

When I think back to 1961 and my first class at Salem Community College, I remember that Harry Hunter, the scientific glassblowing instructor, blew a swan out of Pyrex tubing for our first demonstration. I can still remember how excited I was, watching the flames splash and soften the glass tubing. When Mr. Hunter puffed on the thin glass point extending from the end of the tube, I was mesmerized by the glowing glass that expanded into a swan's shape. I had never seen anything like that, and remember thinking how lucky I was to be at Salem Community College. This introduction to glassblowing was my first playful experience in glass. It was in the '60s that my creative side became a stronger and stronger counterpoint to my scientific glassblowing career. I eventually abandoned scientific glassmaking to search for beauty and emotional fulfillment in a studio environment.

Fast forward 48 years, to my being chairperson of the 2009 International Flameworking Conference at Salem Community College and narrating three concurrent demonstrations by Scott Deppe, Matt Eskuke, and Clinton Roman. I was blown away by their commitment to excellence, and found myself enthusiastically celebrating the creative energy and skill evidenced by these three young masters. As I watched what appeared to be an over-the-top flameworking demonstration, I felt awkward, even a little embarrassed, because I have been sitting in front of a torch for nearly five decades and knew nothing about this community of highly skilled and talented glassmakers. I marveled at their courage, which reinforced my belief that this creative movement was on the verge of adding to the glass landscape.

For the most part, this is an outsider or street-craft activity, where young glassmakers are working to develop a distinct style with which they will come to be identified. What makes this craft movement so interesting is its absence, for the most part, of formal art training. Most of the pipe techniques have been borrowed from the scientific glassblowing world, which I find strangely déjà vu and wonderfully unusual. There is a fascinating dichotomy between the small numbers of artists with formal training bringing a

## Fires of Creation

By Paul Stankard

fine-art expectation to their work, and the vastly larger group of craftspeople doing production and/or naively designed one-of-a-kind glass pipes.

When I was teaching myself how to flamework soda-lime glass to make paperweights, I never imagined scientific glassblowing techniques would be used so successfully in the craft world. It's fascinating to witness this full-circle activity play out so aggressively in glass pipes and bongs. In the '60s, there were very few creative flameworkers who attracted attention beyond selling giftware at vacation resorts. The two names that stood out at the time were Charles Kazian of Massachusetts, a scientific glassblower who resurrected antique French paperweight-making with flameworking techniques, and John Burton, a Californian metallurgist who developed techniques to make colored borosilicate glass. Both are credited with breakthroughs that opened doors for others. These two flameworkers gave me the idea of working independently in glass on the creative side. In fact, it was after watching John Burton's three part series, "Fires of Creation," produced in 1966 for public television, that I became committed to a career on the creative side.

If you look at modern flameworking as a tribal scenario, Kazian is at the beginning of the soda-lime glass lineage, and John Burton is at the beginning of the borosilicate lineage. My tribal affiliation would go to Kazian, while almost everyone else, with a few exceptions, in this survey who takes advantage of colored borosilicate could trace their roots to Burton. And, today, it would be nearly impossible to estimate the number of people flameworking borosilicate because of the nature of their product. I initiated this survey without realizing how broad and how deep is the borosilicate flameworking community. This is not an attempt to document the entirety of the movement; that will be the work of later

art historians. This is an overview of the diversity of the community.

The focus of this survey began as an overview of artists who predominantly use borosilicate clear and colored glass, which is, in itself, an unusual barrier to create. As it stands, the survey represents a peculiar mix of functional, vocational, and decorative skills. Less than a third of the artists/craftspeople in this survey are actively involved in pipes, and I feel self-conscious not focusing my attention on Ginny Ruffner, Jay Musler, Susan Plum, Matt Eskuke, Carmen Lozar, and Steven Sizelove, to name a few, although they represent excellence in the decorative and fine art realms. But because pipemaking is an area that I know little about and has fascinated me since my discovery of it, it seems to take the bulk of my attention in this article. The artists involved in pipemaking exist in a very esoteric world of function and decoration. There are even examples of genius. A few of the one-of-a-kind pipes demonstrate extremely high technical skill levels and amazing creativity.

Many in the glass community are beginning to feel the seismic tremors of this underground movement that is about to erupt onto the national craft scene. A growing number of glass artists are taking advantage of the flameworking process and exhibiting their work in fine art galleries around the world. These artists are the tip of an immensely larger iceberg of flameworkers who are working under the radar screen, producing street craft. This community, numbering in the thousands, shares a common commitment to melting borosilicate clear and colored glasses at the torch and lathe. At its core, there are artistic risktakers, searching for new ways to push the physical boundaries of this once-exclusively industrial material.

