



# GLASSTRESS

JOSEF ALBERS | ARMAN | JEAN ARP |  
BARBARA BLOOM | LOUISE BOURGEOIS |  
SERGIO BOVENGA | DANIEL BUREN |  
LAWRENCE CARROLL | CÉSAR |  
SOYEON CHO | TONY CRAGG |  
MARIE LOUISE EKMAN | JAN FABRE |  
LUCIO FONTANA | FRANCESCO GENNARI |  
DAN GRAHAM | RICHARD HAMILTON |  
MONA HATOUM | HYE RIM LEE |  
CHARLOTTE HODES | MIMMO JODICE  
| MARYA KAZOUN | JOSEPH KOSUTH |  
JANNIS KOUNELLIS | RAIMUND KUMMER |  
FEDERICA MARANGONI | ORLAN |  
JEAN MICHEL OTHONIEL |  
LUCA PANCRAZZI | ANNE PEABODY |  
GIUSEPPE PENONE | ANTON PEVSNER |  
BETTINA POUSTTCHI |  
ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG | MAN RAY |  
RENE RIETMEYER | SILVANO RUBINO |  
SANDRO SERGI | KIKI SMITH |  
JANA STERBAK | LINO TAGLIAPIETRA |  
KOEN VANMECHELEN | FRED WILSON |  
KIMIKO YOSHIDA | CHEN ZHEN |

**GLASSTRESS**

**Design**

46xy studio

**Editorial Coordination**

Gabriele Nason, Filomena Moscatelli

**Copyediting**

Emily Ligniti

**Translations**

Brenda Lea Stone

**Copywriting and Press Office**

Silvia Palombi

**US Editorial Director**

Francesca Sorace

**Promotion and Web**

Monica D'Emidio

**Distribution**

Antonia De Besi

**Administration**

Grazia De Giosa

**Warehouse and Outlet**

Roberto Curiale

**Cover**

Jan Fabre, *Shitting Doves of Peace  
and Flying Rats*, 2008 (detail)

*photo* Francesco Allegretto

*graphic design* Facchinetti+ Fortuna

**Photo Credits**

Francesco Allegretto

Chris Amaral

Ela Bialkowska

Christopher Burke

Geoffrey Clements

Alex Deyaert

Francesco Ferruzzi

Andrea Fiesoli

Gasull Fotografia

David Heald

Mimmo Jodice

Joerg Lohse

Fondazione Marconi

Attilio Maranzano

© Archivio Penone

Paolo Semprucci

Studio Marangoni

Studio Shinji Kimura

Markus Tretter

Paolo Vandrash

© Kimiko Yoshida

Oliviero Zane

We apologize if, due to reasons wholly beyond our control,  
some of the photo sources have not been listed.

No part of this publication may be reproduced,  
stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form  
or by any means without the prior permission  
in writing of copyright holders and of the publisher.

© 2009

Edizioni Charta, Milano

© the artists for their works

© by SIAE 2009: Josef Albers, Arman, Jean (Hans) Arp,  
Louise Bourgeois, Daniel Buren, César, Jan Fabre, Lucio Fontana,  
Richard Hamilton, Jannis Kounellis, Raimund Kummer, ORLAN,  
Jean Michel Othoniel, Giuseppe Penone, Anton Pevsner,  
Robert Rauschenberg, Man Ray, Chen Zhen

© the authors for their texts

All rights reserved

ISBN 978-88-8158-743-8

Printed in Italy

Berengo Studio 1989 srl

Fondamenta Vetrai 109/a

30141 Murano-Venice

Tel. +39 041739453

Fax +39 0415276588

e-mail: adberen@yahoo.it

www.berengo.com

Edizioni Charta srl

Milano

via della Moscova, 27 - 20121

Tel. +39-026598098/026598200

Fax +39-026598577

e-mail: charta@chartaartbooks.it

Charta Books Ltd.

New York City

Tribeca Office

Tel. +1-313-406-8468

e-mail: international@chartaartbooks.it

www.chartaartbooks.it

## GLASSTRESS

53rd International Art Exhibition  
La Biennale di Venezia

Istituto Veneto di Scienze Lettere ed Arti –  
Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti  
Scuola Grande Confraternita di San Teodoro  
Venice 6th June – 22nd November 2009

### project conceived and organized by

Adriano Berengo

### in collaboration with

Laura Mattioli Rossi *and* Rosa Barovier Mentasti

### guest curator

Francesca Giubilei

### exhibition management

#### *general coordination*

Adriano Berengo

Marco Berengo

Francesca Giubilei

#### *exhibition staging*

Koen Vanmechelen

#### *organizing secretariat*

Alessandra Versace

#### *shipping department*

Daniela Bufo

#### *insurance broker*

Pierluigi Morasco

#### *biographical apparatus*

Elena Cimenti

Maria Antonietta Sergi

#### *translations*

Brenda Lea Stone

### berengo studio

#### *master glass blower*

Danilo Zanella

Walter Ballarin

Roberto Mavaracchio

Roberto Salso

Giorgio Alzetta

Roberto Berengo

Valter Brunello

Roberto Campello

Mauro Falcier

Gianni Gallo

Stefano Gritti

Francesco Juris

Stefano Lo Duca

Paola Malvezzi

Gianluca Rossetti

Giovanni Scarpa

Alvise Schiavon

Giacomo Semenzato

Diva Trevisani

Marino Zaffalon

## communications and graphic design

Facchinetti + Fortuna

### PR agencies

CLP Relazioni Pubbliche

SGLA Susan Grant Lewin Associates

### special thanks to

Dawn Bennet

Viveca Bosson

Andrea Busetto

Sandro Franchini

Christian Minotto

Marcello Mormile

Nu Fest

Giovanna Palandri

Karolina Petersson

Susan Scherman

VeneziaNews

Angelika Knapper Gallery, Stockholm

Estate of Robert Rauschenberg, New York

Fondazione Giorgio Marconi, Milan

Guy Pieters Gallery, Sint-Martens-Latem

Marcello and Valeria Forin

Galeria Toni Tàpies, Barcelona

Galerie Buchmann, Berlin/Lugano

Galerie Karsten Greve, St. Moritz

Galleria Continua, San Gimignano

Galleria Fumagalli, Bergamo

Galleria Massimo Minini, Brescia

Galleria Michela Rizzo, Venice

Galleria Raffaella Cortese, Milan

Josef Albers Museum Quadrat Bottrop, Bottrop

Joseph Kosuth Studio, Rome

Kukje Gallery, Seoul

Malborough Gallery, London

Francesca Minini

Robert and Dianne Moss

PaceWildenstein, New York

Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice

Patrizia Pepe

Maria Antonietta Sergi

Tucci Russo Studio per l'Arte Contemporanea, Torre

Pellice, Turin

### many thanks to

Assicurazioni Generali

B Restaurant

Neal Bluebird

Karlijn De Jongh

Fonderia F.Ili Bon

Gruppo Fallani allestimento spazi espositivi

Stoffel Hias

Kuhn&Bulow Versicherungsmakler GmbH

Marconati Vetri

Ongaro&Fuga specchi veneziani

Sarah Gold

Rosa Salva pasticceria & catering

Enzo Rossi Róiss

Falegnameria Santini Andrea e Paolo

Noemi Salamone

Mario Sbordone

Silvano Signoretto

TRATTO Trasporti d'arte

Valle Romano di Valle Alessio

special thanks to all the artists  
for the enthusiasm  
they brought to this project

