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**National College of Art and Design  
Craft Design – Glass**

**The Influence of Venetian Glass  
on  
Contemporary American Glass**

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**By**

**Helen Hancock**

**Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and Complementary  
Studies in Candidacy for the Degree of Design (Glass)**

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## Introduction

In the summer of 1997, I travelled to Seattle, Washington, in search of information on the strong influences of Venetian glass on contemporary American glass. My aim was to find out why the American glass scene, especially in Seattle, is revolving around the traditional skills and techniques of centuries-old glassmaking from the small island of Murano, Venice. I visited Pilchuck glass school, which is situated on a tree farm, 40 miles north of Seattle. The school is well known across the globe for its pristine facilities and famous past pupils and staff – glass artists such as Dale Chihuly (co-founder of Pilchuck), Marvin Lipofsky, Stranislav Libensky and Lino Tagliapietra. Here I was able to watch the Venetian artists-in-residence, teaching young ambitious students who gathered there in small groups. The majority of students had travelled over 2,000 miles to attend the sessions. I had the pleasure of meeting two of the known, greatest glass artists, Pino Signoretto and Lino Tagliapietra. Both men now travel from Murano to the United States yearly. Pino Signoretto only visits Pilchuck for a two-week session then returns to Murano, where he has established a hotshot, working in hot glass formed sculptures. Lino Tagliapietra travels from the West Coast to the East Coast over a two-month period, teaching in a variety of small craft schools such as Haystack Mountain School of Craft in Maine, and other institutes such as The California College of Arts and Crafts.

I also had the chance to visit the studios of Dale Chihuly, Dante Marioni and Manifesto, where Tagliapietra gave a private viewing to a limited number of onlookers whose main interest was in the man's genius in glass forming.



Since my return to Ireland, I have researched my thesis in a number of ways. Firstly I had been given the rare opportunity to see work at first hand while in Seattle. Secondly I have continued contact with Benjamin Moore who introduced the Venetians into American glass in 1978, by firstly bringing Checco Ongaro to Pilchuck, a newly established school at the time. Unfortunately, Benjamin Moore has never actually achieved full recognition for this until recently. I have had lengthy conversations with Moore about what has changed in the American glass movement since he introduced the Venetians into his homeland. Although my thesis has been informed by my time spent in the USA, the only formal interview conducted was by telephone with Benjamin Moore.

I have also used secondary sources such as the book Pilchuck: A glass school, (1996) by Tina Oldknow, the book includes detailed interviews with a large majority of the people who have studied and taught there, and is fully illustrated. I have also researched many catalogues, one in particular is from a recent exhibition of Venetian and American glass together titled Heir Apparent: Translating the Secrets of Venetian Glass, (September 6<sup>th</sup> to November 16<sup>th</sup> 1997) held at the Bellevue Art Museum in Washington.

My aim is to use these sources to tell the story of how the new and exciting movement in American glass has developed over the last twenty years, paying particular attention to the people involved with Pilchuck glass school. Dale Chihuly may be the most internationally renowned American glass artist but many more people have contributed to the development of the studio glass in Seattle.





## Chapter 1

By 1962, it had become obvious to Harvey K Littleton (b.1922) that glass could be produced using a single furnace and one individual. Harvey Littleton had challenged that vision for some time. Even as a boy growing up in the factory town of Corning, New York, where his father (Jesse Littleton), was director of research for Corning Glass Works, the boy was exposed to science and industry at an early age.

Once grown up, Littleton had become a sculptor. He travelled to England and later become a potter. Many American glass artists of today have worked with clay before learning how to blow glass. Talking about the common ground between glass and clay, contemporary glass artist Benjamin Moore remarks that: "Glassblowing is a lot like pottery, everything must be kept on centre and symmetrical." (Interview, 23/12/97)

However, Littleton was still fascinated by glass and the image of producing it as an artistic sculpture more so than a functional goblet or vase.

Before the beginning of the American glass movement in 1962, glass was mass-produced through factories, the best known being the Tiffany Company, which mainly specialised in the production of stained glass. The only sign of artists working independently was in the form of 'slumping and fusing,' (kiln formed) glass, which was rarely seen.

In 1957, Littleton travelled to Italy, firstly to the city of Naples, where he was able to watch 'men' blowing glass in the factories. He wanted to



know more about how glass was formed, as up to this time he had only seen functional objects produced in glass, using moulds. Littleton travelled to Murano, Venice. The small island housed over fifty hot glass factories at the time. Unfortunately, now the number of factories on Murano has dropped rapidly. The reason according to Richard Marquis (a Seattle based glass artist, who worked on Murano, 1968), is that judging from the work coming from Murano, skill has been declining steadily there for 30 years for reasons both political and internal. Young talent no longer goes into glassblowing. Because of unionisation, with its policy of seniority based on time rather than skill, there is not much incentive anymore to become a 'maestro'. [Master glassblower] (Marquis, 1997,p.45). In 1957, however, the fiery furnaces of the factories on Murano blazed. Littleton tried entry into many of them, but was refused.

The reason seems to be that up to this time, Murano had kept its glass forming skills a secret. Historical safeguards to contain knowledge and skills within the confines of the Venetian glass houses are well documented. While there have briefly been centres of production in the Venetian mode, such as the '*Facon de Venise*' in the Netherlands during the Renaissance, those traditions were carried by the emigration of the Murano masters themselves. (Berndt, 1994,p.37). These skills and techniques in glassblowing, which the Venetians had spent centuries perfecting, were not going to be easily exposed to an American potter. However, Littleton did get a better response from the workers at the Venini factory. Here he would watch hour after hour, the men working in small teams. It is the maestro who commands a lifetime of technique, and is able to completely control and manipulate the glass as is necessary. Beneath him is the servente, the one who works closest to the maestro, and the next to become master. (Bellevue, 1997,p.8) There are four other





teams members, each under the other with very different jobs to do. This process of working in small teams had been used for centuries by the Venetians, and had not been closely observed by an American until this time. What Littleton witnessed here was to confirm all his ideas that it was possible to blow glass outside the context of industry and that an artist could have a fully functioning hot-glass facility in his own studio.

In 1962, the basement of the Toledo Art Museum was to become the starting point of Littleton's dream to create a workshop, which could produce handmade glass. American craftsmen observed a great change at this time, and the beginning of the American glass movement.

On his return from Europe Littleton had began approaching artists and museums. He and Dominick Labino [friend of Littleton's] were offered the use of the basement in the Toledo Art Museum. The furnace was built, and with the help of a few students who had originally studied ceramics Littleton began seminars, which were held in March and June of 1962. The students who attended the seminars did not continue their studies in glass, but returned to their studies in ceramics. The reason seems undoubtedly due to lack of knowledge and skill related to independently running a glass workshop.

News of Littleton's experiment's spread across America and soon young artists interested in what he was doing gathered to see the furnace and to watch Littleton work with only one or two assistants.

Marvin Lipofsky was the first graduate from the second semester Littleton ran at the Toledo Art Museum. Lipofsky went on to teach



glassblowing at the California College of Arts and Crafts. However, while in Toledo, Lipofsky had learning very basic glassblowing skills.

Although Littleton had travelled to Italy, he was only able to observe the Venetian maestro's at work, while at the Venini factory, and did not interact with the making or forming of the glass. It can be said at this point that no secrets of Venetian glass were revealed at this time.

He had the opportunity to assist in the making of Pyrex kitchenware. But also made cast torsos by a technique similar to *pate de verre* (A process in which crushed or broken glass is placed in a mould and then fuses to form an opaque substance when fired in a kiln.) at the Steuben Glassworks near his home in Corning, New York.

