

Bee Dreaming
the Surreal Odysseys Behind Alan Glass' Wunderkabinetts
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The retrospective exhibition of Alan Glass' surrealist constructions, boxes, collages, assemblages, and paintings opened at the Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City in November, 2008. The works' magical worlds, exquisitely wrought within his *Wunderkabinetts* and *Wunderkammers*, continued to enchant visitors through April, 2009. The exhibition confirmed Alan Glass' inclusion in the international lineage of important surrealist artists living and working in the Americas. Glass' art studies, visionary quests, and surrealist wanderings have taken him from Montreal to Paris and on to Mexico City, where he ultimately took up permanent residence and has lived since the sixties, receiving his Mexican citizenship in the spring of 2009.

Born in Montreal in 1932 and student of the painter Alfred Pellán, Glass was awarded a scholarship from the French government to study art in France in 1952. Thus began his pilgrimage in search of rare objects from realms of the Marvelous. He supported himself in Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris by working in jazz clubs. He experimented with the newly issued Bic ballpoint pen for his automatic drawings. He became the first artist to employ the Bic pen for these innovative works, which were immediately discovered and praised by the Surrealists. In 1957 he traveled to Berlin, Dresden, Prague, and then returned to Paris. Having left his address in the visitors' book at L'Étoile Scellée gallery, the young Jacques Sennelier from the surrealist group paid Alan a surprise visit; upon seeing the drawings pinned on the wall, he insisted that Breton see them. He then took Glass to Rue Fontaine to meet André Breton and his wife, Élisabeth. They quickly organized an exhibition for Glass in 1958 at the gallery of the editor, Eric Losfeld, *Le Terrain Vague*, in Paris. It was at this exhibi-

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tion that Breton, Péret, and André Pierye de Mandiargues admired his work; Matta purchased a drawing.

In authentic surrealist manner, Alan Glass felt the call to go to Mexico the first time that he set eyes upon a Mexican sugar skull. This transformative event took place during a visit to the studio of his friends, Yves and Aube Elléouet, in Montparnasse. He knew immediately that he had to live in a country where people produced extraordinary objects like the sugar skull. In 1961 he purchased passage aboard the Naviera Aznar cargo ship (*Monteanaga*) sailing from Barcelona to Vera Cruz. His friend, Alejandro Jodorowsky, whom he knew from the fifties in Paris, welcomed him upon his arrival in Mexico. The following day Jodorowsky introduced him to Leonora Carrington, who became a lifelong friend. His odyssey took him back and forth between Europe and Mexico, but by the mid-1960s, Glass had settled in Mexico City. He has been commuting to a studio-retreat in Villa del Carbón for several years, where he stays for weeks at a time to work in solitude on the intricate box constructions and luminous paintings of visions gleaned from worlds of reverie, inner and outer journeys, and pilgrimages to sites of the discarded treasures of the material cultures of the world.

The odysseys I wish to speak about here are not just Alan Glass' literal travels to various countries including a long journey to India, Nepal and Sri Lanka in 1968, but rather the magical itineraries behind his wanderings, in a trance-like state, through the flea markets of the world, and especially the outdoor *mercados* of Mexico, where he makes the remarkable discoveries of relics whose provenances fuse dream with reality in ways that actualize the surrealist belief that the imaginary tends to become real. As a surrealist artist, Glass possesses an intuitiveness that I see, metaphorically, as analogous to the navigation system of the bee, since so many of his boxes feature bees, beeswax, honeycombs, jars of honey, or beeswax candles. Indeed, the more I have spoken with Alan Glass, the more convinced I am that there is an analogy worth pursuing between the flight of the bee from flower to flower in search of pollen, towards the fertilization and beautification of our world including the ultimate creation of honey, the alchemical gold of nature, and the ways that he moves intuitively from treasure trove (flea market) to treasure trove, following his own logics, responding to the "call" of certain objects which beckon him and ultimately make their way into his assemblages and boxes. There, juxtaposed with other unexpected and unique finds, they electrify us with the surrealist spark that Breton observed was produced by the chance encounter of completely disparate elements. They too fertilize our world with creative beauty, and through their spiritual alchemy, grant us moments of sweetness and transport us to poetic vistas where we may glimpse the marvelous in our world.



Fig. 1. Alan Glass, *Pigall's: For Marcel Duchamp & Louis Morin*, 1998-2000, large glass box construction, copyright Alan Glass, permission Tufic Makhoulf Akl, Mexico City, Mexico (2008)

Bees have compound eyes made of approximately 6,000 lenses. They have multiple photoreceptors that use the polarization patterns of sunlight in order to navigate. Thus their lenses constantly relate sky to earth through light. One can find in Alan Glass' boxes a parallel relationship between the sky—the stars, the Milky Way, and other galaxies—and the light that pours into his boxes through their many glass panes, lenses, and windows. As the bee senses where it must fly to find pollen, as it sees through its many prisms and scans the field of light, so Glass scans the multi-colored field of displays at flea markets, neighborhood fairs, and exhibits of antiquities.

