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National College for Art and Design

DALE CHIHULY

Thesis submitted to

THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN

and

in candidacy for the degree

FACULTY OF CRAFT DESIGN  
DEPARTMENT OF GLASS

by

KAREN SCALLY

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To my parents,  
for the opportunity to learn  
and to my boyfriend  
for the inspiration to persevere.



To the  
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How Chabry's life and work has been described in this  
and movement with diverse influences. It is these influences  
that have Chabry's work as an innovative and original  
collection of papers which have been published and presented  
primarily over the last 10-15 years. The development of these  
papers through his various positions and the influence of his  
influence and other people's work on Chabry's work through  
most recent years is the main focus of this book and the  
introduction and

## INTRODUCTION

The traditional distinction between art and craft has been  
gradually eroded over the past decade. It is a logical question  
particularly in America where the art and craft traditions  
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American ceramic artists can be compared to Chabry in that  
As early as the 1950's they rejected two major directions from the  
then accepted approach to ceramic work. That the status of a vessel was  
no longer a prerequisite for its validity and that ceramic sculpture  
could be used to create a major work of art. It was the acceptance of  
Harvey Littleton and how Chabry have made his work possible. The  
against classical functions form for the acceptance of his work as a  
sculptural medium is an interesting contrast to Chabry's work. It is  
ideal which becomes very prominent in his most recent work. This  
light for acceptance began with Joseph Lindberg in 1952 when he  
established the first art gallery in the new department of the  
University of Wisconsin-Madison. He was responsible for putting the  
artist in direct contact with the market in the studio situation, which  
marked the initial break from traditional European design  
traditions. This tradition established a way of doing ceramics  
including the work from a decorative direction. This movement rapidly  
spread across the United States through schools, universities and  
private studios. Eric Chabry's contribution to this movement and his  
influence on it is of major importance in its development.

Chapter one covers Chabry's early development while in  
college. This foundation was a solid base of training, experience and



Dale Chihuly's life and work has been described as "One of fluid movement with elusive inflected highlights. It is these highlights that have Chihuly worldwide as an innovative glass artist. In his collections he tackles many concerns; colour and movement being the primary ones. In this thesis I will discuss the development of these concerns through his various collections. I shall also consider their influence and offer some assessment of Chihuly's final works. Chihuly's most recent series tackles the more series subject of craft and art, function and sculpture.

The traditional distinction between arts and crafts has been gradually eroded over the past decade. It is a topical question particularly in American art, Kenneth Price and Peter Voulkos, American ceramic artists, can be compared to Chihuly in their attitudes. As early as the 1950's they proposed two major deviations from the then accepted approach to ceramic use; "that the utility of a vessel was no longer a prerequisite for its validity and that ceramic materials could be used to create a major art form". It is this acceptance that Harvey Littleton and now Chihuly have fought for in glass. The struggle against classical functional form for the acceptance of hot glass as a sculptural medium is an underlying concern in Chihuly's work. It is this ideal which becomes very prominent in his most recent works. This fight for acceptance began with Harvey Littleton in 1962 when he established the first hot glass facilities in the arts department of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He was responsible for putting the artist in direct contact with the material in the studio situation, which marked the radical break from traditional European designer-craftsman. This tradition constituted a team of skilled craftsmen executing the work from a designers drawings. This movement rapidly spread across the United States through schools, universities and private studios. Dale Chihuly's contribution to this movement and his influence on it is of major importance to its development.

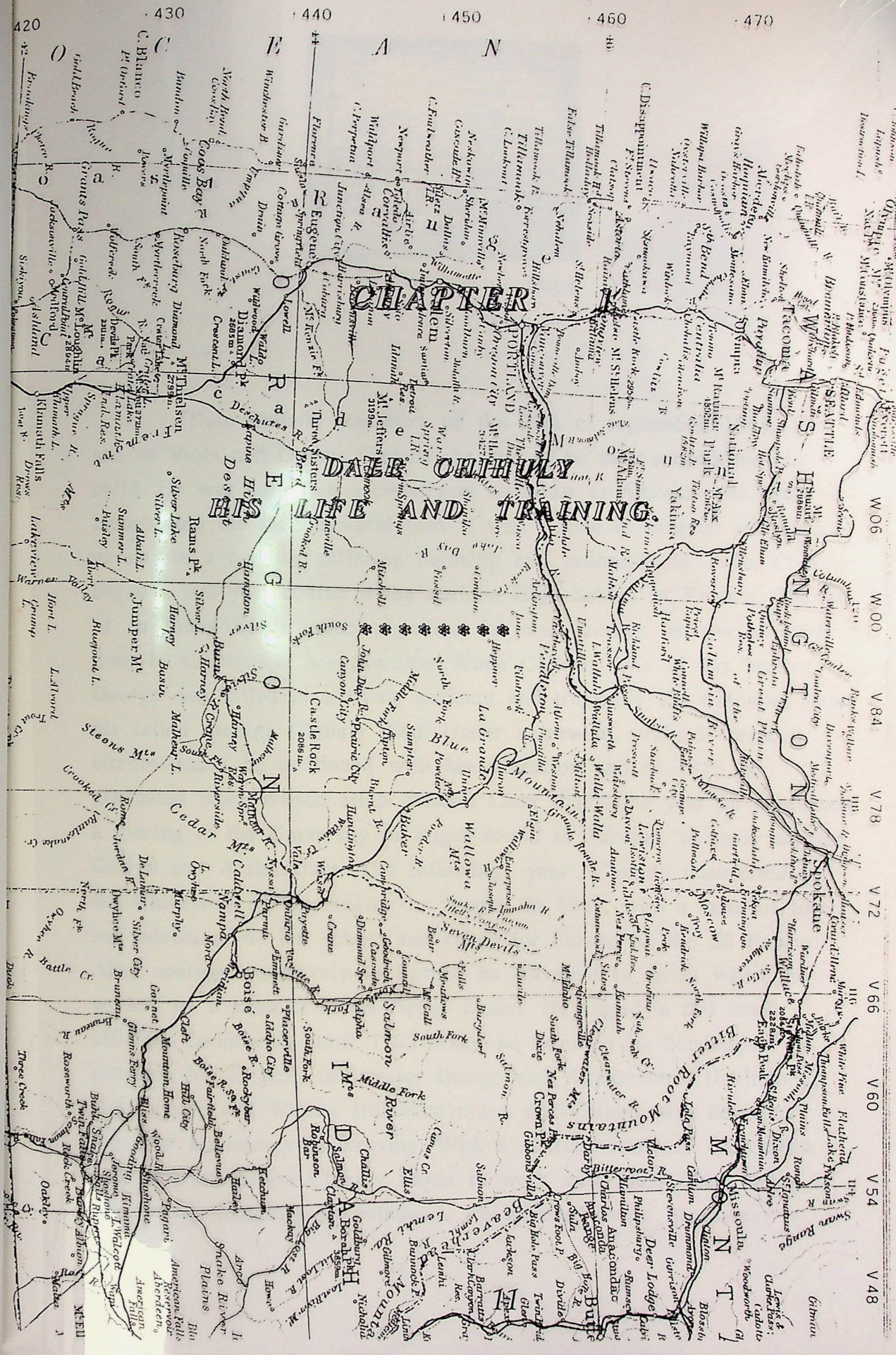
Chapter one covers Chihuly's early developments while at college. This foundation was a solid base of training, experience and



inspiration for what was to be a lifetime pre-occupation. These days of career indecision and experimentation through varied mediums soon came to a halt with his discovery of hot glass. Chihuly's formative years were enhanced by travel and equipped him with an awareness of the studio glass scene worldwide. The next chapter marks a period when the Navajo Indian culture of his home town, Tacoma, was a primary influence. These series included the "Blanket cylinders", the "Pilchuck cylinders" and the "sea forms". In these works we can see a development of Chihuly's earlier concerns with the freezing of flowing movement through the glass. Firstly through surface decoration, Chihuly captures the individual warp and weft threads warping and reacting to the pull of the hot glass. In the "Basket series" he conveys this motion through form with the aid of simple line enhancing their movement. Function has never been a primary concern of Chihuly's. His pieces convey energy and motion and are not restricted in the confines of a utilitarian category. Chihuly's next series are freer forms. They capture energy through the movement in their rims, with the use of line to enhance that motion. These "sea forms" were named so after they were formed when Chihuly made the comparison. In this series the idea of grouping the forms stems from the basket series but here the inner forms have become freer and more enclosed in comparison to the form which contains them. In the collection that followed, these inner forms are slotted together with more open forms to produce a short lived series entitled "flower forms". The re-introduction of bright colours from his blanket cylinder forms resulted in the "Macchia" series. These pieces resemble huge jelly-fish floating underwater. Chihuly's most recent series "Venetians" is a totally new idea and aesthetically contrasting to his previous work. He uses a classical functional core form and engulf it in energetic twisted spirals and additions. This use of primary colours gives this applied bit-work a strength of movement much stronger than in his previous series. These pieces are a direct statement on the relationship between form and function and craft and art.



# PACIFIC COAST



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# CHAPTER I

## DALE CHIHULY HIS LIFE AND TRAINING.

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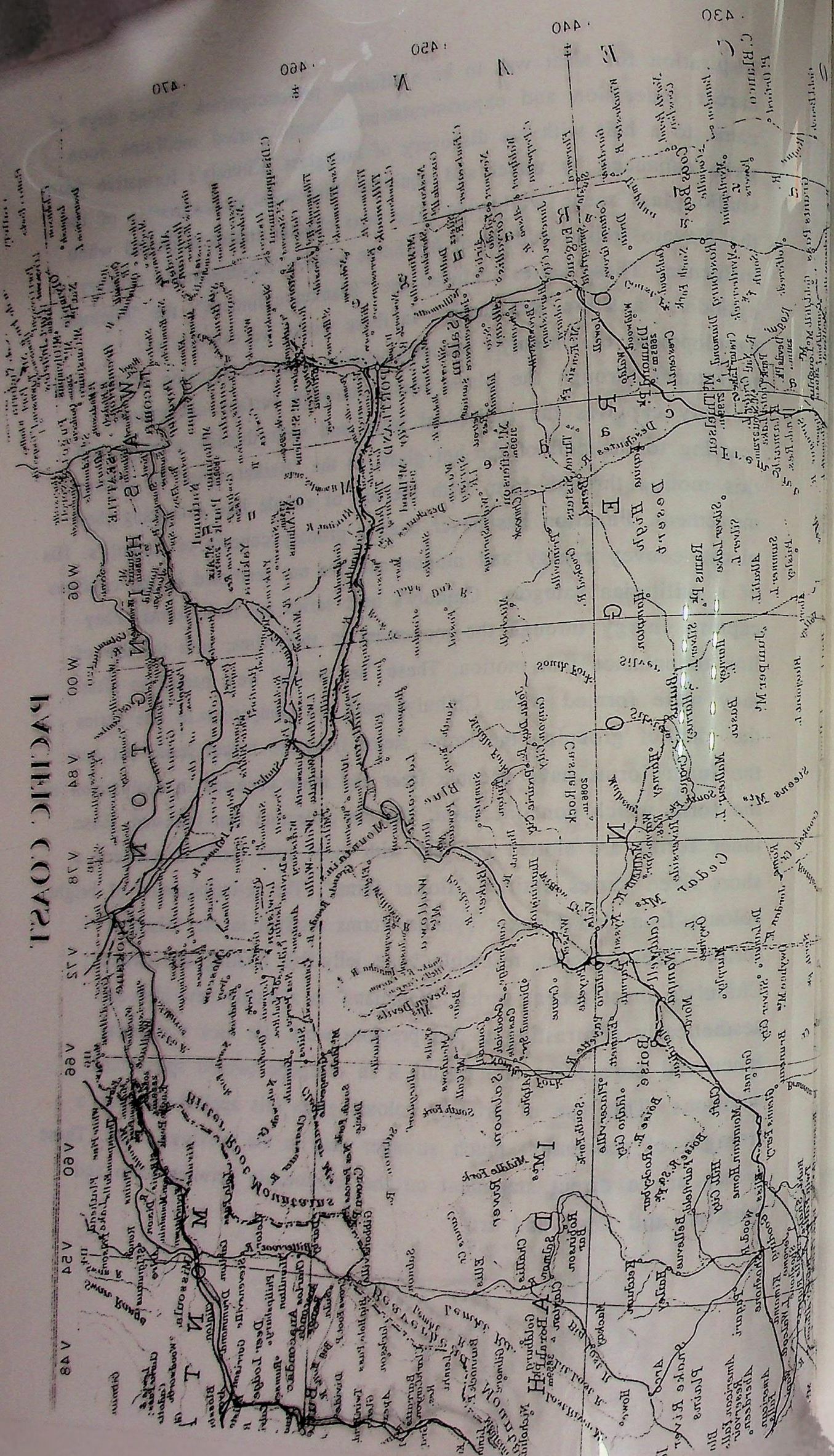






Fig.1

Dale Chihuly was born on the 20th of september, 1941. The son of Viola and George Chihuly, he was ~~to be~~ their second and last child. He was born ~~into~~ a country at war, just as America was about to launch into the second world war. It was a time of disquiet and social unrest, in a country suffering hardship and rationing. In 1956, Chihuly began a two year course at the stadium High School in Tacoma. The son of an International union organiser for meat cutters he worked part-time to supplement his education. When Chihuly was 15 his brother George was killed in a flying accident and tragically the following year his father George Chihuly died. Under somewhat strained financial circumstances he continued with his education and in 1959 he graduated from Wilson High School. Later that same year he confirmed a placing at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, to study interior Design and Architecture. The following year Chihuly transferred to the University of Washington in Seattle. In 1961, with a taste ~~of~~ travel and adventure he left school and sailed for Europe on the SS France. After touring extensively in Europe he travelled to Israel where he worked on a Kibbutz in the Negev Desert. He stayed in this small efficient community until 1963 when he returned to Washington to continue his lectures in Interior Design and Architecture. His tutors, Hope Foote and Warren Hill soon noted that Chihuly was devoting much of his energy to weaving. With a constant sense of exploration and experimentation Chihuly began to work with glass often fusing it into woven hangings for windows. He attended Doris Brockways



weaving course and incorporated small bits of glass into tapestries. Chihuly himself does not know where this initial fascination for this new medium came from, although he says "as a child I did comb the beach for bits of coloured glass"<sup>1</sup>. While discovering ways of incorporating glass into his tapestries, Chihuly developed equipment to melt and fuse the pieces of coloured glass together with copper wire. This newly discovered method allowed him to weave the glass into the fabric. Chihuly's interest in weaving stems back to his childhood. Brought up in Tacoma he was constantly surrounded by Navajo Indian Culture. Their weaving techniques, colour combinations and woven patterns were a strong influence on his later works in glass. Soon these woven pieces became more and more 3-D, evolving into small freestanding sculptural objects.

Chihuly spent his next year travelling, touring throughout Europe to Leningrad and made the first of many trips to Ireland. He returned to complete his degree in Interior Design at the University of Washington and soon began to work as a designer with John Graham Architects in Seattle, but still continued to experiment in stained glass. These experiments were still based on Chihuly's weaving sources. Their is an excellent example of these windows in his mothers dining-room (fig. 1). The pattern appears quite symmetrical at first, but as we look closer we can see that the same arrangement is never repeated twice. The colours used in the work are restricted to browns, yellows and clear glass with the occasional touch of transparent red. We can see from this illustration the effect that this window has on its environment and the effect that the natural background has on it. The greens and greys of the outside view pass through the transparent glass and harmonise with the colour combinations in the stained glass. The light that shines through casts the image of the glass into the room creating a peaceful and warm atmosphere. Michael W. Monroe describes this work with a fitting simile "Here, seemingly incompatible mediums, glass and thread, are innovatively woven together on a loom, and permanently fused by natural light passing brightly through

<sup>1</sup> Chihuly: "Chihuly; Color glass and form"; page 15



them, creating a translucent linear grid"<sup>2</sup>. This idea of glass holding its own and reacting with its environment is an ideal that Chihuly has held throughout his series that followed.

Carrying on his own work with the encouragement of Russel Day, Chihuly decided that he wanted to blow glass. He learnt about the technical and fluid possibilities of the material. One night he melted a few pounds of stained glass in one of the kilns that he had in his workshop. A determined man, he found a steel bar in his basement and dipped it into the molten glass. He blew through the pipe and a bubble appeared on the end. Chihuly had never seen glass being blown before. The excitement and enthusiasm that he felt at that moment is something that has stayed with him throughout his life. This approach gave Chihuly a fresh and uninhibited attitude towards glass-blowing. Like a child who is given his first crayon, he discovers that it leaves a mark. Excited with this new thing, and uninhibited by any past knowledge he begins to express himself in new and exciting ways. Chihuly too, now had a pot of hot glass and a steel pipe at his disposal and like the child he was not restricted by preconceived taught notions. This new and unusual way of working brought about by his unorthodox procedure showed Chihuly the full extent of this traditional and restrained medium. From then on he says "I became obsessed with learning all I could about glass"<sup>3</sup>.

