

MoNA

Museum of Northwest Art

Joseph Gregory Rossano: Portraits of the Divine



Joseph Gregory Rossano, *Woolly Mammoth*, 2020, Panels: Repurposed packaging materials, tar, whitewash, graphite, varnish, DNA; All artworks courtesy of the Artist

William Morris: Early Rituals



William Morris, *Burial Urn*, 1991, Blown glass; All artworks courtesy of the Artist and William Morris Studio

June 22, 2024 - September 29 , 2024

Relating to Nature

The relationship between humanity and nature provokes a multifaceted response. We can explore this relationship through the lens of both harm and harmony—humans both exploiting nature and also communing with it. Our individual relationships with nature and systems of consumption lead to environmental degradation and loss as well as a deep connection, respect and preservation.

Artists Joseph Gregory Rossano and William Morris each explore the relationship between humanity and nature in their own ways. They propel us to look to the past in memory, to consider the present and our part in it, and to ponder the future potential for greater harmony between ourselves and the earth.



Joseph Gregory Rossano, *Salmon Portraits*, 2024, Wood, tar, whitewash, found object

Reflection

How do you relate with nature?

What do you notice in each exhibition that reminds you of your connection with the natural world, whether positive or negative?

Circle the words below that resonate most for you when considering the complex relationship between humans and nature:

creation

consumption

loss

memory

apathy

sanctuary

hunting

extinction

excavation

conservation

preservation

consumerism

unity

time

mystery

empathy

death

refuge

hope

respect

inspiration

What other words come to mind? List them below:

The Art of Studio Glassblowing

The early 1960's marked the birth of the American Studio Glass Movement—a shift in glass making practice from functional, factory-made glass to unique glass sculptures crafted by small teams in independent studios. Studio glassblowing teams work together, each with a different role and set of tasks, while communicating and solving problems in real time throughout the process. This naturally fosters mentorship among artists, making it a collaborative and communal practice.



The **gaffer** is the individual who holds the blowpipe. The gaffer dips the blowpipe into the furnace, rolls it over a flat metal surface (the marver) to cool and shape the glass, and blows into the blowpipe.

When glass is being melted in a furnace, it is at approximately 2,000°F. The medium turns orange with heat and becomes malleable in its consistency. Multiple furnaces are used to heat and reheat the glass. The glass is dipped in the furnace and marvered multiple times to increase the size of the sculpture. Surface treatments and decorations can be implemented during marvering and a variety of tools are used by the team to shape the object, remove it from the blowpipe, and finish its shape and details. Gravity is also a key force in glassblowing. All steps are executed with utmost care and collaboration due to the fragility of the medium and the potential for loss of the piece.

William Morris, who is an innovator in surface treatment techniques, has intentionally removed the luminosity and glint of glass in favor of opacity and textures that closely resemble wood, stone, or bone. In the 1990's & 2000's, the artist blazed a trail in the American Studio Glass Movement and is now considered one of the foremost glassblowing artists living today.

“Glassblowing is an animal unto itself. It requires skill, knowledge, physical strength and respect.”
- William Morris

Joseph Rossano treats the surface of his glass sculptures to reflect like a mirror. This photo shows Rossano (right) working in collaboration with part of a studio team to blow and shape the glass into a tusk. The tusk will then be treated to reflect like a mirror, challenging the viewer to reflect upon humankind's impact on our planet and its varied ecosystems.



Photo courtesy of Georgia Holt, *Joseph Rossano at work*, 2024

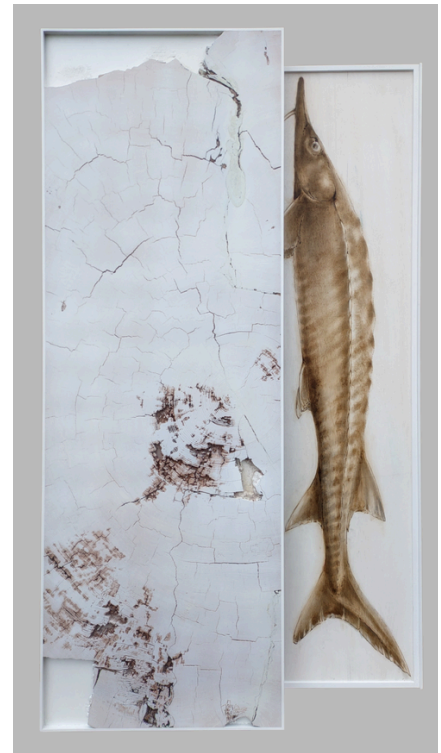
Reflect: What do you notice or wonder about the glassblowing process and the fragility of the medium, especially as it relates to the content of these two exhibitions?

Joseph Gregory Rossano: *Portraits of the Divine*

The artistic form of portraiture embodies presence before the ultimate absence, calling on us to remember. Rossano depicts a menagerie of animal portraits, whether endangered or already extinct, which reference the holiness of nature - the immanence of a divinity on the brink of disappearing. Like in a mirror, Rossano's works in *Portraits of the Divine* function as two-way portraits, reminding us in whose hands rests the fate of these beings.

