

American Craft

Aug/Sept
1988 \$5



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Front Cover: *Chapel*, 1988, steel superstructure, copper cladding, wooden undercarriage, fabric, found objects, 9'x9'x9', by Clark & Menefee, Charleston, South Carolina: W. G. Clark, Charles Menefee, Daniel Stuver, Robert Amerman, Jeffrey Greene, architects, and Judith Morrill Hanes, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, artist—included in "ARCHITECTURAL ART: Affirming the Design Relationship," at the American Craft Museum through August 31. See page 26. Photograph by Wolfgang Hoyt.

AMERICAN CRAFT® (ISSN-0194-8008) is published bimonthly by the American Craft Council, 40 W. 53rd St., New York, NY 10019. Telephone 212-956-3535. The opinions expressed in the magazine are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the American Craft Council. Membership rates: \$40 per year and higher, includes subscription to AMERICAN CRAFT (formerly *Craft Horizons*). Second class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing office. Copyright © 1988 by American Craft Council. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. Address unsolicited material to Editorial Department, AMERICAN CRAFT, 45 W. 45th St., New York, NY 10036. Material will be handled with care, but the magazine assumes no responsibility for it. The complete contents of each issue of AMERICAN CRAFT are indexed in the Art Index and Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature. Book reviews published in AMERICAN CRAFT are indexed in Book Review Index. Microfilm edition is available from University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Microfiche edition is available from Bell and Howell, Periodical Department, Old Mansfield Rd., Wooster, OH 44691. For change of address, give old address as well as new with zip code, allow six weeks for change to become effective. Address all subscription correspondence to: American Craft Council, P.O. Box 1308-CL, Fort Lee, NJ 07024. National newsstand distribution: Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 250 W. 55th St., New York, NY 10019. Postmaster: Send address changes to AMERICAN CRAFT, 40 W. 53rd St., New York, NY 10019.

The quest for ever greater size motivating much contemporary glass work is changing our perception of *pâte de verre* as a rare material subject to technical difficulties that have, except for the work of Henry Cros, confined its use to small decorative motifs and naturalistic sculptures.

Pâte de Verre: The French Connection

BY PAUL HOLLISTER

If the modern French term *pâte de verre* sounds more interesting than “glass paste”—its literal translation—the difference lies in the active role of French craftsmen and artists in inventing, or reinventing, this subtle form of glass during the Art Nouveau and Art Deco periods. Writers delight in calling modern adaptations of ancient techniques revivals, but the similarities often cited between modern vessels and sculptures in *pâte de verre* and ancient glassy materials that were molded into amulets, scarabs, seals and gems are problematical.

In the broadest sense, *pâte de verre* refers to crushed or powdered glass, usually colored by metallic oxides, mixed into a thick paste with a binding agent such as sodium silicate dissolved in water. The mixture is introduced (brushed or packed) into a mold of refractory material (produced from prior plaster and wax models and molds) and fired until fused. After annealing, the mold is broken away. The result is a glass that may resemble ceramic, alabaster, marble, stone, or even other glasses—particularly the deceptive blown glass of Emile Gallé and his followers. The surface is often matte, but may show that wet translucence left on sand by retreating waves. Above all, *pâte de verre* has a dense texture that asks to be touched.

The Manufacture Nationale de Sèvres, the famous porcelain factory outside Paris, was the setting from which *pâte de verre* emerged in the late 19th century after long experimentation by several artists. All *pâte de verre* of this period is signed.

Henry Isadore César Cros (1840-1907) came from a family gifted in academic and scientific pursuits. Insatiable curiosity led Cros to work in such diverse materials as oil paint, terracotta, marble, plaster, bronze, alabaster and wax. From 1861 until his death, he exhibited at the Salon in one medium or another. Latin and Greek texts put him in touch with ancient and medieval methods of painting statues, even to flesh tones; and from 1870, Cros experimented at Sèvres with bas-reliefs in encaustic, a process in which paint is mixed with melted beeswax. In 1884, in collaboration with Charles Henry, librarian at the Sorbonne, Cros published *Encaustic and Other Methods in Ancient Painting—History and Technique*.

