

AMERICANS IN GLASS



Suggested Retail Price \$15.00

June 20, 1981, through August 2, 1981
The Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum, Wausau, Wisconsin

Co-Exhibiting Museums: August 25, 1981, through November 14, 1981
The Cooper-Hewitt Museum, The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum
of Design, New York, New York

March 14, 1982, through April 11, 1982
The Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,
Champaign, Illinois

Three Year National Tour: The Western Association of Art Museums, San Francisco, California

Museum Acquisitions: The Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, New York
The Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,
Champaign, Illinois
The Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum, Wausau, Wisconsin
The Rahr-West Museum, Manitowoc, Wisconsin

The Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum
presents

AMERICANS IN GLASS

An Exhibition
organized by
The Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum

Museum Hours

9 AM to 4 PM Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday
1 PM to 5 PM Saturday and Sunday

Franklin and Twelfth Streets
Wausau, Wisconsin 54401



Accredited by the American Association of Museums

Copyright 1981
The Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum
Wausau, Wisconsin

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

"Americans in Glass 1978," the first of a series of triennial exhibitions, has become more of a success than any of us associated with it could have hoped. Because of its "track record" and the extraordinarily high quality of work submitted for the 1981 exhibition, we anticipate nothing short of a new landmark exhibition documenting current trends in American glass.

"Americans in Glass 1981" could not have been possible without the cooperation and efforts of countless persons to whom I'd like to express appreciation. First are the artists, both juried and invited. Their willingness and enthusiasm to participate in our exhibition is, of course, an essential ingredient to the exhibition. Also, we wish to thank those artists providing color transparencies or separations for use in this catalog.

The task of jurying the work was ably undertaken by Paul Hollister, Peter Rath, and Italo Scanga. Our thanks to them, the staffs of the co-exhibiting museums, and those museums acquiring work from the exhibition for their permanent collections. And again, as in 1978, thanks to the Western Association of Art Museums for its competent management of the national tour of selections from "Americans in Glass."

The intricacies and details of organizing an exhibition of this stature could not have taken place without the professional staff of this museum, especially Bruce Kleist, Curator of Education; Andy McGivern, Curator of Exhibitions; Marcia Theel, Office Manager; Jane Wagned, Associate Curator; and the many others who daily maintain collections, exhibitions, and operations. Special thanks to David R. Huchthausen whose consultation affected every aspect of this endeavor. We are also fortunate to have a dedicated corps of volunteers, including docents, committee members, and our indispensable Board of Directors, who contribute substantially to the operation of the museum.

Finally, I must extend our gratitude to the patrons of the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum, especially the "Friends of the LYWAM," the corporations whose considerable contributions have made a great difference in the quality of programs offered by the museum, and the founding family which continues to provide support and guidance.

David J. Wagner
Director

INTRODUCTION

The history of studio glass in America dates back to 1962. Following a workshop at The Toledo Museum of Art, Harvey Littleton established the first hot glass facilities in the art department of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This constituted a radical break from the traditional European designer-craftsman relationship in which a team of skilled craftsmen would execute the work from a designer's drawing. Littleton put the artist in direct contact with the material in a studio situation. The "movement" spread rapidly to schools, universities and private studios across the United States.

The precious quality and technical nature of the material presented a wide range of problems for the artist. In the early 1970s, the majority of individuals working with glass were infatuated with technique. Work created during this period reflected that attitude. Objects tended to be slick and rather superficial technical statements about the material, seldom addressing contemporary "main stream" concerns.

The large scale work of Larry Bell, the sculpture of Christopher Wilmarth, and the collaborative neon environments of Dale Chihuly and James Carpenter offer notable exceptions. In general, a stronger conceptual approach to the material was provided by artists such as Bell and Wilmarth functioning well outside the confines of the "studio glass movement."

By 1975 the "movement" had come of age. At this point, technical sophistication began to equal the conceptual involvement and forced the work to be taken seriously. Prices rose as public acceptance and curiosity increased. These developments furnished the artist with an increasing degree of freedom. Today there are approximately 80 schools and universities offering programs in glass, making it possible for younger artists and craftsmen to support themselves in a relatively short period of time. In its brief history in America, this new approach to glass has evoked a wide range of artistic involvement and established a new tradition of craftsmanship.

