

Slate Grove

The Making of a Studio Manager

by Colleen Bryan

What kind of education, training, and experience prepare a person for managing six separate glass studios in a 17,000-square-foot facility? Interviewing Slate Grove, the modest, controlled studio manager for the newly reopened UrbanGlass studio in Brooklyn, New York, provides some useful insights.

Midwestern Roots

Having grown up in the Midwest, Grove pursued undergraduate studies at the Cleveland Institute of Art. “I’d never seen glass made before or even considered how glass was made. It was always just there as a bowl or a jar. But the Institute had a great glass program. The pre-enrollment tour took us through the glassblowing studio, and I was enamored. I felt that I needed to take a semester to be able to say that I’d blown glass, and by end of that semester, there was no turning back.”

After Cleveland, Grove found his way to UrbanGlass, where he worked as an artist for nearly two years. “I left New York City (NYC) in 2008 to be the studio coordinator at Penland School of Crafts for two and a half years. There, I was the only studio staff member dealing with budgeting, purchasing, and technical issues. That gave me the opportunity to gain a breadth of experience and knowledge. It also provided a good springboard.”

Grove then undertook a three-year graduate program at Illinois State University, where he studied the art and material of glass. Returning after 10 years to the Midwest, driving once again on blacktop roads surrounded by corn felt like home. “I was able to let myself go, physically and mentally, into the exploration that would be my graduate program.”

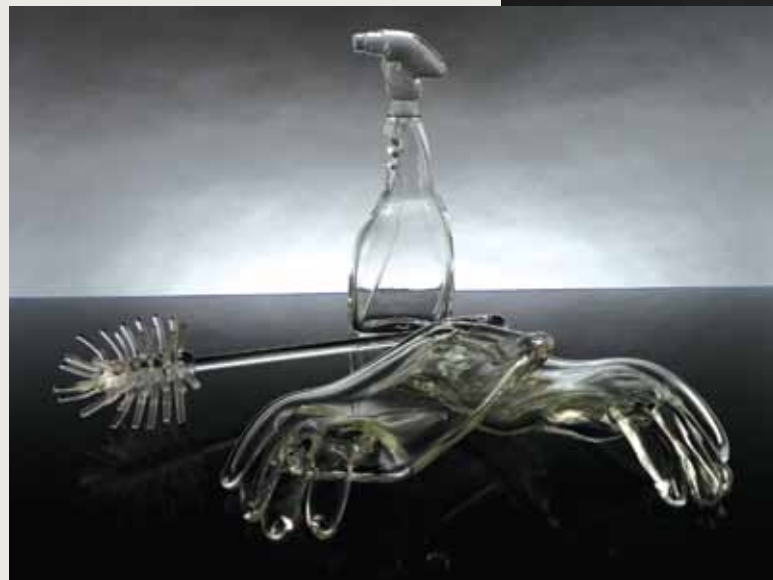
Slate Grove, Hats and Scarves for Christmas, blown and flameworked glass, 10" x 10" x 5", 2013.



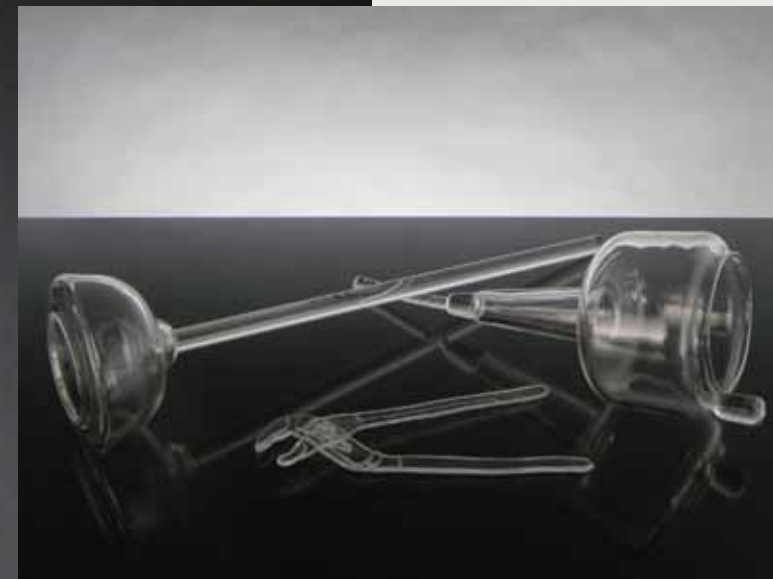
Slate Grove, Honor, cast glass, 24" x 12" x 2", 2013.