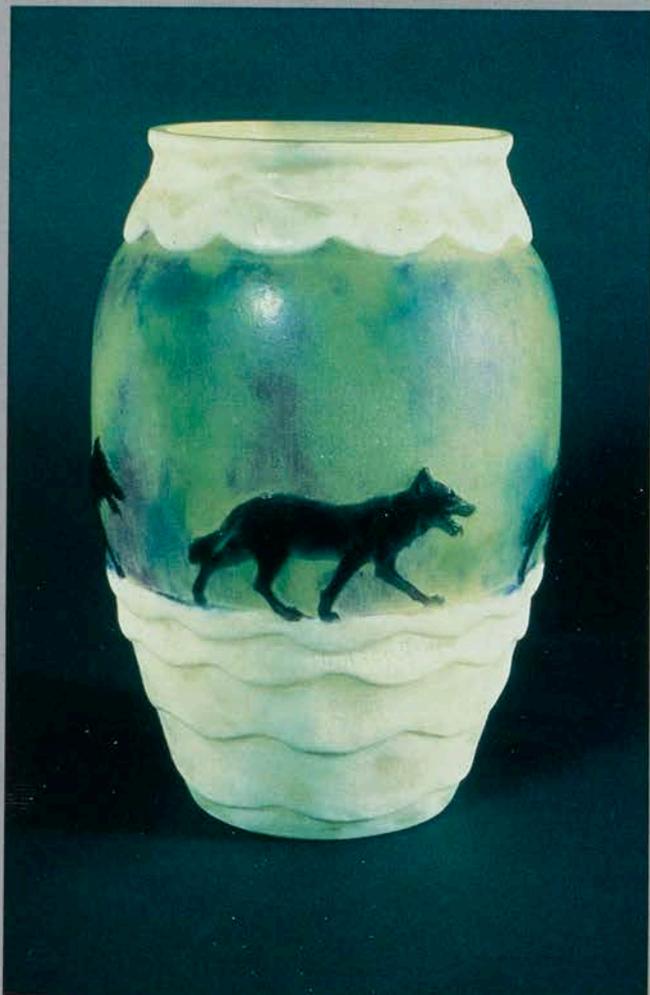
But Cros wanted a material that could combine the durability of marble with the subtlety of color he had found in softly tinted wax, and the material that made colored sculpture possible was *pâte de verre*. Cros's first small (under three inches) *pâte de verre* medallions appeared in 1883. As he assimilated ancient techniques, he adapted mythological and allegorical subjects to his own aesthetic in bas-reliefs of increasing size. A 10-inch bas-relief of 1888, titled *La Verrerie Antique* (ancient glass), depicts the nude torso of a woman holding the famous first-century *Portland Vase*. His portrait reliefs range up to 18 inches high. In 1891, at government expense, Cros was given a studio at Sèvres, with a kiln to enable him to work on ever larger pieces, some of which had to be cast in sections. Among these reliefs are *The Story of Water* and *The Story of Fire*, in the Luxembourg Museum and the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, respectively. His superb *Apotheosis of Victor Hugo*, in the Paris museum devoted to the author, is eight feet wide.

As might be expected of an innovator, Cros was secretive about his techniques, although archival material has revealed his speculations about the ancient glass techniques that produced the *Portland Vase* and murrhine cups. Cros is said to have fired his pieces only to the point of fusion, to prevent the colors from running together. His pioneering larger work shows its technical difficulties in air-bubbly surfaces and noticeable cracks that internal copper wires could not prevent. Some of his rare portrait busts appear to suffer the effects of crude plastic surgery where molds were joined. Nevertheless, the figures in Cros's best reliefs have a rugged simplicity about them, a solidly articulated form and gesture that one associates with archaic Greek sculpture. On the death of Cros, Rodin wrote: “His sculpture has that serenity which belongs to Greek art; that is, I think, the most beautiful eulogy one can make for an artist.”

Henry Cros's son, Jean, later completed a commissioned chimney piece begun by his father, and, reusing his molds, produced a series of *pâte de verre* landscape panels and additional designs by Rodin and Bourdelle.

