



# LARGE PRINT LABELS

## Chihuly Then and Now: The Collection at Twenty

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## Timeline

1966: Chihuly begins graduate school at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, enrolling in the first glassblowing program in the United States.



1968: Chihuly travels to Venice, Italy, a city that has a glassmaking tradition dating back to the thirteenth century. Working with Italian masters at the prestigious Venini factory, Chihuly learns a team approach to glassblowing, which is reflected in the way he works today.



1971: Chihuly founds Pilchuck Glass School north of Seattle, Washington. Originally just makeshift shelters and glass furnaces on a tree farm, it flourishes into a center for glass art education and profoundly impacts artists working worldwide.



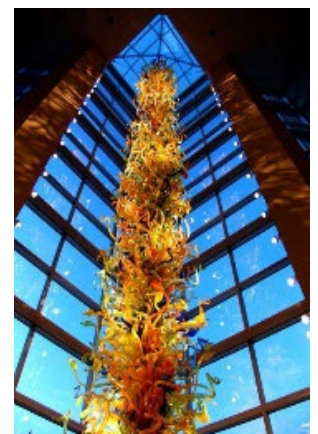
1980s and 1990s: Chihuly experiments with bold colors, larger scale, and asymmetrical forms within his series, pushing through previously perceived limits and becoming a leading artist working with glass.



1996: Thousands of viewers marvel at Chihuly Over Venice, a monumental installation of fourteen chandeliers mounted throughout the city's fabled canals and piazzas. This is the first of many large-scale, international installation projects for Chihuly.



2002: The Oklahoma City Museum of Art inaugurates its new building with an exhibition of glass and drawings by Chihuly, and reveals the fifty-five-foot Eleanor Blake Kirkpatrick Memorial Tower in the Museum's atrium. Today, OKCMOA is home to one of the largest collections of Chihuly artwork in the world.



## Chihuly Then And Now: The Collection At Twenty

"I want people to be overwhelmed with light and color in some way that they've never experienced." – Dale Chihuly

For more than five decades, Dale Chihuly's artwork has captured our imaginations. Often drawing inspiration from nature, Chihuly plays with bold colors, glowing light, and organic forms to create unique immersive experiences. He is continually pushing the boundaries of glass as an artistic medium to produce objects unlike anything created before.

Chihuly was at the forefront of the studio glass movement in the 1960s when he began studying at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, in the first glassblowing program in the United States. He and other studio glass artists were searching for ways to subvert the traditional associations between glass and functionality (such as vases and vessels) through explorations of purely sculptural art forms. By experimenting with innovative glassblowing techniques, creating organic, asymmetrical shapes, and pushing the size of his objects and installation projects to an ever-greater scale, Chihuly has become a leading artist in the field.

In addition to being a visionary artist, Chihuly is an influential teacher and mentor. In 1968, Chihuly established a glass program at the Rhode Island School of Design. Three years

later, he founded Pilchuck Glass School, which began with makeshift shelters and rudimentary glassmaking equipment on a tree farm north of Seattle, Washington. It has since grown into a world-renowned center for the study of glass art and design. A team approach is key to Chihuly's teaching and working methods. This communal model of glassblowing is one of his most important contributions to the field, and many artists who have worked or studied with Chihuly have gone on to significant careers of their own.



## Seal Pups

In 1996, Chihuly assembled a large group of glassblowers at a Finnish glass factory for three weeks of experimentation and unbridled creativity.

Chihuly came with a plan of “no reheats,” meaning the glass object is not returned to the heat for continued working, but rather formed immediately after the initial heating then put away for cooling. As a result of this fast-paced spontaneity, many new, simplified glass forms, such as Seal Pups, were created.



## Native American Inspirations

Chihuly has been inspired by Native American arts throughout his life and career. In his first series, the Navajo Blanket Cylinders, Chihuly captured the colors and patterns of woven Navajo blankets with glass. Using an innovative “pick-up drawing” technique, thin glass threads are laid out on a table in an intricate Navajo-inspired design. Then, a cylinder of molten glass is rolled over the threads, picking them up and fusing them onto the vessel.



The second series in this vein, begun two years later, is Baskets. Inspired by the natural sag of Northwest Coast Native American baskets, the series marks the beginning of Chihuly's pursuit of creating organic and asymmetrical glass forms, and is one he has returned to repeatedly.



