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Ausglass Vicki Torr prize winner

in conversation with Sharon Harrison

Back in January, Ausglass members had the opportunity to vote for the most outstanding emerging artist member, to be awarded the Vicki Torr Online Gallery Prize. The overwhelming winner for 2016 was NSW based artist Clare Peters. Her series of carefully layered and polished glass blocks impressed many in the member-only vote and earned her the \$2,000 cash prize. Ausglass editor Sharon Harrison asked her to explain a little of her background and the influences on her work.

Clare Peters is a former cardiac specialist nurse and educator.

Throughout her 20 year health career, she pursued her underlying passion for glass making as a hobbyist. But when she left nursing, she brought her professional drive to her glass interest and decided to become a full-time artist.

She enrolled in a Bachelor of Visual Arts at the Australian National University's Glass Workshop and relocated with her family from the NSW Central Coast to Canberra. In 2015, she completed her degree with First Class Honours and along the way garnered the College of Arts and Social Sciences Honours Scholarship and an Emerging Artist Support Scheme (EASS) award in 2014 and 2015. It was a challenging, but rewarding time, Clare says, as she learnt new technical skills and an understanding of creativity on a personal level.



'I caught glimpses of where I wanted to be, and where I fit artistically - not just within glass, but within the arts.'

'Initially I was concerned that I may have left my change in career direction too late. But I quickly realised it is never too late to follow a passion that feeds you, and that my previous desire as a nurse to help people could be translated across to my glass practice, where works that bring hope and beauty may help to inspire and uplift, just as I had been able to do through my nursing career.'

So what drew Clare to using glass as a creative medium?

'I was first drawn ... through the craft of leadlighting,' she explains. 'I loved the richness of colour and design, particularly in the historical stained glass windows of the Gothic cathedrals. Although I still have a passion for this technique, and appreciate its richness and beauty, I am now more intrigued by the way light is transmitted through glass rather than just the colour of the glass itself.'

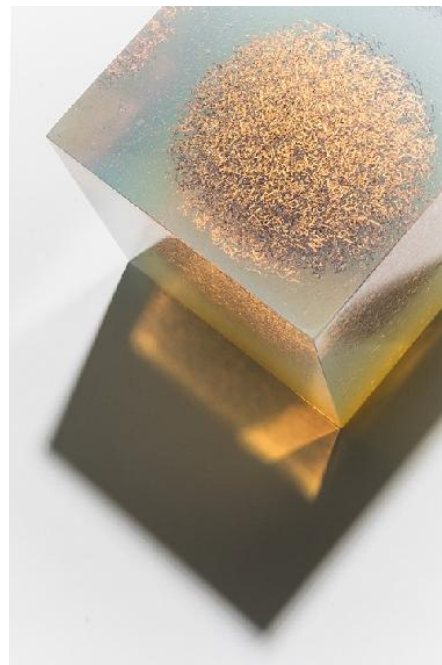
There was a pivotal moment for Clare during her Honours year, while contemplating the late Stephen Procter's *Light Works* installation at the university, which changed her creative direction away from stained glass work.

'This connection had held me quite strongly until a moment of realisation occurred, which I can pinpoint to the day - a tremendous epiphany which seemed to release me emotionally into other glass methodologies... I identified the promise that light holds.'

'In *Light Works*, a work of clear glass prisms and mirrors, Procter reveals the most refined shaft of light - that of pure light. He had expressed that pure light holds the secret of colour, expressed most perfectly in the seven vibrations of the rainbow.

'It is these same shafts of pure light which pass through Procter's work that also passed through the Gothic stained glass windows, carrying with it a message of hope, where the rich array of colours are cast onto the floors and walls of the buildings that contain them.

'It was in viewing Procter's *Light Works* that I saw this same light transmitted not through coloured glass, but through clear prisms and yet still cast these same rich colours into the surrounding space. I realised that 'pure' light contains this richness and promise even though we cannot see it. This shaft of light transmitted through my works contains not just the promise of



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a rainbow, but in the case of the block works, also the promise of the text (in this case the psalms) contained within them, and still illuminated by light.

Since that epiphany, Clare has gone on to develop her multi-layered forms. And under the influence of artists such as Stephen Procter, Libensky and Brychtova, Brian Corr, and Tadao Ando - who she says all harnessed light within their works in differing ways – the nature of her forms have ‘... evolved to a more reductive, minimalist aesthetic.’

‘My recent works arose out of a desire to explore the materials of light, glass and text to create works that allow the beauty in life to be revealed, bringing with it a sense of wonder and hope. I seek to utilise the inherent properties of glass (that of beauty and transparency), and of light (a strong metaphor for transformation and hope). I love the way light can transform an object or situation and change the perception of an experience, just as an aptly spoken or written word can effect a similar outcome.’

Clare’s technique of using multiple fused layers allows her to include text within the form. In her work *Wisdom and Knowledge* she has selected text from the Old Testament book of *Proverbs* on Wisdom, deconstructed then reapplied them to the glass in layers. ‘The layers are then recombined and fused into a sculptural form, suspending the words in space – creating a place for inspiration and intimacy – a place of refuge.’

Where to now?

Clare has taken considerable time developing her body of work, but feels it is still in its early stages.

‘I would like to explore it further, which will take time as it is a very labour intensive methodology - both in the making and finishing processes. But that is part of what I love about it. In developing this work it has highlighted the extent to which I am connected to the physical act of making.’

‘Upon reflection I realised that the slow, contemplative process of creating a carefully crafted piece is in itself a form of devotion.’

‘Every detail of the process - the planning, repetition, technique, attention to detail and consideration of text - is all a form of meditation where the interconnection of materials, process and ideas come together. Thus the outcome of the finished form is a reflection of my intention, and becomes embodied in the work itself. I am sure I am not alone in this experience and many would relate to a similar encounter within their own practice.’

Clare is already achieving success with her work. One of her series *Wisdom Contained, Wisdom Revealed, Wisdom Explained* is currently on show at the Wagga Wagga Art Gallery where it received a Highly Commended award in the National Emerging Artists Glass Prize. During the year she will also be exhibiting work at Form Studio and Gallery Queanbeyan, M16 Chute Space in Griffith, and Belconnen Arts Centre. And, of course, there is also her Ausglass Vicki Torr Online Gallery Prize win, which she sees as a ‘huge privilege’.

‘Apart from the very generous prize, which has assisted me in purchasing a casting kiln in order to continue my block works post university, I hold this award with such thankfulness as it was awarded by the amazing Ausglass community whom I respect and admire so much. It has also given me the encouragement to know that people find beauty in the work, and confidence to trust my ideas and aesthetic decisions.’

Images courtesy of the artist: (previous page): *The Awe of Wisdom – detail 2* (photo Greg Piper); (this page from top): *Wisdom and Knowledge (detail)* (photos David Paterson); *Wisdom Contained, Wisdom Revealed, Wisdom Explained* (photo: Greg Piper)

