

# GLASSY

magazine

FEATURE

## NEW LIGHT FROM THE GLASS

Annealing

CREATIVES

## A WORLD OF GLASS, BUT NOT THE WHOLE

Wendi Xie  
in Conversation with  
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# A Long Road Ahead

In the 2012 Chinese contemporary art field, the most notable news was that Dr. Uli Sigg, a famous contemporary art collector, donated 1463 pieces of Chinese contemporary art works to the M + Museum in Hong Kong. Dr. Sigg's impressive collection included historical works from top Chinese artists as Zhang Xiaogang, Zeng Fanzhi and Liu Wei. Even today, when Chinese private collectors have been building private museums or galleries, I am still curious why Dr. Sigg, with such a large collection, did not open a museum. In this June, I had the pleasure of having dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Sigg, during which I asked that long-awaited question, and Dr. Sigg's answer was unexpectedly straightforward: "It takes too much energy and time to run a museum, and I cannot do that." Behind this short sentence was not only modesty and low-profile, but also a clear understanding of the cause of the museum as a whole: it must require great devotion and efforts to run a good museum. Whether it is tangible or intangible energy, the huge efforts is beyond imagination of anyone who is not involved.

This reminds me of the time when I first established the museum, and I and my team were thinking hard about key questions such as: what kinds of museum should I build? How to maintain sustainable and healthy development of the museum? Fortunately, after visiting hundreds of museums around the world, we have gradually explored own way of operating a museum. Different from stubborn and traditional cultural institutions, Shanghai Museum of Glass upholds the concept of "combination and revival", and has

been growing over the years. With Professional exhibition projects, diversified education activities, comprehensive public service facilities, SHMOG is expanding its reach and influence to present different surprises and transformations for audience with different background and age levels.

Now celebrating the 6th anniversary, SHMOG has never stopped at current achievement and has been pursuing a better future. In 2014, it officially launched one of the most important cross-border project, “Annealing”. If Zhang Ding’s “Black Substance” is considered a prelude to the project, then last year’s “Plain” and “Glass Intestine” marked the official opening of the project. With feelings and formulas, it has built a bridge connecting the tradition and the modern times, and connecting the ideal and the reality, and has displayed astounding charm of glass in the context of contemporary art. In 2017 new artistic cycle, we have invited two major contemporary artists—Lin Tianmiao, a world-renowned installation artist and Bi Rongrong, an emerging star in contemporary art—to join us to play with glass. They will try different methods and techniques, interpret this crystal material from a female perspective, and re-combine glass and contemporary art. Their works under “Annealing” bring us distinctive artistic experience.

Upholding cross-border and integration efforts, Shanghai Museum of Glass has been creating more possibilities for the development of glass art in China, and has been offering an unprecedented museum lifestyle for urban residents. When stepping on the Kaleidoscope gate of SHMOG, the audience can enjoy a new museum experience.

It’s always easier to understand than to practice. Running a museum is never easy. Taking on this road may be lonely and tough. And now our journey has just begun, and it requires efforts and dedication of several generations.

The road ahead is touch and long, but we still have the perseverance and confidence to march forward to become a noble museum with global significance.

On this long and arduous road, we will keep exploring.

# NEW LIGHT FROM GLASS

## FOREWORD

Since 5,000 years ago, when the first piece of glass was made by people from the Tigris-Euphrates Civilization and the Ancient Egypt, this highly pliable man-made product has accompanied the development of the world’s civilizations. Since the late 18th century, with the rise of the Industrial Revolution and the progress in technologies, glass has no longer been exclusive to the gentility, and it has quickly reached every part of our daily life. This clear and gentle material has then become cheap, immediately accessible, and not that important.

In the face of difficulties, innovators stand out to fight back. In the 1960s, a revolution took place to promote the development of glass, where artists took the initiative. Ceramic artist Harvey Littleton, scientist Dominick Labino, and glassblower Harvey Leafgreen set off a glass studio movement, which, for the first time, proved that glass can be used by artists to create artworks rather than being a mere industrial material. At this point, this magical material was introduced from the factory into artist studios and the art education system in universities; completely without constraints in functionality, it is an artistic material of self-expression that is officially labeled under the category of art.

Fifty years has passed since the glass studio movement, and the connection between glass and art has been closer thanks to efforts by glass artists and professional institutions. What is the future of glass? How can this five-thousand-year-old material revive? What is the relationship between the development of the prevailing contemporary art and glass? How can contemporary art, which prioritizes concepts over actions, and glass making, an ancient art form that heavily emphasize techniques, collide and interact?

The island of Murano, which is renowned for a long history of glass blowing, made the first respond: Mr. Adriano Berengo, with great enthusiasm and efforts, has been carrying out the special exhibition “Glasstress” since 2009, which has become an important collateral exhibition of the Venice Biennale of Arts. In every two years, Glasstress gathers well-known or emerging contemporary artists around the world to use glass as the main material and complete amazing works with the long-standing glassblowing technique in the island. Mr. Berengo intended to revive the declining glassblowing tradition through the project, which has made great contribution to the preservation of the Murano glass.

At the beginning of the new millennium, China's first batch of glass art students returned, who built glass studios at Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts and Academy of Arts and Design of Tsinghua University. Their ideas, techniques and basic equipment spread quickly and China's top ten art institutions have all established the glass art disciplines and glass studios. Today, China's glass enthusiasts are pondering where the glass art shall go. The new Shanghai Museum of Glass and its chief executive officer, Mr. Zhang Lin, are also actively engaged to look for the future of glass. In 2014, SHMOG conducted the first cross-border collaboration with contemporary artist Zhang Ding, which resulted in the major exhibition in 2015, “Black Substance”. In 2016, SHMOG officially named this collaborative art project “Annealing”. In the past three years, Annealing has seen participation of five contemporary artists, who have re-discovered glass, this special materials with strong industrial and artisanship characteristics, through contemporary artistic approaches. Through the in-depth cooperation with contemporary artists, SHMOG is able to constantly trigger the communication and integration between contemporary art and glass, which is the best possible extension of this material.

The development of things may not be smooth as expected, and glass, something once glittered like diamonds in history have also undergone recession. Fortunately, forerunners in every part of the world are trying to address these problems with great efforts, and coming up with their thought and possible answers, so as to shed some new light upon this ancient material. Traditions may be maintained, and history may be respected; while in the face of irresistible challenges and changes, breakthroughs and innovation are more welcomed. Glass enthusiasts at both ends of the earth are trying to find the next stop for glass, which is bound to be a difficult process of pursuit and examination.



# WORD FROM ARTISTS

ANNEALING

2015

Artists at the “Annealing” project come from all parts of China, some of whom are emerging newcomers, some others well-established artists. As Liao Fei said, the artists + “Annealing” is not a simple equation of  $1 + 1 = 2$ . Their background, experience, creation approaches and even personalities have a great impact on the final display of the works, which has brought to the “Annealing” very different elements. We prepared the following questions for five artists engaged in the project, hoping to give a full picture of Annealing, which is highly inclusive and complicated, through their narratives.

Q1 Why did you join this project? What attracted you the most?

Q2 What was the most direct understanding/feeling of glass before this project? Please use three words.

Q3 After participating in the project, what is the biggest misunderstanding of glass have you discovered? What is the major difference between glass and the materials you used before?

Q4 How do you use glass to express the idea that you want to pass on to the viewers? What is the starting point of your works?

Q5 Some people argue that glass carries strong industrial and craftsmanship characteristics, which is not consistent with contemporary art which prioritizes ideas and concepts. Do you agree with them?

Q6 What do you think of the future for the combination of contemporary art and glass? What can Chinese artists do in this regard?

Q7 What was the most difficult/happiest/ most regrettable thing during the project?

Q8 If are to participate in the project again, What new ideas will bring to the project? Will you use glass for your future artistic creation? Why?

Q9 What are your expectations for future Annealing projects?

Things are always difficult in the beginning. From 2012, when SHMOG had the idea of connecting contemporary art to 2014, when it put with great efforts, SHMOG finally presented the “Black Substance” Exhibition in 2015. At that time, SHMOG did not have a name for this passionate project, which may have been that the museum was still attempting possible approaches.

The first cooperation might not be mature and there was still room for improvement. It perhaps was only a small step for the world of contemporary art, but for SHMOG, it was a brave and new attempt. We have every reason to believe that if we look back at some point in the future, no one will ignore the importance and significance of this small step.

## ZHANG DING

Born in 1980 in Gansu, China, Zhang Ding lives and works in Shanghai. His artistic practice is mainly presented as personal projects, including videos, installations, paintings and live performances. From the “Tools” (2007), he has been creating absurd and confrontational scenes based on the strength of the senses, which often construct a deeper layer of social metaphor that can be viewed as a deconstruction of the atmosphere of the stage field. The shift of scenes leverages the confrontation between us and our imperfect senses, leading to a displacement of our heart.





**BLACK SUBSTANCE / 2015**  
by Zhang Ding

**“What I wanted to build was an atmosphere of danger, which could be trigger at any time...”**

## ZHANG DING: TRIGGERED AT ANY TIME

For those who have observed Zhang Ding’s works or performances, one word may pop up in their mind: stirring.

When SHMOG began to consider the cross-border cooperation projects, it was thinking hard how to encourage contemporary artists to make something different out of this ordinary mixture of silica, and how to successfully present the valuable efforts together by the artist and the museum. Therefore, the museum was very cautious in the choice of the first artist for the project. Thanks to the efforts of project curator Ms. Lisa Li, SHMOG, who had been outside the contemporary art circle, was honored to be in contact with ShanghART Gallery, a famous Chinese contemporary art gallery. After several rounds of in-depth communication with the gallery founder, Mr. Lorenz, SHMOG gained trust from the gallery. Zhang Ding, a “stirring” and cool post-80s artist who is skilled in a variety of materials for various artistic types, naturally became a candidate for SHMOG’s scheme.

Zhang Ding’s installation works often center around the strength of the senses and the will. Whether it is wood, foaming agent or steel, the use of materials in the installations is the focus for the artist to control and materialize: centering around the control over specific factors such as the senses and the will, Zhang Ding uses a mix of materials to establish passionate and confrontational scenes. “We intended to find an artist who has great use and control of materials.” As the first artist to participate in the project,

Zhang Ding said that he had conducted some examinations and research on glass before signing up in the project, but had finally given up using this material for work when he understood the production process and the cycle. Thanks to this project, Zhang Ding picked up glass again as the major material for creation. “Glass is fragile and breakable; it can also be damaging, but it no doubt possess visual beauty.” In Zhang Ding’s view, glass has its own particularity, “This is not some material I can easily control. It will limit the size of what I make, because small items may be no problem, while bigger ones may be troublesome. I can’t control the production time, either, and I can’t be sure what comes out of the furnace is what I expected.”

