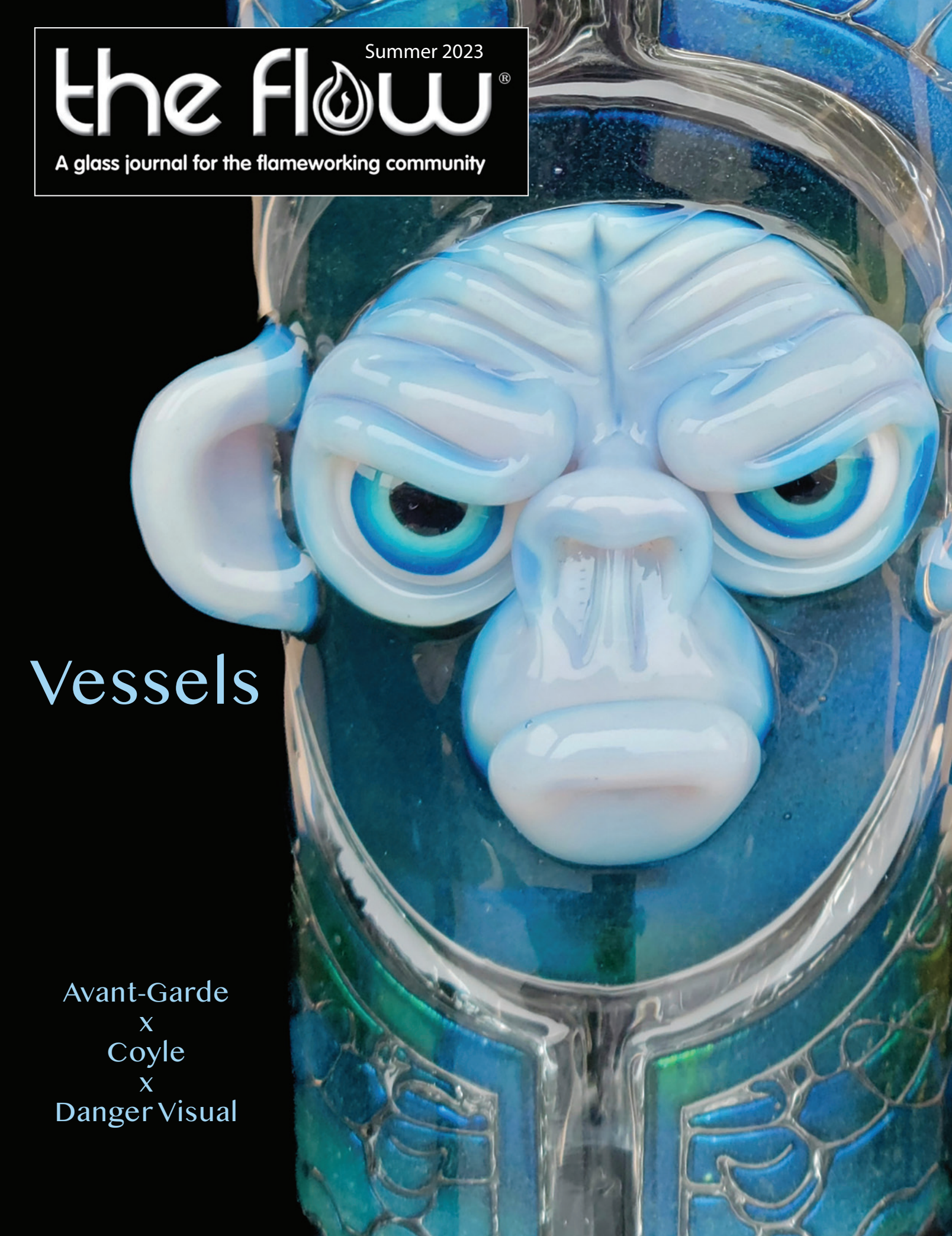




the flow®

Summer 2023

A glass journal for the flameworking community

Vessels

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Featuring the work of 18 flameworking artists

