



# TOOTS ZYNSKY

## Colour, the Common Thread

SARAH NICHOLS

Toots Zynsky, an innovative and leading figure in the American studio glass movement from its early days, has explored colour, in its infinite variety, in her vessel sculptures for nearly 40 years. Initially her work in glass was concerned more with the fascinating properties of the material than with colour. But over a three-year period from 1982 to 1985 many things came together. She solved various technical issues with her work which enabled her to make the thin coloured glass threads from which she creates her sculptures. She also completely changed her environment, living in Amsterdam, Venice and Ghana, which all provided critical colour influences, along with music and the natural world that still inspire her today.

For forty years colour and the work of Toots Zynsky have been synonymous. Zynsky builds up the interiors and exteriors of her vessel-form sculptures with vibrant colours. These are made from layer upon layer of her signature 'filet de verre', thin glass threads just over the thickness of a hair that are clear (transparent) and in translucent and opaque colours from a wide-ranging palette. The many thousands of threads needed to create a sculpture allow for an infinite variety of colour effects. (Fig. 1)

Due largely to serendipity, many happy accidents coincided, particularly in the years from 1982 to 1985, which laid the foundations for Zynsky's acclaimed career in glass and her immersion in colour. This period saw her first one-person gallery exhibition at the Theo Portnoy Gallery in New York and her first visit to Europe, a three-week stay that extended into sixteen years. This sojourn enabled her to locate the coloured glass rods produced by the Moretti Company on Murano, which became the staple for her sculptures from then onwards. For three months she worked at the Venini factory on Murano designing two series of vases that went into production. This gave her the opportunity to work with a large

and technically compatible colour palette and to experiment with colour combinations. She also lived and breathed a city defined by light, colour and glass. She rounded off this period in her life with six months in Ghana, which provided another vitally important ingredient in her 'different recipes for life'.<sup>1</sup>

### Zynsky's Journey

In 1969 Zynsky, who was born in Boston in 1951, enrolled at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in Providence. Not quite finding her niche artistically she was ready to leave and investigate other career options until she opened the door to the hot shop of the newly established glass class run by Dale Chihuly.

"The furnaces were roaring, loud music was blaring, everyone was dressed in wild drag and making a pretty dubious looking film, amid a chaotic, spontaneous "choreography" with hot glass being swirled everywhere through the air. I was hooked."<sup>2</sup>

Returning to RISD after a 10 month break, she enrolled in the glass programme. Chihuly actively encouraged experimentation and exploration of the material. He did not so much teach the rudiments of glass blowing

1. Toots Zynsky, *Tierra del Fuego* series, fused and thermoformed glass threads, 1989. Photo courtesy of the artist and the Betsy Rosenfield Gallery, Chicago.

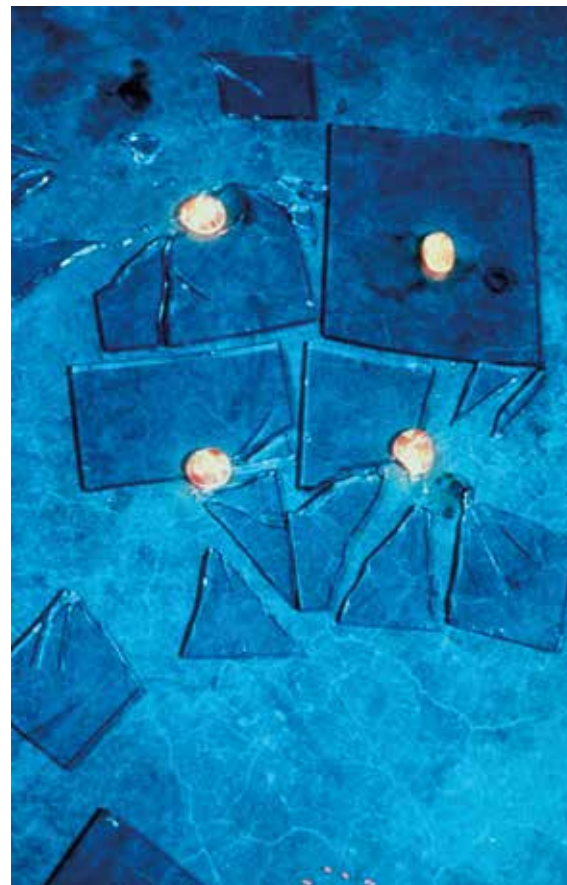




2. Dale Chihuly and Toots Zynsky in the Rhode Island School of Design hot shop, 1971. Photo courtesy of the RISD Archives, Providence.

as facilitate learning from each other and particularly by doing. (Fig. 2) Chihuly and his students were all in it together at the nascence of a new momentum and exciting developments in the American Studio Glass Movement. For example, in the summer of 1971 Zynsky joined Chihuly and other friends and students from RISD to build the now famous Pilchuck Glass School, north of Seattle.<sup>3</sup> Anything and everything seemed possible and Zynsky was one of an important cohort of Chihuly's early students such as Dan Dailey, James Carpenter and Therman Statom who, along with Chihuly, would all go on to shape the American studio glass movement over the next decades.

