

Expressive Independence

The Triumph of American Studio Glass

by Thomas Karman

The history of American glass is as vast and varied as the country itself. The early American glass products, primarily utilitarian, were made in 1825 by the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company and the Bakewell, Page, and Bakewell Company of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. These two companies and many others soon made large quantities of inexpensive glass, both pressed and molded, as well as decorative pieces and later art glass, which set the standards in glassmaking techniques for the early years.

Any artistic development was soon severely curbed by the economic, social and political chasms, represented by Blue and Grey, which tore at the new nation. It was not until the newly-forged unity pacified the land, that American art glass was able to progress toward Victorian elegance, to the richness of Art Nouveau, and on into bold Art Deco.

Technical innovations were also a factor in expanding glass production. When the German Friedrich Siemens invented the tank furnace, he replaced the pot furnace in use at the time, and thus enabled the production of glass on a larger scale.

Soon the artistic aspect in glassmaking came to be an important factor, which gave rise to the American companies that became influential in art glass. Founded in 1837 in South Boston, the Mt. Washington Glass Company merged with Pairpoint Manufacturing in 1880 and began producing art glass in the late 19th century.

Prestigious art glass companies like Durand, Quezal, Tiffany, and Steuben traced their pedigree to European glass centers in France, Austria-Bohemia, Germany, Italy, England, and they employed hundreds of craftsmen trained in those countries.

These American glass companies (essentially factories) represented the USA well in the global art glass market. Much like in Europe, the glass was known by the name of the firm, often the designer's name like Tiffany, but anonymous artisans/craftsmen executed the technical intricacies of actual glassmaking, which transformed the design into decorative art glass reality. Because he was especially creative, Frederick Carder is recognized for his Art Deco glass while working for Steuben and thus tied to the Steuben name, but that occurred after the fact when collectors began to focus on his contributions to the Steuben Glass Works.

There is no question that the USA continued to produce excellent art glass before and after WWII. Yet during the two decades after the war something happened to force a new direction in the American art glass focus. Many returning veterans, perhaps as an antidote to all the destruction they had witnessed, took advantage of the GI Bill to pursue creative arts studies. Thus it could be said that the state of American glass art was

strengthened. Others may argue that the WWII aftermath left an art glass production void in Europe, and thus opened new opportunities for American glass artists.

Artists always challenge limits and strive to ‘push the envelope’, but at this juncture, in addition to creative experimentation, further factors were driving a change from art glass to glass art. The setting for this transformation was a country that had become a world power by defeating an evil totalitarian foe; it was a nation that acted to confront a former ally to save Europe again from repressive domination.

Any art, including glass, may seem to be far removed from the reality of politics or world affairs, but art is never created in a vacuum. Art is nurtured by ideas and responds to experiences and events. Ultimately, art also reflects, and is shaped by, the temperament of the times.

And after WWII, America was innovative, self-confident, and aware of newly-found power and influence. This mood translated into a desire for individual recognition, personal self-expression and independence. In addition to artistic aspirations, these basic human desires also contributed to the emergence of the Studio Glass Movement.

While there were no agreed-upon goals, a common belief in self-reliance, independence, and confidence in the future shaped the objectives of the practitioners responsible for this novel concept now called Studio Glass. For almost a century, glass artists had toiled in virtual obscurity, surely receiving personal satisfaction from their accomplishments, but finding little individual acknowledgment.

We need to remember that the common practice of the times had been to create a piece of art glass as a team, with possibly four or five craftsmen/specialists each executing a specific function. Heretofore, only a handful of glassmakers, like Maurice Marinot, could be called studio glass artists. Now the American artists each wanted to accept the responsibility for the entire creative process, from innovative design to the final creation of that work of art.

Dr. Martha Wexler Lynn, in her scholarly book American Studio Glass 1960-1990, comments on the emergence of the Studio Glass movement:

“From the efforts of a small band of craftsmen would flow enthusiasm for glass as an art medium, a reconnection to factory based skills, the use of these skills in studios, and the development of glass-centered university curricula, which in turn would attract practitioners (artists and teachers) and supporters (dealers and collectors), who would insure the success of glass as an art medium.”

My article about Studio Glass is presented from the perspective of a passionate collector, who is not concerned about precise definitions of art vs. craft; one who does not care about a distinction between glass art vs. high art, or whether studio glass and movement are indeed the correct terms.

