

Other glass works in abstract, plantlike, and floral shapes are set upon this plinth and within a large polished and waxed calcite crystal. Formed from hot-sculpted and handblown glass, the glass pieces occupy discrete spaces within the artwork. Objects nestled within the crystal appear as a form of votive, an alcove that symbolically creates a place for contemplation and devotion. Each assemblage is of personal significance to the artist and her views of time, space, and the body. By inviting the visitor in to explore her oeuvre, meaning can be drawn from her creations.

Ascending to the second floor, the show continues through two more galleries. In the Project Room, light emanates from a spiny chandelier titled *Constellation* (2022-23). Positioned beneath it is Akashi's torso set upon a concrete base. This chest sculpture, *Spines (Inner Light)* (2022-23), is formed from translucent crystal and is enveloped by thorns. Leaves of rose-colored glass are also placed about the floor of this room; the broken necklaces that are draped upon each glass leaf, according to the artist, indicate the transitory nature of relationships. In contrast to the sculpture of her body, photos of distant constellations approximately 20 inches wide are hung on the gallery's walls, extending the focus beyond the physical form.

The third and final gallery brings the show into the light, literally and figuratively. A skylight frames this room that, in its center, is occupied by a clear, networked spherical structure. In *Cosmic Axis* (2022-2023), Akashi takes frameworked borosilicate to form a foundation for glass cherry blossoms which, much like epiphytes, have tendrils that descend into open space. These small, sculpted blossoms evoke the Japanese tradition of *hanami*, which recognizes the momentary beauty of flowering cherry trees. Slowly rotating upon a concrete base, *Cosmic Axis* is encircled by more rose-colored leaves, which have also been set out on the floors of the other two galleries. Decorated with chewing gum and silver necklaces, their forms are brought into greater relief by the skylight.

The walls of this gallery also display photos of constellations that frame the intricate, glass-formed world that is its centerpiece. Capturing moments in galactic time, these photographs were scaled down from glass-plate astronomy negatives shot from telescopes. Akashi, who learned the craft of photography in its analog days, uses these images to illustrate the world beyond and to capture the changing nature of the universe. The photographs selected represent a range of eras, from the 1950s through the 1980s, and in researching the images, she sought to present celestial phenomena. As she explained in *Art in America*, "There's one photograph of a galaxy merger, which occurs when a larger galaxy latches onto a smaller galaxy and starts to pull it into one of its arms." The positioning of these small-sized photographs, contrasting with the detail within the networked glassine orb, forms a spatial dialogue between her sculpture and the cosmological photos. Through redefining size, space, and scale, Akashi draws close attention to, and creates meaning through, the ephemeral.

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## Granite Calimpong

"BANTER"  
TRAVER GALLERY  
SEATTLE  
JULY 6-29, 2023

An intentional naïveté informs the works in Granite Calimpong's lively exhibition "Banter," his first at the Traver Gallery in Seattle. The assembled bulbous figures sport single-word titles such as *Juicy* or *Breezy* (all works 2023), and they are endearing in their dimpled blown-glass forms accented with borosilicate appendages, not unlike toddlers waving stunted arms to be picked up or antennae that might be tuned to a children's radio program. To see only their whimsical essence, however, would be incomplete. Like so much in fairy tales and fantastic fables, there is a darker side as well. *Juicy* and *Breezy*, as well as *Sticky* and *Squeezed*, have an adult aspect—think Snow White's seven dwarves; each designated moniker serves as a naming of its intended personality, if you will, suggesting more mature themes that might lurk beneath the surface: Lions and tigers and bears, oh my.

With this broader approach, one might see a message of regenerative growth in the

*Sticky*, 2023. Blown glass, borosilicate rods, mirror. H 10, W 16, D 13 in.





appendages, a possible reference to Louis Comfort Tiffany's pigtail prunts. Attention is drawn through Calimpong's clever sandwiching of a mirror between the vessel and the attached tendril, illuminating it with the reflected light. Looking closer, viewers see their own eye looking back at them, the returned gaze marking our search for connection and understanding.

Vessel bodies are accented in mottled colors and patterns, recalling the midcentury West German ceramic finish known as Lava Glaze, which creates unique colors and textures reminiscent of cooled magma. An accomplished ceramicist, Calimpong created a corollary to this effect in glass, in which one color is cut by another in seething and boiling bubbles, the result of high temperatures. Several works on display do, in fact, incorporate ceramic in combination with glass. The artist's father is a working potter, and it seems his knowledge passed on to his son, who speaks several material languages.

