

Painting with Glass

by Kathleen McMillen

DICK DITORE LOVES A CHALLENGE, AND THE VARIOUS ROLES he has played in life have led him to a love affair with creating art. His medium is glass, and while glass has some predictable qualities, it is also fraught with chance. No matter how much experience an artist has, the outcome is never completely predictable. Thus, there are endless opportunities for adventure.

Contemporary glass artists understand the materials they put together and what is likely to happen once they are heated. They also start with a clear idea of what they want to create, but years of experience and experimentation are required to master any kind of control over a material that is hot, liquid and will always have its way.

Ditore works with flat glass. He begins with an idea for a design. Then, depending on that design, he builds a body of glass pieces. It may be freeform or he may start with a flat sheet of clear glass and add multiple pieces of glass "frits," which are chunks, threads or powdered glass, often in a variety of colors and sizes. He may dust it with various chemicals that will melt during the firing. Sometimes this "tile" is covered with another piece of flat glass, either clear or colored. It is then set on the kiln shelf and heated to between 1,300°F and 1,750°F.

Once the "tile" is fired and cooled, Ditore has a piece of flat glass from 3/16-inch to 1-inch thick and as large as 20 inches by 30 inches. Next, he does the "cold work," which includes edge polishing, shaping and texturing the surfaces. For these steps, his tools are a sand blaster, wet belt sander, flat lap grinder, diamond wheel lathe, handheld diamond grinder and a variety of saws. A single piece may get multiple treatments.

The piece must then be reheated to create a slump. Ditore either lays the flat piece over a form inside the kiln or removes the glass when it is hot (1,300°F) and hand-forms it. The glass cools quickly once it is out of the kiln, so he uses a blowtorch to keep it hot enough to work with.



Quantum VI
(close-up)

His new series is actually wrapped, which must be done by hand—or, in this case, glove and tong.

None of this is delicate work. Ditore requires an entire wardrobe of safety equipment which includes a welder's helmet, gloves, goggles, respirators, tongs and a complete fire suit.

It must be appreciated that every piece Ditore makes is an experiment due to the element of chance. To even create a design, he must have a good idea of how each element he is dealing with will react when heated. He may know what it will do, but not what path it will take. He must consider that an airspace or any moisture left between two pieces is going to want to go somewhere. Colors may change, go from clear to opaque, or explode, pushing themselves up or down through other colors creating a whole variety of patterns.

Ditore was born on the island of Coronado but grew up in Ohio,

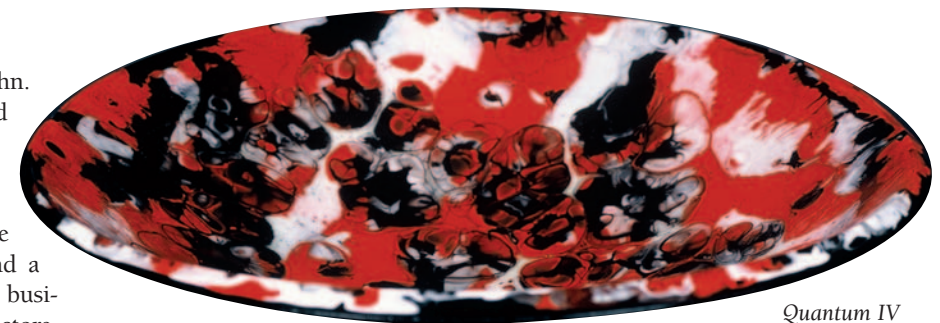
where he spent lots of time with his dad, John. His dad was a professional photographer and teacher, and they often exhibited their photographs together. The two also shared an interest in local theatrical groups, doing everything from acting to building sets and working the lights. While still in high school, Ditore and a friend started their own electrical contracting business. Their first job was to wire a new grocery store, a real trial-by-fire experience.

In 1978, Ditore and his wife, Marlene, moved to Santa Monica, where he specialized in theatrical and art lighting for homes, galleries, exhibitions and museums. When the stress of the big city got to them, they bought 430 acres in Virginia where they ran an organic deer farm for six years. They learned a lot and really enjoyed the experience, but their daughter, Lisa, craved California. An exploratory road trip brought them to San Diego.

