



**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 and Ngambri 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 sixteen 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 together with Megalo Print Studio are delighted to present this exhibition of glass, print and mixed-media artists curated by Aimee Frodsham and Stephen Payne.**

# Memphis Now

CURATED BY  
AIMEE FRODSHAM  
AND  
STEPHEN PAYNE



canberra  
glassworks

## Curators note

The Memphis design movement was a short-lived yet influential design movement that emerged in Milan in the early 1980s. It was founded by the Italian designer and architect Ettore Sottsass, along with a group of designers and artists. Barbara Radice, an Italian design critic, writer, and editor, described the movement as ‘Memphis challenges good taste.’ This description was not meant as a criticism but rather as an expression of artistic freedom and a celebration that was based on years of research, debate, experimentation, and modification.

Canberra Glassworks, in collaboration with Megalo Print Studio, presents the exhibition *Memphis Now*, a collaborative project that brings together contemporary artists and designers who embrace geometry, colour, and materiality. In alignment with the values of the Memphis Group, these artists and designers explore our emotional and physical responses to place, function, pattern, and light.

Glass, printmaking, and furniture played significant roles in this movement. Six artists and designers were given an open-ended brief. Each of them has chosen to reference the movement in new works or to showcase existing pieces that demonstrate their ongoing

inspiration. April Phillips and Ham Darroch were commissioned to create ambitious new works. Phillips developed an editioned series of prints during a residency at Megalo Print Studio and produced hand-blown lighting and vessels in collaboration with glassblower Tom Rowney. Darroch was approached to create the largest work ever displayed at Canberra Glassworks—a 12-meter mural that wraps the internal architecture of the foyer and gallery space at Canberra Glassworks.

Gibson Karlo, a design duo with a deep understanding of design, manufacturing, and product commercialisation, combine bold colours and recycled materials that mimic the bold textures of the 1980s yet seamlessly blend into today’s minimalist approach to furniture. Drew Spangenberg discovered Memphis through his love of music and glassblowing, paying tribute to the works of Ettore Sottsass produced by Vistosi, Toso Vetri d’Arte, Gino Cenedese e Figlio, and Venini, from 1947 to 2007.

Judi Elliott is one of the pioneers of Australian Studio Glass, who studied in the 1980s at the height of the Memphis movement. She is inspired by architecture, geometric shapes, bold primary colours, and expressive textures. Like Elliott, Kate Banazi’s work is bold and playful. She explores light, often working with transparent materials in silkscreen printing, sculpture, and painting. She frequently collaborates on fashion, music, illustration, and

advertising projects, exploring light, colour, and graphic motifs with an experimental, intuitive, and often playful foundation.

**Aimee Frodsham**

October 2023

## More is More Memphis around again

In mid-1988 Ettore Sottsass, the internationally famous designer, called a press conference to declare that Memphis, the design collective that he had instigated in 1980 would no longer function in its original form. This was not a startling revelation, for the company had already begun to wind down the number of new pieces launched each year. However, its demise was not for lack of acceptance or interest but indeed the complete opposite. From their launch at a street stopping party in Milan in 1981, furniture and objects had almost immediately been purchased by both leading taste makers such as David Bowie and Karl Lagerfeld as well as major museum collections. In Australia, the Powerhouse Museum, National Gallery of Victoria and National Gallery of Australia, all acquired items of glass, metalwork, laminated furniture and ceramics which had been produced in unlimited editions by a range of the skilled specialist small manufacturing workshops of which northern Italy is renown. With the financial backing and retail distribution networks of the large Italian lighting manufacturer Artemide, their products were a regular feature in showrooms and magazines.

So, if Memphis was so popular and had an efficient marketing and production process, why did

it officially end in 1988, and more specifically, for the context of this new exhibition presented at Canberra Glassworks in 2023 why would designers still be looking at that work today. The answers to both lie in its original radical seed experiments of the 1960s.

