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Conference Report

The Power of Glass: Craft Scotland Conference, 2022

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Abstract: In 2022, the UN marked the *International Year of Glass*, celebrating the essential role glass has, and will continue to have, in society. One element of this celebration was the importance of glass within art and its history, which the *Craft Scotland 2022 Conference: The Power of Glass* looked to explore. The aim of the conference was to allow a range of individuals, be they academics, researchers, or students of glass and art history within Scotland and the UK, to access contemporary thought within an under-represented field in the UK craft sector. In this paper, we look to highlight the links between the aims of the *International Year of Glass* and the proceedings of *The Power of Glass Conference*, demonstrating how glass artists, makers, and designers are part of a growing international body of creatives who are using the communicative possibilities of glass as a vehicle in which to raise pertinent questions and platform unheard and overlooked narratives. Moreover, they seek to overturn perceived biases of what glass is and its future potential by placing their craft within an arena of judgement beyond discussions of process and technique and by elevating socio-political glass art on par with other forms of artistic protest and commentary.

Keywords: glass; Art Glass; studio glass; socio-political commentary; new narratives; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); sustainability; climate awareness; diversity; identity; representation; environment

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1. Introduction

Glass has long held the power to communicate; however, over the centuries objects within the medium have often been regarded as an expression of aesthetics, wealth, and privilege; or on other occasions advocating certain religious ideologies or hierarchal positions within a familial construct. It has only been in our most recent past, since the establishment of the European and American studio glass movement of the 1950s, that artists in glass have used the creative potential of their medium to explore more pertinent questions and narratives of social and political importance such as diversity, inclusion, sustainability, and climate awareness.

Subjects such as these have often been associated mainly with fine art practice and not with those whose work is considered to sit in the canon of craft, due to the systems of segregation under which our art historical hierarchal taxonomies have been developed. Art critic and historian Garth Clark, in his critique of the studio craft movement, discusses how a desire for equality with fine art has damaged the movement significantly, stating: "for most of the modern craft movement's 150-year life it has wrestled with a debilitating condition, an unhappy contentious relationship with the fine arts. Craft has moved constantly between resentment and envy with the relationship growing increasingly acrimonious as art moved away from craft-based values in the mid-century and closer to post-1950 conceptualism and dematerialization of the art object" (Clark 2008). The argument around a hierarchal construct in art forms, with craft—and thus in turn glass—being considered something lowly, is a tired and unnecessary trope. Presumptions such as this by critical commentators have impeded and marginalized craft, and thus glass art practice, over

the years by pigeonholing its potential for work beyond the traditional process-led and material exploration that craft media have been stereotypically regarded for. This in turn has inhibited discussion, academic debate, and celebration of the artistic endeavour that the discipline of glass has developed.

However, there is a rationale behind some of this argument when we discuss and focus on the glass sector here in the UK, as it was the glass sector itself that perpetuated this delineation. For example, sat within the collection of the National Museums Scotland is a remarkable work by the artist Liz Crowley (see Figure 1), who studied glass in the early 1980s, that was overlooked and dismissed at its point of creation. Today, this work should be re-evaluated as a powerful artistic work of socio-political commentary and the Art Glass sector. Unfortunately, there is little written about Crowley who left the glass scene soon after she completed her studies at the Royal College of Art (RCA). Her collaborator and friend, glass artist Tessa Clegg, in an interview for the British Library oral history series *Craft Lives*[1] puts this down to the fact that Crowley felt despondent, isolated, and undervalued, as the scene was still too obsessed with form over narrative.



Figure 1. Hand mirror, pink cast glass; the handle is the figure of the TV cartoon character He-Man supporting a frame with cherubs, with the image of Adonis in the mirror surrounded by imitation pearls by Liz Crowley, London, England, c. 1985. Image © National Museums Scotland.

At the time, Crowley's explorations around the subject of feminism within her works, and, as with this one, her wry look at male idolatry and the positioning of the Adonis as an ideal masculine attribute, were considered too political by her tutors at the RCA and often overlooked by others when viewing her pieces. This could be purely dismissed as to reflect the era. However, as other Craft disciplines such as ceramics had been radicalized by second-wave feminists in the late 1960s and 1970s, it highlights, as discussed above, the problematic continuation of a male-dominated glass fraternity. Furthermore, glass, with

its imbued gendered material assumptions and bias, has led to less female representation to fight for inclusivity and representation and provide role models by which others could be inspired or continue the call to arms. It also demonstrates that, despite the fact we first witnessed glass as a socio-political medium being utilized by artists in the former state of Czechoslovakia in an attempt to disrupt the then-Soviet political regime during the second half of the twentieth century, the UK sector has been closeted to the potential of glass as a vehicle for socio-political narrative and satire until only relatively recently.

