glass

The UrbanGlass Art Quarterly

Dale Chihuly Reflects on the Pilchuck Experiment

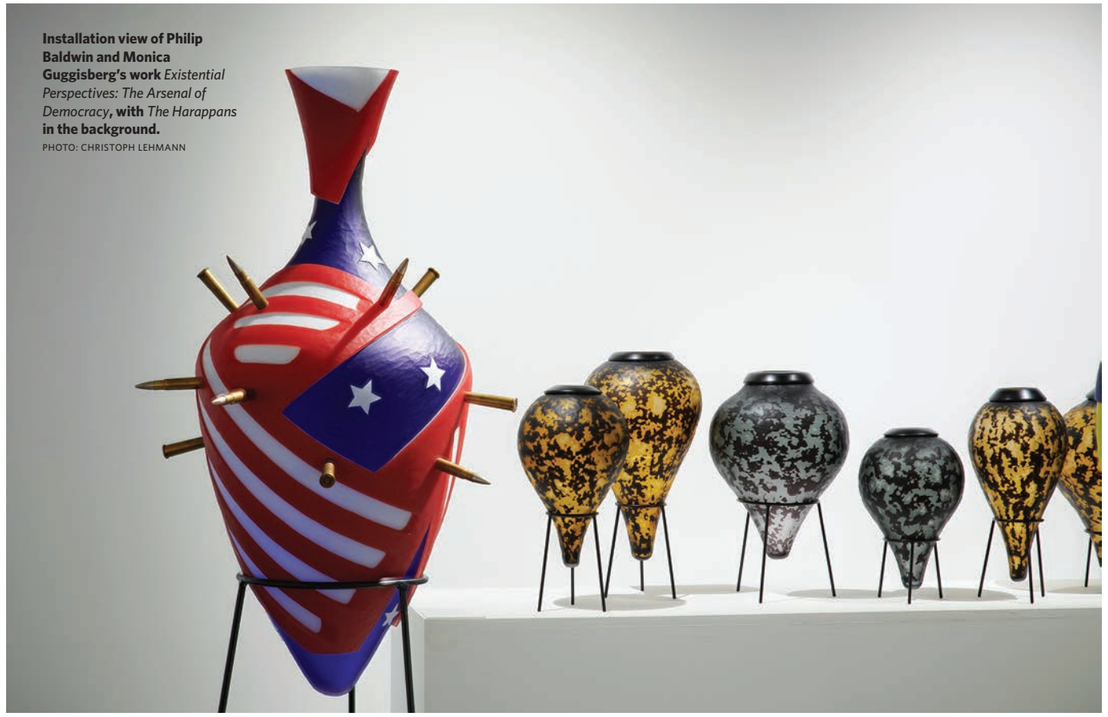
Lene Bødker's Tales Told in Lost-Wax Castings

How Toyama Became Japan's City of Glass

Melissa Schmidt's Constellations of Bubbles

COVER
Helen Lee: Artist as Activist

No. 168. Fall 2022



Installation view of Philip Baldwin and Monica Guggisberg's work *Existential Perspectives: The Arsenal of Democracy*, **with** *The Harappans* **in the background.**
PHOTO: CHRISTOPH LEHMANN

Philip Baldwin and Monica Guggisberg

"AMPHORE MÉTAPHORE"
MUSÉE DU VERRE DE CONCHES
CONCHES, FRANCE
JUNE 25–NOVEMBER 27, 2022

For a country of France's cultural standing, there is surprisingly little glass art in public collections. There is some in the Decorative Arts Museum in Paris. There is a collection of Daum glass in the historic glassmaking region of Nancy; the Lalique Museum in Alsace; and, near the Belgian border, the MusVerre, which focuses on contemporary glass. The Musée du Grand Siècle, scheduled to open in 2025 on the outskirts of the capital, will house Pierre Rosenberg's collection of French and Italian art along with 805 glass animals from Murano (see *Glass* #164).

