



# THE COLORADO PROJECT

by Adam Villarreal  
Photography by Briana Boyer

July 17 and 18, 2009, saw a unique event in Colorado lampworking history. The Colorado Project, a nonprofit organization committed to building the glass community through philanthropy, held its first annual event in Denver, Colorado. Shack Man Glass Studio in conjunction with Glasscraft, Inc., hosted the two-day event. People from all over the country came to participate and show support.

## Glass Artists with a Mission

The purpose of the event was to create a collaborative glass art installation consisting of a four-foot-by-eight-foot mask to be sold at auction to raise money for Learning Landscapes, a University of Colorado program that rebuilds playgrounds in disrepair. Composed of lampworked pieces of crucible-pulled color and a huge bead necklace and headdress, the mask was impressive to say the least. The community aspect of the event was emphasized by having nearly 150 glassblowers rotating through lampworking stations at both Shack Man Studio and Glasscraft to produce the beads for the headdress and necklace.

The work for the mask itself was done by Nathan Aweida, Cary Hollenberg, and Adam Grafuis, with Abe Fleishman from Northstar pulling the color out of the crucible. For anyone who has never seen color being pulled, it is quite a sight. There were meaty gobs of Amber Purple and Mystery Aventurine bigger than footballs being stretched across the shop. At a toasty 2350°F, you could see the smoke coming off of Abe's gloves. Adam Grafuis kept everyone laughing with his constant improv during the work, waving a picture of Arnold Schwarzenegger and a piece of quartz to power up the glassblowers and helping with crystal reheats on the color pulls.

Through the efforts and donations of sponsors and the hardworking team behind the project, a great spread was put out. An entire table of complimentary food and beer for the attendees as well as gas and glass enough for everyone was supplied. During the entire event the spirit of sharing and goodwill was evident as newbies and old timers discussed techniques and traded information freely. Being able to come together to celebrate glass and raise money for a good cause made the atmosphere electric.

The success of the project shows the power of philanthropy and the versatility of the borosilicate community and sets a wonderful precedent for future functions. It was the brainchild of Sean Mueller—along with Corinne Winters, Chris Jetter, and Adam Grafuis—and went from concept to reality in a mere four months, which is certainly a testament to the tenacity and ability of the Colorado project team.



## Benefits Reaching Beyond the Immediate

On the second day of the event Principal Dan Villescas and Vice Principal Carla Callahan of Doull Elementary made it out to see the glass being worked firsthand. Mr. Villescas spoke with great enthusiasm about how touched he was that the community of Colorado glassblowers had come together to help his school, not only with the new playground but with the mural as well. Fox News also made an appearance, getting the word out to the local community about the project. Not including the installation piece, more than ten thousand dollars worth of artwork was donated to the cause—everything from goblets, marbles, and jewelry to a smashing sculpture of handblown glass created on an all-glass GTT. These donated works were sold at a silent auction on August 8 at Shack Man Studios.

## A Glimpse into the Future

The installation piece will tour for twelve months around Colorado with art promoter, Jimmy Sellars, coordinating the tour. The year on tour will culminate in a black tie reception to promote the Colorado Project and showcase the piece. One hundred percent of all proceeds from the corporate sale and all other funds raised from The Colorado Project are being donated to Learning Landscapes. Not only will the money make it possible for a new playground to be built for Doull Elementary, but there is also going to be a glass-themed mural painted at the school, so participants in the project will be able to see the difference they made for years to come.

The borosilicate lampworking movement has risen far above and beyond anyone's expectations and continues to grow and change in exciting ways. As more people join the ranks of the glass community, we see a dynamic evolution of not only technique but the things that drive the industry and the very way that information is propagated. More than any other time in history, glass knowledge is not only available but shared readily. This ensures that the lampworking legacy only grows stronger as time goes by. The Colorado project gives us a glimpse of what the future can hold for the borosilicate movement, and it is a bright future, indeed.

A special thanks goes to Sean Mueller, Brian Schmitt, Susan Schmitt, Corrine Winters, Jimmy Sellars, Nathan Aweida, Cary Hollenberg, Adam Grafuis, Abe Fleishman, Dave Winship, Briana Boyer, and most importantly to the attendees who came from far and wide to make this event the great success it was.



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For more photos of this event, check out the Fall 2009 issue of The Flow.

