

## DOMINIQUE BLAIN

### Veiled Commentaries at Bentley Gallery

By Jenna Duncan

News is disposable. A passing media image offers only a brief glimpse into a much bigger picture. But sometimes, as in the movies "Blowout" and "The Conversation," if one stops and takes a closer look or leans in to listen, an alternate dialogue is revealed.

Such is the work of Dominique Blain, a French Canadian visual artist who traverses across many mediums, intricately tucking clues and recondite meanings into her print, video and sculptural work. "It's like I'm doing prototypes all the time," she says.

Her newest medium is glass. For the show at Bentley, she is bringing *Mirabilia 2*, a series of cut glass blocks, and an extension of the first *Mirabilia*, which is an installation on the roof the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, an old church that has been converted to a gallery and performance space.

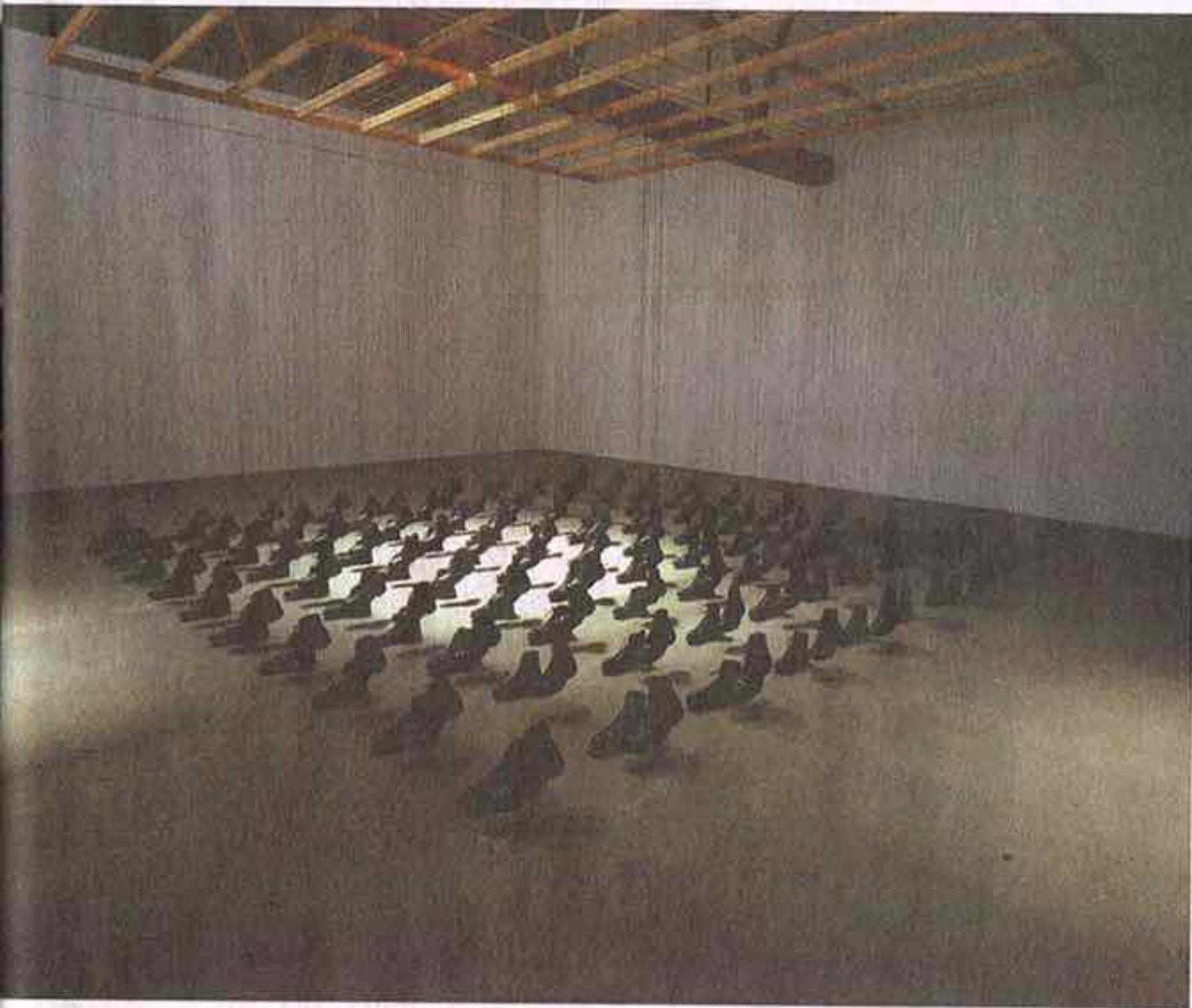
The blocks of green glass, lit from within, may seem to display only simple geometric designs. But if the viewer looks closer, suddenly the detailed shapes and outlines of some very specific objects become clear. Blain cut into layers of glass plates, using a sandblasting technique that she chose for its precision. This technique couldn't have been done 15 years ago, because it did not exist.