In reaction, and due to a lack of critical publications on glass art, self-initiated movements within the glass sector by the artists themselves look to counter-argue the prevailing biases, from both externally looking in on the sector, and from those within, by promoting the view that the studio glass movement needs to succeed and break away from itself, challenging glass artists to actively move away from the technique-dominated culture of studio glass and focus on concept-led approaches instead. For instance, in 2013 the glass artist, writer, and curator Tim Tate advocated for *Glass Secessionism*, a post-studio glass movement to be recognized by the sector, commentating that:

> *"We are moving away from the technique-dominated culture of studio glass. We respect good technique and understand its importance in creating great art from glass. However, we believe that great art should be driven primarily by artistic vision, and technique should facilitate the vision. For too long, technique has driven the majority of studio glass. As Secessionists we do not seek to isolate ourselves from other artists working in glass, but to enhance the field as a whole."*[2]

Closely connected to the mission of Tate's *Glass Secessionism* is artist and academic Jerome Harrington's 2012 project *Glass in the Expanded Field*. Developed with the staff and students of the Glass department of the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam, the project employed Rosalind Krauss' notion of the *Expanded Field* to propose that the field of glass practice has been affected by a similar expansion and that Krauss' text, and specifically her use of a series of diagrams, could be used to visualize and understand the nature of contemporary glass practice.[3] Rosalind Krauss was a prominent art critic of the 1960s and 1970s; her 1979 essay *Sculpture in the expanded field*,[4] was a reaction to what she perceived as the historicizing of the new, with critics failing to recognize that these new artistic endeavours truly broke away from anything that had come before. Thus, guided by Krauss' model, the research team considered a wide range of artworks in glass that had different and often divergent aesthetics and drivers behind them, to raise a series of questions relating to the studio glass movement:

> *"What is the relation of contemporary practitioners to the founding principles of Studio Glass? What are the relations between various contemporary works? What is the difference between the vase maker and the installation maker? And how can the language of criticism, the systems of exhibition, or the numerous publications about glass as an area of activity deal, with this difference? Is the category of glass practice itself, having been forced to cover such a heterogeneity, in danger of collapsing?"*[5]

The project found that many of the artists that were drawn on the map occupied different places within the field, freely working across, and often transcending, disciplinary boundaries depending on their project or the time in their career. The project also sought to break down the different techniques and approaches to break up the wider term of glass into a more nuanced classification that covers a wide range of practices and works. The map, although not perfect, is an interesting discussion point that throws open the field of glass and allows practitioners to understand their trajectories alongside the works of others, navigating the field freely and showing that Art Glass is actively part of the expanded field of art.

As 2022 marked the UN's *International Year of Glass*, celebrating the essential role glass has and will continue to have in Society, we as researchers came together to develop a conference that would look to explore and celebrate recent expansions within the field of Art Glass, by discussing the importance of glass within our creative communities, and

how artists, makers, and designers today are employing this visceral and experiential medium to explore social and political narratives that are pertinent to contemporary society. Our aim was to provide a safe and accessible discussion space in which artists, makers, and researchers could share knowledge, inspire, and educate others on topics that ranged from diversity, identity, representation, and environmental concerns, whilst looking to bring together a range of individuals, be they academics, researchers, or students of glass and art history within Scotland and the UK to access contemporary thought within an under-represented field of art history.

Within this paper, we will highlight the links between the aims of the *International Year of Glass* and the proceedings of *The Power of Glass Conference* (see Figure 2), and demonstrate how glass artists, makers, and designers are part of a growing international body of creatives, who are using the communicative possibilities of glass as a vehicle in which to raise pertinent and powerful questions, and platform unheard and overlooked narratives. They seek to overturn perceived biases when thinking of what glass is and its future potential, by placing their craft within an arena of judgement beyond discussions of process and technique and elevating socio-political glass art on a par with other forms of artistic protest and commentary.



Figure 2. Right to left: Christopher Day, Jeff Zimmer and Sarah Rothwell in discussion at the *Craft Scotland Conference, 2022*. Photography by Neil Hanna for Craft Scotland.

2. Discussion

This main section of the paper will discuss *The Power of Glass Conference* (2022) and its three sessions: 1. Equality, Diversity, and Identity explored through Glass Art, 2. Climate Action, Responsible Consumption, and Sustainability in Glass Art and Design, and 3. The Future of Glass Education in the UK.

