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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

CRAFT/GLASS

**"CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN GLASS:
THE PROS AND CONS OF MAKING A LIVING
AS A GLASS ARTIST IN
THE UNITED STATES"**

BY

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INTRODUCTION:

Since 1962 when Harvey Littleton conducted his first seminars in Wisconsin, during which it was discovered possible to blow or work glass in a small studio space, the glass art scene in the United States has thrived. There are hundreds of working Glass Artists in the U.S. today. A large percentage of whom see a certain amount of success.

Originally, after its discovery, glass was seen as strictly a raw material for industry. The Romans shrewdly used glass in order to produce household ware. The early Czechoslovakian industry, centred in Bohemia, was a major European industrial power. There is a large amount of artistry to creating even the most rudimentary glass object. However, as the last century drew to a close, a number of designers began to create works of art from glass. Emile Galle and his American student Louis C. Tiffany paved the way for the current masters. In the U.S. Tiffany most definitely influenced the growth of the glass industry; in the last eighty years. This in turn led to the influential sixties and the wealth of American talent coming to the forefront in the seventies and eighties.

It is, in my opinion, possible to become successful in any line of work in North America. That is, provided you know how to go about becoming a success in the correct manner. Business is a "trial and error" situation, however, I believe there to be a market for almost everything, in the United States.

With glass or any craft, once one has a space within which to work, there are two ways of selling ones work. That is, either through a gallery or directly to the public. Neither method of selling is more lucrative than the other. However, if one wants to continue working through a gallery, one must eventually make a name for oneself. In most cases, a customer will pay large amounts of money for a piece of art partly because of the artists name obviously so that the customer can own a piece of art by a famous artist. If one decides on the other method of selling, it is possible to become successful and still remain almost obscure.

Having lived and worked with a production⁽¹⁾ glass artist, Andrew Shea, I have seen first hand, the processes by which his work is produced and sold. He will work for long periods of time and then travel long distances to one of many art-fairs in the U.S. to sell his work. The life of a production glass artist is by no means glamorous but non-the less rewarding.

Having also worked with Shea's more famous gallery oriented counter-part, Michael Aschenbrenner, I can instantly see a difference between both of the working practice and general philosophies of the artists. Aschenbrenner does not work as much as Shea, yet is more famous, and both artists make the same amount of money. Both artists graduated from the same glass course in the same year, yet have obviously chosen very different routes to success. In America, the artistic population is split down the middle. On one side are those artists who are famous and sell through galleries, and on the other side are those artists who produce production style work.

However, having travelled to where glass is produced and sold in the U.S., I have seen that glass art in its different forms is alive and healthy in the U.S.A.

Although the "Studio or Art" glass movement, in the U.S. has only really existed for the past thirty years,⁽¹⁾ glass has been used in the manufacture of various kinds of functional or decorative objects since the Bronze Age.

Glass was first made from a mixture of silica (sand, flint or quartz)lime and melted with the aid of an alkaline flux, either soda or potash. The melting together of these ingredients creates a hot, malleable compound which we know as glass.

Glass working techniques have evolved steadily over the years. New techniques are probably still being discovered. The qualities and possibilities of glass are endless. To give an example, The technique of glass blowing was invented in the second half of the first century B.C. The technique was discovered in the Middle East, in the regions of Syria and Israel. Thus the technique was adopted and exploited by the Roman Empire. The process of blowing melted glass through a metal tube, is now the most popular and widely used way of working with galss. Although glass can be cast, or used flat. However, as far as / emerging Roman industry was concerned, Glassblowing made it possible to mass produce simple glassware for daily use.

The technique of blowing galss has barely changed since its original discovery. Hot glass is gathered on the end of a hollow pipe or "iron" and shaped with the aid of fruitwood formers or "blocks". The molten glass can also be rolled to evenness on a metal table called a "marver". The shaped glass is then inflated to the desired shape and thickness. The blown vessal is then knocked off the blowing "iron" whilst held at one end by a solid metal rod, the "pontil" or "pundy". The vessal can now be decorated, and finished, having been reheated. A hot glass object must be cooled slowly in an oven or kiln, during a process called annealing. Chemicals can be melted with hot glass to create colour, for example, cobalt creates blue and mangonese creates black.

Of course, the technique of blowing has been refined and other techniques discovered since its discovery. Internationally, it seems that every major civilisation has had or still has some kind of glass industry or tradition. Each area recognised for some innovation.

In Europe, Venice is an example of a glass centre, recognised the world over. During the rennaissance and beyond, Venetian glass has been recognised for its beauty and fluidity.

However, deep in the heart of Europe lies another equally if more important glass centre. Today Chechoslovakian glass is a major force in the "art" glass world. For their industrial and quintessentially European looking glass, Czechoslovakian artists are respected throughout the glass community.

The areas of Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia have always been rich in forest and mineral output. The ideal location, perhaps, for a glass worker to be situated, surrounded by raw materials. Wood could be used to power furnaces and its ash as a melting flux to be used with local silica and lime.

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Historically, local production in Bohemia started in the fourteenth century. Even then, Bohemian glass was somewhat extravagant and a sign of the wealth of the Country at the time. Glass cutting and engraving was discovered and was thus used to its maximum potential. Bohemian glass seemed to be enriched with the quality of the local minerals. Yet the glass had the quality of diamonds rather than bohemian quartz. Creating such quality synthetically rather than naturally, is a sign of the high interest in science and industry at the time. The establishment of Bohemian glass collectives worldwide, also emphasises these peoples interest in business thus Czechoslovakian glass has survived as a solid and successful empire since its birth. In my opinion, Czechoslovakian glass was the first to adopt a look which is now instantly recognisable as European.

France also had a rich glass tradition. Dating back to before the middle ages, the glass industry in France, especially stained glass had stayed very much alive.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Emille Galle⁽²⁾ was producing beautiful glass, indicative of the period, in an art nouveau style (see Fig 3). He took his inspiration from nature creating classic looking ware enamelled and etched with floral and natural decoration. He was an innovator and a teacher. The artist Louis Comfort Tiffany was a student of Galles.

The son of New York jeweller, Tiffany was born into an affluent environment⁽³⁾ Being headstrong and without much interest in his academic studies, Tiffany declined a university education for a career in art, his one passion. He studied painting in Europe but worked, with his Company (L.C.Tiffany and Associates), in all aspects of design, from interior design to glass making. He first experimented with glass at various glass studios in New York. Proceeding which he went on to work with glass full time, creating objects such as lamps, jewellery and table ware. (see Fig 4). Eventually, Tiffany set up a glass furnace in Corona, New York, where he established and patented "Favrille" glass. When iron salt is added to glass it creates a metallic sheen which distinguishes Tiffanys glass as quintessentially his work. Like Galle, Tiffanys work also embodied the art nouveau style. Tiffany had his imitators in the United States as well as in other countries. However, at the same time as Tiffany style was being imitated in the U.S. , the glass industry was in decline in America.

