

Jellyfish

by Bernd Weinmayer

Now the event is over, and it's time for a review. I'm a German living in Austria, and it is very rare that I leave my workshop. I'm fairly up to date on the flameworking scene in America, however, because the Internet communities and the great flameworking magazines make that possible now. When Wil Menzies asked me to take part in this event, I had the chance to see all of these crazy guys in person.

A Chance to Connect

The main reason for my three earlier trips to the United States was to come in contact with the American flameworking scene. This is the perfect place for new ideas, rising motivation, and pride in being a flameworker. The connections I made eight years ago when I was able to work in Colorado for three months are responsible of almost every international success I have now.

While I was in Las Vegas for the IGHI, I discovered new places where some of our best flameworking students can participate in an exchange program. I'm sure it can be also very interesting for Americans to look for some other, maybe more traditional ways of glassblowing like we do in Europe. A pleasant surprise for me was meeting Hilmar, also a young Tyrolian flameworker, at the Southpoint hotel. The Glass Craft & Bead Expo is the perfect event to meet the right people for each glass issue, and that alone made our overseas trip a big success.

Discovering New Techniques

The second aim in participating in the IGHI was sharing and showing new techniques, and what we saw from the other teams was fascinating. At the beginning of the event, I was very skeptical about the "team" concept and hoped that I would not be the only one-man team. Flameworkers, unlike furnace makers, have the ability to work alone. Borosilicate glass with all of its beautiful colors now gives us the opportunity to make huge sculptures by doing them in sections. Each flameworker has his or her own style, and this can suffer by mixing it with other group members' styles. However, all of the teams did a great job.

Then there was my own work that I had the honor to show at this event. First of all, I must give a huge thank-you to Team Onion Mountain and Karl Ittig. They fixed my equipment at the last minute before the competition started. I never thought that the gas regulator between the foot pedal and the torch would solve my problems with the pressure differences from the big gas line.

I personally was happy that the arena was not sold out, because I was a little nervous working in front of a crowd. Having my wife Gitti, my son Maximilian, Ed Kirshner, and two other guys watching me in my sector was okay, though, and gave me a kind of home feeling. I also was very happy to have the entertainment monsters, Team Lone Star, next to me, since the TV guys spent more time there and I was able to work more like I do in my workshop in Mariastein.



Photography by Ed Biggar



Photography by Hilmar Tschirtsch

Construction of the Jellyfish

The head of the jellyfish was premade, and the five arms and the fine tentacles were made and connected at the show. My assistant Sean Müller helped me immensely during the tiny connection work with the jelly's head and tentacle ring. After exactly two and a half hours I was ready with the jelly.

Unfortunately, the most spectacular aspect of my piece took place while I was working in an empty arena. After the annealing process, I pumped the piece in a total vacuum at 580°F and filled it with neon gas. The most exciting moment was the connection of the self-made plasma power supply to the self-made electrode. There is always a fifty-fifty chance that some glass shapes won't work with plasma. That means that the moving plasma pattern effect sometimes doesn't come and it looks like a very slow, dimmed neon tube. I was lucky, however, and the final effect came after burning in my hotel closet for twelve hours. Now the plasma effect should be burned in and stable for at least twenty years with this kind of filling mixture.

The rule "make one, bring two" allowed me to bring a second jelly with me to display in a case. The mirror in the backside door and the reflecting effect from the float glasses of the case gave an aquarium feeling by showing at least eight jellies moving when it is really dark. During the period between Wil's invitation and the event, I built several kinds of jellyfish. Some of them were copied from nature while others are fantastic jelly shapes, such as the one I made at the show. Some of my jellies are currently being shown in galleries in Austria and Germany and in the Technorama museum in Switzerland.

Now I'm looking forward to starting up a new long-term project. I can only say thank you very much for this great experience. I hope that this event will have a wonderful future!

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