Slate Grove, Zippers and Hems, sculpted and flameworked glass, 10" x 10" x 2", 2013.





*Slate Grove, Cleanser,
blown, sculpted, and fabricated glass,
19" x 19" x 12", 2013.*



*Slate Grove, Dirty Water,
blown, sculpted, and
fabricated glass,
24" x 12" x 6", 2013.*

Selecting an MFA Program

In choosing his Master of Fine Arts (MFA) program, Grove intentionally selected a three-year program. “I didn’t want to rush through the evolutionary process of changing how I thought and what I worked on. I found it important to surround myself with professors and faculty who understood where I started from and wanted to go, but I also wanted to understand where they were coming from. I took the time to get to know the MFA program but also to interact with the other faculty members at the school.”

In the main, Grove dealt with three professors who all shared a similar mindset and sociological background to his own blue-collar midwestern roots. “So many times in an MFA program, things are so completely heady and intellectual that they lose their ability to draw the general public. I wanted to make art that you didn’t have to have a degree to understand.”

Grove notes that his studies would have been impossible without a tuition waiver and stipend program. “For three years I devoted myself to my studies and the responsibilities around my graduate assistantship. I managed to sell some glasswork to help pay for more supplies and glass, but I didn’t have to segment my life between its creative aspects and a part-time job.”

*Slate Grove, Everlast,
blown, sculpted, and
fabricated glass
and stainless steel,
24" x 24" x 36", 2012.*



Slate Grove, Oil Can Installation, glass, 96" x 8" x 18', 2013.

Personal Integration

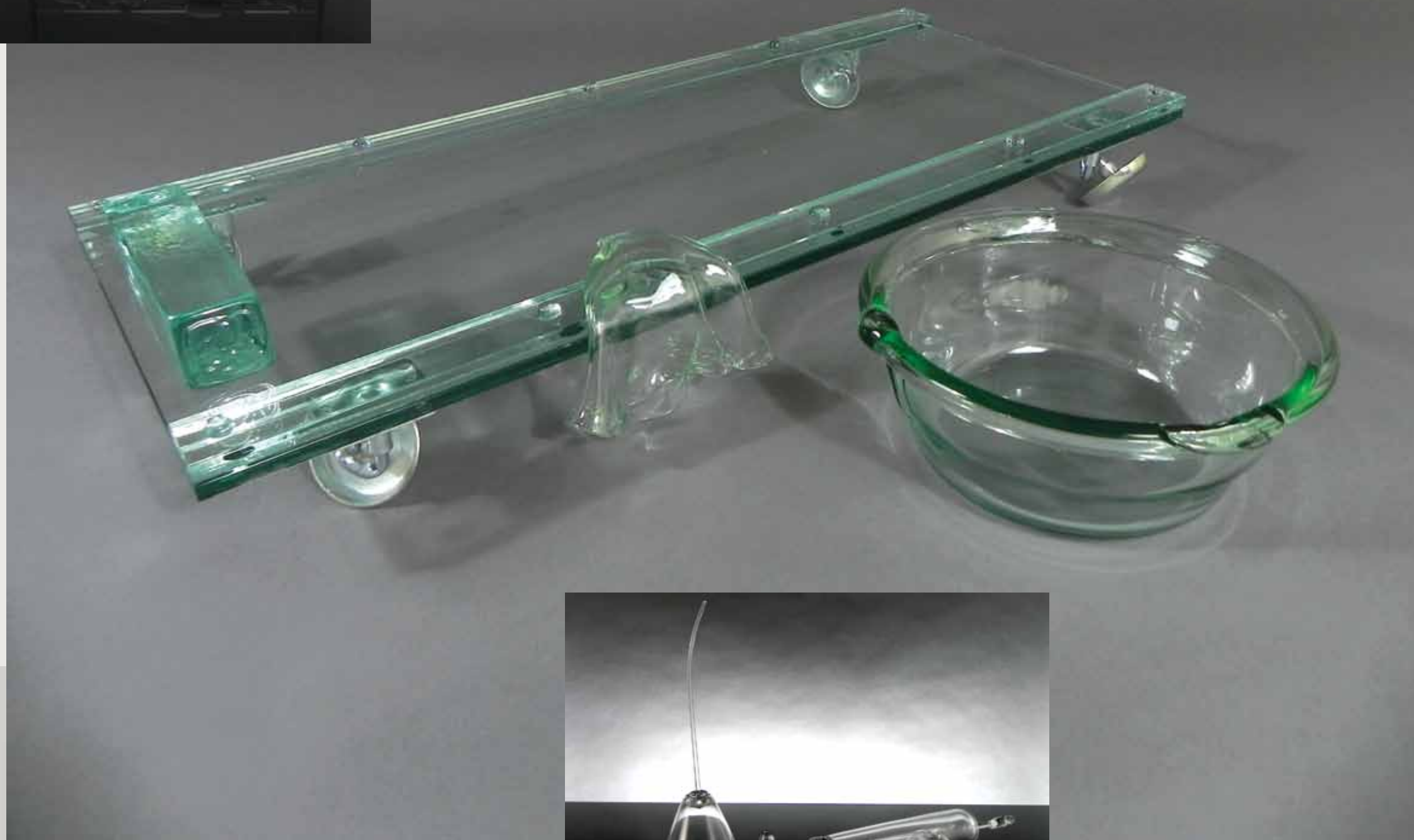
Grove’s personal artistry incorporates work in all genres of glass. Though definitely the most well-versed in blowing and sculpting, he is also comfortable with casting, flameworking, and flat glass techniques.

