

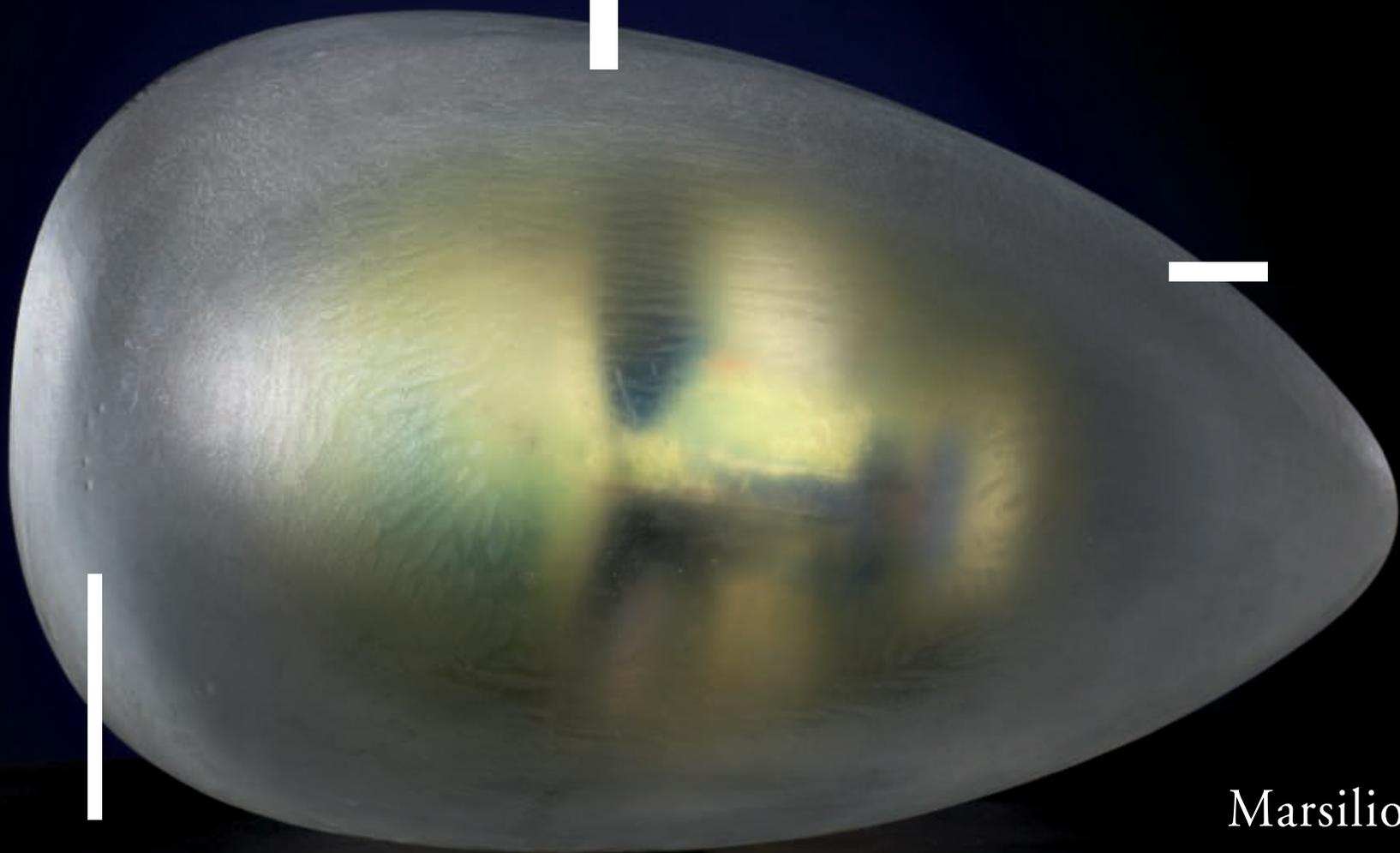
BERTIL VALLIEN. 9 ROOMS



la Biennale di Venezia

13. Mostra
Internazionale
di Architettura

Eventi collaterali



Marsilio

Bertil Vallien, Nine Rooms
13th International
Architecture Exhibition
La Biennale di Venezia

BERTIL
VALLIEN. ■
9 ROOMS
■



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Marsilio

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Bertil Vallien, **Resting Head**

(detail), 2009

Photo Anders Qwarnström

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Bertil Vallien, Nine Rooms

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Architecture Exhibition
La Biennale di Venezia

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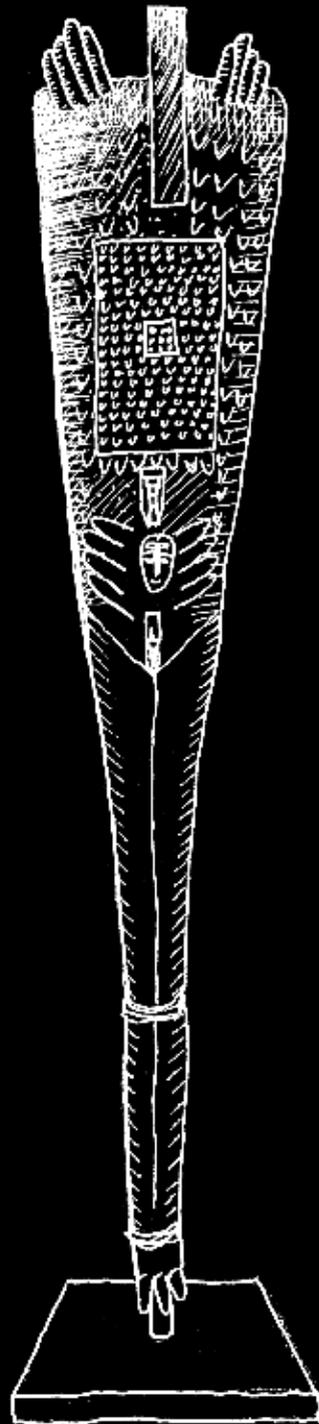
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Encountering the art of Bertil Vallien for the first time is akin to the experience of nineteenth-century archeologists discovering an ancient treasure, the relics of a lost civilization: awe, astonishment, and, perhaps, a little fear. How can one not be intimidated by such luminous work? Vallien's impeccable craftsmanship serves an art that is profoundly moving, mysterious, grand, and richly allusive, speaking of myth, heroic endeavor, and endurance, with the occasional expression of ribald humor—a kind of visual equivalent to the Eddas.

Dawn Bennett

**Bertil Vallien:
The Marlborough Man of Swedish Glass**

Ewa Kumlin
Managing Director, Svensk Form

Bertil Vallien is unique. Truly international, yet utterly Swedish. A great artist and a smart commercial industrial designer. Svensk Form congratulates Berengo Studio for its initiative to hold a retrospective of his art glass at the Venetian Institute of Science, and takes great pride in supporting this exhibition.

Bertil Vallien has been at the forefront of Swedish glass design since the early 1960s. Right out of art college he spent some years in Los Angeles, years that came to inspire the radical changes he was to bring to the Swedish glass industry. When Vallien moved to Kosta Boda in 1963, he launched a completely new era together with his fellow designers. The age of free experimentation had begun: new techniques where anything was possible were introduced. Students and designers from Stockholm and all over the world flocked to the old glassworks at Åfors. By the 1970s a whole glassworks was dedicated to Bertil Vallien's artistic output because of his innovative sand-casting technique, which was a whole new language in art glass.

Today Vallien is internationally most famous for his sculpted sand-cast boat forms, figures, masks, and faces. They have a spiritual and symbolic content which raises essential questions of life and death, and portrays narratives and mythologies, many of which are anchored in ancient Viking sagas. He is often quoted as saying "glass eats light," referring to the way in which light is contained within the glass mass.

Immediately after finishing his studies at the Royal College of Craft and Design, Vallien was awarded its highest honor by the Swedish Society of Craft and Design, Svensk Form, founded in 1846. Since the industrial revolution, one of the early tasks of the Society has been to steer talented artists towards the new serial production techniques, giving designers a self-evident position

within the industry. Bertil Vallien and his colleagues have been key players in the success of the Swedish twentieth-century glass industry.

On a personal note, I lived in New York in the early 1980s and wrote from time to time for our monthly magazine, *Form*. I met many young American glass artists who spoke of being inspired by Bertil Vallien. He made his international breakthrough at the Heller Gallery in New York in 1982, where his sand-cast vessels received particular attention. At that time I collected glass myself and I remember an American critic predicting that the pieces by Bertil Vallien would become precious "antiques of the future." How right he was.

The UrbanGlass Art Quarterly recently included Bertil Vallien among the top ten of the fifty glass artists who will make an impact over the next fifty years.

One of his most impressive commissioned masterpieces, the Altar Cabinet of Växjö Cathedral, will certainly be admired by many future generations.

Vallien's fame in the United States has been reaffirmed by the Glass Art Society, which gave him its Lifetime Achievement Award.

This exhibition in Venice will be yet another artistic landmark in Bertil Vallien's career. The exhibit is divided into nine themes, each intended to highlight the contribution to the Studio Glass Movement, which celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year. Visitors will find a fruitful encounter between the straightforward strength of Nordic glass and the artistic brilliance and elegance of Murano. Vallien himself has begun experimenting with the glassmaking techniques of Murano for this project.

But it will not stop here. Bertil Vallien is ageless, full of charm, and has an enviable curiosity which will no doubt continuously lead him on to further exciting investigations in both materials and the arts.

Bertil Vallien.
The Man, the Myth

Andreas Ravelli
Export Sales Director
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Orrefors Kosta Boda AB and Berengo Studio are very proud to present the *Nine Rooms* exhibition by Bertil Vallien at Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti, Venice. The Swedish glass group Orrefors Kosta Boda AB consists of three glassworks located in "The Kingdom of Crystal" area in the province of Småland. The glassworks have an exciting history: Kosta was founded in 1742 and Orrefors in 1898. The glassworks design high-quality glassware and art glass and sell a wide range of utility and art glass for private and public use worldwide. Since June 1, 2005, Orrefors Kosta Boda AB has been part of the New Wave Group that works with several brands in the consumer and corporate market in the areas of sports, leisure, furnishing, and gifts. New Wave is present in fifteen countries, through its subsidiaries, and is listed on the NASDAQ OMX Stockholm exchange. Bertil Vallien has been and remains a very important player for Orrefors Kosta Boda AB, since he has contributed to the company's continued success for more than fifty years. He has received numerous awards and his work is well represented in leading museums around the world. To the highest degree, Vallien is a very unique designer; his ability to combine commercial thinking with artistry is very unusual. Examples of his work include the series of glasses called *Château*, which he designed in the early 1980s, and the *Satellite* series from the early 1990s, which is still on sale in markets worldwide.

Thanks to his impressive expertise, eagerness to experiment, and open-minded approach, Bertil Vallien has contributed by acting as a guiding light, prominent figure, and sounding board for a vast number of designers while he has worked for Orrefors Kosta Boda AB.

Bertil Vallien is one of Sweden's most widely renowned artists and designers. For the first time in Venice, he will exhibit more than sixty of his unique creations, spanning over fifty years of outstanding work for Orrefors Kosta Boda AB.

Nine Rooms is held at Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti on the Grand Canal and gives visitors from all over the world a magical opportunity to discover Bertil Vallien's unique art in a spectacular setting. Orrefors Kosta Boda AB is delighted that this opportunity came at such a suitable moment and that Bertil Vallien now has this wonderful chance to stage his exhibition.

I would again like to highlight Bertil Vallien's personal characteristics: he has been an inspiration to many designers, in particular through his far-reaching role as a teacher in Sweden and in many other countries. He has influenced students through his positive approach and charismatic personality.

To conclude, Bertil Vallien's passion for experimentation allows him to weave his own experiences and dreams into glass, to create in the frozen moment a sense of mystique that will leave no one who views his work indifferent.

A Chance Encounter with the Contemporary Hephaestus

Adriano Berengo

Many will certainly ask themselves the reason for my interest and involvement in the work of Bertil Vallien, considered one of the most important Studio Glass Movement exponents, which moves in a seemingly antithetical direction with respect to mine.

In fact, for over twenty years I have tried to make glass a material recognized by the Fine Arts world, which instead always and only acknowledged glass as a medium with utilitarian ends, accepting its use strictly in design.

Therefore, my efforts have been that of working on Murano with artists from the contemporary art world, totally unaccustomed to glass, to its characteristics, limits, and potentials, so that they may experiment with the material and discover its unexpressed aspects, unknown to those, like the great Murano masters, who have considered glass merely as a material for ordinary, though very refined, objects.

I became interested in Bertil Vallien because I have shared with him the same approach and farsightedness in our relationship with the material. Like him, I, too, chanced upon the world of glass, and we both chose this material as our own.

I remember an old conversation of ours, where he explained to me his need to directly manipulate and manage the material, but at the same time to keep a certain distance from it and from its merely manual and artisan aspects—a distance that has allowed him to concentrate more on the creative process than on production, so as to avoid that mannerism and virtuosity typical, instead, of *à la façon venetienne* creations.

In fact, his works are essential, almost monochrome; the shapes are simple, made of assemblages of fundamental geometry; the surfaces are rough, never smooth or polished like in more traditional glass. Forms, colors, and the relation-

ship with space are essentially drawn, in a continuity of lines, exclusively from light, which, rather than reflecting itself in the material, is trapped within.

In this approach of his I found great affinity with my desire to make glass a veritable material for art, freeing it from the bonds of tradition and channeling it towards new and unexplored frontiers.

When speaking about his choice to use glass, Vallien has, with great artistic sensibility, focused his attention on a very interesting and delicate aspect in glass production, that is, its randomness, or better, the impossibility of totally controlling and predicting the outcome.

The ability to grasp this bond and limit and transform it into a potential makes the difference in the end. Stubbornly wanting to force the material within certain boundaries is like obliging the mind to give no space to certain thoughts.



Glass is fluid, like thoughts, and to “domesticate it” means needing to “free it.”

This particular aptitude “in making” and the emotional and creative intensity he applies to his work make him the perfect icon for the figure of the craftsman theorized by the sociologist Richard Sennett, who believed the ability to unite manual work and imagination as being the key to overcoming the economic and social crisis at the start of the twenty-first century.

Bertil Vallien’s search for the gesture, his awareness of the importance of the use of forms of collaboration in organizing and producing, such as teamwork in the kiln, and a sharing of knowledge as a form of personal and collective growth are this artist’s answer to the confusion of the times and the art system he tries to resist.

As never before, throughout society and the art world in particular, especially in the West, has the active practice and manual craft been devalued, perceived in these past decades as irrelevant if not extraneous to the realization

of ends considered more noble.

Bertil Vallien, with his works, and Richard Sennett, with his research, bear witness to quite the opposite. At a time when the quality and quantity of work, understood as creative and innovative ability to give one’s own contribution to the growth and wellbeing of society, are held in check, what seems more interesting to me is to present and promote the work of this artist, who like Hephaestus in Ancient Greece, attained a highly refined technical ability and understanding through the pleasure and rigor of “doing good.”

Unlike numerous artists with whom I have worked throughout my career, Bertil Vallien knows glass to perfection, just as Benvenuto Cellini knew gold and stones for his goldsmith works; the same with Stradivarius and wood for his violins. Bertil Vallien, like these great “artisan masters,” has been able to sum up craft knowledge and artistic innovation, bridging that age-old rift between “nature” and “culture.”

Vallien’s career, which began in 1963 in Småland as a designer, is divided between the world of design and that of art. The artistic director of Orrefors Kosta Boda, the most famous Swedish glassworks in the world, has contributed to re-launching Swedish glass and design by introducing an “aesthetic” approach in conceiving forms. Likewise, I feel I can state that an equal influence from the world of design may be read in his sculptures, where the vocabulary is made up of primary signs and symbols, where interpretation and association play a fundamental role.

Rarely have I found such a balance in expression and language in a single creative figure; rarely is a designer able to be an excellent artist and vice-versa, but this is what I have recognized in Bertil Vallien, and that is why I have decided to invite him to Venice to present, within the Architecture Biennale, a vast selection of his works.



Interview with Bertil Vallien

Francesca Giubilei

Francesca Giubilei:

Bertil, this is your first solo exhibition in Italy as well as in Venice, the city of glass. Your work and the artistic movement of which it is part are practically unknown in our country. Would you like to explain in a few words what the Studio Glass Movement, which is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary this year, has meant for you?

Bertil Vallien:

In a way I have not been part of the Studio Glass Movement, originally formed by independent artists with their own studios. My first encounter with glass in 1963 coincided with the birth of the Studio Glass Movement (Harvey Littleton 1962). I later became engaged in the movement mainly as a teacher but I must say their enthusiasm for finding new ways of using glass has been an inspiration.

The Studio Glass Movement began and developed above all in America. As a Swedish artist, what is it that connects you to the artists of this movement and what makes your work “unique” and more “European”?

My desire to find a way to break away from the traditional techniques, to find a way to use glass for more personal/sculptural work resulted in exploring casting glass into sand. That was something new and got me invited to demonstrate in the USA in 1975 at Kent State University, GAS, Toledo.

Who were your teachers? Who and what were your points of reference when you started your career?

When it comes to glass I have not had teachers of any influence.

My inspiration comes mainly from the fine arts. Isamu Noguchi, Anselm Kiefer, Richard Serra.

Unlike other fine art materials that are much more widespread because they're easier to use, glass requires a technical skill and knowledge that is acquired only through many years of experience working directly with the material. All studio glass artists have worked in the kilns, like the traditional Venetian glassmakers. Do you think this has contributed to your work being more closely associated to the world of handicraft rather than to that of contemporary arts where the trend instead has been to delegate the technical production to specialized laborers, leaving the artist free to focus exclusively on the work's design? How do you feel about the long-standing controversy and tension between art and craft as well as the one between aesthetics and functionality, which should also be familiar to you as you work in design? Do you feel that this is a superfluous, if not passé, debate?

Yes I am tired of the never-ending debate craft versus fine art. To me it has been important and exciting to explore the technique. To find out the possibilities/difficulties of casting glass into sand has been part of the creative process.

Like a piano player can't master his instrument without practice. If the result is defined as craft or art does not matter any longer.





Your works are known throughout the world and are immediately recognizable because of the special and unique casting technique you developed. Without revealing your secrets, can you go into a little more detail about what this process involves?

It is easy to describe: press your nose into damp sand and fill it with molten glass. As easy as having a white piece of nice paper and a pencil.

The casting technique you use, your taste for inclusions, and the transformation of the vitreous material into a rough, unyielding, often monochromatic mass that is much more like stone than glass, and is usually transparent, shiny and colorful, especially in the Venetian tradition: all these have made me wonder why you chose to use glass as your material when you so drastically transform it to the extent that it almost seems as if you wanted to make it into something else. In short, why glass?

I dislike glass for its seductive decorative qualities. But there are other qualities. I like the way sand creates a crust, a shell distorting the inside beauty. The contrast between the rough surface and the clean "universe" inside. Also, the fact that the story/metaphors that are captured in the mass is there forever. No other material offers that.

The *Nine Rooms* exhibition that you created for the city of Venice is a sort of summation of your artistic career. In fact, visiting the nine rooms in Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti is like following an imaginary path that takes the visitor from your earliest works to your latest creations.

Some themes, however, recur, rather like flashbacks and flashforwards of the creative impulse that has pushed you to address these same issues repeatedly. What meanings do the "boats," "heads," "landscapes," and "idols" series have for you?

I agree. There are themes that keep coming back in my work. Mainly because I find new ways of exploring the theme. A technical discovery, a color, a surface treatment that will add to previous work.

Like the boat shape. As important to me as the canvas is for the painter. A carrier of stories and memories. I once wrote I make boats that sink through memories and dreams. The boats I make require no latitudes to navigate by, but like vessels turned to glass, they steer towards the horizons of imagination.

A vitrified container, one for Moses, another for a Viking chieftain.

The traveller must put his trust in the delicate skin that separates him from the unknown.

I have always been fascinated by boats, for their beauty of form and for what they signify. Adventure, travel, a livelihood, birth and death. A symbol belonging to our collective unconscious. An archetype. Revered by all.

An island fisherman does not use his old, worn boat for firewood but leaves it to lie, so that in time it may provide sustenance for other boats.

I can understand why the most rough-hewn sailor refers to his craft (and life insurance) as SHE. A life-giving mother to rely on when adrift from the mainland, in a floating society.

The "heads" series started with the fascinating story about the girl that slept for thirty-three years.

