

# CHIHULY

## STUDIO

### Overview

*Looking retrospectively through...decades of Dale Chihuly's daring, delicate and sensuous glasswork, one becomes aware that the dual dominant themes are line and motion. Through his energetic and masterful use of gestural line as a formal element, Chihuly gives us both two- and three- dimensional calligraphic expressions of his unique visual experiences.*<sup>1</sup>

This new series, *Glass on Glass*, comes from a thousand year history of painting on glass. His interpretation of this age old art form demonstrates his ability to push traditional processes beyond an accepted norm. These layered images exist on a precarious border between painting and sculpture.

In doing so he creates a new body of work in which his deep connection to light, color, and form, elegantly finds its way back to the purity of glass. When deciding on a name for this series, Chihuly decided on *Glass on Glass*.

*These energetic paintings on glass serve as metaphors for their dimensional functions in space. On glass, acrylic or paper, Chihuly reveals his dedication to capturing the concept of motion through drawings that are executed with the immediacy and expressive intensity of a master draftsman.*<sup>2</sup>

The composition of each individual work has a variety of physical layers, in which space, light and color all overlap, and when unified, creates a complete painting.

In order to understand how to paint with glass enamels, Chihuly called upon his friend and colleague, artist Cappy Thompson to work with him. Thompson is arguably one of the preeminent painters working in the medium. Together they devised a way to translate Chihuly's working style into painting on glass.

### History of painting on glass

Painting with vitreous enamels is an age old art form going back a thousand years. Some of the first examples of painting on glass can be seen in objects from the Roman Empire between the

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<sup>1</sup> From *Drawing in The Third Dimension* essay by Michael W. Monroe, from the publication *Chihuly- Color, Glass and Form*, 1986, published by Kodansha International Ltd.

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first and fourth centuries AD.<sup>3</sup> Painting on flat glass evolved out of the traditional stained glass tradition in the medieval period of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Its application was seen in great examples of ecclesiastical architecture. During the Arts and Crafts movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century it moved into the realm of the secular, and continues to be used in both realms today.

### Impetus for Chihuly

- In 2014 Chihuly was approached by the University of Nebraska Medical Center and project donors Walter and Suzanne Scott, to create a meditative space filled with several of his spectacular and colorful works of art for the new Fred and Pamela Buffett Cancer Center
- Chihuly and his team worked closely with the UNMC team to create The Chihuly Sanctuary, where patients, researchers and caregivers can meditate and find a moment of peace within the hospital setting
- Chihuly wanted to create something new for this project and decided to create a suite of paintings made entirely out of glass
- The imagery used is from Chihuly's *Ikebana* series and ties into Leslie's Healing Garden, donated by Marshall and Mona Faith in memory of their daughter Leslie who lost her battle with pediatric cancer. The garden that lies adjacent to the Sanctuary
- Ikebana is a Japanese art form which celebrates the line and form of individual flowers

### Technical

- Each layer of glass is made is a sheet of ¼" thick Ultra Clear Low Iron ( low iron content means clearer glass color- no green tint) sheet glass
- It is not tempered but there is a safety coating of Armor Coat- a clear film that is applied using a wet process after the painting is completely finished. This film cures after 2-3 weeks and the drawings dry vertically
- Vitreous enamels are fused onto the surface of the sheet glass at approximately 1050-80 degrees Fahrenheit. Each firing takes about a day to cool in a custom built kiln in Dale's Painting Studio
- They are sourced from different manufacturers in Europe

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<sup>3</sup> Identifying early techniques: a word of caution- it is important to note that very few descriptions of the techniques used by glassworks before the Middle Ages have survived.

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- They are created by mixing finely crushed glass powder in a water and gum arabic solution
- The colors come from metal oxides e.g. chromium makes green, cobalt makes blue, copper makes turquoise and gold makes pinks/reds
- They are applied using brushes, sponges, squirt bottles
- A lot of preparation is required before a painting session- the backgrounds are first created by assistants. Chihuly reviews these and then, decides on the color palette and composition for each individual drawing
- The colors are premixed in different densities and viscosities before the painting session with Chihuly where he works with his team of assistants to execute the complete drawings.
- Once mixed each container of color sits on a magnetic stirring apparatus that keeps the color suspended in the liquid and prevents it from separating/settling