

RAGSfest 2015

by Stan Price

RAGSfest, the annual gathering of the members of the Retailers of Art Glass Supplies (RAGS), met in San Antonio, Texas, at The Stained Glass Crafters Workbench, June 24–30, 2015. Margie Bolton of Margie's Art Glass was the chairman for the event, which involved over 40 people from around the United States. It is hard to imagine any gathering for art glass store owners that is any more educational and productive than this one.

Finding the Fun in Learning

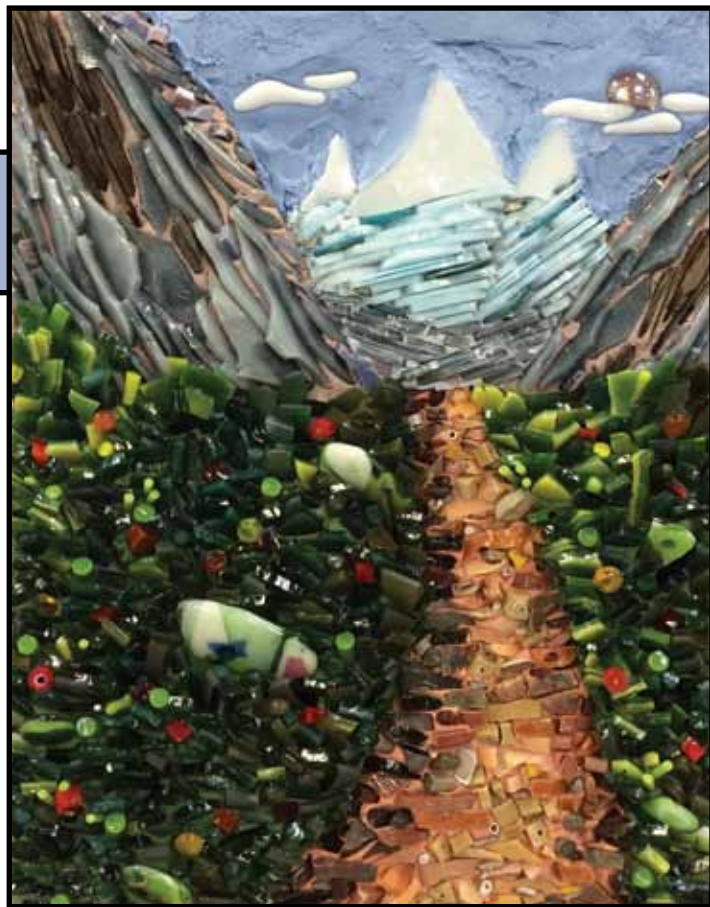
As retailers, we find ourselves offering entertainment alongside traditional art glass classes. Our workshops must not only educate but also inspire our customers in new and fun ways. Appealing to a wider audience has helped us become more successful in recent challenging times. Changes in the construction industry and the challenges it faces have impacted the commission side of many retail studios as well, so creating new sources of income and creative marketing is essential.

At this year's RAGSfest, at least three different classes were offered each day, most of which were taught by our members. I shared the Fused Painting Techniques plus Design & Color Theory classes I teach at my store, Covenant Art Glass. Others included:

- Edge Up projects and Understanding Your Kiln classes with Sharon Carothers, Prism GlassWorks
- Fused jellyfish and tree classes with Kristen Karlin, Allen Kenoyer Stained Glass
- Techniques for making fused glass display stands with Ann Opshal, Stained Glass Crafters Workbench
- Demystifying reactive glass processes with Jesse Baines, Rainbow Artistic Glass
- Unique Sheets, a class on creating fusing components with Joyce Sullivan, Harmony Stained Glass

Unique Techniques

Four vitrograph kilns were supplied by Olympic Kilns, and Denny Berkery from The Vinery led us on a vitrigraph and twisty journey. Zoi Sandy from Glass Endeavors shared a series of fused powder wafer techniques that add another dimension to glass art projects. Joanna Vitale from Art Glass Connection offered many techniques, showcasing new products in her "Working Outside the Box" fusing class, including transferring images and words onto glass. National Guest instructor Gil Reynolds' Fuse Master class, "Five New Directions in Kiln Formed Glass," was inspiring to all.



Katie Hainstein of Rainbow Vision Stained Glass, Pass through the Andes (detail), 9" x 12", 2015. Created during a two-day mosaic class with instructor Laura Rendlen.

Jim Berry of Blue Moon Glassworks taught us how to blow Glaskolbens. He attracts approximately 200 people into his store each year with these ornaments. Bolton helped us widen our horizons by discussing other class offerings involving a variety of mediums in addition to glass.