Whether an artist paints in an atelier or an artist blows glass in a studio, in each case many talents are necessary. Either way, a multitude of insights and emotions, as well as decisions and techniques, are required to convey the intended essence of the work. To dismiss glass oeuvres as craft rather than high art is to slight an entire era of glass artists and the inspired visual and tactile cornucopia they produced. It is what it is, no matter what someone chooses to call it. The artists who created the glass art know who they are and what they did. And we pay homage by admiring their creativity and applauding their achievements. Therefore this article is a tribute to all the men and women artists who dared to follow their passion for glass into uncharted territory.

The turbulent sixties formed a stimulating backdrop for this new movement. The thrill of experimentation and discovery clearly motivated the artists. A number of them had been working in other media, but now became interested in glass. They learned from each other. Some taught, others were students and then proceeded to become instructors themselves. As one of the pioneer glass masters puts it: *“These are building-block people we are talking about.”* The Pilchuck glass school in Washington State and the Penland School of Crafts in North Carolina were among the first schools to conduct glass blowing classes, and many of the early studio glass artists are alumni of these schools.

Soon after, glassmaking became established at universities, and academic programs for blowing glass were established around the country.

Harvey Littleton founded the first fine arts glass program at the University of Wisconsin in Madison in 1962.

Marvin Lipofsky inaugurated the university-level glass program at the University of California at Berkeley in 1964.

Dr. Robert C. Fritz founded a university-level glass program at San Jose State University in San Jose, CA, also in 1964.

In 1966, Bill Boysen initiated the graduate glass program at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, Illinois.

Roland Jahn opened a glass program at the Philadelphia College of Art in 1967.

Christopher Ries founded the glass department at The Ohio State University and was its first instructor as an undergraduate student.

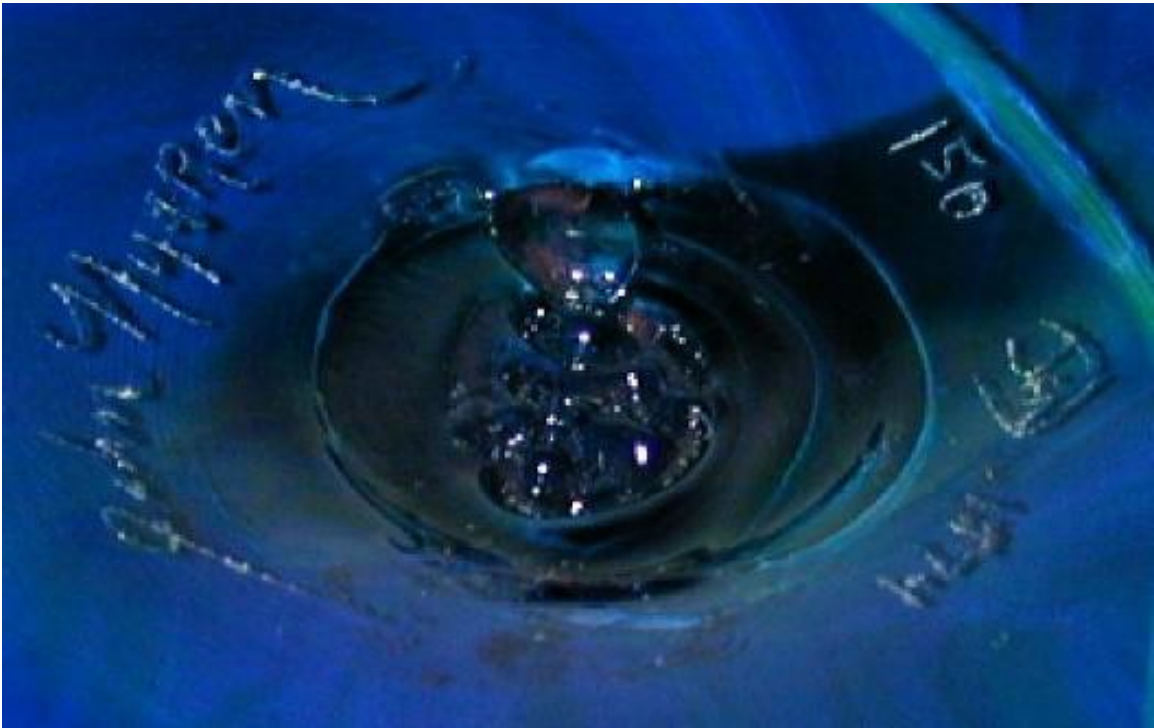
Harvey Littleton and Dominick Labino are generally recognized as the "fathers" of the American Studio Glass Movement for their seminal work with glass, paving the way for the glass artists whose works are highlighted in this article. Their efforts uphold the traditions established in the early 1960s and continue to represent the United States well in the field of studio glass. It is a pleasure to be able to celebrate here a small fraction of their creative talents.

