

# Blown Bound & Bold

A Solo Exhibition  
by Chris Day



Vessel Gallery

CONTEMPORARY ART, CRAFT & LIGHTING





Blown, Bound and Bold  
A solo exhibition by Chris Day  
28th September – 31st October 2020

Chris Day (b.1968, UK) is an emerging glass & mixed media artist and a recent graduate from Wolverhampton University, who received a special commendation at last year's British Glass Biennale held in Stourbridge, UK.

A self-confessed 'arts enthusiast' Day's creative career comes after more than two decades as a self-employed plumber. Initially feeling that his life had taken him on a journey that significantly detoured away from his early love of the arts, Day is now able to reflect on the fact that many of the skills he has developed in his earlier career have directly transposed to the creation of his artworks.

Combining materials used in both heating and electrical systems into his creations, Day finds he able to create the perfect marriage of his artistic path and technical knowledge, both of which rely on dexterity and high levels of skill and craftsmanship.

Creating works that are highly personal, Day's intention is to discuss and investigate the treatment of black people in Britain and the United States of America. Much of his research has focussed on the history of the slave trade in the Eighteenth Century.

A reoccurring and signature theme are 'copper cages' which enclose his glass. These represent the restriction of movement both physically and mentally that traders possessed over other human's lives that were viewed simply as 'commodities'. These are created from simple copper tubing and wire but to dramatic effect. The glass, by contrast, Day compares to the human spirit, attempting to break free despite the restrictions that hold it in place.

In the artist's own words;

*"Like the glass, I have pushed my approach in how I work with glass & ceramics in both traditional and experimental methods, to create contemporary artworks that represent my passion for this part of our history.*

*As a black glassblower, I am one of few and on a quest to find and inspire more. My main purpose, however, is to engage the audience on issues that are hard to confront on many levels, using art to help overcome some of the traumas that haunt our collective past"*

## Being imperceptible | An essay & interview with Chris Day by Karen Phillips, Director, North lands Creative

In the time that one knows Christopher Day, one learns how beauty and horror in his practice exists, it borrows the seductive qualities of glass to make work that comments on issues of race with narratives that range from complex inquiries to unflinching social vignettes. Day makes objects that are more than racially defined, reflecting multiple dimensions of identity and experience.

Day is a bi-heritage (Jamaica/UK) artist who uses his craft to navigate what it means to be black in the UK. And also, white. While he might be both, he sometimes feels like he is not enough of either. His new work, deeply personal in exploration, are often self-portraits that explore what it means to be of bi-heritage in the UK by playing on stereotypes and aspects of generalisations. Constantly aware of the complexity of race, his solo show, 'Blown, Bound and Bold' deals with the complexities of internalised racism as well as the difficulty of establishing an identity that isn't just stratified but overlooked by linear definitions of race and heritage.

Bringing together a very personal selection of work, the exhibition aims to create a sense of community and encourage discussion. Every detail including the unwieldy lines, the ensnared glass bubbles, copper cages and the visual weight of material is so imperfect, restrictive, distorted, a conscious acknowledgement of confronting the subject matter visually. An exhibition such as this is, as much as anything, an exhortation to face history and explore the present – as the Black Lives Matter movement actively reshaped our view of our recent past and future contingencies.

Day's professional engagement with art began quite late, but his past has always been enamoured with the expressive power of working with his hands (as a plumber). With the artist there is insistent questioning on the history of the slave trade in the Eighteenth Century, reactive almost twitter-like in brevity the finished glass-blown pieces are acutely patient in awaiting response. Traditions of art and history, Day's work exemplifies this immersion of personal preoccupation, a unique compositional line of enquiry and an emotive invitation to viewers to engage with that enquiry. The resulting observances confront viewers with a synthesis of new and often shocking realities. Day's work is created in response to his own conflicting feelings of belonging as a man of bi-heritage, which are compounded by the limited representation of diverse narratives by and of people of colour in art history and popular culture.