Minimal skills were shown to students at Toledo. Littleton's view of glassblowing was 'free-thinking', almost lazy as far as learning skills for glassblowing were concerned. Benjamin Moore said of this approach to glassblowing in 1994:

I mean it was a macho thing when the studio movement got started with Marvin [Lipofsky] and Harvey [Littleton] and all those guys. Harvey's remark was that 'technique was cheap.' Well you know that everybody was trying to prove the glass could be an art medium, so they were disregarding all technique and making hideous blobs. (See illustration .1) Granted, they might have historical significance. But technically, how were they executed, and what was going on? It was an exciting, new thing that was happening, but to say 'technique is cheap', in my mind, is like saying to a musician, 'you don't have to practise', or to a painter 'you don't have to study colour or drawing'. (Milne, 1994,p.13)





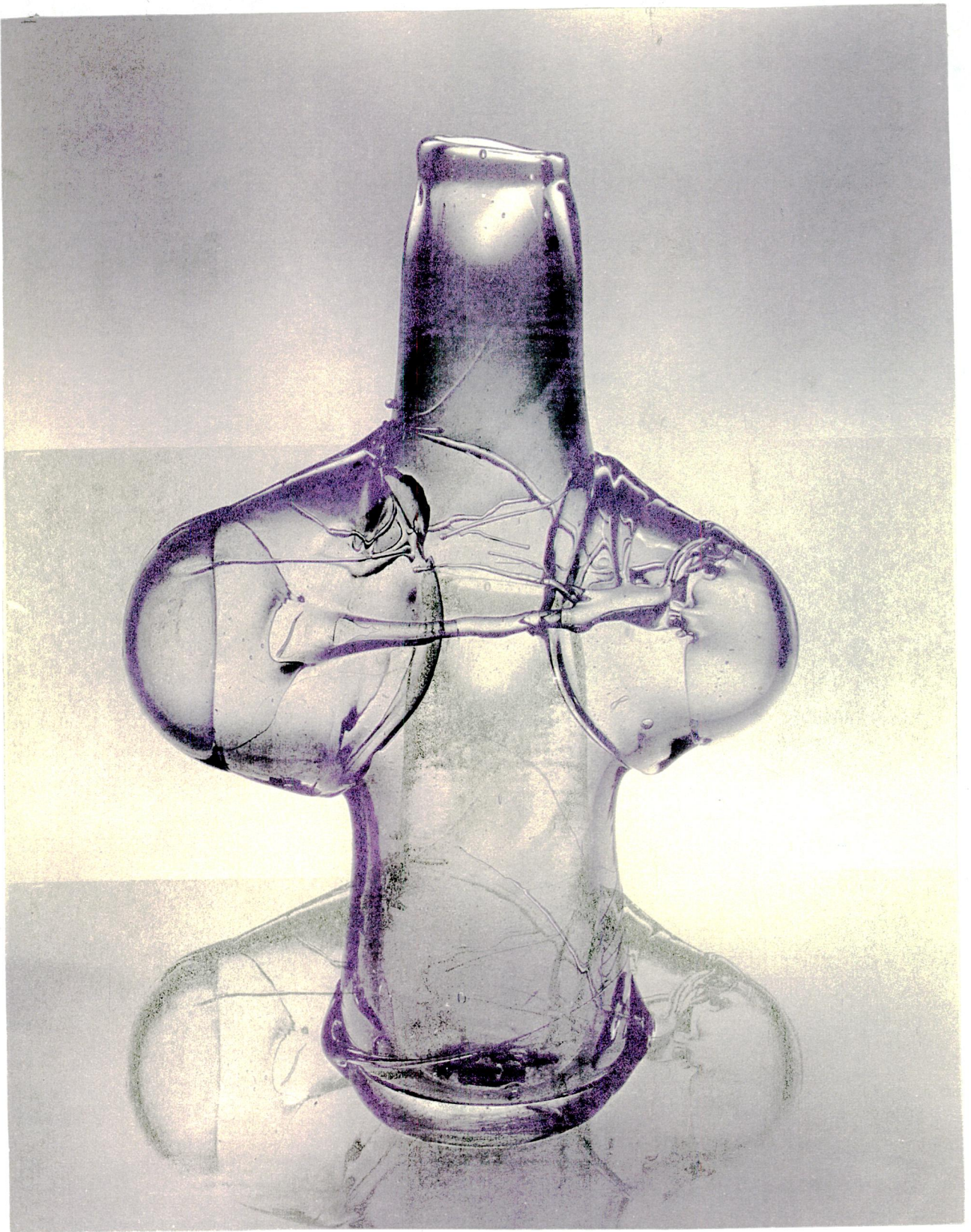


Plate 1.

*Cross Vase*, 1964, Harvey Littleton. Blue/Green clear glass from # 475  
marbles, 12 x 8 x 3 inches.





The techniques were scarce and it showed in the products produced in Toledo in 1962. Moore describes his surprise that people producing glass at this time were so unconcerned with learning technique and not seeking to find good skills in glass forming. Jennifer Lewis (curator for the exhibition held at the Bellevue Art Museum, 1997) recently suggested a reason for the way in which Littleton taught. Her theory is that "it was partly due to a lack of skills, partly influenced by the California 'funk' movement. It was born of a time that attempted to mediate the environment through acquiring and sharing new experiences, in an attempt to relate to one's fellow man". (Bellevue, 1997,p.9)

Since Littleton's classes in Toledo, in 1962, more and more artists began to work with glass. The furnace, which Littleton had used at Toledo eventually, moved Northeast to Haystack Mountain School of Craft, in Maine. By 1964, programmes in glass began to develop across the United States. Schools like San Jose State College in California and soon after Penland in North Carolina offered classes in glass. Fritz Dreisbach founded Penland, in 1967; a past student of Littleton's at the University of Wisconsin. Dale Chihuly had also studied under Littleton at Wisconsin in 1967, and has become a successful glass artist who has gone on to promote and fully establish the American glass movement.





## Chapter 2

Dale Chihuly has notably been recognised for many years now as the man who changed the misshapen face of the American Glass Movement. He is also known as the source behind the introduction of European influences into the skills involved in forming and blowing molten glass in the United States.

Dale Chihuly a native of Tacoma, Washington, (b.1941) began his career at the University of Washington in 1963 where he studied interior design and architecture. It was at this stage of his life that he firstly got involved with glass. And considering that there was little emphasise on using glass as an artistic medium in the start of the 1960s in America, it seems bizarre that Chihuly should choose glass as a material to intertwine within the textile weaves he was creating. (See illustration .2) He would fuse glass together, not completely aware of what the results might be.

It was in 1966, that Chihuly entered a glassblowing class at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, under the instruction of Harvey Littleton. And it was during his time studying at Wisconsin that he visited a lecture by Italian painter and sculptor Italo Scanga, who had taught at Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) a few years earlier. Chihuly was completely taken with Scanga's presence, art and ideas, and made it his business to get to know him. Scanga increased Chihuly's willingness to take the same kind of risks with artistic ideas as he had been taking with technical information. Scanga urged Chihuly to 'let loose and hand draw' on the glass. Scanga says, however, that while he may have given Chihuly a greater sense of what it is to be an artist,





