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THE RISE OF CONTEMPORARY TURKISH ART GLASS

by Fatma Ciftci

The story that follows chronicles the development of art glass in Turkey through the eyes of an artist, academic, and a glass lover who is about to finish her PhD in glass. Since 2003, I have been a close witness to this development marked by the acceleration of modernized artistic processes in glass that began in Turkey in the late part of the last century.

The introduction of glass into the curricula in the Faculty of Fine Arts first started in 1987, but these initiatives were not sustainable and did not last long. It is important to understand that university education in Turkey is free of charge, so the institutions use tax money to fund the university. Hot glass equipment was hard to maintain, as some diesel-fueled furnaces were established in the universities but then closed. However, a sustainable educational program was finally established in 1991, in Marmara University Faculty of Fine Arts, Ceramics and Glass Department in Istanbul. This institution is where I received my Bachelor Degree in 2007. The glass studio was equipped with electric kilns and cold-working equipment. Since 1995, the curriculum has been designed in accordance with the glass as an individual art major starting from the first grade [1]. The education embraced the Bauhaus School approach, therefore, they were conscious of designing for industrial production. It is different from the arts and crafts approach because it does not exclude industrial production, but offers new designs to production that are oriented to industry. Doing one's apprenticeship was very important and encouraged students to learn glass making techniques. Four years after my graduation, the university established a hot glass workshop, Scientific Research Project (BAPKO), carried out by Assoc. Prof. Nurdan Yılmaz Arslan [2]. By the virtue of the project, the renovation and repair of the existing equipment in the glass studio and



The Glass Furnace Foundation / Cam Ocagi Vakfi (Photo by: The Glass Furnace Foundation)

Visiting Artist Jan Wyskaril at The Glass Furnace Foundation / Cam Ocagi Vakfi (Photo by: The Glass Furnace Foundation)



6th International Denizli Glass Biennale, The First Glass Fashion Show, 2021 (Photo by: Glass Biennale Photo Archive)

the machines such as the newly purchased glass fusion kiln allowed for next level possibilities in the glass art major. This project is crowned with the "Outstanding Service Award" by the Rectorate [3].

The existence of The Glass Furnace Foundation which was established in 2002, has held a major role in developing the art glass field. Because of its location in Istanbul, the Glass Furnace became an opportunity for the new generation of glass students. Though it was relatively expensive as a private institution where international artists taught long-term and short-term workshops in a variety of glass making techniques, the foundation eventually gave away scholarships for glass students. When I first started my education in 2003, the opportunities to learn and practice hot glass were few. Now, the hot glass field in Turkey has many possibilities of getting scholarships, working as an apprentice, and events for networking. I had the opportunity to meet international glass artists and makers via The Glass Furnace Foundation. I had attended 8 courses as a trainee, student and teaching assistant as the time went by. The foundation organized an International Artist in Residency Program in 2016, consisting of local and foreign artists working with all techniques of glass making. When a TV show on Turkey's local arts television channel wanted to shoot a documentary about me, and my glassworks, they allowed us to use the venue. I felt that I was part of a glass family and was supported when I needed it. Recently, they carried out a project to bring new techniques to the handicraft masters, whose number is very low, to ensure sustainability by teaching these techniques to their apprentices. A series of technical workshops for experienced artists and artisans was established in order to bring Reticello, Zanfircio, Tessuto, and overlay techniques from Italian and Scandinavian glass techniques to Turkish glass art, and to hybridize the techniques with traditional Turkish forms to create new works to represent Turkish glass art. Despite the difficulties and obstacles, the leading institutions have made significant contributions that makes today's Turkish glass even more valuable. Institutions such as the Glass Furnace Foundation, and the



6th International Denizli Glass Biennale, During Live Framework Competition, 2021 (Photography: Denizli Glass Biennale Photo Archive)

Turkish Cultural Foundation lead the way in promoting Turkey's presence in contemporary glass art to the world. I hope the Glass Furnace Foundation, as an international space where master makers and artists share their knowledge and experience, will continue playing a part in Turkish art glass.

