

*Taking Shape: Pilchuck Glass School in the '70s*  
June 18, 2005 through January 29, 2006  
Guest Curator Kate Elliott



In 1971 a serendipitous meeting of creative minds led to the founding of a groundbreaking “atelier in the woods.” Located north of Seattle on a tree farm belonging to John Hauberg, aspiring glass artists were invited to live and work together in a communal setting during the summer months.

With a mere \$2000 in hand, thanks to a grant from the Union of Independent Colleges of Art, Dale Chihuly and Ruth Tamura persuaded a handful of qualified students and colleagues from across the country to meet them in the rugged Pacific Northwest to share the challenge of building from scratch what was to become the world renowned Pilchuck Glass School. Despite untold obstacles, Chihuly’s improbable concept took root and the Pilchuck summers from 1971 to 1979 surprised everyone, no less for the growth of the “campus” itself than for the strides made by its many foreign and domestic artists and craftsmen.



The majority of the work highlighted in Bellevue Arts Museum’s exhibition in the newly dedicated Pilchuck Glass School Gallery, represents predominantly blown glass chosen by guest curator Kate Elliott from private Eastside collections and Pilchuck Glass School’s study collection. It offers a condensed sampling of the unfolding talent produced and progress made throughout the ‘70s. On display are some seventy-five pieces representing both early and later work by such celebrated artists as Dale Chihuly, James Carpenter, Fritz Dreisbach, Erwin Eisch, Mary Ann “Toots” Zynsky, Italo Scanga (1932 - 2001), Benjamin Moore, Paul Marioni, the team of Flora Mace and Joey Kirkpatrick, William Morris, Lino Tagliapietra, and Richard Marquis.

*Taking Shape: Pilchuck Glass School in the '70s* fills the main Pilchuck Glass School Gallery exhibition space and is complemented by an educational room featuring early

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footage of Pilchuck in DVD format, vintage photos, posters, and in-house memorabilia along with explanatory text, and early examples of work blown on site by instructors and visiting artists between 1971 and 1979. The educational room, conceived as a work in progress, will be expanded over the years and periodically updated to include the '80s, '90s and the twenty-first century evolution of Pilchuck Glass School.

Urban eco-guerilla artist Buster Simpson, praised by critic Mathew Kangas as a "liberal humanist in avant-garde clothing," was also a first generation Pilchuck pioneer. As an adjunct to Bellevue Arts Museum's *Taking Shape* exhibition, Simpson is reprising a revamped version of an installation titled *Shard Cornice*, first unveiled at Henry Art Gallery a few years ago on the Museum's third floor roof. Enhanced by dichroic glass, which Simpson mysteriously qualifies as "a by-product of the military industrial complex," *Shard Cornice*, 10 feet high by 20 feet long, is made up of cinder blocks crowned with hand-blown glass cast offs recovered from a variety of sources, including the dumpsters of a number of well known Seattle artists, bringing into stark relief what Kangas regards as "the moral ethic of recycling glass regardless of its original price".

"Bellevue Arts Museum's Pilchuck Glass School Gallery and educational room provide a special opportunity for glass and contemporary art enthusiasts to view the continuous development of an art form so closely linked with our region," explains Pilchuck Glass School Executive Director Patricia Watkinson. "Retrospective exhibitions such as this tell the amazing history of the aesthetic, technological, and materials advances that are changing the nature of contemporary glass - a story Bellevue Arts Museum is committed to telling just as Pilchuck Glass School is committed to honoring its past and continuing the trajectory of its growth."

This exhibition is supported by gifts from The Boeing Company and the Klorfine Foundation.

Images:

James Carpenter (American, b. 1949)  
Vase, designed 1973, created 1980  
Hand blown glass  
Collection of Pilchuck Glass School, Stanwood, WA

Flo Perkins (American, b. 1952)  
Pop Watermelon, 1979  
Hand blown glass, cane technique  
Collection of the artist, Santa Fe, NM

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