

GLASS



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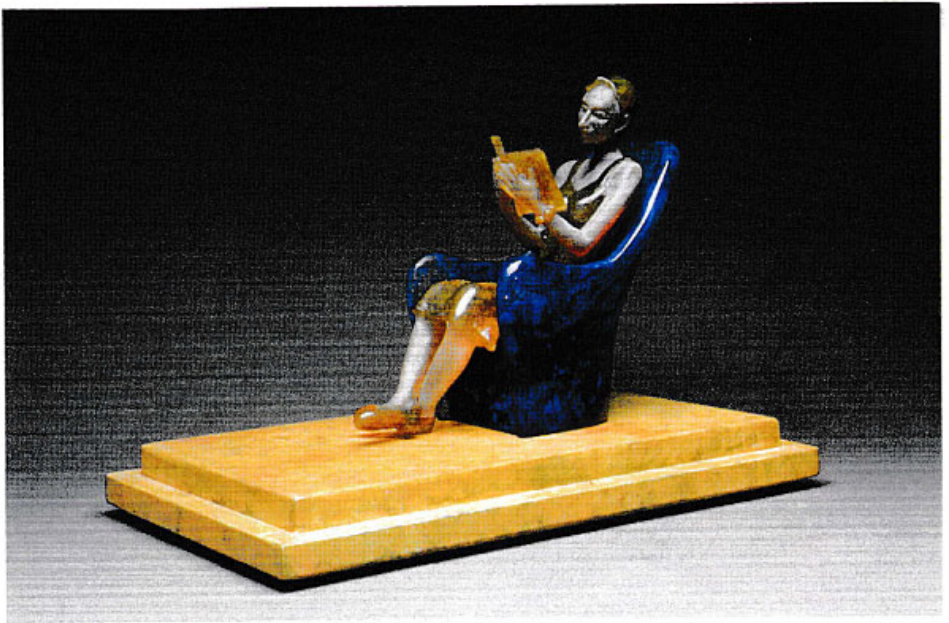
Lucy Lyon

Solitude and Society

Portia Gallery
Chicago

September 8 –
October 10, 2000

Glass usually doesn't attract too much attention from self-taught artists or, for that matter, from the outsider, folk, naïve, non-academic and/or non-mainstream communities. The expense of hot glass furnaces, the specialized knowledge their utilization requires and the benefit of working cooperatively with a crew are not necessarily conducive to the isolate visionary



starting to fiddle with materials near at hand. Glass and apprenticeship seem historically inseparable, even, as in recent years, when the university becomes the usual means by which knowledge is passed on from one generation to the next. This is part of what makes Lucy Lyon interesting: the fact that she has built a very successful career largely outside that system, that her art and vision come from a different context than that usually encountered in the modern glass world.

Lyon might be largely self-taught, but she is no naïve or outsider. She has a degree in philosophy from Antioch College, and about a decade after beginning to work in glass (in the late 1970s) found her way to Pilchuck. But her work does retain a raw and folksy air, a kind of economy of means and ends that is never without charm, even if it sometimes fails to sustain interest. She is best known for her little bookstore/library playlets, odd smallish constructions where rows and rows of books are suggested by little rectangular pieces of colored glass laid side by side in bookshelves while a few cast glass figures saunter around or sit and read nearby (Lyon usually represents her female figures as passive, while the men are shown in more active contexts). Lyon touches on the dream of the library as a vestige of humanism in a too complex world, on the escapist fantasy many of us have just to slip away to some quiet place where we could read

uninterrupted forever. There's something about books and the love of them that Lyon understands here, and the fiction of these little panes of glass and the rather formulaic rudimentary and puffy figures she favors can be strangely compelling. She produces a cliché, inviting a dismissive or generic response, but it's the kind of cliché you can still root for, and Lyon's clear engagement with it makes it disarming and less silly than it might appear otherwise. Conviction is all, even in this type of glass.

The other body of work Lyon showed here was also driven by a narrative impulse, sometimes as specific as a single little cast and sandblasted figure sitting at a table (*Café*), or reading a book (*Sonnet*). These dispensed with much of the specific architectural framework that Lyon usually favors, requiring the figure and its carriage and attitude to carry the day. They often worked well, as Lyon's intuitions about the lives of these individual figures (mostly women) seemed open, rich and evocative. Her multi-figure groups ranged from the prosaic (*Queue 2*) to the poetic *Solitude and Society*, the latter giving Lyon the title for this exhibition. Her little vignettes of numbers of people standing in line or waiting at a train station are efforts at a kind of anecdotal slice-of-life observation that seem irrelevant and forced. Her more ambiguous multi-figure groups, which take place outside time and specific narrative, can be more open-ended and suggestive. Lyon's awkward and proximate skills as a figural artist are balanced by her straightforwardness and freshness of approach, and more often than not the latter win out.

James Yood



Top:
Sonnet, 2000. Glass, 24 x 16 x 12".

Bottom:
Discovery, 2000. Glass, 18 x 20 x 21".