

Cobi Cockburn

Pink Moon

Curated by Aimee Frodsham



Canberra Glassworks is a major ACT arts centre where artists can develop and create works using the medium of glass. Established in 2007, it operates within the historic Kingston Powerhouse, Canberra's first major public building and a critical role in its early development.

Built on the land of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples 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 seventeen 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 Sevenmarks Gallery, Kiama, and Dominik Mersch Gallery, Sydney are delighted to present this exhibition of glass and mix-media by Cobi Cockburn and curated by Aimee Frodsham.



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canberra
glassworks

Cobi Cockburn

Cobi Cockburn's artistic journey is one of perpetual evolution, marked by her relentless study of the materiality of glass through a contemporary lens. Surveying the transitory space between known subject matter and visceral associations, through the expressive language of line and colour, Cockburn's works delve into the subconscious- evoking innate emotions and calling on historical, physical, and emotional contexts to provide clarity. Purposefully void of direct references, she questions perception, acknowledges universality, and contemplates personal narratives.

Cockburn is one of Australia's foremost award-winning artists

working in glass. Two-time winner of the Art Gallery of Western Australia's prestigious Tom Malone Award, Winner of the JamFactory's FUSE Glass Prize in 2020 and finalist in the Art Gallery of New South Wales' Wynne Prize, she has been included in the Lino Tagliapietra Prize and Talente in Germany and Emerge in the USA. Her work is also held in many leading private and public collections around the world such as Corning Museum of Glass, New York, Knoxville Museum of Art and Palm Springs Art Museum. Earning her Master of Visual Arts from Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney, and her Honours Degree at Australian National University, Canberra, Cockburn continues to channel her passion for art and education as a lecturer and senior technician at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney.



Cobi Cockburn in studio.
Photo by Greg Piper.

Countless sunsets

For the last twenty years, Cobi Cockburn has been exploring the emotional and spiritual connections to the colour white, investigating how abstraction, in combination with the seemingly endless shades of white, can evoke human emotion. In her research, Cockburn wrote, 'White is and has been an important colour for almost all formal religions and belief systems. Symbolising, for me, a sense of purity and innocence, a Western construct that embraces the birth of a new being and is the colour we associate with deep rest; a weightless colour that artists have long questioned for its material and immaterial aspects.'¹

The exhibition *Pink Moon* marks a departure from her established palette. Here, she uses colour as a metaphor for the human experience of being and feeling. Through creating large-scale yet exquisitely intricate light-based sculptural works, she merges her skills in kiln-formed glass with industrial processes such as neon, architectural glass, and steel. By using the properties of light to fill

spaces like watercolour bleeding on paper, Cockburn allows the viewer to engage with the minimal beauty and meditative qualities of colour and light. Personal narratives are carefully and lovingly woven throughout the exhibition, making it her most personal exhibition to date. I have long admired Cockburn's commitment and skill in glassmaking and the conceptual frameworks she applies to her practice.

The *Pink Moon Rose*, a tea rose with a soft pink bloom, is named after the full moon in April, which marks the onset of spring in the Northern Hemisphere. The full moon has long been linked to cultural and spiritual practices embodying transformation and life cycles. The rose, a ubiquitous symbol of love, serves as a dedication to Cockburn's mother, whom she lost at nineteen. Every year since her mother's passing, Cockburn received a message of love from a family friend that read, 'Your mother's rose is flowering,' acknowledging it with care, but not letting it penetrate too deeply until now. In a recent and moving conversion, Cockburn shared, 'With 20 years passing by, the message still comes, and the significance of the

moment sets in. My breath still quivers, and I'm reminded of the love and awe associated with the reunion of the mother and child.'²

The overarching theme of *Pink Moon* centres around notions of the temporal nature of existence. In forming this exhibition, Cockburn could have become too caught up in personal nostalgia, delving into self-pity or aligning too closely with stereotypes around the colour pink. However, the result is a brave exhibition, referencing abstract art, poetry and the philosophy of love and grief, which is not binary. The geometric iconography used within the work is intentionally paired back to draw viewers in, creating spaces for the viewer to explore their own consciousness and perception.

Taking cues from well-known artists such as Dan Flavin, famous for his minimal light installations of the 1960s, Cockburn uses coloured light as a medium. However, her approach differs significantly from Flavin's ready-made fluorescent tubes. Her profound knowledge of glass as an artistic material and her surface treatment skills allow Cockburn to create nuanced works with a soft physical presence. These works are as

¹ Cockburn, Cobi. Master of Fine Arts Research Paper - *In the Vicinity of White: a study of emotion and belief within abstraction*. December 2016

² Conversation with artist 6 July 2024

much about the experience of seeing them emit light as they are about the objects themselves. Cockburn's hands-on fabrication of the neon and glass elements reinforces her notions of care. These hand-made works fill the gallery with warm, radiating colour, inviting viewers to immerse themselves in the experience.

