

# Prize shows Australian craft in a glass of its own

## VISUAL ARTS

### Tom Malone Prize 2005

Art Gallery of Western Australia.

Free Entry. Until July 31.

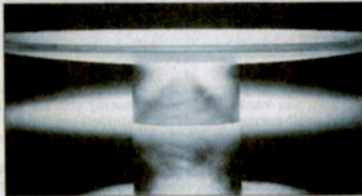
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**W**HAT is it about the work of Australian glass artists that so impresses the world?

On the evidence presented by the recently announced Tom Malone Prize at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, one of the key factors is an innovative and diverse approach to design and fabrication.

Maybe that's what Rosa Baroveri Mentasti, the curator of the massive Glass in the World Today exhibition identified when she chose to include works by Tim Edwards, Andrew Baldwin, Clare Belfrage and Jessica Loughlin. That show at the Palazzo Franchetti in Venice last year listed Australia as one of the key centres of international studio glass.

It's a great fillip to realise our artists are included in the Olympics of glass but it does make you wonder how they have managed such a feat without the massive funding our elite athletes receive or a groundswell of national



**Exquisite:** Clockwise from left, Edols and Elliott's *Curled Leaf*, Horton's *Inspiration*, Belfrage's *Ridge lines #24* and Mowbray's *Spine*

support to urge them on. The acknowledged centres of excellence in Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth are run out of tertiary institutions and arts

organisations and by those individual practitioners who have taken on the challenge of supporting themselves in what is an excessively expensive and

technically difficult medium. They are all relatively small and in many cases precariously poised on the brink of financial viability yet they are produc-

ing work the equal of the established centres of Venice, Bohemia, Seattle and Scandinavia.

Perhaps it is our distance from those centres that breeds independence and encourages experimentation. Certainly the 11 Malone finalists this year present a range of approaches that spans a wide spectrum from traditional vessel forms to sculptural works that highlight the qualities of the material.

Ede Horton's platter is an elegant work that holds a surprise embedded in its core, while Benjamin Edols and Kathy Elliott have collaborated on *Curled Leaf*, an exquisite twist of glass that eschews function and reveals the material's inherent qualities of light and strength.

The winning work by Clare Belfrage also moves into this sculptural territory by detailing a rich surface of glass canes over a blown form to echo the striations of geological formations.

*Ridge lines #24* is a tactile and dramatic work that sits well alongside the works by previous winners Nick Mount and Jessica Loughlin. Now in its third year the Malone Prize is enabling Australians to better appreciate the work that others around the world are quick to praise.

Ted Snell