

Frida Fjellman

Text: MALIN EBBING
Photos: PATRICK MILLER

Somewhere in the borderland between art, design and crafts lives Frida Fjellman. Her works – titled the likes of Hubba Bubba, Manhattan Babe and Marie-Antoinette – have reached Swedish and international audiences alike, and she is currently celebrating the release of the book Frida Fjellman. Malin Ebbing met her in her studio to talk about how her coveted chandeliers came about, which of her ceramic animals she identifies with, and what she does on a day off in New York.



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Stepping into Fjellman's universe is a bit like entering an Alice in Wonderland dimension, where gigantic hand-blown glass prisms in a palette from bubblegum pink to deep turquoise and a charming pair of light green glass beavers create a slightly surreal yet inviting atmosphere. On a table lie large hand-blown glass prisms for a chandelier soon to be shipped to a private client in New York. In one part of her studio hangs a group of chandeliers. Frida Fjellman describes one of them as "bubblegum Jugend" and another as an "underwater tale".

– Chandeliers are such fun to come back to. They're something that can be refined and developed endlessly. Most people want a chandelier just to be beautiful, but I personally like it when it's a bit more punk, says Frida Fjellman and holds up a prism in a milky white shade.

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She describes her Fjellmanian expression as straightforward, exaggerated but with a sense of mystique.

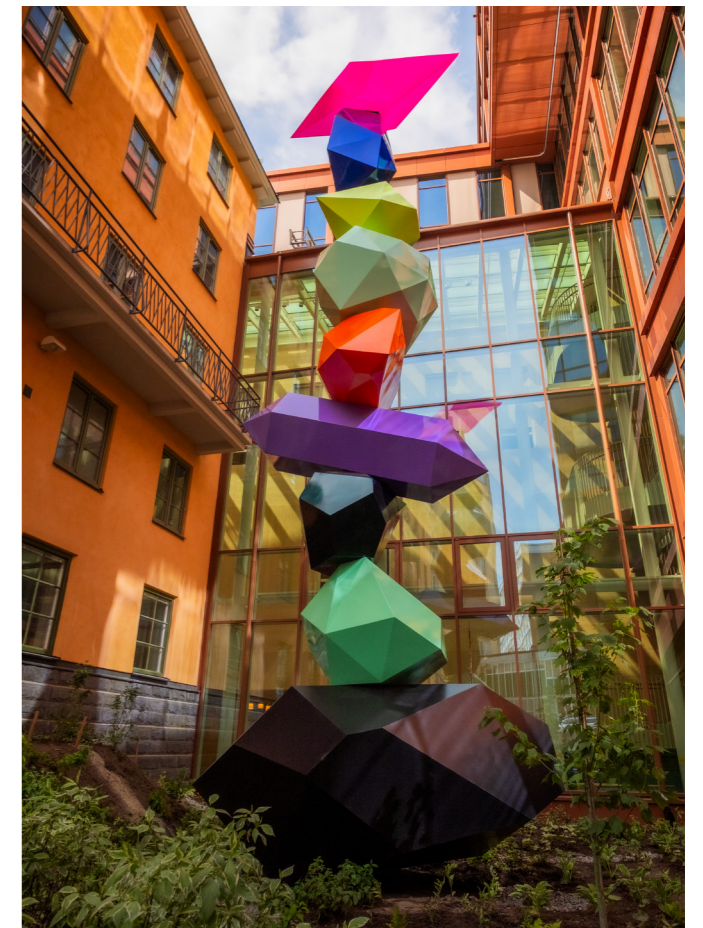
– I also like to say I work with a kind of directness and contact, especially with the chandeliers which I almost become part of because they're so big.

Every object in the studio reflects the fact that maximalism is a central theme in any material she takes on – mainly clay, glass and neon. But in parallel with this extravagance is also a strong tone of subtlety and transcendence, like the large glass clouds in imaginative shapes lined up on a table, whose transparent glass just hints hues of moss green, violet or smoky grey. These are the upper parts of Fjellman's *Gascloud Lamp* series, produced in Denmark at Holmegaard Værk. Like all Fjellman's creations, they are hand-blown by Bjørn Friborg.

– I love everything that people try to eliminate in glass. I like the reflections, the transparency, that it's glossy and a seductive material. I work with these qualities and enhance them rather. Like I've always loved glossy glaze on clay. A lot of people think it's kitschy and too much. When it comes to glass, it almost feels taboo to make something beautiful, which I think is a lame way of looking at it. I've chosen to indulge in it instead.

On her desk is a sketch of the theatrical exhibition *Being Frida Fjellman*, shown at Eskilstuna Konstmuseum in 2015. That was where the very first chandelier with prisms was displayed along with a group of life-sized ceramic animals.

– I always work on a 1:1 scale because I like to mix my animal sculptures with the prisms and build my own world that the vie-



wer becomes part of in the exhibition. My idea behind the first prisms was a troll who had taken a treasure. But more like a troll's treasure – a bit too much, a bit ugly and exaggerated.

She continues:

– At the moment, I'm doing a lot in glass, but that's mainly because there's such flow in it. But I'll go back to clay soon, she says, picking up a folder with sketches of bats, wild boars, pelicans and snakes. There's an interesting connection to us historically with animals. But animals also reflect different emotional states, and many of them are a form of self-portrait.

What is your favourite animal from the acclaimed exhibition Being Frida Fjellman?

