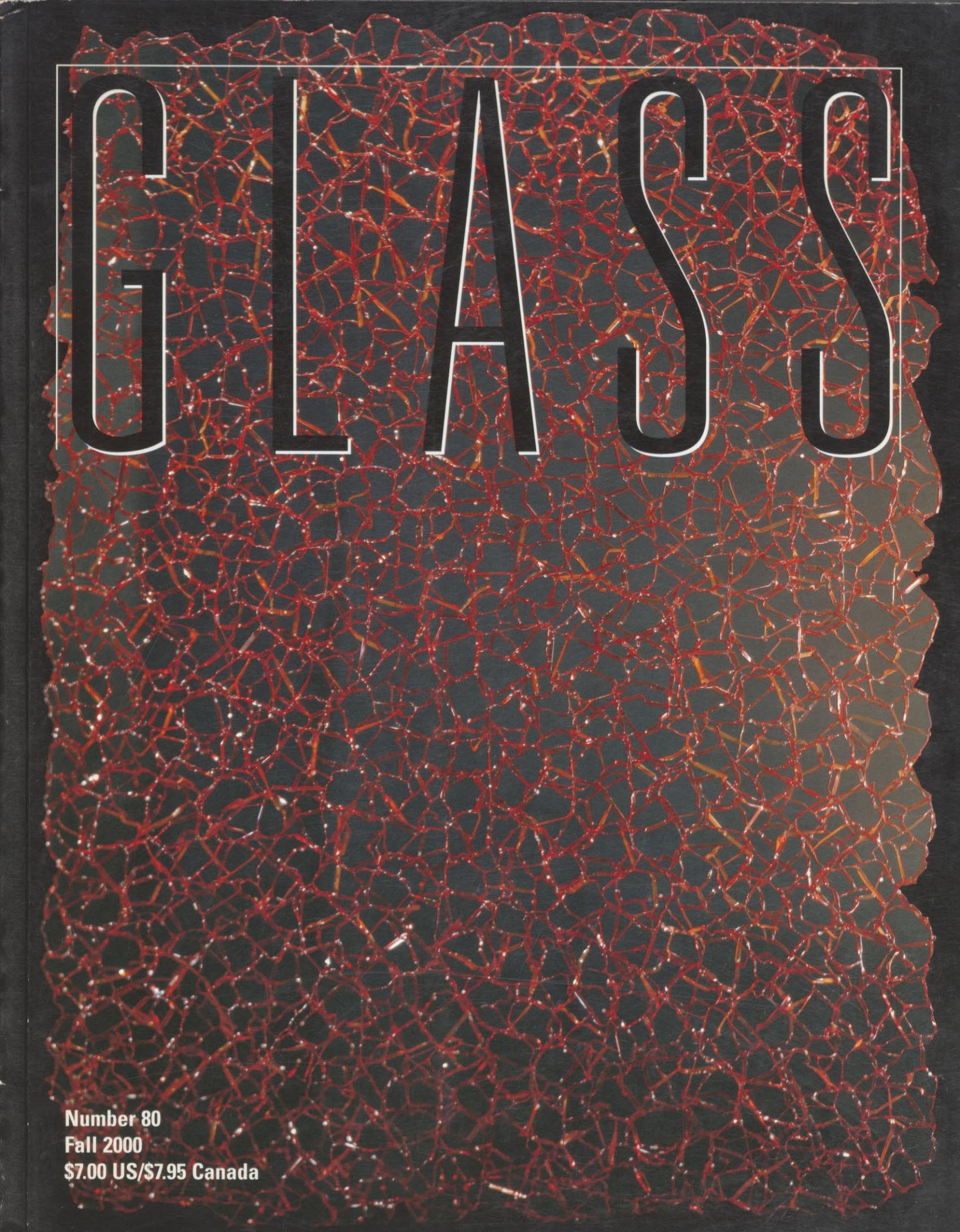


GLASS



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80

A New Paradigm

24

Matthew Kangas examines the work of four women artists—Masami Koda, Jocelyne Prince, Anna Skibská, and Kait Rhoads—and makes the case that they are adding something to sculpture, not just to glass.

Waxing Poetic

32

Geoffrey Wichert unveils the subtle poetry of Jack Wax's works.

Catalogue: Glass on Site

38

An enormous Brooklyn glass studio is turned into an exhibition site.

