

# AMERICAN craft

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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.

## CONTENTS

- 2 **Paperworks** by John Perreault  
*The inaugural exhibition of American Craft Museum II at International Paper Plaza surveys contemporary papermaking.*
- 8 **The Handmade Paper Book**  
*Artists' unique and editioned books are on view at American Craft Museum I.*
- 11 **Conserving Handmade Paper** by Alexandra Soteriou  
*A papermaker and book restorer shares her perspective on conservation.*
- 13 **Craft in Architecture**  
*A large-scale commission for an Atlanta building posed special problems for its creator, Ina Kozel.*
- 16 **Tepcoware** by Joseph Heaven  
*At its height, John Pagliero's "pottery" could produce 30,000 dishes a day.*
- 20 **Basketry: Tradition in New Form**  
*Craftsmen explore the basket as form in an exhibition organized by Bernard Kester for the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.*
- 22 **Books**
- 24 **The Matrix Transformed** by Paul Hollister  
*First sketching, then using a cut stencil and a blaster gun, Michael Glancy carves his blown glass blanks.*
- 28 **Timeless Vessels: The Porcelains of Laura Andreson** by Richard B. Petterson  
*A distinguished ceramic artist and teacher is honored in an exhibition at the Mingei International Museum of World Folk Art.*
- 32 **A Study Collection**  
*In a lifetime of travel and research, Laura Andreson has assembled a collection of pottery spanning centuries.*
- 34 **In the TapestryMaker's Mode** by Jacqueline Bartling Ward and Nancy Merritt  
*Jim Bassler investigates the possibilities within the discipline of the strip.*
- 38 **Portfolio**  
*Janet Kelman, Sharon Church, Dennis Morinaka, Jan Holcomb, John Economaki, Jan Myers.*
- 60 **Craft Marketplace**    61 **Index to Advertisers**    62 **Gallery**  
 69 **Calendar**    75 **Letters**    76 **Craft World**

##### Cover:

Installation view of "Papermaking USA: History, Process, Art" at the new American Craft Museum II, International Paper Plaza, New York City. ACM II was designed by The Space Design Group/Marv Affrime, president, Frank Failla, designer, who were also responsible for interior design of the International Paper headquarters of which ACM II is part. Clockwise from middle left: Vessels by Sylvia Seventy, *Cross Tie* by Gwen Cooper, *Solar Sweat Lodge* by Helmut Becker, *Winter Gone* by Margie Hughto, *Keith* by Chuck Close, *Triptych #2* by Nancy Genn, *Substratum* by Winifred Lutz, *First Quarter* by Michelle Samour, *Memorial Marker R.B.J.* by Bob Nugent. Story on page 2. Photograph by Wolfgang Hoyt.

##### Back Cover:

*Tri-Tic-Tech*, 1982, detail, silk warp, sisal weft, nylon jersey strips from an auction at Tennessee Tech, 50"x45", by Jim Bassler. Story on page 34. Photograph by Don Reese/Dean Caruthers.