These two ideas culminate in Soft Cylinders, which combine the relaxed forms and gentle curves of the Baskets with the “pick-up drawing” technique used in the Navajo Blanket Cylinders. Additional layers of glass threads and more color varieties result in richer, more complex designs that stretch and strain in concert with the asymmetrical forms.

Objects courtesy of Chihuly Studio

Western Trade Blankets  
ca. 1896-1972

Chihuly became an avid collector of western trade blankets in the late 1960s, eventually focusing on vintage works made by Pendleton Woolen Mills (based in Pendleton, Oregon). Chihuly drew inspiration from these textiles when developing his Blanket Cylinders, a body of work which features colors and patterns reminiscent of the tribal designs found in these objects. Presented here are blankets from the artist's collection produced by Pendleton and other mills such as Oregon City Woolen Mills, Racine Woolen Mills, and Buell Manufacturing Company.





## Seaforms

By experimenting with ribbed metal molds to shape and strengthen the molten glass, Chihuly's work became thinner and more transparent, evolving into the Seaform series. Chihuly did not develop this series with the sea in mind, however, the resulting forms evoke elements found in the sea, giving life to the name. Holding a deep affinity for the rhythm and fluidity of water, Chihuly explained, "I love to go to the ocean and walk along the beach. If you work with hot glass and its natural properties, it begins to look like something that came from the sea."



## Venetians

Inspired by highly decorative and elaborate Venetian vases, Chihuly began the Venetian series with world-renowned Italian glassblower Lino Tagliapietra in 1988. Curious how traditional glass practices could be translated to a more spontaneous, contemporary approach, Chihuly communicated his ideas to Tagliapietra through sketches. Originally envisioned as symmetrical, vessel-shaped objects with several handles, the works eventually became bolder, with handles changing to flamboyant, sometimes humorous attachments, colors evolving from subtle to bold, and forms shifting from symmetrical to asymmetrical.



Objects courtesy of Chihuly Studio

## Putti

The Putti series came from Chihuly and his team's glassblowing sessions with Italian glass masters Lino Tagliapietra and Pino Signoretto at Pilchuck. Signoretto was a master of massiccio, a technique in which tools and molds are used to shape dense molten glass into solid objects, in this case into the shape of various types of birds.



## Baskets

Breaking with two thousand years of glassblowing tradition, Chihuly's Basket series, started in 1977, marks the beginning of his lifelong pursuit of experimenting with organic and asymmetrical glass forms. Struck by the natural slumped and sagging forms of Northwest Coast Native American baskets, especially when stacked or nestled together, Chihuly sought to "capture this grace in glass." Continuing to find inspiration in the undulating forms, Chihuly has returned to the series repeatedly over the decades, experimenting with increased scale and exuberant colors.



## Macchia

“The unbelievable combinations of color—that was the driving force.”

– Dale Chihuly



The Macchia series (Italian for “spotted”) began with Chihuly's desire to use every color available in his hot shop. To create this combination of colors, Chihuly employed a number of innovative techniques. The overall speckled effect is achieved by rolling the molten form onto colorful bits of crushed glass. By using one color combination for the interior and a contrasting one for the exterior, separated by a middle layer of white glass (which Chihuly refers to as a “cloud”), a dazzling juxtaposition of colors can occur. For further dimension, a thin ribbon of contrasting glass is added along the vessel's edge. As the technical complexities were mastered, Chihuly increased the scale of the *Macchia*, resulting in works up to four feet in diameter.



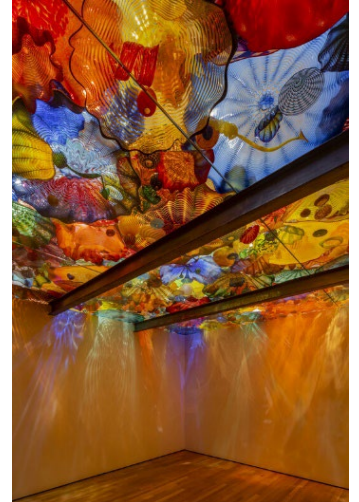
## Jerusalem Cylinders

Created to commemorate Chihuly in the Light of Jerusalem, a 1999 exhibition in Israel, the Jerusalem Cylinders were inspired by the jagged walls of the Citadel in the Old City. To create the crystal forms, large rectangular slabs of glass were cast, then broken into pieces with a chisel and hammer. As a final step, the crystals were carefully fused onto vessels, which required the diligent choreography of a highly skilled team.



