

Richard Hirsch
Michael Rogers

Recollections



A visual dialogue between
ceramic artist Richard Hirsch
and glass artist Michael Rogers
by Scott Meyer

Great conversations between individuals owe their quality to several key attributes. Of primary importance is the shared supposition that a truth can be reached between participants, insight not accessible to the solitary individual. For over a year, ceramic artist Richard Hirsch and glass artist Michael Rogers have been involved in an extraordinary exchange, a Gestalt almost completely impossible to imagine when considering each artist's personal path and vastly disparate approaches to content.

Richard Hirsch has defined his career as an insatiable student of other cultures, particularly eastern and particularly ancient. From his early involvement in the development of "American Raku", his sculptures have effortlessly integrated disparate techniques and spiritual dispositions to produce works of timeless and primal poignancy.

In his process, Hirsch is a reducer, endlessly honing and refining his forms to their simplest and most powerful presence. It is the same "less is more" aesthetic evidenced by the work of Noguchi, Brancusi, and Giacometti, artists he holds in greatest esteem. His content is principally the vocabulary of form, color and surface, subtly referencing utility while defying overt narration and cultural specificity. A mortar and pestle, for example, might be discernable in a piece, but presented with such economy that they become only important as stand-ins for larger issues: their anima/animus relationship or as a record of human use and wear over considerable time. For Hirsch, the particular only exists for the purpose of making the universal palpable. His is a point of view similar to the views of Joseph Campbell whose eclectic study of human culture and spirituality yielded a sense of what is shared by all.

Michael Rogers is an intense student of words and their power to transform meaning as they are juxtaposed. By using recognizable objects in surprising contexts, his glass sculpture builds a complexity of associations the way a poet builds depth and resonance in the spaces between words. But he is a visual poet and as such is unrestricted by linear or temporal order. Indeed he refers to his assemblages as "constellations", aggregates that can be understood only in the infinitely diverse relationship the whole has with its parts.

There is an obvious love this artist has for the particular. The objects he collects (his vocabulary) are from this culture, lifted from our lives and the lives of our families. Ornamental birds, doll parts, toys carry with them very specific and personal associations. Someone played with these, handled them and handed them down. We've found them in drawers and chests when moving from homes that were dear and we saved them; made them stand for people, places or eras. Often Rogers takes advantage of the transparency or translucency of his medium to surround his objects with a series of bulbous domes, and places them on special presentation platforms. From their perch and in this surreal "vacuum" they appear always to know more than they can say, muted by their very significance. Of course their silence is an invitation for the viewer to dream.

On the surface, enough common ground for useful exchange between these two sensibilities might not have been anticipated. While not directly in conflict, their ways of getting to the center of their statements begin at opposite poles of a continuum. Fortunately, for both artists, "surface" is not skin-deep. What lies beneath, each object's specific history, is evidenced in its rich and rustic shell. They and their collections share much more than is evident at a glance, much more than the artists thought when they started their work together. For both, the wear of time makes significance possible. The Japanese word "wabi" is most applicable. A sense of the richness of "lived objects" is an important cornerstone as they moved toward and built a shared language. At the heart of their exchange

is their obsession with collecting things. While the character of their treasures differs in content, once sought and salvaged, they are positioned carefully, loved, revisited and savored again. Whether these are objects from other cultures or our own, of bygone utility or even of natural formation both artists need them around. In their homes and studios, from countless niches these snippets of possible vocabulary are encouraged to speak, suggest, question, and to mingle histories that were once separate.

It is also of no small importance that the artists share a "craft medium" heritage. Both clay and glass have their roots in utility and place a high value on process and careful manipulation. The grace with which parts make up the whole is fundamental to the production of art in craft media. Further, the fabrication of work in clay and glass has historically involved more than one solitary artist. Furnaces, kilns and the sheer physicality of the material often foster the formulation of teams gathered around common production goals. While a climate of mutual regard and shared ideas in a creative process is not the sole province of craft media, these are qualities essential for collaborative work. Both Hirsch and Rogers have spent their professional lives in such environments and are comfortable forfeiting portions of their creative autonomy toward grasping what is not possible alone. As their work together evolved, they created a staging area for shared imagination. The question, "What if we...?" celebrates equally the vulnerability and humility necessary to ask and the confidence necessary to answer.

Though the interface between their contributions appears as a spontaneous jam session, the time for play, speculation and "productive dissonance" is post-ceded by compromise, strategy and painstaking execution. It bears saying that the structure and cohesion of this "music" rest on trust, maturity and gentle humor. Predictably, they start with collections of objects. If these gathered "artifacts" were musical notes, Rogers and Hirsch have taken the stage together for the purpose making jazz. Indeed they speak about their process quite like musicians do. At the apex

of full, rich careers, each is in thorough command of his instrument, secure within and therefore able to delight in the other's assertions. The text of their interaction is a rhythmic question and answer, the substance and meaning of each piece is as much about the journey as it is about reaching accord.

