

Second Annual Female Flame Off

by Victoria Chan



After a year's worth of preparation with organizer Roze Chikiar, the Second Annual Female Flame Off (FFO) was well worth the wait. Twenty-eight female flameworkers from around the world graced Philadelphia Glass Works with their presence for two days of intense competition on Friday and Saturday, October 5 and 6, 2007, and for a day of auctions and celebration on Sunday, October 7. All proceeds from this event went to Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), the nation's largest anti-sexual assault organization in the nation.

My own personal Female Flame Off began on Wednesday October 3 after bartending at Dock Street Brewery. I got off at midnight to go to my neighborhood bar, Johnny Brenda's, to await the arrival of Roze—this woman I'd been talking to for a year via phone calls and e-mails but whom I had never met. I stood outside waiting for Roze, her ride, and fellow competitor Aymie McKesson to show up. They arrived after a twenty-plus-hour drive from Austin, Texas, to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It was hugs all around and straight to the bar for a beer.

The three of us made a late-night pit stop to Gallery 908 at Philadelphia Glass Works where the FFO was held to drop off some expensive goods—kilns, torches, and the like—and then headed back to my apartment to crash for the night. Morgen Dalrymple from Fort Wayne, Indiana, was expected to arrive on a bus around five o'clock the next morning, however, which was only a few hours away. And the next morning, I awoke in my apartment to find Roze, Aymie, and Morgen fast asleep on my couches. Some hot tea, bagels, and a shower and we headed to Philadelphia Glass Works to begin setting up for this charitable event.

The Madness Begins . . .

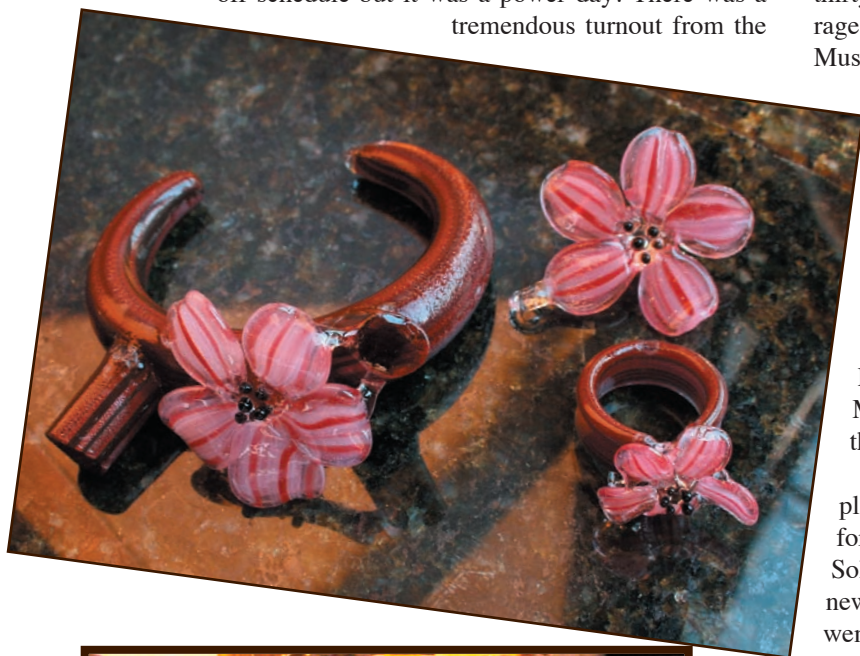
A day of setting up seemed as if it would be enough, but after arriving at 11 a.m. I didn't leave until 11 p.m., and there were still some odds and ends to take care of the next morning. Friday, October 5, 2007, at 10 a.m. registration began—putting faces with names and finding out who was entering which category. It was warming to observe everyone's first time in Gallery 908 at Philadelphia Glass Works as they walked into a 2,100-square-foot space in awe of such a diverse collection of glass art and state-of-the-art lampworking facility. I had the responsibility of setting up a space in the gallery and studio so all the participants could display and sell their work throughout the weekend to make some money back from their trip to Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly and Sisterly Love.

At noon, the Female Flame Off commenced with the first heat of girls: Aymie McKesson, Carla Di Francesco all the way from Germany, and sixteen-year-old Zora Parker from Kodiak, Alaska, competing in her first Flame Off ever! Zora's charisma, confidence, and work made her radiate as a competitor, and the encouragement and support from her father Don Parker was beautiful to witness. A full two hours of total torch time passed in what seemed like only a couple of minutes. The heat was on—not only inside the studio but outside as well, since the temperature was an odd and soaring 90 degrees!

The day went on, and the darker it got the more people there were who stopped by to see what was happening inside Philadelphia Glass Works. From 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., there were four girls on the work station and the energy was incredible! Dellene Peralta from Eugene, Oregon, was so close to putting the finishing touches on her sculpture entry and then—Bam!—the head of her piece fell off. But she came back with a vengeance and dominated—finishing with only a few minutes to spare—and ended up winning first place for sculpture. The first day of the Female Flame Off ended in the late evening but was the beginning of a night out in the neighborhood of Northern Liberties, Philadelphia.

Day Two

Everyone helping with the Flame Off agreed to be at Philadelphia Glass Works at 9:30 a.m., but after experiencing a taste of the nightlife, we all showed up around 11 a.m. Day 2 started a little off schedule but it was a power day! There was a tremendous turnout from the



locals, but there was an even larger crowd representing the glass community. The more the hours passed, the hotter it got, the public eye became more curious, and more raffle tickets were sold to raise money for RAINN. In midafternoon, Roze started calling the raffle winners, all of whom were walking away with incredible donations from Female Flame Off participants and various glass artists. I left during midraffle and right before the third heat of competition to attend the National Liberty Museum Glass Now Auction with Josh Opdenaker and Nathan Purcell. I was torn having to leave during such a climax of the competition. When I returned, everyone was whipped and cleaning up for the next day.

The Wrap Up

Starting my Sunday at 8 a.m. was difficult. I hadn't slept a full six hours in the past week, but it was rewarding by the end of the evening. At 10 a.m., the infamous Lucio Bubacco arrived to give a thirty-minute demonstration in our studio. He came with an entourage of collectors and patrons of glass art and the National Liberty Museum, and the studio and gallery were already jam-packed with

the participants of the Female Flame Off and members of the glass community! It was breathtaking to see our space filled to maximum capacity. We had Bruce Johnson from AV Rental Services to videotape Bubacco creating his intricate, delicate, and provocative soft glass figurines, and the live footage was projected onto a massive flat-screen television. That way everyone was given a chance to view his demonstration.

While watching Lucio, we all ate a nice array of breakfast foods from local businesses Kaplan's Bakery, Honey's Sit n' Eat, and A Full Plate Café while sipping on mimosas and Bloody Marys. After Lucio's departure, the judging commenced. Once the totals were tallied, the awards ceremony began.

Dellene Peralta won first place for Sculpture, with second place going to Karmen Enderes. Christina Cody won first place for Marbles. JC Herrell won first place for Wearables, and Julie Soltow came in second place. Willow Gayton won first prize—a new torch from GTT for Functional Sculpture—and second place went to Amy Ellenhorn for her wicked goblet.

The silent auction began and went until 9 p.m., and then Rita Revere, competitor turned auctioneer, began the live auction. The bidding wars were intense, all to raise money for RAINN from this charitable and memorable three-day event. Thank you to all the participants of the Female Flame Off, those who donated, the supporters, the buyers, the locals, and the helpers. Thank you for the love!

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