

The Brooklyn 100: Cybele Maylone, Executive Director of UrbanGlass BY NATALIE RINN

As head of UrbanGlass—the largest public glass studio in the United States, and the only of its kind in New York City—Maylone has led the organization through the final stages of renovating its building in the heart of Fort Greene. Today UrbanGlass is home to a gallery, store, and over 300 artists and designers, working in everything from glassblowing to neon. Maylone supports artists who push the boundaries of what is possible in glass, and challenges the public to think critically about the materials that are all around us.

Tell us a little bit about your work in arts administration/management before you came to UrbanGlass. Did you also, at any point, make art of your own?

I am really drawn to making things myself and am immensely interested in visual culture but I took enough art classes in college to know that art making is not



where my true talent lies! My father was a curator so I sometimes think that my career in the arts was genetically pre-determined. I've worked at a variety of cultural institutions, places that are very big (American Museum of Natural History), medium-sized (New Museum), and very small (apexart) and these positions have given me a great perspective on how varied organizations navigate in New York City.

Admittedly, glass blowing and working is not something we're very familiar with! What drew you to this position and, did you have much of a learning curve when you arrived on the job?

UrbanGlass is unique, in that it is an organization that is home to a studio where artists make work, and is also home to a gallery and a store, and publishes a magazine. I say that UrbanGlass is devoted to making, seeing, and thinking about art, and it is a rare organization that does all three things with equal weight. To be able to work among artists all day, while also connecting the public with new work in the material is incredible. While I knew very little about glass before starting the job, the material is the icing on the cake: it's mesmerizing. Seeing how artists use it is endlessly fascinating. The learning curve has been steep but thankfully I have incredible colleagues who help me to navigate it.

You've recently helped UrbanGlass through a major renovation. With that completed, what is your next challenge, and goal for the future?

UrbanGlass' studios have a long history as a resource for artists who are working in a variety of materials. Robert Rauschenberg and Kiki Smith made significant bodies of work here and today artists like Tauba Auerbach and Janine Antoni are working at UrbanGlass. Despite this rich tradition, I think artists still can find glass mysterious or downright scary. Through things like our Visiting Artist Fellowships or classes that are designed to provide entry to the material, I really want to make UrbanGlass a place that supports a broad range of artists and designers as they explore the possibilities of glass. This has always been a central part of the organization's mission but there is still work to do!

Glass work, I would guess, is not something most people know much about: to the lay person, how does glass, beyond its artistic draw, play into our economic and cultural landscape? What are some of its applications that would surprise people?

One of the amazing things about glass is that it can take many shapes. Visitors to our studios are always surprised to find that we offer neon classes, and then of course there is blown glass, and stained glass, and cast glass, and flameworked glass. The list goes on and on. One of the things I've been particularly fascinated by is the world of scientific glassblowing, where specialized chemistry equipment is made by hand in glass. Universities and scientific labs often have their own flameworker who creates pieces for particular experiments or studies. The technical skills used in this kind of work also have sculptural applications, so we offer scientific glassblowing classes in our studio for artists to learn these techniques for their own projects.

You've said one of your goals at UrbanGlass is to get people to think critically about all materials that are all around us. What are some of the things we can and should be aware of when it comes to the materials that make up our urban (and modern day) landscape?

Because we so often look through glass in order to see something else, it's not a material that is often given much thought. Humans have been making things with glass for thousands of years, and as anyone who has ever dropped an iPhone knows, glass also mediates our experience with technology.

The programs in our Agnes Varis Art Center are designed to force visitors to ask questions and look closer at glass and the ways that artists use it. Our current exhibition "Render: Responding to Glass," features the work of artists, like Ben Degen and Susan Hamburger, whose work represents glass in 2-dimensions through drawings and paintings. The exhibition also features work in glass by artists like Celeste Wilson and Graham Caldwell, and we are asking visitors to participate in the show by making their own drawings in the gallery. How can you render a material that is both transparent and reflective? It is a significant challenge, but also one that I hope will ask visitors to take a closer look at the material that so often disappears.