

## African Mask by Danillo Zanella



Recognizing the contribution art has had in the Mayo Clinic environment since the original Mayo Clinic Building was finished in 1914, *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* features some of the numerous works of art displayed throughout the buildings and grounds on Mayo Clinic campuses as interpreted by the author.



Danillo Zanella is one of the master glass blowers from the Berengo Studio located in Murano, Italy, an island north of Venice. Except for the use of gas-powered kilns, the studio retains much of the historic set-up and traditional tools that were used in Venetian glass-making in the Middle Ages. The studio is owned and operated by Adriano Berengo, whose goal was to reestablish Murano as a center for innovative glass-making and to infuse it with modern attractions. He achieves this by inviting key artisans and industrialists to combine their ideas, visions, and designs into glass and allowing them to collaborate on projects with master glassblowers such as Zanella.<sup>1,2</sup>

In *African Mask* (25 × 19.5 × 15 in), one such example, tradition and modernity collide. Traditional masks were created for use in ceremonies and rituals and worn for weddings, funerals, and initiation rites to connect with the

spirit world. A mask was thought to grant the wearer with a new identity.<sup>3</sup>

The art of creating masks was often the sole work of a single family lineage, with training being passed from one generation to the next.<sup>3</sup> Usually they were crafted from wood or bone, and decorated with feathers, shells, bark, or other natural things. Hence, the use of glass in *African Mask* defies tradition and reduces its function from one of ceremony and spirituality to one of observation and art. The rainbow effects reflected in the shimmering glass offer the suggestion of feathers and shells, and thus *African Mask* transports us from our highly structured world to one of the ancient past.

*African Mask* is located on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of the Gonda Building on the Mayo Clinic campus in Rochester, Minnesota, and was gifted to the clinic by Louis Gonda in 2014.

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1. Glass masters at Berengo Studio. Icon Magazine website. <http://www.iconeye.com/design/features/item/9404-glass-masters-at-berengo-studio>. Accessed October 25, 2016.
2. Berengo Studio. Wikipedia website. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berengo\\_Studio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berengo_Studio). Accessed October 25, 2016.
3. African Masks. Wikipedia website. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditional\\_African\\_masks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditional_African_masks). Accessed October 31, 2016.