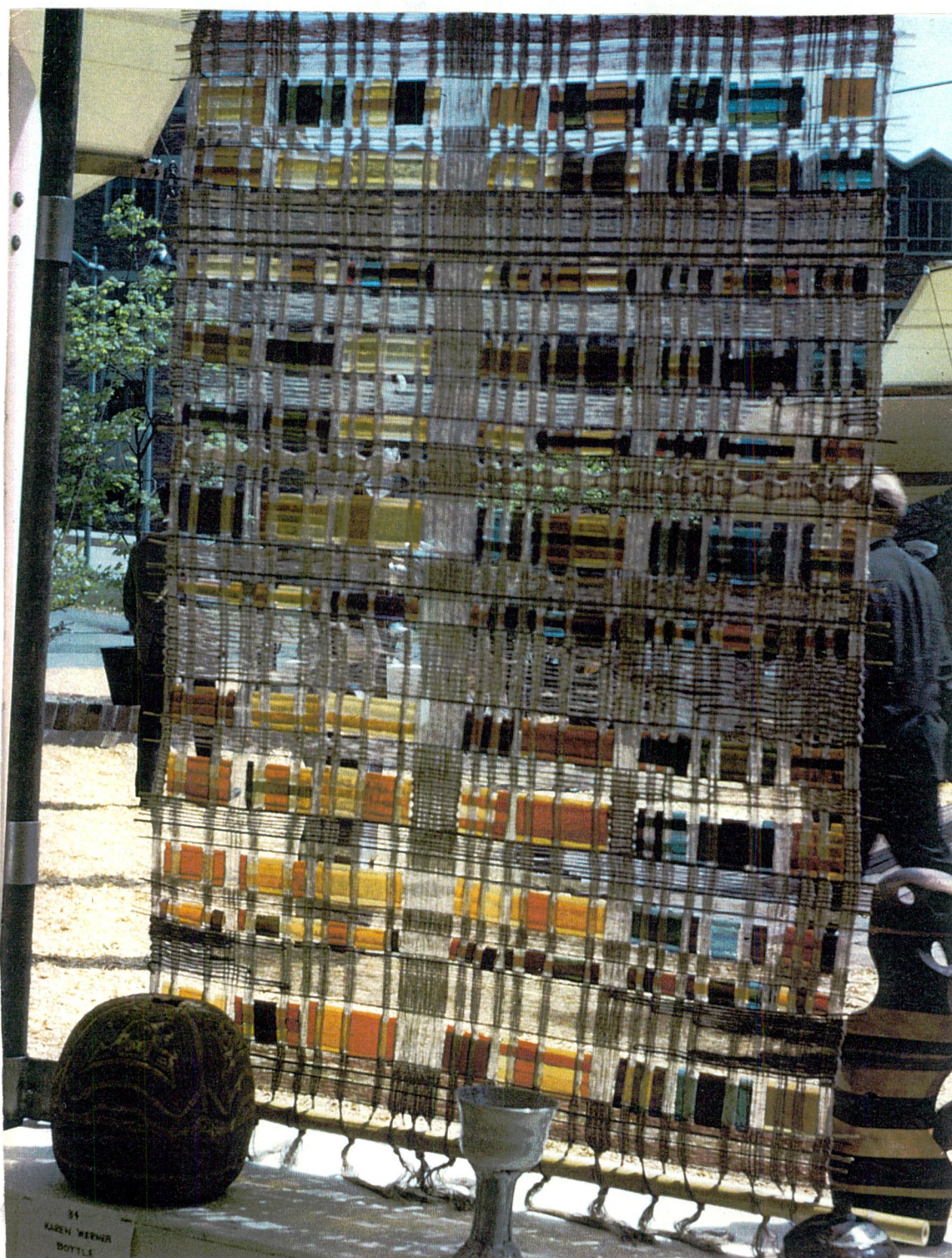


Plate 2.

*Weaving with fused glass*, 1965, Dale Chihuly. Bellevue Art Fair,  
Washington, 48 x 66 inches.





“somehow, whatever it is he wants to do, he gets it done.”(Norden, 1982, p10)

1977 saw Chihuly enter into the Rhode Island School of Design where he worked as a glassblowing assistant; this is also the place where his concept of how to teach is said to have begun.

Chihuly had travelled to Europe before 1978, visiting such places as Florence in Italy and Mayo in the West Coast Ireland. Most of the trips up to this time were discovery trips. None had such an impact on Chihuly's life and work or made such a difference to the American Glass Movement as his trip to Murano, Venice, although the effects of the trip did not actually register until years later.

Chihuly had won the Fulbright grant to study glassblowing in Murano under the request of Ludovico de Santillana, (director of the Venini Company). The secrecy pact still was in full strength when Chihuly arrived and he was met with an unusual approach. Chihuly was officially the first American glass artist to 'work' at the Venini factory on Murano. Soon after Chihuly's arrival, other American glass artists arrived. American artists had helped ease the Venetians suspicion most likely through their lack of knowledge and technique involved in working hot glass. To the Venetians the glass artists who visited Venini in the late 1960s were received and welcomed. Along with Chihuly, American glass artists such as Dan Dailey, Michael Nourrot and Richard Marquis visited Murano. They were known as 'baby' artists who would go home, praise glass, tout Murano workmanship and help promote the glass houses that had sheltered them. (Berndt, 1994, p38)





Chihuly was most impressed by the Italian methods of blowing glass in a team, each person responsible for a set of synchronised duties under the direction of the maestro.

Chihuly found great difficulty in gaining the respect of the glassblowers. Richard Marquis was met with same approach.

My design studio...was up where all the beautiful secretaries were and the workers couldn't understand why I wanted to be down with them sweating when I could be clean and hang out with the secretaries. Almost all of them would have traded to have the other kind of job ~ except for the real glassblowers. (Bellevue, 1997,p14)

Checco Ongano, a 'real' Venetian glassblower, who recalls the Americans' arrival in 1968, said of his thoughts on them,

When the young American people came to Venini I had a lot of patience because I felt sorry for them. The others [factory workers] wanted to push them out, but I said no, I want to give everybody the chance to work. (Bellevue, 1997,p.14)

The only piece of work Chihuly actually constructed at Venini in 1968, was a prototype for a large-scale lamp design. (See illustration .3) This object was more related to his previous work than to the forms he had observed at Venini.

In the spring of 1969, Chihuly returned to the United States, to teach glassblowing at the RISD. He also taught glass at Haystack Mountain School of Craft during the summer of 1969 and 1970, and from his experiences came his dream of a similar arts centre for the Northwest, which would be devoted entirely to glass. Haystack was a compact craft school, positioned on the small Deer Isle off the coast of Maine. Chihuly





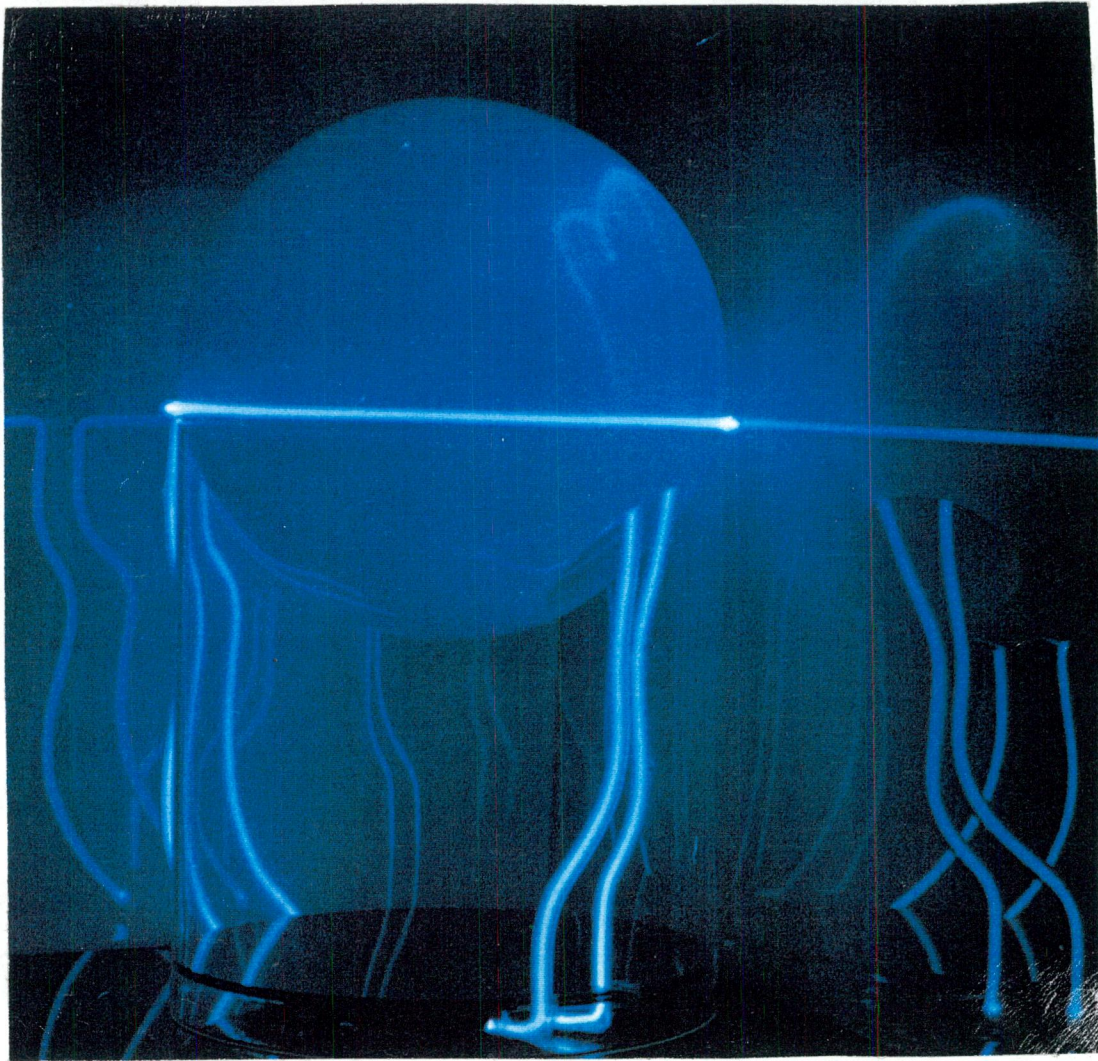


Plate 3.

