



WHAT GAVE YOU THAT IDEA

Zoe Brand

23 July to 8 October 2023



canberra glassworks



ZOE BRAND

Zoe Brand works from her studio in Majors Creek, just outside Braidwood, on Yuin country. As a contemporary jeweller/artist, she is known for her use of text, often repurposing plastic and reclaimed materials. Her practice reflects an interest in materialism, consumerism, and human behaviour evident not only in her smart wordplay but also in the considered processes and choice of materials.

In a series of works started in 2020 titled *HARD TEXTS*, Brand engraves and paints statements such as 'EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE OKAY' and 'HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH' into acrylic shapes that are turned into necklaces. When worn they become performative, sparking conversation and moments of connection. Her choice of text is often drawn from the book *Fifteen thousand useful phrases: a practical handbook of pertinent expressions, striking similes, literary, commercial, conversational, and oratorical terms, for the embellishment of speech and literature, and the improvement of the vocabulary of those persons who read, write and speak English* by Greville Kleiser, first published in 1910.

The book contains phrases grouped under classifications such as: useful, significant, felicitous, impressive, business, conversational, and public speaking – the ChatGPT of the early 20th century. Her choice of tools to engrave these words is similarly old-fashioned. A pantograph, a replicating and scaling tool developed in the 17th century, is used rather than a CNC or computer cutting tool. Glass and its traditional techniques of production seemed like a perfect material to extend these ideas.

WHAT GAVE YOU THAT IDEA? is a phrase that can go either way: it can be an initiation to discuss an alternative idea or a cutting correction delivered with a punch.



Zoe BRAND

WHAT GAVE YOU THAT IDEA

2023

reclaimed glass from a lazy Susan, 23kt gold,
backing paint

IT'S OK

2023

reclaimed glass, 23kt gold, 12kt white gold,
backing paint

For this exhibition, Brand explores human interactions through phrases that can be read or misread, and how quickly things can be interpreted or misinterpreted. The starting point came in her research into text and glass and fascination with the gilding process after attending a professional workshop led by master gilder Will Lyons at Canberra Glassworks. Like much of her earlier works, the use of outmoded processes provides Brand with another reason to flip the narrative. Choosing not to use computer-cut vinyl text or CNC machining to create perfect uniform pieces, she challenges the way to do things and leaves room for human interaction (which is never perfect). For Brand, using gold in this exhibition was also ironic, as a jeweller she rarely (or never) uses such precious metals in her practice.



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LINGER FOR A FEW LEISURELY SECONDS
2023

reclaimed outdoor tabletop, 23kt gold,
12kt white gold, backing paint

Since undertaking the workshop, Brand has created a series of gilded panel works using glass salvaged from second-hand shops and waste recyclers. Paying homage to the past lives of found glass, she transforms discarded chopping boards, tabletops, and a lazy susan into artworks featuring her selected statements from Fifteen thousand useful phrases. She intentionally subverts our expectations by adorning these discarded objects with 23kt gold, while retaining the scratches, chips and wear-and-tear from past use. These pieces quite literally speak to the viewer. One asks to '*LINGER FOR A FEW LEISURELY SECONDS*'. The viewer can choose to linger or ignore the statement. With an air of cynicism, Brand is drawing our attention to the fact that the average person spends just 27 seconds looking at an artwork^[1].



^[1] *The Average Person Spends 27 Seconds Looking at a Work of Art. Now, 166 Museums Are Joining Forces to Ask You to Slow Down*, Sarah Cascone for Artnet, April 4, 2019.

Accompanying this series, is *TRY AGAIN* is an amusing installation featuring 350 gilded, hand-cast glass tokens that delve into the themes of manufacturing and multiples. These tokens pay tribute to our collective failures and serve as a reminder that the process is just as important as the destination. Each *TRY AGAIN* is cast with raw glass material with problematic qualities, what we call the 'bad batch' at Canberra Glassworks, a regular by-product of a glass hot shop. Used to make *TRY AGAIN* these waste materials are reclaimed so not become landfill. When piled together the mass of *TRY AGAIN* golden tokens glow in mocking brilliance, as if gloating that trash has become treasure.

TRY
AGAIN



Zoe BRAND

FACADES FOR AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE

I DIDN'T KNO WHAT TO SAY

EVERYBODY HERE KNOWS

2022

pantograph engraved acrylic, paint, cord,
acryllic mirror, painted timber frame



I SHOULD KNOW

I SHOULD KNOW

I SHOULD KNOW

YOU DON'T SEEM VERY ENTHUSIASTIC

I HAVE BEEN LONGING TO SEE MORE OF YOU



A very short history of hand-painted lettering

The incorporation of text in art emerged as an interest of artists in the early years of the 20th century with the Cubist movement, followed by Dada and Pop movements of the 1960s and beyond. In contemporary practice, the use of text is firmly established, with artists like Ed Ruscha, Jenny Holtzer, and Tony Albert showcasing their text-based artworks in numerous art galleries worldwide.

The connection of glass with painted lettering was initially rooted in the techniques of signwriting and advertising including reverse glass painting, gilding, and later, the use of neon, a medium that merged both art and advertising.

Historically, in Europe, signwriters painted coats of arms, crests, and insignias for the aristocracy. During the Victorian era, gilded signage adorned

museums, chemists, railway stations, and bank doors and windows. As literacy rates increased, gilded signage gained popularity and signwriting flourished until the mid-20th century. The rapid growth of western industrialisation saw computers and automated production processes replace many hand-made techniques. Today, this skill has predominately moved into the trucking industry with tradespeople drawing their inspiration from the rich history of folk art found on wagons, carts, and railway carriages.

While gilding as a trade faces significant skills shortages and has been designated as endangered, there is a resurgence in reverse glass painting and gilded signage. High-quality, exquisitely crafted text-based signage has returned and can now be found in coffee shops, barbershops, boutique tattoo parlours, and restaurants.



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TRY AGAIN

2023

cast glass from 'bad batch', 23kt gold

IT COULD
NOT BE
OTHERWISE



BUT
YOU
SHOULD
KNOW



Zoe BRAND

*IT COULD NOT BE OTHERWISE
BUT YOU SHOULD KNOW
AND SOMETIMES IT WILL BE DIFFICULT
2023*

reclaimed glass chopping board, 23kt gold,
12kt white gold, backing paint



**YOU DON'T
SEEM VERY
ENTHUSIASTIC**

Zoe BRAND

*YOU DON'T SEEM VERY ENTHUSIASTIC
I HAVE BEEN LONGING TO SEE MORE OF YOU
2023*

reclaimed glass shelf from computer table,
23kt gold, 12kt white gold, backing paint

**I HAVE
BEEN
LONGING
TO
SEE MORE
OF YOU**

We acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, the traditional owners of the ACT region, on whose lands we live and work and where the Canberra Glassworks stands. We pay respects to their Ancestors, Elders, leaders and artists past and present, and recognise their ongoing connections to Culture and Country.

Exhibition supporters



Canberra Glassworks is supported by the ACT Government through artsACT and the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

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canberra glassworks

opening hours

Wed to Sun

10am to 4pm

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