

Nick Mount: Blow by blow  
Reconfiguring biography: A genre in motion

Volume one

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# Thesis Table of Contents

Abstract	4
Thesis declaration	5

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## Volume 1. Nick Mount: Blow by blow

Preface	8
1. The scent of the maker	10
2. At the furnace	13
3. Red dots	31
4. Ties that bind	50
5. All fired up	71
5. Repeat and return	92
7. Holy Toledo	112
8. The Nick and Dick show	130
9. Doing the hand jive	146

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Chronology	166
End notes	172
Select bibliography	179
Image credits	182
Acknowledgements	183

## Volume 2. Reconfiguring biography: A genre in motion

Introduction	3
An evolving genre	11
Ethnographic reflexivity in biography	21
Appropriating narrative nonfiction	36
Reshaping the narrative	47
Conclusion	55
Works cited	58
Bibliography	64

# Abstract

## Volume 1. Nick Mount: Blow by blow

## Volume 2. Reconfiguring biography: A genre in motion

I will argue in this thesis that an increased ethnobiographical life writing approach contributes to the contemporary construction of identity. Where, the extant qualities of a subject's lived experience, is the primary objective of biographical enquiry.

The creative component is a work of ethnobiographical nonfiction about South Australian studio glass artist, titled, *Nick Mount: Blow by blow*. It is comprised of a series of separate thematic narratives which act as entry points into more comprehensive, intimate and historical explorations of Mount's identity, and reveals Mount's contribution to Australian visual arts culture.

The exegesis, *Reconfiguring biography: A genre in motion* briefly charts the evolving genre of biographical life writing. It explores ways in which increased ethnobiographical methodologies; narrative nonfiction, and non linearity contribute to contemporary constructions of identity. I will explore ways in which an increased incorporation of reflexive practice and creative analytical processes, and key elements of narrative nonfiction including, immersion, scenes, stance, and point of view; and two features of non linearity, including narrative connection and achronological structures additionally enhance ethnobiographical life writing.

# Thesis declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

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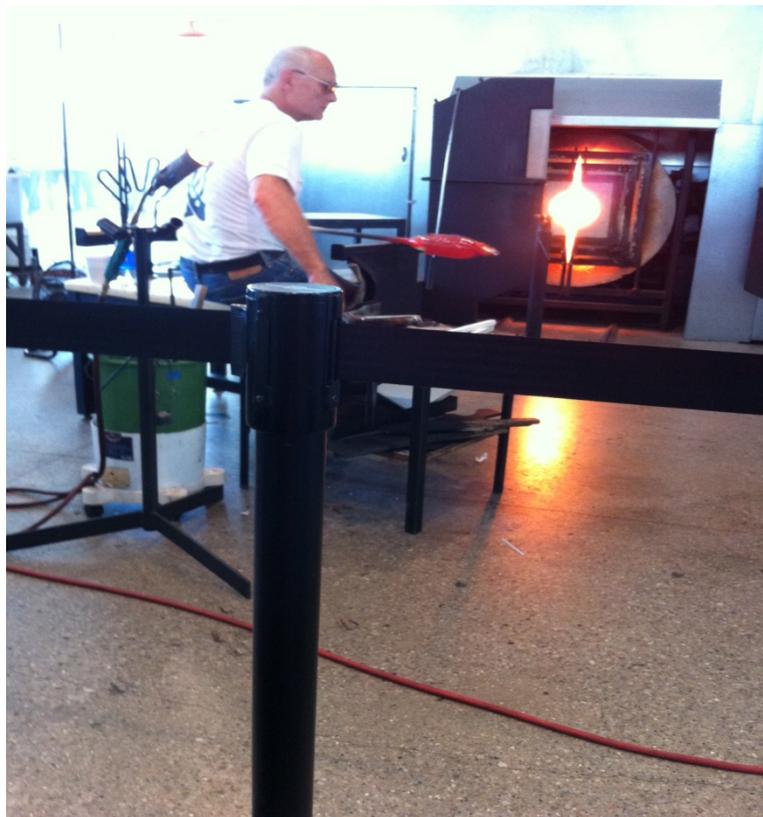
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# Nick Mount

## Blow by blow

Volume one



Denise George

*Most accounts of particular persons are barren and useless...because they are written too late...If a life be delayed till interest and essay are at an end, we may hope for impartiality, but expect little intelligence; for the incidents which give excellence are of a volatile and evanescent kind, such as soon escape the memory.*

*Dr Samuel Johnson, 1750.*

# Preface

*Nick Mount: Blow by blow* explores the visual arts practice of South Australian Glass Artist, Nick Mount, operating from the premise that Mount's life, as life *per se*, is a work in progress.

Mount *makes* glass; it's what he does, it's how he defines himself, and it's how he is defined by the culture in which he lives. Most artists agree the work they create is of primary importance and are reticent about spending time focused on anything that distracts them from the act of creation. Once Mount agreed to allow me to observe him I was mindful of this and focused on exploring significant aspects of his art practice to provide a picture of a contemporary glass artist.

*Nick Mount: Blow by blow* is the result of first-hand accounts, interviews, and unstructured observations conducted between 2011 and 2012. Public events act as entry points into aspects of Mount's identity development

His omnipotence strings together narratives which explore his artistic origins, being a maker, significant others, materiality, glass culture, important influences, and the nature of work. Mount maintains a local, national, and international reputation in a complex creative workplace. His work is physically and visually captivating. His relationship with Pauline, his wife and partner, continues to build momentum after more than forty years, and their collaboration plays a significant part in his individual and artistic development.

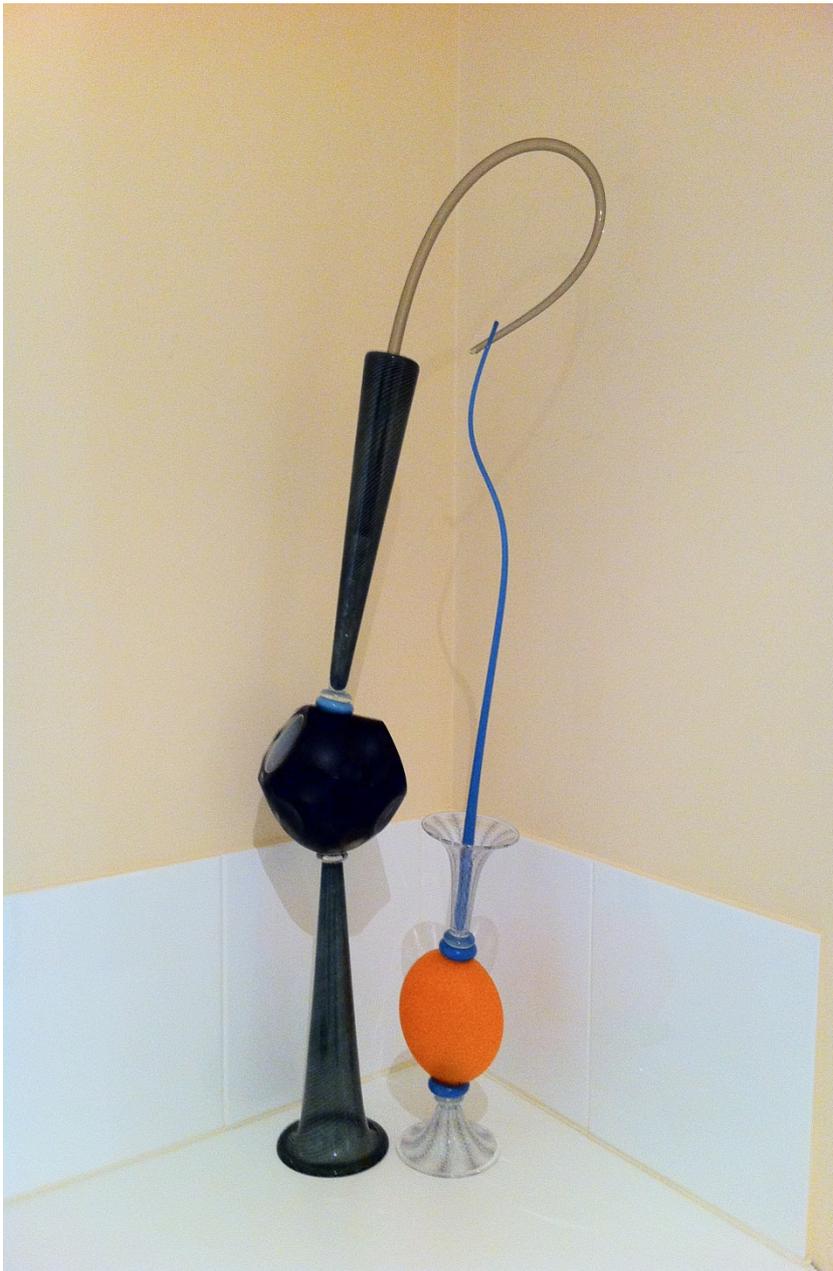
This is not a critical analysis of his life and oeuvre. Nor is it a definitive biography about the artist. It is an accumulation of encounters between myself and Mount which reveal

some, but by no means all elements of his practice. By exploring aspects of Mount's lived experience I simultaneously highlight the commonalities shared by other visual artists, especially glass art practitioners. I employ realist narrative nonfiction gained by immersing myself in aspects of his life to contribute to a contemporary portrait of Mount; that is, an account of his lived experience in real time.

'The scent of the maker' introduces the essence of Mount's creative force. 'At the furnace' describes his glass making practice in the hot glass studio. 'Red dots' highlights the tension between the commodification of art and making a living. The relationships between Nick and Pauline, and artistic mentor and friend, Richard Marquis are explored in 'Ties that bind.' The demands and practical considerations inherent in national and international exhibitions are examined in 'All fired up.' Mount's role as teacher and mentor are uncovered in 'Repeat and return,' and his connection with the American studio glass movement is surveyed in 'Holy Toledo' and 'The Nick and Dick show.' The final chapter 'Doing the hand jive' reflects on the value of hand work and the importance of labour in Mount's art practice.

In the world of glass in which he resides the past holds the key to the future but he is firmly grounded in the present. And it is in the present that my pursuit of the scent of the maker begins.

## The scent of the maker



*Something about the moon, 2005*

*“I wanted to start a series that could be never ending. A traditional perfume bottle always has the same components. They have a foot, joining component, a vessel, a neck, a lip, a stopper, and a dripper. They are well conceived, finely crafted, well resolved objects. They will always carry the scent of the maker and more often than not, even resemble the maker. It’s a wonderful thing that you can make a piece that reflects you in such intimate details.”*

*Nick Mount*

A few months after first meeting Nick Mount I attended his 2005 exhibition of *Scent Bottles* in Gallery One of the JamFactory Contemporary Craft and Design Centre, more affectionately known simply as The Jam. It was a glass menagerie of embellished and flamboyant *Scent Bottles*. Some stood resplendent with sand blasted acid etched surfaces covered in drawn lines, while others, festooned with bright orange and tangerine flames, stood in contrast to a beautiful array of small subtle hued gem-like murrine embedded vessels. The catalogue offered the compositions to the public with titles like *Bodies, Listen, Visibility, Light, Drawing, Song, and Plumb*. The names were prosaic but the *Scent Bottles* were anything but.

“The finesse of his blown work is a trademark that few in Australia can match. He has persevered and perfected his glass making to the point where he can play with it impressively and imaginatively. There’s a certain amount of playfulness and whimsy about his work but it’s always immaculately made,” claims Ivana Jirasek.

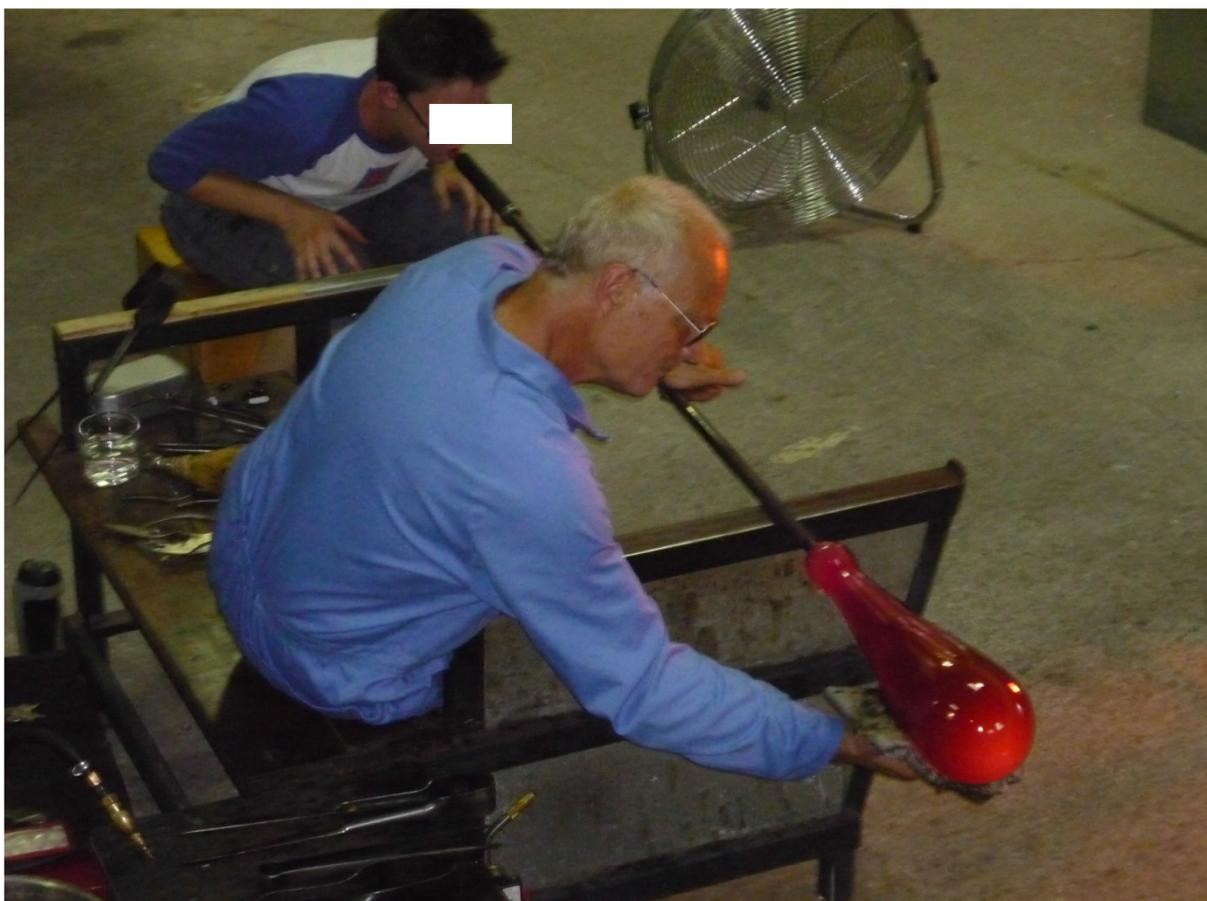
He’s adamant “It’s important to me to have a craft I can call my own—that’s who I am.”

I commissioned him to create a work with the only proviso that it had to be about the moon. He created *Something about the moon* (2005). A composition comprised of two separate metre high blue, orange, black and white scent bottles radiating the intensity of a big orange moon. Eventually he delivered the work to my door. The finely executed glass sculptures radiated amorphous qualities of intelligence, honesty, integrity, diligence, originality, humour, and sensuality. Similar qualities I had come to recognise in Mount. With each blow he had left traces of himself in the glass compositions.

Glass holds the contents of our day-to-day lives. It is laminated, coated, toughened, bulletproof, insulated, glazed, reflective, and most importantly aesthetically captivating. Noris Ioannou describes the magic material as, “fractious and dangerous, enduring yet

fragile, alluring in its glittering reflections, a barrier which protects yet permits the passage of light, a material which extends humanity's endeavours.”

## At the furnace



Nick Mount at the JamFactory

*“Since the mid 90s I have been working on an evolving series of sculptural glass works that I have entitled ‘Scent Bottles.’ The title refers in part to the compositions of the pieces and the traditions of forming small vessels in glass for the purpose of containing precious fluids. It also refers to my belief that every finely crafted work will reflect the identity of the maker”*

*Nick Mount 2011*

In the winter of 2008 Mount gave me clear instructions—walk down the lane beside the JamFactory Contemporary Craft and Design Centre next to the Morphett Street Bridge and rattle the roller door. It takes a while to be heard above the loud rock music and noisy machinery thumping away in the blistering cavernous tin shed. Eventually Mount appears wearing grubby blue overalls, dark glasses, and a wry smile. It's cold, wet and windy outside but the hot glass studio is in full swing. He is slight and fit with intense inquisitive blue eyes, an honest round face, light sprinkling of five o'clock shadow, and a thin halo of closely cropped grey hair. He makes eye contact as soon as I approach. It's a signal I've got his undivided attention. Its 40 degrees Celsius in the hot glass studio and a fine damp moustache of perspiration glistens on his top lip. His time in the hot shop is limited and without further ado he's thrusting his blow pipe into the furnace and I am temporarily forgotten. It's obvious in front of the furnace, with the glow of the fire reflecting off his body that he is in his element.

Sculpture was Mount's first orientation in the arts. "What I make are obviously non-functional objects, even though I am referring to a function. I am aware that with the original functional forms, the craftsperson has been forgotten in favour of the purpose of the object or the symbolic value placed on what the vessel contained. Using these forms as a motif, I enjoy the idea that I am making an object synonymous with glass, but that I am making an object that has been taken way out of the context of its use. I am trying to replace the maker into the process of value."

Gliding back and forth in front of the orange glow of the furnace he tells me "The work itself is such a dance...such a performance." In spite of the hard cement floor, loud whirring metal fans, clambering machines, blistering heat, noxious chemicals, and the smell of smoke, the hot glass studio is a vortex of creative bliss.

He tells me later, “It’s hard to figure out the starting point of the work that I’m doing now. Originally I started fabricating bits and pieces and working on small steel constructions, sculptural funny little things, bits of useless machinery that didn’t do anything and each piece I’ve ever made has grown out of the last piece.”

Mount’s glass sculptures are assemblages of individual components. They can take a day, a week, or a month to come together depending on the amount of surface and finishing work required. Each one begins life as a dry powdery mixture of soda, silica and lime melted in a batch at intense heat in a furnace cranked up to 1200 degrees Celsius.

“Each time we come to the studio we have a plan sketched out on a piece of paper set down on the bench,” he says. “Maybe two or three decanters as a starting point to feel where I am, so I can feel the temperature of the furnace, temperature of the glass, and the flow. Have a feel with my hands; make sure the space is right, make sure my tools are ok, and we have an understanding about what is going to happen through the rest of the session...via that starting point...using the flow of the glass on that particular day, at that particular time, after struggling through the first one or two pieces the third one comes through sweeter and I can use that to judge where I go to from there. There’s always a plan B and a plan C. If you approach the furnace it will present, if you are nice enough to it, if you keep the gas going nicely and the environment is sweet, and if you treat it like it is going to be good.”

Mount preheats the tip of a long thin metal blowpipe and dips one end of it just below the surface of the molten glass, gently turning the pipe, much like twirling warm liquid honey onto a spoon. Once the hot viscous glass is gathered from the furnace he shapes and cools it by rolling it on a flat polished metal surface called a marver. Hot glass loves to move but rapidly hardens as it loses heat. Mount’s mastery over the glass comes from forty years at the furnace and a tacit intuitive understanding of the volatile material. After reheating it to soften the glass once more, he sucks in a mouthful of air, wraps his lips tightly over the cold open

end of the pipe like a kiss, and gently blows a bubble into the centre of the hot glass making it inflate. Surprisingly, it's easier to blow than a balloon.

Mount turns and shapes the white hot glass on a nearby bench where he keeps his tools, an assortment of jacks, metal shears, tongs, mallets, wooden blocks and paddles, all scorched by a lifetime of licking flames. "Ooh that stings," he exclaims as he dampens the breast pocket of his overalls with a handful of cold water to relieve the burning sensation on his nipples caused from the heat radiating from the end of his blow pipe. Occasionally, he dribbles cold water over the thin stem of the blow pipe to cool it. He frequently cups and rolls the gathered glass in an inch thick wad of wet newspaper. The sizzling wad is the closest it gets to shaping the hot glass with his bare hands, while protecting the flesh of his palms from the molten glass. The friction sends red and blue sparks, coils of steam and smoke, and tiny fragments of burnt paper rising into the atmosphere. It's hardly rocket science, but it effectively polishes and shapes the surface of the glass.

'Part of the intrigue of glass for me is that it is difficult to get to know, you can never actually get close to it. You think you're close but you're always at arm's length...it's just so aggressive and frighteningly untouchable for its heat, its fluidity, liquidity, and its corrosive nature...you can get a feeling for it but you can never get friendly and over-familiar with it. The material sucks you in and holds you for your entire life," he says. And sure enough, his eyes never leave the hot glass. Years of experience have taught him never to take the material for granted.

If Mount is in the country he's at the furnace every Saturday morning. At precisely 7.30am he rolls up in his white Ute, pulls on his overalls and gets to work. It's a strict discipline that guarantees productivity and sustainability in an extraordinarily unpredictable artistic milieu. While he continues to mentor some of the JamFactory's most successful

graduates, Saturday mornings belong to him, and he will make as much glass as he can in his allocated four hours.

In the background the studio technicians check the furnace temperature gauges, and make minor adjustments. It's imperative the molten glass is heated and maintained at precisely the right temperature. They need to get it right every day. If they stuff up, if the glass is unstable, no one's happy. Today in the mesmerising dance between the blistering heat of the furnace and his work bench, Mount melts, pats, snips, rubs, hangs, and manipulates the hot glass into one shimmering translucent ruby coloured trumpet shape after another. He twists and turns, and rocks and rolls, flexing his body this way and that, gently swinging the blow pipe from left to right like a pendulum on a grandfather clock, using gravity to let the glass run and lengthen. Over the course of the morning Mount makes five large glass ruby red trumpets. He has a sculptural composition in mind but it will be an evolving process which he'll complete later at his Leabrook studio. For the time being the pieces are left to cool in an annealing oven which works like a reverse oven slowly reducing the temperature to prevent thermal stress and cracking.

"The labour is the most satisfying thing, labouring at the furnace; it's an intense work process," he tells me. It's apparent it's also dirty and dangerous and requires decades of tedious repetition. Mount has formed a symbiotic relationship with glass that has evolved as a result of decades of mutual interdependence. At the furnace he brings the molten material to life; in turn, it provides him with an intellectual, artistic and financial livelihood.

Mount's glass sculptures reside on plinths, and are fixed to walls in homes and galleries such as Kirra Galleries in Melbourne and Etienne Gallery in Holland. But, the creative journey starts in the raucous hot glass studio at the JamFactory in Adelaide. On any given day the JamFactory's purpose built studios buzz with emerging and established ceramic, glass, furniture and metal artists. The gallery shop at the Morphett Street Bridge

entrance is often full of people who come to browse and buy art, craft, and gifts. The four exhibition galleries house continually changing collections of art and craft from local, national, and international artists.

Toward the end of 1996, while in his last six months as Head of the JamFactory glass studio, Mount began experimenting with the first in the series of spectacular sculptural assemblages he would later title, *Scent Bottles*. He combined the apothecary style bottle and Venetian glass blowing techniques to produce a series of unique vessels which traditionally contained precious perfumes, but which now carry the scent of its maker. The scent bottles are comprised of a foot, body, neck, lip, and stopper. The colour palette is of fundamental importance to Mount. He applies transparent layers of coloured glass, one on top of the other, and cuts back through the surface of the hardened layers to spectacular effect. Each individual component is thematically and dramatically different in colour, pattern, shape, texture and form. The series of *Scent Bottles* launched Mount into an opus of infinite possibilities and consumes him far more than any other series of work in his oeuvre. In this series, as with the bowls, walking canes, fishing floats and funnels, Mount continues to explore the role of the glass maker.

I frequent the Jam through the summer of 2011 to observe Mount at work. Perth born, Tegan Empson, his assistant at the time, is a JamFactory associate and accomplished glass artist exhibiting in Australia, the United States and London. One of her glass sculptures is held in the private collection of rock idol, Sir Elton John. She's slender, fit, and athletic with short spiky dark blond hair, and keeps her intelligent eyes constantly shielded behind dark glasses.

*"I saw the crescent—you saw the whole moon...too high, too far, too soon..."* the Waterboys song blasts through the cavernous studio as Mount pulls back from the furnace with a large glowing gelatinous globe of red hot glass, soft and wobbly, dangling on the end

of his pipe. He later tells me it weighs a couple of kilo but it looks a lot heavier. He rolls the glistening ball of hot glass against wads of newspaper and the studio fills with the smell of smoke. Within seconds the bright orange glowing globe of glass fades to black and Mount inserts it back into the hot insatiable mouth of the furnace. He retrieves it, presses his lips into a glass blower's pout, and shoots a quick short breath of air down the length of the pipe into the ball of hot glass. His warm breath forms an elastic skin on the inside of the glass blob that corresponds to the cooling exterior surface. The starter bubble cools preventing the hot glass from collapsing in on itself. Whipping up a blow torch from the floor he flames the glass to keep it soft. For Mount the complex and often dangerous glass blower tasks come automatically, one after the other. There is little hesitation.

Daniel Goleman assures us the zone which Mount occupies on a daily basis is a state devoid of emotional static, save for a compelling, highly motivated focus. "Watching someone in flow gives the impression the difficult is easy and peak performance appears natural and ordinary."

Mount is constantly maintaining control of the hot glass at the end of his pipe while remaining fully attuned and responsive to the unexpected consequences of what may possibly occur. He is able to pre-empt many of the unforeseen tangents the molten glass may take. The pursuit of excellence is evident in the manner in which he works and in his completed compositions. To the uninitiated it might seem easy because he makes it look so.

"People seem to concentrate best when the demands on them are a bit greater than usual, and they are able to give more than usual. If there is too little demand on them, people are bored. If there is too much for them to handle, they get anxious. Flow occurs in the delicate zone between boredom and anxiety," says Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who proposed the theory of flow as a mental state.

Mount tweaks, heats, snips, and reheats the glass into the shape of an elongated thick sausage. It will eventually become one of his *Spirit Level* sculptures. Tegan pulls on a pair of large insulated Kevlar gloves and stands to face him. He expertly taps the pipe with the blunt round end of a pair of cold metal pincher's and the glass snaps away into Tegan's waiting gloves. She does a quick back-step, turns, and places it in the annealing oven behind her.

"*Sweet dreams are made of this...who am I to disagree? Everybody is looking for something...*," belts out Annie Lennox, above the loud whir of the air-conditioner, as Mount wanders off to the back of the studio. On his return he selects a new pipe, pokes it into the furnace to heat the tip, and dips it into the crucible of molten glass to wind on another gather. He withdraws the pipe and a large gob of molten glass drips from the tip. Looking at it, he judges whether the amount will suit his purpose. It's a crucial decision that will determine the success and failure of the enterprise. He cradles the pipe above a bucket of cold water, as he pours water from a watering can with holes in the bottom over the middle of the searing metal pipe to cool. He rolls the gather on the marver, inserts it into the furnace, twisting the end of the pipe between his fingers, withdraws, blows, rolls, and reheats again. The bubble needs to cool before it goes back into the hot furnace. After the second blow he sits at the bench, takes a large gulp of water, and dips his free hand into a bucket of cold water at his feet. He rolls the pipe along the protruding strut on the right side of the bench—slowly at first, then quicker. His movements are smooth and measured. He looks at the colour in the cooling glass. Meanwhile, Tegan gathers glass on the end of another pipe and they bring the two separate gathers of hot glass together. Will it adhere, stay in position, hold? They make it look easy. It's not. Tegan expertly cracks her pipe free from the join with a grin. Mount thrusts his pipe into the heat, twirls it, waits for the temperature to rise, the colour to glow, and withdraws. He sits at the bench and tweaks the glass with metal scissors the size of small garden shears—snipping into the hot glass like cutting into a juicy ripe orange. He pokes the

horizontal pipe in and out of the furnace, grasping it first in both hands, then dropping his left hand to one side and rotating the pipe between the thumb and fingers of his right hand. His hands move quickly, expertly, confidently, and as he does so the pipe becomes an extension of his body, and under his control.

Mount focuses on the glass at the end of his pipe and the activity at hand and is only vaguely aware of the people beginning to make their way onto the viewing platform. It's always the same. They peer in uncertainly before entering, and catch their breath as the first blast of intense dry heat from the studio floor below hits them in the face. Once through the door they are mesmerised by the performance at the furnace. It's a little like standing fully clothed in a hot dry sauna. After only a few minutes people reluctantly turn and quietly slip out. It doesn't take long for visitors to the glass studio to discover that the heat rising from the furnace is a test of endurance, and not for the faint hearted.

On the studio floor Mount picks up a cherry wood block, dips it in and out of a bucket of cold water, and lowers the hot glass into it. Without taking his eyes off the glass, he takes another gulp of water from the tumbler beside him, removes some unwanted tools from the bench, and begins to roll the pipe in the block. He rolls it back and forward; first away, and then toward himself, occasionally sipping on his water, perspiration dribbling across the side of his face and trickling down beneath the collar of his overalls.

Being a glass blower has taken a toll on his body but he remains enthralled. "I have groups of muscles that are weird and distended because I'm a glassblower. Being able to hold and turn a pipe, that's what I do best. And the rhythm and the flow, the magic of it comes from developing sets of muscles and a bodily understanding of the process." Some of the whimsical features that make Mount's work irresistible are the same qualities that make them unique.

“They look fragile; the engineering is challenging, unlikely, they are weirdly and strangely balanced,” he says.

On another day I share the viewing deck with a group of collectors from Washington USA, who have come specifically to watch Mount blow glass. The opening to the furnace radiates like a red hot sun. This morning he’s making components for his *Spirit Level* series. Tegan is away, and he’s assisted by another glass artist with a number-two crew cut and black aviator sunglasses. Mount gently taps away a few large shards of glass from under his feet with the edge of his leather clogs, and repositions his tools in readiness on the bench. He lays a couple of sheets of old newspaper onto what looks like a wooden ‘v’ shaped cradle sitting on the bench, and sprinkles it with water. He gathers a large quantity of hot glass onto the end of a pipe, rolls it on the marver, and again dips it into the crucible of molten glass and coats it with yet another layer. Then he rolls it and shapes it and returns to the bench. The assistant blows into the open end of the pipe while Mount rolls it. Stepping away from the bench he swings the pipe like a pendulum; the hot glass almost skimming the cement floor. Whipping it up, he lays the tubular shaped 45cm length of glass on the newspaper in the wooden cradle. Sparks fly as the paper singes and burns, filling the studio with thin spirals of sooty grey smoke.

Meanwhile, his assistant collects a small gather of glass onto the end of another pipe, and they join the two pieces together. Mount arms himself with metal jacks, the assistant with a wooden paddle, and they roll and flatten and smooth the surface of the glass, eventually snapping off one of the pipes. Together they have rubbed and caressed the glass into shape with loud exclamations from the crowd, and Mount gives a bow.

The following Saturday I get to the Jam late. Jimmy Barnes’ “*The last plane out of Sydney’s almost gone...*” is blasting from the speakers somewhere in the hot glass studio.

“Does it look like a beach ball?” he calls from the studio floor, shooting a look my way then back to the large spherical striped ball of glass hanging off the end of his pipe. I nod yes because it looks exactly like a brightly coloured beach ball.

Today Mount shares the studio space with glass artist and current Production Manager at the Jam, Tom Moore. Tom’s mixed media landscapes tell stories of nature triumphing over industry. His dioramas are peopled with hybrid glass creatures made up of plants, animal and machines. Another Saturday regular at the Jam, part-time glass artist and full-time Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeon, Randall Sach, arrives for the afternoon session.

“Have you worked him out yet?” Sach asks but it’s too soon for me to say. Sach regards plastic surgery and glass blowing as sharing synergies. “Both disciplines have a scientific basis and background...there’s obviously an artistic and creative element...and you have to be able to think outside the square.” Since taking up glass blowing as a hobby over a decade ago it’s become a consuming passion. In cargo shorts and a baggy tee shirt he brings a surgeon’s dexterity and precision to his glass making. He’s established a national reputation for his expertly executed anatomical sculptures.

Today thick industrial electrical cord hangs from the ceiling like grubby white streamers left over from some long forgotten party. After scooping up an overly large gather from the furnace Mount dribbles the excess off the end of his pipe into a large metal bucket. The glutinous glob of molten glass drops heavily, crackles and shatters at the bottom of the cold bucket. A number of young trainees wander round the studio cleaning up after their session. Mount whistles on his way to pick up another fresh pipe from the metal tub near the open louver windows and stands beside Tegan in front of a cardboard template pinned to the blackboard beside the furnace. He measures the piece of glass he’s working on, stares at the template so the dimensions are imprinted on his brain and transfers the dimension to the real thing with the next blow, and rolls and moulds it into the shape he wants. Tegan lays two

wooden paddles flat on the floor then lays a ring the size of the flange he's aiming for on top. Mount hangs the pipe above the ring a second and third time to make sure he's got it right. The relaxed expression on his face suddenly drops away. No whistling. No jokes. Once the piece is complete he walks toward the open annealing oven. He places it gently inside, Tegan slaps her insulated gloved hands together, Mount's smile returns, and he's whistling once more.

A small crowd congregates beside me on the deck. A boy of about seven with a shock of long curly red hair and freckles stands with his little sister, their faces pressed hard against the guard rail. Their parents pass them bottles of water. Today Mount's making a selection of *Scent Bottle* components with canes of glass. It's a technique that begins with pre-fabricated lengths of glass, which he and Tegan have made and cut into the desired length earlier. The canes add intricate patterns and colour to blown glass.

Tegan lines up twenty rods of cane in a row on a ferro steel plate which rests on prongs at the end of a pipe. The thin canes are as thick as large knitting needles and about 20cm long. They tinkle as Tegan lays them side by side. With an eye for detail she tweaks them into position with a pair of metal tongs, making sure they are the correct distance from each other, and the ends line up perfectly. Meanwhile Mount is heating and rolling a cylindrical gather of hot glass on the marver. Tegan pushes the ferro and canes into the rapacious mouth of the furnace, lets them heat up and begin to melt, removes them and with a pair of pointy metal pinchers checks they have melded together. Mount and Tegan stand side by side, their pipes extended into the furnace, their eyes fixed on the warm glow. They withdraw simultaneously. She checks the alignment and taps the end cane away; it falls to the floor and shatters on the cement. After another spell in the furnace the row of tinkling canes have fused together to form a flat sheet of hot, soft, wet glass. Mount picks up the canes by rolling his gather onto one end of the now flattened sheet, winding them on to form a solid piece of

glass. He whips the surface with a brush, and the smell of singed straw fills the air. He shoves the glass back into the furnace to heat and soften some more.