*Full- scale detail from Venini, 1968, Dale Chihuly. Glass, plastic, neon,  
3 x 18 inches.*





knew that the main reason wonderful work was being produced at Haystack, apart from its great teachers, was that it was picturesque and the surrounds lent themselves to the student's imagination and work. The reason for travelling to his homeland in the Pacific Northwest was a lot to do with what was happening in the West Coast at the time.

During the late 1960s, the West held a special attraction for youths all across the country. California, in particular, offered the Bay Area with the University of California at Berkeley – the birth place of student activism – and the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco – the centre of the drug culture – as an important pilgrimage site for a counterculture bent on social revolution. By 1968, the migration to rural communities in Northern California, primarily to escape harassment in the city, had begun. Before long, groups of counterculture youth discovered the 'new landscape' of Oregon and Washington, where alternative lifestyles, if not exactly welcomed, were tolerated. The West, historically receptive to new ideas, was a good place for Americans who expected to change their world. (Oldknow, 1996,p.33)

Chihuly obtained two thousand dollars from the Union of Independent Colleges of Art. All he needed was a site. Chihuly approached John and Anne Hauberg who owned a tree farm in Stanwood, Washington. They were actively involved in 'Friends of the Crafts' and the Pacific Northwest Art Centre. Chihuly's idea for the school really appealed to the Hauberg's and they generously donated a forty-acre piece of their tree farm. According to Anne Hauberg, Chihuly could not have arrived at a better time. The Hauberg's were thinking of opening an Art Museum named after Mark Tobey, under whom Anne Hauberg had studied, at the Cornish School of Art when he was an unknown painter. Fortunately for





Chihuly, Tobey did not like the idea, claiming to the Hauberg's: "I'm not a country person, I don't want my museum in the country." (Oldknow, 1996,p.50)

John Hauberg also agreed to be the schools chief patron; paying the bills for the next ten years, until a broader base support was finally established.

Pilchuck means 'red water' in the Native American language Chinook, 'pil' for 'red' and 'chuck' for 'water'. (Chinook is an international language composed of French, English, and Native American words). (Oldknow, 1996,p.46) The site offered everything that Haystack Mountain School offered with views of the Puget Sound, San Juan Islands, Olympic Mountains and the Cascade Range. It was exactly what Chihuly wanted. Building Pilchuck Glass School seemed impossible the first summer, which was 1971. Students from each of the schools of the Union of Independent Colleges of Art helped, and Chihuly recruited others. Although the summer of 1971 was recorded as one of wettest summers, the people working at Pilchuck were determined to complete the school. This first show of teamwork was a useful concept for Chihuly's later work.

Richard Marquis like many others came to Pilchuck that first summer to investigate what was going on. He looked at the glassblower's knee deep in mud and proclaimed "This has nothing to do with art and it will never work". (Miller, 1991,p.12)

Chihuly had worked all his life to achieve Pilchuck Glass School and nothing was going to stop him. The conditions under which the people



worked in that first summer of 1961 showed that Chihuly was a hard worker dedicated to creating a school for everybody.

Chihuly always preferred working with others. His time spent in Italy only reinforced his belief that one could blow faster, larger and better when several people worked as a team. Something that hadn't been emphasised strongly in the American glass movement until this time in the beginning of the 1970s, during the building and creating of glass at Pilchuck. Glass artists in America generally worked alone. Accepting increased production and the increased ability to make complex artworks was hampered by the American concept of 'genius' in regards to the creation of individual works – an object could only reach true art as the conception and execution of a sole maker. The team concept, from then on fostered by Chihuly and his first lasting contribution to American studio glass, was the first significant Italian idea applied in the United States. (Bellevue, 1997,p.14)

When Chihuly met artists whose work he liked, he invited them to work with him. Many of the young students who came to Pilchuck ended up staying as members of Chihuly's blowing team. During that first summer the groups of people who gathered at the site would be mostly motivated by Chihuly's powerful drive, to complete something challenging.

Two furnaces were set up and everyone gathered around. For the students in the group it was like creating a school just for them. They were excited, most of them had never been faced with the challenge to open a furnace door and get so close to the heat, using a blowpipe.





By 1973, a new hotshop was assembled, built by John Hauberg's logging crew and designed by Thomas Bosworth (an architect who was on the faculty at RISD, when Chihuly was awarded the Fulbright grant to travel to Venice in 1968). Bosworth's idea was to create a building, which was rugged, romantic, and impractical, it blended the grand traditions of a classical Greece and Rome with the similar endeavours of Euro American pioneers of the Northwest. (Illustration .4) (Oldknow, 1996,p.114)

From the assemblage of the new hot-shop came a new era in Pilchuck. Things were really starting to happen now. Chihuly always knew he wanted to create Pilchuck and make it the greatest glass school on earth. However, one main aspect was missing. In order to achieve the status as the greatest glass school, Pilchuck would need to accommodate the greatest glass artists. What was lacking still in American studio glassblowing was the fact that the artists were not yet interested in making a primary focus out of perfected technique. The production of something that was remarkable for being centred and controlled was not paramount among the things those artists were then searching for in using glass.

The situation was much like that of Harvey Littleton in the early 1960s, but Chihuly had the right concept of blowing glass; it was the 'real' skills like that of the Venetians which were lacking.

Harvey Littleton, Marvin Lipofsky and Anne Wolff among other well-known American glass artists visited Pilchuck over the following summers from 1973, teaching students about their skills in glass forming. Unfortunately, these skills were not like the 'real' skills, which were badly needed. The work being produced at this time was thick and heavy.







Plate 4.

*Pilchuck Hotshop*, built in 1973, Stanwood, Washington.







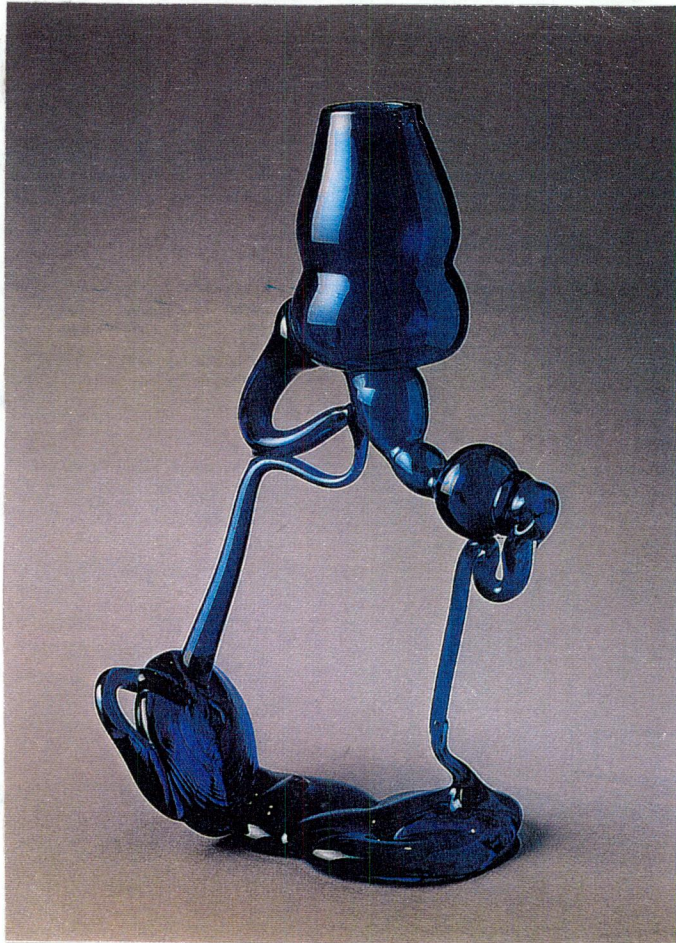


Plate 5.

*Goblet, Vessels, 1971, Dale Chihuly. (this goblet reportedly was the first object blown at Pilchuck).*





An example of this is a blown piece made by Chihuly simply entitled *vessels*, 1971. (See illustration .5)





### Chapter 3

1974 saw a new generation of students coming to study glass at Pilchuck. One of those students was Benjamin Moore.