Fortunately, for Zhang Ding, “everything that may solved is not difficult.” In the final presentation of the works, the artist fully tapped into the physical properties of glass—fragile and hard, transparent and dense, hot in process and cold in finish—and build a spatial balance in the sense of an artist in three ways. “I do not think that glass and contemporary art are out of tune, because any idea will have to be landed in the physical space.” In this landing process, one has diverse choices of materials. Glass possesses both decorative beauty and a capacity for expression. “It all depends on the artist’s own choice.”

“Although I regret that I did not have a deeper understanding of glass, I am very happy to complete a very good piece of work.” This “very good” piece of work is “Black Substance”, which was made out of glass and steel. This artwork, which bears the same name of the exhibition, was display at the Hong Kong Basel Art Fair in the same year before the project, which immediately won great attention. What’s more interesting, this artwork is also Zhang Ding’s WeChat avatar.

“What I wanted to build was an atmosphere of danger, which could be trigger at any time,” Zhang Ding values natural forces between materials, “Glass and steel are very hard materials, and we already have fixed impression about them. Being bound by such impressions, to me, constitutes a feeling of danger.” How to break out of such impressions and stereotypes? Black represents a mysterious and unknown space, and

**ZHANG DING**

when black meets glass, the round glass balls, like fisheyes, reflect the surrounding space where there is no color; the transparent glass in the black feels like a strange world. It seems fragile, but it supports and is supported by the hard steel plates that are stacked in layers. It stands quietly in an atmosphere of crisis that may break out at any time. The artist succeeded in finding a balance where he expresses the sense of pressure in steel and a smooth texture of glass. Through sophisticated calculation and combination, the round black balls achieve a subtle balance with the steel plates without any extra support. With the most simple and basic ways to show the most original properties of two materials, Zhang Ding skillfully provoked the hidden uncertainty, giving the viewers a clear sense of tension. Such tension exist not only between the audience and the work, but also during communication between the museum and the artist. The revamping of exhibition space, the design of the exhibition and promotion materials, and the planning for the opening ceremony ... Such seemingly trivial exchanges and divergences in ideas were also a beneficial lesson for the SHMOG, who was just stepping into the world of contemporary art.

In recent years, Zhang Ding is having a more dynamic presence in contemporary art at home and abroad. In 2014, at Zhang Ding's Solo Exhibition "Orbit of Rock", all chemical actions arising from the mixture of factors twisted into sculptures of mood and atmospheres. Later, he started a series of projects and set up his own art label "Control Club", trying to open up his ways of working to generate more possibilities. From the "18 Cubes", a massive installation, to "Vortex" which is on display at ShanghART Gallery, and from "Enter the Dragon" and "Devouring Time" to projects that integrate various materials and artistic types such as "Invisible", Zhang Ding has brought the audience more surprises and a curiosity what will happen next time. Zhang Ding modestly said, "I am a bit lazy, so I would like to use more materials that are processed through cold working instead of through forging, so as to make the works more industrial." Maybe in the future, we can see more works from Zhang Ding that combine new materials with glass. The artist has made this ancient material a carrier for more abstract concepts in the context of contemporary art. "I hope that better works can appear in the future 'Annealing' projects, and artists need to turn glass from a material into a language, rather than simply form a shape out of it."

As the prelude to the SHMOG's "Annealing" project, Zhang Ding's "Black Substance" exhibition undoubtedly laid the foundation and a standard for the development of the project, and also represented the beginning of the dialogue between glass and contemporary art. Both SHMOG and contemporary artists will face more challenges and collisions which may include tense confrontations as well as new products after the contact and integration.

"Annealing" was triggered well for a brighter future.

TEXT: CATHYE YANG

Following the "Black Substance" exhibition, Shanghai Museum of Glass launched another cross-border project on November 9, 2016, which was 2 years after Zhang Ding's solo, and officially named the project "Annealing". Liao Fei and Yang Xinguang, two young Chinese contemporary artists became the project artists of the year. With "Plain" and "Glass Intestine", two completely different styles of works, the two artist showed to the audience different artistic approaches.

Within eyesight, is what our eyes see really "plain"? How do different substances affect and transform into each other?

Observing our heart, with a good physical health, is our spirit free of sickness? Where are the heartbroken people?

In the late autumn of 2016, it was dry but also vibrant and dynamic.

#### LIAO FEI

Born in 1980 in Jiangxi, Liao Fei lives in Shanghai. In the past, Liao Fei presented his reflection on the world through exhibitions; now, he hopes to convey a more realistic state of life on this exhibition. Liao Fei's studio is located in an urban fringe, where he is able to transform any material scattered around. The materials are easily accessible, functional, semi-finished and uncertain, which have a great potential for creation in the eyes of Liao Fei. In the future, he hopes to experience the impact of life and the world on him more profoundly through a mixture between glass and other materials.

#### YANG XINGUANG

Born in 1980 in Hunan, Yang Xinguang currently works in Beijing. He is a leading representative of the younger generation of Chinese artists, whose works deliberately evade a detailed description of the daily life and the resentment in politics, thus are distinct from the mainstream narration of Chinese contemporary art. The contemplation in Yang's works reminds us of the phenomenological language on the body and the audience of the minimalist discourse in the U.S., which is also identical to the openness in material and space of the ArtePovera. Avoiding the direct description, metaphor or criticism of the social life and political reality, his works conduct practice in the form and discuss the visual materialization.



## LIAO FEI: RESTRICTIONS ARE FUN

The first time I “saw” Liao Fei was by sheer coincidence. At an NGO exhibition, I saw Liao Fei’s work, “Smoke”, which was jointly completed with craftsmen from Loutang, a traditional town in the northern part of Shanghai. In the video, he rides a Forever traditional 28” bike, the back seat of which is equipped with a chimney made of galvanized iron. He cycles slowly on the small streets of the town like a vendor, and during the rising, he is constantly looking for things to burn, and produce different smoke by burning different materials. From the straws, plastic and newspaper to the scattered smoke, i.e. from one form to another, Liao Fei is very concerned about the change and transformation in different items. Coincidentally, this observation of the paths of the world was naturally inherited in the 2016 SHMOG “Annealing” project, “Plain”.

In fact, Liao Fei was not a newcomer to the “Annealing” project.

In the early spring of 2015, when Zhang Ding’s “Black Substance” was launched, SHMOG began to consider the future artist for the “Annealing” project. “After viewing Zhang Ding’s works, I thought it was fun, and I myself also wanted to explore the possibilities of this material,” Liao Fei then engaged himself in the project with this simple idea. Those

### CONTINUOUS SURFACE (2.2m³) / 2016

by Liao Fei

who have seen the 2016 “Plain” exhibition must not have imagined what the project was like or what the artist was thinking in the beginning. At that time, the Glaze Gallery of SHMOG was located on the side of the main road, and it was covered by metal frame-window glass, which was a bit nostalgic with some industrial style. “In the beginning, I planned to tear down all the glass windows of the gallery, melt them, re-make them into window glass, and put it back in the frames. I wanted to videotape the process, edit it into a video work as the result of the ‘Annealing’ project. In this process of re-melting-making-cooling, Liao Fei believed that the substance would change, and the remodeled glass became less transparent, leading to subtle changes in light in the entire display space. In the meantime, some of the glass would be lost in the process of this high-temperature furnace, so the remade windows could be smaller than the original size, thus leaving breaches on the window edges. When the audience walked into the space, what they would see was a seemingly empty room; after careful observation, they would find the delicate differences in the surrounding glass.

This bold and fresh idea was supported by the museum, but the real implementation was not always under control. The change of the exhibition site, the huge amount of the glass, the insufficient furnace temperature, and the insufficient thickness of remade glass to be installed... After repeated experiments, Liao Fei found that he needed to remove the three labels he had on glass in the beginning: transparent, fixed and material, for there lay the biggest misunderstandings about glass: “There was too many principles and texture I didn’t know in the process of melting glass. This transparent material is ‘another material’ for me. Unlike other materials I imagined at first, glass could be melted and then turned into some new form: it is not ‘fixed’.”

Time waits for no one and rushes onward like streams. From the Spring Festival of 2016 when the museum first contacted Liao Fei, to the early autumn when he experienced repeated failures during experiments, both the museum and Liao Fei felt discouraged and a bit suffering. However, in art, sometimes mistakes and frustrations are a catalyst to help artists continue to think deeply about their work content and directions.

On one afternoon before the 2016 National Day, Liao Fei once again visited the museum with his iconic backpack. Before I expressed regret for his another experimental failure, he excitedly took out a new proposal which was based on the latest exhibition space layout, completely abandoning the original plan that he tried for the past six months. When my colleagues and I saw the new manuscripts, we were puzzled by those rough and simple lines overlapping together. “I would like to use the scene where water drops into the lake as the simulation model.” Before anyone had the slightest idea, Liao Fei began to describe the final effect of the exhibition: he would layers of flat glass layers and hollow holes to show the ripple caused by a drop of water into the lake, “I want to use flat glass and the cold processing technique, with the most common old green glass.

LIAO FEI





**PLAIN / 2016**  
by Liao Fei

I want to use this common material to express the relationship between the material and our daily life, as well as the changes of the material in the social environment.

With the settling down of the new plan, the exhibition was then implemented accordingly. Soon after Liao Fei went back to the studio, I received his e-mail on the same day, "I found something interesting when I was calculating the ripples of the water drop. The depth of water has a great impact on the spread of the ripples, so between the 2.5 m<sup>3</sup> water and the 1 m<sup>3</sup> water, the difference of the speed the ripples spread can be as twice as fast, and the cone shape formed in the model can also vary greatly. It's very interesting and unexpected, thanks to the power of nature." An accurate and perfect presentation, required accurate calculation, but the generation of the water drop model was not easy. During the project, when Liao Fei was staying in the United States for artistic issues, he invited professional students at MIT to establish the calculation model according to the formula. Liao Fei was thinking about a "water drop in void", but it failed calculation as any water drop model must originate from a real-world environment, so the water drop must be put in a space for actual calculation, while considering the relationship between waves, the spread speed of ripples, the impact of the wall of the pool on water, and even whether the drop was from the sea or the lake. After several drafts, Liao Fei decided that the work would be one sea water drop falling into 1 m and 2.2 m of water, thus determining the final rendering.

