



glass

The UrbanGlass Art Quarterly

SPECIAL BONUS:
Corning's New Glass Review

Lonnie Holley
Takes Pilchuck

Peter Layton's
London Bridge

Alicia Eggert Tests Time

Jinya Zhao's Ghost Glass

COVER
Layo Bright Blooms

No. 176. Fall 2024



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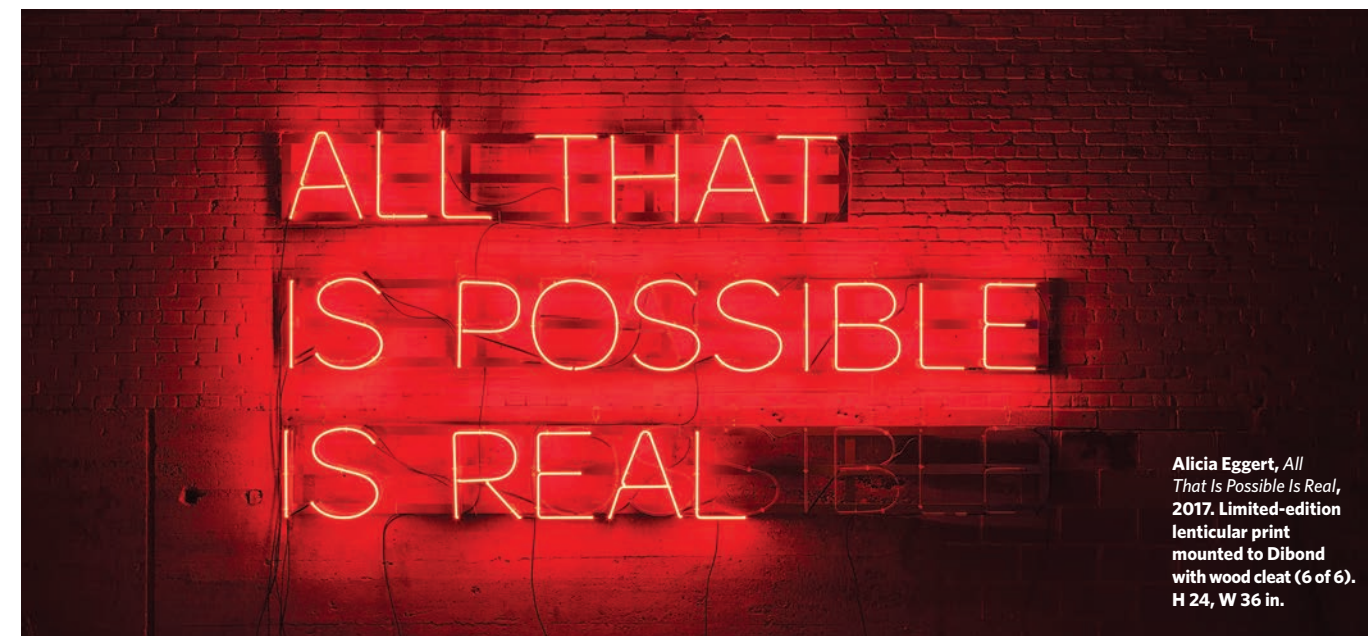
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Alicia Eggert, *All That Is Possible Is Real*, 2017. Limited-edition lenticular print mounted to Dibond with wood cleat (6 of 6). H 24, W 36 in.

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ON THE COVER **Layo Bright**, *Bloom in Spring Green & Purple*, 2023. Kiln-formed glass. H 21, W 17 ½, D 5 in. COURTESY: THE ARTIST

editor's letter

BY ANDREW PAGE

A riot of blooming flowers engulfs a woman's face on the cover of this issue, a close-up of a work by Layo Bright, a Nigerian artist who left behind her successful law career to study art in New York City, where she discovered glass was uniquely suited to give shape to her ideas. Many of the blooms are glass renditions of Nigerian species, others American, and Bright uses the blend of the two to reference migration and resilience. Curator and critic Jabari Owens-Bailey was already familiar with Bright's work, having included her in his Museum of Glass survey of Black artists, but he eagerly accepted the assignment to engage with her latest bodies of work, many done in preparation for her first solo museum exhibition, which opened at the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art in Connecticut earlier this year. As Owens-Bailey points out, Bright's kiln-formed heads reference the kingdoms of Nigeria's precolonial past as well as the personal story of the artist's close relationship with her wise grandmother. Bright's work bridges the personal and the universal, and her work, like her flower arrangements, reflects a cross-pollination of African and American cultures.

