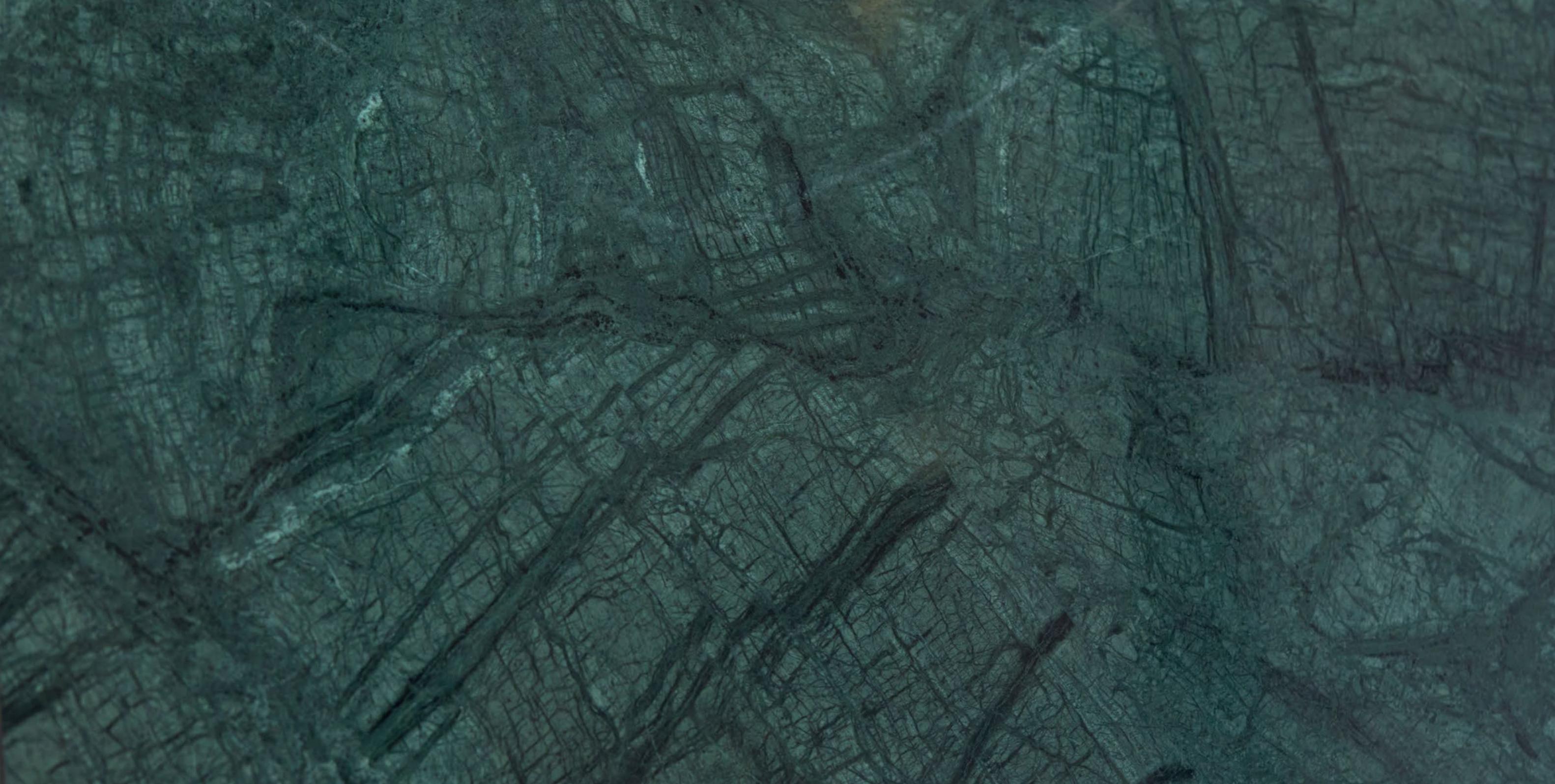


# Ebb & Flow



A solo exhibition by Louis Thompson





Detail *Sigmund Freud's Dreamcatching Apparatus C1910*

## Louis Thompson - A Master of British Glass

It was with immense delight nine months ago I welcomed a call from the curator, Jaquiline Creswell, inviting Vessel Gallery to stage and co-curate a retrospective mid-career solo exhibition of Louis Thompson - in essence, a celebration of three decades of his achievements as a glass artist - to be held within the majestic setting of One Canada Water in Canary Wharf. Excitingly, the event also coincided with the UN International 2022 Year of Glass and would be the largest exhibition of a British glass artist ever staged in the UK.

I have followed Thomson's career for over a decade noting key moments in his career, winning the prestigious British Glass Biennale and being awarded the Jerwood Foundation Makers Commission, however, it was his artworks that followed from his MA studies at the Royal College of Art that brought his talents into sharper focus. Works that balanced a unique combination of finely tuned skills as a glass blower - always pushing the boundaries of the material - with strong conceptual thinking behind his works, often accompanied by enigmatic titles.

Our gallery representation of Thompson intensified in 2015 via our nomination of the collaborative works he made with Hanne Enemark for the Perrier Jouet Awards. This prestigious acknowledgment was the culmination of the ongoing exposure not only from our Notting Hill Gallery but from our active programme of UK & international art fairs and events. Indeed, this expansive exposure and reach has most notably resulted in the very recent completion of a monumental hotel commission destined for Qatar, involving over 175 artworks for two huge site specific installations.

Ebb and Flow presents 13 installations that date from 2012 right through to the present day. Each one uniquely showcasing the breathtaking technical skills and intricate attention to detail that is intrinsic to Thompson's making, someone that I consider to be a great living master of British glass sculpture. However, his true strength and charisma is in the generous nature of Thompson's personal character. Highly respected by his contemporaries, he places his collaborations with other artists as equally important to his own solo endeavours, as demonstrated in the artworks on show that have been executed with Hanne Enemark and Sophie Thomas.

