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National College of Art & Design Craft Design, Glass.

GLASS INSTALLATIONS

THE WORK OF FOUR CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS

STEVE TOBIN,
BERTIL VALLIEN,
BERNARD DEJONGHE,
&
DALE CHIHULY.

By Ruth O'Leary

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INTRODUCTION

The discovery of the material glass dates back before the birth of Christ. Since the beginning, the material of glass was honored for both its suppleness as well as its hardness, also for its fragility and most especially for its qualities of optical illusion. It has come down through time, interacting with man's spirit and skill but still holds great untapped possibilities. Discoveries of glass objects from various ancient cultures show that glass objects have functioned not only for everyday table use, decoration and representation but also very early on for sacred needs. The essential concept of the Christian Eucharist is embodied in a cup containing the Blood of the Lamb. That this vessel was made of glass has been drawn into the doctrine of the Crucifixion. A glass bowl was believed to be the first Holy Grail. Glass traps and emits qualities of light. In the church, the divine origin of light whether coming from above, being reflected or passing through transparent matter represented an opposition to the powers of darkness. The Sacred Objects made from this glass were seen to be endowed with some sort of magic power.

Glass is a mass of contradictions, fragile and strong, hot and cold, liquid and solid, opaque and transparent. No other artistic medium possesses such qualities of transparency and reflection. Traditionally, it has been used primarily for the production of mostly functional objects, artistic forms which were largely confined to decorative glassware styles.

The sculptor Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) was one of the first major figures of the twentieth century to use glass for its inherent material qualities, in his piece *The Bride Stripped Bare*. (1965-1966). (Fig.1)

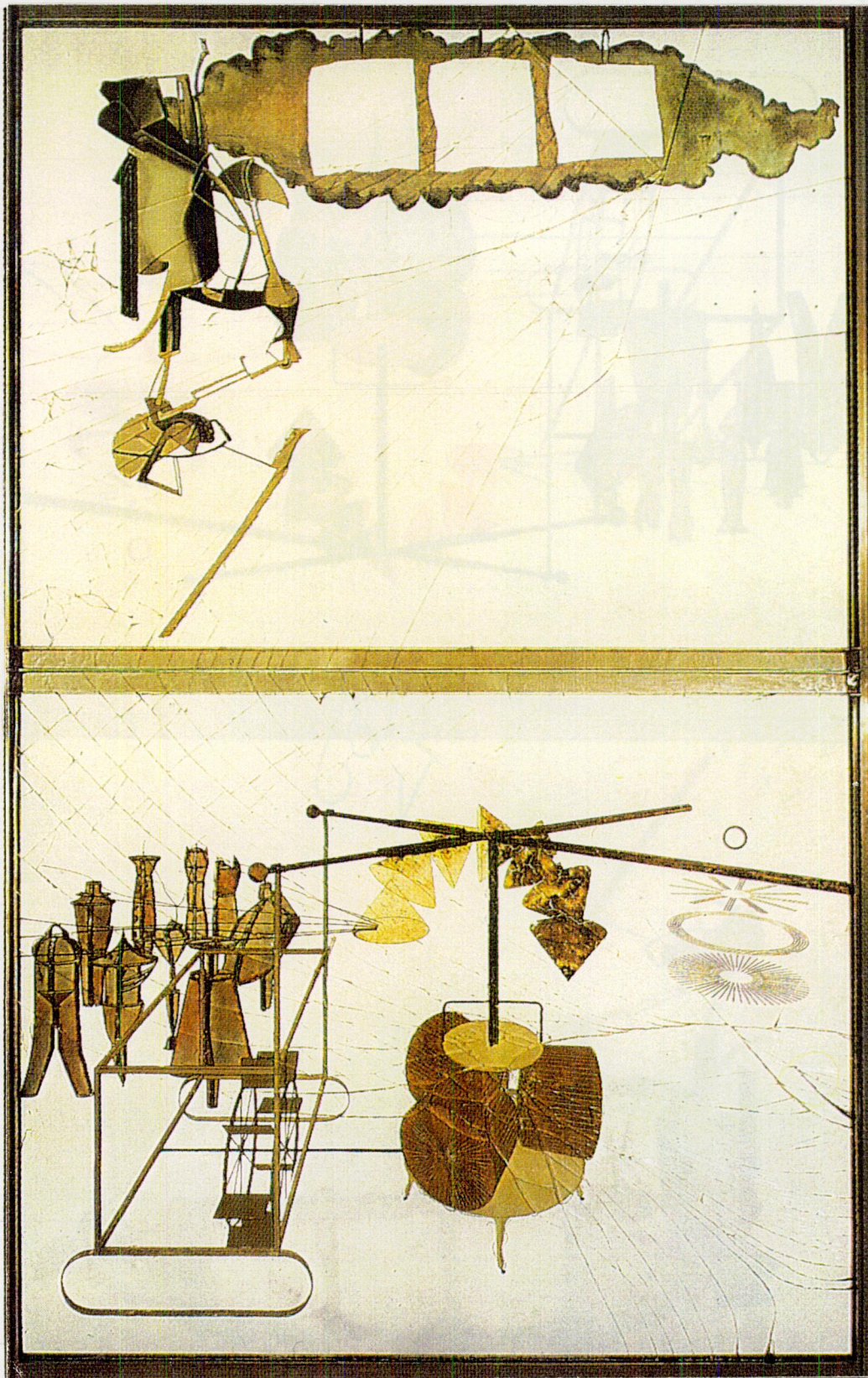
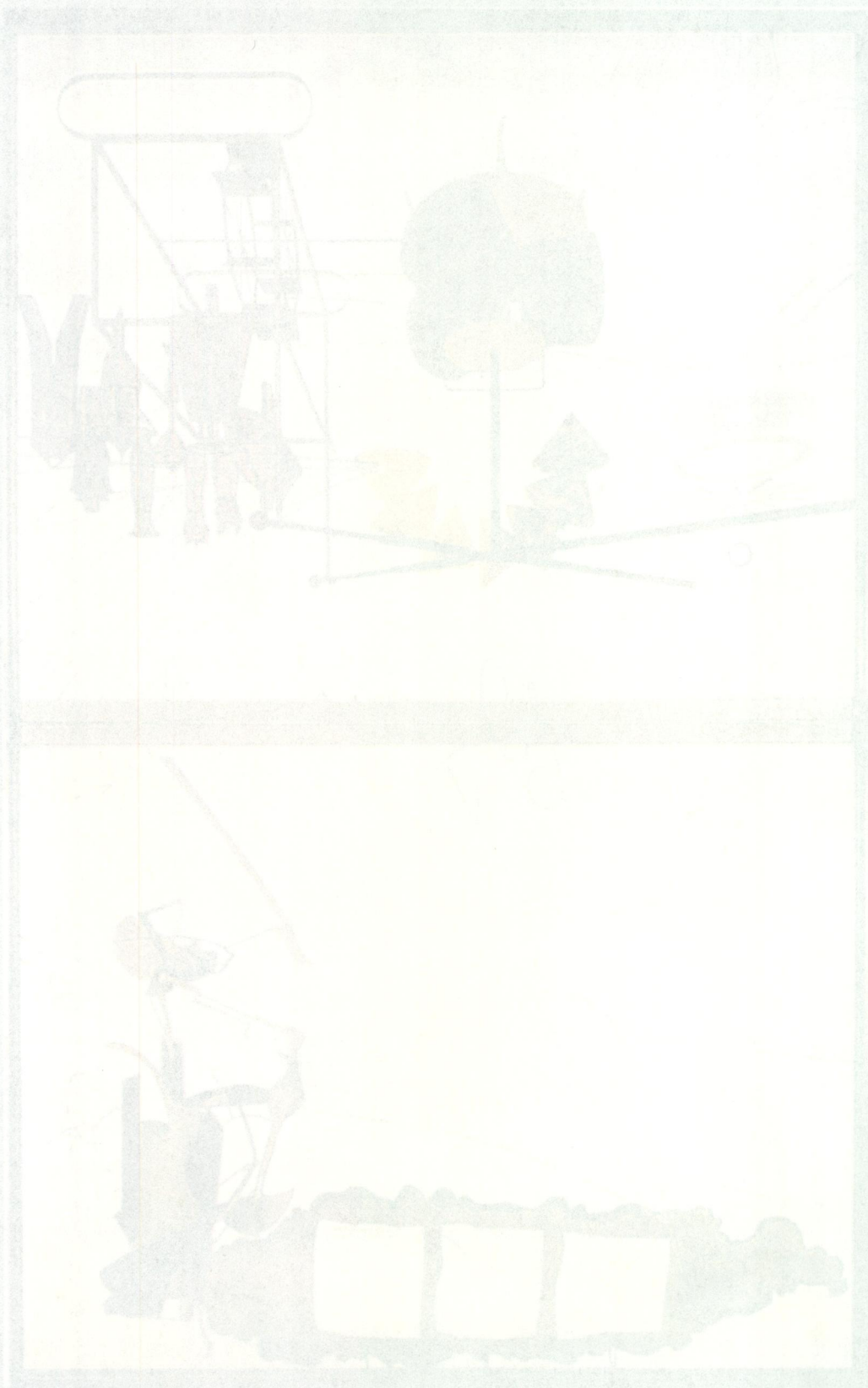


Figure 1: Marcel Duchamps
'The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors'
(1965-1966)

(1952-1955)

The artist's studio, 1952-1955

Figure 1



Here he takes glass at face value and uses its transparent characteristics as a conceptual fragile blackboard for his work. It may be suggested Duchamp was using glass as a metaphor by encouraging the spectator to look through the physical matter of the piece, to grasp a higher mental perception of the work.

The studio glass movement of the Fifties in countries such as America, Czechoslovakia, France and in the Mediterranean and in Northern Europe encouraged experimentation of different techniques in the areas of blowing, kiln casting, slumping and sandcasting. Glass was seen as a fresh, modern-looking, new medium to use, attracting artists from all fields of craft and fine art. In the last decade, glass art has begun to move even further into installation, an area that has traditionally been seen in the fine art area. Installations are arguably among the most original, vigorous and fertile forms of art today. No large scale survey of contemporary glass or of mainstream art would be complete without glass installations. It is these pieces that usually attract the greatest attention and cause the most excitement in glass exhibitions. The prominence of installations in specific non-art sites also continues to figure among the concerns of a number of contemporary glass artists

Three artist's working with glass, who have attempted to extend their areas of installation from the gallery space to non-art public sites are Steve Tobin, Bernard Dejonghe and Bertil Vallien. Vallien's installations are generally indoors, while Tobin's and Dejonghe's are set in the natural environment. For these three artists the essential aesthetic criterion is creation as a liberal expression, unconnected to functional and decorative conditions. They use glass because it suits their artistic needs. They use glass to reinforce their concepts and personal philosophies of life and art. The material itself

fascinates them and has at some time controlled their art. Each one of these artists has a great knowledge of the material and has pushed himself to use it as an innovative medium of expression.

Tobin, Vallien and Dejonghe have a common interest running through their work, that is , the in-depth relationship between man and life and man with nature. Very often glass installations in the natural environment, if approached incorrectly, can lead to a dangerous violation of ecological balance. For these artists, the confrontation of their artistic compositions with selected terrain and vegetation is a challenge. Each of the installations they have produced has transformed the surrounding space into a stage of discovery for the observer, who gains an insight into the creator's space and the interior world of the artist's feelings and dreams. On occasions, spectators are also invited into the piece, where they can relate to their own lives. This is especially seen in the work of Steve Tobin. They are being urged to look at society, to pull away the veil it has covered our eyes with, and to re-evaluate what the important things in life really are.

I spent three weeks working on Dale Chihuly's project *Chihuly over Venice*, when it was based at Waterford Crystal's factory in September 1995. Chihuly has been described as a master glass designer and blower. When he began his installation work in the Sixties, he was sculpturally concerned with light and space. However, he has not developed conceptually beyond the material side of glass creation. He is content to be a decorator. His latest project, the production of large-scale, organic-looking chandeliers hung in Venice, the historic Italian center for glass production, was not as successful as he anticipated. Chihuly was primarily concerned with the quantity of production and the

superficial material of glass, rather than the environment his pieces were to inhabit or the depth of meaning behind the forms.

In my thesis I hope to show the necessity and importance of glass not just as a material for the decorative crafts, but also as a modern medium suitable for personal artistic expression. I also ask what qualities are necessary in an artist's concepts and his installation work to comfortably fit it with both a the natural and gallery environment.

CHAPTER ONE:

History of Glass in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century's

Today glass is seen as a material which is enjoying a growing interest as a medium for contemporary art, a statement which was not as true at the beginning of this century.

At the turn of the twentieth century, glass artists were seen as amateurs, primarily concerned in producing glass for themselves. There was a huge growth in the size of furnaces, glassmaking developed into a heavy industry, production techniques were developed and moulds were used to mass-produce functional glassware for everyday use in the home. The glass artist could not compete with the rate of production or industries competitive prices; therefore smaller studios found it harder to survive. During the height of the Industrial Revolution glass was on the shelf not on the pedestal. The Arts and Crafts Movement of the late nineteenth century led by architects and designers such as William Morris, W. R. Lathaby and C. R. Ashbee were in protest to the heaviness of Victorian style. The glass manufacturer James Powell and Sons of Whitefriars, responded to this plea for change. The company was chosen by William Morris to execute glass designs commissioned from architects and artists of this era for example Philip Webb and Edward Burne Jones. The Arts and Crafts Movement believed in a move away from industrialization towards hand worked craftsmanship. The best option for the glass artist was to work for a factory as a designer of moulds, to produce functional ware. In doing so, he was guaranteed a ready market at the cost of losing part of his artistic freedom while designing. However there were a number of artists who persevered and managed to produce their own work for example Louis Comfort Tiffany, René Lalique and Emile Gallé. Emile Gallé(1846-1904) began his career studying botany, philosophy and drawing. He then spent four years learning glass technology at Meisenthal, a factory in Alsace, France. Gallé was very fortunate to inherit his family business of manufacturing faience pottery and crystal. Within his factory, he created a

large design studio which promoted the continuous research of glass. Like William Morris, Gallé believed that the craftsman's spontaneity, commitment and self respect were vital to the quality of the finished work. Gallé accepted glass as the perfect material to convey all his dreams and aspirations as early as the 1860's when its artistic potential was little realized. Gallé's importance lies not only in the enormous influence he had upon his time but in the significance of so many of his ideas and attitudes to glass art today.(Fig.2). Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1936) began his career as a painter and interior designer and turned to glass when he became interested in the decorative potential of leaded glass. By 1893, he had set up a factory at Corona on Long Island to produce both blown and flat glass for leaded windows. The factory produced a vast range of colours and textures in glass, using contemporary designs, varying and combining colours, styles and techniques to such an effect that few fashionable homes in America were without his work. (Fig.3)

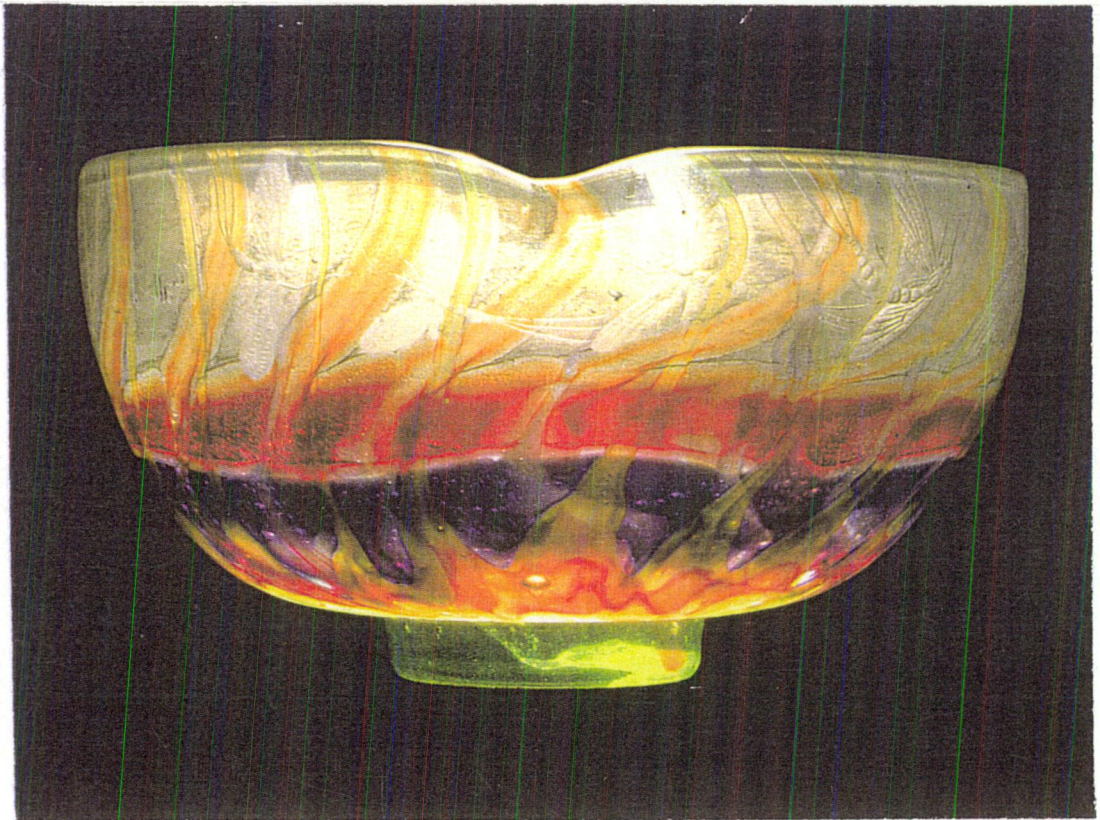


Figure 2: Emile Gallé
'Coloured Bowl' (1900)
12.4cm x 6.8cm, clear glass, cased colour
Wheel engraved decoration

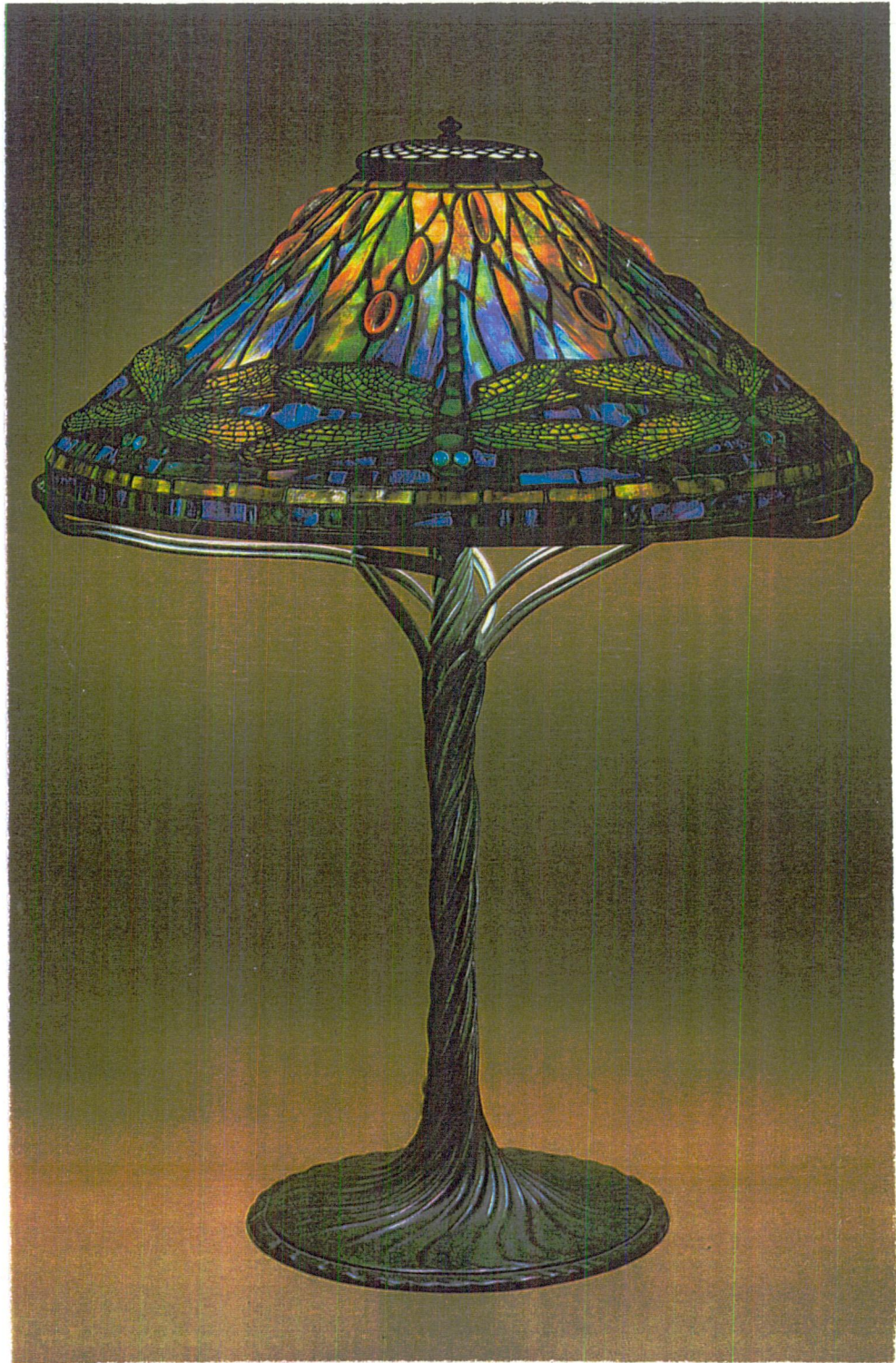


Figure 3: Louis Comfort Tiffany
'Dragonfly Table Lamp' (1915)
26 ½''h x 20''dia.

The horrors of World War One (1914-1918) brought changes in attitudes in art and the sweetness of Art Nouveau seemed inappropriate, giving way to a tougher, harsher philosophy which claimed that function determined form. Functionalism, by no means a new idea, demanded a purity of form and freedom from ornament.

In the United States a search gradually began for ways of simplifying the intricate industrial process. It was not until the end of the Second World War (1939-1945) that a number of new materials, styles and techniques could be investigated and exploited.

New technology, widespread experimentation and fundamental changes of attitude led to a new freedom of approach in arts and crafts and, most importantly, glass began to be recognized as a medium not just for craft, so that sculpture, photography and painting turned to glass as a new and fresh appealing art medium. Glassworks, for example in Sweden at Orrefors, Kosta and Åfors, in Czechoslovakia at Novy Bór, Jan Letz and Zeleny Bród, and in France at Kralik and Daum realized that artists could bring them notice and prestige. Studios were set up, usually attached to these factories, where artists could produce their own work. There were prizes to be won at glass fairs throughout the world and it may be suggested that prestige for the factory became as important as making a profit. This interest in glass resulted in the revival of interest in the whole process of glassmaking, a movement known now as the studio glass movement.

The World Crafts Council of the late Fifties, based in the U.S., used such mottoes as “handmade charm” “respect for the individual artist” and “reflection on the human alienation in a super-industrialized society”¹.

Mass-production and abundant provision of cheap, useful, machine-made articles untouched by the human hand liberated the craftsman from the need to produce functional objects. There was no market for artist's expensive (in comparison to factory glass) utilitarian objects so they began experimenting in the European and American studio's, creating more sculptural and decorative forms.

