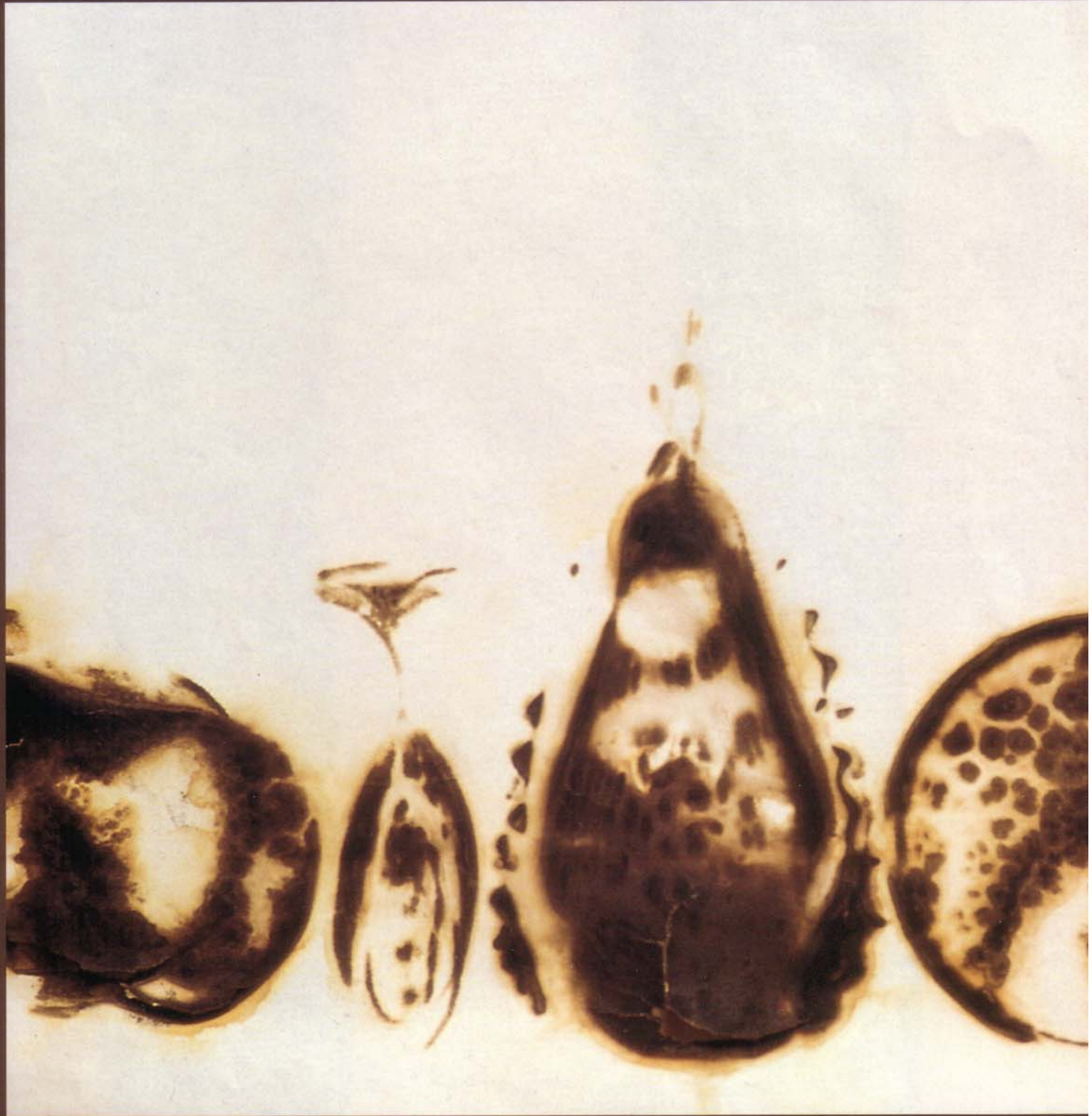


The Art of Burning Paper



AN INTERVIEW WITH ANNE GANT



Most artists are thrilled to encounter ideas that push the envelope, break rules and inspire thoughts outside of boxes. For artist Anne Gant, pushing the envelope is not enough. She'd rather burn it. The process that she uses to burn exquisite patterns onto paper is like none other and includes an element of danger that is clear and present in her creative process.

