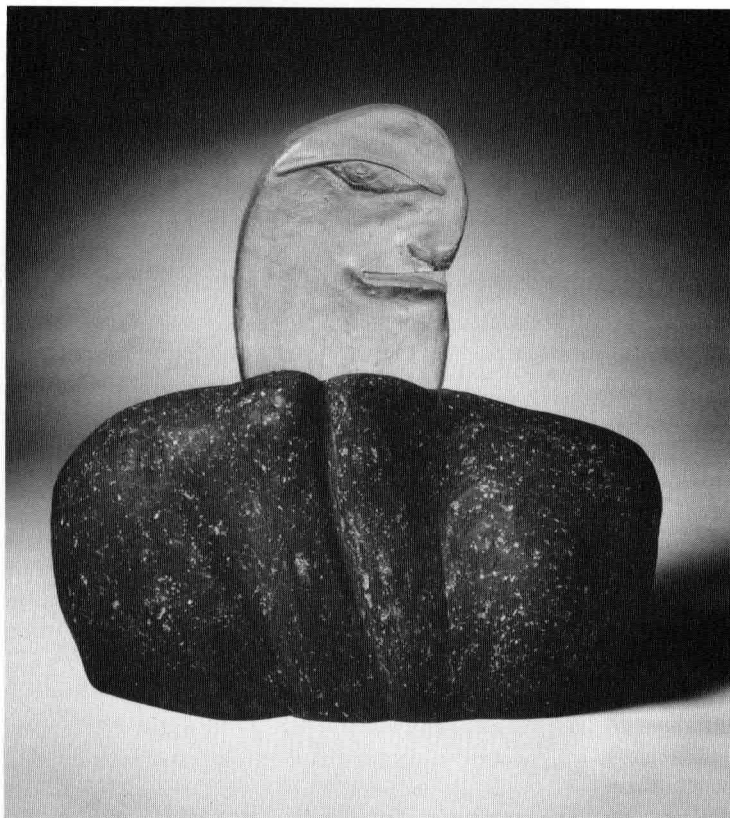


NEW AMERICAN GLASS: FOCUS WEST VIRGINIA June 15—November 9, 1986

by Paul Hollister



Stephen Dale Edwards, "Morphos", 1986. 36" x 36" x 14". Cast glass and concrete.

"Glass is rapidly becoming a vestigial material in studio movement mixed media..."

A decade ago, the Bicentennial exhibition *New American Glass: Focus West Virginia* showed 135 works from fifty-one glass artists, many of them generously represented. In the present 1986 exhibition there are seventy-eight works from seventy-one artists—more artists, but only nine of them represented by more than one work. Of the seventy-one artists showing, twenty, or about twenty-eight percent showed in the 1976 exhibition which is evidence of some durability in the rapidly

shifting art scene. More surprising, only thirty new works, or about forty percent, were blown, whereas a decade ago, over eighty percent involved blowing the standard glass bubble.

What this says is that glassworking is moving away from the 2000-year-old traditional blown form and into areas of form and design that grow from revival and recombination of long dormant techniques and from the spark of American ingenuity that has summoned new meth-

ods whenever necessary.

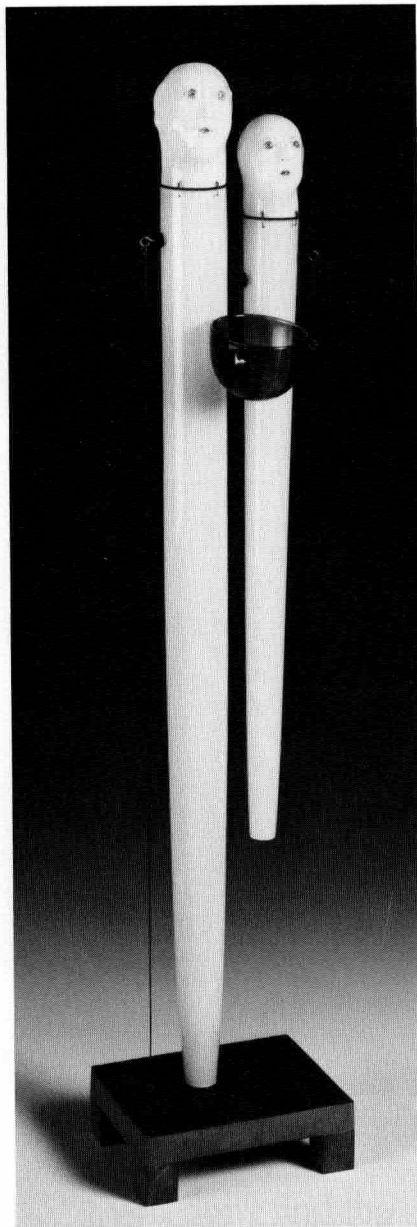
In order to judge the glass selected by chief curator Eason Eige, one must remember that the material glass is simultaneously of the most remote age and of the next millisecond of fire. Its portrait is the record of its workability prolonged and controlled by knowledge and imagination. That record for comparison extends through the exhibition.

