



LEFT: **Morgan Peterson & Alexandra Cannon, *Untitled*, 2015. Blown glass, sand carved.**
 RIGHT: **Annette Blair, *As You Left It*, 2013. Blown, sculpted and coldworked glass.**

PHOTO: ADAM MCCRATH

Group Exhibition
"2015 Auction Awards Exhibition"
Pilchuck Exhibition Space
Seattle
October 1-23, 2015

Pioneer Square, for many years Seattle's hub of bars, panhandlers, tourists, and art galleries, was considerably changed around the turn of the last century by the construction of two nearby major sport stadiums and a 6.8-magnitude earthquake (but not, we are told, the Big One). The Great Recession a few years later closed galleries and disbursed others around the city. Still, a few galleries hung on. The art scene got a huge boost with the opening in 2004 of the Tashiro Kaplan development, which added 28 commercial galleries as well as studios and living spaces for artists. Gradually, the art scene returned.

When Pilchuck Glass School started looking for exhibition space in Seattle, they wanted to be in Pioneer Square, and in 2014 they moved in, close to the bars, coffee shops, galleries, Tashiro Kaplan, and the Union Gospel Mission men's shelter.

There are glass galleries a few blocks away that seem to deal almost exclusively with the clichés of glass-blowing, designed to appeal to a broad public. The Traver Gallery, a mile away, has sewn up almost all of the stars in the glass galaxy. Pilchuck Exhibition Space gives an entryway into the gallery scene for emerging artists working with glass and adds a lively boost of energy to Pioneer Square's art community.

The exhibition features the winners of an online vote, a digital people's choice award. Rather than have an on-site preview night for the auction, Pilchuck invited people to go online and vote for their favorites, and almost 1,000 people (or at least IP addresses) did.

Many of the older, established artists seemed to have stepped back from the challenge to self-promote online. Works by Dale Chihuly, Fritz Dreisbach, and Cappy Thompson will be in the auction, but this show was not about them. Instead, it presented the work of a younger group, the top 15 vote-getters, plus three juror's choice awards.

The votes went for work in widely varying techniques and even more widely varying temperaments: from April Surgent's *In the Dark of Day* (2015), the result of the artist spending long hours engraving glass with a cameo wheel, to Heather Sutherland's *Punch Drunk* (2015), the result of the artist punching hot gathered glass with her bare fist (a photograph accompanies the work).

Kelly O'Dell's hot-sculpted glass rhinoceros head hangs, trophy-like, on the wall, accompanied by a cast bronze bird. Concerned with the impact of humans on the natural world, O'Dell often sculpts images of endangered animals.

In contrast, Nicholas Clawson's sculpted *Jawbreakers* (2015), 4-by-4-by-3.5-inch glass molars, belong not to a creature of the natural world but to some unfortunate legendary being.

There were a striking number of works in either black or white or both. Armelle Bouchet O'Neill's beautiful, tower-like white vessel, *Kasvu* (2014), blown and sandblasted, shows the Scandinavian influence on this French-born, Seattle-based artist, who studied at the School of Design in Bornholm, Denmark.

Annette Blair's group of a gas can, a tin can, a lidded jar, an oil can, and nails in her *As You Left It* (2013)—all black glass, blown, sculpted and coldworked—has stayed with me since seeing the exhibition. It comes from a series, all titled "As You Left It." She often adds to the title the place (toolshed, sitting room, or workroom) where the objects (paint can and brush, teacups and teapot) were left. They remind you of Daniel

Spoerri's snare-pictures, but instead of being actual objects, transported from daily life to captured compositions, Blair's groups of things left behind seem like somber memorials of past lives. She has, obviously, great skills in trompe l'oeil sculpture, but uses them almost surreptitiously; the viewer thinks about the meaning and feeling of the sculpture first, and the medium afterward.

First place went to Ali VandeGrift and Brennan Kasperzak for their *Red Mirrored Pendulum* (2015), a blown-glass vessel with a black frameworked pickup. In another example of collaborative work, Morgan Peterson and Alexandra Cannon's *Untitled* (2015), a black outer layer was heavily sand-carved to reveal an underlying white layer.

Pilchuck's executive director, James Baker, sees the strong collaborative work in this year's auction as a sea change, "as if something has shifted." Increasingly, he says, he finds that people are willing to let go of autonomy; pieces become dialogues. "After all," he adds, "Pilchuck attracts people who are looking for something they can't find on their own."

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Josiah McElheny
"Paintings"

Andrea Rosen Gallery
New York City
September 10–October 24, 2015

Josiah McElheny's newest series of work, none of it two-dimensional paint on canvas, is provocatively titled "Paintings." This irreverent naming is consistent for an artist who has built his career on cleverly reimagined histories, and this newest work adds to a trajectory of scholarly art making. His investigations of theory, literature, science, and art history have spawned a variety of artworks in glass, mixed media, video, and performance. McElheny, always interested in tackling intellectual topics, has turned his attention to painting as a source of symbolism in previous works, such as *Verzolini's Acts of Faith (Glass from Paintings of the Life of Christ)* (1996), a reenactment of an (imagined) act of devotion by the Venetian maestro Giacomo Verzolini (1522–1606). Despite the academic nature of his themes, McElheny approaches his work with humor.

