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## Johne Parsley - Artist Of Vision, Creator Of Jewels

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The gemlike quality, pristine clarity, and elegant stylized floral arrays are all inherent characteristics of the paperweights produced by artisan Johne Parsley. The eldest among today's American paperweight makers, Johne has risen to prominence only within the last six years.

With a degree in chemistry from New York University and training in scientific glass blowing, Johne has manipulated glass, with earth's basic element, fire, for over fifty years. He never thought that a set of cross-fire burners and a few slender rods of colored glass would lead him to create the beautiful and delicately crafted paperweights he makes today. Carrying with him some of the secrets of one of the world's most treasured crafts, Parsley began the art of glass blowing by making whimsical glass animals and birds, precious collectible flowerbud vases, hummingbird feeders and scientific glass novelty pieces.

Friends and relatives collected these curious pieces over the years and, after Johne's retirement from his lifelong profession as chemist, engineer and teacher, "It was time to create something of intrinsic value that would remain with my family for generations," Parsley states. Little did he think that a whole other career as one of today's most serious and sought-after paperweight makers was waiting just around the corner!

*Figure 1: Faceted ruby red rose and bud on a cobalt ground.*

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Figure 2: Triple Johnny-jump-up bouquet with knotweed.

It was the "Glass Blowers of the World" exhibit at the 1938–39 New York World's Fair which sparked John's interest in glass blowing. There, he became acquainted with the Howell family, Rasmussen brothers and Dick Manley, manager of the exhibit. Glass blowing became a diversion from his degree work in chemistry. A Kentucky native, Parsley graduated from New York University, and worked as a research chemist for Wyandotte Chemical Corporation, Wyandotte, Michigan. He became a senior research fellow and teacher at Philadelphia Textile Institute. He also worked as a state drug chemist and teacher at the University of Kentucky in Lexington. Owning a consulting firm and chemical laboratories until retirement, John recalls how his three children, Michael, Betty and Joan, would watch him blow glass in the basement studio of their Pennsylvania home nestled in the beautiful Lehigh Valley. His wife, Anne, so proudly displayed his early glass works in their house and encouraged his artistic development. Their country estate sprawling over 14 acres afforded John rich studies in nature, where he explored the grounds for delicate wildflowers and berries, gardened and planted a wealth of fruit trees and bushes. Country life also offered the

solitude for concentrated study of his craft as he began making paperweights in the mid 1980s.

Over the years, the Parsleys traveled extensively throughout Europe and began their own small, private collection of contemporary French, English and American weights. These, serving as models for a "beginning" along with his first visit in 1984 to Wheaton Village in Millville, New Jersey, became the "tour-de-force" of John's intense desire and love for paperweight design. At Wheaton Village, he met glass artists Don Friel, Gordon Smith, Tony DePalma, the Kontes brothers, and other soon-to-be colleagues. "It was my meeting with Gordon Smith and the genuine encouragement he gave me, coupled with his help and advice, that propelled me to make paperweights," John recalls. "Our friendship and cooperation continues to this day." Together with family and friends, these artists also encouraged John to apply his many years of self-training and experimentation to the art of paperweight design. Pursuing technical refinement of glass working, both lampwork and "tank" weights became his highest priority.

John's first successful design was a delicate realistic ruby red rose and bud on a cobalt



Figure 3: Single ruby, white and yellow petaled Johnny-jump-up on a gold 40-point double spiral latticino background.



Figure 4: Pink primrose and wildflower bouquet with knotweed and forget-me-not on aqua ground.



Figure 6: Triple white dogwood with two red berries on cobalt.

ground (Figure 1). The small weight was faced by Ed Poore in "6 and 1" pattern with a star cut base. The Corning Museum of Glass acquired one of these early paperweights in 1986.

For the past few years, Parsley has worked as a volunteer glass blower at Wheaton Village and continues his association there. However,

he expanded his studio at home in Hamburg, Pennsylvania, and like all serious artists, works methodically and fastidiously in his clean, controlled studio environment where he matches color with form, and experience with the challenge of creating new designs.

The Johnny-jump-up motif was one of these new creations. Ruby red petals were combined with yellow and white striped petals to form the dainty flowers. Johnne fashioned single Johnny-jump-up paperweights and Johnny-jump-up bouquets. The bouquet also included another new flower for Johnne, the knotweed (see Figure 2). The combination of these two very different flowers in texture, shape, and size makes a striking floral spray.

