

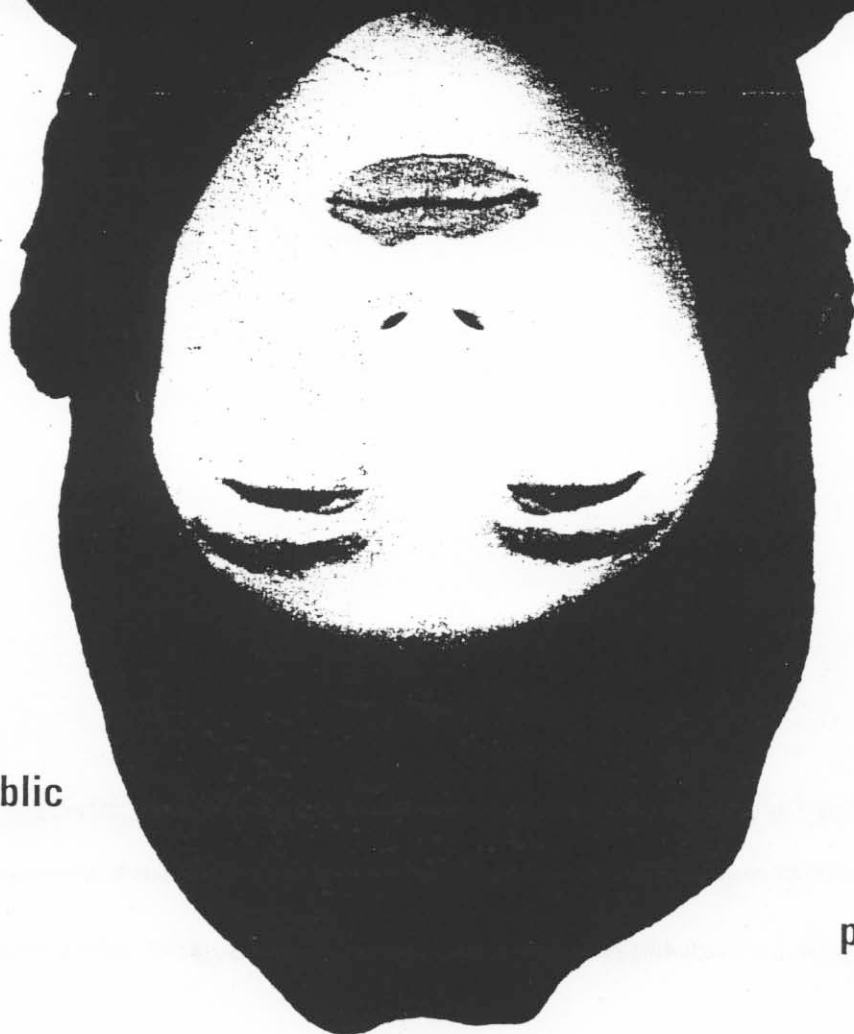


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FOR VISUAL AND
APPLIED ARTISTS

Working glass

Contemporary artists' practice



Artists talk
temporary public
practice

The latest
art world
news

60 open
exhibitions
plus more work
opportunities





AN Magazine is the essential monthly guide for visual and applied artists. It is a dynamic network that connects professionals like you directly to the wider visual arts community (Formerly Artists Newsletter).

Programme Director (AN Magazine)
Julie Crawshaw

Programme Coordinators
Louise Coysh & Emma Safe

Currents Editor
Susan Jones

Helpline & Connections
Rebecca Farley

Advertising Managers
Kelly Wilson & Gordon Dalton

Reception
Maureen Royal & Pauline White

Subscriptions & Sales
Lorraine Michael & Ann Thackray

Accounts Assistant
Claire Maddison

Distribution
Norma Burns

Programme Director (AN Live)
David Butler

Publisher
Richard Padwick

Output Bureau
Printing Services

Print
Scottish County Press

AN, PO Box 23,
Sunderland SR4 6DG

Subscriptions and orders
T +44 (0)191 514 3600
F +44 (0)191 564 1600
E subs@anpubs.demon.co.uk

Editorial
T +44 (0)191 567 3589
F +44 (0)191 564 1600
E edit@anpubs.demon.co.uk

Advertising
T +44 (0)191 567 3589
F +44 (0)191 564 1600
E ads@anpubs.demon.co.uk



14 Working Glass

Artists discuss contemporary glass practice



Tim Collier and Terry Duffy, Rachel Rachel, Part of the Inversion project. (See Comment, p5)

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AESA Björk Thorsteindóttir, *Mallei Vittræi Pro Aedibus Vittræis*, 42 glass hammers, cast glass, 'Glass', Edinburgh
Photo: Lynsey Wright

The poetic language of glass is complex. The qualities of glass are rich, beautiful, mysterious and unpredictable. The material can be layered, combined, defined, multiplied and isolated.

