

GAAC's 2006 Conference Provides Venue for Bridging Vision in Glass

Canadians Forge a Unique Place on the World's Glass Art Landscape

Written by Ann M. Marcus

The Glass Art Association of Canada (GAAC), a non-profit organization founded in 1983, is gearing up for its triennial conference from May 25 to 28, 2006. This time around, the event will take place at Red Deer College in Red Deer, Alberta, Canada.

"We're very excited about this year's program," said Julia Reimer, GAAC president, of the 2006 event. "We have an excellent line up of speakers, artists and events and expect to draw an even larger turn out of glass professionals, students and enthusiasts from across Canada, the US and abroad than for our 2003 event."

The small city of Red Deer contrasts dramatically with the big city venue of Toronto—site of the 2003 GAAC Conference—which, in an unfortunate coincidence, also saw the frightening SARS virus outbreak, potentially keeping away otherwise interested conference participants that year. Red Deer is an ideal backdrop for learning, teaching and getting recharged, as it presents few distractions from the conference agenda (particularly epidemics) and will allow attendees to fully immerse themselves in glass art, design, technology and networking over the jam-packed 4-day event. In addition to a full conference schedule, a series of affiliated pre- and post-event workshops will be held at both Red Deer and at the nearby Alberta College of Art and Design (see sidebar for details).

The theme for the conference this year is "*Looking Within, Reaching Out*," and was envisioned as a recipe for helping Canadian glass artists take an accounting of where they are as a community, recognize the uniqueness of that community and find their "story," while allowing them to reach out and become a part of the larger international exchange.

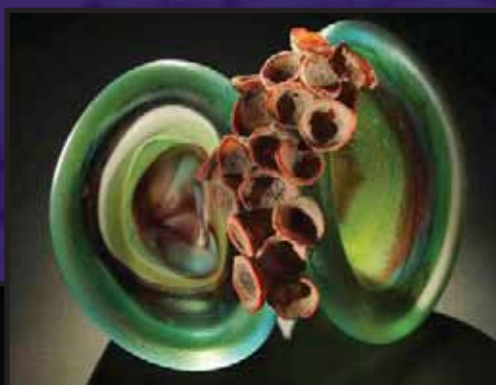
On the roster to present are a number of top American glass artists including Jane Bruce, The De La Torre Brothers, Bandhu Dunham, Lauri Copeland and others.



Keynote for the event is New York-based artist Milon Townsend, who has been working as a full-time glass artist for the past 30 years and has written a number of books and articles on glass technique, innovation and marketing. Drawing on the event's theme, Townsend's talk will explore the ways in which we develop and mature as individual artists and as part of an artistic community—giving and taking as we craft our vocabulary, aesthetic vision, and voice.

The event will feature studio demonstrations, artist presentations, a technical day, and a market place. The comprehensive conference and pre- and post-event workshops gives glass professionals and students up-close-and-personal access to some of the industry's luminaries in an intimate, interactive atmosphere.

The Conference provides Canadian artists with an opportunity to come together from across the vast, but sparsely populated, nation to connect with each other and with other glass enthusiasts from around the world.



While it may be impossible, and perhaps undesirable, to attempt to ascribe a single distinguishable style to Canadian glass work, Tyler Rock, instructor at the Alberta School of Arts and Crafts, board member of GAAC and husband to its director, Julia Reimer—observes that Canadian artists seem to incorporate or reflect some element of the quintessential identity struggle that many Canadians reckon with. "It may be a result of being in the shadow of the United States and also the vastness of space and so few people—Canada has

nearly the same land mass as the US with one-tenth the population. Canadian artists tend to be reverent of the material they use, the mix of media, and frequent references to landscape...It's the separation, the long winters and the cold," surmises Rock.

Canada's emergence into the glass art scene has been growing steadily for the past decade and has begun to influence the rest of the world and vice versa.

There are now three major Canadian schools graduating glass artists who go on to teach abroad, such as Irene Frolic and Laura Donefer at Pilchuk here in the U.S. and Bob Leatherbarrow who also teaches in the U.S. as well as in Norway and Europe. Canadian students are being accepted in greater numbers to residencies, internships and masters program to prestigious venues worldwide, such as the Jam Factory in Australia. Many international galleries have begun displaying Canadian glass work, creating an increasing demand for it.

