



Boro News Newsletter

October / November

Issue: 23

2003 Wind Down

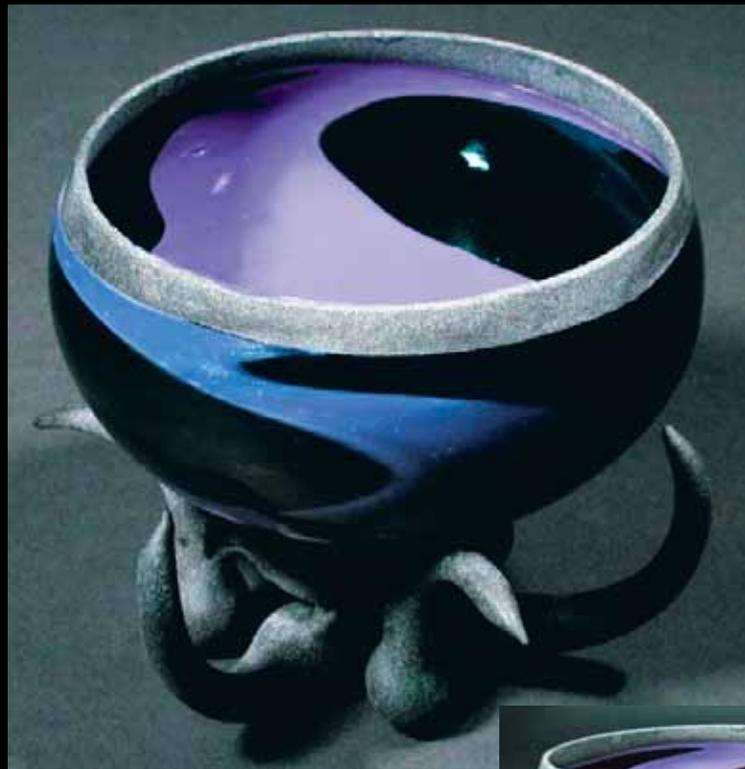
As the year 2003 winds down, we are preparing our final newsletter for this year--the results of which you see. We have taken the opportunity to go in a few different directions: a piece of art that demonstrates the skill and versatility of an artist; a unique use for colored borosilicate glass; and an article about ourselves. In the course of preparing this newsletter, we went back to the roots as well as past newsletters. We have migrated far from the original newsletter of January 1999. The first newsletters promoted Northstar's products, new colors, and seasonal specials. Other newsletters have focused on activities at Northstar, and on our color groups with suggestions on how that group may best respond to being worked. Frits and powders have been promoted, and we have promoted colored borosilicate glass in general as well as the artists using this medium. We believe them to be educational, promotional and fun. If you have a thought as to a different focus for an upcoming newsletter, please let us know by e-mail:

customerservice@northstarglass.com.

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Featured Artist: Ivan Barrow



This bowl by Ivan Barrow (5" x 5.5") is made with NS-55 Periwinkle overlaid with NS-75 Indigo Aventurine. The black is NS-76 Onyx. The lip of the bowl and the stand are also NS-76 Onyx, which have been sandblasted rough.



Ivan's work is displayed at Nebula Glass Studios, Bellingham, WA 98225 Tel No.: 360-738-7005 E-Mail: nebulaglass@comcast.net

