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GLASS
BY
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CIRCUM
SPECTUM

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CIRCUMSPECTUS

A STORY OF MATTER BETWEEN SOLID AND LIQUID

Thomas Blank is one of the Swiss glass artists to have integrated, very early in his career, the collections of great museums of decorative arts and design, such as the Mudac in Lausanne and the Museum für Gestaltung in Zurich.

Born in Bern in 1973, in a country with no glass tradition, he left to train in the United States, another home of glass, which is said to be the birthplace of the "Studio Glass" movement, i.e. the appropriation by visual artists of this material, previously essentially utilitarian, to make it a sculptural material. Trained in sculpture, with an option for glass, at San Francisco State University's Studio Arts program from 1996 to 2001, Thomas was also introduced to Venetian techniques in 1998 by American glass sculptor Josiah McElheny at the very creative Pilchuck Glass School in Stanwood, Washington, a glass art teaching center founded in 1971 by the famous artist Dale Chihuly. This was a revelation for the young artist-designer, who later went on to perfect his skills in the Venetian furnaces of Murano, notably with Simone Cenedese.

UNE HISTOIRE DE MATIÈRE ENTRE SOLIDE ET LIQUIDE

Thomas Blank est l'un des artistes verrier suisses à avoir intégré, très tôt dans sa carrière, les collections de grands musées d'arts décoratifs et de design, tels que le Mudac à Lausanne et le Museum für Gestaltung de Zurich.

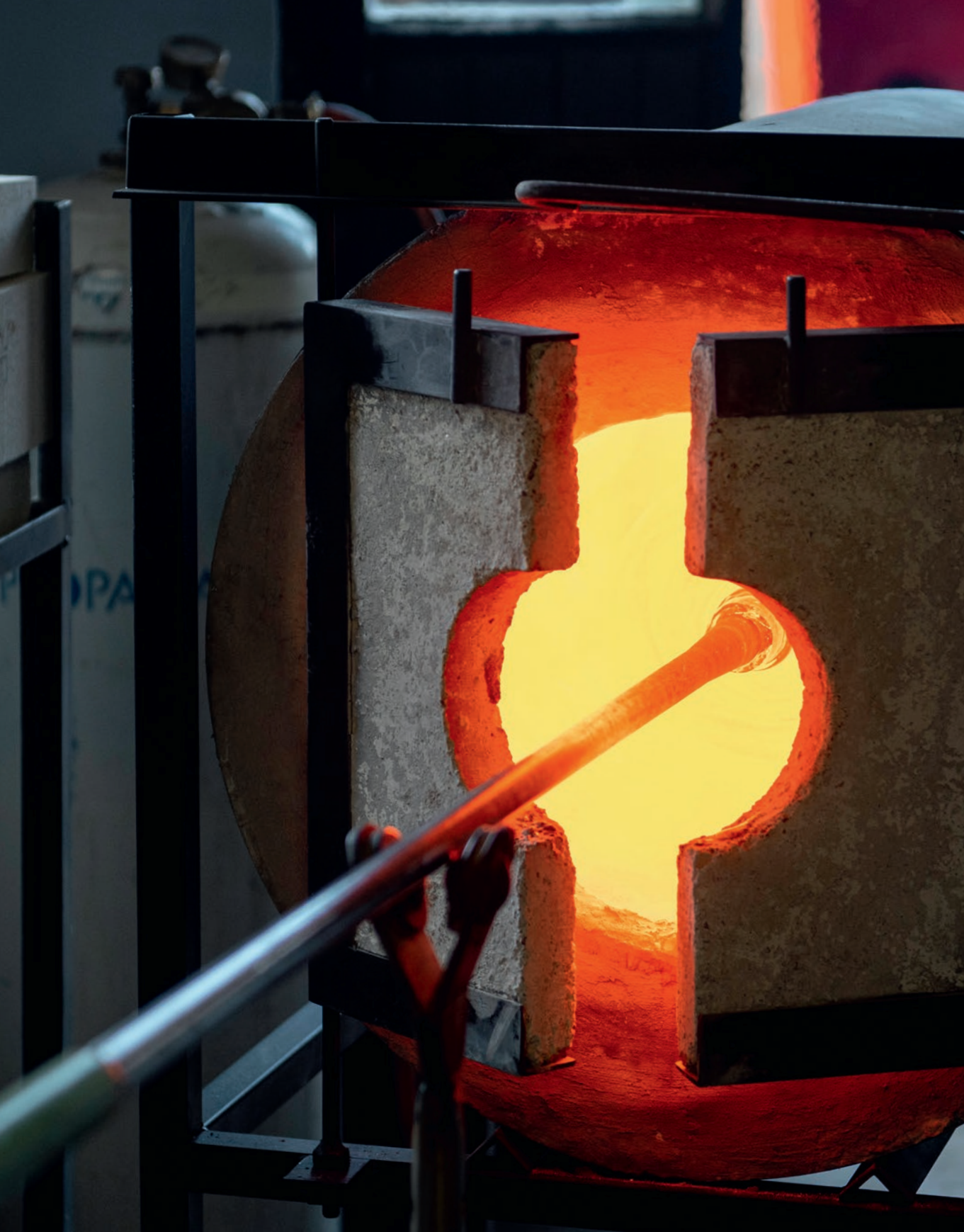
Né à Berne en 1973, dans un pays qui n'a pas de tradition verrière, il est parti se former aux Etats-Unis, une autre patrie du verre dont on dit qu'elle est le lieu de naissance du mouvement du « Studio Glass », c'est-à-dire d'une appropriation par les artistes plasticiens de cette matière, auparavant essentiellement utilitaire, pour en faire un matériau sculptural. Formé à la sculpture, option verre, dans les Studio Arts de la San Francisco State University de 1996 à 2001, Thomas s'est parallèlement initié aux techniques vénitiennes en 1998 auprès du sculpteur-verrier américain Josiah McElheny, au sein de la très créative Pilchuck Glass School. Une révélation et un épanouissement pour le jeune artiste-designer, qui ira plus tard faire des stages de perfectionnement dans les fournaies vénitiennes de Murano, notamment chez Simone Cenedese.

