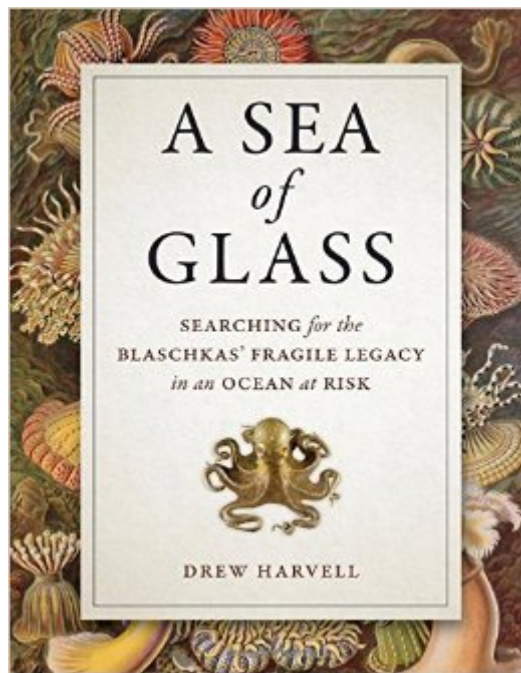


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# A Sea Of Glass: Searching For The Blaschkas' Fragile Legacy In An Ocean At Risk (Organisms And Environments)



## Synopsis

It started with a glass octopus. Dusty, broken, and all but forgotten, it caught Drew Harvell's eye. Fashioned in intricate detail by the father-son glassmaking team of Leopold and Rudolf Blaschka, the octopus belonged to a menagerie of unusual marine creatures that had been packed away for decades in a storage unit. More than 150 years earlier, the Blaschkas had been captivated by marine invertebrates and spun their likenesses into glass, documenting the life of oceans untouched by climate change and human impacts. Inspired by the Blaschkas' uncanny replicas, Harvell set out in search of their living counterparts. In *A Sea of Glass*, she recounts this journey of a lifetime, taking readers along as she dives beneath the ocean's surface to a rarely seen world, revealing the surprising and unusual biology of some of the most ancient animals on the tree of life. On the way, we glimpse a century of change in our ocean ecosystems and learn which of the living matches for the Blaschkas' creations are, indeed, as fragile as glass. Drew Harvell and the Blaschka menagerie are the subjects of the documentary *Fragile Legacy*, which won the Best Short Film award at the 2015 Blue Ocean Film Festival & Conservation Summit. Learn more about the film and check out the trailer here. See the Blaschka collection in person at the Corning Museum of Glass beginning in May 2016. Click here for more information.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

To say that biologists can learn about modern sea life from glass models made 140 years ago is to

credit both worlds: the close observations of the contemporary scientist and the extraordinary skill of the late nineteenth century Dresden glassmakers Leopold and Rudolf Blaschka. In her book, *A Sea of Glass; Searching for the Blaschkas'™ Fragile Legacy in an Ocean at Risk*, Drew Harvell, Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at Cornell University, has succeeded in bringing their glass models to life, searching to find their living counterparts. Each is a metaphor for the other. She sees the glass models as time capsules. Her favorite, the glass model of the common octopus, was carefully restored recently from many small pieces while its living counterpart also lives tenuously today, in its natural habitat. Thus this beautifully written, absorbing, purposeful and eye-opening book presents a time warp: late 19th century glass models and contemporary real specimens, studied on dives by the author in Indonesia, Italy, Hawaii, and the San Juan Islands, Washington State, as well as the low tide flats of Creek Farm, near Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The author begins with a history of these Czech glassblowers, telling how Leopold's™ 1853 sea voyage and his observations of jellyfish in the Atlantic, including the Portuguese Man of War, led to a fascination with invertebrate sea animals. This book restores to public view the importance of these invertebrate models which until now have been less well known than the Blaschkas'™ glass flowers, notably those in the collection at Harvard University. With this book, the invertebrate sea creatures retake center stage, both for their art and for their contributions to the study of nature or, as the author puts it, the tree of life.

Drew Harvell's™ *A Sea of Glass: Searching for the Blaschkas'™ Fragile Legacy in an Ocean at Risk* is a braided work of non-fiction whose three strands focus on the creation of a 19th Century collection of exquisitely crafted glass replicas of marine invertebrates, the biology of the creatures themselves, and Harvell's™ attempt through a series of dives to learn how these creatures, so plentiful at the time of their reproduction in glass, are doing in a world grown mostly more inimical to their existence thanks to overfishing, pollution, and most especially global warming. The Blaschkas, a father and son glassmaking team, ended up creating almost 800 of the finely detailed replicas as teaching tools for universities (they were actually more famous for their glass flowers, many of which were displayed in royal gardens). Their dedication and artistic ability can be traced through their letters and journals, through the painstaking notes they took, through the watercolors they created before attempting the same creature in glass, and through the incredible detail of the sculptures, of which experts at the Corning Museum of Glass declared that they could think of no peers, living or dead, who could have achieved the same fine work. Harvell is an excellent guide to the naturalist account of how these creatures live—what they eat and how, how they reproduce, their place in the

environmental food web, etc. All of it, explained in precise, clear language is utterly fascinating, even when she describes what she acknowledges are often thought of as the more "œdull" creatures, the worms. Meanwhile, her attempt to evaluate these creatures' vitality in their current existence is highly personal and emotional.

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