



GLASSTRESS NEW YORK

NEW ART FROM THE VENICE BIENNALES

OPEN PROJECT BY ADRIANO BERENGO

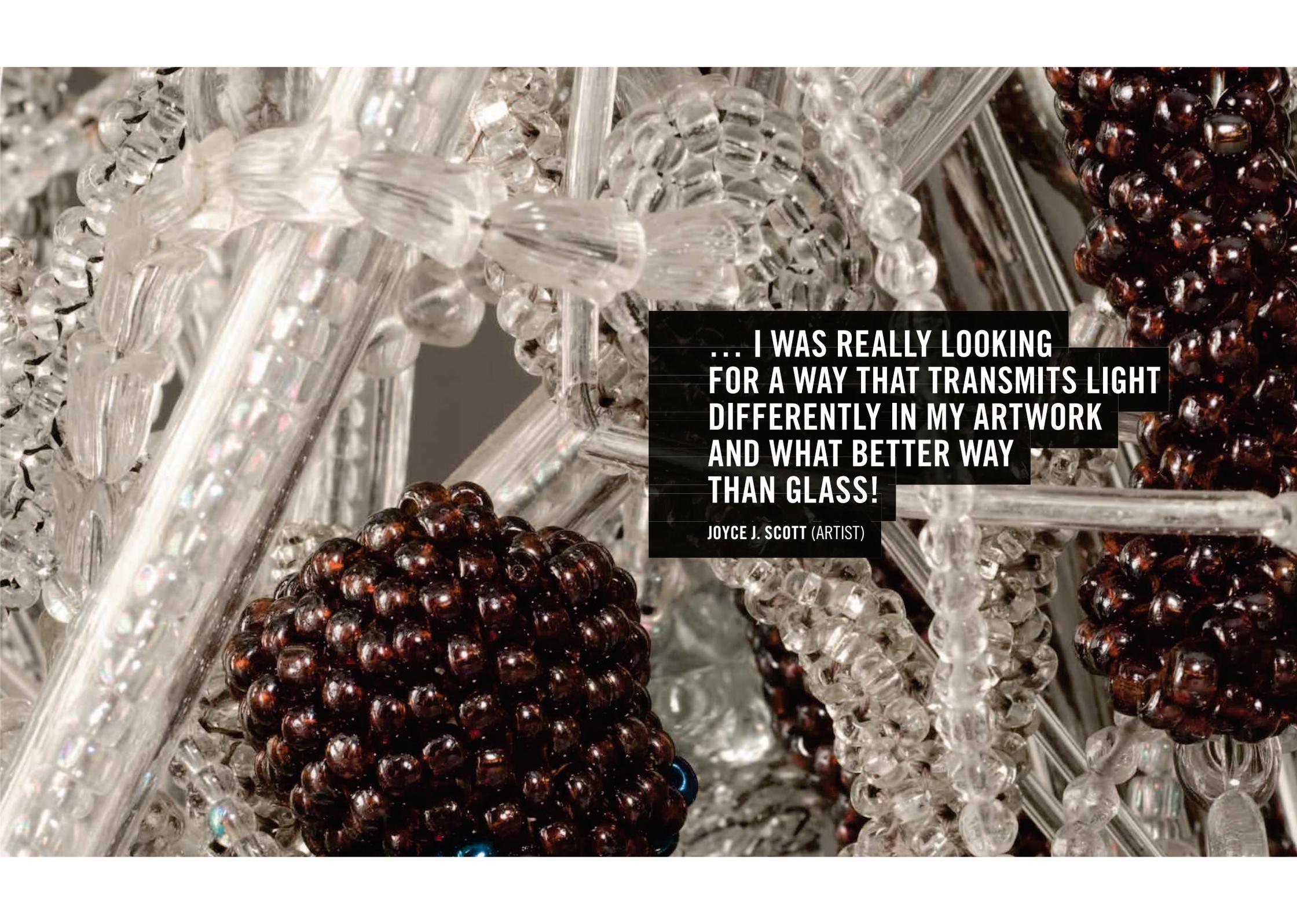
SKIRA

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SKIRA



**... I WAS REALLY LOOKING
FOR A WAY THAT TRANSMITS LIGHT
DIFFERENTLY IN MY ARTWORK
AND WHAT BETTER WAY
THAN GLASS!**

JOYCE J. SCOTT (ARTIST)

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Laura's Hands, 2011

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to this project**

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GLASSTRESS NEW YORK

NEW ART FROM THE VENICE BIENNALES

The Museum of Arts and Design (MAD, then known as the Museum of Contemporary Crafts) opened in 1956. Two years later the museum organized *Louis Comfort Tiffany*, a groundbreaking retrospective of America's most renowned and influential glass designer around the year 1900. Since that time, the museum has been a pioneer in the United States, organizing exhibitions that have explored glass in its many forms. The exhibitions have focused both on individual studio practitioners and thematic overviews of glass as a global medium. This year America salutes the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the American studio glass movement, a renaissance of artistic innovation in this medium launched in 1962 through the efforts of two pioneers: Harvey Littleton and Dominick Labino. The legacy of creativity and expertise in glass making that they founded has inspired and challenged hundreds, if not thousands, of young creators to embrace this most amazing of materials. In this historic year The Museum of Arts and Design is proud to present *Glasstress New York*, an extraordinary international gathering of glass sculpture created in Murano at the studio of entrepreneur and mentor Adriano Berengo.

