

Expanding the Visual Concept through Drawing

by Caitlin Hyde

Mastery of the technically demanding process of flameworking can lead to the production of beautiful objects, but as more artists become technically proficient in glass, more beautiful glass objects are being produced that have a tendency to look alike. In many cases, the form of the object is dictated by our love of the flameworking process itself. If most glass art ideas come directly from our fascination with that process, the potential range of work in our area becomes very narrow.

One way to expand our options as glass artists is to begin working more conceptually. We may all have glass and flameworking in common, but our personalities and ideas are diverse. A skillfully made glass object speaks of the beauty of glass and the adeptness of the maker, but bringing personal, conceptual content to a piece tells us more about the artist, the world, and the human story. Form and style are determined by the tastes and skills that we may have in common with other artists, but our particular combination of ideas and interests is unique and individual.

From the Abstract to the Objective

Becoming attuned to what we see around us in the world, looking at a wide variety of art in different media, and making a habit of drawing are excellent methods of developing and recording ideas for glass. Taking a concept out of the mind and making it objective by putting it on paper frees our minds to examine and develop it more fully over time. Sometimes we get nervous about drawing, because we've all seen beautiful masterworks by famous artists in museums and tend to think the ability to visualize and reproduce objects from nature is inherent. We believe that some grand, magical talent is sprinkled on special individuals from on high and that if we are not so blessed we might as well put away our pencils and leave the building. This stems from the view of drawing as a mysterious *art*—something obscure and unapproachable rather than a useful skill that may be developed by practice.

The fact is that drawings come in a wide variety of types that serve different purposes. A finished art object is what people often think of when they hear the word drawing, but technical, design-development, process drawings and sketches are all useful parts of a broad system of visual development that we can make use of to enrich our glasswork. They need not be especially beautiful or clever in order to be of great use.



Carder sketch book

Capturing Ideas through Drawing

Beth Hylen, glass artist and librarian at the Rakow Research Library of The Corning Museum of Glass talked about design drawing in a recent seminar presentation. She posed and answered this question: “How do glass designers and artists who make glass progress from an unsubstantial concept to an object that we can hold in our hands? Many use design drawings to capture and communicate their ideas. Their drawings allow a glimpse into the process of making or becoming. They give us clues to the artists’ intent and perhaps let us peek into their minds.”

Hylen also quoted William Kirby Lockhard: “There is a difference between paintings and drawings that are intended to be placed on the wall as artwork and those that are design drawings. Designs are intended to communicate in a very specific way. While they can be beautiful and aesthetically pleasing, they are a middle step in a creation process, not the final result—not the creation itself.” (*Design Drawings*, 2000 edition.)

Hylen continued: “Ideas can flow on paper. The artist can experiment and make changes easily. It may not be as easy to alter the direction of a piece of hot glass once you’re working with it. Drawings may be used to help the designer capture ideas and to problem solve. The act of sketching becomes a ‘working out’ of ideas—transcribing shape and decoration as well as experimenting with technical and structural challenges—on paper first.”

In the preface to the book *Architectural Delineation: Presentation Techniques and Projects* by James T. Davis and James C. Watkins, Watkins states: “In these days of computer mania, the fact remains that freehand drawing is the ultimate tool for sensitizing a person to the colorful, shape-filled world around us . . . We feel that the discipline of seeing [by way of drawing] is an end in itself. It makes the individual more intimately aware of the external world and the internal world of ideas.”

So how do we begin making design or concept drawings? We may start by recording the thought process in planning a new piece. Putting simple marks on paper to represent an idea for an object takes the concept out of the mind and places it in the world, thereby making it more concrete and clearing space in the brain to come up with more options. It's a type of visual note taking. Not all ideas are good ones and not all good ideas will get made, but putting them on paper expands and energizes the creative flow.

Comparing Sketches to Finished Work

Artists use drawings differently depending on the intended result. A concept drawing may provide inspiration for a piece that is then fully developed at the torch, or it can communicate mood or style to a team that produces the object. A technical drawing conveys specifics of form, dimension, and structure. Sketches may be rough and simple but carry the thought forward reminding us of intentions set before the mesmerizing work with the glass begins. Drawing may be interspersed with sessions at the torch to fine-tune technical and aesthetic options. And some process drawings may even become finished works of art in themselves.

