

G.A.S. In Seattle Community Catalyst

Written by & photos by Mike Shelbo

It was Tuesday, June 10th and I was checking into registration for the Glass Art Society Conference in Seattle. One of many who would, for the next four days, go to and from Seattle Center identifiable as glassblower by my red nametag and didydim specs. This was my first conference and first time I have been a member of GAS. I got work exchange so my conference fee was less. I recommend doing volunteer work not only for financial reasons but it is a great way to meet other glassblowers, plus it was actually fun. The 1st night was spent trying to decide what demos and lectures I was going to try and catch throughout the conference.

On June 11th I was scheduled to work at the technical display checking people's badges that were exhibitors. So I did that and then found out about donating the auction piece I brought up (which had a crack, doh!). Thanks to Robert Mickelsen I was able to hop on a torch after the flame-working pavilion was operational and fix my piece.

Waking up on June 12th was easy from the excitement and anxiety of waiting. I sprung out of bed and got moving to be at Seattle Center by 8 am. First stop was Pavilion B to see what the Flaming Bee Collaborative was all about. Karen Buhler, Bernadette Scheller, Glenn Lyons, and Joel Meyers were all making separate borosilicate pieces to assemble into one piece showing imagery relating to Seattle. The finished piece, happy people who I'm guessing were glassblowers hanging out with a salmon, of course. I walked out to the Hot Glass Roadshow and saw James Nowak, assisted by Josh Swanson and Will Paschel. He created a gold dichroic pillar with a solid female form on top surrounded by white roses at her feet.

After the demo I found myself drooling at the Corning Museum of Glass' mobile hotshop. Beautifully constructed glory holes and a furnace lined the elevated stage where artisans educate and play. I then picked up my donation for the auction and dropped it off in Pavilion C. I was able to peek at pieces already there and see fellow glassblowers dropping off their work as well. It made me feel proud to have my work alongside art of this caliber. After checking in on Flaming Bee as they were finishing and assembling their individual sculptures into one, I decided to make way back to the Hot Glass Roadshow to watch Dante Marioni. Janusz Pozniak assisted Dante in creating a beautiful pitcher with a blown foot, the whole piece in clear. The lawn in front of the stage was packed to the edges with glassblowers and random spectators.

Once again I found myself at the Flameworking Pavilion and jumping between work exchange assignment and watching three simultaneous demonstrations. Rusty Russo was creating an illuminated piece using soft glass tube that once finished became a tribal mask glowing all different neon colors. Sally Prasch was sealing a small borosilicate figure into a bubble which was sealed into a tube which was then filled with gas illuminat-



James Nowak



Dante Marioni



Bernd Weinmayer



Ben Browne



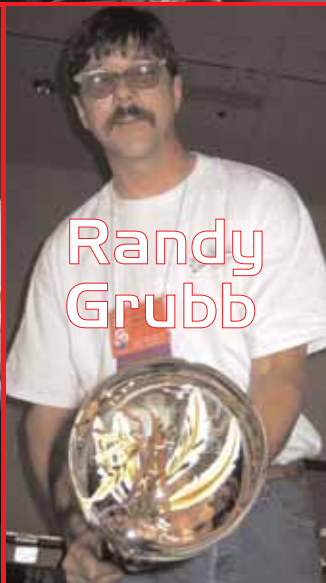
David Venson



Preston Singletary



Lewis Wilson



Randy Grubb



James Minson



Roy Olson



ing the chamber and the uranium tubing she used to make part of the piece. Randy Grubb was creating a large soft glass paperweight with a peacepipe inside surrounded by feathers. He utilized a small glory hole and vacuum encasement apparatus to make the piece. It was my first time watching someone take a puck of Schott optical and peel it like a grape, very fun. I was in Pavilion B up until the end of their demos and stayed to watch Janis Miltenberger. She took suggestions from the audience to find out what people wanted to see and talk about. I saw her create a large clear leaf out of boro tubing that she cut open into a sheet. Ed Biggar was furiously constructing a large organic sculpture that was to be illuminated with different gasses when finished. Ed chose this opportunity to make art and dedicate it to the memory of John Jackson. Pati Walton created a soft glass pendant with gold leaf and murrine showing a tiger in nature.

