

# International Window

## The Brychtová Forum One Artist's Personal Account

By Amanda Ondrick

*The Brychtová Forum, which was held in Seattle, July 15-18, 2010, was conceived to celebrate the rich tradition of women working in glass while also recognizing the life and work of one of the most important artists in the history of the Studio Glass Movement, Jaroslava Brychtová. The lectures, films, panels, and demonstrations presented as part of the Forum were a collaborative effort by several prominent organizations within Seattle's glass community – including the Glass Art Society. All were free and open to the public.*

During the summer of 2009, I had the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to travel to the Czech Republic with Charlie Parriott and eight students enrolled in Pratt Fine Art Center's Study Abroad program. The class focused on Czech coldworking and kilncasting and was an amazing experience for all of us. During that visit, the idea emerged of Mrs. Brychtová coming back to Seattle to inspire a discussion about women working in glass.

Throughout the next few months, Charlie thought more about his concept for the Forum, seeking out the help of the Pratt Fine Arts Center to execute the idea. The Glass Art Society and many other organizations and artists signed on. Working with Pratt Executive Director Michele Bufano and Liz Capanec, Charlie brought the idea into reality in July 2010.

The Forum began on a Thursday evening with a free, opening-night celebration at Benaroya Hall. It was attended by more than 300 people from around the world. An introduction was given by savvy Czech curator Sylva Petrova, and we viewed a 20-minute documentary about Mrs. Brychtová's life and work.



Forum organizers (L-R) Liz Capanec, Jaroslava Brychtová, Katya Heller, Charlie Parriott, Michelle Bufano (Russell Johnson photo)

Mrs. Brychtová gave a lecture, translated by New York art dealer Katya Heller, about her and her husband (Stanislav Libenský)'s artwork. Afterward, we headed to the Traver Gallery, a block away, where Sarah Traver had curated an exhibition celebrating the achievements of women working in glass.

Friday and Saturday were filled with free artist and curator panel discussions at the Seattle Art Museum. More than 100 people attended each day. There was also a party at Pratt on Saturday night, with glassmaking demonstrations by Karen Willenbrink-Johnsen, Karen Buhler, and Keke Cribbs. The Forum culminated on Sunday with a birthday celebration and fundraising event for Mrs. Brychtová and the *Prostor Muzeum* at Chihuly's boathouse studio.

Many people's lives were touched by the event, and over \$16,000 was raised to support the museum. It was amazing to be there to honor such a loved and respected artist.

During the Forum, I had the pleasure of interviewing people for the *Inspiration Documentary*. This series of short interviews was filmed by the Museum of Glass; its intent was to capture a moment in time in the glass world. Participants had the opportunity to pre-register to be filmed for six minutes. They were asked about their personal relationship with

glass, inspiration, and their thoughts on the future of glass. While conducting the interviews, I took former Pilchuck Executive Director Patricia Watkinson's lead and found several common subjects in participants' answers. Three main themes were: (1) the sustainability of glass, (2) gender issues in the glass community, and (3) the history of and admiration for Mrs. Brychtová and Mr. Libenský's artwork. Because of the encouragement of Roisín de Buitlear, a glass caster from Ireland, I decided to share what I found after spending these intimate moments with artists, curators, and collectors.

The sustainability of glass was discussed by many of the interviewees. The cost of materials and renting or owning glass studios is not economically viable for many, especially in these times. Many question whether the use of glass can ever become an environmentally friendly medium. The energy it takes to run a furnace and kilns, or to create a sheet of glass, billets, etc., is enormous. With so many people becoming aware of how our actions impact our environment and moving toward sustainable lifestyles such as eating organic foods and biking, it becomes more difficult to justify using glass and the toxic materials associated with the medium. Concerns were also expressed about the sustainability of glass as a career. There are by far more

glass artists than collectors. Who will buy the glasswork being created? And if artists cannot sell their work – or find employment with artists who *are* selling their work – what will they do?

