JR: When you had those kinds of moments of clarity through nature, did you think: I’m an artist, I want to express this in my art and glass is the best medium to do that in, or was it more of an evolving thing?

PB: It’s a slow process; it’s an evolving process. What happened was, I also went to Bali, I saw the rice fields. I wouldn’t know, maybe now I would, but then I didn’t know how to translate that yet. But being in the rainforests and seeing all such variety of colors and forms, that definitely really sparked a whole new creative enterprise. That was also the time I started to do graal, using this originally Swedish technique in blowing glass, where you manipulate layers of color through cutting or sandblasting or etching or engraving; then reheating it and blowing it up into the final shape, giving you the possibility of working with different patterns and forms and shapes within the layers of colors. That was a good way of being able to translate these impressions.
Maybe to some extent it’s nature imitating art. I don’t know. It’s almost like an ongoing interaction, a play.
ICE BRIDGE II  
2013  
18 x 40 x 9 cm  
7.1 x 15.8 x 3.5"  

ICE CUBE IV  
2013  
24 x 30 x 79 cm  
9.4 x 11.8 x 7.5"
ICE CUBE II 2013

20 x 27 x 13 cm
8 x 10.6 x 5.1”

I&P 238 2011

54 x 60 x 18 cm
21.3 x 23.6 x 7.1”
Nature is touching me in a way that is different from what I feel in everyday life.
GLASS AND COLOR, A MARRIAGE OF EXTREMES?

As easy as it seems combining colors in blown glass, it is mostly impossible in cast glass or so it seems. Talking to Zdeněk Lhotský for the first time in 2002, he shattered my dreams of multi-colored cast solid sculptures. Metal oxides are being used to compose colored glass and are often not compatible as they have different expansion rates. All over the world, glass manufacturers have tried more or less successfully to produce colored casting billets that can be mixed. Adding lead to the recipe seems part of a possible solution.

In collaboration with Michael Behrens lots of experimental casts were undertaken, largely ending up in a bin! With the willing assistance of the Reichenbach Glass factory, we overcame some of the issues resulting in a range of work in both the Canyons and Icebergs series, all made in Michael`s studio. It is a sheer delight to be able to fill a mold with hues of blues, greens and whites, to create an image that resembles the magic of floating icebergs in form and shades as can be witnessed under water. It is not just a technical achievement. Much more important, it broadens the creative pallet as well as the potential of artistic expression.
Filling the molds at Studio Michael Behrens
TIP OF THE ICEBERG

17 x 54 x 38 cm
"61 x 21.3 x 15"

2012
PB: I think what’s really important is that, and it’s interesting when you think of art history, painters many years ago, would try to copy nature; they would use nature and try to represent it as accurately, copy it as accurately as possible. That is something I’m not interested in, not at all.

It’s actually a transformation of what you experience looking at nature being in nature, accepting that you are nature, nature is you, that you’re just a particle of that ongoing evolution. The transformation of that idea into sculptures are basically driven by the need I feel, or the desire, to express my fascination with nature.

JR: Without having to replicate, it’s the feeling, it’s the spirit of it, rather than the thing itself, or the response to the thing itself.
PB: A thing that just popped into my mind, just now, is the image of a Bishop from Giacomo Manzu, the Italian sculptor. When you look at it, what you see, is a big coat with a hat on, that form represents without any hesitation a Bishop, Catholic, the church, so form can do that. Form can be extremely strong, as a narrative, telling you a story. At the same time it can be very intuitive and very sensitive and sensuous and bring you in a different realm, making you feel different. And I would say, often my work is about feeling. It doesn’t mean there is not a concept, there is a concept, but it’s very much a transformation or translation of experience and feeling that will make the sculpture. Definition, that is important in the sense of... this is the color, that’s the line I want, or the volume, composition of volumes, the way lines are moving in and out. When working in glass, all of a sudden you’re working four-dimensional because you can actually look through the piece and see the back of it at the same time as you see the front of it. You don’t even need to walk around it, which would cost you time. You can skip time. That is probably what is, for me, the most interesting, intriguing thing about working in glass.
JR: And it’s in response, like you talked about it’s a feeling, but it’s also a response don’t you think?

PB: It totally is, absolutely.

JR: Internalized?

PB: It’s internalized over time because in the beginning, you’re like a kid in a candy shop, there’s all these possibilities, so you get inspired by so much and you translate it into very different forms. When I look back at my blown glass for the first 10 years, so from 1987 to 1997, before I really started getting into graal work, I went through many different forms and styles and enjoyed every bit of it. Some of it was very minimal and others very exuberant. We went to Venice, to Murano, to watch master blowers work in the Venetian technique and of course it changed my work. Everything continuously is of influence, which I believe to be a great blessing for me because as a person I’m hungry for experience, but as an artist I’m also hungry to translate experiences into new forms. For instance the icebergs series could inspire me for the rest of my life, but I’m feeling I’m coming to an end of that body of work. I actually made a piece which is called "The Last Iceberg".
I started to really consider nature as being an absolute expression of Spirit.
JR: Really? How did you know?