FOREWORD

HOLLY HOTCHNER

Berengo, the founder of Venice Projects, has engaged artists, architects, and designers from such diverse countries as the United States, China, Italy, Germany, The Netherlands, and Spain. The resulting works were originally commissioned for and presented at the Venice Biennales of 2009 and 2011. The pieces are dramatic and often provocative, ranging from independent sculptures to installations incorporating sounds and light to prototypes for production. The spirit of innovation and experimentation pervades the works in this exhibition; many of the artists and designers were given their first opportunity to work with this challenging medium, and in collaboration with the brilliantly capable master glass artisans assembled by Adriano Berengo. Since the beginnings of glassmaking in ancient Mesopotamia and its meteoric rise to international prominence in the Roman Empire, the magical medium of glass—a solid that takes on the appearance of a liquid—has attracted innovative artists and designers to continue to push the medium into new realms. The history of the decorative arts in the West over the past two millennia is a testament to the limitless potential of the medium in both the realms of functional design and independent works of art. Ubiquitous in Roman-era glassmaking are vials, bowls, and containers to hold liquids or other materials, while one need only remember the stunning brilliance of the stained glass windows at St. Chapelle in Paris to realize that this material can achieve the heights of aesthetic needs.

Throughout the history of glass as an art and design medium, the majority of the skilled practitioners capable of working this demanding (and often dangerous) superheated material have remained anonymous. By the nineteenth century, industrial methods of glass production and a complex system of distribution of glass rendered this formerly prized material available to a massive audience of middle-class consumers. At the same time, this democratization of the material rendered it commonplace.

It was not until the end of the nineteenth century when artists embraced the material as a valid and valuable medium for creating unique works of art; such luminaries as Louis Comfort Tiffany in the United States and Emile Gallé in France renovated the artistic reputation of glass, and from that point forward, the intimate relationships between glass and glassmaking as an art medium, a skilled craft, and as a design medium were forged. The twenty-first-century manifestation of this holistic phenomenon is seen in the works created by the diverse artists and designers who have participated in *Glasstress*.

From its earliest incarnation and to some degree the result of the properties of glass to simulate organic forms, whether plants, flowers, or animals, nature has remained a powerful inspiration. This remains true for many of the artists represented in *Glasstress*. Such artists as Jan Fabre and Kiki Smith make use of glass in their sculptural installations featuring brilliant blue sitting pigeons and a colony of frogs, respectively. While the subject matter of the works are recognizable and familiar, their translation in glass moves them into a jewel-like hyperreality.

More abstract studies of nature are found in the work of Yutaka Sone, whose radiant studies of snowflakes in transparent glass make the ephemeral into a permanent form, while Britain's Luke Jerram uses glass to take the viewer into the world of the microscopic by revealing the eerily beautiful world of deadly viruses. Ursula von Rydingsvard captures the rough tactility of wood in her *Glass Corrugated*, 2010, an ironical allusion to the destruction of wood (the artist's primary material) by fire, a ritual burning without which glass could not exist. The delicacy of bamboo is evoked in the Starn Brothers' assemblage of fragile glass rods, a delicacy and fragility in glass that contrasts with the limber flexibility of the organic material. Likewise, Marya Kazoun's *Frosty Ground: The Beginning*, 2009, is suggestive of the evanescent crystallization of moisture, the hoarfrost that coats grasses and twigs for a fragile moment. A profound intimacy between art and nature is recorded in *The Seed of Narcissus*, 2011, by Tomáš Libertíny; the artist has used a mirrored glass ovoid as a foundation upon which bees have built a wax mantel that encapsulates the alien glass form, effecting a fusion between the inert and the living, between the permanent and the ephemeral.

The human form is also explored by several artists in *Glasstress*, notably Jaume Plensa, in the poignant and meditative elongated head of *Cristina's Frozen Dreams*, 2010, and in the expressive *Laura's Hands*, 2011, both made from cast glass. The artist uses the ability of the material to capture and transmit light to give each of the works an inner radiance that evokes the spiritual presence of the sitter. The same light-capturing property of glass, combined with the jewel-like colors that can be achieved in the medium, is effectively exploited by German artist Thomas Schütte, in his red and green male busts that stare blankly at each other across space with the same

air of alienation evoked by traffic lights in an empty middle-of-the-night intersection. American artist Joyce Jane Scott, long known for her provocative figural imagery created with glass beads, has extended her repertoire by creating a memorable cast glass figural group for *Glasstress*.

The world of industrial design is represented in *Glasstress* by the lively animated works of Spanish artists Jaime Hayon and Patricia Urquiola. Hayon's *Testa Meccanica*, 2011, are spunky and engaging robot heads, more innocently toy-like than confrontive. Urquiola has created a menagerie of eccentric and perverse shapes that find their genetic core in a strange mutation part functional vessel—vases, bowls, pitchers—and surf-and-turf creatures ranging from jellyfish to barnyard fowl.

Time and its passing and the contradictory nature of memory is examined from several points of view in *Glasstress*. Silvano Rubino's *Addizione sottrattiva*, 2009, is a dining room table notable for the absence of accoutrements—plates and cutlery that would normally inhabit this domestic space are presented as empty cutouts of space and, by implication, the interaction between two diners. Michael Joo's lonely museum stanchions made entirely of glass are a pointed and humorous commentary on security and regimentation of institutions that create systems to control and monitor access to some desired goal. The artist's title for the work *Expanded Access*, 2011, underscores this dichotomy of freedom and control.

