



**KOSTA
BODA**

SWEDEN 1742

One Million Dollar Boat.

Passage.

BERTIL VALLIEN

sculpture
objects
functional art
and design
SOFA

SOFA Chicago 2016. Navy Pier, Chicago, IL, USA

Hawk Galleries booth, November 3 - 6, 2016

Passage.
BERTIL VALLIEN



Hawk Galleries, Columbus, OH, USA

Passage: BERTIL VALLIEN. November 12 - December 31, 2016

Foreword.

SINCE 1963, Bertil has utilized the creative environment of his independent studio within the historic Kosta Boda factory and its rich and storied traditions to fulfill his creative spirit and accomplishes his story-telling dreams. By painting a picture of independence and freedom within the walls of the factory, Kosta Boda might be seen in a heroic light – completely trusting this free-wheeling and independent spirit named Bertil Vallien with absolute creative autonomy. In a very romantic way, this creative genius has been given awesome freedom to express himself at Kosta Boda. The Passage baton then will pass to Hawk Galleries to present and share Bertil's legacy piece and its magical narrative with the world. Bertil will literally unveil Passage, a masterwork, at SOFA Chicago with great excitement and fanfare.

Kosta Boda is such an enlightened and a forward-thinking company that it recognized decades ago, the true genius and creativity of Bertil Vallien. The culmination of this partnership, and now also with Hawk Galleries, who have represented Bertil for many years, is now embodied in this exceptional, museum-caliber, legacy piece Passage.

Tom Hawk, Jr.

Director, Hawk Galleries



Passage.

BERTIL VALLIEN

“Perhaps what makes Bertil Vallien the greatest in his class, in my eyes, is his desire to tell stories in glass.”

Staffan Bengtsson.
Arts and culture reporter



IN THE BEGINNING of the summer of 2016, I find myself with a dozen other aficionados in the semi-dark at the Kosta glassworks watching Bertil Vallien and his two female assistants sweating over hot molten glass.

The challenge they're working on is perhaps the greatest in Vallien's life as a glass artist: A project entitled the "One million dollar boat". A three-metre-long work of cast glass, which will later be shipped across the Atlantic to be exhibited at one of the world's largest art fairs, SOFA (Sculpture Objects Functional Art and Design)

A boat of solid glass. Vallien has made many before – but smaller and more manageable. This time around, the American partner, the Hawk Galleries in Columbus, Ohio, gave him relatively free hands to design the vessel as he sees fit. At nearly eighty, Vallien has done practically everything a glass artist can do, has earned an honorary doctorate at the Linnaeus University in Växjö and shows no signs of slowing down. Molten glass requires quick decisions, no hesitation. Vallien directs his assistants like a blowing-room Ingmar Bergman as scoop after scoop of melted glass fills the sand mould in front of us.

Of course it's beautiful. Of course the surfaces and depths of the glass shine and it's a pleasure to gaze into the pieces and see all the little figures and shapes seemingly hovering weightlessly in the glass.

But it's all held together by a common thread, a personal voice. Decorative, yes, but also existential and full of clues to Vallien's own life. Like slivers of dreams, fragments of the recent past.



THE ADVENTURE of Passage is far from Bertil Vallien's first American project. On the contrary, Vallien has a long history with the US. After earning his degree at the College of Art & Design in Stockholm in 1961, he headed west to Los Angeles, where he actually worked as a ceramicist! When he talks about those years, you get a strong sense of vital energy and longing for freedom. In 1963 he returned to Sweden, ending up in the glassworks of Åfors.

“Glass became his life's work, but one of the first Bertil Vallien boats was actually made of clay – a coveted collector's item today.”

Now it is May 2016. If you roam through Kosta, Sweden, in the morning sunlight, you'll see a historical industrial town that's done things right. The lush green trees stand out against the red buildings. Here and there you see builders and painters – shops and hotels have taken shape since I last visited the town.

Like a shimmering crown jewel, the seven-year-old Kosta Boda Art Hotel stands at the heart of it all. The cream of Swedish glass designers helped to decorate and furnish the hotel. Down the hill is a newly built holiday village. Traffic between the houses is lively and job opportunities keep increasing. I sip my morning coffee in the sun alongside the early-risers in the glass-blowing room.