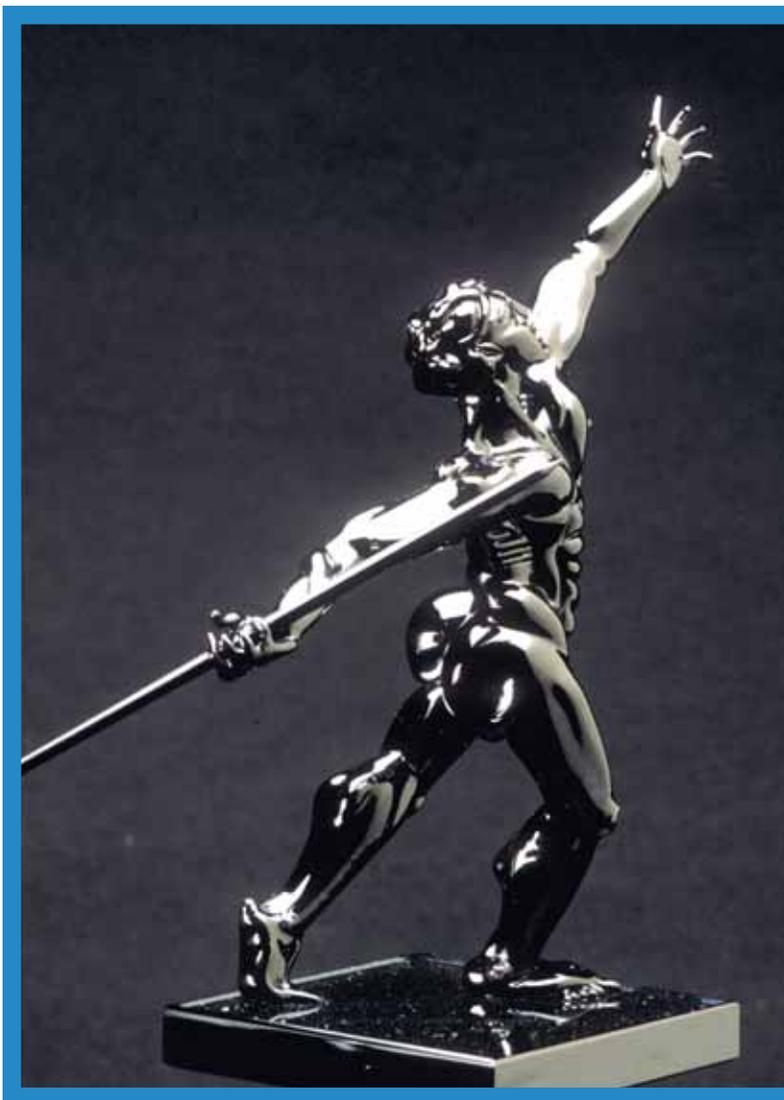
Photographs by Scott Melnick □

Milon Townsend: *Semiotics & the idea that Form Follows Function*

Images: 'Reconciliation', from Glass Art ad; 'Javelin Thrower'; one of Roger's goblets with small feet; a Tidal Pool piece; sculptural scent bottle; body language sculpture

This will be the final segment in this 3-part series on design. I am grateful to Northstar Glassworks for providing this forum for sharing some of the ideas that I have learned over the years. I hope that some of these thoughts will strike a chord with artists working in glass, and shed a little light on the process of designing good work.

If you have followed the history of the development of colored borosilicate glass, then you know that this sculpture was, in fact, about something else entirely. I understood at the time, however, that to most people unaware of our relatively narrow field, it would represent racial harmony. This sculpture is now a part of the permanent display of a museum devoted to liberty, respect and unity, because of the semiotics that the piece carries.



What are semiotics? What the heck is that about? It is a very simple concept. A given society, or group of people, are conditioned to understand that a certain image or color or phrase means a certain thing. For example, look at this image. The peach colored hand, in combination with the black colored hand, raises the image of two races uniting, or reconciling, or working together. We connect the act of shaking hands with harmony, respect, and unity.



