

Ann Veronica Janssens
After the peacock wheel
23 Jun – 25 Aug 2023
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Bortolami is pleased to present *After the peacock wheel*, an exhibition of new sculptures by Ann Veronica Janssens and her fourth show with the gallery. A series of works from her latest project, *Structural colors*, mount the walls of the main space alongside two freestanding glass sculptures, accompanied by a diptych of *Magic Mirrors* in the small room.

Janssens endeavors to enable viewers to perceive light as a material through intimate sculptural environments. Her luminous works create gradient zones that oscillate between light and shadow, opacity and transparency with an eye toward science and architecture. For over a decade, Janssens's object-based work has included sculptures composed of sheets of glass with myriad optical effects. Her *Structural colors* series continues her exploration into the form of material in collaboration with Dr. María Boto Ordóñez, artistic researcher at KASK & Conservatorium, the school of arts of HOGENT and howest, specifically delving into the science of structural colors.¹

In living beings, colors are derived from either pigments or structures. While pigments produce color by absorption of specific wavelengths of light, structural colors involve interference effects. For example, a material might be structurally composed of thin parallel layers or scored with fine parallel lines (as in Janssens's ribbed glass panels on view here), which allow a particular color of light to be seen. Because of their complex interactions with light, structural colors have a broader palette than pigments, accounting for the natural phenomenon of iridescence, or the rapid color changes that appear in adaptive camouflage. Iridescent butterfly wings, bird feathers, and beetle shells are all examples of structural color in the natural world.

Melanin is the most prevalent pigment in nature. In certain living organisms, organized melanin granules interact with light on a microscopic scale, generating other colors: structural colors. For example, peacock feathers are pigmented brown with melanin, however the natural structure of the feather interacts with light in such a way that a peacock's plumage reflects blue, turquoise, and other iridescent colors.

For the present body of work, first exhibited at Collection Lambert in Avignon, France in 2022, Janssens marinates each glass panel in a solution for several days, which allows a thin, colorful film of artificial melanin to form atop the glass. As the liquid slowly evaporates, the film cracks unpredictably as it dries, and she tries to "create little accidents" by encouraging these richly colored fissures. Janssens then siphons the remaining liquid from the bath, bringing the iridescent layer to rest upon the surface of the glass.

Philosopher Maud Hagelstein, in her recent essay about Janssens's oeuvre as it relates to color, posits that "the work targets the moment in which color frees itself, detached from all attempts at mastery, rises to the status of pure sensation, and unravels our structures of mastery (no stability means no definitive reading)." Indeed, the final result of Janssens's precarious process is delicate and mysterious. Each panel is unique and captures light and color differently, using nothing but glass and melanin—rendering the invisible visible.

Other studies on the behavior of light are present: a roll of semi-polished cast glass reveals the escape of oxygen bubbles captured during the material's cooling, like an expanding effervescence trapped in slow motion. A sculpture in perfectly polished optical glass evinces light in its immaculate transparency. In the small room, Janssens placed a *Magic Mirror* diptych, each panel consisting of three layers of glass and various colored filters. With the simple gesture of a powerful impact to the top edge of each panel's central sheet of glass, she achieves a cascade of luminous colored spurts as it shatters, suspended between two pristine layers.

Ann Veronica Janssens (b. 1956 in Folkestone, United Kingdom) lives and works in Brussels, Belgium. Janssens is most recently the subject of a retrospective at Pirelli HangarBiccoca, Milan. Janssens's work has also been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions at institutions including Collection Lambert, Avignon, France; Fondation CAB, Brussels, Belgium; Panthéon, Paris, France; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark; Centre Pompidou-Metz, Metz, France; Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, TX; Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, Finland; Kunsthalle Bern, Bern, Switzerland, among many others. Her work is included in several collections such as the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, TX; Musée d'art Modern, Brussels, Belgium; Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; and Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark.

1 The "ecology of colour" research project is financed by the HOGENT Arts Research Fund.