

## Perry Price – A Short History of American Studio Glass

Slide 1: This presentation is intended to give a very modest and brief introduction to the history of American studio glass, from the industrial and design precedent through the watershed glass workshop in Toledo in 1962 and on to today. It is a general survey of the movement, by no means exhaustive or complete, but meant to provide an introduction to this remarkable material and its exploration among contemporary glass artists. And, because this is an ARLIS conference, it should be mentioned that most of these images have been sourced either from the digital collections of the American Craft Council or other online resources.

Slide2: Glass has been part of American material culture since the earliest established European settlement on this continent, bringing production methods and forms common in Europe before the industrial revolution. Items similar to this blown glass pitcher were common, functional ware produced in endless multiples and without the refinement capable of old world masters of the material.

Slide3: Pressed “depression” glass is also a common form of early American glass. The glass is pressed in a mold meant to mimic the cut patterns typical of European crystal.

Slide 4: Think American glass prior to the studio craft movement and the iridescent glass of Louis Comfort Tiffany, such as this iridescent vase...

Slide 5: ...or his characteristic stained glass, such as this landscape window now in the Driehaus Museum in Chicago. Tiffany’s workshop output is associated with the arts and crafts movement, emphasizing the return to pre-industrial emphasis on the individual craftsman as extolled by British writers and designers John Ruskin and William Morris, but the style is much more akin to the art nouveau than the arts and craft aesthetic here in America.

Slide6: American studio craft, including studio or contemporary glass, was the result of a confluence of artistic developments. The first was a concerted effort to create organizations, such as the American Craft Council, to support the work of craftspeople after the depression and during the austerities of World War Two. The second came later, with the flood of returning service men and women entering universities under the G. I. Bill. Many of those students entered college art departments, which expanded to meet the demand. After the horrors of the war and the austerities of the home front, craft disciplines blossomed with new interest among individuals looking for a different way to make a living and express themselves through their work. But for the most part glass lagged behind interest in other craft media, due in no small part to the physical challenges in working with the material. Glass remained constrained to the factory and to industrial scale production. There were some outliers in the early days. This plate from 1949 is by Maurice Heaton, a ceramist who also experimented in enamel designs on kiln-formed glass – that is composing images and patterns with glass powder that fuse to the glass form under the high heat of a kiln or furnace.

Slide 7: Other notable pioneers in studio glass were Frances and Michael Higgins, who created a line of kiln-fused glass in a variety of color combinations that could be wired together to create hanging compositions, used as room dividers, hung in front of windows or simply on the wall.

Slide 8: This is Michal Higgins on the right, pictured here with the ceramicists Marguerite Wildenhain (on the left) and Harvey Littleton (in the center) at the 1957 ACC conference in Asilomar, California. Glass was of interest to artists in studio craft, but until the technical problems of taking glass out of the industrial environment and into the artist's studio, access to the material remained limited.

Slide 9: That all changed in 1962 after a landmark series of hot glass workshops hosted by the Toledo Museum of Art and led by Harvey Littleton, shown here again.

Slide 10: Littleton was a ceramicist, but his father was director of research for the Corning Glass Works, and was certainly knowledgeable of the material. His workshops were the first successful attempt to scale the furnaces needed for hot glass – the crucible that holds the molten glass, the glory hole used to periodically reheat the glass as it is made, and the annealer which is used to slowly cool the glass so the work does not shatter under the tension caused by uneven cooling.

Slide 11: Those first workshops would not have succeeded without the assistance of Dominick Labino, then director of research at the Johns-Manville Corporation.

Slide 12: Labino provided the chemical formula for a glass with a lower melting point compatible with the relatively primitive furnaces developed for artist's studios.

Slide 13: These are the furnaces built by Littleton at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where he was a professor of ceramics, after the Toledo workshops. Compared to the furnaces of today, they were small and inefficient, but represented a sea-change in the way glass could be used by an individual artist.

Slide 14: Littleton established the first glass studio in a university art department, putting glass for the first time on par with clay, fiber, wood, and metal as a material for experimentation and mastery in the creation of art.

Slide 15: Littleton used many of the common glass blowing techniques known at the time, but was far more interested in experimentation. Littleton is infamous for saying "technique is cheap," preferring expression over technical mastery.

Slide 16: And you can see that in the early years, there was little technical mastery. This Littleton piece, *Cross Vase*, is from 1964, two years after Toledo.

Slide 17: But that is not to say that sloppy was its own aesthetic. Here is Littleton's *Blown Paired Arcs* from 1983. More than technique, it was the material itself and the unique qualities of working with hot glass that Littleton hoped to capture.