The prisms and lenses embedded in his work *Pigall's: For Marcel Duchamp and Louis Morin* (1998–2000, Fig. 1), and dedicated to Marcel Duchamp, remind me of the multiple lenses of the bee. Through the many lenses in this box dedicated to

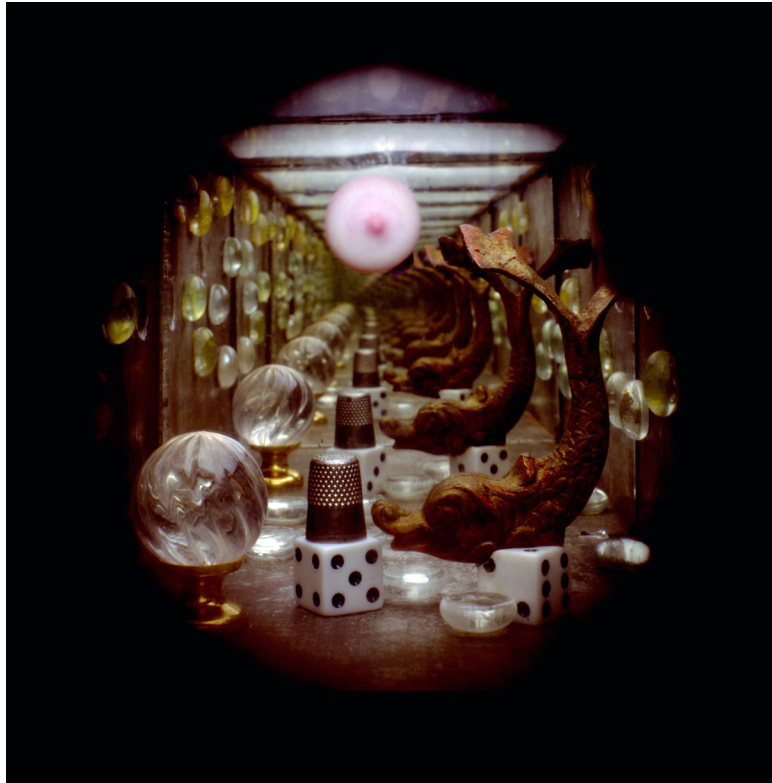


Fig. 2. Alan Glass, *Peak Frean Biscuit Peep Hole Shadow Box*, 2001-2004, box construction, copyright Alan Glass, permission Tufic Makhoulf Akl, Mexico City, Mexico (2008)

Duchamp, and resonating both with Duchamp's *Étant Donnés*, where one observes a hidden erotic scene through a peephole, and through other similar visual devices in Glass' works such as the *Peephole Shadow Box* (1972, and on view with the tripod inside the camera), where one has to view on tiptoe while peering through a tiny aperture and that contains water-colored stage sets, displayed in the manner of a baroque theatre, glass spheres, mirrors. In Glass' *Peak Frean Biscuit Peep Hole Shadow Box* (2003/04, Fig. 2), a box that contains thimbles, dice, dolphin figures, glass marbles, and transparent mirrors, it is possible to catch a glimpse of the many mini vistas that recede into the infinite vanishing point in the distance.¹ In the *Peak Frean Biscuit Box*, a woman's pink and white breast looms overhead, in the distance, near the vanishing point. Can this be a reference to the large box, *Pigall's: For Marcel Duchamp and Louis Morin*, where the breast on the large box refers to Duchamp's and Morin's images of breasts in works from the past? If so, the peephole, named for the cookie

brand Peek Freans, is also a reference to Marcel Proust's *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, where eating the *petite madeleine* brings about a journey into the past of forgotten memories from childhood. Here is a visual interpretation of what the taste of a Peek Frean cookie might evoke for a visionary artist. Metaphorically, then, Glass' creative method might be thought of as analogous to a kind of bee dreaming, which not only scans the visual field in the present through many lenses but interpreted in the light of these peephole boxes, might also be capable of scanning the vistas of memory from the deep recesses of the past.