This energy and enthusiasm is something which Chihuly has carried through all his collection to date. This willingness to experiment and accept new discoveries gives Chihuly's work a freshness and vitality. In order to study glassblowing and thus to feed this new obsession he abandoned his career as a designer and in 1966 went to Alaska where he worked as a commercial fisherman to earn money for graduate college. He then received in 1966 a full scholarship to study with Harvey Littleton at the University of Wisconsin, Madison and entered their M.F.A. (Master of Fine Art) programme. During this year

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<sup>2</sup> Chihuly: "Chihuly; Color glass and form"; page 33

<sup>3</sup> Chihuly: "Chihuly; Color glass and form"; page 16





Fig.2.

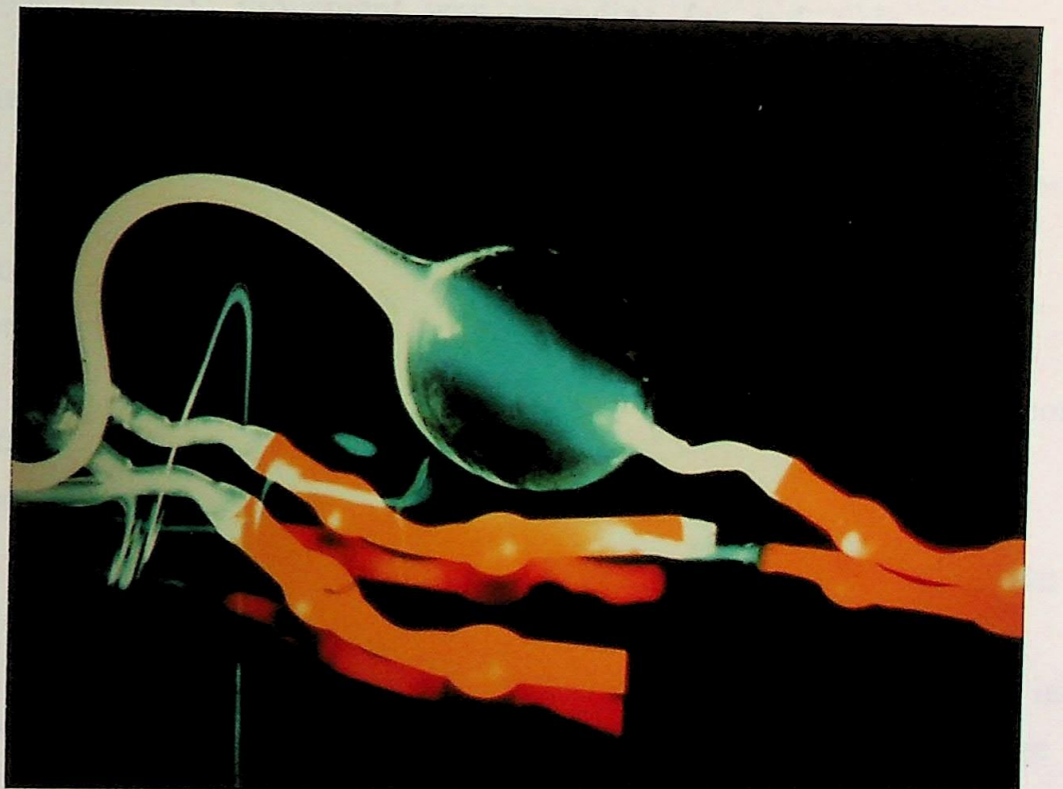


Fig.3.



Littleton was truly a brilliant and obvious inspirational character who and exerted a major influence on Chihuly, if not literally, certainly psychologically. Harvey K. Littleton is modernly known as the father of the studio glass movement in America. Having travelled extensively abroad and experienced glass all over the world, Littleton concluded the hot glass was an unexplored but feasible medium for the Artist. He laid the foundation for the free exchange of information between artist and glassworker. It was this line of communication that stimulated the development of the glass movement in its first two decades.

In 1963 Littleton secured the University funding to rent and equip and off-campus space in Madison for a student studio. Chihuly was one of the first students to avail of this student opportunity. At this stage, Littleton had begun to see his efforts rewarded. He had spent the previous three years lecturing on the possibilities of studio glass. Finally the studio glass movement was beginning to have an international impact. It was also taking hold in widely separated areas of the United States. Marvin Lipofsky had completed his MFA degree in the summer of 1964 and travelled to the west Coast, where he introduced glass to the campus of the University of California at Berkeley (fig. 2). The movement was spreading far and wide.

In 1967 Chihuly received an MS from the University of Wisconsin and entered the MFA programme at the Rhode Island school of Design, Providence where he was offered a teaching assistantship. While teaching here Chihuly worked primarily with experimentation, often incorporating neon and other materials. This development resulted in Chihuly's first series of work dated 1967 entitled "The Neon Experiments" (fig.3). These blown organic forms were a result of dripping molten glass straight out of the furnace and blowing. The essence of this work was anamorphic shape. These forms were then lit with neon and placed in environments and lit in special and exciting ways. This newly discovered power of light was to play a major part in the exhibiting and photography of all his collections. Even at this stage Chihuly's interests were primarily sculptural, with no interest in the



vessel form at all. His freedom to work with the glass instead of against it, to respect the medium's ability to be blown and manipulated in a very natural manner is what gives his work its sense of fluidity and movement. These concerns were central to many of the collections which were to follow.

With a mere two years experience with hot glass behind him, at the age of twenty six, Chihuly opened his first exhibition. A one man show at the Attica Gallery, Seattle and at the University of Wisconsin Gallery, Madison.

Chihuly describes the 1960's as a "revolutionary time"<sup>4</sup>. It was then at the Rhode Island School that he met Italo Scanga at a guest lecture given by the artist. This was the beginning of one of the most important relationships in Chihuly's career.

In 1968 Chihuly graduated from Rhode Island school of Design with a M.F.A. and continued his environmental installations, using glass, neon, plastics, rubber, etc.....Post war America was now at the peak of its economy. American Industrial production was more than one third of the world's total. The materials used would have been quite readily available.

Later on that year Chihuly received the Tiffany foundation grant for work in glass and the Fulbright fellowship to study glass at the Venini factory on the island of Murano, Venice. He was the first American glassblower to work for Venini. Here he had the opportunity to work alongside the masterblowers who had been such a strong influence on Harvey Littleton.

The influence of Venetian glass reached England as early as the sixteenth century. The Americans in various fields however did not become fascinated with Venetian glass until as late as the 1950's. The painter-sculptor-ceramist Robert Wilson had studied in Mexico and the Rivera. He was one of the first Americans to ponder on the possibility

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<sup>4</sup> Chihuly: "Chihuly; Color glass and form"; page 17



of applying glass to sculpture and made an exploratory visit to Murano. He returned to Murano in 1956 to work first with Fratelli Toso and later with designer/glassblower Alfredo Barbini whom he has worked with every year since.

It was twelve years later before the next American, Dale Chihuly armed with his scholarships and grants, went to Murano. Chihuly had written to many factories but only Venini had responded. Ludovico Diaz de Santillia, son in law of Paolo Venini, the company's founder, welcomed Chihuly as he was to welcome many more American Artists. He gave him a studio and set him to work on a model for a light competition. Chihuly's design won the competition for Venini glass, the design incorporated his concerns with glass and light (fig. 4). It was an opportunity to use previous techniques but apply them to a functional form. The lamp consisted of a glass sphere nesting in a neon support. Lengths of neon tubing flow and twist out of the circular opening in the sphere. These tubes push against the ground as if they are trying to break away from its gravitational boundaries.

Murano is the home of international glassblowing and a focal point for glass artists from all over the world. An island just half a mile of the coast of Venice, Murano held its secrets for many centuries. Glassblowers employed there lived on the island and were not permitted access to the mainland. Only supply boats were allowed to visit and their was no communication between the crew and the islanders. To this day there are no organised visits to the island and transport is very difficult to find.

Chihuly had returned to the source of hot glass. He spent his year at Venini totally absorbed in this age old craft and blew no glass himself. The Venetian technique of working glass; their tendency to flow with the material and expand its potential manipulations. He also learnt the colouring techniques of "Vetro a retori" developed in Venice in the second quarter of the 16th century.



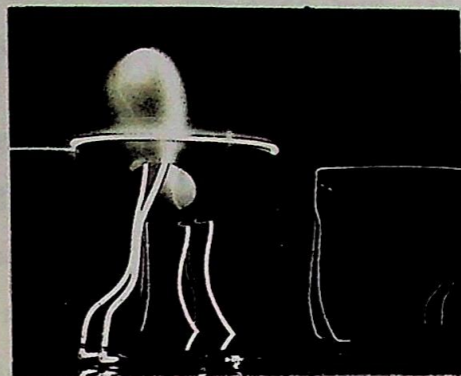


Fig.4.

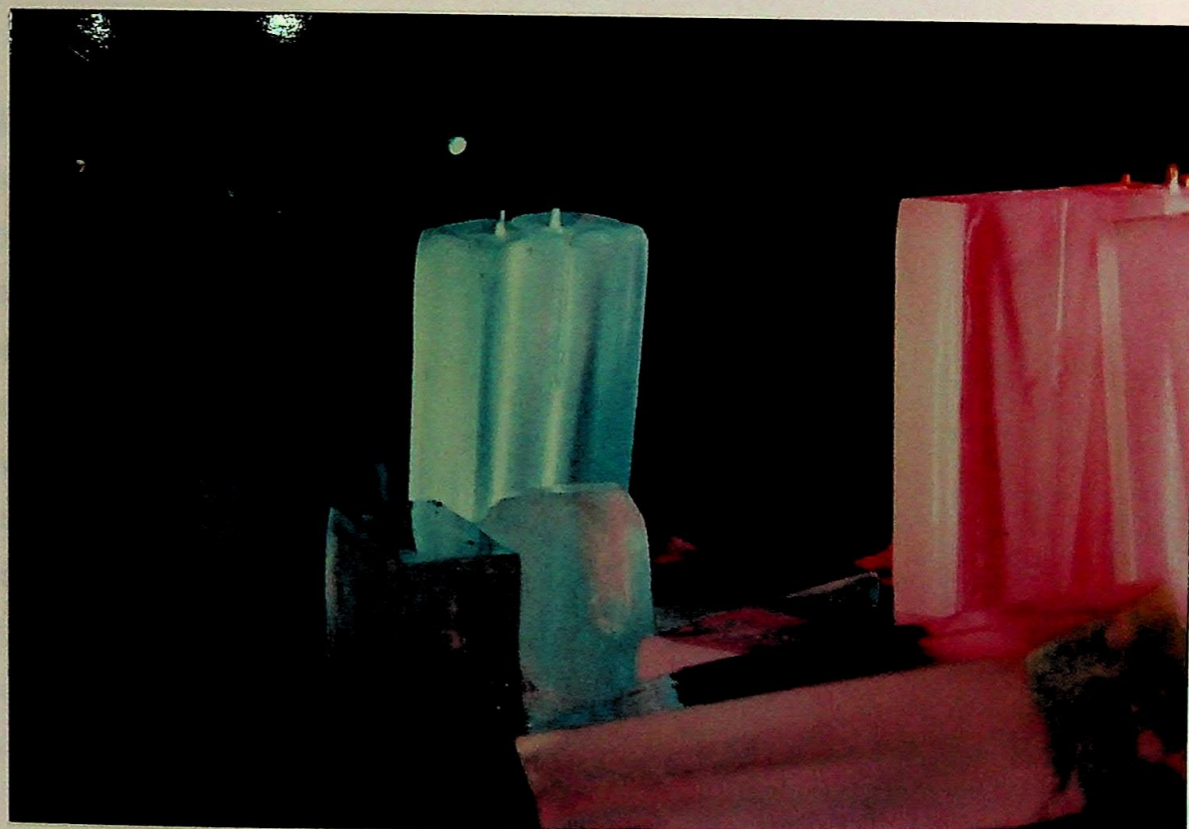


Fig.5.



When his year was completed Chihuly left Venice and visited his favourite artist, Erwin Eisch, a glass artist working in Germany. Eisch was to be a great influence on Chihuly. This will become more apparent later on. He continued his tour and visited Czechoslovakia and then he travelled on to Ireland.

After a further year of travelling Chihuly returned to teach at Haystack, Deer Isie, Maine in the late summer. He attained the position of full-time head of the glass department at Rhode Island School of Design in the autumn of the same year. With the Rhode Island schools hot glass facilities at his disposal Chihuly began to work on his own designs with the assistance of Jamie Carpenter, a student at Rhode Island. These works were included in "Object, U.S.A.," The Johnson Collection of Contemporary crafts, (a travelling exhibition circulated by the National collection of fine arts, Smithsonian Institution). Chihuly <sup>1 date</sup> was only four years working in hot glass and he had already been accepted by an international collection.

In 1970 Chihuly developed plans to build his own hot glass school. He modelled his new ideal on features he admired at both Haystack and the Rhode island school of design. The following year on a tree farm north of Seattle, Chihuly started the Pilchuck school. The Union of Independent of a mere \$2,000 for its construction and the land and additional funds were donated by Seattle art patrons John Hauberg and Anne Gould Hauberg. This school was to prove a revolutionary contribution to american studio glass. That same year Chihuly's pieces were included in the "Young Americans," exhibition at the museum of Contemporary crafts, New York, and in the "Toledo Glass National III", a circulating exhibition organised by the Toledo Museum of Art. He also exhibited the works that he and Carpenter had created the previous year at Rhode Island, in new York and in Zurich.

Chihuly's next series of work made in 1971 was entitled "20,000 pounds of neon and ice" (fig. 5). These pieces were completed with the assistance of Jamie Carpenter. They consisted of huge chunks



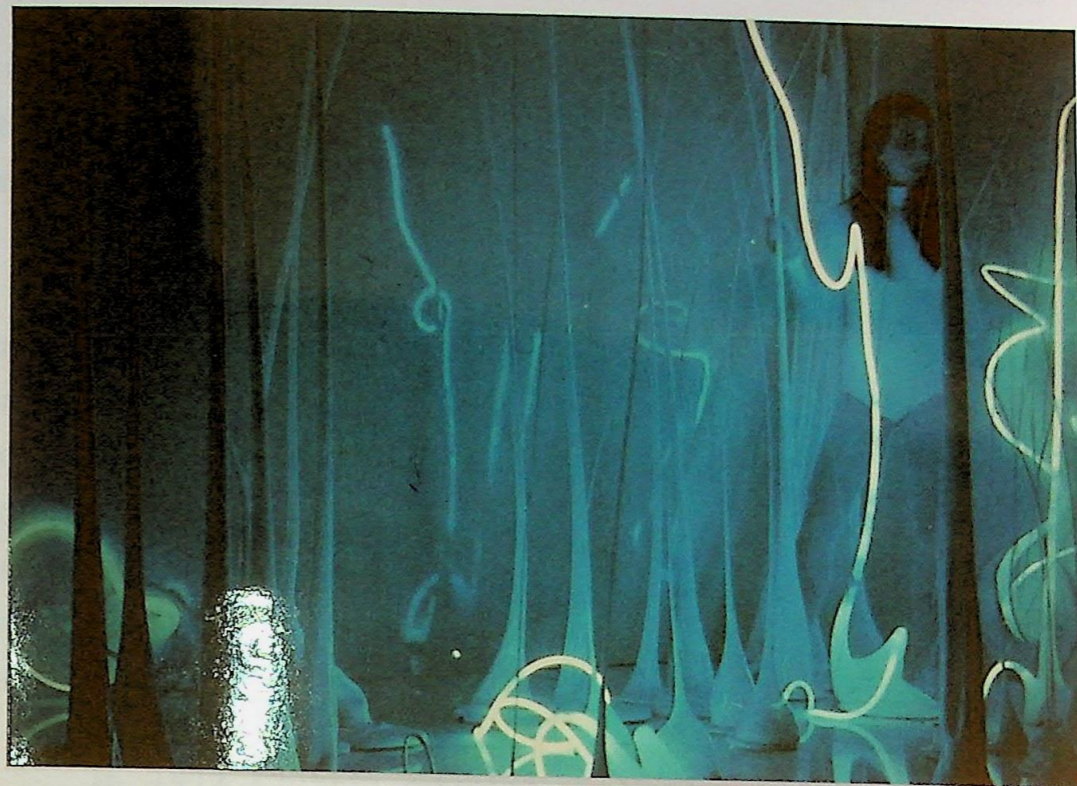


Fig.6.