Your works reveal a deep connection to the traditions and history of your country. Unlike other artists whose works seem to be the result of an instinctive, energizing act, to me your works seem rather to be the result of a long discussion and of a creative process mediated by your artistic exploration and study. Can you discuss the creative genesis of your work?



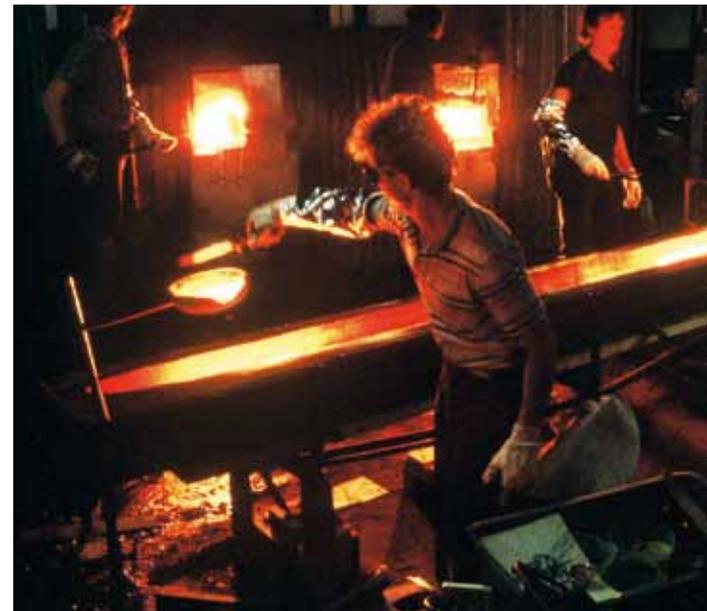
I work a lot. Sketching is the starting point. I constantly draw, make plans on paper while listening to music. Find inspiration reading García Márquez for example. I had this newspaper clipping pinned up in front of me, on my studio wall for several years: an exciting picture that had caught my eye, though I was not exactly sure what it represented. It gradually faded and I decided to throw it out. But, just as it was going into the bin I hesitated and read the caption.

It was an aerial photograph of a bombed-out village in northern Iraq. One could make out an ordered system of roads leading off the circular marketplace, remains of houses and walls enclosing small fields. A settlement which had been laboriously built up over hundreds of years into its present form. Now, razed to the ground in a matter of seconds by a deed of animosity.

Knowing the true significance of the picture made me feel bad. Bad about how erroneously I had constructed it. All I had seen was a decorative pattern of graphic marks, which I imagined to be the face of a man staring straight at me.

The picture assumed a special significance and prompted an exhibition, entitled Area II. The theme of which is an imaginary archeological excavation. It consists of a series of Maps, and Findings of glass or ice, from a site that has been exposed to a most terrible catastrophe: volcanic heat, nuclear explosion of the abysmal cold of the Antarctic. The man with the menacing stare, however, remained in the maps. As an image of evil.

It seems to me that the themes running through all your works are those of man, landscape, and history, understood as a relationship between time and events. The interconnection between these three entities is also the "common ground" on which architecture unfolds and develops. Not surprisingly, the artistic director of this year's Biennale, David Chipperfield, has invited participants to reflect precisely on this link that is often lost in contemporary society. The relationship and balancing of these three components create an environment in which our shared past, present, and future may be seamlessly integrated. Your work also seems to go off in this same direction. Is there any willingness to reveal certain issues to the public and increase their awareness of them, issues such as balancing the needs of man and the environment or the profound dissolution of the link between history and the people of today who are completely focused on their fleeting present? Aren't your Viking-inspired boats as well as those numerous totemic sculptures reminiscent of small animist amulets that you call "Watchers" or "Idols" perhaps an invitation to look at the civilizations of the past and at our more primitive roots as a resource to teach us important lessons today?



I suppose have dealt with existential issues but more from a poetic standpoint. The only obvious political statement besides Area II and Somna/Vakna (Sleeping/Waking) occurred by chance. Area II was about the horror we face not taking care of our planet. Somna/Vakna talks about our dreams/wishes to be someone else or wanting to live forever.

I have been taken by how the glass transforms from glowing lethal heat to the seemingly opposite: ice. Like for example in Area II.

Then... 2007 by mistake 2000 grams of cobalt was added instead of 20 and out came totally opaque BLACK glass. Transparency gone. That was the beginning of the "Desert Snow" series. Landscapes that have been burned, destroyed.

Let's finish with Murano. Throughout your career, you have always worked with Swedish glass. What was there about the opportunity to experiment with Venetian glass that fascinated you?

The intricate way the Venetian glassmasters handle the glass, their ability to manipulate details and color has always fascinated me.

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Two States of Catastrophe: The Work of Bertil Vallien

Jim Baker

Bertil Vallien's introduction to glass came about because he needed a job. In 1963, following a college education in ceramics and design, he became a designer at the Åfors Glass Factory in Åfors, Sweden. The factory had a venerable history of making glass crystal, which was no longer in demand. His role was to design a contemporary production line. Vallien's original intent was to work in the factory six months a year to support himself and then to use the rest of the year to pursue his passion to become an artist. However, the more he worked in the factory and observed the skill of the craftsmen the more he became fascinated. Being close to and having access to glass and people who knew how to melt it and to work it drew him into the process and the material.

He considered himself a sculptor first and wanted to avoid the pitfall of simply making beautiful objects. Prior to being introduced to glass, Vallien had spent a couple of years in Los Angeles influenced by artists such as Peter Voulkos who, through his work and that of fellow ceramists, were challenging the utilitarian and decorative traditions of ceramics. He recognized a similar challenge for glass. "Glass can be very seductive; it is so beautiful in itself that it is easy to make fascinating decorative pieces."

Another problem was that he liked to work with his hands. In order to make glass in the traditional manner he would have had to use a blow pipe and, of course, would not be able to get his hands into the 2300 degree molten glass. "So my desire was to find a way to form the glass very spontaneously and very directly." Sand-casting became the answer. He could physically touch and shape the sand to make a negative space and then fill it with molten glass to create sculptures.

For Vallien it was a slow learning process. In spite of early failures, he understood the possibilities.

"Even if the pieces blew up and broke, I could see and say to myself that I could do something nobody else had done before. I spent twenty years failing." In the process he invented ways of making glass that were completely new.

Heat and cold, birth and death, hell and heaven are the universal themes that inform Vallien's work. He came to realize "that glass is like two states of catastrophe: destructive heat and destructive cold. When you work in the hot shop it's like ladling from a volcano; it is very dangerous and it's hot and it's beautiful, it is radiating heat and it is radiating light. But then, after the glass is cooled, it is transformed to ice; which is the other, so to speak, catastrophe." When Vallien makes larger castings (some of his boats are up to 14 feet long), he uses a team of seven or eight people. He emphasizes that everything is extremely well prepared and ahead of each casting all the molds and inclusions (the small objects he imbeds in the glass) are made. When the preparation comes to a climax to pour in the molten glass "that is a day of drama and beauty and teamwork that is indescribable. It is wonderful and like being close to hell and heaven at the same time because everybody knows that the slightest mistake would ruin the thing."

In fact, mistakes do happen but they do not always result in failure. Sometimes they reveal a new direction. Once an assistant mistakenly added a hundred times the recommended amount of Cobalt Oxide to color a batch of molten glass. Instead of lending the glass a characteristically vibrant blue cast, "it turned the glass black, in a beautiful way" and gave rise to a new series of works.

Another thing that intrigued Vallien and encouraged him to continue to work with glass was its capacity to capture or enclose something forever. He was not attracted to the more obvious attributes of glass such as its transparency and,

in fact, wanted almost the opposite quality in his work. "To work the surface of the glass I actually destroy it, I like that very much where you kind of peek into something that is mysterious, hidden, or gone." One image that inspired him was a 1930s newspaper article about a Mr. Moro of Portland, Oregon with a photograph showing him encased into a block of ice. One could make him out, but only obscurely; the ice was like an almost enclosed sarcophagus. "I like to hide what's inside." Newspaper clippings, photographs, stories, and legends inform Vallien's oeuvre. "It may not be so clear when the work is done, but when I am working on a particular series I have a very clear image or story in my head." Many of his pieces deal with the idea of a journey. "The boat shape for me is, for example, very much not a boat that is going from, say, England to America, it is not going for an adventure, it is on a journey to places that nobody knows anything about." His inclusions are an alphabet of symbols, among them stars, ladders, houses, spirals, and small figures of people. It is almost as though he is inventing a language while he is using it. "For me it's similar to something I might write down on pieces of paper, shake in my hands, and toss out. I chose the words very carefully but the story that occurs is done by chance." In 2012, we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of what has become known as the Studio Glass Movement. In 1962, unbeknownst to Vallien at the time, the sculptor Harvey Littleton was introducing artists to the techniques of glassmaking in a series of workshops in Toledo, Ohio. His goal was to put the making of glass within the reach of studio artists. At around the same time and through his experience at the Åfors Glass Factory, Vallien undertook the same goal; to integrate the previously segregated roles of designer and glassmaker that prevailed in glass factories not only

in Toledo, Ohio but in Ithaca, New York at Corning Glass Works (where Littleton's father had been head of research and development) and in other centers of glass production around the world. The timeline of Vallien's work and its technical and aesthetic development both parallels and influences the development of glass as a material for creative expression. Within the career of a single artist, Bertil Vallien exemplifies the qualities and trajectory that gave birth and propelled the Studio Glass Movement. In addition to unifying the functions of designer and maker into one person—the artist—Vallien developed innovations that moved his work beyond the traditions of glass at the time and into the forefront of contemporary art. He learned how to work as part of a team to realize technically difficult and physically large pieces. This spirit of collaboration among artists making glass has also become an important aspect of contemporary glassmaking. Out of the allied catastrophes of heat and cold Vallien not only helped to birth a movement but, through his personal creative journey, expanded our understanding of the expressive potential of glass and has, as a result, given to us a remarkable and important legacy of art.

Bertil Vallien. The Innovator and Spiritual Leader of Art Glass

Gunnar Lindqvist

Bertil Vallien is primarily known around the world for his sand-casted glass sculptures in which he has developed a whole new technique within art glass and been able to use it to reach brand new artistic results. He is one of a handful of pioneers in art glass who has released this form of expression as an art on its own and, along with the Czech Libensky as well as the Americans Littleton and Chihuly, created the most independent form of art glass of our time.

Bertil Vallien's glass sculptures sparkle and shine from within. It is neither the surface nor the shape that are most important but rather what is within, what one perceives behind the form, behind the surface of the glass sculpture. Bertil Vallien is art glass's philosopher and spiritual leader. Each sculpture conceals existential and mystical stories that touch all humanity and also each individual. It's a matter of life, of love, of death.

Most of the world's leading glass artists use the reflection qualities of glass, its transparency and its seductive light in their artistry, but Bertil Vallien does the opposite. He pulls a thin skin over his glass sculptures and closes in the light. Inside, encapsulated, they live a life of their own and become a cosmos of mystical colors, fairytale-like forms and contents that, like archetypes such as the sun wheel, the cross, ladders, and figures, become equally self-evident the world over.

Bertil Vallien's artistry is versatile and is always about man's life on earth, everything from matters of faith and the unknown mystical worlds to humanity's self-destruction in the archeological sculptures where the horrors of war hide themselves in fragments from a lost civilization. In this respect he is one of the world's most distinctive artists, continually searching for the truth about life's primary questions. He can be likened to a seeker who, while on his

artistic journey, finds a world beyond our own consciousness, a surrealistic world that unfolds in the inner light of the glass and which Bertil Vallien unfailingly conjures up.

Sand-casted glass has become synonymous with Bertil Vallien. He has developed the technique and he continues to explore it. Its limits are far from reached. For each new technical accomplishment there follows an increased artistic register.

The design circuits have changed successively since the 1960s and 1970s discoveries of the inner light of the glass to his metaphysical boats filled with universal characters, across the torso, the monoliths, across wide and thin glass blocks like rune stones or perhaps prehistoric maps of archeological findings encapsulated in the solidified glass. Glass casting technology has continually developed and created conditions for different sculptural forms.

He has created a variety of different series of casted glass sculptures which are being shown at this retrospective exhibition.

Boats

The first motifs, which were also an international breakthrough, were the boats. They were widely shown for the first time in 1983 in the Heller Gallery in New York. With this motif he began to work on various themes: woman boats, death boats, love boats. The boats became an isolated world for his personal need for expression. It was filled with hate, with happiness, with life, and became more and more mystical and fable-like. For Bertil Vallien, the boats became an expression in which he had to continually be moving forward in his thoughts and his fantasy, but also continually moving forward in work and in geography. The 1980s for him became the decade of free flight.

The boats have become a hallmark for Vallien's

sand-casting technique, partly through the changes in this evermore complex technique, but mainly through the strong metaphysical and allegorical content. They have pronounced mythological traits and form different self-contained worlds. The boat is still an important motif in his creations. He has himself explained that he creates boats because the form is beautiful and contains both mystique and symbolism. Boats mean to travel. And life is, from beginning to end, a voyage.

Faces and Heads

During 1991-1992 he did a series of faces consisting of masks made in the sand-casting technique but with clear glass that barely opens the effects in a compact body into which the interior of the mask can be seen through a minute eye or rather opening.

In 1994 Bertil Vallien began to work with sand-casted heads, universal portraits if you wish. The glass heads are mounted on narrow pedestals of wax-covered wood or sandstone, sometimes with engraved symbols, and high enough that the heads meet the viewer at the same height. The pedestals become small bodies that bear the egg-shaped heads.

It is quite consistent that Vallien made the transition from the masks as a substitute for man to the making of man himself. There has been a glimpse of him in his earlier sculptures, often enclosed in the glass, imprisoned and symbolically taking part in an action about traveling, life, and death. Now man has stepped from the glass and meets us with naked heads, almost immaterially through the elusive substance of the glass.

Bertil Vallien had read in a Swedish newspaper about a girl, Karolina Olsson, who in 1875 was out on the ice on the sea. She fell and hit her head so hard that she became unconscious. Not until 1908–

thirty-three years later–did she wake up from her coma. Miraculously, she got her strength back. Since heredity matters had come to the fore and were brought up in court, detailed hearings with her appear in the court records. She told of how she was in a great darkness surrounded by blue men. These blue men and women who stepped out of the dark coma correlated well with Vallien's encapsulated figures in the cobalt-blue glass blocks. These now came forth as three-dimensional portraits. That historical newspaper article gave impetus to yet another exhibition at the Borgholm castle ruins, situated just above the place in the sea where the girl had fallen. The dark blue men stepped forth in the tower room of the weathered ruins, a symbiosis between the transient in the weathered ruins and the dream of an underlying world. The blue heads have since then had a prominent part in Vallien's work and have developed and changed in a continuously shaping process. Mainly through reforming the details in the basic form was he able to change the expression dramatically.

With the heads the form has become more concentrated and simplified. They are closed, simplified facial features as in Romanesque sculpture and these sculptures become more archaic than the masks' more primitive appearance. However, the heads are archetypes and the symbolic function has the same metaphysical basis as in Vallien's earlier glass sculptures.

Glass has a singular intrinsic mystical power. The transparency and the spherical give the heads a ghost-like spiritualism. They are there and at the same time not there. They are like the girl in coma. It is the oscillation between the physical nearness of matter and simultaneous resolution that pinpoints and clarifies feelings, obscure and fragmentary. Through its powerful color, the cobalt-blue glass

is still sufficient to specify the form. The heads are sometimes classically beautiful with a smooth surface, as with a polished marble head from the time of Praxiteles. Other heads have a rough surface as a result of allowing the cast sand to combine with the glass and thus create deformities, which Vallien accentuates by inserting copper threads or colored threads. In the orange-colored body the eyes acquire a flaming eeriness, and with a metal grid in the area of the eye the emptiness of the brain gives it a macabre impact. In the midst of this metaphysical and humanistic-shaped sculpture, many characteristics of the hard art will create contrasts that will confound the observer. In the sculpture series *Resting Heads*, Bertil Vallien has moved the motif of the head form and the half-transparent glass forward. Within the matt surface of the egg forms one catches a glimpse of a fast-frozen head. In these sculptures, the form has reached its greatest simplicity and the impression of ice, of frozen water, becomes very powerful, although at the same time the head is a capsule, a seed, containing something that is to be reborn. In these sculptures, he works with a more subtle appraisal and with a life-thread's fragility. The effects become disconcerting for the observer. The head is in a haze, frozen into the glass, a mist, without consciousness. The message becomes, as it so often does with Vallien, ambiguous though the form is simple. It brings forth a poetic, almost sensual tone that doesn't exist in the more expressive blue head sculptures.

Sleeping/Waking

In the series *Findings* from 1998, the sculptures were of archeological objects from our own time, such as a part from an airplane or a complex detail from a machine of our technical age. In the *Head* series, the sculptures are about secret thoughts

and dreams, about man in a meditative dormancy on the edge of unconsciousness.

When Bertil Vallien began his work with the series *Sleeping/Waking*, the issue had become more oriented towards death and the question of whether or not there is an afterlife, about the possibility of postponing death and hanging onto life.

The first sculptures in the series came out in 1999 and were shown in connection with the millennium shift at the Traver Gallery in Seattle.

They consist of rectangular cast glass blocks, the severity of which is marked by even edges and a heightened upper portion like a lid. Inside the frosted surface of the glass can be glimpsed a figure, encased and fettered. As so often before, Bertil Vallien had grown attached to a particularly odd story about Mr. Moro from Oregon. In the 1920s, this man had frozen himself in ice in order to subsequently resurrect himself and live his life at a later period in time. The similarity to the story about Karolina Olsson is apparent, but in her case it was a question of involuntary unconsciousness that took her into another world. In Mr. Moro's case it concerned a conscious means of trying to extend life by going to sleep and hopefully waking up. During the 1990s an American had also introduced a new business venture, namely a company that was going to use the freezing method to achieve a future life by freezing and later thawing the body. This state between life and death became the inspiration for the sarcophagus-like sculptures whereby the observer can walk around the mummified figures that are sleeping in expectation of resurrection. With modern freeze techniques, the Charon basin would no longer need to be entered. Its nearness to the Christian promise of everlasting life has of course also been a driving force for Bertil Vallien.

Once again he studies the existential questions but

with focus on man and death. In the glass coffins man lies alone, glimpsed in a diffuse misty world, both present and transcendental. The suit-wearing Mr. Moro has assumed a position of expectation. He finds himself in a pause in life, but later, at some time in the future he emerges handsome, respectable, and well tailored. The pause between life and death is over.

Black/Desert Snow

As so often happens, it's the coincidences that open the doors to a new artistic process. Such was the case with the latest series of sculptures called *Black*. An assistant had accidentally used too much of an oxide, with the result that one of the casts was, in the conventional sense, ruined. Instead, however, there emerged a sand-cast black glass. Bertil Vallien immediately saw the possibilities of developing the mistake into a medium in the artistic process. The black glass could be given a burnt surface, as if it were ravaged and decomposed during a long period of time. Now there arose a series of sculptures where the sooty, black surface stressed deformation and doom.

The boats become ravaged wrecks, partially melted, black from burning but with a cargo of a polished shining black sarcophagus. They are fate-ridden sculptures, expressive and alarming. With the *Black* series he has introduced a new strain in his artistry. It is not only fateful, but also melancholic as if the unavoidable, irreversible end is drawing near. These black sculptures reverse every concept. Landscape sculptures such as *Desert Snow* express an abandoned disorientation in an unmerciful, empty technical world with no holding-points whatsoever for mankind. The American professor Robert C. Morgan has likened it to a virtual world populated by dehumanized figures. In other sculptures there is a black cone,

monumental and powerful, stiff and unmoving, and adjacent to a little house that is fearfully crouching in its smallness. Through the black glass's displacing of the glass's shining and reflecting properties, they become sad figures that infallibly lead one's thoughts to death. In a few of these black sculptures the shapes are connected by a red thread, a life-nerve or rather an umbilical cord at the moment of death.

Bertil Vallien's new sculptures touch the very essence of life. They oscillate between hope and despair and their serious expressiveness stands out as a deep humanistic manifestation.

The symbolism that fills his sculptures sometimes becomes so multifaceted and full of approaches that it is unfathomable. Each thread of thought wells over into a new association and his glass boats sometimes became the very escape boats in which he, like an Odysseus, found himself on his own wanderings. The sculptures therefore also have a mythological pull of a world beyond our own consciousness, a surrealistic world as that which is elicited in Apollinaire's early poetry. Bertil Vallien himself describes the art process: "I choose the words, but then I can almost mix them up at will and there emerge sentences that I could never in my imagination have thought up. Coincidence contributes so much."

