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National College Of Art and Design.
Faculty of Craft Design, Glass.

American Studio Glass
and the Work and Influence
on William Morris (b.1957).

by

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CHAPTER ONE

THE STUDIO GLASS MOVEMENT IN THE 1960'S.

Art glass is a term that has only come into use in the last thirty years or so. In the 1960's the glass world saw a new revolution occur in America. Glass up to this point could only be seen used in factory settings across the world. Since glass is believed to have been first blown on the island of Murano, Venice, Italy, in A.D.982, it has been appreciated by the public for its many attractive qualities, its functionality, transparency, luminosity and its reflective and refractive capabilities. It was in these factory settings that many believed glass would stay, mainly due to its expense and the secrecy surrounding many of the factories. In Murano especially, secrets of skills and techniques were passed from one generation to the next and the workers were unable to leave the island for fear that they would reveal the knowledge of the Venetian glass blowers.

Then, in the 60's, a change occurred. What we now call the "Studio Glass Movement" started in the Spring of 1962, when Harvey Littleton, professor of ceramics at the University of Wisconsin, and Dominick Labino, vice president and director of research at Johns-Manville Fibre Glass Corporation, devised a small glass melting furnace. Otto Wittmann, the director of the Toledo Museum of Art, offered the resources of the museum and its art school to Littleton, and it was here that the first small furnaces were developed. This innovation in small furnaces enabled artists to set up their own individual workshops and for the first time glass could be produced outside the factory setting. Littleton and Labino gave two workshops that Spring at the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio, and the studio movement was underway. In 1964, two years later, an artist, named Russell Day, one of the few who was working with glass, attended one of Littleton's summer workshops. Later that year he recommended to Michael Whitely, a student, and Dale Chihuly, a recent graduate of Interior Design from the University of Washington, that they should both apply to Littleton's classes. Both did, and eventually set up their own glass programs in the Washington State area. Whitely set up first, in 1968, Chihuly was soon to follow.

The Venetians at this time were still being seen as the ultimate in glass makers, but were too secretive in their knowledge of glass and would not divulge information about it to the rest of the world, therefore slowing down its progress as a creative medium. At this time, a few Venetians saw what was going on in America and broke their ties with Murano in Venice and shared their knowledge with the Americans. To the Americans, glass was not seen as a traditional craft but a new material with which to produce amazing art. Since Chihuly's first meeting with glass in 1964, he instantly loved it and its qualities and was willing to find out all he could about it and share his knowledge with anyone who was interested. Chihuly was amongst the young artists who travelled to Europe in 1968 to gather more information on traditional techniques. For the most part, though, the up and coming American glass artists learnt by doing, being willing to experiment and to learn by their mistakes. With Chihuly, this

knowledge was there to be spread to the masses, and it was through this frame of mind that glass became so popular. The public became aware that young artists were producing glass that was new, innovative and exciting, with a high degree of quality and design, glass the likes of which had never been seen before. What this craft needed was a form of publicity from someone who had faith in and understanding of the medium. This came from Chihuly amongst others, a brilliant public relations manipulator, who drew attention to the fact that glass was no longer a stuffy collectors' item but a new medium for artists. Chihuly was what the movement needed, a personality who saw a future in glass as an artistic medium and was able to use the media to his full advantage to get his ideas across to the public. Chihuly led others to believe that glass could be not just purely decorative, functional ware but instead a new medium that could be used in conceptual work through sculpting, painting and printing in the same way as the fine arts were, while the boundaries of functional ware in design and production could still be pushed.

The early days of the glass movement saw individuality, experimentation, and innovation as the keys to making a success of the studio glass movement; artists were expected to work alone to further themselves from the factory method of working in teams. So it was in the first two American national shows of blown glass in 1966 and 1968 that all glass artists entering work for the exhibition had to sign a declaration that their work was entirely produced by themselves, alone, without any help. The Americans lacked skill and techniques, but they made up for these in ideas and experimentation. They were determined to push glass to new boundaries, and it was this determination and innovation that generated interest in the medium. More artists were becoming attracted to glass in the States, yet the facilities to support their needs were still non-existent in the art schools and also for the use of independent glass artists. It was Dale Chihuly, who was able to help solve this problem.

The summer of 1971 saw the birth of the Pilchuck Glass School, the brain child of Chihuly. Here he planned to hold an annual summer school for artists who were interested in the medium of glass. When Chihuly returned from Venice, in 1968, he taught at Rhode Island School of Design; he also taught at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts at Deer Isle, Maine, during the summers of 1968 to 1970. While in Venice, Chihuly became the first American glass blower to work in the prestigious Venini factory on the island of Murano. He did not work on the factory floor, or blow glass, but spent much of his time watching the glass blowing and assimilating the meaning and process. His assignments for Venini were design schemes for a public project which, though never realised, did produce a prototype for a related lamp. Chihuly absorbed the technique of teamwork which the Venetians had guarded for so long, the one that would revolutionise the new American glass movement. He returned to Maine that summer being able to benefit the college with his learning experience in Italy. It was on his experience in Maine that he based his Pilchuck School of Glass. The difference between the two was that Pilchuck was purely for glass, whilst Haystack was a school for all crafts. The land for the school belonged to John Hauberg

and his wife Anne Gould Hauberg, whom Chihuly approached, knowing of their involvement in the Friends of the Crafts, in Seattle, a group she had formed with local art dealers Don Foster and Betty Willis to promote regional designers and crafts people, and with the Pacific Northwest Art Centre, also based in Seattle. Chihuly's passion and determination to make this idea work attracted the Haubergs and they donated a forty acre piece of their tree farm to Pilchuck. Once Chihuly had the land, all he needed was people to help him turn his dream into a reality. Young artists from around the country volunteered to help. Not only did they have to build furnaces and kilns, they also had to make their own shelters in a summer where the rain seemed to never stop. For their efforts, they were able to produce their own work from the newly built furnaces. Chihuly never intended Pilchuck to be a traditional school, but the best glass centre in the world where people could come to share ideas and stimulate each other's work. With this in mind, Chihuly, great at networking, was able to convince most of the best glass artists in America, as well as Europe, to teach in his summer programs. Chihuly wanted Pilchuck to be a place that was more than just about learning, it was to be an eye-opening experience. He wanted to create an atmosphere where people would share ideas openly with others, a place with no strict codes or rules. It was there for the use of the students. If they wanted to make glass in the middle of the night, there was nothing stopping them. Chihuly never cared much about the technical aspects of glass making, he believed that you should learn the techniques you need to make your own work. He emphasised that Pilchuck should be as much of a life experience as a learning one. Students would attend a session and would not leave the campus until it was finished. Students would come to rely on themselves as well as on each other and would not be distracted by outside influences. Pilchuck was built on team work and everyone striving for the same goals in a learning environment based on these ideals. Those involved in the studio glass movement up until then had believed that glass should be produced by the artists themselves without any outside help. After his visit to Murano, Chihuly realised that teams of people, each aiming for the same goals, could create a working environment a lot better than working alone. It was in Pilchuck that he introduced this work ethic to American glass artists. In the same way Pilchuck was created through team work.

From this ideal, Pilchuck grew. The first few years saw it as a temporary summer living environment, but from the mid-Seventies onwards it has grown into a permanent institution with students attending this now well facilitated school from around the world. Pilchuck is seen as a symbol in the glass world, in that out of nothing grew a place where people could come to produce glass and learn about themselves. It symbolises the whole American glass movement; it grew from people who, with enthusiasm and energy, created their own work with a lack of knowledge for the medium. They had to develop their own skills and techniques in order to work the glass, they created their own style. They were willing to share ideas and techniques with each other, and so the movement grew, no one kept secrets. If the knowledge was there, it was shared with anyone who was interested. Glass making up until this point

had been seen as a dying craft, but it was the Americans who turned this around. They saw potential in the medium as a way to produce new, experimental glass that would be held in the same regard as any other art form. Littleton, Chihuly and the Haubergs were seen as the main players in this glass movement, but it was a huge team effort that it all came about, and made glass what it is today. They believed in the medium as a way to express themselves artistically and worked together as a group to expand their knowledge, and the public's knowledge of glass. However, Chihuly became more involved with his own work after the first few years of Pilchuck. After the second summer, he decided he no longer wanted to be director of the school but, instead, an artist in his own right.

