

**TOM MOORE:  
ABUNDANT WONDER  
JAMFACTORY ICON**

JAMFACTORY

**Tom Moore's engaging, sophisticated and technically challenging hybridised animal/plant sculptures – and the fantastical worlds they inhabit – are embedded in the history of glassmaking and scientific discovery. His artworks are disarmingly playful in their use of narrative to critique the pressing social and environmental concerns of our contemporary epoch.**

Tom Moore aims to present quirky responses to the melancholy observation that human activity is increasingly detrimental to the natural world. In Tom's practice, there are a number of recurring protagonists illustrating this idea. These archetypes include un-categorisable kangaroos, birds loosely styled on kookaburras and referred to as "hooligans", and absurd amalgamated creatures such as the *potato-fish-car*. Margaret Hancock Davis, Jam Factory's Curatorial Director and Curator of *JamFactory ICON 2020 Tom Moore: Abundant Wonder*, recently discussed these characters with Moore to learn more about their back-story and other themes and ideas in the exhibition. This is what she found out...

### ***The "hooligan"***

When I am outside, I am always aware of birds. I like the shape of them, and I find the prospect of spontaneous flight intensely appealing. In the early 2000s, I was living in the Eastern suburbs of Adelaide and kookaburras were common in the backyard and on my ride in to work along Linear Park. One day, I happened to visit the zoo and had an intense experience looking at a caged specimen who stared furiously back at me.

The image of that kookaburra came at a time when I was thinking about what I wanted to say in my work. I was becoming a skilful craftsperson, adept at making tableware and inclined to incorporate representational elements. I realised that I wanted to introduce some narrative and create some tension. This also led me to enjoy a degree of roughness in material handling in combination with the more refined technical and optical tricks. These conflicts presented additional scope for drama.

The kookaburra does seem to be laughing at people - mocking the foolishness of so much busy-ness and industrial activity. It seems terrible that this activity is making the planet uninhabitable to humans and dreadful that it is leading to the extinction of so many other creatures. There is something bizarre about technological cleverness creating profoundly stupid unintended consequences.

The first glass kookaburra was made to perch on top of a chunk of discarded glass in the crude form of a car, salvaged during a furnace re-build. The contrast between this rough chunk with the fluid forms and detailed patterns of blown glass was a revelation. The glass kookaburra on the car is intended as a joyrider, with no respect for human property. The hooligan got its name from a news report on the radio in which three kids tragically died in a stolen car crash and a witness described the three as "young hooligans". Despite these troubling and somewhat nihilistic connotations, the hooligans are intended as a hopeful symbol of nature's triumph over industry. The car has glass plants attached, as if sprouting forth from it.

Some of these works, such as the kangaroos, are partially motivated by the challenge of producing things that reflect a uniquely Australian perspective.

I am intrigued by the thought that European explorers considered Australian animals to be anomalies that defied conventions of categorisation. Early representations of Australian animals by Europeans seem influenced by more familiar animals - the kangaroos are something like a deer or a greyhound. I wonder if these preconceptions might actually influence the way that new phenomena are perceived. In making works such as the kangaroo I tried to imagine that I was from a planet made of glass and that my visual vocabulary was comprised of bottles,

bowls, jugs and vases. How then would I represent a kangaroo?

The *potato-fish-car* arose from the desire to represent one of the un-glassiest things Moore could conceive. The potato is such a humble, lumpy form, it seems a perfect antithesis to the elegant subject matter and sparkling appearance of historical glass ornaments.

I have been captivated by these glass potatoes since 2003 because I was learning to make eyes and they have so many...I wanted to see them with their eyes open! I wish to imbue these objects with a sense of agency and for the audience to feel observed by the artworks.

To make the potato, I start with a light beige coloured glass similar to the flesh of a potato and apply various shades of finely ground brown glass to its surface to replicate the matte, dirty skin. The *potato-fish-car* embodies metamorphosis. It is a symbol of the interconnectedness between lifeforms and with technology. It has a human face, and incorporates elements drawn from plant, animal and machine forms. It dissolves the boundaries between botanical, zoological, mechanical and personal realms. This all may sound rather serious, so it is worth noting that the things are also fun to look at!

The title of the JamFactory ICON exhibition is *Abundant Wonder*. In many ways this title is both outward looking and reflective. Through the exhibition the audience may experience wonder in the artworks Moore has created and the world they inhabit, while alongside this, lies Moore's own wonder and interest in the world around him, its complexities, its contradictions and its joy.

Perhaps it is due to his surname that Moore is excited by abundance.

I have great respect for my minimalist colleagues who choose the difficult path of striving for perfection. However, I take issue with the modernist adage that Less is More. I am a maximalist - I am most satisfied by exhibitions that are stuffed full and enjoy feeling overwhelmed by an excess of things to see. I realise it's not for everyone: you may need to have a rest afterwards!

