

Magical, complex works with intense colours

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TOM Rowney: *Aventurine Spirit*. Canberra Glassworks. On until May 7, 2023. canberraglassworks.com.

Aventurine is a specific kind of quartz that is shot through with tiny sparkling mineral inclusions. Its use in connection with Tom Rowney's work suggests that the artist has seen a link between his own body of work and the intense colour of this quartz (in particular the green aventurine) and its ability to reflect light.

Rowney's glass spherical forms, vases, goblets, candlesticks and bowls are illuminated and reflected in the mirrors on the surfaces of their display plinths and gallery walls. This dramatic effect evokes a sense of theatre that is magical particularly in the darkness of the Smokestack gallery. Yet, as well as this ability to

make such an initial dramatic impact, these works are also subtle and complex with their different layers of glass and trailing network of patterns and markings. The segments or *tesserae* (the name of this series of works) of deeper coloured shapes are linked by these networks of fine glass trails and are accompanied by areas of clear glass so that light penetrates through the forms.

Rowney has long been interested in the glassmaking murrini and canework techniques of Venetian glassmakers. The use of coloured glass canes to create flowing repeating interwoven patterns throughout the glass is a centuries-old Venetian technique.

Rowney has worked with these techniques to push them to the edge of their potential - what results is glass of several surface levels that can project simultaneously

intense translucent colour. Paradoxically, patterns are controlled yet appear free flowing; colours are restricted in number but give the appearance of opulence. The intensity of the translucent colour is well illustrated by two works; *Cherry Low Form* and *Blue & Green Tall Form* where the intensity of the red and green translucent colour has the richness of medieval stained glass. Two of the most spectacular works among the many on display are the *Bronze & Gold Tall Form* and its companion, the *Bronze Low Form*. The *Bronze Low Form* in bronze coloured glass has a flower-like shape with radiating petals. The *Bronze & Gold Tall Form*, a glowing gold firebrand, seems to radiate light from within its overlapping shell-like patterns that are stretched in shape through the glassmaking process as they ascend to



Tom Rowney, *Cherry Low Form Tesseract Series*, 2022.
Picture by Adam McGrath

its tapering neck.

Rowney's candlesticks, candelabra, goblets and stemmed bowls make playful homage to the centuries-old Venetian seahorse motif. The motif was possibly derived from Roman images of Neptune's chariot drawn by seahorses and was used since the mid-16th century as a decorative

device on Venetian gondolas. It is still used in Venetian glassware. Rowney has refined this seahorse motif, embellished its decorative characteristics and used it to twine around the stems of his glasses and embrace the surface of his candlesticks and candelabra.

Tom Rowney is an artist of considerable stature both

here and internationally. He has worked overseas at the prestigious Pilchuck Glass School in Seattle, USA, at Creative Glass in Zurich, Switzerland and in prominent glass studios in Australia.

His long association with Canberra began in 1991 as a student at the Canberra School of Art where he later took up a series of professional roles.

He is currently the technical director at the Canberra Glassworks.

To create works of this complexity is a great technical challenge. Rowney obviously has the support of other skilled members of the Canberra workshop team.

These beautiful and magical art works not only reflect the artist's love of glassmaking traditions but also his creative ability and skill to carry this tradition into a contemporary context.