

NewGlass

Review 33

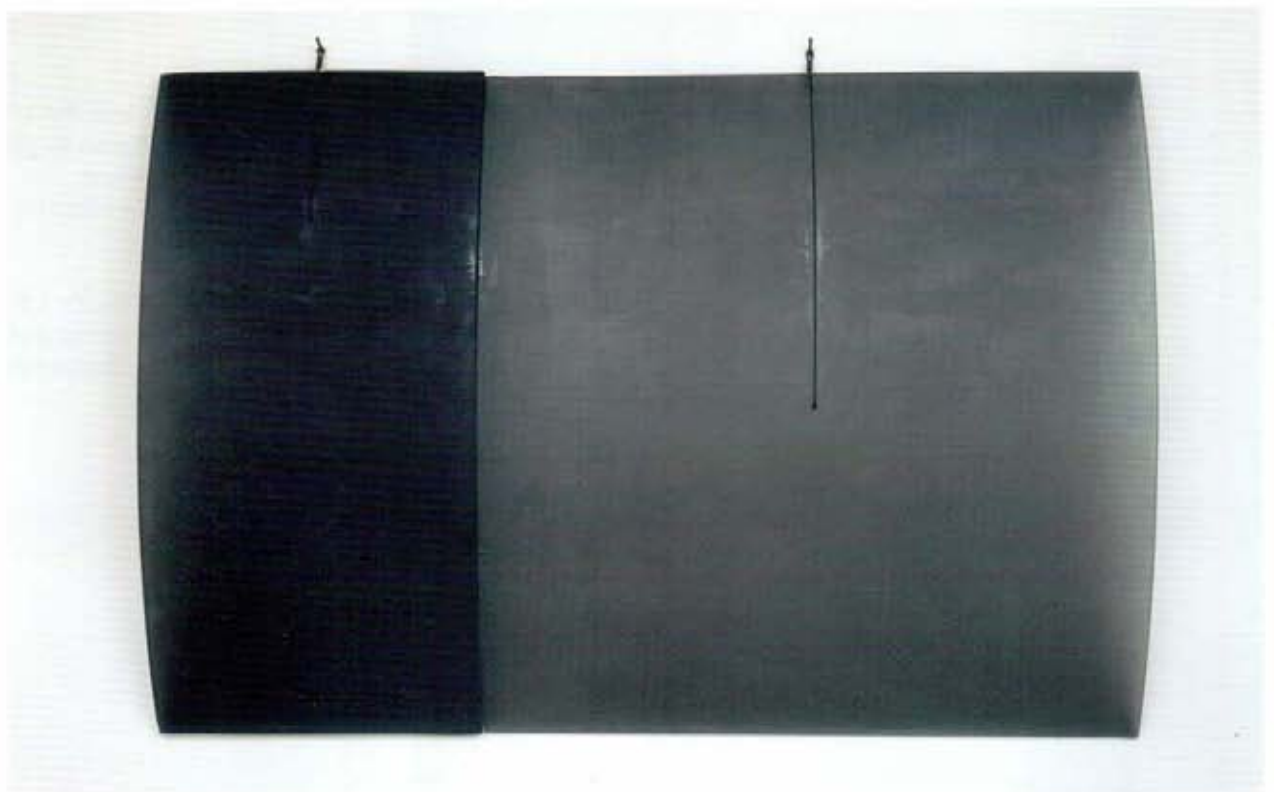


The Corning Museum of Glass



Bar Agricole Skylight Triptych, Bar Agricole,
San Francisco, California
Nikolas Weinstein (American, b. 1968)
United States, San Francisco, California, 2010
Hot-formed borosilicate glass tubing "fabric"
Triptych: H. 2.3 m, W. 1.5 m, D. 2.1 m (each)
Photo: Bruce Damonte
AP

October Ladders
Christopher Wilmarth (American, 1943–1987)
United States, New York, New York, 1974
Etched glass; steel cables
H. 78.7 cm, W. 114.3 cm, D. 15.2 cm
Photo: © Estate of Christopher Wilmarth; Jerry
Thompson, courtesy of Betty Cuninghams
Gallery, New York, New York
AP



I'm a fan of top-10 lists for what they reveal about the taste and expertise of their authors. They distill the infinite and chaotic universe of experience to a focused and highly personalized inventory of the outstanding. Each year, when I've received my copy of *New Glass Review*, I look forward to getting to the "Jurors' Choice" pages, for these reasons. Through others' eyes, I've made new discoveries of artists and designers, and I've been forced to look again at work I may not have appreciated fully, understanding that it has made the cut for someone else and examining it anew to understand why.

And so I will embark on my own juror's choice of 10 works in glass, with the disclosure that, in assembling my own list, I've gone with my gut, by which I mean I've sifted my memory for the work that has stayed with me, its lingering presence in my mind evidence of its power. In writing and editing critical essays about work in glass, there is a temptation to lead with your head. While I can make the case for these works on a purely intellectual basis, it was the poignancy of experiencing each one that still resonates; the memory of the profound feeling each left me with was my road map for making these particular selections.

Except for the work by Christopher Wilmarth from the 1970s, I also wanted to share some of my discoveries of the new. Most were made in the past couple of years. Several of my selections were chosen because, in my mind, they occupy the meeting point of technical engineering and poetic expression. I've included three architectural pieces that are radically fresh experiences of the material because of scale, structural integrity, and pure gesture. In one case, I've included historical production glassware as a high-water mark for the design and technical achievement of drinking vessels. And finally, I've included one performance art piece that captured my imagination.

It was only after compiling this list that I realized that all of the selections have to do with gravity—each is suspended in some manner and speaks to the unique translucence of glass, which makes it aesthetically logical that it might float or billow or soar, as some of these works appear to.