### supported by



### VENICEPROJECTS



### with the patronage of



General Consulate of Belgium  
in Milan



General Consulate of Japan  
in Milan



### sponsored by





23	AN ADVENTURE IN THE ART OF GLASS
	<i>Adriano Berengo</i>
24	MODERNISM AND GLASS
	<i>Laura Mattioli Rossi</i>
27	A SUSTANCIA LUMINOSA Y MALEABLE, THE GLASS
	<i>Rosa Barovier Mentasti</i>
33	WOMEN'S GLASS
	<i>Francesca Giubilei</i>
38	THE CRAFTSMAN AND THE MANUFACTURER
	<i>Giacinto Di Pietrantonio</i>
41	GLASS AND THE PSYCHE
	<i>Fausto Petrella</i>
49	RECASTING GLASS
	<i>Tina Oldknow</i>
52	RETURNABLE CONTAINERS
	<i>Luca Beatrice</i>
55	GLASSTRESS / WORKS
132	ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES
141	GLASSTRESS / EXHIBITION
159	GLASSTRESS / SPECIAL PROJECT











Marya Kazoun and Berengo Studio staff





Adriano Berengo and Lawrence Carroll







Adriano Berengo, Silvano Rubino, Shintaro Akatsu and Tony Cragg











Charlotte Hodes



Koen Vanmechelen















# AN ADVENTURE IN THE ART OF GLASS

Adriano Berengo

I began my adventure in the world of glass in faraway 1989. I say “faraway” because twenty years have passed since that date and many things have changed in the approach to this material including the recognition it has managed to obtain in other, distant yet conversant milieus. I am referring, in particular, to the world of art.

When, with great humility and care, I began to work with glass, I immediately understood the necessity and importance of working so as to free it from the exclusively commercial ghetto in which it had been imprisoned for years. There was an urgent need to free glass from the outmoded tradition that confined it to a material used exclusively for prestigious everyday objects.

Intellectual integrity compels me to say that in the mid-twentieth century the great Egidio Costantini had already begun this courageous enterprise, inviting great masters of modern art to the island of Murano and involving Peggy Guggenheim, the multi-faceted collector and patron, in his project. I only had the courage and perhaps the recklessness to continue along the path forged by Costantini.

Today, on Murano, those who support the idea of glass as an artistic medium are few, their actions sporadic, and their voices weak. Berengo Studio stands out for its innovation, the farsightedness of its projects and its ability to develop opportunities for the worlds of glass and contemporary art to come together.

“The emphasis on the creative process and on things in the making will not exclude works in classical media,” writes Daniel Birnbaum with regard to the 2009 Biennale.

The Studio I created has welcomed a multitude of artists from around the world. In this place, they have had the possibility

of experimenting, of challenging this material, of conceiving surprisingly innovative works—in short, of *Making Worlds*, thus giving their creations the meaning of a vision that fully welcomes the *Thought and Realization* project.

As a rule, I support emerging artists and artists who come from horizons distant from that of glass. “Glass artists” do not work at Berengo Studio, but rather artists who, before coming to Murano, have worked with completely different techniques and materials. This choice guarantees a fresh approach and the ability to look with entirely new eyes at the material, something that would otherwise not be possible.

The history of this island, with its centuries-old expertise, its skilled workers, its unique tradition, its recent past—marked by great names in art who have worked with its master glassblowers—and its present marked by a growing fervor and a new wave of experimentation led by contemporary artists have contributed to building a new world that perhaps no one had believed was possible.

The theme of the 53rd Venice Biennale is “the construction of new worlds,” which seemed to me the perfect occasion to present an exhibition in which to try to imagine *another world*, a context where glass—thanks to the inspiration of great international artists—has the possibility of showing the best of itself. For this project, which I immediately realized I could not bring about alone, I have asked the cooperation and help of two experts: Dr. Laura Mattioli Rossi, curator, and Dr. Rosa Barovier Mentasti, historian of glass. I am firmly convinced that synergy is essential for realizing good projects, good ideas, and grand objectives, and hope that this project can be a splendid opportunity for contemporary art, the artists, the world of glass, and the island of Murano.

# MODERNISM AND GLASS

Laura Mattioli Rossi

The two *Runners* in the Museo Archeologico of Naples look at us with bright and intense eyes made from glass paste, like those of the five *Danaides* nearby. The glass-cameo panel portraying the initiation of Ariadne (15–54 CE) is one of the museum's treasures, together with a *balsamarium* shaped like a dove in blue blown glass also from Pompeii just as the other finds. For the Ancients, it was normal to use different materials in statuary and, in general, in plastic arts—wood, stone, marble, bronze, wax, terracotta, and glass—were used according to the object's value and the artifact's characteristics. Polychromy always complemented the shape. This great freedom continued throughout the centuries and lasted from Antiquity to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, up to the mid-eighteenth century, namely to the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. In Gothic cathedrals, frescoes were replaced by stained glass windows; glass beads and glass inserts on the clothing of the most noble figures were common in frescoes and polyptychs, and glass and copper were used to create precious miniatures. Only with neo-classicism and the affirmation of the artistic culture of the Academies of Fine Arts did a rigid hierarchy of values establish itself regarding even artistic materials, placing marble and bronze statuary, mural and oil painting above all other materials, to which was assigned the accessory function of decoration in the sphere of "minor arts." But this rigid distinction lasted only a short time. It was swept away, on one hand, by artists' experimentation (Degas created his *Fourteen-year-old Ballerina* in 1880, with flesh-colored wax and real hair, clothing, and shoes and Medardo Rosso began to model works in wax in 1895), and on the other hand, by Art Nouveau and the Vienna Secession, which had put forward and practiced a renewed fusion of the arts since 1890.

But the revolution that gave artists complete liberty in the choice of material and made glass a new material of predilection was launched by the avant-garde movements and found its full expression with the affirmation of modernism in the first half of the twentieth century.

Umberto Boccioni was the first to theorize that modern sculpture should be made of several different materials in his *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture* from 1912, claiming the need to

"destroy entirely the literary nobility of marble and bronze [and to] deny that one must use a single material for a sculptural ensemble." He even proclaimed "the abolition of the closed statue" in favor of a new plastic genre, in which the figure merges with the environment: "So that transparent planes of glass, strips of metal, wire, interior or exterior electric lights can indicate the planes, the tendencies, the tones and half-tones of a new reality." He gave concrete form to this program with his sculpture *Fusion of a Head and a Window* from 1913, in which a woman's head in painted plaster was crowned by a wooden and glass window and given a finishing touch by a glass eye, horsehair, and an iron wire that audaciously outlined its profile.<sup>1</sup> The use of different materials could seem to be a mere expedient for realism (as Margherita Sarfatti must have believed in 1913 when she visited the artist's studio), if Boccioni had not found in glass itself a material, both transparent and reflective at the same time, the means by which to give concrete form to his ideas regarding the interpenetration of the inside and the outside and the blending of bodies with the surrounding space through light. The evolution of futurist poetics towards an ever greater abstraction as in Giacomo Balla's work and towards mechanical-like forms as in Fortunato Depero's sees the return of glass—together with wire, mirrors, colored tinfoil, and "very flashy materials"—among the items necessary to create abstract and dynamic plastic constructions, as stated in their manifesto, *Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe*, dated March 11, 1915.