Another important development in the field of education is the "Glass Department" of Anadolu University Fine Arts Faculty in 2004. The Department, established under the chairmanship of Assoc. Prof. Ekrem Kula, continues to be the first and only Glass Department established in Eskisehir, Turkey. This university had the privilege of hiring glassblowers who had retired from SiseCam Glass Factory and incorporating a glass furnace. This is the institution where I received my MFA in Glass Art in 2017 and worked as a Research Associate. This university's biggest advantage is a healthy circulating capital which helps to maintain a natural gas fueled hot glass kiln. MFA students and Research associates have potential to carry glass art one step further, so the policy of such well-equipped studios should be open to them, but not limited to producing only within the scope of a lecture. The praise they win and the techniques they explore as the institution will be credited to the lecturer.

The Glass Fellowship, founded in 2005

by Izzettin Baki and Ekrem Ozen under the leadership of Gultekin Cizgen, brought together glass enthusiasts. This initiative welcomed all glass enthusiasts as hobbyists, artists, artisans, and academics. This union is important because it prompted the establishment of the first and only Contemporary Museum of Art Glass in Turkey. This initiative began with 7 group exhibitions held in different cities of Turkey. On arrival at the last destination, Anadolu University Head of Glass Department Assoc. Prof. Ekrem Kula and Metropolitan Mayor of Eskisehir Prof. Dr. Yılmaz Buyukersen had supported the establishment of the Museum. I opened my first solo exhibition in this museum in 2017 and they supported me with ads and posters all around the city.

As we consider the pioneers and development of Turkish glass, it is important to maintain the legacy. It is surprising that after 10 years of the establishment of the museum, I was the first artist who had a solo glass exhibition in the museum. As leader in the field, especially residents in the city, we need to embrace and contribute more to the Museum. Disconnects between institutions makes the development slower than it could be. Thus, we need improved authority from the museum in every glass event in the field. I mention this not solely as an encouragement for attending to the protocol of the events for taking



Glass Studio in Anadolu University Faculty of Fine Arts, Glass Department students blow glass, 2016 (Photo Credit: Fatma Çiftçi)

pictures for promotion, but understanding the scope of glass making and getting in touch with the people involved in the field, seeking opportunities of building up new projects and networks. As the partners of the field, the boundaries between the authorities and artists should be blended. The approach should be either all together or none of us go forward.

The “Denizli International Glass Biennials” have been held regularly since 2011 by craftsmen-artist couple Omur & Fatih Duruerk, owner of Karma Design Studio, financed by Denizli Metropolitan Municipality. In the last biennial held in 2021, Turkey's first Glass Dress Fashion Show was held. The fashion show, which broadcasted live on a local TV channel, featured glass dresses of 32 hobbyists, designers and artists. In this event, a simultaneous glass competition was also held. Although it is not an academic event, speakers of the conferences held within the scope of the biennial consist of art historians, academics, and world-renowned international artists. In addition to the seminars, exhibitions, flameworking, kilnforming, and cold glass techniques are demonstrated at the festival. I always love taking part in this event, as an academic, a designer, and as a glass enthusiast. Everyone who works with glass, can find a their niche at the event in one way or another.

M. Kemal Atatürk established Turkey's first glass factory Sisecam Inc. in 1934 during the Republican period. Today, Sisecam Inc. has 83 companies in the fields of flat glass, automotive, glassware, design, mining, chemicals, recycling, packaging and fiberglass, and continues to produce glass in many countries of the world. With the sponsorship of Sisecam Inc. and The Glass Furnace Foundation, the exhibition "Designed in Istanbul" and "Mediterranean Impressions of Turkish Glass" took place at Edsvik Konsthall (gallery) and The Glass Factory (museum) in Sweden. The works of 39 selected five artists to be exhibited together with the Sisecam Glass Collection. Sisecam Glass Symposium has been held since 1988 and although it has an industrial scope, it is one of the most established symposiums in our country. Through this factory, glassblowing and cut glass masters were professionally grown. When Erkin Saygi, the general manager of Sisecam Inc., and Ruhcan Topaloğlu, the cut glass master trained by Pasabahce Factory, retired in 2001, they opened a glass workshop together. The works produced by them were exhibited at the SOFA Chicago art fair, at the “Turks Glas” exhibition held in the Netherlands in 2004. They still run the studio together in Beykoz, Istanbul.