Each image cut in the glass refers to an artwork that has been destroyed, looted or vandalized—in many ways, gone forever. An intriguing shape that looks like a Venus sculpture is a tribute to the piece "The Dancer," a German artwork that was damned by Hitler as "degenerate art." Blain explains the story that broke a few years ago: when Berlin was digging underground to expand its train lines, something was struck. It turned out to be nine of these "degenerate" art pieces—hidden underground. They were restored and placed on public view in 2010 at the Neues Museum in Berlin. With another piece, Blain has reconstructed the iconic Han vase destroyed by Ai

Wei Wei in one of his most famous performance art works.

"Always—how can I say?—the work feeds the work," she says. "There are always links between what I do." What changes over time is merely the medium and the technique. For example, *Family Portrait* is, in a sense, a companion piece to *Maelstrom*, which is a video projection directed toward the ground. The content is a loop showing the faces of hundreds of children; they resemble portraits from school picture day. In reality, the children aren't classmates at all but displaced refugees, dispersed all over the globe. Blain says she was lucky enough to collect the images at a UN photo bank that used to exist in New York City 20 years ago. She was allowed to peruse thousands of such photos and keep the ones she wanted. She has no idea if this archive even exists anymore.

*Maelstrom* (2013) has shown previously, Blain says. But it arose in her mind with fresh relevance earlier this year, when it was reported that hundreds of