At that time, Marcel Duchamp began to fashion a revolutionary work in glass that was destined to become a milestone in the history of art, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*, known as *The Large Glass* (1915–1923, Philadelphia, Museum of Art). Starting from an idea based on some drawings from 1912–1913, he decided to abandon the purely pictorial research of the cubists in order to create completely different works in concept and aspect. The choice of working with glass was born somewhat by accident: having used a piece of glass as a palette, Duchamp was intrigued by the fact that the color could be seen from both sides and thought that this would force the spectator to make a choice of which side to view. He then explained: "The transparency of the





1

glass is important, because it creates depth, as opposed to the boring sense of background created by canvas. Each image on the glass has a precise goal, and nothing is put there simply to fill an empty space or solely to please the eye.”<sup>2</sup> The reflectivity of glass permits not only seeing the work but also the surrounding space, optically projected on its surface. Thus it becomes the place, almost immaterial, where the projection of three-dimensional objects drawn by the artist and the reflections of real objects meet. From 1964 to 1968, Duchamp dedicated himself to creating a series of etchings depicting individual elements that appeared in *The Large Glass* and how the work should have been if it had not remained unfinished in 1923. During the same period (1965 and 1971), the English painter Richard Hamilton, a friend of Duchamp and a thorough scholar of his work, curated a one-man show of the French artist at the Tate Gallery in London (1966) and produced a series of works inspired by *The Large Glass*, one of which reintroduces the funnels used in the lower part of *The Bride Stripped . . .* and is on display in the current exhibition.

Another fundamental work of Russian constructivism should have been constructed largely in glass, *The Monument to the Third International*, designed in 1919 by Vladimir Tatlin: an anti-bourgeois architectural monument, abstract and mobile, 400 meters high and made up of a cylinder, a cone, and a cube, all of glass, encircled by a slanting metal spiral. This bold and difficult design was never produced by the Party, which was opposed to abstract art, but remained a fundamental point of reference that inspired generations of artists. Two other constructivist artists, the brothers Anton Pevsner and Naum Gabo, put forward in 1920 in *The Realist Manifesto* an art that used abstract shapes, geometric principles, architectural plans, and dynamic lines, able to depict the contemporary world in both space and time. Refusing the static mass as a constant sculptural element, they created plastic ensembles with transparent materials that enabled them to reformulate in a complex way the relations between full and empty, concave and convex, internal and external. While Gabo preferred new materials like Perspex, Pevsner used glass above all, as in the work on display in the exhibition.

In 1919, in Weimar, Walter Gropius founded the Bauhaus school

of architecture and applied arts where young people could receive anti-academic training. The school also included a glass workshop, overseen by a master of shape and a master craftsman, which was practically inexistent in 1921—when Josef Albers decided to attend—for want of students. Albers got permission to work alone and, lacking both technical support and materials, went about collecting from the dump bottle pieces and bottoms in many different colors. He therefore created his early compositions with glass debris, held together by iron, lead, and copper wires as well as metal parts, also recycled. The tangibility of the material, its geometrical shapes and rustic character gave extraordinary strength to these works, whose potent luminosity contrasted with that of traditional oil paintings. Appreciated by his teachers for this work, Albers was put in charge of the workshop together with Paul Klee. In this way, he was able to continue his experimentation, implementing increasingly complex techniques to create stained glass windows and glass paintings, with a production that continued until the early 1930s.<sup>3</sup>

As is sadly known, the 1933 Nazi repression of Jews and intellectuals forced many artists and notable German speakers to emigrate, while the totalitarian regimes in power in the Soviet Union and in Italy, not to mention the Spanish Civil War, in actual fact paralyzed the most creatively innovative and expressive talents. In the 1930s, the artistic scene seems to have been characterized by the dying out of the revolutionary impetus, which had sprung up at the beginning of the century. Apart from some extraordinary and isolated figures, such as Picasso, only surrealist and abstract artists, mostly active in France or fled to the United States, continued to develop new ideas and images that, however, were alien or unrelated to the distressing and tragically inhuman social and political situation. As in the case of Miró, who sought to free painting from any bourgeois legacy and to put into action a systematic technical revolution, their images were created with unusual materials, which sometimes included glass.

The end of World War II was met everywhere with an overwhelming desire to move on from the past and to build a new world, in which art would play a role next to scientific and technological innovations in renovating everyday life and the world. Filled



2

with this new excitement, Lucio Fontana drew up his *White Manifesto*<sup>4</sup> in Buenos Aires in 1946. He posited the need for an artistic renewal that corresponded to the “transformation of the material base of existence,” the new organization of work, and the “great scientific discoveries.”

He asked: “We call on those in the world of science who know that art is a fundamental requirement for our species, that they may direct part of their research towards discovering that malleable substance full of light, and instruments that will produce sounds which will enable the development of four-dimensional art.” In fact, the material that Fontana imagined had already existed for millennia. It was glass, a material that soon entered the artist’s paintings breaking their two-dimensional aspect and lighting them with intense touches of color.

In the second half of the twentieth century, paintings on canvas lost their frames, pictures stopped being “square,” assuming more and more various shapes. Art materials, often untraditional ones, were chosen freely. Today when an artist decides to continue using only canvas, brush, and paint, he does so as a challenge to tradition, following the specific decision to take a stand. Not only different types of materials (textile, metallic, chemical, etc.) but also everyday objects are used as artistic means. Glass is not only worked “artistically” but also used in the shape of industrially produced everyday objects—like bottles, glasses, vials, or light bulbs—that become at once artistic materials and subjects. It is the case, for example, with the works on display by Man Ray, Arman, and César, but even with some photographs by Mimmo Jodice.

Glass, in its various forms, is particularly adapted to the research carried forward by some artistic movements, such as conceptual art or Arte Povera.

Joseph Kosuth created one of his most famous conceptual works in glass (*Clear, Square, Glass, Leaning*, 1965), using four identical square sheets of glass and writing one of the four words of the title on each, like four spoken definitions, all equally true but also insufficient to describe the object.

Roni Horn creates powerful masses of rather transparent colored glass and often pairs them, to indicate contrasting and ambiguous perceptions and conceptions, like solid and liquid, mass and

transparency, fragility and solidity, identity and difference . . .

Barbara Bloom evokes the dialogue between past and present, the ability of tradition to prompt questions and answers, the fragile existence of shapes and words passed down to the world of today.

Other artists, like Larry Bell and Dan Graham—interested in working on the spectator’s perception and the psychophysical aspects related to it (such as the perception of angles and planes in an asymmetrical system or self-perception in an open/closed space)—prefer to use glass sheets because of their reflective and transparent qualities.

Arte Povera has made widespread use of glass in all its various forms, from Mario Merz’s *Igloo* and *Tables* to Giuseppe Penone’s *Nail and Candles*, 1994 and from Luciano Fabro’s *Basins (Iconography)* to Gilberto Zorio’s *Alembics* and to the wall compositions by Jannis Kounellis, to name only a few.

Glass has also become the preferred material for many artists who express themselves through shapes that allude in various ways to the human body. As Fausto Petrella argues in his text, glass has characteristics opposite from the body. But it is precisely for that reason that it lends itself to becoming a metaphor of the fears and desires of the deeply rooted Self: the fragility implied by incurable wounds or total destruction, the transparency that reveals how much is hidden from view but no longer today from medicine and science, the ability to hold and at the same time to show liquids, including organic ones, or anatomical parts, and the ductility that allows it to assume complex and basic forms simultaneously, have made glass one of the richest expressive media available to these artists.

