

The art of Collecting ~ Glass

By Morgan Geisler and Trudy Van Dop

Sol Maya installation, photo credit Gwen Poole

A Rich History ...

It's been said that human-made glass first appeared in ancient Mesopotamia, circa 3000 BC, where glass fusion was used for constructing tools. Another account states that Phoenician sailors, who accidentally melted the sand beneath their cooking fires, discovered the process. Whatever the source of this invention, works of fused and sculpted glass became prized collectibles over the centuries. By Roman times, glass was an officially recognized artistic medium - the first glass blowers took up their tools around 50 BC.

Today, glass continues to make the transition from craft to fine art. In studios around BC, artists prepare this delicate material to the delight of collectors from around the world. The pieces created represent the enigmatic quality of glass - even when it appears to be solid the molecules within the piece are moving at a slow rate. In this way, glass is "alive" - transformed through various methods such as blowing, fusing, etching and staining, to create unique pieces of art.

Glass Blowing

There is an old Hindi saying about glass blowing - "fashion the cup as if it were to be touched by the lips of your beloved". Glass blowers use a five foot long pipe which is thrust into a fiery opening called a glory hole. At high temperatures (up to 2100 F), the malleable glass is lovingly shaped into creations such as bowls, vases, bottles, and sculptures.

To watch this process in action, stop by New-Small & Sterling Studio Glass on Granville Island (page 18), where live glass-blowing demonstrations compliment the gallery space showing a variety of hand-made works.

Also not to be missed is the work of Sol Maya, at Solart Glass Studio in West Vancouver (page 25). His Native American spirituality and natural interest in space and the stars (inherited from his Mayan ancestors) are all reflected in his work.

Glass Fusing

Also known as warm glass and kiln-fired glass, fused glass is created when cut pieces are fired in a kiln.



Pousse Café Trio: Red Sky at Night, by David New-Small, 2005. Blown glass. Photo Credit: Michael Sider.

Glass Etching

Etching (sandblasting or the more traditional acid etch) is a technique that permanently applies designs or graphics to glass and mirror. Carving is etching taken to the extreme, but generally the glass should not be carved deeper than a depth equal to 1/2 its thickness. To see quality sandblast-carved glass visit the John Nutter studio on Granville Island (page 22).

Stained Glass

Every window starts as a full-size drawing of the desired end result. Pieces of coloured glass are then selected to bring the vision to fruition. The glass is cut to size with a glass cutter and designs are applied using a special 'paint' containing metal oxides, powdered glass and gum. The pieces are kiln-fired to set the designs and then connected using lead. Mastic is brushed into the seams to secure the project.



Sol Maya installation, photo credit Gwen Poole



Photo Credit: Michael Sider, 2005. A piece being re-heated at the "glory hole" in the hot shop at New-Small & Sterling Studio. The piece is from the Marine Reliquary series by David New-Small. The "glory hole" is a natural gas-powered furnace which operates at about 1200° C and is used to re-heat glass work in progress, to keep it malleable as the "gaffer" (master glassblower) shapes the piece.



Carnival Evening, by Naoko Takenouchi, 2004. Blown glass with sandblasted design. Photo Credit: Michael Sider

Protecting Your Investment – Caring for your glass:

Purchase a clear adhesive gel designed to hold your collection in place on the shelf. This is available from the studios or online through museum hardware stores. Dust regularly with a soft cloth or static duster. Wash serving ware gently according to the artists' instructions.

And ... enjoy!

For access to BC's best glass artists, and the studios that carry their work, visit www.art-bc.com and search for glass under "media".