It has been a pleasure compiling this catalogue, staging this exhibition and working with Jacqueline Creswell, all of which could not have happened without the generosity of the Canary Wharf Group. This momentous show may end on the 20th August but the gallery will continue to promote the buoyant & exciting studio glass movement that we currently have in Britain.

Angel Monzon, Vessel Gallery Director

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Exhibition Artworks

## Ebb & Flow by Louis Thompson

A site specific solo exhibition at One Canada Square, Canary Wharf, E14 5AB  
An introduction by the exhibition curator Jacqueline Creswell

Glass is a captivating, versatile medium, which touches our lives in so many ways. It possesses transcendent qualities beyond its physicality, with its unique characteristics able to transform our environment and the way we see things. To celebrate the United Nations ‘Year of Glass 2022’ I have invited Louis Thompson, one of London’s most innovative, multi award winning glass artists, to create a new exhibition in the Lobby of 1 Canada Square, bringing together important works from across his career.

Louis exploits the inherent properties of glass using various methods of making which include blown and solid sculpted glass. The installations range from flamboyantly colourful, tactile and organic installations where forms precede and are followed by accumulations and gatherings, while other displays are cogent and impactful architectural aesthetic, narrative statements. His work is not only commanding and enchanting, it’s also powerfully conceptual. Every sculpture tells a story.

*Ebb & Flow* presents thirteen installations, including Broken Ocean, DNA Taxonomy, Seven Stages of Degradation and the Hive Installation. These works explore the artist’s journey as a glass artist and underline the themes that define his personal iconography of narratives, groupings, collections and archives. Louis states that his aim is to make an intervention in a space that allows us to experience that space in a new and exciting way. Through each installation we observe him developing and refining his techniques and forms. He explains that he is always learning something new, each piece is a new adventure with an unknown outcome, requiring great skill, patience and creativity.

Louis is an alchemist who transforms sand into spectacular crystalline objects with that sense of awe when a molten mass is transformed into a precious, jewel -like solid form. He brings a human connection to his colourful, tactile creations, which elicit wonder, transmitting, reflecting and refracting light. Thompson’s glass sculptures draw us into their depths, where DNA helixes and delicate golden filaments sit magically suspended, animated, frozen in elegant glass forms.

Glass blowing is used to inflate glass by blowing through a metal blowpipe. The sculpting process is entrancing, yet extremely challenging as the glass bubble inflates. It looks effortless, however the flow of air pressure must be consistent, incredibly difficult when the temperature is a scalding 1,090 degrees Celsius. This technique requires a team approach. Louis enjoys the sharing and exchange of ideas, knowledge and skills, which he embraces as he collaborates with other glass artists such as, Hanne Enemark and Sophie Thomas, who have collaborated with Louis to produce some of the works in this exhibition.

Louis says, “I love the material, its physical challenges, its intellectual rigour.  
It stretches my imagination and my ability. Glass is my visual language.”

Louis gained a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1988, followed by an MA degree at Royal College of Art. He has exhibited and worked with artists from around the globe, including at the international exhibition of glass in Kanazawa Japan, The Saatchi Gallery London and SOFA Chicago. His work is held in public and museum collections in Belgium, The V&A Museum London, the Czech Republic, Germany among others. Louis has completed a number of prestigious residencies around the world including Glazenhuis Museum, Belgium and Soneva Art Glass in Maldives.



