The Corning Museum of Glass and Corning Incorporated have come together to create a unique residency program. The Specialty Glass Residency, announced last fall, offers artists a chance to use specialty glasses developed by Corning and work with teams of experts from both organizations. At the heart of the program is innovation and experimentation – two elements that are key to both Corning and the Museum.

Corning Incorporated, a leading supplier of specialty glass and glass ceramics, has developed and patented more than 150 formulations, including products such as Gorilla Glass. Artists not only have access to these materials, but they also have a chance to consult with staff who have technical expertise in glass formulation, melting, and forming.

The Corning Museum of Glass offers resident artists a chance to work with Museum glassmakers in their facilities, including the recently-completed Amphitheater Hot Shop. Resident artists have the opportunity to consult with curatorial and research staff that can provide historical and artistic context for the project. In addition, the artists have access to the world-class collections of the CMoG and The Rakow Research Library.

Dr. Glen Cook, chief research scientist at the CMoG and scientific advisor to the residency program, said his hope is to “create an environment that nourishes the sojourning artists and scientists on that journey [of discovery], so that the greatest potentials can be realized.”

The first artist invited to participate in this endeavor is American sculptor Albert Paley. Paley, who is best known for his large-scale works in metal, first worked with glass at Pilchuck in 1998. “Their [residency] program there was to bring people outside the glass medium to experience glass.” Paley incorporated glass objects he made at Pilchuck into a series of sculptures, noting at the time the “relationship between the metal and the glass.” He continued to use these materials in tandem over the next several decades, and was therefore interested in the opportunity to work with specialty glasses developed by Corning Incorporated.

Along with a team of experts, Paley spent the first part of his residency experimenting with different types of specialty glasses. One of the glasses he chose to work with, Corning Code 7056, is a borosilicate glass engineered to bond tightly to the metal alloy Kovar. The properties of this glass allowed Paley and his team to achieve something truly special. Museum glassmaker Eric Meek said of the experience, “The idea of fusing glass with another material is something almost every glassmaker dreams of, but usually is totally off the table as an option. We did something I don’t believe has been done by an artist in the 3,500-year history of glassmaking – we fused iron with glass.” Paley, who has spent two decades exploring the “visual integration” of glass and metal...
could finally achieve the “total unification” of these materials.

Due to the unique nature of this residency, which blends art and science, research will certainly come into play. This was the case for Paley, who calls his studio a “research facility.” He considers research an integral part of the design process: “We’re always trying new things whether it’s driven by aesthetics... or the technical aspects,” and those experiments necessitate investigation. Paley’s approach to research is illustrated by his residency. When melding metal into molten glass, Paley and his team noticed air bubbles were being trapped in the glass. Once the glass was manipulated, however, many of these bubbles were “drawn out and deleted.” This unexpected outcome led Paley to investigate how the team could manipulate the metal and glass to accentuate the trapped air.

Amy Schwartz, director of The Studio of The Corning Museum of Glass, also sees the need for research and collaboration between those who are involved in this program. Schwartz hopes a dialogue between the resident artists and Corning scientists will benefit both groups. Cook seconds that thought, adding, “I want [scientists and engineers] to see how observing and learning from artists can inform their own inventive processes, as artists take materials up to and beyond perceived limits in ways not typically possible in the more mechanized environment of a laboratory.”

The residency program will be discussed in detail at this year’s Labino Lecture, Exploring New Possibilities with Science and Art: Corning Museum of Glass/Corning Incorporated Specialty Glass Residency. Join moderator Amy Schwartz and panelists Rob Cassetti, Dr. Glen Cook, Eric Meek, Tina Oldknow, and Albert Paley on Saturday, June 6 for an overview of the program, an introduction to the resources residents have access to, and a look at plans for working with artists and designers. Cook hopes artists who come to the lecture will “be moved to push the boundaries of materials and processes in their own work, seek collaboration with artisans in other media to combine with glass, and seek out advice and their own partnerships with scientists and engineers.” Schwartz, who will talk about the resident selection process, adds, “Artists have long been excited to get access to Corning’s specialty glasses and to Corning’s scientists. This [residency] opens new avenues for artists to do their own research using these materials.”

Learn more about the residency and see Paley and his team at work on our blog.

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