2.1. The Power of Glass Conference

The premise of the Power of Glass conference started out following the announcement on 18 May 2021 that the General Assembly of the United Nations had approved a joint application by the International Commission on Glass (ICG), the Community of Glass Associations (CGA), and ICOM-Glass, creating UN resolution 75/27[6] and declaring 2022 the *International Year of Glass* (iyog2022). The purpose of this UN-sanctioned festival was to celebrate the essential role glass has in Society, and in turn, how glass was inherently linked

to the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.[7]

iyog2022 succeeded in this by:

1. *Demonstrating the role of glass in advancing civilization throughout recorded history.*
2. *Organizing international glass science and art festivals, with workshops to excite and inform the public of this rich history, and highlight links between glass, art, and culture.*
3. *Stimulating research on glass amongst organizations in education, industry, research, and the public domain, including museums, to address the great challenges the world faces: achieving sustainable and equitable growth and improving the quality of life everywhere.*
4. *Building worldwide alliances focused on science and engineering for young people, while addressing gender balance and the needs of developing countries/emerging economies.*[8]

Since their publication in 2015, the world has reflected upon and used the UN Sustainable Development Goals as a target to revise our actions and to direct our research drivers with an aim to implement them by 2030. This call to action is a collective, universal wake-up call: to end poverty; protect the environment; achieve gender equality; ensure health and well-being and ensure peace and prosperity for all. But what does this mean in terms of Art Glass? The far-reaching effect of these goals when viewed through the lens of the international Art Glass movement is an engaging and exciting space to examine. Understanding how the goals can or have been applied to contemporary Art Glass practice, education, and community is an important inquiry for the sector. This was most recently witnessed at the European Glass Context 2021 biennale[9] when the organizers themed its celebration of art and studio glass around the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, our own interests and research focused on some of the goals of this celebration.

As such, *The Power of Glass Conference* of November 2022, was developed with the second and third aims of *iyog2022* (as set out above) in mind, with a desire to not only celebrate the contemporary artistic achievements of glass, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to highlight and draw attention to a selection of glass artists, makers, and designers who were addressing the challenges of our age by utilizing the visceral nature of the medium to explore narratives related to the subjects of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)[10] as well as sustainability and climate awareness. In this way, we are educating those unfamiliar with the craft on its place in the current political and artistic discussion, whilst also shining a light on Scotland as a place for education and research alongside making in the field of glass, through our collaboration not only between our two institutions—Edinburgh College of Art and National Museums Scotland—but also by working alongside Craft Scotland[11] (the national development agency supporting makers and promoting craft) and North Lands Creative[12] (a centre for the study and development of glass as an art form based in Lybster, Caithness, in the far north of Scotland).

2.2. Equality, Diversity, and Identity Explored through Glass Art

The first session of the conference focused on how glass artists explore *Equality, Diversity, and Identity* in their glass art practices, and was shaped by the following two SDG goals:

> **SDG UN Sustainable Development Goal 5—Gender Equality:**
>
> To achieve: Gender equality and empower all women and girls. The equal representation of women and girls within society is a necessary right; goal 5 aims to end discrimination and violence against women in all public and private spheres. It also makes a call for women to be able to fully participate in all levels of society and have equal opportunities to take on leadership roles across all political and economic spheres.

SDG UN Sustainable Development Goal 10—Reduce inequality within and among countries:

To achieve: Reducing inequalities and ensuring no one is left behind. By empowering and promoting the social, economic, and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status. And ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies, and action in this regard.

The recent Crafts Council England 2021 report, *Making Changes in Craft*,[13] laid bare a review of racism and inequality within the UK Craft sector, revealing the narrowness of the craft canon, the lack of alternative histories and narratives in craft, an urgent need to decolonise the craft curriculum, and the lack of initiatives to nurture Black and ethnically diverse makers. Examples of racism and micro-aggression in craft spaces and educational settings were also evidenced in the report findings. Finally, the perception of craft as a credible career was deemed an issue, with many minority group makers discouraged from a career in craft by their families who viewed it as low-paid, unstable work. Problems with the curriculum were also highlighted, with many courses dominated by a white, Eurocentric history. How the Art Glass sector and the community respond to these issues will form an important challenge to the field, which has predominantly been a patriarchal and often insular industry, closed to 'outsiders', be they those wishing to learn the craft from outside the community or those of another race or gender.

Four glass artists—Jeff Zimmer, Christopher Day, Karen Donnellan and Suzanne Peck—were invited to discuss their creative practices and highlight how their glass art explores issues of diversity, identity, and representation, giving voice and a platform to those who have been overlooked, ignored, or in some cases erased from our collective histories, and challenging assumed structures within glass hot shops, studios, museums, and exhibition spaces alike. Furthermore, they are declaring through direct discourse, community engagement, and a subtle sprinkling of purple glass frit, that what these artists have to say is important and should not be ignored any longer, and producing powerful works of art that make us all stop and think. Some of their artworks on occasion rightly make us feel uncomfortable, whereas others poke fun at the system and elicit joy from the connection that they exalt.