Mosaics seem to be making a comeback, and several sessions were led by National Guest instructors Laura Rendlen and Dianne Sonnenberg, both mosaicists. Rendlen had students make some stellar landscapes with a variety of materials combined with glass, and Sonnenberg shared how to set up a successful mosaic program. Joyce Sullivan also did a great class creating a teacup mosaic planter. No Days adhesive was used, so they were able to grout the same day. All and all, this was a very comprehensive lineup of classes.

Sandy also organized an afternoon vendor show for our members, who are extremely thankful to the companies that support our event each year. Face-to-face time with the representatives of the products we sell allows us to serve our customers with a new level of excellence. A big thank-you to the following vendors who joined us in San Antonio: Colors for Earth; Creative Paradise, Inc.; Glass Accessories, International; Glassic Arts; Handy Hanger; Hoevel Manufacturing; Mayco Color; Olympic Kilns; Paragon Kilns; and Spectrum Glass Company. Additionally there were close to 40 vendors represented by products they donated for our classes and auction or as samples to take back to our stores. A heartfelt thank-you from all the RAGS members.

Annual Offerings

An annual educational highlight of the week is an evening gathering, Workshop Wonders, organized by Vitale. Member stores are invited to bring information and samples of a workshop they offer at their stores that has been particularly popular and successful. Everyone in attendance plus members who aren't able to attend have access to the written material and images to prepare them to teach a similar workshop. One idea like this shared several years ago has literally brought thousands of dollars into the shops that started offering it. Some say that Workshop Wonders alone is worth the price of admission.

A silent auction and dinner are also part of our events each year, with the money raised helping fund future RAGS gatherings. Kathy Truba from Glassic Arts championed all the auction details. Members as well as vendors donate items for this action packed evening. This year we had more than 70 items ranging from glass and solder to stunning jewelry and art pieces created by many of the talented artists in our group.

RAGSfest Wrap-up

Several of our members run stores alone or with a very small staff. They have found the information gained at RAGSfest so financially impacting that they choose to close their store for a week in order to be part of the event every year. That is a strong statement of value.

There are so many "best parts" of RAGSfest each year, but getting a feel for the local culture is always a highlight. This year, our hosts Dianne and Roy Reina did not disappoint. We were fed some of the best BBQ and Mexican fare ever. There was the amazing riverboat dinner cruise along the famous river walk in downtown San Antonio. One day Dianne treated us to a piñata at lunch filled with favorite candies from around the United States. Then there was the totally entertaining confetti egg fight—the eggs are called cascarones, a tradition at fiesta time—which left all of us with confetti in places we won't talk about and was great comic relief after days of intense learning.

RAGSfest is the best blend ever of professional enrichment, moral support, education, relationship building, and overall fun for all of us who work hard to delight our world with glass on an everyday basis. Next year's event will be hosted by Denny Berkery, from The Vinery in Madison, Wisconsin. If you are a stained glass retailer, now is the time to join our organization so you can take part in our next RAGSfest.

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Visit www.stainedglassretailers.com for more information on becoming a RAGS member.



Attendees to RAGSfest in San Antonio, Texas.

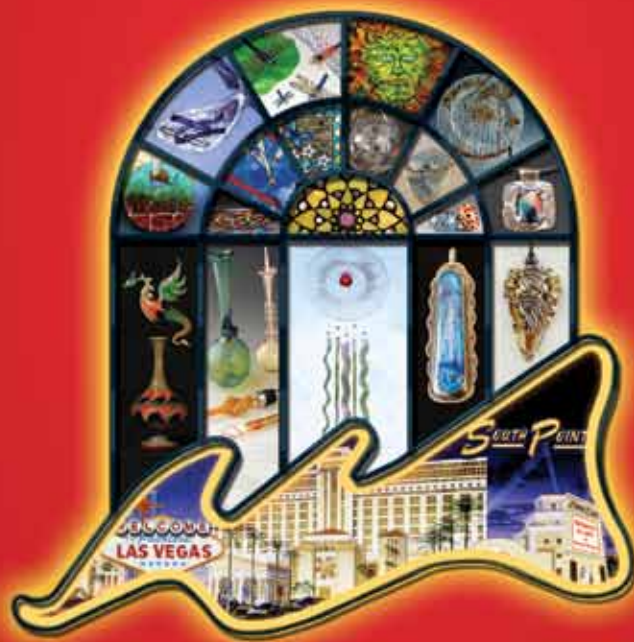
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