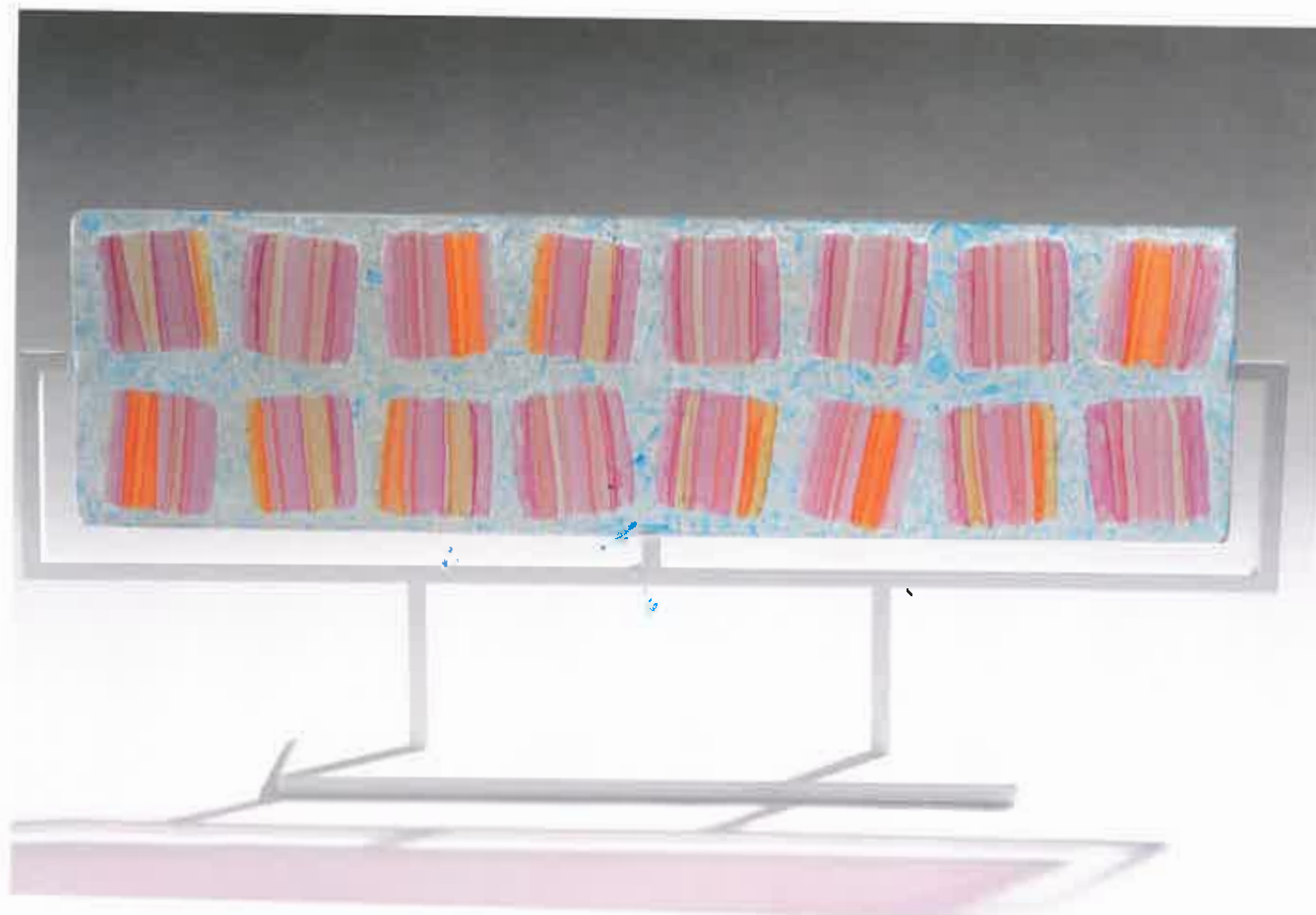


The
Fabric
of Light
David Traub

25 October - 17 November 2019



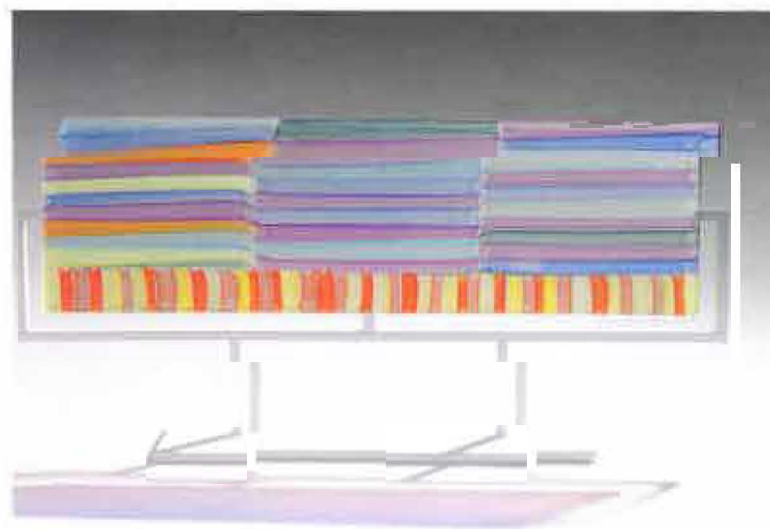
Diatoms. Fused glass in powder-coated steel frame. 650 x 300 x 120mm. (incl. frame) 2019.

Some years ago, when I visited David Traub's studio, he introduced me to the work of the Gee's Bend Quilters Collective. Gee's Bend is in Alabama, an impoverished African-American community where quiltmaking was, at least in the first instance, a practical solution to poverty, the need to stay warm, and the use of whatever material came to hand: old work clothes, household fabrics, scraps. These quilts rarely obey the norms of American quiltmaking, and where they do turn to the use of geometrical blocks, and dependence on regular patterns, repetition and balance, they go beyond the conventions, introducing movement and rhythm into their designs.

Their work, Traub points out, is as strong and sophisticated in its improvisational composition and use of colour as the work of the colour field painters working from the mid-twentieth century. He has been looking at, and inspired by, these quilts for years now. The attraction is in part due to the brilliance of their design. It is a visceral response too, to the alluring presence in the quilts of traces of the previous lives of those fabrics – bleached by the sun, stained by water, stretched and frayed by the movements of the body.

Traub sees resonances between their practices and his. Like the quiltmakers, he preserves scraps and offcuts; like them he begins by sifting through his boxful of glass pieces and draws from what is at hand, making decisions about how to structure the object and its composition; and like them he uses scraps to make something new, something whole.

I had not expected to meet textile art in a glass art studio; the two media seem to belong at opposite ends of a continuum: soft/hard, pliable/rigid, warm/cool. But there is a clear affinity between Traub's aesthetic and way of working, and that of the quiltmakers. Paul Arnett writes, of the Gee's Bend quiltmakers, that their forms 'offer metaphors for existence in the Bend, where art discovered ways to sprout from daily life'. Similarly, Traub's work finds ways to render practical domestic items



