

Glass Beads from the Corning Museum of Glass
An NEH Public Humanities Project



Overview

The Corning Museum of Glass seeks one or two part-time consultants to conduct work over 3-6 months to research and interpret glass beads from Southeast Asia and from West Africa in the Museum's permanent collection. The consultant(s) should be able to spend 4-8 weeks in Corning during the contract period. Additional work may be conducted remotely.

Background

This work will be funded by an NEH Public Humanities grant in support of the re-interpretation and re-imagining of the *35 Centuries of Glass* galleries. The Museum collected glass materials from around the world in the mid-20th century through a set of agents, including Dorothy Blair for Japan and Alastair Lamb for west Africa, but more recent gallery installations and curatorial activities have been oriented around Europe and North America. In recognition of the global history of glass, this project will excavate our collections to discover institutional stories, update incomplete catalogue records, and expand scholarship for an area of the Museum's collection that has not been as well documented or displayed.

Scope of Work: Glass Beads from Southeast Asia, 500-1800 CE

Preliminary investigation of collections records has identified 143 records, representing 5,741 beads from the countries of south and southeast Asia (India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, and Vietnam). This project will focus on the materials from the ancient and early modern collections. 35 records (1,391 beads) belong to the ancient collection, with the bulk of objects associated with the site of Kuala Selinsing, Malaysia (11 records, 905 beads) and Arikamedu, India (12 records, 356 beads). The remaining 62 records (4,130 beads) are assigned to the early modern collection, with the majority coming from Pengkalan Bujang, Malaysia (54 records, 3,947 beads).

The objects entered the collection in various ways. The majority (89 records) came in 1975 from Alastair Lamb, particularly recounting excavations of the 1960s. Lamb was the source for the objects associated with the Malaysia sites and most of the Arikamedu beads. The remainder were largely gifts, from Dr. Edmund H Conrow (9 records in 1979), Y. Yamanishi (10 records in 1981, mostly from Indonesia), and Torben Sode (8 records in 1996, mostly modern India).

Scope of Work: Glass Beads from West Africa

In the 1970s, the Museum commissioned Alastair Lamb to write a catalogue of glass beads from west Africa, based on the pieces he had collected and sold to the museum. This work was never completed, although various records associated with this project, including cataloguing cards, are held in the Registration department records. The 1016 object records, representing 1078 beads, initially selected for this catalogue are to be the starting point of the consultant's work. About 75% of these are assigned to the early modern curatorial department, but the poor records or wide date ranges result in a lot of overlap with other department dates. The initial cataloguing information for Place Made varies greatly, with about 50% attributed to Italy and about 20% attributed to countries in Africa, mostly west Africa. It seems that Lamb purchased the majority of these objects in west Africa, although that information is not easily discoverable through collections management system search functions.

Deliverables

The consultant will work under the advisement of the Curator of Ancient Glass, and in consultation with the curatorial and collections teams, to produce:

- 1) **Documentation:**
 - a. **Records:** Update records in the Museum's collections management system for beads as described under "Scope of Work", to include date, place made and/or collected, short description, explanatory notes, provenance, and relevant bibliography.
 - b. **Collection Analysis:** Updated collections records will form the core of a collections analysis memo (template outline provided by CMOG) defining the scope, strengths, weaknesses, and significance of this area of the collection. Recommendations may also be made for collection development strategies, analytical work, and any concerns about collection history.
- 2) **Interpretation:** A paper addressing the significance of this group of glass beads and/or glass beads in general for an interpretive, public humanities topic to be developed in consultation with the consultant and the Museum. This document may constitute part of the interpretive plan for the reinstallation and should consider how to present the information to a general, non-academic audience in a museum context.

In addition, the consultant may be asked to participate in Corning's annual Seminar on Glass, to be held virtually October 7-8, 2022.

Compensation will include a \$15,000 research stipend and travel expenses for work to be conducted in Corning.

Interested individuals should send a current CV to Katherine Larson, Curator of Ancient Glass, at larsonka@cmog.org by February 28, 2022.