Typical of his artwork is the tacit encouragement to approach each series as a researcher. The increasingly voluminous amount of supporting documentation available with each exhibition makes it almost impossible to consider the work for its aesthetic merit alone. At the gallery, a small booklet outlines the artist's intellectual journey, from the installation of his work *The Alpine Cathedral and the City-Crown* (2007), a crystalline interpretation of the imagined glass utopias of German modernist architect Bruno Taut (1880–1938) and writer-poet Paul Scheerbart (1863–1915); to his exposure to the narrative of modernist painting through the works of Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), Kazimir Malevich (1879–1935), and Hilma af Klint (1862–1944); to the creation of “Paintings.”

As the gallery statement explains, McElheny traces the essential moments in the history of 20th-century abstraction. He refers to works by Malevich, Kandinsky, Maya Deren (1917–1961), Ellsworth Kelly (b. 1923), Ad Reinhardt (1913–1967), and Albert Oehlen (b. 1954) that were canonical touchstones and contributions to the conceptual fabric of this history, and reimagines them through the lens of the recently rediscovered Swedish visionary Hilma af Klint. The voices of these artists are heard in varying degrees of clarity, depending on the art historical knowledge of the viewer. For example, the minimalist and monochromatic nature of Reinhardt is easily experienced in McElheny's Blue Prism Paintings, even if the viewer cannot recall the abstract painter by name. These three works center around the iconic grid structure of Reinhardt's paintings of the 50's and 60's; however, their mirror-backed framework is filled, seemingly endlessly, with blue glass prisms reflective of Swedish and Italian designs. The transparent nature of the glass draws attention to the often-missed dimensionality of Reinhardt's work while also creating a visual connection to midcentury design.

When first entering the gallery, the visitor is confronted with one of McElheny's Crystalline Prism Paintings, the most formally successful selection of works in the show. It is a constellation of press-molded glass prisms in blue, yellow, white, and red, set into a black ground. These works continue past the vestibule into the main gallery and dominate two walls. When viewed from a distance, the Crystalline Prism Paintings take on a flat two-dimensionality that resembles painting more closely than any other works in the exhibition. They are more layered in their veneration of modernist painters, pulling inspiration from Kandinsky and Malevich works such as *Several Circles* (1926) and *Suprematist*



Josiah McElheny, *Blue Prism Painting V*, 2015. Hand-formed and polished blue glass, low-iron mirror, cut and polished blue architectural sheet glass, sumi ink wood finish, oak and plywood. H 43 ½, W 43 ½, D 7 ½ in.

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Painting (with Black Trapezium and Red Square) (1915), respectively. Additionally, McElheny's choice of hues is a direct reference to the symbolist color theory of Af Klint. This depth of meaning is not likely to be perceived by the casual viewer, particularly because the groundbreaking contributions of Af Klint as a pioneer of abstract painting are only just beginning to be recognized by scholars.

McElheny's work encompasses two extremes: multilayered, esoteric works such as *Prism I and II*, gelatin-silver prints that are obscure reinterpretations of the already deeply interpreted Crystalline Prism Paintings, and the barely made commentary of *Window Painting*, an almost exact glass version of Ellsworth's 1949 painting by the same name, with added gray prisms. Similar is his screening, with only slight interventions, of two deconstructed and reprocessed films by Deren, *Witch's Cradle* (1943) and *Ensemble for Somnambulists* (1951), which only in passing reference projections over paintings, such as *FM 57* (2011) by Oehlen. According to the gallery, McElheny “hopes to suggest the possibility of an expanded experience of viewing” with the work. The experience plays out in the continuous unpacking of his references and how they relate to the work that he, as an artist, has created. Independent of context, McElheny's

work is enticing, although its display is repetitive. The 13 works, which could have been reduced by half, in the exhibition—*Crystalline Prism Painting I, II, III, IV, and VI*; *Blue Prism Painting V, VI, and VII*; *Window Painting I*; *Projection Painting I and II*; and *Prism I and II*—are arranged in their subcategories; however, the Projection paintings are separated from one another, and *Prism I and II* are installed in a different room from Crystalline Prism paintings. This organization seems driven by the realities of the space rather than any curatorial thesis.

The deeper relationship to the history of abstraction and its pioneering artists will be lost to the uninitiated observer. McElheny's success, however, lies in his works' tendency toward multiple interpretations. A sincere examination of the themes imbedded in early 20th-century abstraction, the supplementary material supplied creates an entry point to the more substantial narratives of the period. Simultaneously, his reverence for modernism and painting is a continuation of the tongue-and-cheek commentary found in his earlier works on the current obsession with modernism in today's visual culture.

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