

# SIMON WARANCH PATTERNS

An activation of the historic  
space with sculptures in glass,  
metal, and wood.

**P** **K**

Pollock-Krasner  
House and Study Center



***Patterns:***  
*Simon Waranch at the*  
*Pollock-Krasner House*

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**Assemblage**  
Exterior, Pollock-Krasner House





# Introduction

**Terri Provencal**

*Editor-in-Chief, Patron Magazine*

The pursuit of artistic excellence is a path that often takes decades to realize. Rarely has an artist achieved renown within a short period of time as the artist Simon Waranch, even more so in the unconventional medium of glass.

Simon began his professional journey while still in high school at the arts magnet Booker T. Washington for the Performing and Visual Arts in Dallas, Texas. A chance encounter with glassblowers on a trip to Murano, Italy then cemented his calling. After learning from the masters, specifically the time-honored reticello technique — glass blown with canes in a criss-cross pattern — he began developing his own amorphous contemporary forms. His years at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit furthered his unique experimentation with these traditional techniques.

Waranch's practice consists of several distinct bodies of work which he classifies according to a playful nomenclature. Wiggles, Skittles, Couples, and People populate his portfolio. It is in Waranch's Duomos, however, which he describes as his “love letter to glass,” that the artist demonstrates his technical acumen. Compared to his improvisational forms, the Duomos are planned and intentional and present a mastery of pattern, meditative qualities, and an artist at ease in his own artistic expression. Simon eschews being categorized as a glass artist, however. He also delves into painting, woodworking, and metal sculpture.

Patterns: Simon Waranch at the Pollock-Krasner House, includes several examples of his non-glass expressions and in turn considers the breadth of this artist's oeuvre and how any true artist's mark is not beholden to one specific medium, but will manifest in their work, regardless of materials, as an inevitable extension of the self.

**Simon Waranch**  
at the Pollock-Krasner House





'HE IS  
OPENING  
UP  
HIS OWN  
PATH  
IN THE  
WORLD  
OF GLASS  
ART'

Interior  
Simon Waranch's home in Dallas, TX





**Mirrored Wiggle**  
2023

## About the artist

**Nancy Cohen Israel**  
*Art Historian*

It all started in Venice. As the birthplace of European luxury glass production, Venice and its innovative, technically precise artists have been breathing life into this ethereal medium since the Middle Ages. In the city known as 'La Serenissima' Simon Waranch was offered his first glimpse into this refined, ancient art.

In the decade since that seminal trip to Venice, undertaken while Waranch was yet a student, his work has been featured in six museum exhibition and in galleries throughout the United States and Canada. Though his forms challenge the boundaries of traditional glassblowing, Venetian techniques have continuously undergirded Waranch's work. He quickly mastered its most complicated procedures, from creating his own caning to transforming it into refined reticello objects. Waranch's formal education has been augmented by study with a litany of contemporary glass masters, including Davide Fuin, the Murano native who continues the rich tradition into which he was born. The influence of American mentors, such as Joe Cariati in Los Angeles, Dante Marioni in Seattle, and William Gudenrath in Corning, New York, whispers through his work. Canadian glass artist, Laura Donefer, is another master with whom he has spent time. Waranch's signature, however, remains uniquely his own. Threading his visual vocabulary into a more traditional canon comes naturally for the Dallas artist. While Venice may inform his work, the patterning found in much of it is quintessentially

Simon. From a young age, he expressed himself through patterns. What were once doodles scribbled on scrap paper have made their way onto his glass vessels, whether through traditional shapes imbued with reticello or on forms created specifically to be palettes for his own version of automatic writing. Waranch's wide creative range reaches into other sculptural media, including wood and metal. In these, the patterns are often the subject.

Exhibiting his work in venues such as the Pollock-Krasner House places Waranch squarely in a tradition of boundary pushers. While his gestural two dimensional works may hint at Abstract Expressionism, others, such as the slumped glass vessels in his Couples series, are wholly contemporary. In these, a pair of forms lean against one another, often appearing deflated. A playful nature permeates his Skittles series. When installed, these brightly colored discs, arranged in seemingly random ways, dance across walls, creating an electric buoyancy. Waranch's deeply saturated palette gives these works a spectacularly rich quality. In the Duomo series, however, clear crystal vessels are infused with a sparer use of color, offering a more traditional elegance. Waranch's broad oeuvre shows the full range of an artist with an insatiable curiosity about his chosen medium.

It is important to note that Waranch grew up in a family of artists. Reaching as far back as his paternal great grandmother, his family tree includes at least one painter in each generation, as well as a grandfather who was a concert cellist. While his aunt and uncle are working artists, his father, Barry, used painting as a creative outlet and his in-progress canvases littered the Waranch home. Today, Simon credits Barry as a core influence on his career. What is perhaps most spectacular about Waranch's work is that it is in a never-ending state of evolution. Whether it is a new shape, experimental medium, or reworking of earlier ideas, he is perpetually pushing forward.