An overturning of the assumed gendered materiality of glass which has been perpetuated due to the appellations that are still employed by the sector, is something that artists, educators, curators, writers, intersectional feminists, and passionate glass community members Karen Donnellan and Suzanne Peck, looked to achieve through their discussion by drawing the audience's attention to their ongoing project "Blow Harder: Language Gender and Sexuality in the Glass Blowing Studio". Their original 2017 lecture of the same name looked to question the male-dominated power dynamics at play in the hot shop, by looking to offer a broader language of terminologies to encourage a safer and more inclusive creative environment that had new alternative options for all. This led to consultations with a range of glass artists and the creation of their poster Blow Harder: Alternative Lexicons, set with a series of 'neutral', 'feminist', and 'highbrow' alternatives to the known terminology. The power of this work in using humour to call out and in some places overturn indoctrinated misogyny is no soft act of political activism by these artists. This is a strong and powerful visual that has made itself known, through its continued development (see Figure 3),[14] and acquisition into the Corning Museum of Glass's Collection, telling us all that we should, as the artists state, "create new opportunities for language to upend the kyriarchy"[15] and highlights how the Art Glass sector is becoming receptive to challenging itself to change.



Figure 3. *Sex Positive Lexicon Poster*, Karen Donnellan and Suzanne Peck, 2020. Image reproduced with permission from the artists.

Providing safe and neutral arenas in which artists can create, exhibit and find representation not only aids inclusivity, but also allows for shared knowledge exchange to happen without fear and intimidation. However, the field of Art Glass still has a long way to go in terms of advocating gender equity and diversity as many artists are still discriminated against, under-represented, and under-valued in the sector. Looking to overturn some of these prejudices in the sector is the Edinburgh-based, American glass artist Jeff Zimmer, whose practice pushes the boundaries and perceptions of glass by using the medium to discuss socio-political narratives, giving voice to the overlooked, and platforming the importance of representation in the glass sector through his beautiful and powerful works of glass art. Zimmer spoke with honour and care at *The Power of Glass Conference* about his

lived experience as a gay man negotiating the glass sector, opening his talk by frankly placing his artwork *Queer Bricks: Agents of Creation and Destruction* on the lectern to emphasize his position (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Jeff Zimmer at the *Craft Scotland Conference, 2022* with his artwork *Queer Bricks: Agents of Creation and Destruction*. Photography by Neil Hanna for Craft Scotland.

We are collectively aware that people who might today identify as lesbian, gay, bi, trans, intersex, queer, or asexual will have lived throughout history, yet their presence has so often been hidden or erased by society from our shared history, and their artifacts and presence under-represented within the collections of many museums. Zimmer looks to rectify this through his Art Glass which celebrates and highlights the experiences of LGBTIQA+ individuals, creating tangible artifacts of these individuals, communities, lives, and love. One of his most personal works that directly confronts this erasure is his 2018 artwork, *The Fragility of Memory and Material (Personal)*.[16] The work was created following the discovery that his friend and partner John, who died in 1995, had no online presence and could not be found, inspiring him to laser etch images of John onto mobile phone screen glass, to create a memorial to him, and to encourage others to remember those loved ones who have passed away. His subsequent piece, *The Fragility of Memory and Material (Public)*,[17] goes on to pay tribute to lesbian, gay, bi, and trans individuals by etching their images onto the glass to form a lasting tribute and collective monument to their lives. Further, with the acquisition by the European Museum of Modern Glass Collection in Germany of *The Fragility of Memory and Material (Personal)* in 2019, we see again tangible evidence of the wider sector looking to reverse this erasure from our public collections.

However, as highlighted by the Crafts Council report *Making Changes in Craft*, there is startingly even less advocacy and opportunities for Black and ethnically diverse makers in the field of Craft, which is especially seen in the medium of glass here in the UK regardless of their gender or sexuality. This is highlighted by the continued advocation for predominantly white male artists' work, which centres around the celebration of technical prowess, and only a few individuals of colour working in the material in both artistic and industrial capacities, and fewer still celebrated and recognized in the arts sector. In 2020, North Lands Creative launched its online campaign—*Glass Lives Week*,[18] with a range of films, podcasts, interviews, and exhibitions to reconcile some of these findings by highlighting the diversity of the field internationally, celebrating a wide intersection of glass

artists. This campaign included Christopher Day (see Figure 5), one of the few artists of colour working in glass in Britain, who chooses to use glass as a platform through which to explore the cultural segregation, repression, and death of Black individuals during not only our colonial past but our most recent history. His work is highlighting how societal biases and prejudice linger on today, giving voice to those whose stories have been erased from our global histories, and challenging us all to no longer turn a blind eye to our collective past and present. In his talk and studio demonstration for *The Power of Glass Conference*, he discussed how he became empowered through glass education, during his time studying glass at the University of Wolverhampton, to be able to have these discussions.



Figure 5. Christopher Day's glass demonstration at Edinburgh College of Art for the *Craft Scotland Conference, 2022.* Photography by Neil Hanna for Craft Scotland.

