



Flower & Flame: A New Documentary Highlighting Glasswork Artist, Paul J. Stankard

Transcript

Story by Gina Marie Rodriguez

[MUSIC: "A LITTLE WIGGLE"]

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (00:03):

This is Gina Marie Rodriguez and you're listening to the Jersey Arts Podcast. Today's episode is a little different than those previous but you'll see why soon. First, I'd like to talk to you about acclaimed flamework artist, rather I should say flamework pioneer, Paul J. Stankard.

Paul is an internationally acclaimed artist and pioneer in the studio glass movement. His lifelike nature based glassworks have changed the paperweight world over his forty year artistic career. Having begun his career working in scientific glassblowing, it was through this industry that he found creativity and learned he was indeed an artist.

It is important to note that he found himself on this vocational path due to struggles with standardized schooling. A later diagnosis of dyslexia helped to make sense of those struggles and led him down a path of creation. Learning differently is not learning incorrectly.

He has since become an author in addition to his visual creations, having written four books and many poems as inspired by his own idol, Walt Whitman.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (01:04):

I'll admit, I may have overextended myself here. In my research, I was able to watch an early screening of the new documentary, "Paul J. Stankard: Flower and Flame" and I was so moved that I had to speak

PRESENTED BY



Discover Jersey Arts is presented by ArtPride New Jersey. The program was co-founded by, and is currently supported by funds from, the [New Jersey State Council on the Arts](#). Additional support for JerseyArts.com content is provided by the [National Endowment for the Arts](#).





with both Paul and his director, Dan Collins about their new film. Which means you lucky listeners get a two for one this time around!

It also means that I had to pick and choose what could make its way into this podcast. I had wonderful conversations with both gentlemen, but you will hear but a small portion of that. Hopefully just enough to whet your whistle so that you may discover this new documentary yourself.

We begin with Director Dan Collins as he explains what makes this film, and Paul, so special.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (01:47):

Paul was such a sweetheart, and I told you I loved this movie. I cried while watching it, and that might be a me thing, I don't know. But I love seeing artists at work and I love watching other people's passion, and it's just so- you did a wonderful job of exhibiting that. I'm going to say, if you had to pitch this film in as few words as possible, how would you encourage audiences to see it? Why is this important for them to watch?

DAN COLLINS (02:17):

You might think you know what art is and what kind of art you like, but if you've never experienced what can be done with glass in terms of not only capturing a very realistic element of nature's beauty, you need to see this work. But beyond the sort of, the nature that he's captured, the beauty of nature that he's capturing, there's something else. The work takes it a step further and there's an emotional response when you see this work, either holding it in your hand or seeing it in a museum or seeing it on a theater screen.

DAN COLLINS (03:03):

There's an emotional response to his creations that goes beyond his intent to just capture a beautiful nature scene. There's something in his work that is more than the sum of its parts, and I think the film through this incredible 4K technology and the closeup shots we have of his work, I think that's about as close as you can get to understanding it without holding it in your hand. So, if you don't have the privilege to do that, this is probably as close as you can get. And if you've never experienced glass art like this before, I guarantee you it's going to blow your mind.

PRESENTED BY



Discover Jersey Arts is presented by ArtPride New Jersey. The program was co-founded by, and is currently supported by funds from, the [New Jersey State Council on the Arts](#). Additional support for JerseyArts.com content is provided by the [National Endowment for the Arts](#).





GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (03:40):

Well said. I agree with that entirely. And like he says, his labor is his prayer. Right? And I think a lot of what you just said encapsulated that as well. It's you're capturing someone's oration on camera.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (03:57):

Laborare est orare. Memento mori. These are the words plastered on the wall of Stankard's studio. *To labor is to pray. Remember, you must die.* This is the motto of Benedictine Monks, a motto that has inspired Stankard to continue creating. Hailing from an Irish Catholic family, faith and religion are very important to Paul. As is family and their support. Here, he tells me just how important family has been in the trajectory of his success.

PAUL J. STANKARD (04:30):

I taught my father-in-law how to do glass.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (04:33):

Oh wow.