Fig.7.



Fig.8.



of square glass lit from the interior with neon. These pieces utilised light to emphasise their form, which is solid and stocky. Chihuly does not express any of his concerns with movement through these works. He collaborated with Carpenter for the following summer and autumn developing his ideas and producing a large volume of work. These experiments resulted in large "glass environments" (fig. 6).

The following summer Chihuly travelled to the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina to teach at the Pentland school. That year he was included in the "First Invitational Hand-blown Glass Exhibition", in his home town Tacoma, and also in "Attitudes" the Brooklyn museum of art New York. This continual exhibiting was very important to Chihuly. His pieces were for show as well as personal pleasure. Public reaction and acknowledge served Chihuly with a fresh outlook from a purely aesthetic point of view.

In 1972 Chihuly returned to Venice and brought Carpenter with him to work at Venini. Here they prepared several more works to exhibit in Zurich. Working with the "Masters" they perfected many skills and techniques which they later employed in large architectural projects. One such project was completed later on in the same year back at Pilchuck, utilising lead and blown glass (fig. 7 & 8). These pieces were included in "American Glass Now". Chihuly found architectural work quite tedious in comparison to the spontaneity of hot glass work. This exhibition travelled to Pittsburgh, New York, Washington D.C. and California.

Constantly concerned with the work of his contemporaries, Chihuly set off on another tour in 1974. Accompanied by Tom Buecher of the Corning Museum of Glass and Paul Schulze of the Steuben glass, they set off to visit the glass centres in Prague, Stockholm and Helsinki.

That same year, eager to spread his knowledge and develop the field of hot glass throughout America, Chihuly went to teach at the Institute of American Arts in Santa Fé. Here he built and established their hot glass workshop. This constant awareness of the hot glass



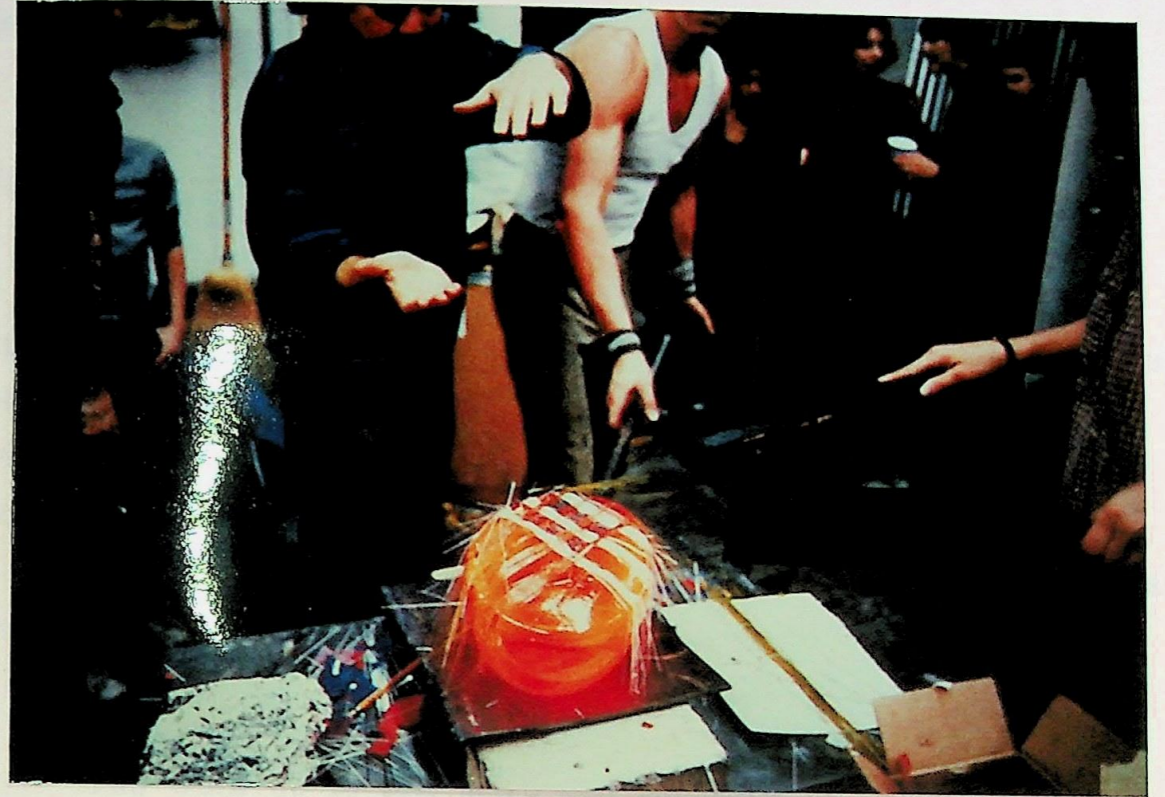


Fig.9.



movement, and Chihuly's willingness to put so much of his energy and enthusiasm into its development is one of the major contributing factors to the speed of its growth. Even now after a mere ten years working in glass, Dale Chihuly had travelled the world both teaching and learning new skills. In the true spirit of his tutor Harvey Littleton, Chihuly along with his contemporaries, Marvin Lipofsky, Italo Scanga and Erwin Erich had built the international glass movement from the foundations set by Littleton.

Chihuly continued his work back the Rhode Island School of Design where he taught their summer course. He returned to Pilchuck that autumn and began a new series of experiments with Carpenter, Kate Elliot, also a former student, and Italo Scanga. In true Pilchuck tradition, where artists are encouraged to break fresh ground, the team developed a new glass drawing, "pick-up" technique (fig. 9). This drawing on glass process was inspired by the Venetian's use of "Latticino" canes. This technique consisted of a meticulously arranged cane design (glass drawing) which was picked up onto the surface of a blown form and heat fused. It was this process with further refining that was the basis of Chihuly's next series "Blanket Cylinders".

The work up to this stage had consisted of mixed media pieces. His next series utilizes both the technique and the glass. It is interesting that the technique was discovered first and now Chihuly is in search of an aesthetic source on which to base this technical approach. We will see a further development of this process later on in the series that are to follow.



## CHAPTER

### 2

#### CHIHULY'S SERIES INFLUENCED BY NAVAJO INDIAN CULTURE.

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In 1972 Chihuly visited Boston to see the Navajo Blanket Show at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. This exhibition reawakened his life long love of the Navajo Indian Culture. This was a natural extension of Chihuly's earlier interest in textiles. Using the "Glass drawing Pick-up" technique which he had developed with Carpenter, Elliot and Scanga, Chihuly began a new series of works.

A symmetrical, even, sharp, straight and perfected cylinder was blown usually with opaque colour. The cylinder was then rolled on the "marver" over canes (thin threads of coloured glass), to pick up the surface colour and drawing. Finally the whole piece was reheated to fuse the layers. Chihuly describes these forms as a "neutral presence". For the early cylinders, Kate Elliot, a former student, executed the glass patterns while two or more assistants aided with blowing. Because Chihuly was so actively engaged in teaching, his students became one of his natural sources for assistants. The cane patterns captured the essence of the individual warp and weft threads, meshing them in a more open graphic than is found in the source (fig.10). These pieces are more than reproductions of Navajo patterns. The images capture the vitality and richness of movement that resulted from flexible fibres draped on a human form. Chihuly makes the comparison between the blankets and the glass forms. The images become "second skin"<sup>1</sup> on these thick rimmed cylinders, as a Navajo blanket becomes second skin to the Indian. The cylinder serves as a curved piece of drawing paper but its form is also reminiscent of the Indian Conical Tin Tinklers. Chihuly has taken the functional form and the decorative elements and combined them into a series with contrasting but unified qualities. It was this series of work that was to lead to his first critical acclaim as an independent Artist.

In the summer of 1975, while helping to set up a glass programme at the University of Utah's Snowbird Art School, Chihuly met glass artist Flora Mace, who became an important collaborator.

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<sup>1</sup> Chihuly: "Chihuly; Colour glass and form"; page 35





Fig.10.

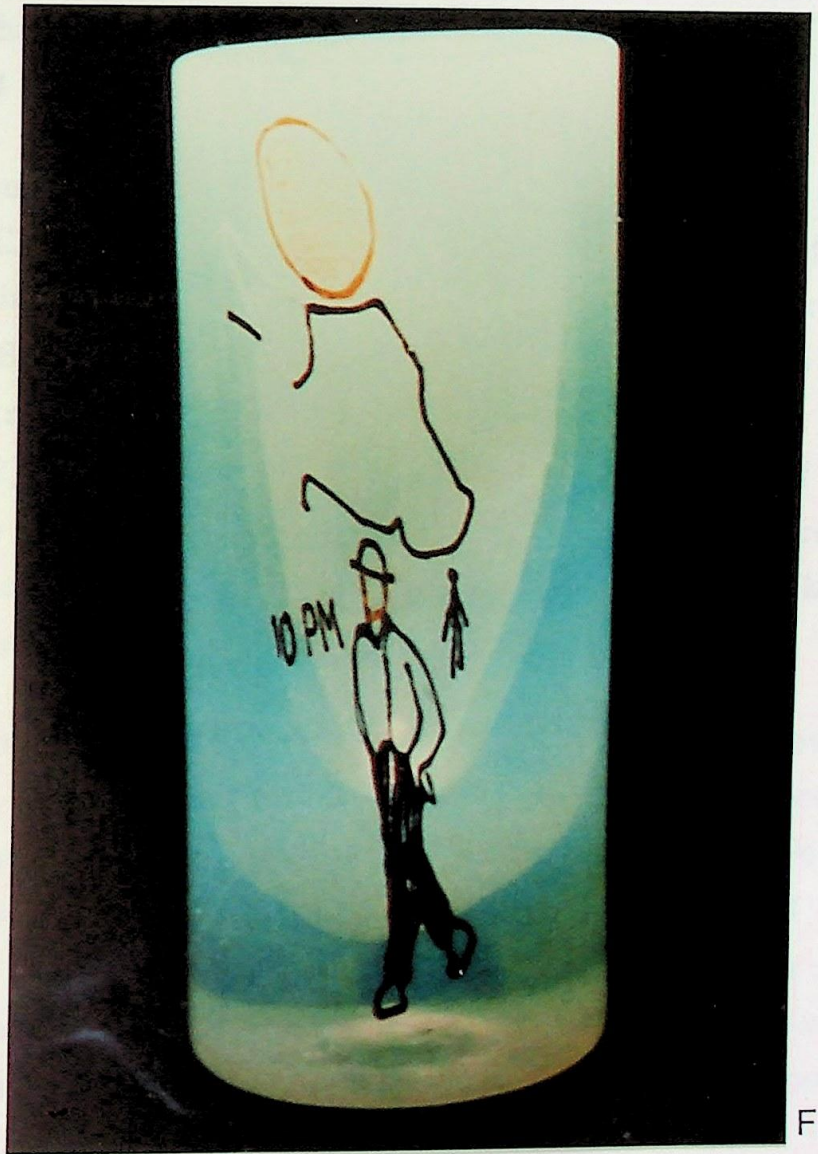


Fig.11.



Mace accompanied Chihuly to RISD (Rhode Island School of Design) and together they developed the blanket drawings to their highest technical level. He spent most of that summer with Seaver Leslie, another RISD collaborator, organising the first major museum shows of the cylinders - at the Utah Museum of fine Arts, Salt Lake City and the Institute of American Indian Art, Santa Fé. Chihuly and Leslie also worked at Pilchuck, and then collaborated on a project at Artpark, Lewiston, New York in August.

Later that Autumn Mace and Leslie worked with Chihuly on two series of cylinders, a "Ulysses" series drawing upon images from Joyce's novel and an "Irish" series based on Irish folklore(fig.11). With the intention to lecture on these "literary" cylinders at several English and Irish universities, late in the Autumn of 1975, Leslie and Chihuly took off on a tour through England and Ireland. Before they reached Ireland, while still enroute to British painter Peter Blakes country home, they had a devastating automobile accident that left Chihuly badly scarred and minus the sight of one eye.

Recuperating first in England and then at his home in Providence, Chihuly blew no glass for several months. He did however organise an important one-man show of the cylinders at Brown University's Bell Gallery. Here the cylinders were exhibited alongside Navajo blankets which had inspired the drawings on their surface.(fig.12) Chihuly found this idea exciting as it was of great importance to him for the viewer to accept his work. This connection of weaving through an already established medium would make his work easier to relate.

Before the accident, Chihuly had discovered the power of collaboration, this had served to create a dynamic and effective working method. Now this teamwork became a necessity. In many ways the accident had propelled Chihuly into a new kind of collaboration. He found that he had sufficient experience to manage intuitively much of what he could no longer actually perceive but there were many manoeuvres and operations for which he had lost the





Fig.12.

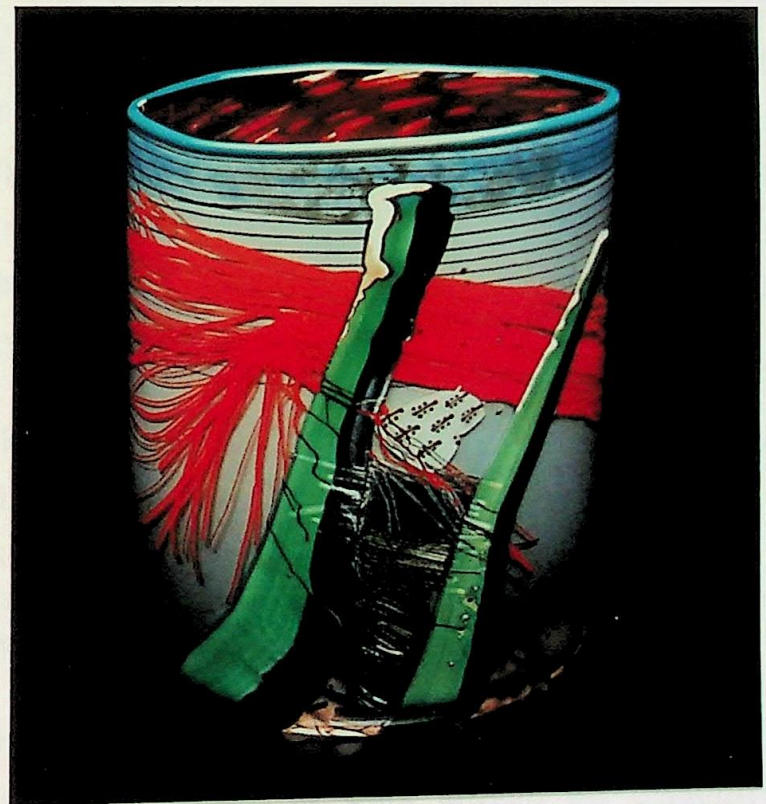


Fig.13.



accurate depth perception required. For these Chihuly was now dependent on others.

With this newly found power of collaboration, Chihuly set about his next series with a new energy and stronger emotion. This new series of work continued nearly a decade after the initial conception, was titled "Pilchuck Cylinders". Although the woven image continues as a source of inspiration, we are not conscious of the specific design origin(fig.13). Here the warp and weft threads explode with a fresh emotional vitality. The imagery is no longer confined to the front of the cylinder as before. Glass threads are energetically thrust helter-skelter. Bold coloured rims become necessary to cap this energy from expanding vertically, while the warp and weft threads grasp the entire cylinder, totally unifying the surface decoration with the background. The drawings on the Pilchuck cylinders shows a new complexity and control. These aggressive images are considerably more spontaneous than before.

Now the decoration is not so much surface as part of the cylinder itself. The imagery has penetrated the glass, creating an animated inner layer that is unified with the form, complementing and intensifying the expressive mood of these pieces. This series of works were much larger than the previous collection, the lines were stronger and the colours were more subdued. Chihuly now realised that scale was more accessible than before. Teamwork enabled greater control over a large gather. ?

Paul Hollister, a New York painter and writer specialising in glass observed

"What Chihuly couldn't see...[after the accident]... because of his eye problem, he couldn't see before because he was too close to the piece"<sup>2</sup> .

