

Caterina Tognon

presents

Mel Douglas | *Luminance*

opening

28 april 6 | 8 pm

28 april | 29 july, 2023

tuesday | saturday 10 am | 7 pm

Ca Nova di Palazzo Treves in Corte Barozzi

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Supported by



Caterina Tognon arte contemporanea is pleased to introduce the exhibition *Luminance*, by Mel Douglas (Burnie, Tasmania, Australia 1978). Douglas' refined and detailed work employs a minimalist aesthetic along with considered mark-making to engage a dialogue of how line, light and form can define and defy our understanding of space and volume.

In her words, "Objects and drawings are often thought of as two separate entities. My work explores and interweaves the creative possibilities of this liminal space, where the form is not just a support for drawing; but a three-dimensional drawing itself. Using the unique qualities of the material and the rich potential of mark-making on and with glass, I am using line as a way to inform, define and enable three-dimensional space".

In the early 2000s, contemporary british anthropologist Tim Ingold (1948, Kent, UK) elaborated his theories on the line from a distinction between *traces* and *threads*. We find examples of threads in nature and landscape, such as those in leaves or the mycelium of mushrooms, or in natural cotton and wool yarns; but threads are also artificial, such as those in electrical circuits. A trace, on the other hand, is a permanent line left on a solid surface by a continuous movement; it can be *additive*, such as that left by charcoal on paper forming an additional layer, or *reductive*, when lines are marked, scratched or engraved.

Based on these theories and the study of the history of drawing, Mel Douglas investigates glass through the aesthetics of the drawing and comes to conceptualise the form itself as a drawing, using her sculptures as if they were a canvas or a sheet of paper. The artist also uses the unique properties of glass - transparency, translucence and opacity - to connect and subvert space through line and surface, developing two- and three-dimensional sculptures that spatially fuse surface and drawing, where the form is no longer just a support but a three-dimensional drawing in its own right.

With the title of the exhibition, *Luminance*, the artist tells us about the impression of brightness of a light source on one side and a surface on the other, which depends to a large extent on the degree of reflection and the colour of the surface.

Luminance is a photometric measure of the luminous intensity per unit area of light travelling in a given direction. It describes the amount of light that passes through, is emitted from, or is reflected from a particular area, and falls within a given solid angle¹.

¹ Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luminance>



Mel Douglas has worked as an independent studio artist since graduating from the Canberra School of Art, Australian National University (ANU) in 2000, where she has also been a lecturer. In 2020 she received her PhD from the ANU based on research she carried out at the ANU's Glass Workshop and at Bullseye in Portland, OR. In addition to the 2020 Tom Malone Prize, Douglas has received several major awards including the Ranamok Glass Prize in 2002, the International Young Glass Award in 2007 from Ebeltoft. In 2019 her work was the inaugural acquisition for the NGA's Robert and Eugenie Bell Decorative Arts and Design Fund. She will be honorary artist of the Pittsburgh Glass Center in September 2023 for their annual fundraiser Art on Fire. Douglas' work is held in the private collections and public institutions internationally, including the Corning Museum of Glass, New York, the Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA; the Ebeltoft Museum of Glass, Denmark, and National Gallery of Australia, Australia.



Light Transition I-V, Mapping series
2022
Blown, cold worked and engraved glass
h 40 x 40 x 40 cm
Unique piece