“I was studying ceramics at the California College of Arts and Crafts – and had tried working with glass during my junior year, under Marvin Lipofsky – but did not have time to develop with glass. I first attended Pilchuck in 1974. Richard Royal [who also attended Pilchuck in 1974] and I had just finished college and had ‘big’ plans for setting up a ceramic’s workshop. Dale [Chihuly] knew we were enthusiastic about glass. I turned down an offer to work as an assistant to Chihuly at RISD due to the plans Rich and I had made. Although I soon changed my mind and went to work at RISD.” (Interview, 23/12/97)

Alongside Moore and Royal came another new student. William Morris had just graduated from the glass programme at Central Washington University at Ellensburg, and came to Pilchuck as a truck driver in 1975. He began work with Chihuly as his assistant along with Moore and Royal. They all worked as a team: that was what made the pieces come together.

Moore travelled to Italy in 1978 and 1979, just as Chihuly, Marquis, and other American glass artists had before him. The differences between Moore's visit and the others were that Moore was aware of the Venetians attitude towards foreigners.

Moore went to work in the Venini factory in 1978. His first eight months at Venini were spent on the hot-shop floor under the watchful eye of the



head maestro at Venini, Checco Ongaro. Although Ongaro had been sympathetic toward the early American visitors, it would seem that he felt more of a bond with Moore, something that he did not have with the others. Ongaro gave Moore the chance to work first hand with the maestro's, something no other American had the opportunity to achieve. Moore was thrown into the roles of both the glassworker in the traditional factory context, and the technician and/or designer, a dicnamony that was to become a very valuable experience. (Glowen, 1994,p.18)

Moore encouraged Ongaro to come to Pilchuck as a visiting artist. Ongaro and his wife Rina travelled to Pilchuck in 1978, and a lot of interesting things occurred, according to Moore.

For example, that was the first time Rina had ever seen her husband blow glass and Checco had been a master glassblower his whole life. At that point he was probably in his early fifties. You know, women simply do not go into the glass factories (in Murano), period. She was anxious though about Checco sharing the Venetian secrets with the Americans. The next year he didn't want to come, and I think that was one of the reasons. (Milne, 1994, P.12)

Moore returned to Venice after the summer of 1978. On his return Ongaro suggested Moore invite his brother-in-law, Lino Tagliapietra, also a maestro.

Tagliapietra is said to be very different from other Venetian maestros. He had an urge to travel and expand his opinion of the world. Tagliapietra is a worldly thinking man, and more willing to explore glassblowing than any other glassblower of his time (Milne, 1994, p.14)





Tagliapietra was a well-respected master at Venini. He was born into a glassmaking family on August 10<sup>th</sup> 1934. His father worked in the cold shop at Venini. Tagliapietra began his life time career in glass at the workshop of Archimedes Seguso at the age of eleven. It was here that he developed his individuality, his cultural references and his world. (Sarpellon, 1994,p.18).

He took centuries of Venetian made glass bottles, vases and other functional objects, which preceded him as his starting point. Tagliapietra was making functional objects designed by others, and later to work with increasing independence, his creative inspiration easier to express because he was technically proficient. While working at the 'La Murrina' glass factory on Murano, from 1968 to 1976 he produced his first '*Saturn*', (See illustration .6) an extremely light, spherical vase, the central part of which is encompassed by a band running parallel to the base. (Sarpellon, 1994,p.18)

One thing that Tagliapietra was conscious of, as few other artists were was that art glass has an international dimension and that Murano tradition must awake to the new competition emerging in Europe, America and Japan. According to Benjamin Moore it was for this reason solely that Tagliapietra grasped the chance to visit Pilchuck in 1979. (Interview, 23/12/97)

Many opinions from both Murano and America have been voiced on Tagliapietra's decision to travel to Pilchuck, but it is the Venetian's who see Tagliapietra's move as a disloyalty to centuries old Venetian glass.

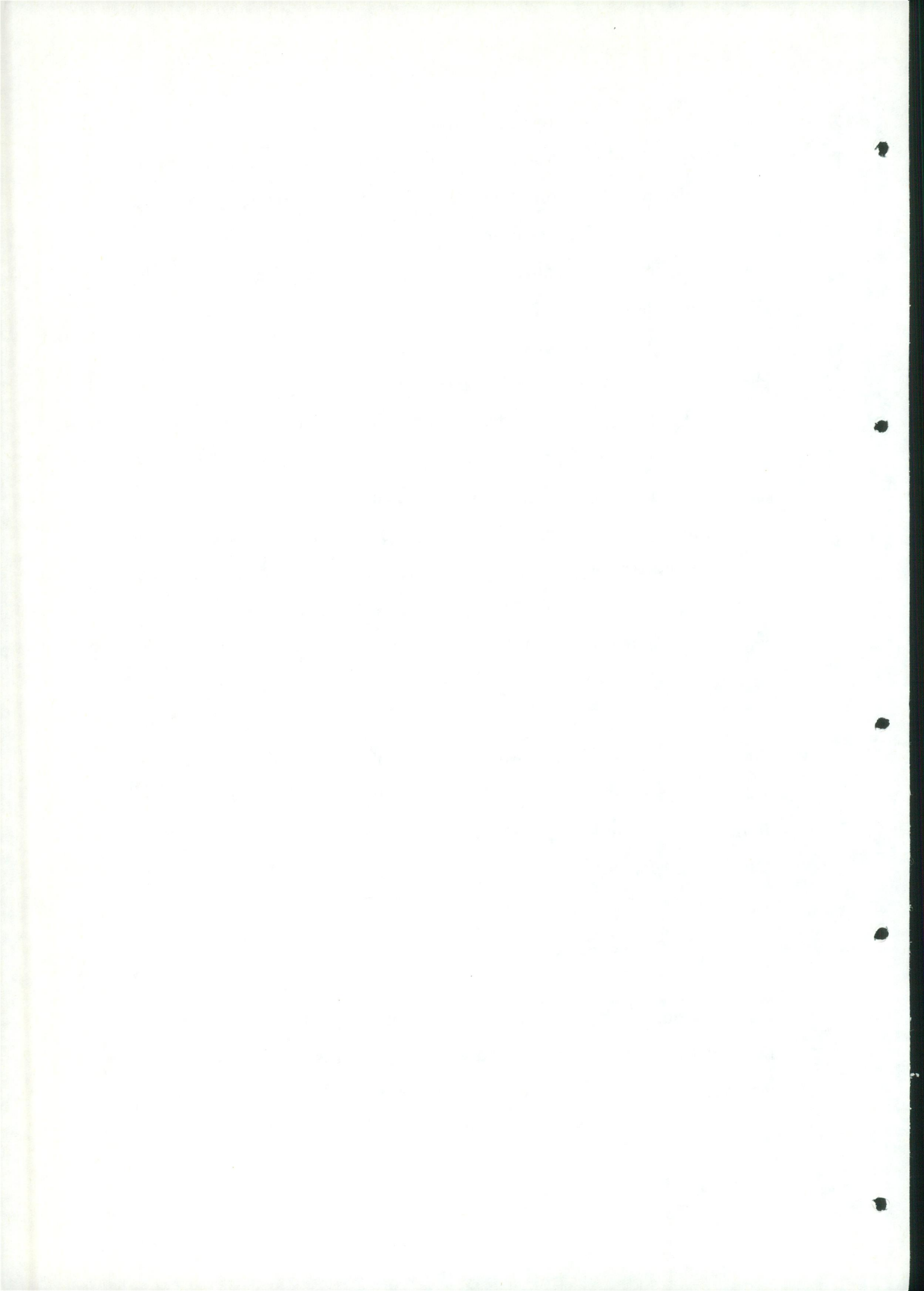




Plate 6.

*Saturn*, 1967, Lino Tagliapietra. Murano, Amethyst and Sapphire glass with sky- blue double spiral opening from the opposite ends.







