

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE:
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for
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glass

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COVER

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glass quarterly guide

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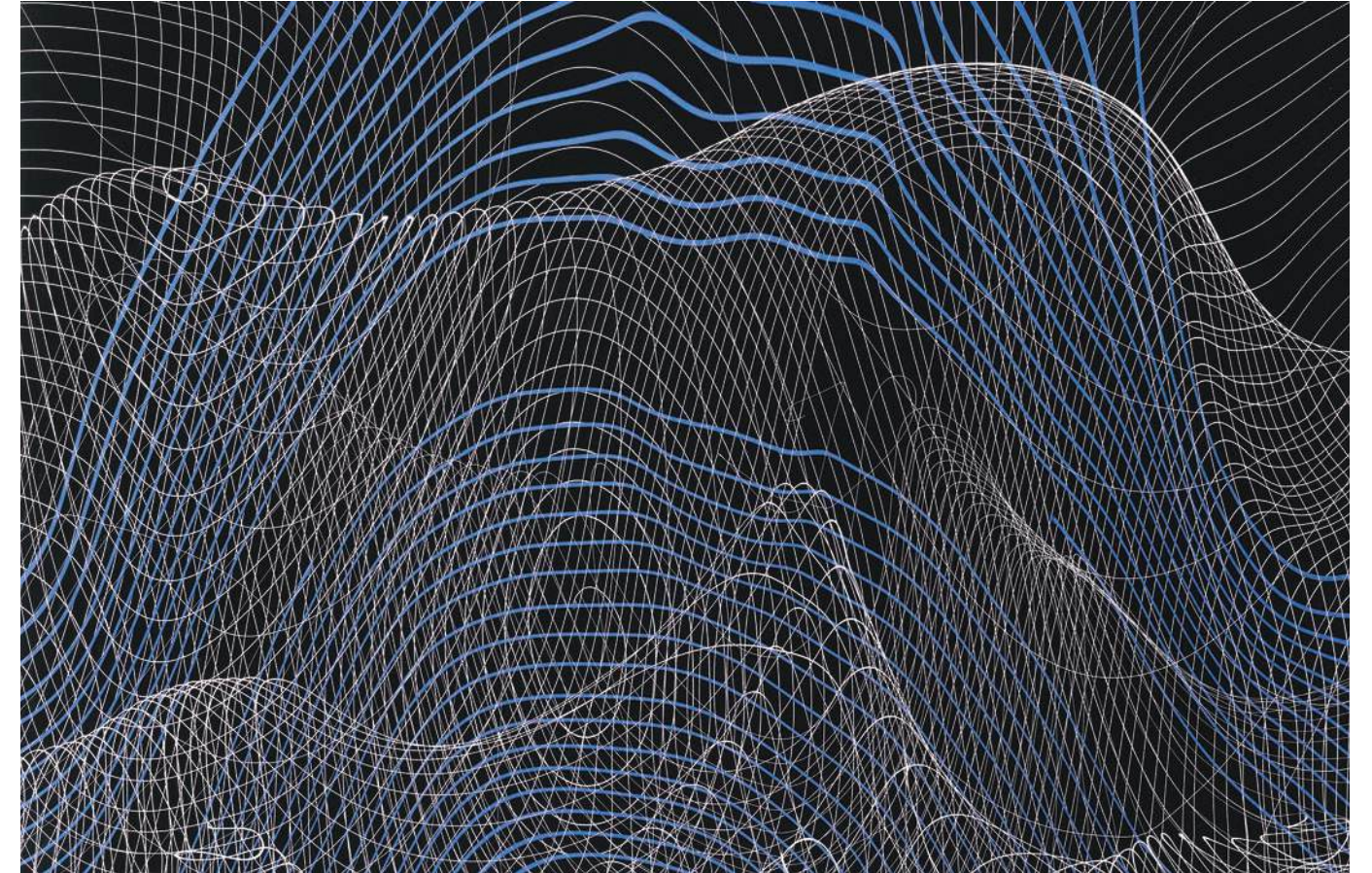


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reviews



Cosmic Waves, 2023. Blown and slumped glass. H 30, W 21, D 1 in.
PHOTO: RUSSELL JOHNSON. COURTESY: THE ARTIST

Nancy Callan

"FORCES AT PLAY"
MUSEUM OF GLASS
TACOMA, WASHINGTON
OCTOBER 9, 2024 - SEPTEMBER 1, 2025

Nancy Callan's glass panels and sculptures are so playful and mesmerizing that it's easy to forget how technically challenging and groundbreaking they are. For decades, Callan has fused tradition and innovation with humor, intellect, and references galore, forging a path for herself as an LGBTQ woman in a male-dominated field. Through her 19 years of working with maestro Lino Tagliapietra, Callan became an expert in traditional Venetian glassblowing techniques, which she now pushes forward through formal experimentation and a postmodern sensibility.