But it is no coincidence that it is first and foremost the inner light of the glass that Vallien, with unerring skill, conjures up. It is instead the artist's superb mastery of the medium.

Stat crux dum Volvitur Orbis

William Warmus

I have known Bertil Vallien since the 1970s; in the early 1980s I taught the History of Glass at the Pilchuck school, where Bertil was developing his now famous sand-cast glass sculptures. Recently, I moderated a panel that included Vallien, at the Glass Art Society 50th Anniversary of Studio Glass conference in Toledo.

Studio glass is all about using this amazing material as a medium for fine art, and about spreading the word through education and workshops. Vallien has been a leader and inspiration for this project, and instrumental in the way that art and the glass industry have learned to work together.

Vallien's importance was validated as recently as June 2012 when *Glass Quarterly*, a prestigious magazine for the glass world in the United States, published a list of the fifty leading artists using glass, juried by nine museum curators, critics, and scholars (full disclosure: I was a juror). Vallien ranked seven, between Kiki Smith and Lino Tagliapietra.

My work as a writer focuses on how technologies, aesthetics, and narratives emerge, compete, and find balance in art and nature. For me, Bertil's position on the list is intriguing: between Kiki Smith, who is known not as a glass artist but as a narrative artist, and Lino Tagliapietra, a supreme technician. Both make works of art but come from different directions.

And Vallien? Let me write something here that will not make sense until a little later in the essay: his art recognizes the cross, or as Bertil prefers to describe it, the X. He balances between narrative and technique. And yet his narratives are meant to be impenetrable, his technique of sand-casting primitive.

Maps

Narrative is about mapping a specific time and place. Bertil produces maps. They are about the horizontal element in existence, about war and how nations and places fight and struggle over lines and dots and two-dimensional boundaries. Thus some of Bertil's maps are bleak and blasted and sad. But isn't there also the triumph of coexistence in a map? How, after war and struggle, come the surveyors and the boundary lines and some kind of peace? The beauty of Vallien's maps surely implies that coexistence is possible. So he makes them blue, implying the universal, which contains good and evil.

Diving

During the panel in Toledo, a member of the audience asked about the boat in modern art. Bertil's boats contain water rather than float on water. As a scuba diver, the delight of diving for me has always meant getting into a space full of mystery and pleasure like the one inside his boats. The color of the glass is like the color of water that surrounds a coral reef.

But it is there that the parallel ends. "Life englazed, visible yet unattainable" is Vallien's description of the phenomenon he achieves in these cast glass boats. "Whatever has been laid within the fluid glass can never be recovered, though the sculpture were cleft asunder."

**Stat crux dum Volvitur Orbis
(The cross remains constant while
the world turns)**

The two parts of the cross are central to Bertil's work: his horizontal boats and maps encase the path we take through life, while the vertical sculptures point up, to the realm of the spiritual. And, I might add, point down towards the depths of the deep blue sea, another spiritual place. Suffering and redemption. While crossing the Toledo Museum of Art campus on the first day of the GAS conference, I asked Bertil a rather serious question: As someone who was brought up a Christian, isn't your work an acknowledgement of the eternal power of the cross? He said that he "prefers to see the cross as an X, symbolizing the unknown, the mysterious, the undefined." The cross implies that suffering and redemption are constants, but also, and this is the true meaning of narrative, that while the cross remains constant, time and place change ("the world turns"), and each instance of suffering and redemption must be defined by a time and a place. Narrative is about a specific time and place. It is praxis, not theory. Of course Bertil prefers the X. It is the theoretical, and mysterious, definition of his art. But the art itself, the very matrix of glass, the tangible stuff that we as collectors and audience might own and enjoy: that occupies a specific time and place, just as we do, too. That is the story of the cross.

Bertil Vallien, Nine Rooms

Laura Christine Johnson

Bertil Vallien's art glass works refer to and connect Swedish pre-history with modern themes encased in an eternal medium. Basic shapes and universal topics are almost abused or stretched beyond their natural limits in his art forms. Vallien is one who creates art from glass in an incomparable technique coupled with the unique concept that he has of light. He sculpts with an elegance and manner in which nature and the elements obey him. Glass is just one of his tools. As he bends and molds his medium of glass to his will, light and its seemingly magical properties do not betray him, rather light conforms to his desires. The way Vallien manipulates light creates a glow in his simple forms that gives the viewer an altered visual perspective. He creates a different way of approaching them. The "heads" seem to glow internally, as if they are infused with life because of this mystical transformation of sand and heat into a radiance that he orchestrates. Externally, there is an aura of light that seems to change the work, imbuing it with a spiritual or celestial essence. The infusion of light into and through the works gives the castings an eerie look, almost as if they were death masks. The "heads" are not portraits, nor do they refer to specific persons. Vallien has taken a more global approach without bowing to uniformity or the banal. Their essential features hearken to more prehistoric times and to the talismans of ancient cultures and even religious idols. The technique of molding these forms reflects a more tactile sensibility as well. The castings often have a texture to them which can be felt physically but also on a visual and intellectual level. Influences of Swedish totems or rune stones extend the relation of Bertil's glass to earth-related themes dominated by his constant manipulation of light. The "black works" are elegant examples of this transformation. The boldness of the shapes

rendered from the molded and cast-glass forms are enhanced by the potency of their blackness. True drama and tension are sensed as the subjects are seemingly altered through the lack of brighter colors with a light that provides a primordial connection as it plays in and passes through the glass. Vallien's "boats" pay homage to his Scandinavian ancestors but in their modernity exceed and transcend any physical location, any reference to a specific culture, and any way in which time has been measured. Transparent and solid, the "boats" are water and earth united into one element and metamorphosed into structures that have a futuristic or dream-like quality, and thus are also imbued with the theme of longevity. The boat as a symbol of eternity could signify the concept of travel or movement, but the various mementos inside the boat, when viewed as relics or souvenirs, change the idea. Perhaps they are symbols of humanity's materialistic trappings; the "things" are literally trapped in the molded-glass structure. It is as if time and humankind are standing still, too. These entrapped pieces or talismans should be viewed as archeological finds that tell a story. In the nine different themes of this *Nine Rooms* retrospective exhibition, Bertil Vallien visually demonstrates his series of stories in glass and light.

The Glass Age

Giacinto Di Pietrantonio

“Works in glass are always a reflection of ourselves and of our world. May we observe, by the way, that both glass and computer chips are mainly made from silicon, therefore history, memory, and knowledge, while they share the artistic, technical, and scientific wisdom into which we are able to transform it, but that is stuff for another story.” Pardon me if I open with a self-quotation from the close of my essay “The Craftsman and the Manufacturer” from the 2009 *Glasstress* catalogue. However, as you can see, it contained the idea for continuing the text as material useful for another story, a vaster story that needed to be told as soon as the opportunity arose. This opportunity presented itself when I was asked to write about Bertil Vallien in whose work, memory, and the future, a methodical experimentation with materials, and the artisan’s knowledge of his art coexist. But going in order, and picking up the initial discourse, we can say that, though it is one of the most ancient of materials, glass is also one of the most modern and among those most eminently suited to represent the contemporary world. We live, in fact, in a transparent and fluid post-modern society, where glass is used widely to construct the symbols of our life: stations, airports, buildings, homes in which it is possible to look inside—or at least give that impression. So, if the history of mankind begins with the Stone Age then passes to the Iron Age to arrive at that of concrete, we are now in the age of computers thanks to silicon chips. Being also made of silicon, glass indeed becomes a metaphor of our time. Of course, the aforementioned materials—stone, iron, and cement—are sturdy materials that have endured from antiquity to modernity. In contrast, glass is a brittle material as fragile as our times. Therefore, using it to make works of art becomes an essential point of our existential representation.

Consequently, it must be said that, as there are times that are reflected in certain materials, so there are artists who choose some materials over others to create their own works, who are identified with one material more than another, a material that is shape and image. In confirmation of this, some examples from nowadays are easily given: lead is identified with Kounellis, iron with Serra, and felt with Beuys. Going back in time, we reach the modernity of Rodin’s bronze or Medardo Rosso’s wax. Going even further back, we finish with the marble of Michelangelo and the glazed ceramics of della Robbia, continuing our examples with the wood of Andrea Fantoni and Jacopo della Quercia’s terracotta... Nevertheless, perhaps because of its fragility, glass has been used primarily in the “artisanal” sphere, from the regal to the quotidian, although stained-glass windows in churches are one of the highest levels of artistic expression of all time. Yet in our case, as for the artists mentioned above, it is working in the round that interests us and, as a matter of fact, it is this aspect in which the Venetian artistic tradition of glass blowing excels above all. It makes us think that while humanity has sought to discover and give some identity to the materials, it has been the task of art to remove things and facts from tradition through experimentation, thus opening new possibilities. Bertil Vallien is an artist who has done this and has done so by working predominantly on two fronts: on one hand, by making glass his own and, on the other, by using it in an unorthodox way that offers new qualities. Traditionally, when following new paths, it is thought that they must be modern ones, as the new normally accompanies the modern, whereas invention, especially in art, also means going backward. Was it not Giorgio de Chirico who said that he did not want to be original, but wanted to return to the origins, i.e., not modern, but age-

old? And yes, de Chirico's metaphysical elaboration of death between Greco-Roman classicism and Boeklin's Northern romanticism hovers in the shadows of Vallien's works. Thus, turning to technique, it should be noted that, as early as the 1960s, Vallien had begun to use glass as if it were metal, not blowing it but pouring it into previously prepared molds, to achieve forms that are larger than those permitted by blown glass like, for example, a 4-meter long glass boat. But beyond size, it is the themes found in both the forms and the titles that return to the origins and give meaning to his work in such pieces as *Ararat*, which means "God's creation, or Place created by God," thus, the holy mountain on which the biblical tradition has Noah's ark run aground after the flood and from where life began again. There are themes of sacrality to which the artist has dedicated himself for some time, as is evident also in the series of sculptures he has called "Idols" or "Golgotha." *Golgotha* is the place of the skull, where Adam—the first man and so the beginning of all humankind—is said to have been buried. It is no coincidence that *Golgotha* is then also called *Calvary*, the site of Christ's sacrifice, where his blood washed the earth of the grave of the first man, once again a presage of humanity's resurrection. So, in this circle of ascending sacrality and origins, we return to our grand ship of glass. These forms of cast-melted-molded glass give a more solid appearance because, as used by Bertil, glass is full, not empty. It is full of transparency and obscurity, of the light of day and the dark of night, and thus full and empty of the time of humanity. It is no coincidence that one of the other themes is that of time with the "Janus" sculptures, the two-faced god of time, but also the patron of ancient Rome's *Collegia opificum e Fabrorum* of craftsmen and artists. He is thus the lord of the past and the

future, of the passage and the passing of time. Even here, it is no coincidence that Vallien has another series of works dedicated to days. At this point, the importance of the themes as well as of the material experimentation appears evident, because they help us to understand that the subjects are not those of craft, but of art, e.g., the body or landscapes. Indeed, they are among the oldest subjects in art itself. It is no mystery that the body, as a whole and in its parts, has always been at the center of a reflection on art and not by chance has the head been the subject most often portrayed. In fact, Bertil has always given form to entire bodies or to heads. The head is what defines us the most not only in terms of our appearance, but also in terms of the senses, of which it is the center: the nose for smell; the ears for hearing; the tongue for taste; the skin for touch; and the eyes for sight. Moreover, the head contains the brain, which connects and expresses all the senses. From the general to the specific and vice-versa, bodies and heads are used to investigate different moments in human life, like those intense moments of emotion and imagination encountered in sleep. Sleep is the time of rest, of dream, and also of imagination. Yet it is also a time of remembrance because of what happens in the silence of life and of what feigns death, which is the conclusion of life. In fact, no self-respecting artist does not deal with and worry about death in some way, elaborating upon it and, through this process, consign it to the future, as Vallien's sculptures make evident. In fact, one of his other themes is that of fear, which lets us understand that the artist is also interested in discussing issues that people usually prefer to avoid even if they are ones that completely permeate our lives. Yet this is useful for artists who, in fact, like saints and shamans, are familiar with those psychic territories

into which we are afraid to venture. Fear is what comes from a threat, and, precisely here, Northern Europe has given us, with the scream of Munch and the films of Bergman, among the greatest expressions, an attraction into which ours must also be placed. What emerges from these expressions is one of the most intense manifestations, one of the primary emotions in which the physiognomy is more expressive besides being one of the more realistic metaphors to represent our age of anxiety and uncertainty. Thus, it may also be considered a social alarm of the era in which art is consecrated. It is no coincidence that another of the themes that Vallien tackles is that of confusion, but also that of malaise—signs of a society that has abolished the superheroes of modernity. They have been imprisoned as often happens in Vallien's works, in bodies, but especially in heads, always in glass, which have been themselves imprisoned in glass structures, almost as if they were tombs of time and space that, like ice, give the impression of preserving them for eternity. For this reason, we find the faces mainly in those works that Vallien calls "Guardians," totemic and primitive statues that look at the past and observe the future. Ancient signs and symbols are engraved on the erect, forward-facing bodies as if in a declaration that tells us that we cannot escape the memory of what we were originally. The signs and drawings that Vallien traces on the surface of these bodies and heads are almost always engraved, as if to remind us that the body was one of the earliest "canvases" when, at the dawn of the human race, man painted his body, aestheticizing it. Thus, everything is a symbol of time, of a time that comes, passes, and returns. Indeed, it is this oscillation of time that the work *Pendulum* suggests: a time that goes back and forth, being nourished by the past and future to be in the present. The present, in this case, is the

present of art as we said above, expressed through the body and its parts, but also through landscapes, another theme dear to Vallien. If we think about it, artists have always used landscapes as a subject by which to signal changes. Consider Leonardo's landscapes that marked the Renaissance, or of the landscape becoming protagonist in a Poussin or Lorrain work, going forward to the modernity of the impressionists and so on. This is why Vallien has fixed his gaze on landscapes that range from the desert to the city and on elements like water or snow, those protagonists of the landscape itself, but also on bodies, as mentioned above, because, in the end, the body of man and the body of nature blend into one in Vallien's works, reassembling the primordial conflict between nature and culture, like that between art and craft.

Return to the Sea: Bertil Vallien at Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti

Matthew Kangas

The sea, navigation, boats, maritime instruments, maps, and seafarers are a few of the themes that have preoccupied Bertil Vallien over the past fifteen years in his glass and mixed-media sculptures. Viewed near the Grand Canal in the historic Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti, examples from a variety of series executed during those years mark a symbolic return to the sea for the leading Swedish sculptor (and a return to Venice after his 1996 exhibition in Palazzo Ducale).

Carefully installed in a sequence of rooms for the viewer to cross, the sculptures accumulate into a narrative of travel, a journey from molten glass to solid; from land to sea; from conscious psychological states to fantasies of the unconscious mind. If one art critic, Jenny Zimmer, considers Vallien's repeated recognizable shapes such as boats, human heads, and dwellings as timeless archetypes along the lines of Swiss psychiatrist Carl W. Jung, another critic, Robert C. Morgan, prefers a reading according to Sigmund Freud.

Seen this way, as continuous streams of memory in a Freudian psychological sense, all the objects trigger darker memories of events long repressed. Even the liquidity of glass, so often analogized to the sea, may be viewed instead as jellied amniotic fluid caught containing the germinating seeds of memory, not just material fragments.

As we contemplate the human figures in the *Janus*, *Heads*, *Sleeping/Waking (Somna/Vakna)*, and *Watchers* series, we must note their predecessors and followers, the *Boats*, *Pendulums*, *Maps*, *Findings*, *In Transit*, and *Black works* series. With their upright presences, Vallien is populating the Palazzo with effigies that now allude to Venice's illustrious maritime past as well.

Viewers will gaze deeply *into* the sculptures. Look into a *Boat* and you find insertions of found objects to help piece together your own interpretation.

The opposing faces of a *Janus* contain smaller elements suggesting that each person has a double nature with conflicting expressions and emotions. The heads and figures submerged in the *Sleeping/Waking* series offer much once we look at them closely: suggestions of waking dreams and trance-like wakefulness.

The more recent *In Transit* and *Black works* series extend from the earlier *Maps* and *Findings* with sites, settlements, and landscapes of abandoned human activity. Adding metal elements, they also posit darker visions that are exposed by the bright sunlight of Venice. The circular shapes of a harbor suggest that all passageways repeat and rotate, returning the viewer to the present moment near the Adriatic Sea.

Although Sweden's maritime past was a popular explanation for his earlier art, the last fifteen years have pointed Vallien towards an uncertain future, an unknown sea. With the *Black works*, our gaze cannot completely penetrate into the glass. Houses, heads, and other familiar shapes appear, but now such repressed memories are less accessible.

The sculptures take us forward but, as time passes, they will more clearly reveal themselves for our appreciation, analysis, and interpretation.

Bertil Vallien in the Magical Land of Berengo

Marcel Paquet

Leonardo da Vinci once stated that everything made in Venice was spiritual. Venice, he maintained, produced the metaphysical.

Unfortunately, very few painters or sculptors have ever produced immortal works, works of true spirituality. Most have been—and still are—content to produce humdrum, everyday art, provided it is decorative enough to sell. The creative minds that have had the good fortune to enter the enchanting and enchanted world of Venice's Fondamenta Vetrai are one striking exception to this rule. For in the world of Venice, of Adriano Berengo, they have enriched their personal universes through the manipulation of a raw material so pure and so alive that it gives certain immortality to their inspirations. Bertil Vallien made a remarkable debut in this marvellous world, under a firmament inhabited by glittering stars like Lolita Timofeeva, Bengt Lindström, Licata, Bram Bogart, Corneille, Jannis Kounellis, Hitoshi Kuriyama, Giuseppe Penone, Thomas Schütte, Zhang Huan, and Marya Kazoun (without having to evoke those past masters of abstraction and dream, like Josef Albers, Jean Arp, and Man Ray).

Bertil Vallien made his mark on this island of immortals through a series of works focusing on the egg as a symbol of life, the same mystic egg that Piero della Francesca must have envisaged above the heads of the Madonna, the baby Jesus, and all the saints in his masterpiece *The Sacred Conversation*, now housed in Brera in Milan. The egg is not just a source of life: it is also a place of security within which life can prepare for its arrival in the world.

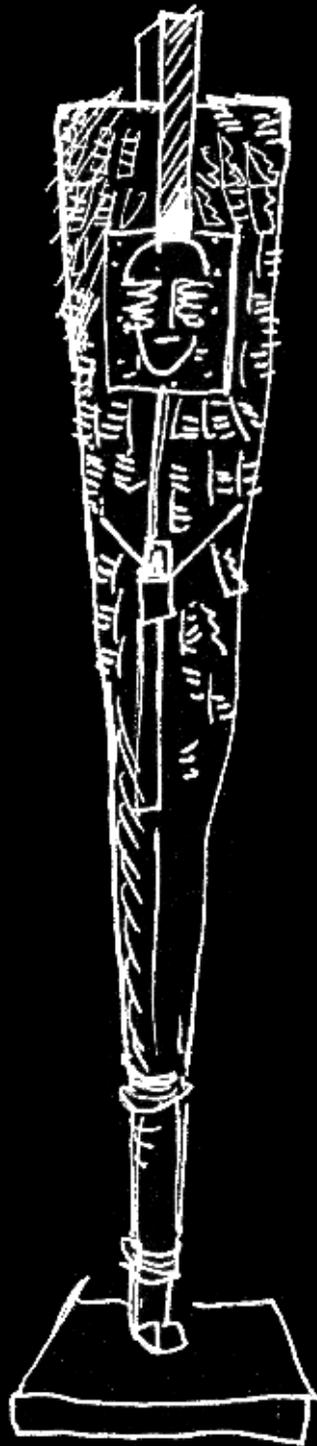
Bertil Vallien's *Resting Head* embodies the egg mystery: it portrays life as the marvel of marvels, a certainty of existence contrasted with our fear of nothingness. The head depicts life as a moment in which each and every one of us participates,

though it is only a tiny part of an enigmatic but splendid infinity.

