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Still following the visions and concerns I had when I first began working with glass 35 years ago, I am continuing my quest to produce artwork of an involving and challenging nature, which primarily seeks to address and engage the viewers mind.



JANUSZ A. WALENTYNOWICZ A SELECTION OF RECENT WORK
2014

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And it dawned on me that I might have to change my inner thought patterns...that I would have to start believing in possibilities that I wouldn't have allowed before, that I had been closing my creativity down to a very narrow, controllable scale...that things had become too familiar and I might have to disorientate myself.

~Bob Dylan

Like Dylan, I feel a need to maintain a momentum of change and renewal, in order not to stagnate in the comfort of familiarity and repetition. The work presented here is a selection of pieces produced during the past few years, showing a range of processes, subject matters, and directions. During the past thirty-five years of working with glass, my constant goal has been to push the material outside of its natural comfort zone and, using both traditional and unconventional techniques as well as a variety of secondary materials, to create work of an “involving” nature that caters to the mind rather than seeking only to please the eye.

My interests always have been, and are still, focused on the complexity of human nature, our flaws, insecurities, small daily defeats, and victories — in short, the human condition. Although the work may

not always hold a strong reference to a specific subject matter, it is all born from a yoke nourished by the same curiosity, interests, and concerns.

The Standing Female Figures (pages 30–33) represent individuals, “assembled” from the various bits and pieces that fate equipped us with via our upbringing, our culture, and those who influenced us as we traveled through the early stages of life. The various components, or building blocks, that become us, may or may not fit perfectly. Still, it is our personal responsibilities to keep them all balanced to the best of our abilities, while attempting to maintain a measure of dignity, as we continue our journey through life.

The Hand/Hose body of work originated some time after I had lost a dear and close family member and still was seeking to find meaning and to re-establish a sense of equilibrium in my life. The first pieces expressed either my somewhat frantic search for meaning, or the duality of restraint and outwards yearning (catalog 34, 38, 42) while later pieces began to express the other end of the spectrum and reflected balance, peace, and continuation (catalog 44–55). As happens with most of my work — and also what I find most inspiring and thrilling — is when the work itself takes charge and, more or less on its own, begins to morph into other possibilities

and expressions. I then mostly become a follower being lead by my gut, or intuition, rather than my intellect. In doing this, I always face a good chance of ending up with a surprising and interesting result, whereas following the intellect often results in predictable and — for me — less interesting results. The fascination of the process is when novel and previously unknown discoveries are made.

The “processors” (catalog 20–29), which address quite a different set of concerns, are a result of just such a morph, where I allowed the creative process to lead the way and only occasionally in moments of discovery, let myself take the bridle to influence the direction.

The journey may become a ride into the subconscious, often a somewhat unconscious search, which in retrospect may reveal a “meaning” to the completed work.

When the work is presented to the public though, I want viewers to approach the work with their own experiences, memories, and imagination, so that they themselves will take ownership of the work.

Janusz Walentynowicz
Clinton, IL
Oct. 20th. 2014

By *Nannette V. Maciejunes*

I first wrote about Janusz Walentynowicz's work nearly twenty years ago. At the time, I was struck by the fact that he belonged to a generation of artists working in glass who were determined to move beyond the sheer thrill of technical innovation that had dominated the first two decades of the contemporary studio-glass movement. This generation had sought to use, and indeed expand, the extensive range of technical knowledge bequeathed to them by their elders in order to explore ideas and expressive possibilities well beyond the confines of their material's natural beauty. Some even had chosen to deliberately deny the medium's traditionally prized qualities of brilliance, clarity, and translucence. I remain struck by that fact.

We seemed in the mid-1990s to be on the cusp of the moment when glass would finally transcend its historic connotation as a craft medium. Unfortunately, despite my earlier optimism, the argument over whether contemporary glass should be defined as craft or fine art has continued to plague artists. The blurring of distinctions among media continues apace, but studio glass has yet to become fully integrated and accepted as a legitimate medium for sculpture. This ongoing struggle for recognition is epitomized in recent exhibitions like *Habatat Galleries' 42nd International Glass Invitational*, which sought to challenge the

field by taking as its theme "the evolution of glass as an art medium" and asking artists to contemplate, "If you were to look beyond the glass community—where would your work fit in the spectrum of the art world?" For far too many curators, gallerists, and collectors, glass is still glass. And we prefer to be dazzled by what artists do with glass rather than what they can say in glass.

Because of this, artists like Walentynowicz must continue to work in counterpoint to the perceptions—and preferences—of the art world. Walentynowicz has never been interested simply in what he can do with glass. His primary concern always has been to find a way to express in artistic form his interest in what he calls "the intimate levels of human relations."