For the time being, the two artists have agreed to structure their dialogue with a unifying display device employed as a central housing for each assemblage. The forms and their contents are reminiscent of displays of rare china dolls or of the 18th century "bell jars" within which those referred to as "natural philosophers" housed their curios. Viewed in this first major touring exhibition of this collaboration, each piece feels like the consummation of one phrase, a momentary resting place that is stirred to further action by the next. Like music, common threads of melody surface and resurface assuming subtly or overtly different roles across the series. Realized in ceramic, Hirsch's familiar pestle form, for instance, carries into the piece its associations of weight, age and historical/anthropological significance. Perch a toy figure on it as Rogers might and this somber artifact serves double duty as a display device for whimsy, the elongated body of a figure or the plug sealing an apothecary jar. Repeat the form in glass and it becomes a fragile enclosure for other brief vignettes taking place inside. In one piece, a translucent glass pestle balances precariously, almost threateningly over a series of protective display domes of similar form. The enclosed little figure peers out self-reflectively from the milky overlays of glass probably unable to be heard if he was ever moved to share his thoughts with us verbally. With each transformation, the objects carry with them the history of the other associations, from both inside and outside the boundary of this exhibition. In this fashion, the summation of their visual dialogue is literally a series of overlays that intermittently reveal and conceal in equal measure. These objects, in their fragmented state, removed from their points of origin appear as flickering memory, as echoes, shaped by the contours of an unseen topography. The very effort to protect them from harm holds the figures apart from us and

changes their relationship to us. They are both illuminated and obscured, as are the recalled images of experience when held apart by the passage of time and then transformed by imagination. This makes it incumbent upon the viewer to visit and revisit individual pieces while taking periodic stock of the whole.

Nowhere is the character of this dynamic more in evidence than in the two pieces featuring "Boy Blue". In the first the now familiar pestle form is interpreted in glass, protecting and isolating the figure inside. In what we could consider its sister piece, this melody's theme is turned upside down. Here it is the figure seated precariously atop the display dome and it is the icon of work, the pestle shape that is shown protected and isolated. Does the out-of-scale dye in his lap offer a symbol of the gamble his lofty position suggests? In any case, there he waits patiently as the viewer is allowed to question and to speculate. When considered together, the two pieces offer just enough information upon which personal interpretation is within reach. Together they crackle with possible meaning and inference, each stretching what the other is capable of revealing alone, quite like the artists themselves. To tell us more would be akin to spelling out for the audience who or what "Godot" really is. And like Samuel Beckett, these artists aren't about to say. They'll just lead you to the next piece of dialogue and the next. Thankfully, this exhibition surrounds just one performance, a segment of a session the two will continue as long as the whole remains greater than the sum of its parts.

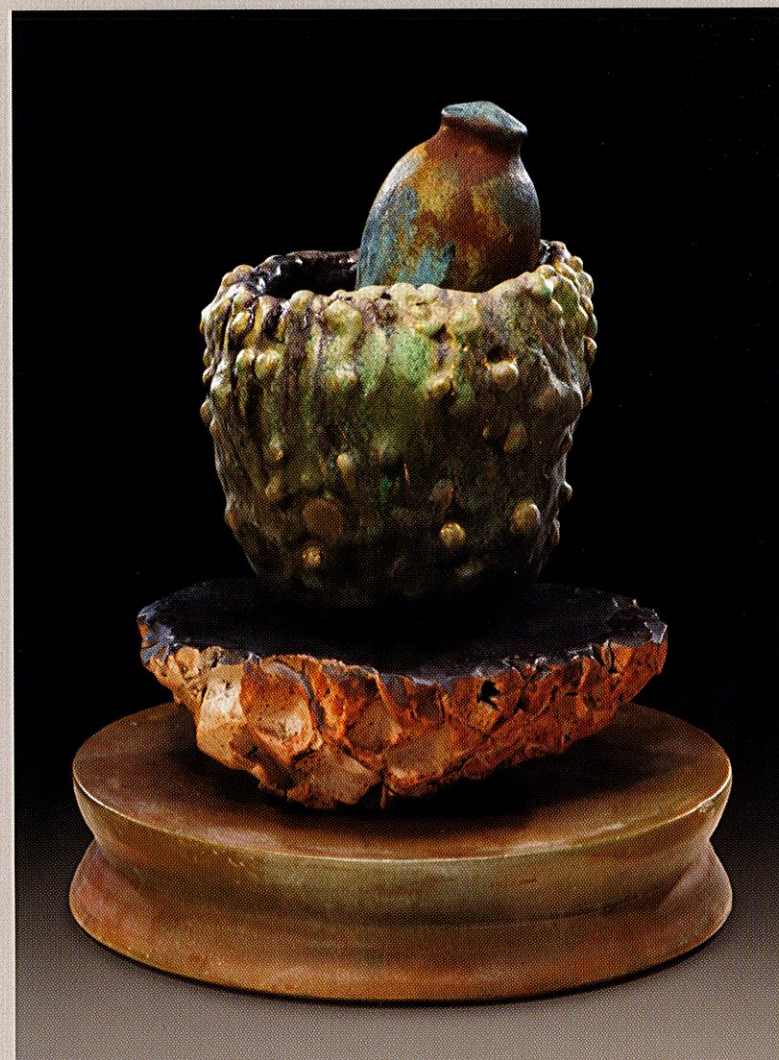
Dr. Scott Meyer is a ceramic sculptor and professor of ceramic art at the University of Montevallo, AL.

