

Artists El Anatsui and Chihuli Bring Glass, Wood, Color, Imagination to Life

After a week of torrential rains, my friend E and I felt a huge need for light and color—so took in two excellent retrospective art exhibits: [Dale Chihuli's *Through the Looking Glass* at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts](#) and [El Anatsui's *When I Last Wrote to You about Africa* at Wellesley College's Davis Museum, in Wellesley, MA.](#)

✘ *Through the Looking Glass* is a 40-year retrospective of the Washington State artist's blown glass sculptures—such as a boat containing thousands of glass flowers, fantastical forests, sculptures based on South American basketry—which took us out of our doldrums and got our imaginations flowing and reminded us that we can each create worlds of our own.

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✘ In [When I Last Wrote to You about Africa](#), the West African artist El Anatsui transformed mundane materials into forms and objects that were beautiful and real.

Surveying nearly five decades of the West African artist's internationally renowned career, the exhibit featured some sixty works in wood, metal ceramic, painting, print and drawing. E and I especially loved the gorgeous tapestry created from used wine-bottle caps and labels; wooden sculpture made from open boxes meant to remind viewers of the opening of market stalls and paintings of African colors, shapes. More difficult and disturbing was a stone-carved head—with traditional face but open in back to reveal not much in the brain.

An additional highlight was an exhibit of fashions designed by

Wellesley students—meant to interpret the show. I particularly liked one showing a long, flowing fancy dress which, on closer glance, turned made of a black garbage bag, with collar and ruffle resembling feathers—but made from cut up magazines—all commenting on the ephemeral nature, I believe, of show business careers. E was partial to a dress with a bodice composed of typewriter keys...reflecting El Anatsu's use of everyday objects in creating new ones.

Apologies for waiting so long to see/write about this one—(it closed on June 26) but E says the ICA has acquired one of the works; that will definitely be worth seeing, there.

Chihuly/ Through the Looking Glass will be at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, through August 7, 2011.

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