REFLECT NO. 5

Blown glass, mirrored

H 11 cm | ø 29 cm





Today, he has become a recognised master of glassblowing techniques, which he teaches in his workshop Open Glass Studio in Payerne, Switzerland. Thomas is also a master of silvering methods for his cane-blown volumes: their inner walls are brought into contact with alcoholic solutions of silver nitrate salts, which are poured in briefly after being heated. At other times, the molten glass is lightly colored with pigments and oxides, giving it bronze, amber, bluish, pinkish, veiled gem colors or nacreous pearls, with a darkened luster. The shimmering reflections can sometimes be frosted with acid - this time on the outer surface of the cooled volume - in order to give them an almost mineral or metallic aspect, solid raw talismans restored before our eyes, like objects of archaeological excavation.

CIRCUMSPECTUS

Thomas Blank does not appreciate the total transparency, the flashy purity, the layers of bright colors mixed, a little easily lurid, too

Il est devenu lui-même aujourd'hui un maître reconnu dans la technique du verre soufflé, qu'il transmet dans son atelier Open Glass Studio fondé à Payerne, en Suisse. Thomas maîtrise également à merveille des méthodes d'argenterie de ses volumes, soufflés à la canne: leurs parois intérieures sont mises en contact avec des solutions alcoolisées de sels de nitrates d'argent, versées brièvement après avoir été chauffées. D'autres fois, le verre en fusion est légèrement coloré de pigments et d'oxydes, lui accordant des nuances bronzées, ambrées, bleutées, rosées, des couleurs de gemmes voilées ou de perles nacrées, à l'orient assombri. Les reflets miroitants peuvent être parfois dépolis à l'acide - cette fois-ci sur la surface extérieure du volume refroidi - afin de leur accorder un aspect quasi minéral ou métallisé, solides talismans bruts restitués devant nos yeux tel des objets de fouille archéologique.