Day's practice investigates complex topics and social tensions through the use of the personal; often creating works that hold colour and light and the potential of how these incredible objects reflect the subtle and not-so-subtle integrations of ideas into individual lives and identities.

Day's early works 'Strange Fruit Series' raw, anthropomorphic sculptures depict human parts and are explosive sculptures – to represent states of metamorphosis and pain, and the passage of time in his works, often by incorporating found materials other than glass, like metal wire, wood, rope and plumbing parts.

Interaction between those materials is essential in forming shapes – the blown glass is pushed to its bursting point and the material is often capturing the moment of passage from one state to another. He admits he rarely ends up in the place he thinks he is going because the glass has its own ideas. He likes the feeling of being led by the material.

Glass is the perfect medium for Day to create emotional weight in his works by developing physical tension within them and affords the artist unending surprises. He sidesteps the traditional rules of glass blowing in favour of unusual combinations and partnerships. This process leaves a vivid, energetic footprint on the work.

With every passing decade, glass is a medium that becomes more rampant, versatile, and exposed, and perhaps more worthy of a position within the wider history of sculpture. Day's approach is shifting the perception of hot glass not fitting to the hermetic of the master glass blower. The work deserves better than to be indelibly coloured by allusions to (not) being useful, ensuring that whether taking the shape of a functional vessel or an explosive sculpture, the work receives its due respect and recognition.

KP What influences translate into your art practice?

CD *The starting point for the development of my work was the intimate connection with my black heritage. A journey that starts with my ancestors that were stolen from Africa, incarcerated in Jamaica and after centuries of oppression finally finding a home in the UK. The discourse surrounding issues of Slavery, The Civil Rights Movement and Racial Identity, have been conceptually captured into my work, to encourage the conversation on this aspect of history.*

KP Has this changed the way you approach your work?

CD *Researching into my heritage has had a significant effect in how and what I make. Producing work that tells a story releases the emotions that have built up through live experiences and those of others who have had to confront discrimination and racism just because of the colour of their skin.*

KP What initially captured your imagination about glass?

CD *The allure of glass has only recently come into my life and from the first encounter that mostly ended on the floor, has had me in under its spell ever since. The techniques and art form have not changed over the centuries and having a passion for engineering I consider glass as my escape from conforming to society's regulations, gaining the freedom to do what I want.*

KP What's the significance of the handmade to you?

CD *Having spent over half a century on this planet I feel the concept of using our hands to create like many of the craft traditions is losing its young audience due to technology. Encouraging children to engage with making no matter what medium can only stimulate their sense of something hand-made. The experience of making with your hands for many children and adults that are not academic can be a way of increasing one's self-esteem as well as giving pleasure to others.*

KP What was your route to becoming an artist? What is your chosen medium and what are your techniques?

CD *Wolverhampton University of Art has given me the opportunity to once again discover that sixteen-year-old boy who loved art. The Glass and Ceramic degree course gave me the freedom to experiment and most of all play in both mediums. Glass blowing is only one of the disciplines I use, others include throwing on a potter's wheel and metal sculpting. The university has supported and helped develop my confidence to be able to call myself an artist.*

KP How would you describe your work and where do you think it fits within the sphere of contemporary glass?

CD *Over the last four years because of the context surrounding my work I feel that I have a very small audience to connect with. For some in the glass world, Glass is to be desired, put on a pedestal and admired. All these attributes I desire and only from the forward-thinking of one gallery, Vessel in London, have I been able to place my artwork on the stage of contemporary glass. Over the last few months with Black lives Matter and the protests that have reignited the plight of not only American but also British black members of society, I hope the debate will spill over into the glass art world, and the audience I have been looking for will emerge so the conversation can continue.*

KP What currently inspires you and which other artists do you admire and why?

