



## *Pursuit of Perfection* Damon MacNaught

By: Nancy Alfano



Every once in a while paperweight collectors' get a big surprise, a new artist arrives on the scene. Damon MacNaught is an intriguing young man with an engaging smile and he is taking over the ancient art of millefiori making [Figure 1].

Damon states that his personal goal is the *Pursuit of Perfection*. This kind of drive showed itself early on when he graduated from Hartwick College in Oneonta, NY with a Bachelor of Art: Sculpture in 1997, Cum Laude. Thus began his trip down the road to a long list of awards and further exploration into all aspects of art. He wants to go the distance and find out what glass can really do.

After college Damon took up a residency and then post baccalaureate study at the Appalachian Center for Crafts in Smithville, Tennessee. It was at the center that he had the privilege of studying under the renowned glass artist Curtis Brock. It was Professor Brock who encouraged him to continue his studies at the University of Illinois where another famous glass artist, William Carlson, was chair of the department. He pursued his masters during the last year that William Carlson was at the school, gaining his Master of Fine Arts, Sculpture, in 2005.

But it was at the Appalachian Center that an incident happened that altered his artistic life. When Damon tells the story it is quite humorous. There he was, working away with several other young students, when he noticed a solitary man with white hair working on canes. What was he doing? And why



Figure 1: Damon MacNaught

was he doing it? What was the point of this tedious process? Damon introduced himself and had lots of questions. Very soon he had a new friend and it was none other than Jim Brown, a paperweight artist we all admire. A mutual admiration began and a whole new world opened up to Damon. Jim has this to say about Damon: "Damon is an easy young man to say nice things about. He has all the elements of someone who will be remembered for a long, long time. Besides being educated in the arts, he is talented and dedicated. He has a fantastic work ethic and brings a different esthetic to the table, more than any other artist. Damon teaches art in several different universities and schools and we all know that teaching magnifies our knowledge of any subject. Because of his considerable glass working experience, he picked up the fundamentals of

paperweight making very quickly. Now he is putting his own twist on the genre and I, for one, look forward to seeing where he takes it. No less important, in my estimation, Damon has the core values of someone we can admire and I'm pleased to call him a friend. I'm sure he will achieve the success that he so richly deserves." They see each other often and are good friends to this day.

But Damon needed to continue his education and took on teaching assistantships and fellowships. He began teaching art, design, and printmaking at Tennessee Tech University in 2007 and then moved on to teaching drawing and design at The Art Institute of Tennessee in Nashville where he is now full time faculty. Despite the heavy schedule of teaching, he is still able to maintain running his own glass studio, Bare Glass Studio.

Damon brings a wealth of art experience to his paperweight making which he began to focus on in December of 2009. His first weights were scratch signed and then in 2010 he used a signature cane with a lower case "dm" as well



Figure 2: "M" signature cane of Damon MacNaught

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as scratch signing with a two digit date. He now uses an "M" cane on the under side of the weight framed in a murrini basket and continues to scratch sign "D.MacNaught."

In June 2011, Damon taught the Millefiori Class for the International Paperweight Foundation. It is easy to see what a good teacher he is and how he engages his students with his knowl-



Figure 3: Spoke pattern millefiori, "dm" signature cane. 3 1/2" diameter.

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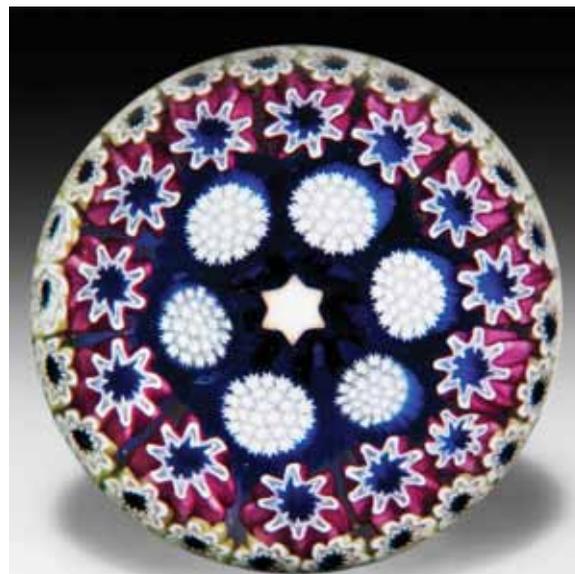


Figure 4: Pattern millefiori with stars, scratch signed "Damon MacNaught 10." 2 1/2" dia.

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Figure 5: Ring star canes, faceted, scratch signed "Damon MacNaught 11." 3 1/4" diameter.

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Figure 6: Super magnum, pink, faceted, scratch signed "Damon MacNaught 11." 4" diameter.

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## *The Pursuit of Perfection*



Figure 7: Spaced canes on latticinio, scratch signed "Damon MacNaught 11." 3 3/4" dia.

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Figure 8: Concentric millefiori with central duck cane. "M" signature cane on bottom. 3 1/2" dia.

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Figure 9: Damon Macnaught & Deb McConnell

edge. He makes his classes fun and still there is no doubt about the seriousness of what he is doing.

One of the class members, Deborah McConnell, speaking for herself and her husband Geoff, had this to say; “We really thought it was an experience of a lifetime and proud of our attempt.” [Figure 9] All of the class members gained an insight into what it takes and went home with a millefiori paperweight of their own making. Of course, it is always a thrill to meet with a paperweight artist, it is of what collectors dream.

The paperweight collecting world can be assured that there will be new paperweights in the future when artists such as Damon MacNaught are continually spurred on to be creative and innovative. Because of the depth of his art experience and his broad background in handling all aspects of glass, Damon brings a technical strength to paperweight making that we don’t often see.

Damon lives on a small farm in Silver Point, Tennessee with his wife, high school art teacher, Shayna where they enjoy growing vegetables and have a stand of fruit trees. They have plans to increase the size of the orchard. Living in nature suits them to a tee.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said: “The beautiful rests on the fundamental of the necessary.” He must have been speaking about paperweights. We collect beautiful paperweights because it is necessary. And we have Damon MacNaught to thank for adding beauty [Figure 10] to our lives.

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 **About the Author:** 

Nancy Alfano began her interest in paperweights as a collector specializing in French antiques. Through the years she has written and lectured extensively on fine paperweights and is now concentrating on collecting with a new interest in emerging artists.

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Figure 1, title page headers: Joe Alfano  
Figure 2: Damon MacNaught  
Figures 3-8, 10: Courtesy L. H. Selman, Ltd.  
Figure 9: Joe Alfano



Figure 10: Pink and white double overlay, scratch signed “Damon MacNaught 11.” 3 1/2” dia.

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