



Glass Alliance of Northern California
www.glancinfo.org

A GLANCE AT GLASS Winter 2011

Message from the President

I came across an old set of notes from a 1997 lecture at the Glass Art Society conference in Corning, NY. The line that jumped out at me read "collectors collect artists, not art." I don't know the name of the speaker uttering those words, but it made me think about my interactions with collectors and artists since '97. The statement is not an absolute, it does contain a huge amount of truth. When describing a piece of art, most collectors start with the name of the artist. Often it will bring to mind a particular style, so it is a shorthand description. But if the listener is not familiar with the artist, the name is still right at the beginning of the description, like the list of ingredients on a package in order of importance.

When artists collect, frequently work of friends grace their homes. Aesthetic sensibility is important, but looking at something made by a friend whom they like and respect adds value to any piece. And this is basically the same throughout the collecting community. If you know the artist, or have met the artist, the piece has a much larger context; there is a back story attached to the work.

And of course, that statement made me think about the function of GLANC. The importance of connecting collectors to artists has never been clearer. In our commitment to bring artists and collectors together we are sponsoring a series of visiting artists for lectures, demos, and just conversation. 2011 looks to be an exciting year of bringing artists to the Bay Area. In cooperation with BAGI, Jenny Polman and Sabrina Knowles demonstrated and spoke to the public Sunday, 2/20. Other artists scheduled through a GLANC/BAGI collaboration in 2011 are the team of Charlie Lowery and Michael Menconi, Ethan Stern, Fritz Dreisbach, and Hiroshi Yamano. Please watch for these announcements, come to the events, and meet the artists.

Susan Longini

Welcome New Members

[Nancy Ruskin]

A warm welcome to our new member,
John Williams

The **Glass Alliance of Northern California** is a non-profit organization whose mission is to further the development and appreciation of art made from glass.

www.GLANCinfo.org info@glancinfo.org

Water and Fire, A Love Story

An interview with Paul DeSomma and Marsha Blaker

[Shirley Roberts]

Marsha Blaker and Paul DeSomma have been married for over twenty years. Both have an impressive reputation in the world of art.



Their passion and respect for their profession and for each other was evident when recently I met with them in their Santa Cruz studio. They are quick to give each other credit for the other's ideas and creations. They have become a team. Marsha's expertise is conceptualizing how to transform glass into images of sea life and nature. Paul's expertise is executing those unique ideas directly from the furnace. Out of fire, they create fabulous art that mimic flora, fauna, and creatures from the sea. On a personal note, the "water and fire" moniker goes deeper. I'll explain later.



Marsha DeSomma earned masters degrees in ceramics and in glass from San Francisco State University. In the 70's Marsha became the first female glass teaching assistant at SFSU where she worked with Paul Marioni (Dante's father). In 1977, Blaker attended the Pilchuck Glass School in Washington State as a scholarship student. In 1989, she returned to Pilchuck as a staff member. Also, she taught at Cabrillo Junior College, Santa Cruz, California where she has a devoted following.

Paul received a bachelor's degree in Hotel Management. However, soon after graduation he decided that glass was his passion. Paul worked in a number of studios including New York's Urban Glass, an experimental glass work shop. He also blew glass at Ohio University and in Murano, Italy. By 1989, he was Pilchuck's Master Craftsman-in-Residence. Pilchuck provided Paul with the opportunity to work with some of the most respected glass artists, such as Flora Mace, Joey Kilpatrick, Dale Chihuly, Lino Tagliapietra, William Morris, and Pino Signoretto. Maestro Pino

Signoretto is one of DeSomma's most influential mentors. Pino guided Paul's technical approach and influenced his sculptural aesthetic. Pino taught Paul to "come up with whatever is necessary to get the job done." Paul used these skills to succeed in establishing their shop in Santa Cruz.