Previous page and right

*Dew Drops Installation*

Unique

2016

H 102cm, ø 150cm

Individual elements H 10cm - 33cm

Handblown & sculpted glass





Previous page - left to right

*DNA Sequence II*

Unique

2022

H 33.5cm, W 23cm, D 14cm + stand

Blown and sculpted glass with steel stand

*DNA Allel Bottles*

Unique - shown right

2020

H 41.5cm, W 102cm, D 15cm + stand

Blown and sculpted glass with steel stand

*Dancing Genes Allel 1*

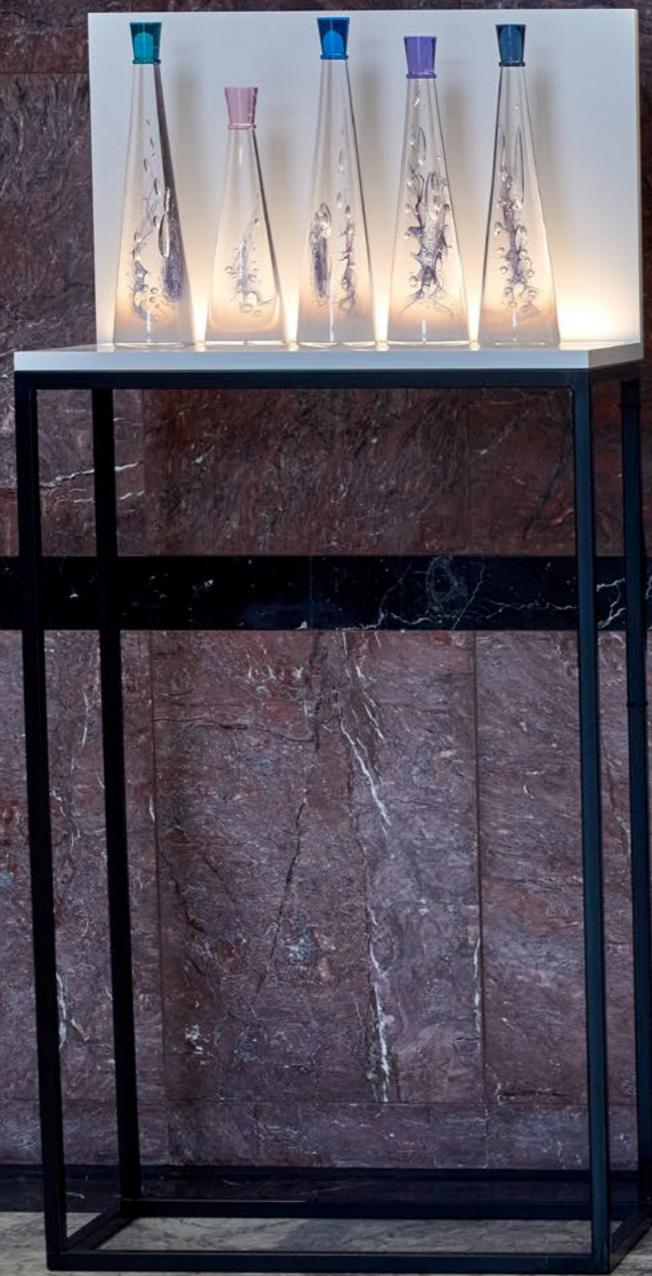
Unique

2021

H 42.5cm, W 59cm, D 13cm + stand

Blown and sculpted glass with steel stand







Previous page left

*Dancing Genes DNA Sequence*

Unique

2021

H 46cm, W 63cm, D 12cm + stand  
Blown and sculpted glass with steel stand

Above & middle previous page

*DNA Sequence I*

Unique

2022

H 40.5cm, W 165cm, D 12cm + stand  
Blown and sculpted glass with steel stand

Previous page right

*DNA Sequence III*

Unique

2022

H 42.5cm, W 37cm, D 20cm + stand  
Blown and sculpted glass with steel stand





Left to right

*Enchanted Dawn in Blues I*

Unique

2022

H 51cm, W 20cm, D 10cm

Blown and sculpted glass

*Enchanted Dawn in Oranges I*

Unique

2022

H 67cm, W 27cm, D 12cm

Blown and sculpted glass

*Enchanted Dawn in Oranges II*

Unique

2022

H 31cm, W 18cm, D 13cm

Blown and sculpted glass

*Enchanted Dusk in Rubies*

Unique

2022

H 70.5cm, W 25cm, D 11cm

Blown and sculpted glass

*Enchanted Dawn in Blues II*

Unique

2022

H 42.5cm, W 23cm, D 17cm

Blown and sculpted glass



*Enchanted Dawn in Iron Blue*  
Unique  
2022  
H 60cm, W 29cm, D 13cm  
Blown and sculpted glass

Opposite page

*Enchanted Dawn in Fuchsia*  
Unique  
2022  
H 42.5cm, W 25cm, D 13cm  
Blown and sculpted glass

*Enchanted Dawn in Light Aquamarine*  
Unique  
2022  
H 43cm, W 30cm, D 14cm  
Blown and sculpted glass



Opposite and next page

*Altar Installation*

Unique

2016

H 246cm, W 150cm, D 70cm

Individual elements H 14cm - 65cm

Blown and sculpted glass with steel stand







CANARY  
GROUP

*Cryptograph 7302531 (in Celadon & Sargasso Green)*

Unique

2021

H 32cm, W 22cm, D 8cm

Blown and sculpted glass



Left to right

*Cryptograph 0402511 (in Violet & Aquamarine Light)*

Unique

2021

H 35cm, W 23cm, D 9.5cm

Blown and sculpted glass

*Cryptograph 4102721 (in Pale Turquoise & Hyacinth)*

Unique

2021

H 33cm, W 23cm, D 8cm

Blown and sculpted glass

*Cryptograph 241311 (in Vanilla & Red)*

Unique

2021

H 34.5cm, W 20.5cm, D 9cm

Blown and sculpted glass





Previous page, this page & next page

*Hive Installation*

Unique

2012

H 170cm, W 400cm, D 40cm

Blown and sculpted glass with distilled water, rubber bungs with steel stand







Please do not touch

Please do not touch



Previous page, this page & next page

*Sigmund Freud's Dreamcatching Apparatus C1910*

Unique

2009

H 183cm, W 250cm, D 40cm

Blown and sculpted glass with pre-made scientifically precise glassware created circa 1910, plastic tube and rubber bungs





Artworks created in collaboration with Hanne Enemark



Hanne Enemark graduated with her Masters degree from the Royal College of Art in 2010 and holds a BA degree from Bornholm, Glass and Ceramics School. She has represented Denmark in the Emerging Artist category at the European Glass Context and in 2012 she won Elle Decoration's New Designer of the Year Award. In 2015 her collaborative artworks created with Louis Thompson were nominated for the Perrier Jouet Awards.

Enemark is a regular guest lecturer at various art schools, including at the Royal College of Art and the Glass and Ceramics School in Bornholm. In 2014 she was invited together with Louis Thompson, as guest artists at The Artist in Residency program at the Museum of Glass, Tacoma, USA.

Enemark has worked with glass artists in Denmark, France and the UK and her work regularly features in magazines such as Elle Decoration, Wallpaper magazine and Financial Times. Her work has exhibited internationally and can be found in private collections in Denmark, UK, Spain, France, Monaco and the USA. One of her pieces is part of the permanent Collection at Ebeltoft Glass Museum.

