



Photograph by Jerry Ataip

WORDS Amanda Dobra Hope

Through the Looking Glass

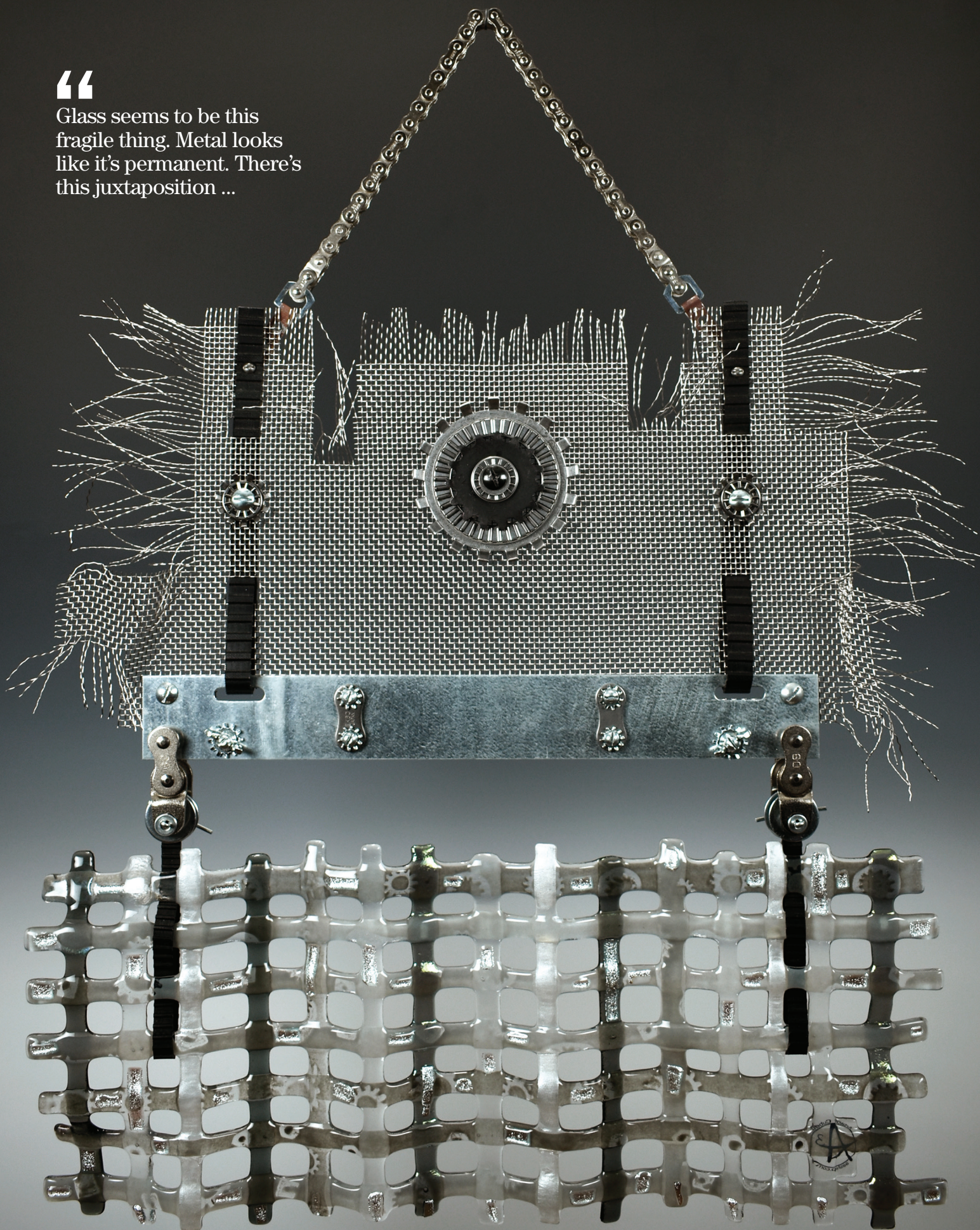
Alice E. Shepherd's Glass Creations Take Off at Nashville International Airport, June 4–August 26

“Why fit in when you were born to stand out” is a quote many artists relate to. In fact, it's one they must come back to often when their inner world is challenged, but they just can't stop doing what they know they're meant to do.