Time as a force of both physical and psychic presence is made tangible in Javier Pérez's *Carroña*, 2011, a blood red chandelier made in the grandest of Venetian ornamental styles that has crashed to the ground, leaving behind only fragments of what was once perfect and beautiful, fragments being picked over by black crows. Among the simplest of the works in *Glasstress*

and yet one of the most provocative is Vik Muniz's untitled hourglass containing a full-sized clay brick rather than sand. In this work, time has literally and figuratively stood still. The rough and tactile presence of the brick is pitted against the fragile transparency of the glass. Time as we experience it is held in limbo, a metaphor for the vague territory that separates the physical world from the realms of the spirit.

MAD has defined its role in the global museum community as an institution dedicated to the exploration of materials and process in the arts and design, and to the creative transformation of materials that results in works of significant visual, emotional, and intellectual content. MAD also rejects the traditional hierarchies and boundaries that have separated art, craft, and design over the centuries. The diversity of creators involved in this exhibition, and the quality of the works that they have produced, are testaments to this belief and this commitment.

We are deeply indebted to Adriano Berengo for his ceaseless energy, vision, and generosity for making *Glasstress New York* a reality, and for making it possible to premiere this exhibition at MAD. I also want to thank Susan Scherman, a founder of Venice Projects, for her commitment to new talent in glass. Many thanks also to Marco Berengo who has taken these projects around the world and to Laura Bresolin who coordinated the us exhibition. From MAD, thanks go to David McFadden who helped to curate the exhibition, and to Elizabeth Kirrane, Nurit Einik, and Dorothy Globus who made the exhibition at MAD come to life. And finally to Goya Contemporary Gallery, Suzi Cordish, and an anonymous donor who made this new catalogue a reality. We hope that with these new experimentations in glass the artists have expanded their horizons and opened a new chapter in glass history.

I became interested in glass around 1985. An interest in modern and contemporary art had prompted me, right from the beginning, to study the way in which glass had been used in the context of modernism—that is, since the split from nineteenth-century aesthetic canons and the search for new forms of expression expanded to include materials which, until that time, had been considered foreign to the plastic arts. Despite this new direction and the degree to which glass working techniques had developed over the centuries, with the *objects* created reflecting a particular style and having incomparable formal qualities and elegance, glass continued, even in modernist times, to be considered a material more in keeping with design than with the art of sculpture.

Glass was thought to be inadequate for the creation of works of art, mainly because of the ways in which the material was worked, requiring the use of specialized labor. Indeed, if art has always welcomed such materials as wax, clay, marble, or wood, the same cannot be said for glass, which can only be shaped at extremely high temperatures. The artist who chooses to work with glass can design a form; define its color, weight, and transparency;

GLASS, MON AMOUR

ADRIANO BERENGO

and monitor the different stages of the process. Yet he is rarely able to manipulate this incandescent material himself. It could be argued that bronze sculptures also require the use of master craftsmen (though this has never made bronze a material foreign to the plastic arts). However, these sculptures come from forms that the artist's own hand has molded or assembled using other materials. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that, over the last half century, artists have increasingly entrusted to skilled artisans the production of their works, using ever more varied materials. If artists in the early decades of the twentieth century earned the right to appropriate everyday objects, from the 1960s onwards—namely, with pop art in the us and new realism in Europe—the new frontier became a definitive statement that a work's intrinsic value is found as much in its conceptual qualities as in its formal ones. This conception asserted, once and for all, that the author of a work is the one who conceives it and oversees its outcome, and not the one who carries out its actual production. This shift can be traced back to two fundamental starting points in the 1960s when it first became fashionable to entrust the construction of extremely large works to skilled workers from outside the artist's workshop and then later, when pop art began to borrow images from advertising and glossy magazines. The latter could be

considered the basis for the vision of the world that, in the second half of the 1970s, came to be known as postmodernism. Thus, the fact that, in choosing to use glass, the artist could not fully control or change the shape of his work, after having second thoughts or new insights, ceased to be a problem.

