

King Street Concentric Review

By: John Drury

Since his eponymous Seattle glass studio opened in 1985, Benjamin Moore's hot shop on King Street has attracted a long list of major artists, including Dale Chihuly, Lino Tagliapietra, Dan Dailey, Fritz Dreisbach, Dick Marquis, Marvin Lipofsky, Therman Statom, Paul Marioni, Toots Zynsky, and Dick Weiss. A second generation of artists—including Paul Cunningham, Dante Marioni, Deborah Moore, Richard Royal, and Preston Singletary—has also chosen to fabricate work at Benjamin Moore Inc. Over more than two decades, BMI has produced an extraordinary variety of work without superimposing any discernable style. In recognition of his unique vantage point over the wide range of Studio Glass, Moore was asked to curate a group show to coincide with the Glass Art Society conference in Portland. The exhibition provided a snapshot of the range of expression possible in blown and hot-worked glass.

Richard Royal and Moore have a working relationship that dates back to the 1970s. Royal's *Tart* (2006) is a saucy example of the material's plasticity, and its size pushes the boundaries of man and equipment. For more than 20 years, all of Dan Dailey's work in glass has been made at BMI, with Moore and Royal at the helm. Dailey's *Quizzical* (2004) is a work from his "Individuals" series, and depicts a balding figure with a comical comb-over that echoes the stripes of his shirt.

Visitors to the gallery seemed most drawn to the figurative work. Sam McMillen and Erich Woll's works possess a similar sensibility, rooted in comic books. McMillen's *La La Land* (2006) is an unnerving installation of blown-glass components in combination with enameled imagery. A dozen thought bubbles contain metaphors derived from what McMillen calls the "American Dream." Home, health, and happiness are marred by misfortune and violence, as imagined by an *anime*-inspired android. An interest in words informs the playfulness of Woll's *Skunk Cabbage* (2007), a wry visual joke depicting a skunk, arms crossed, and the smelly cabbage known by the same name and common to the wetlands of the Northwest; the two are in an apparent standoff, perhaps over which smells worse. Woll and McMillen seem to be a new type of glass artist, less interested in the material's functional and decorative past than its sculptural potential for narrative.

Robbie Miller's paintings of Abraham Lincoln on clear blown-glass vessels are inspired by his extensive readings about the Civil War. (Full disclosure: While we each work independently, Robbie and I have also worked collaboratively for 20 years, as CUD). His expressive Red Abe (2002) is a bold depiction of Lincoln; the president's large and prominent ear, the cumbersome shape of a peanut, is unceremoniously stuck to the bright red background supporting his likeness, like a piece of tape holding his head to a page in history. This is American glass. Miller, like Moore and Royal, was a prominent member of the Chihuly team during the early, more intimate years.

Until recently, Michael Fox served as the studio manager at BMI. Fox's included work is reflective of the colorful centerpieces he designed for the 2007 Pilchuck Glass School auction, though presented here in ivory white. The purity of its form is enhanced by its frugal coloring.

With his King Street studio, Moore has created the model for the artist-run professional glass studio, and he has helped to nurture a group of artists whose friendships are based on mutual respect and admiration. It is just this camaraderie that allows the creation of works, under Moore's watchful eye, which could not have been made by any individual. Moore's frequent collaboration with artist Louis Mueller is represented here by their dizzying wall sculpture Modified Modern (2005), which further exemplifies the power of collaboration to go the extra mile. Dick Weiss also employs rondels, fabricated in the hotshop, in a work playfully out of character.

Moore's individual work was represented by a brash red pairing from his wellknown "Palla" series. The seemingly endless line in Palla Set (2006) seems to represent his determination. But this exhibition is not just a celebration of Ben Moore's successful career as a teacher and an artist; it is also a portrait of the greater glass community that he in part created, as well as generously supported. The great variety and quality of expression executed on King Street is a testament to his steady vision.

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