

THE Degenerate FLAME OFF 2009



Photography by Chris Carlson



Functional Art Glass from the Underground

by Mer

In January of this year, my wife and I came into Cornerstone Glass to pick up some materials for the shop. Over a brief conversation with Justin Sheppard, the facility's owner, we began to toss about the idea of hosting an event for the large community of artists making functional glass smokeware in our area. We had no idea of the amount of support and excitement that a pipe makers' flame-off would eventually garner. Once word started to get out about our plans, the interest snowballed into hype and the event took on a life of its own.

Coming Together Again

While there are so many of us here in Eugene, it's rare to find more than a dozen pipers in one place. After the federal government had made its stance against the pipe making industry in 2003, our community was forced underground. Working in small shops throughout the town we began to lose touch with what other pipe makers were doing. While times were tough, we were forced to grow and adapt to the new environment. As with so many of life's trials, this one ultimately served to strengthen us all. We began to see the end of glassblowers reproducing the established lines of large production houses. The result was a blossoming in creativity as we were forced to innovate our own styles.

As the political climate began to shift to a more moderate stance, artists started to peek outside of their little circles. With the growing popularity of online forums such as The Melting Pot (www.talkglass.com), which were accepting and supportive of the pipe making world, connections were able to be made that built our community back up and allowed us to share the magic that we had been cautiously and quietly working on.



An Incredible Event

So the stage was set. Cornerstone Glass can host up to twenty-five glassblowers at a time. The facility was perfect. The team of glassblowers there had been working together for a long time and ran the shop like a well-oiled machine. Justin and Ashley had the skill set to handle not only a storefront and studio, but the infrastructure to host an event of this scale, and I had established relationships with a broad base of artists and industry leaders. The timing was finally right and all of the pieces were in place to host an event that could serve as a coming out party for our repressed community.

The result of our efforts was overwhelming. The event was incredibly successful and the community was lifted up. I've rarely been a part of such a positive experience. The love of this community for each other and the glass we make is astounding. I can hardly wait until next year's Degenerate Flame-Off. Hope to see you there

The Degenerate Flame Off 2009

by Adam Villarreal

On May 29–31, 2009, competitors from all over the country gathered in Eugene, Oregon, at the Cornerstone Glass Studios to participate in the First Annual Degenerate Flame Off (DFO). For the very first time in Eugene, glass artists would publicly compete and be judged . . . on pipes. It is fitting that the city of Eugene host the DFO, since the city is not only home to the prestigious Eugene Glass School but also a hotbed of talented artists in many fields. Some of the most cutting-edge borosilicate pipe art in the world is coming out of this small patch of the Northwest.

Inspiring Demonstrations

Inside the main building, the pace of activity accelerated as worktables were made ready and kilns were put into place. Abe Fleishman, Darby Holm, Dellene Peralta, Marcel Braun, and Salt were kind enough to come down and demo, and by 2:00 p.m. the demos had begun. Marcel Braun was up first, prepping steel blow-tubes, soft-glass style, by wrapping rods of 10 mm borosilicate on the ends with his GTT hand torch.

Abe Fleishman and Adam Mayhe demonstrated Northstar's crucible dip tubing technique. Dellene Peralta was first up to receive one of the dips. As she began to sculpt, a woman's body slowly came into view. Matt DuBois used his dip prep to make a hollow, structural Buddha figure. Darby Holm was there as well working on a multisection, German montage-style, handworked bong. Salt formed an abstract sculpture in his signature style using a whole array of different sculpting tools—everything from knives to assorted kitchen utensils. A face with a haunted expression emerged from the front of



the sculpture. As a finishing touch, he added a large glob of solid Amber Purple and sculpted a wing. It was a real treat to be able to watch these artists from the top of their fields. For some who work from home or in isolated shop environments, this event was a bonanza of new information and a chance to grow as an artist.

Many people came together to make this all possible. A special thanks to the demoing artists for donating their time and materials and a huge thanks to the volunteers, sponsors, vendors, and especially the attendees, for putting their whole hearts into making this incredible event a reality.



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Visit the "Articles" link at www.TheFlowMagazine.com for an expanded, day-by-day description of the Degenerate Flame Off.