CHAPTER 2

CHIHULY AND MORRIS.

A native of Washington state, Dale Chihuly was born in 1941 in Tacoma. Since the first time he blew a bubble of glass in 1963, as a student discovery in a basement studio in Seattle, Chihuly has consistently pushed his own creativity and also the very definition of blown glass and the contemporary expression of the medium. He is now, without a doubt, the most famous artist in the glass world. The Sixties saw a change in people's way of thinking, freer ideas about life and art. Revolution was the way forward in making changes and Chihuly was a revolutionary.

Chihuly originally studied interior design at the University of Washington and it was in 1964, on a weaving course, that he first introduced glass into a tapestry. With this tapestry in mind, he developed equipment that could melt and fuse glass. From this point on, Chihuly became immersed on his glass work. It was one night whilst working with a few pounds of melted stained glass in his basement that he stuck a steel pipe in to it and blew his first bubble. From this point on his sole focus was on this molten glass and how to control it. He was now obsessed with learning all he could about the material. Several years passed, and Chihuly was known as a key player in the glass revolution. After he had made huge steps forward in introducing glass to the American public through his Pilchuck Glass School and publicity exercises, Chihuly decided that the role of director of the school was not for him. He felt that he did not have the organisational skills or the time to be of benefit to the school, so in 1972, after the second summer of Pilchuck, Chihuly handed the job over. His own work was of main importance to him now, although he still returned to Pilchuck over the next few years as a teacher.

Chihuly initially recruited the students of Pilchuck to help produce his own work, either in Pilchuck or at his studio on Hobart Street in Providence, Washington. Often they themselves would take on the role of gaffer or head glass blower, while Chihuly would stand back and conduct the work of his team. Chihuly realised in Murano, while watching the workers in the glass factories, that team work was the best way to produce glass, and introduced this method to the studio glass movement. His team would change often, coming and going as they wished, but his set-up stayed the same, with himself as maestro, a gaffer in charge of the glass piece, and several skilled glass workers helping in the production, from blocking the gaffer from the heat of the glass, working at the bench, and opening furnace and kiln doors. Chihuly's direct hands-on contact with glass dwindled after 1976 when, in a car crash in England, he lost an eye, therefore disabling him in his judgment of depth and distance, a necessity in the hand/eye co-ordination skills needed for glass making. His team became crucial in his glass production and Chihuly took on the role of designer and co-ordinator. It was for this reason that Chihuly came in contact with William Morris.

William Morris came to Pilchuck to learn glass blowing in 1978 at the age of twenty one. Born in Carmel, California in 1957, William Morris was the youngest

child in a medical family. He lived here on the Californian coast for twenty one years until, in the summer of 1978, he went to Pilchuck. Initially, he started out as a truck driver, and when asked about his beginning there and his early meetings with Dale Chihuly at Pilchuck, he commented:

“One of my jobs was picking up people at the airport and that was the way I first met Dale. We talked on the way back to Pilchuck where we arrived about midnight. A short while later, I came up to the hot shop. There were some cute girls working out on the pad and Dale was giving them a demo. At first thought he was just flirting with these women, but I watched the demo that he did and actually it was one of the best I'd ever seen, where he showed somebody how to work the glass without any tools, just using the natural characteristics of the glass. I thought, this guy really knows what he's doing. So I said, 'I would love to work with you. Do you want any help?' He said, 'Sure. Be on the pad at four in the morning.' We've worked together ever since.”¹

Chihuly's philosophy was that anyone who showed an interest in glass making should have a go. He was not concerned with qualifications; if you could work well within his scheme of things, you had a job. This atmosphere of sharing is one of the key factors of Pilchuck's success. Morris, from these first meetings with Chihuly, had a job. His relationship with Chihuly grew to the point where they became best friends. Morris's immense skill in working with the glass shone through and he got promoted to the rank of gaffer and Chihuly's right hand man. Chihuly's team of glass workers was a breeding ground for the sharing of knowledge and skill. Morris was not the sole gaffer on the team; others, such as Benjamin Moore and Richard Royal, also led teams, and they themselves are now glass artists in their own rights. It was due to this fact, that there were several gaffers, that the skills of each could be shared with one another. Thus Morris was able to learn more and more techniques in this environment. Chihuly the maestro, led his team into more complex work, shedding a new light on the glass world. By this time, his name was becoming more and more known, not just in the glass world but also in the art world. He was creating enough attention for himself and American glass art that exhibitions in some of the best American galleries were a regular occurrence.

Morris was one of the people that made all this possible for Chihuly. Chihuly was the artist, the visionary, but he would not have accomplished any of his work without the team led by Morris. Chihuly pushed glass to the limit, always trying for new forms, more colours and larger pieces. It was this constant pushing of the material by Chihuly that made glass grow as an art form. Other glass artists in America saw what he was doing and followed suit, themselves pushing their own glass work to its limits. Glass, although still a young artistic medium, by now had been used for this purpose for just over fifteen years. By now, the experience and skills of the Americans were so advanced that experimentation led to bigger and better glass being produced.

With the new techniques Chihuly needed for his glass to be produced, new

tools had to be developed; ribbed moulds, for example, needed to produce Chihuly's 'Sea Forms' series (Fig.1). Morris was the gaffer on the 1981 series 'Macchia' (Fig.2), where he excelled. Chihuly described him as "having a great pair of hands", which were needed for Chihuly's most adventurous work at this point. Initially concerned with colour, Chihuly's 'Macchia' incorporated new techniques, helped by Morris's skills. Chihuly himself has said the aim was to use every one of glass making's palette of three hundred individual colours. Chihuly's work has always had an ethereal quality to it; sea forms, floating glass installations, have commonly played a part in his work. There is a lightness, an airy feel to his work. Morris's work, on the other hand, was in complete contrast.

It was at this time that Morris started his own work. The late Seventies saw him experimenting with glass shard drawings on simple vessels (Fig.3), but it was in the early Eighties that Morris's work and its distinctive style were really beginning to be noticed. Morris's work was earthy, with a prehistoric feel to it. Chihuly was willing to let Morris do his own work in his own time. He was not the type to feel threatened by others arriving on the scene, even if they happened to be his own employees. Morris had the advantage of by then being able to produce two different types of blown work: his own, and Chihuly's, which enabled him to have a broader perspective.