One of the works discussed was Day's work *Back to Black* (see Figure 6) which looks to directly confront the lack of representation in the arts of Black and ethnically diverse makers and was inspired by the development of the BLK Art Group, a collective formed in Wolverhampton in 1979[19] amidst growing racial tension towards the black community, especially from the National Front, and perceived racist discrimination due to the stop-and-search policy from the police. The BLK Art Group endeavoured to confront aspects of racism and expose it in a different light, by empowering and encouraging black voices and resources within Britain through art. By creating this work in 2020, at the height of the Black Lives Matter movement and protests, Day looked to draw our attention to the fact that four decades on from the formation of the BLK Art Group these same voices are still fighting to be heard, and calling out the embedded institutional inequality that still needs addressing—not only in the glass industry and art studios but also in the galleries, both commercial and public, and the museums that promote artistry within the subject—to

break down the unconscious or, in fact, conscious bias displayed within the exhibitions and collecting activities of these organisations.



Figure 6. *Back to Black*, handblown and sculpted glass, microbore copper pipe and copper wire, unique work by Christopher Day, Wolverhampton, England, 2020 (K.2021.27). Image © National Museums Scotland.

The fight for the right to access the glass arena and to have your work recognized seriously as a political commentary on society's inequalities and collective histories, beyond the purely decorative, sculptural, or process-led achievement regardless of gender, sexuality, or cultural heritage only now seems to be gaining ground in the UK glass sector, as these artists and this session demonstrate. In addition, it highlights the challenges the Art Glass sector continues to face to meet the SDG goals outlined by 2030.

2.3. Climate Action, Responsible Consumption, and Sustainability in Glass Art and Design

The second session of the conference focused on how glass artists and designers explore *Responsible Consumption and Production and Climate Action* in their practices, and was shaped by the following two SDG goals:

> **UN Sustainable Development Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production**
>
> Global consumption and production have a huge destructive impact on the natural environment and resources of the planet. Over the last 100 years, our environment has been seriously impacted and damaged by social and economic progress, risking our future development and threatening our existence.
>
> **UN Sustainable Development Goal 13: Climate Action**

> Climate change is widespread, and its effects are apparent worldwide, affecting and disrupting economies and lives. Our weather, climate, and environmental conditions are changing fast. Weather patterns and temperatures are mutable, our sea levels are rising, and extreme weather events such as precipitation, drought, or flooding are widespread.

A further three speakers—two glass artists, Pinkie Maclure and Dr Maria Sparre-Petersen, and one design collective, Atelier NL, a studio based in the Netherlands—were invited to discuss how glass can be a vehicle for glassmakers and designers to voice their concerns about the sustainability issues we face, and how creative practice can embody a form of craft activism on the subject of climate action. All of these speakers prioritize the environment, responsible production, and consumption, spotlighting sustainability at the core of their creative practices, be that through using traditional processes in which to communicate environmental messages, pioneering the use of recycled and sustainably or locally sourced materials, or developing low-impact alternatives. Their work highlights how sustainable Art Glass production can be viewed as a vital antidote to the environmental issues we face.

Environmental concerns relating to sustainability and climate action are gaining considerable ground within the Art Glass community. Historically, glass recycling can be traced back to the First Millennium AD. Today, glass is viewed as a sustainable material as it is made from naturally occurring materials, and if properly cleaned and sorted can be infinitely recycled. Unfortunately, the recycling and processing of glass is complex. Contamination and sorting are a huge problem; most glass is only considered for single-loop recycling, with the majority becoming aggregate within road surfaces. When processed and disposed of in the right way, glass can offer a viable alternative to synthetic materials, offering sustainable products that actively reduce our impact on the environment. This recognition of sustainable models of practice alongside discussion of its importance within Art Glass has seen a range of glass artists prioritizing sustainability as part of their practice.

First to speak was the Scottish-based multidisciplinary artist Pinkie Maclure, who creates humorous, dark works of glass art that are a social commentary on the Anthropocene, upending the impact of man on the natural world. She believes that our present is haunted by our past and we have more in common with our ancestors than we may know. Using stained glass installations, she makes intimate work that examines today's big issues, such as addiction, insomnia, and our relationship with nature. Maclure uses the distinctively chaotic nature of stained glass to express deep anxieties—often with dark humour—exploiting the tension between the sacred and the unexpected, speculating at a time when the end of the world feels closer than ever. During the conference, she was able to share a range of artworks to narrate her artistic approach that explore the themes of the session, including her poignant work *Self-Portrait Dreaming of Portavadie* (2019) (see Figure 7). This artwork explores the artist's memories, connection with place, and sense of loss around her childhood holiday cottage at Portavadie on the west coast of Scotland, following the destruction of the Loch after the government sold the surrounding land to a company who dynamited the shallow bay to build oil platforms, killing the delicate ecosystem within.[20] The piece layers surrealism and historic symbolism in a poetic manner, sensitively combining imagery of her family within the landscape in happier times with the brutality of the concrete building, razor-wired and with symbols of occupation of the land. Maclure does not shy away from themes of this nature, challenging us, the viewer, to take responsibility for our impact upon the landscape, and the sector to be open to creating works that discuss such topics, whilst commemorating a forgotten area of outstanding natural beauty whose destruction has been covered up by the passage of time. This is a very personal work for the artist and explores a narrative that will resonate with many who have experienced or been frustrated and dismayed by the actions of heavy industry upon the landscape. It is not a shortbread view of Scotland; it is raw and true to her memory of the situation.