Two countries which played a huge role in the revival of modern glass were America, with its fresh, experimental and daring attitudes, and Czechoslovakia, which had sought a high quality of skill, purity and diversity of creativity in its work since the turn of the century. In the United States (and subsequently in other countries), the studio glass movement came into existence as soon as craftsmen and artists began building their own furnaces, melting their raw materials and using blowpipes to create handblown work. This was largely due to the perseverance and work of two men, Harvey K. Littleton and Dominick Labino. Littleton, a former ceramist, had an unwavering vision and ambition while Labino, a scientist and artist, succeeded in developing an accessible formula which allowed glass to melt at a lower cost in a smaller pot than an industrial glass melting pot. After Littleton built a suitable furnace, they held the first ever glass workshop in 1962 in a disused building in the grounds of the Museum of Art in Toledo, enabling glass to be produced with simple, inexpensive equipment. Glassblowing could therefore become an activity for the individual, resulting in widespread experimentation and advances in the glassblowing area. The resulting enthusiasm and skills encouraged experimentation in other areas, including slumping, fusing, kiln work and sandcasting.(Fig.4)

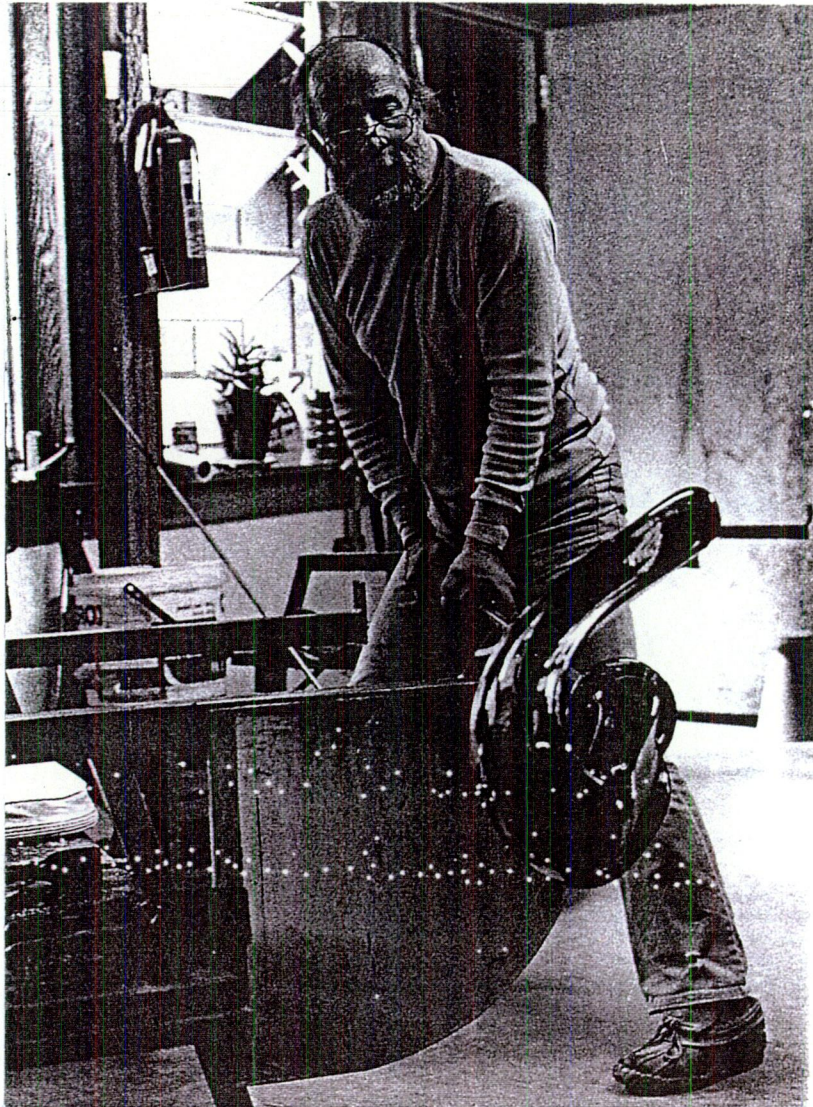


Figure 4: Harvey K. Littleton
'Experimental Glass' (1962)

Since the Middle Ages, Czechoslovakia has been associated with glassmaking and has developed many techniques including cutting, enameling and gilding on crystal and coloured glass. The characteristics of Bohemian glass are heaviness, hot furnace forming and decorating techniques with engraving and cutting (Fig.5). The Bohemian glass industry was slower than Britain, America, France and Germany to introduce mechanized production, therefore, by the late nineteenth century, it was still to a large extent based on a traditional hand-manufacturing process with the exception of flat and container glass production. Successful collaboration between designers and factories would transform glassmaking in the twentieth century. Foreign styles were adopted intact but usually absorbed and altered to fit the Czech cultural climate and traditions. Both parties realized quite early on that they could be of benefit to one another - factories getting high quality designs and artists, and designers getting facilities and materials impossible to attain at the time outside the glassworks. This successful combination can be especially seen with Stanislav Libensky and his wife Jaraslov Brychtova working at the glassworks in Zelenzy Bród (Fig.6). In Bohemia, the beginning of the twentieth century was a fruitful period for both artists and factories. The independent Czech government of this time realized the potential of glass. It was publicized at home and abroad as a symbol of the new state's cultural program in the economic sphere, and enhanced the Czech's historically established reputation for creative glassmaking. During the last hundred years Czech glass has searched for its own identity and meaning amidst dramatic and often antagonistic historical developments in their national politics and internal affairs.



Figure 5: Karl Pfohl
 'Lines Attacking A Caravan' (1880)
 Traditional Bohemian Glass.
 'The Good Samaritan' (1858)



Figure 6: Stanislav Libensky
'Three coloured Bottles' (1964)
Designs for Novy Bor factory.

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed numerous changes in political power, causing confusion and complete disruption in the production of glass. Nazi German occupation during World War Two closed all forms of higher education in Bohemia. The socialist government from 1945-1955 demanded that all artists be servile and subordinate to party doctrines. Artists were still able to create their own work as long as it was favorable to the government of the time; art was principally seen as important for illustrating political ideals or as a purely decorative form, while artists were forced to live under an oppressive totalitarian regime. These socialist ruling governments only wanted a noteworthy international presence and therefore encouraged lavish displays of art as propaganda, urging artists to participate in exhibitions worldwide. They financed a national system of intensively technical glass schools, for instance at the Central Arts Centre in Prague, at the schools for glassmaking in Nůvy Bór and Zelený Bród; this ensured the production of a reservoir of world class glass artists. Czech artists such as Dana Vachtová, Libenský, Brychtová, and Jaroslav Matouš realized if they kept close to the glass factory and had the support of the government, they could produce large-scale works showing the sculptural qualities of glass in interior design. (Fig. 7)

Their skill, level of experimentation and ideas during the Thirties and Forties were way ahead of their time and of their fellow artists abroad in America and Europe. Czech artists were also among the first to realize the concept of glass as a non-utilitarian or functional art object. Their sole purpose was not to present glass as a beautiful material but also to use it as a medium of expression, a medium which could dramatically represent personal, spiritual and aesthetic concerns.

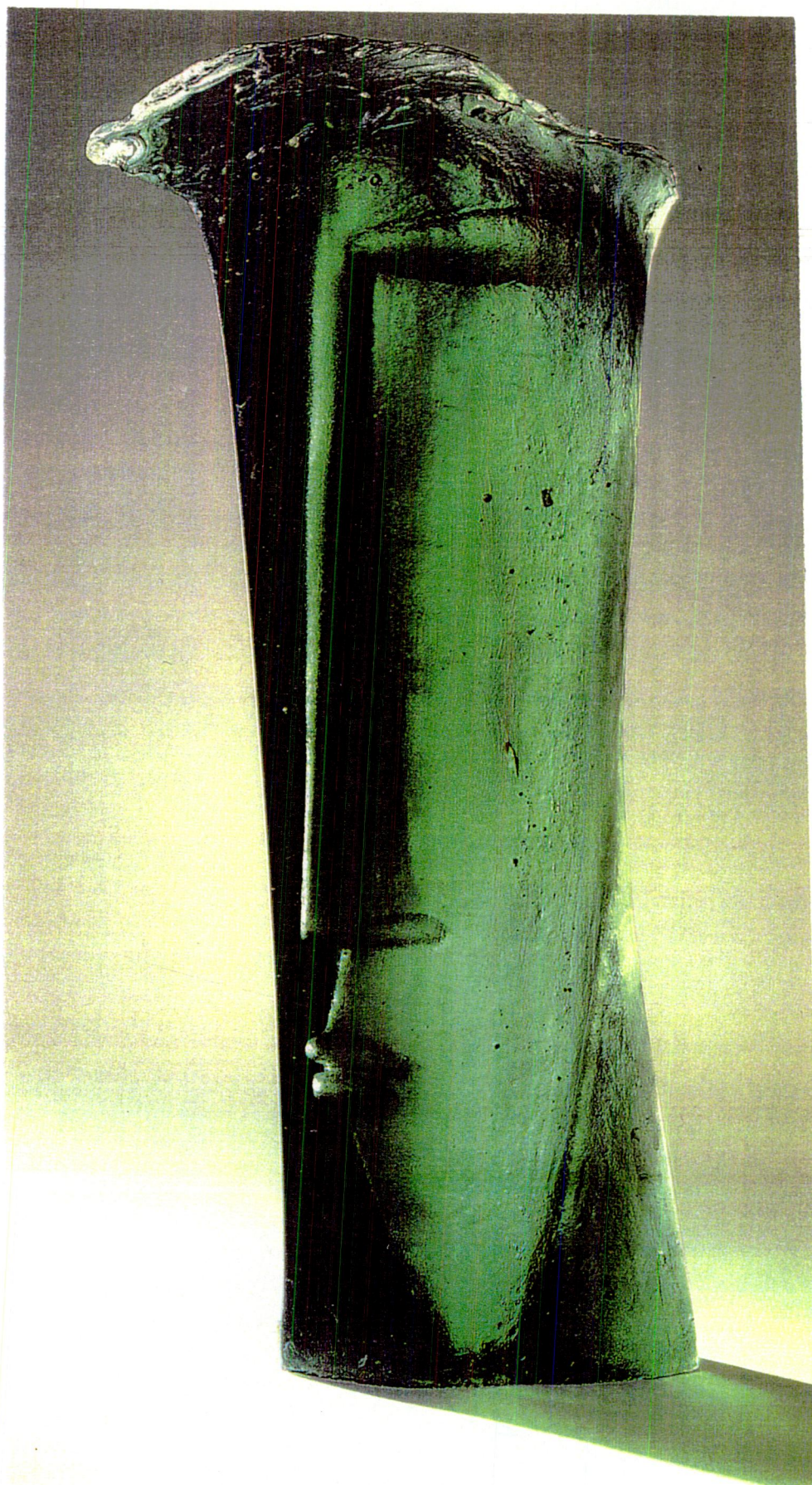


Figure 7:

Stanislav Libenský
'Head One' (1961)
35.5cm ht., 16.9cm dia.

Commissioned for Czechoslovak Airline, CSA Building, Prague.

By the early Seventies, sculptural glass, that is objects that disdained function, had become more prevalent. Primarily in the U. S., the use of glass in site-specific work then followed. At the present time, the main issues are how an object is made and perceived, what defines its style and, of even greater interest, why this art form is made, what the piece means and represents, with less reference to its formal stylistic use. Artists have continued to experiment, now glass is not just about new techniques and forms; it has become recognized as an important medium of expression.

With this attitude, many glass crafts people/artists have moved from concentrating on decorative or functional glassware and architectural and sculptural forms into an area traditionally seen in the fine art arena; that is, installation. Artists using glass appear to be advancing into more site-specific, non-commercial gallery activity. Glass installations are being increasingly associated with architecture in the scale they use; they also relate to the works of contemporary sculptors, painters and installation artists whose purpose is expressive rather than functional.

“Artists are now pursuing options of working with glass that extends the original premises of the studio glass movement. Through their use of expanded scale, new techniques, and manufactured and found glass, and through their abiding commitment to content as well as form, they have drafted a promising chapter in the history of glass.”²

In examining free-form glass installations, it is necessary to look at some of the properties of installation in a fine art context. Installation art took off in the Sixties. It originated from artist's desires to show their dissatisfaction with fixed notions of how durable on artwork must be to merit serious consideration, their defiance of the traditional boundaries of art and as a resistance to conventional systems of presenting and marketing art. However it was not just used for political reasons. Artists also found

it a new and challenging way to express themselves. It stemmed from fine art preoccupation's and represented the artist's desire to extend the area of practice from the studio to the public space.

The artist invited the spectator, rather than just look at an installation, to inhabit it as they inhabited the world. Very often what the work looks like and what it means depends to a large extent on the individual spectator's perception and on the configuration of the space. What is important in a specific space can depend on a number of things, from its dimensions, the materials from which it is constructed, general character, feeling, what is previously has been used for, its historical and political significance, and whether it be indoors or outside in the natural environment. Robert Smithson spoke of his interest in the site as a desire to "return to the origins of the material."³

The actual site is important to some artists, while to others it is of no great relevance. It can play the role of a surface for inscription:

"Objects could be anywhere this does not mean that the sit hold no importance but does signify that the work does not belong to any specific site. Site does not come before the work, nor is it the first in relation to it rather, it is the work that constitutes the site and gives it its identity. To think the opposite would be as simplistic as to think that the constraints of the material determine the forms of a sculptured object."⁴

Today installation art is as widespread as conventional forms, it set out to subvert. Nowadays vast numbers of artists are working in and with the environment. There are not as many in the field of glass, but this area is still young. It is the influence of many now-established artists that has promoted and brought on this form of expression.

English artist Richard Long has proved to be one of the most noted of these. His use of materials, obvious respect for nature and skill at subtly working in and combining successfully with the landscape has led him to be an inspiration to all artists in the area.

Critics have sought to place Long's work within the confines of such categories as minimal art, land art and conceptual art, however his creative, free activity is absolutely individual. Long's first works began in 1964, when he was nineteen years of age, in the gardens and parks of his home town, Bristol (Fig.8). Long seems to express a desire to recompose the division between man and nature, between society and life. He considers himself a realistic artist who creates in reality, utilizing the materials he loves and finds at his feet. Through his installations of found materials, he speaks to the world in a universal language of symbols.

For almost thirty years, Long has made solitary walks into wild landscapes of forests and glaciers on all latitudes of the earth. He has crossed deserts in the Sahara, highlands in Scotland and beyond. He chooses extremely neutral, uncluttered spaces which are less contaminated by human presence, usually in rural areas but not always remote from people. Long uses his own physical strength and the materials around him to leave some sort of sign or symbol which is not always permanent. He uses simple, universal symbols such as the circle (Fig.9, 10), a movement of perfection in itself, a line (Fig.11), an expression of progress, or the spiral, associated with fertility and birth but which can also denote a feeling of loss of control or identity.(Fig.12). He wishes his work to reflect the impermanence of nature and the limited existence of a human life; also, the ever-changing process of nature, that these two worlds are mutually dependent and dedicated to each other.

Richard Long is not willing to project, modify or even challenge nature. He desires to experience it. No attempt is made to invade the place or overwhelm it with structures or materials not belonging to it. He tries to make work for the land and not against it. Long to this to this day has used a never-ending list of materials, such as stone, mud, wood, snow, water, pine needle, flint and slate. The symbols he uses in each of his installations and their scale depends on the construction and character of the installation of the terrain and the materials he finds there. The work Long produces in gallery spaces is in the form not just of installation but also photography, maps and words that echo that which has been produced outdoors. He subtly shows the interdependent relationship between nature and man by using natural organic materials, not necessarily from a previous installation site and very often from the local quarry or forest transported into an urban gallery environment.



Figure 8: Richard Long
'Snowball Track' (1964)

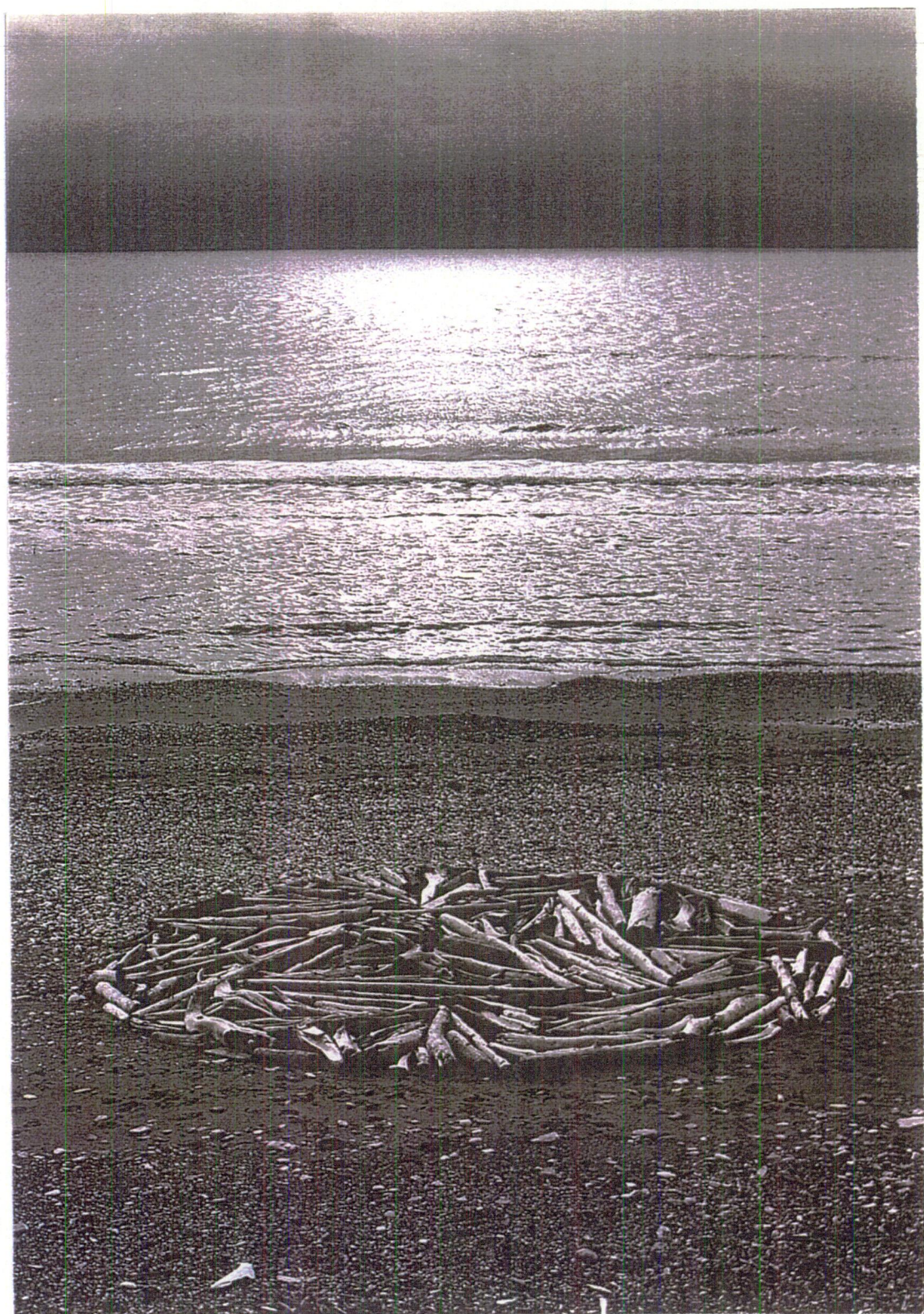


Figure 9: Richard Long
'A Circle in Alaska' (1977)
Driftwood

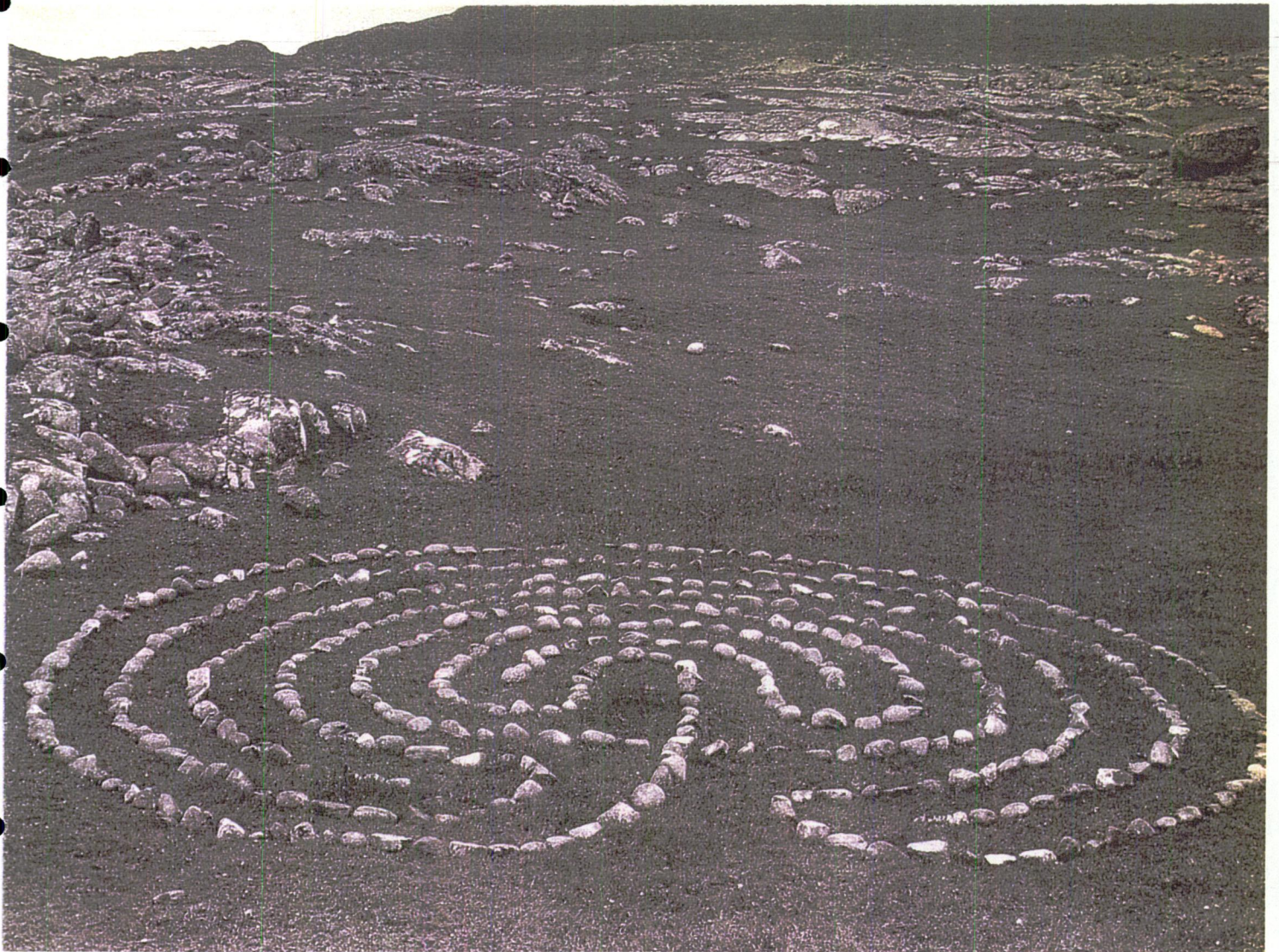


Figure 12: Richard Long
'Maze With Stones in Ireland' (1971)

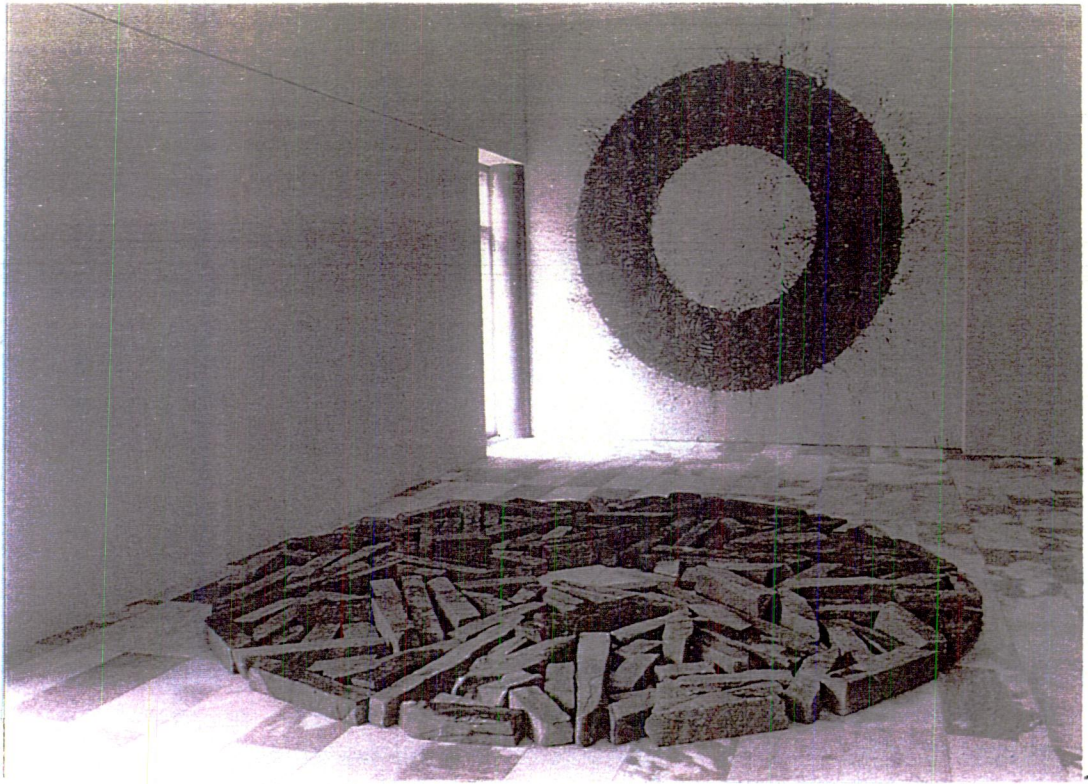


Figure 10: Richard Long
'River Avon Mud Circle' & 'Tennessee Stone Ring'
 New York (1984)



Figure 11: Richard Long
'Carrara Line'
 Milan (1985)

CHAPTER TWO:

The Installation Work of Steve Tobin At Retretti Caves,
Finland (26th of May - 29th of August 1993)

“The caves lend their power to my installations and these sculptures bring life to the caves.

The rock and the glass come together at Retretti echoing the theme of the exhibition. All cultures are one. All time is now. Everything is everything.”⁵

“There is a purity about both glass and math which appeals to me but I have infinitely found more freedom as an artist than I would as a mathematician.”⁶

Steve Tobin was born in Philadelphia in the late Fifties. His first love was science, or more precisely mathematics. He studied theoretical mathematics, physics and music in New Orleans for four years before turning to glass in the eighties. The majority of Tobin's work is large scale, some pieces measuring over four meters in height. Their setting or context is very important to Tobin. Each group of work may be displayed in numerous venues, each bringing new life and changes to the glass. This is why he was so excited about the unique exhibition space provided at Retretti, between 26th May - 29th August 1993.

