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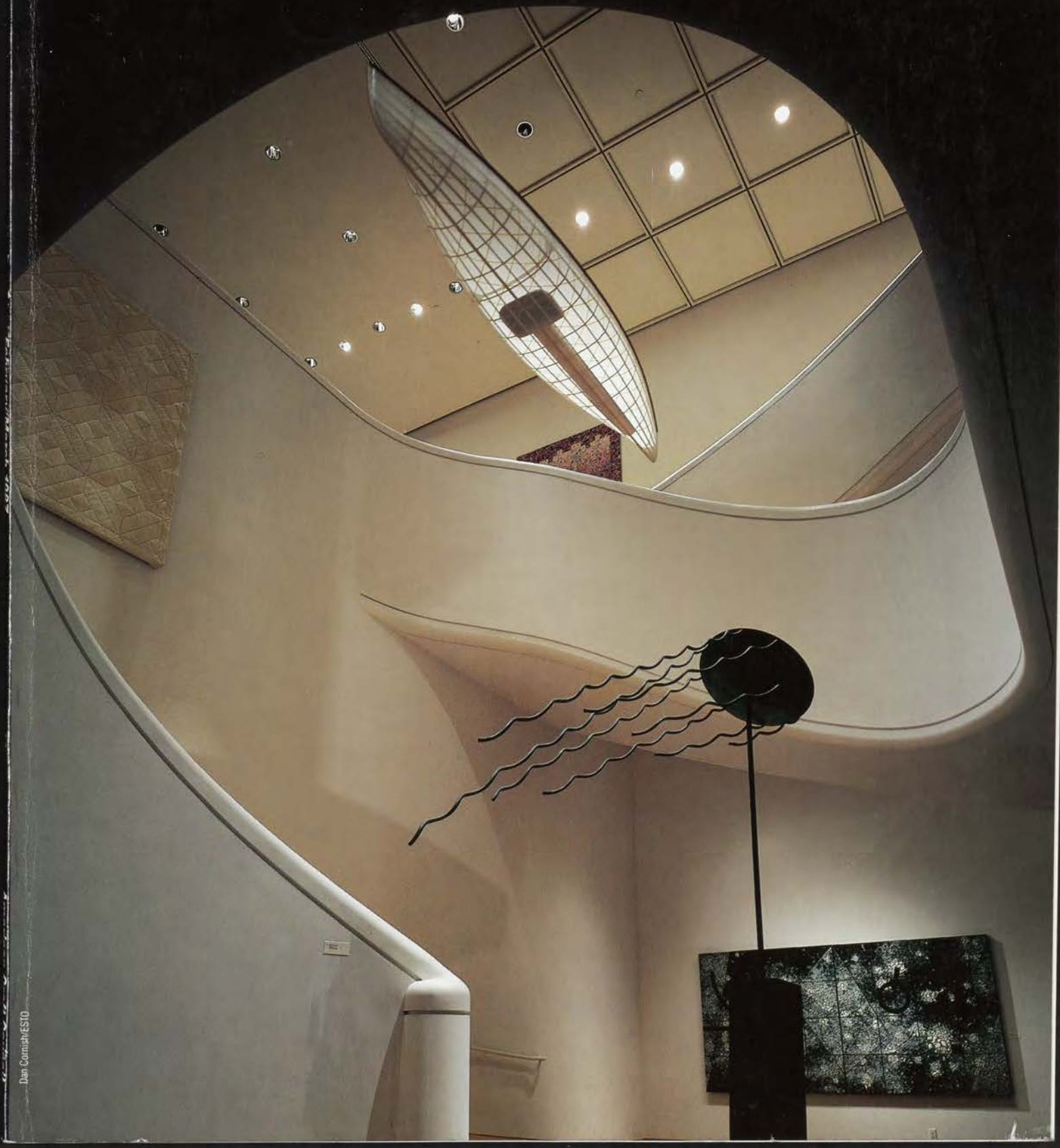