The *Resting Head* hints of a magnificent and mysterious genesis within an egg of fertile life, a life whose true purpose is to prepare for the arrival of other lives, whose heads contain secrets of their own, including the black bird of death that accompanies us throughout our time on Earth to remind us of its one certain, inescapable, and intimately personal outcome. In his flute-shaped heads, Bertil Vallien experiments with the presence of a parallel universe but leaves us unable to determine whether it is one of organic death or inorganic, eternal life, resurrected through the art of glass, that magically pure material to which Adriano Berengo dedicated his quasi-sacred cult. In Bertil Vallien's works, life and death are constant elements, as are the ineluctable transformation of future into past, faces that hide all expression and thought, and glass temple architectures from which a Spirit of absolute immanence emerges, and sacral blue bars and plates from which fingers and hands extend in suffering, but still succeed in offering us a vertical glass reminiscent of the stele in that most metaphysical of films, *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Simply replace 2001 with 2012, or any of the years in which the civilization of the Renaissance has been transmuted into the global culture of glass of which Adriano Berengo and his workshop are the precursors and founders.

In the imagination of Italians, but especially that of Venetians who know a bit more about glass, the best representations of Swedish glass are extremely pure and somewhat sterile, with figurative engravings in a classical, possibly expressionist, style, yet in the traditional sphere. Bertil Vallien and, with him, his wife Ulrica Hydman Vallien, have acquainted us with another aspect of Swedish art and of art glass in particular. He prefers a deliberately rough glass, an unusual casting technique, where the inclusions in his works evoke personal events but also stories of Swedish culture and sagas that are well distant from the classical style typical of the court tradition. Bertil Vallien is a paragon of creative freedom with his highly personal way of using glass as an artistic medium.

Rosa Barovier Mentasti





BERTIL
VALLIEN
9 ROOMS





1

The sleeping girl

In the year 1875, thirteen-year-old Karolina Olsson slipped, fell, and hit her head on ice. She went into a coma. In the year 1908, she awoke from her coma and remembered only that she had been surrounded by blue men. Twenty-four blue men on the other side of consciousness. Encapsulated in glass, a Karolina Olsson as a virgin princess in her white, transparent attire.









Head 1, 2006
12.5x19x12 cm
sand-cast glass
photo: Göran Örtegren

Head 16, 2003
21x18.5x11.5 cm
sand-cast glass
photo: Göran Örtegren







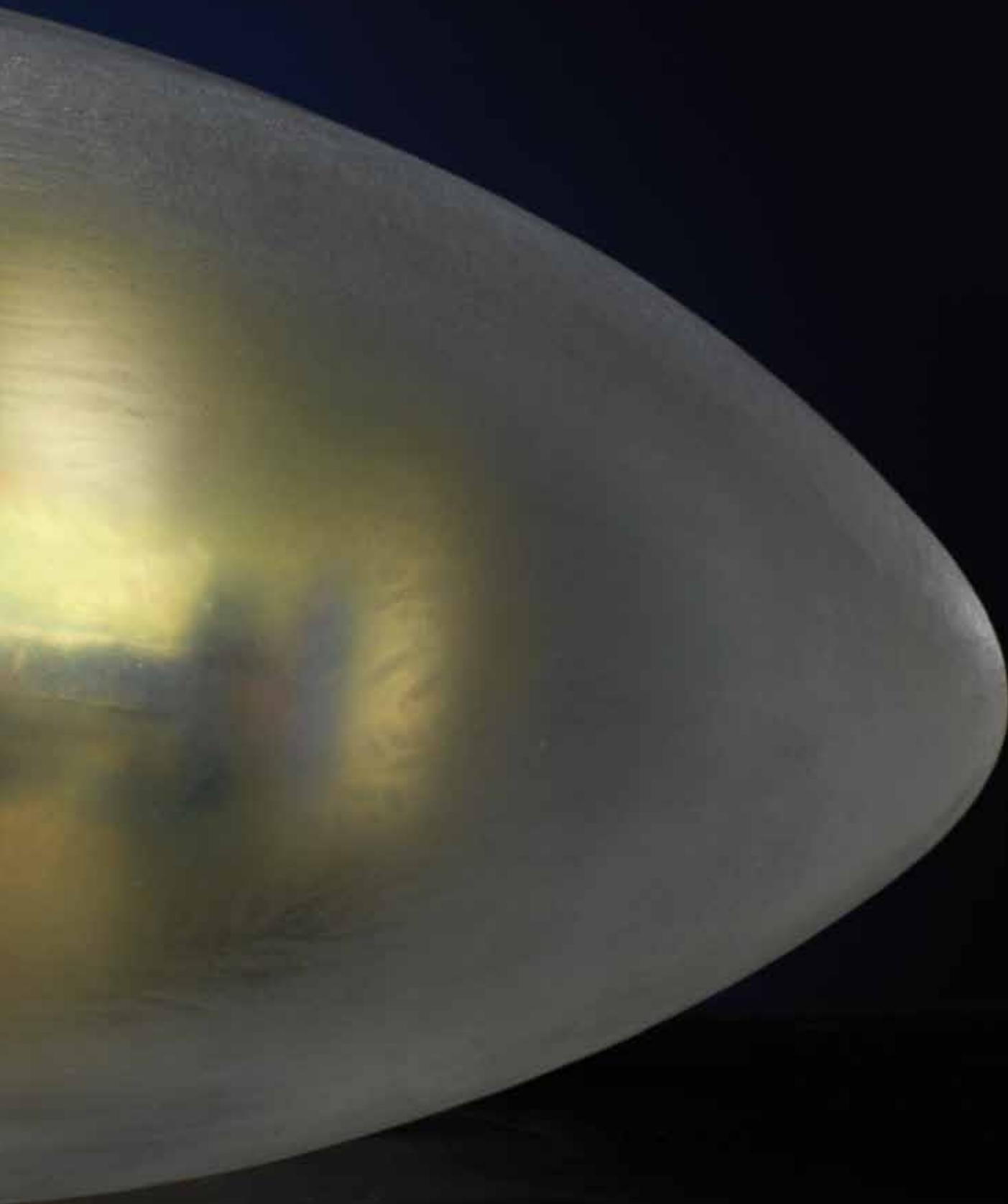


Resting Head, 2009

23x28x38 cm

sand-cast glass

photo: Anders Qvarnström





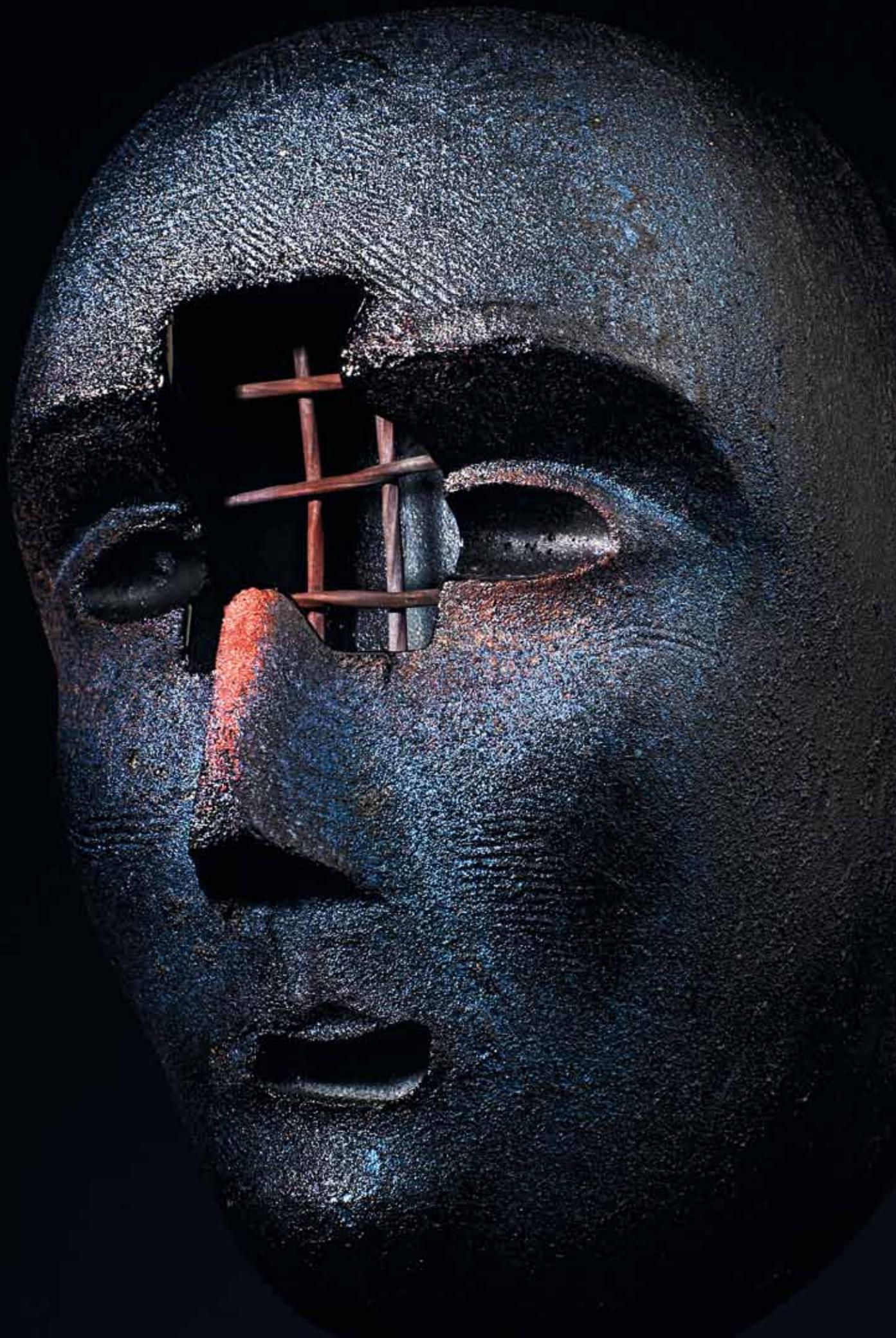
Head 4, 2011
19.5x12.5x20.5 cm
sand-cast glass
photo: Göran Örtegren



Head 5, 2012
22x13.5x19.5 cm
sand-cast glass
photo: Göran Örtegren

Head 2, 2012
19.5x12.5x20.5 cm
sand-cast glass
photo: Göran Örtegren







B. Völlinen.

1911

Janus II, 2010
21x28x12 cm
sand-cast glass
photo: Göran Örtegren

Janus III, 2012
21x28x12 cm
sand-cast glass
photo: Göran Örtegren



Target II, 2006
138x138x20 cm
sand-cast glass, acrylic, wood
photo: Göran Örtegren

Janus I, 2009
21x28x28 cm
sand-cast glass with
inclusions, cut and
polished details
photo: Jonas Lindström





2

Idols

Idols with a powerful masculinity. Variations on a theme about masculine attitudes.

Strength, power, tenderness, and toughness.

The black glass represents the blackness in the mind, evil, sorrow, melancholy.

The crucified idol, the moon ascender, the courageous.







Idols I, 2008
78x82.5x7 cm
sand-cast glass, acrylic, wood
photo: Göran Örtegren

Idol, 2009
h. 22 cm
sand-cast glass, metal
photo: Göran Örtegren







Idol, 2009
h. 21 cm
sand-cast glass, metal
photo: Göran Örtegren

Idol, 2009
h. 19 cm
sand-cast glass, metal
photo: Göran Örtegren





Idols, 2003
variable dimensions
(15–22 cm)
sand-cast glass, metal
photo: Göran Örtengren



Black Bend, 2008
17x68x15 cm
sand-cast glass
and encaustic on wood
photo: Göran Örtegren

Red House, 2011
14x110x11.5 cm
sand-cast glass, metal, silver
photo: Göran Örtegren







Desert Snow

20 grams cobalt is blue.
2000 grams cobalt is black.
A mistake gives birth
to black glass.
Sootiness, deformation,
and doom.

3 | Landscape without people
in death's shadow.
A red thread, a life-nerve,
an umbilical cord
at the moment
of death.



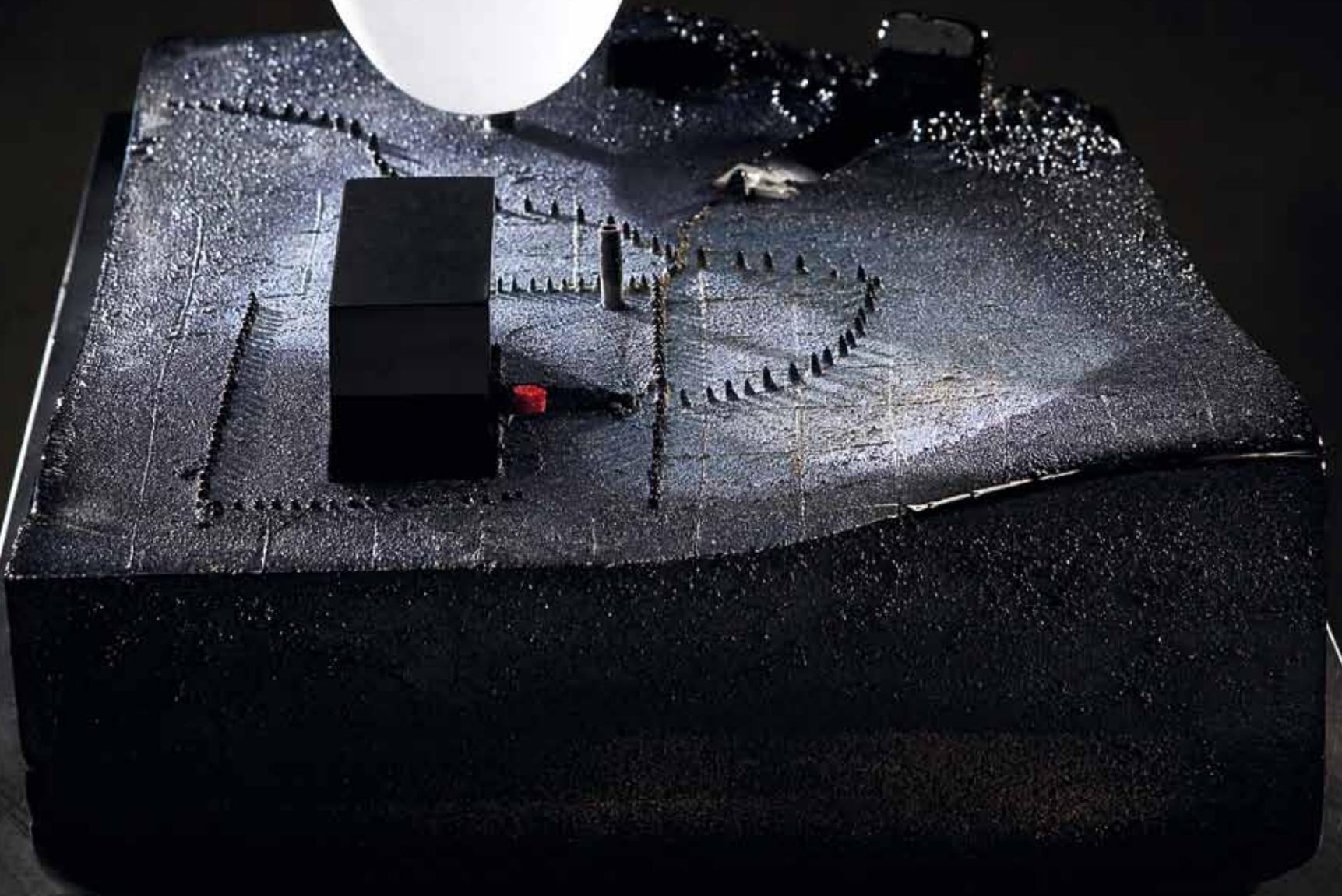






Ararat II, 2007
16x39x13 cm
sand-cast black glass
photo: Göran Örtegren

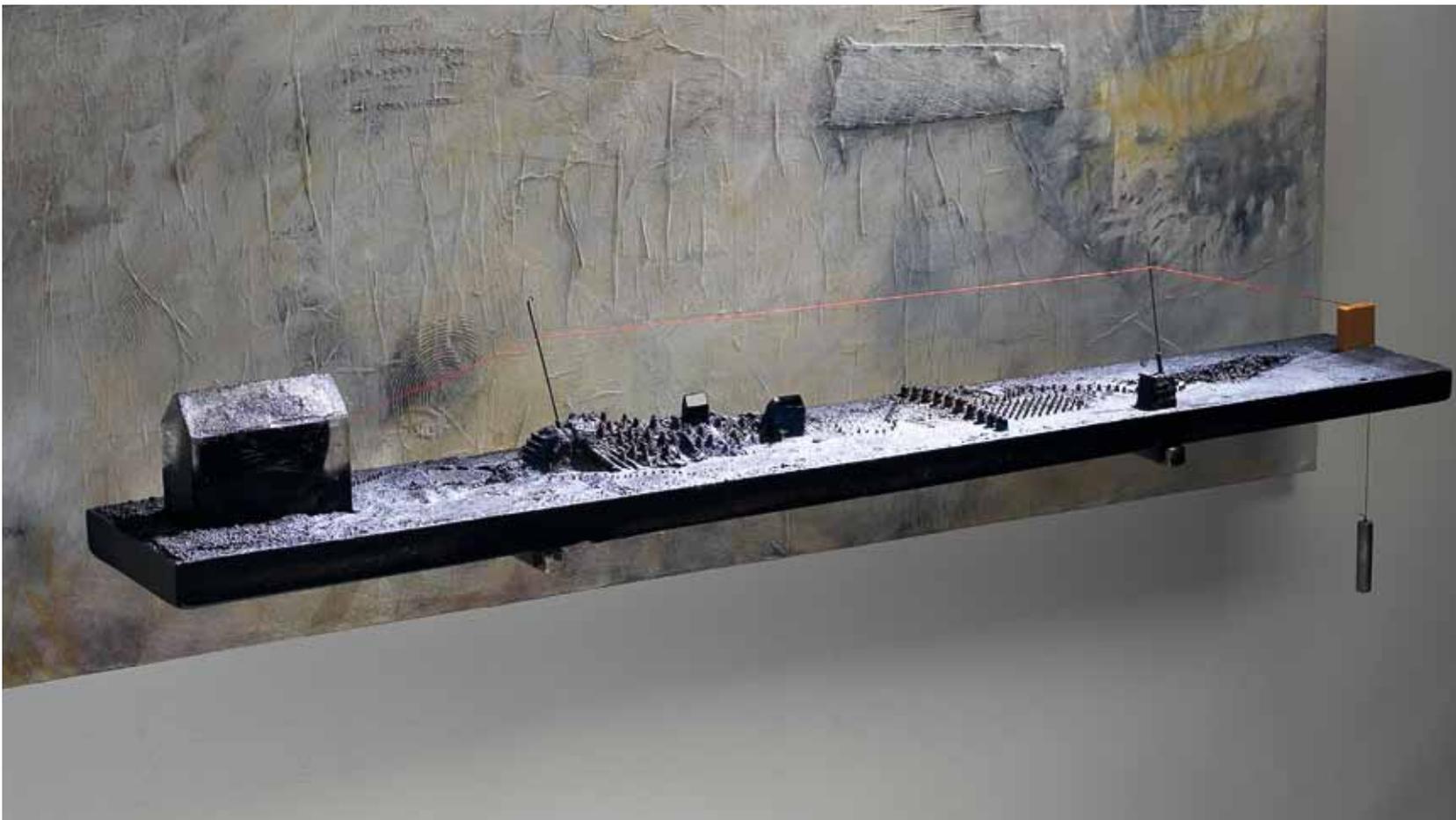
Public Service, 2010
26.5x23.3x32.2 cm
sand-cast glass and off-hand details
photo: Göran Örtegren