In his intentions and his attitudes toward his work, rather than the medium he uses, is where Walentynowicz finds a critical distinction between craft and art: "Being an artist is, for me, definitely not an occupation; it's a way of life. For me, that's the only way it can be. When you're dealing with crafts, you give all your energy and all your time. However, when you deal with art, you give your life." He recently expanded on these earlier comments, adding: "As an artist, I have a need to explore and experiment and not just arrive at a product that seems to please and then stick with it as long as the market can absorb it. Making objects of beauty and having as one's goal to make a living by executing one's craft is a wonderful

profession, but as an artist I seem to be driven by something beyond that.... There are artists who work to please the crowd, and there are artists whose role it is to challenge and show the crowd something new—I hope to belong to the latter."

Nothing more true could be said of the recent work featured here. It is something new and it challenges us. Walentynowicz is now unquestionably a master of his craft, and he has continued to push, prod, and demand more of his cast-glass technique. His focus, however, has remained on his expressive purpose. I always imagine that we disappoint him when we ask the easy technical question, "How did he do that?" Now, as always, Walentynowicz wants us instead to ask, "why." Indeed, the medium of glass and the way that Walentynowicz handles it is integral to his expressive intentions. He shares with other artists who work in glass the defining experience—and challenge—of actually creating the material with which he is working. It is significant, therefore, that Walentynowicz has chosen to eschew the traditional seductive qualities of glass in favor of a distinctive textured, semi-opaque glass with which he is now so closely identified. The specific character of the glass he creates is inseparable from his meaning. As Walentynowicz has explained in the past: "Glass insists that we look into it, that we not stop at the surface of what is shown.

The emotional states depicted here are points of easily disturbed equilibriums between inner and outer states. The traces of surface, color, and texture both hold back and reveal clues. You can look past these external details of identity right into the scars and stress of experience that are still evident and threatening internally, though healed on the surface.”

Walentynowicz’s work continues to be highly personal and grounded in his life experiences. Some of the works found here expand on themes already familiar to those who know the artist well. His fascination with the human figure continues. His bearded doppelgänger also returns in several reliefs. The new cast and painted female nudes are the direct descendants of figures such as *Three Muses* and *Her Garden* (both from 1999). Although now accompanied by teddy bears, curtains, cellos, and red high heels, they seem more accessible than their earlier sisters. They occupy a knowable, even comforting, world in which we want to linger. The abstract *Standing Women* (cats. 30, 31, 32, and 33), built of what Walentynowicz describes as the “bits and pieces of Fate,” by contrast presents us with a familiar theme in the artist’s work completely reimaged. The recognizable intimacy of his other nudes has vanished, replaced by an uncompromising demand for us to consider a pure, psychological construction of the human figure.

In his remarks, Walentynowicz quotes Bob Dylan reflecting on a moment when he realized that he needed to open up his creativity and distance himself from what had become too familiar, “to disorientate” himself. The affinity Walentynowicz feels with Dylan’s journey is palpable in the numerous departures that he has taken in much of his recent work, particularly in his decision to explore anew his relationship with the human figure and at times to abandon it altogether. In one group of works (cats. 60, 61, 62, 63, 64 and 65), Walentynowicz uses a disembodied, realistically sculpted arm—depicted variously as reaching, grasping, clutching, and working—as a metaphor for the human condition. In another (cats 14-15 and 58-59), he gives us a series of repetitive, anonymous figures sitting alone or in pairs and small groups on staggered plinths. Lacking arms and feet, the still, featureless figures appear simply to wait, spectators perhaps of an unseen drama. For Walentynowicz, these works are an attempt “to express acceptance that some things are just what they are,” that it is part of the human condition that there are “things all around us and in our lives that we will never have answers to.”

The artist also explores this twin ideas of searching for answers and then ultimately accepting things for what they are in a series of pieces he has dubbed his “hose/tube” work, which was executed in part as a response to losing his sister to lung cancer.

“In the process of making this work, I was attempting to process my emotions and grief and in the process seeking to regain an equilibrium, emotionally as well as in daily life.” The works as a whole embody the dilemma at the heart of such grief. Individually, the pieces range from expressions of emotional turmoil and frustrated searching in *Half Truths* (cat. 34) and *Seeker* (cat. 38); to yearnings for a return of equanimity and balance in *Perpetual Motion* (cat 40, 41) and *Letting Go* (cat. 43); to images of tranquility and resolution in *Meeting* (cat cover) and *Vortex* (cat 52, 53). Walentynowicz believes that the new vocabulary he used for the hose/tube work resulted from a search for answers after his sister’s death “somehow merging with my seeking of new expressive avenues.” The enigmatic character of the hose/tube work is of particular interest to Walentynowicz: “One common factor these works seem to share is that one cannot explain them; they do not offer a story or even an answer/ solution. They just are what they are and do not concern themselves with whether they viewer ‘gets it’ or not.”

Closely related to this body of work are Walentynowicz’s “processors.” The emergence of these pieces is a prime example of what the artist describes as “the work beginning to dictate its own path.” The funnels from the hose/tube works reappear in the processors, now as parts of strange machines rather than connected to fragments of the human form.

