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Marc Kornbluh, Carnival Bobbin, detail.
Photo courtesy of ISGB.

Below: Constance Abuan,
Sea Turtle, Photo by
Doug Baldwin.



For the Next Generation

An In-Depth Peek Behind the Scenes of the International Denizli Glass Biennale

by Dr. Julie Anne Denton

Modern Denizli is an industrious city in the southwest of Turkey that is relatively close to the coast on the Mediterranean Sea. The province is home to the world heritage sites of Pamukkale, famous for its mineral-rich hot springs, and Hierapolis, an ancient Greek city of great archaeological importance. The city is also host to the International Denizli Glass Biennale. The festival has been running since 2011, which makes the May 2023 incarnation the seventh biannual festival to date.

Teaching Glass to Nonglass Professionals

We caught up with Karma Design Studio, the thought engine and driving force behind the Biennale, to find out more about this unlikely mecca for glass and how it all began. After speaking with Karma founders Omur and Fatih Duruerk, we discovered that the studio was established in 2006. In the Turkish language, Karma means mixture, a word that Omur and Fatih found appropriate because he initially trained as an industrial engineer and she studied literature. “We worked with glass as a hobby, but after attending the Glass Furnace in Istanbul, which is styled on the Pilchuck school model, we became hooked on glass and wanted to work with it professionally.”

Karma’s philosophy is to teach glass to nonglass professionals to enlighten them to its potential as a medium for self-expression while developing and empowering the glass art movement in Turkey. “We pour love, hard work, and charity into Karma Design Studio. That ties in with the Eastern interpretation of the word because we see daily that we reap what we have sown.”

*Flameworked rooster
sculptures created by Gianni Toso
at the second Biennale in 2013.
Photo by Zeki Akakça.*



Aysem Otuk and Vahide Kaya during a glassblowing presentation. Photo by Cihan Çelebi.

Discovering the Artistic Potential of Glass

In Turkey, the average person imagines painting or marble sculpture when the word *art* is used. “From the youngest child of seven to the oldest of elders, we endeavor to educate the public to the artistic potential of glass. There is a huge industry in Turkey selling factory glass all over the world. That is why people only regard glass as a utilitarian material here.”

One such company the rest of the world may have heard of is Paşabahçe, which is an important part of Turkey’s identity. It is one of the 46 factories that the founding father of the republic of Turkey and its first president, Atatürk, created and opened during the modernization of Turkey between 1923 and 1938.

Atatürk is regarded as one of the most important political leaders of the 20th century and is revered by the entire Turkish nation to this day. “Paşabahçe prides itself on its handblown glass manufacturing and creation of high-end boutique industrial glassware, but they are not creating art glass. The general population here does not understand glass as an artistic material. If they do use their imaginations, they imagine something in clear without color. That is where our mission to prioritize education comes from.”

The Ozdeniz family’s collaborative flame-worked grouping with decorative floral candleholder, grasshopper, and bee.
Photo by Cihan Çelebi.





Eylul Ozturk admiring the glass enameling and detailed flameworking on a Shamanic-themed costume.



Nur Ozel at the 2023 Glass Fashion Show with a live orchestra modeling a framework-detailed baroque style costume. Photo by Akgun Akova.

Breaking Down Intellectual Borders

Given Karma's mandate as a company, it is clear where the desire to create a glass biennale originated. The Biennale brings glass to the people, and equally important, it brings national and international art glass to the glass artists of Turkey who also attend the festival in droves. Glassmaking is often a very solitary trade, and it is clear that there is a need for festivals and conferences so artists can get together to see what is currently happening internationally in their topic, swap ideas, and fill each other up with new inspiration and joy.

"For us, it is also about the intercultural exchange, as our country has such historical significance. When we invite international artists, they are inspired by the cultural landscape, plus they get to experience the hospitality, sincerity, and enthusiasm of the Turkish people. International artists gain this special experience in exchange for their knowledge of glass. Turkey can seem very foreign to English-speaking Christian nations, and the biennale creates a way to embrace differences through a common goal. The biennale is a form of diplomatic/international border opening. It also invites idea exchange in a safe space and makes the everyday spectacular."

