

Modern Interpretations and the Importance of Our Past

by Eric Goldschmidt

To progress as a society, it is absolutely crucial to first understand the lessons that history can teach us. We can certainly avoid mistakes previously made in history, and we can also learn from the wondrous discoveries that have been made in earlier generations. By understanding and appreciating what previous generations of artists have discovered and produced, we can continue to accelerate the growth of our craft. I want to share with you how my own work has been influenced by delving into historical glass. Hopefully this will inspire other glass artists to more deeply explore what has come before us. This understanding can only help to stimulate the growth of our craft.

Taking Advantage of Valuable Resources

As a full-time employee at The Corning Museum of Glass, I have the great privilege of being able to peruse our incredible collection, and I can readily accomplish my research projects at our Rakow Research Library whenever I have the urge. These resources have proved invaluable to me as I continue to grow as an artist. They are also available to the general public, and artists can benefit from visits to museums, galleries, and libraries that are closer to their homes as well. These visits are a wonderful source of not only education, but also inspiration.

It is hard for me to believe that I am in my fifteenth year of glassmaking. Throughout my first ten years, I was extremely fortunate to study with and assist several of the world's greatest flameworkers. A few of these artists come from centuries-old family traditions of Venetian glassmaking and have inspired me to explore the Venetian style of design, construction, and decoration. This sort of work really speaks to me as an artist, and my early interest in Venetian-style glass continues to permeate my work.

Through the years I have spent countless hours studying and interpreting the pieces we have in the museum's collection. In my studies, I have continued to come across works from other parts of Europe that demonstrate this same appreciation of Venetian design during the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries. While I enjoy the challenge of trying to re-create some of these masterpieces, I gain even more satisfaction from incorporating my own voice into these traditional styles. *Inspirazione di Firenze Tre* was inspired by originals that were made through furnace-style glassblowing, but they can readily be adapted to flameworking. I have done several interpretations of this type of stemware over the course of my career. This sort of stem construction lends itself well to numerous color and sculptural variations. I do find the original pieces to be somewhat static and strive to express a bit more of my energy into the pieces they inspire. Nowadays we have a much greater palette of colors from which to choose and a heightened potential to control minute details at the torch.

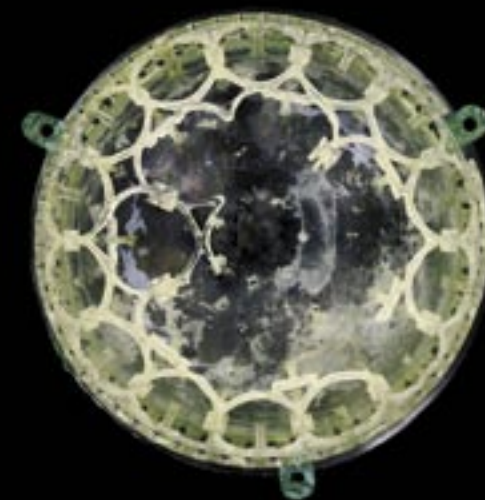
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Autumn Evening Cage Cup
by Eric Goldschmidt, Corning, New York, 2007.
Photo by Christina Zawadecki.



Roman Cage Cup, early fourth century A.D.
Photo courtesy of The Corning Museum of Glass.



Finding a Contemporary Take on Traditional Glass Art

When drawing from history, it is important to add one's own contemporary adjustments. Find a way to put your voice into these historical influences. The older pieces can often be used as a benchmark of what was possible in years past. This should represent a jumping-off point to motivate our current generations of artists to strive beyond what has been created to what *can* be created.

In my studies of Venetian-style stemware, no single piece has grabbed my attention as significantly as the *Coppa Guggenheim*. This piece has been described by many historians, curators, and glassmakers as the tour de force of Venetian superiority in furnace-glass craftsmanship. In my opinion, the level of dexterity and accuracy required to create these stems is absolutely second to none. While furnace workers have been re-creating this piece for many years, I had never seen a flameworked version. I see the overall form as an interesting canvas upon which to expand. Like many critics, I often find some traditional Venetian designs a bit too ornate and over the top. I thought I would try to use the same overall theme but scale it back a bit, such that it is not so overwhelming. Through the years I have continued to try my own interpretations on this theme.

