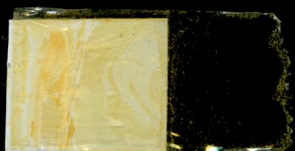


CONTEMPORARY IRISH ART GLASS
IN A COUNTRY DOMINATED BY FACTORY
PRODUCTION

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CONTEMPORARY IRISH ART GLASS
IN A COUNTRY DOMINATED BY FACTORY PRODUCTION

BY RACHEL E. M. DURAND

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INTRODUCTION

For somebody from another country looking at art glass in Ireland, it doesn't seem as if there is very much happening here. The market is swamped with cut crystal from many factories around Ireland such as Waterford, Cavan, Tyrone, and places like Sligo which doesn't even blow its own glass, but buys in ready-mades, and cuts them. There is also a lot of cheap, mould-pressed glass, and functional items made from recycled glass from Britain, which are popular. The Irish art glass movement is very small in comparison to countries such as America, Sweden, Finland, and England, as we haven't gone in for setting up large numbers of small studios as they have. There is also only one college which gives a training in art glass in this country, namely the N.C.A.D. in Dublin.

In my thesis, I want to show that there is actually more happening in art glass in Ireland than it seems, and the cut glass which is so popular here has not hampered the growth of the art glass movement. In fact, in a positive development which has begun to emerge recently, factories and glass artists are beginning to work together.

I decided to write my thesis on this subject as, being an Irish glass student, I wanted to find out about the other glass artists working in Ireland, discover what they are doing, as well as look into the future to see what might happen in this country. As there are no books published yet on contemporary Irish art glass, and only a few catalogues and newspaper articles, my thesis has given me the opportunity to meet and talk to those who are currently working in glass in Ireland.

I am going to begin the first chapter by looking at the design department at Waterford Crystal, and comparing it to the way that design is taught in the glass department at the National College of Art and Design as this is the only glass course in Ireland. I have selected only Waterford Crystal rather than trying to include all of the factories in this country, as it has the longest tradition of glass making in Ireland, and because of the way it is beginning to interact with Irish glass artists.

In the second chapter, I will look at a project which showed this interaction, the 1993 'Art and Design in Crystal' competition. I will discuss my interview with one of the students involved in the project, as well as the views of a few of the people at the factory, such as the Chief Operating Officer and the Design Director, to consider how successful it was from both angles.

In my third chapter, I will follow on this idea by writing about the recent stage of the 'Chihuly over Venice' project in which the American glass artist Dale Chihuly worked with Waterford Crystal in Ireland. Although Chihuly is not an Irish glass artist, this project was important because of the way the American glass artists he brought with him worked alongside the blowers at the Crystal factory, as well as interacting with Irish glass artists and students. There is also the hope that such a large glass project happening in Ireland may open the eyes of the people who were involved in the factory to the incredible effects that can be achieved with glass; likewise, the members of the public who saw the work. I am also going to discuss the views of some of the people in the factory about this project.

I will concentrate, in the fourth chapter, on some of the glass artists who are working here in Ireland, such as Killian Schurmann, Roisin de Buitlear, Salah Kawala and Deirdre Rogers. I will also look briefly at Simon Pierce and Keith Ledbetter who run small studio-like factories. I will discuss their views on what they feel is happening in glass in Ireland at the moment, their views on the future of Irish glass, as well as looking briefly at their work. I will then take a look at the galleries and craft outlets which exhibit and sell the work of glass artists working in Ireland.

In the fifth chapter, I will put contemporary Irish glass into context by comparing it to contemporary British art glass. I will concentrate on looking at the glass artist Rachael Woodman who is presently working as a designer at Dartington Crystal. Although there are many factories who currently employ glass artists, I chose to write on Dartington as Waterford Crystal have adopted the R.S.A.'s idea of running yearly competitions for glass students, which is centred on Dartington Crystal.

CHAPTER ONE

WATERFORD CRYSTAL AND THE GLASS DEPARTMENT

AT THE N.C.A.D.

In 1783, the Waterford Glass House was set up by George and William Penrose on Anne Street, Waterford; it was, in fact, the second glass factory to have been set up in Waterford. The Penroses had no experience with glass themselves¹, being merchants²; to them it was just a business venture. Because of this, they needed someone who knew about glass, so they brought over John Hill from the Stourbridge Glassworks in England as he knew all the technical details necessary for starting up the factory. Hill was able to bring over some skilled workers to start off the factory's production, as well as having a viable glass batch recipe³

As far as the design aspect of the factory in the late eighteenth century is concerned, Mary Boydell has suggested that the designers would not have been chosen for any particular design skills, but as it was just a business, these would have been people who were thought able to do the job, and the designs probably arrived at by experimentation.⁴ Michael Robinson has also said that there isn't a great deal to say about the role of the designer in the eighteenth century, as it was too early then to specify the contemporary concept of 'the designer'.⁵ In the same way that glass blowers and cutters moved between factories in Ireland and England, the patterns for blown forms and cutting were also shared. For example, in the early 19th century, Waterford Crystal used a book of cutting patterns previously owned by Samuel Miller, which were for English, Scotch and Irish glass⁶ (Fig.1); Miller was the foreman cutter at Waterford in the 1820's and 30's.⁷ The glass produced was therefore influenced by styles in glass at that time; whether they were specifically influenced by Irish fashions isn't

¹ Ida Grehan, *Waterford; An Irish Art*, 1981, p.25.

² M.S.Dudley Westropp, *Irish Glass*, 1978, p.69.

³ Grehan, op. cit., p.25.

⁴ Interview with Mary Boydell, Dublin, 1995.

⁵ Letter from Michael Robinson, December 1995.

⁶ Interview with Michael Robinson, Dublin, 1996.

⁷ Westropp, op. cit., p.177.

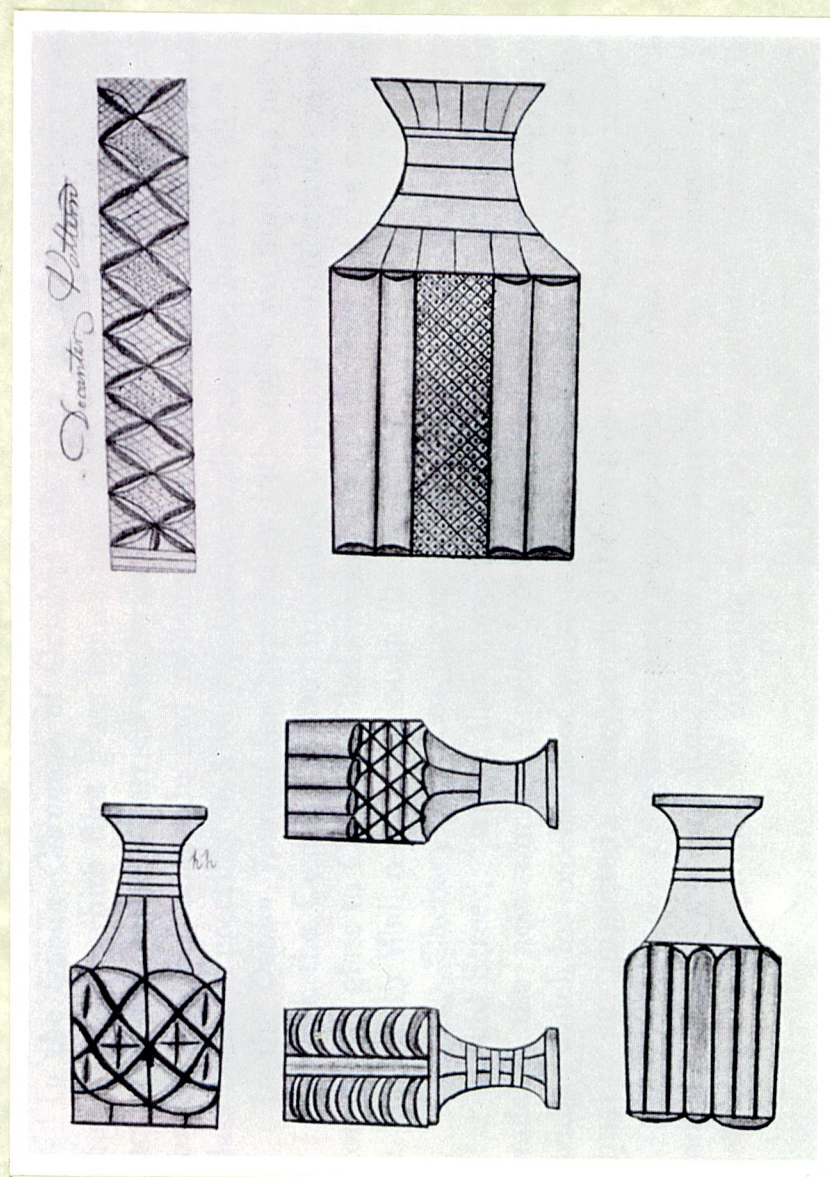


FIGURE ONE

Cutting patterns used by the Waterford Glass House in the early 19th century, previously owned by Samuel Miller.

obvious, but they were certainly influenced by English fashions as this is where the workers at the factory originally came from.¹

In 1850, The Waterford Glass House had to close due to heavy excise tax.

100 years later, between 1950-51, the present Waterford Crystal factory was set up by a Czech called Charles Bacik, who had previously owned three glass factories in Czechoslovakia. After the war, when things weren't going very well for him, Bacik decided to move to Ireland with his family. Irish apprentices were trained for the factory by blowers and cutters who had been recruited in Europe by Bacik and Noel Griffin, a businessman. Waterford Crystal only really began to get off the ground in the year 1950, when the Irish Glass Bottle Company became interested in the venture. Joseph McGrath and Joseph Griffin had played a large part in helping Waterford Crystal get onto its feet when they and others took over the management of the failing Irish Glass Bottle Company as far back as 1932.²

In 1947, Miroslav Havel had come over from Czechoslovakia to work at the factory, which was still being built at the time. He wasn't told that the factory hadn't yet been completed and therefore spent his first three years in Ireland helping to set it up. Havel became Waterford Crystal's chief designer, the first time that they had an employee with that specific role, although he seems to have had a talent in every area of the factory's production.³ This was very helpful, if not necessary for being a designer, in order to know what could be achieved during every stage of the production of a piece of glass. As Noel Griffin said, "You have to be a draughtsman, a mathematician, and a designer. In fact, most of our designers can also sculpt, paint and draw; some can blow, others can cut."⁴

¹ Westropp, op. cit., p.176.

² Grehan, op. cit., pp. 39 & 40.

³ Grehan, op. cit., p.43.

⁴ Ibid.

In 1961, a team of six Scandinavian industrial designers came to Ireland for two weeks to do a brief, but intense survey of design for industry in this country. One of the areas they looked at was glass. They said that the technical side of the production was of a very high standard, but the idea of re-using old designs from museums, even if not down to exact detail, reduced the glass to a second class product.¹ I presume that they were referring specifically to Waterford Crystal as, when Havel arrived at Waterford as a designer, he went to the National Museum in Dublin, copied precisely the designs from the old Waterford Glass factory and put these pieces back into production. These designs were still being produced in 1990.² This, only one example of many, shows the factory's lack of innovation in the design area. As design students, we are taught that we should keep our designs from going stale by constantly bringing in fresh new ideas, and by renewing our source materials and inspiration. In her book Waterford: an Irish Art, 1993, Ida Grehan wrote that "Miroslav Havel believes in a constant flow of new ideas"³ and, in his own words, Havel had said "I am now here 33 years... But I cannot change my style, so fresh ideas may come from outside."⁴

In the Swedish factories of Orrefors, Kosta and Boda, the designers spend six months of a twelve month contract designing for the factory, and the other six months doing research, or making one-off pieces, and paying the factory for materials used.⁵ This is a good idea as it keeps the designers constantly learning in order to provide them with new ideas.

The current Waterford Crystal factory is divided into four separate plants. The main two plants, with the visitors centre and showrooms, are at Kilbarry, in the outskirts of Waterford city. Here stemware is made in one plant, and other blown ware such as bowls and vases are made in the other. There is a third plant a short distance further from the city centre, at Butlerstown, where lighting

¹ Scandinavian Design Group, Design in Ireland, 1962, p.18.

² Maol Muire Tynan, 'City divided by clean cut issues', The Irish Times, May 10th 1990, p.9.

