

ELENA LEE'S 41 YEARS OF CANADIAN STUDIO GLASS

By Galerie Elena Lee

The first glass art gallery in Canada, Galerie Elena Lee has specialized in the exhibition and the promotion of contemporary Canadian sculptural glass for over 40 years. The Gallery's numerous activities, combined with the exceptional talent of its artists, helped to establish a solid reputation of excellence which now spreads beyond the city of Montreal and the borders of Canada. During these years, the vision and the determination of its founder and owner, Elena Lee, stimulated the development of the glass art community. Reciprocally, the growing quality of the production of Canadian glass artists contributed to the success of the Gallery. Simultaneously, at the time of the Gallery's opening in 1976, the Studio Glass Movement in Quebec and Canada was also at its beginning. The history of the Galerie Elena Lee is thus bound to the particular development of this movement in the country but also, more broadly, on the international stage.

Born in 1942 in Milan, Italy, of an Italian father and a German mother, Elena Lee was brought up in Germany. During her studies to obtain a master's degree in theatre and cinema at the University of Munich, she met Stuart Lee, a Quebecois geology student. When the couple decided to establish their roots in Montreal with their young son Marco, Elena decided to move on from her teaching profession which she had practiced for the past five years. It is then that she began her pursuit into new avenues in which to invest her passion for the arts.

Prior to her departure for Canada in 1975, intrigued by "rumours" of an exhibition of new sculptural objects made of glass, Lee ventured to the Bavarian Forest region which was close geographically and culturally to Czechoslovakia. This region possesses a very ancient and unique tradition of manufacturing glass production and expertise, different from that of Italy. In Czechoslovakia, glass is considered a sculptural material and is taught at university level.

In Frauenau, Germany, Lee visited the Eisch family glassblowing factory. In their modest museum, she discovered with fascination the innovative sculptures of Erwin Eisch, a glassblower trained in Fine Arts. It is also here where she found indications of an American connection...

The Studio Glass Movement

At the end of 1950s in the United States, the emergence of new currents on the artistic scene revitalizes the domain of ceramic arts. Since clay and glass are silicate-based materials, several ceramists who wished to push the limits of their practice, developed an interest in working with molten glass.

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Ceramist Harvey K Littleton took the initiative, in collaboration with different partners, to look for new ways outside the industry to investigate the glass material. After exploratory journeys in Europe, upon his return to the United States in the spring of 1962, Littleton oversees the setting up of the first American workshop which approached blown glass as a medium allowing for personal expression.

During the summer of the same year, Littleton returns to Europe and meets Erwin Eisch in Frauenau. Eisch provided Littleton with moral and technical support, essential for the success of his project. In the fall of 1962, the University of Wisconsin, where Littleton teaches, officially offers a glass course in its curriculum. Several young artists working with clay adopt the new material and soon other universities also open similar programs. It is the beginning of the Studio Glass Movement in America by which glass passes from the factory to the university.

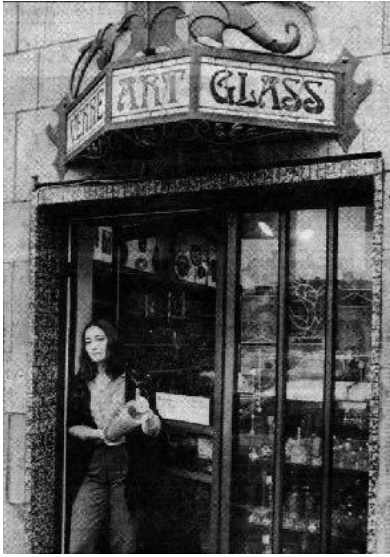
The Studio Glass Movement is introduced in Canada in 1967, year of the 100th anniversary of the Canadian Confederation and the World Fair of Montreal (Expo 67), thanks to two young Americans, Robert Held and Martin Demaine. Held, who studied glass at Penland School of Arts and Crafts, is invited to coordinate the setting up of a hot glass studio at Sheridan College in Mississauga, Ontario. The studio is built in the ceramic's department of the school and Held begins teaching in 1969. Under the subsequent direction of Daniel Crichton, Sheridan College will become an important incubator for several Canadian and Quebecois glass artists. During the same period, Demaine opens a studio in New Brunswick in a touristic "folkloric village "; he also builds a mobile studio to make public glassblowing demonstrations.