PB: I didn’t and I don’t and it’s not the last piece I’ve done that is inspired by ice because I’ve made other pieces afterwards because I still feel new ways, new, well I’ll say phrases. You’re a man of the word, again word is form for me in a way there are phrases that I am still looking at and remembering my trips to the polar areas that ask for a different translation. It keeps popping up and when it pops up and it feels good and feels important enough, I will turn it into a sculpture, turn it into a piece of work.

JR: Let it take you on a journey which art does.

PR: Absolutely!
It's all about the feeling, the experience.

“It’s all about the feeling, the experience.”
ON CREATING A TYPE OF GLASS THAT CAN WITHSTAND ALL THE ELEMENTS OF THE NATURAL WORLD

JR: Talking about the differences of the works in nature, when did you decide to kind of do the opposite and say, 'I’m going to make this work that’s not just inspired by the natural world but can withstand the elements as well.' When did you decide to turn that into something that can be explained in the natural environment, or when did you think or decide that’s something you wanted to approach?
PB: Basically, the most influential step was that we found this low-expansion glass in the Czech Republic that Ruda Banas, who is an absolute wizard in making colored glass, was able to color in the most beautiful aqua and icy blues and blue-green colors. It gave me the possibility to create a piece, an Antarctic or iceberg piece, that I could put outside that could be almost like it is given back to nature, like the icebergs were given to me when I went to the Antarctic. So in a sense it only feels natural to see a large iceberg made of glass standing outside in your garden as a sculpture. How it responds to the natural light and the change of the day, the sky, how it looks different when it’s raining, when the sun is hitting it, different time of the year. That is fabulous, because it’s always different, just always is. Together, with Zdeněk Lhotský and Ruda Banas we worked several years on developing new glass that has this low-expansion that enables it to be outside and be covered in snow, or to be heated up in the summer sun.

JR: Makes me think of something; how you said it’s always different and how that’s the thing itself, the iceberg itself. The mountains here, sometimes you come home and it’s just red and just burning and it’s acting like it is art imitating nature. It’s the thing in itself.

PB: Maybe to some extent it’s nature imitating art. I don’t know. It’s almost like an ongoing interaction, a play.
JR: And that’s something you get only from glass. I think a traditional bronze sculpture when placed outside; it has a patina or rust but it doesn’t have that interplay to the environment that the glass does.

PB: That is an interesting thing you’re saying because I’m actually right now thinking about making shapes in chrome, not in glass but chrome, probably in bronze or any other material but then have it chrome-plated. So what will it do? Here is the difference: if you look through a piece of glass that is polished, clear and transparent, you perceive the world deformed, transformed by that glass form. If you look at that same form made of chrome, highly polished or highly polished stainless steel, for instance, all of a sudden, you’re still looking at a transformed and deformed environment in that reflection but you are part of that reflection. You’ll see yourself in it as well and you yourself will be deformed. I’m very intrigued with that and it’s a new step that I’m going to work on in the years to come. I’m actually thinking about making the same form in glass so you can have that specific experience and the same form in chrome and maybe even also in marble because, then again, that form has changed and so has your perception and your experience of it; the way it makes you feel will change again because it’s marble.
ICE CUBE VII  2013
22 x 35 x 11 cm
8.7 x 13.8 x 4.3"
JR: How you respond to it?

PB: Right, how you respond to it, even how you perceive the form, even though it’s the same form. I think it’s very interesting.

JR: Oh yeah definitely. Let’s go back where you were talking about working on the actual glass itself and getting it to function outside.

PB: It’s a fabulous achievement of Ruda Banas. A sort of collaboration we have here, Studio Lhotsky and myself, where the demand is actually creating this new material. In this collaboration there is a real innovation that enables me to do stuff I could never have done before. Most artists that have made glass for outside either would use window glass or glass panels or they would take the risk that the glass would crack or they would make it in blown glass, where the glass is thin enough that the difference in temperature doesn’t really affect it.
JR: Oh right, but it's still vulnerable.

PB: It's vulnerable but...

JR: And did he come up with this type of glass, or was it another happy accident?