³ Grehan, op. cit., p.53.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Interview with Deirdre Rogers, Dublin, 1995.

ware is made. The fourth plant is at Dungarvan, Co. Waterford; this is for the production of giftware. The following is a brief outline of the structure of Waterford Crystal, so that one can see how it functions: the man in charge of Waterford Crystal is the Chief Executive, Patrick Galvin; under him is the Chief Operating Officer, Redmond O'Donoghue. There is then the Plant Manager for all three factories, Michael Wilcock, as well as there being plant managers for each of the individual plants (two at Kilbarry, one at Butlerstown and one at Dungarvan). Under the individual plant managers there are managers for each area, from the blowing room and cutting shop to maintenance. There are then foremen and workers in each area.¹

In Waterford Crystal there are very few women. The only jobs that women are allowed to do are carrying glass to the 'lehr' (a kiln used for annealing glass) in the blowing room, marking the glass for cutting, and inspecting and packing the glass. However, there will soon be even fewer women working there, as Waterford are gradually bringing in machines to do all these jobs.

Up until 1977, the only facilities for glass at the National College of Art and Design were for stained glass. This was part of fine art painting, and was a subject that all the painters had to study, with the possibility of specialising in it in their final year. The renowned Harry Clarke studied stained glass there in 1905.

In 1977, Johnny Murphy, who had been a stained glass tutor in the college since 1955, had the idea to set up a furnace, and begin to teach the students hot glass. He started this project with the help of Phil Roche, who had been a technician in stained glass in the college since about 1971. The Irish Glass Bottle Company and Dublin Gas helped them to start up the hot glass workshop. It was at this time situated in Kildare Street, before the main part of the college moved up to Thomas Street. Keith Leadbetter (who will be discussed further in chapter four) was brought in to blow the first glass, and held glass blowing workshops every week for between six and nine hours a week. In 1978, George Elliot was brought over

¹ Interview with Fred Curtis, Waterford, 1996.

from England to do a workshop and among a number of visiting lecturers was Mike Jermyn.

In the mid 1970's, a school of design began to form. Glass, metal work and ceramics opted to go under the branch of 3-D design, which in 1979 became known as Craft Design. It was decided that hot glass would fit better into this department than into fine art as technically it had more to do with ceramics, apart from its more functional nature, and after that stained glass began to be phased out. Outside of college, the idea of religious stained glass was becoming less popular, so there were less people working in stained glass. Now, however, it is beginning to be revived again.

When the main section of the college was moved up to Thomas Street in 1980, the glass department had to build a new furnace. They did this with the help of The Irish Glass Bottle Co. and Waterford Crystal. Waterford still provides us with glass for the furnace.¹

There is a large difference between design in the glass department of the college, and design in Waterford Crystal as well as between the results produced by them both (Figs.2&3). As part of my thesis focuses on the way that Waterford is interacting with the glass students at the college, I will therefore compare the way the designers work in both areas.

Waterford Crystal, as a factory, is there to provide the market with a product that will sell. They therefore have to keep their designs to what they know people will buy. As most of their market is in America, their selling points are based on the fact that the glass is made in Ireland, and that their cut crystal is part of an old tradition. Waterford are therefore quite restrained by the market. Another factor which influences the design of the glass is the fact that the designers don't blow glass themselves. They learn about the qualities of the glass by watching the blowers at work. However, some of the designers have travelled, and have seen glass being produced in other countries; this has broadened their knowledge. I still feel, however, that their ability to design a

¹ Interview with Phil Roche, Dublin, 1996.



FIGURE TWO

Waterford Crystal, Templemore Suite, blown and cut glass.



FIGURE THREE

Anne Hynes, Look this way, blown glass, 1994.

broader range of pieces would be increased if they had a chance to work with the glass themselves, and learn more about its possibilities.

Design in the glass course at the N.C.A.D. is considered part of the making process. You aren't allowed to start working on a piece of glass until you have gone through the process of designing it. It is also considered that you don't design a piece according to the skill you have, but that it is through trying new techniques that you learn more about the glass. I think that the main difference between design in Waterford and design in the college glass department is that in the college you're involved in a learning process, whereas in the factory, there is little space for learning; it's more about using what you already know. Another fact that gives the college its freedom is that your work isn't aimed at a specific market. It is geared towards making one-off pieces which are designed around what you are inspired and influenced by.

CHAPTER TWO

ART AND INDUSTRY IN IRELAND

It is very interesting in this country, where the production of cut crystal is so popular, to see a crystal factory at last making the effort to work with glass students.

In 1993, Waterford Crystal launched a competition, 'Art and Design in Crystal', to enable young artists to make pieces which they had designed themselves, but in an industrial setting, using the expertise of the craftsmen in the factory. The project was set up by Jim O'Leary, the design director at Waterford Crystal. O'Leary decided to introduce the idea of Waterford Crystal working with art students as he felt that they, as a factory with extensive facilities, had an obligation to offer the use of these to young people who want to work with glass. Waterford is probably the best known crystal factory in the world, but up until 1993 they didn't have any ties with the only educational body which taught glass in Ireland, namely the N.C.A.D. They decided to follow the lead of other factories who had regular contact with glass students, such as Dartington Crystal, which will be discussed further in chapter five. The brief was set by a team of people which included Jim O'Leary, Michael Robinson, then Curator of Applied Arts at the Ulster Museum, and Neil Reid, Head of the Craft department at the N.C.A.D., who also judged the competition.¹ This competition was open to any students who were studying art and design in Ireland. The winners were four students from the glass design degree course at the N.C.A.D.² It was exciting to see the results that could be produced when a large factory such as Waterford Crystal worked with a group of emerging glass artists over a period of nine months. It was a time for Waterford to see crystal being used as a medium for expression, rather than just being a material for making functional or decorative objects.

The craftsmen in Waterford are highly skilled, yet as they work in a factory, they have to sell what they make to keep going. The factory has a large clientele, especially in America, which buys its crystal; therefore the factory tends to stick to making what it has

¹ Telephone conversation with Jim O' Leary, 1996.

² Article by Waterford Crystal on 'Art and Design in Crystal' exhibition.

done all along, as they know that this is what sells. The glass students are young people who have exciting, innovative ideas of what they want to make, but their skills are limited, due to the short training period in college and to the limited facilities there. This is why the idea of a large factory and a group of glass students working together is such an exciting idea. It is the bringing together of the ideas, the skills, and the facilities needed to realize them. The results in themselves show how successfully this idea worked.

The project worked well for both parties: Waterford Crystal gained public interest, and publicity for their factory. They also gained the experience of working with young, innovative glass artists. The glass students gained a greater knowledge of glass during this time, and also the experience of working in a factory environment to produce their work, which they would not have been able to do otherwise. This was the first time that anything like this had taken place at Waterford Crystal. Brian Patterson, the chief operating officer at Waterford Crystal, said when the project was over, "Waterford has an important role to play in promoting the use of crystal as a design tool and to establish crystal as a modern artistic medium in Ireland today."¹

I asked Deirdre Rogers, one of the students involved in the project, how the time that she spent working at Waterford had influenced her. She said that at first they found it hard working at the factory. They were thrown in at the deep end as they were the first people to go down and work on a project like this there. The managers had arranged the project, but the blowers and other factory workers didn't know that they were coming.

The students found that the fact they were four young females didn't help at first (as there are so few women working at the factory, any new females are very much noticed by the men working on the factory floor). They weren't taken seriously in the beginning, even by the designers, until their pieces had been finished. The designers were used to seeing a finished product within a week of producing drawings. Because the pieces were so time-consuming to make, they didn't have the finished pieces until

¹ Waterford Crystal, op. cit.

the end of the project nine months later. They also found it hard because the designers didn't know about any of the techniques that the students wanted to use, and none of the designers had blown glass before.

The brief for the project stated that they could only use clear glass, as Waterford didn't use colour at the time. Deirdre said that she found this hard, as in college they had just begun to use colour, so she was dying to use it in her work. According to the brief set, they had the option of using another material as well as glass, so she used slate in her pieces. She found that not using colour in the glass meant that she had to concentrate more on the form instead of on the decoration. The form therefore became more important and more simple. She found that this idea worked in well with the graduate thesis she was writing on Finnish design at the time, which is all about simplicity.

Another reason why they found it hard to adjust to the factory is that in the beginning they had nothing to work on, as they had to ask specifically for blowing time, which they might not get for up to two weeks. They had to organise their time so that they were constantly working on something. They therefore shared their time between the factory and college, where they did some of the finishing work on the pieces. After about two months, they began to adjust to working in the factory, but they still had a few problems, such as not being taken seriously.

Another problem that the students encountered in the factory was that they couldn't interrupt the factory's normal production schedule, which resulted in them having to compromise their ideas. However, although the blowers only had limited techniques, they had the skill while the students had the ideas. The blowers also enjoyed working on something that was a change from the usual production. It worked well in the end because all four students decided to use their time in Waterford to design and make things that they physically couldn't in their college environment.¹

¹ Interview with Deirdre Rogers, Dublin, 1995.

Fred Curtis was the only member when the sculpture department at Waterford started ten years ago. The purpose of the department was to produce one-off pieces, but two years ago they started to include presentation pieces. There are now six people working there. Curtis said that since the students came to the factory to work on the 'Art and Design in Crystal' project, the sculpture department has started to break over the line into making more artistic work. A good example of this is the trophy which was made for the Eurovision Song Contest which was held at Mill Street, Co. Cork in 1993.¹

The work produced at Waterford by Elaine Griffin was a series of five pieces in clear cast glass and pâte de verre. The pieces are inspired by movements in nature such as the cycles of the moon and water, and the association which the female psyche has with the moon² (Fig.4).

Niamh Lawlor made a series of pieces inspired by water and its associations and attractions. Her work was made from blown, cast and sandblasted glass, and she used coloured sand and fabric to introduce another material into her work³ (Fig.5).

Ruth Shortt based her three pyramid forms on the struggle that exists between the geometry of man, and the freedom that nature has within its environment, which is closed and inhibited, symbolising man's position in a self created-society.⁴ Her 'Prophecy Book' looks metaphorically at the effect that time has on balance.⁵ She uses a combination of patinised and plain copper as well as blown and cast glass in her work (Fig.6).

Deirdre Rogers created a sense of tension in her combined use of slate with blown and sheet glass in a series of four pieces influenced by the stillness and sense of infinity in simple, natural forms⁶ (Fig.7).

¹ Interview with Fred Curtis, op.cit.

² Solomon Gallery, Art and Design in Crystal, Dublin, 1994, p.1.

³ N.C.A.D., Craft Design Graduate Degree show, 1994.

⁴ Solomon Gallery, op. cit., p.4.

⁵ N.C.A.D., op. cit.

⁶ Solomon Gallery, op. cit., p. 3.

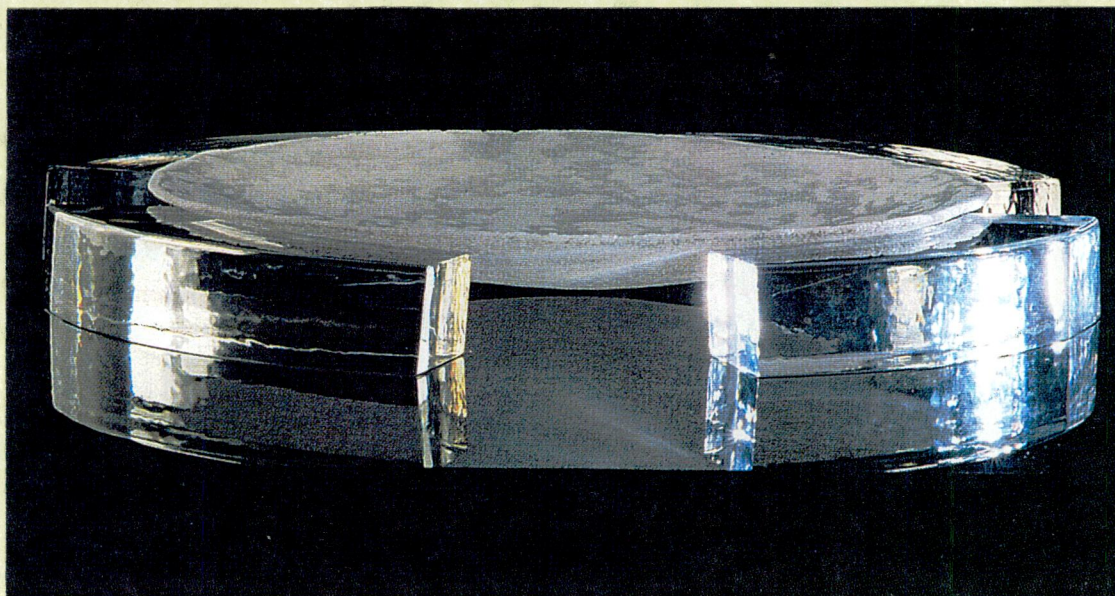


FIGURE FOUR

Elaine Griffin, Moon Reflector, cast glass and pate de verre, 1994.



