

Art:Design:Culture

Glass

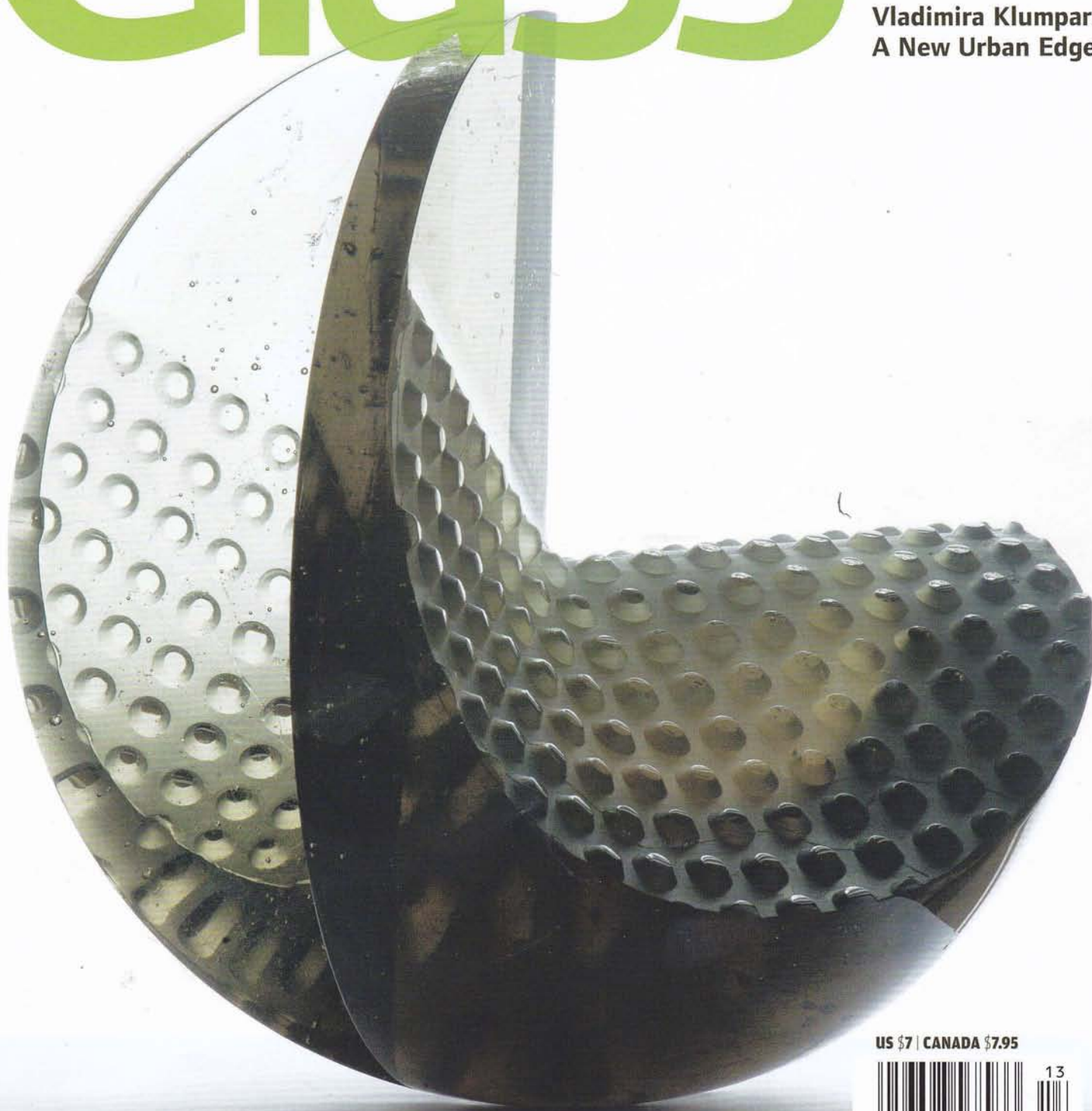
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Art Quarterly

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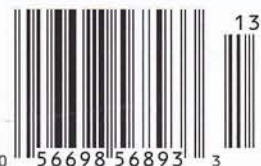
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“GLASSTRESS” GROWS UP

With the second incarnation of **Adriano Berengo's** ancillary exhibition during the Venice Biennale, art made from glass gets special focus on the contemporary art stage.