When the "Plain" was officially open to the public, I believe the audience were overwhelmed by the three massive sets of works. An ordinary office was turned into a contemporary "white box", and a room covering 300 square meters was stuffed with



**FAILURE EXPERIMENT  
PRODUCT**

glass, wood plates and wood sticks to be turned into the massive installation of "Plain". The work only left the audience a 65cm-wide trail, to push or "force" the audience to feel and experience the interaction between the work and space, between materials and individuals. Two sets of glass installations—"Continuous Plain 1m<sup>3</sup>", with a diameter of 1 meter and the "Continuous Plane 2.2m<sup>3</sup>" with a diameter of 1 meter—were placed at the exit and entrance of the exhibition, which substantially and forcefully displayed ripples generated on the plane from a drop of water at a certain moment. The ripples were also subject to changes in the depth of the water under the plane, resulting in changes in speed and completely different extensions on the time axis. The properties of the "Plain" exist only in our mind at certain moment, like in the Zeno's paradoxes. We can only use our imagination "at this moment" to think about the whole picture of the plain.

In Liao Fei's view, during his participation in the "Annealing" project of about a year, the most difficult thing was the "resistance" he felt in glass making techniques: from glass melting in the beginning, to the hole-drilling and thickness selection on glass plates in the new plan, and then to the hanging of the work which weighed about 4 tons, the implementation was nothing like what he expected in mind. "I like this kind of 'resistance'," Liao said optimistically. And even when the three sets of works were not able to be displayed elsewhere due to their size, he thought, "As these works were customized on the basis of the space and thus reflect the influence between materials and space, such mutual restriction is also fun."

"In my future works, I will keep using glass and consider combining it with other materials, because I'm very interested in materials themselves. I like such so-called

**“I want to use this common material to express the relationship between the material and our daily life, as well as the changes of the material in the social environment...”**

‘restrictions’, which is fun for the artists as this will eventually lead to the creation of the information conveyed in the works.” Liao Fei does not think that the glass, which is strong in industrial and craftsmanship characteristics, will influence the idea expression which is an emphasis of the contemporary, “Artists have their own scope of work, and so does glass; the two can undoubtedly produce an intersection, where the most interesting works may be born.”

Liao Fei now continues to explore the meaning of the material itself in a more in-depth level. “The main component of the glass is silica, and I am particularly interested in element of the ‘silicon’, Although silicon is the most common natural element in the Crust, humans have invented a lot of silicon compounds that have different shapes and structures. For example, the granite is a natural product of temperature, pressure and crustal movements, and humans can also create more and more silicon compounds. I would love to explore the relationship and contradiction between them.” Liao Fei develops interest of any research from the doubts he has about the surrounding things and himself; he explores the basic principles of things to gain wisdom and enlightenment for his style and works. Any cognitive progress made nowadays in humanity is largely dependent on scientific positivism. The mainstream world view to understand the outside world is basically a binary view on matters, which undoubtedly carries our hope to make a clear division of things. Isn’t this a resistance or restriction? Just as shown in “Plain”, how is it possible that there are absolute “plains” in the world?

“Restrictions are like rocks in the river; the water passes the rocks and eventually converge into a new stream. Such restrictions or resistance will result in very interesting outcomes. We are having a profound relationship with this material and looking to express in a more in-depth way so artists may have to jump out of the box. Restrictions of a material are fun.”

Ubiquitous as it is, restriction brings out the best of but some artists.

TEXT: CATHYE YANG

## YANG XINGUANG: GLASS SHOWS BROKEN HEART

As a newcomer to contemporary art project, the museum was worried how to communicate and collaborate with contemporary artists to present the important “Annealing” projects to the public and to the industry. When I heard that the ancestral home of the other artist for the 2016 “Annealing” project, Yang Xinguang, is in Ningxiang of Hunan province, I was excited. Knowing that he and I are from the same region, I naturally felt good about him and our communication. As Hunan people are generally considered aggressive or somewhat domineering, which was expected of Yang Xinguang before the meeting. When I first met him in person in June 2016 at the museum, he struck me only as a “calm” person, who gave the most sincere handshake. In nearly half a year of cooperation, what I senses more was the delicacy and subtlety in his personality and works.

“Glass is new to me.”

When Yang Xinguang participated in the “Annealing” project, he brought a relatively complete exhibition plan and ideas, “The process of annealing is more complex than expected, and it may not turn out as we want it like clay sculpture.” In his previous works, Yang Xinguang mainly applied natural materials such as wood, clay and stones for his sculptures. These natural media can be controlled and shaped easily by the artist. But this time he must use glass, an artificial material, to carry out new attempts and challenges. When the glass enters the furnace, its fate cannot be controlled by man to a certain extent. During the annealing process, due to changes in temperature and internal pressure, unexpected results may arise. “The starting point of my work is to fully leverage the breakability of the glass and make some human intestine out of it.” Mature furnace casting techniques may perfectly realize the artist’s idea, “but due to the actual length of the production, the glass may stand a chance of fractures, which is perfect to display the meaning of “断肠” (literally: broken intestine) or “heartbroken” in traditional Chinese poems.” Such properties, which are seemingly restricted but at the same time “beautiful, fragile and sharp”, are natural in the hands of Yang Xinguang to express his



YANG XINGUANG

## GLASS INTESTINE (PART) / 2016

by Yang Xinguang



emotions. The randomness of “objects” and the occasional combination of the “heart” have formed an interesting relationship.

The works are a reflection of Liao’s aspirations and pursuit.

In Liao Fei’s work of the “Plain”, he adopted a lot of cold processing methods, such as cutting, hole-drilling and grinding, which echoed the rational calculations and calm thinking of Liao Fei. In contrast, the “glass intestine” was created with more hot processing techniques such as blowing and casting, which was consistent with Yang Xinguang’s idea of heated passion. Yang Xinguang once jokingly called the “glass intestine” an answer sheet as a liberal arts student, which constituted an interesting contrast to Liao Fei, whose “Plain” could be considered a reply from a science student.

It was in August, and the temperature reached the highest in Shanghai with the maximum daily temperature of nearly 35°C. As SHMOG was undergoing a transformation, the artist’s studio was not that pleasant: there was no air-conditioning facilities, or even the basic lighting. In the sweltering space, a large fan that was designed for outdoor barbecues and an emergency light became the only electrical appliances. At that time, Yang Xinguang was supposed to create models of the glass rocks within a week, which was surprisingly completed in only three days when he dealt with more than 80 pieces of rocks and nearly 1 ton of sculpture clay.

During his stay in Shanghai, Yang stayed in apartment assigned by the museum, and whenever I arrived at the museum for work, I could always see him busy in his studio: he found a few rocks that could be made into models from the lawn of the park and constantly slapped the clay onto it, giving no notice about the rolling sweat. At about 10 o’clock, the temperature began to rise to an unbearable state, so he simply took the wet shirt off and kept working. The power of such a scene could only be felt by those who actually saw it. The noisy sound of cicadas echoed the powerful “slaps” of the clay; enjoying the roar and blow of the big fans, I thought that was the attitude for artistic creation.

Some time past 11 o’clock, Yang Xinguang got up and picked up his clothes, “It’s too hot! I’ll go back to my apartment for a shower and a meal, and pick up in the afternoon.” There were water droplets on the ground, which one couldn’t tell was his sweat or just water he left when drinking from a barrel. A few months later, his studio became the exhibition hall for Liao Fei’s “Plain”. The heated working scene of the “Glass Intestine” and the calm atmosphere of “Plain” constituted an interesting and meaningful dialogue through time.

In addition to the glass rock models, Yang Xinguang completed the clay sculpture of the glass intestine, the welding of the fitness equipment, and even the grass and trees on the bottom of his work. He was able to do things quietly, highly attentive for a whole day when he didn’t disturb or need help. Perhaps all the power in his working was injected into the exhibit and all his emotions were condensed into the glass, so that the final outcome of the glass intestines carried such strong spiritual implications. Looking back on the exhibitions and works of Yang Xinguang, we can always sense the influence of Chinese classical culture, which was put out of the stereotypes and was interpreted otherwise. Similarly, the “Glass Intestine” continued this habit as a standard artwork from a liberal arts student: on the first floor of the exhibition hall, there was a piece of work called “Leaning Post”, which borrowed the concept from the famous poem Shuiling Yin—Arriving at Shangxin Pavilion of Jiankang—Looking at the Wu knife, I hit all leaning posts and no one understood me. The poem was written by Xin Qiji in the Southern Song Dynasty, who often aspired to recover the old capital, but was suspected and even excluded under the conservative political environment, so he felt lost and unfulfilled as a patriot. Hitting on leaning posts does not only mean the physical pain of doing



YANG XINGUANG



so, but reflects the resentment and bitterness for surrounding people who would not understand what he pursued. At this moment, the human and the body seem to be the imposer of the action, and the giver of the strength, but they are actually fragile and weak, just like glass, which could be extremely hot after being melted and could easily burn us; when put on leaning posts, it can only leave burning marks and a small piece of debris after cooling.

Similarly, the “Glass Intestine” on the second floor and the “Human Large Intestine” on the first floor were a reflection of the concept of “断肠”, or heartbroken, to express the spiritual or mental pain that extends to the body; when the pain reaches some point on the body, the original pain on the mind may not be as important. People often have a lot in common with glass: they are seemingly bright and gentle, but are extremely fragile that a little external force may result in destruction. When this excruciating pain becomes visualized, can we still feel such spiritual crisis?

In all Yang Xinguang's works we can see his knowledge and control of the material; with a number of modeling concepts, he has managed to control the expression of things and people just right. Whether it is wood, steel, oil paint, stone and even gravel, Yang is able to put them in the best state in his works, and in the meantime dig out the most essential meaning of the material. Different materials have different properties, including color, hardness, density, melting point, etc., and they have different impact and interactions among each other. Such contradictions may depict the artist's inner emotions, but not to the fullest. The cold and sharp glass in the “Glass Intestine” was a perfect component for that part, which, combined with wood, metal, plastic and other materials, expresses his deepest and strongest tearing pain.

In the long history of glass, we have intentionally or unintentionally labeled it with something that is so not consistent with contemporary art. When we try to drag glass closer to contemporary art, we, from a certain point of view, actually believe that these are two different things subconsciously. Because there are differences and divergences, we need cross-border cooperation, or integration. As put in Buddhist classics, “Since all is void, where can the dust alight”, which means everything are like a dream, so people should be too obsessed about something. In this sense, have we all been preoccupied or obsessed by the difference between “glass” and “contemporary art”? As Yang Xinguang said, “industrial and craftsmanship characteristics do not hinder the expression of the concept.” Glass is only a material that is neutral, and it can be the medium for artists to express feelings and emotions like the sludge, canvas and metals. “I may use glass in my future works, because glass has a unique character to fulfill certain creation needs.” Fortunately, in the latest exhibition of Yang Xinguang, “The Unknown Depth of the Woods”, we have once again seen the “glass intestine”.

Things are just what they naturally become.

Yang Xinguang has found a way to balance the “things” and the “heart”.