Moving to non-figurative work provided Walentynowicz with a challenge and a new freedom of expression that he was not finding at the time in his figurative work. Or in Dylan's words, it provided him with the opportunity to "disorientate" himself. The original idea of the processors according to Walentynowicz was to "address the issue of the processed foods we consume." This initial idea, however, is easily transcended to embrace a broader concept of process: "The funnel, the input, is a big part of these and has also been used in prior work of a more figurative nature, where the funnel is the instrument through which we are fed all the elements, good and bad, that makes us who we are."

The initial idea behind the body of work he calls his "boxes/packages" (cats 5 through 13) is equally easy to transcend. Meant originally by Walentynowicz as a way of visualizing "the excess volume held in containers on the verge of bursting as a metaphor for the human mind or soul filled beyond capacity with emotions and information," he quickly realized that the image resonates with multiple meanings. In particular, the bulging packages invoke our fear and suspicion of abandoned packages in the new reality of a post-9/11 world. Most important for Walentynowicz is the different perspectives and interpretations that viewers bring to the work from their experiences with persecution, expulsion, and the terror of being uprooted to their immigrant dreams

of unknown destinations and new possibilities: "All in all, my experience has been that most people seem to make these pieces 'their own' by projecting their own personal experience on to the work. In my eyes, it could not have been more successful."

Like his expressionist predecessors such as Vincent Van Gogh or Edvard Munch, the threads of Walentynowicz's life cling to his work and seem at times almost inseparable from it. The true expressive power of Walentynowicz's work, however, lies not in speculative intrigue over the details of his life, but, like all successful expressionist works, in the power of his pieces is in the tension the artist creates between his personal experience and the universal human experience. The works transcend the specifics of his own life allowing us as viewers to respond on our own terms.

Walentynowicz is keenly aware that to succeed his sculpture must "liberate itself" from him: "The themes I work with come directly from personal experience. Still, when a piece is finished for me I want to find myself in the position of the beholder, as surprised and as intrigued as anyone else could be by the evidence of the complicity of human nature and the simplicity of survival." As an artist, he is interested in what he calls the "element of recognition," or "moment of personal connection" between the viewer and his work, the moment when the viewer sees

himself reflected in the work.

In order to heighten this element of self-recognition for the viewer, Walentynowicz prefers the elusive and enigmatic to narrative: "I don't necessarily want people to look for a 'story.' If they do that, they're looking for my story, which isn't important. What's important is that it shows a direction, then the viewer can look at it and put their own experience into it, and color it their own way. It's never a story with a beginning and an end, it's a slice of something, you add your own experience to it."

Walentynowicz is an artist working in glass who engages not only our eyes but also our minds. In his recent sculptures, he continues to challenge us to add our own experiences to the "slice of something" he creates as he boldly continues to delve into the unknown.

Nannette V. Maciejunes
Executive Director
Columbus Museum of Art
October 2014

All quotes by Janusz Walentynowicz are taken from an interview with the artist published in the April/May 1995 issue of Glass Focus, unpublished artist statements and conversations between the artist and the author.





