Eventually the demonstrations for the day were over and I missed a lot of lectures that I had hoped to see, but still made it to the opening ceremony. After being led to Fisher Pavilion by Northwest Taiko drummers everyone enjoyed the Salmon Bake and good company, followed by full bellies. We rested our feet while Preston Singletary put on a show in the Corning mobile shop. He was assisted by Nadege Desgenetez and Joe Benvenuto in creating a large black vessel form that was transformed into the open beak of a raven. The finishing touch was a seed resting in the curve of the bottom of the mouth. It was a good encore or after dinner treat to finish the day with.

The next morning, June 13th, I arrived at the flameworking pavilion to Don Niblack setting up a small glory hole to work with while he torched soft glass. What the finished piece was I don't know because I got to re-park his van, which was great, an old three on the tree, one of many perks of volunteering. James Minson was assembling a large wreath, made of clear boro rod and silver fumed flowers. Mark Joy and his wife and cheerleader of the illuminated arts put a demo together on writing names in neon. The best reaction to describe this experience, wow.

Ten o' clock came quickly and I was planted in the torch demonstrations. Ray Olsen made a violet and pink goblet in Moretti with a lonely fairy sitting between avolios as the stem. He showed how to use boro punties and blowtubes in conjunction with soft glass lampwork. At the same time Loren Stump was putting together a large soft glass paperweight. It was a scene depicting the space needle with a GAS 2003 murrine included in the layout that was picked up using the Stumpsucker. David Svenson was working with soft glass tubes and some molds to create his illuminated figure to be used in a mixed media piece with a suitcase.

Twelve noon came and I went over to witness the goblet grab. After a bit of commotion there were a lot of happy people waiting in line to purchase their chosen drinking vessel. I wandered over to the Hot Glass Roadshow and saw Mark Eckstrand at work assisted by Tom Anderson, who was handling a huge wad of glass while Eckstrand sculpted and made adjustments at the bench.

At one o' clock I returned to Pavilion B where Mike Plane was about to begin his latheworking demonstration. He constructed pre-made sections incalmo style onto a huge diameter clear blowtube. Once assembled he jumped inside an air cooled suit and brought out his GTT Python that he

converted to handheld and started raging it. Tracy, Plane's assistant, also had a handheld torch going for spot heating. The temperature of Pavilion B was on the rise. At one point a speaker cover dislodged itself from the ceiling and I grabbed it off the floor and it was quite warm. After Plane shaped the mass and puffed it up, the resulting shape was a large sphere. They separated the upper two thirds of the sphere, which was clear, leaving a beautiful low bowl with an interior montage pattern. This was the first real demo I had ever seen on a lathe and it was great. Chris Buzzini was making a floral paperweight at the same time. Jay Blazek also demonstrated a lot of different techniques for blown objects in neon, using molds and different gas filling methods.

At three o'clock the room finally got back to regular temp and Roger Parramore jumped on to construct a large vessel form by hand. Without a kiln he introduced his pre-colored tubing to the fire and began blowing it up into shape. He then created a long skinny neck for the vase and again brought up the vessel in the fire to attach them together. The proper use of an annealing flame was a strong point of the demo, giving the kiln pre-heating dependent lampworkers something to think about. Brian Kerkvliet one table over was working on a hollow sculpture of a man. He showed coloring techniques using different frits. I was quite wrapped up in the last two demos so I wasn't sure what Ron Carlson was working on, besides provoking the audience to actually discuss what was on their minds about neon. After the demos finished Mickelsen announced that during the beginning of the open torch session the next day Lucio Bubacco and Vittorio Constantini would be working together from 8 to 10am.

Pavilion B was closing up so I took a stroll and checked out the auction preview. I was excited to see that my donation had made it into the live auction and was sitting with pieces by artists whom I have looked up to for five years. That evening I didn't make it on the entire gallery hop circuit but I went to a few. The Tribe 13 gallery had a great exhibit of paintings and mosaic floor art that I hope everyone got to check out. The Butter Eaters show at their gallery showed collaborative efforts that were quite amusing with their cartoon glass crossover imagery and interesting messages. At this point sleep was sweet as sugar and as valuable as gold.

