

**“Suspended Mobility”**

**Philip Baldwin and Monica Guggisberg**  
**David Richard Gallery**  
**Santa Fe**  
**December 28, 2012–February 9, 2013**

It seems entirely right that the American artist Philip Baldwin and the Swiss artist Monica Guggisberg should create mobiles. The artists have spent their mutual career reconciling languages, cultures, and artistic directions. They embrace both unique work and production design; they join Swedish and Venetian techniques. Balance is what they do best.

Like all sculptors, Baldwin and Guggisberg must integrate surface and volume, and their solution to this challenge—a fusion of Swedish layering techniques with bold, Venetian-style cold work—probably defines their work more than any other element. In their recent show in Santa Fe, they exhibited several freestanding, layered vessels from their “Urbana” and “Futura” series. A quick look at the titles and the works might lead you to see them as scrupulously designed products of midcentury modernism, and you wouldn’t be entirely wrong. The battuto and inciso surfaces are inspired by Carlo Scarpa’s innovations for Venini in the 1940’s. The works’ inspiration may be midcentury, but their edge is contemporary. In work such as “Attitude in the Dark” (2012), the aggressive hatching and cross-hatching cuts seem to slash through the layers of glass, exposing the colors beneath and creating a volumetric, low-relief sculpture. The artists achieve the look of impulse, though, through slow, careful teamwork—and as much as a 20 percent loss in the cold shop. As Baldwin writes in an email, “The cutting is indeed deep, even violent in a manner of speaking.... Caution helps a lot, even if the actual work may be said to appear reckless.”

The artists focus to a great extent on series, continuing to change, develop, and expand on a few key forms. They created their first large, freestanding, almost-figurative “Guardians” in 1996, for what they thought was a single exhibition. Seventeen years later, the Santa Fe exhibition included nine examples of recent blown vessels that seem to flame from their vertical, stainless steel supports. There were a number of works from a newer series of boats, begun about five years ago, in which minimal wooden or metal vessel forms are filled with blown and cold-worked glass vessels. “The Dreamer” (2012), for example, contains over



**Philip Baldwin and Monica Guggisberg, *Attitude in the Dark*, 2011.**  
**Blown-glass vessel with cold-worked surface. H 16 ½, W 11 ½, D 10 ½ in.**

COURTESY: DAVID RICHARD GALLERY, SANTA FE

a dozen double amphorae, that is, blown vessels joined at the mouth, in range of ambers and twilight blues.

A 2012 private commission for a mobile propelled Baldwin and Guggisberg in a dramatic new direction. Working with a high-tech metal-fabrication company in Switzerland, they were able to satisfy the mechanical requirements of their design, enabling them to create a moving collage of blown and cold-worked glass. Excited by their success, they went on to produce a huge version for their exhibition last fall at Frankfurt’s Museum of Applied Art (*Museum für Angewandte Kunst*). At 32.2 by 11.5 by 8.2 feet, *Birdfeeder* moves through a space of more than 3,000 cubic feet.

After the mobiles debuted in November 2012 at SOFA Chicago, the next three works in the “Suspended Mobility” series came to Santa

Fe. These mobiles contain as many as 19 blown elements in various shapes, most of them cut or etched. About four feet square, they hang roughly ten feet down. The high-contrast palette of black, white, and clear glass in *Number Three* (all are from 2012) brings attention to the various surfaces of the 18 blown-glass elements. Cut and etched, each piece catches the light a little differently, inviting the viewer closer. Seen from farther away, the work appears to grow bigger: as it slowly moves, its gray shadows follow it, apparently dissolving the white gallery walls. For *Number Four*, the artists used fewer elements, in an aggressive palette of black, dark red, and yellow. *Number Five*, with its red, blue, white, and black elements, is the most like works by

(Baldwin and Guggisberg continues on page 58...)