Left

*Ore Totem in Aquamarine & Pale Turquoise with Platinum*  
Unique  
2022  
H 84cm, W 21cm, D 18cm  
Blown and sculpted glass with platinum lustre

Following pages right

*Ore Totem in Iron Blue & Pale Turquoise with Platinum*  
Unique  
2022  
H 82cm, W 21cm, D 17cm  
Blown and sculpted glass with platinum lustre





NICOLAS

NICOLAS  
wine bar

One  
Canada  
Square

*Ore in Sea Green & Celadon with Platinum*  
Unique  
2022  
H 58.5cm, W 24cm, D 18cm  
Blown and sculpted glass  
with platinum lustre



*Ore in Sienna & Ecrú with Gold*  
Unique  
2022  
H 59cm, W 24cm, D 17cm  
Blown and sculpted glass  
with gold lustre



*Ore in Copper Blue & Pale Turquoise with Platinum*  
Unique  
2022  
H 38cm, W 35cm, D 18cm  
Blown and sculpted glass  
with platinum lustre



*Ore in Grey & Navy Blue with Gold*  
Unique  
2017  
H 49cm, W 22cm, D 18cm  
Blown and sculpted glass with gold lustre



*Ore Eclipse in Salmon & Sunset Red with Gold*  
Unique  
2022  
H 46cm, W 25cm, D 16cm  
Blown and sculpted glass with gold lustre



*Ore in Amber & Ecrú with Gold*  
Unique  
2022  
H 36cm, W 37cm, D 23cm  
Blown and sculpted glass with gold lustre



*Ore in Brilliant Yellow & Ecrú with Gold*  
Unique  
2022  
H 61cm, W 25cm, D 19cm  
Blown and sculpted glass with gold lustre



*Ore in Bright Orange & Ecrú with Gold*  
Unique  
2022  
H 58.5cm, W 23cm, D 16cm  
Blown and sculpted glass with gold lustre



Left to right

*Panicum in Indigo & Pale Turquoise*

Unique

2017

H 42.5cm, W 24cm, D 18cm

Blown and sculpted glass

*Panicum in Amber & White*

Unique

2017

H 46.5cm, W 24cm, D 16cm

Blown and sculpted glass

*Penumbra in Grey*

Unique

2015

H 47cm, W 27cm, D 14cm

Blown and sculpted glass





Artworks created in collaboration with Sophie Thomas

Sophie Thomas is an unusual mix of campaigner, practicing designer and chartered waste manager. She has been working in the fields of sustainable design, behaviour change and material process for over 20 years; through her design agency, Thomas.Matthews Ltd; and through a number of campaigning posts including Director of Circular Economy at the RSA and more recently becoming trustee for WRAP UK.

A curiosity in material disposal, recycling and recovering led Sophie to share her experience of closed-loop thinking with other designers. In 2012, she founded The Great Recovery, a programme to build capacity and understanding of circular design in the materials supply chain, that she ran through the RSA, supported by Innovate UK for four years until 2016.

Her long-term interest in materials and waste that has taken her around the world, exploring attitudes to waste (including a day working on the bins) and helping networks including designers, scientists waste managers, businesses and politicians to re-design systems for resources recovery.

She has assisted global businesses and UK government organisations to define the role of designers within discussions around waste streams, resource efficiency and circular economies, and has worked with major organisations and businesses on new models for circular business, internal communication of sustainable systems and external sustainability campaigns.

She is the voice of sustainability on numerous design panels and the voice of design in waste debates. As well as being in Who's Who since 2010 and becoming one of the first designers to become a chartered waste manager. She is part of the Creative 50 and has made it onto the 30 Waste Influencers List, twice being shortlisted by CIWM for Industry leader of the year.

*Seven Stages of Degradation*

Unique

2019

H 32cm, W 80cm, D 11cm

Blown and sculpted glass with ocean plastic





*Broken Ocean Installation*

Unique  
2022

H 140cm, W 540cm, D 120cm

Blown and sculpted glass with ocean plastic & fishing net

## Broken Ocean

Words by Sophie Thomas

Sometimes, using different media to talk about current issues creates arresting outcomes. *Broken Ocean* and *The Seven stages of Degradation* are outcomes of a collaboration between myself; a designer and creative campaigner, and glass artist Louis Thompson. They are part of ongoing work representing the challenge of the colossal flow of plastic pollution that runs into our seas every minute of every day – currently a rubbish truckload a minute.

When I first met Louis in 2012 I began to tell him about my research on global plastic pollution and my personal collection of broken plastic pieces, picked up from beaches across the world. Handles, lids, bottles and tops, yoghurt pots and fishing net knots - all once useful, now causing problems and pollution. Louis described his lifelong work in glass, amazing pieces of art in incredible colour, created with technical skill and precision. Inevitably, as designer and artist collaborate, the conversation went back and forth around what we were creating and why. As a designer, I need to have reason – a brief or narrative behind the work, but Louis was more relaxed about this, focusing on the form and the how we could make.

We started to build a picture of the pieces we would create that would inevitably push each other out of our comfort zones: Louis into chaotic uncontrollable outcomes and me into three dimensional skilful precision and technique.

As a space for making, the hot shop exudes creativity. You can't stand there and do nothing, you have to move around, avoiding people and heat like a strange dance. The nature of the raw material – hot molten glass – means that you have to instinctively make. Once you start the process you have to see it through in one go, no teabreak halfway even if your work takes hours to create.

The creation of each vessel starts with the selection of a plastic ocean waste fragment that will begin to inform the shape and the story. The plastic fragments used in both these installations have been collected; in 2014 on a trip to Kamilo beach, Hawaii, and along the River Thames and its estuary mouth into the sea in 2018.

Marine litter is one of the clearest symbols of a wasteful and careless society. These objects that litter our beaches and impact our environment should be captured for their value before they reach the seas and create problems, but this currently does not happen at the scale required and they end up filling up our oceans and entering the food system.