**Duomo**  
Parlor, Pollock-Krasner House







**Simon Waranch**  
in the Studio

**Couple**  
with portrait of Pollock and Krasner by Hans Namuth



# Glass as Medium & Glass as Identity

**Matthew K. Ward, Director**

*Pollock-Krasner House And Study Center*

Glass, like ceramic or wood or textile, is a medium sometimes hung about the neck of the artist like an albatross, ascribed like an asterisk beside their name, or stitched like a scarlet letter to their breast. An artist who works primarily in glass is often referred to as a “glass artist.” This is not always meant to deride, but it is, nonetheless, a qualifier. By naming an artist thusly, the medium is given priority over the practitioner.

Why? What distinguishes an artist who works with glass from a glass artist? Why distinguish the one from the other in the first place?

To qualify an artist by their medium suggests that the medium leads the artist, that the formal qualities of said medium take precedence over the intent or expression of the artist. The presence of such a hierarchical structure can be used to define an artist’s practice as craft. In this sense, the qualifier can be interpreted as a destructive device in that it implies that the artist is in actuality a craftsperson in disguise. This interpretation, of course, hinges on a bias for what society deems high art over what society deems craft. An artist or a craftsperson, a “maker” more broadly, who works in service of their medium rather than one who employs their medium in service of their own expression, is often judged harshly, seen as an accessory, a mechanical apparatus. The glass artist, naturally, operates within the confines of glass art, a world apart from that of Art with a capital “A.” For some, this specialization is a point of pride.

These artists are fully satisfied contributing to a medium-specific conversation. Indeed, the structure and standards inherent to medium specificity, the dogma of a given tradition, provides some practitioners their own sense of moral superiority over artists engaged in less clear cut, more ambiguously defined, genres of production. Still, for others, the qualifier disqualifies them from a universal discussion which they may see themselves as a part of.

What, then, of the term “painter”? One might presume that this identifier operates in a similar fashion, however, there is a key difference. In painter, the medium is synthesized with the maker. As opposed to something like “paint artist,” in the word “painter” there is an almost ecstatic union, a transfiguration in which artist and medium become one, a marriage that is transformative and pure. The same could be said for sculptor, printmaker, so on and so forth, but in Western art history none of these carry with them the same cache as “painter,” the author of all authors.

Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner are strongly associated with the medium of paint. You cannot divorce either artist from the medium upon which they wielded so much influence. At the same time, they are also associated with personal expression and individualism. While they are undoubtedly painters, neither Pollock nor Krasner are defined by the medium of paint. This is reinforced when Pollock and Krasner incorporate secondary media into their primary medium. The introduction of new media does not challenge either artist’s identity. This is because, although both artists are strongly associated with their medium, neither artist is actually defined by their medium. For Pollock, Krasner, and artists like them, the term “painter” begins to supersede medium and instead comes to refer to a master for whom “painting” is an act of self expression achievable in mediums other than paint. Painters like Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner redefine the borders of their medium.

As Clement Greenberg declared, “Modernism criticizes from the inside,” and the Modernist uses “characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself...” Greenberg’s Modernist is not led by their medium, but employs their medium in the service of their expression. For such artists, a “painting” is anything made by a “painter.”

It is within this context that we might consider Pollock’s and Krasner’s own use of glass.

In the late 1930s, Jackson Pollock began work on a glass mosaic for the Works Progress Administration. Although the project was ultimately rejected, Pollock’s tenure with the WPA represented, as it did for many of his contemporaries, a financial lifeline which allowed the artist to explore new ideas and techniques. In his WPA mosaic, the viewer notes a quasi-cubist style as well as an all-over approach to composition that would remain consistent throughout his mature abstractions. Glass would appear in those works too. For example, Pollock incorporated crushed glass into 1952’s Blue Poles. While the broken shards are largely obscured beneath layers of paint, they nonetheless serve to build up and complicate the surface of the work, yielding a visceral texture, enhancing the native violence of the artist’s gesture. In this example, Pollock uses glass to accentuate qualities that are essential to his method of painting. In effect, he is painting with glass. In Hans Namuth’s 1951 film documenting Pollock at work, the artist states: “I also use sand, broken glass, pebbles, string, nails, or other foreign matter.” Despite Pollock’s use of foreign matter, there is no question that he is yet a painter painting.

Early in her career, Lee Krasner attended lectures on mosaics at the National Academy. Then, while working for the WPA, she assisted Harry Bowden in designing a glass mosaic. Later, in 1947, at her and Pollock’s Springs home, Krasner began making mosaic tables. These kaleidoscopic works incorporated glass, shells, coins, and jewelry, all set in cement and framed by an antique wagon wheel.



In 1959, she, along with her nephew and fellow artist Ronald Stein, produced a monumental mosaic for 2 Broadway in the Wall Street district of Manhattan. Created only three years after Pollock's death, the 2 Broadway mosaic is a triumphant, and public, demonstration of Krasner's return to work on a grand scale. In none of these examples did Lee Krasner abandon her identity as a painter. When she works with glass, she does not temporarily become, for the duration of the project, a glass artist. She remains Lee Krasner and all media which she uses function in service of that identity.