People in this position can sometimes feel as if they are floating around in the void, unsure that their purpose is indeed serving a purpose. I call them visionaries. People with such an inner

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Glass seems to be this fragile thing. Metal looks like it's permanent. There's this juxtaposition ...



Assimilation #2, 2016, Kiln formed glass, upcycled industrial parts, 18" x 24"



Synthesis #1, 2016, Kiln formed glass, upcycled industrial parts, 21" x 7.5"

passion to do what they do, even when it doesn't fit in with what's already being done, exist in a field where few have been, blazing the trail for those behind them. Though they may not feel trendy or as though there is a market for what they produce, it's almost as if their clear inner vision leaves them no choice but to pursue it.

I called Alice E. Shepherd, of Artwork Cubed, a visionary, and I'm not sure what she thought of that, or if she was just too humble to completely agree. Nevertheless, I'm sticking to it.

I believe that when the collective experiences of your life set you up to bring something so extraordinary to the world that there's no niche, even "outside the box" to put you in, you almost have a responsibility to continue to do it. And I think that's exactly why she does it.

"I think what I do is strange; so do others. 'Why would you do that?' they've asked. I've never had an answer for that; I've just done it. The pieces are strange. I don't even know if they'll sell," Shepherd recounts.



Delicate Balance, 2016, Kiln formed glass, upcycled industrial parts, 9" x 10"

As an almost entirely self-taught kiln-forming glass artist, Shepherd knows that she exists in a very sparsely populated category for artists, but her quest for authenticity helps keep her on track. She becomes very vulnerable, a feeling she says she experiences often in her work, when she shares with me her inner struggle for authenticity.

"When I look at myself in the mirror, I just want to be authentic. I have to dig deep and be honest. It takes a lot of reflection. Why am I doing this and what does it mean?"

"I was raised by men," she continues. "I don't cry a lot. When I work with the glass, all of these pretty things are coming out, and I have to own it. I have to say yes, that came out of me," she continues.

The concepts for Shepherd's pieces are born from her raw emotions. Her upcoming exhibit *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, which will be presented as part of the *Flying Solo* exhibition at the Nashville Airport from June 4 through August 26, was inspired by her background and love for sustainability, as well as her concern for the proper balance of progress coupled with it.

The exhibition consists of her industrial sculpture series, pieces she designed by fusing glass with scrap-metal parts to create something new, beautiful, and contemplative. The series is representative of her own self-reflection, as well as a reflection of the city's growth and waste.



Trans-Mission, 2016, Kiln formed glass, upcycled industrial parts, 18" x 14"



Missing Link, 2016, Kiln formed glass, upcycled industrial parts, 18" x 6"



Changing Gears, 2016, Kiln formed glass, upcycled industrial parts, 20" x 8"

"When I look at the work, I see the concern I have with the rapid transformation of a place. I want growth and progress, but we have to be good stewards and do it sustainably," she says.

This collection, unlike her previous glass collections, really emphasizes the look and feel of industry. In complete paradox to her colorful *Seasons* series, this body of work is done completely in black, white, and silver.

Shepherd's journey with this collection began years ago when her husband first came home with a piece of windshield slag for her to work with. When he started bringing home metal, she just knew she had to fuse it with the glass, physically and metaphorically.

"Glass seems to be this fragile thing. Metal looks like it's permanent. There's this juxtaposition of metal and glass. Our cars are made of metal and glass, and so are our buildings," she explains.

The fact that she uses all recycled materials and scrap metal also echoes the values of her formative years. "I was raised by mechanics. We used everything and fixed everything. There was no waste," she recalls.

Being that her art is always reflective of her life, the word authenticity pops up again in our conversation. "I like the fact that it's my work, my life, my art. It doesn't feel disjointed like some things can. It's representative of my life," she says with confidence.

As we wrap up, she says the words I've been waiting for

the whole time: "If I wasn't passionate about glass, I'd do something else. It's expensive and a lot of work, manually and on my feet. But I just never get tired." Hmm . . . Sounds like a pretty authentic visionary to me. **NA**

***Building, Dwelling, Thinking* by Alice E. Shepherd is on view at the Nashville International Airport from June 4 through August 26. The artist's reception will be held Monday, June 11, from 4 to 6 p.m. For more information, visit www.flynashville.com. See more of Shepherd's work at www.aeshep.com.**



Photograph by Jerry Atnip