

<u>National College of Art and Design</u> Design Faculty, Craft Department (Glass)

Dale Chihuly:

"The Chihuly Machine"

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INTRODUCTION



The first aim of this paper is to introduce Dale Chihuly, one of the most famous producers of contemporary art glass in the world at present. I will be looking his early life and training and areas of his work important to my investigation. It further aims to look at the importance of team-work in his operations and to record and discuss the work produced and my experience of working with the Chihuly team in Waterford on his largest on-going project to date, "Chihuly over Venice".

The high level of media interest and support Chihuly receives renders him a heroic contemporary glass artist, he is a source of inspiration for anyone interested in contemporary blown glass. A medium cannot be appreciated and/or worked with, without developing an interest in artists of that material, both past and present.

An enormous amount has been written about Chihuly both in contemporary glass magazines and in magazines such as "Vanity Fair" and international and local newspapers. There are also many books about his work, including books recording in photographs, each of his major projects. But my interest in Chihuly does not come from a text book background. It comes from having the opportunity to meet and work with Chihuly and his team in Waterford Ireland, during October 1995, on his latest venture, "Chihuly over Venice". This invaluable experience enabled me to acquire an unique insight into the work and working methods of what I now describes as the "CHIHULY MACHINE".



To introduce any glass artist the history of glass has to be taken into consideration. Having considered aspects of the history of glass relevant to Chihuly's work the Thesis will then focus on some series¹ of his work. First it looks at his "Cylinders" and "Baskets" series and other work leading up to his "Chihuly over Venice" project, which is his largest to date. Chihuly's breakthrough in the area of the "Art versus Craft" debate will also be touched upon.

Central to this investigation is the importance of team-work, as Chihuly is unable physically to make his own work, he relies upon his team. A look at how he runs projects like the one in which I partook and the media interest generated by such an extravaganza in glass will be discussed.

Chihuly incorporated is the company Chihuly owns and under which he employs 85 people at his headquarters on North Lake Union and at his shipping centre in Tacoma, a busy vanity press that publishes lavish coffee table books on his work and also a multitude of artists and craftsmen full and part-time who work for him at different times and in various locations. Chihuly Inc. costs approximately \$500, 000 a month to operate. What this thesis will do is discuss Chihuly Inc. in an original light, with contrasts and comparisons between previously documented information drawn and the impressions and opinions developed through the writers personal experience in Waterford.



Chapter 1:

The history of Glassmaking.



There is a popular misconception that great modernist art always makes a radical break with the past. In fact, very good new art more often breaks with the present by going back to the past, by going back to its material essentials.¹



The art of glassmaking is an ancient one, its place and date of origin unknown. Amongst many theories, one popular legend lead us to believe that it was discovered by accident at a prehistoric campfire. The combination of natural elements, whether accidental or experimental have lead to a breakthrough resulting in one of the most remarkable substances ever conceived by man.

The history of glassmaking is as haphazard and fascinating as the material itself. We can piece together a rough outline of how glass has featured during the ages in museums and galleries throughout the world. The numerous artifacts left behind by our ancient predecessors offer clues to its origin. These artifacts range from glass beads produced three to four thousand years ago by the Egyptians and Phoenicians to the exquisitely formed and coloured blown glass of the Venetian craftsmen.

Though the art of making the highly refined clear glass of the ancient Egyptian period was lost for centuries, it resurfaced in Western Europe around the twelfth century. The battle for glass revival is never ending. Civil disruptions, war and squabbling among the glassmaking guilds of Central Europe meant that many methods and techniques were once again lost in the thirteenth century.

The Venetians, are a wonderful sources of skill and influence, but are not without a history of unrest. Around the year one thousand A.D. they began refining the art of glassblowing on the island of Murano. By the fifteenth or sixteenth century glassblowers were confined to the island, for two main reasons. One being to keep the glassblowers safe and the other being to prevent the secrets of their



trade from being revealed. This lead to a restriction of the flow of information. This is one of the reasons why the extensive working of Venetian glass was nearly unknown outside of the factories until Harvey Littleton started the first courses in studio glass in 1962, on the once heavily guarded island of Murano.

Americas role in the glass industry began around 1608, when the first glassblowing house was established in Jamestown, Virginia. In 1771 Henry Stiegel began producing the first American cut glass. By the early nineteenth century press moulded glass (mechanically produced) made America a leader in the glass industry. Though glass was established, as yet fame lay within the realms of factory and machine production. The first major breakthrough in American art glass was made by Louis Comfort Tiffany, (1848-1933) a pioneer in art glass, glass that is a work of art as well as being utilitarian. Almost one hundred years later the much admired artist of his day was matched by Dale Chihuly.

I think it is possible to compare what Dale Chihuly is doing with what Louis Comfort Tiffany did.²



Chapter 2:

Introduction to Dale Chihuly



Chihuly looks like a pirate and sometimes acts like a pirate; perhaps it's partly a disguise, an attitude, a way of getting through life, a way of taking something negative and making it work for you.³



Dale Chihuly is one of the most famous and established producers of contemporary art glass in the world at present. In a thirty year career he has promoted his art and himself from obscurity to world wide fame. In the process he has emerged as one of the most controversial characters in the art world having challenged the on-going debate of "Art versus Craft". Much of the influential New York art press describe him as a "craftsman", while competitors deplore the carnival atmosphere of his entourage and his obsessive concern with coverage by the media. Chihuly argues that he is not a mere craftsman but an artist working with a highly expressive medium. He has been described as the epitome of the best of the American *can do* mentality. He has also been described as,

A legend in his own time 4

and compared in status to many great artists such as, Louis C Tiffany, Andy Warhol and even Picasso.

One may put oranges or limes in his "baskets" or dried flowers in his "cylinders"; but one can also use a Picasso to cover a hole in the wall.⁵

It has been said of Chihuly:

Perhaps Chihuly's most impressive talent is his uncanny ability to promote and market glass both his own work and studio glass in general.⁶

On his latest venture "Chihuly over Venice" the title itself has provoked moans from Chihuly's detractors, some of whom wonder if Chihuly's "midas touch for marketing and publicity has finally sent him over the top".⁷ Regardless of conflicting opinions, most can agree on the fact that he has made one of the largest breakthroughs



in the world of studio glass in the twentieth century. Whether his work is Art or Craft is the on-going debate, but it is undisputable that he has challenged this debate and helped remove many of the invisible barriers between the two.


Section One.

Dale Chihuly: His early life and training.



Dale Chihuly was born on the twentieth of September 1941 in Tacoma Washington. In 1960 he entered the University of Washington, Seattle to study Interior Design and architecture. In 1961 he decided to set sail for Europe and the Middle East. His desire to travel and explore, prominent from the early stages of his career, has had a strong influence on his work and the route he has followed. He admits to having some of the characteristics of a nomad and this trait in his personality is evident through his many excursions abroad both working and pleasurable, during his lengthily career.

On returning from his travels (1962), he re entered the University of Washington, this time specializing in weaving. His initial introduction to glass came in 1964, when he began incorporating glass in his tapestries (Fig. 1). He became fascinated with the potential of the material and decided to specialise further in glass.