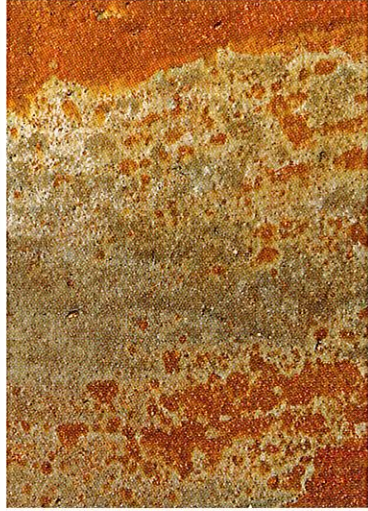


◀ **Richard Hirsch**
Mortar and Pestle #27
 Wood Fired Stoneware
 Raku Green Rust Patina
 22"h x 12"w x 12"d
 2007



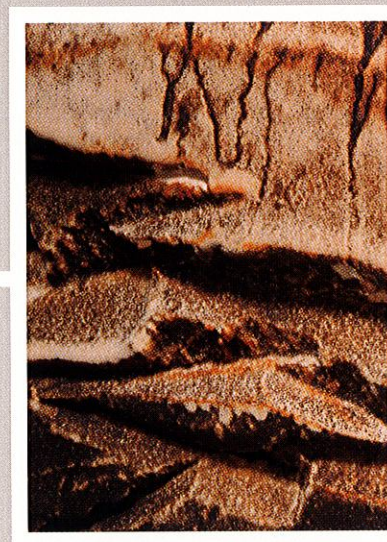
Richard Hirsch ▶
Mortar and Pestle #2
 Low Fired Slips and Glazes
 Raku Rust and Green Patinas
 14"h x 11"w x 11"d
 2006





Richard Hirsch
Altar Bowl with Ladle #1
Low Fired Slips and Glazes
Raku Rust Patina
19"h x 24"w x 24"d
2007





Richard Hirsch
Altar Bowl with Ladle #3
Low Fired Slips and Glazes
Hot Glass, Raku Green Patina
24"h x 31"w x 14"d
2007

Richard Hirsch

Altar Bowl #2

Low Fired Slips and Glazes

Hot Glass, Raku Rust Patina

26"h x 29"w x 15"d

2007



Richard Hirsch

Mortar and Pestle #26

Wood Fired Stoneware Hot Glass

Raku Rust Patina

20.5"h x 11"w x 11"d

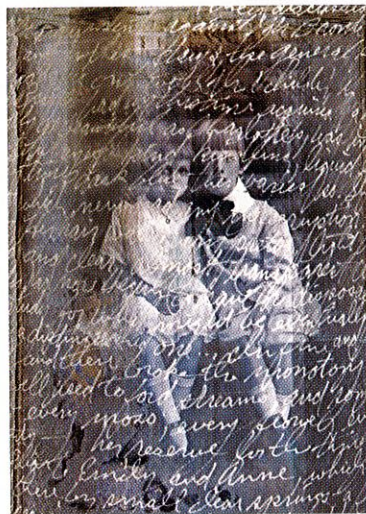
2007



Michael Rogers



◀ **Michael Rogers**
Sisters
 Glass and Found Object
 20"h x 8"w x 8"d
 2007



Michael Rogers ▶
Portrait of Meitner
 Glass and Found Object
 21"h x 4"w x 4"d
 2006



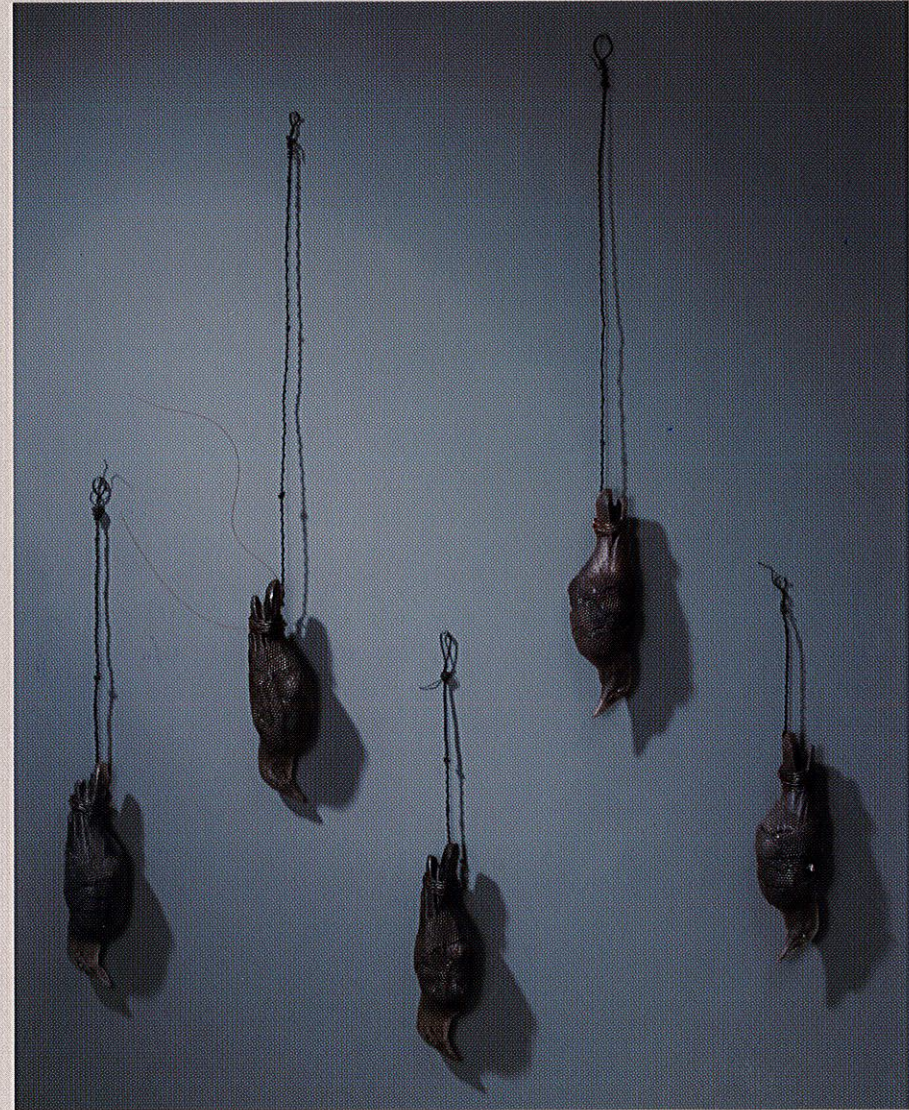


◀ **Michael Rogers**
Alchemist's Mantra
 Glass, Brass Lion, Magnet, Iron Powder
 21"h x 5"w x 5"d
 2007



