

Glass Art Society Conference New Orleans

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Photography by Chris Kellum
& Mike Shelbo*

Some of the kindest folk I have ever met are associated with the world of glass. In June, from the 10th to the 12th, the Glass Art Society gathered in New Orleans, Louisiana for their 34th Annual Conference. Glassworkers came from near and far to represent themselves and have a good time. Bringing forth new ideas to share and connecting with one another as only people of glass do. The Big Easy definitely served well as the stage for the production that was the conference. Twenty four hour access to libations and madness contributed to the atmosphere. Bourbon St. aside, one such as myself could become intoxicated on the intake of new information.

Ed Kirshner demonstrated using glass flux from Reusche, an amazing technique to hot fuse your blown and solid soft glass. The finished effect was that of UV glue but without the glue or vacuum leaks, illuminated artists I hope you caught this. The lovely Dinah Hulet informed me of vitreous paste, now my brain hurts from thinking of the million different uses, thank you.

The sharing of information and process is what will in part further the world of glasswork to no end. Most of the folks who have been in business for a decade or three understand this. It is the generation of glassworkers I am grouped with that needs to understand that communication and above all respect to our glass mentors and maestros will be what revolutionizes our industry. I believe in a new renaissance of glass art that is already unfolding and it involves harnessing the knowledge of the masters so the new breed can collaborate and expand upon it. This embodies what a GAS conference is all about. Besides meeting wonderful people and enjoying each others company, we are working. Through the network which is the Glass Art Society, we become conscious of the glass world around us. New directions for expressing

your ideas and feelings into your

work are ripe for the picking at the conference. It becomes very difficult to choose what to do.

Fascinating lectures such as Shane Fero's slideshow on the Evolution of Flameworking, touched on subjects such as carnival families and world's fairs from his personal experience and opinions. As a collector of old photographs myself I could have watched and listened all day. Dante Marioni made a touching speech as he presented his father Paul Marioni with the Lifetime Achievement Award. Andrei Codrescu was the keynote speaker for the conference. He is an author and often can be heard on NPR, or read on his



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online magazine. During his speech he said, "It's good that all the artists are artists and not metaphysicians first, because then the world is full of things that are interesting, instead of just lessons." He is entirely correct. Although artists who cross the boundaries of communication and understanding must use their given talents to fuel the fires of the world of glass.

Once again Lucio Bubacco put the awe in audience as we watched him ever so quickly formulate and assemble a stemmed candelabra. With two mythological figures dancing around bit work between a blown foot and candle holder, his torch work, all soft glass, will never cease to amaze me. Debbie Tarsitano also a soft glass flame-worker created a large paperweight using murrine and cane to create what I interpreted as a theme of DNA, molecules, and science. Victor Chiarizia exposed people to the use of fired enamels and borosilicate glass. His botanical forms served as a great example of color palette expansion using all different enamels and lusters. Dr. Eric Ehlenberger reinforced the fact that neon is not just for signs, illuminated glass can be integrated into many styles and artforms. As did Michael Cain, who combined

furnace blown sculpture and torchworked tubes to make a head with a pretty wild finished effect. Being at the Contemporary Arts Center, where the torch action was, led me to missing many a furnace demo, such as Katherine Gray or Stephen Rolfe Powell. But one furnace demonstration came to the CAC that could easily contend for best of conference. Thor Bueno put on a demo that brought showmanship back to the spotlight. Raised on stilts, Thor led a squad of female assistants and a rum fed crowd through a glass voodoo performance. Creating a voodoo doll to sacrifice to the open flame in which it was created. Some who watched were confused, but regardless everyone was smiling. I had a warm feeling inside, not rum related. Hans-Godo Frabel created a hollow borosilicate figure on the torch, a large scale man ready to incorporate into a sculpture. Ryan Higgins visually asked the question, what came first the chicken or the egg?, with his torching demo. He encapsulated a solid boro chicken into a hollow boro egg, thus leaving you to decide the answer. Ed Kirshner showed dif-

ferent illuminated patterns one can create using different gases and pressures in all forms of hollow glass sculpture. Bandhu Dunham brought his newest boro steam engine and demonstrated how influences of old have enlightened his found love of kinetic sculpture.

On the 12th, the last day of the conference I went beyond the CAC to Wet Dog Glass. Karen Willenbrink-Johnsen and her team astonished a packed house with humor, wit and garage working precision while they assembled a piece called "Canine Circus". All furnace off hand made dogs, flowers and other circus goodies were put together using adapted hand torches, a glory hole and love. A fabulous demonstration showing how fusion of different glassworking styles can come together to create a thing of beauty.



