Discounted art

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A Thesis submitted of the Faculty of the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences in candidacy for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

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by

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May 29, 1997
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Cynthia Clarke
Angela Duron
Greg Keochakian
Melissa Lagod
Leroy the Janitor
Frank Smith
Robin Winters
Walter Zimmerman
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"THE TRADE" by Gary Snyder

I found myself inside a massive concrete shell
lit by glass tubes, with air pumped in, with
levels joined by moving stairs.

It was full of the things that were bought and made
in the twentieth century. Layed out in trays
or shelves.

The throngs of people of that century, in their style,
clinging garb made on machines.

Were trading all their precious time
for things.¹

Within the boundaries of this sterile and unnatural environment, Gary Snyder uses
two dissimilar definitions of the term trade to show that this poem is about business and
commerce and how these make for another trade, which is the loss of our time in their
pursuit. We throw away our time twice, once to earn the money for the goods and again
when we go out to buy them. The “throngs of people” in their “clinging garb” visiting in
“concrete shell(s)...with air pumped in..” -- he could be describing any one of us.
Commercial spaces can often be discouraging, but still we go. Shopping is actually a very
popular pastime. Spending those hard-earned dollars for some well-deserved treat, that’s
the rationalization in the reasoning. The draw of the marketplace lies in its nullification the
pain and loneliness of life with that moment of gratification by the purchase of a new
item. Each item can be a surrogate for something else that we might believe is missing in
our lives. I think compromise is the best way to describe the process of procuring a

¹ Gary Snyder, Regarding Wave, New Directions, San Francisco, 1967, p 47.
physical object to replace an inner longing. Just about anything can be bought or sold, but little that really matters in our lives, whether it's love, peace, security, happiness, friendship, or health, is obtainable only by purchasing it. One can purchase the illusion of any one of these, though. Our capitalistic practices create false desires and goals for people to strive for by basing the imaginary fulfillment of one's dreams within the context of the next thing to buy. Each purchase never lives up to it's promise of fulfillment, enjoyment, and happiness; it just becomes a desire for "ever more....". Life turns into a distraction of consumption. A need is always developed for something new, and we eventually have one sitting in our house. An example might be the the "Jurassic Park Crunch" cereal (figure 1) -- here in a Collector's Edition coinciding with the release of the film. It's a "sweetened whole-grain oat and corn cereal with prehistoric marshmallow shapes", and it is likely to be very popular with small children and collectors of such stuff.

It is the first purpose of this thesis to look at glass-art movement, and to consider if it may have become polluted in a similar way to that of Hollywood in the above example. The glass-art movement has become more of a marketing tool to create an imaginary need for glass art, which may only be a Tiffany vase reproduction. There is an abundance of glass art, yet most of it is not. The second purpose of this thesis to show my interpretation of what glass art is and to help render a more concise definition to the term.

I am not immune to distracting myself with new items, so a point of my work is spoof of my own shortcomings. I can also see this act of purchasing as a substitute for my deeper needs of interaction, and an object is better than nothing at all. I hope it will be the center of my attention for a long while. The familiar items of everyday play such an intriguing role in our lives. Our relation to these items, and our familiarity with them, that is shaken when they are presented as art. Many would say that art should be "special". Yet it is the process of creating something that can be called "special" and can be more important than the finished item itself. Art turns into a journey of creation, and the objects
of this endeavor are just the debris of this journey. Ideas develop, transform, and change - the work being the manifestation of this process. This process has characterized my glass work.

In my early explorations of what could be made from glass, I directly observed the glass while working with it -- while it was hot, molten, dribbly, and seemingly alive. I developed a keen interest in the motion inherent in the formation of the glass on the blowpipe, as it constantly revolved. I tried to capture some of this movement in a series of work by creating the "Restless Vessels" (figure 2). I went on write about these pieces, stating,

My work is derived from the passages of life -- the changes, transformations, and migrations which we all experience. Because these transitions reside within the boundaries of time and space, I've created the Restless Vessels as a physical manifestation of this principle. These vessels have uncertain repose. They come to rest with different bearings after each spin -- just as change can affect all systems.

