Sponsors & Colophon

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GLASSTRESS

White Light | White Heat

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Foreword

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Professor Frances Corner OBE
Pro Vice-Chancellor
University of the Arts London &
Head of London College of Fashion

White Light | White Heat is a development of Glasstress, conceived by Adriano Berengo, President of Berengo Glass Studio and Venice Projects, in 2009.

This new exhibition is a dramatic expansion of the original Glasstress concept to include London College of Fashion (LCF), University of the Arts London and t he Wallace Collection working in collaboration with Berengo Glass Studio. New work has been especially conceived and produced for the exhibition which is jointly curated by Adriano Berengo and James Putnam, Senior Research Fellow at LCF.

The exhibition explores boundaries of fashion and fine art through the medium of glass focusing on the relationship between the artist and designer; craft skills and curatorial practice. This important collaboration offers a unique opportunity to reinterpret the rich tradition of glass in Murano alongside The Wallace Collection, a world leading museum with an exquisite glass collection and the cutting edge environment of London College of Fashion where traditional notions of fashion are challenged every day.

The exhibition had its opening at the magnificent Palazzo Franchetti as part of the 55th Venice Biennale with a selection of work being restaged in London at the Fashion Space Gallery at LCF as well as The Wallace Collection.

I am indebted to the vision and generosity of Adriano Berengo and to Dr Christoph Vogtherr, Director of The Wallace Collection for his enthusiasm and commitment.

I would also like to thank Professor Charlotte Hodes and Dame Rosalind Savill for their support and contribution and Janice Blackburn, OBE who gave us the initial introduction to Berengo Glass Studios.

Fred Wilson, Iago's Mirror (2009)
–
200 x 130 x 20 cm
Murano glass

Frances Corner OBE

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Adriano Berengo
Director Berengo Studio Murano, Venice & Co-Curator Glasstress: White Light | White Heat

There was a moment, during these months preparing for Glasstress: White Light | White Heat, when I knew for certain that the entire project was developing a fullness of meaning. I'm not referring to the fact that Glasstress, thanks to the 2009 and 2011 exhibitions, is probably the most recognisable collateral event at the Biennale d'Arte di Venezia, or even that Glasstress has started to tour internationally (the previous incarnations have been exhibited in Riga, Stockholm, New York, and Beirut, and the current exhibition will travel to London and more cities in 2013/14).

One morning in our furnace on Murano I understood Glasstress had obtained one of its objectives. That day, in a coincidence of arrivals and departures, we were hosting artists from three different countries. Each had brought their own history, project, and expectations. During a break, these three artists – who had never met before – started sharing their impressions on glass and the experiments they were conducting. This dialogue, I noticed, had greatly influenced their original projects. And so, this is Glasstress. Not necessarily an exhibition, but rather a process in which the show is not a definitive outcome.

Thomas Schütte, Berengo Head (2011)
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50 x 30 x 27 cm
Murano glass

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Adriano Berengo

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Vik Muniz, Untitled (2010)
–
108 x 52 cm diameter
Glass, brick, wood, steel

Glasstress: The Quantum Leap of Glass

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There are contemporary art works that are born as pre-established incarnations of knowledge, and then there are works that are born from experimental curiosity, where the final result is not foreseen. By allowing artists to come into contact with this known but seldom used material (in aesthetic terms), I like to think Glasstress has created for each artist the ideal conditions for limitless experimentation, open to failure, to second guessing, and to the elation of new discoveries. All of the artists have had to deal with glass, with its chemical characteristics, with its production processes, and with the aesthetic stereotypes that have accompanied this material for centuries. No one has simply expected to use glass as an interchangeable material with commonly used ones; each, in the end, has found a way to assimilate glass into his own poetic theme, expressing it concretely in the final work. These works would not have been possible without glass, they would not bear the same meanings and, in a similar way, each work of glass finds it has a new purpose it did not have before.

