

# THE MOLD OF FORM

Lebanese-French glass artist Flavie Audi's work evokes a strong sense of mystery and ambiguity

Words JEANNINE YAZBECK

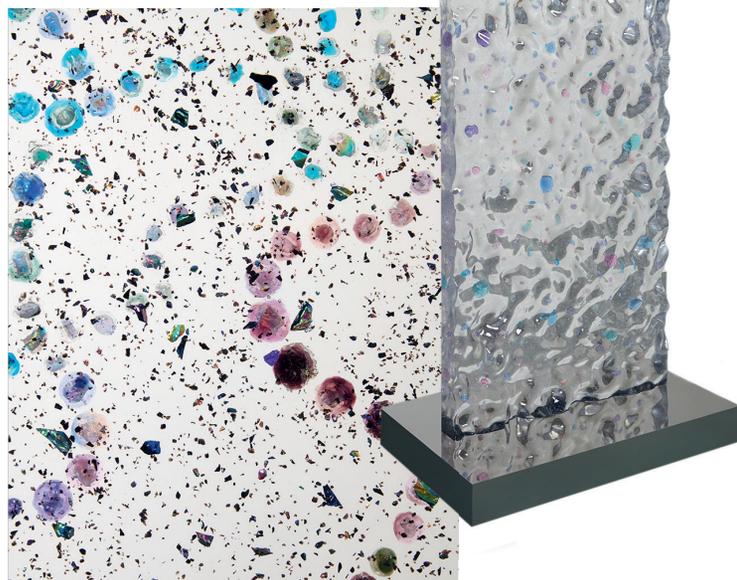
Lebanese-French glass artist Flavie Audi is making a name for herself through the art of glassblowing. An ancient skill, the complex craft of blowing air into semi-molten glass through a long tube to create unique pieces is an art influenced by architectural concepts, practiced and admired around the world. Audi's work has adorned international galleries and museums, including the Corning Museum of Glass in New York, Galerie Tanit in Beirut, and Karma International in Zürich.

Glass work holds a special place in design: part tangible, part ethereal, the very best examples of the craft often defy belief, appearing almost magical as their delicate beauty blurs the lines between sculpture, product design, art, and the artisanal. The 35-year-old Audi's work underscores the multifaceted appeal of glass; moving beyond the established boundaries of this age-old craft, the designer's work has crossed into fashion, jewelry, and furniture; its celestial nature captures a sense of barely contained energy as it moves into both physical and digital projects.

Lebanon is still close to her heart, she says. "I am very attached to the country, its culture, its people, its nature. I see it as a kind of sanctuary where I ground myself. I am always fascinated by the ability of people to articulate their feelings and to demonstrate such an extraordinary solidarity. I am inspired by how people open their heart to each other. It indirectly influences why I thrive so much to manifest in my work the solidarity around bodies of water and human interconnectedness." Although she never lived in the country, growing up she would regularly visit her grandfather in Beirut, during the post-war era of reconstruction. "Beirut was an immense construction site. The passion for architecture and construction and the connection with material flourished in me. It is extremely painful to see such a rich country turning into smoke."

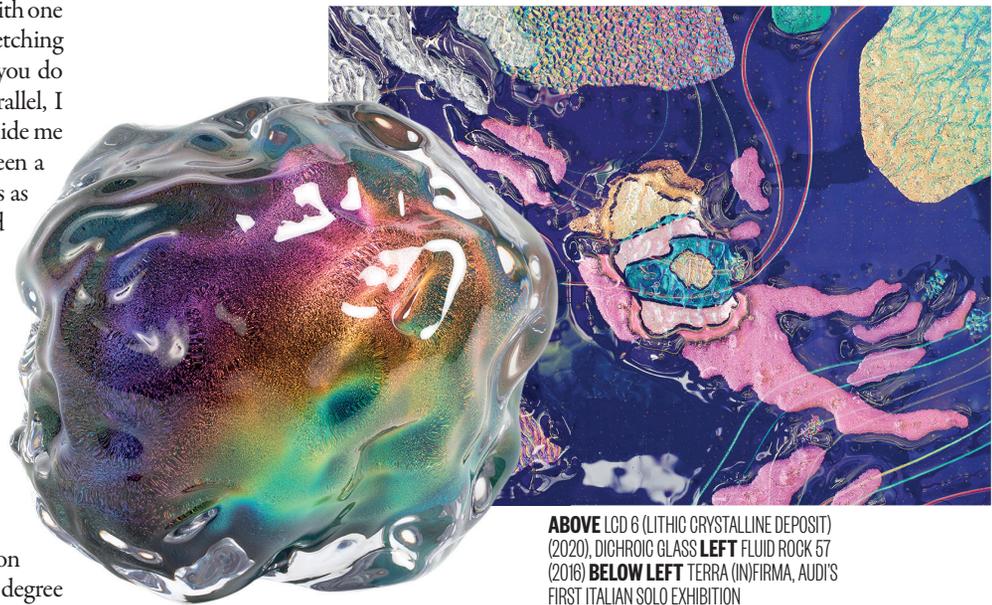
At her atelier in London, she is working 10-hour days producing new works for a third solo show entitled *Ora et Labora* in London at the Tristan Hoare Gallery, opening in November. "The show continues my explorations on artificial speculative forms of geologies. The new works bring us closer to the divine. I have been greatly inspired by invisible forces surrounding us and supernatural imageries in connection to spiritual ecstatic experiences," says Audi. For the artist, time to finalize an artwork is divided in three: research, conceptual, and production. "A new process is slow, and it requires many months of experimentations. Once the technique is controlled it goes faster," she explains.