It is this work that I use as an example of what is commonly known as glass art. "Restless Vessels" are attention-getting pieces of glass that rotate with the slightest disturbance. The movement of a "Restless Vessel" (figure 3) always seems to cause viewer reaction. The pieces are never in grave danger since they only spin in a circle roughly one-and-one half times the width of the piece. I was exploring the notion of making containers of change, vessels that hold insight into the future. The "Restless Vessels" may be an oracle for some, but they are a toy to others. The motion of the pieces also has a slight hypnotic effect. Altogether, this was rich enough material for me to conclude that I could make art out of glass.

Later though, I came to understand that my work was not limited to just being
1. Jurassic Park Crunch

2. Restless Vessels
4. Art-Glass Vase with Everlasting Flowers
made of glass. My ideas could be transposed into other materials. Glass was the easiest material for me to use that body of work, but not my only option. And my idea of glass art changed after I realized that the “Restless Vessels” were not necessarily about the glass itself. It seemed to me that I was missing the point of using glass, so I started to look into making work about glass rather than just making works of glass.

I believe that the new and improved definition of glass art is illustrated in the piece entitled “Art-glass Vase with Everlasting Flowers” (figure 4). This glass vase uses a traditional decorative glass technique called murrini in which a cross section of a colored-glass segment is melted in over the color field of the piece. These vase is an archetypical glass art piece, being decorative and unique, functional and perhaps somewhat expensive. If this were an antique glass vase from Murano (figure 5), it would be more expensive. And if it did sell for a high price, why would one want to use it for holding flowers? Adding water to the vase may keep the flowers in bloom, but it will also cause algae growth and mineral deposits -- both detrimental to the health of the glass piece. Further, increased handling means the likelihood of breakage also increases. So, I’ve tried to find the safest and best use available for this piece, without subverting its function a vase. My solution was to use silk and plastic flowers which will never wilt, need water, or require maintenance. The vase is safe while it performs its function. The irony here is that the preciousness of this piece is also its greatest liability, and thus determines its ultimate function. The object is demeaned to an ignoble use here -- becoming a sad receptacle for fake flowers. One may construe that the expansion of glass ware to glass art can also be its own diminution.

Glass art doesn’t tend look into its own folly very much, though regular art has. Marcel Duchamp was a pioneer in this realm, pointing out the folly of separating art from life. He did this by displaying, as art, mere consumer items with little or no alteration. He called them ‘ready-mades’. “Bottle Rock” (figure 6) is an example of such. It has great formal vitality but is only just a rack for drying bottles. Duchamp broke down the wall
5. Venetian glass vase

6. Bottle Rack

7. Fountain
that separate art from everyday life. He chose articles of “aesthetic indistinction.” \(^2\) “The danger to be avoided lies in aesthetic delection”, he said of his “Fountain” (figure 7). \(^3\) It is from Duchamp that I begin to understand the dissonance created by using the stuff of everyday existence for art.

There is a dissonance in “Stickered Vase” (figure 8), a blown-glass vase form that has been covered with product stickers. It looks like the bottom of a skateboard. Just enough glass is left visible to show this piece is made of glass. The stickers present a direct contrast to the pleasing visual sensations inherent with glass. The disorganized mess of stickers would make an even larger mess if one tried to remove them. It is as if the piece had been vandalized, a victim of aesthetic spoilage. This piece is a rebellion against the inherent beauty of glass. But the stickers are not about rebellion; they are product logos. Defiance, as in the stickering of a glass vase, becomes just an attitude of appearance rather than a commitment for a changed, better world. Image turns out to be more important than substance. The vase becomes merely another billboard. Rebellion is turned into merchandise, but is it not merchandise and trade that unites all peoples of all varying belief systems?

