

The background of the cover is an abstract glass artwork. It features a vibrant yellow background with large, irregular shapes in shades of red, orange, and brown. Thin, dark lines and streaks of blue and green are scattered throughout, resembling veins or splatters in glass. The overall effect is organic and textured, reminiscent of natural glass or a microscopic view of a material.

glass

The UrbanGlass Art Quarterly

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Lush, Expansive Landscapes

COVER

Dale Chihuly's Inward Turn



Intense Quiet

Dale Chihuly, known for his florid and exuberant aesthetic, makes a surprising turn inward.

BY VICTORIA JOSSLIN

Pop quiz: Name the most flamboyant artist working in glass today. “That’s easy,” you might say, “Dale Chihuly.” Chihuly’s extravagant color and audacious style remain unmatched, as are his riotous forms when gathered together in outsized assemblages that explode with energy.

Now let me ask you to name a glass artist whose work would be perfect for the quiet, meditative sanctuary of a cancer hospital. You’d probably offer almost anyone *but* Chihuly.

But just as a famous novelist might long to write poetry, or an opera singer might secretly dream of trading the opera house for an intimate cabaret venue, Chihuly, too, had a hidden desire. When Omaha benefactor Walter Scott Jr. asked the artist if there was something he’d always wanted to do, he confessed he’d always wanted to build a spiritual retreat, like Henri Matisse’s celebrated *Rosary Chapel* in Vence, in the south of France.

Scott was involved in the funding for the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center, a joint project of Nebraska Medicine and the University of Nebraska, which was planning an art component, and so the spark was struck, connections made, and a three-year collaboration began.

Dr. Kenneth Cowan, the project director, said, “Studies have shown that creating an atmosphere of hope and resilience through artwork goes beyond curing a disease and leads to improved patient outcomes.” The new center’s arts program includes poetry, music, and a garden. In May 2017, the 3,667-square-foot Chihuly

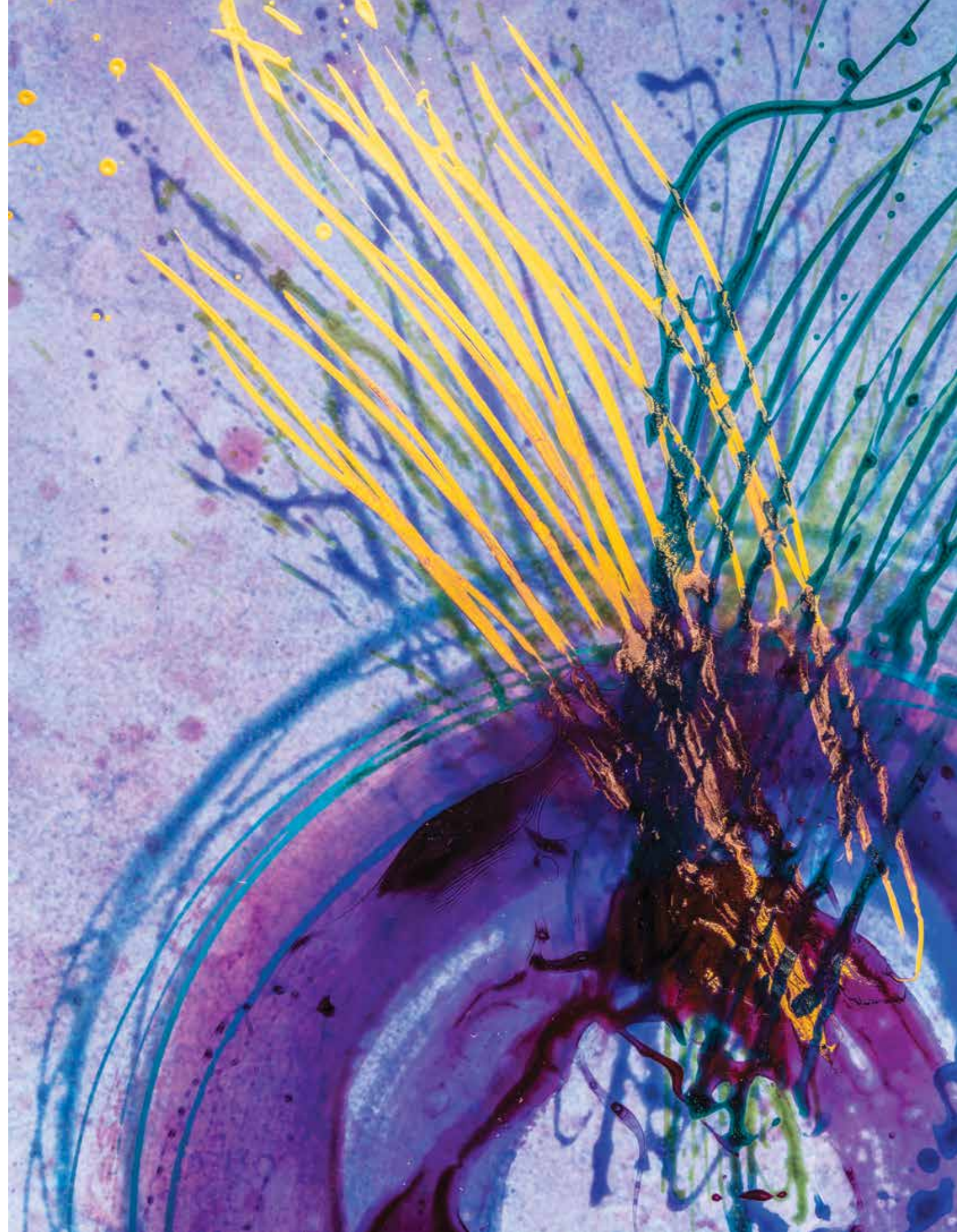
Sanctuary was opened. The design of the sanctuary speaks of one complex, thoughtfully integrated composition, with a curved shape based on the artist’s *Macchia* series, a glass façade that overlooks paths and a garden, and 10 installations of more than 3,000 works of blown glass.

