

GLASS BEAD

evolution



An Introduction to Blowing with Soft Glass

Shane Fero and Zurich Glass School

by Cathy Somody



Blown birds by Shane Fero

class review

Anyone who sees the colorful work of Shane Fero catches their breath. Then, when they learn it is soft glass, their breath often escapes in disbelief. The colors! The shapes! And oh, the birds! How does he do that?

Those of us lucky enough to participate in Shane's recent online class through Zurich Glass School, facilitated by Dr. Julie Anne Denton, got to learn how he does it. And you can, too, because ZGS is offering the class online on demand – the class recordings are made available to students for rewatching. It includes a one-on-one consultation with the maestro. More good news: two follow-up classes are planned for those who want to continue this journey in both soft and borosilicate glass.

The excitement had been building for months among a group of ZGS members, when we learned that Shane would be teaching a series of three classes, and that we could participate at a reduced rate. The class was scheduled to meet once a week for six weeks. As word got out that the class would include professional videography and a variety of presentation styles including voiceovers and a dialogue between Shane and Julie, more and more students signed up. Class kits were prepared and shipped around the world, and Shane 1: An Introduction to Blowing with Soft Glass, premiered with a full class of 20 students the United States, Australia, Israel, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. Oh, how excited we were!



Blown birds by Shane Fero



Blown bottle by Shane Fero

Shane has been teaching in person-to-person workshops around the world for more than 35 years. “Now,” he said, “due to the pandemic, I have slipped into Zoom conference presentations, and I was thrilled to continue my teaching virtually when Dr. Julie Anne Denton invited me.” Whether in person or on Zoom, he says, “I did the same as I always do, demonstrating and elucidating my knowledge and skills to students, which I love. Passing on and sharing information is tantamount to continue our craft and art into the future.”

Our course began as Zurich Glass School courses always do, with an interactive slide show featuring the work of Dr. Julie: self-proclaimed “tortured artist” and all the participants. These shows and student introductions lay the groundwork for the cohesive and supportive community that always grows out of the school’s classes. Seeing everyone’s work, we knew right away we were in a group of very talented and creative glass artists.

There is also a private Facebook learning group, which allows students to share their successful and not-so-successful attempts, and to support and encourage each other. Julie and Shane were very active in our group, quickly responding to our questions and commenting on our photos.

Another benefit of classes at ZGS is the one-on-one virtual consultation meetings with either of the instructors. Consultations with Julie are included in this course—as they are with all courses through ZGS—and for an additional small fee, we met with the Maestro Shane Fero for one-on-one attention.



Points by Paulina Verzijden



Blown bubbles on points by Paulina Verzijden.
Approximate size: 20 cm x 6 cm.

Lesson 1: Pulling Points

Our first lesson began the way most blowing classes do: learning how to pull points. However, we were not working with the usual robust borosilicate tubes used in most blown work. We were working with neon tubes, 93.5 COE. Those of us who were used to working with boro and our super-hot torches soon discovered it was an entirely different skill. One of the participants said, "It is like working with cellophane." We soon learned how to adapt our torch flames and caress the soft neon tubes, gently adjusting points and practicing clear bubbles. We learned how to blow bubbles, and how to melt erroneous bubbles back into the original tube shape and start again: a very important skill if you wish to master the techniques and not waste glass.

Lesson 2: A Christmas Bauble

In this lesson we continued to work with clear neon tubes and learned to make blown Christmas ornaments. We practiced and practiced and were very excited when we got a near-round shape! While clear ornaments themselves are not that exciting, we knew we were building the foundational skills in preparation for making more colorful creations in the sessions yet to come.



Blown Christmas baubles by Janie Trainor



Blown bottles with stoppers by Hayley Tsang Sather



Blown bottles by Viviane Perret

Lesson 3: Bottle and Pulling Cane

Now we were really having fun! Shane taught us how to make a beautiful small bottle with a foot. Many of us practiced these skills with boro, then attempted to transfer our newfound skills to the soft neon tubes. It was not easy, but there were many successes in the group. We celebrated the successes and encouraged those who were struggling. ("Don't give up! You can do it!") Another exciting part of Lesson 3 was how to pull chunks of color bar (furnace glass, 96 COE) into cane to decorate our creations.



Above: Shard by Michael Grady



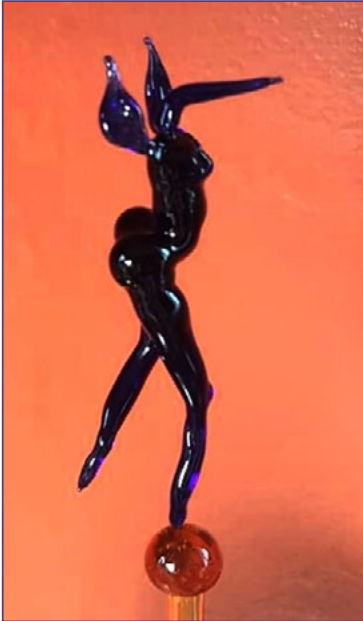
Right: Blown goblet from a single tube by Esther Silver

Lesson 4: Goblet and Shards!

