

Group Exhibition

"NEW GLASS FROM SWEDEN"
CULTURE OBJECT
NEW YORK CITY
NOVEMBER 10, 2022 - FEBRUARY 18, 2023
(EXTENDED)

The West 38th Street entrance to Culture Object gallery is a few doors down from a billiards supply company and a meat market, but step through its glass front doors, and you are transported away from this drab block of New York City's Garment District into a brightly colored world of texture and intrigue. Here, art and design dealer Damon Crain has organized an exhibition that brings together experts in Swedish glass techniques with highly contemporary concerns such as feminism and environmentalism.

The exhibit "New Glass from Sweden" is presented in the gallery's Peacock Room, named after the Peacock Room at the Smithsonian. Though the title promises a survey of contemporary Swedish glass, the exhibit is far too small to represent more than a highly curated look at new approaches to Swedish glass art. The work of five artists does resonate, however, as a highly collaborative effort between artists and a dealer pushing to bring more challenging content to traditional techniques. With his background in 20th-century American and Tuscan glass, Crain sees himself as a catalyst for showcasing more ambitious conceptual approaches to Swedish glassmaking.

BarroLevén, one of the five featured artists, is a collaboration between two women, Ulrika Barr and Kristina Levén. Having trained at Orrefors, both makers come from a background in traditional Scandinavian aesthetics. They approach their current works with sustainability in mind, transforming industrial air filters into pseudo-celestial bodies reminiscent of Earth and other planetary bodies, a physical commentary on the nature of a cradle-to-grave form of environmental responsibility.

Similarly, Nina Westman uses recycled glass to create abstract vessels adorned



The "Peacock Room" of the gallery was the site of a small group exhibition of Swedish glass, where traditional themes were deployed in service of highly contemporary issues of identity.

with references to female anatomy, aptly named the *She's Got Balls* (2022) vases, spurring discussion around inclusivity and gender equality as well as ticking the box for sustainable artistic practices. On brand for her anatomical commentary, she also created a series of *Titty Bombs* (2022) for Crain, experimenting with increased scale, different finishes, and colors at his behest. A fun reference to animated bombs in classic cartoons paired with her signature breast-ornament style, the pieces doubly serve as eye-catching decor and a point of conversation about equity and gender standards.

Another Orrefors alum, Fredrik Nielsen, also studied at Pilchuck and the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, bringing together interdisciplinary and international techniques (Crain fondly dubs him "the bad boy of Swedish glass"). Nielsen's studio, The Garage, as well as his collaborations

with the BOOM Glass Group, are all imbued with a spirit of activism and a highly conceptual approach. His featured work at Culture Object stands as a study into unconventional glass and is "engaged with challenging function." What looks to be a metallic vase of some sort is actually not hollow on the inside; *I Was* (2019) is covered in layers of car paint, and weighs over 40 pounds. Simon Klenell, working with the same intent to defy expectations of glass, brings a lighthearted touch to iconic traditional Orrefors-trained Swedish crystal work. Skilled in the historic art of Swedish crystal, Klenell creates perfectly cylindrical pieces, heats them up just enough to retain the sharp crystalline edges, and then turns them into abstractions with globs of glass added on in carefully whimsical ways.

Both Micke Johansson and Morgan Persson's figurative creations depict

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monsters and certainly monstrous versions of the people represented. Both Johansson and Persson worked with long-distance guidance from Crain in their creative process. For Johansson, who is known for being the only person in the world capable of creating double ariel works, a complex Swedish technique featuring encased sandblasted designs, Crain commissioned a work that incorporated a monster motif found in his previous works. When Johansson instead sent over a work of graal, *Deep in the Forest* (2022), it ended up more than satisfying Crain—an anecdote the dealer shares lest one see him as an overbearing presence in the process.

Crain clarified his role: “I don’t tell people what to make. I just say, Here’s what I like, here’s what you’re good at, can you push that—and they do their thing.” The same went for Persson, whose works also largely feature the graal process, and who produces more “conservative” works for his domestic clients, as Crain put it. For this exhibition, Crain pushed for Persson to create from his world and his life, resulting in several graal vessels emblazoned with stylized, almost cartoonish, Klimt-like portraits of his friends and family.

Culture Object is packed with works from artists with whom Crain has formed a working relationship, pushing and inspiring them to expand their conceptual and technical repertoires. The gallery features works that he deems significant and deserving of a New York City platform. Chock-full of anecdotes about each and every single piece on display, down to the custom furniture that adorns each room of the gallery, Crain has an intimate knowledge of the materiality and history of each piece. His gallery policy also invites clients and visitors to handle the pieces on sale, intending for viewers to connect with the works on every level. For the same reason, all pieces are arranged and displayed on pieces of furniture, also custom-made and for sale, so that gallerygoers can envision the pieces in their own spaces and homes.

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