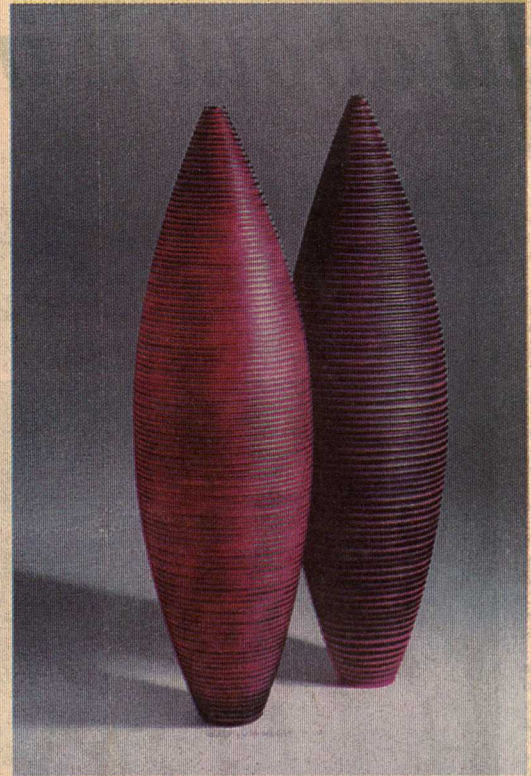


Guggisberg and Baldwin: Zebra Vases, glass

(Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv).



Guggisberg and Baldwin: Parallel Sentinels, glass

(Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv)

## Blowing hot & cold

By GIL GOLDFINE

After working together as apprentice glass designers at the Orrefors Glass School in Sweden 20 years ago, Swiss-born **Monica Guggisberg** and American **Philip Baldwin** formed a working partnership that has sustained a robust, stimulating and creative relationship, creating exceptional functional and sculptural pieces in all possible permutations: clear and colored, transparent and opaque, hot (blown) and cold (sandblasted or cut). As independent artists in their private studio in Nonfoux, Switzerland, they have fashioned one-off pieces while simultaneously collaborating on mass-production designs for major international firms including Rosenthal (Germany), Steuben (United States) and Venini (Italy).

In recent years Guggisberg and Baldwin have synthesized the concepts and techniques learned in their formative years in Scandinavia with new ideas based on Venetian traditions. The results are magical objects that display a purity of form and line coupled with a cool, transparent color scale achieved by experimenting with the hot-glass technique of layering colored surfaces, combined with the Venetian cold-glass techniques of *battuto* (beating and hammering) and *inciso* (etching and cutting).

Although their professional relationship is based on a mutual understanding of the studio's craft-art objectives, Baldwin is responsible for the hot-blowing

technique which forms the work's basic shape, color, size and proportion while Guggisberg controls the cold finishing stage, one in which surface treatment is handled in a decorative and sculptural manner.

Their current exhibition *Hot Glass-Cold Glass*, is an exhilarating experience. A sampling of their early collaboration includes *Aztec*, a set of limited-edition bowls and dishes designed for Rosenthal and produced in a mold technique. Influenced by the angular austerity of constructivist and Bauhaus styles, this series was based on carefully balanced geometric shapes and calculated compositions of near-mathematical equations. The severity of the design is matched by a monochromatic scale of gray, opaque white and a lustrous velvety black.

Other black-and-white pieces include an exceptional pair of *Zebra Vases* (1996), blown in two pieces and fitted in *incalmo* technique (joining two or more bubbles of molten glass) and finished in a slightly textured surface achieved by minimal sandblasting.

The highlight of the exhibition is an assembly of elongated vertical forms entitled *Cortigiane e Guardiani* ("Courtesans and Guardians") created especially for the first International Glass Biennale, *Aperto Vetro*, held in Venice in 1996. These reductive quasi-figurative forms – slender, sumptuously colored and projecting an aristocratic carriage – are derived from images of elegant women gliding through the

baroque halls of the Doge's palace. Blown and decorated in a combined hot-and-cold technique, the inner and outer layers of different colored glass are finished in marvelous non-symmetrical textures by a process of hammering and incising.

In recent years Guggisberg and Baldwin have made a radical departure from their traditional disciplines of linear beauty, chromatic purity and an obsession with resolute perfection to a more sculptural inclination. For example, *Blue/Black Faceted Night* (1999) is a blown, vertical vase compressing an opaque charcoal-black skin with translucent inner tones. An asymmetrical planular surface of sharply carved irregular parallelograms, inset with pale blue elliptical shapes, transforms glass into what looks like a solid geometric chunk of lunar stone or prehistoric shale. It is the measured combination of nature and geometry that provides the basis for this beautiful yet mysteriously primeval volume.

The exhibit was curated by Henrietta Eliezer Brunner and mounted with the assistance of the Swiss Embassy in Tel Aviv and the Pro Helvetia Arts Council of Switzerland. A quality comprehensive Hebrew-English catalog is available. (Glass Pavilion, Eretz Israel Museum, Ramat Aviv). Till June 30.



Guggisberg and Baldwin: Cortigiane e Guardiani, glass

(Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv)