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"Form and Process in Bertil Vallien's sandcasts"

BY

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## CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1	4
CHAPTER 2	22
CHAPTER 3	34
CHAPTER 4	59
CONCLUSION	75
NOTES	77
BIBLIOGRAPHY	79





## LIST OF PLATES

Page

Fig. 1 Bertil Vallien standing beside one of his longest sandcast moulds measuring over 7 foot long	5
Fig. 2 Vases, 1953-1959, by Erik Hoglund.	6
Fig. 3 Teapot, stoneware, 1960, by Signe Persson-Melin.	7
Fig. 4 Vase, date unknown, by Bertil Vallien.	10
Fig. 5 Stylised Horse, 1960, by Bertil Vallien.	12
Fig. 6 Teapot and Jug, earthenware, by Bertil Vallien.	13
Fig. 7 Teapot and Hot Water Jug, produced 1956-1957, by Stig Lindberg.	14
Fig. 8 Plate, glazed earthenware, exact date unknown, Stig Lindberg.	15
Fig. 9 <u>Family on Whale</u> , 1962, by Bertil Vallien.	17
Fig. 10 <u>Ceramic Boat</u> , date unknown, by Bertil Vallien.	19
Fig. 11 Candleholder, stoneware, date unknown, by Bertil Vallien.	20
Fig. 12 <u>Dragon</u> , 1964, by Bertil Vallien.	25
Fig. 13 <u>Husor</u> , 1965, By Bertil Vallien.	25
Fig. 14 <u>Ararat 11</u> , 1966, By Bertil Vallien.	26
Fig. 15 <u>Growth</u> , stoneware, by Bertil Vallien.	27





Fig 16 <u>Cleanforce</u> , 1965, by Bertil Vallien.	29
Fig 17 <u>Goddess N</u> , 1967, by Bertil Vallien.	30
Fig 18 <u>Wagon</u> , 1967, by Bertil Vallien.	32
Fig 19 <u>The Ruler</u> , Stoneware, 1979, by Bertil Vallien.	35
Fig 20 <u>Box of Possibilites</u> , earthenware, 1979, by Bertil Vallien.	36
Fig 21 <u>Sphere of solitude</u> , 1982, by Bertil Vallien.	39
Fig 22 Detail of box containing the glass rods, various symbols and colour pigment waiting to be placed into the molten glass.	40
Fig 23 <u>Area 11-Map 111</u> ,1991, by Bertil Vallien.	42
Fig 24 Detail of face in relief, from <u>Pompeja</u> ,1986, by Bertil Vallien.	42
Fig 25 Bertil Vallien forming the sculpture by using a wooden template.	44
Fig 26 Vallien preparing the sand for casting.	45
Fig 27 Sandcasts waiting for casting.	46
Fig 28 Sprinkling the cast with coloured oxides and graphite.	47
Fig 29 Vallien's assistants pouring the molten glass by ladles into the casts.	48
Fig 30 Vallien placing his symbols into the glass.	49
Fig 31 The moulds being placed into the annealing oven.	50







Fig 32 <u>Crossboat</u> ,1985, by Bertil Vallien.	52
Fig 33 <u>Quarry</u> , 1984, by Bertil Vallien.	53
Fig 34 <u>Spiral</u> , 1983, by Bertil Vallien.	54
Fig 35 <u>Voyage of Dreams</u> , 1986, by Bertil Vallien.	56
Fig 36 <u>Solitude</u> , 1987, by Bertil Vallien.	57
Fig 37 <u>Construction 11</u> , 1979, by Bertil Vallien.	58
Fig 38 <u>The Circle</u> , 1989, by Bertil Vallien.	60
Fig 39 <u>Nero</u> , 1988, by Bertil Vallien.	61
Fig 40 <u>Vertical</u> , 1988, by Bertil Vallien.	62
Fig 41 <u>Vaso Secco</u> , 1988, by Bertil Vallien.	63
Fig 42 <u>Madre X</u> , 1988, by Bertil Vallien.	65
Fig 43 <u>Madre</u> , 1988, by Bertil Vallien.	66
Fig 44 <u>Willy-Willy</u> ,1988, by Bertil Vallien.	67
Fig 45 <u>Area 11 Map</u> , 1990, by Bertil Vallien.	69
Fig 46 <u>Area 11 Map</u> , 1990, by Bertil Vallien.	70
Fig 47 <u>Area 11 Finding Man</u> , 1989, by Bertil Vallien.	72
Fig 48 <u>Area 11 Finding</u> , 1989, by Bertil Vallien.	73
Fig 49 <u>Area 11 Watchers</u> , 1989,by Bertil Vallien.	74





## INTRODUCTION

Swedish glass designer Bertil Vallien has truly stretched the potential of glass as both a functional and sculptural medium in the last thirty years. He entered the glass field quite by chance having firstly studied and worked with ceramics. Seemingly unaware of the growing glass studio movement of the 1960's, he now ranks with the pioneers of that movement, such as Littleton, Libensky and Chihuly as one of its modern masters. Doug Heller, coowner of New York's Heller Gallery says of Vallien,

"within the international glass community, he stands at the very highest level, for both his design work and his art...,"<sup>1</sup>

This accolade is achieved by Vallien because of his immense scope in designing for glass and his abundant knowledge of the various techniques for this medium. To have become one of the leading glass artists of today Vallien has taken ancient glass techniques as well as introducing new ones that originated within other mediums and has pushed them to their limits to create contemporary glass sculptures.

The scope of Vallien's work in glass is breathtaking, he creates both functional and sculptural pieces within the constraints of a factory situation at Afors glassworks. His designs for functional ware and his sculptural work are both equally exciting and enthralling. It is however, undoubtedly Vallien's sandcast sculptural forms that are truly amazing for both their beauty and technical ingenuity.

Vallien's sandcast work is recognised world-wide for its intense beauty and brilliant technical skills. Pieces by Vallien have sold for over 70,000 dollars and work is in collections such as those at The National Museum in Stockholm, The Corning and Everson museum in New York, and London's Victoria and Albert Museum. Vallien has also been involved in creating many sandcast sculptures on a commissioned base for such notable clients as the Swedish Telecom Headquarters in Malmo, the Volvo Car Corporation Headquarters in



Gothenburg, and just last year he completed a large sandcast  
instillation piece for the Headquarters of Corning Inc., in New York.  
Vallien has also won many awards for his sandcast pieces, his most  
notable <sup>one</sup> was in 1985, when he won second prize in the prestigious  
Zweiter Coburger Glass Prize in Coburg, Germany. He has also been  
recognised by various <sup>the</sup>groupes and institutions for his outstanding  
contribution to design, for example the "Japan Interior Design  
Magazine" in 1985 described Vallien as "the most influential  
designer in his field since 1961".<sup>2</sup>

Getting to this level has not been easy for Vallien, he has combined  
two immensely different roles, that of designer and artist both  
taking equal amounts of time, energy and importance. Vallien's work  
amazes me for its sheer volume, diversity and immense beauty in  
colour, use of form and symbols and of course its technical virtuosity.  
Vallien is now one of the foremost figures in glass, today. He has in  
some ways struggled to this position in the last thirty years, by  
having to overcome his family's working class attitude and an  
inferiority complex which he suffered from while at college. Since  
1963 when he entered the glass world proper, this struggle has  
entailed pushing himself to learn as much as he could about relevant  
glass techniques, which he could then incorporate into his work.  
Sandcasting was one of those techniques, and has made Vallien quite  
famous, for he has pushed and stretched this technique, taking it  
from a basic metal industry casting method into a modern diverse  
sculpturing process. It is my intention to show Vallien's dramatic  
progression from a working class strict pentecostal background to a  
successful artist, from primitive-looking early casted forms to his  
powerful, dynamic technical successes of today. Vallien uses many  
different forms and symbols within his work but all evoke a sense of  
journeying either through life or into the next world. Life as an  
infinite voyage has been a constant theme in Vallien's creative  
work. All Vallien's sandcasts are vehicles for his emotions and  
thoughts, they have been driven by his desire and quest to represent  
his ideas in glass and to learn as much as possible about this difficult  
technique of sandcasting. It is my intention to <sup>re</sup>present Vallien's  
artistic journey in reaching his now successful position. This will be

achieved by focussing on both his background and early influences, and by showing clearly how Vallien's sandcast work has developed and changed drastically over the years, in both style and technical advancement.



## CHAPTER I

### Background / Early Year

The late Fifties and early Sixties were years of major change in the applied arts and craft industry in both Sweden and throughout the world. The typical Swedish design of simple, elegant, functional items was being rebelled against. "Form Fantasi", the title of a major exhibition held at the Liljevalch Art Gallery in Stockholm in 1964, was a showcase displaying the changes and new ideas that were appearing in Swedish design. Designers were reacting against the overabundance of perfection that was prominent throughout Swedish design pre 1955, they were allowing bubbles and impurities to appear in glass and pottery, and clay was being used as a freer medium with a greater sculptural feel. One particular designer, Erik Höglund at the Kosta Boda glass factory, was introducing bubbles in his simple blown vessels (see fig 2) from 1953; the contrast between his designs, which are so rustic in appearance, and the preciseness and sophistication of glass before this period is striking. In ceramics, Signe Persson - Melin's stoneware teapot (see fig 3), with its unusual incorporation of such a hard industrial feature as a bolt into the design of such a simple item is a good example of the coarser, rougher, more experimental design that was appearing at this time. Commenting on the exhibition of 1964, the Dame Svend Erik Møller summed up the feeling towards earlier design ideals.

"We are tired to death of the poverty of form with which the one-sidedness of functionalism has infected the whole of our surrounding"<sup>1</sup>.

This rebellion away from perfection and simplicity which had been the essence of Swedish design was exciting and invigorating for both the designers and the general public. It must be remembered that these changes were a very striking departure away from tradition and "Beauty for All"<sup>2</sup>, which was a book published in Sweden in 1899, but was also the ideal that designers held up until the mid Fifties. They felt that all Swedish people had the right to surround themselves with beautiful, elegant, well designed functional items that would be relatively affordable. This fundamental need for elegance and beauty was an essential and characteristic part of Swedish design before the dramatic changes took place. "Swedish Grace"<sup>3</sup> was how Morton Shand, an English critic summed up in particular the 1920's but it can be used to describe the simple, elegant forms throughout Swedish design history pre



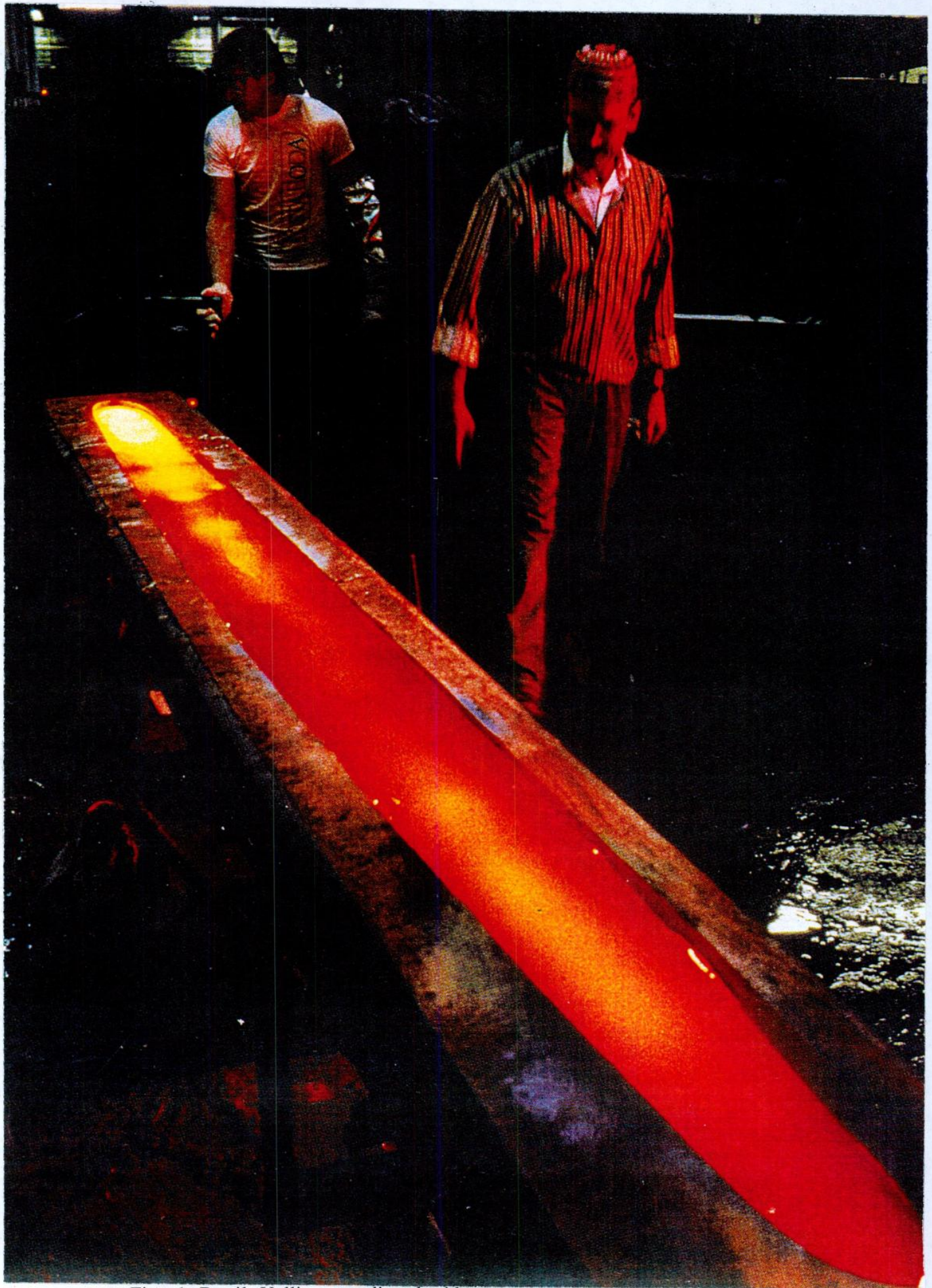
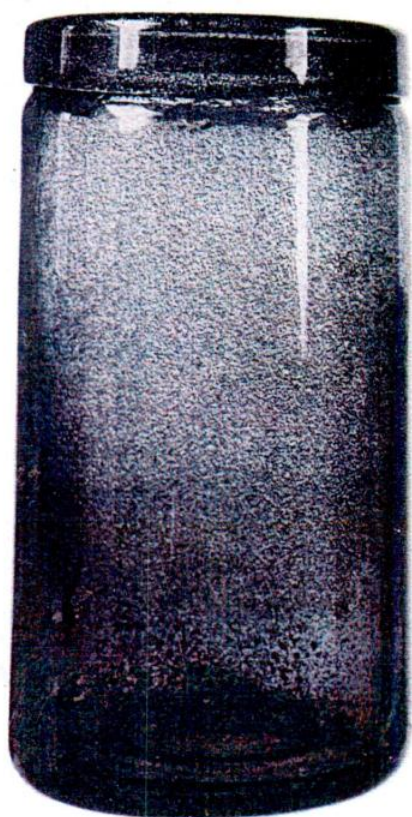


Fig. 1 Bertil Vallien standing beside one of his longest sandcast moulds measuring over 7 foot long







176



177

Fig. 2 Vases, 1953-1959, by Erik Höglund.

1955. The late Fifties and early Sixties in design revealed the fundamental changes that were taking place in Sweden. Design and materials were used in a freer sculptural way, imputities were no longer a worry, in fact they were incorporated and made into strong features. Designers became more aware of their surroundings and their work reflected their fears concerning the destruction of the earth from pollution. Many incorporated various different materials into their work, or used material or ways of colouring pieces that were not conventional; feelings and emotions became an important element in work post 1955. Their work became a way or vehicle to express feelings, emotions and thoughts. Freedom, experimentation and breaking the bonds of any restrictions were the new progressive ideals.

This was the climate which surrounded Bertil Vallien as he studied ceramics at the Konstfack School of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm from 1955. He entered the school when these influential, dramatic and striking changes were commencing. These changing ideals and values, together with his attendance at this institution, were to influence the young Vallien greatly and many of these features have remained with him to this day. What has made Bertil Vallien into one of the leading glass artist/designers of today is his background and those formative influential early years.

Bertil Vallien was initially a ceramist, studying first at the Konstfack School of Arts, Crafts and Design for a two year period, then continuing his studies at the School of Advanced Industrial Design for a further two years in Stockholm the year after finishing Konstfack. The intervening year between the two schools was not caused by lack of eagerness but in order to facilitate compulsory military service in the cavalry division of the Swedish Army. This was a time that was to benefit the young Vallien greatly by giving him an insight into his heritage and nationality; this was to become a fundamental element of his work in the future. It also helped to mature and strengthen Vallien: the Army's rigid discipline and structured environment made a lasting affect on Vallien and has clearly remained an element of his working character. Vallien chose the initial course at Konstfack after attending the school for evening classes in Life Drawing. His artistic ability was noticed early on in his life - during a wallpapering job while he was an apprentice to his father's decorating firm. A need to express his built up artistic frustration which was being restricted by his working class family background, found Vallien using



the unpapered walls as the surface for some figurative drawings. When it was discovered that these drawings were showing through the wallpaper, Vallien was sacked, and sent to Konstfack to study Life Drawing on a more appropriate surface. Here he discovered the ceramic department and, while also working as a part-time window dresser, he developed a love and feel for more three dimensional forms, and enrolled in the course.

During his college days, Vallien mixed with students from totally different backgrounds from his own, who had contrasting values and held different stances on most issues from his, and his industrious working class family living in the small suburb of Sollentuna, just north of Stockholm. His parents who were strictly religious people who grounded their seven children in the rigid ideals of the pentecostal movement was a striking contrast to the other students' bohemian home life, where art and design was an intricate part of growing up. Religion, hardwork and breadwinning abilities were held in high regard and considered of utmost importance to Vallien's family. This puritanical attitude has formed the backbone and innermost quality in Vallien, remaining a steadfast characteristic of the man. However in someways this noble, hardworking ethic restricted and confined Vallien and his artistic potential. Being surrounded by more worldly people, Vallien felt for sometime inferior and struggled to draw himself up to what he thought was a better standard of knowledge, which it seemed his fellow students had already obtained. It took Vallien a while to settle into this artistic institution and not to feel intimidated by his fellow students. He slowly began to learn from them and their ease and comfort with art as something that should not be feared. He discovered with tremendous relief that he was by no means

"below them as far as knowledge, creativity and intelligence were concerned."<sup>4</sup>

It was only his timidity and a strong influential background that was restricting him.

Vallien's work during his college years reflects the dramatic changes in style that were occurring, and shows clearly the influences that he was encountering from students and indeed his tutors, who instilled in and encouraged him to be freer and more experimental in his work. Vases such as that shown in fig 4, date unknown,







Fig. 4 Vase, date unknown, by Bertil Vallien.





but created while at Konstfack, shows the strong influence of Lis Husberg, one of Vallien's tutors. This vessel, crude and rough in appearance, is striking in contrast to previously typical Swedish design. However it still shows respect and understanding of ancient traditions and craftsmanship, but pushes these skills into forming a more artistic and looser vessel. This is a strong indication of the influence Lis Husberg had over Bertil Vallien, for this is the ideal that she tried to maintain in her own work. Early signs of the importance of surface texture and decoration is shown in this piece, an importance that is still included and developed in later pieces. It is clear that perfection is not a concern to Vallien. Here in this piece the walls are not symmetrical and surface texture is rough, showing Vallien's finger marks that he made during this vessel's creation.

Other pieces from college days centre mostly on the theme of the horse, showing clearly the impact the cavalry division in his compulsory military service had on Vallien. In pieces such as the one showing a stylised rider (see fig 5) a stoneware piece dated 1960, surface texture is roughened by various forms of markings and scratches. This primitive-looking form shows the experimentation and playfulness which Vallien was using in the clay during this period. The famous ceramist, Stig Lindberg whom Vallien studied under, was to have a dramatic and lasting affect on him. Strong similarities and comparisons can easily be made between Vallien's designs for a teapot and jug (fig 6) and Lindberg's interpretation of the same item (fig 7) produced around 1956. Both show a strong oriental style. In Lindberg's design decoration and markings are important, which follows throughout Lindberg's work. Lindberg used many unusual forms of motifs such as that shown on the plate in fig 8 where the mundane task of hanging washing is shown in a refreshingly witty and humourous manner. Such humour and usage of ordinary everyday elements was picked up on and developed by Vallien himself in later, more recent pieces.

It was this first artistic working environment, and indeed the developments occurring throughout the world in design methods, that gave Vallien a strong and firm base. Husberg and Lindberg taught him to work freely and to experiment greatly, not to be afraid of the clay but to work with it, to enjoy it and to stretch the clay, to see its possibilities. In so doing Vallien stretched himself both physically and also his designs. From this strong, sensible, influential background Vallien





Fig. 5 Stylised Horse, 1960, by Bertil Vallien.