“Artists all over the world should be told about this fantastic exhibition space.”⁷

This unusual exhibition space, situated three hundred and fifty kilometers north east of Helsinki on the Punkaharju ridge, consists of an expansive network of caves that have been blasted out of Finnish rock. Although his works were not created for the Retretti caves, it looked as if they had been formed there. Asked about these installations, Tobin emphasizes the intricacy of his new creation which in the caves could be ideally developed and rounded out by the space. Down sixty stairs, one entered this unreal world. At a depth of twelve meters, one might be reminded of labyrinths, tombs or a maze of dungeons, where feelings of death and fear prevail in the pitch darkness. However, Steve Tobin turned this around and created a fairytale, mythical atmosphere. Tobin was invited, along with fellow glass artist Marc Chagall to show his work in this impressive, unique space at Retretti. When Tobin went to view the caves before the show, he had the use of seventeen different underground lakes and chambers. Tobin

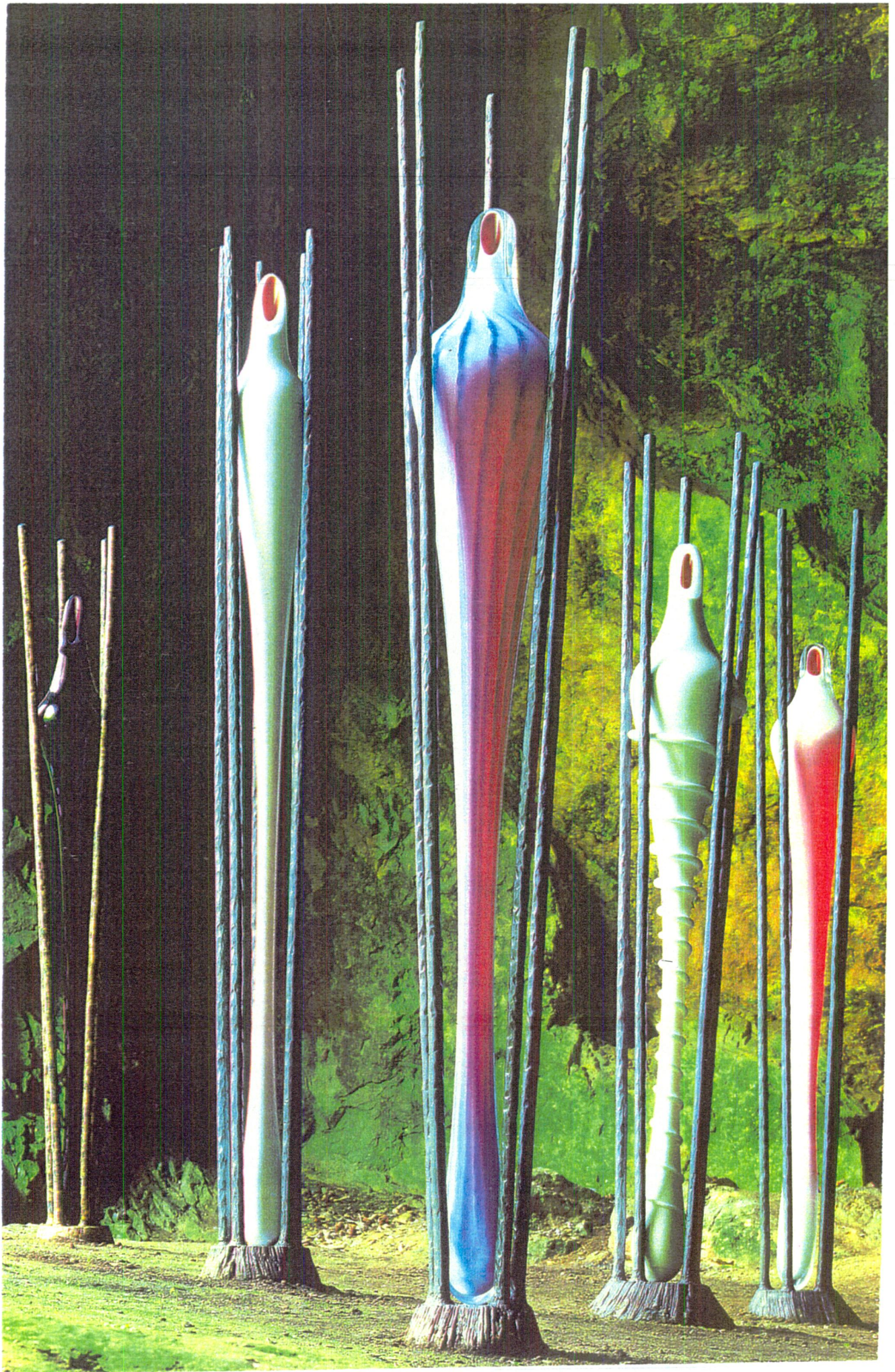
decided to use these different spaces in the way a theatre director uses different acts, to tell a progressive story, his own story of birth, life, transformation, and the relationship between man and nature.

The caves were transformed by his installation. There were no reminders that you were in a museum, no lights or visible supports, so it appeared that the viewer had entered an alternative reality. Tobin used halogen lighting which could be placed at a hidden distance from the pieces and still illuminate them sufficiently. When I spoke to Tobin about the use of supports, he said that "in the caves he had to hide all sorts of supports so as to enhance a feeling that the work belonged and was formed there".⁸ Tobin spoke of the aspiration not to present art on a pedestal, where the work looks prepared for the spectator, he desired the viewer to feel they were not looking at a piece of art. In turn, the glass pieces were transformed from individual objects and appeared to have grown out of the rocks. The rock surfaces and the total darkness provided a contrasting backdrop to the work and especially the radiant substance of glass he uses.

Tobin feels he is producing art of his time about individual thoughts and influences. Tobin's forms are charged with meaning and multi-layered messages. He seeks to dissolve the boundaries of the human, natural and built up world. He attempts to give clues to the birth and evolution of man. The myth of coming to be and the passing of time are among Tobin's themes and messages. These works were about his own philosophies of the world.

Each of the installations dealt with some form of transformation. A canopy of small white suspended blown *cocoons* hung from the ceiling of the caves above, eventually this

umbrella of tiny *cocoons* led to the larger, more colourful *cocoons*(h.2-4m). These *cocoons*, of different patterns and colours, although of similar form, showed individuality in spirit and character through differing shades of colour and tone.(Fig 13). The metal cages designed to hold the pieces upright were clearly meant to suggest both support and restraint - spirits imprisoned within their skins of glass. These latter appear free from their cages, like spirits floating.(Fig. 14&15)



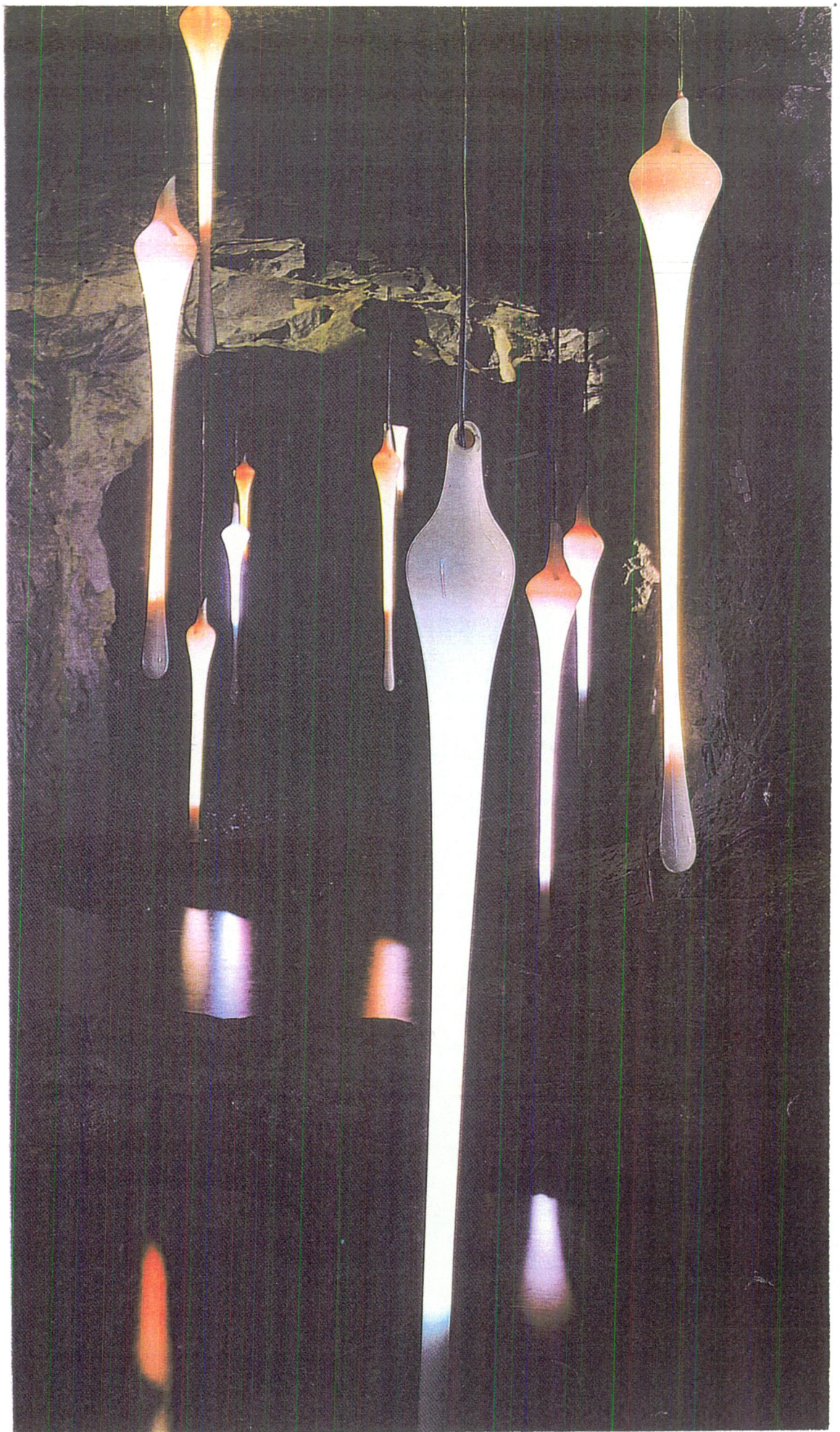


Figure 14: Steve Tobin
'Dreams' (1993)
5x10x20m

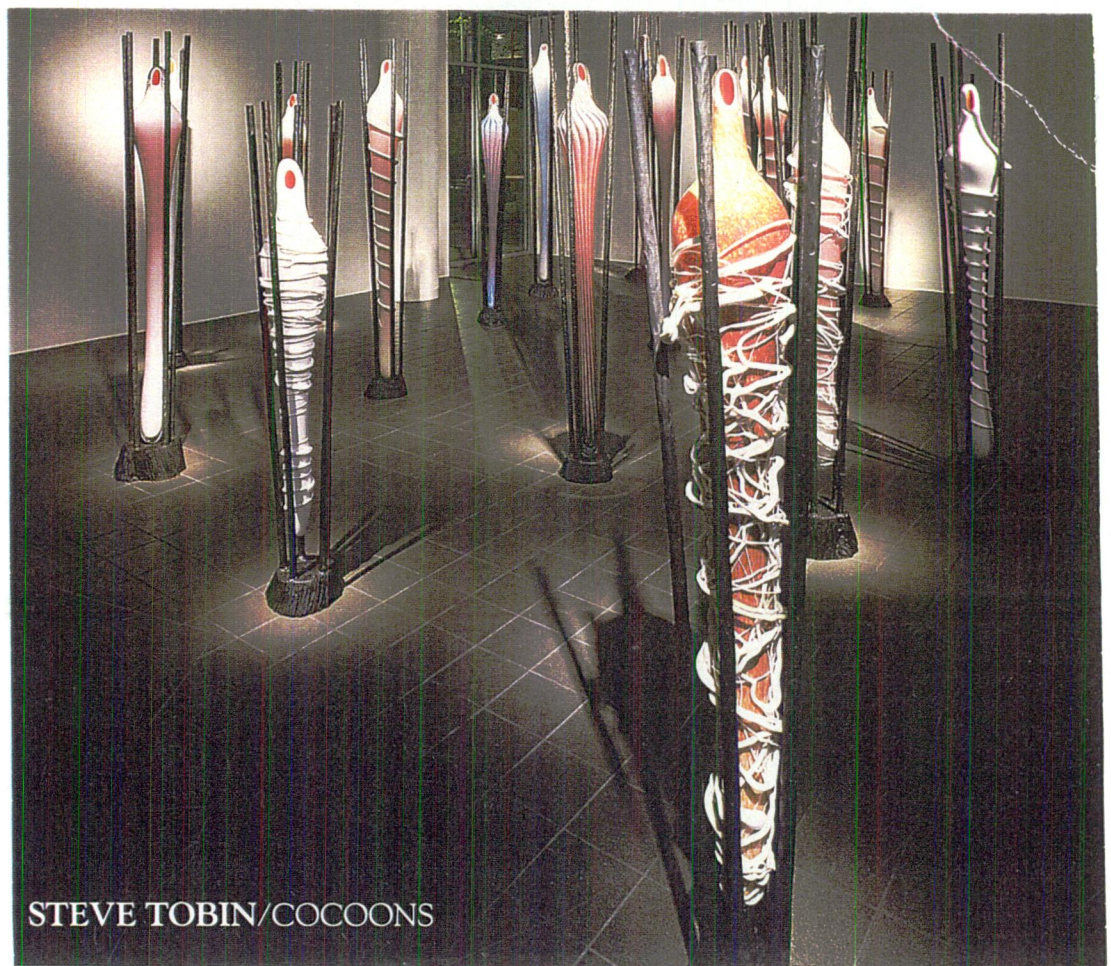


Figure 15: Steve Tobin
'Cocoons' (1993)
Glass Gallery, Bethesda.

Tobin communicates with the viewer through universal symbols, images and ideas. In doing so, he asks the onlooker to enter his installation and decipher the mystery of each installation. Tobin guides and insinuates but never answers. He provides the setting for his vision of the story of mankind and the freedom for the onlooker to interpret the pieces based on their own feelings. Scale is of great importance to Tobin. He has no limitations regarding making glass; he feels techniques can be overcome and changed to his desired result. Tobin has his own studio in Philadelphia with all facilities for glassblowing, sandcasting and kiln work. He has a crew of ten, some members having been part of his team for over ten years. Tobin himself is a key figure in the production team (Fig.16) He is not tied up in the practical side of glass, he does not wish to conquer technical impossibilities:

"I often design a piece that is uncomfortably large for its intended space. By dramatically impacting or assaulting the viewer with the presentation I can throw him off balance and move his mind and emotions. For the fraction of a second the unreal becomes real. Once this door is opened it can never be closed."⁹

The succeeding installation in the Retretti caves is that of the sandcasted three dimensional *doors* (Fig.17,18&19). Tobin is attempting to point us towards the basic event of living. We can no longer see what we have become. The shape of these casts comes from the space below an arch or a doorway. It has been indicated that we are being offered a view of earlier cultures:

"These arch shaped slabs of cast glass suggest the monoliths erected at places like Stonehenge by worshippers of light."¹⁰



Figure 16: Steve Tobin
Working with production team.



Figure 17: Steve Tobin
'Memories of Prague Detail'

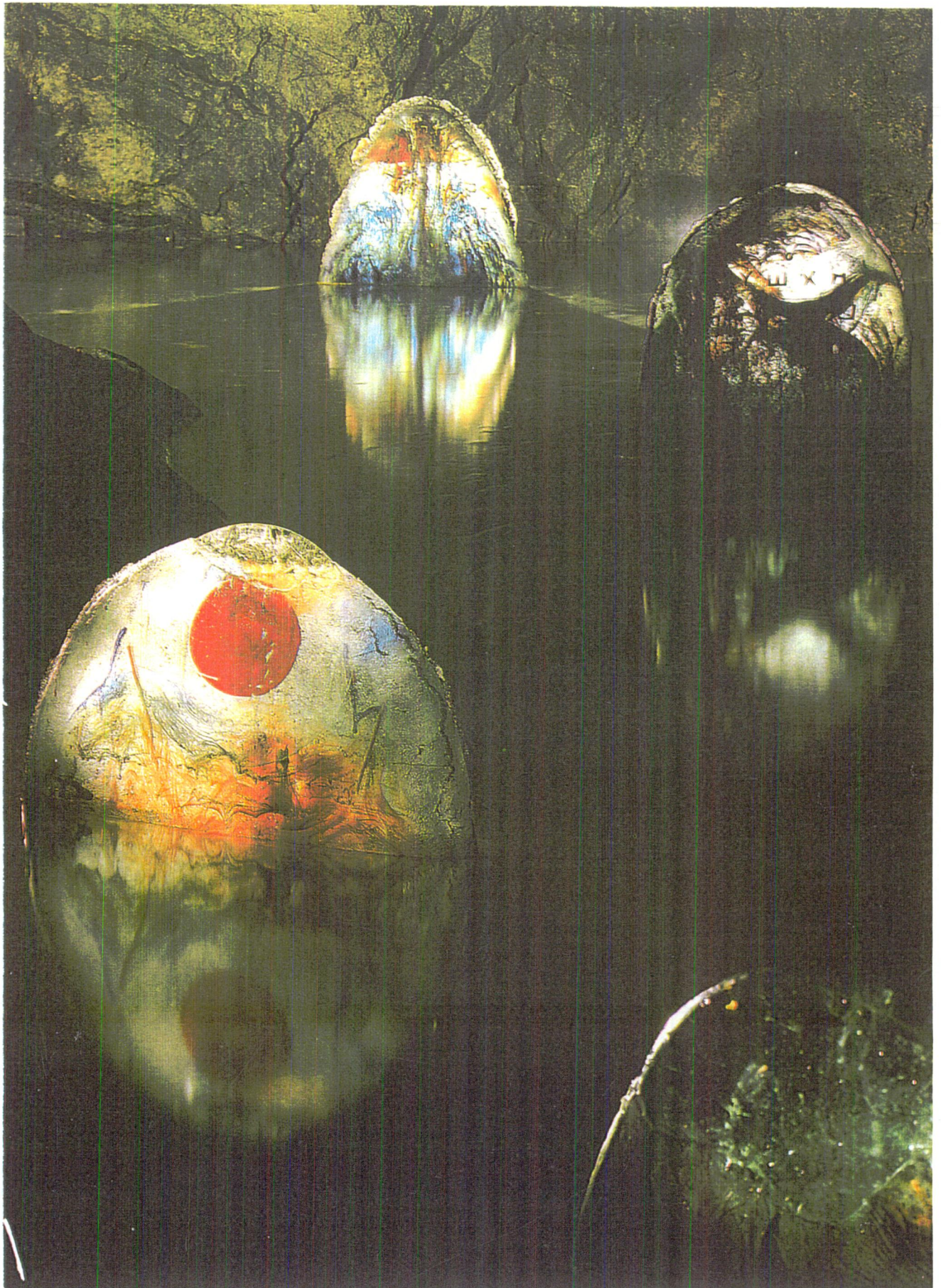


Figure 18: Steve Tobin
'Door Reflections' (1993)
2x10x20m

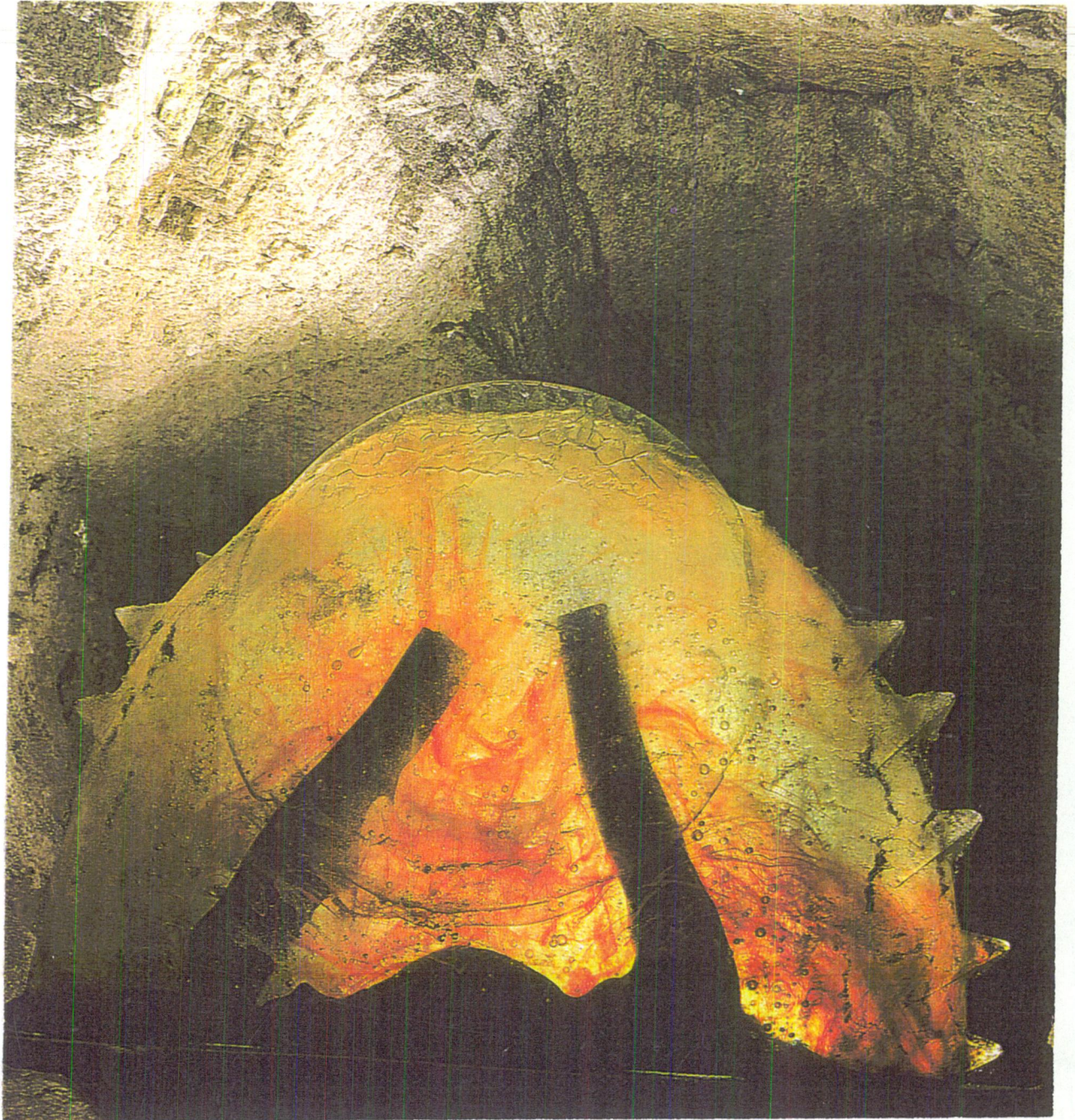


Figure 19: Steve Tobin
'Door' (1993)
0.8m ht.

Nonetheless, it is not light Tobin is interested in. He is inviting us into the polished interior and beyond. These portals do not depict the beginning, birth or the end, death but life that has to be understood as a procedure of continuous change. The *doors* invite a transformation of emotion and space. The colours used are bubbly blue-greens of the sea and yellow, red and oranges, the colours of fire and energy. The colour red dominates a lot of Tobin's work, representing blood giving life. The transitions in colours in their flowing patterns represent the transformative notion of creation in nature and human:

"Our culture is moving towards a scientific definition of the universe."¹¹

Tobin is asking spectators to look at their lives spiritually not materialistically and to realize what is truly important in life. Further on, in the depths of the caves, a stunning glass *teepee* is made up of discarded glass tubes (h.9x5x5m). The *teepee* represents both shelter and the movement of culture into time, specifically the native American culture.(Fig.20). The modern world uses the visual images, lands and foods of their culture but we have no room for them as people. We have chosen not to enter the native American culture. We in the modern world have merely digested them. The *teepee* has no door, as the modern world has no Indians in its representations of culture. Steve Tobin describes the *teepee* as his first attempt to transform the work by introducing his political views into his artwork, a trait that has become more apparent in his recent works.



The next station on the path in the caves is the *hall of bowls* (Fig.21). They stand supported by iron rods in a small underground lake. Dripping water from the cave roof provides a repetitive, rhythmical sound which is enhanced and echoed with audio equipment. There is whale like music representing the last breaths of a soul before death. Throughout the majority of the different stops on this journey different types of music (flute, saxophone and guitar) are played to add to the atmosphere. Also represented in the hall of bowls are the rhythms and rituals which have belonged to cultures of all times. For example a general brief outline of my particular cultural rhythms would be education, employment, family, retirement and death. The colour red dominates, from white over delicate pink and orange to strong but light red.

