

# Glass Art Society's 46th Annual Conference



by Kristin Solomon

Photography by Heather Baigelman

The 46th annual conference of the Glass Art Society (GAS), *Reflections from the Edge: Glass, Art, and Performance*, was held June 1–3, 2017. Glass artists, collectors, students, and other industry professionals from all over the world flocked to Norfolk, Virginia, for the annual celebration of art made with glass. The attendees experienced technical glass demonstrations, lectures on science and art, and many more special events including several avant-garde glass performances.

GAS selected Norfolk and the Chrysler Museum of Art as the 2017 host because of the strengths of its renowned glass collection and its state-of-the-art Perry Glass Studio, which is growing a national reputation for its support of groundbreaking glass theatrics. Both the museum and the glass studio also serve as an anchor for Norfolk's blossoming arts district. New Energy of Norfolk (NEON), launched in the fall of 2015, invites visual, performing, culinary, and touring artists to transform several downtown blocks into a synergistic urban hub for creativity.

Norfolk marks the center of America's Eastern Seaboard, halfway between Maine and Florida. The first colonial glassmaking venture took place in Jamestown, a short drive away. Today, Jamestown's glass artists occasionally bring their old-world techniques into the Chrysler's modern studio, bridging the country's earliest functional glass objects with today's contemporary glass scene. Norfolk is pushing glass to the edge and is a wonderful reflection of the innovation happening in glass today.

## Opening Conference Ceremonies and Celebrations

On the afternoon of June 1, the Opening Ceremonies welcomed GAS attendees to the 2017 Conference and paid tribute to recent GAS award recipients. The GAS 2017 Lifetime Achievement Award recipient is the bold and beautiful mixed-media sculptress Joyce J. Scott. The GAS Lifetime Membership honoree for 2017 is neon artist extraordinaire Wayne Strattman.

New York-based conceptual artist Mark Dion gave the keynote address, *Adventures in the Culture of Nature*, showing his journey through his art. Guests then headed to the waterfront to board the historic *USS Wisconsin* for a lively reception and great company.



*Karen Willenbrink-Johnsen and her team creating a Leucistic Peacock.*

## Demos and Lec-Mos

Alongside the Perry Glass Studio was the new Corning Museum of Glass Hot Glass Roadshow, which debuted offering a larger and improved working experience for the artists. This year there was another separate off-site location. Known as the Three-Ring Circus, it was made up of three mobile glass furnaces for daytime demos and evening performances. The Commune NFK and Work | Release Gallery is a local Norfolk artist space that dedicated its venue to the conference frameworking demonstrations. We were able to see John Miller's team push the envelope to build a 4-foot clear goblet in the hot shop using parts made on the fly.

Grant Garmezy and his Richmond crew used their impeccable timing and team spirit to create a large lion sculpture. The lovely Karen Willenbrink-Johnsen and team brought to life a Leucistic Peacock, in full courtship display, with incredible detail and attitude.

Art met science in Wayne Strattman's lec-mo presentation, *Beyond Neon: Lit Glass Sculpture*. During his lecture he covered some basic theory and instruction on how to make lit glass sculpture using a kiln, a simple vacuum setup, and various gases.



Joyce J. Scott, GAS 2017 Lifetime Achievement Award winner.



The closing night party at the Chrysler Museum of Art.

## Lectures and Panels

This year's Labino Lecture, *Seeing Our History and Our Future With Glass: 4 Centuries of Mysteries*, was given by NASA's Dr. John Mather. He told the story of how glass in microscopes and telescopes opened our eyes and our feelings to the incomprehensible beauty of the cosmos and piqued the curiosity of what we might find with new equipment such as the James Webb Space Telescope.

Anna Mlasowsky shared the research she has been doing on the moldless *pâte de verre* technique, for which she received the 2014 TAG Grant. The lecture focused on technical details and the artistic challenges of this research project, and presented some of the results and current investigations.

The 2017 GAS Green Panel focused on organizations that are helping to facilitate social entrepreneurship and community engagement through their green glass studio practice. Panelists included Tracy Kirchmann as moderator, Rebecca Byer, and Timm Muth, who shared their own experiences creating energy from landfill gas, using waste stream recycled glass for cullet, and tapping alternative fuel sources for kilns and furnaces. They highlighted how these green ventures create vital engagement opportunities in their own communities while also supporting the arts, entrepreneurship, and education.

## Performances

Hannah Kirkpatrick mesmerized us at the Perry Glass Studio with her performance *From Pinhole to Pixel*. It incorporated different light sources (neon, molten glass, candles, and other materials) as a means of making a moving image through a camera obscura installation. We also celebrated an evening of magic with Eddie "The Great Flambeau" Bernard. He presented a unique set of effects and illusions with glass, fire, mystery, and audience participation in a magic show that could only have taken place in a hot glass studio.

This year the UNBREAKABLE student group from Chicago's South Side returned to the GAS conference with a multidisciplinary glass performance piece incorporating video, dance, music, and glass production to tell the story of their own lives, in their own words. The work focused on the best parts of their lives—education, people they love, art, and music. It also focused on the destructive forces that threaten their survival, including gun violence, institutional racism, and poverty.

## GAS Film Project Archive

Attendees left the conference feeling more motivated than ever! They were excited to head home to their studios, schools, and communities with fresh ideas for making works of glass art, disappointed only in the fact that they could not see more in such a short period of time. However, there's no need to lament. Whether you want to catch something you missed or relive all of your favorite highlights, we've got it covered.

Due to generous funding support, the wonder and excitement of GAS Conferences have been captured for posterity. GAS membership comes with an exclusive pass to gain access to the GAS Film Project, an incredible archive of videos from this year's conference and great moments from past conferences long ago. Of course, we will continue to build our library with many more amazing conferences to come.

## GAS 2018

The island of Murano, Italy, will host the 47th annual Glass Art Society conference. From May 16–19, 2018, *Il Percorso Di Vetro—The Glass Path* will lead attendees through the winding path of the island's remarkable history. At the same time, participants will be able to explore the future of glass and discover the hidden routes connecting the conference venues.

A selection of Murano's glass factories and studios will provide the Glass Art Society with the incredible opportunity to use these facilities for the conference. Attendees will also partake in highly anticipated GAS conference programs including glass demonstrations and lectures on inspiring glass topics. They will also enjoy special programming unique to Murano as they are surrounded by the beauty of the region of Venice. The trip to the Murano/Venice area will be the first time GAS has taken its annual conference outside of the United States since 2005, when it traveled to Adelaide, Australia.

The 2018 GAS Conference is sponsored in part by the Berengo Foundation and the artists of the Italian Steering Committee led by glass maestro, Lino Tagliapietra. "I am excited to have GAS in my native city of Murano, as it is a symbol of union between the two places that have allowed me to become the glassblower I am today," said Tagliapietra. "This conference will be a wonderful and historical event."



*The Hannah Kirkpatrick From Pin-hole to Pixel performance.*

You must be a current GAS member to register for and attend the conference. Registration opens in early December 2017 and is filled on a first come, first served basis. Be sure to register early to reserve your spot. Spaces are limited, and you won't want to miss out on this historic event!

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Visit [www.glassart.org](http://www.glassart.org) or e-mail [info@glassart.org](mailto:info@glassart.org) for more information on the Glass Art Society, its upcoming events, and how to become a member.

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