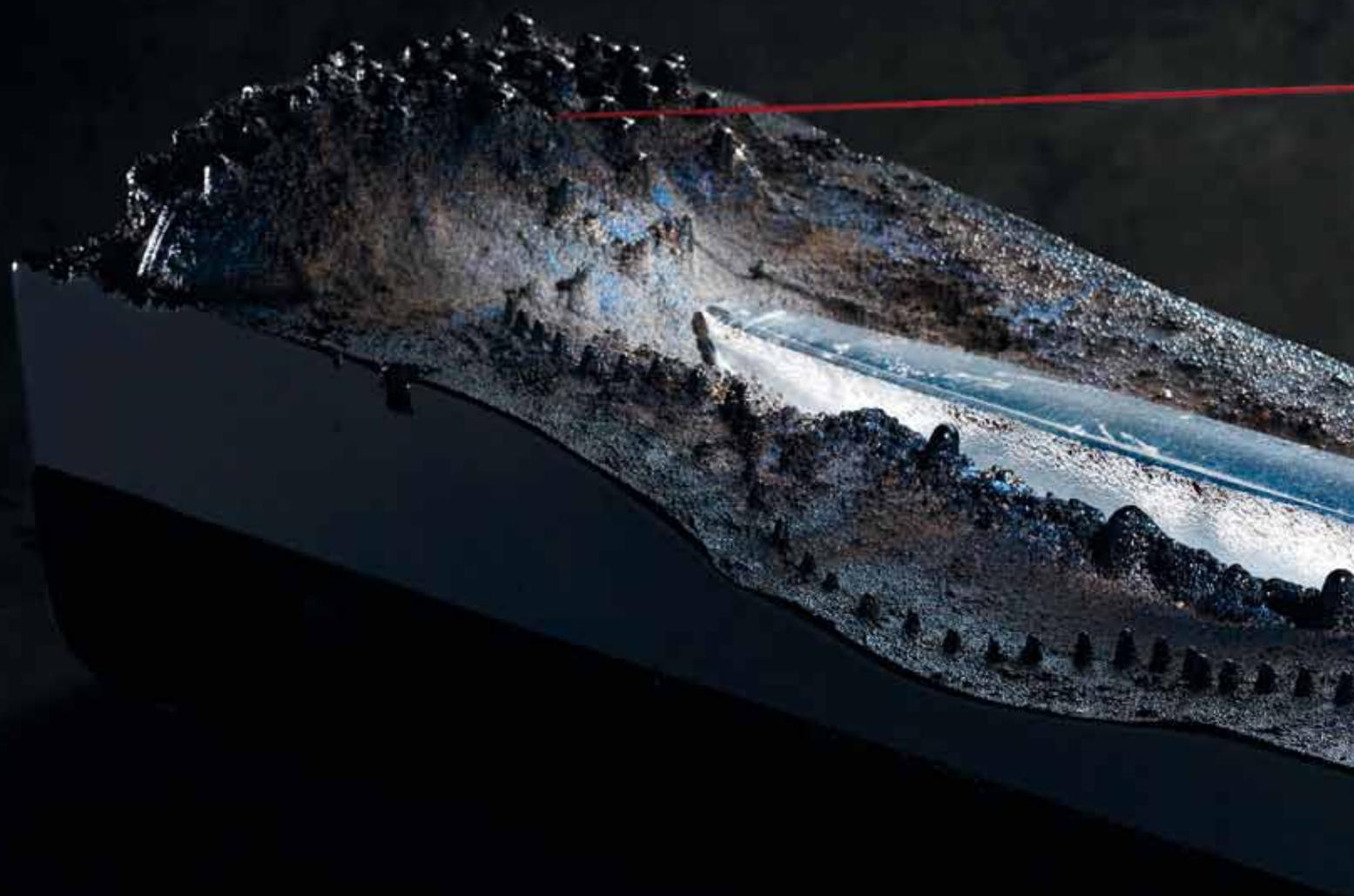


Abyss, 2009
40x36x16 cm
sand-cast glass, metal, string
photo: Göran Örtegren

Tension I, 2007
78x150x29 cm
sand-cast glass
photo: Göran Örtegren



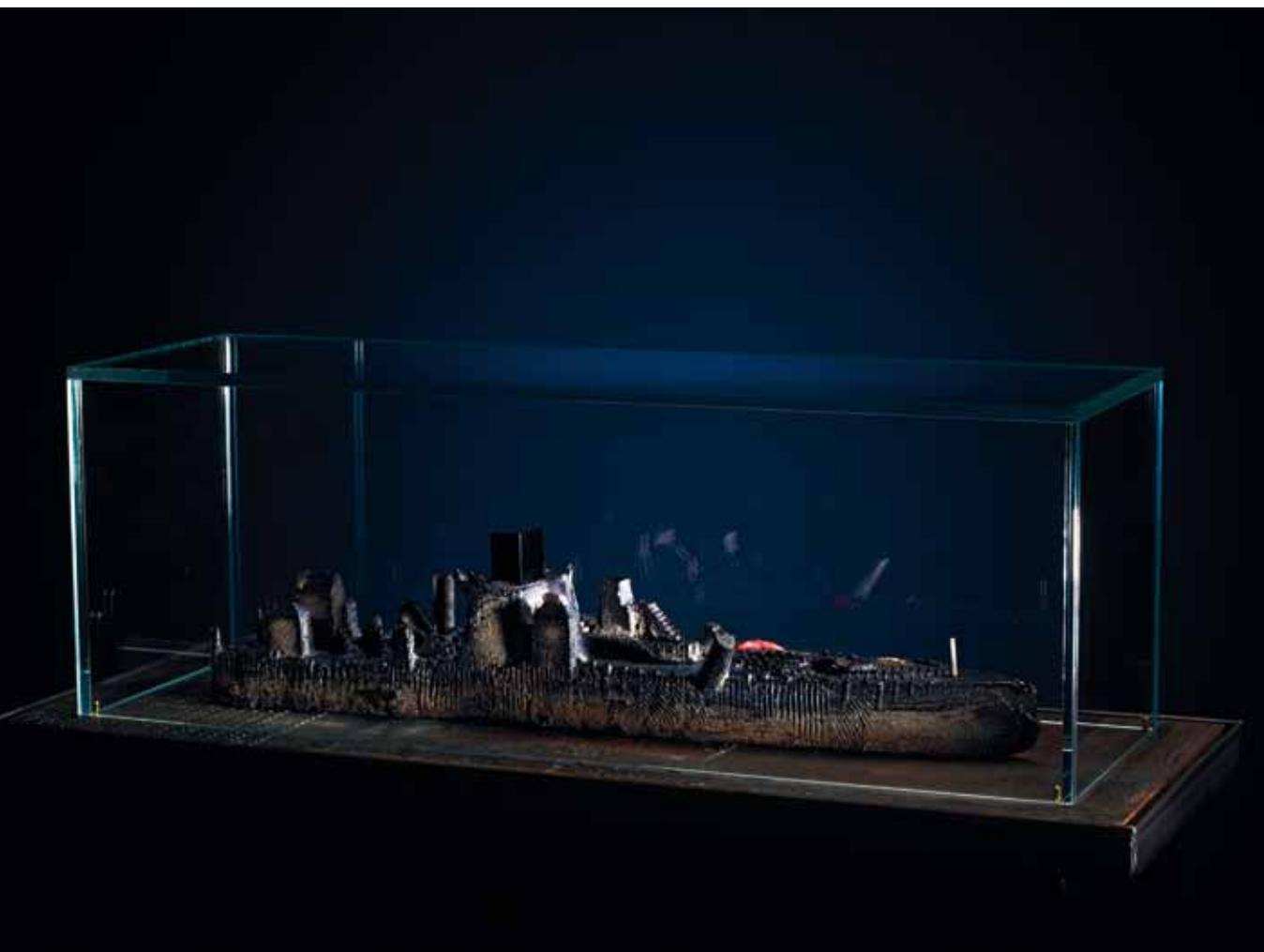
Landed, 2009
15.5x49.7x12 cm
sand-cast glass
photo: Göran Örtegren





Rombak, 2010
26.5x80x30 cm
sand-cast glass, wood
photo: Göran Örtegren

Desert snow II, 2009
20x44x44 cm
sand-cast glass, metal, threads
photo: Göran Örtegren



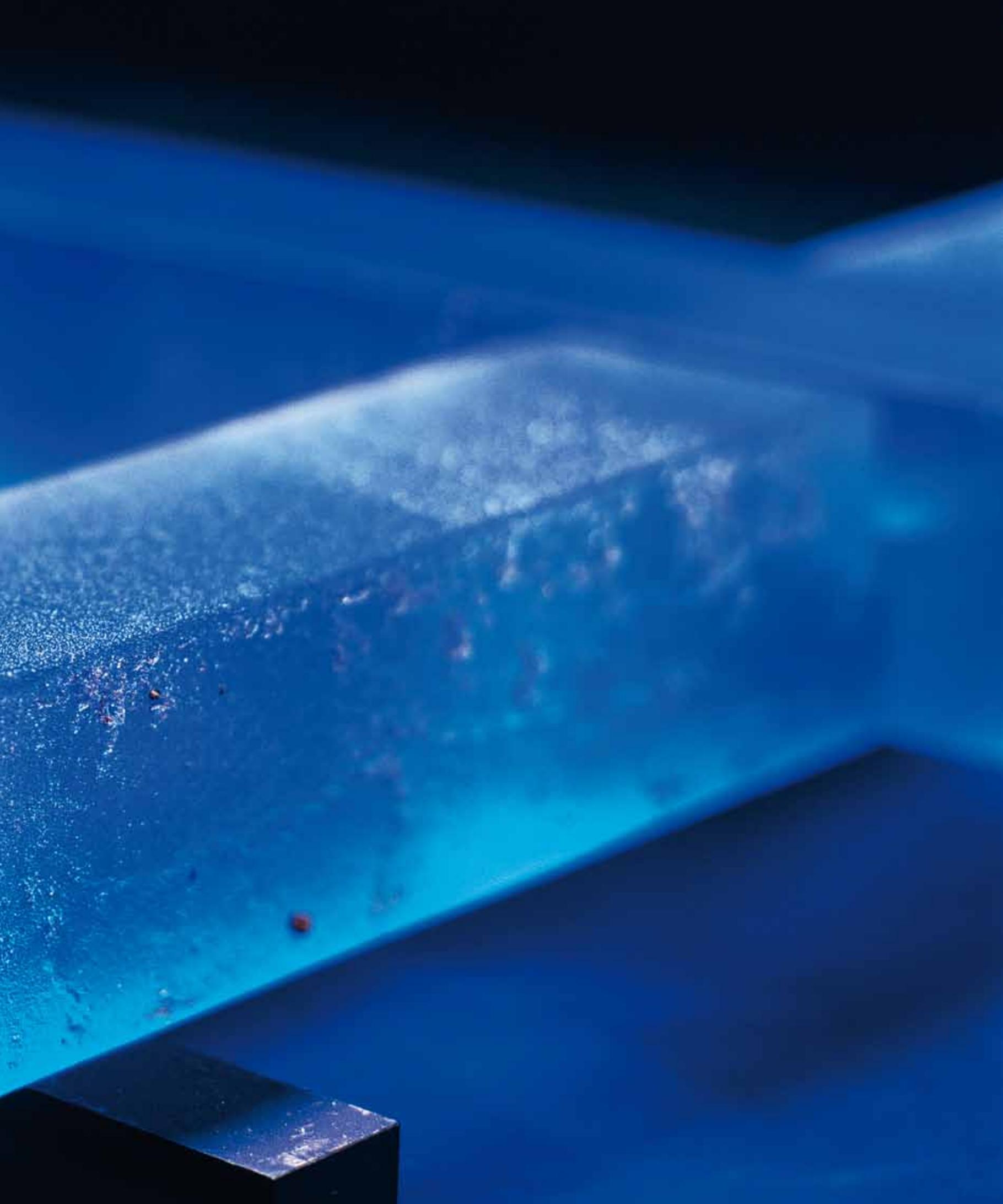


In Transit

In Transit consists of sculptures in glass of universal signs, archetypes. The equal-armed cross and circle correspond to sense and feeling. An austere idiom with monumental architectural forms allows us to wander through a timeless world. The impenetrable glass mass with its inner light elicits continual new worlds.





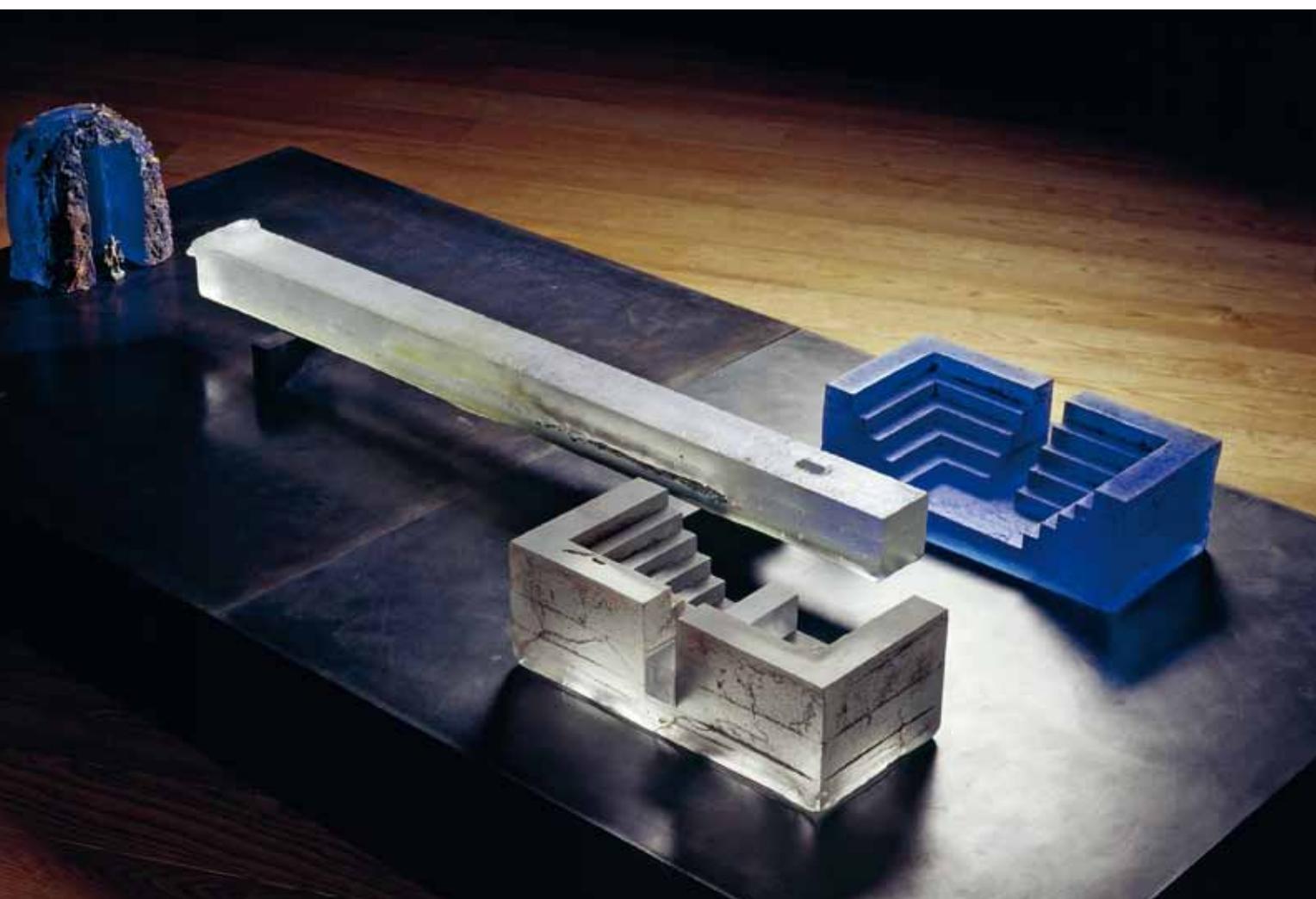


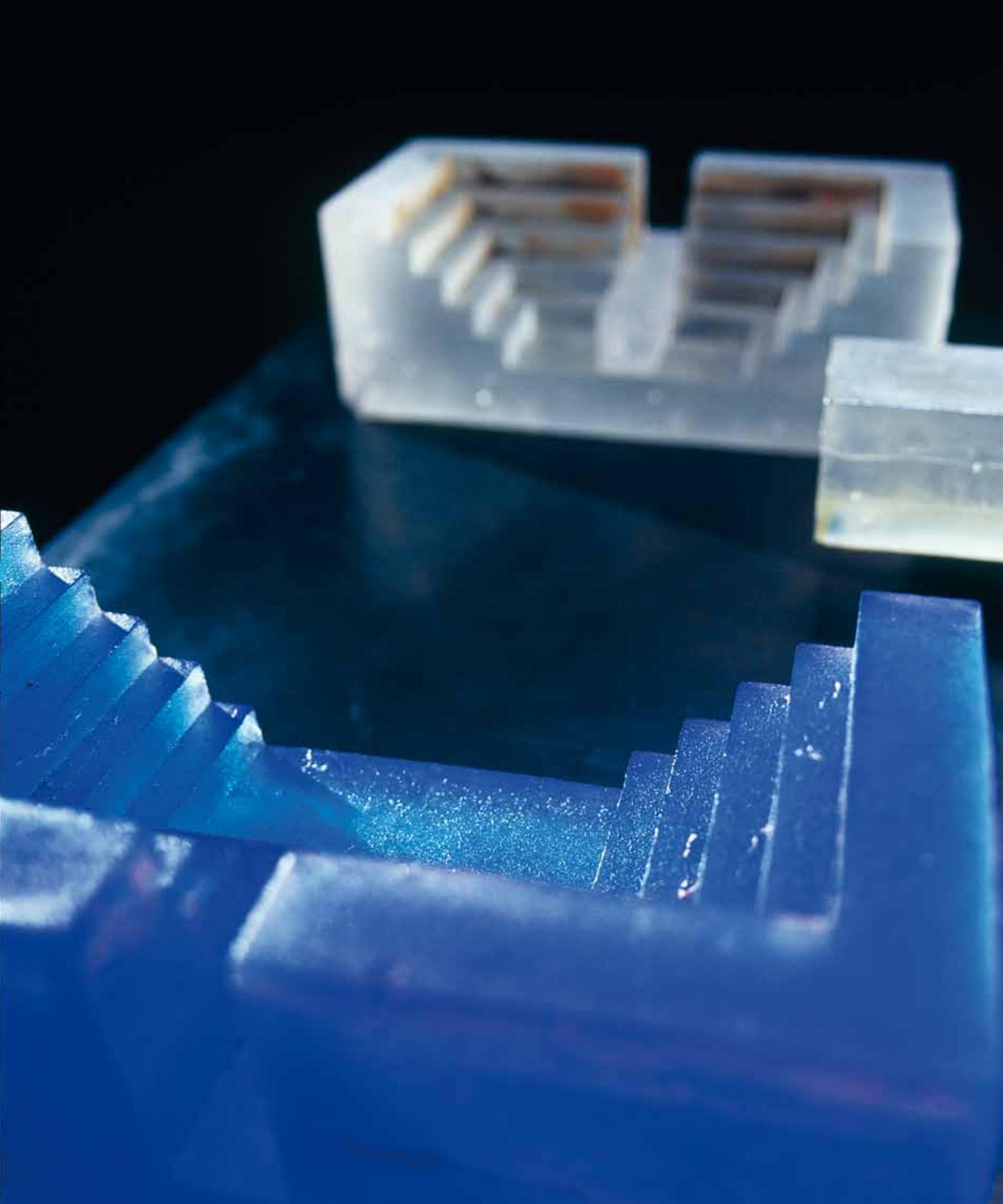
In Transit (Port), 2004
61x200x100 cm
sand-cast glass
and mixed media
photo: Anders Qvarnström