Slide 18: While Littleton ushered glass into studio craft, perhaps no one has had a greater impact on the field than Dale Chihuly, pictured here in 1996 with Corning Museum of Glass Curator Tina Oldknow on the occasion of the publication of her book on Pilchuck. You'll hear a lot more about both Dale and Pilchuck from our other presenters.

Slide 19: Dale worked with glass intermittently prior to 1966, when he became one of the first students to study glass under Littleton at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. After graduation, he studied and then eventually taught at the Rhode Island School of Design. This image from the cover of *Craft Horizons* Magazine illustrates his early work with neon in combination with hot glass.

Slide 20: He received numerous fellowships for his work in glass, including a Fulbright that sent him to the glass-blowing island of Murano in Venice. Chihuly is credited, alongside other innovators in the medium, with both advancing the technical craftsmanship of contemporary glass and by adapting and advancing the team approach to the production of individual pieces he witnessed in Italy. He was also inspired by the material culture of the American Northwest, as seen in his series of Blanket vessels, such as this one.

Slide 21: He adapted Italian techniques to new forms, such as in his series of basket vessels.

Slide 22: This is Chihuly's chandelier at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, made in 1999 and enlarged in 2001. It combines his familiarity with Italian techniques with a vision of glass all his own.

Slide 23: and the forms continue in this Ikebana boat piece, part of series of installations inspired by botanical forms.

Slide 24: Chihuly would go on to teach and mentor successive generations of glass artists, such as William Morris, whose *Petroglyph Vessel* is seen here.

Slide 25: Morris would push glass beyond its association with light and transparency in works such as this *Suspended Artifact*.

Slide 26: The explosion of innovations in studio glass in America attracted the Italian master of the medium, Lino Tagliapietra, shown here working hot glass with his team, to join the American glass community as well.

Slide 27: Lino has often credited the open aspect of the American arts community with freeing him from the traditional limitations imposed on glass in Italy.

Slide 28: If there is any commonality to 20<sup>th</sup> century glass in America, it is this open approach to experimentation unrestrained by tradition. Glass processes and techniques may continue, but the work and forms are novel. Here is an early vessel by California artist Marvin Lipofsky...

Slide 29: ...and another, where he has flocked the surface of his biomorphic glass sculpture, denying its shiny and transparent attributes.

Slide 30: Innovation and experimentation in glass is ingrained in the history of the field. Here is an early form by Tomas Patti, playing with blown bubbles in stacked and layered glass...

Slide 31: ...and a later piece, showing the innovation and advancement in technical ability with the same concept.

Slide 32 and 33: The next two pieces are by Toots Zynsky, who created an innovative method for pulling glass thread, which she then arranges in painterly compositions and fuses in a kiln before manipulating while still hot.

Slide 34: Dan Dailey has worked with a number of glass processes, including the reuse of plate and tile made from glass called Vitrolite, common in the art deco period.

Slide 35: You can see the fascination with deco in a number of his forms, often done in series.

Slide 36: As well as Dailey's early interest in combining glass with other materials, such as metal, but with a clear nod to decorative arts precedents.

Slide 37: This is an example of cast glass by the artist Howard Ben Tre, who creates monumental forms from the typically industrial process.

Slide 38 and 38: Stained glass, an art form as old as antiquity's discovery of glass, has been vaulted into the present through the work of Judith Schaechter of Philadelphia, who approaches glass with a painterly sensibility.

Slide 40: Another artist who has taken a traditional glass practice and updated it is the paperweights of Paul Stankard, who has turned the Victorian novelty into a marvel of technique.

Slide 41: And because of our location in Seattle, we cannot omit the work of Preston Singletary, who has translated the traditional forms and imagery of his Native American Tlingit heritage into glass forms.

Slide 42: More recently, there has been a conscientious effort among glass artists to distinguish themselves from studio glass, which they describe as technique and process oriented with more conceptual works. These Glass Secessionists, such as Tim Tate, pictured here, have expanded conceptual and material scope of the medium.

Slide 43: Chris Taylor is known for creating work in glass that mimics other materials, such as this bubble wrap sculpture...

Slide 44: ...and other performance pieces, such as a video of him blowing glass in a small dingy.

Slide 45: Andy Paiko has taken traditional forms to exhaustive sculptural ends...

Slide 46: ...as well as explore the aspects of artistic labor, such as this fully functioning glass spinning wheel.

Slide 47 and 48: Mathew Szosz is also interested in the glass object as a record of the performance of its own creation. The two pillow forms are created by the expansion of super-heated air trapped inside the glass pockets.

Slide 49: And finally here is a performance by Bohyun Yoon, who created a series of glass tubes that, when a metal mesh at the bottom is heated with a propane torch, create a series of musical tones.

So, that is a crash course in the history, artists, and concepts of the American Studio Glass movement, something that I hope will put the following presentations into some perspective. Thank you.