So, semiotics are the emotional, societal baggage that a certain image, or color, or title, or association of images carries with it. You need to at least be aware of this aspect of your artwork, and make artistic choices accordingly. Some artists try to pretend that this dynamic doesn't exist, or isn't important. This naturally leads toward a widespread misunderstanding of the work. I think it is much better to use this to your

This piece is made of black glass, because I am attracted to the color and the aesthetic of black. It is entitled 'Javelin Thrower'. The idea of naming it 'Spearchucker' briefly crossed my mind, but I realized that some people would take that as a pejorative, and that wasn't where I wanted to go with the piece.

advantage, than to willfully ignore it, and not succeed in communicating what you are really saying with the work. (cont. page 3)

The entire concept of semiotic awareness, and that you make conscious choices when making your work, implies that you know what the work is about, what you want to say. If the only thing that you take away from this series of articles is the knowledge that you are going somewhere with your art, that you are expressing something specific, and that you make your artistic choices accordingly, you will have gained something worthwhile.

Form follows function. This is not hard to understand. For example, if we are making a goblet, it needs to have a cup on the top, and a foot on the bottom. A chess set requires 32 pieces, certain heights in relation to each other, and they need to fit within the squares of the board. A pipe has to have a mouthpiece, a stem and a bowl. A perfume bottle has to have a stopper, and a paperweight must have a flat surface on the bottom so that it does not roll off the table or desk. These are ordinary examples of how the shape and design of the object is determined, at least to a degree, by the way that the object will be used - its function.

This 'Tidal Pool' paperweight, part of the series of pieces that I produced in collaboration with Ryan Higgins, has the figurative elements on the outside of the weight. Traditional paperweights have the ornamentation on the inside, encased within transparent or clear glass. Although Ryan and I noticed a degree of unease with this new approach to the form, among paperweight collectors and dealers, the pieces were well received.

This is one of the reasons that part of the classical definition of 'fine' art is that it must be non-functional. The idea behind this is that if the artist has to subordinate his or her design to the function of the object, then he or she is not fully free to express the inner idea or emotion driving the creation of the piece. The artist will be constrained by working within the parameters of the function of the piece.

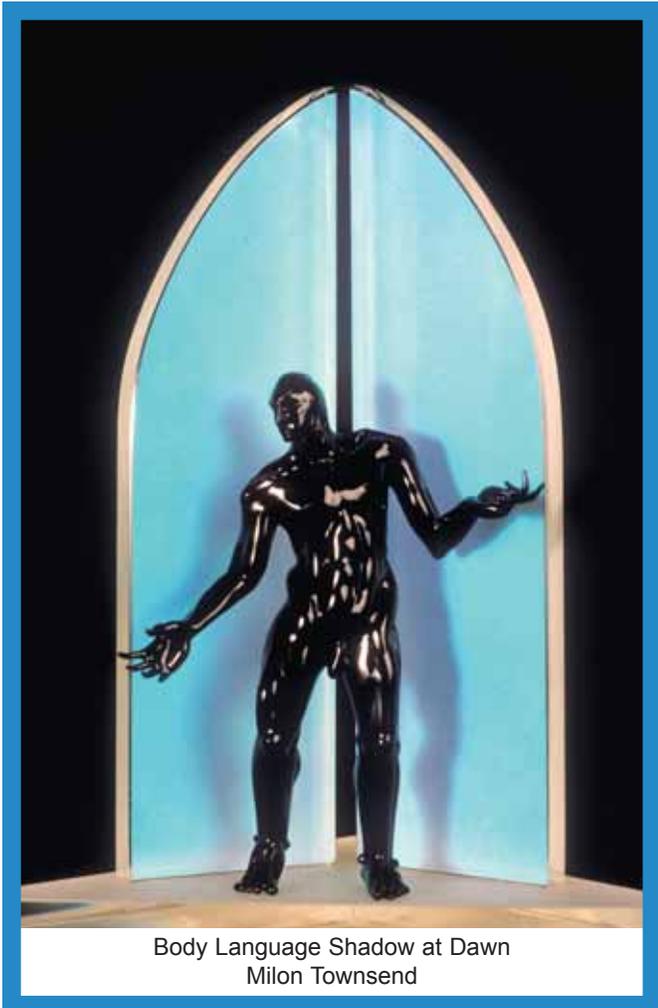
Here's another function that needs to be considered, especially when working with glass - shipping! If we cannot create a safe and effective packing and delivery



system for our work, then we cannot successfully sell it. We need to either design packing for the work, or design the work to be safely shipped. This would be an obvious artistic compromise, but does need to be honestly dealt with.