The porcelain manufactory at Sèvres was the training ground for other important *pâte de verre* artists. Albert Dammouse (1848-1926), the son of a decorator of Sèvres por-

Works by four French masters of *pâte de verre*. CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *Loie Fuller*, 1912, 7" high, by François Emile Décorchement, collection of Chrysler Museum; *Fish*, ca. 1900, 10" high, by Georges Despret, collection of Corning Museum of Glass; *Girl's Head*, ca. 1920, 8½" high, by Amalric Walter, collection of Chrysler Museum; vase with four stalking wolves on snow, ca. 1925, 9½" high, by Gabriel Argy-Rousseau, collection of Chrysler Museum.



celain, was a great ceramist in his own right, who is said to have apprenticed as a youth with Marc-Louis Solon, the developer of *pâte-sur-pâte* porcelain relief painting. In 1897 Dammouse turned to *pâte de verre*, creating thin, opaque vessels of a mixture of soft porcelain paste that required two firings in a refractory mold to secure the *cloisonné*-type decorations.

In the Salon of 1898, Dammouse exhibited cups, bowls and goblets decorated in relief with patterns of plants, seaweeds and shells. The work combined the look of Art Nouveau with *Japonisme* and was an instant success. Dammouse also made objects in the lovely *pâte d'émail* (enamel paste, half-ceramic, half-glass), which was shaped and fired without external support. He often applied small, wistful floral decorations of *pâte d'émail* to *pâte de verre* pieces. Much of Dammouse's work has a membrane-thin, fragile look; his colors are subtle and subdued. As his success continued, he gradually abandoned ceramics for *pâte de verre*. All his work is signed A. DAMMOUSE in capital letters forming a circle around an S for Sèvres.

While a student at the Ecole de Céramique de Sèvres, Amalric Walter (1859-1942)* had produced *pâte de verre* in collaboration with Gabriel Lévy. Upon graduation in 1906, Walter signed a contract to work for Antonin Daum's Verrerie de Nancy (as it was called until World War II) to experiment in *pâte de verre*. There Walter made the glass castings in his workshop, both from his own designs and from models made for him by Daum's chief designer, Henri Bergé.

Walter's work for Daum included small but heavy sculptural objects that could not be achieved by blowing, such as thick cups and vases, bookends and especially ashtrays, in a popular smoking era. The ashtrays feature sculpted female nudes and such creatures as fish, crabs, frogs, lizards, chameleons, bats, mice and newts, characteristically perched on leaves or riding the crest of a wave. Molds for these workshop productions were used only once; the glass paste was mixed with an adhesive that enabled a piece to be worked by hand after removal from the mold and then baked freestanding. Walter also cast a figure of the dancer Loïe Fuller, after a model by Victor Prouvé, and copies of Tanagra figures adapted from Greek terra-cotta sculptures.

Before 1910 Walter made translucent *pâte de verre* windows depicting brooding landscapes with sunsets and rivers seen in eerie light. In 1919 he left Daum and set up his own studio, employing five assistants, where he produced *pâte de verre* after models by several artists, including Bergé. Walter made both monochrome and polychrome pieces in yellows, browns, blues, bright greens and reds, often with a matte surface. His work generally has a heavy, fully sculpted look.

At the age of 22, in 1884, Georges Despret (1862-1952) was named director of Glace de Boussois, a mirror and plate-glass manufacturing firm in northern France founded by his uncle. Though he was in practical terms an industrialist with an engineering background, Despret nevertheless spent nine years, beginning in 1890, searching for a translucent material that would be both hard and malleable. He found it in *pâte de verre*.

For the Paris Exposition of 1900, Despret turned out his first pieces: small bowls, naturally shaped and lightly colored in a heavy *pâte de verre*. Since he was not an artist,

the models were sculpted by others. Working with an artistic adviser, Géo Nicolet, Despret, like Walter, reproduced Tanagra statuettes and eventually cast from models by several French sculptors. His fish, adapted from a model by Yvonne Serruys, writhes up from a rock as if seeking another element, its color flowing from blue-lilac to ivory to flesh. Striving for realism, Despret is said to have covered a live frog with *pâte de verre* and fired it in a kiln. Like others of the time, Despret decorated calyx-cups, vases and jewel boxes with insects and sea creatures; but he also produced bowls of classic simplicity by the lost-wax process, in which flames of color flow like molten lava. These convey an abstraction transitional between Arts Nouveau and Deco. The name Despret appears in gold or blue, occasionally with a monogram or number. Despret's factory and studio were destroyed in World War I but reopened afterward, closing finally in 1937.