Speaking of crossing oceans, what are the chances a recently graduated British

ceramicist would seek work across the Atlantic, and just happened to sign up for a glass class taught by one of Harvey Littleton's original Toledo Workshop participants? Even less likely would be if this same Brit would become so smitten, he would return home and become one of the foundational figures in glass art in the U.K. The story contributing editor Emma Park relates as part of her feature profile of Peter Layton ("A Man in a Hurry," p. 38) also covers great distances (Layton was actually born in Prague to Jewish parents who fled to England just before World War II), but then the saga becomes rooted in the British capital, where Layton set up London Glassblowing in the 1970s. Now in his 80s, Layton's gallery and studio have sustained over the rise and potential fall (see "Saving the National Glass Centre" in the Summer 2024 edition, *Glass #175*) of British glass. As the arts reel from funding cuts, Layton's long-running apprenticeship program is more necessary than ever, and London Glassblowing gives up-and-coming glass artists a way to earn money as they develop their skills, providing them a place to develop their own young art practices in the process.

This issue features an even more dramatic tale of perseverance in our feature on Lonnie Holley, a self-taught

assemblage artist who has become a major figure in American art as well as a widely regarded recording artist. Contributing editor John Drury co-taught a Pilchuck course with Holley in the summer of 2023, and he was taking notes and marveling at Holley's ability to dive into an entirely new medium without hesitation. Holley's resilience is legendary, having overcome grueling setbacks in his impoverished childhood, and his success is a testament to the power of art to connect across great distances, be they geographic, social, or economic.

Elsewhere in this issue, Alicia Eggert's neon word-art installations call attention to the passage of time, provoking viewers to contemplate matters sweepingly philosophical and political. To cover her first solo museum exhibition, contributor Justin Ginsberg traveled across much of Texas to get to Beaumont. Ginsberg recounts his highly attuned experience, documenting and illuminating this important milestone in Eggert's expansive career.

And finally, contributing editor Samantha De Tillio reflects on the ethereal work of Chinese artist Jinya Zhao, a graduate student at the Royal College of Art in London, who has already attracted major gallery representation for work that captures the ephemeral state of being in between.

hourglass



CONVERSATION

Peabody Essex Museum curator-at-large Sarah Chasse on the significance of its recently acquired Carl and Betty Pforzheimer Collection

The Peabody Essex Museum, known as PEM, is one of the top ten art museums in the U.S. in terms of exhibition space, budget, and endowment. The Salem, Massachusetts, institution boasts one of the most important Asian art collections in the country, and its campus extends across more than 22 historic buildings. While the museum has continuously displayed a cut-glass English chandelier in one of its oldest galleries since 1804, and was gifted two dozen contemporary glass works in 2015, it had not boasted a major glass-art collection until Carl and Betty Pforzheimer announced their gift of over 260 works in 2022. On the evening of May 30, 2024, in celebration of the installation of 46 of the works from the collection into the newly christened Pforzheimer Gallery, a crowd of 250 invited guests lifted a glass to honor the significance of the donation.

PEM curator-at-large Sarah Chasse spoke to *Glass* about what the 268-work collection will mean for one of the oldest art museums in America.



ABOVE, L TO R **Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, executive director and CEO of the Peabody Essex Museum; Betty and Carl Pforzheimer; Dean Lahikainen, the museum's curator emeritus of American decorative art, who is credited with bringing the Pforzheimer collection to PEM.**
PHOTO: DIANA DERAMIO, PEM

RIGHT **Lino Tagliapietra, *Odissea*, 1998. Fused hand-pulled cane and murrine. H 70 3/4, W 24, D 12 in.**

GIFT: CARL AND BETTY PFORZHEIMER
PHOTO: RICHARD P. GOODBODY
© LINO TAGLIAPIETRA



The Floating Cloud,
2022. Blown glass.
H 18 ¾, D 11 ½ in.
PHOTO: HOMER HE
COURTESY: THE ARTIST

Barely There

With exquisite control of surface texture, color, and opacity, **Jinya Zhao** creates sublime atmospheres that evoke the profound state of being in between.

BY SAMANTHA DE TILLIO

*“Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination ...”*

—From the poem “Wild Geese” by Mary Oliver

It’s early spring in the Helderbergs, an escarpment just north of the Catskill Mountains, and yet snow swirls through the air, comingling with the fog that hangs over the valley carved by Ten Mile Creek. The bright gray sky mirrors the whiteness covering the land. The silence is punctuated by the periodic cooing of doves and laughing of crows, and the atmosphere encases me. I feel as if I’m inside one of Jinya Zhao’s sculptures.

