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Out of the Minds of Babes

The Museum of Glass pairs children's creativity with professional artists' expertise

BY BARBARA WYATT

This long-legged creature wanders through the mountains, looking for rocks and clay, which it eats," writes Campbell Glass, glass art designer, of his new creation, "Glumbo the Rock Eater."

The description begged to be blown into a museum-quality glass sculpture. At least that is what the Museum of Glass Hot Shop Team thought. Campbell was 12 when he submitted "Glumbo" to the team.

"Glumbo," along with "Recycle Robot," "Pip," "Mixed Up Flamy!" and "Shark Attack," is among the 52 unconventional glass sculptures in an extraordinary exhibit that has visitors flocking to the Museum of Glass in Tacoma, Wash.

Kids Design Glass (KDG) is very popular with kids and families," says Julie Pisto, marketing and communications director at the museum. "Visitors of all ages really linger in that gallery and talk a lot about what they are seeing."

KDG began in 2004 as an educational element accompanying the traveling exhibition "Murano: Glass from the Olnick Spanu Collection."



Only a child could imagine a long-legged, blue banana monster like "Glumbo the Rock Eater." But only a master artist could bring it to life in glass.

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Erica Hankins' sketch of "Shark Attack," right, was interpreted in three dimensions by the Museum of Glass's Hot Shop Team. "Green Guy," a slightly more passive monster, is pictured at left.



MUSEUM OF GLASS



MUSEUM OF GLASS

Eight-year-old Cameron Day got a front-row seat to watch his creation, "Pip," come alive. His sketch, and the finished product, are pictured at right.

Museum visitors under the age of 12 were encouraged to design their own vessels with a crayon or pencil sketch. The Hot Shop Team chose some of the designs to transform into three-dimensional glass pieces.

The children let their imaginations run wild. "Creatures and monsters started pouring in immediately," says Pisto. "Kids do not design vessels."

Cameron Day, age 8, describes his creation: "'Pip' is a baby monster that loves to smile and laugh, even though he's little and cute. He loves food, especially bananas."

Ten-year-old Andrea Garcia explains, "'Mixed Up Flamy!' can do fire with his head."

Eight-year-old Erica Hankins' "Shark Attack" description is short and effective: "It's scary!"

"We look for sketches that make us laugh and pieces we really want to re-create in glass," says Gabe Feenan, a Hot Shop Team artist.

A piece takes two to four hours to create—with four of us working at a frantic pace," says Benjamin Cobb, another Hot Shop Team member. "It's one of our favorite things to do—and one of the most intense."

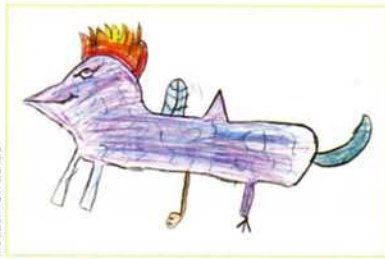
The Museum Hot Shop Team, all professional glass artists with years of advanced glass design and technical schooling, had to make innovative changes to their classical techniques. "We needed to forget the tight, refined skills that work to create Venetian glass," says Cobb.

Because of the fragile nature of the KDG pieces, the artists are unable to grind off the scars, called "punt marks,"



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Chronicling the birth of "Mixed Up Flamy!": from sketch, to hot shop, at the hands of artist Alex Stisser, to colorful finished product.



where the blowpipe is broken off after the glass has been blown into shape. They search for places to hide punt marks on each creature, such as under a tail or head. "Hiding a punt mark under appendages" is not a topic covered in glass-blowing schools.

Feenan, Cobb and Alex Stisser created 90 percent of the pieces, but quickly give credit to the other artists who contributed, including world-renowned glass artist Lino Tagliapietra, who created "Out at Sea." Karisha Lutz, age 10, designed this piece.

On the last Sunday of the month, the day of each creature's creation, the child artist and family are seated in the front row of the Hot Shop Amphitheater. The Amphitheater, housed in an imposing 90-foot-high stainless-steel cone, can accommodate more than 200 visitors who come to watch the live glass blowing.

The child directs the professional artists as they heat, snip and shape the molten glass into two sculptures—one for the child to take home, and the other for the museum's permanent collection.

Kids Design Glass is currently on exhibit at the Museum of Glass through Oct. 31, 2011. The museum shop features KDG playing cards, a comic book, a catalog and figurines to take home or purchase online at www.museumofglass.org.

BARBARA WYATT writes about the many adventures of life and the arts from her home in Washington State.

"'Pip' is a baby monster that loves food, especially bananas."

—Cameron Day, age 8



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