ABOVE FLAVIE AUDI AT NILUFAR GALLERY WITH TERRA (IN) FIRMA, HER FIRST ITALIAN SOLO EXHIBITION RIGHT HYPER GATE (2018), PU RESIN AND GLASS BELOW SUPER ZOOM (2018), PU RESIN, GLASS, STAINLESS STEEL



Indeed, each of Audi's series has its own unique process, with one project often triggering an idea for the next. "I start by sketching ideas, because you don't know how valid an idea is until you do that. I move to digital modeling and visualizations. In parallel, I experiment with various material effects. I let the process guide me and trust the material," she says. Audi, who would have been a dancer if not an artist, further describes the creative process as similar to that of a choreographer. "I initiate an order and sequence of steps. I create my own tools using digital 3D printers or CNC machines. Then I apply these tools to manual sculptural processes. It is a back and forth between manual and digital gestures. But, in the end, the key to the process is to be adventurous with the material," she says. When asked which of her creations is her personal favorite, she says that it is always the one she's working on at the moment. "It's the birth of a work that I cherish the most. It is the moment of transformation and grace that I connect most intimately with," she shares.

Graduating from London's Architectural Association School of Architecture in 2011 and with a master's degree specialized in glass and ceramic from the Royal College of Arts in 2014, Audi attributes her education to first turbocharging her curiosity and passion for the transparent material. "Since 2011, glass has never stopped guiding and inspiring me. I have been interested in the major impact that glass created in architecture in the 20th century but disappointed by how flat, sterile, dull, and generic its use has been in construction. Buildings should reflect humanity and the way glass is used doesn't reveal this. During my last year at the Architectural Association, while making glass models, I discovered the material that would allow me to develop an artistic language that could reveal sensuality, humanity, and bring more light and life," reveals Audi. "The aqueous quality of glass also helps me to develop a sculptural vocabulary that invites the mind to expand in the universal solidarity of bodies of water."



ABOVE LOD 6 (LITHIC CRYSTALLINE DEPOSIT) (2020), DICHROIC GLASS LEFT FLUID ROCK 57 (2016) BELOW LEFT TERRA (INFIRMA, AUDI'S FIRST ITALIAN SOLO EXHIBITION

“Glass allows me to develop an ARTISTIC language that can reveal sensuality, humanity, and bring more light and life”

Audi is fiercely experimental and rebellious when jumping between different glassblowing skills and techniques. Mixing traditional methods with digital ones, she creates value from this delicate balance. "The bridging of diverse digital techniques with traditional craftsmanship reveals a certain ambiguity," she comments. "Manmade and industrial robotic manufacturing processes are blurred – the work appears as a natural lithic meteor or some sort of extraterrestrial object when in fact it is digitally conceived and manmade. The surface of the rock shifts gradually from smooth to rough, materializing the transformation from digital to organic textures. The work looks earthy, naturally aquatic, and digitally rendered – all at the same time."

While we use technology to simplify, demystify, and solve problems, Audi's work – characteristic of the quality of inexactness – uses technology to intensify the universe's mystery. "The moment of balance comes when ambiguity is reached. I also think about the balance of techniques in relation to the energy and emotions I want the work to suggest. Within a rock, for instance, there is an inner energy that emanates, which is in accordance with the universe where we belong. Crystalline-looking pieces are suspended in liquid, captured in time, and seem to convey a possibility of life brewing. The pieces weave handmade and robot-made processes to reinforce our affection with the fervor of life," she explains.

The designer is known for her successful collections of formless glass art resembling and named after cosmic-looking "clouds," with their own vibrant energy, chromatic joy, and haptic textures. "I manipulate colors so they appear in a continuous state of flux, suggesting indeterminacy and limitlessness. In a dematerialized world where all is virtual, it is reassuring to connect with tangible, tactile work." □

