

Realizing Your Full Potential



Sidecar Spaceship

By Gateson Recko

For many aspiring glass blowers, the most difficult part of the artistic journey is crossing over from “student” to “artist”. I use these terms to define one’s position in their artistic career. For the majority, art is a spectator sport. For many, art is a hobby and for a few, a way of life.

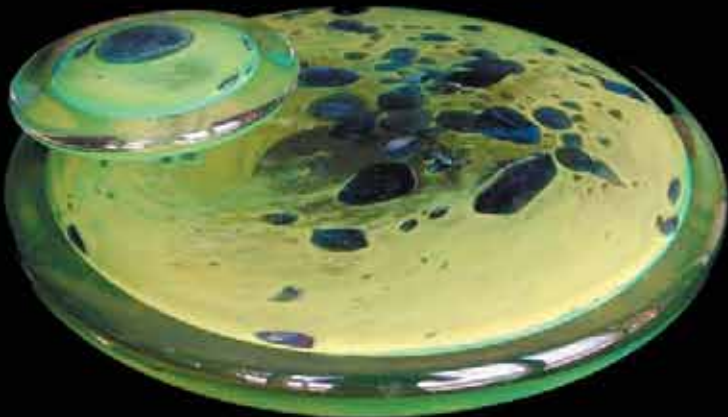
By definition, a student is anyone who is learning, and we all fall into this category. Quite possibly the single largest motivation for me to work is the desire to learn. Upon meeting Vittorio Costantini, I asked him if he still learned from the glass. His response? “Every day.” At that moment I realized how an artist is able to work with one medium for a lifetime. Vittorio has more than thirty years experience behind a torch. One reason for his success is his constant desire to learn. Although Vittorio is still learning, I would never call him a student. So, what really is a student of the arts?

For the purpose of this discussion, a “student” is anyone who is absorbing more information than they are expelling. That is to say, more time is dedicated to learning new techniques and studying other artwork than is spent creating an original body of work. Perhaps the single best tool for learning is simple observation. We can learn so much just from looking at

other work. If you are in school, you no doubt have art history courses. These courses can be extremely valuable in giving the student a broad overview of artistic movements. If you are not in school, and therefore, are not afforded the luxury of encapsulated information, then it is up to you to go out and seek knowledge on your own. I believe the more you know what has been done the more you know what has not been done. Read as much as you can. Go to galleries, museums, and craft shows. In viewing other art, you will eventually identify with certain styles and artists helping to refine your own tastes and individual style. The more artwork you view, the more you will understand, and keep in mind, glass is not the only form of art in existence. For fellow glass artist, John Koutsouros, a.k.a. yehaw, inspiration and ideas come from non-glass realms of his life such as music.

After assimilating new information, the next step is to attempt to make what you saw and liked. Just about everyone learns from the age-old technique of copying what we see, which seems to serve two purposes. It not only provides knowledge of technique, but also creates confidence. “I can do that.” Many teachers heavily encourage you to make things the way they do. Cesare Toffolo is a good example of an artist who teaches classic Murano goblet design, necessary to understanding Venetian form. His method teaches art history as well as technique. Through copying these classics, Cesare’s students learn form and proportion. The teacher’s goal is for the student to emulate their work in order to learn new techniques. They are teaching you with the hope that the skills you learn will take you farther along in your own work.

At some point in a student’s career (this point varies from one person to another), the focus moves from replicating work to developing a personal style. This could be the most treacherous part of the journey, crossing over to being an “artist”. An artist is someone who makes art (or craft..., not this debate). From the moment you start to study art you can call yourself an artist. Some artists’ best work happens as a student.



Lunar Mango 1997

We can all call ourselves artists of one sort or another, but for the purpose of this discussion, an "artist" is anyone who is creating original, personal work. I am not talking about the countless numbers of people who produce that which has already been produced.

The challenge of becoming an artist is in taking all the information you have gathered and using it to create something unique. This is where having a strong art history background pays off. Step back, look around, decide where your interests lie and then work to make your design different from your fellow artists. This is easily said, I know. For some, the drive for originality is the result of competition, a game of topping each other's design or technique. Jason Lee, pipemaker extraordinaire, once said, "If you are copying what I made yesterday, you won't be copying what I made today." For his theory to work, Jason Lee must continue to develop and change his artistic style, which is perhaps his motivation to be an innovator.

With the infinite number of possible artistic designs, why do we still see so much work imitating others? Imitation creates trends, ripples in the artistic wave of time that become the art history of tomorrow. We are all part of an endless flow of information. Historically, artists were considered innovators of

their time. Throughout time, particular artists stand out for causing shifts in trends. They took chances by going against the grain and influenced others to study their designs. If you are like me, aspiring to reach the top of my field, then it is imperative to make work that stands out as your own, different from others and unique to you. No matter where you are on your path, recognize your past and realize your potential future.



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