FURTHER ON is Holsteins Väg, a road consisting of town-houses designed by another world-famous Swede in the 1950s, Bruno Mathsson. They were the height of modernity at the time; the glass wall sections became the model of future architecture and now you can even visit a show apartment decorated in the style of the era. On the way back to the glassworks I pass the Kosta Boda Art Gallery and am reminded of the great heritage of this little industrial community in Småland. Bruno Mathsson designed the gallery and his glass mosaics became the epitome of Swedish modernism.

“This is the perfect place for visitors to Kosta to get familiar with all the skilled creators at the glassworks. Including Vallien’s wife, Ulrica Hydman-Vallien, perhaps Sweden’s most beloved designer.”

My friend explains to me Kosta was founded by noblemen Anders Koskull and Georg Bogislaus Staël von Holstein in 1742. Former bodyguards of King Karl XII, they were named county governors of Småland as thanks for their service in battle. The first letters of their last names gave the name Ko-Sta. Sometimes things are that simple. It’s just past nine in the morning. Bertil has just gone round spraying water in the sand mould. Each phase has its own technique – nothing can be left to chance. For example, Mexican cornmeal was mixed into the sand to make it easier to remove the glass from the mould.

He works with a smile on his lips, seemingly enjoying every step of the work. The casting is a veritable performance for us spectators. In the past, Bertil has occasionally cast glass works before an audience, accompanied by a jazz band. I think he could very well have gone on world tour with a group like that. And he’d have loved every minute.



Master Blacksmith Lars Larsson



Cabinet maker Richard Kautto

Passage. Bertil Vallien.

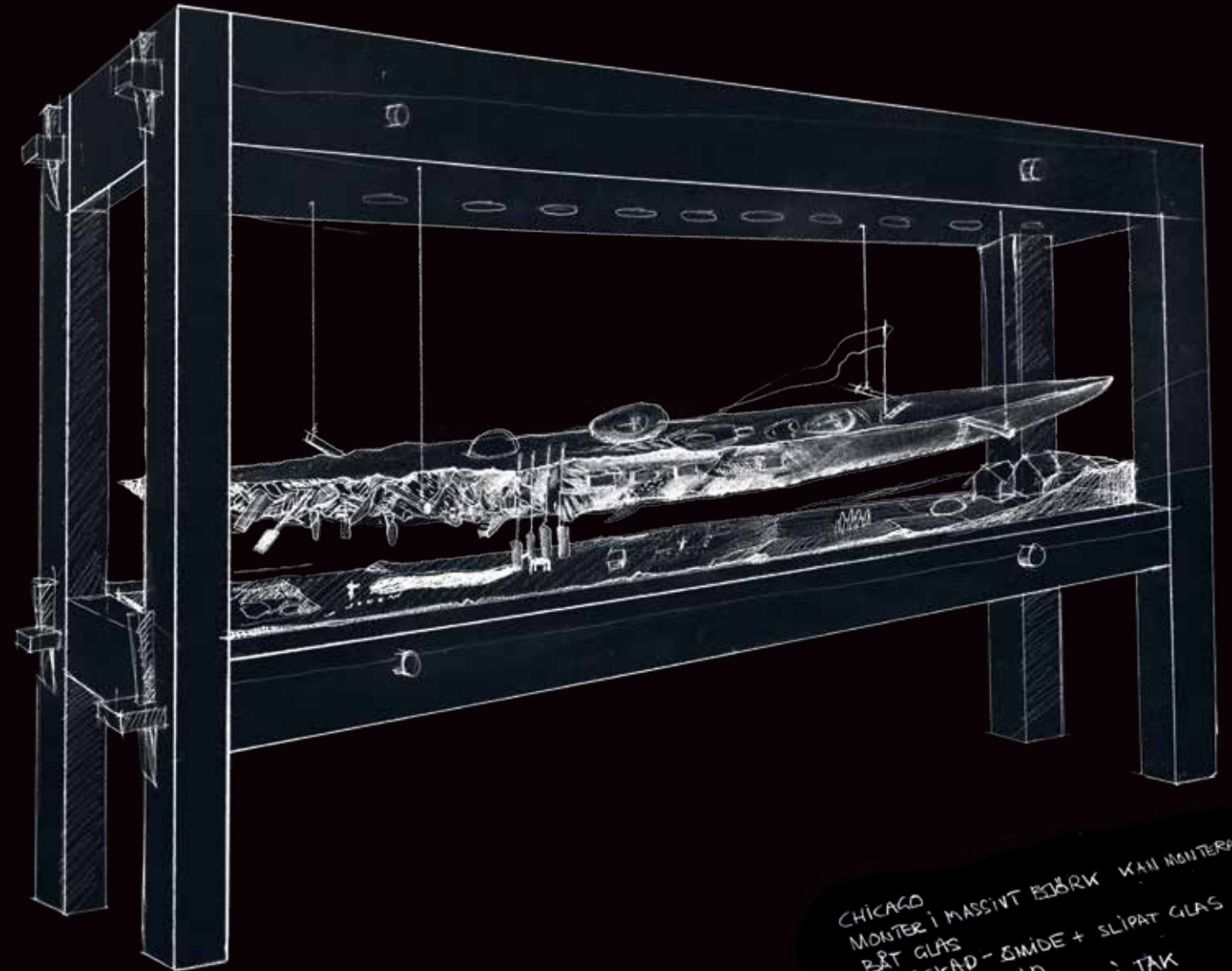
It is about history and the unknown future. It is a voyage with an unknown destination. The boat shape with fragments of the past gathered at the rear end and the clear bow representing the future.