The first "Americans in Glass" exhibition, organized in 1978, generated considerable impact in the United States and Europe. In recent years, a drastic transition in emphasis and increased aesthetic experimentation has been obvious. "New Glass," a major international exhibition organized by The Corning Museum of Glass in 1979, confirmed the extent of experimentation and innovation emanating from America. The proliferation of the material as a medium for artists has been staggering. The "studio glass movement" has diversified and expanded to such a degree that the terminology is no longer legitimate. Infatuation with the material has given way to a varied and exciting range of directions.

Now established as a major triennial exhibition, "Americans in Glass" will continue to document significant trends and innovations. In the 1981 exhibition, a separation of emphasis becomes obvious. With the exception of several artists who have refined personal directions, little sense of innovation or risk is evident among those individuals pursuing the vessel tradition in blown glass. Instead, we see a reoccurrence of technical and aesthetic emulation. Statements about containers and the destruction of their functional capacity have been popular in glass and other craft materials. This attitude constitutes a reaction against the technical process as well as a challenge to the craft heritage of the various materials.

Without question the most disappointing aspect of this exhibition is the stagnation of works in "flat glass." From the many entries submitted to the jury, and those included in the exhibition, only a minute number of artists seem willing to initiate a sufficient degree of risk. Complacency seems the rule, with Quagliata, Kehlmann and Stinsmuehlen providing notable exceptions. The integration of glass and architecture remains neglected, although it represents one of the greatest potentials for investigation.

In general, a rapidly expanding degree of sculptural involvement and a more intellectual approach to the material characterize the situation in 1981. As an increasing number of established artists incorporate glass into their work, the differentiation between art and craft becomes one of attitude. Statements continue to be made about the material itself, rather than utilizing the material in support of personal concepts. This is one very significant reason why glass has achieved only minimal acceptance as an artistic medium. Contemporary glass has, in general, lacked the emotion, the conceptual base, and the guts required to compete on a serious level with "mainstream" art.

To date, the "studio glass movement" has escaped significant critical evaluation. Objects have emerged in a continuous unchallenged stream. It is now imperative that criteria for evaluation be established and that artists be willing to pursue such criticism. A technical vocabulary has been established and is readily available to any artist approaching glass for the first time. If a concept cannot be realized by an individual, studios, craftsmen, and qualified technicians are available. It is this legacy which a new generation inherits, access to a myriad of technical skills, visual and aesthetic information, and a challenge to explore and surpass what has been accomplished to date. The history of the evolution of glass as a medium for the artist has just begun. Glass is on the verge of transcending its historic connotation as a craft material. What is necessary at this point is a sense of magic, a sense of history, and most importantly, an idiosyncratic sense of self, without which all significance lies with the material alone.

David R. Huchthausen
Consultant

JURORS' STATEMENTS

Harvey Littleton, the instigator of the American studio glass movement, professed the philosophy that "technique is cheap," meaning that art is more important and more difficult to achieve than technical facility. Dominick Labino, a catalyst in the movement's development, has argued that "science and technology are not handicaps in art and that to measure is to know how." A hybridization of these two attitudes has produced the growing phenomenon we call studio glass. In its first decade (1962-1972), studio glass ranged from the safe and salable to experimental.

A necessary ingredient for both approaches to glass is some degree of technical knowledge. Objects produced during this period were often low on both imagination and technique. Still, in its second decade, the movement has made tremendous progress; technique has become the airstrip from which imagination soars.

Today we confront a glass panorama so broad and so deep that it affects craftsmen, artists, critics, dealers, curators, and the general public. As it develops from year to year, even from month to month, contemporary glass-making picks up from the detritus of culture influences from other arts, cults, and fashions which it uses at times with remarkable facility (often awkwardly), and then discards without notice. Individual practices and stylistic imprints change so rapidly among artists climbing the parallel ladders of technique and imagination, that we never know what to expect next. It is therefore difficult to establish practical criteria for judging, to find constant values among ever-changing characteristics.

How is it possible to view 1,600 color slides three times over and select from this menagerie of glass a specified, tiny sampling that exhibits imagination, daring, fancy, facility, ingenuity, solid achievement, whimsy, or great promise?