CIRCUMSPECTUS

Thomas Blank n'apprécie guère la transparence totale, la pureté clinquante, les couches de couleurs vives mélangées, un peu facilement

AURUM NO. 7

Blown glass, polished and mirrored

H 30 cm | ø 13 cm

immediately seductive and overloaded with effects, which often discredit the artistic production of contemporary glass today, especially that which has become very popular in Murano. He prefers opalescent, iridescent, smoky surface treatments, shimmering finishes that subtly throw the surrounding light back at the viewer in the form of curved shimmers, in the manner of “witches’ mirrors” altered by time, those black mirrors that one notices in the paintings of medieval Flemish interiors. When approaching and moving around Thomas Blank’s mirror-objects, it is best to remain on the lookout, worried about the mysterious pretenses that only gradually reveal themselves, and which could indeed bewitch us (steal our souls, as some people thought...). Sensual and instinctive, the artist explores the possibilities of shimmering on three-dimensional volumes, drop shapes that seem to be endlessly stretching, of an elegant and lascivious nature. He nourishes an obsession with these images of a drop of liquid “bouncing” off the surface of another liquid, causing impeccable circles of undulation, sophisticated images made effectively visible through ultra-fast, precision photographic techniques. Starting from this fascination for the

racoleuses, trop immédiatement séduisantes et surchargées d'effets, qui discréditent souvent la production artistique du verre contemporain actuel, particulièrement celle devenue très touristique de Murano. Il préfère les traitements de surfaces opalescents, irisés, fumés, les matités chatoyantes qui relancent subtilement vers le spectateur la lumière environnante par des miroitements bombés, à la manière des « miroirs de sorcières » altérés par le temps, ces miroirs noirs qu'on remarque dans les peintures des intérieurs flamands médiévaux. Lorsqu'on se rapproche et qu'on se déplace autour des objets-miroirs de Thomas Blank, mieux vaut rester aux aguets, à l'affût, inquiet des faux-semblants mystérieux qui ne se révèlent que progressivement, et qui pourraient bien effectivement nous ensorceler (dérober notre âme, comme pensaient certains peuples...). Sensuel et instinctif, l'artiste explore les possibilités du miroitement sur des volumes tridimensionnels, des formes de gouttes qui semblent devoir s'étirer sans fin, d'un naturel élégant et lascif. Il nourrit une obsession pour ces images d'une goutte de liquide qui « rebondit » à la surface d'un autre liquide, provoquant des cercles d'ondoyance impeccables. Partant de cette fascination pour le mouvement



AURUM NO. 8

Blown glass, polished and mirrored

H 15 cm | ø 27 cm



“stopped” movement, he also conceived freer forms recalling certain models of dumbbells drawn by Philippe Starck (the POAA published by XO in 1999) or the very aerodynamic aluminum chaise longue of the Australian designer Marc Newson (Lockheed Lounge of 1988). The fluidity of the contours that nothing interrupts also suggests the infinity of Moebius’ rings... Less surfaces than depths, Thomas’ creations belong to the family of “magic mirrors”, functioning like television screens, those found for example in Walt Disney’s work, when the famous mirror of the evil queen, in Snow White, plays as much with refraction as with reflection, and promptly makes a figure of (evil) genius appear to respond to it. As we no longer recognise ourselves clearly, such objects become essentially the mirrors of our own melancholy: they present an image of the world reinvented according to our mood of the day or night. A fantastic experience, comparable to that “Descent into the Maelstrom” described by Edgar Allan Poe in his “Extraordinary Stories” (1856).

Frédéric Bodet

«arrêté», il a conçu également des formes plus libres rappelant certains modèles d'haltères dessinées par Philippe Starck ou la très aérodynamique chaise longue en aluminium du designer australien Marc Newson. La fluidité de contours que rien ne vient interrompre nous suggère bien sûr aussi l'infini des anneaux de Moebius... Moins surfaces que profondeurs, les créations de Thomas sont de la famille des «miroirs magiques», fonctionnant tels des écrans de télévision, ceux qu'on retrouve par exemple chez Walt Disney, quand le fameux miroir de la méchante reine, dans Blanche-Neige, joue tout autant de la réfraction que de la réflexion et fait surgir promptement une figure de (mauvais) génie qui lui répond. Comme on ne s'y reconnaît plus nettement, de tels objets deviennent alors essentiellement les miroirs de notre propre mélancolie: ils tendent une image du monde réinventée selon notre humeur du jour ou de la nuit. Une expérience fantastique, comparable à cette «Descente dans le Maelström» décrite par Edgar Allan Poe dans ses «Histoires Extraordinaires» (1856).