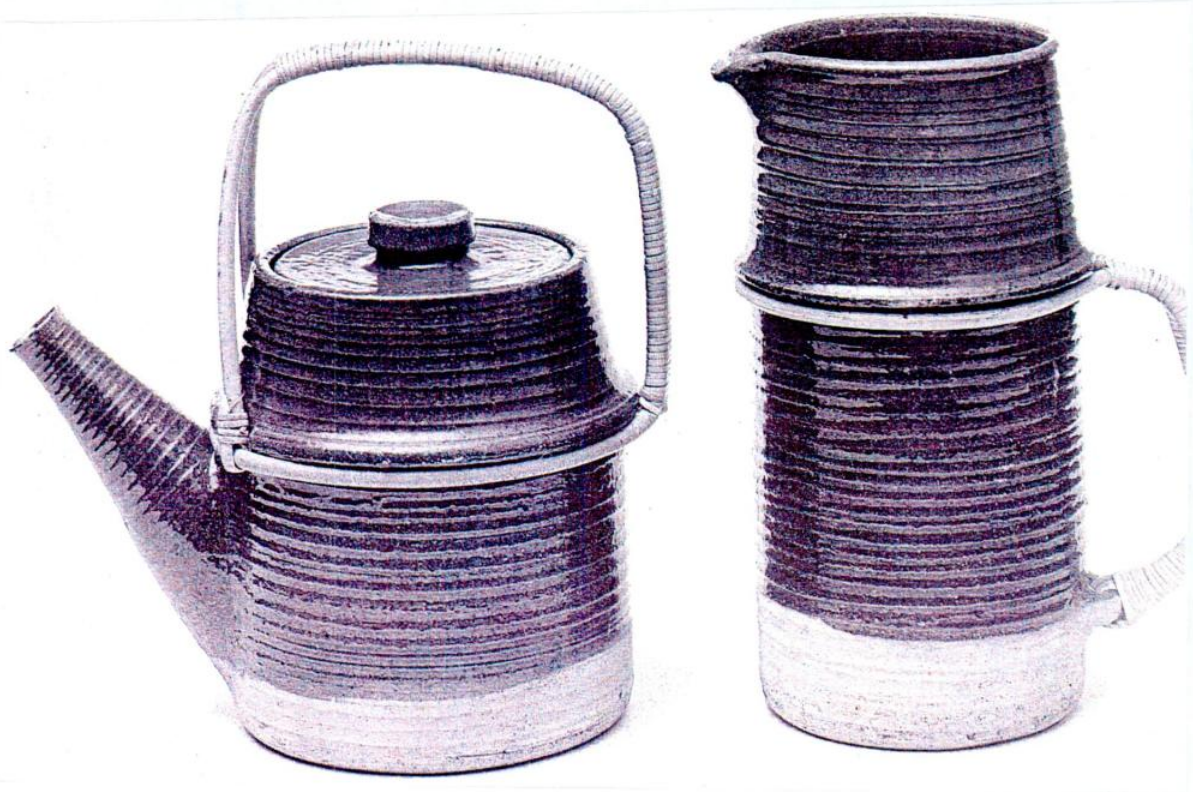


Fig. 6 Teapot and Jug, earthenware, by Bertil Vallien.





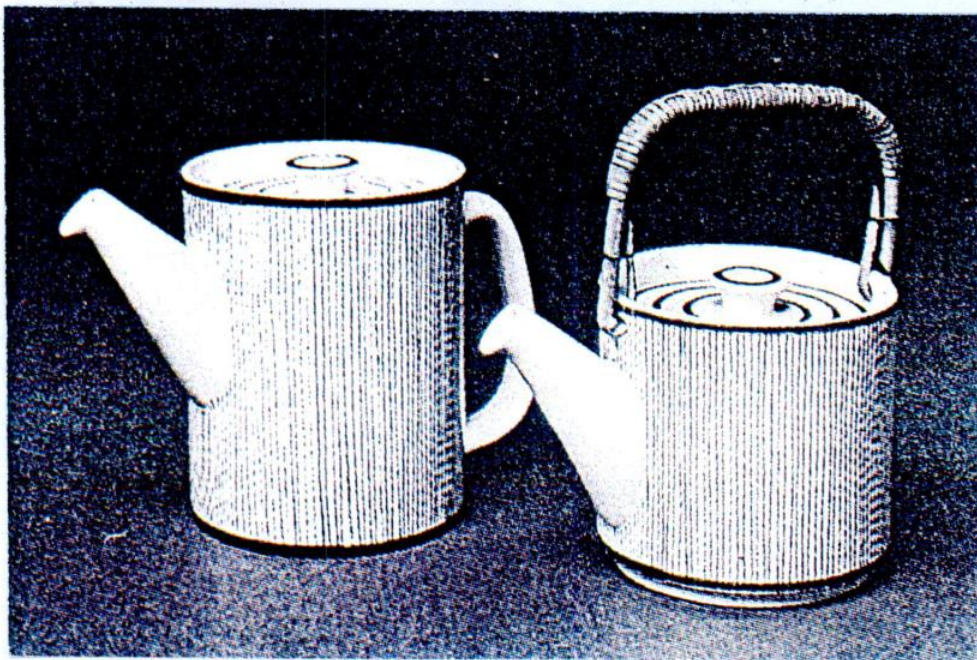


Fig. 7 Teapot and Hot Water Jug, produced  
1956-1957, by Stig Lindberg.







Fig. 8 Plate, glazed earthenware,  
exact date unknown, Stig Lindberg.



135





developed, taking on these suggestions and working with this advice and new way of thinking to strengthen his own designs.

Other influences were to follow. Soon after finishing college, Vallien won a scholarship from the Sweden-American Foundation to travel to America. Here he obtained a job in Los Angeles with the Hal Fromholt Ceramics company, a small factory producing largely craft-based products. Vallien was instantly struck by the bright, brash, fast lifestyle of America, a contrast to the stereotypical, quieter, more natural, peaceful lifestyle of Scandinavia. His American colleagues experimented a great deal; often they allowed their work to suffer for the sake of taking risks. Often their finished pieces were of poor quality but had a refreshingly daring quality. This heavy emphasis on experimenting and stretching the medium, together with the exciting way the Americans worked, Vallien found both impressive and refreshing, probably a factor in his growing aversion to his Swedish background and its persistence to clean-cut perfection. Vallien rebelled against this Swedish design tradition of perfection and elegance begun in the 1920's, reaching its peak in the 1950's. Vallien comments,

"I was sick and tired of Swedish grace and elegant function, of the almost fanatic attention to refinement ..... I was looking for more spontaneity, more feeling, more guts ..."<sup>5</sup>.

He enjoyed and found his American experience rewarding having been "tied down by tradition, function and the notion of being true to the material," he likened America to "standing in a cold shower for two years"<sup>6</sup>.

Pieces such as Family on Whale (1962), (fig 9), produced while in America which won him first prize in the "Young Americans" competition and earned him a nomination for the most promising artist-craftsman of the year, is typical of this period. This sculptural form with its abstract standing figures on a large whale shows a clear development from his stylized student work. Here there is more vigorous use of the clay and the form gives a more weighty, powerful feeling, which was lacking in previous college work.



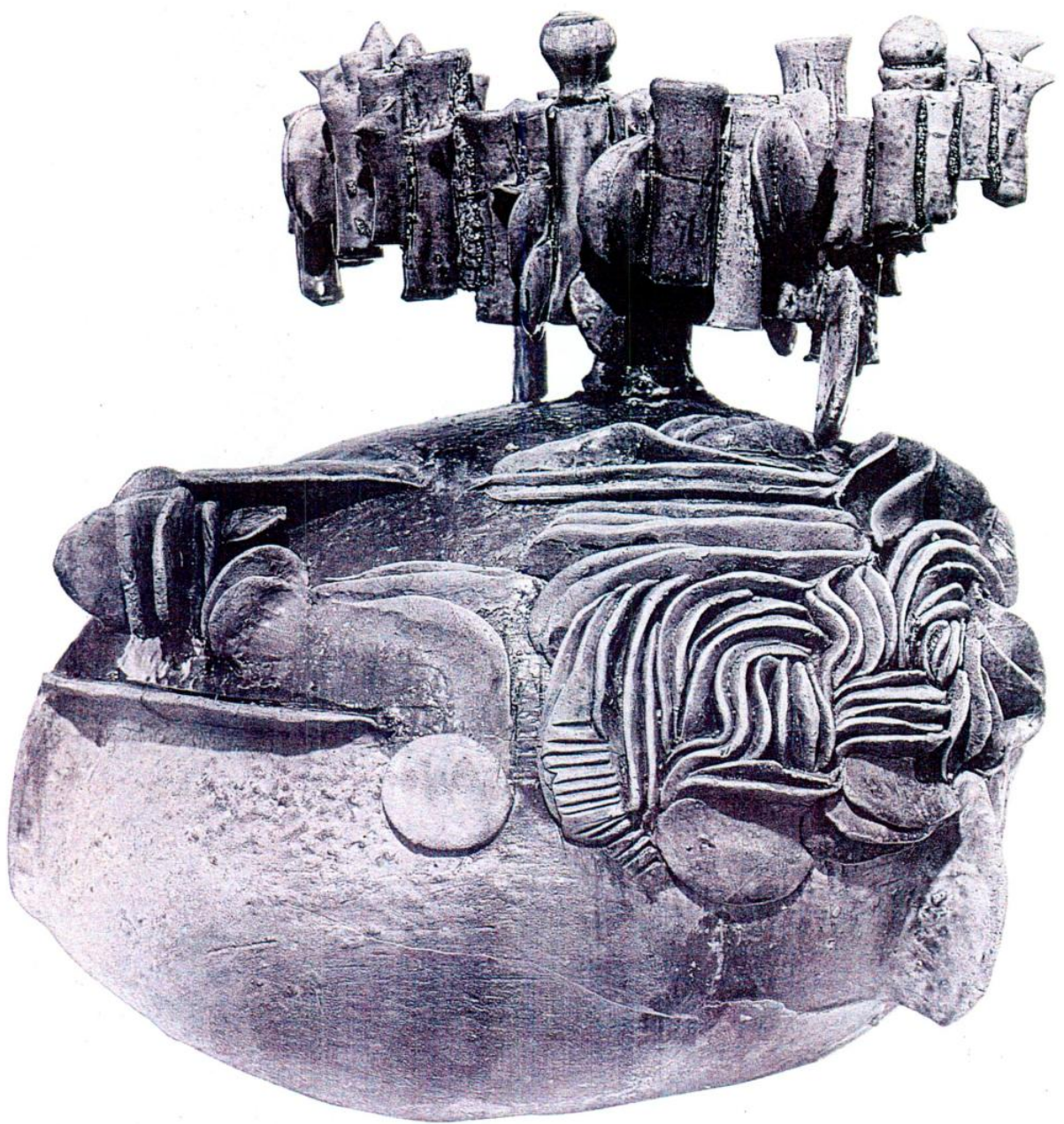


Fig. 9 Family on Whale, 1962, by Bertil Vallien.

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GC II

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The freer style in ceramics that was used by contemporary artists is known to have influenced Vallien. Vallien encountered the work of American sculptors Theodore Roszak and David Smith. Others such as Jerry Rothman, and Peter Voulkos in particular, with his powerful abstract sculptures, using the clay in a very manipulative and dramatic way - qualities Vallien took on in his work. The well-known ceramist Gunilla Palmstierna wrote concerning her own personal experience of the American craft scene in 1959, of

"a tremendous zest for experimentation both with material and with formal expression." Admittedly all was not of top-quality, but "a lot of it was refreshingly daring - they dared to make mistakes in order to find new directions"<sup>7</sup>.

It seems that many Scandinavians, like Vallien, were taken by the striking differences they found in America, strong contrasts appeared with their own nations' perfectionist attitude. The ability to be fully aware of the material and to experiment and be brave and unfearing of the outcome of the pieces was the American criteria, which Vallien latched onto and has held onto to this day.

During Vallien's stay in America, his first boat sculpture appeared. This motif was later to develop into his glass work and has become one of Vallien's most famous and much used motifs and symbols. Ceramic Boat (date unknown) was created while he was in the States and shows Vallien's first use of the image of the boat. This sculpture is a very simplified primitive piece. The lone figure on board the vessel shows a strong resemblance to simple linear figures that appear in paintings by Jean Miro. Indeed, the ideals held by surrealist artists were similar to those of this era, that being to place more emphasis on automatism, i.e. to switch off your conscious mind and work freely without any constraints.

Texture in Ceramic Boat (fig 10) is kept to a minimum with only lines or scores and tiny pin marks appearing. Texture and markings are very important to Vallien in these earliest pieces and continue to be so. In pieces such as fig 11, a candleholder (date again unknown but from this period) marks and scratches appear here that have many times been repeated in Vallien's work. The arrow on the base of Ceramic Boat suggests direction. This symbol, together with the propeller image or more possibly the earliest appearance of a similar symbol depicting a cross inside a





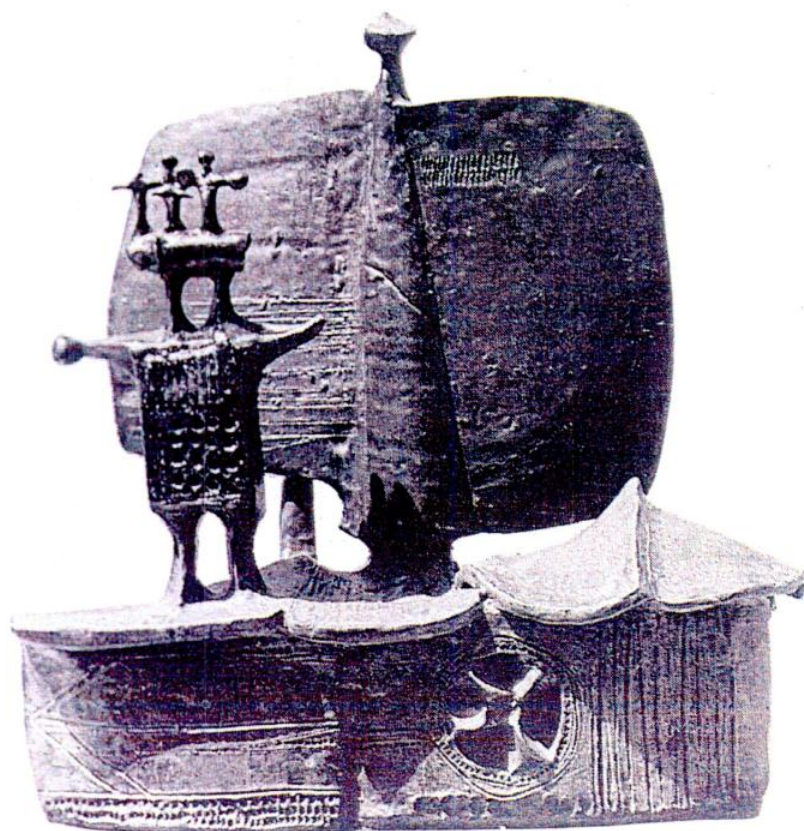


Fig. 10 Ceramic Boat, date unknow, by Bertil Vallien.





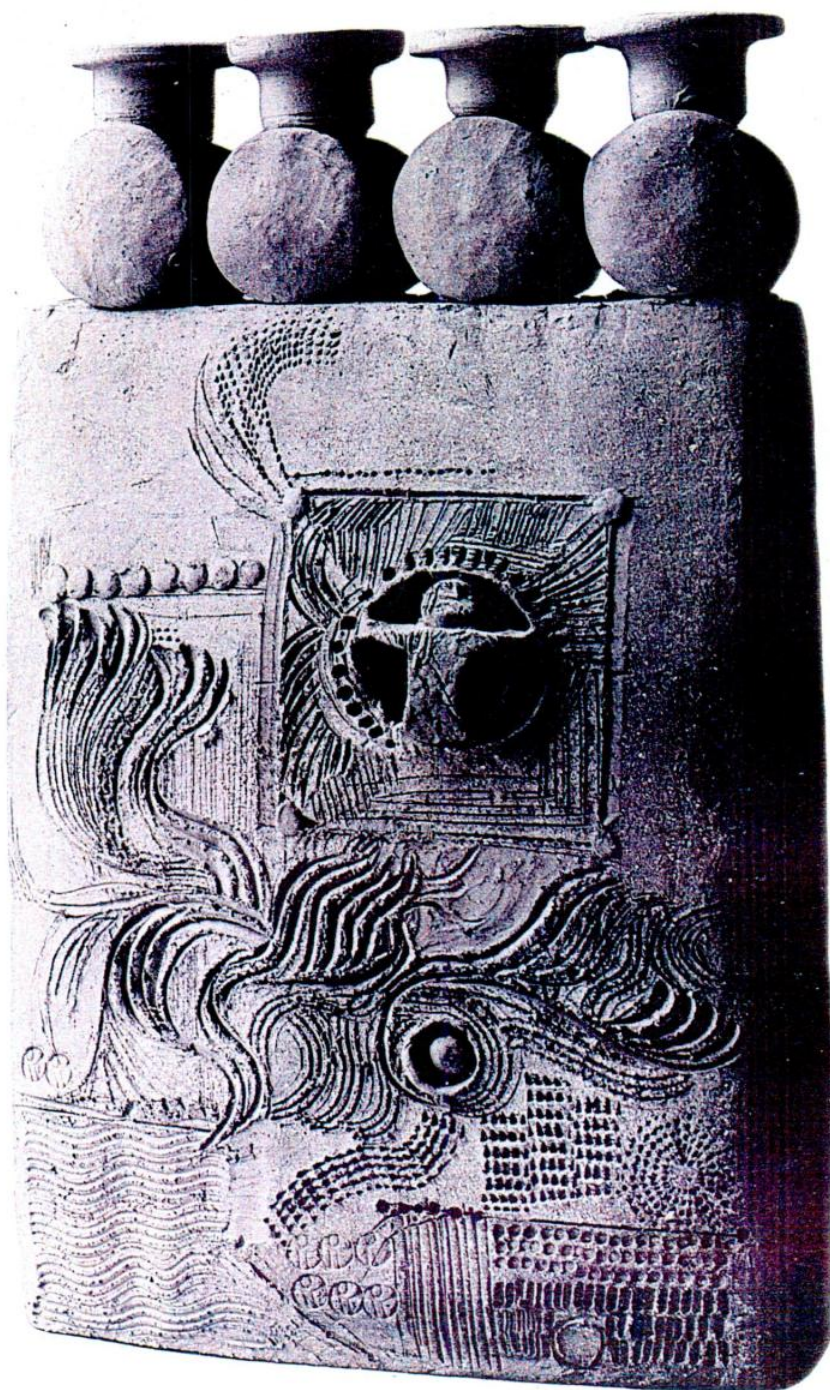


Fig 11 Candleholder, stoneware, date unknown,  
by Bertil Vallien.

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circle are quite common images throughout Vallien's work, even his most recent. The strong outline of the sail behind the figure, together with the basic boat form, show deep connections to Viking longboats and Vallien's own native folk and historical tradition. The primitive style of the piece strengthens its link with history and gives the piece a sense of mystery and aura. However, this piece is still suffering from the lack of suggestive movement that also occurred in Vallien college work. This sculpture is a heavy, solid somewhat cold piece which emphasizes its inability to move. This is a problem which is addressed and corrected in later pieces, albeit in a different medium, that of glass.

It is clear that Vallien learnt a lot and was influenced greatly by this American experience. He left his mark though on America, not only by winning the "Young Americans" competition but by also gaining the respect of many critics and fellow artists, in particular Professor Karl With. With wrote, concerning Vallien's exhibition at the Ryder Gallery in Los Angeles in 1963 that "the ceramic tradition of Southern California has gone rather stale or eccentric lately, efforts should be made to secure the presence of this great talent (Vallien) in Los Angeles as a source of refreshing and invigorating influence"<sup>8</sup>. Such a plea however was not taken up by Vallien, for he returned to Sweden in 1963 to commence work at the Afors glassworks (which later was to merge with Kosta Boda). The reason for choosing a glass factory, a somewhat alien medium at this time for Bertil Vallien, was put simply by himself,

"I needed a job. My idea was to support myself as a designer while I worked as an artist with clay, wood and iron. But after five years, glass took over"<sup>9</sup>.





## CHAPTER II

Bertil Vallien arrived home from America to commence work at Åfors glassworks, situated in the Smaland region of Sweden, in 1963. Smaland province is home to the most notable glassworks of the present day, namely Orrefors, Johansfors, Kosta, Åfors and Boda. Each factory is sited amongst the dense natural forests of this area with small communities encircling them. Glass production has been carried out in this "The Kingdom of Crystal"<sup>10</sup>, since the eighteenth century, with the emergence of Kosta. The glassworks of Åfors are made up of the four most famous factories of the past centuries, that is, Kosta, Johansfors, Boda and Åfors itself, all having merged to form the present day Kosta Boda company. They have gained the might of a large corporation but each retains its own unique individual style and importance.

