

# MOVING RIGHT ALONG

I HAVE A FAVOURITE NECKLACE. WHEN I WEAR IT THE GRITTY SCRUNCH OF THE OVERSIZED GLASS LINKS DELIGHTS ME. THE UNEXPECTEDNESS OF THE MATERIALS, A COMBINATION OF PRECIOUS SILVER AND PLAIN GLASS, INTRIGUES. IT IS AN EARLY PIECE BY BLANCHE TILDEN. ALREADY SHE WAS WORKING WITH A DELIBERATE PALETTE OF MATERIALS, AND HER INTEREST IN SCALE AND REPETITION WERE IN EVIDENCE. ALREADY SHE BALANCED A GUTSY RAWNESS WITH ELEGANCE.

TEN YEARS ON AND IT IS THE WEARER'S EXPERIENCE THAT ENCOURAGES AND SUSTAINS TILDEN'S PRACTICE. AS SHE EXPLAINS: 'IT IS THE RESPONSE OF THE WEARER THAT MAKES MY JEWELLERY SUCCEED FOR ME. THE CONNECTION THAT CAN DEVELOP ONCE THE NECKLACE BECOMES PRECIOUS TO SOMEONE ELSE, ONCE IT BECOMES PART OF THEIR PERSONA, THEIR LIFE, THEIR EXPERIENCE, IS THE ASPECT OF MY PRACTICE THAT I VALUE THE MOST ...'

PIECES SUCH AS THE ABSORB AND COMPRESS NECKLACES, DEVELOPED IN 2006 FOR THE CECILY RIGG AWARD, HAVE BECOME MORE REFINED AND SOPHISTICATED. PERHAPS A GROWING SOPHISTICATION COMES THROUGH A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE MATERIALS, A HIGHER DEGREE OF FACILITY IN THEIR MANIPULATION. BUT TO IMAGINE THAT THE PROGRESSION HAS BEEN AN EASY ONE WOULD BE AN ERROR.

CREATIVITY IN ANY FIELD IS A DEEPLY PERSONAL PROCESS. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN SELF-DOUBT HALTS ANY KIND OF MAKING, WHEN ONE MUST LOOK TO THE WELL-SPRING OF INSPIRATION TO BE ABLE TO CONTINUE. SUCH A PERIOD PRECEDED THE MAKING OF THIS SUITE OF NECKLACES, AND IN MANY WAYS THEY ARE MORE PRECIOUS FOR THAT.

TILDEN RETURNED TO ADVICE MENTOR STEPHEN PROCTOR GAVE HER WHEN SHE WAS HIS STUDENT AT THE ANU CANBERRA SCHOOL OF ART: 'IDENTIFY WHAT IT IS YOU LIKE THE MOST'. A DISARMINGLY SIMPLE, BUT TRULY WISE, DICTUM. FINDING THE ANSWER TOOK TILDEN BACK TO A CHILDHOOD DELIGHT IN COLLECTING AND ASSEMBLING: TASKS SUCH AS GRADING PLUMS ON THE FAMILY FARM, OR GATHERING SHELLS AT THE BEACH. THESE ACTIVITIES SATISFIED AN ASPECT OF HER CHARACTER THAT SHE NOW UNDERSTANDS AS UNDERPINNING HER ART PRACTICE. A CHANCE VISIT TO THE MUSEUM OF SYDNEY CLARIFIED HER THINKING:

I WAS STANDING IN FRONT OF AN ENTOMOLOGICAL DISPLAY OF STAG BEETLES. THE BEETLES WERE DISPLAYED IN A CIRCLE ... THE GRADATION IN SIZE WAS ALMOST IMPERCEPTIBLE BUT THE LENGTH OF THE BEETLES GRADUALLY CHANGED FROM 150MM TO 2MM. THIS DISPLAY OF STAG BEETLES HAS ALWAYS STAYED WITH ME AND WOULD HAVE TO BE ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THINGS I HAVE EVER SEEN – NOT BECAUSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL BEAUTY OF EACH BEETLE, BUT MORE SO FOR THE SUBTLETY AND ELEGANCE OF THE GRADATION.

TILDEN'S INITIAL INTEREST IN SYSTEMS SUCH AS PULLEYS, CHAINS AND COGS—THE MECHANICS THAT DROVE THE MODERN ERA—HAVE GROWN INTO A MORE ABSTRACTED, LESS LITERAL ENGAGEMENT WITH REPETITION AND GRADATION.

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IF THESE MORE SOPHISTICATED PIECES ARE THE RESULT OF EXPERIENCE IN THE WORKSHOP, THEY ARE ALSO THE OUTCOME OF A NEW CONFIDENCE BORN OF OVERCOMING A PERIOD OF CREATIVE INERTIA, OF SELF-REFLECTION, OF TAKING RISKS AND MOVING ON.

THE TITLE OF THIS EXHIBITION, CARTE BLANCHE, IS A DECLARATION. IT IS NOT THE WHITE CARD OF SURRENDER, BUT PERMISSION TO CHOOSE WHATEVER COURSE OF ACTION YOU WANT.

FOR ME 'CARTE BLANCHE' IS MORE THAN A WITTY ONE LINER – RATHER, IT IS A SIGNIFICANT MARKER, AND THE SUMMING UP OF A PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY... SINCE RESUMING MY PRACTICE, I HAVE GIVEN MYSELF 'CARTE BLANCHE' – PERMISSION TO TRY SOMETHING ELSE, ANYTHING ELSE, TO LEAVE BEHIND THE TAG OF 'THE BICYCLE CHAIN JEWELLER', TO MOVE OUT OF SAFE TERRITORY, TO MOVE ON.

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