#### Notes

1. The sculpture, lost, is known by some photographs taken by Lucette Korsoff at the Exhibition of Futurist Sculpture by the futurist painter and sculptor Boccioni, held at La Boetie gallery in Paris from June 20 to July 16, 1913.
2. *Marcel Duchamp and Other Heretics*, edited by Arturo Schwarz, Milan, Skira, 2008, p. 137.
3. Regarding glass production by J. Albers, see *Josef Albers. Vitraux. Dessins. Gravures. Typographie. Meubles*, exhibition catalogue, Château-Cambrésis, Musée Matisse, July 6–September 29, 2008.
4. The quotations from the Manifesto are taken from *Art in Theory 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Charles Harrison, Paul J. Wood (eds.), pp. 652–653.



# A SUSTANCIA LUMINOSA Y MALEABLE, THE GLASS

Rosa Barovier Mentasti

There is an ancient work, very well-known to lovers of glass, which continues to astonish visitors to the Römisch-Germanisches Museum in Cologne because of its beauty and superb execution. It is a high-relief portrait of Augustus, dated to the first century CE, probably cast using the lost-wax process in dark blue glass that, over the millennia, has acquired a splendid surface coloring of turquoise with striking plays of silvery iridescence. It is about five centimeters tall but its delicate modeling distinguishes it from among the hundreds of sculptural portraits of the emperor that are known today. If the technique of casting glass in a mold had been as advanced at that time as it is today, perhaps the anonymous glassmaker who made it would have created a larger work that might very well have become not only the symbol of the seminal exhibition, *The Glass of the Caesars* (1987), but would also have been displayed in an exhibition on Imperial Age sculpture. The portrait would have enjoyed even greater appreciation had it been sculpted in snow-white marble. This confirms how ephemeral, if not imaginary in certain cases, the border between art and decorative art is, and how the size and choice of material have conditioned our perception for centuries, creating conventional barriers in the vast and varied field of artistic expression.

Over the last decades, the world of art has radically changed as it has opened up to materials and techniques that some time ago would have been unacceptable or even unimaginable. However it has been difficult for glass to be considered an artistic medium, perhaps because, in the popular imagination, it is closely associated both to useful household objects and to the brilliant craftsmanship often tied to traditional decorative models. If today it is found in contemporary art exhibitions, this is due to the absolute freedom with which some of the greatest artists have chosen their techniques and materials, including glass when it meets their needs, without letting themselves be conditioned by prejudice. The critics—and the public as well, notwithstanding some resistance—cannot but take into consideration and accept the most unconventional choices if they believe them to be compatible with the work at hand.

The first faint signs of change were seen more than a century ago. Emile Gallé, perhaps the most important pioneer in modern glass, introduced a new perception of glass as an art material. In recalling Gallé's works at the 1889 Paris World's Fair, Jules Henrivaux, a careful observer of both industrial and artistic glass at that time, wrote in 1911 that the glassmaker from Lorraine had demonstrated "how much art, poetry, how many deep and exquisite intents, delicate and rare thoughts can be put into the composition of a simple flower vase or into a drinking glass. It seemed one could go no further in animating matter with such a wealth of feeling and spirit." The author continued by stating that Gallé had actually gone even further at the 1900 exposition.

It is obvious that not all Gallé workshop's craft products must be considered in this light, no matter how pleasantly decorated they may be, but more exactly the unique pieces that Gallé personally created. Through these exceptional works, he was able to express his impassioned involvement in the current events of his time as well as his profound and very personal feelings (which themselves were, nevertheless, in tune with the spirit of the age). Through many vases, Gallé proclaimed his support for Captain Dreyfus, unjustly accused of high treason in 1894; he was also intensely committed to condemning the Armenian genocide, as he expressed in the chalice *Le sang d'Arménie*. His aims were not superimposed on the glass but were intrinsic to it. An outstanding example is a famous vase, created with sophisticated experimental techniques and whose surface is a relief decoration of herbs, flowers, mushrooms, and even falling leaves. On the shoulder of the vase, one sees a delicate butterfly, beneath which, at closer look, lies a menacing spider's web: created inside the wall of the vase, the web can be seen only when held up against the light. In this way Gallé conveyed the feeling of life's precariousness and the transience of beauty, addressing those sensitive enough to intuit his message without recurring to striking and dramatic images. There is no question that this work could only have been created using the transparent and chromatic



3

overlays of glass, which, in this case, highlight how glass was the only possible expressive medium.

Yet Emile Gallé has remained confined within the world of the art of glass, and his works, although highly prized on today's market, are considered "mere" vases. What he did however has reverberated far and wide. Some artists wanted to create an all-Venetian response to Gallé's innovations; so renowned glassmakers from Murano created vases, using specifically the murrhine technique—of noteworthy decorative value but without the expressive merit of the best works by the glassmaker from Nancy. It was however the Murano painter Vittorio Zecchin who, together with his Venetian friend Teodoro Wolf-Ferrari—more inclined towards the Munich Secession movement—designed a collection of fused murrhine vases and small plaques, in a style close to that of the Viennese Secession, for a 1913 exhibition in Munich and a double solo at the 1914 Venice Biennale. The two painters were aware of the interest shown by the Art Nouveau movement, the Viennese Secession, and the Munich Secession towards decorative techniques. In the catalogue of the international exposition, the two painters announced their intention to produce outsized stained-glass windows that, at the time, were not possible to make owing to the size of the furnaces at the (otherwise well-organized) Barovier glassworks, where their works were produced. Zecchin and Wolf-Ferrari were fascinated by the transparency of glass and the variety of colors that, in their view, could enhance the colors of their paintings, while avoiding the interruptions required by the metal structure in traditional stained-glass, thanks to the technique of fusing polychrome tesserae, i.e., "murrhine." In reality, they never brought to completion their project of creating large stained-glass windows fused into a single piece, something with which Paolo Venini would experiment in 1957 and which has been adopted more recently at the international level following the improvement of the glass-fusion technique, applied however to a base sheet of colorless glass.

The art of creating stained glass windows is certainly the one most intimately related to that of painting, so much so that since the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, many painters,

as well as artists dedicated strictly to that art, have been involved in making the cartoons for stained glass windows to be executed by specialized glaziers. Some minor painters actually have given the best of themselves to stained glass. One Venetian example is that of the Murano painter Girolamo Mocetto, who left us his masterpiece in the lower part of the large stained glass window in the Church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo. In the late 1920s, using traditional techniques, Vittorio Zecchin made a stained glass window that involved using a metal structure for the MVM Cappellin & C. glassworks. The same glassworks exhibited stained glass windows by Carlo Scarpa, Ernesto Thyat, and Mario Sironi at the 1930 Milan Triennale. Sironi's stupendous work, which can be seen at Milan's Civiche Raccolte di Arte Applicata at the Castello Sforzesco, demonstrates how stained glass windows, if made with blown glass and worked by hand, can rival paintings while claiming, of course, their own expressive autonomy and can reach the very heights of excellence through the chromatic shades and irregularities that result from artisanal glass working techniques.

Since the beginnings of contemporary art, numerous painters as well as designers, not only in Venice but, in reality, especially outside of Venice, have experimented with stained glass. Henri Matisse stands out as among the most famous. Between 1949 and 1951, he conceived stained glass windows in Mediterranean colors as an integral part of his design for the Chapelle du Rosaire in Vence in the French Maritime Alps. Other great colorists, like Marc Chagall, were attracted by stained glass, as well as the rationalist architect Le Corbusier.