In using the concept of bee dreaming to speak of Glass' visionary quests, I want to make reference to the Australian Aboriginal concept of the dreamtime, in which it is believed that the ancestors, as they moved across the land, created the unique topographical features on earth such as mountains, rivers, waterholes and sacred sites. The mythic journeys of these spirit ancestors are honored each time one makes a pilgrimage, known as a walkabout, to reconnect with the myth of origins inspired by their travels. Surrealist artists were deeply inspired by the art of various aboriginal and indigenous cultures, and it is not inappropriate to make an analogy between the creative methods of surrealist artists and the myth-inspired journeys of

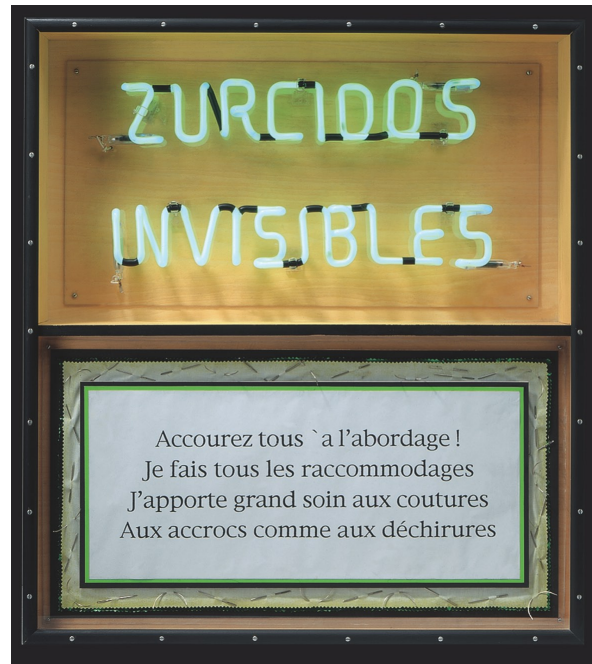


Fig. 3. Alan Glass, *Zurcidos Invisibles*, 1996, neon sign box construction, copyright Alan Glass, permission Tufic Makhoulouf Akl, Mexico City, Mexico (2008)

the Australian aboriginal peoples. Yet while the surrealist interest in the Dream and the aboriginal concept of the Dreaming must be distinguished one from the other, I nevertheless see in Glass' work a gesture of recovery of a lost world of forms created by our ancestors, a world of objects from the past, that he gathers on his own walkabouts and that he protects and curates in his boxes—a gesture of honoring their passing, and preserving the memory of their creation that incorporates some elements of the concept known as the dreaming. Whether Glass is creating enchanted worlds of his childhood past, boxes based upon the ice castles of the North, nostalgic memories of the eras whose indelible images are forever imprinted in our minds' eyes from the Paris of the fifties, or artifacts of ancient goddesses, he is also re-tracing the routes of ancestral, pre-historic and historic creation that have left behind those visual and material artifacts that form the topography of our inner psychic and mythic visionscapes. It is also in this sense of the rescue and restoration to memory of those vanishing worlds that I refer to Glass' oeuvre as bee dreaming. His creative process and the worlds he creates fuse the multi-eyed perception of the bee with the journeys of those who came before us, and who created cultural artifacts of enchantment that the artist celebrates and enshrines in his boxes and *Wunderkabinetts*. These exquisite mini-worlds recreate the memory of moments of ecstasy that might otherwise slip away. His oeuvre takes us on our own dreamtime journeys by linking us aesthetically to both the tangible and the mystical dimensions of the marvelous as it manifests in this world.

The title Glass chose for his retrospective in Mexico City was "*Zurcidos Invisibles* (Invisible Mendings)." The work of the surrealist engaged with *Zurcidos Invisibles* (1996, Fig. 3) via bee dreaming may also be understood as sacred work akin to the kabalistic concept of repair and mending. It is the kind of work known in Kabala as "repairing the world" or "*tikkun olam*." Bringing forth honey and bringing forth magical works of art are acts of rescue, restoration, transformation and creation. I often mentally anthropomorphize the *Zurcidos*/mendings, making them into invisible tailors, for the neon light reading *Zurcidos Invisibles* that marked the entry to Glass' retrospective was inspired by a sign on a tailor's shop. The analogy is immediately created between the work of the artist bringing back images and mementos from by-gone eras to preserve them, and the work of a tailor repairing the worn pieces of an ancient garment so that it might be preserved for posterity. The artist and the tailor are both salvaging articles and artifacts from the past, so that the magical qualities of past zones of the marvelous will not be erased from our "remembrance of lost time."

"*Le hasard objectif*" plays an important role in Glass' creative process. Many of his works bring together objects that are connected in unusual ways with people,

events, and discoveries. The intersections of the objects with time, place, and chance coalesce to reveal the existence of the marvelous in our daily reality. To indicate the uncanny nature of these examples of “*le hasard objectif*” in his life and work, I will recount some of the “coincidences” that led to the creation of one of his most important boxes that may be best understood from this perspective: *Pigall's: For Marcel Duchamp and Louis Morin* (1998–2000). Sometimes the unfolding of these synchronicities and objective chance occurrences take decades to reveal their coded meanings or their secret itineraries. They take place in various countries, on different continents, and often right at one’s own front door.