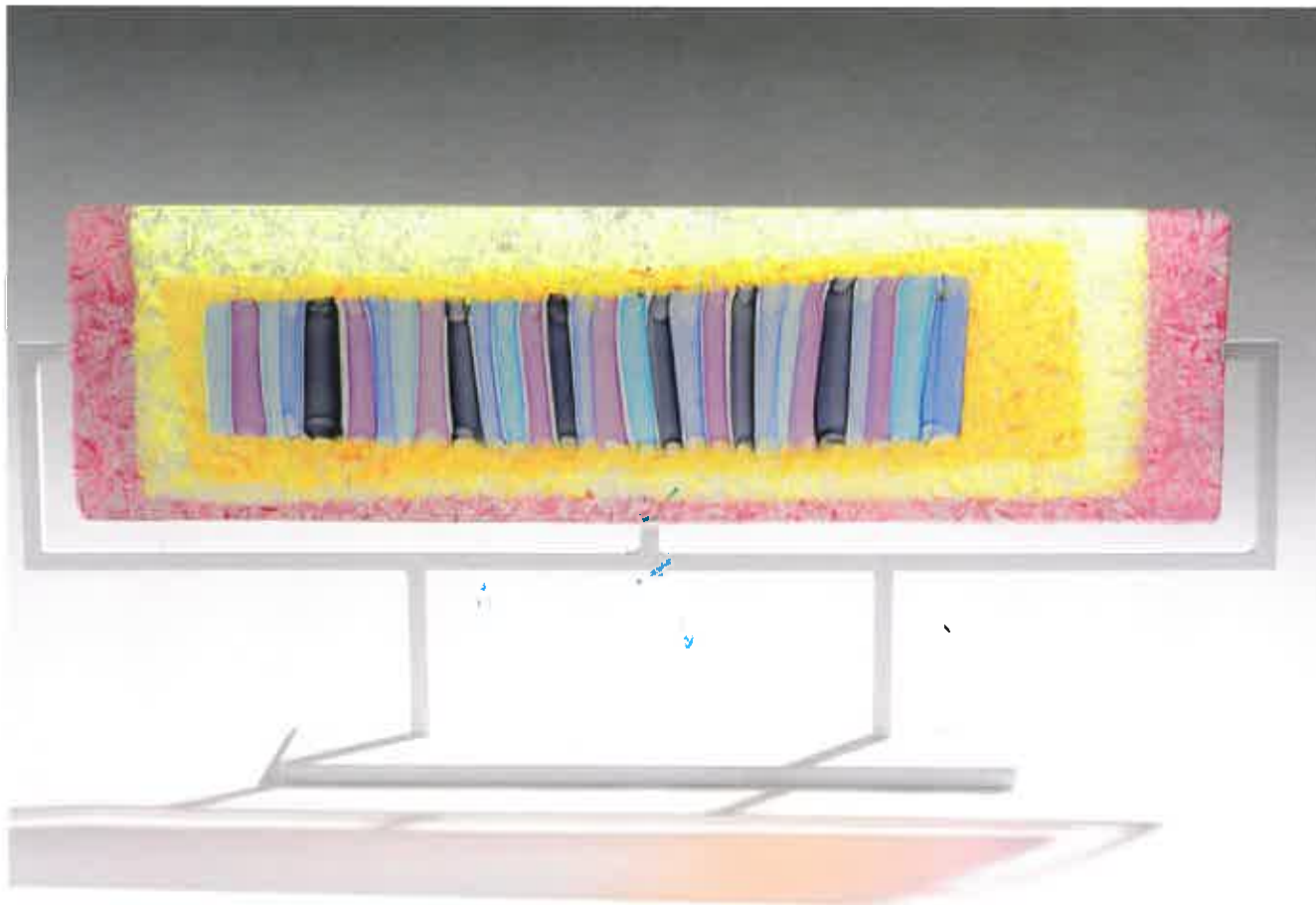
Banner.

Fused glass in powder-coated steel frame. 65 x 300 x 120mm (incl. frame) 2019.



Fiesta.

Fused glass in powder-coated steel frame. 65 x 300 x 120mm (incl. frame) 2019.



Meteor. Fused glass in powder-coated steel frame. 650 x 300 x 120mm. (incl. frame) 2019.

as art, and to use the affordances of colour and colour combinations to produce vivid, distinctive works of art.

This exhibition highlights concepts that have been part of his thinking and practice for some years now. The works on display, polished and mounted and lit, began as the black-and-white drawings he produces to work through ideas, testing the sense of where he might go with a particular work, considering foreground and background relationships, division of space, balance and imbalance, fulcrums and multiples, and repetition as aesthetic. Though his glass art is to some extent intuitive – a matter of feeling out the colour palette – his drawings provide shape and structure, and the ability to think on a two-dimensional plane about the three-dimensional object that will emerge.

