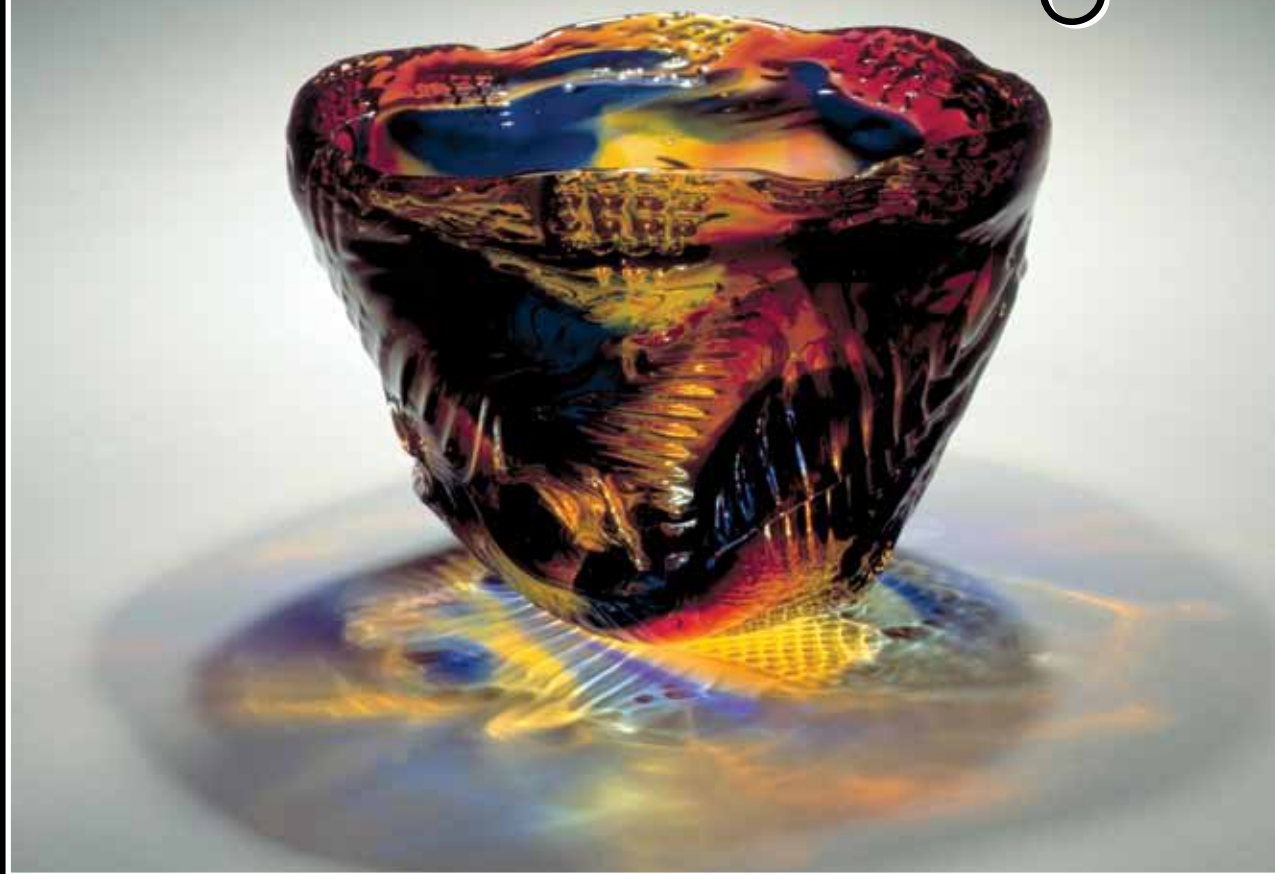


Fritz Dreisbach Shares “The Real Story”



*Fritz Dreisbach, Deep, Rich, Multi-Hue
Optic Mongo Bowl, 2002.*

by Shawn Waggoner

Fritz Dreisbach has become an historian of the American Studio Glass movement. His passion for the accurate telling of his medium's birth and development includes the histories of three seminal figures: Harvey Littleton, Dominick Labino, and Erwin Eisch. Dreisbach himself plays a vital role in the story of hot glass as he traveled the country demonstrating techniques, organizing workshops and classes, and “spreading the gospel of glass.” He has taught at so many glassmaking schools and programs worldwide that he became referred to as the “Johnny Appleseed” of glass.

