
Design

The New York Times

DEPN



Goddess in Sky vase by Amber Cowan, with poppies. \$4,800 at Heller Gallery; hellergallery.com. Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

TYPOLOGY

Not Just Any Vase

They can be decorative objects, miniature pieces of table architecture, even without flowers.

By RIMA SUQI

Vases are vessels meant to hold cut flowers or other foliage. But they often work as decorative objects even when empty.

"What I think is appealing about a vase shape is it's a little miniature piece of table architecture and really open to wild interpretation," said Richard Wright, the Chicago-based auction house president and specialist in 20th- and 21st-century design. "I also think it's the type of piece where a designer feels a lot of freedom. It doesn't have to hold up a human being, it doesn't have to bear a lot of weight, it just has to hold some water." (And it doesn't even have to do that.)

Andi Kovel and Justin Parker of Esque Studio in Portland, Ore., found freedom in blowing molten glass vases simultaneously and joining them before they cooled. At that point they continued blowing to puff up the size of the now double vase, which they call Pushmepulleme. "The forming is a choreographed dance of fire, molten material and movement, and we both know our part of the dance to the point of pure instinct," Ms. Kovel said.

Bari Ziperstein of BZippy & Company in Los Angeles, said she was interested in vases that "look like miniature Brutalist monuments or architectural relics," whether in use or not. Wyatt Little, a ceramic artist in Houston, makes vessels that resemble sneakers, old-school computers and even a dryer vent that was inspired by a trip to a hardware store. "I fell in love with its shape, texture and flexible nature."

Alexandra Cunningham Cameron, the curator of contemporary design at Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, said vases historically had served as markers of wealth, industrial progress and cultural style. She cited Ettore Sottsass's postmodern designs as "a great example of vases that represent a time, a movement and a consumer." Ditto for Dutch Delftware and Native American blackware pottery. "Vases quickly define the tools of our age through artistic expression," she said. "They are loaded with much more than just flowers."



Asked to fill a dozen unusual vessels, Juan Carlo Bermudez, a florist in Long Island City, N.Y., picked poppies (which he called "a very irreverent flower") for Amber Cowan's turquoise Goddess in Sky vase. \$4,800 at Heller Gallery; hellergallery.com

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TONY CENCICOLA/THE NEW YORK TIMES



"This was very shiny, like an air-conditioning conduit," he said of Wyatt Little's Slink vase, which he filled with protea, red ranunculus, blue thistle, scabiosa, hellebore and seeded eucalyptus. \$150; wyattlittle.com



Not only did Marco Antonio Noguero's Naturofantastic vase for Lladro already have flowers molded in ceramic, but the blue also made a strong statement. "I needed a contrast. You don't try to match the vase," Mr. Bermudez said. He used cream and blush ranunculus, Bowl of Cream peonies, anthurium a Nero and Coral Charm peonies. \$1,075; lladro.com

A Chat With a New York Florist



Juan Carlo Bermudez — he goes by Carlo — is so rarely seen without a hat that he feels compelled to announce that he has hair. The third-generation member of a flower-growing family in Colombia, Mr. Bermudez, 50, runs his business, Floresta, out of a plain brick building in Long Island City, N.Y.

Floresta, which employs his niece and nephew, whom he is grooming to be the fourth generation, handles walk-in requests for birthday bouquets and million-dollar corporate

events and weddings. A typical Floresta bouquet might have eucalyptus, berries, a succulent and an artichoke, or it might be an armload of fresh peonies tied with twine.

His flowers often come not from Colombia or the Netherlands, but Okinawa, where blossoms are packed precisely and the sweet peas "are super sweet and delicate," he said.

For this assignment, faced with an odd lot of vases, he said his job was not to compete with them, but to flatter them. "They are the bride," he said.

He noted the radical differences in styles. "It was east, west, north, south," he said. But there were two he would buy.

One was Heath Ceramics' tiny Box and Stopper vase with double openings. "The texture is nice. You can use it for one flower or three."

He especially loved the little stopper, "like a perfume bottle." The other was BZippy & Company's Tall Scallop vase, which can be turned upside down. "It's simple," he said. "With flowers, it looks nice either way."