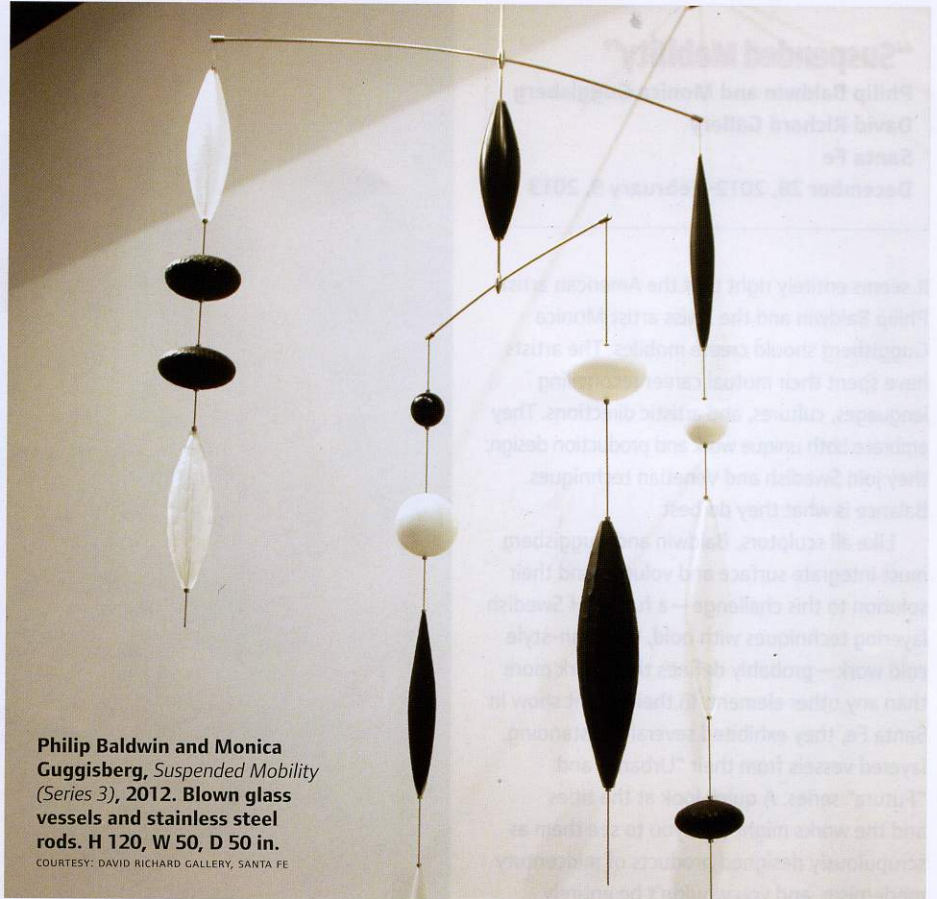
(...Baldwin and Guggisberg continued from page 57)

Alexander Calder and evokes comparison to a solar system.

The outstanding strength of the mobile series is the successful union of large size and subtle surfaces. The stainless steel apparatus moves smoothly (on tiny concealed ball bearings), presents the assembled glass vessels with restraint, and allows blown glass to overcome its inherent limitations of scale.

Cool and elegant, there is nothing that feels “reckless” about these mobiles. They would not appeal to a viewer looking for impulse, passion, or drama; to that viewer, the mobiles might look like nothing more than carefully calibrated designs. The work does indeed depend on a refined and poised structure, but you know there’s more when you watch the glass vessels glide dream-like through the air, or when you get close and see the light on the varied and sensuous surfaces. When you see the mobiles surrounded by the other series of glass sculptures these artists have been working on for decades, you think, What took you so long?

*VICTORIA JOSSLIN is a contributing editor to GLASS.*



**Philip Baldwin and Monica Guggisberg, *Suspended Mobility (Series 3)*, 2012. Blown glass vessels and stainless steel rods. H 120, W 50, D 50 in.**

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