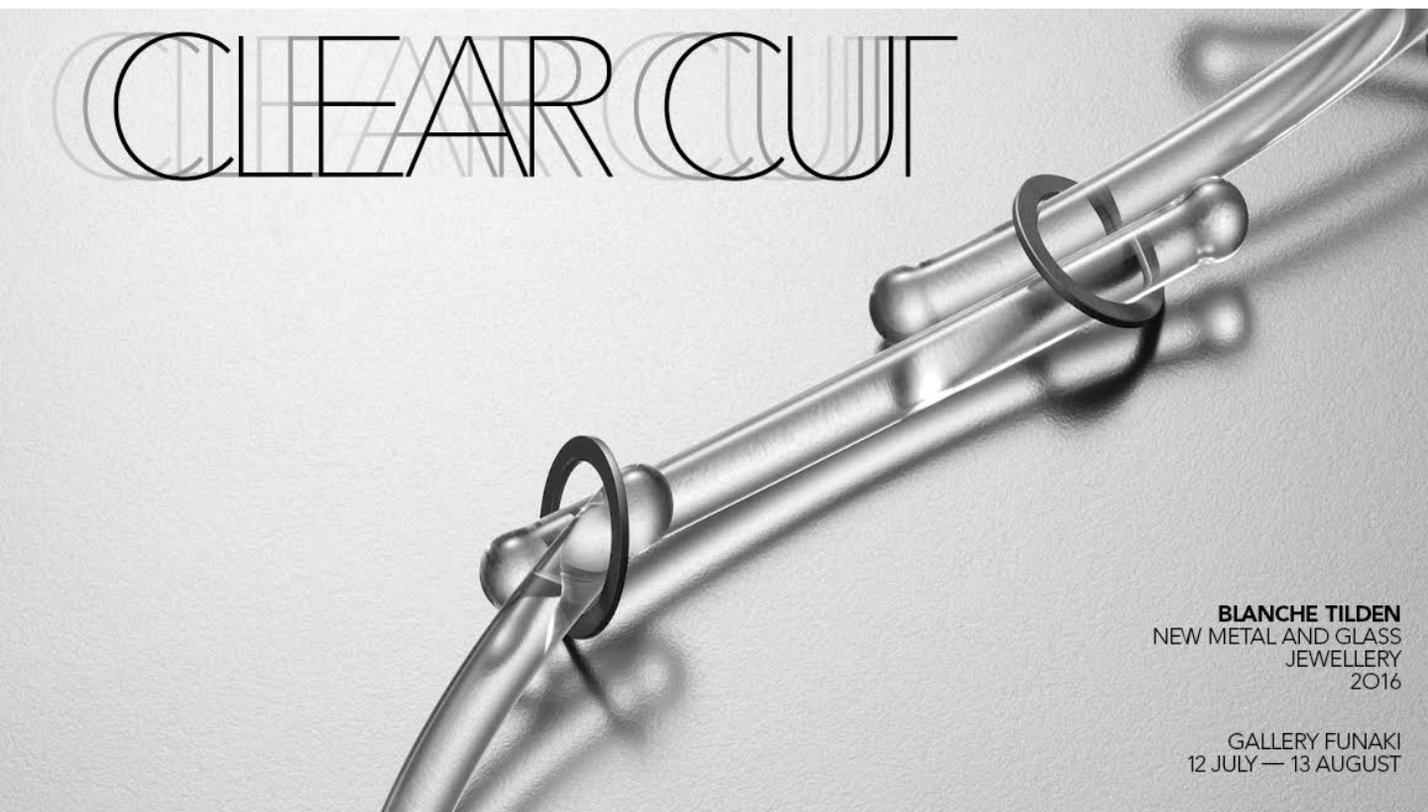


CLEAR CUT



BLANCHE TILDEN
NEW METAL AND GLASS
JEWELLERY
2016

GALLERY FUNAKI
12 JULY — 13 AUGUST

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Blanche Tilden makes beauty. In her hands, glass and metal are transformed into limpid jewellery that spills and flows and falls down and round the body, circling it with light. I think of water sparkling, of light playing from a shaded beam, of something caught just at the edge of vision that unexpectedly illuminates the world: Blanche's work summons all of this, and has for two decades, yet in this latest work we see a fundamental shift in direction — a clear cut.