Vallien came to Åfors glassworks, so he could combine his design skills learnt at Konstfack with his freer sculptural abilities and get a salary while doing both. Although having spent time in America, Vallien surprisingly never came in contact with the strong studio glass movement which was occurring there, with the likes of Harvey Littleton and Dominick Labino. Instead he had been drawn by an earlier experience in working with glass in Sweden, under the influence and tuition of Stig Lindberg. Lindberg had long seen the advantages of learning design with a practical base, and designing directly for industry. He regularly set projects to design items for particular industries. It was on one of these special courses that Vallien visited Boda glassworks for research purposes. Here Vallien discovered that the renowned, radical designer Erik Höglund was in need of an assistant. Thus in the summer of 1959 Vallien began helping in the production of Höglund's blue and grey bubbly glassware. This was a stimulating and exciting job for Vallien and with the encouragement of Kosta's director, Erik Rosen, who early on saw Vallien's talent for designing glass, he was asked to return the following summer. That summer saw Vallien at the Åfors glassworks section, designing glasses, pots and decanter sets. This initial experience in the glass world made a deep impression on Vallien. He saw the excitement, potential and possibilities glass has to offer, impressions that remained deep rooted in him despite his American experience and the dramatic affect that that had on him. So when Erik Rosen offered him a contract for Vallien to work for six months of the year designing functional ware for the factory and then use the remainder for his own sculptural work, Vallien not surprisingly accepted and returned home.



Vallien's first task on arrival at the glassworks was to understand and unearth the full potential of this medium. He achieved this by practical hands-on experience in the hot-work shop. He came to glass with a totally open mind, nothing was there to restrain him. He was quite innocent towards the subject, free from any predetermined or previous perceptions of what exactly glass could or could not do. Put simply, Vallien learnt the basics and learnt to develop on these and push traditional techniques into his desired forms. His lack of knowledge about glass forced him to experiment. Through his own personal involvement, by working directly with the hot glass and also by communicating and learning from the existing skilled workforce at the factory, he developed and learnt a great deal of essential elements and techniques that could be incorporated into his designs. As Vallien says himself

"Glass cannot be designed on paper. Many effects are impossible to calculate, that is why I often go straight into the hot-shop and try out my ideas in practice"<sup>11</sup>.

This close contact not only enhanced Vallien's knowledge of the medium but also helped to raise the standard and extend the experience of the glassworkers on the floor, making them more receptive to undertake the sometimes unusual or seemingly crazy ideas that Vallien would suggest.

Vallien's style of learning through experimentation was nothing new or usual; it was a method of working that had been instilled into him by mentors such as Husberg, Lindberg and Kosta's own Höglund, and also by artists such as Jackson Pollack, whom he admires greatly, and ceramist Peter Voulkos. These artists, along with the changing social climate, were free to experiment and openness was penetrating through all spheres of society. Dramatic changes were occurring not just in design methods, but also in society where freedom to experiment in activities previously perceived as immoral and to express oneself openly and freely were common in the young generation of the 1960's. The rebellious spirit of the 1960's is summed up by Vallien himself "it was a time of fun, of a lack of respect"<sup>12</sup>.



The Kosta Boda company, itself has a strong history, of designs breaking free from tradition and experimenting, revealing new possibilities and features for design in glass. Designers such as those there from its beginning, like Simon Gate and Edward Hald were amongst the first in the world of glass to collaborate and work directly with the masterblowers and engravers. The tradition goes back also to Sven Palmqvist, who developed and stretched the techniques of Kraka and Ravenna during the 1940's and on to Höglund, who produced eccentric rustic glassware.

During the 1960's, Vallien's functional and sculptural pieces have naturally striking contrasts. In his function lines of the Dragon series (fig 12) of 1964 and Husor series (fig 13) of 1965, Vallien shows a strong rustic style in his very stout-footed, thick stemmed weighty glasses. Mistakes due to his newness to this design area were being made, for Husor was later removed from production due to cost and complexity.

While Vallien designed functional glassware for Åfors, he continued with his sculptural work simultaneously. Vallien's ceramic pieces, for he remained working in this medium during the 1960's, were very brightly coloured organic forms protruding from solid symmetrical shapes. In pieces such as Ararat 11 (1966), see fig 14 and Growth, fig 15 (date unknown but from the same period), there is a strong sense of colour being used, and in, for example, Ararat 11 the use of bright yellow paint instead of traditional glazes allows Vallien to be unrestrained by the colour range of ceramic glazes or their unpredictability. Here the brush strokes allow an immediate finish to these organic forms, piled one on top of another, balancing and emerging from the contrasting angular forms. Looking at Ararat 11 the piling or layering is in such an irregularly structured fashion that it unbalances the piece and together with the weighty spherical form which is pushing down on the sculptures, gives a sense of insecurity and instability. In these pieces where natural forms compete against more structural ones, there is a strong sense of metamorphosis occurring. It is as if the organic matter is taking over and devouring the mechanical, structured forms. A message of change, of perhaps hope, that nature will dominate in a time where pollution and Earth's destruction is a major concern. The early brightly coloured sculptures capture a sense of hope and optimism, a theme that has its origins in these ceramic sculptures but was to follow into Vallien's glass work.



Fig 12 Dragon, 1964, by Bertil Vallien.

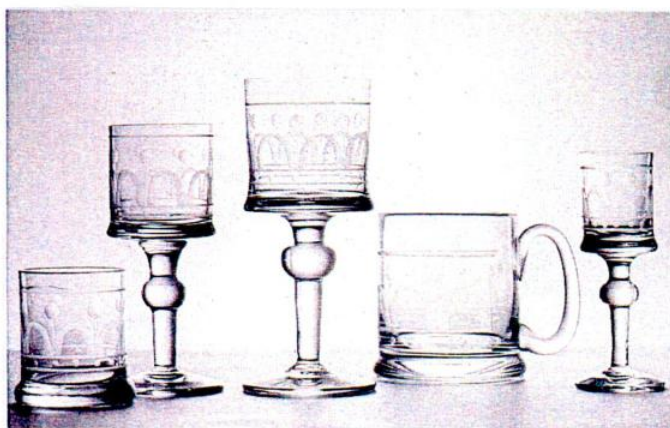


Fig 13 Husor, 1965, By Bertil Vallien.





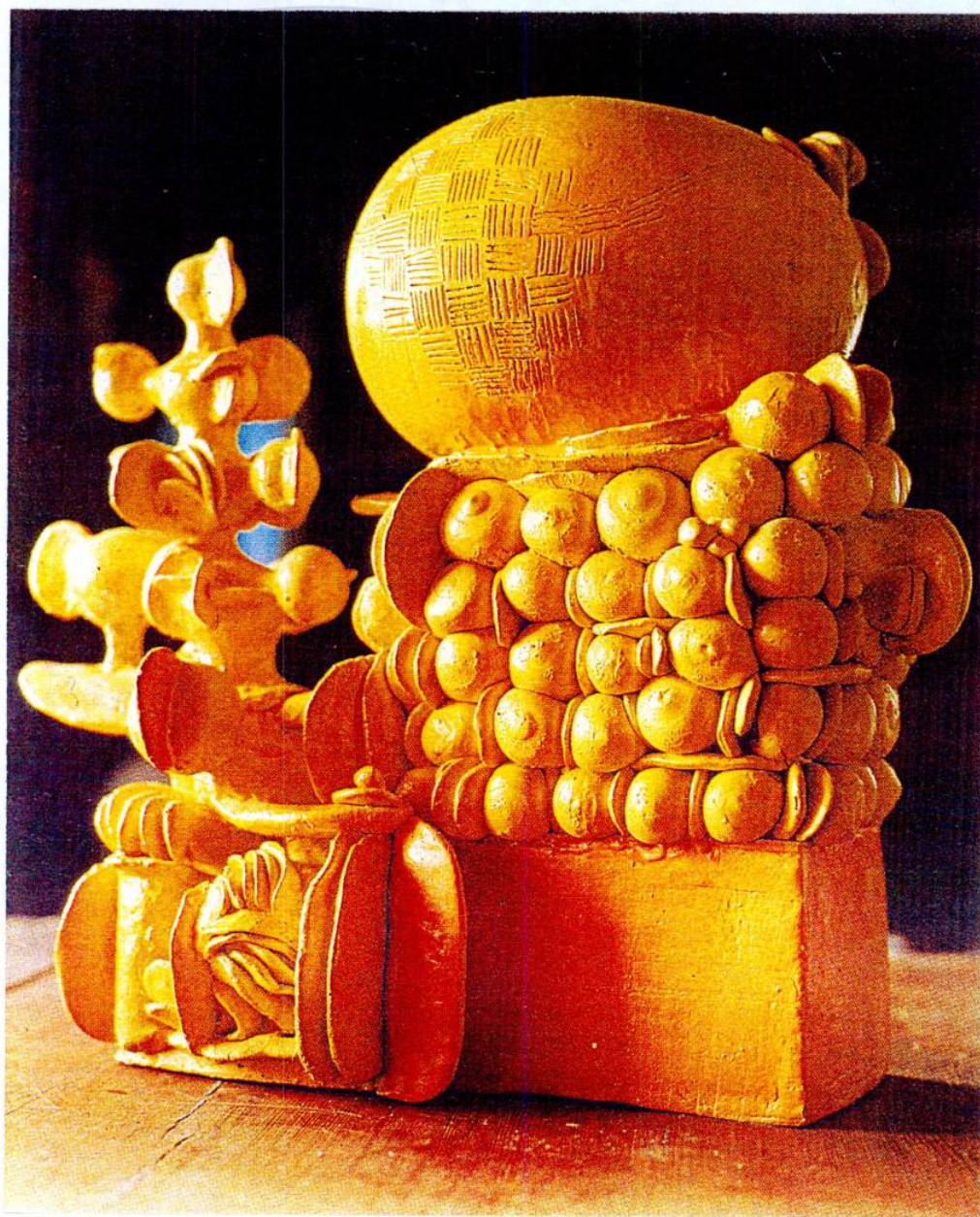


Fig 14 Ararat 11, 1966, By Bertil Vallien.



14

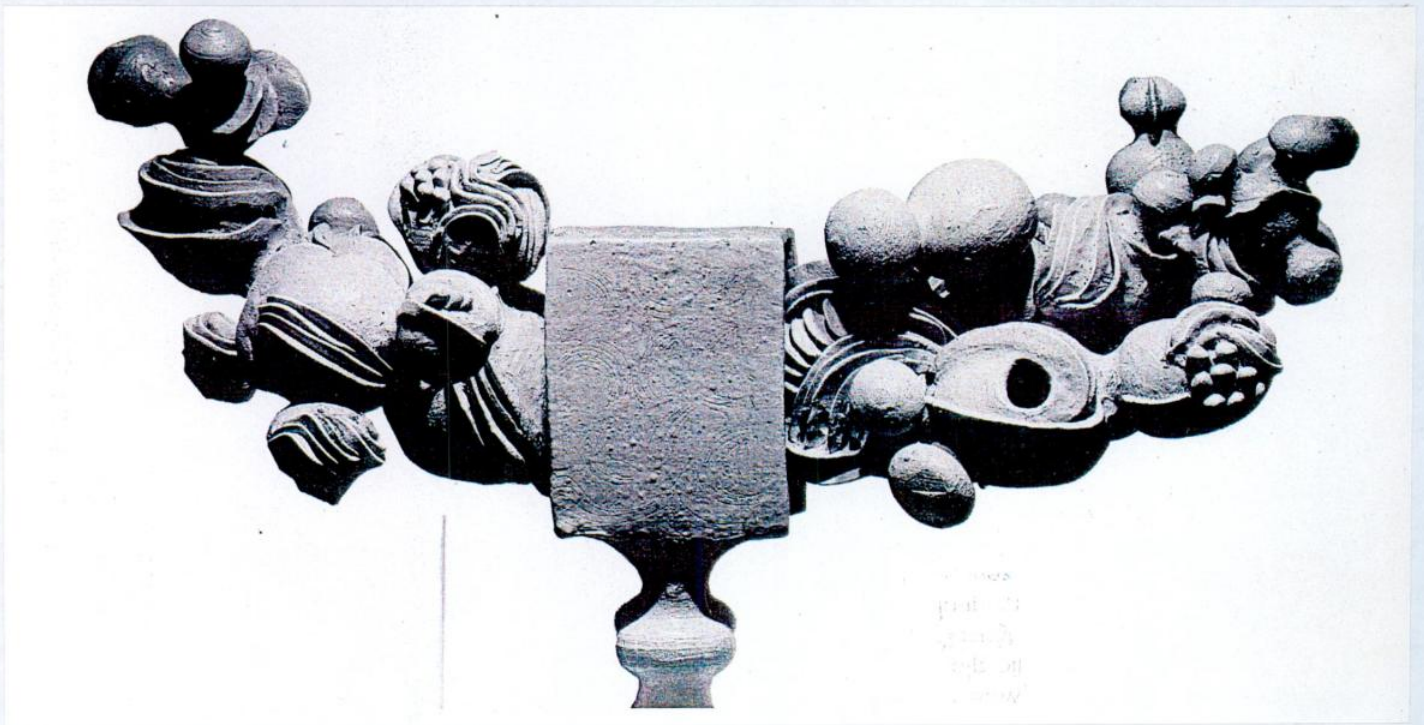


Fig. 15 Growth, stoneware, by Bertil Vallien.





During this time Vallien was simultaneously creating sculptures in ceramics and glass alongside his functional glass designs for Åfors. His first sandcast sculpture was created the year previous to Ararat 11. This method of sculpting or forming the glass was to push Vallien into becoming one of the foremost figures in glass today and was to show the most extraordinarily beautiful pieces ever created in a seemingly previously unused technique in the field of glass, that of sandcasting. For sandcasting has no tradition within glass, being more a part of the metal industry.

His first sandcast sculptures are very primitive in appearance. This is not intentional or the influence of his interest in Primitive Art but rather a result of his primary experiments in using this technique with glass. Historically, sandcasting was traditionally used in the metal industry for casting but was introduced to the ceramic area by ceramists such as Hungarian Imre Schrammel and Swedish Anders Liljefors who wished to use clay as a freer art medium. Due to Vallien's background in ceramics, he would have been very familiar with Schrammel's and Liljefors' pioneering examples of the mid 1950's. In particular, Liljefors who was designing at the Gustavsberg ceramic factory at the same time as Vallien's influential tutor Stig Lindberg. Vallien introduced sandcasting as a technique to form sculptural glass because he had seen its benefits to freeing clay in the ceramic area and also, like Liljefors and Schrammel, he wanted to explore new ways of working. Also, by sandcasting, Vallien who had no training in glassblowing or working with glass from a furnace, could have a closer contact with the material and could in some ways control or predetermine the outcome of the form, by casting.

Vallien's first sandcasts occur in the mid 1960's, with pieces such as Clean Force 1965 (fig 16) and The Goddess N 1967 (fig 17). These pieces can only be described as clumsy and crudely produced pieces, good examples of Vallien's early stages of learning and coming to terms with this difficult technique. These early pieces are more concerned with concentrating on discovering a technique, rather than as vehicles of artistic expression.



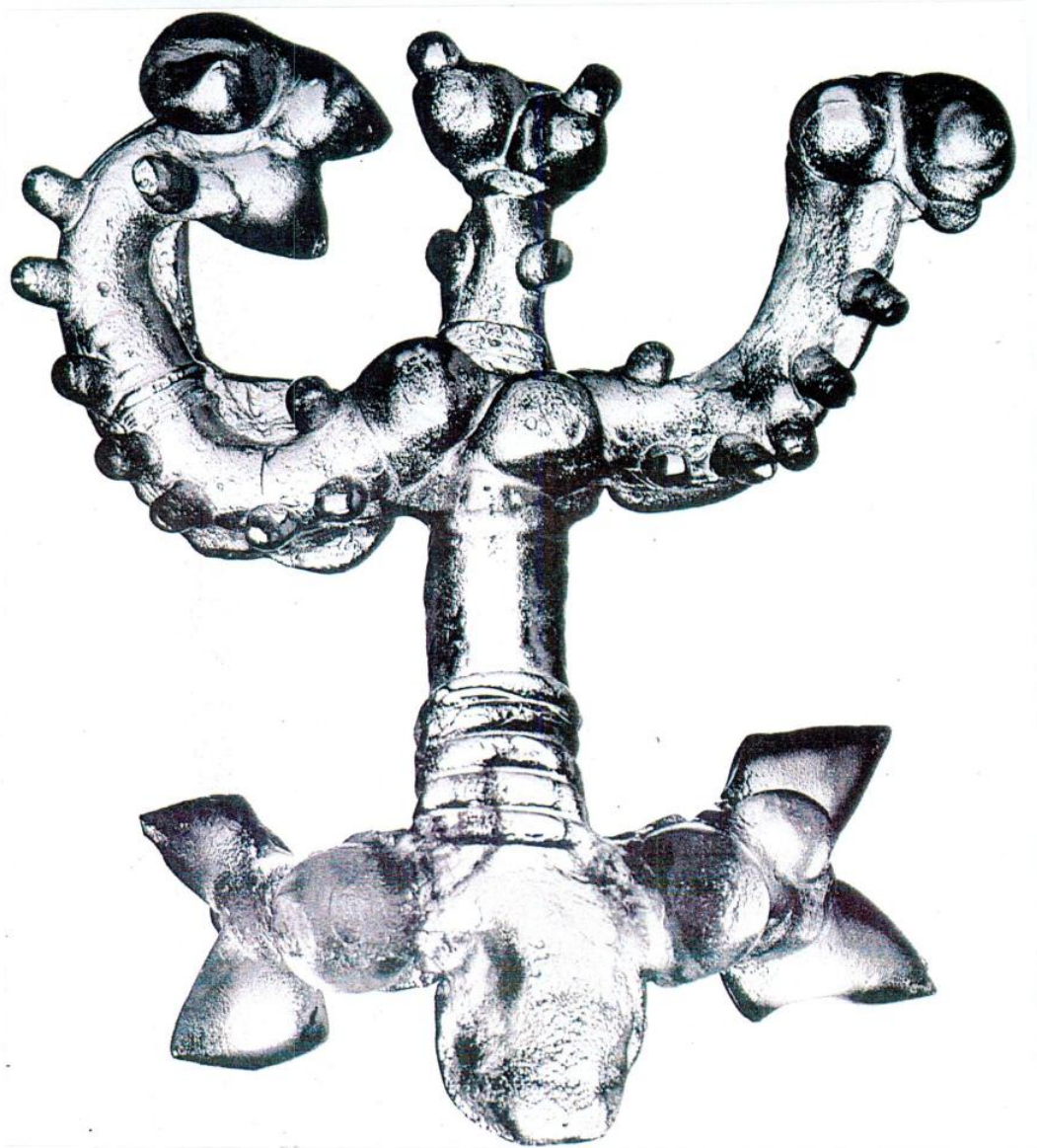


Fig 16 Cleanforce, 1965, by Bertil Vallien.





