

A Hope for Contemporary Glass Art

“From The View of The Situation in Japan”

Excerpt from the essay by Jun Noiri,

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Glass is a very popular material for people today. Glass windows or fluorescents are necessities of our present life. Once upon a time, we used glass as a material to emphasize the decorative senses of beads, wine glasses, or stained glass in churches rather than the practical sense of them. But after the 20th century, industrial technology has made rapid progress and glass has been used widely in various fields as an industrial and practical material.

From this point of view, glass has been recognized as a useful material like paper or iron. Its' range of use has been wide, like oil which has been used not only as fuel but also as a material for various products. But most people are not able to perceive that plastic is made from oil, while if we show a fluorescent to a craftsman who lived several centuries ago, they must reply immediately "this is glass." This means that whenever we use the word 'glass', we imagine that its' texture is under solid condition, even with changes of form or color in appearance. Glass can never be changed to another substance by mixing other materials, thus we are able to distinguish glass clearly from other materials by its' appearance or the sense of touch, and it is easy to hold the same recognition in common.

To overthrow this well-known recognition, we have to change our perception in some ways, such as exhibiting a furnace, itself, which is melting glass. In fact, it is interesting that Mr. Kazuo Kadonaga, who lives in Kanazawa, has shown a mass of glass which is heaped up naturally and showing its' process by a video as an installation work. It is like Mr. Kadonaga

to bring out a strong point of the material maximally by manufacturing the material minimally. From his work, we are not only impressed by its inexpressible power as a huge mass of glass, but also intuit something like a true essence of glass. This is one of the cases of dealing with glass from the approach of modern art. He drips melted glass for some time and takes out a mass of glass from an annealing oven after annealing it for a few months. His work includes this whole process itself and it clearly differs from craftworks in that he never manufactures the mass of glass. He also refuses to identify himself as a glass artist, although he sometimes deals with glass as one of the materials of his works.

We sometimes discuss a question in which glass art is classified under fine arts or crafts, apart from the more essential problems of their definitions of each term. But this question might be nonsense today because the borderlines of each art category have been unclear. That is, I doubt that this alternative question does not have much meaning. But on the other hand, it will be possible that these artistic stances will sometimes support artist's activities, and, especially in Japan, that crafts are very popular. There are many complicated problems which cannot deal just with the difference of artistic stance. 'What stance do I have?' 'What appreciation do I want to get as an artist?' 'Do I have a core of thought including my own philosophy in my creation process?' 'Even today, everything is free and so called 'first come, first serve', these old fashioned or

lay-man's questions might perform a role like a lasso in catching the essence of art. But it seems that there are few artists who create their works with clear consciousness of the meaning of these questions. Some create vessels, some create sculpture as fine art, some exhibit their works as installations for groping space, or some come out with their artistic originalities by combining with other materials. Although the material is common, there are various stances, and it seems that each artist avoids interfering in the stances of other artists with an assumed indifference. As a result, the definitions of craft or fine art begin to be unclear, year by year.

As far as I can see, almost all artists create their glass works because of the attractiveness of the texture of glass itself from premise of manufacturing it. In this case the texture of glass means being under solid condition. In my opinion, glass art is clearly classified into crafts from the point of manufacturing a material and using a special technique. But on the other hand, glass has been freed, rapidly, from many restrictions recently as a material for artistic creation. During that time, glass art has changed in its quality while it has been influenced by or has connected with various kinds of

artistic movements. Thus, the attitude to seek the pure artistry has been natural. As a result, especially young glass artists have been more attracted by the freedom of artistic expression, and they seem not to identify themselves as craftsmen. This situation might be common among the whole of the crafts field. But especially for glass, it might be very hard to benefit from being classified into crafts or arts, furthermore, the production pieces or the art pieces. Glass is a material which is easy to distinguish clearly from other materials by its' appearance or the sense of touch. But as far as its' manufacturing, there are more various techniques than that of other materials, and it makes much visual difference depending on the techniques. Furthermore, it is possible to take advantage of the unique effects of refraction because of its transparency, and to form a space from the inside as well as from the outside. Probably, the rich variety of techniques and freedom of forming space have been suitable for many themes of the present day. This is why young artist have been attracted to glass. Thus, glass art has presented the aspect suitable for calling it 'art' by conspicuous activities of the talented glass artists around the world.



「Glass No.4 B」
Kazuo Kadonaga
1997
H31½XW29½XD23½ in.
H84.0XW75.0XD60.0 cm
880 lbs. 400kg
Solid glass
Toyama City Board of Education