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*Two Man Glass Show
... p. 36*

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Photograph by *Greg Edwards*

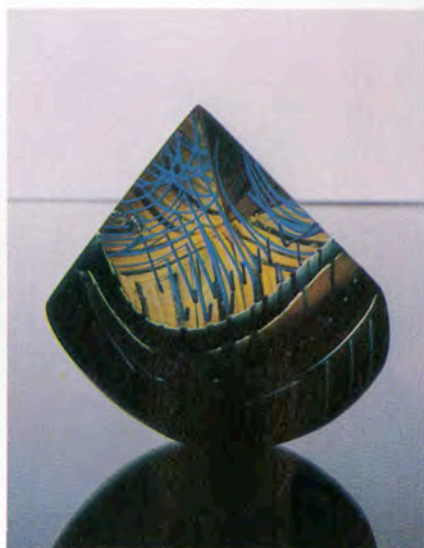
Glass artist William Carlson's newest scent bottles come in an interesting assembly of three detachable parts—base, bottle and stopper. Colored inner layers run horizontally, recalling ancient Roman agate glass.

Glass As Different As Can Be

Greg Edwards

William Carlson And Christopher Ries In A Two-Man Show At Contemporary Art Glass Group.

by Paul Hollister



Carlson's geode-like wedges, actually sliced from his bottles, become interesting decorative objects in their own right.

In the December 1976 issue of *Acquire* I enthused about a small glass scent bottle made by William Carlson. I said it was really a piece of sculpture in disguise. Carlson had sliced through the black glass exterior of the spherical bottle to reveal a mysteriously turbulent and subtly colored interior. What was surprising in terms of the many cross influences in today's studio glassmaking: the bottle didn't remind me of anyone else's idea. For the past three years Carlson, who teaches glass and design at the University of Illinois, has explored the small but solid handful of the scent bottle as if it were in fact a piece of sculpture, "programming" his effects first from the inside out, then from the outside in. To see his bottles lined up in the February two-man show at Contemporary Art Glass, 806 Madison Avenue, one might almost be standing at the counter of a chic perfumery, where bottles (at \$200 to \$500) are as important as the fragrances contained.

The idea of the spherical black glass bottle with spherical black glass stopper came naturally to Carlson—he was born in 1950—as part of his art school training