Steuben glass was restyled and launched in Corning, New York in 1933. Steuben was set-up by an English designer Frederick Carder, and an American. Thomas G. Hawkes, the president of a glass engraving company. Steuben had seen success, but suffered financially at the beginning of the depression. However, having been reorganised, Steuben glass grew once more. It was strange for an American glass company, at the time to abandon the Tiffany style of glass-making and concentrate on the production of clear, cut and engraved glassware. However, Steuben survived in the face of depression and with the approaching war.

Eventually, coloured glass was phased out of production at Steuben by the fifties, asymmetry and sculptural form became popular at Steuben as artists and designers matured. Steuben glass changed with the times, from asymmetry to art deco. Designers and artists steadily changed through the decades keeping up with trends and movements.

In the U.S. at this stage, glass was beginning to transcend its image as a raw material for the production of strictly functional items. It was beginning to become a recognised and viable artistic medium.

During the 1960's in the States, self expression was becoming popular among artists. The example set by Abstract Expressionists in the fifties was perhaps rubbing off, as well as the Vietnam war, and various social issues at the time.

Harvey Littleton was born in 1922, the son of the director of research at the Corning Glass Works. He grew up around glass and the various techniques involved in its production. In 1962, Littleton and a number of artists, academics and technicians discovered that it was possible to melt glass in a small studio environment. This seminar in Toledo, Ohio is recognised as the birthplace of the modern studio glass movement in the United States. As a result, a number of seminars were held in the University of Wisconsin in 1962. During these seminars, Littleton, Dominick Labino, already an experienced blower, and others, educated people on the beauty of glass, and the feasibility of using glass in a studio.

Eventually, Glassmakers in America became aware of technique from Europe. Information began to become more readily available. As artists became more proficient in technique, ideas began to take precedence over technique. Early studio glass has, I think a distinctive crudeness. Surface decoration, such as paint, "trailing", "bits" (4) and other forms of decoration were applied freely. Artists made a conscious decision to keep away from the restrictions of the vessel form, possibly in an attempt to form a link with sculpture. Marvin Lipofsky a major American glass artist, described the innovators as "Trying to explore glass through blowing and manipulation whilst trying to keep away from function" (AMERICAN CRAFT MAGAZINE AUG/SEPT. 1993)

Stereotypes too were buried as women came to the forefront of the glass world, for example, Audrey Handler, now a leading artist was a student of Littletons.

As the sixties progressed, so did studio glass in the U.S. Artists were all the time gaining technical virtuosity and looking to Europe, and especially Czechoslovakia for information and inspiration. American artists began to travel to Europe to fine-tune technical skills. Magazines were started aimed directly at the glass artists.

At the end of the sixties American glass artists had now a reasonable understanding of traditional technique. Information was readily available and of course, people were becoming more interested in learning technique as a means of using glass as a medium for expression of their ideas. One can see a definite progression in the work produced. Obviously, as the artist became proficient in technique ideas come to the forefront and subsequently became stronger.

"Working with glass is no more difficult than pottery, yet an aura of impossibility has prevented artists from realising its full potential", said Harvey Littleton of artists, growing interest in technique. (American Craft- Aug/Sept '93). Perhaps fear or perhaps ignorance of glass technique has held people back from investigating glass-working in the past.

However, by the start of the seventies, glass programmes had been established in many American Universities, from California to Wisconsin to New York. One major breakthrough was the setting up of a school in Seattle, which dealt strictly with glass.

Dale Chihuly is a major glass artist, and well known internationally. His work is instantly recognisable (see fig 5) and he is seen as one of the pioneers of the studio glass movement in America. He established the Pilchuck glass school in 1971 in forty acres of tree-farm near Seattle in Washington. Primarily, Pilchuck was set up to provide a major glass centre for the American Northwest. It was also designed to serve as an environment where people could interact and exchange ideas and philosophies. Teamwork is very important to Chihuly mainly because he lost an eye in the early stages of his career thus disabling him from working. This emphasis on teamwork is important to many glass artists. Pilchuck now plays host to a vast number of international glass artists either as pupils or teachers. Chihuly was the first American artist to study at Venini in Italy so he has gained some expertise in traditional technique. Thus he has definitely got the skills to direct and control a team of glassblowers. Thus I believe that Chihuly's emphasis on teamwork, his constant early promotion of glass as a sculptural medium and the growth of glass programmes such as Pilchuck have helped to give glass-art a more accessible and human image.

A writer, John Ashberry said of the upsurge in interest in craft in the seventies, "Someone should tell craftsmen that they are artists so they can stop worrying and enjoy their work as art". (American Craft Aug/Sept. '93).

With Pilchuck now established and successful and other glass courses throughout the U.S., it is important to think about what the buying public thought of this new energy within the glass making community. It goes without saying that not all American glass artists have found success.

Andrew Shea and Michael Aschenbrenner are two artists currently working in the U.S.A. to a considerable amount of success. Both artists completed their masters work in the same year 1978, at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. The two artists remain good friends yet have taken different routes to success in the glass-world.

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Andrew Shea is a glass blower, who lives and works in the city of Minneapolis in Minnesota. He, together with four artists founded "Semi Automatic Glass", a studio and gallery, in the centre of Minneapolis in 1978 having left the University of Minnesota. The studio is large and now houses Shea, two ceramists and a number of lampworkers.(1) However artists have come and gone from the studio and all the founders still work with glass in one form or other.

Shea works with a number of techniques to produce a large and varied body of work. As well as being a skilled glass blower, Shea is also a master cutter and grinder. Since he works on so many different projects at once, it is difficult to categorise Shea's work. Strictly speaking he is a "Production Artist", producing large amounts of related work for instant sale. However, Shea is also represented by a number of large American galleries as well as European and Japanese collectors. Shea's work is appealing and very popular with an ever increasing clientele.

Shea's subject matter stems from a love of science. He studied chemistry, Ichthyology and phycology, or the study of fish and algae. He is also obsessed with geometry. These varied influences give Shea a very scientific and analytical approach to his work.