TEXT: CATHYE YANG, CESARE YE

## ANNEALING

2017

The 2017 “Annealing” has for the first time engaged female artists. Gaining her inspiration from trips, Bi Rongrong looks to explore the relationships between her works and the space as well as the viewers from the element of “waves”. Lin Tianmiao, on the other hand, combines glass and mechanical installations based on concepts of “revolution” and “rotation” to express her concern on people and the society.

Observing carefully the works and concepts of the two artists, we may find a common clear pattern: from the summary of personal experience, to the exchange between the viewers and the works, and to the dialogues between the works and the space, such progressions reflect the unique and subtle observation paths about the world by the two female artists.

Although we do not give any label to the female artists, we do know the the 2017 “Annealing” is bound to be different.

### BI RONGRONG

Born in Ningbo in 1982, Bi Rongrong currently lives and works in Shanghai. After obtaining a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in Chinese painting from Southwest China Normal University and Sichuan University respectively, she studied at the Frank Mohr College in the Netherlands from 2008 to 2010 and acquired a master's degree. In her current practice, Bi Rongrong looks to express her art through easel paintings, murals and field-specific installations. Her paintings often start with sketches to record her own interpretation of nature. As a young artist across multiple fields such as painting and installation, Bi Rongrong has gained widespread attention in recent years due to a simplified and accurate artistic form.

### LIN TIAOMIAO

Born in Shanxi in 1961, Lin Tianmiao is the most well-known installation artist in China who combines various pieces of cloth, strings and other materials into a huge installation. Influenced by female artists such as Ann Hamilton, Barbara Kruger and Kiki Smith, Lin Tianmiao initially showed her reflection on female life and trivial daily issues by means of wrapping with white thread or reassembling household goods and other everyday objects as a means of expression. Later, Lin Tianmiao began to combine photography and video recording, expanding the boundary of the video art. Now, she has focused on glass art.



**Colored Pieces - Repeated Patterns / 2017**  
by Bi Rongrong

## BI RONGRONG: TAKE THE ROAD YOU'VE WALKED ON

“Waves were chased, connected, and repeated.  
It has shape, because it can be touched.  
The sky draws close,  
But it drifts far away with a touch; it has no shape.  
The sky is full of light, and its colors are changing.  
Waves, thanks to the light in the sky,  
Has shape. “

Transparent, light and fragile—such are Bi Rongrong’s direct impression and feelings on glass, “transparency makes glass looks swift.” For those familiar with Bi Rongrong’s art style, her works are closely related to, or originated from, her paintings, which are rich in colors and visually appealing. When seeing the outcome of the 2016 Annealing Project, Bi Rongrong expressed her hope to further explore the relationship between her works and the field with the help of the professional teams at SHMOG. Such an exploration requires the artist to try media other than painting to extend the lines, shapes, colors, and structures in her mind into the space. “Glass and contemporary art can totally learn and integrate with each other; cross-border creation is fun.” From the shape to the color, and from the lighting to the perspective, glass seems to be a material exclusively tailored for Bi Rongrong. This medium is capable of reaching different dimensions than painting in terms of expression, thus enabling her to open new perspectives to interpret the relationship among different objects and structures.

Majoring in Chinese painting, Bi Rongrong turned to contemporary art after graduation, and she possessed a totally different perspective from ordinary contemporary artists from the beginning. Just like the illustrations in Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden that are designed for learning painting skills, mimicking, repetition and different combinations, she has been considering and producing a very individual modular system in her own artistic practice. If the Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden is a standard manual based on orthodox narratives in the literati painting, Bi Rongrong’s modules are completely personal and private, which have generated a reference system that refer to each other behind the paintings. Each illustration or pattern comes from a piece of personal experience and is a memory of the past; therefore, each of the works are refined and constructed from numerous such modules.

It is better to travel far than to read voluminously.

Bi Rongrong once said: “Chinese painting majors are used to draw fragments in their trips, and the picture gradually extends from the current mountain or plants, during which process a lot of things can happen. Such narrative is very romantic.” Maybe this way of observation has made the artist sensitive of what passes her and willing to build some of connections between them. She likes to travel because she can keep breaking up time and territorial restrains and intertwine them on her personal timeline. “In the last two or three years of my trips, I’ve collected some posters on streets in the city, graffiti, as well as patterns on buildings and on exhibits in museums.” For the 2017 “Annealing” project, she chose the “wave” as the basic inspiration and material for creation. She first collected the elements of “waves” from a small pottery ancient Greece that dated back to 2,800 years ago in a museum. With more trips, she collected more and more “wave” patterns: from the pillar with spiral patterns in the Assyrian Empire period four thousand years ago, to the river and ocean patterns on the dragon robes in Qing Dynasty of the seventeenth century, and even to her records of a lake near her apartment during her stay in Italy. “I think these patterns are very interesting, because they connect the past and the present, as well as different regions. Through the collection process, I found that although separated by time and space, these patterns have incredible differences and similarities. I took photos of them, archived them, and then extracted, refined and re-constructed.”

How to put the colorful graphics into three-dimensional works in the exhibition space? For Bi Rongrong, who had never known much about glass, she had to learn everything about it from the beginning. “The glass is really heavy, and the production process is full of power!” The vibrant young artist is also a very curious person, who would love to try anything even at a glance. “The most difficult part was the determination of the plan. I did not understand the performance and techniques of glass, which caused a lot of trouble.” But Bi Rongrong never gave up asking: what are the characteristics of glass? How to make this shape? Can I make that color? As the high plasticity of glass, which was well conceived in mind, met with great resistance because of the difficulty of the techniques or the cost of production, she has learned more about glass as a material,

**BI RONGRONG**



**“I usually have new ideas during the process of creation or production, so there will be new ideas in the implementation process...”**

including the weight, light transmission and plasticity—these abstract concepts became clear as the project was implemented. Gradually, Bi Rongrong grew from being confused about where to start to being better aware with an improved plan.

From the nine versions of work, we can identify great changes as well as the process where the artist learned. This piece of work about “waves” can be said to be a landmark case, which changed from the red three-meter-high plane double waves, to transparent waves, to a single wave combined with metal, to a 50-cm-high wave, and to a three-dimensional wave. “I hope I can convey my understanding the relationships between objects, structures and the environment we live in through the expression of lines, blocks, shapes, colors, structure, space and other languages.” Collecting materials and knowledge during travel is the result of the artist’s connection with the living environment: such close and personal relationship is first transformed into paintings. In this “Annealing” project, these elements have been placed in the specific exhibition space. Through lighting, structures, video and sound, the artist builds close connections among these seemingly loose elements. For viewers, they can walk through the three-meter-high works, and get close enough to see and feel these elements. From an individual experience, to the viewing of paintings, Rongrong built the relationship between the viewers and the painting, between the three-dimensional or large works and the venue, and even among the magnetic fields of viewers.

Such changes can be spotted in a certain pattern. Last March, Bi Rongrong held a solo exhibition called “Absolute” at Vanguard Gallery, where the paintings, installations and animation were all based on her collected material. The title came from one of the patterns she collected from the dome of a museum, and because such an architecture has a special structure and a sense of revival, the meaning behind the word has gone beyond the image or the structure itself. She began by using this word to rebuild her self-awareness, and has been improving or digging deeper this construction process. From private to the public, Bi Rongrong has expanded and enhanced the dimension of her works, so as to lead the audience to re-examine these personal experience, enter into her woven fantasy world, and listen to her stories on roads in a magnified and powerful

**Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Spiral Pattern / 2017**

by Bi Rongrong



way, “As for the connection and reaction of the audience on the works, I am also curious and I would like to see how it goes on the exhibition.”

The use of glass has also made Bi Rongrong feel the difference from her previous painting work in her studio, because she had to consider more factors and influence, “I’ve tried something new in expression because the change of the media and space, such as the combination of glass and metal and the increase in the total volume of work, which has prompted me to raise new questions on the understanding of my previous works.” This female artist, who may look small but is highly energetic, never stops challenging herself, “I usually have new ideas during the process of creation or production, so there will be new ideas in the implementation process. Of course I will have regrets, and I will take them as the drive for my next move.”

The “wave” of the glass is itself a brief history of evolution, starting from the time human beings discovered this natural material from the wild to later periods. The “waves” in different time or space of the world have finally been involved in the modern reflection of Bi Rongrong. At this point, the wave pattern itself seems no longer important, as the constructive relationship has established in the process. If Bi Rongrong’s previous exhibition, “Absolute”, was considered as the beginning of this construction process, this new solo “Wave” is the continuation of the construction. The changes that have taken place in the works are no doubt a process of including her own understanding and her soul.

TEXT: CATHYE YANG, CESARE YE

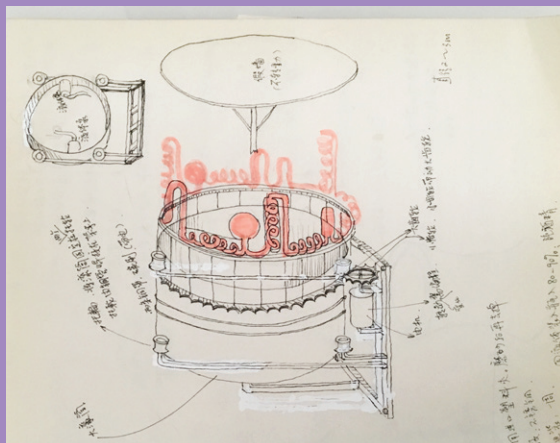
**BI RONGRONG**

## LIN TIANMIAO: DON'T PUT OUT THE FLAMES IN YOUR HEART

Before meeting Lin Tianmiao, I was able to know this well-established artist only through her artworks and media coverage. One of her previous works, "Protruding Patterns", was made of carpets that covered the whole room where positive or negative words about women were "protruding". Even if the audience had no idea what contemporary art is, they could fully feel the artist's input and emotions. Such continuous enthusiasm and passion has also been seen in her cooperative work with SHMOG for the 2017 "Annealing" project.

It's been a brand new challenge and attempt for her to create works with glass, which is completely unnecessary for an artist who has been at the peak of her career. With her qualifications, quality of work and reputation, she could have just follow her routine mode, but she chose to make a difference and discover a new creation path. "I happened to want to get rid of some of the previous creation and thinking modes. I want to change my intention and methods in art creation with this opportunity to work with Shanghai Museum of Glass." Lin Tianmiao owns a studio and a huge creative team. In her previous works, the artist provided concepts and ideas, and the creative team carried out the implementation. Lin Tianmiao admitted that she had been doing this way for 20 years, and that she wanted to break out of this pattern and force herself through such a bottleneck.

