



Klaus Moje
Untitled (Green field)
 2002
 mosaic glass, fused, kiln formed, wheel carved
 53 x 53 x 7.5 cm

It is surprising how many places contain records of your work and thoughts.

You are right, but sometimes unexpected things show up.

I am interested in talking about your evolution from the object to those very large wall pieces I saw in your recent retrospective at the Museum of Art and Design in New York.

That exhibition was an indicator of what I always did. I work from the plane. I don't work from the form. If you do a bowl or vessel, that form is what you dominantly work from, but the form has always been a secondary step in my work. I work on the plane and I have always worked on the plane and I add the form to that. I add volume just for presentation.

It is interesting that this has only been seen lately. This has been by those whose business it is to analyse and since they have done that, I admit to it. As Bruce Guenther, the curator of Contemporary Art at Portland Art Museum, wrote in a catalogue about the relationship of my work to fine art, and more so in a lecture recently delivered at SOFA Santa Fe [*Klaus Moje: Artist Innovator*, July 10, 2010].

You can draw a clear line when I reveal a theme like the *Ballet Russe*. This is not just ballet; it is an art movement through Russian Constructivists to the Expressionists. Art movements came together to display their art in stage design, costume design and in movement. When you look at ballet you have a clear leaning towards geometry. Look at the choreography. All these ideas are presented specifically in the Ballet Russe with its enormous input of colour, movement and presence. In a much smaller sense this is what I apply to my work.

I'm a solo worker. I am not a group worker. So this whole idea has a different impact for me.

I always understood your concern to be with the object, but you talk like a painter.

I do. The obvious thing I presented was the object – up to a point when I started to occupy the wall. In '93 I had the first pieces on the wall, but 1996 was a break though for me. That is when I started to do this with confidence. I did this because I thought I could compete with any good painting (laughs).

But using a material you would not expect to 'paint' with.

There is a very intelligent interview [Klaus Moje ABC Canberra Radio National 21/12/09] that Nigel Lendon (ANU) conducted. For him there is certainly a discrepancy in seeing me as a painter. It is not painting. It is still glass, but it is related. Many painters have used different materials for their work. They have found many solutions over the years that lean on those materials. Where in most cases painters used collage, or found object, it may be that in my case there is a high level of sophistication in the use of the material.

But there is rigidity in the material.

I call that its 'high resistance' (laughs). It is not a brushstroke. I don't produce brushstrokes and I don't try to imitate them, but I create movement. This is what I can do because of my knowledge of the material.

You can do this because of your developed skill, but that skill does not stand at the front of the work. It is not an exhibition of skill.

That is right. It is next to the imagination. I think I show the balance between skill and imagination, because who knows how much further I would go if my skills were more complete. Certainly those skills have accumulated over a lifetime.

Some of your wall pieces are enormous in scale. Why?

I see it as going into a higher dimension. It is like an explosion, like a burst. In a small piece it ends like that [holds fist tightly], with a large piece it can go out and over [gestures out from his chest], you can set dramatic points within the larger scale.

Your gesture needs to be more expansive?

You saw when you look at these bursts in those large pieces, but there was also a large green piece that was very contained. It was just built on line. There is always this play for me between the geometry, the very static and then the explosion that breaks any dimension.

For the recording you are moving your hands – from the closed clenched fist close to your chest and moving out as if it is exploding out of you. This is about gesture?

Yes. These are also the works that you are driven to do. This is possibly also the difference when you go into larger work. You have to apply a different passion. The work is grabbing you, where as in other smaller work you take the gesture and bring it down.

The object does this. Like function, it binds.

Exactly

But that can be a sophisticated and elegant control.

That is very true.

Once you have finished the work and released it?

It is a wonderful thing that I have never collected my own work. This is not intentional. I have no reason to collect my own work, because when I have done a piece, it is out. It is wonderful if it is doing a new job and picking up attention for the next work, but its importance is that it is going out and I can do the next piece. This is not only in my mind, but also as a financial situation. The input into these large pieces is immense. (That is in comparison with a painting.) If I were careful in my use of materials I would end up with restrictions in the making, and I have never put any restrictions on myself.

You use whatever you need to use to do what you need to do.

Yes, even if it is irresponsible (laughs).

There is also the process. That again restricts free gesture.

That is true, but you have your moments. You take that moment that is there and you know exactly where you have to apply the bursts and where you have to restrict yourself in what you are doing – where you just have to be calm to get the results out.

There are stages where I can release the energy and there are stages where it is pure meditation. The technical side of grinding is an example where you have to have ease and you have to have time. You stay there for hours and hours and hours (laughs). It is meditation, but it can also be physical pain (laughs). Those things come together. You go through all these different stages when you are involved in these larger objects.

Why did you use the word 'meditation'?

Because people do not understand there are areas in the working process other than the creative ones. There are other areas that are exciting and although to someone they may look boring, they are not, even though they are not so action led. They have their place within the work and in the end I see in the work the different phases that were applied to come to the desired result.

You see evidence of those moments of meditation and moments of action – as a record of time?

Yes. It may be a very individual reaction to it, but for me it is a matter of substance to live through the different stages and accept the different stages. There is nothing there that is second rated.

You have that as a record of time in which you engaged the work?

Yes.

When you look back at you work in something like the Museum of Art and Design retrospective, what is your reaction?

As I said, I release my work the moment it is done and goes out. Many of the works that came together for this retrospective I had not seen for twenty, or thirty years. When confronted with them you ask yourself, "Where were you when you made this piece?" I have gone through phases in the development in my work, which started very humbly. These were purely experimental things at the beginning where I tried to establish the vocabulary in which I was working. It started off more or less with geometry where I could follow processes in the piece from the very beginning to the very last bit, because the rate of unsuccessful pieces was pretty high in the beginning. So you try to establish a vocabulary that you could follow to be successful.

Viewing it today (like Bruce Guenther does), viewing the same work that was for me experimental and just a steppingstone and seeing it as a work strongly related to the art movements of the time, that was new to me. It was only after it was spoken out did I see and appreciate it for myself.

Without realising it you were reflecting a culture.

Exactly. But it was also a culture that only grew up at that time. I started my studio in 1962. That was the same time as the birth of the [studio glass] movement in Toledo. I was not inclined then to do objects. That came later, but never mind, I stood within the movement – the relatively young reawakening of the craft movement after the war [WWII]. That was a very interesting time. In Germany we had those people from the Bauhaus. They became friends of mine. So you grow up in a mindscape (which is practically coming out of the Bauhaus) without really knowing you do. I became a very good friend of Lothar Schreyer, one of the Bauhaus masters who, typically, was also involved in the Bauhaus theatre and he was involved with Dada in poetry and certainly in painting. There was this whole rich soup and I was there and sometimes had my finger in it too (laughs).

You didn't see yourself as an object maker?

I didn't care whether I was seen as an object maker. I always declined the expression 'sculpture' and 'sculptor in glass'. I am not a sculptor. When I came to Australia the word skill was a four-letter word and everyone thought if you have the gesture that is enough. It was the same in the United States. I was seen as a pure technician then, but America has changed substantially. When I came to Pilchuck, I said what I can do is something that Lino (Tagliapietro) doesn't. He went into glass blowing and it was fully successful. At that point America changed over from appreciation of the Swedish glass blowing approach to Italian. This is skill development because they were quite comfortable with the heavy work of the Swedes, then the Italian makers came and that produced what I call the *Facon de Venise* in modern American glass. That is a term that refers to the glass styles applied by various countries. Czechoslovakia had the time of *Facon de Venise*. Germany had it. Scandinavia had it. England had it. It was when the appreciation of the Italian glass was so high that everyone wanted to make Italian glass. That is right now in the United States and partly here as well. This is raising the skill to a level that opens new fields. Nothing was there when I started at Pilchuck, but from then 'blowing' was supported and my work wasn't.

Wherever I went to teach glass I stood in front of students who wanted to know answers their teachers couldn't give them. I knew those answers, but the equipment wasn't right and you need basic equipment for doing basic things. When I came to Australia I came on the basis that I had free range in developing curricula and

developing a workshop and I started not with blowing, but with kiln forming and cold techniques.

Giving students the means to develop their own voice.

Exactly. You see now a whole mosaic of approaches out there. I am amazed how much further students of mine have gone. They have surpassed what I'm doing and in a wonderful way. There are many things that I dreamed to experiment with that are suddenly there, and this resulted in fantastic work. They have gone far passed my imagination. It is wonderful that I can say I was part of that.

The Canberra Glass Centre?

It is fantastic that we have the Canberra Centre and that we can build on it, but we must all be aware that this is an artist initiated situation. It is owned by artists and must be occupied by artists and driven by artists.

Were you ever bound by 'labels'?

It didn't matter. This whole issue of the craft/art debate has always been such nonsense for me. It is not relevant to what I am doing and possibly not relevant to what others were doing. I lived with it, but always smiled when it came up. If you want to classify that's OK, but you can also break through barriers with your work. If I wanted to do design work (which I haven't done for ages) then it is design work and that is a different kettle of fish. With my 'colour work' (I can only call it my 'colour work'), it doesn't matter for me, although the education I promoted was skill driven, but it was for a very good reason.

I think kitsch is more of an issue for glass.

(Laughs) I have always had a spot in my heart for kitsch, but not when it takes itself seriously.

Is this current exhibition (Dance of Colours Klaus Moje at Sabbia) all recent work?

Yes. There is a component of collaborative work, which I have pursued for quite a while with the 'Rollups' and the recent 'Wrap' piece. This fabulous thing evolved out of the *Nijjima* series I started around 2000. It was fantastic that when I came back from the island and talked to Kirstie Rea and Scott Chasling, they said they could help me. It was wonderful that two former students would do that. Again it involved glass blowing and from the very beginning I pursued combining the two sides of kiln fusing and blowing. The first attempts I did with Billy Morris at Pilchuck in 1982. Then I worked with Dante Marioni and had a wonderful series done in '93 as the first larger attempt at combining blowing glass with these fused elements. Then came the *Nijjima* series, which was not successful when I did it on Nijjima, but when I started working with Kirstie and Scott we had wonderful success that then created the 'Aussie Rollups'. They went out and taught it all over the world. The beautiful thing now is that I got into the next step of the 'Rollups', that is the 'Wraps' and I do this with Tom Rowley, also a former student.

It is almost as if those you work with are extensions of your body.

Yes, it is a wonderful thing. There is a lot of preparation going into these pieces, but it is very satisfying when the action is taking place you have seven people that you are somehow related to, because they are all your offspring (laughs).

Your gesture has expanded out. It now incorporates other bodies.

Yes and it is also wonderful when you go out and see people who have taken on this technique (Kirstie and Scott taught this in America and in Venice) and it is a new arm in object making. This is what the whole area does – we created over the years an extension of glass techniques, first of all with fusing and then the combination of fusing and glass blowing. This is something that was not there before.

Creating traditions.

It is wonderful to see that can happen still.

As I look at studio glass the issue of family and community often arises – the whole is greater than the sum of its individuals.

Yes, that is very true.