Nothing Ventured Nothing Stained

Glass Art: Stained glass artists find fun, profit in their crafts

If you're looking for a release from tension, a creative new hobby to dress up your home, or a way to save money on gifts, working with glass is an art form to consider.

From small "sun catcher" ornaments made in a few hours to huge doorways and windows, glass art adds brilliant color and depth to practically any space available — "You shouldn't be structured or limited by anything," says Dave Temple of Acadia-na Art Glass.

Once you're set up with the basic tools: a cutter, grinder, nails, lead, a soldering iron and some glass, the rest is up to your imagination.

The advantage to stained glass is that the finished product is realistic — swamp scenes look like swamp, because of the three-dimensional quality of the glass, Temple says. Instead of looking out of your bathroom window to the neighbor's back yard, you can view vivid, life-like scenery created by different types of glass.

The advantage of stained glass over a painting is that with glass, the color is absorbed directly by your eyes, whereas when viewing a painting, the color is reflected into your eyes, lessening the optical effect.

Stained glass scenes are unlimited, from a portrait reproduced from a photograph, to a caricature, such as one woman's request for her face on a mermaid's body for her bathroom, Temple says.

"There's no secret to glass art," he says. "It's just hard work, a lot of practice and attitude..."

Attitude is what attracted Sissy Grapes to glass art. A crisis in her life 13 years ago set her searching for something productive to help relieve stress.

Grapes says she found herself proof of the old cliche, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop." Once she got started, she couldn't stop. "I had worked with different crafts, but when I found glass, something clicked," she says.

A graduate student and part-time art teacher, Grapes says her eye for "true color" comes in handy with her glass work. "I look at the glass and see something there. I envision how light will work behind it," she says. For example, a dark shade used for a horizon will catch the morning sun, so a grey or blue will appear light in the morning and darker at night.

Grapes works with stained glass, she "fuses" glass, where two or more pieces are heated to become one, such as with decorative plates, and she also "slumps" glass, where a piece is set in or on a mold then heated in a kiln to achieve a desired shape. She displays many vases of unusual shapes that have been created by "slumping."

Grapes says working with glass has been therapeutic for her. She has sold pieces in the community and donated some of her work as well. The real enjoyment, she says, is going from project to project, awaiting the unpredictable outcome of her next piece.

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