An impressive box constructed to memorialize “*le hasard objectif*” of events that led from Paris to Mexico City and took place over the decades between the ’50s and the ’90s is Glass’ large glass, two-sided box, *Pigall's*. It is helpful to consider the title of an automatic text written by André Breton with Philippe Soupault, *Les Champs Magnétiques*, for the Surrealists live in a world that is like a magnetic field. In the 1950s a *clochard*, a vagrant, at the Parisian metro stop of Bonne Nouvelle, insisted on selling some picture postcards to Alan Glass. It was from this chance encounter with the *clochard* that a surrealist chain of events, signs, and synchronicities emanated, and continued to reveal its meanings over the next half century. One can hear the word *cloche* in *clochard*, the bell that is sounding like a *wake-up call FOR ALAN*. Why did this happen at Bonne Nouvelle, which translated into English means Good News? If we look into *Nadja* by Breton, we are struck by reading what Breton wrote about the Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle:

Meanwhile, you can be sure of meeting me in Paris, of not spending more than three days without seeing me pass, toward the end of the afternoon, along the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle between the *Matin* printing office and the Boulevard de Strasbourg. I don’t know why it should be precisely here that my feet take me, here that I almost invariably go without specific purpose, without anything to induce me but this obscure clue: namely that it (?) will happen here.²

Certainly the clues were embedded in this incident. Bonne Nouvelle was the place where Breton anticipated that IT (?) WOULD HAPPEN. Bonne Nouvelle became like a magnetic pole for Breton—the surrealist locus of propitious encounters. Naturally, Glass was not thinking of all these meanings when he bought the cards from the *clochard*. He could not have known that eventually Duchamp would appear in this story (whose name actually means “of the field” ... perhaps the magnetic field). Alan took the cards with him to Mexico. On one side of each card was an art

nouveau sign, an *enseigne* of the restaurant Le Bœuf à la Mode, located at 8, rue de Valois, near the Palais Royal. In the word, *enseigne* (the large sign outside the restaurant) I hear the verb, *enseigner* (to teach), suggesting that a teaching is encoded in the purchase of the postal cards. We learn that this restaurant was called Hôtel Mélusine before it was called Le Bœuf à la Mode. Anyone familiar with *Nadja* cannot help but connect the former name of the restaurant, Mélusine (a Celtic goddess), with Nadja's self-identification with the Celtic serpent-goddess, Mélusine:

Nadja has also represented herself many times with the features of Melusina, who of all mythological personalities is the one she seems to have felt closest to herself. I have even seen her try to transfer this resemblance to real life, insisting that her hairdresser spare no efforts to arrange her hair in five distinct strands in order to leave a star over her forehead. The strands must be coiled besides, to make ram's horns in front of her ears, the spiral of such horns, also being one of the motifs she most frequently related to herself.³

At this point we simply note the importance of the "horns," still bewildered by how they might relate to Alan's adventures. Another clue to some of the hidden meanings can also be found in *Nadja*, for it was at the Palais Royal that Nadja re-identified with Mélusine, and asked Breton a mythological question that hints at the motivation behind Nadja's quest in roving the streets of Paris like a medium in states of trance and exaltation. It is significant, therefore, that the restaurant, Le Bœuf à la Mode, which was formerly called Hôtel Mélusine, is located at Palais Royal. In *Nadja* we read,

After dinner, walking around the garden of the Palais Royal, her dream seems to have assumed a mythological character I had hitherto not discerned. With great skill, so that she gives the striking illusion of reality, she briefly evokes the elusive character of Melusina. Then she asks me point blank: "Who killed the Gorgon, tell me, tell." I have more and more difficulty following her monologue, which long silences begin to make unintelligible.⁴

According to Robert Graves in *The White Goddess*, "The myth of the killing of the Gorgon is descriptive of the breaking of the (Argive) Triple goddess' power by the first wave of the Achaeans, figured as Perseus, the Destroyer."⁵

In my own interpretation, Nadja, in identifying with Mélusine, connects with and reclaims the matriarchal power of the Celtic goddess, who, once a week, had to relinquish her human form and was turned into a hybrid being, a mermaid, part serpent, part human. Here, inquiring about the murderer of the Gorgon, she is again

haunted by the knowledge of the destruction of female power by patriarchy. Nadja is intuitively in touch with a revelation about the annihilation of powerful women. Throughout the narrative Nadja is magnetically drawn to sites in Paris whose histories reveal the places where women of power once lived, women who were beheaded or guillotined. We see this in the episode where she asks who she might have been in Marie Antoinette's circle.⁶ The magnetism of the Palais Royal—where we will soon find Duchamp at the restaurant *Le Bœuf à la Mode*, Breton and Nadja in their evening stroll, and, by extension, Alan Glass, who is connected with the restaurant at the Palais Royal via the post cards purchased from the *clochard*—have created a nexus of surrealist energies and magnetic forces, drawing people to it, one that is both *insolite* and enigmatic. What these converging lines of destiny will lead to is yet to be deciphered.