Initially, the term studio glass referred only to free-blown works. But numerous artists working in this medium later pursued many other techniques for creating glass art.

In this new era of studio glass the pride in creating and a desire for personal recognition becomes evident in that a given piece of glass is now signed with the name – or at least

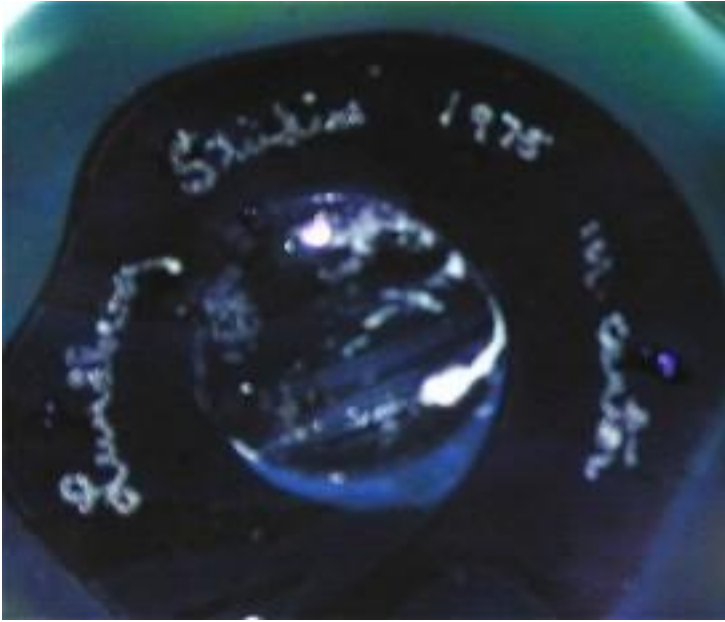
the initials – of the artist, and in most cases also carries a date. When two artists worked on any piece, both names may now be present.

John Nygren devised the most elaborate identification system for his glass. He autographed his works in five ways. He designed a special glass button seal with his initials, which sits over the pontil area; additionally, each piece is signed with his initials JFN, his signature John Nygren, the year, plus a unique identification number. His wife Sharon named each piece and kept meticulous records of these facts, creating a complete catalog. Over a thirty-two year period, she named over 4,000 pieces.



A John Nygren Signature

Some studios never changed to name individual artists; other larger studios continued to sign their name, but in addition also began to mention their top artists' names or initials, for example Lundberg Studios and Mark Cantor.



A Mark Cantor Signature



Miniature, 3", 1975

The scope of my contribution to the story of Studio Glass is but a small window into the contrasting variety of works created by the sizeable number of artists who can count themselves a part of this movement. This article focuses for the most part on the beginnings of the Studio Glass Movement. Any inclusion here is limited to the extent of our modest collection, and the artists presented are mostly early pioneers displaying dramatic, sometimes abstract, spontaneity; also included are later glassmakers who demonstrate expertly calculated, measured use of techniques in the process to achieve the desired effects, sometimes evocative of earlier styles like Art Nouveau or Art Deco. Their work is being showcased in museum as well as private collections. They are listed here in alphabetical order, with the works for each artist shown in chronological sequence.

Bob Biniarz

Initially working in pottery, Bob Biniarz was one of the artists attracted by the possibilities of glass and used his artistic sense to become successful in that field. His work shows a strong talent for traditional composition, based on classic forms and conventional color combinations. His glass is sometimes evocative of art nouveau. Noteworthy is his treatment of surface texture. Not much is known about this artist after the early 1970s, but the results of his efforts earn him a place in the ranks of Studio Glass pioneers.

Collections: Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY



Vessel, 6 ½", 1970



Vessel, 4 ½", 1973

Frederick Birkhill

1974 B.S. degree in General Science from Eastern Michigan University

1987 B.F.A. degree from the University of Michigan

Shown is an example from his furnace glass series.

