



So where are we today?

Glass artist and curator Matt Durran, responds to the words of Harvey Littleton, considering the context for glass art 40 years after the first publication of *Glassblowing: A Search for Form*:

What strikes me is that art and the making of glass are more popular than ever, but becoming less and less a daily pursuit. The rising costs and distractions of paperwork have led to the pursuit of ideas and creative investigation before the material is even touched. The artistic life seems more complicated today, with the increased amount of technical choice to hand. It is a process of creating through rejection, leading to an economy of making.

With the advancement of switch-off technology for furnaces and small mobile-units, the need for flexibility has been underlined. We need to be able to produce work in small batches of time and the studio space has become a shared, multi-disciplined arena. Of course, some protagonists of hot glass are blowing every day, but even their endeavours have been limited by the need to maintain a viable working space: need that demands artists repeat forms in their work, hire out the studio, and teach. This all adds to the distraction of creating the art piece.

One of the trends is that an art form, sculpture or installation is only created once the funding has been raised through a proposal-based application. Owing to the high volume of applications, many of these works will never be created or commissioned, and the results will remain as unmade dreams or ideas kept to recycle for future works.

Another trend is the current issue of sustainability in working practice. The development of new sustainable fuels and the recycling of glass materials are adding new dimensions and technical difficulties to all areas of glasswork. There is also a movement towards the upcycling of the material where the life of a product is extended by the incorporation of other functions.

These are the issues that will define the next generation of glass makers.

What has also become evident is the way fine artists and designers are incorporating glass practices and craft into their work; sourcing makers to create work or components for installation. Their inspiration, we can conclude, partly comes from the advancement of the studio-



glass art movement and artists working in glass, whose raised profiles and access to global markets with media exposure have informed the fine artist of the possibilities. But this is no one-way street. The artist-maker is also informed by this contact and is allowed to question the preciousness and highly crafted finish, even encouraged to work on content, psychology and personal expression right through to questioning the restrictions of glass. There is value in this, as we are starting to see the crossovers and collaborations, which in turn create opportunities for experimental works to be seen and understood by a wider art community. This conversation has led to activity in many new arenas, including performance, dance, film and animation.

There have been many changes over the years, but there remains the truism that the moment still exists when, in mid-flow, the molten glass can change direction and the artists' skills can capitalise on the moment.

Matt Durrant, 2011