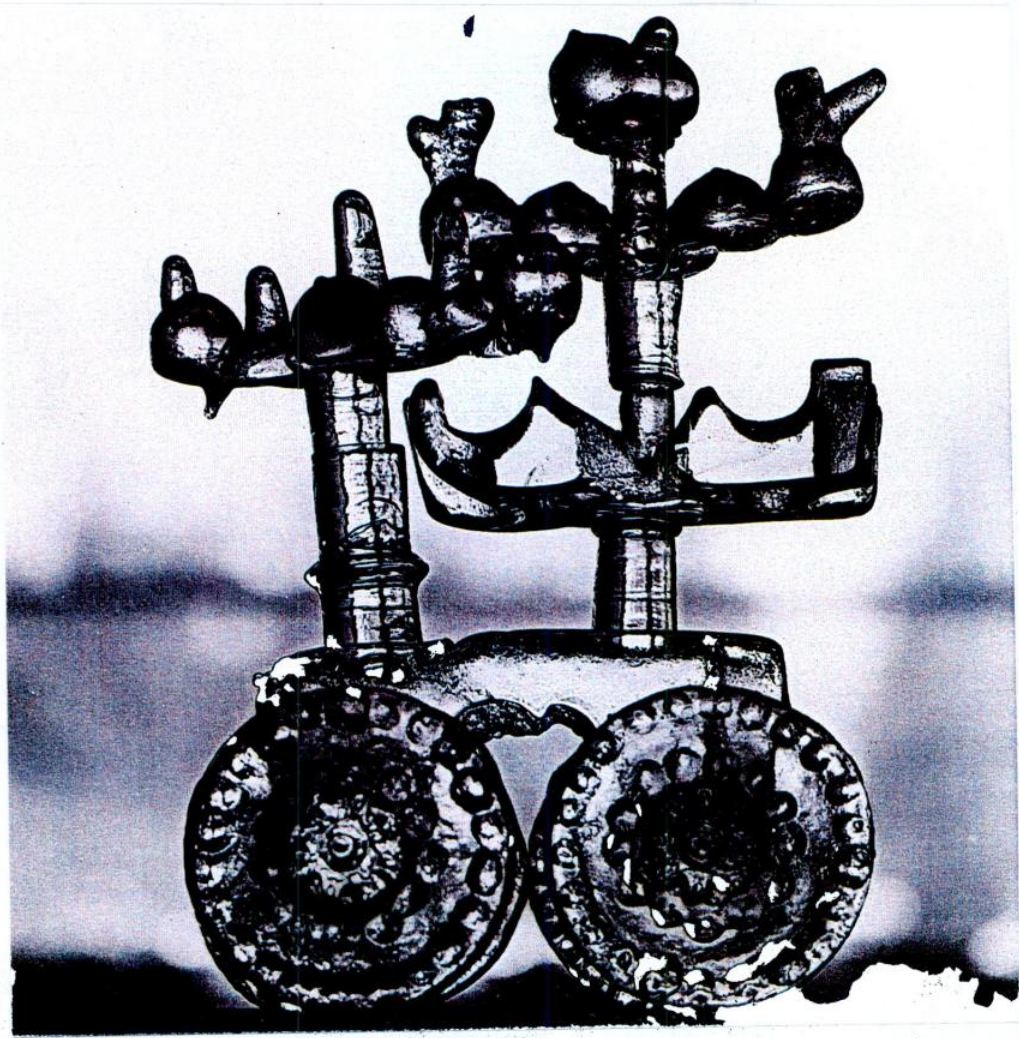


Fig 17 Goddess N, 1967, by Bertil Vallien.





Clean Force (1965) has a strong, primitive feel, in its depiction of a bodybuilder flexing his muscles. The figure is actually quite shapeless and crudely produced as Vallien struggles to master sandcasting. The overestimation of glass needed is evident in the righthand flexed arm, where there is a lip of glass, showing where the hot glass has brimmed over the walls of the sand mould. The surface texture of dots, achieved by pushing somethings as simple as a pen or stick into the sand, is exercised many times in the upper section of the pieces. Multiple ring formations around the middle section, presumably the waist of the figure, give a tightness and restricted feeling to the pieces. These rings again only show the possibilities or are only used as examples for varying decoration. Clean Force (1965) with its rough and crude appearance, together with its lack of crispness and clarity, is a far cry from the stylish recent sculptures of Vallien. Vallien's Clean Force, together with the rest of his 1960's sandcast, are good examples showing his exploration of this new technique in glass and demonstrate how strong and successful his development has been from those early years to his highly skilled creations of today.

During the latter part of the 1960's, Vallien became interested again in using images of vehicles or methods of transport, an often recurring motif, first seen in Ceramic Boat (fig 10). Wagons started to appear in his work from 1967, in such pieces as The Goddess N (1967) and a piece dated also 1967 known simply as Wagon (fig 18). Both pieces depict isolated wagons where, unlike Ceramic Boat, no figures are aboard these haunting crafts. These pieces and in particular The Goddess N (see fig 17) have clear connections with Vallien's sense of national identity and his Swedish roots. The Goddess N was a Nordic Iron Age figure who held the power of invisibility upon boarding a wagon. The vehicle's load or any other passengers became invisible also, with only the tracks of the carriage's wheels ever being seen. There are many references to wagons and wheeled carriages in Scandinavian mythology and indeed in other cultures. The notion of a fertility deity that travels over land in a wagon after death, giving blessing, is a familiar image in Scandinavian literature. There are archaeological discoveries of small, beautifully elaborate wagons left in graves dating back to the second century AD in such places as Dejbjerg in Denmark. In other cultures such as ancient Egypt, wagons, along with other items perceived to be of necessity in the after-life, were buried with people of high rank or importance, such as royalty or nobility. These wagons would help the dead travel into the next world. Today modern society still has strong connections with these ancient customs, for many deceased bodies are still carried to their final resting place in wheeled vehicles or wagons.

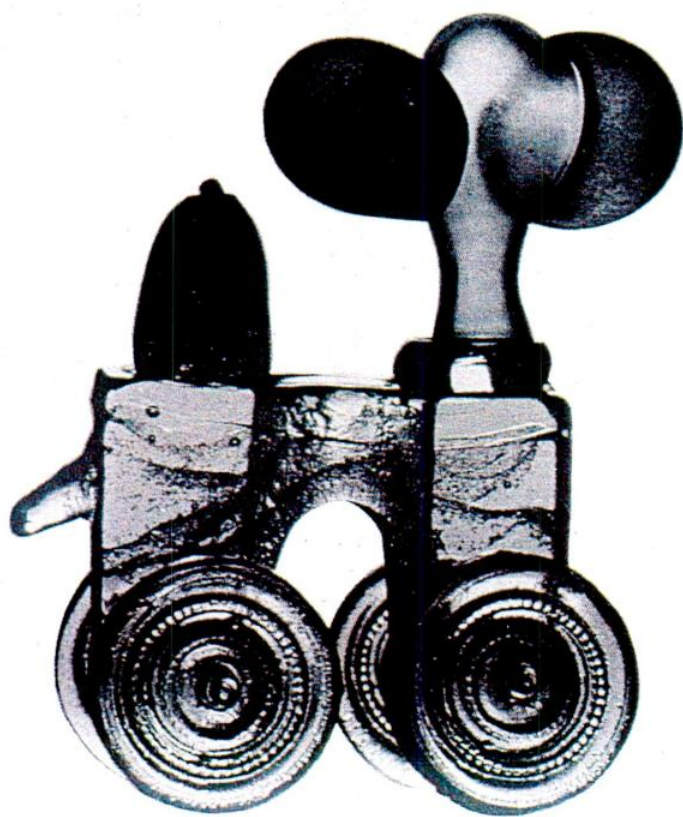


Fig 18 Wagon, 1967, by Bertil Vallien.



18

This theme concerning death or the inevitability of extinction, either through destruction in nature, as depicted in Ararat 11 (1966), or expressed in a more personal, human manner in Vallien's wagon series (late 1960's), has its initial roots in the 1960's but has remained a continuous theme or source throughout Vallien's work, even to his present day sculptures.

In The Goddess N dated 1967, (see fig 17) and Wagon, dated the same year (see fig 18), there is clear evidence of Vallien's development in sandcasting. These pieces are much more adventurous for they have a more three dimensional feel to them that was not evident in pieces such as Clean Force (1965). Decoration and marks are more confined to definite areas. In such places as the wheels, decoration serves to show their importance, and by being very similar to Viking shield decoration, these marks strengthen the Nordic heritage connection. Vallien is using surface texture here with more comfort and ease, now knowing what each mark will achieve in glass. There is still, however, a primitive feel here in Vallien's wagon series, there being no sense of movement within these forms of transport. They are quite heavy, stocky, stationary pieces, reflecting current craft theories of the time and the rebellion away from perfection and streamlined elegance. Vallien grasped this ideal of experimentation and exploration firmly. The 1960's proved a base, a discovery time for Vallien; from these early experimental sandcasts Vallien has developed and now creates the most beautiful, technically accomplished masterpieces of sculpture, using simple sand to form the glass.





### CHAPTER III

Throughout Vallien's work, he has often used the image of a vehicle or a mode of transport to convey a message. From his college days and his rustic horse sculptures, to the wagon glass pieces of the 1960's, and again the image occurs in the 1970's and 1980's in the form the boat. Vallien first began using the image of a boat in ceramic form in Ceramic Boat, created during his time in America. It is interesting and delightful for me to discover that Vallien first became enchanted by boats while visiting the Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland many years ago. Inspired by the islanders' vessels and indeed by his own Swedish boating tradition, Vallien started creating sculptures using various themes such as women's boats, death-boats and lover-boats in the 1970's. These ceramic vessels are burnt umber in colour, quite earthy and natural, even primitive in appearance, stirring up images of the past. The cracked surface texture of the unglazed ceramic suggests old age and weathering and the whole composition of these pieces gives a sense of an archaeological find, and that these pieces are relics from ancient civilisations.

In Vallien's ceramic piece The Ruler (1979), (see fig 19), it is totally evident that there is a reference to ancient cultures. And again this image of a vehicle of death, transporting the deceased into the next world is strikingly apparent, with the piling of sombre ceramic faces to brimming point within this vessel. This laden vessel stirs up images of the Scandinavian Viking burial rite where royalty was buried in ships which were set alight and allowed to drift out to sea, filled with objects for the after-life. Within The Ruler, the sombre ceramic faces with their upturned eyes and gapping mouths, suggesting that they have all just drawn their last breath, is haunting. The erratic nature in which Vallien has encircled this vessel with bindings serves not only to confine the faces or souls in the boat but also to strengthen the craft for the dangerous imagined journey into the next world.

In Box of Possibilities (1979), (fig 20), a bare twig serves as a mast, symbolising perhaps the extinction of all life in the piece with the twig being devoid of any foliage. Binding occurs again, here in a more constricting way, as the figure is tied through pierced holes to the side of the vessel. More holes appear along the other length of the piece but no more figures; perhaps they have not survived the journey to this point. These pieces are presented on wooden pedestals, giving them a feeling of great importance; a sense of aloofness and mystery surrounds them. This



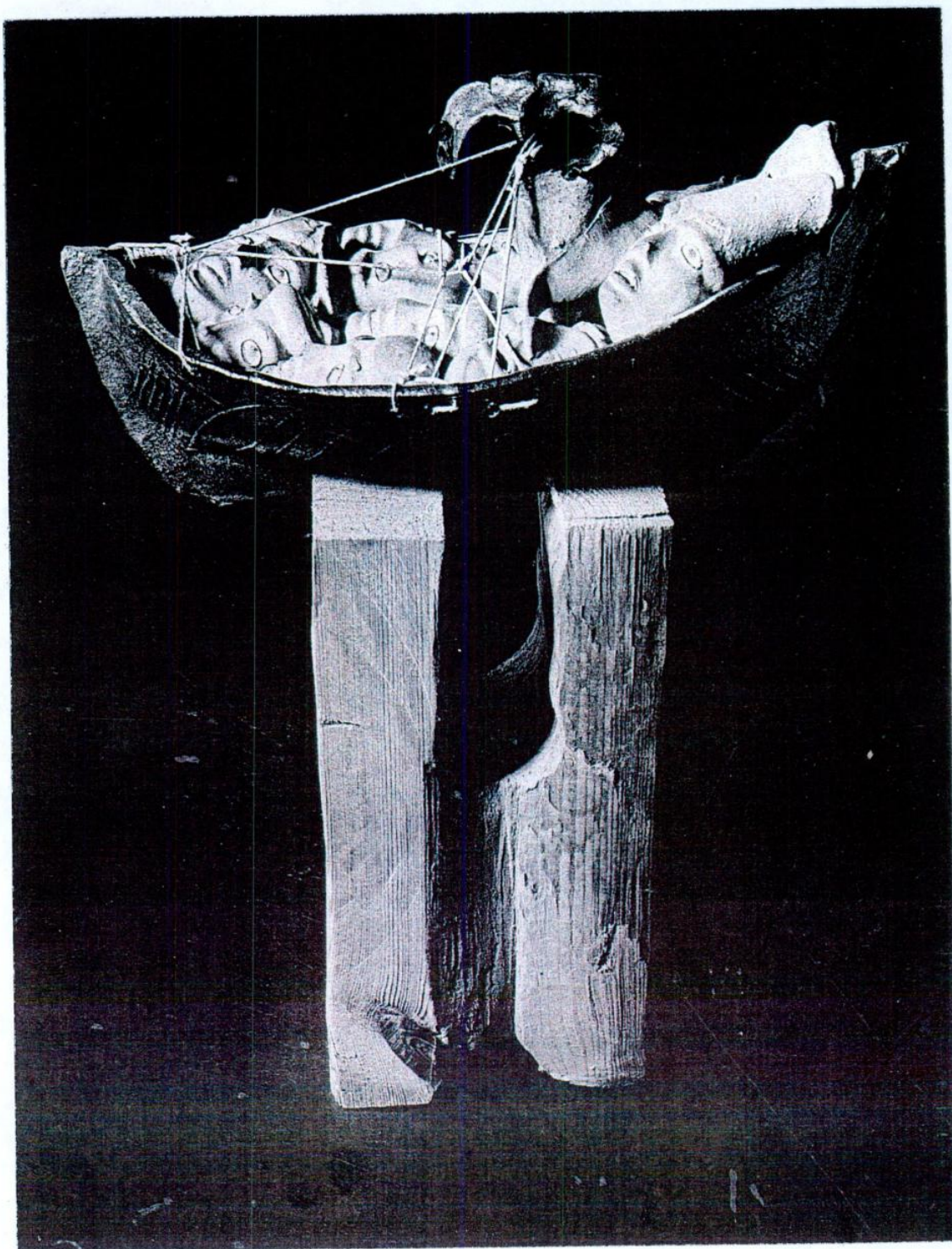


Fig 19 The Ruler, Stoneware, 1979, by Bertil Vallien.





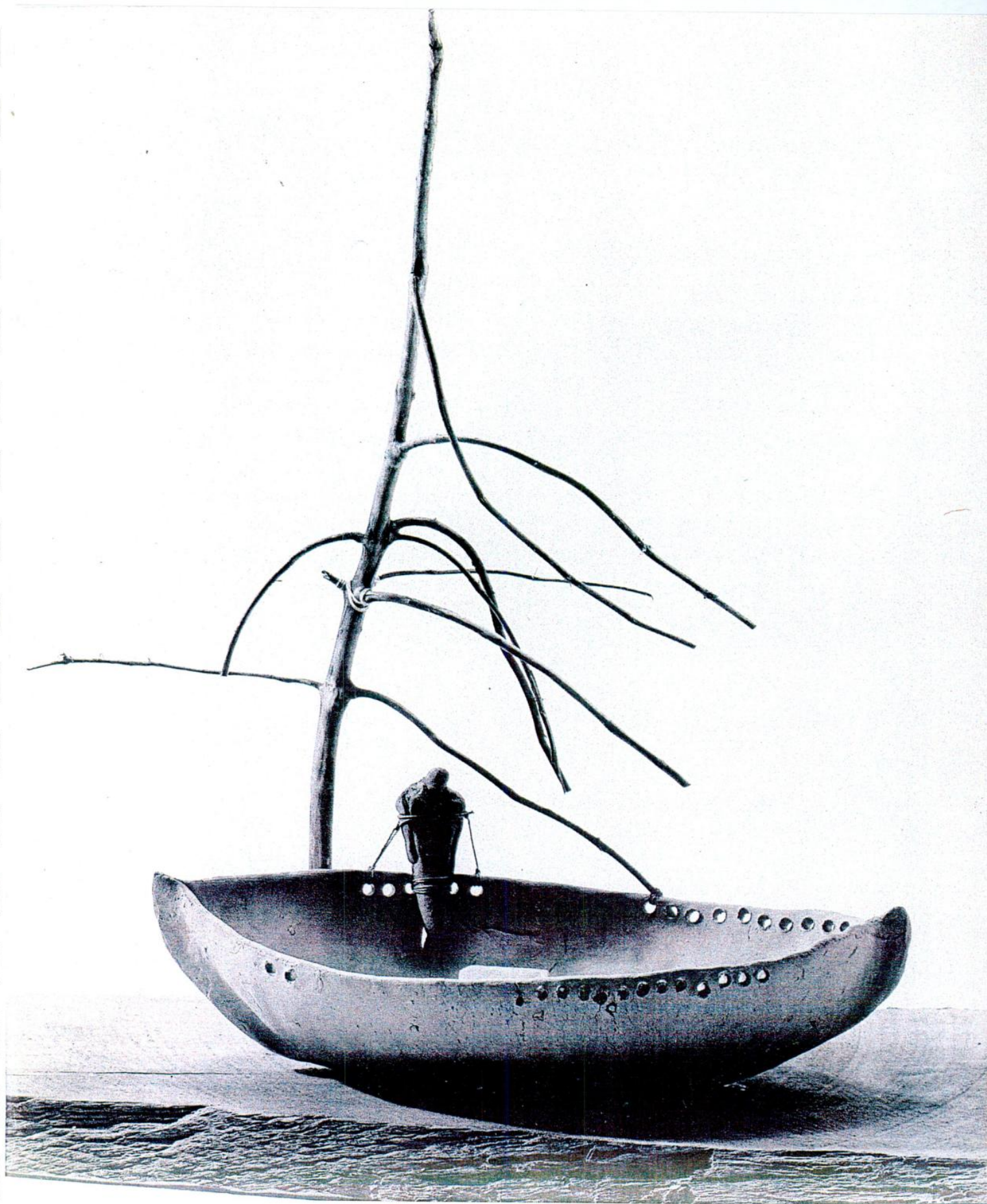


Fig 20 Box of Possibilities, earthenware, 1979, by Bertil Vallien.





eeriness achieved by the wooden mounts stirs up further links with Vallien's Viking heritage and reminds one of the Viking belief that the Gods in their ships could fly across the sky, tracking the sun into the underworld; depictions of such ships can be found in grave chambers such as Bredoror at Kivik, in the south-west of Sweden.

Vallien's sculptures from this time depict boats sailing imaginary journeys into the next world. They are full of the same hope and optimism that the ships of Viking burial rites carried. Boats as an image have a strong, positive feel to them and, as Gaston Bachelard in L'Eau et les Reves (1942) notes, the boat is depicted frequently in literature as a cradle or womb that we rediscover. A boat gives refuge and safety to its passengers and crew, against the rough cruel exterior world within its hollow hull. The boat is an image of freedom and flight, of hope and positiveness. The boat is, particularly in reference to its use as a burial craft, a symbol of progression and optimism; put simply, a way forward. It is with this meaning in mind that a connection can be drawn between Vallien's ceramic sculptures of the late 1970's and what was going on with Åfors functional ware.

In the early 1970's, the Swedish glass industry hit hard times. With cheaper imports from the Far East and mechanization occurring in the Finnish industry, glass could be produced more quickly and with less expense; flooding the Swedish and World markets. Sales in handmade Swedish functional glass were dramatically down and within such a small factory as Åfors, this situation hurt. But through the efforts of Bertil Vallien, Åfors survived. Vallien, now an integral part of the factory, described by Gunnar Lindqvist as not only an artist and designer but also as "a technical and work leader, spokesman and marketing manager for the works,"<sup>13</sup> saw that there was still a market for handmade glass items, but within a new direction. Vallien argued that people of this decade desired one-off pieces, pieces that were unique and original combining the beauty of pre 1955 Swedish glass design with modern artistic expression. So Vallien created the 'Artist Collection' - where glassware formed in moulds was suitable for manufacture in large numbers, but each item had the appearance of being an original or slightly different from the rest. The 'Artist Collection' created in 1976 enabled Åfors to flourish again and saw the introduction of young artistic designers to the factory to design within this wonderful new concept. Artists such as Ann Wahlstrom, Gunnel Sahlin with his fabulous desert vegetation-inspired ware, indeed even Vallien's wife Ulrica, a member of the design team in her own right, have designed for several collections.



So, it seems Åfors has <sup>been</sup> resurrected itself. Death and closure was imminent. The company's saviour was Vallien. In my view his sculptural work of 1970 reflects the fear of death and extinction of the factory, its transition into new possibilities and the hope for the future and better times for the glassworks. There is also quite a personal stamp to these pieces, a reflective need for movement and progression both in the factory and in Vallien himself. These ceramic forms conjure up images that Vallien himself wanted to move on both mentally and physically. The late 1970's do not only show changes in the factory but also in Vallien himself. During the time when Vallien was free from his functional design duties he travelled more, returning again to America, beginning in 1974 as a guest teacher. Firstly at Kent State University, Ohio, then the universities of Chicago, Rochester and Minneapolis; he also has held the prestigious positions of artist-in-residence at the Rhode Island School of Design and visiting lecturer at the world famous Pilchuck Glass Center in Washington State.

Boats may have emerged in ceramic form but from 1983 this form slipped into his sculptural glass work and became one of Vallien's most powerful sandcast images. He had cast clear-glass boats as early as 1977 but these were small in size and only served as examples for varying shapes in his glasswork. It was not until 1983 that Vallien had any true success with sandcast boats in glass due mainly to the difficulty and technical problems involved in creating long tapering forms.

