



# The Glass Art Society 2019 Lifetime Award Honorees

by Tess McShane

The Board of Directors of the Glass Art Society (GAS) is pleased to announce the 2019 Lifetime Award honorees. The 2019 awards will be presented at the opening ceremony of the organization's 48th Annual Conference, *Charting a Course: Visions in Glass*, March 28–30, 2019, in the burgeoning “Glass Coast” city of St. Petersburg, Florida.

Each year, GAS honors and acknowledges individuals who have made significant and outstanding contributions to the development of the glass arts worldwide. This year's honorees are Ginny Ruffner and Robert Mickelsen.

## Lifetime Artistic Achievement Award Ginny Ruffner, Seattle, Washington

Ginny Ruffner was born in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1952. Ruffner trained at the University of Georgia as a painter, graduating with honors and an MFA in painting. She has had 88 solo shows and several hundred group shows, and her work is in 55 permanent museum and public collections around the world. Seattle public art installations include a 30-foot-tall kinetic water feature downtown and a permanent installation in the Seattle Art Museum's Olympic Sculpture Park. Recent Augmented Reality projects include *Weston Riff* at Photo Center NW, *Branches* at Seattle International Film Festival, and *Poetic Hybrids* at Seattle Art Museum.

Ruffner has written two books and is the subject of an award winning, full-length documentary titled *A Not So Still Life, the Ginny Ruffner Story*. She has also lectured and taught extensively and has served as an artist-in-residence numerous times at schools and universities around the world. Widely considered a groundbreaker for women in glass, when asked how things have changed for women she said, “Just the fact that there are women working in glass is the biggest difference. It's not even considered unusual anymore.”

In the early 1980s when she moved to Seattle, the artist burst onto the glass art scene with her distinctive style of lampworking and sculpture—bold, colorful, bigger than life—just like her personality. Ruffner was at the top of her career when an automobile accident left her severely injured and in a coma for six weeks. Defying the odds, she fought to regain her ability to talk, walk, and work as an artist. In a true testament to her spirit, her creativity and artistic endeavors have only grown and expanded, and her brilliant mind continues to explore new ideas.

Since the 1990s, Ruffner has continued to thrive artistically, living and working out of her Ballard studio in Seattle—unassuming from the outside but astounding on the inside—where she is surrounded by her drawings, sculptures, and a beautiful hidden garden. She continues to make art that surprises, inspires, and adds beauty to the world around her, including large public works and a steady stream of exhibitions.



Ginny Ruffner, glass sculpture, painting, fiberglass, CGI, Augmented Reality app, invented taxonomy. The viewer's Augmented Reality experience, created when aiming their devices at glass tree rings of the Reforestation of the Imagination exhibition.



Ginny Ruffner.  
Photo by Mary Van Cline.

Ruffner's upcoming exhibition, *Reforestation of the Imagination (ROTI)* at the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum will run from June 28, 2019, through January 5, 2020. *ROTI* combines traditional sculpture with augmented reality (AR). By using technology to overlay digital information onto sculptural objects, two disparate environments are portrayed. Her drawings literally leap off of her glass sculptures into the air.

“My augmented reality work was initially inspired by the technology itself. But as glass artists know, making art requires the artist to go beyond the material. Augmented reality seemed to be the most appropriate medium to convey a sense of the magic of hope, which is the central focus of my latest work.”

No doubt, she will continue to do great things. After the announcement was made public, she posted on Instagram: “This doesn't mean I'm not going to achieve more. I'm just getting started. As Babe Ruth said, ‘You ain't seen nuttin' yet.’”

## Lifetime Membership Award Robert Mickelsen, Ocala, Florida

Robert Mickelsen was born in 1951 in Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and was raised in Honolulu, Hawaii. Although his formal education ended after one year of college, he apprenticed with a professional lampworker for a number of years and was inspired by Paul Stankard after taking his class. Mickelsen credits this experience with expanding his vision of what was possible when working with glass.

The artist is attracted to nontraditional techniques and forms, often using the “networking” technique, which results in light, low volume forms defined by intricate lattice and thin glass rods. The process is slow and meditative and not as immediate as blowing glass. His works can take days or weeks to complete.

In addition to making art, Mickelsen served on the board of GAS for six years as treasurer and vice-president. He has taught extensively at major glass schools including the Pilchuck Glass School, Penland School of Crafts, The Studio at The Corning Museum of Glass, UrbanGlass, and the Pittsburgh Glass Center. He has also filmed and produced two videos on his flameworking process and published numerous articles.

Mickelsen’s work is exhibited in many prominent galleries and collections including the Renwick Gallery of American Crafts at the Smithsonian Institution, The Corning Museum of Glass, the Toledo Museum of Art, the Museum of Arts and Design, the Carnegie Museum of Art, the Mint Museum, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Museum of America Glass at Wheaton Village. The artist continues to work in his Florida studio, pushing the boundaries of what he can achieve with glass.

## Encouraging Excellence in Glass

The Glass Art Society is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to encourage excellence, advance education, promote the appreciation and development of the glass arts, and support the worldwide community of artists working with glass. Registration is now open for the 2019 GAS Conference, *Charting a Course: Visions in Glass*, in St. Petersburg.

Visit [www.glassart.org](http://www.glassart.org) to find out more about becoming a GAS member and to register for the upcoming conference. You can also follow GAS on Instagram @glassartsociety and on Twitter at #gasstpete2019.

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*Ginny Ruffner and Robert Mickelsen were recently guests on Glass Art magazine’s Talking Out Your Glass podcast. Subscribe free on iTunes or Stitcher to hear these 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](http://www.glassartmagazine.com).*



*Robert Mickelsen.*



*Cosmic Rainbow Tactical, Robert Mickelsen and Patrick McDougal.*