PB: Well no, interestingly enough, we used to buy clear, low-expansion glass and Ruda Banas would color it for me. He would re-melt it adding oxides and the chemical recipe that would change that clear colorless glass into clear colored glass. The factory that we used to buy this glass from went broke and we found ourselves without glass. It took several years to come up with a new formula, so to speak, and Ruda, he's a person who has these wild ideas of creating these recipes that result into this glass that is totally new, didn't exist before. It's totally in line with what I'm looking for, and to have Zdeněk Lhotský and his crew being able to cast these pieces for me, that collaboration has been extremely effective, creative and productive. And we've only just started. I see so many possibilities.
ON THE USE OF COLOR

JR: You mention the color of that piece and I think color is very important to your work as we talked about before and everything kind of gets broken down into a form and color. Talk a little bit about color, working with this new type of glass and developing your own colors. I think that’s one thing that struck me so much about the work you did at Habatat Galleries is that I knew that color. It was like the color of sea kelp. I knew it, like I don’t know what color that is, but it’s there somewhere.

PB: You also notice that when you look at that piece the color is different when it’s thin, it becomes very transparent blue. When thick, it turns almost green and very murky. Color is emotion. People mourning in our culture will wear black; in other cultures it could be another color, but it has meaning. When spring is in the air all the women, men too, but women in general are more sensitive to it, will walk out the door in these bursting colors. They all of a sudden change their clothes, they all of a sudden decide the sun is shining, let me put on something yellow, something green, something pink. We may not think about the emotion, but intuitively we respond to color. That to me is very important. When you choose a color, it’s linked to emotion but it’s also linked to the concept. It’s like the black piece I told you about; the fact that it’s black and not transparent totally changes how I perceive this piece that’s called Erotica. All of a sudden, I’m kind of even confronted with the dark side of erotica, the perversion.
JR: Just from the color?

PB: Just from the color.

JR: Well it’s kind of true when working with colors, you don’t know what you call them. You get a blue or a green.

PB: We actually give them numbers.

JR: Do you really.

PB: Yes, officially I’m colorblind.
When you look at icebergs they have every imaginable shape.
ICEBERGS & PARAPHERNALIA 191
2010
63 x 79 x 40 cm
24.8 x 31.2 x 15.8"
JR: Really?

PB: *When you have these tests where you see all these little dots and you have to see a figure or a number or something, I fail that every time, but I’m convinced I’m not colorblind. They said Vincent van Gogh was colorblind. It doesn’t mean you don’t perceive color. I do perceive color.*

JR: And you do perceive the subtle differences?

PB: *Very much so.*

JR: Because that’s very much part of the work.

PB: Yes, yes.
These floating icebergs must be ‘His’ sculpture garden.
EYE OF THE GLACIER
52 x 84 x 18 cm
20.4 x 33.2 x 6.3" 2013
JR: And so, have you created all these various colors and numbered them or do they just kind of happen?

PB: This process of creating colors is so complex, the recipes are secret. All over the world in glass factories, the recipes they use for their glass are secret. Nobody will give you the recipe. Of course nowadays we can find formula because we share on-line. But this specific glass, whenever we make a new batch the color is different, so even if I say to Ruda, we need more of this color, there is no guarantee that even though he uses the same recipe, it will turn out exactly the same way. This is glass. Though it’s a manmade material, it’s very much behaving the way nature is. It keeps surprising you. It’s changing all the time. And if you can embrace that very difficult material, very frustrating material at times, you will find it’s very loyal as well and very giving.
ICE I
28 x 35 x 34 cm
2014
ICE II
2014
39 x 31 x 30 cm
15.4 x 12.2 x 11.8"
JR: And it brings things to the table as well.

PB: It brings things to the table, it opens opportunity, it gives you new clues. The material itself often inspires me, where I will take a certain shape, reshape it and use different glass to create a different experience. So, it becomes a body of work where the concept is the same but the sculptures are kind of transformations, ongoing transformations, almost like a story that you’re telling. Every new one is a new chapter, but it’s one book, one story. In the beginning I didn’t quite trust myself enough to do that. Now I’m much more at ease with it. I don’t like to do editions because for me the creative process is in making the first one. The interesting thing is by just changing the color or the way the glass is put in the mold you change what you will experience, what you will see, when it comes out. For instance instead of having a polished surface you have velvet, a very soft or structured surface. It changes what you see even though it’s the same shape. It causes a new experience.

JR: Every time?

PB: Every time.
MELTING ICE II
2009
25 x 27 x 9 cm
9.9 x 10.6 x 3.5”

MELTING ICE I
2008
43 x 38 x 10 cm
16.9 x 15 x 4”

MELTING ICE 10
2009
20 x 20 x 19 cm
8 x 8 x 7.5”

MELTING ICE 12
2009
56 x 35 x 12 cm
22 x 13.8 x 4.7”