Julia Reimer believes that Canada has effectively nurtured its artistic community through generous support for the arts and is now enjoying the benefits. The Canada Council for the Arts has funds set aside for craft, with a substantial amount earmarked for glass. Fifteen years ago, show jurists had a narrower perspective and had less exposure to outside influences; the work they selected reflected this conservatism. According to Reimer, those participating now have a broader education base and their selections reflect it. Art glass programs are now generating more attention from the Arts Council, which translates to greater support and exposure for Canadian glass programs. These accomplishments prepare the Canadian art glass community to better promote itself worldwide and be taken seriously.

This is the motivation for inviting an international roster of speakers and instructors to the GAAC event. The contrasts help to highlight regional and national differences as well as offer an opportunity to recognize that artists working in the same medium often have common issues and strategies that transcend differences, forge respect and uncover similarities. The GAAC Conference will welcome experts who rarely come to Canada: Tessa Clegg of the UK and Emma Camden of New Zealand, the world's top casting artists, for example, teach nowhere else in North America but at this conference.

For Lauri Copeland, top borosilicate bead maker, this will be her second visit to Red Deer College; she offered a 5-day class back in May 2005. "I often take for granted the wealth of tools and supplies we have to choose from here in the U.S. I hadn't considered that this wasn't the case outside of the U.S. The students at Red Deer devoured information and would have never left the studio during all five days if they'd been given the chance. The excitement was contagious, but I couldn't help but notice the more relaxed attitude and less chaotic pace than in the U.S. I would have liked to have brought that lifestyle back home with me!"

Asked about his participation in the event, Arizona-based artist Bandhu Dunham revealed some strong opinions. Dunham noted that he truly enjoys working with the Canadians as he finds them generally more civil than their American counterparts. In discussing the theme for his talk, entitled, "Money, Vulgarly and Chihuly Disease," Dunham explains that "Money" refers to his struggles with not having enough of it. "Vulgarly" refers not to bad behavior or rough language, but to his frustration with encountering a lack of sophistication that art calls for. And finally, in explaining, "Chihuly Disease," Dunham casts no aspersions on the iconic artist himself, but on those who seem compelled to behave in a Chihuly-esque manner: Acting like a big shot with lots of people working for them and being the center of attention. He admonishes in a wry tone, "Only Chihuly has the right to behave like Chihuly," and then, under his breath, "I'm in Chihuly-disease recovery myself."

With still favorable exchange rate, the Conference courses are a very good deal for Americans. For more information on Glass Artist Association of Canada or on the Conference, visit GAAC's website at www.glassartcanada.ca/ or to register visit the Red Deer College site at www.rdc.ab.ca/continuingeducation or call toll-free 1-888-886-2787.

Ann M. Marcus is a freelance writer/editor, consultant and analyst primarily in the technology arena who delights in the opportunity to look at beautiful things and write about them. To contact Ann call 503-234-3942 or email ann@marcusconsulting.com.

Guide to photos: Page 24, upper right necklace by Michelle Wilman, bottom two pieces by Stephanie Metivier. This page, goddess bead by Michelle Lusk.



In conjunction with the Canadian Glass Conference being held in Red Deer, Alberta from May 25 – May 28, 2006. The Alberta College of Art & Design glass program in Calgary will be offering the following intensive workshops taught by acclaimed international glass artists:

Pre-conference workshops:
 May 16 – 24, Glass Casting: Wish in a Box with Tessa Clegg
 May 16 – 24, Glass Casting: 100% Natural Light with Emma Camden
 May 18 – 24, Glass Blowing: An In-Depth Introduction to Venetian Techniques with William Gudenrath

Post-conference workshop:
 May 29 – June 6, Coldworking Techniques/Aesthetics: Breaking the Skin with Jane Bruce

College credit equivalency can be arranged for all ACAD glass courses offered. For more information see our website at www.acad.ca. To register call Extended Studies at (403) 284-7640 or email continuingeducation@acad.ca.