

Vibrant Things

Three red-hot artists sculpting glass radiant with color, light, and charisma

October 11, 2022



*Thaddeus Wolfe's glass exhibited at Friedman Benda in summer 2022.
Photo by Daniel Kukla; courtesy of Friedman Benda and Thaddeus Wolfe*

For this edition of our “Ones to Watch” column, we’re profiling three red-hot artists taking blown glass in new directions. Each in their proprietary style transforms the ancient medium of molten silicates and pigments into of-the-moment expressions radiant with color, light, and charisma.

Oscillating along the spectrum between design and art—from functional lamps and vessels to pure sculpture—the glassworks of these ascendent talents have been spotlighted in a stream of gallery exhibitions, museum programs, and editorial coverage

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over the last few years. Given the many projects they have underway, you can expect to see even more of them in the near future.

Scroll on for our interviews with Sébastien Léon, Pamela Sabroso, and Thaddeus Wolfe, and get to know the vivacious glass creations from these ones to watch.

THADDEUS WOLFE



Thaddeus Wolfe at work. Friedman Benda director Carole Hochman tells us, “The gallery’s roster is focused on creatives who innovate in terms of materials, expressions, and narratives, and Thaddeus certainly fits this criterion. He approaches his medium in a totally unique way, creating sculptures and lighting—at times brutalist and other times playful—that challenge traditional blown glass’s reliance on transparency and fluidity.” Photos courtesy of Friedman Benda and Thaddeus Wolfe

In an essay on A New Realism, the group show he curated last year at Friedman Benda, the illustrious Glenn Adamson encapsulated Thaddeus Wolfe’s Brooklyn-based glassmaking practice in this way: “Wolfe brings an entirely different, disruptive energy to

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the discipline. At every step—the collaging of the form, the hot and liquid painterly composition, and the final finishing, or coldwork—Wolfe works spontaneously, reacting to what’s already in front of him.”

Wolfe’s remarkable affinity for glassmaking runs deep. Born and raised in Toledo—aka “the glass capital of the world” and the birthplace of America’s Studio Glass movement—he studied glass at the Cleveland Institute of Art before apprenticing with renowned glass artists like Jeff Zimmerman and Josiah McElheny.

Since establishing his studio in 2009, Wolfe has earned a reputation for innovation, blending casting and blowing techniques to sculpt uniquely architectural, highly textured forms. Institutional recognition has taken off in recent years, from the Corning Museum of Glass’s Rakow Commission awarded to Wolfe in 2016, to the three new museum acquisitions (including the Chrysler Museum of Art) that followed Wolfe’s show at Friedman Benda this past summer. Wolfe shares more details of his creative trajectory in the interview below...



*Untitled works by Thaddeus Wolfe, 2021-22.
Photos by Joe Kramm; courtesy of Friedman Benda and Thaddeus Wolfe*

What drew you to glassmaking, and what aspects of the medium do you most enjoy exploring?

Seeing someone blow glass at the Toledo Museum when I was young first put the idea in my mind to try this material. But I never planned to work in glass [professionally] until I was hooked by a course during my second year of college. Glass’s capacity to appear transparent, translucent, or opaque, and to take on any range of coloration, has always been appealing.

How do the forms you create reflect your way of seeing the world around you?

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The forms I work with, though made up, seem to come from my urban environment. I take inspiration from architecture as well as from textures and details from the natural world. Ideas seep in from seeing almost anything. Inventing forms and structures for casting glass is a way for me to process all of this.



*Untitled Sconces by Thaddeus Wolfe for Friedman Benda, 2022.
Photo by Daniel Kukla; courtesy of Friedman Benda and Thaddeus Wolfe*

Tell us more about your glassmaking process.

Generally I make molds from forms that I have designed. Working in facilities in Brooklyn and New Jersey, I blow multi-colored glass into these molds to make a cast of the object. Continuously experimenting throughout the glassblowing process, I use a variety of simple techniques to layer and combine colors. Many of my works are finished by grinding away the outer layers of color to reveal underlying elements.

How do you think about your glasswork in relation to the medium's long history?

There is a long history behind my process of blowing glass into molds, starting with the Romans. But I take more inspiration from modern and contemporary examples, like Carlo Scarpa, Yoichi Ohira, Ettore Sottsass, Fontana Arte, and certain Czech glassworks from the 1950s and '60s.

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*Mattias Sellden / Thaddeus Wolfe, a joint solo exhibition mounted at Friedman Benda in summer 2022.
Photo by Daniel Kukla; courtesy of Friedman Benda, Mattias Sellden, and Thaddeus Wolfe*

What's next for you?

I have a show this November at Volume Gallery in Chicago. I am also working on two new ceiling lamp designs for Friedman Benda, where I just had a solo exhibition in July. In the coming year, I plan to experiment more with kiln formed glass and the pâte de verre technique.

Glassworks by these artists are available in the Design Miami/ Shop, with Sébastien Léon represented by Twentieth Gallery, Pamela Sabroso represented by Emma Scully Gallery, and Thaddeus Wolfe represented by Friedman Benda.