Of special interest is the sanctuary’s core installation: a curving, darkened room lined with Chihuly’s newest body of work, *Glass on Glass*, which was designed for a particular function. Somewhere in the process of imagining this project, Chihuly took a surprising turn inward. Without losing any of the spontaneous gestures and brilliant color that have always characterized his work, the artist has entered new territory, in both form and sensibility. The works in *Glass on Glass* rest on stands, clear of the wall. Though many of them are richly colored, their limited size, relatively austere forms, and dim lighting radically change their character, transforming the usual Chihuly fireworks into an intense quiet.

Chihuly is best known for his three-dimensional work, his sculpture, but he also has a vast body of drawings. (No matter what medium he uses, he always refers to them as drawings, never paintings.) As early as the 1990s, Chihuly painted with acrylic on acrylic, lighting the pieces with natural light. Subsequently, he experimented with backlighting. For the pieces in *Glass on Glass*, he leaves both acrylic and natural light behind and moves into backlit glass enamel on glass. Beyond that, he leaves the

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THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE
Dale Chihuly, Ikebana Glass on Glass Paintings, 2017. Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas.
© CHIHULY STUDIO





THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE
**Dale Chihuly working on
 the Glass on Glass paintings.
 Seattle, 2016.**
 © CHIHULY STUDIO

second dimension behind, making work that falls just slightly over the brink into the third.

The artist begins by drawing with powdered glass, suspended in a medium, onto a sheet of glass, usually 30 by 40 inches in size. After firing, the layer of colored glass enamel—transparent, translucent, or opaque—fuses with a sheet of clear glass. From many such panels, the artist selects three and arranges them in order from front to back. They are then inserted into a slotted frame, a mere three-quarter inches apart, but that small space is enough to create the illusion of even deeper space. The viewer sees one glass-on-glass drawing behind a second drawing, behind a third drawing. All three glow from the back panel, which backlights the entire work.

Glass artists keep reminding us that glass is a near liquid, and I have never been more aware of that than when looking at this work. Looking straight into the work is like looking through seawater. You're wearing goggles, and you see some organic shape quite clearly in front of you. Less clearly, through the seawater, you see plants and organisms that seem to sway, and sometimes to glow. In the distance, you see an even hazier layer, faintly moving in the distance. The trick is that the creature that is moving is you. You can't move without seeing a slightly different work.

The first challenge was the medium itself. Chihuly needed a glass enamel paint that would allow him to make the distinctive gestures so typical of his work. The paint had to be heavy enough to become a skin of glass resting on glass, but light enough to be manipulated by bristle brushes, to be squirtable from a plastic squeeze bottle, and to respond to the heavy splat of that same bottle. And the paint had to be, at least sometimes, translucent, seemingly suspended between the light from both front and back. To help create that medium, Chihuly turned to an old colleague, Cappy Thompson, who has worked for decades with glass enamel.

Thompson is enthusiastic about the Glass on Glass works. She begins her conversation with *Glass* by saying, "I love what he's been doing. It's incredibly beautiful. He's a great painter." She goes on to talk about the practical nature of the problem. "Perceptually," she says, "glass can be the strongest object in the room. It's not like other artwork. When you look at blown glass in a room, they sparkle, they hold light. Go into a room full of art and squint: what you see is the glass. A painting with transparent enamels has the same quality of color and light that blown glass does." She adds, "Because Dale pushes things further, the paintings are created for both surface color and backlit color."