Henry Cros wanted a material that combined the durability of marble with the subtlety of color he found in softly tinted wax.

François Emile Décorchement (1880-1971) carried *pâte de verre* stage by stage through nearly 60 years, from the best Art Nouveau style to the most typical Art Deco. A painter and ceramist in a family of artists, Décorchement graduated from the Ecole des Arts Décoratifs in 1900. He began making glass to his own formula and experimenting, around 1902, with an opaque *pâte d'émail*. A small, thin-walled *pâte d'émail* vessel of 1906 could pass for ceramic. The bowl is wrapped in seaweed, with three seaweed handles outstanding.

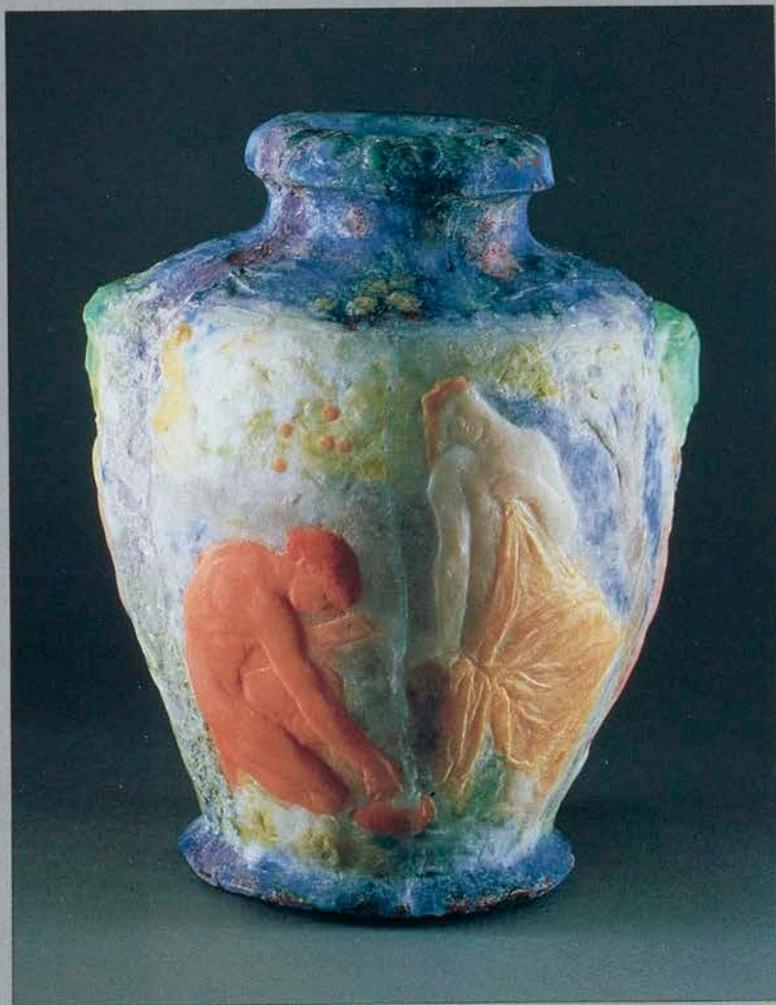
Décorchement made everything from scratch: the colorless glass to which he added metallic oxides, the crucibles in which he fused the glass before crushing it, the fireclay molds in which he carved the *intaglio* design, the slip which gave cohesion to the powdered glass. An oil-fired kiln enabled him to control firing. His early pieces were fired twice—once at a low temperature, after which the piece was brushed with metallic oxides, and again at a high temperature. This was followed by up to five days of annealing to prevent breakage. Even so, his success rate was low.

By 1908 Décorchement had mastered the lost-wax process, firing work at a high temperature and annealing it for eight days. After removal from the mold, a piece was finished to a surface like polished jade. His new, translucent *pâte de verre* was fused into thick-walled vessels clothed in aquatic and plant designs and masks typical of the period, but with the difference that sculpted motifs covered the entire outer surface, while stronger colors were diffused through the glass, independent of the motif. Décorchement's work was interrupted by World War I but was resumed in 1919.

