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Glassblowing (Summer 2024)

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Staff Creative Residencies Summer 2024 Self-Assessment

Glassblowing

Andrea Drummond, Communications Project Coordinator in the Department of Music, learned to work in the medium of glassblowing.

My staff creative residency was to explore the art of glassblowing. Initially my goal was to study in the South with female glass artists. I aimed to spend 2–3 days in the hot shop creating and observing alongside my selected mentors. The remaining days would be dedicated to research and travel. One day was set aside to discuss studio setup, artist processes, dig into methods and materials, and the science behind the art.

In the research process before submitting my creative residency application, I connected with Solange Ledwith of Swamp Girl Glass Blowing in Slidell, LA. Initially, I was to spend most of my creative residency in the hot shop of Swamp Girl Glass. When Solange suffered a broken leg, keeping her out of the shop for most of the summer I formulated a back up plan. My back up plan took me to Ouray Glassworks in Ouray, CO and Blown Fuse Glass Art in Summertown, TN.

First stop of the summer was Ouray, Colorado. Family vacation plans already found me on Colorado's western slope so I reached out to friend and retired glassblower, Sam Rushing. My time with Sam started with a conversation on his front porch. We discussed his start in the medium with Mississippi glass artist Susan Ford, how his kiln and melting furnace were built and operated, and how one might set up a similar operation today. Our conversation meandered through material sourcing, workshops for continued learning, marketing, and today's art form compared to that of the

one he started in 30 years ago.

I was then introduced to Annie Quathamer, who took over Ouray Glassworks after an apprenticeship with Sam. I observed Annie in the hot shop blowing bubbles, shaping molten glass, and adding color to create usable vessels such as wine glasses and bowls. Annie allowed me to work in the shop as Sam walked me through the process of creating small glass vessels using a blowpipe, punty, jacks, paddle, and newspaper pads. It took me a ridiculous amount of time compared to the two trained artisans! After 12 hours in the annealing kiln, I was able to leave Ouray with two small, slumpy, vessels and a new appreciation for the art form.

My next adventure in glass would take me to The Farm in Summertown, Tennessee to study under artist Teresa White of Blown Fuse Glass Art and Studio 1688, previously of Memphis. Teresa works with borosilicate glass, or pyrex if you prefer brand names. Some of the information and skills learned in Colorado translated to the different glass. As opposed to working with melted, molten glass, I was directly heating glass rods and tubes to manipulate and blow into shapes and designs. This kind of glasswork is often referred to as lampworking, torchworking, or flameworking.

I spent two days on The Farm working with Teresa, discussing studio setup, torch regulation, and glass manipulation techniques. We started small, creating pendants, pulling hooks, and learning how to fuse color into the creation via glass rods or fritz, which is colored glass that has the texture of sand or tiny pebbles that you fuse into glass pieces that add color and texture. Throughout the two days I created ornaments, vases, tried my hand at glasses, and was inspired by the entire process. I already have ideas for the next time I get in front of a torch!

I am grateful for this time out of the office to study and practice in a medium that I have admired for so long but was not very accessible to me. After this experience, I plan to take advantage of future opportunities to further my glass techniques and skills in a hot shop environment. The processes are meditative, hot, and so fulfilling!



Practicing framework techniques in the studio



Annealing a glass tube in order to gather glass and blow an ornament



Blowing and ornament using colored glass tubing



Blowing the beginning of a vase. Photo was taken through Didymium glasses so the viewer can see the torch as the artist working does when wearing the Didymium lens glasses.



Created shot glass photographed behind the experienced artists' example. Ouray, CO.



Using a graphite rod to shape the blown glass. Photo was taken through Didymium glasses so the viewer can see the hot glass and torch as the artist working does when wearing the Didymium lens glasses.