

Mamana Mamanta *Gradual Friendship*

Luna Ryan and Jock Puautjimi

Mamana Mamanta *Gradual Friendship*

Luna Ryan and Jock Puautjimi

A recent trip to the Northern Territory highlighted the fact for me that the English language for most indigenous people is their third or fourth language and when you consider this, it is quite amazing that a Dutch national now living in Australia has developed a project with a prominent Tiwi Island artist and forged a gradual friendship which translates into the title of this exhibition, *Mamana Mamanta*. Luna Ryan, originally from the Netherlands, is an established glass artist working in Canberra and focussing on cast glass. Her ideas and sculptural objects were what attracted Caroline Hunter, the then Arts Advisor for Tiwi Designs to host a series of glass workshops for the Tiwi artists on Bathurst Island and it was here that she met Jock Puautjimi. Hunter obviously saw the potential for Tiwi artists to extend their rich repertoire in carving, painting and textiles to the relatively new medium of glass sculpture.

Jock and Luna's initial collaborations resulted in two cast glass *Pukumani Poles* (Tiwi burial poles) which were briefly exhibited in Canberra and again in Adelaide during the Glass Artist Society International Conference in 2005. The response to this exciting new work was extremely enthusiastic, prompting Luna to apply for development funds through artsACT to continue the collaboration and to create *Mamana Mamanta*. The success of the grant has enabled each artist to push their abilities further and bring new techniques into their practices, especially for Jock as he discovers glass casting and the benefits it may well have for artists associated with Tiwi Designs.

Jock's work focuses on glass *Pukumani* poles and vessels, which he has designed, carved and cast with the assistance of Luna. Jock presents his Tiwi culture through



these significant and unique works that are both integral to his way of life and symbolic of the Tiwi people. For Jock, an accomplished artist in a range of media including ceramics and wood carving, the chance to work with glass enabled him to investigate the idea of transparency in combination with his carving skills; he mentioned that through using glass, it has enabled him to see inside his pole forms and explore new colours. He also saw the project as an invaluable opportunity to work in Luna's glass studio, meet a range of people and experience places through travelling.

From the start of the project Luna's work has evolved to the point where she is now concentrating on a limited palette using black and white glass to represent her initial experience of coming into contact with such a different culture and grey to express the merging and sharing qualities of this project. While in the Tiwi Islands she was confronted by the state of health of the people and began to focus her work's imagery on the importance of good food, health and the freedom that comes with that. Her latest work in the exhibition is a series of dishes cast out of the glass from discarded television screens, where images of individuals are surrounded by plants, seeds, birds and other zoomorphic imagery, invoking a contemplative response and referring to an attainable state of bliss.

The forms in the exhibition are by no means static. Luna's work suggests movement, especially *Merge* and *Arrow*

Group which almost appear as missile forms; a sort of message stick ready to be launched. Her use of recycled television screens suggests a melting of that cultural delivery device to the point where the translucency forms a dreamlike landscape. In some ways her actions comment on the way today's television programming attempts to mediate our knowledge and contact with people of other cultures. There is no substitute for a real getaway and experiencing the great outdoors for yourself. Jock's *Pukumani Poles* cast in conjunction with Luna talk directly to the body in terms of their scale. The innovative use of glass gives the poles a heightened sense of body by suggesting an interior and an outer skin of glass. The transfer of skills and ideas in this collaboration is definitely a two way street where Luna's work has been influenced by Jock and Jock has been influenced by Luna.

The textural markings of Jock's work and the form of the Pukumani pole translate effortlessly into glass, the proportions and the fit of the pieces seem just right. The crowning pieces engage the space above them so well. As with Luna's work, a sense of the initial casting form of ceramic translates into the finished work. The linear markings are still markings in clay and in a way have become interned in the glass and given added permanence. The structural pole inside these works creates a haunting effect suggesting an inner core/spirit radiating outward into the glass as it interacts with light. With both artists, the grouping of elements creates works that depend on the space between them.

In Luna's work there is always an element of herself embedded in the final piece that traces the creation of the work. The surface of her works maintains a sense of the wax she uses to create her moulds. The final works also record the process of carving and hand forming. A forensic scientist could probably match Luna's prints to some of the markings embedded in her works! Her work is a form of playful abstraction, where she has created her own totemic imagery challenging the viewer to decide upon its origin and meaning. Her use of black glass creates works that appear impenetrable where the works are primarily about surface while the more transparent colours speak of the fluidity of glass. This could also be said about Jock's work in the exhibition.

The work of these two artists is continuing to break new ground by incorporating glass into Australian Indigenous art and at the same time highlighting an important story about artistic and cultural collaboration. The project continues the long history of sharing ideas and working together that exists in the field of studio glass. My experience of glass workers in Canberra is that when a project is on they get in there and help each other out. The process of making glass pieces often requires a team and the sharing of the workload often extends to helping out with finishing and assisting with mounting exhibitions. At the heart of this project is the notion of sharing where a member of the glass community is putting her community in touch with an indigenous community. It is a sharing of the glass from one who believes in the wonders of the medium and its ability to build friendships.

Jas Hugonnet
Curator / Exhibition Manager
November 2007





images

[previous page]

Luna Ryan, *Merge*, 2006, kiln cast crystal.

[this page left to right top to bottom]

Luna Ryan, *Arrow Group (detail)*, 2006/7, kiln cast crystal.

Jock Puautjimi, *Pukumani Pole (detail)*, 2006/7, cast with Luna Ryan.

Jock Puautjimi, *Pukumani Pole Buffalo Horn*, 2006/7, cast with Luna Ryan.

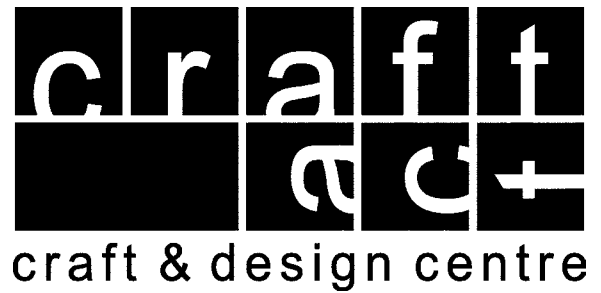
Luna Ryan, *Vision of a fragile Eden series (detail)*, 2007, kiln cast recycled television screens.

[opposite page left to right]

Jock Puautjimi, *Pukumani Poles Buffalo Horns and Fighting Sticks*, 2006/7, cast with Luna Ryan.

All Photos: Simon Maberley





Level 1 North Building
180 London Circuit Canberra ACT

PO Box 992
CIVIC SQUARE ACT 2608

craftact@craftact.org.au

T: (02) 6262 9333

F: (02) 6262 9666

www.craftact.org.au

OFFICE HOURS

Mon - Fri 9:30am - 5:00pm

GALLERY HOURS

Tue - Fri 10am - 4pm

Sat & Sun 12noon - 4pm



Australian Government



ACT Government

THE VISUAL ARTS AND CRAFT STRATEGY



Supported by the ACT Government



Australian Government



tiwi design

www.tiwidesign.com

Craft ACT is supported by the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory Governments.

Craft ACT is supported by the ACT Government and the Australia Council, the Federal Government's arts funding and advisory body.

Craft ACT is a member of ACDC, Australian Craft Design Centres.