



Tom Rowney

Aventurine Spirit

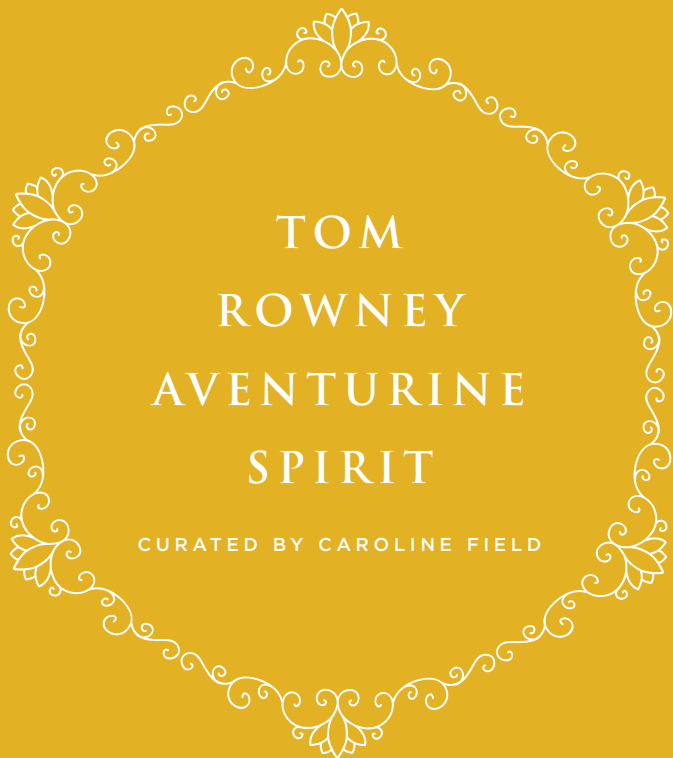
Curated by Caroline Field

Canberra Glassworks is a major ACT arts centre that provides a range of well-equipped workshops for artists to develop and create works using the medium of glass. Established in 2007, it operates within the historic Kingston Powerhouse - a building that was Canberra's first major public building and played a critical role in the early development of Canberra.

Built on the land of the Ngunnawal people who used the site as a meeting and gathering place, practising their culture on the banks of the Molonglo River for millennia, Canberra Glassworks acknowledges and respects the traditional custodians of the land on which it is located.

Over the fifteen years since its opening, the Canberra Glassworks has been pivotal in the development of the careers of artists using glass as a creative medium. The collaborative process of the creation of studio glass has built a community of artists whose work has been recognised throughout the world. It attracts visiting artists who spend time in Canberra to access the facility. A program of curated exhibitions increases the profile of studio glass artists.

Canberra Glassworks is delighted to present this exhibition of new work by Tom Rowney - *Aventurine Spirit*, curated by Caroline Field.



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Aventurine Spirit

Aventurine Spirit is an engaging selection of new works by the extraordinary glass artist Tom Rowney. With a focus on Venetian traditions, Rowney conjures amazing textures and patterns within simple shapes, transforming the everyday into objects of desire. Always pushing boundaries with his technique, Rowney is well known for his ovals, cups, spheres and vase forms, created with stunning colourings including aventurine green and ruby red. With an eye to bling and frippery, Rowney combines classic elements of traditional glass blowing with enchantment and style. Daring form and structured contemporary shapes are embellished with meticulous fine linework and shimmering texture, pushing the functional into a fluid aesthetic.

To Rowney, the Venetian style of glass blowing is exacting in its combination of precision and accuracy and continues to be very much a part of his work today. Celebrating the physical process of dealing with and shaping molten glass, his works characteristically retain that moment of aqueous fluidity in their solid state, that represents the sense of flow and timing intrinsic to his working style. His use of canes and bold colour is a key feature of his design, creating a dialogue with the viewer that draws them closer to his work.

More recently, Rowney is embracing the looser and more painterly murrini technique which allows him even greater fluidity and a freer approach in the application of patterns. This provides a fresh creative freedom to which tightness and discipline is later applied through the process of refinement in which trademark canes continue to be employed to provide a container and structure. Rowney describes this technique as 'extra gaudy', which supports his love of colourful shiny glass made up of layers of overlapping colours created by transparent layers of colour placed over opaque glass.

Aventurine Spirit is presented across three individual bodies of work with each one focussing on particular aspects of Rowney's practice. Seven works from his *Tesserae Series* form the main body of work and combine a mixture of historical and recent techniques, taking the form of round objects and tall vertical shapes. These new profiles are described by Rowney as 'elliptical forms' and are adorned with repeating pattern which are distorted and stretched by the inherent nature of glass in its molten state. The bold outlines hold a matrix of twisted lines that become ribbon-like and elastic in appearance. The pattern is assembled from individual coloured glass rings and canes bundled and melted together, with a final stage of heating, twisting and forming, creating a patchwork like quality where the stitching is exposed.