Ashley Bickerton has used product stickers and corporate logos on his work, such as “Tormented Self-Portrait (Susie at Arles) #2” (figure 9), and it may appear that he’s making art under corporate sponsorship, similar to race-car drivers and other competitive and athletic types. I think Bickerton is alluding to the actual corporate sponsorship of everyday life. From our communications and transportation to most of our food and entertainment, we utilize corporate products daily. Bickerton shows us the logos that make up his self. These brands may appear to be “sponsors” for Bickerton’s life, but actually he is the one sponsoring them, using their products and sending them his money. Even his power company, Con Edison, is included. Bickerton shows that corporate sponsorship is pervasive, penetrating deeply into many layers of our existence. Objects are becoming

\(^3\) Ibid.
8. Stickered Vase

9. Tormented Self Portrait (Susie At Arles) #2
shaped canvases for graphics and logos of the manufacturer. These corporate icons infuse all this gear with an inordinate amount of importance and, unfortunately, desire to possess it.

Somehow there also seems to be an ever-increasing desire to possess glass. People are readily seduced by glass, captured by its transparency and held in the grip of its shine and beauty. In the prosperous times that we're experiencing in the first half of 1997, glass is something that is quite salable. Glass now plays a significant role as gift items and personal acquisitions. Since glass can be found in a wide range of prices, from a few dollars for a glass trifle to tens of thousands for something from a brand-name glass artist, glass is available to almost anyone.

The glass art movement sees its American beginnings with Harvey Littleton and Dominick Labino\(^4\), running some experimental glass workshops in the early 1960's. It has been propelled into the limelight of the contemporary art market over the last 35 years. The increased exposure of glass, in such varied publications as Artnews\(^5\), the San Jose Mercury News\(^6\), Cigar Aficionado\(^7\), and The Wine Spectator\(^8\), along with the proliferation of studios and artists in the last three decades has led to a much larger audience for glass. Dale Chihuly, probably the most famous of all glassmakers, has increased the publicity of glass immensely. He recently hung his chandeliers over the streets and canals of Venice, Italy, in a spectacle that will be hard, even for him, to top. The Glass Art Society now has the largest membership ever in its twenty-seven year history and it recently had its most well-attended conference to date.\(^9\) There was a large international exhibition, and glass sales played a significant part of the conference.

I'm not saying that this is a bad thing to have happen, but I also believe that for

\(^6\) San Jose Mercury News, 1.8.95., 3.31.95., 8.8.95., 8.17.95.
\(^7\) *Cigar Aficionado*, "Collecting Scandinavian Glass," Fall 1996.
\(^9\) Penny Berk, personal communication, April 1997.
some, the glass itself tends to become more significant than the actual work that is made with it. This is not true in all cases, and certainly every glass artist has a defense for using glass. But I think that glass art always begs the question from Arthur Danto: "what meaning is contributed by the fact that glass is used?" Beyond the decorative, optical, and breakable qualities of glass, why do artists make use of glass?

Process is a valid answer -- I find working with glass to be a very satisfying aspect of making glass art. Other glassmakers would answer similarly. The glass community is wonderfully close knit; a tightness developed from working with the same incredible material. There can be moments of soothing joy with glass making. But I think salability is another reason to make glass, and it becomes a requirement to help offset the expenses of producing the work. It is at this point the notion of glass art falters when glassmakers "develop an appealing idea, then manufacture it over and over again until every glass collector has an example of these 'one-of-a-kind' works of art in their collection." Glass art becomes just another product.

Inevitably, one will face the marketplace as a vendor. It is within the context of selling items that the root of my thesis topic is found. I begin my critique of this system with my brochure, "Bi-More Get-More" (fig 10, 11), which is an abridged catalog of my glass objects. This brochure was intended to look like it fell out of the Sunday paper. It is a reckless promotion for the sales of glass-art items -- similar to the "Starving Artists" television commercials that have their weekend sales at the Holiday Inn with paintings selling for "as low as $7!". "Bi-More Get-More" is a spoof on the sanctity of the marketplace, especially the glass art market.

"Bi-More Get-More" is my answer to the endless promotion of the glass art movement. My intent here is to create what I consider glass art, which is art made about glass rather than art made of glass. I was able to pursue a few different avenues of glass art and to provide a basic overview of glasswork about glass. My glass objects explore

the context for using glass as its own content. I want the viewer to see that this piece needs to be made of glass. I then take my glass art and convince the viewer to want it. The text included in the “Bi-More Get-More” brochure provides a listing why these pieces must be purchased.