Johnne is the first artist to successfully make a double spiral latticino with the torch for the various sizes of his weights (see Figure 3).

Until now, double spiral latticino has been achieved only with the hot (tank) paperweights. Although several artists have made attempts at executing the double spiral latticino, none are believed to have been successful with the torch using this somewhat difficult technique on other than miniature sized weights. Johnne is the only artist to accomplish a 40-point double



Figure 5: Wildflower with buds and knotweed garland on cobalt.



Figure 7: Triple upright wood sorrel and pink primrose garland with variegated stems, leaves and tendril on cobalt.



Figure 8: Forget-me-not bouquet with red twig and moss green leaves. Made for John's wife, Anne, in 1989.

spiral latticinio. While the so-called "upset muslin" background is a type of latticinio, it is not to be compared to nor confused with the double spiral that John has perfected and uses as backgrounds for some of his delicate floral bouquets, fruits, and other designs. This single pansy on gold swirling latticinio is only one of the latticinio effects John creates.

John has concentrated on developing his bouquets and other floral design concepts of garlands. He perfected new flowers such as primroses and forget-me-nots. His pink primrose and wildflower bouquet combines the primrose with bright berry-like knotweeds of red and yellow (Figure 4). The blue forget-me-not adds a contrasting color to the bouquet which stands out on an aqua ground. John also included a new look to his stems and leaves by applying dark green veins.

These new veined leaves and stems were used in John's garland designs. Yellow and white wildflowers with buds and red and yellow knotweeds form the garland on cobalt illustrated in Figure 5. This weight was cut in an unusual pattern by Aaron B. Croop. The top and sides are cut in the standard "6 and 1" style but along the base are 12 flute-like facets. This

distinctive bottom cutting enhances the entire effect of the paperweight.

John's love of nature can be easily seen in his more complicated design of dogwoods. The triple white dogwood paperweight incorporates the growing cycle of the dogwood with the inclusion of two red berries (Figure 6). John paid strict attention to the details of the dogwood blossom. He ribbed the white individual petals and re-created the realistic green clump berry-like centers of the flowers. The variegated leaves and white flowers are striking on the deep cobalt background.

The yellow wood sorrel was another flower that appealed to John. He incorporated three upright wood sorrels and three pink primroses into a garland design (Figure 7). Variegated green stems and leaves form the garland with a delicate coiling tendril.

John wanted to create a paperweight especially for his wife. He chose to make five forget-me-nots with two buds and placed them on a red twig with curving moss green leaves (Figure 8).

Torsades also intrigued John. Just as he mastered the 40-point double spiral latticinio, John concentrated on conquering the torsade.

He now incorporates torsades in many of his designs. One such design is made up of two forget-me-nots and white wildflowers with variegated green leaves on a red twig (Figure 9). The floral spray is surrounded by a white twisted torsade.

Other museums containing one of John's paperweights in their permanent collection are the Museum of American Glass at Wheaton Village, the Bergstrom-Mahler Museum, and the Toronto Museum, as well as many fine private collections. He has become a frequent speaker at many PCA chapter meetings.

Each of John's weights carries a distinctive green or blue "P" signature cane in addition to an etched initial and date on the side of the weight. Production of weights is very limited. "Each Christmas my three grandsons clamor around me and want to know what paperweights I've made for them," John admits. "I know they'll be proud to see my weights in the museums someday."

At 74, John is still a man of many energies. He flies his own Beechcraft Bonanza, has car-



*John Parsley*

ried an instrument rating for the past 35 years, and has logged more than 5000 hours of personal flying time. An avid downhill skier, he and his wife are off frequently during the snow season, but John states that "glass working is still the settling influence after a trip." His personal energy is visible in his weights as stylized garlands, and bouquets of wildflowers seemingly dance through their crystal cases.

John continues to express personal love of nature through his visions captured in carefully executed glass and crystal jewel weights available in both miniature and full scale weights. He has evolved as a respected artist of our times whose significant contributions in glass, thank goodness, are no longer a well-kept secret. Parsley's commitment to matching color balanced with form and clarity make him one of the most exciting sought-after paperweight artists today.

His work is not merely satisfying, it is to be treasured.



*Figure 9: Upright forget-me-nots and wildflowers on red twig with white torsade.*