



image credit - Peter Hyatt

## ‘Dead Still’ Springs to Life at ACCA Text – Peter Hyatt

Viridian is a key collaborator and supporter of one of this year’s major showings at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA) in Melbourne. The company provided specialist technical and material support for two of the contributing artists.

The exhibition initiative, by interiors and graphics consultancy Nexus Designs and ACCA, explores the relationship between art, design and architecture. Titled NEW010, A Nexus Designs and ACCA collaboration, the exhibition celebrates individual art/sculpture within a dynamic gallery space.

Viridian’s support is represented in two of the seven powerful exhibits. Louise Hubbard’s ‘Dead Still’ and Fiona Connor’s ‘What You Bring with You to Work’ have benefited from technical support by Viridian, Australia’s premier glass manufacturer and supplier.

Danielle Midalia of Nexus Designs says the exhibition reflects a strong collaboration between artists and industry.

“The idea as a practice was to reflect on the philosophy of what we do. The process of collaboration also facilitated new relationships. Nexus Designs Director Sonia Simpfendorfer and designer Midalia worked closely with all of the artists and industry contributors. “We exposed the artists to different professions and fostered new relationships,” explains Midalia. “But we also tested ourselves as a practice in the design of the internal spaces. It is a stimulating, cross-disciplinary test that dissolves the boundaries that often confine ideas.”

“Nexus Designs founder Janne Faulkner’s involvement with art began 40 years ago and this latest ACCA project really reflects

that working life commitment.” As a multi-disciplinary studio, Nexus Designs has expertise in graphics, architecture, interiors and product development.

Midalia says Viridian’s support for the exhibition was instrumental, especially for the sculptor of Dead Still. “Lou Hubbard describes materials in very specific ways. Glass for her, has a very different meaning to ours. The colour and thickness of glass needed to be extremely precise. It was critical that the glass be a very specific colour, shape and weight.

“Understanding the artists’ perspective was important. It has helped us see materials in an entirely new light. While we don’t necessarily have their artistic freedom, it has encouraged us to look beyond accepted standards and be a little braver,” observes Midalia.



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Left to right: Con Kantis - Viridian and Danielle Midalia - Nexus Designs. (A Fiona Connor installation featuring nine accurately produced windows that frame the view of the world.)

Hubbard's lifelike polystyrene and latex horse, compressed by 300 kilograms of laser-cut, Viridian SuperClear glass delivers audiences a knockout, emotion charged, sculpture.

A former keen horse-rider, Hubbard describes the challenge as "creatively and technically demanding". Three such large, heavy sheets of glass and a connecting rectangular strip, required more than a few calculations and finally a leap of faith that the horse would support such a weight.

"The model could have exploded," says Hubbard. There were many nervous moments when the glass arrived, had to fit through the door and finally be laid on the horse.

Viridian's architectural segment manager Con Kantis was initially approached by Nexus Designs to assist with the exhibition.

"It was an exciting opportunity to contribute expertise in addition to material to such a project. That was the most satisfying aspect - an involvement with the artists that indicated the material possibilities. Much better than simply saying: 'Oh yes sure, here's some glass' and then washing our hands of any further involvement."

Kantis was able to help recommend the best glass types - Viridian SuperClear toughened - that allowed maximum transparency and legibility of Hubbard's prostrate horse.

"Even after all of our calculations and preparations nothing was absolutely certain. The horse could have simply collapsed and we would have ended up with a vastly different result," says Hubbard.

"But we were prepared for such a possibility. Had that eventuated, that would have been the exhibit. It wouldn't have necessarily been a disaster." She admits such a result might not though be quite as aesthetically cohesive.

"Kantis provided a high level of technical information about placing one sheet of glass on another and it was why I reverted to separate, layered, lenses for balance.

Hubbard says Viridian's input was invaluable. "They were certainly supportive and interested in pushing their glass in that way. Knowing from the outset what I could expect from that glass impacted upon manufacture of the horse.

Hubbard's lifelike horse, compressed by 300 kilograms of laser-cut, Viridian SuperClear glass delivers audiences a knockout, emotion charged, sculpture.



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Artist Louise Hubbard with her sculpture 'Dead Still'.



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“As it turned out, the glass kept escalating in weight from 110 to 170 then 250 and finally 300 kgs.” For structural integrity reasons, the lightweight ‘tabletop’ became a heavyweight almost overnight. “Put that much weight on a polystyrene and latex model and you begin to appreciate the forces at work.” Hubbard concedes that her horse has sunk and flattened under its load.

“Even super clear glass has a slight colour and three layers of glass makes the latex skin appear more lifelike and bruised. That is something I hadn’t counted on but it’s there. It’s as if you’re standing in clear water and look at your calf compared to your thigh, you see a similar colour shift.”

“There were a lot of phone calls in the lead up to getting those shapes and scaled up glass lenses. I just had to make sure that there was a balance between compression and my control of a material and the material fighting back. The will to want to do something is where the art resides. The idea behind it is the dominant part of the art. If we get something that looks good at the same time it’s an absolute bonus,” says Hubbard.

Beginning life as a full-size polystyrene model, Hubbard’s galloping horse was sent to an industrial cutter where it was seam cut along its underbelly, ‘gutted’ and treated with numerous coats of latex.

“The scooped out section assists with compression rather than having the glass lenses balanced precariously, or unevenly supported,” Hubbard explains.

“It was transported by horse float on its journey,” the artist points out. Almost a work of art in itself.

Central to the design is the blood red floor that also caused Hubbard anxiety. Given the circumscribed, laser cut edges to the glass, she says that the green glass outline is part of the finessed aesthetic that required the floor to become a strong counterpoint. Dead Still can be read as a three dimensional object but it also has a two dimensional, drawn or graphic quality. Set in a white, fluorescent-lit room, lighting reflections are all a part of the sculptor’s intent.

“I wasn’t originally searching for that specifically coloured floor but Nexus Designs recommended a marmoleum

surface. A strong floor was needed to tell me something about the glass and horse. I was wary of being seduced by colour for a cheap, quick effect, but blood oxide has a richness in art history and that finally convinced me of its legitimacy here.”

Viridian were keen to push the boundaries of how glass can be used and showcase its more unusual applications. “Viridian are passionate about actively supporting the use of glass in extraordinary ways, and having the opportunity to assist two such talented artists has been extremely rewarding,” says Kantis. “Hopefully the exhibition will inspire more artists, designers and architects to explore the possibilities of glass.”