

Jeremy Grant-Levine checking a mini installation of 1,000 glass cranes at the Divine Lorraine Hotel in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2016.



Jeremy Grant-Levine Germ's 1,000 Cranes Project

by Shawn Waggoner

Photography by Jeff DiMarco

According to Japanese tradition, anyone with the patience and commitment to fold 1,000 paper cranes will be granted their most desired wish, because they have exhibited the crane's loyalty and recreated its beauty. Backed by a successful \$92 thousand Kickstarter campaign, Jeremy Grant-Levine, aka Germ, will flamework 1,000 glass cranes in a year's time. Exploring one large idea requires the artist to focus on the moment rather than the future. "It's a step back from feeding a commodity market for a year to focus on one thing rather than what's next."

Based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Germ has been flameworking glass pipes for over 13 years, earning a reputation as one of the most technical and innovative makers in the industry. Mixing classical shapes and modern silhouettes, he transforms functional glass into sculpture that has been exhibited at galleries in Philadelphia as well as Seattle, Washington; New York, New York; Miami, Florida; and Tel Aviv, Israel. Germ has also taught workshops and collaborated with other artists worldwide.

His 1,000 Cranes project represents more of a fine art move for the veteran functional glass artist, whose smokable pieces typically sell for thousands of dollars. This, the largest project Germ has undertaken to date, will require up to 250 pounds of glass for flameworking and approximately two miles of wire for display, totaling \$20,000 in materials.

As Germ works solo making the cranes, his focus remains on this singular artwork rather than the many individualized pieces he typically creates when making pipes. Though he misses the personal aspects and relationships involved with functional glass, the 1,000 Cranes project offers Germ the chance to achieve larger-scale impact. Upon completion, his work will be displayed in an immersive installation in conjunction with Arch Enemy Arts gallery in Philadelphia.

Germ, Medici, 2016.