Figure 7. Self-portrait Dreaming of Portavadie, sandblasted, painted, fired, and layered, with glass beads, glass panel by Pinkie Maclure, Tayport, Fife, Scotland, 2019 (K.2020.20). Image © National Museums Scotland.

Man's impact upon the natural environment and the leaching of its resources has, as we have all witnessed, had catastrophic effects across the globe, with the majority of society only now sitting up and taking notice and calling for more sustainable and eco-sensitive models of manufacture. Though glass is inherently recyclable, it is, however, an energy-expensive industry, that often relies on imported raw materials, and thus requires reconsidering to make it a viable outlet for creatives of the future. One way to consider this is to look again at where we source our raw materials from. The design duo Nadine Sterk and Lonny van Ryswyck, collectively known as Atelier NL (see Figure 8), are leading the way in reshaping how we consider local raw materials by creating everyday objects that showcase the richness of the earth on our own doorsteps, by developing a unique research methodology that analyses the hidden qualities and narratives of localized clay and sand deposits and transforms them into ceramic and glass objects. This is eloquently explored in their ongoing project *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*[21] which highlights how sand is an incredible natural resource, inviting people from all over the world to send a sample from their favourite location. The sand is then melted into a small glass sample that reveals the unique colours embedded within that very place and becomes part of an expanding collaborative archive. The greater objective of the project is to create stronger ties between natural materials and living communities, in the hope that as people learn about their surroundings, they begin to identify more deeply with the place where they live and the resources that have been overlooked due to globalized consumerism. It is also an example of the call that is being conducted for an expanded valuation of local sourcing and production, by focusing on the graceful subtleties of the natural world and how the integration of local natural products into daily life is a critical step toward greater environmental balance.



Figure 8. Nadine Sterk and Lonny van Ryswyck, Atelier NL. Image © Atelier NL® Mike Roelofs.

As discussed above, the issue society currently faces in terms of recycling glass is that the current infrastructure has limitations on what glass can and cannot be recycled. Looking to overturn these presumptions on what waste glass can be recycled is part of Danish artist, researcher, and educator Dr Maria Sparre-Petersen's practice, which investigates issues of sustainability and ethics through material exploration, creating glass sculptures from a range of recycled glass materials, including glass containers, that focus on glass' plasticity and uncertainty as an infinitely recyclable material. In recent years, her work has taken the formats of installations, sculptural objects, and interactive collaborations in public spaces, often incorporating extensive experimentation with robotics and 3D printing as well as concepts of failure and imperfection. In her discussion for *The Power of Glass Conference*, Sparre-Petersen openly shared her creative practice and sustainable approach to materiality and making, whilst also raising key questions about how we need to teach sustainability within our educational models considering the climate emergency. Her discussion highlighted how her work explores, and is part of, a closed-loop cycle and the need to eliminate waste and pollution, circulate products and materials, and regenerate nature.[22] There are, however, greater challenges with working with recycled materials, as the material needs to be handled differently because the chemical structure may be incompatible because the waste glass is likely to have been made from different recipes, thus it will not expand in the same way or as expected, creating internal stresses in the material that may develop cracks immediately or over time. There is potential in waste glass for those such as Sparre-Petersen, who see these challenges as part of a process of investigation, finding satisfaction in the uncertainty of the outcome, making the potential visible rather than achieving a preconceived work of art which her series *Epistemic Artefacts* (see Figure 9) reflects. Thus, through her research into recycling waste glass, Sparre-Petersen is helping the sector to form the view that material sustainability is a necessary consideration, and in fact a given part of all current and future contemporary Art Glass practice.

With ever increasing restrictions on fuel and a lack of facilities in which to work in the medium, finding new ways to push the boundaries of glass by reconsidering and questioning the foundation of this age-old medium into a more sustainable and climate conscious model of manufacture, is vital for its survival, not only in the terms of a design medium but also in its artistic application.



Figure 9. *Epistemic Artefact CK4_2017_07*, recycled container-glass, Maria Sparre-Petersen, 2016. Image © the artist.

2.4. The Future of Glass Education

The final closing keynote lecture of the conference focused on glass art education and the question of its survival with ever-increasing cuts to practice-led higher education programs, and was shaped by the following SDG goal:

> **SDG UN Sustainable Development Goal 4—Quality education:**
>
> To achieve: Inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The equal education of all groups and minorities within society is a necessary right, to ensure access to free schooling by 2030 and to provide equal access to affordable vocational training, and to eliminate gender and wealth disparities with the aim of achieving universal access to quality higher education.