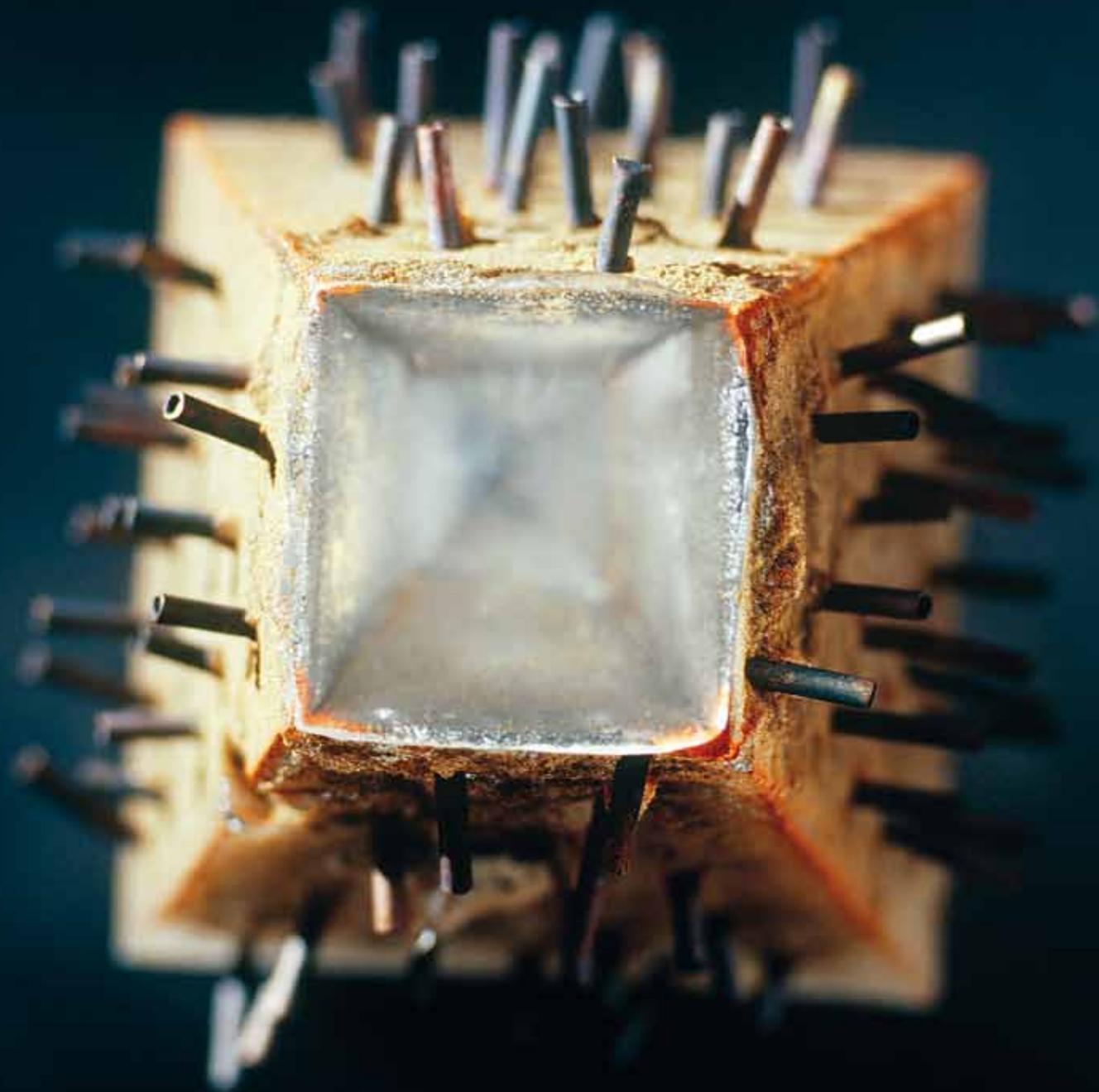




In Transit (Water), 2004
55x200x100 cm
sand-cast glass and
mixed media
photo: Anders Qwarnström







In Transit (Home), 2004
70x200x100 cm
sand-cast glass and
mixed media
photo: Anders Qvarnström





In Transit (Anod), 2004
53x200x100 cm
sand-cast glass
and mixed media
photo: Anders Qvarnström



In Transit (Anod)

(detail), 2004

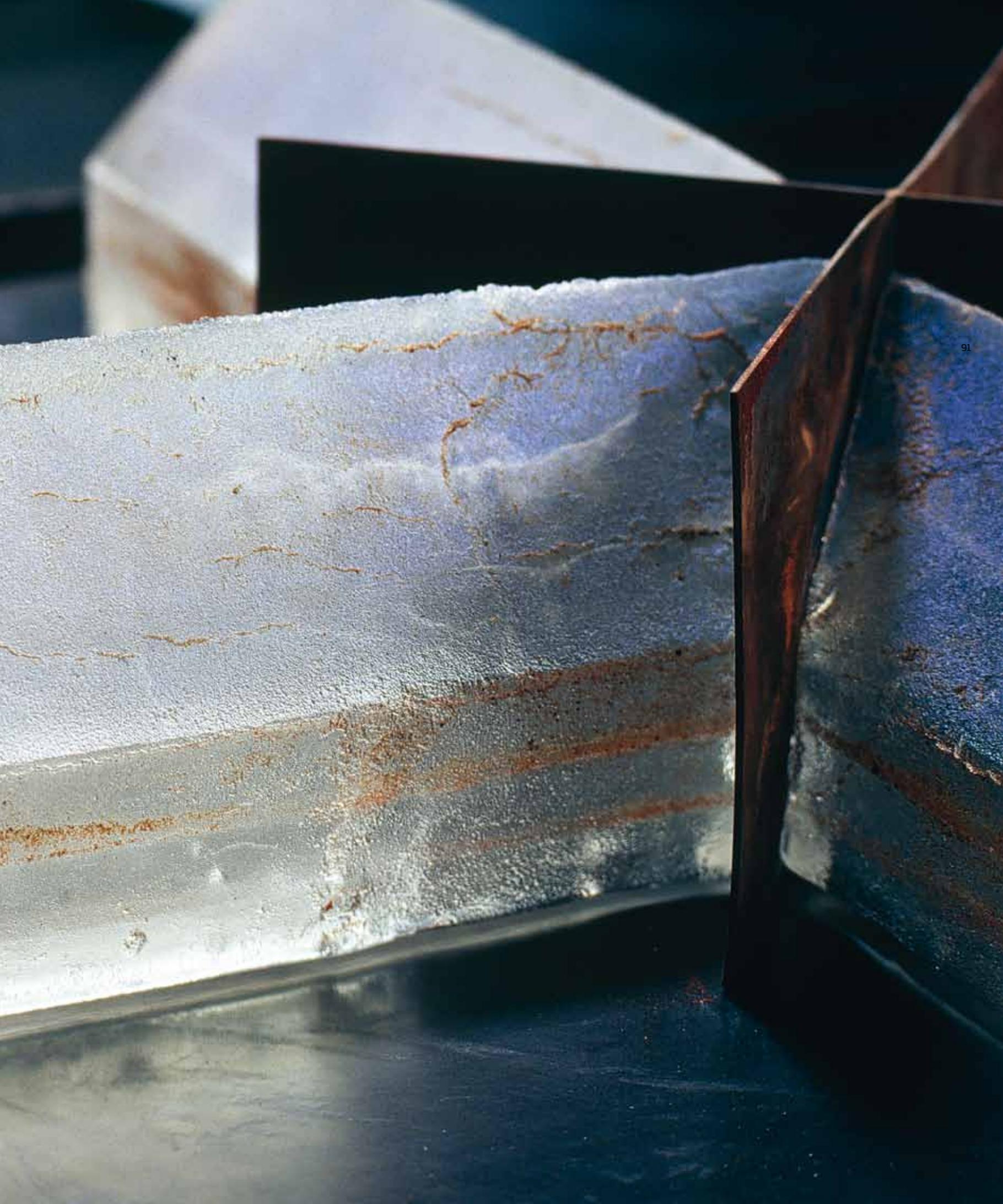
53x200x100 cm

sand-cast glass

and mixed media

photo: Anders Qwarnström





In Transit (Anod)

(detail), 2004

53x200x100 cm

sand-cast glass

and mixed media

photo: Anders Qwarnström



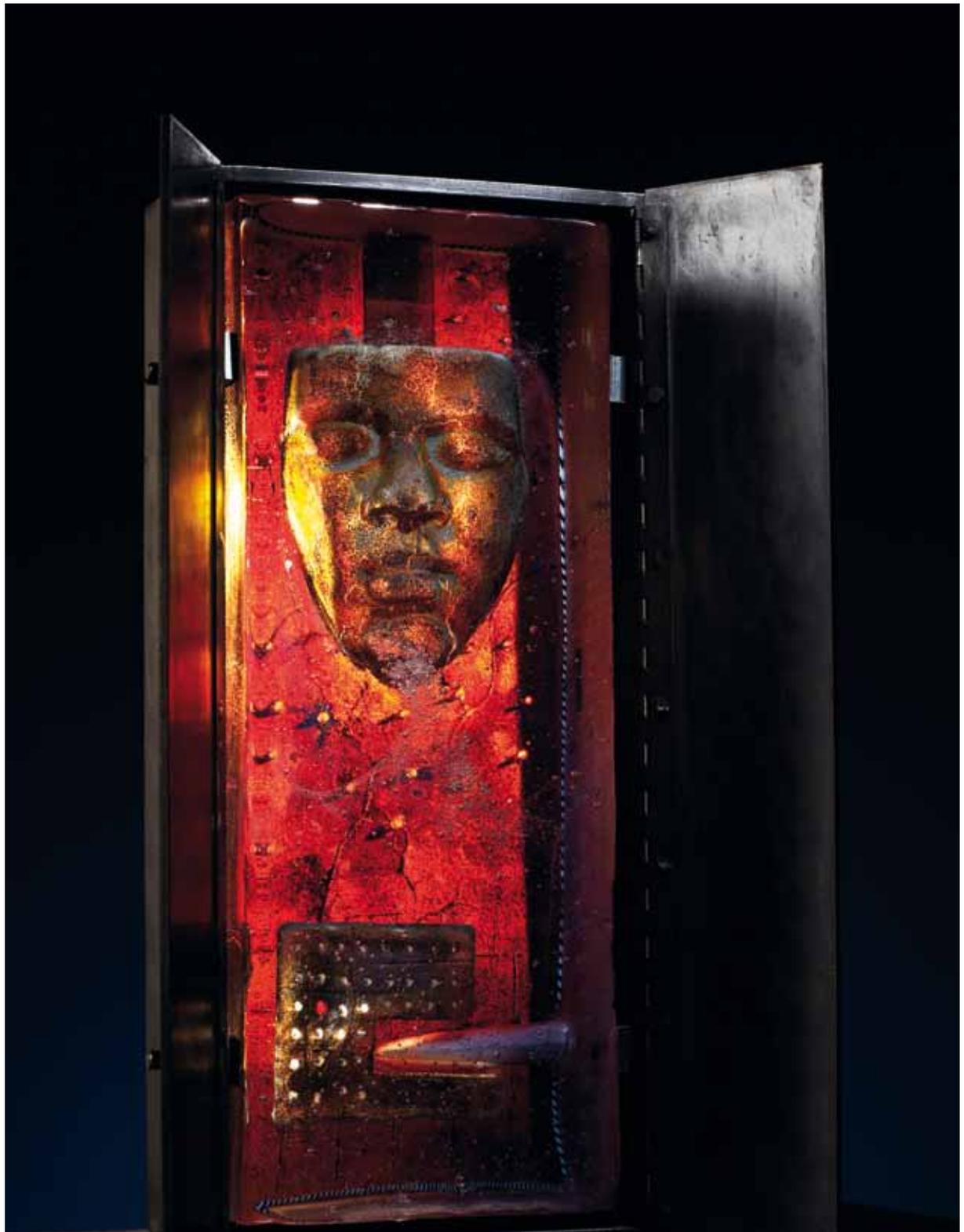


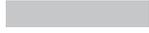


B. V. ...

Entrance, 2001
56x26x13 cm
sand-cast glass, metal
photo: Göran Örtegren

Port II, 2001
56x26x13 cm
sand-cast glass, metal
photo: Göran Örtegren





5

■ Area II

Boats are meant for traveling, and life,
from the beginning, is a journey.

Boats became the first sand-cast
sculptures in 1983.

They became the hallmark
of the sand-casting technique.

There are woman boats, death boats, love
boats with allegoric messages.

Area II from 1991 has an archaic
destructive tone.

The sculptures remind one of lost
civilizations like rediscovered
tablets and findings are
archeological discoveries.

Watchers guard the discoveries
and the tombs, unyieldingly strong.

A time journey across the history of man.







■ Precious Cargo I, 2010
110x110x30 cm
sand-cast glass
with inclusions
photo: Jonas Lindström





■ Hidden, 1987
10.5x15.5x65 cm
sand-cast glass
photo: Anders Qvarnström





■ E-Echo, 2010
12x198x13 cm
sand-cast glass with off-hand
details, metal, leather
photo: Göran Örtegren





■ Precious Cargo, 2012
14x269x14.5 cm
sand-cast glass
photo: Göran Örtegren



■ **Watchers**, 2004–2006
variable dimensions
(190–201 cm)
sand-cast glass with
polished areas
photo: Anders Qvarnström

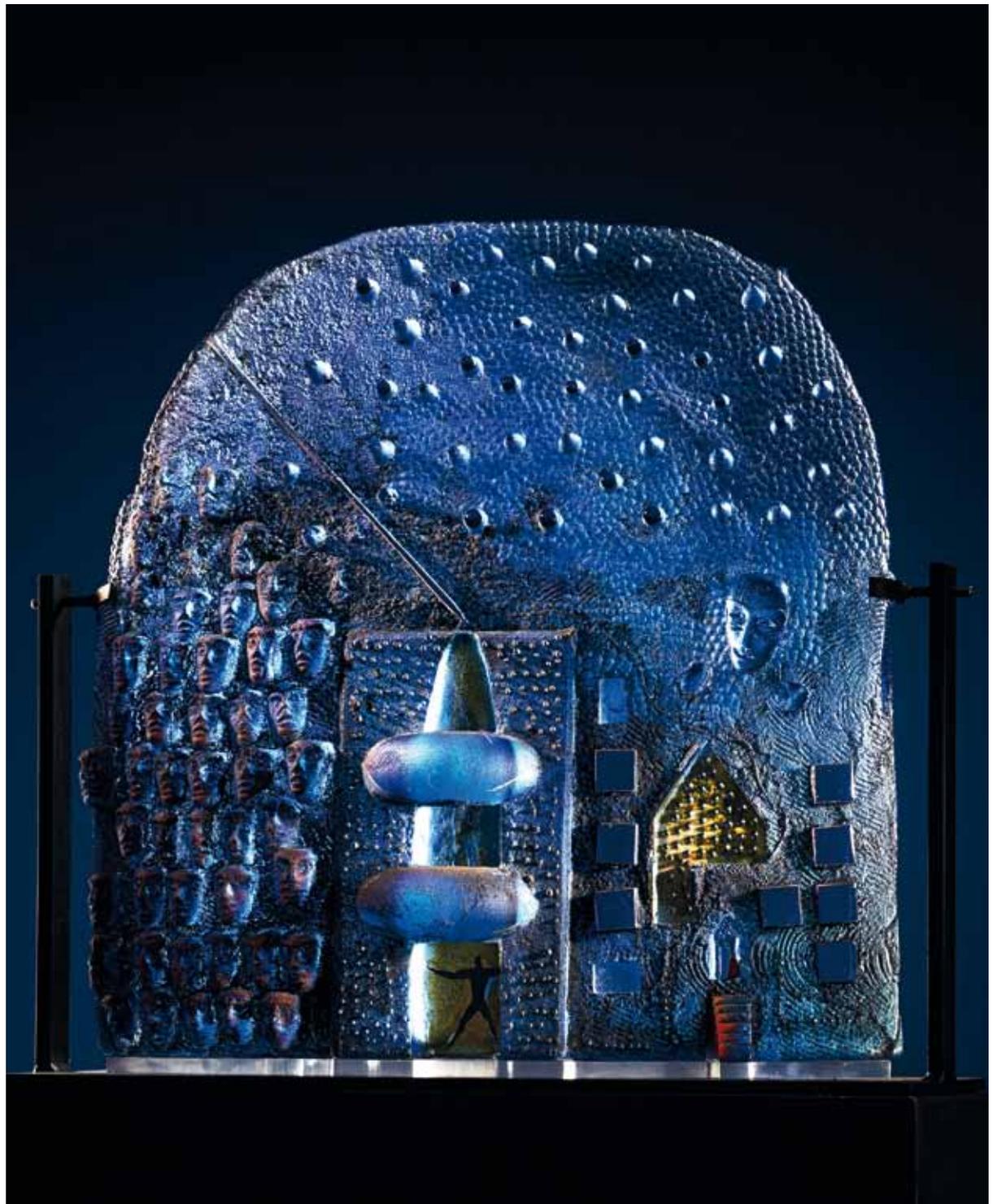






■ **Black**, 2011
123x63x11.5 cm
sand-cast glass, acrylic, wood
Watcher II, 2012
210x50x50 cm
sand-cast black glass, metal
photo: Göran Örtegren

Portal, 2005
65x70x25 cm
sand-cast glass, metal
photo: Göran Örtegren



■ **Area II Map II, 2010**
65x70x25 cm
sand-cast glass
photo: Göran Örtegren









Blue room

The blue glass takes its color from the sea,
transparent, deep down towards the bottom,
Or takes its color from the sky,
high up towards outer space.

The blue glass sanctifies all things,
elicits happiness and hope.

For me, the blue color is a color to play with,
To give poetry a higher sphere,

6  possibly to paint with glass.



