

AMERICAN craft

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 1982 \$4



WOLFGANG HOYT

AMERICAN CRAFT MUSEUM II AT
INTERNATIONAL PAPER PLAZA

fit—rubber gloves and apron, vinyl trousers—and works carefully under the acid-fuming hood which sucks away the bad air. He never uses a respirator because, he says, "The nose is the best piece of safety equipment there is."

The final step, and the one that distinguishes Glancy's work from nearly everyone else's, is electroforming, which he does in another Providence studio. Glancy knows how to get the metallic textures he wants, though it often requires 100 hours at low amperage to accumulate the right thickness and texture. The copper does not fuse to the glass, but interlocks with it, forming a tight jacket like a setting holding gems. The word jewel appears in some titles, as in *Fractured Jewel* (1981), a small bowl in which the visible colored glass resembles stones held in the pronged bezels of copper. On some pieces Glancy further electroplates the copper with a two hundredths of an inch coating of "fine silver," that is 99.5 percent pure. This gives it a peach fuzz or "smut" surface that is white today but may turn golden with age.

Aside from the obvious patience and skill with which each piece is produced, the most remarkable thing about Michael Glancy's work is the extraordinary variety of decorative designs he produces, blasting them into the thick fabric of the glass until the original shape of the matrix is transformed into something approaching sculpture. Whatever the historical sources of the designs, the transformations are brilliant creations in themselves. Glancy tints his interiors with subtle premeditation, grading from rich color to clear, seasoning some areas with the dust of metallic flakes or glittering aventurine.

Pieces from about 1978 through 1980, some in two colors, others of one color sheathed in copper, tend to be fat melon shapes studded with square bosses. One of the finest is *In Bean's Scale* (named for his young son), a three-inch-high vessel whose square vermilion bosses alternate with dusky metal recesses to produce an effect as powerfully mysterious as a Congo mask. The raised glass surfaces of the pieces are composed of rings and tiers of squares, triangles and circles left outstanding when their interstices were carved away, and framed in copper or silver jackets. The patterns of crenelated arrangement grew more mathematical, reaching a limit in *Grand Complication* (1981), an eight-inch-high piece in copper and frosted colorless glass on a foot-square plate to match. Equally precise in execution is *Magna Triskelion* (1981); its ribbed symmetry of dark green glass windows framed in svelte, black patinaed metallic "smut" suggests the merciless eyes and soft feathers of a bird of prey.

To break from the rigidity of his designs, Glancy produced *M-Chronicle* (1980), a piece whose small and large circular bosses show skies of cobalt blue streaked red with reduced, powdered copper and silver flakes. And into each boss he introduced a stroke of copper lightning.

In 1980 Glancy completed *Center Line in Iron*, a nine-inch vase form of green uranium glass entirely coated in iron filings, except for a single horizontal groove cut into the inner green. The piece has the massive form and dangerous power of a gun turret. That he is able to achieve something so simple, while at the same time making pieces of increasing complexity, indi-



M-Chronicle, 1980, blown glass, carved and polished, electroformed copper, 10" high. LEFT: *Lapis Star X*, 1981, blown glass vase form, carved and polished, electroformed copper, electroplated silver, on 1/2" plate glass, carved, electroformed copper, 11 1/2" high.



THE MATRIX TRANSFORMED

One of the more intriguing mysteries of design is how certain ancient motifs have spanned time and circumvented geography. In the history of glassmaking, one wonders if a chance familiarity with ancient Roman or Syrian mold-blown, ribbed and waffled patterns may have sparked the Anglo-Irish cut glass of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, which in turn may have encouraged the cheaper American mold-blown patterns of the same period, including even the inkwells from Keene, New Hampshire.

Such speculations are as risky as they are entertaining. Who would have thought, for example, that the young American glassblower Michael Glancy had no familiarity with the Sassanian and Islamic wheel-cut Persian vessels of the 6th to 10th centuries, which appear to have influenced his work? Certainly, these vessels must have been known to the great modern French glass artist Maurice Marinot. Glancy in turn may have got some of his geometric imagery from Marinot, but it is more likely that he is influenced by what he sees about him today, for example, racing car tire treads that stimulated his eye. Raised in the tradition of visiting museums and libraries, Glancy travels as often as he can to exotic places such as Mexico, Morocco, Greece, Egypt, Yucatán, and also to that inner world he finds and absorbs in the stacks of art libraries. Wherever and whatever the stimuli, he appears to have developed a lexicon of natural progressions from geometric designs that is endlessly varied. His pieces are all one-of-a-kind.

