

SILVER CELEBRATION: GEM ARTISTS OF NORTH AMERICA MARK 25 YEARS



# Rock&Gem

THE EARTH'S TREASURES • MINERALS & JEWELRY

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## IRIDESCENT MINERALS

*Inspecting An Optical Phenomena*

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**GEO TOURISM**  
Exploring Wonders  
of the World



**THUNDEREGGS  
AND FAMILY**  
Delivering Bounty  
and Blessings



# GEM ARTISTS OF NORTH AMERICA

*CELEBRATING A QUARTER CENTURY  
OF CREATIVITY & CAMARADERIE*

STORY BY HELEN SERRAS-HERMAN

A quarter-century has passed since the birth of the Gem Artists of North America (GANA), an organization comprised of lovers of the gem art world. Gem artists held their first meeting in February of 1995 during the annual gem shows held in Tucson, Arizona. It was only natural to choose Tucson as the annual meeting venue, as thousands of gem dealers, mineral collectors, jewelers, gemologists, appraisers and gem artists, were present to experience buying, selling and discovering gems and vendors.

The group's goal was to create a forum for artists and professionals of the gemstone art industry that ignites the creative spirit, supports artist needs, and increases awareness and appreciation through education, promotion, and exhibits. A group of 20 artists gathered for the first GANA meeting. The group included many opinionated individuals not used to working with anyone else, much less within a group. But they overcame the difficulties, and an organization was born. At its height, membership topped 100 members.

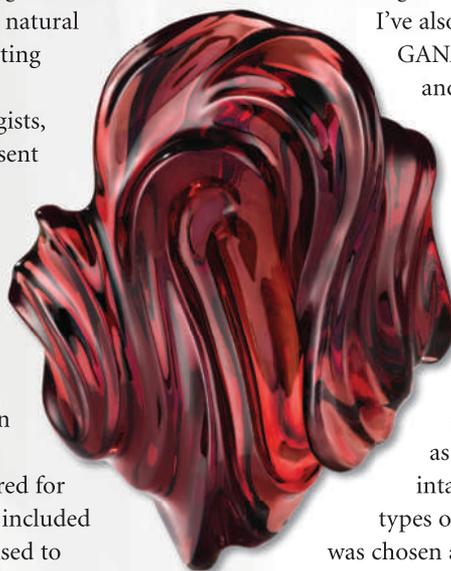
During my first trip to Tucson in 1997, I attended the annual meeting of GANA and immediately joined the ranks. Over the years, I have exhibited with the

group at several museum venues, including the Lizzadro Museum in Elmhurst, Illinois, multiple times at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the Pittsburgh Ballet Opera, and the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum.

I've also served in leadership roles within GANA, as treasurer from 2000-2001, and as president between 2002-2003.

Something you may not know is that the terms "gem art" and "gem artist" were adapted (if not coined) by GANA. Several terms are used to describe the art of carving gems, including glyptic arts (from the ancient Greek *glyptoi lithoi* sculptured stones), gem sculpture, glyptography, gem engraving, gem carving, as well as intaglio, cameo, faceting, capping, intarsia and mosaic relating to specific types of lapidary work. The term gem art was chosen as it embraces all art forms, figurative and non-figurative, stylized or organic freeform, that utilize gem materials.

Gem artists are spread geographically across the country from coast to coast, living in almost every state, and in the early days, several Canadian artist members also traveled to Tucson for the annual shows and to attend the GANA meetings. Mostly



**Gates of the Mountains, almandine garnet carved by Naomi Sarna.**  
NAOMI SARNA



Medusa, BC jade,  
gem sculpture by Luis  
Alberto Quispe Aparicio  
(L'AQUART).  
L'AQUART

GETTY IMAGES

## GEM ARTISTS OF NORTH AMERICA



## GEM ARTISTS OF NORTH AMERICA



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1. Moonlight, larimar and lapis gem sculpture by Helen Serras-Herman.  
HELEN SERRAS-HERMAN
2. Cuff bracelet carved from Wyoming nephrite jade and pure silver by Tom Finneran.  
TOM FINNERAN
3. Aurora Star, ametrine, faceted by Rick Stinson.  
RICK STINSON
4. Ametrine carving by David Christensen.  
DAVID CHRISTENSEN
5. Marine Ray, larimar pendant by Helen Serras-Herman.  
HELEN SERRAS-HERMAN
6. Heron Rising, blue topaz intaglio by Nancy McGehee  
NANCY MCGEHEE
7. Daphne, tourmaline gem sculpture by Susan Margolis.  
SUSAN MARGOLIS
8. Amethyst pendant carving by Dick Friesen.  
DICK FRIESEN
9. Oregon sunstone pendant carving by Bruce McKay.  
BRUCE MCKAY
10. Ice Tree, mineral sculpture by Uli Kuess.  
ULI KUESS

## GEM ARTISTS OF NORTH AMERICA



**Pixies & Fairies, topaz internal carving by Howard Friedler.**  
HOWARD FRIEDLER

self-taught, the group's artists evolved their skills through books, trial and error, and experimentation, working isolated in their studios. Gem art, which is a complex artistic discipline, is not taught as a full discipline in any U.S. college or university, and as such, artists' work reflect very independent styles and ideas and a creative mix of expression.

