



From top: "Bird" (1999) by Oluf Foinum; "Between Space" (2001) by Kari Hakonsen; "Decanter and drinking glasses" (1999) by Ida Pernille Lochen; and "Seashell" (1997) and "Reptile" by Arne Jon Jutrem

Glass art's beauty made transparent

By Ines Cho
Staff Writer

Made with nothing more than a skilled craftsman's breath and a few simple tools, gossamer-like glass works have fascinated art collectors, especially since the tradition was revived in the United States and Europe in the 1960s.

Now the tradition is being showcased in Korea, with an exhibition of Norwegian glass at Gallery Sklo, the first of its kind to specialize in glass art here.

Korea once had an opulent history of glassmaking, which started around the second century B.C. in the form of glass beads, according to Kim Hyo-jung, the owner of Gallery Sklo. However, a number of foreign invasions interrupted the practice of the art for more than 1,000 years.

It was only in 1989 that an artistic society, Korean Studies of Glass, was formed to initiate research on the long-lost tradition. "Glass art is not something contemporary Koreans would look for in stores or shows, but we're looking for ways to show what it really is in a special space," said Ms. Kim.

For last Friday's opening of "Norwegian Contemporary Glass," in association with Norwegian Embassy in Korea, art industry professionals, foreign diplomats and the press packed the gallery for the first

viewing of the rare and lustrously illuminating artworks.

The spacious gallery displays a wide range of art glass in various forms, colors, shapes and nationalities, such as the legendary Swedish glass artist Ulrica Hydman-Vallien's "face" vases, bowls and goblets and Italian artist Massimiliano Luzzi's "Abstract Walking Man" in the form of mirror frame.

Also worth a look are 42 Norwegian glass works by eight artists, including Ulla-Mari Brantenberg, Karen Klim, Cathrine Maske and Arne Jon Jutrem.

As a part of his opening address, Arild Braastad, the Norwegian Ambassador to Korea, said the works were "products of a long Norwegian tradition of glass works, where artistic skills and excellent workmanship have been combined.... Throughout the centuries, Norwegian artists have created transparent masterpieces of light and color, inspired by local tradition, but also reflecting international techniques and trends."

Despite technological advancements in today's glassware mass production, art glass still relies on an ancient method of production, the same one used by Mesopotamian potters.

Artists mostly used a traditional glass sculpting procedure known as free-blown



"Longing Flower and Waiting Red Amaryllis" (1999) by Ulla-Mari Brantenberg

or mouth-blown production as seen in a delicate set of "Decanter and Drinking Glasses," by Ida Pernille Lochen; a large salmon-pink "Seashell," by Arne Jon Jutrem; a painting-like wall installment, "Portal to the Past II," by Oluf Foinum; and a heavy-weight mass of glass called "Ear" by Cathrine Maske.

This method is physically demanding and labor-intensive, explained Kim Joon-yong, a Korean glass artist who also teaches at Kookmin University in Seoul.

The artist has to withstand the ambient heat from the furnace, at about 1,200 degrees Celsius. The glass blower heats the glass in the powder form and then blows air into a glob of molten glass from one end of a long blowpipe. He or she then blows the glass into various shapes.

Once a desired form is achieved, the glass is transferred to a pontil rod for further finishing. The artist will break off the rod from the piece, which will leave a pontil scar in the form. Some pontil marks can be rough or smooth, which is often used in examining the age of products. When casting is used to design a certain shape, the artist briefly heats the glass with a propane blow torch to smooth the surface.

Ms. Kim says she began collecting art glass since she bought a small vase by French glassmaker Emile Galle in the United States in 1989. She continued to collect glass art for many years, but it was considered an unusual hobby in Korea.

For the past three years, Ms. Kim has

prepared to open a gallery specializing in glass sculpture and objects. Last year, she visited a glass artist's studio in the Czech Republic, where she found the word "sklo" written all over the place. She liked the way it sounded and asked the artist what sklo meant. The artist laughed and answered, "What else, but glass?" — and so her gallery found its name.

Gallery Sklo consists of two parts, a glass shop and an exhibition space. The shop displays famous art glass works, such as a vase by Sweden's Kosta Boda that costs 530,000 won (\$450).