In the early 1920s, his *pâte de verre* became more tightly designed, with bands of precise vertical, horizontal and all-over decoration clinging to the surface of larger, thick-walled vessels streaked with colors. One might be looking at Oriental ceramics. By the time of the landmark 1925 Paris Exposition, where his glass was exhibited in Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann's pavilion, *Hôtel d'un Collectionneur*, Décorchement had recast his bowl forms and stylized his floral motifs

*The spelling of Walter's first name varies with sources consulted. *Amalric* appears in a book and a catalog by Daum; *Almaric* is used by curator Yvonne Brunhammer of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris; Newman's *Illustrated Dictionary of Glass* spells it *Alméric*.

Pâte de verre by the French pioneer Henry Cros. RIGHT AND BELOW: *Portrait of Caroline Hill*, ca. 1900, relief, 12" high, collection of Corning Museum of Glass; *Vase*, ca. 1895-1900, 9" high, collection of Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.



to fit the bold, blocky preoccupations of Art Deco. Handles in the shape of chameleons and caryatids gave way to vestigial stumps; colors were reduced.

From 1933 until World War II, Décorchement's forms tended toward simplicity: large, polished geometric facets and minimal decoration. These pieces rivaled the massive, acid-etched vases then being featured by Daum. At the same time, for the Church of Saint-Odile in Paris, Décorchement turned to "stained glass" windows in pâte de verre—medieval in feeling but with figures from his own time and his own family. After 1945 he continued to produce bold, flat-faceted vases until his death in 1971. Décorchement's name is stamped on his work in a horseshoe shape, together with a series of letters and numbers in an elaborate dating system.

Like Décorchement, Gabriel Argy-Rousseau (1885-1953) pursued a range of styles, sometimes reverting to his earlier motifs. He was often innovative in compositions and generally pleasing in his use of color. Argy-Rousseau graduated from that springboard, the Ecole de Céramique de Sèvres in 1906, the same year as Walter, and assumed direction of a ceramic research laboratory.

In 1914 Argy-Rousseau exhibited his first pâte de verre in the Salon des Artistes Français and gained immediate attention. Seven years later he helped found the private company (société anonyme) Les Pâtes de Verre d'Argy-Rousseau, in which a number of decorators and workers fabricated his designs. The company shut down in 1931 owing to the Depression. Though his own output decreased sharply, he continued to exhibit in salons and galleries until 1952.

Argy-Rousseau produced vases, boxes, trays, perfume bottles, inkwells, paperweights, bookends, lamps and figures. While some of his early work is easy to confuse with that of Décorchement, by 1922 he had developed his own clipped Deco style—floral patterns fitting into overall geometric designs framed in bands—which became more monochromatic. The opening of King Tutankhamun's Tomb in that year inspired him to do "Egyptian Style" vases. Argy-Rousseau was a juror of glass in the 1925 Paris Exposition, showing his own work *hors-concours*. By 1927 he was also using pâte de cristal, a more transparent, heavier glass, in which he produced female nudes in collaboration with the sculptor H. Bouraine.

A manuscript by Argy-Rousseau describes in minute detail his painstaking, many-step procedure for pâte de verre. Briefly, it involved making a one-part final mold slightly larger than the preparatory piece-models and piece-molds. Into this the latest piece-model is placed upside down within a cylinder of linoleum, the cylinder filled with a pâte de verre mixture of chalk, feldspar, kaolin, sand and boric acid that had previously been brought to a temperature of 1,250 degrees centigrade (2,282 degrees Fahrenheit), plunged into water, and pulverized. After the addition of metallic oxides and water, the mold with its mixture was heated in a muffle kiln for 7½ hours and cooled slowly for 15 hours before being removed. The cast result was then brushed, dried, cleaned with hydrofluoric acid, polished energetically with wooden wheels and ground sand, and brushed once again. This was the program for only the simplest of objects. Pâte de verre pieces with handles were still more complicated.

Gabriel Argy-Rousseau and François Décorchement were the last of the French pâte de verre pioneers.