Callan's first major museum survey—at the Museum of Glass in Tacoma, Washington—puts dozens of the finest examples of her work on display in all of their layered, colorful glory. (Disclosure: I contributed an essay for the exhibition catalogue.) Organized into three overlapping themes rather than following a neat chronology, "Nancy Callan: Forces at Play" isn't your typical retrospective. But if you enter through the "Pop Art and Graphics" section (and I suggest you do), you'll get a sample of early works including the delectable "Pin Up Girls" from the early 2000s. These bubblegum-pink bottles feature silhouettes of nude women, a wry comment on the way the female form has often appeared in studio settings. Also in this section is a stunning display of three vibrantly colored "Stingers" against a vivid

yellow wall; the bulbous forms are topped with conical bee-stingers that Callan extended to impossible points. Each one is inspired by a comic book hero, a testament to Callan's range of interests, from Mystique to the mysteries of string theory.

After moving through this riot of joyful color and pop culture allusions, the next section, "Pattern and Textiles," offers a quieter experience of nuanced pattern in a more muted palette. Soft pinks and greens cozy up to grays, blacks, and whites in these panels and sculptures, many of which were inspired by Callan's deep interest in fashion. The showstopper in this section is a wall-length installation of 19 blown and slumped panels that infinitely expand the possibilities of cane. The title, *Comme les Filles*, is a gender-swapped reference to the fashion company

Comme des Garçons, founded by the iconoclastic designer Rei Kawakubo, whose interest in opposing forces, forms, and patterns has been a major source of inspiration for Callan.

Bridging the section on pattern with the final theme of nature is another wall-length installation that suggests a promising new direction for Callan. It would be enough to simply display *Cosmic Waves*, a stunning dark panel with undulating white and blue lines that conjure up complex soundwaves or the digital mapping of terrain. But Callan has gone further to integrate the wall beyond the panel, filling it with hand-drawn swoops and parallel lines in graphite, evoking a field of energy and the conceptual moves of Sol LeWitt.

The last section, “Nature and the Wonders of the Universe,” features another recent glass panel installation, this time in blacks and silvers and practically oozing with texture. Titled *Shadow Realm*, each panel was created out of Callan’s innovative slumping process, which allows remarkable surface treatments, from slick undulations to bubbly knobs. Altogether, the installation evokes primordial landscapes or intracellular planes, like peering at a series of slides under a microscope.

Scattered in front of the wall installation are additional works from 2023, including elegant “Spires” that evoke conical trees and “Space Rocks,” which are the latest iteration of Callan’s “Orbs” series. Callan creates these lustrous, translucent spheres with a silvered, reducing black murrine, resulting in fluid, organic circles that seem to float around each object, much like the mesmerizing movement of a lava lamp.

Callan’s knack for creating and then reinventing her own series is on full display throughout the exhibition. Those familiar with Callan’s work will be gratified to see her famous forms: Droplets, Stingers, Clouds, and Winkles (named after Rip Van Winkle’s cap), to name just a few. And interspersed among these standout works are contextualizing elements that add background and texture. Bespoke wallpaper with samples from

Callan’s toy collection shows some sources of inspiration. QR codes link to process videos. And a vitrine is packed with Callan’s sketchbooks, photos, and material samples.

Both thematic and slightly chronological, the exhibition’s organizational philosophy aligns with the artist’s “both/and” approach: her work is both deeply respectful of craft and irreverently diverse in subject matter. At times winkingly high-spirited and then profoundly insightful, Callan’s art invites us to look, enjoy, and be astounded by the diversity of the universe and our experiences within it.

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Liza Lou

“PAINTING”
LEHMANN MAUPIN GALLERY
NEW YORK CITY
SEPTEMBER 5-OCTOBER 12, 2024

“It really blew my mind when I saw images of a blob of paint under a microscope and it looked exactly like a cluster of beads,” Liza Lou writes in her artist statement for her recent New York exhibition. Using glass beads like the Abstract Expressionists used paint—straight out of the tube, raw, with thick strands of primary color slashing this way and that—Lou challenges the male-centric, distinctly American art movement by her use of materials associated with domestic femininity.

For an artist dedicated to the glass bead, it is notable that Lou doesn’t mention the

material at all in the title of the exhibition, which is simply “Painting.” What better way to make the point that it’s not the media but the application of said medium, and the knowledge of what came before, that matters? To those who long to be seen as full-fledged artists yet focus on technical proficiency rather than the wider history of the art field, take note.