FIGURE FIVE

Niamh Lawlor, Immersed Movement, blown and sandblasted glass, perspex and cloth, 1994.

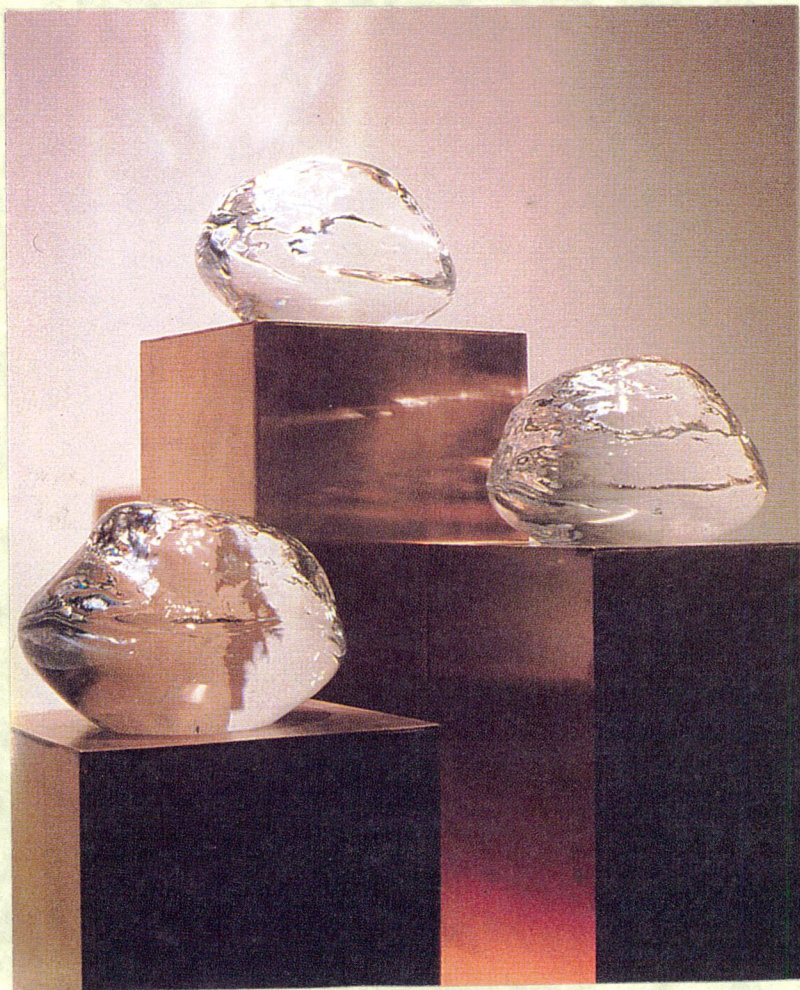


FIGURE SIX

Ruth Shortt, Seeds, cast glass and copper, 1994.

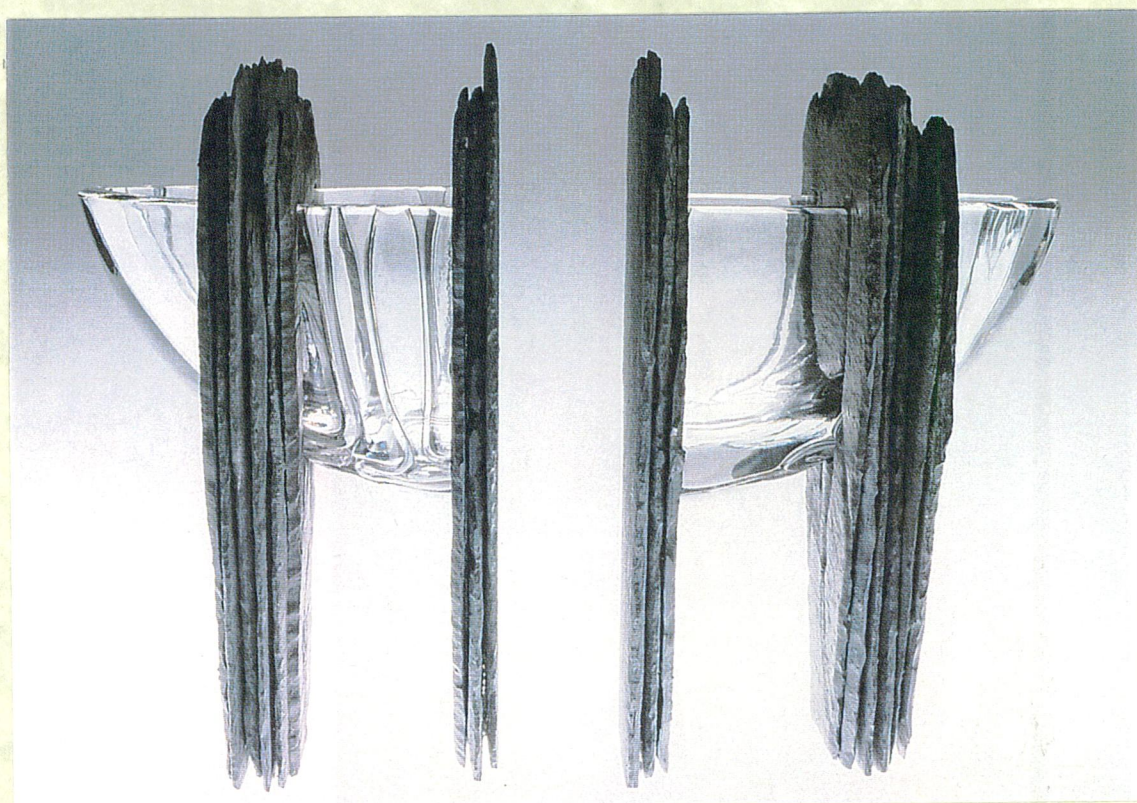


FIGURE SEVEN

Deirdre Rogers, Fragmented Unity 2, blown glass and slate, 1994.

Deirdre feels that glass artists and factories can work excellently together. In fact, Ireland is one of the only countries where it doesn't happen. In Europe, and especially Scandinavia, all glass designers have been through art college in some form. She feels, however, that it is very important for a designer to have a good knowledge of the material, to enable them to design pieces to their full potential.

As Waterford Crystal only makes production line pieces, it is only eligible to enter trade fairs, whereas if it worked permanently with glass artists, it would also be eligible for craft fairs, and would therefore broaden its name.

It seems time for Waterford to move on, though Deirdre feels that they aren't likely to change because what they do is safe, and this makes money. Some of the managers have said that they want to bring in an artistic sideline, but she thinks that they might not, as they have been talking about it for a long time but haven't done anything about it yet. She feels that it might just be something that they will always talk about, as they are afraid to change.¹

Killian Schurmann is an independant Irish glass artist who has also worked with Waterford Crystal. I will consider his work in greater detail in chapter four, but as it is relevant here, I will write about how he has worked with the factory.

In 1994, one of Waterford Crystal's managers invited Schurmann to go down to their factory to use their facilities for trying out new ideas. After his lampwork training in Germany, Schurmann worked at a few factories in England, France and America as well as assisting glass makers working on a similar basis in factories, so he knew the kind of reception to expect. He didn't want to work on something that would generate excitement which would then die down (perhaps like 'Art and Design in Crystal'), so he told them that he would approach them with proposals every now and again.

¹ Interview with Deirdre Rogers, Dublin, 1995.

As he has his own studio in Co. Dublin, Schurmann prefers to work with other artists such as sculptors in the factory, like Dorothy Cross, Felim Egan and David Wilcoxon. The artist, who knows nothing about glass, has an idea, and he helps them to create it in glass. Schurmann knows how Waterford functions, and can therefore act as a mediator between the factory and the artist. He can bring a proposal to the factory and explain it to them, so that the factory can understand exactly what they are wanting to make, and show that they won't interfere with the factory's production by limiting themselves in ways such as working over lunch time.

Schurmann believes that Waterford is not working with artists out of desperation. Although there are a number of other Irish crystal factories, Waterford is doing very well now, especially in America. They are working with artists because they feel that it's the right thing to get involved in¹. Contrary to Deirdre Roger's view that Waterford might not bring in an artistic sideline because they have been talking about it for a couple of years, but haven't done anything about it yet², Schurmann thinks that it is a good idea that Waterford are taking it slowly. He said he has seen other factories jump into it, but because they have gone about it too fast, they have jumped straight out again. As an artist, you can decide to make what you want, whenever you want, but in a factory situation, things have to be planned and organised. Schurmann says that as well as this, changing is a slow process. There are maybe twelve managers who all have to be persuaded that artists working with the factory is a good idea, and then the investors have to back the idea as well; all of the people involved have to want it.

One important thing that has to be taken into consideration, when artists go to work permanently in a factory situation, is who owns the ideas. If Waterford pay an artist working in the factory, then Waterford own the designs. In this type of situation, the designs may have to be modified to suit factory production and their price range. He suggests that a better solution would be to have a separate area where artists could work, perhaps paying rent, which could be sponsored by Waterford, but not necessarily appear under their name. This idea would take the stress off artists having

¹ Interview with Killian Schurmann, Dublin, 1995.

² Interview with Deirdre Rogers, *op. cit.*

to set up their own studios.¹ To me, the idea of setting up a studio is a daunting one, as you have to have a business mind as well as having a great deal of technical experience. The idea of being able to work in a space provided by Waterford Crystal would therefore be a much more appealing one although, as Schurmann pointed out, it would have to be done realistically, from a business point of view, rather than just being a business promotion.²

According to Fred Curtis, head of the sculpture department at Waterford, part of the idea of the 'Art and Design in Crystal' project was to introduce their blowers to a new way of working. Jim O'Leary, Design Director for Waterford Crystal, also organised the Waterford part of the 'Chihuly Over Venice' project in September 1995 (which will be discussed in the next chapter) for the same reason. They want to slowly change their production line into a more modern style, and are therefore introducing their blowers to different ways of using glass in order to broaden their knowledge of the material. In Waterford's conference room, there are examples of pieces of glass from countries around the world, such as Europe, Japan, India and America to research what other factories are producing.³

In August of 1994, Michael Robinson, then the Curator of Applied Arts at the Ulster Museum, brought Jim O'Leary to Czechoslovakia. The purpose of this visit was to see five Czech glass artists in the hope of inviting them over to work at Waterford. It was also an opportunity for Robinson to show O'Leary the more contemporary results which could be achieved with cut glass (Fig.8). As a result of this visit, Pavel Hlava, one of the Czech artists, came over to Waterford in April of 1995. On looking around the factory, Hlava remarked that, with all the equipment that Waterford Crystal have, there is nothing they can't make. Hlava returned to Czechoslovakia, and is currently working on designs which he will produce at Waterford in the near future.⁴

¹ Interview with Killian Schurmann, op. cit.

² Interview with Killian Schurmann, op. cit.

³ Interview with Fred Curtis, op. cit.

⁴ Interview with Michael Robinson, Dublin, 1996.



FIGURE EIGHT

Ludvika Smrckova, Vase, aquamarine glass blown
and cut, height-18.5cm, 1977.

CHAPTER THREE

CHIHULY OVER VENICE, PART TWO, WATERFORD

In September 1995 an even bigger art glass project than the 1993 'Art and Design in Crystal' competition took place at Waterford Crystal. This project, 'Chihuly Over Venice, part two, Waterford' took over a section of the Waterford Crystal factory at Butlerstown. It was a time for Waterford Crystal's master blowers (men who have completed five years as an apprentice, and three years as a qualified blower) to work alongside the team which Dale Chihuly, probably the most famous contemporary glass artist in the world, had brought over with him from America. The Waterford Crystal part of the project took place between the 25th of September and the 12th of October. This was the second of a five part project which Chihuly is working on in five countries which have a long tradition of glass making - Finland, Ireland, the Czech Republic, France and Italy. The idea of the project is to make thousands of varying free-blown pieces, most of which will be used in making installations and 'chandeliers'. These chandeliers do not fit the dictionary definition of "an ornamental branched hanging support for several candles or electric light bulbs"¹ nor are they anything like the cut crystal chandeliers hanging in the showroom of Waterford Crystal (Fig.9), but are huge, often coloured, unique pieces of free-form sculpture (Fig.10). They do not surround a light source, but use the reflective qualities of the glass they are made from instead.

When the five separate parts of the project have been completed, one chandelier from each country will be hung over the canals in Venice as a tribute to the traditions of glass and chandelier making in Venice.