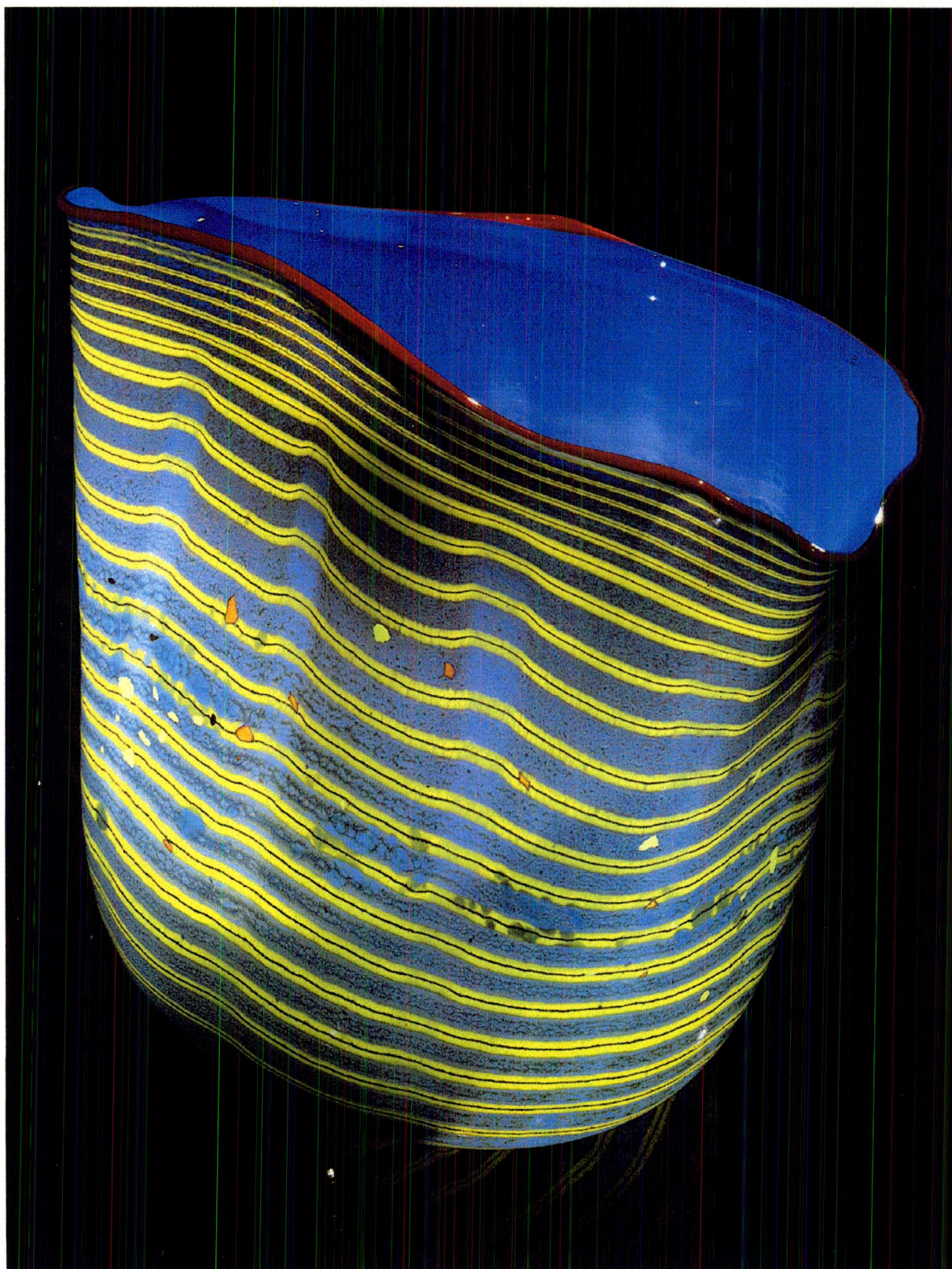


Fig. 1.
Dale Chihuly,
Ultramarine Blue Macchia with Red Lip Wrap, 1983.
Blown Glass.

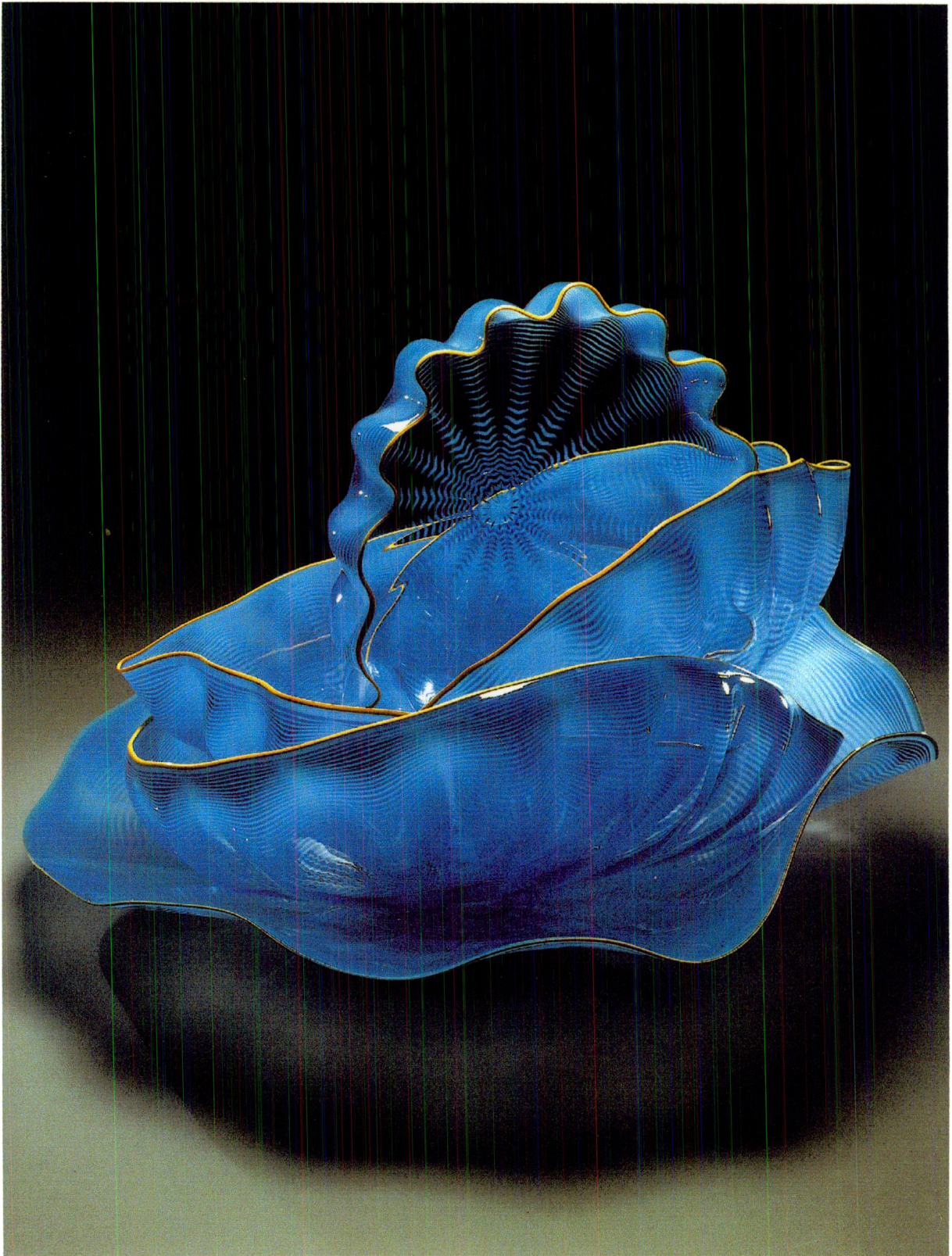


Fig. 2.
Dale Chihuly,
Honeysuckle Blue Seaform Set with Yellow Lip Wraps, 1989.
Blown Glass.



Fig. 3.
William Morris,
Roundel and Vessel with shard drawings, 1979.
Blown glass.

CHAPTER 3

WILLIAM MORRIS AS AN INDEPENDENT GLASS ARTIST.

William Morris's personal aesthetic has always been about the forest and the earth. From his early days living in Carmel, he has always spent his spare time roaming the hills of the area. That was where he would come to think, to imagine about the past and the people that lived there before him. This area was steeped in Native American history, and a way of life that was close to Morris's own lifestyle. In the wild lands he found a place to be. As Morris recalls,

"I was very comfortable in the woods at fourteen, out several nights at a time."² He dug pot shards from burial mounds of Native American Indians almost in his backyard. He found arrow heads in the caves. His personal work from the late Seventies onwards stemmed from his memories of discovering and excavating artifacts, be it bones, tools or shards of pots from the hills. From this time in history, the time when the only inhabitants in North America were the Native Indians, mystical legends and stories of the past as well as his own imagination have influenced his life. Images of the tribal culture of the Native American Indians of the area, and them hunting, living and storytelling, conjured up ideas of a wonderful environment and time to live in. Morris, throughout his life, has always kept his links with nature strong, returning to the wild as often as possible. His life has been influenced by these ideals of the past Native American culture so much that he tries to live a life similar to those people.

