

Cathy Richardson

An Environmentalist Interprets Nature

By: Nancy Alfano

Cathy Richardson began her affair with nature not as an artist but as an academic focusing on geology. It is no wonder that one of her strong suits is in rocks. Cathy has often said “I used to study rocks and now I make rocks” [Figure 1].

Cathy grew up in Virginia, spending her childhood along the Chesapeake Bay admiring the nuances of nature and becoming more curious as each year passed. She had a creative mother who recognized the talents of her daughter but encouraged her away from the life of a struggling artist. With a keen intellect, Cathy pursued degrees in science, realizing her PhD in geology from Harvard University in 1977.

However, the creative urge was always there. It was just quiet for a few years. The rigors of intense studies have added to the quality of her paperweights. It is unusual for a talented artist to be so steeped in the sciences, but this is exactly what makes her art so special. Cathy interprets nature from a deep understanding of how everything in nature works.

The habits of her youth have stayed with her. From strolling in the woods and along the bays and absorbing every little thing as a child, she now takes time away from her glass studio in Winona, Minnesota to visit the Badlands, walk the nature trails in Colorado, and stroll along the beaches of northern California, taking countless photos. After a September, 2008 trip to northern California to do a presentation to the PCA of Northern California and a trip to the Monterey Aquarium with Daniel Salazar as the superb tour guide, Cathy developed a



Figure 1: Rocks in a Richardson paperweight

new paperweight, Pink Anemone [Figure 2]. These mental and digital images come back to the studio and work their way into amazing paperweights.

But why glass? Cathy's Mother had a small paperweight collection with an unidentified crimp rose, a few Muranos and some local pieces. Cathy still has that little grouping today. Looking into the glass is always fascinating; so early on, glass piqued her interest. When Cathy and her husband Steve, also a geologist and educator, moved from the east coast to Iowa to work at the University, she found time to pursue an interest in stained glass.

It was stained glass that led her down the path through the world of glass and brought her



Figure 2: Pink Anemone. 3 1/4" diameter.



Figure 3: "Navajo Woman." 18" x 24"

to paperweights. While living in Iowa Cathy opened a stained glass studio, Nature's Image Studio, and began work on intricate panels for private homes and larger installations [Figures

3, 4, and 5]. Cathy took a class at Pilchuck in 1991 with Narcissus Quagliata, a renowned west coast stained-glass artist who has installations all over the world.

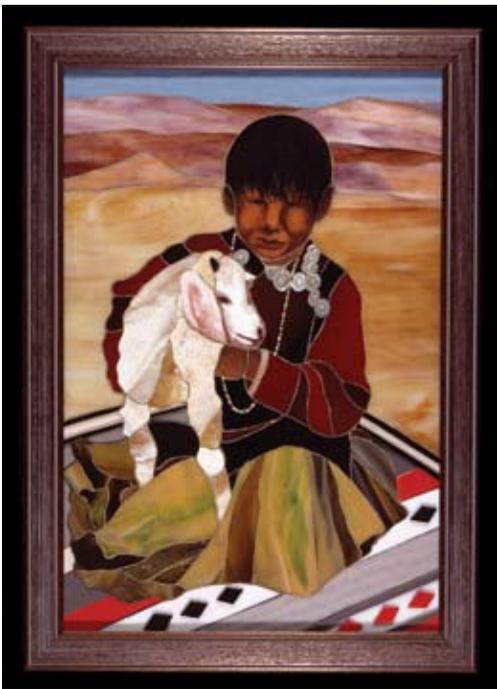


Figure 4: "Navajo Girl." 18" x 24"



Figure 5: Japanese room screen. 4 panels, each 5 1/2' x 2'.



Figure 6: Sandblasted bowl. 10" diameter.

Cathy continued to increase her knowledge and expand her techniques and took her first lampworking class at Corning Glass Studio with Bandhu Scott Dunham in 1997. She also experimented with sandblasting [Figure 6]. The family moved, this time to Ohio in 1997, when Steve took a position at Bowling Green State University. This gave Cathy the opportunity



Figure 7: Cathy with torch.

to pursue glass blowing for the first time. She was able to take any number of glass classes at the university. The family was only to be in Ohio for three years and when they moved to Winona, Minnesota in 2000, Cathy opened a spacious, well equipped studio, Touchstone Glass Studio which is a family business with Cathy [Figure 7] at the helm. She is ably assisted



Figure 8: Cathy and son Colin.



Figure 9: Marbles



Figure 10: "Alpine Garden." 4" diameter.

by Steve, now retired from Winona State University, who brings a wealth of organizational skills to the business. Colin Richardson, heir to the throne, assists at the furnace and learns the art of paperweight making [Figure 8].

Initially Cathy created marbles [Figure 9] and torchwork paperweights. She continued to expand her knowledge, returning to the Corning Glass Studio three more times. She took classes in lampworking with Shane Fero in 2000, with Loren Stump in 2003, and with Vittorio Constantini in 2006. But it was the special class in encasement in 2004 with premier paperweight artist Chris Buzzini that brought it all together. This interesting path has led her from little marbles to magnum three-dimensional environmental paperweights, for which Cathy is best known today [Figure 10].

Cathy has the respect of paperweight artists such as Jim D'Onofrio, who had this to say: "Cathy Richardson's work has caught my attention because of many reasons but one thing that stands out is the consistency of the designs. Her underwater weights [Figures 11 and 12] are particular favorites of mine; all the pieces fit together and make a believable underwater scene. Her weights are executed well with striking color and technical knowledge of the paperweight process. The weights



Figure 11: "Jellyfish." 3 1/4" diameter.



Figure 12: "Octopus." 3 1/4" diameter.



Figure 13: "Desert Garden." 4" diameter.



Figure 14: "Yellow Cactus." 3 1/4" diameter.

are never short on entertainment value and fun. We need more artists of Cathy's dedication to paperweights to up the bar for us all." Today Cathy Richardson and Touchstone Glass Studio create some of the finest paperweights in the world [Figures 13 and 14]. She is constantly studying nature and developing new designs. Collectors have definitely taken notice that after twenty years of dedication to studying and exploring glass, an outstanding paperweight artist is in our midst.

Cathy has this to say about her work; "I love making paperweights, especially working out the sculptural and design challenges each new piece presents. I have always been a detail person and feel temperamentally well suited the rigors of making fine weights. I enjoy analyzing the shape, form and artistic possibilities of different types of plants and animals and then figuring out how to actually make them in glass. Even though I basically interpret natural environments into glass, color is also a big part of my work. I like figuring out how to play one color against another to make some elements stand out and others blend together to make a less obtrusive backdrop. I enjoy trying

to push the limits of the medium to create a truly three-dimensional environment."

To Learn More:

Additional examples of Cathy Richardson paperweights can be found in the Contemporary Showcase feature of the 2006, 2007, and 2008 *Annual Bulletin of the Paperweight Collectors Association, Inc.*

About the Author:

Nancy Alfano is the owner of Portia Paperweights in Chicago. She greatly admires the work of contemporary artists and enjoys writing about them.

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