

Dear Readers,

This year will be the 20th anniversary of my career in glass. I've had many conversations about the evolution of the modern glass market with veteran artists, who described the '80s and '90s as the prime decades for glass art. I have worked in roughly eight different studios, half of which, unfortunately, have gone out of business. Thankfully I've learned not only glass techniques over the years, but what works and doesn't work in the glass marketplace.



Having a strong product that is unique to you is important. I worked in a glass factory in my early 20s where we produced glass that included a variety of solid sculpture and mold-blown forms. I must have made over 10,000 apples in the three and a half years I worked there until they closed, partially due to the arrival of cheap imported glass. How do you compete with that? By being able to adapt.

I currently own and operate my own studio as a paperweight artist but also work two to three days a week, nine months a year at a hot shop for another artist. My peer members in the National Paperweight Collector's Association have told me that collector attendance at paperweight conferences has decreased drastically since the '80s and '90s, so I adapted by branching out into different markets. In my early 20s I had made and wholesaled pipes around Connecticut, then took a 15-year hiatus from pipe making to focus on the art of the paperweight. Recently, I have started to get back into making smokewear due to the current market and direction of cannabis nationwide.

The openness of information in current glass education is phenomenal. Between workshops and classes, videos online, Instagram, and publications like *The Flow*, sharing glass techniques is at a volume never seen before. In my early 20s as a furnace worker who was purchasing lampworking equipment to set up in my mother's basement, I had never seen it live, and there were only a few books and a handful of VHS tapes to explain the process of lampworking. The art of the lampworked paperweight currently has less than 30 people left in the world making encased soft glass paperweights, and I am one of the youngest at the ripe old age of 39. The key to changing this is sharing knowledge with and inspiring others. I answer questions through Instagram and e-mail, demos, and lectures and will be teaching at the Corning Museum of Glass in July 2020.

The past 20 years have been one heck of a ride with lots of highs and lows. Perseverance and adaptability are a must in this field if you want to survive and make a living at it. I recommend that beginners take classes, apply for scholarships, keep an open mind, and talk to glass artists whom you admire. I did the same thing when I was young and was able to get great mentorship and advice from such renowned veteran artists as Milon Townsend and Paul Stankard. Now I have new artists reaching out to me.

I wish you the best in your creative endeavors and hope some of you will continue in the tradition of encased soft glass paperweights. Enjoy the issue.

Clinton Smith
Contributing Editor

Genack Raven
by Patti Leota Genack



Deadlines for Editorial Submissions

Fall 2019 **Functional**
June 1, 2019

Winter 2019 **15th Annual Women in Glass**
September 1, 2019

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ISSN 74470-28780 is published quarterly
by Glass Patterns Quarterly, Inc.
8300 Hidden Valley Road,
P.O. Box 69, Westport, KY 40077
POSTMASTER: Send address
changes to The Flow,
8300 Hidden Valley Road,
P.O. Box 69, Westport, KY 40077
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Subscriptions: (4 issues)

\$28 for one year,

\$52 for two years, \$74 for three years,

Kentucky residents, add 6% state

sales tax. International Rate

\$48 one year, \$87 two years,

\$124 three years.

All subscriptions must be paid in U.S. dollars with
an international money order or
with a check drawn on a U.S. bank.

Periodicals Postage Paid

at Westport, KY 40077

and additional mailing offices.

Sample issues U.S. \$9, International \$13.

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