During his intense working sessions, which last a few months, and only during the cool seasons, Morris will rise with the sun to start work and often go to bed when the sun sets. Pilchuck, where he got his start in glass, is closed in winter, so he rents the hot shop for the off-season. He is a keen hunter and will spend days and nights out camping, hunting for his food with only a long bow and arrows. He loves to spend his time touring around the countryside alone on his motorbike, thinking about his surroundings and the past. He tries to live his life as simply as possible. He is not comfortable in big cities or in big crowds and does not even keep in contact with the news or television. He lives this type of lifestyle to help his work and his mind to grow, constantly learning about and studying the land and the people of times gone by. The Native American tradition is not his sole interest when it comes to earlier cultures. Morris is interested in many past cultures, their traditions, legends and lives, and has chosen to use some of these influences in his work. Morris is not interested in excavating these artifacts for the purpose of collecting; he would rather see the objects in their settings and wonder what led these people to create such burial sites. He wants to imagine what happened to people, and why they were motivated to build a particular site. He has commented,

"I don't care about the scientific theories, the science of archaeology; I like the mystery and the romance of it. I like the fresh spontaneous ideas that people have when they respond to what is there".³

Morris has always wanted the public to respond to his work in the same way. He imagines his work as a burial hoard that has recently been unearthed. He creates objects, "artifacts", in the form of something that he would love to find. Although, upon reflection, he has commented,

"It isn't the finding, it's the imagining".⁴

The spontaneous ideas that he has talked about when unearthing a burial are what led him to create his first series, 'Stone Vessels', in the early Eighties. Here he was not trying to copy anything that he had seen before; that would seem pointless, but instead he wanted to create vessels that could tell a story. The vessels would be created with a prehistoric quality to them, they could have images adorning them similar to those found in ancient caves. The vessels might depict ancient tribal rituals or customs, but these images would not be created from any primary sources such as pot shards or tools; they come from the mind of Morris and what he would like to imagine the past was like. In the end, when Morris has his work on display, it is left up to the eye of the beholder to make their own interpretation of what is in front of them, what Morris has created for them. Morris does not particularly like to talk about it, he makes it according to his own vision, but when it comes into the public eye he does not really want to voice his own opinion on the work; he wants the public to make up their own minds and stories about the work. He says he wants his work to be suggestive rather than definitive, and the stories to be open-ended, so he tries to arrange it so there is more than one possibility for people to read into it.

Morris's work as an independent glass artist first started in the late Seventies when he was head blower for Chihuly. His style however, was rather different. From the start, his work had a certain earthy quality to it. The early days brought experimentation into his work, simple glass shard drawings on roundels and vessels reflecting his love of the past. These initial pieces, simple in content, look as though they contain recently unearthed pieces of ancient pottery. These objects recall his first memories of his childhood interest. Morris soon followed these 'Stone Vessels' with his first series of 'Petroglyph Vessels' and 'Standing Stones'. These, 'Stone Vessels' especially the earlier forms, take on a pre-Celtic European feel to them, from around the Stone Age. Morris was greatly influenced by a visit to the Orkney Islands in the eighties and felt that the flat terrain contrasted strikingly with the monoliths erected there. These pieces have earthy colours and textural qualities. They, just like the standing stones of the Orkneys, are meant to jut out of the landscape or environment surrounding them - the 'Standing Stones' Morris produces can measure up to four feet in height and in the context of a gallery or a museum stand out of their environment and look really impressive. In this early work he attempted to return to a time where the land and nature were vital to people's existence. He tries to relive the prehistoric rituals of erecting standing stones. With his team of four assistants and himself, they attempted to create their own standing stones in the same team-like approach of the Stone Age. The whole creation, process and finished piece evokes a method that is meant to be like that used by the Stone Age people - the idea is, in order to create/erect

this stone we must work as a team.

The 'Stone Vessels' and 'Standing Stones' are often intended to work together as a grouping. In one of his 'Stone Vessel and Standing Stone' pieces from 1985 (Fig.4), we can see the interplay between the two aspects of Morris's work. On one hand we have purely decorative, beautiful objects, exquisite in colour and form, on the other we see the pieces as canvases for Morris's visions of the past. The question is whether Morris is trying to push one aspect across to the viewer more so than the other. A royal blue is the main colour of the piece which gives a richness to the work. Yellow, orange and white are delicately interspersed to give a contrast to the blue. The imagery on the vessel reminds me of ancient burial traditions, twelve standing stones surrounding the coffin like image containing a body. Morris depicts death and the traditions of burial in a beautiful way; this is what he intended. I feel that Morris is not trying to be morbid in his work, instead he is trying to push the viewer into viewing the work as an artifact from the past. I find myself questioning the piece, wondering about the burial, about the possibility of it being a ritualistic ceremony, why they erected standing stones around the burial site, was this person important or was it a tradition for burial at the time? Morris wants the viewer to ask the questions, and not to be shocked by the subject of death, but instead imagine the past, the people and the rituals.

As Morris moved on with this series, there seemed to be quite an evident change in his style, from the prehistoric Stone Age era to a Native American Indian feel in his work; next came the 'Petroglyph Vessel' series, a continuation from the 'Stone Vessels'. Now instead of drawings of pot shards and decorative stones adorning the work, Morris takes on the imagery of hunters and animals. These vessels attempt to capture the rituals and traditions of the tribal culture of the Native American Indians. This change and its resulting work were closer to his original memories and possibly closer to what he intended to produce from then on. This, in fact, was the style he has mainly worked in since; he has continued to progress and push the boundaries of glass. In the mid eighties, when the change in his style occurred, Morris accompanied his work with his new 'Artifact Series'. This series worked beautifully with the 'Standing Stones' and 'Petroglyph Vessels'. The 'Artifact Series' was to be a more sculptural idea. The stones, vessels and artifacts would all work together. Their main subject was human and animal forms, and the artifacts became more skeletal as a result. When on display, they would look like a huge hoard from a burial site which Morris had just discovered.

These works are unlike his vessels; they are not between art and craft but are bold sculptures which brought William Morris closer to his intentions towards glass. For Morris it is not the remains that interest him but the unanswered questions that these remains bring up. How did these people live? How did death come to them? With these solid images in glass, Morris is asking audiences to create their own images in their heads and answer some of the questions which he proposes.

With Morris's Native American work, he creates types of mystical scenes on his vessel forms. Images of elks, hunters, and buffalo are frequently seen on the