One night I melted a few pounds of stained glass in one of my kilns and dipped a steel pipe from the basement into it. I blew into the pipe and a bubble of glass appeared at the end. As far as I could remember I had never seen glassblowing before. My fascination for it probably comes in part form discovering the process that night by accident. From that moment I became obsessed with learning all I could about glass.⁸

Whether it was working in Alaska as a fisherman for six months in order to save money so he could blow glass full time or travelling half way across the world as one of the first studio glass pioneers to work in Murano, no opportunity to learn new skill and knowledge in glass was by-passed.



Though at times unpredictable, Chihuly follows a similar pattern in his working methods. He has an idea, an aim and a plan to make his idea materialise. With no fear about carrying out his dreams, he creates an energy that is evident in every piece produced. His vibrance and ambition appears to have always rivalled his talents. Nothing is too experimental, no project impossible and he never applies set rules where making or designing is concerned.

Chihuly says of himself;

favourite artists always One of my has been Harry Houdini; maybe that's what I'm trying to be - a magician ⁹

How far is this statement from the truth? How close is Chihuly in actually achieving his ambition? Chihuly may not pull rabbits out of hats, but the work he creates has a magical ingredient setting it apart from other "objects" in glass.

Chihuly claims that glass has an inherent magic.

It is the most magical of materials.¹⁰

Yes, indeed the material itself is a fascinating substance, but this explanation falls short of explaining his success with and the wonders he creates in glass. If glass itself was the magic, how are the hundreds of glass objects that refuse to excite magic explained?

Chihuly began teaching first in Wisconsin in 1968 and then in the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) during the 1970's. This proved to be a revolutionary time for the young Chihuly. With the influence of sculptors and painters he began to develop as an artist. His work at the stage involved ice, neon, plastics, synthetic and many other



Fig. 2.





Fig.3.

reflective materials. The most exciting work he produced at this time was in hot glass initially. He would blow amorphic shapes which involved dripping molten glass out of the furnace and combining these with blown "organic forms" (Fig. 2). He would then put equal emphasis on the lighting and environment ensuring the finished result was effective, fresh and exciting work (Fig. 3). According to Chihuly this was one of the most creative periods in his life, This was because he was using glass in a way that had never been touched on before. Without realising, the young Chihuly was beginning the revolution in studio glass, with his innocence, creativity and love of the material guiding him into this whole new area.

With the aid of a Harvey Littleton scholarship (1964), Chihuly got the opportunity as one of the first glass pioneers, to go and learn from the Venetian masters on the island of Murano. This venture had many effects on Chihuly and also on the entire glass movement of this time. Before, glass was always factory produced and little time or money was available for experimentation. However, the Harvey Littleton courses, set up in 1962 opened up a whole new area in glass. Suddenly students had the opportunity to learn the traditional glass techniques and apply them in a new way the result being the birth of contemporary glass, with Chihuly as one of the major benefactors.

This opportunity to learn the traditional skills from the original masters of glass that had for so long been a carefully guarded secret allowed Chihuly to grow as a maker of art glass. These new found skills enabled him to produce the exciting forms he had only been able to imagine and thus opened new doors for experimentation. It







Fig. 4.

was also during his time on the island of Murano that Chihuly came to understand the advantages of team-work. He had previously dabbled in this area, teaming up with Fritz Dreisbach and Michael Whitley at Madison and acting as a gaffer for Italo Scanga in 1967. Chihuly states that:

Team-work suited me; nothings more inspiring than blowing glass with a group of friends.¹

On his return to RISD to teach in 1969, he asked students to assist him with his work. In return he would the assist them with their ideas and pieces. While pursuing this method with Jamie Carpenter, one of his first students their ideas began to merge and a team formed. This working relationship with Carpenter lasted until 1974, when they decided to go their separate ways. At the same time as the split (1974), Chihuly was inspired too begin his "Cylinder series"(Fig.4).

The team Chihuly put together for this project included Flora Mace and later Kate Elliott who would prove invaluable to help create these pieces. In 1971 he founded the famous Pilchuck school of Glass and was then able to put together a skilful team of Pilchuck students. As workers came and went the make up of the team always remained fresh and working continuously with new people enabled Chihuly to bring out the best in his students and thus keep the work from going stale.



Section two.

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Previous Projects.



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Fig. 5.





Fig. 6.

Pieces produced prior to and leading on from the Cylinder series suggest Chihuly's working practise to involve pushing the idea and the glass to its limits. Natural forms emerged from the molten liquid which was never forced into an unnatural state.

Ironically the cylinders are quite out of character with this usual practise, the form itself is neutral and unnatural to Chihuly's concept of glassblowing. It suggests function, an area he rarely considers. Quite simply the importance of these pieces lay in the drawings applied to the form and in typical Chihuly style these images are free and spontaneous. Kate Elliot and Flora Mace would prepare the drawings and these would then be picked up on the molten glass. The excitement lay in the fact that Chihuly never really knew how the image would turn out, a challenge that motivated him to continue working for quite some time on this series. The relevance of the cylinder form was due to the fact that his concentration lay within the realms of the drawing, hence the form had to be subtle and practical. With his background in textiles and an interest stimulated in the Navajo Indian weavings', Chihuly was inspired to create the "Blanket Series", in 1975 (Fig. 5).

Kate Elliott and later Flora Mace would weave threads of glass capturing the essence of individual warp and weft threads. As opposed to being reproductions of Navajo pattern, the glass "drawings or fabrics" enhance the "vitality" and the richness of the movement that results from flexible fibres draped on a human form. The flowing and delicate images would be picked up on the cylinder, wrapping around the thick, solid, smooth walls, becoming like a second skin (Fig. 6). This can be compared to the way in





which Navajo Indians would wear the original fibre blankets as a second skin. The practical cylinder form serves as a piece of curved drawing paper and the proportions carefully worked out so as the woven image and cylinder match the scale.

The individual thread lines express a gesture, and direction, in motion contrast to the neutral stable cylinder.¹² and

The road to success never runs smoothly and Chihuly has had various set-backs. On a lecturing trip to the United Kingdom in 1976, a serious automobile accident resulted in Chihuly losing an eye. This put an end to the cylinder series for roughly a decade. When Chihuly returned to the series in the late 1980's the original concept of the blankets was still very apparent, but the forms became more fluid and the colours brighter. They were named "Soft Cylinders" (Fig. 7).

It took a year for Chihuly to recover from his injuries which forced him to reassess his working methods and projects. Teaching in the RISD and developing Pilchuck consumed most of his energy and allowed him the time to revitalise and find a new direction.

The loss of an eye was a huge blow for Chihuly. Though he is no stranger to emotional pain, having lost both his brother and father at a young age, this latest physical and mental trauma could very easily have sent him into a state of no return. Rather than give in to the adverse situations which preyed on his life and instead of admitting defeat, Chihuly saw this latest disaster as a turning point, which lead to a period of rebirth.



Fig. 8.





Fig. 9.

Chihuly is renowned for disappearing for periods of time and reappearing revitalised, moving rapidly into a new type of work, usually bigger and better than the last. During these periods of re energizing, he travels, looking and waiting for the next bolt of inspiration. It is also a time when he can be himself, with no dependents.

Almost two years after the accident, whilst visiting the "Tacoma Historical Society", with his good friend and work colleague Italo Scanga, Chihuly was taken with a pile of Northwest Coast Indian baskets that were haphazardly stacked one inside the other, the loose form and texture instantly caught his eye (Fig. 8).