She is a glassblower by training and for the series shown here, she uses the glass vessels as "stamps" that are pressed onto paper to make one-time imprints that can never be reproduced in the same manner ever again. This is because in the process, the glass disintegrates, after making its distinctive mark.

Anne recently spoke with the *Mélange* department of *Somerset Studio* to explain more about her technique.

Mélange: Tell us a little bit about your background and what made you start burning paper.

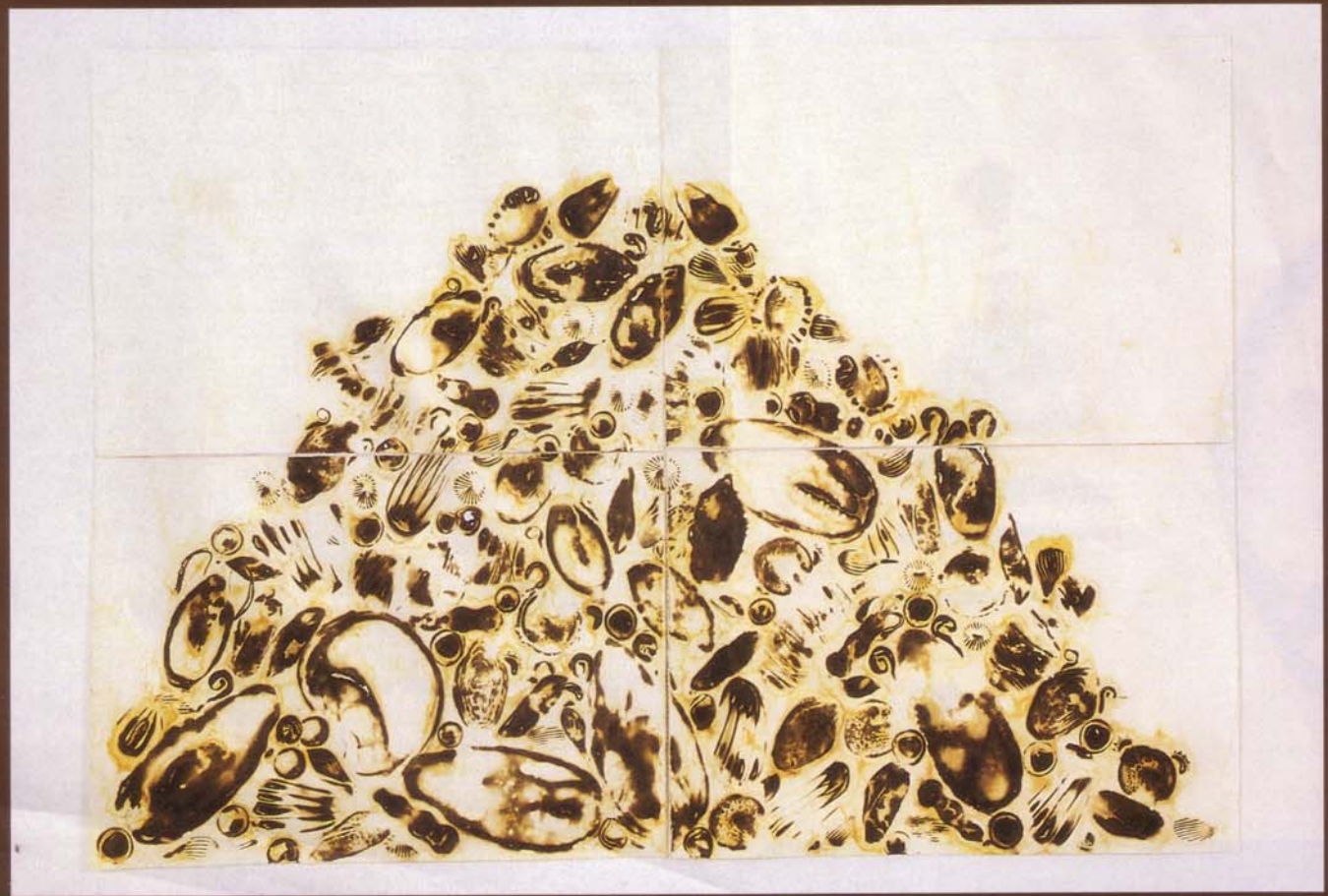
AG: I went to undergraduate school in New York as a sculptor but quickly got interested in glass. I did my graduate work in Philadelphia in glassblowing. In between I did a lot of interesting jobs, including cataloging photos at an historical society, which is where I got interested in the ideas of decay and memory that are present in this work. I'm trained as a glassblower, and I wanted a way to show the heat of the glassblowing process. It's something exciting and dangerous, and a part of glass making that most people don't see. I am using the vessels I was making as stamps and using them to burn the paper. Making "heat prints" seemed like a good way to convey this energy.