As I said before, my interest in glass arose in the mid-1980s when postmodernism manifested its artistic identity through the repetition of images and forms borrowed from the past as well as through the bold use of all material. Recalling the cultural climate of those years, I now find my decision to create on Murano first, in 1989, Berengo Studio and later, in 2009, Venice Projects to have been a natural one. Berengo Studio was set up as an experimental workshop in which artists could create their own works with the help of skilled artisans, but also as a place where it was possible to meet critics and come into contact with the best glass craftsmen working on Murano. As for Venice Projects, it came about from the need for a space in which to exhibit and promote some of the works created in my workshops, with a particular focus on developments in contemporary art. I sensed that art was becoming increasingly interdisciplinary and multisensory and that this would change radically our relationship to the works of art themselves. At the same time, I was sure that glass, thanks to its distinctive qualities, could attain the same status in art as any other medium. Nevertheless, I realized that the difficulty of working with glass and the high production costs related to the need for a skilled workforce (that sadly was disappearing) were major obstacles. I wanted to give artists the opportunity to create works that would have been difficult for other workshops to produce. Over time, this has given me the opportunity to work with such artists as Monica Bonvicini, Barbara Bloom, Tony Cragg, Jan Fabre, Kendell Geers, Michael Joo, Liu Jianhua, Oleg Kulik, Vik Muniz, Jaume Plensa, Thomas Schütte, Fred Wilson, and Zhang Huan, to name just a few. For years, I had cherished the idea of setting up an international exhibition to be held every two years in Venice during the Biennale, but I was not able to make it a reality until 2009. I wanted to create an international event that showed the best works made of glass. This is how *Glasstress* came into being. The event's success was instantaneous and, in many ways, beyond my wildest expectations. After such important milestones as the exhibitions at the Latvian National Museum of Art in Riga and Stockholm's Millesgården Museum, *Glasstress* today has arrived at The Museum of Arts and Design in New York, with a selection made together with Holly Hotchner and David McFadden, and which offers an original and critical vision of the works. Art cannot be separated from the processes of its creation and production; otherwise it would be something else, a philosophy: the technical and manual aspects are essential components of a work. Today, artists are increasingly turning to other professionals, including artisans whose work weds precision with imagination. However, let us not forget that it is the conceptual dimension—namely, *that which is implicit in its appearance and shape*—that confers its identity on a work in glass. In other words, it is this conceptual dimension that lets us recognize that a work in glass conveys something that no other material could express.

Focusing on only some of the works on display in the latest editions of *Glasstress* at Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti in Venice, part of the 54th Venice Biennale, and now chosen for a further limited selection for this exhibition at The Museum of Arts and Design in New York, does not mean they are more important than the others, but simply that they are best suited for a reflection on the use that an artist can make of glass today. Rather than an art material, glass has long been considered a material for furnishings. With few exceptions, such as Duchamp's *The Large Glass*, glass was used more in the twentieth century to create design objects than veritable works of art. This way of understanding glass was lacking in the early 1980s with the strengthening of the postmodern view, which considered the experiences of the past with an eye to using them instrumentally in new contexts. Moreover, this way of understanding art continues to this day, as demonstrated by *Expanded Access*, made by Michael Joo in 2011 for *Glasstress*.

Interested in the way men tend to limit their personal freedoms by subordinating them to the needs of social organization, Michael Joo has

GLASSTRESS IN NEW YORK

DEMETRIO PAPANONI

repeatedly dealt with barriers created to make certain areas inaccessible or to indicate obligatory routes. The most common among these are the string or cloth barriers supported by columns of steel or wood that each of us has seen in theaters or museums. Not being immovable, these objects mostly tend to inform us that there is a boundary beyond which one cannot go. Therefore, they act exclusively on a psychological level. In Adriano Berengo's kilns, in Murano, Michael Joo created examples of these boundaries from blown glass polished to a mirrored finish, giving them a sense of extreme fragility. While bumping into ordinary steel barricades and rope does not involve special risks, hitting the glass barriers made by Michael Joo means inevitably damaging them. Furthermore, the skill with which these glass barriers are made deceives the spectator, who at first glance is led to believe that they are made of steel. It is a sort of visual trap that can lead one to get dangerously close to the work without perceiving its fragility. Glass has allowed Michael Joo to give an ambiguous identity to a physical object and thwart the function that its shape suggests. *Expanded Access* takes advantage of both the theories and dynamics of early twentieth-century Duchamp and those that characterized the conceptualism of the 1970s. Using blown glass rather than a resistant material—such as bronze, steel, marble, or resin—to reproduce the barriers is in itself a choice sufficient to define the content and meaning of the work. The language

remains unchanged, which is that of sculpture, even though what does change is the way it relates to the spirit of the time.

From Duchamp onwards, many sculptors speculated a good deal on the possibility of altering the meaning of an object through the title of the work or by creating unlikely associations, namely transferring the idea of beauty from the visual plane to the mental one. Aware of the fact that beauty is manifested by arousing astonishment and wonder, the artist embraced the opportunity to engage the spectator on a conceptual level through images capable of revealing an intuition. *Expanded Access* by Michael Joo demonstrates that this aesthetic vision, which implies the encroachment of art into areas once considered the prerogative of philosophy, is still relevant today. While on the one hand these boundaries promise to protect, the use of a brittle material such as blown glass means they can easily break, injure, or harm. The work is thus a reflection on how what seems to be and what actually is are not the same.

A similar idea of fragility is expressed by *Carroña*, an installation by Javier Pérez also made for the 2011 edition of *Glasstress*. The work consists of a classic Venetian red chandelier with leaves, flowers, and rings that the artist broke into pieces by letting it drop to the floor from up high during a sort of performance. On it are crowded ten stuffed crows that seem to feed voraciously on its fragments. The ancient fables tell us that the plumage of the crow, once white, became black as punishment for the sin of excessive vanity. Through the symbolic use of color, this bird is thus linked to the concept of guilt.

Blood vessels are frequently depicted in Javier Pérez's work, sometimes under the guise of red horsehair, other times as branches or shrubs. In *Carroña* the blood vessels are brought to mind by the joints of blown glass that support the goblets. As much as the chandelier is like a found and modified object, shattered on the floor, it evokes flesh and blood and on the symbolic level becomes a dramatic representation of history crumbling into a thousand pieces. Hence *Carroña* equates the existential crisis assailing and tearing up contemporary individuals with the impossibility of the West to see their history reconstructed and projected into the future. The crows gathering the shards highlight that we are at a tipping point of no return; the contrast between the black and the red, between the impenetrability of the black and the transparency of the red, envelopes the entire scene in a pall of bereavement.