In the artist's own words:

"I have been working with glass for over a quarter of a century. The works you see before you represent a lifetime of experiences and thought. My sources of ideas are numerous, ranging from imagery derived from nature to a romantic belief in a European tradition of glass art. Though the principal influence of my work is Surrealism as expressed in mixed media, I always return to the use of glass as a favored material."

Collections: Smithsonian Museum, Washington, DC

Corning Glass Museum, Corning, NY

Detroit Institute of Arts

Museum for Modern Art, New York, NY

Museum für Glaskunst, Lauscha, Germany



Vessel, 5", 1980
Furnace Glass Series

Michael Boylen

A.B. degree from Yale University;

M.A. degree in American History from the University of Wisconsin.

Boylen studied pottery before he commenced blowing glass. Not only did he study and teach in this country, but he also visited European glass factories and schools. He has concentrated on the development of techniques for segmenting interior space into multiple compartments and colors. In his work and teaching he always emphasized irregularity of shape. His understanding and command of blowing glass are the mark of an accomplished artist. His work is well represented in many public collections.

Collections: Cleveland Museum of Art
Corning Glass Museum, Corning, NY
Bennington Museum, Bennington, VT
Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH
Milwaukee Art Center



Abstract Vessel,
6 ½", 1971



Abstract Vessel
6", 1971

Peter Bramhall

He first became interested in glass at the University of Wisconsin in the 1960s. In 1968 he attended the Penland School of Crafts for sessions in glass blowing. He has also taught glass blowing, drawing, and sculpture at Earlham College's Vermont Studies Program. He earned a B.F.A degree in Fine Arts/Sculpture from the Cleveland Institute of Fine Art in 1970.



Vessel, 10 ½", 1979
Applications &
Top & Bottom Crackle Glass

José Chardiet

1980 B.A. degree from Southern Connecticut State University

1983 M.F.A. degree from Kent State University, Kent, OH

He was on the faculty at Pilchuck Glass School and the Penland School of Crafts. His most recent focus has been primarily on designing and making glass sculptures using blowing and casting processes. His work is represented in private and public collections.

Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Art Museum

American Craft Museum in New York

Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY

High Museum, Atlanta, GA

Yokohama Museum of Art, Japan

Musée des Arts Decoratif, Lausanne, Switzerland



Cameo Vase, 10", 1987

Dr. Robert C. Fritz
1920 – 1986

1954 B.A. degree from San José State University

1956 M.A. degree from San José State University

Ph.D. From Ohio State University

A pioneer and a major force in America's mid 20th century Studio Glass Movement, Dr. Robert Fritz is remembered for his contributions to the world of glass art. Many contemporary artists boast tutelage under Dr. Fritz on their resumes. Glass art created by Dr. Fritz during the 1960s to 1980s is marked by his own hand "Fritz". He explored sculptural form rather than creating functional objects, and his work is remarkable in using difficult techniques approachable only by masters of the art.

His glass art masterpieces can be found in museum and private collections throughout the U.S., Europe, and Japan.



Abstract Vessel,
8 ½", ca.1968

Audrey Handler

Audrey Handler has been operating a private glass studio since 1970. She has a BFA in painting and art history from Boston University and is an MFA graduate of the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She has taught at the Royal College of Art, London England, Penland School of Crafts, and given classes and lectures around the country. She is an Honorary Life Member of The Glass Art Society of which she was a founding member.

Collections: Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY
Glassmuseum Ebeltoft, Denmark
Glashaus Lobmeyr, Vienna, Austria
Wustum Museum of Art, Racine, WI
Bergstrom-Mahler Museum, Neenah, WI
Greenville County Art Museum, Greenville, SC



Sculpture, 3" / 4 ¼" / 2 ¼" (H/L/W), 1980

Kent Ipsen

1961 B.S. degree in art education from the University of Wisconsin, Madison

1964 M.S. degree in art education from the University of Wisconsin, Madison

1965 M.F.A. degree in ceramics and glass from the University of Wisconsin, Madison

Kent Ipsen is one of the early pioneers in American Studio Glass and has become one of the outstanding American artists in creative glass sculpture. He was the director of the glass program at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA. His work has been included in many important glass books and has been exhibited in major galleries; his pieces are part of many private and major museum collections in the United States and across the world.