What it came down to in this case was three jurors attempting to reach unanimity on what was exhibitable beyond a reasonable doubt. Choices had to be made between works of equal quality, then made again between surviving pieces and other works radically different in appearance. Judging from slides amounts to judging from appearances. I am hurt for those who should have submitted work but, because of pride, anger, or indecision, declined. I am hurt for those who submitted slides that did not do justice to the work; and for those who failed to submit slides of their best work; and for those who, inevitably, will not understand why their work was rejected. I am distressed that those working in the area of flat glass seemed, for the most part, unable to move beyond the standard clichés and mere "do-it-yourself-satisfaction," unable to break away from the centuries-old restrictions of stained glass.

Given the widely varying backgrounds and the healthy friction among the jurors present, I feel that the objects we did select represent a broad spectrum of the potentials of glass. I am angry, relieved and satisfied. And my defense rests.

Paul Hollister
Glass Critic and Historian
New York, New York

"Another phenomenal exhibition!" was my first impression after viewing selections for "Americans in Glass 1981." A new generation is clearly visible and at least as excited as the pioneers! From a European standpoint, the movement is frighteningly self-assured and highly creative through growing competition and professionalism. Europe still relies strongly on the schools which have not been able to really carry a continent-wide movement. What studio glass has done in the United States is no longer a trend, but a major step in glass history. It equals the heights of Art Nouveau but without becoming a "style." It remains full of individualism and experimentation.

We in Europe are so used to art history developing in styles that we have sometimes felt the new glass to be without philosophy, things happening as experiments, but seemingly without plan or aim. The artistic message is now reaching the general public and by the echo we have proof of its significance. Still there is danger! As in modern art everywhere, the anarchy and complexity generated by accepting the full freedom of individual experimentation inhibits the thrust that might be possible if clearer directions could be found.

The problem, as I see it, is the lack of traditional artistic concern with theme and personal conviction. Most themes have passed and belong to history: religion, family, nature, beauty, the urge for perfection. Artists are proud of this accomplishment but feel uncertain, as we have not really found new replacements for these traditional human goals. We still enjoy ruining more than building. It seems so much easier to be free.

Raoul Goldoni, painter, sculptor and glass artist from Zagreb, Yugoslavia — whom I admire greatly for his theoretic contribution to contemporary European art — offers a warning: "Art is dead if it does not speak, and with art dies man." After viewing more than 1,600 slides of new work from the United States, I realize the significance of Goldoni's demand for a purpose.

A decision is necessary: to produce an object for a market, or to formulate an idea sealed into the precious material for this and future generations? We must admit contemporary art is still far from an effective force in our society; artists are producing salable objects, and not ideas. After Wausau I am more than optimistic! Technical skill is becoming more visible but is not dominant. Ideas are emerging through a more natural and assured approach to the material. The younger generation is definitely using the tools developed by our pioneers. We must all be very grateful to initiatives like those of the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum, to David Wagner and David Huchthausen for providing us with documentation as comprehensive as "Americans in Glass." I enjoyed the opportunity to participate in this endeavor and am confident that this exhibition will cause a great deal of excitement.

Peter Rath
Co-owner, J&L Lobmeyr Glass
Vienna, Austria

I have special affinities and feelings for glass as a material. As a child in Italy, when everything was scarce during World War II, I remember in our house we had two glass bottles: one for olive oil and the other for wine. And they were mostly empty. When they were empty, there was sadness. I developed a love-hate association with glass.

I also remember private gardens which were enclosed with high stone walls and the top of the walls were filled with violet shredded sharp pieces of broken glass. I always fantasized about the beautiful gardens full of oranges, vegetables, and flowers with little houses for bees. But, of course, the garden was unreachable because of the protection of the wall and the broken glass.

Later, I discovered the stained glass windows in some churches. I became very enchanted with them, primarily for the colors, especially red. Then for the narrative images. But I was also a little afraid of those authoritarian figures.

As I became involved with art and became a teacher, I watched the development of studio glass. At first, it looked odd to me. It didn't seem to make any sense then, and I didn't take it too seriously. At the start, of course, as in any beginning, there were many problems to be solved, aesthetically and technically. Now that studio glass is in full bloom and there is no end to its potential, I feel that something important did happen. Jurying "Americans in Glass" has shown me that the movement continues to grow in both size and creativity.

Italog Scanga
Artist and Professor of Art
University of California
San Diego, California