Examples of forays by painters and designers into the world of stained glass are so many and varied that they would require a very substantial treatise. If some have made use of traditional artisanal techniques, using a metallic framework and grisaille painting for details, others have preferred to abandon them so as to bring out the intrinsic colors of glass and the polychrome lights transmitted (by day) and reflected (by night) that intensify the glass material per se. During the twentieth century, stained glass followed an evolution-



4

ary path parallel to that of painting, sometimes acquiring a liquid appearance—glass is actually a supercooled liquid—sometimes that of a geometric pattern. Much more than glass mosaic art, which however has always involved even great painters, stained glass art has been renewed by technology through the use of experimental processes and sometimes an ingenious use of recycled materials. Besides, who among us has not given in at least once to the temptation during a visit to a glass furnace to collect leftovers from the work—drops, colored threads, and sharp pointed bits of glass that then stayed in our pockets as fragile, useless souvenirs? The artist looks at them with a visionary's eye and senses their potential.

It is impossible to examine all the projects undertaken in this sector by artists or designers interested in experimentation. Josef Albers, a German artist who moved to the United States, stood out for his audacity; while at the Bauhaus—first as a student and then as a teacher—he created stained glass windows with a metallic frame. The glass parts were broken pieces of glass and bottle bottoms found in the Weimar dumps. From 1925 onward, he developed a new, technically innovative stained glass model, conceived as a wall panel and made from layered sheets in various colors. A sandblaster was used to make the surface layers opaque; they were then cut in such a way as to create alternating shades of color. Owing to his research on the perception of color, he is considered one of the most influential color theorists of the twentieth century.

At the opposite end, flat glass has sometimes been chosen for its transparency and virtual invisibility, which remains unchanged over time. Indeed, more than five centuries have passed since Murano's Angelo Barovier in around 1450 was successfully experimenting amidst the alchemist's retorts, alembics, and ovens of his glassworks to achieve a colorless glass without any impurities that for the first time was called crystal. And so the cryptic signs made by Marcel Duchamp using oil painting, lead wire and sheets, dust and paint in one of his most famous works, *Le Grand Verre*, or *The Large Glass* or *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915–1923),

which seem to float in the air, are actually imprisoned between two sheets of transparent glass. Sheets of glass are also used in Anton Pevsner's constructivist sculpture *Anchored Cross* (1933), this time to delineate space, together with marble and painted brass. The colorless surface is barely visible, if not thanks to its curved edge or in particular light conditions.

The sheets of glass that contemporary artists have found most fascinating however are those with mirrored surfaces. One could speak of a “neo-baroque” art founded on an exploration of illusionistic effects, if the prefix “neo” actually had some meaning and if situations, thoughts, and artistic intuitions were repeated in exactly the same way throughout history.

Mirrors, however, have always fascinated artists, who are sensitive to visual phenomena, and human beings in general, who perceive a mirror's function between sixteen and twenty-four months of age. As was highlighted by the magnificent exhibition *On Reflection*, which opened at the National Gallery of London in 1998 and was curated by Jonathan Miller (who not by chance, is a neuropsychologist, author, and stage director), the mirror has always been a part of art works or related to art in many different ways until it became a work of art in itself in the twentieth century.

Mirrors have been a tool for painters, sometimes to ensure a synchronous vision of different points of view, sometimes to do a self-portrait. It has also been used in the particular forms of anamorphic painting in which the use of a mirror is necessary to reconstruct a distorted image—let us think of the anamorphic depiction of a skull in Hans Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (1533).

Furthermore, mirrors have been placed in paintings as an integral element of the scene depicted, especially since the fifteenth century. They have made it possible to go beyond the two-dimensional limits of canvas and to introduce into the painting a part of the scene that remains physically outside of the frame. A convex mirror then acts as a wide-angle



5. Bettina Pousttchi piece / set-up crew in action  
 6. Bettina Pousttchi  
 7, 8. Lino Tagliapietra



5

lens. Think of the *Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and His Wife* (1434) by Jan Van Eyck, which shows an image, otherwise impossible to see, of the rear of the room that includes the painter himself between the two figures. Giovanni Bellini, for his part, is reflected in the mirror of an *Allegory* (1490) perhaps of prudence, perhaps of conceit. In *Las Meninas* (1656), Diego Velázquez introduced in his painting, by way of a mirror, the two sovereigns, parents of the young royals who are the centerpiece of the scene. In the composition, they find themselves in the act of being portrayed, in the position of one who today observes the painting as it is being portrayed. Infinite variations on the theme were made until twentieth-century painting.

In daily life, the mirror is a device of self-knowledge—in this sense, it is a symbol of prudence also because it allows us to look simultaneously at what is behind our backs and what is before us—and of vanity. As a symbol of vanity, it has been used since the Venuses of the Renaissance who, owing to their beauty, made this vice acceptable, while it is instead connoted as grotesque when it is a wrinkled old woman who gazes at herself, as in a painting by Bernardo Strozzi (1615 ca.) or an etching by Otto Dix (1921). All the implications connected to mirrors have stimulated in various ways contemporary artists, but not only artists. One of the greatest critics and promoters of contemporary art, Pontus Hulten, was fascinated by Parmigianino's *Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror* (1523–1524) to such an extent that he introduced a copy of the original into his personal collection alongside works by Rebecca Horn, Robert Rauschenberg, Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, and Andy Warhol. The uniqueness of the sixteenth-century work comes from the fact that Parmigianino did not depict the mirror but that we are able to intuit its presence because of the disproportion of the youth's body and the distortion of the background.

Parmigianino's painting fixes on canvas a purposely distorted image of the painter at a time (the sixteenth century) when the flat, non-distorting mirror was already being produced and its use becoming widespread. It was therefore the artist's deliberate intention to manipulate objective reality and

its proportions. Today, in mirrors that become works of art, the viewer each time interacts in different ways with the work itself and the surrounding environment, which is also reflected in the artwork. It almost becomes a work in motion, whereas in reality it is the onlooker who moves and the immediate surroundings changes. Entering one of Dan Graham's *Pavilions*, made of flat or curved, semitransparent, transparent and reflecting walls, gives us a new outlook on the setting, as it is transformed by the interaction between ourselves and the glass surfaces. In Daniel Buren's installations, mirroring effects are combined with the colored reflections of bands of brightly hued gels. His extraordinary installation constructed in 2005 inside the Guggenheim Museum in New York accompanied visitors along their descent of Wright's spiral ramp, leading them to experience ever-changing visual sensations. Not all reflecting glass works are architectonic and monumental, even though the current artistic trend is prevalently oriented in that direction. Let us mention—to cite three examples that require being seen from up-close—Sergio Bovenga's sculptural forms, Anne Peabody's delicate silver leaf surfaces finely etched with images that have a dream-like vagueness, and the "Venetian" mirrors of one of the most extreme figures in body art: ORLAN.

