

DALE CHIHULY

Bio

Born in 1941 in Tacoma, Washington, Dale Chihuly was introduced to glass while studying interior design at the University of Washington. After graduating in 1965, Chihuly enrolled in the first glass program in the country, at the University of Wisconsin. He continued his studies at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), where he later established the glass program and taught for more than a decade.

In 1968, after receiving a Fulbright Fellowship, he went to work at the Venini glass factory in Venice. There he observed the team approach to blowing glass, which is critical to the way he works today. In 1971, Chihuly cofounded Pilchuck Glass School in Washington State. With this international glass center, Chihuly has led the avant-garde in the development of glass as a fine art.

His work is included in more than 200 museum collections worldwide. He has been the recipient of many awards, including two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and thirteen honorary doctorates.

Chihuly has created more than a dozen well-known series of works, among them, Cylinders and Baskets in the 1970s; Seaforms, Macchia, Persians, and Venetians in the 1980s; Nijima Floats and Chandeliers in the 1990s; and Fiori in the 2000s. He is also celebrated for large architectural installations. In 1986, he was honored with a solo exhibition, Dale Chihuly objets de verre, at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Palais du Louvre, in Paris. In 1995, he began Chihuly Over Venice, for which he created sculptures at glass factories in Finland, Ireland, and Mexico, then installed them over the canals and piazzas of Venice.

In 1999, Chihuly started an ambitious exhibition, Chihuly in the Light of Jerusalem; more than 1 million visitors attended the Tower of David Museum to view his installations. In 2001, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London curated the exhibition Chihuly at the V&A. His lifelong fascination for glasshouses has grown into a series of exhibitions within botanical settings. The Garden Cycle began in 2001 at the Garfield Park Conservatory, Chicago, and continued at several locations, among them the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, near London, in 2005 and 2019, and the New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, in 2006 and again in 2017.

Meanwhile, Chihuly has exhibited at other venues as well, including the de Young Museum, San Francisco, in 2008; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 2011; the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, in 2012; the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, in 2013; the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, in 2016; the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas, in 2017; and Groninger Museum, Groningen, Netherlands, in 2018. Chihuly Garden and Glass, a major long-term exhibition, opened in Seattle in 2012.

Statement

When I was a child, my parents, tore the roof off of our house and began a seven-year remodel. With the exception of a couple of months sleeping in a borrowed RV parked on the street, our family of four lived among the constant demolition and reconstruction. Along with the piles of broken plaster and splintered wood inside the shell of our home, the yard was also a construction zone, full of mounded soil and puddles of mud. A favorite pastime of the neighborhood kids was engaging in dirt-clot throwing wars, and our yard provided plenty of ammunition.

One day I picked up a handful of soggy earth, and began to slowly and deliberately fashion it with my bare hands. After perhaps an hour of shaping, the amorphous matrix began to take the form of a ball and eventually a perfect sphere.

To me, this tennis ball sized object was too perfect to sacrifice in battle, so I placed it in a small glass dish borrowed from the remnants of my Mother's kitchen, and hid it inside a barn shaped tool shed behind our house. This spherical shrine was perched on a shelf at my eye level, just to the right of the door. I would visit it almost daily.

Weeks later, I decided to share my creation with the other kids in our neighborhood. After summoning everyone for the big reveal, not a single one of my cohorts believed that the sphere was merely soil shaped by hand! The leading theory amongst the group was it must be a ball coated with dried mud.

I pondered two options, return my treasure to the shed or break it open and impress my friends? At this moment, I had no idea what the outcome would be.

Looking at the broken pile of earth, splayed out on the sidewalk, I felt a sense of pride that I had created something so perfect, and a sense of loss that it was ruined it; or was it? I stood there, my gaze fixed on the destruction below – not a pile of ruin but clearly a broken sphere. The round outside surfaces were still intact - rough inside sections cast contrasting shadows and questions arose; which is more interesting, intact or sectioned, outside or inside, material or shadow? Why was I so drawn to this broken form?