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Press Release

Larry Bell: Works from the 1970s

Hauser & Wirth Monaco
4 June – 31 August 2024



Larry Bell first came to attention as part of the light and space movement in Los Angeles in the 1960s. This exhibition will focus on his architecturally scaled works from the 1970s, known as standing walls. The large scale works in this show are among his most ambitious early works and follow a rigorous, radical and austere economy of means. They reflect a change in Bell's work that occurred in the late 1960s when he abandoned the use of metal frames in his sculptures, towards free-standing glass panels joined with silicone, allowing him to work on a much grander scale, determined by the body. This also saw him move away from the pure form of the cube, towards an exploration of architectural and mural geometries, not just squares but corners and zig-zags. A recent large-scale purple and blue glass sculpture by Bell will also be installed outside the gallery in the Jardins des Boulingrins from 28 June – 31 August 2024.

The exhibition will consist of the four large-scale glass sculptures from the early 1970s, along with 'Moving Ways,' a monumental late 1970s wall work. These works highlight Bell's historic contribution to a severely pared down aesthetic and how his work at this stage addresses not just the viewer's gaze but the perceiving body (Bell's recourse to corporeal phenomenology), both characteristics that can be allied to minimalism. To signal and compliment the exhibition, a more recent, highly coloured glass work will be installed outdoors in the Jardins des Boulingrins adjacent to the gallery during the course of the exhibition. The rare, museum-quality works that will be shown come primarily from important Italian collections, such as the Panza Collection. This includes the work 'Untitled' (1970) which was featured in a key solo exhibition of Bell's work in Rome in 1974.

Larry Bell, born in Chicago in 1939, is one of the most renowned and influential artists to emerge from the Los Angeles art scene of the 1960s, alongside contemporaries Ed Ruscha and Robert Irwin. Known foremost for his refined surface treatment of glass and explorations of light, reflection and shadow through the material, Bell's understanding of the potential of glass and light allows him to expand visual and physical fields of perception, and his sculptures to surpass traditional bounds of the medium.

Since 1969, Larry Bell has used his own high-vacuum coating system that allows him to deposit thin metal films onto his glass surfaces, harnessing a little-known technique developed for aeronautics to create a highly original body of work.

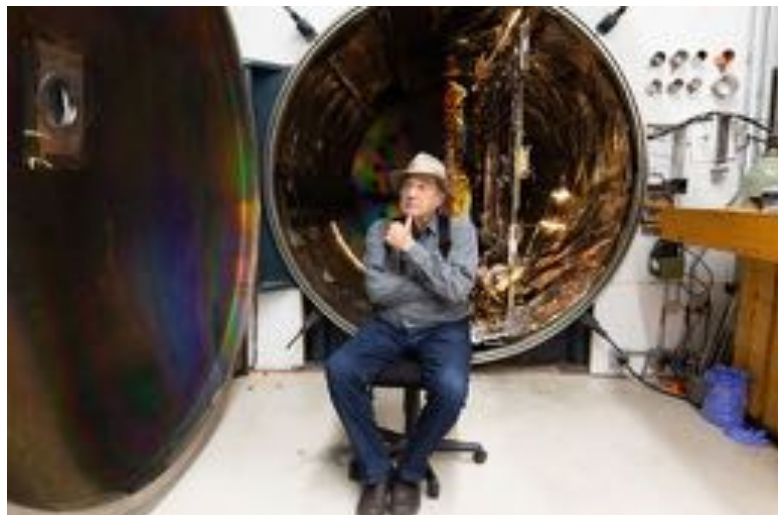
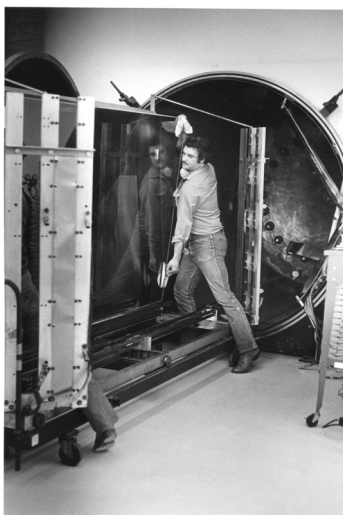
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Bell's use of commercial industrial processes in his studio since the 1960s demonstrates his unparalleled skill and dedication in each step of his sculptures' fabrication. He has said: 'Although we tend to think of glass as a window, it is a solid liquid that has at once three distinctive qualities: it reflects light, it absorbs light, and it transmits light all at the same time.'

In 1978, Larry Bell began experimenting with a modified version of the vacuum coating process, to make his 'vapor drawings' on paper. The unique large-scale wall work 'Moving Ways' (1978), made from applying aluminum on black paper, comprises five individual drawings hung together to make up a multi-panelled composition. In the 'vapor drawings,' Bell controls the density of the metallic coating, much like his glass works, in order to vary degrees of transparency and opacity across their surface. Thus, the drawings emulate and complement the elusive, reflective and spatial qualities that are present in his sculptural works.

Outside in the Jardins des Boulingrins, the major sculpture 'The Blue Gate' (2021) will be shown from 28 June. This much more recent work shows the development of Bell's practice. This is most apparent though his masterful adoption of colour achieved by employing the very different medium of monochrome colour-laminated glass. While related to the earlier standing walls in its scale and relation to the body, here the form has also become more complex through the use of contained or intersecting forms and triangular glass panes to create diagonals. This work is comprised of panes of vibrant amethyst purple and peacock blue. These colours overlap, revealing a variety of mixed hues through their layers. It shows how Bell delights in colour contrasts and complementarity, as well as their mixing through the special transparency afforded by glass. Displayed in the Mediterranean light that has attracted artists through the centuries, this work will be especially impactful.



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Caption and courtesy information:

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Larry Bell
Untitled
1970
Inconel coated glass
182.5 x 91 x 0.6 cm / 71 7/8 x 35 7/8 x 1/4 in

Larry Bell
Two Glass Walls
1971-1972
2 coated glass panels
182.9 x 182.9 cm / 72 x 72 in, each
Photo: Gian Sinigaglia, Felicity Samuel Gallery,
London. Panza Collection, Mendrisio

Larry Bell
Moving Ways
1978
Aluminum on black Fabriano paper; suite of 5
panels
198.8 x 587.4 cm / 78 1/4 x 231 1/4 in
Photo: Nicolas Brasseur

Larry Bell
The Blue Gate
2021
Peacock and Amethyst laminated non-tempered
glass
182.9 x 243.8 x 243.8 cm / 72 x 96 x 96 in
Photo: Alex Delfanne

Larry Bell with 'Homage to Griffin', 1980.
Photo: Tony Vinella.

Portrait of Larry Bell, 2023
Photo: Kalen Goodluck