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Artists working with glass strike blow for original decor

By Kim Cook *Associated Press*



Chris Ahalt's balloon animals are whimsical creatures made of blown glass. (Chris Ahalt photo)

Chris Ahalt's menagerie of blue whales, pink hippos and gold giraffes looks like a flotilla in a really fun dream. Their balloon-animal bodies are gathered at the point of attachment in a tight little knot, tethered to a tiny lead weight.

But they aren't latex. Ahalt, a Minneapolis resident, makes the whimsical yet realistic-looking creatures out of blown glass.

“Balloons, to me, suggest celebration, children and wonder,” he says. “The animals that I pick appeal to those childlike sensibilities as well.”

But there’s profundity in his designs, as well. He crafts animals that are facing endangerment; rendering them in glass, he says, highlights not only their beauty but also their precarious existence.

“The thrill never gets old of thwarting the glass’ desire to fall apart, and it’s always a victory when a piece comes together,” Ahalt says.

“At times I do wish I’d chosen a career in something a little less temperamental,” he says. “Glass blowing can be a really frustrating medium. There are countless hours lost to broken glass.” (www.thechesterfieldgallery.com)

Lots of other artists also are willing to take the risk.

Danielle Blade and Stephen Gartner, glass blowers in Ashley Falls, Mass., create vessels and lighting inspired by the environment outside their rural studio. “We’re trying to bring that walk in the woods into our living room,” Blade says.

Some of the design duo’s objects come topped with surprising touches like a delicate snail’s head. (www.gartner-blade.com)

At his Louisville, Ky., studio Casey Hyland blows softly tinged blue and white glass into vessels that look like droplets of sky with wispy clouds. (www.hylandglass.com)

Some glass designers are producing furniture.

John Foster, another Minneapolis-based artist, assembles multiple cut crystals of various sizes into his Sparkle Palace cocktail table, which looks like a giant molecular structure. (www.fancy.com)