

Norfolk's growing prominence in the world of glass art will be on full display this weekend

By Denise M. Watson
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Davis Hartman, graduate of Bowling Green State University's glass program, entertains those attending a Third Thursday performance at the Glass Studio on Thursday, May 18, 2017. The 2017 Glass Art Society will be holding its annual conference in Norfolk from June 1 - 3, 2017.



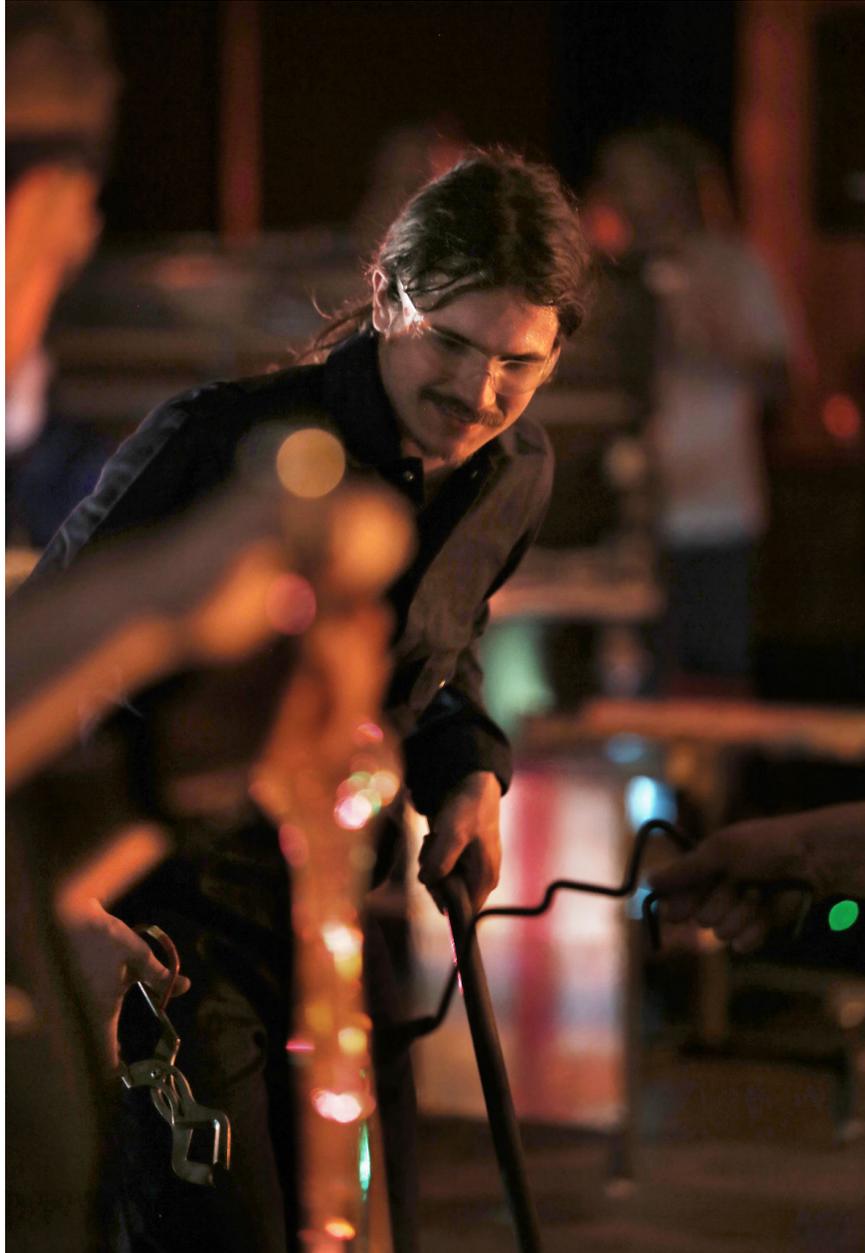
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Tess Healy, graduate of Bowling Green State University's glass program, entertains those attending a Third Thursday performance at the Glass Studio on Thursday, May 18, 2017. The 2017 Glass Art Society will be holding its annual conference in Norfolk from June 1 - 3, 2017.