Interstice, Rendering series

2022

Blown, coldworked and engraved glass

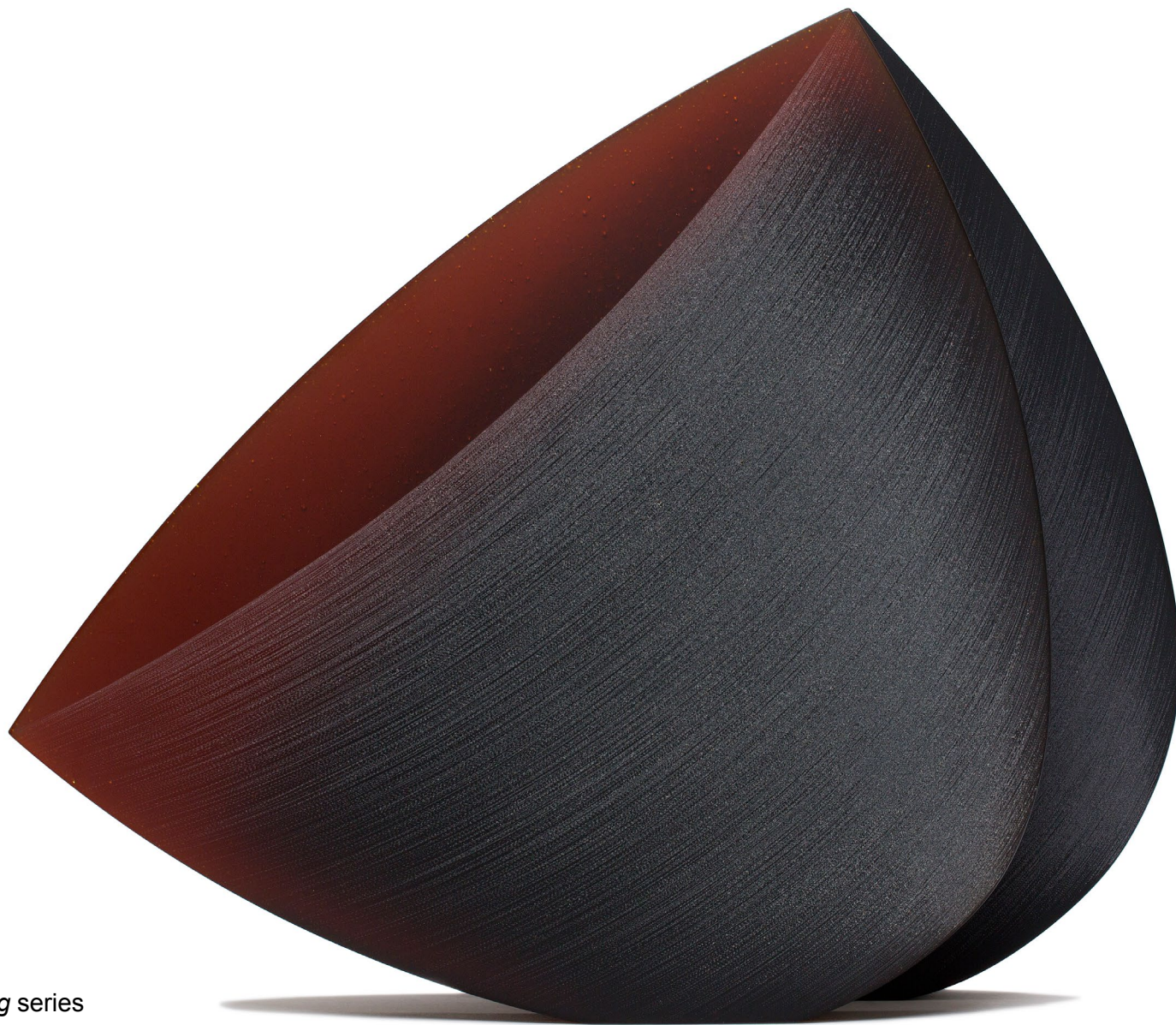
2 elements

h 40 x 40 x 40 cm

Unique piece



Interstices VI, Rendering series
2023
Blown, coldworked and engraved glass
2 elements
h 43 × 43 × 43 cm each
Unique piece