This success in 1983 was due to Vallien's persistence with sandcasting glass and his continuous experimentation with this technique from as far back as 1965 and Clean Force. Vallien's process of sandcasting is lengthy and has developed with increasing success throughout those years. Preparation commences well in advance of the actual casting in the hot workshop. First, he prepares the coloured oxides that he will use in the piece; colour was only introduced to his sandcasts during the early part of the 1980's, in pieces such as Sphere of Solitude (1982), see fig 21. Together with the colour, early preparation is needed for forming the various objects such as twisting rods, crosses or figures that Vallien wishes to trap in the glass, see fig 22. Each mould consists of a metal box which holds the dampened sand. In this sand Vallien shapes his basic form by pushing a wooden template into the sand and pushing this back and forth until the desired shape is achieved. The





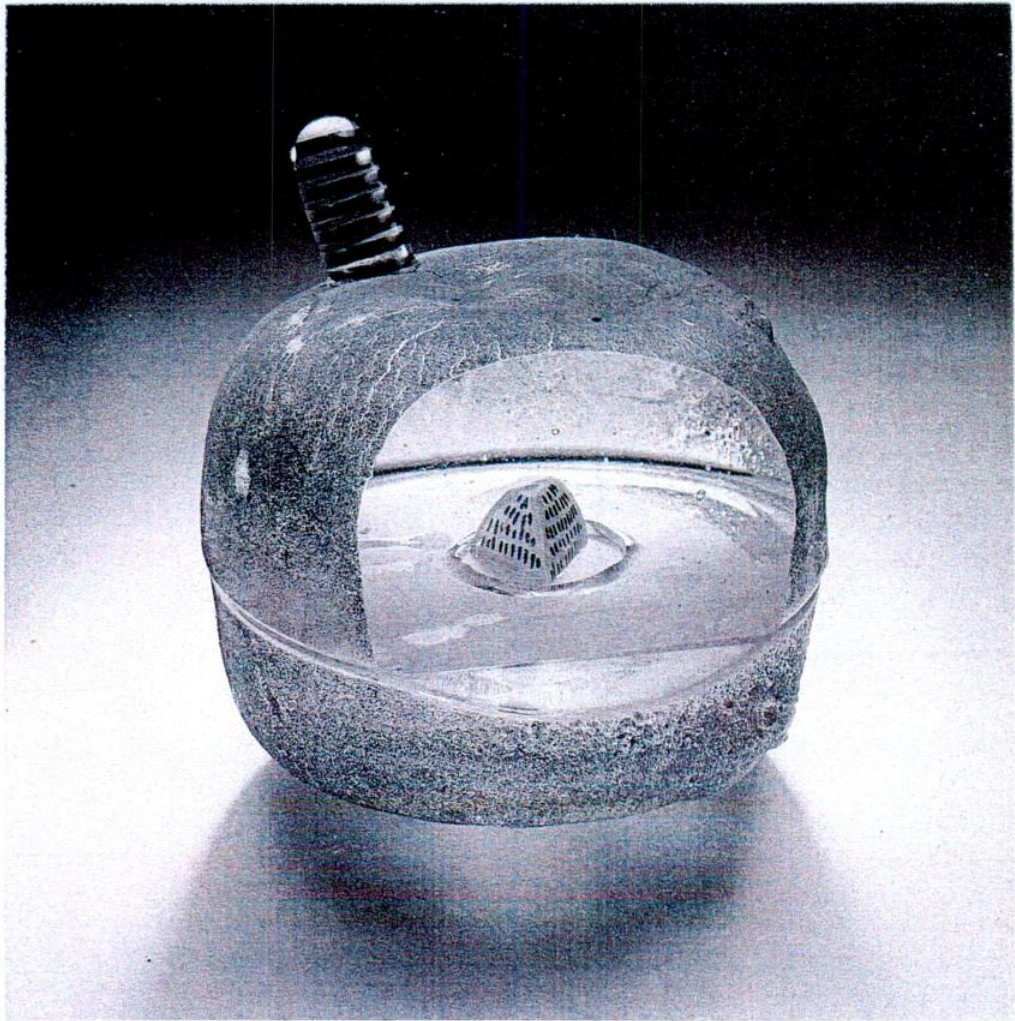


Fig 21 Sphere of solitude, 1982, by Bertil Vallien.







Fig 22 Detail of box containing the glass rods, various symbols and colour pigment waiting to be placed into the molten glass.





wooden template, made from abachi wood for its lightness and easiness to carve, is ploughed through the damp sand to create a cavity into which molten glass will be poured by Vallien's assistants. Vallien prepares these sand moulds; many take up to a week to create, e.g. Area 11 Finding (1989), due to complex additions to their surface walls. Vallien adds texture to the surface of the glass by scratching or marking the sand with ordinary found objects, such as pens or pointed sticks, a practice first used in pieces such as Clean Force (1965) and The Goddess N (1967). Surface texture has always been an important feature in Vallien's work, from his ceramic sculptures right through to his glass forms. In more recent glass sculptures, Vallien has pushed his own fingers or whole fists into sand e.g. Area 11 - Map 111 (1991) or made imprints with a variety of found objects, like dolls' heads, used in a piece like Pompeja (1986), see fig 23 and fig 24. These imprints will later form reliefs or contours in the hardened glass when it is released from the mould. When Vallien has created the desired form within the sand mould and all the imprinting is complete, the mould is then sprinkled with graphite powder to prevent excessive amounts of sand sticking to the glass, a problem that the glass suffered from during the 1960's; then, over this, the coloured oxides of various vibrancies are sieved to cover particular predetermined areas of the mould. The glass in its molten form will pick up every detail and colour, trapping and holding every detail forever in its solid, cold form.

When the day comes for casting, the moulds are brought carefully into the hot-shop so none of the sand is disturbed. Several moulds are cast at the same time, each waiting in turn on the casting table for the glass-filled ladles to start pouring. Now, the hot work is ready to commence, ladles filled with molten glass are carried by Vallien's assistants from the furnace to the mould with the aid of mini-cranes which are suspended from the ceiling and can be pushed back and forth from the furnace to the casting table. The contents of each ladle are poured into the cavity several times over until the cavity is full. This part of the process is done quickly, to stop crease marks and prevent heat tension in the piece (that is where glass that is cooling is hit by hotter molten glass, causing tension and cracking, all the glass should be kept at similar temperatures). This quick motion section in proceedings is only interrupted momentarily by Vallien when he wishes to insert the various objects or symbols that later will seem to be floating in the glass, eternally trapped between the layers of glass. When Vallien is satisfied that the mould is complete, it is wheeled carefully over to the annealing oven, where it is placed to cool down slowly. The piece remains within the annealing oven for one to three weeks,





Fig 24 Detail of face in relief, from Pompeja, 1986,  
by Bertil Vallien.



Fig 23 Area 11-Map 111, 1991, by Bertil Vallien.







depending on the size of the sculpture. This movement and placing of the sculpture into the annealing oven is the most nerve-wracking part of the process, as the glass can be contaminated by sand falling into it or by cracking due to rapid heat loss. (In respect to this detailing of Vallien's sandcast technique, please refer to fig 25 - fig 31).

Vallien has worked hard to develop this technique; a clear positive progression is evident from his early examples to today's highly successful, technically elaborate sculptures. Vallien's success and mastering of this difficult technique was achieved, in my mind, by his sandcast sculptures that use the image of the boat. He developed and changed both technically and stylistically from those crude, primitive sandcasts of the 1960's to the first successful sandcast boat of 1983. He says himself

"Before I was driven by the desire to master the technique, I was controlled by a fascination for the technique. Now I know it so well that I have time left over for the message"<sup>14</sup>.

And a "message" is exactly what Vallien started to convey within his symbolic boats. Vallien's use of the image of the boat to me represents many things, for instance the journey we travel on through life, carrying with us the burden of existence, represented by Vallien in the form of the frozen, trapped objects within the glass. Also the journey we embark on to eternity carrying with us our past or necessities for the journey. Within his boat sculptures Vallien discusses, life and death; he clarifies his thoughts and emotions on these subjects and also allows the viewer to clarify his or her own view. Art critic Åke Livstedt is thoroughly correct in describing these sculptures dating from 1983 as "the ark of thought"<sup>15</sup>. After viewing an exhibition containing Vallien's sandcast boat sculpture which was shown at the Heller Gallery in 1987 New York, as well as in Sydney and Melbourne, the director of the Dusseldorf Museum of Art and a juror on the Corning Museum's New Glass Review, 6, Mr Helmuth Ricke wrote,

"Boats are symbols with a definite meaning. They stand for the journey from yesterday to tomorrow, they are laden with relics of the past which might have no meaning for the future. In ancient oriental cultures, boats are





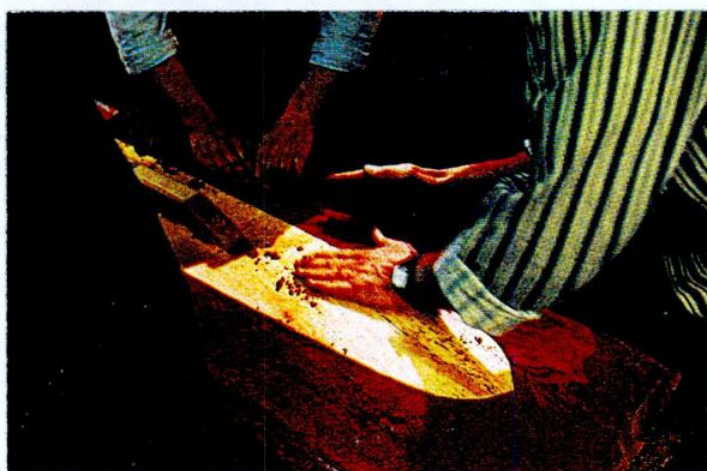


Fig 25 Bertil Vallien forming the sculpture by using a wooden template.

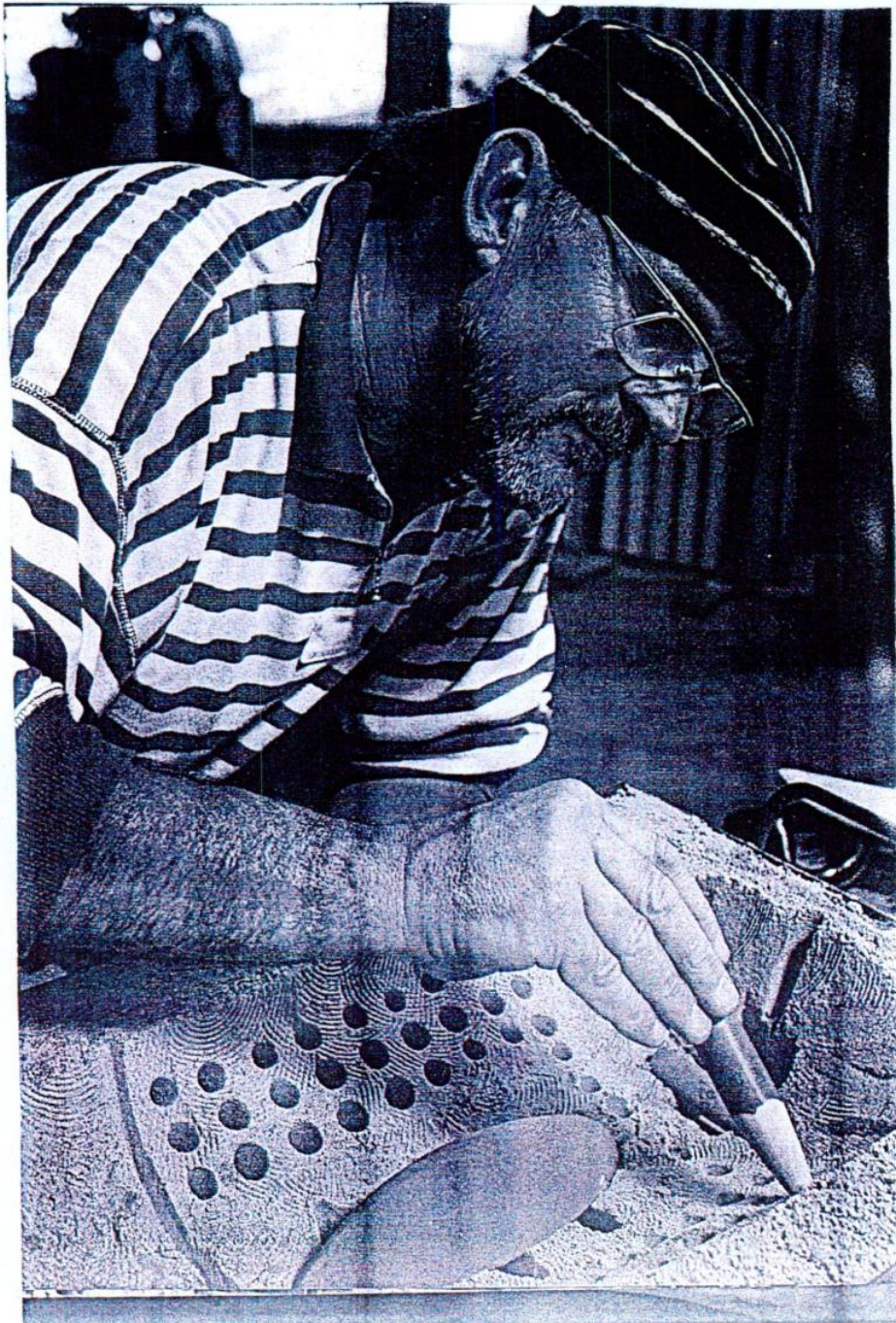


Fig 26 Vallien preparing the sand for casting.







Fig 27 Sandcasts waiting for casting.







Fig 28 Sprinkling the cast with coloured oxides and graphite.





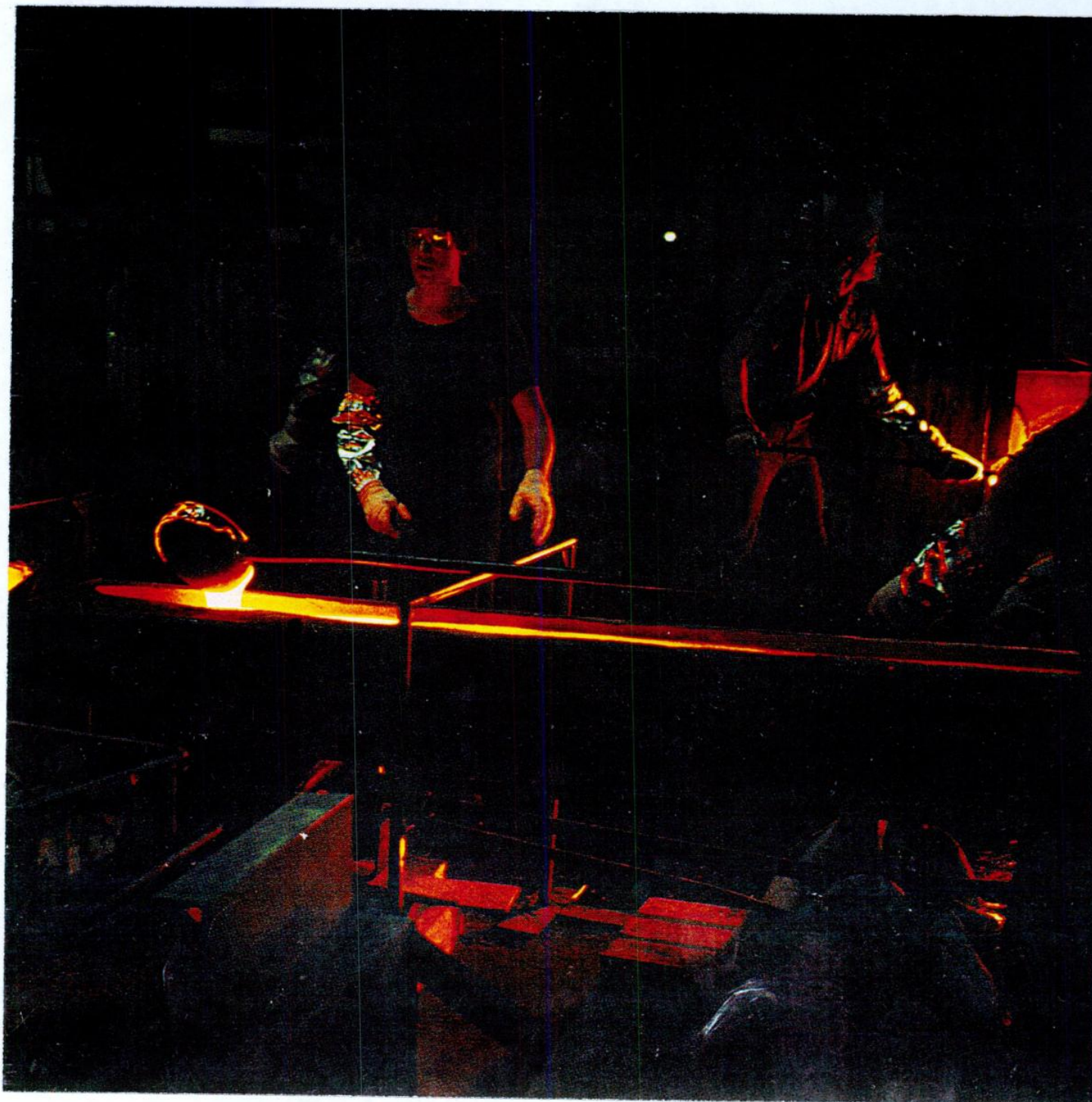


Fig 29 Vallien's assistants pouring the molten glass by ladles into the casts.





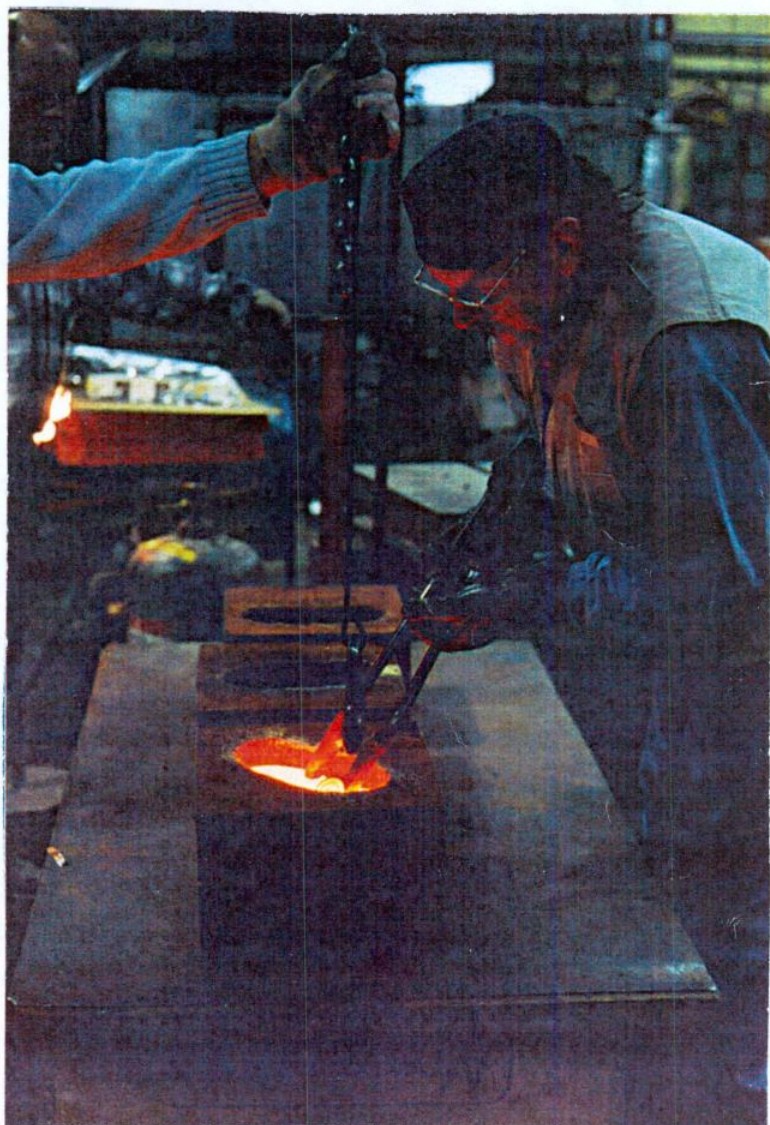


Fig 30 Vallien placing his symbols into the glass.





Fig 31 The moulds being placed into the annealing oven.





often vehicles for the 'last journey'. The Swede, Bertil Vallien, challenges our comprehension"<sup>16</sup>.

By looking in detail at Vallien's sandcast boats the "definite meaning" can be seen and comprehended. Crossboat (1985), measuring 7" x 19" x 12", is shaped like a cruxifix, symbolic of The Resurrection and also an echo back prehaps to Vallien's own strictly religious upbringing. This cruxifix formation could be likened to two colliding ships which merge together to form one, two separate identities joining together to form one unit. In this piece (see fig 32) the trapped, frozen objects are clearly shown: a threaded mummy, ring, ladder, rods of twisted glass, crosses and an anti-nuclear sign, in itself a clear symbol of concerns towards the environment, first aired in the 1960's and still an issue when this piece was created. These are the elements fused into the glass during casting. Each trapped symbol creates a sense of frozen chronology within the vessel's walls, a feeling that these vessels are like time capsules, where each and every symbol and figure is trapped and unable to escape, that only time, like any archaeological study, will allow the emergence of these tiny features for closer examination. "Life englazed-visible yet unattainable"<sup>17</sup> is how Vallien has described this piece, but this description applied to all Vallien's work where he incorporates floating symbols.