PAUL J. STANKARD (04:34):

Yeah, he loved it. He was a union operating engineer, and he'd come home. A lot of times he was laid off, so he'd be in the garage playing with glass. He would make little animals. I told him how, I showed him how to make the animals, and he said, I'm going to do a show in Atlantic City. It's the Indian Summer Art and Craft show. And there was a juror named Reese Palley. Reese Palley was a dealer, porcelain dealer. He was very, very successful promoting and selling Boehm porcelains, cedar porcelains. Trenton had this huge American porcelain activity. I don't know if you knew that.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (05:18):

I did not.

PAUL J. STANKARD (05:20):

Huge. So anyway, Reese Palley was a juror and he was going past the artists in the crafts people's booths. And he came to my father-in-law, and he saw this paperweight and he said, 'did you do this?' He said, 'no, my son-in-law made it.' He said, 'oh, this is very, very interesting. Have your son-in-law come to visit me at my gallery.' So, Pat and I went down to Atlantic City with the kids. We're going to let the

PRESENTED BY



Discover Jersey Arts is presented by ArtPride New Jersey. The program was co-founded by, and is currently supported by funds from, the **New Jersey State Council on the Arts**. Additional support for JerseyArts.com content is provided by the **National Endowment for the Arts**.





kids swim at the beach. And then I walked over to see my father-in-law, and he said, 'oh, there was a juror, one of the jurors admired your work and wanted to have you visit him in the gallery.' So, I didn't know Reese Palley and I went into the gallery and I said, 'I'm the person, the glass person who made the paperweights.' And he said, 'oh, you're very good.'

PAUL J. STANKARD (06:21):

I'd love to have you exhibit some of your work in my gallery.' And I said, 'well, that's nice.' He said, 'we have a holiday gathering and you could show your work on consignment.' I said 'consignment? Oh, I don't know. I'd like to sell them'. So he says, 'well.' And so I walked out thinking, no, I wasn't going to do it. I was working at Roman House at the time. That Monday, fellow came in and I told him about meeting this art dealer named Reese Palley in Atlantic City. He said, 'ya know, the Philadelphia Magazine has a story about this man and his picture's on the cover. So I went and bought the magazine. I thought, oh my God, look at this. He's serious. He's a major player. I called him up, I said, yeah, I'd like to do this show. And he sold the work, and he took orders on it.

PAUL J. STANKARD (07:26):

So when I said, well, I'm doing this part time, he says, part time he should be doing this full time. I said, I don't think I can make a living at it. He said, 'I think you could, and I'll make sure you do.' So that's when I asked Pat if I could quit my job and make paperweights, and it worked out. Palley became the studio's patron saint. So I told Reese, I said, 'Reese, you're my studio's patron saint.' He looked over at one of his assistants and he said, 'everybody should be a saint to somebody.'

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (08:07):

Aw, that's great. And I feel like I'm hearing that this wouldn't have happened if not for your father-in-law.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (08:14):

The paternal influence in his life was strong. While his father-in-law may have led to a chance meeting with the art dealer Reese Palley, it was his own father's exuberance for the world of science that led Paul to scientific glassblowing, paving the way for a talent to be born.

But it was his wife Patricia, who provided the space and support to allow him to take a chance. It takes a village.

PRESENTED BY  ArtPride
NEW JERSEY

Discover Jersey Arts is presented by ArtPride New Jersey. The program was co-founded by, and is currently supported by funds from, the [New Jersey State Council on the Arts](#). Additional support for [JerseyArts.com](#) content is provided by the [National Endowment for the Arts](#).



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
for the **ARTS**
arts.gov



PAUL J. STANKARD (08:39):

So, a little backstory, I'm the second oldest of nine. My parents are both college-educated and being educated was second only to being a good Catholic. So I had the house - my siblings were all college bound and good grades and I was difficult grades. So I told the guidance counselor, 'I think I'd like to go to vocational school.' He gave me a brochure, Salem County Vocational Technical Institute in Salem City. So I'm looking at it and I said, 'ya know, I think I'd love to be a machinist.' So I came home and I told my dad, I said, 'Pop.' We called my dad Pop. I said, 'Pop, I'm thinking about going to vocational school and becoming a machinist.' He said, that's a good trade, son. So he opened up the brochure and he goes, 'Scientific glass blowing! Wow, that's what you want to be!' I go, 'what do they do?' He said, 'well, they make laboratory apparatus. And my dad was a chemist, and 'I use the laboratory glassware daily and it's a good trade.' I said, oh, okay. He got so excited about scientific glassware. He took me to- we drove down to Salem City. I saw the students bending glass in a flame. I thought, wow. So I signed up the following September. This was in the spring of '61, and I signed up in September '61 and I graduated in '63. So, here's the kicker. I'm highly regarded in my world of glass- I failed scientific glass blowing.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (10:42):

[laughs] I was not expecting that.

