

Kinetic Sculpture

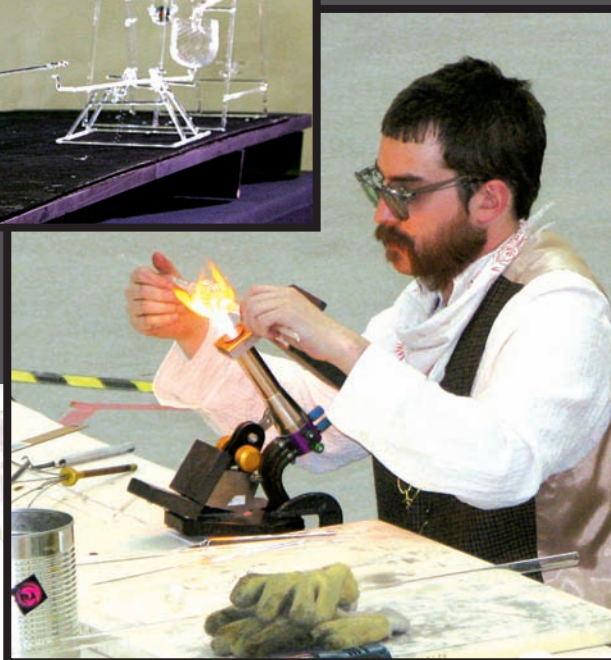
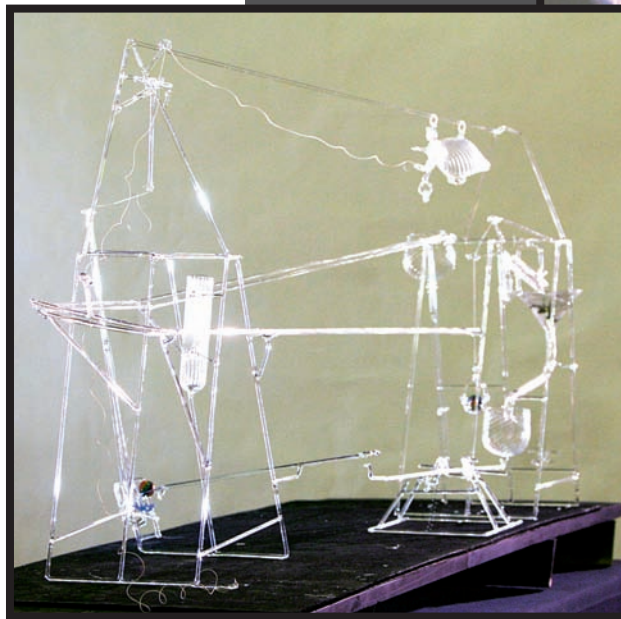
by Bandhu Dunham

Team Pitagora is a beast with multiple incarnations. I didn't realize that until after a couple of them had already happened—at Pilchuck and at Penland. The team I put together for the International Hot Glass Invitational (IHGI) was drawn from the class I taught at The Penland School of Crafts and consisted of myself, Andy Pollack, Cameron Reed, and Dan McCarney—talented glass-blowers all! There's a little video about the Penland class called "Lively Lampworking" that you can see on my YouTube channel, "SalusaGlassworks." The work we did there was the precursor to what we attempted in Vegas.

The Allure of IHGI

Competing at IHGI appealed to me even though I'm not really much of a competitive type. Flame-off events are always a matter of apples and oranges—every piece is so different, how can they be compared on any basis for judging? And what's with all this judgment anyway? Still, the competitive aspect—and the deadline—creates a higher level of excitement in the whole process, and that's what it's about—getting people excited about lampworked glass or feeding their craving if they're already excited. In that sense, any flame-off is a good flame-off, and IHGI put itself at the top of the list for sheer scale, drama, and available resources. The first year for any event is always a special challenge, and now that they've pulled it off, everyone is eager to see it happen again.