My work is comes from a variety of sources, from 20th-century art to magazine advertising. It is the fusion of the two, art and marketing, that inspired this thesis, which links the success of the glass art movement to the crassness of the consumer culture into which the glass movement is headed. I’ve presented a humorous exhibition of serious work, “the bitten tongue-in-cheek” as it were, to help illustrate my point. I thought I should take the fall as the cheesy glass artist who sells his soul to the “McDisney’s” of the world, thus Discounted Art! I used the advertising supplements for Odd’s-n-End’s, the “Closeout Superstore” (figure 12), as guide for the layout of “Bi More Get More”.

A humorous and cheesy object from the discount store of the future might be the “Cel-Phone Tie” (figures 10, 13). It not only helps to give the tie some functionality, but it adds another fresh item to the lucrative cellular-phone market. The “Cel-Phone Tie”, is also a play on words about how we become so readily dependent on our new gadgets and get “tied” to them. Its intended pun is enhanced by the pacifiers in the pattern of the material. It is actually an object that may be clever enough to catch on in some trendy marketplace. It might not be in the a Giorgio Armani collection or next fall’s J.Crew clothing catalogs, but there could be a “tie-conversion kit”, easily assembled with “Popular Mechanics” magazine (figure 14). My use of glass in this piece is purely as decorative function, i.e., display. I wanted to bring out the wide range of settings in which glass is used, and here glass is merely a support for another item. The intrinsic value of the fabulous glass bottle is undermined by its role as the display for something else.

Common household building materials provide an aesthetic of familiarity for the creation of objects for domestic situations. The hardware-store look is seen in the work of Joel Otterson (figure 15). His father was a plumber, and much of Joel’s expertise in
Rubbermaid Servin' Saver Jars

Eastern Electric Waffle Maker

Barbie Fashion Favorites

 Famous Brand Sliced Carrots

 Assorted Gerber Products

Wedge Bed Rest Pillows

 Famous Brand Chunky Mild Salsa

Wood Board Games

Rhinelander Potato Chips

Satin Supreme 4 pk Toilet Tissue

DINNER NO RAIN CHECKS. All these prices these DEALS will go fast! When they're gone...they're gone!

Odd's - n- End's

12. Odd's -n- End's

13. Cel-Phone Tie

14. Popular Mechanics
manipulating and sweating the copper tubing “is hereditary”. There is a decorative beauty in the hardware and plumbing supplies that Joel uses; he approaches camp with his choice of materials, perhaps reflecting a childhood response to the memory of his father’s work. Common construction materials, not meant to be seen, can be some of the most visually startling since these are the materials upon which we all rely. Very few people live without running water, and yet the plumbing system does not receive the praise it deserves, however poorly it may work. A “Rolling Oil and Vinegar Mixer” (figures 11, 16) has the looks of fresh copper tubing used in household plumbing. The stand supports a glass vial, which does not slide or spill as the mixer is rocked. The glass vial pours the mixed ingredients out on a plate that fits below. There may not be a huge call for this item in the market for salad accessories, but it would be an excellent “specialty item”, destined for the counter tops of those who have one of everything else.

“2 Vases” (figures 11, 17) is another example of glass and copper tubing. The copper tubing was inserted through a hole in the glass in which it is grasped. This piece is about materials, and the relation of their forms to their different methods of construction. The glass is a round, soft bubble which hangs off the end of a blowpipe while being made. The copper tubing is inflexible and thus requires fabrication and fitting to complete the form. There is tension between the two materials, yet there is the harmony of both forms being upright, like vessels, one elevating the other, serving a common purpose. This piece thus provides for two vessels and added decorative choices.

I believe the best things for my art are things already within my chosen environment. Found objects are also useful because they cannot fully be separated from their everyday association, even though they may be used differently in art. Art is more effective if it is in the guise of the commonplace, similar to the things we see almost everywhere. It speaks in the vernacular of everyday existence, the ordinary things in life that aren’t noticed until after they’re gone.