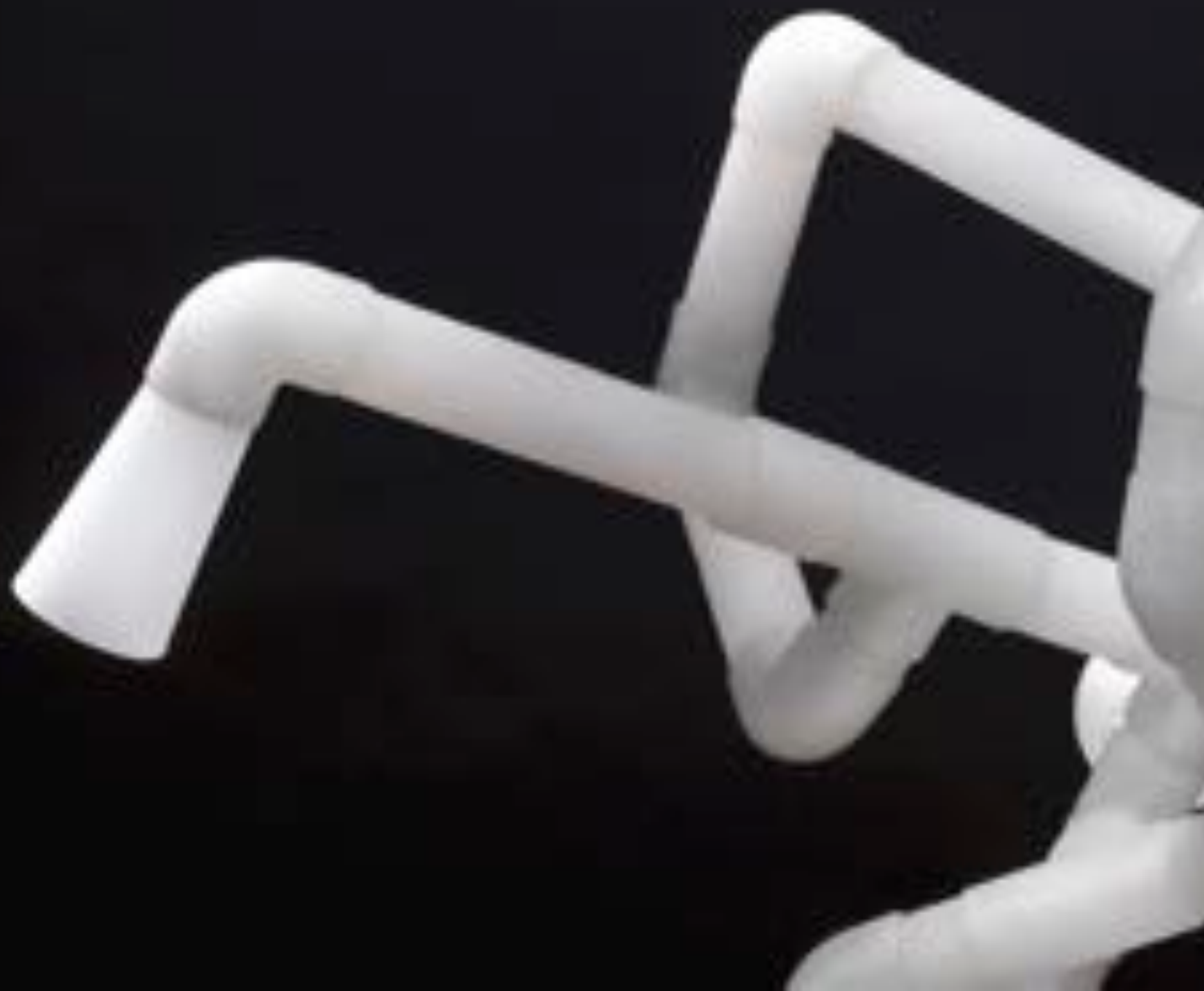








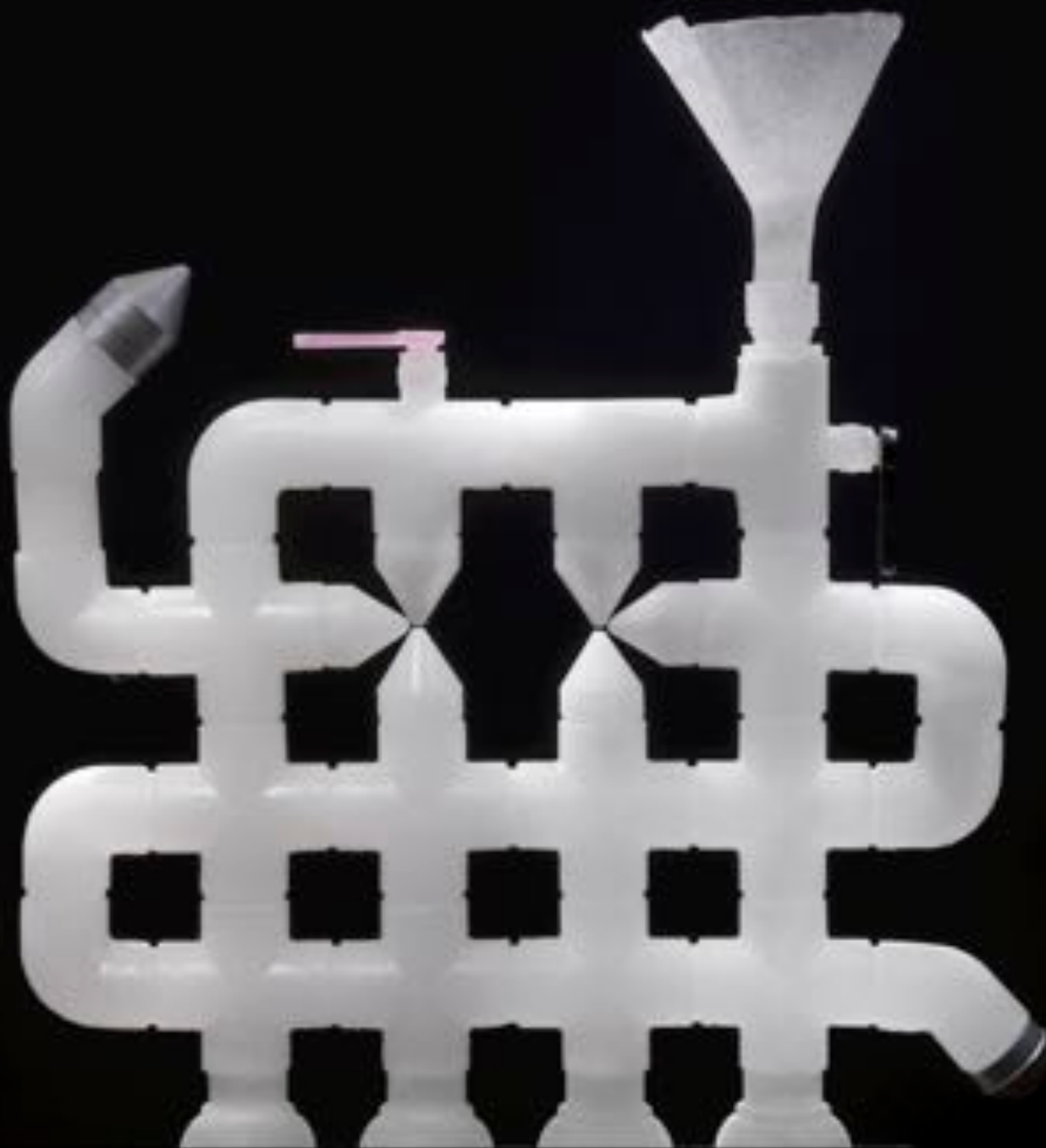




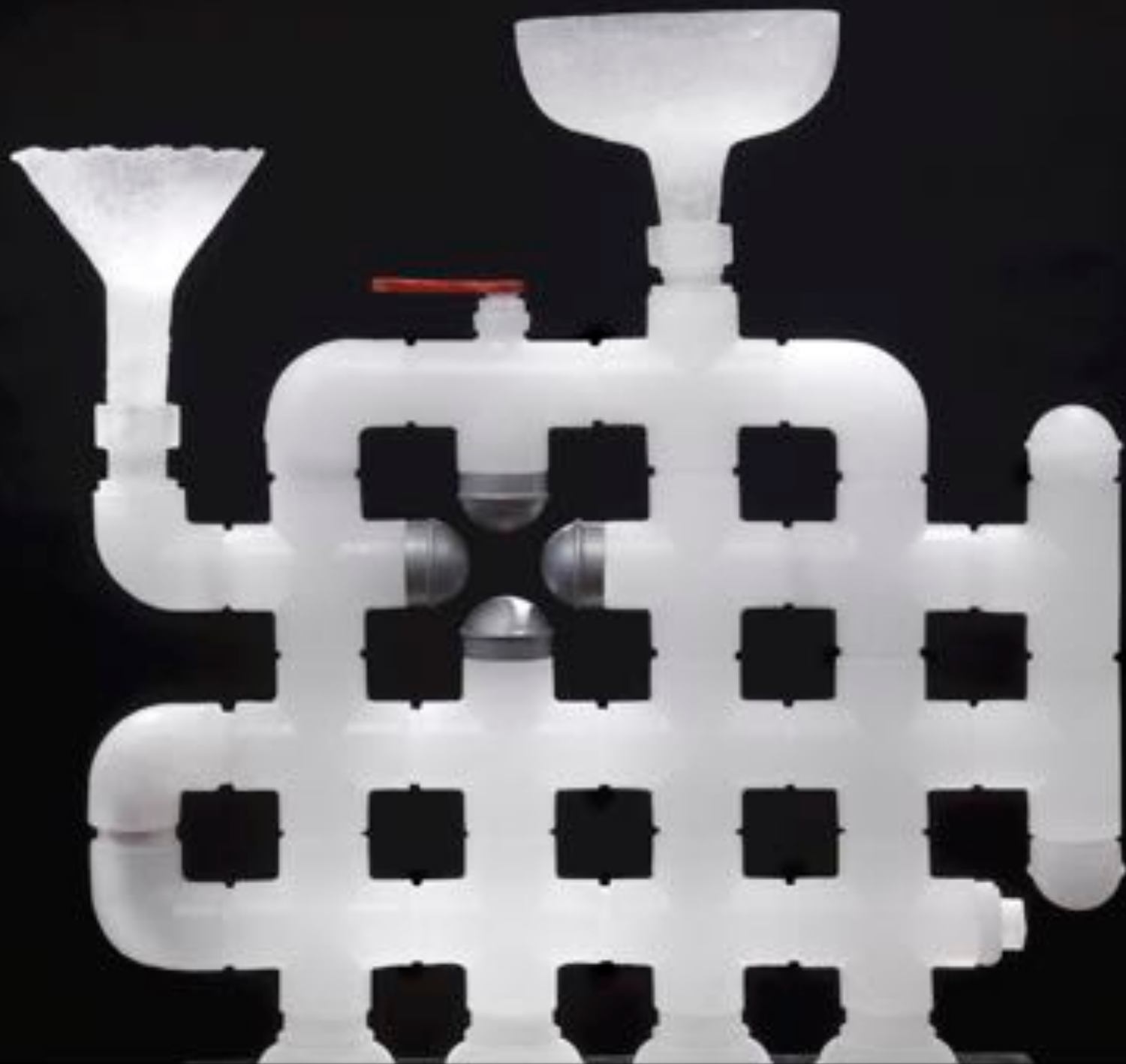




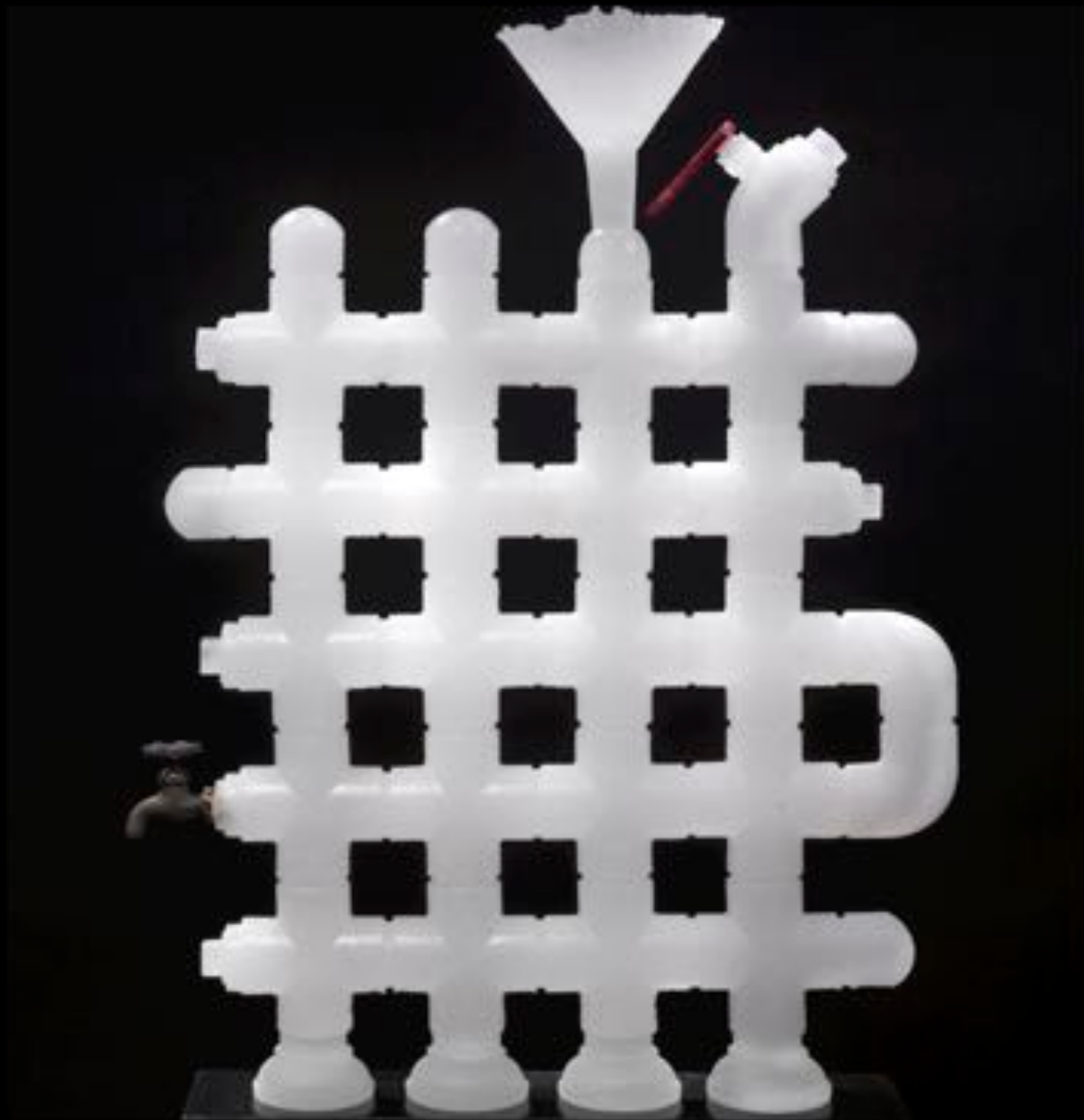


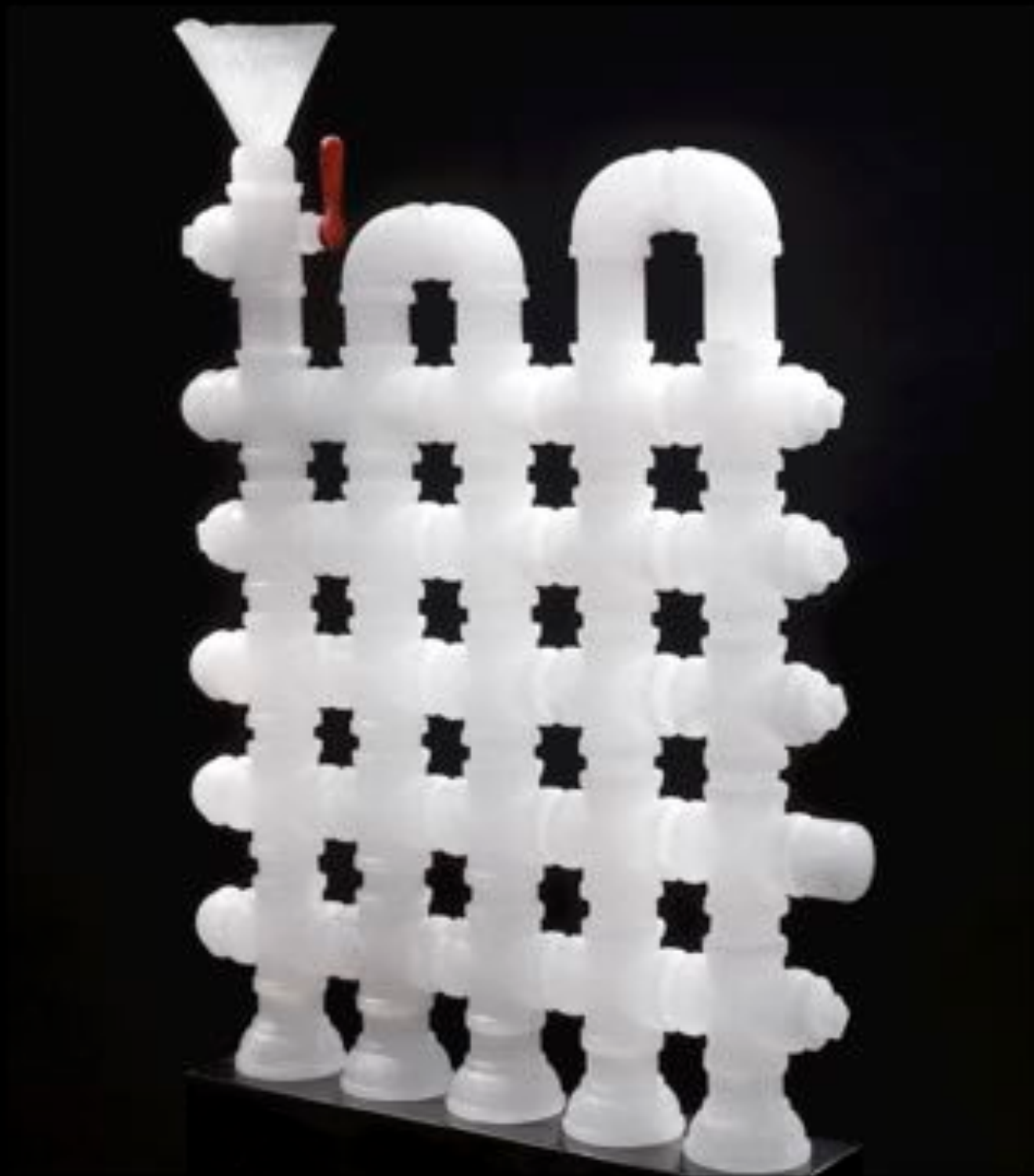














1
"Stine"



2
"Frida"



3
"Sille"



4
"Dora"



5
"Elga"



6
"Dora"



7
"Tina"



8
"Vera"



9
"Lene"



10
"Siogrid"

























































































Index

Front Cover

Meeting, 2011, 15 x15 x 5 inches, cast glass

Inside dustcover (front)

Coffee Pot (Memories), 2012, 24 x 19.75 x 3.25 inches, cast glass

- 5 Untitled (*Black, Strapped Box*), 2013, 19 x 14 x 14 inches, cold-patinaed cast glass
- 6 *Black Stack*, 38 x 3.25 x 14 inches, cold-patinated cast glass