Santa Cruz is where Blaker and DeSomma live and work. In 1989, Paul and Marsha fell in love when she returned to Pilchuck as a staff member. Paul took notice as she stepped out of the van. He remembers "how cute she looked in her hat." Later that evening, Paul introduced himself; meanwhile, Marsha thought "Blaker-DeSomma sounded like a wonderful name." They were engaged in 1990 and were married in 1991. In 1996, they both traveled to Venice with Dale Chihuly to work on the well-documented Venice Project which consisted of fourteen massive glass-blown chandeliers hung over the canals of Venice.

Paul and Marsha worked separately until she was involved in a serious car accident in 2002. When Marsha recovered, they decided to merge their skills and techniques. Each brings their own aesthetics to their joint creations. Marsha has always had a bent for detail, texture, twists, and colors. Her inspiration comes from nature. Paul goes for the big form concept. His large forms have subtle detail. What glass is or does optically is Paul's primary inspiration.

Soon after Marsha's recovery from the auto accident, the two were invited to be artists in residence at Tacoma. Together they used teamwork and balance to enlarge and to add more detail to their sea creations.



Blaker/DeSomma's first collaborative art forms were the "Waves." To give the Waves depth, the couple create many layers of color. The Waves have been popular throughout the U.S., especially in Hawaii. However, this is only one of many Blaker/DeSomma creations. Others water themes include sea urchins and octopi.

Occasionally, DeSomma and Blaker enjoy going back to their individual art techniques. Paul's spare time involves the creation of very large optical orbs with subtle black or clear designs. The orbs are placed in metal stands. One of Marsha's signature pieces are blown vases encased in color, then immediately plunged into water to create patterns.

Blaker/DeSomma sculptures are shown all over the country from Florida to Hawaii. In addition Vietre distributes many of Paul's figurative works to stores, such as Neiman Marcus.

Blaker/DeSomma art is tranquil, detailed, and beautifully executed. I think their work is simply beautiful. Elton John must think so as well because he purchased one of their sculptures.



Now for the double meaning of "water and fire" for Paul and Marsha. It turns out that Paul is a Sagittarius (the star sign for fire) while Marsha Blaker is a Cancer (the sign for water). Since fire and water is so important in their work, how fitting that the couple met under the stars at Pilchuck.

Martin Janecky at BAGI

[Linda Goldstein]

On October 28-30, Martin Janecky came to BAGI to teach a master class in glass sculpting, and then on October 31st, he did a free demonstration for the public, showing us his amazing process of sculpting figures out of glass. His appearance was sponsored in part by GLANC. Martin is from the Czech Republic, and has been blowing glass since the age of thirteen. He now does most of his work in Alaska, where the weather is very conducive to glass blowing. He is young with enormous potential, and is one of the major up and coming artists in the world of glass today.



About 150 people were able to experience his remarkable process of sculpting molten glass into a figure, much like the first set of figures shown on his web site (www.martinjanecky.com). In fact, if you would like to see the finished product, it will be in the BAGI auction which will be held on March 26th at the Palo Alto JCC. That Halloween Sunday afternoon was one to remember.

Vladimira Klumpar

[Allison Aldrich]

On November 9th GLANC members and BAGI patrons were treated to an intimate lecture by Vladimira Klumpar at Allison and Steven Aldrich's home. We enjoyed wine and cheese and casual conversation with Ms. Klumpar prior to her talk and had a question and answer session afterward. Ms. Klumpar was born in 1954 in the Czech Republic. She began her studies at The Specialized School of Glassmaking in Zelezny Brod (1969-1973), and then she continued at The Academy of Arts, Architecture, and Design in Prague (1974-1981) where she studied with Stanislav Libensky. She later moved to Massachusetts, and she now divides her time between Mexico and the Czech Republic - while continually visiting other parts of the world as well.



When in Mexico she is inspired by natural forms and colors and makes smaller pieces, prototypes, and maquettes. When in the Czech Republic she creates her full scale works. Recently she had been using textures – adding a new dimension in her work. Light, form, color, and nature inform her pieces –she transforms the simple and basic into the extraordinary and monumental.