There are a surprising number of notable pieces in this exhibition showing a

great range in size from Tom Patti's monumental miniature in which an eternal eye appears suspended in a self-contained block of some rare liquid to Steven Weinberg's small but elementally powerful casting perhaps suggesting the structure of ocean waves and to Ronnie Wolfe's highly original, comfortably composed four by eight-foot fused tale of her travels—large but unpretentious.

Paul Stankard's tiny and exquisite botanical studies are easily the finest lampwork produced in the world today. In a new columnar, shaded form, in which the plant appears as if first seen by man in deep woods, Stankard has entered a domain of psychological portraiture unique in floral lampwork. Lampworking of a very different sort by Ginny Ruffner suggests some underwater organism in a teeming coral reef gaily waving its pastel-tinted polyps and syphons to supply its exotic needs. Other fine pieces include Richard Jolley's *Faun*, a cast and acid-etched head, its features drawn in blue glass threads with a subtle freedom suggestive of a Matisse drawing; Mark Peiser's evocative casting, in two shades of green, of stairs leading deceptively through dreams; and Andrew Magdanz's meticulously conceived and proportioned *Massively Resting with Point*, a case of a perfect message for our age. *A Breeze* by Flo Perkins is a word picture in glass and steel, in which a delicate glass seed pod tilts to the clamber of twigs. Rare among blown glass pieces is Anthony Corradetti's beautiful vase, its translucent fabric covered with bubbles as fine as mist and splashed with colored suggestions of silky poppy leaves. Another near-perfect piece is William Glasner's subtly textured *Gourd with Silk Cord*. The red cord with tassel, elegantly looped about the clear glass stem and waist, imparts the formality and poise of a gourd in a Japanese surimono print.

On the next level is *The Dirndl*, the 49-inch casting by Kent Ipsen, remarkable both for its cast size (except when compared to contemporary Czech castings) and for the illusion of a fully modeled figure inside the dirndl, and the sense of imminent motion made palpable by light in the glass itself. Yet perhaps, finally, the most remarkable thing about



Flora Mace and Joey Kirkpatrick, "A Vision with Likeness," 1985. Fabricated blown glass elements.

it is the surprise that it is of glass. Would it not be as expressive if cast by an artist in bronze?

Relative newcomer James Watkins approaches glass as if it were painting. When he paints over vessels he is painting them flat—which doesn't quite work. But in the pate-de-verre relief *Still Life with Head*, the subtly limited variations in tone tend to flatten three dimensions into two. Watkins appears to be on the road to something very interesting. In one of the most

