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Photography Lord Ashbury

# CRYSTALLINE CUTS

WITH HER INTRIGUING OBJECTS, FLAVIE AUDI BLURS THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN THE NATURAL AND THE SYNTHETIC



*BULBOUS, SWIRLING GLASS FORMS, THEY EVOKE PULSING JELLYFISH OR EVEN A WIZARD'S PROP*



In the middle of French-Lebanese artist Flavie Audi's West London studio, a meteorite has landed. "Lithic Fragment" is among her newest works, made in late 2017: a waist-high, rippling ball of what appears to be dark rock. Its rugged, apparently organic surface was, in fact, computer mapped by Audi. She has studded its contours with a variety of synthetic and naturally occurring materials, including real meteorite fragments. "I like the ambiguity of something that looks earthy, aquatic and digitally rendered – all at the same time," she says.

Much of Audi's work that looks organic is manufactured, or vice versa. The point is often the indistinguishable blend of the two. "I enjoy the tension between the synthetic and the natural," she says. "It's interesting, the importance we put on authentic materials, even when some synthetic materials are better performing."

She is, for example, a skilled glassblower, who also sometimes uses crystal-clear resin in place of glass. "It has almost the same index of refraction, so you'd never be able to tell as a viewer, but chemically it's slightly different." She also works with highest-grade artificial diamonds, which even the best technology can "no longer distinguish from the natural thing." Some aspects of her practice are more free-form than others. "With the glassblowing especially, there are always





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shapes and patterns created that can't be replicated, and I deliberately allow for chance formations," she says. "I control the uncontrollable."

Having trained in London at the Architecture Association, including a year out working for leading architecture practice John Pawson, Audi eventually changed tack. "During the last year of my architecture studies, I was working a lot with structured glass, and became very frustrated with minimalism," she says. "I wanted buildings to reveal more humanity and be more sensual. Glass is one of the most used materials in building construction, but everyone just uses it as a flat panel."

It was a turning point for her. "I started manipulating glass and realized that I wanted to be more sculptural with it. One of the things that's so interesting about glass in an increasingly digitized world is that it is the liminal space in between the digital and the real. It materializes the tension between the two realms." She embarked on a Master's degree at the Royal College of Art, working in glass and ceramics. "I dug into the making process, and learned how to craft."

Small in stature but with an easy confidence and commanding presence, on the day we meet Audi is bundled up in black knitwear, her silhouette broken by flashes of her neon manicure as she gestures at objects around us in her studio. Most look as though they could either have fallen from space or have been mined from the earth's crust. Walls and plinths are studded with her signature "Fluid Rocks," which featured prominently in her London solo show at Tristan Hoare gallery. Bulbous, swirling glass forms, they evoke pulsing jellyfish or even a wizard's prop. "The Fluid Rocks always have a sense of energy and look as though they are in movement," she says. "I use liquidity to give a sense of life."

Also on the walls are some of a series of panels called "Gemscapes." "These almost look like MacBook computer screens," she says, "as well as resembling landscapes. I have things floating in the skies that look like northern lights, but were created digitally. I'm



interested in the landscapes of the future, which might be made artificially."

As an architect who became an artist via a craftsman's training, Audi is wary of drawing any firm lines between creative disciplines. "I have done collaborations with jewelers, in fashion and in furniture design, because I don't think art should sit in a totally different pigeonhole to those things," she says. "The difference between a sculptural space and architectural one is sometimes as simple as whether or not people move through it."

As well as the London solo show, Audi has participated in group shows from Mexico to Lebanon and completed a glass-themed artist's residency in the Maldives. Her next showing will be as part of "True Beauty; Tales of Research and Imagination," a kind of art-meets-science extravaganza at the Stedelijk Museum in Breda, The Netherlands, which runs from March to August 2018. It sits well with Audi's fascination with landscapes and forms of the far future, and whether we might will them into being today. "I'm interested in that moment," she says, "when geology and gemology might align."