



THE ALCHEMY OF COLOUR in Mandi King's Glass

Mandi King's career in Australian glass came about almost by accident. Originally from Columbus, Ohio, in her final year of school, King saved the money from her part-time job to buy a pottery wheel. She played around with ceramics, working up crude cups and bowls. "I did a lot of material study in my basement."

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Glass was her second choice at Alfred University, New York, world-renown for its ceramics program. But she took to it quickly. It seemed to capture the essence of graphics and sculpture, with its unending possibilities for light, form and colour. She stumbled across a book on Australian glass artists that sparked the desire to study at Adelaide's Jam Factory. She was attracted to the potential for glass with high design elements that went beyond existing trends in American studio glass.

The combination of highly skilled technique with an appreciation of the contemporary art context is a consideration in King's own work. She draws her inspiration from graffiti art, animation and ambient electronic music, as well as 1950s innovators in furniture design such as Charles and Ray Eames, and Verner Panton, who introduced the pop aesthetic to furniture design. Colour is a central theme to her work, particularly the dynamic of bold, graphic, contrasting colours.

"There's sort of an alchemy to colour. Those sorts of contrasts create imagery that is alive and vibrant in its own right. What really attracted me to glass was that I felt that it could express, that it could capture those colour combinations in a way that not a lot of other sculptural mediums can, with the exception maybe of plastic and resins."



Bauble Bowls



Telescopium

Texture also plays an important role in the identity of King's finished pieces. The innate beauty of molten material worked in the glory hole is refined and exploited through the contrasting effects of industrial machinery: flatbeds, circular saws, handgrinders. "The juxtaposition of soft, warm, voluptuous organic forms with the cold, hard, graphic lines and finishes that can be made with machinery – there's something really radiant about that." King experiments with magnification and distortion, with perfectly cut, polished surfaces through to really rough, lathe-worked textures.

She is a stubborn experimentalist. "I'm a bit of a romantic. I have to scratch the itch. I can be in the middle of finishing a commissioned piece then suddenly lightning strikes. As soon as that piece is finished, I'm off in a new direction with my glassmaking. Quite often there are dead-ends but sometimes I create something really, really beautiful, something really, really spontaneous."

Glass is a high-energy material and with production costly in Australia, King is keen to explore the use of recycled materials. "In every finished piece, there are often two or three that fell on the floor, or end up in bins and skips. They are good materials, just not



Seeking Symmetry

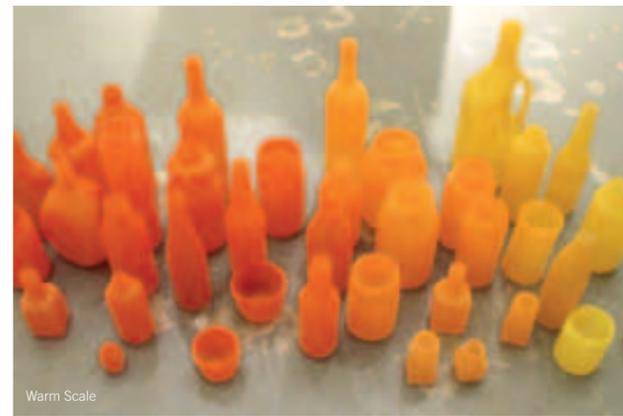
fully realised.” King is organising them into colours, melting them down. “I’m not one hundred percent sure what I’m going to do with them yet, but I can see lots of potential. There are a lot of beautiful,



Rocket Vases

innate qualities in those giant chunks of melted down, recycled glass that can be applied to new pieces in the future.”

The Adelaide Hills are home to King now. They have cultivated a new appreciation of nature. “I live literally in the bush. I’m finding now that a lot of my surroundings



Warm Scale



Newrainbow Vases



Bubble Boxes



Rainbow Bubble Boxes



Bubble Boxes

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craft community. Everything is sourced and made locally. For King, imported work cannot compete with the nuances of handmade artisan work.

There is no shortage of retail interest in King’s work, but with many galleries facing the financial crunch, the need to seek out new avenues for glass making is imperative. “Finding the right context for your work is definitely a challenge.” But after four years working freelance, King finds the investment extremely rewarding. As she moves from



Supernatural Bowls

in the Hills are starting to inform my work in new ways that I wouldn’t have seen before.” The community is self-sustaining, both socially and environmentally, encouraging responsible art practice. Illumini, King’s collaboration with fellow glass artist Karen Cunningham, uses materials and labour solely from the Adelaide



Organic Bubbleblocks

emerging to established artist, King is gravitating towards larger projects, both in scale and concept. She has come a long way: from her basement in Ohio to her studio in the Basket Range, looking down through the valley and the forest and out to the sea. **“To be able to go to the studio every day to make my work, makes me feel truly nourished.”**

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