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AMERICAN **Style**

OCTOBER 2008

FALL ARTS PREVIEW

The Best

- Expositions
- Museum Shows
- Arts Events

Poetry
in Glass
Paperweights by
Paul Stankard

ARTS TOUR
Kansas City, Mo.

PORTFOLIO
Mixed-Media Artist
John Petrey

US \$5.99
CAN \$5.99
UK £2.95

Display until
October 31, 2008





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FEATURES

68 **Miracle Worker**

Paperweight artist Paul Stankard creates meticulous depictions of flora and fauna in glass. Lee Lawrence tells the story.

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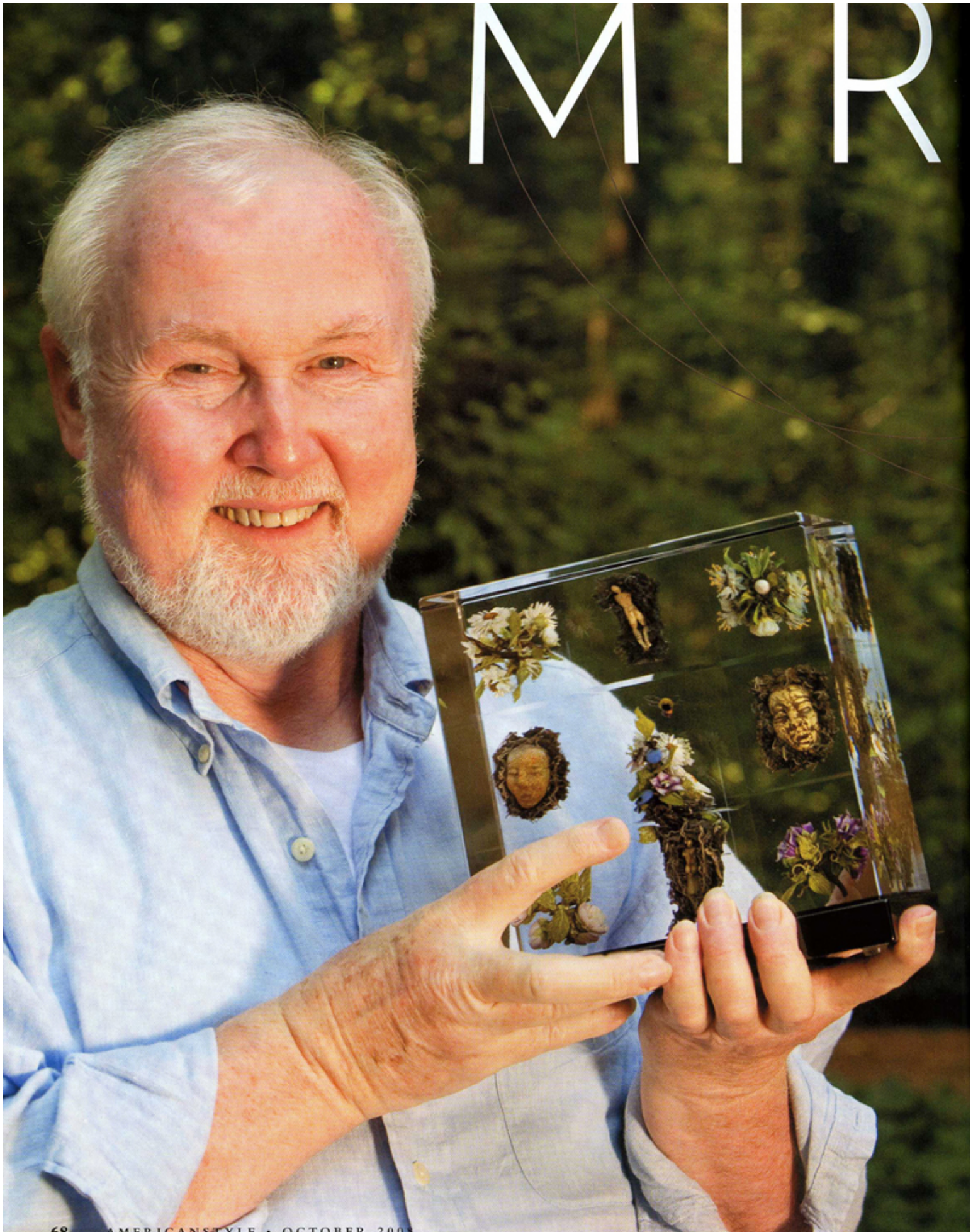
Comfort, collaboration and a sense of humor inform David and Jacqueline Charak's quirky collection. Susan Caba leads the tour.