Tobin also uses a series of female busts which have been sandcast (h.40cm-120cm). These are unusual in the fact that they are three dimensional. Most sandcasting is two dimensional, where you have a flat-topped, open sand mould, the sides and back worked on but the front usually clear and flat. Tobin's are cast from the bottom of the pieces; he feels

"If a piece of work is not three dimensional it is not sculpture."¹²

When I quizzed Tobin about what was a previously unknown technique to me, he said I must come to Philadelphia to see how he overcame any problems and discovered how this technique could be done seemingly quite easily.!. Set high up, enthroned on a jutting cliff, keeping watch, these Greek-like torsos represent containers for ideas, emotions and the spiritual qualities of the soul. Cast from life, these torsos appear to have been startled at a moment of dramatic gesture. These frozen bodies all reach upwards as if suggesting power, or asking for something humbly. Different sources of illumination

enhance swirls and veins of colour, implying that they contain or once contained life. The process of natural forming is represented within the numerous, now familiar spiral and pyramidal-shaped shells and crystals which appear to be swelling out or growing on the surfaces of these busts. This decorative skin refers both to nature's seasonal adornment of flowers, leaves and more permanent changes, as shells and fossils attach themselves to the surface of the glass. These ancient-looking torsos begin to look as if they have been formed from nature, rather than manmade, because of their natural-looking surface textures:(Fig.22&23)

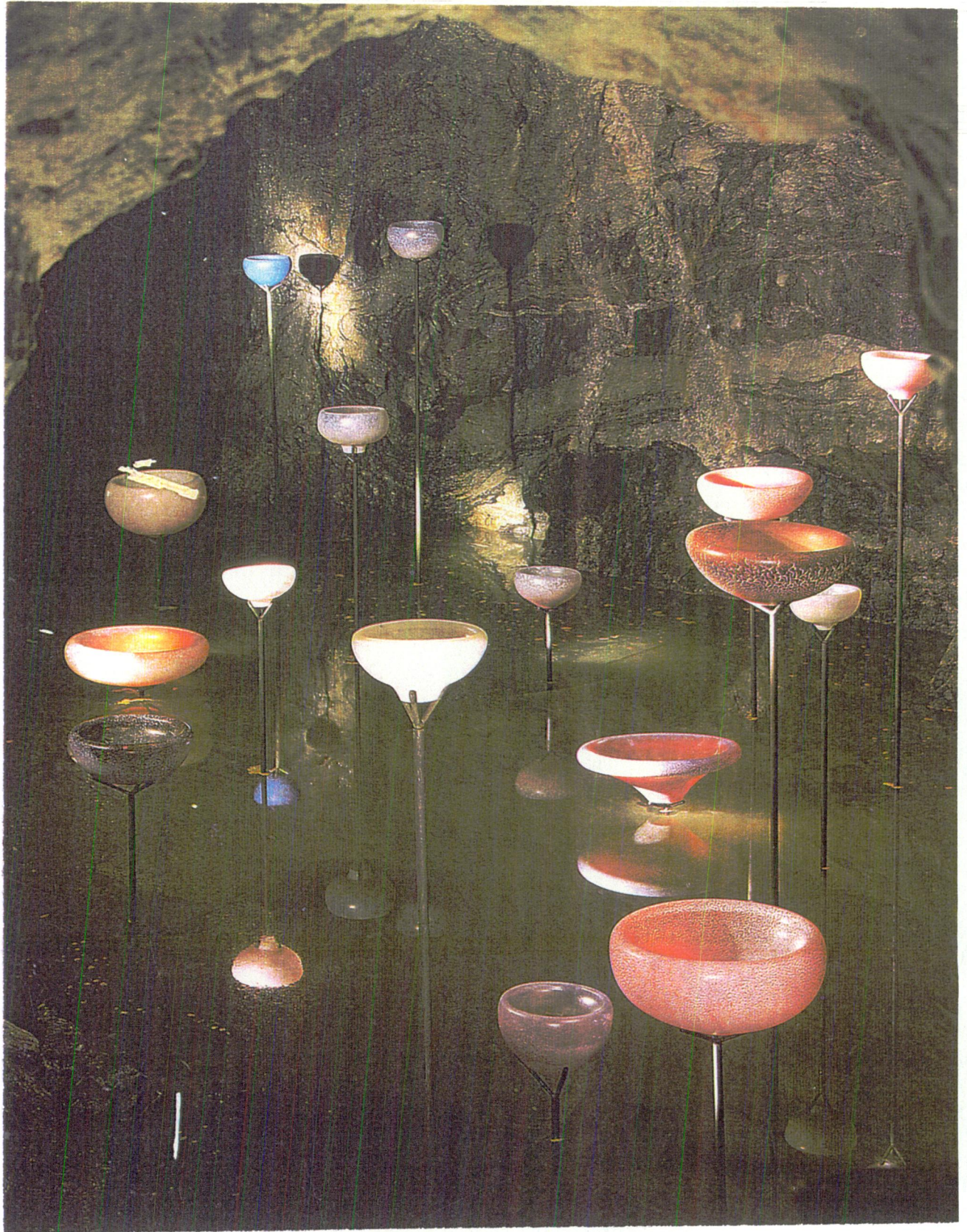


Figure 21: Steve Tobin
'Hall of Bowls' (1993)

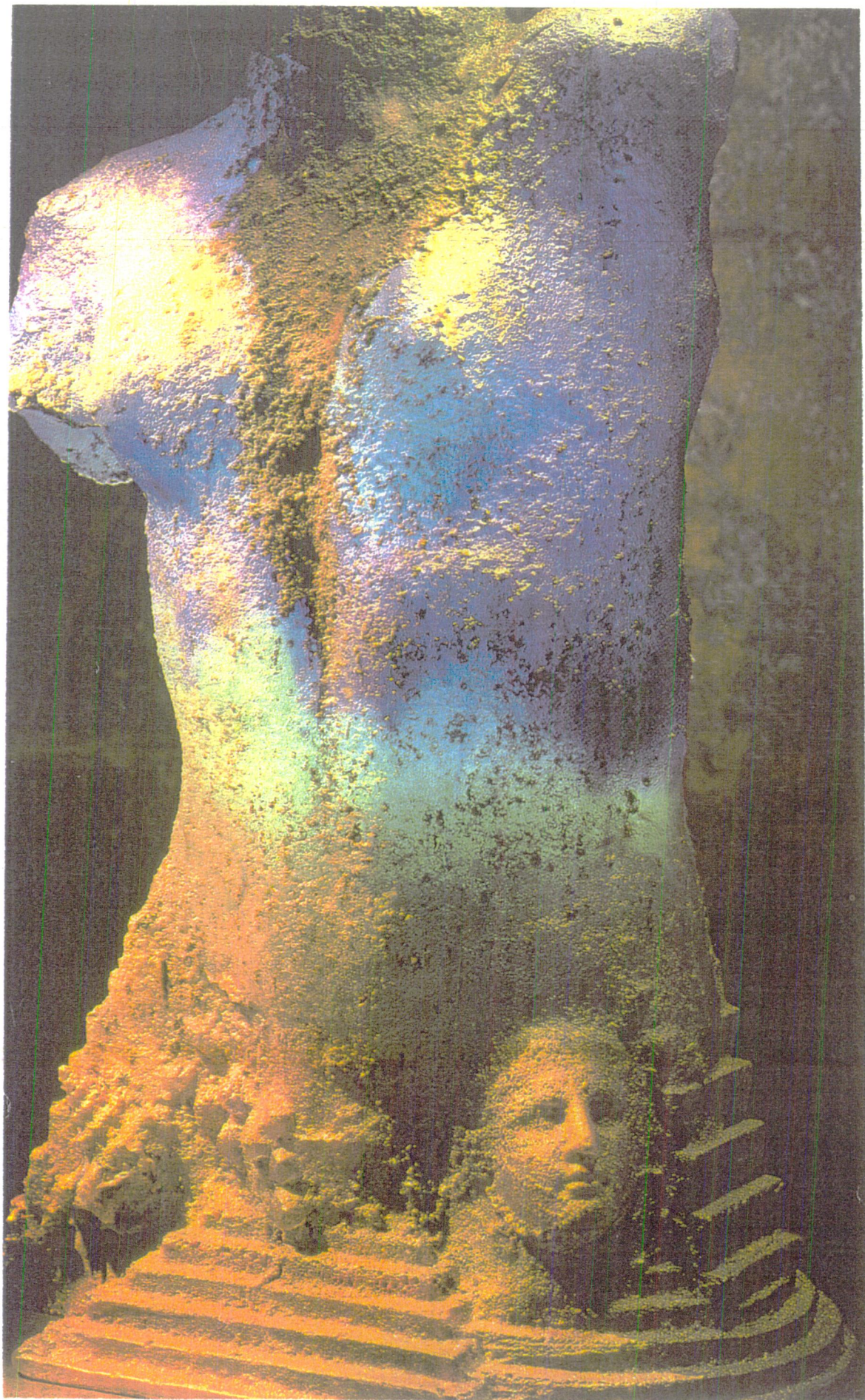


Figure 22: Steve Tobin
'Blue Lady' (1993)
65cm ht.



“My processes and imagery are designed to present the whole sculpture to the viewer as an artifact created by time more than by the hand of the artist.”¹³

In a continuing attempt to introduce social and political statements into his artwork, Tobin resources the refuse he finds obscuring our environment. Scavenging, recycling and trading have provided the source of his materials. Ecology is one of Tobin’s main interests. One of his final installations in Retretti consists of a twenty meter long river of discarded thin glass tubes, frozen in full flow (h.8x4x25m) (Fig.24). Glass as a material in this piece takes second place and the onlooker experiences the passionate, silent roar and surging mass of a waterfall. Tobin’s efforts in a lot of these different installation settings are philosophically directed at removing the layers of socialization that have accumulated on mankind, to point out the numbing beliefs of our times and how they have woven a veil over our eyes. He tries to makes us comprehend what the important things in life are. The final piece of his work at Retretti is the *Tree Of Life* (6x4x4m); like encased butterflies, hundreds of tiny white cocoons literally hang from a bare tree. There, spirit and life are still sleeping encaptured but ready to be awakened into life again.(Fig.25)

“In this installation at Retretti, Steve Tobin attempts to illustrate his spiritual and political messages through the medium of glass. Tobin has been described by the New York Times “as doing something a bit madder and grander with his medium than anyone else.”¹⁴



Figure 24: Steve Tobin
'Retretti River Waterfall' (1993)
5x4x25m



Figure 25: Steve Tobin
'Tree of Life' (1993)
6x4x4m

Tobin is not caught up in glass as a material itself. For him it provides a metaphor to create objects which should reinforce his personal philosophies. Each glass installation in the caves is emotional, evocative and intriguing on a vast level. Tobin uses glass to portray his personal apprehensions and worries about our society today. He attempts to use the material to fill a void for the artist where he sees a lack of justice and order in society. Tobin's work is a reaction to life as he sees it. It may be suggested that numerous artists working in glass are not striving to use glass as a medium for expression. They have grasped glass in a technical sense and remained at this point; which results in their work looking stale, so that no excitement or emotion is trapped within the piece waiting to be discovered. Such artists appear, in many cases, to have stopped growing inside; they have become more obsessed with the material than the idea, which can give glass its mysterious life.

"Art is not just about making objects. The object created is a souvenir of the art process. Art happens in the formation of an idea and the maturation of this idea. For me the art is the personal, emotional and the mental growth that occurs as a result of realizing an idea. The object that is created only documents this growth."¹⁵

Tobin's works achieve their significance from their surroundings and through the consciousness of the onlooker. This installation at Retretti has been described by one critic as a

"splendidly adapted and scintillating fairytale."¹⁶

but by another, declaring

"that the complex and complicated relationships have been simplified all too crudely."¹⁷

When one thinks of a fairytale, images of children spring to mind. Tobin has created this fairytale land and simplified obvious explanations of his pieces as if he were communicating with children. It may be suggested that people have become so caught up with their own problems, usually materialistic, that they can't see clearly. Tobin brings them back to their childhood where they had no worries, and in doing so, makes them realize what the important things in life are.

Tobin has now moved on to creating installations, primarily of found objects, artifacts from our culture, and preserving these in bronze as icons for the future.(Fig 26,27,28&29). He has not worked with glass for over three years. Originally he decided to work with glass because,

“it was so spontaneous however it became so spontaneous it was distracting. Ideas were beginning to come from the glass”.¹⁸

He left the field of glass art because it was becoming very showy. It was becoming transformed into a material about money not concepts. He comments also that he “grew up.”¹⁹



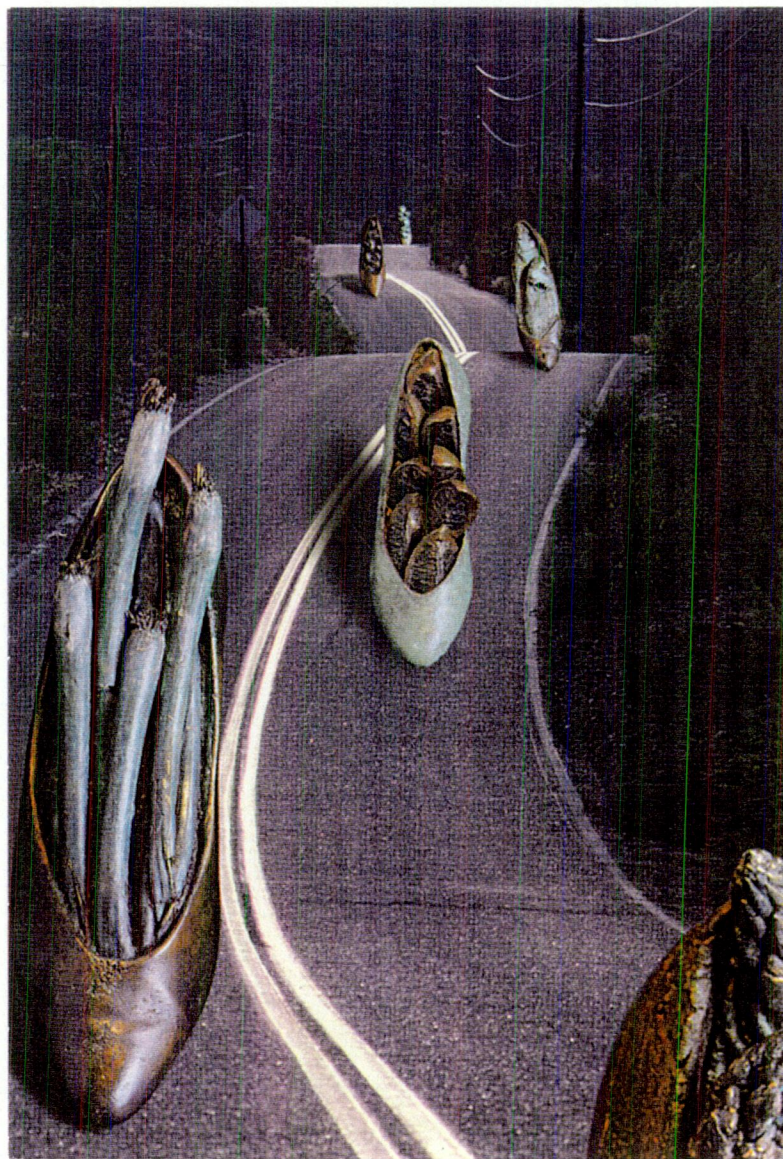


Figure 27: Steve Tobin
'Les Chaussures en Marchant' (1995)



Figure 28: Steve Tobin
'L'Innocence Crucifiée' (1995)



Figure 29: Steve Tobin
'Le Triomphe de la Vie' (1995)

CHAPTER THREE:

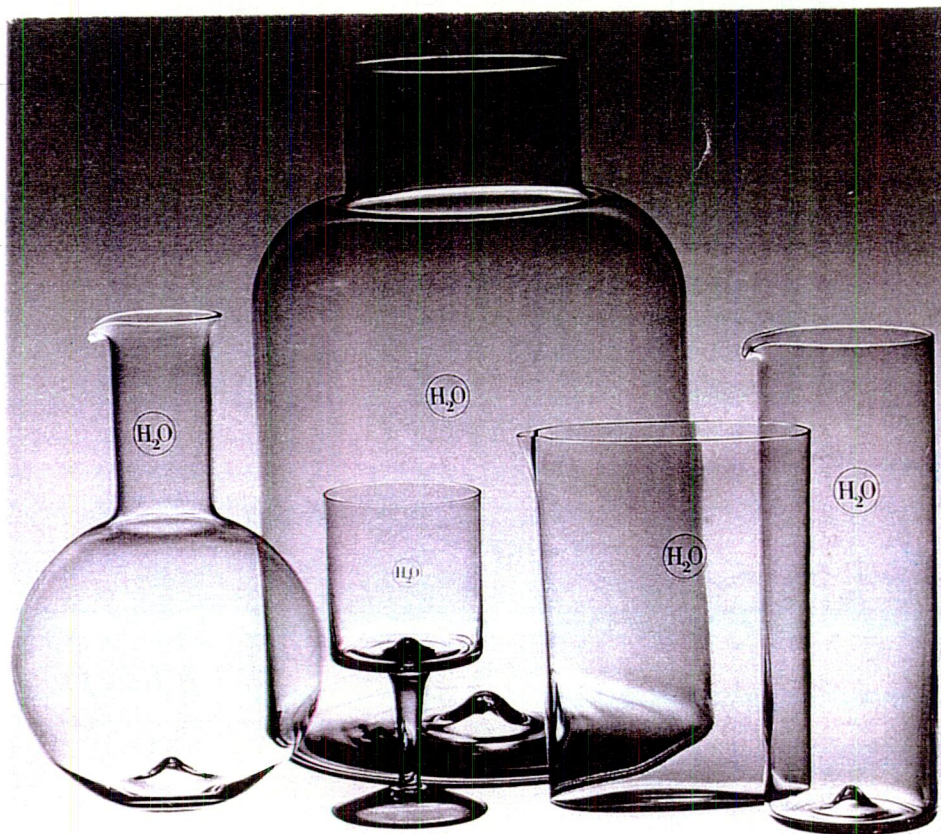
The Work of Bertil Vallien and Bernard Dejonghe

Glass has a very fresh appeal for contemporary artists. No other art material possesses such qualities of sparkling transparency, ease in coloration and diversity of form obtained through heat, cutting, polishing, slumping or corrosion. Many artists from other areas have been drawn to glass and are now held in its thrall. Experimenting with a material that offers so much unexplored artistic territory has particularly appealed to them. In this chapter I will discuss the work of two artists, Bertil Vallien and Bernard Dejonghe, who once worked in ceramics and now glass.

Bertil Vallien is perhaps Scandinavia's most prominent artist in glass at the present time. He studied crafts at the Konstfack school of Arts/Crafts and Design in Stockholm. He has been more or less solely responsible for the development of the seemingly unused sand casting technique worldwide. It is because of Vallien's constant exploration and perseverance that sandcasting has become one of the most superb forms of glass art in the Twentieth Century. He began his career in ceramics and was soon drawn to glass and has been addicted ever since. Since 1963 Vallien has been designing for the Åfors Glassworks in Sweden. Vallien continued to manage to be both a designer for industry and a successful glass artist until 1989. The terms of Vallien's contract allowed him to spend six months designing glassware for the factory and the other six devoted to his own work.(Fig.30&31)



Figure 30: Bertil Vallien
'Earliest blown designs' (mid 60's)



H₂O 1977.

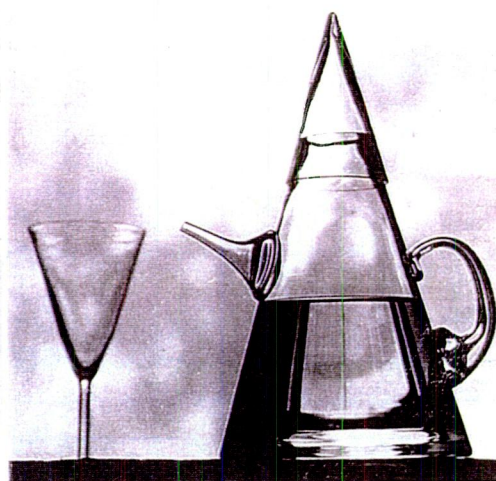
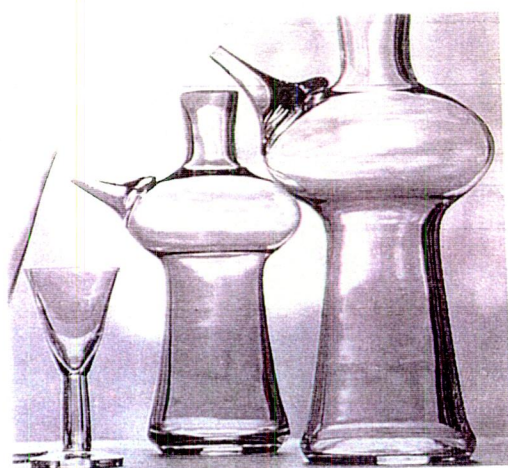


Figure 31: Bertil Vallien
'First designs produced for Åfors' (1960)

The factory received high quality designs and Vallien, in turn, was given the use of all facilities, materials and manpower to help produce his large sandcasts. The opportunities and equipment available at Åfors have allowed Vallien to develop and improve sandcasting as an artistic medium. In the Seventies, the Swedish glass industry hit hard times as cheaper glassware could be imported from Far East; also the industrialization of the Finnish glass industry made production quicker and cheaper. In 1981, the Swedish government put forward a proposal for the mechanization of glassware. Vallien quickly reacted to this and made a statement to the press which the Department of Industry took heed of, realizing that glass was more multifaceted and not just an object for rational mass production:

“I am reactionary enough to believe in the handicraft. The hand can never be totally replaced by a centrifuge or a pressing machine. It is our job to cherish traditions. It's here that the exciting things are happening.”²⁰

It is because of adhering to this traditional attitude that Swedish glassworks are among the most notable to this day. While first working in the factory, Vallien became engrossed in the experimental side of glass casting. Early on he was more interested in the discovery of new techniques, rather than using the work as a vehicle of artistic expression. Often, before designing a piece, Vallien would go to the hotshop and try out ideas in practice. Through this constant experimentation he stumbled on a method which he now terms “glass eats light.”²¹ Vallien has managed to capture a magical light within the glass. He casts glass, not to exploit its surface reflective qualities but to explore its light-absorbing traits. Vallien has been able to trap a hidden, magical, unidentifiable light source which gives these pieces an enchanting spirit within. Nevertheless, like Tobin, Vallien has gained control and knowledge of glass over the years, so he can now move

on. This medium can now be used as a metaphor for his own personal ideas and philosophies:

“I was controlled by a fascination for the technique, now I know it so well I have time left over for the messages.”²²

SANDCASTING.

Vallien fills a metal box with casting sand, then the basic form of the shape desired is modeled out with a wooden template which is pushed into the sand. This template is fabricated out of abbachi wood because it is light and easy to carve. Graphite powder is then sprinkled over the mould to stop excessive amounts of sand sticking to the glass. Vallien then spends time sieving different coloured oxides over the mould. It is possible to fill several of these moulds in one day. The model is then brought carefully into the hotshop where the crew fill each cast with the aid of ladles and cranes. The hot glass is poured quickly in order to prevent any crease marks forming in the glass piece. As this quick, exciting process is going on Vallien inserts different glass symbols made earlier. When the piece is cooled, which could take up to three weeks in the annealing oven, these emblems appear to be floating within the clear glass (Fig.32&33). Vallien's cast boats can be as long as 370 cm.



Figure 32: Bertil Vallien
'Vallien preparing the sand mould'

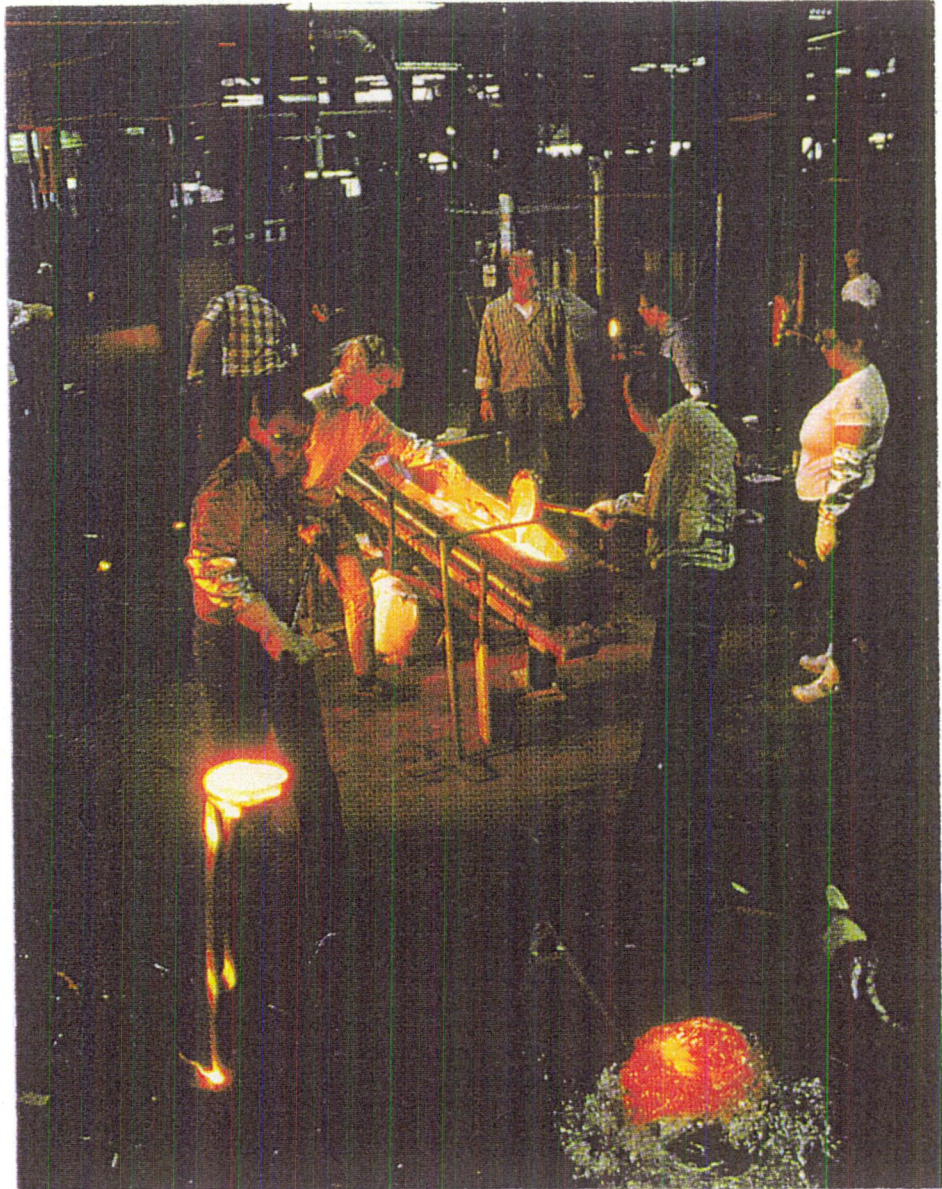


Figure 33: Bertil Vallien
'The pouring of the glass'

Bertil Vallien achieved his large international breakthrough with his installation of sandcasted boats in New York's Heller Gallery in 1984. Vallien first became enchanted with boats while visiting the Aran Islands off the West coast of Ireland. He first presented some ceramic boats at the Konstaf Antverkarna gallery in 1979 (Fig.34). Through symbols, he clarifies thoughts of freedom, flight and also the historic necessity of each person's cultural legacy. When these glass boats appeared, art critic Ake Livstedt described them as;

"arks of thought."²³

The shape of the boat itself represents a journey through life and death, a journey in time from the past to the present kingdom. It also carries a message of freedom that we should constantly be on the move both mentally and imaginatively. One should always stride on and not look back. However, it may be suggested that his work is not explained by delving into the numerous meanings that a ship evokes, but more through the universal symbols which he freezes and traps within the mysterious walls of his forms. Glass gives Vallien the opportunity to create enclosed worlds full of symbolism and messages.

