

GAS 2019, a Growing Glass Community Exploring Glass Beyond Borders



Making glass at the Morean Arts Center Glass Studio and Hot Shop.

by Tess McShane

Each new year brings a new conference for the Glass Art Society (GAS). During March 28–30, 2019, our glass reunion will take place in St. Petersburg, Florida, a burgeoning city that is quickly gaining international recognition for its glass studios, galleries, and museums. This annual event is just one of the many benefits of a GAS membership, giving artists and glass enthusiasts from around the world a chance to come together and celebrate the possibilities of glass art.

Opening Doors

“Glass is an amazing subversive material that allows us to find a common connection through material and skill,” says Natali Rodrigues, president of the GAS Board of Directors. “It allows us to look beyond differences in language and culture and brings us together.” Many witnessed this at the “Il Percorso di Vetro, The Glass Path” conference on the beautiful island of Murano, Italy, in May 2018. This historic event literally opened doors to both people and places rarely seen by the general public. GAS members were given an unprecedented chance to watch demonstrations take place in some of the oldest glass furnaces in existence.

“Il Percorso di Vetro, The Glass Path” didn’t just open doors to people who came to Murano. It also opened doors for those who live and work on Murano by bringing a huge group of artists and new ideas to the island to share their processes and techniques. These kinds of personal connections matter, because there is so much we can learn from others. The only way to do that is to keep on opening doors to new people and places.

Exchanging Ideas, Expanding Knowledge, Exploring Possibilities

One of the primary goals of the Glass Art Society has always been to connect people in order to build a community of glass artists and enthusiasts focused on exchanging ideas, expanding their knowledge base, and exploring new possibilities. Since 1971, GAS has expanded both in membership and in opportunities. In our nearly 50-year history we have held conferences in more than 32 cities in seven countries. With each new conference and each new place, GAS continues to evolve.

The organization's website and the Internet are also helping GAS to spread the love of glass around the world. GAS currently has more than 16,000 Instagram followers and thousands more on Twitter and Facebook. At last count in 2018, there were roughly 380,000 visits and 1,834,000 hits to the Glass Art Society website. This virtual world allows GAS to reach more people, promote its member artists, and continue to help create a greater public awareness and appreciation of the glass arts. These tools are valuable resources for the glass community and GAS members.

Connecting with Innovative People and Places

The GAS Board of Directors has also grown over the years to include members from a number of different countries. Included are members from Japan, Germany, England, Italy, Australia, The Netherlands, Mexico, Canada, and more. In his GAS Membership Award speech in Murano, Durk Valkema, Dutch glass artist and previous GAS board member said, "Our only hope of truly understanding the importance of a place is to be there, to engage all of your senses, to smell it and hear it, to walk the streets, to talk to the people, to experience some of the culture and environment."

Moving forward, the GAS Board of Directors has identified expanding its reach as one of the organization's top priorities. As such, GAS is exploring ways to increase membership and engage artists in a more significant way beyond North America. GAS has formed an International Task Force to find ways to include artists in this conversation and expand its reach to places around the world. Although expanding internationally has its own obstacles and challenges, the GAS Board of Directors believes it is an important step in taking GAS to the next level of excellence, and they are committed to taking the time to get it right.

Proposing New Ideas

GAS is also launching a unique new prize, The Glass Art Society International Artist Prize, in partnership with the British Glass Biennale in August 2019. This prize will be awarded by the GAS Board of Directors and signifies an international recognition of the winning artist by his or her professional peers. There is no comparable prize in the British Glass Biennale, and this new tribute shows a dedication and willingness from the GAS board to continue to play a larger role in international glass.

Sponsorship of the Glass Arts Society International Artists' Prize in the British Glass Biennale presents an invaluable opportunity for GAS to communicate the organization and its mission directly with new artists, makers, and visitors. More information about this will be announced soon.

Focusing on the Future

The Glass Art Society is excited about the future and what it holds. We hope to grow in the best possible way and hope that you will continue to help us expand our impact and reach by telling others about GAS and the opportunity it provides to glass artists around the world.

GAS knows that people are eager for more events like Murano and GAS conferences that have been held in other places overseas including those held in Australia, Amsterdam, Mexico, Tokyo, and Toronto. Our goal is to try to make that happen. As always, we thank you for being a part of our growing glass community, and we look forward with excitement to the many new people and places that the future brings.

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Visit www.glassart.org or follow GAS on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter @glassartsociety to find out more about becoming a member of the Glass Art Society.



Amber Flame at Zen Glass.

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