Within Lee Krasner's Springs home, now the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, visitors find evidence of the artist's affinity for glass in every room. Colored glass ashtrays and matchstick holders, crystalline jewelry boxes, and reclaimed glass buoys decorate shelves, countertops, and bedside tables. The delicate forms of these objects are echoed by the elegant curvature of abundant sea shells, which Krasner collected throughout her life. In *Patterns*, a site-responsive installation by Dallas-based artist Simon Waranch, glass returns to the Pollock-Krasner House.

Waranch is classically trained in Venetian glass blowing techniques, but experiments freely and playfully with the medium. At times, he dances hand in hand with tradition, producing sophisticated treatises on form, odes to a lineage that includes the likes of Lino Tagliapietra Dante Marioni. Still, at other times, Waranch abandons tradition entirely, seizing the dance floor for himself, the romantic waltz giving way to an effervescent improvisation. And yet, even in these "solo" performances, imbued with the reckless joy of eternal youth, formal standards provide the structure from

which true experimentation is allowed its fullest effect. "Glass gives me the freedom to produce whatever I have in my head," says Waranch. Such freedom is possible not in spite of technique, tradition, or craftsmanship, but because of it. As Greenberg alludes to in his aforementioned quote, true experimentation cannot exist in a vacuum. Experimentation must respond to, challenge, or play with tradition in order to possess meaning. And so while Waranch is undoubtedly a consummate craftsman, he refutes the label of glass artist. Glass is his primary medium, the one which excites him most and with which he is most capable, but it is still a means to end, a conduit for the artist's expression of self.

Keeping with Pollock and Krasner's interdisciplinary approach to painting, *Patterns* features work by Waranch in a variety of media. In addition to blown and cast glass sculpture, the exhibition includes steel and wood sculpture, as well as two dimensional mixed media works. Altogether, these works impress upon the viewer a clear sense of who Waranch is as a person and as an artist. His respect and affinity for glass is apparent, but we do not read Waranch strictly according to the lexicon of glass. He is equally adept at conveying joy, whimsy, humor, drama, sensuality, and intimacy in all of his chosen materials. If Waranch's choice of materials and portfolio of forms is too varied to call him a sculptor, then something akin to "maker" feels more fitting than "glass artist."

Like any great craftsman, Waranch reaches for best tool for the job at hand. Like any great artist, that tool is utilized to realize a vision that goes beyond the physical object.



**Untitled (Stainless Steel Sculpture)**  
Living room, Pollock-Krasner House

**Clockwise from left: Vita Petersen, John Little, Gustav Petersen, Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock seated around Krasner's mosaic table in the living room of her home in Springs, April 1949.**

**Photo: Martha Holmes/The LIFE Picture Collection/Shutterstock.**



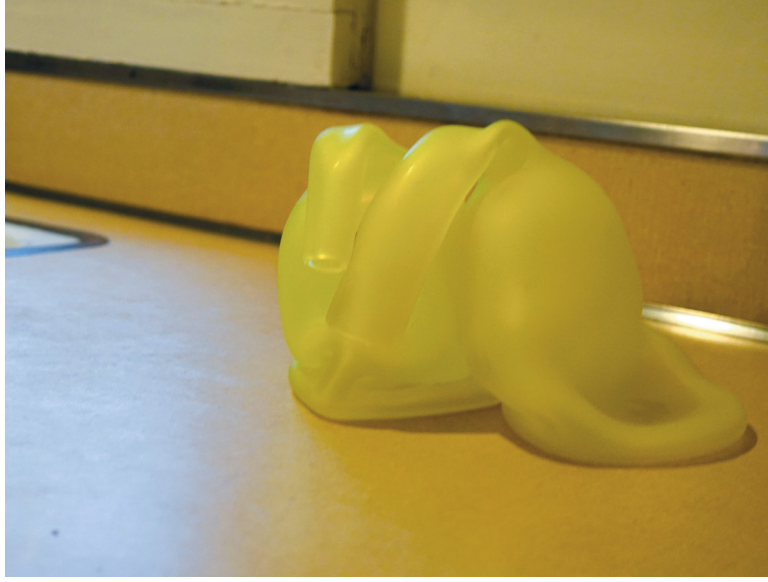


**Couple with Jackson Pollock, Untitled**  
(Red Arc with Horses), 1938

**Still Life**  
Kitchen, Pollock-Krasner House







**Couple**  
Kitchen, Pollock-Krasner House

**Love Letter**  
Kitchen, Pollock-Krasner House





**Mirrored Wiggle**  
Dining table, Pollock-Krasner House





**Baby Foot**  
Foyer, Pollock-Krasner House

**Still Life**  
Living room, Pollock-Krasner House





**Frosted Wiggle**  
Foyer, Pollock-Krasner House



**Glass strips**  
Studio, Pollock-Krasner House

**Simon Waranch**  
Studio, Pollock-Krasner House



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*830 Springs Fireplace Rd  
East Hampton, NY 11937*