

My Collection

I have always been a collector; some would say a hoarder, particularly of books. At age five I collected paper ephemera (wine labels, beer labels, cheese labels and fruit tissue packaging) from trips to France. I loved the colours, typesets and designs. I often think that I should have studied fine arts or design rather than Agriculture. In my junior school years I turned to stamps when they were still made of paper and had to be carefully hinged into albums. Heraldry and flags and the use of colour and devices fascinated me. I was also sport mad and designed jockey's silks and football strips!

While at university I collected plants, as herbarium specimens, insects pinned in shadow boxes and started a lifelong love affair with Japanese prints. I bought two beautiful insect and plant prints by Barei from the early 19th century and was hooked.



Barei – Bees and Hydrangea – the first print in my 'serious' collection

I specialize in contemporary (1950's onward) sosaku hanga (creative prints) and have over 125 prints in my collection with some excellent examples from some fabulous artists. More on them in later articles.

As an aside I would recommend Bruce Chatwin's (very) short novel *Utz* to anyone who wants to understand collectors. *Utz* is an eccentric porcelain collector in Prague who is so obsessed he is oblivious to the Iron Curtain. It is a parable about human fascination with the beautiful and obsession.

I had bought a few pieces of Scandinavian glass – paperweights and small functional pieces – over the years but it was a gallery in Berrima in the NSW Southern Highlands where studio art glass first caught my eye. It was beautiful, expensive and mysterious. The interplay of opacity and transparency, strength and fragility, clear and coloured glass and its obvious craftsmanship made me want to explore studio art glass, a relatively new (50 years this year) school.

Driving home one evening I saw a cardboard sign on the side of the road advertising a glass plate sale so I stopped. The artist was Dagmar Ackerman and she was later to be my first teacher. I bought a piece that was simple and elegant in yellow, red and black.



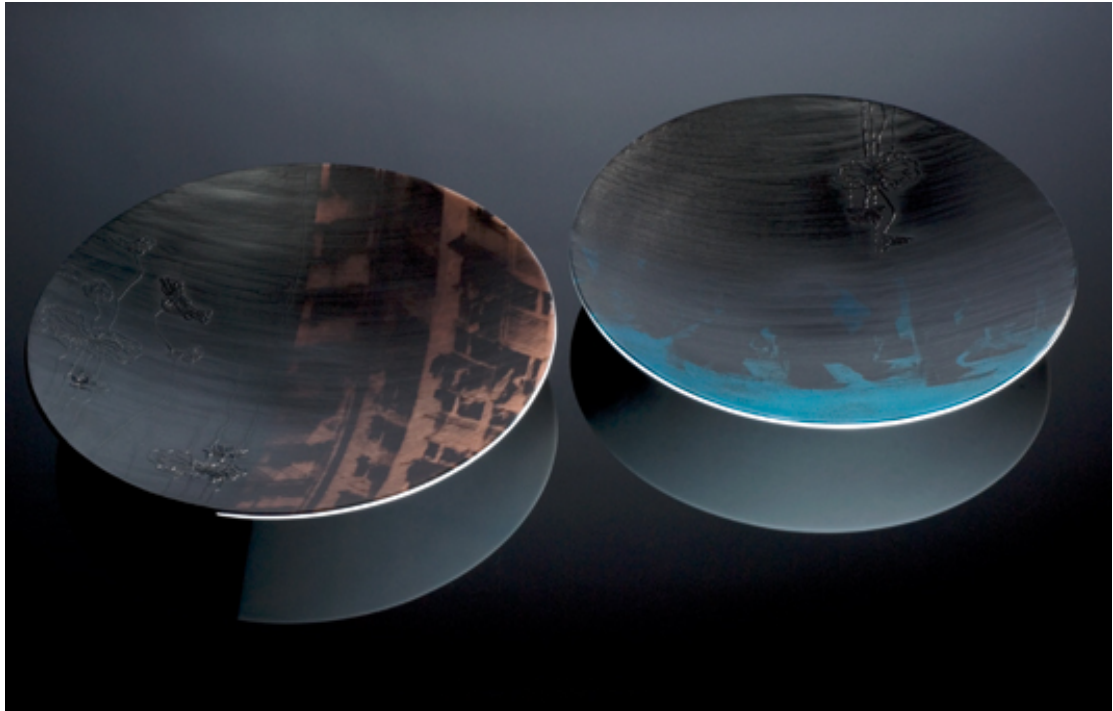
Dagmar Ackerman – Two Autumn panels not (yet!) owned by me

Buying the first few pieces is easy. Not buying any more pieces is the hard part! I was fascinated by how Dagmar had made the piece and researched glass fusing online and bought books. I knew my career as a banker was coming to an end and I wanted a new beginning. I own and run a sheep farm near Goulburn that is heavy physical work. Studio art glass would be my creative outlet and become a business in its own right with a weekly stall at Paddington Markets and regular commission work.

The Ranamok Glass Prize is an annual acquisitive award for glass artists who are resident in Australia and New Zealand created by Andy Plummer (himself an ex-banker and glass addict) and Maureen Cahill (artist and owner of Glass Artist Gallery in Glebe) as a way to promote glass as an art form to the public in 1994.

“The work presented for consideration for the Ranamok Glass Prize is expected to be a major effort in the artist's personal body of work. This work should be innovative, displaying excellence and imagination in quality of idea and execution in contemporary practice.”

