

## Lukas Milanak

"ALLEGORY AND APPARATUS"  
BEACON ARTIST UNION  
BEACON, NEW YORK  
SEPTEMBER 12-OCTOBER 4, 2020

Artist Lukas Milanak is fairly new to the game, yet already he's establishing himself as an artist to watch. In 2018 he graduated with a BFA in glass and ceramics from Philadelphia's Tyler School of Art at Temple University. He then joined the ranks of The Corning Museum of Glass's mobile hot shop for four months on the road during the 2018 GlassBarge tour. That year he also relocated to the Hudson Valley, where he joined the Beacon Artist Union and has subsequently had two solo shows of the body of work he has since been developing. His multidisciplinary practice is indicative of a new generation of artists, who are both gaining the craft skills necessary to create medium-based art yet are unburdened by the extreme technical focus that had been central to glass-based art for so many decades. In short, it's neither virtuosic nor sloppy craft.

Instead, Milanak works at the crossroads of art and science, fiction and truth, elemental transformation and a DIY ethos. Art and science combine to create imaginative realities that provoke inquiry into the nature of the world and its truths. Milanak's constructions operate through the lens of speculative fiction, where a post-cataclysmic world has led to a revived interest in alchemy, inquiries into nonverbal communication between humans and plants, and non-biological alternatives to species extinction. In walking through "Allegory and Apparatus" at the Beacon Artist Union, one is presented with a series of what-ifs for which the artist's work provides the answers.

Of the 15 to 35 works included in the show (depending on how you count the many sculpture-drawing pairs and philosopher's stones), the one most likely known is the *Mobile Alchemy Research Station (M.A.R.S.)* (2018), which was included in the 2019 "New Glass Now" exhibition at The Corning Museum of



Lukas Milanak, *Mobile Alchemy Research Station (M.A.R.S.)*, 2018. (A functional glass-melting apparatus, purpose-built for guerilla experimentation.) Recycled materials. Dimensions vary.  
COURTESY: THE ARTIST

Glass. *M.A.R.S.* considers a disrupted future in which a renewed interest in alchemy has led DIY hackers to construct a mobile hot shop run off a microwave oven in order to revive the hunt for the elusive philosopher's stone. Unlike much art made to evoke inquiry into a fictional scenario, *M.A.R.S.* is a functioning workstation comprising glass shards, metal oxides, a torch, a microwave oven, and a tin-can crucible. The brilliance here is equally in the concept, the real-life DIY technology, and the creation of small works available to burgeoning collectors.

Additional works of note include *Device for Interspecies Communication (D.I.S.C.)* (2018), in which a device, called Dottie, interfaces with a plant and translates its electromagnetic current (as well as that of observers, when they get close enough to the work) into Morse code. The Morse code itself is illegible but is meant to illustrate the similarities that bind humans, animals, and plant life by pointing out the universality of our energy fields.

Pushing that line of inquiry further, the work considers other forms of communication used by plants and animals that, while extant, are not understood by humans.

There is a performative quality to Milanak's work in which the objects themselves are made by an artist persona, or "paraphysicist," whose inquisitive nature and scientific prowess lead to experimental works such as *Last Cicada*, a mixed-media, found-object sculpture in which a wooden figure strums a tin can to make a sound meant to evoke a cicada. In making this work, the paraphysicist seeks to preserve a lost sound and to consider the experience of being the last of one's kind. The work speaks to species extinction and seems to warn of a future where mechanized objects will stand in for the lost. The exhibition also includes a series of cyanotype drawings that mimic blueprints and correspond with various sculptures, but were in fact made after the objects they seem to plan. The drawings

grew from Milanak's interest in how things are built, and the fact that they don't actually serve as plans for the objects he creates seems of no consequence. Additional works include a series of plywood boxes that act as various translation machines and offer more of a perspective on the artist's aesthetic.

By his own indication, Milanak leans against what he calls "the wall of truth," or the line at which the art becomes too scientific and warrants fact-checking, perhaps evoked most by *M.A.R.S.*'s true functionality. This is an interesting line to consider in a world where truth seems up for grabs. But the artist's job, which he fulfills, is to encourage inquiry, skepticism, new angles of looking. In speaking with him, Milanak expressed that he hopes his work conveys a sense of discovery, which I think it does. By presenting curiosities, partial truths, possibilities, he encourages curiosity and lets us live for a while in an imagined world, one that feels a little bit like we could build it ourselves.

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## Joanna Manousis

"FOCUS"  
HELLER GALLERY  
NEW YORK  
SEPTEMBER 17-OCTOBER 24, 2020

## Mel Douglas

"DEFINING SPACE"  
OCTOBER 1-NOVEMBER 14, 2020

Joanna Manousis's silvered wall assemblages are impossible to miss. Her first solo exhibition occupied the front windows of Heller Gallery, where the mirrored surfaces of her wall-hung assemblages were alive with the shifting outdoor light streaming in from the wide Tenth Avenue windows on a slowly reopening New York City. Titled "focus," the works are elaborate assemblages of exquisitely crafted components—some cast, others blown into digitally formed molds—that radiate light from their complex reflective surfaces and dazzle the eye even as they incorporate the mirror image of viewers into the visual splendor of intricate compositions that explore her theme of the universality of human experience.

Her virtuosity as a maker is on view in the sheer range of impeccably cast

shapes, as in *Indra's Web* (2015) and its faceted polygons, which evoke cut jewels, but their molded and cast forms create intentionally imperfect shapes that pulse with intrigue and tension. *Chrysalis (Morpho-Eugenia)* (2020) features squat hexagonal components with intense geometry that multiply reflections into multifaceted images of the viewer, allowing us to see ourselves from all angles and perspectives. These installations celebrate humanity, and visualize how the individual impacts the collective. Just as our independent beliefs and decisions have consequences both immediate and delayed, local and far-reaching, Manousis's assemblages can be configured in multiple ways on a wall, the placement of each individual component impacting the placement of the others and, ultimately, the form of the installed work, which resonates with the interplay of light, perspective, and layers of historical reference and contemporary meaning.

*The Golden Thread (Diamond Point)* (2019) and *The Golden Thread (Hex Decanters)* (2019) convey this interdependence more directly. The three clear cast bottles, with surface embellishments and faceted stoppers, each have a segment of a twisting and turning glass "thread" that is visually linked as it runs through each of the bottles, with the thread in the center bottle appearing knotted. Although the wall installations are easily the star of this show, the gold within these triptychs commands attention similar to the silvered mirror, and shows the artist's range of ideas and technical chops as it has evolved over the past half-decade of her prolific studio practice.

Where Manousis's work is illuminated by its dispersal of light, the mood is much more inward in the adjacent room, where Mel Douglas's interpretation of the triptych took center stage. *Volume and Capacity* (2020) is a grouping of three large black blown and coldworked bowls that have been elaborately coldworked into opaque works that interact with light in much more subtle ways. Each has line patterns on either the interior or exterior



Joanna Manousis, *The Golden Thread (Hexagonal Decanters)*, 2019. Cast glass, gold. H 11, W 11, D 3 1/4 in.  
COURTESY: HELLER GALLERY