



Lena 25+

A Solo Exhibition by Lena Bergström





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30th May - 15th July 2022

Vessel Gallery presents a new solo exhibition by the Swedish glass and textile designer Lena Bergström, whose playful, exuberant forms communicate her love of glass as an artistic material and her intuitive sense of colour and texture.

The exhibition celebrates the 25 years and more for which Lena has been designing glass for the boutique Swedish brands of Orrefors and Kosta Boda, and the nearly 20 years for which she has been represented in London by Vessel.

Lena 25+ is Bergström's fourth exhibition with the gallery. Having first encountered Angel Monzon - the gallery's founder - in the 1990s Stockholm's creative scene, he came across her again in the 2000s, when she was at Orrefors. "It was Lena's work which really inspired me to go into glass," Monzon says. "She has been part of Vessel's collection since the early days."

Bergström has designed several prize-winning products and received numerous awards including a staggering 12 'Excellent Swedish Design' awards. She has works in the permanent collections of the;

Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, Sweden
The Röhsska Museum of Fashion, Design & Decorative Arts, Gothenburg, Sweden
Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, United States
Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo, Norway
The Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK

Exhibition Artworks

Anemone in Orange
Limited edition of 5
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 37 cm W 22.5 cm D 24 cm





Heart Flower in Turquoise
Unique
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 32 cm W 41 cm D 29 cm

Heart Flower in Clear & Frost
Unique
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 48 cm W 34 cm D 26.5 cm

Heart Flower in Bronze
Unique
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 23 cm W 52 cm D 36 cm





Landscape vase in Amber & White
Limited edition of 10
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 43 cm W 15 cm D 15 cm

Plissé vase in Rich Amber & Brown
Limited edition of 10
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 40 cm W 17 cm D 17 cm

Landscape vase in Amber, White & Brown
Limited edition of 10
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 43 cm W 15 cm D 15 cm

Plissé vase in Brown, White & Pink
Limited edition of 10
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 45 cm W 17 cm D 17 cm

Heart Flower in Metallic Bronze

Unique

Handblown & sculpted glass with car body paint

H 36 cm W 44 cm D 42 cm





Heart Flower in Pink
Unique
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 40 cm W 33 cm D 28 cm

Heart Flower in Grey & Dusky Pink with Granite
Unique
Handblown & sculpted glass with granite
H 51 cm W 27 cm D 22 cm

Plum Diamond
Limited edition of 5
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 23 cm W 35 cm D 35 cm

Anemone in Green

Limited edition of 5

Handblown & sculpted glass

H 35 cm W 19.5 cm D 19 cm

Anemone in Bronze

Limited edition of 5

Handblown & sculpted glass

H 36 cm W 20 cm D 21 cm





Heart Flower in Soft Bronze with Birch
Unique
Handblown & sculpted glass with birch
H 48 cm W 37 cm D 27 cm

Anemone in White

Unique

Handblown & sculpted glass

H 23 cm W 26 cm D 27 cm

Plissé vase in Turquoise & Celadon

Limited edition of 10

Handblown & sculpted glass

H 44.5 cm W 17 cm D 17 cm

Plissé vase in White & Celadon

Limited edition of 10

Handblown & sculpted glass

H 43 cm W 17 cm D 17 cm



Heart Flower in Clear & Frost with Birch
Unique
Handblown & sculpted glass with birch
H 38 cm W 54 cm D 37 cm





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Anemone in Purple

Limited edition of 5
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 33.5 cm W 23 cm D 20 cm

Anemone in Grey

Limited edition of 5
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 33 cm W 22 cm D 21 cm

Anemone in Turquoise

Limited edition of 5
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 34 cm W 24 cm D 22 cm

Right

Origami in White with Birch

Limited edition of 5
Handblown & sculpted glass with birch
H 41.5 cm W 15 cm D 9 cm

Origami in Black with Granite

Limited edition of 5
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 42 cm W 15 cm D 8.5 cm

Origami in White

Limited edition of 5
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 39.5 cm W 20 cm D 9 cm





Plissé vase in Turquoise, Light Blue & Black
Limited edition of 10
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 44 cm W 17 cm D 17 cm

Landscape vase in Celadon & Black
Limited edition of 10
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 43 cm W 15 cm D 15 cm

Plissé vase in Black, Turquoise & Light Blue
Limited edition of 10
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 45 cm W 17 cm D 17 cm

Landscape vase in Light Blue & Green
Limited edition of 10
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 42 cm W 15 cm D 15 cm

Plissé vase in Celadon & Dark Green
Limited edition of 10
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 44 cm W 17 cm D 17 cm

Anemone in Grey
Limited edition of 5
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 33 cm W 22 cm D 21 cm

Heart Flower in Grey & Dusky Pink with Granite
Unique
Handblown & sculpted glass with granite
H 51 cm W 27 cm D 22 cm

Anemone in Black
Unique
Handblown & sculpted glass
H 24 cm W 27 cm D 30 cm



Lena 25+

Lena Bergström at Vessel Gallery Celebrating over 25 years of glass design

An essay by Emma Park

Lena Bergström was born in Umeå in northern Sweden in 1961. From 1985-89 she read for an MFA in Textiles at Konstfack, Stockholm's University of Arts, Crafts and Design. After a six-month period of study and apprenticeship in Japan, she worked for her own textile design company, until in 1994 she was headhunted by Orrefors. After Orrefors moved to the Kosta Boda premises in the mid-2000s, she designed for both brands. Among other accolades, she has won three Elle Interior Design Awards and a staggering 12 Excellent Swedish Design Awards. She has worked on prestigious architectural commissions, including for the Swedish embassies in Tokyo and Bucharest, and a crystal reception desk at the Clarion Hotel Post in Gothenburg. Glass made to her design is held in the public collections of the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, Sweden; the Röhsska Museum, Gothenburg, Sweden; Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, United States; Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo, Norway and the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK.

Lena 25+ will be the designer's fourth exhibition with Vessel. She first encountered Angel Monzon, the gallery's founder, in the 1990s Stockholm's creative scene. He came across her again in the 2000s, when she was at Orrefors. 'It was Lena's work which really inspired me to go into glass,' Monzon says. 'She has been part of Vessel's collection since the early days.'

Many years later, when I first met Lena Bergström, she had just come from the hotshop, and was wearing a bright orange t-shirt that said 'people & planet' over black jeans and orange trainers. Despite the long hours she had been working, she greeted us with an enthusiastic

handshake and, over the course of dinner, accompanied by cocktails in *Carat* glasses that she had designed, proceeded to discuss everything from the latest television shows to Winston Churchill.

Ebullience and energy, as well as a sense of fun and a willingness to try new things, are attributes not only of Lena's personality but also of her art glass. They are clearly visible in her current exhibition for Vessel, which represents some of her most recent projects. Her playful approach can be seen, for example, in her *Anemone* series. To make these sculptures, bubbles of hot blown glass, like the petals of a flower, are attached to a central sphere and then cut at the outer edge, before being shaped while still hot and made to curl out in all directions. In some of the pieces, the 'flower' is poised on a cubic or cylindrical base in the same colour, but with a different texture. In others, there is no base; instead, the sculpture is designed to rest directly on a table or windowsill.

The colour scheme of the *Anemones* ranges from the monochrome – grey, black and white – to rich colours, from the pastel blue, purple or green of a Nordic spring to a brilliant deep orange. After the last two years, says Lena, people are longing 'to take care of each other'; these pieces are both a way for her to 'refresh herself' and communicate a sense of joy to the viewer. Walking between these exuberant glass 'flowers' makes the viewer feel almost as though they were moving through a dream garden.

As reflected by the *Anemones*, Lena has oscillated over the course of her long career between a monochrome palette and colour. Early series for Orrefors, such as her cigar-shaped *Havana* vases (1995), were monochrome; it was in the early 2000s, with sets of tableware like *Pastillo* and *Mingle*, that she started working with colours in transparent glass.