This move is towards a decisive emphasis on translucency. In the new works the focus is on transparent light-catching glass; metal serves here as the necessary architecture that articulates and defines the marvellous purity of the glass elements. A miracle of industrial manufacture, this borosilicate glass is tough and enduring, but suavely soft to the touch. (In our mother's kitchens we knew it as Pyrex.) Through loving crafting, Blanche persuades this mass-produced material to surrender its complementary secrets, to share its beauty openly: nothing is hidden; all is revealed, with both senses of transparency being invoked.

Of the six new families of necklaces, made in various sizes, *Clarity* offers a summary of the metaphorical thread running through the entire body of work. Blanche has explored the antinomies embodied in glass for many years, but her solution here is simpler, more refined. Sister to a much earlier piece, the *Vertebrae* necklace of her graduation year in 1995, *Clarity* is composed of single intersecting circles and discs. One is made in darkly oxidised silver that is open in form, with the other being identical in diameter but simultaneously solid and translucent. In its indissoluble unity, in its irrefutable present-ness and infinite continuity, *Clarity* proposes a sort of perfection — glorious and splendid. (I am remembering here the French medieval theologians who argued that the light flooding through the great new windows of the Gothic cathedrals embodied the principle of the sacred.)

The articulated circularity of this chain is important to the entire project. Not coincidentally, the circular form is as old as jewellery itself — around 100,000 years at the current estimate from archaeological evidence — and it persists today in every single necklace. In *Clear Cut*, Blanche explores the rich imagery of continuity and transmission that the circular form suggests, all of which points to the possibility of coherence, and perfection. (In one case, it gestures to cosmic forces.) With the form of the circle, time can be measured but also made to stop, whether the precise reference is to the beloved domestic bicycle chain of many of Blanche's previous works — consider *Spin*, with its perfectly proportioned discs and connecting struts; again, more technologically elaborate aspects of speed and movement are suggested by the family of *Circuit* necklaces, where twisting silvery titanium wires inside the sections of curving glass tubing suggest the sleek mechanisms of complex communication systems. *Orbit* invokes an altogether larger circular operation: the differently sized discs might be planets and moons in astronomical diagrams (if not in the actual skies), and in another metaphoric register entirely, perhaps the ways that people are constantly entering and leaving one's personal spheres, moving into, and away from, one's life.

Amongst these open optimistic structures, *Buoy* took me by surprise. Flat round discs cascade down the supple chain like gathering droplets accumulating at the bottom of a waterfall; when worn, the sinuous chain moves and shifts and rolls against the body, like a buoy floating on the surface of the sea. More than any of Blanche's previous pieces, *Buoy* makes unpredictable moves. It is very sexy, and ambiguously so, a floating signifier, as the semioticians might say: happily, I cannot say if *Buoy* is masculine or feminine, or whether it is both. (This tease is noted in the title.)

Then there is the pronounced, and entirely unexpected, beautiful liquid movement of *Flow*. The curving ellipses of this family of necklaces are formed from generous segments cut from a larger notional circle that does not exist in actuality. These elements are then captured by titanium rings that tie them together, and sit across bulging terminals achieved by lampworking each end of the segments. Importantly, the necklace has no clasp but must be dropped, unbroken, over the head, emphasizing the unbroken continuity of a circle formed from tenuous relationships, which nevertheless works perfectly, and suggests happy complicity. Moreover, the title *Flow* describes the action of the necklace when worn: the entire piece is a set of passages from one curved element to another, shifting so subtly around the neck and over the collar-bones that it is a constant caress. *Flow* almost makes glass molten again, a living moving force. It is uncanny: I shiver thinking about its touch.

I said earlier that with *Clear Cut* Blanche was foregrounding the particular beauty of glass. More than any other family of necklaces in this new group of works, the confidence and innovation exemplified in *Flow* shows Blanche not only building on her previous repertoire of techniques, but letting go of some older working methods and finding new ones to reveal the distinctive characteristics of glass: its clarity, its ephemeral perfection. But there is a final revealing allusion in the title of the work: to the state of complete energised absorption in one's undertaking that is known to the practitioners of many arts and physical disciplines, and has been given the name 'flow' by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, the American-based psychologist of creativity and happiness. To experience 'flow', in this sense, is to be both lost and found through one's work. It is one of the best forms of bliss.