In addition to such a strong motive for change, Lin Tianmiao herself is a dedicated learner. "I want to know what glass really is." Behind these simple words are the time and efforts the artist has devoted: from February 9, 2017 when she arrived in Shanghai, she has traveled through Baoshan, Qingpu and Chongming, commuted among manufacturers and studios, and talked to technical engineers and glassblowers about mysteries of glass. "I did not expect that glass is this highly plastic. It has the capacity for very radical approaches: it could be made very strong or very fragile, or it could be made very beautiful or very ugly." In the two months of her glass observation tour, Lin



Warm Currents Draft / 2018  
by Li Tianmiao

**“But such abstraction is not beyond the real world or the society. The foundation of art is still humane and personal...”**

Tianmiao was never tired of talking about her own project with and glass professionals; from the concept to vision, she always elaborated her ideas from the beginning to the end each and every time, as though she was never bored of doing so. The artist has also been exploring the limits of glass, "What's the limit for glass to be bent? What colors can I put? What are the largest or smallest size for glass blowing? And what might the duration be? Some artists may think they do not have to go to the factory or understand this material, and they can only offer the renderings and leave the rest of work to the factory. But this is not the case for me. I have to know everything about this material."

After understanding the characteristics of the material, the next step was to understand the concepts. The essential idea of the "Annealing" project is to invite contemporary artists to integrate their ideas into glass. For Lin Tianmiao, after carefully observing each exhibit at SHMOG, she was thinking about how to combine glass and ideas. "Glass is a very magical material that it absorbs artist into it," Talking about whether the collision of glass and contemporary art could bring discomfort, Lin Tianmiao said, "The boundaries are blurred. Going a little further, we may be dealing with only craftsmanship, or with mere concepts, or some conventional ideas like large sculptures or monuments. Such boundaries are actually clearly defined, but may be implemented with not-so-strict principles. I don't think it's necessary to focus on the definitions of crafts, art and concepts." With such a long time to observe glass, Lin Tianmiao is now able master this material, "When boundaries are blurred and not so distinctive, I think I have a wider and more open space. This is actually a good thing, and I don't need to be stuck in here."

Under the cooperation with SHMOG, Lin Tianmiao is expected to complete three pieces of works together with the museum. The works, in her view, will be groundbreaking, which will be unprecedented exhibits for SHMOG and total new challenges for herself. Although at that time no one would know what the outcome would be, the artist has inspired and motivated the people around with great confidence and devotion. Some say artists have completely different attitudes towards the manuscripts. That's like when people compare storyboards from different directors, and the stark difference in those from Jiang Wen and Tsui Hark was hilarious, as the delicacy or roughness in storyboards represent the different characters and ways of creation of the artists. Whenever Lin

Tianmiao took out her dictionary-like manuscript, she struck and even overwhelmed surrounding people: it was so think! Each page is full of words, figures, and marks with different colors that represent her concerns of different aspects of the works. Whether it is a perspective, profile, or floor plan, each page is the accurate calculation of Ms. Lin like engineering drawings, and the changes in each manuscript shows the ideas of the artist, “You can see from my manuscripts that things are related to the structure of the human body, and are extended to reflect the spirit of the contemporary time. As I slowly move forward, I explore a variety of possibilities. Finally I found what can make the works alive and vital: one is the mechanical rotation, and the other the flow of liquid. In this sense, glass becomes a carrier of thought, so I do not have to be stuck in the boundaries between glassmaking techniques and idea expression.” Perhaps for some artists, the manuscripts may be only an expression of the completeness and they materialize the manuscripts; but for Lin Tianmiao, the meaning of the manuscripts is far more than that: her manuscripts reflect the process of her thinking and creation, “From the scripts, you can see how my ideas originated, how I met bottlenecks, where I needed to explore, and the gap between what I expected and what can actually be done.”

As she improved the manuscripts, the plan also became clearer. The concept of the three groundbreaking works came into shape during her multiple travels between Beijing and Shanghai. The sketches finally became detailed drawings, and the names of her works were also determined: “connection”, “warm currents” and “response”.

Among the three pieces of works, one large outdoor installation is something that has never been tried before at SHMOG, which is the “connection”. For this “tricky” outdoor works, Lin Tianmao made dozens of modifications. What was changed was not only the plan, but rather the idea behind it. Outdoor installations are large, political and preaching public sculptures that carry a sense of direction. “I do not like being preaching or political, because it makes people feel restrained. Politics has played a too greater role in guiding or infringing our lives, so I want to make something that is more related to our body and our consciousness.” This outdoor installation is, to some extent, an “unfinished” piece of work, and the artist hopes the audience can integrate their own sense and education background into the work when observing it, “I am not teaching or telling you what to learn. I want each of the audience to generate a public awareness which is not political but universal; an awareness that people in any part of the society can resonate with.

In contrast, “warm currents” and “response” are completely different in visual experience and expression. “warm currents” is about our daily experience and subconscious lifestyles; the artist hopes to transform from the collective orientation of the first piece of work to a mass awareness, or a small-scale exchange. “warm currents” features a lot of modified glass experiment equipment, “Viewer must think that we live in a chemical environment, a chemical state, or a state under control,” There are two dynamic manifestations in the work. First, the fluorescent stimulating liquid rotates in the glass instruments that are connected with each other. Second, the external mechanical

structure drives the instruments to revolve. “In the process of rotation and revolution, the installation is not able to remain balance, and such a contradiction is interesting.” As for the third piece of work, “response”, the artist looks to explore the one-on-one response between “I” and the machine. This reaction is visualized and exists beyond in the concept, “Viewers must see the image of I’ in this work, and the image of such ‘I’ is also seen by the machine.” Lin Tianmiao hopes to help people understand the vulnerability of one-on-one relationships and the risks in this increasingly singular and individualized world. “Though all made of glass and liquid, the status of the three works must be different, but they must constitute a consistent system.”

In these three pieces of indivisible and yet independent works, automotive “mechanical” control and movement play an extremely important role. I also asked the artist about the relationship between the works and the “mechanical”, and even artificial intelligence out of curiosity, “In fact, we are dealing with artificial intelligence every day, and the difference lies in how deeply we are involved. For example, we use smart phones have changed greatly our way of life and communication,” and Lin Tianmiao said sincerely, “In fact, I found it quite difficult to go in this area, but through research, we can see more possibilities. Through technological advances, we artists can participate in contemporary society more deeply, and our topics are broader and more abstract. But such abstraction is not beyond the real world or the society. The foundation of art is still humane and personal.” Ultimately, all the material external expressions, precise mechanical operations and glass are attributed to people, “Going back to ourselves to look into our heart is a particularly important direction.”

People are not only the artist’s focus, but also the most vibrant about “Annealing”. At this moment, what is flowing is not only the liquid in works, but also exchanges and emotions between the artist and the museum. Lin Tianmiao has been very willing to communicate with various staff of the museum, especially with Executive President Zhang Lin. “Every time we talk, we start by the structures of galleries and museums in Shanghai. We learn from and understand each other. We keep analyzing what the museum’s collection system should be, how the cultural structure in Shanghai, and what the museum should do through the ‘Annealing’ project.” In such exchanges, SHMOG, as a newcomer to contemporary art, gained huge benefits. During the cooperation between the artist and the museum, it’s not only about Lin Tianmiao completing these three pieces of works, but also about going deeper from the works to cultural possibilities, from the micro to the macro, and from small things to bigger things. It helps the artist correct her own working methods and opens more possibilities for the museum. These are exactly the eternal and precious spiritual heritage the “Annealing” project will leave.

“I hope in the future, this project has its own particularity,” Lin Tianmiao has expressed great expectation for the “Annealing” project,” This particularity lies in the fact that only this institution can complete such a task with this material. It is not simply about inviting artists and make artworks; it is about every artist does their best to present their ideas in a particular environment with a specific material, and the works should be unique and

only possible in this place.” For SHMOG, we are exploring the future of glass art, and even the future of human society, and we are building a unique collection system. The collection of “Annealed” project works are not the same as ordinary collection. Today, China is entering into an era when museums and galleries are springing up. Whichever theme they choose, these museums or galleries should still offer interpretation around a historical clue or artists. “We get the glass, and we can create history. Both the museum and I need such ideas and ambition.”

As of the completion of this article, Lin Tianmiao’s works are still in full swing of production, and the story of the 2017 “Annealing” still goes on. We can not be too optimistic that we won’t encounter difficulties or setbacks in the future, but as Lin Tianmiao said, “I’m never too depressed to work, and I never give up.”

“I never put out the flames in my heart.”

TEXT: CATHYE YANG, CESARE YE



President of SHMOG  
Zhang Lin with Lin Tian-  
Mao and Wang GongXin

## ANNEALING: NON-STOPPING PURSUIT OF THE FUTURE

Since our founding in 2011, Shanghai Museum of Glass, who pursues innovation and height, has been providing diversified, high-quality art experience and aesthetics joy for more urban residents with great social responsibility and the function of public cultural services. With high-quality exhibitions, featured activities and comprehensive service, SHMOG has attracted more than 800,000 visitors to share the unlimited possibilities of glass. In this six years, the vitality and surprises SHMOG has brought has not only won the recognition of the industry at home and abroad, but also gained affection from the visitors. In the face of honors and awards, we should remain sober and introspective. As a museum, we need to not only bear the responsibility to serve the public and the society community, but also do our best to guide the public and influence the society. To become a museum with global significance is not a slogan, and we need to devote practical and hard work. In the meantime, we should also think about potential crisis and future directions under such circumstances. Where does the future lie for SHMOG? How can glass art develop? These are questions I have been pondering over since engaging in the museum industry.

Glass is a godsend. Since its birth, glass has been closely related the development of human society. Throughout the long-standing history, with its flexibility and beauty, it has been loved and welcomed by the public. In the 1960s, the glass studio movement and glass artists tried to revive this material which is easily to be recognized as handicrafts. Although we are proud to exhibit collections of globally renowned glass artworks, and we have also carried out two highly acclaimed Keep it Glassy creative glass design exhibition, where these artworks or designs have been intended to show to the public that glass is far beyond a cheap industrial material or ornaments, the public may still find it difficult to set a clear boundary. I was often asked whether an exhibit is a handicraft, a design or artwork. What I want to talk about here is not clarifying these confused concepts, and I have to admit that this is due to the material itself. This question has been lingering in my mind.

Discovering the future of the museum is another big problem in my mind. Before establishing SHMOG, I visited and studied more than 100 museums at home and abroad. With this experience, I found that these museums consider more about how to collect and sort out exhibits. Therefore, in the beginning of designing the displays of SHMOG, I chose a massive and comprehensive narrative system that shows from the basic characteristics of glass to the glass of Western history, to the glass in daily life, and to the artistic expression of glass. At that time, I felt that such a comprehensive exhibition was necessary for a museum. We also referred to the “present” of glass in the original Unit Four of the original venue, “The Creativity of Glass”. But the problem is, all of these works were almost done by artists of the “past” and were merely collected by the museum. So how should the museum think about the future and respond to the future? I found even the best museums have made such an response.