Gender may seem like an obvious theme at a forum celebrating women working in glass, but there was an interesting divide in how the people interviewed perceived the issue. Some said they feel gender is a non-issue on the hot shop floor and in galleries and that having a women's-only forum encourages the division of the sexes. On the other hand, many people said that the Forum allowed stories to be told that otherwise would not be heard, allowing women to come together and feel the sense of camaraderie that has been enjoyed by males working in glass for some time. In any case, the Forum was a great opportunity to open the dialogue for this topic and many others.

It was clear, both through the *Inspiration Documentary* project and through the Forum over all, that the influence and inspiration of Mr. Libenský and Mrs. Brychtová on Seattle's glass community has been profound. People had nothing but admiration for the artists, their collaboration, and their illustrious artwork. Interviewees noted their innovativeness, resourcefulness, and passion, as well as their generosity in sharing their knowledge of kilncasting at Pilchuck. Many were also inspired by the pair's ability to use glass in a way that no one thought was possible, all the while living in a communist regime. It is inspiring to many to see how greatness could develop in such difficult conditions. Many admire their work above all others, and have been personally touched by knowing them.

*The Brychtová Forum* has inspired what I hope will be a dialogue that will continue for some time. Next year, at GAS 2011 Seattle (June 1-5), the Glass Art Society will screen the *Inspiration Documentary* and the Jaroslava Brychtová documentary. I sincerely hope that the momentum generated by this event will carry on and that people's lives will continue to be touched by Mrs. Brychtová for years to come.



Nancy Callan, "Red Riding Hood"



Cappy Thompson, "Detail, Gathering the Light" (detail of glassblower from reverse-painted glass mural, Museum of Glass, Tacoma, WA), 2003

#### Special thanks to the presenting sponsors of the Brychtová Forum:

Art Alliance for Contemporary Glass, Jon and Mary Shirley Foundation, Leslie and Dale Chihuly, Linda and Gerry Nordberg, Dudley and Lisa Anderson, Jack and Becky Benaroya, Leonard and Norma Klorfine

#### Participating Organizations:

Chihuly Studio, Glass Art Society, Museum of Glass, Pilchuck Glass School, Pratt Fine Arts Center, Seattle Art Museum, Traver Gallery, Olympic Color Rod, and The Corning Museum of Glass.

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## Image Gallery

To see more from the Brychtová Forum, click here.

## The Brychtová Forum Schedule

### Thursday, July 15, 2010

Jaroslava Brychtová and Sylva Petrova: Opening Address. Exhibition and Reception at the Traver Gallery, Seattle

### Friday, July 16, 2010

*Panel Discussion: Emerging Artists* – Rebecca Chernow, Rachel Moore, April Surgent (moderated by Sarah Traver and Patricia Davidson)

*Panel Discussion: Established Artists* – Shelley Muzylowski-Allen, Tina Aufiero, Nancy Callan, Jen Elek (moderated by Rock Hushka and Jenny Pohlman)

*Jaroslava Brychtová Documentary Film*

### Saturday, July 17, 2010

*Panel Discussion: Master Artists* – Joey Kirkpatrick, Flora Mace, Nancy Mee, Ginny Ruffner, Cappy Thompson (moderated by Paula Stokes and Linda Tesner)

*Panel Discussion: Curators* – Sylva Petrova, Margery Aronson, Greg Robinson (moderated by Maria Porges)

*Jaroslava Brychtová Documentary Film*

*Glass Demonstrations and Artist Party* – Karen Willenbrink-Johnsen, Kait Rhoads, Rachel Rader, Elli Bemis, Keke Crips, Alicia Lomne, and Karen Buhler

### Sunday, July 18, 2010

*Fundraising Brunch, Birthday Celebration for Jaroslava and Demo* at Dale Chihuly's Studio

*Pilchuck Glass School Open House*

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