Frederick Carder used drawing for inspiration and to convey design ideas. As Hylen stated: "The Carder Steuben archive is filled with evidence of what Carder called 'looking for possibilities.' . . . Frederick Carder's sketchbooks, which cover the period from 1880 to 1891, show his student work and assignments and record objects that he saw in museums."

There are many artists who have used drawings, paintings, and sketches to support their glass art, including the Blaschkas, the German father-and-son team who made thoroughly researched and accurate scientific models for university study in the form of the famous glass flowers at Harvard. "Their drawings reflect the purpose—methodical investigation and teaching, not decoration. Their sea creatures made of glass, like an octopus or jellyfish, are still found in universities around the world."

Another example to consider is that of Dale Chihuly. His paintings may serve as finished art objects, but he produces them as a way to communicate visual concepts with his glassblowing team.



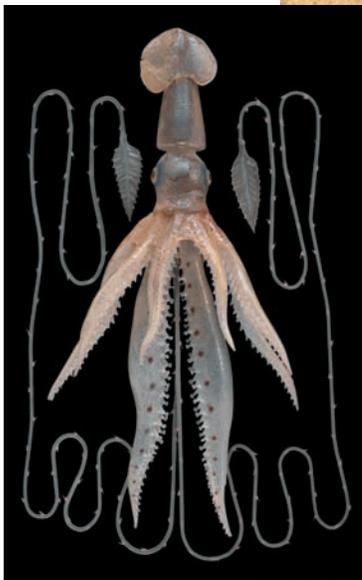
Chihuly Portland Erbium chandelier

Chihuly chandelier painting

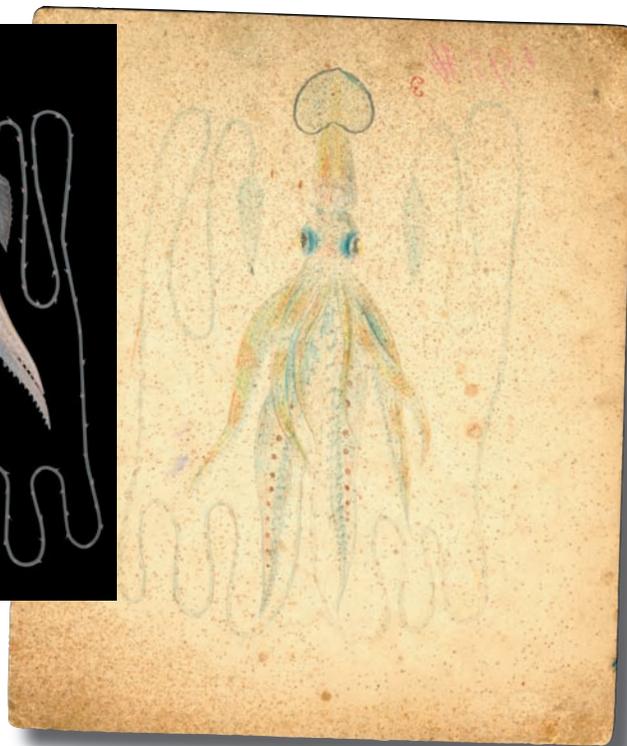


It is interesting to see how the sketches of glass artists have helped them to bring their works of glass art to completion. Carmen Lozar, for example, creates exquisite narrative frameworked pieces using

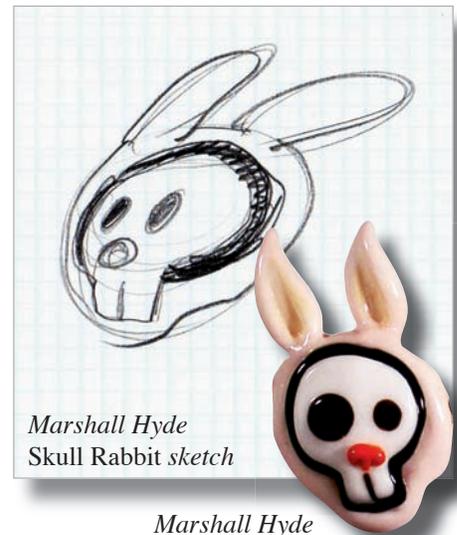
sketches to record and develop her storytelling ideas. And Beth Hylen's subtle and poetic pieces take shape in her sketchbook before being transformed into glass and silver, while Marshall Hyde uses simple line drawings to convey shape and character for his quirky creatures.



