

# Krista Israel

## Bard of the Glass Canvas



By Dr. Julie Anne Denton

Situated centrally in the Netherlands lives a glass artist by the name of Krista Israel whose voice is delicate, yet whose message comes across with a strength all its own. Krista works predominantly in flameworked glass but keeps versatile by including *pâte de verre* and kiln formed glass components in her work. From ant babies to fluffy glass dogs, Krista Israel is pushing the boundaries of glass sculpture with her fine art approach.

Catching up with Krista, she states, “Originally, I studied silversmithing, and after two years I stopped this education as the material simply didn’t speak to me. I bumped into a friend in 2003, half a year after I finished with silversmithing. This friend inquired if I was still interested in jewelry making, which I was, so she showed me a bead shop downtown. This store was filled with little glass cups full of beads. After a few months of stringing beads together, I realized that this was not enough for me. I wanted to make the glass myself. I called a glass artist and queried whether she made glass beads. She was a stained glass artist named Moniek van Munster, but she had the equipment for flameworking, so she invited me over for the weekend to have a play together with the torch. We made nothing of interest, but the experience of melting the glass and pulling it was the first step, and I was so thankful for that opportunity.”

### Searching for Further Artistic Expression

One may think the next move would be to buy a flameworking torch, but at that time Krista lived in a small apartment, so that was not a safe option. Further, at this point she didn’t realize that the lamp would become such an important part of her story. She took classes with numerous glass artists in numerous techniques, and after some years she opted to attend—as a part-time student—the state-run glass department in Belgium, IKA (Instituut voor Kunst en Ambracht). Once a week for nine years she drove the 170-mile round trip to IKA. “I took one class in beadmaking previous to attending IKA, and I didn’t continue further as I felt

Top: Virtue Is Bold, And Goodness Never Fearful

Above: Good Hair Is 90% Of the Perfect Selfie, 6.2" x 15.7" x 8.6", borosilicate glass, fabric, silicone, found objects, antique objects, 22 karat gold leaf. Flamework, glass fusing, sewing, gilding, 2021.

Photo by Steven van Kooijk Photography.

it was difficult to narrate in such a small format. Originally the attitude at the glass department relegated flameworking as a process to ‘just beadmaking.’ They told me that they didn’t want to follow that path, and I helped them realize that the torch could be used for further artistic expression. In 2013, I was the first student at IKA to graduate with a higher degree (bachelor’s) and later (2016) a specification degree (master’s) in flameworking.”

When asked how she specifically found flameworking as a tool in her artistic repertoire, Krista explained, “During my education, I discovered a scientific glass studio close to my former hometown. I made an appointment to meet them, and had such a pleasant connection with the owner, we talked the entire afternoon! He offered me a torch to work on one day per week. During my time there he didn’t teach me anything, he just let me play on his father’s bench when he was off work. This is where the idea for my glass fur originated. One day I spied a pulled tube with a drop on the end that caught my eye in a pile of the father’s glass waste on the corner of my work table. The drop picked up the light so beautifully. I began pulling similar glass components, hundreds of them with no idea yet what I was going to do with them. I am truly grateful to Berthold Apple for initiating the inception of my glass journey.”

Upon finishing her bachelor's degree, Krista Israel's graduate work was selected for inclusion in the Coburger Glaspreis—the Coburg Prize for Contemporary Glass—and was added to the collection of the European Museum of Modern Glass in Germany. The prestigious Coburger Glaspreis only happens once every four years and is arguably the most important award for contemporary glass in Europe. "It was an amazing honor to be included in the glass prize event." After a year of working away from the educational environment, Krista felt she needed something more solid to hold on to. She returned to the nurturing environment of the Instituut in Belgium to complete her master's degree and further develop her artistic voice.

## Taking Her Coat Off

The overarching topic of Krista Israel's work is concerned with well-being. "My ability to express my thoughts and feelings all began with my graduate piece of 2013 entitled *Taking My Coat Off*. This piece is an incredibly personal work created from 12,000 individually pulled glass parts. *Taking My Coat Off* is all about getting over being severely bullied when I was young. The bullying of the past had a lasting influence on my life. This work was concerned with letting go of the pain I suffered as a child by metaphorically shedding the protective armor I had created internally. My life-size glass coat allowed me to let go of those hateful years of cruel abuse and embrace my new life as a confident adult. I have never before, nor since, felt such a real urge to get a piece of work out of my system, as I did with that piece."

