

International Flameworking Conference 2008

by Mike Shelbo

Photography by Bill Clark and Mike Shelbo

Just before spring in Salem, New Jersey, we, the glass people, came together for the 2008 International Flameworking Conference. It was to be a wonderful event filled with demonstrations and lectures with amazingly talented artists from a broad spectrum of glassmaking.

Getting to Know Carmen Lozar

Featured Artist Carmen Lozar was brilliant as she dived into the opening session with a slide show lecture, giving us all more insight into her creative process, individual works, inspiration, influences, and thoughts on life as an emerging artist. She said, "I wanted to take the time to discuss more than the title of each work. There is something deeper to connect to when you get to know what someone is thinking regarding his or her work or a concept behind a piece or maybe just thoughts that did not change the work but that you remember specifically from the creation of that sculpture. A lecture is a time for speculation and underlying motives behind an artist's work and themselves, so I shared myself and my work and the inner workings of creating my art."

Carmen's work is leading the pack of emerging glass artists and proves that when there is a true voice behind each piece that the work is strong, intriguing, and beautiful. From quirky metaphors visualized in glass such as the sculpture *Pollination Tin* to the raw emotions depicted in works such as *Early Mourning* and *Late One Night the Hunter's Wife Is Found Out*, Carmen embraces the creation process as a way to bring forth and examine memories and her inner thoughts on the curiosities of everyday life.

The next morning Carmen gave a live demonstration of a sculptural piece that was similar to *Perch* from 2007. As Carmen shared: "The demonstration was the creation process often used while flameworking elements in my work, and it made for a good piece that I was comfortable creating for an audience. The finished demonstration piece ended up being smaller than *Perch* and had a flameworked dress as opposed to being kiln cast. For this the idea was replicated, but that is not usually the case for my work." She began by creating a dress for a female figure out of cobalt borosilicate tubing. Using blown techniques and graphite tools, Carmen was able to shape a gown that would be the hollow base of the sculpture. Then attaching the head and arms, she switched to handling the piece by the dress to add the bits that would transform one arm into a tree limb, complete with birds and leaves. The other arm was holding the scruff of a cat just removed from the branch. Carmen seemed to enjoy the making process of this piece and discussed her use of oil paint and colored glass to give her work the look she desired. She also mentioned the fact that if her art outlasts the ages, paint through time may not. Therefore, inclusion of colored glass as her base layer has become more important to the life of her creations.



Late One Night the Hunter's Wife Is
Found Out by Carmen Lozar

Carmen loves transparency, the true nature of the glass, but she also uses, without restriction, any other media needed to complete her message within each sculpture. Is it life, love, or tiny tomatoes that for Carmen Lozar allow her to inspire us, entice our imaginations, and in my opinion set a wonderful standard of quality to strive toward when completing a body of work? It is most definitely all of these qualities and so much more.

Preconference Sessions

As part of the preconference program, there were breakout sessions with five guests. These sessions offered intimate discussion groups on a variety of topics. Each conference attendee chose three of the five sessions to attend. The first on my three was Beth Hylen, the librarian for the Rakow Research Library at the Corning Museum of Glass (CMOG), who gave insights into the vast amount of information available within the archives at CMOG, where the largest collection of glass-related knowledge that is available to the public is housed. You can tap into this great treasure by going there directly, asking them to mail you copies of specific information, or logging on to their expanding website. The library is also open to the submission of uncataloged documents that are for public sharing and research that you may have conducted and wish to share.

Next was Dr. Jutta Page, Curator for the Toledo Museum of Art. Her discussion and slide show was on the topic of "The Curator's Role in the Process of Glass Art Preservation and Promotion." She delved into many areas of the curative process including obtaining new work for a collection, restoring damaged glass pieces, and investigating the making process and associated information relating to each piece. Dr. Page shared with us the excitement of seeing and handling ancient flameworked pieces and the joy of bringing them to the public and discussing them.



Pomegranate Bottle by Suellen Fowler

Chris Pavlou, owner of Turning Point Gallery was my last session, and the discussion centered on the artist/gallery relationship. The group consensus was that quick and very open communication is needed between galleries and artists and that galleries should represent the work and the artists properly and professionally. In a nutshell, I learned that artists should take their work where they feel it needs to be, whether it's a gallery or a gift shop, and be responsible for communication regarding consignment, payment, and the work itself.