Zynsky graduated in 1973. Her work included blown vessels with thick glass asymmetrical supports, slumped glass hung



3. Toots Zynsky, *Time/Sound/Release Series*, 1973. Video/simultaneous infra-red photo. Photo Buster Simpson, courtesy of the artist.

from walls or as floor sculptures, often combined with other materials such as wood, metal or sand. She made installations, and video and performance pieces combining hot and cold glass with their explosive interactions. (Fig. 3) Her work was about the fascinating properties of glass and definitely not about colour. Zynsky then took a break from glass, although she continued to sculpt in other materials such as barbed wire and cloth both of which informed her later work in glass. In late 1979 she came back to the medium when she returned to RISD as a special student in the advanced glass programme. The following year she moved to New York and became the assistant director at the second New York Experimental Glass Workshop (now UrbanGlass in Brooklyn, New York) and was instrumental in its early development. Around

this time she started regularly to use glass threads in her work, either attached to or wrapped around blown vessels or as 'nests' for the vessels sit on. (Fig. 4) These threads were hand-pulled. This was not only a laborious process but meant that the threads were not a uniform thickness or length. Importantly, she started to introduce colour into her work, frequently using red or black, which have a special resonance for Zynsky as she considers them life and death colours.<sup>4</sup> (Fig. 5) She also thinks of them as 'difficult colours' as they are both so strong and intense, whereas other colours, such as pink, green or blue, can be

4. Toots Zynsky, *Bound Series*, 1979, blown glass and hot spun glass. This series in which glass threads are spun around blown vessels grew out of Zynsky's work with barbed wire earlier in the decade. Photo, Ed Claycomb, courtesy of the artist.

5. Toots Zynsky, *Keeper of the Trap*, 1982. Blown glass, hot applied glass thread, painted brambles and masking tape, glass twigs. Photo Ed Claycomb, courtesy of the artist.







6. Toots Zynsky, *Clipped Grass*, 1982, fused glass threads. Digital Image courtesy of The Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY

too 'pretty'.<sup>5</sup> However, due to the technical incompatibility of the glass colours available in the United States at the time, she could not easily use these two or other colours together.

The gallerist Theo Portnoy saw Zynsky's work at a faculty show and invited her to have a solo exhibition at her gallery to open the 1982 autumn season. At this time Zynsky started to produce sculptures made solely of fused and slumped glass threads. An early example of this technique is *Clipped Grass*, shown in the Portnoy Gallery exhibition and acquired the same year by the Corning Museum of Glass (Fig. 6). It was the first of many examples of the artist's work the museum would acquire over the years and the first piece she made entirely from threads. The Portnoy exhibition was entitled *Pending*. Zynsky elaborated on the various meanings of the title in a letter written just before the show opened:

'...while waiting, not yet decided, immanent, also with reference to a pendulum, a body suspended from a fixed point so that it may swing freely...Simply the work is quite like myself'.<sup>6</sup>

The nest of threads in *Clipped Grass* were hand pulled so there is a variety in thickness and nuances of colour just as one would expect in newly mown grass. This work can be seen as the starting point for Zynsky's exploration of glass thread sculptures so the exhibition's title was quite prescient.

One advantage of being at the New York Experimental Glass Workshop was that it was a hub for those interested in glass and two visitors had a particular impact on Zynsky's work. The first was a Dutch 'artist's inventor', Mathijs Teunissen van Manen who, having seen Zynsky's first one-person exhibition at the Theo Portnoy Gallery wanted to watch her work. He was horrified at the labour intensiveness of pulling threads by hand. Within 24 hours he had improvised a machine to pull the threads. Over the years van Manen and Zynsky collaborated on new iterations of this machine, which she still uses today to pull her incredibly thin and uniform threads. The second was the Venetian glass artist Gianni Toso, whose demonstration used a wide variety of different coloured Venetian glass rods, in a palette range that was impossible to emulate using the glass available in the United States at the time. Zynsky learnt that these rods were supplied by the Murano firm of Moretti (now Effetre Murano SRL) and its colour palette was so extensive because it had provided glass for mosaics for centuries. Another Venetian mosaic provider, Orsoni, proudly proclaims that it has a colour library of approximately 3,500 colours.<sup>7</sup> Today Effetre produces around 200 different colours.<sup>8</sup>

The next seismic shift occurred around the same time when Zynsky was awarded a 1982 Emerging Visual Artist Fellowship by the National Endowment for the Arts. This enabled her to go to Europe for the first time in 1983. She settled in Amsterdam and went to Venice in search of the Moretti coloured rods. Originally, she intended to go to Europe for three weeks but ended up staying for 16 years. In Venice she stayed with a friend and fellow American glass artist, Tina Auferio, who was working at the Venini factory. Auferio showed

7. Group of warm-up bowls and vases, 1984. Blown glass, designed by Toots Zynsky and made at Venini, Murano by Checco Ongaro and his team. Photo courtesy of the Anna Venini Archive, the Glass Study Centre, Cini Foundation, San Giorgio, Venice.



