

CORNING MUSEUM OF GLASS



A CONVERSATION BETWEEN RAKOW COMMISSION ARTIST ANDREW ERDOS AND TINA OLDKNOW, CURATOR OF MODERN GLASS

The artwork of [Andrew Erdos](#), the Museum's 2013 Rakow Commission artist, is pop, sarcastic, and humorous, with a hint of social commentary. His over-the-top installations create a situation of sensory overload, which he sees as a reflection of everyday life in urban culture, especially the culture of New York City. Through the use of mirrored futuristic-looking animal sculptures, vehicles used by the artist to navigate identity and environment, Erdos explores the relationships between nature, technology, and people.

Erdos was at The Studio in July making this year's Commission, titled *Ghost Walk Under Infinite Darkness*. He took some time to sit down with Tina Oldknow, curator of modern glass, to discuss his work.

Tina Oldknow: Andrew, when you decided to come to Corning to work, what was your goal?

Andrew Erdos: My goal is to try new things, purchase materials I've never purchased before, experiment with a process I've been fascinated with for a long time, try things I haven't done before and take chances. I think one of the best things about the Rakow Commission is the opportunity and the obligation to try things you don't normally do and experiment with it.



Oldknow: What kind of piece are you thinking of making for the Rakow Commission?

Erdos: It will be a continuation of my current body of work using these large animal forms. What I am most interested in now is using glass mixed with light to create colored light—producing color with a sculpture. Using basic, simple pieces of colored murrine almost as if they're pixels in a digital image, or dots in a pointillist painting, to produce light, to produce color and produce a new visual experience.

Oldknow: I want to ask you about video. You've worked a lot in video and now you are focusing on glass sculpture and creating environments. Do you find that you spend as much time with video or are you moving away from video?

Erdos: I think one of the most interesting things about video is its ability to fill a space with light. Glass can do a lot of those same things when combined with light. The core beauty of what a video is, which is just a way to control light in a space, is something that I'm really excited to work with by combining murrine with light. When you think about what a digital video is, it's just lots of little dots of color combined, added with time. You have your pixels, you have your image, you play that image fast, you change the relationship of the pixels to each other, you change the relationship of each little pieces of color to create the energy.

Oldknow: Will this sculpture have a video component?

Erdos: This one is actually not going to have a video component. It's just purely as simple as white light mixed with meticulously made small discs of murrine of different colors to act as pixels in a complex sort of relationship of colors mixing together in a confined space.

Oldknow: What do you hope that visitors to the Museum get from your sculpture?

Erdos: The Museum is really remarkable in the sense that there are people from everywhere. There are Mennonite visitors, lots of people from India, lots of people from upstate New York, lots of people from China. I want to create an experience that people from a wide spectrum of cultures and ages and life experiences can look at and relate to and be visually able to connect with, and then connect with on a more simple basic unspoken level.

Oldknow: More of a symbolic reading.

Erdos: Yes, working with unspoken ideas that are prevalent in basically every culture in the history of humanity. Ideas of time, nature, our place in nature, our relationship with each other, with the earth, with technology, and also something that is beautiful.

Oldknow: Has actually making the work at Corning and being in proximity to the Museum kind of brought these things to the fore for you?

Erdos: Being in proximity to the Museum is not especially new for this body of work because I've produced so much of my work here at The Studio. I've been working here over the last 11 years. I started working here as a teenager when I was in high school and the Museum has always influenced and shaped and helped to present the options of what is possible to do with this material; what is possible to do with these ideas. I feel like it has always been a part of the work. It's interesting and really exciting to have the opportunity to create the new large scale work that I know is specifically for the Museum. It is great to be here and I'm really honored to be part of it.

Oldknow: I've noticed that the words "ghost" and "time" often appear in the titles of your works. Why is this?

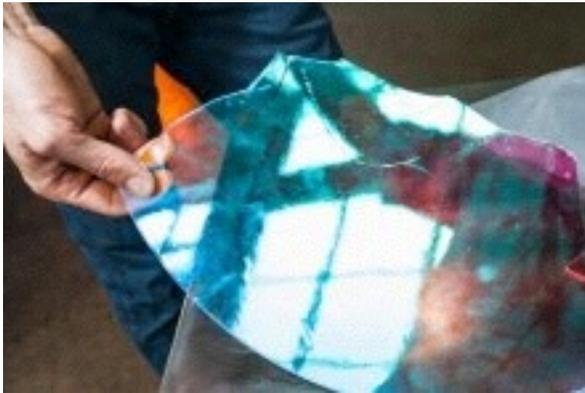
Erdos: Ghosts and time are really powerful ephemeral ideas that fascinate me. Over the entire course of human history, every culture makes references to these very powerful energies and the manifestation of these physically intangible but very prevalent entities.

The idea of experiences or energies that are too big or too complex or too profound for humans to comprehend is fascinating, and it's something to continue to explore and something that I think people from every culture can relate to on a certain level. I'm asking what the core fascinations of humans are. Joseph Campbell writes about it a lot in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. What are the ideas that are prevalent in every single culture over the course of human history? Regardless of the time in history, geographic location, or cultural differences, these are just things that humans are always fascinated by, and we'll never be able to completely understand.