The unexpected fluidity seen in *Flow* brings me to the markedly more open play of allusions that Blanche is making in these new works. Previous exhibitions, such as *Fer et Verre* in 2010 or *Wearable Cities* in 2012, with their conceptual foundations in the technological achievements of the iron and glass exhibition palaces of the late nineteenth century, were the outcomes of defined research projects, but *Clear Cut* is far more wider-ranging and relaxed in its references. Here Blanche has drawn on images and ideas deriving from her on-going interest in architecture and design — once again, she has looked at the history of modernist architecture: the Bauhaus, Australian modernist design, photographs by the great Australian Wolfgang Sievers. Yet other references came from sources as various as fashion (the French couturier Jean-Paul Gaultier, and a wonderful navy blue dress marked with mother-of-pearl buttons in the National Gallery of Victoria's 2014-15 exhibition) or the rings of light circling the body of the female robot in Fritz Lang's 1927 film *Metropolis*. One important source is the philosophy of the influential contemporary German industrial designer Dieter Rams, working for Braun, whose 'Ten principles for good design' includes espousing the idea of 'as little design as possible': Rams's focus on nothing but what is essential is mirrored in the reduction and simplification of the works comprising *Clear Cut*. (Significantly, Rams also maintains that only well executed objects can be beautiful.)

Despite the undoubted pleasure to be had in wearing the necklaces in *Clear Cut*, not to mention the cheeky earrings, there is a cautionary sting in the tail of the exhibition title: all these exquisite works are wrested from a material that is inherently both fragile and dangerous. Glass has the potential to suddenly shatter, and to tear and cut flesh, so wearing it close to the body demands a degree of trust in the maker. For the most part, this 'fine line between and danger and seduction', as Blanche herself put it in 2003 speaking of work made for an exhibition titled *The Cutting Edge*, has been implicit in her work, rather than openly manifested. Yet this challenge is always present, and this element of

uncertainty is an inextricable aspect of the pleasure of using glass, which appears in so many forms in modern life. Blanche has worked with this seductive duality, this undeniable frisson, for decades: she knows the ways of glass, its habits and its unexpected enchantments. She is intimate, for example, with the musical aspirations of glass, with the way it slips and slides past the confining links of the chains she makes, just so far and no further, ringing and tinkling and singing in small occasional solos. Wearers love this portable musicality: in 2007 Merryn Gates wrote about 'the gritty scrunch of the oversized glass links' heard when she wore a favourite early piece.

Blanche Tilden's clear intention in making her jewellery is to bring beauty and pleasure to its wearers: she says she wants to offer 'enduring moments of happiness, optimism and peace'. This is a noble, if quixotic, ambition. Nothing does endure, after all, except change, as the Greek philosopher Heraclitus said a long time ago, but it is the human condition to live and love and work as if this were not so. In Blanche Tilden's case, it is a delicious and permanent paradox that the knowing sensual pleasure offered in her work as a jeweller should be embodied in a material that is transparent, and in chains that are always provisional: the extraordinary performance of appearance and disappearance that is the special delight of glass is forever married to its permanent fragility. Almost like life itself.

JULIE EWINGTON INDEPENDENT CURATOR AND WRITER, SYDNEY
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Spin 01, necklace, 2016, flameworked borosilicate glass, blackened silver, H6mm x D210 mm \$1900
Photograph: Grant Hancock



Spin 02, necklace, 2016, frameworked borosilicate glass, blackened silver, titanium, H6mm x D210 mm \$1700
Photograph: Fred Kroh



Spin 03, necklace, 2016, frameworked borosilicate glass, blackened silver, titanium, H6mm x D210 mm \$1500
Photograph: Fred Kroh