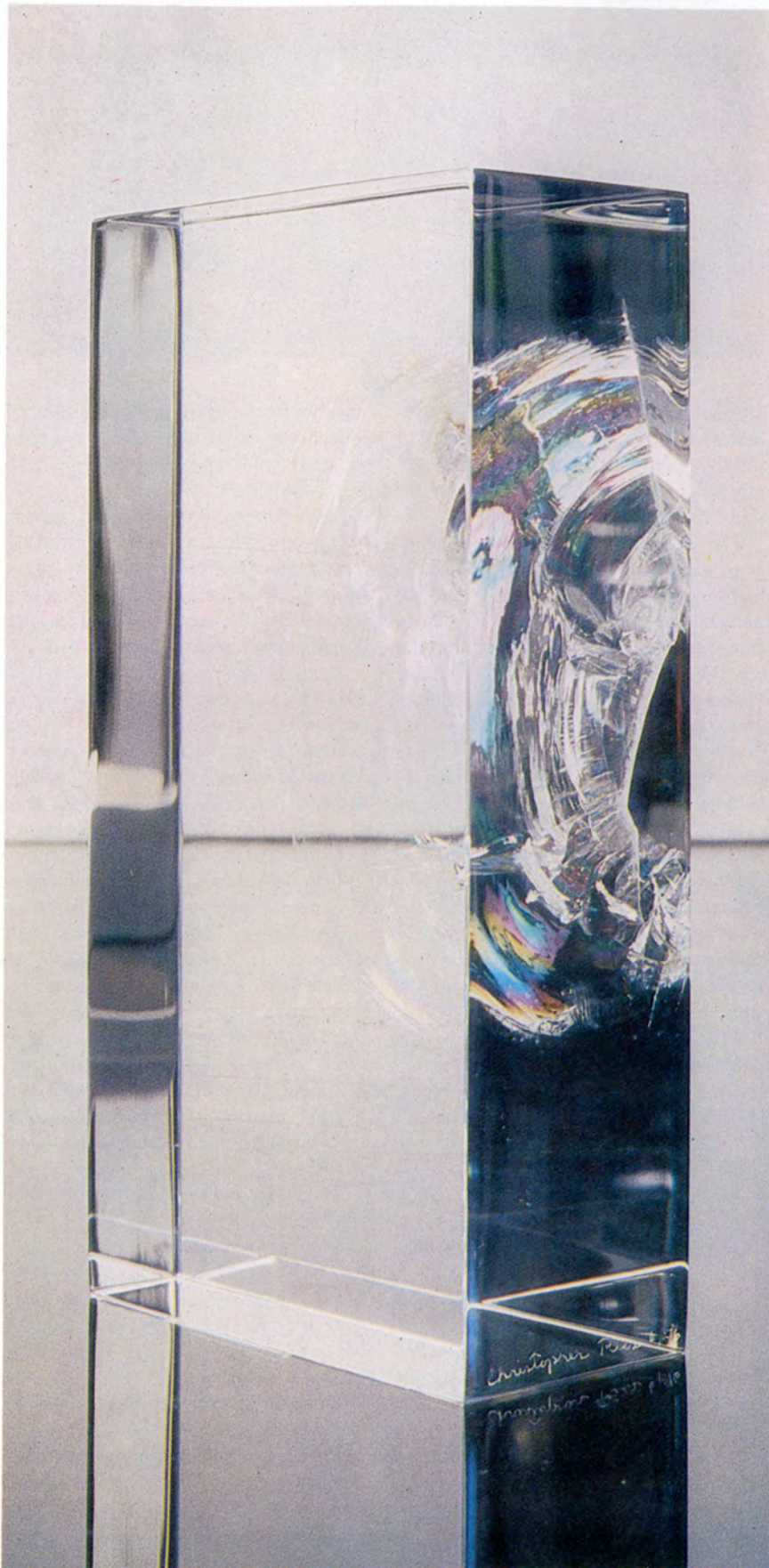


William Carlson scent bottle showing graphically delineated interior layers. Long-tipped stopper lies beside the piece.

about the time Art Deco began its comeback. Carlson has been bound up in his glass techniques, and there is a geometry with a vengeance about his scent bottles that is stridently Deco—but with a difference. Let me explain.

As Carlson developed the spherical form it became more sculptural. If one slice off the sphere revealed the interior, two slices, then three would reveal more. In order that there should be something to reveal, the design of the interiors became more complex, more convoluted

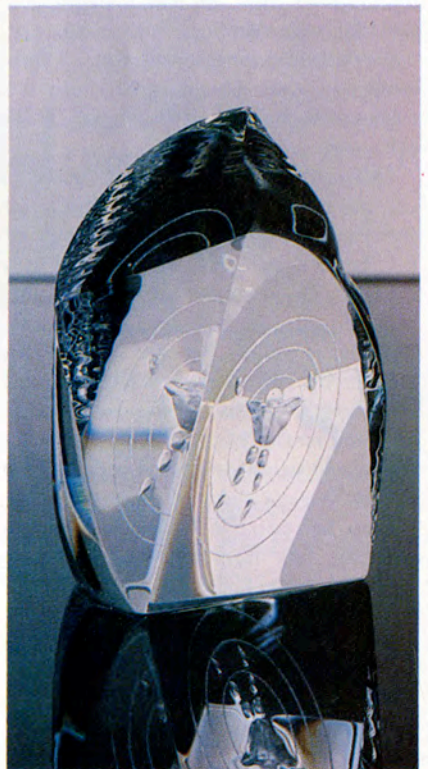
and colorful, or, as Carlson, who likes fancy language, puts it, more "structured" for the visual effects he calls "graphics." He begins his bottles by blowing the small bubble that qualifies them as bottles. The bubble serves as the inner, see-through core for a series of spherical wrappings, each different in texture and color, that seem as carefully executed as the concentric ivory balls of a Chinese chess set or the nested sarcophagi of King Tut himself. There are sandy-textured wrappings, ruffles of turquoise,



One side of this glass monolith by Christopher Ries has been whacked with a hammer to produce iridescence. Note image echo and reflection on other smooth surfaces.



As the eye takes it in, this small polyhedral mass by Ries becomes a monumental sculpture. Like his other pieces it traps color.



Ries's "Piece Macabre" places the matte engraved figure on one side, smoothly cut ripples on the other in literally three-dimensional treatment. The subject is more haunting than morbid.

Sculptured optical glass chip by Ries is a fun piece that moves freely on its elegant pedestal.



all bound together with parallel threads of red glass. Carlson reveals these interiors by slicing off sections of the opaque outer sphere. These methodical dissections give his bottles the rather sinister appearance of a sliced eyeball, or of some control center that has been severed. The bottles are topped with pyramids of rings, an idea Carlson says derived from telephone pole insulators, while the ball stopper terminates in a glass applicator that extends down into the transparent bubble like the pupil of a cat's eye.