Mélange: How hot does it get when you are blowing glass?

AG: Molten glass in the furnace is about 2100 degrees Fahrenheit. When glassblowers work with it, it cools down quite quickly but stays above 1000 degrees. The hotter it is, the more liquid in form it is ... it's similar in viscosity to honey. When I'm working, I wear jeans, sunglasses with good UV coating, leather shoes and Kevlar sleeves. Glass studios are usually quite warm, even in the middle of winter, so it's tempting to wear less, but it increases the likelihood of getting burned.

Mélange: So there is real danger in handling materials around this kind of heat. How do you feel about working with this element of danger?

AG: For a woman, I'm fairly strong so I enjoy the high



level of energy required for this process. I still get burned now and then, but it's a matter of training. It's fun to do something physical and dramatic. The creative process always has an element of danger, which involves taking risks.

Mélange: Is there any rhyme or reason to how the patterns end up looking on the paper?

AG: Glassblowing is a craft that takes focus and discipline but these particular pieces involve a large element of chance as I can only control the burn to a certain extent. I have an assistant who has to stand by and be ever watchful, and spray water on the prints right after I stamp them, or the whole piece will burst into flames. It's a dramatic but disciplined process because it involves smoke and flame and lots of water being tossed around. It's very fun to watch and I often have an audience. Over time, I have gotten better at controlling the exact colors of the burns, and the results are more predictable. That isn't always a good thing, though. Sometimes, the unexpected events are the most rewarding.

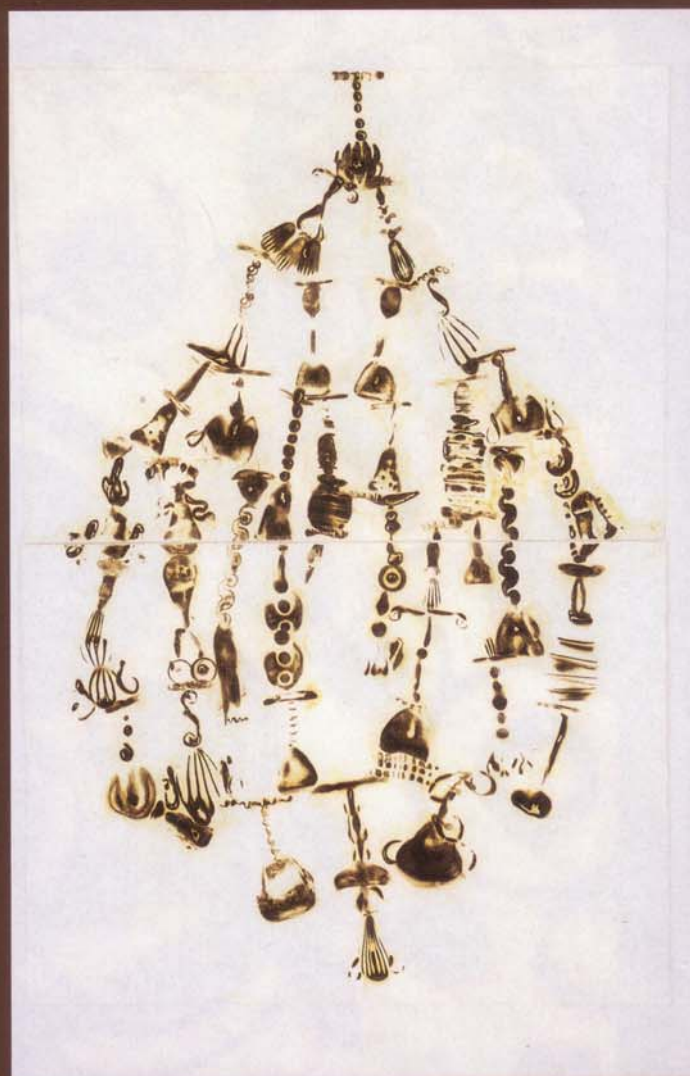
Mélange: Where do you find inspiration?