As Mount blows and moulds the ball of glass, Tegan stands beside him with paddle, tweezers, gloves, a bucket of water, and the concentration of an operating theatre assistant. After a while she sits down on a low wooden stool beside Mount's bench with her knees bent up under her, leaning forward on her haunches. She wraps her lips around the end of the pipe twirling in Mount's hands.

"Blow," he says, and Tegan blows.

"Stop," he calls softly, as she looks at the inflating glass on the end of his pipe.

"Blow harder now," he says.

It sounds like a long spit as Tegan loosens her mouth hold on the pipe and he rolls it back and forth along the protruded bar of the bench. She licks her lips with the flick of her tongue, staring off into space, a momentary lapse. He rises to his feet in a single quick smooth movement, scratches the crown of his head and lowers his face close to the glass looking for imperfections. He takes off his dark sunglasses and wipes the sweat from his forehead with the end of his sleeve. He's satisfied and cracks the glass free from the pipe.

"Sweet," he says and whistles. Looking in my direction he tells Tegan, "she's writing a book about glass with me in it." If I could be heard above the din of the studio I would tell her it's actually a book about him with glass in it. When it's time to finish up for the morning, Mount pushes up his sleeves and takes off the protective white elastic wrist bands and stuffs them into the back pocket of his overalls. He stands up straight, stretches his spine back and forward in smooth deliberate movements to ease the kinks out of his aching vertebra, slips his smaller tools into a fabric bag, rolls it up and tosses it into his tool box. The sound of clanking metal rises from the studio floor as he throw his other tools into the fire engine red metal tool box with *Milwaukee heavy duty deep cut band saw* scrawled across the lid. There

is a scattering of fragments, off-cuts, pointy shards, thin chips, and irregular marbles of glass on the floor at his feet. He picks up the biggest shards and tosses them into the cullet bucket as Tegan sweeps up.

“Is he the best?” I ask Sach.

“Yes,” he replies, without a second thought. “He works intuitively. It takes 10,000 times to learn to do something intuitively and he’s probably blown 10,000 bubbles. Some people focus on one technique, but he uses a variety and he’s mastered them all. He’s the best around here.”

Mount likens the spontaneity of glass blowing to playing a musical instrument, a talent he leant from his grandmother. When asked by a friend recently how he knew how to strum the Ukulele? He replied, “I’ve got absolutely no idea because it’s just so natural. Being able to change chords, count how many bars you’ve done, to sing at the same time, remember the words, change your voice, and remember the notes, as well as planting something of yourself into the meaning of the song. It’s such a complex set of things to do and completely without thinking. It’s like blowing a piece of glass. You can go from pure technique because you’ve done it so many times it becomes second nature or seemingly intuitive. Then to be able to design with that in mind and put something of yourself in the design is complex. I do a whole set of things with my hands without thinking because, if, at any time I think about what I’m doing, then I totally and absolutely lose it.”

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Mount’s process of free-blowing glass has been around for thousands of years. It’s a fire art where danger lurks in the blazing depths of the furnace and the hot molten material. It’s changed little over the millenniums and it’s only one of a variety of glass making techniques. Its exact origin is uncertain. Over the years archaeologists discovered glass beads, ingots, and plaques in coastal north Syria, Mesopotamia, and ancient Egypt dating back to the

third millennium BC and little has changed in the ancient art of making glass. If you wandered through an Egyptian village during the Late Bronze Age you would have been privy to the sight of Egyptian artisans standing in front of their open wood fires, the flames licking dangerously close and searing the hairs on their bare arms. Under closer inspection you would have seen artisans expertly winding pliable ropes of hot glass round moulded cores of sand and clay. They wound thin coloured threads of glass made from oxides on to the mounds and festooned them with vibrant patterns created with handmade tools. They carefully attached handles and feet, ground the glass, and scraped out the core of sand with refined techniques borrowed from years of stone masonry.

Mediterranean artisans migrated westward during the Iron Age and took glass making to Yugoslavia, southern Austria, and finally to Italy. By the time the Mediterranean emerged from the Dark Ages, glass making was an integral part of an arts and craft revival that has gone in and out of fashion ever since.

In 30BC, Julius Caesar's nephew and heir, Gaius Julius Caesar Octavian, defeated Mark Anthony and Cleopatra, and in doing so, brought the Hellenistic epoch to an end. Octavian set about establishing an honest government and successfully restored peace after a century of civil war. He set up a stable monetary system, fostered free trade, erected bridges and built roads connecting the provinces. As the Roman Empire began to take shape a proliferation of new buildings and aqueducts appeared adorned with works of art. Romans across the country developed a taste for the good life and began to accumulate possessions of wealth and prestige. One consequence of the growing Roman upper class was the number of large glassworks that sprang up to meet the growing need for beautifully crafted objects. A desire for possessions of splendour enabled Roman glassblowers to master and exploit the inflationary properties of glass and eventually glassblowing workshops spread through the provinces to Venice.

The *Portland Vase* is one of very few free blown Roman glass objects to have survived from this period. It is made in the shape of a two handled long neck cobalt-blue amphora exquisitely overlaid with a paper thin layer of opaque white glass. Once the first stage of the amphora was complete it was delivered to the local gem cutter who meticulously carved the intricate glass relief to create a cameo effect covering the vase. The precious and few expensive and luxurious glass objects like the aforementioned amphora in due course became more commonplace, and eventually every-day household glass items lined the shelves of Roman homes.

In 1291 the Venetian Republic forced the glassmakers of Venice to re-establish their foundries. The immense fire risk of the glass furnaces led to the removal of the glass industry to the island of Murano. Fourteenth century Murano glassmakers enjoyed immunity from prosecution and their daughters married into some of Venice's affluent families. The skilled glass blowers became the island's prominent citizens. They were essential to the Venetian economy and discouraged from leaving Murano by governing bodies to prevent them from setting up business elsewhere. Venetian artisans produced luxurious dinnerware, mirrors, and other glass objects using a mixture of local quartz pebbles, pure silica, combined with soda ash obtained from Levant, for which they held sole monopoly. The Venetian merchant fleets carried glass to the world and for 400 years Venice maintained its glass supremacy. The ancient glass masters of Murano were a privileged guild and today's glass craftspeople still consider Murano the centre for Italian glassmaking.

Two notable champions of Venetian glass of the Victorian era, John Ruskin and William Morris, believed nothing beautiful in glass could ever be produced unless there was a return to the high principles governing Venetian production of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Morris, inspired by the writings of Ruskin, is said to have led the arts and craft movement of England that spread to Europe and North America in the early 1800s.

It rose to prominence as a reaction against what many considered to be an impoverished state of decorative arts. The craft movement advocated economic and social reform. This resulted in a resurgence of glass making in Venice and by the nineteenth century it had travelled to Europe and Asia.

“Murano is an extraordinary sociological phenomenon which has created itself with its furnaces as the hub of activity...and the pride that the makers had in their ability to produce still affects the way I feel about glass today,” says Mount.

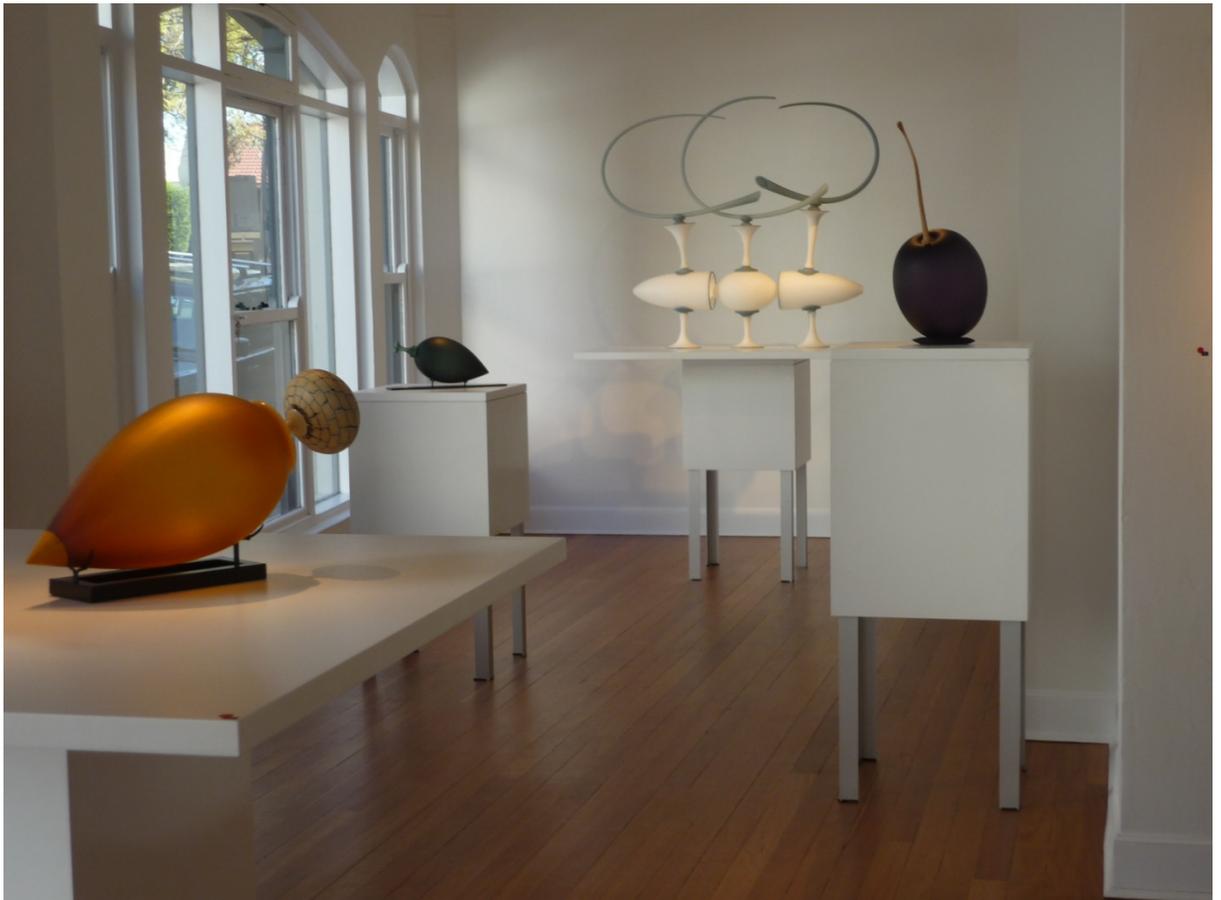
In post-war Venice the glass blowing renaissance in Murano was inspired by a new generation of master glass blowers, including Paolo Venini and Ercole Barovier. Glass historian, Dan Klein says that when the Venini factory reopened in Murano after the Second World War, it did so with “characteristic Venini wit.” Venini favoured a juxtaposition of century old techniques with a Venetian desire for spontaneity and elusive elegance in his non-functional glass pieces. A glass umbrella, pair of gloves, revolver, woman’s hat and purse, and a walking-stick were exhibited at the first Milan Triennial in 1947. The Venini phenomenon carried through into the 1950s and 60s. During which time the first wave of American studio glass-artists including Dale Chihuly and Richard Marquis made their way to Murano. Mount was seduced by the properties and potential of glass during a chance meeting with Marquis in Gippsland in 1974. Following his initial attraction Mount went to America and spent time blowing glass with Marquis in Benicia, California. In 1975, while visiting the glass factories on the island of Murano, Venice, Mount’s infatuation blossomed into a full blown affair.

“They are such magical places,” says Mount of his experience in the Venetian glass factories. “I watched them making glass as they have made it for hundreds of years. The relationship between the designers and the makers, and the makers and the medium was powerful stuff for me.” Mount’s distinctive idiosyncratic glass sculptures have strong visual

and historical links with Venetian traditional aesthetics. He incorporates a number of the Italian glass making techniques including Zanfirico (cane working), murrine, and battuto (carved surfaces). No one, least of all Mount, realised this fortuitous collision of creativity, innovation, passion, and tenacity would foreshadow a long career.

“I think creativity can be learnt,” says Mount. “I think it comes from working with your hands. You are not automatically creative. You somehow have skills and you get drawn in and intrigued...the material and the process and the way you apply yourself gives you the chance of building up a friendly relationship...that gives you the opportunity to *be* creative.” Today Mount’s life is defined by the transformative qualities of glass.

## Red dots



Sabbia Gallery, Sydney.

*“On opening night it can be pretty nerve wracking because as a craftsperson...you make a little piece of yourself and you put yourself on the pedestal and you say this is me, what do you think of me, this is my heart and soul, everything I’ve been able to gather together in my skills and in my mind and I’ve put this on a pedestal and I’m asking you to please comment on it. To buy it if you want.”*

*Nick Mount*

The sun glistens on Sydney Harbour like beams of light reflecting off glass and I realise the harbour city is a perfect setting for Nick Mount's *Plumb: New works in glass* exhibition at Sabbia Gallery. Prior to the Sydney exhibition I met with Mount at his small Leabrook studio in Adelaide nestled amongst the vegetables and flower beds in the family's rear garden. There's an old worn couch for visitors with soft music playing in the back ground. He tells me a recently acquired commission will pay for another water tank to add to a number of large tanks in the back garden. After the frenetic tempo of the Jam's studio it's a cool haven of quiet contemplation and an Aladdin's cave of glass compositions. Some are complete, others little more than eclectic bits and pieces of various shapes and sizes strewn across tables and shelves.

"I do things here that other people can't stand. The cutting, grinding, and polishing, it's detailed and fiddly," says Mount. And he works at it for days at a time. "It's tiring, wearing, tough hard work, but I get so wrapped up in it, I love it."

The Sabbia exhibition has already been advertised. "It's going to be called *Plumb*," he tells me, picking up a large blown component to give me a better look at the fine crisscross pattern embedded in the polished surface. Sabbia Directors, sisters Anna Grigson and Maria Grimaldi don't specify what work they want in the exhibition. But Mount is conscious of designing and creating sculptures with their clientele in mind and fitting the number of pieces into the space available. The gallery owners want to meet their commercial and financial obligations and Mount admits he wants to make sales so he can move on to the next piece. But most importantly, he wants to make work that reflects who he is.

"Some people find something sexual in the pieces but I don't necessarily see that myself, but a lot of people do partly because they have preconceived ideas about the seductiveness and sensuality of the material itself." Pointing to a piece on the table he explains, "It's a slightly oddly engineered composition, a little bit quirky but it reflects the

traditions, formality, simplicity, and solidity of the craft and its material. I might be fooling around a lot of the time but I'm serious about the objects I make and how they are crafted, finished, textured and weighted."

"How did you get those markings?" I ask looking at the fine criss-cross snake skin pattern embedded on the surface of the glass.

"With a fishnet stocking," he replies. "I sprayed it with the air brush and enamel, then let it dry, cut it off and fired it." He picks up another large component. "This one's had four firings, different layers of colour scratched back and then I've layered another colour and then another colour...it's not finished yet I'm still working on it." I notice many of the new works recline on stands.

"*Reclining bob* has been with me for a while but I'm feeling that I need to make them look like they are more important pieces with museum style presentation. But I still like the randomness of the soft cushioning," he says, lifting one of the small handmade soft pillows used to cushion some of the *Reclining bobs*. "Does this look like an acorn?" he asks holding up a piece of blown glass that looks like an acorn the size of a football. "It's the olive and the acorn and I'll probably make a third something to sit with it to make up a still life composition. And I think I'm going to carve some olive wood into the little stand...but I'm not sure how to present the still life yet. I think it will be three components. It has to be stable...but I haven't figured it out yet." The still life under discussion was entered into the South Australian Waterhouse Natural Science Art Prize later that year. In 2013 his entry *Fruit Salad #090312* was awarded the Waterhouse Sculpture and Objects prize.

He turns his attention to a metre length of blown glass shaped like a thick bent sausage lying on the table. "I'm going to start working on this series here which represents the bubble out of the middle of a spirit level—it has a curved glass bubble—and I'm going to work the surface and cut the two ends off. I'll implant a coloured piece of glass like a bubble

in the spirit level...that's the starting point for it...I don't know how much they'll look like spirit levels when they're finished...It's about tools—about plumb—about the nature of material and the simplicity of the tools and how they describe who we are...I am blowing the spirit level out of its natural proportions, using exactly the same motif, putting it in a different environment and drawing attention to *it* as an object...for me personally *plumb* is also about being centred...centred and calm which I never am," he laughs.

A couple of weeks before the Sabbia show I visit his studio again to see how things are progressing. He's already been to yoga, and picked up the previous day's work from the JamFactory. He's busy feeding logs into a pot belly to take the chill off the air. He's wearing a soft grey woollen beanie pulled tight over his ears. A small pale yellow enamel bowl containing a mixture of orange cumquats and water bubbles away and fills the room with the scent of citrus. Mount rummages through two small cardboard boxes on the rug at his feet. He picks up one roughly wrapped package of blown glass after another, and lets the discarded sheets of crumpled newspaper float to the floor. Collecting components from the Jam and adding them to the array of others in his studio is a regular Tuesday morning ritual. He unwraps each piece and holds it up to the light. He wants to make sure the colour has run the way he planned. The tips of his fingers caress the smooth surface as he runs his hands over the recently blown glass.

It's not always possible to ascertain the creative origin of each component. Some ideas slowly simmer, some brew for weeks. Many are bright flashes—a word, a suggestion, an unformed image, a fully formed concept. More importantly, like one warm breath after another, they keep coming. Sometimes the creative possibility doesn't take shape in his mind until he dips the tip of his blow pipe into the crucible of molten glass.

He takes the newspaper off a cobalt blue thin tubular funnel. It's the insert for one of his signature long neck wine decanters. "It's a difficult colour to get right," he says, holding it

up to the light happy with the result. The popularity of the functional wine decanters and other commission work continues to provide a regular source of income. The decanters are aesthetically alluring and quirky but it's the exhibition pieces that allow Mount to experiment and stretch his creative ingenuity.

After unpacking the boxes he leaves the strewn newspaper and larger glass components on the floor and sits on a stool in front of me. I've made myself comfortable on the couch beneath the window overlooking the garden. He glances absentmindedly at the recorder as I click it on. Exhibitions play a crucial role in Mount's development as an internationally recognised glass artist. They have become a key factor in determining his reputation and the market value of the work, and are a good source for future commissions. Our conversation eventually gets round to the rush to get everything ready for the up and coming Sabbia exhibition.

"There was a lot happening in the past week and I cut the end of my finger with the bolt cutters, totally crushed it. It split open like an over ripe mandarin. Randall took a look at it and said it would be okay," he grimaces, pointing the mangled index finger at me. Reconstructive hand surgeon, and fellow glass blower, Randall Sach, decided it didn't need stitching. It was, needless to say, a painful, albeit temporary, handicap for an artist who works with his hands. He's cautious about safety in the studio but sometimes the unexpected happens. On another occasion he was cutting a piece of hot glass with metal shears and the cut end of the hot glass slipped round and sliced into the back of his hand. It cut deep into his flesh but because the material was so hot it cauterised the wound at the same time and stopped the bleeding. It was a reminder of the hazards of being a glass blower.

He recalls "There was a woman who, through poor studio protocol, happened to manage to pick up the hot end of a blowpipe and it stuck to the inside of her hand. It caused a horrific injury, right there and then, first experience of glassblowing. And so you realise very

early on that it's pretty dangerous material. Once you're burnt by glass you get the idea it's a bad thing. The burns go deep." He's reticent now the work for Sabbia has been packed and shipped. It's been a busy time and he's also been working on other commissions and projects in the lead up. I wonder whether getting it right and getting it done give rise to inner conflict?

"I was surprised at what happened for this show because I didn't end up giving myself enough time to make it all work which is very unlike me. I hate working in a rush, making decisions that might be compromised because I haven't been able to devote enough time to them."

"What are you like under pressure?"

"You'll have to ask Pauline," he laughs.

I ask how he's feeling now the work is on its way to Sydney.

"I always get anxious shipping the work to a show. It's packed up and then it goes off on the truck and I think oh shit that's it. It's like getting on a plane and signing yourself over to fate because you've done everything you possibly can and if it crashes...it crashes." Later he says, "The way you feel about a project after it's all finished is about the compromises you've had to make along the way. And nothing turns out perfect. You determine its value, its worth, its exhibitability, or how you feel about it yourself by the compromises, and so, if you are in a hurry, you tend to have to make more compromises, but nobody sees that in the work. But time is always an issue."

Making art is not about making money, it's nonetheless an important consideration in determining creative productivity. Recent research indicates artists' creative activity is seriously curtailed and constrained by their limited finances. In Australia, only 12 percent of all artists spend one hundred percent of their working time at their art practice. It's taken the Mounts over forty years of emotional and financial peaks and troughs to maintain a full time creative and financially rewarding artistic enterprise, even so, there are no guarantees. Both

Nick and Pauline are aware that a lot of time continues to be occupied by work that is not art for art sake.

Mount's work is loosely divided into three main categories: the commissions with clearly defined briefs to which he comes up with work accordingly; functional and commercial glasswork, including runs of wine glasses and the like; and lastly, his own self-generated creations. I assume this must be frustrating, but apparently not. The challenge inherent in some of the difficult commissions forces him to work outside his comfort zone, pushing him to experiment and develop new ways of working. The three categories feed each other placing different demands on him while offering a variety of benefits. So now the current series of work is on its way to Sabbia—what's at stake?

"It would be good to makes sales and it would be great to have a good looking show in the space and I definitely work to the space. I really work hard on trying to visualise where things are going to go, how they are going to sit in the space, what kind of impression I want to get when people walk through the door. I've changed my attention from being really flamboyant to being calm. The flamboyant part of what I've been doing for a long time has been a lot about the American market and that's not going to come good any time soon. But that has also been a barrier in a way because the engineering of the work is purposefully made to look fragile and delicate and that's not necessarily about me. I like forms that are more serene. Not necessarily minimal because I like objects that are addressed intensively. So I'm now trying to work toward that. Smell that," he says, taking a whiff of the stewing cumquats on the pot belly.

"We've got spirit level bubbles, more of those hanging bobs and I've got some other pictures if you want to see them," he says heading back into the house and returning with his laptop. He brings up the photographs his daughter Pippy Mount has prepared for the Sabbia catalogue.

“Here’s *Plumb*, and *Hanging bob*, and this is the big hero piece. It’s the same shape as the spirit levels with the bubble in the middle. Its matt white, surface worked, and sand blasted. Ah look at Ace,” he chuckles, when a photo of his two year old grandson, his face smeared with birthday cake, unexpectedly pops up on the screen.

The compositions colours are subtle compared to the exuberance of the previous whimsical *Scent Bottles*. In this series Mount has deconstructed the scent bottles and reassembled the separate components into configurations where the individual components have become stand alone sculptures. What looks like a massive muted glass crescent moon has been sliced into small pieces and each piece stands on top of fluted glass footings, while various plumb bob components lay on their side waiting to be suspended from the ceiling and walls by fishing wire.

“Do you think you’ve toned down?”

“No I haven’t,” he insists pointing at one particular piece. “This one has got all the details I like, the form, the glassiness, the shape, the balance, dynamic composition, and a mysterious glow of red from the glue. No one can work out where the hell that comes from. Glassblowers will find it intriguing, I hope. All the details are addressed, the lines, the aesthetic, the lustre on the surface, the texture of a used tool, and the bases are made of wood.”

The olive wood and glass compositions are an eclectic combination. The glass represents the glass bubble in a spirit level and the wood base is derivative of the wood of the spirit level.

“Olive wood carves beautifully and it’s as hard as hell, and I use glass making tools to carve it.” A few of the bases have been cut and polished by Adelaide furniture designer, Andrew Bartlett. But Mount cuts, carves and polishes some of the bases. I mistake one of the bases for a new piece of wood made to look old.

“It is old,” he corrects me, “and something I like to refer to—the tool itself.”

After glancing at the dying coals in the pot belly he returns with an armful of wood. He pokes the burning logs, stoking the flames to increase the temperature in the small studio.

“I have the whole studio hot so the glue goes off faster so we go through a few tons of wood,” he says yanking off his beanie as a text message comes through on his mobile. Laughing, he shows me a photo of a table spread with large tarts. His youngest daughter, Peta, currently living in Sydney, sent a photo of a celebratory morning tea she is sharing with her work mates. The family are constantly on the move but remain close.

A couple of weeks later back in Sydney I’m sitting in the rear of a taxi weaving its way through lesser known alleyways to Paddington. The driver insists on regaling me with tales about the seedier side of adjacent King’s Cross. We turn off Oxford Street into Glenmore Road and pull up outside Sabbia, one of Sydney’s commercial galleries specialising in contemporary studio glass and ceramics.

Sabbia’s directors aim to introduce artists to collectors and help build existing and new personal and public art collections. Anna Grigson insists “The American audience is the most educated audience in the world and they are the ones who build collections and in the past ten years have responded very well to Australian glass.” I was here six months earlier for the opening of the annual Masters of Glass Series exhibition, when Sabbia played part in the Sydney 2011 Ausglass conference, the principal body for the promotion of glass artists in Australia. In that exhibition twenty five contemporary glass artists from Australia and New Zealand, Mount among them, presented one major piece of work in response to the theme of geometry. Working to a designated theme is not everyone’s preferred option but it’s one way of bringing an eclectic group of artists and glass together. Many of the artists in the show including Clare Belfrage, Lisa Cahill, Mel Douglas, Ben Edols, Kathy Elliott, Tom Rowney, and Klaus Moje are established glass practitioners and close friends of Nick and Pauline.

Grigson initiated the Master of Glass series in 1997 when she was curator and manager of Quadrivium Gallery, the precursor to Sabbia.

“The term *Masters of Glass* can be considered controversial,” says Grigson. “The audiences and collectors love it as it allows them to assess what is considered to be first class and diverse at the same time. Glass artists themselves do not particularly like the term as they feel that the title is beyond them.” It also has masculine connotations.

Mount’s extensive body of work traverses a number of local, national and international exhibitions, the list of which runs into page after page. His perpetually evolving oeuvre is in a constant state of transformation sporadically punctuated by work that comes together to comprise a number of separate distinguishable series.

Exhibitions can be experimental and liberating. “In exhibition work you look at yourself, you make something that reflects you in a way and reflects the material. You make something you find exciting. It’s a self-driven brief,” says Mount.

A number of Mount’s past exhibitions are of particular significance including, *Pagliaccio, Plates and Poppolo* in 1993, held following a period in 1992 when Mount worked as teaching assistant to European and American glass artists Bertil Vallien, Norman Courtney, Dante Marioni, and Lino Tagliapietra at Pilchuck Glass School in Washington State, USA. Noris Ioannou describes *Pagliaccios* as “a group of four attenuated vases which interpret the Venetian tradition of stoppered bottles in the form of clowns, reduced to simplified form, yet retaining the whimsical expression of the historical model and demonstrating the glass practitioner’s mastery of the fluid qualities of blown glass.”

*Les Grands Fabliers*, the first exhibitions of Mount’s signature *Scent Bottles* was shown at BMG Art in Adelaide, and Beaver Galleries Canberra in 1997. This was at a time when Mount’s reputation as an international glass artist was on the ascent with his inclusion in a number of high profile European exhibitions. He was awarded the Gold Medal, Bavarian

State Prize following an exhibition of a selection of *Scent Bottles* in *Portrait der Meister, Internationalen Handwerksmesse Munchen*. Much has been written about *Scent Bottles*, of which there are currently 120 in circulation and counting. There is no shortage of commentary on the evolving series that continues to monopolise his creative practice and productivity.

Over the years the scent bottle compositions have appeared in various guises. Wendy Walker, describes the *Scent Bottles* of Mount's 2004 Parisian exhibition, *Un Nouveau Soufflé*, as ranging from "squat and rather restrained forms to the soaring, fluid and brilliantly coloured scent bottles, with risky, vertiginous, punctuation mark-like flourishes." Adding they are, "sculptural objects representing a symbiosis of dual formative strands of influence: the distinctive Venetian glass blowing techniques, specific to Murano in Italy, in tandem with the dynamism and experimentation of American glass artists, such as Dick Marquis and Dante Marioni." In describing the early series of *Scent Bottles*, Ivana Jirasek, writes, "the oversized-perfume bottles reveal a new body of work using a variety of hot and cold glass techniques. The work explores the aesthetic of the perfume bottle, the intimate and luxury object, and offers a new interpretation by magnifying its scale and experimenting with the design of the components...to produce a series of alluring sculptures and visual jewels."

Another international show took place in Venice in late 1998 in the Palazzo Ducal. The exhibition of glass was arranged like precious jewels within the Palace walls. A selection of Mount's *Scent Bottles* stood among the display by artists known for their contemporary use of traditional Venetian glass blowing techniques.

By the time I arrive at Sabbia the afternoon light has begun to fade. Sabbia is the Italian word for sand and it's symbolic of the key ingredient in the glass and ceramic artwork represented within its walls. Grigson and Grimaldi opened the first Sabbia Gallery in March 2005 in Surry Hills, Sydney. It was the precursor to the current historic corner gallery in the

centre of Paddington opened in 2009. Its polished floors, white walls and ceilings, spacious domestic double street frontage, and abundant natural lighting is an elegant space. The assortment of individual glass components I saw strewn on the floor and bench top of Mount's home studio a couple of weeks earlier are now a fully realised repertoire of sculptures glistening beneath bright halogen lights.

Mount has long been enthralled by the plumb bob, an ancient tool of measurement. The shelves in his studio are piled high with hundreds of the humble weights collected over the years. The ordinary plumb bob, with its pointed tip on the bottom, is suspended from a line of string or fishing wire and used by tradespeople to get a vertical line plumb-straight. Mount's *Plumb Bob* compositions provide a point of reference for the viewer pointing toward the earth's centre of gravity, instilling a sense of balance and equilibrium. Four of Mount's blown glass, carved, and polished *Bobs* of various colours, are fixed to vintage spirit levels and attached to the gallery walls. The contrasting coloured tips of each point earthward; suspended in time and space. Occasionally a whisper of breeze gently spins the *Bobs* and the cut and polished lenses in the glass throw a kaleidoscope of flickering light across the gallery walls.

In this series, Mount incorporates elements of the traditional spirit level, another of the tradespersons humble tools. It's a tool, similar to the plumb bob that measures whether a horizontal surface is level. The spirit level contains a glass vial partly filled with coloured alcohol or spirit, leaving room for a bubble of air which travels until it settles and rests at the centre of the vial, providing an accurate measurement with a minimum of fuss. Mount uses elements of the spirit level in his glass creations, illuminating the modest bubble and giving it a voluptuous presence not previously imagined. Spread out through the gallery are four large blown, cut, reassembled, glued, and polished luminous glass *Bubbles*—one purple, two in varying shades of golden yellow, and another pale pink. The glue provides a magical element

in the process with the same refractive index as glass. All the bubbles rest lightly on either polished vintage Mahogany wooden spirit levels or thin planks of Rock Maple.

A single large blown deep ripe purple plum, the edible kind, with a stalk carved from olive wood, sits alone. He's playing with us now. A brilliant red and black *Working Bob* with clear convex lenses cut into its surface hangs in simpatico with a sturdy pointed *Reclining Bob* below it—a juxtaposition of working poses. A collection of oversized opaque *Reclining Bobs*, with the string that ordinarily suspends them removed, lie flat on pieces of polished wood, or in black powder coated metal stands, like the precious museum pieces he was aiming for. A trace of the tool used in their creation remains etched on the polished surface of the glass like an indelible signature. The hero piece we spoke about in Adelaide radiates elements of both the bubble and the scent bottle. It is a large cloudy opaque white glass bubble sliced into three and reassembled into a configuration of three separate but complimentary scent bottles capped off with enormous gestural stoppers and displayed as one large sculpture. At \$26,400, it is the most expensive piece in this collection.

The plumb bob and spirit level are not glass making tools but Mount has made them his. More than that, he spins them into works of art, while simultaneously turning his practice into a labour of love and toil. There is more at stake for him than artistry. Mount believes in the value of work. No matter how many red dots appear, Mount's belief in himself and his confidence as an artist and a human being depend not only on the fruits of his labour but on the actual labour itself.

“The last show we had in 2006 was called *Indigo* and it came after Pauline and Nick were in Japan and they did a collaborative collection of work and it was very successful,” says Grigson after the show. “It was wonderful and one of the best shows I've ever seen and because of that exhibition this one has been highly anticipated. He had a big show in the States last year and this show leads from that one but he is taking another big step here—

moving away from the oversized *Scent Bottles*. With this work it's all about the concentration of the artist toil—all about the work and tools.”

“How do you judge if it's been successful?”

“Sales number one probably. It's a success if the work goes home with people and gets enjoyed and shared in a context other than the artist studio. It's a great success if the public can appreciate it in a public gallery. It's a success if the artistic process in creating that work and the lead in to that exhibition has actually developed them personally or developed their career in some way, and it's a success if people walk through the door and want to know more.”

The exhibition is where art is introduced to the public. It serves as both a stage and performance for visual artists. A friend once joked to me that some people will go to the opening of an envelope if there's free wine and a sniff of culture, but there's no air kissing or tyre kickers tonight. Everyone here knows somebody else and they wrap their arms around each other with the generosity of a family gathering. A few serious collectors are deep in conversation with Mount in front of the sculptures that pique their interest. Gradually the space between the plinths fills with people and loud conversation. Grigson is talking to Sydney glass artist, Emma Varga on the stairs and I wait for my chance to arrange an interview for the following day. Maria Grimaldi is offering glasses of wine. A couple of red dots have appeared on the plinths. At seven o'clock Grigson finds a clear space by the entrance and invites Tony Hanning to open the exhibition.

“Sometimes we get dignitaries to open which is great to pull people in. That works in group and theme shows but when they are solo shows it really has to be someone who can speak on the artist's behalf, knows them and knows their work,” explains Grigson. “It was Nick's decision, he throws it at me, he didn't ask, they don't ask me first, they throw it at me and I either agree or disagree.”

