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## Spotlight on The Corning Museum of Glass

It's not often that a museum experience includes intentionally breaking glass and setting paper on fire, but it's part of the schedule every day at **The Corning Museum of Glass**. This unique museum located in Corning, NY is an interactive learning center, a state-of-the-art glassmaking studio, a research library and an art gallery that houses the world's largest collection of glass with more than 45,000 objects, all in one architecturally stunning building. "The Museum is unusual in that it is a museum about a material," says CMOG Communications Manager Yvette Sterbenk. "So there's an opportunity to showcase the full story, which encompasses art, history, technology, science and craft." After several expansions and transformations over the years, including recovering from a devastating hurricane, **CMoG will celebrate its 60th anniversary** next week, on May 19, 2011.

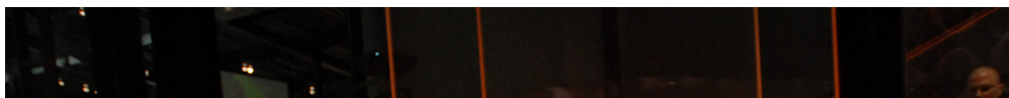


*Red/Amber Sliced Descending Form*, Littleton. Gift of the Ben W. Heineman Sr. family. Photo courtesy of The Corning Museum of Glass.

When the museum opened its doors to the public in 1951, it was significantly smaller with only two staff members, a collection of 2,000 glass objects and a **research library with glass-related books and documents**. Although founded by **Corning Incorporated** with a windowed wall looking into the commercial glass factory, the museum was created solely as a non-profit educational institution. "The Museum has always been generously supported by Corning Incorporated," says Sterbenk, "but it has never been a showcase for the company. Instead, it has remained committed to its intention to tell the world the full story of glass—actively collecting, educating and showcasing glass."

When tropical storm Agnes flooded the Chemung River Valley surrounding the museum in 1972, **CMoG was filled with 5 feet of water**, a collection of toppled over, mud-crusted glass pieces and waterlogged books. Thomas S. Buchner, the first director of the museum, described the scene as "possibly the greatest single catastrophe borne by an American museum." A tremendous restoration effort was carried out, including meticulously cleaning every glass piece and drying all of the contents of the research library page by page.

After its recovery, the museum soon outgrew its space. Twenty-nine years after the museum's initial opening, it



after the museum's initial opening, it reopened in 1980 with a new addition designed by architect Gunnar Birkerts to create a larger exhibition space that would accommodate the ever-increasing number of visitors. This new space contributed to the museum's now iconic design, evocative of free-flowing molten glass, with a facade composed of rolled glass and a stainless steel backing. Birkerts' design was both beautiful and practical with thoughtful details including mirrors beneath the windows for indirect lighting of the galleries, minimizing glare and heat gain to protect the delicate collections on display. In addition, keeping the recent natural disaster in mind, the entire new gallery area was constructed on concrete pillars, raising it high above the flood level. This design, along with future expansions, helped to make the CMOG building **one of America's 150 Favorite Buildings** as ranked by The American Institute of Architects.



Flameworking demonstrations are given several times a day at the museum. Photo courtesy of The Corning Museum of Glass.

Not long after its first expansion, as its collection grew and the number of visitors increased, the museum once again needed more space. In 1996, it began a \$65 million, 5-year transformation to turn the museum from a gallery and research library into an engaging, interactive facility that incorporates teaching, collecting, exhibition and research.

The creation of **The Studio**, a state-of-the-art teaching facility, allows everyone from hobbyists to those interested in glassblowing as a trade to study at the museum and learn the intricacies of glassmaking.

The **Glass Innovation Center** transformed the museum into an educational experience for adults and children alike with interactive exhibits called Do It! stations that allow visitors to experience many of the different properties of glass through their own actions. Daring visitors can stand on a floor made entirely of glass and peer down at those visiting the GlassMarket Caf  below. They can also watch a friend disappear behind a piece of LCD glass that is transparent one second and opaque the next, and learn how glass bends—or breaks—depending on its composition.



Art really heats up at the Hot Glass Show. Photo by Ed Wheeler.

Daily live demonstrations include flameworking—forming art from rods and tubes of different colored glass using a 5000° flame; optical fiber—demonstrating how glass that can transmit vast amounts of information was developed right in Corning, NY; and glass breaking—showing visitors how heating or cooling glass affects how it breaks. Finally, the hottest live demonstration at the museum—literally—is the Hot Glass Show, where master glassmakers make beautiful pieces of glass art from molten 2300° glass in around half an hour. “Our live glassblowing demonstrations bring the material in the galleries to life,” says Sterbenk. **The museum's gaffers**

create bowls, vases and sculptures that are later given away to lucky audience members, or sold in the 18,000 square foot GlassMarket, one of the largest museum shops in the country. The Hot Glass Show often demonstrates how hot a finished piece is by dropping paper into a recently completed bowl or vase, causing the paper to ignite in seconds. Sterbenk attests, “It's not your usual museum experience.”