Finding ways to create inclusive and equitable quality glass education and studios regardless of gender, race or an individual's societal demographic is still an issue the Art Glass sector faces. Since the inception of the studio glass movement in the 1960s, glass education has spread widely throughout Europe, the United Kingdom, North, and South America, the Antipodes, and Asia. However, though many European Higher Education Institutions offer reasonable fees or free education to resident students, international fees charged to study glass can be extremely high. As such, with the continuing closures of practice-led glass programs within the UK, it is both an economic and accessibility factor that continues to restrict and inhibit access to those who wish to study glass. Some argue this is why there continues to be a lack of diversity and inclusivity in the field. In the UK, widening participation schemes are in action; campaigns such as the Crafts Council *Make Your Future (2015–2019)* recognize that craft education in the UK is in crisis and have set out a range of strategies for how to reinvigorate craft education in schools. The project has made considerable contributions to the field since its launch in 2014 and has piloted a range of schemes that have seen craft education within secondary schools to create and embed an array of teaching resources. Still, glass education in the UK is under threat, with many glass programmes facing closure including glass courses at the University of Wolverhampton and the City Glasgow College.

So, it was poignant that the closing Keynote talk on the survival of glass education was delivered by Dr Max Stewart (see Figure 10), an internationally respected artist and educator, who is a senior lecturer in Glass at the University of Wolverhampton. Stewart sombrely discussed how the very nature of art school education in the UK has dramatically and perhaps irrevocably changed over the past two decades. Stewart asked us all a simple question: How can subjects like 'Glass' be saved when the cultural barbarians are already in the citadel? He was able to draw upon a poignant range of examples that represent the present-day context of glass education in the UK and why it is threatened. He set out clearly what he believes needs to be achieved to safeguard the future of glass in the UK, especially during an increasingly pressurized period of social unrest and impacted by the financial and climate crisis we currently face, and highlighted via a range of socio-political viewpoints and recent governmental social policy around the arts, why education has sidelined craft to such a grave extent that its very existence is questioned. He went on to make an emotional call to action to the community of makers, researchers, and advocates present and online, to come together and act now before it is too late to save craft education.



Figure 10. Dr Max Stewart at the Craft Scotland Conference, 2022. Photography by Neil Hanna for Craft Scotland.

The marginalisation of craft and its absence from many of our schools' curriculum—in particular art schools—that we have witnessed over the last decade, is a serious threat to the survival of this discipline, and is something, as members and contributors to the sector, we should all be concerned about. Is the current state of our UK glass education unalterable, or can we as a unified collective break this terrifying sea change and make a call for the survival of the powerful medium of glass?

3. Conclusions

As discussed, fighting for the right to access the glass arena regardless of economic status, gender, or cultural heritage and to have your work recognized seriously as a socio-political commentary on society's inequalities and collective histories, beyond the purely decorative, sculptural, or process-led achievement only now seems to be gaining ground in the UK Art Glass sector. The field of Art Glass globally still has a long way to go in terms of gender equity and diversity, with many artists still discriminated against, under-represented and under-valued in the sector, due to a perceived bias towards the continued advocation for predominantly white male artists' work which centres around the

celebration of technical prowess. This is an issue that transcends across the arts sector here in the UK, where art fairs, museums, galleries, and commercial ventures are predominantly run by white men who have focused on Northern American and Eurocentric artistic movements and the key creatives that have been associated with these canons, and that said creatives are predominantly male is due to the patriarchal systems of segregation that our art historical taxonomies have been developed by. This explains, but does not justify, why there is an under-representation of artists of colour and women artists being exhibited, collected, and acquired by public institutions. Exhibitions, workshops, and conferences such as *The Power of Glass*, are vital ways of raising awareness of the professional, high-level calibre of glass artists who are out there, pushing the boundaries of glass, questioning the foundation of this age-old medium, and overturning the institutional and sector bias that has pervaded for so long. In an ever-changing world, with new restrictions on education, fuel, and spaces in which to see works of glass art, finding new ways to support and represent the sector is vital to allow diversity and equality to succeed, and alternative voices to the known canon to be heard, so the sector can grow and be relevant for the next generation.

This paper has also introduced a collective call to action within the Art Glass community, creating an engaging and exciting space for us to celebrate the contribution that Art Glass brings to climate awareness, responsible consumption, and sustainability. The opportunity to introduce the powerful narrative of Art Glass to new audiences through the distinct environmental commentary of the discipline has been a significant contribution to the field. The wake-up call to protect the environment through creative practice is clearly stated within this paper and recognizes a range of sustainable models of practice by a prominent set of glass artists and designers that can and should be used as a model by others in the field.

