

Dale Chihuly Presentation



SLIDE 1: INTRODUCTION

Images: Red Chandelier, 2000 (size: 20'X10') Chihuly Exhibition, Naples Museum of Art, November 2, 2000 – March 15, 2001

- What do you see in this image? What does it look like?
- What do you think it feels like?

While you are studying the image, I am going to read a riddle: “I can be as clear as crystal, red as rubies, or blacker than the darkest night. When hotter than dragon’s breath I turn to liquid light. When cold, I’m like ice and more solid than rock or steel. What am I?”

Does anyone know the answer? The answer is glass. Today we are going to talk about glass art and one of the world’s greatest glass artists, Dale Chihuly.

Dale Chihuly (chih-WHO-lee) is an American artist who creates his art out of glass. Chihuly has created hundreds of projects using glass, some as tall as an evergreen tree, some that float, and even one that weighs over 40,000 pounds. Some projects are so big that they take over thirty people just to put them together.

In this image we see Chihuly’s Red Chandelier displayed in a museum. Chihuly is famous for making enormous chandeliers. This chandelier is 20 feet high and 10 feet wide at its widest point. The chandeliers are made out of several pieces of glass wired to a metal structure. Could you imagine something like this hanging in your dining room? I’m now going to tell you about Dale Chihuly and then we’ll look at some more images of his work.



SLIDE 2: BACKGROUND

Image: Dale Chihuly in his studio

- Have you ever seen somebody blow glass?

Here is a photo of Dale Chihuly working in his hotshop. A hotshop is a special work studio where you make glass. Dale Chihuly was born in 1941 and grew up in the city of Tacoma in the state of Washington, near the Pacific Ocean. (Chihuly is still alive today, is married and has one son.)

Chihuly quote: "I was first taken with glass as a little child walking along the beach, picking up bits of glass and shell. I was struck by its translucency, its transparency, its color...Then I learned to blow glass in the mid-1960s, and I fell in love with glassblowing. The combination of the two [glassblowing and the qualities of the glass] have kept me interested ever since." "Glass is transparent, hard to understand," he explains. "It is formed from sand, fire and human breath—it is the cheapest material and yet the most magical."

While in college, Chihuly learned how to melt and fuse glass. Around this time, Chihuly set up an art studio in his basement and began to experiment with glass as a material for creating artworks. After melting stained glass, he used a metal pipe to blow his first glass bubble. Chihuly was fascinated by the way light passed through glass, reflecting colors in the space around it.

After graduating from college, Chihuly enrolled in the first glass program in the country, at the University of Wisconsin. He continued his studies at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), where he later established the glass program and taught for more than a decade.

In 1968, Chihuly went to work at the Venini glass factory in Venice, Italy. Italy is known for its beautiful glass art and it was very educational for Chihuly to observe the Italians' team approach to blowing glass, where they work in teams of four or five people. The team approach is critical to the way Chihuly works today.

In 1971, Chihuly cofounded the Pilchuck Glass School in Washington State. With this international glass center, Chihuly has led the avant-garde in the development of glass as a fine art. When Chihuly was 35 years old he was in a car accident in England that caused him to lose sight in his left eye. This made it dangerous for him to blow glass and he began to depend more and more on his glass blowing team. To direct the team and explain his ideas for his sculptures, he created drawings or paintings in brilliant colors. Despite the challenge of working with impaired vision, Chihuly found strength and a sense of community in working with a team.



SLIDE 3: TECHNIQUE

Image: Dale Chihuly in the Hotshop with Jim Mongrain, The Boathouse, Seattle, WA 2000

- Does anyone know how to make glass?
- Is glass a liquid or a solid?
- Have you ever seen glass being blown?

Chihuly creates his colorful sculptures using hot glass. Glassblowing requires unique equipment and a whole team of specially trained adults. To shape glass, you have to work in a special work studio called a hotshop. In the hotshop there is a furnace that heats up to 2,150 degrees Fahrenheit to melt the glass into liquid. There are also special ovens to allow pieces to cool.

The first step is to put a mixture of sand or quartz and other materials into the furnace where it is melted. The artist uses a piece of constantly rotating steel pipe to “gather” the glass. The glassblower then blows into the pipe, creating a bubble of liquid glass at the end. Next, wooden paddles and blocks are used to shape the bubble. Moving the glass back and forth between two furnaces, the artist forms his piece. The glass is dangerously hot – certainly too hot to touch – so sometimes water-soaked newspaper is pressed against the bubble, sending steam into the room. When the piece is complete, it is moved to a specialized oven, called an annealer, to cool slowly for many hours or even days. Quick changes in temperature would cause the glass to crack.

- Does anyone know how they color the glass?

Most color is created by mixing a specific oxide (chemical compound) into the batch and allowing it to react with the other ingredients during the melting process. Most glassblowers today use a pre-manufactured form of concentrated color that is compatible with the clear glass that they are melting in their furnace. These “pigments”, or colors, are specifically formulated for use in hot glass and come in every color of the rainbow.