But there can be no denying that Chihuly could now not blow glass alone. Devising a means to work around his disability meant that

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<sup>2</sup> Norden: "Chihuly";page 15



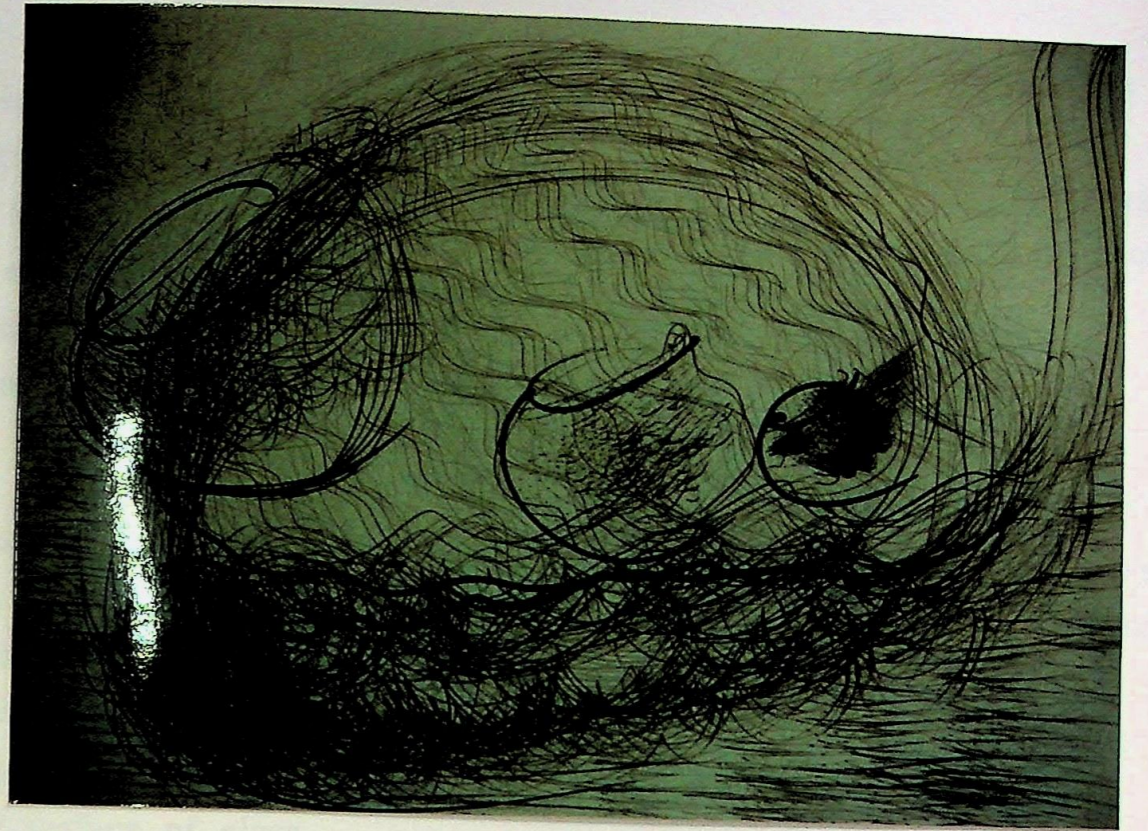


Fig.14.



Chihuly needed to develop a form of collaboration quite different from the earlier tandem work with Carpenter or Seaver Leslie. With greater financial independence from the sale of his work he could now afford to hire and pay assistants for particular blowing sessions. And, as he distanced himself from the physical aspects of forming the glass, he gave new emphasis to the creative phases preceding and following the blowing, that is, to drawing and photography.

Chihuly's drawings for this series are not design drawings as we would class them. Instead they offer gestural maps for working moves. They express a motion, a feeling much like an abstract painting. But the expression needed to be strong so he could convey this emotion and energy to his team of workers. If their collaboration was to be a success they had to feel what Chihuly felt and this emotion had to be retained in them so as he could call on it during the long sessions.

The drawings for his next series of works (fig.14) are especially energetic yet the glass is still somewhat repressed. Chihuly's lines on paper, often worked with a handful of pencils at a time, reveal a probing for forms that preceded their achievement in glass. Sometimes the graphite actually gripped through the paper, exposing an aggressive kind of energy, often lost in translation to the smooth shiny surface of glass.

Chihuly has begun to focus on line, both the applied line and the line created by the form of the piece. This freeness developed from Chihuly's new way of working which distanced him from the blowing process and gave him the opportunity to stand back and assess these pieces.

The second process responsible for this progression was photography. The photographing of the finished pieces, by contrast, provided an analogue to the raw energy of both the drawing and the actual work in hot glass. Chihuly's ability to reassess his work and the visual lessons he had learnt from photographs of his glass helped to push his ideas dramatically and lead him to a more complex



exploration of his medium, thus developing his work and entering a new phase of stronger expression.

Chihuly knew that this energy contained in the ~~w~~heft threads needed to escape into the form. He was in search of new and fresh inspiration.

In the summer of 1977, while visiting the Tacoma History Society with Italo Scanga, Chihuly was struck by a pile of North West Coast Indian baskets stacked one inside the other. He was ready to abandon his cylinder series for one more organic and responsive to the gravitational pull on hot glass. The idea of reproducing these crumpled, wrinkled baskets, collapsing under their own weight sparked an excitement. He couldn't wait to get back to his workshop to begin experiments with his students.

Chihuly began work on his "Pilchuck Basket" series that same year. During that summer, he and his team produced about one hundred of them. This rate of development would have been much slower if it were not for the collaboration of his team. Paying particular attention to their misshapen dented form, Chihuly began to rediscover his initial fascination with flowing, spontaneous frozen form. Breaking away from the rigid formalities of the cylinder form Chihuly had begun to capture the flexibility of their shape. Here he uses line not for mere decoration as before but to complement and enhance the form. Yet these lines are used with great subtlety often just on the rims to emphasise the uneven ellipses and to describe the light and heavy stresses that result from the unique character of molten glass. Chihuly said that at the time he wasn't sure what made him want to reproduce these baskets but that it was his mission for the summer. It was only on subsequent recollection that he realised, these pieces reflected his earlier concerns, which had been confined to colour applications. These concerns could now be developed freely through form.

While in Chihuly's cylinder series there is great contrast in surface movement and the static cylinder form it is as though the



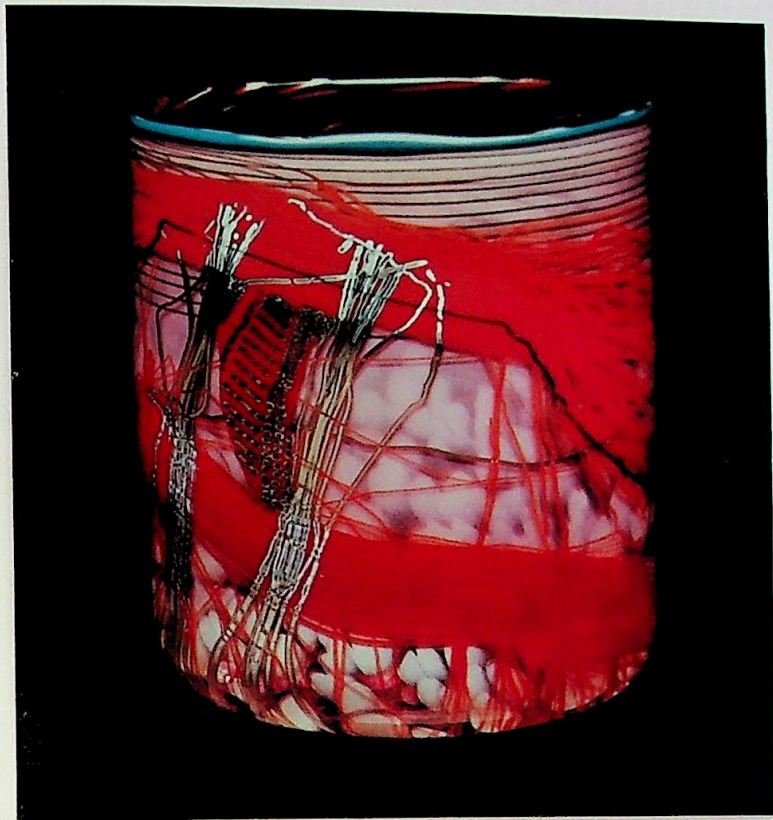
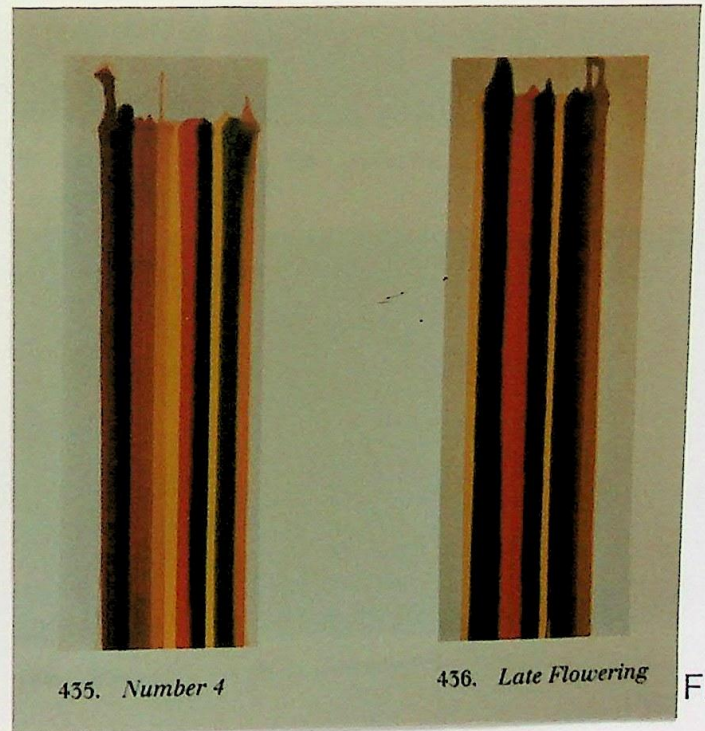


Fig.15.



435. Number 4

436. Late Flowering

Fig.16.





Fig.17.



Fig.18.



cylinder is there to control and curtail the pattern(fig.15). The mass monochrome background not only acts as a neutral canvas for these colour energies but also as a framework around the piece of art. It is this energy that was allowed to escape and flow freely in the basket series.

Chihuly captured the flexibility of the woven basket form and translated it into an even more fragile material, glass. In this series Chihuly consistently resorts to subtle use of colour and restraint in his description of the shapes through the use of line. Always there is a total fusion between the applied line and the form so that the outer surface always remains smooth.

Initially his production team didn't like these pieces but Chihuly decided that it did not matter because he enjoyed making them. It was only when Chihuly began to group the pieces together that something exciting started to happen for him. These developed slowly and began to lead to new forms.

In grouping these separate units together Chihuly realised in glass the concern of one of his major influences - colour field painting. Dale Chihuly's formative years as a student and young teacher were the 1960's. As Henry Gelzahler points out, this period was dominated by "colour field" painting. Clement Greenberg, who is largely responsible for the strength of the best contemporary American art criticism, the Veils of Morris Louis(fig.16), the Chevrons and Stripes of Kenneth Noland (fig.17) and the large stained chromatic landscapes of Helen Frankenthaler (fig.18) heralded a new aesthetic sensibility<sup>3</sup>. These artists were inspired by the masters of watercolour, Homer, Prendergast, Martin and Demuth. It was their way with light and air and their realisation that the paper as the support also existed as a source of light, that served the "colour field" painters as example and inspiration.

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<sup>3</sup> Gelzahler: "Chihuly; Color, glass and form" page 11





Fig.19

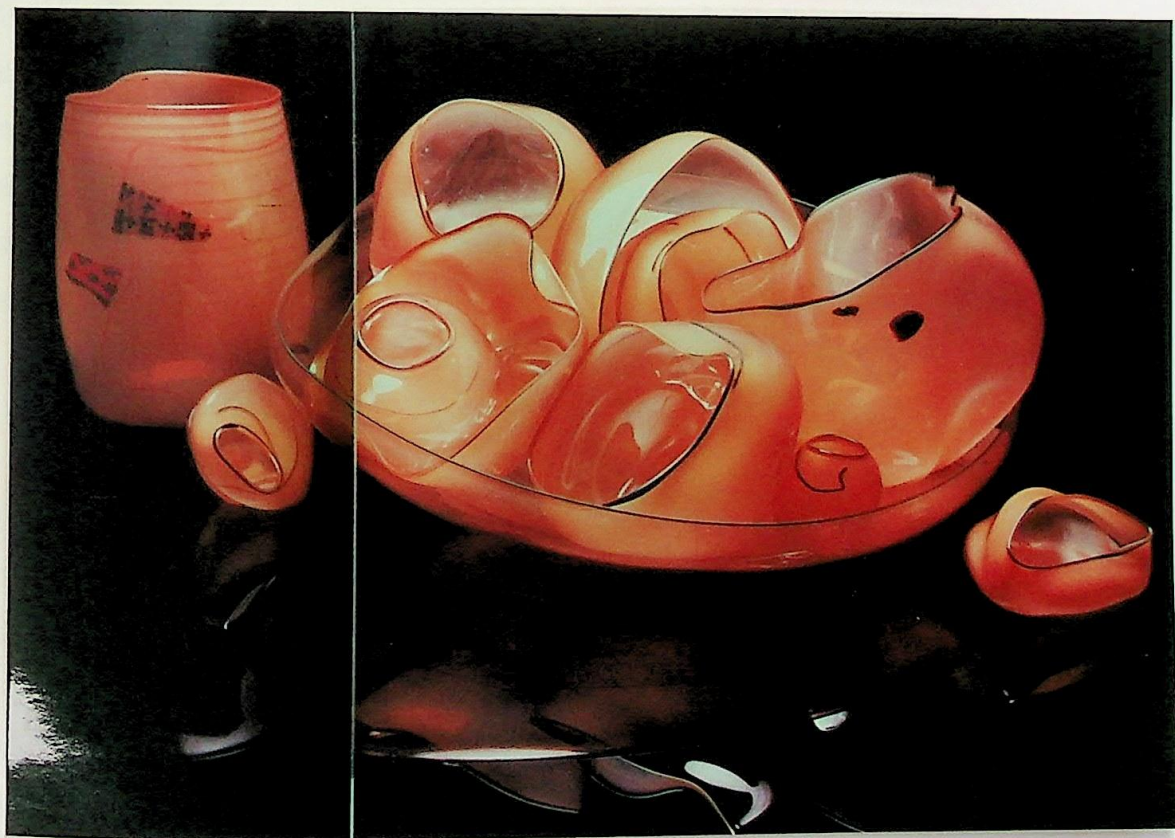


Fig.20.



We can see these direct influences even in Chihuly's earlier series, the "Blanket Cylinders". Here we can see specific influence of colour (fig.19) , and Morris Louis' themes and variations on his veils series (fig.16). The influence of colour combination has been incorporated with his earlier weaving influences to produce this series of works. Many of Chihuly's colour combinations have been directly influenced by Louis, Noland and Kankenthaler but this series does not express their concern with light source. These cylinders are used as canvases on which to paint but their colour density is high. The light is absorbed into this density and the translucent qualities we know glass to possess are ignored.

In Chihuly's basket series he has become concerned with the diaphanous clarities of the glass. Yet with this concern he has subdued his colour tones in some cases to monochrome groupings.

These works consist of several units grouped together, resting in a single larger shallow form. The groupings can range from two to ten and more pieces together. Each vessel is unique and beautiful in itself. Their forms are stronger than the initial stronger pieces in the series. The first groupings created were much like the cylinder forms in their colour schemes. A solid background colour was highlighted with bright contrasting threads of dense colour which grasped the entire piece. He attached to this surface irregular, highly patterned contrastingly coloured shapes. They hang like washing on a line against a clear blue sky. They are as if to anchor it down.

Chihuly's later pieces of this series provide a strong contrast to the earlier forms (fig.20). They are very light, freeflowing and he has started to realise the potential of the transparency of the glass. Each individual piece is encased with a layer of kugler (thin coat of even coloured glass) which appears opaque in its layering, but is transparent in the singular. While form and line have become important he has used the tonal qualities of the glass itself through this layering to create great depth and translucencies.