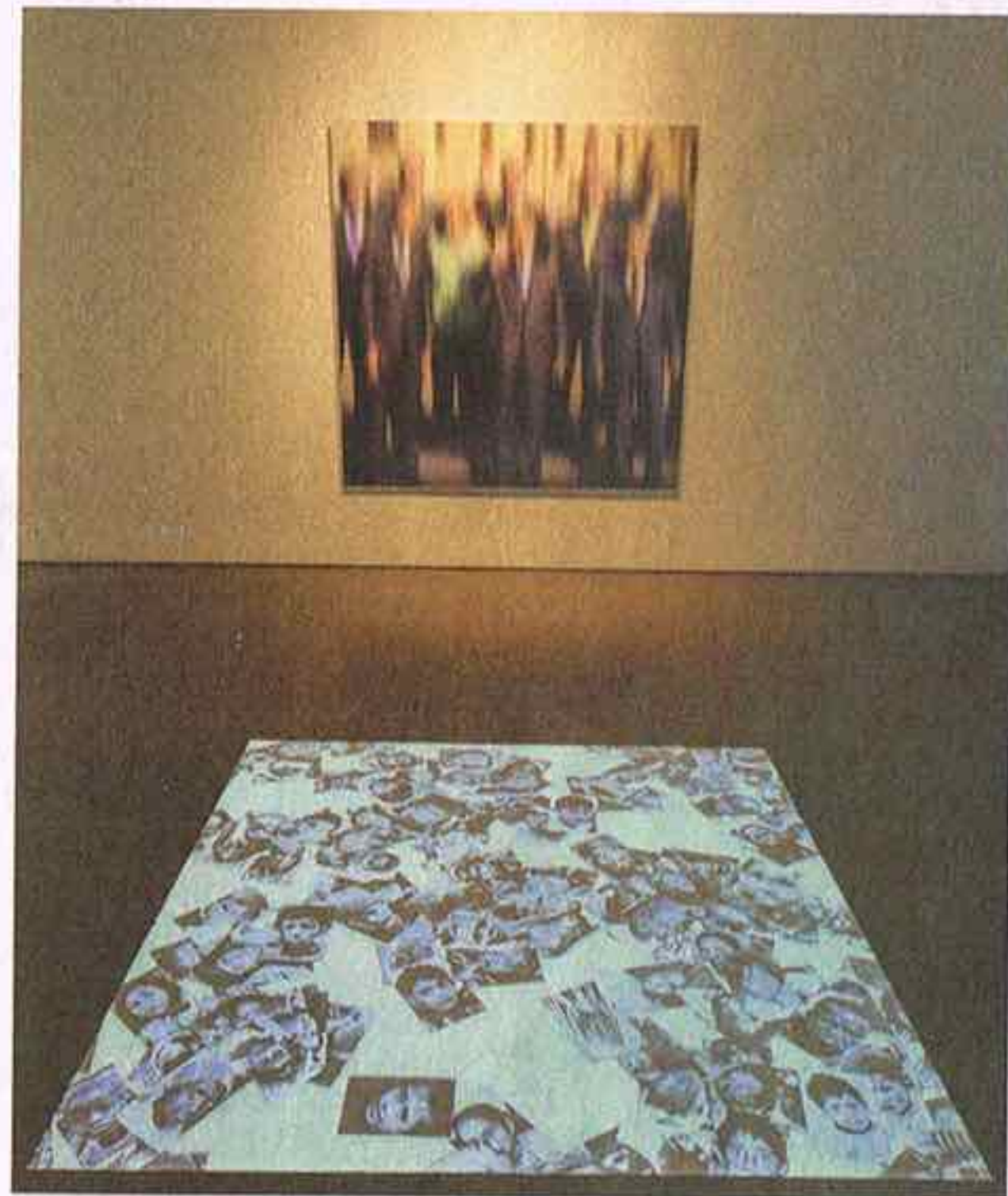


children were killed at a school in a gas attack in Syria. This piece connects to the still *Family Portrait* in an indirect but chilling way.

In November, President Obama met with Vladimir Putin and other world leaders at the G-20 Summit in Brisbane, Australia. Though this is nominally an economic conference, Blain explains that she was shocked and outraged that these leaders could so casually carry on when they had the power to put a stop to something like the gas attacks.

On closer inspection of *Family Portrait*, the faces of Obama, Putin, Angela Merkel and other world leaders become recognizable, though altered by their implicit guilt. They seem to melt and drip from the top of the frame to the floor. They could be dripping toward the feet of the *Maelstrom* children.

This year Blain received the Prix Paul-Émile-Borduas award, which is part of the Prix du Québec, a series of prizes awarded by the Quebec government to recognize cultural and scientific achievements.



Her work has been exhibited at the Biennale of Sydney, the Kunstverein Frankfurt in Germany and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, among other venues throughout North America and Europe. ■

Dominique Blain, *Mirabilia*

Dominique Blain, *Missa* (1997)

Dominique Blain, *Family Portrait*

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**Dominique Blain at Bentley Gallery**

**Jan. 8 through Jan. 31**

**Opening reception, Thursday, Jan. 8, 6–8 p.m.**

**The artist will be in attendance for a walk through at 4:30 p.m. on Jan. 8.**

**[bentleygallery.com](http://bentleygallery.com)**