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*OCTOBER 2018 - "THE BEST ART IN THE WORLD"*

Art Made from Mirrors and Glass Comes Together in Kent

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Installation of “Mirrors and Glass” at James Barron Art in Kent, Connecticut. Courtesy James Barron Art

**By PAUL LASTER** October, 2018

I try to apply colors like words that shape poems, like notes that shape music. – Joan Miró

Color—or the lack of it—is a central feature of the art of Jeannette Montgomery Barron and Laura de Santillana, the two artists currently paired together in the engaging exhibition “Mirrors and Glass” at James Barron Art (<http://jamesbarronart.com>) in Kent, Connecticut. Comingled by color and form, their juxtaposed photo and glass works create a conceptual pas de deux for the gallery’s modernist style space.

Light is another shared component in their sublime artworks, with the reflection of light being a basic function of mirrors, which Montgomery Barron strikingly employs in her poetic still lifes, and the absorption and transmission of light being

key factors in our perception of glass, which De Santillana seductively shapes into spellbinding sculptures.

Taking a traditional tabletop mirror as the subject of her stark still lives since the early-1990s, Montgomery Barron transforms an object of self-contemplation into a tool to convey light and her surroundings. Starting the series in black and white in her home in Connecticut, she shifted to color when she moved to Rome in 2003 and brought her pliable prop to this new realm.



Jeannette Montgomery Barron, Roman Mirror #1, 2003. Courtesy James Barron Art

In the exhibition, four of her vintage silver gelatin prints of mirrors are displayed on a wall above four pedestals with De Santillana's hand-blown, compressed glass sculptures, which lyrically shift in tone from frosty white to dark grey. The photographer's Mirror #1 (1991) portrays a black-stemmed looking glass resting on a white ledge while reflecting the bars of a gridded window frame. Creating a cross, the bars look soft and warped in reflection, yet rather ominous in the way they X out the mirror's circular white face, suggesting the sense of being caught in the crosshairs of something unknown.

Mirror #25 (2001) dreamingly captures beads of water lightly cast upon the object's oval surface like freshly fallen raindrops or sadly shed tears, while Mirror #24 (2002) was shot with multiple exposures of the film to construct a grey, ghostly appearance that might be anticipating the deathly darkness of Mirror #21 (2001,) which is fading before our eyes. Relatedly, De Santillana's Quartet 1 and 2 are frosty white flattened forms, created by hand-blowing balloon-shaped, colored glass and then tightly squeezing it to resemble a book, while Quartet 3 and 4 take us into a grey zone, evoking dusk and a moonlit night.



Installation of "Mirrors and Glass" at James Barron Art in Kent, Connecticut. Courtesy James Barron Art

Infusing colors into the process, De Santillana constructs two-part glass works, which beautifully balance red with aqua blue, violet grey with blue green and pale ruby red with an earthy brown, while bringing to mind the Abstract Expressionist paintings of Mark Rothko and Minimalist canvases of Ellsworth Kelly. Rothko is also an inspiration for Montgomery Barron, as evident in *Cyan Mirror #3* (2003-2018) and *Red Mirror #2* (2018,) where the picture plane is split into shifting color fields. However, there is also a bit of an Arte Povera sensibility at play in the

photographer's use of a simple gesture applied to a common object and De Santillana's insertion of substance-altering foil in *Untitled* (2007) and *Red Over Pink, Brass Foil* (2018,) which bring industrial materials into her process, akin to how Luciano Fabro used them.

Conceptually, the face of the mirror performs like a portal, creating the illusion of an opening in the picture plane to another realm. In *Roman Mirror #1* the opening leads to a black hole, while in *Roman Mirror #3* the portal invites passage from the street to the sky, or—more surreally—from the earth to the heavens above. In a similar vein, De Santillana's rectangular glass forms function like title deeds to the rest of the world, in the same way Yves Klein's monochromatic blue canvases served as surrogates for the property he claimed, the universe.



Laura de Santillana, *Untitled*, 2018. Courtesy James Barron Art

Capturing the artist's own breath, which De Santillana's blows into the glass and permanently preserves in its compression, the pieces possess the very essence of life. Adding an ironic twist to this breath of life, research reveals that Egyptians use the same word—one derived from an ancient hieroglyphic resembling a cross but having an oval loop instead of the top arm—to represent both life (and by extension a symbol of life) and a mirror.

The Romans are credited with developing glass mirrors, but Venetian glass makers created the kind of flat, silvered mirrors that we know today. Given that bit of history, along with the facts that Jeannette Montgomery Barron splits her time between Rome and Connecticut and that Laura de Santillana is a third-generation Venetian glass-blower and calls the City of Canals home, makes the meeting of these minds and pairing of their work the perfect match.