Hanning's makes his way to the front of the crowd. Meanwhile, Mount leans against a window ledge in the background, a thin black jumper and black jeans clings to his slight muscular frame. Hanning is a glass artist with a long personal and professional relationship with Nick and Pauline dating back to their days together at art school in Gippsland in the mid seventies. "It's an honour to see so many people present who are peers, writers, artists, craftspeople, and critics, who have such high regard for Nick in the art world," says Hanning. At the mention of his name Mount's gaze momentarily sweeps the crowd. He recognises friends, family, colleagues and collectors, nods and smiles. He's a seasoned artist with more than forty years of public exhibitions behind him. Still, there is a degree of reservation in his usually confident demeanour. Here among his peers and the public he is exposed. It is here amid the noisy conversations and laughter that the critical responses to months of artistic endeavour and long hours of work are articulated. Hanning acknowledges the presence in the room of Pauline, Nick's sister Marianne, his daughter Peta, and her future husband, Jason Sims.

"If not for their love and support it wouldn't have been possible," he assures the crowd. Adding, "*Plumb Bobs* are special icons of work suspended by a yarn pointing to the centre of the earth. And this exhibition is about the beauty and labour that goes into making things that are beautiful." Mount believes the process of *making* glass has impacted his identity in ways he hadn't previously considered. The seductive allure for Mount captured his attention from day one but it's no longer the only driving force. Over the years the theme of work has taken on greater significance and for the time being it takes precedence.

"My most recent works have been designed and made in reference to my belief in the fabric of work, with tools as the motif. The *Plumb Bob* that has appeared as a component in the *Scent Bottles* for quite some time has become more of an object in its own right.

*Suspended Bobs, Reclining Bobs* and, for this exhibition, the *Bubble* of a spirit level, are all indicators of *Plumb*.” According to Mount “it’s *all* about the work.”

Max Weber’s thesis about the prevalence of the Protestant work ethic in society professed there is a moral imperative that basically guaranteed that people who worked hard were rewarded. Even without protestant religious overtones, the notion of a solid work ethic continues to underpin the societies in which many of us live. But why has work become one of the central motivating and aesthetic forces of Nick Mount’s practice?

I’ve come to the conclusion that it has a lot to do with the way he’s wired, a combination of nature and nurture. He was raised to work hard. He loves nothing better than to work hard. He’s committed. He starts early, applies himself, and retires at the end of the day satisfied.

Hanning ends his address by saying, “Nick is totally devoted to his work and constantly questioning his process. Questioning how he can control the material, how much it represents his labour and the people in the world who devote their lives to glass. Nick is one of the greatest international glass artists we have in this country and I am extremely proud to open this first-class exhibition.” After the applause quietens, Grigson announces Mount has been chosen as Object Australian Centre for Craft and Design, *Living Treasure* recipient 2012. The award is an initiative promoted by Craft Australia and supported by the network of Australian Craft and Design. The award, launched in 2005, celebrates the achievement of Australia’s most influential craft practitioners. It is awarded to artists whose mastery of skill and contribution is deemed worthy of national recognition. The title of *Living Treasure* makes reference to the treasures of Japan and the ancient tradition of people achieving status through their craft. It features the recipient in a solo exhibition of new work, a major monograph publication, and a national, and in Mount’s case, international tour.

During an interview the following day I ask Grigson how much impact the living treasure award will have for Mount.

“More people will get to see his work because it travels through the regional galleries and that’s the best part of the program. I don’t think it makes a big difference in Sydney. Object works hard to get the program through and the book is really important. It’s a tangible thing he can take away from the experience. It will be helpful to us too. More people across Australia will get access to his work. And the people who know his work will see it in a different context.”

“How will it impact on his work practice?” I ask.

“He’s only got a year and that’s a big year of hard slog for him creating a large body of work and packing it so it can travel and all the literature that goes with that. Then there’s the book, and funding is always so tight and some of it will have to come from him. So it will make a difference. Our clients whether they collect Mount’s work or not, will at least have the knowledge that their investment, and he as an artist, is making headway and being recognised.” Unlike many past *Living Treasure* recipients, Mount is not an academic and doesn’t have the luxury or opportunity to take a sabbatical to pull it off. Brian Parkes, CEO at the JamFactory, nominated him for the award, but Mount didn’t think he’d be in the running having never thought of himself as an Australian living treasure.

“The real high point of it is that we are going to get a monograph which for us in our career stage is really good. It’s a great thing for Object to have the focus, to be able to get funding, attract a lot of attention, they get to choose who wins and there’s a chain reaction that comes from there.” *Nick Mount: The Fabric of Work* written by Tony Hanning was published in September 2012 to coincide with the official opening of the Living Treasure exhibition at Object. A previous monograph was written by Margot Osborne as part of the South Australian Living Artist (SALA) Award awarded to Mount in 2002.

There's no question the accolade is justly deserved and provides substantial recognition for a master craftsman and artist. Nonetheless, an enormous volume of new work needs to be created with the same passion and expense demanded of such a large undertaking. The planned exhibition, tour, and monograph provide an opportunity to expand Mount's exposure and profile. The win comes with inherent time and financial cost to the artist—a paradox of privilege and obligation. In late 2011 discussions took place to make adjustments to the exhibition arrangements due to Federal Government funding cuts to the Arts in the Budget.

Staging exhibitions in the current climate can be fraught because of the lingering effects of the global financial crisis on the art market. As well as the Living Treasure award in 2012 Mount was the first independent visual artist to receive South Australia's Triennial Project Grant. The grant of \$150,000 from ArtsSA distributed over three years enabled Nick and Pauline to meet the demands of producing a substantial new body of work. Grigson says, "There is a relatively small spread of clients who are collecting glass although this has been relatively strong in Australia in recent years. The proportion of buyers from overseas versus buyers from Australia has reversed since the global financial situation changed." In recent times there has been a reduction in the number of galleries representing glass artists and subsequent fewer opportunities for glass artists to exhibit regularly.

As I'm leaving Sabbia more red dots appear next to Mount's compositions. Sydneysiders, Barbara Pearce and Josie Grainer, tell me they are captivated by the colours and intrigued by the perfectly balanced compositions. So has the exhibition been a success?

"Yes, so far it's pretty good with ten sales and commissions as part of those sales, which in this market is good," says Grigson the following day. "We always like more. We have high expectations. People are saying it's very subtle. The cutting is more concentrated, not so much razzle-dazzle, a little more honest, a lot more personal. Nick doesn't usually do

subtle. It's dramatic usually, flamboyant, loud and colourful—maybe he's mellowing—but that's my comment not theirs," says Grigson.

## Ties that bind



The Leabrook Studio

*Intimate partnerships demand delicate balances between interdependence and individuality between a trust of one's own strength and the supporting power of connection.*

*Vera John Steiner*

Nick and Pauline, spouses, business and artistic partners of more than forty years, live in Leabrook, South Australia. For the Mounts, as for many creative people, work and home are integrated to such a degree that it is no longer possible to tell one from the other. Their home, studio, and outdoor workshop are an artistic enclave where family and work inextricably entwine. No fence divides the small front garden from the street. The canary yellow front door is a welcoming introduction to what lies within. Big round grapefruit hang from the branches and flowering wisteria drop like bunches of purple grapes from the twisted woody branches entangling the front porch. Mount's white Ute is backed up the gravel drive and parked snugly in between flowerbeds and the side veranda. Adelaide photographer, Grant Hancock, drives up at the same time as I do and disappears into the studio at the rear of the house.

Craftspeople in the middle-ages slept, ate, and raised their children in the places in which they lived. Home was the interface where labour and life came together. And so it is here. As I make my way up the front steps to ring the doorbell the scent of citrus escapes nearby branches as I brush against them. Pauline appears with a warm unselfconscious embrace. Over the decades her long fair hair has turned silvery grey. Today it's brushed off her face, parted on the side and falls softly to her shoulders. Her complexion flushes pink and she laughs spontaneously, happy and secure in her own skin.

Walking down the narrow hallway past the upright piano I feel the home's soft and warm embrace. Signs of the creative essence of their daily lives are everywhere. An eclectic collection of other artists work is scattered on the shelves and hanging on walls; arranged beside Mount's glass sculptures. Parisian paraphernalia including a vast collection of Eiffel Towers of varying sizes decorate the shelves—mementos of their residency and major exhibition, *Un Nouveau Soufflé*, at the Australian Embassy Paris, France in 2004. Pauline's office is full of books, paperwork and glass objects. A row of large apothecary jars hold bits

and pieces collected over the years. A small window with white plantation shutters overlooks Nick's work area under the carport. Sitting in the back room overlooking the garden and studio I recall Frank Lloyd Wright's biographer, Meryle Secrest's remark that "work was far more than dutiful toil...it was the very stuff of living."

Creativity has been a major part of their relationship since they first met at art school. Both their lives are fuelled by a strong desire for artistic expression. I'm curious to know how they navigate through the minefield of living and working together and the complexities love and art demand of them as a couple. I wonder how they successfully master the mix of family and work, and work and home, and the never ending complications that entails.

"In actual fact we have totally different roles," says Pauline. "It was pretty obvious from when Hugo (their son) was a baby if Nick was blowing or grinding glass he couldn't be interrupted." After a period of working with her parents and getting little done in early 2012, their daughter Peta commented, that it was hard to get any work finished because of the sea of people regularly ringing up and coming in and out of the house and studio.

"And that's been my role," says Pauline. "I'm a barrier between other people and him otherwise he can't get anything done. People want to ring up and speak to him. That was something I had to learn when the kids were little—even though we work at home—we do actually work and we have to be respectful of the working place. If Nick's in the studio working then you don't go out there unless you are invited. That's helped me, but it hasn't always been easy."

The relationship between love and art is precarious. Following the end of Stella Bowen's marriage to writer Ford Madox Ford she wrote, 'her role had been that of consort to a man who could not write if there was a disturbance of any kind during the mornings. If the household was to survive the writing of his books—the task that fell to her—as muse and lover—was to ensure silence while he worked and to provide relief, companionship and

sustenance when his work was done.” It was only after the marriage ended that Bowen had time to maintain her own career as a painter. She relinquished all artistic endeavours while she occupied the subservient position in the marriage demanded by Ford. Bowen realised her diminished position in the marriage worked against her. Nonetheless, she insisted, ‘on the countering benefits that came to her from those years with Ford.’

Nick Mount does not wield the masculine privilege of a self serving male artist stereotypical of the likes of Ford. Nonetheless, as Pauline’s previous comment indicates, there are occasions when the gendered roles within their relationship favour an environment conducive to Nick being able work.

Nick and Pauline have occupied various family and work responsibilities. When the children were little it was Nick who carried out a lot of parenting duties while Pauline went to work. Pauline is responsible for the financial and commercial aspects of their business. The primary consideration in their relationship is not that the responsibilities are gendered, but that they are flexible, negotiated, and agreed upon. In regard to the fissure between art and love, Drusilla Modjeska writes, ‘At stake are questions about how we live our lives, what we are prepared to ask of ourselves and of those who love us, what value we put on art; what compromises we will make, which gods we will appease.’ Nick and Pauline’s relationship highlights the process by which they travel the path of interdependence.

Vera John Steiner believes that people in collaborative relationships who engage in new and partnered activities learn from the consequences of their actions and from their partners. Together they are buoyed by collaborative support. This is in contrast to a theory of the self—where individual self development takes precedence. It would seem that collaboration, as opposed to autonomy, has the potential of stretching one’s identity through partnership, through sustained varied action, and through the interweaving of social and individual processes. I would have thought there would be a loss of self in such closely

interwoven interdependence; however, Nick and Pauline’s capacity for intimate collaboration clearly brings an abundance of individual and joint rewards.

“We have great resources in each other,” Mount told an interviewer in Pittsburgh in 2012, “including conversations about design direction and aesthetic decisions as well as facilitating the whole thing.”

Pauline believes the success of their relationship is largely due to both having always wanted the same things in life. Their mutual love, respect, and passion makes them artistically, philosophically and intellectually challenging companions. For some couples individualism and competition are problematic hallmarks of success, but for Nick and Pauline interdependence and creative collaboration is maintained through enduring renegotiation.

This collaborative process requires lowering of the boundaries of self, claims Vera John-Steiner. To achieve such bonding partners need to listen carefully to each other, to hear their words echoed through those of the collaborator, and to hear the words of the other with a special attentiveness born of joint purpose. Nick and Pauline sustain perpetual conversations around conceptual and creative development. Pauline’s contribution and support are difficult aspects of the artistic process to quantify and it is Nick’s name that appears on the work. Her valuable contribution nonetheless impacts Nick’s creative process, and is integral to the commercial development of their business. The following account of their residency in Japan highlights the complex nature of the collaborative process. On this occasion Pauline received public recognition for her contribution in creating the glass sculptures.

Nick and Pauline went to Kurashiki in 2006 at the invitation of Akihiro Isogai, a former trainee at the Jamfactory and one of Japan’s most recognised glass artists. The experience remains as sharply etched in Pauline’s memory as the sgraffito motifs she scratched on to the indigo glass sculptures.

It was minus five degrees Celsius when they first arrived in Japan in 2006. A biting wind pierced their cheeks as they stood huddled at the airport waiting for their ride to Kurashiki. They flew out of sunny Florida and spent five days in mild Kyoto, and the Kurashiki mountain chill was a rude introduction to rural Japan. Eventually a small car arrived to rescue them from the buffeting wind and they crammed their large suitcase into the back seat.

In the 1940s and 50s a large number of Korean people arrived in Kurashiki to work in the Mitsubishi plant and were housed in two and three storey concrete apartment blocks that stood like stunted monoliths in the snowy landscape. The original plan was for the Mounts to be accommodated in one of apartments with concrete walls inside and out, a small kerosene heater, no hot water, a Japanese style bath hovering above a flickering gas flame, flat futon, and two-burner stove.

“We didn’t know where we were. There was no car, no shops, and poor Nick had a terrible chest cold,” says Pauline, remembering their arrival in Kurashiki. “We finally made them understand we couldn’t stay in the accommodation they had suggested. We subsequently went to a hotel until the head of school returned and helped us find an apartment and we ended up with a really nice place.”

Each morning Nick and Pauline woke early, walked to the station, and boarded the bus that wound its way up the corkscrew mountain through a thin veil of smog on its way to the Kurashiki University of Science and Arts situated at the top and overlooking the fields and factories below.

They decided almost immediately that indigo—the deep blue symbolic hue of work would form the departure point for their creative work during their time in Japan. Mount would continue to incorporate indigo in his compositions for years to come.

“I researched on the internet and found an indigo dye factory,” says Pauline. “We went there and bought a whole bunch of samples. The owner had about fifteen hand-dyed indigo pieces from around the world.”

Natural indigo dyeing is one of the oldest dyeing methods dating back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century in Japan. It was once a big industry but fell away once people no longer grew indigo plants. The colour provided by indigo plants is different depending on the soil in which it grows. Cauldrons brimming with oily indigo dye are buried in the ground of the small courtyards of indigo craftspeople, and the blue liquid bubbles and ferments for days. The dyers dip swatches of fabric into the simmering cauldrons sometimes forty or fifty times before hanging them out to dry or slapping the wet fabric on rocks in the sun. Through this exhaustive process the fabric oxidises and turns various shades of indigo. At first glance it appears as if the dyers are wearing gloves because their hands are stained permanently blue.

During their residency, among other things, Nick and Pauline collaborated and explored indigo and its symbolic representation of blue collar workers in Japanese culture.

“We bought a whole bunch of fabric and the plan was for Nick to make a shape. We fired enamel on to the indigo glass then scratched it to replicate the patterns we’d found, and it worked wonderfully. Nick decided to do the dome which was Mount Fuji and when we told Aki, (their representative in Japan) we wanted to use the colour of indigo he referred us to a lady from the town of Kurashiki who blew indigo glass. She gave us her own recipe and we cooked it up.” Mount blew glass every day assisted by the local students and Pauline assisted.

“There was a golf driving range about three kilometres away from the University and when Nick was feeling frustrated he’d take himself off there and whack balls. On the walk down there was a bamboo forest on either side and the bamboo seemed to whisper around you,” says Pauline.

Together they embraced the concept of work and elements of Japanese culture in innovative ways. “Some of the pieces had big wooden chop sticks,” says Pauline. “Some had fishing rods made of bamboo. Then of course there are the beautiful wheels made of murrine.”

Mount shows me a small white and blue murrine glass wheel that’s been lying on the shelf in his studio gathering dust for over a decade. “I was looking for an object that would carry the murrine pattern of the Ishigaki. The sloping stone walls made of cut stones that fit perfectly into one another and carry the amazing temples. They are such a beautiful graphic gesture and look a lot like murrine.” He points to the fine detail in the glass. “That’s the indigo colour we made and this is the murrine blown up,” he says, holding the glass wheel up to the light. “In some places it comes apart and looks tenuous but at the same time it’s a beautifully solid stable heavy object. I was looking for a shape that would carry that into the compositions. It’s a graphic shape: flat edge, two flat sides that would carry the murrine and talk to those wall shapes. And the wheel is such a Japanese thing reminiscent of the wooden wheels on their barrows.”

“What about the fishing rods?” I ask, remembering their inclusion in the Japanese inspired compositions.

“The rods are handcrafted and one of those things that craftspeople deal with all the time.”

“Do you like fishing?” I ask, because it’s emblematic in the compositions.

“I like fishing but I don’t like fishing as much as I like the rods,” he says. “It’s the type of object that at one stage would have been thought of as being essential to life or death. But then they become recognised in some areas for their fine crafting and specific design. Each of the components is addressed so intimately and finely by people that want to indulge or involve themselves in some kind of crafting activity. The rods are that kind of thing. Also,

there is a huge winding river near the University. One of the technical assistants would go fishing there and when he caught something big he'd bring it to the studio and the communal living and communal study came together at lunchtime when he would cook the fish."

"It was amazing," says Pauline. "He cooked great big fish on a gas burner in a small space with about sixty of us there and we would all get a small mouthful with rice, and that would be lunch."

"It became a big deal that he was a good fisherman," says Mount. "He caught it and brought it back to the studio, and prepared it, and cooked it, and shared it. It's a focus of communication and education which doesn't happen much in our universities."

In near isolation, with few distractions, and limited social contact, Nick and Pauline focussed on the *Indigo* series and little else the glass is clearly influenced by their experience.

"It was one of the best bodies of work we've ever done," says Pauline.

Some of the dome shaped scent bottles are embedded with delicate swirling sgraffito winding around clear translucent stem sections; others have small repeated motifs that dance across the surface of larger sections inspired by the Shibori patterns found in Japanese textiles.

Karen Finch described the *Indigo* compositions as being made of additional materials including sticks, polished to a fine gloss then transformed with the addition of fishing rod fittings, lures and cordage of various types. These were contrasted with the natural variations of found sticks and carefully formed pieces of bent wood, arching through and above the solidly placed section of the piece. Finch acknowledged "too often, combinations of disparate materials can end up looking as if the maker is trying too hard to make a statement for the sake of making a statement...in this instance the blend is successful."

Living at close quarters in Japan allowed Nick and Pauline to work more collaboratively on *Indigo* than any other series. Mount blew glass and together they would

sgraffito its surface. In 2009, Mount again began incorporating swaths of indigo dyed and patterned Japanese fabric in compositions of startlingly large one and half metre *Hanging Bobs*, having fully incorporated motifs of Japanese textile images and design into his repertoire.

Mount's dedication and commitment to family underpins his very existence. He was born 18 August 1952, one of four children to Graham and Margaret Mount. His father was a dentist with an established Australian and international career in dental restoration. During the 1960s Graham and Margaret Mount travelled extensively and accrued a broad network of friends and colleagues. Mount and his siblings grew up surrounded by the benefits of a thorough education, hard work, and a secure family life.

"Dad would get up early every morning and cook us porridge and eggs for breakfast before we went to school. And we always sat down for every meal as a family and ate and discussed things together." Mount says his father was a perfectionist and passionate about his work. "He worked at the University, in private practice, and at home, and was very successful. He set goals, set the standard. I always felt we were really close and he was emotional and demonstrative and there for us...I really love him for what he's done and what he is now and I don't know what that does to you but obviously it does something to the way you think about yourself...My dad said he never knew what his father was thinking but we know what he is thinking all the time," says Mount.

Graham Mount recently confided to his granddaughter, Peta, that he was sad not to have known his own father on a more personal level. He loved and respected him but the parenting style of past generations often precluded much demonstrative intimacy between fathers and sons.

Margaret, Mount's mother, was raised on the land and inherited the strong work ethic of her German parents. As a young woman she trained as a nurse at the Adelaide Children's

Hospital, as did her mother before her. Mount's younger sister, Marianne, followed suit. I recently watched Mount take his mother's hand, now in her eighties, and guide her carefully up a steep flight of stairs at an exhibition in Adelaide. As the exhibition came to a close, he took hold of his mother's hand once more as she gingerly left the building.

In the early 1960s Mount and his siblings roamed the open hills around Glen Osmond. Their parents encouraged them to think for themselves and make their own decisions. After attending Linden Park Primary until year five, Mount started at St Peter's College. The following year, with little warning, he was moved into the boarding house when work commitments took his parents overseas for a year.

“It was actually a pretty good year from what I remember, but it was a big change from what we'd been used to as loved and nurtured free agents. And that's what I think of when I think about my parents and my family—that they were very keen to give us the best of upbringings, but at the same time they were very liberal.”

Mount came to the attention of art teachers, David Dridan and later Hugo Shaw. Both encouraged him to take himself and his artistic abilities seriously. In the clean organised art room at St Peter's College Mount was guided in drawing, painting, and occasionally, sculpture.

“I would go around the school with Hugo Shaw and draw landscapes. His attention to detail and the skills he taught me have been really important for me from then until now.”

During his final year at high school Mount took night classes at the South Australian School of Art.

“We did drawings from still life you know, bones, and balls and buckets and boxes, all the 'b' words,” he laughs. “But that grounding in drawing and the first year at art school ... eighteen hours of life drawing every week, have really stood me in good stead and held up well right through my career until now.”

Shaw and Dryden recognised Mount's aimless creativity and encouraged him to spend time in the art room. It was there he discovered he liked drawing, he liked painting, he liked sculpting, and he liked making things with his hands. He liked it so much he forgot to go to other classes. He was caned in the days when caning was considered a reasonable punishment for academic negligence. His grandmother taught Mount how to play the piano and he realised he liked music too.

By the time Mount left school he had worked out he didn't want to read, write, do maths, or follow the crowd. His art teachers encouraged his creativity but where it would lead was anyone's guess. The early 1970s hinted at social and cultural change in Australian, but it was early days. Mount escaped conscription into military service and the lottery that sent young men to the jungles of Vietnam and the horrors of war.

After a couple of years picking up a rudimentary training at the South Australian School of Art, Mount travelled around New Zealand doing odd jobs. On his return to Adelaide in 1972 he heard that two of his art school lecturers Robin Wallace-Crabbe and Nigel Lendon, were heading to Gippsland in rural Victoria to set up a visual art course at the Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education. Gough Whitlam was prime Minister and in an atmosphere of artistic liberation, the government made more funding available for the arts. The course supported creative experimentation. Following Wallace-Crabbe and Lendon to Gippsland made sense and Mount headed to Victoria.

"Part of the year Robin Wallace-Crabbe took us for liberal studies and he is an absolute hoot, a great artist, we've got some of his work. He got us very excited about what we were doing, addressed a lot of different subjects, was completely informal in his way of approaching the class and really charismatic and a champion," says Mount.

"I followed those guys because the school was an open system, no set times, no subjects, no examinations except that you had to speak to your lecturers once a week and be

operating multi-disciplinary in the visual arts. That really suited me because I've never really liked being told what to do.”

It was the ideal learning environment for an autodidact like Mount. He would continue to seek guidance from experts, friends, teachers, and members of the glass community but any formal instruction would always remain complementary to self directed learning. Wallace-Crabbe and Lendon ignited Mount's artistic wick during his time at the South Australian Art School in Stanley Street. Nobody, least of all Mount, had any idea how long and bright the flame would eventually burn.

Initially he stayed in a spare room at Nigel Lendon's place before moving into an old caravan nearby. He got himself a whippet, and eventually settled into a run-down farmhouse with a group of friends just outside of Churchill.

“It was beautiful country, green hills and the richest dairy farming in the southern hemisphere, says Mount. “It's depressing when we go back now. With the open cut coal mines and the power stations at Hazelwood and Yallourn. It was hugely multicultural then and there was a reasonably affluent cultural society but when they stopped building the power stations and privatised there was an enormous amount of unemployment. Now it can be a drab existence for the people who live there.”

The small Gippsland arts community was multi disciplinary and free-spirited

“When I got there the school was in an old shed in an industrial estate and a disused service station on Highway One as it goes through Morwell,” says Mount. The unstructured art environment was what Mount had been searching for. By the beginning of third year the campus had expanded and required more facilities to accommodate the increasing number of students. With the help of a contractor—the staff students constructed new buildings by hand. It was ingenuity and creativity at its most exciting and most productive.

“Everything you did was regarded as part of the course. I did a lot of fabricating buildings and got pretty good at welding.” It was a skill that would eventually guarantee an introduction to American Glass artist, Richard Marquis, and come in handy in the years to follow.

Pauline Donaldson was the first of her family to gain a tertiary education or to finish high school. She lived with her widowed mother in Morwell after her father died while she was studying in the United States as an exchange student. She caught Mount’s eye as he made his way around campus. He was twenty and she a couple of years younger. At a gallery opening recently, Hanning told me he was going out with Pauline in Gippsland when Mount arrived. According to Hanning, he and Pauline visited Mount one and as the evening progressed the men decided to play music together. Hanning went home to get his instrument and by the time he returned Pauline was sitting on Mount’s knee.

“Pauline and I are thinking of getting married,” Mount told his father a few months after they met. “Dad got all excited and mum gave me a diamond ring that was dad’s mothers and it started me thinking...maybe getting married *is* a good idea.”

It was a small family affair in the church in Morwell where Pauline’s father’s ashes are interred. Looking at their wedding photo today you can discern a gentle breeze whisking Pauline’s shoulder length hair off her face. She’s young and beautiful with laughing eyes that steer demurely away from the camera. You can’t see the two-tone red and cobalt blue leather platform shoes with the huge rounded tips Mount claims to be wearing. He stands close to Pauline, their shoulders pressed against each other. She’s in a simple white wedding dress that falls softly to the ground, a small brooch pinned at the neckline, and he’s in a safari suit, wide tartan tie, and those platform shoes. These days Mount jokes that the allowance made available by Gough Whitlam for married students was an added incentive to get married in 1974.

Mount had seen one other Australian craftsperson blow glass but nothing prepared him for the impact American glass artist, Richard Marquis, would make when he first appeared in their final year at the Gippsland campus.

“He was an adventurous get-it-done kind of guy and he was looking for someone to assist him and I wasn’t moving in any particular direction at the time,” recounts Mount. Crown Corning assisted with the costs of the touring trailer, and for three months Nick and Pauline went on the road with Marquis. At the completion of their course the Mount’s toured California with Marquis, with support from the Craft Board of Australia. A small group of notable trailblazing pioneering craft practitioners were experimenting and working in glass in Australia in the early 1970s. Stephen Skillitzi, Rob Knottenbelt, Warren Langley, and Maureen Cahill among them, but 1974 is generally acknowledged as the pivotal point when studio glass took off in Australia.

In 1975, after seven months blowing glass with Marquis, Nick and Pauline travelled across America before heading to Europe. They toured glass factories in England, Sweden, France, and Germany as they made their way to Italy. And it was there, in the hot smoky Venetian glass factories on the island of Murano, that they relinquished any doubts of doing anything other than pursuing a life in glass.

Checo Ongaro, cousin of Venetian glass maestro, Lino Tagliapietra, took Nick and Pauline on to the Venini factory floor. It was there the Venetian glass blowers, sweat pouring down their faces, hair slicked back behind their ears, and sleeves rolled up to their elbows, blew glass at the same blazing furnaces where they had been apprenticed as teenagers. Mount was entranced. The magic and fantasy of the Italian blowers captured his imagination. The small glass studios of California hadn’t prepared him for the extraordinary performances of the Italians.

“It really had an enormous effect on me and that was when I first started thinking that perhaps it’s something that I could invest the rest of my life in. When I walked into those Venetian factories it was a powerful feeling of heritage, of history, and of belonging.”

He returned to Australia with unique, albeit relatively limited glass blowing knowledge and experience. Nonetheless, his rare skills were quickly recognised by arts administrators at the Caulfield Institute and he landed a teaching position there. It was his worst nightmare. The frustrating formal structure of institutional education went against everything he believed the learning experience should be. He had borrowed money from the bank to buy a car and for the first time in his life Mount felt the weight of financial commitments. It had all the markings of mediocrity and the makings of a trap. Within a year he bolted.

“We sold the car and got a cheap truck and shifted out to Gippsland. We went into it without having a plan. We negotiated what the next thing would be with each other along the way,” says Pauline.

“When we first set up the art studio I bought the machinery and equipment to get it going and set up a business in welding to make cattle crushes and gates. We had very little confidence of how the business would actually work, because there was no precedent in the country for it at the time,” says Mount.

In Gippsland, among the paddocks, animals, screeching galahs, and growing community of craftspeople, Nick and Pauline set up their first studio, One-Off, in art school teachers, Nigel Lendon’s, cowshed in Yinnar South. The fledgling glass studio built in 1976 is now recognised as the first private one of its kind of the pioneering movement in Victoria.

Mount blew glass for hours in the small studio and together they wrapped the small hand blown bottles, jugs, jars, vases, goblets, plates and bowls in newspaper, piled the packages into washing baskets, packed them into the tray of the ute, and headed off to the

craft shops. They had no idea how to run a business and hadn't bothered to investigate. On one of the first forays Mount ended up at Distlefink, a little craft shop on Burwood Road, in Hawthorn, Victoria. The owner was bemused, having never seen hand-blown glass.

Unperturbed she bought a couple of pieces, not knowing what it was worth or whether it was any good, and in the congenial spirit of the time sent him to another craft shop in Lygon Street, Carlton. The barefoot owner there bought a couple of pieces and so did the owner of the next shop, and the one after that, and the one after that, until the washing baskets were empty.

"I was selling the pieces for ten, twelve and fifteen, up to eighteen dollars each," said Mount.

"We were just totally committed to the venture...the very first time we started selling stuff, which we did together, people bought it," said Pauline.

With a loan from Nick's father and low operational overheads they transformed the dream of making a living from glass into a reality. Mount compares the simple and practical philosophy behind starting a business enterprise in glass to that of any other person attempting to earn a livelihood from working with their hands.

"You set yourself up as a glassblower, and you buy a glassblower's type of toolkit and a glassblower's kind of car, you live in a glassblower's kind of house and you sell glassblowing kind of products...you make jars and jugs and bottles and bowls and sell them as best you can, same as Graham Seeth, the local plumber. It's no different for a craftsperson, except there seems to be some sort of mystical reason why work in a craft or the arts is different—in my view it's not."

In 1978 after a couple of years living and working in the One Off studio they bought a small farm property in nearby Budgeree overlooking the La Trobe Valley in the Strzelecki Ranges. The small yellow weatherboard cottage with green windows was surrounded by a

hectare of garden, rose beds, an orchard, vegetable patch, and sprawling gum trees. Now firmly entrenched in the Gippsland community and the owners of a mortgage, Nick and Pauline fired up their second private studio, Budgeree Glass.

“When we first set up the art studio I bought all the equipment and machinery. I also bought the equipment to get the studio going and set up a business in welding to make cattle gates. We started in a void with a lot of enthusiasm, dumb enthusiasm. In 1976 when we started building our first glass studio we had to make everything ourselves. A lot of the steel and things we got from junk yards. Our furnace, for instance, was a thirteen gallon oil drum, and the steel around the furnace was scrap angle iron...some of the first tools I made from components I found in a garbage bin in a studio in America.”

Pauline provided income support for the family while Mount looked after the kids and made glass. The responsibility of the commercial side of their creative business would remain under Pauline’s control. Nick and Pauline extended the offer for others to make use of the rare private glass studio.

Pauline returned to teaching art to classrooms full of uninterested boys at Morwell Technical School soon after their first child Hugo was born in 1978. Meanwhile, Mount got up at four in the morning, headed for the studio, stoked up the furnace, and blew glass in the early morning light before the sun came up. Before leaving for work Pauline parked Hugo’s big pram in the studio and the little boy, lulled to sleep by the humming furnace, slept soundly in the warm studio. When Hugo started walking, he pulled on his rubber boots and followed Mount around, digging in the garden, planting vegetables, hoeing weeds, and rambling with the dogs.

On a cold day in 1978 twenty six year old Mount was filmed driving his old Ute along a dusty track in country Victoria. He stops, gets out of the car, swings the wide iron-gate open across the driveway, crosses the paddock and makes his way into a dilapidated corrugated tin

shed. Dressed in baggy dungarees and dirty black knee high rubber boots, he turns to the camera to speak. His voice is thick with humour and confidence. Skittish sheep bleat like hungry babies in the paddock behind him as a couple of friendly ducks wiggle their backsides at the camera before shooting off out of view.

The old dairy looks much like any other except for the collection of hand blown glass bowls, vases and goblets strewn across the bench tops, and the dominance of a glowing brick furnace in the middle of the floor.

“I think too many craftspeople take themselves too seriously and have trouble laughing at themselves. I think I should be having a good time at the same time,” he says, strolling into the shed. Once inside, Mount pushes his long hair flat beneath a sun-visor covered with red white and blue stars and stripes. A ten centimetre piece of clear dark plastic hangs down in between the lenses of his large frame aviator glasses to protect his eyes from the heat of the furnace. Picking up a blow pipe, he slides it into the opening, twirling it clockwise between his fingers and thumb.

“Each time I start the furnace I work for three or four weeks at a time during which my whole life becomes a routine from early in the morning when I have to light the annealing oven till late at night when I turn it off. While working on the glass you have to keep moving. There’s never a moment when you can really stand still, because as soon as you stop, the glass slumps and moves off-centre, so to get it back to its original form you have to keep it moving in your hands the whole time...I can’t say where I’ll be heading in the future because I like to leave myself open on that, but my aim at the moment is to blow the best piece of hand-blown glass I can.”

For more than forty years Nick and Pauline have traversed the terrain of work, family and friends. As many artists and craftspeople attest it takes more than talent to sustain an artistic livelihood and it’s not always easy.

