

Conference Venue Spotlight

Pratt Fine Arts Center

By Grace Meils

People are often surprised, the first time they visit Pratt Fine Arts Center's campus, to find such an amazing organization operating out of a hodgepodge of austere-looking, old, industrial structures in Seattle's Central District.

Pratt's studios are spread throughout three buildings that at one time served as a loading dock, a truck garage, and a Hostess Twinkie outlet store for the now-defunct Wonder Bread factory. The iconic Wonder Bread sign is still mounted on the apartment building next-door, a landmark that is visible as you approach the area on the highway from the south.



Pratt hotshop, courtesy of Pratt Fine Arts Center



Work by Jeffrey Sarmiento, who is teaching a post-conference workshop at Pratt: "Graphic Glass: Screenprinting for Kilnformers"

Aside from the resourcefulness evident in how Pratt's modest facilities have been transformed into art-making studios, the thing people most often comment on when they arrive on campus is the energy and vitality that emanates from the studios. As all the artists and students who are involved with the organization know, there is a welcoming, supportive atmosphere at Pratt that truly is greater than the sum of its parts.

Originally called "Pratt Fire Arts Center," Pratt was a co-op-type organization started by the Seattle Parks Department in 1976 to provide access to art-making in this neighborhood that was then one of the most economically disadvantaged in Seattle. Both Fritz Dreisbach and Norman Courtney were instrumental in getting the glass program up and running. In the beginning, they didn't have a furnace. I attended an artist talk by Dreisbach at Pratt a few years ago, where he described, with his characteristic good-natured humor, trying to teach a glass class with only a slide projector.

Since then, Pratt has played a quiet but important role in Seattle's glass community. It has existed alongside Pilchuck Glass School all these years, providing a place for glass artists to work

and learn outside of the summer season. I came to work for Pratt after several years with the Traver Gallery, and when I told the artists I worked with there about my new job, almost every one of them had a story about how Pratt had been an important part of their artistic lives early in their careers. Rob Snyder told me about the days when all the artists had keys to the building and they worked through the night on their projects; Debora Moore told me about how she worked at Pratt as a charger and a teaching assistant to pay for time in the hotshop; and Dante Marioni told me he used to stop by Pratt, after a full day of working at the Glass Eye Studio, which was then nearby, to watch the older guys working. Today, the next generation of artists is learning and working at Pratt. I expect Rachel Rader, Armelle Bouchet-O'Neill, Pete Singleton and Hugh Willa will tell similar stories someday.

Since the days of the slide projector, Pratt's glass program has grown to offer a full range of glassworking techniques, alongside programming in jewelry/metalsmithing, welding/blacksmithing, stone carving, printmaking, drawing and painting. Members can rent Pratt's studios and equipment to make their own work whenever classes are not in session.

Pratt's core instructors are consistently great, in my experience – being somewhat of a glass-class addict, I've tried most of them out myself throughout the years. Cayn Thompson, Paula Stokes and Julie Bergen all have loyal groups of students in the hotshop, as do casting instructors Cathy Chase and Theresa Batty. Cheryl Matson, Rachel Rader, James Minson, Susan Balshor and Patty Gray are sought-after instructors in the warmshop, and Pat Bako and Becca Chernow both offer popular coldworking workshops. We recently found a copy of a course catalog from the early '80s, and Sonja Blomdahl and Stephen Edwards were listed as the instructors that quarter, indicating that Pratt has been offering classes by some of the best artists in town right from the beginning.

In addition to Pratt's core curriculum, Glass Studio Manager Katie Miller brings nationally and internationally known artists to teach as part of the Master Artist Program. In the past few years, Pratt has offered intensive workshops taught by Davide Salvadore, Paul Cunningham, Jiří Harcuba, Shane Fero, Boyd Sugiki, Janusz Posniak, Karen Willenbrink-Johnsen and Jasen Johnsen, just to name a few. Miller has also lined up an impressive selection of pre-and post-conference workshops around this year's GAS conference. Workshops are being offered in the hotshop by Laura Donefer and Jay Macdonell; and in the warmshop by Karina Guevin, Patty Gray, Susan Balshor, Jeffrey Sarmiento and Bandhu Dunham. Elli Bemis and Morgan Sims will team teach a vitreography class in the print studio. (Full descriptions are available on Pratt's website.)

"Pratt served as a Glass Art Society venue for the 2003 conference, and we are absolutely thrilled to welcome GAS members to our studios again," says Michelle Bufano, Pratt's executive director. "Pratt has always been a gathering place for glass artists in Seattle, and a central part of the community. It just makes sense for us to participate as a conference venue."

Pratt's glass studio technician Chuck Lopez has a plan to transform studios in



Work by Laura Donefer, who is teaching a pre-conference workshop at Pratt: "Dancing with the Diva"

all three buildings to welcome the GAS conference audience. All equipment not needed for conference demos will be removed from the hotshop to ensure comfortable seating for an audience of 100 people for demos by Ted Clark, Mike McCain, John Kiley, Dante Marioni, and Chuck himself. (Please note that there will be special ticketing for Marioni's two demonstrations.) Pratt's flameworking and fusing studios will be temporarily relocated to the much larger metal fabrication studio to accommodate audiences for demos by Sarah Blood, James Minson, Janis Miltenberger, Sally Prash, Karl Taylor and Milton Townsend; and the coldworking studio will be moved into a larger space in our Drawing and Painting building to allow adequate space for demonstrations by Joseph Benvenuto, JP Canlis, Duncan House, Jong-Pil Pyun and April Surgent. Vitreography demonstrations by Dick Weiss, Walt Lieberman and Cappy Thompson will take place in Pratt's print-making studio.

In addition to being a gathering place, Pratt serves as a resource for the many young glass artists who come to Seattle to work for the many established artists

and studios in town. The ability to trade work time for shop time has allowed many young glass artists to continue to develop their own art while working for others. As their careers progress, these same artists use the studios to make work for their first gallery shows. I can think of one artist who was preparing for his first show at the Traver Gallery during a time when the coldshop was being renovated. The staff set up the equipment he needed in the hotshop to help him to finish the work in time; this is just one of many examples of the supportive atmosphere at Pratt.

From the beginning, artists have given their time and expertise to make Pratt a success. They truly are the heart of the organization and the source of the creative energy that is almost palpable in the studios. I feel lucky to be a part of the Pratt community, and to spend my days working on its behalf.

To read GAS's earlier Conference Venue Spotlight on Seattle Glassblowing Studio, [click here](#). Coming up in the May/June issue of *GASnews*: The Corning Hot Glass Roadshow.

Image Gallery

To see more images from Pratt Fine Arts Center, [click here](#).

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