



'Land Lines', 2010, fused and kiln-cast glass, 32 x 63 x 5 cm. Private collection Palm Springs, US

## GERRY KING'S ICONIC MEMORIES

GERRY King has recently completed the first pieces in a new series of glass works entitled *Iconic Memories*. This is a rare moment for King, who normally works on variations within each thematic body of work over a period of years. With an air of quiet confidence mixed with anticipation, he says that 'taking on a new series is like taking on another child'.

After a break from solo exhibitions in recent years he will be exhibiting works from the *Iconic Memories* series in his solo show at Sabbia Gallery, Sydney in September, and in group shows at Aptos Cruz, Adelaide in July, and at Kirra Gal-

leries, Melbourne in November. King explains that his use of the term "iconic memory" refers to 'something that you can picture after you have seen it. It's a visual memory.' The idea for the new series originated when he was in Iceland a couple of years ago: 'I saw icebergs and I was a little surprised to find they weren't pure ice. Soil and rocks were trapped inside. Locally this is known as "scrapings", but geologists in Australia call it "till". This glacial ice had travelled across the land over a very long period of time, collecting evidence of its path that was retained for centuries. The notion of history being preserved in this

way intrigued me.' He adds: 'Held in the mass of ice are mementos of many years' passage across the earth. Stones and soil form patterns within the translucent blocks, teasing the spectator to postulate the circumstances of this inclusion.'

The first four works in the *Iconic Memories* series are semi-abstract visualisations in fused and cast glass of his memories of the landscape around Kanmantoo Valley in South Australia. Other works, still to come, may be influenced by landscapes further afield in the British Isles and Iceland. King has "painted" in glass an abstracted three-dimensional world, while avoiding going too far down the

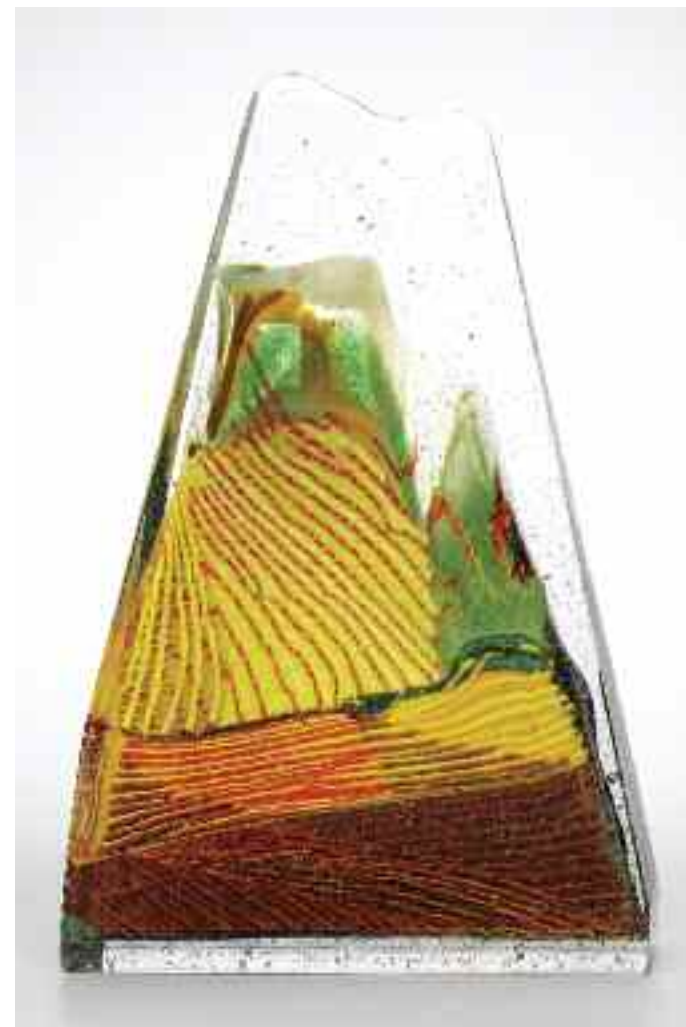
path of literal representation. He has encased within transparent cast glass, fused configurations of coloured glass that are suggestive of the layered linear contours of the landscape. Each piece is a poetic evocation of a fragment of the natural world – with a hint of depth of field, nuances of light and shade, and allusion to natural formations. This world is preserved within the cast glass – like an insect immortalised in amber.