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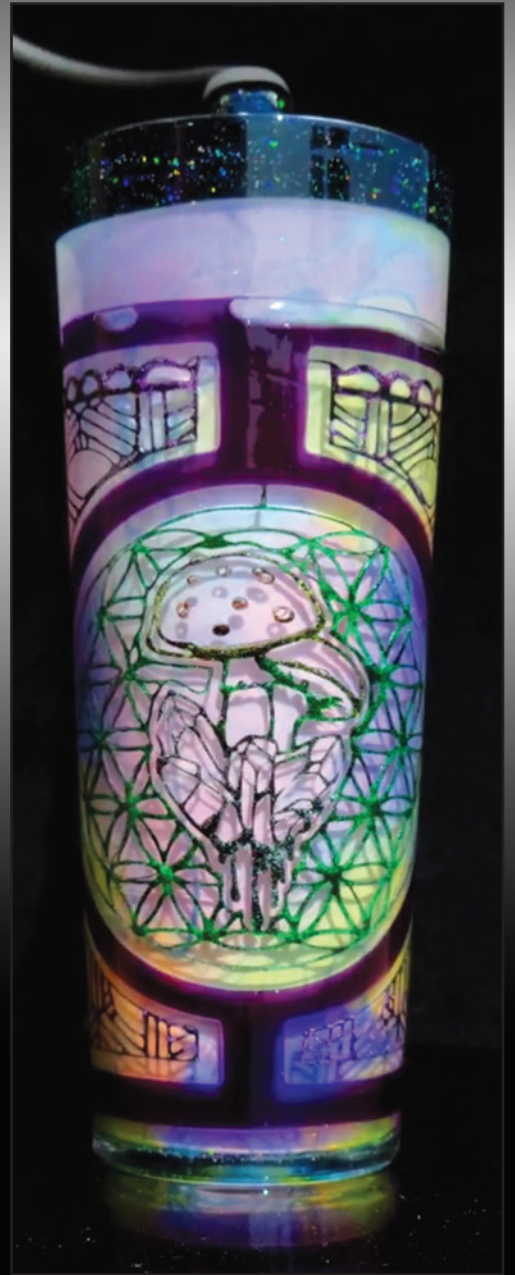




Shane Fero
www.shanefero.com
 Photo by Mary Vogel



Eric Goldschmidt
 Instagram @ericsglass



Dylan Kelley
www.avantgarde.glass
 Photo by Merry Kelley

Shane Fero



Don't Run Before You Can Walk

Floral Teapot, 15" x 10", flamedrawn hot glass, flameworked glass, sandblasted & acid-etched. Teapot gaffed by Pablo Soto. 2017. Photo by Shane Fero.

by Dr. Julie Anne Denton

Deep in the mountainous regions of North Carolina there lives a glass artist called Shane Fero. He lives and works beside the eminent Penland School of Craft. For those who have never had the pleasure to meet Shane in person, he is a genuinely benevolent man who has more than a passing resemblance to David Bowie. Shane Fero has been flameworking for fifty-three years. The Flow catches up with Shane to inquire how it all began. "I moved with my parents from Chicago to Florida when I was fourteen. We lived close to Lake Ned in Winter Haven. As I was riding my bike one day, I rode past some businesses overlooking Lake Ned, and I spied a glass shop. This shop was home to third-generation flameworker Bob Howell. I stopped and watched him create his Bohemian wares, making vessels from soft glass. For a year I kept going back to watch the beautiful spectacle until he retired and sold to my first mentors. In 1969, husband and wife team the Cokers noticed my obvious fascination and took me under their wing. At first, I was doing odd jobs until they realized I had talent, and that is where my lifelong fascination with glass and, a little later, art, began for me."

Shane has been creating vessel forms throughout his flame-working career. "I started by making bud vases, pitchers, cream and sugar sets, vases, candleholders, bells (which are just upside-down vessels) and of course goblets. In hot glass, in unison with experienced glassblowers, I create larger-than-life bottles and teapots." As well as these myriad types of vessel forms, Shane also creates special perfumers which have morphed into his *Spirit Vessel* collection. "Originally, I made functional scent bottles. Once you can blow, perfume receptacles are something you are taught early on as a flameworker. A perfume bottle involves blowing a bubble of some kind and then creating a stopper that slips through the opening in the top of the vessel. I continued to make these bottles even into the early nineties. Thereafter, I started to play with the idea of the perfumer. I began to experiment with enlarged forms that encompassed figurative, surrealistic stoppers. They had handles and I made them in thematic sets." These artworks became incredibly popular in the latter part of the 1990s and are still popular today. "However, I do not believe any of my clients used the spirit vessels functionally; they have transitioned to become collectors' items."



*Shane Fero, creating the head of a blown bird, 2020.
Photo by Zurich Glass School.*

*Above: Pastel Mist, 23" x 6-1/2", flamedrawn hot glass, flame-worked glass, sandblasted & acid-etched.
2018. Photo by Mary Vogel.*

*Left: Turquoise, 23" x 6", flamedrawn hot glass, flame-worked glass, sandblasted & acid-etched.
Bottle gaffed by Pablo Soto. 2012. Photo by Mary Vogel.*

Search For the Laws of Harmony and You Will Find Knowledge

Of course, Shane can make all and any of the aforementioned vessel forms, but there is a higher pursuit that drives him. Shane Fero's work has an integrity to it that follows a personalized artistic ideal. "In my mature career, I consider my goblets and my spirit vessels as an ongoing collection of works." Fero's work has had a consistent theme for scores of years now, based around the idea of the mystical and the mythological in combination with the surreal. Shane is particularly inspired by Egyptian mythology, and, with a name like Fero, why not! "In my younger days I loved the work of Salvador Dali, and over time that has developed." Looking at Shane's oeuvre in terms of color and shape, it has a tangential kinship with the abstract painter and surrealist fantasist Joan Miró. "His work is childlike, but the execution is superb! I like Paul Klee too, and Hundertwasser. They are fabulously inspiring artists for me and my work."