And there is the Musée du Verre de Conches, which, after a three-year renovation project, reopened in June on the site of a former hospice in Normandy. The museum was established by the Conches municipality in 1996 to house the sculptures and stained glass of François Décorchement (1880-1971), who contributed to the revival of *pâte de verre* at the turn of the century. With the reopening, however, the director, Éric Louet, has larger ambitions: he wants to make his museum a leading center for 19th- to 21st-century glass, both French and international.

French people do not know enough about their own glass tradition, observes Louet, but when they visit the museum, they are favorably surprised. The collection comprises about 600 pieces, dating from circa 1860 to the 2020s, and includes both French glass and modern and contemporary sculpture from Europe and the U.S. It is particularly strong on Czech and Slovak glass, specialities of Louet's. With a modest budget, he hopes to acquire three or four new pieces annually.

Louet has known Philip Baldwin and Monica Guggisberg for 15 years. A keen admirer of their work, he commissioned them to create the revamped museum's inaugural exhibition. A visit to the site of a Roman pottery workshop in Narbonne gave them the theme of the amphora. It is somehow fitting that they should have chosen an object so simple and yet so historically resonant both in Europe and other cultures.

All the glass in the exhibition is amphora-shaped. Each of the nine installations, however, uses the amphora as a metaphor or symbol for something different. Two matching ovoid amphorae are hung on pillars near the entrance. One is turquoise and the other amethyst, with graduations of color layered over clear glass; both are intricately carved to create an absorbing pattern of irregular tessellations. Without title or caption, they explore the aesthetic aspect of the vessel's distinctive shape, with the pointed end that means that it cannot stand upright without support.

Intellectual history, an unusual topic for glass, is touched on by seven amphorae representing *The Greeks*. These are patterned with large, lightly textured oblongs, in oranges, reds, and blues; the rectangularity evokes the geometric "key" design used as a border on Greek vases. According to the caption, the sculptures are intended to symbolise, and question, the "rationalism" and scientific bent of Aristotle and the early philosophers. (As a classicist, though, I cannot help thinking that this simplification is unfair to the Greeks.)

In the darkest corner, a glowing cross-section of an amphora in red and blue neon plays with the idea that this quintessential 20th-century craft might be nearly as outmoded as the amphora itself. More personal to the artists are five framed groups of *Shards*, flat silhouettes of amphorae on a white background. These are made of fragments of colored glass that have been rescued from the Baldwin-Guggisberg studio's recycling bin and fused together "for a new beginning," as the caption puts it, as well as a memento of previous labors. The fragmentation suggests the act of piecing together the remains of the past.

On the white wall at the far end, the most ambitious installation, and the poster work for the show, is a 15-foot silhouette of a canoe-shaped boat, pieced together from 257 translucent black amphorae of different shapes and sizes. The uniform color is a foil to the variety of forms, and suggests the type of wooden hull in which many amphorae would have traveled across the seas.

Studying amphorae led the artists to reflect on what might happen to their own work millennia after its creation. This was the inspiration for *Baldwin Guggisberg 4022 AD*, a working aquarium in which broken amphorae are displayed half-buried in sand, as if returning at last to their native element. It was a novel experience to see goldfish swimming around inside finely wrought vessels, whose curves and mottled surfaces were strangely distorted by the refraction of light through the water.

With "Amphore Métaphore," Louet has put Conches on the map as a serious center for contemporary international glass art. He is already planning the next exhibition, with up-and-coming French artist Julie Legrand. As to Baldwin and Guggisberg, their latest show only reinforces the impression that what will survive of their work is not its verbally dependent "messages," but the aspects that can speak to people across history. These include qualities like formal perfection, richness of color and pattern, and presence as well as the ability to breath new life into an ancient, workaday vessel and make it interesting.

London-based arts writer EMMA PARK *is a contributing editor to* Glass.