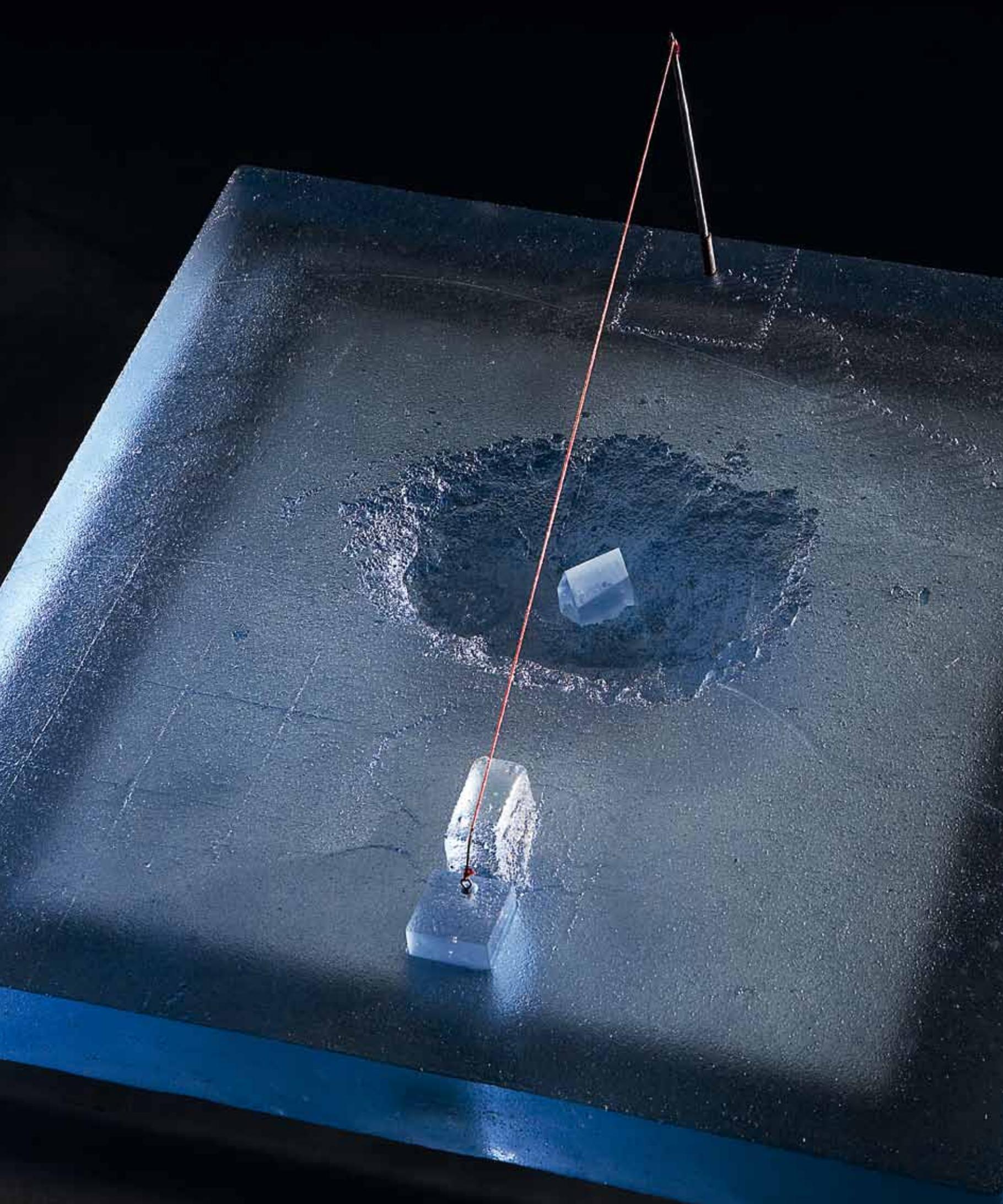






Memorandum, 2007
22x37x28.5 cm
sand-cast glass
■ *photo: Göran Örtegren*

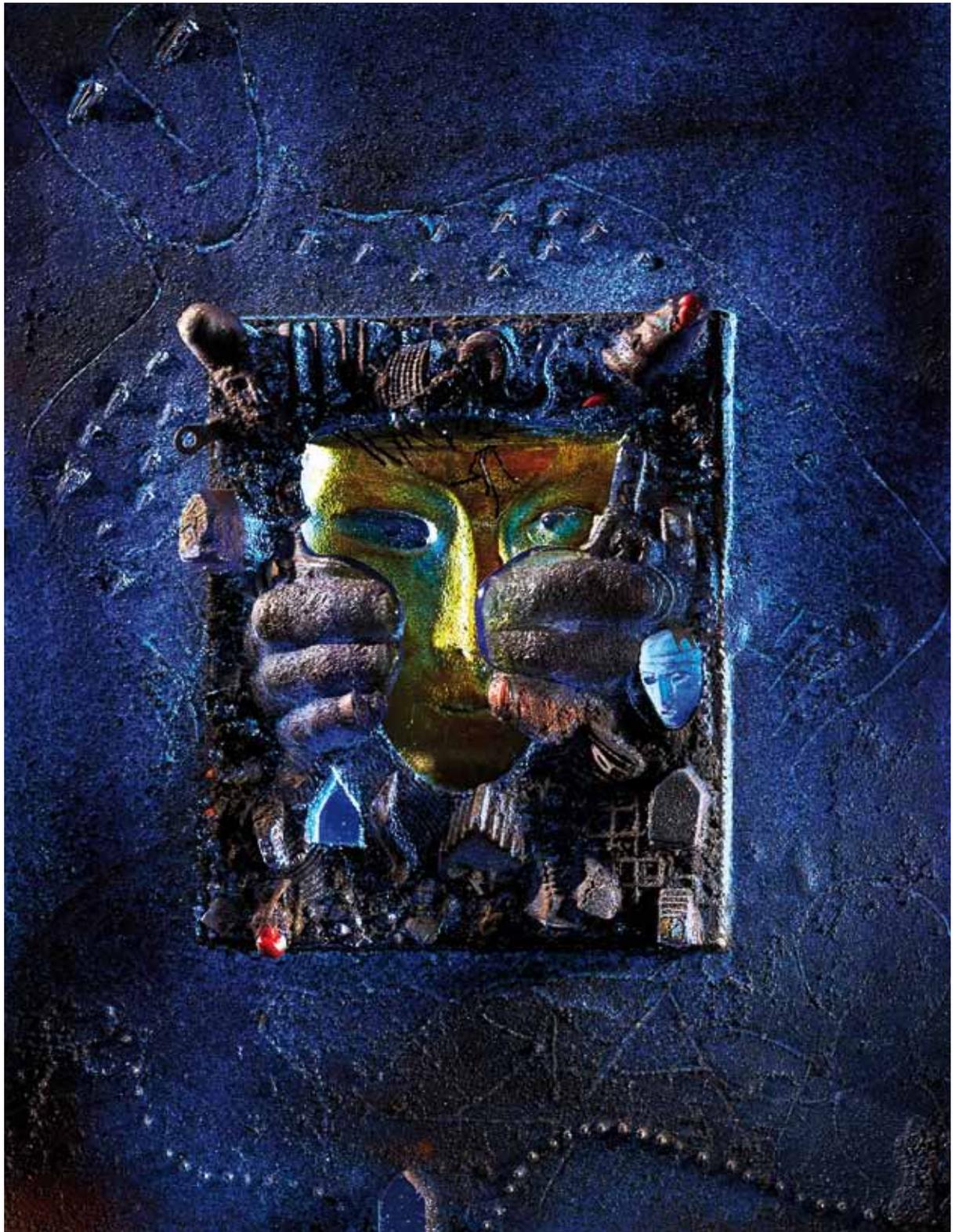
Desert Snow I, 2009
20x44x44 cm
cast crystal and mixed media
photo: Göran Örtegren





To Pass, 2011
48x48x20 cm
sand-cast glass
■ *photo: Göran Örtegren*

Embrace, 2012
54x48x20 cm
sand-cast glass, metal
photo: Göran Örtegren



Blue Bar, 2003

8x110x8 cm
sand-cast glass

■ *photo: Anders Qwarnström*

Hull, 2005

95x21x12 cm
sand-cast glass

photo: Göran Örtegren





Intruder II, 2011
14.5x59x13.5 cm
sand-cast glass

■ photo: Göran Örtegren





Intruder I, 2011

12.5x28x12.5 cm

sand-cast glass

■ *photo: Göran Örtegren*

Inside, 2012

20.3x19.5x19.5 cm

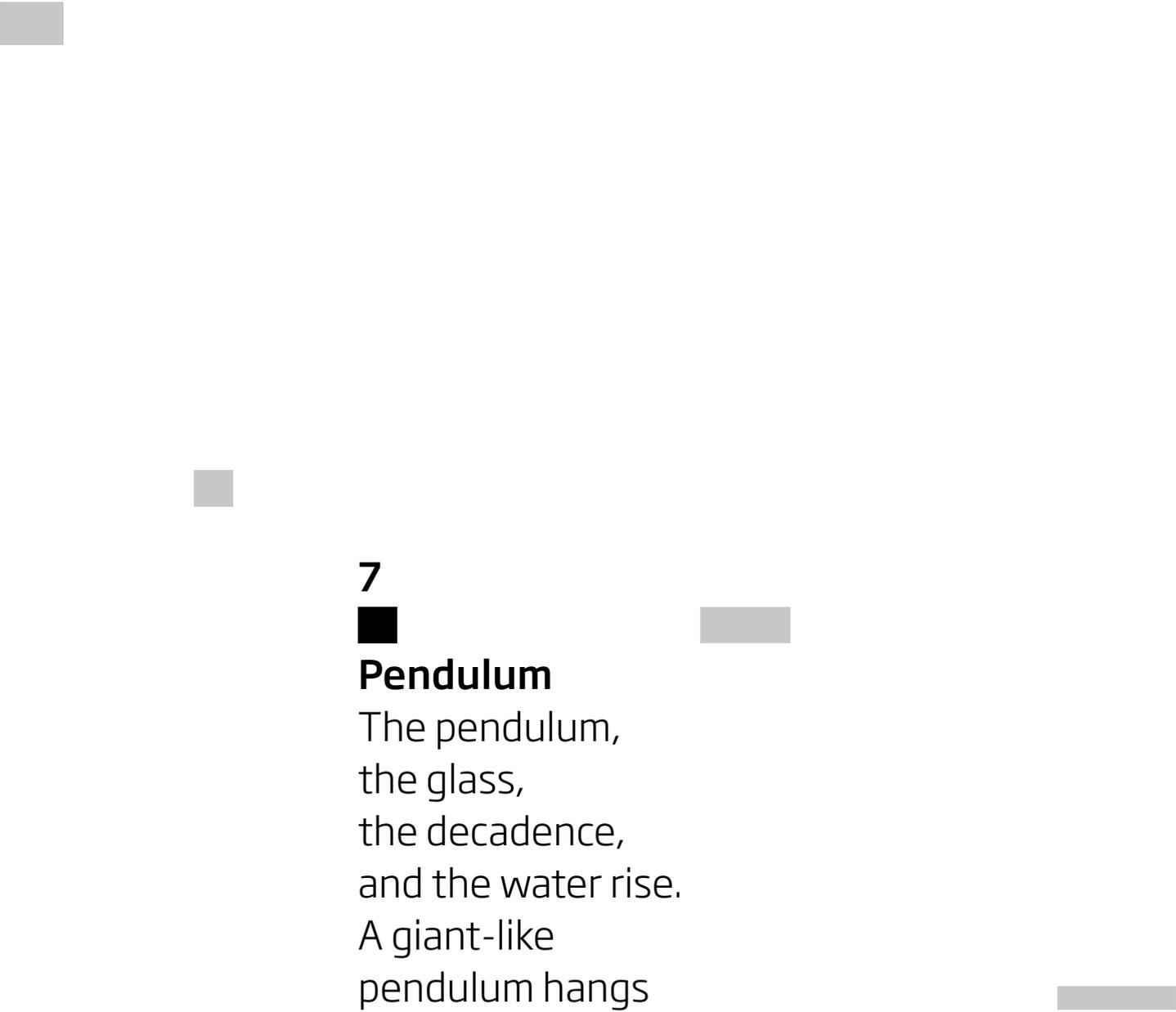
sand-cast glass with cut
and polished details

photo: Göran Örtegren









7

■ **Pendulum**

The pendulum,
the glass,
the decadence,
and the water rise.

A giant-like
pendulum hangs
above

Piazza San Marco.

The pendulum
invalidates time,
is independent
of the Earth's
rotation.

Time is beyond
life's landscape.
Eternity.







■
Pendulum I, 1997
198x13x12 cm
sand-cast glass, metal
photo: Göran Örtegren

Organic Bar II, 2009
121.4x59.5x17.5 cm
sand-cast glass, acrylic, wood
photo: Göran Örtegren





■
Pendulum III, 2012
118x33x8 cm
sand-cast glass
photo: Göran Örtegren

Organic Bar, 2009
121.4x59.5x17.5 cm
sand-cast glass, acrylic, wood
photo: Göran Örtegren





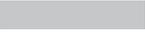


Kafka

In the heart
of Europe
Yet I belong
to no one,
The coldness
of solitude
enfolds me.
Will it ever
be warmer?



8

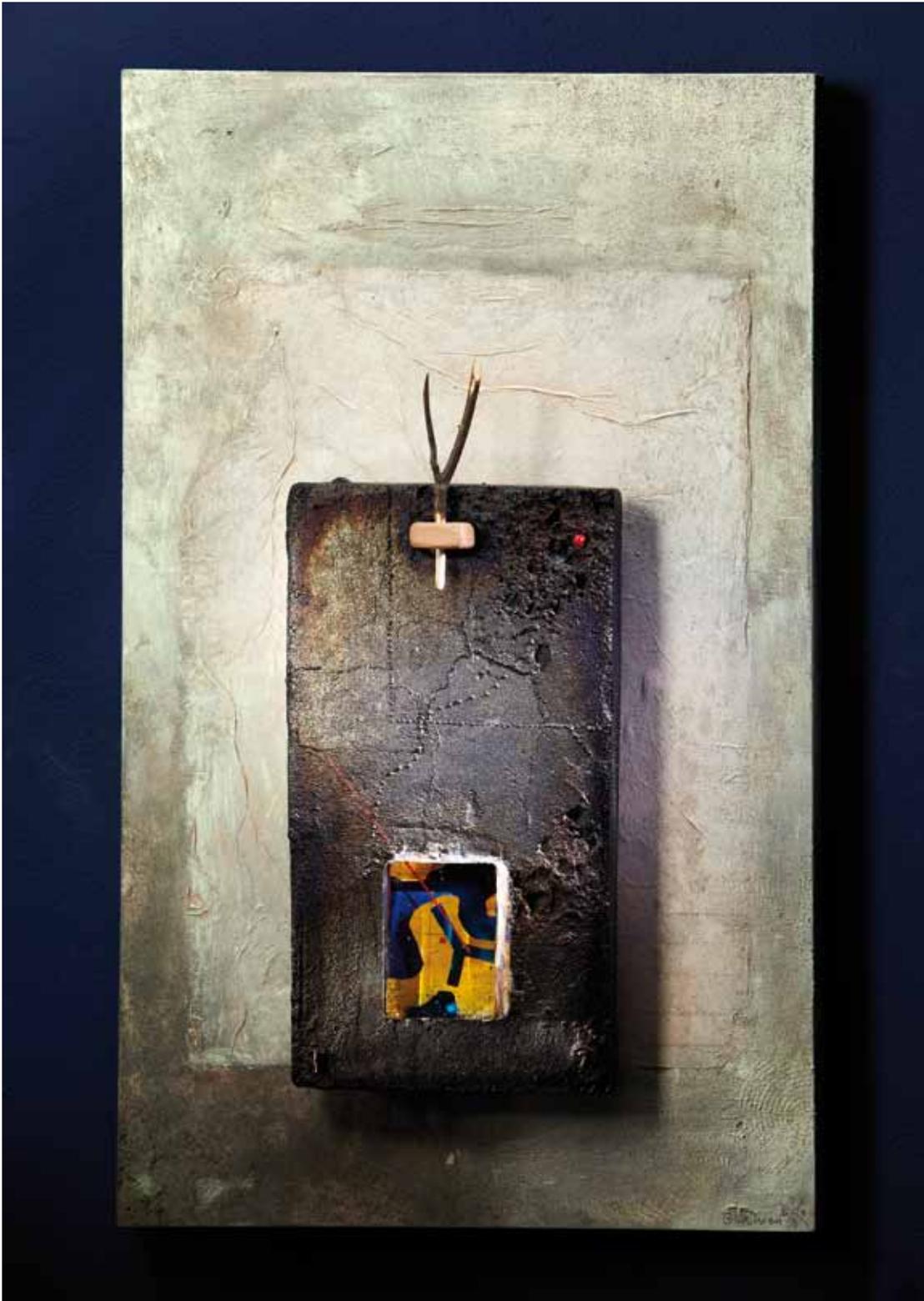






Book of Rules V, 2010
54x34x12 cm
sand-cast glass, acrylic, wood
photo: Göran Örtegren

Book of Rules VII, 2010
54x34x12 cm
sand-cast glass, acrylic, wood
photo: Göran Örtegren

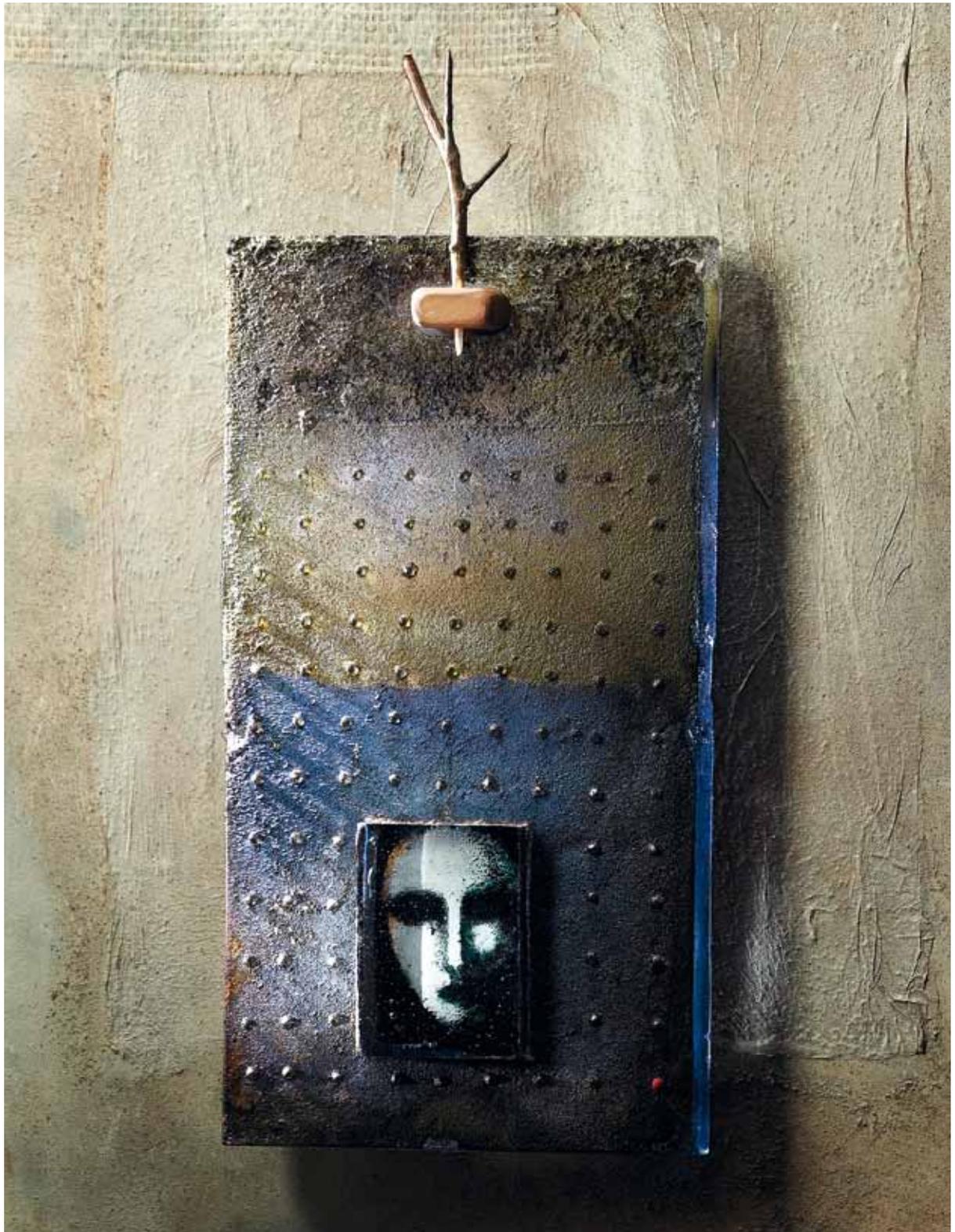






Kafka I, 1983-2012
36x27x12.5 cm
sand-cast glass
photo: Göran Örtegren

Book of Rules IV, 2010
54x34x12 cm
sand-cast glass, acrylic, wood
photo: Göran Örtegren



Kafka II, 1983-2012
38x27x13 cm
sand-cast glass
photo: Göran Örtegren

Kafka III, 1983-2012
37x31x12 cm
sand-cast glass
photo: Göran Örtegren







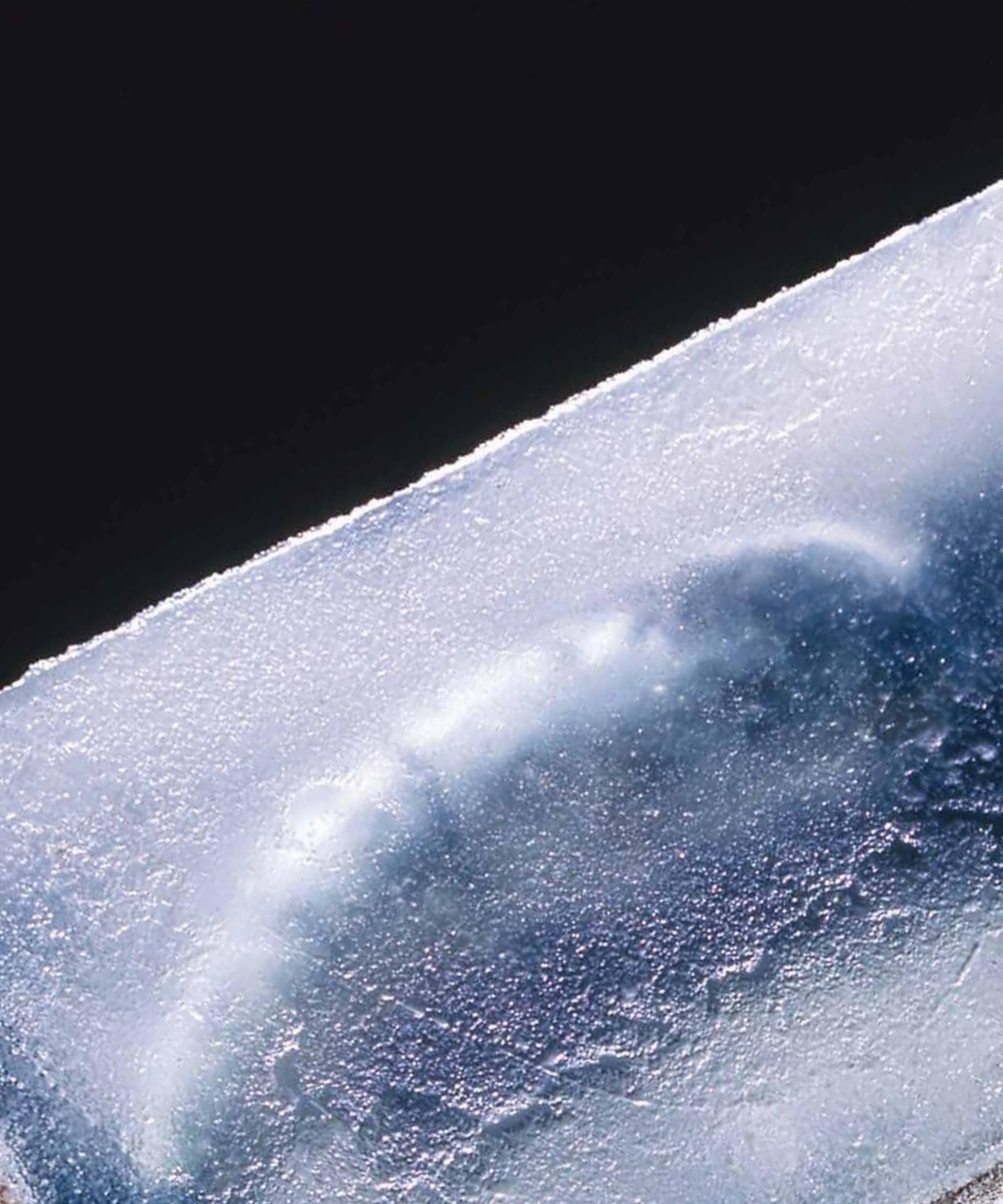


9

Somna/Vakna

To sleep and to awaken
at a later time to an extended life
in the future.

