

More than a touch of glass



About 1,500 years before the birth of Christ, an unknown craftsman in the area we now call Syria, made a discovery of profound importance - ordinary sand, mixed with a handful of other common materials, could be transformed into a thick viscous fluid with magical properties. Heated to a fiery white glow, this liquid poured like honey so that a skilled man could work it into numerous shapes. When cooled, it not only retained these new shapes but assumed the smooth lustre and brilliant colours of the most precious gems.

Thus the basic techniques for transforming the most common materials into things of exquisite beauty was born and persists to this day. The Royal Ontario Museum provides a glimpse of this legacy in A Gather of Glass, An Exhibition of Glass Through the Ages, until December 31.

The exhibition consists of more than 500 diverse pieces of glass, from all over the world, ranging

from the time of the Pharaohs to the near-present, and drawn from the Museum's own extensive collections. The oldest man-made piece on display is a striped Egyptian perfume jar (approximately 1500 B.C.), while the newest is a pale aquamarine horse manufactured in Czechoslovakia in 1974.

The show is the culmination of three years' preparatory work spearheaded by the Museum's European Department. Chief organizer, Peter Kaellgren, says, "With this exhibition, I hope to gather the many different kinds of glass scattered throughout several museum departments so that for the first time, visitors will be able to compare them with ease. Normally you would have to plough through more than 80 galleries, more than 3 acres of museum terrain - before seeing what this display offers at one site." Glass pieces that have never been viewed by the public will also be brought from storage to celebrate the show.