Glass is a solid material obtained through the cooling of a fluid, and one of its main characteristics is that it does not form crystalline structures. Its molecular structure stays amorphous, lacking a long-range geometric pattern. This greatly influences its physical and optical characteristics, but I believe this

can also act as a metaphor for its ability to be used in new ways, in functional terms (what would contemporary architecture be without glass?) and in aesthetic terms as well. Here in Venice the history of glassmaking is long and glorious, scattered with changes and innovations that through the weight of tradition, inhibits our perception of it as an artistic medium. But there certainly is not, and never has been, a long-range trajectory to follow. This is why, when I state that Glasstress has to give birth to the future of glass I do not mean this future has to be in line with the past.

Javier Pérez, Carroña (2011)
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120 x 235 x 300 cm / variable dimensions
Murano glass, stuffed crows

Adriano Berengo

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Glasstress: The Quantum Leap of Glass

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Is Glass Silent?

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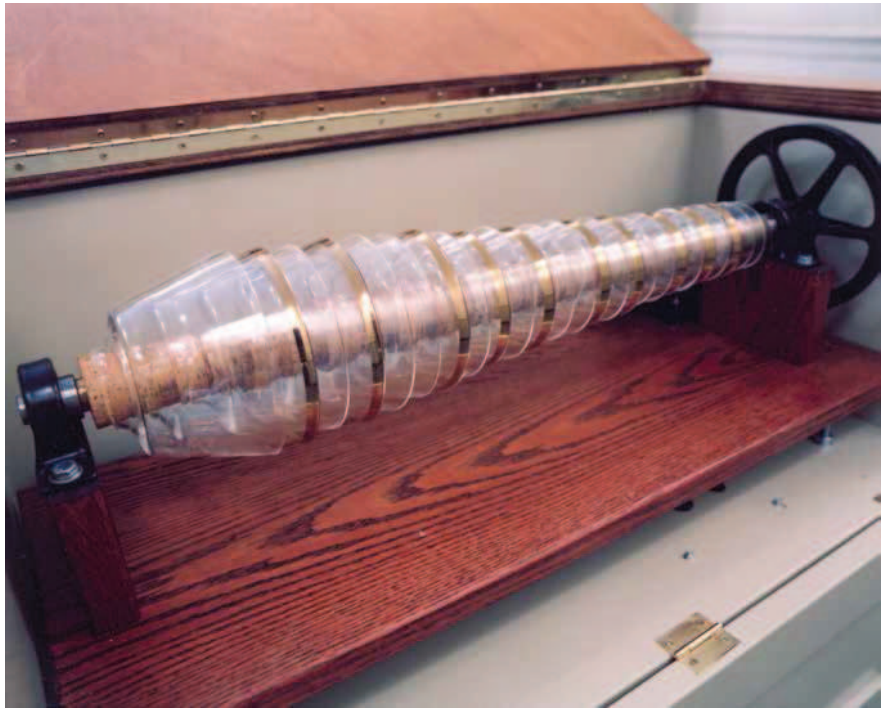
David Toop

From within an ancient trunk that may only be opened by some unexplained process of involuntary trance, a yielding to the influences of silence and darkness, the villain unpacks a set of strange glass devices – 'great pieces in strange forms'. One of them, a large glass wheel, has been shattered during this somnambulistic exercise, an explosion of aural drama that brings the sleepwalker back into an awareness of his surroundings. The glass machine is said to be an arcane instrument of magnétisme animal from the 17th century, invented by the father of modern hypnotism, Franz Mesmer. This intriguing discovery – one of the many plot strands squandered by Bram Stoker in his confused, abhorrently racist novel, The Lair of the White Worm – is symptomatic of Stoker's own ambivalent fascination with weird science and occultism.