Here, in the still-wintery mountains, there is a solitude that borders on isolation. This separateness is environmental, dictated by prolonged weather patterns, and yet it is a sensation fathomable by anyone who has felt lost within themselves. Zhao calls this feeling “non-existent existence,” and for her it is manifested by periods spent living abroad. Culturally divorced from the familiar, contending with feeling like an outsider, the artist’s elegant sculptures evoke this separateness through receptacles of containment and a measured opacity. Where most seek out glass’s transparent qualities, using it as a window or lens, Zhao seeks to obfuscate or obscure. What is beyond the glass is perceptible, but also consistently just beyond our grasp.

Consider *The Floating Cloud* (2022), a stack of pastel pink, blue, and green shapes under a cloche that both accentuates and veils the form within. Particularly where the cloche meets the base and at the top, resulting in an object that merely suggests architecture, shrouded in haze evocative of the atmospheric works of J.M.W.

Turner (England, 1775-1851) and Ma Yuan (China, c. 1160-1225), whom the artist cites as influences. Likewise, the inner structure of *Early Spring Movement* (2022) is barely discernible within its surroundings. Shapes in blue, turquoise, and terracotta are hidden behind a vitrine that shifts between colorlessness and green. The colors vibrate with energy, as does the spring flora, all its potential on the verge of unfurling. This undulation speaks to the artist’s interests in sensation and perception as realized through her use of a spatial layering of color. Zhao, who is a doctoral candidate at the Royal College of Art, is studying phenomena—including *cesia* (the perception of different spatial distributions of light, i.e., the



Early Spring Movement,
2022. Blown glass.
H 17 ¾, D 8 ¾ in.
PHOTO: HOMER HE
COURTESY: THE ARTIST



Erhai 18:37, 2022. H 16, D 12 in.
PHOTO: HOMER HE
COURTESY: THE ARTIST



Nelumbo by the Pond, 2022. Blown glass. H 22 ½ D 12 ½ in.
PHOTO: HOMER HE
COURTESY: THE ARTIST

spectrum of transparency to opacity, or mattness to glossiness); metamerism (when the color of two objects appear the same under a particular light source, but have different spectral power distributions); and synesthesia (the experience of sensory crossovers, i.e., hearing colors or tasting sounds)—with an interest in how they can be exploited to broaden the viewer’s sensorial interaction with her sculptures.

These interests are realized in the contrary nature of Zhao’s works, in which sharp geometries are modulated and the slickness of the material’s surface is subdued. It’s as if all the harshness has been caressed away, leaving behind only sea glass. When considering a material to evoke the earth, glass may not readily come to mind; however, in Zhao’s hands this sometimes harsh medium becomes soft and yielding: capable of charting the morning sun as it dazzles on a lotus blossom, its foliage rendered in a near-perfect shade of green, in *Nelumbo by the Pond* (2022), or of capturing the burning glow of a sunset as it dissipates across the sky in swaths of orange and coral pink, such as in *Erhai 18:37*. Recalling a chalice form, the foot and cup are near mirrors on either side of a stem comprising two spheres separated by a flat disk. It’s as if, reflected in a body of water, the upper form disperses outward into something less defined. This transformation of the landscape into abstracted forms of light and color recalls the work of the disparate artists the artist’s research references,

including the impressionism of Claude Monet, the color theory of Josef Albers and Mark Rothko, and light installations by James Turrell, Antony Gormley, and Olafur Eliasson. While vastly different in result, the work of these artists and Zhao’s own work can be unified around a use of light and color to provoke an emotional effect, striving to communicate a feeling, a sense of environment, or energetic movement.

Zhao’s work vacillates between a sense of melancholy and awe, an apt emotional underpinning to an experience of the sublime, which she strives to transmit through her larger-than-expected tabletop sculptures. Where some of her forms feel suspended in a brume, others pulsate. *Light Traveler* (2023), for example, reverberates hues of neon orange and pink. The work’s two main forms, a bowl and a shape like the foot and stem of a goblet, are joined by three ovoid masses. A violet egg rests at the pinnacle, its form and color representative of enlightenment and rebirth, belying an inner spiritual invocation. Photographed amid a moss-covered stone outcropping, it conveys a monastic experience, becoming a temple in architecture or body, recalling the Swedish mystical painter Hilma af Klint (1862-1944). The work, in this context and connected back to the phrase “non-existent existence,” the title of Zhao’s 2017-2021 series, brings to mind concepts of the Nothingness that is Everything, a philosophy that permeates theology and mysticism from East to West, including



Light Traveler, 2023.
Blown glass. H 18, D 9 in.
PHOTO: AD CHINA
COURTESY: THE ARTIST



Installation view of the 2023 exhibition "Nebulosity Walk in Thy Memory" at the Liuli China Museum, Shanghai, China. PHOTO: HOMER HE COURTESY: THE ARTIST

Buddhism, Taoism, and Abrahamic traditions, among others, and apophatic theology, which emphasizes the unknowability of the divine.