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In America in the 1920s and 30s, the great glass man Frederick Carder (1863-1963)—who had studied French work at the Paris Expositions of 1900 and 1925—created his own pâte de verre in ceramic molds by the lost-wax process, mixing in whatever colored cullet was available in a procedure as casual as Argy-Rousseau's was meticulous. But Carder was familiar with glass chemistry and all glass techniques, and he produced castings in a variety of innovative forms, from Diatreta (cage cups) to large sculpture and architectural glass. Carder's assistant, Paul V. Gardner, also produced a few pâte de verre plaques.

In Japan, research in pâte de verre began in the early 1930s at the Iwata Glass Company, following a visit to France by factory workers. Though Iwata manufactured lighting and signal equipment, in 1936 it sponsored a three-man exhibition of pâte de verre. One of the exhibitors was the versatile Sotiochi Koshiba (1901-1973), who produced pâte de verre in a mixture of styles, from Art Nouveau pendants, sash-clips and buckles to Art Deco incense burners, tea bowls, covered jars and a thick-walled vase that could pass for a Décorchement.

In 1984 the First Japan Pâte de Verre Competition was sponsored by the Tokyo Glass Art Institute. Done in a broad range of cast and slumped forms, the entries showed the unmistakable influence of international studio glass, though the filtered colors glowed and fluctuated with Oriental subtlety. Also in 1984, Toshio Yoshimizu executed a spectacular pâte de verre painting, measuring 28 by 40 inches.

From 1968 through the 70s in France, Jacques Daum of Cristallerie Daum updated pâte de verre, based on designs by Salvador Dali and several other artists. M. Legendre's *Warrior* of 1969 could be a cityscape, while R. Couturier's *He and She* suggests the figures of Giacometti.

The Leperlier brothers, Etienne (born 1952) and Antoine (born 1953), have been collaborating in pâte de verre since 1979, perfecting coloring techniques they learned in their teens from their grandfather, François Décorchement. Both produce vases in Deco and post-Deco forms by the lost-wax method; a large pyramidal sculpture by Antoine is kin to similar sculpture in clear crystal by the Steuben designer Peter Aldridge.

Other French workers in pâte de verre today include Raymond Martinez, who creates impressive 26-inch monoliths with a high-rise look; Michel Murlot and Lyane Allibert, who collaborate on acid-frosted architectural abstractions; and Cristallerie Daum, which continues to make pâte de verre and pâte de cristal from a variety of designers, including the American glass artist Dan Dailey.

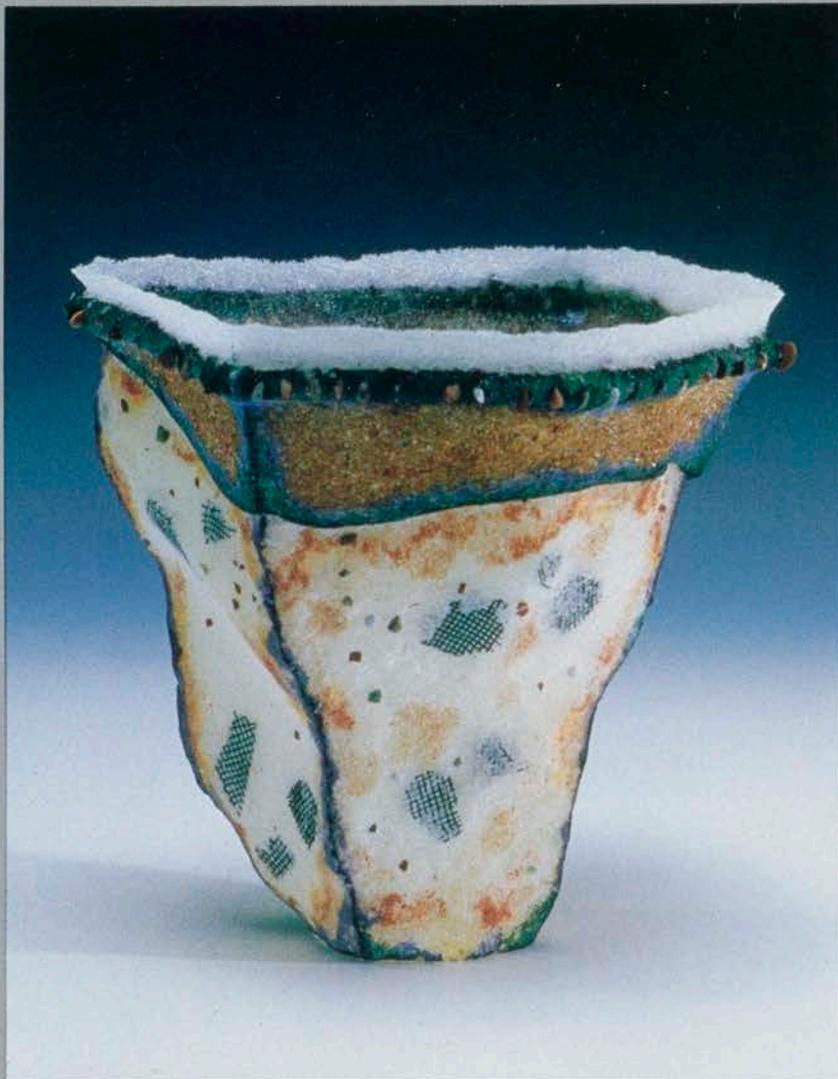
Outstanding among English makers of pâte de verre is Diana Hobson, whose small, translucently thin, gently rumpled bowls seem woven of color-checked fabric. Irregular shapes set them apart from other pâte de verre, while their colored designs echo Roman millefiori patella cups.