Jane Rosen

"DUAL NATURE (WITH LIGHT)"
TRAVER GALLERY
SEATTLE
MAY 5–JULY 2, 2022

Jane Rosen's art is as quiet and beautiful as a cemetery. Just as some people find calm transcendence in those open-air sites where life and death connect, Rosen's solid and still sculptures of animals, abstract forms, and opaque glass vessels allow us to perceive something timeless and true.

Widely admired for her mixture of glass and stone, along with her sensitive attunement to nature, Rosen has been on the scene for a while now, currently making sculptures and drawings in her rural home in Northern California. According to her bio, she relocated there after years in her native New York City "in order to live where nature was larger than culture." A lovely, sparely installed solo show at Traver Gallery offered space to consider the relationship between nature and culture and an opportunity to commune with her recent sculptures and 2D work in ink, watercolor, and beeswax.

I must confess I'm not typically a fan of many realistic portrayals of animals—the attempts at verisimilitude can be technically impressive but somehow lack any sense of actual life. But in Rosen's work—much of which focuses on birds—there is more than the obvious re-presentation of wildlife; the interplay of naturalism and abstraction conjures up thoughts about what is essential, what is hidden, and what is revealed. How much of the outline of a horse do we need to recognize it as such? At what point does a chunk of stone suggest a canine head? Rosen doesn't pretend to capture every feather of a hawk or every muscle of a deer, although her works are clearly based on careful, respectful observation.

Rosen's "wall birds" are exquisitely rendered creatures of handblown pigmented glass or limestone with paint and ink. Their surface treatment veers between achingly beautiful detail and graceful swaths of generalized color or texture. Their overall forms are simple and closed, with wings tucked in and chests forward. They are completely motionless, resting upright on a wall, like creatures wholly unrelated to clichéd wall art of birds in flight. Each one carries nuances of an individual bird—the banded tail feathers of a hawk, or the hooded head of a peregrine. This individuation, the subtle layers of color and pattern, and the slight translucence of the glass generate a gentle animation despite all their stillness.

For her glass bird pieces, Rosen works with Seattle-based sculptor Ross Richmond, whom she met in 1998 at the famous Pilchuck Glass School in Stanwood, Washington, where Jane was an artist-in-residence and Richmond was a gaffer. Videos on Richmond's Instagram show a fascinating process of slowly rolling set-up

shapes through powder patterns to pick up the color and markings of a particular area of a particular bird. Additional firings, pipe-switching, and adding pigment flesh out the forms and create an amalgam of color, pattern, opacity, and light.

Rosen also seems to consider thoughtfully the relationship between object and support, and she has a knack for using a wall-as-background or a pedestal-as-sculpture. A roughly carved plinth can serve as a pedestal for an animal sculpture, become an abstract sculpture in its own right, or move in between the two. This varied use of blocks is both cleverly practical and abundantly interpretable.