“It could be a problem when the kids were really young,” explains Pauline recently. “I remember how fabulous it was when we got an answering machine because Nick always answers the phone because it might be the next big job. And that can be annoying when you’ve got three kids and everyone’s finally sitting down to the table and the phone rings and he’s gone for half an hour. In the last year or two there have been a lot of people coming here and we’ve been having dinners and entertaining. We had one week at the beginning of last year when we had over fifty people for dinner that week. There was a group from Rhode Island School of Design and there were about twelve kids and a whole bunch of other people from the University and we had a barbeque and two days later there was some other dinner. I love to have people round but it means I don’t always get everything done.”

It’s a delicate balance between interdependence and individuality. Pauline and Nick share the mutual objectives inherent in the business of being Nick Mount Glass. The intensely creative pursuit is divided between creating a livelihood and the creative work. The two separate strands require a division of different roles and responsibilities for each of them. From an outsider’s perspective it’s not always clear who does what, and for some it is of little consequence. For the consumer or art appreciation set, in the end, it is the work, the object, the art, that really matters. For Nick and Pauline the issue of visibility and recognition is of prime importance. Not only because of how other people perceive the work, but because of how they perceive themselves and each other. Their individual and shared identities are in constant transformation through the process of building a creative, artistic, commercial, and family life together. The activities of their daily lives overlap and entwine in complex and intriguing ways. Pauline is smart and savvy about money and administration. Mount is intense, disciplined and productive. They both value creativity, self expression, and autonomy, and possess an unquestionable belief in themselves and in each other’s capabilities.

Along with Pauline's collaboration in the Budgeree and Nick Mount Glass business enterprises she has been President and Administrative Officer of Ausglass, and Co-ordinator of the Adelaide presentation of *Chihuly: Masterworks in Glass* in 2000. Pauline's optimism is a driving force in their partnership, but it's their joint commitment to one another, family, and glass, which forms the foundation of their success. They both agree, they wouldn't be where they are today without each other. Mount's daughters, Peta and Pippy both work in the arts, and his son, Hugo, is a landscaper and stonemason.

"I've got an angle on Pauline...the way she looks at things," says Mount. "It's because she comes from a family that's earthy. Her dad was a mounted police officer in country Victoria for most of his life and her mum worked at home. They were really grass roots types and their way of regarding things was not to be always wanting more but to be happy with what they had. Some of us come from middle class over privileged under-performing families that want a lot for nothing."

"To those who know them, it is evident their contrasting skill sets are fundamental to their success," says daughter Peta. "Where Nick is passionate and intense, Pauline is grounded and level headed. He is an independent thinker and has incredible discipline in all areas of his life. She is the eternal optimist and upholds a powerful can-do attitude...They recognise their limitations and play to their strengths. Despite the idealistic decision to attempt to make a living from studio glass and the constant process of evolution which this has required, their goals have always been realistic and achievable."

## All fired up



Nick Mount at home, 2012.

*“I realise now looking back that the things that have been strong and influential in my life have been about regarding myself as a maker and getting satisfaction out of making.”*

*Nick Mount*

On the day before Easter 2012, I visit the Mounts at home as they prepare a large number of sculptures for seven exhibitions in seven months. The local, national, and international exhibitions begin with simultaneous shows in Pittsburgh, USA. The first is *10 Years of Bottles and Bobs: A Survey* at the Pittsburgh Glass Centre and the second at the Morgan Contemporary Glass Gallery. The third is in Cleveland, USA in June, followed by a fourth, *Nick Mount @ 60* at BMG Adelaide in August, set to coincide with Mount's sixtieth birthday. The fifth is *The Treasure* at Sabbia Gallery held in tandem with the sixth, *Nick Mount: The Fabric of Work*, to launch the Living Treasure Exhibition at Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design, both in Sydney in September. These will be followed by a seventh show at the International Exposition of Sculpture, Objects and Functional Art (SOFA) in Chicago in November. SOFA Chicago is the largest art fair in America. The artwork on show includes glass, ceramics, textiles, and wood and metalwork from all over the world. It attracts over eighty exhibitors with an average attendance of 35,000.

Mount's exhibition schedule is a complex organisational roller coaster taking months of planning. Since the first grant from the Craft Board of the Australia Council in 1975, Mount has accumulated a number of awards and grants. He won First Prize in the glass section of the Stirling District Council Art and Craft Award in South Australia in 1983 and continues to receive public accolades. He was the recipient of South Australia's Living Artist (SALA) Monograph in 2002. Two years later he won the inaugural Tom Malone Prize—the prize initiated by Benefactor of the Foundation of the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Elizabeth Malone, to celebrate the art of glass.

Mount received the \$150,000 Triennial Grant from ArtSA in 2012. The three year grant enables him, among other things, to employ glass artist, Christine Cholewa to assist in preparing the large number of interstate and overseas exhibitions. Cholewa has an extensive

training in fine arts with exhibitions in Germany and the United Kingdom, and is making a name for herself in the Adelaide glass community.

“When you find someone with the talents of Christine you just have to make the most of it, it’s so rare,” says Pauline. Cholewa originates from a small town near Toronto, Canada. She is quietly spoken, organised with an eye for detail, and recipient of the 2011 *Advertiser* and Business SA’s Contemporary Art Prize Award. The judges were so impressed with her work in 2012 they again awarded the prize to Cholewa.

Nick and Christine are packing and preparing the sculptures to travel when I arrive. The work is slow and meticulous and they would probably prefer to be doing it unobserved. I offer to help but apparently there is little I can turn my hand to. I brought chocolates and curiosity but it’s done little to reduce my redundancy in the workshop under the carport that’s been converted into a packing bay for the morning.

A small outdoor table is piled high with clip boards and inventories for each of the coming exhibitions. The name of the gallery and the work is listed. Each sculpture is named and numbered with a description accompanied by a photograph. It’s taken Nick, Pauline and Christine weeks to decide which pieces will go to what exhibition. Mount’s been blowing and making new work, meanwhile, Pauline has been busy acquiring older pieces from collections in the USA and Australia for the survey show. A lot of decisions need to be made and some without all the necessary information at hand. Ordinarily they would be working toward one major show a year, maybe two at most. The seven impending exhibitions are pushing the limits.

A two metre high mountain of flat sheets of soft yellow foam panels wrapped in thick black plastic sit on the side veranda in the sun. Piles of constructed cardboard boxes in the shape of small coffins line the gravel drive. The empty cardboard caskets will eventually hold the precious glass cargo carefully cushioned and securely packed in between sheets of foam

to protect them on the flight to the Sydney and American galleries. Mount handles the weighty glass components with confident hands. I on the other hand, wrap one particularly heavy expensive sculpture in white tissue paper and cradle it close to my chest like a swaddled infant. I imagine the worst—the large smooth shiny heavy glass sculpture slipping through my fingers and smashing on the unforgiving cement into a million little shards, destroying the work, the art, and part of his livelihood. It doesn't warrant thinking about.

Pauline tells Christine the inventory needs to be updated. Some of the work stills needs to be named, numbered and the dimensions taken and recorded.

Hanging on a wall inside the house in an alcove off the hallway is a large pin-up board with photographs and hand written notes outlining which work is going where.

“So far these three pieces are going to Thomas Riley and that cherry piece is going to Amy Morgan's gallery,” says Cholewa.

“Is there a full quota for the other shows?” I ask, looking at the array of works designated for each gallery.

“It chops and changes,” she says pointing to the board. “This is the work that's made and this is the work that's been allocated but Nick could come along and change it. But there aren't any *Bobs* for Sabbia—but I can suggest it without getting him angry.”

“Does he get angry much?” I enquire.

“Not a lot,” she replies. “But it's okay for me—all I'm doing is packing. He's got a lot else going on. The other day I asked him to decide on something and he was like—‘I'm not deciding.’”

Mount joins us in the alcove. Pointing to a large black smoky coloured *Reclining Bob*, Cholewa asks him where he wants it to go.

“You don't have many *Bobs* in Sabbia. I didn't know whether that was intentional,” says Cholewa. Mount's eyes dart around the board without answering.

“Let’s put it in Sabbia,” he says. “Although we haven’t got much space in their upstairs room...we’ve got these three, four, five, six,” he continues, counting the number of photos of the *Bobs* on the board. “Put it there with the olive one because that’s a single piece, then we can make a composition out of it...maybe.”

“Then Sabbia’s done,” says Christine.

“Sabbia done,” echoes Mount.

“What about these? Did you see these?” he asks me, picking up a couple of fruit inspired *Scent Bottles* on the dining room table. It’s a composition comprising a gold leaf, purple and silver coloured glass pear sitting next to a bulging glass can with another slightly misshapen glass can beside it.

“It’s called *Damaged goods*. The can of plums got too hot and blew up a bit. And that’s a can of beetroot that fell off the shelf and got dented,” he explains. “I think I have to redo the silver on that one, for some reason it went all grainy.” He’s unhappy with the finish on another piece. “That one was gold before,” he says, pointing to the silver base. “I’m going to grind it back and redo it. I’ll do a sweeter job on it.”

Back under the carport Mount rests a large *Scent Bottle* on a layer of foam, draws around it in texta, and cuts out the silhouette of the piece with a buzzing electric knife. He wraps a number of smaller sand blasted glass components in squares of soft fabric explaining that tissue paper erodes and leave marks on some surfaces of the glass.

He lays three small pieces of glass on a layer of foam working out the best way to pack it safely in a carton travelling air freight to Toledo, Ohio.

“This one goes this way, this one goes that, it will rest on the stem...and we’ll put those two pieces on top of that,” he tells Cholewa, positioning the small glass sculptures with carved wooden stems into the box.

A fine puff of engraving dust sprays into the air as he inscribes his signature into the flat edge of a white and clear glass hanging bob with a tool that looks and sounds like a dentist drill and sets my teeth on edge. Through the screeching sound of packing tape being ripped from its reel I ask if any of the work ever gets broken in transit.

“Not usually,” he says. “The only time we’ve had work broken is when it’s been packed at the gallery and shipped internally in America.”

Mounts younger brother, Sandy, who lives a couple of doors away, walks into the carport carrying a small bird in a large cage.

“The relatives are coming to stay,” jokes Sandy, hanging the cage on a hook under the back porch.

“Sandy’s driving up to Alice Springs with the whole mob and we are looking after the damn bird while everyone else is going on holidays,” says Mount.

“Right, he’s all yours...the bird says ‘morning pretzel,’” calls out Sandy as he heads off.

Mount lets go a few mild expletives as he heads into the house almost hitting his forehead on the swinging birdcage. I have a sneaking suspicion the bird might be saying something else by the time Sandy returns from holidays. Mount returns a few minutes later carrying a large *Bub*, a piece referencing the bubble in the spirit level which has been reclining on top of the piano in the lounge room.

“Is that the uranium glass piece you blew at the Canberra workshop earlier in the year?” I enquire, looking at the silver green silver iridescent glass composition.

“It is. But I’ve cut it twice, popped it round the edges, had it mirrored in three different sections, glued it back together with blue glue and machined it. What number are we up to?”

“010512,” replies Cholewa. The sequence of numbers refers to the date, month, and year of production. “Do you want to call it something as well?” she asks.

“Uranium green bubble,” he says. The bird whistles as if on cue and Mount whistles back lowering the uranium bubble deep inside the foam lined carton.

Pauline has relinquished much of the preparation for the coming shows to Cholewa. Without the funds from the Triennial grant, she would have been the one packing and working with Mount under the carport. Today she is at the computer liaising with Gallery owners in the USA and finalising travel plans and following up on the things that require her attention to get the coming shows on the road.

Pauline was the first female in her family to be born after a long line of boys. She and her parents followed her older brother to Gippsland when she was a teenager. At the time her parents expected her to finish school, learn how to type, and get a secretarial job. She jokes now that she got married to get away from her mother but it was really the first step toward making a life for herself that stretched beyond the confines of rural Victoria and the local typing pool. She immersed herself in art subjects all through year eleven and twelve and acquired a scholarship to attend the local art school with vague plans of being a teacher.

In 1975 Nick and Pauline joined the thriving Californian craft community who occupied some of the empty factories in Benicia just north of San Francisco where Howitzer machineguns were once manufactured. Some of them made American Art Nouveau glass in one of the studios. Right next door they made Italian glass, in another studio they produced funky ceramics, and next door to that was a furniture maker. Soon after arriving they moved to Berkeley where Mount spent his mornings earning enough money to pay the rent working with glass artist, Steve Smyers, an art school graduate with a good head for business. In the afternoons and evenings Mount blew funky pieces of glass with Marquis in an adjoining studio.

Marquis was technologically savvy on the science of glass blowing having developed a comprehensive and sophisticated repertoire of Venetian blowing techniques. *The West Coast pioneering cowboy*, as Mount describes him, was blowing wacky, crazy, West Coast funk pieces and incorporating everyday found objects into art. Marquis's primary objective at the time, and one that remains to this day was that the work had to reflect him in some tangible way and not simply cater to the consumer market.

In 1975 Nick and Pauline came across people successfully making a living from their crafts. With a cursory exposure to glassblowing Mount began to create new opportunities, develop his own style, and forge a path of his own making.

"In America we saw people deciding what they were going to do after art school. They'd go into business, set themselves up, make stuff and sell it and there was a big market for it," says Mount. "There was a tradition and a culture for doing that, a culture of being in partnerships and sharing the load and the skills and responsibilities—being commercial about your art. Actually making proper commercial decisions about what you were going to make and how you were going to sell it. Nobody at art school here would ever think about that."

After returning to Gippsland Nick and Pauline wanted to live a creative life and needed to support themselves financially. Armed with washing baskets full of small glass objects to sell, and a lot of wishful thinking, they began to make enough money to cover their living costs.

"We made jugs and bottles and bowls and everyone said we were crazy. But, the first time we started selling stuff people bought it. We were like wow...oh my god...we've sold it all," says Pauline. In the meantime, Pauline grew increasingly frustrated with teaching.

"One day I was driving to school and I just kept driving for about a hundred kilometres." After five years teaching and a stint living and working in America the Mounts decided to focus on their own studio in Gippsland.

“I rang Nick and said I just can’t go back. All the children were born by the time I was thirty and I planned to work in the business which is what happened. Nick did all the blowing and I was doing the rounds of the craft shops in Melbourne carrying the washing basket full of stuff to sell.” It was a slow but promising beginning.

“We had the passion to have our own business, and the resilience to go with the ups and downs. It was total luck that we did hook up together and we could work together and be able to adapt because things are so different now to what they were thirty five years ago,” says Pauline. “Neither of us can do what we do without the other one doing what they do and that’s hard for a lot of artists...the good thing about having each other is that we get to share the money, share the decisions, share a whole lot of what the other is doing. There’s no just living and going to work. We’ve got twenty four hours of life and work all the time and some of that’s luck I reckon.”

More than a century before Mount started blowing glass in his Gippsland studio, a young English apprentice chemist by the name of Alfred Felton arrived in Victoria from Essex, England. By 1861 Felton set up a wholesale druggist distribution business in Swanson Street, Melbourne. Five years later he bought a wholesale drug store in partnership with its manager, Frederick Grimwade. The two men shared similar aspirations and accumulated a number of businesses during their twenty five year partnership. In 1872, Felton and Grimwade founded the Melbourne Glass Bottle Works, subsequently Australian Glass Manufacturers Limited, later renamed, Australian Consolidated Industries, now more commonly known as ACI. In 1891 the factory moved to a six acre site on the riverbank at Spotswood. They employed thirty two glass blowers at the Melbourne Glass Bottle Works in South Melbourne and ACI became the major contributor to Melbourne’s history of glass production. Felton grew increasingly generous and philanthropic with age, developing a passionate interest, not only in business, but in literature and the arts. After his death in 1904,

his Will established the Felton Bequests' Committee Trust with a start-up fund of over two million pounds. Half the proceeds went to relieving the suffering of under-privileged distressed women and children; the other half was spent on acquiring works of art for the Melbourne National Gallery.

In the mid seventies Mount scouted the local area for cheap sources of glass to use in his studio and met Phil Butler from Research and Development at ACI in Dandenong. Butler allowed Mount to take ACI cullet, the glass off-cuts and breakages ordinarily destined for remelting. As a result, the cullet from ACI became a source of Mount's start-up glass blowing enterprise. Without Alfred Felton's entrepreneurial ambitions there would have been no ACI glassworks on Mount's doorstep and no glass off-cuts for him to use.

"You can't possibly melt glass in a furnace that size," said one of the ACI brick layers assisting Phil Butler and Mount build a small furnace in the Gippsland studio. But he was wrong.

The local State Electricity Commission power station scrap yard was another cheap source of material from which Mount scavenged and recycled discarded pieces of metal and machinery in creative ways.

After setting up the Budgeree Glass studio in Gippsland Mount worked hard to make as much glass as he could in the best way he knew how. But it didn't take long for him to realise his skills and experience were limited and with glass blowing in Australia still in its infancy he had to travel to the USA to develop his craft. In 1980, with a grant from the Visual Arts and Craft Board, Nick and Pauline returned to California for six months.

"I worked in a studio called Marquis, Wax & Fine, with three guys, Dick Marquis, Jack Wax and Jodie Fine," says Mount. Marquis was producing high-end glass art and early versions of his signature teapots. Jack Wax paid close attention to the business and commercial side of glass manufacturing and his approach had a big influence on Mount.

Jody Fine was the son of screen writer, Moreton Fine, and the nephew of Larry Fine from the Three Stooges, Curly, Larry and Mo. Together the three American glass artists taught Mount about the design and production potential of glass. This time round, having just started his own glass studio in Australia, Mount focused on what he needed to learn. “When we came back to Gippsland, we expanded the studio, took on more employees and started making production lines that were more carefully designed, packaged, and produced for a specific craft market,” explains Mount. Budgeree Glass produced stemware in the form of red, white, martini, and champagne glasses in the 1980s and with a more sophisticated marketing approach acquired in the USA things started to take off.

*Funnels*, the first exhibition in a series of non-functional glass forms, was formulated while Mount was in California working with Marquis in 1980. After he returned from California an exhibition of *Funnels* was held at Solander Gallery in Canberra. The National Gallery of Australia Canberra, the National Art Glass Collection Wagga Wagga, and the Brisbane Queensland Art Gallery acquired pieces from the exhibition in recognition of Mount’s innovative contributions to the glass movement. *Funnels* was also exhibited as part of the Contemporary Glass International Survey at the National Museum of Modern Art in Japan.

“The funnel—apart from being an interesting sculpture in its own right—is an art form that in the early days was made entirely by hand, and required an enormous amount of skill, but this is lost on the person who uses it in the home or laboratory,” Mount told Margot Osborne in 2002. *Funnels* hinted at the simple and symmetrical monochromatic series of glass sculptures made in the ‘pop’ colours of yellow, red, black, blue, and green that were to follow.

“Nick placed some *Funnels* in partnering cylinders—an early suggestion of the interest in containment and insertion that he has developed in the later *Scent Bottles*...As in

his later series, he uses the idea of the found object as a departure point for experimentation with forms and techniques and to signify values associated with glass-making traditions, such as artisanal skill, usefulness and beauty,” writes Margot Osborne.

Moving through the 1980s Mount worked on less functional and utilitarian glassware and moved to more experimental and sculptural territory.

“The trigger for Mount’s second series was the craftsmanship displayed in the spherical blown-glass balls used as net floats by Japanese fishermen,” writes Osborne. “Using new glue he had found in the United States, Mount was able to join separately blown components—a cone and a hemisphere—in a seamless whole to create playful symmetrical forms with contrasting areas of solid colour in plastic tones.” Osborne draws our attention to how the floats’ contrasting masculine and feminine shapes became part of Mount’s repertoire of sculptural forms, re-appearing notably in the later *Scent Bottles*.

The embryonic conceptual threads surrounding the importance of manual labour, traditional Venetian glassblowing, craftpersonship, tools, and a strong work ethic evident in Mount’s early series continue as recurring emblematic motifs in his later work. His identity has developed through decades of intellectual, creative, and physical investment in blowing glass. Being a glass blower is no longer simply a matter of what he does—it’s who he is.

In 1984, after living in country Victoria for ten years, raising their three children on the farm, stoking up the furnace in the shed, successfully building a small business, and establishing a reputation as one of Australia’s glass pioneering families, Nick and Pauline decided it was time for a change. The creative and self sufficient lifestyle to which they’d become accustomed, devoid of the pitfalls and creature comforts of institutions, had grown a little *too* comfortable. Plus the lure of support from extended family, not to mention the practical bonus of having three-phase power, and natural gas on tap for the studio, cemented their decision to return to Adelaide.

They found a former butcher shop and boning rooms with a house attached on the corner of William and Charles Street in suburban Norwood. One newspaper headline claimed “Nick Mount has turned a cool room into a furnace, a butcher’s shop into a glass studio.”

“I liked having to scrounge around, improvise and adapt things. The steel for my first furnace came from the rejected framework of the dairy that became my first studio. And there were rusty bits and cow-dung on the bracing of my first furnace. But, once I got that out of my system I decided to opt, not so much for the comforts, but for the feedback of civilization,” said Mount, after settling into the new Norwood studio.

“The move from the country meant more freedom in terms of equipment, cultural input and the response to our work from the general public,” said Mount. “We wanted that extra input, and some stimulus, and finding this building and position was exactly what we were looking for,” said Mount at the time.

Mount’s fascination for *friggers* continued while working out of the new Budgeree Glass studio in Norwood. The ‘end-of-day’ creations were traditionally created by glass blowers after their day’s work was complete. Friggers could be anything, such as walking sticks, pipes, and shoes. Making them allowed blowers freedom of expression and the opportunity to experiment. Some were produced and sold to raise extra income for factory glass blowers. In ancient times superstitious people believed small glass friggers held the power to drive away evil spirits.

“Nick has made seemingly anomalous fishing floats, funnels, and beautiful walking sticks, items akin to the friggers manufactured out-of-hours by hot glass workers to display their technical prowess,” writes Lynn Collins, following a solo exhibition at Macquarie Galleries in Sydney, featuring an eclectic collection of Mount’s work of the period. Mount had appropriated an ancient concept and given it his own idiosyncratic spin. Collins went on to say, “after years of making a delightful range of containers he is now concerning himself

with expressing the essence of containing, and of containment.” Although this exhibition marked Mount’s move in to more exhibition work, he would continue to make production glassware.

By 1987 Nick and Pauline were supplying 120 shops around the country, sharing the responsibility of all facets of management, marketing, sales, product development, design, accounting, and publicity. They were also making the prototypes, moulds, products, and doing the finishing, packing, shipping, and sales.

For four years Mount worked at the Norwood Budgeree studio blowing glass with rudimentary furnaces, tools and equipment; business boomed and the potential to do bigger and better exhibitions loomed large. By establishing the glass studio complex Nick and Pauline created a new niche in the craft market. But within a very short time Mount grew disillusioned with the limited potential of the small craft studio and the daily frustrations of reconciling his own artistic aspiration with the limited business capacity of the traditional craft movement. People came through the door requesting bigger orders incorporating increasingly more complex designs and it became evident the Norwood studio had exceeded its capacity to meet growing demands. Following conversations with the South Australian Department of State Development and Technology, and armed with advice on how to put together a business plan, they secured an injection of funds from an Adelaide venture capitalist and established a privately owned and operated handmade glass manufacturing factory. In doing so, Nick and Pauline headed in yet another new, as yet, unexplored direction for the studio glass movement in Australia.

In 1988 they relocated Budgeree Glass to a rented building opposite the Port Dock Railway Station in the light industrial Port Adelaide tourist precinct. They filled the empty warehouse with glass furnaces, annealing ovens, a foundry, and a couple of engineering workshops.

“We bought a factory from New Zealand that had gone broke over there and we imported eight twenty-foot container-loads of machinery and equipment and gear, and we employed a bunch of people from New Zealand and we had a factory going in Port Adelaide with fifteen people employed melting one tonne of glass a day, making tableware, souvenirs and giftware,” said Mount of the innovative venture.

He produced glassware in short runs and limited editions in a style more reminiscent of the Venetian factories than the small studio craft movement. In the new business enterprise they were both craftspeople and industrial manufacturers with Mount focusing primarily on design and production.

“The sense of urgency’s fantastic, the clients coming from everywhere, the potential is fabulous, building new machinery, sub-contracting people to build machinery for you, and working with mould-makers, engineers, all that kind of stuff, and having a bunch of glassblowers. I’d say we need a hundred of these, and off they’d go. A thousand of those ice-cream soda glasses for the Pancake Palace in Melbourne, and a whole new range of stemware for Country Road Homeware...Pauline was doing the books and running a retail outlet...I didn’t mind relinquishing control of a lot of it because really what I had control of and responsibility for was the most exciting part as far as I was concerned and that was the innovation, design, product development, client liaison and coming up with new products,” said Mount at the time.

Although, Budgeree Glass was thriving in financially vulnerable times, the looming 1990 recession brought unfortunate consequences for the venture capitalist and principal financial underwriter in the Budgeree Glass factory. Due to circumstances beyond the Mounts’ control the investor went bankrupt as his other numerous companies failed. At the closure of the factory they purchased a small proportion of the equipment. In late 1988 while

Mount concentrated on Budgeree Glass, Pauline established the Nick Mount Glass and Tim Strachan Ceramics gallery in partnership with Strachan on Stephens Terrace St. Peters.

Following the closure of Budgeree Glass in Port Adelaide Mount searched for a change of direction. He returned to private practice in Leabrook and subsequently rented space in Sydenham Road, Norwood, where he built a small glass studio and established Nick Mount Glass. For about a year Mount wasn't seen as often at the furnace during which time he undertook life-drawing classes with Rod Taylor at the Adelaide Central School of Art.

“By the time Budgeree ended I'd decided that it was time for me to go into more of the exhibitions end of the spectrum, less production, commissions, and concentrate on exhibitions and building my name as an artist.” It was another leap with the usual personal and professional benefits, and the inherent risks which the seasoned artist was by now well acquainted. After Mount's stint in the large glass factory environment, many in the arts welcomed his return to studio production. His foray into life-drawing provided an opportunity to explore and experiment with figurative sculpture. But, the seemingly innocent creative detour led to unexpected controversy.

Following his engagement with life-drawing Mount appropriated the image of the goddess to blow a series of fecund female glass forms simply titled *Torsos*. The pre-Christian earth mother or goddess is an instantly recognisable icon, writes Noris Ioannou and as such, a powerful source of visual language for contemporary artists. Ioannou describes Mount's *Torsos* as “thick, copper wire “cages” seemingly restraining the bulges, whilst emphasising the conjuncture of breasts, buttocks and stomach...the curvaceous, thrusting torsos have a direct, sensual appeal...enticingly smooth to touch.” Ioannou extrapolates on the presence of the thin drawn line in the creation of *Torsos*, created by twisting lengths of wire into the shape suggestive of three dimensional female figures. The combination of metal and glass is explored by other artists but Mount's glass representation of the human body is unexpected.

He blows large amounts of hot glass into a wire mould which restricts the form in some parts while allowing it to bloom into shape in others. In doing so, he resolved a sequence of technically difficult dilemmas whilst integrating two disparate artistic genres of figurative sculpture and glass blowing.

“When I showed this group of work for the first time in America I got an instant and powerful response from people who thought I was making the female form and binding it with wire. It was kind of exciting and a bit scary because it’s a rare thing for a craft person to get such a strong emotional response to the work,” says Mount.

A slideshow of the blown glass female *Torsos* during a presentation at Pilchuck Glass School in Seattle garnered a less positive interpretation than Ioannou had given. Glass artist, Susan Stinsmuelen-Ahmend drew attention to the blown glass *Torsos* bound by wire and mounted on a single shaft of metal. There was indignation when a photograph of one of the *Torsos* appeared on the invitation to an exhibition at Artworks Gallery in Nungurner, Victoria. The inflated head and legless glass female figures confined by wire were read as images of female bondage, no matter how much Mount protested a lack of ill intent on his part. In response to the controversy he added a series of ostensibly androgynous *Torsos* with flattened breasts. These were regarded as seemingly ambiguous and deformed.

Margot Osborne acknowledges *Torsos* evoke unintended metaphors of constraint, but also she recognises, *When the fat lady sings* (1992), one of the *Torsos* series held in National Art Glass Collection, Wagga Wagga Regional Gallery, New South Wales, carries connotations of the ancient earth goddess rather than the bound and mutilated victim.

“It’s a long while, if ever, since Australian ‘craft’ made such a powerful and perplexing statement,” commented Tony Hanning following the uproar. He argued, that no matter how commonplace or widespread a ‘misconception’ may be, its acceptance, even to the point of *political propriety*, does not mean that it has anything to do with the truth.

Ioannou wrote critics of the *Torsos*, “ignored the spontaneity with which they had been conceived through the act of blowing, as well as the erotic qualities of glass as a medium when manipulated impart to the representation of the human form.” Nonetheless, *Torsos* was the dawning of an unsettling realisation for Mount of the powerful forces at play in the symbiotic and often controversial relationship between art and viewer. Highlighting the precarious minefield regularly straddled by artists in the quest for creative expression.

Meanwhile, the Mounts continued to pursue the kind of cooperative lifestyle most art and craftspeople only dream about. In 1994 living and working together in close collaboration took an unexpected turn, when, after many years working in the same environment, Mount was appointed Head of the Glass Workshop at the JamFactory.

“When he got that job at the JamFactory we made a decision to sell the studio, (at Norwood) says Pauline. “I wasn’t very keen on selling the studio but I couldn’t answer the question about who would do all the maintenance. I imagined I could rent the studio to other glass people and look after it and maybe make a living out of it. Nick is so particular on the way things would need to be done and he couldn’t possibly do the Jam job and keep the studio, so in the end I agreed someone with different skills than me would have to take on the maintenance themselves. That was a real problem—once we’d sold the studio and he’d gone into the Jam my role changed.”

For the first time in twenty years they would not be living and working together in close proximity to each other.

“I never appreciated what a problem that was. The good thing was we kept up the exhibition side of the business and of course I did all of that but we didn’t have a studio and it was no longer obvious to other people what I did. In the early nineties it was just me working from home for awhile,” explains Pauline.

Nevertheless, they adapted to the new arrangements. The strong desire to maintain a contented work-home life prevailed as Mount divided his time between the JamFactory and home in the years ahead.

For much of the 1980s ceramics dominated the craft scene, but the 1990s shaped up to be the decade for studio glass in Australia. In 1994 the Studio Glass movement reached an all time high with over five hundred practitioners in Australia. By which time Mount had accumulated twenty years of glass blowing experience and a comprehensive understanding of maintaining a glass studio.

“For a craftsperson whose primary material is glass, to work and run and make a living out of their own private studio is a concept that is strictly sixties and seventies and never really worked all that well,” explains Mount. “As soon as you build a glass furnace and studio and fire up the furnace, it takes five days to get it hot and everyday is a twenty four hour cycle—*every day*—of making, annealing and finishing the glass you have made...you have to keep on running the machinery. You become a slave to the machinery in a way. And to be innovative amongst that is very difficult. Of course, you need that kind of work cycle to build your skills and understanding of the material and to attain the diversity that’s required to *be* innovative. It’s so hard to put a week or a month aside to generate a new exhibition of work...which we did every year...so historically glass has always been made in factories. All the skills in a factory an innovator can use. In Adelaide we have the JamFactory—it’s not a factory but in a way it’s got the information that an innovator in the glass arts needs.”

In 1995 Diana Laidlaw voiced her concerns about the JamFactory’s rising levels of ‘operational turmoil’. There was a minor upheaval followed by revised management practices and the Jam was forced to raise its public image and improve operations. Mount remained Head of the Jam glass studio until he resigned in 1997, during which time he injected his own philosophy into its management and operations.

“I want glass practitioners to realise that the team approach is a strength which can underpin individual work,” he said at the time. He enlarged the glass workshop; educated trainees in production work, design, and marketing; and got individual trainees together to work in teams capable of much larger volumes of production.

“I feel the JamFactory should be much, much more a public facility. We have started doing weekend classes for beginners and working on more levels. We are also doing work on commissions for trophies, giftware, wine bottles, and so on.” It was an opportunity to develop the style of studio he preferred and enabled him to cultivate his own personal philosophies around teamwork and cooperative artistic practice in the South Australian glass community. Along with managing the Jam’s glass studio and keeping up the growing number of orders for casting, pressings, blown work, trophies, souvenirs, presentation pieces, lighting, and antique glass repairs, he continued to maintain a high volume of his own studio commissions.

In May 1996 the seaside town of Lakes Entrance on the edge of Ninety Mile Beach where the Gippsland lakes meet the ocean hosted to a major exhibition of glass artists who had lived and worked in the region. *Class Glass II* included works by Mount, Hanning, Rob Wynne, Brian Hirst, Mike Hook, Tricia Allen, and Carrie Wescott. The significant exhibition highlighted the establishment of the Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education and the development of Budgeree Glass by Nick and Pauline in partnership with Tony Hanning in 1980. This exhibition and many that followed offered Mount an opportunity to travel, show his work, and expand his horizons.

“Its ideas, information, conversations, relationships, places, geographies; everything that you actually use in your work you get from a trip away,” says Mount, of the regular interstate and overseas travel and exhibitions.

“A very important part of our practice is to visit other people in their studios and see other cultures. We bring back bits and pieces of what we find and implant it into our studio and in our own culture here in Adelaide,” says Mount.

In 2012, with seven exhibitions in seven months, the responsibility of curtailing interruptions at the studio rests primarily with Pauline

“It’s been fantastic and quite strange having Christine because there’s so much work to do and I can’t get it all done. She’s taken over all the cataloguing,” says Pauline from behind the computer in her office. “Now I feel like Nick does because I have to say to people...wait till Christine comes she’ll know the answer. That’s the sort of thing I’ve always done and kept on track.” I ask her about the other roles she carries out.

“Spending all the money,” she laughs.

“So you look after the finances?”

“Yes. And I do all the diary work. It’s a joint decision about where we are going, how long we are going to be overseas, all that sort of thing, and it can be achieved in a very short conversation. Then I make it happen. With the travelling most of the time Nick doesn’t know unless he asks me what day we’re leaving or where we’re going. I make the arrangements and I’m social secretary, and communicate with the galleries. Now we use email I can’t imagine how we operated in the past. I do the mail and the administration stuff and everything else you do to keep your life running smoothly. I love working—some people love doing nothing—some people would like nothing better than to retire but I couldn’t imagine doing that because even though we work a lot, it’s so much more than work, it’s what we are and I think we will probably do it forever.”

## Repeat and return



Canberra Glass Blowing Workshop, 2011.

