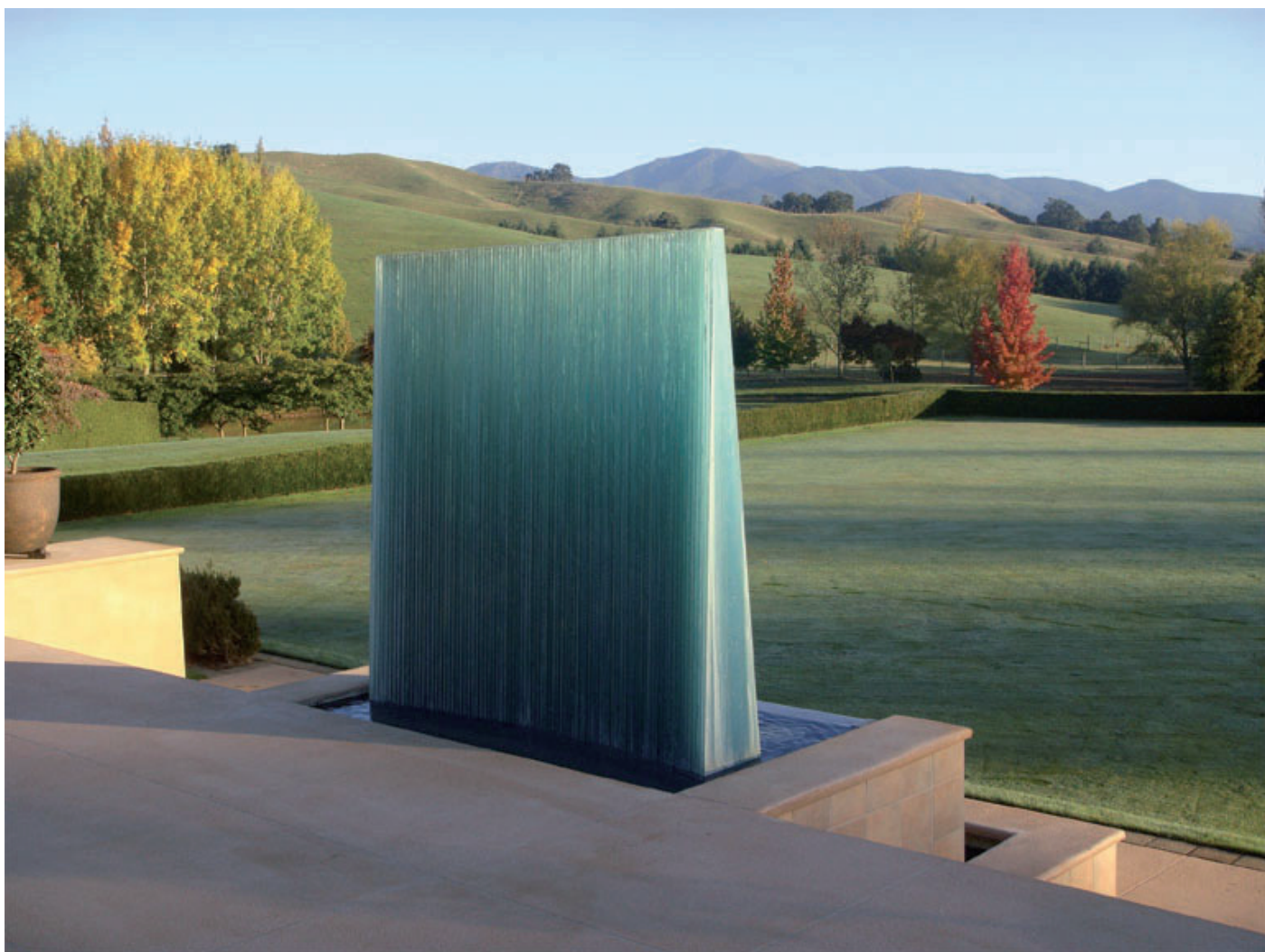


**Los Angeles Modern Auctions Blog:** 'Interview with De Wain Valentine', by Paul des Marais, September 25th, 2012

# Interview with De Wain Valentine

On October 7, 2012 LAMA will offer two De Wain Valentine works - one being a large scale fountain. Continue reading for an exclusive LAMA interview with the artist and his insights on these two specific works.



**Paul Des Marais:** Was Curved Waterwall your idea or did the patrons have a specific idea in mind?

**De Wain Valentine:** At a MOCA gala when I was on the board of directors, Sally and Robert Hunt won my fundraiser to have dinner at my house in Venice and we all became great friends. They saw some pieces of mine and said, "We want you to do a piece in our backyard sculpture garden." I made a proposal for their backyard in Encino. It was an interesting project because I worked with her son who is a sculptor. He has a fabricating business on the east side of L.A. He fabricated the stainless steel base for the piece. During the Northridge earthquake, the Encino house was red-flagged. They had a house up in Sun Valley, so they decided to move there and bring the sculpture with them. They eventually decided to move to New Zealand. They moved the sculpture from Encino to Sun Valley to New Zealand. That's curious that it has come all the way back to the Los Angeles area.

