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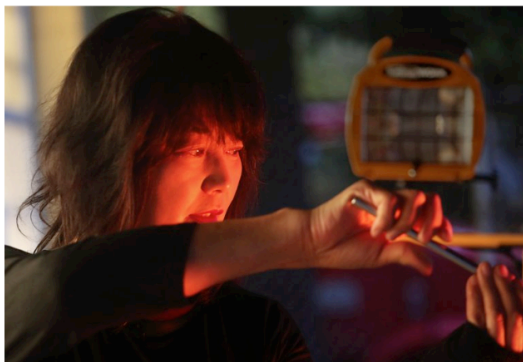
The Seattle Times

For artist Etsuko Ichikawa, drawing with molten glass is a dance

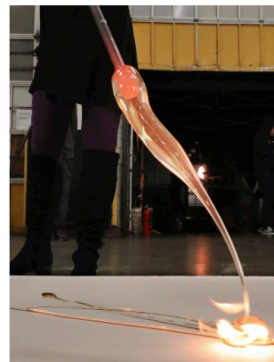
Originally published November 6, 2019 at 6:00 am



1 of 11 | It's an artful performance as Etsuko Ichikawa draws with molten glass at Pratt Fine Arts Center marking the paper but not burning through it. (Alan Berner / The Seattle Times) [Less](#) ^



2 of 11 | The glow from the furnace illuminates Etsuko Ichikawa as she prepares molten glass at the end of a metal rod at the Pratt Fine Arts Center. (Alan Berner / The Seattle Times) [Less](#) ^



3 of 11 | Quick strokes determine the pattern Etsuko Ichikawa produces on a dense French-milled paper. It flames up but does not burn through. (Alan Berner / The Seattle Times)

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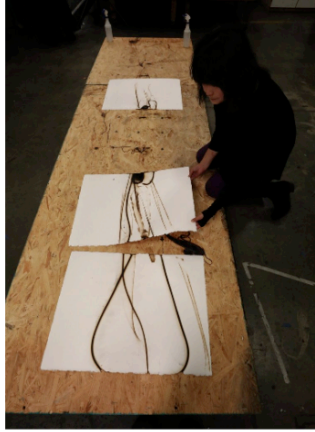
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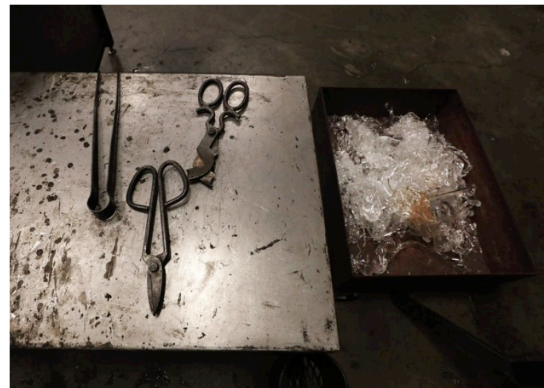
4 of 11 | Etsuko Ichikawa gathers the panels of a triptych just produced before an audience at Pratt Fine Arts Center. (Alan Berner / The Seattle Times)



8 of 11 | Etsuko Ichikawa moves the panels of a diptych just produced to another room at the Pratt Fine Arts Center. (Alan Berner / The Seattle Times)



5 of 11 | Molten glass leaves the furnace at more than 2,100 degrees Fahrenheit. The glowing piece at the end of the rod is called a "gather." (Alan Berner / The Seattle Times)



9 of 11 | Spent glass used to mark the paper cools in a bin next to tools used in the process. (Alan Berner / The Seattle Times)



7 of 11 | The dense paper Ichikawa uses flames up but does not burn through. (Alan Berner / The Seattle Times)



6 of 11 | Sayuri Fukuda, assisting Etsuko Ichikawa, shapes the molten glass at the end of a metal rod. (Alan Berner / The Seattle Times)

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📷 **10 of 11** | *Finished pieces, large and small, are discussed with the audience. Etsuko Ichikawa took questions throughout each drawing session about the paper, the process and spontaneous and intentional lines that occur. (Alan Berner / The Seattle Times) Less ^*

By [Alan Berner](#)

Seattle Times staff photographer

Mothers always say, “Don’t run with scissors.” But running with molten glass?

That’s how artist Etsuko Ichikawa discovered the concept of drawing with it.

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It was at the Pilchuck Glass School in Stanwood. She was an assistant to Dale Chihuly and the situation required moving a large, molten “gather,” or dollop of glass, at the end of the metal pipe about 30-feet — and quickly.

It began to drip and created a pattern on the concrete floor.

And so her artistic concept was born in 2004.

Immediately she did tests with at least 20 different art papers.

Ichikawa started with 140-pound, thin paper, but the glass would make holes in it, and the drawings were very fragile.

She discovered what works best is a really dense, French-milled 300-pound paper called Lanaquarelle. It’s 100% cotton rag, extremely smooth and silky to the touch.

To create her work, Ichikawa will stand over the paper, as she did recently at Pratt Fine Arts in Seattle’s Central Area.

Next are broad, quick sweeping movements with the glass.

Body language determines the drawing, and she usually moves to jazz music in the studio. It’s both production and performance.

“It’s abstract,” she says. “In some ways it’s similar to dripping paint.”

The molten glass leaves the furnace at more than 2,100-degrees. The paper is but a few steps away.

Though paper will ignite around Fahrenheit 451, Ichikawa’s paper will briefly flame up but will not burn through.

The black lines left behind are sinuous, elegant and surprising. The works are called pyrographs, born of fire.

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“I love the process,” Ichikawa says. “I feel the gesture. It’s fluid, and fire is mesmerizing.”

The drawings reflect her Japanese heritage. She was born in Tokyo and has lived in the U.S. since arriving in 1993. Shortly after that, she began working for Chihuly as a studio assistant, a total of eight years.

Known as a multimedia artist, she’s received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Andy Warhol Foundation. On Thursday — First Thursday — she’ll show a film at Winston Wächter Fine Art gallery in Seattle.

Alan Berner

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