

Chris Carlson— Artist and Archivist

by mer

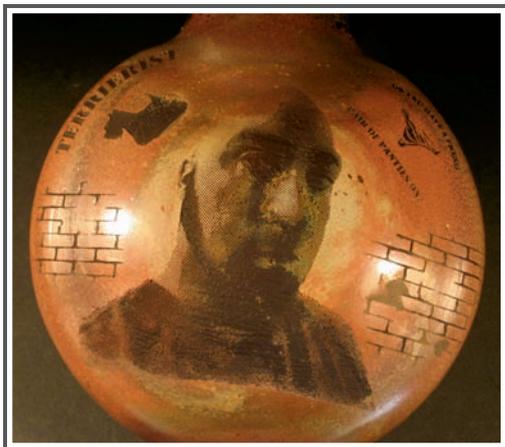
Photography by Chris Carlson

Chris Carlson holds a unique position in the modern glass world. Equally adept at the dual disciplines of lampworking and photography, Chris has carved out a niche that allows his body of work to stand out from his contemporaries. With an affinity for black and white, he has played to this vernacular in glass and photography with equal skill and grace. His interactions with the glass world have afforded him the opportunity to present his own work beautifully as well as a rare chance to document the scene around him.

Drawing Inspiration from Life

Chris's style has been heavily influenced by his life experience. Raised by parents who encouraged him in the arts, he began composing photographs in the late 1990s, taking first of show for his photographic work at the Torrance Artists Guild in 1999. "I love geometric patterns in nature as well as man-made. I love lines—converging, symmetrical, and chaotic. I enjoy their aesthetic and the stories they tell about our lives." Such stylistic concerns informed his approach to blowing and photographing glass. "I love the juxtaposition of a piece of shiny, delicate glass with so much time and care put into it mixed with the ruggedness of nature and man-made terrain."

Chris was introduced to glassblowing while working at Tommy Chong's shop in 2001. After picking up the basics he was ready to move out into an independent shop where he was able to develop a personal style and pursue the work that held the most interest for him. In 2004 Chris discovered the cutting-edge glass community that was developing on the Internet. Through sites such as glasspipes.org and the Melting Pot at talkglass.com, Chris was exposed to artists who inspired him to push his boundaries. Attending events at the Eugene Glass School including classes with Robert Mickelson, Carmen Lozar, and *The Flow's* own William Menzies pushed his work in new directions. After Chris's first class, Wil said, "It was pretty easy to tell that Chris had a natural understanding of the medium."



Documenting the Glass Pipe Revolution

Over the next few years Chris worked in numerous shops soaking up what he was being taught. In 2006 he took a spot working in a studio with Marcel Braun and Jason Lee. As his skills developed he found himself engaged in collaborative glass projects with Arty, Shad, Alissa, J. Lee, Marcel, Pakoh, Slinger, Dale Sommers, Nate-dizzle, Cowboy, D-Wreck, MNP, JP/Toro, and Sabina Boehm.

These collaborations led to Chris's photo documentation of the burgeoning glass pipe revolution. Inspired by their skills, knowledge, and lifestyles he turned his camera to the scene he found himself immersed in. "This has been rewarding for me as well as them." Because the scene is so underground and borderline illegal, these artists have felt more comfortable and welcoming to Chris's photographic documentation than they would with an outsider. "I have earned their respect glass-wise, so they don't feel threatened or exploited." Chris's access was earned: "I'm an insider; I have collaborated with most of the guys I shoot. I know where to be and where not to be. I know the steps of the process, so I'm usually ready for the exciting parts and I'm not afraid to get close. They're



One poignant example of the combination of Chris's love for these aesthetics was showcased in his collaborations with Pakoh. Chris and Pakoh spent time together photographing the gritty aspects of urban landscapes that are so familiar to Chris from his upbringing in the socio-economically deprived areas of Los Angeles, California. Pakoh was able to incorporate Chris's images of urban decay into glass with the medium of sandblasting that is the hallmark of Pakoh's style. The collaboration yielded work that showcased the interplay between the fragile nature of glass with the rugged decay of urban settings.

Recording Glass History

Chris has attended many major glass events around the country as an artist, competitor, and photographer. Winning the 2007 Seattle Night with Boro in and the 2008 Eugene Glass School's Flame-Off led Chris to attend and document other events. Notable gatherings included the Bern Classic, the Chicago *Suck On It* show, and the *Smoked—Volume One* book opening where his glass work was featured. He also presented his photographic work at Cornerstone's Degenerate Flame Off where he presented his photography as well as serving as the official event photographer.



Chris's professionalism, attention to detail, and enthusiasm have created a body of work unlike that of any other artists working in the glass world. If the level of craft he displays is any indication, we can expect to continue to be blessed with beautiful glass as well as unique insight into the culture that spawns it.



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