Swedish Peep Show

44

So you think you know what is Swedish about Swedish glass? Brett Littman presents the work of the latest Swedish superstar. Hint: he started in clay.

Portfolio: Glass Express

52

In New York's hottest art district, six artists push the limits of glass.

Reviews

56

Ben Edols and Kathy Elliott, Michèle Blondel, Lorella Di Cintio and Jonsara Ruth, Ellen Driscoll, Sandy Skoglund and Glass: A Celebration.

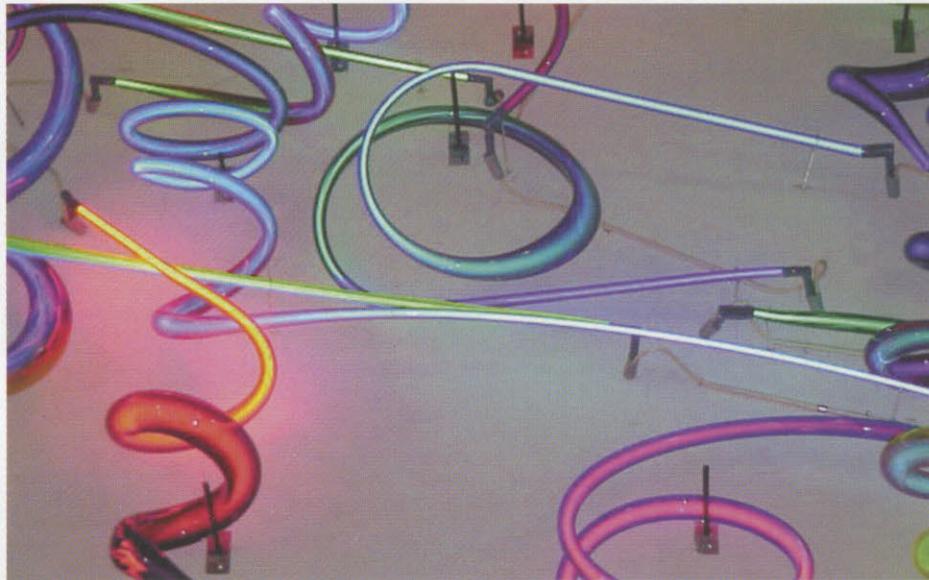
Glass Notes

68

Pilchuck's innovative program for visiting curators.

Cover:
Anna Skibská
Marge's, 1999.
 Fused glass,
 30 x 22 x 3"
 Collection of
 Marge Levy, Seattle.
Photo:
 Russell Johnson

Below:
UrbanGas, (detail)
 Paul Seide,
 Handblown tubes
 with color and neon



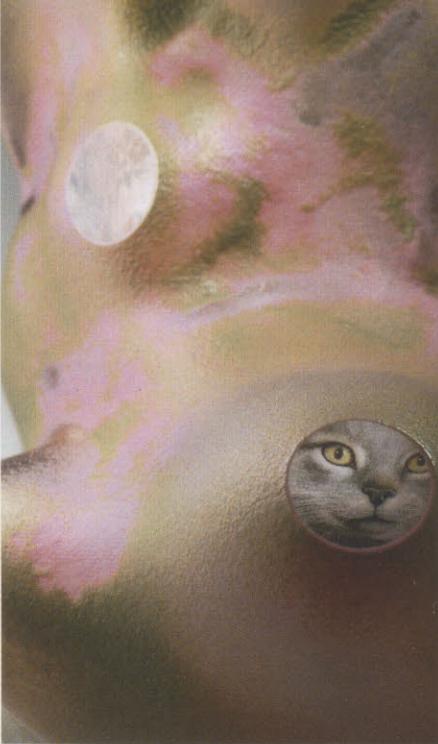
Swedish Peep Show

by Brett Littman



Red Sofa
(installation)





Opposite:
Green Chair
(installation)
Above:
Fabula, 1998

er B. Sundberg's glass objects are both startling and completely innovative. I first came across Sundberg's work at the Global Glass Art Exhibit in Sweden last summer and ever since then I have been thinking about his fantastically organic, colorfully decaled vessels.

Through his patent-pending *Fabula* technique, Sundberg has magically been able to translate clay's freedom of form and texture into glass that

has the most unusual shapes and surfaces. In May 2000, I caught up with Sundberg at the Stockholm New York Exposition where he was displaying his newest designs for Orrefors with Ann Wählström and Ingegerd Råman. I talked to Sundberg at length about his artistic process and aesthetics and his recent solo installation in Galleriet in Växjö, Sweden, that brought together his glass and ceramic objects.

