

## LANDSCAPES THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

**Roger Thomas'** work could be called experimental: His best pieces usually begin as "test" projects for new fusing techniques, he's often unable to see what his designs will look like before they're kiln-fused and he leaves the interpretation to his viewers. Practicing Balance (*below*), a piece built of glass remnants from another work, is a perfect example. "Practicing Balance is one of my best accidents and definitely one of my favorite pieces," he says. "When you look at it, you think it's a landscape until you start looking for the usual signals of what a landscape is," he says. "They're here, but none of them quite make sense. Vertical lines trigger your brain to think, *Oh, those are trees!* I'm providing you with so little information that your mind is doing all the work in this piece. And that's what I want: for my pieces to be abstract until *you* decide they're a landscape."

Thomas' glass fusing techniques are just as enigmatic. In one technique, which he calls "recipe work," he builds the piece backward in the kiln, layering clear glass, then transparent colors, opalescent colors, and finally a piece of white glass which forms the back of the piece ("applying the canvas to the paint"). In a technique called "impressions" (which he used to craft Practicing Balance), Thomas reverses the layering process, building from back to front the way a painter would. Either way, the varying colors and sizes of glass make it almost impossible for him to see the final design until it's fired. "I love the time between when I put it in the kiln—when I *think* the piece is done—and when I open the kiln—when the work *is* done," says the 55-year-old. "During that time, the artwork is perfect. And then I open the kiln and reality imposes itself on the piece! It's never perfect when it comes out, but it's always interesting."

Thomas has been teaching and working with glass (stained glass before fused) for nearly 30 years. Before that, he held jobs as a taxidermist, a Formica carpenter and a histopathological technologist (a.k.a. microscope slide-maker: "It's definitely glass-related," he says, with a laugh). But in his tiny Portland basement, crafting glass masterpieces in his three kilns with his two studio assistants, he's found his true calling. "Making my pieces is like play," says Thomas. "Glass isn't a pictorial medium, but it's great at creating emotions. There's something about the purity of color and movement of light that makes it such a delight to put these pieces together." Practicing Balance sold for \$4,000.

Contact glass artist Roger Thomas through Brian Marki Fine Art (2236 N.E. Broadway; 503-249-5659) in Portland. You can also see his work on his website, [rogerthomasglass.com](http://rogerthomasglass.com).



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