Like most of Di Mauro's work, these sculptures are also imbued with the artist's Australian heritage. In many ways they are quintessentially Australian – their hues recall the beating hot sun of central Australia and the tropical climate of North Queensland where the artist grew up.

This exploration of the sculptural potential of the everyday is key to Di Mauro's practice. When in his studio he becomes a contemporary alchemist transforming mundane materials into sculptural delights that engage and confound many a gallery visitor. Di Mauro's ongoing interest in alchemical associations and the properties of various metals, finds a new form in his most recent series, the *Cirrus Suite*. These cast aluminium forms are the offspring of a marriage between Di Mauro's well-known Astroturf sculptures and large aluminium works for the public domain. Simultaneously plant, grub and animal-like, works in the *Cirrus Suite* also exude an industrial flavour with their high-gloss, chameleon finish seemingly borrowed from auto paint workshops. Their domestic scale and shimmering colouring mean these works can also be read as nuggets of rare metallic elements that shine purple from one angle and gold from another – the very embodiment of alchemical goals perhaps? Like many of Di Mauro's sculptures, these new works are ambiguous forms with myriad associations that encourage the viewer to consider evolution, the environment, and the relationship between humankind and nature, amongst other pertinent topics. The *Cirrus Suite* is an exciting new development and it further affirms Di Mauro as the embodiment of the artist as "… a kind of visionary, or seer, offering, through his [sic] work, glimpses of a reality more profound than the material world we know"[2].

1. Nevill Drury and Anna Voigt, Fire and Shadow: Spirituality in Contemporary Australian Art, Craftsman House, Roseville East, 1996, p.163

2. Alan Bowness, Modern European Art, Thames & Hudson, London, 1995, p.133.

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Detail from *"Pro Marcus Aurelius"*, 2009-10, neoprene, fibreglass and plastic mesh, 93 x 56 x 25cm.

dianne tanzer gallery + projects

SEBASTIAN DI MAURO
Scuta

OPENING 29.05.10
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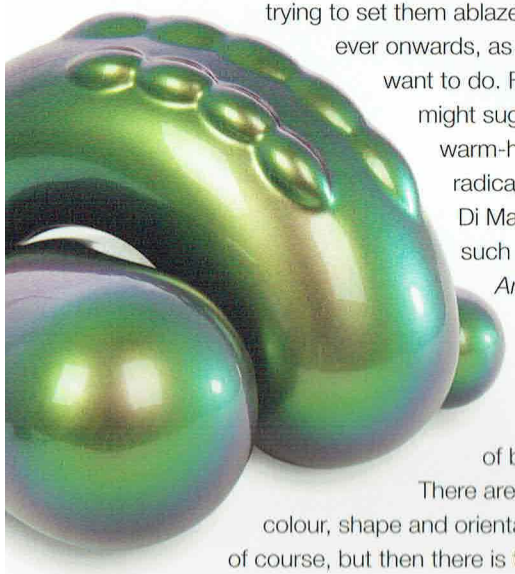
SCUTA

On encountering the *Scuta* series one is immediately struck by bursts of colour radiating from a universe of artificial suns. These wall-based sculptures are woven from red, orange and yellow neoprene and emit an uncanny sense of heat. They appear as balls of fire and light, formed of flames that lick at the viewer trying to set them ablaze and then race ever onwards, as bushfires are want to do. First impressions might suggest that these warm-hued works are a radical departure from Di Mauro's recent series such as *Float and Archimedes' Bath*, which included marine-like forms fashioned from cool shades of blue neoprene. There are the obvious colour, shape and orientation differences of course, but then there is the different way these works operate phenomenologically.



Where Di Mauro's blue neoprene sculptures are almost introverted in the way they act as enigmatic objects absorbing the world around them, drawing the viewer deeper and deeper into their never-ending depths, these new works jump out at the viewer, playful extroverts that threaten to multiply.

While not immediately obvious, the *Scuta* series retains a connection to the ocean, a recurring presence in Di Mauro's practice. They are of course formed of neoprene (most commonly known as wetsuit material), but they also recall coral or fantastical marine creatures from the Great Barrier Reef and alternatively they read as surfboards with which to harness the movements of the sea. More notably however, these new forms tie together Di Mauro's continued used of fire as a symbol of transformation over a period of more than twenty years. Fire and light first appeared in the artist's paintings of the 1980s, which based their painterly forms on the ocean but often took on fiery palettes, and in his early assemblages using charred wood.

A description of one of his paintings as having "yellow-tipped waves scudding like 'tongues of fire across the scarlet surface'"[1] could undeniably describe any work in this new series. Hence, rather than representing a radical departure, these works are a new manifestation of symbols at the core of Di Mauro's practice.

The series grew out of the public commission *Blind spot*, a wall sculpture, which took its circular forms from the sun. Too bright to look at directly, the sun imprints temporary blind spots on one's vision when such attempts are made. While this is the overt reading of the work's title, it also references psychological and emotional 'blind spots' that people create to avoid specific issues, particularly apt given the work's location in the Crime and Misconduct Commission, Brisbane. Works in the resulting Scuta series explore permutations of the circular form, at times morphing into surfboards and shields, at others remaining slightly askew astral bodies. Dark celestial masses on first glance, the diverse markings on the surfaces of these works bring to mind the residual dots and patterns of blind spots. At the same time glints of red and orange appear as little flares of colour reminiscent of the sun's kaleidoscopic surface only seen through scientific photographs.

In addition to solar inspiration, Di Mauro is interested in the metaphorical associations fire has with regeneration and renewal, destruction and purification and energy spent, harnessed or contained. Ideas of potential energy and the fiery fury of nature bring to mind volcanic activity and more specifically Mt Etna, the active volcano in Sicily, from where Di Mauro's family originates. The artist remembers his grandfather extolling the joys of cherry farming in the shadow of Mt Etna, and in light of this the red bursts read as a subconscious bringing into form of a nostalgic tale of halcyon days working the land. On the other hand, the sculptures are volcanic rocks, by-products of the power of natural forces, or perhaps more humbly, a flock of the ladybeetles like those that incongruously flood the landscape atop Mt Etna. Whilst the main tourist section of the volcano looks like an arid desert, on the other side one finds lush green valleys, fruit trees and an abundance of life. Ironically, it is the numerous lava flows of the past that have left this side of Mt Etna extremely fertile, a reminder of nature's ability to be at once all-destructive and life-giving.

"Cirrus 3", 2010, fabricated from cast aluminium, dimensions variable.