The debt contemporary art owes to the dada movement deserves to be stressed over and over again; dada was the movement that proclaimed the right of an artist to confer the status of art on a readymade object, presented as such yet deprived of its function, or assembled into sculptures, bas-reliefs, and collages. This revolution has developed in various ways, which are often distant from the dadaist ideological assumptions. The readymade object is a recurring element in contemporary works and installations; it is often an anonymous industrial product that the artist feels free to fill with meaning, which is of course a direct expression of the artist's thoughts and emotions. Finely manufactured objects are usually shunned either because they bear too strongly the imprint of whoever invented and produced them, or because



6

they seem too far from the present-day society accustomed to industrial design and standardization. It is not so for Barbara Bloom, the extraordinary American conceptual artist whose installations, made of collected and finely executed objects, visually recreate a very personal world in which memories, literary tastes, self-perception, and the perception of others flow together. She loves small, everyday things that also correspond to her attention to detail in her observation of people. By her own admission, she is particularly attracted to porcelain and glass that, owing to their fragility, bring to mind ephemerality.

Even if her work suggests them in some way, Bloom is a long way from dadaism and other later movements—new realism, for example—that hailed urban scrap as materials with which to create works of art. She is far from Arman and César who, in different ways and with different aims, collect and put together many objects of the same type, giving them new life and using them like colors on a palette. In these works, glass occupies an important place as it is found abundantly in everyday trash, unlike traditional art materials such as marble and bronze. The attitude of these artists, however, implies indifference toward the artist's ability to transform matter and toward the “craftsmanship” aspects of creative work, which had been considered inalienable values for millennia.

The new generation of artists has moved partly away from this position. For instance, Luca Pancrazzi, in recycling everyday objects—a chair, a lamp, a ladder—transforms them and gives them new light—“light” in the literal sense—as he covers his objects with brilliant shards of glass that glitter and mystify the viewer. Soyeon Cho blends disposable products, lighting sources, glass beads, and other items into evocative, highly colored, and luminous artifacts. There is consequently some regenerative intervention performed by hand, almost as if the call to recycle materials (to melt glass and metals and to pulp used paper in order to make new objects)—a moral imperative in present-day society—had awakened the world of art. Or is it art that has contributed to opening our eyes?

In contrast to the trend for using sheets of industrial glass, readymade objects, and urban scrap, some artists in the second half of the twentieth century decided to create works or parts of works using the traditional and often very refined manual techniques of glass-making, without a sense that their creative role was diminished in any way. Actually, a similar phenomenon also took place in the world of furniture and furnishings, which followed a course parallel to that of art. In fact, while industrial design was being successfully developed, movements aimed at promoting extremely well-made traditional crafts were also being born. They were a great success with the public and often resulted in the creation of exceptional, one-of-a-kind pieces, especially in glass. This development was already taking place during the 1950s in Venice and in Bohemia, and nurtured the American Studio Glass movement through visits by young Americans to Europe and teaching by European masters in the United States.

The choice of some artists to have expert glassmakers craft their works in all or in part was born from the growing interest generated by this material; in any case, its use is conditioned by the meaning that the artist attributes to glass, a meaning that often is connected to such intrinsic qualities as transparency and fragility. Thus, Louise Bourgeois, in expressing her lacerating memories and her sense of isolation, has also used glass together with her favorite materials: marble, bronze, and fabric. Kiki Smith, a passionate technical innovator with a predilection for decorative art techniques, uses glass for totally non-decorative ends. Mona Hatoum often plays ironically on oppositions, such as that between the pleasantness of fragile colored glass and what can be modeled with it. Chen Zhen has chosen glass to represent parts of the body, his own body, and to speak about its very delicate balance which can be destroyed by the slightest thing.

With glass in Bohemia seen as a material for carving, sort of an artificial semi-precious stone, the Bohemian glassmakers of Studio Glass developed techniques that went beyond cutting and engraving; in first place was casting, which allowed the production of works of sizes never before seen in glass. The



7

great Bohemian master glassmaker, Stanislav Libensky, who taught numerous students in his country and abroad, including some interesting artists from the United States, exhibited massive pieces of colored or colorless glass whose surfaces, by turns, are rough or perfectly shiny. The glass works by the American Roni Horn, well-known in Italy, refer to the Bohemian school of glassmaking for the techniques chosen and her sensitivity towards the medium; she has always worked with pigment drawings on paper that she then cuts up and assembles. From these spatial compositions, she goes on to create solid geometric forms in cast glass, which on the vertical side are generally rough with the upper surface clear and polished. Looking at one of these works means plunging one's vision into a pool of water that, in reality, is a block of a "supercooled liquid," the depth of which cannot be perceived.

Since the 1950s, the Venice glass furnaces have boasted a steady stream of artists unfamiliar with the world of glass yet who are fascinated by the material and the skill of the city's master glassmakers. For instance, it is known that Giuseppe Santomaso worked with the master glassmaker Archimede Seguso, and that his pieces were exhibited at the 1951 Milan Triennale. The interest displayed by Italian and foreign artists, especially painters, towards Murano glass was facilitated by the foundation in 1953 of the Centro Studio Pittori Arte del Vetro by Egidio Costantini, a figure whose merits still have not been recognized by Murano. He organized the studio—later called the "Fucina degli Angeli" ("Furnace of Angels") by Jean Cocteau—so as to coordinate the collaboration between recognized artists and master glassmakers. These were artists such as Jean Arp, Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall, and Max Ernst, who had marked and would continue marking the history of art of the twentieth century. Meanwhile, spatialism was gaining ground. The *Manifesto Blanco*—written by Lucio Fontana in 1946 in Buenos Aires—imagined the use in spatial art of a *sustancia luminosa y maleable*; although not identified, the substance seems to have the characteristics of glass. It was not by chance that Fontana himself and other artists close to



8

him joined the Fucina degli Angeli or, in any case, chose glass as an expressive medium. Some of them, like Luciano Gaspari and Vinicio Vianello, even decided to work as glass designers, alongside their artistic activity.

If the Fucina degli Angeli, not having its own furnace, could only have its pieces produced at dependable furnaces, Murano workshops have often hosted artists who wished to create works in glass. For twenty years, Berengo Studio's mission has been to facilitate the collaboration between artists from outside the world of glass and glassmakers. Creating a unique piece of art in glass implies a preparation phase with technical experts who can assist the artist in assessing the feasibility of his design and the possibilities offered by glass. The artist is therefore present at the furnace when the work is made, which is a guarantee of its authenticity. It is a delicate operation that requires both an understanding of the material on the part of the artist and an interpretative sensibility on the part of the master glassmaker. Over time, some artists have included glass among their own means of expression and have established an ongoing relationship with Berengo Studio. In this exhibition, they include Marie Louise Ekman, Marya Kazoun, Silvano Rubino, and Koen Vanmechelen. Others have made occasional incursions into glassmaking or have come to it recently, such as Lawrence Carroll, Tony Cragg, Jean Fabre, Raimund Kummer, Rene Rietmeyer, and Fred Wilson. In their work, glass is celebrated for its quality as a colored and ductile material, which can be blown and shaped in a race against time when fire has brought it to a malleable state, using the ancient techniques typical of Murano.

It is also to pay homage to the Murano tradition and its inexhaustible ability to innovate that Lino Tagliapietra was invited to display one of his installations at the *Glasstress* exhibition. Tagliapietra is the most famous Murano glassmaker-artist in the world today; he has been able to demonstrate how a very ancient material and traditional expertise—that of Venice—that dates to before 1000 CE can become incarnate in undeniably contemporary works.



# WOMEN'S GLASS

Francesca Giubilei

"I see life only with one eye; the other is made of glass.  
Though I see many things with this single eye,  
I see much more with the other one.  
Because the healthy eye allows me to see, the blind one to dream."

