

# Collector Editions

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# Collector Editions

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*Courtesy of Sotheby Parke Bernet*

"Faenza Maiolica" portrait dish, late 15th century Italy. Realized \$15,000, or nearly double catalogue estimate. A similar specimen sold for \$6,440 at a Sotheby Parke Bernet 1965 London auction.

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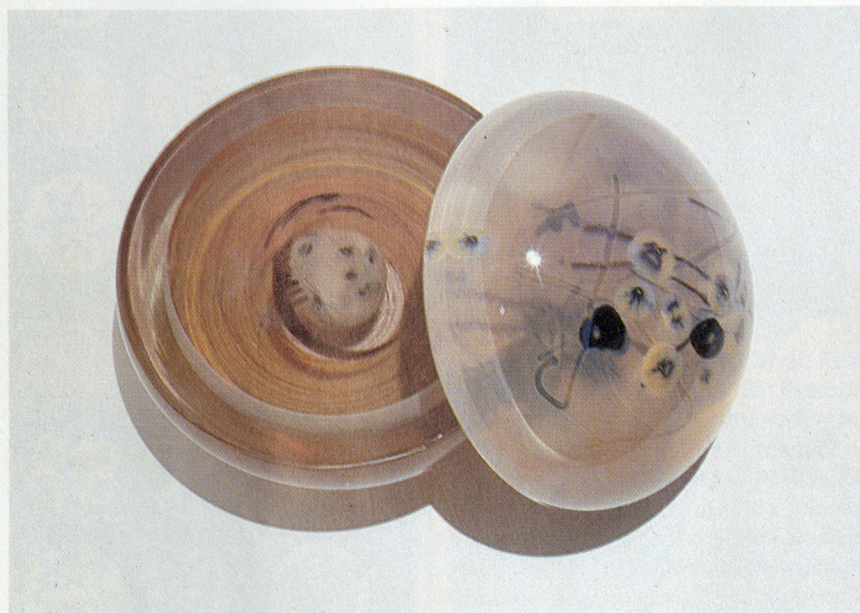
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# Contemporary Paperweights, An International Exhibition At Habatat

*These days the road to Habatat is jammed with glass pilgrims*

by Paul Hollister

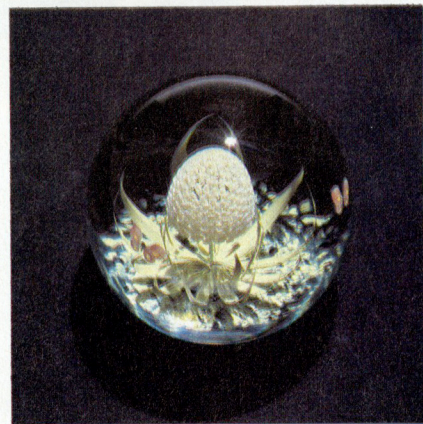


A paperweight show at Habatat has become standard but the whole character of glass paperweight making has changed. Twenty years ago, even ten years ago, a paperweight of good quality was still designed in accordance with European millefiori and lampwork traditions of the 1840s and 1850s. Those were the prime time years of the Victorian period, when paperweight designs and colors represented the best production of that long and dusty era. In our own time the best paperweight makers were never able to recapture the Victorian aura, and their efforts resulted in pale and labored imitations. Even some of the factories that had produced the originals could not do it; and for the simple reason that we are not for a moment living in Victorian times. The finely executed weights of Charles Kazium and Francis Whittemore on view at Habatat bear the stamp of their makers' personalities, and it is not Victorian. Bob Banford's remarkable bouquets are probably better done than nearly all classic floral work, and they come from a technicolor seed catalog of guaranteed perfect blooms.

Yet even these weights looked slightly out of place in the company of the 72

other paperweight makers represented in this gigantic and remarkable show. Nearly all glassmakers are now marching to a dozen other drummers. Paperweight making is no longer slavery to old notions and designs, it is a form in which studio glassmakers choose to work from time to time—a small convenient means to work out possibilities and fantasies, to consolidate and refine ideas applied to large glass containers and sculptural forms.

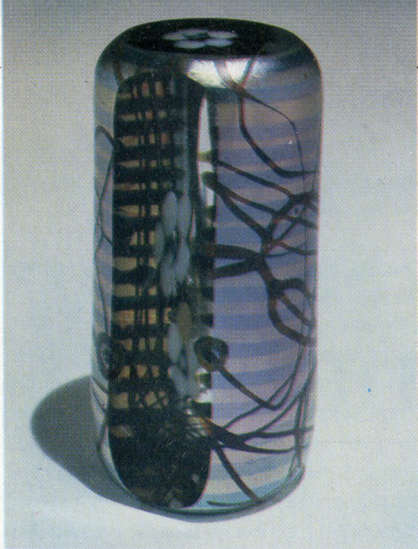
If it's realism you're after, color for color, detail for detail Rick Ayotte's cardinal or his yellow warbler are about as identifiable as their namesakes in Roger Tory Peterson's bird guide. But Pete Robison's trumpet flowers on sandy ground put standard lampwork and crimp techniques to the service of illusion; the sort of illusion one accepts in children's book illustration. The same sort of free fancy shows in the frog and flower weight by Lee Hudin of the Orient and Flume studio, a scene you have to rotate to take in. The simplicity of the assembled parts of frog and greenery would pass for crudity were not the objects in the arrangement so ingeniously distributed over the entire inner space. By "painting" with colored glass rods, Janet



