= Harvey Littleton =

Harvey Littleton (June 14 , 1922 ? December 13 , 2013) was an American glass artist and educator . Born in Corning , New York , he grew up in the shadow of Corning Glassworks , where his father headed Research and Development during the 1930s . Expected by his father to enter the field of physics , Littleton instead chose a career in art , gaining recognition first as a ceramist and later as a glassblower and sculptor in glass . In the latter capacity he was very influential , organizing the first glassblowing seminar aimed at the studio artist in 1962 , on the grounds of the Toledo Museum of Art . His aim was to take the manufacture of glass out of its industrial setting and put it within the reach of the studio artist .

In his role as an educator , Littleton was an " ... outspoken and eloquent advocate of university education in the arts . " He organized the first hot glass program at an American university (the University of Wisconsin ? Madison) and promoted the idea of glass as a course of study in university art departments in the Midwest and northeastern United States . Several of Littleton 's students went on to disseminate the study of glass art throughout the U.S. , including Marvin Lipofsky , who started a glass program at the University of California at Berkeley and Dale Chihuly , who developed the glass program at the Rhode Island School of Design and later was a founder of Pilchuck Glass School in Stanwood , Washington .

Littleton retired from teaching in 1976 to focus on his own art . Exploring the inherent qualities of the medium , he worked in series with simple forms to draw attention to the complex interplay of transparent glass with multiple overlays of thin color .

= = Early life = =

Harvey Kline Littleton was born in Corning , New York where his father , Dr. Jesse T. Littleton , Jr . , was Director of Research for Corning Glass Works . A physicist , Dr. Littleton is remembered today as the developer of Pyrex glassware . Harvey Littleton 's introduction to the world of glass began when he was six . On Saturdays his father would take Harvey off his mother 's hands for a few hours by bringing him to the laboratory . There he was turned over to the laboratory stockman who entertained him or , at least , kept the little boy out of trouble . At home , the properties of glass and its manufacture were frequent topics at the family dinner @-@ table . Dr. Littleton was fascinated by glass and believed that the material had almost unlimited uses .

= = Education = =

When he was eighteen , Harvey Littleton enrolled at the University of Michigan to study physics . His choice of major was influenced by his father , who wanted one of his children to follow him in his profession (Littleton ? s two elder brothers chose medicine and business as careers ; his sister was an industrial psychologist) . According to Littleton , " I always thought I would be a physicist like my father " .

Littleton 's interest in art began in high school , where he took life drawing and sculpture classes . He also took a sculpture class during his freshman year at the University of Michigan . His growing preference for art eventually proved stronger than his respect for his father 's wishes . After three semesters of physics he transferred to Cranbrook Academy of Art for its 1941 spring semester . There he studied under sculptor Marshall Fredericks and worked part @-@ time as a studio assistant to Carl Milles . Dr. Littleton was not pleased by his son 's decision . Littleton enlisted his elder sister Martha 's aid in pleading his case to their father , and a compromise was reached . Littleton would return to the University of Michigan that fall , but not to physics . The study of fine art was not part of the compromise ; instead , Littleton agreed to major in industrial design .

During summer break in 1942 Littleton worked as a mold maker at Corning Glass Works in the Vycor multiform project laboratory . There he cast his first work in glass , an academic torso , in white Vycor . That fall Littleton was forced to delay his education for three years when he was drafted into the U.S. Army Signal Corps . He served in North Africa and Italy and , near the end of

the war , received a commendation for his work in encoding . In early 1946 he was in England , waiting his turn to be shipped home . To fill the time he attended classes at the Brighton School of Art , where he modeled and fired a small clay torso that he carried home in his barracks bag . Once back in Corning , New York , Littleton cast the torso , again in Vycor , as a small edition .

He finished his degree in industrial design in 1947 at the University of Michigan . With his father 's encouragement Littleton submitted a proposal to Corning to create a workshop within the factory to research the aesthetic properties of industrial glass . The proposal was rejected and instead Littleton and two friends , Bill Lewis and Aare Lahti , opened a design studio in Ann Arbor .