These boat sculptures are very spiritual and reveal a great respect to the past. Each boat and indeed it can be said of all Vallien's work captures the emotion of hope towards the future but portrays this with images from the past or ancient cultures, e.g. the mummy that mostly appears in these glass boat sculptures, the boat itself with its positive image even in connection with death, and the various objects submerged in the glass of the boat sculptures that can be traced back as symbols throughout time.

Crossboat is among Vallien's simpler boat forms whereas Quarry (1984), sandcast at Pilchuck, (see fig 33), has more detail on the vessels' walls. Scratches and dots occur again in this piece and some of the symbols that are usually left floating in the glass mass appear along the sides. Vallien allows much of the red sand to remain on the surface in this piece, so that adds more colour and a fiery red glow to the piece that is missing in Spiral (1983), (fig 34), where all the sand is airblasted off and the surface is highly polished where possible. Within Quarry (1984), Vallien is





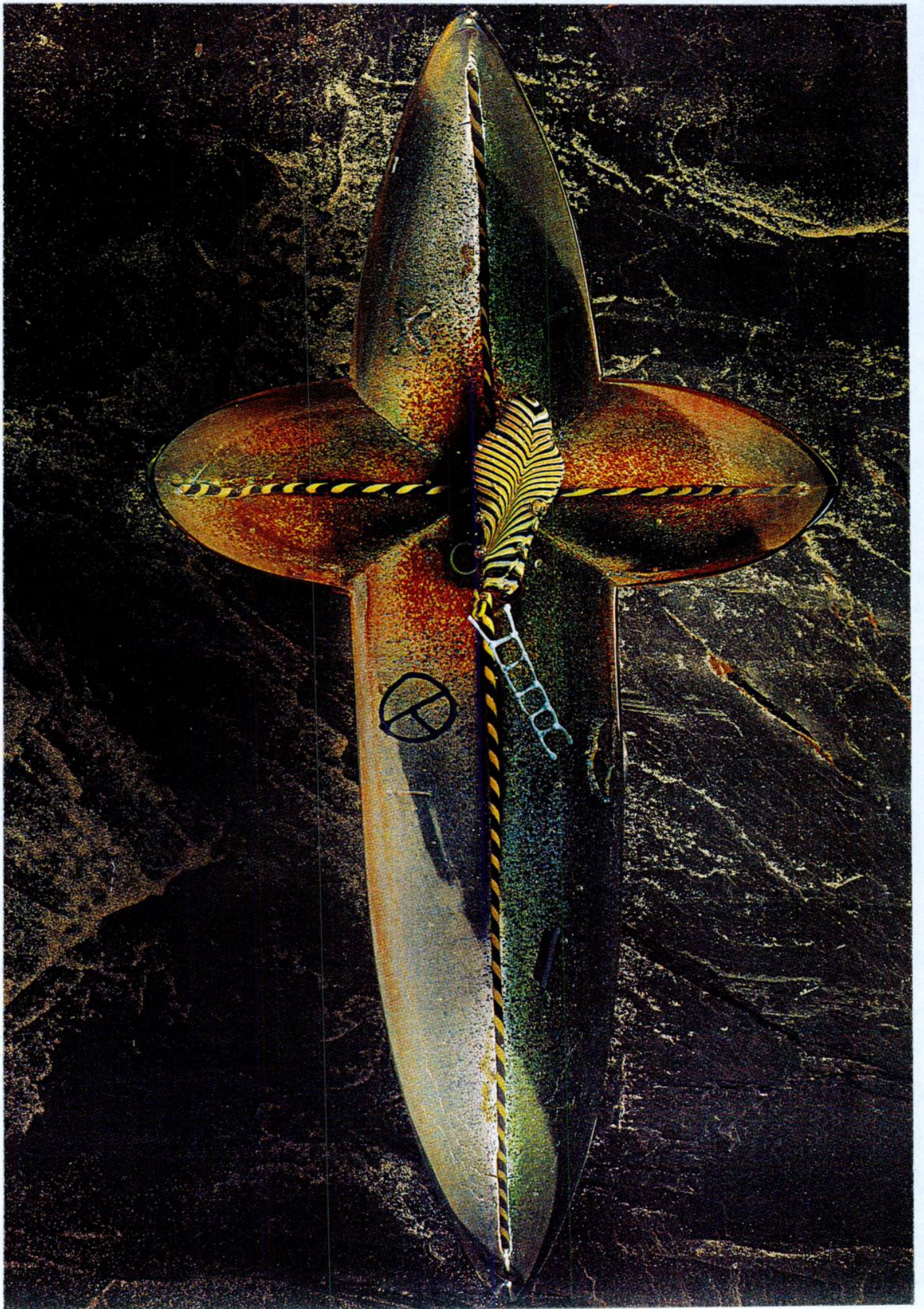


Fig 32 Crossboat, 1985, by Bertil Vallien.







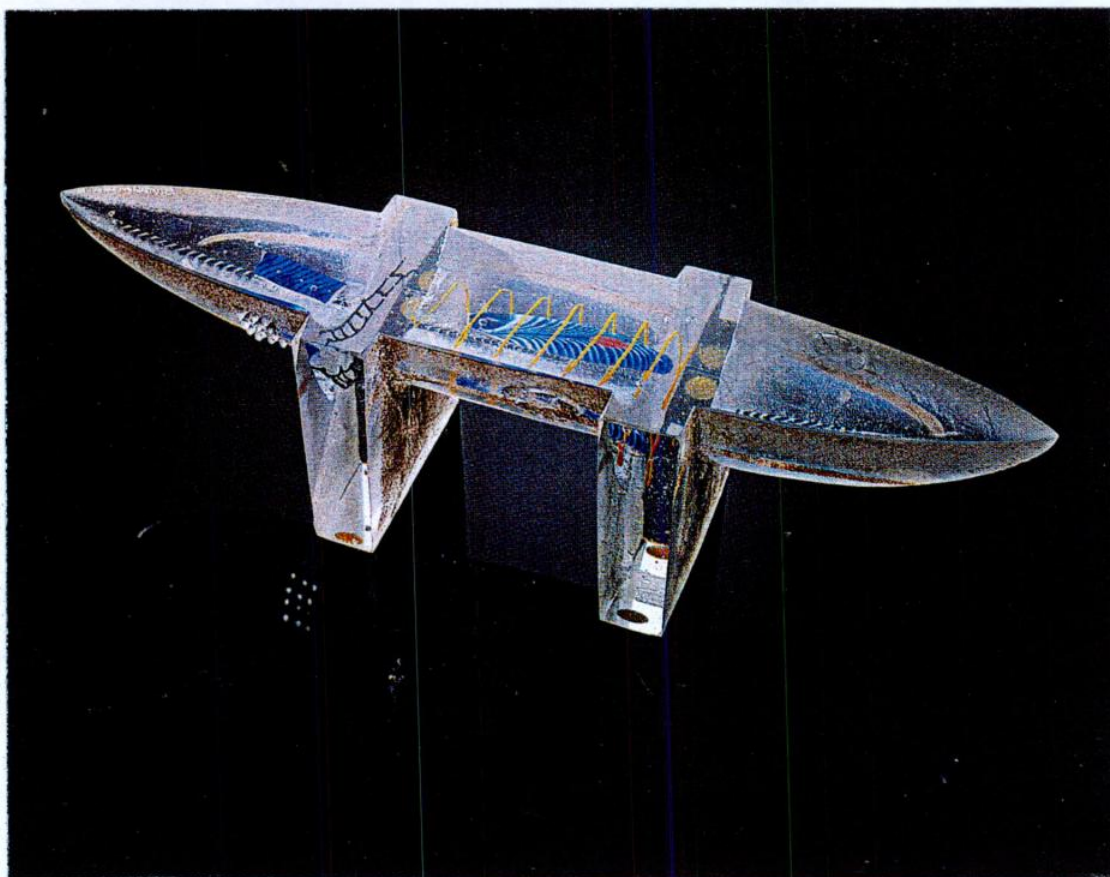


Fig 33 Quarry, 1984, by Bertil Vallien.

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Quarry



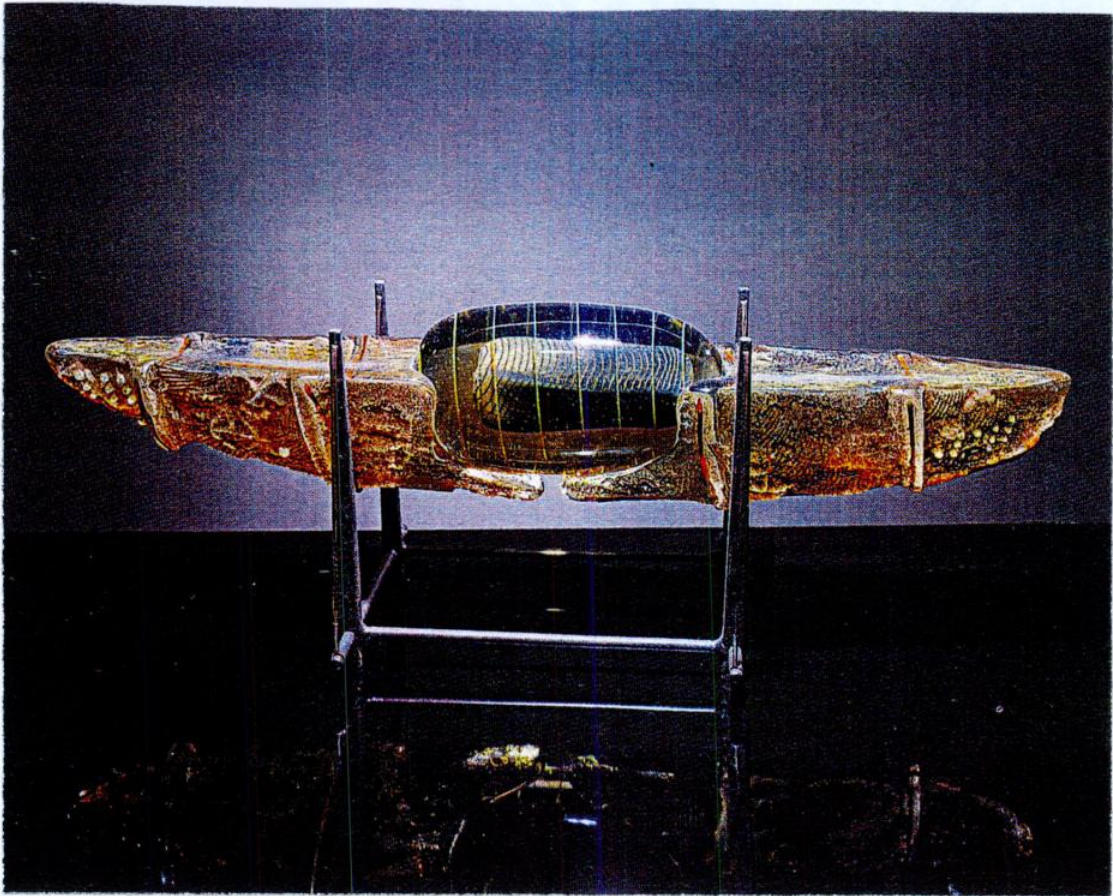


Fig 34 Spiral, 1983, by Berti Vallien.

Spiral bottom  
34



demonstrating his high technical skill, for this piece consists of three separate parts joined only by balance and weight distribution in a very adventurous piece.

In Voyage of Dreams (1986), (fig 35), more of Vallien's technical excellence is witnessed, for this piece is 209cm long, a somewhat technical nightmare with such a long tapered form. The large, beautifully coloured head that dominates the piece, also a technical problem during the casting process, balances dramatically on the narrow vessel. The head's vulnerability is heightened by Vallien's use of red thread to bind and hold such a weighty element in position.

In a work like Solitude (1987), (fig 36), whose length is 111cm, a submerged silver face, similar to a death mask, is haunting. The simple face is similar in appearance to those found in Vallien's ceramic boat sculptures e.g. Future Construction 11 (1979), (fig 37), and indeed The Ruler (1979), (fig 19). In Solitude this simple image is in fact quite hard to achieve, Vallien having to form the face in bas-relief. Vallien's use of bas-relief images first appeared in his boat sculptures around 1987. These forms are created before the sand mould is cast. I have discovered through correspondence with Vallien himself, that he creates these reliefs by two methods: in one he mixes the red sand used for glass casting with bentonite (a ceramic glaze product), then enough water is added to dampen the sand and act as a binder. This mixture is poured into a mould that depicts the desired shape, in this case a face. The sand will harden because of the bentonite content and it is then taken from its mould; further detail can be added by carving into the toughened surface. The face made of sand is then placed into the cavity of the main sand mould and pushed into the sand for stability. The sand, when mixed with bentonite, will not move, creating a solid sculptural material that can be carved into and shaped into almost anything. This discovery by Vallien has opened up further doors for him, prevented previously by the delicate nature of sand. Bentonite mixed with sand has allowed Vallien to create dramatic effects previously thought of as impossible, these effects which he has achieved in glass are most notable in his most recent sculptures from 1989 to today.





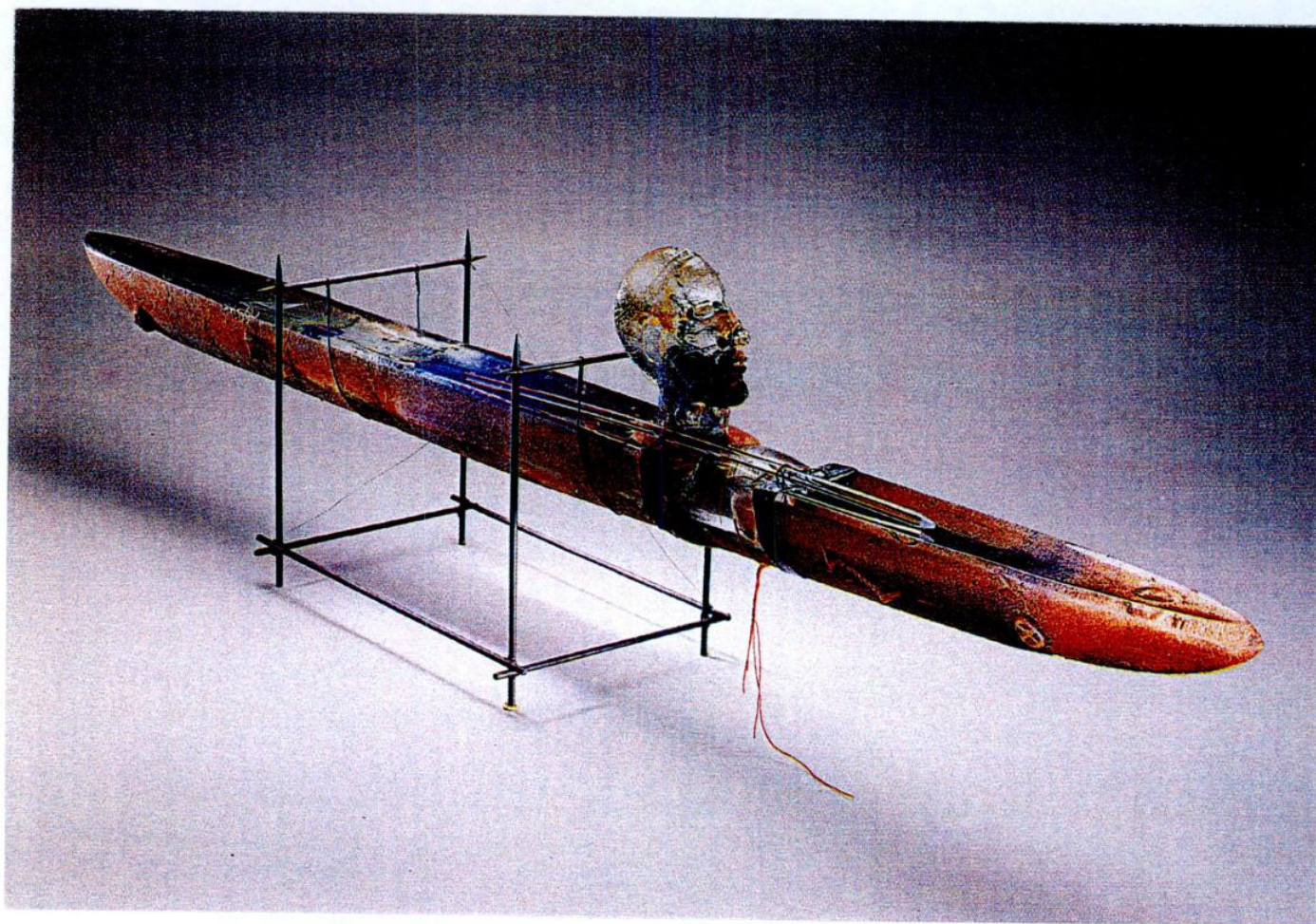


Fig 35 Voyage of Dreams, 1986, by Bertil Vallien.





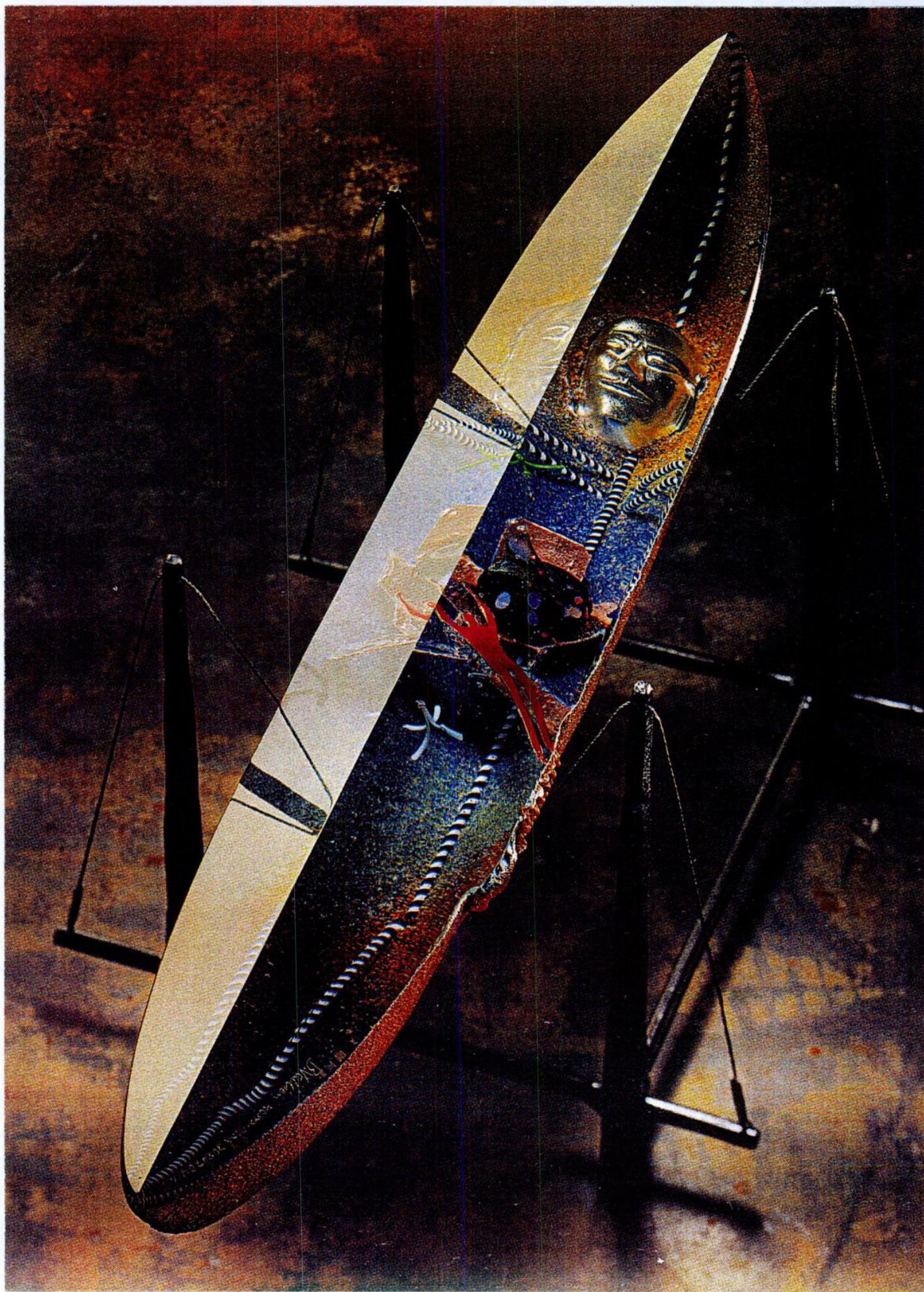


Fig 36 Solitude, 1987, by Bertil Vallien.