Shea's speciality however are his perfume decanters, (see fig 6). These intricately made bottles are colourful, yet have a hard edge and subsequently prismatic qualities. Shea's comments, "I like the geometric shapes, the crystalline forms".(1)

His bottles range in size and colour. However Shea likes to limit himself to a set palette of colour, yet each individual bottle has a quality of its own. Shea also works with sculpture, primarily optical glass jewels. (see fig 7) He produces large solid sculpture which he cuts almost as well as any of the European crystal houses (2). Shea also produces production sculpture such as glass fish and pyramids, his favourite shape. However, with all this variation, there is one trend which can be seen all the way through Shea's work, that is an obvious love for the qualities and overall look of glass.

Having worked with Shea, I understand his philosophies on becoming and remaining a successful glass artist. Shea has produced a range of work which has changed slowly, almost consciously so throughout his career to date. Since Shea sells work on a regular basis, he must keep his work eye-catching and simple. If he were to drastically change his work, Shea would possibly lose money.

When an artist comes to work at Shea's studio, it is not difficult to automatically see differences between the artist and Shea, as far as style and technique are concerned.

Michael Aschenbrenner graduated from the same glass programme as Shea in the same year. Therefore they both learned about working with glass in the same way from the same people. Yet the differences between the two artists and their respective work is remarkable.

(1) from an interview.

Having graduated from high school, Aschenbrenner was sent to Vietnam. He was discharged after six months after suffering a serious leg wound. His work to date has reflected his Vietnam experiences. Primarily, his work deals with the frailty of human life. Bones in particular play a big part in Aschenbrenners work, that is, the bone as a thought provoking even chilling image. (see fig 8)

Aschenbrenner was originally a ceramics student, but was advised that his work would perhaps work better if made from glass. That is the linear, rigid shapes he was trying to produce, would be far more suited to the hard, cold nature of glass. His work also employs found objects, such as tape, wood and wire to give the effect, essentially, of a broken bone, crudely bandaged and splinted. The fragile look of his work also adds to the effect he is trying to achieve. Aschenbrenner creates work that people will hopefully think about. Perhaps he is like a political poet or songwriter yet using glass as his medium. Aschenbrenner recently took part in an exhibition of current artists tackling the subject of the holocaust during the second world war (2) Aschenbrenners entry was based on the horrific experiments carried out by Dr. Mengele. The piece simply depicts a bone contained in a scientific specimen jar; chilling and thought provoking. (see fig 9)

" My work is about situations, circumstances, conditions and environments affecting the individual". (ARTISTS CONFRONTING THE INCONCEIVABLE" CATALOGUE 1992)

When Aschenbrenner produces his pieces from hot glass, he works in a very casual and loose manner. In the summer of 1993, Aschenbrenner worked on a new commission at Andy Sheas Studio in Minneapolis. He produced a large body of work in the form of components, which he would later assemble to create larger finished pieces. It is now that one can see the difference between the two artists. The most obvious difference between the two artists is their respective studio procedure, i.e. loose on one hand and tight and hard on the other. Aschenbrenner works quickly so he will have a large number of components to mix and match in large pieces. Shea works to a tight schedule. He will allow himself a certain amount of work per day. Thus making sure he stays on top of his vast workload. The finishing on Aschenbrenners pieces is minimal, thus allowing him lee-way to spend longer with hot glass. For Shea, however, finishing is half of his pieces, so he must divide his time equally.

Therefore, both artists differ as far as working methods are concerned. That is not to say that every production glass blower in the U.S.A. works exactly like Shea and likewise with Aschenbrenner. The main difference which separates gallery artists from production artists, is that a production artist like Shea works 360 days a year and must have a ready stock of work at any time. Aschenbrenner works to a commission deadline, or perhaps just for himself. Thus he will work for a certain amount of time and then perhaps teach and work again. This is only the beginning of what is essentially two different worlds, that of a production artist and of a freelance gallery artist.

(2) see chapter 3.

From a production glass artists point of view, it is necessary to maintain a steady body of work all year round. Or , at least, from an artist like Andrew Sheas point of view, the year is divided into two sections. about two thirds of the year is spent making, blowing and finishing work, the rest of the year is spent selling the work.

Shea is lucky , in a sense, since in the time he has been working with glass, he has settled on a range of items, ranging in price, which he knows people are going to buy. Items which have proven to appeal to American collectors and also to the general consumer. That is not to say that he has compromised any of his "artistic integrity", to produce his work. He has always considered himself, first and foremost, an artist. Each piece Shea produces is a one-off. He does maintain an eclectic body of work, but everything he produces is instantly recognisable as his own work. Each individual piece is linked in some way to the next, for example, Shea keeps a set palette of colour and applies colour in a certain way to his pieces. (see fig 10)

Shea works hard to keep up with the demand for his work. He runs his own studio like an office and his business sense has grown more and more acute since "SEMI AUTOMATIC GLASS" began in 1978. He is committed to his work and has subsequently gained much respect from fellow artists, gallery owners and the general public. He is not a public figure but he knows people and how to deal with them. In the longrun, this knowledge of people and "what they like" is one of the main, contributing factors to his success as an artist. It also helps Shea in the Selling of his work, because he is not totally dependant on agents or gallery owners to sell his work for him. Most of the time Shea sells his work himself.

The "Art Fair" circuit in the United States is probably the key marketplace for lesser known American artists, in all fields, to sell their work. There is a large number of art-fairs throughout the year in the U.S.. Some are more popular than others, due perhaps to location, time of year, or because there is more money to be made at some art-fairs than others. However, since a jury judges entrants into most, if not all art-fairs, the quality of ones work must be high.

Generally, an art fair is a large outdoor marketplace, during which an artist is allotted a ten-feet by ten-feet space to set up what is essentially a miniature gallery. Usually, twenty to thirty artists are arranged alongside each other on a street in front of a walkway, thus people are given the freedom to browse or meet artists. An art-fair will occur in a town or a city about once a year. So when an art-fair occurs in a town, a major occasion is made of the fair. Streets are closed off, Street performers and food vendors move in and suddenly that section of town becomes something resembling an Eastern Bazaar. It is now that an artists skills both as business person and sales person come into play. There is much profit to be made from an art-fair over its two-four day duration.

Andy Shea learned to sell his work from scratch. However, now he is a master salesman and qualified to advise smaller artists new to the art-fair scene exactly how to make the most of an art-fair. This combined with his knowledge of the buying public, as well as his consistantly high quality of work have all contributed to his success at art-fair level.