And so Thompson's hunt began. With 40 years of experience working with enamel, she knew the issues, but finding the right components to develop a new medium was challenging. In the end, it was her discovery of a fabric dye that led to a commercial chemist who provided the medium that would hold the ground glass in the right density and could be thickened or thinned as needed. The fired enamels become a "skin of glass" that transmits light. Most paintings, Thompson reminds us, are seen in reflected light. In glass, the light goes through the paint.



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Beyond developing a new form, Chihuly continues to be as bold as always, but in a completely new way. His new work pulses with gesture and color and light, but in the darkened installation it turns into a zone of intense quiet, of healing, meditation, contemplation, or prayer. Cancer patients who walk to the sanctuary or arrive in wheelchairs or are wheeled into the space in their hospital beds, have time to enjoy, to think, to feel, to experience.

What does the Chihuly Sanctuary offer these patients, families, and caregivers? That it offers beauty, radiant energy, light, and color would be, for most people, obvious. What more? And why choose the word "sanctuary," with its implication of both holiness and refuge? And why would Cappy Thompson say the works in Glass are "a little more cerebral" than Chihuly's other work?

Dale Chihuly, Ikebana Glass on Glass Paintings, 2017. Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas.
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the work of many artists, composers and poets. Writing about J.M.W. Turner in *The Telegraph* (Sept. 6, 2014), Mark Hudson describes artists' late work: "And there is a small and select band of artists who were able to go on developing and experimenting into their final years, whose last works become a distillation of everything they've done before, transcending the barriers of taste and time: Titian was one of them, so were Michelangelo, Goya, Hokusai, Matisse and, not least, Turner himself."

Over decades, Chihuly has invented, adapted, and expanded many forms and techniques that have then inspired countless younger artists. It would be possible to think of Glass on Glass as yet another example of his ability to explore new territory. The new work shares numerous qualities with Chihuly's earlier work. One could compare the successive panes of Glass on Glass with the nested blown baskets he began over 40 years ago, which let you see one or more vessels through the larger vessels that contain them. The suggested plant forms might relate to his sinuous Ikebana series and many of his drawings. Recently, too, he has been working on Light Drawings, single panels of acrylic glass lit from the back. The structure of the sanctuary itself, with a curving footprint, is based on his Macchia series. Nevertheless, there is a surprising change of direction in Glass on Glass. It has to do with a shift in what Chihuly's work offers viewers. Aside from its inventiveness, the surprise of this new series is in its invitation to the viewer to slow down, to absorb, to suspend thought, and to be quiet.

Glass on Glass has now moved beyond the site-specific environment of the Cancer Center into museum exhibitions in Taiwan and the Netherlands and into collections. Its genesis as a healing element, though, may remain with the newer work, reminding the viewer of its original purpose. ■

Glass contributing editor VICTORIA JOSSLIN spent most of 2005 being treated for cancer.

To begin with the first question, what is another dedicated space of meditation and refuge? A cathedral comes to mind, and of all the arts in the cathedral, the stained glass is what we see first. The artist's website makes a point of saying that as a young man traveling in Europe, Chihuly "marveled at the beauty of stained-glass windows." As Cappy Thompson says, we squint and we see only the glass. In the West, "sanctuary" is associated with "sanctity." A sanctuary is a place where, by long tradition, we are sheltered and protected. A sanctuary is also a place where we consider our lives, we pray, we are reassured, and where (at least

we hope) we find peace. These consolations are both immediate and abstract.

What are the consolations, then, in a secular sanctuary? How might they be cerebral? Perhaps when we are ill and being treated in ways that slow us down, we become more open to acknowledging and accepting our current experience, perhaps also to opening ourselves to aesthetic experience. It is imaginable that it becomes easier for us as cancer patients to spend time, suspend judgment, and meditate; to remove ourselves from the immediate world, experienced intensely in the body; to encounter

and explore art; and to encounter and explore our interior selves in different ways. Imaginable, too, that a quiet, sheltering, and beautiful space might encourage us to do so. And even if we're quite well and walking through a museum or gallery, I believe that the "Glass on Glass" pieces invite reflection. Just looking at pictures of the installation, I wanted to take a long, deep breath.

Glass on Glass is a long distance from so much of Dale Chihuly's work and the big "Wow!" it often elicits. Chihuly was born in 1941, and it's fair to consider Glass on Glass as late work, as the pronounced change in direction that has been discerned in

Leslie and Dale Chihuly at the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center, Omaha, Nebraska, 2017.
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