Inclination, Inscribing series

2021

Kiln formed, cold worked and engraved glass

2 elements

h 35 x 35 x 5 cm each

Unique piece



Transference, Inscribing series

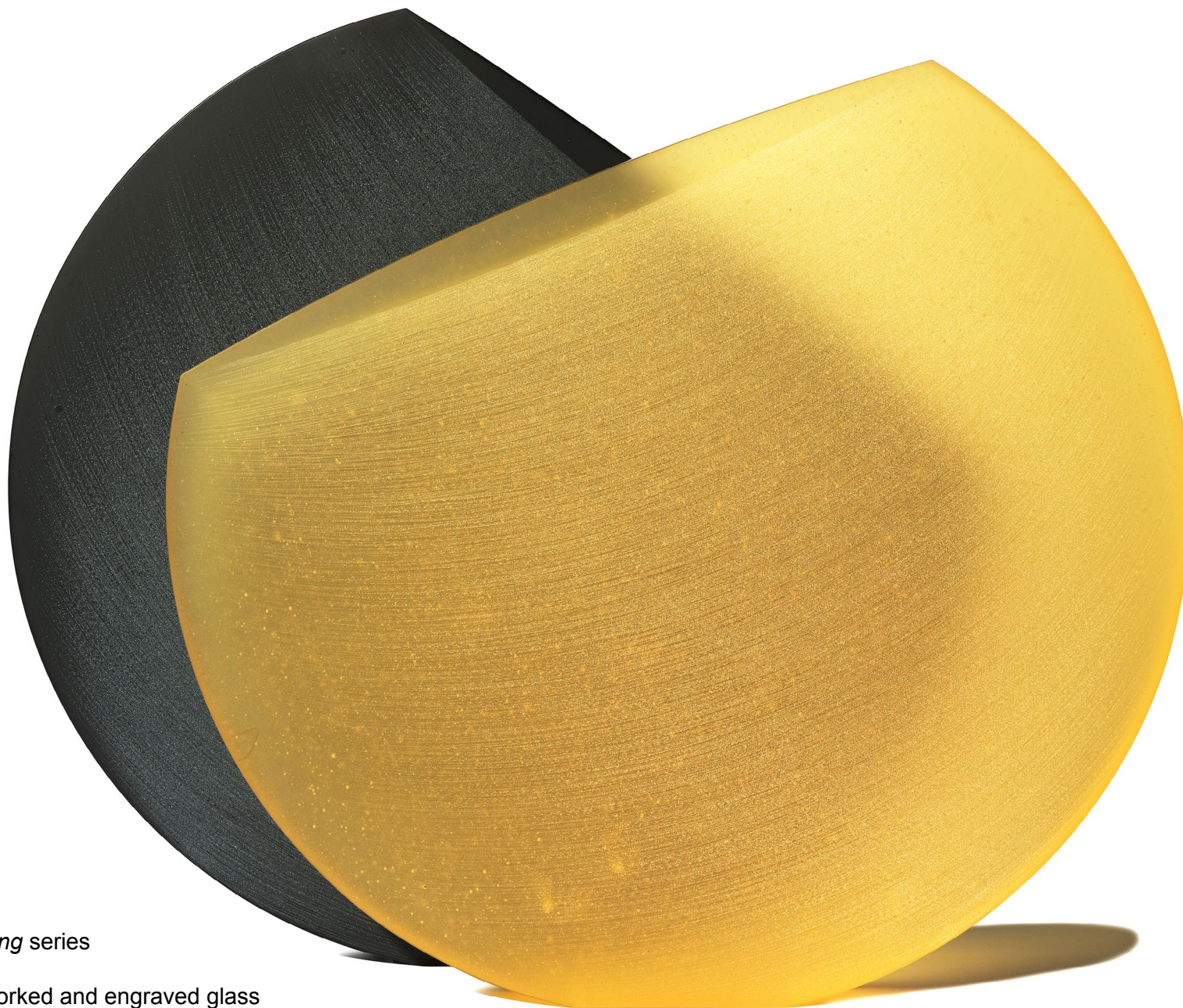
2023

Kiln formed, cold worked and engraved glass

2 elements

h 40 x 40 x 5 cm each

Unique piece



Alternation, Inscribing series

2022

Kiln formed, cold worked and engraved glass

2 elements

h 45 × 53 × 6 cm each