As a technology of the psyche whose chief component was as invisible as the vitalistic energy flow of animal magnetism, the glass instrument also echoed Mesmer's use of a glass harmonica in his 18th century healing sessions. According to James Kennaway in his book Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease, contemporary accounts reported Mesmer's masterful performances on a musical instrument whose reputation was already sullied by allegations of harm, many based on deep-seated anxieties about women and their "nerves". The tones of the crystallophone, produced by rubbing tuned glass bowls with finger tips dipped in water, seemed to emerge as weightless emanation without definition or clear point of origin, as if independent of human agency. This combined with a subtle sensation of dissonance in each individual sound, a combination of factors deemed excessively "feminine", and so the instrument came to be associated with depression in men, fits in women, convulsions in dogs and death to the young. Kennaway even notes a bizarre 19th century usage (worthy of Edgar Allan Poe)



Modern Glass Harmonica

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Benjamin Franklin House, London UK

in the mortuary at Weimar, whereby corpses were attached by strings to a glass harmonica. Any who woke up from terminal slumber to find themselves mistakenly pronounced dead could alert the guards and prevent the dreaded fate of being buried alive.

There is no doubt that glass has strange properties which cannot entirely be blamed on the patriarchal obsessions of pre-modern neurasthenia. The glass harmonica, used famously by Mozart, Björk and more recently in George Benjamin's opera, Written On Skin, is the most ethereal of instruments, yet its unsettling characteristics also stem from haptic perception: the hearing, as if by the penetration of those Victorian "nerves", of friction between skin and glass (perhaps the angelic equivalent of Freddie Krueger's knife glove fingernails scraping metal). Many other musical instruments stimulate the fingertips, so it must have been the uncanny combination of glass and its sound that led one 18th century physician to caution performers that they may suffer paralysis, fainting, even see ghosts as a consequence of their profession.

I have argued in Sinister Resonance: The Mediumship of the Listener (2010) that our hearing of sound is equivalent to the experience of haunting. Sound is an absent presence, a temporal event, a ghost whose vibrations melt into air at the moment of perception. Sound leaves no trace other than memory, yet its impact is profound. A comparable contradiction applies to glass, matter that is almost invisible, smooth barrier yet opening, transparent nothingness that can turn nasty when broken. In a world in which seeing and touch are the dominant terms of reality, glass embodies those states which lack the solidity of tangible, visible and supposedly stable matter: mind, consciousness, sound, air, breath, scent. Symbolically, at least, glass bridges the Cartesian divide of mind and body in the form of compressed light.

Implicit within that compression of light is the potentiality of fission, a shattering into shards. In 1968 The Velvet Underground released their second LP, White Light | White Heat. The subject of the title track was a drug – specifically the injection of methamphetamine (also known by street names such as crystal, glass and ice) – and its speed rush. Mumbled lyrics notwithstanding, the song's significance rests on broader issues, on intensities of experience, revelation and clarity born out of abjection. The influence of composer La Monte Young was still evident at this point in Velvet Underground history. In 1960, Young composed a piece called 2 Sounds for which he combined the sound of a tin can scraped over a pane of glass with a drum stick scraped around a gong. Both sounds were close miked and amplified. "When the first sound starts you cannot imagine that any more horrible sound exists in the whole world," Cornelius Cardew wrote after a performance choreographed by Merce Cunningham. "Then the second sound comes in and you have to admit you were wrong."

Is glass silent? We maintain the illusion that silence is nothingness, a void, yet silence is perhaps closer to Marcel Duchamp's Dust Breeding of 1920, the section of the Large Glass on which he varnished accumulated dust. Events collect over time, a delay, and yet their accumulation goes unnoticed until they are fixed, perhaps by a perceptual retuning that allows the listener to become aware that silence is not silent. Redolent of alchemy, this composition of quartz sand, ash and other substances is born in the furnace, moving through states of liquidity to brittle hardness and transparency. Glass is a magical substance, a midpoint between spirit and spear. In musical contexts – The Glass Orchestra of Canada, Annea Lockwood's Glass World, the Cloud Chamber Bowls and Mazda Marimba of Harry Partch and the Baschet Cristal inventions of Bernard and Francois Baschet – the use of glass has often rested on such contradictions of delicacy and volatility, clarity and evanescence. To tune the Mazda Marimba, made of discarded lightbulbs, Partch would snap small pieces of glass from a bulb with a pair of pliers. Invoking the Persian god of light by using the brand name Mazda – "after the means of making light are removed" – invited ironic interpretation, Partch admitted, yet glass is light without light, sound without sound, silence within silence.