Blaschka octopus



Blaschka octopus sketch



Marshall Hyde Skull Rabbit sketch

Marshall Hyde Skull Rabbit bead



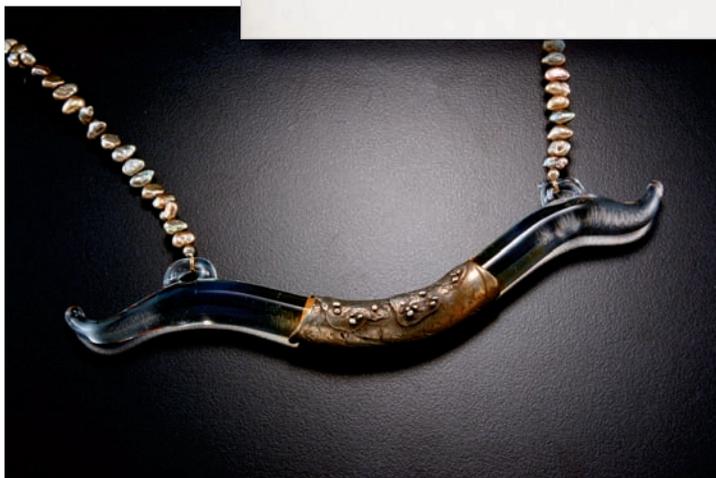
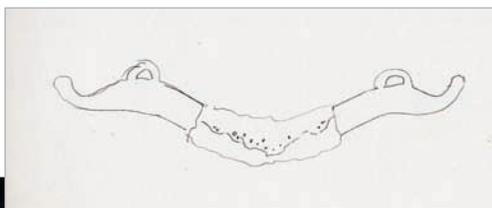
A concept doesn't necessarily have to be something brilliant or grand. Even a simple idea expands your work and makes it personal, and drawing helps develop and make the idea concrete, bringing it to the torch more fleshed out and alive.

*Carmen Lozar,
Sanctuary*



Carmen Lozar, Sanctuary sketch

*Beth Hylan,
Submerged sketch*



*Submerged by Beth Hylan, Lampworked glass,
fine silver, and Keishi pearls. Photo by Tommy Elder.*

From Nature to Glass Art

I'm interested in the cultural history of beads as power objects, talismans, and protective amulets, and I bring those interests to my glass beadmaking. November in our neighborhood is berserk squirrel season. The squirrels are so intent on gathering food for the winter that they race around the streets unaware of traffic, and many of them end up flat in the road. I thought it would be nice to make a protective squirrel amulet, so starting with this simple concept I began watching local squirrels, studying photos and other artists' illustrations of squirrels, and developing a few sketches. Next I began to work with the glass trying to capture the essence of the squirrel character in simple strokes of color. The small space of a bead surface requires the elimination of all but the most necessary details, so working back and forth between the glass and my sketchbook, I gradually stylized and simplified the squirrel to a manageable cartoon image.



Caitlin Hyde Squirrels

Working with glass is challenging and fascinating. It takes great skill to coax glass into the forms you want, and there is a lifetime of potential technique development before us all, but as you become more proficient in glasswork, what more can you do to set your work apart? Drawing for personal concept development is a powerful tool for any artist and helps expand and enliven the world of glassmaking.

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Caitlin Hyde lives in Corning, New York, and has been making flameworked glass beads and small sculptures since 1996. She teaches workshops at The Studio of the Corning Museum of Glass and across the country. Caitlin's background in illustration, textile design, and love of high-contrast, rhythmic pattern are evident in her pictorial beads and assembled figurative work. You can find more of her glass art at www.caitlinhyde.com.