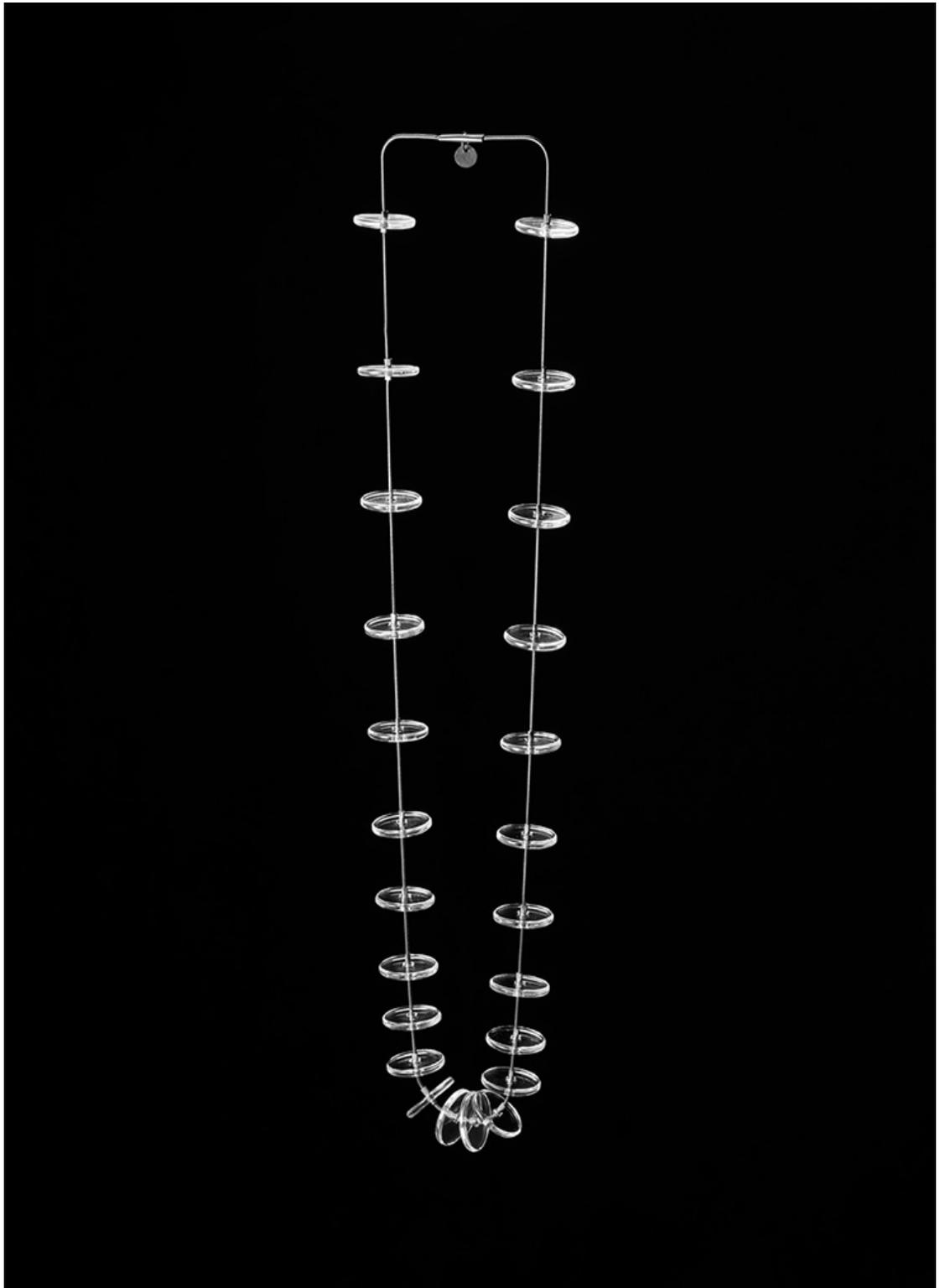
Clarity 01, necklace, 2016, frameworked borosilicate glass, blackened silver, H25mm x D260mm \$1800
Photograph: Grant Hancock



Clarity 02, necklace, 2012, flameworked borosilicate glass, blackened silver, H20mm x D260mm \$2000
Photograph: Grant Hancock



Clarity 03, necklace, 2016, flameworked borosilicate glass, blackened silver, H15mm x D260mm \$2200
Photograph: Grant Hancock



Buoy 01, necklace, 2016, flameworked borosilicate glass, blackened silver, H25mm x D300mm \$1500
Photograph: Grant Hancock



Buoy 02, necklace, 2016, frameworked borosilicate glass, blackened silver, H20mm x D230mm \$1200
Photograph: Fred Kroh



Buoy 03, necklace, 2016, flameworked borosilicate glass, blackened silver, H15mm x D180mm \$900
Photograph: Fred Kroh

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Flow 01, necklace, 2016, flameworked borosilicate glass, titanium, H22mm x D250mm \$2200



Flow 02, necklace, 2016, frameworked borosilicate glass, titanium, H22mm x D300mm \$2000
Photograph: Fred Kroh



Flow 03, necklace, 2016, frameworked borosilicate glass, titanium, H22mm x D250mm \$1800
Photograph: Grant Hancock



7. *Orbit*, earrings, 2016, *Flow 03*, necklace, 2016, flameworked borosilicate glass, titanium, blackened silver, small / medium / large \$380

Photograph: Fred Kroh



Orbit 01, necklace, 2016, flameworked borosilicate glass, titanium, blackened silver, H14mm x D380mm
\$1800

Photograph: Fred Kroh



Orbit 02, necklace, 2016, flameworked borosilicate glass, titanium, blackened silver, H11mm x D250mm
\$1400

Photograph: Fred Kroh



Orbit 03, necklace, 2016, flameworked borosilicate glass, titanium, blackened silver, H11mm x D175mm
\$950