= = As a ceramist = =

In 1949 Littleton enrolled as a graduate student in ceramics at Cranbrook Academy of Art . That same year , he accepted a position teaching ceramics at the Toledo Museum of Art School of Design commuting between Toledo , Ohio and Bloomfield Hills weekly . For that portion of the week that Littleton was in Toledo , he stayed at the apartment of artist Hal Lotterman . There , at one of Lotterman 's Wednesday night poker games , Littleton met Dominick Labino , who would be important to the success of Littleton 's first glass workshop a dozen years later .

Littleton 's production as a potter focused on functional stoneware that he sold in Chicago @-@ area art fairs and in galleries from Chicago to New York City . His work was included in group shows in the United States , including " Designer Craftsmen U.S.A. , " sponsored by the American Craft Council in 1953 and the Ceramic National exhibition at the Syracuse Museum of Art in 1954 . His pottery gained international exposure in 1956 at the First International Exposition of Ceramics in Cannes , France .

While heading up the ceramics department at the University of Wisconsin , Madison , he designed a manually operated wheel called the " Littleton Kick Wheel " . These wheels were used by students in the ceramics lab at the UWM .

= = Research = =

After earning his master 's degree in ceramics , Littleton began teaching at the University of Wisconsin ? Madison in 1951 . In 1957 a university research grant allowed him to visit Europe , where he studied the influence of Islamic culture on contemporary Spanish pottery . However , he first stopped in Paris to visit Jean Sala , who had been recommended to Littleton as an artist who worked alone in glass .

After four and a half months of research in Spain , Littleton visited the site of his war @-@ time service in Naples . He was surprised to find seven small glass factories there . On a later visit to the island of Murano , he visited more than fifty glass factories . He was fascinated by the little demonstration furnaces that some of the factories placed outside their walls . The furnaces would be staffed by a couple of the factory 's glassblowers , who would perform their craft for tourists . Prior to this Littleton believed that glass could only be made in an industrial setting , by a team of workers . His Murano experience convinced him that a single artist could melt and work glass in a private studio .

Upon his return to his Verona , Wisconsin studio Littleton began melting small batches of glass in his ceramics kiln , using hand @-@ thrown stoneware bowls as crucibles . As a result of these experiments , the American Craft Council asked him to chair a panel on glass at its Third National Conference in 1958 . The panelists were glass artists and designers Michael and Frances Higgins and Earl McCutchen , who worked in laminated glass at the University of Georgia . Paul Perrot , director of the Corning Museum of Glass , was the fifth panelist . By the time the American Craft Council convened its fourth conference in 1961 , Littleton not only presented a paper on his own work in glass but also exhibited a sculpture made of three faceted pieces of cullet that he had melted , formed and carved in the previous year . After the conference , Littleton began applying for grants to get his vision of a hot glass studio program off the ground .

= = 1962 glass workshop = =

In March 1962 , Otto Wittmann , director of the Toledo Museum of Art , offered Littleton the use of a storage shed on the grounds of the museum for a one @-@ week glassblowing workshop .

According to former student and Littleton biographer Joan Falconer Byrd , " Littleton brought a small pot furnace he had built at his farm and hooked it up in the museum garage with the help of Norm Schulman , pottery instructor at the museum school . Dominick Labino , then director of research for Johns Manville Corporation ... volunteered a low @-@ melting glass formula . "

Because of a misreading of Labino 's formula , the first batch of glass was ruined . Labino himself oversaw the conversion of the pot furnace into a day tank , supplying it with low @-@ melting @-@ point glass marbles he had developed for use in the production of fiberglass . This glass proved easy to work for glass blowing , and the workshop participants experimented with it in shifts for the remainder of the week . On the final day of the workshop , Harvey Leafgreen , a retired glassblower from the Libbey glass plant in Toledo , presented an unexpected two @-@ hour demonstration of the craft .

The ten attendees at the March 1962 Toledo workshop included Littleton , Dominick Labino , Norm Schulman , Tom McGlauchlin from the University of Iowa , Karl Martz from Indiana University , John Stephenson from the University of Michigan , William Pitney from Wayne State University , Clayton Bailey , Littleton 's Graduate Assistant from the University of Wisconsin , artist Dora Reynolds and Edith Franklin , one of Schulman 's ceramics students at the Toledo Museum of Art . A second , better advertised Toledo workshop that attracted more participants was held that June . Littleton , Labino , Leafgreen and Schulman shared teaching duties at the second workshop .