SPECIAL SECTION: FALL ARTS PREVIEW

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Improved museum spaces lead the way to a fall calendar bursting with memorable exhibitions and shows. Lynda McDaniel reports.

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ACCLE worker

Paperweight artist

Paul Stankard

creates meticulous

depictions of

flora and fauna

in glass

BY LEE LAWRENCE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREGORY BENSON





SEATED at his worktable,

eyes shielded by blue-tinted glasses, Paul Stankard is creating an illusion. In one hand, he holds a rod of clear glass; in the other, a dark one. Between them, fire shoots out of a gas-fueled torch, softening the glass. With smooth, steady gestures, Stankard layers clear glass onto the dark, then pulls. The rod stretches. Again, he coats and pulls until the dark glass is but a filament inside a clear rod that he can shape into minute petals, stamens, root filaments or the edge of a damselfly wing. Once Stankard has assembled countless components into a color-rich bouquet, he encases it in crystal. The clear glass enrobing the dark filaments “disappears,” leaving wisps of color so fragile it is impossible to fathom how Stankard could have manipulated them.

This is the “wow!” factor in the work of an artist who is, by many measures, an inspiring anomaly. He attended technical college, not art school, and even after tasting Manhattan, opted for South Jersey, his home since the age of 15. In 1972, the married father of four left a good job in scientific glass to devote himself to art. He chose lampworking, a technique then associated more with street fairs than with the burgeoning studio craft movement. In New Jersey, paperweight production had a rich history and was “a wonderfully respected category and also somewhat of a lost art,” Stankard explains.

“In the factory,” he elaborates, “being creative meant paperweights.”

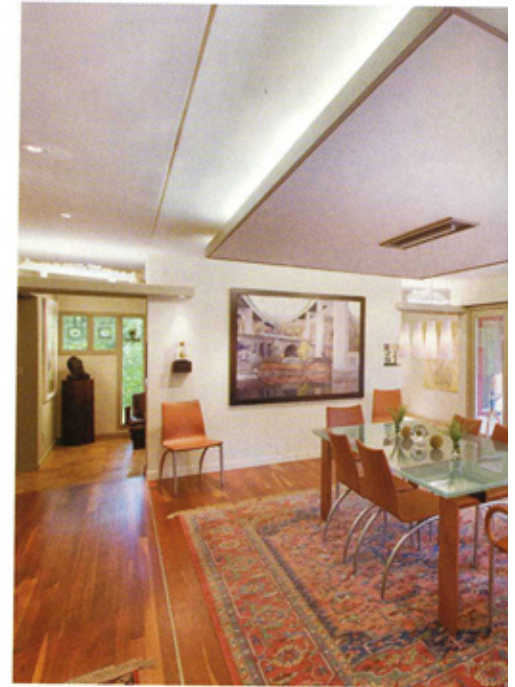
No longer satisfied with “wow,” Stankard prefers to hear “*aah ...*,” as people experience his floral and plant vignettes with their intimations of fertility, decay and wondrous mystery. Although Stankard’s compositions are painstakingly detailed, they are not botanically accurate—the form may be slightly off, roots may take on



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As a result of his nearly 50-year career, Paul Stankard enjoys an international reputation for his assemblages and paperweights, including the orb on the previous page, all of which celebrate the mysteries of life. “Veiled Tap Root Botanical,” right, includes a human figure only visible from the bottom of the piece.





“poetry EXPANDED MY WORK.”

human form, faces might emerge underground. Memento mori? Jungian archetypes? Spirits or sprites? These are the kinds of questions Stankard likes to hear. “The sex, death and God part of my work,” he says. “That’s what’s important.”

At his home in Mantua, N.J., where he and his wife, Pat, have lived for nearly 40 years, other surprises await. We think of artists as being more likely to read Sufi texts than attend Sunday services, yet Stankard is a practicing Catholic. We think of glass artists as relishing technique, yet Stankard prefers talking literature. And, at home, the man heralded as the undisputed master of floral sculpture surrounds himself with artworks ranging from his daughter Katherine’s figurative paintings to Jay Musler goblets and Mark Peiser sculptures. Aside from one or two of his own works and a paperweight by his daughter Christine, there are no depictions of flowers.