*“In learning a skill, we develop a complicated repertoire of such procedures. In the higher stages of skill, there is a constant interplay between tacit knowledge and self-conscious awareness, the tacit knowledge serving as an anchor, the explicit awareness serving as critique and corrective. Craft quality emerges from this higher stage, in judgements made on tacit habits and suppositions.”*

*Richard Sennett*

On day one of a five day Master glass blowing workshop I pull on my hat, gloves, scarf and boots to make the half kilometre walk from my serviced apartment to the Canberra Glassworks in Canberra's oldest public building, the Kingston Powerhouse. It's situated on the Kingston Foreshore on the southern side of Lake Burley Griffin. Warren Langley's glass monolith, *Touching Lightly*, a 22 metre chimney of glass and light rises out of the ground at the front entrance. It's a beacon signalling the blaze of imagination burning within the buildings historic walls. I make my way to the rear entrance, and it's a warm reprieve from the frosty minus five degree outside.

The Canberra Glassworks has the mantle of being the only cultural institution in the Southern hemisphere entirely devoted to contemporary glass.

Mount regularly teaches and mentors in Australia and overseas and thrives on the opportunity to immerse himself in diverse Australian and international cultures. In roles of mentor, teacher, and artist in residence, he gets back as much, if not more, than he gives. He and Pauline regularly travel the country and the world, lingering just long enough to get to know the local artistic communities. He explores the ideological and geographical offerings of other cultures and acquires additional skills and experience that he could not accrue had he not ventured further afield. The time spent living and working in Japan, Canada, America, Austria, Germany, and Korea enhances Mount's creative practice.

Richard Sennett writes about how individuals and groups make social and cultural sense of their world and their labours. He suggests virtuoso craftspeople set the standard that lifts everyone's game depending, that is, on how they behave. Sennett calls virtuoso glass blowers like Mount, *sociable experts*, because they are comfortable with mentoring, the modern echo of medieval in *loco parentis*, referencing a parental style with strong leanings toward equality and humility in the transfer of knowledge and skills. He believes thinking like a craftsperson is more than a state of mind; it is a sharp social edge. Mount is influenced

by his own personal champions and embodies a sociable mentoring approach. Despite his witticism for trainees to *aim low and win* he expects apprentices and trainees under his guidance to perform in accordance with the standard of the rest of the members of the glass blowing fraternity. In the words of Hanning, Mount's philosophy should not be misconstrued as 'making less effort'. The objective is to set achievable goals that build confidence at every step, but the process of 'stepping' is what really counts.

Mount is already seated at a large square table surrounded by empty seats when I arrive at the Canberra Glassworks workshop. Slowly the glass makers roll in. They drop their bags, peel off their coats, take their places around the table, check each other out, smile, and introduce themselves. Queanbeyan local, Annette Blair, or Netty as she likes to be known, is one of two studio assistants for the workshop. She's an established glass artist, Honours graduate from the Australian National University and the JamFactory trainee program in Adelaide. Her exhibition pieces explore a combination of portraiture and glass focusing on identity and personal narrative. Brian Corr, a native of Colorado, USA, and resident artist at the Glassworks, is also assisting. He's an accomplished glassblower who has spent time as an instructor at Corning Museum of Glass in New York. After spending a year in South Korea as Associate Professor in the Department of Environmental Art and Design, Corr calls Australia home, at least for the time being. In the studio he wears long khaki shorts, a serious expression that quickly breaks into a wide grin, black sandshoes and dark protective glasses shoved back on the top of his head. His work explores elements of volume, void, light and shadow in sculptures and large-scale installations which serve as reflections and interpretations of his own experiences.

"A lot of time when you're working in glass in the studio there's an urgency to get stuff done that's saleable," says Mount. "Whereas, in a workshop environment, there is a chance for teachers, students and teaching assistants to relax. You're much more concerned

with issues like developing new processes, listening to people talk, being involved in a group that is fairly demanding, and you can afford to be adventurous for that period of time. The innovative activity which goes on in that group of people during that time is great. Each workshop is different so it's determined by the orientation of the group and the group dynamic as much as by the person heading up the workshop."

Mount has agreed to let me audit the group, even though, having an outsider observe is not the preferred option. *Funroom* is scrawled in large letters above Creative Director, Clare Belfrage's office door. She's excited Mount accepted her invitation to do the workshop. "He has such generosity and such a great sense of humour and he hasn't done one here for awhile," she tells me. One of the group has *hot shop addict* scribbled across his tee shirt, and although he's the first to admit it, everyone here shares his obsession.

Around the table sits James Dobson, with twenty seven years of glass making behind him and his own glass studio practice in Tasmania. He's the guy with the bushy grey beard at the furnace in the Boag's beer commercial. Softly spoken Ruth Oliphant is an Honours graduate from Australian National University and recipient of the Embassy of Spain Award 2008 and the Vicki Torr Memorial Prize 2009. Belinda Toll is another graduate from ANU and winner of the inaugural National Student Art Glass Prize in 2010. Bachelor of Fine Arts and Masters Graduate from Monash University, Holly Grace, has just arrived. Over the last few years Holly has travelled and worked extensively overseas and been a studio assistant to renowned glassmakers in Australia, Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom. She says she wants to try murrine. Nikki Main, the 'rock chick' as Mount calls her, was unanimously selected as the recipient of the prestigious 2010 Waterhouse Natural History Prize, and awarded the \$50,000 prize money that went with it for *Floodstones*. The Museum prize and national recognition is a huge win and has been known to change careers. Main is fast

developing a reputation for her hand blown organic glass sculptures based on the movements of water, soil, and rocks in the landscape.

John, a second year student at ANU, just back from an enamelling and glass workshop in Japan, wants to extend what he's been doing. Naomi, a PhD student from Perth, wants to work on form and closed vessels. Marcel, the youngest of the group, runs his fingers through a shock of spiky thick hair and says to Mount, "cane work: that's what I came for." Tall lanky Glen, another student at ANU, is ready for anything. And over the next five days the group of glass makers, regardless of their national and international reputations, and despite their individual accomplishments and awards, are, for the time being, mere apprentices.

"I didn't have much direction and I wasn't all that easy to get along with as a teenager," says Mount. "I think I was okay as a young kid but as a teenager I was kind of introvert, you know negative...there was no technical education available to me and I wasn't academic and I didn't care about those things and I was confused by the education we had, the religious side and the academic side of it, and the classics, and the fact that I was really strongly physically discouraged from being part of the art department."

Like most autodidacts Mount has an aversion to authority with a tendency to resist formal instruction in pursuit of his own interests.

"I remember in grade five...not being able to read properly...our teacher was aggressive in his teaching style. He was a returned soldier and scout master and I didn't respond all that well with reading...totally giving up and not caring...I didn't want to fit in with what everyone else did...In the last couple of years at school I was a total under achiever but I made good friends with David Dridan in the Art Department...I spent a lot of time there...he liked what I did...he was caring and all the rest of it...but I wasn't supposed to do art in year 12 and got into a lot of trouble...It might have been a good thing to create some sort of

drive or feeling of being different...I think some of us are makers and we are hand workers and if you are not given the opportunity then you haven't got a place. If our culture doesn't encourage or value people or give people status for being hand workers then the culture is missing out."

Mount's preference for hand work was apparent from a young age.

"I didn't know what I wanted to do when I left school and I just sort of mentioned to mum and dad one day—what about going to art school? And they said *great* idea, fabulous, wonderful."

"I'll do whatever you want me to," he tells the Canberra workshop group.

It's a loose plan but a tight schedule if they are to get through everything. He wants to keep the diverse group of artists satisfied. He suggests they work from 8.00am till 5.30pm and make the most of the short time in the hot shop to explore new techniques and stretch the boundaries.

"It's about understanding the material at the end of the stick," he says, as they make their way downstairs to the glass studio.

"Try to make sense of its next move through the cold metal pipe, wooden paddles, and wads of wet newspaper. You need to have an idea in your head about what you want the glass to do. It takes a lot of visualization. You are always asking it to come with you on the journey, and that's how I'll teach it."

Mount tells them about a glass blower whose shirt caught fire at the Jam last week. He yelled for her to put her hands up and whipped her shirt off over her head. He's reminding them to keep their wits about them. By the time the group reaches the furnace the women have tied back their hair and everyone is sporting dark protective glasses.

They've all arrived with design ideas about the basic glass blowing they want to practise under Mount's guidance. They slap their tools on the benches and a dull clank of metal on wood echoes throughout the studio. Sixteen large dome lights with bulbs the size of footballs hang from the cathedral ceiling to light up the purpose built studio. Mount stands at the mouth of the furnace and dips his pipe into the molten glass.

"You must be careful with your pipe, look at it, and look into the furnace at the surface of the glass and determine where to go in. Look for the different currents in the pool of hot glass, the different atmospheric conditions, the lazy areas, and the corners. The surface viscosity is like skin on custard. For the optimum gather don't go beyond your physical capabilities. You have to know where you want to finish up when you start. The foundation gather will determine what you will get at the end. If it has a bubble in it—get rid of it. Get it as close as possible to perfect or the rest will be compromised no matter how good you are. You have to get it right or it will mirror any original problem."

Mount makes it clear being a glass maker is fundamental to his identity.

"My own personal worth is determined by my skill with glass," he tells them, rolling his first gather on the cold marver. "Hold the pipe in your mouth, blow, then put your thumb over the end. Once the cold air is in it builds up pressure slowly. The blow is important."

I move a little too close to the furnace and blanketed in searing heat. A large discarded fragment of freshly blown glass shatters in the cullet bucket about a metre behind me. As the hot molten glass cools quickly it explodes and brittle shards ricochet against the inside of the metal bucket. A splinter of glass piecing flesh is a real possibility and in the likelihood of a missile escaping the bucket I move out of the firing line. In the wink of an eye things can go terribly wrong and a lot of glass blowers have the scars to prove it. Netty shows me an old scar on her upper arm where she inadvertently leant against a hot pipe while assisting Clare Belfrage a few years ago. The skin has healed and the scar has faded, but the

excruciating contact of flesh and flame is a painful memory of a momentary loss of concentration.

In 1915 the Powerhouse supplied Canberra with coal-generated electricity. The piercing whistle that once signalled start and knock-off time stopped disturbing the locals in 1957. The fitter and turners, boiler makers, firemen, and general labourers vacated the premises decades ago. In 2007, after fifty years of abandonment, the old building became a significant part of the urban renewal Kingston Foreshore Redevelopment. The original roof trusses, drill press, and huge exhaust fan are retained in the ground floor Economiser Room. Today waste heat from the glass furnaces boils water which circulates through pipes in the floor to heat the building. The blazing foundry fires and deafening steam-driven turbines no longer light up Canberra with electricity.

In 1983 the nearby glass workshop at the Australian National University's School of Art established an international reputation under Klaus Moje. Today the glass workshops at ANU provide courses and facilities which prepare students for careers in the visual arts, and many of the ANU graduates make the most of the Canberra Glassworks. The Australian Capital Territory government funded Canberra Glassworks is a state-of-the art facility showcasing many of Australia's eminent glass makers and wields immense cultural collateral. It's been pivotal in establishing Canberra's international glass art reputation and provides a unique opportunity for emerging and experienced glass artists to spend time with glass makers like Mount.

“That's where the steam used to escape from the turbines but the enormous holes have been filled with cement,” Tom Rowney, tells me, pointing to a series of dark grey coloured squares on the floor. Today, after extensive renovations, the original powerhouse black steel coal hoppers remain a permanent fixture on the north wall of the studio, and a fortification of flues stand like silver metal sentinels providing an escape route for smoke and fumes from

the furnaces. Visitors watch and meet the artists, view exhibitions, take tours, purchase glassware, soak up the atmosphere, and have a go at blowing glass.

“I’ve got a big fat wet one instead of a double dip,” calls Mount from the studio floor, as he gathers a large round blob of glass on the end of his pipe. He’s about to make a twisty cup—a staple of Italian glassblowing made of thin glass with small ridges made by blowing a glass bubble into a small optic mould. He gives the wet gather a blow. It immediately begins to cool to an elastic state somewhere in between thick honey and soft rock. He doesn’t want it to turn hard too soon because it’s near impossible to regain ground once it gets to that stage. He rolls it on the marver, always rolling the pipe in the same direction on the first gather. He thrusts it in and out of the furnace and hangs it down to let the hot glass slowly ooze into the mould on the floor between his feet. Then he’s back at the furnace before returning to... the bench.

“Blow harder,” he tells Netty, while he cuts and snips the wet glass into shape. He flattens the base with a paddle while Netty heats up a punty, or receiving post. She joins the heated end of the punty to the glass, it adheres, and he taps his pipe and it snaps away clean. The flat base of the cup is attached to the new pipe. He reheats the lip of the glass in the furnace, snips it, cuts off the surplus and inserts the tips of the pointed jacks into the lip and the glass flanges open wide into the shape of a drinking tumbler.

Mount works to control the molten glass. What appears natural comes from having repeated the same behaviours and skills until they come more often than not, without having to think about it too much. His tacit knowledge comes from years of hard work. It’s a knowledge not easily transferable. The best way to learn how to blow glass, and some would argue the only way—is to just do it. After the first demonstration Mount immediately tells the group to get set up.

“Make sure everyone knows what they are supposed to be doing. Work as a team, everyone takes responsibility for the piece being made, get your confidence, have a good attitude, and aim low and win,” he laughs.

The class breaks into four small groups and begin to set their own tools up at the benches in front of the four furnaces. There’s plenty of room for everyone including myself and glass artist and photographer for the next few days, Nicholas Wooley. The fulltime glass artist striped beanie covers a recent surgery that prohibits him from taking the workshop. Wooley gravitated from a successful career in Architecture to blowing glass. He’s disappointed at not being able to do the class but will get to watch Mount teach and that’s what this workshop is all about. He tells me the tumbler is the first object they learn to make at university and everything after that is derivative of the process.

Over five days the glass makers, some with years of experience and an accumulation of awards, others less experienced and virtually unknown, will focus on Venetian glass blowing techniques: on blowing the first bubble, making various figurative forms, the twisty cup, incalmo, and one of the most theatrical of glass making performances—pulling cane.

James and Holly pair up. She stares at him over the top of her dark glasses waiting for him to cue her to blow. James started making glass in 1975. He trained in London and spent time at Orrefors before returning to Tasmania, and he’s been making glass in his own studio ever since. So why, after almost three decades making glass, is he doing the course?

“Saw the ad, and my wife told me I should do it,” he says. He works in country Tasmania in isolation most of the time so it’s a good way to mix-it-up with others.

Naomi from Western Australia and Sara from Canberra team up together. Coincidentally, having never previously met, their individual note books are full of similar colourful figurative drawings. The quietly spoken *notebook girls* are very precise in their movements and instructions to each other. Sara’s designs are reminiscent of outrageous

couture and she works closely from the coloured drawings pinned on the blackboard beside their furnace. The ANU guys, Glen, Marcel and John partner up. They know each other and are familiar with each other's work. Belinda Toll is already working at the bench. Her eyes are watering from the wisps' of smoke billowing off the burning newspaper she uses to caress the glass at the end of her pipe.

Holly Grace has been a finalist in the Tom Malone Prize and received a Pilchuck Glass Scholarship. Her work is in the National Gallery of Australia, Australian National Glass Collection Wagga Wagga, Parliament House, Artbank, the Art Gallery of Western Australia, and the Glasmuseum, Ebeltoft, Denmark. No small achievement, and yet, today she is here to learn. She kneels on her haunches, tightens the hair clip pulling the fringe off her face and sucks in a mouthful of air, wraps her mouth over the end of the pipe and blows as Mount rolls the pipe back and forward on the rails of the bench beside her. The bubble in the fresh hot wet gather slowly inflates. She blows again and the bubble grows bigger. Mount grabs a wooden block out of a bucket of cold water and rests the now circular hot glass in the head of the block rolling it back and forth. Later in the day I ask Holly about her tools.

“You get addicted to them—I have a lot. I travel and buy them when I can. They are expensive but they last a lifetime if you look after them,” she says, dipping a piece of rag in water and meticulously rubbing the rust off the blades of a pair of metal diamond shears.

“She's serious about what she does,” Mount tells me later in Adelaide. “It was great to have her there and get to know her a little better. Some of her leaf form pieces have a thick base and reach a fine translucency at the top. They have good stability, good presence, good glassiness, and sometimes she works the surface with various commercial engraving and photographic techniques. So it has the art input, the saleability, the price, all the stuff that works really well. A lot of glass makers whip themselves stupid for the sake of technique and craft and totally ignore the marketing side of it and have trouble making a living. The market

is not always discerning when it comes to crafting issues. Chasing your craft is a really selfish pursuit and it's what gives you a sense of who you are and pride in your work but it's got nothing to do with what you can sell."

I ask him if it's different for emerging artists today.

"I think they have a much higher expectation of themselves, and among their peers they have to be, like Holly Grace, extremely smart, and it's incredible what she's done. Back in the 1970s everything was fine and funky and slop and dribble but now the market expects a different level of skills."

Shards and brittle fragments of glass begin to pile up on the cement floor as Mount slides onto the bench, right hand on one end of the pipe and his eye on the other. He pulls the neck of the piece he's working on with the tip of the tweezers, snips and cuts into the glass.

"The secret is to take command. People often hesitate and stuff it up, the secret is to be bold, snip and cut like you have done it a thousand times before," he tells them, and the thing is—he has.

"Grab a little section of the hot glass, tweak it, go in with the shears, cut the soft glass, and don't tell me you're not a good clipper," he tells Glen, moving from one furnace to the next.

"Good pull," he calls out to Marcel.

"Work with the paper not the jacks," he tells Ruth.

"Go deep into the heat," he calls out to another.

The glass studio is a closed workshop but other glass makers come in and out throughout the day, perch themselves on spare marver tables to watch and chat with Mount. A stinging hissing sound goes unnoticed as someone plunges a discarded hot pipe tipped with a failed glass gather into a bucket of cold water.

Eventually, the heat, loud monotonous drone of air conditioning, and reverberating furnaces drive me off the studio floor temporarily and onto the bleachers. It's here the general public get a front row seat to the glass blowers' performance. Mount calls up from the studio floor and introduces me to Scott Chaseling. A glass artist originally from Adelaide who regularly travels, works, and exhibits internationally.

"Glassblowers have long lasting far reaching relationships," Chaseling tells me. "It's a tight community but once you're in—you're in for life. It's all about the type of glass you make and glassblowers are at the top, followed by the rest."

I wonder whether the harsh, at times punishing environment endured over the years generates an imperative among glass blowers to be good to each other. Perhaps the need to physically depend on each other in dangerous industrial environments fosters and cements a great many relationships, and forges the binding sense of community prevalent in the glass community.

"What are they making?" asks a young boy transfixed by the licking flames escaping one of the furnaces. His mum shakes her head in bewilderment.

"What do you like most about your visit," I ask him.

"The fire," he exclaims. This is thrilling and unknown territory for the inquisitive stream of visitors mesmerised by the performance on the studio floor.

Language does not always adequately describe the complex intricacies of making glass. A lot of what the participants are learning is gleaned from observing Mount in the act of creation. Belinda Toll assists Mount during the last demonstration of day one, and he provides a verbal account of what he's doing throughout the process

"The thickness of the glass retains the heat—I'm going to do a two gather set up and centre it. Softly touch the base—blow," he tells Belinda.

“Stop—blow a bit more. See how wet it is—just blow away easily. Before it gets cold I’m going to reheat it up a bit—now blow it up a bit more,” he says without taking his eyes off the glass.

“Centre it at the same time—just rest it on the paper not pressing—freshen the jack line—hang it out in the glory hole—get it hot—see the movement—let it drop—the shoulder has shifted—now blow softly—just touching the base—not pushing just let it go—let it drop to add length to the neck—blow now stop. I’m getting my neck and base body and shoulder.” He withdraws and swings the pipe to get a better shape.

“Blow softly—flash it a bit in the glory hole—flatten the sides with the jacks—and the base—now I’m forming the neck—try to control it because it will try to go square.”

It’s an intense psychological game of control and surrender. He appears to have the upper hand but insists it’s an illusion. It’s evident the art of glassblowing is like so much else in life—the more you know the more you realise how much more there is to learn.

Corr is reminding Naomi and Sara of the basics—where to put their fingers on the blow pipe, how far up to hold it, how to get a good grip, gauge the weight, where to position their feet, hold their upper body, face the furnace, and how to thrust and withdraw. Glen’s blow comes adrift mid-air and he trashes it in the cullet bucket. Ruth attempts to tap a cup off the end of her pipe but it falls away and smashes on the unforgiving cement.

“You lost another one. I heard it leap off,” laughs Mount.

Glass *leaping off* the end of the pipe and unceremoniously smashing on the floor is not usually a regular occurrence in the hot shop. But the group are pushing their own boundaries and practicing new methods. The look of disappointment on Ruth’s face is hard to disguise as she rams the discarded pipe into a bucket and starts again from scratch. At 5.30pm Naomi starts packing away her tools. Polly grabs a large wide broom and dustpan and sweeps

up the broken glass. The three ANU guys hang their jacks and shears onto hooks as the last piece of glass for the day goes into the annealing oven.

On the afternoon of the second day of the workshop I make the short walk along the breezy shores of Lake Burley Griffin to check out one of Mount's *Scent Bottles* at the National Gallery of Australia. Once through the entrance of the main gallery. I take the escalator upstairs and make my way past the Impressionist and Post Impressionist Gallery, past David Hockney's, *A Bigger Grand Canyon* painted in 1998. I bypass the Indian and Southeast Asian Hall stopping briefly to look at the ornate nineteenth century *Buddha Shakyamuni calling the Earth to Witness*. It is a magnificent work carved out of wood, partly covered with gold leaf, lacquered, and studded with coloured glass sequins. According to the wall plaque the sculpture *alludes to the moment in Buddhist narrative when, on the eve of his enlightenment the future Buddha was tempted in various ways by Mara, the god of desire and death*. The sculpture depicts the enlightened Buddha sharing his philosophies with his growing number of followers.

Clare Belfrage's, *Passage #3*, an acid etched blown glass sculpture is visible at the end of the corridor, and tucked in behind Belfrage's sculpture sits Mount's *Scent Bottle* (2005). It shares the display case with *Groove Bottle* (1999), made by Ben Edels and Kathy Elliot. The four glass sculptures emulate the individual idiosyncratic qualities of each artist. The separate compositions arranged together in close proximity at the end of the gallery are examples of Australian glass and embody the shared intimacy and cherished friendships of the glass artists who create them.

Later that afternoon back at the Canberra hot shop the group gets down to pulling helix-style ballotini cane. The complex ballotini Italian canework adds intricate patterns and stripes to blown glass objects and is achieved by layering coloured patterned glass canes, fusing them together, and twisting and stretching the glass into brittle rods. At the beginning

of the process Corr cuts previously pulled three metre rods of cane into about a dozen 15cm lengths. He heats the flat ferro plate at the end of his pipe until it's warm to touch and lines up the cut canes on top of the flat surface. Meanwhile, Mount collects and marvers a clear gather of molten glass for the pickup. When the soft glass is the size and shape he desires he rests the tip of the domed gather onto one end of the canes and gently presses and rolls and picks up each individual cane rod. Then he reheats the picked up canes in the glory hole.

Netty stands with the punty in an upright position, one end almost touching the floor, the other pointing skyward. Mount flips his pipe and lets the gather of molten glass pour onto Netty's punty where it firmly adheres. They lean toward each other, bent at the waist, feet spread hip width apart, eyes on the pipe, and begin to unravel the hot luscious liquid glass off the tip of Mount's pipe. Netty takes one step back, then another, slowly lowering her pipe and continually pulling it away as Mount twists his pipe clockwise with both hands, slowly at first then faster and faster. Sweat pours from his forehead as his body thrusts sideways with every vigorous twist of the pipe. His eyes fixed on the twisting thinning hot thread of coloured glass suspended in mid-air at waist height between them. Netty pulls further away, three metres, four, five, still twisting the thin cool brittle rod of glass. At six metres they stop, snap the fragile thread of twisted glass off the end of the pipes, and lay it gently along slats of a wooden ladder lying on the cement floor.

“Good one, Netty. I didn't lose much of it,” says Mount throwing her a high five.

To add a degree of difficulty, he uses the cane to demonstrate how to make a low Incalmo bowl. The Incalmo technique originated in the sixteenth century and involves moulding two or three different colour sections together as one. It's a complicated technique. He works the glass through the early stages not pushing it into shape but holding it gently against newspaper, carefully pulling the neck out with tweezers, chilling it off with a shot of air, getting the base thinner, forming the shoulder, the body, and gradually increasing the

flange of the lip. The handicaps stack up. Nothing distracts him when he's blowing glass. He once told me the strong scent of certain perfumes in the studio trigger his allergy and interrupt his momentum.

At the end of the process he dribbles cold water onto the jack line he made earlier and the bowl breaks free from the pipe and into Netty's waiting insulated grasp. As she steps in the direction of the annealing oven the thin rim of the bowl unceremoniously slumps in on itself. The group stare in disbelief. Without a moment's hesitation Mount pulls the bowl out of the annealing oven and trashes it in the cullet bucket, grabs a new pipe and re-gathers at the furnace. There's a brief autopsy—wrong mix of glass—too much heat—and it's forgotten. An important aspect of the workshop is to work out what to do when things go wrong.

On a shelf in Mount's Leabrook studio lies a collection of various size loops of glass he calls *graphic gestures* which are recognizable components of his *Scent Bottles*. They are made from threads of thin pulled glass and often form the flamboyant stopper in his sculptural compositions. In a matter of minutes he makes another graphic gesture to add to the collection at home by collecting a small gather and stretching and flipping a thin stream of hot syrupy glass into the wisp of a loop where it sets hard in mid flight. It's a brief expressive interlude followed by a whistle.

Toward the end of the workshop a small group of onlookers gather in Gallery II on the ground floor of the Glassworks smokehouse to listen to Mount talk about the *Ten Good Stories* exhibition currently on show. The visiting exhibition is the story of the artists working in Adelaide's JamFactory glass studio.

"Investing time and patience is a grand thing," Mount tells the crowd. "It's great to be a craftsperson and to have an organisation that fosters that and the value of it."

A large composition of small *Scent Bottles* bearing strong influences of the Venetian granulare murrini technique takes centre stage in the gallery. The pieces were produced at Richard Marquis's studio on Whidbey Island in Washington State, USA, and the composition holds sentimental significance for Mount. Marquis assisted and Lino Tagliapietra contributed the unusual opalo dura to make the glass during the blow. The composition serves as a statement about the value of handwork and the relationships that are built on a foundation of materials and process.

“I will set up the plinth and take pieces out of the box and hear people rationalise why I did what I did. Sometimes it's random,” he tells me later. “The idea that everything has been set and decided and considered and obsessed over isn't always the case. At times I'm dealing with it in a totally random way. In the set up—the pick up—the blow—why I do what I do is random. On the plinth it seems like a character but really it's like passing each other in a tight hallway at a party, close enough in each other's space, but not close enough to know any more.”

Robyn Archer opened the exhibition the previous night. A painfully sore throat and lack of a public address system didn't prevent her from highlighting the connection and synergy between the artists in *Ten Good Stories* and those of the Canberra glass community. Mount has an enduring history with the JamFactory dating back many years. In February 1999, he exhibited two giant white *Scent Bottles* with elaborate Zanfirico coiling thread stoppers in an exhibition of Australian studio glass, *Alla maniera Veneziana* (in the Venetian manner) at the Purple Space gallery in the original JamFactory then situated at Payneham in Adelaide. His sculptures shared the gallery space with other Venetian inspired glass artists, Giles Bettison, Gabriella Bisetto, Tim Edwards, Tom Rowney, Benjamin Edols, and Kathy Elliot.

The poignant exhibition coincided with the Italian community's annual Carnevale and the recent death of former South Australian state premier, Don Dunstan, a passionate promoter of the arts, and one of the first Australian political leaders to enthusiastically support multiculturalism. The Jam's humble origins in an abandoned jam factory at Payneham in the north-east suburb of Adelaide can be traced to an undertaking by Dunstan, who decreed at the time, that he would if re-elected for another term, put his full support behind craft and cottage industries in South Australia. He remained true to his word.

On the last day of the workshop we arrive to a freezing cold building. Mount, along with the rest of the surrounding neighbourhood, was woken by the Glasswork's fire alarm at 5.30am. It was a false alarm but nonetheless it cut off the electricity supply and the building is as freezing inside as it is out of doors. The heater, air conditioners, enormous extract fans, and furnaces are eerily quiet. It doesn't take long before Tom Rowney gets the machines and furnaces up and running and a loud monotonous whirring again echoes through the void.

Mount starts the final day of the workshop with a demonstration blowing granulari. The technique involves blowing glass with two lots of tiny glass tiles of vastly different viscosity, and he compares it to blowing nougat. He begins by laying a mixture of yellow and grey tiles on a flat heated ferro plate ready for the furnace.

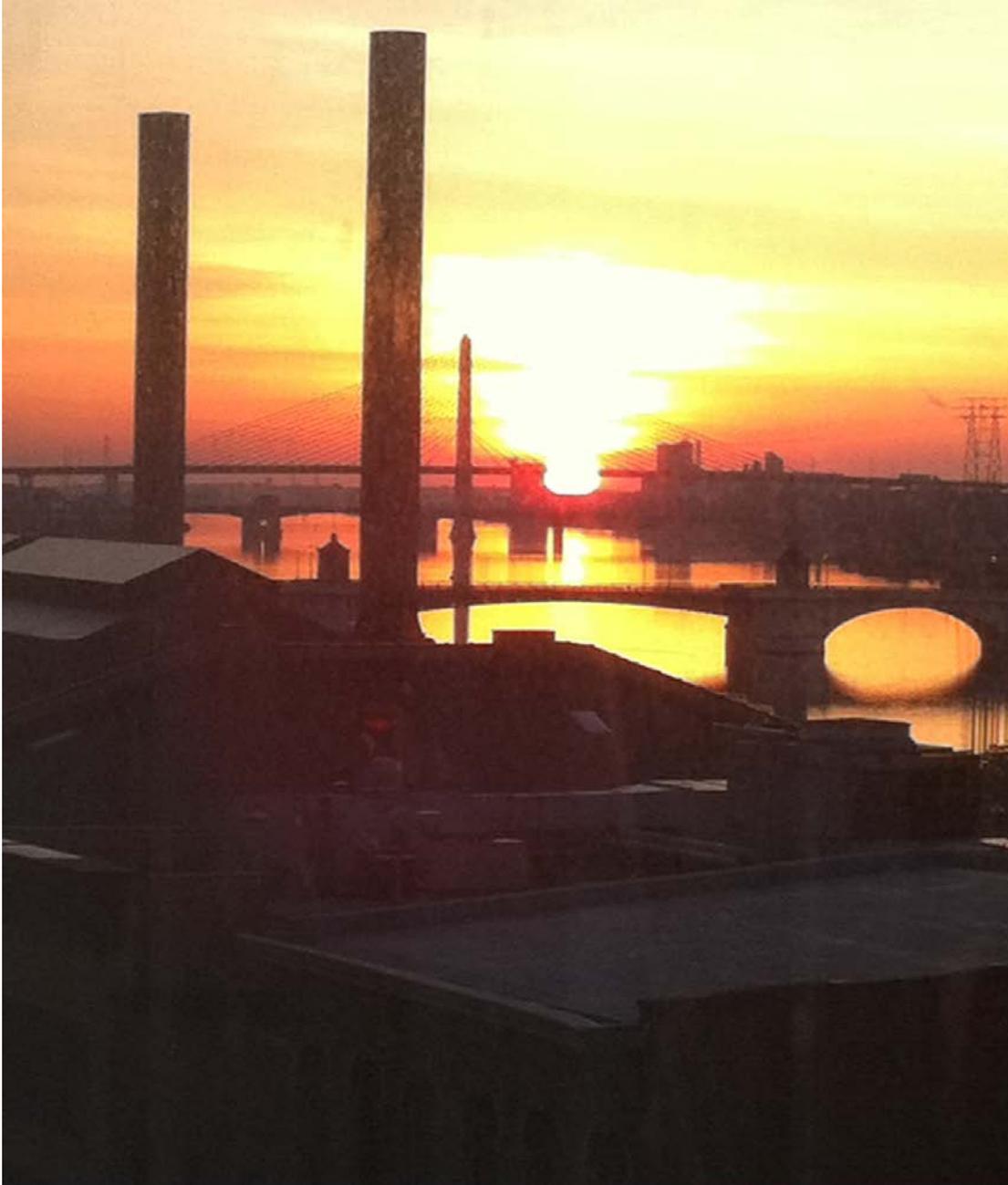
"I like these colours because they are a mixture of the aggressive and mechanical and the soft and voluptuous," he says, heating the tiny tiles until they melt together forming a single sheet of glass. He watches the rapidly changing surface tension of the two different types of glass so they don't pull apart. He heats the sheet and tweaks it with the tip of the jacks to push them together.

"You need to get into the sheet early," he tells the group. He likes the intimate and tiny detail of the granulari. He reveals that the secret to getting the suede soft-to-touch opaque

finish on the murrine and granulari *Scint Bottles* on show in *Ten Good Stories* involved sand blasting and whipping the surface of the glass with horse hair pumice.

As Mount heats and moulds and blows the granulari into shape the workshop continues through a backdrop of exploding glass, smoke haze, searing heat, the clink of rolling cane, snap of brittle glass, clank of metal jacks, and the soft murmurs of awe from the bleachers above. Through a thin veil of shimmering heat in front of the furnace the successes end up in the annealing oven while accidental slumps and breaks are accompanied by short lived tremors of disappointment. But the desire to return to the furnace again and again is overwhelming. Repeat and return. Ten, a hundred, a thousand times if necessary. Because these glass makers, like generations of Venetians before them, know it takes a lifetime at the furnace to master their art.

# Holy Toledo



Maumee River, Toledo, Ohio.

*“When the artist lifts his blowpipe, he must be prepared to intervene with all his aptitude, training, form-sense, as well as physical and mental energy...breathing his desire into the molten glass.”*

*Harvey Littleton*

“Welcome to the glass city,” calls out the driver from the front seat of a hire car as we cruise along the highway through green fields past small wooden farm houses and coloured barns on our way to downtown Toledo on a warm afternoon in June 2012. I assume he’s referring to Toledo being the glass city because it’s hosting the Glass Art Society (GAS) forty second Annual Conference: Ideas, Impact, and Innovation. I soon discover he’s actually talking about the time in 1888, when young Edward Drummond Libbey moved his family’s New England Glass Works from Massachusetts to Ohio, hired inventor and glassblower, Michael J Owens, and established Toledo as the *glass city*. The moniker stuck once glass manufacturing giants, Owens-Illinois, Owens Corning, Libbey Glass, Pilkington North America, and Therma-Try established operations in the then small American city situated on the western perimeter of Lake Erie in northwest Ohio.