They were dented and misshapen, wonderful forms.¹³

They appealed to him so much that he made the decision to reproduce them in glass. Having not blown glass for two years this may have been just an excuse to get back to the workshop, but whatever the reason he began the basket series that summer. He produced about one hundred at this time and exhibited at the "Seattle Art Museum" that autumn (Fig. 9). Initially he received a negative response to this series, but this set back did not influence him to discontinue. The joy and satisfaction in the making was enough and it did not matter if his friends were unimpressed.

Nobody seemed to like the baskets when I first got them going. Neither Jamie nor Italo responded to them, but I knew what I wanted to make.¹⁴

The result of this early decision is some of the most exciting glass produced in this era, with it he laid the foundations for more major



Fig. 10.

breakthroughs to follow and generated mass media interest and excitement within the up and coming world of studio glass and art.

With the Basket series Chihuly pushed the material to its very limits, by allowing the glass to follow its own natural course, yet manipulating and stretching its abilities to the fullest potential.

Within the baskets Chihuly liberated the glassblowing process from the restrictions of symmetry, allowing glass to do what it wanted to do naturally, respond to gravity.¹⁵

The original baskets were pure forms in sheer shades, tabac or red; later his confidence with the success of the form allowed him to introduce stronger colours and subtle textures, honeyed yellows and dusty blues, and he translated the impression of woven fibre onto the glass (Fig. 10). This allowed his early interest in weaving to shine through in his passion for glass.

Essentially the importance of the basket series lies in the exploration of form as opposed to surface decoration. In appearance the baskets look almost ghostly they are so fragile, soft and malleable. They give the impression of the movement, stress and tension that first attracted Chihuly to the original Indian baskets, but with a grace, beauty and subtle quality that makes you want to touch and feel them. In my opinion the success of his baskets lie in the fact that he allowed the purity and simplicity of glass to take over resulting in the freedom of the form he desired.

Shortly after I started blowing the baskets in 1977, I found that I could use the heat of the fire to form them. Fire, gravity, centrifugal force and human breath became my primary tools.¹⁶



Fig. 11.





Fig. 12.





Fig. 13.







Learning to understand his material and respect its potential and strengths lead to further originalities in glass for Chihuly and the world of studio glass. When Chihuly had gone as far as he could at this time with the baskets the series naturally lead into the creation of his next major media delight and breakthrough. When he returned to the baskets in the 1990's, the forms and colours became more bold and vibrant, but they are very clearly an extension of the original series (Fig. 11, 12).

This new series was entitled "Sea Forms" (Fig. 13) and what makes this series dramatically different is that he simultaneously shows us both the hidden and visible aspects of an object. Again the idea, as with the baskets, of smaller units nesting inside larger is apparent. But here by using a layering effect of several super imposed linear patterns crossing within the structure of three dimensional forms a suggestion of a co existence of ethereal yet vigorous movements through space is developed (Fig. 14). As with the original sea forms he wanted to capture the qualities of fleeting moments and sudden movements. The shapes suggest living essence, a mood of forms in space and movement best describes "Sea Forms". The impossible thinness, liquid translucence of glass and illusion of living as opposed to being man made provokes an inevitable beauty, thus making this one of his most popular series with media critics and the public to date.

At this point Chihuly had became a major figure in glass stimulating great excitement, energy and media interest. Chihuly always the nomad, now travelled not alone but with an array of photographers, media, glassblowers, installers and management. Arriving in a









Fig. 16.
destination meant calling in even more outside forces to add to the "circus" of people and equipment on the move.

Without realising, Chihuly had become a network. A name offered to the work made by many. What I describe as the "Chihuly Machine" was being conceived.(Looking at Chihuly's history helps explain how the "Chihuly Machine" was born and operates.)

Following on from "Sea Forms" came the "Macchia" series (fig. 15), yet another breakthrough in pushing the abilities of his team and the material into new areas undiscovered, the result was success with even larger more ample forms and brilliant colour.

Faced with the bountiful colour of the surfaces Macchia and the ampleness their of of only thrill volumes,one can at their unerring poise, caught as they are midway between a soap bubble and a sculpture.¹⁷

The combination of individual pieces in previously mentioned series and the emphasis of form led to works exhibited in various locations, each installation using the same work, but made up differently to create a new mood and exciting overall form.

Though continuing to create new series, such as "Niijima Floats", "Ikebana" and "Chandeliers", Chihuly began turning the full circle, backtracking to previous work and finding a new relevance in their form in connection with the creation of new pieces. In the converted Seattle shipyard were Chihuly lives and works he has recently installed a 50 foot \$500,000 swimming pool, (Fig 16) filled with a combination of his shell like sea forms and flowery persians, at the top of the pool hangs a may green and cadium yellow



chandelier. With a safety sheet of glass about 40 inches down you can float right above the sculptures.

No longer was the work of Chihuly the efforts of one man. Gone even are the days when two or three made up a team. A combination of his desire to travel and exhibit glass in temporary installations, as a moment and a mood created with form, in the context of a particular environment made the progression from the work being made in the hot shop, to then being installed and photographed in that particular environment. The work is then stored and often shipped to exciting and different locations to be used in other types of installation work. The emphasis on exhibiting work as installations with space and form working in unison, had aided the growth of his team, popularity and success.

necessity for Chihuly to have the work recorded, The photographically and in text cames from the fact that series such as "Baskets", "Sea Forms", "Floats" or "Chandeliers" create as much of an image as they are objects. These images are a reference to all the forms that precede and follow them. A process involving the original form idea, the technical procedure and eventually referring back to the form idea. When he nests, stacks and gathers pieces into astonishing accumulations and proceeds further to enhance by lighting and installing he creates a mood, a sense of wonder momentarily. This mood is captured, recorded for ever within the pages of books and on film and does not lose the magic of the image at the time through the process. In fact, the recording of the work in this way creates a whole new type of image. The spirit of the work is captured in a photographic image which sometimes can be lost when faced with the work in its' three dimensional form. This



way of working explains Chihuly's popularity. The media love a showman and the aspects of Chihuly's "circus" provides enough excitement to keep them interested.

By beginning to loop back on series, for example returning to "Cylinders" after a decade and showing "baskets" recently in collaboration with his most recent venture "Italian Chandeliers", Chihuly opens doors for a new insight into the significance of his can look away from past analyses, technical work. We breakthroughs, metaphors and the overall ever expanding web of description which surrounds the work. Elements previously discussed, such as, exploitation of the inherent proprieties of glass, the beauty and success of these images are only part of what his talent involves and what his work is all about. Beneath the monster of description that surrounds his work, lies a simplicity that I believe to be the key to all his media success, popularity, breakthroughs, achievements and criticisms.

Quite simply, Chihuly is an artist who works with and in form. His form means form!

His first language is the language of form.¹⁸



Chapter 3:

Team-work in theory.



How does a team of very different artists join forces in settings ranging from a summer camp in Maine to a glass factory in Venice to make works that are universially recognizable as the art of one man? The answer lies in the man - Dale Chihuly.¹⁹



Fig. 17.





Chihuly's interest and exploration into large scale team-work developed following his accident. The situation he was in physically and mentally and the direction his work was taking made the natural progression to large-scale team-work (Fig. 17).

The damage to his left eye incurred in the horrific car accident (1976) meant the depth and perception essential for handling the complex forms and apparatus of glass blowing was lost. Hence his previous position as head of the team were he was completely physically involved in the making of the glass had to be reconsidered. Being in a position where he had to hand over "the stick" to another gaffer ironically enabled Chihuly to "see" better and have more control than before. This inspired him to push his ideas further and organize more ambitious projects. It is difficult to imagine that with full sight he would have still taken this new path. It is more conceivable the he might have been content to work with one or two associates, thus preventing the birth of the "Machine".

