

# Shane Fero

Below are excerpts from a Glasscaster interview with flameworking artist, Shane Fero. Glasscaster podcasts feature "hot glass talk in a high-tech world." This series, hosted by Marcie Davis, can be found at [www.fireladyproductions.com](http://www.fireladyproductions.com) or on iTunes.



### What were your first experiences in glass, Shane?

We moved from Chicago when I was almost fourteen to Winter Haven, Florida. Nearby, Bob and Marie Howell had a glass shop, and I would watch them demonstrate. I was fifteen at the time, and I was pretty enthralled by it. Within a year or so he sold out to Jerry and Lee Coker who had a son a couple of years older than I was. I became friends with them and started mowing the lawn and doing odd jobs at the glass shop. Then they started teaching me how to do things.

The first thing they taught me to make was teardrop earrings. Then they taught me to pull points on the point-pulling machine. It was a half-mechanized version of making swan vases with neon tubing. They worked with cross fires, fishtail burners, ball fires, and even ribbon burners, depending on what they were making—fires that were a mixture of forced air and gas, but no oxygen. It was all soft glass.

I did some parts of the swan vase, but pretty quickly they started to train me to make Christmas ornaments. About that time, they wanted to leave the area, so they sold out to one of their students, Roger Smith. I worked for Roger and started making bud vases and pitchers. I was also learning how to sculpt solids, very small animals, so I was learning two different techniques.

### Were the Cokers from a Carney tradition?

Yes, they came from that tradition, but they also had neon experience, too. Lee Coker's father was involved in the neon industry as well in the wintertime down in Tampa, so they didn't really come from a scientific background. They called it an artistic background—Artistry in Glass.

### Did you spend any time at the Citrus Tower in central Florida?

I never worked there, although there was a relationship later on between Jerry and Lee and Roger Smith and Jean Boutz at the Citrus Tower, as well as with other flameworkers who were in different Florida tourist attractions. Or studios where they made things. So there was a kind of a network in a sense.

### Am I correct about that there was a Florida flameworkers school of thought among these old-timers around the 1950s?

I'd say that's probably true.

### Who came out of that tradition? I know there's you and Roger Parramore.

Roger Parramore actually came from a more scientific background at the University of Florida in Gainesville. Although he might have been aware, I don't think he was really part of that community, per se.

There was another person, Mark Selleck, who was trained by somebody whom Jean Boutz trained.

### What other early influences affected the direction that you went in?

Jean Boutz, the Myers family, the Lorow brothers, Dick Manley; they're mostly the people whom I knew from the community of people who were associated with the Cokers.

### There has to be a transition from the kind of work that you were making with these teachers—a shift over to a more artistic framework.

That's a long process. Jerry Coker turned me on to some glass books that he had that had furnace glass and people whom he knew—Charles Kazium, who was an influence for Paul Stankard. I started seeing other blown work that was done in a furnace. Probably a major thing that influenced me was going to visit Jean Boutz, who had quite a collection of glass, mostly flameworked glass from all over the world that I would go and admire and try to figure out how they were made—sculptural things from Italy and Bohemia, France, Japan, China, even England—different places. The biggest transition was when I went to Corning and saw their major collections and then subsequently kept going back there, becoming exposed through the Rakow Library and exhibits there.

### Let's talk a little bit about Lauscha, because you're kind of an expert. When did you first go there?

I was aware of this for a long time through Jean Boutz, Larry Williams, and Fred Birkhill, but I didn't actually go there until 2001 right after 9/11.

### What was your first impression?

I loved it. It was just fantastic to actually go there and see so many flameworkers. There are hundreds who live in that village.

### There are only about 4,000 residents, so to have hundreds of flameworkers is a huge concentration in a very small place. How did the Lauscha school of flamework influence your work?

