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VOICES

Attraction to color leads to lampworking

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By Jennifer Larue

Correspondent



Janet Crosby makes lampwork beads at her studio, Firefly Art Center, in Spokane Valley. The process she uses is called flameworking. Below are two of her beads: purple fantail, top, and Fenwick. (Photos by J. BART RAYNIAK / The Spokesman-Review)

VALLEYFORD – Rudy Rooster, Chief Hot Head and Happy Checkers are names of some of Janet Crosby’s creations. “I’ve named some Henry, Sebastian and Fenwick. Sometimes they become a series, like the Red Zinger Fish,” she said.

Using a torch to melt and shape glass, Crosby, 42, creates lampwork beads, also known as torchwork or flamework.

“Lampwork is an old term for glass work,” Crosby said. “Back then they used an oil lamp with a foot pedal. I like the history of it.”

Crosby uses a propane-oxygen torch and winds Italian glass around a stainless steel rod called a mandrel to build the initial structure of the bead. She then adds features and designs to decorate the colorful beads. Each piece makes a unique addition to earrings, bracelets and necklaces.

Her artistic endeavors began when she made jewelry pieces out of mud that she baked in the sun at the age of 6. It didn't work. “I also remember at about that age going to going to the Oktoberfest in Mount Angel, Ore., and being mesmerized by the flameworkers doing glass demonstrations,” Crosby said. She's said she's always been fascinated with colorful and shiny things.

She went on to take art classes in junior high and high school and minored in art in college. She needed a creative outlet and focused on beads while she was in graduate (veterinary) school. With wire and tools, she taught herself to make bead jewelry.

“That was 20 years ago, and since then I have explored many types of bead art,” she said.

She strived to find ways to stay unique and creative. “In 2003 I began making my own glass beads to have that ‘one-of-a-kind’ type of art. I intended to simply make beads for my jewelry pieces, but quickly became enamored by the glass medium, making focal beads.”

Now she has merged her love for animals and nature with glass, creating small works of art that represent things like fish, bugs, fireflies, chickens, dog bones and faces.

She works with glass in a barn in her Valleyford home as well as in a studio above a fish store on East Montgomery where she teaches classes on flameworking.

Her pieces sell well online and Crosby has been featured in magazines including Glass Line, Bead Unique, The Flow and Beadwork. In 2004, she was awarded Most Creative Booth at the Yuletide Juried Art Show at Spokane Art School.

A member of the Spokane Jewelers Guild, Crosby was contacted by HGTV through the guild. One of 18 area artists, Crosby demonstrated her lampworking for a show titled “That’s Clever” on the Home and Garden channel. It will air sometime next spring. She made a dog bone glass bead and fried egg earrings.

“I am constantly thinking of what I want to do next in terms of color, sculpture, and how to put them all together,” she said. “I eat, sleep, and dream about glass. There is never enough time to torch ... so many directions to go and things to do with glass”

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