In her *Plissé* and *Landscape* vases, she plays with different shades and combinations of colours, and the effects that result when they are layered and blended in a medium which lets through the light. Each vase involves three colours, one or two opaque and the rest transparent. It took many

experiments to work out the best combinations. The grouping of colours in each vase evokes a particular feature in the Nordic landscape, whether the browns of bare trees, the muted greens of the pine forests or the luminous tones of lake and sky. She even photographed some of the vases out in the woods or by the water, to see how they fitted into the natural scene.

The colours and moods of nature are a constant thread in her work. She grew up in the northern Swedish town of Umeå, not far below the Arctic Circle. 'Up north, it's a wide sky,' she says. 'In winter time, there are a lot of contrasts. The sun is always going up and then going down, so you have a lot of long shadows, especially in the mountains. I think that has affected me.' Winter and spring are the seasons she most associates with her childhood. 'The air up there is very fresh – everything is distinct.' Perhaps as a result of these associations, the long, hollow cylinders of her vases create a tangible sense of space and of contemplation. She still seeks light, airy places in which to work. Her office, in an upper room overlooking Kosta's coldworking studio, has tall windows. 'An atmosphere with good light is important,' she explains. 'You need light to appreciate glass.'

The *Plissé* vases also manifest another major aspect of Lena's glass design: the use of texture. The ribbed texture of these vases is made by blowing the glass through a metal grille; the way it seeps out will be unique in each case, as will the extent to which it slumps at the base. 'It depends on how much the glass is breaking free,' she says. The slumping at the bottom gives the piece a 'soft colour and movement,' which prevents it from remaining static. In the *Plissé* form, she also had in mind traditional Japanese paper, with its thick lines of cord that remind her of threaded fabric. With this large-scale 'threading', the vases shimmer as the light passes through them, almost as though they were made of silk or rippling water. In contrast, the *Landscape* vases, with their smooth surfaces, are quieter and focus the viewer's attention more on the effects of colour blending.

Lena's obsession with texture, as something both

tactile, tangible and visual, was fostered in her early career as a textile designer, and even before that. As a teenager in Umeå, her first job was working in a department store, where she quickly was promoted to window dresser. This interest in fashion and fabrics was continued when she moved to Stockholm and enrolled on a degree in textiles at the Konstfack. After graduating, she started her own textile design company.

In 1994, Lena was headhunted by Orrefors, arguably the leading company of high-end art glass in Sweden during the twentieth century. The company had an established tradition of bringing in artists from other fields, which continues in Kosta today. The glassworks were located in Småland, in southern Sweden's traditional glassblowing region, now known as the 'Kingdom of Crystal'. Orrefors and Kosta had been acquired by the same owners in 1989, but at the time Lena started, they still operated on different premises, on opposite sides of a pine forest, and in an ongoing spirit of rivalry. It was a steep learning curve to begin with. 'At that time, I had never worked in glass,' she says, 'but I fell in love with it.' The firm's culture at the time allowed her plenty of room to observe, experiment and learn.

The 2000s were economically difficult for glass production in Sweden and elsewhere in Western Europe, as energy prices rose and competitors sprang up in Eastern Europe and China. After the ownership of Orrefors Kosta Boda passed to the New Wave Group in 2005, the decision was taken to shut down the Orrefors glassworks altogether and move the brand and its staff to Kosta's premises, which were being expanded. Lena now works on art glass and collection items for both Kosta and Orrefors. She has also increasingly worked on external commissions, particularly from architects.

Architecture is something that has always fascinated her. 'I would love to study for a year to look at buildings and set up the structure of a room.' She sees the interior design of a room, articulated by its fabrics, as a smaller-scale version of the same process. The influence of these preoccupations is clearly visible in her *Origami* series. These abstract, angular sculptures, with their concertina-like

surfaces and ‘smoky’ hues, are designed to recall both the folds of origami paper and the forms of Japanese skyscrapers, which Lena first encountered on a six-month apprenticeship in Tokyo after her graduation. Arranged together and balanced on plinths of glass, wood or stone, they evoke a ‘city’. For their first exhibition in the Kosta gallery, they were displayed on a mirrored surface which increased the play of light between and through them.

This fusion of ideas – small-scale paper with large-scale buildings –, and of materials, is typical of Lena’s kinaesthetic way of looking at the world, and of imaginatively sensing how one surface or structure may resemble another. The *Origami* pieces also draw attention to the versatility of glass as a material and its omnipresence in modern life.