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For Shea, Art-fairs count for the majority of his income throughout the year. Shea is aware of the "tricks of the trade" for example, when Shea takes part in one of the annual Michigan art-fairs, he will produce a large amount of blue items since he now knows that the people of Michigan like the colour blue. Shea also makes sure to include a number of lower-end, inexpensive items such as paperweights and his sculptural pyramids. As well as making him some money, this also serves as a good method for getting rid of seconds. (2) Generally at the art-Fair, Shea's attractive and eye-catching set up, at his booth, attracts many curious browsers. Shea usually talks about fifty per cent of these people into buying some item from him. Shea does this by complimenting his own work to the customer, convincing the customer that they need said item and finally by convincing the customer that they can easily afford two hundred dollars. Shea is a "talker", and is willing to haggle if needs be. I find him reminiscent of my romantic image of a carpet salesman in an Istanbul market.

Like Shea, Michael Aschenbrenner likes to talk. He talks about travel, food, work, everything with the view of a born cynic. However, Aschenbrenner does not need to sell his work at art-fairs. Firstly, this would be impractical since all of Aschenbrenner's work is wall mounted, and unsuitable for excess handling and travelling. Secondly because he does not have enough work to take to an art-fair. Aschenbrenner works on commission, towards exhibitions and sometimes sells privately. Aschenbrenner is what one could call "a fully fledged artist".

Unlike the majority of Shea's work, Aschenbrenner's work reflects a definite subject matter or theme. He has been producing his "Bone" pieces for almost fifteen years with the intention of having his work looked at. He wants people to learn about his experiences and personality. He does not have to sell a lot of work. For example, Aschenbrenner and I worked on a commission in Minneapolis (3) in the summer of 1993. The price of the finished piece was \$28,000 U.S. Dollars or in Aschenbrenners words "enough money to start a hot glass studio from scratch".

Also, Aschenbrenner has recently moved from his home of 15 years, New York, back to his original home, Los Angeles, primarily to take up a teaching position. It seems that "well known" glass artists internationally, teach at some level as well as selling their work.

Shea produces a limited amount of sculptural work. Some of which (4) is on show at certain galleries. However, he also submits his bottles, fish and pyramids on consignment to various agents, Galleries and retail outlets throughout the U.S.. Shea does not like to work on consignment to galleries, save to those people he knows and trusts. "Consignment" can sometimes mean that work, in large quantities may sit on a gallery shelf for long periods unsold, or breakages occur during transit. Therefore, Shea may lose his work and lose money.

Michael Aschenbrenner is at the level where he can easily hold a one man show of his work in any major gallery in the U.S.. However, Aschenbrenner has taken part in collective exhibitions along-side other artists, usually examining a theme. One such exhibition is "ARTISTS CONFRONTING THE INCONCEIVABLE", (see chapter 2) . a recent exhibition examining the holocaust. And Shea does not produce glass with a cause or message. Shea's work simply celebrates light and colour it explores glass and all its numerous aspects. Shea's work is beautiful in its simplicity.

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Generally, big name artists do not take part in the annual and healthy, "glut" of out door art-fairs. However each year, the American Crafts Council organises five major craft showcases. "Larger name" and little known craftspeople come together at ACC shows to take wholesale orders that is, big names up to a point. Artists such as Dale Chihuly (2) now command very high prices for their work. Artists like Chihuly have now broken through the confines of the international craft circle into the mainstream art-world. His name alone usually means he can price his work at very large amounts of money. However, Chihuly has always run his business empire with the flair of a film star, he enjoys the limelight. Chihuly is renowned among the glass artists of the U.S.A. as the ultimate business success story. He is often referred to by artists with a certain amount of cynicism. However, Chihuly (see chapter 2) is an artist who others look up to since he is a very rich man.

However, the American Crafts Councils craft fairs attract strictly buyers for craft objects, that is buyers for craft retail outlets or galleries. Therefore, there is less opportunity for an artist to show his or her skills as a salesperson. Generally the buyer knows exactly what he/she is looking for before he/she comes to the show. A.C.C. craft shows act as a stepping stone for new or lesser known artists into the art-world. So I believe it pays to stay loyal to the American Crafts Council, even down to subscribing to "AMERICAN CRAFT MAGAZINE". Perhaps in the event of an artist taking part in a show or producing a new and exciting line of work, the A.C.C. will provide exposure for the artist. To an artist like Aschenbrenner this is all important since he relies on people finding out about his exhibitions and then travelling to see them. Shea is more comfortable waiting for his customers to come to him, so he can sell them his work his way..

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It takes a certain type of person to undertake and survive an open air art-fair. People have tried and failed at what is a "hit and miss" business. It does not help to be perhaps too shy, rude or bad tempered. However, in the long term an artist will become used to one of two lifestyles, that of production and non production artist.

As I have stated, (1) Aschenbrenner and Shea differ in their production methods. When they are brought together during a working day at an art-fair one can see why Aschenbrenner is not perhaps suited to selling directly to the public. During the 1993 "Uptown Art Fair" in Minneapolis, Aschenbrenner visited Shea at his booth. He subsequently proceeded to drive a number of potential customers away from Shea's booth by means of light-hearted and cynical remarks about Shea's customers. However, the general public are, to an artist like Shea, the largest and most important source of feedback, criticism or praise, possibly since lesser known artists have less chance of receiving reviews or being written about in books and magazines. It goes without saying that a good "write-up" can be an important factor leading to an artists success. However, word of mouth from satisfied customers can often have the same effect.

I believe that the out-door art-fair is a healthy enviornment for an artist. It is interesting to walk around an art fair and watch artists as they relate their various sales pitches to customers or perhaps insult another artists work.

Dale and Kathleen Eggert are close friends of Andy Shea and seasoned art-fair participants. Even though they are husband and wife and share a studio space, they produce very differing work. Dale specialises in ornately decorated; futuristic looking furniture and sculpture from flat glass and steel. Kathleen specialises in softer figurative sculpture. They produce their work seperately but often exhibit together. Their work is aimed to be sold at both gallery and art-fair level. However, they are authorities on the business of being a glass artist. Originally, Dale managed a large department store and learned about working with glass from working with his wife. Dale maintains that it is not necessary for an artist to make a name for his or herself provided he or she can target a particular market. For example, Sheas and Eggerts work is sold to a predominantly jewish clientele, since both artists have noticed a trend in those customers who keep coming back for more.

Dale Eggert's business expertise has aided him and his wife in reaching their current status in the glass-world. Eggert has advised Shea about business and also to a certain extent sales. Being well known and having an identifiable style helps an artist and increases his or her chances of being juried into better shows. It can be difficult for a new artist with something new to offer to break into the market place. However, There is a living to be made from glass on every level, provided one knows their market and can practice business to a certain extent. Even as far as simply meeting deadlines and generally satisfying the customer.

Eggerts work fits into a high price bracket and generally sells in large quantities. He could probably give up participating in the amount of art fairs he does. However, the Eggerts enjoy and possibly rely on feedback from the public. For Shea and the Eggerts, art-fairs are an important link between the artist and customer.