This exhibition, *The Fabric of Light*, draws together a number of the threads that have woven through his oeuvre, and in particular his interest in the works of other artists, the techniques of other artforms. Elsewhere, Traub says 'art has a conversation', and this is evident in the conversations his work has with the New Zealand weaving tradition (in his series of glass baskets); sculptors like Claes Oldenburg (in his perspectival work); watercolourists (in his *Painting with Light* works, glass

that captures softness and luminosity), colour field painters like Morris Louis (in his Illusions series); and of course, the quiltmakers.

Traub has been working within the platter format since 2002, and is still stretching the boundaries of what he can do with that form; and this exhibition extends that work. Which references a further point of affinity between Traub and the quiltmakers – creativity. Experts observe that valid measures of creativity include ways of thinking and ways of operating. Highly creative people go beyond established means, in both thinking and practice, to find answers to the questions they face, being innovative in process and divergent in thinking. But more than that: they produce innovative solutions that are effective; that fit the context. The Gee's Bend quiltmakers respond to the problem of poverty and comparative isolation by engaging unexpected, vibrant approaches to the use of scrap materials to make necessary objects that are at the same time art works. Traub responds to the question of how to use domestic forms in ways that both honour and transform their origins; that use glass as a material for art rather than simply for production.

Each object exhibited in The Fabric of Light is based on a quilt, and while Traub references the conventions of the quilt block, of repetition and regularity, he extends these



Matrix. Fused glass in powder-coated steel frame. 650 x 300 x 120mm. (incl. frame) 2019.



Hopscotch.

Fused glass in powder-coated steel frame. 650 x 300 x 120mm. (incl. frame) 2019.



Labrynth.

Fused glass in powder-coated steel frame. 650 x 300 x 120mm. (incl. frame) 2019.

into the more aleatoric relationships that are evident in the Gee's Bend quilts. "Fiesta", for instance, pieces together nine irregular blocks of irregular strips, the space between strips moving like steps in a dance.

A second work, "Labyrinth", is all geometrical shapes, pieced together like a puzzle, not allowing the eye to rest at any point, but always drawing the gaze through the contrasting steps.

"Beyond the wall" exploits the pulsing of coloured bars – arranged like a wall – against a scatter of frozen light: it's forest, perhaps, or wave, surging 'beyond the wall'; movement in powerful contrast with stasis.

"Banner" also has a run of vertical bars at the lower edge of the artwork, and these shimmer against the horizontal bars, that shimmer in turn against each other, a joyful rhythm of colour and light.

"Meteor" is a burst of colour, the quilting of vertical bars pressing up against graded yellow, bleeding against a border all pink frit, which carries the eye up and out.

Each work in this exhibition is filled with dynamic breath, a choreography of colour and light and gesture. Each is an element of a conversation that explores the relationships between making do and making art, and between very different artforms, in a mode that enriches the potential of each. Each panel too achieves what, arguably, only glass art can achieve: sound in silence, movement in frozen form; and in this, it introduces new ways of seeing, thinking and experiencing the vibrancy of life.

- Dr Jen Webb, *University of Canberra*

David Traub

David Traub's career in glass spans over 46 years. Growing up in New York, he trained in ceramics and photography before falling in love with glass in 1973. He spent 10 years in East Texas teaching himself the newly rediscovered craft of studio glass and selling his work in art and craft fairs around the USA.

In 1984 he moved to England, first as a student at the Royal College of Art and later as a Masters Degree student at Stourbridge College of Art and Technology. During that time he began teaching for several of the polytechnics that were offering glass programmes. In 1995 he moved to New Zealand, to Whanganui, as head of the Wanganui Polytechnic's glass programs. In 2006, after more than 20 years teaching, he again decided to focus on his art and now works from his studio in Whanganui.

David's work has featured in group and solo exhibitions in Europe, America, Brazil, Japan, Australia and, of course, New Zealand. His work has been collected into public and private collections worldwide and has featured in numerous articles and catalogues. He has won a number of awards including the New Zealand Cavalier Bremworth Glass Art Award.

For more information about David's work and career visit his web site:
www.glass-newzealand.co.nz.



Beyond the Wall. Fused glass in powder-coated steel frame. 650 x 300 x 120mm. (incl. frame) 2019.

The Fabric of Light