Frédéric Bodet

LAPIDOSUS NO. 11

Blown glass, mirrored

H 17 cm | ø 25 cm



REFLECT NO. 6

Blown glass, etched and mirrored

H 18 cm | ø 35 cm





THOMAS BLANK

Thomas grew up in Switzerland, where he was born in 1973.

In 1996 he moved to the United States to study Fine Arts at the San Francisco State University. He graduated in 2001 with a BFA in Sculpture and relocated back to Switzerland to continue his work as an independent glassmaker and educator. Since then, he has worked in many different glass studios and gained work experience in Murano, Italy.

His work is being exhibited in Europe and the United States and is in the collection of the Contemporary Museum in Honolulu and the Museum of Design and Applied Arts in Lausanne. He currently divides his time between making his own work and collaborating with other artists and designers.

In 2020 he founded Open Glass Studio, a community-oriented and public-access facility, with his wife Nicole Kleiner.

AURUM NO. 6

Blown glass, polished and mirrored
H 19 cm | ø 25 cm



FAMILIA NO. 13

Blown glass, glue-chipped and mirrored
H 34 cm | ø 16 cm



YOU USE A GLASS
MIRROR TO SEE
YOUR FACE; YOU USE
WORKS OF ART
TO SEE YOUR SOUL.

G. B. Shaw

REFLECT NO. 7

Blown glass, mirrored

H 40 cm | ø 40 cm





ARTIST STATEMENT

Intriguing the viewer's expectations and perception about certain materials and thus evoke the working of the human brain as to how quickly our minds jump to conclusions, is one of the aims of this exhibition.

I question the glossy, smooth and transparent properties inherent in glass by playing with the numerous possibilities of color applications and surface treatment.

For centuries many decorative techniques of glassmaking were based on imitating other materials and surfaces, specifically precious stones and crystals. But imitating not only means to mislead, but also to make the wonders of nature like gems more accessible to a larger public.

The use of silver nitrate to mirror glass has been used for ages and the secret of the mixture was kept like a state secret, it made the possession of a mirrored object even more precious. For a mirror not only allows us to see ourselves, but it also reflects our surroundings. It can thus be used in many ways and for very different reasons.

The vision for this exhibition was to use these techniques in 3D objects, partially veiling the reflection by treating the surfaces in different ways, giving the shapes an almost mystical or enigmatic appearance, sometimes distorting, or even hiding an image. The viewer is invited to see her- or himself and the surroundings in a different light and by that creating a sense of wonder and amazement.

Glass surrounds us everywhere, and we all have mirrors, but to feel the magic of mirrored glass in different shapes, is to enter a different world.

Thomas Blank



FAMILIA NO. 14, 15, 16

Blown glass, etched and mirrored

H 40 cm | ø 18 cm



LAPIDOSUS NO. 12

Blown glass, mirrored

H 22 cm | ø 26 cm



WE ALL
NEED MORE MAGIC
IN OUR LIVES!

T. Blank

MARGARITAS NO. 3, 4, 5

Blown and iridised glass

H 13 cm | ø 12 cm



THANK YOU

I thank my wife Nicole whose love, support and inspiration fuel my fire and keeps the flame lit!

Barbara Frei and Bastien Thomas have helped me make the body of work for the exhibition. Their skill, patience and friendship have made the fabrication of the glass pieces more than a joy.

Madeleine Krebs lent me her keen eye and her extraordinary talent with all the graphic design and this catalog. The collaboration with her was smoother than the best Scotch Whisky.

My gratitude goes to Frédéric Bodet who kindly wrote the extraordinary text and Elisabeth Kleiner for all translations and proofreading.

And last, but most importantly, I thank Lionel Latham for this opportunity to show my new work and his trust in my artistic vision.

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