In summary, this paper has defined, discussed, and celebrated the contribution that *The Power of Glass Conference* of 2022 and the artistic practices explored within it has brought to the international Art Glass community. The opportunity to introduce the powerful narrative of Art Glass to new audiences through the distinct voices of the speakers who introduced a range of distinct social, political, and environmental commentary, in turn, defined the impact Art Glass practice has and can have when viewed through the lens of the *UN Sustainable Development Goals*, within the celebration of the *International Year of Glass 2022*, and can be considered to have assisted in advocating for the expanding field of art glass.[23]

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Notes

1 Clegg, Tessa (3 of 6) National Life Stories Collection: Crafts' Lives. https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Crafts/021M-C0960%C3%970101XX-0003V0 [last accessed 16 February 2023].

2 http://washingtonglassschool.com/tag/after-studio-glass [last accessed on 13 June 2023].

3 https://www.jeromeharrington.net/glass-in-the-expanded-field [last accessed on 13 June 2023].

4 https://monoskop.org/images/b/bf/Krauss_Rosalind_1979_Sculpture_in_the_Expanded_Field.pdf [last accessed on 13 June 2023].

5 As note 3.

6 https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/123/57/PDF/N2112357.pdf?OpenElement [last accessed on 16 February 2023].

7 https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals [last accessed 16 February 2023].

8 https://www.iyog2022.org/ [last accessed 16 February 2023].

[9] See Jøker Johnsen, S. ed. (2021), *European Glass Context 2021*. Denmark; The Royal Danish Academy, Architecture, Design Conservation. http://www.europeanglasscontext.com/ [last accessed 29 April 2023].

[10] EDI ensures fair treatment and opportunity for all. It aims to eradicate prejudice and discrimination on the basis of an individual or group of individuals' protected characteristics.

[11] https://www.craftscotland.org/ [last accessed 16 February 2023].

[12] https://northlandscreative.co.uk/ [last accessed 16 February 2023].

[13] https://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/documents/1512/Making_Changes_in_Craft_-_Craft_Expertise_Phase_One_Report_2021.pdf [last accessed 16 February 2023].

[14] In 2019, at the Corning Museum of Glass's 58th Annual Seminar on Glass, the artists participated in a panel discussion "The World's Sexiest Hairshirt: Expanding the Language of Gender and Sexuality in the Hotshop". During the discussion, they led an interactive section where the audience generated new ideas for lexicons and examples of particular words. It was here that The Sex Positive Lexicon was initiated. This update addresses our need to acknowledge the hot shop as a sexy place, linguistically and potentially, materially. The language pushes further into the absurd, humorous, and queer. Glass is a sexy material and working with glass can be a sensual act. The artists generously updated the Lexicon in 2020, creating the Sex Positive Lexicon Poster for the 2021 European Glass Context, and most recently in 2022, a viral TikTok meme.

[15] Kyriarchy encompasses sexism, racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, xenophobia, economic injustice, prison-industrial complex, colonialism, militarism, ethnocentrism, anthropocentrism, speciesism and other forms of dominating hierarchies in which the subordination of one person or group to another is internalized and institutionalized. See https://www.karendonnellan.com/blow-harder [last accessed 16 February 2023].

[16] http://www.jeffxzimmer.com/the-fragility-of-memory-and-material-personal.html [last accessed 29 April 2023].

[17] http://www.jeffxzimmer.com/the-fragility-of-memory-and-material-public.html [last accessed 29 April 2023].

[18] https://northlandscreative.co.uk/glass-lives/ [last accessed 29 April 2023].

[19] http://www.blkartgroup.info/ [last accessed 29 April 2023].

[20] See https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/12573695.ghost-of-oil-boom-that-haunts-loch-fyne/ [last accessed 29 April 2023].

[21] https://aworldofsand.com/ [last accessed 29 April 2023].

[22] Closed-loop recycling is the process by which waste is collected, recycled, and produced to make something new. Effectively, the waste does a full circle without having a negative impact on the environment. Closed-loop recycling relates to many types of waste, such as glass, as defined by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/topics/circular-economy-introduction/overview [last accessed 29 April 2023].

[23] Please note this conference report on the proceedings of the Craft Scotland Conference "The Power of Glass" is to be viewed as a provocation and an inclusive call to action for all glass artists. The aim of the conference and this accompanying paper is to inspire discussion on the UN SDGs and how they might be applied to Art Glass, through the case study of artist speakers that use socio-political commentary as a form of expression within their artistic practices. We do not view the conference theme as a definitive or prescriptive approach to Art Glass but rather as a discussion of what Art Glass is and could be, for all.

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Clark, Garth. 2008. How Envy Killed the Crafts Movement: An Autopsy in Two Parts. Past Craft Perspectives Lectures at the Museum of Contemporary Craft, Portland, OR, USA. Available online: http://www.museumofcontemporarycraft.org/media/2008_10_16_Garth_Clark_Craftperspect1.mp3 (accessed on 13 June 2023).

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