In the Czechoslovakian Pavilion at Expo 67, Gilles Désaulniers is fascinated by the discovery of the glass sculptures exhibited. He soon registers for the glass PhD program at the Prague Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design. In 1971, upon returning to Quebec, he helps to establish and becomes director of the glass studio at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières (UQTR). In January of 1976, it is in this studio that the first glassblowing workshop took place in Quebec and was led by the French artisan Claude Morin.

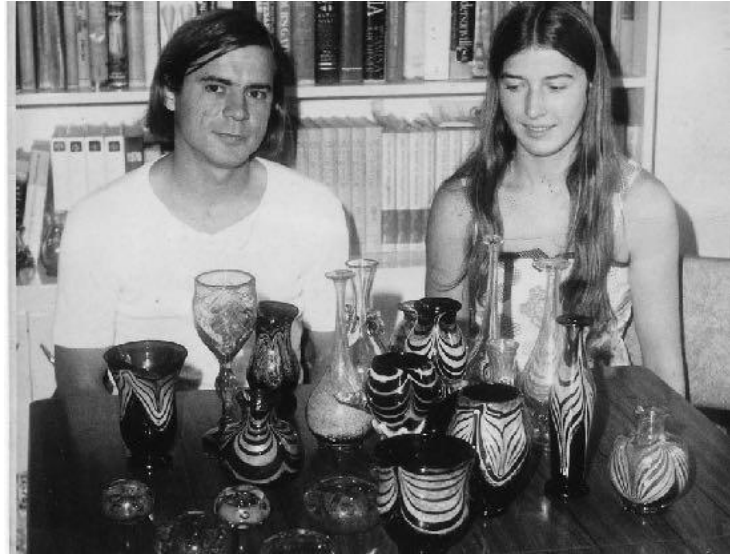
Galerie Elena Lee

It is during the emergence of this glass movement, that Lee's vision of a glass art gallery materializes in 1976 in Montreal. She rents a small retail space on MacKay Street and opens under the bilingual name of Verre-Art-Glass. At first, she presents the works of the Eisch factory along with the only two glassworkers who then had a regular practice in Quebec, Ronald Lukian and Toan Klein. The debut was modest and demanding, especially since the public in Montreal was unaware of the existence of the Studio Glass Movement.

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First Gallery



The beginning: Ronald Lukian and Gail Hall in 1974.

In May 1979, the rapid development, both of the commercial activities of the Gallery and the domain of glass art in Canada, brings the Gallery to occupy a more spacious location, situated on Sherbrooke Street in the district of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA). Wishing to underline the event of the relocation of the Gallery under the name of Verre d'Art, Lee invites, at her expense, all the young Canadian glassworkers whom she knows to offer glassblowing demonstrations to the public. The improvised studio thus takes life thanks to the ten or so glassworkers present and to Martin Demaine's mobile equipment, on an empty lot next to the new gallery in downtown Montreal. It was a real "happening", the first urban public performance of its kind in Canada.



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Karl Schantz, Ione Thorkelsson, Marty Demaine, François Houdé

This relocation had become necessary to accommodate the new objects created by the Canadian glassworkers; certain exhibitions even required the renting of additional spaces. From the small craft and functional productions at the beginning, the newer work took on determinedly sculptural dimensions such as large wall installations.