While living in Virginia, Ditore had studied stained glass as a hobby. Later, while recuperating from shoulder surgery, he took a kiln-forming class at UCSD's Craft Center and knew at once he had found his niche. His instructors, Brock Craig and Avery Anderson, encouraged him to apply to Pilchuck Glass School.

Pilchuck was established by Dale Chihuly and friends in the early 1970s. This country's foremost glass school, the campus sits in the middle of a 15,000-acre working tree farm just 35 miles north of Seattle. The surroundings provide a spectacular workspace, and the isolation allows the artists to really focus on what they are doing.

In 2004, Ditore attended a month-long session



Quantum IV

at Pilchuck where he studied with Klaus Moje and Steve Klein. Moje was impressed with the integrity of Ditore's designs, but encouraged him to step back and learn to see them from a different perspective. "Let the glass be what it wants to be," Moje advised. And when Ditore would obsess over minute details, which is his way, Moje would say, "Get your face out of the art!" Wise words Ditore repeats to himself regularly.

Ditore went back to Pilchuck again in 2005, and this time studied with Judy Hill. She encouraged him to look closely at nature and study how things go together. Her input and a visit to Seattle's Japanese Garden are the inspiration for a new series of work.

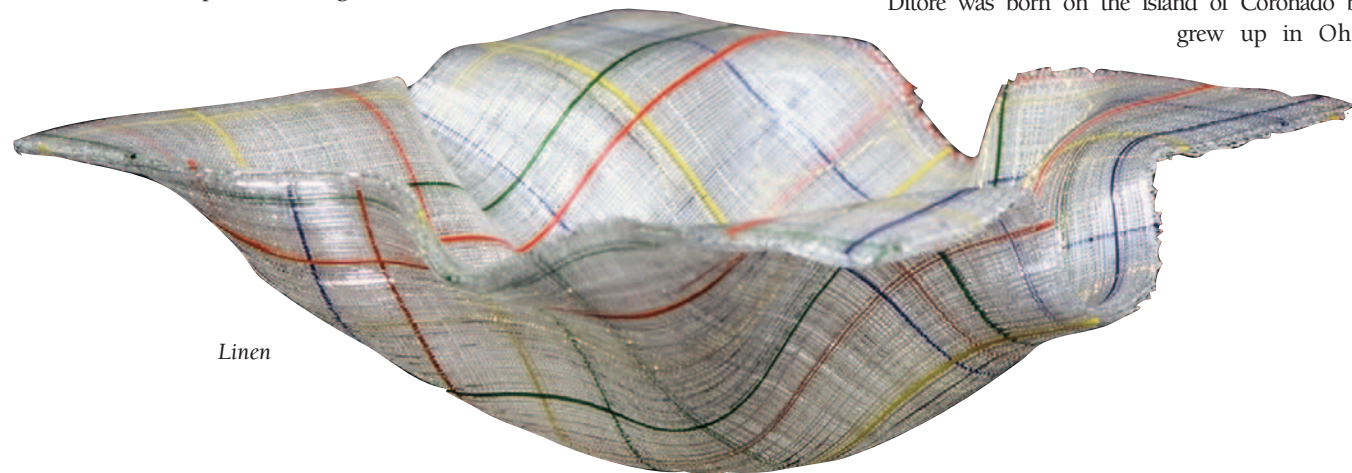
Ditore was recently notified that he is a nominee for a Corning Award, which would allow him to attend any Pilchuck class of his choice on scholarship. A rare honor, indeed.

Dick Ditore's work is shown at the Ordovery Gallery, 444 South Cedros Avenue in Solana Beach. Gallery hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday and 12 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sundays. Call 858-720-1221. Beginning in mid-January 2006, Ditore's work will be displayed at The Natural History Museum in Balboa Park along with the work of nationally known nature and landscape photographers. □

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Quantum VI
photography by
Clay Chapman



Linen