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TACOMA, WASHINGTON

Karen LaMonte

**Museum of Glass: International
Center for Contemporary Art**

Karen LaMonte's recent solo exhibition "Absence Adorned" crowned nearly a decade's work addressing gender in the form of clothing. Clear or tinted green, her new cast-glass dresses not only use full-length originals, they also employ standing, seated, semi-reclining, and reclining positions in order to suggest a range of actions.

The subject of meaty catalogue essays by Arthur C. Danto and exhibition curator Joli Cho Bailer, LaMonte's work now enters the hallowed art world precinct, light years away from her cutesy, diminutive *Colored Clothesline* (1995) seen in the Tucson Museum of Art-organized touring show, "Calido! Contemporary Warm Glass." From the earlier 12-inch-high works made of slumped glass bottles to the new life-size, Czech factory-



/ LAMONTE: MARTIN POLÁK, MUSEUM OF GLASS

assertions, acceptably moved by the emotional raptures neatly engineered into classical music.

The 40-year-old New York native began this body of work while on a 1999 Fulbright fellowship at UMRUM, the Academy of Art, Architecture and Design in Prague. The "Dress Impressions" raise material as well as conceptual issues, however. Created in collaboration with Czech glass technician Zdeněk Lhoský, they contain extraordinarily realistic details of seams, draperies, folds, appliqués, and embroidery that are stunning to behold. At the same time, the general uniformity of color, size, and scale, despite the differing poses, can become wearying. This is part of the price LaMonte is willing to pay for omitting color to gain conceptual clarity (*Evening Dress Remnant* is in a green-tinted glass that offers some relief). Without color, process is more evident: the sections that are combined, the search for casting seams, and the wonder at the uniformly smooth, matte surfaces. And the art and art historical analogies summoned by both Danto and Bailer (Bernini, Judith Shea, and Howard BenTré, among others) help place LaMonte's comparatively one-note responses but fail to fully make the case for their equal significance.

By contrast, a two-part stage curtain (*Curtain*, 2005) underscores LaMonte's recourse to theatricality in order to breathe life into her ghosts. Their thin, see-through quality is also brittle, making it especially hard to render lively such surrogates of the female figure. To take one other contrasting artist, not mentioned by

Danto and Bailer, Nicholas Africano created cast-glass, full-scale dressed female figures throughout the 1990s and managed to instill some vitality into his effigies.

Left to their own monumentality, LaMonte's "Dress Impressions" come across as rescued cultural artifacts. Recalling the Venus de Milo, also without arms, LaMonte's vanished performers are hauntingly beautiful while remaining tied to the versatile material of their origin with all its assets and limits.

—Matthew Kangas

made castings, LaMonte has followed the requisite steps for the acceptance of glass in the art world: drop color, increase scale, and stress concepts beyond process.

That said, as Danto and Bailer point out, hers is an impressive achievement. In a beautifully spacious installation, the dresses became ghost memories of fin-de-siècle sopranos and pianists, performers caught up in stereotyped gestures of swoons and surprising