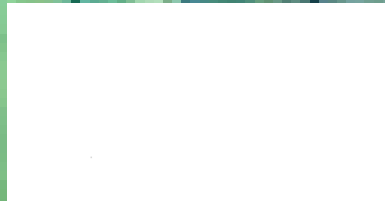


112 Contemporary Artists

glass art

 SCHIFFER PUBLISHING
Barbara Purchia and E. Ashley Rooney

Foreword by Herb Babcock
Introduction by Corey Hampson





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Introduction

From a Gallerist's Perspective

Corey Hampson

Glass is a mixture of 80 percent Mother Nature, 10 percent alchemy, and 10 percent magic—a universal blend found eloquently splashed throughout the pages of this book. Early evidence of functional glass has been discovered throughout the world. Use of the material has been around for millennia. Fragments found from ancient civilizations indicate that glass was used to carry or move liquids and was sculpted for prayer. The need for glass was embedded in ancient civilizations, and glass was used during their day-to-day activities. Today, we too depend on glass on a daily basis; whether it's driving in our cars or checking out our appearance, glass has been accepted, often without notice, in our daily routine. However, it was not until recently that artists discovered glass as a material to make art. Once they were exposed to the beauty of glass and began to understand its flexible applications, both the purpose for the material and the art world would never be the same.

Glass as a means for expression encompasses a very broad spectrum based on the variety of techniques, ideas, and uses that have emerged over the years. As the owner of a gallery devoted to artists working with “studio glass,” I often use the word “glass” as a generic term. I have learned, however, that the term explains very little to those who want to learn about this new art form. Collectors, most historians, artists, and gallerists have dubbed 1962 as the exact year when artists in the United States experimenting with glass challenged the material and ultimately caused it to take a leap into the unknown. Harvey Littleton and Dominic Labino guided the way by melting some marbles, but, more importantly, they had the vision that artists could use glass to give form to their ideas. This insight spawned a revolution for glass over the next fifty years and later fueled the concept of studio glass as a collectible. Glass art would eventually be accepted into curriculums in colleges, be acquired by museums, and become a part of both significant public institutions and private collections. Reputations of artists, museums, collectors, and galleries would be developed and careers made.

Harvey Littleton explored the world to find answers as to whether glass was a viable material for art. In this pursuit, he stumbled upon Erwin Eisch in Germany. Erwin always thought of himself as a “not so good glassblower.” He would paint on glass and stated, “If I paint on the surface . . . do you still consider it glass art?” He brought something to the glass world that distinguished it from other materials. He taught there could be a message beyond the material. This mantra may be why Harvey Littleton coined the term “Technique is cheap.” This implied that anybody can learn a trade, but utilizing creativity in a field will give that field life, and with life art will follow.



Harvey Littleton's *Yellow Crown* from his *Topological Geometry* series created in 1983 is made from barium/potash glass with multiple cased overlays of Kugler colors: white, ruby, yellow, with red amber lines and an orange center line. The 23" × 28" piece has 12 separate elements. Courtesy of Douglas Schaible Photography.

Fifty years. Middle-aged or still in its infancy? Is studio glass suffering from a mid-life crisis or is it just too young to realize its own potential?

The internationally acclaimed artist Dale Chihuly paved the way for most artists who work with glass. With the advice from his good friend Italo Scanga, he started a major self-promoting marketing campaign. His visions went beyond the glory hole. He created entire cities of glass, private and public installations as well as botanical gardens where his work interacts with each unique habitat. He has created museums devoted to great visual experiences. With the help of philanthropists Anne and John Hauberg, he introduced the world to the Pilchuck School of Glass. Founded in 1971, as a summer school, Pilchuck is a creative learning center situated deep in the rain forest of Washington. Artists can learn and share knowledge while exploring outside of their specialty. It would be difficult to look at the glass world without paying homage to Dale Chihuly and his crew. Dale would find the most talented artists in the world to work on his projects; many artists, including Rich Royal, William Morris, Martin Blank, and Lino Tagliapietra, would go on to develop extraordinary careers.



Martin Blank's *Demeter* 2014 measures 78" × 43" × 15.5". Martin Blank uses gold/silver leaf on clear and amber hot-sculpted glass wheat stalks to express the beauty, fragility, and preciousness of life. Courtesy of Douglas Schaible Photography.



Richard Royal's *Tropical Leopard Skin Scroll*, 2014, is 21" × 21". Each element was made at the end of a blow pipe and heavily cold worked to reveal layers of color beneath the surface. Courtesy of Richard Royal.

Generations of maestro (master) glass handlers anchored around the Mediterranean Sea have been working with glass for centuries. Marooned on Murano, glass techniques were passed down through families like ancient cooking recipes. In the late 1970s, Lino Tagliapietra picked up where his brother left off and taught these secret formulas and techniques to artists in the United States. His conquest to educate the world led him to be ostracized for a period of time by the glassblowers of Murano. Ultimately, he helped globalize a better understanding of the material by inspiring many young glassblowers. For his love for the material and a desire to share his talents with anyone who shared his passion, Lino Tagliapietra will forever be revered throughout the world as a true maestro of Murano.



Lino Tagliapietra's *Dinosaur* series created in 1997 measures only 20" high. Work from this series grew in scale, some pieces reaching nearly 70" in height. Courtesy of Daniel Fox/Lumina Studio.