What Chihuly couldn't see (after the accident) because of his eye problem, he couldn't see before because he was too close to the piece.²⁰

Financial independence and fame enabled him to hire and pay assistants for particular blowing sessions, leaving him free to put more emphasis into the creative phases preceding and following the blowing (Fig. 18). When Chihuly's working on a project, popularity, money and power allows him to bring his own team from America, this team is then matched by a team from the host country and a collaboration ensues. The different cultures inherent in the teams is not a significant factor because as Chihuly says:



Fig. 19.

It's like dancer being a or playing in an orchestra, don't vou have have to common language to work together, what you are doing is common language.²¹ the

As Chihuly can no longer blow glass, he now puts more emphasis on the coloured drawings that serve as designs and act as gestural maps for working moves. They contain the same, if not more energy and spontaneity than the actual piece made from them.

In order to create those "maps" Chihuly will use whatever material close at hand to try and capture the mood and movement he needs to incite in the workshop. Often he will rip through the paper with handfuls of pencils, or draw over a rough surface of broken glass (Fig. 19). He often draws the environment in which he plans to install the glass, giving a broader overall idea of the entire project; But nothing is ever rigidly pre determined!

The gaffer heading whatever project at the time, is able to sense what Chihuly desires to accomplish through the drawings and is able to check the drawings that correspond to blown pieces. Because only an outline of what is required is given initially, Chihuly does not restrict the creativity of his team and the inherent qualities of the glass.

In contrast, the final photography work is vital because Chihuly firmly believes that the photograph

Dematerializes the object so that I feel I'm looking at its' real spirit, its' other dimension.²²



The finished pieces in photographic form are able to provide an analogue to the raw energy of both the drawing and the actual work.

Team-work in blown glass has always been essential in factory production being a practical and productive way to work. In the traditional collaborations, production is the goal and each team member has an assigned task. In contrast, Chihuly's team make unique pieces and people exchange jobs. In order to create the work, Chihuly instructs the team verbally and through his drawings he gives the initial order and the final word on whether or not a piece is a "keeper". In this making process he is like

A choreographer who uses his dancers bodies to make tangible his ideas.²³

To offer a personal opinion, Chihuly, is like the director, not actually involved in the making. He has a gaffer to head the team, who not only is technically qualified, but also understands fully Chihuly's aim and is able to pass this knowledge onto the rest of the team. His job is essential, but all team members are regarded as equals and everyone is encouraged to put forward ideas and improvise as a team.

In "Form from Fire", the working method of the team is compared to Celtic story telling by Walter Darby Bannard.

The good whiskey and the fire and the listeners packed around the teller of tales, throwing in their two bits at every pause.²⁴



The Chihuly team gives the impression of working together with apparent ease. To reach this stage Chihuly is required to instruct and organize. His communication with the blowers is essential in order to create work that is characteristically 'Chihuly'.

A Chihuly glass making session is a performance in itself. Chihuly loves a show and the show comes essentially from the energy generated from the creativity. Like a film set, with Chihuly as the director, the participants know where they are going and what they want to achieve to a certain extent, but they are not exactly sure how to get there. Chihuly's role involves creating the concept, initiating the action and setting the scene. He is the vital ingredient that impresses on the team the importance of incorporating the key elements of fire, gravity and spontaneity into the work. three To achieve the best from his team, Chihuly nurtures and encourages them. He is a father figure, a director and the catalyst. Chihuly importance in providing an ambience conducive to places spontaneity and an environment which facilitates team freedom. Music plays an important role as it helps maintain concentration during intensive work sessions.

In theory, Chihuly plays an important role in maintaining the welfare of the team and the execution of his designs. However the reality, in my experience does not always correspond to the theory. This will be discussed in chapter five.

To conclude, without team-work the world would not witness glass "art" like that produced by Chihuly and his team as one person could not create pieces of such magical stature and scale like those created by Chihuly incorporated.



In the words of F. Belbin,

Nobody is perfect, but a team can be.²⁵



Chapter 4:

"Chihuly over Venice"

Italian Chandeliers and the Waterford work.



"Chihuly over Venice", is a four part international project of which two parts have already been completed (Finland and Ireland). It involves Chihuly's vision of bringing his team of glass workers to four internationally famous European centres of glass making to work there with the factory workers. the four centres are, Finland, Ireland, The Czech Republic and Italy, to work with a Seattle based team of glass blowers and installation experts. The result of this venture is a meeting of not only Americans and Europeans, but also of artists and artisans. At each of the designated locations, Chihuly and his team, with help from the resident factory glass blowers, will produce thousands of hand blown parts to make up chandeliers and various installations. Of the chandeliers produced, five (maybe more) will be exhibited hanging over the canals in Venice paying homage to the century old Venetian tradition of glass and chandelier making.

This latest venture is his largest to date in every sense of the word, even Chihuly himself admits that it is huge. At each European stop, up to about twenty of the Chandeliers and various installations are constructed, but only a few pieces from each location shall be used in Venice for the grand finale. (The date for the finale has not been determined yet, but it is rumoured be sometime in the summer of 1996.)

The city of Venice is the initial inspiration for these pieces, but one can also see influences from other series such as "Sea forms", "Baskets" and "Macchia". It is possible to compare the "Italian Chandeliers" with other Chihuly projects previously discussed, because of the strong organic forms and the wide range of vibrant







Fig. 21.



Fig. 22.









Fig. 24.





Fig. 25.

and delicate colours and subtle textures. His showing chandeliers along with other forms (before taking the project across to Europe) were seen when he exhibited chandeliers in collaboration with his "Baskets" at the "Charles Cowles Gallery" in New York (1992). A collection of "Baskets", "Sea Forms" and a specially made "Italian Chandelier" have appeared on the film set of the movie "Disclosure" (1994), based in Seattle. Famous software tycoon Paul Allen recently installed a Million dollar chandelier over his jacuzzi in Seattle to add to his Chihuly collection, and as previously discussed Chihuly installed a Chandelier above his sea forms and persians filled swimming pool. Also, in his "Chihuly Courtyards" venture in "The Honolulu Academy of Arts" Hawaii (1992), a chandelier featured amongst his installations of "Floats", "Ikebana", "Macchia", "Persians", a (Fig. 20) 20, 000 pound ice and neon sculpture and "Sea forms".

In "Chihuly Courtyards", (Fig. 21) an image of large decorative spheres with a seemingly weightless quality give the impression of floating across the warm, green lawn of the "Central Court". "Macchia" pieces (Fig. 22) with their ruffled edges and array of loud colours adorn the "Kinau Court" and "Ikebana" (Fig. 23) spring from the Academy's lotus pond very much at home in the Asian Court. In the "Graphic Arts Gallery" amongst a collection of Chihuly's paintings a reminiscent of "Sea Forms" (Fig. 24) (Yellow Sea form set with Red lip Wraps, 1990) recalls marine life such as shells, seaweed and skeletal sea urchins, and one of the first in his new series "Lemon Yellow Chandelier with Cobalt Blue Stem" (1992) (Fig. 25) is suspended over a fountain in the "Mediterranean Court". It is



a composition of two parts, firstly a mass of brilliant yellow conic forms bunched tightly together

resembling a hornets nest 26

and a long blue stem extending below the burst of yellow forms ending in a bulbous flower.