Unfortunately, since he decided to go to Pilchuck, Tagliapietra has not been the respected glass artist he once was on Murano; he is seen by many of the other masters as a traitor and has been described as 'not' being a 'real' maestro. Carlo Tosi (a Venetian maestro) has expressed his views on Tagliapietra's choice and what his decision would be had he been offered the opportunity to teach around the world:

In my opinion the masters of Murano who have taught our techniques to foreigners are entirely mistaken. It is not *their* experience: we have inherited our craft from our forefathers; each advance cost them months, even years, of hard work. Teaching abroad shows a complete lack of respect for our traditions. It is not right, not honest. He is a traitor. Its like selling your own wife on the streets. (Berndt, 1994,p.46)

Tagliapietra's first shock when arriving at Pilchuck was the American way of blowing glass. The students were so casual. Tagliapietra said of his first experience: "If you lose one piece of glass on the floor, in the factory, people start to watch you. Maybe you are drunk." The students' freedom and lack of hesitation also made an impression. "The boldness was so new to me. On one hand, it was a shock; the lack of cultural base, the absence of traditions. But on the other hand it was exhilarating, very inspiring for my own work...the lack of restraint in the process, the exciting results". (Oldknow, 1996, p. 163)

It could be said that for glassblowers at Pilchuck it was Lino Tagliapietra whose influence was and still is unsurpassed. Although Tagliapietra returned yearly to Pilchuck and despite the other master's opinions, he still regarded Murano as his main base for blowing glass. His opinion of what he thought of American glass artists in 1979 and now has changed a



lot. Benjamin Moore has said of Murano and the changes in Tagliapietra, that many of the Venetians:

think the rest of the world is nothing, and that Murano is the only place where it has happened and is still happening. Which is completely ludicrous. At any rate, when Lino came to America, particularly after the second or third year, he saw what an incredible movement we had going here. And it wasn't but a year or two later that he said, 'Murano is very difficult now. Its really America where exciting contemporary things are happening, and that's where I want to be.' And that's why he 's come back year after year. (Milne, 1994,p.12)

It was obvious, even the first summer that he arrived, that Tagliapietra would single handily give the American glass artists the skills and technique's they had longed to learn. Tagliapietra did not teach the students how to make specific objects based on Venetian products, but more so the vital skills involved in producing good quality pieces of glass. Tagliapietra's view of how Americans approach using the Venetian skills in their glass; is that at least seventy percent of the technique evidenced in current American glass is absolutely Venetian. They apply it in very personal ways. (Berndt, 1994,p.39)

Tagliapietra's way of manipulating the glass was fascinating. His coordinated movements with the glass and manipulation with the tools has been described as watching a 'very graceful dance'. (Sarpellon, 1994,p.19) The glass was thin and fragile, the forms elegant and held a vast range of meandering lines, which were created by using a *canne* and *inciso* technique. (A cane worked technique on a hot plate). (See illustration .6) Something that few Americans (except Benjamin Moore) had learned to achieve in their work. The reason Moore was so familiar







Plate 7.

*Canne and Inciso* technique, 1990, Lino Tagliapietra. Seattle.



Plate 8.

*Venini* prototype, 1978-1979, Benjamin Moore.







with the techniques was because of the time he had spent working with the glassblowers on Murano. (See illustration. 8)

Unfortunately as Moore was still learning to perfect his glass skills, he somehow got caught up in the commotion of the people's reactions to Tagliapietra's unique way of working hot glass. Ron Glown, a writer on art glass from Seattle, wrote an article in Glass Magazine, in 1994, showing what seems to be a rivalry between Dale Chihuly and Benjamin Moore. He saw Chihuly as playing the role of Pablo Picasso and Moore, the role of Georges Braque. (In this equation he has described Harvey Littleton as playing the role of Paul Cezanne.) Glown's opinion is that while the protean accomplishments of Chihuly are well documented and widely seen it is Moore who has been largely responsible for directing the course of contemporary American glass. He has been working from behind the scenes and building – (as did Braque) a rigorous formal and modernist basis for this new aesthetic of glass. (Glown, 1994,p.32)

One could imagine this statement to suggest a great divide between Chihuly and Moore, yet the two have always worked together harmoniously. It can remain to be seen that if Chihuly had not created Pilchuck, Moore may not have become a glassblower. Yet, it can also be said that if Moore had not Introduced Tagliapietra and Venetian glass into America, that, Pilchuck may not have survived, or the American glass movement would not be as well established as it is today. Therefore it is hard to determine who has contributed the most to the American glass movement. But the odds seem to be swaying more in Moore's favour, that he is the main contributor.



Due to the impact which Tagliapietra and Ongaro had on Pilchuck, the Northwest glass artists were eager to bring more masters from Murano.

In 1987, William Morris had been making yearly trips to Murano to observe the maestros working in solid off-hand technique. Prior to 1987, Moore had unofficially invited Murano-based, solid-glass working artist Loredano Rosin to come to Pilchuck. In 1987, Morris and Paul De Somma (also a Northwest based glass artist) made a trip to Murano specifically to persuade the *massiccio* (meaning 'working in the mass'. A description for glass artists who work in solid glass) to teach at Pilchuck. Loredano Rosin and Dino Rosin came in 1988. The two brothers had worked together for twenty-five years. In 1989, Guiseppe 'Pino' Signoretto came for the first time, to Pilchuck.

Signoretto's "expertise lay in the uncanny ability to sculpt directly from objects or drawings", (Bellevue, 1997,p.19) one piece in particular which shows Signoretto's abilities in hot glass is entitled *pieta*. (See illustration .9) The sculpted piece of glass is very large in scale and has been deeply carved while hot and attached to a bit iron (similar to blow pipe, only solid, and used a lot in solid work)

Signoretto's approach to the medium influenced a new generation of artists, not just through the presentation of a different technique but by presenting a new way to think about the material: *massiccio*.

Signoretto's first impressions of Pilchuck were quite different from Tagliapietra's, but, by 1989, the students who were studying at Pilchuck had developed their own skills a lot in the Venetian style, taught to them by Tagliapietra and also by the Rosin brothers the year before. Signoretto

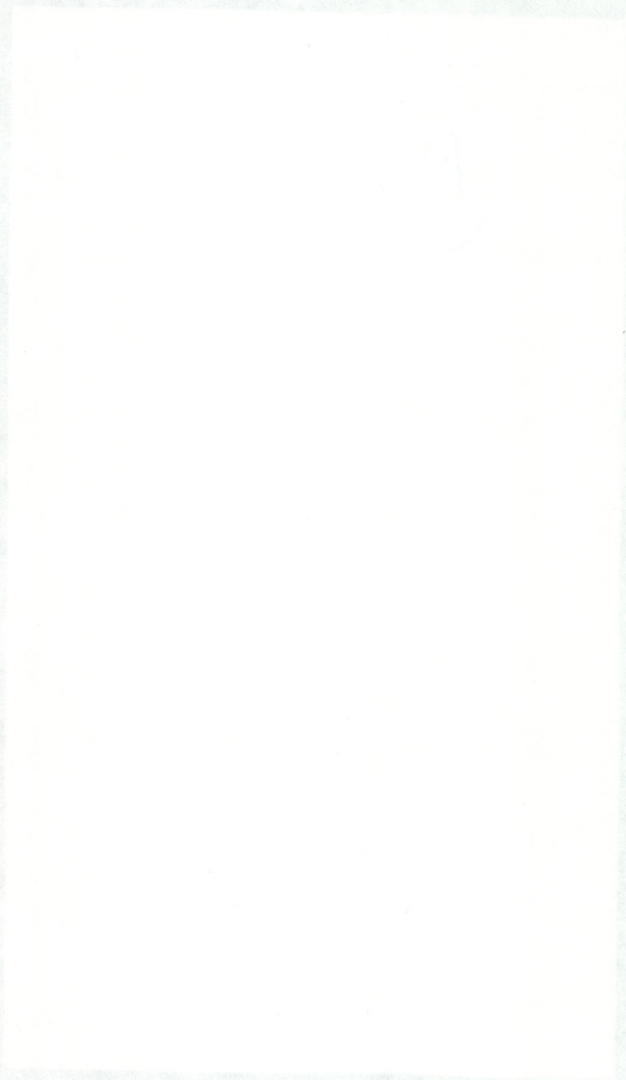






Plate 9.

*Pieta*, 1996, Pino Signoretto. Hot sculpted glass. 35 x 9 x 9 inches.





said of his experience; about the absolute freedom of expression he felt at Pilchuck compared to Murano:

Whenever I tried to get beyond a certain point (in Murano), there was always a wall created by those before me, or those that was supposedly teaching me. They would say, 'You can't do this, you're not supposed to try that'. I want to give everything I can to the students. I don't like the way there have always been trade secrets in Murano, the professional skills that the maestro, hid from you, that you were supposed to go off and discover on your own. I want to take away that barrier between teacher and student. We are all walking along the same road. (Oldknow, 1996,p.231)

For Signoretto seeing women in the workshop was a revelation:

If I had ever thought women were incapable, I was wrong; men are used to first using their strength and then their heads. Women are the opposite; they must use their brains before their strength, and if I hadn't come to America, I might not have learned that. (Oldknow, 1996,p.231)

When Signoretto visits Pilchuck there is always great interest in what he can create. He still speaks no English, but has been fully assisted for a few years now by a young American woman, Amber Hauch. This would seem like quite a breakthrough, the fact that Hauch not only fully assists Signoretto, but that she also is based on Murano, all year round. (See illustration. 10) Hauch is not the only woman to assist a maestro. Women also frequently assist Tagliapietra.