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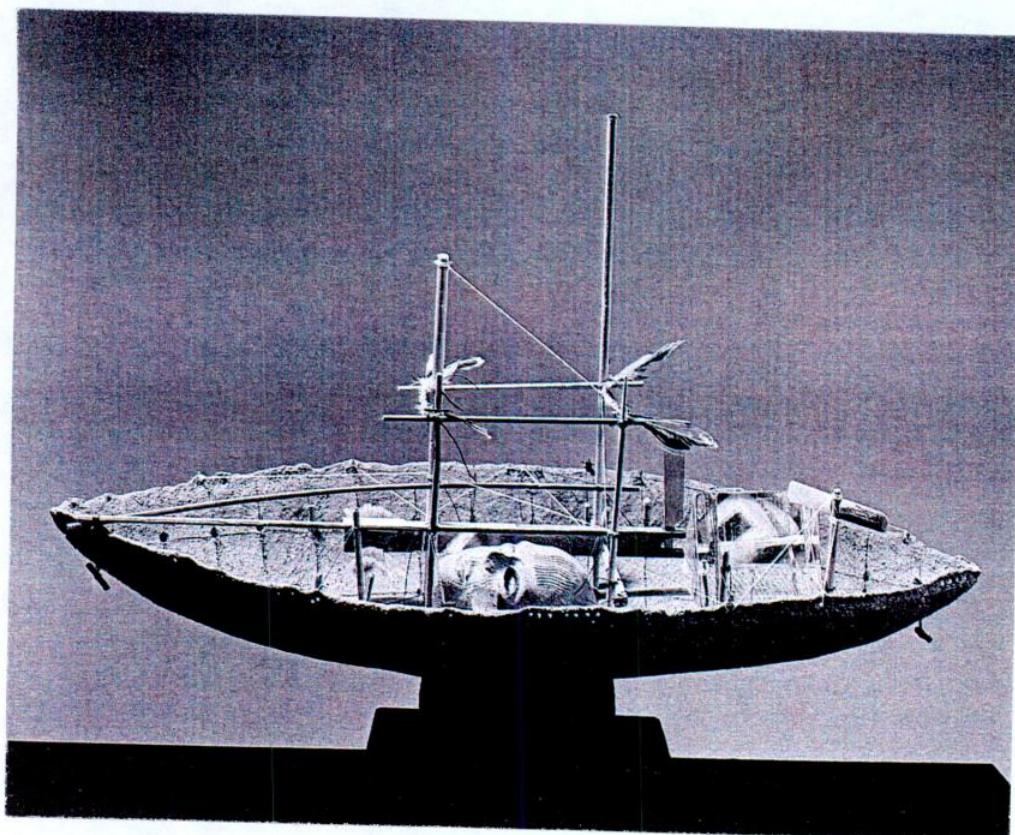


Fig 37 Construction 11, 1979, by Bertil Vallien.





#### CHAPTER IV

Since 1989, Bertil Vallien has been able to take a break from serial production at Åfors and devote more time to his own sculptural work. Due to this concentration solely on one aspect of his artistic life, and also because of his discovery and success with mixing bentonite into the sand, new forms and concepts have evolved from previous images. Details like a coloured circle or the mummy, which were previously small symbols submerged in the glass boat sculptures, are now developed further and enlarged to create new sculptural forms.

The circle took on the shape of an entire piece in the late 1980's, (see fig. 38) along with the mummy (fig. 39). The boat form continued to appear throughout the 1980's alongside these new adventurous forms but from the late 1980's the boat became upright, either hanging like a pendulum or freestanding with its prow pointing upwards and its stern flattened and fixed firmly to a plinth (see fig. 40). The meaning behind Bertil Vallien's work after 1988 is in complete contrast to his previous boat sculptures. While the earlier boats convey a clear sense of hope and optimism towards life and indeed death, these new sculptures contain a more threatening note, a fear of extinction. As Vallien grows older, within his work there is a greater feeling of fear expressing his growing realisation of his own mortality.

This new element within Vallien's work is evident in such pieces as The Circle (1989)(fig. 38), and also within the mummy forms, for example Vaso Secco, (see fig. 41) dated 1988. Within The Circle, Vallien's symbols are trapped, seemingly travelling within the confines of the ever-constant circular form, whirling and flowing in a seemingly constant confusion. This circular form that Vallien begun using in 1988 does not have the freedom or sense of travel that such a simple form as the boat previously offered to Vallien. This lack of movement and sense of confinement are also evident in Vallien's torso sculptures, such as Madre X, Madre, and Willy-Willy





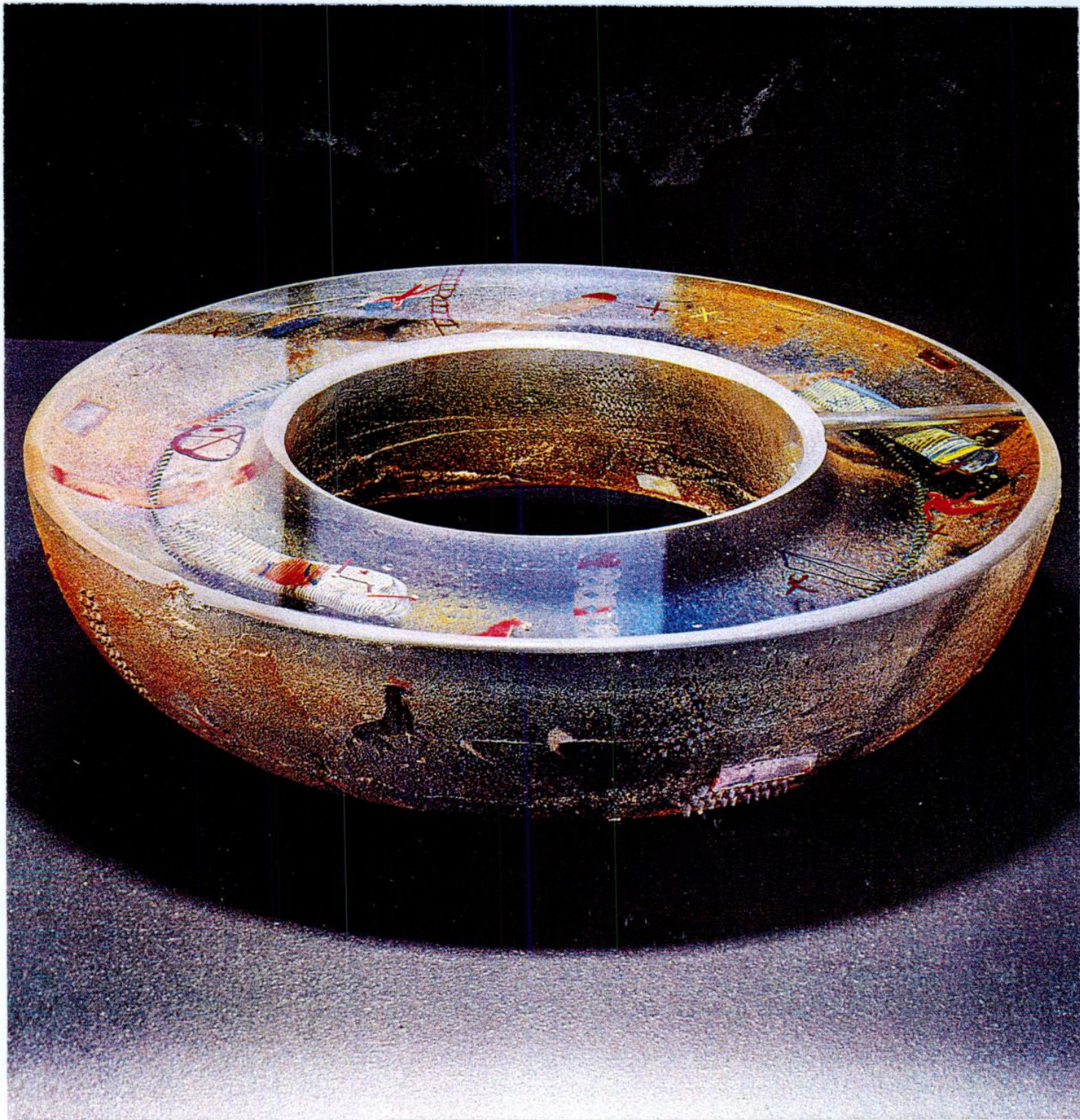


Fig 38 The Circle, 1989, by Bertil Vallien.









Fig 39 Nero, 1988, by Bertil Vallien.







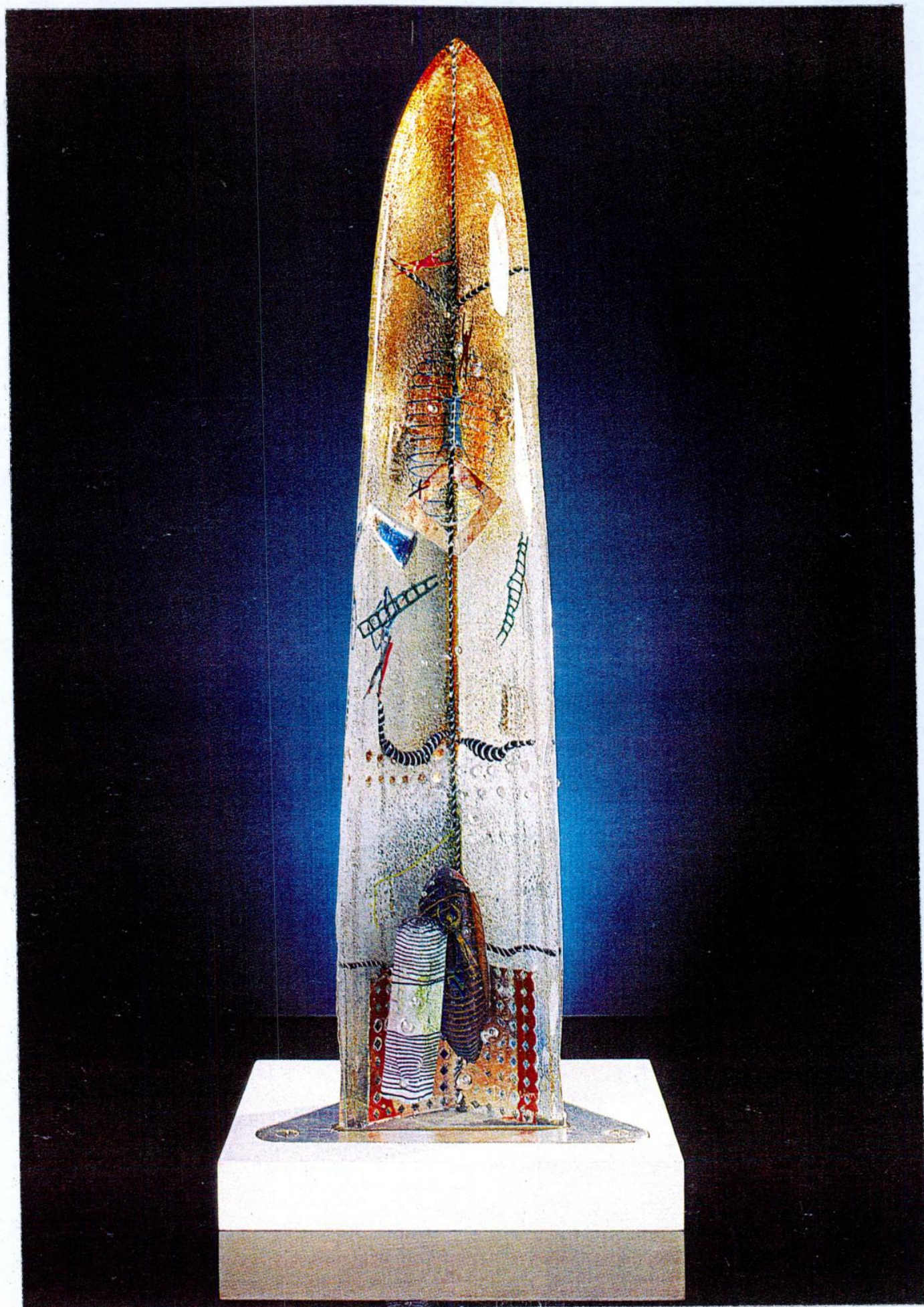


Fig 40 Vertical, 1988, by Bertil Vallien.



140





Fig 41 Vaso Secco, 1988, by Bertil Vallien.



41



(figs,42,43,44) all from 1988. Within these pieces Vallien's use of thick sandcast coils of glass wrapped tightly around the figure adds to this notion of confinement and entrapment of the piece itself and indeed the objects bound inside them. These coils, tightly wrapped round limp, resigned figures, as in Madre, clearly show lack of motivation. All Vallien's work from this time are intentionally tied down with bolts that pierce the glass sculptures. They are fixed firmly into solid bases of granite, wood or marble, further restraining the piece.

From 1988 onwards the image of the boat takes on a new direction and meaning. A piece\_(fig. 40), Vertical, created the same year, shows clearly Vallien's new direction with his boat forms. These solid upright sculptures bolted firmly to their bases no longer conjure up images of imaginary journeys into the next world as the previous boat sculptures did, but instead they are similar to raised memorials, grave stones or Scandinavian runes from Viking times. While the earlier boat sculptures convey a clear sense of a metaphysical voyage, there is in these new sculptures the emergence of a more threatening note, a real fear of extinction. Through the use of these new solid, restrained forms secured firmly down, it is clear that Vallien is concerned and worried deeply about the here and now.

This new concerned attitude of Vallien's has continued right up to his most recent work. Earlier, more hopeful, positive pieces, for example Solitude or even Wagon, are replaced by a depressive, claustrophobia atmosphere within his present pieces, where a sense of complete desolation, a fear of passing time and the inevitability of death is the central theme. This new theme and its incorporation into his most recent forms can be best summed up by reviewing his work shown at an exhibition in the ruined castle at Borgholm, on the Swedish island of Oland, in 1991. This 17th century ruin with its gaping windows and rough corroded limestone walls was an ideal setting to enhance Vallien's sculptor's desire for permanence, and strengthen the dismal and desolate air that he captures within his present sandcast sculptures.

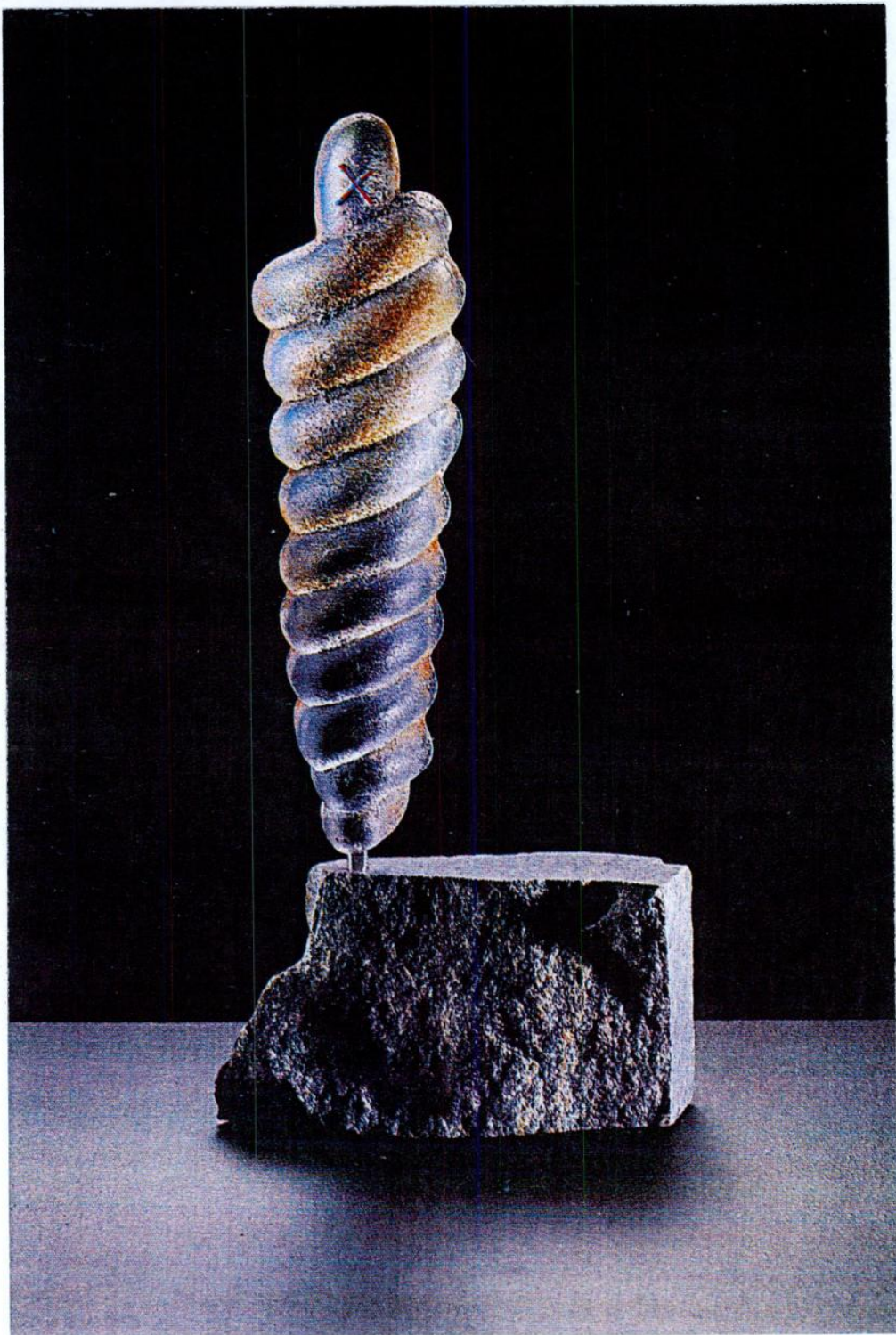


Fig 42 Madre X, 1988, by Bertil Vallien.



42

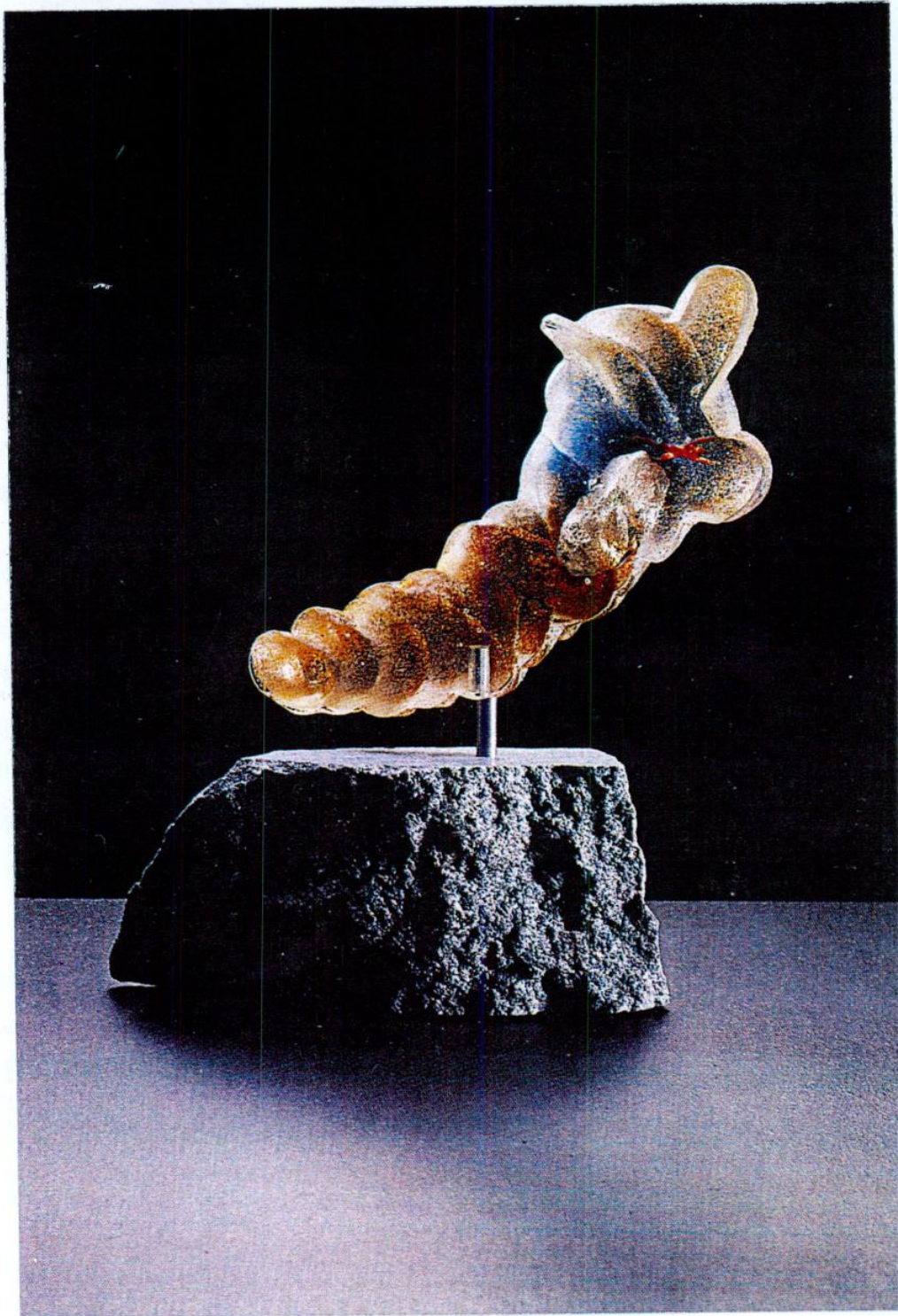


Fig 43 Madre, 1988, by Bertil Vallien.



