

# Glassed over

D.C. gets its refract together

Washington is by no means a large center for glassworking studios, so it's not surprising that the material's use in large-scale, public art is a relatively new concept in the area—but a few key artists are paving the way for the medium with compelling works. The Washington Glass Studio, a studio and glass-art school in Mount Rainier, is introducing high-quality, large-scale works into the public domain, and has been commissioned for projects in several high-visibility spots, including the National Institute Of Health, the 14th Street Bridge, Rosedale Community Park, the Dupont Circle Metro Station, and the Corcoran Gallery Of Art. The studio's artists are also among the growing number of area sculptors using glass to make their point.

Haven't yet come across any pieces yourself? Understandable, as a lot of it's new; you just have to know where to look. Here's five of D.C.'s top public glassworks to materialize recently.

**Title:** "The Gravity Between Us"

**Artist:** Michael Janis, director of architecture and public art at the Washington Glass Studio

**Location:** Hotel Palomar in Dupont Circle

**About the art:** The installation consists of three vertical structures, each just under 7 feet tall and outlined by a rectangular, steel frame. Mask-like faces sculpted from pale, cucumber-green glass fill the spaces created by the frame and are separated by ridged tiles. Some tiles feature images of large eyes (created from fused-glass powder imagery), which look like charcoal sketches drawn directly onto the glass.

**Media used:** Cast glass, steel, fused-glass powder imagery

**What's cool about it:** The natural light pouring into the hotel lobby hits the glass, yielding different images from different angles—the eyes are visible from one perspective, but begin to fade as the viewer changes position. In this way, the ridges on the glass act almost as blinds. Like much of Janis's work, the piece conveys themes of identity through motifs of faces and eyes and altered perspective.

**Title:** "The Spider And The Flea"

**Artist:** Allegra Marquart

**Location:** National Institute Of Health in Bethesda

**About the art:** The upright rectangular prism, just over 6 feet tall, consists of four fused, sand-carved glass panels framed by a metal stand. The navy-blue panels tell a story with white and blue pictographs and

writing. Each panel's drawings (they're adorable!) feel as if they're taken out of an old book of fairy tales. The result is a sort of vertical comic strip on each side of the structure.

**Media used:** Sand-carved glass, metal stand

**What's cool about it:** Marquart frequently bases her work on folk tales and fables from around the world. Inspired by the Grimm fairy tale of the same name, "The Spider And The Flea" uses pictographic images, mixed media, and color to guide the narrative, in a style reminiscent of totem-pole storytelling.

**Title:** Untitled stained-glass installation

**Artist:** Brenda Belfield

**Location:** Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Vienna

**About the art:** Stained glass is an art form that's been passed down through the ages, but artists continue to discover new ways to utilize the medium for stunning murals. Belfield's work here is no different, with groups of panels that form images of the sky and solar system brought together with mountain ranges and wildlife. The installation depicts layers of the earth—space, sky, land, ocean—through a collection of abstract images.

**Media used:** Stained glass

**What's cool about it:** Close inspection of individual segments reveals incredible detail in color gradation and texturing. Rough textures create the appearance of harsh movements in the water and sky portions of the mural.

**Title:** Shakespeare Theater, Sidney Harman Hall

**Architect:** Jack Diamond

**Location:** Shakespeare Theater in Gallery Place

**About the art:** Completed this September, the Shakespeare Theater's phenomenal new stage, designed by Toronto architect Jack Diamond, complements the exterior of the building, which includes a five-story glass façade and 8-foot bay window projecting over the F Street sidewalk. Inside the building, glass staircases adorn the theater lobbies.

**What's cool about it:** The façade creates transparent lobby levels, so passersby can see into the theater lobbies, bringing animation and vibrancy to the urban surroundings.

**Title:** Untitled architecture for the Liberty Center park and plaza

**Artists/Architects:** Washington Glass Studio artists

**Location:** Liberty Center in Ballston

**About the art:** The just-unveiled installation at the public park and plaza of the mixed-use Liberty Center sticks with the whole "liberty" theme, with bands of cast glass in blues, lime green, orange, and red undulating across vertical glass panels, creating the appearance of flowing, glistening banners.

**What's cool about it:** Landscape lighting will be integrated into the installation to add even more visual drama during both day and night.

Washington won't dethrone artistic hubs in Seattle and Italy as centers for glass art any time soon, but the presence of such art continues to grow in the area. As more sculptors expand their repertoires to mixed media, glass will likely become more commonly used in public art and architecture, giving art lovers even more to see... or, rather, see through. —Suedmedha Sood



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