Walking onto the factory floor of Libbey Incorporated today, America’s longest nonstop running glass manufacturer is like walking onto a post apocalyptic science fiction film set. The air reeks of carbon acetate fumes. Loud thundering steel machines dripping thick black grease tower two stories high above the factory floor. Hundreds of intermittent shots of cold water splash from metal protrusions, blue flames erupt unexpectedly into the air, and measured gobs of hot molten glass drop from tap-like spouts into designated metal moulds on what look like ominous pulsating grotesque steel rotating roundabouts.

A glass worker in dark overalls astride an old black leather swivel chair sits adjacent to one of the thunderous machines keeping a watchful eye. A radio blasts away in the background pumping out barely audible honky-tonk above the din. The glass worker leans closer to the monstrous machine and with a small metal rod rhythmically puts a kink in the once straight glasses stem, a signature of the new mass produced Libbey cocktail glass. Over and over he places his own mark on the glass but unlike studio glass makers, there’s only limited scope for creativity on the assembly line.

Up until recently the general public were not permitted entry here and there's still a cone of secrecy hanging over the factory floor. Strictly no phones, no photos, and some of my questions are acknowledged but go unanswered. It's a colossal operation spanning ninety three thousand square metres of warehouse where one thousand two hundred workers produce hundreds of thousands of individual glass pieces from three hundred tonnes of molten glass three shifts a day for three hundred and sixty five days a year. Libbey Incorporated is the largest manufacturer of glass tableware in the Western Hemisphere and the second largest glass tableware manufacturer in the world with almost eight hundred million dollars worth of sales in 2010.

Across the Maumee River opposite my hotel above a line of trees towers a solitary chimney stack belching thick grey smoke. It rises into the atmosphere, snakes its way across the sky and dissipates—somewhat like Toledo's factories have done over the last few decades. Following the invention of the automobile Toledo became a manufacturing hub for the car industry. Today the biggest employer here is not the car industry but healthcare. The 1980 slump in manufacturing in Ohio and the recession that followed, savaged the car industry in neighbouring Detroit. Thousands of Toledo city dwellers packed up and moved to the suburbs or left altogether. There's an air of faded glory about the place. Many of the buildings downtown are empty. Wide deserted streets lay quiet with anticipation, and it's a familiar story in many other northwest towns. The housing market is slowly starting to pick up, mirroring the uneven economic recovery in the rest of the country. More recently, the growth in green jobs and a developing artistic and cultural revival with a big emphasis on glass is giving Toledo a whiff of optimism. And once the GAS crowd of twelve hundred move into town for five days the museum precinct swarms with a large cast of local, national, and international artists with a smouldering fascination for glass.

The conference is celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the first studio glass workshops ever to take place in America. The two 1962 Toledo workshops ignited a blaze of attention for glass as a medium of individual artistic expression and sent ripples as far afield as Europe, Asia and Australia.

Apart from being a successful businessman Edward Drummond Libbey wanted to show the development of glass from antiquity to the present. True to his word the philanthropic glass industrialist and his wife Florence founded the Toledo Museum of Art (TMA). Today it houses one of the largest historic collections of glass in the world.

On the first day of the conference I seek respite from the humidity in the coolness of the conference restaurant, Mad Mike's. I'm introduced to glass tool manufacturer, John Steinert, one of the recipients of the 2012 GAS Honorary Lifetime Membership award. Harvey Littleton is too ill to attend. It's a shame considering Littleton is recognised as the key figure in establishing the Studio Glass movement in America.

An unassuming bright eyed eighty four year old with grey hair down to his shoulders is quietly munching away on a plate of spring rolls at the end of the table. It's painter, sculptor and glass artist, Erwin Eisch. Born in Frauenau, Bavaria, Eisch grew up during Hitler's rise to power and like many of his family suffered under the Nazi regime. He served in the German army, was interned by the British, and eventually returned to the family glass engraving business in Frauenau, where he later studied glass design, sculpture and interior architecture. Eisch established a reputation in the 1950s for being anti art establishment, and in 1952, ten years prior to any sign of studio glass in Toledo he held an exhibition of expressionistic free-blown glass described as full of all kinds of provocative themes and unusual, anti-functional, colourful, and grotesque glass. A meeting between Harvey Littleton and Erwin Eisch following the original 1962 Toledo studio glass workshops would influence the future of Studio Glass in America and around the world.

For thousands of years craftspeople across Europe made glass in small furnaces in their own homes. Eventually glass making moved out of the artisan's home and into the factories where it remained for centuries. At the turn of the twentieth century, factories were using industrial glass making machines to turn large volumes of hot glass into bottles and utilitarian objects. Glass of unprecedented genius, notably from the workshops of Emile Galle and Louis Comfort Tiffany became a medium of artistic expression. Several glassworks in Murano, particularly Venini, were at the forefront of a post-war glass renaissance. Industrial glass making teams such as Tiffany and Steuben in the USA, Galle in France, Hoya Crystal in Japan, and Orrefors and Kosta Boda in Sweden were champions of the factory system. However, on a cold day in March 1962, a group of ceramic teachers and a couple of post graduate students walked into an old garage on the grounds of the Toledo Museum of Art in an attempt to blow glass from a small furnace. The experimental workshop would take glass blowing out of the factory and jettison it back into the artist private studio from whence it had come.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Harvey Littleton's father, Jesse T. Littleton, was working as Chief Physicist in the research department of Corning Glass Works, New York. Jesse often took his young son Harvey to work. At the time no one at Corning considered glass good for anything other than industrial use. But as a physicist, Jesse knew glass would absorb and conduct heat evenly, and as a practical family man decided to explore its domestic potential for use in the kitchen. In 1913 Jesse took a cut-off battery jar made of industrial glass home to his wife Bessie and asked her to bake a pie in it. The following day he took the pie baked in the jar into the laboratory without disclosing the method of baking until all the scientists agreed the results were excellent. From this inauspicious beginning Corning allocated time and money into developing what later was patented and trademarked as Pyrex in 1915.

Harvey Littleton was well versed in the practical qualities inherent in glass. Up till the mid 1940s glass wasn't considered a medium of artistic expression in America. However, during the late 1940s and 50s a handful of ceramicists began using their kilns to melt glass to make decorative bowls and vases. While Littleton was a ceramicist at the University of Wisconsin he developed a passion for glass and couldn't understand why glass wasn't offered as an artistic medium to study in colleges. He was ecstatic when Otto Wittmann, then director of the Toledo Museum of Art, wrote to him in September 1961 inviting him to host the Toledo glass making workshop. It was an ambitious enterprise considering the limited understanding of glass blowing techniques outside commercial factories at the time. Littleton could never understand if a potter could have a kiln in his backyard why couldn't a glass blower have a furnace? He decided to teach the group how to melt glass in a specially built small fire brick prototype furnace. It had never been done in America and was to become the pivotal philosophical shift that would enable artists and craftspeople to once again work with hot glass in small furnaces in their own studios.

In March 1962 Littleton arrived in Toledo with graduate student Clayton Bailey. Seven participants scribbled their names on the workshop sign-up sheet. A couple of people rolled up at the last minute. Edith Franklin, a Toledo local taking pottery classes at the museum was told she couldn't attend because the classes were limited to pottery instructors only. But they couldn't fill the numbers for the workshop and a few days before it was due to start Franklin added her name to the list and paid her fifty dollars to join in. She was one of only two women in the first workshop, the other being Dora Reynolds from Columbus, Ohio.

"Everyone connected with this workshop is as nervous as I am," wrote Tom McGlauchlin, a twenty something pottery teacher from Wisconsin to his wife Pat the night before the workshop. "Clay said he hasn't been able to sleep all week. He's been waking up

really early and isn't able to go back to sleep and Harvey dreams all night about blowing glass."

On the morning of the workshop the group stepped into the small concrete garage, moved the lawn mowers to one side, and set about building a small rudimentary pot-furnace similar to the one in Littleton's Madison shed. For three days the temperature in the makeshift hot glass studio soars, patience frays, and tempers boil as attempts to fuse the molten glass fails.

"It was very difficult," recalls Bailey, now a professor emeritus in ceramics. "Most bubbles cracked because we didn't know how to anneal them, so most cup size pieces of glass always broke. People were making bubbles twelve inches long, but they were very thin and they would pop." Unfortunately, the glass was too hard, wouldn't melt properly, and proved impossible to blow.

"I was so excited," claims McGlauchlin. But there were problems.

"We got a pot loaded up with glass yesterday, but it didn't seem to melt...It just got crusty on the surface and sat there...We ended up throwing that glass out...Labino came down and solved our problem. He thought the substitutions were the problem and in a short time, after we had gone round and got all the right things, we finally melted some glass that could work."

Dominick Labino, vice president and director of research at nearby John Manville Fibre Glass showed up at the workshop with advice on furnace construction and a wealth of knowledge on the chemistry of glass. He told Littleton to remove the original crucible and switch to green-tinged John Manville number 475 glass marbles. He organised a donation of ninety kilograms of the marbles and things finally fell into place. Labino was an inventor and expert in the field with over fifty patents to his name including the development of pure silica fibres used to insulate tiles on the Space Shuttle Columbia.

During the workshop Harvey Leafgreen a retired glass blower with twenty five years experience stepped from his seat in the audience to offer the practical know-how that the experimental group clearly lacked. Leafgreen had grown up and worked in glass factories in Sweden, and had a long history blowing television and radar tubes at Libbey Glass. Within minutes, still dressed in his suit pants, crisp white shirt and thin black tie, Leafgreen successfully blew glass pieces on request. For the rest of the workshop the inexperienced glass blowers blew a motley collection of lopsided and heavy vessels. No one at the time realised the gathering in the garage would be regarded as the genesis of Studio Glass in America.

Harvey Littleton first met Eisch four months after the second Toledo workshop in June 1962 and was immediately impressed by Eisch's experimental attitude. Littleton came across a piece of glass, a mug, unlike any other he had seen before during a visit to showrooms in the Kristal-Rimpler glass factory in Zweisel. It was made at the Eisch Glass factory in nearby Frauenau.

"Harvey left Toledo in '62, and found me at my house in Frauenau. Then he invited me to the World's Craft Council in New York. This was most important. I would not be here if it wasn't for this funny meeting," explains Eisch. At the Eisch factory Littleton marvelled at Eisch's expressionistic style of work.

"Meeting Erwin confirmed my belief that glass could be a medium for direct expression by an individual," says Littleton. The two met again in 1964 at a glass blowing demonstration in New York where Littleton and some of his students set up another small furnace.

"The little furnace is the future," prophesied Eisch and he was right. Travelling to America he taught alongside Littleton before returning to Frauenau to concentrate on working

in his own small studio. Over the years the two pioneering stalwarts of studio glass have exhibited together.

The Toledo workshops were a spring-board that rapidly launched Studio Glass into university courses across America. After the workshops Littleton organised the first American hot glass program at the University of Wisconsin. From this point in time glass maintained a significant presence in the American universities. Littleton's enthusiasm had a huge impact on the first generation of studio glass artists and the generations that followed, many of whom are attending the 2012 GAS conference. The first pieces of modern glass art acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in New York were Littleton's *Amber Crested Form* and *Amber Twist* in 1977. His work is held in the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, New York City, Smithsonian Institution, Toledo Museum of Art, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and museums in Japan, and through Europe including, Denmark, Switzerland, and Holland, just to name a few.

“The public and private art school departments accelerated the growth of studio glass in the United States,” claims Marvin Lipofsky during the conference. Within two years of the 1962 Toledo workshop Lipofsky founded the glass program at the University of California. Tom McGlauchlin did the same at the University of Iowa, and Robert Fritz, at San Jose State University, California. Sam Herman took an exhibition to the United Kingdom in 1966. Bill H. Boysen built the first glass studio at Penland School of Craft in 1965. Then in 1969 Dale Chihuly initiated the glass program at the Rhode Island School of Design. Today, Chihuly is considered as having done more than most to promote the value of studio glass. Many of his works are massive daring colourful biomorphic blown assemblages representing abstract living organisms. A floor-to-ceiling piece, *Campiello del Remer Chandelier #2* (2006), designed by Chihuly and made at the Waterford Crystal factory in Ireland hangs in the Toledo Glass Pavilion front lobby.

The pioneering Studio Glass movement enabled artists to take command of their own creative and artistic practice, something that was impossible to do in the factories. Today Seattle, Ohio, New York, Los Angeles, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and San Francisco, are centres of American Studio Glass where artists incorporate flaming, casting, fusing, beading, and blowing. Glass artists make the pilgrimages to Pilchuck Glass School, the Pittsburgh Glass Centre, and the Corning Museum of Glass teaching facilities.

“There are probably three times as many studios in Seattle as there are in the whole of Australia and one of the people primarily responsible for getting it going is Dale Chihuly, and all of us worldwide, have benefited from what Chihuly has done in glass,” says Mount.

Littleton celebrated his ninetieth birthday at home in North Carolina during the conference. Following the conference opening address Brian Kennedy led the large crowd in the cavernous Greek Peristyle Theatre in a loud rendition of happy birthday for Littleton. His daughter stood on stage with mobile phone in hand while Harvey listened on the other end. Sadly, Littleton died on 13 December 2013 at his home in Spruce Pine, North Carolina, he was 91.

Over one hundred and sixty venues across the United States honoured the fiftieth anniversary of Studio Glass in 2012 with exhibitions. Part of the celebrations in Toledo included a comprehensive exhibition, *Colour Ignited; Glass 1962-2012*, held in the Wolfe Gallery at the TMA. The exhibition featured work from American and international artists and explored the pivotal element of colour. Elsewhere, established and pop-up galleries across Toledo brimmed with glass art from all over the world. Mount, along with a large selection of other artists, was represented at the Riley Galleries exhibition on North Michigan Street in down town Toledo.

On the second day of the conference a handful of international first and second generation studio glass artists, including Fritz Dreisbach, Henry Halem, Marvin Lipofsky,

Richard Marquis, Joel Phillip Myers, and Toots Zynsky wait in the wings of the enormous Peristyle Theatre. The auditorium is ordinarily teeming with opera and symphony orchestra patrons but not today. Over the next couple of hours the artists are invited up one by one to take their seat on a large red couch in the middle of the stage to tell their stories.

The title of the panel *Blowing in the wind* refers to Bob Dylan's 1962 song of the same name. The group of glass pioneers share anecdotes with the audience and lend intimacy to the celebratory conference.

"The studio glass movement aimed to free glass from the industry in order to make glass, not craft," says Joel Philip Myers. He credits Corning for pushing the glass movement to the forefront with a legacy of loyalty and support. Today Corning continues to provide major financial support to foster glass art enterprises in economically difficult times.

"I'm not a true believer but if I had to say what God looked like it would be Fritz," jokes Myers, as Fritz Dreisbach takes his place on the red couch. Fritz's actually dies resemble a holy man as he shares his story with the crowd.

"They all had a sleepless night before the first workshop because they knew something big was coming," he says. He's adamant the workshops exponentially propelled the glass movement.

Edith Franklyn, one of the two women at the 1962 workshop subsequently acquired the title la Grande Dame of the Arts and Godmother of Ceramics in Toledo. She is not on the panel this afternoon; however, at a spritely eighty nine she glamorously made her way down the cat walk in a costume made of glass at the conference closing night party. Sadly, Edith passed away two and a half months later.

Second generation glass artist, Toots Zynsky, is representing the pioneering women of studio glass who came before her. Zynsky gives full credit to Jaroslava Brychtova, Ann Wolff, Audrey Handler, Sylvia Vigiletti, Ruth Tamura, and Paula Barton. Not because they

are the only significant female glass artists but because it was their standout work that caught her attention as she made her way into an artistic milieu dominated by men. Zynsky didn't arrive on the glass scene until 1971 and claims to have at times been on the receiving end of a lingering gender imbalance. Henry Halem interrupts Zynsky to congratulate the “unsung women—our wives.”

“I've never had a wife and I've always been jealous of that,” replies Zynsky; conceding the condescending “you can be my punty girl” attitude eventually disappeared.

The 1960s and early 1970s were a time of political and personal turmoil in America. For many, the Kennedy and King assassinations permanently stained the fabric of American society. The Vietnam War was raging out of control and the country was in the midst of political melt down. *Make love not war* became the catch cry as a swelling population of young people, folk and hippy, took up residency in California. Henry Halem, now a distinguished glass artist and academic, told the conference how happy he felt when he woke up on the morning of 4 May 1970. It was his birthday and he had good reason to celebrate because he had recently landed a teaching position at Kent State University. But his jubilation turned to horror when peaceful anti-war protests on the university Commons turned into a blood bath. For reasons still debated today, the National Guard opened fire on unarmed students when attempts to disperse the two thousand strong student rally failed. Within thirteen seconds, twenty nine of the seventy seven guardsmen fired their weapons, four students lay dead, and nine were seriously injured. The tragic shootings came to symbolise deep political and social divisions and created a schism in the American psyche.

In 1969 as the sixties settled into mild chaos, Richard Marquis showed up on the doorstep of a glass factory on the island of Murano and was invited inside to work and study. He was one of the first Americans to have the opportunity to do so. No mean feat considering

how guarded and secretive Venetian glass blowers were at the time. It was during this period that Marquis concentrated on the Italian murrine technique for which he is renowned.

“I was never in those pictures because I was too busy,” jokes Marquis as he slides onto the red couch following a photo montage on the big screen behind.

“I started blowing after everyone else and built my own shop in 1969. I went to Italy and the world changed for me. The Venetians had been blowing glass for eighteen generations. I saw things being made I’d only seen in books. By late 1975 I was using found objects, fabricated pieces, and got into *super* glues, but these days my gluing is a lot better,” he chuckles.

At the end of his talk the music and lyrics of *Dick Marquis’s Last Words*, the song written by Seattle based Mark Graham in tribute to the very much alive Marquis swirls around the huge auditorium. “*Could I have all your stuff when you die?*” the singer humorously begs in a comic country and western plea to be bequeathed objects from Marquis’s legendary collection of art and paraphernalia.

Marquis’s resides at his home and studio nestled amongst the trees of Whidbey Island. It’s a haven of tranquillity and a private creative retreat where he and artist Johanna Nitzke Marquis live and work. It’s an astonishing repository for his insatiable appetite for found objects. Some old, some still in the original packaging, lay on benches, hang from the ceiling and rafters, stand in neat piles on shelves, and peak above the lush green grasses in the garden. Hundreds of separate individual collections of glass, fly fishing poles, straw brooms, paint brushes, kerosene lamps, mallets, oil cans, antique tins, bowling balls, tools, and all manner of conceivable paraphernalia. All found, all precious in their own way, all of personal significance.

The audience sit quietly in the dark auditorium as each poignant country rock lyric is played out. However, the future loss of a close mate, albeit amusingly disguised, is a little too

much for Mount. “I tear up whenever I hear it,” he says, as he watches Marquis sitting alone and motionless on the big red couch in the semi darkness.

I’ve heard people speak of glass as a *hero* or *heroine* art. At first I thought it was a disparaging remark, inferring some glass artists received unwarranted celebrity accolades. And there’s no denying the reverence given to some of the artists as witnessed here in Toledo. In a society where celebrities reign supreme it’s hardly surprising successful artists receive rock star treatment from adoring collectors and are idolised by emerging artists. In this instance, I think the status refers to a select number of artist or journeymen and women who complete long craft apprenticeships and are universally recognised as being at the top of their creative and artistic game.

Thirty eight years ago at the height of a hot Australian summer Nick and Pauline sold their car, pocketed the five thousand dollar grant from the Crafts Board of the Australia Council, threw a few belongings in a bag and flew to California. He was twenty one and she nineteen. In between helping Marquis re-build his Model A Ford pick-up truck Mount worked in a number of small Californian glass studios.

It was in those small Californian craft studios that the Mounts’ initial infatuation with glass took on a whole new meaning. While ensconced in the alternate communities of California, surrounded by politically passionate and artistically motivated young American art and craftspeople, Nick and Pauline’s idea to set up their own glass studio took shape.

Since the early sixties American and European glass artists have been travelling the world sharing new and ancient glass making techniques. On the third day of the conference a small group of international artists gather on the red couch for the *World Influences: American or World Glass* panel. Lucia Bubacco, Samuel Herman, Klaus Moje, Charles Parriott and Bertil Vallien are considered champions in their respective fields. A common theme running through their stories is one of reciprocal generosity between the

simultaneously developing American and European movements. Lucio Bubacco is up first. He's a flame worker who grew up in a family of glass blowers in Murano. At the age of fifteen he became a flame working artisan. In 1995, Bubacco arrived in Pilchuck with Venetian master Lino Tagliapietra, who is heralded for his glass virtuosity and encyclopaedic knowledge. Bubacco tells the audience his experience in the US was opposite to the glass culture of Venice where everyone tended to close the door on outsiders. He was blown-away by the open generosity of American blowers.

Swedish artist, Bertil Vallien, whose work is inextricably linked to sand casting, concedes that although glass wasn't invented in the US, despite what some people may think, Americans of the 1960s nonetheless rediscovered its limitlessness. After working in the factory environment for many years Vallien was inspired on his first visit to America and one day discovered his work exhibited in a window adjacent to that of Andy Warhol in Los Angeles. Today he continues to regularly teach and exhibit in the US.

Distinguished German born Australian glass artist Klaus Moje took his turn on the couch. Moje established one of the most influential glass teaching programs in 1983 at the Canberra School of Art. It was also strong lobbying from Moje and the Australian National University in 2007 that facilitated the Canberra Glassworks.

While artists from the Studio Glass movement of the sixties and seventies nostalgically talk about their experiences; a group of twenty-first century young American artists are discussing other ideas and encouraging their audience to explore new terrain. A site called *Glass Secessionism* has been posted online of late by a growing number of artists who view themselves as working *with* glass, as opposed to being glass artists. The group strongly advocate an artistic aesthetic with an emphasis on narrative rather than materials and technique. As early as 1995 Norris Ioannou claimed contemporary glass lacked the critical

discourse which develops around other traditional craft media. He went on to say that a cursory examination reveals the arts-versus-craft rhetoric dominates the discourse.

Walking into room 201 of the Seagate Centre in Toledo I find the *Post-Studio Glass* Panel, Alexander Rosenberg, Matthew Szosz and Tim Tate discussing new schisms in current glass theory. They question the object-on-a-plinth mentality. Some in the audience subscribe to a shift from the established studio glass movement which, according to their way of thinking, remains dependent on materiality and technique. But glass artists are a polite lot and the arguments are quiet and respectfully couched. Rosenberg favours the investigation of glass as a medium in conjunction with a more interdisciplinary art practice with other media and is unsatisfied with the current discourse. He pushes for concept, ideas, and narrative to take precedence over the seeming preoccupation with traditional aesthetics and materiality.

Online Glass Secessionism site claims no disrespect is meant toward technique driven work. It's a different branch of the glass tree—separate but equal. This seems to be more of an intellectual shift challenging established creative and artistic paradigms in an attempt to reconceptualise glass as a medium of sculptural expression. The Secessionists want to move away from what they see as a narrative-free vessel-driven approach in glass, but speaking to some of the older glass makers it appears the narrative versus materiality discussions are nothing new.

“I love to be affected by what other people are doing and have champions I'm in awe of,” says Mount. “During the sixties, seventies and eighties there was always competition between glass makers. Who could blow the biggest? Who could be the best? But it's become obvious to me for years that the competition has been won by one guy, Dante Marioni. He won the prize years ago and still maintains it. He's the coolest guy in the world, is an amazing glass blower, has an incredible high level of skills, is super generous and a nice guy. What I admire and look for in people most is whether they feel okay about themselves as

craftspeople and what they come with. Not necessarily the content and complexity but the resolved work that sits sweetly in a space and reflects them as makers best of all, and the honesty and integrity of the material, and the processes of the maker.”

Marquis, like many young Americans of his generation sought alternative political, cultural, spiritual, geographical, and creative horizons. He started in ceramics at the University of California, Berkeley, lived amongst the West Coast Funk movement working in clay and eventually switched to glass. Marquis’s California funk style was typified by a reverence for craft that grew out of his generation’s reaction against mass production. The paradigm of funk proved a perfect fit for Marquis.

Art historian Dan Klein claims “of all the arts affected by the explosive tendencies of Pop Art and Funk the medium of glass suffered the most direct hit.”

Today Marquis’s idiosyncratic miniscule murrine patterns are created by fusing, pulling and stretching hot glass cane to form brittle rods that are cut into small half a centimetre thick glass tiles to produce colourful patterns. Then heated and fused together into glass sculptures.

During decades of serious playfulness, Marquis continued to propel the possibilities of murrine to new heights. In 1972, as part of his master’s thesis and in the throes of wild creative inspiration, he created a standout piece of murrine. It is a tablet size murrine version of the Lord’s Prayer measuring 1.5cm high x 2.0cm wide x 0.4cm deep.

“Dick started by forming out of glass canes each of the letters he needed for the prayer text,” explains Barry Behrstock. “He grouped the cane letters into words and the words into sentences. While the text was hot, he stretched the entire clumped glass paragraph out into one long *pull* or rod of cane. When each segment was cut into cross sections, each bead or murrine exposed the entire full prayer.”

Marquis's current work combines a mastery of traditional Venetian glass blowing, and plenty of offbeat West Coast funk laced with his own unique sense of humour.

In 1974, more than a decade after the 1962 Toledo workshops, twenty nine year old, Marquis toured Australia when there were a few glass practitioners, virtually no glass-blowing facilities, and an absence of tertiary training. "Dick Marquis needed someone with skills like mine to weld and build equipment and follow him around the countryside. I just happened to be there and it seemed like a good idea at the time," says Mount.

## The Nick and Dick Show



Nick Mount and Richard Marquis, 2012.

*“I gave demos on how to blow a simple bubble, punty it, and make a little cup...Nick watched everything, then had a go and proceeded to blow a perfect bubble, stick it up, and make a nice little cup. It was impressive. But what was more impressive was that he wasn’t impressed. He knocked it off into the cullet barrel, folded his arms, and wondered what the big deal was.”*

*Richard Marquis*

In early 1974 Marquis stand in front of a make-shift furnace in the welding room of the Gippsland College of Advanced Education. His long side burns stretch across his round cheeks to the tips of a handle-bar moustache drooping over his upper lip. Mount stands beside him, his face almost hidden beneath a full beard. A dozen curious students stand behind them watching as Mount slides a small gather of glass at the end of his pipe into the glowing furnace.

A few months earlier while Marquis and his girlfriend Rafaella Del Bourgo were in New York they met Paul Smith, head of the American Crafts Council. Smith tells them Marea Gazzard from the Crafts Board of Australia is keen to get someone from the US glass scene to introduce Australian art and craft students to glassblowing. Few Australian craft practitioners, mainly the potters, were experimenting with blowing at the time but it was slow getting off the ground. Marquis takes up the offer to go to Australia and they cancel their travel plans and return to Berkeley so Dick can make up the fibreglass moulds he will need for the furnaces in Australia.

“It was determined that I would do a three month tour to about ten places, mostly going to different art schools to set up a quick and dirty studio, show them how to run it, and the rudiments of glassblowing, leave the gear, and then move on to the next venue.”

He shipped off the moulds, rolls of nichrome wire, some glassblowing tools, and a few Kuglar colour bars along with a list of other glass blowing essentials to Australia. When he got to the technical college in Prahran Melbourne they hadn't arrived, but within a couple of days Marquis scrounged scrap metal, a masonry saw, and the indispensable refractory material to line the furnaces and immediately started building a furnace from scratch. Raffi who had never blown glass acted as his assistant.

It's almost forty years since Nick and Dick stood side by side at the furnace in Gippsland. They occasionally still teach and do demonstrations together and Mount regularly returns to the US to exhibit.

“Getting our work shown in America has been an important step for us. The audience for glass there is huge. They're a relatively well informed group of collectors and a good network of commercial galleries that deal with glass,” said Mount in 2001. Since then, the heady days of the contemporary art market have plummeted along with the global financial economy, but Nick and Pauline's forays to the US and their American connections remain secure.

“I had no formal training. I hung about in private studios in America and I had a look at what people did for one year and then we set up our own studio,” says Mount. But, it took more than hanging out with the right people and being in the right place at the right time.

Mount's journey in the international arena has been influenced by glassmakers with whom he has established meaningful relationships. Topping the list is Marquis, Dante Marioni and Lino Tagliapietra. Although his ties with Marioni and Tagliapietra are lesser known, they are immensely important.

2012 American Craft Council Fellow, Dante Marioni spent his childhood in the Californian hippie haven of the San Francisco Bay area. His father, Paul Marioni, started out making stained glass and eventually moved the family to Seattle where he became thoroughly entrenched in the Studio Glass movement. Dante saw his father Paul blow glass for the first time at ten years old and blew his first bubble at fifteen.

“I couldn't believe everybody didn't want to blow glass,” said Marioni recently. Marioni, like his father, remains surrounded by people and relationships that continue to impact his life and work. Similar to Mount, many of Marioni's friends are his champions, including Paul his father, Benjamin Moore, Lino Tagliapietra, and Richard Marquis.

“I have a house full of Marquis’ work and he’s pretty much my favourite glass artist of all time.” Although still in mid-career, Marioni has established a highly regarded international reputation as a master glass blower with work in private and public collections including the White House Collection of American Crafts. His creations incorporate a unique twist of bold contemporary Venetian and minimalist modern aesthetics. They include elegant, slender, delicate, complex, bold, colourful, impeccably finished Greco-Roman inspired vases, goblets, and pitchers.

Lino Tagliapietra was born in a small apartment on the Rio dei Vetrai, Murano Venice. Tagliapietra spent his early childhood kicking soccer balls round outside the Venetian glass factories. At eleven he was apprenticed to entrepreneur and master glass maker Archimede Seguso, considered to be one of the most significant Venetian glass maestros of all time. Tagliapietra’s life in glass began as a lowly paid water carrier in the local glassworks. While working for more than twenty five years in some of Murano’s most prestigious glass factories he educated himself in the study of modern art among other things. Remarkably, he earned the title of *maestro* in his early twenties, an exceptional achievement even by Venetian standards.

Matthew Kangas believes Tagliapietra became the single most important living figure for glass by adopting a boundary-free, global attitude about skill sharing and the evolution of artistic vision in glass. Dale Chihuly freely calls Tagliapietra “the greatest glassblower in the world.”

In 1979 Tagliapietra travelled to America after crossing paths with the flamboyant Chihuly in Murano the previous year. The mutual exchange of Venetian and American techniques between the two giants of studio glass brought benefits neither envisaged. Departing from the long held tradition of coveting the secret glassblowing skills of Murano, Tagliapietra spread his unique knowledge and glassblowing expertise through the Far East,

Europe, America, and Australia. “American studio glass artists never would have attained excellence without Tagliapietra’s generous teaching,” says Kangas.

In the mid eighties Tagliapietra made the transition from traditional Venetian glassblower to independent designer and studio glass artist. Mount has received Tagliapietra’s magnanimous mentorship and his admiration for the Venetian maestro is unequivocal. This group of glassmakers maintain enduring personal and professional ties. Mount and Marquis continue to conduct demonstrations internationally, and combine their talents in artist residencies in Australia and America. Together they teach murrini workshops all over the world. In 1993 Mount taught with Dante, his father Paul Marioni, and Lino Tagliapietra at Pilchuck Glass School in Washington State.

“Lino Tagliapietra was one of the very first people I saw working in Venice in 1975 that really impressed me and I’ve been able to work with Lino from time to time. A lot of the techniques I use now are Italian and a lot of the people I work with have been strongly influenced by him as well,” says Mount.

The Toledo Museum Art Glass Pavilion is the repository of historically significant glass today and a fitting locale for the *Nick and Dick Show*.

On their way to Toledo, Nick and Pauline stayed for a week with fellow glass artist Carol Yorke and her husband Gerry in their four storey brownstone in Brooklyn before heading to Pittsburgh. Carol is in the process of raising millions of dollars to fund improvements to Urban Glass in Manhattan, New York, where she is a member of the Board. After leaving New York the Mounts drove to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania for the opening of a small show at Morgan Contemporary Glass, followed by the large solo exhibition at the Pittsburgh Glass Centre, *10 Years of Bottles and Bobs: A Survey by Nick Mount*.

The survey exhibition was an exploration of Mount’s *Plumb Bobs* and *Scent Bottles* from 2002 - 2012. The large collection of forty six pieces from Mount’s evolutionary oeuvre

illustrated the dominant themes and aesthetics of his work and offered viewers a unique insight into his experimental and creative development beginning with the *Fire Series* through to the 2012 series of *Scent Bottles*.

Small sumptuous jewel-like amber faceted *Scent Bottles* (#090205), and various pieces from the murrini donut series were on display. As were the Japanese inspired *Indigo* and *Whispering Domes* made of blown glass in the shape of Mount Fuji with surface etched sgraffito. The large dazzling combination pieces from 2007, along with the upscale *Scent Bottle Combination* (#010108) measuring 139 x 104 x 15cm take precedence. The well crafted diverse display of scent bottles illustrates shifts in Mount's technical and conceptual evolution. Each piece from the various series exemplifies how Mount creates each component with a balance of colour, tone, pattern, scale, and texture. A number of elongated suspended indigo fabric and blown glass *Soft Bob* mobiles, hung from the ceiling, including *Soft Bob* (#010910,) measuring 198cm in length. Nearby the newly inspirational strange fruit sculptures, *A Still Life of Bosc and Gage* (#020212) and *A Still Life with Cone Fruit* (#020212) rested in elegant repose on planks of polished rock maple.

On the wall behind *Reclining Bobs* and *Wall Bobs* from 2009 and 2010, hung graphite drawings, *Falling Bob*, *Triptych* (2008) and *Bob in the Landscape* (2008). They are unique inclusions because Mount doesn't ordinarily exhibit his working drawings but the finely executed sketches illustrate the important role drawing plays in his creative process. Sennett suggests *drawings are pictures of possibility* and circulatory processes whereby craftspeople start with an idea, do some sketches, create the object, and then return to the sketches. Occasionally Mount sits in his studio carefully completing sketches to bring his ideas to the page. He regularly vacillates in the act of creation between the blackboard and the furnace. It is here he intermittently glimpses at the board of sketches, often nothing more than scribbles

drawn in white chalk, and manipulates and moulds the glass at the end of his pipe until it resembles his drawings.