Oldknow: Tell me more about the routing animal that you use, your very characteristic animal. I see them as you. Can you tell me a bit more, what is this animal?

Erdos: I want something that is identifiable. You can tell it's a mammal, you can relate to it on this basic primal level, and you can empathize with it, you can understand it, you can feel emotion towards something and be fascinated by it—you care for it. But when you actually step back and look at the situation, it's not a real animal, and it's not actually natural at all. It's very foreign, it's very alien. And upon closer examination, this relationship is exposed to be very conflicting in a lot of ways. And the object is also mirrored, so you literally see yourself in this conflicting, yet comforting and familiar relationship between nature, technology, time and our place within all those things.

Oldknow: I've noticed that you use a lot of silver mirroring on your animals. Will these animals be mirrored as well?



Andrew Erdos used dichroic glass in creating the 2013 Rakow Commission

Erdos: The animals will all be mirrored. I'm using another material with similar properties, which is dichroic glass. It's a material I've been extremely averse to for a long time. It's a part of an overwhelming sense of the experience.

I've been going and looking at as many shows as possible and the key show that I can relate to is the most recent Jeff Koons show—which is an over the top sensory experience. Three monumental balloon sculptures next to each other, a classic Greek figure from a Renaissance master made larger in scale, cast in stainless steel, and then brought to a high polish, and it's a bright color. And it's more, more, more, more, more, and then it reaches the tipping point of being just so overwhelming—and it's a really fine line. That's one of the great things about the Rakow Commission is I can make a large piece and if I don't like it I can smash it and do something else. And it's totally cool.

Oldknow: You are very hesitantly approaching dichroic.

Erdos: I think hesitation is an understatement as to how apprehensive I was to even think about buying it. But there is really something magical about it. I was at Art Basel Miami this year and there was an amazing piece of sculpture that was purely a sheet of dichroic glass about 2 feet wide by 6 feet long leaning against the wall. And it was so simple and so beautiful and then so much stimulation at the same time. It's a delicate balance that sometimes can be achieved and sometimes it's just opening the gates of ridicule. And sometimes, something really amazing can be created. Thinking about Damien Hirst's *For The Love of God*. . . I mean, you can't put more visual stimulation per square millimeter than was put onto this sculpture. And as a result he's created something that will be an artifact of humanity 5,000 years from now. He's created something that wars would have been fought over in the Middle Ages. It's so simple and so complicated and so much visual and conceptual stimulation on one object. So, try it out...see what happens.

Oldknow: Your studio is in Brooklyn and you work in Brooklyn normally. What attracts you to come to Corning to make your work?

Erdos: I am really attracted to come to Corning and make my work for the piece. Here I have mental clarity, the opportunity to look at nature, to be part of something that is sort of greater than humanity.

I love my studio, I love Brooklyn, I love working all night and looking at the Manhattan skyline just illuminated and shining when the sun's rising—but there is this sort of strength and clarity one gets from being able to step back from such an overwhelming barrage of achievements of humankind.

And to take a moment and go out into the woods and look at a waterfall and look at how rocks have been eroded over thousands, millions of years. To look at the broader perspective of how minimal a single human's life is in the greater spectrum of time on the earth. The opportunity to be in nature, get a moment of clarity, calm down, focus and get to work.



Andrew Erdos works with Lorin Silverman and Ernesto Echeverria at The Studio

Oldknow: Has anyone worked with you on this piece to help you make it?

Erdos: One of the great things about Corning is there are so many talented people working with glass in this community. One of the artists who's always been very helpful in the fabrication of my recent body of work is Lorin Silverman, a fellow Alfred graduate, who's a young master glassblower, very humble and discreet about it, but he's been very essential in the production of this new body of work.

Oldknow: But you blow all the glass yourself?

Erdos: I'm always in the hot shop. I'm handling the pipe, I'm doing all those things, but to work with a team of skilled assistants and fabricators is just necessary to produce large quantities of complex work. And, there are so many parts of the process that are really time-consuming. To polish an animal takes a lot of time. I try to organize and run a team of skilled assistants and fabricators to be able to produce as much art as possible, as efficiently as possible, to produce the best objects I can.

Also though, I'm in the hot shop, turning the piece, covered in sweat, hands are getting blistered. I'm still 100 percent there and for me that's what I want to be doing—it's what I enjoy doing.

Obviously there are artists like Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons or Richard Serra, who are physically completely detached from the actual production of their work. And I'm totally fine with that. I think it would be absolutely absurd if Richard Serra were to spend all day grinding metal on a monumental sculpture. It would be illogical. I personally enjoy being in there and getting to be part of it, but it's really as long as the idea can manifest itself—that's what's most important. And I think that what's most important as an artist is just being able to have your idea physically be manifested.

Oldknow: You're interested in creating a situation that is overwhelming, your idea of sensory overload. I want to talk a little bit more about why you go there.

Erdos: Creating a situation that is overwhelming to the senses is many ways a representation of daily life. Living in New York, being surrounded by millions of people doing their own lives—everyone is doing something all the time and there's just intense competition for energy, for emotion, for people's time, for people's feelings, for people's responses, for people's ideas. And then you also have something like a beautiful sunset that is an absolute sensory overload. But, it can also be really peaceful and calming. When all your senses are activated is oftentimes when there is a moment of clarity.

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