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The common denominator of Paul Stankard's imagery is flowers of colored glass, which are lampworked in various formats and encased in clear glass. ABOVE: *Water Lily Environmental*, 1985, enameled mottling on colored glasses, 2"x2⅞", collection of Pat Stankard. LEFT: *Trailing Arbutus Paperweight*, 1986, illustrating the flower's life cycle, 2"x3 3/16", collection of Pat Stankard. OPPOSITE PAGE: *Woodland Bouquet Paperweight*, 1986, an arrangement—blueberries, trailing arbutus and spring beauty—inspired by the Pine Barrens of New Jersey, 2¼"x3", collection of Dr. Michael Diorio.

Natural Wonders
The Lampwork of Paul J. Stankard

BY PAUL HOLLISTER

Lampworking is a little known and even less understood glassworking process by which such articles as scientific apparatus, floral or figural subjects, beads, even glass eyes are produced by softening and fusing glass tubes or canes in the heat of a flame, and reshaping them into the desired form. The term derives from the early use of a lamp fueled with oil, its cotton-wick flame intensified by air pumped through a pointed tube connected to a bellows operated by a foot treadle. In the mid-18th century the great French encyclopedist Diderot wrote of lampworking that "of all the arts with which I am acquainted, it is the most agreeable and amusing."

For centuries the trade routes of the world were strung with Venetian beads. By 1731, 800 pounds of oil a day are said to have been used to fuel beadmakers' lamps. Yet beads were only one product of lampworking. Others included portable altars, religious and secular scenes, table centerpieces, and the charming figures of 17th- and 18th-century Italy, Nevers, France, and other European centers.

During the Industrial Revolution of 19th-century England and America, glassworkers in factories brightened their few idle moments by performing lampworked feats called whimsies or friggers—such things as full-rigged ships, birds on perches with spun-glass tailfeathers, writing pens, Jacob's ladders (angled spirals) and musical instruments. At the turn of the century, delicate wineglasses shaped like flowers were made in Germany by Karl Köpping and his imitator, Friedrich Zitzmann, in the fashionable Art Nouveau style. Glasses as thin as soap bubbles on improbably looped stems were shown by Barovier Artisti at the first industrial art biennial in Venice in 1895.

Between 1886 and 1936 glass flowers of a different sort—uncannily accurate and lifelike—were produced as studies by Leopold Blaschka and his son Rudolph for the Botanical Museum of Harvard University. Equally accurate and incredibly delicate are the enlarged glass models of microscopic primitive protozoa made after 1915 by Herman O. Mueller and his father for the American Museum of Natural History.

The botanical lampwork of Paul J. Stankard ranks with the historical best. Born in Attleboro, Massachusetts, in 1943, Stankard received a less academic education than that of later studio glassworkers who have earned M.F.A. degrees. His artistry, like that of the Blaschkas and Muellers, emerged from rigorous training in glassblowing.

At the age of 15 Stankard moved to southern New Jersey and in 1961 enrolled in Salem Vocational and Technical

"To me, wildflowers are spiritual: the reality of God is there in a wildflower."

RIGHT: *Wild Arum Botanical*, 1984, detailed seedpod with seeds and complex stamen structure, 4¾"x2⅛". OPPOSITE PAGE: *Spring Beauty Paperweight*, 1984, incorporating a detailed bulb, 2⅛"x3¼", collection of Mike Belkin.

ABOVE: *Trailing Arbutus Environmental*, 1986, detail, "root people" or "spirits under the earth with earth flowers," 3⅛"x2", collection of James Donofrio. LEFT: *Cactus Botanical*, detail, 1985, anthropomorphic root system, ground and polished by Jim Shaw, 5¼"x2½", collection of Pat Stankard.

Institute, a two-year college, where he studied scientific glass technology. While there, he became friendly with the well-known lampworker Francis Whittemore, who taught an evening class in ornamental glass. Whittemore was just beginning to make the Millville rose, a South Jersey floral paperweight known from its production in Millville in the early 1900s. When Stankard asked how it was made, Whittemore—following centuries-old glass tradition—demurred, expressing pride in guarding his secret.