Since its inception in 1951, CMOG has grown to become the world's largest glass museum, entertaining over 360,000 thousand visitors a year. It's expansive glass collection represents 3,500 years of glass history. As for its own history, the museum has been celebrating its 60th year with several special events, culminating in the

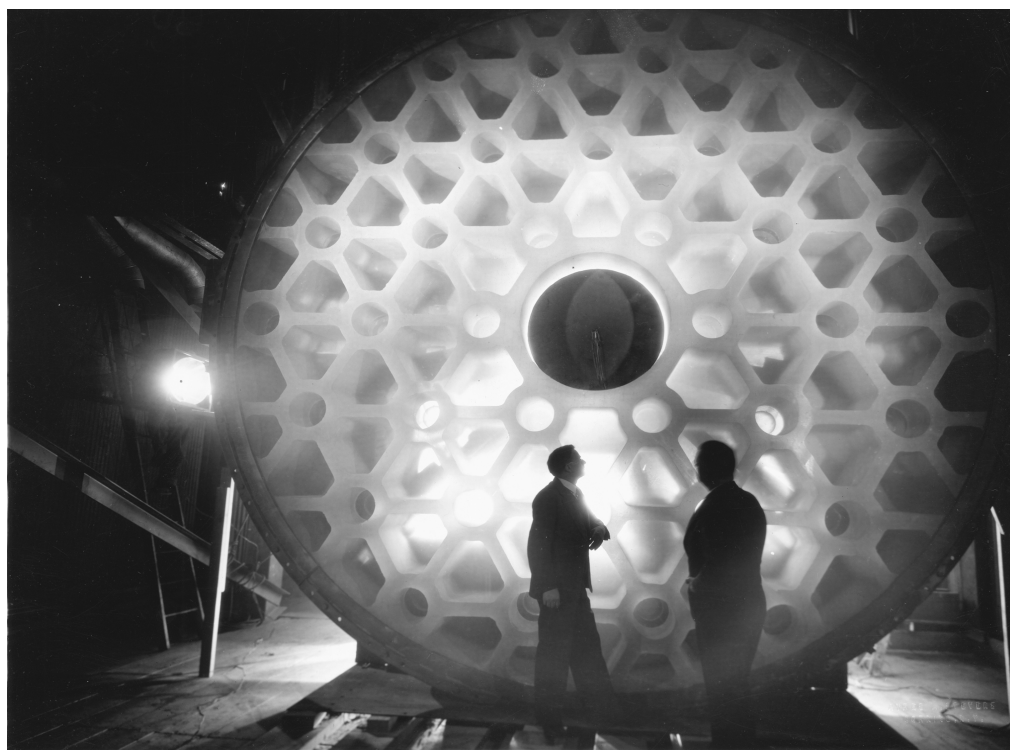
its own history, the museum has been celebrating its 60th year with several special events, culminating in the birthday celebration beginning at 9:00 AM next Thursday, May 19th. "There's a real sense of pride that permeates the Museum and the community," says Sterbenk. "The Museum is an international treasure, and it's also a cultural center for the community."

## 60th Birthday Celebration Details

*Thursday, May 19, 2011*

To start off the celebration, a parade of vintage '51 Chevys will lead the way to the museum's entrance while Corning's East High School's brass section plays. There will be live music throughout the day in the lobby, and admission to the museum will be free. Visitors will receive a commemorative 60th anniversary pin as their admission tag and a complimentary cupcake from the coffee bar. New special exhibits opening that day include *Mt. Washington and Pairpoint: American Glass from the Gilded Age to the Roaring Twenties*, the newly installed Contemporary Glass Gallery, and the **60 Favorites Tour**, which you can explore on your own or with a docent to see 60 stops around the museum's campus that showcase special objects and stories that are important to CMOG's history.

Visitors will also be able to tour some of the rarest books in the **Rakow Research Library** and view the newest exhibit, **Mirror to Discovery**, on the museum's iconic 200-inch disk. The museum also held their **43rd annual Student Art Show** earlier this month, showcasing the work of over 2,000 local students, and created a **special section on their website** compiling thoughts, photos and stories from museum visitors' experiences collected on their Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr pages. Finally, the town of Corning will help continue the celebration with their **2nd annual GlassFest**, which the museum will be participating in as part of their **2300° series**.



Despite disasters, expansions and renovations, CMOG's 200-inch disk has remained suspended in the same spot for 60 years, since the museum's opening.

**Learn more >**

Photograph by Ayres A. Stevens, Corning Glass Works  
United States, Corning, NY 1935–1936

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