Zynsky's portfolio to Alessandro de Santillana who then showed it to his father Ludovico, who was running the business, and his wife, Anna. Ludovico, Alessandro and Anna were the son-in-law, grandson and daughter of Paolo Venini, the founder of the company. The de Santillanas were impressed with Zynsky's work and invited her to come to the Venini furnace to work on a sculpture project. Zynsky returned to Venice and Venini in February 1984 and started making 'warm-up' pieces with maestro Francesco 'Checco' Ongaro just to get the feel of the place and experience working with a Muranese glass team.<sup>9</sup> (Fig. 7)

### Venice, Venini and Colour

Like all the Americans before her who had worked at Venini, she was incredibly impressed with the range of colours that were available in the furnaces every day. In 1969 Richard Marquis had been amazed to find tanks of about 20 different colours melted each day, mixed from Venini's own recipes.<sup>10</sup> By 1984 there had been some cut backs but Zynsky would go into the furnace and find up to 12 different colours available on a given day, with which she could experiment in her 'warm-up' pieces. Zynsky approached these colours with new vision and complete freedom. The Venini

experience gave her the opportunity to immerse herself in a large and technically compatible colour palette and to experiment with colour combinations. She later commented that the Italians were surprised by her colour choices.<sup>11</sup> Venini, like the other Murano furnaces, made its own colours and continually experimented to expand the colour range and so differentiate it from other factories. In its 1983 catalogue 61 colours are listed as being used in the product lines (transparent 28, opaques 20, multilayers 11, and alabaster 2). Only 56 are listed the following year (transparents 26, opaque 16, and multilayers 14). Although the alabasters, and light straw, orange red, ruby pink (transparent), and anthracite black, sky blue, grey and green turquoise (opaques) disappeared, lemon (transparent) and bronze, dark blue, and night (multilayers) were added in 1984.<sup>12</sup> Today, Venini claims to be able to make 132 colours.<sup>13</sup>

Just before starting working at Venini, Zynsky made an early comment on her relationship with colour and glass in a magazine article.

'I like the colors. I never used to use color before, but in the past two and a half years it has become very important to me. In glass the color is in the material, it is permanent. You can make an infinite variety of shades of absolutely pure color and you don't have to worry about them fading.'<sup>14</sup>



8. Washing hanging on a line outside a Venetian house, tastefully organized by colour and size, 2008. Photo courtesy of Sarah Nichols

With her immersion in glass colour on Murano, colour was to become central to Zynsky's work.

She had not studied colour theory at RISD but she now became fascinated with this whole new field of study. She taught herself to look at paintings in a new way, focusing on the balance and composition of colours. Being in Europe provided the opportunity to visit world class museums and galleries and being in Venice meant she was immersed in a city of light and colour. Paul Hills, in the preface to his book *Venetian Colour: Marble, Mosaic, Painting and Glass 1250–1550* encapsulates the all-pervasive colour of the city.

"To understand the value of colour in Venice it is necessary to look more widely than at the history of painting... In Venetian luxury manufacturers colour is substantial rather than mimetic. Similarly in the polychrome fabric of Venetian buildings, colour constructs, decorates and signals difference and distinction. Chromatic value inheres in material and pattern – colour builds a world before it imitates one."<sup>15</sup>

In Venice, even today, one is surrounded by colour, not just in the fabric of the city and its luxury products like glass and textiles but in the ephemeral and everyday, from Carnival costumes to washing hanging from the lines outside and between buildings. (Fig. 8)

### Folto and Chiacchiera

Zynsky's sculpture project with Venini had been dependent on the involvement of other Americans, Dale Chihuly and James Carpenter and the Finn, Tapio Wirkkala. For various reasons none of them could come to Venice at the allotted time, so it was abandoned after Zynsky had arrived. However, the de Santillanas liked her 'warm-up' pieces and commissioned her to design two series of vases, now known as *Folto* and *Chiacchiera*, that went into production.<sup>16</sup> A third series was also commissioned but was never produced. Each series was meant to have three vases but only two in the *Chiacchiera* series were produced. Zynsky's signature threads were integral to all her designs for Venini. The bodies of the vessels are made up of two or three different colours of glass, an internal, external and perhaps middle layer in a technique known as *incamiciato* which gives depth and nuance.



The layering of different coloured translucent or opaque glass including *lattimo* (milk white), was well established at Venini and had been a signature of Tomaso Buzzi when he was artistic director of the factory in 1932-33. Buzzi devised a new layering technique consisting of seven to nine ultra-thin glass layers, include one or two of *lattimo* glass. This allowed Buzzi to create 'unusual, sophisticated and intense colour hues'.<sup>17</sup> Zynsky capitalised on the effects of multi-layering different colours in her own later work.