Sottsass (1917-2007) had a long archive of radical propositional design thinking as well as a suite of mass-produced iconic consumer products designed for Olivetti from the 1960s, but the Memphis moment was shaped into the global force it became with the artistic direction and strategic writing of his second wife Barbara Radice and a group of younger designers. They included Italians Aldo Cibic, Matteo Thun, Marco Zanini, Martine Bedin, Michele De Lucchi, French born Nathalie du Pasquier who had travelled extensively in India and Australia and the English born George Sowden who had met Sottsass through his work at Olivetti.

Avoiding the formal language of a manifesto, their statements of intent were, especially for an Italian design house, deliberately accessible.

*There was a necessity of updating figurative language because what was around, as Ettore used to say, after a while felt like chewing cardboard. So you need a little mustard, don't you? <sup>1</sup>*

Their immediately recognizable lexicon of dazingly electric patterns, incongruous geometries, bright colours and cheeky historical references defied standardisation and the so-called

good taste of International Modernism that they felt had dominated and constrained individuality and local character. In the era just prior to the internet, the global impact of Memphis was propelled by staging exhibitions across Europe, North America and in Tokyo and by featuring a smattering of objects by well-established international architects such as Irata Isozaki, Hans Hollein and Michael Graves. Many of the products were named to associate them to a pantheon of global references, such as Sottsass *Euphrates* ceramic vessel and *Murmansk* metal dish, du Pasquier's *Madras* table and *Burundi* textile and Matao Thun *Santa Fe* pendant light.

Memphis products were first brought to Australia by Artes in August 1984, some three years after the Milan launch. Kevin Jarrett Director of Artes explained "We waited two or three years to bring it to Australia because we didn't think at that particular stage it was ripe for it. Luckily for us the market has picked up quite dramatically over the past twelve months. I brought the collection out here not really to sell but to stimulate the market, to get peoples reaction to it."<sup>2</sup>

The Memphis brand was also disseminated in influential projects such as the Esprit store in Carlton Melbourne by Sottsass Associati and the availability of laminates to the trade through Abet Laminati who set up a local office on the back of the interest.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Radice Ten-questions-for-memphis-member-barbara-radice with <https://www.phaidon.com/agenda/design/articles/2014/april/28/>

<sup>2</sup> Peter Fish 'Top Drawer' Australian Business, Sept 26, 1984

National mood is a difficult thing to judge within the moment, but that shift had come with the incoming reformist Hawke Labour government, the end of an extreme drought and a growing openness to difference and self-expression. Working in the Decorative Arts Department at the PowerHouse Museum at that time, I was involved in the work of preparing the acquisition reports for the 11 pieces that the institution purchased in 1986, but it was already evident that there was a concomitant equally confident range of young Australian designers working with a similarly bold aesthetic. The Craft Council of Gallery of NSW staged 'The Patterned Edge -Post Modernism' in 1985, showing the work of eight craftspeople including ceramicist Jenny Orchard and textile artist Annabelle Collett, 'using a decorative style which draws upon Post Modern influences by the use of strong surface pattern, architectural references and colour applied to functional objects' The primary difference then was the absence of skilled manufacturing that could take those handmade designs into wider production. Instead, the aesthetic was trickled to wider popular culture with products such as Sheridan sheet range of 'Memphis Frost' which reduced

the strong colours to a soft pastel and the brazen 'Memphis Koala' series by greeting card manufacturer Ink Group. It was no surprise that Sottsass would have reckoned that by 1988 their work to disrupt was done.

Glass featured prominently in the original Memphis range, with Ettore Sottsass in particular working closely with Murano artisans at Toso Vetri d'Arte, to exploit the vivid clarity of colour the medium offers. The apparently loose and deliberately unfussy forms of pieces such as the *Alderbaran* fruit bowl were a radical departure from the elegant cane work associated with Venetian makers. However, with limited opportunities for skilled glassmaking at that time in Australia, it was not until the establishment of the Glass Workshop at the Canberra School of Art and the impact of the teaching of Klaus Moje, that contemporary glass as a medium could contribute to contemporary international design languages.

Judi Elliott was the first to graduate from that course in 1985 and an exuberant and intelligent use of colour has always been a tenant of her practice. Her gleeful recent work *Come Fly a Kite* (2018) presented in this exhibition offers the viewer exactly that.