With the exception of Ginny Ruffner's and Jay Musler's borosilicate glass sculptures, it's fascinating to realize the material has very little history in the contemporary glass scene. Outside of the studio glass art world, the glass-pipe roots go back to Akron, Ohio. This underground glass movement goes back to scientific glassblowing and Grateful Dead concerts. In a conversation with Bob Snodgrass, the figurehead of the pipe movement, I learned about his friend, Chuck Murphy, who was trained in scientific glassblowing and showed Bob how to make glass pipes in 1971. It's interesting to be able to trace this multimillion dollar industry to a lampworking bench hooked up in the back of a refurbished bus that Bob and his wife Marie drove as they followed the band. In a conversation with Clinton Roman, another glass artist who started making pipes on the Deadhead trail, he said it wasn't unusual to be demonstrating flame-working hot glass in front of 300- plus people. He also attributes the demand for colored glass pipes to seeding the successful beginnings of the colored borosilicate glass industry.

People who follow the market put the numbers of lampworkers/flameworkers in the thousands, clustered in and around cities like Eugene, Seattle, Philadelphia, New York, Colorado, and Los Angeles. These tribe-like communities celebrate a loose manifesto with a strong sense of unity nationally. For many, the attraction is the lure of money in the economically successful pipe market and, in the beginning, the element of risk and danger associated with balancing hot glass in the torch while connecting with the creative spirit. The glass pipe symbolizes independence and an alternative lifestyle. With little effort, these young people are able to connect to others with the same interest through the Internet with the help of social networking sites, as well as DVDs, books, and regional shows or gatherings.

If you study the history of glass and see how borosilicate interprets works from the past, created in soft glasses, the borosilicate imitation looks clumsy by comparison. This happens because the working characteristics of borosilicate glass don't respond like the soft glasses. But, when an original body of work is created with borosilicate glass, then the history of glass has expanded. This is one of the reasons

the glass pipes are so interesting: there's never been anything like them.

These skilled glass crafters are opening a new chapter in our American glass heritage. As energy costs continue to climb, it's easy to predict that flameworked glass will eclipse the 30-year studio glass movement within a decade. The growth of creative people melting glass at the torch, and the introduction of the process into art schools offering BFA and MFA degrees, is leading to fresh artistic breakthroughs. The Eugene, Ore., tribe is leading the way, with its collective energy aggressively pushing glass flameworking boundaries. Technological developments in manufactured material, in tandem with innovative torch technology, are bringing greater artistic expectations that are pushing new boundaries.

That success has produced a higher demand for a greater variety of clear and colored borosilicate glass rods and tubing, as well as a wider selection of hotter bench burners and specialty tools. The most complex and visually pleasing works of flameworked art and craft being made today have surpassed the past. Most of artists in this survey are actively pushing beyond function, and the best of them are making glass art significant in a fine art realm. People like Roger Parramore, Kathleen Eliot, Janice Miltenberger, Kevin O'Grady, and Timothy Lindemann are outdistancing the pipemakers with visual expressions in their art and, with the help



Early Paul Stankard Paperweight

of the marketing exposure they are getting from the galleries representing their work. The irony is that these gallery-represented artists are attracting attention and owe a debt to the pipemakers who have facilitated advances in borosilicate colored glasses and technology.

Unlike the early days of the Studio Glass Movement, when the motive to express one's creative energy was mostly driven by a need to express ideas in new forms, the pipemakers are searching for a decorative style to attract the new breed of pipe collectors in the marketplace.

What was once a timid and publicity-shy artistic glass community is now growing eager to be seen in a glass art context, with the best of them going public with their individual efforts. Evidence of this is seen in the increased number of websites, DVDs, books, and galleries documenting one-of-kind pipes. Among the top artists, there is an interest in being shown with other glass artists who are represented and exhibit in galleries across the country. This need has nourished glass artwork by artists like Matt Eskuke, Steve Sizelove, Clinton Roman, Rex Trimm, Gateson Recko, Julie Riggs, Matthew Stroven, and Darby Holm, who are moving from functional art to more creative efforts.

It takes years to climb onto the artistic maturity platform and call out with clarity. That's not to say anyone is listening, but at least you're expressing things that are important to you. For me, it's about knowing what is considered excellent by history's standards and competing with those virtues from the past. Ultimately, it's about expressing human emotions—in my case, layered onto a glass object. The message to my students is to seek out excellence in all its forms; when you recognized it, you'll be able to internalize the experience in your own work.

I wish I could tell you that becoming a respected artist craftsperson was an easy road. It isn't, and there are no rules. Each maker has to find their own way. At this stage of my career, it's an honor to share my experiences with you. If it comes down to one person finding any of my words helpful, then I'm leaving something behind.