“I have the best collection of Nick Mount glass in the world,” he joked once the Pittsburgh exhibition came to a close and the work was put in storage.

After leaving Pittsburgh the Mounts drove a couple of hours out of their way to a remote corner of the Pennsylvanian countryside. The detour took them to *Falling Waters*. The cantilevered stone house built over a waterfall in Mill Run, Fayette County, designed by American architect Frank Lloyd Wright in 1935. Standing indoors they heard the Bear Run waterfall make its way through the house. The design incorporates broad expanses of glass and windows and integrates Wright’s passion for Japanese architecture.

I meet Nick and Pauline in the hotel foyer at 7.00am. on day two of the conference. Someone at the reception desk is telling the manager his products for the trade show haven’t arrived. Mount explains later that the *can do* attitude of the 1970s may not be what it used to be. A lack of empathy and poor business practices are another legacy of the deflated global economy.

Gail Oldknow, a flame worker from Sydney tells me she is, “more of an activist than an artist.” Oldknow’s been on the Ausglass committee for a couple of years and is of the opinion a lot of people come to glass accidentally because it doesn’t have a large presence in the arts curriculum.

Marquis flew in from his home on Whidbey Island in Seattle around midnight. He’s not a morning person and looks like he could have done with a few more hours sleep. Apart from a few extra grey hairs and a ruddier complexion, Dick looks much the same as he did standing beside Nick at the furnace in Gippsland forty years earlier. He wears metal rim glasses, Levi jeans and a checked shirt.

“I’ve got my lucky tools,” he says, as Mount crouches down beside him.

Marquis is leafing through pages of pencil sketches in a small battered brown note book on his lap.

“We can blow this—make the bowl— pick it up here—and put it all together,” he tells Mount pointing at the rough sketches.

Peter Layton walks up all smiles, pushing his wire rim glasses back over the ridge of his nose. Born in Prague and raised in England, Layton is another forty year veteran of Studio Glass and an old friend of Mount and Marquis. He’s a founding member of British Artists in Glass, the Contemporary Glass Society, and currently a board member of GAS. He’s introducing the demonstration.

“I’m back-up singer,” announces Kait Rhodes, a tall striking dark haired glass artist from Seattle who can’t disguise her excitement at having been selected to assist.

“It’s expensive to make glass,” she tells me later. She received a BFA from Rhode Island School of Design in 1993, a MFA from Alfred University in 2001, and a Fulbright grant to study sculpture in Murano in 2001. Her work is held in collections at the Seattle Art Museum, Carnegie Museum of Art, the Corning Museum of Glass, the Museum of Northwest Art, LaConner and the Palm Springs Art Museum. The other assistant is Seattle sculptor and glass artist Katrina Hude.

Hude graduated from California College of Arts and Crafts and received an MFA from San Jose State University California in sculpture in 1995. She has been awarded a fellowship at The Creative Glass Centre of America and has been an Emerging Artist in Residence at the Pilchuck Glass School. She lectures and demonstrates in Japan, Australia and the US and regularly assists Marquis.

“The US system isn’t based on the guild system where they want to keep secrets. We share,” says Shane Fero, a flame worker from the collaborative community at Penland School

of Craft in the Blue Ridge Mountains in Spruce Pine, North Carolina. And, true enough, there's a real sense of community here.

The *Nick and Dick Show* is a ticketed event and people are lined up early at the Toledo Museum of Art Glass Pavilion. Twentieth-century architects, Frank Lloyd Wright among them, recognised the vast aesthetic and functional qualities of glass in their building designs. In 2010, contemporary Japanese architects, Kazuyo Sejima and Ryne Nishizawa received architecture's highest honour, the Pritzker Prize, for the entirely transparent TMA Glass Pavilion. The building is a work of art. Opened in 2006, it is situated across Monroe Street directly opposite the main museum building. It's surrounded by wide green lawns and the historic homes of Toledo's old West End neighbourhood. The interior and exterior walls are constructed of panels of clear curved glass which provide views of the building's interior. The curved glass floor to ceiling cavity walls enclose the museum galleries which feature more than five thousand works of art, function rooms, and the hot-glass studio.

At 7.15am a line of people wind their way through the Pavilion foyer and the glass blowing team set up in the studio. A small dedicated band of technicians make final adjustments to the work space.

"You can get the garages going," says Marquis instructing them to turn on the furnaces. He spreads his legs hip width apart and hooks his thumbs into the front pockets of his jeans. Pamela Figenshow Koss wanders in to ask if they need anything. The crowd streams in at 8.00am. The mature figureheads of glass back slap each other.

An audience of ardent collectors, serious scholars, and hip gallery curators fill the tiered wooden benches. The GAS attendees come from far and wide. Canada, Saudi Arabia, England, Australia, Germany, Bermuda, Norway, Italy, Wales, Argentina, Ireland, Turkey, Finland, South Korea, Japan, Brazil, Singapore, Israel, Portugal, Switzerland, France, Sweden, and forty states throughout America. By the time the two furnaces are fully cranked

a cacophony of international voices and heightened expectation reverberates through the hot glass studio.

Nick and Dick brought small plastic bags tinkling with tiny murrine glass tiles from home. Today they are demonstrating Dick's signature murrine and granulari teapots, and despite Nick jokingly saying "I'm in charge" the day before, Dick takes the lead. Despite a few differences in the studio the layout and principles are universal and its familiar territory. After four decades Nick and Dick are centre stage to perform, create, entertain, enthrall, and once again blow glass together on the hot shop floor.

"I asked Nigel Lendon for a welder; I meant an arc-welding machine; he thought I meant a person...He introduced me to Nick Mount, who could weld. I put him to work making the furnace frame and glass blowing benches. Nigel took me aside and told me that Nick was a talented student but had no direction and if I could get him interested in what I was doing Nigel would appreciate it," explains Marquis years later. From that point on Raffi took a back seat and Mount assisted Marquis for the rest of the Australian tour. Within four days they built the furnace, got it fully operational, made the blow pipes and tools they needed and started blowing. By the time they set up a studio in Tasmania, Mount had got better at it. Marquis concentrated on making his glass teapots which sold at the time for a few hundred dollars. Today the prized works are sought after by glass collectors worldwide for tens of thousands of dollars.

"Nick had a go at it and he did exactly what I had done," explains Marquis. "He gathered perfectly, he did everything like he was a natural. Nick and Pauline were here in California in 1975. Then they went on to Europe and I gave Nick connections in Venice. He went to the Venini factory where I'd worked...He saw the masters' work and he saw just what could actually happen. He was probably the first Australian to understand the potential for the material."

“We’d go into a small school, we’d build a furnace within a few days, an annealing oven, build a furnace, and start demonstrating with a blow pipe and a stick of stainless steel...of course to set up a studio now cost \$100,000. Dick wound some wire on a piece of rod sticking out of a drill and wound it round a pile of bricks and stuck it right through the wall into the socket and turned it on. That’s how the kilns worked. It was a little cowboy. No Occupational Health & Safety in those days,” said Mount recently.

“At that time Australia had a bunch of money,” says Marquis. “And they weren’t afraid of spending it. It was really admirable—they weren’t afraid of making mistakes. But, one of my major disappointments was that I expected a much more pioneering spirit. Okay let’s get it done. In fact the people in the colleges and schools were always waiting for parts to arrive from England and it used to drive me nuts. But with Nick and Gippsland it was different—it was one of the few places where there was that sort of spirit and you could get things done.”

In 1975 Nick and Dick worked together at Northern Star Glass Studio in California. They spent a further six months together in 1980 and continue to work together regularly. During 2001 Mount worked for a month on Whidbey Island with Marquis and Katrina Hude.

“Of all the people I’ve worked with and met in America Dick Marquis has been by far the most influential and helpful for me and my career. Dick’s been one of the major players in the contemporary glass movement. His work is highly collectable and he’s in great demand for teaching all across the world,” says Mount.

Demonstrations are a valuable component of glass culture and the large audience are squeezed in tight on the long benches. On the floor of the TMA Glass Pavilion studio a deep pool of clear molten glass bubbles away in the furnace. The furnace is cranked up to 1200 degrees Celsius. The benches are in position, the marver clear of dust, the tools lined up, the

blow torches lit and hissing. Large television screens beam the activity at the front to those sitting at the rear.

“Nick and Dick met in 1974 when Dick was invited by the Australia Council for the Arts to tour Victoria and Tasmania and the rest, as they say, is history,” says Peter Layton in his brief introduction. Nick whistles and the crowd clap and cheer. The reunion is as much about Nick and Dick’s forty year collaboration across two continents, as it is about the two colourful, quirky, and beautifully crafted murrine and granulari teapots they are about to make.

Many of the young glass makers watching weren’t born when Mount and Marquis first met in Gippsland; nevertheless, they recognise their significant connection and powerful influence.

“A lot of people watch me for hours blowing glass but I’m not comfortable with the adulation. They recognise me but I don’t know them,” says Marquis embarrassed by the attention. But reputation is not about how artists see themselves but how they are seen by others.

Nick and Dick begin working to control and shape the hot glass in the short time available between heating it in the furnace and manipulating it at the bench. They are the stars of the show but it’s a team effort requiring accurate timing and collaboration, and a sixth sense doesn’t go astray in the intense environment. Assistants need to be attuned to the glassblowers every step because a lack of concentration, a mistaken cue, or a momentary lapse can bring it to a crashing halt. Dick lays his tools on the bench beside him and paces the floor in front of the furnace. Nick sets up his tools at another bench. There’re about to have some serious hot, sweaty, noisy fun, and despite years of experience they remain, to some degree, at the mercy of the material. No movement is wasted, no thought ill considered; every moment and every manoeuvre makes a difference. The twirl of the pipe, the weight of

the gather, the size of the breath, the first bubble, and the right tool, it's all important. It's a subtle, measured, thoughtful, and controlled choreography.

Mount starts at the marver with his back to the audience. He lays the tiny red and white, and blue and grey murrine tiles in a pattern ten across and five down on a ferro plate. The flames from the blow torches shoot into the air as he cocks one ear to catch what Dick is saying. Marquis pushes his hair off his face and strips down to his tee shirt. He collects a small gather from the crucible of hot glass, slowly rolls it on the cold marver, raises the blow pipe to his mouth and shoots a breath of air into the pipe; blowing his first bubble for the day.

With his legs spread wide he stares into the glowing orange orifice, pulls the pipe out with one smooth move, lets it hang to the floor like a weighted pendulum, swings it from side to side, then round and round like a cheer leader swings a baton, and crosses the floor to roll it on the marver once more. Meanwhile, Mount checks the murrine tiles are melting and fusing together to form a flat sheet of molten glass. Marquis rolls the gather again to remove any imperfections and smooth the surface. Coming together in the centre of the studio floor, Nick whistles through his front teeth, Dick lays the gather across the sheet of murrine and picks it up rolling it onto his gather and slides it back into the furnace. Dick collects another large gather, lets the excess molten glass dribble off like hot lava into the bucket beneath, rolls it on the marver, heats the tip with a flaming blow torch and slides it back into the heat. Nick watches as Dick rolls the gather in a wad of wet newspaper before he thrusts it back into the heat of the furnace.

Katrina Hude's flushed cheeks inflate like small balloons as she holds her breath momentarily then shoots a gulp of air into the pipe. It enters the centre of the hot glass, forms an air bubble and inflates. Nick dribbles a few drops of water onto the wad of newspaper Dick is using to gently caress and smooth the hot glass. He takes the pipe from Dick, slides it in the furnace while Dick waits for its return at the bench. Dick flames the glass with the

blow torch and passes it back to Nick to return to the furnace once more. Nick slides it in, dips his head to see it better, and brings it back to Dick, who tweaks the glowing red globe with the sharp point of the jacks. They lean in toward each other and exchange a few words that can't be heard above Steppenwolf's *born to be wild* blasting out speakers on the studio floor. Nick wipes a smudge of black soot from his cheeks with the back of his hand, picks up a wooden paddle and waits for Dick to withdraw the freshly blown glass now resembling the body of the teapot. Returning to the bench Dick sits down as Katrina kneels on her haunches and starts to blow into the end of his pipe. Nick heads to the other furnace pipe in hand smiling to himself. Dick flattens the base of his tea pot, pauses, takes off his glasses and wipes the sweat from his flushed forehead. He remains seated as Katrina takes his pipe, crosses the floor, reheats the pot and returns the pipe to him without saying a word.

Nick and Dick quickly pick up each other's cues to move, stop, go, wait, and blow. They exchange glances. There's no need to elaborate. The assistants speak the same language but they don't always get the subtleties. Nick takes the body of the tea pot and puts it in the furnace. Back at the bench he rolls and tweaks it with the jacks then twirls it once more. Nick and Dick face each other. Dick stands the blowpipe upright, looks at the body of the glass on the end, while Nick attaches the spout and handle with a quick thin dribble of hot glass.

"It's a sweet teapot," says Pauline.

Katrina's blue and white striped singlet is camouflaged beneath a knee length protective silver thermal coat and her face is hidden behind a perspex shield and helmet. She pulls on a pair of thick heat resistant Kevlar gloves and looks like something from outer space. Dick taps the teapot off the end of the blow pipe and into her waiting gloved hands. The audience hollers as she carries the freshly blown sculptured teapot to the annealing oven.

In the hot glass studio, art and science combine to create magic as the pace picks up. The team is running out of time. The assistants are working up a sweat in the rush to make up

the murrine arrangement for the next piece. Nick chooses a warm clean pipe and blows into it. Dick picks up another plate of melted murrini. They're working in unison now, one at either end of the studio. Nick rolls a grapefruit size globe of red hot glass in a water-soaked wooden ladle, rolls it on the marver, blows it, rolls again, blows again, then slides it back into the heat. His eyes don't leave the glass. Kate and Katrina are melting another sheet of murrine for Nick. He carefully touches the hot plate of melted tiles with the edge of his gather and the two pieces of glass stick together. He rolls the pipe picking up the melted tiles onto the gather, wrapping it round and joining the ends and completely enclosing it. He pinches the ends of the murrine together sealing the connection, and flicks it briskly with a straw brush. He slides the fused murrine tiles and gather back in the furnace, rolls it on the marver, tightens the join again with the jacks, slides it back into the heat, and rolls it smooth once more. He stands up straight as his shoulders move back and forward. He holds the pipe in his right hand continually twirling it in the heat and with just the right amount of pressure and release he gently thrusts the pipe in and out. Dick's face is red, flushed and sweaty. He's partly deaf in one ear dulling the drone of the furnaces.

“Dick is economical when he works,” says Kait from the studio floor. “He treats the murrine with grace; he's gentle and doesn't man-handle it.”

Nick is working on the body and Dick the spout of the second sculpture. Dick attaches the handle, twisting it with the tips of the tweezers, while Nick flames the body. It's not until the second teapot is in the annealing oven and the crowd starts clapping and cheering that the serious expression on Dick's face falls away and he smiles. I assume having done countless demonstrations over many years Marquis takes them in his stride but he tells me he and Mount hadn't blown together for a couple of years and he always gets a bit nervous.

A storm rolls in on the last day of the conference. Deafening thunder rumbles across the sky bringing forked lightning and heavy rain. Nick and Pauline head back to Pittsburgh to

finalise the finishing touches on a composition for an American collector. I make my way to the airport determined to weather the storm. And as the glass crowd disappear to their respective corners of the world downtown Toledo is left to ponder its legacy as the glass city.

## Doing the hand jive



Nick Mount, 2012.

*“My recent work is talking about my feeling for the value of hand work – how we find our sense of ourselves through our relationship with materials and tools. How our hands develop the skills that afford us our identity and how our intelligence is developed with our hands as the starting point. How we develop our place in family and community through the work that we do and the things we make.”*

*Nick Mount 2012.*

An unusually thick layer of fog settled over Adelaide followed by afternoon showers with the potential to dampen the exhibition opening of *Nick Mount @ 60*. BMGArt gallery's modern architecturally designed bright red brick and glass facade situated in one of Adelaide's reinvigorated West End backstreets hints at the contemporary collection of Australian artists represented within its walls. The invitation to Mount's sixtieth birthday celebratory exhibition arrived in July 2012. *Still Life with Aubergine* graced the cover. The photograph by Mount's daughter Pippy depicts a composition of two glass sculptures: a reclining oversize deep purple aubergine and a white granular scent bottle. Both pieces are polished and assembled on a glossy base of Rock Maple made by cabinet designer Andrew Bartlett. It's been more than thirty five years since his first series of blown glass was exhibited at The Craft Centre in South Yarra Victoria. Since then his work has been shown in over one hundred and thirty different solo and group exhibitions in Australia and around the world.

On the evening of the opening BMGArt gallery's white interior, grey cement floor, open space and dazzling halogen lighting accentuate the colour and finish of the twenty two glass compositions on show. By the time I arrive at 6.15pm the wine is being served in the alfresco entry to the main gallery, a generous gesture from Penfolds Wines coinciding with the recent release of twelve limited edition glass objet d'art Ampoules for the luxury wine market. Each ampoule contains 750ml of premium 2004 Kalimna Block 42 Cabernet Sauvignon with a price tag of \$168,000 each and billed as the most expensive Australian wine product originating from the world's oldest continually producing cabernet vines in South Australia's Barossa Valley. Mount designed and blew the conical shaped transparent grey and ruby coloured glass elongated plumb-bob sculptures that encase the ampoules. Each ampoule is suspended in a bespoke jarrah cabinet made by Andrew Bartlett. Australian designer, Hendrik Forster, prepared the precious metal detailing. The scientific grade inner ampoule encasing the wine was created by scientific glassblower, Ray Leake. Russian

oligarchs and wealthy international business people top the list of prospective buyers. Within two months of the Penfolds Wine Ampoules entering the world market, wine supplier Treasury Wine Estates claimed to have only one remaining. The wine is rare; the ampoule is a work of art, and the experience is made all the more exceptional with a wine expert available to travel to the destination of the purchaser where the Ampoule is ceremoniously removed from the plumb-bob and opened if desired.

Osborne wrote on a previous occasion that, “Mount’s work has the radiance of transparent hues interacting with saturated opaque colours...a muted translucent glow...gleaming polished...accentuating the subtleties of densely textured surfaces; complex patterning highlighting plastic fluidity of form.” I spot Mount dressed in one of his favourite black western shirts and blue jeans inside the charged atmosphere of the gallery. He is chatting with a crowd of familiar faces from South Australian politics, media, and the arts. And as famous or infamous as some of these people are, tonight it’s *all* about Nick Mount at sixty.

Many of the glass artists Mount trained and mentored over the years wander through the crowd looking at the newest additions of his work. Clare Belfrage, a studio assistant in the 1980s, and her partner, Tim Edwards have travelled from Canberra to join in the celebrations. They along with Mount, Giles Bettison and Brenden Scott French, participated in the *Master Glass: Five Contemporary Australia Artists* group exhibition at BMGArt in June 2011. Several of Mount’s contemporaries from the JamFactory, including the rakish Tom Moore, uncharacteristically dressed tonight in a dark suit and tie, weave their way through the growing throng. *Nick Mount @ 60* is as much a celebration of love and friendship as an exhibition of the latest in an evolving body of work.

Since blowing his first bubble Mount has blown a tonne of hot glass to become technically proficient and innovative. It’s a convoluted and mysterious process through which

his body, mind, and personality have coalesced. He readily admits the manner in which he engages with the world has come as a direct result of what he does with his hands. It is through his hands that Mount leaps from intuition to innovation.

Writing extensively on the subject of the hand in human development Frank Wilson, coined the phrase *intelligent rehearsal* to describe the artisan's process of spending a lifetime using their hands. One of the most important functions of the human body is our ability to seize, grasp, and manipulate objects with our hands, and glass blowers have advanced hand techniques. After decades of practice Mount's prehensile ability, that is, his capacity to use his hands and anticipate what's to come, is finetuned and highly developed for alert, engaged risk taking work. In a state of intense concentration and with the regularity of a beating heart he gets into a rhythm and anticipates what the hot glass will do. It is tacit knowledge accumulated from blowing glass over many years. During the process of hot and cold glasswork Mount rapidly determines, through his hands, the level of force and release required at any given juncture. He has a repertoire of hand skills which continually feed clues to his brain about what he needs to do next. In doing so, he maintains a firm hold on the task and a keen mental grasp of the creative and artistic paradigms with which to operate in and move beyond.

"If you have knowledge in your hands about materials—steel—glass—it's just a matter of wading into the material and following what it tells you," replied Mount when asked recently if he was schooled in woodworking. However, being a virtuoso glass blower is never taken for granted.

"I'm a hand-worker. My hands are the most important thing. I learn through my hands and understand my material through my hands and new ideas come through my hands and from the work that I've just made...It's not an understanding gained from reading books, or academic learning or university, it's from practice and practice is the most important part.

Practice is everything I do. It includes gardening, playing music, talking to friends, grinding, blowing, and exhibiting the glass, taking on briefs and understanding the business side of things. My hands are the most important thing. Not as implements or instruments but as the path through which I learn and progress.”

According to Wilson, when personal desire prompts anyone to learn to do something well with their hands, an extremely complicated process is initiated that endows the work with a powerful emotional charge. Mount’s compositions in the gallery radiate the kind of charge to which Wilson refers. Wilson compares the artisan’s practice to that of a writer whose creativity, rules, and technical processes culminate in stories. Mount’s skilled hands have become what Wilson calls *articulate organs of expression*, whereby he embeds meaning and personal narratives into solid forms.

“It is in the human hand that we have the consummation of all perfection as an instrument,” wrote Sir Charles Bell. The Scottish surgeon commissioned to write a book on the human hand in 1840. Bell explored the mysterious process whereby the hand becomes the instrument by which body, mind, and soul become unified. With decades of repetition Mount’s body has developed and maintained the robust health and strength required of a glass blower. At sixty he has a firm grip, strong shoulders and arms, good muscle definition, a straight back, and the stamina of a labourer. On the down side he has repetition strain injuries in both arms, a back that gives him trouble, and an assortment of random scars, because like Icarus, the mythological son of master craftsman Daedalus, Mount got a little too close to the flame.

“We are here to celebrate a life well lived by a man well loved,” says Hanning, standing behind the rostrum at the far end of BMGArt gallery in the opening speech for *Nick Mount @ 60*. Mount’s elderly father, Graham, dressed in a neat check sports jacket, and his mother, Margaret, looking frail in a soft turquoise suit, stand beside each other. She gently

points her chin toward her companions to catch snippets of conversation stifled by the noisy crowd. Although both are now in their eighth decade, they continue to attend Mount's exhibitions in Adelaide. Pauline sweeps through the crowd and sidles up beside Nick. He slips his hand in hers squeezing it gently.

"I'm the luckiest guy in the world," he tells television presenter, Leigh McClusky in an interview prior to the opening. But it's taken a lot more than luck for Mount to ramp up a successful artistic career.

A month after the exhibition at BMGArt in Adelaide Mount strolls across the floor at Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design's main gallery in Surry Hills, Sydney. Tonight the customary white plinths are crowned with glass sculptures. Against the far wall taking pride of place is the *White Granulare Composition* (2006). The work is the centrepiece for the opening of *Nick Mount: The Fabric of Work* honouring Mount as the 2012 Living Treasure: Master of Australian Craft. Launched in 2005 the award is accompanied by wide spread public recognition. Mount is delighted. "Pauline and I feel the Living Treasure Award is great for the Crafts. We're very happy that this year's award acknowledges the contribution of the glass community of South Australia and the JamFactory."

Craft Australia, the advocacy organisation representing professional Australian craft and design at national and international levels is responsible for coordinating the nominations and 2012 celebrates Mount's achievements as one of a select number of Australia's influential craft practitioners with thirty or more year's professional practice. Objects previous Living Treasures include Les Blakebrough (2005), Klaus Moje (2006), Marion Hosking (2007), Liz Williamson (2008), Jeff Mincham (2009), and Robert Baines (2010). Living Treasure Touring Program Coordinator, Sandra Brown, says the panel recognised the innovation in Mount's work and achievements in Australia and overseas since the early 1970s. The Living Treasure recipient stages an exhibition at Object and tours nationally,

and in Mount's case, internationally; exposing them to audiences in regional cities and small towns. To date over 250,000 people around Australia have seen the various series.

Unfortunately for artists who depend on sales to make a living the work cannot be sold along the way but may be acquired by collectors and institutions at the completion of the tours. However, as the Mounts' organised their tours they decided works could be sold. To date they have sold a number of pieces from each venue and created additional pieces—so it is an evolving collection of changing works. The award comes with public accolades as well as added responsibilities and expectations. The touring and extra exposure is considered a bonus for recipients. Mount is accustomed to travelling and touring extensively so for him it's business as usual.

The *White Granulare Composition* is a collection of fifteen small, technically challenging granulari scent bottles with a unique colourisation of Gaffer enamel rose that came about by accident. Mount vows the composition, like a group of devoted family members, will forever remain together. Thin spiralling gestures of colourful blown glass curl from the top of each small monochromatic *Scent Bottle*. The beckoning gesture or *precocious stoppers* as they have been called seemingly dismiss me as they twist upward while, like a hooked finger, simultaneously beckon me closer, where I am able to discern the minute luxuriant detail and complex raised bubble surface of the intricate murrine vessels.

During the exhibition Pauline sips wine in conversation with a previous Living Treasure, Liz Williamson. Mount's eldest daughter, Pippy, and eighteen month old granddaughter Olive, play quietly in a nook to one side. Between little Olive's oohs and ahhs, Julie Lomax from the Australia Council for the Arts, compares Mount's recent *Still Life* sculptures to the work of Russian-American painter, Mark Rothko in her opening speech. Perhaps Lomax recognises a semblance of Rothko's tension, powerful sensuality, irony, wit, and representation of the ephemeral in Mount's compositions. When the applause subsides I

cross the polished parquet floor to view the work on show. A few past compositions including *Reclining Bob* (# SB080709) reside on top of a large plinth in the middle of the gallery. One end of the reclining vessel is accentuated with a brilliant tangerine mirrored pointed tip while the body bears a surface finish resembling deliberate swipes of paint. Here Mount has left traces of the artisan's mark on the surface of the glass, juxtaposing the rough with the smooth. A series of monochromatic carefully arranged compositions in velvety black, indigo and voluptuous aubergine are highlighted by a variety of soft matt and glossy surface embellishments. Another of the ubiquitous *Reclining Bobs* (#SB010609) comprised of two small, cut, polished yellow and green granulare murrini bodies with solid black opaque and highly polished tips luxuriate on top of a soft cotton pillow.

“Granulari is an old Italian technique I really enjoy working with. It's probably not easy for regular people to see, but for me, the granulari is super special,” explains Mount running the tips of his fingers over the bubbly surface of a small granulari scent bottle during an earlier interview. “It's just beautiful; it's got a sweet textual surface: the two glasses, the green and the yellow, form a dark interface so each of the little square glass tiles are outlined. The texture comes from using two different glasses with different viscosity at a particular temperature so when you blow—the hard glass stays proud and raised and the soft glass remains soft and flat.” Other plinths are crowned with a selection of over-scaled, botanically erroneous *strange fruits*, and other glass-fruit forms with the inventive addition of sleek and meticulously carved timber stems made from olive wood and Huon. *Baci: A Still Life* (2011) comprises a blown glass olive, small yellow nut, and translucent pear embellished with swirls of yellow and cream, each with carved wooden tips and stems. They lie on a plank of polished jarrah. An oversize succulent opaque plum coloured blown globe of glass titled *Plum* (#050112) with an English lime polished stem balances on a soft handmade pillow of

navy blue cotton. Its polished surface illustrates the imperfect texture of the natural skin of the plum while bearing traces of Mount's grinding and polishing technique.

Mount held a small blown glass yellow translucent nut up to the light and pointing to the intricate pattern in the surface of the glass, explained: "Recently I've been working with wood and different fruit forms so a pear, or little nut are made with the same kind of sensitivity to the material. You can see the Italian technique here called Canne which produces parallel stripes of colour in the form, and that for me refers as much to the material and the glassiness as to the ancient traditions of Italian glasswork. That is encapsulated in this little nutty thing—that when you extend it with a carved wooden stem becomes an object in its own right."

It has taken Mount more than four decades to master superior glass blowing and multisensory hand-eye coordination. Watching him make glass is like watching a magician create magic. He physically and intuitively manipulates and controls the glass. He instinctively calculates how best to use his entire body in the process of blowing. Time and again he wraps his lips around the end of the pipe and blows. The solid glass gather balanced precariously on the end of his pipe inflates into an air filled balloons of paper thin glass. But no two blows are ever the same. As the hot material hits the air at room temperature it can deflate, go off-centre, drop, fall away, alter shape, implode, cool too quickly, cool too slowly, crack, shatter and explode. The trick is to prevent and modify the normal consequences of hot glass from doing what it naturally wants to do. Throughout the process Mount constantly fine tunes his movements. He subconsciously knows where each hand is with respect to his midline, the turn of his shoulders, the position of his legs, and the tilt of his head. He couples this with a heightened capacity for engaging and fixing visual contact with the glass on the end of his pipe. Throughout this process he receives an ongoing series of messages to his

brain which enables him to coordinate all the movements and gestures required to successfully work the magic of a master artisan.

He regularly twirls the metal pipe in the heat of the furnace with his left hand while reaching with the right for the tools on the bench. He grasps a pair of metal shears, or a wooden mallet, or a blow torch with the requisite precision grip required to carry out the necessary manoeuvre. Wilson tells us that for humans it is not so much the tool but the task that dictates the grip. The hand speaks to the brain as surely as the brain speaks to the hand. Through decades of specialised training and experience Mount's hands have become what Wilson calls *critical instruments* of thought, skill, feeling, and intention, and mechanisms by which elements of the physical and psychological self come into being.

On the morning following the Living Treasure opening in Sydney I head to Object and find Mount in conversation with CEO of the JamFactory, Brian Parkes, in-situ among the *Fabric of Work* collection and a small crowd in the main Gallery.

“With your interest in hand work in this digital post industrial era, what do you think is the role of hand work?” asks Parkes. “For any of us to be part of a family, community or culture we have to be able to involve ourselves in a conversation. To be able to negotiate a situation, to be able to operate within a group of people you have to have a conversation like we are having now,” says Mount. “And a really important part of having that conversation is having a context of yourself, knowing who you are. Because without having a clear vision of *who* you are then you can't respond. So for those of us who regard ourselves as makers, not the noisy set, not the clergy, or teachers or bankers, but those who think of ourselves as *makers*, we learnt who we are through our hands. You can, with the material and the process, add yourself into that. I can say after awhile—I'm Nick Mount and I'm a glassblower. That gives me a context of who I am and determines how I involve myself in a conversation. I think a sportsperson is a classic example because they have a craft. A footballer, for example,

is admired and works within a set of rules set down very clearly with the material at hand. They are able to innovate within that set of rules and develop themselves mentally to a point where it's seemingly intuitive to run fast, bounce a ball, kick a goal and they are always working to develop themselves. They are held up by others as being champions to the point it becomes art. As little kids we start kicking a ball and playing and build up some sort of play skills and for some it becomes a craft."

Mount later tells the gathering, "I've been using exactly the same shapes I've been using since the 1970s and sometimes I can feel really embarrassed about that because I've been doing the same thing for a life time and I don't seem to have gone far with it. The floats, the walking canes, the vessels, the vases, the plates, were all about the same shape, and all about what the glass wanted to do on the end of the pipe."

He explains how he is coerced and seduced by the power of the mysterious hot molten material. A hypnotic and entrancing lead which he successfully pursues with a blower's skills and experience. For him, the potential for danger and innovation makes returning to the furnace irresistible.

Mount's ideas and designs are seldom solely the product of intellectual pursuit; more often than not, they come about as a direct result of him physically engaging with the material.

"I think there's a common expectation that a person will be able to come up with a new idea or a new design and it's just so difficult for me to even conceive of a new idea coming out of someone's brain. New ideas don't come out of a person's thinking or sitting carefully with a pencil and a piece of paper...It's so hard to conceive of a situation where someone will come up with a new idea in science or the arts without having hands-on work involved somehow." For Mount creativity means being hands-on.

“How peculiar,” writes Wilson, “that people who normally permit themselves so little rest from an extreme and, by some standards, unrewarding discipline cannot bear to be disengaged from it.” If Mount is not making glass, he’s thinking, planning, exhibiting, or doing something that directly or indirectly is engaged with glass.

“The approach to training you have given yourself over time has become the norm in this country for glass. Not exclusively but largely as a result of your influence. I can say it is the central ethos of the JamFactory still twenty years after you started as Head of the Glass Studio and it’s a trajectory I am trying to involve in the other studios beyond glass in some way as well,” says Parkes.

Dozens of colourful glass sculptures stretching the breadth and depth of Mount’s oeuvre mingle together in conversation on the bench tops and shelves of his Leabrook studio in Adelaide. Some almost touch the ceiling ostensibly confident and aloof like fully formed exuberant personalities, while others stand half-formed hesitantly waiting completion. A myriad of individual components are strewn on the floor, shelves, and table tops throughout the small studio. Some are only a few days old while others have gathered dust dating back to the 1970s. But what of his most recent compositions?

“I’m following the material and being drawn by the last piece I made into the next piece and the exciting thing comes from the techniques that are recognised in the history of glass. Which are more or less difficult to make or slightly different to what you might have seen before. For example, the blanket stitch murrine, in the latest series, is something I haven’t seen in anybody else’s work. It’s a minor change in technique with its tradition in the history of the material and to take that and have the capability to be able to innovate is what makes it special for me.”

Mount sculptures are part of the US art and craft scene particularly in North American galleries. Tom Riley of Thomas R Riley Galleries was introduced to Mount’s work through

an employee of Dale Chihuly. Riley showed Mount's work at Sculptural Objects Functional Art and Design (SOFA) Chicago and New York with good responses from collectors. "He is able to appropriate diverse techniques in each piece. From top to bottom collectors are able to perceive skills Nick has developed over the years and all of these techniques allow him to make each piece a separate distinct unique sculpture that stands on its own... we feel he's able to make sculpture—not just glass objects—but sculptures," says Riley.