Michael Rogers ▶
Yea's Key
 Glass and Found Object
 28"h x 6"w x 6"d
 2007





Michael Rogers
Five Crows
Glass
7'h x 5'w x 6"d
2007

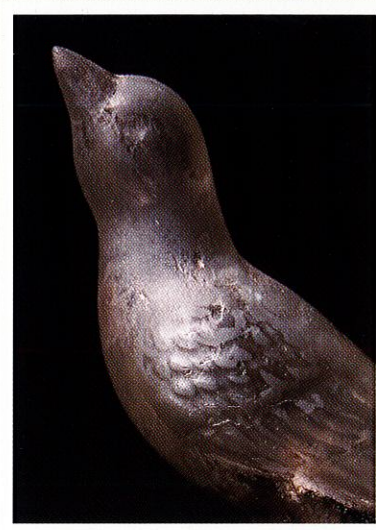


Michael Rogers
Resonance
 Glass and Brass
 17"h x 28"w x 4"d
 2007

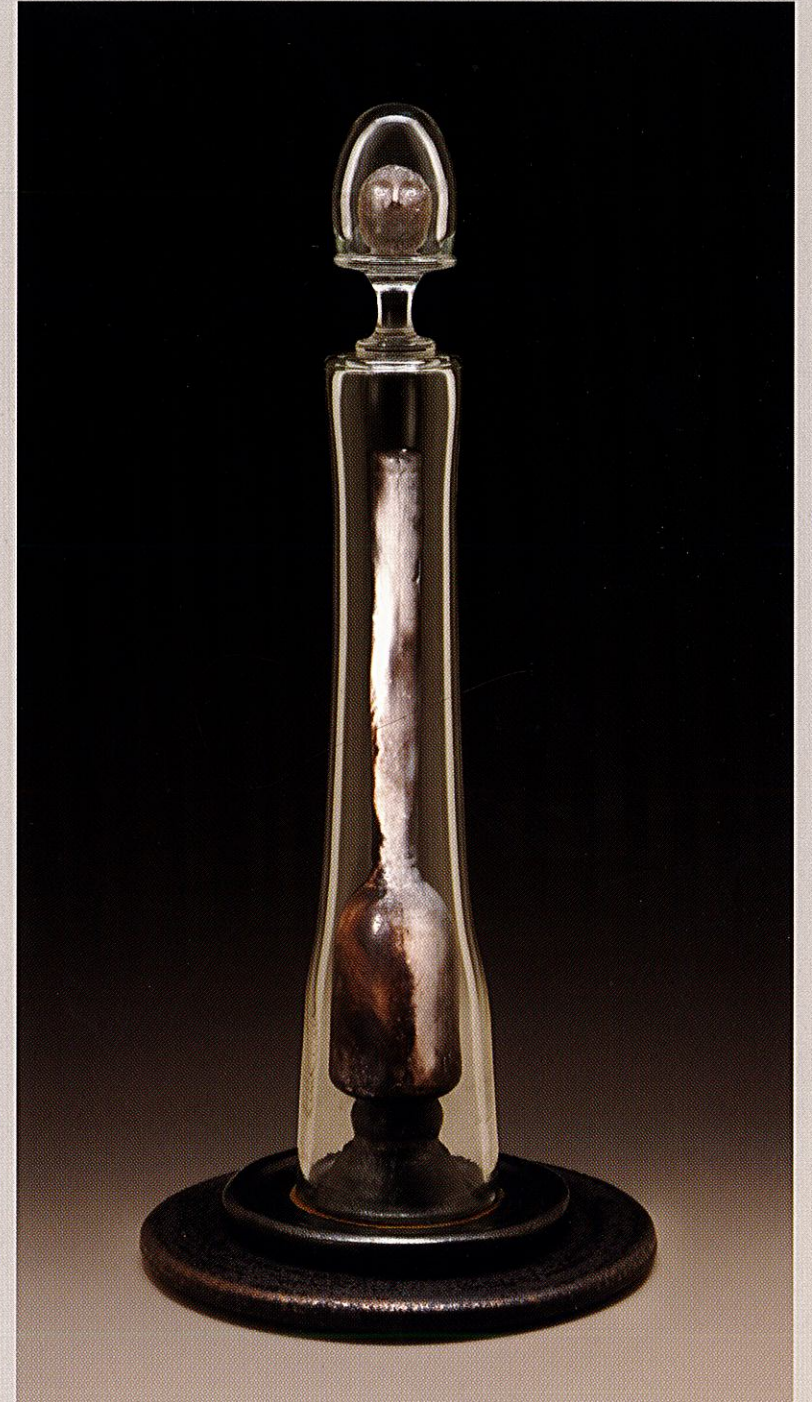




◀ **Richard Hirsch & Michael Rogers**
Grounded
 Glass and Ceramic,
 23"h x 10"w x 10"d
 2007

