

Remembering Japan: The 2006 Japanese Lampwork Festival in Nagara

by Mark Lammi

Back in October of 2000, the very first Japan Lampwork Festival was held in the city of Nagahama in Shiga Prefecture. Six years later on December 2, 2006, the fifth Japan Lampwork Festival was underway in Nagara at the Nagaragawa Convention Center adjacent to the Gifu Miyako Hotel. The setting was located by the beautiful river Nagara, and observers looking out of the exhibitors' area found breathtaking views of Gifu Castle built by the famous warlord Nobunaga Oda just across the river. It was a majestic setting for what proved to be a wonderful festival and an all-around great glass-related experience. I was fortunate enough to attend this event, which marked my first trip to this wonderful country as well as my first glimpse into the blossoming Japanese lampworking scene.

I arrived in Japan at the Narita Airport in Tokyo and was greeted by Keith Bryan. Keith is an American lampworker who lives in Japan and works for Walt Disney Company in Tokyo where he creates incredible glass sculpture. Keith turned out to be a great guy with a ton of glass knowledge and experience. He was kind enough to meet me at the airport and make sure I got on a train to my first destination, the city of Kyoto. The week prior to the festival, I was in Kyoto with my friend, John Kobuki, with whom I traveled throughout my stay in Japan. John is an extremely talented lampworker and was very instrumental in helping provide me with this opportunity. We spent the week teaching classes at Studio Morio and enjoying the beautiful city of Kyoto, the old capital of Japan that is rich in history and known for its breathtaking temples and gardens. I am extremely grateful to have taught classes there, and I want to thank Morio and his family for making me feel incredibly welcome.

After my workshop concluded, we traveled to the city of Nagara in Gifu Prefecture where the festival was held. We spent the evening getting accustomed to the sights and sounds while preparing for the lampworking festival that was to take place the next day. We also stopped by Takumi Studio's "World Design Gallery" and enjoyed a great glass art exhibition showcasing 100 lampworkers who are featured in a new book that shared the same title. I was amazed by the detail and intricate work that I saw, primarily in the form of lampworked beads made out of Satake, Kinari, and some Moretti glass. Tonbodama is the term used to refer to the art of crafting lampworked mandrel beads and is a very respected artform in Japan. This was my first introduction to the world of Tonbodama, and I instantly gained a deep appreciation and respect for the intricate murrine work that so many of the beads adorned.



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Elements of a Successful Festival

The following morning we arrived at the convention center, and the glass enthusiasts started to pour in at a steady pace. In one area there were a number of vendors and display booths promoting the various types of glass available to the flameworking artist. There was also a silent auction table that had an incredible array of glass art from end to end. On other floors of the convention center you could find a number of rooms hosting demonstrations by Kristen Frantzen Orr, Loren Stump, Terri Caspary Schmidt, Hsu Chin-Lang, Mari Aoki, Yuko Abe, Atsuko Amino, Katsuhiro Arai, Yoshiko Etoh, Chizuko Oguchi, Atsushi Ono, Yuuka Kawakita, Norikazu Kogure, Ikuko Suzuki, Emiko Tanoue, Daisuke Takeuchi, Katsumi Hayashi, Taeko Yamada, Hideko Yoshida, and Miki Yoshida. I was like a kid in a candy store as I ran between demos, overwhelmed by the amazing display of talent in the building.

Toward the end of each evening, I found myself unwinding in a chair, taking in the beautiful moonlit view of Gifu Castle perched high above the Nagara city lights. On both nights, John and I were invited to postconference parties at the adjacent Gifu Miyako Hotel by the executive chairperson of the committee Yoshiko Shiiba. Mrs. Shiiba and her great staff were largely responsible for making this festival happen, and I want to extend my gratitude to them for all of their efforts and kindness.

I felt that the festival was a very positive event and an overall great success. It gave me a chance to meet a ton of new friends and experience the joy of this wonderful medium on an international level. I also got to meet and catch up with some lampworkers from the United States whom I have respected for some time. Watching Loren Stump work is a treat in any country, and it was great hanging out with him and picking his brain when I could. I also ran into my friend and mentor, Roger Parramore, as he was in Japan teaching an advanced class at Osaka University of the Arts. I was very impressed with the glass scene in Japan, and there seemed to be a hunger for knowledge on many levels. Overall I found the artists to be incredibly humble and eager to learn. There was a great attitude toward expansion and the sharing of ideas and techniques, which in turn has led to a constant evolution of the lampworking industry. Borosilicate glass seems to be gaining popularity among the Japanese flameworkers, and there were a number of distributors encouraging the many uses of boro as an artistic medium.

Lampworkers Sharing

Following the event, John and I traveled to Toyama where we performed a number of demos at Spiral Arts and Kogure Studio. We also visited the Toyama Glass School and were able to tour their extraordinary facilities. I was blown away by the extensive hot shop and coldworking facilities to which the students had access. It was an excellent studio and a good learning environment from what I could tell. A special thank-you goes out to Yoshiyuki Takahashi, Koichi, Santa, and the entire Spiral Arts crew for their kindness and inspiration. I would also like to thank Norikazu

Kogure and his wife Hiroko for their generosity and hospitality during our time in Toyama.

Next we traveled south to the city of Tokyo to teach workshops at Lunar Cycle Borosilicate Art School. The glass studio had recently moved to a new location, and it was a very nice shop with a great feel to it. Connected to the glass studio is a store called Kef that boasts an awesome display of borosilicate glass creations in addition to various other handmade crafts and hemp clothing. After teaching an

exciting three-day workshop at Lunar Cycle, it was time to prepare for my departure and the long plane ride home. It was a great end to an unforgettable trip, and I want to thank Yishai and his family for everything they provided for me during my stay in Tokyo. I also would like to thank Kouhey and Mami for opening their home to me and all of their hard work in translating my workshop. As with everyone I visited, they taught me a whole new definition of the word hospitality.

It is nearly impossible to thank and mention everyone, because I met so many awesomely kind people along the way. I am excited about the friendships and contacts that I made, and I am grateful for all the opportunities provided to me during my stay in Japan. I hope to continue to become a part of their lampworking tradition and contribute in any way possible in the future. This was my first exploration of just one of the many countries so rich in the lampworking tradition, and I hope it is the beginning of many. I am eager to become a part of the lampworking scene in Japan, and I look forward to visiting the Kobe Lampwork Festa again in October 2007. Until then, to all the artists in Japan . . . Keep creating, sharing, and exploring the wonders of this limitless medium! And most importantly, keep it hot!!



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