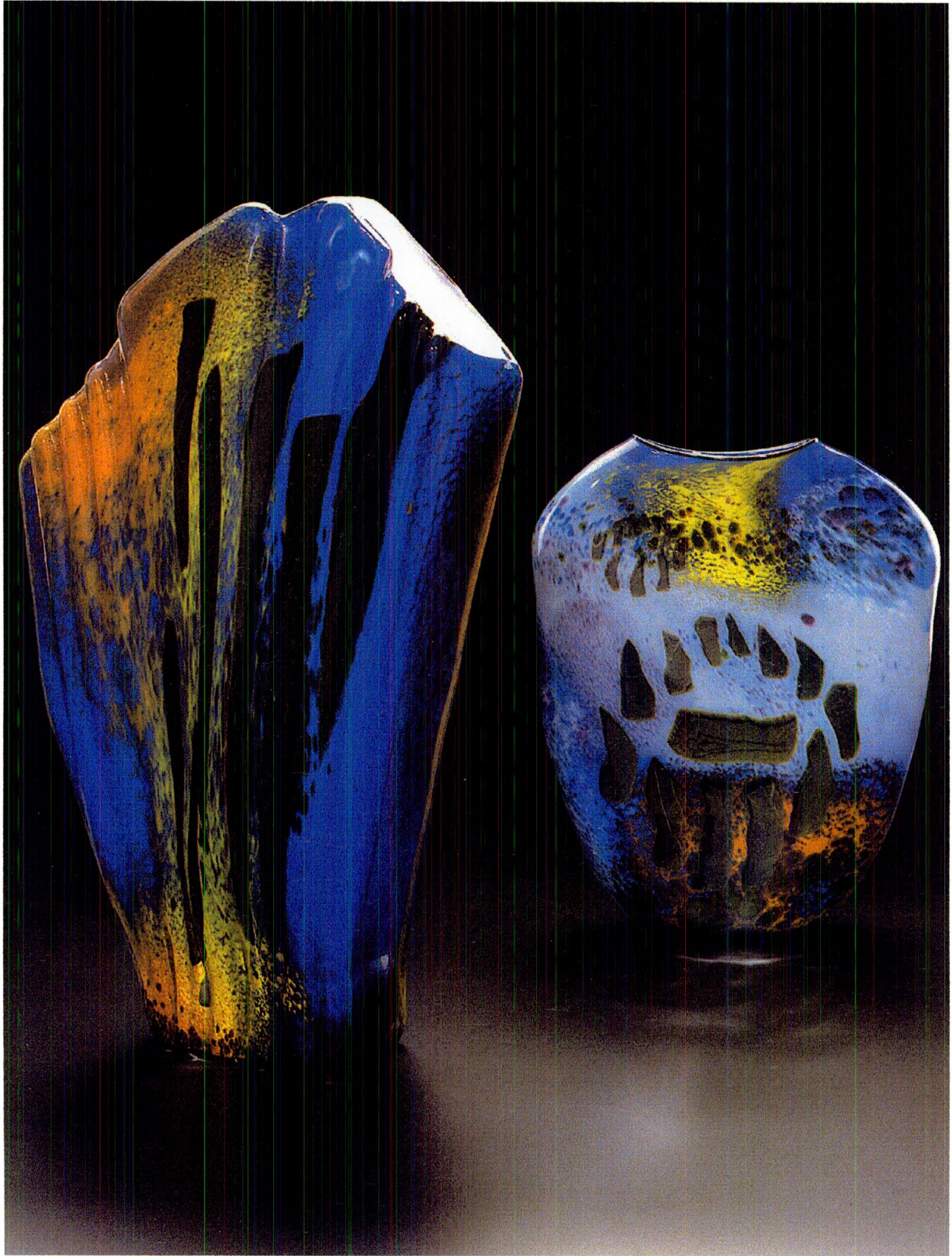


Fig. 4.
William Morris,
Standing Stone and Stone Vessel, 1985.
Blown and Hot Worked Glass.

vessels (Fig.5&6). With Morris's earth tones and floating images of the past, we are given a sense that these were magical times where the scenes were commonplace in everyday life. These objects really affect viewers and make them think about the past and how people lived. It is an almost idyllic scene that Morris portrays, and I think that it is the magical, mystical quality of the Native Americans, with their traditions, legends and folklore that evokes that reaction of wonder. It is idyllic in the sense that he does not attempt to portray any of the savagery or brutality of the hunt, chase and kill depicted on many of his vessels, which started appearing on them around 1986. His vessels tell stories of hunting, but they are created with a charming quality to them. Images of the hunters and the hunted are created with a glorified image. They play a role in a scene that Morris has imagined, idyllic in all senses of the word, from the rich blues and golds that can be seen adorning many of his vessels to the postures and positioning of the characters. This mystical quality of the work captures the spirit of the Native American tribes and their ritual dancing and chanting but does not capture the true qualities of hunting. Morris has been greatly influenced by these people and seems to not want to portray a brutal side to his heroes.

William Morris's assistant Jon Ormbrek, an artist and painter, is the creator of the faux- primitive drawings that adorn Morris's glass. Ormbrek has been working with Morris since 1977 and in that time has created and developed his own method and style of glass decoration, quite like Native American sand painting. Using finely powdered glass colour, he sprinkles and shapes his drawings on smooth metal plates. The plates with these colours on them are then heated and Morris will roll the glass bubble, still in its preliminary state, over the design, picking up the colour and drawings. Morris will then blow the bubble into its desired shape and at this time the drawings will expand and distort at their own rate, giving them their own life and magical quality. Neither Morris or Ormbrek know what the end result will be and it is this quality that attracts them to the glass. Morris's use of form, imagery and colour all work hand in hand. These are his artifacts, things he would love to unearth and therefore they must have an ancient, natural feel to them. The forms themselves in the 'Petroglyph Vessel' series are far from perfectly symmetrical forms but if they were it would take away from the basic concept; it reflects a time where pots were made of clay and would have been hand-built and not thrown. The images are flat and featureless; rather like the ancient cave drawings of that era, they are distorted, twisting and full of action. The figures hold spears, bows and arrows, out on a day's hunting. They tell stories. For example, in one of Morris's 'Petroglyph Vessels' of 1988 depicts a hunting outing. On one side we see the hunters, six blue stalking figures and on the other side, the hunted, two deer grazing in the long grasses. We can read the story around the vessel, just as you would read ancient pots or cave paintings of centuries past telling the same types of stories. The blues and golds in this particular piece give it a precious quality, a scene that is precious and should be explored.

Morris mainly worked on the 'Petroglyph Vessels' and 'Standing Stones' from 1984 to 1988. This work was to lay a foundation for his later work to follow. From

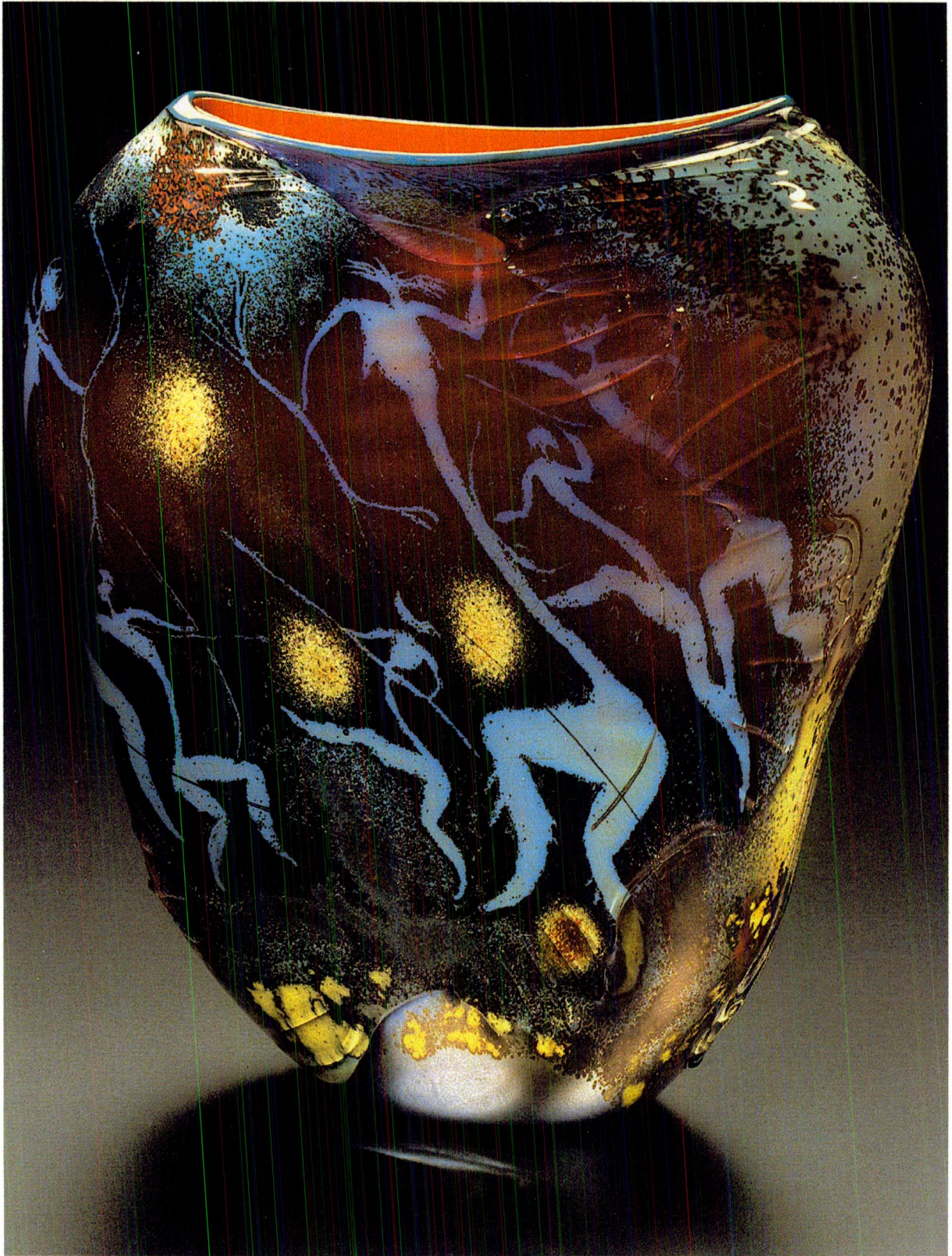


Fig. 5.
William Morris,
Petroglyph Vessel, 1988.
Blown Glass.