The two artists met for the first time in Rome, but rather than all roads leading there, this time they lead to Kent. **WM**





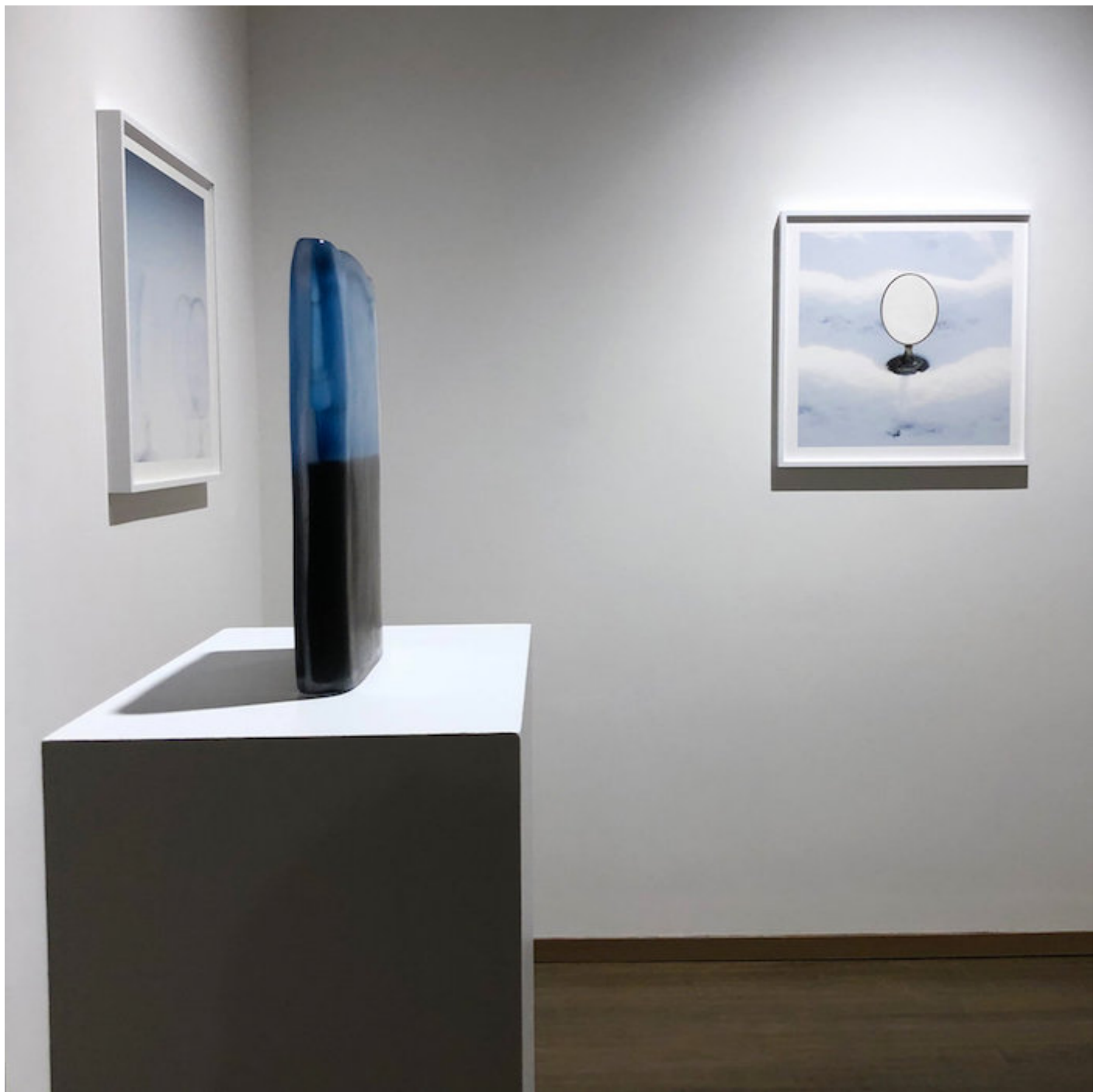
Installation of “Mirrors and Glass” at James Barron Art in Kent, Connecticut. Courtesy James Barron Art



Laura de Santillana, Tokyo-ga (Violet Grey - Blue Green), 2018. Courtesy James Barron Art



Jeannette Montgomery Barron, Mirror #25, NYC, 2001. Courtesy James Barron Art



Installation of "Mirrors and Glass" at James Barron Art in Kent, Connecticut. Courtesy James Barron Art



Laura de Santillana, Tokyo-ga (Sky Blue - Warm Brown), 2018. Courtesy James Barron Art



Jeannette Montgomery Barron, Red Mirror #2, 2018. Courtesy James Barron Art



Laura de Santillana, Tokyo-ga (Rubino - Terra d'Ombra), 2017. Courtesy James Barron Art





Jeannette Montgomery Barron, Roman Mirror #3, 2017. Courtesy James Barron Art

## PAUL LASTER

Paul Laster is a writer, editor, independent curator, artist and lecturer. He is a New York desk editor at ArtAsiaPacific and a contributing editor at Whitehot and artBahrain. He was the founding editor of Artkrush.com and Artspace.com and art editor of Flavorpill.com and Russell Simmons's OneWorld Magazine; started TheDailyBeast.com's art section; and worked as a photojournalist for Artnet.com and Art in America. He is a frequent contributor to Time Out New York, New York Observer, Modern Painters, ArtPulse and ArtInfo.com.





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