I was fortunate to have been able to volunteer my help, along with some others from our glass course, to the team for about two weeks while they were in Ireland. Therefore what I have written will be a personal account of my experience, focusing on information relevant to my discussion.

¹ The Concise Oxford dictionary of Current English, 8th edition, 1990, p.187.



FIGURE NINE

Waterford Crystal, Chandelier, blown and cut glass.



FIGURE TEN

Dale Chihuly, Clear Chandelier, blown and cut glass, 1995.

On the 28th of September 1995, we arrived at the Butlerstown plant of Waterford Crystal a few miles from the main factory, where lighting ware and mould-pressed glass, such as gift items, are produced. There was quite a different atmosphere from when I had previously visited the factory. There was a buzz of excitement due to the amount of people busily performing all sorts of jobs, in contrast to the steady continuous flow that usually happens in the factory every day. The half of the blowing area which Chihuly had taken over was quite transformed. There was loud music coming from a speaker in the corner, Chihuly's huge, mad, colourful paintings hung on the wall (Fig.11), and two chandeliers hung from the ceiling by thick chains, (one of which we found out had just been sold for \$50,000!). As the local newspaper, Waterford Today, put it, "It seemed a bit as though Picasso had set up shop with your Uncle Paddy."¹ I was then amazed to watch the teams in action. There were three teams blowing at a time, each made up of four blowers, two from the American team, and two from Waterford. It was great to watch them working side by side. The pieces themselves were large (up to six feet long), some requiring to be handed up to a person on a seven foot step-ladder to be blown, while the glass was stretched out almost to the ground (Fig.12). This was quite different to the regular glass blowing at Waterford Crystal (Fig.13). Sometimes you could see, if you watched the Waterford blowers, that behind the look of intense concentration, there was a look of slight panic. This was perfectly understandable as the pieces didn't have to be an exact size or shape, unlike normal factory production, so a certain amount of the shape was left to chance. However, after a few days, the Waterford blowers got the hang of 'freeblowing' very well. Gravity was used to make the forms longer, but in such large pieces, it sometimes got out of control, resulting in the piece stretching down onto the floor.

I was told by one of Waterford's glass cutters that the Waterford Crystal employees were a bit apprehensive about the Chihuly team's arrival, as they thought of them as being 'arty-farty'. Even after their arrival, some of the Waterford employees still didn't appreciate what Chihuly was trying to achieve, but I think most of them got on well with the American team, and even though their

¹ Sue Healy, 'Chihuly in Waterford Crystal', Waterford Today, October 10th 1995, p.22.



FIGURE ELEVEN

Dale Chihuly, painting, acrylic on card, 1995.



FIGURE TWELVE

Blowing part of a Chihuly Chandelier at Waterford Crystal.



FIGURE THIRTEEN

Regular glass blowing at
Waterford Crystal.

styles of working are quite different, they respected the fact that the American blowers had a large amount of talent. The Waterford blowers also taught the Chihuly team a lot about working with crystal, as Chihuly uses soda glass in his workshop. Soda glass can be blown much thinner without the glass collapsing in the heat. Crystal has a greater tendency to shatter as it is a softer glass, and as well as being heavier, it cools down a great deal faster which means you have to reheat it more often.

I think that part of the reason why some of the Waterford employees remained sceptical about the Chihuly team was because of Dale Chihuly himself. The Waterford group had probably never heard of him before, even though in art glass he is a very big name. In order to be able to appreciate that, it is necessary to know a little about what he has achieved during his life. In 1968 he was the first American glass blower to work at the Venini Glass Factory on Murano in Venice. In 1971 he established the Pilchuck Glass school in Seattle, Washington, which is still going strong twenty four years later. He was made a Fellow of the American Crafts Council in 1968 and has received honorary doctorates from the University of Puget Sound and R.I.S.D.I. He has had a one man show at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs of the Louvre Museum in Paris. Only two other Americans have achieved this, another being Mark Tobey¹. Chihuly has also exhibited work in over a hundred museums worldwide, not to mention being placed in several important corporate and private collections, including the White House.² In 1992 he seems to have been the first person to be given the 'National Living Treasure Award' by the United States.³

Because of his fame and popularity, while he was in Waterford he was followed around by several photographers and two film crews; one was his own, which was making a documentary of the project, the other was from American television. He also signed autographs as well as painting people's shoes on request! This following probably caused the scepticism in some of the employees from Waterford, who had not, in any case, heard of him before, so

¹ Telephone conversation with Paul Fisher, art dealer for Dale Chihuly.

² Museum of Arts and Sciences, Chihuly: Form from Fire, Daytona Beach, Florida, 1993, pp. 124-127.

³ The Solomon Gallery, Dale Chihuly, Dublin, 1995.

could not understand why he deserved such admiration. There is the added fact that Chihuly doesn't blow his own glass. In 1976 he was in a car accident in which he lost an eye. As a result of this, he can't really blow glass any more, as you need both eyes to judge distances, and he could end up getting burnt. As he had blown glass before the accident, and had already made a name for himself, it is perfectly acceptable that he employs a team to make the work for him. The employees at Waterford saw this man followed around by his publicity crew, who came in, splashed paint onto a page with 'Chihuly Custom Fluid', which had already been sponged down with a base colour by one of his helpers, and occasionally directing a team of glass blowers. It is therefore understandable that some of them were sceptical about this man who seemed to have very little input into the work, and yet had such a following and sold his wild pieces for so much money. However, this being said, most of the Waterford blowers seemed to really enjoy working with the Chihuly team, and said they would find it hard going back to the normal routine when the Americans had gone.

On Tuesday the 3rd of October, the blowing finished at Waterford Crystal, and on Wednesday the Chihuly team went to Lismore Castle, Co. Waterford, to hang and install the pieces which had been made (Fig.14). Chihuly gave the installers a general idea of how he wanted the pieces constructed, but the installers often used their own initiative. Chihuly then came around, looked at the results, and said how he wanted them changed.

As well as the blowing at Waterford and the installing of the pieces in the grounds of Lismore Castle, there was an exhibition of Chihuly's work at The Solomon Gallery in Dublin's Powerscourt Townhouse. Here he showed some of his 'Baskets', 'Macchia' and 'Sea Forms', which he had made before coming to Ireland, as well as some individual pieces of his 'Chandeliers' which were made in Waterford. Unfortunately he couldn't show a whole chandelier as the gallery is too small.

Apart from this exhibition, there wasn't really a chance for the public to see the results of the time Chihuly spent at Waterford. The security at the Crystal factory was strict, and as Lismore Castle is a private residence, unauthorised people weren't allowed in. There



FIGURE FOURTEEN

Dale Chihuly, Amethyst Chandelier, 1995,
installed at the grounds of Lismore Castle.

were a few pieces installed at the Botanic Gardens in Phibsborough, Dublin, but this fact wasn't well publicised, so people came upon them more by chance, and access was restricted. In fact when people phoned up the Botanic Gardens to enquire about the glass, the staff didn't seem to know it was there.

In spite of this, hopefully the people who did get to see Chihuly's work will have had their eyes opened to the versatility of glass and will become more broad-minded as a result. I also hope that Waterford Crystal, on the whole, will have gained something from the project. Personally, I was very glad to have been able to help, and become a part of the whole experience. Although this project has cost them a large amount of money, Waterford still plan to continue working with glass artists in the near future.¹ However, I don't think that having some of the Waterford blowers working on the Chihuly project was a good idea in the long run. Now that the Chihuly team have returned to America, the Waterford blowers who were involved in the project have had to return to normal factory production. They have been given a taste of free-blowing, but do not have the opportunity to continue with it. They may now become dissatisfied with their normal routine. It is great that Waterford want to introduce their blowers to new ways of working, but I feel that Chihuly was the wrong man for this. I don't think Waterford will include any free-blown glass in their range in the future as the results are too varied for factory production. I feel it is unfair to give the blowers a taste of freedom, only to take it away again.

¹ Telephone conversation with Jim O'Leary, 1996.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONTEMPORARY IRISH GLASS ARTISTS, GALLERIES AND CRAFT OUTLETS

Deirdre Rogers graduated from the National College of Art and Design glass design degree course in June 1994, after which she studied at Orrefors in Sweden for four and a half months. There she learned a lot about mould blowing, which she had previously only thought of as a factory production method, but has since decided that this is not necessarily true.

She found that it was more what she saw in Orrefors than what she did there that changed her work. There was glass everywhere, and she learned about new techniques that she hadn't even heard of before. She said, however, that if she had had the use of blowing facilities here in Ireland, it would have had a greater change on the way she is working at present.

Deirdre is at the moment trying to set up a studio with about seventeen other artists here in Dublin. They are all working in different media, so it will be a place for them to interact, as well as sharing the equipment that each of them has, such as kilns. She is looking forward to having the studio set up, as it will be a place where people can bounce ideas off each other, and become motivated. They have all been out of college for a few years, so they are very serious about their work. Deirdre is also currently employed as a design consultant by Cavan Crystal three days a week. She is able to get some of her own work made there.¹

Killian Schurmann did not train specifically as a glass blower, but did a three year lampworking apprenticeship in Germany, making laboratory instruments. Here he was trained just to work, unlike in a college environment where you are also trained to think.

Schurmann first became interested in glass when he was about thirteen or fourteen, when he used to go and watch a glass maker in a tiny shop in Germany. He said that the man made glass blowing look so easy, and could make whatever you wanted him to. He was

¹ Interview with Deirdre Rogers, Dublin, 1995.

also interested in the spontaneity of glass. When Schurmann went to watch the glass maker work, he realised that this man was making a living from glass. The glass maker was an old man from Eastern Europe, whom Schurmann enjoyed talking to. He found out that this man had been hopeless in school, and so decided that this was something for him. He therefore left school early and went to the glass blowing school, Staatliche Glasfachschole, Ladamar, to do his apprenticeship.

He has also learned a great deal over the years by working in different workshops for small amounts of time, during which he made pieces that were ideas which he is working through now that he has his own studio.

Schurmann built his own furnace in Rathfarnham, County Dublin five years ago. He has the only small craft glassblowing workshop in Ireland, and is surprised that he doesn't have any competition yet. At first he only made things to sell, to try to make a living. He said that his work only became more interesting when he became tired of the whole glass movement. At the moment he makes work which he sells to support himself, such as goblets, as well as work that he likes for himself; he also works with artists, sculptors and painters, as already mentioned in chapter two. He says that he isn't interested in exhibiting as, while it might look good on a curriculum vitae, the exhibition itself might not be all that good in itself; however, he has had his work in more than ten exhibitions since 1984.

Up until two years ago, Schurmann had never questioned himself on what he hoped to achieve with his work, but over the last two years, his ideas have totally changed. Between the ages of eighteen and thirty, glass enabled him to travel and learn a trade. He is interested in what is happening in glass in Ireland, but he's not trying to be a part of it. He doesn't want the glass movement to influence what he likes doing, or what he's trying to sell. His plans for the future now involve securing his work so that he can go off and do something completely different, part of which might be to go and live in another country, coming back to Ireland to work. He wants to continue working with glass to support himself so that he has as much possibility to find new things as he goes along. He

doesn't want to just focus on one thing, such as glass, and make a career out of it. Schurmann feels that he needs to go away and have nothing to do with glass, as he has focused so much on it over the last sixteen years that he thinks he has blown a fuse somewhere. He loves glass. He has learned an awful lot, technically, over the years, and it is a means of support, although he says he can't imagine cruising along for the next twenty years making glass; it would bore him to pieces.¹ Like everyone, he needs some kind of challenge. If you get to the top too quickly, you are limiting the amount of new challenges you can find for yourself.

With the craft side of glass, you can get so involved in making something, that you stop thinking. Schurmann is interested in more than just that. He feels that glass is just a nice material, which one day you take for granted when you know that you have mastered it. Years ago he never realised that. He said that he used to just watch somebody working and think that it was amazing, but now he doesn't care. He became so obsessed with his work that he wasn't doing anything else. He feels that you have to keep on the move or else you'll take glass for granted.

The future of art glass in Ireland, as far as Schurmann is concerned, is in the way that artists in other mediums are now becoming interested in using glass in their work. They have specific reasons for using glass, and are using it because they need its qualities, rather than using glass because it's the material they work with. He believes that glass artists make work and like it because of the material, rather than questioning whether their pieces should be made out of an alternative material instead. He feels that glass artists are too obsessed with the material, but where glass art has become interesting is when respected multi-media artists are realising that glass has a lot of potential.² An example of this is Clifford Rainey, whom I will discuss later on in this chapter. Schurmann feels that we have an advantage over places like Britain and America in that glass has been accepted as a sculptural medium here in a way that it hasn't been in other countries. In Ireland it has been accepted for trophies along with more conventional

¹ Interview with Killian Schurmann, op. cit.