# 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-

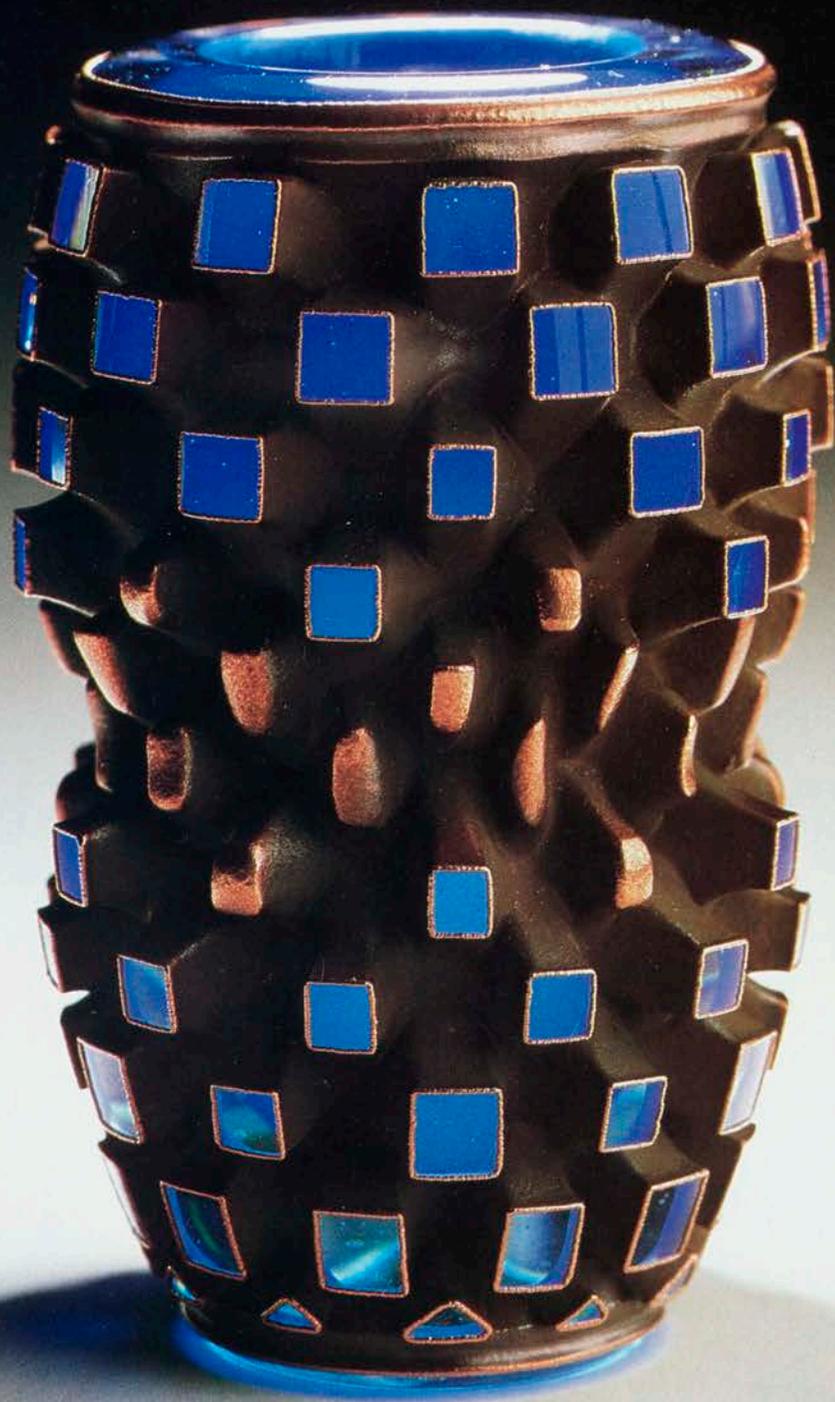
enheit, but the working temperature is about 1800 degrees. Glancy begins with the bubble on the blowpipe, a process he enjoys because of its association with glassworking over two millennia. As blowing proceeds, he adds casings (coatings) of Kugler or Zimmermann colored glass from Germany. He may also 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-



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."

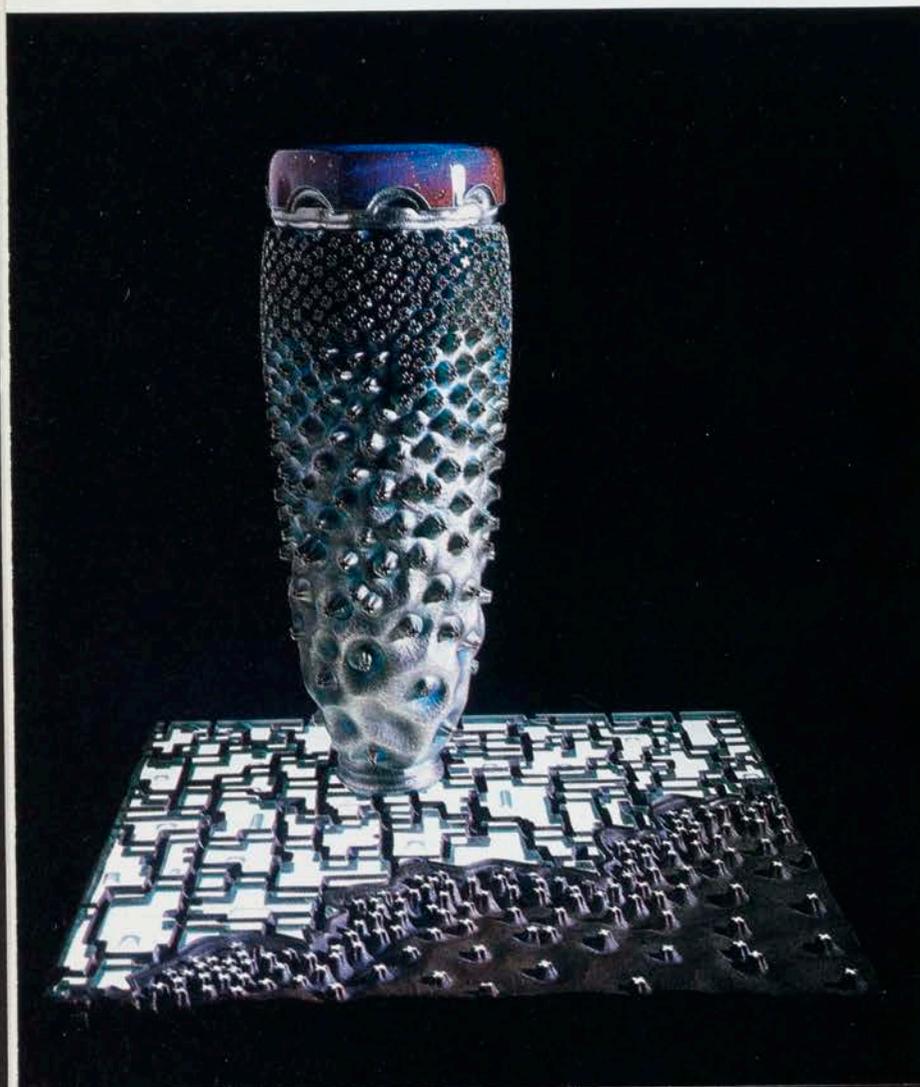
The final step, and the one that distinguishes Glancy's work from nearly everyone else's, is electroforming, which he does in another Providence studio. Glancy knows how to get the metallic textures he wants, though it often requires 100 hours at low amperage to accumulate the right thickness and texture. 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.