These containers hold both relics of the past and symbols of the future. The bridge may signify a new way of thinking or, in Vallien's case, the ability to pull oneself out of a depression, the wagons representing vehicles of death transporting the deceased into the next world, the bar or pillar symbolizing permanence. He also uses ladders (yearning for new routes), rings, mummies and anti-atomic symbols. Even though Bertil Vallien's sculptures contain universal symbols, like many other artists of his time, he manages to shape and combine them to make them his own. On occasions, the message and

interpretation is singularly clear. However, when looked at again it may be obscured. They convey a personal, secretive if not secret meaning. It is a sort of challenge to the viewer. It results in stimulating people to make new attempts at interpretation again and again (Fig35&36).

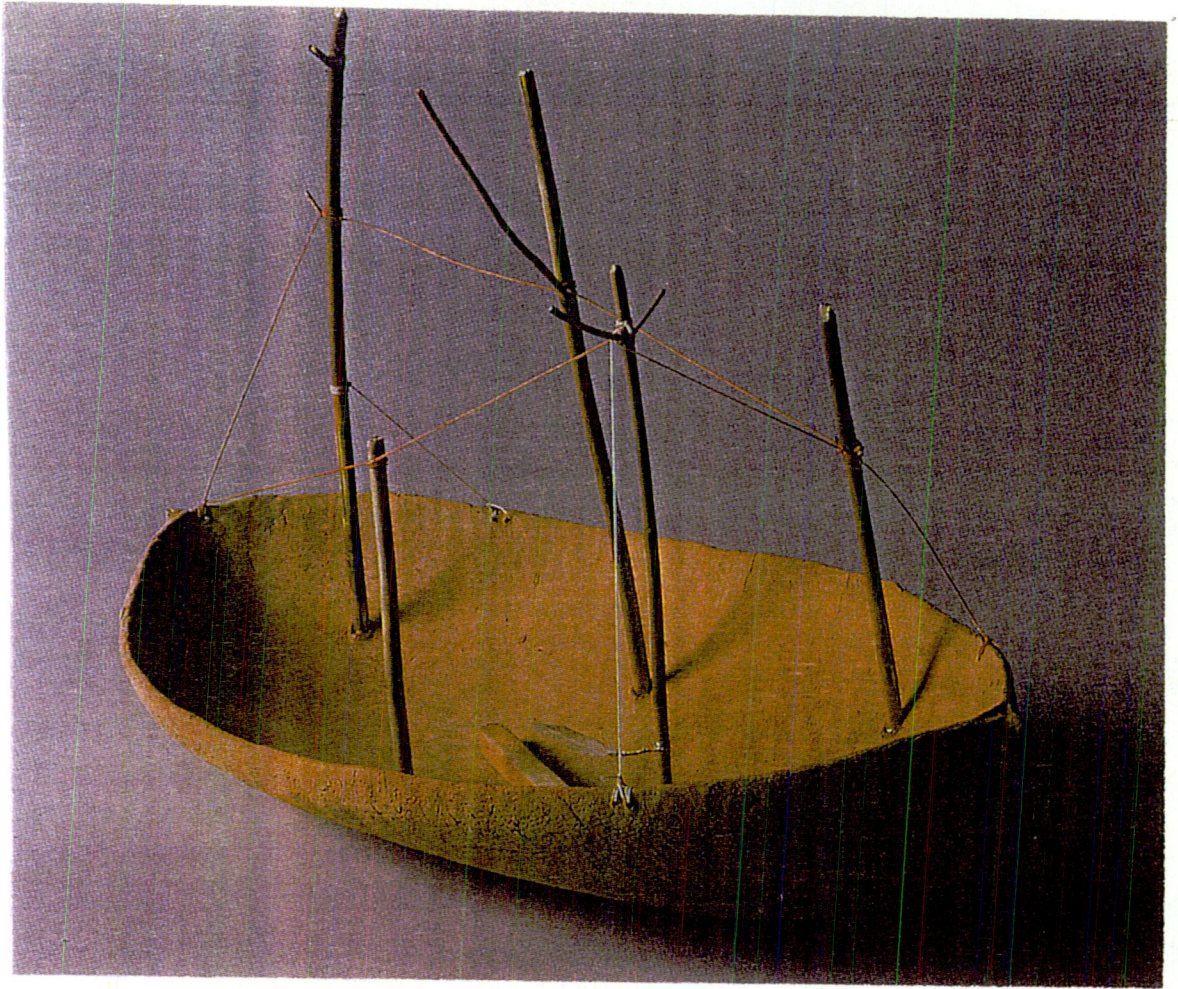


Figure 34: Bertil Vallien
'Earlier ceramic boat' (1979)

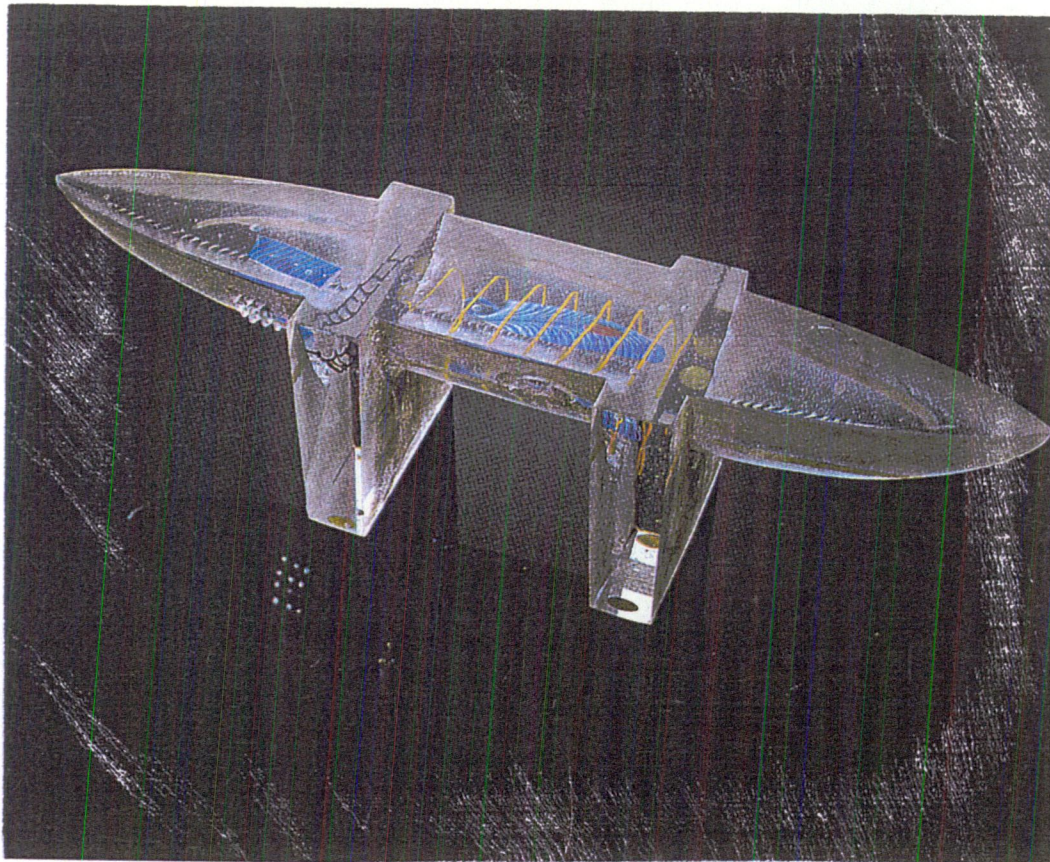


Figure 35: Bertil Vallien
'Quarry Boat' (1984)

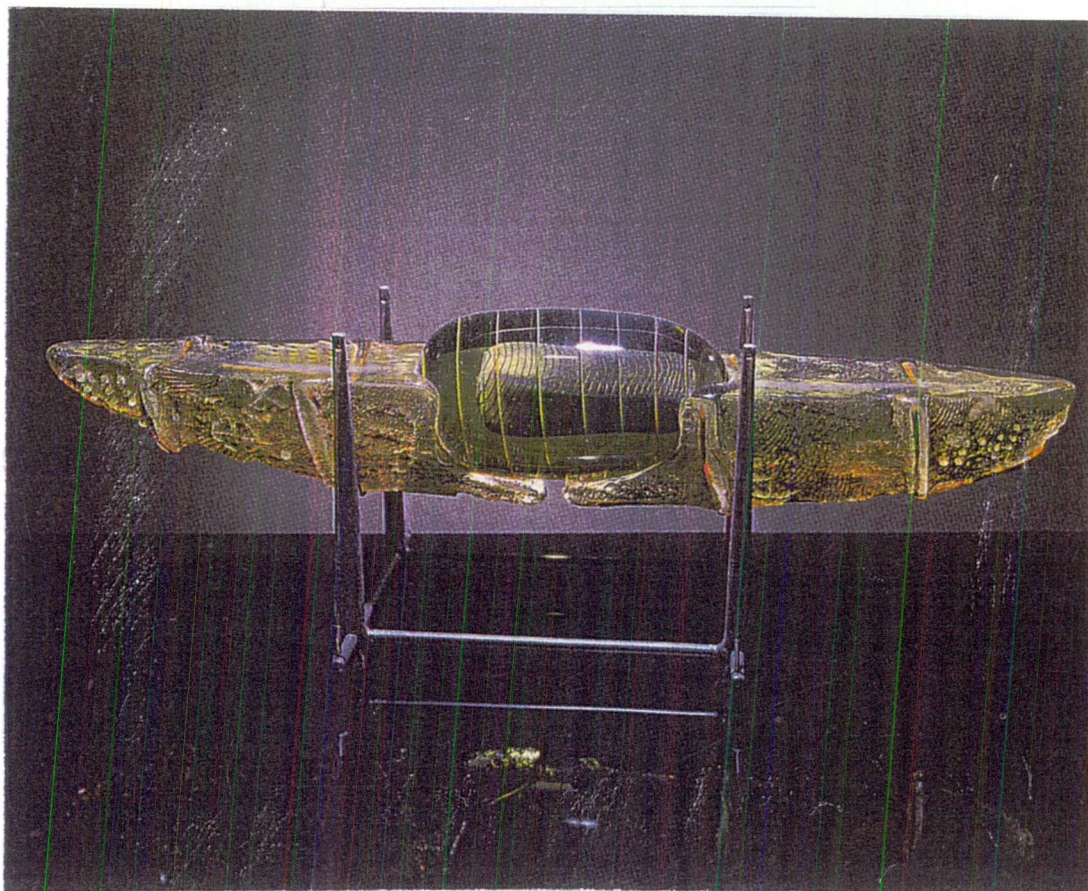


Figure 35: Bertil Vallien
'Spiral Boat' (1983)



Figure 36: Bertil Vallien
'Cargo Seed Two' (1988)
Sandcasted with polished surfaces

Vallien's aim was to abandon perfection and beauty and work in a symbolic, sculptural way. He has succeeded in doing so and along the way he has, it may be suggested, learnt a lot about himself. He has realized how precious life is and to this day is trying to understand and come to terms with the complex riddles of the world and death itself. Vallien has changed his casts, to the more classical torso forms in an effort to reach more deeply into the complicated world around him (Fig.37). Since 1989 Vallien has taken a break from designing for the Åfors factory. His sculptures have become more closed, with signs of depression and loneliness; he has become preoccupied with death and the fear of what lies ahead.

The involvement of the viewer is important to Vallien but it may be suggested that these are very personal works, which he uses to personally answer or seek answers to his own questions, to help him deal with life. Even the titles given to his installations suggest personal problems and anxieties, for example, *Constrict* (1993) (Fig.38), *Pendulums* (1993), *Solitude* (1987), and *Finding* (1992). Personal mythologies, the struggle to deal with time as a determining factor in one's life and history as a result of the passing of this time have been important subjects and questions in the work of numerous artists in recent years.

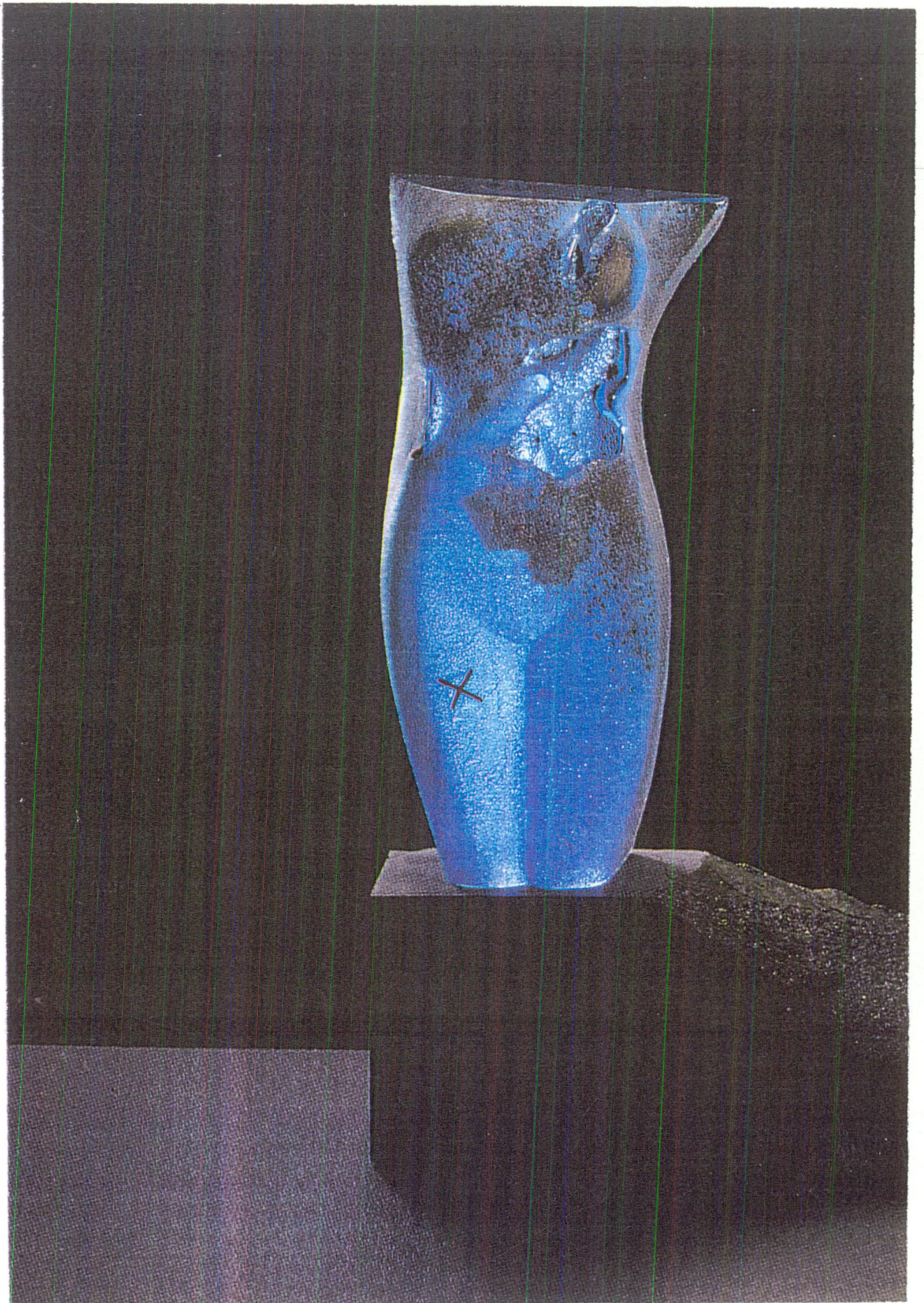


Figure 37: Bertil Vallien
'Blue Venus Torso' (1981-1988)
Sandcasted cobalt blue glass.

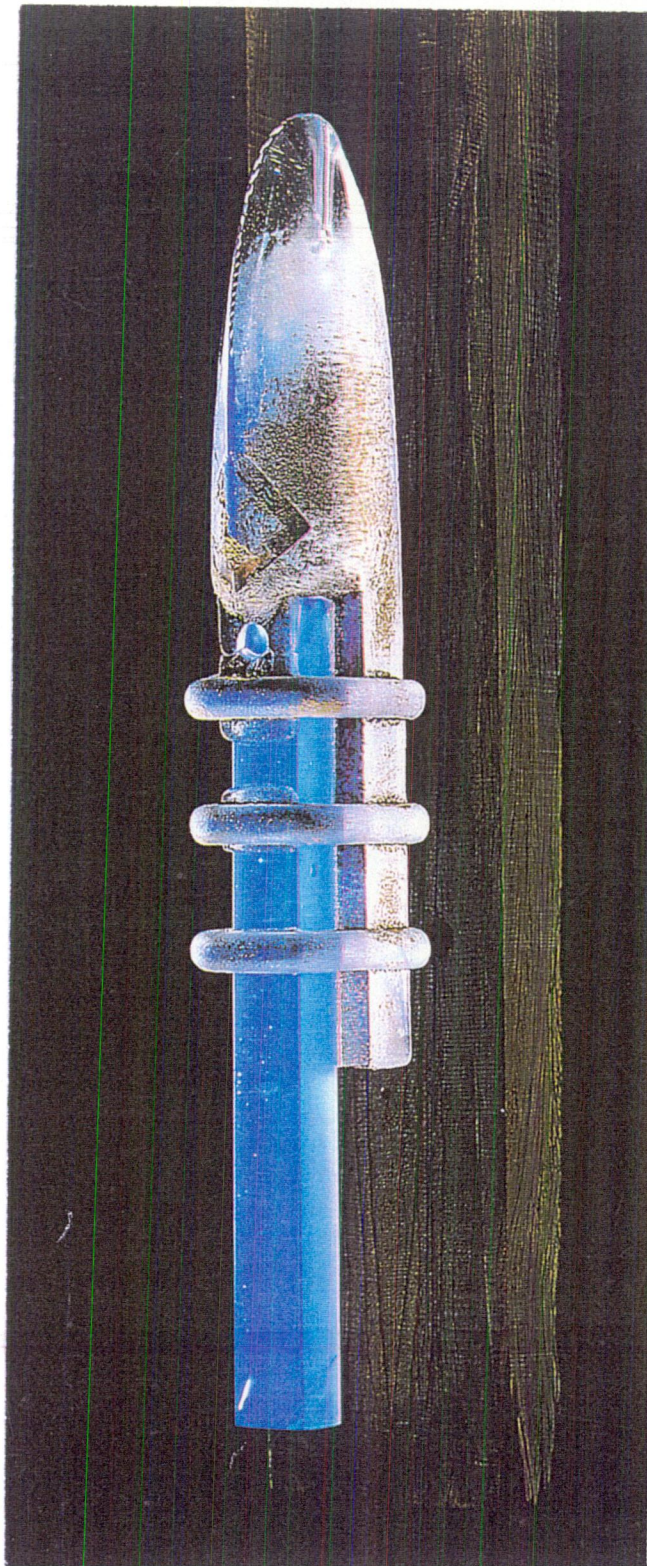


Figure 38: Bertil Vallien
'Constrict' (1993)



Figure 39: Bertil Vallien
'Monoliths' (1989)

The majority of Bertil Vallien's installation exhibitions are shown indoors. He takes over a space, filling it with large pieces of sandcasted glass. He attempts to create magical environments within the room. Vallien, like Tobin, tries to catch the viewer by surprise and bring his/her mind and emotions into fascinating worlds through these installations. Vallien gives no concrete interpretation of his work in order to give room for the imagination of the observer. He pushes us to relate to his work on a personal level. His work has been photographed outdoors, set in lakes and rivers (Fig.39). In my opinion, the natural environment takes away from the complex meanings and interpretations frozen within his glass. They look awkward, loud and uncomfortable in the natural environment. They do not complement nature and nature in turn rejects them. The forms themselves are more breathtaking set in a dark gallery space, where light from within attracts and pulls the viewer (Fig.40). Often, when producing a piece for the outdoors he uses materials other than glass: for example, his "Perpetual Voyager" (1989), set in the ruins of Borgholm Castle, was made solely of canvas (Fig.41). In changing his materials to suit a particular environment, in my opinion Vallien shows his respect for and knowledge of materials.



Figure 39: Bertil Vallien
'Monoliths' (1989)

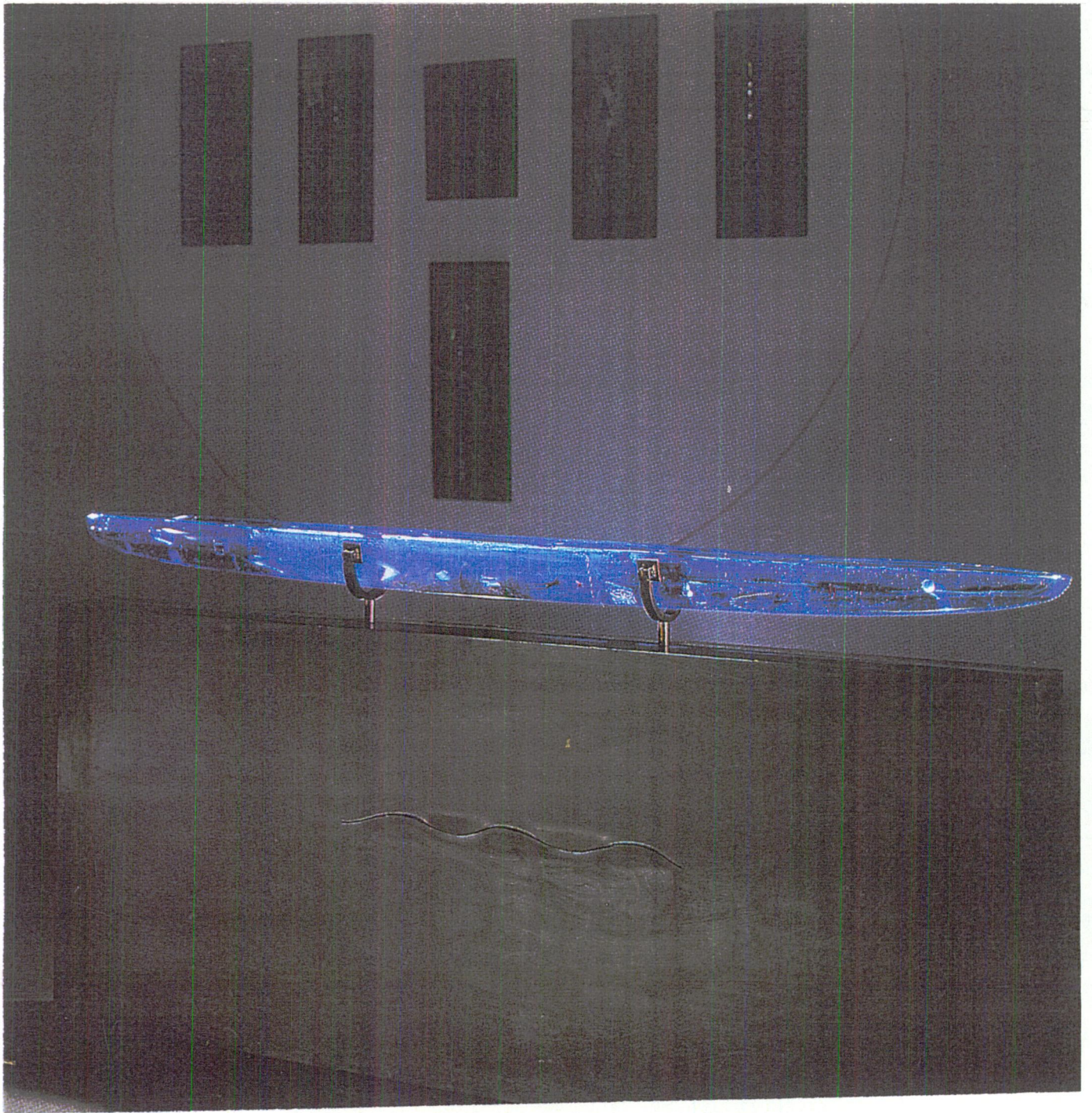


Figure 40: Bertil Vallien
'Blue Voyager' (1993)
195cm l



Figure 41: Bertil Vallien
'Perpetual Voyager' (1989)
Canvas.

“Like other artists of his generation including Richard Long and Andy Goldsworthy, Bernard Dejonghe’s work communes with and adds to nature both drawing on its power and enhancing it with its presence.”²⁴

Bernard Dejonghe, the French sculptor and ceramist of twenty years, began working with glass between 1988-1989. When questioned about this changeover of materials, he has replied:

“I decided to work with clay or glass the way someone chooses a particular instrument because he likes the tone colour or because he has the talent for it.”²⁵

While working with clay, Dejonghe came to the conclusion that working with clay was a task of developing one's skill as regards work processes. These are repeated over and over again over a long period of time. The process ends up becoming more important than the final piece. Working with glass, the end product is just as important as the process:

“The coming together of space and time is very important to me. I work with massive glass which requires highly developed technology and thus receives a visual, futuristic symbol.”²⁶

Dejonghe has produced monumental installations, for example his *Blue Vertical* installed in the French Alps in 1986 (Fig.42&43). This involved the placing of forty nine geometric pillars of approximately one meter in height on the peak of a mountain. His desire to work on a large scale led him to begin immediately working in glass on a grand scale. Any tendency towards shelf objects and loud colours did not interest Dejonghe. His meeting with Howard Ben Tré and his strong, bold pieces inspired Dejonghe to work in that direction. Dejonghe is in control of the material of glass and is using it to suit himself.

