

international glass

galia amsel

passage to a space beyond



transparency, fragility, tension

Galia Amsel's new glass is both inviting and yet withholding: a frozen moment, a glimpsed memory, reports **Jeremy Theophilus**

IN DEEPEST SOUTH LONDON, SQUEEZED BETWEEN A GARAGE SERVICING SECOND-HAND ROLLS ROYCES AND A CHINESE ANTIQUES WAREHOUSE, YOU WILL FIND GALIA AMSEL'S STUDIO that she shares with Bruno Romanelli. It exudes a confident efficiency, echoing her own easy sureness and the direct way she explains her work, although like many artists she is unwilling to be drawn too far into origins and motivation.

Galia trained at Middlesex University and the Royal College of Art, starting out in industrial design but quickly moving to glass. Through the 90s she exhibited in London, Rouen, Paris and Venice, and in 1998 she was one of eight artists selected for the Jerwood Prize for Applied Arts: Glass. At the time she wrote about her work as "highlighting the unique and opposing characteristics of glass: transparency, fragility, strength and flexibility."

In recent years her work has moved away from the earlier organic forms towards a more robust and formal vocabulary of circles and prime architectural shapes. The initial ideas that she draws clearly and succinctly in her notebooks are then worked up as technical drawings in order to ensure that the chemistry of the mould and the castings are accurate. Where risk and uncertainty enters the equation is with the colour she uses: its density, reflectivity and diverse emotional readings can never be anticipated.

Tension is a word Amsel uses a lot, and it's clear that there's always the struggle not to accept a compromise between her desire and the material's permission until every possibility has been explored. She also talks about "interrupted sequences" and "breaking a rhythm": making the work is an extended process, allowing materials to react and adjust to change, and moments of action are relatively few and far between.

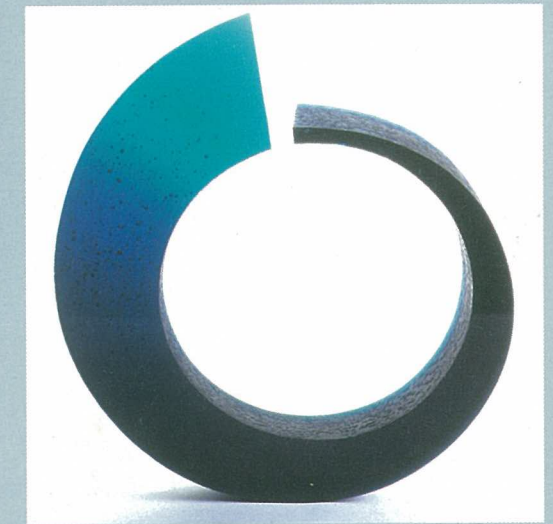
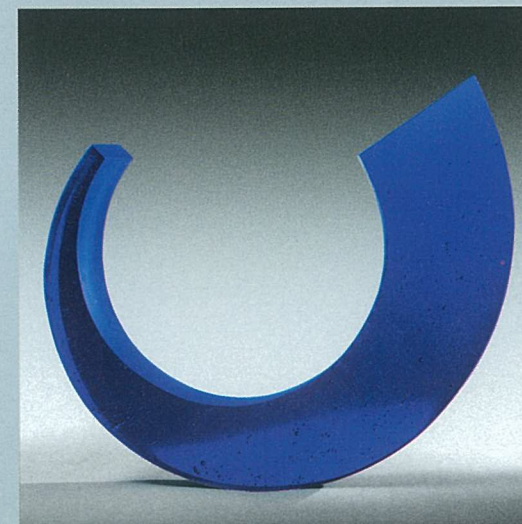
A key motif of her recent exhibition with Bullseye, and which forms a significant part of her forthcoming exhibition with Clara Scremini Gallery in Paris, is the rectangular doorway or window where the top hung door-trap-curtain leans back to allow restricted entry/view through. It is both inviting and yet withholding: a frozen moment, a glimpsed memory. This particular series started on the horizontal, but has developed a completely new life once re-articulated on the vertical, and Amsel has further extended its potential by upending it and filling the contained space with sharply contrasting colour. For instance a deep, deep azure 'base' holding a scarlet shaft that fades away towards its centre like a final orchestral chord.