There is less joy evident in *Moraine* (2022), and here my mind moved to another sort of powerful mythology—20th-century television advertising and its fondness for recurring characters. I saw an echo of Grimace—the large, misshapen purple taste bud of McDonaldland, the creepy mascot of capitalist steamrolling and empty calories. The core vessel of *Moraine* is ceramic and matte, and, in contrast, the attached glass is a complimentary study in buff and gloss, transparency and opacity.

The more recent works, *Tuned In* and *Slugged*, see a move to recognizable shape—harder-edged, with the geometric replacing the lumpen and undefined. In its given title, *Tuned In* includes, sprouted from its blown mass, an antennae-like and vertical appendage that reaches above the brash and bulbous form beneath. *Slugged* is adorned with a similar protrusion, although its reach is short and suspect, and is matched by the speckled yellow mass of the body it is attached to. Here it is more joystick, or whammy bar, and looks not to the sky for supposed function, but inward to resonance and self-referential manipulation, a search for soul.

A materialist by nature, Calimpong's understanding of form, as expressed in asymmetry and highlighted by color, is distinctive—if quirky. Borosilicate extensions pair complimentary color with base tone, cool in combination with warm and vice versa, revealing a knowledge of color theory. For the artist, surface is fetish, and allows the elbow room necessary for wide experimentation atop exploratory shapes, all derived from the basic bubble.

This is what glassblowing should be, in its most unfettered, and in pursuit of pure sculpture. In such capable hands, what is old becomes new again.

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## Laura Kramer

**"PORTRAITS IN PEARLS"  
HELLER GALLERY  
NEW YORK CITY  
JUNE 2-30, 2023**

There's a reason hyperrealist sculptors such as Ron Muek or Sam Jinks use silicone for their startlingly lifelike sculptures of people. The material, like the human body itself, is fundamentally soft, and nothing else approximates skin so unnervingly. Sure, glass can be mold-blown or hot-sculpted into a reasonable facsimile of a face or body, but there's no mistaking its inherently brittle stiffness for something once alive. That's what makes Laura Kramer's choice to present sculptural abstractions of aristocratic figures from history as jewel-encrusted vessels so compelling. For its summer exhibition, Heller Gallery displayed nine abstracted personages, with glass vases standing in for kings and queens of Europe. In Kramer's interpretation, these suggest variously voluptuous and full-figured, tall and militaristic, or languid and pliant personalities, and they are named accordingly, by first name only. Who would

have thought that a tabletop glass vessel could evoke heads of state whose exploits remain legendary today?

Kramer, in addition to holding a BFA and MFA in glass (RISD and Ohio State, respectively), earned a master's in anthropology and material culture from Columbia University, and her new body of work represents the fusion of her glass education with her research into the relationship between society and the objects around them. Kramer centered on the emergence of the pearl as the ultimate status symbol in the courts of 17th- and 18th-century Europe.

An artifact of the early (and tragic) encounter between the Old and New World, the pearl was relatively unknown in Europe before this time despite the fact that the Romans valued them so highly, a Roman general was said to have once financed an entire military campaign from the proceeds of the sale of just one of his mother's earrings. The sudden influx of pearls from newly discovered lands to the West rapidly became a symbol of a new age of conquest, and pearls became closely associated with the riches of the New World, for which there was a bloody race between powers to claim the most land and resources.

Entering the gallery exhibition last summer felt a bit like arriving at court, where one first "met" the last queen of France, *Marie* (all works 2023), practically glowing in pastel shades, including her signature turquoise, which has become widely known as the distinctive color of the Tiffany box. But Kramer also includes sea green, darker blues, as well as soft pink and white tones for the cascades of pearls that are so thickly encrusted on the 11-inch-tall vessel's walls that they seem to be pulling it downward with their pendulous weight. Kramer sees the introduction of the pearl to European society and its rise to become the ultimate aristocratic status symbol as part of a larger race among monarchs to outdo one another in the exploitation of the New World, which led to the rise of empires but also centuries of brutal wars. Many of the finest pearls were the result of the Spanish conquest of South