Unique piece



Concurrent, Inscribing series

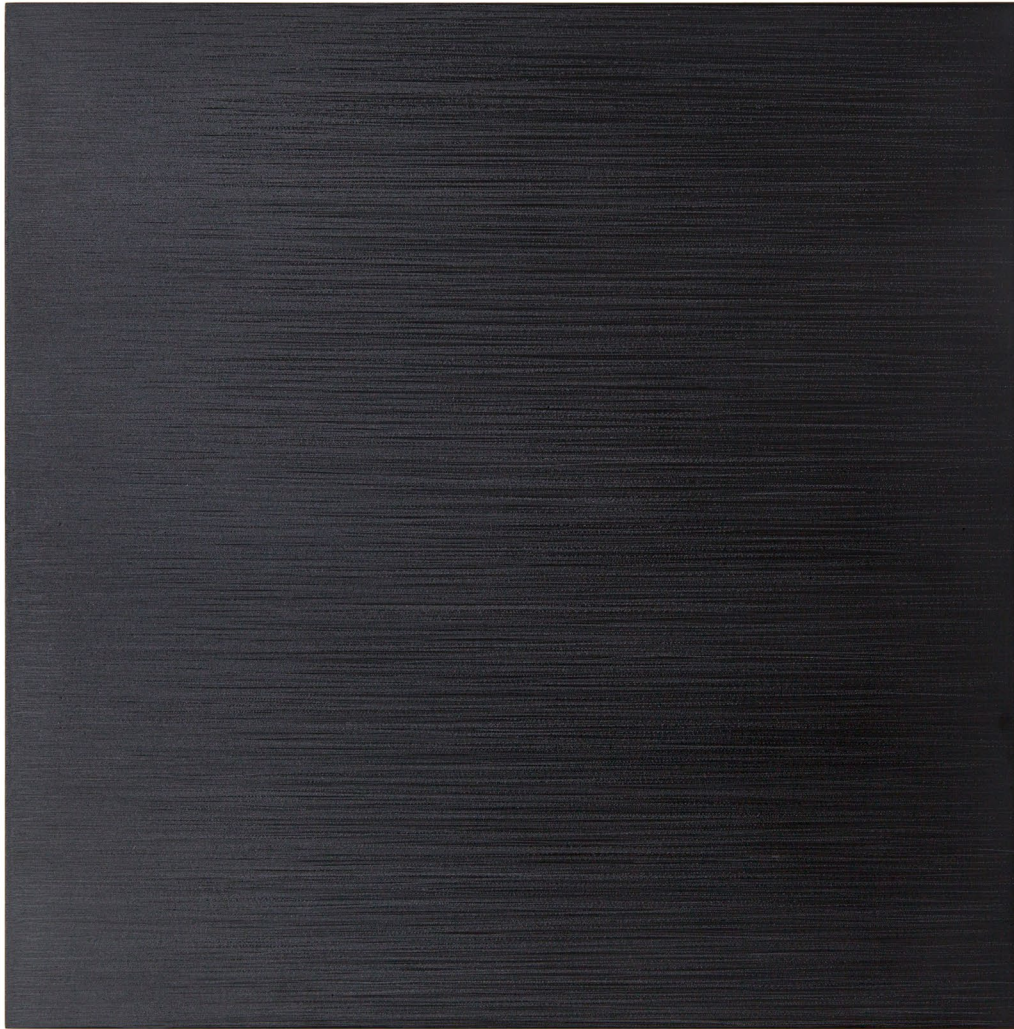
2022

Kiln formed, cold worked and engraved glass

2 elements

h 45 × 43 × 5 cm each

Unique piece



Infinite space, Tracing series

2022

Kiln formed, cold worked and engraved glass

Dyptich

h 44 x 90 cm

Unique piece



Affinity II, Highlighting series
2022
Kiln formed and coldworked glass
Tryptich
h 44 × 150 cm
Unique piece