Galia is now anxious to work through a new phase that will explore the potential of pairs of slumped curved walls/edges, setting up new areas of tension, but also developing positive and negative spaces, a different concept of architectural glass, perhaps...

Having spent her childhood and early teens in Hong Kong, Galia admits to a leaning toward the Pacific-rim, to a can-do culture that is less inhibited than it seems to be in the UK. There is certainly a frustration with the fact that her markets seem to be everywhere but home, and that there is such a small commercial network there to support the glass artist.

However, these are problems she alone cannot solve, and the fact that she has been able to concentrate on her own work for the past commission-free year has provided an immensely rich output of new work, together with an increased profile and collector base in both the US and Europe.

Jeremy Theophilus ran publicly funded galleries in England and Wales for 20 years before joining the Arts Council of England as Senior Visual Arts Officer. He has written for *Crafts* magazine (UK), and has had two texts published in the last year: *Caroline Broadhead* for Telos, and *Bruce Gernand* for the European Ceramic Work Centre in Holland.



Previous page: Galia Amsel, *Transition 1*, 1999, cast blue glass, sand blasted, 89cm l. Photo: Paul Louis.

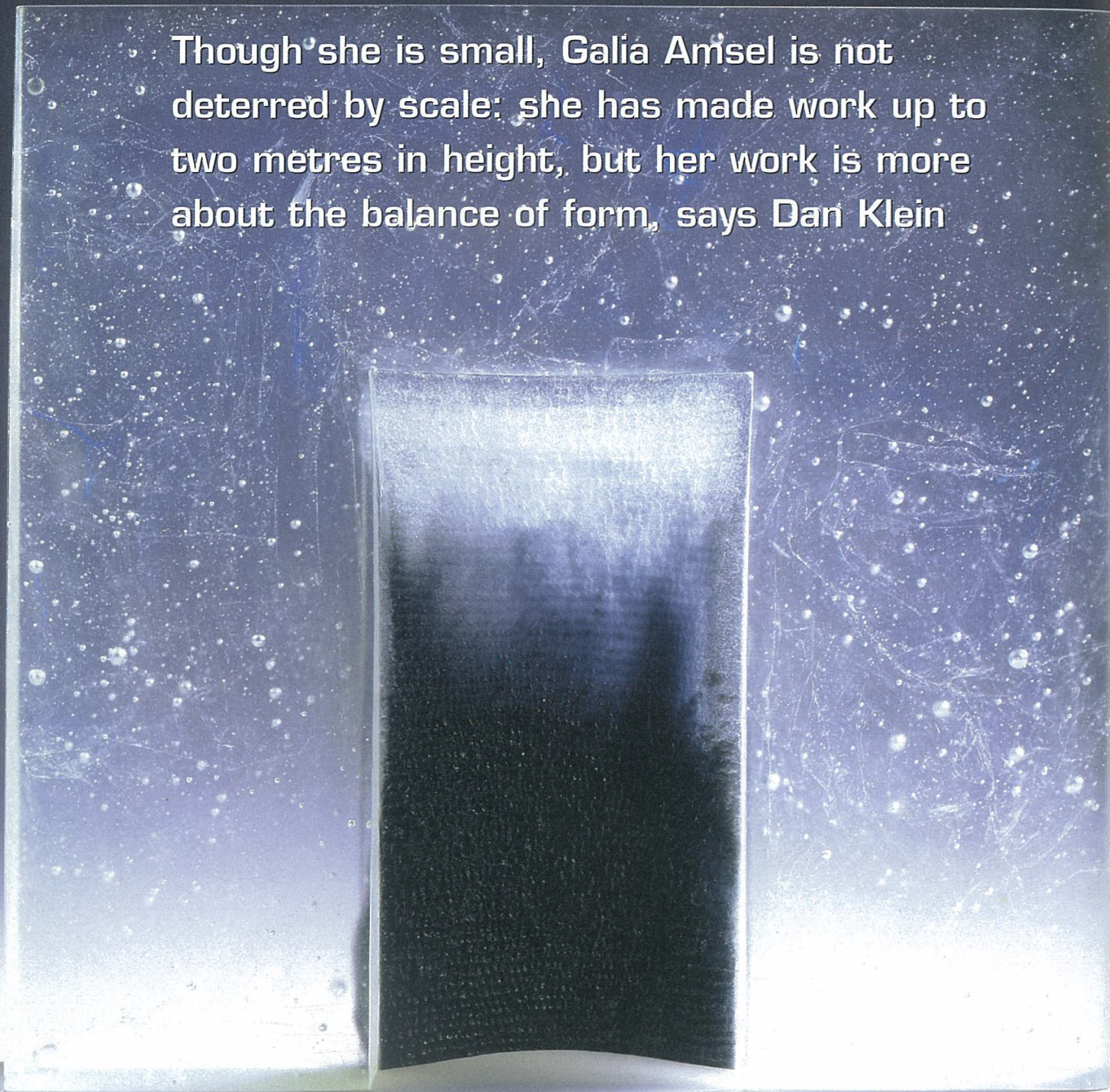
Opposite page: Galia Amsel, *Transition XIII*, 2002, cast light yellow glass, 50cm d. Photo: Matthew Hollow.

