

Glass

Dali discovers magic art material

By Mary Klemle
staff writer

Glass has held a fascination all its own over the centuries.

Until the birth of Christ, it could be made only in a complicated process that was reserved for kings. Glass was considered rarer and more precious than gems.

A company in France experimented with a glass casting process until it was mastered in the 1930s, and artist Salvador Dali, known primarily for his paintings, created 18 works in glass using this technique.

TODAY, VISITORS from around the country stop at the University of Michigan-Dearborn library to see Michigan's largest public contemporary glass collection. During April, which is Michigan Glass Month, thousands of visitors from San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Minneapolis, St. Louis, Boston and other cities are attracted to the Dearborn campus, according to C. Edward Wall, head librarian.

"Glass is a magical material," he said. "Some say it's a dangerous material, because glass is so captivating."

One is captured by the color and depth of the glass.

"But if an artist is able to use glass successfully, the work becomes even more important. You've got dimensionality: depth, height, width. It's not just an opaque object."

Nine of Dali's original sculptural works in glass will be on display at the library from Friday through Monday, April 30. The work of other artists, dating from 1968, also will be featured in the exhibition.

"Many of the images that you find in Dali's paintings and prints, such as a clock, are interpreted in the glass," Wall said. "If they were done in steel or plaster or porcelain, it wouldn't have had the impact of that transparent glass."

WORKS BY Dali and other artists on display were made in a glass casting technique called pate de verre, which dates back 3,500 years. Examples of glass works made this way were found in a pharaoh's tomb from the year 1550 B.C.

In the process, a sand mold is filled with a paste of glass that includes different colors and is heated to approxi-

mately 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit. As a result, the glass takes on the form of the mold itself. It can take on blue, green, purple or almost any other color.

"By filling the mold with the right colors, it's possible to replace the sculpture exactly," Wall said.

The pate de verre technique was perfected in 1968 by Daum, a world famous French glass company. Since that time, Daum has produced some 80 glass sculptures with that method, including the 18 by Dali. Approximately 40 of those sculptures are in the university's exhibition, to make it the largest pate de verre collection in the United States.

GLASS USED In the pate de verre technique contains 30 percent lead, according to Wall.

"Much of the contemporary glass uses high-quality light bulb glass, which is very strong," he said. "It can be very light and very fragile and still has considerable strength."

Included in the exhibit is Dali's "Soft Clock," a sculpture of a clock dripping from a hanger. The image represents the sadness of wasted time, Wall said.

"Dali always felt time was so critical in his life," Wall explained. "He regretted growing old and not able to produce. This shows a clock dripping time away."

DALI RECEIVED inspiration for another work on display, "Importance

of a Rose," when he saw a plastic bleach bottle washed up on a beach. He drove his hand into a mold to create the glass sculpture entitled, "Diving Hand."

Other glass sculptures in the display feature toros, vases and animals. Some weigh as much as 20 to 25 pounds each. The crystal ball balanced on the mouth of a fish in another Dali work weighs five pounds alone.

The university's public contemporary glass collection is one of the largest such collections in the country outside the Corning Museum of Glass. That museum's president has visited the Dearborn campus to see the artworks, Wall said.

The pate de verre works are part of the Alfred Berckowicz Collection of the University of Michigan-Dearborn. An opening reception is planned for 7:30-9:30 p.m. tomorrow at the library. Reception parking and admission are free. For more information, call 593-5400.

HOURS FOR the exhibition are 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday, 1-6 p.m. Saturday and 1-10 p.m. Sunday.

The university has housed a major art collection for some four years. Glass sculptures have been at the campus for the past two years. All of the artworks are contributions, most of them from the Detroit area.

"Two of the works were for the Smithsonian Institution but came here instead," Wall said.



Librarian C. Edward Wall displays two Dali works, "Green Vase" and "This Is Not a Potato."

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