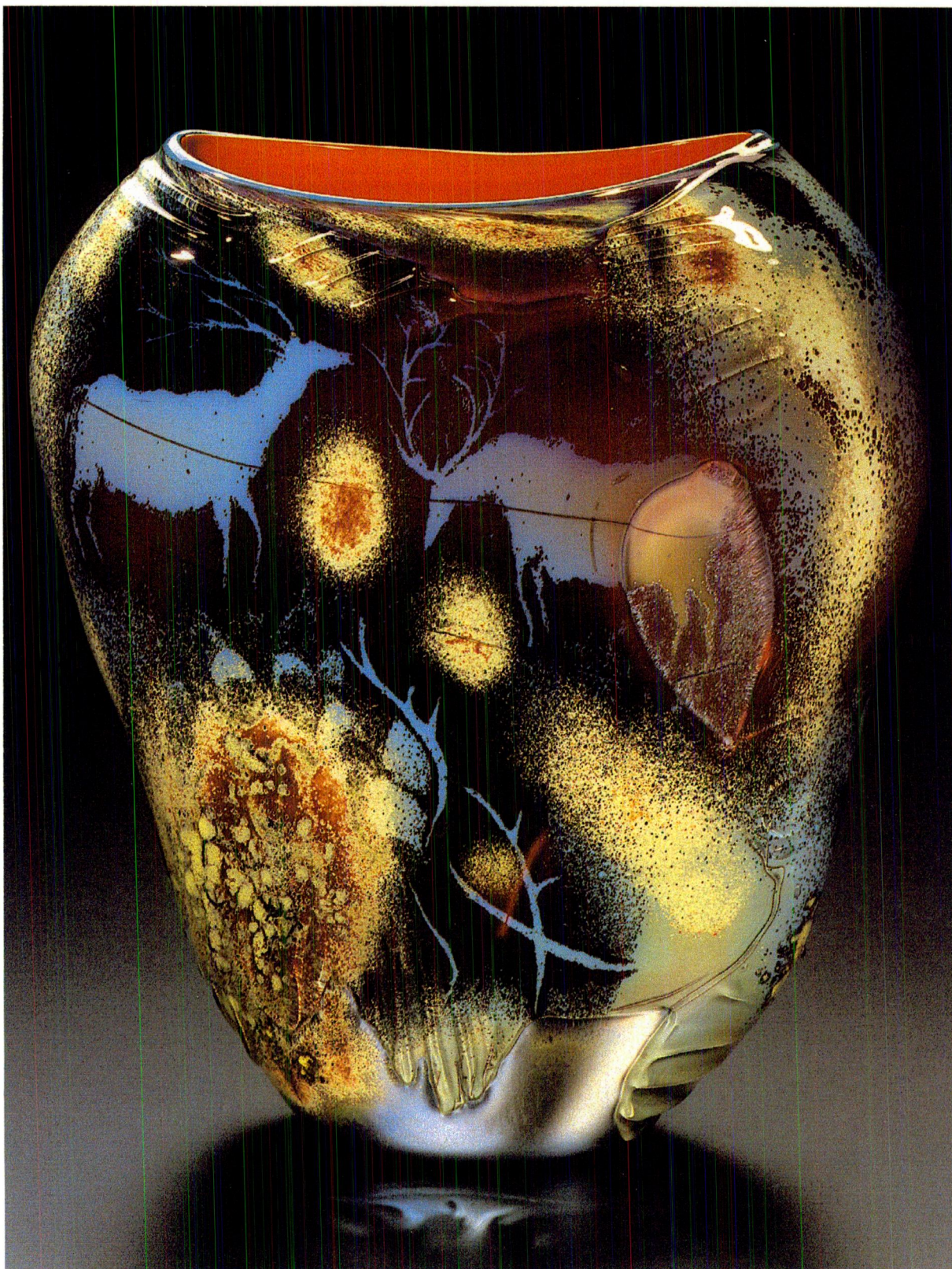


Fig. 6.
William Morris,
Pertoglyph Vessel (opposite side), 1988.
Blown Glass.

1988 onwards, Morris developed his 'Artifact Series'. This work was to be the most complex work he had undertaken to date. Emphasis on vessels telling stories of the past were no longer his main focus. This 'Artifact Series', which would take up all his working time up to the present day, would question and manifest his wonder at how they lived and died. They were to be seen as artifacts, nothing more, nothing less, things you would find in a museum. In this work of the late 80's, Morris maintained the glassy quality in his work, something he would move away from in the 90's. His work in the early stage of the 'Artifact Series' was contained in small groupings or still lifes. Here we see Morris visualising his separate pieces as a whole and how they will interact with each other. These sculptural pieces were meant to represent recently unearthed objects, items such as tusks, bones, tools and implements. At this stage of his work, actual vessels were no longer the main emphasis. He still used them, but from now on he would include them as part of the whole sculptural piece and no longer as a one-off to be placed on a pedestal. These vessels would be left lying on the floor often on their sides as only a small part of the whole piece. For example, in one such piece entitled 'Artifact Series No. 14 (Offering)' (Fig.7), from 1989, Morris depicts a scene of a human skeleton, two red vessels and a large rib cage from some large mammal. Here we see how the vessel form is used only as a part of the story telling of the piece. We can only assume that these are used as offerings to the gods upon death. Morris seems to be telling the public about the burial rituals of the Native Indians in the past and what one of these burial sites might look like if unearthed today. This is a stunning piece on a huge scale, measuring 96x120x120 inches. Morris is now showing us how his technique is near perfection, and that scale is of no object to him. His human skeleton figure in an amber-coloured glass is sculpted by Morris using his tools, such as shears, tweezers, jacks and wooden boards, no moulds are used. They may not be anatomically correct, as his father, a doctor, had once pointed out, but it is what they represent that counts and the whole feeling it portrays. This piece, 'Artifact Series No. 14 (Offering)' is a piece that demands attention with its eight foot by ten foot rib cage. This is meant to grab people's attention as they engage their surroundings in an aggressive way. These pieces are purposely built, along with the rest of his artifact series, to make you think, wonder and feel.

Morris' works in the 90's, whilst still using the same ideas and themes, now have a different look to them. Morris has left the natural qualities of glass for a more natural, earthy feeling. The shine, reflectiveness and transparency of the glass, that once was a part of Morris's work, has given way to a more technically advanced method of texturing the glass to give it a more natural, real, earthenware-like quality. Morris has commented on the natural qualities of glass that he does not like;

"I love the luminosity and the way it works, but if it's shiny, it loses that internal glow because the light is all reflected from the surface....it's a distraction from what I'd like the work to say....if that were the only quality the material had to offer, then I'd probably stop working in glass".⁵

