

I & WE

Michelle Thaller is one of the most sensitive astrophysicists exploring the universe. In her scientific practice, she shares a unique story with her listeners, asking a controversial question at the outset: “Where do we come from?”. Her answer is: „We are dead stars.” Thaller stresses the fact that people, stars and all animate and inanimate beings originate from the same atoms. SIC! Gallery’s latest exhibition is a collection of works showing the man/nature relationship as a system of communicating vessels.

Stars are huge spheres consisting of hydrogen. After exhausting their hydrogen resources, stars explode, and the bigger atoms produced inside them return to the universe. Then other stars moving around the galaxy “sweep up” the stardust and remnants of the deceased predecessor. And that is when another uncanny process begins – nuclear reactions. A new, spherical celestial body is born and the unused remains begin to orbit around it, creating young solar systems. Planets like our Earth come into being. This is how Thaller’s question where we come from may be answered in the simplest possible way. A story put together piece by piece for thousands of years.

If the universe or galaxies have so far seemed remote to us, then we need to change our perception. We are made up of the same atoms. And quite importantly, not just humans but other living, nonhuman beings and our planet as well. The earth is composed of various macro- and microelements, including iron, zinc, copper, magnesium, silver and many more. The same atoms may also be found in the human body and they resulted from precisely the same explosion. As a species, humans are not the only ones who are connected – everything around us has the same composition and is interdependent.

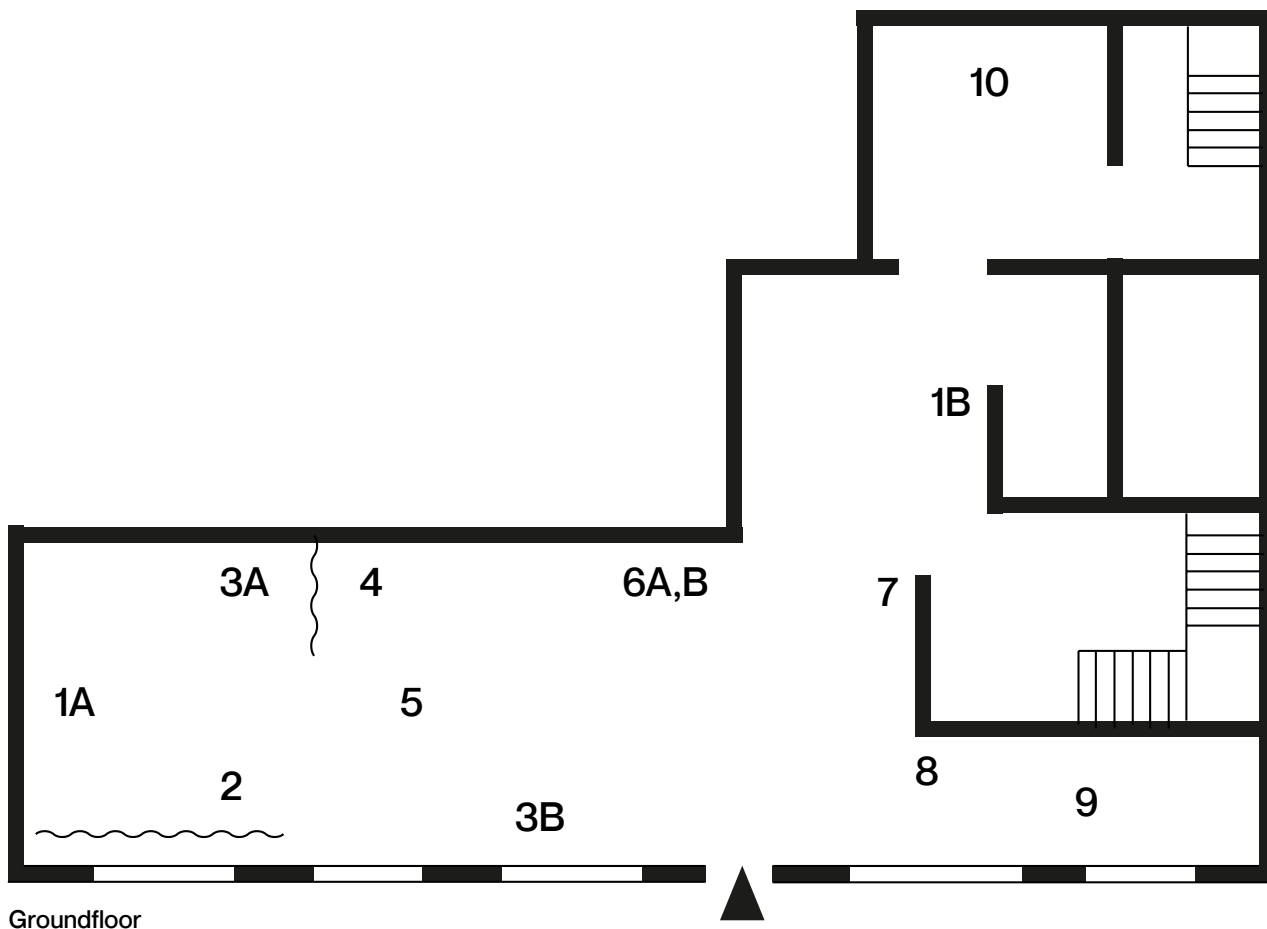
I & We is an open-call exhibition of works made by female Norwegian artists who use glass to create unique artistic universes. Their practices are rich in tenderness and care, both for the material and the world around us. They are inspired by the exceptional, diverse nature of Norway, which in many ways reflects the social and cultural development of the country’s inhabitants. Their culture and social awareness has been shaped by nature, their everyday life is also connected with it. They live in accordance with the natural cycle of change, seasonality and nature’s impact on all living things. When