### ***Wonder***

Wonder is perhaps the principal driving force of human innovation. Historically, wonder has fed collecting. In particular, this can be seen in cabinets of curiosity or Wunderkammer. These cabinets were sometimes conceived to act as a microcosm of the whole universe, containing examples of all types of phenomena that could be sorted and ordered.

Some collections placed particular emphasis on items that were considered as anomalous because they defied classification. Coral was believed to be miraculous because it appeared to be a combination of the botanical and geological realms. Such fascination with wonder has driven scientific discovery in the effort to understand the world we inhabit. Glass has played a useful role in this endeavour: compound lenses allow us to view the world at a microscopic scale and to see the vastness of the universe.

In his practice, Moore is often drawn to the theme of transformation, Glass is a perfect medium to delve into such ideas - a material of metamorphosis. It is a strange state of matter, neither truly solid nor liquid.

“Glass” is a very imprecise blanket term - there are thousand of patented recipes for kinds of glass with very different behaviours designed for various applications. These different types of glass cannot be joined together or they will crack apart when they cool. All of the different colours and the clear glass in this exhibition expand and contract at a rate similar enough to be considered compatible. This is one of the fussy defining features of this mysterious and paradoxical stuff. Glass evokes many contradictions; it is fragile and yet it has survived thousands of years.

You will notice there are many flames in Moore’s artworks. These are intended as a simple reminder that glass is produced through a fundamental transformation of materials through fire and that these objects are made by repeated reheating.

Many of the characters in the exhibition are hybrids, and, like glass, they are in a state of flux, morphing from one life form into another. In addition to the main protagonists described earlier, in recent years Moore has included forms inspired by the Greek and Roman mythology such as the nymph Daphne, Diana of Ephesus and Echhidna as well as the extraordinary capriccio glass designs of 16th Century Italy.

Some of the objects in *Abundant Wonder*, are coloured using uranium glass and glow under black light. The low-grade uranium used in this glass is a by-product of copper mining. the level of radioactivity emitted by these objects is only marginally greater than background radiation. However, the origin of this the otherworldly glow imparts a sense of danger. The use of this contentious element is a reminder that all of the glass colours present are created by the addition of metal oxides and of the close ties between glassmaking and mineral extraction.

Despite its ability to elicit wonder, glass art might carry ominous connotations in an age of climate chaos. Glass making is a resource-intensive industry that contributed to the deforestation of Europe. Wood-fired glass factories were located in forested areas and voraciously moved on once the fuel was exhausted. As Moore explains:

I realise that there is a contradiction in my continued reliance on fossil fuels to produce artworks that reflect upon environmental concerns. Many of the works in this exhibition seek to acknowledge this uncomfortable internal conflict. This reached a crisis of conscience during my PhD, when I decided I could no longer justify blowing glass unless I calculated and offset my carbon impact. This is an imperfect solution. However, I have dedicated 3 decades to learning the skills to communicate with glass and I hope that there is a cultural value to using this material as a medium for responding to the troubled times in which we live.

Though Moore's artistic practice is partially driven by existential dread, it also employs humour. As he states:

It is uncommon for a glass artist to focus on humour. However it is one of the things that I am most drawn to. A joke is about setting up for a punch line. You think one thing is happening and then realise it is something else. I aim to construct visual jokes, through anomalous combinations to create things that don't quite make sense. This is related to wonder...

I like stuff that confounds my expectations: that produces an enjoyable shock that allows me to experience a pleasant cognitive shift. There is something really beguiling about particular combinations of ideas or aesthetic effects that cannot be reconciled.



One of the many amusing visual elements used in Moore's artwork is the diving duck, its bottom up and its legs flailing. It evokes the cartoonish image of the ostrich burying its head in the sand in order to avoid witnessing disagreeable events. The duck seems to reveal how many of us would really rather not have to deal with our current state of affairs. And, of course, it is simply a funny image.

When creating his artworks, Moore always begins with an expressive drawing. Multiple small sketches are done until he settles on an image that is somehow exciting. Moore creates all the finely detailed coloured glass rods that feature in his works. He then selects specific rods to create the small flame-worked glass components such as the small birds, flowers, teeth and the many eyes that are needed to create the new creature. Placing the small parts onto a large sheet of paper, Moore will re-draw the design at the full-size of the final artwork. The drawing guides Moore and his team of assistants while working in the hot shop. The tiny components are reheated and kept hot in a small oven near the glassblowing bench and can be brought out and attached as required. Moore has been known to remark that "glass is glue!" because it will readily fuse together once it has been heated with a small intense flame.

There is an intention to maintain the freshness of the original sketch in spite of all the planning and preparation required to create the objects. Moore has developed methodical processes to make something that appears spontaneous. The fluid nature of hot glass and the joy of making is forever frozen in his final artworks.

**CURATOR:**  
MARGARET HANCOCK DAVIS

**ESSAY:**  
MARGARET HANCOCK DAVIS

**EXHIBITOR:**  
TOM MOORE



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