Through the years, Krista has consistently revisited the topic of well-being, not only ruminating through her own personal head space, but delving further into her existential experience of the spirit of capitalism and the influence of media upon contemporary society. The reason she focuses on these issues is because the impact of modernity—or post-modernity, to be more precise—and its ongoing effect on human culture and politics is something she struggles to understand. The physical creation of any one of her pieces is her journey of discovery, connecting the dots and critiquing the rise of the individual in a rapidly changing and increasingly shallow world. "With my pieces of art, one needs to look beyond the facade and deeper into the reasoning behind their creation. Take the pink poodle, for example. The clue is in the title, *Good Hair Is 90% Of The Perfect Selfie* (2021). On the one hand it is a cute glass dog, but the reflection of the poodle in a pink mirror symbolizes the rose-tinted portrait we paint of our 'perfect' lives on social media. Few will post a negative picture of themselves publicly, and this obsession with the "likes" and the image of our imagined lives I find troublesome. Humor has become a part of my work in recent years as I feel wit makes it



*Top, Left, and Below: Until the Answer Comes, Or a Worry Disappears, 46" x 68.5" x 24", borosilicate glass, vintage rocking chair, table, telephone, Bullseye coarse frit, paint, silicone, resin. Framework, mixed media, 2021. Photo by Steven van Kooijk Photography.*



easier to comprehend complicated issues. *Smells Like Roses But It's All Horseshit* (2020) was a personal commentary on the political conditions of the time. Recognizing the white lies. Being aware of the fake news. Dealing with the reality that these self-serving yarn-spinners are the people running our countries."

### Glass as a Tool to Portray a Story

In terms of artistic influences on Krista Israel's artistic oeuvre, in 2012 she met the now winner of the 2022 incarnation of the hit Netflix series *Blown Away*, glassblowing giant and humble storyteller John Moran. Moran lived in Belgium at that time and he was completing a residency at IKA. He gave a talk about his own work to the students and explained that his approach to glass was not pandering to the prettiness or shininess of the medium. John approached glass as a tool to portray a story that may also include difficult topics. "That talk for me was like an 'Aha' moment! I hadn't realized that there was a possibility to turn the pictures I struggle to verbalize in my head into sculptures that live and breathe in the real world. John Moran's words gave me freedom of expression." An artist whose personal visual language can resonate with the many has the ability to sum up the zeitgeist (spirit of the age) as a bard of the canvas, and Krista Israel has cracked it.

There are also outside influences on Krista's work. "Since I was a child, I watched, was interested in, and have been inspired to act by the news. In the Netherlands there was a youth news program, and at six years old I was already on top of all the world stories. I find it intriguing how things change, and yet singularly, one has no control over how these situations develop. News stories are topics I use in my work, and world events are one of my main influences. I am also interested in animal fur types. I study them. Before I create a piece I will research the fur of the particular animal I would like to reproduce. As a single glass component, animal fur is not so interesting, but once you put a thousand of these pieces of glass fur together, something exciting starts to grow and this is what I find really inspiring."

