Milan Design

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SPECIAL

Best In Glass

A NEW GENERATION OF DESIGNERS IS HAVING HUGE FUN WITH GLASSWARE. *by* FRANCESCA PERRY

PORTRAIT *by* CONSIGLIO MANNI

FACING PAGE: STUDIONOTTE FOUNDERS CAMILA CAMPOS (LEFT) AND LUISA ALPEGGIANI
ABOVE: GLASSWARE FROM STUDIONOTTE'S 'SIO 2' TABLEWARE RANGE

Daniel Nikolovski wants to upend the Milan hierarchy. The 33-year-old Macedonian, who moved to the city more than a decade ago, knows furniture is king during Design Week. That will never change. But he is determined that glassware shouldn't be "secondary", and has come up with a plan to showcase the growing playfulness and confidence that defines the best in contemporary glassmaking. "I really feel that glasses are part of design, no matter the scale," he tells me enthusiastically from his Milan studio.

Nikolovski knows what he is talking about. He started out making furniture before pivoting to set up a glassware brand in 2023. Traga makes colourful, multifunctional, "infinitely recyclable" drinkware, such as two-tone geometric glasses designed for Martini cocktails on one end and shots on the other (just in case your Martini needs a chaser). He started Traga to "experiment and have fun", but also believes in the power of glassware to bring people together, over drinks and conversation. "It connects me with my friends – and people that I don't even know."

For this year's Milan Design Week he has connected a range of designers for *Glasslands*, a group show hosted at Traga's studio that celebrates innovative approaches to glass design and the creative potential of glassware. Traga products are featured alongside the work of Milan-based designers Sara Ricciardi Studio, StudioNotte and Ylaria Pavone, as well as South Korean glass designer Studio Chacha. The independent approach of such a group show is "crucial", says Nikolovski, especially when younger designers might not have the money to participate in the larger design fairs at Milan such as Salone del Mobile.

Glasslands is part of a movement that can be seen across the whole of Milan Design Week this year. Here are just some of the new generation of designers whose experimental and sculptural glasswork sees function and expression melt together in intriguing ways.

StudioNotte
Whether it's drinks cabinets or sex toys, StudioNotte's projects explore and support "hedonistic pleasure", explains
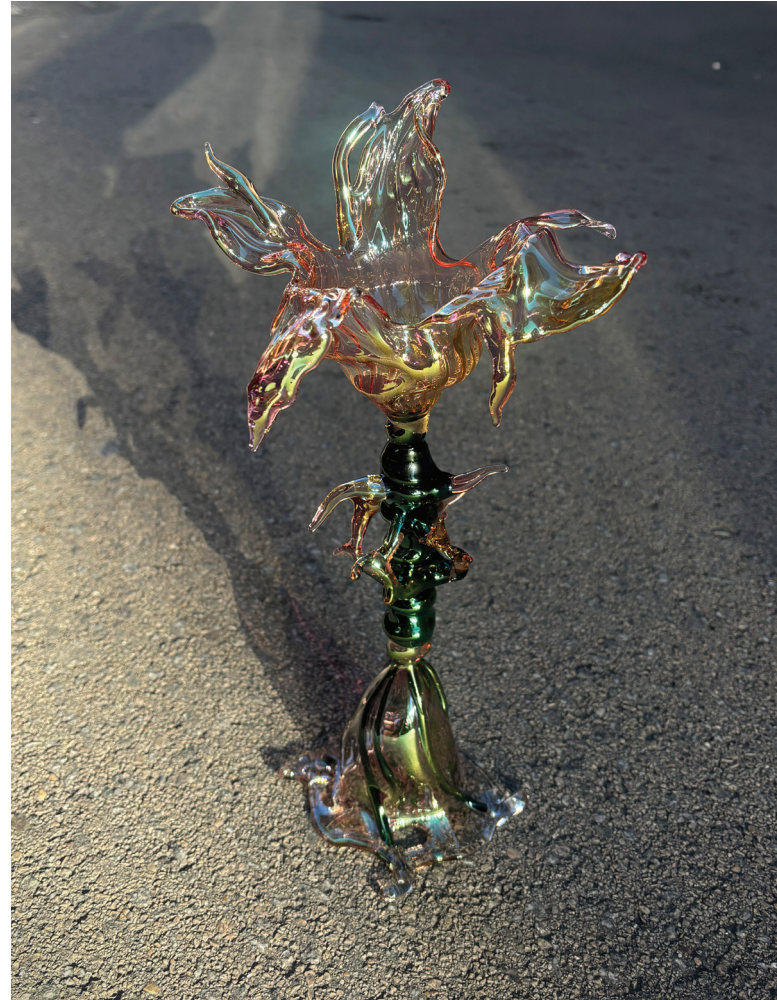
MOLD-BLOWN, HAND-SCULPTED WATERING CAN BY MAARJA MÄEMETS

A BESPOKE PIECE OF GLASSWARE BY 6:AM

VESSEL CELEBRATING THE FEMALE FORM BY KIKI GOTI

FROM PIA GLASSWORKS' 'SELF DISSOLUTION' SERIES

Camila Campos, the 31-year-old Brazilian designer who co-founded the Milan-based studio in glass in 2019 with Italian creative Luisa Alpeggiani, 33. Having met at university, the two noticed a lack of female-led studios and wanted to design in a different way to the prevailing industrial and digital trend they saw. The focus on pleasure is simple: "We are interested in creating objects that make your life better," says Alpeggiani.

