



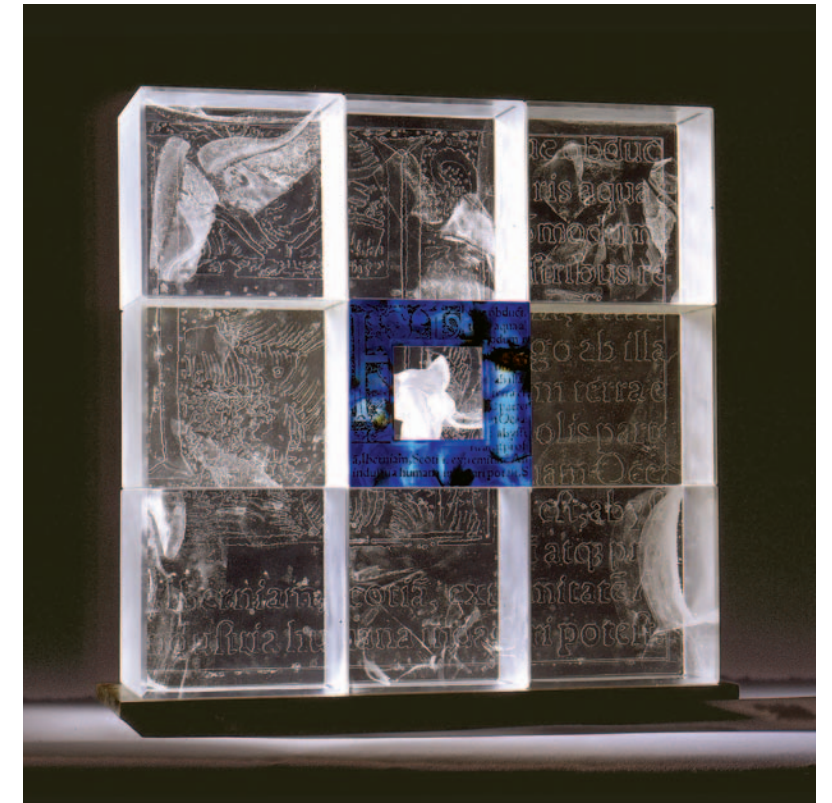
'Vanite au Lapin IV', 1999, cast glass and lost-wax technique, 110 x 68 x 25 cm. Collection: Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris



'Vanite au Lapin V', 1999, cast glass and lost-wax technique, 100 x 60 x 25 cm. Collection: JCC Galerie, Luxembourg



'Vanite au Lapin VI', 2001, cast glass and lost-wax technique, 55 x 38 x 20 cm. Collection: Tutsek Munich, Germany



'Effets de la Memoire I', 1993, cast glass and lost-wax technique, 60 x 60 x 17 cm. Collection: Musée du verre de Sars Poteries, France

## EXPRESSIONS OF GRAVITAS

Heir to a long and distinguished lineage in French art, glass artist Antoine Leperlier takes his technical abilities very seriously, believing mastery of these to be the key to freedom of artistic expression. Profile by Dan Klein.

FAMILY tradition has played an important role in determining Antoine Leperlier's career path. His great grandfather Emile Décorchemont (b. 1850) was assistant to one of France's leading sculptors Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904) and a sculptor in his own right. 'I look rather like him' says Antoine Leperlier with an air of pride. A statue by Emile Décorchemont stands in a prominent place outside the town hall of Evreux in Normandy, the area where Antoine Leperlier was born and still lives. François Décorchemont (1880–1971), Emile's son and also an artist, helped out in his father's studio, in particular helping him to research the possibilities of creating jewelled adornments in *pâtes d'émail* (enamel pastes) for Gérôme's polychrome sculptural creations. François Décorchemont, a potter and painter at the outset of his career, became fascinated with the idea of developing and utilising a thin translucent glass material in his work. It was in essence the revival and an adaptation of a long forgotten Egyptian glassmaking process using coloured crystal

powdered glass, metallic oxides and an adhesive paste. This "new" material, known as *pâte de verre* was developed around the turn of the century, principally at the Sèvres porcelain factory, by a number of artists working there, notably Henri Cros and Albert Dammouse. During the first half of the 20th century a number of French artists became famous for their work in *pâte de verre*, and François Décorchemont among them.