(1) See Chapter 2..

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Direct sales can help an artist decide to change direction or perhaps stop producing a certain line of work. However, it is necessary to stress that taking part in the art-fair teaches the artist to practice professionally as half artist, half business person. Criticism directly from the public is useful in that the customer will give useful advice and encourage the artist, more so than a magazine review.

For an artist like Michael Aschenbrenner, it is hard to duduce whether or not he could benefit from the close personal contact of an art-fair. Perhaps it is not necessary for him to listen to the views of several people. His work serves one major function which is to give the viewer something to think about. Perhaps he is comfortable to sit back and watch people make their own minds up about his work. Obviously, if someone is interested they will eventually do business. The personal contact is therefore unnecessary. In my opinion, Aschenbrenner is not suited for life as a production glass artist, yet he is lucky enough to stay busy throughout the year.

For Shea, there is more to his workload than taking part in art-fairs. Shea is represented by a number of galleries in the American Midwest. For Shea, sending work on consignment (1) is as a result of wanting to stay loyal to friends, people who have helped him out before. Edgewood Orchard is a small gallery in North Wisconsin which has carried Sheas glass for many years. He remains good friends with the curators and sends them a sample of each new line of work he produces or intruduces . Thus the gallery has some beautiful items to exhibit and possibly sell. Shea, however, turns down many offers from galleries for large consignments, mainly due to the risk involved. Shea does not want to lose out on either his work or the profit that could be made from selling his work elsewhere. However, a gallery can be an excellent forum for trying out new ideas in an exhibition style environment, e.g. sculpture.

Shea also receives various commissions for trophies or awards. He also performs repair work on glass.

However, Shea must also take into account the actual cost of blowing glass and running a large studio. Sheas gas and electrical bills each month are astoundingly high. When Semi-Automatic Glass was established originally, Shea, and the other resident artists, built the majority of equipment at the studio. The remainder of the equipment was bought second hand and restored to working order. Shea also needs to buy raw materials with which to work. The actual glass he uses is obviously essential but very expensive. Shea buys glass in its "raw material" state for maximum quality and clarity. However, polishing and grinding compounds, colouring agents, tools etc. constitute a substantial percentage of Sheas earnings. Shea does however rent space to other artists and thus collects a weekly rent. His travelling expenses to and from art-fairs, exhibition fees and motel fees also come under his list of expenditure. Shea also has a family and so must keep ahead of day to day expenses, thus meaning that Shea must earn a substantial profit. Glass blowing is an expensive occupation, so perhaps producing large amounts of sellable work as a production artist is the only feasible way to keep working, support a family and run a large studio. I believe that if Shea was as well known as Mike Aschenbrenner, he could easily decrease his workload.

However, the glass community in Minnesota and the Mid West is close knit. Many of the key glass artists in this area are on very friendly terms. Possibly to the stage where there is a constant interchange of ideas and advice between the artists of this close circle, Shea has won best of show at the "Uptown" art -fair in Minneapolis, six years in a row. M.C.Taylor, curator of M.C. galleries in Minneapolis has labelled Shea, in her opinion, "the best perfume bottle maker in the world". Even so, Shea could not survive without his clients in Florida, New England, California and New York. Shea puts a generally slow market in the Midwest down to the conservatism of buyers and their seeming prejudice against local artists as well as the small size of the area. Shea has very few clients in his home city of Minneapolis, his studio is more of a novelty to the locals since it is positioned across the street from the hugh Minneapolis Sports Arena and next door to a famous bar. He also has representitives around the city in the form of eleven brothers and sisters, none of whom seem to be able to drum up business for Shea. Midwestern people lack the eccentricity, extravagance and willingness to spend money of people in an area such as Miami, an area which always guarantees success for artists like Shea and others.

Michael Aschenbrenner has always survived on grants, awards and commissions. He rents studio space as he travels or wherever there is a studio available. Whilst living in New York, Aschenbrenner has different studios for different lengths of time. With awards comes the chance to work in a studio to produce a prize-winning piece. Aschenbrenner has recently moved back to his birthplace in California where he has long term plans to take a teaching position and set up a studio. Aschenbrenner also has the advantage of being single, and his work is in demand . His market seeks him whereas Sheas market must be sought.

CONCLUSION:

In the last three to four decades, the craft scene throughout the world has seen new life breathed into it by an infinite number of innovative, creative artists. One only has to pick up a craft magazine or exhibition catalogue to see the wealth of talent that now exists in all craft media, from jewellery to paper making.

Glass making has progressed steadily since its origins. It has found its way through many civilisations and industry, to the birth of western civilisation as we know it today. Techniques have bearly changed, but attitudes towards glass as a beautiful and workable medium have. In the United States artists such as Tiffany set the scene for the new art glass movement. Through the sixties and seventies, as artists became comfortable with glass, ideas and finished work became more confident. It has now reached the stage where, provided one is willing to spend time learning technique, anyone can become a glass artist and make a success of it.

Two artists who emerged from the upsurge of American glass talent in the seventies are Andrew Shea and Michael Aschenbrenner. Both have gained success yet through different means. Shea is a production artist so produces large amounts of functional, sellable work. Aschenbrenner concerns himself with sculptural, non-functional work which tells a story. The key to success as an artist is down to whether or not the work sells at the end of the day. Shea and Aschenbrenner sell their work in different ways.

Shea concentrates on targeting the U.S. art fair market. He produces a large body of work which he transports around the country and sells directly to customers from a stand in an appointed venue. He is a talented salesman so he makes a good living from this. Shea's work does not necessarily represent anything yet is beautiful and sells to people who like the way it looks.

Aschenbrenner's work represents his personality in relation to the time he spent as a soldier in Vietnam. His work is completely sculptural so sells directly to collectors and corporate organisations. His work is also fragile and so is more suited to hanging on a gallery wall than constant handling. Aschenbrenner's work is very expensive, so he does not sell to much in order to make a profit. He also works on commission which means he must meet a deadline, however he is not obliged to hand over a percentage of his earnings to a gallery.

If Andy Shea began to solely exhibit in galleries, he would soon lose a lot of money. As far as the glass collectors of America are concerned, Shea is relatively unknown. His work is not sculptural enough to appeal to the small amount of people who buy art from galleries. He is more suited to selling to the "man on the street".

If Michael Aschenbrenner was to start participating in art-fairs, he would also make a loss. His work is too sculptural and the subject matter too complex to appeal to the masses who visit art-fairs. He is not an experienced salesman and not as business inclined as Shea.