1518 Sherbrooke West

In 1980, the Gallery offered François Houdé, a recent graduate of Sheridan College, his first solo exhibition. Houdé, whose passion for glass dates back to his visit of the Czech Pavilion of Expo 67, then pursues his apprenticeship at Illinois State University where he specializes in large-scale glass sculpture and in glass slumping. He develops a uniquely artistic, sculptural and interdisciplinary approach to glass: "If this material is to be used for artistic expression [...] it is rather the essential authenticity of the material which must be looked for.". Lee will actively support Houdé throughout his career and will also be a central figure in the germination of his project for a glass school in Montreal, Le Centre des Métiers du Verre du Québec inc./Espace Verre.

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Espace Verre is co-established with Ronald Labelle (a student of Morin during the workshop of 1976) and moves into its premises in the old fire station N°21 in 1986. At the opening of Espace Verre, both co-founders teach glassblowing and, in the summer of 1987, the first workshops by invited artists are offered, one of whom is Daniel Crichton. The first students graduate in 1989, the year the collegial program is finally established; Lee will sit on the board of administration of the school from 1984 until 1999.

Galerie Elena Lee also maintained an association with the glass schools in Canada by organizing annual exhibitions open to graduating students. While offering a professional context for emerging artists to showcase their art, the Gallery also ensured it would be up-to-date on the promising talents. This close collaboration with Daniel Crichton was the source of the privileged relation which Lee maintained with her artists, who are for the greater part his former students.

Lee's involvement in the development of glass art in Canada is also made through the Gallery's regular participation at the conferences of Glass Art Association of Canada (GAAC) and Glass Art Society (GAS – its equivalent in the U.S.A.). A presence at first ensured by Lee, then by her business partner Joanne Guimond. In 1983, the Gallery was strongly involved in the organization of the GAAC Canadian Glass Conference in Montreal.



1428 Sherbrooke West

In 1992, the Gallery relocated once again on Sherbrooke Street West, under the name of Galerie Elena Lee. Maintaining a strategic location in the immediate sector of the MMFA was fundamental to support and facilitate the development of a clientele, which often included American tourists interested in the arts.

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International Fairs

Besides its success at the local level, Galerie Elena Lee ensured an international representation thanks to its participation at International fairs in the USA. In 1986, the Gallery participated in the first Chicago International New Art Forms (CINAFE) fair which specialized in the "new" artistic mediums: glass, ceramic, fibres, etc. The Gallery considered this presence and subsequent ones as a long wished for opportunity to tackle the American market. The artists widely reaped the advantages, not only by direct sales at the fair, but also through invitations to exhibitions in American galleries.

However, Lee, having assumed all the responsibilities associated with the fairs herself, found the logistics involved too exhausting for her to continue on this adventure. The Gallery began again to participate regularly in international fairs in 1995, mainly at SOFA (Sculpture, Objects, Functional Art) in New York, Chicago and Miami. The presence, the talent and the implication of Lee's partner during this period, Joanne Guimond, finally made it possible for Galerie Elena Lee and its artists to be represented at fairs once again.



Diana Walton and Joanne Guimond at SOFA Chicago



2000 Forward

The year 2000 marks the beginning of a new millennium and the fourth move for Galerie Elena Lee, closer to the MMFA. In its new premise, glass is brought to life in a spacious and floodlit setting. It is here, in October 2011, an exhibition highlighting Elena Lee's 35 years of promoting Canadian glass took place. A publication on the history of the Gallery, written in collaboration with glassmaker and art historian Bruno Andrus, was produced to accompany the exhibition. At this point, the Gallery represented over 60 artists and Elena Lee could now count on the implication of a new partner, Diana Walton, for support in her projects; for example, the continued participation at SOFA Chicago.



1460 Sherbrooke West

However, after the many difficult years following the 2008 world economic crisis, Elena Lee saw herself forced to close the Sherbrooke Street premises in December 2014. The outpouring of dismay from the public and artists convinced Elena to open up a warehouse space where Canadian glass could continue to be showcased.