Joel Otterson, personal communication, July 1995.
15. Artificial Intelligent

16. Rolling Oil and Vinegar Mixer
17. 2 Vases

18. Prince Albert Razor Case
This vernacular of the ordinary is seen in the “Prince Albert Razor Case” (figures 10, 18), which is plastic razor case from Wal Mart with a 7” silver ring inserted through two holes at the handle-end of the case. There is a soft blue, nipple-prunted, handmade glass bead attached to the ring. The bead alludes to the notion of decoration and ornamentation. This piece sits in an upright posture, providing a visual pun of an upright phallus. The “Prince Albert” refers to the ring inserted through the handle of the razor: it is suggestive of similarly placed rings pierced through penile tissue -- something that is known as the “Prince Albert” piercing. This piece deals with many facets of the body, from shaving to ornamentation to a possible sexual aid. This piece is a parody of all these needs, ridiculing our obsession with removing “unwanted hair” from certain places, poking and piercing things through sensitive areas, and the bizarre things people do in the name of sexuality -- the accessories which provide for an even better climax, or so I would hope. Unfortunately, sex is similar to shopping in that it only placates the need for a physical gratification for a short moment. After the satisfaction is achieved, it is eventually supplanted by a need for more. And again comes the pain of longing.

We can also wear our pain. “FSHN SCKS” (figure 19), two words sans vowels, is a fashionable pair of socks with sharp glass embedded in the fabric. The broken slivers of glass severing the socks allude to the infliction of pain -- to oneself and to anyone else. Today’s culture puts a premium on avoiding pain. It is easily medicated away. Pain has become something we can control. It can now be something to seek and explore too, possibly to help define one’s life. No longer feared, pain can become a allegorical basis for personal myth. These beliefs are the fabrics of our existence and manifest themselves in our personal image, quite often by what we wear. The toned-down version of FSHN SCKS would probably sell more -- with tumbled safety glass replacing the sharp, broken spikes.

Of course, being fashionable means having more than just the right clothes. Accessories and gear are all part of the statement and image we present to the rest of the world about self. And for the true fashion-plates, there is now the “Vase and Valise”
19. FSHN SCKS

20. Vase and Valise
This small decorative glass vase fits safely into its case and can be worn as a small backpack. Now it's easier to take your glass art with you. Also included are "Glass Wipes"™, which are sealed tissues with a dry-lubricated cleansing solution. The backpack is lined with "Sturdee-Bubble"™ for greater durability. Yet the sensibility of this collection of objects is overshadowed by their sassiness. A vase and carrying case is always preferable to cardboard boxes, bubble wrap, and peanuts, and what sort of person are you?

There are commercial antecedents to my marketing and merchandising musings. I'm intrigued by the graphics and contents of ads that show our changing tastes over time. This "Breath Right"® ad (figure 21) is great marker for this moment. Maybe it's a dubious product, but doesn't "... a drug-free Breath Right® strip lifts and pulls..." add a neo-holistic-healing, war-on-drugs copy that is almost irresistible? I try to imagine what it's like own a "Cordless Insect Disposal Vacuum" (figure 22) from the Hammacher Schlemmer catalog. What would it be like to whoosh those bugs to certain death? And a good thing it's cordless! The "Pop Up Hot-Dog Cooker" (figure 23) just looks so intimately useful with its slots for all the wiener and buns. With these items we are much closer to having a specialized appliance for every household function. The Interclean™ advertisement (figure 24) has some truly racy imagery, looking like it suggests more than just whiter teeth. The coupon page from Tops (figure 25) is a lovely bit of information, with all those pretty product pictures and the ever-important, key consumer word, "free". The Builder's Square "Hot Buys" (figure 26) has the very quotable "Buy More Save More!". These advertisements are exciting blends of text and image -- the aesthetic of the sale.

The "Satellite-Dish Serving Bowl" (figure 10, 27) is a response to this aesthetic with a fully functional serving bowl that emulates the small TV satellite dishes, which are popular in today's electronics market (figure 28). In this piece, a glass bowl sits on three transfer bearings which allow the bowl to rotate. Suspended above the bowl is a glass cone, which might hold flowers or dip. A mock adjustment knob, halfway down the arm...