Here at home, Doug Anderson and Karla Trinkley have handled this special glass in distinct and unusual ways. Like the great French 16th-century ceramist Bernard Palissy, Anderson casts directly from nature, impressing such diverse objects as fish, feathers, pliers, bananas, corn on the cob, a horsefly, acorns, an envelope and a toy automobile into sand-plaster molds. Their negative imprints then cast positive in wax, and these in turn cast negative in the final refractory piece-mold into which colored lead glass pastes and crushed glass are packed. After kiln firing at low temperature, a piece is annealed for several days. Anderson's work is realistic down to the tiniest veins on a leaf, but subtle muted coloring



Ride the Wave, 1987,
cast pâte de verre,
3"x6"x7", by Doug Anderson,
United States.

RIGHT: Vase, 1987, pâte de verre, approximately 6" high, by Diana Hobson, England. BELOW LEFT AND RIGHT: *Millerosetto*, 1987, pâte de verre, approximately 10" high, by Liz Marx, United States; *Untitled*, 1987, pâte de verre, mixed media, 42"x38"x6", by Rachel Berwick, United States.



and unexpected juxtapositions of objects related to puns help moderate a literalness that was never a problem with French *pâte de verre* flora and fauna, which were sculpted. In 1985 Anderson received the Rakow Commission of the Corning Museum of Glass for a new work in glass. He created *Finders Creepers*, a 30½-inch slice of woodland floor complete with ivy, pinecones, vines and a snake. The work impresses by its size—a bulldozer load of turf—not by its composition.

Trinkley, whose increasingly large pieces resemble abandoned machinery parts or ritual vessels, is another original. Her work is cast in one piece with an inner, vessel-shaped core and an outer network design like an Art Deco radiator grill or a Middle Eastern openwork window. The confectionary colors and the dry, crumbly-looking *pâte de verre* are misleading; the vessels are rough and hard to the touch, but they glow in congenial lighting.

In 1987 the neon artist Paul Seide laminated a number of abstract landscapes in *pâte de verre* that transcribe to glass the richness of impressionist color. Other studio glass artists have recently been drawn to *pâte de verre* as a casting technique; Rachel Berwick, for example, has made a large mixed-media wall sculpture incorporating translucent *pâte de verre* flames.

The quest for ever greater size motivating much contemporary glass work is changing our perception of *pâte de verre* as a rare material subject to technical difficulties that have, except for the work of Henry Cros, confined its use to small decorative motifs and naturalistic sculptures. A new awareness of this mysterious and enticing century-old material is evident in the current bold experimentation with its potential, which is the way arts develop. ■

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Evora, 1988, cast *pâte de verre*, concrete, glass, plaster, paint, 44½"x15"x5", by Karla Trinkley, United States.