It was really by chance again that I walked past the building foyer that was the venue for the 2007 prize. The diversity of work was astonishing. I thought I had read widely and understood how to make glass pieces but the works on display blew me away. I bought the two fused, slumped and etched plates, Lotus Dreaming, by Clovelly artist Kate Baker. She has since gone on to bigger and bigger things and is represented by the Bullseye Glass Gallery and has had sell out shows at the Sabbia Gallery in Paddington.



Kate Baker

Lotus Dreaming 1

Kiln formed glass
13 H x 45 W x 44 D cm
each, 2 pieces

“Urban scapes depicting facets of crowds and architecture reflect environments created in the pursuit of modern societies. Contrasted against the traditional and highly decorative motif of the lotus flower, this new body of work seeks to question the paradoxes inherent in our quest for progress and inspiration.”

I also bought a beautiful framed glass work by Jennifer Taylor. How did she make the glass blocks and how did she produce the symmetrical images that did indeed look like a reliquary or the shroud of Turin? I found out how in a Patty Gray’s master class when we made ‘pattern bars’, layers and layers of coloured glass strips and frit that are fused into a block and the sliced with a diamond saw. It is such an interesting technique and makes you think in three dimensions. I have made several pattern bars and exhibited two at the TAP Gallery Spirit show in 2010.



Jennifer Taylor

Reliquary for Memories (a)

Kiln formed glass
8 H x 8 W x .6 D cm
each, 5 pieces

“Reliquary: a container for precious objects.”

Memories are stored throughout the body; embedded deep in blood and fat and fibre. When the time is ripe, something prompts these memories to percolate and rise, flitting in and out of consciousness. Shards form and reform, generating the new and bringing up the old.”

It was a while before I understood the technical challenges of glass and its versatility. I bought a kiln, some tools and some glass and froze. It wasn't so much an artist's block it was more fear of failure. I procrastinated programming the kiln controller. I could not get in to a glass fusing course, not because they were full but because they were so undersubscribed they were always cancelled. Not an auspicious starting point.

About a year after installing the kiln I finally found a course with Dagmar Ackerman and the addiction began! I followed up with a 'master class' with the incredibly generous Patty Gray and a sculptural class with the amazing Emma Varga. The kiln hardly had a night off as I experimented with layering, deep stacking, frits, paints and colour, always colour.

My next major purchase was at the 2008 Ranamok. The Mariner is as huge a 'lump of glass' as they come. It is extensively cold worked so even though it is

made of clear glass the opaque areas create beautiful plays of light and shadow. Its reflection creates the illusion that the mariner is the boat and that he is the water too.



Brent King

The Mariner

Cast lead crystal glass
16 H x 103 W x 15 D cm

“A human voyage, seen and unseen.

The effects of an undertow,
felt and not felt.

The conscious and subconscious journey, floating above and below the
horizon.”



I purchased one of Colin Heaney's Psyche goddesses at auction as part of a box of odds and sods. Just lucky I knew what it was amongst all the rubbish. Heaney is no longer working with glass but has moved on to textile design.



Bertil Vallien – the legendary designer at Kosta Boda – “Reflections”

Vallien is a legendary designer and this is a beautiful piece of trompe d'oeil work. His boat sculptures are exquisite but hard to find these days at affordable prices. I really love his work and was thrilled to find a piece by him at auction. It is not a boat but a couple of figures will do! More on Vallien in another article.



Gunnel Sahlin – a Kosta Boda designer – I own the outside two pieces

Gunnel Sahlin was originally a textile designer and trained at the College of Arts Crafts and Design in Stockholm. Kosta Boda recruited her to their team of designers in 1986 and she has worked as a professor at the same college where she received her education.

As a designer, she embarked on a "glass voyage" where she explored the unimagined possibilities that glass holds. She also discovered how glass can "lift" colour and make it vibrate and come alive. In her designs the colour often creates and supports the shape.

When she designs she loves letting different surfaces and colours affect each other. Deep down in her soul Gunnel is a romantic and she finds her inspiration in many places - journeys, pictures of old houses, graffiti, colours, New York, folklore, art and nature.



Judi Elliott – I unfortunately don't know its title

Judi Elliott, one of Australia's most acclaimed glass artists, works and exhibits art glass nationally and internationally. Her work is kiln-formed and sculptural and her inspiration is all things architectural, employing simplified geometric forms and bold primary colours combined with expressive textures.

Originally a ceramic artist and member of the Potters Society of Australia, Judi Elliott discovered glass and commenced her studies at the Glass Workshop at the Australian National University School of Art. After graduating in 1985, she travelled to the United States to study at Pilchuck International Glass School near Seattle.

I have some pieces by South Australian Julio Santos, four clear glass cubes with blue nudes suspended inside them made by a Kosta Boda designer, Xeng, a firing test piece by glass engraver Anne Dybka and some other smaller pieces of Scandinavian factory work. All in all a small but carefully considered collection. I would like to buy something every year from the Ranamok but while the quality and diversity stays incredibly high so do the prices. It would have to be something extraordinary for me to buy it.

That does not mean that the collection won't get added to over the next ten years. Perhaps I am more discerning or perhaps I now understand more about how the pieces are made and will "have a go" myself before spending my profits.