When the fountain's arch of water meets the tip of the flower, the entire court becomes a gentle sea of water sounds, glowing colours and swaying forms.²⁷

The success of the "Chihuly Courtyards" venture lies mainly in the fact that the pieces used in this exhibition correspond to the distinctive architecture, the charm and beauty of the Academies courtyards and the indoor/outdoor flow of the gallery and its grounds.

The European series follow a similar pattern with the chandeliers and complimentary installations all having an organic feel, and blending naturally into the chosen surroundings. The series in each location is influenced strongly by that particular environment. From Seattle to Honolulu, the forests of Finland to Waterford Ireland, the pieces differ in accordance to the exhibition space, but it is obvious that they all follow one concept.

Once the initial concept was conceived, tried and tested in the United States, and after years of planning and organising, only then was Chihuly able to go on tour to Europe. Particular countries interested him because of their strong culture, incredible landscapes



Fig. 26.




Fig. 27.

and architecture, and in particular their traditional internationally famous glass Blowing factories.

The launch of "Chihuly over Venice" began in June 1995 when a Chihuly team of thirty glass blowers, installers and support staff spent two weeks at the "littala glass factory" in Nuutajarvi, Finland. (which is one of Scandinavias premier producers of glassware) The landscape, forests with watery, lush green thick tangled undergrowth and tall willowy trees influenced organic flowing and interlocking, twisting and turning shapes. The forms installations worked in unison with the landscape (Fig. 26). Leafy branches resting on the clean crisp water and following the natural contours of the environment influenced the installation crew to dangle chandeliers (Fig. 27) into the nearby rivers and glass installations to decorate the wooded river bank.

After the success in Nuutajarvi, Finland, in September (1995) Chihuly took an even bigger team to Waterford Ireland, home of Waterford Crystal Ltdⁿ. The Chihuly team consisted of around fifty Seattle members, a dozen of Waterfords finest blowers and cutters, and numerous volunteers from Dublin (NCAD; of which I was one) and the nearby Waterford Art College (RTC).

Chihuly has always loved Ireland, with its strong Celtic culture, friendly welcoming people, the rugged landscape in areas such as the West, and the timeless architecture from Newgrange to the many fairytale Castles.



Fig. 28.





Fig. 29.

On previous trips to the Emerald Isle, the desire to create work under the influence of its culture and natural beauty was born, and the reputation of "Waterford Crystal" as one of the leading manufacturers in cut crystal world-wide gave Chihuly the excuse he needed to make Ireland an absolutely essential stop in this latest venture.

Originally, he wanted to create forms in and around the ancient, mysterious Dolmens and burial sites. The famous "New Grange" a timeless passage grave, creates an atmosphere of ancient times unknown, peace and solace. The peacefulness, air of mystery and feeling of a greater presence would have encouraged the spectacular, earthy forms to occur naturally. The mysterious stone dolmens and ancient burial grounds are scattered all over the country and only one was close enough by, (Fig.28) to allow any kind of installing work to take place. Time, distance and manpower did not permit travelling cross country with enormous quantities of large fragile glass. But Ireland famous for its beautiful landscapes and architecture meant that finding a suitable replacement close by did not prove difficult and disappointment was minimal. Further south of Waterford Crystal in the quaint sleepy town of Lismore, a magical fairytale castle (Fig. 29) with unspoilt pristine grounds offered the environment and atmosphere that offered Chihuly and his team the chance to create in unison with this magical surrounding.

In delicate shades of pink, purples, blues, greens and even clear glass, the subtlety of the colours and strong organic forms blended gracefully in with the traditional, classic beauty of the castle and its



grounds. In order for the installations to create an atmosphere and "magic" as opposed to being merely glass objects, it is essential for them to revert back to the form from which they emerged. This is why it is important to be able to appreciate the exotic quality and colour of the form merged in with the environment from where they grew. It is also essential for them to be highlighted accurately so as not to blur or distract, just accentuate the natural beauty.

The forms created in Waterford contrast to those for example made in the hot climate of Honolulu. The appearance of brightly coloured "Floats" and "Macchia" and the Squat brilliant yellow chandelier in "Chihuly Courtyards", though suited to that particular environment would have been very much out of place in Lismore. The appearance of the Castle and its grounds meant that more delicacy and subtlety in form and colour was required.

Size in this venture is always an issue, the chandeliers and installations cannot appear overpowering in their environment. This would result in them loosing their overall power and effect. But, at the beginning of a crisp Irish autumn in the acres of gardens with rolling hills, lush green lawns, greenhouses, pathways lined with trees, high ceilings, tumbling remains of once stately rooms and stately archways emblazoned with royal crests, the installations were allowed to be viewed in their full glory and with enormous impact. In order for these forms to instil magic and drama, they have to portray a feeling of power and action frozen and compliment their environment as much as it enhances their beauty and effect. If the elements do not work in unison the pieces remain as being just enormous quantities of large fragile glass objects.



Fig. 30.





Fig. 31.

Though we, in Lismore, constructed many installations and chandeliers, what to me really excited magic was the image of an amethyst chandelier (Fig. 30) made from a combination of bulbous, textured forms tapering into dangerously thin twists. These forms were then bunched tightly together enabling them to splay outwards as if reaching in every direction. It hung as if by an invisible force in the midst of a long tunnel of ancient yew trees, and above a reddish path of autumn leaves and dying grass. When the brilliant late afternoon sun shone through the canopy of boughs, the shinning appearance of the chandelier glittering like a giant jewel was positively mesmerizing. The success of this piece was the result of a clever combination of glass and the magical atmosphere and environment it became a part of.

Other installations that captured the atmosphere and magic that had been sought could be viewed in abundance all over the castle grounds (Fig. 31). With some it was the element of surprise that provoked a reaction. On walking through the grounds and turning one its many steep corners, or coming to the top of a small hill, an installation would suddenly appear right in front of you or in the near distance. In the midst of a tall, narrow archway facing a regal crest on one side, and a steep stony slope on the other, a classical clear crystal chandelier hung in its secretive position. The reaction of each person that made the discovery was one of awe and admiration for its simplicity, and classic beauty.

....The effect was delightful, surprising, even magical, like finding Easter eggs hidden in the garden.²⁸



Fig. 32.





Fig. 33.

Along the castle walls and on the gentle grassy slopes dangerously tall thin, spears in an array of colours created a regal atmosphere (Fig. 32), capturing the feeling of medieval culture, but yet the exaggerated organic colours and form also blending in with the natural environment, as if they were growing from the earth.

Whereas most of the installations were exhibited outdoors, one particularly successful chandelier was choreographed in a bombed out, rubble strewn shell of a room, with a high semi preserved cathedral ceiling. During this installing period it was referred to as the "Destruction Room" and I assisted with the installation in this room for the three days it took to fully erect the largest Chihuly chandelier to date (Fig. 33). After much perseverance, a few breakages, (but fortunately no casualties) the chandelier once erected filled most of the room. The strong contrast between the collaboration of pale purple bulbous forms tapering downwards into long slightly balloon like pieces, and the rubble was so sublime that visitors had a tendency to whisper on entrance as though in a church.

