

# My Glass Education Journey

## A Guide for Prospective Scholarship Applicants



*I spent a week with glass artist and teacher Hallie Richards-Monroe in a content-rich, independent learning environment.*

*We selected some of my sketches and drawings, and she showed me how to use them in a design for painting. I spent the week studying traditional glass painting techniques on clear glass and flashed glass where I had sandblasted my design under her watchful eye. An AGG scholarship paid for my tuition.*

*Photo by Hallie Richards-Monroe.*

by Kelly Caswell

Finding and paying for learning opportunities in techniques of glassmaking is not easily done. Unlike, say, drawing and painting where classes at every level can be found in almost any community, classes in glass technique are not as easily found. I was fortunate to live in Baltimore where I learned traditional stained glass techniques from a regional craftsman, Martin Vittek, who taught me in exchange for working at his studio on Saturday mornings. Learning under an experienced mentor who has the time to lend his or her expertise to teach an emerging glass artist in exchange for sorting glass is not available to most emerging glass artists, and yet, finding and paying for classes can feel just as difficult.

When I left Baltimore for a new life in central Kansas, I found only a few hobby workshops, so I spent evenings cruising the internet for good learning possibilities in glassmaking. I was elated when I found them until I factored in tuition, travel, food, and lodging. Then I saw the scholarship opportunities. I do not fit the profile for the average emerging working artist, not the age nor the academic background, but that did not deter me from applying. Nor should it for you. I strongly encourage those of you who are



*This is one of my designs I transferred to glass in Hallie's workshop using a multi-technique approach: sandblasting on flashed glass, matting and tracing, and finally silver stain. It was a thrill to see the work after the final firing. Photo by the artist.*

trying to decide if you can afford to attend a workshop or class to apply for a scholarship. I have applied and received scholarships from American Glass Guild (AGG), Stained Glass Association of America, Penland, and The Corning Museum of Glass and have benefited greatly from these learning experiences, which shows in my current body of work.

There are quality learning opportunities for glass artists, from nationally recognized institutions to professional organizations to nationally recognized artists who teach. Large institutions such as Pilchuck, Penland School of Craft, and The Corning Glass Museum as well as smaller, though equally equitable learning centers such as Urban Glass and Pittsburgh Glass Center offer a variety of scholarships for their programs for artists. If a professional, independent working artist or student is looking for funding, AGG's James Whitney Scholarship is a great resource.





*The infamous Christmas ornaments. I always intentionally send images with my application that clearly exemplify my current skills level. Then I explain in my essay exactly what techniques I hope to improve by attending the workshop or class. Photo by the artist.*

*I spent a week with a group of students in a weeklong workshop with Kathy Jordan in 2019 in a highly collaborative and learning-rich environment. Our lessons were structured, and there was something about the communal aspect Kathy encourages that made the rigors of learning enjoyable. We had such fun that week and worked long into each day together. I left her studio as a much-improved painter, again thanks to a scholarship. Photo by Kathy Jordan.*

As a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting education and providing scholarships, AGG seeks to work with the gamut of craftsmen and artists, emerging and experienced. In its mission statement, the guild pledges to be inclusive in its representation of all types of decorative glasswork, its creation, restoration, and preservation. As of October 2023, the AGG scholarship committee has given out 177 scholarships totaling of \$170,485.

## Tips for Successful Scholarship Applications

So what is the magic bullet for hitting a scholarship target? I can speak to this not only as a three-time AGG scholarship recipient but also as one of the AGG members who volunteers on the AGG Scholarship Committee that reviews scholarship applications twice a year.

First, do your homework. Review scholarship guidelines carefully to determine whether or not you qualify for a particular scholarship. Read the mission statement and guiding philosophy of the organization as well. Write a well-crafted resume that gives the scholarship committee a clear idea of the skills and experience you possess as they relate to what you want to learn. Do not hesitate to include any sort of training or learning you have taken in glassmaking, as this indicates your earnestness in this craft.

Next, write a cogent essay that clearly answers the questions the scholarship guidelines put forth, clearly explaining why you are the best candidate for that scholarship. Finally, take the time to photograph your work using studio techniques with a quality phone camera. It is crucial to provide scholarship committees with quality images that show your skills as they pertain to your scholarship application.

## Working Toward Becoming a Professional

Do not despair if you are not yet a professional. At this point, a compelling essay and your body of work become paramount. I applied in 2019 for an AGG scholarship to learn traditional painting. I was new to both painting and glassmaking as my trade. I included images of a kiln-fired, painted Christmas ornament I had made and sold the previous year as well two stained glass panels I had painted and sold.

The ornaments were decidedly not high-end art, but they clearly spoke to technique. My essay described my weaknesses and explained exactly what I hoped to achieve in the class and what I would do with my newly learned skills as a working artist. I received the scholarship, attended the class, and am a better painter for it.

The next application deadline for the James Whitney Scholarship is February 28, 2024. Interested individuals can apply at [www.americanglassguild.org/scholarship](http://www.americanglassguild.org/scholarship) or email Scholarship Chairperson Melissa Janda at [scholarship@americanglassguild.org](mailto:scholarship@americanglassguild.org) for more information.

GLA

Visit [www.americanglassguild.org](http://www.americanglassguild.org) to find out more about AGG, its current and upcoming events, and how to become a member.

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