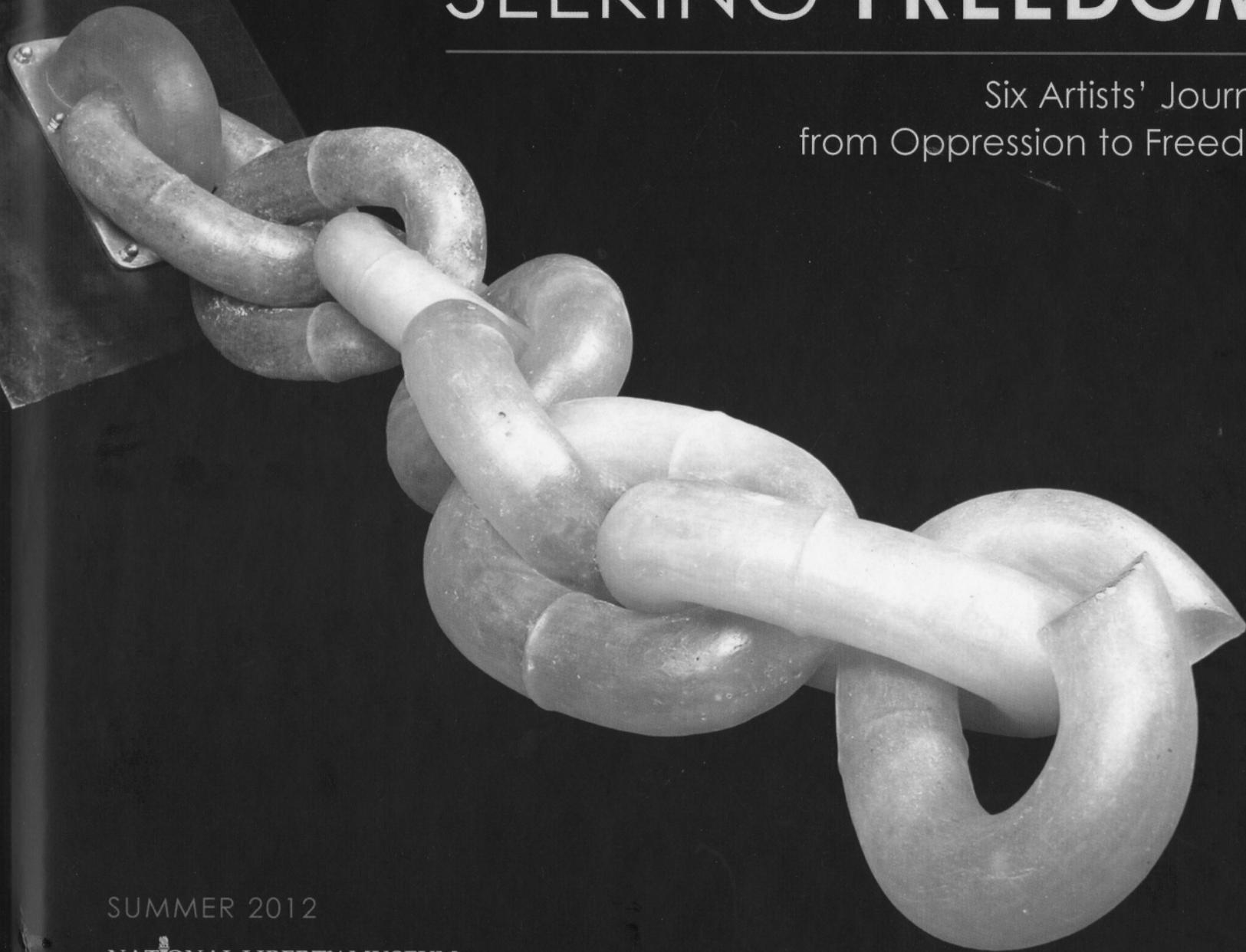


# SEEKING FREEDOM:

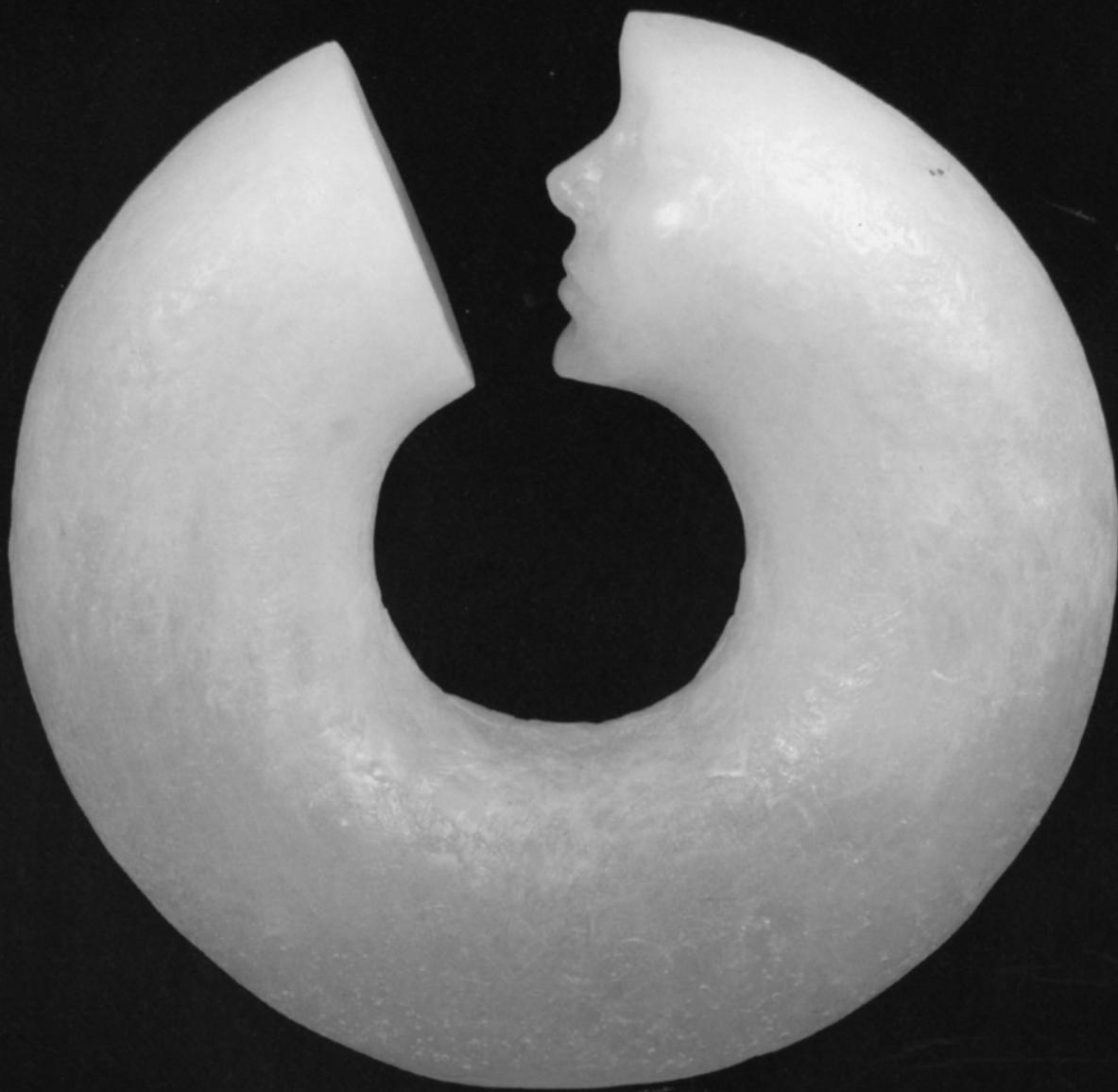
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Six Artists' Journeys  
from Oppression to Freedom.



SUMMER 2012

NATIONAL LIBERTY MUSEUM



*"Vortex", kiln cast glass, 15 x 15 x 5 inches*



"I left Poland with my family in 1960, escaping in the middle of the night in an old fishing boat together with two other families, all hidden in a specially constructed hideaway

in the engine room. Due to a broken compass, we ended up in Sweden. We continued to Copenhagen, Denmark, where the leaky vessel eventually sank.