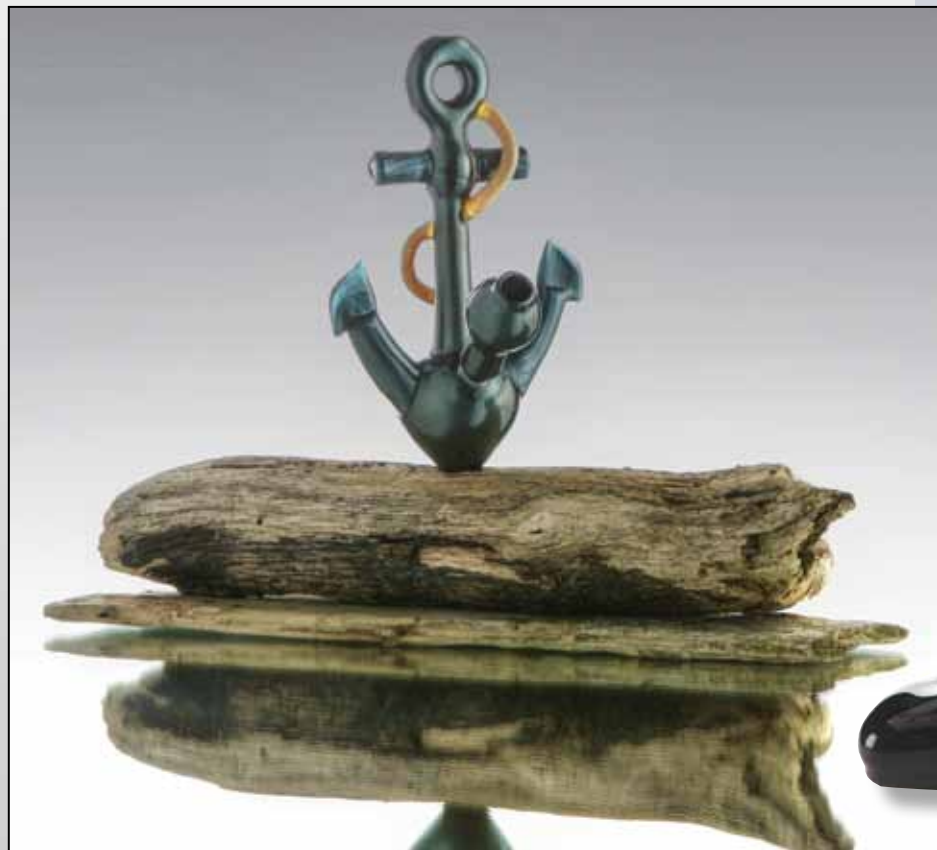
The Science of Doing What You Love

Both of Grant-Levine's parents are artists who have worked in many mediums, glass excluded. The artist's early exposure to art, along with the first pipe he bought in high school, inspired his dream of becoming a glass pipe maker. As a teenager, Grant-Levine enrolled in a glassblowing class at a community art center in Connecticut only to realize that's not how you make pipes. Eventually he met a pipe maker at a music festival and discovered Salem Community College (SCC) and its glass program.

At the end of 2002, Grant-Levine enrolled in the scientific glass program there. Because it was almost taboo to discuss pipe making at SCC at the time, he learned nearly all of his functional glass skills outside of the classroom from his community of fellow students, including an artist named Spandex who was instrumental in teaching others.

Following graduation, Grant-Levine worked temporarily in scientific glass at three different factories. But after an eight-hour shift at a factory, it was challenging to go home and want to make pipes. Eventually he began an education of a different sort, primarily traveling the West Coast with his friend JD Maplesden and learning from the nation's top pipe makers. At the end of their journey, Grant-Levine ended up living in the back room of Maplesden's Spokane, Washington, studio for a few months. "This was an intense studio time. I didn't have a car, didn't know anyone outside of the studio, lived in the studio, and flameworked glass 16 hours a day."

Luckily for Grant-Levine, he ultimately landed in the vibrant, artistically driven pipe making community of Philly. There he found mentors in functional glass heroes JOP (Josh Opdenaker), JAG (Nate Purcell), and Zach Puchowitz, amazing examples for all the younger guys following in their footsteps. He also looked up to Marbleslinger, whom Germ considers to be his main mentor in the game at that point. In 2009, Grant-Levine opened a studio, Future Labs, with contemporaries Elbo and Coyle. When Elbo and Coyle moved to Massachusetts, Grant-Levine moved into Marbleslinger's studio. "It's been the most amazing experience for me, being able to work with a guy like that every day."



Germ, Anchor from the Smoke on the Water series, 2015.

*Germ and Tyme collab,
Beasts of Big Business, 2015.*



*Germ,
Montage Mini Tubes,
2015.*

At the time Grant-Levine started his pipe making career, the aesthetics of pipe making were limited. His initial goal was to learn how to create the popular pattern work of the day. “Early on, the skill and knowledge were not there. It was challenging to have a vision for something more grand, but as time progressed people were constantly breaking the rules of what boro can do and redefining the material. It was cool to unlearn all the things that I learned about boro’s limitations and develop my own personal aesthetic.”

The alias “Germ” was the initial invention of childhood peers being unable to pronounce Jeremy, a shortcoming that irked Grant-Levine at the time. When looking for a moniker for his glasswork that would enable him to stay anonymous during Operation Pipe Dreams, the artist reclaimed his childhood nickname. “It was a beautiful consequence of the fear of putting our real names on our work that we ended up with these recognizable, marketable brand names that helped functional glass become the successful industry it is today.”

The Germ Style of Versatility

Germ glass might best be described by the adage, “Nothing stays the same except the changes.” Always in flux, Grant-Levine’s work could focus on the sea and his New England upbringing through *Smoke on the Water* in 2015. The next body of work would reference Eastern spiritual practices and communal ritual through *Tools for Enlightenment* in 2016. *Bent Necks*, *Whimsies*, and his sculptural *Rabbi Pipes* comprise a varied line designed to keep things interesting for himself and his audience. He won second place at the 2013 Corning Museum of Glass FlameOff with a functional sculpted *Rabbi* piece. Collectors can always expect something innovative and unique from Germ glass.