The blowing of the *Chiacchiera* vase is particularly complex as the internal layer has to be pulled over the external and middle layers to form a rounded, hollow lip or rim. Zynsky, a skilled blower herself, had perfected this technique and introduced it to Checco Ongaro, the maestro of the team she worked with. Coloured threads were then spun around the body of the vessel, giving a textured surface. The *Chiacchiera* are derived from Zynsky's earlier work, such as the *Bound* series and others designed in 1979. (see Fig. 4) But whereas these were composed of clear glass vessels covered in clear threads the artist now had tanks of colour at her disposal and was determined to experiment with them. (Fig. 9) In the *Folto* series the threads were encased in the body of the vessel creating a smoother

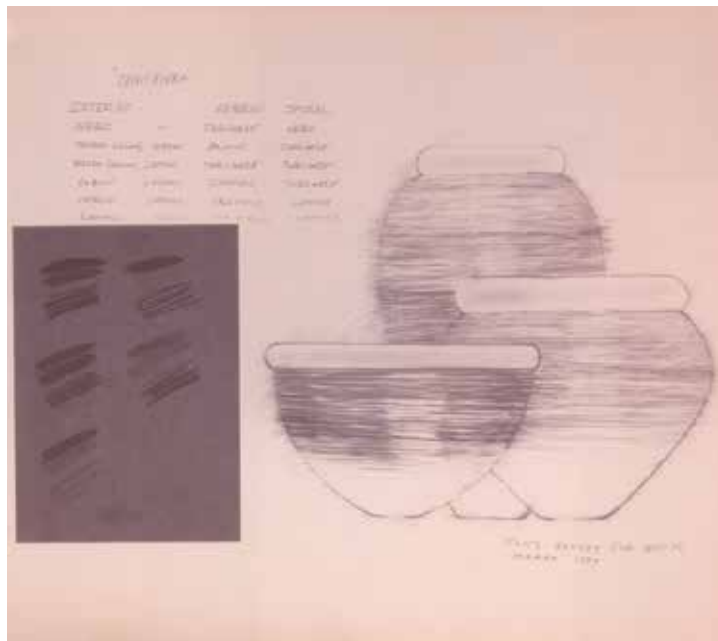
9. A Prototype *Chiacchiera*, 1984. Designed by Toots Zynsky for Venini. This dramatic black and red colourway was not put into production. Photo courtesy of the Anna Venini Archive, the Glass Study Centre, Cini Foundation, San Giorgio, Venice.

10. The three vases in the *Folto* series, 1984, designed by Toots Zynsky for Venini. Private Collection. Photo courtesy of Sylvain Deleu.

effect. Production work meant that Zynsky's designs were scrutinized from a costings and marketing perspective, and she did not have total control over the finished product, in particular the colour combinations chosen for production. For example, she admits she is not happy with the colour combination of the middle sized *Folto* finding it a little 'too sweet'. (Fig. 10) The body is composed of layers of green, milk white and clear glass with threads of green and apple green and ruby, milk white and cyclamen. She would have preferred bolder, more contrasting, if not jarring, colours rather than this somewhat pastel palette.<sup>18</sup>

Her original designs for the *Chiacchiera* had the spun thread beginning just below the rim. (Fig. 11) Two early examples of *Chiacchiera* (both signed 1984), in the Olnick Spanu collection have bodies more or less covered in threads, particularly the larger green and





11. Toots Zynsky, *Drawing for three vessels in the Chiacchiera series with colour notations*. For Venini, March 1984. In the end only two vases, based on the larger vessel in this drawing were put into production. Photo courtesy of the artist.

12. The two vases in the *Chiacchiera* series that were put into production, designed by Toots Zynsky in 1984 for Venini. Private Collection. Photo courtesy of Sylvain Deleu.

black example, whereas later examples have the threads starting much lower down.<sup>19</sup> (Fig. 12) Presumably, this is easier, quicker and therefore cheaper to make. The maestros were always under pressure from the production manager to produce work within set time limits. As the thread pattern is random in the *Folto* series, each vessel is unique and Venini was a keen advocate of what it termed 'the unique edition'. But what is surprising is the difference in the number of threads used to create the patterns in each vase of supposedly the same design. (Fig. 13)

While at Venini, Zynsky also produced her own work using the portable thread-pulling machine and the kiln she had brought with her. At one point a group of four architects visiting the furnace stopped to watch her work with her fused threads.

'The architects were curious and I was nervous and the piece just wasn't going right.



All of a sudden, I reached into the kiln, grabbed the vessel, and gave it a squeeze. Finally, I had the form that I wanted! I was fed up with the piece so I tried something different because I had nothing to lose'.<sup>20</sup>

As the glass was hot she made indentations and so discovered a way of manipulating her sculptures which she has developed over the years.