Not all the installations were graced with such success. When an installation failed to create the required effect it would be reassembled in a new format until the desired result was achieved. One case in particular that springs to mind, was an installation of pale blue balloon forms, hung aimlessly within the branches of an aging tree. The first attempt resulted in what appeared to be half deflated balloons struggling to escape the confines of sharp branches. It was an awkward and clumsy result and defied the

 $W_{i}(t) = W_{i}(t) = \frac{W_{i}(t)}{W_{i}(t)} = \frac{W_{i$



theory of the glass blending, enhancing but also offering a spectacular contrast with its environment.

Once each piece was successfully completed, photographed and filmed, they then had to be dismantled and packaged carefully. Some were then shipped back to Seattle, others went into storage for the finale in Venice, and those that had been sold were carefully packed and shipped to be installed in the desired location of the buyer. On dismantling the chandelier in the destruction room, being aware that it had been recorded on film, initially did not compensate for the taking apart of this masterpiece. But on reflection I became aware that I had become too close to the work through being involved in the making. The image of "Destruction room Chandelier" recorded on film helps maintain the atmosphere and wonder of the work at its very best. Unlike many permanent sculptures, the initial wonder and impact cannot wane, the image cannot age, be vandalised or gather dust.

The unique wonder of the work created in Waterford was the result of one moment in time, a place, the atmosphere and the combination of talented people involved. This experience and the work created is unrepeatable. The same pieces exhibited in another location will have a different type of success as all the elements involved will have changed.



Chapter 5:

The Waterford Experience.

Teamwork in practice.



... he is the maestro who orchestrates with flair, finesse and unlimited energy.29



Fig. 34.

On the first of October 1995 I made my first trip to "Waterford Crystal Ltd" to observe and partake in "Chihuly over Venice" - Part two. With a preconceived image of what I was to expect, but uncertain of what I would learn and discover, I made my way to a corner of the Waterford Butlerstown factory that had been taken over for two weeks of glass blowing by the famous "Chihuly Inc."

My first visual experience on arrival was of hundreds of coloured blown forms lying on the grass outside the main entrance to the factory (Fig. 34), with trucks and vans parked wherever a space was available waiting to be packed up with glass and various bits of high tech. equipment. A portable office complete with a fax machine, phone lines and boxes of Chihuly catalogues, books and specially printed T-shirts had been installed as a headquarters. Various Americans bustled around murmuring purposefully into walkie-talkie headsets and celluar phones. Inside the factory, the scene proved every bit as dramatic as previous Chihuly ventures described earlier. U2's "Sunday bloody Sunday" blared from an enormous specially installed sound system.

...At a decibel level that threatens to shatter any stemware on the premises. ³⁰

Resembling a movie set and with the atmosphere of a rock concert, the factory that normally produces lead-crystal stemware had been completely transformed. The harsh glare of television lights drenched the circular platforms (referred to as 'Pads') where teams of sun glass clad Seattle glassblowers, and pot-bellied Waterford blowers produced the various large coloured glass forms at a



Fig. 35.

frightening speed. All around the pad, film crews, photographers, people with walkie-talkies and important looking people in suits went about their business (Fig. 35). The sunglasses worn by the Chihuly team protect them against the glare of the blowtorches and fire breathing furnace, but this practical step nevertheless added more emphasis to the whole "Hollywood" scenario. The enthusiastic way in which the glass-blowing teams were going about their tasks was quite a contrast to the normal factory atmosphere. Though obviously working hard, there was also the appearance that they were enjoying every hot, sweaty moment of the production.

Having circled the factory area I got a good idea of what each of the separate teams were working on and the common procedure they followed. Each team of six was made up of a combination of Irish and Americans, all of them men and going about their work in a boisterous fashion. A fast working team could churn out each egg-shell fragile form in less than five minutes, working continuously and only stopping briefly to laugh, joke and high-five after a piece is carted off to the annealer (a slow cooling unit that prevents the glass from getting too cold too fast and cracking). The blast of music from the overhead speakers varied from hard rock to traditional Irish music, and the blowers reacted accordingly. When an Irish jig blared forth the Waterford blowers high-stepped in a light-footed Irish dance much to the admiration of the Americans, few of whom were to manly enough to attempt it.

Initially Chihuly was not on the premises, but on his return to the factory later that afternoon I was able to witness in person the mastermind behind this venture in action. His entrance



momentarily hushed proceedings and his presence commanded constant attention from the film crews, photographers, journalists and buisness men alike. The Chihuly crew jumped to attention, giving the appearance of being wary of being seen to be making mistakes at this crucial time. Strolling into the workshop the physical appearance of Chihuly and his entourage was more than eyecatching. On this particular day Chihuly sported a pair of bright green chinos, a royal blue long sleeved sport shirt, and partly covering his large head with its abundance of thick wirey curls, an Irish tweed cap in honour of his hosts. The combination of his brightly coloured clothes, cap, paint covered shoes and the trademark pirate's eye patch that covers his defunct eye on a weathered bulldog face, gave an overall effect of 'the' jaunty heroic art figure. Close behind, walked his young, photogenic fiancee Leslie Jackson, a couple of Chihuly people with walkie-talkies, two film crews, three photographers, and in a prime position by Chihuly's side, a Floridian art collector who was always referred to as "Jules". As Chihuly made his way towards the pads he was encircled by camera men and media, waiting with bated breath for his every next move. On making his way onto the platform he prepared to direct a team headed by gaffer Martin Blank, a Seattle glass artist who has worked part-time for Chihuly for ten years. Blank is an extremely demonstrative glass blower. It is said that

He blows glass like Leonard Bernstein directed orchestras.^{3 1}

Blank's team included two fifty year old Waterford blowers, (Tommy Rowe and Tommy Kiley) who, being quick learners and having twenty-five years experience, were able to match Blank's



Fig. 36.





Fig. 37.

flamboyance which was essential for the visuals. As Chihuly moved in to direct, the cameras began to roll and click not wanting to miss a second of the performance (Fig. 36). At one point he hunched down next to Tommy Rowe checking the development of the glass very much like

A movie director checking a shot. ^{3 2}

Sparks flew and flames leapt, Blank grimaced, swaying and chewing on his lip. As Chihuly shouted commands, the spectators got the full advantage of a perfect 'Chihuly in action' scene. This type of scene was to be repeated over and over again. Each time Chihuly entered the factory the swarms of photographers, media, film crews and various visitors would be enthralled with another 'show'.

This was in order to maintain the image of Chihuly as the core of the project, the creative director. It was another daily occurrence for the spectators and media entourage to witness the production of a Chihuly painting. These 'working maps', vital as the guide lines for the crew, were prepared inside the factory in the midst of all the commotion. When the film crew, photographers and spectators were in position and with his own brand of specially formulated "Chihuly paints" he would begin another \$4000 painting. Or as described by a Seattle journalist, (Fig. 37)

Squirt and sponge painting session. ^{3 3}

Moving rapidly over the thick sheets of watercolour paper, with a deep set look of concentration, he would shout demands to his



Fig. 38.

helpers to pass him another colour, or more water and sponges. The paintings were churned out at a blinding speed; each piece individual, yet concerned with the uniform concept. Whilst on one occasion, painting on a sheet of clear glass, a member from the film crew positioned himself beneath the easel to capture the full effect of the 'creative genius'. Chihuly appeared oblivious to the crowd of onlookers, but very aware of their expectations. The whole production was perfectly choreographed to ensure the show was a success.

