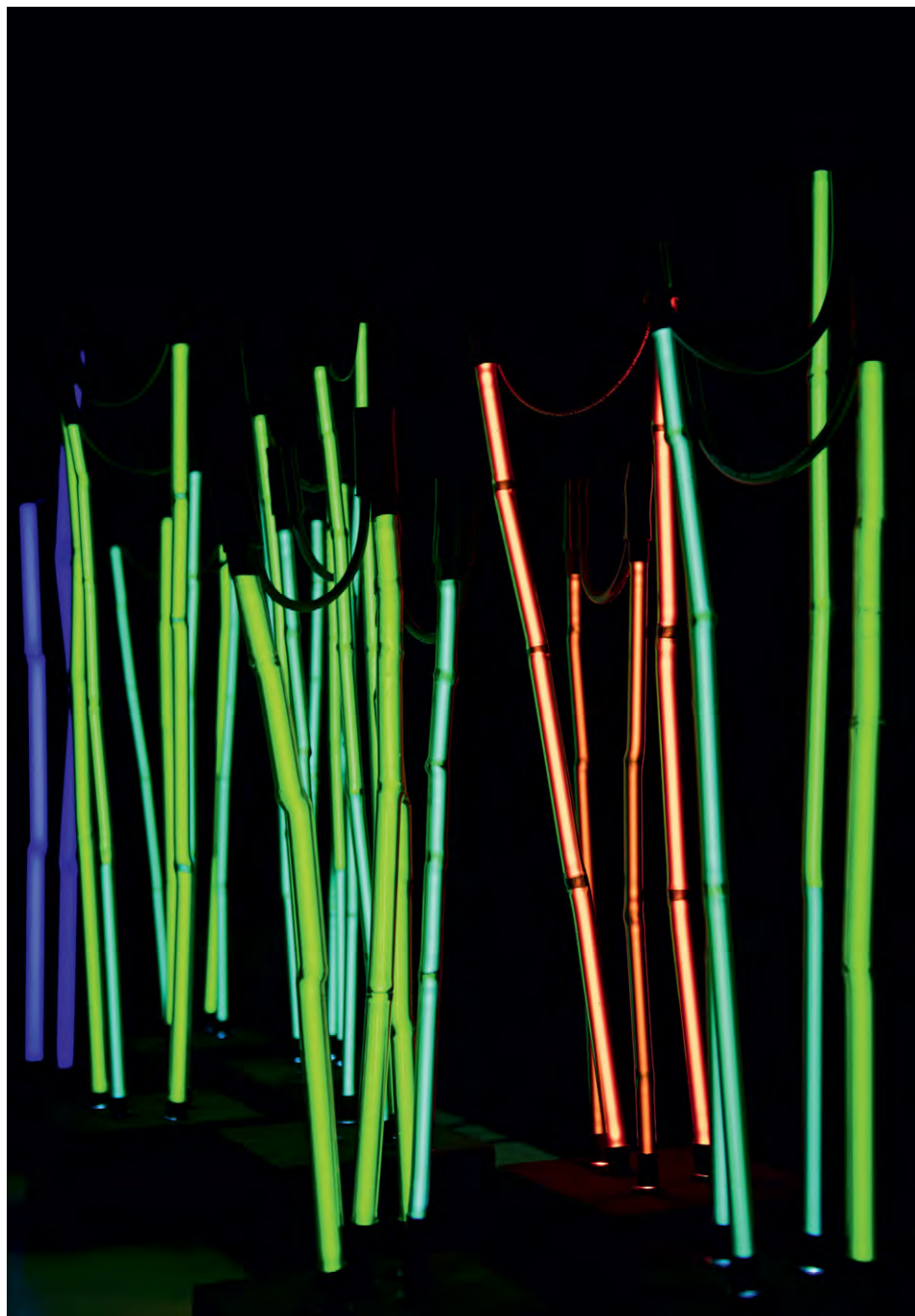
Five point palm exploding heart technique, 2022, draws inspiration from the martial arts death strike of the same name. The deceptive move implies little impact, yet it can kill, much like the silent unseen seepage of poisons into land and waterways. *Name your poison*, 2022, presents three ironically beautiful shiny black bomb-shaped glass vessels etched to reveal the universally recognised bright yellow radioactive safety symbols that warn of dangerous hazards.

BACKLIGHT asks us to heed the warnings in our quest for greater wealth, power, and technological advancement, before it really is too late.

Kirsty Francis is a Sydney-based writer.

Kronenberg Mais Wright
Until 19 November 2022
 Sydney

All images courtesy the artist



In delirium, walking through the neon lights (New Territories) (detail), 2022, cold cathode (neon) and argon-bombarded discontinued glass, dimensions variable