So why revisit Memphis now? Contrary to expectations, the Memphis influence continued to smoulder and now after a decade or more of the safety of dominant pale beige and cool grey and endless Hamptons White, of shutdowns and globalised sameness, the Memphis challenge of experimentation, individuality and sheer fun has returned. But this time with new insights for the sustainability of materials and the awareness that these objects are indeed special things whose making has involved clever thinking and careful making and which we should hold onto and live with.

**Virginia Rigney**

Senior Curator Visual Arts  
Canberra Museum and Gallery

<sup>3</sup> Author interview with Ettore Attomare Director Abet Laminati Australia 10 October 1988 from 'Riding the wave Marketing and Consumption of Post Modern Design in Australia' Unpublished Honours Thesis for University of Sydney, Department of Fine Arts, 1988, p. 12

<sup>4</sup> Michael Bogle Exhibition Essay Craft Council Gallery of NSW 1985 Peter Emmet Exhibition Curator

An abstract graphic design in the Memphis Group style. It features a teal background with several overlapping geometric shapes: a large orange parallelogram, a purple triangle, and a yellow circle with a red center. A blue dashed line with square segments runs diagonally across the composition. The text 'Memphis Now Artworks' is positioned on the orange shape.

Memphis  
Now  
Artworks

**Judi ELLIOTT**

NEW SOUTH WALES

*Come Fly a Kite*

2018

filn formed glass, ribbons

*photo Rob Little*





**Ham DARROCH**

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY



*Piscina (work in progress)*

2023

acrylic paint on MDF





# Drew SPANGENBERG

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

*Continental Champagne, Continental  
Martini and Impossible Pourer*

2023

blown, coldworked and hot formed glass



*Photography Pippy Mount*



*Beachside*

2023

blown and coldworked glass



*Grenadier Bottle, Bowl, and Canister Set*

2023

blown, coldworked and hot formed glass

*Pellet Plant Smoke Stack Bottle with Cup*  
2023  
blown, coldworked and hot formed glass



*Tideline Urn and Shamu Urn*  
2023  
blown, coldworked and hot formed glass



*Continental Cloche 2*  
2023  
blown, coldworked and hot formed glass

*Continental Cloche 1*  
2023  
blown, coldworked and hot formed glass

# April PHILLIPS

Wiradjuri-Scottish

NEW SOUTH WALES



April Phillips during her 2023 residency at Megalo Print Studio, with Alex Lundy and Clare Jackson.

*Photography Megalo Print Studio*



# April PHILLIPS

Wiradjuri-Scottish

NEW SOUTH WALES



*Moments, Triptych (edition 7/10)*

2023

screen and woodblock print, handmade paper produced by dodgy paper from artists paper waste, printed by April Phillips, Alex Lundy and Clare Jackson for Megalo Editions

