

# Celebrating the Tenth Anniversary of the International Flameworking Conference

by Tracy Wiggins

The tenth anniversary of the International Flameworking Conference (IFC) at Salem Community College (SCC) was celebrated by reuniting previous featured masters and honoring Paul J. Stankard as this year's featured artist. During the weekend of March 19–21, 2010, over 400 glass enthusiasts from across the country and around the world gathered in the Paul J. Stankard Studio & Lab in Alloway, New Jersey, to celebrate excellence in glass art.

## Presenting the Masters

The event's first demonstrations by Stankard, the conference's founder and chair, and Lucio Bubacco, the featured artist in 2002, set the tone for the conference. Designed to be educational as well as enjoyable, the concurrent presentations were comfortable, with questions welcomed from the standing-room-only crowd as the two masters created their distinctive art.

Along with Bubacco, other previous featured artists who attended the conference were Robert Mickelsen (2001), Kari Russell-Pool (2003), Cesare Toffolo (2004), Ginny Ruffner (2006), Loren Stump (2007), Carmen Lozar (2008), and Shane Fero (2009). Iwao Matsushima (2005) was unable to attend due to a previous engagement in Japan.

Attendees were treated to four extraordinary concurrent demonstrations on Saturday and Sunday. Stankard and Bubacco, Lozar and Stump, Toffolo and Russell-Pool, and Fero and Mickelsen. Guests packing the Paul J. Stankard Studio & Lab viewed the eight masters' intimate glass-working techniques that were enlarged on two screens. Speaking before a very enthusiastic audience, Ruffner presented a slide show celebrating her artistic references and challenges as an artist.

## Origins of the IFC

The three-day conference kicked off Friday evening with a packed house as Stankard shared insights into his glass art career and Andrew Page, editor of *Glass Quarterly*, spoke on the work of Stankard and the nine previous featured artists. Page feels that the conference has helped the individual artists bond and create a stronger sense of community. As he explained it, "There have probably been technical developments and creative interchanges that would not have otherwise happened if not for the gathering of talent at Salem Community College once a year."

For the past decade, the International Flameworking Conference has featured exhibits, demonstrations, scholarly talks, and networking opportunities for SCC glass students and glass artists. These artists have brought their expertise, talent, and vision to offer inspiration and guidance to the students of the College's glass programs, helping ensure the continuation of a unique and viable art form.



The IFC's origins are traced to conversations between Stankard and SCC President Dr. Peter B. Contini about promoting excellence and starting a glass art degree program. Utilizing Stankard's internationally respected career, SCC held the first IFC in 2001. The Conference's growing significance has truly influenced the face of glass art history, according to Page. As the 1962 collaboration of Harvey Littleton and the Toledo Museum of Art is credited with the beginning of the Studio Glass movement, so, believes Page, is the impact of the International Flameworking Conference on the modern glass art movement, particularly in flameworking.

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“In the years ahead, when the history of glass is being written and the history of flameworking in particular is being discussed, those conversations between Stankard and Dr. Contini and that first conference here at Salem Community College will very likely be seen in a similar way,” Page said to the group gathered at the opening night celebration. “From my perspective, the flameworking conference has accomplished a lot in terms of putting this unique style of working with glass on the map and giving it institutional backing and increasing awareness.”

### Success through Growth and Excellence

Stankard said he considered the 10th annual conference a complete success. “This conference was extraordinary and absolutely unique,” he said. “There was such a collective joy and a feeling of pride in a process that had long been associated with kitsch. But today, the focus is on excellence.”

Stankard said the event’s original and main objective is to offer an additional aspect of education, an out-of-the-classroom experience for glass students while celebrating excellence in glass art. But it offers benefits to the glass art masters as well. “I know firsthand that Salem Community College’s glass program is exceptional, because I continually learn through my association with the students and the faculty,” Stankard said.

Mickelsen, the conference’s first featured artist, said he has been witness to the growth of the conference over the last ten years, especially the erection of the new Samuel H. Jones Glass Education Center. “This facility is remarkable on any college campus in the country, but to have it at a community college is really something,” according to Mickelsen.

Over twenty SCC students demonstrated at the conference, which was sponsored by the SCC Foundation. They were led by Assistant Professor of Glass Art Rika Hawes and Instructional Chair of Scientific Glass Technology Dennis Briening.

Stankard said he is enthusiastic about the future of the International Flameworking Conference. “With the confidence we’ve gained, the incredible new glass center, and the tremendous professional success of the tenth International Flameworking Conference, the future will only hold more ambitious endeavors, focusing on the chance to grow and provide even more for our students.”

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