*Dybukk collab with
Vorhees and Ebz,
2014.*



*Germ and Marbleslinger collab,
William S Berg, 2014.*



Germ and Trevy Metal collab, Tools for Enlightenment number 1, 2016.

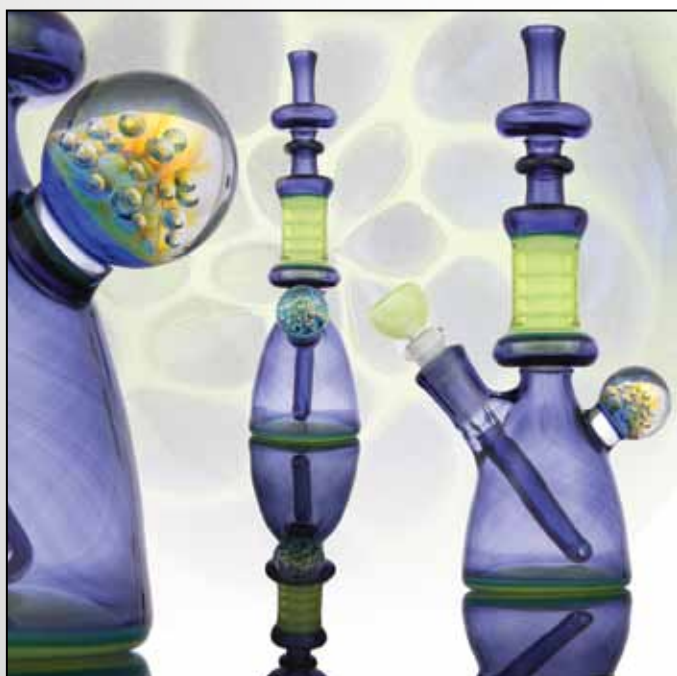
For many years Grant-Levine has experimented with the traditional German flameworking technique of montage. Inspired by German soft glass artists Thomas Müller-Litz and Kurt Wallstab, Grant-Levine has mastered the techniques he describes as “controlled chaos.” Montage requires the combination of many small sections of color into a retro/future/abstract free-flowing pattern.

“I had a great conversation with Robert Mickelsen last year. He told me that Frederick Birkhill came back from Lauscha in the late 1980s talking about montage and how it was impossible to do in boro. That’s what soft glass supposedly had over boro. Mickelsen said that he himself tried to do montage in boro and couldn’t, so he concluded that Birkhill was right, but years later I proved him wrong. That felt pretty good.”

Amazingly, Grant-Levine is colorblind and selects glass colors for his work based on contrast and opacity. “As long as there’s high contrast in the pattern, if I limit my palette to just a few colors I should be okay. If it looks right to me, hopefully it looks right to you. I run into issues with color when making my more realistic sculpted work. Then I rely upon input from my shop mates.”

From 2012 to 2015, Grant-Levine worked on his most successful body of work, the *Bent Neck* series. Frustrated with the aesthetic of mini tubes, where a straight beaker shape included a marble welded to the side of it, the artist set out to resolve the problem of the marble interrupting the flow of the piece. Instead of looking as if it were floating out in space, Grant-Levine fully incorporated the marble as part of the piece. “It also turned out that the bend in the neck worked really great functionally. “Function followed form in that case. But I have this problem where if anything is successful, I destroy it and move on to the next thing.”

Grant-Levine’s *Whimsies* began with traditional shapes and forms, which he transformed into his unique style. In response to online commentary about the functional glass community’s lack of history, the artist began his own research project to debunk the notion that pipe making is “the bastard stepchild of the Studio Glass movement.” He discovered *Whimsies*, glass top hats and canes made for fun at the end of the day by glass factory workers in the 1800s.



Germ, Optic Mini Tube, 2016.