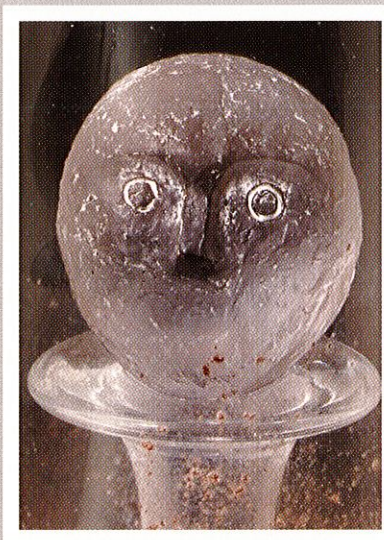


Richard Hirsch & Michael Rogers ▶
Figure
 Glass and Ceramic
 24"h x 10"w x 10"d
 2007

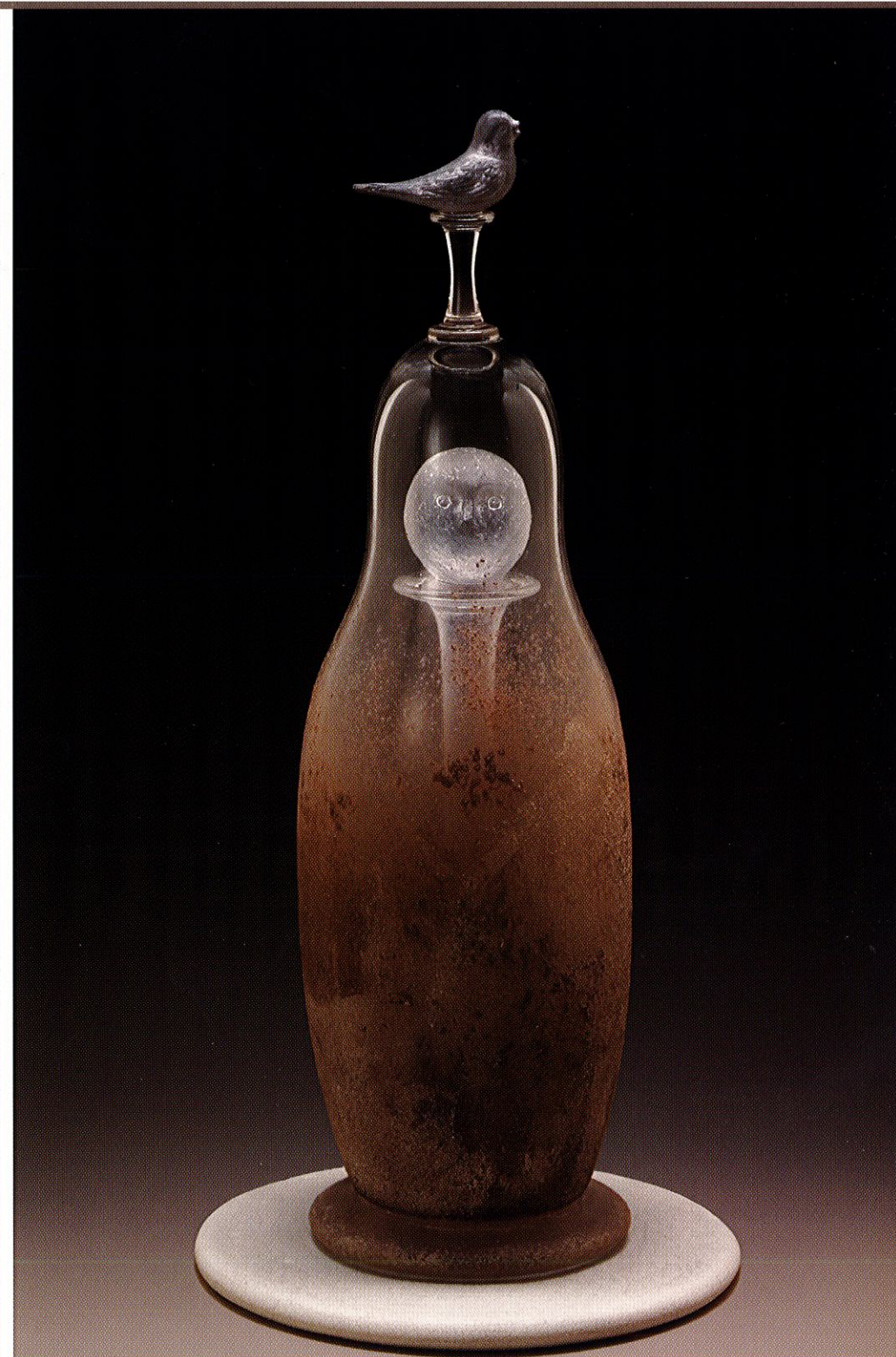




◀ **Richard Hirsch & Michael Rogers**
Time
 Glass and Ceramic
 25"h x 9"w x 9"d
 2007



Richard Hirsch & Michael Rogers ▶
Small Silver Bird
 Glass and Ceramic
 24"h x 11"w x 11"d
 2007





◀ **Richard Hirsch & Michael Rogers**
Floating
 Glass and Ceramic
 28"h x 9"w x 9"d
 2007

