



*Kanopi*, 2008. Slump glass, brass fittings.  
H 36, D 53 ½ in.

PHOTO: MICHAEL CULLEN, TRENT PHOTOGRAPHICS

## Tim Whiten

"Up, Down, In Between"  
Olga Korper Gallery  
Toronto  
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In his latest exhibition, Tim Whiten continues his alchemical explorations into poetic and metaphysical realms. Always grounded in his materials, the artist creates a link between daily life and implicitly transformative allusion.

The central piece in this current exhibition is *Kanopi* (2008), a generously proportioned umbrella that is so umbrella-like, one can imagine picking it up and walking out into the rain. Except, in this case, slumped glass stands in for umbrella fabric, while the fittings are finely wrought brass. There is some marking at the brass seams, caused by flux but suggestive of the way dampness can leak in at the seams of a real umbrella. The glass has been clouded so that the whiteness of the umbrella is in elegant contrast to its brass structure. The piece rests on the gallery floor as if casually dropped there to dry.

A glass umbrella cannot be so easily let fall, of course, and so its utilitarian purpose against the rain is subverted through the inherent fragility of the medium. Invitations are extended, then

withdrawn; psychological barriers are established. The intrinsic beauty of Whiten's work fits well with romantic ideas of walking in the rain, with art historical references (you can't have an umbrella without making Renoir sit up in his grave), and with an aesthetic purity and precision that takes the work far beyond easy romanticism. The irony in creating an everyday item that demands to be enjoyed as an art object nudges the work into the territory of Pop Art were it not for its absolute and transcendent beauty.

Glass is the basis for most of the works, often with accompanying objects and drawings that act as useful companion pieces. For example, there is *Muse* (2005–2008), made from a well-used aluminium cooking pot enhanced by the addition of a twig-like support of hand-forged, welded steel and containing three cast-steel roses painted red, white, and blue. While not technically a crucible, the piece functions as such for the ideas that percolate throughout the exhibition. Alchemy is one of Whiten's many references, as is the rose, both as a personal symbol and for its mystical associations in numerology.

The pristine clarity of glass echoes the purity of mathematical abstraction in *Magic Squares* (2002–2003), in which a square of sandblasted crystal is supported on bevelled

glass supports. Whiten has rendered his personal numbers in overlapping squares that present the viewer with a sense of numinous illumination. Whiten also uses the idea of magic squares in *Mary's Permeating Sign* (2006). In homage to his mother, he has etched her numbers onto a glass replica that recalls her special oversized rolling pin, made for her by his carpenter father. The object rests on a homey pillow with crocheted borders, an object of reverence but also of comfort, and resonant with childhood memory.

*In-Sintillate* (2008) is a glass kaleidoscope that, like *Muse* with its hidden roses, reveals a visual extravagance in its interior—colored beads magnified and multiplied. However, the fragility of the object creates a barrier that is suggestive of the effort and care that must be undergone to attain enlightenment.

Contemplative and meditative, the work continues the artist's evocative and transcendent use of the medium. In the past Whiten has used glass in cast form to create a human skull, a giant ice cube, a broom; he has also made a variety of mirrored constructions. Each piece is fabricated to exquisitely high standards, theoretically rigorous and materially perfected. Whiten credits his working relationship with a skilled and perceptive fabricator for the implementation of some of his ideas.

In keeping with all of Whiten's art, this show delivers an aesthetically rich offering about perception, memory, and enlightenment. There is elegance and economy in the vocabulary, a consistency of articulation and intent as Whiten pulls viewers along on his interior journey.

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