Joseph Rossano is an American multidisciplinary artist, environmentalist and outdoorsman. His work explores themes of natural history, extinction, taxonomy and conservation in the genres of assemblage and installation art. Rossano is known for manufacturing environments that incorporate wood, photography, technology and glass.

Rossano's engagement with the glass medium dates back to the 1980s. Between 1988 and 1989, the artist worked with artist William Morris, assisting in the execution of works from the series *Early Artifacts*, *Standing Stones*, *Stone Vessels*, and *River Rocks*. Between 1991-1996, Rossano assisted Italo Scanga and Richard Royal on the execution of collaborative glass pieces. From 1991-1997, Rossano served as Special Projects and Glass Studio Manager for artist Dale Chihuly, managing 30 Chihuly Studio artists and successfully spearheading the international sensation Chihuly Over Venice.



Joseph Rossano, *Acipenser oxyrinchus oxyrinchus (Atlantic Sturgeon)*, 2024, Wood, tar, whitewash, found object

Look & Reflect

Rossano presents three bodies of work: *At the Top of Her Lungs*, *Whitewashed*, and *Ivory*. Which body of work is most striking to you and why?

Consider *At the Top of Her Lungs*: What do you imagine the animals saying or doing in these portraits?

Rossano intentionally uses mixed materials to deepen the meaning of his work:

- Wood calls to mind forest fires.
- Whitewash paint reminds us of climate change and the retreating Arctic ice pack.
- Mirrors return the gaze and reveal us, human beings, as a divinity capable of harm.

What other materials does the artist use to deepen the meaning and message of his work?



Joseph Rossano, *Panthera tigris tigris (Siberian Tiger)*, 2023, Repurposed material - Tar, whitewash, ink, wood

William Morris: Early Rituals

William Morris' work explores the relationship between human beings and nature through the lens of death and memory: death as a return to nature and memory as the resilience of and communion with nature. His works honor the memory of ancient civilizations and remind us that we are part of a long continuum of making our mark on the earth.

In his youth, Morris would encounter (yet not disturb) traces of past human and animal existence while hiking, camping, or climbing near the rugged central California coast—arrowheads, pottery shards, bones, and tusks. The impact of coming upon burial sites and archeological remains, especially when he was alone, was profound. These moments ignited a reverence for past human life—an awe and respect for those deeply connected to their land. This awe was rooted not in morbidity, but rather wonderment at the miracle of life and the mystery of death.

Morris' work in studio glassblowing dates back to the late 1970s when he arrived at the Pilchuck Glass School in Stanwood, WA to work initially as a driver and eventually as the chief gaffer for Dale Chihuly. He remained with the Pilchuck studio for approximately 10 years and then traveled to Venice to learn additional techniques from the Venetian Glass Masters of Murano, Italy. Morris also traveled to see monolithic and megalithic structures erected by ancient cultures, which would inspire his stone vessels and standing stone sculptures.

Looking Closer at *Early Rituals*

Look for signs of Morris' signature surface treatments on his glass sculptures. Notice the cracks of stone and opacity of bone.



William Morris, *Standing Stone*,
1989, Blown glass

How does the use of glass as a medium connect to the artist's themes of death and memory?

How does the artist invite us to contemplate nature and our place in it over time?

"My work is about the symbolic meaning which is attributed to objects and/or artifacts from various cultures. Ordinary objects, such as bone, take on great cultural and spiritual significance, reflecting the values and beliefs of tribal man. Although my work is shaped by the influences of contemporary life and technology, it contemplates fragments from the past."

- William Morris

Digging Deeper



Joseph Gregory Rossano,
Pinguinis impennis (Great Auk), 2013, Wood, tar, whitewash, found object

Joseph Rossano has studied scientific subjects and human actions that have irrevocably impacted nature and our relationship with it. Themes of extinction, conservation, natural history, and climate change are examined by Rossano. His work is a call to action in our present-day thinking, systems, and practice of human, animal, and earth care.

William Morris has delved into human feelings and practices around death and memory –that we might look deeply within ourselves at our connection with nature and ancestral past. Morris' work invites us to ponder archeological excavations, the human urge to mark the land they lived and died on, the memorialization of past civilizations, and our eventual return to nature through death.



William Morris, *Burial Urn*, 1991,
Blown glass

Both Rossano and Morris create glass sculptures to evoke emotion, provoke change, make meaning, explore time, and create new connections between human's relationship with nature.

Questions for Further Reflection

How do these two exhibitions make you feel?

How do you see yourself in relation to nature and animals across time?

What has been lost?

What could be gained in the future?



Joseph Gregory Rossano, *Tusks*, 2024, Blown glass, silver, Douglas fir table

What do you hope for after seeing yourself reflected in the glass tusks by Joseph Rossano?

What do you wonder when viewing *Standing Stone* by William Morris?



William Morris, *Standing Stone*, 1989, Blown glass

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- 18** MoNA Book Club
- 21** Drawing in the Galleries w/ Jean Behnke
- 28** Joseph Gregory Rossano Artist Talk: Portraits of the Divine
- 28** Spoken Word at MoNA: An Open Mic Exploration of Portraits of the Divine



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