Glass' story continues in the summer of 1962 when he took a ship from Vera Cruz to France. Arriving in Paris and in need of a job, he contacted Nicolas Bataille, who had staged Ionesco's plays at *Le Théâtre de la Huchette*. Bataille suggested that Glass visit a certain Mme. Martini at a nightclub called *Pigall's*, for she just might have a job for him. She was the grande dame of theatre and night life in Paris, and Glass went to see her at the nightclub on the Rue Pigalle. On the wall of this club were nineteenth-century paintings; indeed, Mme. Martini wanted him to modernize one of them by painting horns on the head of a satyr, and putting stockings on the woman in an underwood that the satyr carried in his arms. Glass did so. Soon after that, he went back to Mexico via Canada.

Many years passed; Glass was to have an exhibition in Canada, and the night before leaving, Leonora Carrington invited him for dinner at her home in Mexico. There he met Marcel and Teeny Duchamp; the meeting was auspicious. Not only did he meet Duchamp, whose presence (and "magnetic field") was to play such a large role in this extraordinary tale. Like Glass Carrington has Celtic roots in her background, and her life and work share a quest for the Celtic goddess Dana and her tribe, the *Tuatha De Danaan*. The dinner took place in 1964. Duchamp was supportive of Glass' exhibition; with this double surrealist blessing, Glass left for Canada.

One day in 1997, Marie-Aimée de Montalambert, the sister-in-law of Glass' friend, Carlos de Laborde, came to visit, bringing a book. It was a catalogue of Duchamp's Venice exhibition.⁷ There, under the dates March 21, 22, and 23, 1910, Glass saw the very painting that he had transformed in Paris, in *Pigall's* nightclub, the painting of the satyr, to which he had added horns. But in the catalogue, the painting was reproduced as it had existed before Glass' transformation. On March 23, 1910, Duchamp had taken Max Bergmann on a magical tour of the cabarets of Montmartre. They ended up at a place that Duchamp had reserved for last. It was *Pigall's*,

where “Louis Morin has painted the panels on the walls and ceiling, which are also elaborately framed in gold...In the largest panel, which hangs between the bar and the stage, a mad-eyed satyr, life size, carries off an unconscious naked girl through a leafy undergrowth.”⁸ Thus Glass discovered that he had transformed one of Duchamp’s favorite paintings housed at one of Duchamp’s favored night clubs.

The catalogue also contained a reference to the restaurant *Le Bœuf à la Mode*. Duchamp had been at the restaurant *Le Bœuf à la Mode* with Suzanne Duchamp, and on April 18, 1929, the Duchamps both signed a postcard to Miss Dreier, Duchamp’s patroness. The card that they signed was of the restaurant, *Le Bœuf à la Mode*, formerly the *Hôtel Mélusine*, one of the best restaurants in Paris. The *enseigne* that appears on the two postcards the *clochard* had given Glass had been done by the painter Swaggers, who ran up debts at this establishment and in order to acquit his debt, made the image on the sign, of a *boeuf habillé à la dernière mode*, an ox dressed up in high fashion, an image of a cross-dressed ox. The ox was coiffed with a plumed bonnet, and wore a shawl on its back. This image from the *enseigne* was much like the image on the card of the restaurant. After much searching, Glass thought he had identified the image on the card signed by the Duchamp family at the *Bœuf à la Mode* restaurant because one corner of the card so resembled the work of the architect, Jean-Jacques Lequeu. Lequeu, known to have been a cross-dresser, turns out also to have been a favorite passion of Duchamp. Indeed, Lequeu (an eighteenth-century architect) had called his architectural drawings “*mes lavis roses*” (my rose washes). This connects him with Duchamp’s *Rose Sélavy*, his feminine alter ego (meaning *Eros, c’est la vie*).

Here, linked across time and space were Lequeu, Swaggers, Duchamp, Glass, and Morin, the nineteenth-century artist who had painted the satyr carrying the woman and that Glass had painted horns on in Pigall’s night club. In the same catalogue of Duchamp’s exhibition in Venice, we learn about Louis Morin from a short description of the cabaret:

Louis Morin has painted the panels on the walls and ceiling, which are also elaborately framed in gold.... In the largest panel, which hangs between the bar and the stage, a mad-eyed satyr, life size, carries off an unconscious naked girl through a leafy undergrowth. Max Bergmann considers that Pigall’s is the most incredible place that he has ever seen.⁹

Morin (1855–1938) had also decorated *le grand magasin du Printemps*. He was well-known for his work using silhouettes at the *Théâtre d’Ombres* of the famous

Montmartre cabaret, Le Chat Noir. In his art he wanted to evoke the nudes of paganism in the festivities and decorations of the artists' balls that were held in the Montmartre nightclubs of that era. Through some mysterious concatenation of events, over the years in which the story unfolded, Glass had been summoned by this auspicious group (Duchamp, Swaggers, Lequeu, Morin) and by the magnetism of places in Paris (Palais Royal, Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle, Le Bœuf à la Mode) to bear witness to the way in which these incidents strike one as being both simultaneously uncanny, coincidental, inexplicable, and also almost predestined, containing occulted meanings that still remain to be deciphered.