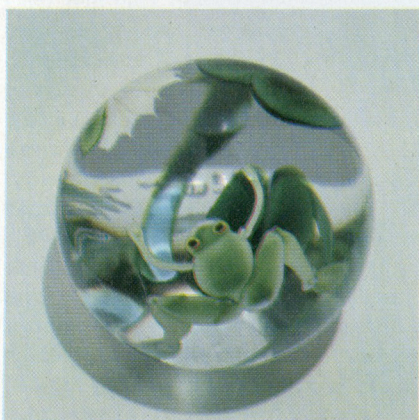
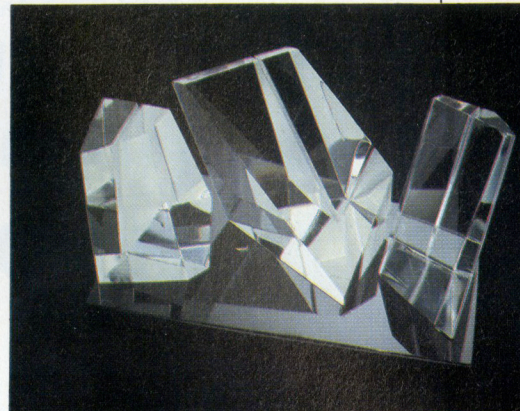
*The paperweight on the left is by Bob Bartlett; weights on the right, from top to bottom, are by John Nickerson, Mark Peiser and Janet Kelman.*

Kelman manages to combine a portrait of a real fish with a poetic backdrop of aquatic fronds that suggests a Japanese print. David Huchthausen loosens up the whole floral process by floating his blossoms vertically as if in a stream, along with leaves in three shades of green. The paperweight shape suggests a little wave of rippled water, a free form originated by Milropa Studios for its undersea treasures.

With Mark Peiser's work we enter a different world of paperweight making. Peiser is best known for his massive, clear glass vases in which woodland scenes are



Photos by Robert Vigiletti



*Paperweights in the top row, from left to right, are by Larcomb and Wicht, Steven Correia and Harvey Littleton. The middle weight is by Pete Robison and the bottom one is by Lee Hudin.*

created by successive layerings of hot glass coated with trunks and twigs and leaves and blossoms. The designs cover all 360 degrees of the inner surfaces and create three dimensional effects so convincing that one feels surrounded by forest, swamp, or bower. The vase has become the container of the vista. But in Peiser's latest vases and paperweights imagery is reduced to a minimum that will tell a story, like a Japanese haiku poem of only 17 syllables. We get the simple message: single upright flower in marsh surrounded by butterflies. The extraordinary delicacy of the scene was achieved

by layering.

John Nickerson's weight shown here was also done by layering, but in a method used over a hundred years ago by bottle factory makers of paperweights in Yorkshire, England, and used again in recent years by studio glass maestro Dominick Labino for his Air Sculptures. Nickerson has accentuated the fountain effect in shimmering veils and a teardrop at the top, then faceted the top to reflect the bubble. Doug Merritt of Vandermark Studios has turned the old paperweight idea inside out by placing his millefiori and lampworked spider on top of the paperweight. This intriguing piece with its pearly opalescence and delicious coloring is a tactile delight. Speaking of coloring, I was attracted to an extremely clear glass weight by Dick Huss, with a magnified nucleus in soft rust, blue and cream.

Equally abstract, Richard Ritter's designs are based on his unconscious absorption of natural forms. For several years now he has been wrapping variously colored glass shapes around similar or different shapes in a series of layers. Until recently the layering has been internal, that is covered up by an outer coating of clear glass that seals away the design. With the paperweight seen here, Ritter leaves his outer layers exposed to the touch. The palette is reduced to black and white, and the areas between strong elements of the surface design are sandblasted to create a second or grayish black. The weight is a large handful that demands to be picked up and turned. It has the fascination of a contour map or a golf course seen from the air, and the finger wants to move over the rough and smooth surfaces.

In the early decades of this century clear glass paperweights in the form of a cube, pyramid, or pyramid of spheres were a common sight on the desks of bankers, railroad magnates, and other potentates. Harvey Littleton has updated those old forms by showing three separate but interdependent polyhedral forms that can be rearranged to suit. The assembly resembles in miniature one of those outdoor sculptures we confront in

the zoned plazas of giant office buildings. Especially pleasing to the eye is the high sparkle of the glass which such geometric forms require. This is a welcome departure for Littleton, who has not until recently showed much concern with the quality of the glass he uses, so long as it behaves.

For some time now Steven Correia has been lagging back in the old neo-Nouveau format of iridescent fumed surfaces and loopy, butterfly-wing tracery, a catchy styling that seems to be well on the way out. So the paperweight of his shown here comes as a complete and welcome surprise. Correia has at last gotten inside the glass and placed there a something that draws the viewer's eye. The something has surrealist overtones, but whatever it is or is not meant to suggest, it compels you to look. Correia is not the only man of mystery at Habatat; Bob Bartlett has decided that his paperweights of a year ago, which enclosed cryptic signs and symbols, needed something else. So he has sliced the top off one to reveal a further inner mystery. One is tempted to cover and uncover this compound of secrets, observing the change in appearance. This is certainly different from anything we called a paperweight in the past. Another piece with a lid, but this one old-fashioned, is Joe Zimmerman's covered jar. Both lid and base contain a big pink, camelia-like flower. The flowers resemble those made in Murano in the early 1960s, but the glass is more limp than Murano glass and the lush blossoms and leaves fill the lid almost to bursting. Some lucky collector must have taken this spanking piece home to treasure.

My favorite in the show, for some reason I can't explain, was one of several by Larcomb and Wicht, a cylinder with a slice down the side. The silvery exterior is covered with vines, while the slice reveals a striped interior about a thicket of blossoms. The whole concept is an unusual pastiche of recently popular ideas that by themselves are today slightly shopworn, but are in combination absolutely compelling. The weight exuded luxury, but all Larcomb and Wicht's weights were priced low and all were sold.