

FROZEN *in* TIME



ALISON SIGETHY

BY DONNA CEDAR-SOUTHWORTH

When examining Alison Sigethy's glass works, one feels a sense of turbulence and, paradoxically, a sense of tranquility. It's as if she has captured a dramatic yet contemplative moment in time.

The result is akin to the way ice shapes almost instantly during an ice storm—rigidly, but also naturally and organically.

An expert and avid kayaker, Alison recently returned from a three-month sojourn as part of a kayak team that paddled through Arctic Canada's Northwest Passage. "It's a fabulous landscape," she says, "Its incredible and powerful lighting is amazing, but what really fascinated me were the rocks. There are huge cliffs and they're dramatic just because of the colors and size and scale and markings, but the small stones were incredible, too. When you're holding those stones, it's evident that you're holding history." Alison, who has also kayaked in Greenland, says that the sport is "a big part of who I am, and it's reflected in my work."

That connection with nature and the environment is inherent in many of her pieces—especially in her *Kayak* series, which captures both the excitement of the up-and-down-movement as well as the solitude of kayaking.

For a typical kayak piece, Alison fuses a brick of glass together, stacking the individual layers in whatever way that suits her at the moment. She then saws the brick into strips, carving each one on a lap wheel, the same machine that is used for stone carving. "It's a diamond disc that spins with a waterfeed," she says, "and you just push the glass into it—controlling where you're pushing. It's not a fast process, but I like the effect [and] the control. I like that every piece I make is different."

The undulating waves of "Sea Dance 3" conjure the beauty and movement of the water that buoys a kayak. Alison began the piece by melting strips of glass in a kiln and then slumping the pieces over a fiber blanket. To achieve the effect of waves, she stacked the pieces so they appeared to move together. The process was repeated until she had fabricated three multilayered waves. The result: Alison has created the wild and wonderful

FACING PAGE, TOP: "YELLOW TOTEM," 8" x 3" x 5"; AND "WATER COVE," 8" x 4" x 4". BOTH ARE CARVED, SLUMPED AND SANDBLASTED GLASS.



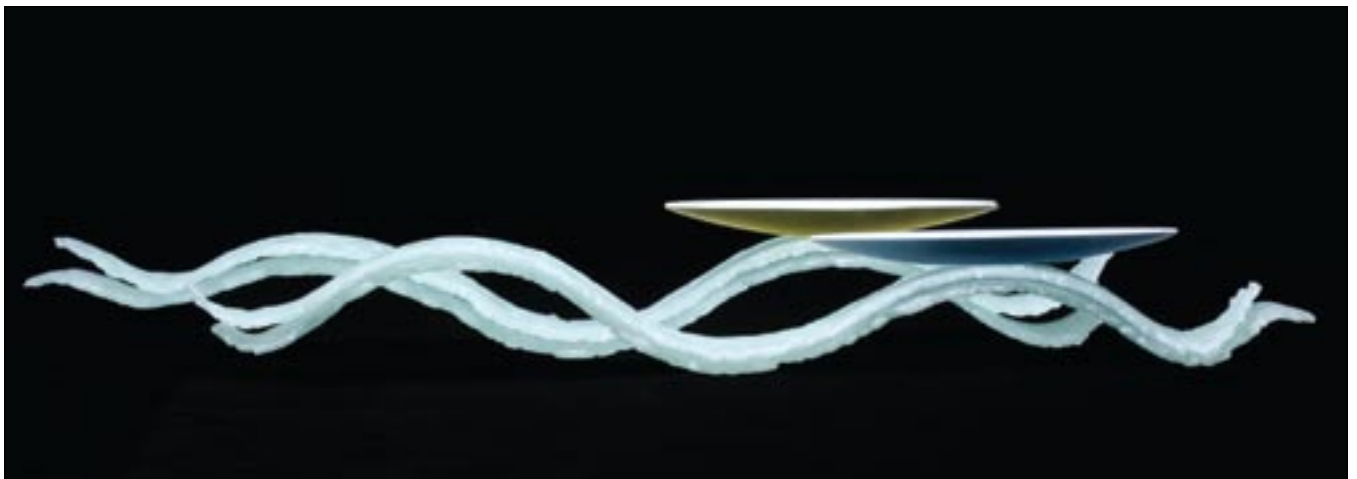
rhythm of water, and she has frozen it in time. Because she wanted a shiny finish for the piece, she did not sandblast the waves. Somewhat unexpectedly, she chooses not to attach her separately carved kayaks to the wave constructions. “I like [the viewer] to be able to move them to different parts and change the piece,” she says.

Alison doesn’t believe in shortcuts. She views each piece as unique—a part of the artist’s soul—which is why she won’t use molds, choosing instead to carve her own pieces. This practice echoes her affinity for kayaking: “If you talk to anyone who builds wooden boats, they will say, ‘That boat’s got a soul,’ and I’ve spent enough time in them to know this is true. I feel like when I carve them, I’m giving the little boats a soul, too.”

At times, Alison creates opaque surfaces through sandblasting, as she did with “Contemplation.” She opted for a matte finish in “Wave Ride” simply by using a different type of glass and retaining the grinder marks.

Alison’s more functional pieces, including her lotus and nesting bowls, are the simplest to make and are priced accordingly, she says. Here again, she creates each shape through fusing and slumping and sometimes sandblasting the finished product. She stays away from “perfect” shapes, preferring a more organic look: “I take a big fiber blanket and I’ll put it over a bed of sand—sometimes brick—and push it down and make the shape. No two bowls turn out the same, and I like that.”

Her newest series, *Stones and Bones*, recalls her time in the





Arctic: "One of the things I liked most about the rocks was the stress fractures caused by the ice moving." Fractures are usually something to be avoided by glass artists, but Alison creates them purposely—layering pieces, accelerating the cooling and letting the cracks spread "like rampant spider webs" before returning the pieces to the kiln to make them structurally sound.

Some of her pieces incorporate recycled glass, specifically, commercial and construction glass salvaged from building projects—things like shower doors and plate glass windows. "People think we recycle glass," she says, "but that's only consumer glass, bottles, etc. Ninety percent of the glass out there is building/construction glass that goes to a landfill. It's part of being 'green,' and it gives the glass a second life—it also works for what I'm doing." Occasionally, she purchases glass from ReStore, a thrift store offering appliances and building materials that have been donated by contractors and homeowners.

All proceeds from purchases go to Habitat for Humanity.

Alison hopes to be able to create some commissioned public works based on the manmade stone structures known as inukshuks that she saw while paddling in the Arctic. "The inukshuks would be fabulous in a park setting or water setting," she says.

In addition to creating environmentally inspired works, Alison volunteers as an adaptive paddling instructor for the American Canoe Association. Her works are on view February 12 through March 6 in Studio 307 at the Torpedo Factory Art Center in Alexandria. For more information, visit www.goingtogreenland.com, or contact Alison at alison@goingtogreenland.com or 703-980-2948.



FACING PAGE, TOP: LOTUS BOWL, 14" x 14" x 7"; AND "DUET," 37.5" x 6" x 7"; THIS PAGE, TOP: "ARCTIC TOTEM," 8" x 3" x 5"; AND "ALL THAT REMAINS," 6" x 3" x 3". ALL ARE CARVED, SLUMPED AND SANDBLASTED GLASS.

