

AMERICAN craft

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1981

\$4

AMERICAN CRAFT MUSEUM: 25 YEARS



CLAYWORKS: 20 AMERICANS

MADE WITH PAPER



FURS AND FEATHERS



SALT GLAZE CERAMICS



FOR THE TABLETOP



YOUNG AMERICANS:
FIBER/WOOD/PLASTIC/LEATHER



SCULPTURE IN FIBER



BODY COVERING



NEW STAINED GLASS

GRASS



BAROQUE '74



YOUNG AMERICANS: METAL



FELTING



OBJECTS FOR PREPARING FOOD



HOMAGE TO THE BAG



THE GREAT AMERICAN FOOT



YOUNG AMERICANS: CLAY/GLASS



FACE COVERINGS

NEW HANDMADE FURNITURE



THE NEW AMERICAN QUILT



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AMERICAN Craft

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From American Craft Museum exhibitions (as identified) a panorama of work by (top, left to right) Jack Prip, Nancy Merkel, James Melchert, Ernest Schaeffer (detail), Arline Fisch, Tim Mather, Richard Loveless, Bonnie Boudra, Claire Zeisler, Voukko Eskolin, Richard Posner, Korean basket (detail), Fritz Dreisbach, Timothy Glotzbach, Ellen Mears (detail), Albert Paley, Marilyn Levine, E'wao Kagoshima, Stan Welsh, Andrea and Bob Hanson, Michael Speaker, Helen Bitar. Story on page 9.

Photographs: Bob Hanson, Renita Hanfling, Mitch Bader, Mark Schwartz, Bror Karlsson, Mikio Sekita, Joe Schopplein, Ferdinand Boesch. Courtesy of Your Portable Museum.

Back Cover:

A corner of Sam and Alfreda Maloof's den. The potbellied stove is surrounded by Pueblo pottery and ceramics by Timothy Moore. Story on page 4.
 Photograph: Jonathan Pollock.

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The American Craft Council is a national, nonprofit educational organization founded in 1943 by Aileen Osborn Webb to promote interest in contemporary crafts. In addition to publishing AMERICAN CRAFT magazine, the council maintains the American Craft Museum in New York City and sponsors a library and nationwide audiovisual service. Through its subsidiary, American Craft Enterprises, Inc., craft markets are presented in various parts of the country. Membership in the American Craft Council is open to all.

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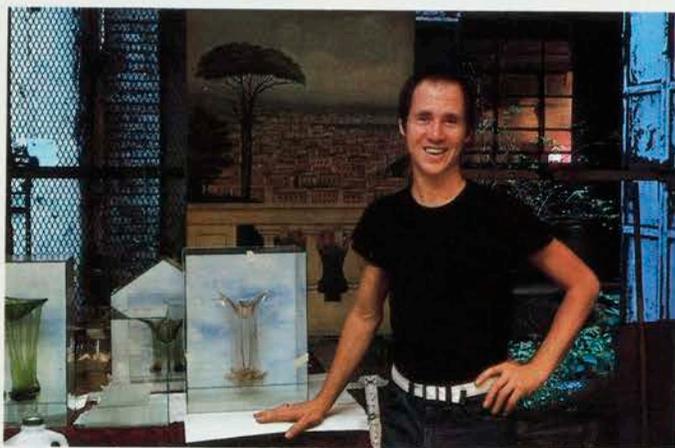
For about nine months in 1970-71, when probably no one else had thought of doing it, Sydney Cash slumped sheet glass over wires to make the glass bend and ripple. The work was done in his loft in lower Manhattan, and after the bent sheets were annealed, he had them mirrored by mirror-silverers who worked in the neighborhood. One mirrored sheet was shaped into peaks, another was sagged into a mold to give it a sculptured look. Cash was interested in the imagery reflected in the rumpled shapes. The mirrors encouraged the viewer to move about, thus creating gliding distortions. As with most pioneering efforts, there were mistakes and Cash, reluctant to throw anything away, put the mistakes aside. Six months later he got them out again and thought to himself, "Boy, look at this stuff."

With money he had saved from a Greenwich Village shop where he had made and sold cast reproductions in plasterlike Hydrocal of gargoyles, angels and other medieval figurines, Cash turned now to colored glass, slumping it on wires into sculptural forms suggesting the dance. He was taking a dance class at the time. At the turn of 1971-72 Cash had his first one-man show of these colored glass forms in Soho. The announcement featured a pirouetting, green glass, leaflike form reflected in an opaque blue glass circular base that lent it additional motion. But glass did not have general acceptance as a sculptural material in 1972, and the show was a disappointment to Cash, who felt his artistic expectations had been unrealistic. As he puts it, "I wasn't famous and rich. I realized that if I was going to do worthwhile work there was a lot I needed to learn."