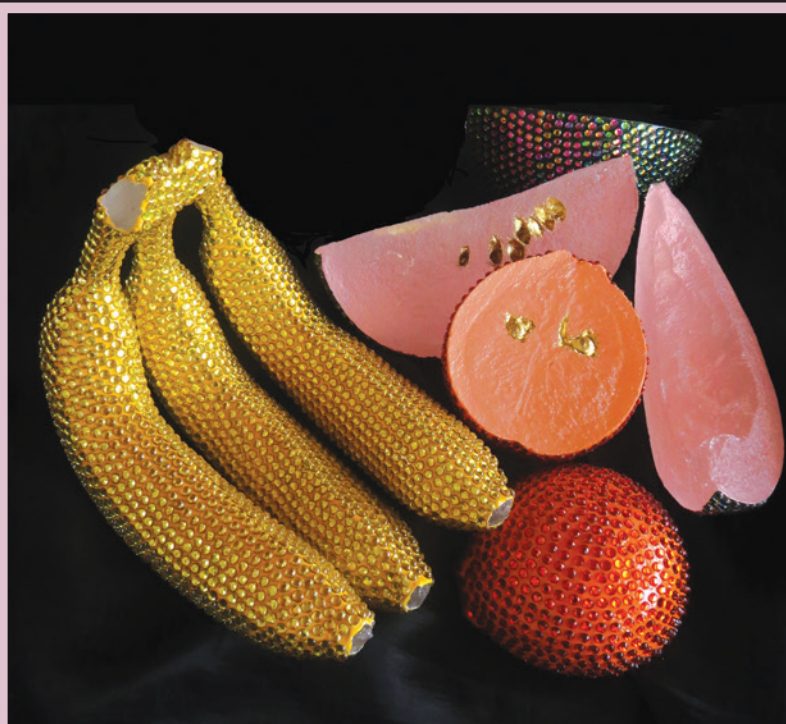
### Flameworking Lights My Fire

Krista, when talking about her relationship with glass, explains, "I have tried numerous other materials, but they all put my fire out! From the moment I placed that first glass rod in the flame, I was sold. Glass is extremely challenging, and it continues to fascinate me. I love it! I just can't help myself." When Krista is flameworking, her technique sends her into a meditative state, at one in the now with her material, with no past and no future to consider. "I am using a lot of kiln casting in my current work. I enjoy casting immensely as it's messier and more removed. I enjoy the immediacy of flameworking, and I like the inherent differences between the two techniques. Predominantly I use clear borosilicate glass to flamework with, as it does not detract from the narrative of my pieces. In 2019, I first used pink glass in my work, and I was rather surprised by the effect a color change can have and how differently people respond to that color. Of late, I have been broadening my flamework skills by using a hand torch and heat-proof plate to create two-dimensional structures from borosilicate."

A typical day for Krista Israel involves taking breakfast to her custom-built studio in the back yard of her house. The day begins with a few hours of flameworking fur components in between taking care of the hens. Thereafter, fur assembly begins, which involves painstakingly gluing the pulled glass components onto an armature. In a previous incarnation, Krista was a pastry chef, and she applies the glue in the way a pastry chef would add decorative elements. This method adds further texture to the glass fur—it belongs to the texture in the fur. "I switch a lot between projects; generally I have four on the go at any one time. Sometimes I will be working on the hollow cores of a piece, which take a lot of time to prepare. These cores I have started making in glass fiber and acrylic resin. Previously, I created these cores from pure silicone or fabric, which was not optimal. The fiberglass cores have completely changed my craft and opened a huge door for me. Now I am able to create larger pieces that can support heavy cast components."



Above and Left: *Smells Like Roses But It's All Horseshit*, 8.2" x 17.7" x 13.4", borosilicate glass, silicone, fabric, fake eye lashes, jewelry findings, nylon cord. Flamework, kiln casting, mixed media, 2020. Photo by Steven van Kooijk Photography.



Left: Pussycat, 15.7" x 7.4" x 15", borosilicate glass, silicone, fabric. Flamework, mixed media, 2014. Photo by Steven van Kooijk Photography.

Above: Keeping Up Appearances, life-size, Bullseye casting glass, spray paint, lacquer, glass, rhinestones, twig, 23.75 karat gold leaf. Kiln casting, mixed media, 2019. Photo by Krista Israel.

### Would Grandma Like This Glass?

Currently, Krista Israel is working closely with Habatat Gallery in Detroit on a rolling project called *Not Grandma's Glass*. "This is the second year I have been working on this project together with John Moran, Morgan Peterson, and Joseph Ivacic from last year. I am working on five new pieces that include my baha-saurus, whose individual title is *Virtue Is Bold, and Goodness Never Fearful* (2022)." Four winners from last year and eight new artists are included in the 2022 show, where each month a new artist takes the spotlight with their own vision, their own dreamwork! The artists included in this exhibit are not showing what would be considered "traditional" glass. This move from the classical is Aaron Schey's brainchild to pique the interest of the younger art collectors to glass.

Krista Israel's career continues to go from strength to strength. This year she was one of three winners of the Saxe Emerging Artist Award from the Glass Art Society, USA. She has participated in national and international exhibitions in Belgium, Germany, Ireland, China, Poland, the United States, and the Netherlands. Her work is represented in public collections, including The Corning Museum of Glass, USA; Liling Ceramic Valley Museum, China; Ernsting Stiftung Glasmuseum Alter Hof Herding, Germany; and Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg, Europäische Museum für Modernes Glas, Germany. Her work is represented in the USA by Habatat Galleries and Oooit Art in the Netherlands.

Dr. Julie Anne Denton received her doctorate in 2017, in the combination of sandcast and flameworked glass. She has been schooled in the Italian flameworking tradition and has worked alongside some of the best flameworking and sandcasting artists of the day. Settled in Zürich, Switzerland Julie runs her design firm [www.atelier315.ch](http://www.atelier315.ch) and virtual school [www.zurichglassschool.com](http://www.zurichglassschool.com) from the center of the city. She works with a small team beside her who all care deeply about quality. Julie Anne creates works that resonate beauty, workmanship, and authenticity. Her key themes are people, folklore, nature, and counterculture. She has received worldwide recognition for her storytelling skills as an artist and her technical skills as a glassmaker.