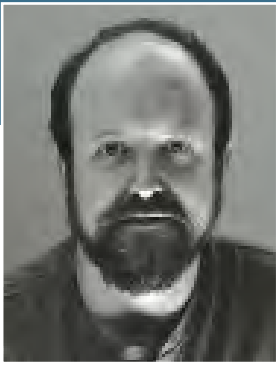
The latest major development is Beykoz Glass and Crystal Museum that was established in 2021 under the supervision

of Prof. Uzlifat Ozgumus, in a pavilion built during the Ottoman period in Beykoz. In this museum, 1480 pieces of glass works are exhibited. These precious artifacts, which were previously displayed or waiting in the warehouses of other museums in Turkey. We are delighted to see them brought to light in an entitled concept. It would be amazing if there would be a Contemporary Glass Gallery, to show how far we have come. I wish there would be a sufficient research library about glass in every context.

The story is focused on the pioneers, but I think that everyone working in the field of glass in Turkey takes this field one-step further in their own way. I hope that in the near future the vision of kiln-glass can be developed and supported as much as hot glass. The approach of art glass in Turkey marginalizes artists working with electric kilns, placing the greatest significance on artists who work with hot glass. There are still many modern methods to be discovered and utilized in kiln-glass produced in an electric kiln. Turkey needs to be supported by contemporary glass galleries to represent and support the artists, and show how far the medium has progressed. With a rich history and expanding technical and artistic field, artists and scholars would benefit greatly from a research library that houses and catalogues the developments within the country and knowledge from around the world. While Turkey does not hold the same level of prominence and notoriety as many European leaders in glass, there is a great deal of history, contemporary scholarship, and makers that we take pride in. Our story is one that will continue to expand and I am excited to see how the collaboration of our community and influence of our makers will progress will shape the future of Turkish glass art.

[1][2] Interview with Nurdan Arslan on 31.Oct.2019
 [3] Arslan, Nurdan. (2013). Sanat-Tasarım Dergisi. Volume 1. Issue 4. Serbest Cam Tasarımı ve Endüstriyel Cam Tasarımı Eğitiminde Sıcak Cam Atölyesinin Önemi. p.39-46.

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EDITOR'S LETTER

This issue marks the culmination of a 2-part series exploring the Tacoma GAS conference theme *Between Here and There*, with informed speculation of movements in

glass art that are cutting a path forward. GASnews writers address this with a focus on location, technique, and approach. You will find numerous inspiring facets of artistic glass research and community that are developing and morphing from our network that spans the globe.

This issue also marks the end of my tenure as GASnews Editor. The past 6 years have held a constant stream of change for the Glass Art Society, its conferences, and the global community that it serves. I take pride in being part of this community and looking back at the work that has been done both at GAS and what we have provided in the pages of GASnews. There has been a consistent understanding that we reflect and honor the past while adapting to what we learn from our community. For GASnews, it has been my view that we attempt to address journalism of the field with both a broad view and a critical mindset... and to have some fun with the content. I applaud the writers I worked with who have provided their insights, expertise, and flexibility in their address and approach.

I look forward to what the future hold for this publication. I did not achieve every hope I had for what GASnews would become, but, like many of my projects, it has been a work in progress. I think the critical- and community- based approach has provided some of the best writing on the state of glass art, sparing our readers from flowery reviews and hype of the trendy. I hope that GASnews continues to develop and morph to reflect and reach an increasingly wider and more diverse glass art community.

Michael Hernandez
GASnews Editor



DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Dear GASnews reader -

October 1st marked the start of a new fiscal year for the Glass Art Society and a transition on the GAS board of directors. It happens every year, and every year I am equally excited about new folks coming onto the board (I'm looking at you, Leia Guo, Sara Hulkkonen, John Moran, and Kim Thomas!), and saddened to be losing people that have volunteered so much of their time to making our organization and the glass community bigger, better, stronger, and more inclusive and equitable. While always part of the GAS family, at the end of September, Glen Hardymon, Mike Hernandez, Jessica Jane Julius, Paige Lizbeth Morris, Lynn Everett Read, Demetro Theofanous, and Caitlin Vitalo all stepped off the board.

Each one of these folks has given a huge part of themselves to GAS, and their contributions can not be over-stated. We have worked side-by-side through some pretty tough times, and the Glass Art Society is a much different organization largely due to them. With much respect and affection, I want to thank them all for all of their hard work and support for the global glass community. The issue of GASnews marks the end of our 50th Anniversary celebration and more than a year of reflecting on our past as we work to make the future brighter. We look forward to the next issue of GASnews with a new editor and the next chapter of GAS - we will see you all there!

Brandi P. Clark
Executive Director