There's another largely unacknowledged function - sales. If we want to successfully sell our work to certain groups of customers, then our work needs to conform to their understanding of that type of work. If it does not, and we want to continue making the work, then we need to provide our customers with a greater understanding of why our work should be important to them. One obvious example, of the concession of form to the function of sales, is evidenced in the making of smaller objects to sell at a lower price point to a greater number of clients. It might mean making objects in blue for south Florida, and in reddish tones for the Southwest. We can push the envelope of the category, but once we depart to a significant extent, we must honestly admit that the form of the objects we make no longer serve the function of connecting with the group of clients that purchase that type of object. (cont. page 4)

As a footnote in this newsletter, we want you to be aware that we will be closed for the Thanksgiving Holiday during the entire week of November 24 through November 28 and for the Christmas Holiday from December 22 through January 2, 2004. Distributors should be planning their ordering accordingly, so that shipments will be made to meet your needs. Also, during these periods, we will be listening to our answering machine to respond to urgent situations.



Body Language Shadow at Dawn
Milon Townsend

make potential customers compare it to other objects within that category - a semiotic response. For example, if I use a figure as a part of a perfume bottle, I will not be able to sell it for as much as a very similar figure that is part of a sculpture. 'Sculpture' carries more perceived value or importance than 'scent bottle', even though the work involved may be similar or the same. 'Pipe' carries the semiotic baggage of all pipes, no matter how remarkable an object it may be. It is a human tendency to weigh, categorize, measure and compare. I think you'll find more success in working around this than trying to change it. □



Sculptural Scent Bottle
Milon Townsend

Occasionally, the relation of form to function has semiotic connotations. Note the small size of the foot on this goblet by Roger Parramore. I asked him why he made it that way, since it seemed to be impractical and unstable. He explained to me that this design characteristic is specific to Italian goblets of a certain

time period. By making the foot so small, it made the goblet very tipsy, especially when it was filled with wine. This was the host's subtle way of indicating that he could afford to have the goblet tip and break, and also afford to easily replace them. This casual, careless approach to finely made, delicate objects was intended to simply the owner's wealth and substance. In this way, the form (small foot on the goblet) followed the function (making the goblet easy to knock over). Thus, small footed goblets came to represent personal wealth (semiotic meaning), within that particular society and time period.



Goblet
Roger Parramore

You should also be aware that making an object functional will

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www.northstarglass.com

Northstar Glassworks Has Been Re-formulated!

Over the past 18 months, change has been the key focus at Northstar. Not only have we introduced many new and exciting colors; we have aggressively strived to improve just about every existing color in the Northstar pallet. Some re-formulations have been nothing more than minor adjustments while others have involved radical changes with regard to the original recipe. However, before the color re-formulations could take place, the company itself had to undergo some changes. As with the color formulas, some of the changes were minor and some were major.

A key decision point involved the practice of direct sales. As the colored borosilicate market continued to develop, Northstar had to decide whether it was in business to sell and market directly to the end users or was it in business to concentrate on the production of a cost competitive, quality product to include research and development driven by market input. Obviously, we choose to concentrate on manufacturing and thus began to establish a nationwide distribution network. The transition has been slow and sometimes painful for both Northstar and the end users. But, once into the mission, the additional focus being put forth regarding product quality, workability, and manufacturing flexibility has been quite evident.

Northstar also had to establish internal goals and objectives consistent with the concepts of strategic manufacturing and a formal product distribution channel using outside entities. We began to evaluate the necessary skill set of the organization with regard to these goals and objectives with a strong focus on

to be a positive influence in the market versus a roadblock to the incredible innovation being demonstrated regarding techniques, application, and overall growth. A critical theme to the entire undertaking was and still is based on a very simple belief: once we think we have achieved our goals, it is time to refocus and start the process all over again as there is always opportunity to improve.

