

Tucson Flame Off!

Written by Laurie Nessel

Photos by Laurie Nessel,

Katheryn Guler & Bandhu Dunham



I never cease to be amazed at the generosity, camaraderie and altruism of the flameworking community. Sure, donating our work for good causes gives us a certain amount of exposure, but it goes beyond self-promotion. Flameworkers are genuinely enthusiastic about growing the craft, sharing knowledge, challenging each other to further heights of accomplishment and technical expertise and rejecting the secretive practices of the past. And admit it, we're exhibitionists at heart. Such was evident at the 4th annual Flame Off! in Tucson last February at The Glass Studio at Sonoran Art Foundation, a non-profit studio that offers both flameworking and off-hand glass classes.

To accommodate the 12 two-person teams coming from as far as New Hampshire and N. California, the parking lot was transformed into a studio annex. Although the finished pieces sparkle and awe, the process is where the magic truly lies, which is why there was standing room only as the competition got underway. The staff was zipping around, rearranging annealers, doling out tools and water as we set up. A bank of industrial strength torches was lit as flame tests were performed. Excitement and energy was building as our prep time diminished.

Bandhu Dunham and Jeremy Guerrero devised a marble run, a roller coaster type track of clear rod. As they tested their engineering intermittently, the marble would cruise, bank, then slow as the audience held their breath, rooting for it until it passed the sluggish spot and made it to the bottom. Such drama! Such pressure to complete within the two hours allotted! Other designs were no less inspiring. Matt Roberts and Jared Sandifer coaxed a rain forest inspired iris, bamboo and abstract figure out of boro. With a pump added the next day it became a stunning fountain, water flowing over the slender leaves into a beautiful vase. Jared Sandifer showed off the prowess of his stainless GTT Cobra which dwarfed the Little Torch he used to weld the leaves and petals to



the stems. There was a bit of tension as the high oxygen pressure kept popping the hose off the Little Torch. Oxygen gushed as Matt tried to tame the flailing hose back onto the nipple.

Sponsors Arrow Springs, Carlisle Machine Works, Crystal Myths, Glass Alchemy, Glasscraft and Northstar Glassworks provided ample incentive with first place prize being 2) \$100 Carlisle gift certificates and 10 pounds of Northstar color rod. However, none of the entrants knew about the prizes. All entered for the chance to share their talent, support the studio, and best of all, get that cool

Flame Off! T-shirt!

First place went to Eli Aller and Rob Traylor for their floral stemmed goblet. They devised their strategy the previous evening without rehearsal since they live almost one thousand miles apart.



Second place went to Matt and Jared's fountain. Third place went to Seth Hawkins and James Lynch for their boro vessel held by an otherworldly figure. I'm proud to say that first and third place were won by artists that included three new Mesa Arts Center instructors- Rob Traylor, Seth Hawkins and James Lynch. Special Recognition went to Doug Remschneider and Julie Reynolds for their innovative use of ruby tubing in a fertility fetish. Other teams included Wayne Robbins and Jeff Rogers, Bronwen Heilman and Margaret Zinser, Jeff Buss and Nate Biskind, Kevin Englemann and Harold Cooney, Jason Gunn and Rashan Omari Jones, Maria Haynie and Joy Jones & yours truly with my partner extraordinaire, Jim Wuerfel.

All of the pieces made at the Flame-Off! were silent auctioned at Lewis Wilson's Best Bead Show to benefit The Glass Studio, which also offers outreach programs for high school students. In total, Mesa Arts Center affiliated artists raised \$1,235 for the Sonoran Art Foundation. To view more images and for information on Flame Off! 2006, visit www.sonoran-glass.com

Laurie Nessel teaches flameworking at the new Mesa Arts Center, Mesa, AZ. Contact Laurie at laurienessel@hotmail.com. For Mesa Arts Center information, www.mesaartscenter.com.



Guide to photos: The goblet on the previous page made by Eli Aller & Rob Traylor took home first place. The core formed vessel to the left was made by Laurie Nessel & Jim Wuerfel. The fountain above was made by Jared Sandifer & Matt Roberts. Photos below from left to right: Eli Aller, Margaret Zinser & Bronwen Heilman. James Lynch & Seth Hawkins. Teammates Rob Traylor & Eli Aller. Jared Sandifer. Jim Wuerfel & Laurie Nessel.