Liza Lou is Duchampian in knowing the question is more important than the answer. Rattling the cages of the largely male painters of the mid-20th century—think poster boys Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning—Lou has reclaimed and feminized an entire movement using only glass beads, thread, and needle. While it is tempting to read Lou’s beaded passages as a feminization of a pictorial process, the artist’s glass-bead “strokes” recall not only the first, male-dominated wave, but also the female practitioners of second-generation Expressionism, the Action Painters such as Joan Mitchell, whose fragmented compositions find echo in Lou’s *Jongleur* and the similar *Idyl* (all works 2024).

The outcome is glorious, the transitional works included. In the leaping point of *Falling Action*, for example, we get a lone nod of acknowledgement, via incorporated horizontal and vertical lines, of the Modernist’s grid. Two other works (the smallest on exhibition), *Septet* and *Ode*, leave not a square inch of the support uncovered; beads fill an evenly dispersed field in an impasto-esque and edge-to-edge application, to entirely obscure the ground.

The clumped beads included in the majority of the works are made possible by the use of a mastic. These passages mimic brushstrokes on the otherwise blank canvas—where the artist sheds a two-dimensional skin, this volume achieving kinship with the shape, à la the tubular mass of coil-built pots. We feel the hand at play in wadded material. We sense the hand’s presence, not at a tool’s distance from Liza Lou’s creations, but the hand as implement itself. It is fecal; it is joyous and celebratory. It is life. To borrow a descriptive adjective from another of the

senses—it is visually pungent. Intention is everything, and as every good Duchampian is well-aware, play is a necessary ingredient to success. It is the wolf in sheep’s clothing that is most successful in the hunt, the beast best fed.

And in an amped-up pursuit of the glamorization of the period, Lou’s fetishistic use of the bead is an avenue, a manifestation, a reverence: if irrational, also devotional. In the excessive is a religiosity. In Liza Lou’s case, however, it is free of dogma—and allows, even insists, that one might continue to build on a given pre-practice. And so, as regards studio glass, Liza Lou looks not to rote repetition in the pursuit of perfection, but an expressive freedom built upon the ruins of a never-stagnant precedence. Lou is based instead in advancement through spontaneous and unfettered reaction to a philosophical and past practice.

In her artist statement, Lou looks beyond art history and into the nature of life, itself, writing in her artist statement “that’s what’s so essential about the material—when you get down to it, everything is a bead, a cell, an atom.”

Contributing editor JOHN DRURY is a New York City-based artist, author, independent curator, and instructor.

Lino Tagliapietra

“MAESTRO, MENTORE”
TRAVER GALLERY
SEATTLE
AUGUST 1-31, 2024

With Lino Tagliapietra’s work on permanent display at his own gallery in Seattle, Traver Gallery had to find a novel way to exhibit this legendary artist who has shown dozens of times at this outpost of glass on the Northwest Coast in the 1990s and 2000s. A clever concept informs this show, so aptly titled “Master, Mentor” in Italian. Alongside the maestro’s works are works by five other glass artists, handpicked by Lino himself, who schooled these

next-generation experts in his exacting methods and techniques. What makes the show especially interesting is that the curatorial roles were flipped for Lino’s own works, with each of his disciples choosing one of their teacher’s works for the exhibition. The experience of the exhibited works is disparate in coloration and sensibility but all intertwined, with as much undulation and intermingling in the lives and careers of the individual artists as in their tours de force of glass.

Lino’s recent *Forcola* (2024) served as backdrop to this insightful overview, a master class in itself of technical process, both hot and cold, the work sure to instruct for generations to come. A breathtaking talent garnered through the hard work of assistantship, innate talent, and personal drive, Nancy Callan offered *Kitty Pride Stinger* (2023). Callan, who was simultaneously enjoying a solo show at the Museum of Glass in Tacoma (see p. 55), credits Lino with opening her eyes to the graphic effect of wide bands of color. The power of this purposeful visual and chromatic asymmetry is intensified by those venturing to Tacoma to marvel at her stunning trio of Stingers.

It was Dave Walters who did the heavy lifting for Lino. It is surprising, then, that he steers clear of anything resembling the master’s work. His *Race to the Bottom* (2021) is the odd man out here, void of only decorative purpose or even discernable Italiana. Walters looks to his chosen medium as a sculptural avenue to a personal political stance, and his contribution is a sharp look at today’s government.

John Kiley and Dante Marioni take what they learned at the knee of the master, benchside, to the extreme. Dante puts to use the ornamentation that he has flawlessly perfected, first at the insistence of Lino, to fresh personal means. Dante credits Lino with pushing him to explore the *reticello* technique of patterning, which has become a mainstay in his current working practice. On exhibit is a stunning and sexy-sleek pitcher in blue with black lip and handle, made this year. At nearly three feet tall, it is a mesmerizing feat of



Liza Lou, *Denouement*, 2024. Glass beads and oil paint on stretched canvas with artist’s frame. H 50, W 51 in.
PHOTO: JOSHUA WHITE
COURTESY: LEHMANN MAUPIN GALLERY, NEW YORK