The history of glass is embedded in function, decorative form and architecture. With the exception of stained glass, the use of glass as a material to explore meaning is fairly recent. Glass is a contentious material in that it is not recognised within the arts as a material of expression and is thus misrepresented. After all, who actually knows about the art practice of glass other than the community within which this practice occurs? Where would you be able to go and see these works? And, what impact do these works have upon the viewer?

Over the last few years there have been a growing number of artists from painters to sculptors who have used glass within their work. The 'art' community accepts these individuals as their works are deemed to be artforms, non-specific to technique or material. The use of glass by these artists is purposeful to the concept, allowing glass to engage in a language of context. Aspects of transparency, translucency, light, opaqueness, fragility, sharpness, containment and the list goes on, are qualities of fascination and purpose. However, glass artists addressing similar subject matter find themselves ostracised by the 'art' establishments of Britain. The glass artist has to face the fascination of technical dialogue before the content, concept and presence of their work will be critically examined. Why?

We live in a society where a need exists to categorise information, this application of logic enables us all to comprehend and decipher forms of intelligence. Glass practice whether it is design, craft or art is a victim of this logic, in that the simple association of the material with the applied arts has limited its acceptance by the wider community. Glass is locked

in a realm so specific to material classification that the exposure of work produced by a diverse community of professionals is often restricted to an audience versed in technique.

The Crafts Council and the Contemporary Applied Arts exhibit work by practitioners, exploring the different qualities of glass without really challenging perceptions or generating awareness of this multifaceted material. The Victoria and Albert Museum displays contemporary works as part of its glass collection. However, as Oliver Watson¹ stated in an article concerning the new gallery, the establishment is concerned with collating appropriate information from the Arts and Crafts era, to bring this up to date to show how history has influenced new practice. And, if the objects created in this contemporary sphere are of a fine art nature then surely another institution like the Tate Gallery should be collecting and exhibiting the works.

So whose responsibility is it to generate awareness and allow different interpretations of glass to occur? The easy and obvious answer would be the

media. In fact, the responsibility lies closer to home and within the creative fields. By this I mean the craftspeople, designers and artists who enrich our environment with their visual practice and language. For it is not just their ability to practice but their belief in what they practice which should propel their activities and challenge formalised perceptions. In addition, the responsibility should be shared with the arts institutions and visual organisations that promote, exhibit and lead the way in which work is received, interpreted and valued. The combined effort will then allow glass to become part of a diverse visual language that is engaged in creative exploration and critical discourse.

Shital Pattani

1 Interview by Geraldine Rudge with Oliver Watson in GLASS magazine No. 58 published by Urban Glass: New York Contemporary Glass Center.



Max Jacquard, 'New London Glass Exhibition'.

I often feel torn between revealing the inherent beauty of glass and finding my own voice within it. In this sense I have much in common with other young glassmakers who have grown out of the craft tradition and aspire to produce work which communicates ideas beyond the pleasingly decorative.

When I left college in 1987 it seemed logical to produce artifacts of a loosely functional nature which would look good on

the display shelves of craft shops and galleries. A fascination with natural growth patterns initiated a series of bowls based on fossils and the Fibonacci series. This led me to explore more three dimensional pod like forms which seemed to embody the 'life force'. Initially taking the shape of vases, they eventually became liberated from the

constraints of function. The *Starfruit* piece made for the Sotheby's Contemporary Decorative Arts show in February 1998, takes the seed form almost to the level of a scientific curiosity balancing on its laboratory-like bronze stand.

Alongside my personal pieces I have always worked on projects of an architectural nature. My studio in Battersea – Glassforms – operates as a processing plant for a variety of commission projects.

Frustration with the lack of opportunities to show work led Gaby Kienle and I to organise the 'New London Glass' exhibition with twenty-two other London-based glassmakers, at the Candid Gallery Islington. I was particularly impressed with the works which had left behind the conventional plinth-top display and sought to engage with the space and the viewer in a more direct way. One example was Kirsty Brooks' *Negative light source* – an installation of back-lit sandblasted panels creating a false window in front of the original. My own pieces – collaborations with the neon artist Clare Brew – also sought to exploit the effect of light on glass and to give a living heart to forms with a transparent and husk-like exterior.

For me, the exhibition represented a spirit of adventure in glass, and today there are other signs that the attitude towards glass as an artistic medium is changing. Recent exhibitions such as 'Embody' at the Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art in Sunderland and 'Glass' installations at Edinburgh's Royal Botanical Gardens, show glass objects escaping the traditionally prescribed role of the pleasingly decorative.

New British glass art is a fusion of practitioners and influences from home and abroad, from inside and outside the world of glass, and as such offers a unique and fresh voice to the established international scene. Whilst maintaining integrity as makers the new generation of glass artists is pushing the boundaries of context and meaning in their work, giving glass a vitality and relevance within contemporary culture.

Max Jacquard is currently working with Nazeing Glass Works towards an installation by sculpture Michael Marriot. He will be running a three-day workshop at Daedalian Glass, Stalmine Lancs in August 1999.