Eventide, Highlighting series

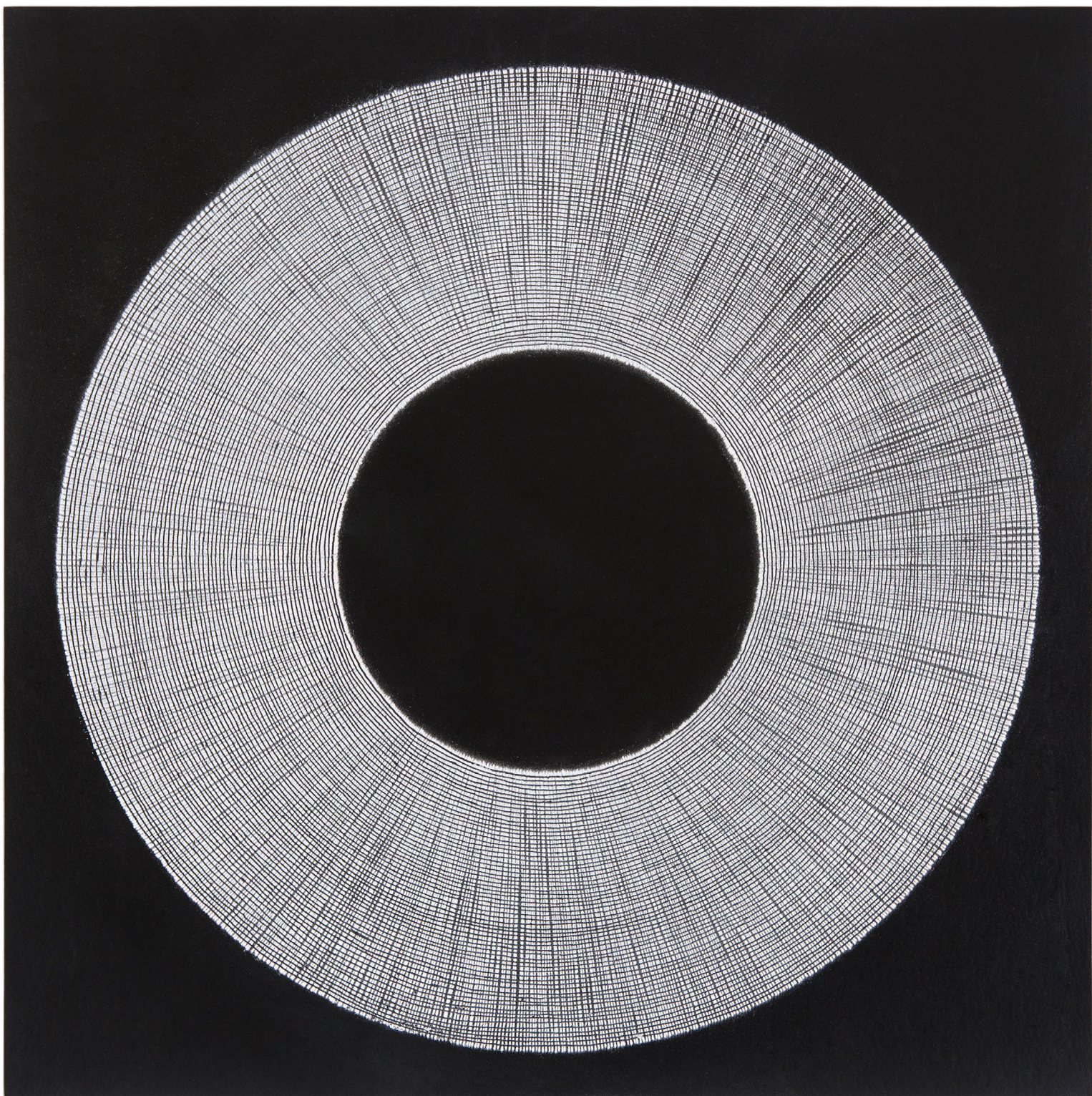
2022

Kilnformed, coldworked