

Singapore HeritageFest 2009
“Arte (factually) Speaking” Story-Writing Competition
Shortlisted Entry (Lower Secondary Category)



Contest ID: 182
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Artefact: The Persian Wall Installation
Museum: Singapore Art Museum

Blow

Deep within the dark, there is only the warm pulsating rhythm of lighted furnaces and hisses of steel. Shelves behind are cluttered with numerous half-finished masterpieces; a workbench surrounded by scattered designs of outrageous hues.

The Glassblower lives here.

Here, with unkempt hair, scraggly beard, sharp eyes and nimble fingers. Few understand the secrets of his craft. Spring brings tourists. He makes magic from flame and air. He basks in their attention; proud. But we have lost our awe, living near him all our lives; we know everything.

So draw a little closer. Maybe he'll tell you his story....

My childhood was bittersweet; flushed with memories, my first obsession with colours. I used to live in a house by the sea. The organic nature of waves, myriad blues and greens, curious patterns of shells, all became my early inspiration. When I moved to Iowa as a journalist, I longed to capture the translucent, unstable texture of that seascape in something solid so I would always have it, but knew not how to.

My discovery of glassblowing was coincidental. On a trip to Wisconsin, I saw a small man sitting in front of "Jim's Glassware". In the shop window stood strange, elaborate works, delicate goblets and vases. He was holding a long rod, on which glowed a mass of liquid fire.

"Sir, what is that?"

He looked at me awkwardly.

"Why son, it's glass of course! I'm shaping it."

I was intrigued by its transparent qualities, and he showed me how to blow colour into it gently, as a summer breeze breathes life into the trees. Here, I knew, was my answer. I was certain that glass was the only material that could freeze my beloved seascape into something I could touch.

Change came creeping upon me when least expected. I began investigating the techniques and origins behind glassblowing. Before long, I had quit my high-paying journalist job to become a glassblower. I set up a shop in Iowa, combining my research and methods I had picked up from Jim during subsequent visits. My first series of works were mixed forms of gulls, storms, ships, sand; my best friends, vacuum plates, blowpipes, optic moulds. But most importantly, my freedom to add colour after gaudy colour to create beauty brought fresh joy every time.

Then my brother died, taking away my colours for awhile.

Black is not a colour, though many believe it is. Rather, black is the absence of colour. My world turned black with tears, and my grief, like water through a crack, leaked into my art subtly. Glass, I learned, could be hideous; dark, moulded into snarling demons and vampiric shapes. I took liberties with my looks, neglecting to dress well, to tidy my hair. However, even when the pain of loss had faded to a dull heartache, I still kept my dishevelled appearance, finding some comfort in the way people shunned me, left me alone to creativity. Yet, I grew in fame across America for my extraordinary passion in glassblowing, and people flocked to admire my works. I became The Glassblower, nameless, a mystery.

"There you have it; my story."

You see a sudden flash of sadness in his eyes, but it passes quickly and you are unsure if it is real. With insincere courtesy, you smile your thanks, purchase some glass trinket from his collection, and head into the sunlight, wondering why you feel sympathy at all.

Besides, you'll probably never see The Glassblower again.
(575 words)