When the Norwegian exhibition ends, Ms. Kim said she will display about a dozen items from her private collection from all over the world.

"Mine tend to be quite large, like the one you see in the corner," pointing to one item in the gallery's permanent collection, titled "Bamboo Connecto," consisting of 270 centimeter-high glass bamboo stalks in coral and turquoise, by Italian artist Pino Castagna.

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The exhibition runs until May 23. Gallery Sklo is on Cheonggu 5-gil street near Yaksu Station, subway line No. 3, exit No. 3, in Sindang-dong in northern Seoul. The gallery is open daily from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. (5 p.m. on weekends). For more information, call (02) 2236-1582 or visit the gallery's Web site, www.gallerysklo.co.kr, or the Norwegian Embassy's Web site, www.norway.or.kr.



Kim Hyo-jung, the owner of Gallery Sklo, left, with Norwegian Ambassador to Korea Arild Braastad and his wife, Nina, at the opening reception on Friday. By Ines Cho

Food pantry due for wrecker

By Chun Su-jin
Staff Writer

The homeless in Seoul have few places to call their own, but at a small church in the Yeongdeungpo district, they always knew they could get a free meal. Lim Myung-hee, 47, the minister of Gwangya Church, made sure they could get three square meals daily at Gwangya Church.

That will change soon, however, because the district told Mr. Lim that his church and the homeless he serves, a total of 600 people, must move out by early June to make way for a park.

Mr. Lim first set foot in this neighborhood, notorious for sheltering the homeless of all ages, in 1987. Nicknamed *jjokbangchon*, or "cell town," for the many cubicle-sized dwellings where the impoverished hunker down, the neighborhood has

long been considered an eyesore by the city government. Only a few blocks from department stores, *jjokbangchon* is off-limits to minors.

The government has been gradually remaking the area since 1994, but last year it ramped up its efforts to clear out the *jjokbangchon* residents. Most of the area has already been cleared and trees have been planted.

However, the government only recently told Mr. Lim that his church will have to leave by June, giving them little time to find a new home.

The food pantry isn't Mr. Lim's only undertaking; he also runs a shelter for 120 people, thus earning him the nickname "angel to the homeless." Running the shelter and preparing meals costs 20 million won (\$17,000) a month, which comes from donations by Christian groups nationwide as well as out of

Mr. Lim's pocket. The government provides no aid.

Mr. Lim says he cannot sleep at night, knowing that his shelter is the last refuge for the homeless there.

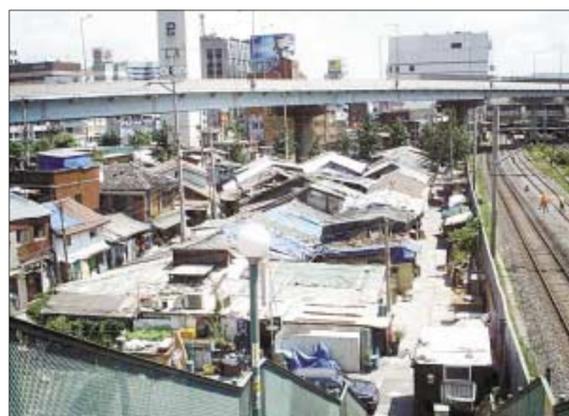
The government's compensation of 50 million won falls far short of what's needed to make Mr. Lim's longtime dream, a four-story homeless shelter, come true.

"What's the city government for? It's for the citizens, including the homeless," Mr. Lim said. His constant efforts to meet city officials have been in vain; the only response he receives is, "Please wait."

An official at the Yeongdeungpo district office said, "The evacuation plan has been going on from 1994, which means that we're not kicking them out overnight. As far as we know, there is nothing illegal about the plan."



Gwangya Church, above, has operated a homeless shelter in Yeongdeungpo, southwest Seoul, since 1987. The neighborhood, right, also known as *jjokbangchon*, or "cell town," must be evacuated by June, leaving Minister Lim Myung-hee little time to find a new home for his church and the shelter.



Mr. Lim said, "If those politicians would pay a little more attention to taking care of people, they could spare some of their dirty money to spend it on a good cause."

Mr. Lim knows it's a long shot, but he is asking the government to build a temporary container shelter. The government officials' response? "Let's wait and see."

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