Beginning with the *enseigne* outside the restaurant Le Bœuf à la Mode, we may now see “the one in the other,” the ox in feminine attire, the image of a cross-dressed ox. This is the sign that beckons one to enter the “magnetic field” that emanated from the restaurant over the years. It is Duchamp's presence that brings together all the fragments of the story that are separated by time and space. Like the bits of iron filings that are drawn to a magnet following the lines of force, each incident of “*le basard objectif*” is attracted to the Duchamp(ian) magnetic field.

Duchamp also cross-dressed, appearing as his feminine alter-ego, Rose Sélavy (Eros is life). Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* is another cross-gendered hybrid with surrealist flair that opens onto multiple interpretations. What is the meaning of these gender-blendings and hybrid species boundary-crossings such as that of the Celtic deity, Mélusine, half woman, half fish? From a surrealist point of view, these are images of “the one in the other.” In each case we perceive the hybrid merging of the masculine and the feminine, or the human and the non-human, as each gender and species enlarges our perception of the multiple aspects of the self that are fused in the composite image of the often cross-dressed hybrid. The spark resulting from these images is similar to the “convulsive beauty” that Breton predicted would result from the juxtaposing of unrelated or disparate elements in an unexpected fashion. Each of these cross-gendered and species-blended figures constitutes a surrealist image, and radiates the energy that one feels in the presence of surrealist art.

This charged field of hybrid beings is connected to another set of charged signs that recurs in this story—Alan's painting of horns on the satyr and Nadja's identification with Mélusine (also a hybrid), coiffing her hair and placing horns on her forehead. Even Duchamp has placed horns on the head of a satyr in his *Monte Carlo Bond* of 1924.¹⁰ The arc of this story seems to teach us (*enseigne*) about seeing in a diverse, complex, and playful manner that liberates our imaginations.

Glass' large glass box *Pigall's: For Marcel Duchamp and Louis Morin* (1998–2000), is a surrealist fantasy based on the arc of this surrealist adventure, and pays homage to the two artists whose creative energies brought such astounding visitations of

“*le hasard objectif*” into his own creative life. Glass engages in the work of rescue and recovery as he brings to our attention the now largely forgotten creative oeuvres of Morin and Lequeu, both so admired by Duchamp. We note that the “large glass”—all resonances with Duchamp’s *Grand Verre* intended—is composed of two sides. The main large figures, based upon Morin’s image of the satyr carrying the woman, are presented as a huge cutout, permitting us to see through the image to the other side, to see behind the box through the front and vice versa.

At the upper right of the back box, which stands upright on the reverse side of the front box, we find a beautiful breast set in a circle of white fur. The breast relates both to Morin’s carved female breast on the staircase of Pigall’s nightclub, and to Duchamp’s *Prière de Toucher* (*Please Touch*, 1947), a foam-rubber false breast for the deluxe edition of the catalogue for the exhibition, “Le Surréalisme en 1947.” On this glass (box) Alan has also placed a gas lamp, referencing the illuminating gas lamp held by the woman in Duchamp’s last work, *Étant Donnés*, made in secret over a period of twenty years, and revealed to the public after his death. Visible only through two peep holes in a huge wooden door, the intimate and subjective/voyeuristic experience of peeking through the holes is one of the most important features of the Duchamp work.

A fantasy elaboration on this feature is the inclusion of a pair of binoculars and many miniature lenses with perforated holes in Glass’ “large glass” box. Glass’ aesthetic, so different from that of Duchamp, provides us with an experience of “wonder.” Glass has given us—as had Duchamp in *Étant Donnés*—two sides of something marvelous that, like Duchamp’s *Étant Donnés*, also took more than twenty years to unfold.