Collections: Chicago Art Institute
Milwaukee Art Center, Milwaukee, WI
Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH
Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY
Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA
Louisville Art Center, Louisville, KY



Thick-walled Vessel, 5 ½", 1967

Roland Jahn

1966 M.F.A. degree from the University of Wisconsin, Madison
He also studied art history at Friedrich-Wilhelm University in Bonn, Germany. He was a student of Harvey Littleton, where he was part of the historical role that UW-Madison played in founding and promulgating the Studio Glass movement. He taught at the Penland School of Crafts, NC and at the Philadelphia School of Art.

Collections: Art Museum, Wilmington, DE
Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY
Museum of Art, Newark, NJ
Philadelphia Museum of Art



Sculpted Vessel,
8", 1973



Vessel, 4", 1973



Sculpted Bottle,
6 ½", 1974

Dominick Labino
1910-1987

Internationally-known artist, technologist, inventor, and master craftsman in glass. Trained at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, he attended the Toledo Museum of Art School of Design. Through his research and development of new technologies, like the fusing of colors, he provided artists with the methods and tools to create glass as art in their own studios, no longer making it necessary to involve glass factories in their creative process. In 1962 he collaborated with Harvey Littleton to set up the first glass seminar at the Toledo Art Museum. Because of the originality of his art, his inventiveness, ability and knowledge, as well as the quality of his works, he is not only considered the father of the Studio Glass Movement, but is often looked upon as its symbol. In 1963 Labino set up a studio on his large farm in Ohio where he began freehand blowing of molten glass....and the rest is history.

Collections: Toledo Museum of Art
Cleveland Museum of Art
Chicago Art Institute
Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC
Cincinnati Museum of Art
Detroit Institute of Art
Fowler Museum, Los Angeles, CA
Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA
National Glass Museum, Leerdam, The Netherlands
Kunstmuseum, Düsseldorf, Germany
Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg, Germany
Victoria & Albert Museum, London, England



Vessel, 8 ½", 1967



Vessel, 4 ¾", 1970

Dominick Labino

“Among the individuals who assisted at the birth of Studio Glass, the most prominent was Dominick Labino.” Quote by Harvey Littleton



Vase, 4 ½”, 1974



Sculpture, 5 ½”, 1979

Labino Studio – Baker O’Brien

After working with Mr. Labino as his sole apprentice, Baker O'Brien has become a world-renowned glass artist in her own right.

“Strong rich color is what sets my work apart from the pack, my work is never monochromatic.”



Stoppered Bottle, 7”, 1987



Triangular Vessel “Sails”, 5 ½”, 1989

John Lewis

1967 University of California, Berkeley, BS, Major: Zoology

1972 University of California, Berkeley, MA, Major: Design

John Lewis was introduced to blown glass by Professor Marvin Lipofsky. He opened his own art glass studio in 1969 and was one of the first artists to open a hot glass studio in the Bay area. His early work focused on colorful blown glass vessels, but more recently he has created large-scale sculptures of cast glass where the emphasis is on sculptural, solid and structural aspects - often incorporating simple shapes.

Collections: American Craft Museum, New York, NY

Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY

Oakland Museum of Art, Oakland, CA

High Museum, Atlanta, GA

Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY



Ovoid Vase, 4 5/8", 1969



Vessel, 5", 1976

Paul Manners

1967 B.A. degree from Harvard College, Cambridge, MA

He studied ceramics at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He was introduced to glassblowing by Dr. Robert Fritz at San José State University and adopted it as his career. The example shown here exhibits an intricate interior threaded and chambered glasswork with four compartments, clear to a rich blue, and several extremely fine radiating "pulled" threads of glass that attach from the interior body to the walls of this intriguing studio art glass sculpture.

Collections: Lannan Museum, Palm Beach, FL



Glass Sculpture, 6 ¼", 1979

Kimrie Newcomb

1968 B.A. degree from San Jose State College

1969 M.A. degree from San Jose State College

He is known for innovative shapes of his glass creations and for their strong iridescent surfaces, as he expresses himself in eye-catching compositions. The results are captivating and unique pieces.

He taught at Foothill College in 1968 and later at the University of Illinois.

