

Ribbons of Remembrance
By Debbie Tarsitano

September 11, 2001

“It is my wish at this time to remind you that I have always believed and still believe that artists who live and work with spiritual values cannot and should not remain indifferent to a conflict in which the highest values of humanity and civilization are at stake.”

(Pablo Picasso the New York Times 1937).

Before September 11th I had been reading a book about Picasso, his thoughts on art, and views on other artists. At the time I read his statement written above, it did not make an impression on me but I vaguely remembered it. I could not know that later in the week, it would become more important and meaningful than I could ever imagine.

After September 11th when I began writing this article, Picasso’s statement came to mind and took on new meaning appropriate for the time we live in now.

The year Picasso made that statement he created one of his greatest paintings “Guernica.” “Guernica was the ancient capitol of the Basques in Northern Spain mercilessly bombed by the Nazi Luftwaffe in 1937. Picasso, a Spaniard, reacted to this assault on his home by creating “Guernica” an unforgettable painting, which evokes the agony of destruction through symbolic representation. I had the privilege of viewing “Guernica” at the Prado Museum in Spain many years ago and still recall its chilling images. Only an artist who truly felt the pain could have portrayed the anguish in that painting.

September 11th, the painting “Guernica”, and Picasso’s statement became a lesson from one of the world’s greatest artists on the meaning of our own work as artists.

Before September 11th I had an agenda at hand for my glass artwork. There was a set of accomplishments on my list, which I thought were very important for me to achieve. Some of them were technical like a larger kiln to make greater statement pieces, others were more ego oriented, like a great important gallery show or acceptance into a well-known Museum collection.

When I thought of themes for my work much of it centered on the world in which I live. Things I saw around me, feelings I wanted to express about what I enjoyed and what I thought were important.

I measured my success somewhat by the acceptance or rejection of my work by the glass community. Many times I was unhappy because my expectations were limited by what that community would accept. Many artists try to please a group, while forgetting the whole larger world beyond with its thousands of variations and important ideas needing to be expressed.

The morning of the tragedy September 11th I was getting ready for a session of paperweight making. I went around my studio turning on kilns, loading in glass, preparing as I had done a thousand times to create my work. I was preparing work for a show at the L.H. Selman Gallery in California on November 3rd.

My biggest concern was having the work done on time and shipped in time to have everything catalogued and photographed. I looked forward to showing new designs I was making and the reaction of the collectors who would see them. I also was thrilled by an

ad in American Craft with my work and the beautiful invitation that would arrive all over the country inviting collectors to my show. Such was my preoccupation on that morning we will never forget.

A phone rang and I went into the house to answer it “ Turn on the Television” the caller said, a statement surely repeated to millions of American’s that day. I turned the television on to view the horror as the tragedy of the day unfolded in front of me. In one moment all artwork stopped.

I went back into my studio and turned everything off; everything stayed off for the next two weeks. In the days following I did not go back into my studio because of an overwhelming sense of being totally lost. Compared to the reality of the tragedy taking place my work seemed insignificant and without meaning. My enthusiasm moments before the event was gone, replaced by devastation and sadness.

Two weeks later I opened the door to my studio and stepped inside. It felt like a new place. It actually looked different, empty and cold. President Bush asked all Americans to resume their lives and I needed to begin to try to see meaning in my work again. Encouraged by Picasso’s example after the bombing of Guernica, I began to fill my designs with new resolve making pieces that have a deeper, lasting meaning.

A new attitude towards my work began to form. I began thinking about Picasso’s work and statement. I realized that before Sept 11th many artists work told about who they are personally. We sometimes seem to become “personalities” whose styles govern who we are.

Now we are now called on as artists to tell the world about who we are as a global community. Picasso told the world about what happened to his community, “Guernica” his painting is an enduring testament to the time of 1937. When we see his “ Guernica” we are there.

Is art important? Is what we do as glass artists important? Yes, it leaves a record for future generations of what it felt like to live in our times.

It was hard getting started again; I sat at my bench and thought, what could I do? With all this new feeling, I had to go back into my studio but with a new attitude. I looked around my studio and found all my red white and blue glass. I began to create an idea for a glass red white and blue ribbon. For a day or two I pulled ribbon canes and played with twisting the cut pieces into the ribbon that many Americans now wear as a symbol of our unity and strength.

Several days later I thought of the American eagle and how it is soaring through a mighty storm. I began to see the eagle flying in heavy fall winds with leaves swirling, winter storms with snow blowing and summer hurricanes. I began designing a piece I am now working on,” The Eagle Through The Storm.” I could see the Eagle clutching the red white and blue ribbon in its claws as we all unite. I made eagle sculptures with Ed Poore of Sagamore Ma. Glass cutter, and Max Erlacher of Corning who engraved the majestic eagles. I decided to express uplift and strength rather than sadness.

I have so many ideas now; I want to use the glass to tell the world about who we are and how we have come through this terrible time. I hope all glass artists express their feelings at this time in their work to leave a legacy of remembrances for future generations.

So many memorials need to be created; we as artists can capture those memories for the future with our glasswork. We can make lasting statements in glass.

I found making designs, which expressed the unity and dignity of the American people, helped put new meaning into my work as a glass artist and gives my work-renewed purpose while uplifting others and myself.

My ideas will never be the same, the Debbie Tarsitano that existed before September 11th is gone and in her place a renewed artist with a greater sense of belonging not to just a community of glass artists but to a country of diverse people.