In Catholic countries, on an individual level, death is experienced as calamity and misfortune, while theologically and culturally it is associated instead with the hope of the Resurrection, the promise of an afterlife. The funeral rituals and the period of mourning have always been the necessary steps for channeling the pain within a cathartic process tied to the idea that becoming necessitates death because it goes from "what has been" to "what will be." Over time the idea of becoming and that of progress became increasingly intertwined, ending up being the same thing in most cases. Starting from the French Enlightenment and German Idealism, in particular, and moving through the Industrial Revolution of the second half of the nineteenth century, the idea of progress found its natural outlet in the avant-garde concept developed by the first modernist art movements. The twentieth

century thus experienced the death of the cultural experiences that had preceded it as a liberation from the numerous constraints that the past had placed on art, preventing them from designing a better future. From this perspective, the death of theories, phenomena, and trends now considered foreign to the spirit of the times was seen as a celebration and not as bereavement. In the postmodern era artists have considered it a limitation only to endeavor to look forward. Consequently, they have looked back, without nostalgia and with utilitarian behavior, to recover the fragments in random order, *improperly* assembling them and placing them in contexts related to the contemporary. Hence the use in today's art of old objects, forms, and materials, glass included.

Like *Carroña* by Javier Pérez, Antonio Riello's installation, *Ashes to Ashes*, 2009/2010, also presented at the 2011 edition of *Glasstress*, is a dramatic representation of history that is crumbling. The installation consists of about twenty containers of blown glass in the shape of wine glasses, hermetically closing within the swollen stem the ashes of a book the artist took from his library and burned. About 35 to 40 centimeters high each, and with a diameter of between 6 and 25, these reliquaries aligned on glass shelves have been *soffiati al lume* based on a design by the artist, in Massimo Lunardon's glassworks, in the province of Vicenza. The very thin glass binds these artifacts to the glassmaking tradition of Central and Northern Europe, which is very different from that of Venice. At a formal level these glasses are inspired by the Italian Medieval and Renaissance periods, but also by forms taken from international design.

Book burning is unanimously considered a barbaric profanation. Inevitably the mind returns to the book burning of 1933, in Berlin, at the hands of the Nazis, a ritual that was to consecrate the superiority of German culture over the rest of the world by erasing the memory of written words. Burning the books he has loved the most and placing them in an urn is one way for Antonio Riello to consign them to Eternity instead, turning them into tutelary deities. In *Ashes to Ashes* we find individual goblets engraved with the names of Kafka and Joyce, Russell and Bateson, but also with the titles of comics and science fiction stories. Conceived as a work in progress—many titles will be added by the artist—the installation refers to the many volumes that have crowded the shelves of the spatially infinite library of Jorge Louis Borges.

Burning his favorite books is also a propitiatory and apotropaic gesture for Antonio Riello: the ashes are not scattered to the wind, but lovingly collected and piously protected in special reliquaries. The books kept in these glass goblets thus represent the mark left by every book in the existence of people who, as artists, transcend their own individuality.

Other examples of interesting glass works included in this exhibition are *Hourglass*, 2010, and *Sheet of Bubble Wrap*, 2011, by Vik Muniz. The first is a large hourglass with a crumbly red brick inside it. Despite having the shape and materials of an hourglass, this object does not in fact have its function. *Sheet of Bubble Wrap* looks like a sheet of bubble wrap sinuously folded over itself. Vik Muniz has chosen glass to imitate this most appropriate material for packing fragile objects, such as those made of glass itself. In these as in other

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works by the artist we recognize the object as a model, but what we see does not correspond to the real nature of the elements that constitute it. In both of these works, the aim is to demonstrate the misleading nature of the image in relation to its historical memory and to the experience of the spectator.

Apart from the many implications expressed by the works under consideration, what I wish to emphasize is the originality of the use of glass, which thanks to its properties becomes part of itself. In other words, these examples are intended to show that glass material is not alien to contemporary art and that actually, precisely because it has been kept at the margins of modernist experimentation, can now tap unexplored areas. This is demonstrated by the work of Kiki Smith, an artist who has devoted much attention to the expressive possibilities of this material. Glass, says Kiki Smith, "has excellent qualities and a special light that seems to come from the contemplation of a Christ of ice; like the skin, it gives the illusion of being fragile and impenetrable at the same time."¹