GLANC Tour to Scottsdale

[Susan Longini]

The GLANC tour to Scottsdale, October 21-24, 2010, was a feast of art, cuisine, and friendship. Upon arrival, 24 travelers gathered and made our way to the main street of Old Town Scottsdale, abundant with galleries and restaurants. We visited several galleries that focused on glass. Carole Perry, our wonderful on-ground coordinator, artist and Arizona Glass Alliance member, demonstrated her building process to create richly textured and nuanced stringer “blanket” sculptures at Duley-Jones Gallery. The evening ended with a feast at a nearby Thai restaurant.



David Bennett speaking to GLANC members

We started Friday with a visit to Agnese Udinotti and the Agnese Udinotti Museum of Figurative Art. Set on several acres, this complex houses her private studio, guest house for visiting artists and impressive private museum dedicated to showcasing emerging and mid-career Arizona artists working figuratively. The architecture of the buildings was stunning southwest contemporary. Holding her miniature poodle as she shared her thoughts and spaces with us, Agnese explained her commitment to figurative work both as an artist and gallerist in the face of the abstract movement that dominated painting for several decades. She explained that she designed her windowless, white cube studio in order to focus on her work, while the connecting guest house has sweeping views of the desert. The museum itself was built below ground level, a cement and core-10 steel cube half buried in the earth so as not to obscure the guest house

views. She has a stunning collection of figurative work from ancient Greece, Asia, and tribal Africa permanently on view.

We next visited artist Susan Silver Brown in her Frank Lloyd Wright home filled with monumental Oceanic art, which she acquired in her previous career as an art historian focusing on Oceania and Africa. These powerful pieces also influence her beautiful “mystical surreal” cast glass works. Though her casting studio is off-site, we were fortunate to see a large body of work which that afternoon was to be packed for transport to SOFA Chicago.

Our itinerary then took us to the Phoenix Art Museum. In 2006, a 40,000 square foot contemporary art wing was added to the museum that houses a cutting-edge collection of installation art. We toured computer-generated digital installations, multi-media spaces, and glowing colored voids. The line between “reality” and “virtual” disappeared and it became clear that Phoenix is committed to the future of art.



Preston Singletary addressing GLANC and AZ Glass Alliance

Preston Singletary flew in from Seattle to provide the highlight of the day and the tour. He led us through his major retrospective at the Heard Museum. The meticulously executed glass pieces ranged from his iconic *Raven Stealing the Sun* to full size facades for traditional Tlingit buildings. Each work represents a story from his Tlingit tribe, reinterpreting traditional art in a contemporary medium. He charmed us with his stories of first blowing glass as a teen with best friend Dante Marioni at the Glass Eye Studio, one of the earliest commercial hot shops, then working for master

artist Ben Moore and assisting Therman Statom and Lino Tagliapietra at Pilchuck. He currently works with other indigenous artists from around the world to interpret their tribal stories. In the evening Preston, GLANC and the Arizona Glass Alliance feasted at the University Club across from the Heard.



Raven Stealing the Sun

Saturday was “collectors day”. Our first stop, at the home of David and Sara Lieberman, was a wealth of contemporary baskets and ceramics, 70 of which had just returned from a 3 year national traveling show. What struck us, in addition to the beauty of the work, was Sara’s impressive knowledge of each artist and work collected.

The next 4 collections were glass. Fred and Sharon Schomer’s extensive collection included large, fabulous works by Karen LaMonte, Vladimira Klumpar, April Surgent, Therman Statom and Rick Beck, among others. They had graciously labeled all the work so we could each tour the collection at our own pace, but also told engaging stories regarding the various pieces. Ted and Melissa Lagreid had a smaller collection of choice pieces including some by Preston Singletary, Tammy Garcia and Laura Donefer.