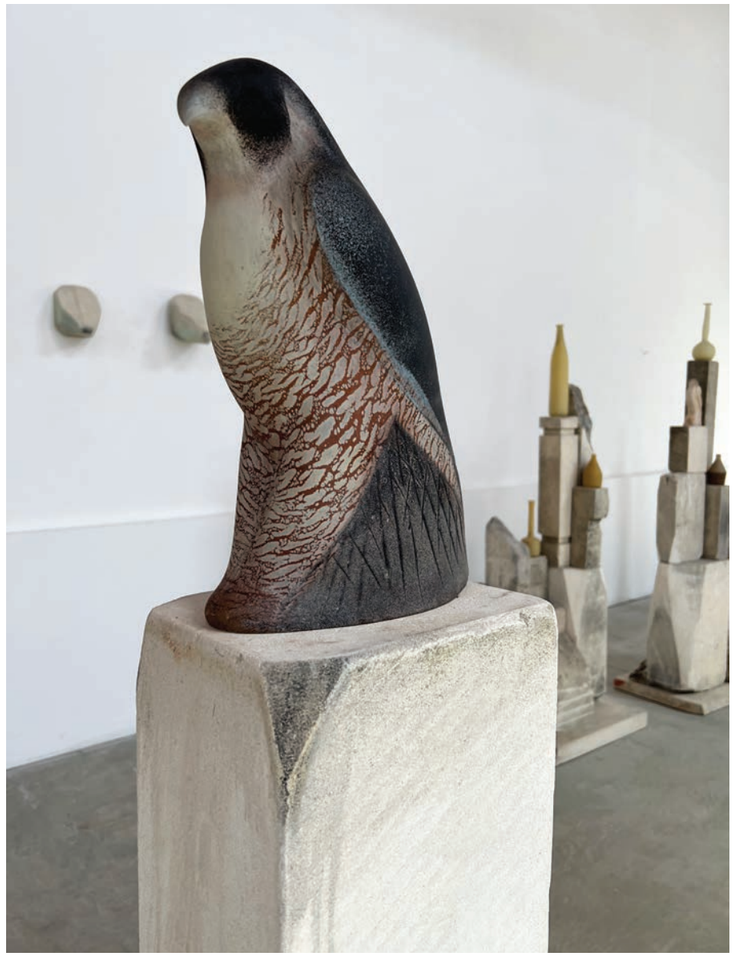
A singular base adds textural substance or contrast to the figure it supports. *Pale Rider* (2021), for example, is a blown-glass bird whose soft browns and blues shimmer atop a simple base of white limestone. With other bases, Rosen suggests natural forms, like a bird resting atop a rock, but here the relatively smooth surface and clear intervention of notching implies a human-cultural history, and foregrounds the delicate aesthetic of this bird of prey.

Occasionally, Rosen will cluster slabs together—with or without sculptural toppings—in installations that evoke ruins, quarries, construction sites, or even Egyptian temples, complete with stelae of gods in animal form.

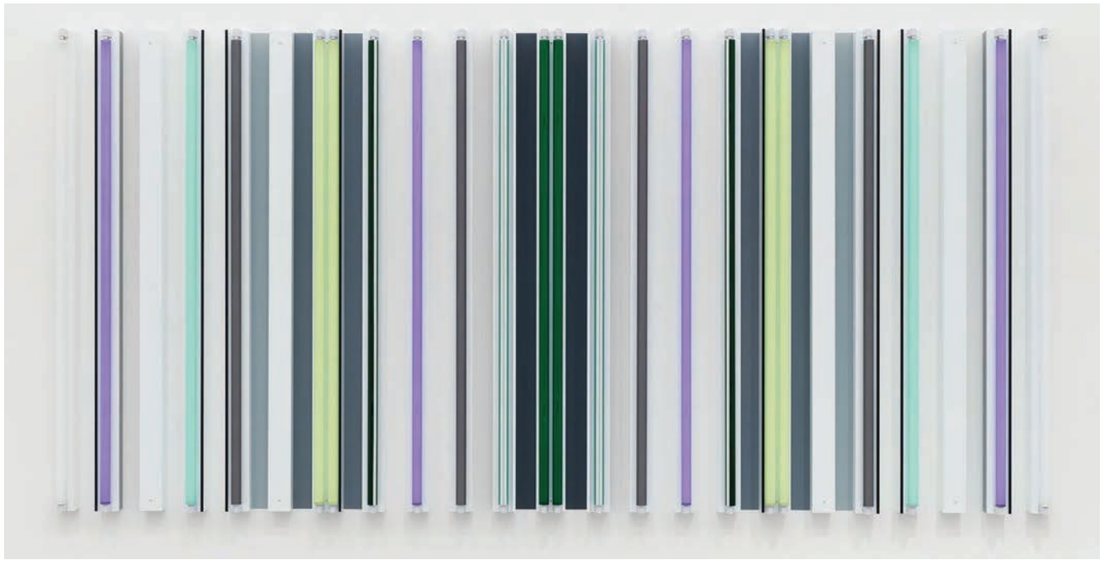
Morandi Tale (2020) is a large-scale installation assembled from stacked and abutted limestone blocks with compellingly chiseled and mottled surfaces. Perched here and there are opaque cast and handblown glass vases in harmonious hues of cream and amber. A couple of birds stand like silent sentinels or divine intermediaries. Presumably, the title refers to Giorgio Morandi—the Italian painter known for his still lifes—and Rosen's art is likewise tonally subdued, compositionally grounded, and utterly calm. But Rosen's three-dimensional riff extends over six feet into the air and vaguely suggests crumbling structures or human activities with secret-filled vessels and totemic reverence.