Shea and Aschenbrenner live two different lifestyles. Aschenbrenner lives life in the preverbial fast lane whereas Shea is a typical, hardworking American citizen. They are similar in personality yet different at work. However both are artists through and through.

I believe it is possible to become a success at glass-art in the United States. There are two ways to go about it neither more lucrative than the other. However, each is , in my opinion, as rewarding as the other.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION:

- (1) - I have used the term "Production Artist" to denote artists who produce large amounts of work for direct sale to a customer.

chapter 1.

- (1) - The new studio glass movement in the U.S. founded by such artists as Harvey Littleton and Dominick Labino (Dan Klein "Glass a Contemporary Art" Ch 2 North America)
- (2) - Emile Galle - 1846 - 1904.
- (3) - L. Comfort Tiffany - 1848-1933.
- (4) - "Trailing" and "Bits" are hot glass additions to another piece of hot glass.

Chapter 2.

- (1) - Lampworking is a technique involving torch melted glass rods.
- (2) - Waterford. Tyrone Etc.
- (3) - University of Minnesota.
- (4) - I have used the terms "Studio" artist or "Gallery" artist to denote an artist whose work is strictly gallery oriented.

Chapter 3.

- (1) - When glass is cool, it can be finished in a number of ways e.g. Ground, Polished, Cut, Engraved, Sandblasted or Acid Etched.
- (2) - Damaged goods, old stock etc.
- (3) - Shea's Studio.
- (4) - Sculptured Fish.

Chapter 4.

- (1) - To be sold at a later date. (A body of work is sent to a gallery and exhibited until sold or perhaps unsold).

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ANDREW SHEA "PERFUME BOTTLE" 1990

FIG 1.

MICHAEL J ASCHENBRENNER "CROSS"
1992

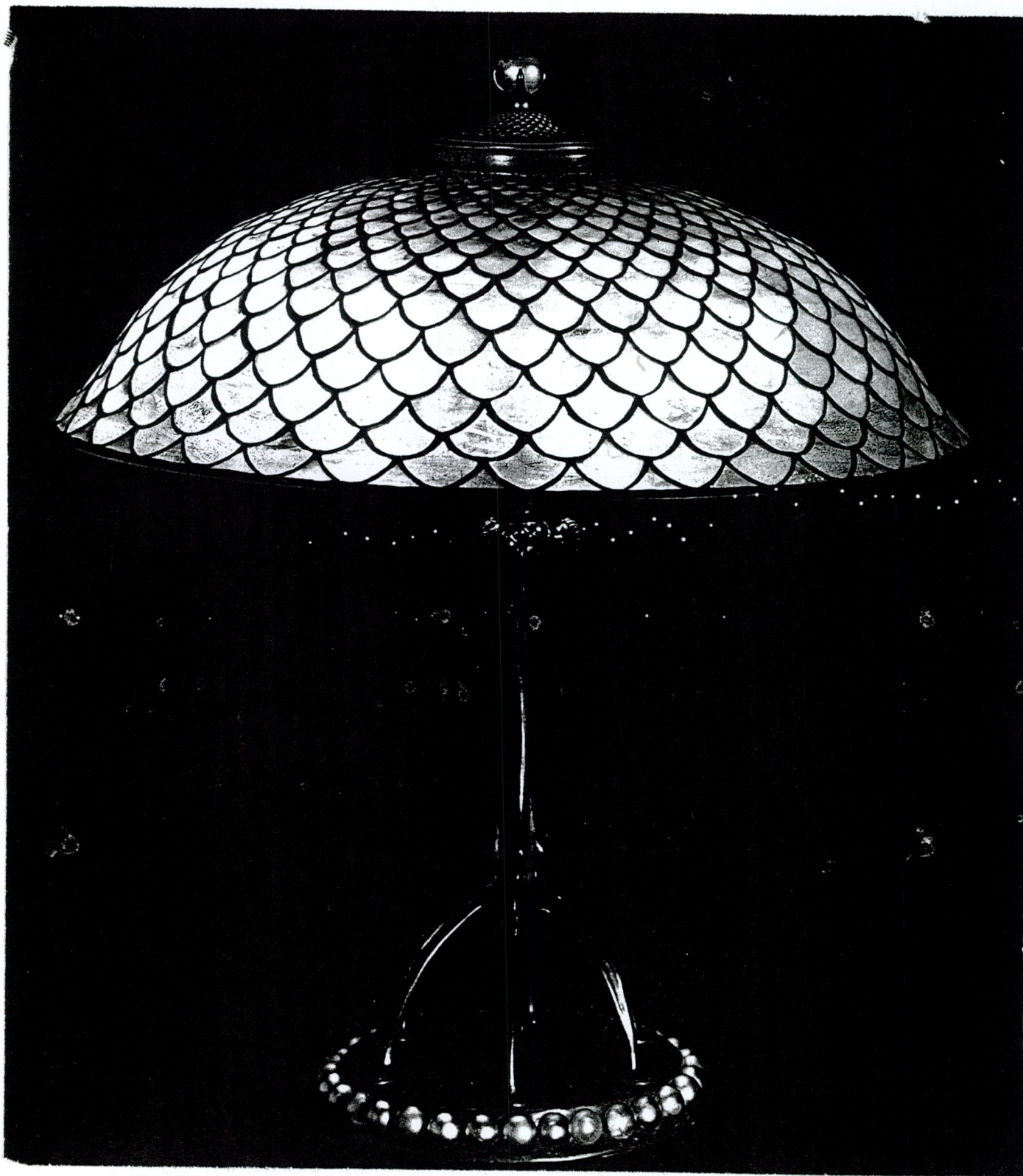


FIG 2.