The large luminous warehouse space suited the works perfectly, but after 3 years it became evident, that the market had changed to the point that the cost of maintaining a gallery space in Montreal dedicated to only glass became untenable. Many artists then established their own websites and it is there and in galleries in the US, Ottawa, Toronto and across Canada that you can now find their work. As a courtesy, Galerie Elena Lee maintains current information about several artists it has represented over the years on its Facebook page.

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4710 St-Ambroise

For 41 years, together with the great talent of its artists, founder and owner Elena Lee's vision and tenacity forged a reputation for quality both domestically and abroad. The historic importance of Galerie Elena Lee is undeniable. The development of the Studio Glass Movement in Canada, the institutionalization of glass as an artistic medium and the positive impact on the careers of Quebecois and Canadian glass artists are all due to Elena Lee's tireless promotion of Canadian glass.

In this international year of glass, Galerie Elena Lee wishes you joy in discovering Canadian glass of today.



This text was produced in 2022 by Elena Lee, with the support of her Guatemalan friend Shanny Ocampo and the assistance of Joanne Guimond and Diana Walton, based on a text written in 2011 by art historian Bruno Andrus as part of his doctoral research on art glass.

References :

- **Andrus, Bruno.** « La Galerie Elena Lee : 35 ans de verre d'art au Canada », in *Galerie Elena Lee : 35 ans* : 8-11. Montréal : Galerie Elena Lee, 2011.

- **Andrus, Bruno.** *Trajectoires fluides et croisements lumineux : Histoire du verre d'art au Québec dans le contexte d'Expo 67.* Doctoral Thesis. Concordia University, May 2017. <https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/id/eprint/982558/>

(To be noted: chapter 3 focuses on the Studio Glass Movement in the United States, in Canada and in Québec, section 3.6 focuses specifically on the history of Galerie Elena Lee.)

Canadian museums with glass collections :

Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, QC: www.mbam.qc.ca/en/
Anna and Joe Mendel collection
Louise and Laurette d'Amours Bequest

Musée des métiers d'art du Québec, Montreal, QC: www.mumaq.com

Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Québec, QC: www.mnbaq.org
Louise and Laurette d'Amours Bequest

The Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery, Waterloo, ON: www.theclayandglass.ca

Canadian schools with glass programs:

Sheridan College, Oakville, ON: www.sheridancollege.ca
Head of Glass Studio Koen Vanderstukken.

Espace VERRE/Centre des métiers du verre du Québec Inc., Montréal, QC:
www.espaceverre.qc.ca

Alberta University of the Arts, Calgary, AB:
www.auarts.ca/learn-with-us/program-areas/glass

Red Deer Polytechnic, Red Deer, AB: www.rdpolytech.ca

Université du Québec à Trois Rivières, Trois-Rivières QC: www.uqtr.ca

Fleming College - Haliburton School of Art and Design, Haliburton, ON:
www.flemingcollege.ca/school/haliburton-school-of-art-and-design

Artist in residency glass programs:

Harbourfront Center/Craft and Design: Toronto, ON
www.harbourfrontcentre.com/program/craft-design/studios/glass/

The Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery: Waterloo, ON
www.theclayandglass.ca/programs-and-events/residency/

National and International glass organizations and institutions:

Canada:

GAAC (Glass Art Association of Canada): www.gaacanada.ca

FUSION: The Ontario Clay and Glass Association: www.clayandglass.on.ca

United-States:

GAS (Glass Art Society), Seattle, WA: www.glassart.org

UrbanGlass, NYC: www.urbanglass.org

Pilchuk Glass School, Stanwood, WA: www.pilchuck.com

Penland School of Crafts, Penland, NC: www.penland.org

Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, ME: www.haystack-mtn.org

Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY: www.cmog.org

Museum of Glass, Tacoma, WA: www.museumofglass.org

Art Alliance for Contemporary Glass, Dallas, TX: www.contempglass.org

Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center, Millville, NJ: www.wheatonarts.org

Europe:

Museum fuer Modernes Glas (Museum of Modern Glass), Röderthal, Germany
glasmuseum.kunstsammlungen-coburg.de

