



American Glass Now: 2015

Featuring the latest from the American Glass Guild

by Patrice Schelkun

The American Glass Guild's fourth annual juried show *American Glass Now: 2015* showcased the recent work of 17 glass artist members in a tower gallery at the Washington National Cathedral in the District of Columbia. The three-month installation coincided with the AGG's 10th annual conference proceedings in Rockville, Maryland, and at the Cathedral.

A cadre of exceptional talent was represented in the show, which included works by Kathy Barnard, Joseph Cavaleri, Marie Foucault Phipps, Saara Gallin, Tony Glander, Nancy Gong, Mary Clerkin Higgins, J. Kenneth Leap, Ellen Mandelbaum, Sean Merchant, Troy Moody, Nancy Nicholson, Scott Ouderkirk, Nick Parrendo, Richard Prigg, Patrice Schelkun, and Amy Valuck. Many different glass techniques represented in the show incorporated fusing, screen printing, etching, glassblowing, and stained glass painting.

Jurors for the *American Glass Now: 2015* exhibition were Virginia Raguin, Professor of Art History at the College of the Holy Cross; Judith Schaechter, Artist and Educator at the University of the Arts and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia and the New York Academy of the Arts; and Cynthia Williams, Director of the Smithsonian-Mason MA in the History of Decorative Arts program at George Mason University in Virginia.

Collaborative Efforts and Experimentation

Scott Ouderkirk, MFA of Hammond, New York submitted a very unique piece that combined kiln fired paints and fusing in a hand-forged steel frame. *The Queen*, a 24" x 34" piece (excluding the hooks) was made using System 96 fusible glass, vitreous glass stainer's paints, and silver stain.

Ouderkirk says the inspiration for this piece came from his beekeeping work with blacksmith friend, Martin Snye of the River Forge in nearby Morristown, New York, and from an illustration he did for his most recent book, *The Wind in the Islands*. "He and I do some bee work together, and we most recently started raising queen bees, which requires a whole different apparatus." Ouderkirk asked Snye to make a special steel frame for the work, which is hung by steel hooks as well. In thinking about how to create this piece, he said he originally considered pouring cast glass blocks but decided to use multiple-fused layers of glass instead. The overall thickness of the glass is a half-inch, requiring up to seven layers of fused glass in some places. The blown glass ball, which is drilled at both ends to accommodate a steel spike through its center, was made by glassblower Lorraine Austin of Snake Oil Glassworks in Skaneateles, New York.



Scott Ouderkirk, *The Queen*, 24" x 34", 2015.



Kathy Barnard, *The Ravens*, 10" x 19-5/8", 2015.



Nancy Nicholson, *Afloat*, 17-3/4" x 13-3/4", 2015.

Kathy Barnard of Kansas City, Missouri, is known for her incredible nature-themed work in etched glass as well as for stained glass. She decided to stretch her own boundaries of knowledge by incorporating some newly acquired painting techniques into an art glass diptych. Her exhibit piece, *The Ravens*, is based on two different folktales involving ravens. In one of the tales, the story is related of how the raven, originally a white bird, became the black bird we recognize today. The other tale, one of *Aesop's Fables*, points to the way in which a little ingenuity and persistence saved the raven's life.

Barnard says the processes used in this piece were many and varied. "They include experimenting with new techniques using kiln fired enamels and metallic gilding paired with my relief carving. I used a more spontaneous and lively brushstroke than I would normally do as well as quill pen rendering."

Sean Merchant, a glass artist currently pursuing his MFA at Ohio State University, created a 13" x 25" piece titled *Weight*. "Its imagery is drawn from a variety of myth sources combined in a way that allows for them to commune with each other and the world behind the piece." Merchant utilizes the transparency of glass to connect the subject matter within the piece to the environment behind the work. The imagery used in the piece is supported on a front layer of painted and assembled glass and a back layer of silver stained and engraved glass. This method of assembly, he says, creates a sense of depth that allows the imagery to operate within multiple dimensions.

Nancy Nicholson of Brooklyn, New York, who is widely praised for her cityscape work in glass, changed the focus of her work for this show. Her more recent work explores the gesture and abstractions of the figurative form.

For this small-figure study, titled *Afloat*, Nicholson hand-carved an image using red flashed glass, then added dimension with glass paints and silver stain. "Stained glass is often viewed narrowly as a religious or decorative art form, or merely relegated to the realm of craft. I challenge those notions by using glass as a means to create work that communicates on multiple levels, encompassing formal, conceptual, and narrative elements.



Sean Merchant, *Weight*, 13" x 25", 2015.

J. Kenneth Leap of Runnemeade, New Jersey, presented a psychologically charged panel titled *Entanglements*. Originally conceived as a monumental project design depicting the fall and redemption of man, this smaller scene addresses the ideas of alienation, deceit, and violence. Leap hand-painted the images using vitreous paints and enamels on both sides of transparent and opal Lamberts glass. *Entanglements* represents "the perilous state we enter as we give ear to deceit and allow anger to entangle us. It is in these very painful moments of darkness that our need for redemption becomes evident." Leap is well-known for his public art as well as ecclesiastical installations and workshops, which he teaches throughout the year.

With such a broad range of work in contemporary stained glass art, The American Glass Guild is proud to have sponsored another successful juried exhibition. This is its longest-running exhibition thus far, and no doubt the most notable exhibition space. Information on how and when to apply for next year's American Glass Now can be found on the AGG website.

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To view more of the artists' work, visit the following websites:
 Scott Ouderkirk at www.glassgoat.com
 Kathy Barnard at www.kathybarnardstudio.com
 Sean Merchant at www.seanmerchant.com
 Nancy Nicholson at www.nancynicholson.com
 J. Kenneth Leap at www.jkennethleap.com

Visit www.americanglassguild.org for information on how and when to apply for next year's American Glass Now exhibit.

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