



Verdant Beauty, Espresso, and Warm Glass

by Bryant J. Stanton, SGAA Editorial Committee Member

The Stained Glass Association of America's 106th summer stained glass conference was an overwhelming success, setting records for registered attendance and class participation. Those of us who arrived early had a chance to slip away and explore the beauty that is the Pacific Northwest.

As we traveled around the area, we were surprised by the number of espresso bars and coffee shops dotting the landscape. I was also struck not only by the natural beauty and culture of the area, but also by the new innovations and rich history of the large glass companies in the Pacific Northwest. I came away from the conference with ideas and inspiration based on the new techniques that these companies are putting forth.

The Bullseye Projects Gallery

On one of our early morning forays, we jumped onto Portland's MAX Light Rail system and rode it to the chic Pearl District to tour the Bullseye Glass Projects Gallery with its fused, cast, and blown glass. The gallery's propped-open, thickly cast glass door immediately caught my attention. The double door is impressive, standing at least 3 inches thick and about 10 feet tall.

The cast glass was incised with architectural design elements that featured etched and open clear areas and strategically placed seeds of trapped air bubbles. The iconic doors were emblematic of how far the Studio Glass movement has come over the recent years. Studios of all sizes now have within their reach and knowledge base the ability to design and produce similar works that in the past would have been relegated to large glass factories to produce.

Breaking the Rules

After our brief tour, we raced back to the conference in time to sit in on the "Painting and Fusing" panel discussion made up of glass artists Narcissus Quagliata, Ted Sawyer of Bullseye Glass, Andy Young from Pearl River Glass, and David Judson and Tim Carey, both of The Judson Studios. The discussion focused mostly on Judson's latest commission for The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection located in Leawood, Kansas. The original design proposal for this large window included 161 panels, each 4-feet by 5-feet, with the window equal to the size of an NBA basketball court. It was to be crafted in the traditional leaded and painted stained glass style. Upon reflection of the renderings of the project, Tim felt that fused layers of glass rather than a traditional surface-painted glass window would capture the essence of his painting style. But how would this be possible with the size of the window?



*Detail of a fused glass panel by Tim Carey of The Judson Studios.
Photo by The Judson Studios.*

To give an idea of the window's scale, the head of Christ alone is 5 feet tall. This is just one example of the potential that the glass industry has to pave the way in the future of art, but with it brings logistical problems such as glazing and supporting windows of this weight and size. As with all challenges and struggles, innovative solutions come from out-of-the-box thinking.

Carey had heard that Quagliata was giving a fusing workshop at D&L Stained Glass in Denver, Colorado, so he signed up for it. During the class, Carey shared his design renderings with Quagliata, who looked at them and said, "You have to fuse this project." That's how Quagliata ended up in Los Angeles, California, where he is mentoring Carey in fusing this large-scale work. Together, they decided the panels will be fused, but then broken up and leaded together in the traditional manner.

For over the past two decades, Quagliata has been revolutionizing painting with fused glass. His methods have produced a painterly flow to his glasswork with deep, rich layers of colors. Over the years, Quagliata has unselfishly shared with others what he has learned while experimenting and producing his work. During this panel discussion and his presentation later in the conference, he generously shared with us his journey and techniques in glass. When I returned home from the conference, I found myself inspired to push the boundaries of my own work and find new ways to innovate my studio's art.



Architectural rendering of the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, Leawood, Kansas. Photo by The Judson Studios.

The West Coast “Trinity” of Glassmakers

Washington State and Portland, Oregon, have been, in my mind, the pinnacle of the modern American Studio Glass movement for over 40 years. Innovations and trends in the movement have been spawned along the Pacific coast. Serving as an incubator of West Coast artists using everything from new approaches and techniques to centuries-old craft techniques, the area has also inspired countless others around the globe to stretch the possibilities of the glass medium. This year’s Portland conference gave us all a chance to explore the place where three new handcrafted sheet glassmakers first made their appearance.

Blown glass artist, Eric Lovell, founded Uroboros Glass Company in 1973. The following year, Dan Schwoerer, Ray Ahlgren, and Boyce Lundstrom founded Bullseye Glass Company with both companies producing handcrafted sheet glass. Meanwhile, 173 miles north in West Seattle, Don Hansen, Ron Smids, and Jerry Rhodes marked the beginnings of Spectrum Glass in 1974 in an old warehouse, also turning out colored sheet glass for the stained glass industry. These new handcrafted sheet glass producers became the “new kids on the block,” and saw a promising market in businesses wanting to cater to the quickly emerging studio art glass industry.

By 1981, Bullseye Glass introduced a line of “tested compatible glass,” the world’s first sheet glass specially formulated for working in a kiln. Boyce Lundstrom and Daniel Schwoerer became fused glass evangelists, spreading the word and educating us in such terms as glass compatibility, devitrified glass, and annealing glass. In 1983, they co-authored and published *Kiln Firing Glass: Glass Fusing Book One*. A whole new market was birthed within the stained glass industry along with a thirst to learn more.

Education is a large part of Bullseye’s success, as the company teaches over 1,200 students a year in the Portland location. Both Uroboros and Spectrum have long since joined Bullseye in producing compatible glasses and teaching classes in fusing and working with kiln formed glass.



Verdant, rugged beauty viewed during a day trip to Cape Disappointment, Washington, where the Columbia River meets the Pacific Ocean. Photo by Bryant Stanton.



Kilns, Really Big Kilns

Over the past 34 years, glass fusing, casting, and slumping have grown into their own niche industry, spawning specialty equipment, supplies, and educational workshops. Warm glass as an art medium has become a serious form of artistic expression. While touring different glass studios around the Portland area, it was commonplace to see enormously large kilns used for cast, fused, and kiln formed glass. While visiting Savoy Studio, I lost count after we saw over nine ridiculously large glass kilns arranged in groups in their production area. At Walter Gordinier's studio, the kiln all but swallowed up his modest studio space. But from it, he is producing monumental architectural art pieces in glass.

By the time the conference and all of the tours were concluded, folks were sitting around the conference complaining of sensory overload, an occurrence when one or more of the body's senses experiences overstimulation from the environment (in my case, all of my senses). From the verdant landscapes and all of the inspiration

SGAA trip to Savoy Studio. Photo by Bryant Stanton.

that my overcaffeinated brain was taking in and my eyes that were tired from looking at so many inspirational works of art, I came away inspired—inspired to try new techniques in my work and to consider how to use these tools to better express myself.

As a teacher of mine once said, "Technique is cheap," meaning that everyone can learn new ways of doing things, and that's fine. But technique is only one tool in your bag of tricks that you can use to produce what you are trying to express. He also said, "Going is knowing. If you never go, you will never know." Now that I've gone, I know.

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P.O. Box 1012
306 N. Main St.
Greer, SC 29652

Phone: 864-270-1287
Fax: 864-877-7576

E-mail: pmagco@gmail.com
www.palmettoartglass.com