In his culminating MFA exhibition, Grove tapped old roots. “I came from a blue-collar background in Northwest Iowa. A lot of my graduate work was in sociology, focusing on the history of masculinity. I have always been captivated by the knowledge that a car mechanic or other skilled craftsman might acquire after 20 or 30 years of experience. That experience translates to a kind of intuitive mastery and efficiency. They know where to look first to find and fix a problem. I have always been impressed by that.

“For my MFA exploration I made a lot of tools, depicting in glass things that blue-collar workers identify with. Making tools in glass forced me to go through the same kind of process, battling with the material in the same way as the mechanic until I knew intuitively where I needed to go next. I found myself moving through the same process of exploration, experimentation, and mastery that I was trying to illustrate.” He brought his artistic exploration together as a master’s exhibition for his MFA degree. The exhibition was staged in the University Galleries in Normal, Illinois.



Slate Grove, Tools of the Trade, blown, sculpted, and fabricated glass, 18" x 12" x 7", 2013.



Grove returned to NYC in his current position of Studio Manager as UrbanGlass studios reopened in October 2013. He is candid that his personal artwork is taking a back seat for the moment, and he does not proffer the easy excuse that his life is absorbed by his duties at the new studio. "I work hard, but I have personal time. Having spent three solid years creating and getting ideas out of my head, I feel that I need time to recharge before I can generate new ideas and more art. My MFA exhibition was a culmination. Now I can take a breath." Ten months out of school, he chooses to devote his personal time to going home and reading rather than making for making's sake.

On a personal level, Grove reflects that he has benefited the most by letting glass take him places. "I've gotten to see the country through glass. I attended school in Cleveland and have lived in New York City; Louisville, Kentucky; and at Penland in Bakersville, North Carolina. I held visiting artist workshops at the Rochester Institute of Technology, the Massachusetts College of Art, Iowa State University, and Kirkwood Community College. I taught in Finland in 2010 and returned during the two subsequent summers to work with a designer there. Glass makes the world a much smaller, friendlier place. Common friends bond the community of glassmakers together and make us all feel wanted."

For his peers, Grove advises: "Find a place where you can surround yourself with mutual respect as a basis for learning and exploring your craft. In a creative environment, it is important to be with people whom you respect and who respect what you're trying to do." **GA**

Find more on how the newly renovated UrbanGlass facility serves hundreds of artists and hobbyists in an open, energy efficient space in the November/December 2014 issue of Glass Art.

Slate Grove, Can I Still Lay on My Back?, blown, sculpted, and fabricated glass with stainless steel, 36" x 32" x 6", 2012.



Slate Grove, Lube and Oil Change, blown, sculpted, and fabricated glass, 24" x 12" x 12", 2013.

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