Kamilo beach (also known by the locals as Trash Beach) sees the results of the global plastic waste tragedy wash up onto its shore every day on every tide. The amount of plastic-to-sand ratio is shocking. Everywhere you look plastic

is present, deep in the fabric of the beach and seemingly almost impossible to extract. Everything I picked up had a story; a journey from Japan after the Tsunami or from the landfills of the USA. There are snatches of words on bottles bleached by the sun. Some plastic had been in the sea under the hot UV sun so long it turned to powder when touched.

London's plastic trash held similar tales, being blown off landfills, tossed into the river, or picked off the streets on a stormy rain surge.

Using these collected plastic fragments along with images of microplastic swirling around the ocean gyres as inspiration we created work using waste glass picked from the floor of the hot shop to illustrate this chaos and intrusion into the natural environment.

The process is one of gathering and adding waste glass, shaping and blowing. *Broken Ocean* includes a number of larger vessels where waste shards have been engraved and enamelled with illustrations of nets, seas and ships or snatches of words from the plastic waste pieces themselves. Some of these waste glass fragments are melted into the surface, clinging on like the barnacles attached to floating plastic in the gyres. The pieces are completed by the attachment of the original plastic piece. Colour, one of the most seductive things about glass, was chosen very carefully for each stage; very little red or yellow in the end as the microplastic it represented would have been consumed by sea creatures, mistaken for ocean food.

The process of making *The seven stages of degradation* is inside out. The series also used waste coloured glass shards from the hot shop floor which was formed onto molten clear glass cullet, then dipped and rolled in coloured chips and strands to represent the breakdown of plastic into smaller and smaller pieces. More molten glass was added and the pieces were formed into perfect bottle shapes which were then twisted and dented to represent the distortion from the power of the oceans. There are seven disformed bottles in all, each representing the stages of photo-degeneration of plastic in the oceans. The bottles themselves get darker and darker with pollution and each have a bottle cap from my collection picked up on Kamilo beach in Hawaii.

Called “beautiful, yet horrifying” by Craft magazine the initial *Broken Ocean* installation was originally shown at the 2019 Collect Open. Shown in its full form where it won the prestigious Collect Open award. *Broken Ocean* uses nearly a ton of salvaged ghost nets, pulled out of the ocean by Surfers Against Sewage. Ghost nets are fishing nets that have been dumped or lost in the ocean. Fishermen sometimes abandon worn-out nets because it is often the easiest way



to get rid of them. These nets, often nearly invisible in the dim light, can be left tangled on a rocky reef or drifting in the open sea. They can entangle fish, dolphins, sea turtles, sharks, dugongs, crocodiles, seabirds, crabs, and other creatures. They are one of the big problems of ocean plastic pollution and there are many active campaigns to stop the dumping.

Globally we recycle only around 9% of our plastic waste and the amount of plastic produced in a year is roughly the same as the entire weight of humanity. Plastics production is expected to double in the next 20 years and almost quadruple by 2050. It is also projected that by 2050 there will be more plastic on our oceans in weight than fish.

Adopting a better, more circular approach, which puts emphasis on; designing systems that prevent waste and encourage recovery of valuable materials, designing products that use materials that can easily be recycled & reused, and simplifying the use of plastics, especially in packaging would be the most effective solution for marine litter, as well as using less of this material in the first place.

Detail left

*Broken Ocean Installation*

Unique

2022

H 140cm, W 540cm, D 120cm

Blown and sculpted glass with ocean plastic & fishing net



The original *Broken Ocean Installation*  
shown at the 2019 Collect Open

*Barnacle Vessel with Plastic Carton*  
Unique  
2019  
H 55cm, W 28cm, D 17cm  
Blown and sculpted glass  
with ocean plastic



*Barnacle Vessel with Net*  
Unique  
2020  
H 57cm, W 29cm, D 30cm  
Blown and sculpted glass  
with ocean plastic & fishing net





Left

*Barnacle Vessel with Plastic Cap*

Unique

2019

H 34cm, W 24cm, D 16cm

Blown and sculpted glass with ocean plastic

Right

*Barnacle Vessel with Plastic Screw Top*

Unique

2019

H 34cm, W 29cm, D 12cm

Blown and sculpted glass with ocean plastic

*Barnacle Vessel with Toothbrush*  
Unique  
2019  
H 39cm, W 36cm, D 32cm  
Blown and sculpted glass  
with ocean plastic



*Barnacle Vessel with Plastic Fitting*  
Unique  
2019  
H 36cm, W 34cm, D 30cm  
Blown and sculpted glass  
with ocean plastic



## Louis Thompson, Ebb and Flow

An essay by Dr Emma Park

When I arrived in the hotshop at the back of Peter Layton’s studio, Louis Thompson was helping to repair the furnace. This, as I soon discovered, was characteristic: for Thompson, being a production glassblower, fabricator and technician on the one hand, and a designer and independent artist on the other, are two sides of the same coin. ‘I’ve always enjoyed that balance between the two,’ he told me. After thirty years in hot glass, *Ebb and Flow* is intended partly as a retrospective of his career, displaying the range & variety of the techniques and lines of artistic thought that he has explored over the years.

One of the highlights of this career was participation in a group show in 2016 at Salisbury Cathedral, Wiltshire. The curator, Jacqueline Creswell, has also overseen the present exhibition at One Canada Square. In some ways, the challenge presented by both locations is similar: the need to create areas of interest in a large, echoing space – whether a Gothic transept or the lobby of a skyscraper – without becoming lost in it. Thompson’s brilliant glass sculptures are eminently well-suited to this role.

The group entitled *Altar with DNA Bottles* comprises one third of *Devotion*, an 81-bottle display, in a rainbow of colours, originally exhibited in the Morning Chapel of Salisbury Cathedral. The number mirrors the number of relief carvings of saints on the cathedral’s West façade. The display involves ‘bottles’ of a range of sizes and colours, each with a larger bulge at the base and a smaller bulge, like a head, above it, out of which a straight, elongated neck is drawn. The top of each ‘bottle’ is crowned by a thin

transparent disc with a little glass droplet on top, to suggest a ‘lid’. Arranged on the three-tiered stand, the sculptures evoke the rows of candles that stood in the chapel, as well, perhaps, as the silhouettes of the people who would pass through to sing or pray.