### Ghana

That same year, 1984, she and Mathijs Teunissen van Manen were also awarded a grant from the newly founded Stichting Klankschap (Soundscape Foundation) in Amsterdam, her home in Europe, to spend six months in Ghana to research and record its music. She set off for Africa later that year, after a trip back to the USA. Although Europe had been a cultural eyeopener and a wonderful opportunity to experience world class museums and galleries and study works of art at first hand, it was still part of the western industrialized world. Africa gave Zynsky a chance,

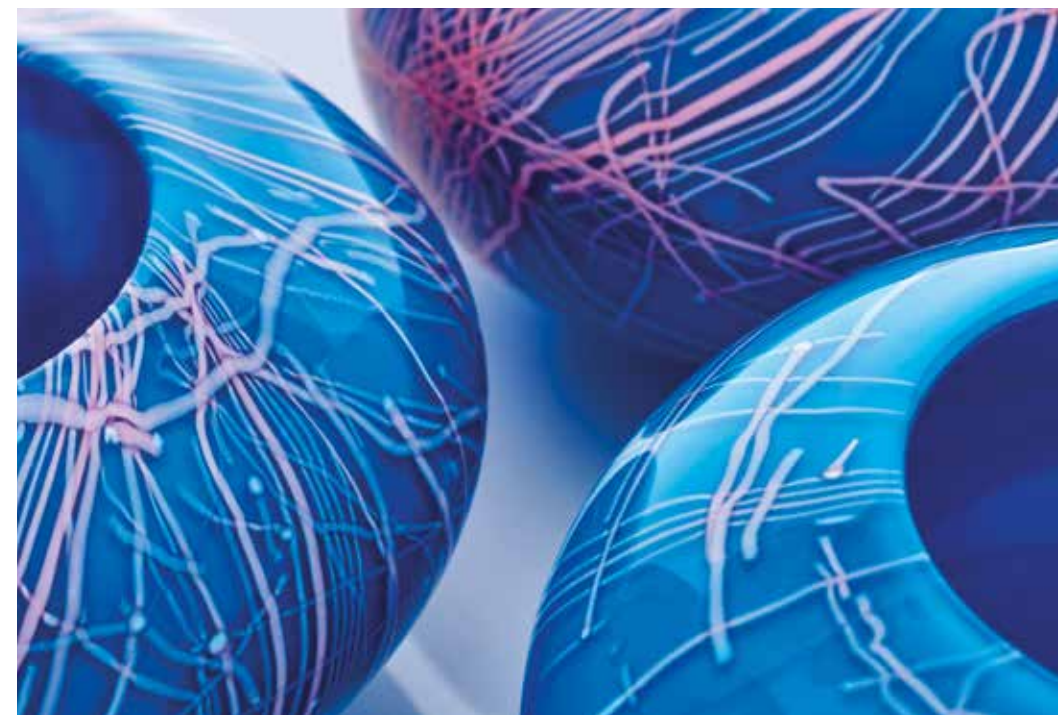
'...to be confronted with very different ideas about life, the world, the universe, spirituality, everything. Ghana was fantastic, it was another world'.<sup>21</sup>

Living there also provided the opportunity to engage with the vessel in a different way and to rethink its significance as a container, not just of material things – visits to the market required shoppers to bring their own receptacles to take things away – but also ideas.<sup>22</sup> A vessel can serve a range of purposes from utilitarian to sacred and provides for Zynsky an

'...inside, outside, back on the inside, and the other side. You can never see the whole piece at once. There's always something mysterious, no matter at what angle or in what light you're looking at the piece. It forces you to move around it'.<sup>23</sup>

Africa also provided another colour storyline. For Zynsky,

'the gorgeous, brilliantly colored and patterned textiles I saw there, the brightly painted houses, the birds and the flowers, all had an important impact'.<sup>24</sup> '...Inspired by the bold and uninhibited color sense I was surrounded with in Ghana, my work since that time has obviously centred on a personal plunge into color'.<sup>25</sup>



13. Three of the small vases from the *Folto* series, designed by Toots Zynsky in 1984 for Venini. In each vase the number and pattern of threads is different. Private Collection. Photo courtesy of Sylvain Deleu.

On her return to Amsterdam she did not immediately go back to glass but returned to her studio to draw. The African experience was so life changing, it made her question what she was doing with glass but a phone call from Cara McCarty, the Curator of Design at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, galvanised her return to the material. McCarty wanted to acquire her glass sculptures for the museum. She purchased a monochromatic acid-green one from 1984 from an exhibition in Sweden and commissioned another directly from Zynsky. This is made from clear threads with a hint of lilac and grey, so still a very restrained palette in terms of colour. (Fig. 14) As Zynsky stated later,

'upon returning from Africa, I briefly picked up where I had left off and made just a few more transparent pieces – one commissioned by the Cooper-Hewitt Museum and one commissioned by MoMA – before immersing myself in bold primary-colored pieces'.<sup>26</sup>



## The Right Rods

Zynsky's primary reason for visiting Murano in 1983 was to search out the Moretti company and purchase a wide range of coloured glass rods, which she could pull into extremely fine threads to use in her sculptures. For nearly a year the work she made with glass bought from Murano kept breaking and she could not understand why. She discussed the problem with Gianni Toso who asked which Moretti company she had gone to. The same surnames abound in Venice and particularly in the Murano glass world, causing much confusion. Zynsky had purchased glass from the wrong Moretti. She had purchased her glass rods from a distributor for different glass makers and glass from one maker was not compatible with glass from another. So combining different colours led to breakages in the kiln. Once she located the correct Moretti, a company which made all its own glass so the colours were compatible, she was up and running.<sup>27</sup> All the pieces of the jigsaw were in place for her immersion in colour to begin.