The sections are laid like tiles that when bunched and rolled up, provide the perception of mosaics, as evidenced in the carmine brown *Bronze Low Form 2023*. The round objects display great fluidity, and although made by the same technique, each presents with a unique character within their lustrous ruby, aventurine green and oro duro yellow colour fields. Rowney's work achieves high impact with the viewer with a strong sense of intensity and a beguiling eccentricity. While his glass forms convey a great modern flair, he knows when to exercise restraint and is, in practice, revitalising and restoring these Italian techniques to achieve a new level of enjoyment and respect for glassmaking.

The focus of the second body of work is on smaller objects, while the final body presents work of a similar theme on a grander more monumental scale, both showcasing collections of glass goblets and candelabras supported on exquisite stems in the form of seahorses. Positioned against mirrored backdrops and illuminated by projected light, these works combine Rowney's characteristic style and fine caned patterning with coloured translucent glass embellished with multi-spiral opaque-twist cores, scrolls, pincer handles, fins and glass drop eyes. Resembling fireworks, complete with light play and shadows, a striking theatrical experience is created with plinths of varying heights and a vibrant prismatic atmosphere. Invoking the exquisite novelty of ancient Venetian designs, particularly those involving dolphins, these fanciful shapes are an important extension to his practice and extoll a love of fantasy with their preposterous and luxurious decorative elements combined with vivid colours that appear to be having conversations.

Rowney describes his current technique, which has been employed for most works in the exhibition as an adaption of the murrini technique. "The art of making murrini has been a long-practiced niche of the glass art industry for many years. The process of making a murrini is very long and strenuous, however the payoff is well worth it."

The physical method surrounding the creation of these complex objects involves the assistance of three or four additional glass artists working as assistants. Their responsibilities in the construction of the complex forms are predetermined and planned in advance, down to the specific positioning of each member as they manage the molten glass. Several pieces of equipment are employed in the process, the first for heating the glass, another as a reheating chamber (known as the glory hole) and the last for controlled cooling and stabilising of the completed work of art, in addition to a blow torch to maintain temperature while at the glass blowing bench as the components are joined.

Rowney possesses an extravagant expression combined with a robust discipline underpinned with a strong sense of balance. The challenge of producing pieces in the venetian style informs him to establish and produce his own evolving style, characterised by the intricate kaleidoscopic patterns he is able to create with almost mathematical precision. Within his practice there are displays of fantasy and virtuosity, explosions of creativity, excess and fearlessness along with great appreciation for colour.

There is an anarchy involved here with the artist throwing caution to the wind before reigning it all in to produce something new, raw, powerful and magical. Today, working at the height of his innovative powers, Rowney presents as a modest, yet revolutionary and rebellious force shaping the nature of contemporary Australian glass art.

Caroline Field

Curator

7 February 2023

Tom Rowney is renowned as one of the most accomplished glass blowers in Australia with over thirty years' experience in the field.

He has perfected his skills and is inspired by traditional Venetian techniques which have been a constant source of exploration.

The combination of precision and accuracy used to create a magnificent piece of glass is something he continuously strives for. Rowney is passionate and inspired by the physical nature of blowing glass. His practice is based on learning, refining, and adapting Venetian glass blowing processes in combination with his joy of making beautifully crafted objects. This is evident when watching him work from his studio based at the Canberra Glassworks.

Rowney currently resides in regional New South Wales and is also employed as the Technical Director at Canberra Glassworks. As one of Australia's foremost glass blowers Rowney continues to be sought after for teaching and fabrication projects by the leading glass studios and artists in Australia and overseas.

His works have been collected by the National Gallery of Australia, National Glass Collection - Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, Powerhouse Museum, Australian Catholic University Collection, and the Tacoma Museum of Glass (USA). Rowney is represented by Beaver Galleries, Canberra and Sabbia Gallery, Sydney.





Tom ROWNEY
Bronze Low Form—Tesserae Series
2022
blown glass



Tom ROWNEY

Bronze & Gold Tall Form—Tesserae Series

2022

blown glass

Tom ROWNEY

Green Tall Form—Tesserae Series

2022

blown glass









Tom ROWNEY

Cherry Low Form—Tesserae Series

2022

blown glass

Tom ROWNEY

Blue & Green Sphere—Tesserae Series

2022

blown glass

Tom ROWNEY

Blue & Green Tall Form—Tesserae Series

2022

blown glass

Tom ROWNEY
Green Vase Form—Tesserae Series
2022
blown glass

Tom ROWNEY
Blue & Green Low Form—Tesserae Series
2022
blown glass







Tom ROWNEY
Golden Seahorse Tazza
2023
blown glass, goldleaf

Tom ROWNEY
Seahorse Candelabra
2023
blown glass, goldleaf



Tom ROWNEY
Seahorse Goblets
2022-2023
blown glass, goldleaf



Tom ROWNEY
Seahorse Candle Sticks
2023
blown glass, goldleaf





Aventurine Spirit

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Works by Tom Rowney
Curator Caroline Field

Canberra Glassworks

9 March to 7 May 2022

Melbourne Design Fair

Melbourne Convention and
Exhibition Centre
19 May to 21 May 2023

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