Here Shane taught us how to make a goblet from a single piece of tubing. These goblets are very thin but sturdy because they are made from a single tube. Shane said, "I used to demonstrate to my customers how sturdy my goblets were by pushing them over onto the cement sidewalk, and they survived." We also learned how to blow large two-colored, paper-thin shards with the same color bar chunks we used to pull cane. Shards are one of the color techniques Shane uses for his beautiful birds and bottles.

Lesson 5: Colored Bottle and Bird Woman Stopper

We watched this lesson in fascination as Shane created one of his signature colored bottles and a stopper. We learned how to roll the neon tube in glass powders and decorate with shards, stringers, and frit. To top it off, Shane taught us how he makes his otherworldly figures in the form of a bird-woman stopper. This gorgeous piece is now owned by one of the class participants, the high bidder in a silent auction. This is a frequent perk of classes at ZGS, and we were honored to have an opportunity to own a Shane Fero original.



Above: Demo piece: Blown bottle with bird-woman stopper by Shane Fero

Far left: Bird-woman bottle stopper by Melea Farlo-Low

Near left: Decorating with powder, shards and stringer by Adriene Buffington

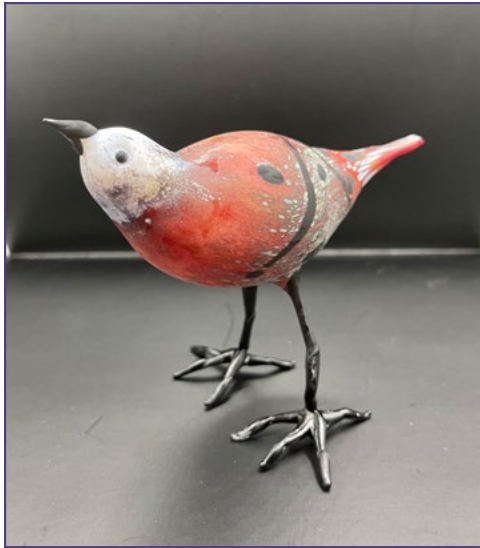
Lesson 6: Bird!

Wow—we were so thrilled when we realized the final lesson was a Shane Fero Bird. Honestly, we thought we were going to have to wait for a future class with Shane to learn the bird, but he did not make us wait! Again, this awe-inspiring creation is now owned by a very lucky class participant who won the silent auction. Now, we were so glad we had practiced with the neon tube, pulling points, and blowing bubbles. We were also very happy to discover that adding the many layers of glass powder provided substance to the tube and made it much easier to work with. However, this added a further level of skill because it created uneven thicknesses and coefficients of expansion.

The birds and bottles are far from easy, but many class participants persevered and proudly displayed colored bottles, goblets, and birds in the learning group. For those of us who are at an early stage of glass work and not ready to attempt these blown pieces, we still learned many



Demo piece: Blown bird by Shane Fero



Blown bird by Cathy Somody



Blown birds by Michael Grady

techniques and skills that will transfer to other work. We look forward to learning more from maestro Shane Fero in two future classes, one geared toward more simple creations and glass skills, and another advanced course for the eager bird and blown-vessel creators.

“Dr. Julie Anne Denton’s programs from her Zurich Glass School are extremely well organized,” Shane says, “and her desire for perfection in these classes is due to her dedication and hard work to make it all happen. I am proud to be an exclusive online teacher, and it is something I would recommend to any student.”

For more information on this course and future ZGS courses sign up for the ZGS mailing list or visit www.zurichglassschool.com

About Shane Fero

Shane Fero was born in Chicago in 1953 and has been a flameworker for more than 50 years. He maintains a studio next to Penland School in North Carolina. He participates in international symposia and conferences by lecturing and demonstrating. Fero has taught at institutions including Penland School, Urban Glass, the Pratt Fine Arts Center, the Studio of the Corning Museum of Glass, the University of Michigan, Eugene Glass School, Espace Verre, Montreal, Quebec, the Pittsburgh Glass Center, Pilchuck Glass School, Bild-Werk, Frauenau, Germany, the International Glass Festival in Stourbridge, U.K., Scuola Bubacco, Murano, Italy, Chameleon Studio in Arizona, Tasmania, Taiwan, China, Australia, Turkey and in Seto, Osaka, and the Niiijima Glass Art Center in Tokyo, Japan.

His work can be found in collections at both in private collections and public institutions worldwide. He has had more than 33 solo exhibitions since 1992 and has participated in more than 400 group exhibitions during his career. He has been honored with three retrospectives: a 30-year at the Berkowitz Gallery at the University of Michigan in 1999, a 40-year at the Huntsville Museum of Art in Huntsville, AL in 2008 and at the Christian Brothers University of Memphis, TN in 2010. His work can be found in museum collections worldwide including the Museum of Art & Design and the Corning Museum of Glass in New York; the GlasMuseum in Denmark, the Asheville Art Museum in North Carolina, the Huntsville Museum of Art in Alabama, the Museum fur Glaskunst in Lauscha, Germany, and the Niiijima Contemporary Glass Museum in Japan.

He is the Past-President of the Board of Directors of the Glass Art Society and received the Lifetime Membership Award from GAS in Chicago in 2014, honored in 2009 for Extraordinary Contribution to the Glass Art World, Salem Community College, Carney’s Point, NJ and Award for Significant Contributions to the Chinese Glass Community from the Hejian Government, Hejian, China in 2017.