The Cokers and a lot of the people in that community in Florida and on the East Coast and actually into Ohio and that area used techniques that were like Lauschan or Bohemian techniques versus, for example, Italian techniques in flameworking, mostly making things from tubes, which included vases, bells, pitchers, birds, and other blown animals. To see one of the birthplaces of this sort of technique was really incredible.

### Fred went to Lauscha first and shared it with you, then the two of you shared Lauscha with me. That changed the direction of my whole life, that trip that we made together, so thank you.

Oh, you're welcome. That was great.

### Were you in any way influenced by certain periods in art such as surrealism?

When I was sixteen, I started studying different artists such as Salvador Dali, so that was creeping into my work at that time, although probably it didn't really become more full-blown until the '80s.

### I love that period of your work. It's gorgeous, and it was so revolutionary. Nobody has ever done anything remotely like that. When you started to work in that style, it was just unbelievable. You had taken it where no man had taken it before. I mean, that's what I think. And you also got very asymmetrical as well at that point, yes?

In the '80s. Making abstract sculptures definitely was like a stepping-stone where you just didn't depend on symmetry anymore. That was pretty exciting.

### When you departed from symmetry, in what ways did you depart?

Traditionally, you would want to blow bubbles, spheres, elliptical shapes, or whatever and keep them concentric constantly. Probably in the late '80s I started exploring by doing them asymmetrically so they're more of sort of a vessel/sculpture combination. I did that a lot through the '90s and maybe the early part of 2000.

### Now you have kind of a slight return to the symmetrical?

Yes, most of the time. Other people started doing asymmetrical work more and more as well, so I try to stay away from what everybody else is doing.

### When you lead, somebody's going to follow, so you have to go somewhere else.

I probably was also influenced by Dale Chihuly's spin-outs. I didn't really think about it at the time, at least consciously. I did actually go into a museum once and saw an ancient piece was similar. A lot of times things are filtered into your mind and your nervous system, and you don't consciously realize it. Then it comes out in your work.

### Let's talk a little bit about your involvement with the Glass Art Society and as President of GAS. What are the challenges that face the Glass Art Society?

It's always in a state of transition. GAS started as a studio glass organization and then kept adding other types of mediums—casting, flameworking, stained glass, fusing, beadmakers. There are all kinds of different factions within the Glass Art Society. Last year we had around 3,400 members worldwide in 52 countries, so it's grown quite a bit. Also there are lots of different things that are happening around the world constantly within the glass community that

have to be addressed. Not only do you have the Conferences, which is a good networking venue, but you have lectures, access to technical information, and a worldwide community that you can travel to, learn from, share with.

### My first GAS Conference changed my life forever. It's the central point of my glass life as far as getting together with everybody. If you don't attend the Conference, however, there are other benefits as well. There's the GAS newsletter, which is a great source of information.

There's the *GAS Journal* as well. About every five years, the Glass Art Society Board has a long-range planning meeting, and out of that come mandates that are worked out and what the membership wants and what the Board wants the organization to continue to do. One of the things that came out of that was to add membership benefits such as discounts on shipping, so we have a FedEx discount program. There is also health insurance, which we've instituted.

### If people would like to join GAS or register for the upcoming Conference, how do they go about doing that?

You can go to [www.glassart.org](http://www.glassart.org) to register or get your membership rate. In the last few months we have upgraded the website so we can upload videos and historical information—a lot more content than we previously had because our membership wanted these things. You can just go to the website and find out what GAS is about.

### What's your goal for the future of GAS?

One of the main things that I would like to see that I've been working on is the various stages of membership benefits and long-range plans—the institution of an advisory board, history projects, history committee, and a foundational trust visionary fund. Before I finish the presidency, I'd like to see this instituted so GAS has a program where people are able to donate to GAS for the continuation of the organization and for different types of functions other than the Conferences themselves. PGQ

Discover more about how Shane Fero developed his distinctive style of glass art in the Spring 2010 issue of Profitable Glass Quarterly.

You can find more of Shane Fero's glass art at [www.shanefero.net](http://www.shanefero.net).

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