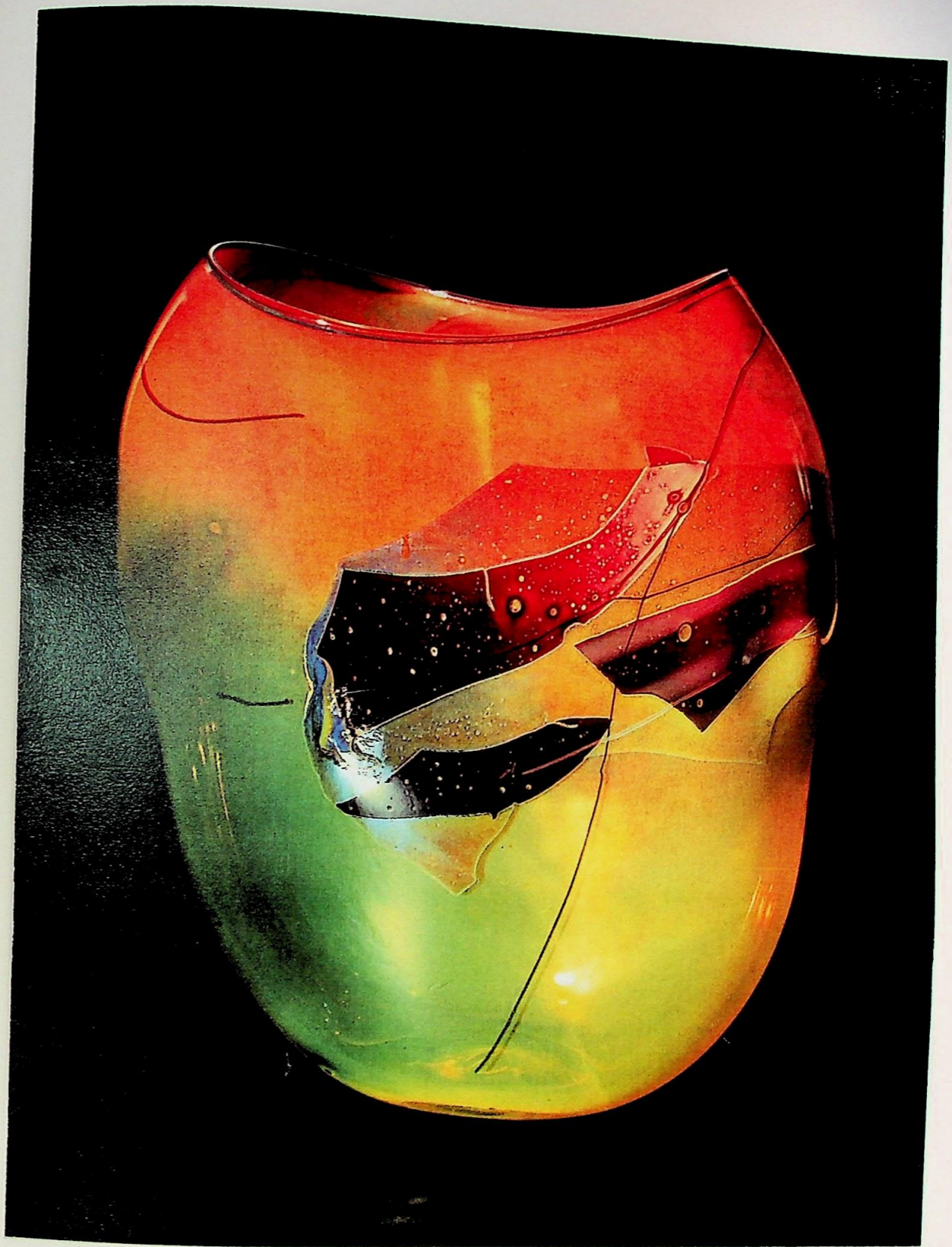


Fig.21.



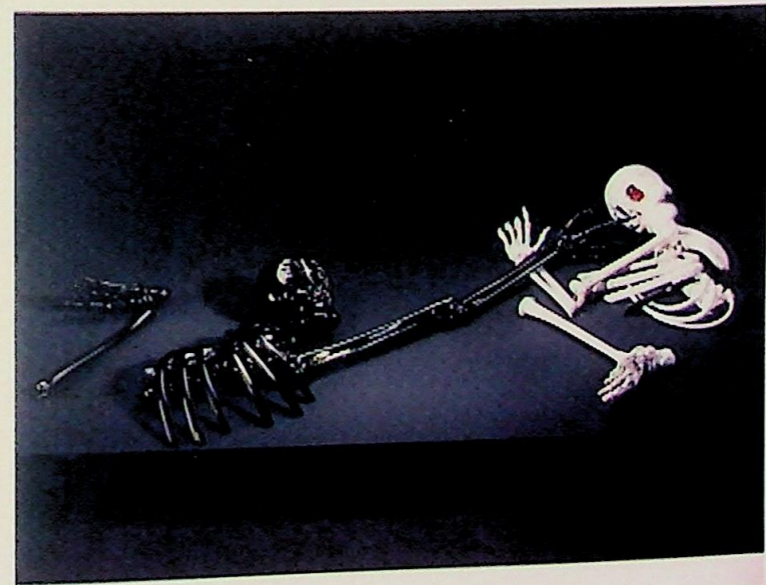
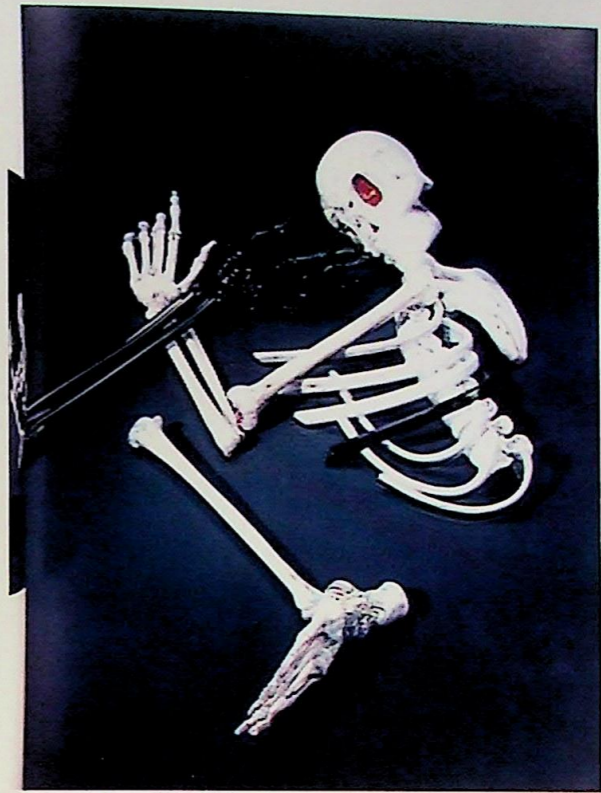


Fig.22.



During these developments Chihuly worked in Baden and Austria with Ben Moore, Bill Morris, Michael Scheiner and Rich Royal. In the beginning, Chihuly's team was made up of his students. Some of these students who became artists in their own right now work with a team of professional artists to create their individual work. Bill Morris, one of the original students on Chihuly's team continued to work for him for a further eight years. If we compare Chihuly's work, especially the "Basket" series which they were producing in the late 70's, to Morris's "Roundel and Vessel with shard drawings"(fig.21) we can see the likeness between particular works of these artists become apparent. Chihuly's main concern in this work is form, and the enhancing of it through a subtle use of line. The similarity of irregular form, the darker coloured rim wraps enhancing the openings, their use of restrained and subtle colours, the helter-skelter line applications and the large areas of applied "shards" (thin coloured fragments). Chihuly states that during his blowing sessions the entire team is "an integral part of his creative process"<sup>4</sup>, working so closely and sharing so many ideas naturally has advantages. However, as these works are so similar it poses the question as to who is the actual innovator.

Morris went on to become Chihuly's principal assistant and team leader. In the past five years he has become a master in his own right, but we can still recognise a strong influence from Chihuly which concerns Morris's present work. He has moved away from the vessel form toward the unique Chihuly characteristic groupings of glass forms as one overall installation. These new forms were inspired by indian burial sites on the northern Californian coast. Morris, like Chihuly has been influenced by the surrounding indian culture. His bone and skull collaborations refer to the more serious concerns of social issues - for example; acid rain, ozone, nuclear death and societal breakdown (fig.22). We will see the use of this now sculptural medium to convey a message in Chihuly latest series.

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<sup>4</sup> Chihuly: "Chihuly; Color, glass and form." page 23



In 1977 he held an exhibition of these pieces at Lobinyer in Vienna. He completed the year with a one-man show at the 'Museu de Arte', São Paulo, Brazil.

That same year, Chihuly developed a new technique using ribbed moulds. This was a technique that he had learnt from the Venetians which he was able to adopt to suit his own purpose. The inner structure produced by the ribbed moulds allowed him to work with much thinner glass and therefore blow much larger pieces than had ever been done before. The scale of these pieces would not have been possible working alone. Originally his accident had forced him to collaborate a team to produce his work. This form of working meant that Chihuly could reproduce his work with different teams and at a faster rate possible before. It also gave him the freedom to view his pieces objectively during the blowing process therefore allowing greater freedom for spontaneous decision. Technical awareness during the process could now be supervised without preoccupying his mind with how to control this molten glass. He and his team pushed this method as far as they could and were able to produce forms with a great deal more strength and movement than before. This gave him greater freedom for the expression of his earlier concerns. Chihuly discovered when he blew using this technique that the form became reminiscent of sea life. Extending his concern with transparency and tone he now began to use colour to achieve a greater depth of controlled contrast.

In 1980, Chihuly began his new series, "Sea Forms".



CHAPTER  
3

DEVELOPMENT OF FREE FORM.

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In 1980 Chihuly resigned his post as head of Rhode Island school of Design glass department and assumed a position as artist-in-residence. This gave Chihuly more time to concentrate on his work with less lecturing hours, throughout that summer and autumn he worked on his new "sea form" series at Pilchuck. Chihuly had discovered the essence of his work-spontaneity. His fascination with glass the 'frozen liquid' having a unique characteristic of preserving moments of flux between the liquid and solid states. This new series of works used the heat and fire of the furnace to naturally distort the forms of the thin glass vessels which were spun and manipulated while molten, some weighed as little as an ounce. These forms stretched Chihuly's rib mould technique to the full, with the skill of his master blower to a diameter as large as thirty eight inches.

In contrast to the simpler swelling forms of the basket pieces(fig.23), described and enhanced with an economy of line, the subsequent sea groupings are considerably more asymmetric and complex(fig.24). For these pieces Chihuly works with translucent colours to emphasise their lightness and delicacy. They express a directional movement that was not previously present. These new forms describe a great volume yet the diaphanous clarities are stronger than ever. One critic has compared Chihuly's use of line to that of a cartographer who charts lines on a map in an attempt to describe three dimensional earth features, just as Chihuly uses line to enhance our ability to see each subtle swell on the surface of these brilliantly animated forms. Because of the technical process used in forming these pieces(i.e. rib moulding) the line quality is dictated by the form. When the hot glass comes out of the mould it has a series of ridges or ribs across its surface. When glass threads are trailed over these ridges in a continuous motion, they adapt to the specific contours of each vessel, so that, as in the Indian basket series, form and surface decoration occur simultaneously. This is a marked contrast to the applied blanket weavings on the earlier cylinders.



In 1950 Charles Eames designed a set of four chairs for the Design Research Department and created a series of chairs. The Eames chairs were the first mass-produced plastic chairs. They were designed by Charles and Ray Eames for the U.S. Navy during World War II. The chairs were made of molded plywood and were designed to be lightweight and easy to transport. The Eames chairs were a revolutionary design and they are still popular today. They are a classic example of mid-century modern design.

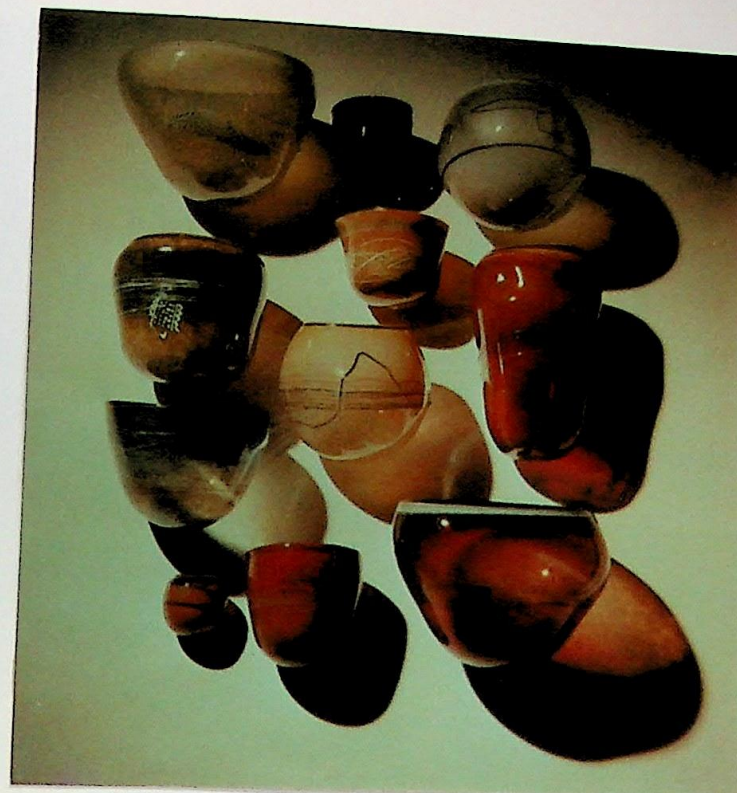


Fig.23.

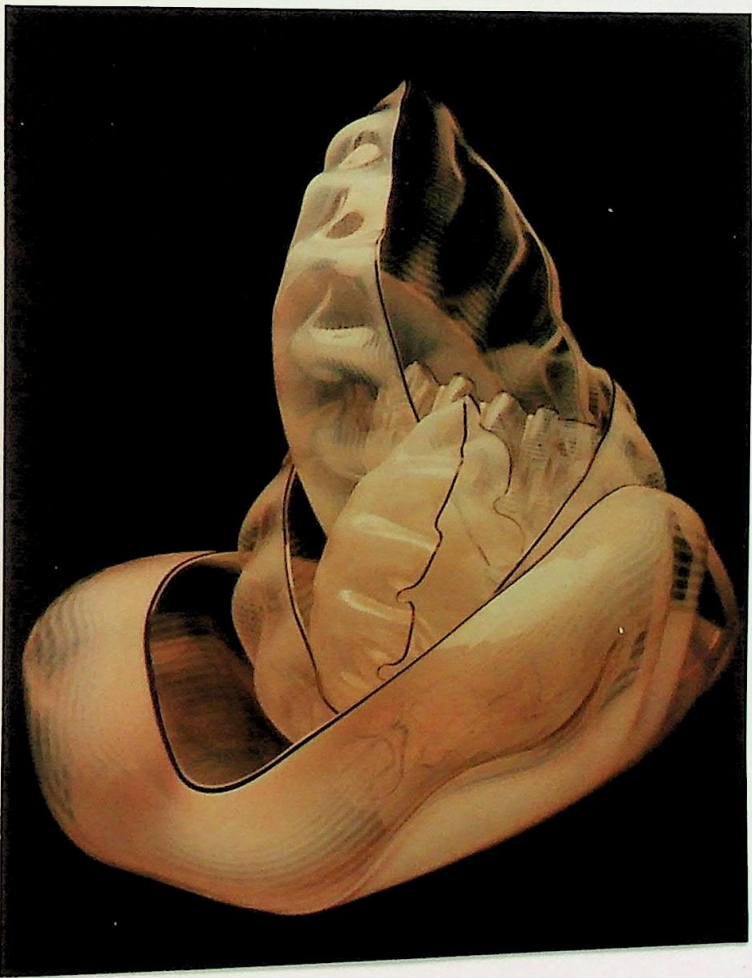


Fig.24.





Fig.25.



Chihuly devised a technical means to replicate not a visual source itself, but its gestural equivalent in glass. As his control over the glass grew, the original forms became more abstract. The blankets retained their "blanketness", the Pilchuck baskets were, at first, simply glass imitations of the Indian prototypes, submitting to gravity more rapidly perhaps, but retaining direct reference to their source. With the sea and shell forms, however, Chihuly is moving increasingly away from the specific towards the abstract. While he obviously had in mind such characteristically Venetian concerns as lightness, freedom of shape, and infatuation with colour, these forms emerge from the depths of an independent, vital imagination.

These abstract, aesthetic concerns could be compared to the work of the German glass artist Erwin Eirch. His glass forms are depicted in Chihuly's words as "simple functional forms made non-functional"<sup>1</sup>, - a beer stein filled with permanent foam, or a flower pot with a little cactus so as although they appear utilitarian forms their function has been contradicted. It is this overt reference in Eisch's work that Chihuly has taken one step further towards abstraction and gesture. Chihuly blows these beautiful, large open vessels and fills them with interesting little forms and further vessels. Each one functional in itself yet when arranged together non functional. Here I use the word "function" in the purely utilitarian context as I consider aesthetic "function" to be just as, if not more, important than its utilitarian one.