AG: I think we all crave ecstatic moments. For some people, such moments are found in religion or art. For others, they may be found in watching sports games, or by feeling powerful driving a big car. Sometimes I find ecstatic moments in film and music, but mostly I find ecstatic moments in making artwork and doing creative work.

Mélange: Tell me about some of the most significant films and music that you've encountered.

AG: Right now, I'm listening to a lot of Chutney Soca, which is Indian and Trinidadian, Rai from Algeria and France, and Bhangra which is Indian and UK. Sonically, but not lyrically, it's about adaptation and musical influence and the struggle to maintain cultural identity. I find it to be fascinating, tricky, and not always successful!

I like raw documentaries, because I respect the filmmakers



who get out in the field and capture the stories as they become witnesses and voices for stories that would often go undocumented if someone hadn't had the bravery to film them. I also enjoy completely astounding escapist films including *Blade Runner*, *Moulin Rouge*, *Spirited Away*, and *5,000 Fingers of Dr. T*. I respect the incredible effort that goes into making something that didn't exist before.

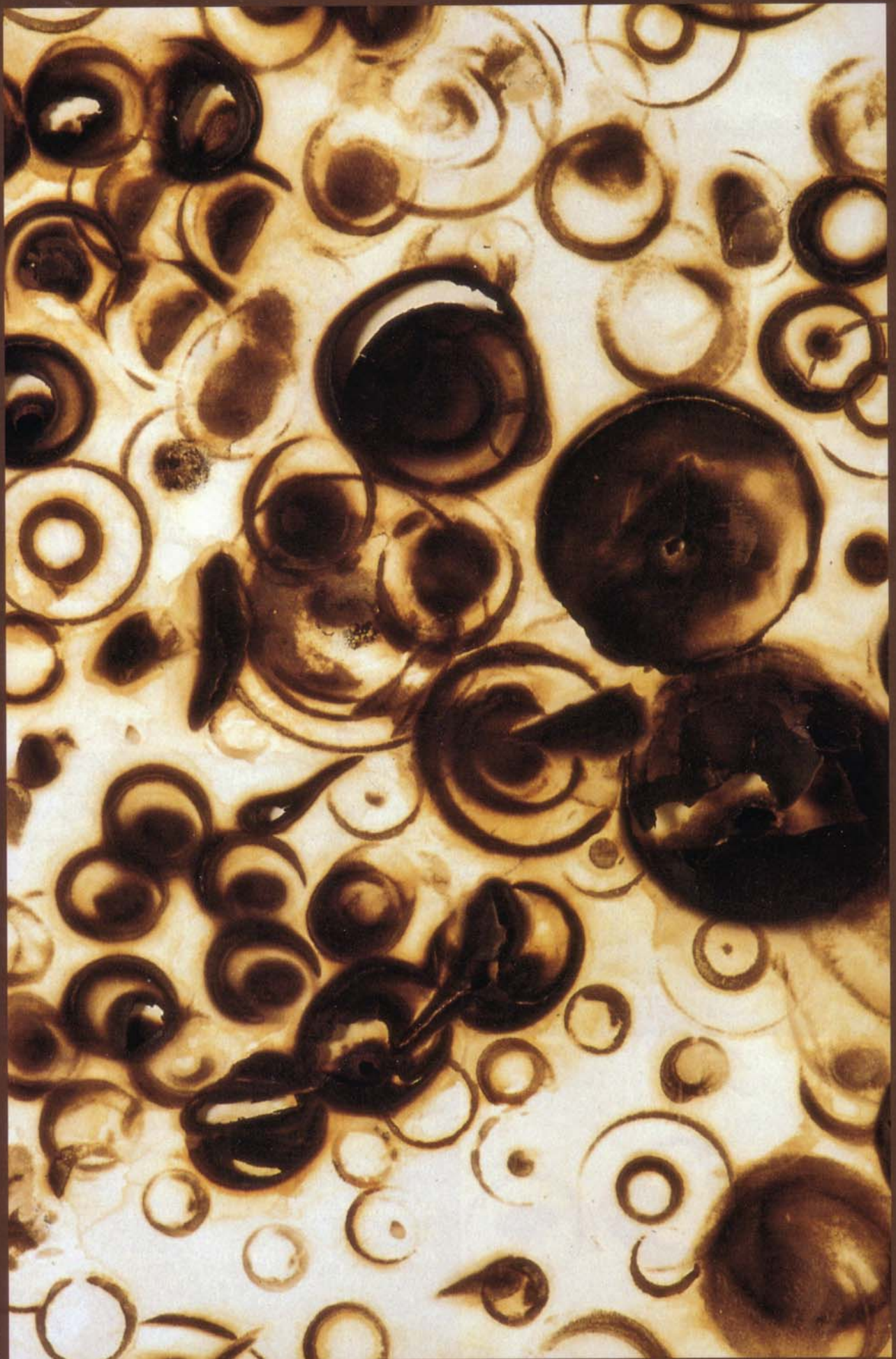
Mélange: Are there any specific people who inspire you?

