

Glasscaster with Marcie Davis
Julie Riggs —
Artist with an Eye for the Unusual

Below are excerpts from a Glasscaster interview featuring flameworking glass artist, Julie Riggs. Glasscaster podcasts feature “hot glass talk in a high tech world.” This series, hosted by Marcie Davis, can be found at www.fireladyproductions.com or on iTunes.

Would you like to share which lines of glass you prefer, Julie?

I have worked with all kinds of different glass. In Shane and Fred’s class, the first class I ever took, we used soft glass. And I’ve taken Loren Stump’s class with the soft glass, and Vittorio Costantini. So I play around with soft glass, but I work mostly with boro. Lauscha glass, too. I still have some from our trip, a whole box of it.

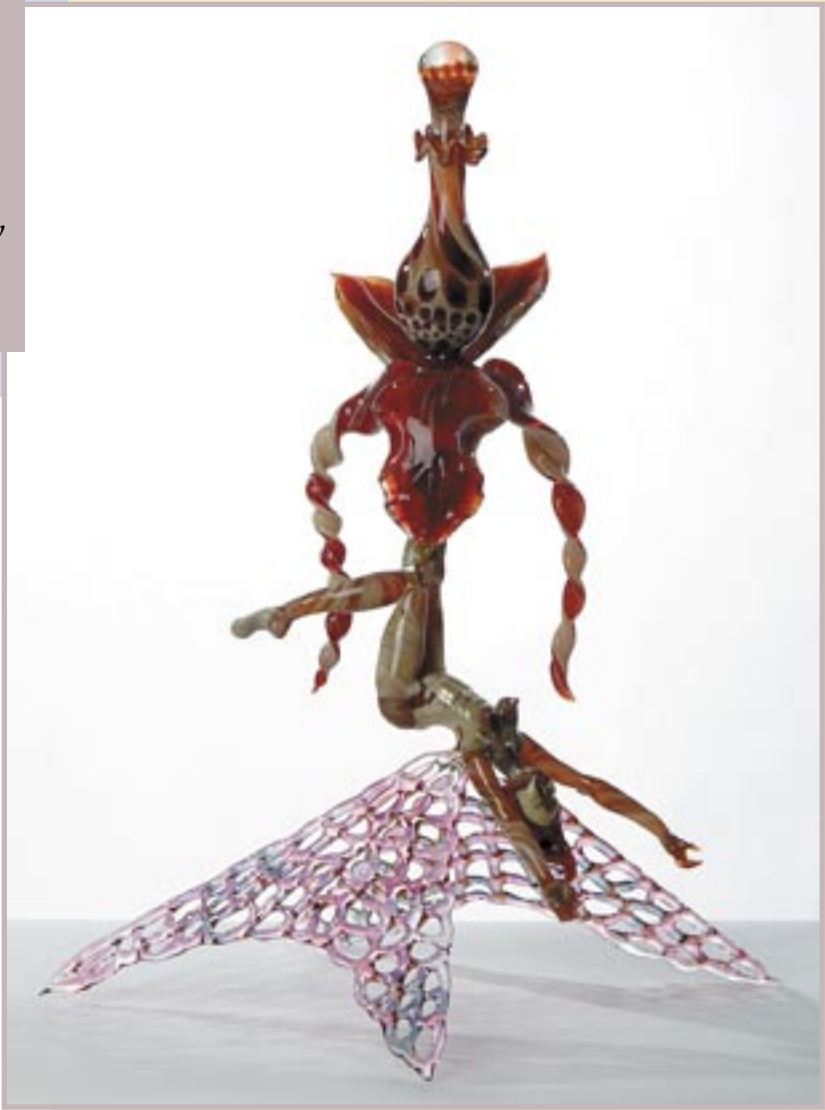
When we went to Lauscha, Julie dropped out of the tour for a day to spend extra time with Walter Helbach, who makes glass eyes. You spent almost a whole day with him in this tiny little smoke-filled studio and made these really cool eyes. Can you tell us a little bit about that experience, not just the class but also what you did with it, because your eyes are not for human prosthetic use. Your eyes are for use in jewelry.

When I took the class from him, he asked what color eyeball I wanted to make and I said, “Purple.” He didn’t understand why I wanted to make a purple eye. But I’ve also made a lot of faces and more realistic eyes. It gives them more expression. I’m actually working on a piece that I’ve owed somebody for quite some time that is inspired by the work of Alex Gray. He wanted eyeballs all over this piece. I still want to explore more with the glass eyeballs, definitely.

When you’re doing them on your pieces, are they hollow or are they solid?

I’ve made some solid, some hollow. I like to make them hollow and then maybe fill them or shrink them down or just cut off that part of the eye that I need and add it on. So it becomes more solid, but usually I prefer to make them hollow. That way you get that depth that you can’t get as well as if you make them solid. You can still get it if you make it solid but it isn’t the same effect.

Do you find inspiration for your work in nature, or are there periods of art or certain artists that you find inspire your work?



I was into for a while and still want to explore Tree Women. I was doing Tree of Life Women for a while. One thing that inspired me was music by Manis Yahoo. I don’t know why, but images just kind of came into my head of a Tree of Life woman. I made this large Tree of Life Woman menorah. After that I made smaller candleholders and pendants. And I think for the Female Flame-Off one year I made a Tree Woman candleholder. Trees and flowers and nature definitely do give me a lot of my inspiration.

So the Tree Women, is that sort of an Eve reclamation thing or . . .

No, it’s more like back to the goddess of the Tree of Life. One of the pendants I made was a pregnant Tree of Life, and they’re shaped like women giving life.

Is there anything that you’d like to add about your glass work or inspiration or history or body of work that we didn’t touch on that you think we should know? What’s your favorite piece that you ever made, for example.

I really like collaborating with people. That’s a lot of fun when everybody’s ideas come together in one piece, and that just amazes me, like the 2009 International Hot Glass Invitational in Vegas. We were collaborating through e-mails and pictures and phone calls across the country, and that was a lot of fun. Right now that’s probably one of my favorite pieces—the piece that we made in Vegas.



What was that piece specifically?

It was a Cirque du Soleil–themed piece with figures and a big hamster wheel in the middle that originally had two circles spinning around with the people in them that were staying in the upright position.

Did you get to do any of your sinewy figures, because that would be very Cirque du Soleil-ish?

Yes. Actually I came up with the circus. We were trying to figure out what we were going to make, and the whole team hadn’t really come together yet. I’ve been to Cirque du Soleil several times, and I’ve always wanted to make glass figures that are in sets like that.

The competition rule was that if you made two at home you could make one there, so we were able to have some premade parts and then make the other pieces there and put the entire thing together. The entire Fall 2009 issue of *The Flow* was dedicated to the Vegas competition, so you can read about the project and see photos of the finished piece there.

If someone wanted some of your work or wanted to take a class, where can they contact you?

E-mail angelicflamesva@aol.com.

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Visit www.GlassArtists.org/JulieR.Riggs to view more of Julie’s glass art.

Discover more about how Julie Riggs became a flameworking artist in the Winter 2009 issue of *The Flow*. You can also find a description of the IHGI project mentioned above and a tutorial for making the flames included in the project by teammate, Tim Williams, in the Fall 2009 issue of *The Flow*. The tutorial from teammate, Tim Kornahrens, for the circus tent spires can be found by visiting www.theflowmagazine.com in the Tutorials section.

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