*Framed by United Measures*

*Photography Henry Murphy*



*Moments light (drop)*

2023

glass, lighting componentry

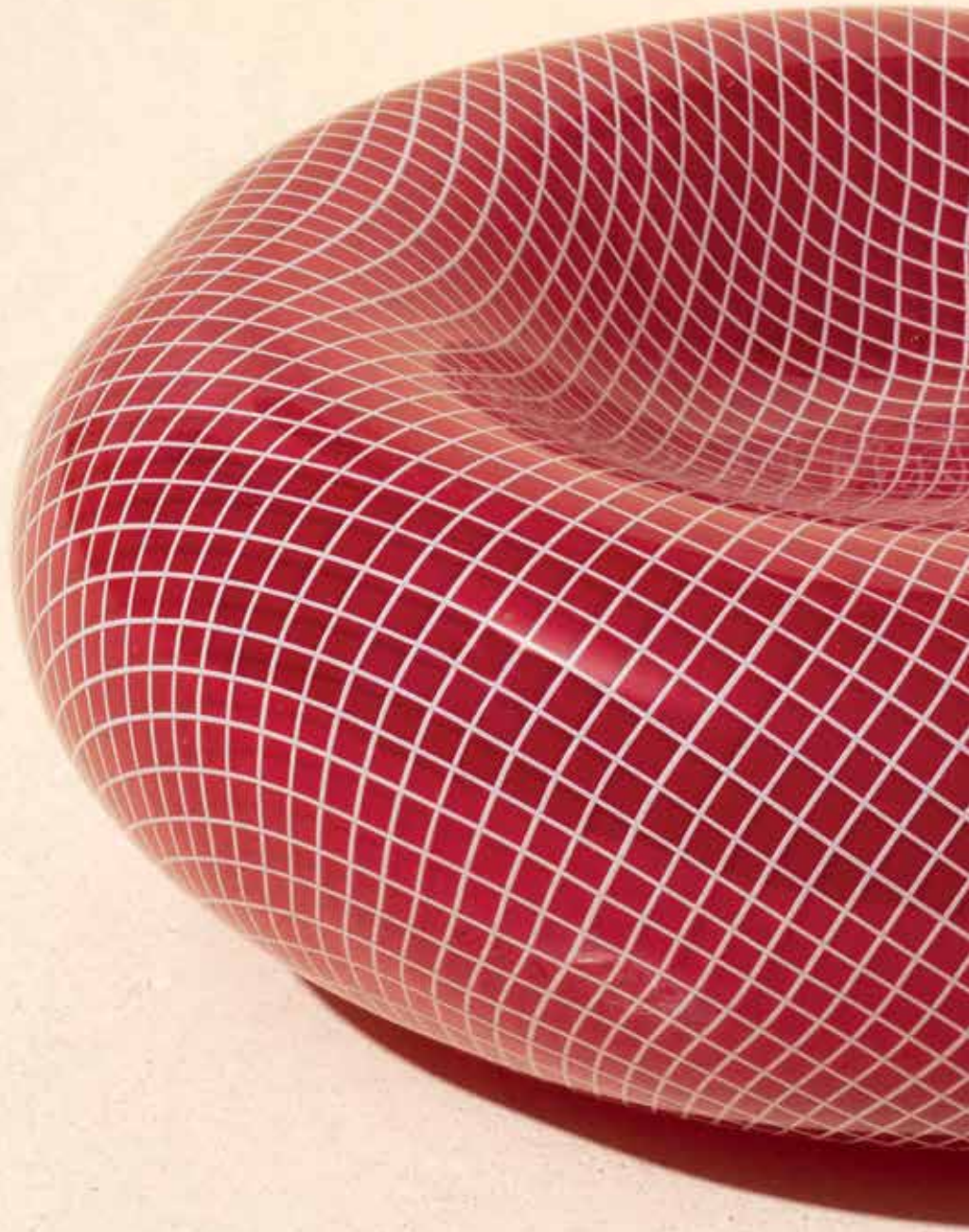
*Photography Brenton McGeachie*



**April PHILLIPS**

Wiradjuri-Scottish

NEW SOUTH WALES

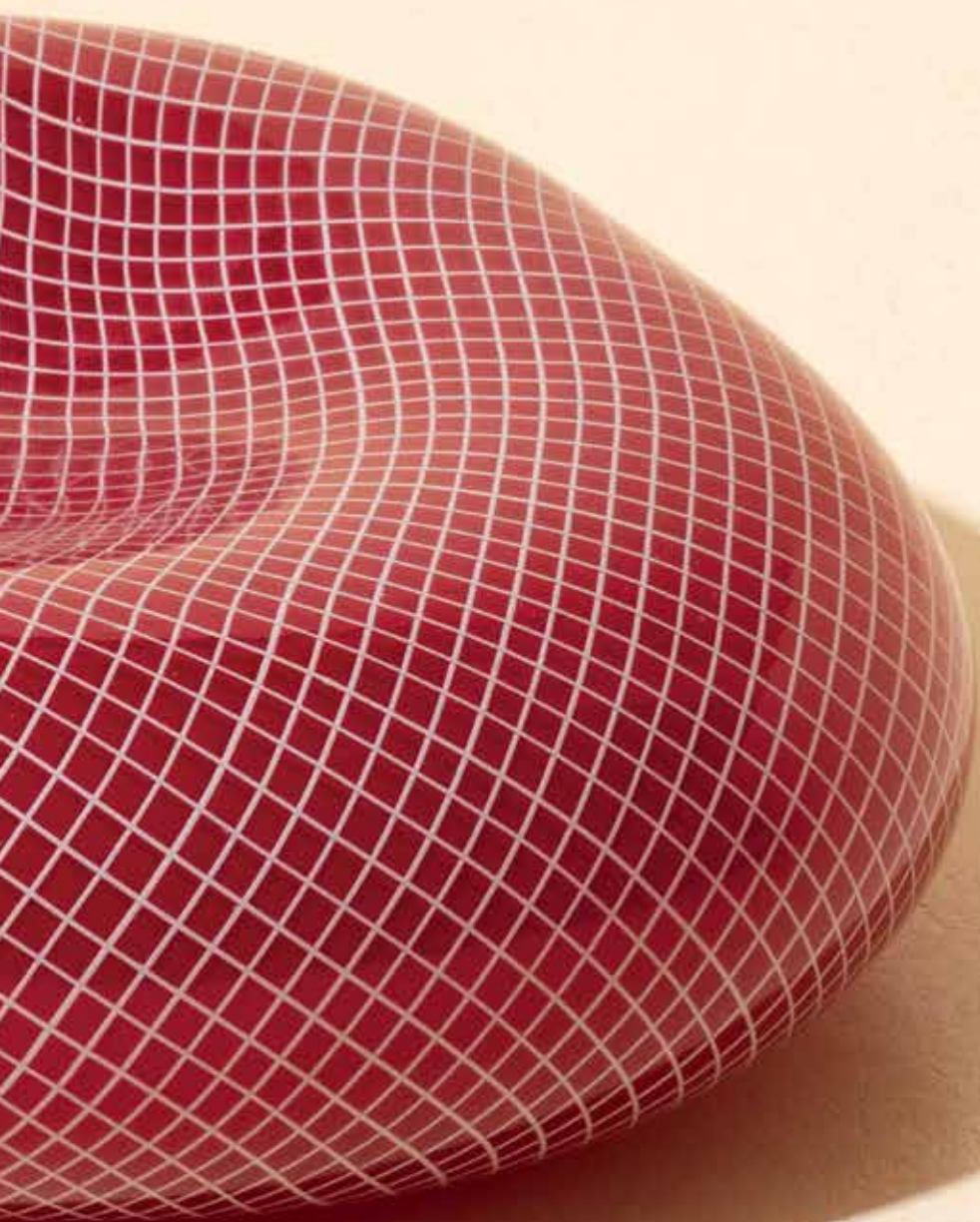


*Smoosh Bowl*

2023

glass, fabricated by Tom Rowney  
and Rob Schwartz

*photography Brenton McGeachie*



**Kate BANAZI**  
NEW SOUTH WALES

*Correspondence 3 & 4*  
2023  
acrylic panels, UV glue

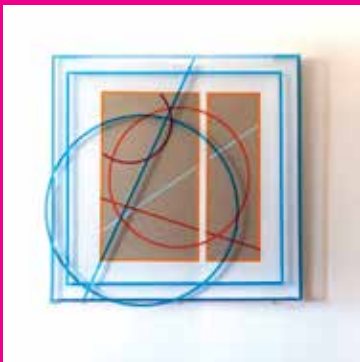


*Rerouted Narwee to Kogarah*  
2021  
acrylic paint on linen,  
acrylic panels,  
UV glue



*Guardian*  
2023  
acrylic panels, UV glue

*Raw relic*  
2023  
acrylic panels, UV glue



*Rerouted Stratford to Streatham*  
2021  
acrylic paint on linen,  
acrylic panels,  
UV glue



*Rerouted Stead to Dale*  
2021  
acrylic paint on linen,  
acrylic panels,  
UV glue

**Sarah GIBSON and Nicholas  
KARLOVASITIS as GIBSON KARLO**

NEW SOUTH WALES

*Confetti Collection*

2018

Recycled plastic, compact laminate

*Courtesy of DesignByThem*



# Memphis Now

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Canberra Glassworks

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