and stippled glass

Dyptich

h 45 × 90 cm

Unique piece



Field Line, Transcribing series

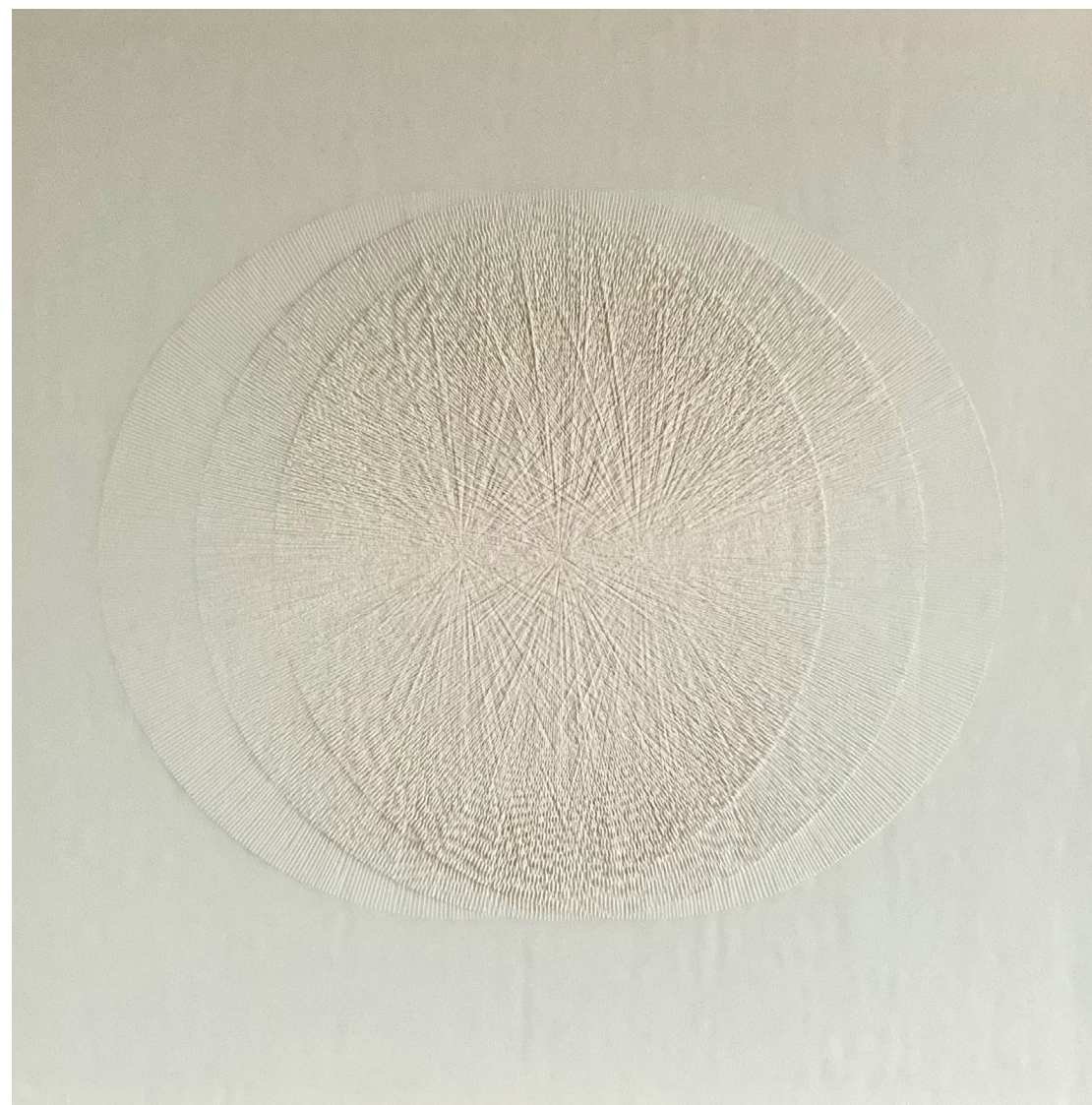
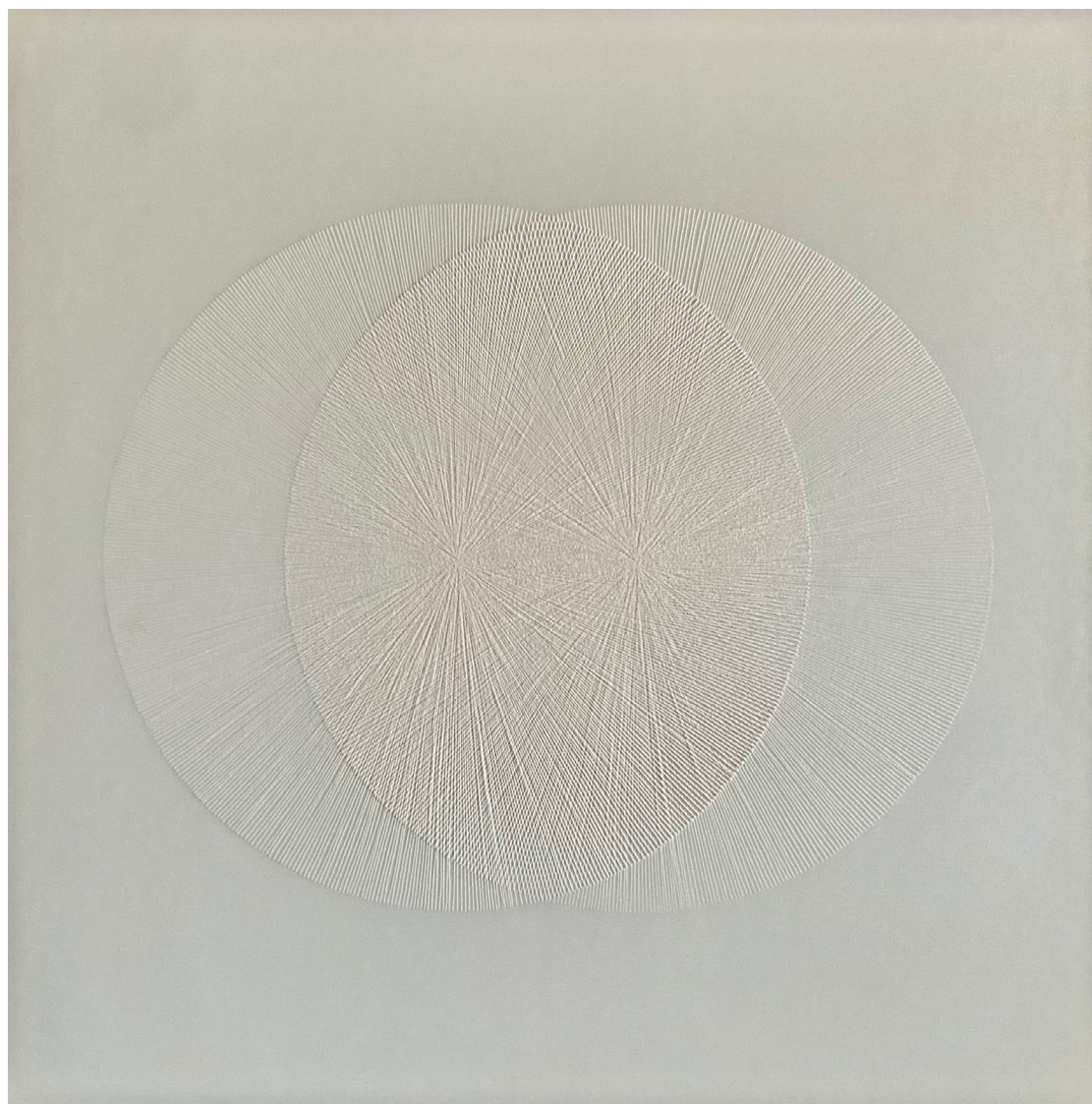
2022