Far left: Galia Amsel, *Transition 10*, 2001, cast glass, 48cm x 48cm x 13cm. Photo: Matthew Hollow.

Left: Galia Amsel, *Transition 2, Oasis*, 2000, cast Pacific blue glass, sandblasted 55cm d. Photo: Graham Murrell.

inner revelations

Though she is small, Galia Amsel is not deterred by scale: she has made work up to two metres in height, but her work is more about the balance of form, says Dan Klein



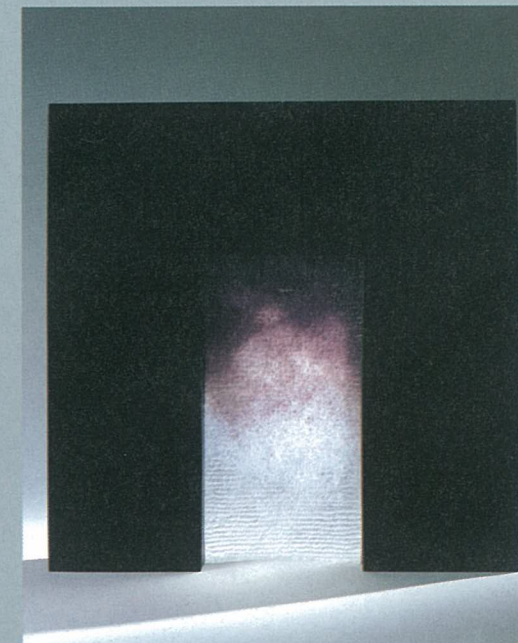
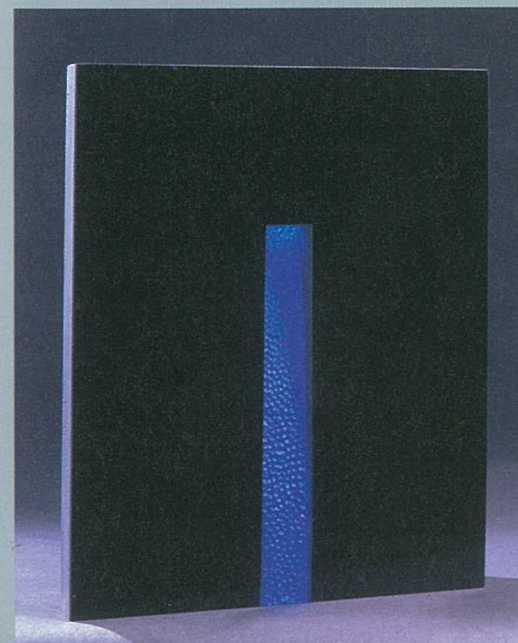
GALIA AMSEL'S AIMS ARE PERFECTLY CLEAR. SHE WANTS TO CREATE SCULPTURES IN GLASS THAT HOLD ONE'S ATTENTION. Her work is about movement, rhythm and tension. Open ring shapes, either standing on end or lying flat, have a kind of magnetic force: broken circles whose open ends pull towards each other. The circle has magical powers which Galia Amsel seeks to reveal. She finds strength in geometry of all sorts. Pieces can be round, rectangular, square or undulating. Whatever their shape she finds points of balance and angular relationships that are exciting. Cast glass can be transparent or opaque or both at once and over the years she has learnt how to use these qualities to find inner spaces or what she refers to as "revelations". There is a respect for ritual and for things that are made for a purpose. "I like things that work—machinery, bridges, things that fit together and move, work together."