staging situations and creating objects, the artists use unconventional means of expression. In this way, they point out values based on balance and respect rather than deepening divisions.

The exhibition showcases a selection of objects, videos and photographs in which the metamorphic character of glass is used on the level of formation of both matter and ideas. The works on display are instruments of commitment, they generate relationships, perform. They act as carriers of information, show future generations our present, but also offer a bitter commentary on contemporary times. They spur a revision of artistic practices in the context of climate change and our overexploitation of the earth's resources. Some of them pose the question how, or even whether, glass will still be part of our lives. Others, without a hint of seriousness, boldly mock our reality. In some, we see metaphors of human codes and behaviours, others reflect our resilience and adaptation skills.

Irrespective of the formal and conceptual layers of particular works, the exhibition offers an opportunity to look at glass from various perspectives and learn diverse practices of working with the medium. What they all have in common is an effort to empower this exceptional material.

Mika Drozdowska



1. ANNA-LINDA GABRIEL

1A) *Note to Self*, 2021, video

1B) *LIV(Life)*, 2021, blown glass, fabric

Why do we collect things? Are they symbolic reminders of who we are? Or rather indicators of who we want to become?

In the video *Note to self*, presented at the exhibition, the artist „writes” an odd kind of diary with the help of created and collected objects [in the exhibition we present the object entitled *LIV* (eng. *Life*)]. By using the dancer as the transmitter, she emphasizes the functioning of a human being in complete symbiosis with the material world around them. Glass and the human body seek a balance between themselves. Objects define and allow the performer and artist to sort of practice humanity, while their corporeality and stories create an object. Quite often, in order to experience and get to know ourselves better, we gather objects that express and define us.

In the artist’s work, this relationship is well-balanced and none of the elements of the puzzle predominates. In this way, she prevents the emergence of what some ontologists defines the “gloomy side” of the man/object coexistence, when things begin to let us down or become obstacles in our proper functioning. Or is it the result of having their original identity stolen from them? Objects of everyday use or those taken from the world of nature, are transformed into glass by Anna-Linda. Consequently, they cannot fail her, lasting for thousands of years unchanged and unspoiled. The artist, however, does not treat them materially, as simple tools she can control her environment with, but rather as a partner or part of herself.

2. HEIDI KRISTIENSEN

Gloubi-Boulga, 2022

blown glass

Fun is an activity that harkens back to the deepest roots of humanity. From an anthropological point of view, there is no community (culture, civilization) whose members would not know fun. Contrary to the industrial paradigm, it is characterized by unproductivity; not even playing for money leads to the production of material goods, which today, on foundations of the capitalist system, seems to be an uncommon feature. Overproduction of material goods and the resulting excessive consumerism have both become the characteristic and the dominant mechanisms of the present day. Ridicules and useless fun are perceived as synonyms of laziness, inefficiency and pointlessness.

The artist, Heidi Kristiansen, strongly disagrees with such a state of affairs. In her sculpture *Gloubi-Boulga* (eng. “Mish Mash”), she expresses opposition to the narrative, built by culture and social norms, in which our life only matters, having broader meaning, when we produce, manufacture, sell and consume.