## Oklahoma Persian Ceiling

The Persian series was first exhibited in 1986 as part of Chihuly's exhibition at the Musée des Arts Decoratifs, Palais du Louvre, in Paris. Originally presented on pedestals, the series' compositions have evolved to include dramatic installations on walls, windows, and overhead on ceilings, as well as formed into chandeliers and towers. For Chihuly, Persians evoke an ancient sensibility and conjure notions of past civilizations, including the Byzantine and Ottoman empires.



Treasure hunt! Can you find the five small glass putti, or winged cherub figures, scattered throughout the ceiling?

## Ikebana

In 1989, Chihuly began the Ikebana series, inspired by Japan's disciplined art of flower arranging. In contrast to a Western floral aesthetic of abundance, ikebana is grounded in simplified, often minimalistic arrangements in which twigs, leaves, blossoms, and even the container are all important elements of a harmonious composition. Chihuly's long-stemmed glass flowers and leaves, which can get up to six feet long, are presented dramatically in gourd-like vessels.



## Tiger Lilies and Autumn Gold Persian Wall

As a child, Chihuly gained a profound awareness of color and natural forms from his mother's extensive gardening.



This exposure led to the creation of works such as Tiger Lilies, which continued his experimentation with organic forms inspired by nature. Juxtaposed with this work is another iteration of Persians. Originally presented as discrete objects on pedestals, the series evolved into dramatic, experiential compositions that include groupings mounted on walls and ceilings (such as OKCMOA's glass ceiling), or assembled to form chandeliers and towers.

This pairing recalls Chihuly's compositions that range from a few standalone forms to multiple elements brought together in large installations he calls Mille Fiori (Italian for "a thousand flowers").

## Neodymium Reeds

Chihuly first made Reeds while working with his team at a glass factory in Nuutajärvi, Finland. The facility's high ceilings and long annealing ovens (enclosures that allow the hot glass to cool gradually) gave Chihuly the opportunity to experiment with new forms in sizes not previously achievable.



To create the long, tubular shapes, one glassblower blows through the pipe while being raised in a mechanical lift to encourage the form to stretch while another pulls the glass toward the ground. Reeds are among the most dramatic blown glass forms, and Chihuly has created them in various colors, such as red, yellow, blue, and the “Neodymium” purple seen here, which is named after the chemical element known for its lavender hue when oxidized.



## Ikebana Boat

Chihuly first filled boats with glass in Nuutajärvi, Finland, during the 1995 Chihuly Over Venice project.

After several days of glassblowing, Chihuly started tossing glass forms into the Nuutajoki River to see how they would look in the environment. As the glass floated downstream, it was retrieved in wooden boats by local teenagers, inspiring Chihuly to begin grouping various glass forms in wooden boats for installations in museums and gardens.



The Ikebana Boat features an eccentric collection of long, flower-like glass stems inspired by the Japanese art of ikebana, or flower arranging. The spherical forms were inspired by Chihuly's trip to the Japanese island of Niihima, and by childhood memories of discovering round Japanese fishing net floats along the beaches of Puget Sound in Washington.

## Rotolo

Started in 2013, the Rotolo series (Italian for “coil”) evolved from the spiraling and exuberant forms found in the earlier *Venetian* series, and developed as an exploration of the quality of light emanating from the complex clear glass forms. Over time, Chihuly expanded the series to include rich hues of red, blue, green, and purple. Heavy, intricate, and delicate, Rotolo is the most technically challenging work Chihuly has created.



Objects courtesy of Chihuly Studio.

## Chihuly Merletto

Continuing to explore his iconic Baskets, in 2019 Chihuly was inspired by the ancient Venetian technique called merletto (Italian for "lace") in which white cane, or rods of glass, are used to create intricate, lace-like patterns. Creating his own interpretation of the traditional merletto technique, Chihuly has elegantly integrated opaque white cane within his asymmetrical basket forms.



Objects courtesy of Chihuly Studio

## Glass On Glass

Debuted in 2017, Glass on Glass demonstrates Chihuly's ongoing exploration of the transmission of light through transparent media. Comprised of glass panels that are painted with vitreous enamel (which is made of powdered glass), then layered within a special frame to create a single unified vision, the depth of each Glass on Glass composition is revealed as the viewer changes position. Painting with vitreous enamels is an art form going back a thousand years, and Chihuly explores modern themes using this traditional technique.



Left: Object courtesy of Chihuly Studio

Right: Gift of Julia Carrington Hall, 2021