BY JAMES YOOD

In the ocean, great fish are often closely shadowed by little fish. These smaller creatures live off the larger; they groom them, rid them of parasites, consume their effluvia, and spend their entire existence in a symbiotic and causal relationship with their bigger hosts. So is it, too, with large and transcendent scheduled events; they are always accompanied by smaller independent satellite entities that, depending on your point of view, piggy-back on the aura of the main event and exploit it for their own benefit, or help it somehow, broadening its scope and providing ancillary areas of interest. The Venice Biennale (within the context of the contemporary art world) qualifies as a large and transcendent event, and since the 1960s—the Biennale itself dates to 1895—it has been perhaps the most important survey of the contemporary art scene, a true gathering of the clan, with artists, collectors, dealers, critics, curators, and the public descending en masse on Venice every two years. Dozens of smaller projects, exhibitions, and events circle around the Biennale, some affiliated with it but most independent of it, taking advantage of the spotlight and audience that the Biennale provides to call attention to themselves.





Michael Joo

Expanded Access (overview and detail),
2011. Mirrored borosilicate glass.
H 61, W 114, D 114 in.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND VENICE PROJECTS

A few of these have become almost parallel in significance to the Biennale. The display of the constantly changing art collection of François Pinault in the Palazzo Grassi and the Punta della Dogana, two historic buildings redesigned by Tadao Ando, have become mandatory visits, and in the next rank of rotating exhibitions, Adriano Berengo's "Glasstress" has become, in its 2009 and 2011 incarnations, perhaps the next-most-visited venue not a part of the Biennale itself.

"Glasstress," of course, builds on the already pervasive public consciousness of Venice as a—perhaps the—central city in the history of glass fabrication. "Glasstress" was conceived of and organized by Adriano Berengo, owner of the Berengo Studio in Murano. His core thesis, that glass can be a wonderful material through which to assess the range of inquiry of all of modern and contemporary art, not a niche medium to be accessed only through its specialized practitioners (to Berengo, those would be denizens of the so-called Studio Glass movement), is well suited for a Biennale audience more familiar with avant-garde art than concerned with who studied with Harvey Littleton or what happened in Toledo in 1962. I remember on my visit to the inaugural 2009 version, held in the Palazzo Franchetti, that while it was replete with sculptures in glass by major participants of modern and contemporary art—including Robert Rauschenberg, Fred Wilson, Mona Hatoum, Joseph Albers, Tony Cragg, Louise Bourgeois, Kiki Smith,

Jannis Kounellis, Man Ray, Daniel Buren, Jana Sterbak, Joseph Kosuth and many more—only the inclusion of Murano's own Lino Tagliapietra in any way represented the Studio Glass movement and the history of glass as rooted in a tradition of highly refined artisanry. While some of the so-called avant-garde artists Berengo included in 2009 seemed to me to be represented by marginal efforts, he did make his point that, much as in printmaking since the 1960s, work done therein by artists whose expertise and fame was for work in another medium (Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Frank Stella, etc.) could invigorate printmaking more than the tradition-bound efforts of its expert and specialized practitioners. Berengo cast his net widely, and on the whole successfully negotiated the terrain between what seemed at worst art-celebrity name-dropping and at best a broadening of the context of modern sculpture in glass.

Berengo is a bit of an impresario, a multi-tasker who likes to make things happen; he thinks big and then goes full steam after it. As his thoughts turned toward "Glasstress" 2011, he decided to amp it up; while he had worked directly with several artists for "Glasstress" 2009, he now sought to make that a more central practice by selecting many of the participants a year or more in advance, and inviting them to Murano to fabricate their pieces at his glass workshop. Many accepted, and like the print workshops that began to flourish in the 1960s by bringing in guest



Thomas Schütte

Berengo Heads, 2011. Glass.

H 17 ¾, W 11 ¾, D 10 ½ in. (green)

H 19 ½, W 11 ¾, D 10 ½ in. (red)

COURTESY: THE ARTIST



Antonio Riggio

Ashes to Ashes, 2009-2010. Installation of 28 blown-glass chalices including ashes. H 13 ¼, W 7 ½ in.