Because of the tragedy of September 11th we have been given permission to express publicly feelings many Americans felt would have been a sign of weakness before. Outward emotional sings of compassion and personal grief can be worn publicly like our red white and blue ribbons and create a new reality of unity and strength.

Ribbons of Remembrance

I would like to share with you how to make a red white and blue glass ribbon. It will give you a good feeling to create this work in glass. It is very easy to do and you may want to make them to raise funds for your favorite charity. I think it would be a great thing for glass artists to create helping their neighbors while uplifting the glass art community.

How to create patriotic glass “Ribbon of Remembrance”.

You will need a base white glass, and for the overlay, a bright red a deep blue and enamel white. Use the glass of your choice, as long as it is compatible.

I use Kueglar opal white, enamel white, cobalt blue, middle blue transparent, and ruby transparent.

Size is also an option the bigger the base gather of glass, or rod, you start with the larger the ribbon will be when pulled. You can make the ribbon small or large quantity.

1. Start by heating a 2-inch rod of white. Heat and flatten the rod.
2. Stripe on ruby transparent or (opaque red) on one side
3. Stripe thin cobalt blue line next to edge of red.
4. Stripe enamel (Or any other bright white) in center
5. Edge with thin stripe of cobalt blue
6. Stripe blue on end (cobalt, or any other opaque blue)
7. You can overlay a transparent blue if you like.
8. (No Picture) Important repeat the same pattern on the other side. You must have the pattern on both sides so when you twist the ribbon pattern will show properly
9. Heat entire glass.
10. Heat in flame and attach a steel rod to end, be sure to pull the ribbon straight as you pull it out. You will need two people unless you pull a short ribbon. (Diameter of ribbon is optional anything from ½ inch diameter will work).
11. Heat carefully and pull straight.
12. Pull to desired length and thickness.
13. Completed ribbon rods.

Go to a smaller torch

14. Cut sections of rod to desired length. Hold ribbon rod with another piece of glass. Heat in a flame and twist over. This will take some practice, use a real ribbon as a model; it will take a few tries but you will get the hang of it.

15. No Picture. You can cool the completed ribbons down in a kiln set at a warm temperature so they do not melt.

When cold add tie TAC or stickpin back.

“Patriot Dreams”

Interview with Milon Townsend by Debbie Tarsitano

I called Milon Townsend to ask him how the events of September 11th affected him and his artistic statements in glass.

“The world was profoundly changed by the event. My work is very personal -- and as I was affected, so was my work,” he said.

On the morning of September 11th Milon was in his studio. Upon hearing the terrible news he felt devastated and he developed an overwhelming need to do something. While listening to Samuel Barber’s “Adagio for Strings” Milon went into action creating a human figure using very deep black glass. He called this figure, “Mourn” because it evoked the sadness of the event he had just witnessed. As Milon heated and shaped the figure in the flame its significance to him evolved. The recoiling figure is retreating, yet remains unbeaten and powerful.

As days following September 11th passed, Milon found himself wanting to deal with more serious subjects in glass. This feeling led him to envision a group of sculptures expressing feelings and thoughts about the tragic events. The result is his newest book *Patriot Dreams*. “The book gave me the opportunity to express principles I have always believed in.”

Milon says, “I made a list of words...concepts that I feel have great importance at this time. Concepts and ideals I want to preserve and nurture for the future. I wanted America to hold on to its newfound enthusiasm for a better country.” Milon’s *Patriot Dreams* figures portray “Unity,” “Response,” “Prayer,” “Protect,” “Sacrifice,” “Model,” “Teach,” “Build,” and “Learn” among the many powerful words on this moving and suggestive list.

As the completed work took shape, Milon documented his feelings—through a text and photos for each sculpture included in a companion book that interprets the *Patriot Dreams* glass series. Milon hopes his work “nourishes the spirit of unity and citizenship we see renewed in our country today.” The book documents 26 of his works, including 17 new sculptures created specifically for *Patriot Dreams*. Together, the sculptures and the book express Milon Townsend’s heart felt ideals and hopes for all Americans.

For more information on *Patriot Dreams* by Milon Townsend contact www.thebluemoonpress.com

Paul Stankard
“Masks”
Interview by Debbie Tarsitano

Different artists harvest different emotions from their September 11th experience. For one artist the events of that tragic day brought back recent sadness. When I talked with Paul Stankard I was interested in finding out the meaning of the masks, which have recently appeared in his work. In particular, a friend recently told me of a Paul Stankard mask with a teardrop and surmised that Paul made the work after September 11th. This conjecture was wrong; the tearful mask was made prior to our national tragedy but could have been an omen of the tragedy to come.

Paul told me that late last summer he lost a dear friend. He expressed his feelings of sorrow by placing a blood red teardrop on the mask. He showed this work at S.O.F.A. as part of his “column series” of encased cubes. Paul did not tell anyone about the personal meaning of the red teardrop. “Tears on the masks seen after the 11th have a broader meaning,” he said.

Although his design preceded the events of September 11th. Paul states “Nine-eleven brought to mind a lot of expression and tension. The tearful mask’s prophetic tension also makes sense in the context of that day: the masks create a counterpoint between extremes of sublime flowers opposite a distraught expression on the mask.” Paul also said “beauty, not just sadness in my work brings uplift.”

A collector displaced from her home living near ground zero told me that her paperweight collection reminded her of beauty in the world. She couldn’t wait until she could have her collection displayed again. I am sure Paul Stankard must have made many of her paperweights.