Glass powder screen printed on sheet glass, engraved,

wooden frame

h 40 × 40 cm

Unique piece



Luminous Flux I-II-III, Transcribing series
2022
Glass powder screen printed on sheet glass,
wooden frame
h 64 × 64 cm
Unique piece

Aimee Frodsham, Artistic Director, Canberra Glassworks
on *Luminance*
Mel Douglas solo show
at Caterina Tognon arte contemporanea, Venezia, Italia

Hour upon hour, Mel Douglas sits in the light-drenched cold working studio in an old industrial building in her hometown of Canberra. Sometimes I pause to watch her engrave intricate networks of lines as if she is meditating. Her hand moves the engraving tool over the surface of the glass as if she is studying every square millimetre of its surface. The engraving tool becomes an extension of her hand and mind. She is tender with the tool, and the mark-making is exacting and sensitive. She describes these acts as tracing, inscribing, mapping, rendering, highlighting and transcribing using the qualities of glass, line and light. The artworks in *Luminance* are drawings that use light, shadow, and texture, and glass is the collaborator.

In the late 1990s, Mel Douglas first used the drawn line in combination with glass. She developed an appreciation for surface finishing and form as a single entity through this early stage of her career. The 25-year journey that followed provided opportunities to push glass to its limits, whether kiln formed or blown. Today, her meticulous attention to detail means that each piece can take weeks or months to complete. To the outside viewer or the trained eye, it is a privilege to witness the process as the works develop. The finished pieces illustrate Bauhaus philosophies of line, texture, tone and composition, demonstrating her research and passion for architectural space, form and layering.

I've enjoyed researching some of Douglas's influences, including Tim Ingold, Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen. Ingold draws parallels between making and knowledge as a human experience. In the keynote lecture, *The Art of Paying Attention*, delivered by Ingold in 2017, he speaks of how we may be able to see a surface, but it's not until we are deeply involved in listening to and working the surface that we can respond with knowing. This is a process of giving and receiving. An actual labour of love where the material and hand of the artist are equal¹. This is true of Douglas' practice. I can see how the *Luminance* works echo the level of understanding and care between both material and maker. Each piece within this body of work is paired back to reveal the purest inherent qualities found in glass, one-by-one they focus on tone, light, shadow, or texture. Douglas uses these qualities like a tool, whether the objects are two or three-dimensional in form. She studies shadows, using them as a material, and these shadows become form. This is evident in the four works that Douglas categorises as 'Inscribing'², which exemplify this.

Another influence for Douglas is László Moholy-Nagy, who started to explore photograms as a material in 1922. This description of Moholy-Nagy's experiences with this photographic process perfectly summarises Douglas's 'Inscribing' pieces. 'A photogram, on the other hand, is a 1:1 scale negative record of a shadow. It is unique and unpredictable. Photograms tell the truth, but only a thin slice of it'³. While these works are not photograms they share a similar conceptual framework, when compared to a vessel they reference. Douglas reverses the process transforming the pattern of a shadow into form. This use of multifaceted connections in seeing, thinking, and making are evident, as Ingold described. In other works, objects are stacked to amplify the richness of colour, creating a new shadow and new internal spaces.

1 Keynote presentation by Tim Ingold at the Art of Research 2017, Helsinki, Finland
2 Mel Douglas, *Inclination* (2021), *Alternation* (2022), *Concurrent* (2022) and *Transference* (2023)
3 Jonathan Griffin, [Out of the light, and into the shadows](#). TATE ETC issue 33 Spring 2015.



Douglas's double-form piece, *Interstice* (2022), uses intense colour and curved line work, prompting us to see the inside and outside surfaces and look at the space between these surfaces. At first glance, the drawn line reinforces and traces the contours of the form in a decorative manner. However, Douglas is mapping and reading the physical nature of form and the material, blurring the boundaries of where the material ends and the space starts. Rather than creating the illusion of space, she holds the space and brings the viewer in close.

It is a great privilege to watch Douglas at work in her studio at Canberra Glassworks. To witness exhibitions growing out of the studio with such quality, rigour and beauty at every stage of the process. Douglas has found the perfect balance of exploration, process and precision.

Aimee Frodsham