On the main side of the box, at the top, we find a three-dimensional head of the satyr from Morin’s painting with his horns, as transformed by Glass in the fifties. The image of a horned satyr is also used by Duchamp. In one set of photos by Man Ray taken in 1924 Rose Sélavy is presented as a very fashionable woman, relating this image to that of Le Bœuf dressed *à la dernière mode*. Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, and David Hopkins, in their book on Marcel Duchamp, inform us that as Duchamp once said, “Rose Sélavy was a *femme savante* (intellectual woman), the soap portraits show Duchamp as her male alter ego, an *homme/savon* (soap man).”¹¹

Two works that the artist had to remake from memory for this retrospective because of the difficulties of obtaining the originals are *Quien Teje la Red de los Sueños?* (*Who Weaves the Web of Dreams?*; original 1998, replica 2008) and *Nouvelle Rosée, Nouveau Miel* (original 1963, replica 2008). Both works are emblematic of the most important themes in his oeuvre. In *Quien Teje la Red de los Sueños?* we find many lace-

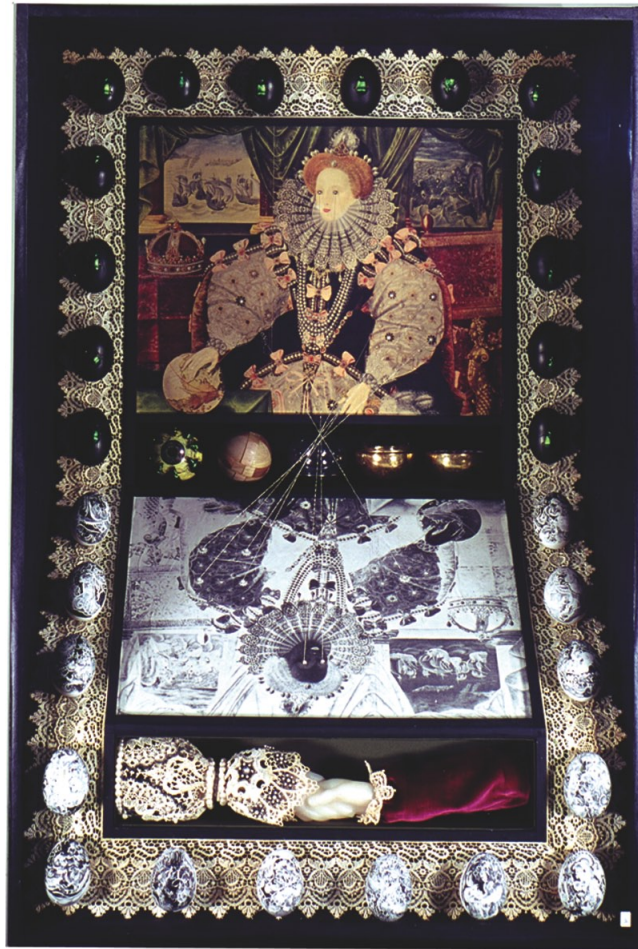


Fig. 4. Alan Glass, *Reina Isabel Con Escarabajos*, 1966, box construction, copyright Alan Glass, permission Tufic Makhoulf Akl, Mexico City, Mexico (2008)

makers' bobbins that weave the web of dreams, attached to a pillow painted with the stars in the constellations of the night sky. The object is a stunning surrealist inquiry into the identity/ies of the *Zurdicos Invisibles*, the invisible dream-weavers or lace-makers, behind the dreams that are woven into reality while we are asleep so that the realms of oneiric vision and of ordinary waking will flow back and forth between each other via "communicating vessels," as Breton had envisioned it. The expan-

sion of the limited frontiers of reality to an enlarged awareness of a more expansive surreality is woven by invisible weavers and lace-makers at night, and alchemically prepared by invisible shamans of sleep as we journey into ever more subtle cosmic times and spaces.

A work in Glass' queens series is *Reina Isabel con Escarabajos* (1966, Fig. 4). Black eggs with luminous beetles appear on the upper half of this box. In general, the symbolism of the scarab from Ancient Egypt is a representation of resurrection from the dead, a symbol of the immortality of the soul after death. It was also believed that there were only male beetles, no females. Thus the beetles are the gendered and cosmic counterpart to the queen and the eggs. They are the masculine element and the "otherworldly" aspect of the continuation of the soul after leaving the body.¹² The eyes of the queen have threads connecting them to the dark or negative reverse image of the queen in the lower half of the box. Here she is shown in the filmic negative of the positive image in the upper box. Could these threads from her eyes that are attached to her image in the dark box beneath be connecting the queen to another version of herself, to the one she, too, will move to after death? Framing the bottom box are white eggs with black designs painted on them. These designs, like those painted on the eggs in *Nouvelle Rosée, Nouveau Miel*, again suggest associations with the multiple spirit beings of Glass' large paintings. Now sacred scarabs are also linked to bees, appearing with eggs and queens, and foretell the fertility of new mornings (*rosée*) and new honey, whether in our world or in a parallel universe beyond death, beyond existence on this earth.

In his *Firefly Portrait* (1985) that lights up on two sides, and his *Sea Urchin Portrait* (1985), both of Queen Elizabeth I, Glass associates her with the light-giving splendor of the fireflies that seem to be constellations alight in the night sky, as well as with the realm of the sea or sea urchins. He suggests that the greatest power behind the creation of the earth, the sea, the sky and humanity may be viewed as a feminine force-field manifesting in multiple forms ranging from that of a queen to that of a firefly.

