

"Images Captured in Glass" by Ken Rosenfeld

I have always been attracted to small precious objects. To me, it is perfectly natural and logical to work with the paperweight form. The slick, glassy surface and reassuring weight of the piece are very satisfying. The circular shape is one of the most basic and primal in existence. The idea of sealing an aesthetically created image under a dome of glass has a magical quality to it. How can it be floating, suspended in the middle of the sphere? The curved surface adds to the mystery, because one can never tell exactly how big or how small the encased image is due to magnification. One has visual access to the work, but it can never be touched; it is sealed forever!

I prefer to work with figurative images. I want the viewer to identify with the subject matter as something familiar. I am not interested in presenting random bubbles, patterns or swirls as design elements; but, rather, attaining a distinct, sharp rendering in glass. This is part of the challenge--to create bright designs using only glass. Meeting this challenge successfully is definitely a measure of skill.

Glass is a material unlike any other, and working with it is a learned skill. Along with an aptitude and reasonable amount of dexterity, there is no substitute for experience. One also has to have a tremendous ability to withstand frustration. There have been countless hours of intense labor that seem to have been entirely fruitless. Seemingly endless examples with cracked flowers or terrible bubbles will fully test the artist's determination. However, when a piece turns out as planned it is very gratifying. In it, I have created a personal vision of color, balance and clarity--an object of beauty that with reasonable care will last for generations.

I have many considerations on my mind when I sit down to design a new paperweight. The most important aspect for me is color. Beautiful, rich colors transmitted through clear glass have a wonderful quality unlike any other art form. I want the color to draw in the viewer and to hold his attention.

Next in importance is the composition. Does it have balance? Does it flow and fit within its space? Do all the elements of the design blend together? I am interested in creating images that are balanced and complete. The viewer must be satisfied that all of the elements are present. There should be nothing omitted and not too much squeezed into the piece either.

Next is detail and level of execution. Is there sufficient detail to hold the viewer's interest? Often times, this can only be achieved by a high level of craftsmanship. Sometimes, it can take the viewer hours to discover these small, hidden details. The overall look of the piece is always dependent upon consistent, high caliber workmanship.

My approach to my work evolves as I gain experience. As my skills expand, my

technique improves; and this in turn influences my design choices. Attempting more ambitious pieces is tempered with the knowledge that some things just will not work. For example certain glass cannot be put directly adjacent to others because they have a coefficient of expansion that is too great and would cause the piece to crack. As glass is heated and cooled, it expands and contracts. Different chemicals and oxides used to create different colors add to and change these coefficients, and therefore make certain kinds of glass incompatible.

Other technical considerations must be taken into account as well. Often times, several different kinds of glass must be combined and overlaid to achieve the desired effect. What appears to be a simple pink flower with yellow stamens, for example, is not composed of just two colors but can have as many as six or seven colors in it. Virtually every component used as a design element in my work is made up of several different kinds of glass. A typical paperweight may contain as many as twenty different colors of glass!

The technique of manipulating glass rods in the flame of a torch and then encasing them can produce a very profound and powerful effect. I believe this process is one of the highest and best uses of glass as an art form. It is a natural and logical evolution of glass art and for me, personally, a pure joy!