The science of how we see colour is complex. In *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, Rebecca Solnit writes, 'The world is blue at its edges and in its depths. This blue is the light that got lost. Light at the blue end of the spectrum does not travel the whole distance from the sun to us. It disperses among the molecules of the air, it scatters in water. Water is colourless, shallow water appears to be the colour of whatever lies underneath it, but deep water is full of this scattered light, the purer the water the deeper the blue.'³

Cockburn's artwork embodies the concept of visual alchemy through her use of a combination of frosted glass (or acrylic) and neon. Unlike the traditional use of neon to create bold forms, bright text, and vibrant colours, Cockburn's integrative and nuanced approach creates

complex layers of light and colour that interact subtly, offering a more immersive experience than the straightforward use of neon alone.

To expand my own knowledge of seeing, I began researching French philosopher Simone Weil (1909-1943). She proposed three ways of seeing: through persistent attention, sudden realisation, and integrated insight. Believing that attention was a discipline to be practised, Weil argued that personal and spiritual growth could be achieved by maintaining a persistent focus on a subject. Like Weil, Cockburn takes time to observe the fleeting aspects of nature. She practices this technique while observing sunsets and believes this has given her a deeper understanding of the natural and spiritual world. By focusing on the ephemeral beauty of sunsets, Cockburn has distilled the essence of persistent observation within her work, capturing both the transient and ethereal qualities of light and colour.

Standing among Cockburn's works in the gallery, I feel compelled to breathe in the coloured air, much like inhaling the familiar, comforting scent of a rose. This sensation reminds

me of James Nestor's book, *Breathe*, where he describes breathing as absorbing the essence of everything around us, highlighting the interconnectedness of all life. Cockburn seeks this sense of universality in her work, creating art that invites viewers to experience and connect with the human experience on a profound level. Nestor writes, 'I exhale stale air from my chest and take in a deep breath. I imagine all these molecules pushing deep into my lungs and then deeper into the bloodstream, providing fuel for thoughts in the sensation that made them. Everything that you, I, or any other person breathes in is hand-me-down space dust that's been around for 13.8 billion years. This wayward matter has been split by sunlight, spread throughout the universe, and come back together again. To breathe is to absorb in everything around us.'³

³ Solnit, Rebecca. *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. New York : Viking, 2005.

⁴ Nestor, James. *Breathe: The New Science of a Lost Art*. Riverhead Books, 2020.