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21. **Breath Right**

Breath Right® is a cordless insect disposal vacuum. This lightweight, battery-powered device lets you quickly capture and dispose of insects at a comfortable distance without ever having to touch them. Flies, spiders, and bees are suctioned by the 14,000 rpm fan and drawn into a sealed disposable cartridge (included). Lined with a non-toxic gel (harmless to humans and pets), the cartridge traps and kills insects. Powered by a built-in rechargeable battery. Comes with one disposable cartridge. ABS plastic 24" L. (1 lb.)

- **50700** .......................................................$49.95
- **50701** .......................................................$29.95

22. **Cordless Insect Disposal Vacuum**
23. **Pop-Up Hot Dog Cooker**

**POP-UP HOT DOG COOKER.** Operating much like a pop-up toaster, this unique kitchen appliance lets you easily prepare two hot dogs (complete with toasted buns) in just minutes. To use, simply drop two wieners in the center basket and the buns in the two toasting baskets on either side. Its 660-watt electronic heating coil has four controllable heat settings so that you can cook the wieners and toast both buns to your taste preference. Removable crumb basket. Plugs into household outlet. 8½" H x 10½" W x 3½" D. 50929 ............. $49.95

24. **Interclean™**

**SelfCare**

**A Slender Floss-Like Filament — Spinning at 6,500 RPMs — Makes Interclean™ the Ultimate Between-Teeth Plaque Remover.** Everyone knows proper dental care means flossing daily — but who does that? Frankly, hardly anyone (fewer than 25% of adults) because who can master the acrobatics of string floss? At last there's a solution worthy of the most respected names in dental care — Braun®/Oral-B®'s innovative Interclean electric "flosser" takes interdental cleaning into the 21st century. Its cordless/rechargeable power handle — much like an electric toothbrush's — rapidly spins a tiny, tough-but-extremely-slender filament at 6,500 rotations per minute. Simply position the tip between teeth, slide "on," and a quick 2-second burst disrupts and removes plaque from virtually all interdental spaces — even the tightest. It's so easy — the filament does all the work! Each disposable tip is designed to last for one complete cleaning. Comes with charging base, wall mount, two sleeves, two gum massagers, and 50 tips. Braun®/Oral-B® Interclean™ CS025 $80 Replacement Tips (100 tips plus two extra sleeves) CS026 $30

The extremely slender filament slides into the tightest spaces between teeth, and then spins at 6,500 RPMs to effortlessly disrupt and remove plaque and food particles. Works like string floss, but very much easier!
BUY ONE GET ONE FREE SALE

Arm & Hammer Ultra Detergent
Free
50 oz.

Egg Noodles
Free
1 lb.

Pepperidge Farm
Free
Three Layer Cakes
19.6 oz.

2 Liter Soda Pop
49¢

Boneless Skinless Chicken Breast Fillets
199¢

Aunt Fanny’s Twirls
Free
6 pack

All Natural

Classic Shingles

BAHMA MANSWERS

Builder’s Square

BUY MORE, SAVE MORE

1.0 cu. ft. Peat Moss

QUIKRETE

Concrete Mix
9.5 lb.

BBQ Grill

Multipurpose 4.0 cu. ft. Mower

159.99

Builder's Square

25. TOPS

26. Builder’s Square
27. Satellite-Dish Serving Bowl

RCA DSS®
Receive over 200 channels through US Satellite Broadcasting® and DIRECTV® programming! RCA's DSS has an easy-to-use on-screen program guide, parental control, program information, alternate audio and channel banner. Systems start at $139.99. For special offer details, please call one of our friendly representatives. DS3120RA model featured.

28. Satellite Dish
that holds the cone, is a bit of decoration only. All the glass is removable for convenient cleaning.

The "Satellite-Dish Serving Bowl" alludes to the reckless creation of objects that will soon be obsolete. Tiny satellite dishes are replacing their large forerunners. This implies we face more obsolete trash in the future. With this in mind, I have extrapolated that as soon these small dishes are superseded, they can resurrect by fulfilling a new household function for dinner parties and thus avoid the trash pile.

