

CONCEPTS IN GLASS

New Art Center
61 Washington Park
Newtonville, Massachusetts

Through May 15

The New Art Center in Newtonville, Mass. has a 33-year tradition of scheduling its main gallery with group exhibitions curated by an exhibiting artist or independent curator. Their spring exhibition, "Concepts in Glass," presents the work of four Boston-area glass artists exploring their seductive medium conceptually through sculpture.

Curated by glass artist Hillary Faccio, "Concepts in Glass" features her work alongside that of three current faculty members at her alma mater, the Massachusetts College of Art and Design: professor Alan Klein, assistant professor James McLeod and visiting professor Christopher G. Watts.

Aptly situated in the center's rehabbed 19th century church gallery with its arched, stained glass windows, the exhibit is mounted on both wall and pedestal.

Chris Watts claims the church's former altar for "Grave Dust," a large wall installation formed from cascading curtains of blown and slumped glass. According to the identification tag, the transparent glass is suffused with "granite dust obtained from the carving of deceased persons' names into grave markers." Making pointed use of found materials to address issues of race, class and perceived and agreed value, Watts' work is highly conceptual. His detailed material lists act as one entry point for the viewer. In this instance, however, "Grave Dust" falls a bit flat in its presentation. Chalk it up

to poorly focused lighting, which doesn't do the scale and subtlety of the work justice in this venue with its high, cathedral ceiling.

A riff on Damien Hirst's controversial 2007 sculpture "For the Love of God," Watts' "There But for the Love of God Go Us All" transforms "found window glass recovered from neighborhoods experiencing extreme fluctuations in real estate market value" into the form of a bejeweled glass skull. With an oversized glass "gem" set in the forehead, the home of the third eye, this skull is a fantasy object — a talisman with which to divine the future (a tool into which many would have gladly gazed prior to the housing market crash). Unlike Hirst's treasure, a real Victorian-era skull encased in flawless platinum and studded with £12m worth of ethically sourced diamonds, Watts' up-cycled glass skull retains the grit of its making in the spaces between the teeth, giving it the look of a relic recently unearthed as opposed to a carefully preserved and priceless work of art.

A master Venetian glassblower, Watts wields a variety of techniques



James McLeod, *Memory Container 12*, 2006, glass, 15 x 36 x 25".

and materials to best convey his conceptual narratives. Intriguingly, one of his most successful pieces on view relies on the subtlest of handiwork over the flash and filigree of his capable training. Leaning against the far wall, "Mother's Colors" is a grouping of two dilapidated windows and a paned door, the kind typically found discarded against the side of a lonely garage. Unremarkable, with the exception that Watts has seamlessly replaced several panes with sheets of blown and slumped glass glinting a phosphorescent

golden hue. The coloration is the result of gold and silver incorporated into the molten glass from jewelry belonging to the artist's mother. The subtle narrative is of something discarded hiding something precious; both transformed by elements, time and memory.

Hillary Faccio presents a bristling little collection of mixed-media constructions inspired by petroglyphs she discovered while living on the big island of Hawaii. These symbols led her to develop a lexicon of her



Hillary Faccio, *Tall Yellow (detail)*, 2003, wood, sand cast glass, paint, 6 x 6 x 28".

own in an investigation of the mysteries of human communication. While petroglyphs are pictorial representations of language carved in stone, Faccio's work instead utilizes glass, wood and copper toward an expressive end less evocative of language, per se, than of personage.

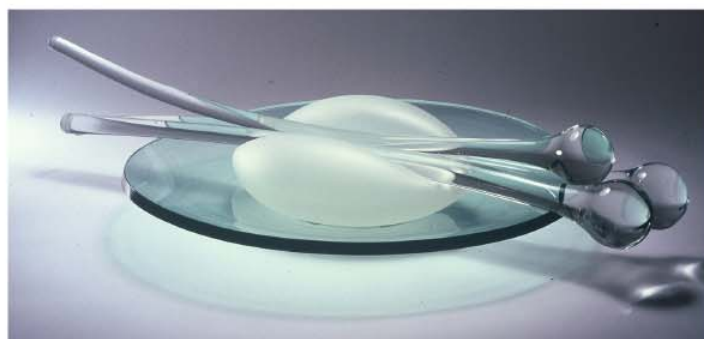
Faccio's "Tall Yellow" holds court over the gallery like a wacky sentinel, exaggerated by copper inclusions that suggest hair protruding from a glass "head" form. Percolating within, bright ribbons of orange, yellow, scarlet and white evoke a measurement of a thought that this little being cannot express out loud.