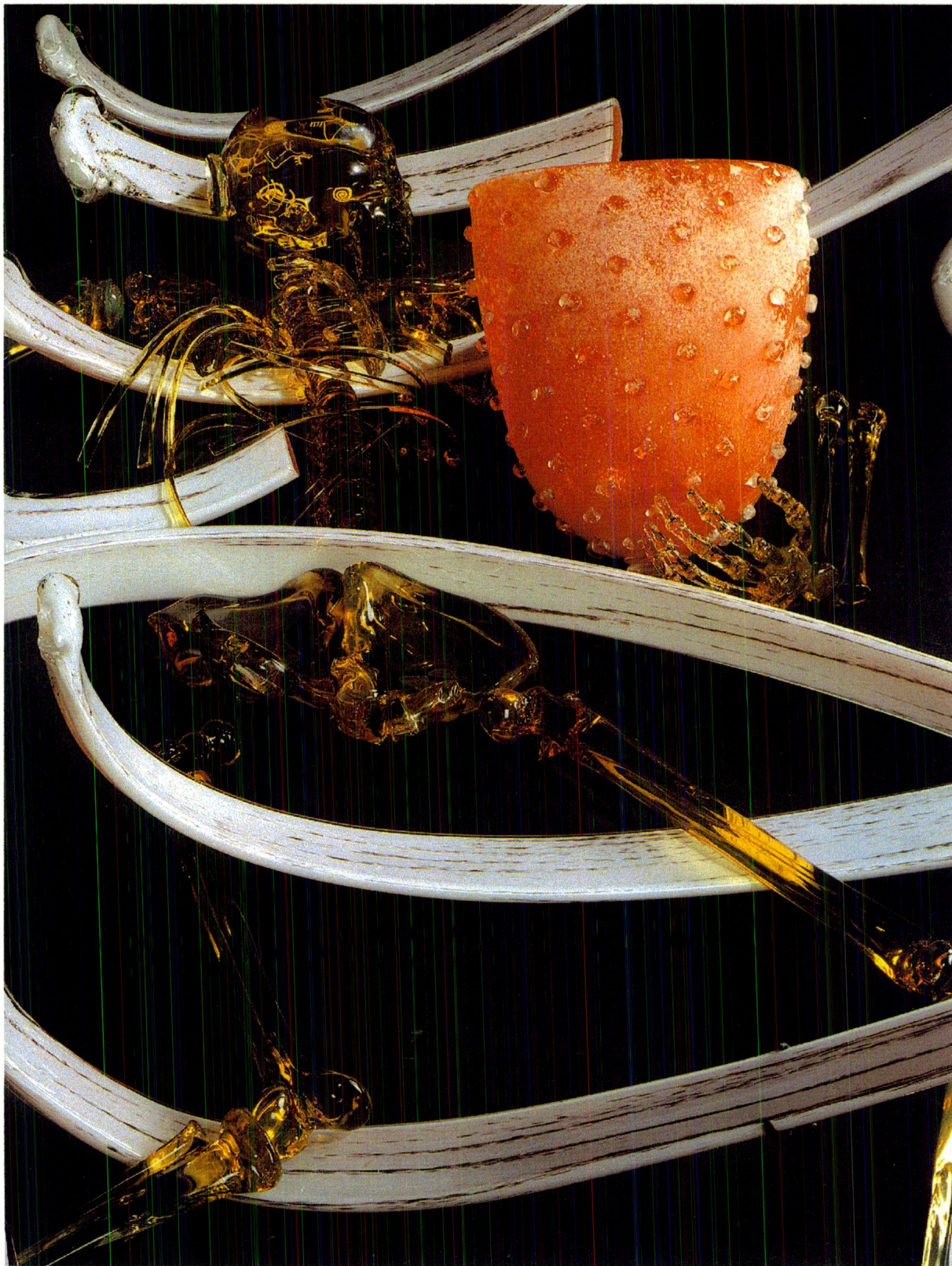


Fig. 7.
William Morris,
Artifact Series No.14 (Offering), detail, 1989.
Blown and Hot Worked Glass.

His inspiration for the 90's, more so than before, has been tools, weapons and ritual symbols. Ritualistic burials of the past have been a key focus for Morris. It was in the early 90's that Morris started work on two series, first 'Burial Urns', then 'Burial Rafts'. These works, of amazing technical ability, give a stunning, almost stark insight into the burial rituals of the past. In one such 'Burial Urn' from 1991 (Fig.8), Morris has suspended a conically shaped vessel between two standing posts. A skull and bones can be seen through the slightly clouded glass. These pieces along with the later raft series were not used just to represent the end of a life but the start of a new journey into the unknown. Morris would use these two series to explore the ritualistic burial and topic of death for the last time in 1993. He then moved on to the next phase of his artifacts, daily living implements displayed as 'Suspended Artifacts.' Morris's work has taken a huge journey from his first 'Petroglyphic Vessels' of the 80's. His subject matter has always been the same, ancient people and how they lived and died, particularly the Native American Indians. But now, rather than representing a series of decorative vessels which depict the timeless stories of stalk, chase and kill he has moved on to the implements that these people would use each day. These tools are the closest you could get to discovering how they lived each day. Before, the scenes on the 'Petroglyphic Vessels' seemed distant, like story telling. Now we can see what instruments these people might have used, what they would have hunted with, cooked with and drunk out of. It would be like going to a museum and seeing a drawing of ancient tribesmen hunting and then actually seeing their spears, axes, and arrows in real life. You would feel closer and be more attracted to the actual tool. With these, you could say that hundreds of years ago a hunter might have caught his food with them. It is with these new 'Suspended Artifacts' that Morris tries to relate the feeling of discovering one of these tools or seeing one for the first time. These pieces could not hold themselves on their own, so Morris decided to group new 'Petroglyph Vessels' with tools or a whole group of different tools and implements; the combinations are endless. Pieces would be made individually and then stored, then Morris would group them as he saw fit. Often his end product was very different from his initial concept. Now questions would spring to mind. What are these things doing together? What do they signify? How do these shapes, colours and textures relate?

Morris is a keen hunter, using the bow and arrow as his only weapon for killing and I feel that in his 'Suspended Artifacts' he is still trying to explore his interests in the rituals of the hunt. These 'Suspended Artifacts' (Fig.9) seem to give an impression that they are trophies. Often arrows, spears and tools can be seen grouped with animal heads and bones. Why? Who buys these pieces? Are his clients rich American men who hunt at the weekend and love the idea of animal parts adorning their homes? These pieces, whilst not as gruesome as actual stuffed animals, are still quite graphic. The beauty and warmth of the glass take away from the impact of the subject matter, but it is hardly something you would use as a decoration in your home. Again, as in his previous work, we see Morris using the two aspects of the decorative and the meaningful. The quality of his surfaces is seductive and engages us in a superficial



Fig. 8.
William Morris,
Burial Urn, 1991.
Blown and Hot Worked Glass, Iron.



1941-1942
1943-1944
1945-1946



Fig. 9.
William Morris,
Suspended Artifact: Pouch with Pins and Orinka, 1993.
Blown and Hot Worked Glass, Iron.

way, whilst the subject matter is steeped in the past, questioning the existence of people from early Native American cultures. Is Morris trying to suggest that these are totemic in their meaning, rather than the brutal remains of a days' hunting? Are they to be held in similar regard as they were by the the Native Americans? The questions are always left to the viewer to answer.

Morris in the early Nineties was beginning to cross over with different cultures. Now he was experimenting with tribal symbols of Native Americans, mixed with African tribal symbols and artifacts. Ornikas, which are African tribal sceptres, were seen paired with pouches decorated with images of buffalo, a native animal of America. His work at this time became his most technical to date and he worked equally on hot glass, sculpting and vessel blowing. Often the two would be grouped in a single piece. Morris's 'Suspended Artifacts' commenced in 1992 and have continued up until the present day. Along with these pieces he has also created 'Canopic Jars' (Fig.10), vessels that are based on ancient Egyptian burial urns used by the Pharaohs of the time, but topped with typically native animals of America, such as buffalo, deer and hawk. These capture the spirit of two cultures in the one object: the Native American Indians, with their symbolic animals, as mentioned, and the Egyptian culture with the canopic jar, a typically used burial urn of the time. Morris' interests, which were once solely focused on the natives of ancient America, have now spread to other cultures of ancient times. Morris wants to capture the spirit of their race, whether it be African or American. Morris' introduction of animal heads to his 'Suspended Artifacts' and 'Canopic Jars' intended them to be seen as an artistic component rather than just a representation of their surviving bones. They were not intended to represent the found objects of archaeology, but were made to represent either the mythic fantasy or graphic reality of the trophy hunt.

William Morris' glass has brought about quite a lot of critical response. His work has been compared to and mentioned alongside the work of Nancy Graves, an older contemporary American artist, for whom Morris has made work. Graves came to the public's attention with the creation of her 'Camels' in 1967-1969. Since then she has used anatomy and archaeology as the main starting points for her work. Between 1969 and 1971, she made a number of works using camel bones. The bone forms were made out of sculpted wax, formed over steel rods and painted. At this time, particularly in 1970 and 1971, her bones took on forms based on the totemic and shamanistic forms of primitive hunting societies. Her ritualistic forms referred to cycles of life and death, day and night, light and dark. Here we can see a parallel to Morris' work, the one major difference being that Graves has received great critical response since her introduction into the art scene in 1969, while Morris has received rather mixed reviews from his critics. Claims that his medium is too elegant for his subject have been made,

"Morris' grand idea of a meditation on mortality and life is hampered by a medium that is still too elegant, too glamorous, to make his statement seem real,"⁶

commented art critic Ron Glown. Graves' work, in comparison, must seem rather



Fig. 10.
William Morris,
Canopic Jars: Baboon and Jackal, 1992.
Blown and Hot Worked Glass.



