

Mixing it Up

By Mark Lammi

Ah, borosilicate glass. A medium as complex, yet intriguing as any I have ever known. Glass itself has a very interesting appeal, as it is one of the few mediums that can be worked both hot and cold. The fluidity of glass and its inherent nature lends itself to smooth, flowing forms as the molten material dances to the laws of gravity and centrifugal force. As an artist I have found borosilicate glass to be very intriguing and I have gladly made glass my artistic medium of choice. However, I have also found that glass and its' crystalline appeal is often complimented by the use of other artistic mediums. This recently led me to take the plunge into the wonderful world of mixed media. There are endless options as to what can be successfully incorporated into your glass designs with the help of a little creativity.

When exploring this avenue of artistic expression it is important to first find out what other mediums interest you, as well as which ones compliment your glass and your design concepts. It is also important to look at your work and decide what the addition of another media will bring to it, if anything. If adding another media will help turn the conceptualization of a piece into the completion of a piece, then I am all for it. Besides, one of the most important aspects of design is being able to successfully carry it out.

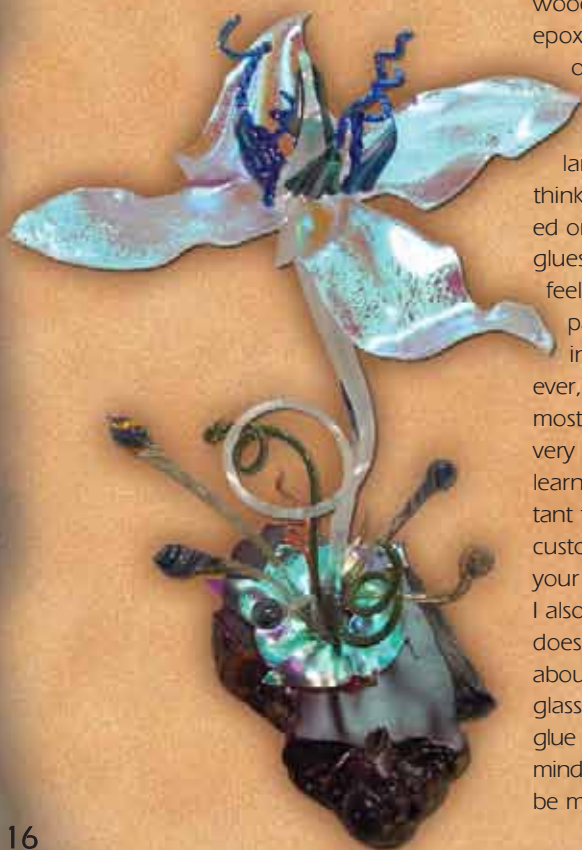
When considering which mediums may best compliment your work, remember to think of materials that may not only make your piece more aesthetically pleasing, but also ones that will make the assembly of a piece less difficult. I have found that materials such as wood and metal as well as various glues and epoxies can play a huge role in the assembly of various glass pieces. All too often lampworkers think strictly in terms of what is super technical in the eyes of other lampworkers, which often leads them to think that glass artwork should be constructed on the torch only, without the use of glues and epoxies. These same artists often feel that adding other colorants such as oil paints or enamels is in some way "cheating". I respect this line of thinking, however, I disagree with it strongly. One of the most important lessons I have learned came very early in my glassblowing career. I learned to realize that often times it is important to think in terms of what the average customer may appreciate rather than what your glassblowing buddies think is "worthy". I also realized that the Joe Blow America doesn't necessarily understand let alone care about things like whether the piece is soft glass or hard. Whether the piece contains UV glue or all welds will probably never cross their mind. You may find that your customers may be more impressed with simplicity and

whether the piece is appealing to them rather than the fact that you put twenty bow-tie reversals in a piece. If you think the addition of another media will add to your designs, then do so. And if not, then continue to do what makes you and

your customers happy. Aside from that, all that matters is that which pertains to the fulfillment of your artistic appetite. Whatever you decide, the important thing is that you are willing to experiment.

One of the greatest joys I have found from the use of mixed media in my work is the ability to expand the size limitations of lampworked pieces. This particular perceived limitation might be one of the largest universal gripes among lampworkers. Many artists seem to become comfortable within these "perceived limitations" while others feel confined within these restraints pertaining to size, scale, etc. This feeling of confinement led me to search for other artistic mediums that might compliment my glass designs. Since doing so, I have opened my eyes to a whole new reality relating to size and scale. Recently I have been making multiple components on the torch, which are then assembled through the use of different wires, steel armatures and epoxies. This allows me to create large pieces with little concern for time and less difficulty than assembly on the torch would provide. In addition to executing designs on a larger scale I am also able to include colors in my work, currently unavailable in the borosilicate color palette through the use of different oil paints.