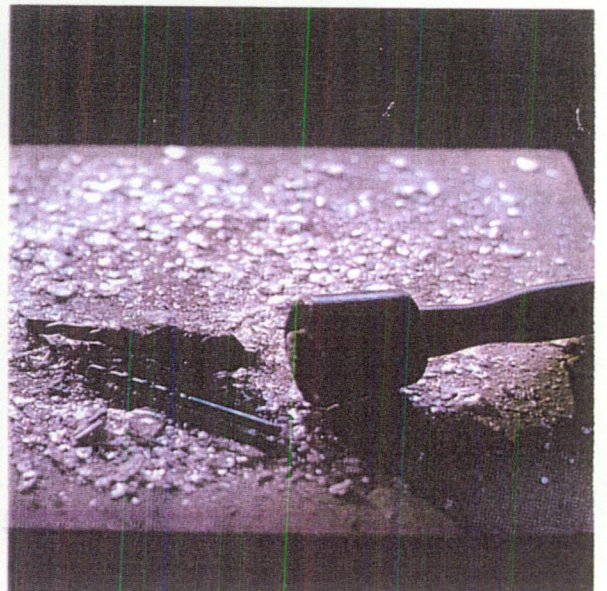
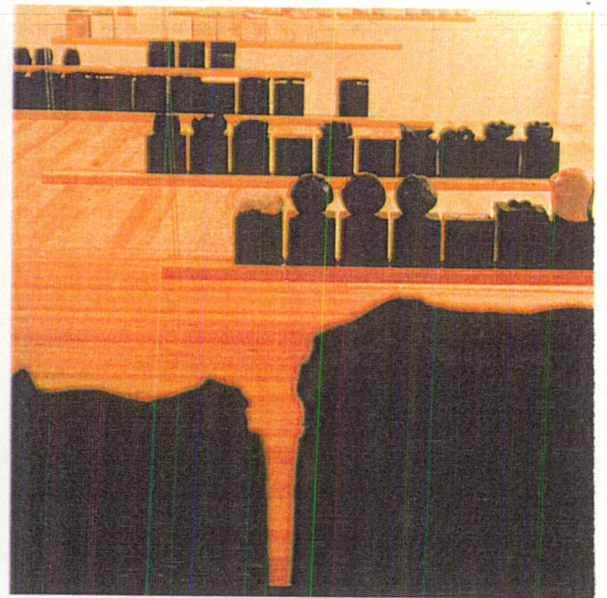


Figure 42: Bernard Dejonghe
'Blue Verticals' (1986)
1m

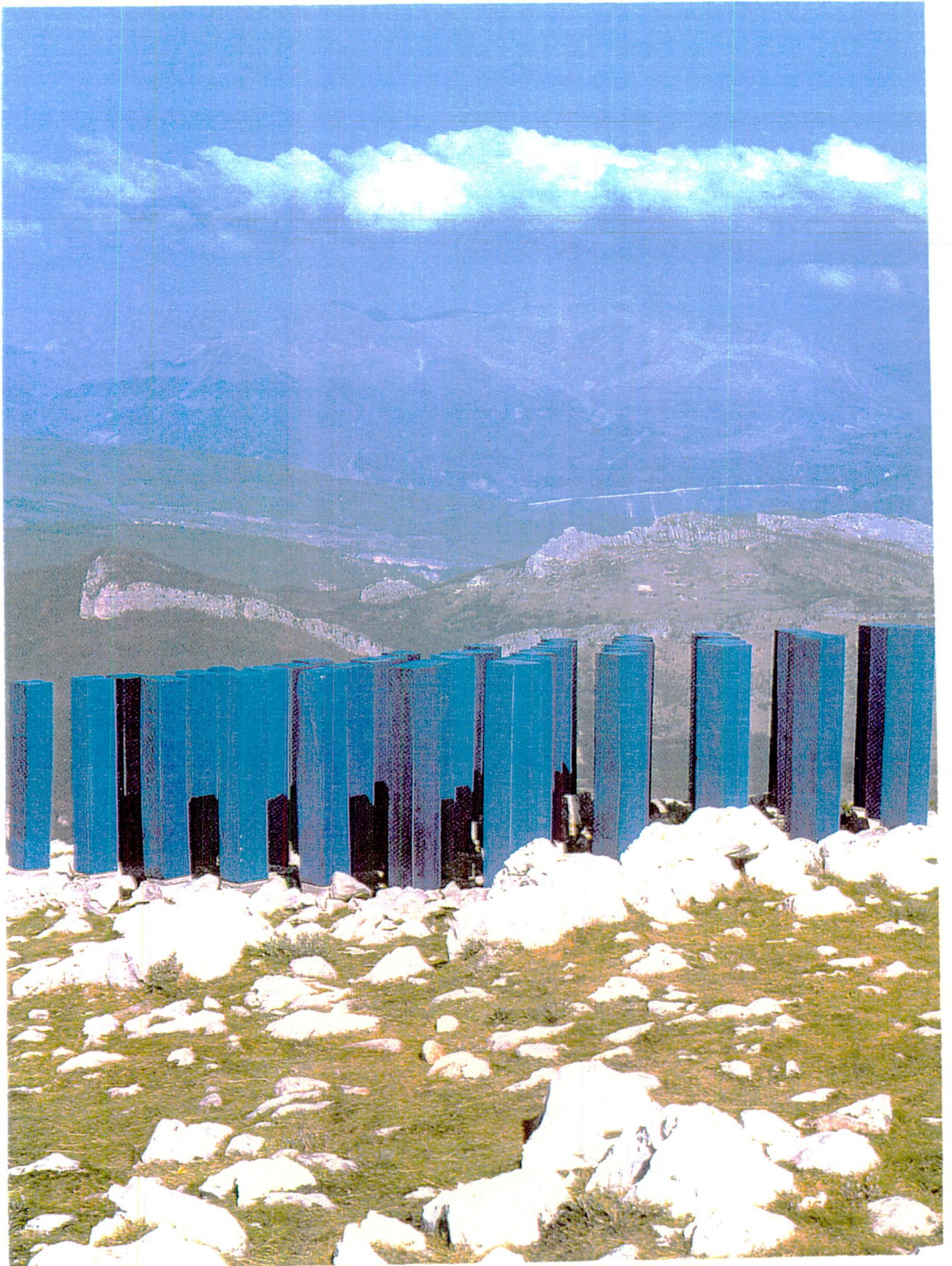


Figure 43: Bernard Dejonghe
'Blue Verticals French Alps' (1986)

Dejonghe works and lives in the far south of France, in the foothills of the Provençal Alps. He has been described as a rare artist because he has chosen to live in exile, away from the Parisian art scene. It may be suggested that this is a beneficial decision. He appears to be concerned with nature:

"I am not a city person. I love the wind and the stones. There, where they are, I feel at home. I try to let the energy which I feel in the stones emerge."²⁷

Living in this remoteness, he can concentrate on his own ideas and work and is not influenced directly by trends and fashions in art. He produces what he desires, not what is fashionable. Dejonghe has been unfairly classed as a craftsman of glass and ceramics, when he is more a sculptor using a particular material that suits his needs. Dejonghe has little knowledge or interest in craft tradition, particularly in the history and traditions of glass design. This has resulted in Dejonghe's possessing an open-mindedness with regards to overcoming technical difficulties. He has successfully applied sculptural ideas and methods to glass. He is using glass because it suits his expressive needs. It may be said that very often craft is too traditional and this limits the realm of experimentation and working methods. It is only in the last twenty years that artists have begun crossing material barriers and foregrounding aesthetic rather than technical and functional concerns. Thus artists are recognizing glass as one of the most unexplored, fresh mediums of expression.

The basis of Dejonghe's ideas is that all things are connected, there is no separation between the physical and the spiritual. He has devoted all his efforts to forsaking decoration in favor of perfection of material and form. Dejonghe's forms are usually very geometric - triangles, circles, horizontals and vertical lines. Dejonghe is influenced

by the work of Richard Long and also uses the universal symbols of the circle, line or standing stones understood by people worldwide. The *Colonne triangulaire, verre*(1992) and *Grand cercle, verre*(1995) remind the viewer of Neolithic stones or prehispanic circles.(Fig.44,45&46) His geometric forms are in complete contrast to the landscape of the mountains where they are installed. When placed alongside nature, their geometric shapes will not blend in or completely melt away:

“Dejonghe’s forms are simple, modular and repetitive they often constitute a set of samples destined to gauge variations and record differences and change.”²⁸

As a ceramist for twenty years Dejonghe worked extensively with a deep colour blue. The reason for this was a desire to experiment and achieve a maximum colour intensity. Since 1989 he has worked with clear, uncolored glass because of its visibility and its non-colour. Despite this, Dejonghe appears intensely interested in the qualities achieved from the firing process:

“Depending on how one works with the glass one can achieve whiteness, opacity or transparency. Its all about traveling in the world of minerals.”²⁹

Dejonghe has described himself as having a mad ambition to magnify nature using only nature’s means, in order to conquer and dominate it. Dejonghe is an artist who chooses a form to begin with and afterwards a place, whether it be a forest, a courtyard or a mountain peak, which causes the real birth of the work. Dejonghe has created installations from in the wilds of the Provençal Alps, with glass forms of strict, formal simplicity, complementing the grandiose and spectacular presence of the landscape, as well as in gallery spaces often steeped in history. Dejonghe has a desire to go beyond the object in order to take possession of the space:

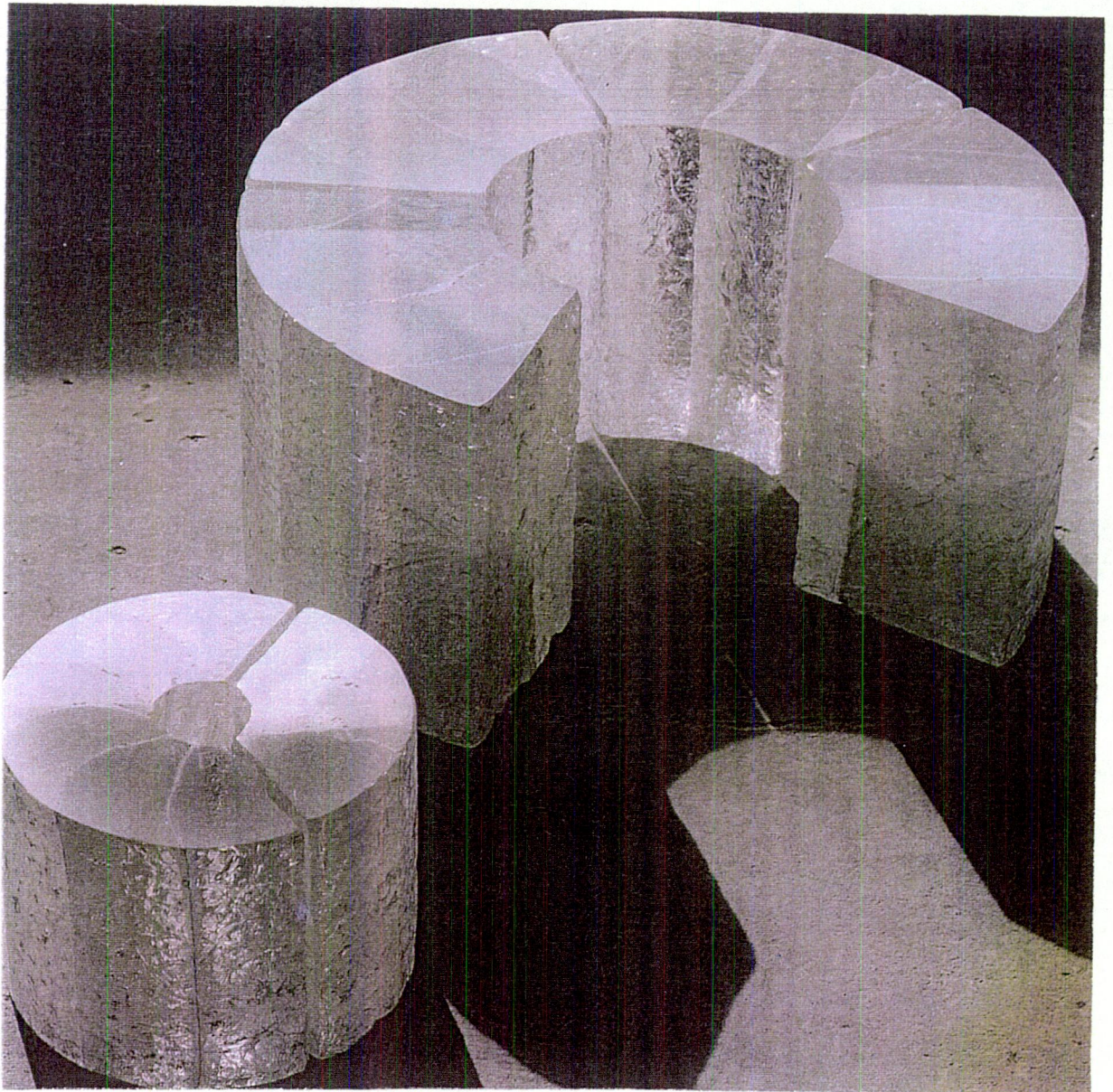


Figure 44: Bernard Dejonghe
'Grande Cercle, Verre' (1995)

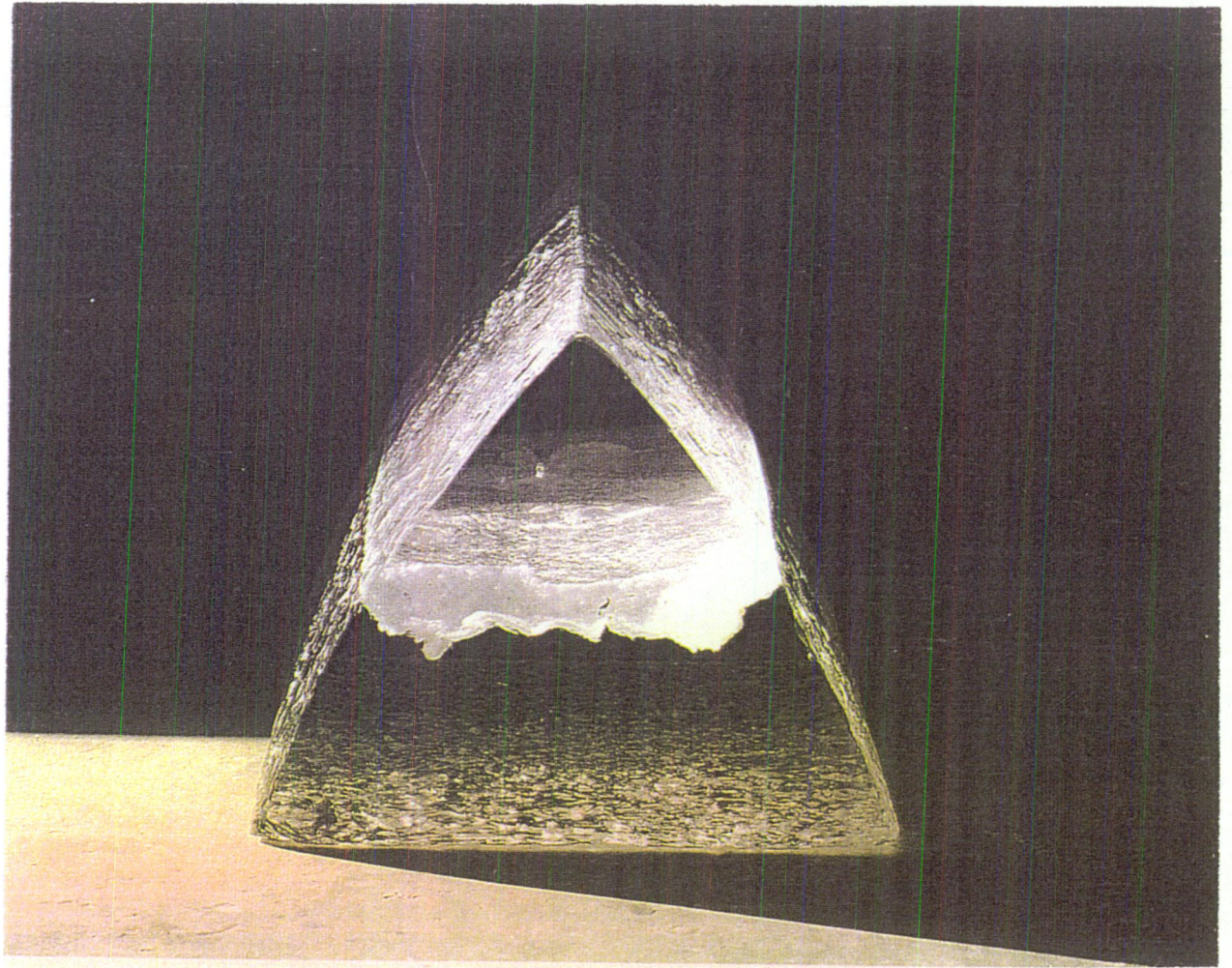


Figure 45: Bernard Dejonghe
'Colonne Triangulaire, Verre' (1992)

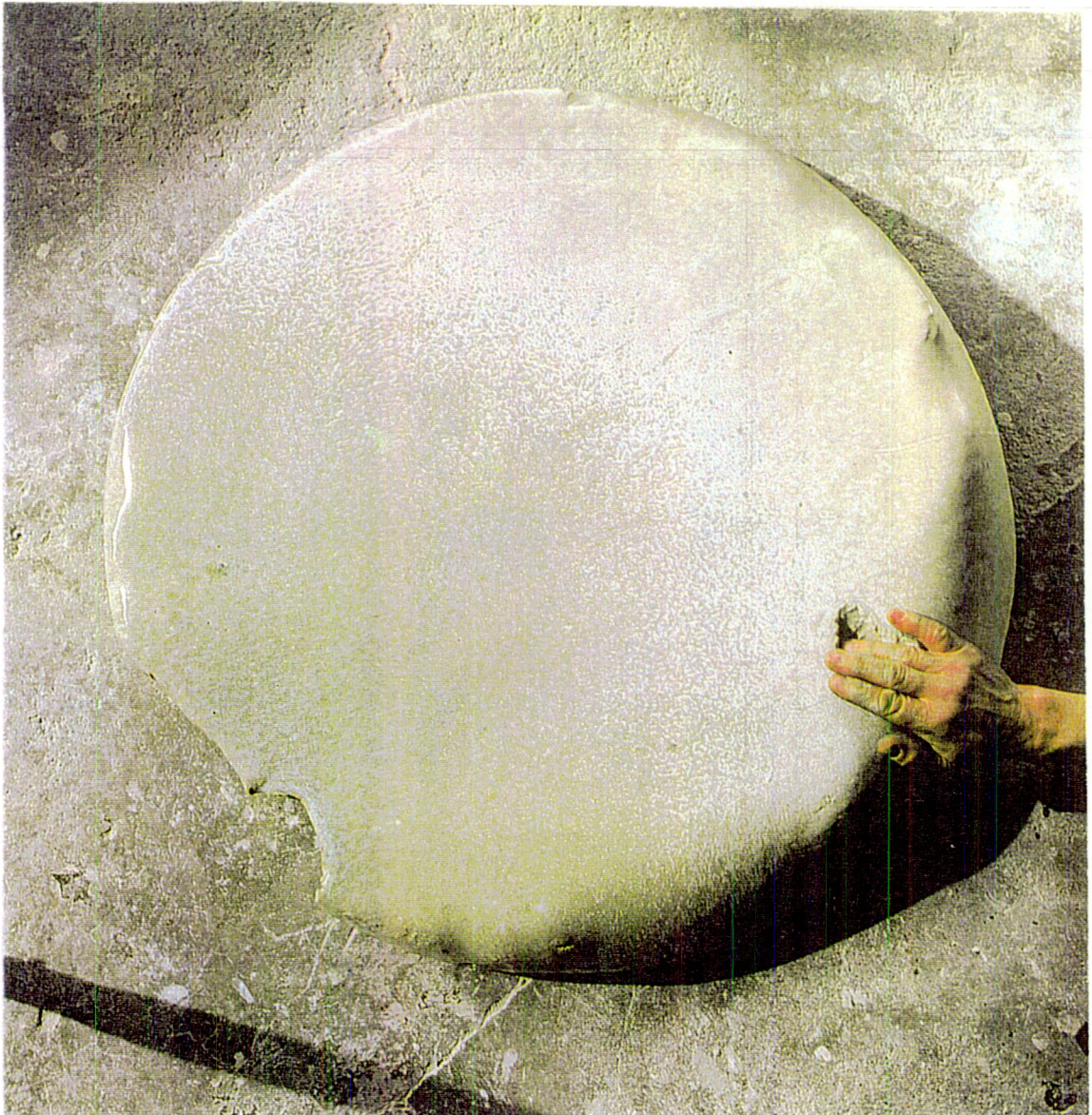


Figure 46: Bernard Dejonghe
'Meules Dormantes' (1992)
80cm dia.

"A sculpture or an object or anything else does not exist in a vacuum. All things are connected with one another."³⁰

As regards outdoor installations, Dejonghe creates environments of glass in areas encroaching on domains formerly and historically reserved for architects and gardeners. His installations, although of geometrical forms, demonstrate a sense of communion with nature, an approach more related to zen philosophers than to modern ecologists. Dejonghe's glass columns are ideal examples of this desire. His glass columns have been photographed in surging torrents where they appear like fountains of water, frozen into immobility. On the other hand, when photographed in woodlands, they appear to be more like sentries standing guard amongst trees. Installations by Dejonghe in various sites, from the ruins of an ancient castle to a mountain peak, are never perceived in the same way (Fig.47,48&49). Displaying in an indoor gallery is just as important and complex to him as exhibiting outdoors, for example, the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris; very often this confrontation with a place already full of a historical background, where even artificial lights and showcases are part of the effect can impose a sort of canvas that attracts or rejects the contemporary artist. Dejonghe has overcome these difficulties and succeeded on many occasions in producing successful installations indoors. The *Plissement du verre* (1995), in the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris, appear to have a quiet presence about them. They do not interfere with the environment they are set in. They like the majority of Dejonghe's works subtly complement their settings (Fig.50&51).

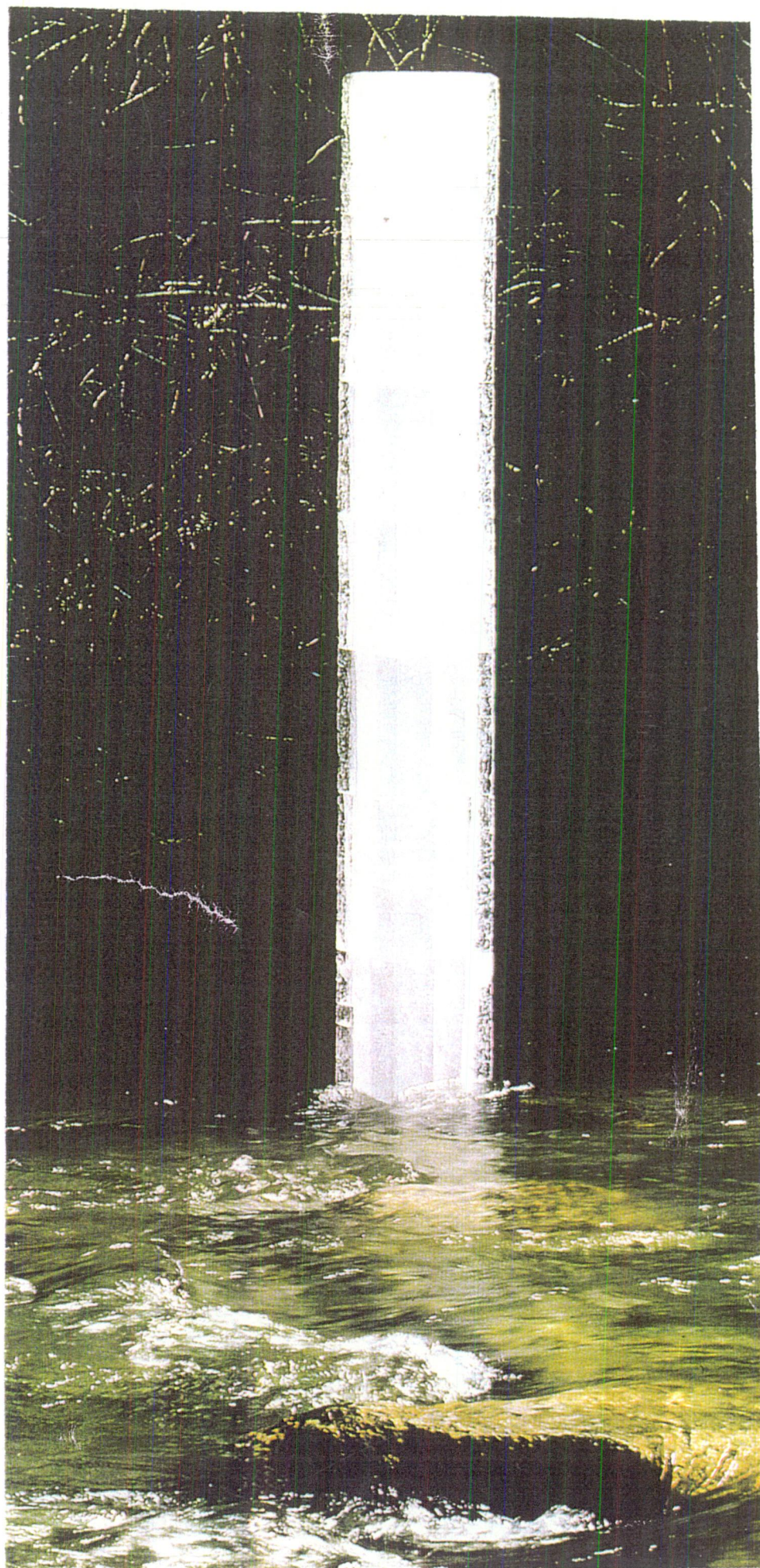


Figure 47: Bernard Dejonghe
82 'Colonne Triangulaire' (1991)
Optic Glass 200cm ht.