Publications:

Glass: The Urban Glass Quarterly: www.urbanglass.org/glass

American Craft: www.craftcouncil.org/magazine

New Glass Review: www.cmog.org/research/publications/new-glass-review

Neues Glas/New Glass, art and architecture:
www.neuesglas-newglass.com/?lang=en

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Partial list of glass artists who have exhibited at Galerie Elena Lee or who have contributed to the development of Canadian Studio Glass:

Anagnostou, Alex	Gibb, Julie	Mossop, Jonathan
Andrighetti, Joanne	Giguère, Jean-Marie	Munsen, Mel
Andrus, Bruno	Girard, Amélie	Muscat, Francis
Balles, Cali	Goodman, Jeff (1961-2012)	Nesbitt, Carol
Beaulieu, Marie-Hélène	Goranitis, David	Norton, James (1957-2016)
Bélanger, Sylvie	Gotzens, Detlef	Ouellette, Caroline
Bennett, Jennifer	Grodet, Mathieu	Payette, Gilles
Bolt, Gary	Held, Robert	Peterson, Darren James
Bromm, Jesse	Henry, Martha	Pilon, Carole
Buick, Robert	Hillman, Nathalie	Powning, Peter
Burnette, Jeff	Houdé, François	Primeau, Patrick
Busque, Nadine	(1950-1993)	Rankin, Susan
Bussièrès, Maude	Hunter, Mischka Alexi	Reimer, Julia
Campbell, Blaise	Hupé, Alexandre	Reusch, Astri
Cantin, Annie	Jolda, Ted	(1945-2016)
Charpentier, Christiane	Koistinen, Minna	Robertson, Donald
Chartrand, Maryse	Klein, Toan	Robinson, John Paul
Copping, Brad	Kuntz, Andrew	Rock, Tyler
Cornish, Jason	Labelle, Ronald	Rodrigue, Paull
Crichton, Daniel	Labonté, Catherine	Roth, Mark
(1946-2002)	Lachance, Lianne	Ryzak, Waine
Czarnota, Kasia	Lapointe, Michèle	Salehi, Shay
Demaine, Martin	Leatherbarrow, Robert	Samphire, Lisa
Demers, Karine	Leclerc, Michel	Sears, Karli
Desaulniers, Gilles	Lemieux, Lisette	Sherwood, Brad
(1935-2022)	Leone, Denise	Strokowsky, Cathy
Donefer, Laura	Leser, Max	Takenouchi, Naoko
Doré, Aurélien	Lockau, Kevin	Thai, David
Duchange, Sébastien	Lynn, Lou	Thériault, Caroline
Dyszkiewicz, Maciej	Lyons, Tanya	Thorkelsson, Ione
Engerer, Alfred	Macdonell, Jay	Tippin, Steven
Edgerley, Susan	Mahut, Sheila	Tjang, Paulus
Faulkner, Norman	Mainville, Nicola	Trottier, Jean-Simon
Ferland, Diane	Marier, Elisabeth	Tudor, Morna
Fineberg, Robin	Maunsell, Claire	Vanderstukken, Koen
Forbes, Ian	Mayr, Christina	Waddell, Mariel
Frève, Carole	Michaud, Annie	Webster, Gordon
Frigon-Lavoie, David	Milinkovic, Eva	Webster, Kim
Frolic, Irene	Mongeau, Julien	Wong, Rachael
Gene, Kriston	Morina, Toni	Zaryski, Tanya

This compilation is the contribution of Galerie Elena Lee's 41 years of involvement with studio glass and an overview of some of the artists that were known to the Gallery. This list is by no means complete, just a starting point to discover Canadian Studio Glass. Many more Canadian artists in glass emerged after Galerie Elena Lee closed its doors in 2017. You can find them through the above mentioned schools and institutions in addition to galleries such as the L.A. Pai Gallery in Ottawa (www.lapaigallery.com), Sandra Ainsley Gallery in Toronto (www.sandraainsleygallery.com) and La Guilde in Montréal (www.laguilde.com).

