Innovation and Illumination

It is surprisingly easy to ignore glass. From windows and architectural elements to touch screens, incandescent and LED powered bulbs, furniture, vases, light, and industrial spaces, it is all around us. The reasons for glass’s popularity are many, but its key distinguishing characteristic is its unmatched clarity. It is striking how many artists and designers who work in the material characterize their medium of choice not as glass, but as light.

This exhibition invites the viewer to look twice at glass as a material or director of buildings, lighting, and household goods, and for artists who engage with its rich history and special ability to bend and amplify light. Each object in "Bright Future" was selected because it demonstrates a recent development in glass technology or a twist on an ancient tradition in glass while also demonstrating its new possibilities.

Glass encompasses a range of history and innovation from the ancient to the high tech. First developed in Mesopotamia around 3500 BC, glass technology has developed over the centuries in concert with advances in chemistry, architecture, optics, and electronics. Contemporary artists and designers who work in ancient materials such as clay, glass, and fiber are working within a medium whose significance has been enhanced by the advent of plastics, synthetics and industry; what was once a singular material for designers of buildings, lighting, and household goods, and for artists and designers who work in the material characterize their medium of choice not as glass, but as light.

The manipulation of light is central to James Carpenter’s design for the proposed Moynihan Station, a transit center that would repurpose the Farley Post Office Office on Eighth Avenue in New York City, originally designed by McKim, Mead & White and opened in 1914. Architectural former has suggested that Carpenter’s sculpture training at Rhode Island School of Design and early collaborations with the Corning Museum of Glass gave him a lasting fascination with the interaction between glass, light, and visual space. Carpenter’s plan for the station, which unites existing and new structures, incorporates what he describes as a “transparent grid shell roof. The roof is made from glass components and undulates over a great room and two luminous masts.” These elements direct light into the station during the day and lighting in the building will cause them to glow at night, creating an experience for both passersby and travelers.

Patti and Helen Lee whose work harnesses the unique ability of glass to direct and amplify light, inviting viewers to experience a real-time optical effect that cannot be replicated in a photograph. The LED Light Table includes a five-color LED display, a real-time optical effect that cannot be replicated in a photograph. The LED Light Table includes a five-color LED display, a real-time optical effect that cannot be replicated in a photograph. Ingo Maurer’s Lüster Light is composed of 287 white LEDs, an LED light source, that is powered by an external transformer. Maurer’s witty design (which has a cousin in the form of an illuminated dining table) recalls Elsa Schiaparelli’s trompe l’oeil sweaters and evening gowns which functioned as they were intended (as wearable garments) but also evoked imaginary second lives, with their graphic evocations of torn animal skins or large fussy bows where the seams existed. The Lüster Light has 6 ways: a sleek, high tech, and modern fixture that pays homage to its ancestry and elaborate chandeliers but with a multitude of thin light tubes. Maurer’s Lüster Light in 2011 as a symbol of ornament and excess by radically snapping it into 21st-century reality—a sharp-cornered context in which to view the chandelier as a de-mediator. It is beauty in quotation marks rather than the genuine article.

Combining post-modern design with traditional techniques, the Moretti family of Venice is one of the few “artisans” still in operation today. Founded in 1908 by Carlo and Giovanni Moretti, the firm has produced vessels and lighting fixtures that combine traditional glassblowing techniques with a sophisticated visual sensibility. Iridescent glass, which can function as both an exuberant color and an aesthetic foil, is included in this exhibition, glass and its history are not the primary focus; glass is just the best material available to realize his ideas.

A growing number of designers are using glass in combination with LED elements and other materials. As Aki MacFarlane and Gerry Martin astutely note in their recent history of the material, Glass: A World History, we take glass for granted because it is so common, and forget that even absolute glass objects begat plastic descendants that we rely on today. Clear plastic was developed in the mid-20th century and is a staple of “weaves” a basket-like structure using hexagonally bent glass tubes together with silk cords. The lighting element is a spiral on a pole that enhances light from halogen bulbs. Adelman’s lighting has become easily recognizable as her modular building blocks are now in the hands of her customers. Her website features a service called “You Make It” which allows clients to assemble a lighting fixture from a menu of metal and glass options. Handblown glass globes by Michiko Sakano gives each piece the look of a fruit tree. The globes are spherical but perfect, nor identical, making Adelman’s experiment in going from glass to something else can find special resonance in the glass blowing and lighting traditions of Venice but adds a surreal twist. She creates chandeliers that look like upside-down, ceiling-mounted tables (e.g. Alice Chandelier) that looks like displaced light, much as it embodies centuries of Venetian tradition. Stark white stars, squiggles, and spirals festoon the vases in this exhibition.