PAUL J. STANKARD (10:43):

Well, I failed. And I had to go to the director's office and he said, 'Paul Stankard, I think you should leave Salem and join the army.' I said, 'I don't want to join the army. I want to be a glassblower.'

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (10:56):

He may have failed once but what's that's saying? If at first you don't succeed, try and try again. Well, thankfully for the art world, Paul pursued his craft. He excelled in the industry for nearly a decade before leaving to dedicate himself to more artistic labors.

Here I'll take you back to Dan Collins, director of the documentary that will give you far more information about the brilliance of Paul's work than I can in this podcast. It is work that behooves a visual counterpart but until you are able to see the film, Dan and I discuss why this documentation of his life in motion is so meaningful.

PRESENTED BY



Discover Jersey Arts is presented by ArtPride New Jersey. The program was co-founded by, and is currently supported by funds from, the **New Jersey State Council on the Arts**. Additional support for JerseyArts.com content is provided by the **National Endowment for the Arts**.





GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (11:33):

I love that - and this might just be me because I recently lost my father, so when I view things now, obviously it's with a different lens. But, this will always be there for his children, his grandchildren, his family, and I love that you've preserved that for him and that emotion is there and it's raw. And I loved hearing about him and Pat, and that's the romantic in me. I love seeing happy, healthy couples who've gone the distance, so to speak. But I love this film. You did such a great job with it. I keep saying that, but I will keep saying it because it's really good.

DAN COLLINS (12:07):

It's good to hear and it's good to hear from an objective voice. I mean, it means a lot to me. It's easy for people I know, or for even Paul or Dave to say, wow, this is really great. But when you have no reason to know anything about it, and if you see it and it strikes you on an emotional level, I'm doing my job. I mean, one of the biggest challenges I have is I've got to make a film that pleases glass experts, at least mostly, you never please everybody all the time. But I've also got to please people and reach people who know nothing about glass, who've never heard his name, who didn't even know that paperweights existed, or the art forms that Paul has evolved into exist. So, if it strikes someone who has no reason to, who's an objective viewer and it moves them like it has you, then I know that I'm kind of hitting the nail on the head.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (13:01):

I learned a lot. I guess the only thing, I told Paul this too, the only thing I'd known about glasswork before was the phrase 'Venetian glass.' That was basically the only thing I'd known. So, to watch him actually make those orbs and the bouquets that- they look like real flowers, that somebody stuck in a ball of glass. I have no idea how he does it, but it's so beautiful.

DAN COLLINS (13:27):

One of the things that I take the most heart in my work is when my instincts are kind of confirmed or reinforced. And so, I went into this with an open heart working with Paul in a way that I kind of opened myself up to him and hoped he would return the favor, and he did. And so I am struggling to think of some epiphany that I learned, but I found that the more I trusted my instincts and pursued the work we were doing from a point of just kind of opening my heart up and being open to what he says and not trying to manipulate what was going to happen or anything like that, that I was rewarded with these beautiful moments. And because he was willing to do the same. So that just tells me that you know,

PRESENTED BY



Discover Jersey Arts is presented by ArtPride New Jersey. The program was co-founded by, and is currently supported by funds from, the [New Jersey State Council on the Arts](#). Additional support for JerseyArts.com content is provided by the [National Endowment for the Arts](#).





especially in documentary, when you get somebody to trust you, as I hope he does, and I think he does, you will be rewarded with great material.