Lena’s interest in exploring structures is combined with her love of fashion in another series of sculptures: her large-scale gemstones. This series is represented at the present exhibition by *Plum Diamond*, which is something like a cross between the stone in an engagement ring and the stopper on a perfume bottle. Sculptures like this play on the resemblance of glass, a manmade material, to naturally occurring stones. Their striking forms and deliberately magnified, irregular facets are testimony to the many hours that Lena has spent in the coldworking department, where she supervises the expert makers who cut, grind and polish her sculptures. One of her most successful series for Kosta’s ‘collection’ of affordable design is her *Carat* tableware, which exploits the same techniques of deep cutting at a smaller scale. A unique piece like *Plum Diamond*, with its glittering surfaces and seductive purple interior, is almost a substitute for the jewellery which its designer does not wear herself.

Lena’s glass sculptures are often designed in ‘families’ rather than in isolation. This goes back to her childhood, her connection with her two sisters, and the difficulties she experienced as a teenager when her parents divorced. In her work, she works series partly in order to ‘keep the family together,’ as well as to play on the relationships between different colours and shapes.

In the case of the *Heart Flowers*, the shapes involved resemble both fantastical flowers and actual hearts, as though they were living organs made visible, or an expression of the emotion connecting artist, maker and viewer.

Working in series also enables Lena to develop a new idea or technique through different iterations. *The Heart Flowers* are based, like the *Anemones*, on the idea of a central bubble to which more are attached. They also explore teamwork & the making process. She experimented with having each glassblower in Kosta’s team of art glass maestri join one bubble to the centre, one at a time, so that they were all involved in the result. The result, she insists, is not intended to be perfect, ‘because it’s not a perfect process.’

Lena has always enjoyed working with glassblowers. As the designer, she is in a sense their ‘director’, helping them to realise her ideas. ‘You need to be very clear what you want to do,’ she says, and to be able to ‘read everyone,’ in case they are tired or need a break. When she is in the hotshop, she starts with the glassblowers at six in the morning and stays there until they finish at half past three. When the relationship works well, the glassblowers are able to realise her designs very precisely: as she puts it, ‘they become me in a way.’

Although Lena does not wear jewellery, she has long enjoyed wearing hats. Since a visit to Tanzania in 2015, her favourite style of headwear has become a pashmina made into a turban, which was inspired by the women’s headscarves that she saw out there. ‘So now I have a collection of pashminas in many colours.’ The turban, which resembles some of her sculptures, might be said to encapsulate her approach to glass design: the fabric-like surfaces, the variety of colours, and the exploration of tall, complex structures. Oscar Wilde reportedly said that ‘one should either be a work of art or wear one.’ In a similar spirit, for Lena Bergström, wearing a work of art and creating one could be two sides of the same process.

Lena Bergström with her *Carat* and *Squeeze* Collections.
Photo by Carolina Diaz.





**KOSTA
BODA**
SWEDEN 1742

With thanks to

Lena Bergström

Kosta Boda

María Lomholt

Åsa Hultqvist

Remco Snoeck

The Kosta Boda Masterblowers & Cutters

Right

The inaugural showing of *Lena 25+* at the Kosta Boda Gallery featuring *A Self-Portrait* (right within the image)
H 164 cm W 50 cm D 50 cm, Limited edition of 5, Stainless Steel, Crystal, Birch

'You could call it a table-lamp but I prefer lamp-table. The blasted vertical stripes in the glass screen correspond with linen warp on a loom - my textile legacy. The spine of the table is a newly made steel blowpipe. The birch tabletop represents my origins - I am from Umeå, after all, city of the birch trees. On the leg are Puck candle holders, my first major product for Orrefors. The base is stable Swedish stainless steel. Glass, birch and steel - these are my materials. Only later did I realise that the table is actually a self-portrait' Lena Bergström.



Vessel Gallery

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Lena Bergström profile portrait by Carolina Diaz
Cover image featuring the permanent mural at the Kosta Boda Gallery by Vicke Lindstrand curtesy of Kosta Boda

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