As a young boy Antoine Leperlier frequently visited his grandfather's studio. Antoine was born in 1953, by which time his grandfather was already in his seventies but the two developed a close relationship, which has marked his whole life. Because of the special bond between them, François Décorchemont decided to make Antoine his artistic heir. It is a decision that has affected Antoine deeply. Already as a child the relationship between them had been of fundamental importance. He made so many discoveries in his grandfather's studio, about himself and about his family. He recalls vividly and with great affection how in 1968, the



'Quatre dents du Soleil', 1985, cast glass and lost-wax technique, 22 x 40 x 40 cm. Collection: Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

year of the general strike in France when everything, including schools, shut down, he spent many hours in his grandfather's studio sorting papers, watching him at work and helping. Reading through old family papers and learning things about his family that he never knew before, made him aware of the importance of the written word, of history and of the passage of time, all of which are at the heart of his artistic creation. The written word for Antoine encapsulates a moment in time. Words, by defining the moment at which they were written, help us to understand the elusive nature of perpetuity. With the written word time stands still for a moment. It links past and present, recording the occurrence of a thought and fixing it for future generations. The written word is both past, present and future. Philosophical thoughts in this vein invest the work of Antoine Leperlier. They account for the prominence of the carefully chosen texts that he so often incorporates. The words are much more than titles. They define the whole aura of the creation they occupy.

As a student Antoine Leperlier studied philosophy at the Sorbonne (1973–76) and the plastic arts at the University Paris I–Sorbonne (1972–82) and the Ecole du Louvre in Paris (1974–76). Looking around at the art of his contemporaries he felt dismayed at their lack of concern with technique. He had seen his grandfather at work and through him had absorbed a feeling of respect for technical process. He was concerned by the devaluation of process in contemporary art. For him process lay at the heart of artistic creation and much as he admired the revolutionary ideas of Marcel Duchamp and the surrealists, he felt uncomfortable about dismissing craftsmanship from artistic creation. If he was to become an artist he needed to adhere to the honesty of craftsmanship. For him this meant working with his hands, using them to interpret complex thought processes. He saw it as the only way forward, which made him decide that his future was as an artist in glass. Philosophy and art are inseparable in Leperlier's mind, partly because of his studies, partly because that is simply the way he is. He has always been curious about



'Le Tombeau de Monsieur Manet', 1994, cast glass, lost-wax technique, 23 x 40 x 40 cm. Collection: Lechaczynski, Biot, France

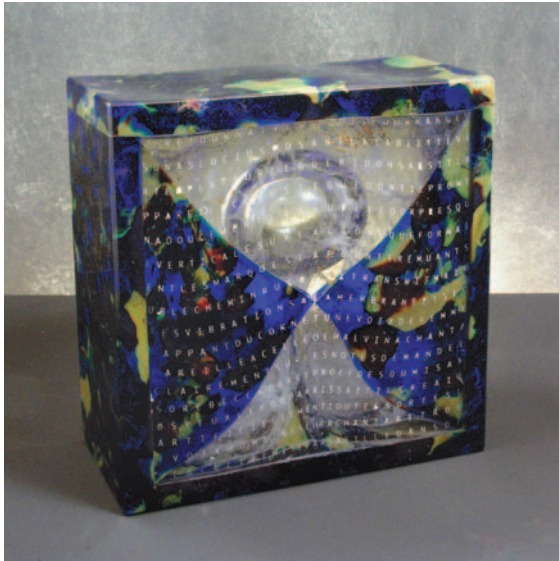


'Ombre Simultane XV', 1995, cast glass and lost-wax technique, 23 x 40 x 40 cm. Private collection

