

Tulane receives gift from Gene and Mary Koss to create professorship in glass

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pdavis14@tulane.edu



A gift from Tulane Professor Gene Koss, prominent glass sculptor and founder of the Newcomb Art Department's glass program, and his wife, Mary, will create the Gene and Mary Koss Professorship in Glass Endowed Fund. (Photo provided by Gene Koss)

Tulane Professor Gene Koss, an accomplished artist who founded the Newcomb Art Department's renowned glass program in the 1970s, has left the university a parting gift upon his retirement: a donation to establish an endowed professorship in glass.

The gift from the prominent glass sculptor and his wife, Mary, who is a Tulane alumna and retired certified public accountant, will create the Gene and Mary Koss Professorship in Glass Endowed Fund. It will support a faculty member in the School of Liberal Arts, with the preferred holder teaching glass as a sculpture medium incorporating hot glass casting — a technique synonymous with Gene Koss' celebrated body of work.

Koss arrived at Tulane in 1976 to teach ceramics and later founded the university's [glass program](#) with the help of alumna and former Pace Foods owner Margaret Pace Willson (NC '43) and her husband, Robert. Today the Newcomb Art Department boasts the state-of-the-art [Pace-Willson Glass Studio](#) — the second-largest university glass studio in the nation.

“In the late 1970s, Margaret Pace and Robert Willson made a donation that allowed me to build a small glass studio at Tulane, and they subsequently helped fund the program's expansion,” said Gene Koss, who retired in May as the Maxine and Ford Graham Chair in Fine Art after 48 years at Tulane. “I have always been so grateful for their generosity, and Mary and I want to pass it forward to support the glass program into the future.”

Mary Koss earned a bachelor's degree in management in 1979 from what is now the A. B. Freeman School of Business. She retired as a partner after nearly 40 years with Bourgeois Bennett LLC.

“Tulane's outstanding professors provided me with an excellent education that contributed to my successful career,” Mary Koss said. “With this gift, we want to support Tulane professors as they continue to make an impact on the lives of students.”

Liberal Arts Dean Brian Edwards expressed the university's gratitude for the Kosses' gift. “Over nearly a half-century, Gene and Mary Koss have been two incredible Tulanians. Their support ensures we can maintain our leadership in glass as a sculptural medium and continue to have world-class artists such as Gene himself on the faculty long into the future.”

Gene Koss' works have been exhibited internationally and are held in many important public and private collections, such as the Corning Museum of Glass in New York. He has received numerous awards, including from the National Endowment for the Arts. The Arnoldsche Art Publishers of Germany released a 2019

retrospective monograph of his work.

“Gene’s career at Tulane University helped shape the Newcomb Art Department, and he is a pivotal figure in the teaching and creation of glass art in the South,” said Stephanie Porras, chair of the Newcomb Art Department. “This gift is as visionary as Gene’s art, and we’re thankful to both Mary and him.”