

Article by Richard Morrell

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I graduated from Stourbridge in 1979 and migrated to Australia the same year. After two years of teaching I managed to escape Academia and fulfilled the long held dream of running my own studio.

Whilst I earned my living as a glass-blower, after a few years of running a professional hot glass studio I found the creative restrictions of blown glass to be frustrating my development. In an effort to extend my repertoire, I started to experiment with hot glass casting in my spare time.

Early in my career I chose the bowl form as a vehicle for my endeavours. A vessel was probably one of the first human artefacts and has carried the marks of humanities creative efforts since prehistoric times. Despite being often dismissed by the fine art world as mere 'decorative art' or 'craft', I believe the vessel to be an ancient and valid art form. I appreciate being part of the continuity the bowl represents.

Inspired by the rugged Australian outback, it was my intention to develop work where the 'decoration' overtakes, or becomes the form. Early pieces were achieved by pushing a thick blown glass form into sand-cast hot glass. Once cooled I would cut off the overblow with a diamond saw, then cut and polish the top, leaving a small blown bowl suspended in the centre of the casting. The process I used is well documented in Keith Cummings seminal work 'Techniques of Kiln Formed Glass'.

Details of the process have changed several times over the years, but the small hollow bowl floating in the surface of a mass of polished and textured glass has been central to my work for nearly thirty years and is recognised as being synonymous with my style.

One of the earliest pieces typical of this style was titled 'Atlantis Bowl' (pictured above). In 1985 this piece was included in 'International Young Glass Artists' at the Glasmuseum in Ebeltoft, Denmark. The piece was documented in the catalogue of the exhibition and is currently in the collection of the Glasmuseum. The piece was also documented in 'The Survey of World Glass' published by Kyuryodo, Japan in 1993.

In early pieces the bowl was coloured with cased glass. In the mid 1990s I began experimenting with different surface treatments and found that gilding the interior of the bowl with gold leaf emphasised the bowl in dramatic fashion. I used this technique on several pieces, including 'Bowl of Truth' which in 2000 won the People's Choice award in the RFC Glass prize, the premier glass exhibition in Australia at that time. Subsequently the piece was featured with other works of mine in an article published in 'Neus Glas', issue 1/2001. I was pleased to get some international exposure.

IN 2001 I ACCEPTED A POSITION WITH JENGGALA KERAMIK IN BALI, WHERE I TRAINED A TEAM OF STAFF AND DESIGNED A RANGE OF BLOWN AND KILN FORMED GLASS TO COMPLEMENT THE CERAMIC WARE WHICH JENGGALA PRODUCED. THIS WAS A FANTASTIC EXPERIENCE, BUT THE RIGOURS OF INDUSTRY AND THE TROPICS TOOK THEIR TOLL AND AFTER FOUR YEARS I RETURNED TO MY STUDIO IN RURAL AUSTRALIA, WHICH IS WHERE I WORK

FROM NOW.

AS IT HAS FORMED THE CORE OF MY LIFE'S WORK, I STILL OCCASIONALLY PRODUCE BOWLS WHICH CONTINUE THE THEME OF THE SUSPENDED HOLLOW, BUT AFTER SO MANY YEARS IT SEEMS THE STYLE HAS BECOME SOMEWHAT A CLICHÉ. MY WORK HAS NOW BRANCHED INTO OTHER AREAS, BUT THE BOWL, OR VESSEL, WILL ALWAYS BE CENTRAL TO MY EXPLORATIONS. THOSE THAT ARE INTERESTED CAN SEE MORE OF MY WORK AT: WWW.MORRELLGLASS.COM.

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