cates a control of ideas over technique.

One of the most striking pieces in which Glancy combines the blown form with the base plate is *Lapis Star X* (1981). Though completely jacketed with silvered copper, the extruded stars nevertheless show the brilliant sapphire blue of the interior glass; the use of stars in both vessel form and plate creates a mysterious spatial landscape that appears at once urban and interplanetary.

*Aventurine Cascade* (1981) is another object and plate combination that works well. The circular, whirling cuts in the plate seem actually to be caused by the powerful rotary appearance of the slightly flared, banded cylinder. In this piece also, fine silver has been plated over the electroformed copper, and its rich, golden color will continue to develop. Patination on the metal surface is an interesting feature of Glancy's work. Though all glass changes its appearance over long periods of time, most glass produced currently will not change perceptibly during our lifetime. Because of their metal jackets, however, Glancy's electroformed pieces will alter within a very few years; through oxidation and also through handling, they should appear more mellow and more venerable, like objects in some ancient ritual.

One of my favorites is *Spiral Continuum* (1980), which has a definite, though doubtless unconsciously conceived, design connection with a deeply acid-etched vase made by Marinot about 1931. In Glancy's piece the glass interior is deep blue at the top, grading downwards to clear glass, and covered with ruby flakes that appear to be settling slowly. The barrel shape of

the object gives added drive to the copper spiral.

This year, in *Ruby Continuum*, Glancy has carried the spiral motif into the shape of an ancient Babylonian ziggurat. Its transparent green glass has a ruby core, tapered at one end. The graphlike plate beneath the object does not enhance the piece, which is strong and complete in itself.

Finally, another 1982 work, *UXB*, shows Glancy's interest in further altering the original glass blank by carving. The deeply sandblasted area in the middle creates a form that is sculpturally dynamic. The translucent blue glass windows expand a form that is otherwise reined in, and the polished copper bosses—really windows that have been covered—contrast with, yet unite, the top and bottom halves of the work.

These last two pieces show that Michael Glancy has moved beyond earlier work in which the projecting or positive elements are geometrically decorative, and into sculptural concepts in which the original form of the glass matrix is not only modified but defied and largely transformed. To achieve this, Glancy truly has carved as a sculptor carves. Inside and outside have become interchangeable as contained and container, spiral cord and skin. Glancy's forms have acquired their own exterior/interior existence, as art forms must. □

*Paul Hollister has been writing and lecturing on glass since 1965. He has contributed to Antiques, the Journal of Glass Studies, New Glass and The New York Times.*



*Center Line in Iron*, 1980, blown glass with iron filings, carved and polished, 9" high. RIGHT: *Spiral Continuum*, 1980, blown glass, carved and polished, electroformed copper, 8" high.

