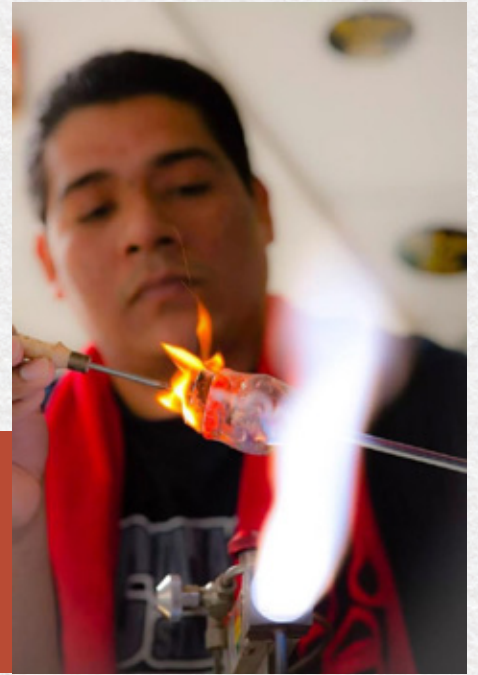


Glass artist Benjamin Zazueta Rodriguez from Mexico

An Artist Expressing the Nature of Kurashiki with Glass

Benjamin Zazueta Rodriguez from Mexico is creating colorful art works of glass taking inspiration from the nature of Kurashiki City, Okayama Prefecture.

FUJITA MAO



BENJAMIN Zazueta Rodriguez from Mexico is a glass artist based in Kurashiki City, Okayama Prefecture. Benjamin creates art works using a technique called burner work, in which borosilicate glass¹ is molded

after being melted with a burner flame. Benjamin's glass art is characterized by vivid colors reminiscent of his native Mexico, such as orange, yellow, pink, and purple, and unique designs. His works cover a broad range that includes glass pendants, paperweights, ballpoint pens, cups, vases and muddlers.

Born in 1979, Benjamin moved to the United States and learned the techniques of glass art. He married a Japanese woman he met there and decided to make a living as a glass artist in Japan, moving to his wife's hometown of Kurashiki City at age 26. Benjamin set up a studio on the grounds of his home and started his creative work. His works gradually became popular, and he now receives orders not only from around Japan but also other countries such as the United States, Spain and Mexico.

Benjamin says, "I try to create works that really reflect my inspiration. Ideas come to mind when I see sunsets from my home, oceans and waves, mountains and forests, and other aspects of nature." The workshop is quite close to the Seto Inland Sea, with hills extending behind it and fields of rice and other crops and streams all around.

"The area near my house is blessed with nature, so I can take a walk or do yoga to refresh my mood, which allows me to keep making works without the need for compromise, even when the designs and shapes are complex."

Benjamin says that he likes to make motifs out of the nature around him, like the rice fish (*medaka*) and frogs he finds in a stream when out on a walk or small flowers blooming on the roadside. Then, in order to bring out the natural color of the motif, he mixes coloring powder to achieve new colors, making abundant use of gold and silver powder, and applies a variety of methods to best express the motifs. Benjamin explains that just as the scenery differs from day to day depending on the weather and temperature, the colors of glass art also dif-



A vase made with pink glass inspired by Kurashiki City sunsets



fer depending on the temperature of the burner flame and the thickness of the glass, making it impossible to reproduce the same work, which is what is so attractive about glass art.

In the past, most of the people buying his works were women, but recently, various people of both genders and all age groups are buying them in Japan and abroad. The events to launch new works, held at Benjamin’s home several times a year, attract many fans from children to the elderly.

Benjamin says, “Someday, I would like to give free lessons on glass art that are open to all, so that I can teach everyone the techniques and mindset. My dream is to share the happiness that art creates as well as reverence for nature through such lessons.”

Taking inspiration from the nature of Kurashiki, Benjamin will continue to create works that fascinate people around the world. 7



A glass ballpoint pen being molded by a burner flame



A glass sugar pot made with orange and yellow glass, colors reminiscent of the artist’s native Mexico



A blue cup inspired by the gentle waves of the Seto Inland Sea



Glass accessories including two ballpoint pens (foreground)

i Also known as “heat-resistant glass,” this is a type of glass with especially high transparency, heat resistance, and strength.