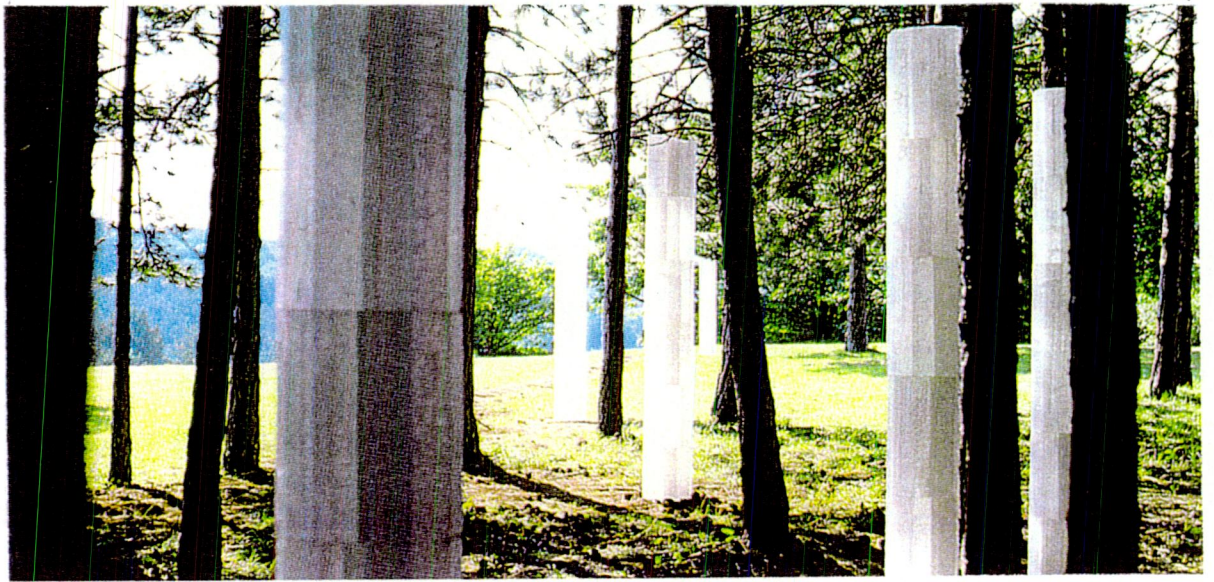


Figure 48: Bernard Dejonghe
'Neuf Colonnes De Verre' (1988)

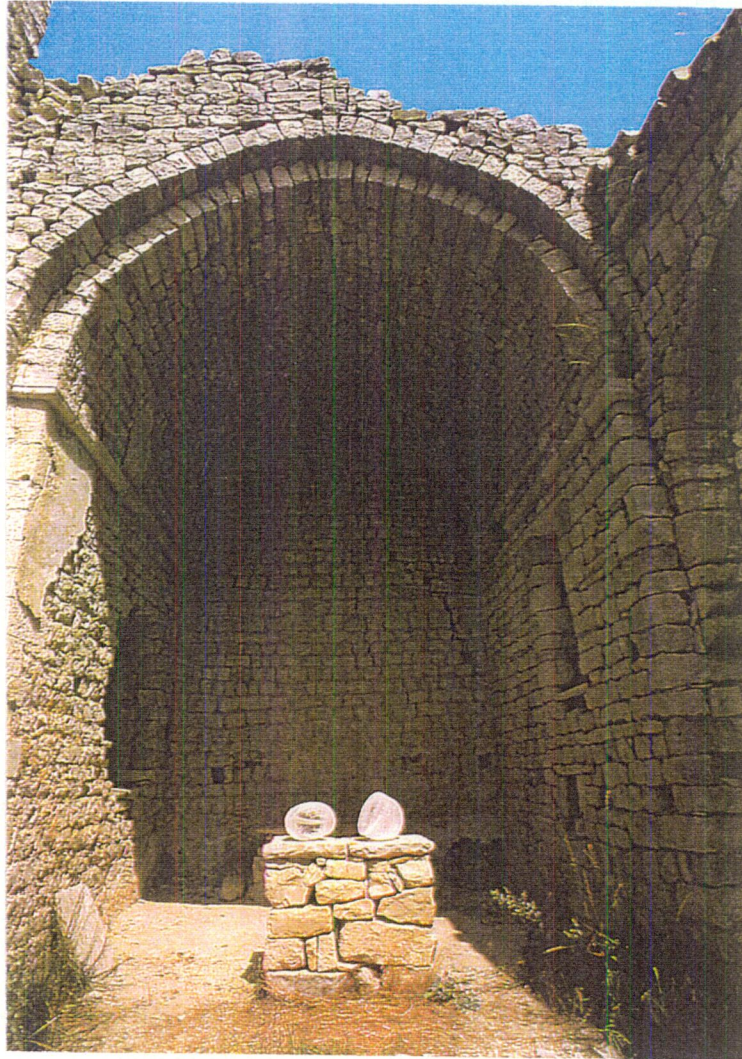


Figure 49: Bernard Dejonghe
'Chapelle De Viere' (1991)

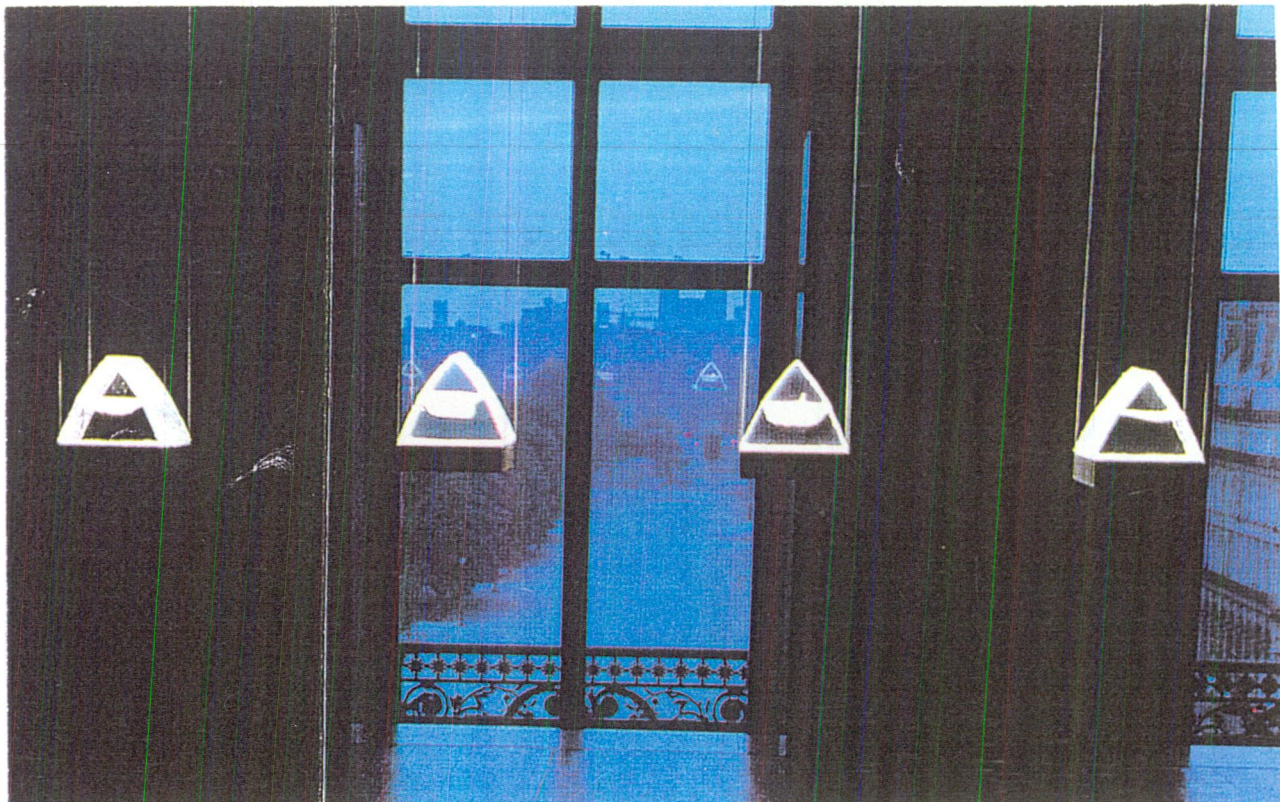


Figure 50: Bernard Dejonghe
'Les Plissement Du Verre' (1995)

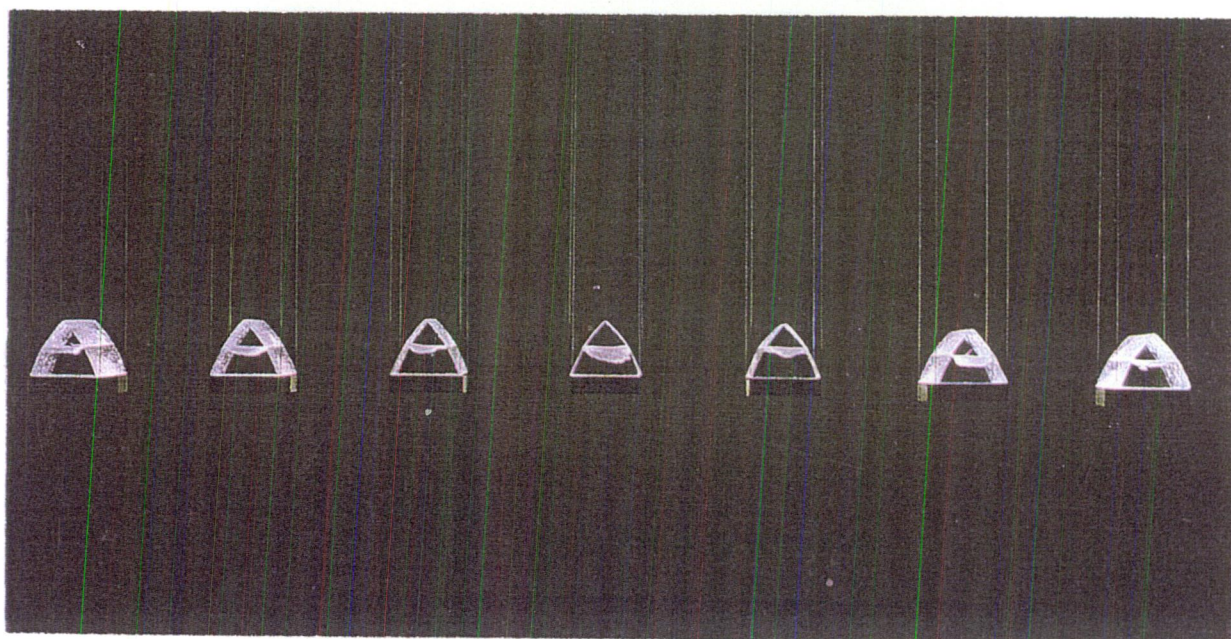


Figure 51: Bernard Dejonghe
'Les Plissement Du Verre' (1995)

CHAPTER FOUR:

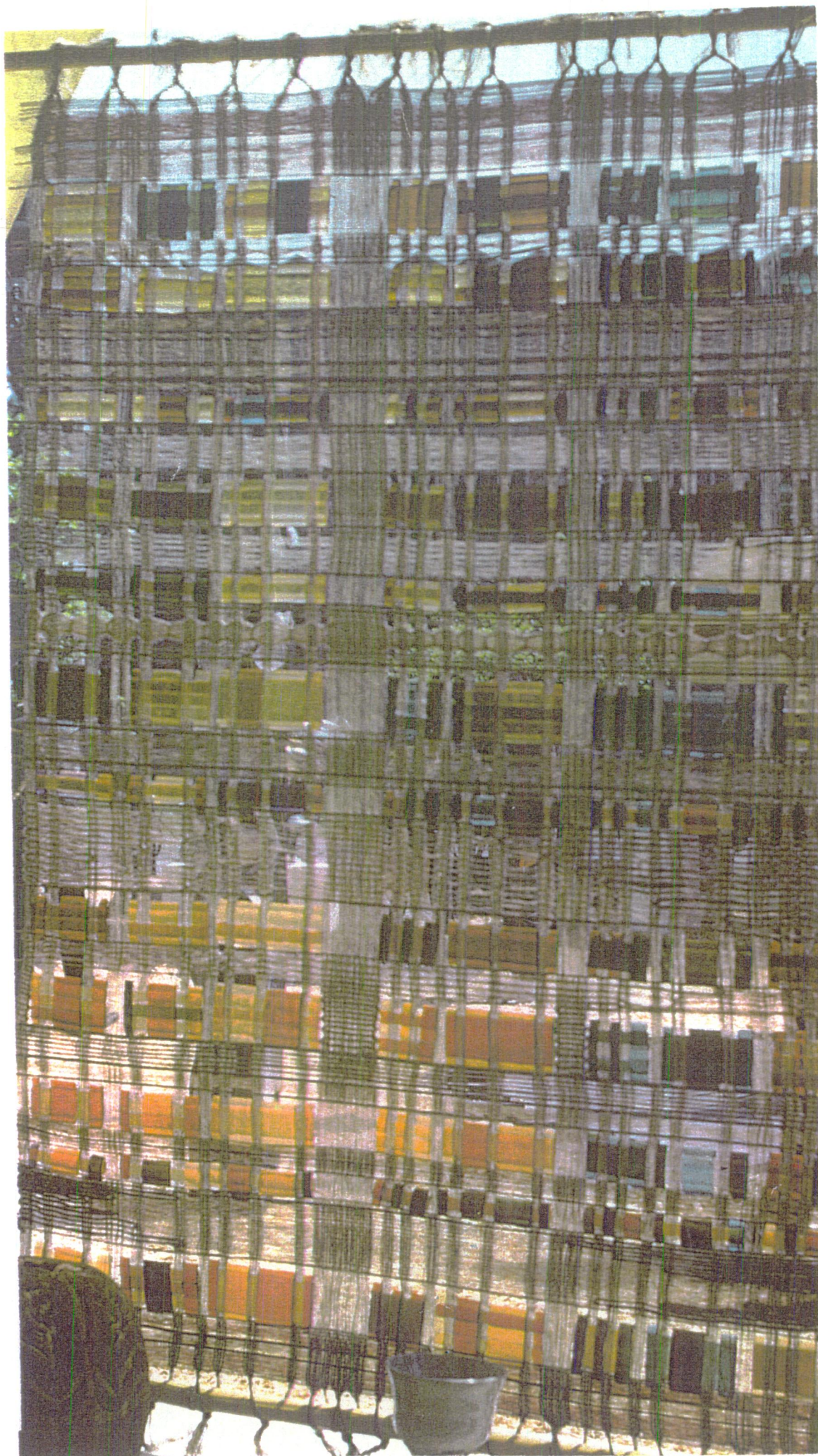
The Work of Dale Chihuly

“If one person has been responsible for transforming the scope and reputation of glass as an artistic medium it’s Dale Chihuly.”³¹

Dale Chihuly , America’s internationally acclaimed glass artist, studied architecture, interior design and weaving at the University of Washington at Seattle before, in 1963, embarking on a career of experimentation in blown glass. While at university he began incorporating pieces of glass in his tapestries. This new medium resisted every manipulation of the artist but, instead of giving up, Chihuly began to experiment with heat and techniques of stretching and slumping, bending the glass to his own need. Chihuly’s 1964 *Glass Weaving* piece resulted in his soon becoming fascinated with this new ,as yet relatively unexplored, medium (Fig.52).

After leaving college, Chihuly worked for an architectural firm as an interior designer. Within a year he realized this was not what he wanted to do and enrolled in 1966 under a full scholarship at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, to study glass blowing with Harvey Littleton.

By 1971, with Northwest art patrons Anne and John Haulberg, Chihuly founded the Pilchuck glass school on a tree farm north of Seattle. This has been a great success. It is the only international glass school to bring glass artists/teachers and students from around the world to share ideas and experiment with the excellent facilities of the studios. Chihuly was at first very involved with Pilchuck, but due to his own work he doesn’t teach anymore.



87 Figure 52: Dale Chihuly
'Glass Weaving' (1964)

There are three main periods in Dale Chihuly's glass career:

- 1) The installation work he provided as a student in the Seventies with James Carpenter
- 2) The blown glass of the Eighties, a time of ceaseless experimentation and
- 3) In the Nineties Chihuly and his team led *Chihuly over Venice*, a project which I was involved in and where I witnessed a very different aspect of the Chihuly.

As tutors at the Rhode Island School of Design, Chihuly and Carpenter produced numerous site-specific environmental installation works. It may be suggested that the most memorable and interesting piece was their *Twenty Thousand Pounds of Ice* (1971),(Fig.53). This featured an array of 'u'-shaped neon tubes trapped inside sixty blocks of ice. Some blocks pushed and others fell over, making their arrangement appear random. The piece took ten days to melt and was regarded as the most beautiful and dramatic of the Chihuly/Carpenter installations. The opening of the 1992 Seattle Art Museum's exhibition is the only other time this installation of *Twenty Thousand Pounds of Ice*; has been re-created. It may be said that the overwhelming energy and excitement of experimentation was a hallmark of Chihuly's earlier work. His primary interest at this time was investigating the characteristics of luminosity, reflection and transparency. The work was made to be fragile, experimental, ephemeral and non-commercial. Chihuly himself considers this time to be one of the most creative periods of his career.

After using ice, Chihuly began to incorporate neon with blown glass pieces (Fig.54). At this stage, he was using glass in a purely sculptural sense. Chihuly was very involved with the high-tech kinetic art of the time. Using neon, he fulfilled his desire to artificially animate the glass to move from solid, sculptural statements to more energized environments that invited human participation and response.

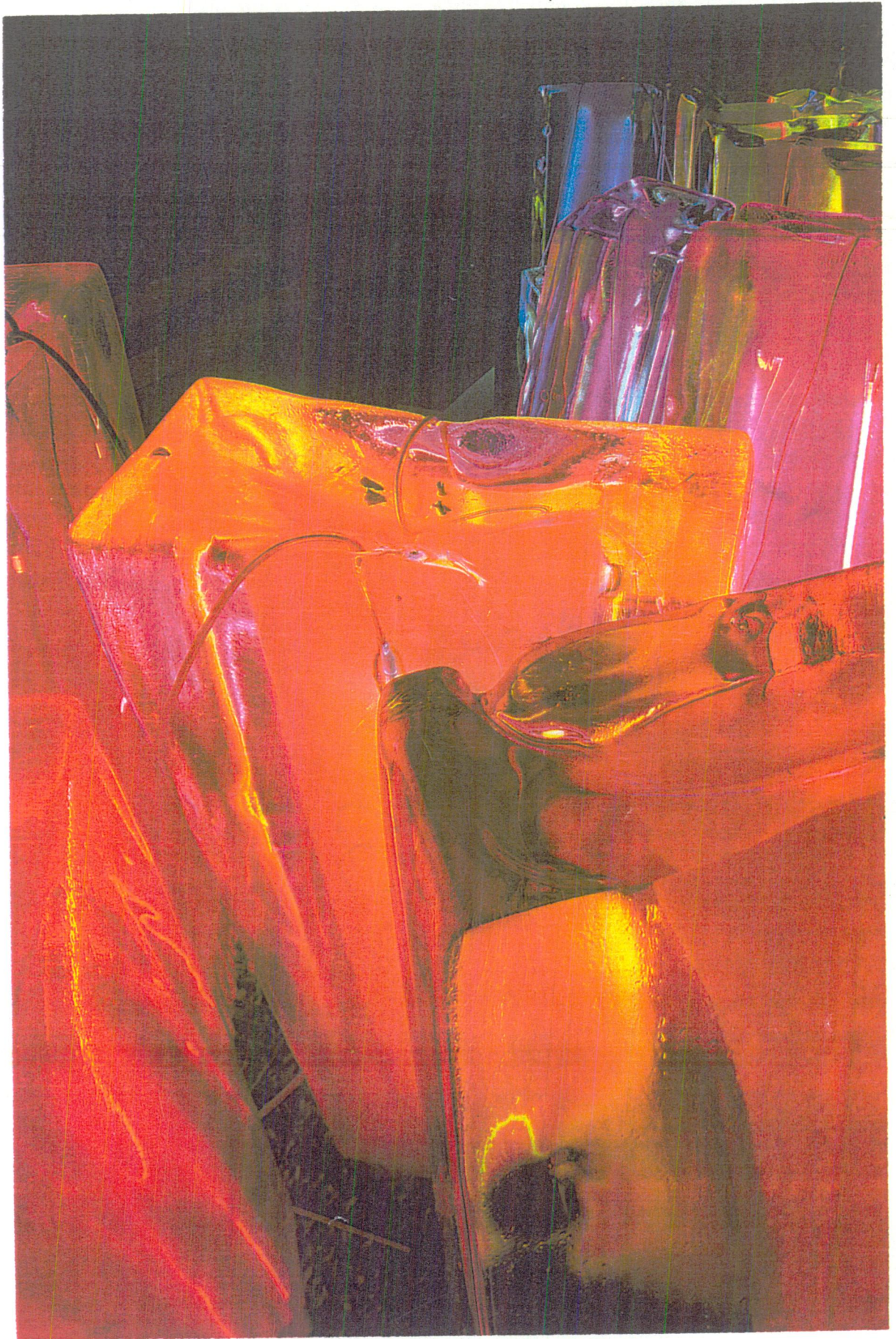


Figure 53: Dale Chihuly /James Carpenter
'20,000 Pounds Of Ice' (1971)

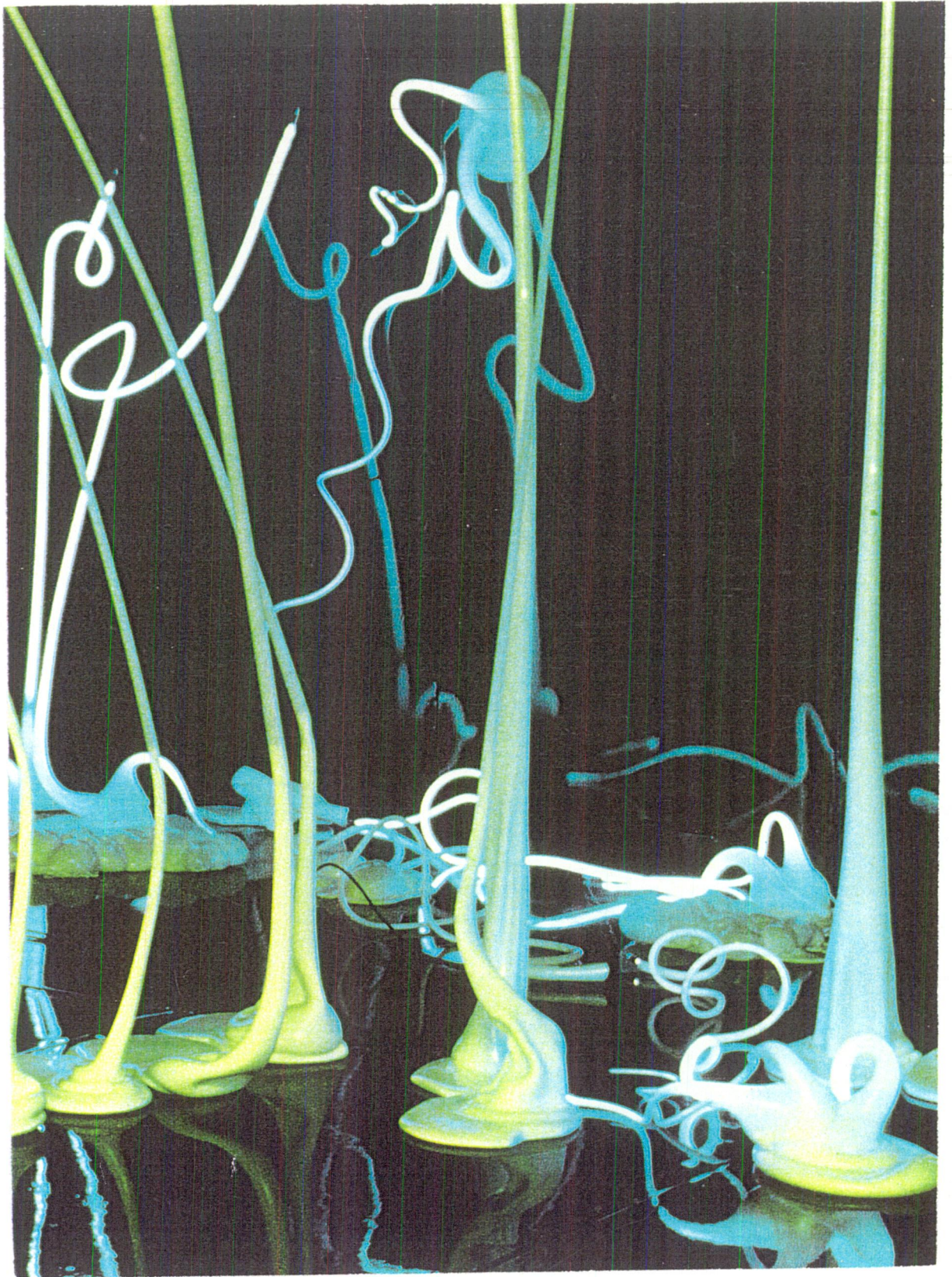


Figure 54: Dale Chihuly
'Glass Forest' (1971-1972)
Neon, Glass and Argon

This period of installation work from 1965-1972 seems completely isolated from any work of the Eighties or Nineties. Chihuly appeared to have put aside these desires to create site specific, non-commercial temporary work where individual human involvement and response were important. While he was teaching at the Pilchuck Glass School, much of his installation art of the Sixties and Seventies was destroyed when his Providence studio burned down in 1973. Chihuly's disregard for this work is seen when he did not return to Providence to salvage any of it. He prefers that most of the installation work that he did with Carpenter can now only be seen in photographs.

One may question why he seems to have so little interest in this work. Is it due to the fact that they are his earliest pieces and now he feels he has moved on and they are of no great importance? The destruction of the work added to the feeling of its being site specific and temporary. Is it that Chihuly wishes to be remembered just for the blown installation work he has done with his team of helpers since then?

During the late Seventies and Eighties he became engrossed in glass blowing. He ignored his earlier interest in light, space and colour and became wrapped up in the hotshop end of things. Chihuly was the first American to study in Murano, where he worked and developed under the Venetian teamwork tradition. He feels that "you have to blow in a team, you just can't blow glass successfully on your own".³² Chihuly has stated he is fascinated with the blowing itself rather than the glass as a material:

"I used to think that it was the glass that was so mysterious and then I discovered that it was the air that went into it that was so miraculous. I often wonder how anyone ever thought of the idea of blowing air into molten glass. It doesn't work with any other material".³³

Chihuly himself hasn't blown glass since 1976, when he damaged his left eye in a car accident. He then lost the depth of perception essential for handling glass. Now his primary role is to design through painting and to control and oversee the execution of these designs carried out by his world-class team of glass assistants. His paintings in acrylic are supposedly a record of the spontaneous process of glass blowing.