43





Fig 44 Willy-Willy, 1988, by Bertil Vallien.



44

The pieces within this exhibition known as "Area 11" were broken down into three sections: Maps, Findings and Watchers. The Maps series, eg. Area 11 Map, (1990)(fig 45) consisted of moulded slabs of glass, which are not only maps but more like inscribed tablets or epitaphs, similar to the earlier Vertical piece. The map is the most basic form of relaying a message, charting features of the landscape, giving clear graphic detailing of unknown lands and also recalling previous journeys. The map's ability to chart the natural environment is similar to the way that memorials, runes or grave stones depict or chart a life. This adds to the poignancy of Vallien's work.

In pieces such as the two pieces shown in fig.45 and fig.46, both sharing the same title of Area 11 Map, there is clear usage of surface texture to convey the sense of a map : lines marked in close, even proximity similar to contour lines, an obvious gridding of the piece into even square portions and marks made in the glass like tracks and various shapes that on a map would mean different forms of natural features to be found in the landscape. However the use of the darkened outline of a figure in fig.46 and the inscription of various mysterious lettering shapes in fig.45 together with the roughness and cold stony colour of both pieces, conveys an autobiographical element and indeed recalls the characteristics of memorial stones or runes.

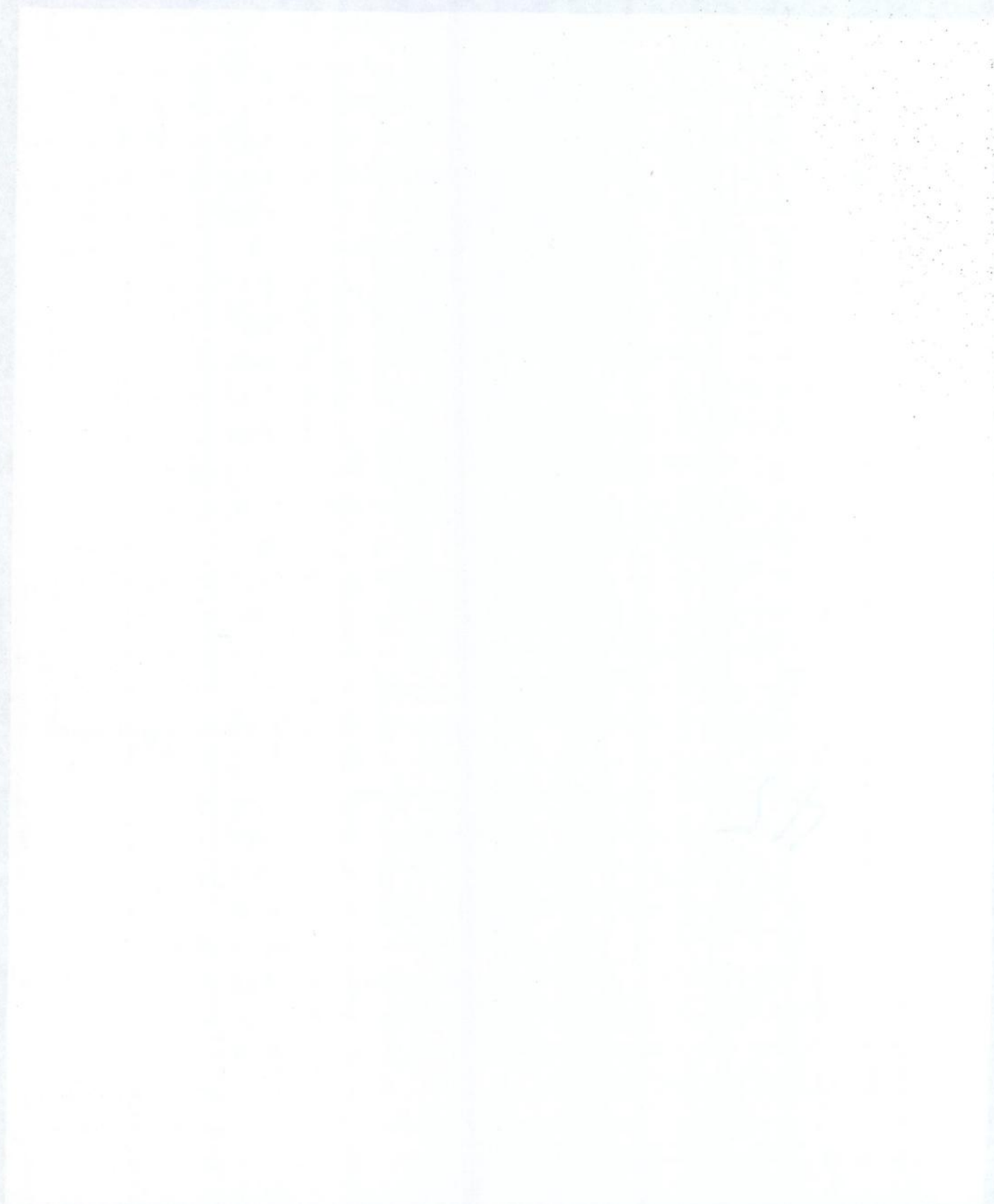
The second section within this exhibition are the pieces known collectively as Findings. These consist of glass crates containing artefacts or symbols that have appeared throughout Vallien's work: the boat, the face and indeed the figure. Again, no sense of optimism is evident in this section, once-free images full of hope on their mythical journey are now cased in, trapped within the constraints of the rectangular glass mass. Imprisoned and entombed, confined not only by their rectangular forms but also by the heavy bases on to which all these pieces are fixed and also by Vallien's use of icy blue





Fig 45 Area 11 Map, 1990, by Bertil Vallien.







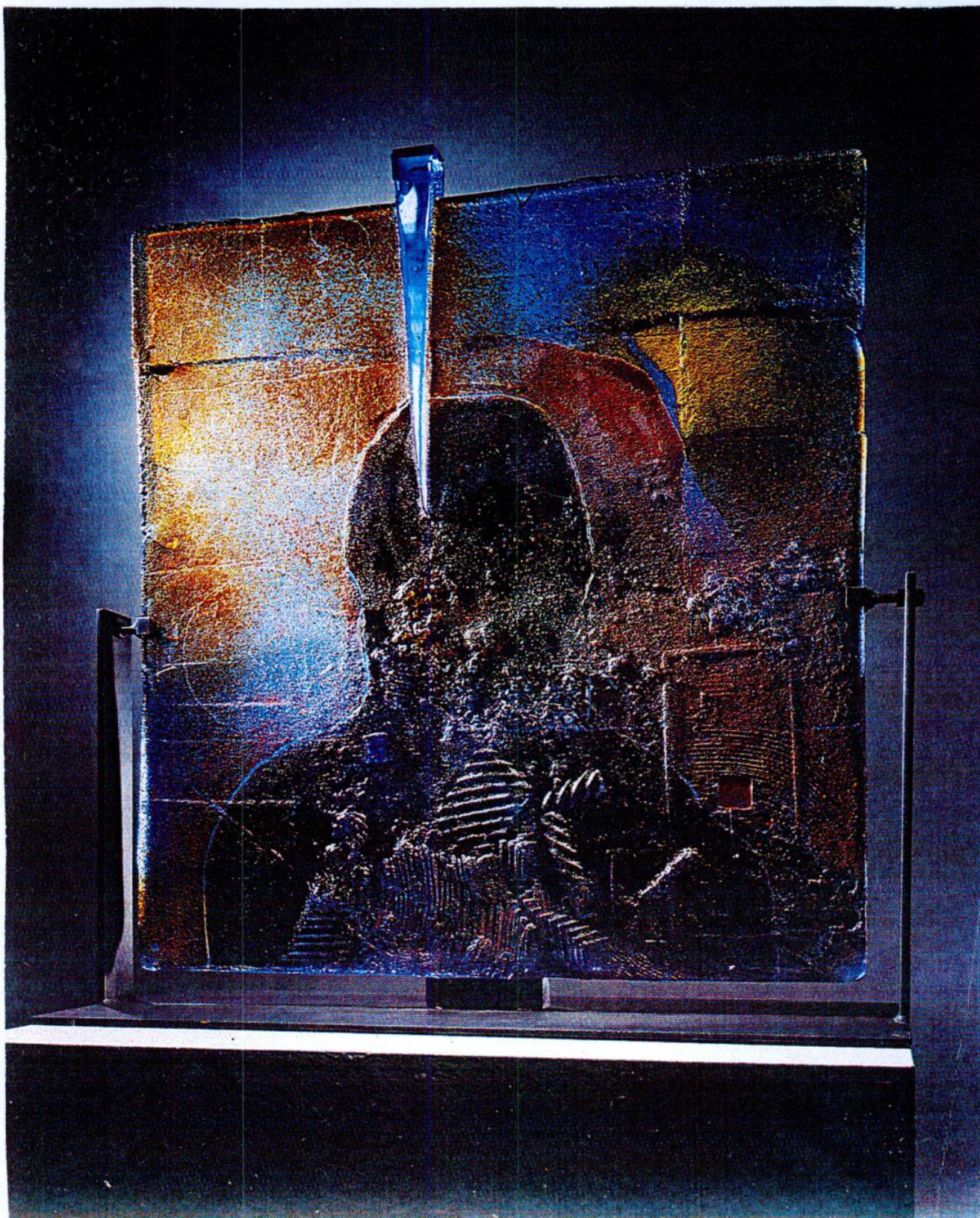


Fig46 Area 11 Map, 1990, by Bertil Vallien.



Wp



and stony grey colouring. In a piece such as Area 11 Finding Man (1989)(fig 47), the human face trapped within solid symmetrical walls, together with Vallien's deliberate frosting or misting of the glass, is haunting. This stark, poignant and somewhat chilling element is also evident in fig.48, with the confinement of a ship carrying cargo that Vallien once felt was necessary to travel with to the other world, but now this form is trapped and under constraint in these his new thicker sandcasts.

The third and final part of this exhibition is The Watchers. These tall free-standing sculptures, some of which are over seven foot high, broad at their highest point and tapering down to being very narrow towards the base, represent a further recognition of Vallien's continuous success and achievement within sandcasting (see fig 49). All the pieces from this exhibition clearly show the success that bentonite has made to the sandcasting process of Bertil Vallien. The haunting face depicted in Area 11 Finding Man and multitude of various forms on board the vessel in Area 11 Finding (fig.48), could not have been made possible without bentonite and Vallien's ability in creating bas-reliefs when mixing this ceramic product with sand.

All the pieces from 1988 onwards have an icy coldness to them, pessimism and fear are evident throughout all these forms, and even more so in Vallien's recent sculptures from 1989 onwards and in particular from the 1991 'Area 11' exhibition. Earlier pieces of Vallien's, such as Solitude (1987), (fig.36), Voyage of Dreams, (1986)(fig.35) and indeed as far back as The Goddess N (1967)(fig.17) all show great optimism and hope in the future, but in Vallien's latter day work there is deep concern about his own personal longevity.





Fig 47 Area 11 Finding Man, 1989, by Bertil Vallien.



47

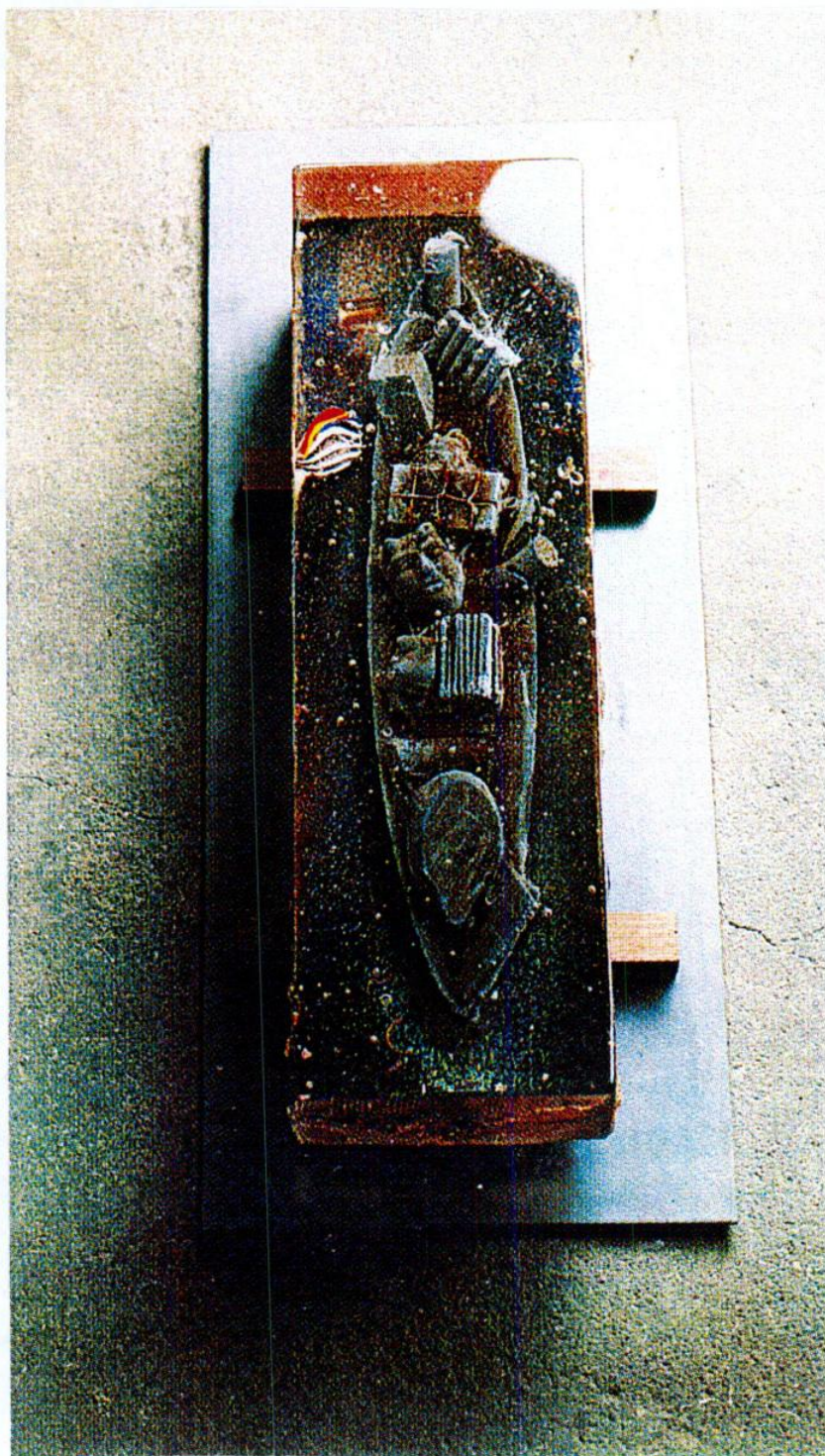


Fig 48 Area 11 Finding, 1989, by Bertil Vallien.









Fig 49 Area 11 Watchers, 1989, by Bertil Vallien.





## CONCLUSION

For many years I have found the sandcast sculptures of Bertil Vallien both fascinating and exciting. The first time I saw his work was during a slide show given by the British contemporary glass artist David Reekie, on modern casting techniques in glass. Since then I have remained inspired and amazed by Vallien's achievements in glass, using the technique of sandcasting.

Vallien's work amazes me for its sheer volume, diversity and its immense beauty, in colour, use of form and symbol and ofcourse its technical brilliance. His productivity is almost unbelievable, as is his indepth knowledge and skill in creating such dramatic technical brilliance in glass, using simple sand to create his dynamic pieces. His work contains universal and eternal symbols but his way of shaping them and producing them is unique. Bertil Vallien has been certainly interpreting them and taking this simple basic method, developing it and making it his own.

The first thing that captures the attention of the viewer when viewing Vallien's work is its sheer amount, individual size and striking beauty. What frightens me about these pieces is that these pieces could quite easily never been created if Vallien had not decided to take up Erik Rosen's offer of a job and return from America. Vallien's initial interest was in ceramics, and due to his strict religious background the priesthood had been considered by the young Vallien. Also the airforce, because of his military experience and love of flying, it too had crossed his mind as a career option. Lotta Jonson says of Vallien concerning his choice of glass over these other careers, "today he is one of Scandinavia's foremost glass artists. Which is fortunate for us, who regard his art with fascination. And fortunate for Swedish glass producers whose future should be brighter, thanks to Bertil Vallien."





Jonson is ofcourse is complete correct in this statement. Vallien has made a tremendous difference in the survival of Afors and indeed its continuous success by introducing new techniques and a new line with the "Artist Collection". Also he has paved the way for other emerging glass artists by his indepth research into various possibilities for glass in particular in using simple affordable products such as sand and bentonite, he has pushed the possibilities for glass sculptural forms to unbelievable highs. A look at pieces such as Solitude (1987)(fig. 36) and Area 11 Finding (1989)(fig. 48) can simply prove the tremendous strides that Vallien has made in the last thirty years. Even today, Vallien remains challenged by his chosen medium of glass, he says,

"You have to be stubborn and a little bit stupid to work in glass. It is so difficult. But glass offers qualities no other medium can achieve. Glass eats light. You can freeze a happening, an event. When you look inside glass, there is no scale; it is easy to get lost. It invites you to see it as air, or stars. Glass for me represents something very hot, molten like a volcano, and something very cold, like ice. I want to continue to examine that duality of fire and ice. I am always looking for a reason to work in glass".<sup>2</sup>

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## NOTES

### Introduction

1. \*ROSENBAUM, Joshua, 'Fire and Ice', Scanorama, July/August 1993 pp. unknown
2. GLOWEN, Ron, 'Metaphorical Cargo', American Craft, June/July 1986, pp. 82.

### Chapter 1

1. SWEDISH INSTITUTE, Design in Sweden, Stockholm, 1985, p. 31.
2. SWEDISH INSTITUTE, Design in Sweden, Stockholm, 1985, p. 12.
3. SWEDISH INSTITUTE, Design in Sweden, Stockholm, 1985, p. 14.
4. LINDQVIST, Gunnar, Bertil Vallien, Stockholm, 1994, p. 113.
5. \*ROSENBAUM, Joshua, 'Fire And Ice', Scanorama, July/August 1993, pp. unknown.
6. GLOWEN, Ron, 'Metaphorical Cargo', American Craft, Vol. 46, No. 3, June/July, pp39.
7. LINDQVIST, Gunnar, Bertil Vallien, Stockholm, 1994, p. 19.
8. LINDQVIST, Gunnar, Bertil Vallien, Stockholm, 1994, p. 23.
9. \*ROSENBAUM, Joshua, 'Fire and Ice', Scanorama, July/August 1993, pp. unknown.

### Chapter 2

10. KOSTA BODA GLASBRUK, Artist Collection, Stockholm, 1992, p. 1.
11. LINDQVIST, Gunnar, Bertil Vallien, Stockholm, 1994, p. 33.
12. \*ROSENBAUM, Joshua, 'Fire and Ice', Scanorama, July/August 1993, pp. unknown.
13. LINDQVIST, Gunnar, Bertil Vallien, Stockholm, 1994, p. 69.

### Chapter 3

14. JONSON, Lotta, 'Priest Pilot or Potter', Form, Vol. 4/5 (668), 1990, pp. 39.
15. LINDQVIST, Gunnar, Bertil Vallien, Stockholm, 1994, p117.
16. LINDQVIST, Gunnar, Bertil Vallien, Stockholm, 1994, p. 119.
17. LINDQVIST, Gunnar, Bertil Vallien, Stockholm, 1994, p. 127.

### Conclusion

1. JONSON, Lotta, 'Priest Pilot or Potter', Form, Vol. 4/5 (668), 1990 pp. 36.



2.\*ROSENBAUM, Joshua, 'Fire and Ice', Scanorama, July/June 1993, pp. unknown.

\* The article titled 'Fire and Ice' by Rosenbaum from Scanorama was received from Kosta Boda Glassworks in the form of photocopies and an exact page location was not given.

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