To freeze one's body to ice.
The sarcophagus in glass contains
a person awaiting
A resurrected life.
To hope for eternity.





Mr. Moro, 2000
11.5x36x12.5 cm
sand-cast glass
photo: Göran Örtegren

Somna/Vakna II, 2002
11.5x12.5x35.5 cm
sand-cast glass with inclusions
photo: Göran Örtegren

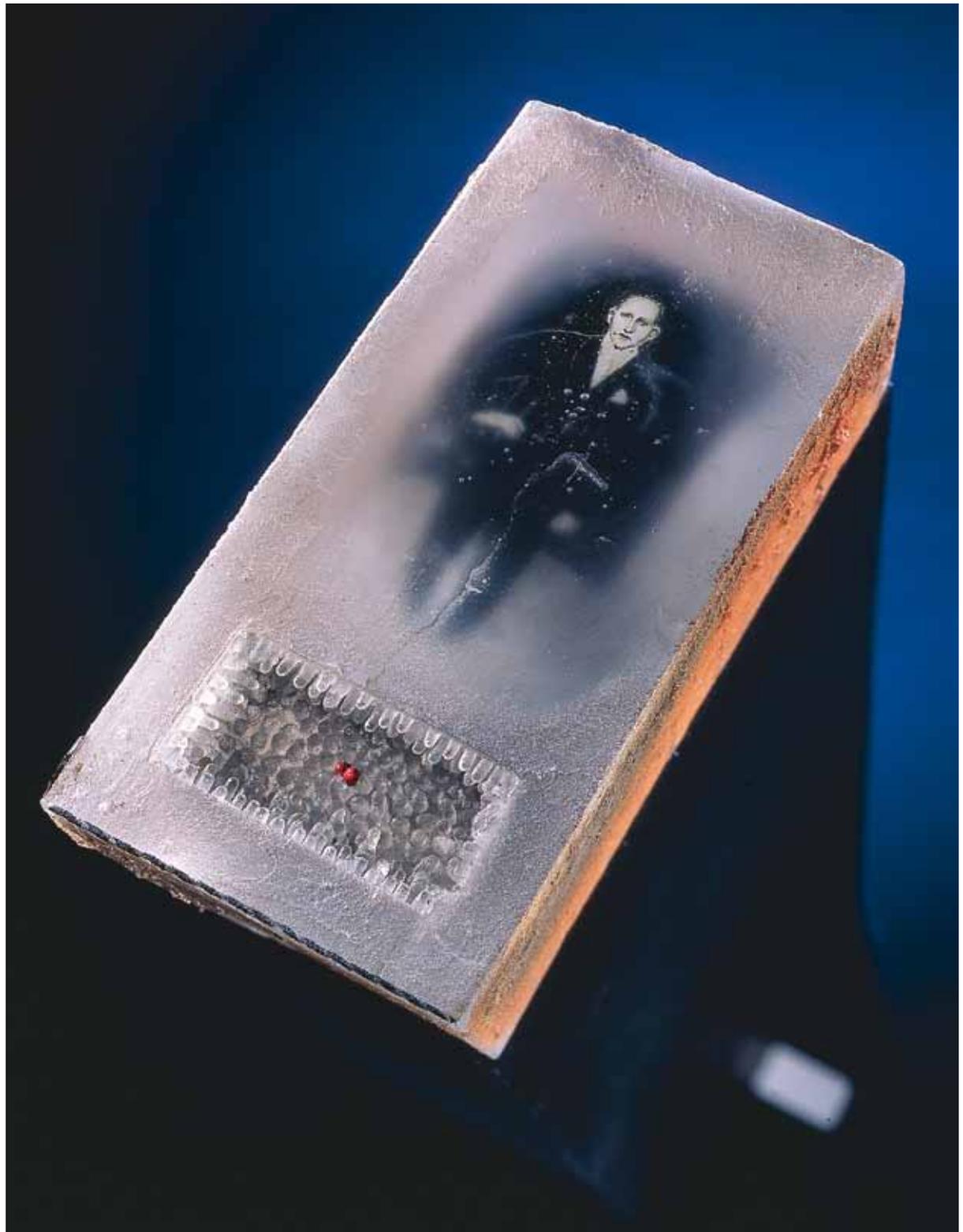






For Susanna, 2000
11x37.5x19 cm
sand-cast glass with
inclusions
photo: Göran Örtegren

For Claude Cahun, 2000
11x19x37.5 cm
sand-cast glass with
inclusions
photo: Göran Örtegren



Somna/Vakna VII, 2000
11x12.5x35.5 cm
sand-cast glass with
inclusions
photo: Göran Örtegren

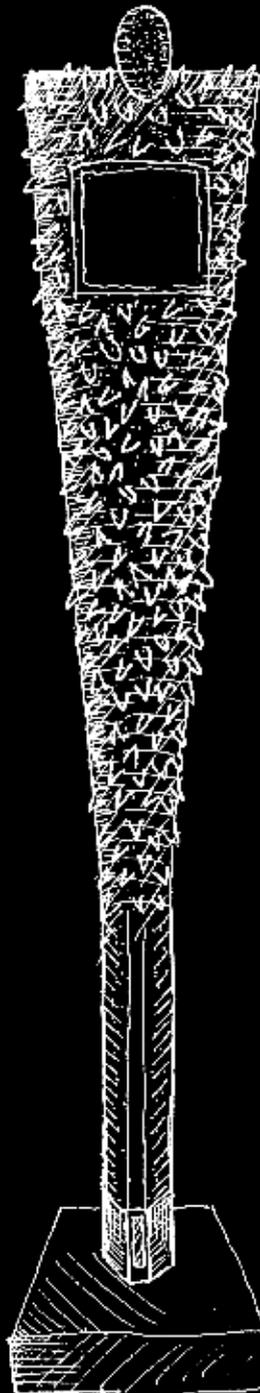
Analog, 2008
89.5x60x16 cm
sand-cast glass
photo: Göran Örtegren





I met Bertil Vallien in the United States, at Pilchuck. I had known of him only through his work and his worldwide fame. I was absolutely fascinated by the man and by how his personality clearly emerged in his works. Over time, I have had the opportunity to become acquainted with and learn more about his qualities and the great impact he has had on the Studio Glass Movement. I hope to meet him again soon.

Lino Tagliapietra

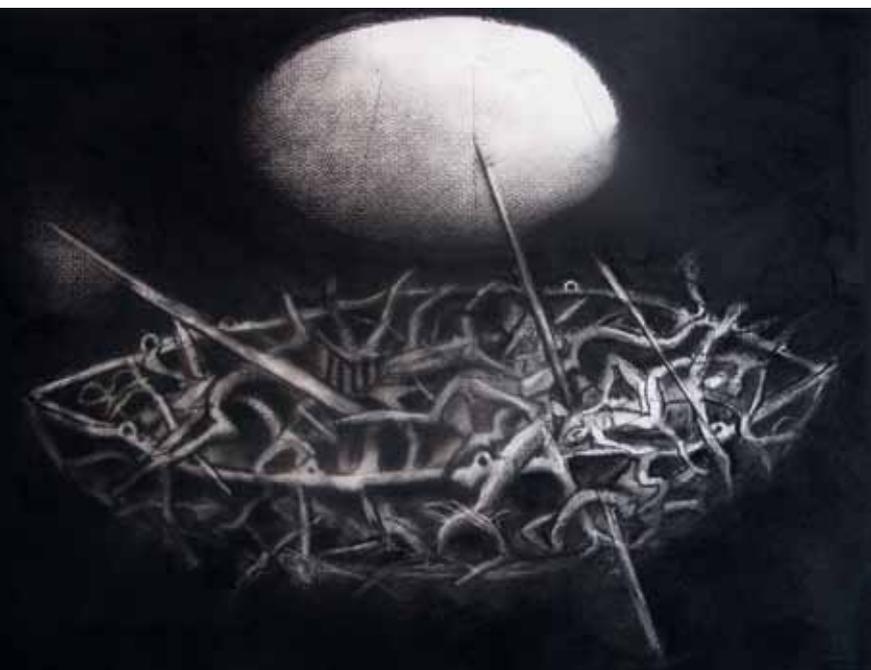


Drawings



Desert Snow, 2011
84x111 cm
charcoal and pastel on handmade paper
photo: Bertil Vallien





No title I, 2012
51x63 cm
charcoal on handmade paper
photo: Bertil Vallien

No title II, 2012
51x63 cm
charcoal on handmade paper
photo: Bertil Vallien

No title III, 2012
51x63 cm
charcoal on handmade paper
photo: Bertil Vallien









Cheops, 2011
76x60 cm
charcoal on handmade paper
photo: Bertil Vallien

No title V, 2012
51x63 cm
charcoal on handmade paper
photo: Bertil Vallien

No title, 2008
57x80 cm
charcoal on handmade paper
photo: Bertil Vallien





No title, 2012
61x76 cm
charcoal on handmade paper
photo: Bertil Vallien

Big tree, 2010
91x74 cm
charcoal on watercolor paper
photo: Bertil Vallien



Key Works



Installation
at VIDA Museum, 2010
photo: Börge Kamras



Installation, 1995
Borgholms Castle
photo: Börge Kamras

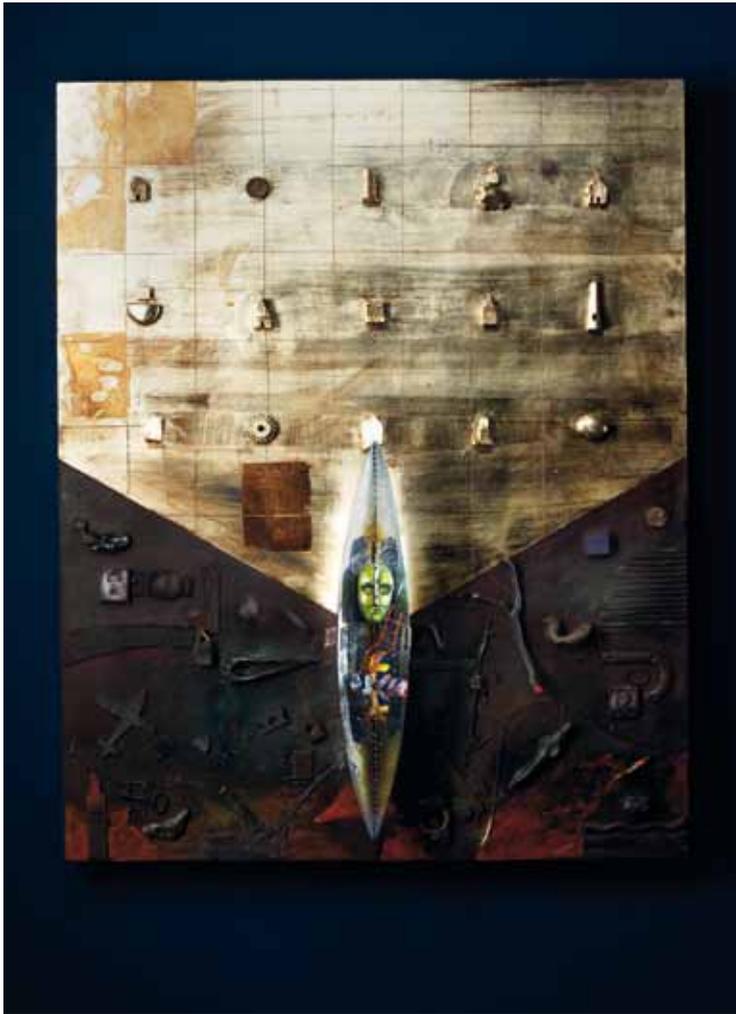
Journey, 2006
120x63x20 cm
sand-cast glass, wood, metal
Marker, 2007
170x30x30 cm
sand-cast glass, acrylic, wood
photo: Göran Örtegren



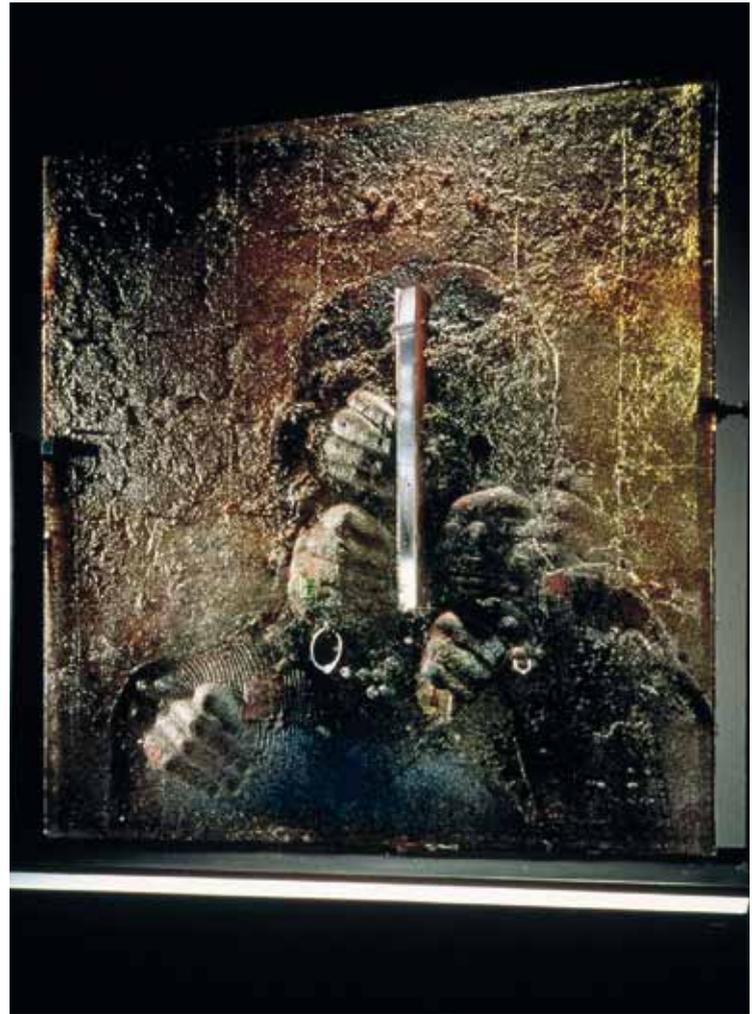


Analog II, 2008
 89.5x60x16 cm
 cast glass, wood, mixed media
 photo: Göran Örtegren

Unknown, 2005
 37.5x38x20 cm
 black glass
 photo: Göran Örtegren



Commission for Newspaper lobby.
GP.(Model ¼.), 2005
70x49.6x8 cm
glass, mixed media
photo: Göran Örtegren



Area II Map III, 1991
68x70x25 cm
sand-cast glass, metal
photo: Göran Örtegren



Moro Sleep II, 2002
21.5x49x11.5 cm
glass, aluminum
photo: Göran Örtegren

Moro Sleep, 2002
22x48x11 cm
glass, aluminum
photo: Göran Örtegren



Janus House, 1995
40x40x20 cm
sand-cast glass, wood
photo: Göran Örtegren

Nemo, 2010
80x96.5x20 cm
sand-cast glass, threads, wood
photo: Göran Örtegren



Nemo 1, 2003
18.5x48x17 cm
sand-cast glass, copper
photo: Göran Örtegren



Cheops II, 2011
30x140x29 cm
sand-cast glass, metal
photo: Göran Örtegren



Harbor II, 2010
38x60x15 cm
sand-cast glass, acrylic, wood
photo: Göran Örtegren

Ararat I, 2007
11.5x100x30 cm
sand-cast glass, rubber
photo: Jonas Lindström



Bertil Vallien

Born in 1938, in Stockholm, Sweden

Graduated in 1961 from the University of Art and Design in Stockholm, Sweden

Studied in USA and Mexico, 1961-1963

Independent artist/designer

Freelance designer for Oreffors

Kosta Boda AB glassworks in Sweden since 1963

Selected Public Collections

Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA

HM de Young Museum, San Francisco, USA

Yokohama Art Museum, Yokohama, Japan

The State Hermitage Museum,
St. Petersburg, Russia

Museum of Arts and Design, New York, USA

The Art Institute, Chicago, USA

National Museum, Stockholm, Sweden

VIDA Museum, Borgholm, Sweden

Everson Museum, New York, USA

Düsseldorf Museum of Fine Arts,
Düsseldorf, Germany

Indianapolis Art Museum, Indianapolis, USA

Trondheim Art Museum, Trondheim, Norway

National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan

Absolut Collection, New York, USA

National Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan

Microsoft Art Collection, Seattle, USA

JB Speed Art Museum, Louisville, USA

The Prescott Collection at Pacific First Center,
Seattle, USA

Detroit Art Institute, Detroit, USA

The Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, Australia

Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg, Germany

Mint Museum of Art and Design, Charlotte, USA

Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, USA

Museo de Vidrio, Monterrey, Mexico

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, USA

National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh, UK

Rockford Art Museum, Rockford, USA

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, Canada

Museum Beelden aan Zee, The Hague,
The Netherlands

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, France

Selected Awards

1962. Young American Award, Museum of Arts and Design, New York, USA
1985. Zweiter Coburger Glaspreis, Coburg, Germany
1995. Urban Glass Award for Outstanding Achievements in Glass, New York, USA
1998. Prins Eugenes Medal for Outstanding Achievement in Art, Stockholm, Sweden
2001. Visionaries Award, Museum of Arts and Design, New York, USA
2002. Honorary Doctorate, University of Växjö, Sweden
2004. Award in recognition of the Promotion of Glass Art in the World, Museo del Vidrio, Monterey, Mexico
2005. The Wilson Award, GAS, New Orleans, USA
- 2005 Gold Medal, Royal Academy of Science, Stockholm, Sweden
2008. The Libensky Award, Prague, Czech Republic
2012. Lifetime Achievement Award, GAS, Toledo, USA

Selected Solo Exhibitions

1997. Museum of Arts and Design, New York, USA
1998. Museum of History, Stockholm, Sweden
1998. The Bullseye Gallery, Portland, USA
1999. Centre for Contemporary Art, Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, Poland
1999. Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv, Israel
2000. Traver Gallery, Seattle, USA
2001. Riihimäki Museum, Riihimäki, Finland
2002. Konstindustrimuseet, Oslo, Norway
2002. Gävle Museum, Gävle, Sweden
2002. Cellier de Clairvaux, Dijon, France
2003. Glass Museum, International Centre for Contemporary Art, Tacoma, USA
2004. Museo del Vidrio, Monterrey Mexico
2005. Röhsska Museet, Gothenburg, Sweden
2005. Landskrona Konsthall, Landskrona, Sweden
2006. Prins Eugenes Waldemarsudde, Stockholm, Sweden
2007. Rockford Art Museum, Rockford, USA
2007. Heller Gallery, New York, USA
2008. Etienne Gallery, The Netherlands
2008. Augelimuseet, Sala, Sweden
2009. Imago Gallery, Palm Springs, USA
2009. Leger Gallerie, Malmö, Sweden
2011. Hawk Gallery, Columbus, USA
2012. Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti, Venice, Italy

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Head 1, 2006

12.5x19x12 cm

sand-cast glass

photo: Göran Örtegren

pp. 56-57

Idol (detail), 2009

h. 19 cm

sand-cast glass, metal

photo: Göran Örtegren

pp. 68-69

Earth (detail), 2009

h. 18 cm, Ø 50 cm

sand-cast black glass

with cut and polished details

photo: Göran Örtegren

pp. 80-81

In Transit (Port)

(detail), 2004

61x200x100 cm

sand-cast glass

and mixed media

photo: Anders Qwarnström

pp. 98-99

Watchers (detail),

2004-2006

variable dimensions

(190-201 cm)

sand-cast glass with polished areas

photo: Anders Qwarnström

pp. 116-117

Inside (detail), 2012

20.3x19.5x19.5 cm

sand-cast glass with cut

and polished details

photo: Göran Örtegren

pp. 130-131

Pendulum II (detail), 2010

190x54x12 cm

glass stone, metal

photo: Göran Örtegren

pp. 138-139

Kafka II (detail), 1983-2012

38x27x13 cm

sand-cast glass

photo: Göran Örtegren

pp. 148-149

Mr. Moro (detail), 2000

11.5x36x12.5 cm

sand-cast glass

photo: Göran Örtegren

p. 175

M-Watcher III, 2009

110x30x30 cm

sand-cast glass, metal, wood

photo: Göran Örtegren



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