Left: Jade Teapot, 22" x 6-1/2",
flamedrawn hot glass, flameworked
glass, sandblasted & acid-etched. Tea-
pot gaffed by Pablo Soto. 2019.
Photo by Brady Connelly.



Right: Floral Goblet, 12" x 3-1/2", flam-
worked glass & acid etched. 2018.
Photo by Mary Vogel.



Dividing his time equally between glass and painting, Shane works in watercolors and acrylics. “I have always had an innate ability to visualize three-dimensional forms in terms of shape, but once I took up painting, I gained so much as a sculptor. Not only do I enjoy the process of painting, but I have found that the two-dimensional investigations I compose inform the design and colors I use in my glass works. There is an incredible interplay between painting and sculpture that fascinates me. Many of the greatest artists are adept at both disciplines. Giving the appearance of depth in a painting requires a different toolset to the mindset used when creating an object.” Painting for Fero began with the frames of his shadow box compositions. Shane paints his frames by hand to complement and create a visual interplay between the box and the frameworked components inside. “The shadow boxes are exactly how I was drawn to more serious painting. I like to keep a journal that I generally populate when I am traveling. My journal has been the birthplace for myriad initial ideas I have for my glass art.” Firstly, drawing means that one is not held hostage by the material constraints of an object, and that allows creativity to flow without restraint. Secondly, sketching can quickly visualize where three-dimensional ideas may go without having to create them all in glass. “Drawing helps to distill the good ideas and leave the mediocre ones behind.”

The Best and Shortest Road Toward Knowledge of Truth Is Nature

The main influences on Shane Fero’s work are the natural world, surrealism, and music. “Jazz is perhaps closer to what artists do. Musicians play the same songs over and over again, which is akin to the skills a visual artist uses. Jazz musicians have such amazing skill. They never play the same song in the same way; they are improvising. Just like jazz improvisation, I have collections of work, but they are never the same! I riff off my themes, developing and refining my personal skillset and design ideas constantly. Sometimes when I listen to music, and I am about to blow a piece, I will time the way I blow to coincide with the notes of the music. My reaction to the music I am listening to informs the work I am creating. My auditory response during creation is equal to my visual sensibility in apprehension.”

Fero’s blown work is different from many other flamewerkers for a couple of reasons. There are relatively few artists blowing vessels with soft glass, excepting artists like Robert Mickelson, Fred Birkhill, and Emilio Santini. When blowing with soft glass, the color palette is very different from that of borosilicate, and Shane uses color on glass the way a painter would on a canvas. Shane Fero’s go-to torch is a Bohemian crossfire that runs on gas and air. “Flamewerkers haven’t really used these torches since the 20th century, but neon workers use them still. With a little searching, one can still find these torches in the States. The crossfire can be purchased in numerous configuration settings, but mine is a twelve-jet, meaning six torch jets on either side. I use a Carlisle major burner in tandem with my crossfire to heat objects up quickly with a gas and oxygen flame, and I also use a Smith jewelers torch for small jobs, but I certainly don’t use that when I am creating vessels.”



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Bird Spirit Vessel, 12" x 3",
Flameworked glass & acid etched.
2018. Photo by Mary Vogel.

Some may find the techniques involved with making a glass vessel elude them, and Shane elucidates on the process further. "There are occasions when I may make something that does not have a foot. In this instance you take a piece of tubing, pull a double point, straighten your points so everything is in balance. Just for fun, I score my points out of 100 at this stage in the process. My double points are always in the high 90s, as I have been blowing glass for so long. Then I blow a bubble of some form, and once I am satisfied with my shape, I flatten the base of the vessel using a handheld graphite marver. Most of my vessels are made with a foot, so let's take, as an example, my *Spirit Vessels*. I make the main body of the vessel which comes down to a constricted solidified point. Once this step is complete, I make a foot bubble separately with a similar solid protrusion that attaches to the vessel. At this moment the foot is still a bubble, and thereafter I flare the foot out either with centrifugal force or with a graphite or brass reamer, or both in unison depending on what the glass is asking of me. The same techniques are utilized in the creation of a goblet form; in fact, that is essentially how all flameworked vessel forms are created without the use of a blow hose and rubber bungs."