² Interview with Killian Schurmann, op. cit.

sculptural materials such as stone and bronze. In America, glass artists have been fighting for it to be seen as a sculptural material, whereas Schurmann believes that in Ireland glass has come in at a higher level.¹ I would agree to a certain extent with Schurmann's view about multi-media artists who use glass. However, while there are some interesting results in glass being achieved by multi-media artists, I think that there is still a great deal of potential in the way that glass artists could use the material. As glass is a medium which has only quite recently begun to be used in an experimental fashion, I don't believe that all its possibilities have been explored. Multi-media artists who use glass don't have enough knowledge of the material to experiment, and it is through experimentation that new and exciting results can be achieved. There is also the fact that two different glass artists who use the same technique can achieve very different results. I would also agree that in some ways glass has begun to be accepted as a sculptural medium here in Ireland, perhaps helped by the fact that glass was used in both the 1993 and 1995 trophies for the Eurovision Song Contest. The 1993 trophy was made by Waterford Crystal and the 1995 trophy was designed by Kevin O'Dwyer, silversmith and part time craft design tutor at the N.C.A.D., and made from silver and glass by O'Dwyer and Jim Griffiths, glass maker and full time glass tutor at the N.C.A.D. (Fig.15). However, there is as yet only a very small market for sculptural glass in Ireland, and not many places where it can be exhibited. In America, glass artists had to fight for glass to be seen as a sculptural medium, but there is now a large market for it there, as well as many museums and galleries where it can be viewed.

Schurmann makes two different kinds of work; one which he creates for the market, and one-off pieces which he makes for himself. There is great diversity between the two. The work for the market consists of jewellery such as hat pins (Fig.16), hair pins and rings; he also makes goblets which are medieval in appearance, each one slightly different with a unique character (Fig.17). Although Schurmann has said that there aren't any glass artists in Ireland making sculptural work, I see some of the pieces he has made for himself as sculptural. He makes large blocks of cast glass with flowing colours in them, sometimes incorporating the figure of

¹ Interview with Killian Schurmann, op. cit.

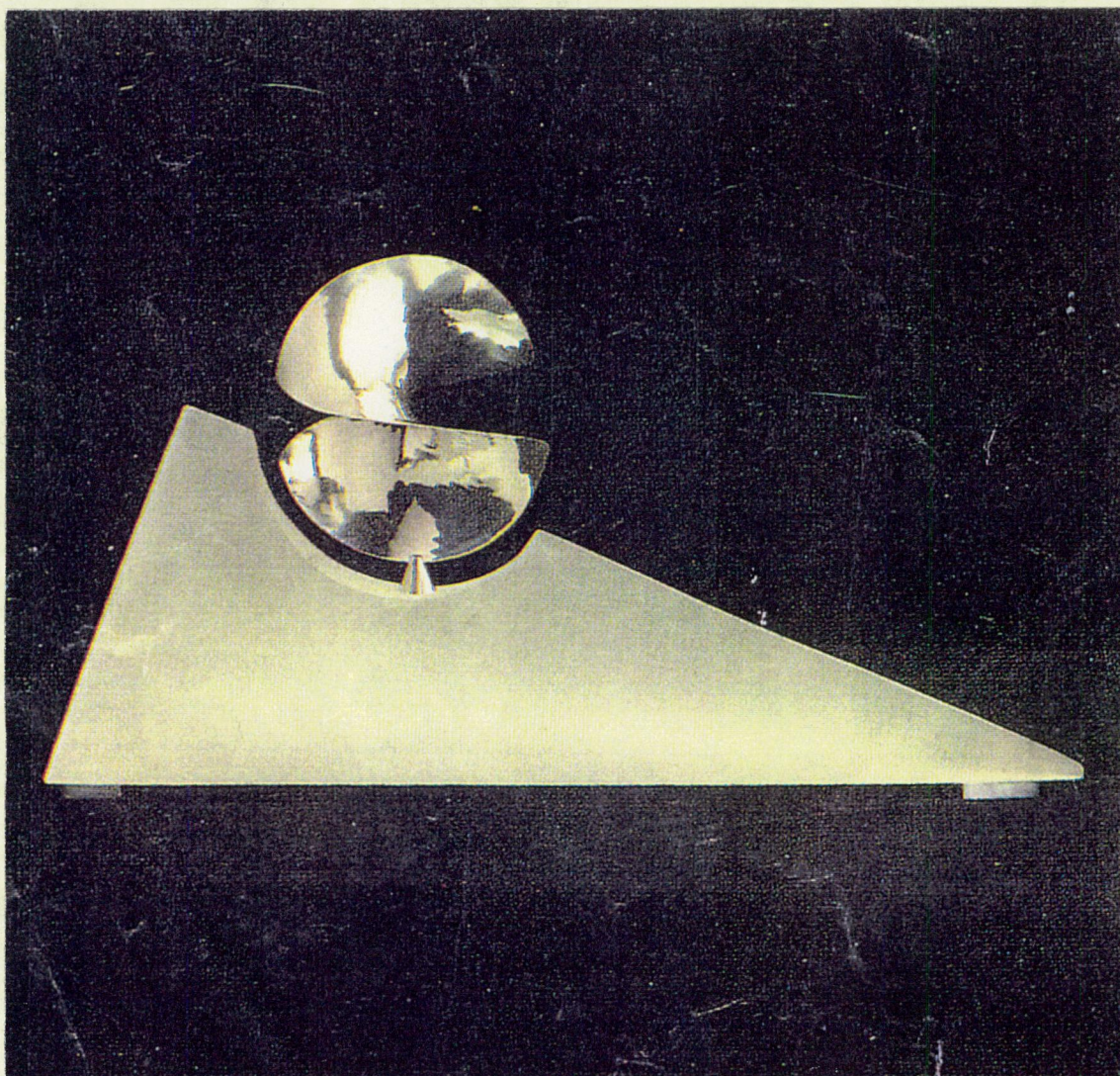


FIGURE FIFTEEN

Kevin O'Dwyer and Jim Griffiths, Eurovision Song
Contest Trophy, silver and glass, 1995.

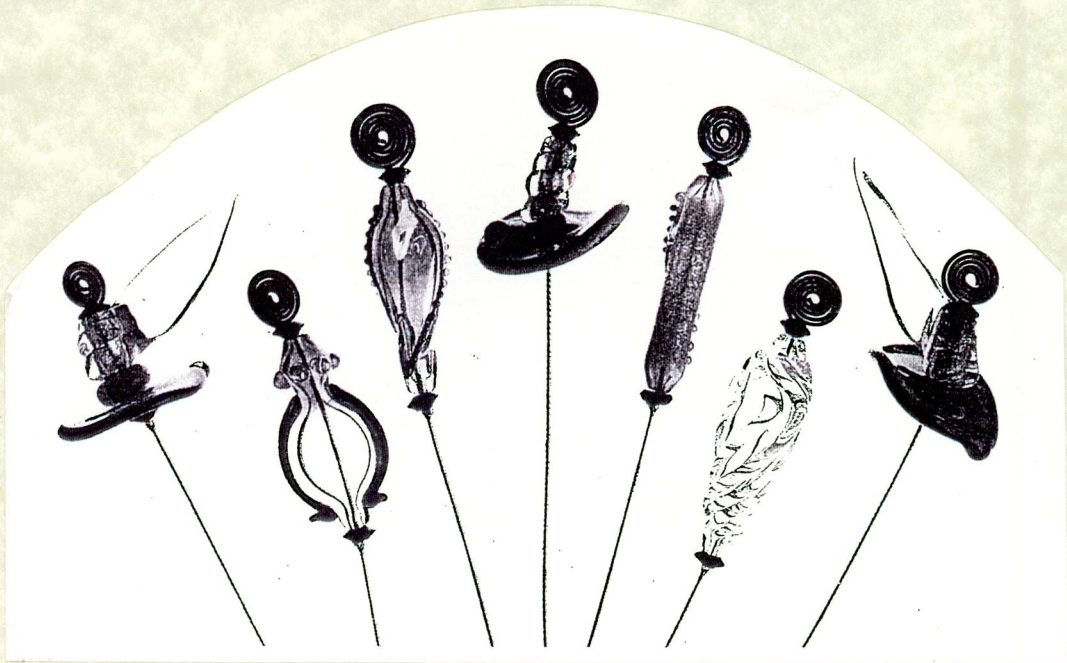


FIGURE SIXTEEN

Killian Schurmann, Hat Pins.



FIGURE SEVENTEEN

Killian Schurmann, Goblets.



FIGURE EIGHTEEN

Killian Schurmann, Head No. 2, glass on stone, 18.5 x 19 x 25cm, 1992.

a head (a concept that he came up with while working at someone else's studio years ago, but which he is only now developing in his work) (Fig.18), and has also made a large sculpture of a head on a piece of stone. The difference between Schurmann's hat/hair pins and his large sculptural work is amazing. The pins are tiny, created by lampworking glass over a small flame, and are very detailed, in contrast to his large kiln-formed blocks. He also uses the idea of having some of his glass on permanent display out-doors to use the weathering process on the glass as an element in his work. I would, however, essentially call Schurmann a craftsman.

Salah Kawala is an Egyptian-born glass maker, who is currently working in Ireland. Unlike most people in university, Kawala didn't know what subject he wanted to study. In Egypt he studied law for one year, arts for three years, followed by applied arts for three years. In art college, as part of the applied arts course, Kawala was sent to spend a small amount of time in every area in the college, which included stained glass. He went on to spend about eight years making stained glass in London. In the eighties, about half way through this time, commercial work became popular, and people began making cheaper stained glass without the same quality. Kawala then started looking into areas which didn't have the same kind of competition; this led him into slumping and fusing glass. He bought a kiln and began to experiment with glass, at the same time making stained glass to support himself. He found that some of his clients were open-minded to his kiln worked pieces instead of stained glass. However, at this stage he found that he was fed up with London.

On one of his visits to Ireland, in about 1988, Kawala showed some pictures of his work to the Furniture Gallery in Parliament Street, who offered him a one man show. At that stage there wasn't anyone working architecturally in glass in Ireland. He phoned the I.D.A. who found him a studio in Gardiner Street so that he wouldn't have to travel between London and Dublin with his glass, and has remained in Ireland since then.



FIGURE NINETEEN

Salah Kawala, The Garden, curved glass wall.

Kawala believes in the art of creating objects which "make life beautiful"¹, and in providing a service to humanity. He is opposed to the art glass movement, and says that very little of what is called art glass is actually 'art', it's just "technical muscle"². Having seen glass chairs that had been made as sculptural statements, he decided to make glass chairs that were both functional and comfortable. Kawala holds the same view as Schurmann, that the only real art glass is when artists use glass because they need the material. He is a strong believer in both function and beauty, and likes the fact that his work can not be made by machines and, as it is time-consuming, can not be industrially produced. He has a dislike for the perfections of industrial glass as, being a Muslim, he believes that only Allah can create perfectly and it is a sin for humans to do so. His work is influenced by other people's ideas as it is mostly commissioned, and consists of slumped and fused functional pieces, such as bowls and screens (Fig.19), which are often brightly coloured. He doesn't go through a design process before making these, but gets his ideas from communicating with the material: "It tells me what to do".³

Roisin de Buitlear graduated from the glass design course at the N.C.A.D. in 1983. Since then, she has worked in Denmark, the Channel Islands, England and Japan, as well as here in Ireland.⁴ She started off primarily working in blown glass (Fig.20), but recently the nature of her work has changed, leading her more into architectural glass. She has made a window for the American Embassy in Dublin, as well as collaborating with Salah Kawala on a curved glass wall for the Blasket Island centre in Co. Kerry in 1993 (Fig.21). She is currently involved in a series of architectural cast glass pieces for the canteen at the Photography Centre in Temple Bar in Dublin, as well as five architectural pieces, and a blown chandelier for a private house in Clonskeagh, Co. Dublin. Her work is inspired by colour, texture, the contrast of forms and textiles. She is a part-time tutor in the glass department at the National College of art and design in Dublin, and has been involved in the relations

¹ Interview with Salah Kawala, Dublin, 1996.

² Interview with Salah Kawala, op. cit.

³ Interview with Salah Kawala, op. cit.

⁴ Barra Boydell, 'Roisin de Buitlear: Glass Artist', Glass Society of Ireland Newsletter, p. 3.