Trash and recycling is an important aspect of domestic glass use. Bottles, which are now worth a tiny deposit fee, jars, and other glass containers have the distinction of being segregated from the rest of our trash. Americans have become quite proficient at recycling, and the amount of glass saved is remarkable. In fact, there is a glut of recycled glass available now, and industry has not found a way to use it all. Recent recycled-glass prices are also down. For this reason, I created "Excavating the Cullet Pile" (figure 29) as an informative and interactive piece dealing with the excesses of recycled glass. I assume that somewhere there are big piles of broken glass (cullet) being pushed around by bulldozers. My attempt was to bring about an awareness of this trash after it leaves the curbside. I also wanted a piece that involved people physically. The interactive nature of this piece was inspired by a work I saw at the Power Plant gallery in Toronto. Janine Cirincione and Michael Ferrero's piece, "The Dead Souls", was an interactive game in cyberspace, where one had to negotiate through a landscape and identify the villain from among several characters. I was drawn to the sense of control that one had with this piece. You could explore in any direction and turn around any time you liked. Though the characters were unavoidable, they were easy to flee from. It felt very rewarding to be able to manipulate within the art piece.

15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
29. **Excavating the Cullet Pile**

30. **Jar Tower**
I supplied little candy “treasures” in the pile of cullet to further interest people, offering the possibility of an edible reward for their efforts, similar to games at an amusement park. Amusement is a very popular pastime, an integral part of our culture, and a keen source to make art from. Much of our lives is devoted to seeking amusement, and we often do so without question. It is precisely for this reason that an art piece should address this issue. Things that we take for granted are always deserving of scrutiny, especially their underlying assumptions.

What are the assumptions that go with the “Jar Tower” (figure 30)? The viewer will see that there are empty jars and no contents, all built in a taller-than-life tower. I wanted to display on the large volume of apparently nothing that is present in the empty glass jars. These jars at one time most likely had contents, and so the jars had a purpose. Now, with the contents gone, the jars are just another container of empty space. There’s nothing decorative about them, and there’s a chance they’ll just be thrown away or recycled. I thought that by building a “Jar Tower” I could show one of the effects of consumer culture and how glass plays an important, yet disposable, role in it. The glass jars contain and safely store the contents or the empty space, but the jars don’t transcend their function. They are always secondary to their contents, even when larger than life.

The “Decorative-Mosaic Cleanser Bottles” (figure 30) have a more-equal footing with their contents. It is taken for granted that household decoration is also a function of somebody cleaning and tidying up. Cleansers become part of the visual vocabulary and so do their containers and packaging. I would venture to say that almost everyone has had a screaming-hot orange or neon-bright green bottle of cleaning solution, be it window wash or laundry soap or even toothpaste, somewhere in their house. These containers seem to transcend all economic and class boundaries. And yet, the companies producing these cleansers are missing out on a valuable and lucrative market. With “Decorative-Mosaic Cleanser Bottles” as an option for packaging, these companies can sell some glass art along with their cleansing solutions. These then would be both decorative and functional.
31. Decorative-Mosaic Cleanser Bottles

32. Space-Saving Vessel
objects. With enough of an effort, everything in one's house could be customized, just as these bottles have been. No object need ever again be classified as ordinary. These bottles will hold their own next to any of the finest pieces of glass art. Just imagine art glass that holds it's own cleaning solution!

Too often though, possessions turn into clutter, and space becomes a premium. The “Space-Saving Vessels” (figure 32) give the illusion of expansiveness without the sacrifice. There is volume but no dimension. The illusion here has physical presence when we see it and process it, but there is a dissonance when the object is seen to have no backside. The illusion of the vessel is limited within the confines of the mirror. It is almost more like a window into another realm than a reflection of our existence and space. The “Space-Saving Vessels” are happiest against the wall, where the mirrors canlie flush and the reflection extends into the wall. The depth of the reflection functions to create the illusion of more space where none existed before. It is also the illusion that we must always strive to always “get more”, and so we nurture our pecuniary instincts as if they were the only way to live. Yet, when do we reflect upon this choice?