"I like modern things. If I had the money, I would buy it." LINDA LEE



"I tried to fix the circle with the pink jasmine," Mr. Bermudez said of the Circle vase by Mica DeMarquez of Mimi Ceramics. "I connected it. But you see, I also had one flower, the poppy, getting out. That's the wild part every person has." \$120; mimiceramics.com



The Tall Scallop vase from BZippy & Company is filled with Vanda diamond orchids, Queen Anne's lace and dracena. "I had to be very careful with the balance or else it would tip." \$430 at Coming Soon; comingsoonnewyork.com



To stand up to the vivid color of the Memphis designer George Sowden's Arancio vase, Mr. Bermudez picked burgundy scabiosa, yellow gloriosa lily, lady slipper orchid, calla lily and yellow craspedia. "I gave it everything." \$665 at the Future Perfect; thefutureperfect.com



"To me, the artist tried to re-create a perfume bottle, but it worked very nicely as a vase for the anemones," he said of the Box and Stopper vase by Tung Chiang for Heath Ceramics. \$350; heathceramics.com



"It's one of the few times I draped something over the vase," he said about the choice of amaranthus (also known as love-lies-bleeding) to give the illusion of liquid flowing from the Betta vase by Micóel Hernández. It joined blue milkweed and sweet peas. \$175; micocelceramics.com



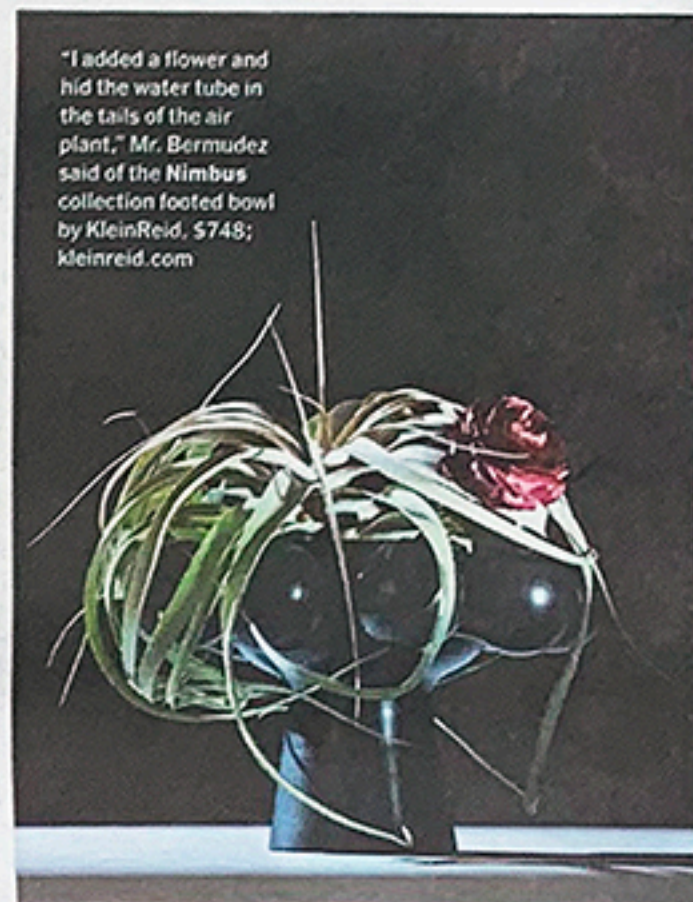
As for the Pushmepulleme vase by Andi Kovel and Justin Parker of Esque Studio, the florist said he saw a pair of swans in the twin-spouted glass vessel with its two shallow chambers. He put dark purple Vanda diamond orchids on the purple side and white Vandas on the lavender side, mixing in Queen Anne's lace and blackberries. \$2,200; esque-studio.com



For the Thistle glass vase by Tracy Glover, Mr. Bermudez used two stems of red gloriosa lily. "It has spirit. Sort of like the vase." \$750; tracyloverstudio.com



Eric Astoul's Bol Géologique is a sculpture, not a vase, the florist said: "big, strong, masculine, very heavy." He used rare Vanda orchids, in tubes, that could be removed. Everything else (privet berries, eucalyptus, onion seed pod) could be left to dry. \$3,000 at Maison Gerard; maisongerard.com



"I added a flower and hid the water tube in the tails of the air plant," Mr. Bermudez said of the Nimbus collection footed bowl by KleinReid. \$748; kleinreid.com