

# “A New Educational Resource for Flameworkers”

By Paul Stankard



(Back): Jahnnny Rise, Shag Snyder, Sebastian Case, Jay Wright, Ryan (Buck) Harris, Mike (Styles) Larson;

(Front): Clinton Roman, Laura Roman, Baby Talon Roman, Paul J. Stankard, Sean Mulligan, Sean O'Connell

Reflecting on my lecture and demonstration at The Eugene Glass School, and visiting the Cornerstone Studio, I'm amazed at the scope of this cultural phenomenon in glass. I was touched by one of the Boro communities nationally known leader Matt Stroven aka Banjo when he thanked me for coming to Eugene and said, "Welcome to the lost tribe of lampworkers".

My involvement with Salem Community College's International Flameworking Conference has introduced me to glass masters from around the world. The 2009 conference was extra-special. In addition to helping celebrate Shane Fero's career, I had the opportunity to meet three young borosilicate flameworkers who are remarkable masters: Clinton Roman, Matt Eskucke, and Scott Deppe. It was a series of events associated with Clinton Roman that led to my article in *Glass Line* magazine entitled "33: A Celebration of Excellence" and to accepting an invitation to speak and demonstrate at the Eugene Glass School. During that visit, I was introduced to more than 100 dedicated borosilicate flameworkers. The respect these artists afforded me and their desire to grow with artistic maturity encouraged me to get involved with the boro community on an art- education level.

I tell the boro flameworkers who have not benefited from formal education in art that it is not necessary to attend art school to do significant work, but it is essential to have the same information that nourishes artistic maturity. Education has always been a top priority with me, and one of my roles as chairperson of the '09 conference was to facilitate an exchange of information between the seminar attendees and the three masters demonstrating at the torch: Scott Deppe, Clinton Roman and Matt Eskucke. This format has become a popular way for the audience to interact with the artists as they watch the various flameworking techniques being executed.

As I stood between the audience and the demonstrations, I was mesmerized by the performance of these three talented artists, all but one virtually unknown to the studio glass world.

Even with my 50 years at the bench, I had never seen anything close to their level of skill and aggressiveness at the torch. They pushed the process beyond anything I had ever done and took advantage of equipment I did not know existed. Clinton and Scott used torches that could double as flamethrowers, and had annealers to keep components hot. Watching Scott ball up borosilicate glass, shape a life-sized human skull, and decorate the forehead with a Celtic knot band, designed to

wrap around the skull, was a new experience for me. Clinton's demonstration was distinguished by his dance-like motions, which allowed him to manipulate colored borosilicate glass into a six-inch human torso in the giant flame. Matt was the only demonstrator sitting down. He was blowing and shaping a water glass with phenomenal skill and sculpting *trompe l'oeil* ice cubes that looked totally believable.

After experiencing the borosilicate flameworking demonstrations with these "outsider" artists of the studio glass movement, I realized I knew nothing about this cultural phenomenon in the boro community. I decided the best way to understand this world was to write an article for *Glass Line* on one-of-a kind glass pipes. I thought this proposed article would be straightforward, but, to my amazement, when peeling away the layers of this glass culture, I discovered a thriving community, dominated by 10 to 20 upper-echelon artists creating unique glass pipes. The best of this artwork on occasion sells in the \$1,000 to \$5,000 range, challenging and impressing thousands of aspiring glass-pipe-making flameworkers. For evidence of the huge interest in glass pipes, compared to other glass categories, search "making a glass pipe" on YouTube—you'll find almost 100,000 hits on instructional videos.

From my perspective, if the various tribes of flameworkers out side of the studio glass movement were challenged by an informed fine art expectation, a new chapter in glass art would unfold with twenty to thirty new glass art celebrities.

The more time I spent unraveling the glass pipe community, the more complicated this unique hot glass culture became. Out of frustration, I asked Jim Thingwold, publisher of *Glass Line*, if I could redirect the article to include the larger community of flameworked borosilicate glass artists. With his positive response and willingness to dedicate the whole issue to such a survey, I turned to my old friend Robert Mickelson and my new friend Clinton Roman to help with selecting the artists to include. I was the least-informed on this new wave of borosilicate artists. Clinton knew the major players to be considered in the glass-pipe world. From the start of the jury process, I came to respect many of the glass-pipe makers, whose work was



In what has been billed as a Degenerate Lampworkers gathering or flame off at the Cornerstone Studio theirs a near fanatical commitment to using Borosilicate glasses.

strangely interesting and complex. The best of their work evidences fine craftsmanship and a personal visions, and it's an easy prediction that many of these talented artists could appear on the national glass scene if they expand their creative focus beyond glass pipes.

A new resource is born

While working on this article, I was invited to demonstrate and lecture at the Eugene Glass School's tenth annual benefit auction and dinner. Knowing Clinton Roman lived in the Eugene area, I asked him if he would assist me in my demon-

stration. He accepted. I spent the next day with Clinton and his wife, Laura, who took me to the market for lunch and then to Cornerstone Glass & Supply Studio. It was amazing to see the high level of skill and experimentation that was being done in that 5,000-square-foot facility, which is home to over 20 artists renting space. We spent the afternoon seeing examples of glass art and interacting with high-energy young boro-glass artists. The day gave Clinton, Laura, and me ample time to discuss previous e-mails and phone conversations about how to offer boro glassmakers' information that could complement their creative journey.

