

Exhibit of the week**Chihuly: Through the Looking Glass**

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Through Aug. 7

Talk about a lightning rod, said Bill Van Siclen in *The Providence Journal*. “The most important glass artist since Louis Comfort Tiffany,” Dale Chihuly has gathered as many detractors as fans across his long career, and the MFA’s whirlwind of a show should stir up both camps. Those dazzled by Chihuly’s singular brand of showmanship won’t be disappointed. Marvels of glassblowing invention abound, from the 43-foot-tall *Lime Green Icicle Tower*, installed near the exhibit’s entrance, to the showstopping *Ikebana Boat*, a wooden skiff overflowing with “a glittering array of glass sculptures.” But Chihuly’s emphasis on “purely visual appeal”—which has made him a go-to artist for Las Vegas casinos seeking extra dazzle—long ago fueled a backlash. In art-critical circles, he ranks “among the least-liked contemporary artists,” as maligned as Jeff Koons or Thomas Kinkade.

It’s nothing personal, said Sebastian Smees in *The Boston Globe*. It’s not even the “general absence of ideas in his work: I, for one, am all in favor of senseless beauty,



'Persian Ceiling': About as profound as fireworks

and would prefer it any day to most of the brittle, air-filled intellectual meringue that goes by the description of conceptual art.” What grates instead is the ostentation: Chihuly’s works are “tasteless in the way that a 15-course meal might be tasteless, or a garage with a dozen Ferraris, or a ward-

robe with hundreds of pairs of shoes.” It’s spectacle for spectacle’s sake. “Make it big, make it bright, make them say, ‘Wow!’” But it doesn’t take long for the wow factor to ebb, as attempts to find “new technical feats with which to impress us” start to look desperate. Devoid of deeper meaning, they become like “daily deliveries of unwanted flowers after a regretted one-night transgression.”

Yet only the truly jaded could resist a 1,000-bloom glass bouquet, said Chris Bergeron in the Milford, Mass., *Daily News*. The dazzling *Mille Fiori* looks like “the lushest tropical garden ever to be fertilized with Miracle-Gro and Salvador Dali’s imagination.” Also splendid is *Persian Ceiling*, inspired by another love of Chihuly’s: Byzantine art. Viewed from below, it’s a 25-by-15-foot glass ceiling bedecked with “hundreds, if not thousands, of what appear to be gloriously tinted seashells, starfish, anemones, jellyfish, and diaphanous membranes of color too profuse to enumerate.” The impulse to categorize or catalog is beside the point, anyway. “Describing the individual components that make each installation is like trying to explain the shapes of July 4th fireworks.” There’s no need to overthink it: You just say “ooh” or “aah.”

Where to buy

A select exhibition in a private gallery

Voyeurism’s all fun and games until someone catches you. **Justin Forbes** invites viewers to peek in on intimate scenes that are rich with overtones of impending danger or salaciousness: a suspicious twilight gathering in a motel parking lot, a seedy pool hall just as things are taking a turn for the seedier. In Forbes’s latest series, each canvas seems to capture the moment the viewer gets caught in the act, as it dawns on



A 2011 Forbes canvas

the revelers/conspirators that they’re on display. That said, the cartoon-like exaggeration of light, perspective, and luminous color offers something in the way of a buffer—as do the clues, vague and otherwise, that these are bygone days. At *Jonathan Ferrara Gallery*, 400a Julia St., New Orleans, (504) 522-5471. Through May 8. Prices range from \$4,000 to \$8,500.

The Wilderness

Miami Art Museum, through June 26

Nature is a volatile mistress, said Tom Austin in *The Miami Herald*. As MAM’s latest group exhibition makes plain, plumbing this “dysfunctional love affair” can yield seriously trippy art. For *Still Life With Stampede and Wild Birds*, installation artist David Brooks left concrete statues of galloping animals inside a local wild-bird refuge until they were covered in “rather painterly guano stains.” Kookier still: Allan McCollum’s *The Event: Petrified Lightning From Central Florida*, the result of six weeks spent directing lightning into strategically positioned vessels of sand. Direct hits produced fulgurites, pieces of glass actually shaped like lightning bolts. The McCollum installation consists of 10,000 replicas of a single fulgurite, displayed alongside thousands of neatly stacked booklets whose titles gently mock man’s attempts to comprehend curious natural phenomena. The titles range from goofy upbeat (*Something*



Ortega’s hummingbird: A video still

New in Fulgurites) to 19th-century spooky (*References to Lightning in the Holy Bible*). It’s bizarre, heady stuff.

Consistently, though, the art asks that we show more humility in our attempts to subjugate nature, said Carlos Suarez de Jesus in the *Miami New Times*. For Fernando Ortega’s “unusual” video *Hummingbird Induced to a Deep Sleep*, the artist hired an ornithologist to help him create the conditions necessary to “encourage the hummingbird to grab a siesta in his Mexico City studio.” Eerily, despite the din of traffic and blaring horns, the hypnotized bird sits motionless for a full hour, making a viewer more uneasy by the minute. Darren Almond’s “equally uncanny” video *Arctic Pull* features a lone figure pulling a sled through a Siberian blizzard at night. “As the man laboriously battles the permafrost,” the wind seems to howl in the dark projection space, “transporting the viewer to shivering, foreign climes.” How’s that for man’s “uneasy relationship” with the natural world?