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Топаз. Копь Мокруша, Мурзинка, Урал. 5x4x4 см. Фото Д. Лисицин.  
Topaz. Mokrusha Pit, Murzinka, Urals. 5x4x4 cm. Photo D. Lisitsin.



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Aquamarine. Kuner, Nooristan Province, Afghanistan. 14.7 x 9.5 cm. Photo by Arif Jan.

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## ORBITULAR GRANITES, or WHEN PETROLOGY BECOMES ART

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**A**s almost every year, I spent about a week in Tucson during the Gem and Mineral show, seeing only a fraction of all objects displayed in this gigantic fair.

The economy crisis has not stopped the regular price increase of beautiful mineral specimens, now beyond the reach of any “normal” person (or museum). The same, or even worse, yields for fossils, with the additional problem that, for these, it is almost impossible to know if the fossil is real, corresponding to a well defined, unique former organism, or built artificially from a number of fragments, possibly collected on a wide areas or from different localities, eventually discreetly mixed with artificial pieces.

However, I was most impressed by another trend in this year show, for me as a petrologist more positive: people start to realize that rocks can also be beautiful objects, provided that they are well prepared by adequate polishing or carving. Like other years, in the “sculpture park” near the swimming pool of Hotel Tucson City Center (formerly InnSuite) demonstrated different things. Some of them was not interesting for me. But this was not the case for the objects displayed by Richard Williamson, native of remote Western Australia, who can rightly claim the label of “stone artwork” ([www.floatingstones.com.au](http://www.floatingstones.com.au)).

Names like Pilbara or Yilgarn are known to every geologist interested in the early history of our planet, and these very old, Archean terranes contains, besides a wealth of mineral deposits of economical values, some really spectacular rocks, notably BIF (Banded Iron Formation), in which former serpentinite layers, pseudomorphosed by quartz, display strongly coloured irisation shades (Tiger Eye, Tiger Iron). These were nicely displayed in the InnSuite exhibition, unfortunately at extremely high prices.

Besides these, I was mostly interested by few large slabs or spheres cut in a spectacular variety of orbicular granite (Mount Magnet, a former gold rush town located at about 500 km NE of Perth). I had seen a number of samples of this orbicular granite, mostly in the form of isolated orbicules, at various shows during the last 10 years. But it was the first time that I saw this interesting rock so well presented, either in the objects shown in InnSuite or in bowls during the Main Show few days later (*Figure 1*). I asked few question about this rock to the young lady at the stand, but she was obviously more competent in art than in petrology. Her explanations were so strange and erroneous (oldest rock on Earth, sedimentary precu-

Figure 1.

(a) Bowl from orbicular granite from Mount Magnet.

(b) Detail of the Bowl.

Author: Richard Williamson.

Photo: J. Callen.