In a gesture perhaps of negation, Carlson has cancelled some of the bottle interiors with epoxy-inlaid stripes of brilliant orange, green, and brown Vitrolite glass that scream across the highly polished cuts like final clearance notices. Vitrolite is a glass popular in the 1930s and 40s for storefronts, restaurants, and bathrooms, and it doesn't work at all with the rest of his palette. Carlson has also used Vitrolite inlays in bottles hinged to flat vertical slabs of glass in assemblages that point in the poverty-stricken direction of "minimal" sculpture and painting.

I liked the geode-like slices cut from the bottles but shown as separate works—a casual grouping of two or three makes a nice display. And I found most appealing his narrow, steel-framed, leaded window panel, in which these geode nuggets are set like jewels. Having almost mutilated his bottles, Carlson seems on the verge of doing something else with and to glass, and that will be interesting to see.

At the ripe old age of 26, Christopher Ries has his bachelor's degree from Ohio State, his Master of Fine Arts from the University of Wisconsin, and a grant (1978) from the Ohio Arts Council; yet he has found time to produce about 7000 pieces of glass. Most of them are amphora-shaped vases in soft colors, some with pinched bubble motifs, others with

internal iridescence, or gold foil shattered in the blowing. They sell well in the \$125 to \$350 range and partially support Reis's more expensive and interesting addiction, his clear glass sculptures.

The reason his clear pieces are generally so expensive is that the glass itself is high-quality optical glass containing 40 percent lead that traps internal fire like a fine diamond and gives his pieces the blemish-free brilliance of Steuben glass. However, what Ries does with and to the glass shows that he has no delusions of grandeur. His pieces range in size from tiny carved prisms such as "Pyramid" (\$155) to the 18 inch high glass iceberg (\$6500) that weighs 155 pounds and looks as if an iceman named Michelangelo had cleaved it from an even bigger block. As evident as the range of sizes is the range of techniques Ries has employed to achieve various results. He has cast some of the pieces, then whacked the glass with a sledgehammer to produce what he calls "impact checks." He has cleaved the glass, carved it, sandblasted it, dropped it on the concrete floor, scratched it, clawed it, polished and embellished it, abraded it, rounded or flattened the edges.

Ries performs these rites upon solid blocks of glass in much the same way a sculptor works with marble or wood—that is by subtraction, by taking away from the original mass. If marble and wood are opaque and the sculptor doesn't know what he may find inside that could change the concept of the work, Ries confronts possibilities that appear only too clearly right through the piece. Thus, in some of his monolithic glass blocks one side only is chipped, fractured, or engraved, but in such a way that it performs reflectively, casting its image upon the three untouched sides. This feat of restraint seems to me the essence of sculptural economy. Abstract though these monoliths are, their varied

positive and negative, light and dark reflections—some in reverse—give one a sense of what an ancient Mayan stela might look like if X-rayed.

Reis's cubes and square-sided columns have been sandblasted to create arresting, frosty internal effects that can suggest whatever your subconscious suggests. Some might see coral; I saw tissue paper blown at high pressure into a crystal.

Apart from his rather obvious tiny pyramid, I found Reis's small pieces compelling sculptural objects that repeatedly draw the eye. His mysterious "Piece Macabre" for example, with its drowned man floating face down in an oval target of ripples that must have been hell to engrave. And why oval? Despite its title, others see this piece as depicting a swimmer, a man playing handball, some sporting event. More abstract is a small, deliciously fractured slice of glass, highly polished on its under surface, that rests or rocks upon a highly finished oval pedestal. Touch the slice and it wiggles for ten minutes, because it rests freely on one pinpoint of surface. Another tiny, upright block of glass is sandblasted on both sides to suggest in abstraction one of Picasso's giant, neo-classic romping women. My favorite among the pieces shown is a polyhedral handful of clear glass sandblasted to suggest, at least to me, the ever-changing geometry of an Atlantic wave. It will take some fortunate collector many years of looking and turning to store in his mind the frozen energy this piece contains.

Mostly too expensive and perhaps too abstract to be commercially successful, nevertheless, the transparent yet reflecting glass sculptures of young Christopher Reis open new avenues to sculptural enjoyment in man and nature's most inexhaustible material. The Patrick Lannan Foundation in Florida is already purchasing his work, and other perceptive collectors are bound to follow.