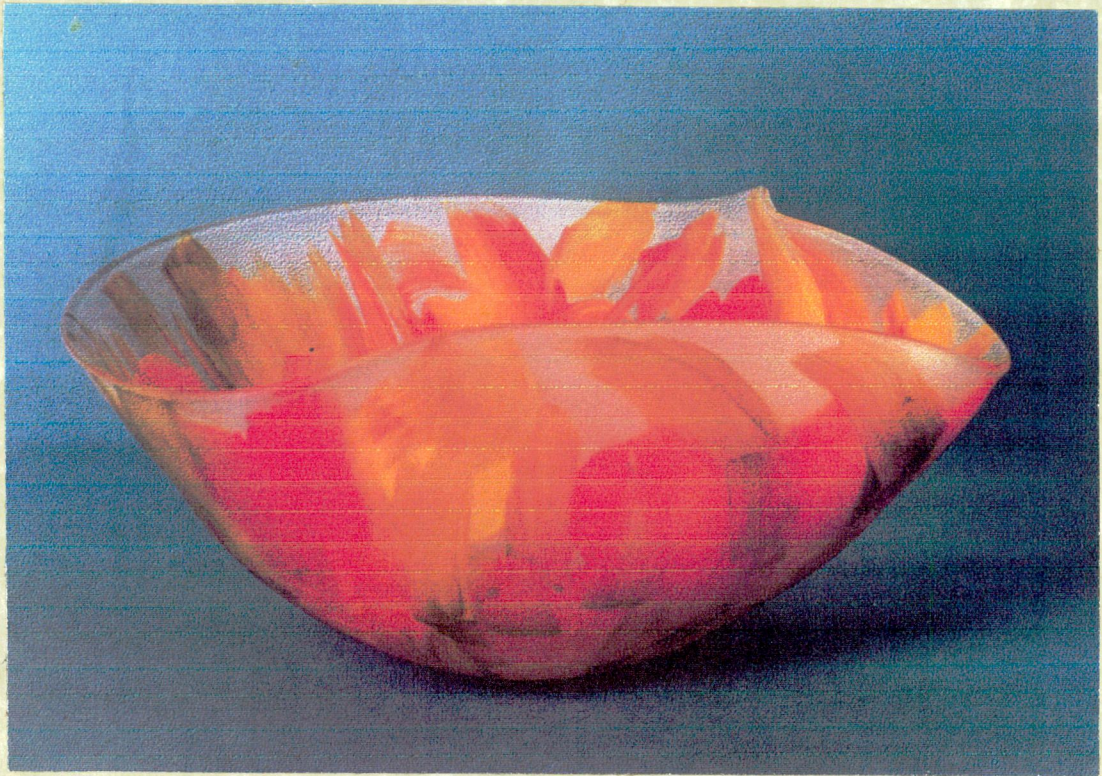


FIGURE TWENTY

Roisin de Buitlear, First Flutter, blown, enamelled and sandblasted glass, 1992.

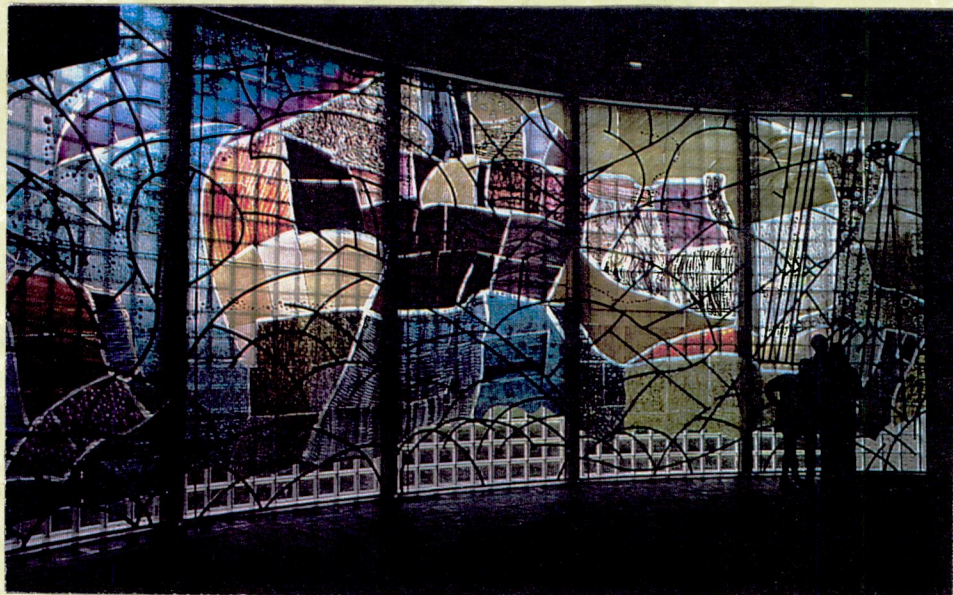


FIGURE TWENTY ONE

Roisin de Buitlear and Salah Kawala, Curved Glass Wall, painted and slumped glass, height-500cm, length-1250cm, 1993.

between the glass students and Waterford Crystal. She helped with the 'Art and Design in Crystal' competition in 1993, and the 'Riverdance' competition, which Waterford set for the students the following year. In 1996, she has set the brief for the Waterford project, which is a more practical one than 'Art and Design in Crystal', and involves the students in both research and development of their ideas. All of the students involved have the chance to engrave, sandblast or cut their designs onto blanks provided by Waterford, as well as there being a three day workshop in cutting and engraving by a Waterford craftsman and time spent learning to mould-blow glass. The winner of this competition is allowed to spend the summer making work at Waterford. Roisin's concept for this project is one to broaden the ideas of the students as to what they can produce given the limitation of factory production techniques, as well as learning to use factory production skills such as cutting and mould-blowing. This is a project which will both teach the students more about the way that Waterford work, and cause less disturbance and cost problems to Waterford, who spent a huge amount of money on the 'Art and Design in Crystal' project.¹

Clifford Rainey is a sculptor who has often used glass in his work. I feel that it is important to include him, as in Killian Schurmann's view about multi-media artists using glass in their work, he uses glass because he needs the material for specific effects.

Rainey studied sculpture at the Polytechnic of North East London from 1969 to 1971. He then worked briefly in glass at the Holmegaard Glassworks in Denmark, before returning to England to study at the Royal College of Art between 1971 and 1973.² Rainey has travelled extensively, visiting places such as America, Turkey and Greece.³ These travels have greatly influenced his work in the use of national and cultural icons such as Greek columns (Fig.22), St. Sebastian and the 'Coke' bottle. He uses the idea of decay and

¹ Interview with Roisin de Buitlear, Dublin, 1996.

² The National Museum of Modern Art, Japan, Contemporary Studio Glass: An International Collection, 1981, p.220.

³ Arts Council Gallery, Clifford Rainey Sculpture and Drawings 1967-1987, Belfast, 1987, p.31.

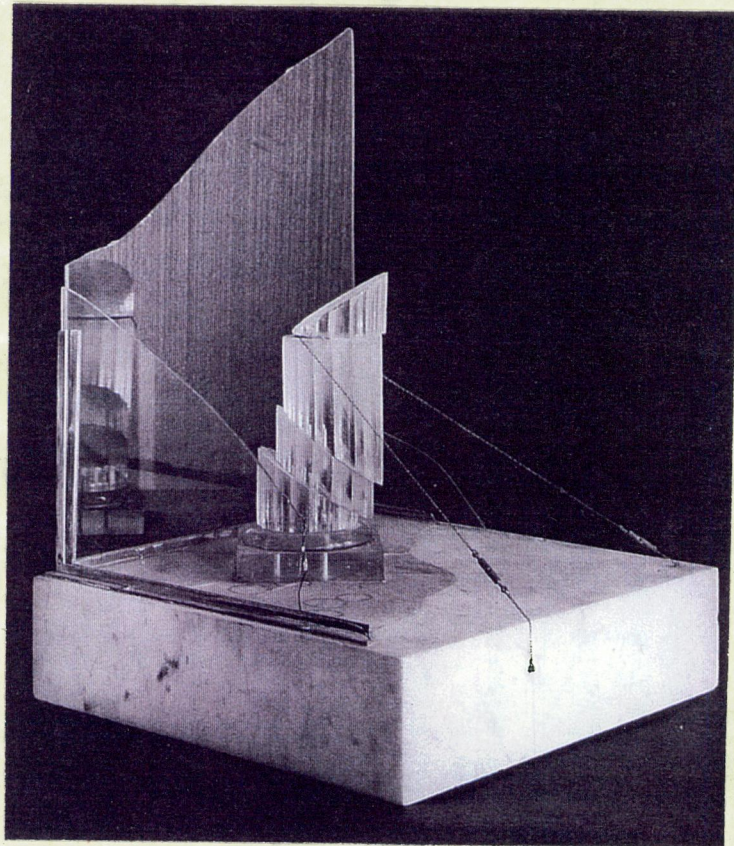


FIGURE TWENTY TWO

Clifford Rainey, Hera, marble and glass,
25 x 25 x 50 cms., 1975.

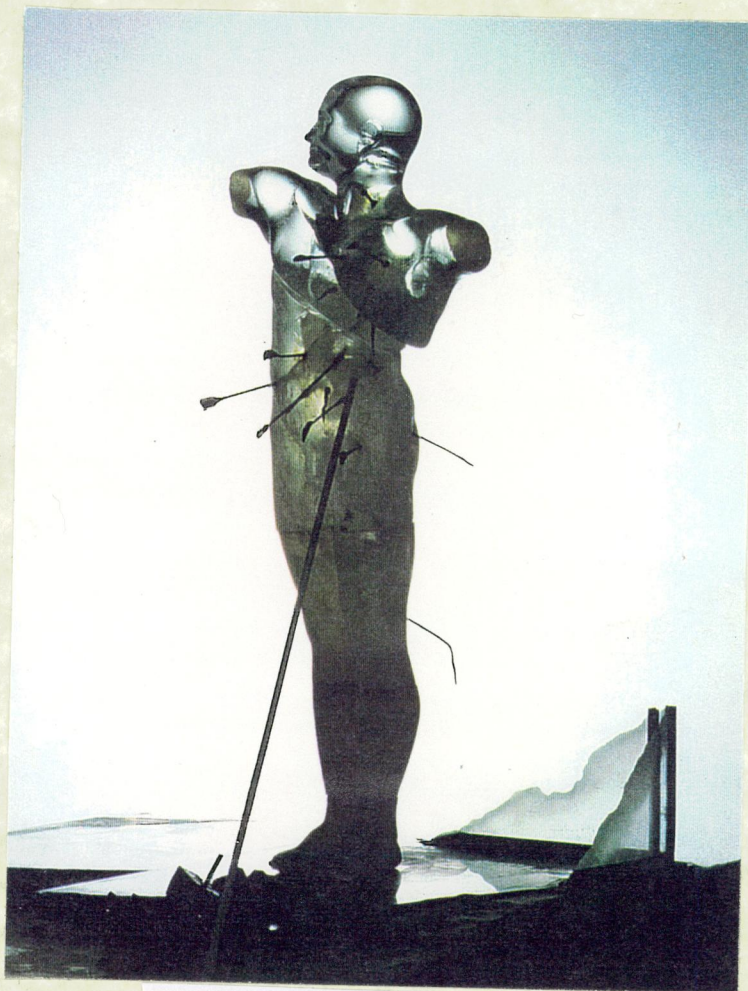


FIGURE TWENTY THREE

Clifford Rainey, Belfast after Palladainolo, glass, iron, marble and
plaster of Paris, height-70cm, width-28cm, 1981.

decay and archeological remains in his work, as well as the lack of successful conservation that has been done on old buildings, using weathering processes such as rusting. He slices some of his figures in the way that columns crack along their weak points.¹ He uses granite and cast iron together-the iron will stain the granite, and will eventually erode.² He also uses rusting metal inside his glass which contrasts with the clarity and pure qualities of the glass as a substance which won't erode (Fig.23).³ Rainey swaps imagery such as St. Sebastian and Greek columns with the 'Coke' bottle. He pierces the bottle with arrows, and relates the curves of the bottle to bulges in old Greek columns and the curves of the human figure.⁴

The Jerpoint Glass Studio, which was started in 1979 in Co. Kilkenny, is a small factory-type workshop run by Keith Leadbetter. Leadbetter trained in glass at Orrefors in Sweden in the late 1960's, after which he visited many of the small studios in Europe and Scandinavia. These greatly influenced the way he works with glass, particularly the simplicity of Scandinavian design.⁵ Jerpoint's glass is a refreshing change from all the cut crystal which is made in Ireland, as none of their glass is cut, and is hand made, rather than being blown into a mould, the process used by industrial manufacturers. They use simple forms, and a small amount of colour in some of their ranges (Fig.24). Although all the people working at Jerpoint are locals, Leadbetter loves to have new people working there, and is open to new ideas.⁶ Maybe here is another place which could be open to working with glass artists in the future.

