

# The Paperweight Chase

Newsletter of the Ontario, Canada, Paperweight Collectors Association

Number 3

February 2003

## 3rd Annual ROM Brocklebank Paperweight Lecture

One of the world's most renowned paperweight artists, **Rick Ayotte**, will be speaking at the Royal Ontario Museum on Saturday, March 29 at 2:00 PM. He will present the ROM with his latest paperweight masterpiece. The museum commissioned this paperweight with support from the J. A. Brocklebank Fund. Rick's slide lecture will document the making of this paperweight and will intrigue anyone interested in the creative process.

Rick started his career in glass in 1962, working for the Macalaster Scientific Corporation, where he was offered a glassblowing apprenticeship. Although he spent 10 years at Macalaster, he set up a glass blowing bench in his basement as early as 1963, and began creating small glass sculptures at that time. Encouraged by his friend and colleague, Paul Stankard, Rick decided, in 1976, to try his hand at creating paperweights. His first creation, in 1978, was a brilliant red cardinal on a branch. He then decided to concentrate his creative efforts on the realistic depiction of birds in their natural environment.

By 1983 Ayotte was beginning to add flowers to his designs. He continued to enhance his creative designs over the next twenty years which has

taken his work in creative glass work to even greater heights.

### **Paul Stankard says this about Rick Ayotte.**

*"Living in the woods of New Hampshire, Rick Ayotte has dedicated his life to the art of the paperweight. His mastery of glass and his consummate familiarity with nature have brought a fresh vocabulary to the art form."*

### **Here's what Ayotte has to say about himself.**

*"My work is a vehicle that allows me to share the qualities of nature with people who have little exposure to it. I've found that an understanding of the wonders of our world leads to . . . respect to our natural environment."*

For information and tickets  
call the Royal Ontario Museum  
at 416 586. 5797.



### The 2003 Meeting Schedule

March 29 Rick Ayotte at the ROM  
April 12 Ottawa  
April 26 TBA  
June 28 Recap of the  
Texas PCA Convention  
August 16 Summer Barbecue,  
Cambridge  
September 20 Ottawa  
October 11  
Antique/Contemporary French  
weights  
November 22 Christmas Social



**GIVING IN TO GLASS** *by Catherine Weary* It began so innocently. "Here, Mom. It's a paperweight," said my daughter one Christmas. "You should have it, since you're a paperweight collector." "I am?" thought I, puzzled. Such a notion had never occurred to me. True, I did pick up that fascinating glass sphere at a crafts fair a few years back. But does that make me a paperweight collector, and just what is a paperweight collector, anyway? I was vaguely aware of the existence in the world of such esoteric beasts. However, that was about the extent of my knowledge on the subject. I had little experience of the objects they collect and no understanding at all of why they choose to do so. If my daughter considered me to be one of their number, it wouldn't do to maintain a state of such ignorance. I resolved to alter this situation, and thereupon set out in search of enlightenment. What I found was a miniature universe as intricate, colorful and varied as the art around which it revolves. It is a universe comprised of many seemingly incongruous elements - science and fantasy, art and commerce, fellowship and competition. Yet it is readily comprehensible. The objects are easily categorized, the cast of characters small and the history brief. All pertinent terminology could be set out in a single vocabulary exam. With a bit of study, one can acquire a solid understanding of the structure of this universe in a relatively short period of time - a boon to the horally-challenged hobbyist. However, to explore its many facets (or printies, as they're known in paperweight parlance) might well consume a lifetime. From the first, I was captivated by the art. It is a wondrous dichotomy - intricacy derived from the simplest of materials, delicacy bred of brutal conditions. It is fragile, yet stoutly endures from one century to the next. To see an array of paperweights is to know visual feasting. One encounters a riot of color and form. Within the limiting confines of a small dome of glass, paperweight artists offer a vast range of

