

DRAWING EXPERIENCE FROM HOT GLASS

BY ANNE GANT

Here is a classic folk tale about drawing: an emperor once commissioned a famous calligrapher for a drawing of a fish. Months went by, but the calligrapher did not deliver the drawing. The emperor sent a messenger to the artist to find out what was taking so long, but the artist told him that he must be patient, that he was hard at work. Again, months went by, and the emperor could wait no longer – he went to the artist and demanded his drawing. The artist calmly pulled a piece of rice paper from his stack and, with a deft hand, quickly drew the most exquisite fish for the emperor. The emperor was flabbergasted and demanded to know, as the artist had done it so quickly, how it had taken so many months. Without saying a word, the artist turned to the giant cabinet beside him. He opened the doors and thousands upon thousands of fish drawings tumbled out.

Many hot glass artists can probably relate to this tale, even those of us who are by no means master craftsmen. So much of hot glass work involves many failures 'behind the scenes' to get to the moment when it's possible to smoothly make one successful piece.

In my current work, I use hot glass to burn paper to make drawings. I use a high-quality rag paper which I press hot glass into when it is wet. The glass cracks when it hits the wet paper and is destroyed (then recycled as cullet). The burned paper drawing is the artwork and also a record of the glass pieces. This is a fun, smoky, wet, chaotic messy process and I love making them, but I do have a lot of failures (paper catches on fire, or it just burns in an ugly way) and I am always trying to figure out ways to achieve precisely what I intend. When the drawings work – that is to say when they don't burst into flames or look too burned



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▲ HOT GLASS AND PAPER ANNE GANT

– the process looks calm and easy, but it has taken a lot of practice to get to that point.

I don't do preparatory drawings, but I do spend time doing 'preparatory glass blowing' for the drawings. Before I start I know what it is I want to make, whether it is a delicate chandelier, or a gigantic wall-sized pile of amphorae and cups and shards, and I blow shapes that I think will result in interesting burns on the paper. I test both the shapes and the marks they make. When I start a piece, I usually look at the blank page for a while to 'see' the drawing on the paper and then I work to 'fill it in'. With each burn, I have to see what results and re-evaluate my plan for completing the drawing.

In a best-case scenario, and when I am working with a good consciousness, each new finished artwork gives me information which helps in the making of next piece –

which will hopefully be better than the previous piece, and on and on. In this way, each piece is a preparatory drawing for the next. Like the artist in the tale, the finished piece may seem like the result of a quick process, but a great deal of practice and preparation happens beforehand.

Anne Gant is an artist who works with hot glass to make drawings and prints. She is an American who lives and works in Amsterdam. A video of her work and some process photos can be seen at www.gantglass.com

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