



**Image front:**

*Broken Windows Object* 2007  
medium 00cm x 00cm

**Images this page left to right:**

*Broken Windows* 2007

*Broken Windows* 2007

*A history of space is the history of wars* 2006  
watercolour, each panel 00cm x 00cm

# Broken Windows

Rebecca Coates - July 2007

On a bleak and wintry Melbourne day, I visited Sanné Mestrom's studio to see the second in her three-part series of projects, Broken Windows. There, displayed across the studio table, were a series of photographs; a pane of glass, broken; and a small, misshapen semi-orb like form made of glass and crudely taped back together with an assortment of pieces of sticky-tape, lumps of glue and other adhesives to hand. The title of this reconstructed orb, 'Broken Window' the only indication of its previous state.

The photographs were to be read sequentially. In the first, a clenched fist is poised above a white picture frame complete with glass. The rear - or contents part - of the frame has been removed, and the fist, partly wrapped in a white cloth, hovers with intent – even menace – over the mirror-smooth unblemished surface. A faint bloody nick is visible on

the thumb of the clenched fist – is this cloth protection or something else? In the second frame, the action is yet to unfold. The fist rests gently on the surface of the still intact pane of glass. It is not until the third frame that the event unfolds: a series of images capture in slow motion the fist punching down and smashing a domestic pane of glass. This is kinetic sculpture in motion, and one wonders at the lack of protective clothing, the flying shards of broken glass, and the potential disaster that could have been captured instead.

The photographs act as a structure, or architectural framework, from which to read the pieced-together shattered glass 'picture' and its three-dimensional counterpart. Mounted in such a way that their support does not overtake the fragility of the object, their very fragmentation and obviousness of re-assembly can be seen for what it is: an exploration of space through an arrangement of shard-like forms that Mestrom first explored in her series of watercolour paintings shown at Spacement Gallery in 2006. A history of space is the history of wars.

Also displayed on the studio table, though further off to the side, was another, more discreet photograph. Its subject was another of these glass sculptural assemblages: the blue-green edges of the broken shards more pronounced, the lumpy blobs of yellowing glue more obvious, and the reflection of the sticky-tape assuming a greater purity and complexity of form than embodied in the concrete original. Photographed against a white gloss surface whose every imperfection and brush stroke was highlighted by the raking light and shadow, the play of greys and whites, this modest object's materiality sat in stark contrast to its reflective support. This small glass object's structure - the simple fact that it could actually stand up – belied the seeming weightlessness and impermanence at the same time. Similarly, Mestrom's large architectural water-colour on paper works have this push-pull of material and substance: she has created an almost impenetrable labyrinth



of glass-like shards and architectural forms, distance and space created by layering shades of darkness, that equally swirl and morph as perspective shifts and alters.

In some respects, the very intentional amateurishness of these reassembled panes of glass and glass structures can be read as a conscious counterpoint to the technical adeptness of the previous large-scale watercolour series. Flawlessly executed, the only indication of the hand-fashioned quality is a subtle pooling of ink along the lower edge of the picture pane, a slight unevenness to an otherwise perfect colouration: these subtle imperfections as much a testament to the pull of gravity as an intentional counterpoint to the artist's gesture.

Whilst it is pertinent to talk about the materiality of object, excursions of space and perspective in relation to Mestrom's work, and these works are intrinsically linked to these explorations in the History paintings, there is a further dimension to her glass-based endeavours. I remember my initial response to these works exhibited at Spacement Gallery: here was a labyrinthine wonderland of shifting perspectives into which I had been thrust. In one, I looked from below, the shards shifting and coalescing above my head, the point of perspective out of sight. My scale dwarfed, I became a child again, or a somewhat helpless individual (there are shades of 1984 here), dwarfed by these fragmentary, shifting forms, whose relationships and positioning were impossible to make sense of. There was a sumptuousness, or lushness to the

monochromatic colouring - it reminded me somewhat of trying to find my way through the back stores of the now defunct fur department at David Jones many years ago. In another, I look from above: I am all-seeing, all-knowing, and in a position to assist in the navigation through time and space. There appears, however, to be no beginning, no end. A sense of claustrophobia and impotence aside, these images have a somewhat surrealist, dreamlike quality of the unforgettable German Expressionist film of the 1920s, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.

These more recent glass-based works, however, are less about the labyrinth of the mind, than about simplicity of gesture, form and material. Contained within these strangely shapen circular forms are echoes of *arte povera's* simplicity of material and purity of form. These objects sit, precariously, like some miniature shelter or dome-like igloo: from rupture and fragmentation, from shards and glue, a suggestion emerges of enclosure and support. Haphazard and hand-made, these structures envelope and nurture in a way that the watercolour paintings, with their references to social tensions and political unease, were never intended to do.

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