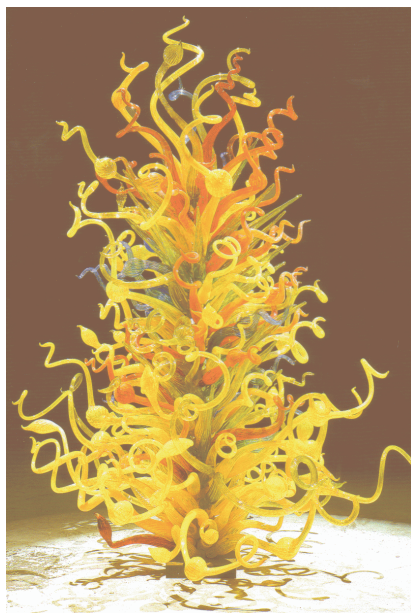
artistic expression. Some choose realistic portrayals of animals or flowers, some present their images through the painterly lens of the impressionist, still others produce work that is strictly abstract. Fantasy makes a ready appearance in the subjects of paperweights and humor is not unknown. Shapes may be angular or softened, colors vibrant or muted. Although disparate in execution, a group of paperweights will cohere harmoniously because it is united by format - hence the paperweight's eminent collectability. The creation of a paperweight is truly a marvel. It is born of fire and slowly cooled, like the earth itself. The process begins with rods of colored glass, which are submitted to a flame then warped and coaxed in various ways. Some artists develop their images by welding together small pieces of glass previously shaped into the building blocks of the ultimate design - a fish scale, a flower petal, a bee's hair - hundreds of elements patiently placed just so. Other artists bundle, stretch and slice the rods ad infinitum, creating the miniature images known as canes that they employ in their work. Each method is painstaking and fraught with peril. The final step of encasing the completed design in molten crystal offers one last opportunity for disaster. Throughout the process, damage and waste are high. Frustration must run at a premium. Paperweight making is not for the faint of heart. So who are these paragons of patience? Who are the stars in the paperweight universe? - a mere handful of studio artists and the odd factory. Paperweight making has never been a mainstream endeavor. When the first paperweights were produced in the mid-nineteenth century, only a few factories made them, and then only as a sideline to a more lucrative production of other glassware. Today, there exists a minute number of men and women that make a living as paperweight artists. Belonging as they do to the information age, these artists have had their lives and work chronicled in numerous publications. Their stories read largely the same. Not one has formal training in paperweight making. Each has come

to his art by a somewhat circuitous path that investment of trial and error, even if he was lucky enough to have a mentor. Experimentation has been the order of the day for the few factories that produce contemporary paperweights, as well. Records of early paperweight making are scanty, so even the two nineteenth century glass houses that are still in operation have had to reinvent the wheel. Surprisingly, the lack of record keeping has enhanced the enjoyment of paperweight collecting for many people. Coupled with a decline of interest in paperweights that lasted for nearly a century, many a paperweight now presents itself as an unknown quantity - an opportunity to "exercise the little grey cells," as Poirot would say. Most paperweights offer a myriad of clues as to their origin. They possess distinctive cane designs or coloration, the encasing crystal has a particular weight or clarity, the elements of the design resemble weights of known attribution. Learning to spot the clues or "identifying marks" is part of the fun. It's a lot like birding in that respect. Armchair detective work seems a natural pastime for collectors of what began as desk accessories. However, many people prefer a more active approach. These are the Teddy Roosevelts of paperweight collecting. Some stalk their quarry in musty, old, out-of-the-way antique shops where they search out the inevitable jumble of miscellaneous glass objects and, with quickening pulse, peer into each scratched orb they find, hoping to discover an overlooked jewel. Others contrive business travel to destinations such as New York, Chicago or Santa Cruz, where they haunt the gleaming glass galleries that feature contemporary weights and more polished antiques. Either way, the thrill is in the hunt - and for these collectors, as for Teddy, immense satisfaction comes from bagging a choice specimen for one's collection. Hunter and armchair enthusiast alike come together in the super-heated atmosphere of the auction house - cyber or real. Periodic auctions unleash new treasures to the public domain and participation can be both exhilarating and addictive. As with

always included a heavy any desirable in limited supply, competition for paperweights is sometimes fierce. Even successful bidders are generally left drooling over something that is going home with someone else. Fortunately, the paperweight community's number is small and its heart is large, and one of the chief pleasures it affords its members is a structure within which to interact, socializing and sharing information - and absorbing the richness of each other's treasures. Of course, one may spend countless hours contemplating one's own. The brilliant colors, clarity and infinitesimal detail of paperweights are as mesmerizing as firelight. I've succumbed, and now I'm hooked. My computer lies banished in another room and my family photos cling desperately to the corners of my desk, for I have given over the ocean of polished wood to a rapidly increasing population of writhing snakes and glittery fish, to flowers of every imaginable pattern and color, and to strange little men arrested mid-activity. It's not a scenario I would have chosen in a rational moment. Nor do paperweights come to mind when I consider likely obsessions for myself. But who among us selects the objects of his affection? Who can choose to love or not to love? We simply have the emotional response or we don't, and the object can be downright startling. Some say it's kismet, others, chemistry. I prefer chemistry - and the simple chemistry of sand, salt and metallic oxide, when kissed by flame and molded by imagination, has ignited in me a passion for things small, smooth and eternally beautiful. I guess I am a paperweight collector, after all.

