



STORY BY  
Sue Taylor

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# Klaus Moje

## Portland Art Museum

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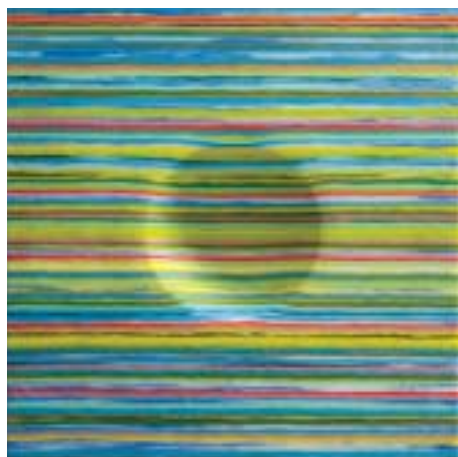
Recognized the world over for his artistry in glass, German born Klaus Moje graced this magnificent 30-year retrospective, curated by Bruce Guenther, with an ambitious new work done expressly for the occasion. His monumental *Portland Panels: Choreographed Geometry*, 2007, comprises four wall-mounted fused-glass rectangles, each over six feet tall and four feet wide. Moje relied on artist-technicians at the Research & Education studios of Bullseye Glass Co. in Portland to cut the 22,000 colored-glass strips he would need when he arrived from his home in Wapengo, Australia, to create the panels. He also required an enormous kiln at Bullseye to fire them. They are abstract designs, with wide variegated bands in three different palettes—yellow/green, mauve/red, and slate gray—interweaving across a dark grissaille ground. The dynamic compositions recall Lucas Samaras's Reconstructions of the 1970s, "paintings" made of crisscrossing sewn fabric strips that mocked the minimalist grid. Though Moje's first commission was for stained-glass windows nearly half a century ago, his *Portland Panels* are more paintings than windows, independent of architecture, with all the autonomy and emphatic materiality of high modernism.

It is fascinating to trace Moje's shifting preoccupations, beginning with several cut-crystal objects from the 1970s that point to his familial heritage: as a youth, he apprenticed in his parents' glass-cutting workshop in Hamburg. These vessels, whether opaque or shimmeringly translucent, soon become anomalies in Moje's oeuvre, for they are carved sculptural forms, devoid of color. In his move to kiln-formed, fused glass, the artist turned from a subtractive to an additive process and an obsession with polychrome patterning. Several bowls in the exhibition show him fashioning mosaic from sliced colored rods in the late 1970s and early 80s. In a round, relatively deep

bowl with lip, subtitled *Lifesaver*, 1979, the cane, cut crosswise, produced concentric circles of white and red; drab greens in the shallower *Untitled 5*, 1977, make the elliptical mosaic bowl resemble an inverted turtle shell. Sliced lengthwise, the rods generated an impression of satin ribbon when fused into bowls with broad brims, in which Moje begins to downplay the functional vessel to explore the various possibilities of surface.

His infatuation with color is informed by sensuous experiences—diving in a coral sea off the coast of Jordan, encountering nature afresh upon arriving in Australia in 1982, discovering aboriginal art and keenly surveying trends in modern painting.

Thanks to the colored sheet glass developed for him by Bullseye, Moje could translate the visual excitement of these experiences into works like *Untitled 9*, 1984, from the New Horizon Series, where blue, green, yellow, orange, pink and white horizontal striations traverse a 16-inch-square panel. One is tempted to read this piece as a vibrant “landscape,” in which the central slumped basin suggests a sun floating in a cloud-streaked sky—but that would be too literal an interpretation. That central concavity persists, throughout the 90s and into the new century, in square, circular or octagonal works displayed on the wall, in gorgeous patterns ranging from herringbone, stripes and eye-dazzling weaves to fluid marbling and rippling, expressionistic effects. Moje’s insistence on a hemispherical depression at the center of these otherwise completely pictorial works nods to his material’s utilitarian tradition.



In the 1990s, his collaborative experiments with Dante Marioni and other glassblowers yielded vessels such as the colorful chevron-patterned bottles and cups titled *M/M/P*, 1993, for Moje, Marioni and Portland, where the two artists ingeniously combined their respective warm and hot procedures. On his own, however, Moje prefers two dimensions to three. His retrospective includes, in addition to the *Portland Panels*, multi-tile flat works that rival the most significant abstract painting of his time. *Floating Red*, 2000, nearly five feet square overall, rehearses a huge camouflage pattern in broad swaths of matte red, green, black and white, while three untitled pieces (all 2006), similarly arranged in grids, separately evoke Frank Stella’s early systemic canvases and

abstractions by such accomplished painters as Howard Hodgkin and Gerhard Richter.

Was it pure coincidence that one passed a Josef Albers painting, *Late Reminder*, 1953, near the entrance to this exhibition? Like Moje, Albers was a German expatriate artist-educator who began his career in stained glass and dedicated his oeuvre to the endless potential of color. Moje’s brilliance encompasses technical innovation as well, and, richly evinced in this survey, the discovery of entirely new horizons for his chosen medium. †

“Klaus Moje” will travel to the Museum of Arts & Design, March 11–May 31, 2009. The 100-page softcover catalog, with essays by Bruce Guenther, Dan Klein and Ted Sawyer, is \$24.95, [www.pam.org](http://www.pam.org).

Opposite:  
*The Portland Panels: Choreographed Geometry* (detail, panel 2), 2007, suite of four fused and diamond-polished glass panels {each panel: h. 74½ in, w. 47¼ in}.  
Courtesy of the artist and Bullseye Gallery

Bottom Left:  
*Untitled 9*, (from the New Horizon series), 1984, sheet glass, stripped, kiln-formed, wheel-cut {h. 16¾ in, w. 16¾ in, d. 2 in}.  
Courtesy Bullseye Gallery

Bottom Right:  
*Untitled 10* (detail, panels 2–8), 2006, glass, kiln-formed, diamond-polished {each panel: h. 23 in, w. 23 in}.  
Courtesy Bullseye Gallery