Sara Lieberman speaking to GLANC members

They see their collection as an opportunity to broaden their selected artists' exposure and have developed a personal relationship with each artist represented. Leigh and Beryl Sherman designed their home to hold their collections of painting, glass and wood, including Leigh's own turned bowls. From a Bertil Vallien *Head* to a Tessa Clegg *Box Vessel*, work by Brent Kee Young, Ivana Sramkova, Therman Statom and more, all were carefully displayed to showcase their extraordinary beauty. They also had an impressive collection of American handcrafted furniture, and they had placed their fossil collection in the poured concrete floors. Jeffrey and Allison Glosser's eclectic collection of glass, painting, porcelain, and wood reflects their exuberant personalities. They collected several artists in some depth, including Therman Statom, and Jay Musler, but also proudly displayed a piece by Ted Lagreid. Their Scottsdale home also included collections of wood – 3 generations of the wood-turning Mouthrop family were represented – as well as paintings, and 19th century German porcelain plates. All of the homes included metal figurative sculptures by Agnese Udinotti.

We watched the sunset over wine and hors d'oeuvres at the winter home of David and Karen Bennett. A successful lawyer, David became enthralled by the glass process in the early '90s. He took lessons at a private glass studio, at Pilchuck, and spent four months observing glass masters in Italy. In 1996, following his personal philosophy to "take bold steps" he left the legal profession and committed himself to glass full time. His glass and wire acrobats are now expanding to installations

with multiple figures who interact with trust, strength, and grace.

Sunday morning Wayne and Martha Ecton welcomed us to their condo. They unabashedly announced that they subscribe to "the cult of the beautiful" with really lovely works by a wide range of artists, including Mark Abildgaard, Tom Philabaum, and Bertil Vallien, as well as a large collection of premier paperweights. Our final glass stop was at the Tempe Art Center, where we were given a pre-opening tour of their 3rd Glass Biennial. Arizona artists either working in glass or inspired by glass had submitted a wide range of work covering the spectrum of techniques and subject matter. The center also has a children's theater and hosts corporate and private events, all contributing to gallery attendance.



*GLANC members visit
Fred and Sharon Schomer's collection*

The farewell lunch was at Hotel Theodore, an art hotel with quirky spaces, major art installations and delicious food. Our 72 hours in Scottsdale was a whirlwind. We made new friends, experienced the unique Scottsdale culture, and saw a wonderful range of art, all in a perfect desert setting.

Calendar of Events

EVENTS

BAGI 2011 Great Glass Auction

Palo Alto JCC, March 26.

www.bagi.org

Tucson Glass Festival

April 8, 9, 10.

[Sonoran Glass Art Academy](http://www.sonoranartacademy.com) , or 520-884-7814.

SOFA New York

April 14-17.

www.sofaexpo.com

Habatat Galleries

39th Annual International Invitational Glass Exhibition

April 28-30

www.habatat.com

Glass Art Society

41st Annual Conference

Seattle, WA, June 1-5

www.glassart.org

EXHIBITIONS

Micaela Gallery

49 Geary #235, San Francisco:

Project 2:2011 March 3-30:

Longini, Levinson, Lipofsky, Musler, Feldman, Rainey.

www.micaela.com

Bullseye Gallery

February 2-April 9

InForm, 6 recent graduates of art programs in Chicago, Canberra London.

www.bullseyegallery.com

Imago Galleries

Palm Desert, January –March

LaMonte and Wegman, www.imagogalleries.com

CLASSES

Bay Area Glass Institute: www.bagi.org

Ohlone College: www.ohlone.edu

Public Glass: www.publicglass.org

The Crucible: www.thecrucible.org

San Jose state University: <http://ad.sjsu.edu/glass/>

GLANC Newsletter Staff:

Editor: Susan Longini

Formatting: Lisa Stambaugh

Contributors to this Issue:

Shirley Roberts, Linda Goldstein, Susan Longini,
Allison Aldrich, Nancy Ruskin