Under one coincidence, I traveled again with these problems. On October 16, 2012, I visited the Island of Murano in Venice, which was renowned for traditional glassblowing, where I first saw the “Glasstress 2012” exhibition. I was immediately inspired by this groundbreaking cross-border project. The combination of the Berengo Studio and contemporary art brought the world’s attention and revival of Murano’s glass art. I believe museums and galleries are different, and we can do similar things and do them better. For contemporary artists, glass is a magical material. To use glass for artistic creation are more costly, and technically demanding, which is a restriction for contemporary artists. But we as a museum can provide a platform and the opportunity for artists to understand glass and use it for creation. When creating with glass, the contemporary artists who are not familiar with glass may have had misunderstanding, unfamiliarity or fear over glass, but the results have been impressive, because contemporary artists can jump out of the box and express the ideas in a more pure way. Glass and contemporary art will be able to have a wonderful encounter and result in amazing works.

My dream was perfect, but it was never easy to materialize it.

After returning from Venice, I worked with Li Li and museum colleagues in March 2014 to plan for the cross-border project of SHMOG, and began to contact the ShanghART Gallery. We chose Zhang Ding and ShanghART Gallery because we delivered careful consideration. For SHMOG, a freshman of the “college” of contemporary art, I have to admit we were a little “utilitarian” at that time: since we had bravely taken the first step in combining contemporary art and glass, we wanted it to be successful. As a first in the industry, we needed a new generation artist for this bold and lively project, who should be excellent in controlling and understanding materials. With support of Zhang Ding and ShanghART Gallery, we were confident the project would end up well. From our first exchange in 2014 to the opening of the “Black Substance” exhibition in March 2015, SHMOG successfully handed in its first response in this dialogue with contemporary art, and the work “Black Substance” was also highly acclaimed in the Hong Kong Basel Art Fair in the same year. This success gave the museum and me more confidence, and we realized that this cross-border approach will end up well. In the opening of the 2016 project outcome exhibition, we officially gave this project a resounding name: “Annealing”. Annealing is an extremely important step in the glass making process, which fully demonstrates the craftsmanship characteristic in glass. This name not only reflects the essence of glass, but also represents our efforts in eliminating stress and mitigating the confusion in cross-border cooperation, so as to generate perfect conceptual works.

In the past two years, Zhang Ding, Liao Fei, Yang Xin Guang, Bi Rongrong and Lin Tianmiao have become artists for the “Annealing” project. SHMOG and I have also been educated and trained by contemporary art in such cooperation, where conflicts and contradictions have been ubiquitous. In Zhang Ding’s project, the then Glaze Gallery was a space only for professional glass art, where the pillars were wrapped with mirrors. At that time, we only understood glass art and believed that exhibitions should be held in

a bright and spacious space; while the artist proposed to change the exhibition space into complete black color and objected any weakening and distraction on his works from light and refraction. As a diligent learner, we agreed with his opinion. In the project of Liao Fei, where he experienced repeated failures, he proposed a very bold plan in the beginning and discussed the feasibility, but none of us could understand it. To be honest, at first I believed it was just messing around, which was proved with my knowledge about glass. However, we still encouraged the artist to try instead of talking him out of it. After half a year of trial, Liao Fei was not satisfied with the results, so he changed the plan.

Even so, all of us believed his final plan was much better than the original one. For Liao Fei, that was a breakthrough in artistic creation. In our recent collaboration with Lin Tianmiao, we are faced with conflicts and still pushing the project forward. In addition to two indoor installations, Lin Tianmiao created a large outdoor installation, where she needed a crystal ball with a diameter of 800mm. At this time, I did not encourage the artist and rejected her immediately. Setting aside the weight of the ball in such a size, the annealing process may take half a year. During the cooperation, we even considered giving up the outdoor installation, but the artist insisted. After continuous communication and exchange with Lin Tianmiao, we were moved by her dedication and devotion. As a well-known artist, she did not consider the project as some ordinary work; instead, she has traveled again and again for several months between Beijing and Shanghai, stayed alone in the artist’s apartment for weeks, remained energetic to improve her plan and ideas, and patiently communicated with all parties about her ideas. Influenced by her efforts, we have gradually understood her persistence on a systematic outcome and a conceptual expression, and have cooperated with the artist to facilitate such a large project.

I am not afraid of conflicts. On the contrary, conflicts show that everyone is trying and devoting to something, and there will be no progress without conflicts or contradictions. That is also true for the museum and the “Annealing” project, and we are learning how to communicate with contemporary artists. What’s more important, museums, artists, galleries and curators are all working together to present to the industry and the audience the most fulfilling results. Compared to the “Glasstress” project each year where dozens of internationally renowned artists participate in, the “Annealing” project is more willing to “accompany” each artist to create and to find a better self. In this process, we are no longer partners but friends. In this sense, the museum is not just an exhibition space, “Annealing” is not just a collaborative project; it is a field for emotional exchanges. Get close to the glass, and let your emotions flow. Shanghai Museum of Glass hopes to become a Living Museum that offers improvement of growth every year, various activities, and a platform for emotional communication and exchange.

Zhang Peili, a famous Chinese contemporary artist, once commented on the “Annealing” project, “This is a benchmark project for contemporary art.” Michael Rogers, a professor at the University of Rochester in the United States and a famous glass artist, has also



The Founder of Berengo Gallery and Glasstress,  
Mr. Adriano Berengo



said something encouraging, “You have done what the Corning Glass Museum couldn’t have done; this project represents the future of glass art. Although the “Annealing” project is new, and SHMOG is only a freshman to contemporary art, I believe we’ve found the future path for the museum and glass art.

Research on glass as a material belongs to the science category, and contemporary art is the most avant-garde in thinking about the future of society and human fate. Science and art are for the first time combined in the “Annealing” project. Interestingly, this summer, I visited the island of Murano again and met with Mr. Berengo. When he heard the “Annealing” project, he expressed some doubts and confusion whether the SHMOG was plagiarizing the “Glasstress” project. But when I showed him the results of the “Annealing” project over the years, he sincerely admired our efforts and creativity, saying that it was not something that they could accomplish, and even made a joke that the work would never sell. Indeed, this is the biggest difference between museums and galleries. Simply completing a piece of work that prevails and sells on the market is not a task for the museum as a carrier of noble human culture. We hope that the artists who have participated in the “Annealing” project can keep embracing the accepting the thinking on the future and the integration of science and art, so they can create outstanding works that prompt the public in a post-industrial era to think about and reflect on.

Today, we have drawn glass closer to contemporary art, and we look forward to more international artists to be involved.

In the future, we will not stop at achievement and we will keep blurring the boundaries of science and art.

Since some say that “Annealing” is a benchmark, Shanghai Museum of Glass is willing to bear such a responsibility.

**It’s a long road ahead, and we will march forward.  
Pursuing the future, we will never make a stop.**

TEXT: ZHANG LIN

CLOSING

# GLASS + CONTEMPORARY ART

## OR

# CONTEMPORARY ART × GLASS

When talking about glass, we can talk about its transparency, fragility, beauty and strength, and we can also explore its history, limits, and even the future. Both “Glasstress” and “Annealing” are inviting contemporary art into the glass world in their own ways and work with the world’s most pioneering people to explore the future of the glass.

“There are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people’s eyes.” We welcome contemporary art to deconstruct, interpret and even misunderstand this ancient material in a beneficial way. Here, “glass” and “contemporary art” are no simply adding up “physically”; we need the chemistry between “glass” and “contemporary art” to generate to new products and burst out more flashes. Shanghai Glass Museum believes that such a two-way collision is not only facilitating glass art, but also shocking the contemporary art field?

Regardless of the final outcome of the combination of glass and contemporary art, and how the world will view this, we have reason to believe that when people in future generations look back on this collision history of glass and contemporary art, they will not ignore the light and passion flashing in between.

TEXT: CATHYE YANG



# CONVERSATION

## A WORLD OF GLASS, BUT NOT THE WHOLE

WENDI XIE  
IN CONVERSATION WITH  
EMMA WOFFENDEN

### PREFACE

Emma Woffenden has been my favorite glass artist since I was at school. It is a privilege for me to have her in the conversation. One of the most attractive parts of Emma's work, for me, is the form. She is good at using glass bottles to create alien-like ambiguous figures, which are somewhere between formal and abstract. The way she named her work is mind-blowing. Her sculptures are not easy to comprehend, those forms can be tracked back to the rich art history, literature, religion, and have strong emblematic. Aesthetics is not the first concern in Emma's work, some of the forms are rather odd, however they induce me to explore the further meaning. Emma has unique interpretation in materials, she uses glass considerably intelligent, the material is crucial in her works,

Our conversation started from "the first engage in glass", we have discussed the "technique and glass characteristics", this lead to discussion of "Transparency", and then "Seeing and being seen"; We talked about "different ways to begin a work", "shifting from 2d to 3d"; and then the "Form, Symbol and Metaphor" in each other's work, talking around "Beauty and Reality"; Emma shared her inspiration and reference at work, her favourite science fiction and movies, which had impact on her figures. We have mentioned "how we would like to be called (as an artist)" and thus had the "advantage and disadvantage of being an artist" conversation. At last, Emma introduced her next solo exhibition, to leave us space to imagine.

We talked originally in English, the Chinese version you see here might be a little raw, although it has been decorated several times. Therefore, I suggest you read English first if you can. Because Emma's talk was as intelligent as in her works. I am so inspiring, wish the same to you.





**A GREAT IMPOSTOR 2**  
by Xie Wendi

## GLASS, TECHNIQUE AND LANGUAGE

X: How did you start to engage in glass?

W: Through blowing glass then casting, and you?

X: When I entered glass department we have been taught to start with cold working. Basically through cutting and making holes of original glass pies and then grinding, polishing and then glue them together to make composition. Most of us didn't enjoy it at all, because it was very cold winter in Hangzhou where I studied, and the equipment were not working so well, and the process and result couldn't really connect to what we wanted. I did slumping, casting, a bit stained glass and very basic engraving on glass in my BA. It was till to study in the RCA, I just found the enjoyment of coldworking, and found many other abilities in glass and forms.

W: Yes cold work not the nicest place to start. It was a long time ago but as I remember at Farnham the course was very new, our instructor Ray Flavell had studied in Sweden at Costa Boda and began by teaching us this style of glass blowing and it was a very addictive process. Steven Proctor taught us how to set up and true cutting wheels which was less enjoyable, and nobody knew how to lost wax cast in glass so I spent time experimenting with this.