PD: That's amazing, all the way back to L.A. You developed your own polyester resin that allowed you to create large-scale discs, pillars, and columns without cracks, such as Grey Column. Did you use any similar innovations, materials, or techniques to construct Curved Waterwall?

DV: I was trying to figure out how to put the glass together. At one point, I used up all the thicker glass I had trying to glue it together. I couldn't afford the industrial companies so I had to figure out a way to do it. I was forced to invent the process, gluing it together and getting the water to flow out.

PD: You like finding a solution to a massive problem.

DV: Right, my two A's were in Physics. My Physics project in high school was on light diffraction and I'm still interested in that.

PD: Then it seems like glass was a natural progression. When did you first begin working with glass?

DV: I started working with glass in New York City in 1976. I could have the glass cut and delivered to the studio in Manhattan. There was no way I was going to haul polyester to New York. I had a one-man exhibition in 1979 at LACMA that showed my glass. There was some overlap of glass and polyester, but the direction was predominantly glass, and it still is. I still make some pieces in polyester. Plastics don't do well outdoors though.

PD: You say you had your glass delivered?

DV: I had the good fortune of having an old time glass man who befriended me. He worked for every major glass company in town. He would take glass companies that were going flat and he'd get them back in business. Whatever company he was with, he would get them to do my glass, which is custom cut. It gives it a flaked, faceted edge. They score the glass at the top with a regular old-fashioned glasscutter. Then from underneath they tap it with a ball pine hammer to give it that faceted look. Now it's all cut with a computer operated machine.

PD: It's faster, but not the same effect.

DV: No it's not the same! We tried it and I got pretty good at it, but it gets expensive. You have to buy a complete order of glass. For the largest works, I had to buy 22 thousand pounds of glass. The biggest pieces of glass were 500 pounds each.

PD: It must have taken you a long time to construct Curved Waterwall...

DV: When I'm asked that question, I tell people it's taken me all my life because it's a point I finally arrived at. I first thought about making glass in the 60s, but I could never justify doing the glass. It was just too expensive.

PD: The interaction of smog and light in Los Angeles has heavily influenced your work. Your surroundings seem to be a constant influence. Once you had enough money to create fountains, how did L.A. factor into the design of a fountain like Curved Waterwall?

DV: I grew up in Colorado and realized how beautiful the blue was. But when I moved to L.A., I couldn't understand why all the headlights were yellow at night. The smog was so bad in 1965. The smog plus the vapor from the ocean - I lived a half a block away. I was very aware of that marine atmosphere.

PD: But it's amazing that in L.A. you can escape it so easily.

DV: Yes! You're out in a meadow in the woods in some fairyland only 30 minutes away. You think, "This is Los Angeles?" It's magical. My work changed so much when I got to L.A., just like Richard Diebenkorn when he moved from the Bay Area to teach at UCLA, his work changed radically. He started the Ocean Park Series. We used to play softball in Boulder, Colorado, the artists against the philosophy department. It was just a fun game, but these philosophers were very serious about their athletics. Richard's a good ball player. He could catch and hit and run, very athletic.

PD: [Laughs] That's a great story. Ok, so does Curved Waterwall have any relation to the Cylindrical Column Laminated Glass? They look like they're from the same period.

DV: Yes it does! I've done many larger cylinders just like this. Right now I'm working on a 12-foot high cylindrical fountain. The first fountain, in fact, was a cylinder at the Federal Reserve Bank in San Francisco.

PD: Does it look like Cylindrical Column Laminated Glass?

DV: Oh yes exactly like it. It was 7 feet high though.

PD: Ah it's almost like a fountain study. Was Curved Waterwall one of the first fountains you made?

DV: It was the third fountain I made.

PD: How did adding water change your design approach?

DV: Adding a water element took me another step closer to making water stand on edge, like taking a saw and cutting out a piece of the sky or ocean. The polyester and glass give me a chance to objectify that idea, to work with that transparent colored space. For me, Curved Waterwall is putting it all together really, the water and the sky.

PD: The water adds a whole new luminosity.

DV: Yes it does, it adds liveliness to it. Sound as well, because it's water. I have a video of Curved Waterwall down when it was in Encino; the sound, the light, everything. It's a babbling brook sound, not a big water sound. It's nice because it isolates you in a sound environment, not like a rushing current.



Lot 417  
De Wain Valentine  
*Cylindrical column laminated glass*, 1980  
Laminated glass  
24» x 6» diameter  
LAMA wishes to thank the artist for his kind assistance in Catalogueing this lot.

***LAMA would like to thank De Wain and Kiana Valentine for their generosity and assistance.***