Biennale Beginnings

It is not a surprise that the 2023 Glass Biennale almost didn't happen due to the catastrophic earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria in February 2023, killing 60,000 people. This seismic shock was the second strongest recorded in the country since records began. "The biennale plans always start one year in advance, and our chosen theme for the 2023 biennale was *For the Next Generation*. In Turkish, the phrase "for the next generation" translates as "hand to hand," and our theme encompasses ideas of charity and support for the glass students of Turkey who will soon become artists and designers.

Unfortunately, Denizli and many other areas share a fault line with the earthquake epicenter. "We did not want to hold the festival if there was a chance of an earthquake in Denizli. At the eleventh hour, it was confirmed that we could go ahead with this year's festival without worry of any harm coming to our visitors. Once sure that the biennale could continue, we requested our Turkish glass artists to donate one or two pieces of their work to the biennale. In honor of the earthquake victims, we organized a

glass auction that was held on the final day of the festival. This first ever biennale auction raised 221,000 Turkish lira, which equates to \$9,300. The money raised from 82 works of art gifted by 50 different artists was donated to aid the displaced."

A Door Opens for a New Vision

Glass biennales are costly events to organize and present, which is why Karma has forged a deep reciprocal partnership with the Denizli Metropolitan Municipality, otherwise known as the local government. The biennale is completely free of charge for all visitors regardless of origin, and the municipality covers every cost incurred by the biennale. "Since the beginning, the municipality has believed in us, and for them this is a service to the community of Denizli and a service to the wider glass student population. Many people come to visit us with their entire families, and for some it is the first time they have seen an art exhibition. Exhibiting has been a part of the biennale mandate for every festival since its launch."

Omur is a lampworker and Fatih is a kiln caster. The biennale concentrates on lampworking primarily, but in the interest of diversity it features at least three other glass disciplines. Since the biennale's inception, it always features kiln casting and engraving demonstrations. This year's event also featured demonstrations in glassblowing and fusing. "If we don't create a physical demonstration, we include techniques in the conference in the form of a lecture. This year we included a lecture describing the process of sandcasting in detail. We invite five international artists to demonstrate lampworking and three additional international artists to demonstrate each of the other chosen glass techniques for the biennale."

It is somewhat unusual in the twenty-first century for engraving to play such a regular role in a contemporary conference, which begs the question why engraving is a key player in the DNA of the biennale. "In the nineteenth century, elite Ottoman families and the non-Muslims of Constantinople, which has been known as Istanbul since 1930, led a cultural transformation that gently rippled throughout Turkey. That led to a demand for imported glass and porcelain from France and Bohemia. Czech crystal was very popular in Turkey in Ottoman times, and our artisans learned to engrave and replicate this modern European glass themselves. Since then, engraving has become a respected tradition in Turkey."

A Typical Glass Biennale in Denizli

The glass biennale lasts for four full days, and during this time there are live demonstrations plus conference lectures each day. Omur waxes lyrical on all the other events that take place in the conference center, home of the biennale. "During each biennale, we have a glass exhibition. This year it was the hundred-year celebration of the Turkish Republic, and in honor of this event, we invited 100 artists to exhibit at the biennale in the exhibition hall. At every biennale since its inception in 2011, we have had free trial benches for people who have never worked with glass before. At these trial benches, we urge people of all ages to create a bead. One hour later they can pick up their creation and take it home with them.

"We at Karma Design Studio believe that if you do not encounter glass on a personal level, you cannot understand how it is created, and therefore you cannot appreciate the artistry involved with this art form. For each day of the biennale, the municipality buses in 500 school students who all receive the opportunity to work on a glass torch. We are educating our customers of the future and introducing them to the beauty and mystery of glass."

The Glass Fashion Show Spectacular

Since 2021, there has been a Saturday night spectacular at the International Denizli Glass Biennale, *The Glass Fashion Show*, which was based on an original idea by lampworker Laura Donefer in 1989. Since then, the fashion event has popped up intermittently at glass artist events throughout the world. "In the previous biennale, we invited Laura Donefer to attend our first Turkish glass fashion show. She eagerly patronized the show via Zoom, as travel was difficult in 2021 due to the pandemic."