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Examples of Canadian Studio Glass:

Cantin, Annie - www.anniecantin.com



A l'Unisson - Programme d'intégration des arts à l'architecture du Québec, Ecole Primaire Laurendeau-Dunton, Ville Lasalle, Qc (2016) Photo: René Rioux.

Don't these creatures make you smile?



Verreluisant d'Altair #2
(2013)
Blown glass, wood.
5.5" x 5" x 6"



Verreluisant d'Altair #3
Red X
(1997)
Blown, carved glass, wood.
oil paint wood, wire.
29.75" x 12.5" x 12.5"



Brin de Soleil
(2005)
Blown glass, textile, metal.
23" x 20" x 15"

Copping, Brad - www.bradcopping.com



Munitions
(2004)
Blown, carved, hot worked glass, brass.
29.75" x 12.5" x 12.5"



Digging for Water
(2005)
Blown, carved, enameled glass.
17" x 5.5" x 6"



Moments
(2011)
Carved glass, cedar.
60" x 10" x 14"



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Crichton, Daniel (1946-2002)



Amethyst Quartz Crucible-
(2001)
Blown glass, etched, gold luster.
13" diam.



Blue Grid Vase
(1981)
Blown glass, etched.
9" x 16" x 16"



Cadmium Quartz
(1996)
Blown glass.
18" x 7" x 7"

Edgerley, Susan - www.susanedgerleyglass.com



Les Berceuses
(1985)
Slumped glass, bamboo, stones.
13" x 35" x 16"



Fleeting Glimpses
(1985)
Fused frit glass, bamboo, paper.
8,25" x 40" x 15"



Poupée
(1989)
Pâte de verre, barbed wire, copper.
43" x 10" x 10"



← *Scarecrow Series*
'Inside/Out'
Glass, barbed wire,
copper.
87" x 34" x 15"

Shimmer →
(2008)
Flameworked glass.
60" x 60" x 6"



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Frère, Carole - www.en.carolefreve.com

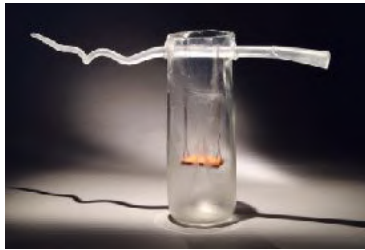


Rêverie à la fenêtre

(2006)

Blown, kiln cast glass, electro-formed copper.

33" x 40" x 23"



Balançoire #1

(2007)

Blown, kiln cast glass, electroformed copper.

15" x 26" x 5"



Impression Fugace

(2007)

Blow, kiln cast glass, electro-formed copper, wood.

11" x 24" x 5"

Houdé, François (1950-1993)



Bol Brisé

(1982)

Blown and cast glass.

10" x 10" x 9"



Bol Brisé

(1982)

Blown and cast glass.

15" x 10" x 10"



← *Bol Brisé* (Detail)



Pygmalion #1

(1983)

Slumped glass.

8" x 27" x 24"

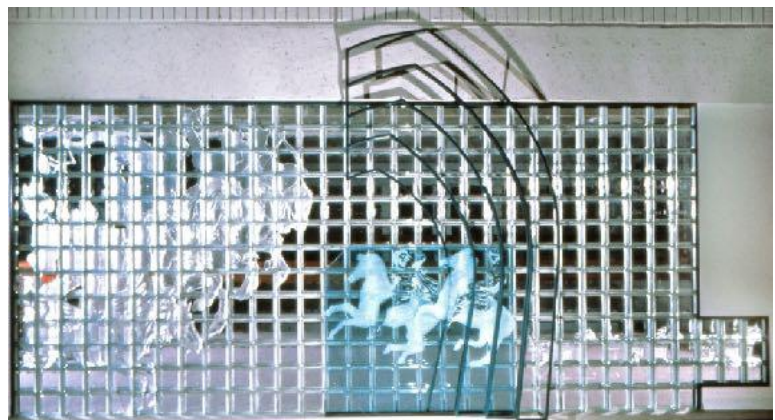


Ming X - Prêt d'Oeuvre d'Art, Musée du Québec

(1986)

Glass, stained glass, wood, tarot card.

