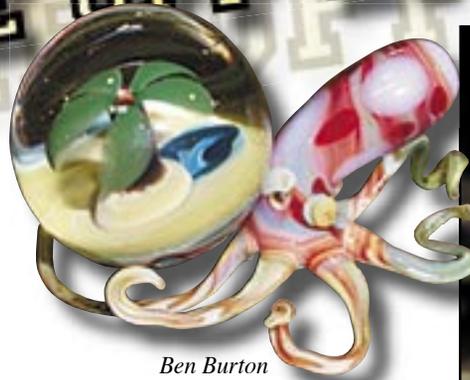


SONORAN GLASS ART ACADEMY FLAME OFF 2010

by Adam Villarreal

Photography by Alan White



Ben Burton

Amidst the Arizona desert the Sonoran Glass Art Academy (SGAA) has been hosting its Flame Offs for nearly a decade. Founded by Tom Philbaum, the event has grown into a flameworking show of international acclaim. Sonoran has done a great job in bringing people from far and wide to be a part of the show. In recent years a larger and larger Japanese presence has been felt, lending international credibility to the already popular event. This Flame Off draws people from all over the United States as well. A large turnout from the crew in Denver, Colorado, was evident including Blade and Corinne Winters from the Colorado Project. Several respected old-schoolers including Bandhu Dunham, Barry Lafler, and Lewis Wilson showed up to compete as well.



Akihiro Okama



James Yaun



Lunchbox

Essential Elements for Success

Putting on an event such as this is like solving a multifaceted puzzle in front of a live audience under a timer—tricky, to say the least. However, Event Coordinator Karl Taylor and Assistant Director Alex Berger were up to the task. The bulk of their time in planning the Flame Off was divided into three areas—organizing the artists, finding sponsors to make the event possible, and locating the right venue.

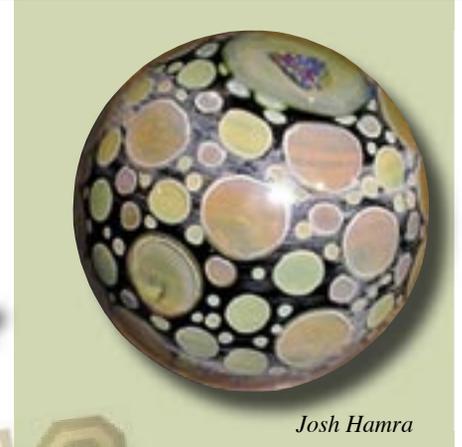
Finding the right sponsors to make the event happen starts almost immediately after the previous year's event ends. Spearheaded by Alex Berger, this is part of the behind-the-scenes action that sometimes gets taken for granted by the public. Constant dedication and hundreds of hours of phone time are required to bring all of the glass equipment and money together to have torches on at show time.

The venue is a crucial decision that can affect the feel of the event. Originally the SGAA Flame Off was held at the school itself. As the event started to grow in popularity and size the school started to make less sense as a venue. There were so many attendees that by 2007 the show was nearly shut down by the fire marshal. In 2009 the school had no choice but to move the event to a larger space, finding a home at the Barrio Brewing Co. The brewery proved a smashing success and managed to boost attendance even higher this year. The 2010 show found its home in a huge warehouse by the airport. The largest venue yet by far, it allowed for a true studied viewing by the audience who sat on bleachers that were stacked around an arena.

On the tech side, keeping everything running smoothly is Karl Taylor's responsibility. Karl is ready to design around and through problems to keep the show going. One example was his ingenious addition of a liquid oxygen tank defroster that he designed on the spot to keep the oxygen flowing at optimal levels. Karl spoke about using every show as a learning tool and every snag as an opportunity to make the next year better.



Josh McDaniel & Patrick Harris



Josh Hamra

2010

Event Highlights

This year's event featured forty-five artists in three sessions of competition in the categories of wearable art, marbles, and goblets/vessels. There was also a three-hour team invitational that was inspired by the International Hot Glass Invitational (IHGI). Marbles and wearable were solo events, and vessels were pairs. The team invitational was set up with groups of three.

The following day, after completing the work, artists had two hours to do any final cold assembly that was needed to finish their pieces before judging. The artwork was then moved to the Best Bead Show to announce the winners and to auction off the glass.

Thunder Canyon Brewery provided quality micro brews. There were a variety of food vendors, live feed video, and fire arts performances to make the evening more enjoyable. A huge thanks goes out on behalf of the SGAA to all of the sponsors who made this event possible, as well as to the competitors, without whom there wouldn't be much of a Flame Off. A full list of the winners can be seen at www.sonoranglass.org/events/flameoff.htm.



Takehisa Okumura



Barry Lafler & Josh Mazet