Stankard spent $2.50 for a paperweight enclosing a small, lilylike flower and tried to figure out how it was made. When he learned from an old-time glassworker that the flower was inserted with an ice pick or a crimp—a process Stankard describes as "Push the cookie cutter into the crystal and out pops a flower"—he lost interest in the technique, considering it too mechanical.

After graduation from the institute in 1963, Stankard worked at companies producing optical glass, laboratory apparatus and fancy scientific instrumentation. True to the peripatetic nature of glassworkers, he moved from factory to factory in New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, acquiring great technical skills in the production of complicated glass instruments that were to become the foundation of his lampworking wizardry.

In 1964 Stankard was making $120 a week with overtime at Andrews Scientific Glass Co. in Vineland, New Jersey. Married and starting a family, he began to supplement his income by working at home in the evening—as lampworkers have traditionally done—making clear-glass birds, elephants and giraffes about one inch high, which sold like hotcakes for 35 cents apiece.

But in the back of Stankard's mind was imagery of woods and flowers derived from his childhood: the menace of a giant sunflower standing guard at the end of the yard lest he wander off; or picking a pink lady's slipper in the woods for his mother, only to be cautioned that it was rare and not to be picked.

By 1969 Stankard had decided he wanted to do something more important than blowing scientific glass and fusing gift-shop animals. He had been making glass marbles, and one evening he said to his wife, Pat, "Look what I've done!" It was a small marble enclosing a flower. Then he added, "Do you think I'll ever be able to make a paperweight?"

He did begin making paperweights, but at that time no information was available on where to buy materials and tools, or what to do with them when you got them. The first five years comprised a series of long, hard exercises, a period of trial and error. As Stankard puts it, "I was busting up glass just to get cullet. At one point I imported glass from France, which involved a super customs hassle. Finally, I was able to get some tomato-red glass that had been used in the South Jersey hot shops of the early 1900s to make fishing poles, and an old-timer at Kimball Glass in Vineland drew glass rods for me." Stankard's technical background ensured that various colored glasses were compatible.

It took a year before recognized paperweight dealers would buy his weights for a mere $10 apiece. Even so, the Stankards were delighted, because each weight was worth a couple of dozen glass animals. When his price reached $100, Stankard was still rejecting about 70 percent of his work. "It wasn't a free lunch," he says.

Paul Hollister, who writes and lectures frequently on contemporary glass, is the author of four books on paperweights, the most recent being Paperweights: "Flowers Which Clothe the Meadows," *with Dwight P. Lanmon (Corning, New York, 1978), an exhibition catalog.*

Yet Stankard's paperweights were competitive with those being turned out both by studio glassworkers—who stuffed them with stiff-looking flowers or blobs and streamers or colored glass—and by companies such as Orient & Flume, who coated the opaque surfaces of the weights with metallic oxides feathered into neo-Tiffany patterns. Stankard's early weights were unlike all these; the softly colored flowers looked natural, like framed floral mementos of some cherished occasion.

In 1975 Stankard had the well-known Schott & Abbe Company melt some 5,000 pounds of hand-drawn soda-lime glass into gob form (lumps the size of an orange). This special order cost $15,000, and to pay for it he had to re-mortgage his home. The new formula was no guarantee of success, but 1975 marked the first of many breakthroughs in Stankard's grail-like quest for perfection. That year he took on an assistant, John Glass, a skilled craftsman, who made many of the glass leaves, stems and berries with an undeviating consistency. The work was tight, controlled and uniform, and the floral designs began to look standardized.

