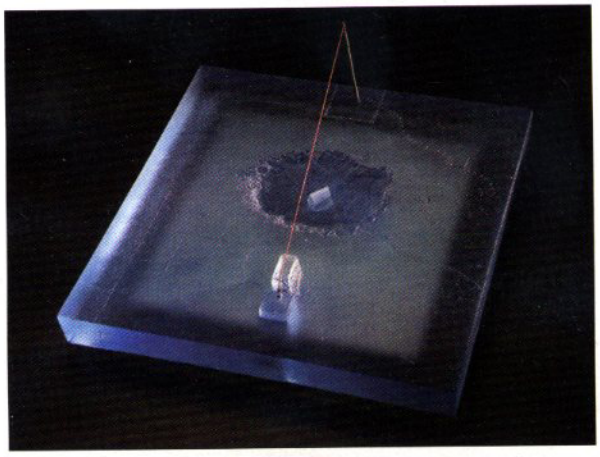
Bertil Vallien

Imago

Palm Desert, California

This selection of recent works by Swedish glass artist Bertil Vallien featured heads, primitive figures, and boat-shaped vessels derived from earlier series, as well as dense, stark landscapes marking a new direction for the artist. These, in particular, expressed a startling intensity.

Among the signature pieces was the ethereal *Resting Head* (2008), which shows a face with a quiet, peaceful expression fully encased within frosty glass. As is common in the best of Vallien's work, the charged piece conveys both a sense of calm and unwavering sadness.



Bertil Vallien, *Desert Snow III*, 2009, cast glass, 8¼" x 17¼" x 17¼". Imago.

Voyage II (2008) continues his series of long, narrow, canoelike forms cast in clear glass and embedded with objects. This piece, containing small masks and ladders, has a hopeful quality, even as it expresses fragility and isolation.

The landscapes, however, were most captivating, especially those that retain hints of recognizability as they push almost to abstraction. For these, Vallien avoided the easy seductions of glass—its clarity, reflectivity, brilliance, and liquid nature—and created pockmarked and sand-encrusted surfaces that mimic ceramic or rusted steel. Several of the landscapes—*Message*, *Desert Snow I*, and *Chance* (all 2008)—were made from black glass and seem to depict charred locales. The remaining ones, including the captivatingly haunting *Core* (2008) and *Desert Snow III* (2009), were created with frosty glass that glows icy blue, suggesting a frozen wasteland.

—Chérie Turner