CURATED BY AIMEE FRODSHAM

Exhibition Dates:
1 August to 22 September 2024

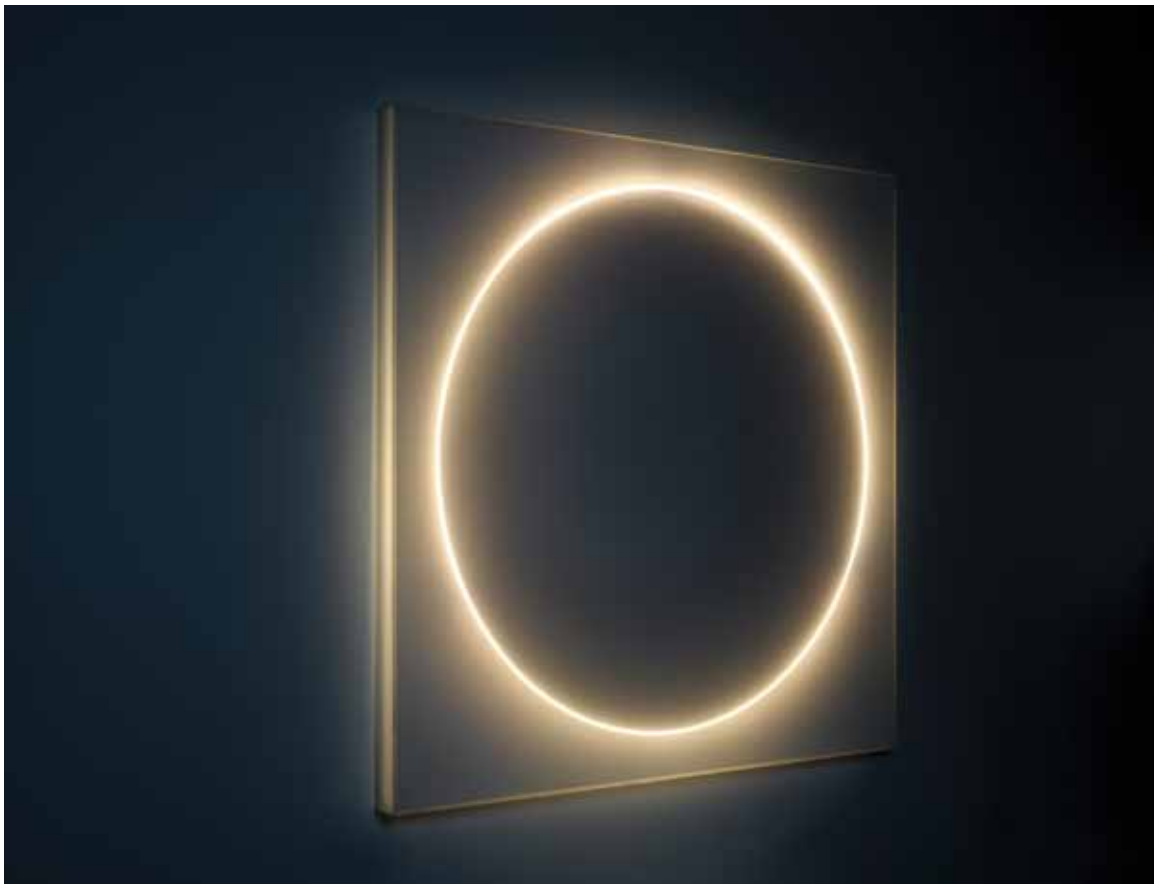


Cobi COCKBURN
Study of Light 1 - 5
2024
neon, glass



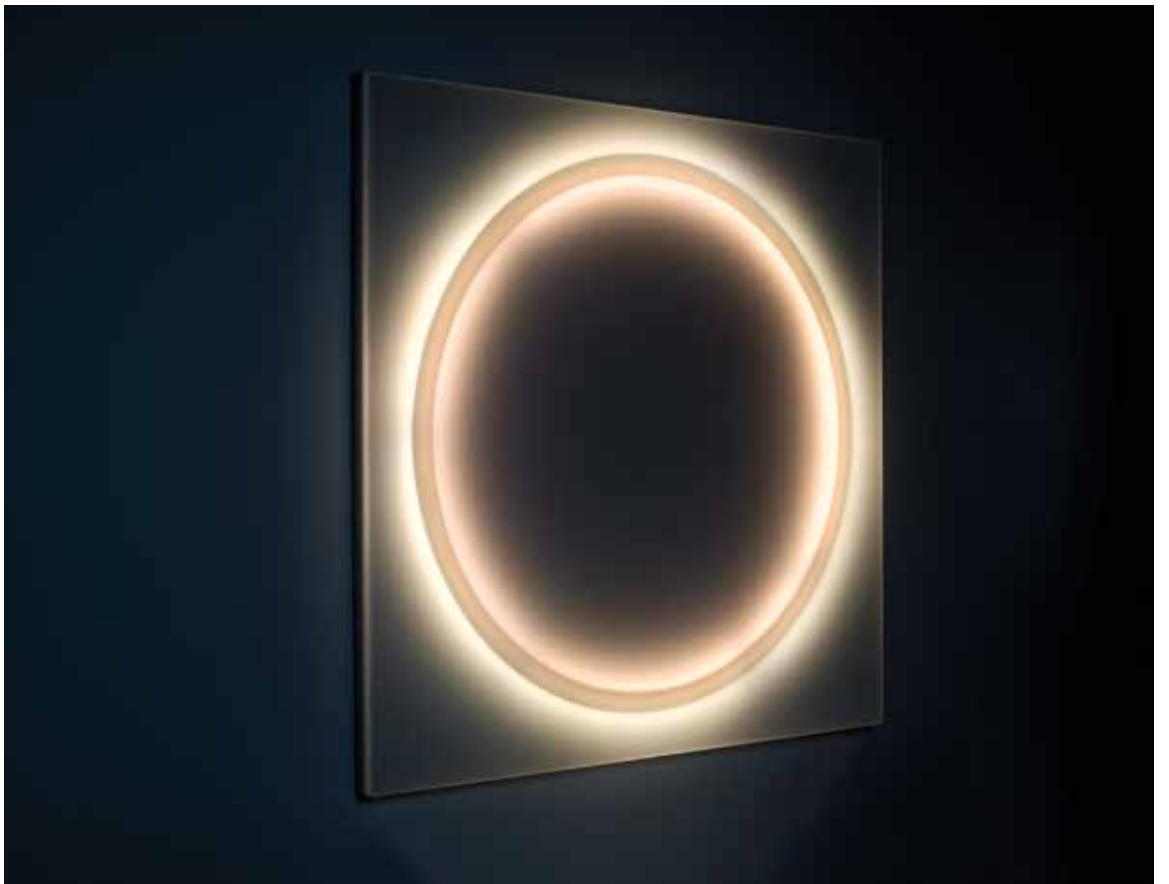
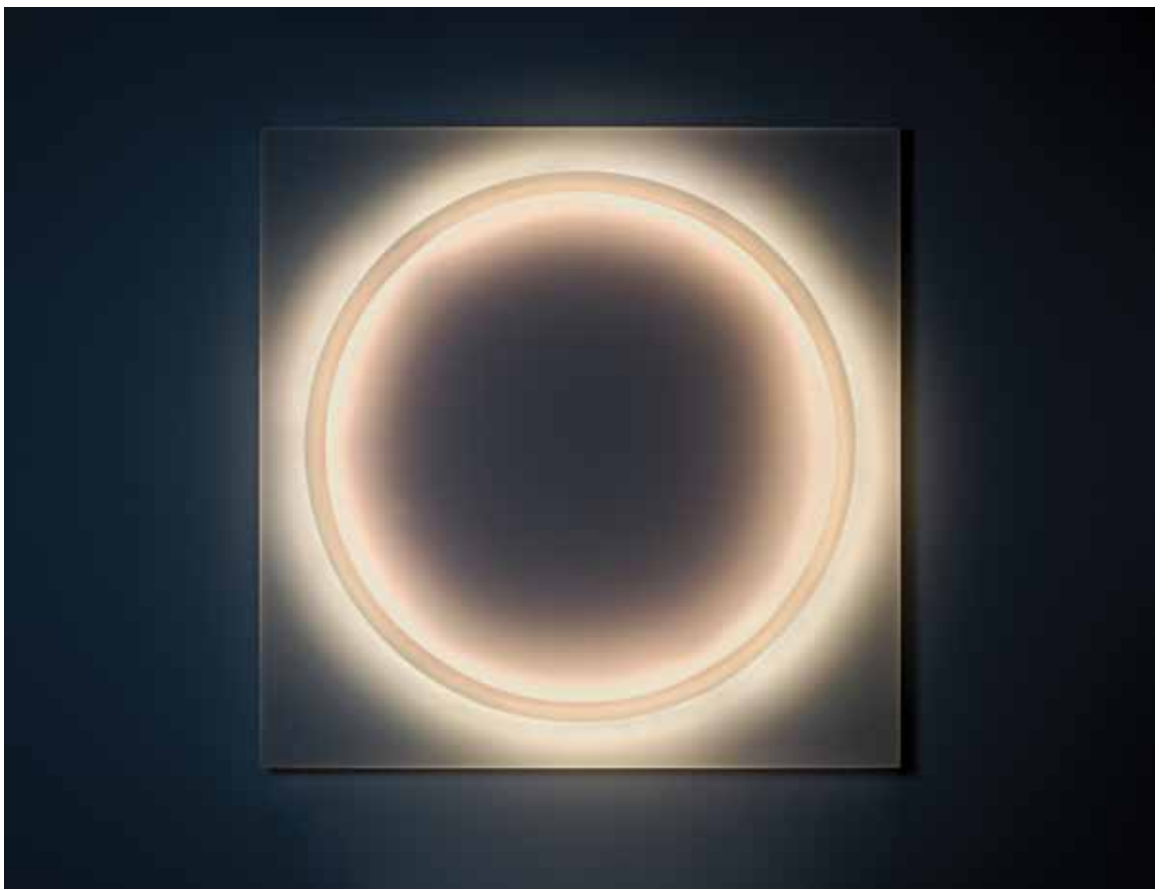


Cobi COCKBURN
Pink Moon # 1
2024
neon, acrylic





Cobi COCKBURN
Pink Moon # 2
2024
neon, acrylic





Cobi COCKBURN
Pink Moon # 3
2024
neon, acrylic





Cobi COCKBURN
Pink Moon # 4
2024
neon, acrylic



Cobi COCKBURN
Spire
2024
neon, glass



COBI COCKBURN

Murmuration – Charcoal, 2019, hot
formed, kiln fused and coldworked glass.



COBI COCKBURN

Murmuration – Fawn, 2019, hot formed,
kiln fused and coldworked glass.



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