

# GLASS

A painting of a woman's face, rendered in warm, earthy tones of orange, brown, and red. The woman has long, wavy hair and is looking slightly to the left. A large, dark purple flower is positioned on her head, partially obscuring her forehead. In the foreground, a blue iris with long, slender leaves is prominently displayed, its stem and bulb visible. The background is filled with swirling, textured brushstrokes in shades of brown and orange. The entire painting is framed by a dark, ornate border.

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# GlobalGlass: The Triennial

48 by Brett Littman

**G**lobal Art Glass: The First Swedish Triennial is one of the most complete overviews of the international glass field to date. Börge and Barbo Kamras organized the exhibit, in the ruins of the Borgholm Castle, on the beautiful island of Oländ in southeastern Sweden. The castle itself is a major tourist destination in Sweden. A dramatic medieval structure set at the edge of a large heath, it overlooks the Kalmar sound. Architecturally, it is a perfect location to mount a glass exhibition. High ceilings, large light filled rooms and seascape views, perfectly complement the glass and

enhance one's viewing pleasure. It is also located about 45 minutes from the "crystal kingdom," home of the venerable Orrefors, Kosta Boda and Afors factories as well as fifteen other glass houses and private studios.

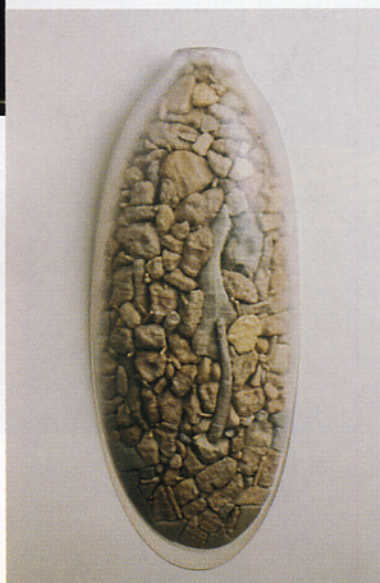
Thirty-six international glass artists working in all forms of glassworking—from blown vessels, to hot casting, kiln casting, kiln forming and neon and pâte de verre—were invited to participate. The organizers intelligently chose a wide variety

of decorative, conceptual and architectural works to highlight the diversity of contemporary art created in glass. Although the artists were not asked to produce new site-specific work for the show each artist was given a specific room or niche to display his or her work in. Marian Karel from the Czech Republic displayed his *Pyramid*, 1996 in an open-air room on the second floor of the castle. The piece was over ten feet tall and majestically filled the space. *Pyramid* is typical of Karel's work, challenging the viewer to walk around the piece to experience its constantly shifting perspectives and sight lines. The Libenský/Brychtová room was filled with seven of their signature kiln-cast sculptures on metal bases. Their room, with a view of the sound, had constantly changing natural light conditions. The ever-changing natural light created subtle mood shifts in the sculptures, as they passed from complete inner illumination to darkened hues when the clouds obscured the sun. Bert Frijns, from The Netherlands, created a meditative minimalist installation with his technique-defying kiln-formed vessels. Three slightly bent vase forms, about four feet tall, were filled with water. The viewer was drawn to these objects to inspect their size, volume and shape and also to watch the incredible display of reflected light on the surface of the water. There was also a large kiln-formed bowl that rocked in the wind as it sat precariously on a metal plate. An accident created one of the most compelling installations of the exhibit. Ulrica Hydman-Vallien had



**Borgholm Castle,  
Oländ, Sweden, site  
of Global Art glass  
Triennial.**

**Piergiorgio Tempesi,  
*Silent Stones 2*, 1999.  
Blown glass and  
stones, 55 x 22 x 8 cm.**





installed three painted-glass panel sculptures in an open-air room on the second floor. Before the opening, a bird flew into one of the sculptures and shattered the panels. In the morning, the dead bird was discovered lying on the stone floor with the glass shards. The image of the dead bird combined with the broken glass created quite a bit of speculation about the sculptures narrative content.

Hydman-Vallien quipped that since the piece was about families the bird must have been from a broken one. Paula Barton, an American born artist who is the chair of the glass department at the Konstfack School of Art and Design in Stockholm, exhibited a sandcast floor piece entitled *White Basin*, 1998. Her piece suggested a house foundation. The sandcast and polished glass looked like bricks and are displayed in the form that of a well. *White Basin* infuses its surroundings with a sense of purpose and history. It makes one think of the



Above: Christiano Bianchin, *Moody Garden*, 1998.

Hand blown glass, 100 x 18 x 100 cm.

Photo: Andrea Morucchio.

Left: Bert Frijns, *Balance*. Slumped glass. Photo: Børge Kamras.



processes used in constructing buildings. Edmée Delsol's *Untitled*, 1999, a mixed media work combines raku and pâte de verre. Raku is a low-fired and sometimes rapidly cooled ceramic that can yield strange iridescent light-reflecting surfaces. Delsol's sculptures capture the complex relationship between glass and ceramics and intertwines their long histories into a single narrative.

Several artists presented work that was anti-glass. By this I mean that their pieces directly commented on the tendency to create beautiful objects with eye-pleasing colors. Some of the most successful anti-glass pieces were created by Per B. Sudenberg, a young designer for Orrefors. His kitschy painted vessels question the primacy of perfection in glass art. During a symposium held the day before

the opening, Sudenberg explained that when he started working at Orrefors the master blowers where hesitant to work for him because his esthetic deviated from the traditional clean lines and forms of Scandinavian design. In my opinion, Sudenberg's vessels represent the future of Scandinavian glass. In order to keep up with the times the factories are going to have to allow more young artists to explore post-modern design and color to achieve a contemporary look. This was confirmed at the opening when I spoke to two journalists from Stockholm who told me that Sudenberg's pieces for Orrefors are being collected by many hip young intelligentsia in Stockholm because of their untraditional shapes and colors. Piergiorgio Tempesti's *Silent Stones 2*, 1999, was also a critique of glass art, specifically the Venetian tradition of glass-blowing. Tempesti, an artist working in Venice and a former student of Carlo Scarpa, created an installation using two

wall mounted ground glass forms containing stones. The coldworked and debased glass acts as a filter through which we can view the worthless stones. His work speaks against the commercialized and consumer based products being produced in Murano today. Tempesti's work forces us to look at glass as just another material in the world devoid of any particular valuation or worth.

As a critic writing about contemporary glass art, I am aware of the need to recognize that high quality and intellectually stimulating glass art is being produced

**Paula Bartron,**  
*White Basin*, 1998.  
Sandcasted glass,  
polished and fused.  
126 x 35 x 7 c.  
Photo: P. Bartron.



**Per B. Sundberg,**  
*Fabula*, 1999. H. 25  
cm. (Orrefors).  
Photo: Per Larsson.



outside the American Studio Glass Movement. Exhibits like Global Art Glass have a tremendous impact on educating us about internationalization of glass. My only reservation about Global Art Glass is that there were no artists from Australia or Japan, two countries with growing glass traditions. Börge and Barbo Kamras, however, are aware of this and have promised to try and include artists from these countries in the next triennial in 2002.

**Brett Littman** is a New York-based art critic and is also Assistant Director of UrbanGlass.



Above: Ulrica Hydman-Vallien, *Family Life* (detail), 1999. Painted glass, mixed media. dimensions variable. Photo: John Perreault.

Right: Edmée Delsol, *Untitled*, 1999. Pâte de verre and raku.