The ‘DNA’ of the title refers to the twisting inclusion of glass trapped inside each vessel. The idea, Thompson says, is to suggest a double helix, a ‘mathematical model’ or a scientific ‘specimen’, visible in the bottle as if it were a ‘slightly otherworldly thing suspended in a kind of solution’. This idea, which he first started experimenting with in about 2008, was born from a fascination with the aesthetic of medical laboratory apparatus – ‘test tubes, condensers, Bunsenburners’. This interest can be seen in the earliest of his works on display, *Sigmund Freud’s Dreamcatching Apparatus* (2009), a fantastical array of test tubes, pipes and bottles which he imagined the scientist might have used to trap, distil and examine his patients’ dreams.

Thompson describes himself as ‘technically driven’, and this side of his practice can be seen in the care and precision with which his works are made. To create an inclusion of ‘DNA’, he rolls a small gather of transparent glass over a row of thin threads of white glass. The regularity or looseness of the pattern achieved will depend on how the canes are arranged and how the glass is heated and stretched. For variety, he sometimes adds touches of colour by applying a heated colour rod to the surface – ‘like piping on a cake’, as he describes it.

To make the bottle, he blows a coloured bubble and then cuts it open while warm to make a hollow cup. He then embeds the inclusion, without losing its shape, in a gather of transparent glass, and adds more layers of transparent

glass over it. Sometimes he inserts small bubbles by adding bicarbonate of soda to the inclusion, which effervesces when it is dipped in the molten glass; sometimes larger bubbles are trapped in the creases of the layers. How or where the bubbles will form, and how exactly the shape will turn out, is partly a matter of chance. ‘I like the little unexpected things that happen beyond your control,’ he says. ‘It’s about the serendipity of the moment.’ The coloured cup is meanwhile reheated, and the layered gather inserted into it until the two structures melt together. The whole can then be shaped using newspaper or turning on the punty, and the stem stretched out to make differently shaped bottles. Meanwhile, the ‘specimen’ has started to twist under the pressure of being moulded, as if it has come alive. The ‘lid’ is glued on when the body has cooled.

Thompson likes the bottles’ play between liquid and solid, the ambiguity of their state of matter. They also encapsulate his aesthetic of clean lines, refined forms ‘stripped down to the absolute bare minimum’, and transparency. The transparency allows the light coming through to exploit the material’s richness and ‘brilliance’ of colour, as well as its ability, through the insertion of inclusions, to incorporate a large number of internal surfaces that can refract the light in different ways. One of his influences is Czech glass, in particular René Roubíček, who has been called a founding father of European Studio Glass. Like Thompson himself, Roubíček had a ‘very free approach to working with the material’. And there is something Czech in works like the *DNA Bottles*, with the use of transparent glass to draw attention to the sheer beauty of the medium.

Thompson also compares the bottle-with-a-specimen to a paperweight or snow globe, with their internal worlds, which have fascinated him since childhood. Because of the element

of chance in the way each specimen will be formed, the result in each case will be unique. The twisting detail means that ‘you can see something different from every angle’ as you turn the bottle round.

In *DNA Taxonomy*, a more recent development of this theme, Thompson has expanded his original concept to a wider range of shapes and colours. Some of his most successful sculptures in this collection are a two-tone group in blue and amber. The amber in the top half fades into blue in the bottom half – ‘like oil on water’, he says. Works like these play with the ambiguous nature of glass, and its fluctuation between solid and liquid.

The lids themselves are a subtle nod to the idea that the bottles come from a laboratory. Originally, Thompson had sculpted the end of the stem into a lid; but then one of stems broke, spurring him to make this part separately. He liked it so much he added it to later bottles: having a separate lid adds crispness and sharpness to the form, and has also allowed him to increase the size of the bottles he can make. In exhibitions, this touch has been surprisingly effective, reinforcing the illusion that the bottles are ‘real’.

For Salisbury, Thompson also made *Sailed on a River of Crystal Light into a Sea of Dew*: an installation of 81 inverted ‘dew drops’ in solid transparent glass in a range of colours and sizes, each resting on a clear glass disc like the circular ripple across the surface of water. These ‘drops’, accompanied by 35 separate ‘puddles’ of clear glass, were arranged on a ten-metre-long platform running down the South Transept. They seemed to well up from the ground like springs from the ancient river that Thompson discovered was still flowing underneath the cathedral. Their rich colours would have echoed those of the stained glass windows above them.

At the same time, their curved surfaces enable them to act as lenses, distilling the environment around them; the effect is similar to that of the convex mirror in van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434), whose small curved surface encompasses the whole room.

It was difficult, Thompson says, to make the dew drops symmetrical, and to balance the solid weight of glass in the 'drop' on its narrowest point to fit it into the clear glass disc supporting it. But the technical feat was worth the effort: balancing the drops on their narrow end gives the pieces a movement and sense of lightness which belies their solidity. Their external shape also suggests the bubble which is always the beginning of a new piece in hot glass; the act of 'blowing bubbles' was one of the things that attracted him to glassblowing in the first place.

If the ambiguity between states of matter is a theme in Thompson's work, this is nowhere more apparent than in his commission for the Jerwood Makers Open Prize Award (2012). The installation, *Hive*, is an intriguing exploration of the relationship between solid and liquid. It consists of five large, clear glass bubbles, which Thompson blew until the glass was thin and distended. He then let them crumple down while still hot, like half-deflated plastic bags, before cooling them in the annealer. They are then filled with distilled water almost to the brim, and the neck is stoppered with a rubber bung – another allusion to laboratory equipment.