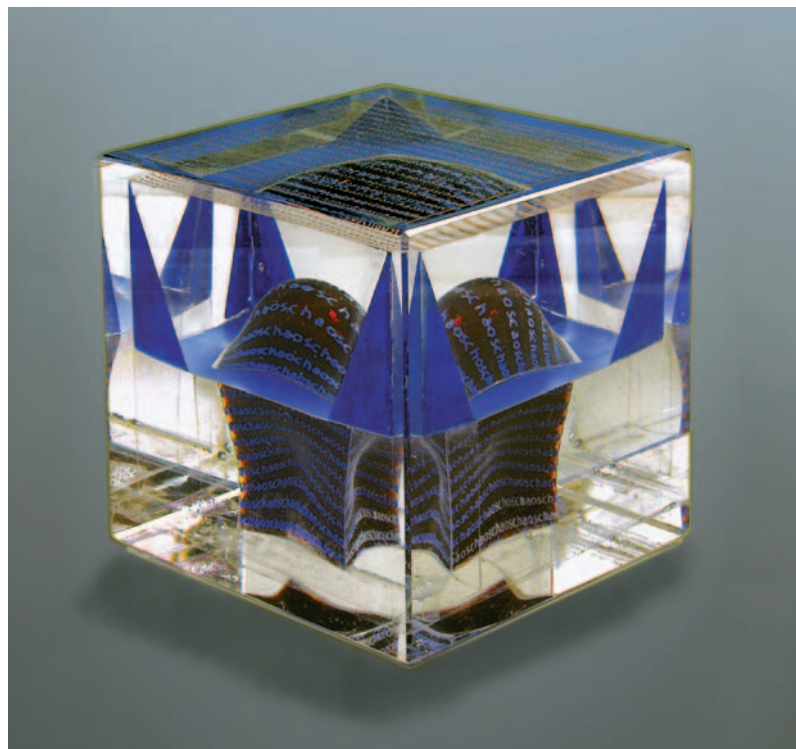


'Effets de la Memoire XIII', 1999, cast glass and lost-wax technique, 30 x 26 x 25 cm. Private collection

'Locus Solus III (homage to Raymond Roussel)', 2004, cast glass and lost-wax technique, 22 x 22 x 9.5 cm. Collection of the artist

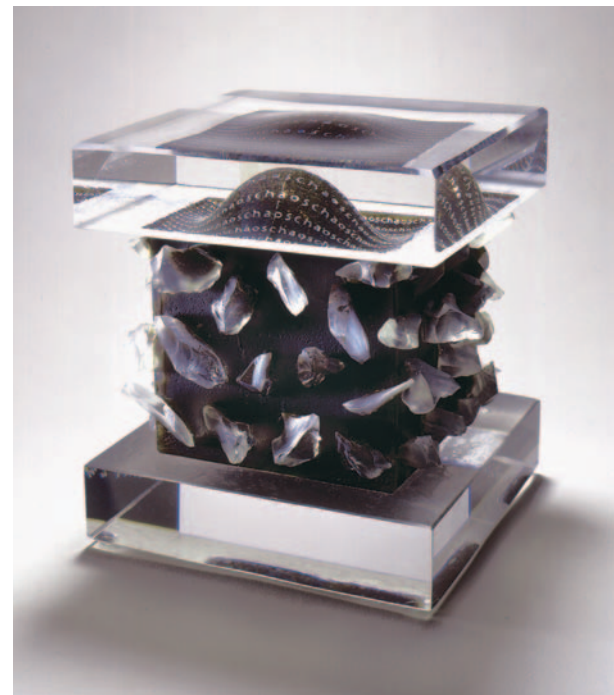


'L'Instant Juste Avant XIII', 2003, cast glass and lost-wax technique, 19 x 20 x 20 cm. Collection of the Leperlier Glass Art Fund, France



'Cabinet aux Fragments I', 1992, layered blown glass, 50 x 60 x 40 cm. Private collection

the nature of existence. What interests him about the way we are is the power of memory and its relationship to time. Memory is our principle means of accumulating knowledge. It is of immense importance in our lives, our means of encapsulating the past and making decisions that will shape the future. Yet we struggle to understand its nature. For Leperlier, glass is the ideal artistic material for investigating memory. He calls it 'une matière de mémoire' (the material of memory). Because of its transparency and its ability to hold light, it allows the artist to investigate the mysteries of the ethereal. Because of its alchemical qualities in which fluid and solid states combine, it allows the glass artist to make time stand still. Whilst Leperlier sees marble and bronze as materials that can define space, glass for him is a material capable of defining time. Through glass the immaterial becomes material. An artist working with glass can investigate the mysteries of time in a way not possible in any other material. For Leperlier



'L'Instant Juste Avant VIII', 2003, cast glass and lost-wax technique, 20 x 18 x 18 cm. Collection: Leperlier Glass Art Fund



'Effets de la Memoire XXI - Chaos', 2001, cast glass and lost-wax technique, 22 x 23 x 24 cm. Collection: Victoria & Albert Museum, London

glass is a means of allowing us to communicate with the imagery of dreams and the shadow world. It allows for the simultaneous creation of outer skin and inner substance, thereby opening avenues of exploration that are closely related to the human condition.