In 2000 the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, and the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, acquired a number of *Scent Bottles* for their permanent collections. The essence and scent of the oversize apothecary bottles remain the underlying premise. The first scent bottles were made of brilliant transparent hues with exuberant cane-work decorations. In 2001, he introduced a more expressive, gestural element by drawing on the surface of the glass, using a low-fire enamel pencil which he developed himself. Along with technique and process, Mount took the scale of the scent bottles to new heights increasing and reducing the size and combinations of the compositions. By 2004 he produced several different thematic groupings, each employing various repertoires of blown and cold work techniques. The larger pieces are gracefully poised, elongated assemblages with exaggerated drippers or inverted plumb-bob shapes capped with stainless steel cones. Opaque and translucent glass, patterned and wheel-cut sections, are juxtaposed in compositions that celebrate and accentuate the inherent beauty and versatility of the medium. The smaller *Doughnut* series feature softer lines and murrine sections in vibrant colours. The *Fire Series* of 2003 are a collection of tall vibrant fire toned blown glass cone shaped scent bottles with hand drawn flame assembled on the base. The 2006 *Indigo* series born out of Nick and Pauline's collaborative residency in Japan subsequently influenced the following series of *Whispering Domes*. The *Domes* feature Mount's unique twist on the traditional Victorian glass domes which once covered specimens and precious paraphernalia. The *Whispering Domes* also incorporate derivative elements of

the quintessential plumb bob. The evolving series flow from one to the other, differing in design, shape, form, technique, and colour, of any that came before or after.

Mount is enamoured by the tools of his trade. They act like a conduit in his hands, bridging the gap between artistic pursuit and the act of creation. His tools are synonymous with the value and transformative qualities of work. The humble plumb bob, comprised of a piece of metal suspended at the end of a piece of string has gone from being referenced occasionally in his compositions to being a recurring motif. Ultimately, tools take centre stage as subjects in their own right. Since 2009, he has used the plumb bob as a motif in an amusing array of compositions with titles such as *Wall Bob* (2010), *Soft Bobs* (2010), and *Reclining Bobs* (2010). In 2011 he expanded the tool motif to a series of *Bubs* referencing the bubble contained within the spirit level. In the reclining and still life sculptures he pays homage to some of the great themes in European art including reclining nudes, figures in the landscape, and still life.

“The scent bottle is an object that has travelled through the history of glass. Every period has had a scent bottle or small bottle for containing a liquid that is more precious than the container itself,” says Mount. “I was looking for something that would allow me to deconstruct the object into its various components, so that I could work the components individually, make each separately, and then, using those components, construct the form.” Each *Scent Bottle* is a unique individual, colourful, shimmering sensual glass creation.

*Scent Bottles* are in a constant state of transformation and evolution. Of late, he has deconstructed and reconstructed its components into large vibrant gravity defying mobiles. These have immense crescent moon stoppers with suspended plumb bobs that dangle counter-balanced in mid air and are no longer recognisable as scent bottles. The surface of the glass is often finished with restrained sanding techniques developed over years. Although Mount obsesses about creating the desired finishes to his compositions he often leaves traces

of the tool and the technique forever stamped on the glass. His desire for quality driven work is not limited to making things of perfection; he's interested in leaving subtle narratives about himself and his artistic processes in his compositions.

More recently, the *Scent Bottle* has evolved into a range of compositions of both real and imagined fruits, occasionally accompanied by misshapen cans of fruit. Although these sculptures are dramatically altered compositions, he regards them as *Scent Bottles*, because they still carry the scent of the maker. They also come together in the same way as the previous series of *Scent Bottles*—composed from a random group of finished objects in his studio.

With the objectivity of a curator in a privileged position of intimacy, his daughter, Peta writes, “Like the *Reclining Bob* and the *Bob in the Landscape* which came before them, these compositions reference a long and rich tradition in art history with the playful humour synonymous with Nick Mount Glass. Each piece is produced individually, with consideration given to both form and finish before being brought together in a process of informed improvisation, the end result simultaneously showcasing Nick’s virtuosity with the medium and the intuitive ability to let it speak for itself. Arguably more accessible than the flamboyance of earlier scent bottles, they have a warmth and subtlety that is powerfully seductive.” Jo Litson, writes, “There is a fascinating dichotomy about the maker himself. On one hand, there is the casual, laid-back character who can’t resist poking wicked fun but put him in front of a furnace fired up to 1200 C and the larrikin recedes. Dedicated, disciplined, deeply committed to his rigorous work ethic and aesthetic, he is an exacting craftsman with an almost religious respect for the traditions of glassmaking.”

Perhaps his identification with tools can in part be traced back to his childhood when he watched a stream of trucks pull into the vacant block opposite his house in Goldsack Street, Glen Osmond. Six year old Nick listened to the vehicles disturb the quiet patch of

slowly spreading suburbia for weeks. Each day he heard the loud crunch of brakes, slamming doors and mumbled greetings of workers as they noisily unloaded their tools and machinery.

The Mount family home was the first to be built in the new subdivision in 1952. The empty patch of land opposite would eventually become home to the Freeman family but in 1958 it was a cacophony of cursing, banging, hammering and sawing. For hours young Nick sat watching the workers, their tanned bodies dripping with sweat and reeking of long days working in the hot sun. He saw towers of timber, mountains of bricks, and bags of cement appear as the men cut, sanded, hammered, chiselled, painted and built the house from the ground up. As the days passed the windows, doors, and roof appeared and in time tools, machinery, manual labour, and the act of creation became embedded in his psyche.

In reviewing one of Mount's exhibitions Wendy Walker drew attention to his frequent reference to the humble tools of the artisan; a motif originating with his homage to the Venetian factory *friggers* in his 1980 series *Walking Canes*. His fascination with mason's measuring tools including plumb bobs and spirit levels now borders on obsession. Mount's tools are more than hand held implements used to carry out a particular function; they are referential, elemental, and catalytic devices that have transformed his identity from a naive apprentice glass blower to a artisan of boundless potential.

"I'm a tools guy," he jokes. The tools he uses shape his imagination and enable him to extend beyond the ordinary and make intuitive leaps. His studio is home to a variety of run-of-the-mill glass making tools as well as a few modified implements of his own making.

"You could see a pair of tools illustrated in a book or on some body's bench, make a mental note of how it goes and build one yourself. I built a *soffietta* (a tool used to further inflate blown glass) from a drawing in a book and it's about the heaviest *soffietta* in the world. It's a piece of steel, around about the right size and shape but it's a crazy thing because it tilts the glass off way too much when you use it." Mount's fascination with tools

may have developed from having watched his father working with the dental tools of his profession. Whatever the origins, Mount's affiliation with tools remains essential to his development as an artisan and integral to his identity as an artist and maker.

The *Fabric of Work* compositions offer motifs surrounding the significance of labour and are representative of Mount's own strong work ethic. From the very beginning Nick and Pauline worked hard to build a life for themselves and their family within the glass community. To help make ends meet and spread the glass culture Mount took on eight trainees during a ten year period. He tells the story of how in the early days at Budgeree, Keith Rowe, now an established glass artist, pulled into their Gippsland driveway on his motor cycle, sporting shaved head and tattoos, and ready to party—only to discover that Mount's priority was to blow glass.

There are different schools of thought on the relationship between the importance of work and personal identity. Karl Marx believed the act of making things enables individuals to develop better self and social relations. I recently saw San Francisco born comedian, Arj Barker, perform on stage in Adelaide. Barker made the point that, as much as he loves getting on stage and telling jokes and travelling the world, he wasn't the kind of person defined by work. Mount, on the other hand, is convinced his identity comes directly from what he does. And it is not only what he does that is of prime importance, but how well he does it. Sennett explores the realm of craftspeople in relation to the human desire to do a job well for its own sake. Sennett examines what the process of making concrete objects reveals about us as people. In defining an idealised notion of the craftsperson's character Sennett sides with late C. Wright Mills wrote, "The labourer with a sense of craft becomes engaged in the work in and for itself; the satisfaction of working are their own reward; the details of daily labour are connected in the worker's mind to the end product; the worker can control his or her own work; skills develop within the work process; work is connected to the freedom to

experiment; finally, family, community, and politics are measured by the standards of inner satisfaction, coherence, and experiment in craft labour.”

It is clear Mount has the knowledge to produce excellent glass art. But expertise is not enough. Through making glass he declares who he is, how he feels, and what he thinks. Each and every decision of his creative process adds layer upon layer to the formation of his identity with artistic mastery and creative intention at the heart of relentless experimentation.

Mount started his career by wanting to be an accomplished glass blower. He could have left it there and continued along a path of prescribed artistic perimeters. Instead he relied heavily on the natural process of creative exploration and trusted his own cognitive and subconscious journey to take him, on occasion, to conceptual spaces of unique artistic expression. It is here, among the conceptual scaffolding of endless possibility that Mount’s creativity and identity stretch beyond the ordinary to the extraordinary. Individual artistry provides him with the freedom to experiment and modify traditional Italian glass making techniques and in the process create an evolving series of innovative compositions. He transcends the invisible fissure between craft and art. To begin to grasp his significant contribution as an artist it helps to appreciate the origins of his creative process and the elemental nature of its development. As a pioneer of the Australian studio glass movement Mount is driven by an irresistible aspiration for knowledge and quality.

Nick and Pauline spend each year searching and discovering new ways to bring enriching personal and professional satisfaction into their lives. Mount is a twenty-first century artisan. He diligently examines aspects of his craft, readily exposes himself to emotional, financial and physical risks, and incorporates the traditional with the contemporary. He is committed to the development of the Studio Glass community, is represented in private and public solo and group collections and exhibitions. He has accumulated a number of grants, awards, fellowships, residencies, teaching workshops,

mentoring positions, executive appointments, and established his own private studios. These achievements provide greater prominence and secure his place in national and international studio glass history. *Being Objects Living Treasure: Master of Australian Craft* is yet the latest in a long line of hard earned honours.

Sennett assures us the craftspeople's effort to do quality work depends on their curiosity about the material at hand. If Sennett is right—and having observed Mount at close quarters, I believe he is—then Mount's obsession with the materiality of glass constantly occupies his consciousness. Sennett believes craftspeople possess a *material consciousness* that is driven by the individual's desire to invest thought in things they can change. He suggests three key elements are in play in regards to this kind of artistic and intellectual investment. Firstly, *metamorphosis* or a change in process and the way you do things; secondly, *presence* or leaving one's mark on an object like a signature; and lastly, *anthropomorphosis* where the raw material is imbued with human qualities. Mount's deeply philosophical creative and labour intensive investments are at the heart of what it means to be a craftspeople.

Without a regular income and with the impending responsibility of a young family he took career risks others may have avoided. He borrowed money, set up small business enterprises with little experience, trusted his inventive juices would continue to flow, and dived into the murky depths of an uncertain future. He could have remained in Adelaide, persevered with a University education, put down roots in familiar territory, got a job, and resisted the powerful urge to live a creative life. And no matter how much he respected his father's academic and professional success, and what choices his friends and family were making, Mount was going to do exactly what he wanted. He strives for independence, and although affected by the opinion of others, is seldom discouraged. He sees possibility. It is a journey beyond the imposition of institutional indoctrination and training. With a creative self

fulfilling labyrinth of knowledge, experience and exploration, Nick Mount lives and works in a creative conceptual space of his own making.

“How do you say *who* you are unless you *are* something? And you gain confidence by doing it over and over. I don't believe in the whole idea of repetition or busy hands but believe that as craftspeople we gain our identity through the material.” His authentic, bright, quirky, unconventional, colourful, and honest veracity lingers in every piece of glass he blows, rendering the characteristics imbued in his creations and his persona indistinguishable.

## Chronology

- 1952** Nicholas John Mount is born in Adelaide on 18 August and grows up with two brothers and a sister in Glen Osmond.
- 1964-69** Attends St Peters College, Adelaide. Wins the school Art prize.
- 1970-71** Studies at South Australian School of Art with lecturers Robin Wallace-Crabb and Tony Bishop; leaves after one year.
- 1972-74** Follows Wallace-Crabb and Lendon to Gippsland, Victoria. Undertakes art course at Gippsland College of Advanced Education. Meets Pauline Donaldson.
- 1974** Nick and Pauline marry in February, during the last year at art school. Introduced to American glass artist Richard Marquis. They tour Victoria and Tasmania giving demonstrations. Mount blows glass for the first time.
- 1975-76** Awarded Craft Board grant to study glass in USA and Europe. Blows glass with Marquis in Benicia, California. Travels to Italy and observes traditional glass blowing in the factories of Murano, Venice.
- 1976-77** Returns to Australia establishes hot glass studio, Caulfield Institute of Technology, Victoria Sets up One-Off Studio in Gippsland. First solo exhibition at Crafts Centre, Melbourne. Takes on trainee, Brian Hirst.
- 1978** Relocates studio to Budgeree and renames it Budgeree Glass. Hugo is born in October. Exhibits at Latrobe Regional Art Gallery. Takes on second trainee, Robert Wynne. Victorian Ministry for the Arts makes three-minute film as part of 'Crafts as a livelihood' series.
- 1980** Receives Australia Council Crafts Board grant to study in USA. Spends six months working with Richard Marquis in California. Exhibits *Funnels* at Solander Gallery, Canberra.

- 1981** Forms partnership with Tony Hanning to develop drinking glass range. *First National Glass Biennial*, Wagga Wagga. *Funnels* are exhibited at National Museum of Modern Art, Japan. Exhibits with Robin Gibson; and collaborative series, *Bitter Suite*, with Warren Langley. Guest artists, Glebe Glass Workshop, Glebe, NSW.
- 1982** Daughter Peta born. Shows *Fishing Floats* in joint exhibition with Tony Hanning and Warren Langley at Craft Council Centre Gallery, Sydney.
- 1983** First Prize, Glass Section, Stirling and District Council Arts and Craft Award, South Australia. *Budgeree Glass Martini Set* is included in the first *International Design Year Book* and acquired by the Art Gallery of South Australia. Second daughter Pippy is born.
- 1984** The Mounts buy a former meat factory in Norwood, South Australia and convert it to studio/gallery. Budgeree Glass bowls and cylinders acquired for the collection of new Parliament House, Canberra.
- 1985** Teaching assistant to Richard Marquis and Thermon Statom at Pilchuck Glass School, near Seattle in Washington State, USA. Greg price becomes final trainee at Budgeree Glass.
- 1986-87** Solo exhibition including *Walking Canes* with Macquarie Galleries, Sydney, and Bonython Meadmore Gallery, Adelaide. President of Ausglass. Teaching assistant to Paul Marioni at Pilchuck Glass School.
- 1988** Re-locates Budgeree Glass to factory in Port Adelaide, South Australia.
- 1988-89** Pauline in partnership with ceramicist Tim Strachan establishes Nick Mount Glass, Tim Strachan Ceramics in Norwood.
- 1990** Family moves to Leabrook, South Australia.
- 1991** Budgeree Glass factory closes. Nick returns to private practice at Sydenham Road, Norwood. Clare Belfrage works with him. Studies life-drawing under Rod Taylor at Adelaide School of Art.

**1992**            *Torso* series exhibited Beaver Galleries, Canberra, and BMG Gallery, Adelaide. Teaching assistant to Bertil Vallien and Norman Courtney, Pilchuck Glass School.

**1993**            Recipient Arts Project Assistant Grant, South Australian Department of Arts and Cultural Heritage. Teaching assistant to Dante Marioni and Lino Tagliapietra at Pilchuck Glass School. Exhibits *Pagliaccio, Plates and Poppolo* at Distelfink, Melbourne

**1994-97**        Strictly Murrine workshop with Richard Marquis, Pilchuck Glass School. Appointed head of the Glass Studio at the JamFactory Contemporary Craft and Design Centre, Adelaide.

**1996-97**        Undertakes technical consultancies and hot glass workshops at Curtin University, Perth, Sydney College of the Arts and Queensland Glass Artists Association. Exhibits *Black* and *Grey Murrine* at Lyall Burton Gallery, Melbourne. Work tours with the National Art Collection. Develops his first *Scent Bottle*.

**1997-2002**     Returns to private studio practice. *Scent Bottles* evolve into more than 120 individual variations. Teaching in Japan, Canada, and Europe, and at Pilchuck Glass School. Blows glass at Richard Marquis Puget Sound studio and exhibits at the International Exposition of Sculpture, Objects and Functional Art (SOFA) in New York and Chicago. Pauline managing Nick Mount Glass, dispatching work to galleries in Australia, Europe and USA.

**1997**            USA residency at California College of the Arts and Crafts, Oakland. Teaches in Toronto and Montreal, Canada. First exhibit of *Scent Bottles* series, *Les Grand Fabliers*, at BMG Art, Adelaide, and Beaver Galleries, Canberra. *Portrait der Meister, Internationalen Handwerksmesse Munchen*. Receives the Gold Medal, Bavarian State Prize.

**1998**            *Scent Bottles* shown in Venice in *Aperto Vetro*. Nick Mount, Gallery L, Hamburg, Germany. Appointed to the Board of Craftsouth, Adelaide, SA. Lectures International School of Glass Art, Japan.

- 1999** Recipient of two-year fellowship from Australia Council. *Scent Bottles* at Brisbane City Gallery; and touring Portugal and Japan. SOFA Chicago and New York.
- 2000** Appointed co-chair International Council of Pilchuck Glass School and helps set up scholarship for a JamFactory trainee. *Scent Bottles* included in *At the Edge – Australian Glass Art*, Munich and Australian tour. Vessels survey at Koganezaki Crystal Park, Japan. Artist in Residence, Canberra School of Art, Canberra, ACT. Workshops Red Deer Summer School, Alberta, Canada; and The Studio, Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, New York, USA.
- 2001** Recipient of South Australia's Living Artist's Week monograph. Appointed board member Visual Arts/Craft Board of the Australia Council. *Scent Bottles* solo exhibition at Quadrivium, Sydney; and *Scent Bottles* acquired for the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, and the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Workshop, Kanaz Forest of Creation, Fukui, Japan.
- 2002** Recipient of the inaugural Tom Malone prize, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, WA. Represented at *Facets of Australian Glass* at Leo Kaplan Modern, New York; and *Material Culture – Aspects of Australian Craft and Design*, National Gallery of Australia Canberra. First Solo exhibition in USA at Thomas R. Riley Galleries, Kirkland, Seattle. *Nick Mount @ 50*, BMGART, Adelaide, SA, Australia. Launch of monograph *Nick Mount: Incandescence* by Margot Osborne, Wakefield Press, Art Gallery of South Australia.
- 2003** Workshops in Penland School of Crafts, Penland, USA; Pilchuck Glass School; Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania, Hobart, TAS. *Fire*, at Thomas Riley Galleries, Cleveland, Ohio, USA.
- 2004** *Un Nouveau Soufflé* at the Australian Embassy, Paris, France. Murrini workshop with Richard Marquis, Fukui, Japan; and The Studio, Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY, USA.

- 2005** Blowing glass Pittsburgh Glass Centre, Pittsburgh, PA, USA. *Nick Mount* at JamFactory, Adelaide, SA, Australia.
- 2006** Artist in Residence, Kurashiki University of Science and the Arts, College of the Arts, Kurashiki, Japan. Workshops Haystack Mountain School of Craft, MA, USA. *Indigo* at Sabbia Gallery, Surry Hills, Sydney, NSW, Australia.
- 2007** Visiting artist at Museum of Glass, Tacoma, Washington. Artist in Residence, Kent State University, College of Arts, Kent, Ohio, USA. Awarded Project Grant to assist with the development of work for major exhibition at William Traver Gallery, Seattle, Washington State, USA, Arts SA.
- 2008** Visiting Artist, Museum of Glass, Tacoma, Washington, USA. The Art of Combination, Advanced Glassblowing Masterclass, International Festival of Glass, Ruskin Glass Centre, Stourbridge, UK. *Double Exposure* at BMGART, West End, Adelaide, SA, Australia. *Whispering Domes and Other Recent Works* at William Travers Galleries, Seattle, WA, USA.
- 2009** Finalist, Tom Malone Prize, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, WA; and, Ranamok prize for Contemporary Glass, National Touring Exhibition. *Recent Works in Glass* at Artisan Gallery, Fortitude Valley, Queensland, Australia. *Nick Mount* at Kirra Galleries, Federation Square, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. Visiting Artist, 11<sup>th</sup> Namseoul International Glass Workshop, Korea; and Australian National University, School of Art, ACT.
- 2010** Received New Work grant, Visual Arts and Crafts Board of the Australia Council. Cane workshop, Pittsburgh Glass centre, Pittsburgh, PA, USA; and The Studio, Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY, USA. *Me and Bob* at William Travers Gallery, Seattle, WA, USA.

- 2011** Named 2012 Living Treasure: Master of Australian Craft by Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design. Workshops, Wanganui Glass Group, Wanganui, New Zealand; and Canberra Glassworks, Canberra.
- 2012** Awarded Triennial Project Grant, Arts SA. Finalist Tom Malone Prize, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, WA. *10 Years of Bottles and Bobs: A Survey* at Pittsburgh Glass Centre, Pittsburgh, PA, USA. *Celebrating Glass* at Morgan Contemporary Glass Gallery, Pittsburgh, PA, USA. *Plumb and Nick Mount, The Treasure* at Sabbia Gallery at Sabbia Gallery, Surry Hills, Sydney, NSW, Australia. *Nick Mount @ 60* at BMGART, West End, Adelaide, SA. Australia. *Nick Mount: The Living Treasure - Masters of Australian Craft – The fabric of Work* at Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design, Surry Hills, Sydney, NSW and Geelong gallery, Geelong, Victoria, Australia. SOFA Chicago, IL, USA. 3M Survey of Glass, Pilchuck Glass School, USA.
- 2013** SOFA, Chicago, USA. *Designing Craft/Crafting Design: 40 Years of JamFactory*, Adelaide, SA. *Prima*, Sabbia Gallery, Paddington, Sydney, NSW. Visiting Artist, Museum of Glass, Tacoma, Washington, USA. Awarded The Waterhouse Natural Science Art Sculpture prize.
- 2014** Exhibits SOFA, Chicago; *Nick Mount: Masterworks* Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand; *Nick Mount: The Fabric of Work – Sculpture Glass from a Master of Australian Craft*, Bellevue Art Museum, Bellevue, WA. USA; The Waterhouse Natural Science Art Prize; *JamFactory Icon Nick Mount: The Fabric of Work, Living Treasures: Masters of Craft*, Adelaide. *The Fabric of Work* touring Exhibitions, Canberra Glassworks, Kingston, ACT; *Master Glass 2*, BMGART, Adelaide, South Australia; Wagga Wagga Regional Gallery, Wagga Wagga, NSW. *Breathing through Transparency*, Chinese International Contemporary Glass Art Exhibition, Academy of Art, Shangcheng Area, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China.

## End Notes

Nick and Pauline Mount spoke with me at length during the research for this project. Except where otherwise indicated, all quotations come from interviews recorded in 2011 and 2012 as follows:

Nick Mount with the author: 15 March 2011, 22 March 2011, 5 April 2011, 9 August 2011.

Nick Mount in conversation at Object Australian Centre for Design, Sydney: Saturday 8 September, 2012.

Pauline Mount with the author: 29 February 2012, 28 March 2012.

A number of remarks and comments included in the text arose from informal and unstructured conversations and observations.

7. “Most account....” Dr Samuel Johnson, 1750 in Hamilton p. 323, 2008.

### Preface

#### 1. The scent of the maker

11. “The finesse of his blown work...” attributed to Ivana Jirasek, in Jo Litson, ‘Top of the glass,’ *The Weekend Australian*, November 21-22, 1998, p.16.

11. “fractious and dangerous, enduring yet fragile...” see Noris Ioannou, *Australian Studio Glass: The movement, its makers and their art*, Craftsman House, Australia, (1995), p.85.

#### 2. At the furnace

14. “What I make are obviously non-functional...” Taken from an interview between NM and Grace Cochrane, A/Senior curator, decorative arts and design, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, 2001. (Artists personal files)

15. “each time we come to...” NM in conversation with Brian Parkes, Object Australian Design Centre Gallery, Sydney, Saturday 8 September, 2012.

19. “watching someone in flow...” Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, Bloomsbury, Great Britain, 1996, p.92.

19. “People seem to concentrate...” Goleman, P.91.

23. “Both disciplines have a scientific...” and “Nick Mount’s been the backbone...” from Randall Sach interview with Ian Henschke, ABC Stateline, Friday, August 9, 2010.

29. “Murano is an extraordinary ...” NM in conversation with Noris Ioannou, 1995, p.119.

29. “characteristic Venini wit...” and more on the history of glass making in Venice...” see Dan Klein and L. Ward (Ed) *The History of Glass*, Tiger Books International, London, pp.119 – 256.

29. “They are such magical places...” NM in conversation with Jo Litson, ‘Top of the glass,’ *The Weekend Australian*, November 21-22, 1998, pp. 16-18.

### 3. Red dots

36. “Recent research indicates...” Throsby, D. & Hollister, V. *Don’t give up your day job: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia*, Australia Council, Sydney, 2013, p.40.

39. “The American audience is...” Unless otherwise specified, all Anna Grigson remarks come from conversations during the Sabbia opening and from interview on 24 August, 2011.

40. “The term Masters of Glass...” Anna Grigson,. Master of Glass series exhibition Interview, [www.craftaustralia.org.au/library/interview.php](http://www.craftaustralia.org.au/library/interview.php)

40. “In exhibition work...” R. Linn, *Nicholas John Mount: Eminent Australian’s Oral History project*, State Library of South Australia, J.D. Somerville Oral History Collection, 16 August, 2001, (.EAOHP), p. 34.

40. “a group of four...” Noris Ioannou, ‘SA work dominates showcase glass event: The Cutting Edge, 1994 Wagga Glass Triennial’, *The Advertiser*, 21 September. 1994, p.30. Also see Ausglass magazine, Summer Edition 1994/95.

41. “the oversize perfume bottles...” [www.nickmountglass.com.au/catalogues.html](http://www.nickmountglass.com.au/catalogues.html), downloaded 4/10/2012, from Catalogues 2011, Nick Mount Glass, comments by Wendy Walker, February, 2004, and Ivana Jirasek, 1998.

### 4. Ties that bind

52. “work was far more than dutiful...” Meryle Secrest, *Frank Lloyd Wright: A biography*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago (1992), p.250.

52. “her role had been...” from Drusilla Modjeska, *Stravinsky’s Lunch*, Picador, Sydney, 1999, p.14.

53. “on countering the benefits...” Modjeska, p.15.
53. “At stake...” Modjeska, p. 17.
54. “The kind of collaborative process...” Vera John-Steiner, *Creative Collaboration*, Oxford University Press, New York (2000), pp.189-190.
57. “I was looking for an object that would carry the murrine...” Murrine glass is made by placing a series of small glass rods together. The rods are fused and pulled (like toffee) resulting in canes of glass. After cooling, cross-cuts of the cane in thin slices results in decorative tiles for further use in glass making.
58. “too often, combinations of disparate materials...” <http://www.craftvic.org.au>.
60. “I would go around the school...” and other quotes from this period originate from R. Linn, *Nicholas John Mount: Eminent Australian’s Oral History Project*, State Library of South Australia, J.D. Somerville Oral History Collection, 16 August 2005.
67. “On a cold day in 1978...” from the documentary *Craft as a livelihood: Nick Mount, glassblower*, Victorian Film Corporation, Melbourne, 1978, State Library of South Australia, SAV846.
70. “to those who know them...” Peta Mount, “Living with a treasure”, *Craft Australia*, No. 85. 2012, pp.18-23.

## 5. All fired up

79. “a young English apprentice...” Poynter, J.R., Felton, Alfred (1831-1904) *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 4 (MUP), 1972, and <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biog/EM00119b.htm>
80. “you can’t possibly melt glass...” from *Nick Mount: Eminent Australian’s Oral History Project*.
81. “The funnel - apart from being...” Margot Osborne, *Nick Mount: Incandescent*, Wakefield Press, 2002, p.11.
81. “Nick placed some *Funnels* in...” and “the trigger...” Osborne, 2002, p.11.
83. “I liked having to scrounge around...” ‘An interview with NM, *The Adelaide Review*, March, 1986, p.5.
83. “The move from the country...” Garry Benson, ‘Budgeree Glass,’ *Craft Australia*, Winter, 1987, p.38-39.
83. “Nick has made seemingly anomalous...” Lynn Collins, “Glass Artistry,” *Macquarie Galleries Bulletin*, Vol. 6. No. 4. 1986.
84. “By 1987 Nick and Pauline...” Noris Ioannou, *The Culture brokers: toward a redefinition of Australian Contemporary craft*, State Print, Adelaide, 1989, p.35-38.

85. “We bought a factory from New Zealand...” from *Nick Mount: Eminent Australian’s Oral History Project*.
85. “The sense of urgency’s fantastic...” from *Nick Mount: Eminent Australian’s Oral History Project*.
86. “By the time Budgerie ended...” *Nick Mount: Eminent Australian’s Oral History Project*. p.34.
86. “thick, copper wire ‘cages’...” ‘Imagery abounds in glass: Nick Mount,’ Noris Ioannou, *Advertiser*, March, 1993.
87. “when the fat lady sings...” Osborne, 2002, p.16.
87. “It’s a long while...” Tony Hanning, ‘Nick Mount: Pagliaccio, Plates and Popolo Glass...The most ‘offensive’ glass I’ve ever seen,’ *Ausglass Magazine*, Spring-Summer Edition, 1993.
89. “For a craftsperson whose primary...” *Nick Mount: Eminent Australian’s Oral History Project*. p.32.

## 6. Repeat and return

93. “virtuoso craftspeople set the standard...” Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman*, Penguin Books, London, 2008, p.33.
93. “sociable experts...” Sennett p. 248.
94. “aim low and win...” Hanning, Tony. *Nick Mount: The Fabric of Work, Living Treasures: Masters of Australian Craft*, Wakefield Press, 2012, p.25.

## 7. Holy Toledo

114. “Edward Libbey wanted to show...” from the Foreword, *Glass in Glass: Toledo Museum of Art*, published with assistance of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Toledo, Ohio. For more on the TMA Glass Pavilion see *Glass in Glass: Toledo Museum of Art*, 2012, published with assistance of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Toledo, Ohio, 2012, and [www.toledomuseum.org](http://www.toledomuseum.org))
115. “An unassuming bright eyed...” for more on Erwin Eisch see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erwin\\_Eisch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erwin_Eisch).
116. “For thousands of years Craftspeople...” Dan Klein & Ward Lloyd. (Ed) *The history of glass*, Tiger Books International, London, 1992, P. 184.
116. “In1913...” [www.media.corning.com/flash/corporate/2011/timeline/1912.swf](http://www.media.corning.com/flash/corporate/2011/timeline/1912.swf).
117. “Everyone connected with this workshop...” Excerpts from Tom McGlauchlin (1934-2011) letters to my wife Pat McGlauchlin, March 23, 1962, postmarked 3/26/62. In *The Glass Art Society 2012 Journal*, Toledo, Ohio, p.58. For more on the early workshops see, ‘How glass-blowing renaissance unfolded 44 years ago in Toledo, Tahree Lane, Toledo Blade,

18.8.2006. McGlauchlin eventually moved the family to Toledo to become head of the museums glass program and an established glass artist. McGlauchlin died in 2011.

118. “Labino was an inventor...” *The Glass Art Society Journal*, 2012, p.24.

119. “During the workshop...” Louise Bruner, Toledo Blade Sunday Magazine, 12 November 1972. For more on the workshops see, *The ‘genesis of American studio glass. How a brilliant form of art gained shape from a humble start.* Jutta-Annette Page, Curator of glass and decorative arts, TMA, ToledoBlade.com, 10 June, 2012.

119. “Harvey left Toledo in 1962...” from ‘Stairway to heaven: 25 years of work with Erwin Eisch,’ by Stephen Paul Day, *The Glass Art Society Journal*, 2012, p. 67.

119. “Meeting Erwin confirmed my belief...” Harvey K. Littleton, *Glassblowing: A search for form*, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, New York, 1980, p.10.

119. “The little furnace is the future...” Joan Falconer Byrd, *Harvey K Littleton: A retrospective Exhibition*, High Museum of Art, Atlanta, USA, 1984, P.12.

120. “The first piece of modern...: Harvey K. Littleton, a ‘Pioneer in the Art of Glass, Dies at 91,’ [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

121. “The pioneering studio glass movement...” for more about the movement see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Studio-glass>

121. “There are probably three times...” From the documentary *Nick Mount Fascination with glass* made with the assistance of The Government of South Australia through ArtSA, A co-production of Pabulum Productions & ABC TV., 2001.

122. “The studio glass movement...” this and other comments from the panellists from *History: Blowing in the wind* (Sponsored by ProMedica) William Warmus (moderator) GAS Conference, Toledo, 2012.

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131. “It was determined that I would...” *Glass Art Society Journal*, 2005, p.5.

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140. “At that time Australia had...” from *Nick Mount Fascination with glass* video.

## 9. Doing the hand jive

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150. “articulate organs of expression...” Frank Wilson, 1998, p.145.
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155. “For any of us...” NM at Object, 2012.
157. “How peculiar....” Frank Wilson, 1998, p.6.
157. “I’m following the material...” NM at Object, 2012.
159. “The scent bottle is an object...” Osborne, 2002, p.20.
160. “Like the Reclining Bob...” Peta Mount, ‘Living with a Treasure,’ *Craft arts International*, No. 85, 2012, p.23.

160. 'There is a fascinating dichotomy...' Jo Litson, *The Weekend Australian*, 'Top of the glass', November 21-22, 1998, p.16.
161. "You could see a pair of tools illustrated..." From the film "*Fascination with glass*", Executive producer Richard Moore, made with the assistance of the Government of South Australia through Arts SA and a Co-production of Pabulum Productions and ABC TV, 2001.
162. "Karl Marx believed..." Sennett, 2008, p. 29.
162. "The labourer with a sense of craft..." a quote from C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1951, pp. 220-223, and in Sennett, 2008, p.27.
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## Image credits

Title Page	NM, Toledo, 2012.	(Denise George)
6.	<i>Something about the moon</i> (2005)	(Denise George)
9.	NM at the glory hole, 2011.	(Denise George)
29.	Sabbia Gallery, Sydney, 2012.	(Denise George)
49.	Ties that bind, Leabrook Studio, 2012.	(Denise George)
72.	All fired up, NM at home, 2012.	(Denise George)
94.	Canberra Glassworks Workshop, 2012.	(Denise George)
115.	Holy Toledo, 2012.	(Denise George)
133	Richard Marquis and Nick Mount, Toledo Museum Art.	(Denise George)
151	Doing the hand jive, Pittsburgh, 2012.	

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