



Contact: Katrina Carl  
805.884.6430  
kcarl@sbma.net



*Oinochoe*, Eastern Mediterranean,  
4<sup>th</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. Glass, h. 4".  
Partial gift from Richard and Lois Gunther.



*Alabastron*, Eastern Mediterranean,  
4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. Glass, 3 ¼".  
Partial gift from Richard and Lois Gunther.

***The Art of Ancient Glass:  
The Richard and Lois Gunther Collection***

**at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art  
October 15, 2005 - January 2, 2006**

*August 4, 2005 – The Art of Ancient Glass: The Richard and Lois Gunther Collection* represents an extraordinary exhibition of ancient Mediterranean glass vessels dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. to the 11<sup>th</sup> century C.E. These works of art provide captivating insight into the transformation of glassware from a luxury item to a familiar household commodity. The exhibition, organized by Consulting Curator Rainer Mack, includes jewel-like bottles for perfume, cosmetic containers, and oil flasks, as well as examples of drinking cups and bowls. The colors of glass, both opaque and transparent, add to the brilliance of the pieces, and their small size and intricate technique are testaments to the skills of ancient artisans.

Due to its comprehensive representation, the exhibition offers examples of a wide range of glassmaking techniques, from core-formed to free-blown glass.

The earliest pieces, such as the *alabastron* and the *oinochoe* pictured above, are prime examples of the core-formed technique, first introduced in the Near East and Egypt around 1500 BCE. In this technique, the core shape of the object is sculpted out of clay or mud and then dipped into molten glass. After trails of other colors are added for decoration, the core is then removed, leaving a hollow vessel. Core-formed glass production was very expensive and laborious, making glassware limited and exclusive to a luxury market. Archaeological finds of glass from this period are fairly rare, indicating that glass was not an ordinary commodity.

In the third century BCE, mosaic glasswork made its debut. Likely the most popular manifestation of this technique was *millefiori*, or “a thousand flowers” in Italian. In this process, fused bundles of glass rods or various colors and sizes were cut into cross sections resembling flowers. These tiles were then arranged, fired and slumped over a mold when still hot to form bowls and other vessels.

During the late first century BCE, the technical innovation of glass blowing emerged among the glassmaking industries of the Near East and Egypt. This technique was significantly more efficient than core-forming, casting, and molding glass vessels. The mass production of glass vessels became possible as glassmakers sought to meet the demands of the new market represented by the expanding Roman Empire.

Examples of two glass-blowing techniques are represented in *The Art of Ancient Glass* exhibition. Most common, and a technique still used today, is the free-blown technique. A tube is twisted to retrieve a gob (“gather”) of molten glass and air is blown into the tube, forming the initial shape of the vessel. The object is further shaped by rolling, pinching, or folding to achieve the desired form and texture. With the mold-blown technique, the glassblower inflates the gather of molten glass into a pre-formed, ceramic mold. The mold gives the resulting vessel its shape, as well as relief decoration on the exterior surface.

The proliferation of blown glass resulted in the greater integration of glass into Roman daily life. Though tableware was the most common use of glass, many of the containers in *The Art of Ancient Glass* exhibition are perfume bottles or cosmetic vessels. In the ancient world, perfumes and other cosmetics were oil-based and not alcohol-based, as is the case today. Clay jars were not ideal containers because they allowed absorption of the precious oils into the vessels’ walls. Glass containers were superior in function as their surfaces resisted absorption. This quality made them ideal for medicinal preparations, often consisting of oils, spices, and herbs, as well.

More than 150 individual works were donated to the Museum in 2003 by Richard and Lois Gunther, who initiated their collection by purchasing the first piece in 1967 for a mere \$25 as a keepsake when traveling through the Middle East. Working with dealers from around the world, the Gunthers continued to accumulate objects until a contact in the Middle East suggested that the collection be donated to an institution that focused on antiquities. The Santa Barbara Museum of Art was one of the first on the list. The collection was donated to SBMA, significantly increasing the breadth of the Museum’s antiquities.

This exhibition has been made possible by the generous support of The Schultz Foundation in memory of George L. Schultz.

Also on exhibition at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art is *First Seen: Portraits of the World's Peoples (1840-1880)* through January 15, 2006, and *Portraits of Place* running October 8, 2005 – January 2, 2006.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a privately funded, not-for-profit institution that provides internationally recognized collections and exhibitions and a broad array of cultural and educational activities as well as travel opportunities around the world.

**Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA. Open Tuesday - Sunday 11 am to 5 pm. Closed Monday. Free every Sunday. 805.963.4364 [www.sbmanet](http://www.sbmanet)**