

Why So Serious?

Curatorial speech 'Keep it Glassy' Tilman Thürmer

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Since 2009, COORDINATON ASIA has been working together with the Shanghai Museum of Glass on creating a cultural hotspot in Baoshan area. This is a work in progress. As you might have noticed, the building in which we are celebrating today is in the middle of a construction site. We are surrounded by what in the future will become a known and loved location for a variety of business and cultural activities, all related to the magical material of glass.

Back to why we are here today. We are immensely proud that over the last years the museum has grown fast into a mature and award winning cultural institute. An increasing number of visitors as well as international media have recognized the museum as a relevant and serious cultural destination. But it's exactly that word 'serious' that brought us here together today. Heritage and history of glass is serious, but have you ever visited the Hot Glass Performance Hall of the Shanghai Museum of Glass? Or seen a live glassblowing performance elsewhere in the world? Then you might already understand that glass is not only a serious matter. Glassmaking is also having genuine and uncomplicated fun with this extraordinary material. Trying and trying again to come to exactly the right design, sometimes an unplanned mistake turns out to be a brilliant glass design. Working with glass is playing, sometimes not knowing what the end result will be. This fun part of working with glass is exactly what 'Keep it Glassy' is all about.

'Keep it Glassy' focuses on glass design. Many designers create ideas during their making process and draw inspiration from the materials they work with. Glass can appear solid and strong, as well fluid and liquid, and this might be one of the reasons why it is greatly embraced as a material by designers worldwide. Working with glass offers endless possibilities to experiment. The slow process of heating and melting, creating shapes and colors, combining it with different materials, and succeeding or beautifully failing to control it, results in interesting designs, of which more than 200 examples come together in 'Keep it Glassy'.

If you have had the chance to have a look around today, you will notice that every single piece that is represented in Keep it Glassy, has 'passion for glass' written all over it. Throughout four halls we show you how designers use glass to create the most surprising shapes and ideas. These ideas sometimes become immediately visible, such as in the Cinderella's Chairs of Anna ter Haar. The designer replaced one of the legs of her chairs by a glass prosthesis, making them look vulnerable, fragile and 'injured'. But in fact the strong and beautiful pieces of glass hold the furniture together,

and their diverging look makes them stand out from the crowd. Your eyes and mind will be tempted by these sparkling pieces. Tempting alike are the skulls of Mexican artist Andres Basurto. From a distance the works look threatening, but it is exactly the scattered glass surface of the pieces that makes you want to approach to have a closer look.

In other works the passion and fun for glass is hidden beyond the surface, such as in the work of Lindsey Adelman. By using the natural characteristics of glass, the designer turns a 'normal' household object - a lamp - into something interesting and beautiful as the 'Catch' lamp. Imagine watching Adelman in her workshop, blowing glass into brass links, and seeing the glass slowly slump into a unique bulb with every try. A similar transformation is recognizable in the work of designer Adrian Froufe. He uses glass to play with stereotype ideas about objects and materials. His design 'Cui' is a bird feeder, not made out of wood as usual, but crafted in fragile glass. Rejecting the known forms and materials associated with this object, Froufe surprises us and puts a smile upon our face.

From a smile to a giggle; the Memory lamps of Boris Klimek use glass as a medium to make a space into a happier place. The designer created balloon-shapes lamps out of glass, that are not only fun to look at, but are also a pleasure to turn off and on. Here, the fun of working with glass is effortlessly translated into the actual object. This is also the case for the selection of objects in 'Keep it Glassy' that are inspired on the ritual of having a drink with friends or family. A great example is designer Jonas Merian, who uses used bottles to create unique lighting features.

These are just a few examples of the endless list of international designers represented in 'Keep it Glassy'. They are accompanied by other established names such as Tadao Ando, Droog Design and Estudio Campana. What brings all designers together is the fun and excitement of working with glass. It is universal and goes beyond borders. Sharing this feeling, we created an exhibition design made to match. A maze of glassy mirrored pools leads the way through the exhibition and dazzles the visitor with a range of shimmering design objects, that seemingly flow on a thin layer of water. Subtle light is reflected in the water and creates a play of light on the ceiling. The contrasting raw and industrial character of the former workshop space is a constant reminder of the workshop of the designer, where all these objects were once created.

Solid and liquid, smooth and raw, and dark and light collide in 'Keep it Glassy', making the exhibition into an engaging visual experience. Combined with over 200 objects, created by more than 50 designers from more than 20 different countries, the exhibition gives the visitor a new and rich perspective on glass. In this way 'Keep it Glassy' beautifully adds to the belief, shared by the Shanghai Museum of Glass and COORDINATION ASIA, that the possibilities of glass are endless.

I hope by now you are anxious and curious to go and have a look. Let me end by thanking our partners at the Shanghai Museum of Glass for collaborating with us on this extraordinary exhibition. A big thanks also goes out to my team at COORDINATION ASIA - Vega, Manuela, François, Yichen, Jessica, Esther and Yu Yin - that has put great effort and enthusiasm into making 'Keep it Glassy' into a success. I invite you all to raise your glass and toast with me to a fruitful partnership and a great result. Enjoy and 'Keep it Glassy'!