**THE OTHER ME**  
by Xie Wendi



X: Glass is a rare material that has so many aspects, when it is in different condition, it feels completely different. What bought you to mix using different techniques in one work?

W: I agree when glass is in different states that's already a huge subject and palette, but it's still one material. I also find walking into a room full of glass objects hard, uncomfortable, uniformity of material across works can be bland or just too overwhelming, sometimes it works such as in museum settings. Once I figured out a technique I would move on, using it to say or add something to the story, so contrasting materials and technique enlivens work I think. How do you feel about this?

X: I totally agree with you. I enjoy very much in the contradiction or maybe paradox is more fit of glass. I don't like shiny glass objects, unless it is necessary. For example, I once saw an exhibition in Camden Art Centre, it was Nathalie Djurberg's work A World of Glass, 4 long table and stacked with lots of shiny glass-like objects. Accompanied by 4 screens that were playing animation. They are in responding with each other. That was very interesting. In my work "A Great Impostor" series, I also mix different material and techniques to play with different states of glass as well as the form bought up emotional matter. I explored pate-de-verre technique in the RCA, I use it in the way it captures the textures of the molds in details. It is hardly to be recognized as glass.

W: The RCA work is surprising its hard to understand the materials weight the piece is held like a mask has ambiguity in the form, please say more.... I enjoy the work of Nathalie Djurberg and have a CD of her animation work, sounds like the film animated the objects.

X: In my graduation work I was looking at things that are mirrored. The pate de verre wing has this quality and in the show at Mint gallery I installed two wings facing each other, made the effect like reflecting each other. In the photo I was holding the piece in front of my head, and called it 'The Other Me', suggesting when you look at the mirror, you see the other self, but it is reversed so not exactly the self. Same in the work Tweedledum and Tweedledee, I took the name from Through the Looking Glass by Lewis Carroll. I made two pieces as well, they are half-half, and the shape is like 6 and 9, literally reversed and mirrored. But then again, I took photo as holding the piece in front of me. I find it somehow has a very powerful connection with my body. But then I'm not sure how to develop it...

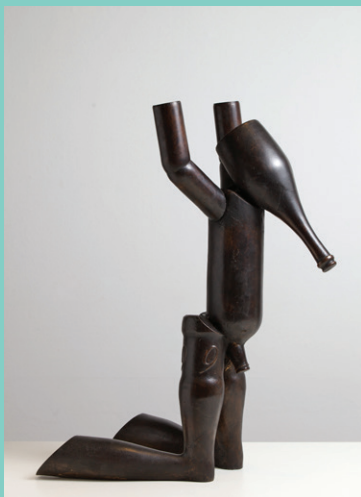
W: I hope you find a way to develop this work, its very intriguing, the body, scale, mirroring. The wing has the sense of not being fixed it could reshape itself, I like that.

X: To what extend do you think glass help in your work to deliver the message you want to say?

W: Transparency seeing inside being there and not there, sensuality, fragility.... When I began with glass I understood it to have modernity its cold and hard so potentially less expressive, when its hot it's a hot metal that needs taming or not. The language I work with across different materials is essentially formed through 'glass shapes' and processes.

X: It is more related to the processes rather than the result, isn't it?

W: That's a nice thought, what we go through to get there.



**ELEPHANT BOY / 2012**  
by Emma Woffenden  
Photo by Philip Sayer

## DRAWING AND SCULPTURE, LINES AND FORMS

X: I've learnt that you did engraving and painting on glass before turning into three dimensional works, does the experience relevant in your later work?

W: I worked three dimensionally since 14 years old and engaged with drawing later—I've been told my drawings are sculptural. Between 23 and 29 my drawings became subliminal and free, they informed the emotional subject matter in later works. I would like to learn to paint traditionally on glass with stain and spend more time engraving. Shifting between the formal and abstract, to narrative and representational, works for me, as does moving between 2 and 3d work, and different techniques.

X: I like drawing as well. But I've been told my drawing is separated from sculptural work. I like painting portrait, in a concrete way. I find myself interested in and good at lines. I'm addicted to Japanese Ukiyoe. I guess I divided drawing into two purposes—the drawings for 3d works are more likely to define the form, but the drawings I create as "a painting" are more keen on lines, which I couldn't bring them together naturally yet.

W: I think that line can define form, and painting is often in a different realm or in a picture plane. As you have a developed language in painting its perhaps not natural to merge them, or necessary. Finding and understanding shapes through drawing things is important, observation, drawing the figure important to understanding the body in relation to objects understanding structure how we stand up, something important in brain hand pencil relationship. There is an artist Helen Marten showing in London who moves in and out of sculpture and painting very fluidly, there is a connection to the work of Robert Rauschenberg.

**“I also find walking into a room full of glass objects hard, uncomfortable, uniformity of material across works can be bland or just too overwhelming”  
- Emma Woffenden**

## WAYS OF BEGINNING

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X: How do you usually start to create a work?

W: Gathering information, searching, identifying art forms in history, thinking, not thinking just doing and seeing what happens. Later it becomes more intellectual, drawing and model making constructing elements as it forms, I see what is coming and follow it. How do you start?

X: Before RCA, I worked with pure imagination – not only me, all of the students drew an outcome on the paper and then just used clay to shape following the ideal model on paper. The consequence always didn't match the original design, in order to finish the work, some of us just simply changed the idea to match the final work. I tried hard to make my paper model became real, which was not bad, I learnt techniques from it. But I didn't realize I lost the fun part between known and unknown. And that was something I learnt from RCA particularly. Actually I found this usually happens among Asian students – that draw the object first and then make it. However, the way like what you describe your working, to start from one point, and play with it, and then the idea and work forms each other, work for me and I personally think it is more efficient. What do you think? Do you have this experience when you teach or work with other students or artists?

W: I've seen people work in both ways revealing something or learning something new, I find finding something new is a big reward. Context and looking outside becomes more and more important, we are part of a big art and design history and one that changes and moves incredibly fast. I have recently spent time at North Lands with the artist Richard Wentworth and he observes the world constantly and is amazed by it. He makes one see more expansively and more acutely, he makes connections teach students by making them aware of the richness around and in themselves.



**BLOOD ON MY HANDS A MOORE / 2009**  
by Emma Woffenden

## BODY AND FIGURE

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X: I have to say the fact that some figures in your work are in one hand quite ambiguous while in other hand being recognized that they are having an obvious bottle-like head, body, arms and feet, are very attractive. What's your concern between using the materials and in responding the meaning it transferred?

W: I am interested in exploring the form of the bottle. I'm taking an existing everyday object and using it to make dramatic or expressive figures this somehow keeps them removed less literal more restrained.

X: How did you start to transfer the form of the bottle into human figures?

W: The bottle work started with transglass a design project with Tord in 1997. 10 years later I was finding new shapes for vessels and really wanted to be making sculpture, so diverted and made two figures a piece called The Gaze.

## SEEING AND BEING SEEN

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X: What do you think of transparency? The reason I ask is because I am curious in why you made a bunch of bronze figures in 2012, although the components shared similar forms, they suddenly have become quite masculine to me. So I'm wondering do you work carefully with transparency? After all, it gives the work a totally different quality...

W: Yes I work carefully with transparency and everything else, its always intentional. Bronze is heavy, soft for a metal, quite warm in its natural colour, traditionally used in monuments. Masculinity, libido, weight are subjects that I'm interested in. In glass white tones and dark tones and levels of transparency can be played with. Opaque objects, light absorbing surfaces define shapes more clearly. How are materials gendered?

X: I like the transparency of glass, but I think it is difficult to be used properly. It loses shape. So I think it is always relative, it is more interesting when being with other non-transparent things. I do think in your works the shape/form plays a key point. I think this is a predictable reason to use other materials to define the form. You know many glass artists are particularly interested in the inner form in glass, plays with thickness and light, which is using its very unique property in glass material. But I like to think it as more sculptural way as well.



# “Looking glass” is a very charming name for describing mirror. It involves the action “staring”, narcissistic, voyeuristic.”

## – Wendi Xie

X: Speaking of transparency, I think one kind of glass is already with many social meanings, that is the window glass/architectural glass. I notice that you used plane glass as an architect, like box or cabinet, for example, in the work “I Never Really Knew Her”. The window glass, also regard as an everyday object, does it mean something to you?

W: Yes, I think its easily available so again its everywhere. A window pane of glass something you look through its voyeuristic in one sense.

X: I like transparent window glass, sometimes I can stare at it for a long while. People are longing for seeing through things. “Looking glass” is a very charming name for describing mirror. It involves the action “staring”, narcissistic, voyeuristic.

W: It is everywhere in our environment but still fascinating.

## FORM, SYMBOL AND METAPHOR

X: Certain forms have been recurring in your work, such as the bell, and the air block (the weighbridge?). Does the bell mean specially to you? I remember you once commented that you think the bell means silence rather than noise. Could you please talk more about that?

W: The bell could be understood as feminine in form I understood it symbolically (religion, wedding party, funeral) and less musically. Tolling bells was a sport of sorts when bells rang out everywhere. They communicate, but without the clapper they can't, I'm experiencing a sense of being silenced, real or otherwise probably from childhood.

Like screaming with no sound, screaming inside and composed outside. In this case the shadows of the bells moved and swung vigorously but silently around the room, the physical object stayed still, there is tension in this.

For me the weighing scale is formal and emblematic, I understand them to be monuments or graves. You have been weighed, you have been measured.

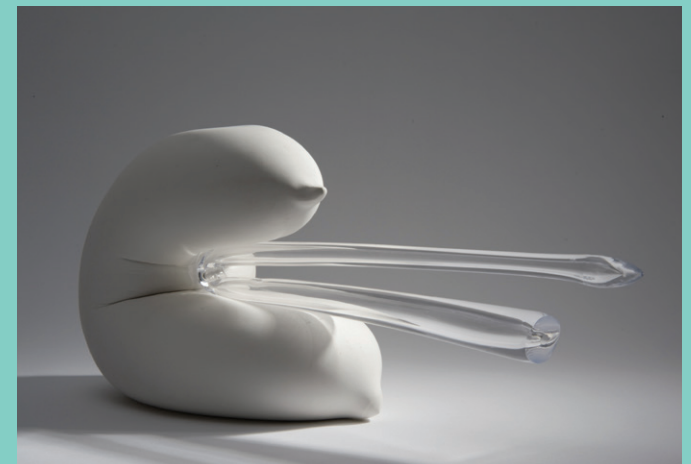
X: That makes very much sense to me! I like the bell shape, but didn't think of it as feminine. I feel it as very childhood-like stuff. I'm keen on the size, when it is small, it is agile, joyful, like a festival reminder; when it is big, it is dignified and solemn. You know in Chinese phrase “Evening drum and morning bell”, it used to describe the daily call to religious life of a monk in the monastery, also refers to time goes by and a warning to people for getting prepared.