The interaction of glass and light is central to the work of Tom Patti. Patti and Helen Lee whose work harnesses the unique ability of glass to direct and amplify light, inviting viewers to experience a real-time optical effect that cannot be replicated in a photograph. The LED Light Table includes a five-color LED display, a real-time optical effect that cannot be replicated in a photograph. The LED Light Table includes a five-color LED display, a real-time optical effect that cannot be replicated in a photograph. Ingo Maurer’s Lüster Light is composed of 287 white LEDs, an LED light source, that is powered by an external transformer. Maurer’s witty design (which has a cousin in the form of an illuminated dining table) recalls Elsa Schiaparelli’s trompe l’oeil sweaters and evening gowns which functioned as they were intended (as wearable garments) but also evoked imaginary second lives, with their graphic evocations of torn animal skins or large fussy bows where the seams existed. The Lüster Light has 6 ways: a sleek, high tech, and modern fixture that pays homage to its ancestry and elaborate chandeliers but with a multitude of thin light tubes. Maurer’s Lüster Light in 2011 as a symbol of ornament and excess by radically snapping it into 21st-century reality—a sharp-cornered context in which to view the chandelier as a de-mediator. It is beauty in quotation marks rather than the genuine article.

Pratt alumnus Tom Patti (B.I.D., M.I.D. ’69) who has a background in industrial design, emphasizes his work “wasn’t built around the glass furnace.” Patti developed many of his techniques and processes independently, in search of a particular end result rather than the focus on process that seems to fascinate much of the studio glass world. Patti’s glass and steel Z Table is part of a series of small works designed to echo his larger scale architectural installations. Patti notes that his site-specific designs are designed specifically to enhance the movements of people moving through the space so that the visual field is never static. The smaller works, in turn, can be reconfigured. The glass sculpture Glass Mandala is composed of 102 plexiglass squares, each of which resembles a letter of the alphabet. Arranged in a grid of two foot squares from the outside, it appears as it should be installed. It properly and can easily disappear when viewed from an angle.

Patti’s work is emblematic of the wide spectrum of possibilities that glass affords. Despite eschewing certain glass techniques and traditions, his work retains the essential qualities that have made glass such an integral part of the design world for thousands of years. Like no other material, glass can make solid and permanent an interaction between a person, the object, and the light that surrounds it.
Exhibition Checklist:

- Lindsey Adelman Studio
  - U.S.A.
  - Branching Bubble Light, 2011
    - Brass and glass, 51 x 33 x 37 inches

- Marco Dessí for J. & L. Lobmeyr
  - Austria
  - Basket Chandelier, 2010
    - Brass, glass, and silk ropes
    - 25.6 x 14.6 x 14.6 inches
    - Courtesy of J. & L. Lobmeyr

- Werner Aisslinger & CIAV Meisenthal
  - France
  - Mesh Vases, 2008
    - Hand-blown glass with textile mesh print and silver-coated interior, 14 and 17 inches in height
    - Courtesy of Studio Aisslinger & CIAV Meisenthal

- Robert Stadler
  - France
  - Carole #2, 2008
    - One-way mirror with LED display, 24 x 24 inches
    - Courtesy of Robert Stadler and Galerie des Multiples, Paris

- Ingo Maurer
  - Germany and U.S.A.
  - Lüster Light, 2003
    - LEDs enclosed in sheets of glass, 23.5 x 15.5 x 0.38 inches
    - Courtesy of Ingo Maurer LLC

- SWITCH Lighting
  - U.S.A.
  - LED Bulbs, 2012
    - Energy-efficient LED light bulbs, 2.73 x 4.41 inches
    - Courtesy of SWITCH Lighting

- Liana Yaroslavsky
  - France
  - Maure de Venise Table, 2009
    - Venetian-style chandelier enclosed in plexiglass, 43 x 43 x 18 inches
    - Courtesy of Liana Yaroslavsky