In Eugene, I met a large community of flameworkers, all on the creative side, and was inspired to share my experiences as a response to the respect they showed me. A strategy developed when Laura suggested an online course designed to enhance opportunities for borosilicate flameworkers. I thought of my own experience in the mid-'60s, watching a PBS series featuring John Burton talking about being creative in glass and demonstrating basic techniques at his torch. I remember being astounded and feeling inspired after watching this kind-hearted and cultured person working in his studio. He articulated a personal philosophy about mak-



Flame offs across the country are attracting hundreds of high energy glass makers. Many are eager to learn new techniques, while others are competing for awards and greater recognition within this outsider glass culture.

ing things with lampworking techniques, and I was emotionally energized by the program. After watching that program, I instantly knew that dedicating my life to the art of making glass would be the right direction; that was the start of my creative journey.

After sharing my story about John Burton with Laura and Clinton, we agreed that his would be a good name for our program, especially with Burton's connection to lampworking and coloring borosilicate glass. The John Burton Program is now a reality, and one of its long term roles is to offer information on material and process safety. We're planning to initiate discussions on safety issues centering on exhaust systems, designed for flameworkers. One of the program's goals is to promote national standards and procedures for safety in our craft.

My friend Robert Minkoff is a philanthropist and enthusiastic supporter of studio glass artists, and an important catalyst and guiding light for the John Burton Program. Without his involvement, the program most likely would not exist. Laura Roman's generous spirit and organizational talent is the center point of the program. She brings her website design skills and online course experience to the program and, with Clinton Roman's input, has designed a website that provides pertinent information to the boro flameworking community.

Salem Community College's 2009 International Flameworking Conference, was attended by over three hundred glass professionals. This year's International Flameworkers Conference will celebrate its tenth anniversary with nine honorees in attendance. Robert Mickelsen, Lucio Bubacco, Kari Russell-Pool, Cesare Toffolo, Ginny Ruffner, Loren Stump, Carmen Lozar, Shane Fero, and Paul Stankard will be featured in a program of demonstrations and lectures. For information go to [www.salemcc.edu](http://www.salemcc.edu)



craft context. Attention will focus on glass artists whose work is represented in major museums around the world. This is one way of inspiring and strengthening artistic ambitions—discussing artwork that reflects a depth of human emotion or celebrates an idea. Over this planned 15-week course, those enrolled will discuss the nuances of craft, design, and fine art. We will also review the glass-art acquisitions of museum curators and review the writings of art critics who are sympathetic to glass art. There will be reading assignments designed to nurture artistic maturity and reinforce creative courage, and philosophical discussions focused on beauty and ingredients that contribute to significant art.

We had a trial run that was an invaluable experience. Laura and Clinton Roman, Matt Stroven (aka Banjo), Steve Sizelove, Robert Minkoff, completed a course entitled “Glass Art Seminar” that started in August and ran for 13 weeks. I used a conference-call format that turned out to be wonderfully effective. At times, our online classroom was enlivened by strongly felt attitudes that reinforced the reality of how complex and personal art making is. One decision as a result of the shakedown run was to not be intimidated by the “M word” (money). This topic often confuses discussions about art making ideals, but to ignore the subject is unrealistic.

To my delight, the course was given “straight A’s” and the artists took away fresh insights into their careers. I learned new ways to deliver information with orderly discussion in a conference-call format. The founders of the John Burton Program and our test students realize the educational value and potency of this online course. The goal is to touch boro flameworkers who are eager to grow beyond production glassmaking and compete in the larger arena. The journey is about seeking fresh insight into art making on a personal level, with the courage to reach higher by taking creative risks along the way.

Laura Cassidy Roman is our first executive director brings her special experience with designing web sites and implementing programs to encourage and promote excellence. Her leadership is focused on establishing this non profit organization

and challenging our founding board members—Matthew Stroven, Clinton Roman, Robert Minkoff, and David Winship—to fuel the JBP rocket. The program’s first online course is scheduled to be launched in January 2010, and will offer a college-level course focused on a contemporary glass-art survey that is limited to 12 students. Titled “Glass Art Seminar” and taught by this writer, the course will span more than 15 weeks with an hour-and-a-half session each Monday night.

Another project of the John Burton Program is to facilitate an exhibition that will challenge the flameworking community to celebrate the spirit of the French lampworked Never’s figurines of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. In a conversation with Dr. David Whitehouse director of the Corning Museum of Glass while standing in front of the museums collection of Never’s Figurines, He said, “For thousands of years, glass workers have discovered ways of doing things. Sometimes, a new discovery attracts attention and the old ways are forgotten. But sooner or later, someone rediscovers the old ways.” His comment was so perceptive it startled me and, as a result of Dr. Whitehouse’s perspective, the John Burton Program is

planning an annual juried competition; open to North American flameworkers, to capture the spirit of the Nevers figurines in a diorama format. The glass art can be no larger than a 10-inch cube or smaller than a three-inch cube with the accepted work documented in a handsome catalog and displayed to be sold in glass center and craft galleries nationally.

Mission statement: The John Burton Program is a grassroots, educational, self-help organization established in 2009 to celebrate excellence in flameworked glass. Beginning as a resource website, this non-profit entity exists to promote independent studies through online courses, seminars, and its growing Internet library. The John Burton Program will facilitate and document juried exhibitions of artwork for exhibit and sale. John Burton, our namesake, was a chemist/metallurgist whose interest in creative flameworking inspired the 1960s glass community through his teaching and techniques for hand-coloring borosilicate glass. The program is dedicated to educating and inspiring creative people in the art and science of flameworked glass.



Scott Deppe is in the upper echelon of a new wave of highly skilled borosilicate glass masters who layer decorative design onto their functional objects. This predominately male one of a kind glass pipe making movement is in sharp contrast to a more artistically mature fine art efforts dominated by flameworking woman artists nourished by BFA and MFA degrees.