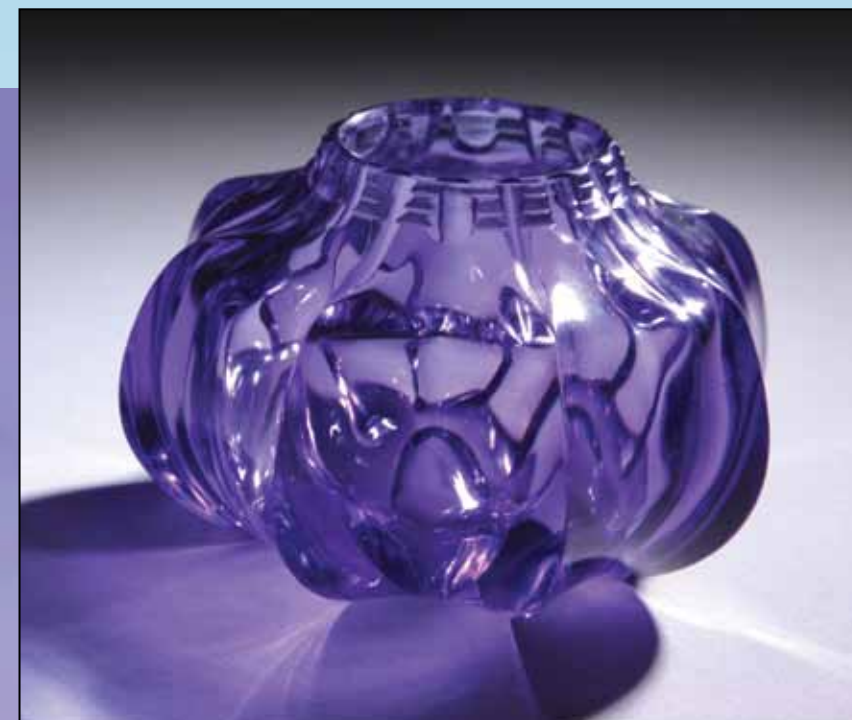
“For years I heard people presenting history a bit incorrectly. I was offended, because in some cases this was done selfishly. I believe that people who deserve credit should get it.” To counter

the misinformation, Dreisbach launched a campaign 40 years ago to tell what he calls “The Real Story,” archived from interviews with people who were present in the '60s, but without a personal axe to grind.

“Fritz has always had a very firm grasp on the importance of history and is doing his part to preserve it,” says Susanne K. Frantz, former curator of contemporary glass, The Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, New York. “One of his recent projects is interviewing and videotaping studio glass pioneers. While he honors the past, he keeps his eyes on the future. Fritz is still excited by glass, he is still having fun, and he keeps those feelings alive in the rest of us.”



Fritz Dreisbach engraving a vase in his new studio.



*Fritz Dreisbach, Neodymium Amethyst
Navaho Wheel Carved Optic Pot, 2006.*



*Fritz Dreisbach, Blue Gardens Carved Bowl, wheel-
carved organic blue eye bowl, 9-3/4" diameter, 2010.*

Dreisbach's Mentors

Three of Dreisbach's mentors play key roles in “The Real Story.” Littleton, a former ceramic artist and professor, used his connections in both the academic and art worlds to advocate for blown glass. He worked with The Toledo Museum of Art and Labino at the first two glassblowing workshops in Toledo, Ohio, in 1962. “His idea was to promote glass both in academia and in museums. If glass was ever going to be accepted in the arts world, you need support from both areas,” says Dreisbach.

“Labino shared his now famous ‘little’ furnace, which he developed in '62, that allowed U.S. artists to blow glass everywhere. He supplied us with a workable and safe glass for blowing, as well as designs for annealing ovens and their controlling devices. Labino's contributions were gigantic. He understood the physics and chemistry of glass and introduced the technical skills and safety measures we needed to know.”

Eisch's family owned a glass factory in Frauenau, Germany, near the Czech border. He showed Littleton that glassblowing could be accomplished by an independent artist. “When Eisch and Littleton first met in 1962, Erwin was already doing what Harvey hoped was possible. Their friendship was very beneficial to each of them.”