Paruir Savak,  
Armenian poet (1924–1971)

Is it still pertinent and does it even make sense to wonder what it means to be a woman artist today? In other words, is it still appropriate to think about the relevance of differences in gender and how these are more or less directly reflected in cultural differences?

The debate is still open and of significant importance since if, on the one hand, it is true that women artists have always expressed a great desire for equality, and that the world of art has always been more egalitarian in respect to other social spheres, on the other hand, works by women artists have allowed their differences to be revealed.

It is wrong to link women to their gender identity in the artistic sphere, yet the biological difference actually carries with it some expressive differences that cannot be ignored.

Though it has never been easily accepted, the image of woman as self-reliant, free, emancipated, creative, and creating, not only in a biological-reproductive sense but also as a creator of ideas, thoughts, and different worlds, goes back to distant times.

It is Lilith.

The archetype of the feminine, a mythological figure of great modernity.

Created not from man but in parallel to him, she did not accept submitting to male power and, for this reason, was expelled and damned.

Lilith thus seems a modern-day symbol representing the emancipation of women and the equality reached between the sexes in the contemporary world.<sup>1</sup>

Besides many well-known names, the exhibition gives space to some young women artists who explore various aspects of

femininity. In particular, the six women artists discussed in this text, through their works, have touched upon such complex and controversial themes as the dualism between nature and artifice, reality and imagination, inside and outside, visible and invisible, man and woman.

The thoughts that underlie their creative process and the practical completion of their works are never irrelevant to womanhood.

In her works, Kimiko Yoshida provocatively displays and questions stereotyped images of women. In large self-portrait photographs, her face and body are continually transformed.

In her 2006 series entitled *Self-portraits*, the artist dresses up in traditional wedding costumes from various cultures that reflect the same message: the central role of marriage in the life of a woman.

The photographic self-portraits of Kimiko Yoshida are based on close connections between baroque canons, minimalist elements, and anthropological and ethnographical references. Her photographic work represents a journey across time and history, but above all a reflection on the condition of women in the past and present.

The use of costumes, besides helping the artist to dissolve her own identity and offer a universal image of existence, also refers to an activity much loved by little girls, who dress up to emulate their mothers, offering an attractive and seductive self-image to conquer first their fathers and then other men. This cycle of works, collected for the 2001–2006 *Infinity Wall* project, examines the link between woman and the tradition of belonging, which often imprisons her in the role of wife-mother-sexual object.

The 2005 series *Self-portrait with a comma*, through the use of monochrome, particular lighting effects and glass, has allowed the artist to transmit a particular sense of fragility, precariousness, and impossibility.

In these works, the comma has been chosen as a symbol of language. It dominates and almost totally covers the artist's face, acquiring a distinct meaning: language, traditionally a male prerogative that has often been used as a weapon



9

against women, is represented and synthesized here by a large blown-glass comma that hides the feminine face of the artist and “shuts her up.” On the one hand, the lack of communication between the two sexes is denounced, on the other, the differences in their languages.

Many women artists owe their creative drive to the personal pain they have had to endure.

For example, Marya Kazoun, through works that use a broad spectrum of techniques (photography, installations, performance, and painting), attempts to give shape to the most private fears and anguish so as to make them more bearable.

A fervid, almost childlike imagination lets her combine the figurative with the abstract in her works. Kazoun is attracted by ambiguity and contradiction. In her works, which utilize a variety of materials, she depicts menacing and tentacular forms, anatomical parts and organs that, through her creativity, acquire nobility, charm, and splendor. The materials used (fabric, wire, paper, pearls, glass, bamboo, and pieces of plastic bottles) come from the banality of everyday life, but through her work they acquire a new life, becoming ethereal and impalpable.

With embroidery she studies and delves into things to see what is below the surface, behind the mask, and under the skin. Often the objects and settings created are marked by strong female symbolism.

Marya Kazoun is a new Lilith, a loving but authoritarian sovereign, surrounded by the Amos, asexual semi-human creatures that, as physical and mental extensions of herself, follow her everywhere on all fours while she moves, mistress of herself and her space, inside her imaginary world. She can be despotic but is also a protective mother. She takes it upon herself to carry the heavy burden of a suffering and oppressed humanity. She caresses and heals her monstrous children, holding them to her bosom to protect them from the aggressivity of the outside world.

The artist entrusts to the beauty, refinement, and delicacy of her art the task of softening humanity's dark side. She embroiders, sews, and draws as if she were reciting a mantra to



10

help her tame the untamable, control the irrational, and give order to chaos.

In her works, she uses “warm language,” intensifying the tactile aspect of the materials. She reintroduces, in artistic form, the manual skill of a craft traditionally performed by women—weaving, an activity that today is rejected by many women.

The 2009 installation-performance *Habitat: Where he came from*, present in this exhibition, reverses the usual roles. Kazoun always plays the part of the main character but this time she is not personally responsible for humanity's salvation, rather it is Momoth—a prehistoric creature that lives among the glaciers and that a little girl, giving voice to the artist's childish fears, calls to help the human race.

Anne Peabody grew up in Kentucky, USA, in the 1970s when the consequences of the feminist movement were dispersing, resulting in the abandonment of traditional crafts by women. Fascinated by her research on myths, by fairy tales and the private, domestic setting, the artist depicts in her work a happy and ideal “pastel-shaded” world.

Her 2004 work *Sidewalk* is a composition of mirrored sheets of glass placed on the floor that invite the observer to take a stroll and walk beside them as if on a path; they tell of a particular moment in the artist's life and suggest an interaction with the observer, who is invited to take part in the process of recovering memories.

Drawn on the surfaces are some common objects from the everyday reality of women and others that refer to the artist's life (a small comb, a stuffed teddy bear, etc.).

Glass and silver fragments freeze these objects, transforming them into memories and divesting them, at least partly, of their emotional charge. At a certain point, the path stops, the glass is shattered, and the dreamy, ethereal atmosphere is disturbed. Something that was is no longer there; the imagined perfection and happiness are perhaps not real.

Maybe it is the end of childhood, or the beginning of a traumatic period. We do not know, but it is not so important. What counts is the message transmitted by Anne Peabody's work,



11

9, 10. set-up crew in action  
11. Marya Kazoun

in other words, the sense of frustration in the face of smashed dreams and hopes.

In her 2005 work *The Silver Show*, the artist has recreated a bedroom atmosphere; the great delicacy and skill with which the objects were made and distributed about the space transmits a strong sense of timelessness and suspension. The use of glass and thin silver foil worked using an ancient technique give the ambiance a subtle and undefined touch. The observer feels wrapped in a moment of memory, inside a remembrance. Her language of symbolic signs is a metaphor to describe subtly the transience of life and the meaning of memory.

An interest in recycled materials and in the fairy tales and dreams of the female world are the themes examined by Soyeon Cho.

The artist brings together two ideas: on the one hand, the beauty and originality of the works she creates with various recycled materials represent an attempt to imagine another world better than the real one; on the other, through the use of recycled materials, she provides a profound criticism of our consumer society.

In capitalist society, the supreme value seems to be the right/obligation to pursue happiness—an instantaneous and perpetual happiness that derives not so much from the satisfaction of desires as from their accumulation. In this type of society, everything becomes a commodity, even individuals who, like any other product, are likely to become trash, “throwaway lives.”