*Editor's Note: Cathy Weary (Steets) was a member of PCA Ontario before moving to California. Cathy wrote the script for the video which our PCA Club used to introduce Brian Musselwhite, Royal Ontario Museum, when he spoke at the PCA Inc. Chicago Convention. (The California Clubs might look into using this kind of writing talent.) You can reach Cathy at <cweary@pacbell.net>*





## **Details about the 2003 PCA San Antonio Convention**

Dates: May 14 - 17, 2003

Place: Adams Mark Hotel, San Antonio,  
Texas

Address: 111 Pecan Street East,  
San Antonio, TX USA 78205  
210-354-2800

Toll Free: 1-800-444-2326  
FAX 210-354-2700

Rates: Single \$139.00 US  
Double \$149.00  
Triple \$159.00 - Quad  
\$169.00

The Convention Registration is now ready. If  
you'd like a copy contact Emily Kak, the PCA  
Administrative Assistant at 336-869-2769. Or,  
PCA Inc., PMB 130, 274 Eastchester Drive, #117,  
High Point N.C. USA, 27262, or at  
<[www.paperweight.org](http://www.paperweight.org)>

San Antonio is a wonderful mixture of  
the old and the new, lots of history, art &  
culture, shopping, dining and  
entertainment. Add a few days before or  
after the Convention to enjoy San Antonio.

Travel writer Daisann McLane says . . .  
"beers and smoky South Texas bean dip at the  
Acapulco Icehouse, polka at Lerma's,  
margaritas at Rosario's and braunschweiger  
at Schilo's." She goes on with . . . "While  
most people associate San Antonio with the  
Spanish mission-style Alamo, its biggest  
architectural treasures are the office  
buildings, hotels and shops with ornate  
facades built downtown during the city's  
heyday as a regional railroad and trade  
center, from the late 1800's through the  
1920's."

New York Times December 24, 2000

Check out all the other details from  
San Antonio's Visitor & Convention  
Bureau at . . .

<[www.San AntonioCVB.com](http://www.SanAntonioCVB.com)>

### **Sandra Ainsley Gallery Dale Chihuly Exhibit**

If you didn't make it to the Sandra Ainsley  
Gallery over the past few months you  
missed a spectacular display of Dale  
Chihuly Sculpture. This was held in her  
second location in the newly redeveloped  
Gooderham and Worts distillery complex  
at the Cooperage, 55 Mill Street, Suite  
100, Toronto. This historic exhibition  
space will be used to showcase large scale  
sculpture and major installations.

Most of you are aware that the Sandra  
Ainsley Gallery is one of the few glass  
galleries in Canada to present  
paperweights by Canadian & American  
artists. The original location is in The  
Exchange Tower, 130 King Street West,  
Toronto.

## **2004 is the 25th Anniversary of PCA Ontario**

In 1979 Helen Carothers formed the Paperweight Collectors Association of Ontario. She was encouraged in this endeavour by Doris Burns of Montreal, where a chapter of the PCA was already operating. We're looking for ideas of how to celebrate this occasion. Should we commission a limited edition paperweight? Maybe we could ask some of our Canadian Paperweight Artist friends to enter a design contest and the winner gets the order. Should we hold a gala event? What about a coach trip to Corning

**Paul Jokelson**

1905 - 2002

Founder of the Paperweight Collectors Association, in 1953, and known as the "King of Paperweights", Paul Jokelson died on November 24, 2002. He was born in Dunkirk, France on January 13, 1905. He came to America as a "war bride" - those are his words describing how he married an American nurse during the Second World War.

When he was a young man in Paris his lifelong avocation began when he bought the famous "*Bird in the Nest*". When he discovered that the large French glass houses no longer made weights, and had lost their expertise to do so, he took the initiative to visit Baccarat and St. Louis and eventually persuaded them to restart production. This was the beginning of the renaissance that is still going on today.

The first time this writer saw him was at a Wheaton Village Paperweight Weekend when he spoke at the closing Banquet. He hobbled to the stage and I think needed a step stool because he was quite short, and said, (*and I paraphrase*) - Well, you see from the time it took me to get up here, that the body is shot, but the mind is still functioning. He then went on to regale us with humorous and serious stories about the PCA, collecting, and so on.

We must all take our hats off to this wonderful gentleman who wrote so many of today's reference books, led the way in putting collections of weights together, and gave his "all" to making sure that paperweights would continue to be an art form.

**Jacques Demers Lectures  
at the**

**Canadian Museum of  
Civilization,  
Hull, Quebec.**

In his lecture titled "*Flowers of Crystal*" PCA Ontario member, *Jacques Demers*, outlined the history of paperweights, how they're made, and displayed a number of pieces from his personal collection. Jacques gave the lecture in French at 2:00 PM and English at 3:00 PM. This was held in *Cascades Salon* of the Museum and he had an enthusiastic audience for both events. Canada Post sponsors this art lecture series. It is staged by the Museum. The organizers said it was one of the most successful to date in terms of attendance.

The half hour slide lectures were both followed by a spirited question session. Jill Rafuse and Hans Adler, Ottawa members of PCA, were also in attendance. Jacques did two live radio interviews promoting the event with the local *CBC* station on Friday and with *Radio-Canada* on Saturday morning.

***Ontario Paperweight Collectors Association***

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