14. Toots Zynsky, *Vessel*, 1985. Fused glass threads. Museum of Modern Art, New York. 2023© Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence.

## Working Process

The thread-pulling machine is in continuous operation during Zynsky's studio opening hours, overseen by a studio assistant. The threads are stored in paper pockets listing not only the Effetre batch number but also the date and time pulled, as even slight changes in temperature and humidity when pulled can alter how the threads react together. Zynsky lays out the threads on a ceramic fibre board, a process that allows time for contemplation and one she compares to drawing or painting.<sup>28</sup> The board then goes into the kiln to fuse the threads together. This fused sheet can then be slumped over 'pillows' to create the folds at the edges, slumped into or over metal forms and manipulated by hand. The large pieces have to be fired several times and, depending on the complexity of the form, the work may come in and out of the kiln many times during this

shaping process. At this point timing is critical and speed essential to achieve the required result. If the glass is in the kiln for too short a time, it cannot be manipulated, but if left in too long the thin threads completely fuse together and the texture of the sculpture is destroyed. (Figs. 15–18.)

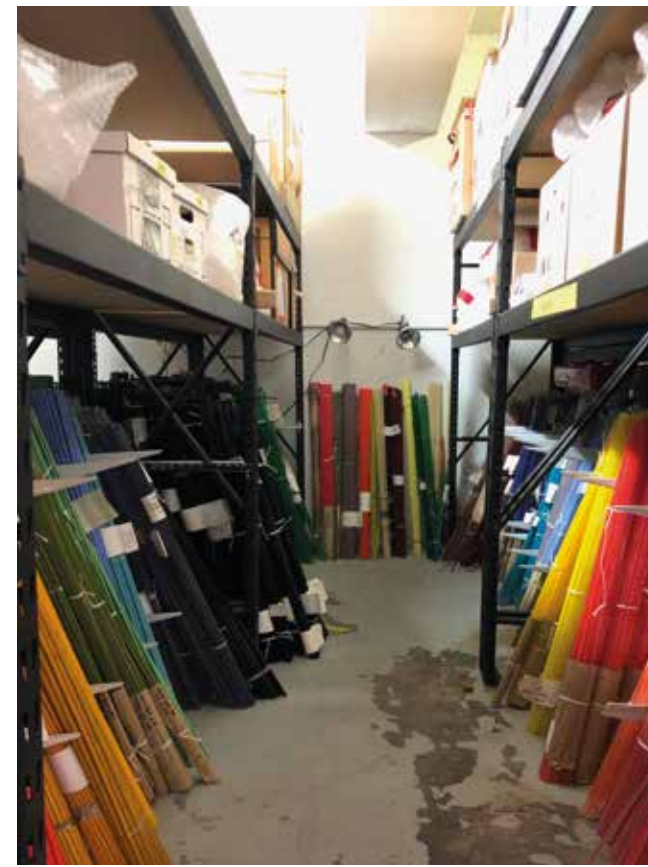
*opposite page clockwise from top left*

15. Effetre Murano SRL coloured glass rods in Zynsky's studio. Photo courtesy of Caterina Tognon.

16. Thread-pulling machine in operation. Photo courtesy of Caterina Tognon

17. Pulled glass threads organized by colour, batch number and date pulled in Zynsky's studio. Photo courtesy of Caterina Tognon.

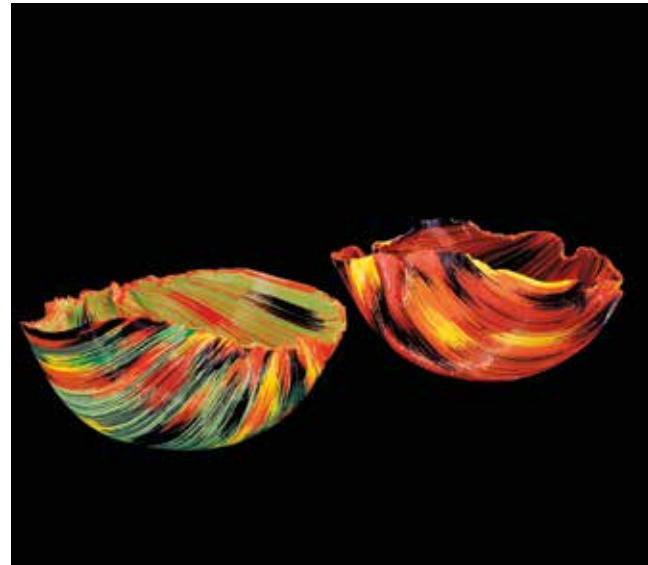
18. Toots Zynsky laying out glass threads on the ceramic fibre board. Photo Alexandria Perkins, courtesy of the artist.