Our new goals and objectives constitute the bulk of the effort over the last months specific to Northstar and how we choose to conduct business as a company. We understand and accept that there have been mistakes made since instituting a new direction for the company. Our challenge is to take responsibility for these actions, correct them whenever possible, and continue the change process utilizing the lessons learned. We will measure success with hard facts and market results, not by fancy phrases and circular rhetoric.

The positive results have had a significant influence in the continued emergence and growth of the colored borosilicate market. As with any developing market segment, some will look for the quick and easy profit regardless of the overall impact. Northstar Glassworks is committed to being a positive and supportive entity to the market through the production of a quality, cost competitive product. The success of the many artists is as integral a part of Northstar's success; as is the

Some of the goals and objectives are as follows:

Refine the existing borosilicate color pallet

Continue the development of new colors utilizing the lessons learned as a result of the re-formulation process

Offer a fully compatible line of colors

Support the different educational programs/classes being offered

Improve the technical support to both the distribution network and the end users

Significantly improve customer service, product quality, and overall market exposure

Listen and constructively use feedback as the basis for future actions

production, customer service, color research, and product development. This included the concept of continuous improvement at all levels of the company. The organization had to begin to transform into a dynamic entity, evolving at the same or faster pace as the market being served. Quite simply, Northstar had

achievement of our internal objectives, belief in our core values, continuous improvement, and the re-formulation process whether color or company. '

This last year and a half has been a mixture of very positive events and some that have challenged us all:

Activity by governmental agencies negatively impacting one of the core beginnings of the colored borosilicate market.

Low quality, cheap imports attacking both the artists and the color manufacturers not for the benefit of the market, but for pure profit with little concern over the long term negative impact

Interference in the market dynamics by individuals no longer part of the movement with little regard to the destructive nature of their actions

The continued development of new torches and lampworking supplies to match not only the growth in the traditional techniques and application, but also the developing interest in the areas of beads, sculpture, and vessels

A fully compatible green

Process improvements reducing the occurrences of stones, air, and divit in the colored rods

Changes to the refractive index of the base glass to improve the vibrancy of the different colors

Adjustment of the working, annealing, and strain points (temperatures) of certain colors for improved workability promoting use in new and more complicated applications with regard to the world of colored borosilicate art

Reduced color variation both within a batch and from batch to batch

The beginning of an understanding of not only the different chemical reactions taking place during the melting process, but also the order (hierarchy) in which they occur giving rise to further improvements in quality and color intensity for all techniques

Refinement of the process changes necessary to transfer the success of a compatible green to the other C.O.E. sensitive colors

BoroStrike Lures: A new use for borosilicate glass

Through research and testing the BoroStrike lures have evolved into a product with high performance. The lure is being tested by Coastal Angler Magazine and Saltwater Sportsman Magazine. The product testing editor says "the lure looks great in the water". He also landed a Cobia during testing. Off shore, the lure has been tested for deep sea trolling, in which a 150 pound marlin was landed. They were so excited with the BoroStrike 5 1/2 inch Saltwater Slayer, that they ordered an 8 inch version and a 12" version. The cone design

The logo for BoroStrike Lures features the brand name in a bold, italicized, sans-serif font. "BORO" is stacked above "STRIKE", which is above "LURES". A stylized arrow graphic points to the right, underlining the word "LURES".

cuts through weeds without getting tangled. At faster trolling speeds the opening in the front brings air through the lure and holds it in the dual layer skirt. When the lure drops back below the surface the stir creates a bubbles trail, attracting large game fish in the same manner as a "smoker lure".

The pricing was able to stay within the high side of normal lure prices. While this lure was designed for trolling, it also can replace the use of jig lures in shore. □

Web Page, under construction; www.borostrikelures.com