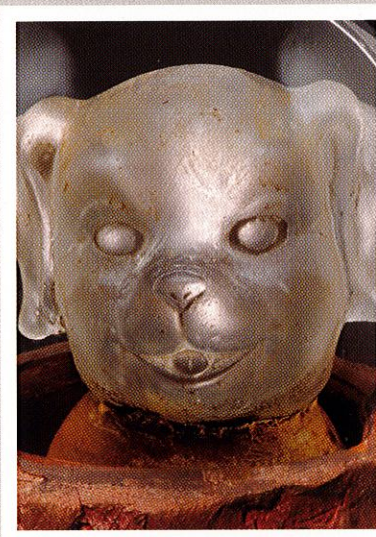


Richard Hirsch & Michael Rogers ▶
Figure
 Glass and Ceramic
 24"h x 12"w x 12"d
 2007





◀ **Richard Hirsch & Michael Rogers**
Locked In
 Glass and Ceramic
 17"h x 9"w x 9"d
 2007

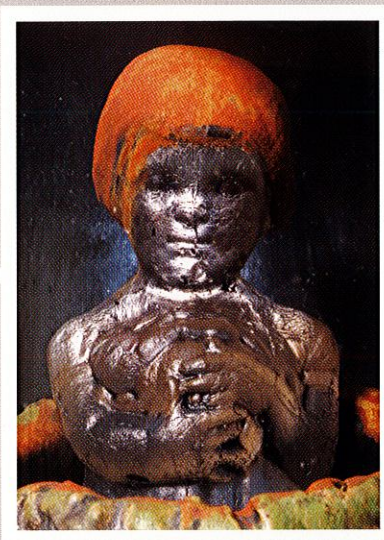


Richard Hirsch & Michael Rogers ▶
Peek-a-boo
 Glass and Ceramic
 24"h x 12"w x 12"d
 2007