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The Technical Display had an array of exhibitors showing tools, educational facilities, raw materials, equipment and everything glass related. If you were there you had to make sure no one saw you drooling over shiny shears, glorious new blowpipes, bar upon bar of color, cane upon cane of colored boro and almost anything you could hope for but probably couldn't afford. Yes, I will take one of everything. Just like the lectures and demos, I know I missed some of the stuff the tech display had to offer. More for next year I guess.

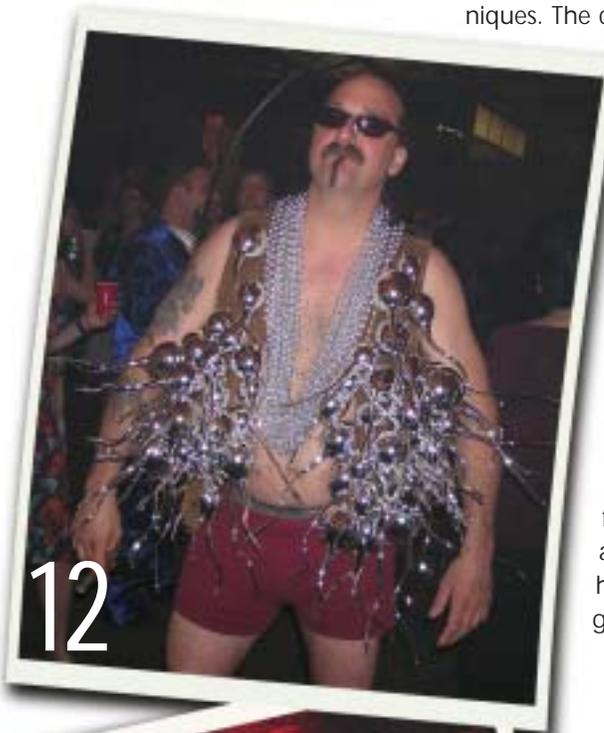
The closing night party was at the CAC and the feeling inside perfectly defined the entire conference. People laughing, enjoying good conversation and drink, music flowing freely. I even heard a song about glassblowing, "heatin it up, coolin it down...", which transitioned to Laura Donefer unleashing her Glass Fashion Show. Half naked, super kinky glass peoples and models shaking what they got on stage in front of all the Glass Art Society. Outfits of glass formed through all manipulations of working techniques. The crowd

applauded, picked up their jaws and went on partying. It was a lot of fun, hanging out with glassworkers always makes me feel better about humanity in general.

The party ending led to walking around the french quarter looking for a pub and eventually staying up past sunrise. Watching glassblowers scramble in the lobby of the Fairmont to catch taxis and flights home. Not me, not yet, I had other plans.

My flight plan was to leave on the 15th, in hope for some interesting post conference action. So when I found out Matt Eskuche was also planning on being in town, we figured why not do some torching, right? Inquiring about this with local New Orleans Chris Bain led us to renting time at Wet Dog Glass. We showed up at about ten o'clock and the word had spread about a get together, so there was a good handful of flameworkers hanging out. Andrew Jackson Pollack did a quick figure study in colored boro, I think it was a rendition of himself. Chris Bain ripped it up on his new torch making components for a stemmed vessel piece. I was working on a hollow head that was my interpretation of New Orleans, to go into a sculpture piece. Matt Eskuche furiously torched away until completion of a stoppered montage bottle. Bandhu Dunham was on the scene to document and for fun. Julie Riggs showed up just in time to collaborate with me on my sculpture. Our joint effort now includes Julie's beautiful amber purple female figure, a lot of bit work, and my goblin head to tie together a theme of almost endless intake and interesting atmosphere while we explored New Orleans during GAS. Eddie and Angela, plus the Wet Dog crew, were most hospitable during our torchworking get together. Very affordable rental rates as well as an excellent facility leaves me highly recommending Wet Dog Glass as a place to do furnace or torch work. All in all it was a great way to finish off my New Orleans experience.

Again I was leaving a GAS conference with a good feeling about what lies ahead for the glass world. I thank Joe Moss and Eric Roman, Cindi Ray, Carlyn and Wendy, Paige Pertz, Leah Bellamy and Eric Labowchere for their kindness toward a po' boy in New Orleans. Because of people such as these, it helps me remember that as we develop our relationship with the glass, we must not forget our friendships to silica sistren and brethren. Keep your fires burning and your imagination churning, there is never a need to ever stop learning.