Because of the weight of water and the need to change it regularly, the sculptures 'require a lot of upkeep,' says Thompson. Nevertheless, when a collector offered to buy them, he refused, because they are in many ways his favourite group. At One Canada Square, they are currently positioned on the side of the lobby that is exposed to the rising sun. The

morning light, says Creswell, throws strange patterns on the wall behind them. Because of the different refractive indices of the two materials – glass slows light down and makes it bend more than water – any light passing through one of the sculptures is made to change direction three times, from glass to water to glass again. This, combined with the glass's curvature and its pure transparency, means that the sculptures can capture and project brilliant ghostlike images from within.

The idea of the sequence, of repetition with variation, is another theme in Thompson's work. It is derived from his early training, first at North Staffordshire Polytechnic and then as a production glassmaker, when his job was to make large quantities of tableware, such as goblets and decanters. 'There was a lot of repetition,' he says, but because the process involved individual makers and not just machines, 'each object was slightly different.' As an artist, he has exploited this idea of sequence to produce collections of sculptures which are linked by a common theme but also represent, in each individual case, a unique expression of it.

This use of sequence can be seen both in the *DNA* and *Dew Drop* series, as well as in more recent works such as *Enchanted*. The latter is a group of eight sculptures in the form of vases topped by strange flowers that appear to grow out of them, as if they were part of the same organism. Inspired by *The Magic Roundabout*, a children's television programme, the sculptures are light-hearted and cheerful, almost cartoonish. With a bright colour palette of oranges, blues and pinks for the flowers, and elongated opaque vessels, the vases are clearly all part of the same family, but no two are quite the same.

After these explorations of the vessel, a new approach

in Thompson's work is represented by *Cryptographs*. This comprises three sculptures, each made from layers of coloured, transparent and semi-opaque glass applied one over the other, with black lines of trailed and carved cane embedded in the middle of the transparency to suggest scrambled writing. The combination of large squares of colours partially superimposed on top of one another was influenced by Mark Rothko's colour blocks. The cuboid shape of the sculptures evokes both an ancient stone tablet, as something heavy and solid carved with text warped by time, and a modern smartphone screen – itself made of glass – with bright colours, as if 'backlit'. The rippled surface and layered interior distort the light several times as it passes through, further scrambling the 'information'.

The use of embedded, digit-like patterns is all the more striking in these sculptures for being unusual for Thompson; it underlines the idea behind them, that all of us, including the artist, have become profoundly dependent on technology to communicate with each other. The orange and lattimo *Cryptograph* will be shown at the British Glass Biennale 2022 at Stourbridge.

As a production glassmaker, Thompson has long been used to making with others; as an artist, he enjoys collaborating not just in the making process but in the development of ideas. For him, teamwork and sharing knowledge are 'one of the great pleasures of working with hot glass.' One of his most significant artistic collaborations has been with the Danish glass artist Hanne Enemark, whom Thompson met while they were studying at the Royal College of Art. Several pieces from their *Ore* collection feature in the present exhibition.

To make one of the *Ore* vessels, Thompson first blows a large

bubble of soft glass, leaving an aperture in the top. Enemark then inserts canes of preheated, very hard glass, which are not designed to be blown; they are white, but some have been coated with gold or platinum lustre, and are of different lengths and thicknesses. When they are inserted, the heated canes partially collapse and fuse with the wall of the vessel. The pair have developed ways of manipulating the canes within the vessel, so as to build up a variety of structures: some are more reminiscent of branches, while others suggest capillaries, or, as indicated by their title, veins of metal in the ground. The techniques involved are still a work in progress, to be developed in future collections. 'We both loved the aesthetic of it,' he says. 'We've got a sketchbook full of ideas.'

Thompson was born in Birkenhead and grew up on the Wirral in Merseyside. He first encountered glass by chance when, as a student of industrial design at Staffordshire, he wandered into the glass department and saw Neil Wilkin at work: 'it was magical.' He enrolled on a week-long glass course, and loved it so much that he transferred degrees. 'I almost knew at that point that glass was going to engage me as an artist and designer for the rest of my career.' What he particularly enjoyed about glass, from an early stage, was the physical process of making which it involved, rather than just 'concepts and design' on their own. He has always preferred working in hot to cold glass. 'Hot glass is such an immediate process,' he says, 'I love the responsiveness of the material – objects come to life so quickly.' David Reekie, Elizabeth Swinburne and Tessa Clegg were among his tutors.

When he left Staffordshire in 1989, Thompson worked for a few months as a glassmaker's assistant, and then spent five years as a production glassmaker at E & M Glass in north Wales, where he consolidated his basic skills. He then moved to Staffordshire University to teach and eventually run their

glass department, and from 2001 also worked part-time as a fabricator for Peter Layton, while establishing himself independently.

Another theme in Thompson's work is the environment and its degradation. He has pursued this in collaboration with Sophie Thomas, a consultant in sustainable design who is keen to raise awareness of plastic pollution in the oceans. On a trip to Hawaii, Thomas had amassed a large collection of waste plastics from Kamilo Beach, where debris from the 'Great Pacific Garbage Patch' is often washed up. 'She had this lovely collection of toothbrushes and bottle tops,' says Thompson.