At the top of my list is *October Ladders*, a 1974 work by Christopher Wilmarth. One of his wall-hung pieces composed of slumped, acid-etched plate glass suspended by metal cables, this is a duet of sheltering curved glass panels. There is a palpable ache at the two contact points where the hole drilled through the curved sheets meets the sinewy metal cables, the only thing keeping them from shattering on the floor. It is an example of the

poetic potential of glass to elicit powerful emotion in the simplicity of form and material, and a powerful realization of post-Minimalist purity. The cold winter's day in Chelsea in 2006 when I visited the Wilmarth retrospective at the Betty Cunningham Gallery remains primary among my most powerful experiences of art made from glass. It was not only the wall works but also the floor pieces sheltering hiding places behind glass and steel walls that captured me. Wilmarth's work is some of the most affecting sculpture I've experienced in any material, and it has informed my appreciation for the unique power of glass as a sculptural medium.

Vladimira Klumpar's 2009 work from her "Breakthrough" series also maps the interior landscape through poetic form, but it is the mastery of cast glass to capture light and, through its translucence, occupy another dimension that exists somewhere between positive and negative space. Studded with glass protrusions, the object almost looks as if it could be computer-generated, except for the graceful, expressive arc of its composition that could have come only from a highly trained human hand. I appreciate how this aptly titled series marks a significant transition for the artist, who has lived between East and West, rural and urban, and somehow found resolution of the many disparate threads of experience in this work.

Pipaluk Lake's *Three Sides* from her 2009 "Drapery" series is thrilling to me for its transformational achievement. Glass drapery is nothing new, nor is slumped glass on metal armature, but the light touch, as well as the sensitivity to colors, is something breathtaking in this work, as unexpected as it is entirely natural when you witness it. It somehow captures the exquisite lightness of a child's breathing, or a dream escaping your grasp in the morning. It is a metaphor for the near-spectral experience of fabric and light, barely subject to the pull of the earth.

Top-10 lists lend themselves to extremes, and this one is no exception. I've chosen a number of works that push the limits of the material in different ways. I got to know Paul Stankard's work through the editing of a book on his work published by The Robert M. Minkoff Foundation. In his more than four decades at the torch, Stankard has been an eager student of the organic form rendered and encased in impossibly delicate glass form. His 2010 *Honeybee Swarm Orb* could well be his most extraordinary accomplishment, each insect captured in mid-flight, gossamer wings beating against the air, circling a bit of honeycomb and a spray of flowers. It is a work with an unexpected intensity, an homage to the natural world that we all occupy but rarely stop to consider with such sensitivity for the heroic at a smaller scale.

Glass can be used for extremely fine detail, or it can be pushed to extreme structural tolerances. The Viennese firm of Lobmeyr has taken the ideal of thinness in glassware to an unmatched degree of delicacy in its "Patrician" stemware, designed by the Czech-born architect Josef Hoffmann nearly a century ago but still in production today. The wineglasses in particular possess a structural purity outdone only by a cool perfection and impossibly

thin form, seemingly light enough to float in mid-air. They are blown from an unusually resilient type of glass that the company developed in the early 20th century. With their cut and polished edges, these are the ultimate expressions of the lightness and precision that have transfixed glassblowers for centuries.

The contemporary equivalent of Lobmeyr's achievement may well be the Apple Store staircases, designed by the engineer James O'Callaghan. Using triple-laminated glass developed by DuPont, and embedding titanium fittings, glass has become a load-bearing material being pushed further with each new store, but nowhere perhaps as dramatically as in the 2005 opening of the location in Nagoya, Japan. The straight run of stairs spans several meters, with the weight carried by two slender glass walls that support the entire stairwell in a straight run from end to end. It's the closest we've come to walking on air, and an extraordinary technical and aesthetic accomplishment.

The former studio glass artist James Carpenter has become an important architectural designer. Carpenter and his British partner, Luke Lowings, designed the ceiling above the glass staircase in Apple's Nagoya store, which mimics the effects of daylight 24 hours a day. A very different Carpenter work, *Ice Falls*, transforms the lobby of New York City's Hearst Tower. Long escalators ferry people across a field of cast glass blocks that act as a cooling waterfall, recycling rainwater collected from the roof. Artfully lighted and spectacularly vast, this 2006 project is a transformative experience that embraces glass as a bridge between the natural and man-made worlds.

Also bringing a sculptural sensibility to architectural projects, Nikolas Weinstein Studios has advanced the scale of glass in its billowing borosilicate glass shades in a San Francisco bar, made using a special fusing and slumping apparatus in massive kilns. The project debuted in 2010, and the architecture and design worlds took note of the new possibilities in the material of glass.

The stature of the Italian maestro-turned-studio-glass-superstar Lino Tagliapietra continues to grow in step with the increasing complexity of his intricate canework, but I find the simplification of his patterning, as it goes

larger-scale in his Bullseye glass project, fascinating. In just-completed works such as *Rio dei Pensieri*, it's as if the surface of his vessels were seen under a microscope: the elaborate pattern rendered large gives the surface a powerful simplicity, a purity of form through the unforgiving scale that proves Tagliapietra's compositional genius.

Finally, I wanted to share a work that transfixed me and the small gathering that made it to a morning performance by Jocelyne Prince at Espace Verre in Montreal during the 2010 Glass Art Association of Canada conference. Using sensitive microphones to capture the sounds of hot glass, Prince oversaw a hot-shop crew while a DJ created a live mix of these sound snippets to create an increasingly textured sound composition that unfolded in real time, the perfect metaphor for how a finished glass piece represents an assemblage of many discrete components. As with all of the works in my juror's choice, the exhilarating experience lingers.

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