I began working with the installation crew shortly after arriving at the factory, and it was through this experience, that lasted slightly over two weeks, that I was able to get a realistic insight into the real workings of "Chihuly Inc." My initial reaction to this important part of the project was one of disappointment. There was a strong contrast between the excitement of the blowing room and the time consuming, often boring installation work. For days, myself and a crew of about twenty other students, carried glass back and forth, packed and unpacked the large fragile pieces, and using small portable drills wired each individual piece in preparation for the final installing, amongst many other small and tedious, but

unglamourous. Compared to the way in which the projects are often described, when the emphasis is on the splendour and excitement of the creative process, this dull, tiring monotonous side is almost completely ignored, even though it is an essential part of the work. This stage is not very well documented by the media as it does not make for interesting visuals, and therefore it remains very much behind the scenes. This however, is also work that, in reality, kept the project ticking over, unglorified.

Once the blowing work was completed and all the glass had been packed and transported to Lismore Castle, I was relocated there for the final stage of the project in Ireland. By this time the majority of the crew, mainly the blowers, had left for Seattle. Those who remained were under a great deal of pressure to ensure that the rest of the venture ran smoothly. Initially I was a bit surprised that the glass-blowers had retired so early into the project, I was curious as to why they did not, at least, want to see the work completed. On inquiring, I discovered that, to the blowers it is only a job. They are brought in to do a specific job and most of them do not care less as to what the overall finished result will be. After all, it is not their own work, and that is where their interest is lost. This was not the case with the Waterford blowers who had a great deal of interest in the overall project. For them this was an opportunity to escape the monotony of factory production. They were completely fascinated with Chihuly Inc., and the glamour and excitement of the project.

The theories, and my previous image of the Chihuly team had not fully materialised. All the initial excitement and energy in the glass blowing stage, was an accurate portrayal, visually living up to my expectations, but there was a breakdown at the middle point in the project, which to me made the overall original image of the Chihuly team appear to be a farce. Various small problems occured which were normally covered up by the crew, so that Chihuly himself didn't even get a whiff of what exactly was going on. This provoked


me to examine in more depth the structure of what I began to describe as 'The Chihuly machine'.

In the premature stages of the installation work it was evident that much of the glass had been blown too thin. This was making the final constructions more difficult and often dangerous, while also limiting the creativity of the installers. Pieces were breaking in a greater quantity than was normal, and the illusion of impossibly thin floating forms in glass was turning into a reality. The frustration of the chief installers was painfully obvious, and the ensuing chain of events that could easily have been avoided, in fact Instead of approaching Chihuly with the problem, the escalated. installation co-ordinators stalled, only bringing the situation to the attention of the glass blowers when the majority of blowing work had been completed. At this stage it was to late for the problem to be rectified, and an undue amount of friction was created between the head glass blowers and chief installers. At the very root of the problem was the lack of research into the chemistry of the lead crystal, which determines its potential. The components of this type of glass are very different to the soda glass the Seattle blowers are used to working with. Crystal is softer, stretcher, and more brittle, thus more susceptible to breaking if blown thinly. In contrast, soda glass is more durable and capable of withstanding much more pressure, even when blown in dangerously thin proportions. Time, lack of knowledge and a communication breakdown between the two teams and Chihuly, were the key elements which provoked the surprising that there was such a lack of problem. It is understanding of the chemical make-up of the glass, considering that there was a combination of experienced Irish and American



blowers on each pad. This is not to say that the union was not a success, but if it is taken into consideration that the Waterford blowers have only been trained in one specialised area, they would have little or no idea of how crystal would react when pushed to unknown limits, and therefore, would not be aware that such a problem could arise.

Based on my overall experience of the project, it seems there was a serious lack of initiative to become informed on the basic details concerning the lead crystal, and quite possibly many aspects that did not concern media attention. Experiencing many blunders, whilst working with the installation crew, such as being told to carry glass to one area, and then being informed after hours of work to move it back again as they had made a mistake. There were also various problems in the transportation of the pieces, with the wrong bits being sent to different exhibition spaces. This type of disorganisation, lead me to believe that only the media aspect of the project was fully organised.

From all that I had previously read and heard about Chihuly, I was initially shocked at how little involvement he appeared to have with his production. As discussed, he would only make guest appearances in the factory were he was treated like royalty by the 'paparrazzi', performing briefly for the cameras and then leaving under a cover of portable phone clad people. Whilst working in Lismore it was much the same story, with cameras, media and Chihuly people at the ready whenever he was due to appear. In theory, Chihuly offers the initial guidance concerning a project and the final word on whether or not a piece is a 'keeper'. By

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encouraging his crew under the instruction of the head 'gaffer' to improvise within his guide-lines, his aim is to allow a feeling of creative equality amongst the team. The overall result of this working method would help create a good team atmosphere, and enhance the quality of the forms. Through my experience, this theory was only partially realised.

Firstly, Chihuly was not consulted on many important matters concerning the work, one being the thinness of the glass of which I have already outlined. But also, the assumption that Chihuly had the last word on whether or not a piece was a 'keeper' an important aspect that essentially characterises the work made as being a 'Chihuly', was not always a material reality. So many chandeliers had to be assembled, photographed and dismantled within a short space of time, that on occasion when a piece was completed the installation crew would give the go ahead to the photographers, without consulting Chihuly. This was not a common practise, but the fact that it happened at all made me question Chihuly's position as the creative director.

My impression at this point, was of Chihuly loosing control over his operation, I felt that in order to get a more accurate picture I should take a closer look at Chihuly the person, and how his personality and position relate to the ever expanding network of people that fall under the name of Chihuly Inc.

At the ripened age of 54 and with a 30 year successful career in glass, I feel Chihuly has reached a point where he must either retire gracefully, or continue to think up even bigger and better ventures.



Having opted for the latter, Chihuly has ignored many of his personal needs, and has succeeded in creating a project so large that if he pulls it off, it will probably go down in history in the same category as the sculptor "Christo", famous for wrapping Florida islands in pink fabric. Already he has grabbed the attention of many Europeans with his success in Finland and Ireland, and when/if the chandeliers are suspended over the canals in Venice they will undoubtably receive a vast amount of media interest. My concern is, what cost is Chihuly prepared to pay to live out this dream.

Having suffered from many emotional and physical traumas throughout his life, Chihuly's health, both mentally and physically have paid an expensive price. He suffers from depression, for which he neglects to take medication. It is rumoured that he feels that taking the required pills will limit his creativity. Painful ligament problems in his feet and ankles means that for much of the time he is in agony, and as a result has to wear the same pair of custom made shoes all the time. Not forgetting the loss of his eye, which although being partly responsible for many successful career moves, has obviously had a devastating effect on both his mental and physical well being.

Chihuly has a reputation for being a human tornado for weeks, and sometimes months on end, before suddenly, slipping into a melancholy low. Most of this personality trait is directly connected to his clinical depression. However, with the Ireland trip coming so soon after Finland, personal exhaustion was a major issue. While in Ireland, especially nearing the end of the trip his energy was



flagging, and according to the crew he was in a 'quiet' mood. His moods have an uncanny effect on his team, and not wanting to upset, while in this unstable and unpredictable humour, they walked around him on eggshells. This resulted in Chihuly being unintentionally excluded from many important issues surrounding the work.