In *Seven Stages of Degradation*, Thompson and Thomas have created seven bottles in the form of increasingly crushed and mouldy plastic bottles. These exploit the ability of glass, essentially a natural material, to imitate the artificial material of plastic. The bottles are made using shards of coloured glass that would normally be recycled externally rather than reused in the studio. Their forms are designed 'to suggest something that has been crushed and twisted, and tossed about in the sea.' Each is capped with a real plastic lid from Thomas's collection. Strangely, the coloured plastic lids themselves 'often had a glassy feel because they had been in the ocean so long,' Thompson says. 'The plastic had become almost transparent, as if it had been bleached.' As with the *DNA Bottles*, there is a sense of ambiguity and overlap between materials. *Seven Stages* also reveals the influence of Andy Warhol, a long-term inspiration for Thompson, particularly in Warhol's transformation of 'found' objects.

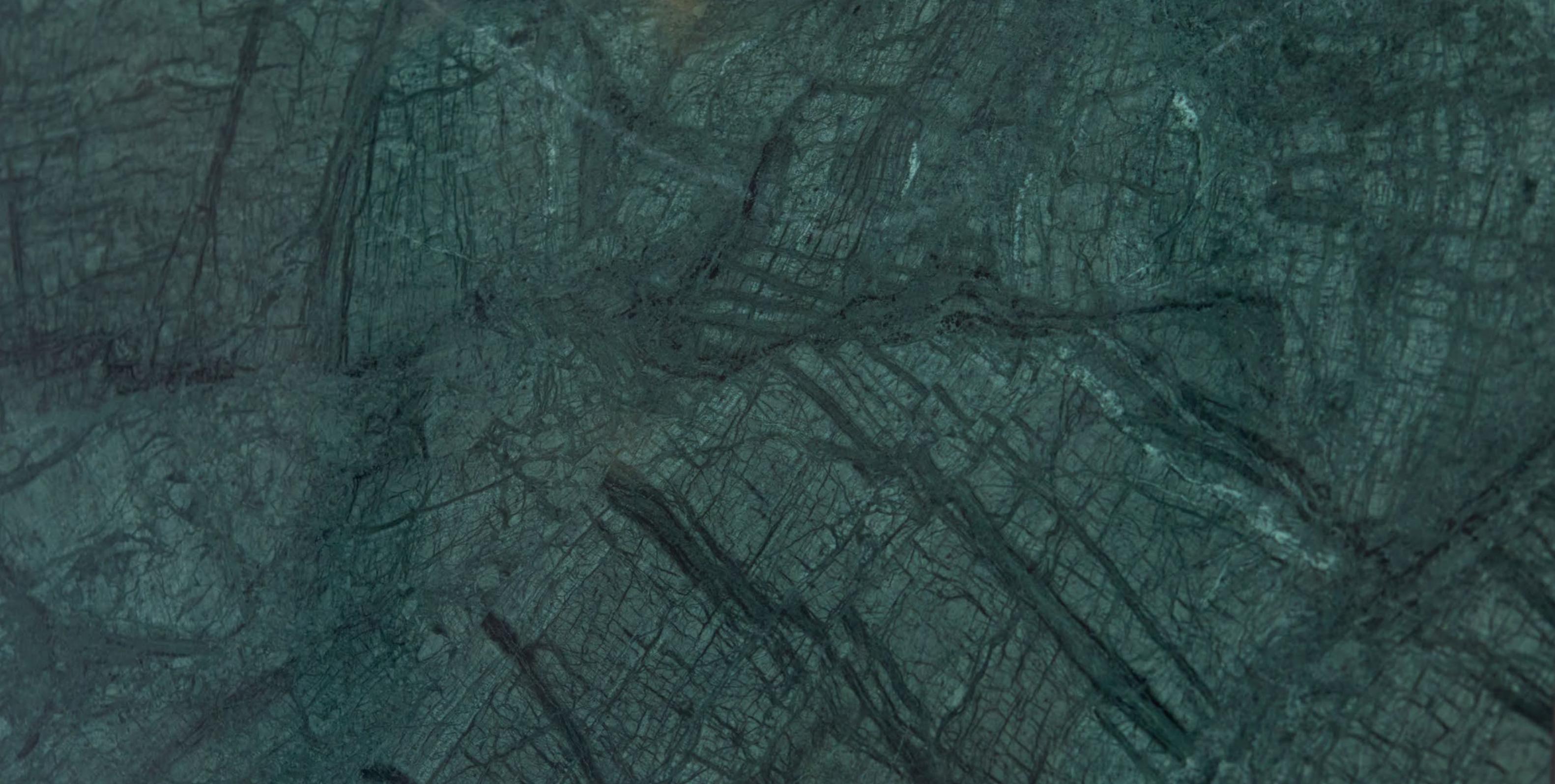
The pollution caused by plastics is also the theme of *Broken Ocean*, another collaboration between Thompson and Thomas, which involves an installation of blown glass balls

with added murrine to suggest patches of colour partly worn away by the sea, and a backdrop of fishing nets on a bed of sand – the base material of glass. The pair went through her collection together and 'picked out the interesting objects that showed a little bit more wear and tear.' The idea was that the fragments of plastic – toothbrushes, lids, handles – should look like shards stuck onto the surface of the glass, or a modern equivalent of 'broken archaeological pottery.' At the same time, the large size of the glass balls, and their juxtaposition with the rope, makes them resemble traditional buoys. The installation, with its emphasis on the extent to which human objects have littered the oceans, transforming their appearance, is both beautiful, evocative and disturbing at the same time.

These days Thompson has his own studio in Park Royal, which he shares with two other artists. He plans to continue with his own practice from there for the foreseeable future, developing new projects, while still fabricating for Peter Layton and occasionally teaching and lecturing. His most imminent project is a commission for 175 *DNA bottles*, *Ores* and brand new sculptures for a hotel in Qatar; he is also planning a solo exhibition at Vessel Gallery for 2023. After thirty years in glass, he still has so many new ideas and projects, he says, that the only challenge is 'finding the time to do them all.'

Right | Louis Thompson in action





# Vessel Gallery

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