Several years ago, I showed my portfolio to renowned paperweight artist Paul Stankard. He gave me the harshest critique I had ever received, but he did not just leave me to lick my wounds. Like the generous gentleman that he is, Paul offered me some constructive ideas with which to work, pushing me to take my work to the next level. Among his many suggestions, he highly recommended that I study and interpret the ancient Roman cage cups. The original cage cups were made in the fourth century A.D. through hours of tedious cold working on furnace-blown clear glass forms. The level of craftsmanship and artistry in these pieces is absolutely incredible for any time period, but considering the tools available at that time in history, they are absolutely awe inspiring. Unfortunately, many of these pieces were so delicate that very few are still in existence. However, we do have an incredible specimen here at The Corning Museum of Glass. I found great inspiration interpreting these bits of history into my own contemporary efforts. Developing these new cage cups led me to find some sculptural elements that continue to permeate many of the pieces throughout my own body of work.

Figurine of a Beggar, France
(probably Nevers), early eighteenth century.
Photo courtesy of The Corning Museum of Glass.

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Historical Commentary Captured in Art

Most recently, I have begun to study the exquisite solid-sculpted figures that were made by lampworkers centered around the town of Nevers, France, in the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. The techniques and craftsmanship of this work are exceptional given the time period in which they were created. These are some of the most notable pieces from the early years of lampworking at a time when the craftsmen built up their glass sculptures over armatures made of iron, brass, and copper.

Many of the glassworkers in Nevers were actually immigrants from Italy. “Artisans from Altare, the glass-producing region in Northern Italy, emigrated to Nevers in the late sixteenth century, after Ludovico Gonzaga, duke of Mantua, married Henrietta of Cleves, duchess of Nevers, in 1566.” ¹ During the early years of this movement, the pieces were not taken particularly seriously as art. They were typically sold as souvenir items to travelers passing through the region. By the mid-seventeenth century, however, the French aristocracy had really taken to these works. In 1622 the city of Nevers presented King Louis XIII with a piece “representing the victory gained by His Majesty against the rebels of the so-called Reformed Religion in the Île de Ré.” ² This interest at the top of the social and financial scale propelled some of these lampworkers to a very high status.



Inspirazione di Firenze Tre
by Eric Goldschmidt,
Corning, New York, 2007.
Photo by Christina Zawadecki.



Coppa Guggenheim replica, goblet with
three-bubble stem by James Mongrain
at The Studio of The Corning Museum
of Glass, 2009. Photo courtesy of The
Corning Museum of Glass.



Guggenschmidt3
by Eric Goldschmidt,
Corning, New York, 2007.
Photo by Christina Zawadecki.



Summer Breeze Cage Cup
by Eric Goldschmidt,
Corning, New York, 2007.
Photo by Christina Zawadecki.



Marie Antoinette Sacrifices the Heart of the
Nobility on the Altar of the French Republic
by Pierre Haly, Nevers, France, circa 1790.
Photo courtesy of The Corning Museum of Glass.

These figures and the scenes in which they were often depicted made statements about the politics, fashions, and religious issues of the times, and it seems to me that they can be reinvented to cover these same sorts of topics and many more to represent our current events and interests. The combination of the artistry, craftsmanship, and historical relevance of these pieces has me deeply inspired once again. I am quite anxious to see where these newfound inspirations from history will take me.

I hope this article will continue to encourage other glass artists to explore the vast histories of lampworking/flammeworking, glass, and art in general. It is incumbent upon all of us to ensure that our craft continues to grow. For this to happen, we need to understand what our predecessors were able to accomplish with our medium. I would, therefore, encourage all of you to get out there and familiarize yourselves with the amazing work that glass artists have been accomplishing through the last 3,500 years. The glass art world can benefit greatly from our increased awareness.

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1. Glass in the Robert Lehman Collection. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 232.
 2. Barrelet, 1960, 298.

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