

JANUSZ WALENTYNOWICZ

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Let us be grateful for "new horizons," the subtitle of Janusz Walentynowicz's recent exhibition. After all, the artist could be said to have attained horizons enough. He's a consummate master of a particularly challenging method of modern sculpture in glass, one in which a figure, or occasionally a landscape, seems embedded within a slab of glass, residing dreamily or uneasily beneath its flat surface. In a work such as *Amy in Light Blue Dress*, 2006, Walentynowicz creates a sequence of derivations (not cast from life) of his desired figure, usually beginning with wax or clay, which is then used to make a rubber mold. He fills that mold with a mixture of plaster and ground silica, and then casts glass over it, making, in a sense, a thrice-removed negative of his original figure. Walentynowicz paints the resultant pitted and volumetric underside of the glass. These signature procedures of the Polish-born artist (long residing in central Illinois) have an air of mystery, evocative and fragile, in all their levels.

We see a painted image of Amy through a flat slab of glass, slightly wavy and translucent, but not, as the term painting might suggest, as a flat representation. The figure retains a curvy sense of volume, a quality of mass, a true figural cavity within the glass block. It is sculpture but planar, painting but volumetric. Like the performer David Blaine imprisoned in a block of ice, there's something vulnerable, even pathetic about this, as if something palpable and vibrant were frozen into imprisoned stillness. *Amy in Light Blue Dress* is freestanding. We see Amy from front and back, though the two molds together do not suggest the full volume of a figure. Walentynowicz embeds two sides of a figure—not a complete body—in the glass.

It might be the additive steps of these processes that led Walentynowicz to think about other ways compositions accrete, how things get layered and built up, how every journey is, finally, a collection of steps. Some of the new horizons displayed in the exhibition treat of such ideas, beginning with several works that take up the subject of jigsaw puzzles. *Puzzle - Circle and Square*, 2006, seems what a child's jigsaw puzzle might look like if it were composed of heavy and pitted bits of cast glass. The bulbous and eccentric shapes, some vaguely figural, are big individual pieces of cast yellow, green, pink and blue glass, interlocking in that odd jigsaw way, here forming an abstract square composition, spry and insouciant.

But the largest new horizon for Walentynowicz is a personal take on figural Cubism—a series of women cast in deep maroon glass, none of whom have arms, each standing three to four feet tall. Figurine-like, each woman is represented fairly realistically from feet to thighs. Then the magic happens. From the hips upward Walentynowicz racks and stacks, presenting the body as composed of a pile of chunks of cast glass. In *Mona*, 2006, the torso is a sequence of jigsaw-shaped pieces, but in the others it seems more rough-hewn, as if the figure were collaged out of chiseled boulders. Breasts, shoulders, head, hair are only vaguely articulated. This is a sign of the body, grounded on representational legs but then piled up in ways reminiscent of Picasso in the 1920s, or more obscure Cubists such as another Polish expatriate, Louis Marcoussis. Janusz Walentynowicz's women, whether cubistic or embedded in glass or his more classically posed cast figures, always refer to history and have a kind of earnestness and sobriety that gives them an air of functioning outside time, place or narrative, indicating that there is something iconic at the end of all his horizons.

—JAMES YOOD

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ABOVE: PUZZLE - CIRCLE AND SQUARE, 2006, CAST GLASS, 27 $\frac{3}{4}$ BY 24 $\frac{1}{2}$ BY 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ INCHES.
OPPOSITE PAGE: AMY IN LIGHT BLUE DRESS (FRONT AND BACK), 2006, CAST GLASS, 73 $\frac{1}{4}$ BY 20 BY 9 INCHES.
PHOTOS/ JO-NELL KOELSCH.