= = Glass at the University of Wisconsin = =

In the summer of 1962 Littleton once again traveled to Europe , this time to research how glass was taught in universities there . He found nothing that he could bring back to the U.S. to help him educate art students at the University of Wisconsin . At that time , European glass programs were geared solely toward industrial production . Students were not taught hands @-@ on techniques with the material ; the craft of working with hot glass was still taught at the factories , under the apprenticeship system . What Littleton did find in Europe was a kindred spirit in glass art , the German Erwin Eisch , who is recognized today as a founder of European studio glass . Eisch had set up a small work area in his family ? s glass factory in Frauenau for the production of his own glass art . Trained as a fine artist in the academies of Germany , he was largely self @-@ taught as a glass blower and at the time produced his work with the help of the factory ? s craftsmen .

Through the fall 1962 and spring 1963 semesters , Littleton taught glass in a garage at his Verona farm to six students under an independent study program . By the following year he had secured University of Wisconsin funding to rent and equip an off @-@ campus glass department in Madison . Through the University ? s glass program , Littleton would train many prominent glass artists , including Bill Boysen , Dale Chihuly , Marvin Lipofsky , Fritz Dreisbach , Sam Herman , Tom McGlauchlin , Christopher Ries , Michael Taylor and Kent Ipsen .

With the launching of the first college glass department Littleton said that he " ... became a kind of evangelist for the medium . " He gave lectures at university art departments throughout the midwest and northeast United States about the potential of glass as a medium for the studio artist . Littleton served as the chairman of the University of Wisconsin art department from 1964 ? 1967 and from 1969 ? 1971 . He retired from teaching in 1976 , and in 1977 was named professor emeritus . It was around this time that Littleton , in addition to his work in glass , began to develop the technique of vitreography ? printmaking using glass plates .

= = " Technique is cheap " = =

In 1972 Littleton was at the Seventh National Sculpture Conference in Lawrence , Kansas when he uttered the words , " Technique is cheap . " The statement touched off a debate that still finds

currency among glass artists : Should technique , or content , take precedence in glass art ?

This was a question that Littleton had evidently been thinking about for some time . In his 1971 book , Glassblowing : A Search for Form , he wrote :

" The method used by the contemporary artist is a constant probing and questioning of the standards of the past and the definitions of the present to find an opening for new form statements in the material and process . It is even said that this search is an end in itself . Although knowledge of chemistry or physics as they apply to glass will broaden the artist ? s possibilities , it cannot create them . Tools can be made , furnaces and annealing ovens can be built cheaply . But it is through the insatiable , adventurous urge of the artist to discover the essence of glass that his own means of expression will emerge . "

The offhand phrase " technique is cheap " soon took on a life of its own . For some it was a rallying cry to discover the inherent possibilities of a " new " medium for the artist ; for others the statement expressed nothing more than arrogant disdain for the timeless value of craftsmanship . In a 2001 interview for the Smithsonian ? s Archives of American Art , Littleton commented on what he termed the " misinterpretation " of the phrase :

" All I meant by that is that technique is available to everybody , that you can read technique , if you have any background . Technique in and of itself is nothing . But technique in the hands of a strong , creative person , like Voulkos or Dante Marioni , takes on another dimension . "

Behind this point is another , as expressed by writer and curator William Warmus : " It might even be argued that Littleton sought long @-@ term to put the artist back in control of the factory , even as he sought to put the furnace into the artist ? s studio . "

For Littleton , the epitome of technique vs. content was to be found in factory @-@ made art glass , where the division of labor was inflexible . Traditionally the art glass designer was a draftsman who made a conceptual drawing for a glass object , and then passed it along to industry craftsmen for execution . According to Littleton , the factory designer ? ... is frustrated by the peculiar misplacement of his skill , and his inclusion in a process where little experimentation or interference is permitted . As for the factory craftsman , his training under the apprenticeship system " limited him to one phase in the production of glass . This training could not prepare anyone to function as an independent artist , but only to serve as a cog in the industrial machinery . "

