



Married Gay Couple Markow & Norris Bring Woven Glass To RVA's Chasen Gallery

“We are woven together through the art that we make.”

LindsayHawk - March 26, 2014

Eric Markow & Thom Norris's masterpieces continue to defy physics and baffle viewers. With incredible woven patterns and a vibrant color palette, their work is truly a feast for the eyes.

They will be having an exhibition of their work at Chasen Galleries on 3554 West Cary Street. The Meet the Artists reception is open to the public and will be Thursday, April 3 at 5:30 - 8:30 PM.

The duo met in 1994. Markow had just taken a stained glass class at a community center, where he made panels and gave them away to friends and family. He taught the techniques he had learned to Norris. The word spread about their work, and soon the two started doing larger commissions for people in the local DC area. They made everything from framed panels to custom fitted windows for about ten years.

Twenty years later, Markow & Norris have been kicking some ass in the art world. There has been a waiting list of at least six months for a Markow & Norris woven glass sculpture for about ten years now.

Their backgrounds in the sciences have greatly influenced their work—Norris's degree in Biology and Markow's degree in Chemical Engineering have led them to draw inspiration from close observation of the natural world.

“We run our studio kind of like a lab,” says Norris, “When we're trying something new, we have to take extensive notes and run lots of different experiments. We change one or two variables and then do it again to get the reaction or the look that we want in particular.”

The experiments range anywhere from the shape or color of the sculpture to how the sculpture hangs, so the artists go through several different experimental stages to get it just right. “It isn't as if we automatically have the colors and the glass woven when we do a custom sculpture for someone,” Markow says, “We have to do all sorts of prototypes ahead of time to make sure that the shape and the color and the polish are right. Because once the glass cools, there's not a whole lot we can do.” Essentially, they have to get it right the first time.

In addition to science, Markow & Norris also love the Southwest. “Georgia O'Keeffe influences a lot of our work,” Markow says, “We love her close-up paintings of flowers—she was very curious about nature, looked closely at things, and drew



inspiration from that. I feel like what we do is very similar.” Markow & Norris enjoy going into their garden and observing nature. It inspires them to use many of the colors, textures, and objects in their work.

The biggest challenge the artists face is an obvious one: breakage. It has taken them years, but Markow & Norris have learned to work with glass skillfully and mindfully. “Glass is a fragile medium. It's not as forgiving as other materials. It is fragile from the start to the end,” says Markow. There are a lot of things to consider during each stage of working with glass, such as heating and cooling techniques, preserving the weave, or chemical reactions with different types of glass.

There is no way to rush what the two do. They have to give themselves a lot of time to produce a sculpture. But their weaving technique yields sturdy results. “We weave onto a very heavy piece of glass to give it its strength,” Norris



says, “Obviously if they were dropped they could break, but they can knock against each other and you can tap on them. They’re strong pieces of glass, but the whole process of getting to that point is fragile.”

The largest sculptures they will have in the show at Chasen Galleries will be their Red Dragonfly & their new life-size Red Kilt. Prints of their iconic Kimonos will also be available. Size is not a concern for Markow & Norris; with six large kilns, if there is a will, there most certainly is a way. The samurais, which will compliment the kimonos in the future, are expected to be even larger and more imposing.



“I’ve been amazed at our progression over the years and how we continue to push the envelope,” says Norris, “Whether it’s the size or the shape that we do, we’ve really been able to push boundaries. I don’t know if there is anything that we wouldn’t try.”

Their artwork has become more than just beautiful glass sculptures—it is symbolic of their relationship together. Markow & Norris were legally married on August 20th in Maryland, though the couple has been together for twenty years. “Our twentieth anniversary is actually going to be April 2, the day before the opening,” says Markow, “So this whole journey with art has grown parallel to our relationship. We are woven together through the art that we make.”

Markow, a Richmond native, is especially excited about the upcoming show at Chasen Galleries. “We usually do one show a year, so we are very excited that it will be in Richmond,” he says, “When I was growing up, I never thought that I would be in a position to get to come back and have a show in my hometown. At the time I didn’t think of it as an arts town. But now I think there has been a lot of new, exciting things happening.” Markow & Norris have never had a show in Virginia. They are excited to be introduced to a southern client base.

As gay artists, Markow says, “I think it’s cool to be able to have a connection with such a big part of ourselves here in Richmond, because it wasn’t like that when I was growing up. It’s very exciting to me that something like this is possible now.”

The exhibition of Markow & Norris’s collection will be held at Chasen Galleries on 3554 West Cary Street. The show premieres Thursday, April 3 from 5:30 - 8:30 PM for a Meet the Artists reception and will extend through April 30.

