

“Vaseline” (aka uranium) glass artifact on display

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A sample of "Vaseline" glass from the Museum's gallery.

The origins of glassmaking have been traced back as far as [4,000 BCE](#), according to the Corning Museum of Glass, and using various oxides to color glass has taken place for centuries:

Popular colors for glass included royal blue and turquoise blue, colored by the addition of cobalt oxide and copper oxide, respectively, colorants which are still used today. Glassmakers were trying to imitate semi-precious stones, such as lapis lazuli and turquoise, which were valued by early cultures.

One ingredient that was used in glass prior to the atomic age was uranium that resulted in glass with hues from bright yellow to dark green. Unlike other collectibles where you need to look for hallmarks to determine if the piece is what you think it is, Vaseline glass can be distinguished by looking at it under a black light—it will glow.

Some might assume that the glowing is caused by radioactivity, but they'd be wrong. In his [Collectors Weekly](#) article from 2014 on the subject, Ben Mark explains:

In fact, there's more radioactive potassium-40 inside each and every one of us than anyone could ever receive from handling, using, or just plain eyeballing a piece, display case, or entire museum full of Vaseline glass.

Actually, according to the same article, it's the chemistry of the uranium that makes it perform its trick, rather than its level of radioactivity.

Interviewed for the mentioned article, Vaseline glass collector, Barrie Skelcher, related:

It wouldn't make any difference whether the glass contained depleted uranium with the 235 isotope removed or natural uranium; the chemistry is identical. Uranium fluoresces under UV light.

Apparently the term "Vaseline glass" was coined in the early 20th century as the glass is similar in color to the petroleum product with the brand name of Vaseline

While its origins are unknown, documentation for the Museum's perfume bottle, indicates it's from the mid 19th century. The item is permanently on display in the history gallery.

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