The message that the artist seems to make is the same as the one that Zygmunt Bauman, one of the most noted and influential thinkers in the world, has been trying to convey for some years now: “Every day we consume without thinking, without realizing that consumption is consuming us. It is a silent war and we are losing it.”<sup>2</sup>

Soyeon Cho’s research is mainly about the dualism between the natural and the artificial; she is interested in the study and discovery of artificial materials and in their possible reuse in unusual contexts.

With cotton swabs, plastic forks, and telephone wires, Soyeon

Cho creates imaginary landscapes, full of light and color.

Her 2009 work *In Bloom* is a large flower made of disposable forks and iron wire. In the center a giant pistil, made of small glass bottles and LED lights, rises from the corolla.

Behind the long manual labor necessary for the creation of this mobile sculpture lies the desire to give new artistic value to objects, the wish to look at the world with a different pair of eyes. Glass in particular—which she introduced only recently into her work—allows her, thanks to its intrinsic characteristics, to reflect on both the transience and fragility of what surrounds us, of what we possess, and contributes to shaping our identity and the need and desire for permanence and stability that we are continually seeking.

Soyeon Cho uses various objects and materials, symbols of modern-day frustrations and unhappiness, to give shape to an alternative reality, as in *Wonderlandlust* from 2005 where she has turned reality upside down in the true sense of the expression; every rational and physical rule has been overturned and everything floats in a very colorful and ironic world.

In recent years, the young generation of artists has opened new territories and possibilities in representation and expression, thanks to the spread of digital technologies that allow the creation of a virtual reality. The Korean artist Hye Rim Lee’s 2007 video installation *Crystal City Spun* is a 3-D animation that tells a fantasy tale based on an intermingling of Eastern and Western popular culture and the study of new technologies and how they influence tradition. It is a reflection on today’s increasingly “changed” female identity, as a result of cosmetics, plastic surgery, and genetic manipulation.

TOKI, the video’s main character, is part woman, part child, part animal, part machine; she is the result of some cyberspace mistake, an imaginary figure that incarnates male sexual desires and the aspirations of feminine beauty.

The dragon YONG, her traveling companion, is the symbol of Asian identity and culture. Unlike in the West, where the dragon is associated with negative values, in the East, it is a symbol of courage, loyalty, and strength.



12

Crystal City is a fantasy world that evokes nostalgia for childhood but it is also a world filled with obsessions and insanity. Crystal City, an artistic project “in progress”, is a reflection on how the female sexual identity is perceived and used at a global level.

The graphics used inevitably refer to the manga tradition, but are mixed with Western aesthetic ideals, thus giving life to a transgender, transcultural heroine who lives in an imaginary world governed by testosterone.

Through an exploration of videogame dynamics, intended for a male public, and a fascination with new technologies, the artist Hye Rim Lee has used a different outlook to analyze some aspects of popular culture, globalization and especially femininity in relation to the media.

Never before has the human body, particularly the female one, been so manipulated.<sup>3</sup> Starting from this consideration, the artist in her 2004 work *Super Toy* makes explicit reference to the idea of transforming and modifying the female body through cosmetic surgery. TOKI becomes a tool with which to criticize –with irony and from inside – contemporary culture, the result of male chauvinist thought that encourages the pursuit of the perfect female body, or better the one that suits male sexual desires. TOKI is not a passive female but a heroine who publicly submits to the tortures of the scalpel so as to show everyone the excruciating process to which women must submit themselves in order to reach the ideal of beauty imposed upon them by men.

Through her numerous works, Hye Rim Lee demonstrates that the exploitation of the female body is still very much a relevant

question. Her work straddles stylistically the East and the West but the reality she tells about is unfortunately universal. No grace but tension and analysis in the works of Bettina Pousttchi. The German-Iranian artist's sculptural and photographic research abandons the realm of the personal and the private to address the external, i.e., society.

Her glass and metal sculptures are the expression of a strong, tough, and combative femininity.

The materials used, although difficult to shape, are distorted, bent, and twisted as if by exceptional strength.

Bettina Pousttchi loves to catch the observer off-guard by creating a sense of confusion and uneasiness. Through the interaction of the various sculptures, she creates settings that are cold, disorienting, and aseptic.

In *Blackout I-IV* from 2008, she positioned various metal crowd-control barriers, powder-coated in black, that block the normal and rational passage of people. Some barriers are standing while others are on the ground, almost as if they had been knocked down by someone, perhaps an uncontrolled mob.

In reality, the space is deserted, creating a certain tension and the unpleasant sense of latent violence, which could explode again from one moment to the next.

The artist frequently uses objects, generally urban furnishings, as models for the sculptures that she then places in unusual settings.

Removed from their urban context, these objects acquire completely different meanings and become messengers of a social criticism directed at institutional power.

A recognized authority imposes rules and places barriers that





13

the artist provocatively and idealistically knocks down, alters, and ridicules.

Through this distortion-destruction of objects, symbols of our society, Bettina Pousttchi mocks political power and depicts it as a victim of its own coercive violence.

What has been said so far has permitted highlighting how women artists—or artistic women, if one prefers—express themselves with a different, female (as it is) understanding that reveals a strong creativity and expressive energy but also a great gift for introspection.

All the women artists mentioned here share a common desire and need to investigate a multifaceted world and to examine thoroughly the connections between the individual and the universal spheres, between everyday reality and fantasy, between art and life.

In addition to the female aspects of creation, the six women artists are united—in this exhibition in particular—by their use of glass, as the central material in their works.

If one thinks about it, the choice of this material by a woman artist seems a rather unusual one, especially as it refers to a material, a craft, and a creative act commonly considered masculine. The women artists that decided to test themselves through this experience have had to deal with this reality and reflect on the subordinate relationship that still exists between manifestations of female and male creativity. The woman who chooses to use glass as an expressive medium, by having to face a male chauvinist hierarchical system, disturbs the pre-established order and asserts her own creative freedom.

Furthermore, how can the many similarities and connections

that exist between the female nature and that of glass go unnoticed? Vitreous paste is the matter best suited to evoke a sense of the everyday anxiety, inconsistency, and uncertainty that characterize every individual and, particularly, the contemporary woman.

From an opaque, incandescent, malleable, and unbreakable mixture, glass distills into a clear, delicate, cold, and sharp material. Resistance and fragility characterize both the nature of glass and that of women.

The women artists of today probably no longer consider themselves the weak link in the process of artistic creation. They are certainly not fragile in their active role as creators; on the contrary, by measuring themselves against glass and the male world that surrounds it, they strengthen and expand the presence of women in the world of art.

#### Notes

1. Trevisan, Maria Luisa. *Lilith. L'aspetto femminile della creazione*. Venice: Quaderni di Concerto d'Arte Contemporanea, 2004, p. 11.
2. Bauman, Zygmunt. *Consumo, dunque sono*. Bari: Laterza Editori, 2008, p. 107.
3. Cf. with *Ibid.*, pp. 149–150.

#### Additional Bibliography:

- Bartolena, S., *Arte al femminile. Donne artiste dal Rinascimento al XXI secolo*. Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2003.
- De Gregorio, C., *Malamore. Esercizi di resistenza al dolore*. Milan: Mondadori Editore, 2008.
- Lonzi, C., *Sputiamo su Hegel. La donna clitoridea e la donna vaginale e altri scritti*. Milan: Scritti di Rivolta Femminile, 1974.