Collections: Pasadena Museum, Pasadena, CA
Johnson Wax Corporation, Racine, WI
American Craftmen's Council
Sheboygan Arts Foundation, Sheboygan, WI
Huntington Galleries, Huntington, WV



Vessel, 8 ½", 1969



Vase, 4", 1979

John Nygren

1965 B.F.A. University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE

1967 M.F.A. Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI

“The central theme reflected in Nygren’s glass art has always been a deep felt reverence towards Mother Earth. His love of nature is expressed in the artistic excellence of his work.

John’s glass art is a personal metaphor for life in the woods.

To Sharon and John,

Thank you for your poetic response to God’s beauty that invites our touch through time.

Paul Stankard”

From the catalog of: John Nygren: 25 Years in Glass Chelsea Gallery, Western Carolina University 1993

Collections: Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY

Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, VA

The Mint Museum of Art, NC



Vessel, 4", 1974
Winged Dragonfly



Vase, 5 ¼", 1974

John Nygren

A love of nature expressed in artistic excellence by an American Master



Vase, 4 ½", 1976
Ancient Persimmon Landscape



Vessel, 4 ½", 1976



Vase, 6 ¾", 1980



Sculpture, 4", 1983
Confrontation

Mark Peiser

Purdue University, Lafayette, IN

1961 B.S. in Design degree from Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago

He became involved with the Studio Glass Movement in 1967, and has been recognized worldwide for his glass art innovations and accomplishments throughout his creative career. A spirit of technical ingenuity and innovation is central to Peiser's art. More recently he has turned to cast, cut, and polished glass sculptures of subtle design and color.

Collections: Asheville Art Museum, Asheville, NC
Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA
Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, CA
Birmingham Art Museum, Birmingham, AL
Art Institute of Chicago
Toledo Museum of Art
Huntington Museum of Art, Huntington, WV
Indianapolis Museum of Art
Tokyo Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan
Lucerne Museum of Art, Lucerne, Switzerland
Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art, Sapporo, Japan



Vase, 5 ¼", 1972



Vessel, 3 ¼", 1973

Art Reed

In Mr. Reed's own words:

"The process of blowing and manipulating hot glass still intrigues me. My greatest inspiration is the inherent quality of the glass. Because of the nature of molten glass, you can't set it down and come back to it later. I like that it is spontaneous, yet immediate."

While each one of Reed's glass designs is based on traditional shapes and patterns, he also enjoys experimenting with more modern interpretations.

But what it's really all about for me," he says, "is the shape and the clarity of the glass."



Vase, 8", Pilchuck 1975



Vase, 3 1/4", 1980

Christopher Ries

1975 B.F.A. degree from Ohio State University

1978 M.F.A. degree from the University of Wisconsin, Madison

During his time in Madison Ries was research assistant to the Founder of the American Studio Glass Movement, Harvey K. Littleton. He founded the glass department at Ohio State University and was its first instructor as an undergraduate student. His early focus was on blowing glass vessels like the example shown here. Subsequently, he used colorless optical glass that he cut and polished to create sculptures of simple abstract shapes. The refraction of light within the body of the work creates internal designs.

In his own words: *“My objective with glass has been and always will be to communicate truth and beauty through the medium.”*

Collections: Cincinnati Museum of Art, Cincinnati, OH
Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY
Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH
Contemporary Arts & Crafts Museum, Palm Beach, FL
Indianapolis Art Museum, Indianapolis, IN
New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA
Otto Schott Centrum, Mainz, Germany
Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH



Stoppered Bottle, 7 ½", 1976

Richard Ritter

1968 B.A. degree from the Art School of the Society of Arts and Crafts, Detroit, MI
Richard Ritter has been an active participant in the Studio Art Glass Movement for over 38 years, creating glass in the mountains of North Carolina. From this idyllic setting his reputation spread far and wide. His work has been exhibited internationally and has involved the extensive exploration of creative glass processes. He is represented in numerous public and private collections.

Collections: Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, VA
Cleveland Art Museum, Norfolk, VA
Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY
Glashaus Lobmeyr, Vienna, Austria
Detroit Institute of Arts
Hunter Museum of Art, Chattanooga, TN
Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, NC
Asheville Art Museum, Asheville, NC
St. Louis Art Museum
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA
Museum of Fine Art, Boston, MA
Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Wash. DC



Vase, 8 ½", early 1970s

Richard Satava

He attended the College of San Mateo and received a B.F.A. degree in Glass from California State University, Chico. Using ancient techniques to create original designs in hand blown glass, Satava creates works of art, individually crafted, by carefully combining the highest degree of technical skills and artistic creativity.

