

# Crossing Boundaries, Making Art

by Rebecca Tuch

**T**rees and flowers have been depicted so often in art that one would think there would be nowhere else to go. One might think the subject's overdone. But to look at the fused glass pieces of Roger Thomas is to discover a revitalization of image. One sees a vibrancy of colors, a subtlety of form, a depth and perspective that is surprising, considering the medium: glass.

**Roger Thomas:  
Fusion**  
L'attitude Gallery  
218 Newbury Street,  
Boston  
To August 8

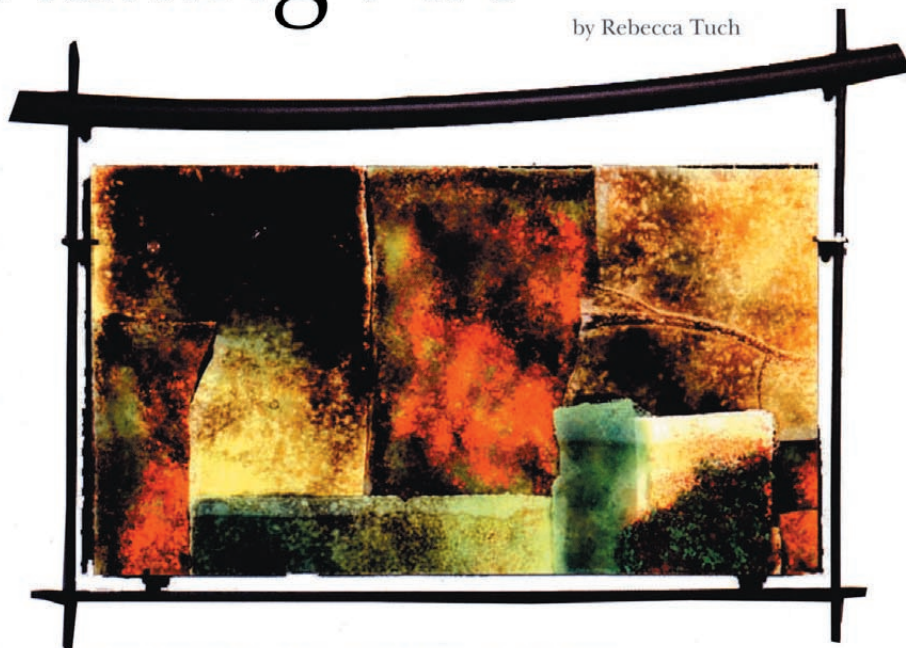
Thomas's pieces shine with a beauty that is neither "pretty" nor common nor in any way tired. Artists, art-lovers, nature-lovers and even those who shun nature all have something to be excited about in his work.

"Japonisme" is a double-paneled work that shows cherry blossom trees in the rain. The branches are long and knobby and extend from one panel into the other, with blossoms flowering in shades of pink, yellow and white. Fine blue lines lay diagonally across the image to suggest a rainstorm, lines that appear to have been painted on the glass, but are in fact within the glass, created in the glass fusion process. As are the patches of gold and the luscious jade green that forms the background.

This piece exemplifies the way Thomas handles nature images: he uses rich, harmonious colors, depicts branches whose hard toughness counteracts the gentle softness of flower petals and fuses in patches of gold leaf that give the image a decorative as well as surreal, dreamy quality.

Looking closely at any of Thomas's works, one can see the small air bubbles that have risen to the surface in the process of fusing the glass. This works well in both Thomas's nature landscapes and his abstract pieces, where the bubbles elucidate the true aspect of glass, which is

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Roger Thomas's "Field Theory" at the L'attitude Gallery, Boston.

a natural object in itself. The air bubbles are the painterly equivalent of visible brush strokes along a canvas's surface — strokes that at once call attention to the medium while imbuing the image with a greater level of depth.

"Reconsidering Birch" is a fun piece that works on multiple levels. Fun, because the colors — cobalt blue, multiple shades of gray, white, black — blur together in a delightfully dreamy way. It is perhaps what you would see if you drove very fast alongside a forest of birch trees, one tree swishing into the next. And yet there is a wonderful clarity: the viewer can see the subtle gradations along the trunk, the sense of depth as some trees appear to be closer than others, the sense of realism as some trees are darker, some are thinner, and all are surprisingly true to form.

The glass is expertly layered, so that the viewer's eye naturally goes into the depth of this birch forest and back out, as if both entering it and watching it from some point along a highway.

It is thrilling to know that when Thomas works, he never knows how his projects will appear until he completes the final firing of the glass. Thrilling because such technique demands an artist who is devoted to the craft itself, to the process of creation independent of the

outcome.

Thomas uses varying techniques such as *pate du verre* in which "wet, finely ground colored powders are cracked together in a mold" and Reverse Layering in which he works "face down" beginning with a clear base plate. He then layers glass sheets, crushed or powdered glass, glass strings and shards, working from transparent to opaque. As in sand painting, after a few layers the artist can no longer see the pattern he is making. Hence Thomas must rely on experiment after experiment, successes as well as failures to obtain the image he seeks. Often, it is when a piece is removed from the kiln that Thomas sees it for the first time.

Trees and flowers are not all that Thomas depicts. His range, in fact is quite remarkable. He has a series of fish images — large, voluptuous fish swimming downstream, with scales as visible and clear as the slices of water that slash along the surface. He also has an architectural series. In these he creates geometric designs that could be the interiors of castles, of churches, of any number of beautiful and spacious areas. Where the birch trees in "Reconsidering Birch" were delightfully blurry, Thomas's architectural structures are astonishingly precise. Tiled floors, sharply delineated corners, upright columns with an exacted perspective,



"Slow Dawn," one of Roger Thomas's works in "Fusion."

straight lines illuminated by a dark, autumnal palette.

Then there are also the pieces that might be termed abstract expressionist. These contain patches, lines, swivels, sunbursts and constellations of color. Turquoise, salmon, deep red, mica, copper, gold leaf, white. Layered so the glass is clear and shining both above and beneath the surface, these pieces reveal an artist who is at home in his medium, an artist who is "adept at using glass and non-glass materials," who has "learned much admiration from his peers and collectors," while being nicknamed the "Indiscriminate Fuser."

No discussion of Thomas's work would be complete without men-

tioning his inspired, unique frames. These are hand-made frames which complement Thomas's pieces in multiple ways. In "Three Koi," three fish swim downstream and a dark metal frame coils around the edge of the glass, suggesting a wave of gushing ocean water. In "Japonsime," as well as several other of Thomas's birch tree pieces, the frames rise both elegantly and wildly out of the image, appearing as extensions of branches themselves.

Though the frames are made of a dense, dark metal, they are crafted in such ways to add whimsy to every piece, to in fact counteract the dense

weight of the glass pieces themselves. The frames rise up from, surround, or decorate the works with the same authoritative whimsy with which a painter takes the last few, significant brush strokes on yet another masterpiece.

Being the "Indiscriminate Fuser" puts Thomas between multiple artistic genres. Rather than painting onto glass, as he once did in his early career as a stained glass painter, Thomas paints with glass. With his art, he has tapped into the third dimension that is inherent within glass.

He "achieves the illusion of depth by using depth," he says, thus falling somewhere in the genre mix of painters, glass artists and sculptors.



Artist Roger Thomas.