

The Spaces In Between

Michael Endo's Kiln Formed Glass

by Shawn Waggoner

Photography by Michael Endo and S. Sayer

An abandoned, dilapidated swimming pool in the forest. A pile of trash smoldering in a secluded backyard. A dark and deserted highway flanked by an unexplained light. Michael Endo's kiln formed glass is about the potential of empty spaces and how people inhabit the subliminal area between the civilized world and wilderness. It begs the question: Is our world real or manufactured?

"Locked in a loop of familiarity and ambiguity, my gestural paintings, glasswork, and sculptures exist in a moment of tension between the unnamable source and fiction. They suggest an original reference but are independent of it. By blurring the lines between the absolutes of reality and fiction, I strive to enter a subliminal state where everything is imbued with an ecstatic transformative energy—a place where the silent hum of the subconscious is unmistakable."

A native of Portland, Oregon, Endo earned a BA from Portland State University in 2005 and an MFA in painting from Cranbrook Academy of Art, Michigan, in 2009. While in Bloomfield Hills he worked as an assistant to Michigan artist Beverly Fishman, who is well known for her painted and polished stainless steel works. He returned to Portland in 2009 and began working as the registrar for the Bullseye Gallery.

Trained as a painter, Endo took classes at the Bullseye Research and Education department in order to learn more about glass. "When I started taking classes, I saw the potential of glass as a painting medium, as a material that could be manipulated to make three-dimensional paintings that not only created the illusion of depth on the surface, but also possessed a physical depth with layers of information. Light could penetrate the piece and bounce around. As a painter, I was always using glazes, which are transparent layers of paint. Glass is naturally translucent, and I layer it just as I would paint. That potential really attracted me to the material."

Last year, Endo became the curator of the Bullseye Gallery and goes back and forth between curating exhibitions and making his own kiln formed art, which has been exhibited internationally in group and solo shows. In 2011, Endo was the recipient of a Regional Arts and Culture Council Grant and a finalist for the Seattle Art Museum's Betty Bowen Award.



Michael Endo, *Adrift*, 13-7/8" x 20" x 5/8",
kiln formed glass, 2013.

Painting with Glass

Endo's workspace is located in an old Portland feed warehouse. Under the 15-foot-high ceilings, he shares a 1,200-square-foot studio with partner and fellow artist Emily Nachison and two other artists. Endo and Nachison have collaborated on curatorial projects and in 2011 exhibited together in a two-person show entitled *Of Other Spaces* at Bullseye Gallery.

Endo begins his process with an original photograph or drawing. Sketching his concepts on paper helps him determine how many layers of glass his piece will require and how the imagery should be divided between layers.

Obtaining painterly results using glass frit and enamel is not a difficult process, he says. "Using the vitreous enamel is just like using paint. I've done a lot of drawing using powdered charcoal and graphite, and using glass powder is similar to that." He sifts or spreads the frit onto the surface, manipulating it with a brush or rubber-tipped tool. Using Bullseye powdered glass and Reusche vitreous enamel, Endo paints his imagery on the front and back surfaces of the 3 mm-thick glass sheets and fuses those individually in his GM 1414 Skutt kiln. They are then layered and inspected before another firing fuses the panels together.

Each piece goes through five to six firing cycles. Endo works on multiple pieces at a time, and each piece takes up to three weeks



*Michael Endo, Smolder, 24-1/8" x 30" x 2-1/4"
(installed), kiln formed glass, 2011.*



*Michael Endo, Olympic, 24" x 29-3/4",
kiln formed glass, 2012.*

to finish. As he creates the work, he incorporates opaque areas where wall clips or French cleats can be glued onto the back, disguising and hiding any necessary hanging hardware.

All of Endo's work is sandblasted, and a clear shield coat is applied after firing. "I am not interested in the glossy surface of glass, because it reflects too much light. As a painter, we are always trying to get light to enter into the paint film to bounce around and give that glazed, glowing effect. With glass, in order for that to happen, I have to break that glossy surface and have more of a satin finish."



*Michael Endo, Et in Arcadia Ego,
34" x 56-1/8" x 1-1/4", kiln formed glass, 2011.
Photo by S. Sayer.*

The Melancholia of the Monochrome

Thus far, Endo's work has been fairly monochromatic. Some of that choice is about trying to capture a certain mood. However, "I like to really understand a material before I use a lot of color," says Endo. "I've only been working in glass for two years, and I'm still learning how each color works. I use color sporadically. I have gotten comfortable using the fuchsia and a few other colors, and I do a lot of testing in order to know how much material to put down to get the color that I want."