As much as there has been an attempt in recent decades to distance itself from modernism, to go beyond it, the works cited above show that today's art is moving in the path traced by the historical avant-gardes who, particularly with Constantin Brancusi and Marcel Duchamp, redefined the concept of sculpture. Prior to Brancusi's modular masses with no pedestal, and before Duchamp's readymades, sculpture was understood as statuary made primarily of wood, marble, and bronze. These were the materials that lent themselves best to that way of understanding sculpture and the execution of bas-relief sculpture, i.e. the construction of narratives with figures emerging from a plane. Clay, ceramics, and glass, on the other hand, were the domain of the applied arts and considered artistic expressions closer to a craft, which however fine the quality did not, however, enjoy the same consideration as the plastic arts. Thanks to art nouveau, between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, at the same time as the political and economic rise of the bourgeoisie and the socio-cultural change triggered by the Industrial Revolution, glass took on a significant role in the creation of artistic objects. After all, glass has always been an ideal material for decorations because of its transparency, its letting light shine through lending brightness to the colors. Nevertheless, however hard the artist strove to embody a new style linked to the spirit of the times, art nouveau objects made of glass—or of glass combined with other materials—had a purpose of use and therefore remained linked to the context of the applied arts. Doors and windows, chandeliers, plates, vases and jewelry had not yet received the full dignity of plastic art works, as has happened in recent times.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, when the inquietudes that would lead to the birth of the avant-garde movements were already apparent, artists were rejecting the idea that a work of art could have a useful function. At the same time as the invention of photography, which had freed art from the documentary role, the new languages did not concede anything to the taste of the old bourgeoisie, which wanted to subvert the aesthetic values. The decline of portrait painting was not simply because a photograph could reproduce reality more faithfully and more quickly than a painting, it also responded to the need to make the work an object for its own sake.

With the end of commissions by the aristocracy and the Church, and with

the emergence of a new conception of the market that led artists to work for themselves and sell their works personally—the first private galleries would appear shortly thereafter—there was also the idea that besides being useless in practical terms, art no longer needed to aspire to beauty. Modern artists preferred to identify with the harshness of the tribal sculpture (beginning to find space in Parisian museums) and in the banality of industrial objects in common use (baked in large quantities by the new factories) rather than in the refined elegance of handmade glass objects from Murano, France, and Bohemia such as mirrors and chandeliers, which had been very popular with the French aristocracy and bourgeoisie of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. What had once been a strength of glass art—particularly the elegance of those items made by hand in Venice from the 1200s onwards—was considered a weakness by the avant-gardes.

It was starting from a view of the world that assigned negative attributes to beauty as it had been understood in earlier centuries that the dadaists came to theorize the *aesthetic of indifference*, a programmatic definition that summarized the need to focus attention on objects that were also chosen by virtue of their anonymity. Since the objects dearest to the old bourgeoisie were those related to furnishings and practical use, emphasizing a clear separation between the applied arts and the noble arts responded both to a formal and linguistic strategy and to the desire to affirm the spirit of the times. This was true despite there being no lack of important formal solutions in the applied arts like those developed by the Bauhaus (1919–1933), in the vanguard from a linguistic perspective while still aiming to create useful objects.

Nevertheless, because the Bauhaus claimed that form must follow function and not vice versa, it marked an important turning point in the way design and architecture were conceived and perceived. The presence of such artists as Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, Oskar Schlemmer, László Moholy-Nagy, and Josef Albers as teachers in a school of architecture and design, the Bauhaus itself showed there was an intention to eliminate the distinction between fine arts and applied arts, overlapping them until they

coincided. The Bauhaus manifested interest in glass as a material suitable for design, but also for art. There was so much interest, in fact, that it led to the establishment of a workshop for glass decorating, whose direction was entrusted first to Paul Klee (in 1919) and then to Josef Albers (in 1923). In the spirit of social revolution, which viewed art as a community asset and not the privilege of a few, artists dressed the part of creator in public, but in the privacy of their studios made a clear distinction between applied arts and plastic arts. No matter how many people may argue the opposite, the handmade objects created in the Bauhaus resemble art more than being works of art. In any case, the debate about what distinguishes design from art is an unresolved question and open to conflicting interpretations. Unlike what happened with marble and wood, which could also be used as raw materials, and therefore be “found,” during the years of the historical avant-gardes there were many who felt that glasswork and ceramics necessarily implied the production of elegant objects, more suitable for the

THE BAUHAUS MANIFESTED INTEREST IN GLASS AS A MATERIAL SUITABLE FOR DESIGN, BUT ALSO FOR ART. THERE WAS SO MUCH INTEREST, IN FACT, THAT IT LED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A WORKSHOP FOR GLASS DECORATING ...

homes of the bourgeoisie than for places of art. As materials to be shaped, glass and ceramics thus brought into play the manual intervention of the artist, while starting with Duchamp and dada, as mentioned before, sculpture was not conceived of as a mass shaped by its author, but an assembly of objects that the artist could appropriate by changing its meaning. Duchamp's inverted urinal presented with the title *Fountain* is perhaps the most explicit example of this dynamic: the artist does not personally mold the shape he needs, but chooses it in a process that presumes a relative interest in the material with which to create the work. From this perspective, glass became part of the modernist work as a found object (bottles, glasses, balls, ampoules, display cases, crockery) and not as material to be shaped. Between 1913 and 1915, Marcel Duchamp gave a glass ampoule the title of *Paris Air*. The greatest emphasis on glass, however, is found in his work *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, also known as *The Large Glass*. Duchamp worked on this emblematic example of modernism from 1915 to 1923, leaving it unfinished. Consisting of two glass panels framed by wooden and steel mounts, *The Large Glass* is seen as a spacious window with cryptic forms inside created with oil paint, silver and lead foils, and wires. As is well known, during transport the glass suffered several cracks, but the artist decided to accept the intervention of chance as an integral part of the work. Apart from the diverse and conflicting interpretations that have been given to *The Large Glass*, the fact remains that one of the fundamental characteristics of this work is that it allows the eyes to see through it, which is why the viewer can grasp the physical space that it houses.