DAN COLLINS (14:29):

And that means you will create a great emotional response in your audience. And one example in the film is, there's this scene that I love, which is towards the end where he's looking at his grandfather's tools. I love this. It's my favorite scene. And it was unplanned. I knew the tools existed because he talks about them in his book. And so, towards the very end of the production, one day we had finished filming the last orb that we were working on, and we had some amazing morning where he was having this epiphany about his new orbs style within the Celestial Bouquet Series. And I said something like, 'Hey, at some point we should talk about your grandfather's tools.' And he was like, 'wait right here.' And he's exhausted. He just made this orb and he's dripping sweat. And he runs across to his house and I'm sitting there and comes back twenty minutes later with that box and he just plops it on the table. And I think I said to him, I'm going to keep rolling. And he's like, yeah, whatever, whatever. And he sat down and that whole scene just unfolded like unplanned. And he got really emotional during the scene and the phone rings, and I'm going, I'm crying and trying to keep my cool and not interrupt.

DAN COLLINS (15:53):

So not only did he allow me to experience this really personal moment with him, but six months later when I showed him the rough cut of the movie, I didn't show him that scene. I didn't show him anything because I've learned how to do that. You can't have too many cooks in the kitchen early on, no matter who they are. So when I finally showed him the rough cut and he saw that scene, I was very aware that he might say, you got to cut that man. That is not for public consumption. And much to my surprise, he was like, wow. He was like, that's really personal. And I was like, do you want me to cut it? And he was like, 'no, that's my favorite scene'.

DAN COLLINS (16:33):

So that's really generous. That scene has nothing to do with promoting his artwork or- there's no self-serving reason to leave that scene in a film from any kind of a promotional standpoint. Do you know what I mean? Not that he's doing it, but I think he just was struck by his own emotion at that moment. And I think, as you said earlier, he wants to share that with his family and his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, great-great-grandchildren, who hopefully will see this film one day. And that took a lot of

PRESENTED BY



Discover Jersey Arts is presented by ArtPride New Jersey. The program was co-founded by, and is currently supported by funds from, the [New Jersey State Council on the Arts](#). Additional support for [JerseyArts.com](#) content is provided by the [National Endowment for the Arts](#).





courage for him to be okay with that. So that kind of trust is probably the most rewarding part of this work for me.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (17:21):

Yeah, I was tearing up just listening to you talk about that scene, and of course, that was one of the ones that I cried at when I was watching. It's really nice to see people talk about their ancestors, I guess, and how much they mean to us, even if we don't realize that in our waking conscious. But he's such an open individual, and I could see that in my short interview with him as well. He's just such a poet at heart, right? He said he started writing poetry recently too, and I feel like a poet would be that open and that raw. I'm just happy that he was willing to share that because it really, it was a beautiful story.

PAUL J. STANKARD (18:05):

"The Morning Glory by my window satisfies me more than the metaphysics of books." Isn't that sweet? So, I really started to be inspired by Whitman's words and that I wanted to, I wanted to bring the depth feeling through my interpretation of nature as Whitman was able to do with words.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (18:35):

He has certainly succeeded in his endeavor to do so. Following in Whitman's footsteps, he has brought forth much emotion through his naturalistic creations.

You can see the documentary, "Paul J. Stankard: Flower and Flame" on February 24th at the Perkins Arts Center in Collingswood. Standard ticket entry begins at 2pm, with a VIP option that includes a demonstration in the glass studio beginning at 1pm.

For tickets and information about the screening be sure to visit perkinsarts.org.

For more information about the film itself, please visit flowerandflamefilm.com.

If you liked this episode, be sure to review, subscribe, and tell your friends. A transcript of this podcast, links relevant to the story, and more about the arts in NJ can be found at jerseyarts.com.

PRESENTED BY



Discover Jersey Arts is presented by ArtPride New Jersey. The program was co-founded by, and is currently supported by funds from, the [New Jersey State Council on the Arts](#). Additional support for JerseyArts.com content is provided by the [National Endowment for the Arts](#).





The Jersey Arts Podcast is presented by ArtPride New Jersey: Advancing a state of creativity since 1986. The show was co-founded by, and currently supported by funds from, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, with additional support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

This episode was hosted, edited and produced by me, Gina Marie Rodriguez. Executive producers are Jim Atkinson and Isaac Serna-Diez. And my thanks to both Dan Collins and Paul Stankard for speaking with me. I'm Gina Marie Rodriguez for the Jersey Arts podcast.

Thanks for listening!

PRESENTED BY



Discover Jersey Arts is presented by ArtPride New Jersey. The program was co-founded by, and is currently supported by funds from, the **New Jersey State Council on the Arts**. Additional support for JerseyArts.com content is provided by the **National Endowment for the Arts**.

