

Artist Marc Ouellette Believes Every Home Deserves Art

The Craft Line



BY MARIE ARY

Seattle glass artist Marc Ouellette, who displays his work at a North Arcade day stall on the Desimone Bridge, likens glass blowing to a team sport that demands successful cooperation among team members.

Ouellette is one of 287 farmers and craftspeople who daily embrace the Market's 99 year old tradition of "Meet the Producer" through direct sales to customers.

"I think everyone should be able to own a piece of artwork in their home that is also functional, not just aesthetic," said Ouellette. "I enjoy people's response to glass art, which seems to be universally appreciated, as it causes everyone from little kids to older people to stop as they pass by the day stall."

He appreciates the creative flexibility this demanding medium provides. "I don't know of any other art form that forces such concentration from everyone or that requires working nonstop straight through to completion because of the demands of the medium," he said. "Once the process begins, everyone must know what to do, when to do it, communicate clearly and focus exclusively on the process."

"Otherwise, one second of carelessness can cause third-degree burns or destroy the piece you're working on, wasting the team's time and effort."

When Ouellette creates a piece of glass art, he decides on the project, selects and lays out colors, then picks up the blowpipe. "Everything begins with the blow pipe, a stainless steel metal tube with a hole bored through it," said Ouellette. "I gather molten glass heated to 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit onto one end of the blow pipe and make a starter bubble with this glass."

He applies color two ways. "I either roll glass attached to the blowpipe in broken pieces of colored glass, a process called frit work, or cover it with a molten layer of colored glass, a process called a color drop," he said. "These two basic techniques are the foundation of most of my color work and, usually, I employ frit work which allows me to work much quicker so I can price my glass work at wholesale direct."



PHOTO BY MARIE ARY

Seattle Glass Artist Marc Ouellette displays his art daily, on the Desimone Bridge, his art ranges from a few inches to several feet. Usually created with solid color or frit work. His mantra is 'everyone should own a piece of artwork, that is functional as well aesthetically pleasing.'

Next, he blows glass to the shape desired, then transfers it to a punty, a solid rod which has a little bit of glass on one end. "On the opposite side from the blow pipe, we place the punty on the glass piece, then put a drop of water where the blowpipe meets the glass bubble which creates a small hole in the glass," said Ouellette. "The blowpipe is removed and we reheat the hole to open the piece up and smooth out the lip created."

From start to finish, Ouellette and his team must reheat the cooling glass. "Glass is workable only at 1,100 degrees Fahrenheit and upwards," he said. "So we are constantly reheating the glass and, often, the shape I want

requires that I enlarge the piece which may mean additional reheating."

Once Ouellette is satisfied with shape and size, "another drop of water is placed where the punty meets the glass," said Ouellette. "This disconnects the punty from the glass piece which is placed into an annealing oven."

Superheated glass cannot be cooled at room temperature. "The annealing oven further equalizes the temperature of the glass piece starting at 930 degrees Fahrenheit and, over 16 hours, slowly coaxes it down to room temperature," he said. "At that point, I can look at the piece to ensure there are no cracks

or flaws and, if it passes inspection, then I can celebrate another piece of glass art.

"You don't celebrate until after the piece comes out of the annealing oven."

Glass has an ancient history, beginning with naturally occurring glass such as obsidian used worldwide for arrowheads and spear points. Various peoples, including Egyptians, are credited with creating glass from sand, plant ash and lime. In first century B.C., somewhere in the eastern Mediterranean region, glass blowing was discovered.

"Everyone's an artist inside and just needs to tap into it and find their artistic expression," said Ouellette. "Mine is glass."

Ten years ago, this Maine born-and-raised artist moved to Seattle "after working six years as a U.S. Army optomalic (eye glass) lab technician," he said. "When I was a child, I visited a Northwest glass blowing studio and saw that it took everybody as a team to make a piece of art."

"I always knew I would be a glass blower, it was just the when and how which presented itself eight-and-a-half years ago when I had the time to take the class," said Ouellette. "I always tell people this story: I hated the first three weeks of class."

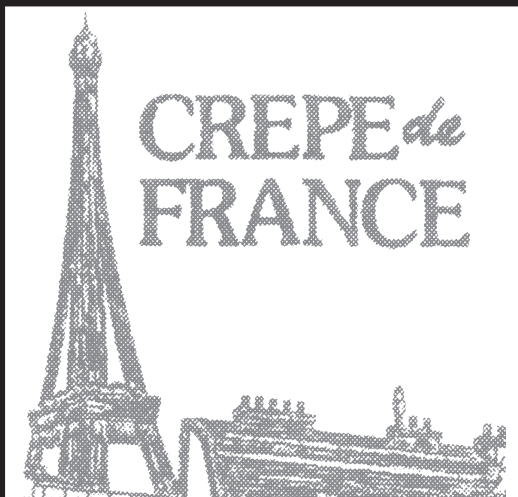
"It clicked the fourth week, then I realized I had only two more classes and knew I loved it."

In 2004, Ouellette joined the Market family, "because the Market, which I love, is a great unique venue 10 million people annually come through either as residents or tourists," he said. "When I joined the Market, I reintroduced glass art because the Market had been without a glass blower for about a year."

Price points for his glass art start at \$10 "and range up to \$800 for my 35 pound hand-blown glass sink for kitchens."

Ouellette, who accepts commissions, invites everyone to the open house held from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. every Friday at his West Seattle gallery at 1904 S.W. Dawson. In addition, he is the only glass artist represented at the Oasis Gallery, 37th and Wallingford Ave. in Seattle, where over of his 70 glass pieces and one large stainless steel installation are displayed.

To purchase an affordable piece of Ouellette glass art, shop his day stall daily on the Desimone Bridge in the North Arcade, visit his West Seattle gallery or telephone 206 427-9199 for more information about his glass blowing classes and workshops.



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