Organization Is Impossible Unless Those Who Know the Laws of Harmony Lay the Foundation

In terms of Shane Fero's work as a teacher, he has been teaching for almost as many years as he has been making glass. Seeing as many of the glass torch greats are retiring from education, it is interesting to hear how Shane feels about teaching glass skills in the latter years of his career. "I haven't quit teaching, but now I will only travel to teach in-person at institutions I find very appealing. Traveling to teach eats a lot of time and artistic energy. Since 2020, I have been working alongside an established remote school. I teach live online courses over Zoom and those live classes have been developed into self-led learning demonstration channels for students to follow at their own pace. I think the online system is great. It's a lot less chaotic because the organization is second to none. It's a fabulous feeling when I teach a live course online because I can reach people from all over the world concurrently. The live course participants are from China to America to Australia." It's difficult to believe that teaching online is a suitable substitute for in-person teaching, and Shane retorts. "I think participants get as much from online teaching as they do from in-person teaching in terms of learning the skills needed to work with glass as an artistic medium are concerned. Participants are obviously not receiving the same in-person relationship with me that they would have in-person, but I also give private consultations over Zoom to help students personally. The beauty of online is that you have a front row seat to the demos, and you can watch the special techniques I use over and over again."

To Have Peace There Must Be Strife

A passionate teacher still, Shane ends with some practical words of wisdom to those reading *The Flow*. "For those who wish to learn the secret skills of glass-blowing and become unique artists in their own right, my first piece of advice is perseverance, obviously." He has a hearty chuckle to himself. "Just keep doing what you are doing. Many people close to me tried to dissuade me in the early days, but I just kept on because I was driven to make something from it. I enjoyed glass, and even in hard times in the earlier years, I struggled through and kept at it. Another way to survive—and this is how I did it—is to be flexible and adapt to the changing markets. The buying market is in constant flux, and adaptability is the key to success. I don't just mean adaptability in terms of the thematic concepts of my work, but also financial survival. I must understand and create what my customers want as fashions morph and develop. Change is inevitable, so why not embrace it! Finally, and perhaps most importantly, radical change of your style suggests you were not invested in the first place, so be jazz and continuously riff off your catalog of work. Here lies success. Your work needs to have conceptual depth, a storytelling power, and a mysterious element in order to become an artwork that stands the test of time and interpretation."

One Does Not Run to Reach Success and One Does Not Move to Spoil It

Over fifty-three years of a career in glass, Shane Fero has worked in production, opened a couple of galleries, presided over the American Glass Art Society, taught, and exhibited worldwide, and he has consistently developed and refined his artistic practice through the journey. This year sees Shane celebrate his Golden Retrospective Exhibition at the Bill & Patty Gorelick Galleries, North Carolina, from January 6 through December 8, 2023. "This exhibition shows seminal work from my personal collection. In the exhibition are twenty large-scale canvases, twelve of which are watercolors, twenty blown birds in soft glass, two shadowboxes, four-large scale borosilicate figures, and three hot glass and flameworked vessels."

Shane Fero's work can be found in collections both private and public. He has had over thirty-three solo exhibitions since 1992 and has participated in over 400 group exhibitions. His work can be found in over thirty museum collections including the Museum of Art & Design NY, The Corning Museum of Glass, NY, GlasMuseum, Denmark, the Museum für Glaskunst, Lauscha, Germany, and the Nijiima Contemporary Glass Museum in Japan. He is the Past-President of the Glass Art Society (GAS) and received the Lifetime Membership Award from GAS in Chicago in 2014, was honored in 2009 for Extraordinary Contribution to the Glass Art World, Salem Community College, NJ, and received the Award for Significant Contributions to the Chinese Glass Community from the Hejian Government, China, in 2017.

Next time you're in Penland and you think you just saw the ghost of David Bowie walk past you, say hello! That is the eminent glass artist Shane Fero.

www.shanefero.com



Above: Shane Fero creating a simple blown Christmas ornament in soft glass. 2020.
Photo by Zurich Glass School.



Center: Detail, Spirit Vessel and Goblet, 12" x 3",
flameworked glass & acid etched. 2018.
Photo by Mary Vogel.

Right: Bird Spirit Vessel, 12" x 3", flameworked glass
& acid etched. 2018. Photo by Mary Vogel.



Dr. Julie Anne Denton received her doctorate in 2017, in the combination of sandcast and flameworked glass. She has been schooled in the Italian flameworking tradition and has worked alongside some of the best flameworking and sandcasting artists of the day. Settled in Zürich, 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 works that resonate 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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