Although she is small, Galia Amsel is not deterred by scale. She has made work up to two metres in height, but her work is less about scale than about balance of form. The larger work she has made has mostly been site specific, mainly in the form of commissions for cruise liners. It is more decorative and colourful than her exhibition work and she enjoys this side of her professional life. It fulfills different needs in her perhaps best explained by her saying that had she not chosen to work in glass she would have best liked to be a landscape gardener.

She has an appetite for colour which is well served by her association with Bullseye. This experience has been a challenging one given the vast range of colour and texture from which she can now choose. Working with this new type of glass has meant taking new risks, during the course of which new paths have opened up. New colour combinations allow more light and shade into her work. Colour graduation fascinates her and she uses it well in her quest for movement and rhythm. When she first encountered Bullseye Glass she was drawn to the possibility of bright colours, but now finds that a muted colour palette serves her better.

Lost wax casting in glass is a laborious process requiring above all patience and technical know how. A solo exhibition of ten sculptures is a major commitment when one considers that firing a medium sized piece can take up to two weeks. One needs to familiarise oneself with the idiosyncrasies of a new kind of glass, but Galia Amsel has been quick to discover the possibilities of Bullseye and use them to her advantage. It has been no more than eighteen months since she began using Bullseye, and for her it has been something of a revelation. Before she went to Portland in the summer of 2001, by her own admission she had spent eight years working in Great Britain without seeing any significant developments in glass technology. Her recent solo exhibition with Bullseye is only the beginning of changes that are already apparent in her work.

Dan Klein is a writer and author based in the UK.



Opposite page: Galia Amsel, *Space Beyond 2*, 2002, cast glass, 45 x 45 x 1.9cm.

Above: Galia Amsel, *Aperture 1*, 2001, cast glass, 70cm l.

Far left: Galia Amsel, *Passage 1*, 2002, cast glass, 34.9 x 28.2 x 3.8cm.

Left: Galia Amsel, *Space Beyond 1*, 2002, cast glass, 45 x 45 x 1.9cm.

All photos: Mathew Hollow.

Galia Amsel talks about...juggling making, marketing and family, diamond accessories and solar lighting

A typical day in my studio?

I usually have a vague plan over a set time like three or four months, usually working towards a show and fitting in some bread and butter work. I find that a new body of work can take this long to develop, and I try to plan it making best use of the kilns I have so that similar things get fired together. Many of my firings now take well over two weeks each, and some things get fired twice (eg. a casting, then a slumping), so if I do not organise this right, things just would not get done on time. Then this gets broken down into months and weeks and eventually days. My working day at the studio now has to fit into my son's school day (9.15 – 3.00)... and the best work gets planned the evening before.

Do I collect art and design?

One of my favourite things at home is a brightly coloured paper mache sculpture we picked up in Mexico a while back. It's about as opposite to what I do as you can get.

How do I juggle designing, making and marketing?

With difficulty... a couple of years ago I was doing such a broad range of work from massive scale panels for ocean liners to corporate awards, and of course my own exhibition gallery work... all really exhilarating and the financial rewards so good it meant that it was possible to employ people to do the more mundane things. Having said that, other people cannot do everything and... eventually the quality things loose out, like... not being able to have enough time to develop my own work. Since the world economy seems to have slowed down, and the big jobs dried up, I now seem able to concentrate on my own work, and spending more quality time at home.

I wish I could be more efficient with the marketing side of my operation. Luckily, now dealing with an American gallery like Bullseye has helped a lot, as they take a far more professional outlook than the galleries in England, and take it on themselves to help with promotion of the work... this also goes with the care they take in presenting it.

How do I see my work responding to the demands of every day life?

I hope they are contemplative and reflective; the kind of antidote you need to living in a big city.

Where do I see myself in five years?

Although I have already done some large-scale commissions, these have been based on other people's criteria. I would love to be able to realize my work on an architectural scale.