In *Kanmantoo Valley*, 2010, overlaid coloured glass is fused in intense shades of olive, emerald, aquamarine and cerulean blue to generate subtle nuances of tone. Through the glass equivalent of a painter's tonal modelling of light and shade, King alludes to a lush contoured landscape of rolling

hills – Kanmantoo's 'grass covered slopes, radiant with a resplendent swaying green'. Organic linear markings in red suggest the furrowed patterns of cultivation. They are open, also, to other readings, as the eroded contours of degradation caused by deforestation.

*Land Lines*, 2010, glows with golden linear designs sweeping across an abstract colour-field of blue-green glass, infused on one edge with bleeds of an intense blood red. This piece may be appreciated simply as an abstract allusion to landscape, or, can be read more explicitly as a statement about the impact of human land-use practices. According to King's artist statement: 'We compel our geometry upon the land ... the plough leaves parallel lines, straight or mimicking the contour. Yet this physical geometry is impermanent. Rain corrodes the incised line of the farmer. Fences ultimately meander and fall. This piece is testament to that journey.'

Works in King's *Iconic Memories* series may be read metaphorically as touching on our desire to preserve the endangered natural environment, to cling to the poignant memory of vanishing beauty. He questions, 'As the planet warms, more will be revealed from within the ice and from the land it covers. What might we discover about the past, what might we ascertain of our future?'



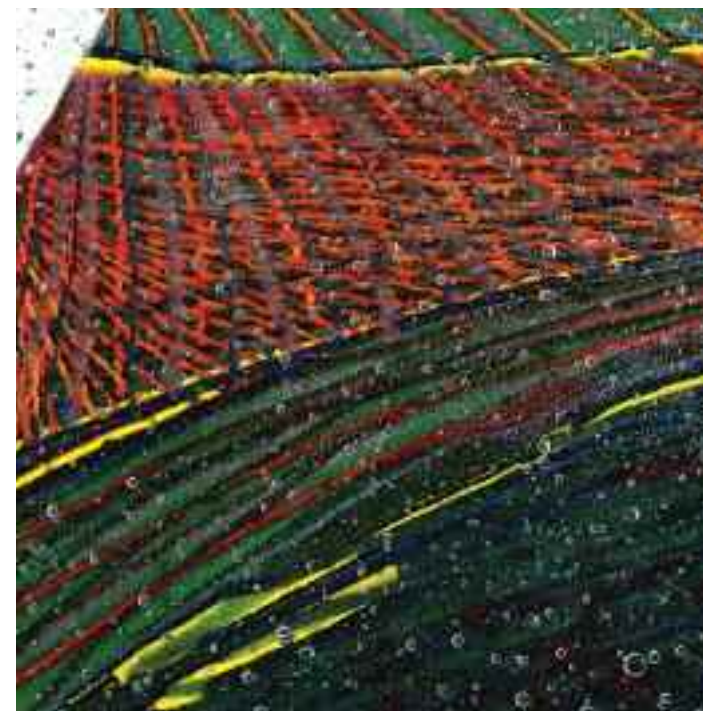
'Native Valley 2', 2011, fused and kiln-cast glass, 33 x 22 x 5 cm

In his previous series of sculptural glass forms King has similarly opened up the possibility of deeper meanings beyond sheer surface beauty. The ritual forms of King's *Tartessos* and *Atlantis* series were requiems to lost civilisations. In this new work, too, there's a vision of loss: of nature rather than of civilizations; not in the past, but in the future. The lingering melancholy of these preserved memories of landscape stems from the seeming inevitability of a future that is as fatally pre-ordained in its trajectory as is the past.

After more than 30 years of professional practice in the top echelon of Australian glass artists, King has already mastered an impressive technical repertoire. But in order to realise the ideas behind this latest work he wanted to create a more fluid, organic feel. Over the past couple of years he has carried out numerous technical experiments in fusing and casting glass at his Adelaide Hills studio aimed at achieving the softer, more fluid quality that distinguishes this new series: 'I experimented for a year a year and half before I came up with what I want to do. It's a bit more painterly than what I have normally done in glass. There's no point fixating on the idea if you can't actually do it. So it's been a fairly slow process of trying lots of different things. The kiln-formed elements are encased inside the



'Native Valley 1', 2011, fused and kiln-cast glass, 34 x 31 x 5 cm



Detail of 'Native Valley 1'



Detail of 'Native Valley 1'