Cash returned to his studio and began working with "cruder, ruder stuff," with scavenged objects in various materials

THEATER IN GLASS

TEXT BY PAUL HOLLISTER PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID RILEY



LEFT: Sydney Cash in his studio in New York City. RIGHT: Red Sky, formed glass, wire, ceramic angel, painted background, 12"x12" x7½".

combined with glass. One wall of his studio preserves a grid of stacked boxes crammed with found objects that were potential raw material for his sculpture: ceramic flowers, bones, velvet, Indian corn, a fire-hose nozzle, the stuffing of a baseball he had played with as a boy in Michigan (where he was born in 1941), the shell of a turtle he had once eaten. The dusty miscellany shows what Cash did not make but might have, had he not absorbed its presence and worked around and beyond it. Nearby, a hanging golden ball with iron calipers and a lightning attractor spiked like a mace represent incompleting ideas.

To support his family during these years of artistic reevaluation and development, Cash did a variety of things, often taking on jobs he did not know how to do. Relying on a natural manual dexterity and a BS in mathematics from Wayne State University in Detroit, and learning from books, from questioning people and from experimentation, Cash was able to complete such jobs as carpentry, renovation, plumbing and electrical wiring to the satisfaction of his customers. The job might not have been done the union way but it worked, and sometimes his solutions were ingeniously suited to private needs. In the process he learned about tools and materials. "I learned how to learn," he says. In addition to these activities Cash worked at flea markets with his two young children, buying and selling antiques. He also sold industrial equipment acquired when the neighborhood around his studio was in transition. He taught at the Brooklyn Museum Art School from 1972 to 1975, and at Pratt Institute, 1973-74.

Through the 70's drawing became for Cash a way of working less self-consciously in two dimensions than he had previously done in three, of developing his art without the pressure to sell. "Over the years drawing gave me the strength, the psychic

nourishment to continue working even when nobody wanted the work. It is important for an artist to be self-sustaining through the work he does; good work nourishes the soul, the heart. Drawing was the work I was supposed to be doing." But while drawing in general brought Cash close to his inner life, "portraiture took me out of myself. My relationship to that other person, the subject, became important."

The slumped glass Cash has produced since 1978 is ranged about his studio, most of it hung from the walls at eye level, some of it on tables and desks. All of the glass is small; the largest piece is about 12 inches high. Unfinished pieces and failed pieces serve as reminders and cautions. Digressions in glass forms have become flower holders. Interspersed among all these, wherever they will fit, are finished works and work nearing completion. Cash uses clear and colored sheet glass acquired from architectural glass dealers, antiques shops and abandoned buildings. Because he is largely unaware of the specific chemical content of the glass, he has to experiment to see what it will do. This he does in a simple electric kiln he built that measures 24 inches high by 27 inches wide and deep. The light firebrick is assembled without mortar and it rests, surprisingly, on a piece of plywood atop an old wood office desk. Next to it is another, smaller, kiln.

To begin a sculpture, Cash cuts sheet glass to the shape he wants and strings it up on wires supported by a metal armature, so that it will sag in the way he has determined. Once the design is set up in the kiln, he brings the temperature up to 1500 degrees Fahrenheit over an hour and a half, monitoring the slowly softening glass through holes in the kiln that are otherwise



LEFT: *Formed glass, wire, patterned glass background and base, 11½"x11"x9"*. RIGHT: *Blue Theorem, formed glass, wire, 12½" x12" x7¼"*.

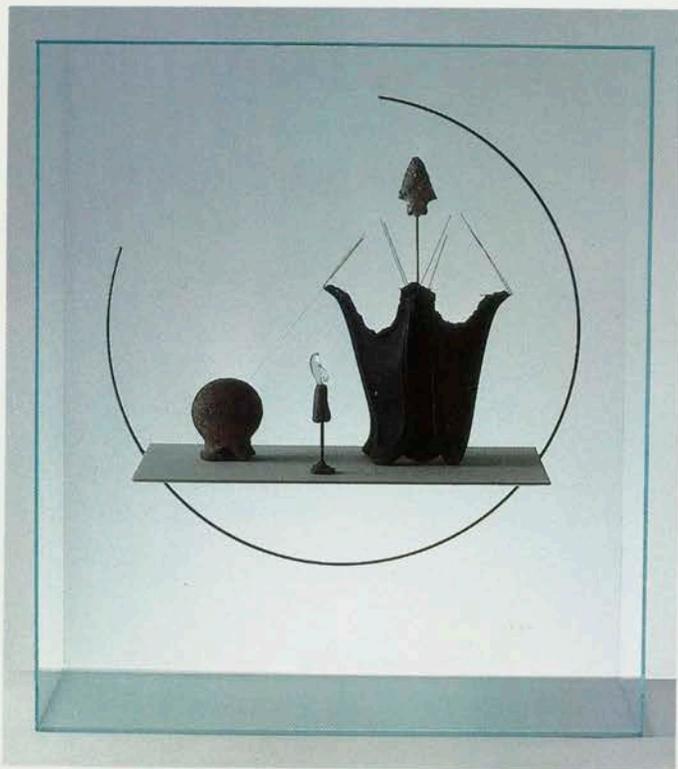
plugged to confine the heat. During the next half hour, which is crucial, the glass must sag or slump like taffy into the graceful folds that characterize Cash's work. Sometimes, when the glass is fluid, he may open the top of the kiln to bring the temperature down 400 to 500 degrees in a few minutes, so as to retard the flow and prevent the glass from collapsing into a formless puddle. When sagging is completed, the piece is annealed in the kiln for 36 hours. "Even though I get to look at a piece at 1500 degrees, I don't have much time to contemplate it," Cash says. "I only get to see what it really looks like when it comes out of the kiln a day and a half later. Sometimes it's wonderful; other times it's—well—I learned something. Some pieces are all process and no art. Others are bizarre and I may be able to remake them. Glass is not a defined medium; working with glass is like alchemy."