COURTESY: GALLERIA MICHELA RIZZIO, VENICE



Monica Bonvicini

Tears, 2011. Murano glass, mixed media, light pedestal with glass plate. H 8 ½, W 5, D 4 ¼ in.

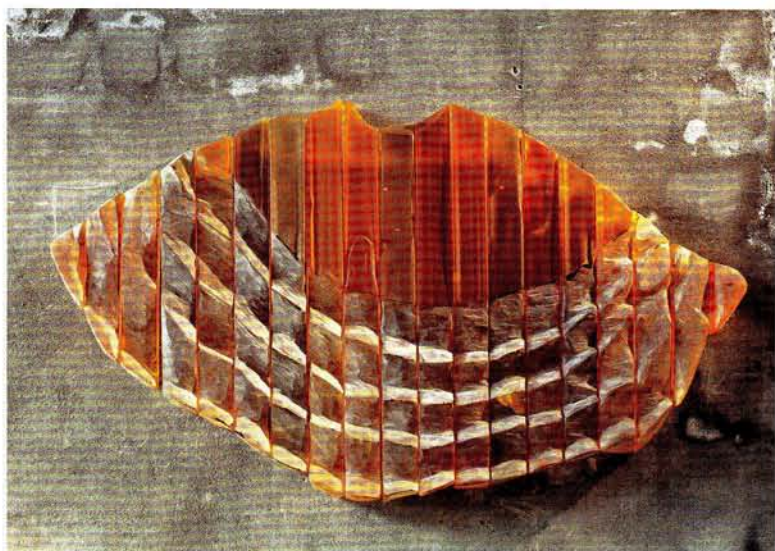
COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND GALERIE MAX HETZLER, BERLIN

artists for a week or so to work with master printmakers to problem-solve their way through their efforts, the same practice occurred in Murano with artists, some of whom knew little of the processes of working in glass, realizing their ideas with the assistance of Berengo's crew.

This raises the potentially thorny issue of the financial and ethical climate of such a practice; it is one thing to curate an artist into an exhibition and another to involve oneself in the fabrication of the work and still another to have some level of financial interest in the production and/or eventual disposition of that work. Four artists in "Glasstress" 2011 — Ernst Billgren, Marya Kazoun, Andrea Salvador, and Koen Vanmechelen — are represented by Berengo Studio, and curating them into an exhibition could raise the issue of a conflict of interest (then again, Berengo's studio lists 63 artists with whom he has a professional affiliation). I can only express my experience and perceptions of the situation, and offer that what drives "Glasstress" is the exuberant zeal and enthusiasm of Berengo, and any analysis that overemphasizes the deals and agreements he enters in to make this highly complex project happen would be misplaced. Berengo is not a passive curator but an active player in all this; he's a creative force who enjoys meeting and working with artists, and seems to assess the issues on a case-by-case basis.

For "Glasstress" 2011, Berengo eschewed the comfort of including the canonical masters of modern art he highlighted in 2009 and went almost fully contemporary. While a few artists have been in both exhibitions — Fred Wilson, Barbara Bloom, Kiki Smith, Jan Fabre, Hye Rim Lee, the aforementioned Marya Kazoun and Koen Vanmechelen, and Anne Peabody — there are no artists of the historic ilk of Rauschenberg or Jean Arp this time around. Instead, Berengo has shown a deft hand at trolling the contemporary art world, including at least one artist — Monica Bonvicini — whose work was also prominently on display at the Biennale. But from celebrated contemporary artists such as Vik Muniz, Thomas Schütte, Yutaka Sone, Ursula von Rydingsvard, Erwin Wurm, Tony Oursler, Jaime Plensa, to a major contemporary architect such as Zaha Hadid (though her large plastic piece wasn't quite glass) and current designers such as Jaime Hayon or Patricia Urquiola, he's made his point that glass is everywhere in the conversation that is contemporary art and design, though only a single piece by Judy Schaechter could be seen to have even a vestigial connection to the Studio Glass movement.