– The marmot. It feels like me sitting there, a bit

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wary but at the same time a bit unsuspecting. The bear also feels like me – it's worried but also a protector. Like a she-bear that doesn't back down from anything. I did several hundred glaze tests for the bear. When it comes to large sculptures, you can't keep firing them, you only get one shot. It has to be exactly the right temperature so that it drips just enough but not so much that it runs off.

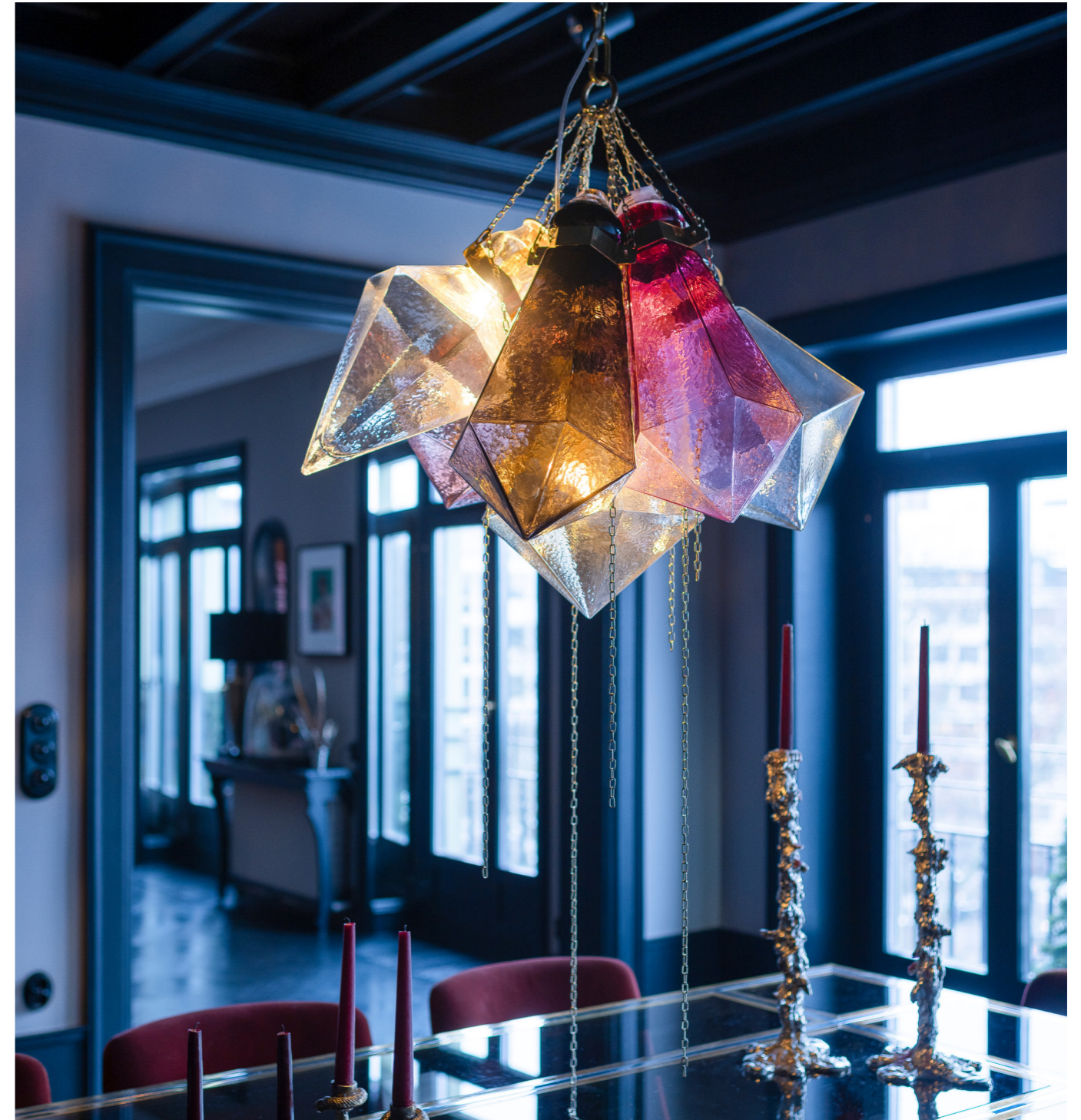
Do you have a favourite material you prefer to work with?

– Clay before it dries is my favourite material. I've worked a lot with it in the past. Wood is also a very lovely material. Metal has to be mistreated – beaten, burnt and hammered to make something happen – whereas clay just wants to be touched. It's a pleasant material. Cold and pleasant. Clay is a fantastic material, it does what you tell it to.

Since 2016, Frida has collaborated with New York gallerist Hostler Burrows, who also has a base in Los Angeles. She has also done prestigious design jobs for Design



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Miami, Art Basel and the TEFAF fair in New York.

– When I was chosen to design the VIP lounge at Miami Art Basel, it was lucky I had already done so many decorating jobs. The site-specific installation *Crystal Atmosphere part 2* consisted of 90 prisms hand-blown in Boda. The prisms looked like a sky in all the colours of the rainbow.

Through her gallerist Hostler Burrows, Fjellman has spent a lot of time in New York in recent years – both for exhibitions and to install works for private commissions.

What do you like to do when you're in New York?

– I always spend a whole day at the Met. I love losing myself in early 20th-century painters like Singer Sargent, Cézanne and Bonnard, they're what I go to look at. I'm also very fond of modern American art, such as all the Tiffany objects. It's not that I like everything, I just think it's all very cool! And I always go for a meal in Chinatown. ☺