

Kobe Tonbodama Museum

by Keith Bryan

Phoenicia, sixth to third century B.C. Eye Beads Necklaces



Hidden away in the heart of the fashionable city of Kobe, Japan, is a secret treasure on the second floor of the Nihon Building. It is easy to find if you possess a treasure map. I speak and read Japanese and still passed it by twice on my original search for it. Once you find it however, you will never again forget its location.

This is a lampworker's paradise - a place to lose yourself with the artwork of generations gone by while still affording yourself the pleasure of some of our contemporaries' greatest pieces. Opened on July 13, 2005, nirvana is known as Kobe Tonbodama Museum in Japanese and the Kobe Lampwork Glass Museum in English. Tonbodama is the Japanese word for glass beads.

とんぼ玉ミュージアム



Imagine. You enter a gift shop filled with all sorts of glass accessories: pendants, earrings, bottle stoppers, glass pens, beads, knick-knacks and much more. Lining the walls on the shelves above are glass pieces donated by some 150 artists to celebrate the opening of the museum, to commemorate the earthquake, and to celebrate the rebuilding of Kobe. Most of them are centered around the themes of "Rebirth" and "Rebuild."

Upon entering, there is a reception desk to the right where you will always find a friendly face and a welcoming smile, and for a small fee of 400 yen, about \$3.40, you will enter a world of glass that is something of which you have only dreamed. Toward the back of the space there is a video screen playing lampworking videos as well as a demonstration area. Before getting too involved, let's start by walking the perimeter.

Learning from the Past and Present

First there are the History beads. The Kobe Lampwork Glass Museum displays around 120 pieces of historic beads from Mr. Mietoku Habara's collection. The oldest beads are from fifteenth century B.C. Mesopotamia. Other eras represented are listed as follows: Egypt, fourteenth to thirteenth century B.C.; Mycenaean, thirteenth century B.C.; Phoenicia, sixth to third century B.C.; China, fifth to third century B.C.; Roman Mediterranean, second century B.C.; Sassan Byzantine, fifth to sixth century A.D.; Viking/Scandinavian mosaic beads, ninth to tenth century A.D.; Islam, seventh to thirteenth century A.D.; Southeast Asia, fifth to eighth century A.D.; and Holland/Venetia, sixteenth to eighteenth century A.D.

I never knew that the Vikings made glass beads. I knew about the Egyptians and the Japanese, but what I could not believe was the colors that were created so many centuries ago and how vibrant they still are today. I have spent more time in this one area than I care to think about. It was just so overwhelming to see glass so old, so close. I was fortunate enough for them to open the glass door to actually look at these in closer detail.

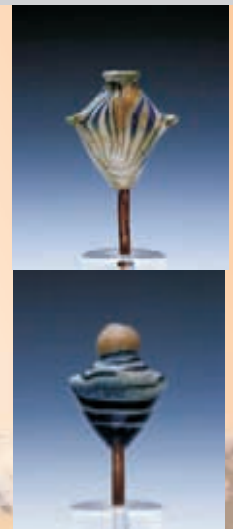
Next in line is the World Lampwork Glass wall. Beads from various artists who donated them to the Kobe Lampwork Glass Museum along with personalized messages fill this space.

Then there is the fun section - the Artists' Area. Many of our contemporaries are found there. This area currently houses over 3,000 pieces of glass items and is still growing. Have you seen Loren Stump's Virgin on the Rocks murrine? There is also a murrini chip located here. Constantini, Bubacco, Stump, Townsend all can be found here. Almost everyone that you have read about or heard about can be found here. One of the most exciting facets of this collection is its equality for the craft and the crafters. Well-known names are displayed side by side with those who are relative unknowns. . . as of yet. Ah, the world of glass!

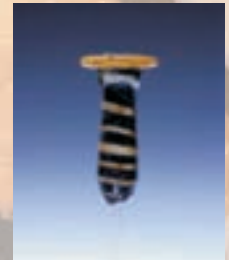
You exit from the display into the demonstration area. If you are lucky enough, you might catch one. They inspire creativity and interest in the glass. Just ask owner Yasuhiro Miyamoto. The Kobe Tonbodama Museum is his baby. He had been running a gallery in Sannomiya, Japan, but thought for years that if he just sells the merchandise, he cannot introduce the true beauty and the craftsmanship that goes into these fine products. With the museum, you not only buy the product but you can look, learn, and even make them yourself as well. It also seemed like a good way to introduce the artists to the public. As a byline, Mr. Miyamoto did not start lampworking until the museum opened. With so many visiting artists, why wouldn't you want to start?