Another Irishman, Simon Pearce, who introduced Leadbetter to the idea of working with glass, and who studied at Orrefors with him, also has his own studio, but in Vermont in America. Pearce and Leadbetter worked together in a glass blowing studio in Kilkenny when they returned from Sweden.⁷ In the mid 1970's, during the

¹ Arts Council Gallery, Clifford Rainey Sculpture and Drawings 1967-1987, Belfast, 1987, pp.4&5.

² Arts Council Gallery, op. cit., p.8.

³ Arts Council Gallery, op. cit., p.5.

⁴ Arts Council Gallery, op. cit., p.6.

⁵ Una Lehane, 'Artistry in Glass', Irish Times, 25/1/1994, n.p.

⁶ Interview with Deirdre Rogers, op. cit.

⁷ Lehane, op. cit.

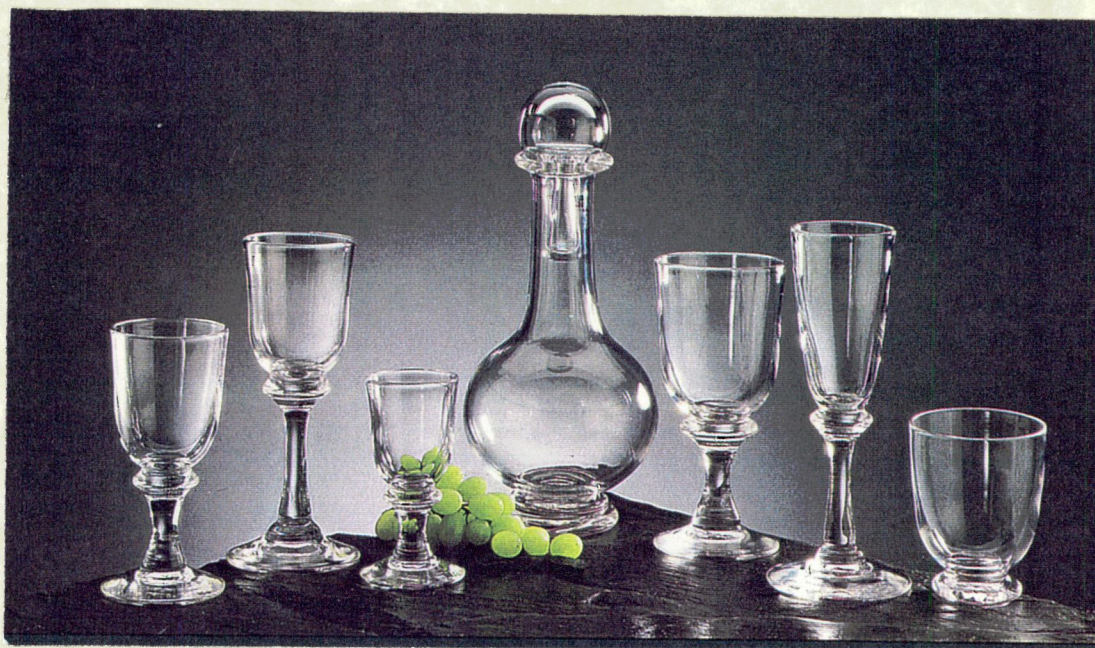


FIGURE TWENTY FOUR

Jerpoint Glass Studio, Straight range,
Kilfane series.



FIGURE TWENTY FIVE

Simon Pearce, Vases.

energy crisis, Pearce decided to move to Vermont where he now uses an old flannel mill as his studio, and runs his furnace on hydro-electric power.¹ In The Mill, as well as a hot glass workshop, he also runs a pottery, a restaurant and a shop which sells Irish goods such as linen and tweed.² The glassware he produces is very similar to that produced at Jerpoint, although he uses only clear glass, as he feels that its clarity is its greatest quality (Fig.25).³ One can also see the Scandinavian influence in his use of pure forms.

The Crafts Council of Ireland, which was established in 1971, and is based at Dublin's Powerscourt Townhouse, is an agency for the national design and economic development of the Irish craft industry. For a number of years it has been supporting Irish craftspeople, and helping them set up their own studios. It is particularly interested in craftworkers who only employ small numbers of people and use traditional, often labour intensive, methods of production.⁴ One of The Crafts Councils' projects is the Crescent Workshop in Kilkenny. This is a course for graduates of craft courses where they are trained to make quality goods for the marketplace. Here they have the opportunity to make work and test it on the market, before setting up a studio themselves. Unfortunately the Crescent Workshop doesn't have facilities for glass blowing, and as a hot glass workshop would be particularly expensive to set up, I don't think it will be included there in the future. However the Crafts Council has been thinking about two other options. One would be to have a hot glass studio where glass artists could rent out spaces, the other would be a course, perhaps at Jerpoint, to train glass artists to make production-line work.⁵

The Crafts Council also has a gallery and shop at its headquarters at the Powerscourt Townhouse. The gallery shows regular exhibitions of international crafts which are innovative in both design and production processes. The shop is a place where top Irish craftspeople can permanently show their work. The Crafts

¹ Simon Pearce brochure, Vermont, U.S.A.

² Simon Pearce brochure, Vermont, U.S.A.

³ Carol Flake, 'Made in Vermont by way of Ireland', *Connoisseur*, vol.221, 1991, pp.104-5.

⁴ Crafts Council of Ireland brochure.

⁵ Lesley Reid, Lecture on Crafts Council of Ireland, 1995.

Council also has a register of craftspeople in Ireland to provide information to retail or wholesale buyers.¹

Whichcraft, situated on Lord Edward Street in Dublin's city centre, is a shop which sells a small amount of contemporary Irish glass, along with ceramics, wood, furniture, jewellery, metalwork and textiles. It was set up to supply Irish craftwork to markets in Ireland and abroad. They sell both work which is contemporary and traditional, functional and sculptural. There is also the advantage of commissions being given due to work being seen there. Whichcraft supports Irish craftspeople who show individuality in a time of mass production.²

The Design Yard in Dublin's Temple Bar is separated into two sections. On the ground floor there is a jewellery gallery where Irish and European jewellery is shown on a yearly basis, as well as having special exhibitions. The jewellery on show is made from a range of materials, including Killian Schurmann's glass hat pins and rings. On the first floor is a commissioning gallery where the emphasis is on Irish applied arts, such as wood, glass, ceramics, textiles and metalwork, for functional interiors. This gallery is a place for selling work, but also puts an emphasis on the idea of commissions.³

The Guinness Gallery is situated in suburban Foxrock, Co. Dublin, and specialises in contemporary art glass, as well as exhibiting paintings, sculpture, design orientated crafts and giftware from Europe. Elizabeth Guinness, one of the gallery directors, is a council member of the Glass Society of Ireland as well as being a glass collector, which explains the gallery's particular interest in exhibiting glass, and has a few glass collectors among its clientele. It produces a newsletter twice a year, giving information on forthcoming exhibitions as well as general glass and craft news. The three gallery directors keep in touch with the work of the craftspeople they exhibit, as well as looking out for new and interesting work at exhibitions such as the Chelsea Craft Fair in London. Among the artists that are regularly exhibited are most of

¹ Crafts Council of Ireland brochure.

² Whichcraft brochure.

³ Design Yard brochure.

the glass artists currently working in Ireland such as Roisin de Buitlear, Jim Griffiths, Killian Schurmann and Salah Kawala¹.

The Solomon Gallery, in the Powerscourt Townhouse, Dublin, is an art gallery which has shown three major glass exhibitions over the last few years. In 1987, 'Ice, Fire & Light', an exhibition of contemporary studio glass, was shown there. Among the work exhibited were pieces by four Irish based artists - Roisin de Buitlear, Keith Leadbetter, Roisi Phelan and Killian Schurmann. The Solomon Gallery also exhibited the results of the 'Art and Design in Crystal' competition in 1994, and Dale Chihuly's exhibition in 1995.

Suzanne Macdougald, owner of the Solomon Gallery since 1991, has always been interested in studio glass and has constantly strived to promote it to the Irish public as an art form in its own right. Her previous premises, the Lad Lane Gallery was the first gallery in Ireland to exhibit contemporary studio glass. She has worked closely with Michael Robinson, former Curator of Decorative Arts at the Ulster Museum, to select the best in Irish, British and American glass artists. The gallery also has a permanent collection of glass which is annually exhibited at their Christmas group show.²

¹ Letter from Kate Munro of the Guinness Gallery, February 1996.

² Letter from Tara Murphy of the Solomon Gallery, February 1996.

CHAPTER FIVE

FOCUSING ON EXAMPLES OF VENTURES INTO INDUSTRY
BY THE BRITISH ART GLASS MOVEMENT

The British art glass movement started in the 1960's and was influenced by the art glass movement in America, Scandinavia, and Czechoslovakia. In the mid 1960's the American glass artist Sam Herman arrived onto the British glass scene. At that time, the only facilities for glass making were in crystal factories and colleges, where the students rarely touched the glass themselves.

In 1965, Sam Herman went to the Edinburgh College of Art on a Fullbright scholarship. He then went on, in 1967, to be in charge of the first course in glass making at the Royal College of Art. Not everyone liked the way he works, using strong forms and colours. He allows the fluid qualities of the hot glass to remain in the finished pieces, giving the glass freedom to move on its own rather than controlling the whole process (Fig.26). He sometimes designs pieces before making them, but more often comes up with the ideas while working with the glass. Some of those who were students of his, such as Pauline Solven, Ray Flavell and Annette Meech, decided to follow his way of working, using glass in a free way, and they have since become well-known glass artists.¹ It is these people who really brought about the British art glass movement.

Sam Herman also helped to set up The Glasshouse which began in 1969 in Covent Garden, London. It was a hot glass workshop which was used as a halfway house between college and the outside world, where small amounts of glass could be produced breaking away from the industrial process. It also included a gallery where the work could be exhibited. It has since been bought by a group of glass artists as a place to make and sell their work. Other glass workshops have since opened throughout England based on the idea of The Glasshouse, to break away from industry. Peter Layton, who helped to set up The Glasshouse, set up the London Glassblowing

¹ Crafts Council, Contemporary British Glass, London, 1993, p.13.



FIGURE TWENTY SIX

Sam Herman, Vase, free-blown and applied
glass, height-18.5cm, 1967.

Workshop in 1970.¹ There are about thirty glass courses in Britain now, quite a large number for a place of its size.

In the 1970's, when the British studio glass movement was just beginning, hot glass studios started on a very experimental basis. Artists had to design any equipment they wanted to use, make up their own glass recipes, and find techniques which suited them. During this stage, Scandinavian glass began to influence their work.

In 1976, a conference and workshop was held at The Royal College of Art on 'Working with Glass'. This became a turning point in British glass. Among those speaking and teaching there were Chihuly from America, Libensky from Prague and other artists from Czechoslovakia. This gave British glass artists more ideas for working with glass as well as bringing in influences from the countries involved.²

In the early 1970's, an important event happened which was the setting up of the Crafts Council.³ This organisation helps craftspeople to set themselves up with advice and grants as well as providing a space in which to exhibit their work.

Overall, there aren't many places for glass artists to sell their work in Britain. They need to have a sideline to support themselves: teaching, designing for factory production or setting up small studio production lines, as not many British glass artists have the kind of recognition necessary to support themselves.⁴

The R.S.A. (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufacturers & Commerce) was founded in 1754 and runs design competitions for students in the United Kingdom. The R.S.A. hopes to create a civilised society based on a sustainable economy by introducing new ideas to manufacturers. Its main areas of interest are business and industry, design and technology, education, the arts and the environment. One of the yearly design competitions run by the R.S.A. is for glassware. The competition is centred

¹ Dan Klein, Glass: A Contemporary Art, 1989, p.148.

² Crafts Council, op. cit., p.15

³ Crafts Council, op. cit., p.9

⁴ Crafts Council, op. cit., p.14.

around Dartington Crystal, the brief being to design innovative glassware based on Dartington's ethos.¹

In 1994-5, Belinda Hornsey won the R.S.A. Student Design Award for glass. She was at the time studying at Staffordshire University. Her work is inspired both by nature and the fluid, even organic qualities of hot glass. Hornsey emphasises simple curves and lines in her work to evoke movement and elegance in vessel forms. These vessels can either be one-off pieces, or for mass production² (Fig.27).