Photograph: Fred Kroh



Circuit 01, necklace, 2016, frameworked borosilicate glass, titanium, blackened silver, H11mm x D360mm \$1500

Also available in 02 (H11mm x D260 mm) \$1200 & 03 (H11mm x D220 mm) \$900

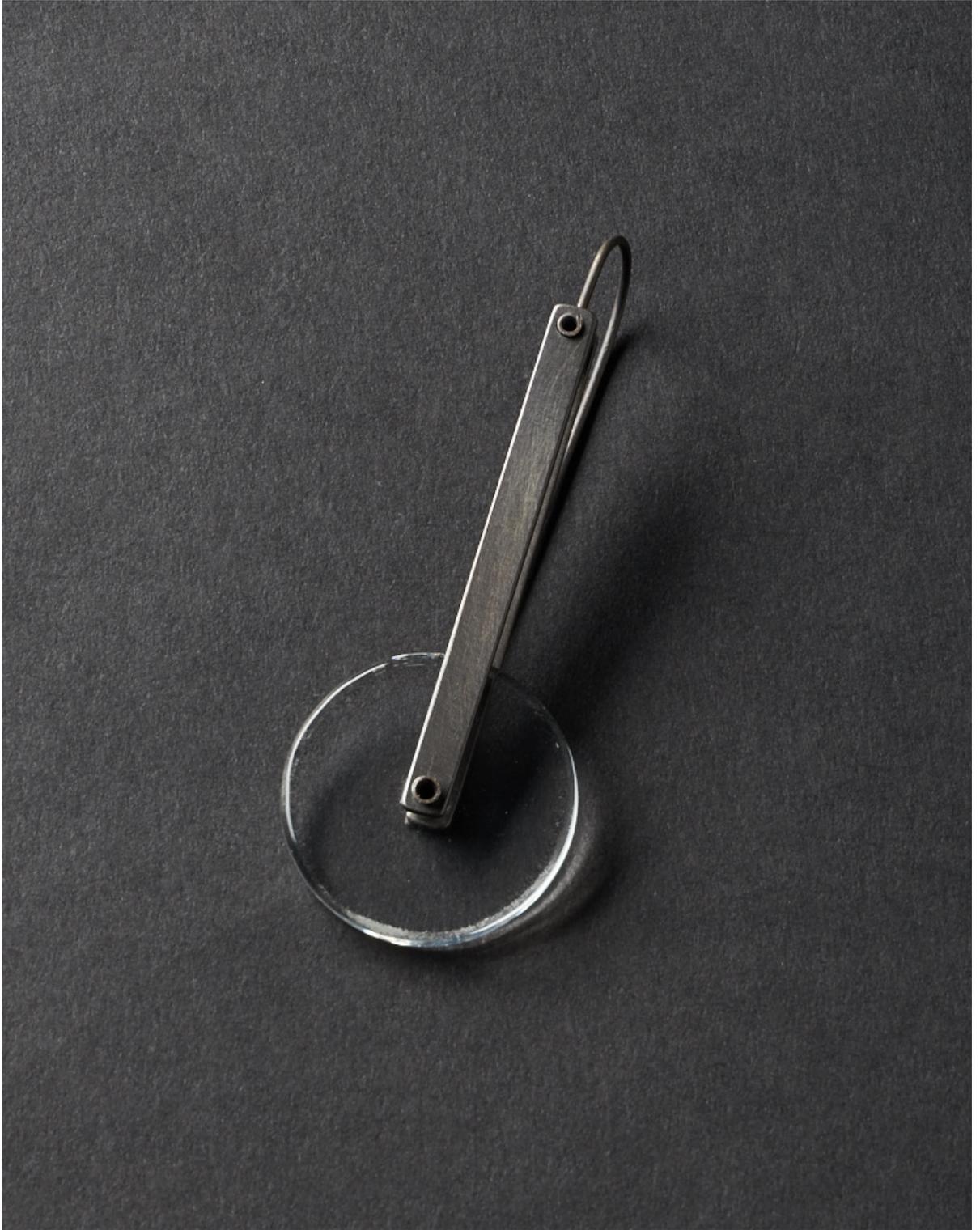
Photograph: Fred Kroh



Short Circuit, necklace, 2016, frameworked borosilicate glass, titanium, blackened silver, H11mm x D155mm
\$450



Buoy, earrings, 2016, flameworked borosilicate glass, titanium, blackened silver, small / medium / large \$380



Spin, earrings, 2016, frameworked borosilicate glass, titanium, blackened silver \$450