In *Abejas de Delft (Bees of Delft)* (2001, Fig. 5), Glass places images of Vermeer's *Lacemaker* in the bodies of the bees on the honeycomb. The entire assemblage links bees and lacemakers' spindles with a blue porcelain-of-Delft teapot spouting bees. A spool of golden thread unwinds near an egg on a honeycomb. Other bees are displayed like angels, while the A of *Abeilles* (bees) is made of honeycomb, covered with bees. All the threads, some golden and visible, some barely visible, some white like lace, weave our dreams and our physical reality, connecting all the powers of natural and spiritual, creation, and healing to the feminine worlds of nurturance, rebirth and restoration. The scarabs mark the masculine aspect of otherworldly



Fig. 5. Alan Glass, *Abejas de Delft*, 2001, box construction, copyright Alan Glass, permission Tufic Makhoulouf Akl, Mexico City, Mexico (2008)

creation via the continuity of the soul's infinite existence. Artistry in the kitchen, using eggs, honey and tea, is a potent curative method. Glass' work gives us clues for producing a powerful medicinal brew. Rather than representing the female power behind these natural remedies as a "witch," so often a demonizing symbol for the wise woman who knows the secrets of nature, Glass replaces that negative image with the positive symbol of the queen whose suitors, the fireflies and the bees, assist her in

the sacred tailoring or repairing of the web of life.

In *The Shamanic Way of the Bee*, which recounts the extraordinary experiences of author, shamanic teacher, and beekeeper Simon Buxton, the author narrates his initiation to the path of pollen or the shamanic lineage of bee masters that took place over thirteen years.¹³ Here we learn that the shamanic knowledge of the power of the bee corresponds almost exactly to the way that Glass intuitively and represents bees in his work. Buxton's shamanic teacher explains to him that "dreams and dreaming played a vital role in the Path of Pollen," and that "the dreaming web evolved from the dream work developed by certain Greek mystery schools that perfected the art of incubation dream-sleep."¹⁴ His shamanic teacher further elucidates the goal of dream-incubation, saying that their dream work was a "potent process of accessing other realities and when undertaken with acute vigilance, it brings about a controlled awareness of our dream-life."¹⁵ Linking the bee to dreaming, to the feminine, and to the natural world, is central to the teaching of the path of pollen, in which the shamanic teacher reveals to Buxton that "bee society represents the zenith of the feminine potency of nature."¹⁶

The shamanic song of creation, as rendered by Simon Buxton at the apogee of his ecstatic initiation to the path of pollen when he acquires bee vision, comes to us in the final song, which embodies the ultimate thought transmission, during his bee-dreaming revelation of the origins of creation.

Time moved on and then they came, I witnessed what Adam had seen on the morning of his creation—the miracle, moment by moment, of naked existence... Relationships between the first honeybees and our human ancestors began.¹⁷

The author's testimony to the relationship between bees and humans is also related metaphorically to that between a fully initiated beekeeper and a weaver:

He held his space like a magician on a stage who takes handkerchiefs and paper and makes them fly, or like a *weaver* [italics mine] knitting some strange fabric made from living things. There was something else, too. It was as if he were lit from within, with a sense of love and deep respect that seemed mutual between the man and the bees....¹⁸

Buxton's vision is analogous to the luminous images we glimpse when we peer into the intense light of Glass' master paintings on paper and canvas. They are the ecstatic shamanic visions of the artist-as-shaman and the artist-as-initiate to the

heightened state of perception of the marvelous, one that I have identified as akin to an aboriginal mythic construct and that I refer to as bee dreaming.

- 1 Tufic Makhoul Aki, *A Travers le Cristal d'Alan Glass*, DVD (Grenoble, France: Seven Doc, 2010).
- 2 André Breton, *Nadja* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 32.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 106.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 129.
- 5 Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (New York: Vintage, 1959), 243.
- 6 Gloria Orenstein, "Nadja Revisited: A Feminist Approach," *Dada-Surrealism* 8 (1978): 96-98.
- 7 Marcel Duchamp, Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Palazzo Grassi; Venice, Italy, July, 1993 (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993).
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1990), 139.
- 11 Ades, Cox, Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, 139.
- 12 Isaac Myer, *Scarabs: The History, Manufacture and Religious Symbolism of the Scarabaeus in Ancient Egypt, Phoenicia, Sardinia and Etruria* (Dayton and Paris: Emile Bouillon, 1894).
- 13 Simon Buxton, *The Shamanic Way of the Bee: Ancient Wisdom and Healing Practices of the Bee Masters* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 2004).
- 14 Buxton, 84.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 85.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 98.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 177-78.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 17.