Her work consists of small glass forms resembling already masticated chewing gums. Connected to each other they form one multi-coloured whole. In terms of ideology, the artist refers to the period of childhood, prelapsarian, blissful moments of happy ignorance, pure fun, acceptable only for a brief moment of our development which is symbolized by a chewing gum. Heidi Kristiansen also uses language and ideas propagated by the art movement called pop art. Artists associated with this trend strove to portray mass culture, and their art was greatly influenced by the consumptive nature of our civilization that was gaining momentum right after the war. Their works often stood as paradoxical juxtapositions of the items used on a daily basis. The installation *Gloubi-Boulga* is a joke, a wink to the viewer, an attempt to recall emotions and needs from childhood; feelings so much different from all the daily races and seriousness that dominate in adult life. The artist reminds us that fun is about building relationships and strengthening them. This is the time for natural development and rebellion.

3. MATILDE DUSS

3A) *Den Sidste Vinter*, 2021

cast glass, bronze

3B) *Vores floder løber over, vores øjne i vand*, 2021

blown glass, stained birch veneer

In the works presented at the exhibition, Matilde Duus looks closely at the most life-giving substance - water. Water becomes something that inspires her, but also stands as a symbol of bitter reflection. Inadequate water management associated with progressive industrialization, urbanization and intensive agricultural development, are just some of the factors contributing to the economic water shortage. Our bodies are 60 percent water, the equivalent of the earth's 71 percent. Both our biosphere and living organisms need a constant, balanced circulation of water. Water itself is responsible for a number of processes thanks to which we exist in balance.

Matilde has been looking for such similarity in her works, while remaining faithful to her artistic practice. The inspiration for *Den Sidste Vinter* (eng. “The Last Winter”) and *Vores floder løber over, vores øjne i vand* (eng. “Our rivers flow over, Our eyes water”) came

from the violent and brutal responses of river systems to climate change, in the form of floods, taking place in Europe in 2021. Climate change keeps increasing the frequency and scale of extreme weather phenomena. Today about 90% of all natural disasters are related to water. Coexistence has been shaken, our world has already shown its rebellious attitude and rivers have been shedding like human tears.

4. ÅSA ELIDA WIGUM SKJETNE

Circulation, 2021

blown glass

Tomas Schmit is a German artist associated with the artistic movement of the 20th century called Fluxus, uniting artists from various fields of art, but characterized by transcending narrow specialties, specific humor and certain distance to traditional art. He was well known amidst artistic circles, but in terms of broader spheres his name did not evoke any emotion. However, his first action, which was a kind of experiment, caused quite a stir and became symbolic for the movement. In 1963 the artist carried out his performance entitled Cycle for water-bottles, which consisted in arranging the bottles radially, pouring water from one to another, until all of it was to be spilled or evaporated. Just like that, emphasizing the ethos of simplicity and minimalism. Speaking of his own activity, he emphasizes that he is interested in actions based on reduction. He wanted to invent simple, particular things. He was concerned with concepts such as perception, awareness, or brain functions, and the activities of our senses. He postulated: “what can be mastered by a sculpture, doesn’t have to be erected as a building; what can be brought by a painting, doesn’t have to be made as a sculpture; what can be accomplished in a drawing, doesn’t have to become a painting; what can be cleared on a scrap of paper, doesn’t need to be done as a drawing; and what can be settled in the head, doesn’t even require a paper scrap!”. A very „post - growth” approach. It was Tomas Schmit and his first experiment that inspired *Circulation*, a work done by Åsa Wigum Skjetne. The work consists of blown glass funnels, filled with soap or syrup, substances flowing from one mold to another, from the highest ones towards the lowest. And so on, over and over again, until the substance is spent. In the context of the exhibition and concern for natural, non-renewable resources, this work can also be read as a perfect allegory of our greed and over-exploitation until the moment nothing is left, everything is spent. We must ultimately recognize that we function in a material world and that it is limited by its characteristics.

5. MAIA BIRKELAND

Kolleksjon, 2022

glass and mixed media (found objects: moss, wood, plants)

Maia Birkeland grew up in the countryside. She has always been accompanied by the landscape of forests and lakes, and nature has been for her a subject of great interest, research, a reason for joy, delight, a space for contemplation, as well as solace and nurturing. For years, the artist's artistic strategy has focused on collecting used and organic materials, reusing old works and things from her home and everyday life.

The *Kolleksjon* consists of a recovered wooden board, glass, collected dried plants, bark, wood, stone and iron. It is a composition in which the main characters are texture, shape, mass/weight and their mutual relationships between the different materials. The seductive and shiny surface of the glass contrasts starkly with the dryness, airiness and roughness of the other objects, but it also stands as a kind of trace fossil that hides the remains of endangered plants. The surface of the medium resembles a tranquil puddle on the forest floor, it is like a small window into another universe, another time.