Fig. 11.
Jon ormbrek, Karen Willenbrink and William Morris at Pilchuck, 1993.

brutal compared to Morris' pristine glass skills and techniques. People feel that he cannot make a profound statement about the subjects of life and death without giving his work a brutal quality to it. I feel that many people are missing the point of Morris's work, that he wants to create work that does not need a studied or intellectual response from the viewer. He is creating an art of vessels and large installations of grouped glass artifacts. These are left to the viewer to form their own opinion of the work, whether it be a critical view of how it does not fit into the grand scheme of contemporary art, or how it can conjure up wonderful images of the past.

Morris has always claimed that he wanted to produce glass that would portray his interests in the past, interests in life and death, the rituals of burial and hunting. Morris never claimed that he wanted to portray the brutality of this way of life, he wanted the work to celebrate the lives of these people. Morris loves the way these people lived and tries to live a similar lifestyle, he wants to glorify their existence, folklore, rituals and traditions. Their existence, to Morris, was one of amazing colour, thrilling hunts and great stories, and this is what he is trying to capture in his glass. His work on the 'Burial Raft' series from the early nineties, touched on the issue of death, but in a way that he wanted to lead viewers to ask questions about their lives, how they lived and died, and where this raft might be carrying them to in the afterlife.

Morris is condemned as an artist due to his close association with glass and particularly due to the fact that he is working with either blown or molten glass. The art world, at this point in time, still seems to be unsure about glass as a serious art medium; it is still caught up in the preconceived notion that glass is purely a craft form, especially if blown work. Chihuly is one of the richest living artists, and Morris is not far behind. They are able to show in many of the great galleries of the world and have a huge demand for their work, yet they are still criticised by the art world and critics for producing highly decorative glass art. It seems that these days art has to be brutal and ugly in order to be validated, ideas forced on the public by the art world and critics. Fine art of recent years seems to use shock tactics to catch the public's attention and, because of this, beautiful art in highly skilled, crafted media is not taken seriously by the public. Beauty in art these days is seen as not being powerful enough to put an idea across. Shock tactics in art seem to be the only way in grabbing the public's attention and receiving any critical acclaim; no longer does the art world want beautiful works of art. In order for your work to be taken seriously, it has to be steeped in deep concepts and issues of modern society and not a return to the past as in Morris' case.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION.

In the glass world in the last thirty years or so, huge developments have been made from what was once traditionally a secretive, factory-produced craft to a hugely lucrative and highly experimental art form. In the Sixties, studio glass hot shops began to crop up developing a new interest in what was becoming a dying craft. Venetian glass was seen as being the ultimate in hand-made, traditional glass, but it was too secretive in its knowledge of glass and the glass houses would not divulge information regarding its making to the rest of the world, therefore slowing its progress as a creative medium. At this time, a few Venetian glass makers broke their ties with Murano in Venice and shared this information with the Americans. It was with this sharing of information that glass moved in to the twentieth century. The Americans, particularly Dale Chihuly, who is nowadays seen as the king of glass and the originator of studio glass art, began to experiment with this new medium to produce new forms of art. Chihuly led others to believe that glass could not be just purely decorative or functional but instead a new medium that could be used in conceptual work through sculpting, painting and printing in the same way as the fine arts, while still being able to push the boundaries of functional ware in design and production. More and more these days there is evidence of the craft world entering the same area as art, with its acceptance into art galleries being displayed alongside the fine arts. Yet still there is a hesitancy for it to be described as art as the work is not produced in the traditional materials of the arts. The public's opinion of contemporary craft is still blurred by the old perception of it as being a nostalgic and aging tradition and still not enough people are aware of the new work being produced. Therefore it may take time for it to reach the same critical and public opinion as art has these days. The craft world today, I feel, is not entirely looking to be considered as an art form as much as it is looking to not be looked down upon by the art world. This is the main problem with the arts and crafts conflict, art being considered superior to craft and craft resenting art for this superiority complex.

So, it seems the main rift between art and craft is caused by the art world's inability to accept craft as an art form. Craft is looked down upon by fine art because of its nostalgic tendencies. In fact, craft can now be part of a modern progressive art form to be considered alongside art. Critics and fine artists tend to look at craft as being purely functional and decorative and not as a discursive medium. It is they who that lead the public's opinion through the media and their own power. In fact craft work and crafts people are often dealing with concepts equally important to those of fine artists, whether in glass with its sculptural, flat and blown work pushing serious concepts, Chihuly pushing the concepts of vessel forms and changing the public's perception of vessels through organic form, or William Morris dealing with the issues of death and burial rituals. The critics' opinion is highly elitist, believing that the only real art is that produced by traditional means; the question is, if a contemporary painter

or sculptor were to turn to blowing glass forms, whether functional or sculptural in order to convey an idea or concept, would the critics suddenly see it as craft or would still be art? If the answer is that it is still art, then the art world have to look differently upon craft and see it for what it is, a contemporary art, capable of producing works equally discursive as those in fine art. This ultimately is what every crafts person is looking for, to be considered as an equal to the painters and sculptors of the art world, as a creator of meaningful art whether functional, sculptural or painterly and for their work not to be looked down upon as purely decorative and meaningless. Art is seen as a progressive medium, where new ideas and concepts can be explored by these great artistic intellects; on the other hand, craft is seen as being a nostalgic art form by the art world, longing to return to pre-industrial times. But now the glass world is becoming more eager to prove that it is on a par with the modern thinking of the art world. Craft has become more advanced and experimental in the latter half of the twentieth century striving to be considered as much an art as fine art itself. Concepts were once seen only in art, but now glass ideas are being explored on a larger scale.

It was the studio glass movement in the Sixties in America that changed the glass world. The development of small furnaces for private use made glass that more accessible to the new artists of the time. The willingness to share the knowledge and information of glass with others was yet another reason why it progressed in the United States. The willingness to experiment with the medium and not be concerned with large scale production was another factor in the rise in popularity of glass over the last thirty or so years, and it was the Americans and their studio glass movement that brought all this about.

So the question is how do we define Morris's work? Is it craft, art or sculpture? Or does it have to be defined at all? I see it as contemporary sculpture using a new medium for the work. Since the Sixties, glass has taken a new role in the art world and it has been Morris and Chihuly who have pushed the boundaries of blown glass the most in recent years. Morris's glass works on its own in individual pieces, or in the in the larger context of gallery settings where they are meant to be seen as discoveries from recent archaeological digs. The layout of Morris's glass in a gallery setting suggests that he wants the viewer to interact with his installations. His work engages the viewer in an aggressive way, his work is not subtle, it juts out of its environment on a grand scale and the viewer is enticed into exploring it. I feel that this is the whole point of his work, it would not work in a two dimensional format, it has to be explored from all angles, each giving a new image or object to think about. Morris's work is sculpture, it uses traditional vessel forms and traditional materials to produce work of a highly discursive nature. He uses the gallery as an environment for installation work, involving a mixture of vessel, bone and tool forms to push his ideas of the past. His interest in the past involves a love and respect for the customs, traditions and folklore of the Native American Indians. He sees himself as a storyteller, these objects which he produces are his tools to tell his stories. There are no definite stories to his pieces, he relies on the individual to make up their own opinions to the work. I think that this is

why his work has a great appeal to the general public, you do not need to be highly educated in contemporary scene to understand and enjoy Morris's work and even if you do not want to approach the work on this level you can appreciate it on a superficial level.

Morris's work has been criticised in the past for being too 'nice' to be considered as a real art form. His work is beautiful in colour and quality but this is used to reflect the customs of the Native Americans. Colour was used by them in many ways, for body adornment, ritual ceremonies and traditions. Morris is using strong bold colour as a reflection of these traditions, and when seen in the context of a burial setting it is suddenly criticised for being too nice. The point is, Morris seems to be emphasising the burial traditions and its use of colour. Life was celebrated at these occasions, colour was used to rejoice in a life that had passed and hoped for a safe journey into the after life. Life and death in his work is not approached with a morbid tone. It celebrates a past culture, its rituals and celebrations of life, death, hunting and beliefs.

In the last decade Chihuly and Morris have been the front runners in the world of hot and blown glass due to their ceaseless efforts in pushing glass to the limit and their tireless campaign to make the world accept it as a valid discursive medium.

It has been these people in the studio glass movement who have resurrected the craft of glass making. Some have pushed the medium in the area of functional ware, some in the art glass area. If it was not for these people and their efforts, glass making would still be caught up in the past and any sort of progression would be made impossible.

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