A string of sand-cast glass glyphs spells out Faccio's wall-mounted "Long Blue Sentence." The arrangement reads somewhere between language and architectural embellishment to be tacitly maneuvered, the doorknobs to a secret passageway.

A glassblower exploring more traditional forms, James MacLeod's work questions the origins of memory through tensions inherent in both the material of glass, an amorphous solid, and implied through the act of binding shut his blown glass vessels with clamps, wire and waxed linen. The frosted, dark violet surface of MacLeod's "Memory Container #1" imparts a seductive glow to the vessel's interior, yet obscures any clear view of its contents.

Holding court along the back wall are four works by Alan Klein, a longtime member of the Glass Art Society's board of directors. Klein's formally satisfying work wields the material properties of glass to demonstrate an action or an interaction frozen in time — what he calls a "Moment of Inertia."

Klein's "Fish for Brancusi" is a large, satisfying slug of clear glass;



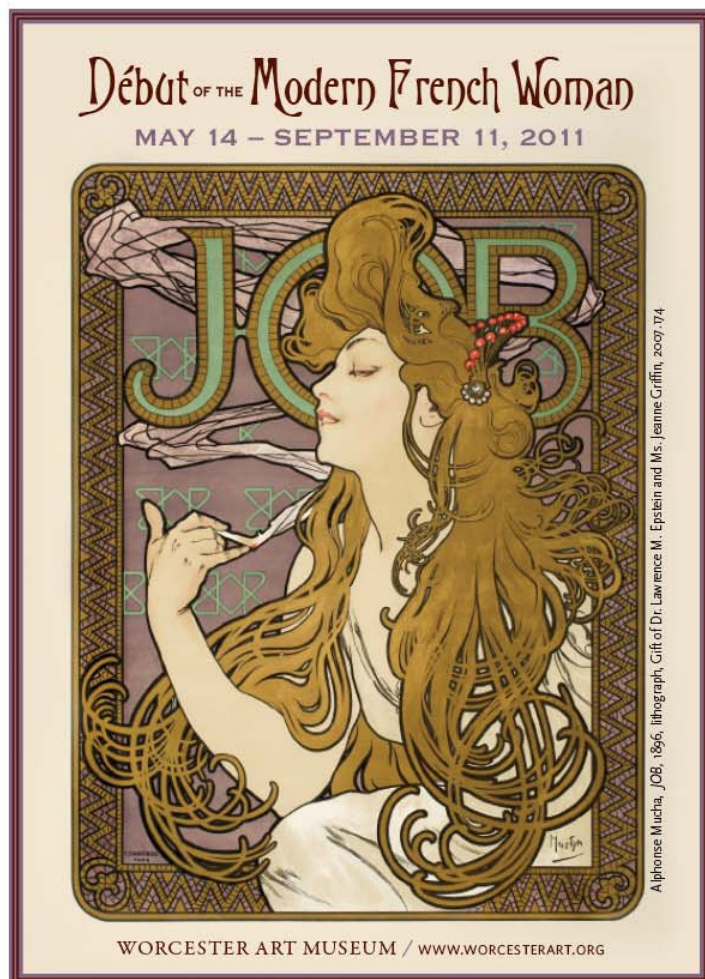
Alan Klein, *Medicine Bowl*, blown and slumped glass, 10 x 44 x 38".

its frosted, bulbous end pinned to the wall by a copper collar. On the opposite side, the slug twists off of the wall into shining life in a tail-like protrusion evocative of suspended water.

Of the work displayed, Klein's "Medicine Bowl" most directly

celebrates the mysterious material properties of glass in a three-phase format. Unadorned by color, mixed-media or other distractions, "Medicine Bowl" sits on a pedestal before the other works like an offering.

Meredith Cutler



Chris Watts, *Mother's Colors*, 2008, blown and slumped glass containing melted jewelry once owned by the artist's mother, wood, dimensions variable; tallest 7'.