“I am in the studio duking it out with realism, banging myself up till I leave exhausted,” he says. “The last thing I want to do is walk into my house and look at a flower!” His cheeks color beneath his white beard as he laughs.

Stankard’s joviality and success notwithstanding, the journey has had its rough patches. In the mid 1980s, after perfecting and building on the techniques of 19th-century French paperweights, he “hit an invisible wall. It was the equivalent of writer’s block,” he says, leaning back in his chair. “I wanted to do work that was significant.”

“Maybe,” he adds, “I needed to stop worrying about the creative process and just slow down.”



CAROL BATES

The way out of the impasse came through poetry—writing it and listening to it. He discovered the verses of Mary Oliver, Seamus Heaney, James Joyce and, above all, Walt Whitman, who validated Stankard’s love of nature, encouraged his mystical side and gave him new purpose. If earlier he strove to recreate the forms and colors of flowers, he now aimed to express a deeply spiritual “reverence to living things.”

“Poetry expanded my work,” Stankard says, his inflection rising as though still marveling at this twist in his journey. And marvel he might: severely dyslexic, Stankard was particularly challenged in school. Today, he brings up



The Stankards have renovated their home, built in 1969, several times with the goal of displaying art while raising a family. Along with bound copies of books Stankard has listened to (with the aid of the nonprofit Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic), the library showcases framed birds by Shane Fero. An encaustic painting by Philadelphia artist Dale O. Roberts hangs on the dining room wall, part of Stankard's extensive collection of Delaware Valley paintings. Robert Mickelsen sculptures are among the works displayed in the stairwell.





The master as assistant: Stankard works with David Groeber to build a paperweight, such as "Lotus Bouquet Orb," inset; the process combines frameworking with glass blowing.

"I AM IN THE STUDIO
duking it out WITH
REALISM."

Read More

No Green Berries or Leaves, a collection of Paul Stankard's autobiographical essays, is available for purchase through The McDonald & Woodward Publishing Company (www.mwpubco.com).

See More

Marx-Saunders Gallery, of Chicago, Ill., will showcase a selection of Paul Stankard's work at SOFA Chicago, Nov. 7-9, at the Navy Pier.



Ovid and Jung and Joyce with the eagerness of someone still unsure he can pass muster—or win the approval of an undemonstrative father who prized academic success. This explains the alcove in his house, lined with books he has never read. “I listen to the book on tape,” he explains, “and then buy a hardcover—it’s my trophy.”

It is also part of his legacy, an issue much on his mind these days. This is partly a function of age—he is 65—and partly the memory of a car barreling into him head-on as he and Pat rounded a corner along an Irish country lane last year. Hoping to inspire others to trust in the value of persistence, self-education and dedication to quality, Stankard wrote an autobiography, *No Green Berries or Leaves* (the title echoes his mother’s approval as she peered into his basket of freshly picked blueberries). And he is pondering a second book, a compendium of essays iterating the advice and techniques he has imparted to generations of students.

Stankard is also shaping his visual legacy. He established Stankard Studio in 2006 and encourages longtime assistant David Groeber and his own children—four out of five are involved in the studio—to create their own work while he himself prunes his output. On a chilly weekend in May he is busy smashing failed paperweights with a metal pipe. “After I’m gone,” he says, speaking over the sound of shattering glass, “I don’t want work out there that I would be embarrassed by.”

A few days later, Stankard is hard at work on a new orb. As he mentions starting each day by “meditating on a higher being and on the mysteries of nature,” the archaic, Biblical meaning of the word “magnify” comes to mind. Just as the crystal orb makes his flameworked bouquet loom larger, Stankard’s composition glorifies the divine being he believes created the blossoms that inspire his art. ●

A regular AMERICANSTYLE contributor, LEE LAWRENCE writes about the arts from her home in Brooklyn, N.Y.



In the studio, multicolored glass rods await their turn at the torch to be remelted into components of Stankard Studio’s work. Stankard’s daughter Katherine, who received her master’s from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, divides her time between painting and working in the studio, where she creates work such as this “Paphiopedilum Orchid” paperweight.