A Place for Sharing

Kobe Tonbodama Museum is the first one of its kind in Japan. It features not only the history of the lampworker but also serves as a tourist attraction for the novice as well as the general public. It is located near the Kobe Lamp Museum and the Kobe City Museum. Where else can you learn about art, buy it, and try to create it in one space?



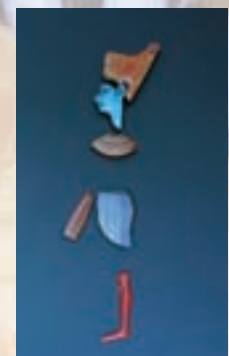
Egypt, fourteenth to thirteenth century B.C.
Heart-Amulet Bead



Egypt, fourteenth to thirteenth century B.C.
Ear-Plug Bead



Egypt, fourteenth to thirteenth century B.C.
Stratified Eye Bead



Egypt, third to first century B.C.



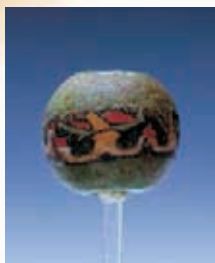
Phoenicia, sixth to third century B.C.
Head pendant Bead



Phoenicia, sixth to third century B.C.
Bird Pendant Bead



Roman Mediterranean, second century B.C./A.D.



Roman Mediterranean, second century B.C./A.D.
Mosaic Beads

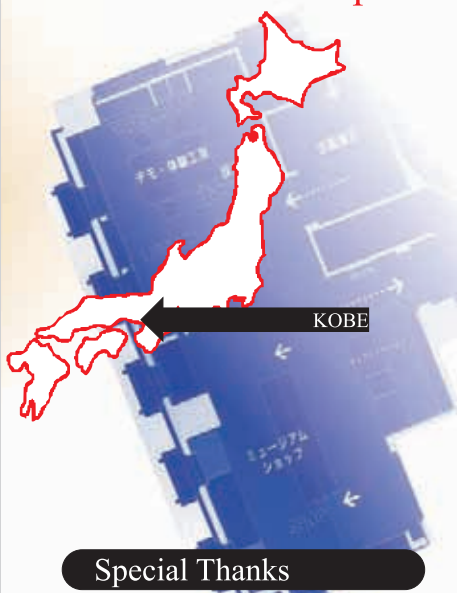


Roman Mediterranean, second century B.C./A.D.
Mosaic Beads

The Kobe Lampwork Glass Museum was the head office of the Kobe Lampwork Festa in December, 2005. (Please refer to an article in the Flow, Volume 3, Issue 3 by John Kobuki for more information.) Mr. Miyamoto served as the director of this fantastic event. It was held to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Kobe Earthquake, also known as the Great Hanshin Earthquake.

The museum will again be the home office of the 2007 Lampwork Festa located nearby at Kobe Fashion Mart on the ninth floor. It will be held October 19 through October 21, 2007, and features some of the best lampworking artists doing demos and teaching their techniques as well as revealing some of their secrets. There will be many vender booths and open torches as well as a collaboration party. The last day of the festival will host a bazaar that is open to the public on the first floor atrium. For more information please visit their website at

www.lampwork-museum.com



Kobe Tonbodama Museum

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79 Kyomachi Tyuoku,
Kobe, Japan 650-0034
(81) 078-393-8500
Open 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.
Closed New Years
Entrance Fee 400 Yen for Adults,
200 Yen for Children and Students
info@lampwork-museum.com

Special Thanks

Thank you to Yasuhiro Miyamoto, Naomi Murata, Masae Gomes, and Jennifer Murdoch (for the English "salt and pepper"). Extra-special thanks to Toshiki Akimoto. You are a great friend and have had so much patience with all of the translations and communications.

The Flow magazine may be purchased in Japan at Lunar Cycle (also a Japan Lampwork Society Member) at www.lunarsupply.com/ as well as from Ropex Intl.

Author's Side Note

Keith Bryan has been working for Arribas Japan at Tokyo Disney Resort since July 1995. He can be heard discussing life at Disney as a glassblower with Bill Rasmussen, Louis Wilson, and Marcie Davis on the Glasscaster podcast site at iTunes or Firelady.Libsyn.com. You can contact him at keithb@ka8.koalanet.ne.jp or at hennakeith@yahoo.com



Roman Mediterranean, second century B.C./A.D.
Mosaic Face Beads



Sassan/Byzantine, fifth to sixth century A.D.
Mosaic Cane Bead



Viking/Northern Europe, ninth to tenth century A.D.
Scandinavian Mosaic Bead



China, fifth to third century B.C.
Stratified Eye Beads



Southeast Asia, fifth to eighteenth century A.D.
Contracted Mosaic Bead

