



# ART OF GLASS

A Bay Area artist merges his creative passions to develop an entirely new medium.

BY BRYAN ANTHONY PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEVIN TREXLER

**W**hen people ask Jonah Ward what type of artist he is, he's often met with puzzled stares after he tells them that he "burns wood with glass." But once Ward whips out his iPod and shows a short video of himself in the studio, the confusion quickly turns into bug-eyed fascination.

Watching Ward work is an exhilarating experience. With ungloved hands, he wields a punty (an iron rod used to

hold and shape melted glass) like a symphony conductor over planks of ambrosia maple, zebra or purpleheart wood. Using the punty and a pair of metal tongs, he drizzles molten glass (which can be as hot as 2,100 degrees) onto the wood, leaving a trail of deep burns. Ward's scar-free hands prove he's mastered his method.

Born in Mendocino County, Ward showed his artistic talents at a young age and by his senior year in high school he was taking three art classes per semester.

At Slow Burn Glass in Oakland, Jonah Ward drips molten glass—sans protective gloves—in order to singe sheets of wood, creating burn marks that make up the patterns for his works of art.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Using glassblowing shears and a punty, Ward manipulates strands of molten glass across wood panels until the glass cools and it's no longer pliable; finished works are presented in two- or three-panel sets, and the patterns can range from a crosshatch of burn marks to curling loops of blackened wood; Ward stands with a blank "canvas;" the exhibit at 12 Gallagher Lane is up through November.

As a painting and drawing major at California College of the Arts, he created Dali-esque works using colored pencils, charcoal and paints. But after his first year, Ward changed his concentration to glass when his favorite professor told him, "You don't have to make something out of glass just because you're in the glass department." It was this same professor who assigned the project that would inspire Ward's current work. Encouraged to try a new technique, Ward decided to use molten glass to burn a design onto paper. His first attempt literally went up in flames, but by wetting the paper before a second try, Ward produced a surface suitable for his desired burns. Ward took this lesson to heart and expanded upon the newfound technique for his senior project by replacing paper with wood for a durable and dramatic canvas.

Two years later, Ward now rents a space at an Oakland glasswork studio called Slow Burn Glass, where he creates new works of his burned wood art. For the past two years, he's displayed

his pieces during San Francisco Open Studios, and last fall he took part in Art-Span's annual show. It was at the closing party for the event that Ward observed Derek Cabaniss, the owner of San Francisco art gallery 12 Gallagher Lane, carefully inspecting his work. With his iPod at the ready, Ward introduced himself and six weeks later, he was at an opening reception for his very own exhibit at 12 Gallagher Lane.

The exhibition, which runs through November 30, showcases more than 20 pieces of Ward's art, each of which is assigned a number rather than a title. "I don't want to give a name to a piece and insert a thought or image into the viewer's mind," says Ward. "I want them to come to their own conclusions." To complete each piece, Ward creates

natural frames by taking thin strips of wood and burning them around the edges. He then covers the entire work in beeswax to preserve and protect it.

*"If I see an interesting piece of wood, even if it's a nice piece of furniture, I think to myself, 'I bet that would look great burned.'"*

"Working with wood, glass and fire—it's all very primal and elemental," says Ward, who never goes into the studio with a specific image in mind. Instead he focuses on the overall composition and says that the wood itself—how it burns and reacts to the melting glass—plays an integral role in the process. "I definitely look at wood in a different way today," says

Ward. "If I see an interesting piece of wood, even if it's a nice piece of furniture, I think to myself, 'I bet that would look great burned.'" ■

Jonah Ward, [jonahward.com](http://jonahward.com)