



A view of the Harvey Littleton exhibition at The Corning Museum of Glass.
PHOTO: GARY HODGES

Museums Take on a 50-Year Milestone

BY KATHARINE MORALES

The early 1960s signaled a paradigm shift across the cultural spectrum in America. The same year that choreographer Trisha Brown was redefining the aesthetics of dance at Judson Dance Theater in Greenwich Village, Manhattan, a few subway stops from the East 47th Street studio where Andy Warhol had set up his game-changing Factory, Studio Glass was being launched in Ohio during a workshop at the Toledo Museum of Art. This event in March 1962 marked the debut of a new kind of glass-furnace technology that made it possible to produce molten glass on a small scale, and put the material into the hands of individual artists rather than the typical industrial-production line. A new medium for sculptural expression had joined metal, wood, and ceramics to challenge the primacy of painting. Universities competed to hire the few available instructors to start up glass programs across the country. The use of glass as an art material was quickly embraced because it fit so neatly into a wider rethinking of what was possible in art.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the famous workshop led by Harvey Littleton, museums across the United States are preparing a year-long cavalcade of openings, galas, exhibitions, lectures, and demonstrations. The Art Alliance for Contemporary Glass (AACG), a collectors group, is helping to celebrate Studio Glass by supporting commemorative exhibitions as well as promoting glass-related events. The AACG has compiled a list of 164 venues—from the Toledo

Museum of Art to the opening in New York City of the Venice-based “GLASSTRESS” exhibition—that relate in some way to this major milestone.

The Toledo Museum, the birthplace of the Studio Glass movement, is revisiting its historic role by hosting an artist residency on the same dates as the original workshop 50 years ago. Three artists who represent a new generation of glass artists and directly experiment with the material will use a furnace based on Harvey Littleton and Dominick Labino’s 1962 design to create contemporary work. The museum will explore the evolution of color in Studio Glass with an exhibition of selected works by decade, starting with Littleton and Labino; moving on to Littleton’s students, Dale Chihuly and Martin Lipofsky; and ending with the recent shift toward an absence of color, as in much of Beth Lipman’s work.

Museum offerings will run the gamut from the reverent to the provocative. For the former, see The Corning Museum of Glass and its dual exhibitions honoring Littleton and Labino; each artist is having his own “Founders of American Studio Glass” exhibition, charting his contributions to launching the movement. For provocation, see the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City, which seems to have little interest in looking backward since its 2002 name change from the American Craft Museum. MAD’s director cites the 50th anniversary of Studio Glass in a press release for “GLASSTRESS New York: New Glass from the Venice Biennales,” an

exhibition featuring very little Studio Glass but chock-full of contemporary artists experimenting with the material with the help of fabricators. The museum’s pitch is that by celebrating the future, it is honoring the past—or, as chief curator David McFadden put it, “acknowledging what has happened but asking where is the field going.”

Glass art took root in the U.S. very quickly because university art departments embraced it; the pioneers of Studio Glass were appointed as professors and trained generations of future artists in the unique material. So it is fitting that, according to the AACG, more than 100 demonstrations and lectures are planned at which the public can learn about glassblowing. The Corning Museum’s “Hot Glass Roadshow” will have a 10-week residency at the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach, Florida; and the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum will host a panel discussion titled “History of the Studio Glass Movement,” to name just two of the many programs in the works.

At 200 events and counting, it would be impossible for even the most devoted supporter of glass art to attend every one. But the year-long celebration is not just aimed at the converted but also seeks to attract the attention of new devotees who might be intrigued by what they learn about glass as an art form, a once-fringe movement, that is now established enough to have major museums charting its history.

KATHARINE MORALES is an intern at GLASS.