Rosen's references to art history and the way she leaves evidence of the human creative process (sketches, visible chisel marks, abstracting choices) might seem at odds with her fascination with nature. But I would argue that Rosen's art does not heighten a sense of opposition or conflict, but instead functions as a go-between. Much as birds connect the realms of sky and earth, Rosen's art intermediates between nature and culture, delivering a soothing awareness of the marvelous, ephemeral vitality within it all.

GAYLE CLEMANS *is an art historian and writer who teaches at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle. Connect with her on Instagram, @gayleclemans.*



Jane Rosen, *Bill's Peregrine*, 2022. Blown and pigmented glass, limestone. H 64, W 8, D 10 in. (H 163, W 20, D 25 cm)
COURTESY: TRAVER GALLERY, SEATTLE



Robert Irwin, *Greek Speak*, 2021. H 6, W 12 ½, D 4 ¼ ft. (H 1.8, W 3.8, D 1.3 m)
COURTESY: PACE GALLERY, NEW YORK

Robert Irwin

"NEW WORK"
PACE GALLERY
NEW YORK CITY
APRIL 1-30, 2022

The vertical points skyward and implies ascension, an escape from the weighted horizontal surface of the earth. It's also a reminder of the inevitability of death. At the forefront of the 1960s Light and Space movement, artist Robert Irwin has investigated the path of ocular excursion for more than 50 years. Comparison to the work of artist Dan Flavin, who also employed fluorescent tubing, is unavoidable, but there are critical differences beyond the common choice of found materials. Irwin's bulbs remain unlit, and his investigations depend on ambient lighting as their source of luminescence—theatrical gels and painted architectural elements are the sources of the glowing colors in the work. An online materials list for Irwin's "Unlight" series offers only the curious notation "SHADOW + REFLECTION = COLOR."

At Pace's flagship gallery, each grouping of Irwin's tube sculptures was symmetrically arranged by the artist to be split chromatically at the center, a sort of interdependent yin and yang in mirrored distribution, with balance the carefully calibrated product. A better subject comparison to these works is the painting of Washington Color School painter Gene Davis. There are certainly similarities to his masterful *Black Rhythm* (1964), a little-known and rarely seen painting, as it has been housed in the CIA's Virginia headquarters since 1968. *Eight, Skate and Donate* (2018) is a rare exception to the rule, where eight of the 22 bulbs are divided above and below the center with a wide strip of color to add a subtle horizontal band to the overall composition, which is otherwise plumb—complimentary purples and golden yellows interrupted by shades of dusty olive green.

Arrowhead (2018) is punctuated in its middle with dual ribbons of fire-engine red at its heated core—the work in crescendo at its center—and appears to fold both toward and away from the viewer in simultaneity and free association, as dictated by viewer perspective. Here also, the artist has employed shallow walls, lattice dividers separating (and housing) the matching lengths of tubes. Several, however, extend beyond and below the greater body of the work in a tail-like fashion; a vertical visual rise, accelerated as if by fin. Similarly, the newer *Greek Speak* (2021) is anchored at its midpoint with two painted strips of near-black wall flanking tubes of forest green, heavy here in contrast to the fade towards off-white subtlety at its outer edges.

In contrast, a work like *Kilts* (2018) appears to lie nearly flat, and to favor patterning over spatial illusion. In this juxtaposition, we are made aware of the greater gallery, and reminded that live-observer participation is integral to fully appreciating Irwin's calculated investigations in perception, as enabled by the particulars of place. There is a sensuous magic at play, revealing the works composed of primarily cool colors to