

DIA

DETROIT MONTHLY

THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS



AMAZING GLASS
Dale Chihuly: Installations 1964-1992

COVER: Looking up at Dale Chihuly's *Persian Pergola* is an extraordinary experience. A multitude of blown-glass forms rest on a ceiling of plate glass. (Installation, Seattle Art Museum, 1992. Photograph by Eduardo Calderon.)

Right: Chihuly's *Macchia Forest* series encompasses an amazing array of colors. (Installation, Seattle Art Museum, 1992. Photograph by John Gaines.)



BEAUTY IN ABUNDANCE

The remarkable glass world of Dale Chihuly

That the glass would melt in heat,
That the water would freeze in cold,
Shows that this object is merely a state,
One of many, between two poles.
from "The Glass of Water"
by Wallace Stevens

There's a wondrous quality to Dale Chihuly's work because of the seeming paradox of its appearance; his glass forms not only look flexible, but often like they have a life of their own. Chihuly's *Sea Forms* are caught in a moment's undulation, as if in mid-breath. His *Macchia* series uses every color available in glass rods (300 colors of rods and some combinations mixed among themselves) to give the appearance of complete lushness — the kind of implicit beauty of something that has reached its apex, in full flower. What makes this work all the more remarkable is its medium — once hot glass, liquid; now we see it in another state — glass formed into shapes so stunning it's breathtaking, and we can't imagine it any other way.

Just named America's First National Living Treasure by America's Governors, Chihuly is also called "the Tiffany of contempo-

rary glass" by Bill Warmus, former curator of the Corning Museum of Glass. Although glass is the medium that awes Chihuly, he says, "I wouldn't want to make it if nobody were to see it. I get a lot of joy when other people get a lot of joy — that's one of my most gratifying experiences, to give joy through my work."

Chihuly does not work alone

and readily acknowledges the help he receives. Years of collaboration have helped him achieve remarkable feats in glass. (In the mid-'70s, he lost sight in one eye from an auto accident — but he'd already begun to work collaboratively as early as '71.) Compared to a "maestro," Chihuly directs his team as they execute his visions, often working from his drawings (one

room in the show is devoted to his drawings). His experience has enabled him to call upon some of the finest talent worldwide; for his recent *Venetians*, for example, the great Italian masters Lino Tagliapietra and Pino Signorretto came in from Murano to work on this ornate series.



Chihuly designed the sets for the opera "Pelléas et Mélisande." This is Act 1, Scene 1, a mock-up for the opening forest scene which was exhibited in the Seattle Art Museum last year. (Photograph by John Gaines.)

(It took a team of up to 18 people to make the *Venetians*, from master gaffers to assistants.)

On conceiving the design of the exhibition, Louis Gauci, the museum's resident architect, recalls,

"Each work's identity would be enhanced if experienced individually. Chihuly agreed." Although the show was exhibited in Seattle and Cincinnati, the DIA is the only museum to exhibit it in separate rooms, including one for each series. Upon entering the exhibition, one sees Chihuly's colossal *Chandelier* cradling glass putti and shooting blue and gold-glass flames in all directions. Following this spectacular entrance is a series of galleries devoted to environmental statements.

Born in Tacoma, Washington, in 1941, Chihuly has been based in Seattle much of his life. In the early '60s he attended the University of

invention of a glass furnace small enough for individuals to own.)

After a solo exhibition at the University of Madison, Chihuly received a special one-year degree and then went to the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in Providence for a second graduate degree. Afterward, he wrote to all of Italy's leading glass factories. Only one responded: Venini Fabbrica. In 1968 he spent nine months in Venice; a Fulbright Fellowship and a grant from the Tiffany Foundation helped support his residency abroad. He returned to the states and began teaching in the summer at Haystack Mountain School on Deer Isle, Maine.

That autumn, he went back to RISD where he founded the glassmaking department. In 1971 Chihuly started the Pilchuck Glass School, with the help of Anne Gould Hauberg and John Hauberg, Seattle art collectors. Today, Pilchuck plays a pivotal role in the glass movement, attracting students and teachers from all over the world.

Seattle has become the largest center for glassmaking outside of Venice.

Chihuly's most current role has been as set designer of Debussy's opera, "Pelléas et Mélisande," performed by the Seattle Opera. Jan

van der Marck, curator of the DIA's Department of Twentieth-Century Art, attended the opera's premiere on March 13. He recalls: "Never has a relatively unknown opera been better served by its visual staging. The music is a delightful cascade of sound, and the fanciful sets, simulating the type of glass Chihuly blows so well, wonderfully complement in color and fluidity Maeterlinck's poetry and Debussy's music." The opening forest scene, one of the 12 mock-up tableaux for the opera, is included in the DIA's show. These colossal iridescent plastic trunks (rather than glass — their models were glass) show Chihuly's diversity.

In the 25,000-square foot Boat-house, Chihuly's famed Seattle studio overlooking Lake Union, the artist supervises a staff of 30 to 40 people. He never envisioned that his creativity, educational efforts and entrepreneurial spirit would foster such enormous growth in the studio glass movement during the past three decades. But such passion is contagious. Having been confined for so long to utilitarian roles — albeit often full of great beauty — glass has finally been unleashed and taken to a fantastic new level, becoming the most innovative acceleration of art and craft in recent years. ♦

This exhibit was organized by the DIA in cooperation with the Seattle Art Museum and funded in Detroit by the Founders Junior Council, the Friends of Modern Art, the Modern Decorative Arts Group, Habatat Galleries, private donors, the city of Detroit, the state of Michigan and the DIA Founders Society Partnership for Renewal.

Pictured here is the *Nijima Float Installation* as seen at the Seattle Art Museum. At the DIA, these immense iridescent balls of glass are placed on an inclined surface to enhance their effect. (Courtesy of the Seattle Art Museum, 1992. Photograph by Susan Dirks.)



Washington to study interior design. Later, at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, he studied with Harvey Littleton. (Littleton helped pioneer the studio glass movement by contributing to the

Chihuly's *Ikebana* series derives its inspiration from the art of Japanese flower arranging. (*Ikebana* Installation, detail, Seattle Art Museum, 1992. Photograph by Eduardo Calderon.)



**Dale Chihuly:
Installations 1964-1992**

**Through August 15
Special Exhibition Galleries,
Second Floor**

**Admission: \$4 adults; \$1 children
and students; free Wednesdays;
members free every day.**

Related Offerings:

The show's catalog is available at all three museum shops. On June 27, Ferdinand Hampson will speak on Chihuly's career in the context of developments in the decorative and fine arts. (See Tours, Talks and Classes on page 5A for more information.)