Riding on top is Janus, a Greek mythological god having the ability to look back in history as well as observing the future. One source of inspiration is the story about the "sleeping princess" based on events surrounding an untouched sarcophagus in a tomb in Egypt that archeologists discovered.

When opening the heavy stone sarcophagus they were astonished by the scene that lasted for mere fleeting seconds. A most beautiful young girl adorned with jewelry and rosy cheeks appeared before she retransformed through the fresh air to a corpse of 2000 years in age. Buried in the boat are figures and metaphors for the journey of life.

The boat is hovering over a landscape made from wrought iron and glass detail. An opening, like a lake, unfolds to an underground space populated with strange figures made from glass. The installation can be interpreted in many ways, primarily it can be seen as a comment on the sad migration we now all are part of.

An vital part is the presentation of the installation in a well-crafted wooden display case with panes of glass protecting the inside, like it is in a museum. Mirrors on both ends give an illusion of infinity and a well thought out lighting system is built into the top of the showcase.

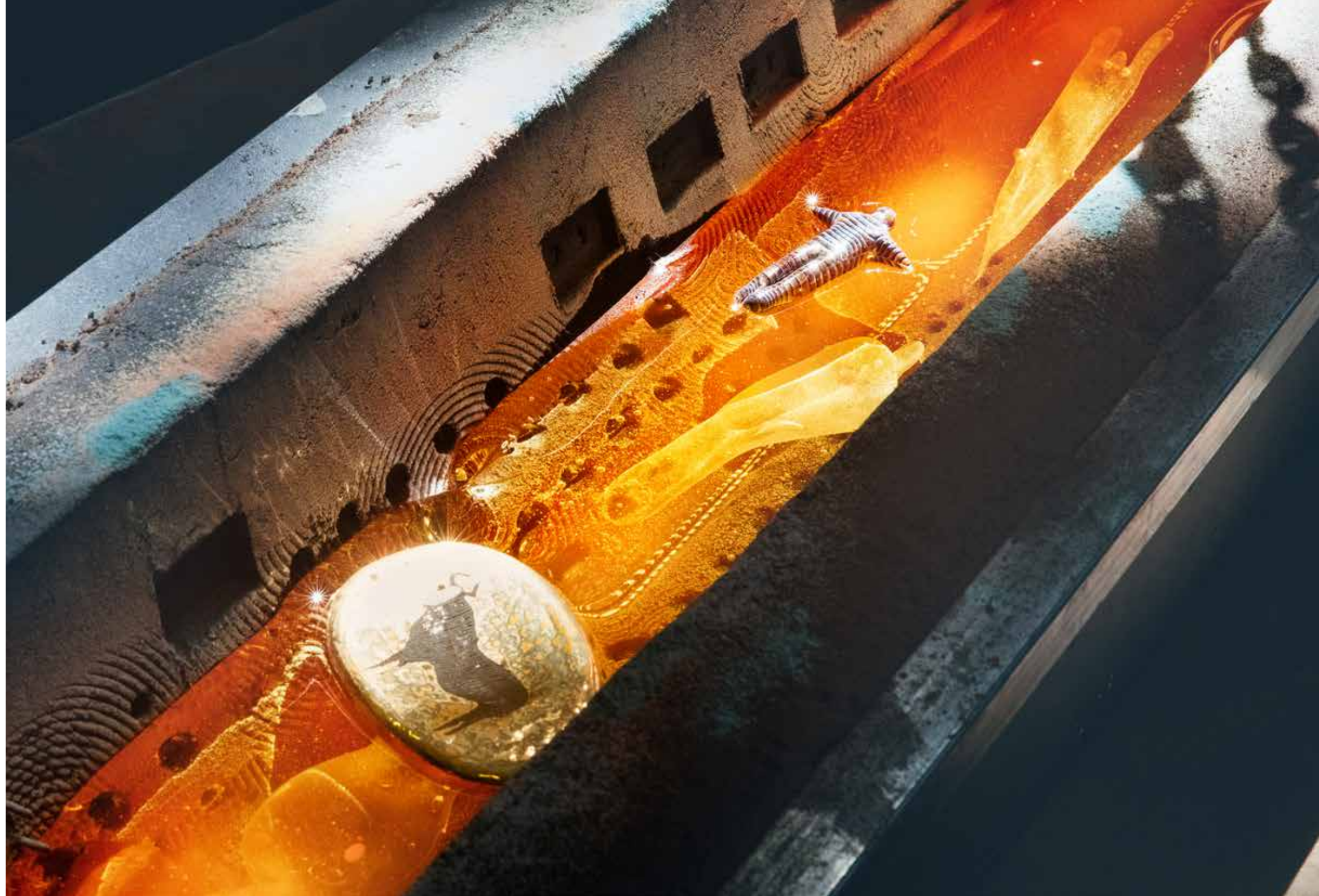


CHICAGO
MONTER I MASSIVT BJÖRK KAN MONTERAS
BÅT GLAS
LÄNDSKAP - SMIDE + SLIPAT GLAS
HELT INGLASAD
INBYGGD BELYSNING I TAK
GLAS DETALJER UNDER TÄLL