The Dartington Crystal Factory was established in 1967 in Torrington, Devon by the Dartington Hall Trust. The aim of the trust was to bring life back into the economic, social and cultural status of rural areas. Dartington concentrates on simplicity in its glassware, inspired by Swedish design, and still employs ten Scandinavian glass makers. It produces a wide range of products with an emphasis on contemporary design (Fig.28), constantly reviewing its range, and bringing in new ideas. It also has a studio where glass artists can make their own work.³

Rachael Woodman studied glass at the North Staffordshire Polytechnic until 1979, followed by a time spent at the glass school in Orrefors, Sweden⁴. She continued her studies at the Royal College of Art from 1982 until 1984. She has worked as a glass blower and designer for the Snogebaek Glashytte in Denmark and the Strawberry Farm Glassworks in Jersey. Woodman helped to start up a glass blowing studio in Bath with Neil Wilkin, with whom she works as a blowing partner⁵. Even though she has this studio, Woodman is one of three glass artists doing experimental work in Dartington Crystal's studio facility, where she also works as a designer.

¹ Brochure on the student design awards run by the R.S.A.

² Staffordshire University, Clear Visions, Glass Design Degree Show, 1995, Stafford.

³ Brochure on Dartington Crystal, Torrington, Devon.

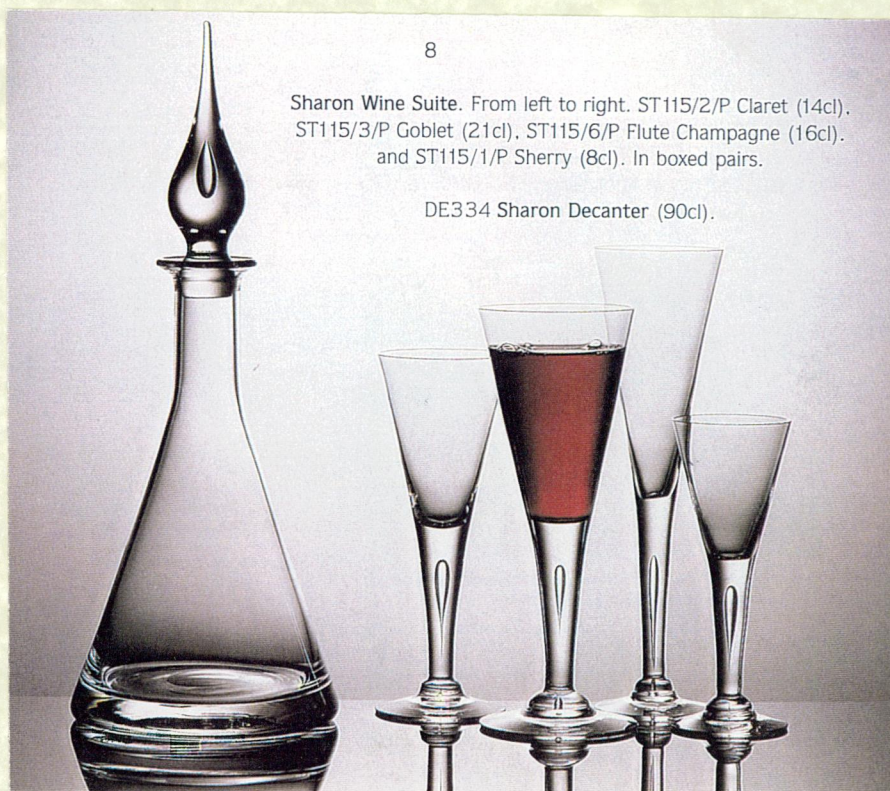
⁴ Graham Hughes, 'Glass by Rachael Woodman', Arts Review, Vol.40, 25 March 1988, p.204.

⁵ Rosita Bernstein, 'Rachel Woodman', Neues Glas, Vol.2, April/June 1987, p.84.



FIGURE TWENTY SEVEN

Belinda Hornsey, Landscapes, sandblasted
clear and coloured blown glass,
height-30cm, width-9cm, 1995.



8

Sharon Wine Suite. From left to right. ST115/2/P Claret (14cl).
ST115/3/P Goblet (21cl). ST115/6/P Flute Champagne (16cl).
and ST115/1/P Sherry (8cl). In boxed pairs.

DE334 Sharon Decanter (90cl).

FIGURE TWENTY EIGHT

Dartington Crystal, Exmoor Suite.

Woodman's work is a series of simple bowls made up of layers of colour. While they are simple in form, the technique she uses is complex, involving two hot bubbles of different coloured glass being joined end to end, one then being folded over the other. When the bowls are cold, she grinds and polishes, bevels or sandblasts the thick rims to give different effects where the colours meet¹ (Figs.29&30).

¹ Hughes, op. cit. p.204.

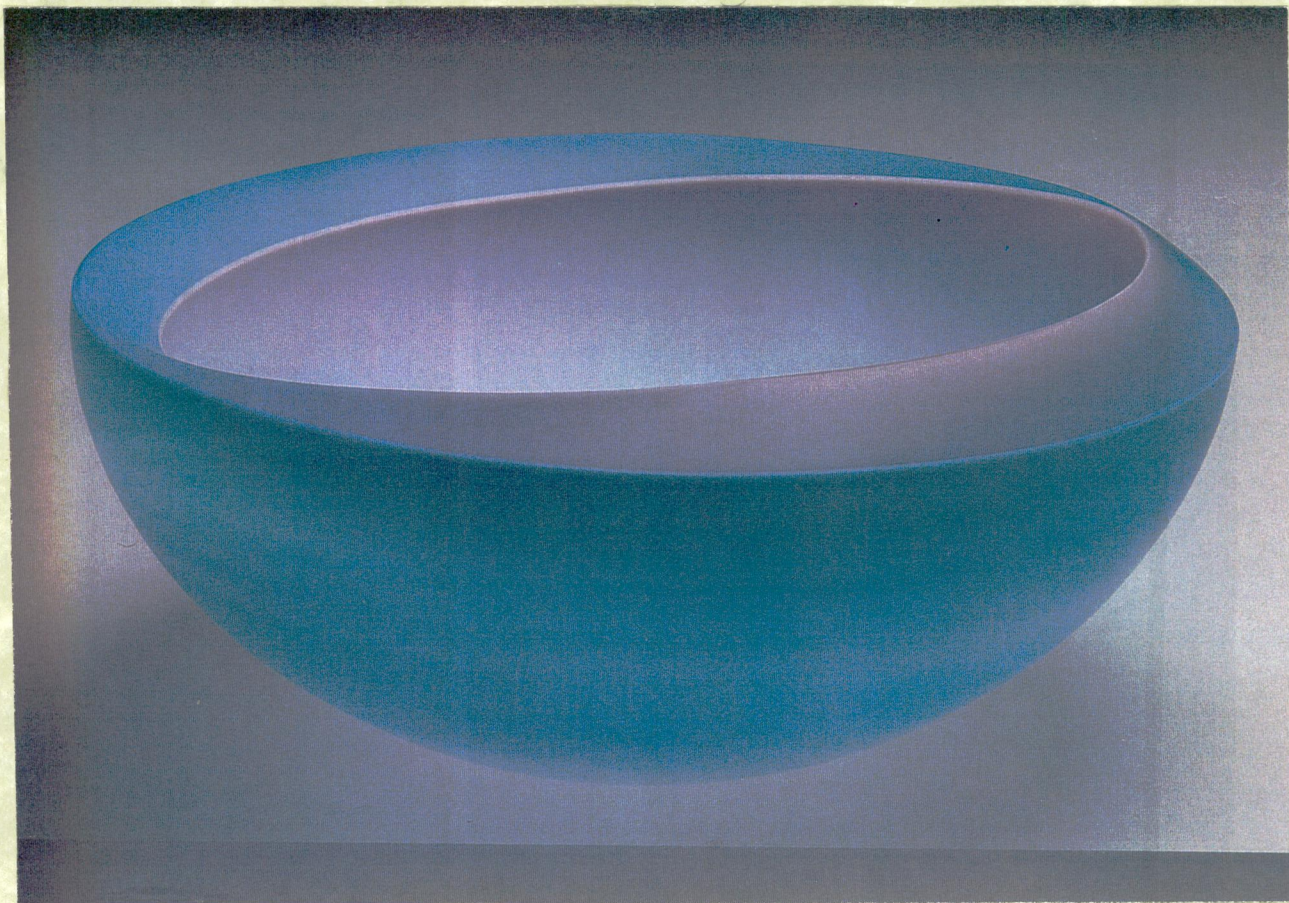


FIGURE TWENTY NINE

Rachael Woodman, Heavy crystal bowl with
inverted bevel, diameter-18cm.

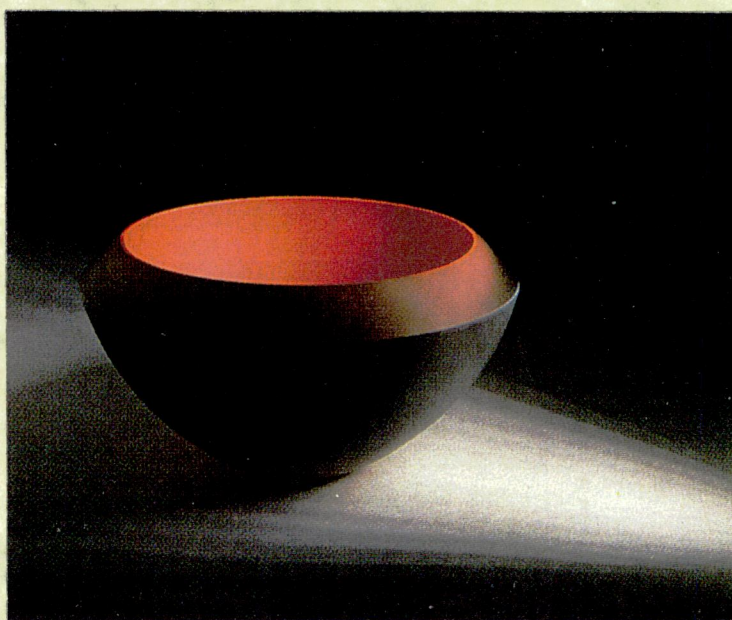


FIGURE THIRTY

Rachael Woodman, Heavy crystal bowl,
diameter-13cm.

CONCLUSION

In Ireland, glass has only relatively recently begun to be used as a medium for artistic expression in comparison to countries such as Czechoslovakia and America. As a result of this, there are only a small number of glass artists working here. However these artists are a group of people who keep in contact with each other, and are open to working together and sharing their ideas.

I have found, through writing my thesis, that there are exciting possibilities now opening up in glass in this country. The idea of Waterford Crystal becoming open to working with glass artists and students is one which has a great deal of potential for the future of Irish glass.

Every year the number of glass artists in Ireland grows larger due to the glass design course at the N.C.A.D., however, not many of these people remain in Ireland. The main opportunity for employment in glass is working in hot glass studios, however Killian Schurmann is the only person with this facility in the country, and he prefers to work on his own. After the three years working with glass before graduating, students still don't have enough skills in working with glass, or knowledge of business and marketing to set up their own hot glass workshop. As this is an expensive investment, graduates often go abroad for employment, and to build up their skills and knowledge. Some of these glass artists may choose to remain working abroad, however some of them will return with what they have learnt, and set up small workshops here, as Ireland seems to draw people back, having a different quality of life to any other country.

While conducting research for a marketing project during my third year in college, I found that while modern production line glass, such as Jerpont, is selling fairly well in Dublin, in more rural areas such as Sligo, glass isn't selling well at all. This is something which has to be taken into consideration when starting up a studio, as line of production pieces has to be made in order to support yourself. American tourists, especially, are always open to buying Irish products, but they have a more exciting choice of contemporary glass at home. Perhaps when more hot glass

which has to be taken into consideration when starting up a studio, as line of production pieces has to be made in order to support yourself. American tourists, especially, are always open to buying Irish products, but they have a more exciting choice of contemporary glass at home. Perhaps when more hot glass workshops have been set up here, and there is greater competition, there will be a more exciting range of glass on the market.

The most exciting thing that is happening in Irish glass at the moment is Waterford Crystal's openness to working with glass artists, and their desire for change. They have based their student design competition on the one run by the R.S.A. and Dartington Crystal, as well as wanting to change their production line pieces into a more contemporary style, possibly like Dartington. Perhaps they will also continue to follow the lead of Dartington and include a studio area where glass artists can make their own work in the future.

It is impossible to tell what will happen in Irish glass in the future, but hopefully this thesis sheds a light on future possibilities, as well as giving an insight into the work currently being made glass artists in this country.

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