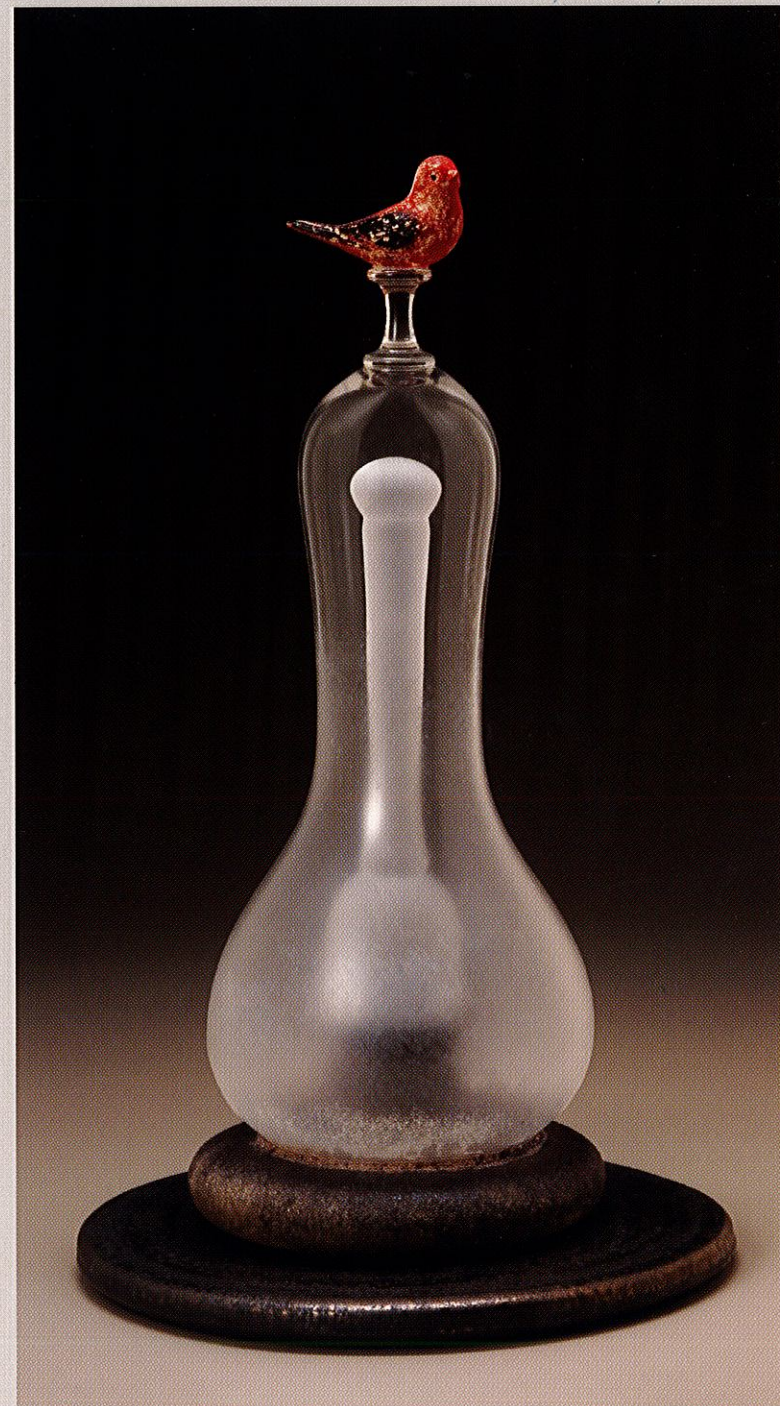


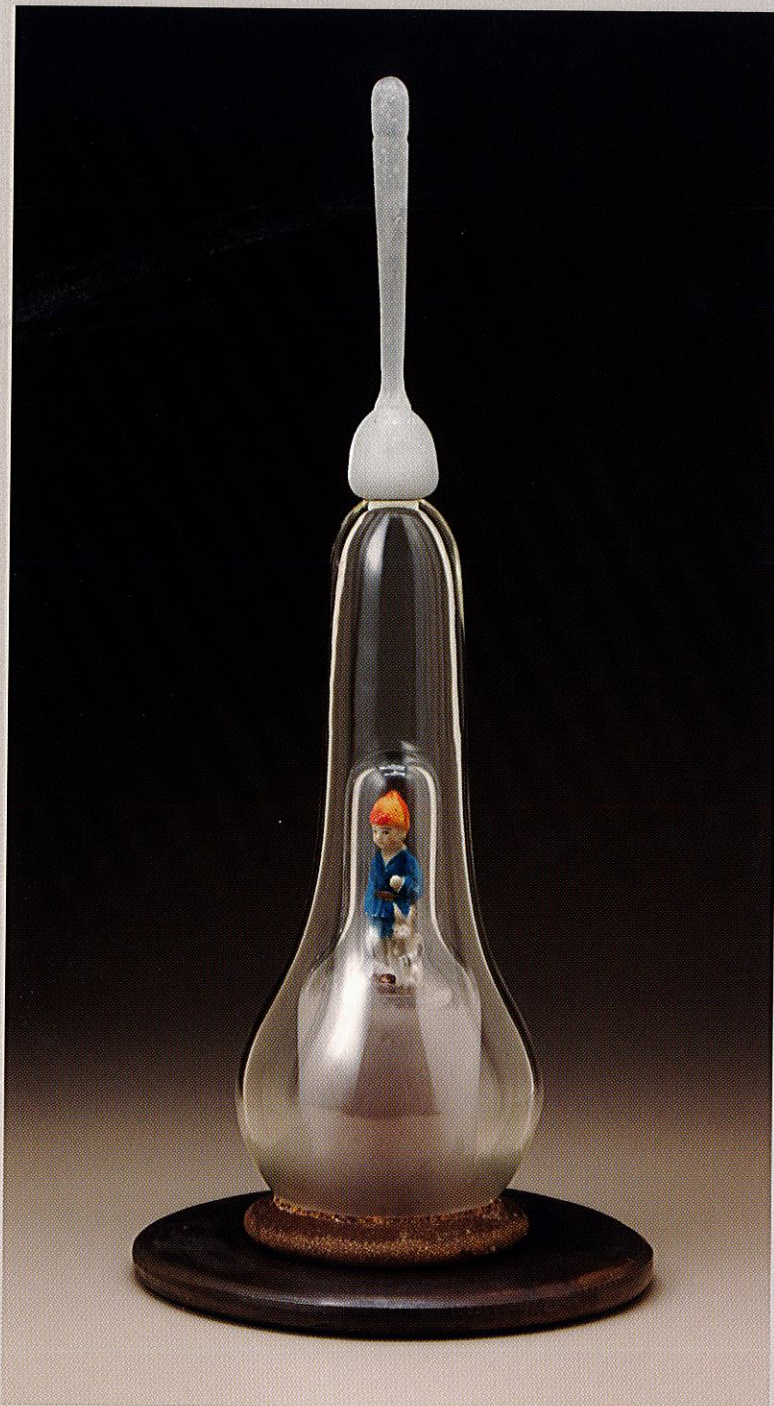


◀ **Richard Hirsch & Michael Rogers**
Impending
 Glass and Ceramic
 32"h x 15"w x 15"d
 2007



Richard Hirsch & Michael Rogers ▶
Red Bird
 Glass and Ceramic,
 21"h x 11"w x 11"d
 2007