NOW HE MARKS AN X in the sand with his knife. He presses pieces of wood in the sides of the sand, where a metal construction will be inserted later so the boat – christened Passage – can be hung up to hover in its wooden frame. The team works with skill and precision, only exchanging the occasional word between the artist and his worthy assistants Sashiko and Cecilia. An hour earlier, we stood in Bertil's studio. His collection of tools was like nothing I've ever seen before. A gearshift from a car and a kitchen tool actually intended to slice onions – anything can be used, they must experiment with everything. Glass casts of this scale are above all reminiscent of surgery. All the “parts” that will later be encased in the giant glass body are all laid out on a special table. Most of it is painted glass – small faces, heads, houses. And keys and small copper figures.

“It’s the only metal that the glass tolerates,” Bertil explains as he sorts through the piles of keys that Sashiko has brought him.”

There is also a letter “E” formed of glass on the table, a typical Bertil Vallien internal joke. Several years ago, he found a ragged old T-shirt at a market in Pasadena in Southern California that had been worn by Einstein himself. “Relatively” cool, I say! He has that T-shirt at home in Åfors, but attentive viewers can find the letter E here and there in his sculptures. The letter “Y” is also lying there waiting to be used. Bertil laughs when I point it out. “That’s Y for yes,” he says, looking very pleased. Then he leans in and whispers in my ear, “It can also be a road forking off, as they sometimes do in life.” “Or two roads meeting and merging,” I replied, feeling a touch of Bertil’s poetic spirit.



