



About the Gallery  
Education Programs  
Exhibitions and Collections

Gift Shop  
Membership  
Newsroom

[Artists Online](#)

[Current Exhibitions](#)

[Past Exhibitions](#)

[Permanent Collection](#)

## Form and Surface: A Survey of Thorn Glass 1984 - 2004

Heather Wood & John Kepkiewicz

July 3 to September 23, 2004



Thanks to our sponsors:



thinking begins inside the gift box



**Thorn Glass Studio, Douglas and Kent Farndale,  
Rick Forler Construction Inc.**

[Essay by Jean Johnson](#)

[Essay by by Irene Gesza](#)

[Artists' Resume](#)

## Heather Wood and John Kepkiewicz

by Jean Johnson

*Glass is more gentle, graceful, and noble than any metal and its use is more delightful, polite, and sightly than any other material at this day know to the world.*

- Antonio Neri, 1612

*Glass: shiny, hard, fragile -- shattering in an instant or surviving for thousands of years, a rigid liquid worked in a molten state -- too hot to touch, yet often made by hand; molded, blown, cut, engraved, enameled, or painted. Of the craftsmen, it demands the ultimate in steady nerves, skill, control, patience, judgment, and spontaneity. Glass is made from sand and lime, the same ingredients in use since before the birth of Christ.\**



"Working Together, Working Apart", an appropriately titled past exhibition of their glass, aptly describes the working relationship between Heather Wood and John Kepkiewicz. Unobtrusive interdependence and mutual professional respect, characterize this relationship between them.

Heather Wood and John Kepkiewicz's careers as artists had their beginnings at Sheridan College School of Craft and Design in 1982, where John studied glass and Heather, textiles. Heather was appointed a resident artist at Toronto's Harbourfront Craft Studio in 1981, and John joined Harbourfront as a resident in 1982/83. Harbourfront provided them both with the opportunity to teach the public and to develop their work and professional careers. Their residency led to their partnership, professional and in life with the establishment of Thorn Glass Studio.

In 1984, John and Heather accepted an offer of studio space in St. Jacobs from Milo Shantz of Mercedes Corporation, who was developing St. Jacobs as a craft centre and tourist destination. Today, Thorn Glass Studio has a large glass furnace, operating at 2,600-Fahrenheit degrees, holding 135 kilograms of recycled glass in molten form. The studio is accessible visually to the public so that they may view how the glass is formed and obtain an understanding of the many processes involved in the making of contemporary glass art.

Their working partnership includes discussions of shape, colour, and design prior to the creation of their work. Working with molten glass, John focuses intensely to fashion vases, goblets, plates, paperweights and other functional objects, working through each idea as he makes the glass pieces. John builds up several layers of coloured glass in the shaping process, producing pieces which are then sandblasted using Heather's designs.

Heather applies resists to the surface of the glass objects, and then sandblasts them to create a low relief of raised glass surfaces. Much of the imagery she uses on the glass is inspired by her experience of nature. Her sketch book acts also to record everyday life and provides an abundant source of imagery. Working in series, she has investigated mythologies surrounding the tree, creation myths, the



origins of the cross, as well as issues connected to the environment. Her surface designs reflect her background in textiles and can be both decorative and whimsical in character. Line, rhythm and texture became her tools when she left the tactile and colourful worlds of textiles. Her constant plea for "more" colour would become a familiar request to John.



Notable experiences include an exchange between artists, organized by the Ontario Crafts Council and Baden-Wurtemberg, Germany. As participants, Kepkiewicz and Wood spent two weeks in Ugingen & Stuttgart, with glassblower Jorg Zimmerman, who in turn stayed with the couple in St. Jacobs.

John returned from Germany "with a better understanding of the history of glass, and the opportunity to step back from his own work and view it objectively". Wood describes the experience "as a turning point" as the exchange experience reminded her of the importance of play in the creative process. She was also captivated by a show of 17th century altarpieces. The show influenced her work as she used the format of the reliquary and altarpiece and combined it with ideas and imagery from her earlier tree series.



The creations of Thorn Glass Studio have been exhibited around the world from Toronto, Waterloo, and Hamilton, Ontario, Montreal, Quebec, Prince Edward Island and Victoria, British Columbia, in Canada, to Illinois, Michigan and Maryland, United States, Germany and Spain. Thorn Glass has been honoured in their receipt of numerous awards including: The Kitchener-Waterloo Arts Awards, Purchase Award by the Burlington Art Centre, as well as awards from the Toronto City Hall Show, and the Ontario Arts Council.

