

A

*Susan Duval visits the forge of glass*

G L A S S

*artists Lee Lyon and Jacqueline Spiro*

A C T



*Glass Menagerie  
Tablet AO is  
fitted together from  
five different pours  
of glass*



*Alchemical Creation Lyon pours 2,375-degree molten glass into carved-sand molds*

Tucked into a peaceful hillside along Maroon Creek Valley is a small, unprepossessing garage that radiates heat even on this snowy winter day. As I crunch up the curving drive through thick woods toward the studio of Lee Lyon and Jacqueline Spiro, strange clanks and low roars emanate from the brightly lit door.

Five years ago and newly arrived from London, I met Lyon in the course of buying an art gallery from his wife, Joanne. At that time Lee was grappling with a volte-face as he switched from clay to glass, having already laid aside a successful business in Kansas City. An inspirational stint at Dale

Chihuly's Pilchuck School of Glass prompted Lyon to swap his kilns for the pyrotechnic paraphernalia of glass casting. He met Spiro when he put the word out that he was looking for some muscle to help in the hot shop. A refugee from Peat Marwick in New York, the diminutive Spiro turned up one day and Lyon, ever open-minded, agreed to take her on. She has since become collaborator, ally, and dear friend.

Entering the garage, I am inundated with the noise of grumbling machinery and startled by sparks and flames. An alchemical process that mixes art with science, the manipulation of molten glass is a

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID HISER

tricky and dangerous undertaking that has mesmerized artists since Roman times. Today, the re-emergence of glass as a vital art form finds a growing number of artists captivated by this creative process, unparalleled in its demand for strength, tenacity, and a will to experiment.

Adding to the unexpected scene in this fiery atelier is the sight of Lyon and Spiro themselves, truly an Odd Couple. Panting as they doff their aluminum-foil space suits and welder's visors, the seventy-ish Lyon and twenty-something Spiro take a welcome break amidst the chaos. I listen to their banter and marvel at the relationship between this pair of artists, brought together — despite an extraordinary difference in age and background — by a passion for glass.

"That last piece was at 2,375 degrees Fahrenheit," Lyon yells to me above the din, "because the deeper mold needed two ladles of glass." I wrinkle my nose against the pungent burnt odor that fills the studio. Resin in the sand molds burns off when hot glass is poured in, making me wish I had a mask like the ones now dangling around the artists' necks. When Spiro opens what looks like a stout refrigerator door, I glimpse sturdy shelves supporting blocky molds, each filled with still-liquid glass. The apparatus is an annealing oven — a sophisticated and essential piece of equipment that controls the cooling process. The many hours spent carving the molds

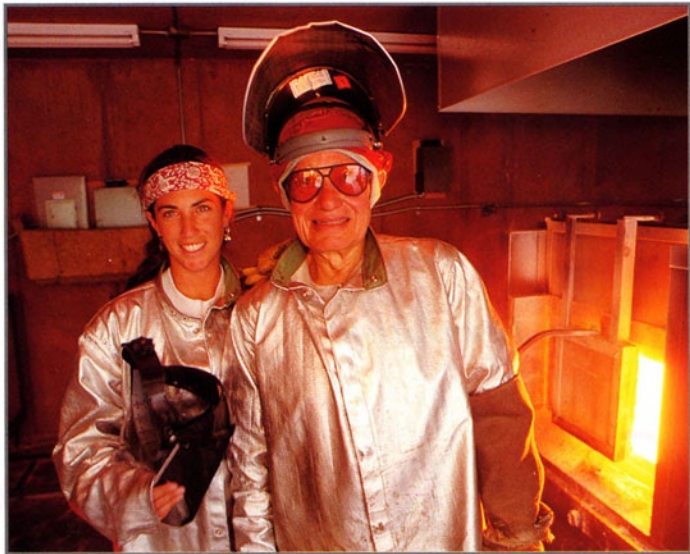
— Spiro often achieves an impressive degree of detail — followed by intense pouring sessions in the hot shop, are put to a final test by this computerized task-master. Typically, eight critical days are needed to bring the glass down to room temperature.

Murphy must have written his law, "If anything can go wrong, it will," after a session in a glass studio. A mold can split, allowing the hot glass to ooze out, and if Lyon miscalculates the annealing rate, the glass will crack under the strain of cooling too quickly. And then there are personal risks: burned arms, fingers cut on unsanded edges, and aching muscles from heaving 45-pound ladles of the red-hot stuff.

Days later, I meet Spiro in the cold shop a little further up the hillside. As she steers a trolley laden with now-cooled work up the steep path toward me, a smile breaks across her face: Every piece looks good. The finishing-off process, called cold working, starts with removing the

remaining mold from around each piece. The two artists grind and polish, apply gold leaf, and discuss the December show — their first in the glass medium.

Although Lyon had broached the idea of a show some time ago, what clinched it for me was witnessing their larger installation pieces, commissioned by collectors here and across the country. In free-standing outdoor fountains, imposing gates and doors, and undulating walls of glass, Lyon and Spiro have achieved a paradox of light and mass, lending an ephemeral quality to solid volume. While museum exhibitions and public installations around the globe highlight the wide range of this versa-



*Odd Couple Jacqueline Spiro and Lee Lyon with their essential annealing oven*

tile medium, the critical attention now being paid to glass ensures a competitive environment among glass artists as they strive to create more interesting and innovative designs. The chance to share in this international movement added to my excitement for mounting this two-person show in Aspen.

The pieces in "Temples, Tombs, and Tablets" emerge out of Lyon's love affair with pre-Columbian and Native American artifacts, and with the striking imagery of these once vigorous cultures. Elemental themes of the cycle of life, a god force, and natural phenomena permeate the sculptures. And glass seems a fitting medium for such complex subjects: delicately fissured and translucent, carved with glyphs and symbols; each piece invites close scrutiny. ♦

*"Temples, Tombs, and Tablets" will be on display at the Susan Duval Gallery December 7-20.*