For Chihuly the late Seventies and Eighties were excitingly productive decades of exhibitions, travel and awards. During these years he concentrated on producing as much of a variety of glass forms as possible. He produced huge vessel series for installations such as *Cylinders* (1974-1984), *Baskets* (1977-1979), *Seaforms* (1980), *Macchia* (1981), *Venetians* (1988), *Ikebana* (1988-1991) and *Persians* (1988) (Fig.55,56&57) It is through these productions that he has taken a medium known for everyday functional and decorative objects into the realm of fine art. Chihuly's work is shown worldwide in numerous museums and galleries of craft and fine art.

Chihuly has been described as "America's first national living treasure".³⁴ It cannot be ignored that through his refusal to be timid, his ceaseless experimentation, not admitting to realistic boundaries, that he has inspired many artists and contributed to the change of attitude towards glass as a medium for both craft and art. Chihuly has made the leap from functional to decorative to studio glass installations and has not slowed down but kept on going. However, it has been suggested that his personality and his constant obsession with media coverage has put him where he is today.

"Chihuly has promoted his art, and himself from obscurity to worldwide celebrity, emerged as one of the most controversial characters in the art world exuberant and overbearing, flashy and unpredictable."³⁵



Figure 55: Dale Chihuly
'Leopard Spotted Basket' (1992)
9x10x11''

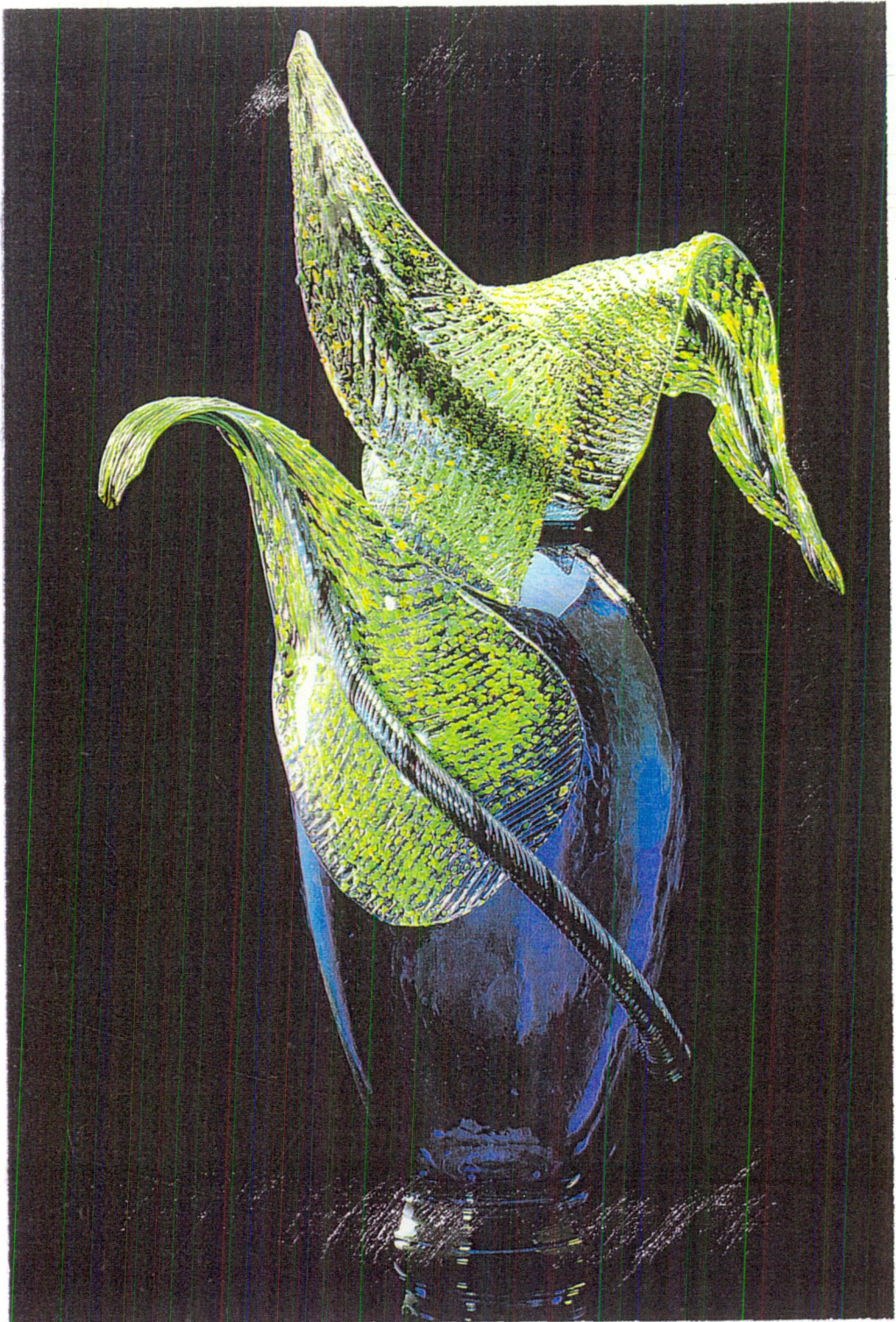


Figure 56: Dale Chihuly
'Ultramarine Venetian With Green Leaves' (1990)



Figure 57: Dale Chihuly
'Putti Ikebana' (1991)

CHIHULY OVER VENICE (IRELAND)

Although Chihuly continued to create public installations throughout the Eighties and Nineties, these pieces generally lack the experimentation, freshness and excitement of his earlier works:

“It seemed as though Martians had landed in the Butlerstown plant of Waterford Crystal earlier this month when it became the setting for a fantastic invasion of curious beings who transformed the factory into a carnival like hubbub of activity as they produced ethereal and wondrous crystal sculptures of brilliant hues aided by ten eager if amused first class Waterford Crystal blowers”³⁶

Chihuly arrived in Waterford in September 1995 with a team of sixty blowers, installers and camera crews. This was the second stage of his project “Chihuly over Venice”, a project devised to pay tribute to the glass making traditions of five European countries, Finland, Ireland, France, the Czech Republic and Italy. The plan was to blow more than 200 new pieces at each venue each day. The end result would be that five of the best creations would be suspended over the canals of the city of Venice, paying homage to their centuries-old tradition of chandelier making.

CHIHULY THE BUSINESSMAN

Along with twenty other fellow students, I arrived at the Butlerstown Waterford Crystal factory on 29th September 1995. On approaching the factory, our first glimpse was of hundreds of blown forms lying on the grass. They had the appearance of huge glass slugs basking in the winter sun. We were greeted warmly by Chihuly’s personal

secretary who supplied us with a Chihuly T-shirt and a form to sign stating we were volunteers and would not hold the company responsible for any personal injuries.

As we entered the factory, we were hit by the blaring sounds of U2's 'Sunday Bloody Sunday'. This was not the typical scene of an industrious Waterford Crystal blowing workshop, but more like the stage of a rock concert or a music set. This loud music supposedly got "The creative juices flowing".³⁷

Teams of skilled workers, including Irish blowers, wrestled with huge glass forms. The sunglass-clad American blowers seemed well used to this wild atmosphere and appeared to enjoy the hot sweaty production. It was obvious that the Waterford blowers were more than excited about this new technique of freehand glass blowing. One Irish blower commented:

"It's going to be really hard to go back to the old way next week. The work is different and interesting, we've been blowing into molds for years and have never seen anything like this, this stuff is amazing."³⁸

Under the glare of studio lights, movie cameras and photographers flashes, swarms of curious onlookers and visitors would burst into spontaneous applause as the master gaffer shouted out instructions to the five different teams. But there was no Dale

Chihuly. We were so excited to be involved and witness this unusual process of glass making in Ireland that we didn't inquire what was involved in our work as volunteers. We were all given portable drills, glue guns and wire. Our task was to block up and wire all the pieces for installation.



Figure 58: Dale Chihuly
'Blown Glass Elements From Chandeliers' (1995)



Figure 59: *'Tommy Bowe blows while Chihuly and factory employees look on'(1995)*

By late evening, word had come through that Chihuly was making his way to the factory. All administrators went into a made panic. After a few days I realized their main function was to keep Chihuly away from any problems or upsets. Chihuly arrived flamboyantly dressed in bright red trousers, a yellow shirt and a tweed hat supporting his well known pirate patch across his left eye. By his side was a entourage of film crews, photographers catching every move, financial and marketing advisors. I had previously read and heard so much about the “master” I was interested to see how Chihuly became involved in the already able team. He flew in and flew out like a guest appearance from a movie star. He approached the teams of Blowers, making comments such as:

“that looks great / pretty / nice”³⁹

“Let’s try and make them bigger.”⁴⁰

He also did a quick painting which took approximately five minutes. These paintings sold from \$4,000. Before we knew, it he was sped off as quickly as he arrived. Within a week of working with the Chihuly team I realized what I had read about Chihuly was a complete farce. Formerly, through literature and videos, I was under the impression that Chihuly was very involved with the design and control of the blowing and installation work; instead, all the decisions and designs were left to the blowers and installation crew. I started to ask myself what was behind Chihuly’s creations.



Figure 60: Dale Chihuly
'Chihuly Paintings' (Waterford 1995)

They were large organic forms of numerous shapes, sizes and colours. Having studied Chihuly's books and videos all made by his production team, I realized that through favorable promotion he has made himself out to be some sort of master of glass design. As regards colour, he has commented:

"I am obsessed with colour -never saw one I didn't like."⁴¹

"I would like things to be pretty / push it sometimes to where it becomes rather strange. By the time I'm finished it comes back and they are beautiful again."⁴²

"When I begin something new people usually don't like it. But by the time I go into a series for years they begin to understand it. You have to see something for a while. What looks ugly now might not be ugly after a couple of years."⁴³

Chihuly is said to challenge taste by not being concerned with it. In my opinion these comments are a joke. In other words, if we look at something for long enough and are told it is a work of art we may accept it. Chihuly is no longer interested in his work. He is so caught up in the material and its production that there is no real depth or, meaning in the forms he creates. It's all about experimentation in the workshop which, from my experience, he is rarely involved in.

During my three weeks working with Chihuly Incorporated, I gained a true insight into the real Chihuly art. There was a huge contrast between the blowing room and the time-consuming installation work, which kept the project ticking over. As this was not the most glamorous side to the project, the media and film crew had little time for it. We spent three weeks packing and unpacking glass, moving these fragile pieces from one installation site to another. On many occasions avoidable mistakes were made due to

lack of communication. We, the students, on numerous occasions were asked to set up these installations for photographing. I met Chihuly once at one of the installation sites at Lismore Castle. He made a quick comment on how great it looked and then disappeared.

It is quite obvious that I was very disappointed with Chihuly himself. It is rumored that he suffers from depression, ligament problems and that the loss of an eye can cause mental and physical exhaustion. However these mood swings rub off on his team. Chihuly has been placed, or it may be suggested has placed himself, on a pedestal and no-one can approach him. I was also shocked at his small involvement with the design team and creative director. He has stated on numerous occasions that he has the final say on a piece. Most of the work was blown, installed and photographed without any input from Chihuly.

Many other hidden problems occurred in Waterford: the glass was blown too thin, and no research had been done by the Americans on the lead crystal. The lack of communication between the blowers and installers resulted in a huge amount of pieces being blown too thin, therefore being too fragile and dangerous to install or transport. The installation crew stalled on this and brought it to the blowers' attention. When it was too late, more frustration and tension grew. Everything was kept from Chihuly as seemingly the smallest problem sends him into a rage. He has been known to fire people at the drop of a hat. An ex-associate described being fired after sixteen years of service through a message on her answering machine. Chihuly can not tolerate cigarette smoking, especially by females. This we found comical but it was apparent that this was frustrating for the American blowers. Chihuly has spoken about the importance of his

team. Most of the blowers returned to Seattle before the final show. They saw the Waterford project as another job and, because it was not their work, they were not very interested in the overall results. Leslie Jackson, Chihuly's fiancée, was a helpmate and marketing advisor. She seemed overbearing and very quick to comment if any volunteers stepped out of line.

Visually I found the project and my involvement very interesting. However, in my opinion Chihuly's own media coverage has made him out to be involved in all aspects of the production of these pieces, while through my personal observation he is responsible for only the name of the product. He is losing control. He has technically brought glass on as regards producing large scale pieces once thought of as impossible. Nevertheless there is no depth of meaning or form to these chandeliers. He has not advanced to using glass as a vehicle for artistic sculptural expression.

The final installation works at Lismore Castle were seen by a dozen art collectors from America, such as Northwest businessmen Bradford Romano, Frank Everett and George Stroemple, Chihuly's New York dealer, Charles Cowle and the founder of Haggen Dazs Ice Cream, Rose Mattus. The chandeliers were selling from \$40,000 to \$400,000.

The more recent displays of work (chandeliers) have brought a greater public prominence for Chihuly, but at the same time he seems content to assume the mantle of corporate decorator, encumbered by a desire to please.



Figure 61: Dale Chihuly
*'Irishman Richard Harte doesn't know what to make
of Chihuly's art' (Waterford 1995)*

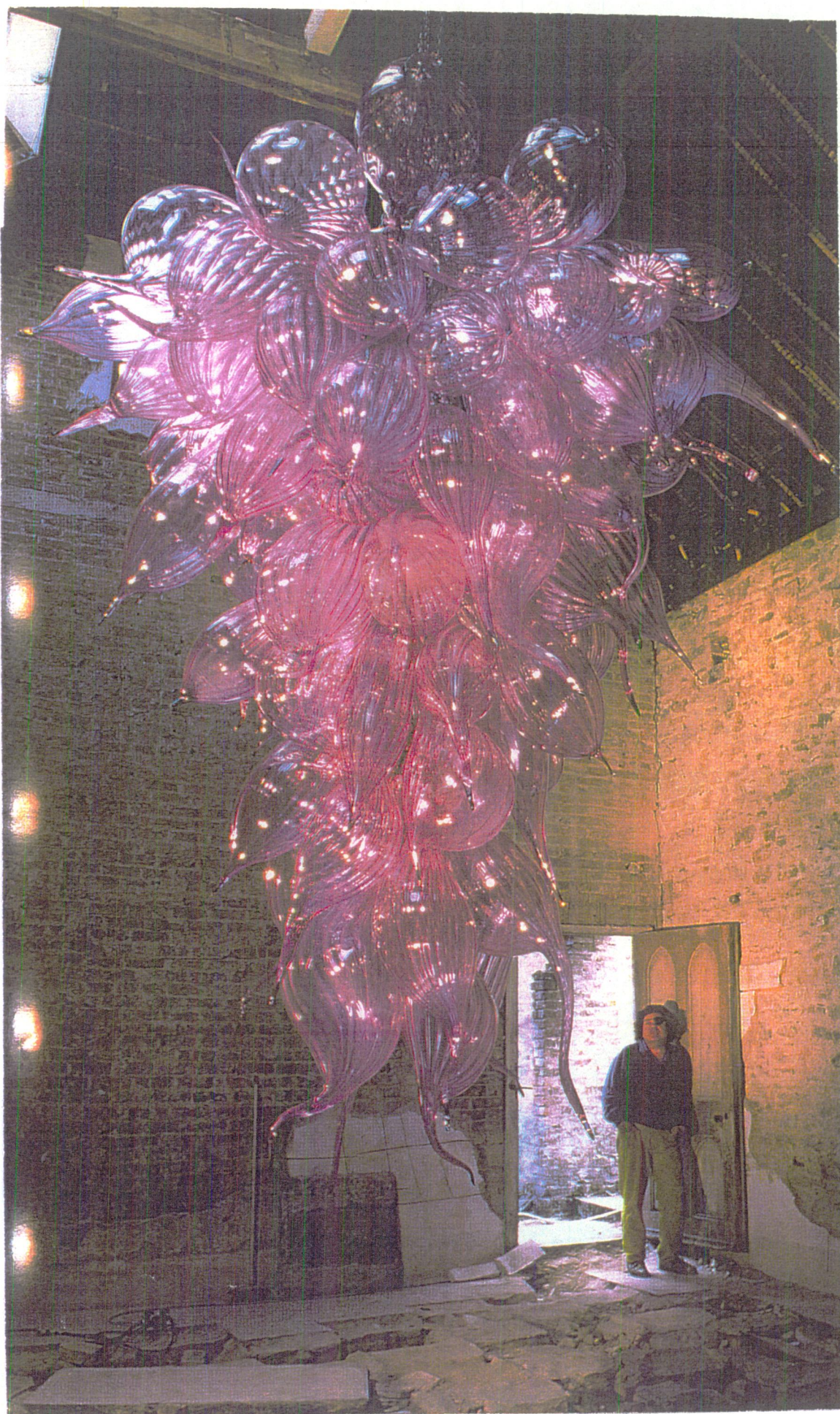
In my opinion Chihuly has two choices: either he retires or thinks up bigger projects which have become too large for him to control. He has lost touch with glass. He is merely the name given to a project produced and designed by other artists/craftsmen. His has become a factory production line with little thought or communication. Chihuly is the name and the person who switches the machine on.

The chandeliers themselves, when installed around the woodlands of Lismore Castle, looked spectacular. Their vibrant colours, large scale and unusual setting combined to show them as exciting works. However, the pieces that were laid beneath trees or in the center of the vast gardens looked like strange looking vegetables. The majority were photographed in this environment: nevertheless, this was not thought out and they ended up looking awkward and loud in the peaceful, natural surroundings of the fairytale-like castle.

The final week of the project in Ireland saw the departure of Chihuly and the last of the blowers. The installation team was left to remove all traces of Chihuly's work. Volunteers were asked to stick around and help. This week ran very smoothly without any interference from marketing or administration people.



Figure 62 Dale Chihuly
'Gourd Chandelier' (1995)



CHIHULY IN VENICE - SEPTEMBER 1996

Although Chihuly designed his chandeliers specifically for Venice, it appears he did not study the historical architecture where they were to be installed. For understandable safety reasons the authorities did not allow, the chandeliers to be hung from the canal bridges. The authorities could never have approved this, therefore the Chihuly chandeliers were installed among the maze of houses and canals and were often hard to make out.

“They seem to be dependent on the camera’s point of view to frame them left and right and to make them the focal point.”⁴⁴

This audience was expecting a lot, due to Chihuly’s documentation of the Finland and Ireland projects. Also the confident title he gave this project, -“Chihuly over Venice”- made one expect his best work ever would be shown. Chihuly received no prizes for his work. In my opinion, after witnessing his project in Ireland and his involvement with design and production, he didn’t deserve any.

„CHIHULY OVER VENICE“

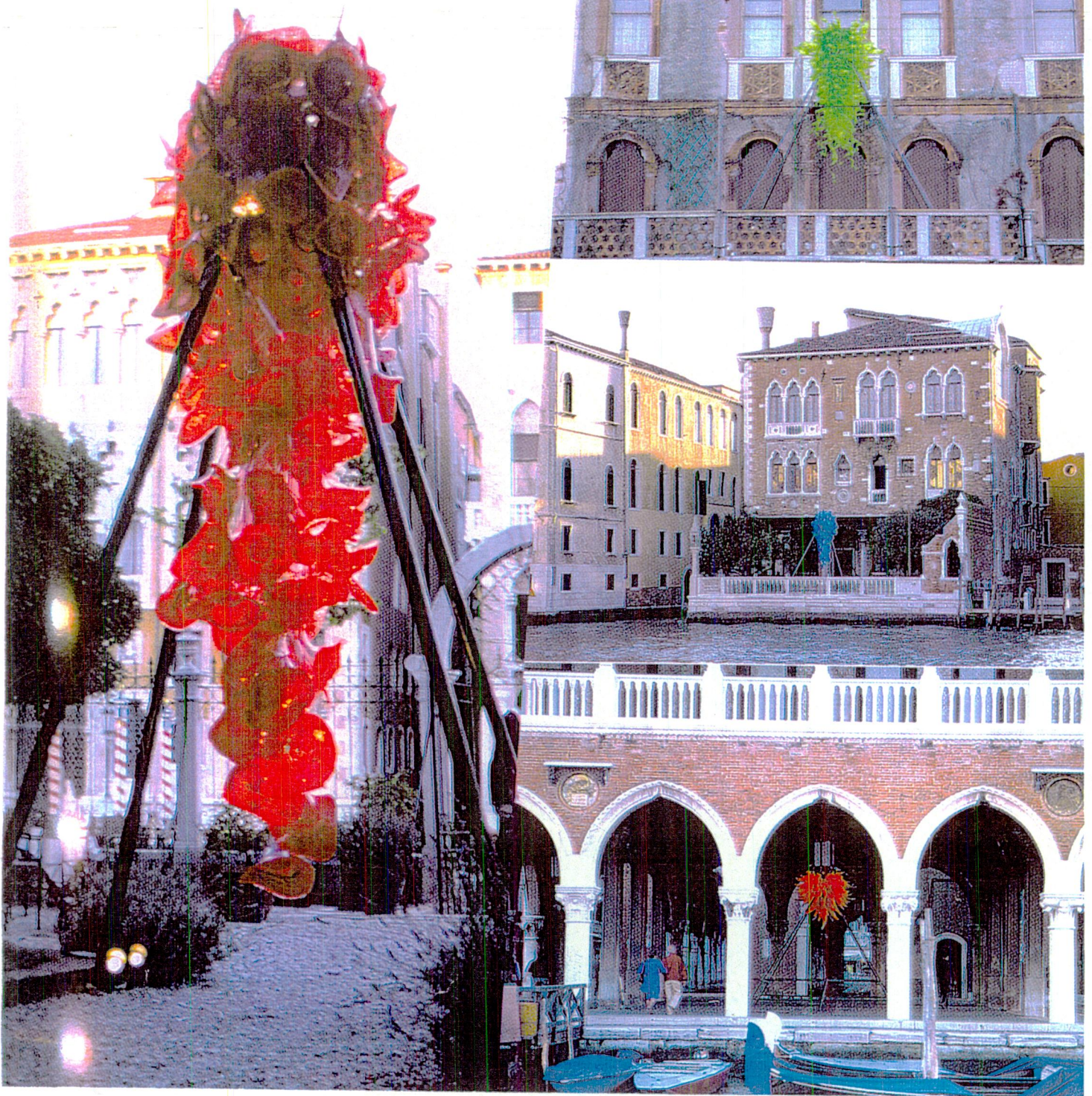


Figure65: Dale Chihuly
'Chihuly Over Venice' (1996)



111 Figure64: Dale Chihuly
'Chihuly Over Venice' (1996)

CONCLUSION

The question I put now is, what are the qualities that must be present to set a piece of glass in an installation environment?

When one looks at the work of Steve Tobin, in the caves of Retretti, a strong bond between the glass and the rock is apparent. Tobin has a great respect for natural surroundings. He does not wish to loudly interfere with the already perfect landscape. He humbly sets his installations in the rocks and underground lakes which accept the work and complement it. Tobin appears to be a man of great contemplation. He does not make glass to achieve technical satisfaction. He chooses glass as a medium for his own personal use. Glass is a metaphor for his personal ideas.

Vallien is also a very deep character. After studying his work, it is apparent he too has great knowledge of his material. He also uses glass as a vehicle for his personal philosophies. His respect for nature is apparent when he accepts his work does not look comfortable in the outdoor environment. These pieces are worlds of thought and reflection in themselves. Nature does not accept them, while the setting of a dark gallery space is more appropriate apparent especially in the work of Bertil Vallien. French man Dejonghe also subtly encroaches on the natural landscape when photographing and installing his work. His simple geometric forms appear to have formed naturally in the rivers, forests and mountainous environments in which they are documented.

All three artist's success lies in the fact they see glass as a medium for expression. They are not caught up solely in the material and with glass. They control the glass to suit

their needs. The glass does not control them. If they respect and subtly add, not take over the installation site, it will accept and complement their work.

Dale Chihuly, on the other hand, began his career experimenting with light, transparency and colour. He was concerned with creating site-specific, non-commercial installation art, whereas with Tobin and Vallien the spectator was crucial in the significance of the installation. The material fascinated but did not control the artist. However, following exhibitions, numerous awards and an influx of capital, it appears Chihuly turned his back on his earlier desires to seek fame and fortune.

Each year his teams and projects have grown larger. In his latest project, *Chihuly over Venice*, he supports a sixty man team of blowers, installers and photographers. Chihuly has become more like a film star than a glass artist. He is satisfied to produce decorative pieces where the brighter the colour and the bigger the size, the more successful he feels. He has rooted himself at a personal development stage where material is in control, not the artist.

If I had primarily focused on Dale Chihuly in my Thesis I might have accepted his carefree attitude that if people look at something long enough they will eventually understand the piece and convince themselves there is some sort of beauty hidden within. Nevertheless, after studying the installation work of Tobin, Vallien and Dejonghe, I feel Chihuly's arguments are very weak.

It cannot be overlooked that he has contributed in the bringing of glass out of the craft ethic into the sculptural league. It is as if he found a style which people accepted and is

content to give up his artistic freedom to keep the public happy and his bank account full. If I look at any artist work for example, a painter's I attempt to look for some sort of idea or facet of the artist's character. Chihuly as a glass artist uses the paint and canvas or glass purely as materials to portray his personal work. It is as if Chihuly is also a painter. He is trapped in the material world of different coloured paints and canvas. His work is therefore impersonal and of no depth.

After working with Chihuly incorporated I am confused whether it is his work or not. He came up with the original idea of allowing glass shapes to form natural with gravity and the human breath. His own film and literature productions have shown him to be the creator in all aspects of the design and production process. However, the production has become too big for Chihuly to control. Now he is wealthy enough to pay others to produce, install and document his work. Chihuly has become a businessman, a factory owner and no longer an artist of glass.

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K.C.T.S - T.V.