



# Art Alliance for Contemporary Glass

Summer 2007 Newsletter

## Louisville: *Renaissance* City of Glass

by Merrily Orsini

Look no further for a place that combines a warm, friendly atmosphere with one of the most progressive and cutting-edge contemporary glass experiences in the nation. Louisville, Kentucky, located in the heart of the Bluegrass state, is a growing oasis for artisans, collectors and craftsmen. More than just the home of the Kentucky Derby and fine bourbon, Louisville now also houses three hot glass studios spanning a 16 block stretch of a renovated and bustling downtown, many galleries and a variety of instructional opportunities across a wide range of glass related skills.

The Glassworks Building at 815 West Market Street was the first venue to house a hot shop in Louisville. The culmination of a dream by Ken von Roenn, a world renowned architect and artist working in sculptural glass structures, Glassworks houses a collaborative hot shop for artists and a retail outlet for their work. Tours of the renovated facility introduce and educate the public to hot

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*(l. to r.) Fundraiser Christopher Miller, and collectors Bonnie Roth, Adele Leight, Rick Heath and Leonard Leight at a preview party for the Cressman Center Gallery in November 2006.*

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glass, frameworking (Mark Payton) and architectural glass at von Roenn's business, Architectural Glass Art, Inc.

Flame Run Hot Glass Studio and Gallery at 828 East Market Street is a 12,500 square foot space that houses a hot shop, cold shop, sandblasting room, sculpture and mold making room, wood shop and welding area in addition to a gallery and a spacious 2<sup>nd</sup> floor viewing area with an enviable



Flame Run Glass Studio and Gallery, anchoring Louisville East Market Street Art's District, is the largest glass blowing studio in the region and hosts visiting glass artists from around the world.

collection of Louisville Slugger bats holding up the guard rail overlooking the glassblowing area. Smack dab in between these two hot shops is the University of Louisville's Cressman Center for Visual Arts, with a brand new state-of-the-art hot shop that on February 9 invited the public to its grand opening. Proud to be a leader in the creative arts community, the university created the center to teach the next generation of glass artists to express themselves in new and creative ways. Renowned glass artist and celebrated instructor Ché Rhodes is proud to lead the school's glass program, which benefits from the center's hot shop, furnaces, ovens and cold glass facilities. The center also boasts a glass sculpture studio and a seminar room where students learn technique from visiting artists.



Professor Ché Rhodes (seated) and assistant created the ceremonial goblet for christening the University of Louisville's Cressman Center hot shop on February 10, 2007.

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The center wasn't built halfheartedly. Even the look and layout of the studio contains the passion and dedication of artists who truly love the craft. Rhodes designed it, and his students were eager to lend a hand

– and some sweat – to see that his dream became a reality. And, thinking green, during the winter the glass furnaces help heat the building and are even the source of the facility's hot water!

Louisville is definitely becoming a destination for contemporary glass art, and that did not happen by chance. It is a realization of a vision by one of Louisville's young talents. Probably the smartest move Ken von Roenn made when he opened Glassworks was to hire Brook Forrest White, Jr. to manage the hot shop. It was that move to Louisville from his Glassbrook studio in Danville that really was the impetus for the development of his vision of Louisville as housing a glass community comparable to Seattle and Murano. Under the tutelage of Stephen Rolfe Powell, Kentucky's premier glass artist, White learned to blow glass, to love glass and to appreciate the possibilities that introducing glass to a community could produce.

Flame Run gallery displays the creative and avant-garde works of some of the world's most talented emerging glass artists like Susie Slabaugh, a co-owner of Flame Run, and a new convert to the 95-year-old Swedish glassblowing technique called Graal. Slabaugh is a Lexington native who was drawn to glass artistry at the Pilchuck Glass School in Seattle. She most recently studied with Peter Houk, who runs the glass program at MIT.



Susie Slabaugh gathering glass at Flame Run Glass Studio and Gallery.

Flame Run offers public demonstrations and hosts artists such as Hiroshi Yumano, John Miller, William Gudenrath, Jim Mongrain, Ché Rhodes, Karen Willenbrink-Johnsen, Thomas Spake, Eoin Breadon, Ona Magaro, Katie Creyts and Matt Urban.

But this is Louisville. You don't have to go to a studio or a gallery to admire sculpture and vessels from your favorite glass artists. Two Stephen Powell sculptures adorn either side of the entry to the glass atrium in Jewish Hospital's Medical East facility, with a wall housing the hospital's glass collection separating the main lobby from the medical areas of the building. You wouldn't expect to see glass in a hospital, but it certainly provides an enriching experience for their patients.

Make your way to Louisville. You're sure to find a friendly eye and a lot to look at in Kentucky's Renaissance city of glass.

Merrily Orsini and her husband, Rick Heath, live in Louisville and collect contemporary glass art.