Before the historic avant-gardes changed the direction of Western art, sculpture still had materials that helped to define an idea of style. Suffice it to say that even an extraordinarily innovative formal sculptor like Auguste Rodin is now considered to be tied more to the nineteenth-century conception of sculpture than to that of the twentieth-century, not only because of the choice of subjects represented, but especially because they were created in marble and bronze.

The impact of the materials in connoting the art object is such that even a revolutionary work like the bronze sculpture *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913, by Umberto Boccioni lends itself to be perceived more as an expression of a renewed classicism than as a real break with tradition. Entering into modernism not only meant renouncing the themes and languages that had characterized the visual culture from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century, from the Middle Ages to Romanticism, it also meant giving up materials that had characterized classical statuary and sculpture. Therefore, it was not a matter of substituting one material for another, but rather of making the selected material a functional tool for the formal and conceptual result that the artist tended. In light of all of this it can be argued that, having expanded the catalogue of usable materials, artists favored the identification of their work with the chosen materials.

In the 1960s, synthetic materials like plastics and resins appeared in avant-garde art. A decade later, the choice of material played such a significant role in the work of individual authors that it became a determining factor in defining their aesthetic. For example, fire refers to the art of Yves Klein, shit to that of Piero Manzoni, and felt and animal fat to the work of Joseph Beuys.

Similarly, the mirror makes us think of Michelangelo Pistoletto, wax and the bundles are associated with Mario Merz, iron with Jannis Kounellis, Richard Serra, and Carl Andre, stones and earth with Robert Smithson and Richard Long, granite with Giovanni Anselmo, felt with Robert Morris, pitch with Gilberto Zorio, and frost (obtained with the resistance of a refrigerator) with Pier Paolo Calzolari. Many other examples could be cited as well, including artists of the decades that followed. Even though the individual artist's choices may not be tied to one material or another—so each one's body of work of is actually far more complex—the examples above show that for many of them the material used is a sort of trademark. The innovation of this aesthetic vision also lies in the fact that artists can make use of any material or medium that helps achieve the pre-established goal, provided the use has a theoretical justification.

The 1960s and 1970s were the years of poor and discarded materials: iron, chalk, wax, straw, burlap, glass splinters. Although uncommon and of little value, within the work they obtained the same dignity as wood, marble, and bronze. There was nothing that could not become a part of the work, including ashes or organic materials *found* in nature (plants, fruits, vegetables, etc.). In this context, glass obviously became a part of the work as an industrial product and not as a mass to be

molded since it requires an elaborate and expensive process and a specific skill to obtain it and shape it by hand.

The turning point that led to a different perception of glass as a material also suitable to sculpture took place in the 1990s, with the second generation of postmodernism: the generation that had seen the enthusiasm for materials of traditional sculpture metabolize in the previous decade. It was a turning point, however, anticipated by Luciano Fabro's *Foot* series. As the title indicates, these are sculptural representations of very large feet, each one of them different and made of stone, marble, glass, and bronze, which form the base for a column of fabric. The choice of materials recalls the Renaissance and Baroque tradition. Contrary to what happened in the past, however, this cycle of Fabro's works placed more emphasis on the base of the column (the foot) than on the column itself, which was assigned the principal role in the classical architectural tradition. By using Murano glass for one of these *feet*, Fabro showed the tendency of the neovanguards to look at the expressive forms of the past with a more forgiving eye than what their predecessors had done at the turn of the century. After all, we are at the doors of postmodernism, i.e. at a conception of art that by reversing the logic of the avant-gardes, rather than trying to invent new styles, languages, and forms, preferred to take possession of the styles, languages, and forms belonging to tradition to combine them so that their contrasts emerge.

THE 1960s AND 1970s WERE THE YEARS OF POOR AND DISCARDED MATERIALS ... IN THIS CONTEXT, GLASS OBVIOUSLY BECAME A PART OF THE WORK AS AN INDUSTRIAL PRODUCT AND NOT AS A MASS TO BE MOLDED SINCE IT REQUIRES AN ELABORATE AND EXPENSIVE PROCESS ...

This (then new) aesthetic vision involved painters, sculptors, performers, designers, and architects, but also poets, novelists, film and theater directors, musicians, set designers, and scriptwriters. There was also the tendency to give body to the sculptures shaped by the hands of its author, interested in following the entire process leading to the bronze casting. Artists started to feel attracted to the fire of the kilns again, thus looking at glass as a sculptural material. This is highlighted in this exhibition, which shows how glass offers artists, as well as designers, expressive possibilities that transcend the memory of elegant, useful objects created in the best glassworks decades and centuries ago.

One of the effects of the renewed interest in traditional expressive forms was a return to the idea that the freedom of art is linked to its uselessness. Is it perhaps not a restriction to subordinate form to a function? Once again we have the debate about the distinction between plastic arts and design. Every aesthetic vision that came from the historical avant-gardes was, after all, the result of overcoming a pre-existing vision, which by nature was to be overcome quickly in the space of a decade. From this perspective, drawing a boundary between the various arts does not mean classifying them, but defining the identity of the creative work (also) through its ability to stand out. As repetitive as it might sound, it is by accepting the differences that the qualities free themselves from discrimination and take on dignity, which is not the same as claiming a return to order. The path of art is an evolutionary one, in the sense that everything the artist does takes into account what was done by those who came before him. As many have pointed out, it is this knowledge that makes us realize that current art, compared with what preceded it, is not better or worse, just different. And it is this awareness that allows us to identify in the alternation of themes and contrasting visions the return of paths that cyclically present themselves in a new look.

