

The Purpose behind the Art

by Jerome Baker

Modern society pushes the need to make money for pure survival. Artists are forced to a crossroads to ponder the many potential paths that lie ahead. Artist or craftsman? The competition to be the best is endless. We are pushed by our love for the glass and what it can become in our hands.

Art as an attraction—something exciting and different—is what led me to the making of the pipe. A pipe is much more than just my natural path. It is also one of a vast number of perfect items to be created from this awe-inspiring medium that we call glass. For me, the art of glass is as natural as riding a bike. Working with glass is a meditation with an awakening at the end as every piece comes out of the kiln.

Endless Possibilities in Glass

As an artist using glass as the medium, the possibilities are boundless. You find that you can control *it* or it can control *you*. The magic of the piece lies in the roots of its creation. As a craftsman, art must be made into something useful beyond just its aesthetic beauty. It must be beneficial to humans in some way—a tool, a toy, a building, an advancement. Therein lies the magic of glass and my life. The blending of the two drives me and inspires me.

The competitive phenomenon associated with today's flameworking community makes its entrance from the first moment you make that incredible piece that is the center of attention of any circle of heads puffing on it. The artist is fed, the motivation stronger. Artist and craftsman have merged in the Pipe—the magical tool that humans use to achieve a different head space, bringing euphoria, all in the breath. It is the scepter that drives the psyche, a tool unlike any other, our facilitator to the upper playground. This “magic” drives the industrial designer to expound and create a more insane, more relevant, more cutting-edge design. The drive is to be the artist, the craftsman, the connoisseur, the everything.

To many, the pipe is nothing more than a bowl to hold burning medicine and a tube through which the smoke may be drawn into the mouth. This seemingly simple device is the result of thousands of years of refinement, industry, art, science, and risks. In a thousand years of smoking, the Indians of North and South America evolved only crude, clumsy pipes made from coarse ceramic and stone. The modern pipe, on the other hand, is the evolution of more than four decades of European influence in the smoking world, having come ions from where it was even twenty years ago.

Our friend, Joe Luisi, knows all about art with a purpose. He's made massive rigs that would fill rooms of glass equipment. Joe taught at Salem Community College for twenty-two years and named some of his more elaborate contraptions with artistic names such as *Time Machine*. Did this give other industrial designers a rationalization to be more artistic and, in the process, help inspire our industry to make huge advancements?

Can anything be looked at quite like art? Organize it differently, and it takes on a whole new meaning. A pipe that gives the illusion of changing color as more smoke snakes through it! Art, as shown in the graceful movements, the gentle curves, and sensual flow. The pipe is beautiful and attractive in so many forms, easily becoming collectible artwork as a beautiful, inspirational, and usable sculpture.

There are many angles, paths, and inspirations that the artist takes to get to the final destination. The basic common denominator of most pipes for the art connoisseur in the modern smoking world is glass, the artist it inspires, and the masters it makes.





Some of the Jerome Baker crew circa 1999



Karl Ittig teaching a class in the old Jerome Baker studio

Pipe Masters Coming Together

The pipe, the art, and the inspiration it has given my life brought me the dream to assemble the masters of the glass world together in one event. This was no ordinary task, but it has now become a reality reached through years of planning and resulting in Connoisseur Kulture 2011 and the World's Greatest Flameoff, in Atlantic City, New Jersey, October 11–13, 2011. This competition will span the course of three days. The teams include the most talented groups of glass pipe makers in the world today and will be comprised of three artists each. Teams can bring whatever premade components are necessary for their masterpiece. Each team has two days to complete all hot work necessary for the piece, and the final day will allow for each team to assemble and display their incredible glass sculptures.

Karl Ittig's team includes Walter Bahr and David Popowitz. Karl is one of the best living flameworkers in the world, holding the knowledge that has been passed to him through generations of glassworkers in his family for over 150 years.

Bob Snodgrass's team includes Wil Menzies, Abe Fleishman, and Ben Naimam. Bob is a true American folk art hero and is credited with sparking the fire that is today's modern pipe making movement.

Lacey St George's team includes Darby Holm and Buck. Lacey is one of the pre-eminent female lampworkers in the world today. Lacey brings spirituality to her artwork and breaks through boundaries that have previously constrained the modern flameworker. She represents the future of the glassworking movement and brings fire to this Atlantic City spectacle.

The Long Road to Atlantic City

The schematics of bringing some of the best flameworkers in the world together to compete for glory has been a long road. Artists are taking time away from their extreme schedules and families. The artists will perform, create, and be challenged to the top of their abilities. The equipment alone is astonishing with burners, ovens, thousands of feet of hose, and tools that could fill a van. The outcome? An event that is full of passion, inspiration, and creativity.

The World's Greatest Flameoff event pushes the boundaries in terms of contestants and audience. The flameworking community has become a somewhat exclusive club. This event offers an opportunity to gain insight into what it takes to plan and execute a piece while working in a team formation. This technique is usually reserved for glassblowers, since flameworking has traditionally been a medium that is done alone. The "new school" masterpieces are the product of working in collaboration with another artist. These collaborations have been a huge selling point in the modern pipe making world. The collaborations represent a time when artists are able to share inspiration and technique with and through each other. The Flameoff that we are bringing to you is an opportunity to witness the creation of works of art that may not have been otherwise thought of. This Flameoff pushes the boundaries of the medium in ways that move the whole industry to new and incredible heights that you won't want to miss.

It is the meeting, the blending of the artist, the craftsman, the dreamer, the scientist, and the connoisseur in each of us. Art as an attraction, something exciting and different, is what led me to the making of the Pipe.

Visit www.ckwholesaleexpo.com for more information, call Laura Wentworth at 609-431-0259, or e-mail connoisseurkulture@gmail.com.

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