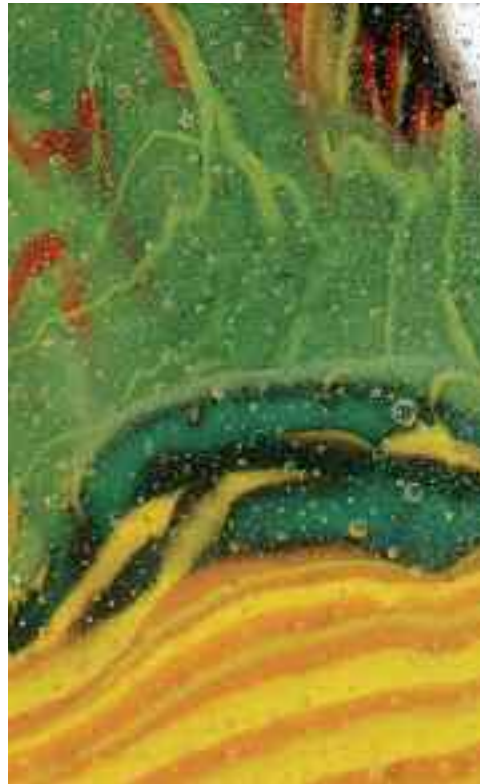


Detail of 'Native Valley 1'

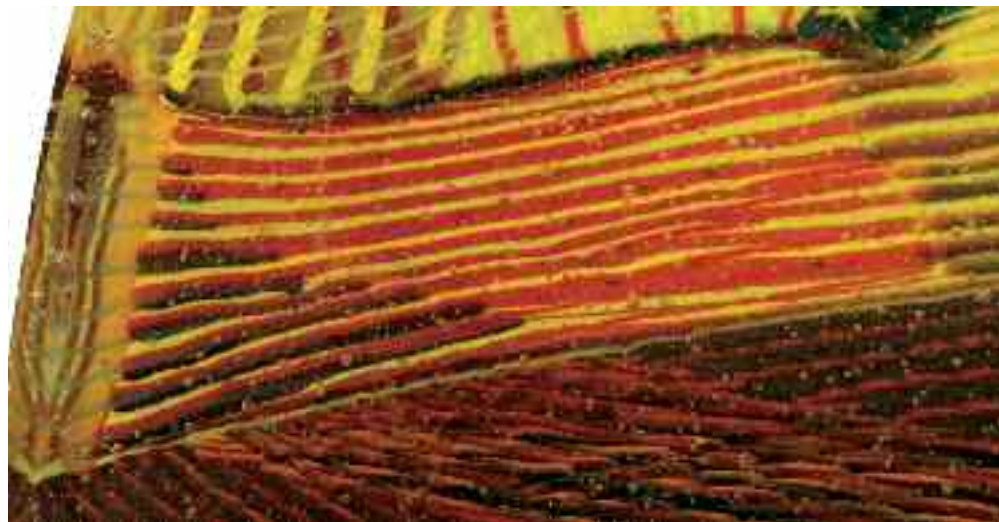




Detail of 'Native Valley 2'



Detail of 'Native Valley 2'



Detail of 'Native Valley 2'



'Kanmantoo Valley', 2010, fused and kiln-cast glass, 24 x 64 x 4.5 cm

cast work. Even though one can predict to a high degree what is going to happen, there is always that bit of serendipity. If you could control everything it would be pretty tedious. That unpredictability is the joy of the kiln.

His confidence that he has got it right with this new series has been encouraged by the recent acquisition of *Land Lines*, which was featured in Sabbia Gallery's "Geometry" exhibition for the 2011 Ausglass Conference, for a private collection in Palm Springs, US.

In the interim since his last solo exhibition King has undertaken a number of major commissions, including a large water feature for a corporate development in Singapore, and a substantial glass sculpture as part of an interior design commission for a private house in Hawaii. He regularly visits Turkey to conduct master classes for the summer program of The Glass Furnace glass centre in Istanbul. In 2010 he was honoured as the first living Australian glass artist to receive a retrospective exhibition at the National Art Glass Centre, Wagga Wagga. At the 2011 Ausglass Conference, King's contribution to Australian studio glass over a long career (including his role as a founding member of Ausglass in the 1980s) was recognised when he was made an honorary life member and invited to deliver the first Vicki Torr Memorial Lecture.

#### Margot Osborne

*Margot Osborne is a freelance writer, curator and author of Australian Glass Today, 2005.*

*Gerry King's glass works are represented in major Australian public collections, including the National Gallery of Australia, National Art Glass Collection, and most Australian State Galleries. International collections that have acquired his work include: Notojima Glass Art Museum, Japan; Glasmuseum, Ebeltoft, Denmark; Auckland Institute and Museum, New Zealand; Wustum Museum of Fine Art, Racine, Wisconsin, US; Museo Municipal De Arte En Vidrio De Alcorcon, Madrid, Spain; Marinha Grande National Museum, Marinha Grande, Portugal; and Nijima Glass Art Museum, Japan.*