BEFORE the long sand mould is rolled into the blowing room – it's very heavy and it takes two strong men to budge it at all – the sand is dusted with “frit”, a powder that brings out the colours in the glass. It is, as we've said, meant for a record-size glass sculpture. But Bertil Vallien actually made an even longer one once. That boat eventually ended up in New York and was exhibited at the World Trade Center for several months. Today it is at the entrance of the Corning Corporation's headquarters in upstate New York. The glassmakers at Kosta are working like never before. The industry that was in crisis a few years ago has become the wave of the future. The glass industry has wind in its sails. It employs many times the number of people it did just a few years ago, and when I discussed this development with the company management, they agreed with my assessment. For a stubborn, tenacious creator like Bertil Vallien, this gives him more energy. Over the years, he and many others had grown tired of being associated with an industry that was always described in negative terms. But things are different now. The rural province of Småland seems to be blossoming like never before. While we wait for the furnaces to reach the right temperature, I roam around the blowing room, where the activity level is reminiscent of Santa's workshop in Disney Christmas films. At one furnace, black-clad men sweat over Anna Ehrner's glass Globe. At another, Efva Attling's wine glasses are being blown, and further on in the heat, five men are busy creating a complex new vase designed by the young rising star Mattias Stenberg.

“An American tourist couple, strangely enough from Pasadena, California, stops to take pictures with their phones. They proudly regale us with stories of all the Swedish crystal they've collected over the years.”



IN 2017 the Kosta glassworks will celebrate its 275th anniversary. It certainly seems that there will be plenty of reason to celebrate. After a longer wait than usual, the furnaces for the smaller glass objects have hit the right temperature and the glassmakers can get started. Bertil and his colleagues, now suddenly crowding around the mould, know exactly what to do. Scoops of hot molten glass are poured into the mould and Bertil, Sashiko and Cecilia position their glass figurines according to Bertil's sketch and instructions. For the audience, this is really spine-tingling theatre – we all seem equally captivated. Right before our eyes, in about 15 intense, oncentrated minutes, an entire world of glass takes shape. An archae-ological cross-section of time, like a Pompeii of glass. And right in the middle of the heat and the sweat, the Artist is expected to stay cool and collected! Yet how can he? For heaven's sake, the man is almost 80!

“Watching these inanimate puzzle pieces come to life as they meet one another in the transparent glass, I think again how Bertil Vallien’s work is like watching creation itself.”

As if we can suddenly see straight into Vallien's head and observe his memories and dreams. Glass is a strangely living material, practically an element in itself. According to the laws of physics, glass is a liquid. Air bubbles can move in glass over the millennia, they say.



PIECE AFTER PIECE descends into the ship, to the tones of Bob Marley, Leonard Cohen and Johnny Cash. Over the years, I've observed many boats from Bertil's hand. This day, when the air is trembling with a special kind of expectation, I get the sense that he's sort of summarizing all of his ships. You could rightly call this one the mother-ship, the body from which the smaller boats are nourished. Yes, the entire project is spectacular and has led to giant headlines, but despite the purely business-related aspects, it is what his projects always are: a unique piece of Swedish glass art coming to life. As the work draws to a close and one of the assistants has magicked away a few air bubbles on the surface with a burner, I now see Bertil Vallien take a few steps back to catch his breath. His face is shiny with sweat and his mouth is smiling with that same calm he always has. There's something liberating about that instant. Bertil quite simply looks relieved. Sweden is rich in primarily two things: raw materials and brand names. The forests and the copper and iron mines laid the foundations of prosperity in the little country at the northern edge of Europe. Successful companies have moved Sweden from the periphery of the map to sit at its centre. A handful of brands have been crucial to modern Sweden's fame. Volvo and IKEA are unbeatable. Björn Borg is not far behind. ABBA has its own claim to fame, as does Absolut Vodka. Bertil Vallien and Kosta Boda are also on that list.

Visitors coming to Chicago this autumn to see *Passage* will be seeing something completely unique and of course to some degree incomprehensibly beautiful.

