

The Art of Seeing

By: David Graeber

Years ago a wise sixth grade teacher named Miss Tuffy challenged her students with this question, “You look, but do you really see?” Her class assignment for students was to walk around their village later that September day and to make a list of all the interesting places, people, and wildlife they saw. “Note details,” she said. They were to report their findings back to her the following morning.

A friend told me about this remarkable educator, Marjorie Tuffy, who had the knack of making an unruly group of students love learning. Honestly, I wish I’d been in her class, for opportunities to travel and explore have always inspired me. Of one thing I’m certain, being a keen observer is essential to the art of paperweight creation.

Whether visiting my daughter, Karen, who currently is a Senior Airman E-4 in the U. S. Air Force, encountering a Mako Shark while fishing off the coast of Cape May, New Jersey, or biking in September through southern New Jersey’s countryside on the 85-mile “Bike MS: City to Shore Ride 2017,” I continue to discover beauty in our world. These experiences are refreshing, and once back in my Westmont, New Jersey studio, I experiment with new ways to capture the essence of special moments.

My newest series, “Fruits of Discovery”, was inspired by this past May’s visit that my wife, Sandra, and I paid to Karen when she was stationed at Sigonella Naval Air Station near the coastal city of Catania, Sicily. Karen, with the help of her interpreter, Isabella, served as our tour guide as we wandered through the city’s



Figure 1: David, Karen, and Sandra Standing in front of Mt. Etna.

market stalls, enjoyed breakfasts highlighted by delicious granita (Italian-style flavored ice) and brioche, and later in the day cooled off with refreshing lemon drinks.

Here we stood in the shadow of Mount Etna [Figure 1], a still-active volcano that last erupted on 16 March 2017! In the mornings, we would find our car covered with volcanic ash. We know this as pumice that we use to polish our glass art.

Recreation of the delicate blossoms, leaves, and fruit of blood oranges and lemons [Figures 2 - 5] are the centerpieces of my Fruits of Discovery Series. Always I strive to provide accurate detail, an approach that my mentors - including the late George Vail, Paul Stankard, and William Marlin - instilled in me. Thinking of the lessons I’ve learned from these artists, I



Figure 2: David, Karen, and Sandra standing in front of a lemon tree.

experimented with various shades of crushed yellow glass to create a shade of yellow that captures the color and texture of lemons.



Figure 4: Lemon weight on transparent green ground . 3 1/4" diameter.



Figure 3: Blood orange weight on azure blue ground. 3 1/4" diameter.

My mentors, especially George Vail and Paul Stankard, have emphasized the importance of continuing education if my work is to remain



Figure 5: Mini lemon weight with robin egg ground. 2 1/4" diameter.



Figure 6: William Gudenrath's Venetian glass blowing class at Corning Museum.

fresh and relevant. With this in mind, I applied for and received the 2015 Sunny Lu Peer Memorial Scholarship, a generous grant given in Sunny's memory by the Paperweight Collectors Association of Texas, Inc. This award made it possible for me to attend the week long workshop, "An In-Depth Introduction to Venetian Techniques" given at The Studio at Corning Glass Museum in Corning, New York [Figure 6]. Directed by William Gudenrath, an authority on historical glassworking techniques and Resident Advisor at The Studio, I was introduced to the Venetian style of glass blowing used to create goblets or tumblers.

I discovered that the art of Venetian style glass blowing is demanding. My particular interest was to learn how to create a pedestal foot and a merese. The merese is a decorative piece that connects a goblet to the foot. Ideally, a goblet or tumbler should be light weight. Connecting a weight to a merese and foot, as I've learned, is challenging because the weight is relatively heavy [Figure 7].

Once back in my workshop, my challenge was connecting the weight to the hot merese and foot. My solution has been to create each individual piece and then to have them assembled



Figure 7: Lilac bouquet pedestal weight with merese. 8" high.

by expert cutters, Jim Poore of Massachusetts and James Shaw of Oregon. The finished products, two tier pedestal weights, are the most ambitious pieces that I make [Figure 8].

Currently, I am substituting a mini-weight rather than a traditional glass merese between the larger weight and the pedestal [Figure 9]. This allows me to include more visual information in each piece. Yes, this is time consuming; however, I'm looking forward to designing more unique one of a kind pedestal weights that incorporate traditional-style three or four paperweights in one of my two tier pedestal creations.

It is always a joy for me to join with fellow paperweight artists and art collectors in efforts to better the larger community. Hurricanes Harvey and Irma provided such an opportunity. Thanks to the organization of L. H. Selman Ltd. in Chicago, participants in



Figure 8: Lilac and chrysanthemum bouquet 2 tier pedestal weight with gold ruby base. 8" high.



Figure 9: Spring Bouquet 2 tier pedestal weight. 8" high.



Figure 10: Asian Rose in bamboo. 3 1/4" diameter.

the "Glass for Life" auction were able to raise \$12,690.00 in a 48-hour period [Figure 10]. Proceeds went to a number of organizations to help affected residents of Texas and Florida.

Closer to home, I was a member of team Loan Logics captained by Brian K. Fitzpatrick, my brother-in-law, in the "Bike MS: City to Shore Ride 2017". The ride's overall financial goal is \$6,000,000.00 to be raised by 31 October 2017. It will be contributed to medical research in the fight against this debilitating disease.

Looking back over the past four years since my 2013 PCA article, I am reminded that my children are now young adults. Kyler, a Haddon Township High School graduate, is mechanically gifted and currently is employed as a diesel mechanic for Campbell Trucking in Pitman, New Jersey. He is a certified Emergency Medical Technician as well as a firefighter for Westmont Fire Company No. 1.



Figure 11: Attending Nellis Air Force Base Air Show.

Kevin graduated from Haddon Township High School this past spring, and is currently attending my alma mater, Camden County College. His future will very likely be computer oriented in the area of graphic design or computer gaming.

Both young men joined Sandra and me as well as family and friends for a trip to Nellis Air Force Base located in southern Nevada. There, on Friday, November 10, Karen, now based at Nellis, gave us a private tour of some of the amazing aircraft, including the MQ-9 drone that was included in the Aviation Nation 2017 Air and Space Expo. [Figure 11].

Obviously my family and friends continue to be my “rock” and my inspiration. Looking ahead to 2018, I will be contributing to the Camden County College Alumni Show scheduled to open in January. In addition, always there will be the pleasure of assisting Paul Stankard [Figure 12], hosting fellow artists, creating weights that capture the essence of our natural world, and lending a helping hand wherever I can.



Figure 12: Paul Stankard visiting my studio and working at my bench.

To Learn More:

More of David Graeber’s work can be seen on his website www.davidgraeber.com.

About the Author:

A life-long “Jerseyman,” David Graeber honed his craft under the watchful eye of teachers, mentors, and friends that included Paul Stankard, the internationally acclaimed glass artist who encouraged him to strike out on his own in 2009. He continues to create his wonderful glass paperweights in his studio in Westmont, New Jersey.

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