

## Board Member to Watch: The Multi-Faceted Robert Minkoff



Miriam Rosenthal

Robert Minkoff is a passionate collector, here holding a Paul Stankard orb with a piece by Dan Dailey on the table and a flame worked piece by Brent Kee Young in the background.

Trying to describe Robert Minkoff and his many activities is a bit like trying to capture the fractured rainbow reflections from a Jon Kuhn glass sculpture. The pieces are related, but incredibly diverse.

Robert had been collecting art with a focus on glass, wood and textiles for some time when he met glass artist Richard Ritter in 1991. Robert was mesmerized by the *Triolet* series, in which pieces are encased in clear glass but contained murrine and veil elements. The three-dimensional properties of the work fascinated him since one could change what one saw by changing viewing angles or the lighting. The die was cast: he purchased his first major piece, and his personal collection has continued to grow since.

While in Tacoma, Washington, seven years ago, Robert met Paul Stankard at a demonstration at the hot shop of the Museum of Glass. Paul's work was already well represented in Robert's collection and, becoming a good friend with the man behind the work added a new element to Robert's involvement; thus, he set about documenting the flame working artist's career.

Robert has loaned more than 70 pieces of his collection to the Museum of Glass in

Tacoma where the exhibit *Beauty Beyond Nature: the Glass Art of Paul Stankard* is now on display. Not satisfied with loaning his art, Robert also assisted in designing the show, and his foundation, the Robert M. Minkoff Foundation, sponsored the exhibit and opening reception. The Foundation also published a beautiful art book to accompany the exhibit with high level magnification photographs, allowing appreciation of the detail in the work.

For at least 10 years Robert has been contributing to the work of various arts organizations through private donations and the Robert M. Minkoff Foundation. As an example, three glass artists will be selected to spend a week at the Toledo Museum of Art Glass Pavilion this March to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the origin of the studio glass movement. This residency, co-sponsored by the museum and the Robert M. Minkoff Foundation, allows the artists to participate in building a furnace modeled on the one developed by Harvey Littleton and Dominick Labino. They will then pursue individual projects in glass and make a presentation of the work produced on March 30. The Foundation also provides major support to Wheaton Arts, a New Jersey organization, which promotes glass arts with a museum of glass and a hot shop.

Beyond something to give pleasure, Robert sees art glass as a tool used to attract and focus the attention of individuals who are at risk of failure. Its unique allure can be used as an enticement to the value of an education in the glass arts. To this end, the Minkoff Foundation has endowed two scholarships at Salem Community College in New Jersey for full-time glass art students.

Named to JRA's Board in 2007, Robert has been helpful to the organization for years. With his knowledge of leading glass artists, he has built connections which resulted in major contributions to the Spring Craft Weekend auctions. He has purchased major works at the auction, has been a Caucus member for years, has brought in glass artists such as Paul Stankard to give educational programs, the Foundation contributed to the Lloyd Herman Curator of American Craft fund, and he has supported the attendance of young artists at the gala.—*Johanna Thompson*



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Meeting at the reception were, left, Ann Peel co-chair of the Smithsonian Craft Show, Clemmer Montague, JRA president, Gary Stevens, JRA vice president for programs, Anne-Lise Auclair-Jones, co-chair of the SCS, and Wendy Somerville Wall, Smithsonian Women's Committee president.

### JRA, SMITHSONIAN WOMEN'S COMMITTEE MEET FOR COMMON GOOD

A cocktail party at the Metropolitan Club on February 21 commemorated the 30th anniversaries of the James Renwick Alliance and the Smithsonian Craft Show. The program was put together by Anne-Lise Auclair-Jones, Smithsonian Craft Show chair, and Gary Stevens, JRA vice president of programs. The idea of the party was to continue the cooperation and interaction between the two groups. A table staffed by the JRA and Women's Committee allowed members of both groups to sign up for each other's upcoming events: Spring Craft Weekend events for JRA and Smithsonian Craft Show events for the women's committee.



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At a lunch in her honor, Ginny Ruffner and Norman Mitchell look at her sculpture in Seattle on her iPhone. Others at the table were Tim Tate, Johanna Thompson, Paul Parkman and Cynthia Boyer.

*A Not So Still Life*, a documentary about the life of lampworker **Ginny Ruffner**, was shown at the Smithsonian American Art Museum's Renwick Gallery on Wednesday, February 29. Maurine Littleton of Maurine Littleton Gallery opened her gallery afterwards to a reception of Ginny's work. On Tuesday, Ginny joined 18 JRA members at a gumbo lunch at the home of Clemmer and David Montague, where Ginny's piece *Ghost Rider in the Sky* was the centerpiece.