I have also dabbled with outdoor projects involving solar lighting... an area that I would like to be able to explore more thoroughly, so that I can begin creating work that fits into the landscape and lights up at night. It would be really rewarding to create work that a whole community can enjoy. Sometimes being an artist can feel quite selfish.

What is my greatest extravagance?

Diamond accessories, the type found on an angle grinder as opposed to an earring.

What do I consider to be my greatest achievement?

Learning to try not to think in terms of great achievements, but to try and gain as much pleasure from even the smallest achievements that occur on a more regular basis.

My most treasured possession?

Certain memories.

Personal motto?

At the moment: 'do less, but do it better'.

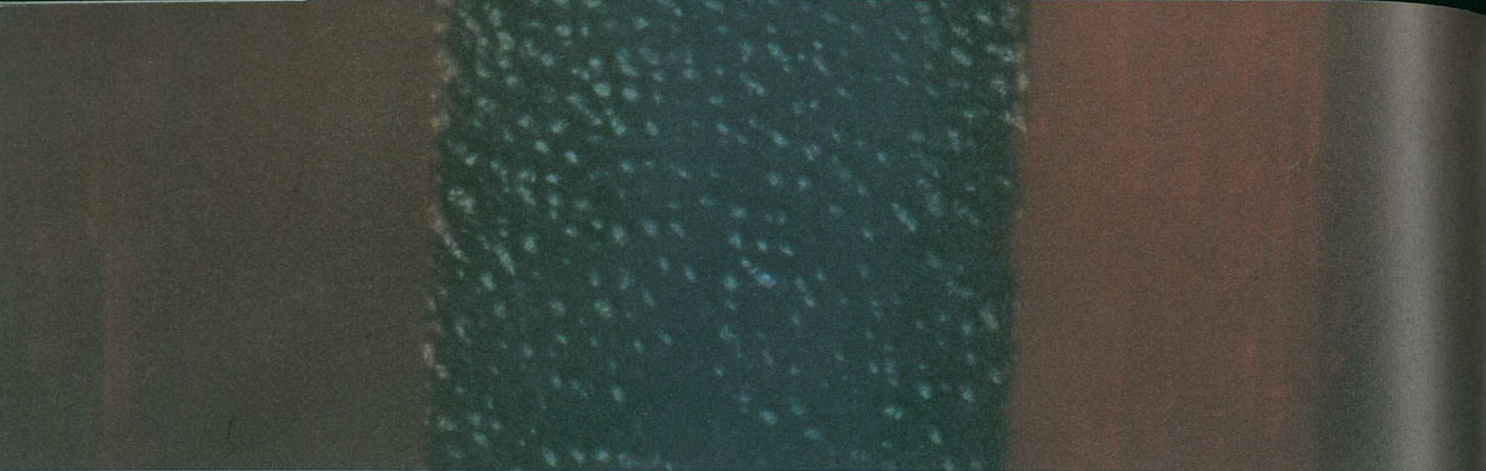
Galia Amsel was interviewed by Object in July 2002.

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Galia Amsel at work in her South London studio, 2002.
Photos: Bruno Romanelli

Background image: Galia Amsel, *Sequence 5*, 1999, cast and slumped glass, 85cm l. Photo: Paul Louis.



Above: Galia Amsel, *Revelations 1* (detail), 2001, cast and slumped glass, 45cm h.

endnotes

Galia Amsel's recent exhibitions include:

Bullseye Connection Gallery, Portland (2002); Clara Scremini Gallery, Paris (2002); Crafts Council at the V&A solo showcase (2001), and Studio Glass Gallery, London (2000).

Galia Amsel is represented by:

Bullseye Connection Gallery, Portland, Oregon; Crafts Council, London/Crafts Council Shop at the V&A; Contemporary Applied Arts, London; Clara Scremini, Paris; Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh; Braggiotti Gallery, Holland.

Public collections include:

Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Ulster Museum, Belfast; Montreal Museum of Art; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; Crafts Council Collection, London; Turner Museum, Sheffield; Glassammlung Ersting, Coefeld-Lette, Germany.

Commissions include:

British Museum (1995); Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines; Lee Valley Regional Parks Authority, Three Mills Island Commission.

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“The commissions I have made range from designing awards, working with companies to recreate their logo three-dimensionally in glass, table tops, tiles, and large scale cast glass wall panels.”