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Michael Scheiner

Michael Scheiner, like Jay Musler, rubbed oil paint into his glass to get past beauty to meaning. Scheiner also used metal and acid-etching to the same effect, and in the '90s he made sculptures as well as vessels. His scale ranged from the modest scientific-implement size to monumental, and he worked individually rather than in series, producing great formal variety by blowing or casting. *Evaporation* (1990) is a two-part work consisting of a plain cylindrical jar and a branched form suggesting bronchii that hangs above it; both are tinged at their bottoms with a rosy pink that fades to white and dissipates toward the top. The work alludes to something lost—breath, or some vital juices—and a consequent emptiness that is as emotional as physical. The opposite extreme of size is *Shimmer* (1993), an ovoid horizontal mass of oil clay into which sheets of greenish commercial glass are jabbed. They bristle out in all directions, making the piece resemble some extraordinary seed pod or caterpillar. Amazingly, the clay mass is raised on the same glass tips. It is a spectacular but decidedly unfriendly effect of stabbing points and slicing edges, to say nothing of crushing weight.

Scheiner (b. 1956), earned his BFA in sculpture and glass from RISD in 1980 and his MFA in the same subjects from Ohio State in 1982. He began work as a glass technician and instructor at RISD in 1983, has designed glass for Dansk International and has fabricated work for artists Jeff Koons, Maya Lin, Kiki Smith and Sherry Levine—experience that he says has provided “a wider vocabulary” for his own work. His is like none of theirs, however. Where a meaning or an emotional tone can be found, his work of the '90s has to do with isolation. He uses reflection to that effect, and also uses opaque blocking via metal either under or over glass.

One of his more curious works is *Duet* (1990), which implies the discomfort or futility of relationships. It consists of two long, intertwining horns of a delicate pink. The mouthpiece of one horn penetrates the bell of the other. That makes them unified and interdependent as they hang together, horizontally, from one rope attached to each. But it also means that the only way to play as a pair would be to accept a blast in the face.

In other works, Scheiner creates glass skins with holes and protrusions that also seem to allude to the body. Such works “bring to mind the perverted minimalism of Eva Hesse, an artist who seems close, in her fascination with organic geometry and the magic of translucent light, to Scheiner’s sensibility.”¹ His social and sexual allusions are thoughtfully tempered by the nature of his material.