- 7 *Ultima*, 2014, 18 x 19 x 19 inches, cast glass
- 8 *Hazardous Goods*, 2013, 9 x 12 x 9 inches, cast glass
- 9 Untitled (*Large White Box*), 2013, 16 x16 x 16 inches, glass
- 10 Untitled (Group (3) #2), 2013, 11 x 22 x 22 inches, cast glass
- 11 Untitled (Group (3) #1), 2013, 11 x 19 x 16 inches, cast glass
- 12 Detail: Untitled (Group (3) #1), 2013, cast glass
- 13 Detail: Untitled (Group (3) #2), 2013, 11 x 22 x 22 inches, cast glass
- 14–15 Untitled, (*Waiting Figures*, 3 x10), 2007, 38 x 96 x 5 inches, cast glass, glass, and welded steel
- 16 *Mediterranean Still Life*, 2011, 26 x 46 inches, reverse painting on cast glass and welded steel.
- 17 (lft) *Raised Still with two Decanters and Vase*, 2012, 36.5 x 12.5 x 4.5 inches, cast glass
- 17 (rt) *Raised Still with Bottles*, 2012, 33 x 12 x 4 inches, cast glass
- 18 Detail: *Raised Still Life with Decanter and Three Bowls*
- 19 Detail: *Raised Still Life with Decanter and Three Bowls*
- 20–21 *Mobile Processor 2*, 2012, 32.75 x 45.5 x 4.75 inches, cast glass
- 22 *Mobile Processor 1*, 2012, 27.5 x 26.75 x 25.75 inches, cast glass and found objects
- 23 *Mobile Processor 3*, 2012, 47.5 x 41.25 x 22.5 inches, cast glass and found objects
- 24 *Processor 4*, 2012, 34.25 x 31 x 7 inches, cast glass and found objects
- 25 Detail: *Processor 4*
- 26 *Processor 3*, 2012, 32.25 x 29.75 x 6.25 inches , cast glass and found objects
- 27 *Processor 3* (View 2)
- 28 *Processor 1*, 2012, 38.25 x 29 x 8 inches, cast glass and found objects
- 29 *Processor 2* (View 2)
- 30 *Stine*, (*standing figure*), 2009, 60 x 11 x 9 inches, cast glass
- 30 *Frida*, (*standing figure*), 2009, 62.5 x 10 x 10 inches, cast glass
- 30 *Sille*, (*standing figure*), 2009, 47.5 x 8 x 7.5 inches, cast glass
- 30 *Dora*, (*standing figure*), 2009, 51 x 15 x 8 inches, cast glass
- 30 *Elga*, (*standing figure*), 2009, 58 x 11 x 10 inches, cast glass
- 31 *Dora*, (*standing figure*), 2007, 52 x 7 x 7, cast glass
- 31 *Tina*, (*standing figure*), 2007, 49 x 5.5 x 6.5 inches, cast glass
- 31 *Vera*, (*standing figure*), 2009, 63 x 11 x 9 inches, cast glass
- 31 *Lene*, (*standing figure*), 2007, 48 x 8 x 8 inches, cast glass
- 31 *Sigrid*, (*standing figure*), 2008, 50 x 8 x 8 inches, cast glass
- 32 Detail: *Elga*
- 33 Detail: *Dora*
- 34 *Half Truths*, 2009, 18 x 29 x 12, cast glass
- 35 *Collector I*, 2009, 18 x 22x 20 inches, cast glass