AG: I am inspired by people who have strong spirits in the face of adversity, and who follow their own sense of truth. Independent thinkers inspire me, and creative people who have the tenacity to complete projects inspire me. I think most people would really surprise themselves with the personal rewards of a creative pursuit — it's amazing how great it feels to make something completely on your own, without anyone else thinking of it for you, with your own mind.

Mélange: What does it take for you to make all of this happen?

AG: Water, fire and good paper, coupled with strong coffee [to drink] and lots of patience during the creative process.

Anne Gant lives in Brooklyn, NY. To learn more about her work, visit www.gantglass.com.





Artist Statement

I use hot glass to make prints and drawings. During the past two years I have created my own process, which is a combination of glassblowing and printing or drawing with glass. First, I sculpt hot glass into shapes and lines. Then, while the glass is still screaming hot from the glory hole, I press the glass forms into wet sheets of Arches rag paper. Instantly, the glass begins to burn and smoke the paper. In this dramatic process, the glass becomes cracked, scarred and destroyed. All that remains is its mark on the paper.

*The soul of glass is its heat.
These prints function as maps of that heat.
They reveal a secret aspect of the glass
normally known only to the maker.*

The casual viewer may not instantly spot that these prints are made from glass, but no other material would be able to create these high-temperature, organic burns. They have a richness, translucency and liquidity that is an echo of the original glass form. The resulting burnt impressions have a high level of detail as the burns pass through layers of paper and also create embossed areas. They range in color from areas of rich, dense blacks to smoky sepias and watery yellows. The burns are full of light- they have a mysterious photographic quality; in some areas they look as if they are backlit.

This recent body of work is based in ruins that I studied recently in Italy. By using piles and stacks of traditional Roman glass forms, I once again connect these prints to



their glass craft origins. The amphora-style forms I am using reference unearthed antiquities. That feeling of ancient, dirt-covered pieces speaks not only to the ideas of preciousness of the original object, but also extends the meaning of the print when it is completed: the final prints are brown, crusty, and damaged, like an excavated shard. These burn prints are poignant, because they exist simultaneously as aesthetic objects in their own right, and yet also speak of the object that was lost. The amphora and plate forms become symbols for the human that is not longer there. These prints remind me of other residue from events in the past- the blast shadows created by the thermic rays from the atomic bomb at Hiroshima, trick "spirit photography" from the early 1900's, and the mysterious prints on the Shroud of Turin. More recent and for me, more resonant, I remember all the singed pieces of paper from the World Trade Center attack that drifted over my area of Brooklyn- little fragments acting as constant reminders of great loss.