Antoine Leperlier began working in glass during the 1970s. Although steeped in glass tradition because of his family background, he was not at all aware of developments in contemporary glass in the United States. It was after his grandmother's death in 1978 that he started working for himself in the studio once occupied by his grandfather and began making his first pieces in *pâte de verre*. In the beginning he knew no other way of working than to think in terms of objects. His early works were vessel forms, though already invested with thoughts gathered as a philosophy student. It was not long, however, before he departed from object-based art and explored the more abstract possibilities of turn



'Effets de la Memoire X', 2001, cast glass and lost-wax technique, 25 x 25 x 25 cm. Collection: Leperlier Glass Art Fund

Right: 'Still Life/Still Alive XII' (detail), 1998, cast glass and lost-wax technique, 75 x 55 x 25 cm. Private collection



'Paroles Vitrifées I', 1999, cast glass and lost-wax technique, 1800 x 1200 x 150 cm. Collection: JCC Galerie, Luxembourg





'Locus Solus VI (homage to Raymond Roussel)', 2004, cast glass and lost-wax technique, 27 x 27 x 8.5 cm. Collection of the artist

'L'Homme Lettre', 2004, cast glass and lost-wax technique, 27 x 27 x 8.5 cm. Artist's collection



'Locus Solus V' (homage to Raymond Roussel)', 2004, cast glass and lost-wax technique, 27 x 27 x 8.5 cm. Collection: Leperlier Glass Art Fund



ing dreams into glass using a sculptural idiom. He singled out thoughts from the many that occupied his mind and began to work thematically. 'I function in cycles' he says, and develops a theme until he is ready to move on to the next one.

When Antoine Leperlier found himself alone in the studio after his grandfather's death, the burden of his grandfather's legacy weighed heavily on his shoulders. He asked his brother Etienne to join him there and until 1996 they worked together on questions of technical research. Technical perfection has remained central to his art enabling him to elaborate on his philosophical musings. But Antoine is very different from his brother Etienne. He needs to be alone with his very personal thoughts and felt the need to move away and set up his own studio nearby.

When recognisable objects punctuate his work, they assume a ritualistic or fetishist significance. His sculptures become miniature shrines in which individual details assume symbolic force. The miniature tortoises that animated his *Et in Arcadia Ego* series were an allusion to the little tortoise that sat on his grandfather's radio. It had been an object of sentimental value to his grandfather and through that association assumed symbolic importance a generation further down the line. The treatment of fruit clusters in his *Still Life/Still Alive* series related to questions of perishability and time. His fish and rabbits become symbols by which to recognise the Leperlier imprint, ritualistic creatures that mark the passing of time within his own life cycle. In his most recent work, the two series *Chaos* and *Instant juste Avant* (the moment just past) he tries to define the passing of time and investigate how the movement of time can be trapped or frozen within the glass mass.

It is Leperlier's ambition to mark his existence on this earth by the works he leaves behind him. He would probably refer to it as the shadow he casts as he moves through life. Whilst in a sense all his work is a form of self-analysis, he hopes that by analysing and communicating his thoughts he may enlighten others. Is that not the aim of all thinkers, be they writers, painters, composers or scientists? Very often he uses the words of others to illustrate his own thoughts. All texts are carefully chosen and frequently the same text will recur within a cycle of work. He quotes in order to explain to himself and reveal the power of words to others. Texts are chosen after much deliberation, chosen to illuminate the shadow world, chosen too to mark a particular occasion. His choice of a Dante text for the exhibition "Venezia Aperto Vetro" in 1996 was not mere coincidence. It was incorporated in a work exhibited at the Ducal Palace in Venice, one of the last cities Dante visited before his death.

Leperlier takes his technical abilities very seriously, believing mastery of these to be the key to freedom of expression. He is technically ambitious and a perfectionist. Finish is as important to him as content. He describes himself as somebody with worried thoughts. 'Je suis plutôt un angoissé' (I tend to be an anguished person) he says of himself. But his worries are of a universal nature and by inviting us to share them he casts them in a new light.

**Dan Klein**

The work of Antoine Leperlier is held in over 20 major public collections around the world, including: Musée des Arts Décoratifs de Paris; Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris; Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK; Corning Museum of Glass, US; Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art, Japan; Kurokabe Glass Museum, Nagahama, Japan; Museum for Contemporary Art Glass, Scottsdale, Arizona, US; Musée du Design et d'Arts Appliqués Contemporains, Lausanne, Switzerland.

Further information is available at: [www.antoine-leperlier.com](http://www.antoine-leperlier.com)