40,75" x 29,75" x 38"



Four Horsemen - Campus Loyola, Vanier Library. Concordia University.

(1989)

Cast glass, 300 industrial glass boxes, metal.

256"

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Lyons, Tanya - www.tanyalyons.ca



Dresses

Flameworked glass, metal, fabric, found objects.



Kimono Series, Sasayaki
(Detail)

(2011)
Flameworked glass, metal, fabric.



Wings - Under Water & Lumière
(2011)

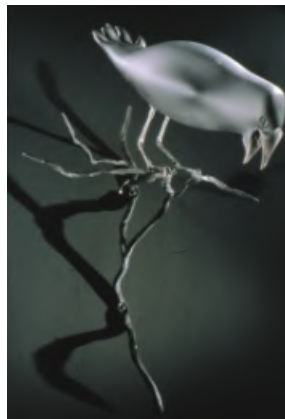
Flameworked glass, metal, fabric.

Ouellette, Caroline - www.welmostudio.com



← *Goutte de Miel*
(2005)
Blown glass, flame-worked glass.
15,5" x 8,5" x 7"

Raven →
(2005)
Blown glass, metal.



Luscious, Delicious Bowl Series
(2010)

Pâte de verre, flameworked glass.
8" x 13" x 13"

Pilon, Carole - www.carolepilon.com



Entrave du Coeur
(2005)

Cast glass, paper pulp, pigments.
22" x 32" x 8"



Les Corps Sylvestre V
(2013)

Crystal, paper pulp, metal, acrylic.
13" x 5" x 8"



Corp Étrangers VI
(2005)

Lost wax cast cristal, paper pulp, pigments.
40" x 5" x 8"



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Primeau, Patrick - www.welmostudio.com



← *Goutte*
(2009)
Blown glass, incalmo, reticello.
21" x 7" x 7"

Yellow Reticello →
(2009)
Blown glass, incalmo, reticello.
21" x 10" x 2.5"



Janolus Series
(2010)
Blown glass.
20" x 14" x 14"

Rankin, Susan - www.susanrankin.com



Columns
(2010)
Hot sculpted glass, steel, PVC.
93" x 6" x 112"



Flowering Vine Vessel
(2009)
Blown, solid worked glass.
16" x 8.5" x 9.5"



Blue Vase White Lilies
(2009)
Blown, solid worked glass.
18.5" x 13" x 13"



Flaming Float
(2003)
Blown glass, steel, wire.
17.75" x 17.75" x 13.5"

Robertson, Donald



Coriolis II
(2015)
Cast pâte de crystal, cut, polished.
19" x 25" x 7.25"



Memory
(2011)
Lost wax cast crystal, cut, polished, copper, steel.
16" x 13" x 8"



Twilight
(2007)
Lost wax cast crystal.
14.5" x 15.5" x 15.5"

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Strokowsky, Cathy



← *Sunrose*
(2008)
Blown glass, flameworked glass, woven artificial sinew.
11" x 5" x 5"

→ *Desert Paintbrush*

(2008)
Blown glass, glass beads, woven artificial sinew, porcupine quills.
18.5" x 7" x 7"



Compassion
(2011)
Blown glass, electroformed copper, woven artificial sinew.
8" x 11.25" x 11.25"

Vanderstukken, Koen - www.vanderstukken.com



Faces
(2001)
Sandcast glass.
27.5" x 20" x 6.25"



Born Again
(2004)
Sandcast glass.
23.5" x 11" x 7"



Rip Series
(2004)
Sandcast glass.
27" x 21.25" x 2"