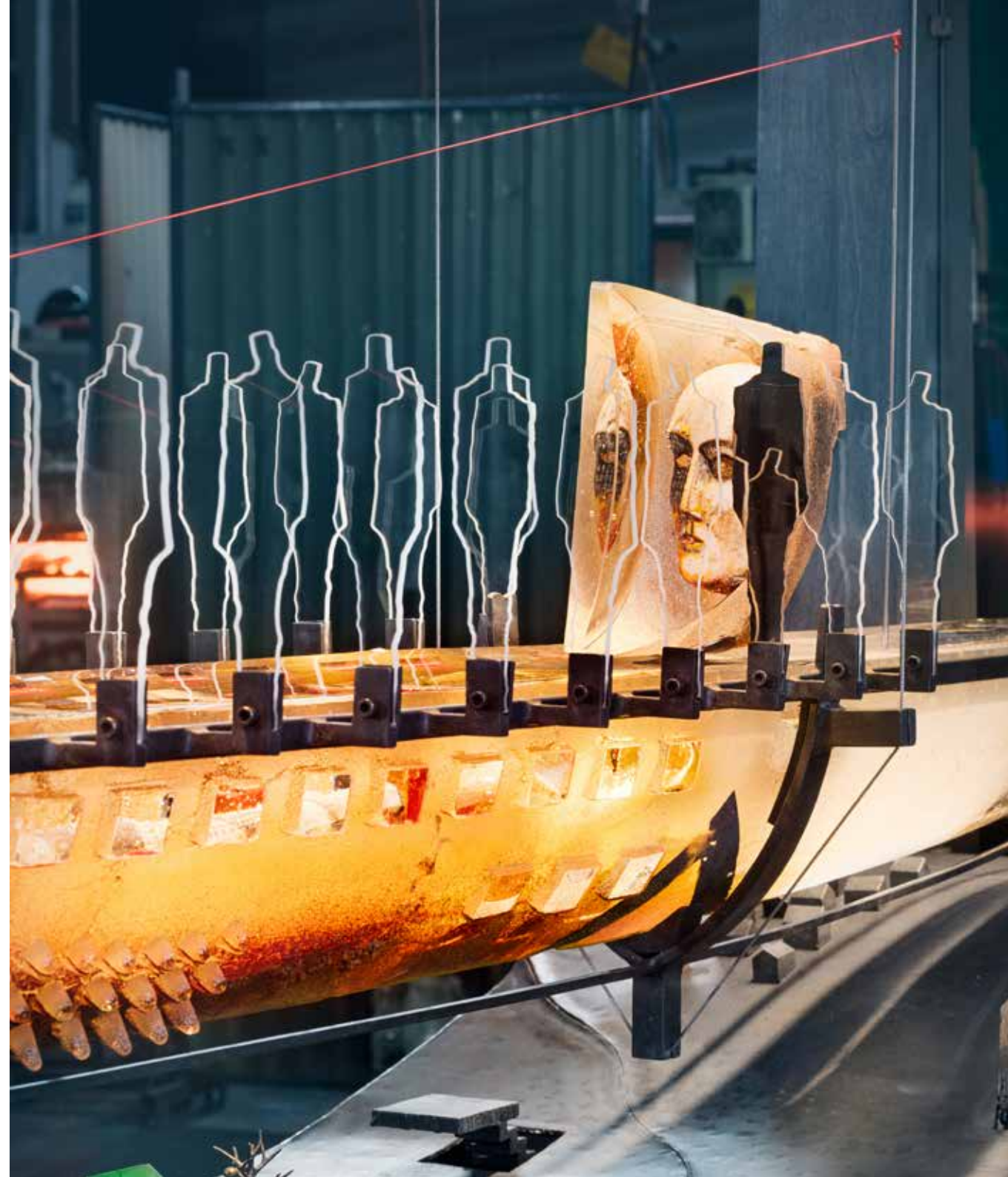
Because that's the thing about art glass: to us amateurs it can look completely, vertiginously impossible. Is this even possible? I have had that thought so many times as I've regarded works from Bertil Vallien's hand. Without a doubt, the Chicago audience will be taking part in a completely mesmerising challenge.



AND NOW THE BOAT is before us. For several weeks it will gradually cool and find its finished shape. We stand in silent awe, exchanging looks and approving nods. In Chicago, the boat will hang in an elegant stand, which Bertil calls a cabinet. It makes me think of another inventive genius, Leonardo da Vinci. The sturdy construction made of wood and metal was created by master blacksmith Lars Larsson and cabinet maker Richard Kautto.

