

Karen Cunningham



Hover-ring stack, 2008 hand blown glass, 280 x 290 Photograph: Mick Bradley

“I want to create a sense of the glass as supple – as if captured mid-movement while molten – displaying a smooth, shiny, inherent fluidity”

that experimental work, such as the metal/glass forms of her final year of visual art studies, was largely set aside in favour of production design work, particularly bottle and platter forms. In the later stages of her Associate program and into 2008 the artist began, through her *Hover-ing* series to explore ways to develop a body of both sculptural and functional forms.

Inspiration

For Cunningham, the fluid qualities of molten glass have always been the heart of the action. She describes her work as “essentially trying to capture the fluid molten form. It’s really luscious. It’s a beautiful material. But, it’s also about trying to capture that quality when the glass has cooled down to a solid state.”

Visualisation

Cunningham makes drawings as part of the planning process. They tend to be more like technical diagrams, assessing the amount and placement of ‘gathers’ of glass to determine the final product.

“I have an image in my head and I don’t have the drawing skills to capture it. So I found it easier to try and make it in glass. There may be odd occasions when I try to make it in other materials but not very often because I can just as easily make it out of glass...I don’t go

into it (planning a work) with sketches or any real idea of what it’s going to look like. I tend to let the metal shape it. Let the gravity shape it and try out different things. I know it’s finished when I can look at it and say, yes, that’s what I’m trying to capture. It’s got fluidity. It’s making a unit with the metal.”

Process

Many of the metal components are sourced from scrap metal yards. When selecting objects the artist is looking for qualities such as rust and surface patination as well as structure that add character to the object. She explains, “the metal informs the shape of the glass.”



Na₂CO₃-SiO₂-Fe₂O₃, 2007, hot formed solid glass, found metal object, 2000 x 450 x 300 Photograph: Grant Hancock



Descend Series 1 (Dripping Box), 2005, hot formed glass and found metal object, 1200 x 400 x 500 Photograph: Michal Kuvanek



Studio investigations during the final stages of Karen Cunningham’s visual art studies centered on interplay between found metal objects such as grills, containers and machine parts, and modules of clear glass. Of this body of work the artist has commented, “A unique harmony is created through the combination of glass and metal. In this body of work the luscious movement of glass is captured and new life is given to abandoned rigid metal. The contrast and duality conveys my interest in the interaction, balance and complementary roles of different individuals.”

The emphasis on skills-based training within the Associate program meant

Realisation

The artist’s interest in the idea of duality and of opposing forces being brought together is expressed in *Anchor*. The glass looks as if it is being squeezed by the clamping force of the metal bracket. The *Nebula* platter is an example of a wide range of platter forms in which the artist explores qualities of fluidity. The idea for *Hover-ing* came partly from the experience of working on a commissioned project involving making a set of ‘top hats’. The process of folding back the lip to create the ‘brim’ suggested the idea of turning the lip down to touch or almost touch the supporting base. The artist also wanted to find a break out form from the series of circular platters she had been making.



Nebula Series platter, 2007, hand blown glass, 500 x 460 Photograph: John Neylon