

FIGURES, FORM & FUN

By Tobin Copeland-Turner

As rays of early morning sun broke the dawn on June 17th, 2003, Ron Parvin bustled with last minute preparations for a three-day workshop with internationally renowned artist Robert Mickelsen. Like many Oregonians, Parvin typifies the great people of the Northwest - kind, generous, and playful. His sense of humor and straightforward honesty make him the kind of guy you want to spend time with. Today, when he can grab a spare minute, he creates beautiful aquarium installations out of flame worked glass. A year ago, starting with nothing but an idea and determination, Parvin put down the torch to do what most of only dream of, creating a comprehensive college level glass program that promises to be one of the finest on the west coast.

At 9AM on Tuesday, June 17th, eager students milled about newly constructed flameworking tables inside building Number 51. Building Number 51 sits on the outskirts of the Chemeketa Community College campus, located in Salem, Oregon. The building is metal and concrete with a tan facade surrounded by non-descript low growing shrubbery. A large covered patio area in the rear of the building provides the perfect setting for B-B-Q's and relaxation from classes. Nothing fancy, but very functional. During the regular school year, the building is shared with construction apprenticeship programs every evening, but during the days and weekends the site has been reborn as a viable center for artistic learning. A place where ideas, concepts, and skills are taught created, formed, refined, and shared.

Students traveled from Louisiana, Tennessee, Washington, California, Nevada, across Oregon, and Canada to study with international glass master Robert Mickelsen. The group consisted of people ranging in ages from nineteen to sixty, with various backgrounds and skill levels.

Parvin contacted Mickelsen several months earlier to ask if he'd be interested in doing a workshop at Chemeketa. Parvin planned to enroll twenty-four students, which is twice the number Mickelsen had taught ever at one time. As a highly regarded teacher, Mickelsen wanted to be certain every student received enough personal attention and would gain from the experience. He hesitated at first. Parvin regularly teaches classes of twenty students and assured Mickelsen that it was not only feasible, but also more rewarding for the students. After several e-mail conversations between them, the workshop Figures, Form and Fun was born.



Parvin contacted Northstar Glassworks and they were happy to support the arts and gave generously to the workshop. Not only did Northstar make a substantial donation of colored rod, frit and powder, and include the workshop flyer in their monthly newsletter, but they also provided one of their talented employees, Brian Holsonback as one of the teaching assistants.

Leroy Espiquertia, another very talented glass artist, also donated his time as a teaching assistant. Four of Parvin's frameworking students offered to volunteer their services as models. Things were coming together quickly. With the flyer in the Northstar Newsletter, soon calls came in and quickly the workshop was filled.

By 10 AM roll was called and everyone given their nametags, notebooks and pencils. Mickelsen soon had students looking at figurative work in a new light as they proceeded to draw sketches of the models. As the day progressed, Robert explained that doing human forms in glass was not a glass problem but rather an exercise at seeing things as an artist. So with paper and pencil, students learned the skills of seeing the models with an artists eye and transferring that image to paper and then finally to glass. From sketchpads to torches, students made the transitions. Mickelsen performed several demos, laid out concepts and ideas, and ignited the fires of creativity. He roamed the room giving individualized instructions while the teaching assistants moved from table to table helping students. Before anyone noticed, it was 6 PM. Parvin announced that even though the formal instruction for the day had ended the studio area would remain open through 10 PM to allow students more torch time. Over half of the students stayed and worked until the lights were turned off and the building locked up.

The second day was even more dynamic than the first. More demos were given, more concepts laid out, and then everyone went to work. From the first day and continuing on through the final hour of the third day, the room filled with action and enthusiasm. Teachers, assistants, and students shared their concepts, skills, and even food with each other. Dave Roller, a student, had been fishing a few days before

and provided a delicious trout bar-b-que Tuesday evening. Special guests attended throughout the workshop. Paul Trautman stopped by and worked on a collaborative piece with Mickelsen. The piece now resides in Chemeketa's permanent collection. Jesse Kohl, from Northstar Glassworks, was on hand to share ideas, information and color. Milon Townsend, a glass artist and author from New York, visited on Friday to check things out. Milon surprised the students when he did a quick impromptu demonstration on using the Stump Sucker with borosilicate and created a beautiful paperweight with an inclusion of a flower with a small figure beneath it.

The last day of the workshop was a day filled with more excitement and fun. The morning started out with Wil and Jennifer of Flow Magazine dropping by to check out the facilities and getting some info on the program. Mickelsen created one of his fantastic intaglio vessels with sections formed earlier using graal techniques. He demonstrated how to safely use powdered glass and frits. Students were treated to a slide presentation of frameworked glass art. For many of the students it was the first time they had seen some of the historic examples of flame worked glass. As the day concluded, Mickelsen expressed his thanks for having the opportunity to work with such a wonderful and diverse group of people. As Mickelsen said his farewells several of the students packed up their projects, tools and glass and made their way back to their studios.

It was busy and rewarding workshop for everyone involved. In spite of the class size, the workshop went smoothly and Mickelsen was pleased with its success. Everyone had a great time. Now students are inspired, eager for future workshops, classes and upcoming events.

Under Parvin's guidance, a flame working studio and a fully operational hot shop are under construction at Chemeketa. With help from conscientious volunteers, a great staff and plenty of hard work, Chemeketa's School of Glass will soon become a mecca for all those involved with the art of glass. These facilities are expected to be ready for action before the "Flame On" which the college is hosting in the spring of 2005. Watch for further news about this big event.