- 36–37 Detail: *Collector I*
- 38 *Seeker*, 2009, 22.5 x 33 x 16 inches, cast glass
- 39 *Collector II*, 2009, 22.5 x 30 x 16 inches, cast glass
- 40 *Perpetual Motion*, 2008, 16 x 17 x 14 inches, cast glass
- 41 Detail: *Perpetual Motion*
- 42 *Inhibition*, 2009, 9 x 23 x 10 inches, cast glass
- 43 *Letting Go*, 2009, 14 x 13 x 17 inches, cast glass
- 44–45 *Scale*, 2009, 9.5 x 32.5 x 8 inches, cast glass
- 46 *Section II*, 2009, 13 x18 x13 inches, cast glass
- 47 Untitled (*Knot*), 2011, 13 x14 x16 inches, cast glass
- 48 *Yearner*, 2010, 14 x 13 x 8 inches, cast glass
- 49 *Yearner*, view 2
- 50 *Coil*, 2009, 10 x 18 x 10 inches, cast glass
- 51 *Madeleine* (end of the cycle), 2011, 15 x 15 x 5 inches, cast glass
- 52 *Vortex*, 2011, 15 x 15 x 5 inches, cast glass
- 53 Detail: *Vortex*
- 54–55 Detail : *Loop* (Wt.), 2009, 13.5 x 22 x19 inches, cast glass
- 56 Detail: *Listen 'N Tell*, 2011, 31 x 24 x18 inches, cast glass
- 57 *Kara with Mirror*, 2010, 20 x 37 inches, cast glass, oil paint, and welded steel
- 58–59 Untitled (*Waiting Figures* 18 Wt.), 2009, 16 x 97.5 x 5.5 inches, cast glass and welded steel
- 60 *Circle*, 2009, 26.5 x 26 x 7.5 inches, cast glass and welded steel
- 61 *2+2=5*, 2009, 26 x 36 x 4.5 inches, cast glass and welded steel
- 62 *Poke*, 2009, 62 x 32 x 7.5 inches, cast glass and welded steel
- 63 *Holding I*, 2009, 26 x 41 x 4.5 inches, cast glass and welded steel
- 64 *Apple*, 2009, 26 x 42 x 4.5 inches, cast glass and welded steel
- 65 Detail : *Holding II*, 2009, 39 x 26 x 7 inches, cast glass and welded steel
- 66–67 *Connection*, 2011, 14 x 44 inches, cast glass, oil paint, welded steel, and flame-sprayed nickel/aluminum
- 68 *Gentle Contact*, 2011, 27 x 27 inches, cast glass, oil paint, and welded steel
- 69 *Two Sisters*, 2011, 22 x 22 inches, cast glass, oil paint, and welded steel
- 70 *Sisters in Yellow Straw Hats*, 2011, 26.5 x 24.5, cast glass, oil paint, and welded steel
- 71 *White Curtains*, 2011, 26 x 40 inches, reverse painting on cast glass and welded steel.
- 72 *Anna with Teddy and Baby Blue Rabbit*, 2011, 26 x 45 inches, reverse painting on cast glass and welded steel.
- 73 *Blue Garden*, 2011, 26 x 45 inches, reverse painting on cast glass and welded steel.
- 74 *Mona with Cello*, 2004, 29 x 48 inches, cast glass, steel and oil paint
- 75 *Loss*, 2013, 30 x 34.5 inches, cast glass, oil paint, and galvanized steel
- Back *Chain* (16L12-1), 2003, 30 x7 x 57 inches, cast glass and steel