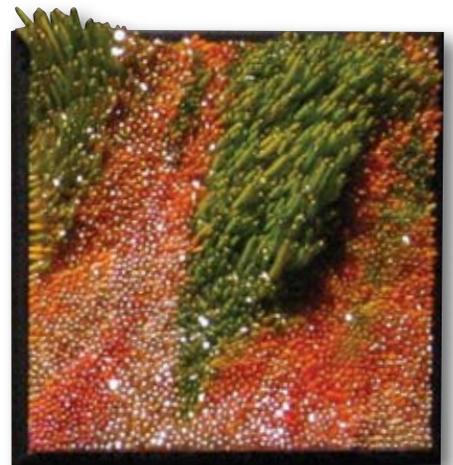


A G L A S S A C T

ALUMNA TURNS ORDINARY GLASS INTO EXTRAORDINARY ART



IF A PIECE OF GLASS breaks in an artist's studio and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?

That's the kind of philosophical question that **Shayna Leib (PHIL '98)** might have pondered during her undergraduate years at Cal Poly. She even considered taking it all the way to the doctorate level at SUNY Binghamton, when she made an about-face and decided to study glass instead, earning an MFA degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and garnering numerous awards and accolades along the way.

Why glass? "I was drawn to it the first time I saw glass blowing at a Poly Royal when I was a kid," Leib said. "I have a love/hate relationship with fire. I was haunted by extreme nightmares about fire, yet it held an irresistible pull. I'm drawn to it divinely."

Divine, indeed. Her exquisite work is now exhibited in some of the nation's top galleries, including the world renowned Habatat Galleries Chicago. According to her mother, Sharon Reese, Shayna has never approached a gallery. They come to her – a sure sign that her art is much sought after.

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In 2003, the same year she earned her MFA degree, Leib won the prestigious Horizon Emerging Artists Award from the New York Museum of Arts & Design and Hunter Douglas. The winning piece is a two-panel sculpture that, when seamlessly combined, measures 15-inches high and stretches four-feet across. The entire sculpture weighs nearly 100 pounds and consists of about 45,000 individual pieces of glass, referred to as "cane."

Cane is created by layering colorants in between gathers of clear glass and stretching the molten glass into long rods, Leib explained. "Cane pulling is often compared to generating taffy candy."

Her winning piece was also featured at the 2003 SOFA (Sculptural Objects Functional Art) exhibit in New York City, an annual exhibit in which she continues to show. Since those early days, she's enjoyed a steady, if somewhat slow climb to the top.

The 33-year-old San Luis Obispo native insists her success didn't come easy. "I lived on mac 'n' cheese and worked up to four jobs to provide for myself and my art," she recalled.

"You have to be willing to endure that, to take calculated risks. When starting a business, you have to make a choice to live without the traditional 'ornaments of life.' It isn't easy living without a safety net."

Whatever the hardship, the resulting works of art are truly amazing. In Leib's capable hands, the cold hard surface of glass takes on an almost surreal organic, fluid look. The pieces invite scrutiny. Colors are brilliantly displayed. The pieces appear to be illuminated from within. Light and sunlight play upon the sculptures' uneven surface, remarkably changing their appearance.

Her art is about wind and water. "Things most people don't stop to look at," she says. She sees the beauty of movement – wind over grass, water over sea grass. "I lend my eyes to those who can't see what I see. I notice the small things."

The process is meticulously painstaking, physically exhaust-

ing and emotionally demanding. The most challenging aspect she says is the "copious amounts of time spent in solitude" assembling her pieces." That, and standing for hours in front of 2400-degree equipment, lovingly referred to as the "hotshop."

Although it's hard work, glass is the only medium that holds her attention. "I can spend my whole life studying it, and I'll never master it. The day I create the perfect landscape is the day I quit glass."

While glassblowing is certainly a passion, Leib is a complicated woman with many passions. While majoring in philosophy, she also studied glass, literature and classical piano. "They all strive to say the same thing," Leib insisted. "Philosophy says it esoterically, literature says it obscurely, music says it sublimely, and art says it abstractly."

Her art says it perfectly.

To see more of Shayna Leib's work, visit her Web site at <http://www.shaynaleib.com/>.



Shayna Leib