The marriage between art and design has expanded the area of expressive possibilities for the former as well as the latter. Understanding that the plastic artist is free to manufacture an object intended for use, and the designer to create an object as a single exemplar with no practical function, we feel the need for new criteria to evaluate both art and design. It is a need revealed by the inability of art in recent decades to move beyond modernism—of which postmodernism is the tail—with the same determination and radicalism with which modernism ferried the new man in the century of psychoanalysis, ideological revolutions, and discoveries in science and technology once considered utopian. In anticipation of an art that expresses the new turning point, there is nothing left to do but once again question the rules of the game made outmoded by also being taken up in the classrooms of provincial academies.

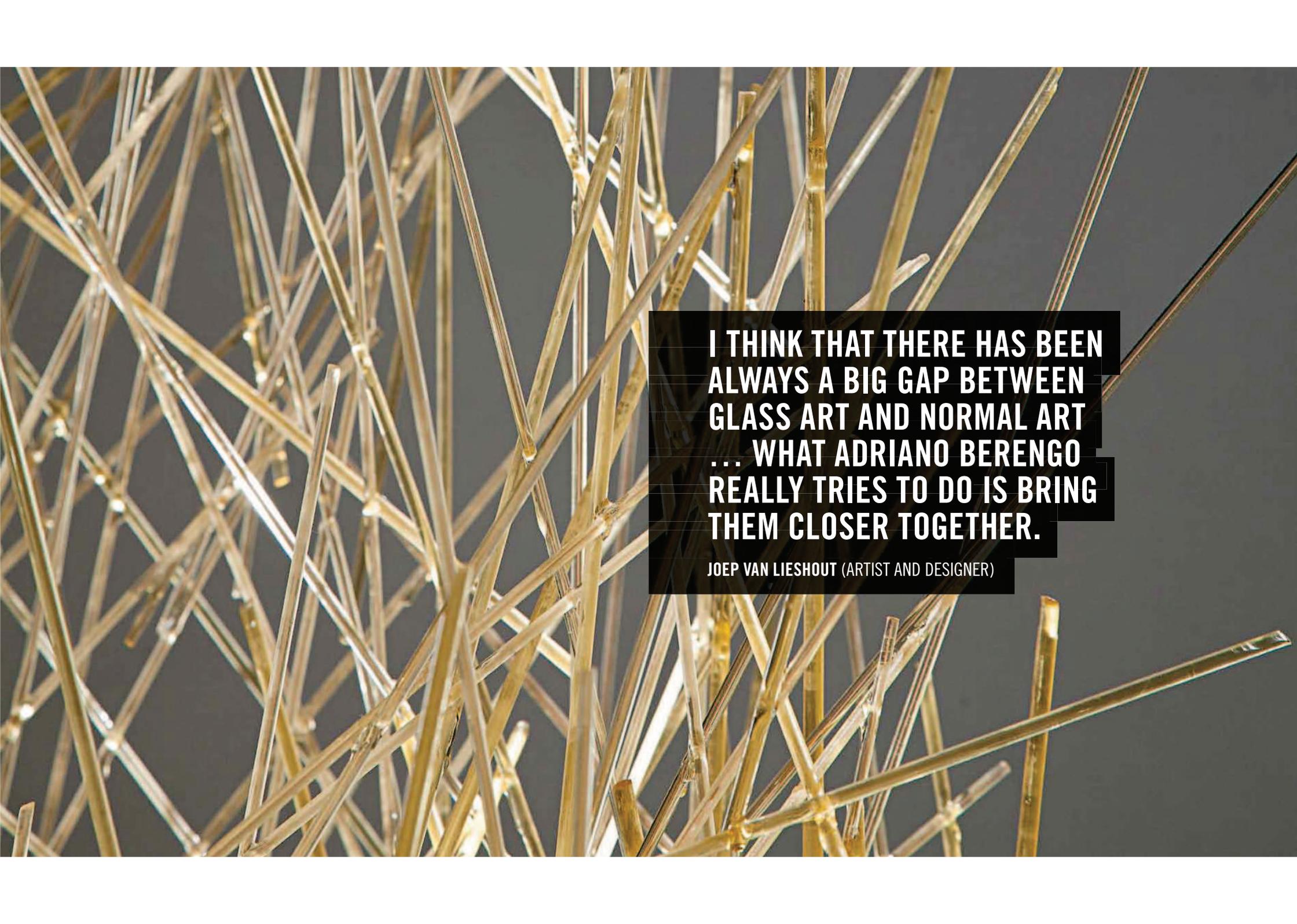
1) *Il ritorno di Kiki*, interview with Manuela Valentini, *Artribune*, September 27, 2011.

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GLASSTRESS NEW YORK

NEW ART FROM THE VENICE BIENNALES

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**I THINK THAT THERE HAS BEEN
ALWAYS A BIG GAP BETWEEN
GLASS ART AND NORMAL ART
... WHAT ADRIANO BERENGO
REALLY TRIES TO DO IS BRING
THEM CLOSER TOGETHER.**

JOEP VAN LIESHOUT (ARTIST AND DESIGNER)