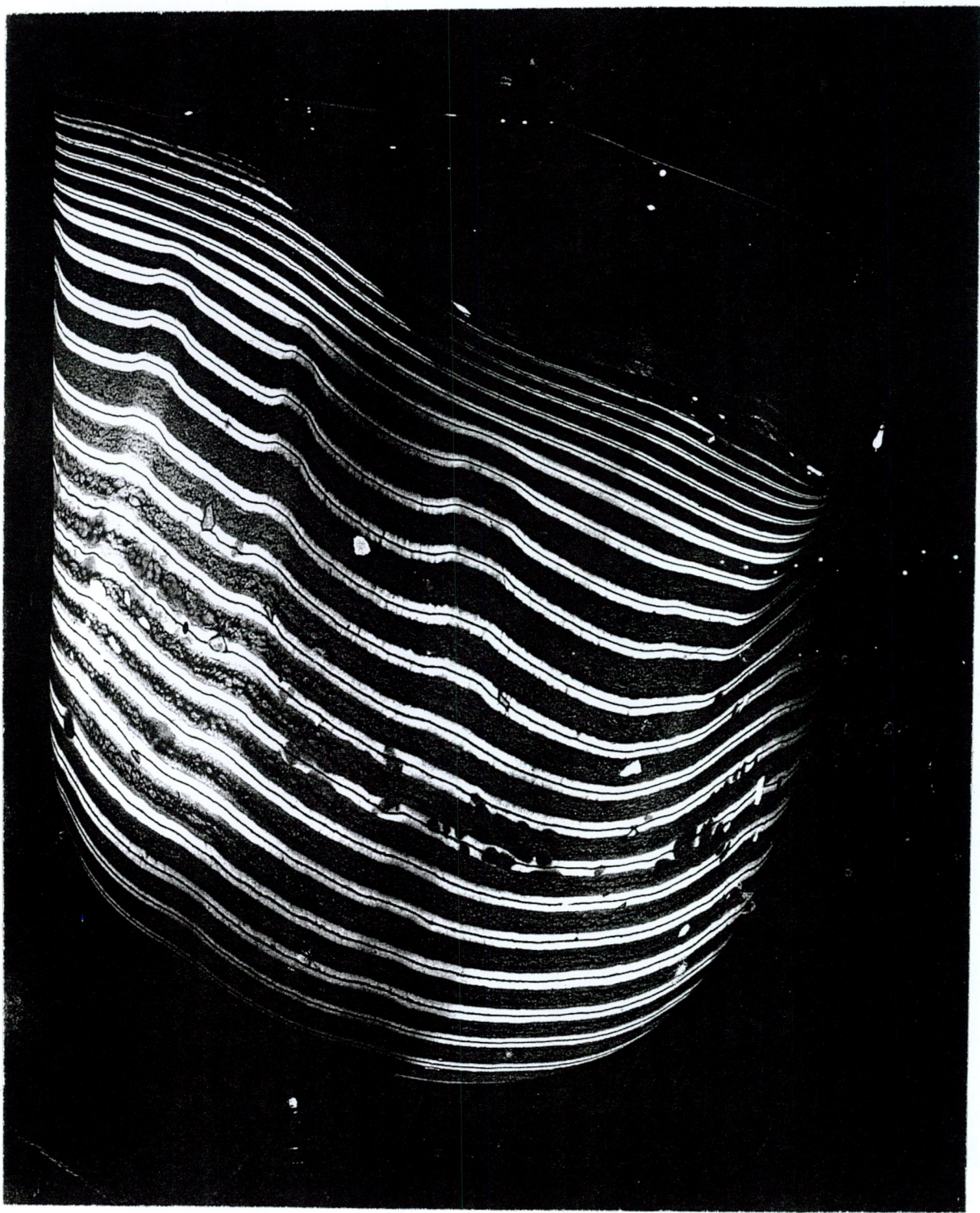


EMILE GALLE "L'ORCHIDEE" 1900

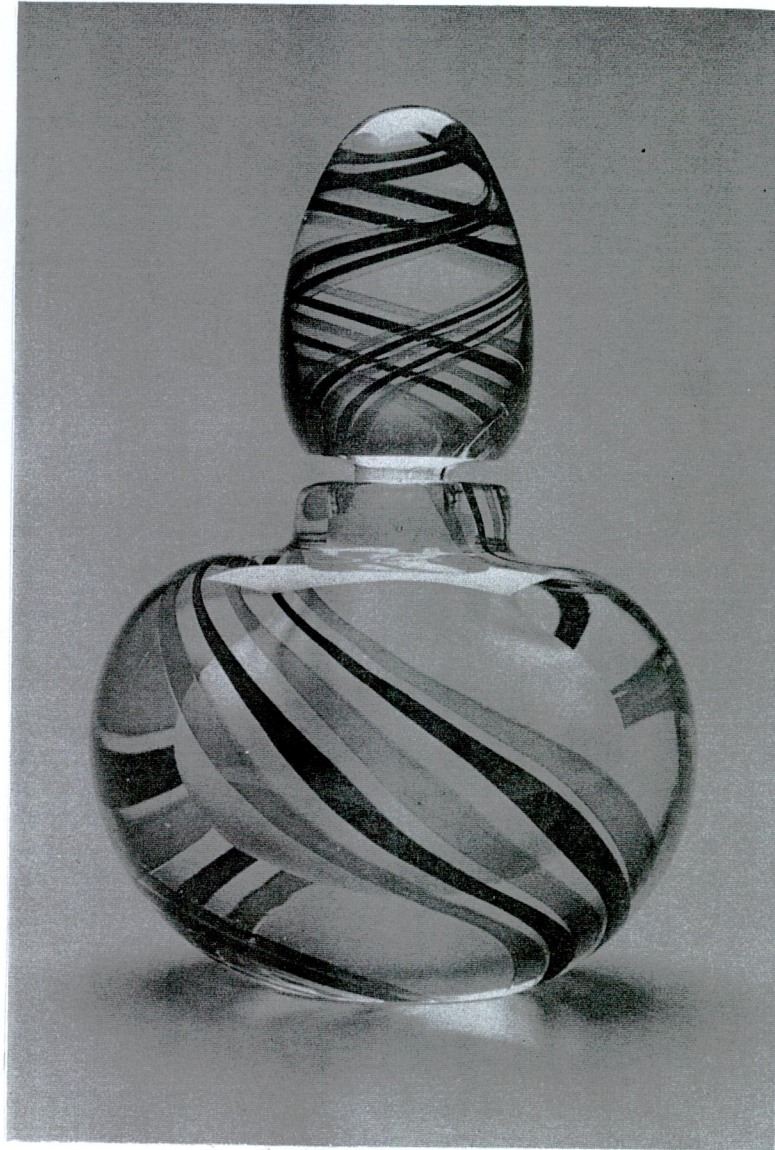
FIG 3.



