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## **GLASS MASTER KICKS OFF PITTSBURGH CELEBRATION**

Creating over 200 permanent installations worldwide, as well as becoming one of three American artists to have a solo exhibition at the Louve, Dale Chihuly is truly a master of glass. Metropolitan Museum of Art, London's Victoria and Albert Museum and the Smithsonian American Art Museum are among a few institutions which still house pieces of his work. But Chihuly's spectacular productions can now be viewed at Pittsburgh's Phipps Conservatory. *Chihuly at Phipps: Gardens & Glass* opened May 10<sup>th</sup> and spearheaded the year-long "Pittsburgh Celebrates Glass" campaign.

Interestingly enough the glass is seen in, what is essentially, a glass house; utilizing both natural and artificial light for enhancement. The menagerie of compliments never ceases in trying to describe the exhibit: outrageous, glistening, expansive, innovative. Every patron is immediately greeted with a blast of color. Looking up, the sunburst of *Goldenrod, Teal, and Citron Chandelier*, specifically created for Phipps, hangs from the welcome center's domed ceiling. The flourish of color continues throughout, with matching exotic names like *Nijjima, Macchia* and *Ikebana*.

Dale Chihuly, born in 1941 in Tacoma, Wash., currently resides in Seattle and has been revitalizing the art of glass since the 1960's. "I call myself an artist for lack of a better word," Chihuly said. "I'm an artist, a designer, a craftsman, interior designer, half-architect. There's no one name that fits me very well."

Chihuly has created prestigious glass work out of his Seattle based "Boathouse" since 1983, which serves as his residence as well. Functioning in his studio, and compared to Andy Warhol's Factory or Tiffany's Glass Studio, he chooses a team

approach in creating his work. Not only does Chihuly teach, but he employs, designs and creates all out of the same space. According to Todd Oldknow's biography on the artist, "He has succeeded in maintaining artistic control while, at the same time, allowing his assistants to exercise their creativity." Chihuly no longer blows the glass himself, due to a car accident that took his sight in one eye, but he continues to design and allows his apprentices to create his highly demanded works.

It was the proactive nature of Phipps' executive director, Richard Piacentini, which brought Chihuly to Pittsburgh after seeing a 2002 display in Chicago. Pittsburgh's 114 year-old Victorian glasshouse, which underwent massive renovation and recently doubled in size, does not disappoint. The venue is divided into lavish, plant-filled rooms trimmed in red brick and earth. Birds, found either by circumstance or on purpose, can be heard when entering the main foyer. The air felt warm and a bit humid, yet strangely appropriate.

Of eco-friendly note, the newly opened, 12,000 square foot Tropical Conservatory incorporates engineering feats such as thermal massing, energy blankets, and roof zone heating (all of which drastically enhances climate control and save energy). The tropical roof is also home to a computer-controlled shading system, setting the precedent for green building construction.

Past botanical expositions have taught Chihuly valuable artistic lessons. His first, in Chicago's Garfield Park, managed to use contrasting colors against the floral hues, creating an awe inspiring effect. Since then, Chihuly has completed seven conservatory expositions. Chihuly persuaded the Conservatory to gut the entire East Room and bring in unique silver plants and other washed out, blue and green flora, to highlight his cobalt *Fiore* – a one time, site specific piece. The blue hued glass, made from sand and molded on waters of the west coast, seemed to marry the sandy, silvery background perfectly.

Phipps' Sunken Gardens incorporates a *Sea of Macchias*. Each unique piece displays one color on its inner surface, a different translucent hue on the exterior and trimmed along the edge with a third. Seemingly a meld between marine life and vibrant, blooming flowers, these large, wavy glass vessels stood against miniature green palms. Eyes instantly pop as one enters the room. For the series, Chihuly invented a new technique. The artist "lip wraps" a thin ribbon of hot glass in a ribbon of a different

color. “Seen under bright light, [the Macchias’ colors] look like nature caught on fire, nature in molten flux, nature in the process of being created,” said Robert Hobbs in an essay of Chihuly’s Macchia line.

What Chihuly received for the exhibition is under wraps, due to the confidentiality agreement between the artist and Conservatory. Pieces range in price from \$3,500 to over a million dollars for installations. Select smaller pieces are available for purchase at the Conservatory, along with select prints, books, and photo essays. The Oakland installation runs until November 11<sup>th</sup> and is a must see for locals and visitors alike. Evening tours are available. More information, including times, prices and information on the artist himself can be obtained by visiting the Phipps Conservatory website: [www.phipps.conservatory.org](http://www.phipps.conservatory.org).