



"Five Untitled Vessels," 2009. Discarded plastic bottles, hot glue. H 12, W 4, D 4 - H 7, W 5, D 5 in.

Shari Mendelson

Jancar Gallery

Los Angeles

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The energy required for traditional glassblowing has provoked more than one artist—Katherine Gray comes immediately to mind—to question its environmental sustainability in contemporary times. Shari Mendelson, an artist who does not work in glass, enters the conversation from another direction, making vessels inspired by glass goblets and vases from antiquity onward—not out of glass but from recycled plastic.

A selection of Mendelson's works included in a three-person show at Los Angeles' Jancar Gallery invoked a curious double take: What seemed at first glance to be glass vessels were made from used water bottles. Both the forms—an orbbed vase, an elegant if eccentric goblet, a blue candy dish—and their transparency gave the impression of glass vessels, but the intricate surface patterns and layered texture belied this

presumption. Made from bits of repurposed plastic pieced together into vessels, Mendelson's works move past the dualistic premise of remaking glass objects in plastic and into new territory.

As the global climate crisis worsens, a variety of contemporary artists have taken up the use of recycled materials, but more often than not they have used plastics, rubber, or cans combined into large-scale sculptural environments, such as the extraordinary *Crochet Coral Reef* instigated by the Institute for Figuring in 2005. Mendelson has made large-scale works before, but her "Vessel" series is smaller and quieter. She does not seem to provide herself with a template or set of rules when working with the recycled materials. Rather than rely on their accumulated bulk to make a surface or a kind of fabric, she allows the quality of each bottle to inform the sculpting process, much like other artists have done with other, less-ubiquitous found materials (such as Robert Rauschenberg's work with discarded photographs and found cardboard). A round vessel, pieced together from recycled plastic bottles and monofilament, makes use of the

bottom section of plastic bottles to create a star-like pattern throughout its clear, bulbous body. Another vase, frosty with a luminescence reminiscent of Tiffany glass, retains a tiny "V8" logo on the front; rounded cups join at the lip to create bulging spheres on a column-shaped vessel.

Mendelson gives cast-off plastics a rare attention to detail, using other materials only sporadically; wax and acrylic medium add minimal color to some of the works, recalling the once-brilliant shades of a glass vessel pulled from the ground in an archaeological dig. Her vessels are not monumental, and the amount of plastic used to make each one is not likely to have a drastic impact on the rain forest or the ocean, but they are idiosyncratic and lovely. The series doesn't seem to aim to enter into or divert the history of glass so much as to open up an admiring and provocative dialogue with it.

A frequent contributor to GLASS, artist and critic ANNIE BUCKLEY also writes regularly for the Artforum website.