Marikåpe (eng. hellebore), kråkefot (eng. stiff clubmoss) and rogn leaf, which the artist has preserved in glass, are now common plants in Norway, but will probably suffer the same fate as many other species that are becoming extinct as a result of human activity. What is not rare now may be endangered in the future.

6. IDA SIEBKE

6A) *Gjennom Slag, 2020*

blown glass, insulating foam

6B) *Avkall, 2020*

blown glass, insulating foam

Judith Butler, the author of „The Force of Nonviolence”, claims that our times, and perhaps all times, require imagining a new way for people to live together in a nonviolent world.

However, her contention does not involve utopian thinking about a reality in which one should get rid of all violent feelings, wishes or fantasies but about cultivating aggression as a reaction and forms of behavior that can be effective rather than destructive. In these fluctuating, unstable and difficult times we have every reason to be in a state of extreme rage. How we express it, however, is of great importance. The artist Ida Siebke, in her works *Gjennom Slag* and *Avkall* (eng. “Through Battles” oraz “Renunciation”), refers to the

themes of abuse and oppression as a consequence of the selfishness, greed and aggression of the human species that can now be experienced in every sector of our lives. She uses her deep sadness and profound anger as a drive and constructive force in shaping the medium of glass, transforming the aforementioned emotions into an artistic expression. She assumes the role of an abuser, and, by using the physical and chemical properties of the material, she viciously treats the round shapes of newly blown bubbles of glass - piercing, tearing, and deforming them with fire and sharp, remorseless tools. Furthermore, the naturally precious material of glass is filled with rough, brutish, insulating foam. Like a shameful secret, it nests in it, giving glass the function of a borderline between what is private and what is public. As a result of this symbiosis, a new entity emerges. The artist's anger and anxiety is transferred onto it, in a palpable and symbolic dimension.

However, we can also read this work as an analogy to the adaptation to the realms of new reality. We are looking at an odd entity that has survived the consequences of abuse. An entity possessing resilience, able to regain its lost potency. Perhaps it is an analogy to ourselves or perhaps to non-human beings trying to subjugate our species through violent behavior. They are the ones who oppose us day after day.

7. KARIN FORSLUND

Portrait, 2018

video

Stop, wait, hold on. Stay with the trouble.

The present world will change, it will be transformed, it will no longer be as we know it. This is just the beginning, it may be both sad and pessimistic, but it gives hope for adaptation to a different, new reality.

These skills are touched by the very humanistic work of Karin Forslund. We are looking at the artist, standing calmly, motionless. Only the gentle, barely visible chest movements and the involuntary twitching of the eyelids tell us that we are looking at the video, not at the photography. In the middle of the footage, a sudden switcheroo occurs, turning the existing order upside down.

It is worth mentioning that Karin uses the medium of glass and its physical, unique properties in a very thoughtful, metaphorical way. Glass acts as a commentator of the present day and the sovereign of the created situation. Hence, the artist, in her work, explores the limits of endurance, putting herself in a new, dangerous situation. Unprepared, she faces reality, and, thus, she keeps building her

resilience (in latin „resilere” means „to resile” thus coming back to the previous state.) We understand it as the development of resistance against destructive events and the ability to recuperate. We can look at this work as a form of adaptation to disturbing future scenarios, perceived on a macro and micro scale, through the prism of a planetary crisis or inbred individual emotions.

8. JEANNE-SPOHIE AAS

Glassism III and Glassism V, 2021

printing on dibond

“Working with glass feels like a relationship: a cooperation where we both have needs and limits. We discover and grow together, but we are also able to hurt each other. Hot glass needs to be handled gently while cold glass is hard but fragile. It can break easily, burn you and make you bleed along the way. It’s important for me to somehow communicate with the material. Glass is my partner of choice because creation is to me a process that cannot take place without interaction and mutual respect”.

In her metaphysical photographs, Jeanne Sophie Aas shows us a different perspective of working with glass as a medium. She employs its metamorphic nature on the level of shaping matter, but also ideas. She goes far beyond the usual patterns of thinking, empowering and treating glass as an entity or an integral part of her body (bioglass naturally integrates with the human skeleton). We are looking at the physical act of establishing a relationship with a „living”, earthy, natural material. Glass communicates with us and we communicate with it. It is our part, partner, obligation or ballast. The artist, in a symbolic dimension, creates an unprecedented community and analyzes its possibilities of coexistence.