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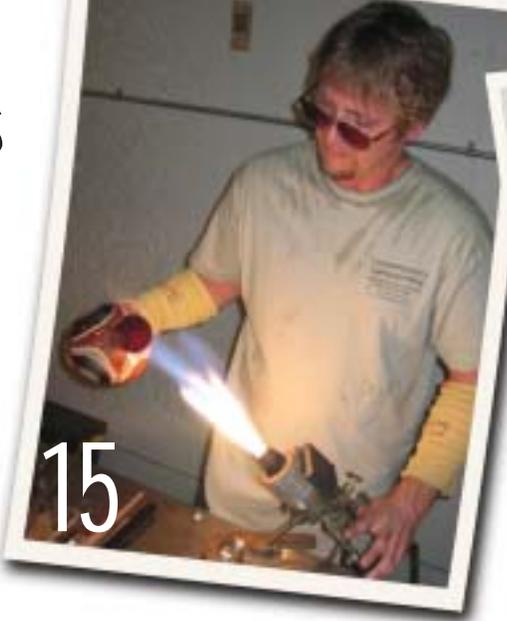


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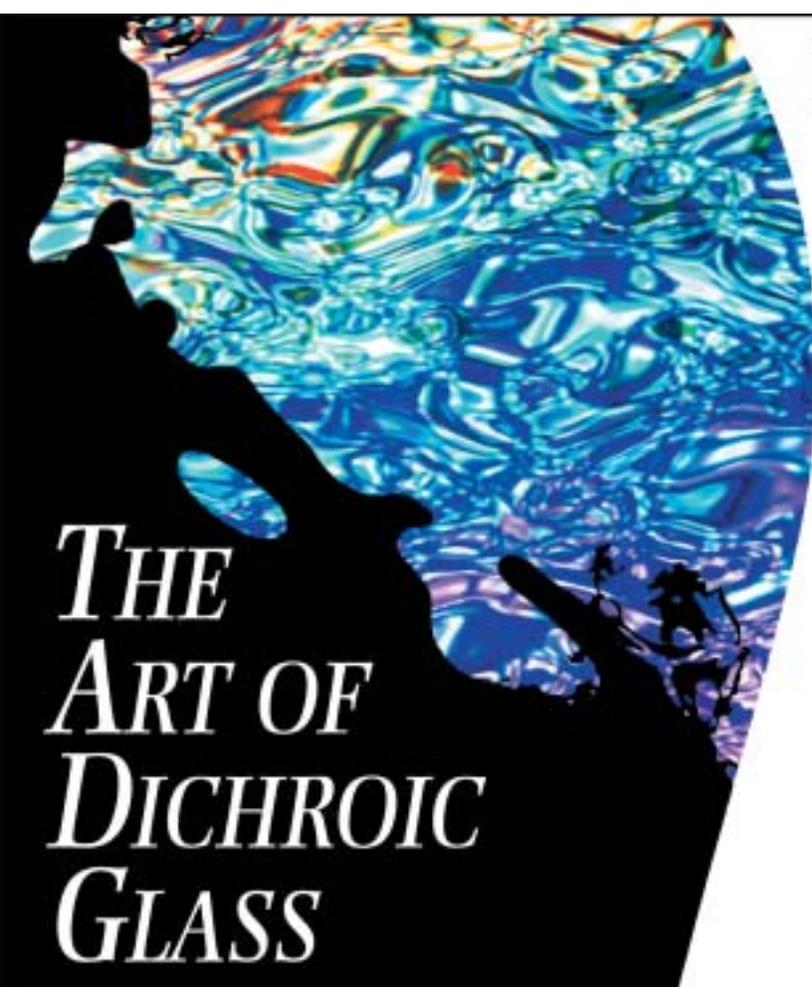
For more information on the Glass Art Society 2005 Conference please visit glassart.org.

Guide to Photos

1. Hans Godo Frabel's Mardi Gras mask.
2. Master of beads, Robert Mickelsen.
3. Mardi Gras matriarch, Dee Dee Rainbow.
4. Author Mike Shelbo and the dreaded "Hand Grenade" scourge of Bourbon Street.
5. Lucio Bubacco demo's at the Contemporary Arts Center.
6. Ryan Higgins "What came first?"
7. Debbie Tarsitano demo's a sculptural paper-weight.
8. Bandhu Dunham's functional glass steam engine.
9. Heather Trimlett doing some mandrel work at the CAC.
10. Having a "GAS" is Hans Godo-Frabel.



11. Fabulous furnace work by Karen Willenbrink-Johnsen.
12. Victor Chiarizia struts at the fashion show.
13. High fashion glass at the CAC.
14. Author Mike Shelbo and Julie Riggs collaborate at Wet Dog Glass.
15. Montage bottle by Matt Eskuche.
16. Metamorphosis by GAS Vice-President Robert Mickelsen.



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