The art form is strenuous, back-breaking work and demands a specific level of discipline. Additionally, the practice requires expensive equipment, and costly gem materials, sometimes holding back artists to fully commit to this art medium. The commitment to create art certainly comes from the individual artist, but as the goals of GANA identify, a key to that is community support and artist interaction.

When GANA was formed, gem artists would often only see examples of other artists' gem art in magazines and shows. The need for an annual meeting to exchange ideas, creativity, how-to tips, and tools became a necessity. Today, of course, with online search at one's fingertips and social media a leading communication medium, the gem world is much more connected.

### Still, the objectives of the organization remain:

- **To facilitate** closer communication between all segments of the gem art, colored stone and jewelry industries.
- **To educate members** by sharing information
- **To educate the public** about gem art
- **To establish, promote and maintain** the highest ethical standards amongst our members and within the gem art industry
- **To protect the gem art industry** and ultimately the consumer from fraud, abuse, misinterpretation and deceptive advertising

### MEMBERSHIP

GANA is an organization comprised of gem artists - those who work with gem materials to create art, and those who support the gem artists' work and the organization, including magazine editors, galleries and museums. Early on, the organization



**River of Light, bead necklace hand carved by Maile Ellington.**  
MAILE ELLINGTON

had different membership levels. To be included in the artist member category, one had to submit a portfolio of work and be accepted by a jury.

A contentious issue the organization worked to resolve was that some artists wanted the organization to be open to all types of stone cutters, including those working in softer stone such as alabaster and marble, while others wanted the organization specifically for those who work in hard stone. Eventually, the group agreed that the artist must have a substantial commitment to hard stone in their work.



**GANA booth at the 2004 Carnegie Museum of Natural History gem and mineral show.** GANA

## GEM ARTISTS OF NORTH AMERICA



Carnegie NHM Section of Minerals curator, Marc Wilson, was instrumental in organizing the nine gem and mineral shows, and GANA'S participation.  
HELEN SERRAS-HERMAN

The requirement and definition of a “body of work” was also controversial, as it did not consist of a specific number of photos. From my own experience, I would say that an artist’s body of work is accumulated after 10 or 15 years of creative artwork. At one point, the distinction between artists and associates created disharmony among members and did not serve anyone. That’s why, since the last decade, there is only one type of membership, with everyone having equal voting rights, and a lower annual membership fee of \$35 that supports, among other expenses, the maintenance of the GANA website.

The website ([www.gemartists.org](http://www.gemartists.org)) also serves as a place where visitors can find all members’ website pages. Artists may submit photos and an artist’s biography to be included on the GANA website, with their own dedicated portfolio page.

Various celebrated artists have had and currently have membership in GANA. Among them, Glenn Lehrer (renowned for his organic carvings and Torus Ring faceted gemstones), Lawrence Stoller (celebrated for his large gem sculptures), several gem artists represented by the North America Gem Carvers, the late Kreg Scully (famous for his amazing carvings and opal inlays), the late Arthur Lee Anderson (famous for his innovative faceted gems

and gem sculptures) who also served as the first president, Sherris Cottier Shank (known for her organic carvings), and sculptor and gem carver Thomas McPhee from British Columbia, to name a few.

Additional revered artists who held membership in the group and served as president include Howard Friedler-known for his internal carvings, Maile Ellington- much-admired for her hand-carved beads, and the recently departed Perry Brent Davis, who served as the immediate past president, recognized for his gem sculptures. The current president is long-time gem artist Bruce McKay, another *Rock & Gem* contributor.

### GANA EVENTS

Over the years, many GANA members participated in museum shows, exhibits and events organized by the group. This is also due to the support of various museums, including the Lizzadro Museum in Elmhurst Illinois, where we held our first group exhibit in 1997, the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum where we held the GANA exhibit in 2000, the

Headley-Whitney Museum where the Cutting Edge group exhibit in 2010 took place, and especially the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh,



Oregon sunstone  
carving by Tom Hay.  
TOM HAY

# *In Memoriam*

Their art  
legacy will  
always be  
celebrated.