David Toop is Professor of Audio Culture and Improvisation at London College of Communication, University of the Arts London.

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In a world in which seeing and touch are the dominant terms of reality, glass embodies those states which lack the solidity of tangible, visible and supposedly stable matter: mind, consciousness, sound, air, breath, scent.

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James Putnam
Co-Curator Glasstress: White Light | White Heat

There is a beautiful glass fish in the British Museum's collection that was made by an anonymous craftsman in Egypt around 1350 BC. It represents a Nile tilapia fish, which the Egyptians associated with rebirth and would have been used as a container for cosmetics or precious oils. The ancient Egyptian word *hemut* is synonymous with both art and craft and in their language the expression for a sculptor, could be translated simply as 'he who keeps alive'. Since it is an antiquity it is justifiable to perceive this fish as a work of art despite its utilitarian function but had it been made nowadays its material may also render this classification questionable. Glass, like clay, is traditionally a craft-related medium that has tended to be marginalised and generally treated with suspicion by art critics. Because of its bright and shiny eye-catching qualities it has been too often dismissed as a superficial medium better suited for applied rather than fine art. Although major contemporary artists have made works in glass ever since the pioneering collaborations between the Murano glassblowers and modernist artists back in the 1950s, it seems only quite recently that glass has been more widely accepted as a new fine art medium. This wider recognition of the potential of glass in contemporary art circles has no doubt coincided with the gradual breakdown of the traditional hierarchy of materials prevalent in the art market that has allowed artists more freedom to experiment with new mediums.

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The ancient Egyptian word *hemut* is synonymous with both art and craft and in their language the expression for a sculptor, could be translated simply as 'he who keeps alive'

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Egyptian Glass Fish
–
Anonymous
Circa 1350BC, British Museum

James Putnam

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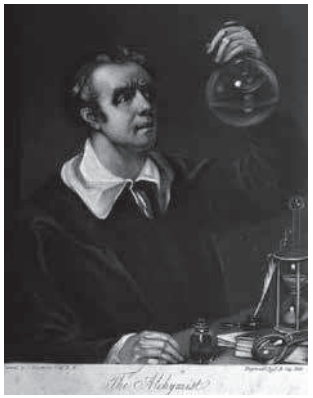
This exhibition is called White Light | White Heat not merely in homage to the innovative 1968 album by The Velvet Underground but because light and heat are fundamental to glass making – light is integral to our perception of glass while heat is required to shape it. Combining the word "white" with both light and heat provides a very evocative and symbolic semantic context. "White-hot" suggests intensely hot beyond red-hot and on an emotional level it suggests something exceedingly impassioned. In optics white is the colour the human eye sees when it looks at light that contains all the wavelengths of the visible spectrum. In a famous experiment using a glass prism, Sir Isaac Newton demonstrated that white light is a mixture of all the colours in the spectrum that can be separated into its constituents by refraction at the prism's surface. White light is also visible from the heat generated by the sun and stars and also many man-made lamps. Light and heat are the components of fire, the destructive/creative element linked to the formation of this planet. Silica or sand is the most abundant mineral in the earth's crust, which can be melted at a very high temperature in a furnace to become glass, hardening as it cools. While transformed into a molten, semi-liquid state it can be blown and shaped into sculpture then slowly cooled over a period of a few hours to a few days, depending on the size of the pieces to keep the glass from cracking due to thermal stress. One of the most striking characteristics of glass is that it is completely dependent on how the light plays on it – it is possible for it to shine with the brilliance of a diamond. Glass interacts with natural light – light brightening the surface of the objects and emphasising the purity of the material – a purity



