

thing that beautiful.” Cathy-Jo happened to read an article in the paper about a glass artist, John Quillen, and gave him a call.

She spent the next three years working in John’s studio. She sold pieces for him, arranged his shows, but more importantly she was immersed in the glass world. Cathy-Jo learned glass blowing and was soon making paperweights of her own. Then a medical condition required her to have brain surgery, and Cathy-Jo was told she would never blow glass again. “My first thought was, what else can I do with glass?” she recalled and then moved on to flame work, also known as lamp work—a move that would evolve into her signature art form.

Cathy-Jo loves oysters. One evening after polishing off a plate of oysters, she held the glistening shell in her hand and immediately thought she could make an oyster out of glass. “Oysters were my earliest lamp work pieces. I took the first one I made home, and my son told me it was the ugliest thing he’d ever seen,” she said, laughing.

But Cathy-Jo kept working until she perfected the oyster. Then she needed a plate to put her oysters on, so she learned how to make a plate from glass. The opportunity to move from her home garage studio to the d’Art center came along, and she opened her studio at the previous location in Selden Arcade in 2005.

Ten years later in April 2015, Selden Arcade was significantly damaged by an accidental power line strike, and many studios in d’Art Center were destroyed. “I lost everything,” Cathy-Jo said. After the smoke cleared, she returned to her studio, where only one of her oysters remained. Now that oyster is prominently displayed in her studio at the new d’Art Center across from the Chrysler Museum, a symbol of resilience.

Cathy-Jo loves the community of artists at the d’Art Center. “I get to give demos every day and share glass with others,” she said. “I love that glass is constantly changing, especially with

Pure Fascination

Overcoming adversity through art, glass artist Cathy-Jo Ramsey, came to glass working out of pure fascination and a desire to make something beautiful. She spent her career as a middle school teacher, never thinking she would move into a second career as a glass artist.

Over 20 years ago, her son gave her a glass paperweight. She was struck by its beauty, but more than that, its origin. “I think glass is the most beautiful medium,” Cathy-Jo said. “When my son gave me that paperweight, I just knew I wanted to figure out how to make some-

Blown Away: Women & Glass (cont.)



Former middle school teacher Cathy-Jo Ramsey discovered glass art and turned it into a second career. (Courtesy photo)

powders and kiln work. You don't know exactly what your piece will look like until it comes out of the kiln. There's a mystery to it."

In her colorful studio space at the d'Art center, glass oysters are everywhere, winking and shining deliciously

from their plates. Cathy-Jo shows me her flame working skills. Working deftly with colored glass and a 1,000-degree flame, she makes a custom glass fish right before my eyes. It's hard to imagine her doing anything else with more joy.

"I am fortunate to have had some great teachers along the way, but it is wonderful to see how things have changed," she said. "Now there are all these women glass artists mentoring and teaching a new generation." Though she is too humble to say it, Cathy-Jo Ramsey is one of those women.

Concept Art

Surrounded by glass sculptures from floor to ceiling in the Chrysler Museum's Glass Studio office,

artist and teacher Julia Rogers is in her element. She picks up a stunning piece, an arm from the elbow down, which ends in a perfectly articulated hand holding a bouquet of delicate buds. "I made this very spontaneously during a demo," she

said. "I didn't know what it would be until I was in the middle of it."

Julia teaches daily at the Glass Studio. Her husband, Robin, another glass artist, is director of the Glass Studio, so glass is an intrinsic part of Julia's life. But there was a time when she never thought about it.

In the late 1990s she was studying art at Oregon State University when she took a semester off to snowboard. She met a glass artist who offered to demonstrate his work. Once Julia saw glass making in action, she was hooked. "Every art medium I tried, I loved, but once I touched glass, I was like this is it! I'm never touching anything else," she said.

Julia took a hiatus from school and spent the next five years working in glass production and private studios. She learned everything she could about glass blowing for production and made paperweights, vases, and bowls—the type of glass work you might find at glass shows or in museum gift shops. Eventually she decided to go back to school and focus specifically on glass.

During her time in private studios, she met and fell in love with her husband. At that time, she was the only female working in many glass hot shops, but in pursuit of MFAs in glass and later full-time work in the glass field, the couple found themselves at the Glass Studio in Norfolk, the most women-centric glass studio in the U.S.

"Women are really good at glass," Julia said. "In all my classes now, there are always more women than men. Glass is a hard career to take on, but it is defi-

nately growing. Seeing women take on larger pieces in a physically demanding environment in front of the heat is a beautiful thing."

"Glass working makes you athletically strong," she continued. "There are so many challenges of working with something that is always turning on a horizontal axis. You can't step away and come back. There's an immediacy to the work."

Julia considers herself to be a sculptor, and much of her work incorporates glass sculpting off the blowpipe and metal casting. Incorporating glassblowing and molten metal casting is a fusion of ancient and modern art.

Julia exposes her students to sculpture early on in their instruction, as she believes the glass world is moving more from vessel work to concept art. In her own work she expresses her fascination with science and human anatomy and also addresses national and global concerns like climate change, immigration struggles, and the view of women in society.

"I'm excited about what is happening in Hampton Roads," she said. "There is great support from the community for the arts, and people are coming in wanting to expand and grow." *

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