Chihuly is often on a knife edge. He has been called imperious and mercurial, and according to a journalist on site

Some of his more public fits of pique are the stuff of legend,- ^{3 4}

In Waterford none of these performances were to be witnessed. I believe in part this was to do with his falling into a quiet humour, but I also came believe that during this project he was never left alone to wander or spend enough time in any one place to become over- excited.

In all his appearances outside the confines of his £200 per night Lismore castle suite, he was at all times guarded by at least one other person. Chihuly's financial and marketing advisers and managers were constantly on his trail, as well as various art collectors who had to be entertained and seduced into buying some of the installations ranging from \$50, 000, to \$100, 000. Leslie Jackson his latest fiancee and a women who sees her role as helpmate partly in terms of marketing Chihuly's work, was never seen unless by Chihuly's side. She is an obviously intelligent women, who in her 34 years is not only a Vassar graduate and a one time





massage therapist, but also a holder of a master's degree in Russian and English. She appeared devoted to Chihuly but also a bit overbearing. She was always by his side, quick to comment if any 'labourers' stepped out of line, consequently succeeding in making Chihuly more unapproachable to the crew and keeping him tied up with money matters rather than having him 'tramping' around with the installers (Fig. 39).

Whilst working all over the castle grounds, the installation crew's life line of communication was in the form of walkie talkies. I was allocated one of these high tech. pieces of equipment along with a headset to match, after being favoured by some of the Chihuly installers as competent enough to be left in charge of the erecting and dismantling of a few small installations. On receiving the two way radio I was also offered a warning never to have it on in Chihuly's presence as the fuzzy noise they make irritates him. There were various pieces of advice given on what not to do around Chihuly. He hated to see people smoking, particularly women, who he always referred to as 'Dear' as if talking to a young girl or an old lady. He did not regard this as an appropriate past-time for 'ladies'. So, when news got round of a Chihuly appearance anyone indulging would be expected to extinguish their cigarettes. I was able to laugh about this, but those working full-time for Chihuly Inc. must feel the pressure of working for someone with such unrealistic and oppressive expectations of their staff.

Content with a better knowledge of Chihuly's humour and commitments on this trip, I was able to adhere to some of the rules, vital to obey, in order to be initiated into the Chihuly system. These



rules were often strange, at times amusing, and more than often than not, appeared quite ridiculous to myself and fellow students coming from a very different culture and working background.

Towards the end of the installation work in Lismore, the pressure was on for the crew to complete the work and then completely clear everything to do with Chihuly Inc. off the premises. Chihuly left a week before most of the installation team, leaving behind (to a rather panicky, thoroughly exhausted group) strict instructions to finish up, and have the mass of glass shipped or stored (about 1500 pieces). Ironically with the pressure of Chihuly and his group of dealers, 'close friends' and working colleagues removed. Myself and those left behind worked at a more organised and rapid pace than I had seen so far on this venture. The small group of Americans and Irish (including us, the student volunteers) bonded easier with each other. What originally seemed like an impossible work load to complete in less than a week, was flown through with an incredible amount of ease.



Conclusion:



Chihuly Inc. as discussed, is a multimillion dollar company. In this thesis I have looked at the development of this corporation, from Dale Chihuly, the son of a Tacoma meat-cutter, to Dale Chihuly a major populist in the art and glass world, and instigator of the largest art based companies in the world at present. I have looked at Chihuly as the person who gains more media recognition and support than any one person working in glass as art.

Regardless of whether one believes Chihuly to be an artist, or a craftsman, no one can deny that he has changed the reputation of glass as an artistic medium. He is a God of glass for many, and a source of inspiration to all working with the material. It is undisputable that he has made many exciting breakthroughs with the technical possibilities of his chosen material, and is exceptionally talented in the area of marketing and promoting himself, and his work.

This part of "Chihuly over Venice", which took place in Waterford, was the largest part of the overall project to date. The scale of this whole venture creates many problems within the Chihuly team. It is my belief that Chihuly Inc. has grown too large for one person to have total control over the work that is being produced. The gap between Chihuly's initial idea and the finished result is getting too big. What is portrayed as a 'Chihuly team' in the pages of glossy magazines and lavish coffee table books may once have been accurate, but now that Chihuly Inc. has entered into a new area



where the scale is much larger and he does not even know the names of many working for him, the personal touch is lost.

There are only two ways Chihuly Inc. can function with the success that is portrayed. Either Chihuly reduces his scale and reverts back to a more family type atmosphere in the workshop, or he takes away all encouragement for team members to improvise and be creative, and runs the operations like a factory production. It is my opinion that Chihuly has opted for the latter, but has not fully put this plan into practise. I describe the team as "The Chihuly Machine", and I consider Chihuly to be like the operator of a large machine. The machine is a network that he has put together using different creative people, each of which have a necessary skill needed for producing his art. If the operator does not look after his machine and tend to the individual parts, a breakdown is inevitable. Chihuly's team is made up of sophisticated parts and as proved has the ability to operate relatively successfully in his absence. Chihuly did not keep a close enough eye on his team in Waterford, he was not around enough to be aware of how it was functioning. The result of this was that the machine found its own way to operate, and once it got over initial teething problems, was able to produce what it felt appropriate under the original guide-lines.

While the work produced in Waterford was brilliant and impressive, there seems to me, to have been areas in which this was not a wholly successful venture. The glass was too blown too thin which need never have happened, and pieces that may have been sold or used in Venice were lost. Another point is that, people in Ireland weren't aware of the 'great event' taking place. Also, there

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were problems among the team which can be exemplified in the fact that, at the end of this multimillion dollar operation the few student volunteers on the team were being begged to stick around for the last week to ensure the project would be finished on time.

There were other influences, that may have contributed to the lack of total success on this venture. As discussed Chihuly relies strongly on media support and interest, and has always received it in abundance. But in Ireland there was an unusual lack of media coverage, and therefore, lack of public awareness and interest. As opposed to being emblazoned across the front covers of the nationwide newspapers and magazines, there were only a few articles in local papers and small elements of recognition in some of the more widespread papers and magazines. Very little of the work was made public, and the small exhibition in the Solomon Gallery (Powerscourt Townhouse), and the Dublin Botanic gardens were given little publicity.

Most of the work which was in Waterford Crystal and Lismore Castle could not be viewed by the public for security reasons. The only people allowed to view the final installations were about a dozen wealthy art collectors who flew in especially from the USA. Among these were three Northwest businessmen, Bradford Romano, Frank Everett and George Stroemple, also Charles Cowle, Chihuly's New York dealer and Rose Mattus who with her husband founded "Haagen-Dazs Ice Cream". A few select members from Irish society such as TV celebrities and art dealers were invited to a private viewing over the final week in Lismore.



The reason for the lack of publicity is quite mysterious, and one that I have not been able to draw a reasonable conclusion on. My theories on the matter rely on bits and pieces of information I have collected. Maybe Chihuly felt he was getting enough coverage, with the American media entourage he had brought over with him, and recognition from anyone other than the glass and art society was not essential. Another more likely theory (as I believe Chihuly Inc. feel they cannot possibly receive enough publicity regardless of where and what it is) is that, they were not well enough informed as to what were the best areas of the media to stimulate interest from. The reason I think this to be a more plausible explanation, is because of Chihuly's humour. As discussed he was not in good form and appeared exhausted nearing the end of the trip. Part of this may have been to do with the fact that the project had not gone completely as planned and that he did not receive the media hype that is so normal for him on these type of excursions. Or my final explanation is quite simply, maybe Ireland was not ready for Chihuly.



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