

# Glass Menagerie

Reynolds Gallery makes homage to glass, but painting prevails.

by Amy Ritchie

**I**nspired by the mega glass show of Dale Chihuly at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Reynolds Gallery has created a group exhibition exploring the use of glass in contemporary art.

The prescient liquid nature of glass rules in "Refracting Light." There's Maya Lin's "Wavefield," a flattened sculpture of recycled glass that dips and surges like the sea, and Dan Clayman's "Hollow Arc," an upright minimalist sculpture in which the preliminary liquid bubbles are cast forever. The elongated shape refers to the complex chemistry of earth, liquid, air and fire — all players in the realm of glass.

"Some of the pieces are easily identifiable as vessels and may allude to holding volumes of water," Clayman says. "Others are pure abstraction holding only quantities of air and space."

Tara Donovan's centerpiece sculpture actually is made of acrylic and adhesive, but the result looks like large-scale crystal carved from a deep recess of the earth, where the intricacy of temperature and chemical compounds generates majestic forms.

Even photographer Sally Mann's still-life ambrotypes, which are glass plates covered in positive photographic images as a result of the wet-plate collodion



Artist Tara Donovan gets deeply organic with acrylic and adhesive.

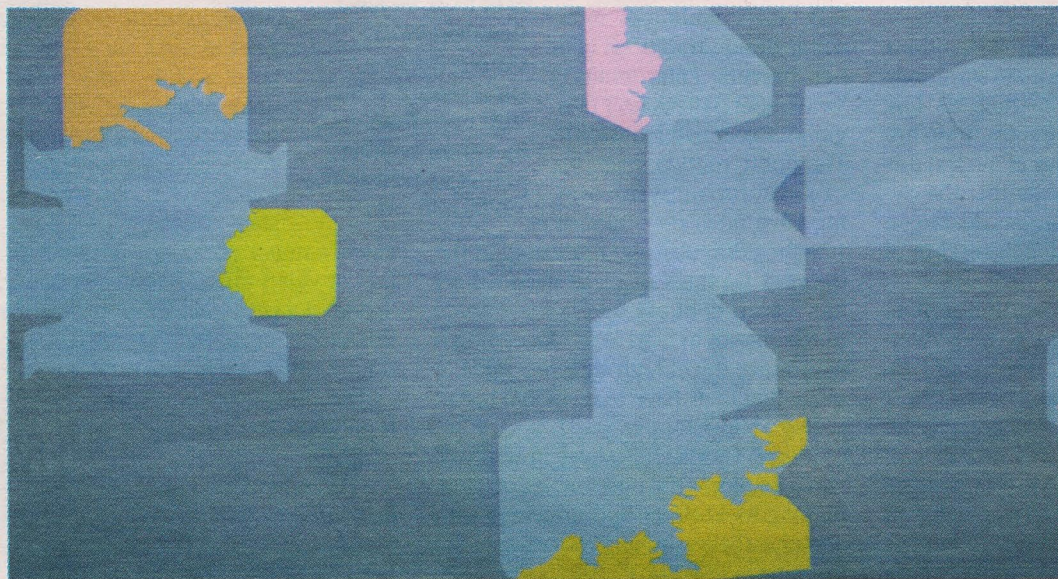
process, divulge liquid secrets. The fruit becomes abstracted and anchors a cascade of vague forms left from the liquid chemicals used in the process. The result is somewhat like seeing your car through a rain-clouded window, void of color.

The most intricate and attention-getting work in the lineup is that of Sarah Mizer. "Blue Ridge Wallpaper" gives no indication that it's glass at all until closer inspection, and even then, clearness or color is apparent but not the characteristics of the medium. Mizer has produced hundreds of tiny, thin and probably quite fragile pieces of glass that are inserted into the wall, like pins in a cushion, creating a vast and elaborate wallpaper. The blue-hued lacy forms bring to mind clouds and mountain vistas, but stepping back a pace or two re-

veals a classic and repetitive wallpaper motif. The installation begs to be backlit at night, in a private space, but how?

This overview of glass art feels somewhat constrained, however, as if glass can go only so far (Mizer excluded). In contrast, in the adjacent room are a series of brightly colored and alluring paintings by Paul Ryan. Some have odd dimensions for standard oil and acrylic paintings: 12 inches by 90 inches. They are highly graphic, precise, boldly colored and textured — a lively pulse on the wall made of forms abstracted from nature and industry alike. An aerial treetop shape sits amid takeout food containers played out as geometry. Ryan is interested in the intersection of nature and culture, the meeting point of wilderness and industry. His work comes from highly intellectual musings

on structuralism, language and the construction of perception, but none of this makes the work any more interesting. It's the use of color, form and space that engages the imagination so uniquely. **S**



Paul Ryan's oddly-sized painting, "binder," and others steal the show.

"Refracting Light" and "On the Hop: New Paintings" by Paul Ryan, are on view at Reynolds Gallery through Dec. 22. For information visit [reynoldsgallery.com](http://reynoldsgallery.com) or call 804-355-6553.