

The Value of Our Work

by Chris Chorvat

Recently I was visiting Glass Cat, a public studio in Spokane, Washington, where I once was the artist in residence. Some younger kids came into the studio and began ogling the glass that I had displayed in the Vetrina. "Oh, my gosh, you want three hundred bucks for this?" said a young girl. She instantly motioned to her friends to look at the piece, then commented, "You must be rich!" Of course, I laughed a big laugh and proceeded to tell her of all that goes into making such a goblet.

She didn't understand most of what I said, and I think she was more confused after I finished explaining it to her.

After the group left, I began thinking about how each piece an artist makes is usually never fully understood. As a lifetime artist, I have seen how many different situations can influence the creation of pieces of artwork. It's interesting that collectors don't usually see everything that occurs up to the point of their receiving a piece.

Making any type of fine art involves a myriad of factors and is usually the result of knowledge acquired over the span of a career or the culmination of experiences from previous attempts to work with the medium. As with anything we buy, whether it be a paper clip or an automobile, there belongs to it a great deal of human effort and ingenuity. The glass art that we create as well as the tools we use to work the glass all have to be formulated, fashioned, and tested before we can even begin. The process is immense!



Goblet by Chris Chorvat

More than Meets the Eye

Starting out with silica sand, glass production requires that thousands of hours go into the research and testing of raw glass. Most of the work happens before it reaches the studio. The academics that are required to do glass research take a measure of genius as well as a significant financial investment. In considering all that goes into the creation of a simple piece of glass art, we have to take into account the welder who fabricated the furnace or torch, the large group of people responsible for supplying the gasses, and the shippers who bring the raw materials to us. Most importantly, however, we have to consider the impact we have on the people who surround us.

The tragedies and triumphs that we experience as artists influence the creative direction of any piece we make. Throughout the birth of a work of art, a myriad of situations arise as we navigate the storms of life while turning artwork from concept to reality. Babies are born. Wars begin and end. We are plunged headlong

into enormous obstacles on the way to the finished creation. We may even struggle to determine the direction that we want to take while exploiting a chosen medium. Interestingly, even the slightest moment of change can alter the outcome of a piece of artwork forever. Something as simple as what we chose to wear that day or a story we read can affect the course of creativity.

It is very intriguing that these rumbles and tumbles of life usually result in tangible and visually stimulating forms of expression. Perhaps that's why many of us do it—for the opportunity to experience a sense of accomplishment while swimming in an ocean of undeniable challenges. Through constant bombardment of issues ranging from stubbed toes to natural disasters, we are the pioneers of adjustment.

Letting the Art Speak for Itself

Promoting our own work is a part of the process that brings our art to the public. As I understand it, many of us work in the private seclusion of our studios and rarely see people on a regular basis. It would be entertaining to tell a collector that we made the piece they are looking at while in our pajamas. Instead, they often see us only at our best, presenting our own personae to them as if we are speaking for the artwork itself.

A common practice for obsessed artisans is to buy raw materials before we buy anything for ourselves. In our obsession with creation, we sacrifice a part of ourselves to get the artwork into the public eye. We skip functions and events, and sometimes we are the ones scrambling during the holidays so that everyone who desires to share our work can have gifts to give in a timely manner.

We cut ourselves, burn ourselves, and because many of us work with hazardous materials to get the job done, we experience collateral costs that can span throughout the rest of our lives. We take many risks to create the simplest of pieces, so many so that one could think the phrase "blood, sweat, and tears" was coined by a glass artist.

A Method to the Madness

Of course, as collectors view the piece in a climate-controlled building while bearing a glass of wine and an event program, they fail to see all that has transpired in bringing this artwork to their attention. This could be viewed as a disadvantage to the artist, as some events connected to a particular piece or series of pieces can say a lot about the work itself.

Artwork that is fashioned into a memorial can express more to the person viewing the piece than words can say. Oftentimes, the artist's own experiences will drive the vehicle of creative expression, and there will be contained within the work a display of the artist's perceptions of the subjects that are being memorialized.

Many years ago, I was enjoying doing research on glassworking and came upon a series of work by Toan Klein. Titled *Listen To The Flames*, Klein's work is an exposition of photographs printed within glass towers holding slightly shattered glass eggs. It represents the events of the Holocaust and its effect on people within his family tree. Each individual tower represents a human relative of Toan Klein. Shards of glass lie at the base of each tower.

Mr. Klein expresses a vast range of emotions in the piece by using various surreal elements that are deciphered through a viewer's own conscience. The events that culminated in the meaning of the artwork are chilling. Although the Holocaust was an extremely undesirable event, it had become a part of the creative process, transforming itself from something terrible into something thought provoking.

Intrinsic Beauty

Not knowing where a piece has been and what has entered into making it can be considered an advantage in terms of its intrinsic beauty. The goal of any artist should be to inspire in the viewer an experience of something beyond the scope of words. When we are not present for the display of our work or we do not give an explanation to rationalize our expression, we give the piece a life of its own. With no exposure of the process or descriptions of its meaning, the piece is "open to interpretation." We are then working with the limitless palette of the imagination of the viewer. A person looking at our work doesn't have to hear our own self-doubts and criticisms, nor do they see the pain that may have brought the piece to life. Not knowing what went into making it can help the work to maintain a virgin integrity, as if it is as pure as the driven snow.

The Driving Force

As we try to make sense of our own creativity, we manipulate glass to make our world a bit less colorless and to bring a social identity to what we see in our own minds. The process may be arduous at times and can sometimes cause us to go outside of our comfort zone to get the job done.

As artists we continually search for some type of favorable resolve in our endeavors, and often we find it in the completion of the process. For some of us, just the opportunity to work with our chosen medium is enough to satisfy our needs. After all, bringing most of our perceptions to the public eye is more often than not something we do for ourselves without regard to what a collector might desire. Our art is our therapy. We live to create, and what could be more wonderful than pulling a rabbit out of the hat? We perform the magic of turning these raw materials and thousands of hours of research into something flawless and valuable. The hidden process is a thing of beauty—an esoteric achievement of the human spirit.

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Listen To The Flames by Toan Klein

A native of Denver, Colorado, Chris Chorvat began to study art in its various media at a very young age while touring European art museums and historical glass studios. In his numerous travels, he recognized his natural ability to develop an understanding of different media and nurtured a lifelong affinity for blown glass.

Christopher has studied under both European and American glassworking masters, and his artwork has influenced several artists toward the transformation of contemporary flameworking. His extensive knowledge of glassworking physics and form enables him to manipulate the medium with careful planning, keeping in mind a strict adherence to architecture, integrity, and aesthetic quality.

By request of both private and public institutions, Chris performs commissioned demonstrations to the public and teaches glass art to students of all skill levels. Currently, he is the Artist in Residence at Vetra Studio in Spokane, Washington. For more information about this article or to obtain his work, please contact him by mail at Chris Chorvat, 1010 E. Thurston Avenue, Spokane, Washington 99203, or by phone at (509) 768-1683 or (509) 362-5764.