Another artist working at this time in America also taking his inspiration from sea forms was Stephen Dee Edwards (fig.25). Unlike Chihuly, Edwards work was inspired by his childhood in and around the Pacific Ocean, but he also uses the inherent qualities of the sea and its inhabitants as the basis for abstraction. The warm colour, eroded surfaces and fluid motion of the sea are all reflected in his pieces. Unlike Chihuly's work, Edwards' pieces are not based on the functional form. Edwards has taken his abstraction one step further

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<sup>1</sup> Norden: "Chihuly", page 21



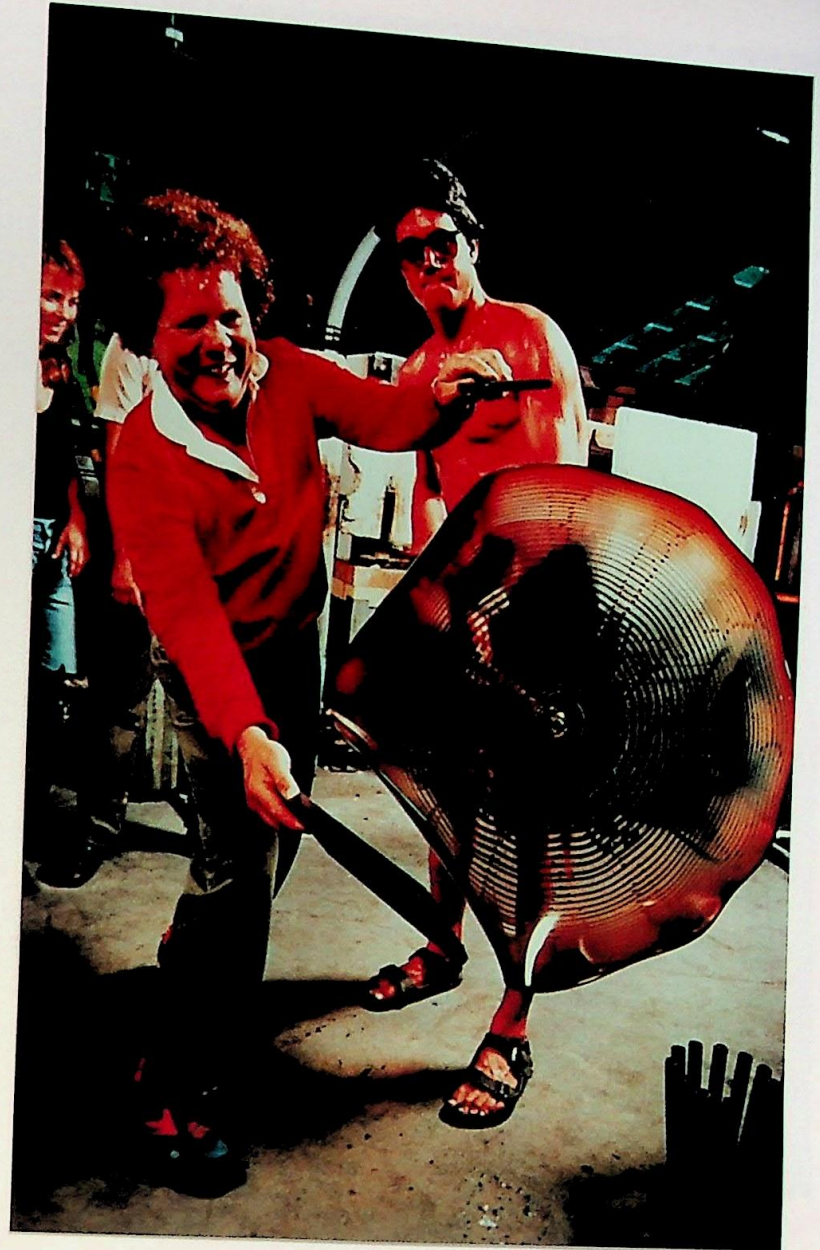


Fig.26.





Fig.27.



than Chihuly. He brought glass to a purely sculptural form, disobeying natural forms which are influenced by process and technique. The form is dictated solely by the artist and not the medium. This statement is purely subjective as Edwards' pieces have not been documented, therefore information about his series is not readily available.

Chihuly's "Sea Form" series store an energy that is characteristically Chihuly. The spontaneity of distortion and movement is captured. These forms are all blown symmetrical and with paddles and boards are encouraged at just the right moment to deform and to move in a sudden and dynamic force of directional movement (fig.26). He had captured the perpetual, liquid movement of real underwater flora and fauna. This frozen motion reiterated Chihuly's earlier concerns. It is said that these forms appear so light as they might float away on a breeze. Chihuly had created glass forms so thinly spun and subtly coloured that as you move around them they flicker and vanish, becoming evidence more of light than of matter.

Chihuly's method of displaying these works has added to the sensuality and freeness of the forms. A dim atmosphere created with darkened light transforms the objects from static representations to rippling jellyfish swimming in water which dissolve into their surroundings. In 1981 these pieces were exhibited all over the world in a traveling exhibition organised by Kate Elliot. Chihuly's drawings for these sea pieces are still much like the basket drawings (fig.27). He continued to work with a handful of pencils at one time. The volume drawings are then highlighted with a definite line, perhaps a suggestion of a rim or some loose form. They are never representative of actual individual grouping but merely expressions of movement.

With an increasing love of colour, Chihuly sought to broaden his combinations and break out of the subtleties he had conveyed in the basket and sea form series. With a reawakening of the ideals Chihuly had admired in the "field painters", he began a new series. In 1981 Chihuly and his brilliant team blew their first "Macchia" piece.



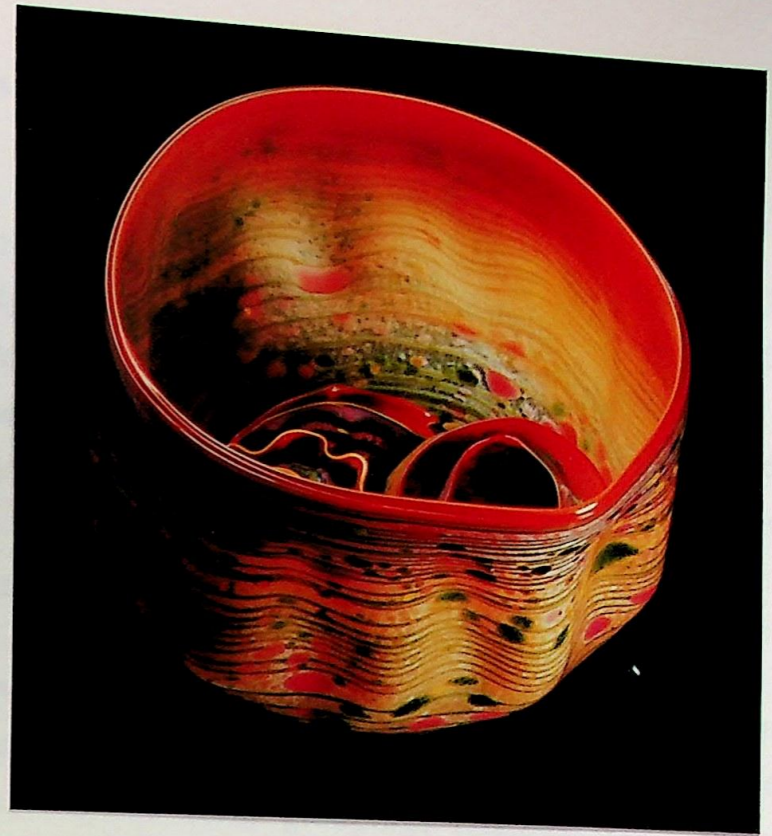


Fig.28.

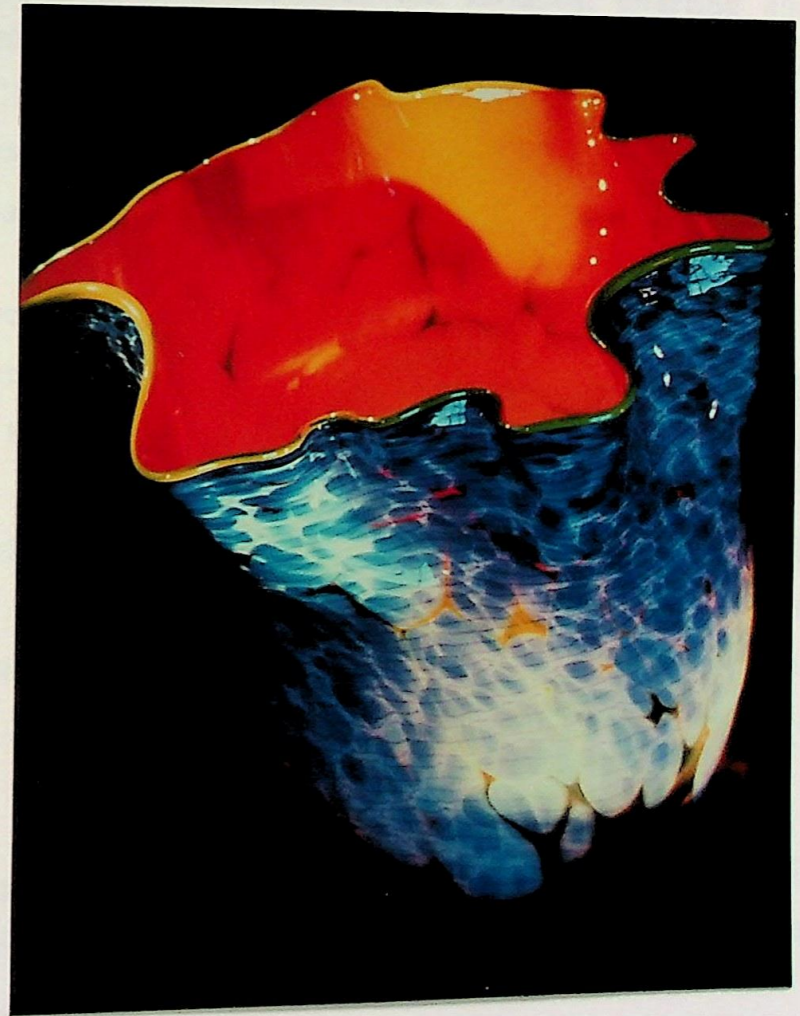


Fig.29.



This was the first time Chihuly had worked on two series<sup>1)</sup> simultaneously.

Chihuly spent <sup>21987?</sup> that summer on the Orkney Islands. This is a place that Chihuly loves dearly. He says that the assembling of families of pieces (referring to the sea and basket form) is like the unpredictable grouping of islands in an archipelago, or ancient stones like those forming the Ring of Brodgar on the Orkney Islands.<sup>2</sup> These newer pieces are reminiscent of pebbles on the beach and the waves lapping over them.

The word "Macchia" is an expressive Italian term meaning spotted, mottled or sketched in. This series is very distinguished from the refined and serene sea form groupings (fig.28). Their riotously bold spirals drawn on the surface of the glass with surprising juxtapositions of raucous colour has a new and exciting energy. The blotches and lines of colour continuously undulate over the surfaces, enacting and evoking the character of the object, thus bringing it to life. In the beginning, the "Macchia" were mostly concerned with colour - usually bright, often strange, mostly opaque colour - where the outside of the piece was dramatically contrasted to the inside colour (fig.29).

These pieces were technically very difficult to blow. Teamwork is very important and necessary in all of Chihuly's pieces. Chihuly is like the movie director, everyone must know their lines, actions and cues if the scene is going to be a "take". In Venice, the "maestro" or "gaffer" (the master blower) is on top of the social ladder, but all members of the team are regarded as equals. Bill Morris was the gaffer for many of Chihuly's "Macchia" pieces. Bill and Chihuly are old friends and they have worked and traveled together for many years.

Chihuly creates the concept clearly, initiates the action and sets the scene. He must work extremely hard, not physically but

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<sup>2</sup> Norden: "Chihuly", page 24



mentally, to convey to his team that special "something" that will make this piece characteristically Chihuly. Environment and atmosphere create a mood of energy and unity and is crucial to the teams freedom to concentrate during the often intensive eight-hour sessions.

To blow these pieces in clear glass is indeed a feat in itself. The added use of colour does not come without its complications. The spectrum of colours all react differently to the clear glass, the heat and the rate at which they expand. Firstly each colour must be tested to see if it is compatible with the clear glass. That is to test if their rates of expansion and cooling are close enough so as not to crack away from each other. Since Chihuly has traveled and blown his pieces all over the world each glass will be different. The majority of his pieces are blown with soda lime glass. The advantage of this glass is that it is more likely to be compatible with the colours and it is a much lighter glass than lead crystal. This lightness allows the pieces to be blown bigger. Colour tests are laborious and time consuming to conduct so Chihuly either uses colours he knows to be compatible or colours provided in the workshop where he is demonstrating. Each colour attracts the heat at different rates and some hold the heat for longer. Because of this there is always a "pull" in the piece because the tension is uneven. This pull makes keeping the form symmetrical very difficult. This tension was easier to control in his previous series because the applications were more evenly applied usually with a solid base or background colour. These pieces have clear backgrounds which maintains their lightness.

The original "Macchia" pieces were very like individual sea forms. They were very similar in shape, colour application, movement in the rim and size. These then developed into firstly quite controlled forms with fat bodies and narrow necks. They resemble shopping bags distorting under the weight of their contents. However he was beginning now to be more adventurous with colour. Gradually we see the rims beginning to open up with controlled distortions. A year later we see pieces with very strong thick unbroken line. The colour combinations are contrasting but still subdued. The forms are resorting





Fig.30.



Fig.31





Fig.32.



Fig.33.



back to the wide open sea forms. (Fig.30 and fig.31 )In the 1st we see a "Macchia" form/the second is a "sea form" made in the same year - they are very similar except for colour and size..

Leaving the open form aside Chihuly now decides to concentrate on the more enclosed one illustrated in the top left hand corner of fig.30. He introduces stronger and more complicated colour. The inner surface colour is in contrast to the outer thick ribs of colour. Here he has started to use spots to break the line and distort its clarity.

With the work of late 1982 he has resorted back to piling smaller vessels of the same colour and pattern inside a larger one. He also continued on producing his sea form during this period. Whereas with his other series Chihuly decides to finish with one form or idea and begin with something fresh. Here the seemingly two separate ideas are merging and developing at a much slower rate than before.

As a comparison I have chosen (fig.32) a "Macchia" and (fig.33) a "Sea Form". If we consider form alone, the Macchia stands alone, therefore it has to be of stronger aesthetic form than the individual pieces of the sea grouping. Yet the enclosed form on the far right of the illustration is stronger than the Macchia form. The Macchia piece is much larger than the individual form in the sea grouping, therefore is Chihuly presuming that size is strength? The Macchia's colours radiate in comparison to the grey, white and yellow of the sea form/is this his primary concern at the expense of strong form? The Macchia series still had a long way to go before it reached the standard achieved with the sea forms.

In 1983 the "Chihuly Glass" exhibition began its five year museum tour. He then decided to sell his studio "Boathouse" in Rhode Island and moved back to the Northwest. The following year he began work at Pilchuck to prepare for his next exhibition "Chihuly: a Decade of Glass". He produced several more "Pilchuck Cylinders" for the





Fig.34.



Fig.35.





Fig.36.





Fig.37.



Fig.38.



exhibition which were even more energetic and boldly coloured than before. At Pilchuck he continued to produce his "Macchia" series which were at this stage really starting to work. Confining the movement to the upper portion of the form gave them a life as though they were ready to float away but were still firmly fixed to the ground (figs.34&35). Some of these forms once again became more open and he felt the need for inner movement(fig.36).

In 1985, Chihuly began to experiment with new "flower forms" Using many of the opened Macchia forms but with narrower bodies and limiting himself once again to monochrome groupings (fig.37). The elongated forms growing from the centre of each flower are similar to shapes he used in the interior of his sea form series (fig.38). Chihuly soon left this new idea aside as he did with his sea forms and concentrated all of his attention on his Macchia forms.

At this time Chihuly was commissioned to produce an installation for the new 65th floor of the new David Rockefeller's building in New York. For the designing of this additional floor, restaurateur Joseph Baum brought together graphic artist and architects along with the buildings curators. The decoration of this floor involved a conscious decision to bring together art not only from the time of the buildings construction but art that would span the time from the 1930's to today. Among the works commissioned were glass and copper sculptures, sliding doors, freestanding screens, an Art Deco cabinet, a boat model, a cast screen by Dan Dailey and a glass frieze by Chihuly.

These "Macchia" pieces somewhat resemble the wider forms of the "Flower" series, Forms supported by wooden shelves far above eye level. They enhance the light source reflecting and diffusing it to create a soft glow (fig.39). Victoria Geibel describes them as "clouds...slowly slipping past the glass panelled walls 65 floors from the ground".<sup>3</sup> It is interesting that the positioning of these

<sup>3</sup> Geibel:"American Craft."page 28





Fig.39.





Fig.40.



Fig.41.



forms gives them a new essence. When they grow from the ground we consider them as underwater jellyfish / now floating near the ceiling they resemble clouds. Wherever they are positioned these pieces give an air of transparency, frozen movement and lightness as if they are about to float away. Here in the Rainbow room at the Rockefeller Centre, Chihuly's Macchia forms float above a luminous vision of Manhattan. They manage to harmonise with vast variations of styles to achieve a peaceful and serene atmosphere yet also demanding individual attention from the viewer. This concern is of great importance to Chihuly in establishing his glass as an art medium.