The piece shown here is from his Shasta Series of vessels, which depict mountainous forests in silhouette. He achieves his accomplishments by carefully combining the highest degree of technical skills and artistic creativity.

Satava's works are included in numerous public and private collections throughout the world, including the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C.



Vessel, 9 ¼", 1989
Mount Shasta Series

George Thiewes

B.F.A. degree from Mankato State College, Minnesota

M.F.A. degree from Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois

At the beginning of his artistic career in the late 1960s and early '70s, Arizona-based sculptor George Thiewes was an active member of the Studio Glass Movement. After working in glass for over 20 years, Thiewes changed course in the mid-'80s, turning his attention to theater set design.

Collections: Art Institute of Chicago
Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, VA
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Phoenix Art Museum



Vessel, 3 5/8", 1973

Peter Vanderlaan

Attended Saint John's College, Santa Fe, NM.

He began to work with the medium of glass in 1970, learning about the techniques of blowing glass. He quickly mastered the technical intricacies of glassmaking and was teaching at the Pilchuck Glass School by 1976. During his career he always recognized that in glassmaking science and art converge:

"I've been hopelessly addicted to glass for the last twenty-eight years. I am as fascinated with the chemistry of glass color as I am with making beautiful things out of it."

Currently, rather than production work, his greater interest is the pursuit of individual pieces that take a lot of time and consideration.

Collections: Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY



Vase, 4", 1975

I have been told by one of the early glass masters that at the outset of the American Studio Glass Movement there were about 125 glass artists and they all knew each other. Presently, there are over 9,000 artists working in this field. Nevertheless, when we look at works being created at the beginning of the new millennium, we realize that the future of American Studio Glass clearly remains bright.

Henry Levine



Calabash vase, 1999
9" / 24 cm

Shane Fero



3 Flame-worked Goblets,
2004, 9" / 28 cm

The examples in this article demonstrate the huge variety of Art Glass created through contrasting shapes, techniques and decorations. Not only are these artists of the American Studio Glass era renowned in their own country, but many of them received world-wide recognition for their contribution to the art of glass. They convey their vibrant visions through fervent energy, inspirational serenity, or picturesque beauty. All of these attributes coalesce to form a legacy that is a boon to the art world and a source of national pride for the United States.

When I look at this inspiring array of glass
I see the rich palette of our union,
the silent silhouettes of our ways;
I see the shining vistas of our land.
I see the American Spirit.

We owe a debt of gratitude to all these artists who became fascinated with the expressive promise of glass during the last quarter of the 20th century, an era during which they translated their passion for glass into a permanent historic testimonial. Glass artist Mary Ann "Toots" Zynsky's quote in the International Herald Tribune in 1994 sums up eloquently the focus of the Studio Glass Movement:

“You can do everything with glass. You can pour it and cast it like metal. You can stretch it, carve it, saw it, you can stick it together. It's the only material that you can melt and blow. It's such a strange and plastic thing. I think that's what keeps drawing me back to it.”

It remains to be seen whether this American Studio Glass Movement has done enough to dispel any doubts about glass art being acceptable as high art. But I am sure that there is no doubt on the part of the glass artists. Their accomplishments have been showered with accolades, and public acceptance has validated their success. All of us are witnesses to their triumph. Therefore, let us appreciate this national treasure and enjoy it. When history delivers the final verdict about Studio Glass being high art, it can only be affirmative corroboration after the fact.

My special thank you: *“I was fortunate to be in personal contact with several of these artists, and I want to thank them for the specific information they provided. Without exception, they have been swift to respond, extremely gracious, and very generous with their time.*

My thanks also to Scott Muller, who anchored this tribute in cyberspace.”

About the Author

Tom Karman and his wife Irmie are long-time collectors of art glass and fine art. All the pieces selected for this article are from their personal collection. Tom is retired from the American Red Cross and from the US Army Reserve. He has published articles about French Art Deco glass in national magazines as well as on the internet, and has lectured at local and national glass club meetings. He is enthusiastic about American Studio Glass because he appreciates the innate energy emanating from these works, which exhibit vitality and passion. They are true symbols of the American Spirit.

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