After graduating in 1990 from the Konsfack University College of Art, Craft and Design in Stockholm, Sundberg worked mostly with ceramics and porcelain. His first projects were designing sinks and bathtubs. However, Sundberg's sinks and bathtubs are studies in the gray area between design and art and are completely unusable. They are decorated with decals that he had rescued from the garbage at the Gustavberg porcelain factory and have large porcelain moose and other figurines placed on top of them. He also encased functional radios, digital clocks and CD players in ornate porcelain shells that were glazed and decaled. This ornamentation is in direct antithesis to the standard sleek design that we might find in contemporary electronic equipment.

Although ceramics were Sundberg's main creative outlet, glass did play a role in his artwork. In 1988, Sundberg attended classes at the Pilchuck School in Seattle. After his stay at Pilchuck, Sundberg began to develop a series of large-scale porcelain fountains with neon

components. He fabricated lamps that combined glass shades with ceramic bases. Later, Sundberg and Gunilla Kihlgren built Fjäderholmarna, a glass-blowing studio in Stockholm so that they could continue to explore the possibilities of blown glass.

In 1994, Sundberg was one of four artists invited to participate in a contest at Orrefors to create a communion plate and a table setting. His designs were chosen by a group of critics for the top prize and Orrefors immediately hired him. Since that time Sundberg has created several serial products for Orrefors, including the popular *Starfish* candle holder and the *Mucho* and *Move* vessels, but he has truly focused on his art glass pieces.

According to Sundberg, it was difficult at first to have his designs executed at the factory. Because his aesthetic was not in sync with the more austere tradition of Scandinavian design, the master glass-blowers had a hard time understanding his style. Slowly, Sundberg was able to gain the trust and respect of the master glassblowers and they began to work for him. Interestingly enough, this might have been because Sundberg began to explore the Swedish *graal* technique that had been championed by Edward Hald at Orrefors in the 1920's.

Orrefors produced his first *Fabula* vessel in 1998. Sundberg, like Hald before him, had the glassblowers create blanks, small unfinished vessels that could be adorned with silk-screen transfers of decals, which they could then reheat, shape and encase in clear or colored glass. In the blowing process each piece is given its unique ridges, bumps and pinches under the watchful eye of Sundberg. Once the vessel is finished, Sundberg either leaves the vessel alone if it is clear or grinds the surface of the glass if it is colored to create lenses that act like portals into his personal and strange iconic world. Sundberg's image vocabulary consists of overly sentimental decals of cats, dogs, geisha girls, women, Santa Clauses, fish, birds, flowers and foxes. Sundberg's says, "I want the viewer to be drawn into my work. It should be vaguely familiar, yet still different."

The *Fabula*'s definitely force the viewer into a voyeuristic position. One needs to get extremely close to the object to look

through the peepholes to truly see what one is looking at. The magnifying properties of the glass lenses reveal glimpses of the images under the surface while the texture or coloring of the outer layer of glass occlude and mask the rest of the inner surface. This is one of the things that I like the most about his glass. There is always a fourth dimension to any vessel that is contained in the space between the inner and outer walls. Sundberg's *Fabulas* make the most of this space and create kitchy movie, like vignettes that the viewer can put together by moving around the vessel.

The other interesting things about the *Fabulas* are their forms, which are highly irregular and bulbous. They look a little like soft ice cream. This type of rhythmic rounding of the glass makes the vessels seem unstable and unbalanced, as if they were still molten.