## International Acclaim, The New Work

Although museums had acquired examples of her work, up to this point they were interested in it primarily for her innovative use of glass threads, as her explosive use of colour was still to come. The Moretti glass palette unleashed a tsunami of colour that continues to this day and the world took notice. Zynsky's new work gained attention on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond, particularly in Japan. It was widely published, included in museum exhibitions and bought for important private collections.<sup>29</sup> She had her first European one-person show of the new, multi-coloured work at the Galerie Clara Scremini in Paris in 1987 and the catalogue included an interesting essay by art historian Linda Norden.<sup>30</sup> The following year she was awarded the prestigious third annual Rakow Commission by Corning Museum of Glass. The two vessels she made for the commission demonstrate her strong palette and the influence of Africa. And in May 1989 her first one-person museum exhibition, *Toots Zynsky: "Tierra del Fuego Series"* (Fig. 1 see



19. Toots Zynsky, *Cabellos de Angel* (Angel Hair) and *Pajaritos en la Cabeja* (Little Birds in the Head), 1988. Fused glass threads. 3rd Rakow Commission, purchased with funds from the Juliette K. and Leonard S. Rakow Endowment Fund. Digital image courtesy of The Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY.

20. Toots Zynsky, *Avvincente* (left), *Avvilupave* (centre), *Avvio* (right), 2010, fused and thermo-formed glass threads. Photo Toots Zynsky.



21. Toots Zynsky, *Copioso*, 2014, fused and thermo-formed glass threads. Photo Toots Zynsky.

p. 108), opened at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Dan Klein, the influential glass collector and writer wrote in the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition,

'...as a colourist she knows no shame; in her work colour juxtapositions that flout every rule of good taste combine to create a vivid firework display frozen in time. Inspired originally by the plumage of exotic birds, her three dimensional drawings have gone beyond anything known in nature to become objects which vibrate with the energy of colour. These are colour statements that travel beyond the eye to touch every nerve capable of emotional response'.<sup>31</sup>

The same is true of her work today.

## Postscript: Music and Birds

By 1985 myriad sources of colour inspiration were swirling around and interconnecting in Zynsky's life. In addition to Venice, Africa and art in all its aspects, there are two others that are central to her whole body of work; music and the natural world, particularly birds. Zynsky grew up in the countryside and was very conscious of being surrounded by birds and birdsong. One of her early series, *Exotic Birds*, was inspired by taking her young son to Amsterdam Zoo and looking at the birds and today her current work, a comment on the dangers of climate change and our planet's future, is inspired by the colours and patterned plumage of endangered bird species. According to Zynsky, music is probably the most important source of inspiration to her work and she always listens to music while working in her studio.<sup>32</sup>

'My use of color is directly connected to the music I am constantly listening to. Music and color are virtually inseparable to me'.<sup>33</sup> '... Music is colour and mood and heart and soul – and just about everything else, too. I am always looking for music which I have never heard before'.<sup>34</sup>

22. (left) Toots Zynsky, *Chilean Flamingo*, fused and thermo-formed glass threads, 2023. Photo Toots Zynsky.

23. (right) Toots Zynsky, *Low Whooping Crane*, fused and thermo-formed glass threads, 2023. Photo Toots Zynsky.

24. (below left and right) Toots Zynsky, *Iberian Green Woodpecker*, fused and thermo-formed glass threads, 2018. Both front and back view. Photo Toots Zynsky.



The years from 2004–07 were difficult for the artist. She lost all the elder generation of her family as well as two very close friends.

'One of the first and most powerful after effects was a profound inability to listen to music of any kind along with a profound inability to create work of any kind'.<sup>35</sup>

She returned to work with the *Ombri* (Shadows) series, an exploration of single colour ranges, often of reds, blacks and greys – her life and death colours – using taller, more undulating, complex forms. (Fig. 20) Gradually, Zynsky reintroduced dramatic colour combinations to her work, particularly inspired by her research into endangered bird species. (Figs. 22–24)



#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Toots Zynsky for letting me spend a day with her at her studio in Providence, Rhode Island and for being so generous with her time. Our conversations, then and later in Venice and her eloquent storytelling formed the basis of this article. My thanks also to Regan Brumagen and the staff at The Juliette K. and Leonard S. Rakow Research Library, Corning Museum of Glass and Marzia Scalon and the staff at the Glass Study Centre, The Institute of the History of Art, Cini Foundation, San Giorgio, Venice. Caterina Tognon and Isabella Vincenti at Caterina Tognon Arte Contemporanea were also extremely helpful in sharing information and images.

