

The exhibition season has reopened. If you want to start with something small and refined, we recommend "Glass Colour Structure" in the Bavarian Arts and Crafts Centre Gallery in Munich, where works by glass artist Ulrike Umlauf Orrom are on display. These works are not glass in the conventional sense of being transparent, but rather very material. 'I compose glass by weaving together colour and simultaneously capturing air and light,' says the artist, who has been awarded the Bavarian State Prize. She explained to Julie Metzdorf how to imagine this:

*"Smooth, shiny, rough, jagged, brightly coloured, subdued, different surfaces that create tension between each other and, above all, fascinating malleability. So if something goes wrong, it's not lost, but you can always remelt it and make another object out of it. With glass, I was also able to add colour and change the surface with sandblasting effects. "*

It is the variety of possibilities of glass that still fascinates artist Ulrike Umlauf-Orrom, even after 40 years of experience. Originally from Franconia, she completed an apprenticeship in ceramics, then studied industrial design and earned her master's degree in ceramics and glass at the Royal College of Art in London. But she soon realised that something was missing. She didn't want to just design things in her mind and then pass on her ideas to the craftsmen who would execute them with the help of drawings or models – she wanted to do it herself.

*"And that's very important to me. I was never completely happy when I was just drawing and working in workshops, because of course a lot of what I wanted to achieve depended on the people who were helping me. So I like to work with my own hands."*

The path to working completely self-sufficiently, as she does today in her 30-square-metre workshop on Lake Ammersee, led through various techniques. First, there is the group of free-blown vessels. Some vases are reminiscent of crooked drops, some bowls of sliced fruit, the shapes always soft and always asymmetrical.

*'I simply found asymmetry more exciting, the tension in the form, in the balance, in the surface, the contrasts. These are vessels that look as if they are about to tip over at any moment, but they really don't.'*

The surfaces are an ever-changing interplay of gloss and mattness. Patterns are incorporated by sandblasting, sometimes reminiscent of leaves blowing in the wind, sometimes of raindrops lashing against the window in a storm. The sand-cast objects are completely different: solid glass forms almost 30 centimetres high, which are not always recognisable as glass objects at first glance. Some are brown, coarse-grained and rough, as if pure earth were stuck to them. Others look like frozen water, greenish blocks with air bubbles inside, matt like an impenetrable pond, with flashes of metal mesh or copper sheet here and there.

*'The great thing about sand casting is that when you take it out, there's a layer of sand on the outside, and then you can expose parts of it by polishing or sandblasting again and practically see what this casting actually looks like on the inside, what wonderful effects I've actually put into it.'*

Ulrike Umlauf-Orrom is currently working with fused glass, i.e. with fusing techniques. She covers the flat glass plates with the finest coloured lines, then three or sometimes four plates treated in this way are placed on top of each other and fused together in a glass kiln. This not only creates patterns that look like fabric, but also produces an amazing depth effect. One of the artist's greatest highlights are the regular bulges – small air cushions similar to bubble wrap, only in glass, stable and much more beautiful. How exactly these reliefs are created remains a workshop secret. It is no secret that all these things are also available for purchase. Ulrike Umlauf-Orrom's works cost between 800 and 3000 euros. She prefers not to calculate the hourly wage, but that's how the market works. As soon as something can be used, pieces are no longer considered art and cost less. But you don't necessarily have to use the things.

*'You can put bananas in anything, but with such a large, magnificent piece that took so many hours to make, I would probably just look at it.'*

Ulrike Umlauf-Orrom on "Glass Colour Structure" until 4 July at the Bavarian Arts and Crafts Centre Gallery, Munich.

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