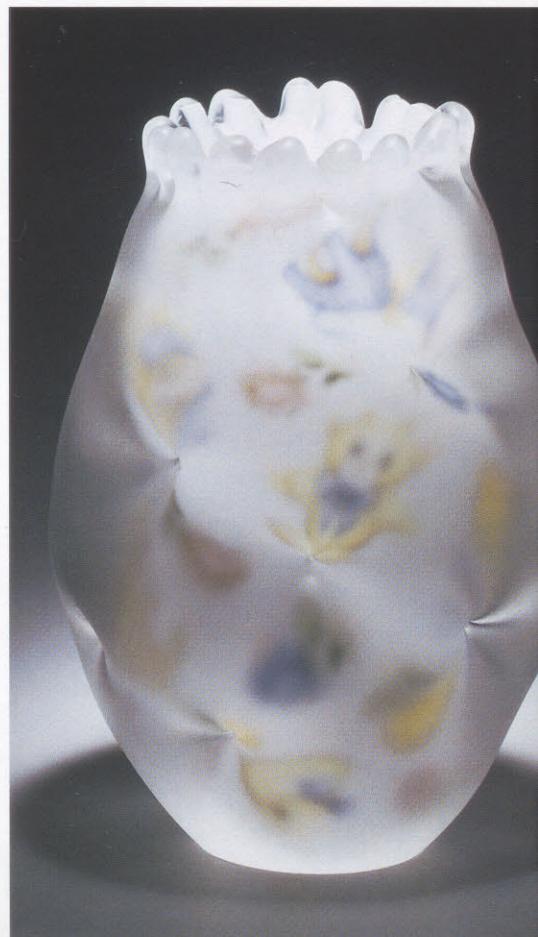
Sundberg, however, does not use the decals exclusively to make his glass pieces. There are series of Art Glass pieces (all his other unique vessels that are not *Fabulas*) that have wraps of fluorescent pinks and greens that pulse under cloudy surfaces. In other Art Glass, the pinks, browns and greens push their way to the surface and protrude roughly out into the bumps. Newer works like *Crystal Object* use simple palettes of black and white or just black to create austere patterning and objects with super tactility. *Blue Plate*, which premiered at Stockholm New York, looks like a large goose-bumped fleshed egg. The small irregular protrusions on the surface of the glass just beg to be touched. Its another example of Sundberg's ability to merge color and texture in unexpected and new ways.

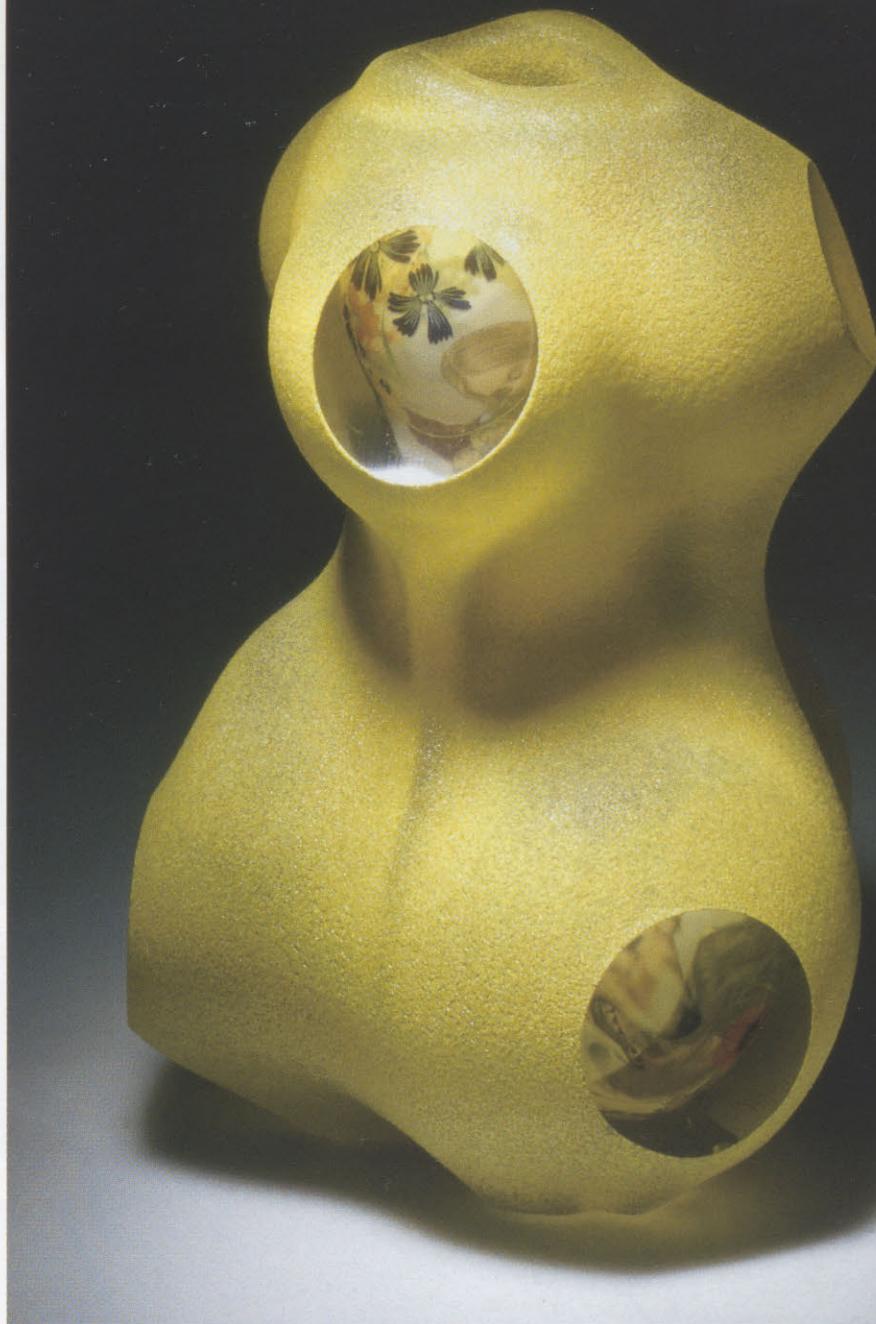
In Sundberg's current installation in Galleriet in Växjö his concerns about the relationship between designed objects and art were formalized.