9. LENE TANGEN

Unique Memories, 2022

cast glass, wood

For the artist Lene Tangen the Arctic, and its climatic and geological conditions, become the main creative inspiration. Controversial in geopolitical terms, rich in diverse fauna and flora and covered with ice - disappearing at an alarming rate - the Arctic stands as a land extremely sensitive to climate change, constituting an early warning system for climatologists. Unfortunately global warming of the Earth has its own effects even in the most remote, pristine and uninhabited

corners of the world. Current scientific analyzes present a sad prospect of the future. The Arctic ice cap, much older than human history, which has covered itself with a new thin layer of ice during the cold months, is now set to disappear within 60 years. And some scientists prophesized that by 2035 it will have been long gone. Ice is the solid state of water. The main factor that distinguishes the Earth from the other planets is the presence of water. It covers 70 percent of our planet. We emerged from water and our life depends on it. Water is the best medium of communication that exists; it enables the transmission of life information between cells. For Aristotle, water was one of the four classical elements that interconnected in order to create reality. In the world of mythology, water is sometimes considered a medium facilitating the transition from one world to another. All the above features and properties of water and its natural analogies to the changing state of glass medium are used by Lene Tangen in her sculpture *Unique Memories*. Looking at this piece of art, we can get the impression that we're looking at a trace fossil from primordial times. An epitaph for a lost world that shall not return. It has vanished as a result of our human expansion and greed. We observe an organic form enchanted within the qualities of glass: its ephemerality and expression in the transition from liquid to solid state, reflecting environmental changes, frozen in time and space. Lene's artistic strategy is oriented towards conveying the nature of phenomena and processes taking place in the world of nature, reflecting care for ecology and the memory of what is here and now. What will be the consequences of human ambition and selfishness and what will our descendants no longer be able to know, experience and know?

*The pedestal is made of 200 years old oakwood by former professor Dieter Stojan at Meisterschule Ebern fur das Schreinerwerk (Germany).

10. FRANTZEN&MJANGER

LÄNE PUST (Lend a breath), 2021

blown glass, wood, mdf box, fabric, steel, paper

The work of the Frantzen & Mjanger duo *Lend a breath* becomes the essence of experiencing and understanding what a community is; what are the benefits for us, for our environment, of co-creating and being part of a community. The artists, however, do it in a puckish way, creating a performative activity and inviting the audience to participate in it; that element seems to play a very important role in their artistic practice. They use a blown glass bubble as a prop. We can

borrow and spend a day with it. It is a unique way to communicate and share the world in times when global forms of contact are becoming more isolated and so much faster. Caring for an object, carrying it everywhere, sort of binds us to the ground, enhances our presence, allows us to consciously look at where we are at the very moment.

The bubble itself was blown, and that basically means, it was created only thanks to the expression of human breath. Breathing connects all living creatures. It is the process allowing us to exist. The most basic, equality mechanism that connects everyone regardless of cultural, religious, racial or species background. We all share the air inside us, around us.

The action itself takes place without the participation of the artists, whose absence acts as a gesture of trust and an invitation to co-create a widely understood space together. In this way, the project democratizes the experience of art and culture through trust, accessibility and co-creation. It becomes close and personal.

Hence, glass becomes the key to building an invisible relationship, bond and community. It is a link, a communication tool and an idea carrier. But how can the invisible community, which we create every day just by breathing, become noticed, visible, understood? How can we build communities which are based on solidarity and friendship? These are the questions that the artists try to answer with their actions, creating a situation of transformation that enables a new economy of cooperation based on a community of exchange and hospitality.

Artists: Anna-Linda Gabriel, Frantzsen&Mjanger, Heidi Kristiansen, Ida Siebke, Jeanne-Sophie Aas, Karin Forslund, Lene Charlotte Tangen, Maia Birkeland, Matilde Duus, Åsa Wigum Skjetne **Gallery Programming and Curator:** Mika Drozdowska **Production:** Monika Muszyńska, Patrycja Ścisłowska **Set-up:** Michał Perucki, Marcin Pecyna **PR:** Joanna Glinkowska, Agata Kalinowska, Żaneta Wańczyk **Audience collaboration:** Anna Kwapisz **Graphic design:** Kaja Kusztra **Scenography consultation:** Hubert Kielan **Networking:** Berenika Nikodemka **Support:** Administration department and education department **Partnership:** S12 Gallery and Workshop **Support:** Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norwegian Crafts **Media Patronage:** USTA