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 Interview with Toots Zynsky, January 25, 2023. For further information see [www.tootszynsky.com](http://www.tootszynsky.com).
- 2 Jessica Shaykett, 'Curiosity is Key, Interview with Toots Zynsky', *American Craft*, February/March 2013, p.130.
- 3 Interview (as note 1).
- 4 Shawn Waggoner, 'Toots Zynsky's Filet-de-Verre Vessels: A Translation of Music into Color', *Glass Art*, July/August 2018, p. 17.
- 5 Interview (as note 1).
- 6 Linda Norden, 'Clipped Grass and Shivering Glass', in *Toots Zynsky, Oeuvres*, (Paris: Clara Scremini), 1987, p. 24.
- 7 [www.orsoni.com](http://www.orsoni.com), history and heritage.
- 8 [www.effetremurano.com](http://www.effetremurano.com), *bacchete* (wands) in products section.
- 9 Interview (as note 1).
- 10 Tina Oldknow, *Richard Marquis Objects*, University of Washington Press, Seattle and London, 1997, p. 19–20.
- 11 Susanne K. Frantz, 'Interviews with glass artists discussing the influence of Venini glass on their own work. Toots Zynsky', 1995 audio cd, The Rakow Library, Corning Museum of Glass.
- 12 Venini list of objects (*elenco oggetti*) for 1983 and 1984 held by the Glass Study Centre, Cini Foundation, San Giorgio.
- 13 Private guided tour of the Venini factory, 16 September, 2022.
- 14 'Glas-wie Fasern/Glass-like fibres Created by Ann Toots Zynsky', *Neues Glas/New Glass*, January-March 1984, p. 37.
- 15 Paul Hills, *Venetian Colour: Marble, Mosaic, Painting and Glass 1250–1550*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 1999, p. ix.
- 16 There has been confusion over the naming of the two series produced by Venini as there was an error in Venini's 'Oggettistica Listino' (objects list) published on 10 February 1985, where all five vases were published under the name *Folto* (thicket). Originally Zynsky had wanted to call the vases with spun threads on the outside *Mulinello* (whirlwind, spinning) but they ended up being named *Chiacchiera* (not readily translatable but has the sense of head spin). The three vases with the threads rolled on and encased are now known as *Folto*. This is how I have used *Folto* and *Chiacchiera* in this article.

- 17 Marino Barovier and Carla Sonigo, editors, *Tomaso Buzzi at Venini*, (Milan: Skira Editore S.p.A.), 2014, p. 25.
- 18 Interview (as note 1)
- 19 [www.olnickspanu.com](http://www.olnickspanu.com), Murano glass artists, Toots Zynsky
- 20 Tina Oldknow, 'Masters of Studio Glass: Toots Zynsky', *The Gather*, Corning Museum of Glass, Spring/Summer, 2011, p. 10.
- 21 'Interview: Toots Zynsky', *Glass Focus*, The Official Newsletter of The Art Alliance for Contemporary Glass, vol 11, June/July 1997, p. 17.
- 22 Interview (as note 1).
- 23 Waggoner, (as note 4), p. 17.
- 24 'Portfolio, Mary Ann (Toots) Zynsky', *American Craft*, June/July 1988, p. 47.
- 25 'Mary Ann 'Toots' Zynsky, A Cultural Odyssey', *Glass Arts Society Journal*, 1992, p. 81.
- 26 Toots Zynsky, *Reflections 1982–2002*, Habatat Galleries, Royal Oak, Michigan, 2004, n.p.
- 27 Interview (as note 1).
- 28 Uta Klotz, *Filet-de-verre, Toots Zynsky...an interview*, *Neues Glas/New Glas*, No 1, 2002, p. 11.
- 29 Kenneth R Trapp and William Warmus, editors, *Contemporary American and European Glass from the Saxe Collection*, The Oakland Museum, Oakland, California, 1986, p.26. Paul Smith and Edward Lucie-Smith, *Craft Today: Poetry of the Physical*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson), American Craft Museum, New York, 1986, p. 219.
- 30 Norden, (as note 6), pp. 22–28.
- 31 Dan Klein, *Toots Zynsky 'Tierra del Fuego Series'*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1989, p. 3.
- 32 Interview (as note 1).
- 33 Interview (as note 1).
- 34 Horst Christoph, 'Interview with Toots Zynsky', *Glashaus*, 4, 2006, p. 14.
- 35 'Corning's Masters of Studio Glass: Toots Zynsky – Influential Work Transcends Traditional Glass Technique', *Glass Art*, July/August 2011, p. 36.

**SARAH NICHOLS** was curator of decorative arts and chief curator at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh. While in Pittsburgh she curated exhibitions on aluminium and glass and built up the museum's collections of 19th and 20th century decorative arts. She became particularly interested in contemporary glass owing to her involvement with the Pittsburgh Glass Center. She returned to the UK in 2011 and started to collect 20th century Italian glass. She is actively involved with The Decorative Arts Society, 1850 to the Present, as Treasurer and Chair of the Grants Committee. Her publications include: *Aluminum by Design*, 2000; *Viva Vetro! Glass Alive! Venice and America*, 2006.