The Alchemist
–
19th Century engraving,
Wellcome Library

Detail of glass inlay on Tutankhamun's gilded coffin
–
c.1320 BC, Cairo Museum

White Light | White Heat

–

17th Century engraving of a glass Furnace from L'Arte Vetraria (The Art of Glass)
–
By Antonio Neri, Berengo Library

shaped by light. The quality of Venetian light from the reflection of the sun on the water is said to have been crucial to the development of the celebrated Renaissance school of Venetian painters like Titian and Tintoretto. Light and heat are the products of fire, which has always been regarded not as the destroying element but as the transforming element. Made from the four elements of air, water, fire and earth, glass is a "noble" material that relates to the alchemic transformation of matter. The alchemists used fire to change substances in unpredictable ways, exploring a hidden inner world within the "material" world. Alchemy, an early precursor to science, played an important part in the history of glassmaking and glass colouring processes. The intrinsic qualities of glass offer a multiplicity of uses and we are now literally surrounded by glass from everyday industrially-produced objects such as bottles, drinking glasses and light bulbs. Appreciated for its unique architectural design strengths, glass has also become the most significant 21st century building material, used for futuristic looking buildings like The Shard in London.

Despite its use nowadays as a common everyday material, glass was once very precious. Glass-making probably originated in the ancient Near East as early as 3000 BC. By 1550 BC the ancient Egyptians were using glass as a substitute for semi-precious stones in beads, amulets or as inlay in gold and silver. Some of the most exquisite examples of ancient glass workmanship can be found among King Tutankhamun's tomb treasure, such as the polychrome inlay on his gilded coffin. In medieval times, Venice had become supreme in glassblowing with its centre moved to the island of Murano in order to keep their processes secret. In the 16th century it also became celebrated for its mirror production using a unique mercury process. Venetian mirrors were highly valued as they were considered the purest in the world and placed in richly decorated frames and installed in the major palaces throughout Europe. The beauty of the glass made in Venice was attributed to the composition of the salt and soda in the Italian silica, the type of wood used to fire the furnace and the salt composition from the ocean water used. But the traditional skill of glassblowing is gradually disappearing in Italy.

One of the aims behind this project is to keep this amazing industry alive and prolific in Murano.

According to scientists, glass is not a single material but a state of matter. It possesses some extraordinary and unique contrasting properties such as fluidity, fragility, solidity, transparency, reflectivity, opacity and virtual invisibility. The essence of glass conveys a dynamic relationship between volume, density and empty space. The reflectivity of glass enables the viewer not only to see the work but also its surrounding space, optically projected on its surface. Glass is completely different in its hot and cold states, and it is transparent, denying its own materiality. It is unique for sculpture as no other material has such an ability to change colour, texture and mass. Glass holds and reflects light as it moves from transparency to translucency to opacity; its volume may be understood in completely different ways. A case in point: mirrors have some unusual properties in that they reflect light or sound in a way that preserves much of its original quality subsequent to its contact with the mirror.

Unlike other light-reflecting objects mirrors can also filter out some wavelengths, while preserving other wavelengths in the reflection.

Glass is a magical and un-exploited medium for artists to work with because unlike any other material it has such a vast range of possible appearances – it can be bright or dull, coloured, transparent, mirrored and metallic or take any number of surface treatments and textures. Hot glass can be incandescent and glow bright orange yet still be transparent when it is molten due to different temperatures. Glass has been worked for so many centuries that a huge variety of techniques exist to produce a vast range of glasses with differing properties that offer artists fantastic possibilities to create work. The Glasstress project is quite different from other contemporary glass initiatives in that the majority of the participants have never used glass before in their work. This means that they are more likely to push the glass masters at the Berengo Studio to realise very diverse and challenging projects. They tend to bring a more conceptually-based approach to working with it than the so-called studio glass artists who are already so familiar with glass making techniques.

White Light | White Heat includes a broad range of established and emerging international artists whose works address some vital socio-political issues expressed through the multiple materialities of glass. While some artists have let the inherent qualities of the medium dictate the theme of their work, others have used this opportunity to see how glass adapts to their characteristic working practice. Besides traditional hand blown glass, the exhibition includes works in moulded glass fabricated with the latest technology, significant not only for their aesthetic appeal but because they illustrate the ever blurring of boundaries and collaborations between art and fashion and art and science.

Top: Ancient Egyptian glass phallic-shaped flask

from Hawara, c. 100 AD, Petrie Museum