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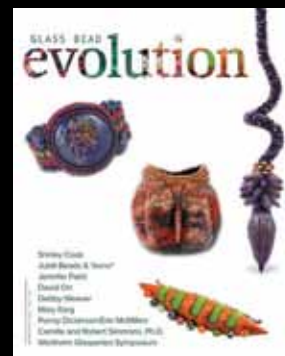
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Amongst all the *Whimsies* was a large number of giant soft glass pipes. “Here are these guys who had this hard job in a factory over 100 years before the Studio Glass movement, and what do they decide to make in their free time? Pipes. When I thought about what all of the items they were making had in common, they were symbols of luxury, of freedom, of free time, all of which were nonexistent for factory workers in the 1800s. I saw *Whimsies* as bold statements of individuality, which is exactly what glass pipes are today.”

Germ Glass Senbazuru

Senbazuru is a group of 1,000 origami paper cranes, or *orizuru*, held together by strings. Ancient Japanese legend promises that anyone who folds a thousand origami cranes will be granted a wish by the gods. Some stories believe you are granted happiness and eternal good luck instead of just one wish, such as long life or recovery from illness or injury. The crane in Japan is one of the mystical or holy creatures said to live for 1,000 years. That is why 1,000 cranes are made, one for each year. In some stories it is believed that the 1,000 cranes must be completed within one year, and they must all be made by that one person to make the wish come true.

Sometime last year, frustrated with the state of his career and personal life, Grant-Levine didn’t know what to do with himself, so he started folding origami. He eventually transitioned from a 3-D paper model to a line drawing, then to a 3-D rendering of a crane created with glass rods. He posted an image of the piece on Instagram, and a follower jokingly commented, “Are you going to make 999 more of those?” Grant-Levine thought, “Yeah, maybe I will.”

With the assistance of his best friend Cat Walshak, Grant-Levine spent three months preparing a crowd funding campaign via Kickstarter. In 45 days he raised \$92,000 for his 1,000 Cranes project. “For me as a pipe maker, I don’t know the first thing about getting grants. So I used my big social media following to my benefit and wrote my own grant through the community.”

Kickstarter backers were given a choice of rewards, the most popular being one of the 1,000 glass cranes. In February 2018, teaming with Arch Enemy Arts fine art gallery in Philadelphia, Grant-Levine will present a massive installation of the work. Cranes in a variety of hues will be suspended in a big fade of color going from light to dark. “That was the point from the beginning, to get them all hanging in one place. I love pipes, but I just wanted to do something bigger. A few years ago my dad worked on this giant two-story-tall stainless steel piece for a sculpture garden in Connecticut. This is my attempt to work on that scale.”

Listening to crass punk, hip-hop, or most likely Erykah Badu, Grant-Levine creates glass cranes in the torch. All of the cranes are handmade without jigs. Finished work is stored in Grant-Levine’s office on a random assortment of free Craig’s List shelving units.

The artist is currently midway through the 1,000 cranes needed to accomplish his goal and allow him to make his wish. “It’s a new freedom I didn’t think I was going to find. Every day I come into my studio and know exactly what I need to do. Usually the struggle for an artist is what can I make? What do I *want* to make, what can I sell, and where is the intersection of all three? In this weird way, I don’t have to worry about that right now. I’ve completed over 500 cranes, and I’m still feeling it.”



Germ, Kartika (Tools for Enlightenment), 2016.

In reflecting on his journey through functional glass, Grant-Levine feels satisfied and justified. Every day that he gets to watch his peers break the rules of boro is a good day. "People are creating objects that push what was originally just an industrial material past its limits. Color companies are creating a wider palette for us. Tools and torches are being innovated because of our community. This whole industry has been built around supporting this artwork."

It's overwhelming to think about the strides functional glass artists have made over the last decade and will continue to make as marijuana laws loosen and social attitudes relax. "I'm so pleased to see where it's heading, but time doesn't slow down enough to truly reflect on it. At this point, the forward momentum is such that you almost take it for granted."

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Visit www.1000glasscranes.com for more information, to reserve a crane, or to contribute to the project.

Jeremy Grant-Levine was recently a guest on Glass Art magazine's Talking Out Your Glass podcast. Subscribe on iTunes or Stitcher to hear this and many more fascinating interviews with glass artists by visiting the "Talking Out Your Glass Podcast" link under "What's New" at www.glassartmagazine.com.

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*Germ,
Montage Bubbler,
2014.*