"In 1978 I attended the School of Applied Arts in Copenhagen, studying ceramics. There I 'discovered' Glass - the first time I opened the door and looked in, I never returned to ceramics. It was like a vision without a picture. I came to Illinois from Denmark in 1982 to study with Joel Philip Myers, head of the glass program at Illinois State University, for one year ... I am still here."<sup>5</sup>

For over thirty years, Walentynowicz has created compelling sculptural works in glass that repeatedly garner national and international attention. He is among the first artists to move beyond the realm of decorative studio glass to create unique works on a highly personal level. He seeks to portray shared human experiences through the implied fragility of glass.

#### **On the WORK:**

"For me, art is not merely a means to produce decorative objects, but a tool for exploration, expression and communication. In my work, there seems to be a constant search: for the unknown, the un-tried, a yearning for change and movement."

Walentynowicz mines the physical characteristics of glass – its fragility and fluidity, its reflections and refractions – to metaphorically and expressively comment

on the emotional vagaries of the human condition.

Interviewed by the Columbus Museum of Art, he said, "Glass insists that we look into it, that we not stop at the surface of what is shown. The emotional states depicted here are points of easily disturbed equilibriums between inner and outer states. The traces of surface, color and texture both hold back and reveal clues. You can look past these external details of identity right into the scars and stress of experience which are still evident and threatening internally though healed on the surface."<sup>6</sup>

"Glass as a material reflects and underlines some of the strongest aspects of my concerns, such as the implied fragility, the visible weaknesses and flaws, the transparent exposure of the inner matter. With the work

*In one's mind, freedom can flourish ...  
a narrow mind is the strongest prison of all.*



I'm doing it would not make sense if the glass looked too perfect, because the work deals with aspects of life, and questions about the human condition. Life isn't perfect; my work can't be perfect either.

"My interest has always been focused on the intimate levels of human relations, the ever-challenged gender roles and the factors shaping our identities. Although mostly working with themes from personal experience, I seek to portray shared human experiences in a way which allows the viewer to expand ... with his or her own experience and memories. It is important to me that the beholder becomes personal with the work rather than trying to 'read it'; remembering that, – In art – as in life, two and two is seldom four."

*In his free-standing pieces, he evokes the effects of precious stone, where translucence, tonal densities, and colorations contribute to a soft, quasi-glow. And Walentynowicz manages surface texture with skill and insight, contributing both to the psychological impact of the piece and the viewer's awareness of it as an art object. — G. Jurek Polanski*

top: Mask "Armor I", reverse painted cast glass, steel, 13 x 5 x 9.5 inches

bottom: Danish news article on his escape

## On INFLUENCES:

"I have always been attracted to the work of American artists from the 60's – 70's, which includes Johns, Rauschenberg, Oldenburg, Warhol, Pollack etc. More than any particular artist, I admired and loved the virility, the innovation, and border breaching energy of those artists / that age, and 30 years ago, I sensed some of that same energy and passion in the (then still new) media of glass. As a young glass artist however, I was inspired and moved by the work of Bertil Valien.

"Working in America – for ten years I studied with and worked for Joel Phillip Myers, one of the pioneers of this 'new' field of glass, – has had a profound effect on my work ... offered much more room to innovation and experimentation ... provided an opportunity to be part of something new, which did not exist elsewhere.

"Although I have often heard from younger artists that they find my work inspiring, I am reluctant to list any here, as 'influenced' by my work. However, two artists who have directly stated having been influenced by my work are Mark Parsons and Karen LaMonte."



## On LIBERTY:

"Coming from a Communist society, I have experienced first hand the difference between free and oppressive societies. It is fairly easy to point out which countries are liberal and progressive, and which are closed and oppressive; it is another matter to take this down to a more personal level.

"In ones mind, freedom can flourish, even in the most oppressive societies. My background has provided me with an open and searching mind and a "never look back" attitude toward life. All this reflects back into my work, as my work, deepest down, is a reflection of me.

"Indeed, a narrow mind is the strongest prison of all. You may enjoy living in a free society, and not even realize that you are living within the confining walls of a closed mind.

"'Prisoner' reflects mental and spiritual imprisonment, while 'Chain', I think, perfectly addresses the notion of freedom and liberty, expressed very much in its large (heavy) scale, together with the last, broken link ..."

*Janusz' works have been included in solo, group, and juried exhibitions at museums and commercial galleries and have been collected by major museums in the United States, France, Denmark, The Netherlands and Taiwan.*



"Prisoner" reverse painted cast glass, steel,  
30 x 19.5 x 9 inches