Illusioned living drew me to include the “Mirrored Bottles” (figure 33) in my show. I wanted viewers to see themselves in the bottles. This piece gives them a chance to explore having their own reflection become the decoration. These could be a very salable commodity to those with overly vain and narcissistic tendencies. The reflection in the bottles is different from each person’s point of view. Thus each piece is unique each time it is viewed by another. The viewer is seen as part of the exhibition, a fact for everyone who comes to the show.

Some say that I draw on a Pop Art tradition, and I admit there is a resemblance. Pop showed that anything could be art if seen in that way. An example is Andy Warhol’s “Brillo Boxes” (figure 34) --"with Warhol it becomes clear that there is no special way that art must look -- it can be a Brillo Box, or it can look like a soup can." 17 The concern of

33. **Mirrored Bottles**

34. **Brillo Box**
Warhol and other Pop artists was to show art as something within everyday life, giving birth to the soft sculptures of food by Claus Oldenberg and the comic-strip panels of Roy Lichtenstein. Pop Art gave credibility and value to these ordinary items by making them something much more than they appeared to be. They have become our new cultural icons: ice-cream cones and comic myths, Brillo boxes and now, ibuprofen, M&M's and Mickey Mouse. They are worshipped more than we suspect or imagine. It is with this outlook that I make my combinations of ordinary objects. The boundaries of What is Art have been explored, and now the artist's job is to build on this knowledge and figure out what to do with it. This impetus can devoted to making work that has meaning and is relevant to the issues we face today.

The "Gerber Goblet" (figure 35) provides a combination of elements that could be seen as Pop Art. This piece mixes a glass goblet that might be used for an alcoholic beverage with a jar of Gerber baby-food lasagna. Baby food and alcohol don't mix very well (especially pureed lasagna). But they are linked together, separated by only glass. The separation forces one to consider a progression of action here. One must finish the drink before opening up the baby-food jar. It is this course of events, and the tension produced, that is the main force of the piece. The implications of finishing the drink, first, and then tending to the baby makes it clear that these priorities are flawed. The piece can also allude to the problems of women drinking during pregnancy and then giving birth to babies with fetal-alcohol syndrome. Alcohol and babies don't mix, yet here they are linked together with the combination of two everyday and ordinary objects that are easily overlooked on their own.

Our ordinary life deserves more scrutiny than we are willing to give it. There is too much that is taken for granted with our own needs and those of our society. Consider that a large percentage of the population is too poor to enjoy many of the luxuries that our consumer society has to offer, yet their lives are often adversely impacted by mass consumption. I do not believe that the results of a capitalistic economy need to override
35. Gerber Goblets

WASTED & USEFUL LIVES

36. Wasted and Useful Lives
the concerns of human welfare or the preservation of the planet. I see the tunnel vision of the entrepreneur, seeking that which will increase the investment. I see the indifference of the salesperson, being the happiest with the product that sells the most. I see the established needs of the consumer, having always to buy more and to get more. These things we buy are mere distractions to keep us busy while we dismiss other aspects of life. Is this distraction we have accepted as our normality truly the best choice to make? Aren’t we just “trading all (our) precious time for things”? Gary Snyder knew about this trade when he wrote his poem thirty years ago. My last visual source, B Kliban, poses the consequences of our choices in a nicely-ironic cartoon (figure 36).

It is at this point in the study of glass art that I must question the need for it. In fact, glass art is more like icing on the cake of life than it is anything else. I have raised a few issues about glass and my relation to it in my work. There are still other aspects of glass to be addressed, but its position as a force in the art market brings about a need for examination of this trend. So much of glass art is neither. Instead, they are just beautiful glass trinkets. One need go no further than a glass gallery to see the superficiality of glass art. It feels odd to be a glass artist myself, and I think that only by inspecting the connotation of the title can the true purpose of it be understood and brought forth. I want glass art to have a reason, besides decoration, for being made of glass.

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18 Gary Snyder, Regarding Wave. 1967.
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