CD *Unfortunately, the history surrounding the oppression of black people has always inspired the way I work, and the current situation has only given me more food for thought. What happened in the 50's,60's,80's,90's and yet again in 2020 shows that a change still needs to happen for black people to be treated equally. As a black glassblower, I am one of few. Finding other black glass blowers is a quest I am on, although top of my list is the artist, Fred Wilson, an American artist whose work reflects the same desire of showing the inequality towards black and ethnic people.*



v e s s e l



Exhibition Artworks



*Previous page (left detail)*

***Commodity Triptych***

Unique wall mounted or free standing installation

2019

Handblown & sculpted glass with reclaimed wood and electrical wire

74cm H, 150cm W, 25cm D (each piece is approx 44cm W)



*Anomic*

Unique

2020

Handblown & sculpted glass with 15mm copper pipe, steel chain, reclaimed sheet steel, bronze, angle iron and electrical wire

100cm H, 50cm W, 50cm D



*Impostor Syndrome*

Unique

2020

Handblown & sculpted glass with micro bore copper pipe, copper wire, 15mm copper pipe and reclaimed bronze

87cm H, 38cm W, 26cm D



*Socially Isolated*

Unique

2020

Handblown & sculpted glass with micro bore copper pipe, copper wire, 15mm copper pipe and reclaimed angle iron  
66cm H, 31cm W, 20cm D



*Minneapolis*

Unique

2020

Handblown & sculpted glass with 200 year old Welsh slate (not shown), 15mm copper pipe and reclaimed engineer's vice

47cm H, 42cm W, 13cm D



*Transcending Bondage*

Unique  
2019

Handblown & sculpted glass with terracotta, micro bore copper pipe and copper wire  
36cm H, 25cm W, 25cm D



*Emmett Till*

Unique  
2019

Handblown & sculpted glass with terracotta, found tree branch and copper wire  
42cm H, 36cm W, 28cm D



## Strange Fruit

Southern trees bear a strange fruit  
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root  
Black bodies swingin' in the Southern breeze  
Strange fruit hangin' from the poplar trees  
Pastoral scene of the gallant South  
The bulgin' eyes and the twisted mouth  
Scent of magnolias sweet and fresh  
Then the sudden smell of burnin' flesh  
Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck  
For the rain to gather  
For the wind to suck  
For the sun to rot  
For the tree to drop  
Here is a strange and bitter crop

"Strange Fruit" is a song recorded by Billie Holiday, written by Abel Meeropol and published in 1937. It protests the lynching of Black Americans, with lyrics that compare the victims to the fruit of trees. Such lynchings had reached a peak in the Southern United States at the turn of the 20th century, and the great majority of victims were black. The song has been called "a declaration of war" and "the beginning of the civil rights movement".  
Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia

*Strange Fruit Installation*

Unique

2018

Handblown & sculpted glass with steel, hessian cord and reclaimed electrical wire

180cm H, 150cm W, 30cm D



*Strange Fruit IV*

Unique

2020

Handblown & sculpted glass with terracotta, micro bore copper pipe and copper wire

29cm H, 19cm W, 23cm D





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***Strange Fruit XI***

Handblown & sculpted glass with terracotta, micro bore copper pipe and copper wire  
29cm H, 15cm W, 18cm D

***Strange Fruit XII***

Handblown & sculpted glass with terracotta and copper wire  
34cm H, 15cm W, 20cm D

***Strange Fruit X***

Handblown & sculpted glass with terracotta and copper wire  
26cm H, 14cm W, 18cm D

Each unique, 2020

[Left](#)

***Strange Fruit I***

Unique  
2019  
Handblown & sculpted glass with terracotta and copper wire  
28cm H, 18cm W, 18cm D

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***Strange Fruit VIII***

Handblown & sculpted glass with terracotta, micro bore copper pipe and copper wire  
25cm H, 20cm W, 17cm D

***Strange Fruit VII***

Handblown & sculpted glass with terracotta, micro bore copper pipe and copper wire  
28cm H, 17cm W, 20cm D

***Strange Fruit IX***

Handblown & sculpted glass with terracotta, micro bore copper pipe and copper wire  
25cm H, 16cm W, 20cm D

Each unique, 2020







# Vessel Gallery

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