Plate 10.

Amber Hauch assisting Pino Signoretto. Pilchuck glass school. Summer  
1997.





## Chapter 4

One fact has yet to be established among contemporary American glass artists. In their opinion, 'Who was the main American contributor of Venetian glass into American glass?'

It seems strange that after twenty years of Venetian influence that this question has only recently come to light. There are a number of reasons why. Firstly it is possible that there are those among the thousands of people involved in the American glass movement who feel that Benjamin Moore, 'got the shorter straw'. In comparison to Dale Chihuly, Moore is merely seen as another Seattle based glass artist, among hundreds who are working in the city. Yet, Chihuly is still recognised as the man who transformed the American glass movement.

It can be said that up until the arrival of the Venetians (firstly Checco Ongaro) in 1978, that Chihuly like all the other glass artists at Pilchuck, was unaware of technique. Moore describes what techniques were emphasised before the Venetian arrival:

"Jamie Carpenter had picked up some techniques at Venini (Also in Venice with Chihuly, 1969) and moulded them into his sensibility. So when I went to Venini, not only did I see where Jamie had got his ideas, but also how he put his own thing into them. He then taught all us Americans to do it in his style. (Milne, 1994,p.13)

Moore is extremely modest about his contribution of the Venetian glass.





When asked if he felt the Venetians would have eventually come to Pilchuck without his help, his reply was; "Absolutely, Checco [Ongaro] was generous with American artists. Lino [Tagliapietra] always knew there was a big market for Venetian glass in the United States".

Yet, in doubt of his answer Moore went on to say:

Most other Venetians (except Tagliapietra) work in a factory environment and are not interested in the other artistic ways of working. They think they are the best, therefore they have no reason to experiment with outside styles in blown glass.  
(Interview, 23/12/97)

Tagliapietra's impact on the American glass movement has had overwhelming effects. The way in which the American glass artists have transformed Tagliapietra's skills into their own work is that an American artist just picks one technique with which to experiment. Moore explains that due to Tagliapietra's vast knowledge of glassblowing and life time dedication to his trade, it would be impossible for any one American glass artist to achieve all the skills which Tagliapietra possesses. So therefore a little is taken by each artist and worked into original designs. Dante Marioni for example, is a young Seattle based glass artist, who (like Tagliapietra) entered into the glassblowing trade at an early age, of fifteen years old. Moore has given an example of how Marioni has achieved glassblowing status, in comparison to Tagliapietra. "Dante [Marioni] might be able to copy a goblet (See illustration. 11) that Lino [Tagliapietra] makes, and make it as good, maybe in some cases better, but he will never; no American, will

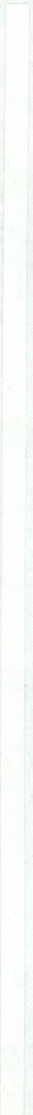




Plate 11.

*Assorted Goblet Series*, 1988, Dante Marioni. Blown glass, 6 to 8 inches high.





ever, in an overall sense, have the understanding of glass that Lino has".  
(Milne, 1994,p.13)

Moore's statement clearly indicates that Tagliapietra has directed American glass into a whole new era. When Moore was asked if the Venetian skills were being emphasised throughout the colleges in the United States, his answer was: "Most of the programmes are bad. Big schools like the RISD and California College of Crafts are okay. But more of a fine art approach is taken." (Interview, 23/12/97) From reading this statement it would seem that although the Venetian influence is proving successful especially in the Pacific Northwest, few people are convinced that skill and technique overrule creativity and concept in glass design. It would also seem that Tagliapietra has nothing to learn from the glass artists using the Venetian techniques. Yet, he has been given the opportunity to explore his own designs, more freely in the United States through the use of the American glass movement, which greatly admire him. This would undoubtedly not have happened had Tagliapietra remained in Murano.

I think the biggest thing I got back was a different philosophy of work. Watching the pieces being made I learned [the idea here] was not a production line, it was unique pieces. It's totally opposite to the [Murano] philosophy that you must make the same pieces every day, even though those piece take a lot of skill and a lot of time. I discovered that when I went back to Seattle, my students were working in a little bit different way than when I left. Their work had changed, and I would tell them "Why are you doing it like this? You might think it's okay, but I think it's not good like this. Go back to the way I showed you!" Now I see students learn the basics, and. Then they discover new things, a new personal way to make their things. I like that now. I don't say it's wrong, no it's just personal.

(Bellevue, 1997,p24)







The majority of the Northwest glass artists have focused on the work of Tagliapietra since 1979. It would seem fair to imagine that through time passing that everyone's work would start to look a bit like everyone else's. Fortunately this is not happening. It would be almost impossible to see a resemblance between the work of Moore and Chihuly. Moore's is extremely tight, using symmetry as the main component for his glasswork, which can be clearly seen in pieces such as his hanging lamp series *Hornet Lamp* (See illustration. 12), or the *Interior Fold* series (See illustration. 13). Chihuly, however has been producing pieces which are 'loose', almost accidental creations which allow the glass to work equally with the maestro who 'teases' it into moving into it's finished form, (See illustration. 14). Therefore, Chihuly achieves very different results from Moore.

There is only one similarity between the pieces, which is not evident in the end product. Both artists work in Venetian styles. The similarities being the extremely thin glass, the manipulation of the hot glass using Venetian techniques of making and also the use of the tools.

Considering the many other artists involved with glass in Seattle, it would seem that an element of competitiveness would be an issue. Yet this is also not happening. Moore explains why,

"Dale stressed teamwork which gave us all mutual respect for each other. The glass community has a lot of new talent becoming involved. Glass artists in North Carolina would be more isolated. Seattle has more established professional artists, and is more positive." (Interview, 23/12/97).





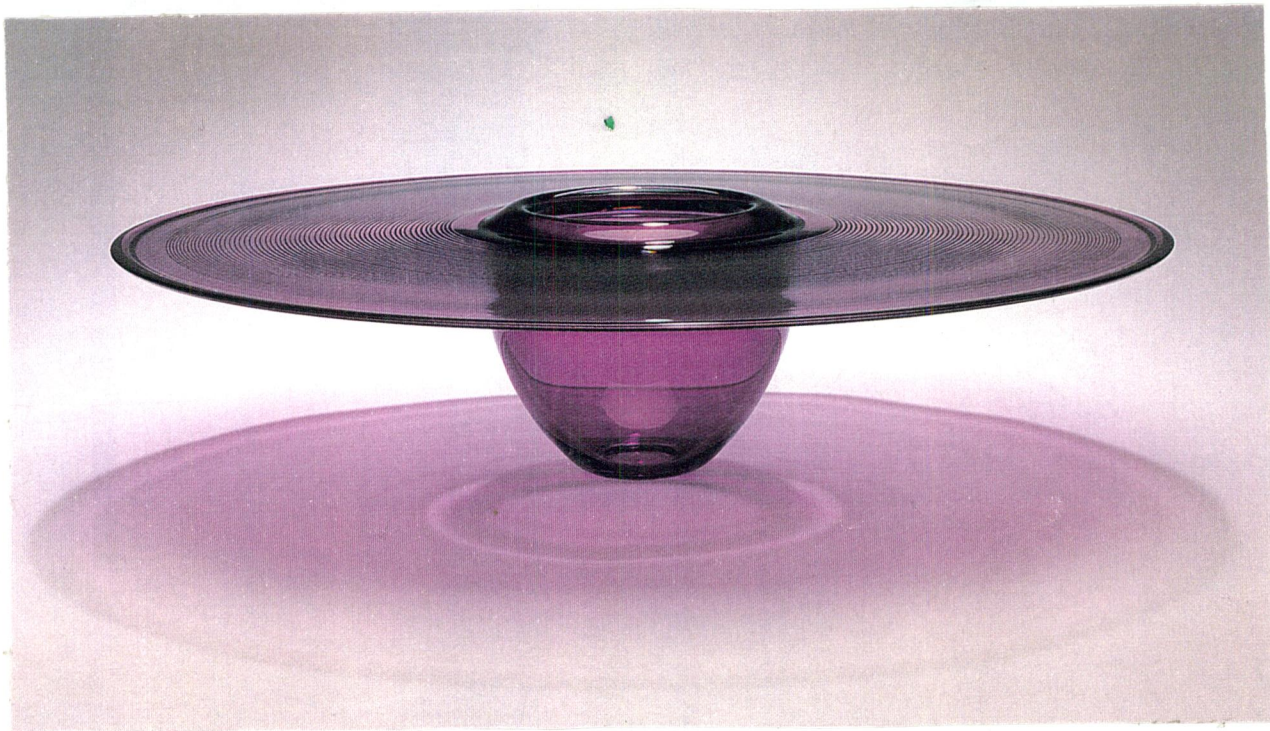


Plate 12.