The glass artist himself looks pleased, in his typical cagey way. Suddenly he whips a little harmonica out of his pocket and plays an improvised hymn in honour of the glass masterpiece. Or is it just a little musical dance of joy? I remember him doing something very similar in the summer of 2012 in Venice, when he had an exhibition in the Venice Biennale. He pulled a harmonica out of his trouser pocket and belted out a tune under the giant twinkling chandeliers in the Palazzo Franchetti, where much of his production was on display in nine gigantic rooms. It's hard to imagine a grander contrast to the glassworks in Kosta than that magnificent 16th-century Italian palace.

“But that’s how great artists work. They take liberties. They press the envelope. They give their audience a new lease on life. They rock the world.”









Bertil Vallien. Curriculum Vitae.



“I like working with themes. They’re like maxims that might be used to set off a whole chain of events. Glass offers opportunities like no other material. It has everything. It has an inner power of suggestion; it has light, heat and cold. Interior depths have always appealed to me more than the outer surface. For me, the blowing room is the centre of everything. It’s like ladling matter out of a volcano and watching the glowing lava turn to ice. Knowing the exact moment at which to capture a shift of light or expression and wrench the secret from the glass is what it’s all about.”

Bertil Vallien has since 1963 worked at Kosta Glassworks and made himself world famous both as a designer and glass artist. He is internationally renowned, holds several design and art awards, and his work is represented in the most prestigious museums around the world.

Selected works from public collections.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, NY, USA.
HM de Young Museum, San Francisco, USA.
Yokohama Art Museum, Yokohama, Japan.
The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.
Düsseldorf Museum of Fine Arts, Düsseldorf, Germany.
National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan.
Absolut Collection, NY, NJ, USA.
National Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan.
Museum of Fine Art, Boston, Ma, USA.
Detroit Art Institute, Detroit, Il, USA.
National Museum, Stockholm, Sweden.
Museum of Art and Design, NYC, NY, USA.
Art Institute, Chicago, Il, USA.
The Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, Australia.
Musée des Arts Decoratifs, The Louvre, Paris, France.
The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, Canada.
Rockford Museum of Art, Rockford, IL, USA.
Microsoft Art Collection, Seattle, USA.
VIDA Museum, Öland, Sweden.
National Museum, Edinburgh, UK.

Selected awards

- 1998** Prince Eugene's medal for outstanding Achievement in art, Stockholm, Sweden.
- 1995** Urban Glass Award for "Outstanding Achievements in Glass" NY, USA.
- 2001** Visionaries Award. Museum of Arts and Design, NY, USA.
- 2002** Honorary doctorate. Linnaeus University, Sweden.
- 2004** Award in recognition of the promotion of Glass Art in the World. Museo del Vidrio, Monterey. México.
- 2005** The Wilson Award. GAS, New Orleans, USA.
- 2006** Gold medal, Royal Academy of Science. Stockholm, Sweden.
- 2008** The Libensky Award, Prague, Czech Republic.
- 2012** Medal for the exhibition "Nine Rooms" at the 13th Biennale in Venice given by Instituto Veneto di Scienze ed Arti.

HAWK GALLERIES

Hawk Galleries has added a unique dimension to the cultural fabric of central Ohio and beyond for over 30 years. This is only possible because Tom Hawk feels blessed in exhibiting the best and brightest in contemporary glass, and loves uniting artists and collectors. Gallery openings feature artists sharing their life experiences, thus infusing works of art with the artists' soulful personalities. Hawk has also partnered with museums, via regular artist lectures, numerous acquisitions and even an occasional exhibition, validating and broadening the studio glass art dialogue.

www.hawkgalleries.com

KOSTA BODA

SWEDEN 1742

Founded in 1742, Kosta is Sweden's oldest glassworks. However, although its historical ties remain strong, Kosta Boda is one of the foremost exponents of innovative, modern design. Today, Kosta Boda is one of the world's leading glass brands. Glass from Kosta Boda is noted for its artistry, its colour and a design idiom like no other. Cooperation and communication between designer and craftsmen are extraordinarily close and are crucial in transforming ideas and sketches into glass. Together, they make Kosta Boda a brand with a strong, multifaceted personality.

www.kostaboda.com