The specific colors Endo currently incorporates are used to signal viewers that they are looking at something other-worldly. In some of the work, he uses pink, an unnatural color in most settings, to signal viewers that they are looking at something outside of the everyday experience. "It's not like looking out a window into the natural world, but rather at a space you are unfamiliar with."

His piece *Smolder* references his upbringing in the Northwest and the everyday sensation that the forest is not far away. "People inhabit the space in between the civilized world and the wilderness, and you can't always see what they're doing. I remember a house I visited as a kid and how they had all this stuff piled up in the backyard. This gave the space an underlying uneasy feeling. Are we projecting the uneasiness or is something sinister going on? The pink highlights those questions."

To create *Smolder*, Endo used a combination of enamels and powder on 6 mm glass. The lines on the house and palette were drawn with a cone 10 underglaze pencil like those used in ceramics. Here the images were drawn onto the glass after the surface had been sandblasted.

In *Drift*, Endo incorporated an opal orange dock or raft. "I didn't want people to just get drawn into the island in the background, but to this platform in between. The color signals the viewer that this is an important landing point for you to project yourself onto."

Drift was fired on a black base sheet, on which Endo used white enamel and powder to create the island imagery. "Adding colors to my palette is a slow and methodical process. As I get more comfortable with the material, additional colors will be introduced."

Traversing Marginal Spaces

Endo's primary aesthetic goal is to reveal and examine the experiences people tend to gloss over. "Some people get turned off by what they perceive as a darkness to the work. But that doesn't bother me. They are entitled to their own opinion, and I don't consider it while I am making the work. I don't think the work is exclusively dark. People read that into it, but I am interested in exploring these marginal spaces and experiences and bringing them forward."

Endo created his work *Et in Arcadia Ego* for a 2011 installation at the Portland Building, designed by Michael Graves. The work, displayed in the lobby, is based on the paintings of Nicolas Poussin, the leading painter of the classical French Baroque style, who spent most of his working life in Rome. The title is Latin for "Also in Arcadia I am Here." It serves as a reminder that even in our most idealized fantasies, death still exists.

"All of Poussin's paintings contained reminders of the presence of death in these pastoral settings. In the 17th century, it was fash-

ionable for Europeans to have images of Roman ruins, but Poussin would throw in vignettes of people dying to remind us that our *idea* of Rome wasn't what Rome really was."

Et in Arcadia Ego is Endo's homage to the Packard Auto Plant in Detroit, Michigan. This piece serves as a reminder that industry in this country is changing and, in this case, dying. In the shape of a car windshield, the work depicts an abandoned and deserted auto plant. The 6 mm piece was created on two layers of glass, a khaki base sheet with a peach powder over the bottom and a top surface



Michael Endo, *Telegraph*, 23-1/2" x 29-3/4", kiln formed glass, 2011.

created with white powders and enamels. Fired five times, black was used in select areas to highlight and shadow some of the elements.

Based on a memory of a Portland camp for kids called Outdoor School, Endo created his work, *Olympic*, which depicts an abandoned swimming pool in the middle of the woods. "There's something very utopian about a swimming pool. It requires a lot of energy and effort in order to mimic a naturally occurring thing like a pond or creek. It's interesting that someone went to all the effort to build this thing only to let it fall into ruin. What has happened here? What's lost? What's gained by the world moving on in this particular way?"

Olympic was created using a white base sheet with two layers of 3 mm clear glass over the top. Powder was applied in between layers and on top to create the depth of light. Fine gradients of black and gray were sifted onto the piece to produce the light effects.

Telegraph incorporates similar techniques—a base sheet of white and top sheet of clear, with the billboard sandwiched in between. Gray and black powders were layered to create the atmosphere. "Telegraph is the name of one of the major streets in Detroit. It runs through Pontiac, a fairly abandoned town now. I used to drive by a deserted strip mall called Summit Place. All of the streetlights still worked, but business signage had fallen down, and the store fronts were empty and abandoned. It created a very lonely feeling."

Somewhere between Sculpture, Painting, and Installation

In July 2013, Endo exhibited new work at the Milk Factory gallery in Chicago, Illinois, and his work will be a part of Bullseye's exhibition at SOFA Chicago in November 2013. Though he is not interested in making glass appear as something it is not, he plans on pushing the material to behave in a different way.

"Locked in a loop of familiarity and ambiguity, my gestural paintings, glass-work, and sculptures exist in a moment of tension between the unnamable source and fiction."

"When people think of kiln forming, they think of fusing plates, but the truth is that you can use glass in so many other ways. One of the nice things about kiln forming is you have the luxury to spend days working out the composition and really developing your imagery in glass. I am interested in the ways in which glass can act as a painting medium. Somewhere between sculpture, painting, and installation is where my work can be defined."

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Michael Endo, Artist and Curator

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