SLIDE 4: Mille Fiori

Image: Mille Fiori, 2003, On display May 3 – October 12, 2003, Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, WA

- What does this image remind you of? A Garden?
- What kind of mood or emotion does the image have?
- Can you describe the different shapes?

This image is called “Mille Fiori”, which in Italian means “a thousand flowers”. The Mille Fiori series are described as Chihuly’s Magical Gardens and are attributed to his lifelong passion for nature and flowers. Chihuly has made both indoor and outdoor installations of Mille Fiori. Chihuly loves to transform an environment, and by installing his sculptures in places like parks and glass conservatories, he transforms the surroundings.



SLIDE 5: SEA FORMS

Image: Pink and Opal Sea Form Set, 1981

- What do these shapes remind you of? (sea urchin, jelly fish)

Chihuly strives to make shapes of glass that no one has ever seen before. Some of his glass looks like imaginary undersea animals or plants. As mentioned earlier, Chihuly grew up near the Pacific Ocean and has always enjoyed going to the beach. Chihuly is inspired by the sea life, and he has created glass pieces that look like sea forms: shells, jellyfish, and urchins. The glass pieces look as if they are sitting on the seafloor, swaying with the current.

Chihuly quote: “I love to walk along the beach and go to the ocean. And glass itself, of course, is so much like water. If you let it go on its own, it almost ends up looking like something that came from the sea.”



SLIDE 6: PERSIANS

Images: (Center) Venturi Window, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA 1992 (Lower right) close-up of Persians

- Have you ever seen glass sculptures hanging on a wall?
- Do you think they are breakable?

Chihuly calls this style of sculpture “The Persians”. The Persians started out as a search for new forms and was developed by a team of glass blowers working with Chihuly and experimenting in the hotshop at the Pilchuck Glass School. Chihuly made pencil drawings of the shapes and he and his team created the new forms. After experimenting for one year, Chihuly and his team had made 1,000 miniature Persians that would be used as models for large scale Persian sculptures.

Chihuly and his team made large scale Persians and displayed them on windows, ceilings, and walls, as seen in this image.



SLIDE 7: BOATS

Images: (L) Carnival Boat, “Chihuly at Fairchild”, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, Coral Gables, Florida, December 3, 2005 – May 31, 2006 (Size: 4’X15’X5’)

- Is this what you normally see in a rowboat?
- Why do you think Chihuly filled the rowboats full of glass sculptures?

Chihuly sees glass art as limitless and expressive and he loves to do art installations in unexpected places. An art installation typically consists of three-dimensional works, such as sculptures that are often site-specific. A fine example of “unexpected places” is Chihuly’s Boat series. Chihuly first started doing his Boat series when he and his team found a partially submerged wooden rowboat, which they hauled out of a river, emptied it of mud and debris, and filled the boat to overflowing with glass.

Since that time, Chihuly has done many outdoor and indoor installations of boats filled with glass. Locations have included parks in England, the NY Botanical Gardens, and as shown here, botanical gardens in Florida.



Slide 8: MACCHIAS (MAH-key-ah)

Image: Macchia Forest, Oklahoma City Museum of Art, Oklahoma, 2002

- How many colors do you see in this image? Are the bowls one solid color?
- Are there colors that you love or colors that you really don't like?

Chihuly Quote: "I'm obsessed with color," Chihuly admits. "Never saw one I didn't like."

One day Chihuly was looking at the various colors that he used to make his sculptures. At that time he used a total of 300 different colors. And then he thought "I'm going to use all 300 colors in as many possible variations and combinations as I can." With this inspiration, Chihuly started making glass sculptures that were one color on the inside and another color on the outside. Chihuly also developed a way to put an opaque layer between the two colors to clarify the colors and to keep them separate. This process became his Macchia series. When Chihuly had to come up with a name for his new work he called up an Italian friend and asked "what's the word for 'spotted' in Italian?" And his friend said "Spotted in Italian is *macchia*," and that's what the name became.



SLIDE 9: SUN SCULPTURE

IMAGE: The Sun, New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, New York, June 25 – October 29, 2006 (size: 168X168X168")

- What is this? What does it remind you of?
- If it were black or pink, do you think it would remind you of something else?

This sculpture is called The Sun and Chihuly and his team created it for a temporary installation at the NY Botanical Gardens in 2006. The Sun was part of a larger exhibit where Chihuly transformed the gardens with his flower and plant type sculptures like those seen in the *Mille Fiori* series.

Some of Chihuly's pieces are in permanent locations, while others can be exhibited in any location. Before The Sun was on exhibit in the Botanical Gardens, it was first assembled in Chihuly's studio so that the team could have an idea of what it would look like when it was assembled on the exhibition site. After assembling the sculpture in the studio, the sculpture was then taken apart, and each piece of glass was packed for transportation in cardboard boxes and shipped by ground, sea or air. The pieces were not numbered so the final look evolved as it was put together: a metal structure was constructed and the individual elements were wired and attached to it, one by one. Chihuly directed the operation, assessing the overall shape as it developed.