In the Czech Republic, Jaroslava Brychtova and Professor Stanislav Libensky had an international influence. Breaking boundaries both technically and through subtle political statements, they influenced the world with their teaching and through their sculpture. They are considered by many to be the most important duo in the history of studio glass. Their work may be rugged or geometrical, yet they control both space and volume by utilizing the density of glass. Throughout their life, their collaborations often discretely documented the harshness of living in a country controlled by communism. One of their many successful students is artist Vladimira Klumpar, who blends the rigid structure of industry with organic shapes. Stanislav Libensky and Jaroslava Brychtova permit the viewer to peer into a hole or an open slice and experience a sense of hope. Vladimira internally folds the material as if one should be looking within rather than through. Much like Anish Kapoor's sculpture in Edinburgh titled *Suck*, it's a hole to the unknown where the viewer may explore and look within to stretch the imagination to what might be in, through, or beyond.



Ann Wolff completed this cast glass and poured concrete sculpture entitled *Notes* in 2014 at 77 years old. The sculpture measures 35.5" x 45.5" and is comprised of three separate elements. Courtesy of Daniel Fox/Lumina Studio.



Stanislav Libensky and Jaroslava Brychtova's *Empty Throne II* was created in 1989 and measures 39.5" x 24.5" x 9.5". This piece depicts an empty throne, which is what essentially happened during the Velvet Revolution in the former Czechoslovakia. Courtesy of Douglas Schaible Photography.

In the late 1970s, a young Rhode Island School of Design student decided to leave his life behind in search of the living Libensky legends. He scraped up enough money to get a plane ticket from New York to France. He met up with a colleague, Dan Dailey, who was working with a well-known production company in France, Daum Crystal. The starving artist traveled to visit Erwin Eisch in Germany, who lent him the money to make his way to Novy Bor in the Czech Republic. Stanislav Libensky and Jaroslava Brychtova opened their home and their school to this young student. When the artist came back to the United States, he looked at the world differently. He started to cast work using carbon to imprint the interior, which successfully made a dialogue between the interior and exterior of his industrial-looking cast glass objects. He realized there are few limits to what one can accomplish with this material. On the facing page is an image of Howard Ben Tre's installations (thirty-two separate sculptures) erected throughout the city core of Warrington, England.

In the mid 1990s, Ann Wolff, a former designer for the Kosta Boda glass factory and well known for her richly engraved blown glass vessels, met with Professor Libensky. According to her, the professor convinced her to translate her ideas into cast glass. Early cast work by Ann Wolff somewhat resembles Stanislav Libensky and Jaroslava Brychtova's older work (*Head I*). Nearly twenty years later at the age of seventy-eight, she is creating the most powerful work of her career. Ann reflects, "Living in Småland, Sweden, which is a rural community, the people are more or less: what you see is what you get." Berlin, where Ann has her studio, is a cosmopolitan melting pot of all types of people from around the world. Her latest body of work concerns the people in Berlin and the façades people wear to mask their identity. Living in Berlin, as in all large urban areas, people build layers for protection and only by continued interaction will they let down their guard to reveal themselves.

A young artist in his early thirties has emerged from the Czech Republic closely following his predecessors with similar uncertainty, angst, and pure love for glass. In 2010, during an annual trade show for glass artists hosted by the Glass Art Society, we stumbled upon a studio that sounded more like a rock concert. This studio hosted hundreds of glassblowers, many of whom were standing on chairs screaming with excitement. We made our way to the front of the crowd, and there was a tall young glassblower working with what appeared to be a molten glass head on the end of his blowpipe. I asked one of the screaming glassblowers, "What is so exciting?" The glassblower enthusiastically replied, "The dude is going into the inside of the head and sculpting the face from within!" We realized then that any glassblower who excited hundreds of glassblowers must be worth looking into. Martin Janecky spends his time between Fairbanks, Alaska, and the Czech Republic. He sculpts his work from the inside out. At first glance, one would think he uses a mold, but his faces are all done "free hand," patiently carved from the inside while hot.



Martin Janecky's *Thom* created in 2014 measures 20" high. The entire bust was created on the end of a blow pipe, and the head was carved hot from inside out. Courtesy of Martin Janecky.

Today, the use of other materials has become prevalent in studio glass. Cristina Bothwell uses ceramic, cement, wood, paint, and found objects mixed in with her pate de verre cast elements to convey her message. Each piece tells a story whether it's a soul rising out to reflect on life or a mother and daughter's unconditional bond. Tim Tate, who is cofounder of the Washington School of Glass, uses cast glass frames to display his looped videos, blurring the definition of studio glass as the glass itself has a function yet the content of the video is narrative. Vivian Wang, a sculptor originally born in China who worked as a fashion designer in



Well of Light, Marketgate. Commission in Warrington Town Centre, Warrington, England, 2002. This installation developed the city core of the city and consists of 32 sculptures created by Howard Ben Tré.

New York and as a ceramicist, recently started exploring the use of glass in her artwork. She uses cast glass heads, hands, and feet with heavily detailed and decorated garments to depict children from early Japanese and Chinese dynasties. Each has a story that is told through a subtle expression and magnificently decorated garment.

Artists throughout the world who chose to explore glass over the last fifty years have created some of the most spectacular objects on earth. Whether glass's beauty comes from color, form, or concept, we are utterly and completely seduced by its attributes. Through archeology, glass has helped us discover where we came from and today, through the exploration of expression in art, it will help us identify who we are.

Corey Hampson is currently president and owner of Habatat Galleries, Inc. He has written and published numerous articles about studio glass and curated dozens of museum and art center exhibitions throughout the United States. He hosts the largest and oldest annual studio glass exhibition in the world, the Habatat Galleries International Glass Invitational. Hampson works very closely developing collections for private collectors, museums, and organizations around the world. He currently serves on the National Advisory Board of Directors for the AACG (Art Alliance for Contemporary Glass) and is also the president of the MGCA (Michigan Glass Collecting Alliance).