Working across a variety of materials, including stainless steel and ceramic, the duo turned to glass for a range of tableware, "Sio2", and a collection of gender-inclusive sex toys that double as decorative sculptures, "Crudités". Challenging the stigma that sex toys are objects people keep hidden away or are even ashamed of, StudioNotte wanted to do something completely different – "something sculptural that you can display", says Campos.

They love the elegance and ethereal quality of glass, says Alpeggiani. Campos sees it as a material that "floats in space and can change with lighting – and comes from something malleable that you can play with".

At *Glasslands*, the studio will present its new "Arsenico" collection, featuring a wine goblet and water glass that aim to explore the "balance between femininity and irreverence", says Campos. The borosilicate glass pieces, handmade with a glass artisan in the Veneto town of Nove, use the flame-working technique, in which a flame from a torch is used to melt and shape tubes of glass.

Maarja Mäemets

Thirty-three-year-old Mäemets never thought that glass would be the focus of her work. "It's such a hard material. I was very intimidated by it," the Estonian artist says. But this challenge was precisely what drove her to explore and experiment with glass at art school in Tallinn. Now based in Stockholm, she talks about glassblowing the way someone might discuss the love of their life. "My inner fire gets amplified when I'm in the hot shop," she says.

This is the first time Mäemets has exhibited at Milan Design Week, with her glass work featured in *Tactile Baltics*, a group show of contemporary design from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. On display will be "Sand Castles", Mäemets' series of rippling, mold-blown vessels, as well as her collection of watering cans, "Thirst". The latter – colourful mold-blown and hand-sculpted pieces with a fragility not typical for their function – demonstrate the play between sculpture and design object that fascinates her. "I want to make pieces that you cannot really categorise," she says.

Interested in the way objects become "performative", for a 2024 installation Mäemets poured vanilla sauce from one of her watering cans over a cake she served to visitors. All of her watering cans have "different characters" and names inspired by pop culture, including "Xena", a piece "symbolising darkness and strength" named after the warrior princess from the 1990s TV show, and "Bowie", who she calls an "absolute eccentric".

6:AM Glassworks

Edoardo Pandolfo and Francesco Palù named their glass studio after the crack of dawn because that was the only time they were allowed to use the furnace when they started glassblowing in 2018. "We were the rookies, the young guys," says Pandolfo, now 31. In a workshop steeped in glassblowing heritage on the island of Murano, the two learnt how to create glass objects with the help of in-house artisans and glassblowers. "They gave us the 6am to 8am time slot – the two hours they could afford to lose because nobody wanted them," says Pandolfo.

They learnt quickly, and now their studio creates inventive lighting, glassware and objects that blend industrial and artistic sensibilities. 6:AM regularly collaborates with other designers, such as the architect Hannes Peer, and produces bespoke works – including large-scale chandeliers for Italian film director Luca Guadagnino. While Pandolfo and Palù are based in Milan, a team member is stationed in Murano to oversee production and keep the artisans happy. "You need someone who brings prosecco to the furnace," says Pandolfo.

This April sees the studio's first solo exhibition at Milan Design Week, *Two-Fold Silence*, which takes over the abandoned underground showers of Piscina Cozzi, a 1930s municipal swimming-pool complex. New collections of glass lighting and objects will be presented in an immersive scenography. "It has a haunted house feeling that is exactly what's inside our minds," Palù says.

Kiki Goti

New York-based Greek designer Goti was mesmerised when she started glassblowing, seeing a material that resembled honey transform into something "fragile but super strong". Glass is magical, she enthuses.

Like 6:AM Glassworks' Pandolfo and Palù, she travelled to Murano, the historic centre of glass creation, to produce her very first glassware collection, "Graces". Taking different shapes, her vessels are celebrations of the female form, each featuring a decorative rim made using the *rostrato* technique, in which hot glass is pinched outwards to create a sculptural, undulating surface. Goti sees these embellishments, some of which feature gem-like colourful tips, as "adornments" of the female figures represented – "like a crown, or a necklace".

The 34-year-old designer's work will feature at Alcova, the sprawling collectible design event that activates unusual parts of the city each year, including a former abattoir and a disused military hospital, and often serves as a catalyst for emerging designers. The Alcova pieces will be presented at Villa Borsani, a modernist residence designed by Osvaldo Borsani in 1945, in a joint installation with New York furniture studio Office of Tangible Space.

Milan is her favourite time of the year. "It's a celebration of all the hard work we're doing," she says. "And everyone is there."

'My inner fire gets amplified when I'm in the hot shop,' says Maarja Mämets of being in the glassblowing workshop

Pia Glassworks

Founded by 32-year-old Argentine artist Pia, this Barcelona-based design studio creates decorative objects and jewellery with forms that appear to melt or grow before your eyes. Tall vessels mimic moving water frozen in time, while pink glass is shaped to resemble tendrils, thorns and petals.

Fantasy, nature and the body are driving inspirations, explains Pia. "I'm particularly interested in the organic flow of movement, and the way natural forms seem to have their own rhythm and energy," she says. Growing up in Misiones, a jungle province in Argentina, shaped her desire to incorporate a "rich visual and sensory experience". Glass is the perfect material, she says, to convey the sense of both fragility and strength she sees in nature.

She mainly uses flameworking, for its immediacy. As the glass transforms in real time under the heat of the flame, a delicate balance between precision and fluidity is required in each movement. At Barcelona Glass Studio, a flameworking-focused workshop she runs with the artist Agustina Ros, she has helped build a community of glass artists and enthusiasts in Barcelona, supporting new ways of working with the material.

In Milan, Pia will show her new "Self Dissolution" series at the *Prendete e Mangiate* exhibition. The glass sculptures will explore "chaotic" transformation, she says. "They fracture or coalesce, depending on the eye that beholds them." FT

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