Rise and shine at 6:30 to get the first shower in the hotel room and get to Seattle Center before 8 am. With no prior printed schedule including Lucio Bubacco and Vittorio Constantini as demonstrators, I felt privileged to be front and center while they worked. Lucio created a devil figure standing on top of a blown foot, holding a torch that was shooting fire. He connected the torch hose to the devil's bum and called the piece, "Natural Gas". When I picked my jaw up off the floor after seeing Lucio work his soft glass like borosilicate and move so quickly, I realized Vittorio was working and creating a fish. He used soft glass as well and some silver leaf for realistic color effect.

During the time that they worked others also got on open torches to demonstrate. Chris McElroy showed a bubble into a bubble overlay for borosilicate and turned it into a beautiful teacup. Damien Namkung sculpted a solid boro fairy figure. I hopped on to create a hollow sculpted goblin head out of multi-colored then coiled cane. Bandhu Dunham brought his borosilicate steam machine to display during his book signing of "Formed of Fire".



Mike Plane



Roger Parramore



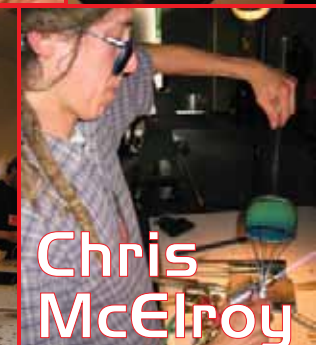
Brian Kerkvliet



Lucio Bubacco



Mike Shelbo



Chris McElroy



Bandhu Dunham



Jason Lee



Mag Mangkang



Marble-slinger



Robert Mickelsen



Need we say more?

When everyone had finished about noon the flameworking pavilion was officially closed. I headed straight to the Technical Display to check out what all our friendly glass and tool manufacturers had to say and show. I left with a red GAS bag full of booty and a smile on my face. I must note a thank you to Jim Moore who is a wonderful person and appreciates his customers as much as we appreciate his tools. Next stop was the auction in Fisher Pavilion where seats were full and the action started to happen. While some staked claim on the silent auction, others battled it out in the live auction for what they wanted. All the donations helped raise money for GAS and the CERF fund, and a good time was had by all.

After the auction I was off to fulfill my final work exchange assignment helping set up the closing night party. The party was a blast, every furnace and lampworker, kilnworker and coldworker with collectors and friends under one roof having fun. We were listening to live music and enjoying good food and drink and each other's company. I couldn't think of a better way to end the conference. Not only did I get to meet almost everyone I ever looked up to in the world of glass but I also got to hang out with them too. Smile.

On Sunday, June 15th, if you didn't go to Pilchuck for the afternoon then I hope you were at Glassworks Park in Seattle. I was and it was awesome. The whole crew from Glassworks was representing with an ongoing collaborative that turned into a giant bubbler with a lot of inside out switch axis montage work and a solid sculpted goblin creature perched on it. Robert Mickelsen did a demonstration with optic tubing, powder and a premade graal section. He combined them all incalmo and made a tri-colored bowl with a star and moon design on the interior. Marcel Braun was using a Python to work borosilicate like soft glass on a metal punty. He pulled out giant flat dichroic cane to be used in a large sculpture piece later. Ivan Barrow demonstrated a technique on how to make large amounts of colored tubing at once. Clinton showed how to pull out giant dichroic and colored ribbons using his Clintonpress. Mag Mangkang raged the Python to sculpt some giant clear boro hands. Glassworks Park had a live band in for a majority of the afternoon and exhibited pieces in the gallery area of the shop. Work from Amber Pellegrini, Ease, Marbleslinger, Eli Zygmentowicz, Derek White, Paco, Kevin Nail, Ian, Tribe 13 and friends of Glassworks Park were shown in glass cases so everyone could take a look up close.

A whole lot of good people were there, sharing information and stories and an overall very enjoyable day together. For me it was the perfect encore to the conference and helped affirm a thought that kept reoccurring in my mind lately. As I gazed out into a sea of glassblowers and didydim eyes I had a wonderful epiphany about the current and continuing state of glass art. We are really lucky to be involved in something that seems to be developing into a new renaissance for the art world. Where not only crossover of soft glass and borosilicate techniques come into play but complete utilization of all methods of art in their relation to glass. Thus creating new work never before seen or imagined. Time will only tell but I know one thing for sure, I can't wait to see what is in development to be shown in New Orleans next year. Thanks to everyone I met while on this vacation, did I mention that I had a great time, I think of you all while I frantically try and catch up on orders that I delayed for