= = Work in glass = =

In 1962 Littleton ? s first pieces in blown glass were , like his earlier works in pottery , functional forms : vases , bowls and paperweights . His breakthrough to non @-@ functional form came in 1963 when , with no purpose in mind , he remelted and finished a glass piece that he had earlier smashed in a fit of pique . The object lay in his studio for several weeks before he decided to grind the bottom . As Littleton recounts in his book Glassblowing : A Search for Form , he brought the object into the house where " it aroused such antipathy in my wife that I looked at it much more closely , finally deciding to send it to an exhibition . Its refusal there made me even more obstinate , and I took it to New York ... I later showed it to the curators of design at the Museum of Modern Art . They , perhaps relating it to some other neo @-@ Dada work in the museum , purchased it for the Design Collection . " This led to Littleton ? s mid @-@ 1960s series of broken @-@ open forms , and " Prunted , " " Imploded " and " Exploded " forms .

These sculptures , especially the " Prunted , " or " Anthropomorpic , " forms were influenced by Littleton ? s colleague Erwin Eisch , who visited and worked with Littleton in his Wisconsin studio for a month in late 1967 . Several weeks after Eisch ? s departure , Littleton realized that he had unconsciously adopted his friend 's strongly personal figural style in his own work . Littleton reacted to this discovery by turning to simple , clean shapes in 1968 , forming tubes , rods and columns of glass that he cut and grouped together on bases of plate glass or steel .

Allowing the pull of gravity to stretch and bend hot glass while on the blowpipe or punty led Littleton to his " Folded Forms " and " Loops " series , which continued until 1979 . His " Eye " forms , also from the 1970s , take the form of concentric cups of various colors in diminishing sizes that nestle one inside the next .

Littleton explored cutting and slumping industrial glass , including plate and optic glass , beginning in 1970 . In sculptures such as Do Not Spindle and Distortion Box , slumped squares of glass are transfixed by a brass rod . In Rock Around the Clock , a bent piece of optic glass bar from Corning Glass Works in Danville , Virginia , can be set rocking on its bronze plate glass base with a touch of the hand .

Littleton incorporated optical lens blanks manufactured by Corning with his own hot @-@ worked glass . In each case he sandblasted and cut the optical disc draping , and in one case piercing , the disc with fluid , cased glass forms . These were followed , in 1978 , by Littleton ? s Solid Geometry series , in which heavy cased glass forms were cut into trapezoidal , spheroid and ovoid shapes and highly polished .

Perhaps Littleton ? s best known body of work is his " Topological Geometry " group of series , made between 1983 and 1989 . Included under this heading are his signature " Arc " forms and " Crowns , " as well as his late " Lyrical Movement " and " Implied Movement " sculptural groups . In 1989 chronic back problems forced Littleton to retire from working in hot glass .

= = Public collections = =

Littleton 's artwork is in the collections of museums worldwide , including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City ; Corning Museum of Glass , Detroit Institute of Arts , Indianapolis Museum of Art , Los Angeles County Museum of Art , Milwaukee Art Museum , Museum of Arts & Design , Museum of Fine Arts , Houston , Smithsonian Institution and the Toledo Museum of Art , among numerous others . Overseas his work is in Glasmuseet Ebeltoft in Denmark ; Museum Bellrive in Zürich , Switzerland ; Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam , Holland ; National Museum of Modern Art , Kyoto in Japan ; Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art in Sapporo , Japan ; the Victoria and Albert Museum in London ; Glasmuseum Frauenau (Sammlung Wolfgang Kermer) and the Decorative Arts Museums in Frankfurt , Hamburg , Prague and Vienna .

= = Personal = =

Littleton was married to Bess Tamura Littleton in 1947 . She predeceased him on October 8 , 2009 . The couple had four children : Carol L. Shay , Thomas Littleton , Maurine Littleton and John Littleton . All work in the field of glass art . Carol L. Shay is the curator at Littleton Studios ; Tom Littleton owns and manages Spruce Pine Batch Company , which supplies batch (the dry ingredients of which glass is made) to artists and art departments around the U.S. ; Maurine Littleton is the owner and director of Maurine Littleton Gallery which specializes in glass art , in Washington , DC . With his wife and collaborative partner , Kate Vogel , John Littleton is a glass artist in Bakersville , North Carolina .

Harvey Littleton died on December 13 , 2013 , aged 91 at his home in Spruce Pine , North Carolina .