Thorn Glass Studio's list of commissioned works is impressive, by both the Provincial and Federal governments. In 1994, each of the 13 award winners of the Chalmers Award, received a vase, each specifically emphasizing the winner's discipline, commissioned by the Ontario Arts Council. Their works are in the collections of former Philipino head of state Corazon Aquino, and the late King Hussein of Jordan. IMAX had commissioned many pieces to mark the opening of their films around the world.

While John and Heather no longer share their private life, they continue to have much respect and admiration for each other in their professional lives. Heather is excited to return to working with textiles and to pursue new ideas and techniques in warm glass.

After twenty-five years, John can't imagine doing anything else. He compares blowing glass with playing a violin; some days everything goes right and other days, wrong, bringing highs or frustration. John says, "glass is alive, immediate. Sometimes you are caressing it, while other times, the glass fights back". Heroes include Quebec artist, Francoise Houde, (his passion and dedication to glass), early Roman glass, Galle, and of course, Dan Crichton. For John, the future is exciting with unlimited possibilities.

\**A Short History of Glass*, by Chloe Zerwick. The Corning Museum of Glass.



### Thorn Glass Studio: Heather Wood and John Kepkiewicz by Irene Gesza

*Consciousness can only be attained by the recognition of something which is not the recognizing ego itself - in other words consciousness is the realization of some particular sort of relation between the cognizing subject and the cognized object. Let us take the illustration of a broom and its handle - the two together make a broom; that is one sort of relation; but take the same stick and put a rake-iron at the end of it and you have an altogether different implement. The stick remains the same, but the difference of what is put at the end of it makes the whole thing a broom or a rake. Now the thinking and feeling power is the stick, and the conception which it forms is the thing at the end of the stick, so that the quality of its consciousness will be determined by the ideas which it projects; but to be conscious at all it must project ideas of some sort.*

- The Creative Process in the Individual, Thomas Troward, 1912



The creative relationship between artists Heather Wood and John Kepkiewicz is not as simple as they like to make it sound.

*He makes the glass piece.  
She provides the surface treatment.  
He has a vision.  
She has one, too.*

Both strive for perfection in their art. Both enjoy stretching the boundaries of previous success, opening to the process of evolution in the work. Each offers the other advice, which both admit they sometimes heed and sometimes don't. Out of mutual respect for the other's skill, vision and creativity, they give one another lots of space. What makes the "dynamic duo of Kepkiewicz and Wood" - as they have been called in the press - so remarkable is that they are able to practice such spaciousness in the context of working together while working apart on the same piece.

Kepkiewicz brings to the effort his unique skill and vision as a glassblower - his ongoing quest for mastery of the process of transforming molten sand and minerals into something beautiful - then steps back and lets his partner take it away. What would be, in another glassblower's studio, a work of art unto itself becomes, at Thorn Glass Studio, a brilliant canvas awaiting the hand of one more artist. It is only when Heather Wood has applied the skill and techniques she has honed over 20 years of working with Kepkiewicz - bringing her own perspective, ideas and imagination to the piece using tape resist methods and sandblasting tools - that the work for which the pair is known is created.

Kepkiewicz says they run into some difficulty when they try to discern whose work it really is. It's neither Kepkiewicz nor Wood. It's not even 50-50, Kepkiewicz and Wood. The work and the process by which it is created is, rather, bigger than both of them.



Individually, the two make two rakes, clawing through the mental detritus that stands between our day-to-day-nine-to-five-hamburger-stand view of life and a notion of creative promise and potential. Together, these two rakes - stepping outside the egocentricity that too often typifies artists - make a boat, a vessel substantial enough to carry the viewer away to a place where there is time and space enough for wonder.

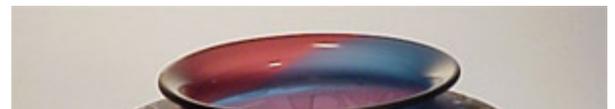


"Sometimes, if you let your ego get in the way, the creative process between two people might not flow as well," Wood says. "John and I tend to create between us what happens in an individual's process by being willing to listen and be creative with the idea, to play with it. Usually, we can work something out so that it makes sense."

Typified by a steady flow of ideas, fits and starts, things that work and things that don't, the space Kepkiewicz and Wood create between them is large enough to both contain and diffuse their individual egocentricities. Wood says they are able to acknowledge their strengths and weaknesses and have a tendency to acquiesce to the other's area of expertise. Kepkiewicz says that even though the two maintain creative autonomy, they can't help but influence each other.

"I don't think you can work with someone for 20 years, without the process kind of crossing the boundaries," he says. "With any partnership, you tend to know the person. After so many years, you know what the person wants, likes, needs."