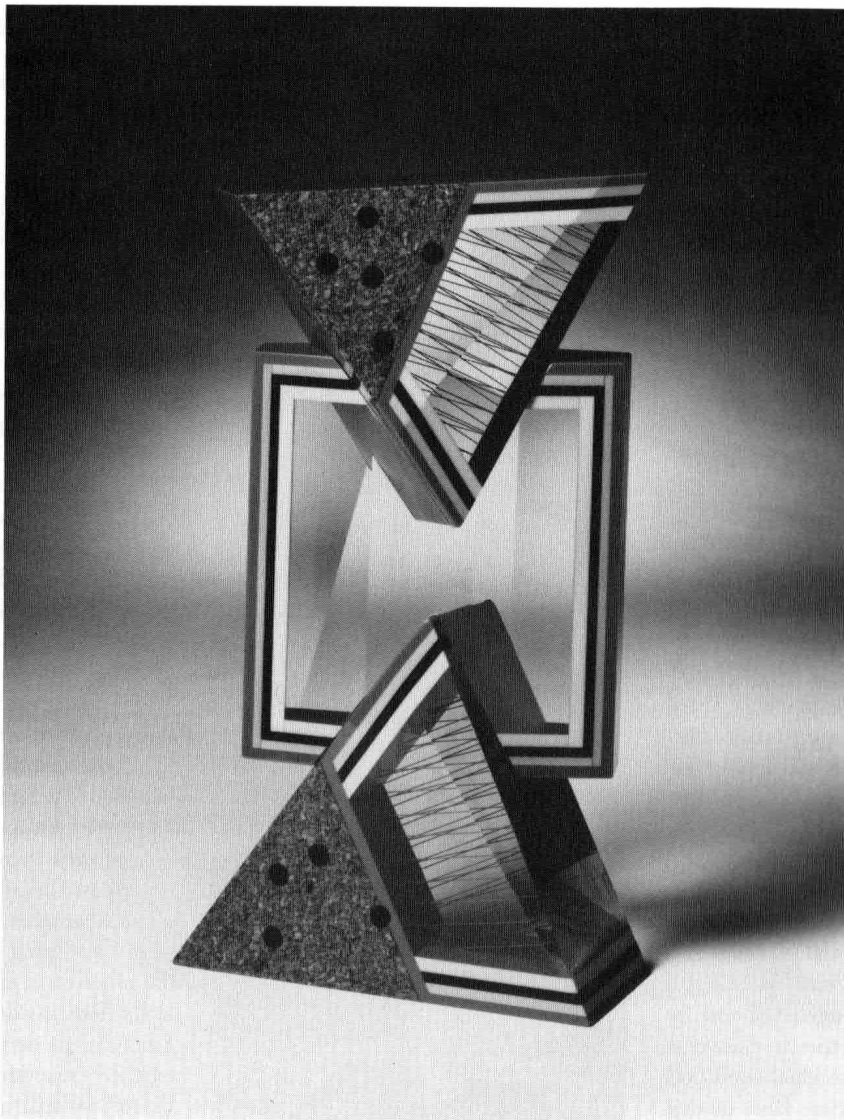
radical changes in studio glass, Henry Halem has nearly obliterated the vitrolite collage he has taken so long to perfect by enamel painting over it as if he were painting in oil on canvas. *Cup* is a painting of quality and celebration and with it studio glass may have lost one of its stars. Dale Chihuly's *Macchia* bowl within bowl contrasts two luminous, cadmium red interiors with shell-like exteriors flecked emerald green, just two of hundreds of adventurous color combinations he evolves. One could be looking into giant flowers.

There is sculpture (Gene Koss, Tom McGlauchlin, William Carlson, Mary Van Cline) or, at least, sculptural exercise in this show. Carlson's work, ever busier looking, does not seem to be headed anywhere. And why on earth has McGlauchlin abandoned his beautiful color veils for dinosaur eggs? There is an interesting architectural piece by Richard Harned of two interlocking ten-sided panels of colored glass and a Linda MacNeil *Abstract Vessel* that would be handsome enlarged as a full-scale contemporary entrance pediment.

And then there is a lot of plain junk, notably two large pieces of glass and some material or other by Thomas Farbanish—one of a yelping figure with glass gloves, the other on a massive pedestal of what looks like condemned margarine. Tom Fleming has cornered the market for artistically assembled junk. His *Fractile Sketch for Trillium Shroud #5* is a heap of colored glass fragments. No matter that it is so weakly and sloppily assembled it can hardly be picked up, it is still very beautiful.

Time seems to have stood still for Dan Dailey. Side by side, his *Dancers* vase (1976) and the attractive *Crystal Rain* (1986) could almost have been made at the same time. But if anything, Dailey's recent vitrolite pop art panels have become more banal.

Where is it all headed? Mary Shaffer's maquette for the cast iron *Guard* would doubtless be more menacing seen full-scale but her notable use of slumped glass is here minimal. Glass is rapidly becoming a vestigial material in studio movement mixed media, increasingly so in mixed-up media. But then, it is also obvious that such as Aschenbrenner,



William Carlson, "Pragnanz Series", 1985. 19" x 6" x 12". Cast and laminated glass with granite.

"Studio glass can carve its accepted mark in the bench of Art, or it can slide away with the refuse of last season's party.."

D'Onofrio, Jervis/Krasnican, Lalonde and numerous others did not bother to send their best work.

Why? Perhaps through ignorance of the landmark importance of this exhibition. But more likely because their work is spread too thin, committed to too many shows too closely spaced. Steven Finke's hair-raising yet hilarious *They Looked from Man to Pig* perfectly expressed (for me at least) the panic of pressure on studio glassworkers. And Kathleen Mulcahy's *Red*

Twister, a blown funnel swirled and slashed in red, blue and brown that uncannily suggest the diagonal suction of a tornado, represents the bright and destructive force of this show and of the American studio movement in general. Her moving form may have been carefully planned, or it may simply have happened and an opportune title applied later. Either way, it exactly fits the daring challenge, ingenuity and opportunism inherent in the movement. What the twister spares of

quality and tradition in studio glassworking, and what it spews forth to meet next season's fashion demand will determine its future. Studio glass can carve its accepted mark in the bench of Art, or it can slide away with the refuse of last season's party, and be epitaphed as a footnote to a minor variant in the history of decorative arts—Subdivision: Glass. □

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