Moving on to the fashion show in 2023, it was truly a sight to behold, performed on stage with a five-piece live ensemble accompanying each new outfit made from glass. As an onlooker, it was quite clear that some of these costumes had literally taken months and perhaps a year to create in full, as many of them were either intricately detailed or technically challenging. The costumes were true labors of love, and the entire show was an incredible theatrical experience, even if you have no clue about glass.

"This year's fashion show was very professional, and the costumes were a sight to behold. The Turkish artists involved were inspired by the possibilities proffered in the 2021 incarnation. They knew what to work toward in 2023 and prepared themselves in advance. The orchestra found suitable music to play for each costume type and theme. We were very pleased with the entire result."

Fulfilling a Vision for Studio Glass in Turkey

The vision of Karma Design Studio is very clearly defined, so the all-important question is to understand what it is that Omur and Fatih wish to achieve with the biennale. "We want to facilitate a studio glass movement in Turkey. We want as many people as possible to be touched by glass and apprehend it as an accepted material in which to create art. We want to lift the veil on the long-standing perception of glass in the eyes of the masses as being utilitarian and transparent. Glass has different colors, it has diverse shapes, and when it is placed in the hands of an artist, it can transcend its origins and become something magical."

It is perhaps difficult for the international glass community to comprehend that the average person in Turkey cannot visualize glass as a colorful object, but this is the attitude of the masses. It is a long and perhaps difficult road to travel when enlightening the buying public and altering perceptions. However, Karma Design Studios is determined, and judging by the progress made already, they will do much for the studio glass movement in Turkey. Karma is following in the footsteps of *For the Next Generation* of Yilmaz Yalçinkaya, who almost single-handedly started the glass movement in Turkey by founding the Glass Furnace School, as mentioned earlier.



Gianni Toso sharing flameworking techniques at the second Biennale in 2013. Photo by Zeki Akakça.



Indonesian artist Ivan Bestari giving a recycled glass demo using recycled glass bottles. Photo by Akgun Akova.



Tom Galbraith demonstrating flameworking techniques at the fourth Biennale in 2017. Photo by Fatih Duruerk.

In hindsight, it is interesting to hear what Omur and Fatih are most proud of after reviewing the 2023 festival. "The general happiness was the most rewarding part for us. The professional artists were happy, the hobbyists were happy, the Turkish artists were happy, and the children were happy. Of course, there were problems during the festival, but nothing that we were not able to solve. After the festival, six contracts with new firms were signed. That creates bridges between the arts and business and is good for everyone concerned."

It is clear that the biennale is great for the Turkish glass movement and an inspiration for the international glass scene as a whole. The next biennale, like clockwork, will be held in May 2025. The festival is completely free of charge, and the Turkish people are so welcoming to their visitors. When making your travel plans in the next couple of years, do not forget that the International Denizli Glass Biennale is an absolute must on the world glass calendar.

GA

Omur and Fatih Duruerk Karma Design Studio

Instagram @ Omurduruerk
Instagram @ Karmatasarim
Instagram @ Denizlicambienali
Facebook @ denizlicambienali
YouTube @ Denizlicambienali



Omur Duruerk in 2021.
Photo by Akgun Akova.



Dr. Julie Anne Denton received her doctorate in the combination of sand cast and flameworked glass for artists in 2017. She has been schooled in the Italian flameworking tradition and has worked alongside some of the best flameworking and sand casting artists of the day. Settled in Zurich, Switzerland, Julie runs her design firm, www.atelier315.ch, and virtual school, www.zurichglassschool.com, from the center of the city. She works with a small team beside her who all care deeply about quality.

Julie Anne creates work that resonates beauty, workmanship, and authenticity. Her key themes are people, folklore, nature, and counterculture. She has received worldwide recognition for her storytelling skills as an artist and her technical skills as a glassmaker.

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