This unknowability extends to a central tenet of Zhao's practice, which is transience, whether seeking international experiences, including living abroad in the U.K. and U.S., or within the natural environment. These experiences of being an outsider immersed in another culture, or within a much greater landscape, inform her creativity and work. In 2023, accompanied by her glassblowing team, the Glass Art Caravan—a China-based group whose collaboration stretches nearly a decade, and is led by Gong Kehai and Zhang Ping—the artist packed up her hot shop and

embarked on a period of travel through the Nu River Valley in Yunnan, China, during which she experimented with and experienced blowing glass en plein air, invoking the Impressionists, whose pioneering approach to harnessing light and environmental qualities



Jinya Zhao blowing glass in the Nu River Valley, Yunnan, China, 2023. PHOTO: HOMER HE COURTESY: THE ARTIST

in paint inform the artist's own work in glass. (Consider the Monet-esque theme of *Nelumbo by the Pond*.) The previously mentioned *Light Traveler* was created during this journey.

In addition to her art practice, Zhao, who earned a BA at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou, is also half of the design brand J. Atelier, which she cofounded in 2022 "with an aim to create products that perfectly merge the sublime aesthetics of art with the practicality of objects." She is also cofounder of Zung Gaan, a "unique space," according to the artist, "that merges a bookstore and gallery in Guangzhou, China."

A rare virtuoso in a climate of process-driven art and post-skill objects, Jinya Zhao's work conveys a sense of poetic ease and beauty taken from her experience of sublime nature. Upon closer look, however, is a rich, philosophy- and research-driven practice that pulls from unexpected corners of art history, science, and philosophy, aligning her with movements from Impressionism and Color Field painting to Light and Space. Her sculptures, which are informed by her sketches in watercolor, effuse light and, as much as possible, dissolve the rigid boundaries of glass with swaths of undulating color. ■

Glass contributing editor SAMANTHA DE TILLIO is a scholar, critic, and curator thinking at the crossroads of the expanded field of craft and embodied expression. In 2023, she received the Lois Moran Award for Craft Writing, and was guest curator/editor of *New Glass Review* 43 for *The Corning Museum of Glass*. From 2013 to 2022, she was a curator at the *Museum of Arts and Design* in New York, and has worked at institutions such as the *Metropolitan Museum of Art* and the *Smithsonian National Museums of American History and Natural History*, among others.



Installation view of "The Maze (Labyrinth)," PHOTO: KASPER PALSNOV

Group Exhibition

"THE MAZE (LABYRINTEN)"
GLAS: MUSEUM OF GLASS ART
EBELTOFT, DENMARK
JANUARY 20-SEPTEMBER 29, 2024
(MODERN WING)
NOVEMBER 10, 2024 (CUSTOMS FLOOR)

The advent of Mikkel Hammer Elming as director of the Ebeltoft Glas Museum in January 2022 has led to a transformation that goes deeper than appearances. The rebranding of its name last year as "Glas," with a new web address, *glaskunst.de*, has been accompanied by a shift in focus away from glassmakers towards artists in the contemporary art world who use glass in the context of a larger oeuvre.

"We wanted to broaden out the possibilities of the material as an artistic means," says Pia Bittner, the museum's PR and communications manager, whom I interviewed via Zoom. The last major exhibition, running from April 2023 to January 2024, was "Evolutions," with Studio ThinkingHand, an artistic duo whose work explores the intersection between science, art, philosophy, and technology.

The current exhibition, "The Maze (*Labyrinth*)," curated by Elming, forms part of this trajectory. It features 19 works in stained and painted glass, made between 1981 and 2023 by 12 contemporary artists, most of whom collaborated with the

Danish glazier Per Steen Hebsgaard to realize their ideas. All but one are Danish, the exception being the conceptual artist Jeannette Slütter from the Netherlands. The idea, says Bittner, is to shine "a light on this particular branch of glass making, glass in architecture, and glass as part of decoration in public buildings and in churches," and "to show how artists in Denmark have been working with glass for many years."

The exhibition runs the length of the L-shaped ground floor of the museum, which is made up of a former Customs House and a modern wing built in 2006. The floor space has been partitioned up so as to suggest a real labyrinth, with three

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