They don't have regular production meetings. They don't, for the most part, collaborate. Kepkiewicz says he doesn't like collaborating, a method of working where individual artists



try to hack out a unified vision of a piece from beginning to end together. Kepkiewicz and Wood only sometimes do that, with special commissions. Most often they don't. Most often, they just talk things over and then let each other be.

"With blowing, you really don't make one piece because it takes so long to learn to do it, to perfect it," Kepkiewicz says. "So, she knows what I'm working on. When she's working on a series, I'm very aware of what the end result is going to be like. Each of us has a vision, a perspective. We have the capacity to go off and do our own thing. We have a lot of respect for each other's space. We both manage to do what we want to do," he adds. "And we make requests of each other, too. She may say, 'We need large plates'. And I'll say, 'What colour do you want?' Or else I just make stuff and she goes with it."



The operational rhythm between them, the seamlessness of their process, implies intimacy, respect, honesty and openness. How else could it work? How else could each turn over such an integral part of their own work - his glasswork is her canvas - so completely to the other? Kepkiewicz and Wood say they both complement and compliment each other. Both understand that their capacity to encourage and bring out the best in the other is the foundation of their success.

"Sometimes," Kepkiewicz says, "she sees the possibilities in stuff that I just can't see. Let's face it. Sometimes, you have ugly days - like bad hair days - when you look at the work and you say, 'God, that's ugly!' A lot of times, that's because you're too close to the work and you can't see it objectively. But we've always been able to offer each other that objectivity, and it comes from a person you respect and whose opinion you trust."

"When you work together as closely as we have," Wood adds, "there is an intimacy that's created. In the end, we both know that our success has come from each of us having the freedom to experiment with what interests us."



## Heather Wood & John Kepkiewicz - Resume

### Thorn Glass Studio

10 Front Street, St. Jacobs, Ontario, N0B 2N0

phone: 519 664-2821

fax: 519 664- 2325

Email: [thornglass@hotmail.com](mailto:thornglass@hotmail.com)

### Education:

#### Heather:

2001	Honours Bachelor of Arts, Studio Specialization in Sculpture, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario.
1981	Diploma in Textile Design, Sheridan College of Applied Arts & Technology, Oakville, Ontario.
1979	Diploma in Design Arts, Georgian College of Applied Arts & Technology, Barrie, Ontario.

#### John:

1982 - 1979	Glass Program, Sheridan College of Applied Arts & Technology, Mississauga, Ontario.
-------------	---

### Employment:

#### Heather:

2004 - 1984	Self-employed, Thorn Glass Studio, St. Jacobs, Ontario.
1984 - 1983	Instructor - Painting on Fabric I & II, Continuing Education, Sheridan College, Mississauga, Ont.
1984 - 1982	Instructor, Painting on Fabric, Harbourfront Craft Studios, Toronto, Ont.
1983 - 1982	Instructor, Quilting and Machine Stitchery, Harbourfront Craft Studios, Toronto, Ontario.

1981	Assistant to Crafts Co-ordinator, Harbourfront, Toronto.
1981	Technician, Textile Studio, Sheridan College, School of Crafts & Design.
1981	Instructor, Continuing Education, Tapestry Weaving and Spinning, Sheridan College, Mississauga, Ontario.
1977 - 1978	Curatorial Assistant, (summers), Grimsby Public Art Gallery, Grimsby, Ontario.

**John:**

2004 - 1984	Self-employed, Thorn Glass Studio, St. Jacobs, Ontario.
1983	Instructor, Glass Blowing Workshops, Harbourfront, Toronto, Ont.
1982	Glass Blower, Crystal Craft Studio, Toronto, Ontario
1981	Glass Technician, Sheridan College, Mississauga, Ontario.