In a magical alignment of the planets, Dreisbach met all three of these Studio Glass pioneers the summer of 1964, an event he describes as nothing less than a miracle. One can't help but wonder if the glass art of today meets the expectations of Littleton, Labino, and Eisch. Dreisbach says: “We have gone way beyond what they, or anyone else, dreamed of. We are still moving toward the ultimate. We're not yet in orbit; the rocket is still climbing. There are no limits. I am still accelerating!”

Innovation, Variety, and Originality

Tom Buechner, in his presentation to Glass Art Society 35 years ago, declared the vitality of the American Studio Glass movement is due primarily to *the innovation, the variety, and the originality* of the people who were and are working with glass today.

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Visit www.cmog.org/video/meet-artist-fritz-dreisbach to see Dreisbach’s illustrated account of *The Real Story*. See the November/December 2014 issue of *Glass Art* for more information about Fritz Dreisbach’s history and the evolution of his work.

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Fritz Dreisbach, Tall Slender Opal Blue Cyprus Trunk Mongo, 1999.



(Clockwise) Fritz Dreisbach, front side of Commemorative Pokal celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the 1962 Toledo Glass Workshops and the artist’s 30 years creating in glass, overall H 54.8 cm, Rim Diam. 16.2 cm, 1993; reverse side of Pokal; detail of Pokal foot. Photos courtesy of The Corning Museum of Glass.



Why Glass, Why America?

by Fritz Dreisbach

Excerpted from Dreisbach’s lecture presented at the GAS conference held in Seto, Japan, in 1998.

What happened here in America? This is *my* interpretation, you understand. In the 1950s, and early 1960s, there was a great deal of freedom in the America art scene. People were pouring stuff on the floor, splashing it on the walls, and they were involved in performance art. There were still people painting landscapes and portraits, but they were not hot in the New York City art scene. The big direction was the action stuff—this doing, this freedom. It was no holds barred. There were no rules. Americans were not bound to traditions in the way that glass artists in many other countries were bound to their formal, predetermined traditions. So if you have lots of freedom, then it seems to me you have the opportunity for a material to evolve into the art world.

The thing about glass is that before the 1962 Toledo workshops, if American artists wanted to work with glass they went to a factory. There were a few people here and there around the U.S. who worked in fusing and lampworking studios. But if you wanted to make any major pieces with glass, you went to a factory, and factories are intimidating. No one wants to go there. They’re big, they’re noisy, and they stink. It’s just not a fun place for a creative artist to go and hang out.

During the mid-20th century, people saw that potters were making ceramics in their backyards, weavers were weaving up in the second bedroom, and jewelers were making jewelry down in the basement. Artists could do any of those things. Why not blow glass? This was the time and the place when everyone could ask, “Why not?” And so they just did it. Nobody knew you shouldn’t. No one said you couldn’t. So they did it!

The fact is that glassblowing for artists in the U.S. started in the schools. Art departments and schools were there to educate people, to turn people on, to get them excited. We got them doing glass, which was what we wanted. That was the idea. The early glass artists were like the disciples. We were carrying the gospel of glass to the rest of the world, and we were having fun in the process.

Today, it’s all serious. Actually, not *all* serious, but a lot of things are very serious now. Pieces of glass don’t have as much spontaneity anymore, probably because you can’t sell spontaneity easily. Galleries won’t show it. In the 1960s, we didn’t have galleries; we didn’t have many museum shows; we didn’t have collectors. We didn’t have all that yet. The collectors were collecting ceramics and other things, but they were not yet looking at glass. Our early work expressed the liquid state of molten glass without much of a statement. Discerning people weren’t that excited about it! But as the glass got better, the collectors got interested and started buying glass. The result was that more glass could be made. Our work became more elaborate, more intriguing.

It is really fantastic the way this has grown and mushroomed. One of the things that I feel most proud of is that I got to be involved in the growth, watching it explode. I am still watching other people get excited about glass art as it spreads all over the world.

So, that is how I see things today. We’re in the middle. What happened earlier was fun, and it was history, but it’s gone; it’s done. Now the big question in our future is: “Where are we going?”