Which brings up an important point about Stankard's flowers. Nineteenth-century glass paperweights from France, which are so prized today, were mass-produced to serve a low-priced novelty market. The flowers were basically composed of interchangeable parts, similarly shaped leaves and petals serving a variety of flowers. Millefiori glass canes were shaped and sliced to form petals, the centers of flowers, even butterfly wings. The flowers themselves were simplified, almost childlike versions of common cultivated flowers of the 1840s grown in the backyards of the lampworkers who assembled them. By contrast, Stankard's are nearly all wildflowers, studied in the woods or brought into the studio. "I think the Pantin lizards are works of art," Stankard says of the large French factory paperweights made about 1878, "but I don't have much respect for the other 19th-century paperweights." He had become fully aware of the monotony of design in his own work.

Meanwhile, in the 1960s and 70s, old French factories that had never ceased operation were turning out floral paperweights in unabashed but second-rate imitation of their own 19th-century prototypes. At the same time, in the shadow of the American studio glass movement, several lampworkers were trying to go the antique French floral weights one better. The results showed superbright, standardized, neo-Victorian flowers that aped their predecessors without capturing their felicity. French glass factories and American lampworkers alike tried to copy auction-record paperweights for collectors unprepared for the staggering record sums. But in this acquisitive climate Stankard's weights were sought out by collectors because they were different from all the rest. In his own little corner in Mantua, New Jersey, Stankard was becoming a name to be reckoned with in studio glass.

Interestingly, Stankard lives on West Landing Road, from whose bygone creek landing two blocks away glass was shipped from nearby Glassboro to the Delaware River and thence to Philadelphia and the American market during the early 19th century. Joined to the attractive house he designed himself, Stankard's studio is equipped with the most up-to-date gas-oxygen torches, annealing oven and glory hole (heating furnace). The prime components of lampworking—colored glass rods in various lengths and diameters—line the walls, along with books on glass and large, detailed botanical illustrations, but the studio is as spotless as an operating room.

John Glass left in 1980, and a year later Stankard hired Jim Donofrio, a graduate in fine arts from Glassboro State College and a sculptor in wood and in lost-wax cast bronze. Newly married and bored with his regular job, Donofrio jumped at the opportunity, though, he says, "I didn't know one iota about lampworking." According to Stankard, "Jim is a sculptor and he questioned everything—'Why are you doing this? Why don't you try that?' I said, 'Go ahead and try it.' I've taken advantage of his talents and integrated them into the flowers. By challenging the imagery he improved the work."

As long as they make sense organically, Stankard does not try to reproduce wildflowers with the total botanical fidelity of the Blaschkas' Glass Flowers at Harvard. Any freestanding glass flower looks very different when encased in solid glass. And this, of course, was the secret of the antique paperweights: lampworked flowers that looked like Cinderellas in free air went to the ball once they were encased in clear lead crystal. Long and careful study of wildflower plants, in situ behind his house and among the six acres of woodland he purchased in 1982, has enabled Stankard to approach plants as a painter would—aware of all the details but knowing what to eliminate and still suggest the overall character of the flower. A partial list of wildflowers and berries that Stankard has used as models includes tropical brassia caudata, cymbidium and paphiopedilum orchids, arethusa, bellwort, blackberries, bloodroot, cinquefoil, Deptford pink, lady's slipper, spring beauty, trillium, violet, water lily, wild geranium, wood sorrel and wood strawberries.

Along the way he developed his own techniques. Where other paperweight makers make leaves by coating opaque white glass with translucent green, Stankard's are made from a variety of opaque green glasses. Flower stamens are individually striped, not simply cut from prefabricated millefiori cane.

From 1977 on, Stankard produced a series of limited-edition paperweights for the Smithsonian Institution and another for the Art Institute of Chicago, from 1982 through 1985. As his techniques developed, Stankard was able to introduce a new level of reality into his plants by placing them in their natural environment: the sandy soil in which they grow and the root systems beneath. The life cycle of the plant was indicated by bees hovering over blossoms, by diseased leaves and withering berries. Where the Blaschkas had treated these stages of growth and decay with botanical exactitude, Stankard suggested them artistically.