It is also intriguing that you think it as a silent screaming. I've never thought like that way. It is in a really unspeakable restraint.

You have mentioned childhood memory, do you want it to reflect on your art practice or it does unconsciously?

W: Thats interesting, the bell resonates further. Unconsciously formative years play out, but many thoughts and feelings are shared with others and layered with experience of visual and written culture.

A GREAT IMPOSTOR 6 / 2011  
by Xie Wendi



**“I think I should leave the big questions on beauty to the philosophers, but within glassmaking we could question why we make decisions in this area.”  
- Emma Woffenden**

EATING FRUIT / 2010  
by Emma Woffenden



X: In your early work, the objects are often involved with additional elements, such as rope, to create a feeling like being bound or tied or suspended. Could you please talk about that?

W: I also made an installation called Exquisite Restraint, but in life restraint being bound or suspended isn't a great state to be in.

X: How to understand Exquisite Restraint? In my perspective, the swing was supposed to be suspended (as its original function), it is supposed to swing as well, but when it comes to a certain height, it had been hit back by a fixed cabinet, and thus caused a huge “Bung” echoing in the space. The other two elements in the installation also make me feel “Restraint”, the bell is made of glass, makes it almost likely to sound, but it is still and without a clapper inside, to me it suggests something to forecast. And the giant white hanging form seems like the heaviness is too much that even itself can hardly bear. The installation is in contrast, peaceful yet combative. Especially seeing through your video, the accompanying music is graceful yet stately, the whole scene is enjoyable to look at until the “Bung” was produced, since then a little bit horrific occurred. However, I think sometimes being bound or suspended is to borrow power from other

things, that making choices easier, and being more stable in a state. Do you like being stable in life?

W: I like your observations and happy it communicates to you. Stability would be nice but not something expected, I expect the unexpected. In a way you suggest being motionless and bound is passive or inactive, which takes power, I think there is some truth in that. Being an artist and stability somehow don't go together easily. I think the crash of the metal is like anti climax, it also is not the expectation.

X: Your work always has a direct name, mostly in noun, recently more inclined to verb (like “Falling Hard”), how did you decide to name them? Do you hoping to give the audiences a hint to imaging? How do you feel when people discuss whether it “looks like” the given name or not?

W: I haven't heard one of those name discussions so you could suggest some mismatches or titles that can't be understood? People do bring their own interpretation which sometimes they share with me. I'm interested in words and would discuss a specific title. My next show is called Play-Fight. I like a title to be 'loaded' with connotation, ambiguous, to expand.

X: For example, the work named Mouse (2009), I saw some discussion underneath, someone thought it was a rabbit, other thought it was a mantis or dinosaur. I like to give the work a name, rather than being “Untitled”, which seems to give up the right to name your own creation. I don't think the name should be very fixed, the subtle connection between a work and the name is as the relationship between visual and linguistic. I have deep impression with your work “I Call Her, Mother”, which shocked me when I first seeing it. The form is attractive, from the front side, it looks like a female body while turning to the lateral side it is obviously a male body. Its seems to have a mouth that opens widely, as if it is painfully screaming. I also think the use of transparency is convinced in the work, especially the “leg” part, invaded by the chair, or actually immersed in the chair. I think it is mixed with very complex emotion and indeed very tensional. Could you please talk about Eating Fruit?

W: Mousie is the correct title, so more like characteristics of the mouse. Eating Fruit is a reference to Adam and Eve, I made a drawing of Eve eating the apple saying I know the truth, and Adam says but I knew it all the time, so its about gender and power relationships, perhaps the story is constructed to control, what if its reconstructed. The figures also reference the snake.

X: Ah, that's an interesting transformation!

## BEAUTY AND REALITY

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X: When you explore body, figures, gesture, where were the inspiration from? Is there anything relates to dance, opera or other performance?

W: Recently I've been using kneeling on both knees, or on one bended knee, this is ritualistic gesture religious or medieval, formal submissive, also walking or striding forward. I look at different forms of dance and performance, this summer I worked with a filmmaker and choreographer in the Scottish landscape. Japanese Butoh was influential on my work. Recently I've been looking at Archaic Greek sculpture the figure when it has slightly more movement than the classic Egyptian pose and before it becomes naturalistic.

X: Japanese Butoh tells a bit of anti-dance, it is an expression of pain, distortion, and long for imitating the real state of human being. It is anti-traditional aesthetics. Is this something that you are seeking for from various forms of different nationalities? Is "aesthetics" important in your work?

W: Yes I find the idea of aesthetics interesting, but the question is what is beautiful.

X: I believe in things that are real rather than "looking good". In one of Alexander McQueen's fashion show (Voss, spring/summer, 2001), the audiences were sitting outside the catwalk which was inside of a giant two way mirrored room. To the end of the show, when the beautiful models dressed up with latest fancy outfits started to walk around the room, there was one glass box in the middle of the room gradually unveiled itself, a naked fat female body which relying on a tube appeared. And meanwhile the two-way mirror turned to be a mirror that all the audiences found themselves half-excited, half-sick faces reflected in it. It was questioning what is beauty.

What's your opinion of "what is beautiful"?

W: Within humanity honesty and kindness could be. As you mentioned in relation to Butoh 'the real state of the human being' without the facade I imagine that across a whole population, so similar to you, 'real'. I saw this fashion show in 2001 because Tord was designing watches and sunglasses for Alexander McQueen for a period. These shows blew me away I saw about 5 late 90s to this one it was a privilege to see, the inverted craft and skill was amazing, as well as the performance and vision. I think I should leave the big questions on beauty to the philosophers, but within glassmaking we could question why we make decisions in this area.

## SCIENCE FICTION AND IMAGINARY FIGURE

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X: The figures in your work, have a very post human feeling, in the same time a little clumsy, do you think this is the future of human (like aliens) or something lied essentially inside the human?

W: I don't know what the future holds and enjoy literature exploring Utopian themes and speculative futuristic novels, my reference is to something robotic the sensual erotic robotic, the naïve figure, sometimes animalistic. The virtual could remove us from our bodies but I think we love the body too much, the prosthetic the interest in controlling our image and identity may take us anywhere. Essentially using a mass manufactured everyday object to form a primal expressive figure is what I'm interested in here. There is a figure Blood On My Hands that defines current human concerns, aggression, libido, the wounded head, the idea of penance.....

X: Right, I can see you are more interested in the imperfect self (usually more real) and tried to unveil its charm. I do think it is charming.  
Do you like watching science fiction movie?

W: Yes some, Blade Runner is one of my favorite films, and when I was young I watched star trek, doctor who and a film called the Stepford Wives, later I read 'The Diamond Age' Neal Stephenson and 'Crash' JG Ballard (I also liked the film 'High Rise'), more dystopian and utopian themes recently, books such as 'news from nowhere' William Morris, 'Woman on the edge of time' Marge Piercy. I have just seen a new theatre production of 1984, Tord is reading a Chinese speculative fiction writer Cixin Liu so I might try that when his finished.  
Outsider art has always interested me and early art, Oceanic and African sculpture.

**“Essentially using a mass  
manufactured everyday  
object to form a primal  
expressive figure is what  
I'm interested in here.”  
- Wendi Xie**



## BEING AN ARTIST OR...

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X: So, will you describe yourself more as a sculptor instead of glass artist?

W: I describe myself as a sculptor, a glass specialist, an artist, glassmaker in no particular order. Or a sculptor who trained as a glassmaker that's enough information, or a glassmaker producing objects, installation and sculpture, in different materials. An accurate description is what matters. And you?

X: I'd like to be an artist who uses glass, or an object fabricator is also cool because I enjoy making objects.

W: That's great, fun to make new names, for a while designer-maker was popular.

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X: To you, what are the advantages and disadvantages of being an artist?

W: Advantages and disadvantages; if you can survive it becomes a life long driving force to discover, learn and produce. We also have specialist skills which can be used outside our practice. Don Thompson writes about the economics of contemporary art (published 2012), out of 80,000 artists in New York and London, 75 become 'branded' artists, 300 are established, 5,000 in main stream galleries and supplementing their income, 15,000 in London looking for a gallery and out of 45,000 most give up before aged 30 making room for the next graduates to try. Very small odds to make a living and I'm not sure how this relates with graduates of glass making. It is an endlessly interesting, holistic and rewarding occupation.

## THE NEXT SHOW...

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X: What's your next show Play-Fight about? That's an imaginary name!

W: It's a scenario involving the human figure, a dolphin, and some ritualistic objects. Balance of power is at play and storytelling. Figures are fragmented or limbless, restrained but also expressive. In recent work a midwife stands as a sentinel to a male figure giving birth, this upturning of ritual tackles subjects such as gender and value, but with a sense of hope, and humour.

Form comes from a specialist knowledge of glassmaking, but the search for freedom amid learned skills I hope gives a lightness to the pieces. Forms 'stolen' from historical moulds are cut up, change media and reused. I'm trying to create a fragmented and collaged environment - beings and their detritus occupy the gallery space in which scale, medium, written and drawn evidence highlight the origins and process.

X: Thank you very much for joining me the conversation! It is very inspiring.

W: Thank you too it was good to think and respond!

#### **XIE WENDI**

Born in 1989, Xie Wendi now lives and works in Shenzhen. With a Master's degree in Ceramic and Glass Art at Royal College of Art and a Bachelor's degree in Glass at China Academy of Art, she uses glass as the major medium for creation. Her works have been selected as one of the 100 new glass works of 2013 in the New Glass Review 34, compiled by the Corning Museum of Glass, and have been displayed in China, Britain, Czech Republic, Germany, and the United States. Recently she has served as a major creative director for a public art project, which is a large glass mosaic wall created for the Airport Station of Shenzhen Metro. Her ongoing projects include the planning, editing and translation for the independent art magazine Si, which promotes and studies the current situation of young Asian artists in Europe by means of interviews. She is currently working at the Department of Public Education of Shenzhen Art Museum, curating and organizing exhibitions, seminars and workshops.

# A World of Glass, But Not the Whole

#### **EMMA WOFFENDEN**

Emma Woffenden received a systematic training in glass art and production techniques at the Royal Academy of Art from 1992 to 1993 and at Farnham from 1981 to 1984. Emma is a globally renowned glass artist who exhibits and lectures around the world. Her works have been collected by a variety of cultural institutions such as the V&A Museum, the London Heritage Trust and Parliament, Ernsting Glass Museum and the National Museum of Scotland. In 1997, Emma and her partner Tord Boontje co-founded the Transglass Studio, whose works are collected by the MoMa and the Corning Museum of Glass in the United States.





by BI RONGRONG



SHANGHAI MUSEUM OF GLASS  
上海玻璃博物馆