*Interior Fold*, 1997, Benjamin Moore. Blown glass, 7 x 29 x 29 inches.

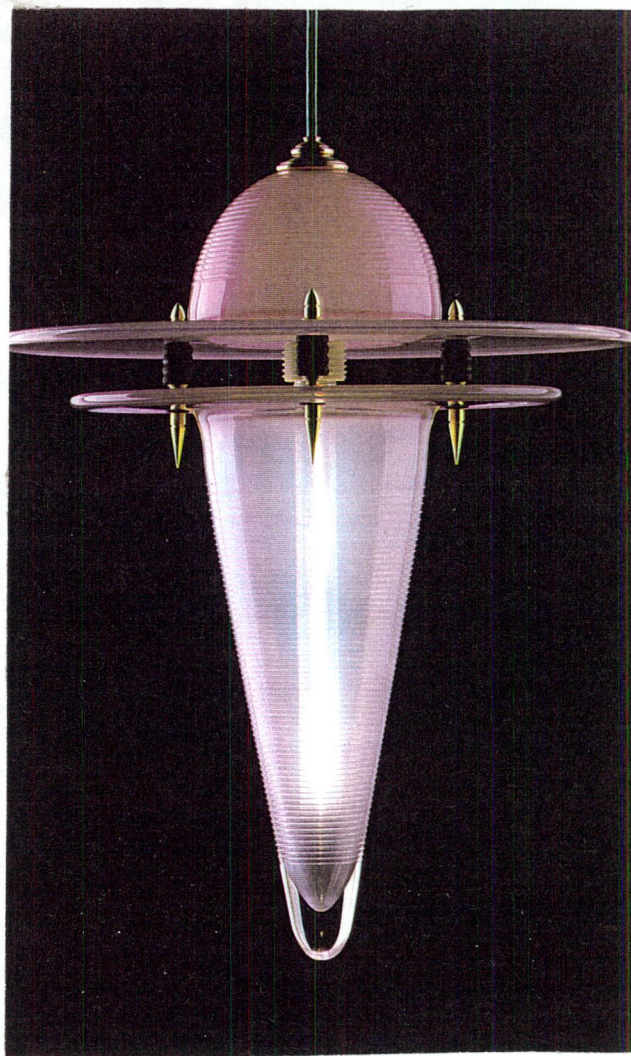


Plate 13.

*Hornet Lamp*, 1989, Benjamin Moore. Glass and brass, 18 x 16 inches.







Plate 14.

Bryan Rubino and assistant making Chihuly *Sea Form*, at the Boathouse,  
Seattle. Summer 1997.







It would seem that the glass artists in Seattle are categorised into many levels, each knowing their own limitations and status in the glass movement there.



## Conclusion

To say that Chihuly and Moore have been equal contributors of the influence of Venetian glass into the United States, especially the Pacific Northwest, might seem a fair statement. Nevertheless, I would argue that each played very different roles. Moore (although a much later practitioner in glass than Chihuly) was the first to introduce real skills in the Venetian style into American glass and cement the link between America (Seattle especially) and Murano.

Chihuly through the use of Pilchuck glass school was able to accommodate the Venetian artists and their skills and develop them throughout. It is Chihuly who promotes the Venetians while they visit Seattle, with annual auctions of the work being produced at Pilchuck and a large dinner held yearly at his home The Boathouse accommodating a large number of American glass collectors and glass artists including the Venetians. Tagliapietra is the main attraction at these dinners, as he is the cook and also seen as the most important maestro to visit the United States.

It would be difficult to determine the future success of the Venetian influence on American glass as it is only recently that glass artists in the United States have become more familiar with the Venetian technique.

The mixed opinions coming from Murano indicate that few other 'real' maestros will visit the United States. Carlo Moretti a maestro working on Murano has made a suggestion as to why this is:





I wonder about the results, what one sees in the shows in Seattle, Germany and other places – there are very few pieces I'd want. I'm sure they will fail some day. If you want my opinion, the Italian traditions of working multicoloured glass on Murano, is much more beautiful than what I see abroad. It is not that they have learned the technique and then applied them, letting them explode in a burst of creativity. (Berndt, 1994,p.43)

Although Moretti's opinions of what is going on in the United States may seem a little naïve, he can be forgiven for expressing his anger, for what he believes to be, a lot of reproduction of Venetian glass produced in the United States. Moretti unlike Tagliapietra obviously feels that he has nothing to gain from travelling and teaching.

The masters don't bring much back, especially because the students they teach do not have enough experience with glass to stimulate the masters technically or artistically. We should not hide the motivation of the masters who go abroad to teach: it is for the public recognition of their talent that, perhaps, on this island, they are not given. An island is an island, and one is more criticised on Murano than honoured. Recognition here only comes through economic success. (Berndt, 1994,p.43)

It is unfortunate that the Venetian maestros on Murano who have not travelled or taught, should be so bitter toward Tagliapietra and Signoretto's success in the United States. According to Benjamin Moore, Venetian glass can only improve.





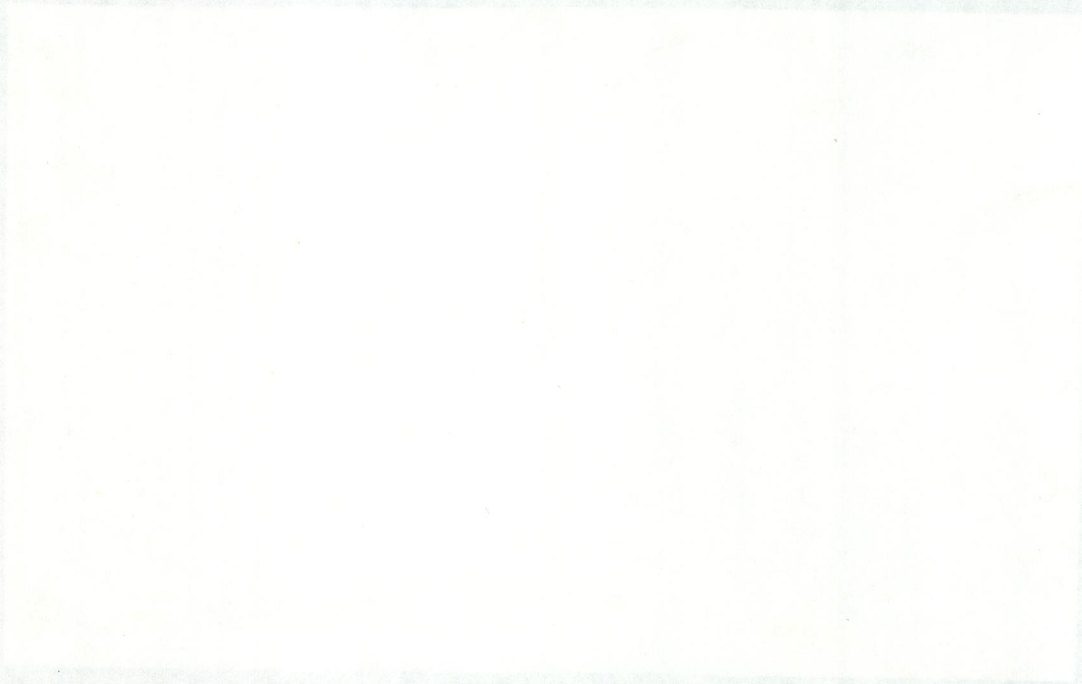
PRIMARY SOURCE

HANCOCK, Helen, telephone interview with Benjamin Moore, 23/12/97.



Plate 15.

*Pilchuck Auction Dinner*, left – right Dale Chihuly, Pino Signoretto, Lino Tagliapietra. The Boathouse. Summer 1997.





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