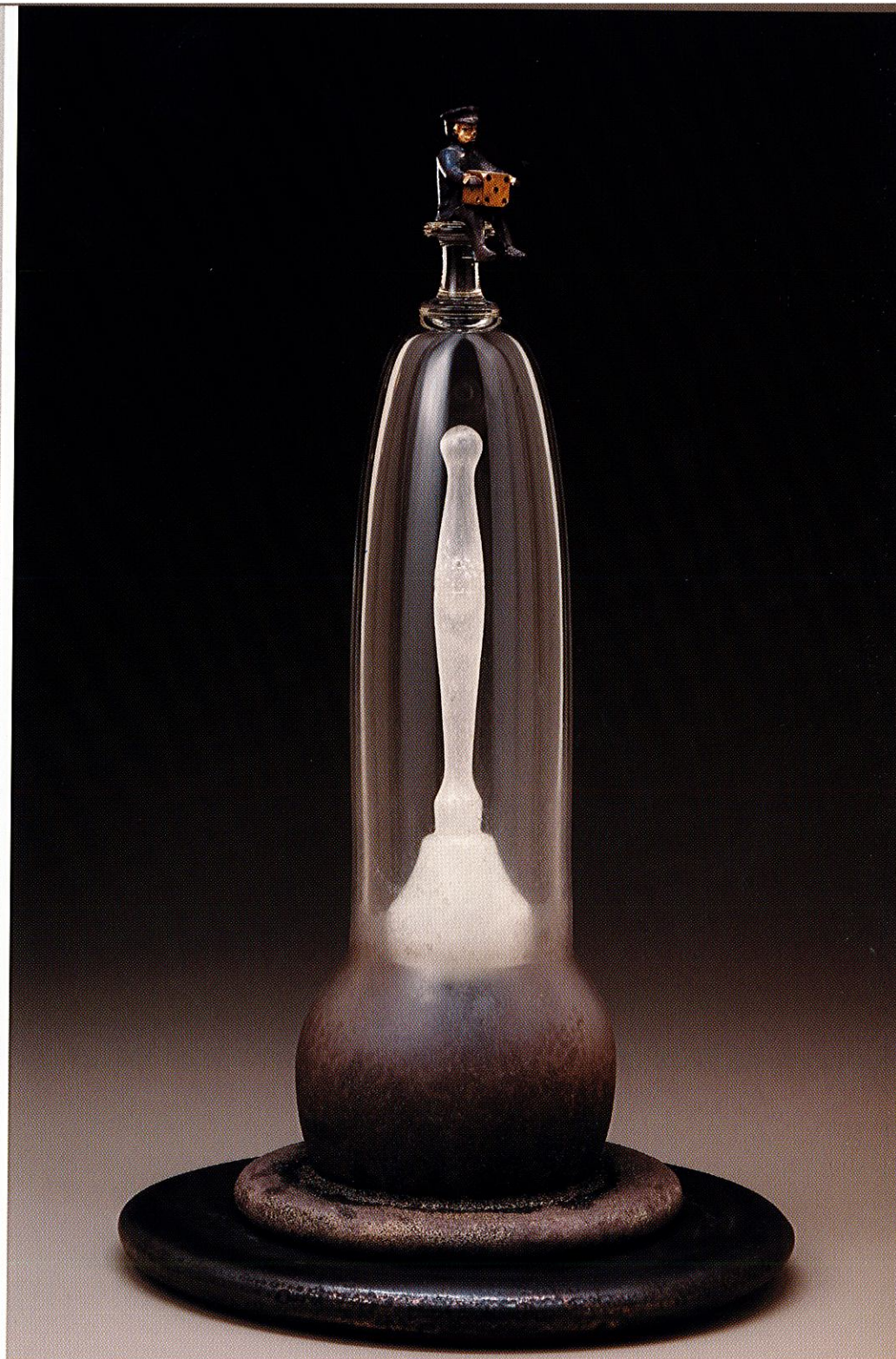




◀ **Richard Hirsch & Michael Rogers**
Blue Boy
 Glass, Ceramic and Found Object
 28"h x 10"w x 10"d
 2007



Richard Hirsch & Michael Rogers ▶
Game of Chance
 Glass, Ceramic and Found Objects
 21"h x 11"w x 11"d
 2007

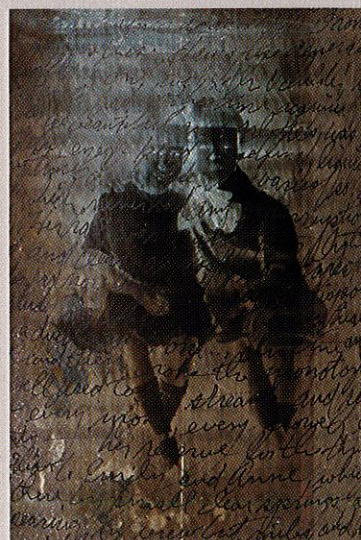
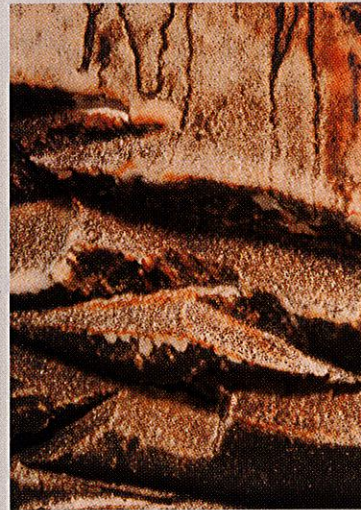


After two very productive work sessions at the Pittsburgh Glass Center and over a year of fabricating sculptures our collaboration culminates in an exhibit titled "Recollections" at the Pittsburgh Glass Center's Hodge Gallery. As this particular collaborative project ends we are delighted to discover that we have arrived at a new beginning, a point in time where we can not only reflect on the work created but also project into the future the many ways we will continue the collaboration. By combining our efforts we have found that we arrive at creative solutions impossible on our own and that discoveries and realizations achieved together begin to feed back into our personal works in positive and informative ways.

Our collaborative project entitled "Recollections" could not have come to fruition without the effort, support and generosity of several individuals and institutions. The catalogue was made possible by the Pittsburgh Glass Center and in part by a Faculty Development Grant awarded to us from the Rochester Institute of Technology. The educational environment at the School for American Crafts, where we are faculty, was essential in facilitating our endeavors in the studios. A generous invitation from the Pittsburgh Glass Center to become "Artists in Residence" provided us with the facilities and resources to execute our collaboration. Pittsburgh Glass Center's phenomenal facility, accommodating staff and skilled assistants enabled us to accomplish an ambitious body of work.

We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to The Union Street Project in Pittsburgh whose staff was incredibly congenial and willing to donate materials and lend their facilities for the ceramic part of our collaboration. A very special thank you to Ilena Finocchi for facilitating the contact with the Union Street Project and assisting us while we were in Pittsburgh. We are also very grateful to Dr. Scott Meyer for his insightful essay in this catalog and for the professionalism of our graphic designer Greg Barwald and photographer Geoff Tesch. Finally our special heartfelt thanks goes to our team, fondly known as "The Damn Good Art Crew". They are a select group, comprised of our School for American Crafts alumni and current graduate students. Each of them, Jessica Julius, Kevin Mulcahy, Minkyu Lee, David Schnuckel, Jeremy Griffith and Andy Koupal, were dedicated, enthusiastic and totally professional throughout. Each member of the crew possesses masterful talents and highly developed skills and were involved in every aspect of the creation of this body of work. Thanks to them we attained a true spirit of collaboration.

Richard Hirsch Michael Rogers



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