Saturday Treats

Across from the auditorium that houses the main demonstration area is the Glass Center where the scientific and glass art programs operate at Salem Community College (SCC). Ari Rom is a local scientific glassblower who was onsite for a demonstration of lathe working a scientific apparatus known as a triple condenser. It is made of three tightly wound, clear borosilicate tubes inside each other, which are inside a larger clear tube. A large crowd gathered as Ari popped premixed hand torches on and off, constantly rotating and sealing complicated welds. The complex that is the Glass Center offers an impressive classroom setting with many worktables and torches, demonstration areas, and the usual classroom atmosphere all rolled into one. Several students whom I met at the conference who have completed their degrees at SCC highly recommend the program.



Top to Bottom: Bill Clark, Lewis Wilson,
Carmen Lozar, Suellen Fowler,
Milon Townsend

Suellen Fowler was back in the Field House preparing a demonstration for color making and one of her signature vessel pieces. The color mixing for which Suellen is known is always interesting to see in person. As she scooped her ingredients into sections of tubing, she told of a time before the vast palette that is now available in borosilicate and her path to exploring color making. She mentioned about her own colors, how many of the formulas are the

same ingredients, just more of it saturated into the glass, and how this was one of the great things about creating your own color. The color can be controlled by creating it in small, handmixed batches. Suellen recommended ventilation for experimenting with this. Her miniature footed amphora was rich with color and patterns from hobnailing and raking. She finished off the piece with a stopper, and both sections were flame-annealed. She mentioned the influence on her early beginnings in lampwork by John Burton, who showed a unique blend of furnace-blown techniques and vertical-torch flame-working. Seeing Suellen Fowler work firsthand is always a treat for me, as she and the book written by Burton were early influences on my glass exploration.

On to Sunday

Early Sunday morning, Eric Goldschmidt demonstrated in the Field House, creating a borosilicate goblet. He used points pulled from conturex tubing. First he made a cup with a nice waisted mid-section and lip wrap, and then created a trumpet blown foot, which was pulled long enough to also serve as the stem. This demonstration was great, because he showed the use of points and a balance of lampworking techniques and furnace tools to shape each section of the goblet. Constantly verbalizing the process to emphasize proper tool placement and heating issues, Goldschmidt delivered a solid demonstration that was a step-by-step lesson for anyone wanting to branch out into technical goblet work.

After lunch it was on to the Glass Challenge, which was a concurrent demonstration by Lewis C. Wilson, Margaret Neher, and Milon Townsend. The challenge was to take a pile of raw glass that was given to them with no notice and make something fantastic. They were off and running the second that Paul Stankard, who was moderating and fielding questions from the audience, gave the green light. Away Milon went, blowing big bubbles and sticking them together one after the other. Margaret was creating some cane to use for coating a section of tubing and prepping what looked like the makings of a goblet. Lewis was burning it up with a miniature figurine of a mythical goddess emerging from a shell perched atop a bit-worked stand. Margaret finished with an organic cup and foot goblet with a blown fruit stem. Milon ended up encasing a solid figure kneeling down inside a clear, hollow egg. It sat on a crystal growth form that was created from taking square, clear rod in broken sections and melting the pieces together on the graphite marver while holding his Carlisle by hand. Lewis Wilson declared "Hippies Rule!" and completed his figure of the nautilus woman in color. In addition, he completed a larger, clear figure of a woman holding a smaller woman who was holding an even smaller, tiny sculpture. Paul Stankard decided that a three-way tie would be the outcome, and the crowd cheered as this signaled the finale of the conference.

Winding Up

Students, teachers, hobbyists, professionals, and collectors dispersed out of the Field House onto the roads of South Jersey with pleasant memories and anticipation of what lies ahead for next year's conference. The President of SCC announced that it looked as though by next year the building would be on the grounds of a new undertaking of the Glass Center. The project is designed to work in conjunction with the local landfill to capture waste methane and run an art studio and classroom from reusable energy. This should be a wonderful addition to the conference and add awareness within our world of glass to be conscious of energy usage.



Flutter by Carmen Lozar

Those of us in attendance at The International Flameworking Conference in Salem, New Jersey, this year were missing you. With hard times at hand for glass people, it is more important now than ever to branch out into education, networking, and communication. There are topics of conversation such as recession and imports and other bothersome factions to the everyday struggles of remaining successful in glass. You need not lose focus, however, on what is most important. The continuation of growth in flameworking on all levels—including imagination, technique, exposure, and innovation—is moving steadily in a positive direction. It is alone that we torch, and so it is together that we must come to provide a platform for discussion and sharing of ideas. I know this happens regularly on the Internet, but there will never be a replacement for face-to-face interaction with your fellow artists and the company of friends. There are many e-mailing lists to notify you of upcoming events. Next time you see the opportunity to attend a conference or class with your peers and influences, seize it and consider nothing else but the value of life experience and proper education.