**Selected Exhibitions:**

2004- 2000	'Canadian Contemporary Glass', West End Gallery, Victoria, B. C.
1999	'Glass Exposition', La Galerie des Metiers d'Art, Montreal, Quebec.
1999	Option Art Gallery, Montreal, @ SOFA, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.
1998	'Selected Work', Kent Farndale Gallery, Port Perry, Ontario.
1997	'Incandescence -- Contemporary Hot Glass', Fusion, Blyth, Ont.
1996	'Wheres the Context/Content?' Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery, Waterloo.
1995	'Canadian Art Glass', Visual Arts Centre, Montreal, Quebec.
1994	'Refractions/Directions', The Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery, Waterloo.
1993	'Working together, Working Apart', Homer Watson Gallery, Kitchener, Ont.
1992	'Austausch -- Exchange', Bund der Kunsthandwerk, Stuttgart, Germany.
1992	'Touching Technology From the Great Lakes Water,' Expo 92, Seville, Spain.
1991	'Austausch -- Exchange', The Craft Gallery, Ontario Crafts Council, Toronto.
1990	'Canadian Glass', Ariana Gallery, Birmingham, Michigan, United States.
1990	'Fireworks', Fusion Exhibition touring Ontario until 1992.
1989	'Ten & Canadians', The Glass Gallery, Bethesda, Maryland, United States.
1988	'Settings by Design', The Seagrams Museum, Waterloo, Ontario.
1987	'Cool as Glass', John B. Aird Gallery, Toronto, Ontario.
1986	'New Horizons', Glass Art Association, Harbourfront Gallery, Toronto.
1985	'Recent Works', Rails End Gallery, Haliburton, Ont.
1983	'Breaking with Traditions', Oakville Centennial Gallery. Touring Ontario & the Maritimes until 1984.
1982	'Ontario Crafts 82', Touring Ontario.
1982	'Northeast Surface Design -- Embellishment -- Decorated Textiles', St. Mary's University Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

**Selected Commissions:**

2003	Fair November Award, Guelph University, Guelph, Ontario.
2002	Icon Awards, Kitchener, Ont.
2001	University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ont.
1999	The Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery, Waterloo, Ontario.
1999	The Kitchener Waterloo Art Gallery, Kitchener, Ontario.
1998	Imax Corporation, Toronto, Los Angeles, and New York.
1998	Nortel Corporation, Toronto, Ontario.
1997	City Of Kitchener Food Bank, Kitchener, Ontario.
1996	Magna Corporation, Japan.
1995	Community Memorial Hospital, Port Perry, Ontario.
1994	The Ontario Arts Council, Toronto, Ont. (Chalmers Awards)
1993	Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario.
1992	Manulife Financial Corporation, Waterloo, Ontario.
1992-88	Imperial Oil Corporation, Toronto, Ont.
1989-88	Amnesty International, Ottawa, Ont.
1992-86	Suncor Corporation, Toronto, Ont.

### Publications:

2000	'The Toronto Star', Toronto, Ont.
1999	'The Kitchener-Waterloo Record', Kitchener, Ont.
1994	'Fusion Magazine', The Ontario Clay & Glass Association, Toronto, Ont.
1993	'Muse Magazine', Waterloo, Ont.
1992	'Studio Magazine', Toronto, Ont. (July/Aug.)
1991	'Ontario Craft', Ontario Crafts Council, Toronto, Ont.
1990	'Fusion Magazine', Ontario Clay & Glass Association, Toronto, Ont.
1989	'Glass Art Society Journal', Corning, New York, U.S.A.
1988	'New Work', New York Experimental Glass Workshop Magazine, (spring issue), New York, U.S.A.
1988	'T.O. Magazine', (December), Toronto, Ontario.
1988	'Craft Focus III', Ontario Crafts Council, Toronto, Ont.
1986	'Craft Focus I', Ontario Crafts Council, Toronto, Ont.

### Awards & Grants:

2001	Award of Distinction, Fine Arts, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario. (Heather)
1999	Visual Arts Awards, The Cities of Kitchener- Waterloo Arts Awards. (Heather & John)
1997	Design Award, Home County Festival, London, Ontario.
1992	Honourable Mention/Glass, Toronto City Hall Show, Toronto, Ont.

1990	Purchase Award, Fireworks -- Burlington Art Centre, Burlington, Ontario.
1988	Award -- Best Use of Colour , Canadian Craft Show, Toronto, Ontario.
1987	Award -- Contemporary Design, Canadian Craft Show, Toronto, Ontario.
1989/88	Ontario Craftsman's Grants, Ontario Arts Council, Toronto, Ont.

### Arts Community Work:

#### Heather:

- Past Chairperson, Regional Regeneration Committee, for the Ontario Crafts Council, Toronto, Ontario.
- Presently South Western Representative for the Regional Regeneration Committee, for the Ontario Crafts Council.
- Past, Board Member, Ontario Crafts Council, Toronto, Ontario.
- Past Chairperson, Ontario Crafts Council Advisory Committee
- Past Chairperson of the Endowment Committee, The Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery, Waterloo, Ontario.
- Past member of the Ontario Crafts Council Exhibitions Committee
- Past Exhibitions Coordinator for Surfacing -- The Textiles Dyers and Printers Association of Ontario.
- Past Editorial Coordinator -- Surfacing Journal, The Textile Dyers and Printers Association of Ontario.

Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery  
 25 Caroline St. N., Waterloo, ON N2L 2Y5 ☎ Phone: (519) 746-1882 ☎ Fax: (519) 746-6396  
 E-mail the Gallery ☎ Site map