

"EVERYTHING IS THE WAY IT IS BECAUSE IT GOT THAT WAY":

AN APPRECIATION OF THE WORK OF MONICA GUGGISBERG AND PHILIP BALDWIN.

*On Growth and Form*, published in 1917 by the Scottish biomathematician d'Arcy Thompson, proposed a radical alternative to Darwin's natural selection: the evolution of forms was not dependent solely on the survival of the fittest, but on the powerful dynamics of the inner and outer forces that shape all organisms according to a mathematical progression. Thompson's quote, used as the title of this short appreciation of the work of Monica Guggisberg and Philip Baldwin over the past two decades, sums up, for me, the way in which these two artists have approached their chosen medium. In their work, which ranges from functional pieces for the table to large scale sculptural installations, form seems to be a magical interpenetration of the limits and demands of the material, and the limitless poetry of form and surface that these artists record.

I remember seeing for the first time the rich colour palette of Monica and Philip's early platters and bowls from their *Clean Lines* series of the 1980s and *Broadway Bowls* from the early 1990s. Saturated jewel-like colours immediately seduced the eye as they interacted with light, their tones flickering and shifting according to the quality of the ambient light or the consciously directed spotlight. In these works, surface was a matter of light beyond substance; shapes were consistently modest and yet self-assured. It was the way in which colour and light were manipulated that gave these objects their special and recognizable voice. In some instances, passages of colour were juxtaposed with clear lines of demarcation between the hues.

It was in these early works that the artists began to peel away layers of colour to expose inner layers of colour and light. The overall forms retained the rigorous simplicity of geometry; the layers of colour provided a new visual rhythm to the design. Combined with the impeccable craftsmanship that has always been a hallmark of Monica and Philip's work, the impression was intriguing and often hypnotic. The subtle colourations of these works, suggesting the transparency of delicate watercolours, attracted one's attention immediately; their true magic was in the ways in which the outer and inner forces of the material were conflated to produce a composite whole. Like the glass bubbles from which they originally emerged, it was the juxtaposition of external and internal forces that gave each piece its distinctive appearance, and maintained its meditative balance.

Soon after their success working in this mode, the artists began further and more complex explorations of edges and surfaces and their relationship to forms by modulating the surfaces. This was frequently achieved by cutting through the covering layer of colour to give the viewer a glimpse into the core of the piece – the inner world that defined form from the inside.

The Nestlé series of plates from 1996 is indicative of this evolving aesthetic, in which a rhythmic patterning served as a counterpoint to the purity of colour and elegant form. Patterns were virtually limitless in their appearance; each stroke of the cutting wheel set into motion a series of painterly gestures that underscored the individual personality of each piece. Over the years, and in collaboration with such skilled cutting masters as Paolo Ferro, the team developed a vast range of textural effects. This aspect of the artists' work became, in many ways, their signature.