Despite the explosion of the borosilicate color palette in recent years, I often find myself at a loss when searching for certain shades that may compliment my glass designs. This has led me to explore other colorants such as acrylic and oil paints. Numerous paints and enamels are available to the working artist today, most of which can be easily incorporated into various glass designs. The use of oils in glass deserves a whole article to themselves as they create a wonderful myriad of options for any artist, especially the borosilicate flame-worker.



I was first made aware of painting on glass after viewing some Robert Mickelsen's painted vessels. Through the use of oil paints, Robert was able to create brilliant "day-glo like" color fades on the etched surface of his glass. This made me realize that there was much more to applied decoration than I had once believed. Rather than having a limited view on color pertaining to my designs, I decided to start incorporating oils into my work as well. I started out making hollow forms that were then etched and painted with bands of alternating color creating an "encalmo like" effect. More recently I have been replicating different items such as rattles, rain sticks, flutes, etc. commonly found in Western Great Lakes Tribal circles. I then incorporate different imagery, symbolic to the beliefs and philosophies of these tribes, primarily the Ojibwa and Menominee. These are just a few ways that I have found the use of oils to be a beneficial addition to my artistic repertoire. I encourage you to experiment with all the different colors and combinations that make painting on glass so much fun. You may be amazed at what this medium may lend to you and your artistic endeavors. Anyone looking for more examples of painted borosilicate glass should research flame-working artist, Ginny Ruffner. Ginny is largely responsible for transforming the public perception of lampworking into a respected "fine art" medium. She is well known for her extremely creative sculptural pieces, which are often completely covered by intricate oil painted patterns.

Generally when working with other mediums I try to keep the primary focus on the glass, however this is not always the case. Sometimes it is effective to use glass as a compliment to a more predominant material. The piece pictured above right is an example of where the glass was used only to suggest the contour of Africa, and the wire and crystals that make up the body of land mass serve as the primary focus. This balance of materials led to an overall effective piece. The glass does not necessarily have to be the most abundant material in the piece to still remain a powerful focus point. The piece below right is another example of an extremely effective design, where the glass, although minimal in comparison, evokes a strong feeling or emotion due to the stark contrast of the flower and the black and white photograph. This piece was made by one of my mentors, David Willis. Dave is well known for creating very large, detailed work by assembling multiple component parts both on and aside from the torch.

If you feel that the addition of mixed media may benefit your designs, but you don't necessarily have the knowledge or materials to do things such as oil painting, or sandblasting. This is completely understandable and easy to remedy. Often times, local art centers offer workshops or classes in different artistic mediums. This may be a good way to learn a new skill / trade. Collaboration is also a popular way of finding other artists with similar interests as you and may prove to be a huge addition to your artwork. A good percentage of my cold working is done out of shop. I also work closely with local artists whom I trust, and I often have these individuals carry out my designs in the form of oil paints, etc. It is really important to establish working relationships with other artists in your area or abroad. Sometimes you will be amazed at what ideas two minds can come up with as opposed to one.

This is just a brief overview of different approaches myself and other artists have taken in adding various mixed media to borosilicate glass designs. The techniques given here are merely to serve as inspiration and hardly begin to delve into the multitude of options available in the wonderful world of mixed media. The sky truly is the limit. Thanks to Will & Jennifer at The FLOW & David Willis for his willingness to share images of his work for purposes of this article.

Mark Lammi is a glass artist who currently resides in Eugene, Oregon. He is part of a growing number of artists pushing the limits of 33COE as an artistic medium. Marks work displays a strong emphasis on the relationship between line and form as evident in his thin, hollow forms. He also produces various sculptural works, inspired heavily by the natural world.



His work can be purchased online at www.theartscoop.com/MarkLammi and can be found in numerous galleries throughout the country. Mark has studied with Roger Parramore as well as other established artists and has served as a teaching assistant for Bob Snodgrass at the Eugene Glass School. He is currently focused on learning all there is to know about glass both in the flame and furnace and looks forward to a career in teaching classes of all experience levels. Mark can be contacted at P.O. Box 11373, Eugene, OR 97440, or email Mark at malammistudios@yahoo.com.

Guide to Photos:

Previous page above right, "Tribal Rattles" Sanblasted, oil painted, 12" x 2.75", collaboration by Mark and Jeanette Lammi. **Previous page below left, "Psychedelic Blossom"**, mixed media, 25" x 19", Mark Lammi. **Above right, "Zion"**, mixed media, 5.5" x 10", Mark Lammi. **Below, "Home"**, mixed media, 15" x 24" x 3", David Willis.