And to what end? The expansion of "Glasstress" to a second site in a raw and semi-abandoned warehouse in Murano a few yards away from Berengo Studio allowed more experimental and site-specific projects than the somewhat august Palazzo Franchetti encourages. (Curiously, this made "Glasstress" mirror the Venice Biennale, which is split between two main sites, the Giardini, where the more august national pavilions hold sway, and the Arsenale, where a vast sequence of factory-like spaces invites more aggressive installations and a sense of a vacated rust-zone remnant run amok.) If it is Berengo's belief that



Ursula von Rydingsvard

Glass Corrugated, 2010. Glass.

H 51, W 30, D 2 in.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND GALERIE LELONG, NEW YORK



Fred Wilson

Sala Longhi, 2011. Installation composed of 26 small frames, one large frame, and one applique in glass. H 27 ½, W 21 ½, D 1 ¼ in. (small frame); H 90 ½, W 46 ½, D 15 in. (large frame); H 78 ¾, 43 ¼ in. (applique)

COURTESY: THE ARTIST



glass is infinitely more flexible a medium than, say, the usual roundup survey of 50 or 60 artists from the Studio Glass movement would indicate, he completely made his point. The work ranged from the witty (Fred Wilson, Erwin Wurm, Barbara Bloom, Michael Joo, etc.), to the profound (Antonio Riello), to the creepy (Luke Jerram, Javier Pérez, Monica Bonvicini), from portraiture (Thomas Schütte, Andrea Salvador) to ruminations on nature (Yutaka Sone, Zhang Huan) and beyond. While no single object or installation in "Glasstress" was the best work in glass I saw in Venice this summer—that would be the superb installation *Well and Truly* by Roni Horn at the Punta della Dogana, part of the Pinault Collection—nothing I've experienced in the past few years has so clearly made the argument that the Studio Glass movement is only one part—and possibly not the most important part—of understanding what glass is capable of achieving. What's proposed in "Glasstress" is that the dialogues with functionality, craft, artisanship, tradition, decorative art, and anything that smacks of narrowing the parameters of what glass can be, anything that even remotely looks back instead of looking forward, can now be dismissed and marginalized, and

replaced by a headstrong immersion into pluralism by putting glass in the hands of every talented visual thinker we (or Berengo!) can find. If one accepts the premise that glass is either part of contemporary art or it isn't, "Glasstress" votes adamantly that it is, with the doors wide open to one and all. ■

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Vik Muniz

Untitled, 2010. Glass, brick, wood, steel. H 42 ½, W 20 ½ in.

COURTESY: VENICE PROJECTS



Q + A with Adriano Berengo

GLASS Quarterly: What's different in this year's "Glasstress" from the exhibition in 2009?

Adriano Berengo: We had more time to prepare, so instead of getting pieces on loan, this time we invited many artists to Murano to make the work at our studios. About 60 percent of the pieces this year were made especially for "Glasstress," either here or elsewhere. We doubled the size of the exhibition by using both the Palazzo Franchetti in Venice and a more raw space here in Murano, perfect for installations and some conceptual pieces.

GLASS: But the philosophy of "Glasstress" is the same...

Berengo: Oh yes, glass is such a wonderful medium; decoration and functionality is not all that it can do. It's a tremendous

material for modern art, and I know it can be a uniting element between artists, designers, and architects, and all those and more participate in "Glasstress." Glass provides a place where visual thinkers of every sort can meet.

GLASS: While I'm familiar with a good number of the artists who exhibit at "Glasstress," almost none are a part of the broader Studio Glass movement as I understand it, either from Europe or America.

Berengo: I admire much of that work, but if the Studio Glass movement made a mistake, it was to make a world apart, to engage in an insularity that created, if I may, a kind of material masturbation, more interested in how things are made than about what is made. This may lead it to a dead end, and I am convinced we must expand the possibilities of the material, bring it to creative minds outside of those trained only in glass: to designers, conceptual artists, etc.

GLASS: And the future of "Glasstress"?

Berengo: We'll continue here in Venice, of course, and we have exhibitions scheduled in Stockholm and at the Museum of Art and Design in New York. I hope "Glasstress" will become a kind of brand. I'm excited by thinking about how many different kinds of artists I'll work with in the future. Glass is a perfect material for intellectual efforts we can't even imagine today. ■

— JAMES YOOD