A study of anthropomorphic stamen and root illustrations in medieval herbals gave him the idea for his "root people," his "figures under the earth." At one stroke, this innovation doubled the viewing possibilities—turn the paperweight over and there is another scene with figures cavorting among the roots. Donofrio's sculptural abilities have come through here; his long, strongly modeled figures climb roots, seek one another or hide in the undergrowth.

In 1985 Stankard added a glory hole at his studio to speed the melting of the larger gobs of clear glass needed for his new botanical studies. These "botanicals" were a major breakthrough. Instead of viewing the plants from above as in a regular paperweight, or even from above and below as in Stankard's "environmental" paperweights, the new "botanical" presents a full-length vertical portrait of a plant encased in a column of clear glass. It sounds easy, but there were great difficulties involving the interface between the two halves of a plant to be shown in the round, and also with the extra amount of glass required for a column. Stankard says, "Glass is so demanding that I have to get new tools, reach new levels of skill to advance. Ideas are easier than execution—how to interpret the idea."

Stankard's ideas take a long time to translate into practice. Three or four years ago he asked the glass sculptor William Carlson to laminate colored glass onto one of his botanical blocks. The experiment is still on a shelf in Illinois. But as soon as Stankard made his own first lamination, he realized it was an important step forward. This writer thinks it was more than that. For the new "botanical" blocks—squared columns—are laminated on three sides with deep green glass, subtly muting the clear, colorless glass surrounding the plant, which appears like a vision in deep woods seen by man for the first time.

The "botanical" is certainly more demanding. Where a Stankard paperweight "accepts" no more than 5 or 6 hours work and requires only 15 hours to anneal, a "botanical" requires 3 to 4 days to produce and 25 hours to anneal. The difference is such that the paperweights are becoming studies for the "botanicals." But the most remarkable thing about the shift from paperweight to "botanical" is that the circular form of the paperweight, which has always accommodated all interior designs and framed them to perfection, has at last, after nearly 150 years, been equalled and perhaps replaced with a columnar shape for our own time, a shape that when laminated on three sides imparts a sense of mystery not present in even the finest antique paperweights. The "botanicals" have at last become sculpture and Stankard has entered the mainstream of studio glass.

In May 1986 Stankard broke lampworking tradition by producing a paperweight before a large audience at Wheaton Village, Millville. In the audience on this occasion were Whittemore, Stankard's former teacher, and paperweight doyen Charles Kaziun, neither of whom has ever revealed his lampworking techniques. In June Stankard outdid himself at the Penland School of Crafts, North Carolina, by conducting a five-day workshop during which he demonstrated at close range and explained every nuance of lampworking to some 40 students and assorted eavesdroppers, including such glass artists as Gary Beecham, Ken Carder, Stephen Dee Edwards, Dudley Giberson, Mark Peiser and Yaffa Sikorsky. These and many novices performed lampwork from 9 A.M. until as late as 4 A.M. the following day. Stankard had three large vases of freshly picked mountain wildflowers placed on the worktable each morning to stimulate the lampworkers and enhance the occasion. This extraordinary demonstration marked the revelation in public of a specialized area of glassworking hitherto persistently guarded as a trade secret by paperweight makers. (In the aftermath of Stankard's visit, Penland is expanding its glass facilities to include a lampworking studio which will be in operation this summer.)

Last July Paul Stankard gave me the special treat of taking me to his private domain, the woods, where he wanted to show me a rare wild orchid, the rattlesnake plantain. It had not yet bloomed. But on the edge of the woods was the Deptford pink, a little wildflower introduced into America 200 years ago. He said, "It's very nondescript until you get close to it and realize that this flower is a real treasure. To me, wildflowers are spiritual: the reality of God is there in a wildflower." ■

Approximately 75 paperweights and "botanicals" by Paul J. Stankard are on exhibit at Kent State University Museum, Ohio (November 21, 1986-February 22, 1987).

RIGHT: *Spring Beauty Botanical*, 1986, illustrating the plant's life cycle—bud, blossom, wilt—detailed stamen structure, "apparitions of the Pine Barrens," cut and laminated by Jim Shaw, 5¾"x2¾".