

Art Review: Whimsy and beauty shine in glass bead show

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By Mary Thomas Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

There are the pretty little beads, separated by color in small containers, that you may have used for a summer camp project.



"Wonkie Gone Wild," one of 48 artworks that incorporate handmade glass beads in the "Metamorphosis" show, is by Debby Weaver of central Maryland.

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And then there are handmade beads that are intricately carved, that have layered interiors so complex they resemble fancy paperweights, that are shaped like fish or tiny people or mushrooms, that are hollow and hold keepsakes, or that are square or pod-like.

The latter and more appear in "Metamorphosis: The Life Cycle of a Glass Bead," at the Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center.

This is another of the exhibitions planned in conjunction with Pittsburgh's yearlong celebration of glass. Last week, I wrote about the somewhat esoteric glassworks by artists showing at CMU's Miller Gallery. In contrast, the immediacy of material is paramount in this eye-dazzling show, though humor and narrative shine through as well as beauty.

The exhibition was organized by the International Society of Glass Beadmakers (ISGB), to mark its 15th anniversary, and will next travel to Evoke Gallery in St. Paul, Minn.

The society wanted its exhibition to be presented in the same city as a Glass Art Society conference. When members learned that G.A.S. was meeting in Pittsburgh, they approached the History Center, says Anne Madarasz, museum division director. She is also an authority on Pittsburgh glass and curator of the History Center's permanent exhibition "Glass: Shattering Notions," which details Western Pennsylvania glass history and is adjacent to "Metamorphosis."

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In 1797, the first two glass factories in the region began production, and by 1902 there were more than 100, Madarasz says. In 1920, 80 percent of the glass made in the United States was produced in the Tri-State area. Pittsburgh was a center for innovation as well as a marketplace.

"This is the reason all of the Pittsburgh Celebrates Glass! makes sense," Madarasz says. "We should be really proud of the 210-year history this city has in glassmaking."

Madarasz was also one of the three jurors for "Metamorphosis." The others were Amy Morgan, proprietor of Morgan Contemporary Glass Gallery, Shadyside, and Julie Keller, Evoke Gallery curator.

Artists were asked to create a single bead and show how it evolved into a piece of jewelry (broadly interpreted), and to submit both, Madarasz says.

Unlike hot glass, which now has a 40-year history as a studio art form, it was only in the 1980s that contemporary bead making began, Madarasz says. Some bead artists came from other media, some were jewelers.

The international competition drew 132 entrees from which 44 artists and 48 works were selected. Besides the United States, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Japan are represented. Six of the artists are from this region and members of the Three Rivers Glass Beadmakers: Marianne Filiaggi, Michael Mangiafico, Diana Dugina Riebling, Darlene Durrwachter Rushing, Laurie Salopek and Debby Weaver.

Works range from those with restrained simplicity to Victorian eclecticism, from readily wearable to challenging as body embellishment. Technique is frequently pushed to the edge, and it's evident that these artists have command of the craft skills required to express their ideas.

Highlights include Barbara Becker Simon's two necklaces, loops of pastel rainbows that show impeccable sense of color; Beth Gaertner's two works, the beads of which emit blazing color like burning coals; and Rushing's "Drip Series" necklaces, a form that originated when she was commissioned to design something both light to wear and visible from a distance for a Pittsburgh Opera production of "Don Giovanni."

The sculptural possibilities ofameworking are endless, and the results fascinating, including gorgeous florals by Barbara Cope Svetlick ("The English Garden") and Nolly Gelsinger ("Everlasting"); and Mary Lamberson's "My Whimsical Garden," which includes mushrooms and gnomes, too.

Taking the show theme more literally are Sharon Peters, whose happy "Spring Has Spring" tells an egg-to-smiling-caterpillar-to-butterfly story, and Nobuko Ikuta, whose delightful "Metamorphosis -- You and Me" begins with a man, a woman and a human embryo and includes lots of crawling babies.

"Curiosity Killed the Cat" by Brit Francesca Cerreta begins with a black cat staring into a fish bowl. "Seed Bead Necklace #3" by Patti Cahill includes more than 600 individually made, amber-colored seed beads.

"Dotted Bead Pin" by Kristina Logan -- a past ISGB president whose work has been exhibited at the Smithsonian -- is serene, ordered and splendid.

Most of the works are for sale, with prices ranging from \$120 to \$3,000. Seven have been sold since the exhibition opened here.

This show is another example of the benefits of attracting major arts conferences to Pittsburgh, and of the vitality of the visual arts venues in this city.

"Bead" continues through July 15 at 1212 Smallman St., Strip District. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Admission is \$7.50, seniors \$6, students \$5, children ages 6-18 \$3.50, children under 6 and members free. A catalog with color illustrations of exhibition works is \$20. For information, call 412-454-6000.

Collins extended

British artist Phil Collins' "the world won't listen" -- two video hours of people in cities like Istanbul and Bogota performing karaoke versions of The Smith's songs -- has been extended through July 8 at Carnegie Museum of Art.



Pittsburgh artist Darlene Durrwachter Rushing originally created the "drip" bead form she uses in this necklace, "A Sea Change," for a commission by the Pittsburgh Opera.

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