Like many, if not most, first-and second-generation American studio glassworkers, Michael Glancy began with ceramics, receiving his BFA from the University of Denver in 1973. Later he went to the Penland School of Crafts, North Carolina, spent several summers at the Pilchuck Glass Center, Stanwood, Washington, and received his MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, in 1980. At both Pilchuck and RISD he worked glass under Dale Chihuly, one of America's best known glass artists. Glancy found Chihuly more inclined to explain than to praise, yet all-encompassing in his presence and in the aura of creativity he radiated.

While at RISD, Glancy was also attracted to the environment of the jewelry department. Impatient by nature, he was challenged by the high level of patience required to make a single piece of jewelry over a period of weeks or even months. Louis Mueller, now head of the RISD jewelry department, taught Glancy the use of light metals. From Rodney Nakomoto he learned about heavy metals and the skills of electroplating and electroforming. Of these two processes, electroforming produces a thick metallic coating, and Glancy began using the technique in 1979 to apply copper to the surface of his glass. Copper had previously been used with glass in the netted forms of Daum and Tiffany.

Glancy's glass, like that used at RISD, is soda lime cullet, reject scrap glass donated by the Corning Glass Works factory in Central Falls, Rhode Island, the country's largest producer of light bulbs and X-ray tubing. To this, Glancy adds softeners and decolorizers. The glass is melted at 2000 to 2100 degrees Fahr-

enheit, but the working temperature is about 1800 degrees. Glancy begins with the bubble on the blowpipe, a process he enjoys because of its association with glassworking over two millennia. As blowing proceeds, he adds casings (coatings) of Kugler or Zimmermann colored glass from Germany. He may also introduce metallic oxide powders, German aventurine, black sand from a beach in Grenada or baking soda, which makes bubbles that trap light. The blowing process may take from thirty minutes to two hours, and the thick forms are "classic" blowpipe shapes.

A high percentage of successful studio glassblowers today produce similar vases, whose thick walls are composed of layered colors to create turbulent abstract imagery or mannered pictorial designs. The same vase forms are repeated over and over, and it is only the colors favored and the transparency or opacity of the glass matrix that distinguish the work of one glassblower from another. Collectors appear comfortable with the similarity of form, and each happy colorist or illustrator has his admirers. But where other glassblowers consider annealed forms the end product, Michael Glancy regards them as blanks, the first step in the creative process.

Having blown several forms at one working session, Glancy sketches designs for each at his home in Rehoboth, Massachusetts, near Providence. The two-dimensional sketches must, of course, be transferred onto the round forms. As a visual halfway step, Glancy, who is fascinated by grids and graph paper, frequently cuts the designs into flat plates of glass, which later become bases for his pieces. He thinks of these plates as his glass sketchbook. (In my view, the graphlike plate patterns do not enhance and often detract from the blown forms.)

The actual transfer of the design onto the blown glass blank is done through a self-adhesive rubber stencil made by Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Corporation, originally designed for what is euphemistically referred to as the monument business—that is, the carving of gravestones. Glancy says, "I used to think there was a little old man making those beautiful letters with a chisel, but it's not so; they sandblast." Glancy learned to sandblast by watching stonemasons in Providence. To cut his design through the rubber, Glancy uses a No. 11 X-acto knife. After the stencil has been cut, the rubber remaining resists the sandblaster.

To Michael Glancy, sandblasting is "carving," a technique that reduces the size and changes the shape of the original thick blown blank, as a sculptor reduces marble. Glancy does his carving in a studio in downtown Providence. A piece with many repetitive cuts may require ten hours of carving, and he has learned how to modulate the action of the blaster gun to change the shape and angle of the cuts and thus prevent the piece from looking flat or overcalculated. "I can't afford to get bored when I'm making these things or the pieces themselves will become boring," he says. "If I see something I like happening, I can go with it." Sandblasting leaves a powdery white finish that must be polished with hydrofluoric acid. To use the dangerous stuff, Glancy dons what he calls his New Wave out-