These days the alchemy is there in almost everything that Cash makes. In his third solo show with Douglas Heller (October 3-31) in New York City, 15 glass boxes project from the wall, concealing the thin metal shelves on which they rest. The boxes measure about 13 inches high by 11 inches wide by 8 inches deep. Three sides are of uncolored glass, so that the boxes approximate freestanding sculptures. Actually, each box is like a theater enclosing a different play. We see the stage—another glass projection above the base—and on it the main act: a membrane-thin curtain of glass arrested in its descent and framed in a hoop of wire. No other glass comes to mind in which we see the interaction between melting glass and gravity so gracefully caught in the act in perpetuity. (Even in what appears to be free-form glass we suspect that the glass was blown in a mold at some point or shaped with a tool.) As with great works of modern sculpture—Brancusi comes to mind—the beauty is in the illusion of

effortless simplicity and naturalness.

In *Blue Theorem* a free fall of filmy cobalt blue glass is framed in an incomplete circle Cash refers to as a broken halo. The triangular shape of the fall was determined by the supporting triangle of wires at the top. In another piece, the pinkish-amber glass descends in three falls against a fuzzy blue, clouded sky. It falls, but it also appears to be rising and looks wet, like streamers of kelp rising from the sea. The sky was achieved by painting the inner surface of the backdrop of the piece and masking it with a frosted glass panel. Still another work, inspired by a visit to Central Park under snow, shows translucent, pinkish glass standing like a huge tree trunk against a backdrop of pressed sheet glass that is patterned with a starred relief that sparkles like snow crystals. In this as in other works Cash has abstracted from personal experience.

Last year Cash exhibited at Heller Gallery a few pieces that included materials other than glass. Now there are more, and extrasensory overtones have entered some of the glass boxes. In one, overtly titled *Red Sky*, a ceramic angel stands before a black archway, a canopy of slumped glass floating above its head like a baldachin. I was particularly intrigued by another box with a reticulated black glass back. An angel stands within a triangular torn curtain of glass, a spiral "halo" falling about the whole like a lasso. The gossamer glass broke in the slumping and Cash had the imagination to rescue it. Imagination is the operative word. Cash places a tiny chip of glass showing an Inca profile near a flint arrowhead and an overturned miniature clay pot and calls it *Warrior*. Titles and symbols are not important, composition is. He has the sense not to call pieces without titles *Untitled*.



LEFT: *Warrior*, formed glass, wire, ceramic bowl, arrowhead, 17" x 15" x 7". RIGHT: *Formed glass, wire, ceramic angel, black glass background*, 12½" x 11" x 7". OPPOSITE PAGE: *Formed glass, wire, painted background*, 17" x 13" x 9½".

Cash sums up his artistic life by saying, "Working has always seemed to me the right thing to do. I've always felt that perseverance and integrity pay off in some way; they suffice to nourish you in your life—sometimes that is all an artist can get." He uses the word integrity frequently, as when he says, "It's the integrity of a piece that counts and not the integrity of the material. My primary interest is in how various materials can further my vision. Glass focuses my vision. I can see it being used in ways I haven't explored yet."

Cash's sculptures explore glass with what seems to be incredible ease. This is because in their apparent simplicity some of the pieces are close to perfection. They stand up to examination beside the best work of glassmakers who are totally involved with and dominated by glass as a material. Sydney Cash is not a glassblower; he is a user of glass interested in transformation of the material into pure form. "Some years I may not use glass at all. I have a wide open vista." He has indeed. □

Paul Hollister has been writing and lecturing on glass since 1965. He is editor of the bulletin of the National Early American Glass Club and has contributed to Antiques, the Journal of Glass Studies and The New York Times.

