

# THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL

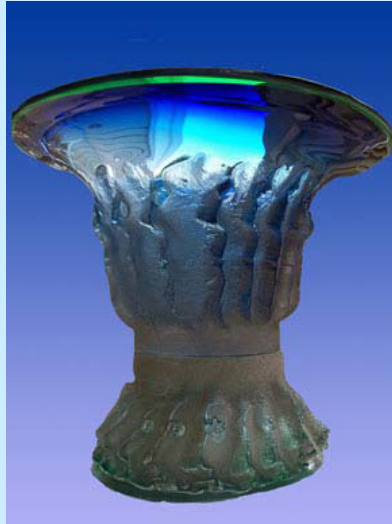
## Art Scene by Bill Van Siclen “A fine home for contemporary glass”

**Sylvie Belanger**  
“Equus Spirit”

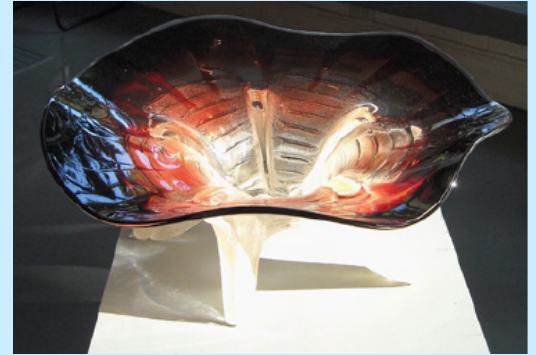


“Horse's Head”

**Neal Drobnis**  
“Ancient Artifacts”



“The Kisser”



“Copper Ruby”

When the Museum of Fine Arts mounted a survey of contemporary American art glass a few years ago, nearly half the contributors had Rhode Island connections. Yet the same state that produced glassmaking stars such as Dale Chihuly, Toots Zynsky, Howard Ben Tre and Steven Weinberg has never ever had a gallery devoted entirely to glass. That is until now.

Last month, a glassmaker and gallery owner named Marianne Spottswood opened the Luniverre Gallery on a quiet stretch of Mill Street, just off Newport's famed Bellevue Avenue. Though the gallery offers a sprinkling of other works — mostly photographs and jewelry — its primary mission is the exhibition and sale of top-notch contemporary glass.

“I always found it rather shocking that a state with so many great glassmakers didn't have a gallery that really specialized in glass,” says Spottswood, a former New York fashion designer who took up glassmaking in the mid-1980s. “So when this space became available earlier, I thought ‘Why not?’ Why not throw caution to the wind and open a glass gallery?”

If that last comment suggests a lack of experience on Spottswood's part, think again. In fact, she owns two other galleries — one in the trendy Marais district of Paris and one in the southern French resort town of Cordes sur Ciel. Both also carry the Luniverre name.

“The Paris gallery came first, in 1998, then the one in Cordes sur Ciel,” Spottswood explains. “I have an apartment in Paris, so it’s easy to keep an eye on things.”

This year, though, Spottswood has been spending most of her time in Newport. First, she spent several months overseeing renovations to the gallery, which occupies a small storefront space at the northwest corner of Touro Park. Among other things, the space, which formerly housed a clothing boutique, needed a fresh coat of paint and new gallery-quality light fixtures.

Then there was the question of what to exhibit. For her opening show, Spottswood decided to highlight her own work, as well as that of two other glassmakers: Neal Drobnis and Sylvie Belanger. Like Spottswood, Drobnis and Belanger specialize in cast glass — a technique in which molten glass is poured in pre-shaped molds, usually made of sand or plaster. When the glass cools, the mold is removed and the finished bowl or sculpture emerges (hopefully) intact.

Spottswood says she was attracted to the technique for several reasons. One is the physical labor involved in the casting process, which is closer to metal forging and casting than it is to traditional glassblowing. Another is the rough-hewn quality of cast glass.

“You can make beautiful things by blowing glass,” Spottswood says. “But you can’t get the texture and thickness that you can with casting. It’s a lot more sculptural.”

Though they share the same technique, Spottswood, Drobnis and Belanger all produce very different kinds of work. Drobnis, who’s based in North Scituate, is known for his striking cast-glass bowls and platters, many of which suggest gnarled root and plant forms. Though his work is completely functional — you can serve appetizers on his platters, for example, or put flowers in one of his vases — they also stand alone as works of contemporary sculpture.

Belanger, who’s based in Montreal, draws on a variety of sources — African masks, pre-Columbian carvings, medieval art and architecture — for her lushly colored glass sculptures. One piece, a large cast-glass horse’s head, looks as if it might have come from the tomb of a Roman emperor. Another work suggests a 3-D version of an illuminated manuscript.

Spottswood, meanwhile, is showing several different bodies of work. One group consists of a series of round cast-glass sculptures, each decorated with an intricate array of patterns and colors. Spottswood, who’s known for using unconventional materials and techniques, created these pieces by pouring hot glass into an unusual kind of mold: old hubcaps.

“They really have some wonderful patterns,” Spottswood says of the hubcaps, which she picks up on the side of the road. “And the best thing of all is they’re free.”

In addition to her sculptures, Spottswood also makes more functional pieces, including jewelry and glassware. “This is what I do for fun,” she says, holding up a wine glass — part of a set of four — whose stem is shaped like a series of half-melted ice cubes.

Spottswood herself is as coolly elegant as any of her sculptures. Born in India, where her military father raised horses for the British cavalry, she was raised in England. In the 1960s, she moved to New York City, where she opened her own HAUTE COUTURE house on Madison Avenue.

“It was very high end — many one-of-a-kind pieces,” she says.

In the 1970s, Spottswood moved back to Europe, eventually settling in Paris. A decade later, feeling restless and looking for a new challenge, she moved back to New York and enrolled in the industrial design program at Pratt Institute. On a whim, she also signed up for a class in glassblowing.

“From the moment I first set foot in the glass studio, I knew it was something I had to do,” she says. “The beauty of the glass, the colors, the process — it was intoxicating.”

Later, Spottswood studied at the Pilchuk Glass School, the glassmaking academy founded by famed glassmaker (and former Rhode Island School Design professor) Dale Chihuly. Located in Stanwood, Wash., not far from Seattle, Pilchuk is considered glassmaking’s Harvard.

“It’s a marvelous place,” Spottswood says. “Just being there, with so many brilliant people and so many glassmakers from all over the world, is inspiring.”

In 1985, Spottswood followed the advice of friends and purchased property in Newport. She also bought an apartment overlooking the Picasso Museum garden in the Marais, the once aristocratic area of Paris that has seen an influx of new galleries, restaurants and museums. She spends part of the year in each city.

“It’s fabulous,” she says. “To be able to live in these two wonderful cities — and now to have a gallery in each place — is a dream come true.”



Marianne Spottswood  
“On The Rocks Goblets”



The Luniverre Gallery is located at 154 Mill St. in Newport, RI. The gallery is open Wednesday through Sunday 12:00 PM – 5:00 PM. For more information please call gallery at (401) 846-9009 or by appointment (401) 849-6887. Visit our website at [www.luniverre.com](http://www.luniverre.com).

**01:00 AM EDT on Thursday, July 17, 2008**