Chihuly continued with these forms until 1986. His final pieces in the series were a mixture of both individual pieces (fig.40) and groupings (fig.41). I find the individual pieces much more successful than the groupings. He had developed from his sea forms to his Macchia pieces which stood on their own as individually strong pieces. Then he resorted back to groupings for security. Size is of great importance to Chihuly. He implies that for a piece of glass to hold its own in a room it must be large. Yet the largest of the forms did not work well enough to stand on their own and needed the support of smaller pieces to fill in the large empty space created in the centre of the piece. Size has been proven to be a key concern in his "Macchia" forms therefore has Chihuly not forsaken design for size?



CHAPTER  
4

A TRIBUTE TO A FAVOURITE CITY.

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When Pilchuck was founded in 1971 Chihuly began to invite European glass masters to come and demonstrate their skill. Although he had already observed their techniques they were well beyond their abilities in Pilchuck. One of the first to demonstrate was Francesco (Checco) Ongaro from Venini. Shortly after Checco he invited Lino Tagliapeta, Checco's brother-in-law. Rather than teach the skills that Chihuly himself had learned from these master blowers, he brought them to teach their techniques and method of working first hand to his student. This allowed them to experience the energy and excitement directly from the source which had charged Chihuly. The master blowers worked on with the Pilchuck Faculty on various projects. Chihuly didn't think it would be beneficial to what were then his present pieces to work with a master. Chihuly says that at the time "my work was asymmetrical and very unorthodox unlike anything that was being made in the (Venini) factories"<sup>1</sup>. Yet we can see a very close resemblance between (fig.42) these pieces designed by "Di Bianconi" for Venini/Murano in 1959 and many of the concerns present in Chihuly's previous collections. The rib mould blown vessel, a bowl form with its floating, flowing lip is strongly similar to Chihuly's "sea form" series and his previous "Macchia" one. Particularly in the "Sea Form", the structure of the rim is a strong facsimile to "Di Bianconi" concerns. The main contrast between the works was size. The factories produced regular, functional, practical, affordable dimensions whereas Chihuly constantly strove to produce his works as large as possible. The colours used in both are also contrasting, but only in tone, not in application.

In the summer of 1987, when Lino Tagliapietra was finished teaching at Pilchuck, he went down to Seattle to visit Chihuly in his new glass workshop. This was the first workshop that he had ever built solely for his own use. Lino and Dale had become good friends and he wanted to leave Chihuly and his wife Sylvia a present to thank them for their hospitality. So they both worked together on a set of goblets and dishes for Chihuly's home. Their teamwork was so

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<sup>1</sup> Chihuly: "Venetians" (no page numbers)



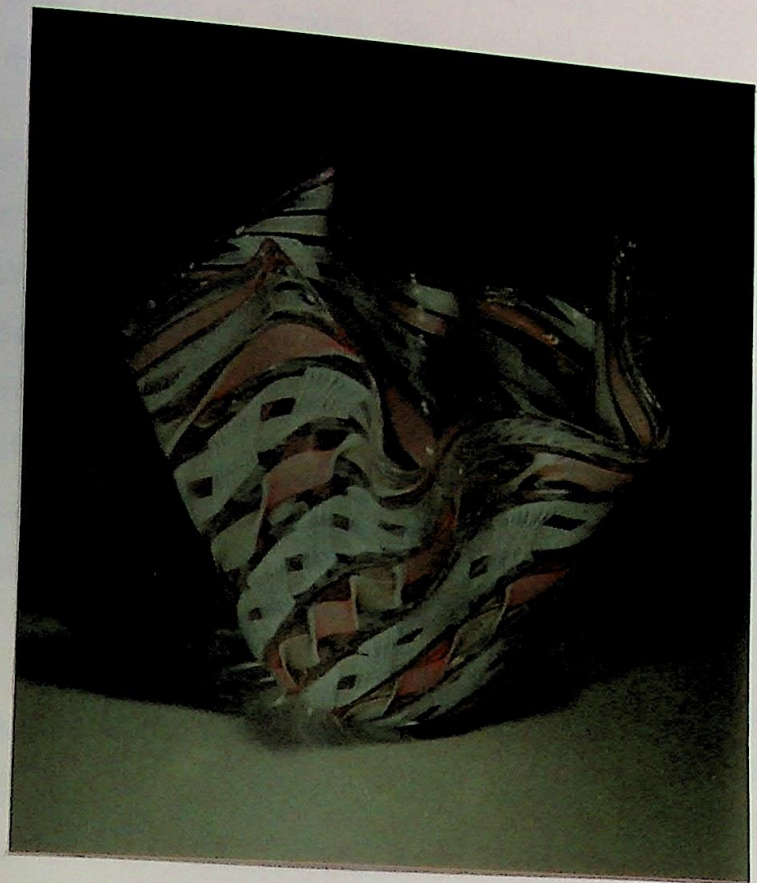


Fig.42.

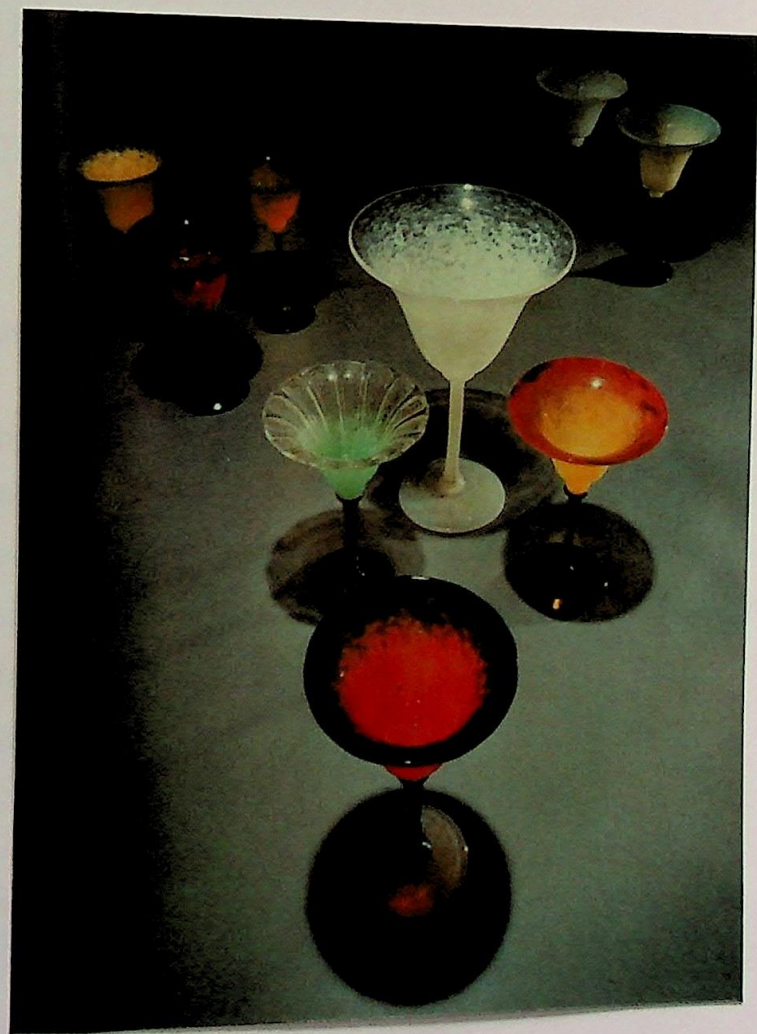


Fig.43.



successful and enjoyable that they decided that Tagliapetra and his wife Lino would return to Seattle the following summer and they would work on a new series of pieces that Chihuly would design.

That winter, Chihuly and Sylvia traveled to Venice. There they were fortunate to see a private collection of Venetian Art Deco vases. Chihuly describes these as "unlike anything I had ever seen in books or museums (fig.43). They were very odd, with garish colours. Most were classical shapes with beautiful handles and other unusual additions. I started to think about Lino (Tagliapetra) visit coming up in the summer and I thought I would design some pieces similar to these, in the spirit of the period"<sup>2</sup>.

The development of this series did not start on paper in the studio but instead the ideas were blown in glass and then further developed. Chihuly brought together the best glass blowers in Seattle, including Billy Morris, Rich Royal, Ben Moore, Martin Blank and Paul Cunningham to his workshop on the 10th July 1988, to meet Lino Tagliapetra.

The initial pieces were replicas of the Italian Art Deco vases from Venice. As these vessels were forming they sparked off new ideas which Chihuly recorded on paper. After each drawing was finished Lino, Ben and Chihuly would discuss the form for the next piece. After a couple of days the work became more involved and it was long before something started to happen.

In the beginning the drawings were made with watercolour and pencil. Somewhere around the fourth or fifth day he started to make bold drawings in charcoal. The series started a drastic change from refined classical shapes to very bizarre pieces; handles changed to knots, prunts became claws, colour went from subtle to bright, big leaves and feathers appeared.

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<sup>2</sup> Chihuly: "Venetians"



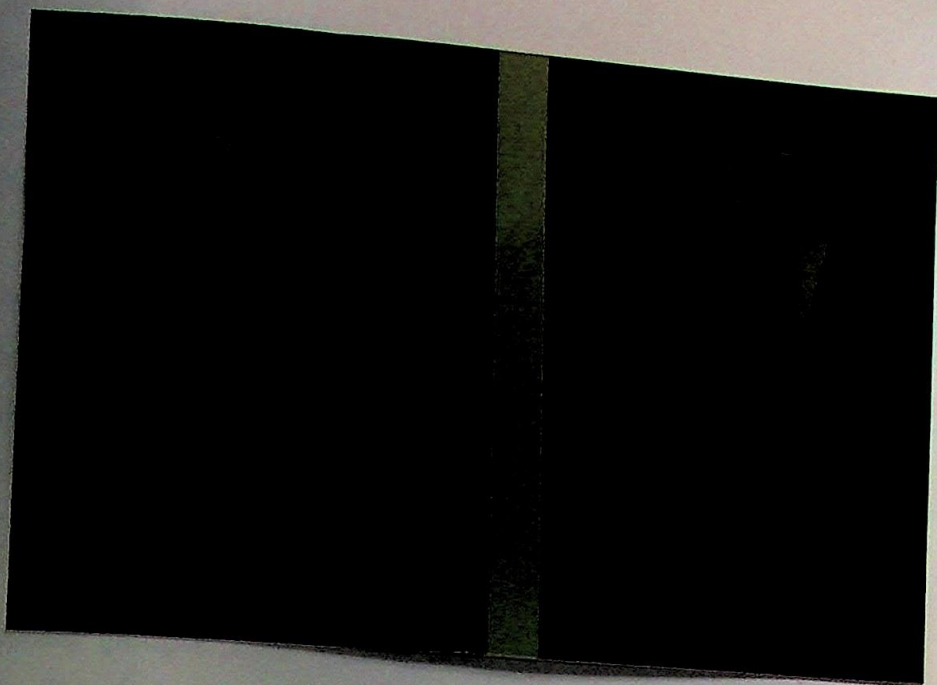


Fig.44.



Fig.45.



As with the previous collections, Chihuly's source was chosen "out of the blue". Something that struck his eye and he decided that he wanted to make them. Unlike before, this idea was taken directly from the historical use of his medium. Chihuly took this old style of blown glass and began to modernise it with his own ideas. All of Chihuly's sources have come from man-made forms and emotions. His "Sea-Form" series originated with his basket series and developed through blowing, the notion of sea forms was something that struck him after these pieces were made. His true source was movement and the capturing of a moving liquid in frozen state.

Some people find that man-made forms prove to be a static, dry source. As a design student we are discouraged from using form that others have already developed from a source as a basis for work. This is because the freshness and individuality can be lost and possibilities become narrowed. But Chihuly is a prime contradiction to this theory. He has taken classical form, applied his colour combination developed through the "Macchia" series and exaggerated what were once highly functional applications to the extent that they contradict the functional vessel onto which they are applied.

If we compare fig.44 and fig. 45 the source of direct inspiration is obvious. Fig.44 is an Art Deco vase dated 1918-22. It is a drinking vessel form that was in common use from that date onwards. The blown clear glass cone is decorated with violet flecks of roll on coloured enamel. The rim is enhanced by a solid red wrap. Its stem and base are solid coloured with an opaque violet enamel. This design was quite common with the Art Deco style and many similar vessels can be found all over the world.

In fig.45 we can see how Chihuly has taken this form and producing it in larger scale with the addition of handles, he has given the form a new and fresh aesthetic strength. In this series as with the Art Deco pieces, Chihuly uses flecks of chipped kougler on a clear ground (colour) in contrast to the solid dense flat colour. This is one of the first pieces of Chihuly's "Venetian" series. He repeats this core form



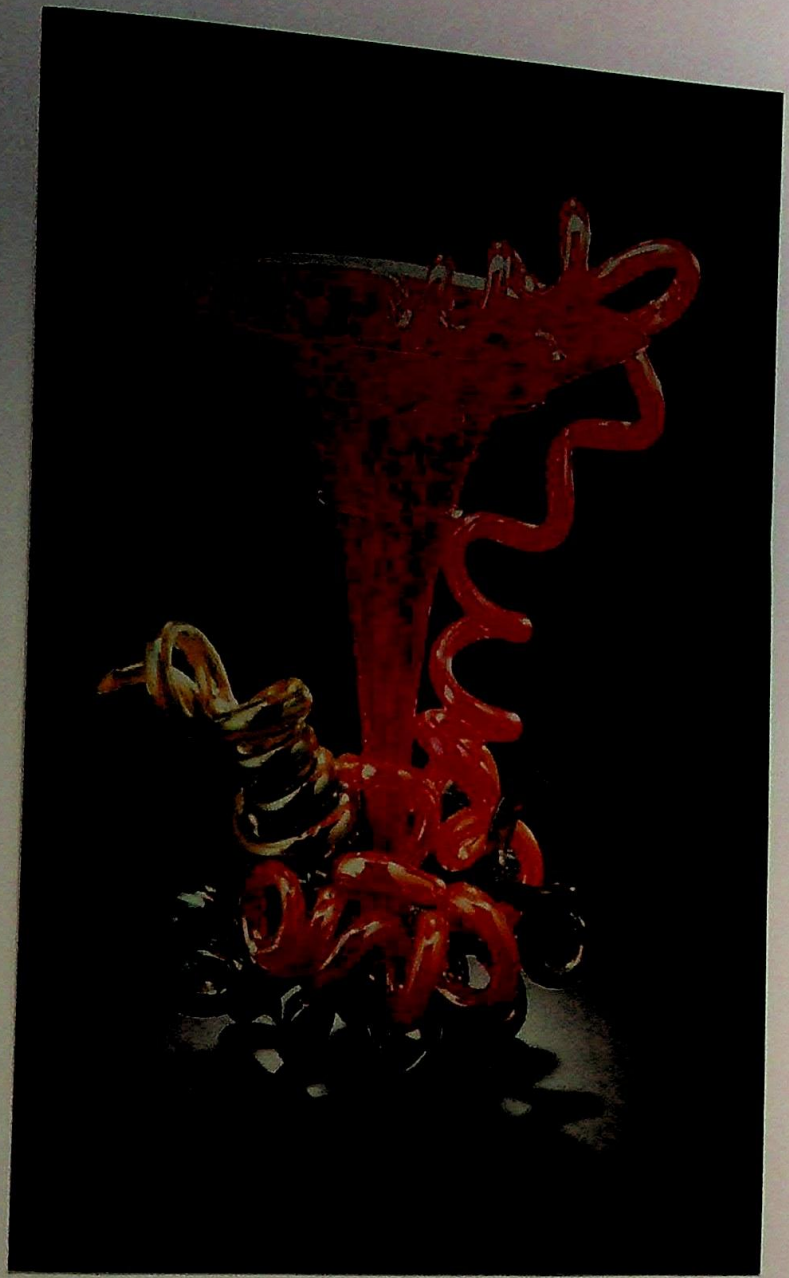


Fig.46.