Sundberg presented three separate living environments complete with vintage sofas, chairs, coffee tables, end tables and specifically placed glass and ceramic objects that he has created. The end result was a playful debunking of the idea that all Scandinavians live in well-designed homes with well-designed objects. Sundberg's glass vessels, lamps and plates are quite not quite practical and his ceramic clocks and CD players

seem more important as decorative surfaces rather than functional electronic equipment. By turning our expectations upside down of what we would expect from the traditions of Swedish design, Sundberg highlights the complicated future of the designer/artist in the post-modern world.

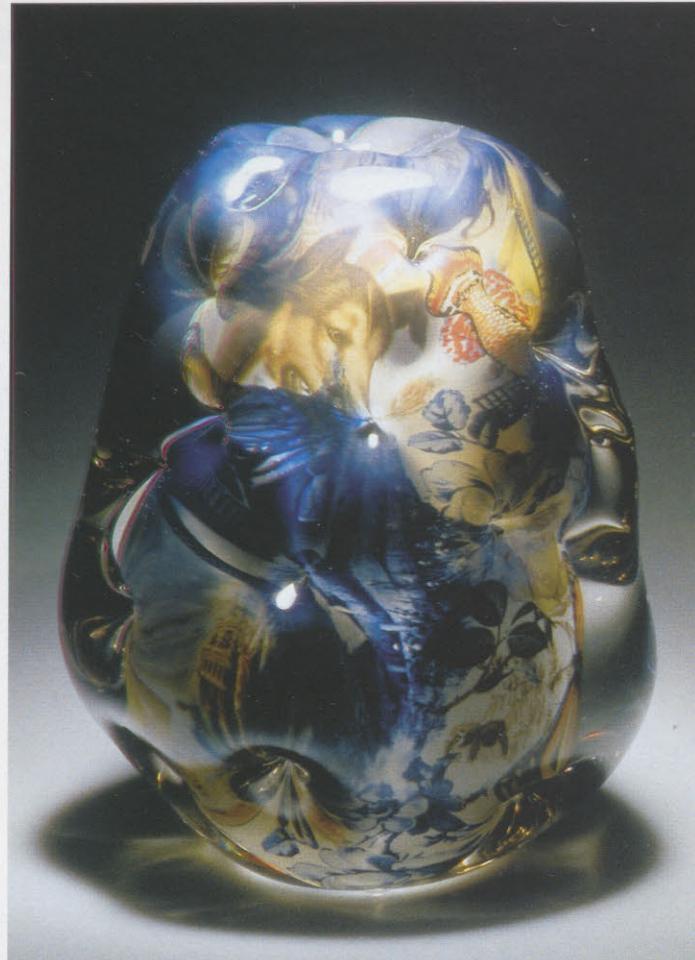
Brett Littman is a New York art critic who writes regularly for the *East Hampton Star*. He is also the Associate Director of *UrbanGlass*.





Opposite:
Fabula, 1998

Above:
Fabula, 1998



Left:
*Vase with German
Shepherd, 1999*

Opposite:
Table Radio, 1999
35cm x 30cm x 30cm