I've always wanted to be a mad scientist, and my work with kinetic glass sculpture over the last few years has come as close to that as anything I have done. It's a bit obsessive and crazy and has a way of getting out of control, sort of like Frankenstein's monster. As I'm working, I find there is an edge one must learn to ride between mesmerizing complexity that is neurotic and that which is elevating to the spirit. I try to discover the latter, but one has to wade through a lot of the former.



Dan McCarney



Andy Pollack

Part of the appeal for me of moving sculpture is that it blurs that line between process and product. There are pros and cons to making a living off of one's glasswork. The joy we feel in playing with glass is often at odds with the realities of keeping the bills paid and dealing with the world of business. My kinetic sculptures and the piece we did in Vegas, in particular, are about the playful process of making, albeit within parameters that are set by the limits of the material, the constraints of time, and the inexorable laws of physics. But kinetic sculpture is also about getting viewers involved in the creativity by enrolling them in a process rather than just a passive product. Even just watching a motorized marble machine do its thing is pretty absorbing, but getting the audience involved in turning a crank or some other interaction kicks things up to another level of participation. Ultimately, I like to see viewers getting involved in the small dramas that unfold as a crankshaft turns and drives a valve mechanism, or as a marble makes its way up and down a complex track. The fact that these mechanisms are made of glass gives people an expression that I really enjoy seeing on their faces, too.

The Best-Laid Plans . . .

I'd have to say that I had bigger plans for our piece at the IHGI than actually came to fruition. I made some miscalculations in the prototype that I built at home beforehand, which led to unrealistic expectations of what we could put together in our allotted time. We did finish the piece and it began and ended as planned, but we had to leave out a stage or two in the middle. So it goes. I also realize now that I shouldn't have put the dry ice around the soda bottle before the mint candies went in, because chilling reduced the height of the geyser. Raincoats, indeed!

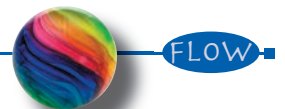


Cameron Reed

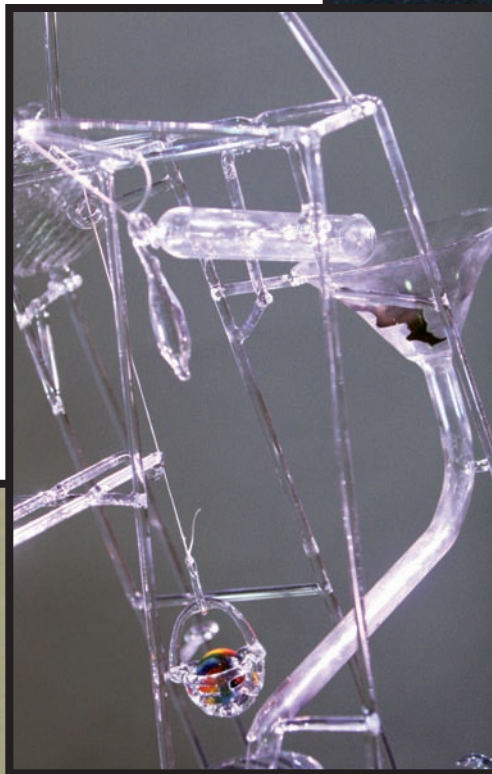
Someone said to me after we finished that they never thought they could make a kinetic glass sculpture themselves, but after seeing us work, they had the feeling that they could try it out now. That was one of the biggest satisfactions I got from the event. I want my art to give other people encouragement and permission to deepen and widen their own creative process. I'm really grateful to my team for putting up with me and making it happen.

A million thanks to Wil, Jen, Patty, and the whole Las Vegas Management team. Another million to Barry, Carl, and the additional volunteers (many of them anonymous) who made sure that every detail was handled and we all stayed safe. Kudos and gratitude also to all of the sponsors, especially the ones who gave our team extra support: Glass Alchemy, ABR Imagery, and TM Technologies (which sells the kickass hand torch set up that I like to use). Further thanks and congratulations to all the other teams for their awesome pieces and putting on a great show.

If you want to know where my team name comes from, you can do an Internet search for "pitagora suicchi" and it will all start to make sense.



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