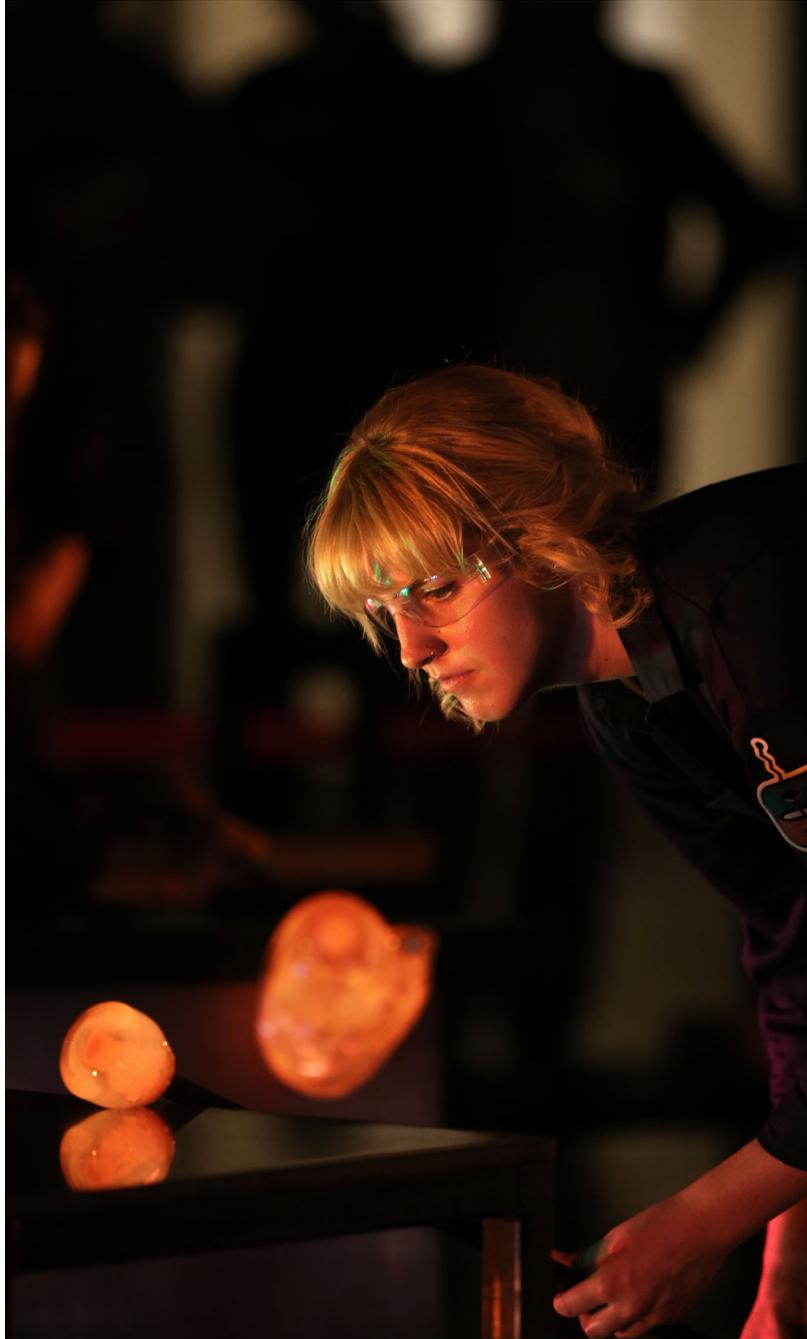
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Graduate students of Bowling Green State University's glass program entertain those attending a Third Thursday performance at the Glass Studio on Thursday, May 18, 2017. The 2017 Glass Art Society will be holding its annual conference in Norfolk from June 1 - 3, 2017.



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Emily Cale, graduate of Bowling Green State University's glass program, entertains those attending a Third Thursday performance at the Glass Studio on Thursday, May 18, 2017. The 2017 Glass Art Society will be holding its annual conference in Norfolk from June 1 - 3, 2017.



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Adam Lewton, graduate of Bowling Green State University's glass program, entertains those attending a Third Thursday performance at the Glass Studio on Thursday, May 18, 2017. The 2017 Glass Art Society will be holding its annual conference in Norfolk from June 1 - 3, 2017.

Norfolk may need a new motto — life celebrated, delicately? No. How about Crystal City? The Big Bottle by the Bay?