LOUIS COMFORT TIFFANY
"FISH SCALE GEOMETRIC TABLE LAMP"
1900 - 1910



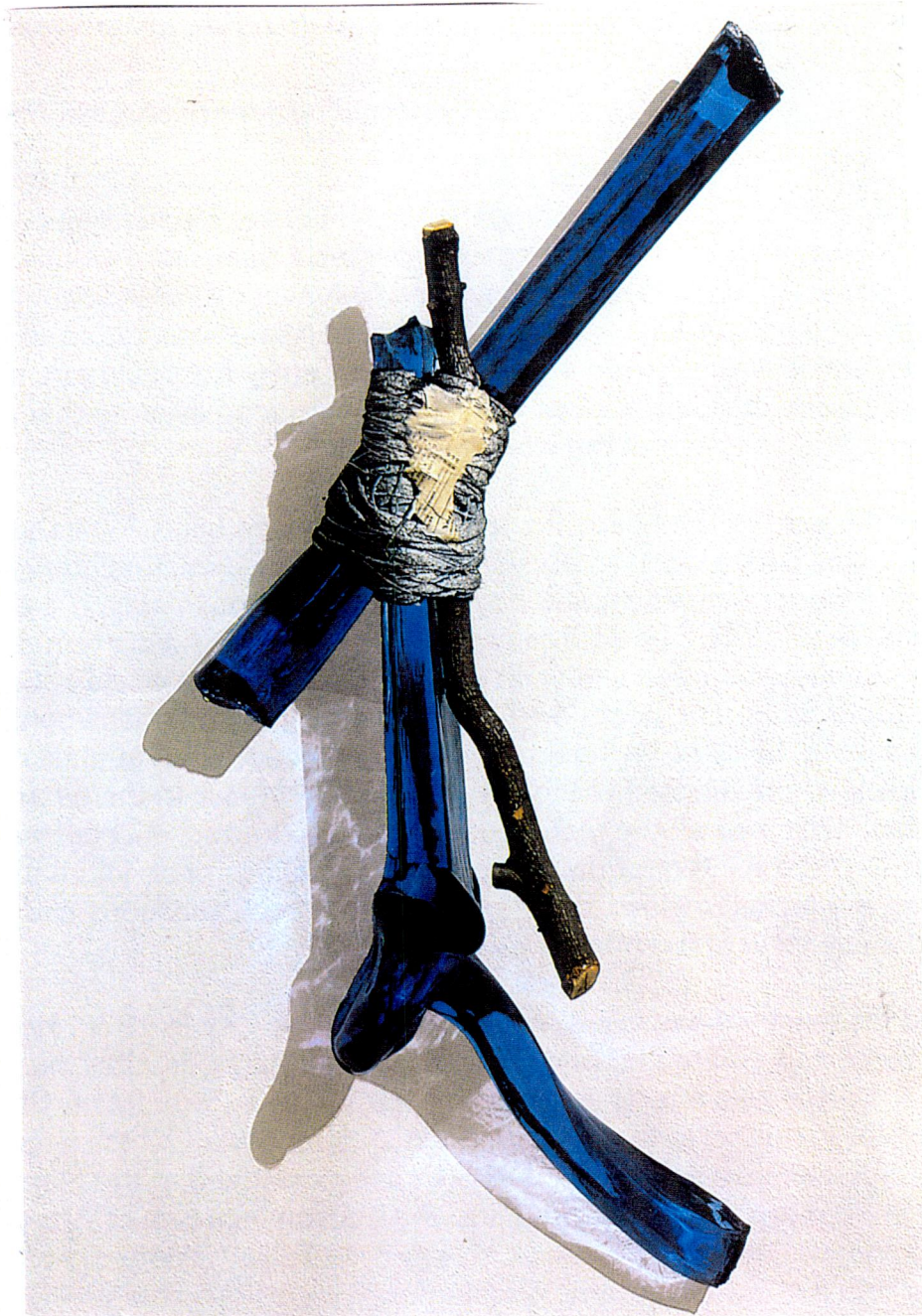
DALE CHIHULY
"ULTRA MARINE BLUE MACCHIA WITH
RED LIP WRAP" 1983



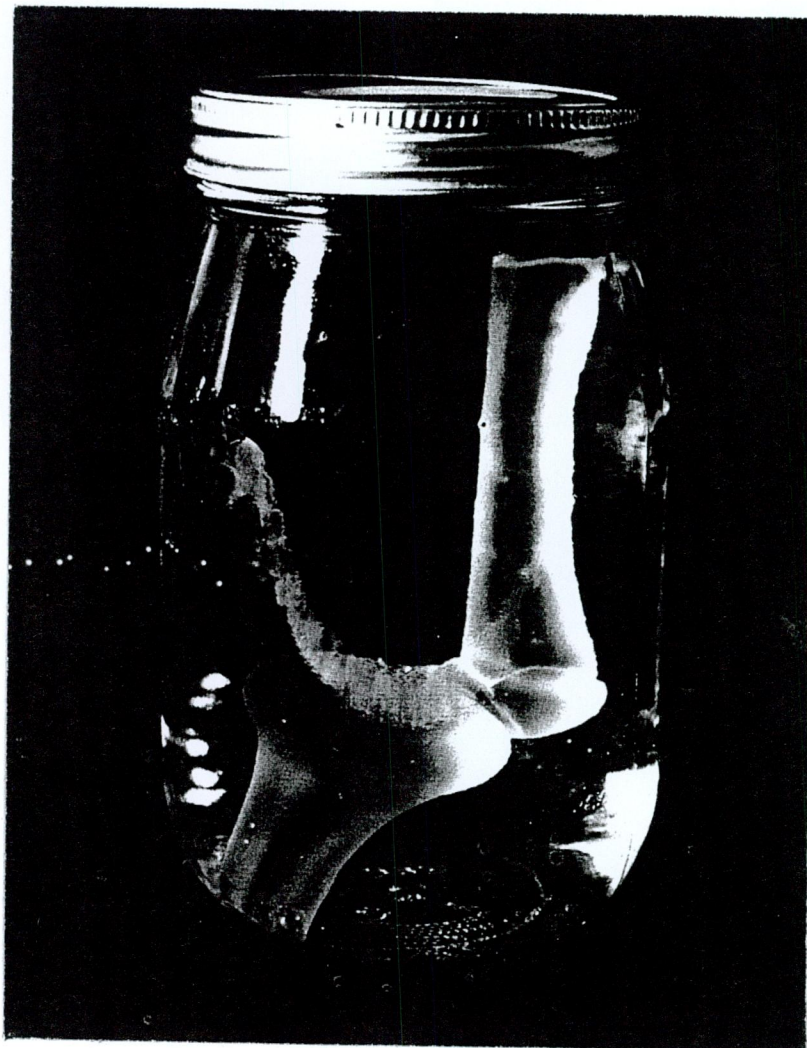
ANREW SHEA "PERFUME BOTTLE" 1989



ANDREW SHEA "OPTICAL GLAS PERFUME
BOTTLE" 1984



MICHAEL J ASCHENBRENNER
"DAMAGER BONE SERIES" 1993



MICHEAL J ASCHENBRENNER "MENGELE"
1992



ANDREW SHEA : CATALOGUE SHEET

FIG 10.