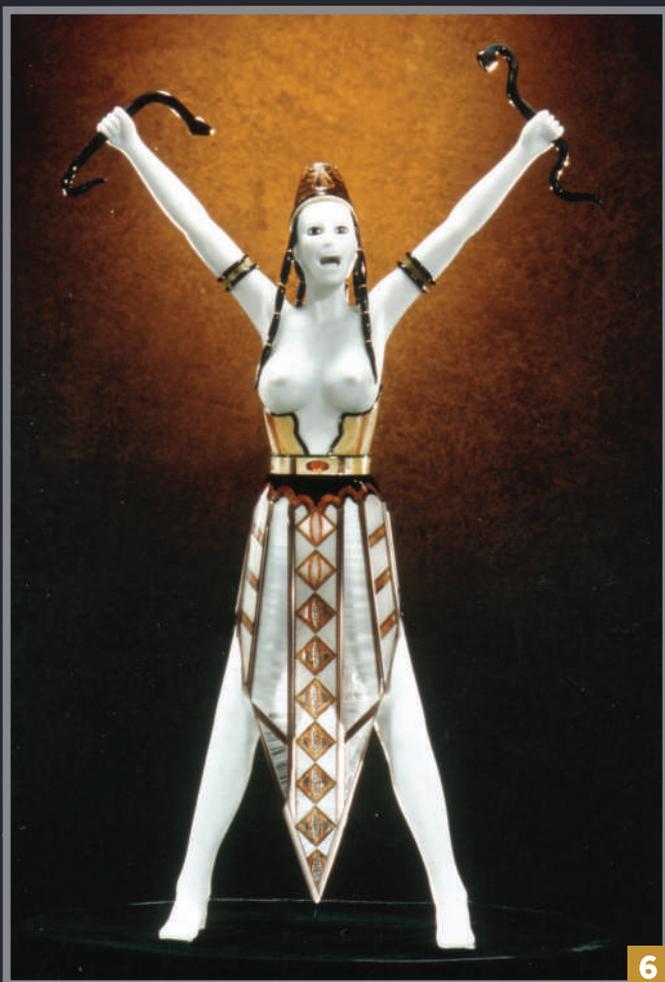
1. Opal inlay and aquamarine pendant carved by Kreg Scully.
2. Lion King, intaglio pendant by Thomas Hart Ames.
3. Dragonfly, rutilated quartz sculpture by Perry Davis.
4. Perfume bottle sculpture carved by Gil Roberts.
5. Jade flute gem sculpture by Whittaker Freegard.
6. 4th Journey gem sculpture by Arthur Lee Anderson.



## GEM ARTISTS OF NORTH AMERICA



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Pennsylvania, where the group has exhibited three different times, and participated in a series of gem and mineral shows at the museum.

GANA exhibits are considered a major attraction at shows, often raising the level of quality gem art and gem show exhibitors. Another show GANA members participated in was the Manning House Fine Art Show, which premiered in 2002 in Tucson, with GANA artist Elizabeth Beaunaiche organizing the event. It was a new gem show venue that featured gem artists exclusively. It was held at the historic Manning House in downtown Tucson. Unfortunately, contrary to all the praise that show received, it never gained enough traction to make it profitable to its exhibitors. In 2004, the AGTA GemFair in Tucson, organized by the American Gem Trade Association, created a special pavilion for GANA in the Tucson Convention Center Arena, a pavilion that I was instrumental in establishing. However, the location didn't provide great access to show attendee traffic.

The group continues to participate, but with an informational booth at the Tucson AGTA GemFair at the Galleria level. GANA exhibits a large panel with iconic photographs of the fabulous art created by members, large printed portfolios, and provides printed brochures to attendees.

### LOOKING FORWARD

Through GANA, many artists have found strength and real camaraderie in getting to know each other, interacting and trading technical information. At our Tucson gatherings, we share stories, discoveries of new gem materials, our latest work, and swap equipment ideas and techniques. Those meetings are open to all, members or not. They are a source of inspiration, encouragement and motivation to many to continue this unique fine art.

I know that a whole new generation of gem carvers has joined our industry, and I look forward to seeing them participate and help the GANA organization flourish during the 21st century.

*For more information about the Gem Artists of North America (GANA), visit [www.gemartists.org](http://www.gemartists.org) or contact me directly, [helen@gemartcenter.com](mailto:helen@gemartcenter.com).* 

**Helen Serras-Herman**, a 2003 National Lapidary Hall of Fame inductee, is an acclaimed gem sculptor and gemologist with over 37 years of experience in unique gem sculpture and jewelry art. Visit her website at [www.gemartcenter.com](http://www.gemartcenter.com) and her business Facebook page at Gem Art Center/Helen Serras-Herman.