That's because it's the new darling in the international bowl when it comes to glass art.

This week, more than 1,000 glass artists, collectors and enthusiasts from around

the world are flocking to Norfolk as it hosts the 46th Annual Glass Art Society conference from Thursday through Saturday.

For those who don't know the difference between a Tiffany and a teacup, this isn't a big deal. But for the city, the Chrysler Museum of Art, artists and patrons of the growing local arts scene, it is huge.

This is the conference's first Virginia appearance. Last year's event in Corning, N.Y., brought in 1,700 people from 31 countries. The event has been held around the country, as well as in Japan and Australia. This year's edition brings in lectures on science and art; regional exhibitions; and special events. Several are free and open to the public.

"The conference marks Norfolk's ascension as a world center for glass art," said Norfolk Mayor Kenny Alexander in an email. "We are grateful to host this international conference, and look forward to the conversation and attention it will bring to this amazing artistic medium."

The Seattle-based Glass Art Society selected Norfolk two years ago in part because of the Chrysler's innovative Perry Glass Studio. The studio is known nationally for its popular "Third Thursday" monthly theatrical glass performance where people sip wine and watch art demonstrations set to music. The museum itself is known for its exhaustive glass collection that includes more than 10,000 works spanning 3,000 years.

There are other signs that the city is creating a name for itself as the place to be for fans of this versatile medium:

- The Chrysler, which opened the glass studio in 2011, announced late last year its plan to expand the studio to keep up with the demand for more programming. The Perry Glass Studio already features a 560-pound furnace, a full hot shop, a flameworking studio, a coldworking shop, and classes for students ranging from beginners to advanced artists.
- The Glass Wheel Studio, a gallery and working space two blocks from the Chrysler, opened in late 2015 for artists who have been moving into the area and needed a place to work and sell their items.
- In April, Old Dominion University started construction on the Barry Art Museum, a 24,000-square-foot facility to showcase glass art. The museum, which will open next year, was made possible by a \$35 million donation from Richard and Carolyn Barry. Richard Barry had a 40-year career at Landmark Communications, predecessor to Landmark Media Enterprises, The Virginian-Pilot's parent company. He retired in 2010 as vice chairman. He also served as rector of ODU's Board of Visitors during the 1980s. The donation is the largest in the school's history.

- Norfolk City Council last year approved a plan by developers to buy and convert the Royster Building on Granby Street into a glass-art-themed, boutique hotel to open next year. The \$27 million investment will be part of the Marriott's Autograph Collection.

Jutta Page, executive director of the Barry Art Museum, is a world-renowned art curator. She was the senior curator of glass and decorative arts at the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio before taking the Norfolk job in March. She has also worked at the Corning Museum of Glass in New York and is a past president of the Glass Art Society.

Page wanted the opportunity to establish a university museum and to look at ways to advance the art form locally. Having the conference here will only further that, she said.

When she coordinated the Toledo event in 2012, the visitors bureau estimated the conference produced a \$1.2 million boost in revenue, she said. She added that Norfolk's downtown is more robust than Toledo's.

"Norfolk will be hopping with glass artists," she said. "The restaurants are going to love it."

Cheryl White, director of the Glass Wheel Studio, said a Glass Art Society committee came to view her site in the center of the NEON arts district even before the venue was completed.

"They saw these places slated to come online, and I'm sure that was a factor," she said.

The Glass Wheel will host a juried exhibition of society artist members, a component the conference hasn't had in years, White said. More than 200 entries came in from around the globe, and close to 50 will be in the show.

Diane Wright, the Chrysler's Carolyn and Richard Barry Curator of Glass, took the job at Chrysler because of its glass collection. She joined in 2014 and quickly started the work to nominate Norfolk as host site. She has been working on the conference ever since.

The local committee wanted to make the conference memorable so that people will want to come back. It helps that the Waterside District and The Main, a luxury hotel with restaurants and lounges, came online recently. Conference events will also be held at the Marriott.

Private tours for collectors are scheduled, and today, the day before the conference starts, the “Day of Glass” will give the public a free taste.

“Certainly the growth of the studio has been important to the growth of the NEON district,” Wright said in reference to the Perry studio. “The NEON District has been important to the growth of the arts, and the arts have been important to the growth of the city.

“We’re excited to be a part of that.”

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