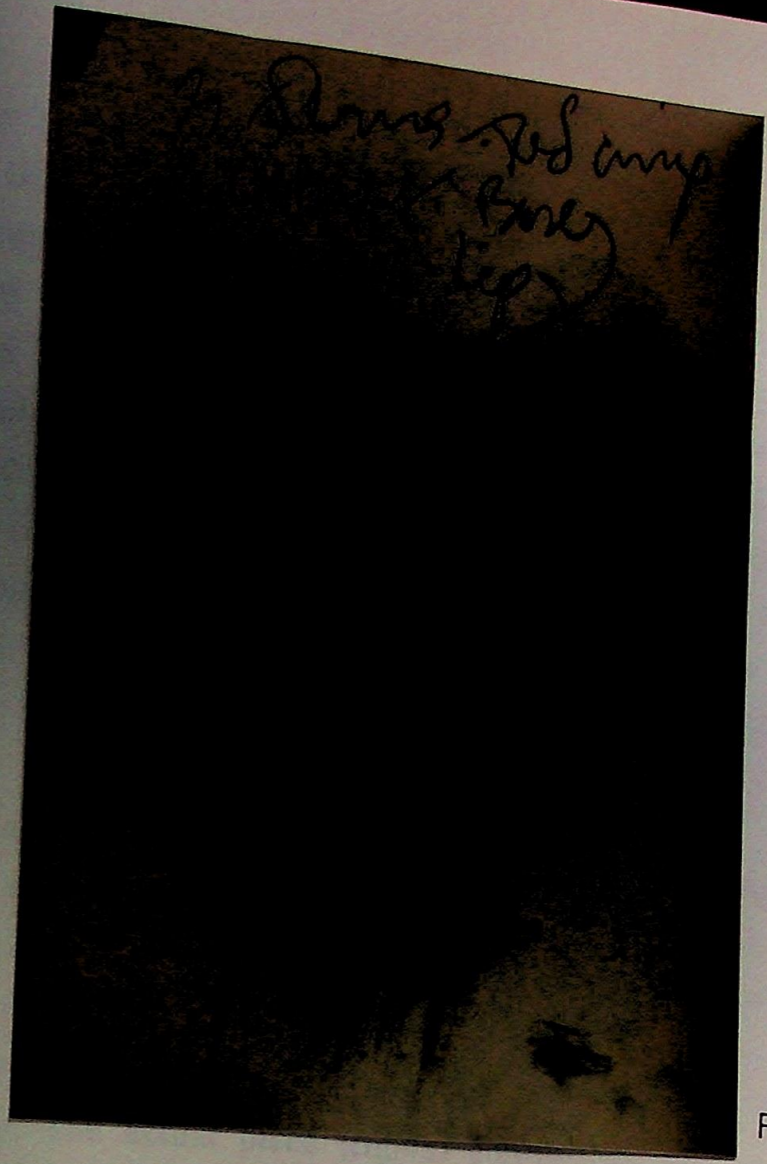


Fig.47.



Fig.48.



later on in the works (fig.46) but now we can see an obvious development. He has given greater fortitude to what once were functional components such as handles, spouts, feet etc...these applied form now give motion and energy to the otherwise subdued form. They twist and spiral around the base of the form like snakes. One of them has stretched high enough to reach the rim and is making its way inside and threatening the functional vessel. Our eye is constantly moving as the reds, oranges and greens clash and dance with energetic yet tensioned motion. The coils are twisted so tightly like a spring that has reached its tension point and is just about to spring open and explode.

With this series Chihuly's drawing had become more defined in comparison to drawings for previous collections. They are more than mere impressions of ideas as before but actual specific drawings, accurate down to colour combinations (Fig.47) shows Chihuly's drawing. The writing at the top reads "3 forms, red mix, cobalt base, red mix lip." The actual piece (fig.48) consists of three gold feet, gold base and blue mix lip. The clear glass in the main core shape has been densely bubbled.

Chihuly conforms to the colours decided in his design, with the exception of a blue mix rim. We can see that the gold lustre was painted on afterwards because the red colouring is breaking through where the applications are contact the clear glass. The addition of the three spiraled feet show that Chihuly has lost the gift of spontaneous decision during the blowing process. These feet were originally blue mix. This later application of colour changes implies that Chihuly is as yet still unsure of his combinations. This also marks the first evidence of Chihuly re-firing pieces after the hot blown process.

The works in the series are all based on a set of six core shapes (fig.49). These shapes are refined and symmetrical, rare forms for Chihuly whose work up to date has been free form and unorthodox. These cores are then engulfed with a combination of spiraling and



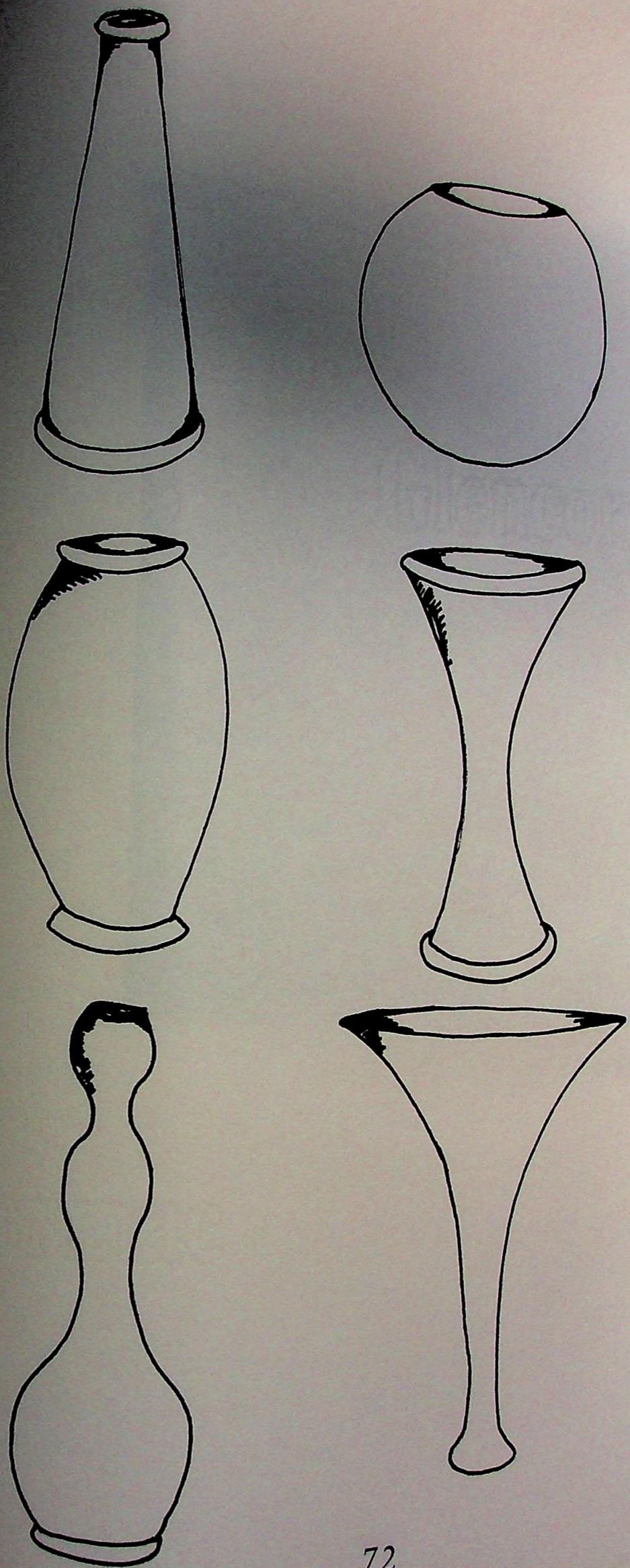


Fig.49.



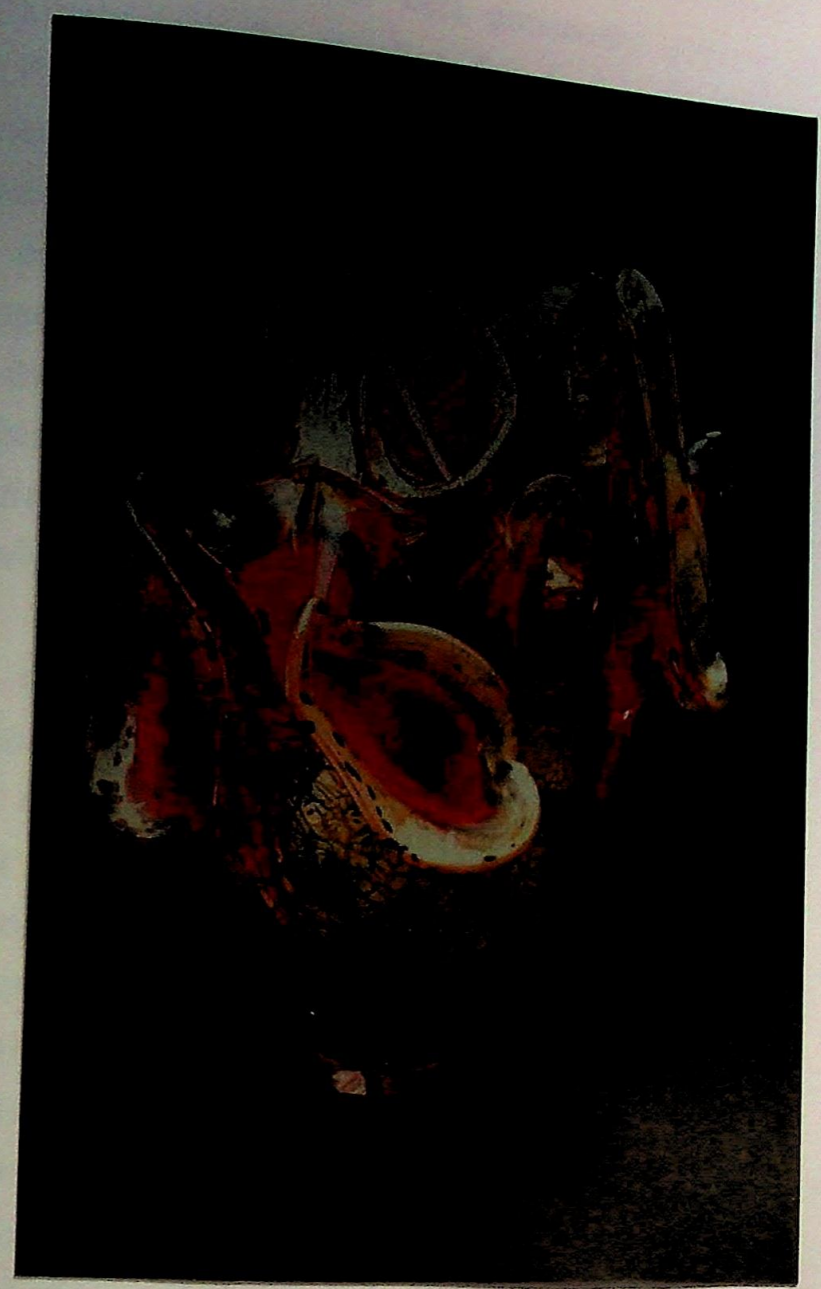


Fig.50.



twisted coils, flame-like protuberances, leaf arrangements and abstract floral forms. Many of these seemingly fresh and disconnected forms bring together many elements that were previously used in more subtle ways. Chihuly took the spiraling fluted, sheared inner forms from his "Sea Form" series, and reproduced them with a new strength in vibrantly coloured attachments. Chihuly has also taken elements from his "flower series"(Fig.50) and once again applied the same concerns with colour and movement. Although Chihuly has re-used these basic shapes and applications in all the forms, their combinations harmonise yet they create a tension and force which is unique to every work. This unification creates a series of unique characters whose personality portrays a stronger relationship between Chihuly and his material than any other series.

This series shows a further development of Chihuly's earlier concerns with tone and motion. In his first collection he conveyed this through surface drawing with the "Cylinder series". The "Basket" forms were an attempt to capture this movement in the form itself with the assistance of simple applied line. With the "Sea forms" it is in the rim and the decoration that enhance this concern. In these forms Chihuly also uses the inner forms to create extra turbulence in their placid centres. The successful "Macchia" forms eliminate this centre and concentrate on vibrate colour combinations and flowing rims. With the most recent series, "Venetians", Chihuly has taken the essence of this energy, colour, motion and form, and utilised it. He has posed himself the problem of creating energy from a static, uncharged form. Yet the combination of these functional, core structures and their abstract surrounding forces compliment and enhance each other.

Chihuly has taken a classical Venetian functional form and applied extravagant surface ornamentation of glass bitwork so as the core is so overwhelmed by these luxuriant growths that the form becomes non-functional. This is a deliberate statement by Chihuly on the relationship between craft, sculpture and function. His work has never been concerned with function but the emphasis on glassblowing





Fig.51



as a utilitarian process is a constant reminder of what Harvey J. Littleton fought so hard to change.

"One may put oranges or limes in his (Chihuly's) "Baskets" or dried flowers in his "cylinders" but one may also use a Picasso to cover a hole in the wall.<sup>3</sup> "

In his "Venetian" series Chihuly was not given us this choice (Fig.51). The functional elements of these forms are their hollowness and our access to that hollow centre . This entrance has been deliberately blocked by the freeform sculptural attachments. These pieces would not differ aesthetically if their core shape were formed from solid glass instead of hollow blown ware. In this illustration Chihuly's message is very strong. The leaf draped over the mouth of the vessel is like a hand forbidding us to look inside. These forms can be taken quite symbolically to suggest sculpture threatening and overtaking the classical and functional form. This reaction against utilitarianism glassware is common in the field of glass in general because of the long hard struggle to establish blown glass as an art medium. To convey this ideal many glass artists treat the glass like any other sculptural material. This is not to say that they do not appreciate its qualities but that they have followed the approach of Harvey Littleton which in itself is very expressive. Chihuly has taken a different approach, much like that of Erwin Eisch, the German glass artist who Chihuly visited in his formative years.

Eisch was a very significant figure in European studio glass because of the strength of his work and his unorthodox methods. Eisch did for European studio glass what Littleton did for the American studio glass movement. Many of his forms were spontaneous distortions of the original bubble. He believed that artists should not slave to the material or to the technique. He has made a series of

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<sup>3</sup> Geldzahler "Chihuly: Color, glass and form." page 11



works that suggest function yet ridiculed it by making it non functional.

This blatant contradiction of function that Chihuly and Eisch share in their work is not a common one. Perhaps the strength of their aesthetic form overshadows the underlying message or are we so tuned to accept these classical forms that the initial basis for their existence is no longer of importance.

The only existing record of Chihuly's most recent collection is a book entitled "Venetians" and is written by Chihuly himself. The recording and exhibiting of his work has always been of great importance to Chihuly. He had discovered with his "Neon series " the possibilities of light to enhance or distort a form. This concern developed with his "Basket "series and he discovered the importance of environment and the effect it had on the works. He slowly began to realise that the creation of these pieces did not end after the hot blown process but that the photography and exhibiting of them was as if not more important. Public opinion and response is a primary consideration with Chihuly therefore the image portrayed to them is very important. Chihuly has personally supervised the shoots for all the publications to date, and he has written a personal section into each one concerning the work. It is this attention to publicity along with the strength of his work that has established Chihuly worldwide as a truly inspirational artist and a major influence in the development of the glass movement worldwide.



## CONCLUSION

Chihuly's fascination with technique is carried throughout his various series. It is his new processes, developed through experimentation that are the inspiration for his works. It is because of this lack of continual source that Chihuly's series alter so rapidly. Although his concern with movement is always present, this is incorporated into the technique instead of the technique being developed to express his particular concern. This process puts more emphasis on the craftmaker and less on the artist. Many artists consider that technique is only the process of transferring imagery from a two dimensional source into a three dimensional piece. They subsequently design pieces to be manufactured by others, thus categorising themselves as artists not craftsmen. Chihuly, with this most recent series, has managed to bridge this gap. There can be no distinction between Chihuly the artist and Chihuly the craftsman. This series is not based on technique but on aesthetic and utilitarian concerns.

With this recent series the "Venetians" and his previous series "Macchia" Chihuly has become obsessed with scale. Through his earlier concerns with the visual strength of the glass form and its impact on its surroundings, the scale of his work has increased dramatically. We have already seen the importance of strong design. When simple form is enlarged this strength can be threatened if there is any weakness. Some of Chihuly's "Macchia" forms have not withstood this amplification and appear out of control. I am disappointed that he has included these pieces in his final collections just for their colour combinations.

Chihuly's fresh and uninhibited introduction to blown glass equipped him with a new exciting and unorthodox approach to hot glass. To him everything is possible in glass and it is this enthusiasm and energy that has made him an inspiration to all glass artists. He is not restricted by lack of technical knowledge but utilises the skills of



the masters. It is the communication between craftworker and designer that Littleton fought so hard to establish, that has enabled Chihuly to develop hot glass, through the American Craft Movement, into an accepted art medium. He has realised this in his most recent collection where he has chosen to highlight and exploit it.

As a fellow glass artist I have found writing this thesis, not only educational but also an inspiration. Chihuly's life and work is an encouragement to new and struggling students and artists in all fields. The energy and enthusiasm that he expresses through his work radiates from his exhibitions and his publications. The development that he is responsible for in the field of hot glass along with the acceptance of a new and fresh experimental approach has open endless possibilities in this medium. After the dramatic developments in Chihuly's latest series I look forward to seeing his next works and am curious to see the new issues he will tackle.







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